

IRISES

I

the University of Canberra
Vice-Chancellor's
International Poetry Prize
2017

I

e University of Canberra

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Maeve Henry

Vice-Chancellor's foreword

In this, the fourth year of the University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize, I am delighted to see that so many poets from around the world continue to enter the prize, representing so many diverse countries and so many different perspectives.

Poetry has always been a significant part of my life, and to read such a fine and varied longlist of works reminds me how poetry continues to speak eloquently for our times and ourselves. Poetry not only addresses the experiences of individuals

Winner

Irises

When my friend's boyfriend's mother died of a tumor, there were umpteen cards in the sympathy section to choose between, and one said, it's hard to find words...

a line I could've written for \$4.99, but the front had that painting by Van Gogh, that cobalt blue—the most expensive of the tubes his brother sent to support

his work—iris blossoms uttering like a moth in different states of flight, and I bet you'd recognize the image. In some hotel rooms, they'll hang two of the same print,

one over each of the beds. Or maybe you know, if you saw it in person and checked the small plaque, how he'd paint in the garden of Saint Remy's asylum. The jaded

watchman at the threshold to the next room of landscapes stared as I leaned toward the picture but kept a mannered distance. How this man became iconic

of unyielding devotion to light—his ravenous eyes winking down the eaves before him—is no mystery, just look at those irises, the ones in his eyes in this portrait

of himself as a monk with shaven head, his lids Japanesed, a bow to Hiroshige, whose 'Sudden Downpour' he'd copied as a student, enthralled with the quiet work

of the knife that kept carving as peasants bolted over the footbridge and the boatman leaned harder on his pole to get to shore. Using the same strokes he'd use for a field

of wheat along his bristling jaw, around the cranial curve—the part of the head that's safe to treat as a thing—he arrives at his own eyes, ablaze with distrust. And when you sit

for hours to study how the lamplight breaks across your brow, the bridge of your nose, you might be surprised how long it takes not just to trace all the parts but to be seen

by yourself. The eye that looks back, whichever one you try to pin down, will slightly shift to consider itself, so you end up having two disconnected eyes, each squinting

through the mask of who you think you are. A backdrop of emerald radiating from his head obliterates, but only in part, the letters à la _____—this gift he made

of himself then chose to give to himself. I once met a man who had played Jesus on stage,
and he said how strange it felt after the curtain, to be watched in the lobby by the
audience,

how no one would talk to him or return his gaze, how empty the moonlit roads,
how desolate the bike ride home.

↙ ↘

Runner-up

Having Intended to Visit an Orange Grove, the Poem Finds Itself in a Supermarket

the smell of orange blossom in California
where exactly seven years ago I stood
before a small tree, watched a hummingbird
dip its beak in a flower. In another life now,
buried in the clatter of a café on lunch break,
I will my pen to do something with that moment,
will it to walk across the page leaving beautiful
footprints. The nib approaches the untouched sand
of the next blank line, the hummingbird holds
like a brief blue laser piercing the flower, when
a child wails. The startled bird vanishes
as only a wild thing can, leaving a hole which
the pen criss-crosses with ink, describing
the screaming child, the dropped chips, the
radio washing the scene with the dishwater
of eighties music and insurance ads,
orange blossom drowned in the smell
of hot sausage rolls. To tell you the truth,
my imagination capitulates shockingly
easily. Without a whimper it puts the pen away
and applies itself to the subject of dinner.
Before I know it we are crossing the road without
fully remarking the dappled effects of the
breezy plane tree shadows on the herringbone
brick footpath, and we enter the Woolworths
supermarket. Here my imagination feasts
without shame, or any sense of irony,
on the full sleeve tattoo of a young woman
who is cradling a bag of Californian
navel oranges. She moves forward in the queue,
recalibrates the load in her arm.
A small bird fixes in the crease of her elbow.

shortlist

e Skull on the Table

*

Bouquet of nothing
in this vase ringed
once with watery thoughts.

*

Someone emptied this glass
but first someone filled it.

*

Seashell rustling of things washed away.

*

Sand at the bottom of an hourglass
never to be turned again.

*

All this openness!
One only had to compose
away from one's bones.

*

 e chambers echo faded hymns.

*

Inside : the blank ceiling of a chapel.
Immense murals unmade take by take.

*

A geode that glistens with phantom
memories. A spiked glitter beyond imaginable.

*

Who embroidered your osseous fabric?

*

Desire carved this canyon.

*

Engraved prison walls.

*

Looted jewelry case still smelling
of silver, amethyst, and sapphire.

*

Sun weaves into your openings
warming the walls where hopes used to climb
like coral roses at every instance of light.

*

A camera without film.

*

Honeycomb. A humming keeps filling
these cells with drops of amber absence.

*

A lesser moon or greater.

*

Ancient monastery where once a monk dreamed
of planting all the flowers of the world.

*

O dried flower pod, what seeds are these?

*

If you're a bell then you have no tongue.

*

If you're nothing
then you weigh heavily upon this table.

*

If you're a souvenir
then you do not remind us of life.

*

If you're a poem, your lines fail
to evoke lips moist at the center,
hazel irises ringed with fire.

*

Mulian

Like any good daughter, I guide my mother out
of the grave. Palm to open rib, fingers to hull
of ear, her breasts ripening into cabbage-patch
the rain rushes to fill. She's still the temple
of her body is now a temple for moss.

Wind has scythed the joss. I lie beside her
to see how far our likeness goes. Not far,
still vegetarian. Soon she will resemble
any other paddy. I could till her feet.

I could carry her on my knees.

My arm responds
in self-defence: palm to open chest,
press. No use. Murder has strained her
into thinking a scarecrow can help
how it's dressed. I plow into her femur.
I think of the strawmen I have sown
against her sundried gure. Unavoidable—
how moss overstays; how wind chimes for passage.

Five Creatures Under Every Mother's Skin

Age thirteen, the skin splits down her back.
Emerging, clad in shimmer and sequin
and glassy wing to much ado. Pretty head
thrown back, clasped by mate after mate.
The green river air is shot silk
scribbled with their heart-shaped pen.

Seaward, she is drawn tail-first. The river,
a silversmith arming her, scale by scale.
The ocean has no boundary, save memory.
Though her flesh will coral with experience,
she will dodge bamboo rod and vernal bear,
return to gravel nurseries of the smolt.

Grotesque red bill pressed to her quilled
leather corset releases the last fry
from gular folds. (This is, the tongue's
business, but hers too tiny to roll around).
If they want to believe she pierces her bosom
to blood-nourish her young, let them.

Bring on the night! Let her stalk and cry,
dog-fox by her side, blackberry picking
by moonlight in fur coat and black boots.
By dawn she returns to earth, her kits
an auburn ball. The sick one she'll carry
to the wood's edge and dump it. Just in case.

Her skin-rubber, hashed and scored
with life's scars, hides an armchair heart.
Her glands can still suckle a youngster
bored with waiting for his mother,
Her children's children will be doctors.

e Rehearsal

Deep in the pelting rain, trampling rain-attened grass (her pelted coat, now short-furred), she can hear the Ouse well before seeing it: tidal, swift. Lately, there has been much river-calling—banks burst, broken water roaring white; the marsh a gulling sea. A grief of long heavy fall, its burden spread about the fields. Each haystack in the wood, marooned so, strikes her as a Monet, each a time-piece, measured out in colour. She moves to where land lies level with the flow. At best of times, high-watered, edges bared by current, the river draws her where a stretch has offered smooth palm-ling stones, dread-heavy; heavier than resistance. She steps out from the bank, out of solidity. But there is no question here of drowning: she gills water to a dampish air, unremarkable as fog encountered on a walk from Tavistock to the Embankment. The Zeppelin of a rowing boat's wooden hull passes overhead; a child's fingers trailing through the under-surface, drawing Ouse-swimmers close:

Barbel, Roach and Dace,

Chub, Tench and Minnow. Visions peel from them in shoals; showing everything that she has feared to see. Every balance, all completeness, ravished and dismantled: squares in ruins; waters rising through the city; libraries reduced to rooms of pulp and twine. She falls. Leonard catches her staggering return—she, fished, bent forward, dripping like a spaniel. Slipped, she tells him. Fallen, in a ditch close by the osier beds. Through the woods of Rodmell, he leads her back towards the house.

Six days on, she rises from her sick bed (illnesses, how express it? partly mystical), swinging wide the casement to find Leonard at the rhododendrons and a curious seaside feeling in the air.

I Remember Telemachus

I am susceptible to
forgetfulness. I know
where my car keys are
now, submissively tied
to the whistle I have
never blown in self-defense,
but I can't recall the conversation
you say we had about whether
or not our friends had mentioned
that they would like to meet us
in Portugal next fall. Some things
I let lapse, like most of my
college experience, but I'm
a pushover for lavender and
open magnolia blossoms. I'm
better at sight than recording
words, but if I could harness
the sound of your voice
when you're happy, like it was
last night when we arrived late
at the party at the lake because
the afternoon light detained us,
I would change my ways.

longlist

Some Days Seem More Ephemeral than Others

Some days seem more ephemeral than others, translucent,
lled with speech no-one listens to, or absences, or grey shawls,

and you icker through them, brittle as an old movie reel,
from seen to unseen, from seen to unseen, mostly unseen,

inhabiting the negative space of yourself, which you will fall into
altogether one day, like people around you have been doing for years

only you seem to be noticing it more now, all those lemmings
dropping over a cliff and the cliff getting closer, you feel it,

but at this minute you don't know whether to push back against
the ephemeral—shout something, make a statement, drop a jug

of water, strip naked, cajole the gaze of eyes, however momentary,
because you are still here, even if no-one is paying attention,

so immersed are they in their own incarnations of visibility—or whether
you should just lean into it as you would a lover, take the gift

of being unnoticed and slip away into rare ed atmosphere,
wispy white contrail trailing behind you marking the passage no one saw.

Urals

Dead Mountain, 1959: Tents cut open from inside. Nine hikers, six hundred meters, one tongue missing, all naked. Cause of death: unknown compelling force. These are facts. Ask him, Veteran of the Great War, but yesterday he fell down the stairs like the diver sucked into a blue mouth in 2001.

How do we contend with chance? I have bullets. Mighty Kalashnikov, bullets frozen in shame and failure. Empires yield to mystery. The Colonel felled by a cramp. Where to bomb back if the bomb, says the radio-voice, came from inside of me? Lungs filled with slivers of rib, the dead lie dead, neither bruise nor lesion in the skin. If they choked on a bullet, if I did, there must be some way to slide it down my lungs, where a snowstorm dances in victory, where the wind sings a gypsy song. This version of the story: hikers irradiated, blood napalm, bones intact and steel. Buried in the snow. A shovel rusts in this lonely pass for the lost survivor, prays to be held. Kholat Syakhl, shadow country. A Hind with nine aboard crashed here in '91. All lived. Jesus Country. This conflict of omens cuts my skin from inside. If you sit up and peer through the slit, there is only whiteness. So lie still. Dawn is slow today.

← · · f ·

Here birds are

~~~~~

I

She was sitting gently
sinking without sinking
in the pleated light

on half their bed. I saw
my mother in the clutch
of scented orchids
wearing her wedding
ring like a trance. Her joy

broken for keeps, a sob
breaking like a small bone in her throat.
I was a child
peering at the bedroom door.

I don't lose sleep over the mercy of God.

She is in love, he is preserved
in love.

II

He was found maculate
on his side, limbs like crushed cowslip flowers
tangled in the bicycle frame.

Swept aside
by something that had passed,
gone in the wake
of something that was passed at the summit
of the world, a trail in pine shadows.

III

 e rst night I raided his palace
for icons, for drawings and photographs
like soldiers

out on the temple roads with shovels
on their backs, holding gods like children

e Jonah Emulator

Except this time the whale
winds up inside of you. Because light
is scarce, because you are
so handsome, because each paycheck
is your bribe, for three days
you are sentenced to carry
the whale in your belly,
it never breaking down, it never
entering the bloodstream. Your body, like any
body, is a prison, but not a prison
of the spirit, just of water
and other creatures. When God
asks you to speak, you will vomit forth
this whale, this whale will be
your answer, and you will finally become
a prophet, so empty
and so completely understood.

At Equinox, Crossing the Hudson River

e year not quite on its hinge, I want
To speak about the happiness of my body
And the delight its joints exert when climbing
ree-hundred-and-forty-two stairs to reach
e pedestrian boardwalk on the eastward side
Of the Hudson River Walkway where sunshine
Exuberant pours from azure and seamless heaven.

e sun rides in sweeps of scarlet nery,
Indifferent to my swift joy as rightly
at's how it works. So, step by stride I follow
A line of mothers pushing prams and vehicles
Carting tiny charming faces and squeals
Of laughter from eastward westward until
Even my sorrow tires of hearing itself.

ough I've been scorned for it, let me never
Be afraid to use the word *eff* or *eff*.
Or any other powers in the garden of voice.
Just now a hummingbird --- I swear it's true ---
Has drummed its brilliant trumpet engine
Literally across my path and swerved
Back again as if to show me the way home.

How many days did the boy I was never
Speak the holy words of gratitude or grace
Yet all the while believed I surely had?
Shame upon that captive boy's successor
For thwarted years that might have flourished.
But that, too, is how it works. You have
To go out into the world to find the world

Waiting inside yourself: to rescue (from false
Because empty certainties) the bravery
Waiting to speak, waiting to be heard.
Not .

Head Count

Of all the field trips my school made us take, the circus seemed the least misleading. Not like the Museum of Natural History, where the tour guide pitched his monotone above the swishing of our puffy jackets as we shifted from foot

to foot beneath a dead version of everything and strange kids eyed us like the blue jays glued to branches behind glass. The circus didn't pretend to teach us anything. Not like the Cloisters, where a unicorn held the spears of still-limbed men from tapestry

to tapestry, only to end up hemmed in by a fence so short he could've stepped right out, the circus was an outing with no takeaway. If this was a forfeit on the part of our teachers or forgiveness, we couldn't tell. But we were old enough to recognize the tiger's reluctance

to leave its cage, grown-up enough to unfold into a stranger's palm a few bills for a chintzy wand of fiber optic strands that glowed like failing embers, but that was not what captivated Leo. That summer, my dad had claimed a patient of his

would be joining my class, a boy from Uruguay who'd been in a crash—a truck plowed into him and his parents as they idled in front of their home. His mom was the patient, but he came to translate. On the first day of school he'd been easy

to spot, but he spoke with no accent and so fast he could commandeer any conversation. And with such strange details, when he'd lie it rang true. Enough, at least, to keep us listening. Like once he shot a horse in a ditch, on fire, to save it from burning.

Motorbikes looped in the cage sphere of death. I offered my popcorn but Leo was too caught up to notice. His father had died on impact. But that my dad warned me not to repeat. Back at school, when the bus unloaded,

I ran upstairs for a book I forgot. The overheads on, Miss Mahn, our teacher, who talked like a starlet from early TV, always and

bowling alone west of Madison Square, how he'd answered their questions—that he'd
gone
to the men's room and by the time he got out the bus had left, so he thought he'd walk.
Twenty miles, he said, was nothing to him—he'd done it before, in Uruguay once,
when his uncles were being disappeared, and how the cops were so charmed
by the tales he told that they dialed the number he gave to them then hung around to
listen,
even paid for pizza and all the games he could play until his dad could come get him.

↙ ↘

Native Orchids

We'd come as far as the wooden bridge, not too far
from town—rows of windows in the distance like strip cartoons,
and the moon in one frame, a dab of correction fluid.

We'd come to find native orchids, though I'd begun
to believe they existed in places none of us would see,
not unless we entered magic circles and danced

ceremoniously with wine cups in our hands, hallucinating
ourselves as gods. Someone said they'd seen native orchids
in a book, that they looked like psychedelic spiders.

We walked past the creek, trudged over rocks and grass,
soft grey moths uttering at our heels; then to an overhang;
below in the creek, tadpoles like free-floating

commas, and an egret still as a porcelain ewer full

taking him on a brutal expedition of incendiary pain.

the group leader, a woman with oceanic blue hair,
her cheeks speckled like a martin's egg, lowered her

head to the ground and with her boot tipped over
a rock. Again no orchids, just a centipede, a scurrying
cutting of brown fern. When we returned to the road,

we saw the late sun syndicating its light in level after
level of office block windows—and for a moment
we were startled out of ourselves, the way we might

have been had we seen the orchids' red, shell-pink
or turquoise petals. . . the eastern sky was now plum-purple,
fruit bats falling it like cinders from a woodland blaze.

... ..

Blue Morpho

Adrift in an azure trance, a fixed by invisible
star-points of pins to the sumptuous nothing of black
velvet, it's as immense as the word 'once'
uttered once, buoyed by silence, to float or sink.
Gazing into the pool-like body, how slowly it becomes
the coveted loved one—exotic, exhausted, ex-
everything. Small as Earth on television, then realer:
the otherworldly waters of Iceland flow over
once, the shifting blues frightening in their nearness,
the glorious black shore. You, afraid until the sensation
of a longed-for presence hit, better than morphine.
You clapped with the rest—reborn, exhilarated.

Shark's Tooth

Color of smoke at its most intense, when re's
rst born and working hardest, in its nest of dry grass
and sticks, to live. An eon ago, a shark
was born to a mother. Struggled tail-
rst into ocean, eyes still enclosed
in eshy darkness, an innocence that lasted seconds,
embedded in Time like beads on a necklace.
Little thing, half in this world, half in utero-Heaven,
was your death like that? Head in the clouds,
seeing again your mother, whose side you clung to,
the rest thrashing before quieting into sand?
Blood- owers wreathed you,
brie y, before you grew monstrous.

Comfort Stop

Friedensreich Hundertwasser
is a name that comes not trippingly
o a Maori or pakeha tongue
yet he was the pride of Kawakawa
and a Living Treasure of New Zealand,
an internationally known ecologist

Imagine a Clochemerle . . . sunny-side up:
no sinister rendez-vous, no political
cabals or vicious rumours. The spiritual
force of Hundertwasser lingers still.

Dream Homes

In my dreams I have often tapped into
the false memory of homes I have never lived in
slapped together from a kit of architectural
and narrative clichés: a harbourside terrace
with no definable features but outside stairs
and a dresser filled with unsecured secrets;
a spacious open-plan apartment with an
indoor garden tended by unseen hands;
a two-storey terrace with upstairs rooms
which were never used, lounges and libraries
with not a bedroom in sight. And none
of these homes was a primary residence,
all bolt-holes to escape to, safe houses
to hide the residue of unnamed crimes,
places to bring an unsuitable lover to
or work on the draft of an explosive memoir.

A diet of crime and espionage fiction might
explain the building-blocks but not the impulse.
An analyst might look for an unhappy child
with a self that festered badly which he needed
a weekend retreat away from. The social realist
might posit something sterner and more mundane:
A North Shore Sydney boy obsessed with
Real Estate options? Who would have thought?

Perhaps it's just a random playing-out of our
common condition: 'I'm not a doctor, but I
who needs doors opening onto other lives

Roll-Your-Own Page

Bereft of kindling newsprint,
being a particularly cold bush night,
reluctantly, I reached for the dry leaves

Ceaseless Tintinnabulation

Right now at the limits
of physics all the persistent circuitry
of crickets and swallows together with
the perpetual electric night-ring of the cicada
are held in the corridor outside the labs
of the World's Quietest Place
(minus twenty point six decibels -
white-out, a record) waiting for news
of when their story might be heard.

Elsewhere on the planet a bell
is still ringing behind glass, one hundred
and seventy six years a prisoner oscillating
in its sound-proof cell like a car-alarm
buried deep in the blizzard. How long can
it endure? Put your ear to the jar:
not even the loudness of a person
whispering alone in a room or the whir
of the fan on your microprocessor.

One day the glass will crack
like ice and we'll hear the speech
of all the creatures in the underground aquarium,
the girls turned into birds the many
unrecorded accounts of the night
in crystal-clear live-stream broadcast.
Till then we must listen for whatever
sounds we can catch the silence which is still
ringing, the snow which is still ringing.

Twelve Tastings

1.

9.

Black seeds circle your white moon like Trappists at compline.
An edible galaxy, you sound the heavens in my throat.

10.

You entice intoxication with two cups—Empty & Full.
ey meld when ringing out their carillon love.

11.

When I bite your ghostly vintage, I too want to hide, but who then
will taste me? We won't give up, will we, my sister wine?

12.

Full-lipped, crimson kisses, lover's knots at all the stem-tips—
you turn tears into lights. Alluring as night candles.

Rooms by the Sea

at further room, a tenth of the whole,
a mere column, with its tranche of light
slanting in across the life of things:
red chair and green carpet; a painting –
sun-glazed, its story untold; the bookcase
whose unseen books touch each other
or lie alone, ready to enter your thoughts,
for your thoughts to enter them.

1.

at further room, a tenth of the whole,
a mere column, with its tranche of light
slanting in across the life of things:
red chair and green carpet; a painting –
sun-glazed, its story untold; the bookcase
whose unseen books touch each other
or lie alone, ready to enter your thoughts,
for your thoughts to enter them.

at further room. It must have granted
ease and pleasure, the solace of dailiness.
In the painter's psyche, in the economy
of his life at the easel, master and captive,
the fact of this room, what it con gured,
amounting to a tithe. Is that a fair guess?

2.

the closer room is the main game
with its folding insert of radiance
hinging wall and oor—an origami of sunlight
you could lean against, warm bare feet on.

the doorway holds, as in a tumbler, ocean
dauntingly at its work, summer sky.

the door, compact as a sentinel, waits.

So this is it: the archetypal real.

A room, stripped, complete. A perilous
openness. Even the shadows are inscaped
with light—lapis ghosting steel-blue.

Under a short horizon, the sea's archaic
pulse and thrash, salt air billowing.
Breathe in, out; breathe in.

Versus

For these few moments gathered here on either side
of the pedestrian crossing, waiting for the freight train to pass
only minutes though it seems longer, the ding-ding-ding, the boom gates falling
and falling, the kicky-de-chick of many wheels, the bounce of the sleepers
as the wheels pass across them, the sunlight flicked between the containers
skittering across the opposite faces (reminding us of colonial photos
people trapped in snapshot moments, eyes squinting into an artificial flash
or of swimmers, faces briefly visibly when they rise above the grey-blue water
gasp, descend below the surface) but then

the gap of an empty trolley
the sense of space
the wider clarity
the faces seen
for slightly longer

a girl on our side jumping up and down
shouting train! the single syllable entering our heads

turning into
steam, electric
freight, passenger
Ghan, Indian/Pacific

the system of tracks criss-crossing the country, signs
and signals, indicators of the system
all that is conveyed, all that is transported
the moving language of the rails and how
these things can grow
from a single word but then

the girl picks up a bit of gravel, throws it into
the gap between containers and a boy opposite
sees her and does the same

the stones' trajectories

while we wait, our minds closed around our own
stones, ready to exchange them in trade, to pass them
as counters in a game or to throw them at the soft
parts of the body, the bruisable flesh, the accident organs or maybe at the hard
parts of the body, the brittle scaffold, the inner structure, or maybe even
to lay them down, we don't know what is going to happen, only
that the train will pass, that our soft-hard bodies will cross over
that another train filled with passengers
is already pulling
out of the station's shadow.

4

If Not Residential School en Where to Go

A dead animal on the logging road small and brown with fur it does not move it is stuck to the road

Its nose froze when the sun is up the ice melts enough it could pull away

A man touches it

It moves it is not dead its nose froze he loosens the way words stuck on the road is why you need punctuation to separate the clumps of words that walk on the road and stuck there

You were warned to leave the animals alone all of them they are wild

Wild thoughts do not leave they keep coming with fear that says they will hurt they will take when you are not looking if you do not look you will be taken

You stay in the woods you could hide if they came

We do not have roads though our paths stay the same we follow without a road and there is an animal stuck on the road is it dead poke with a stick there on the road it is stuck

Do not touch it is wild it lives in a world that intersects ours but we cannot bother its world

We cannot let thoughts run wherever they want they have to be killed skinned scraped with punctuation stretched to dry in paragraphs and worn against the cold

the ice stuck to the road that caught the animal that would get up but it froze the fur matted to the road it wanted to get up but could not until the man touched it and it was not dead

He loosened it for a moment it did not know it was not stuck it took a while for it to know it could run away

Stay where you are the man said give it a moment to know where it is to find the side of the woods where it ran from the road where it was stuck

the rain on the roof is falling an encampment of words yet without marks to tell them where to stay what to say

the words in groups need marks after them they will teach you there you will like the pencil in your hand the sound of it writing on your paper like rain

You thought it was cold and it would be snow that does not sound like rain because snow is quiet it knows how to hide if it falls in the night but when the sun is up you see the white and it is snow

It melts and runs like rain it changes to something else it is not its own anymore do you want that to happen you argue

they will change you from snow to rain or rain to snow whatever it is that is falling

they will hear your footsteps on the roof they will know you are the snow that walks silently and unseen until the light

Had the animal stopped to sleep on the road at night not caring it was on the road
where a horse or wagon or truck could come

Only now it was a brown animal covered with fur that stuck in the ice that froze
in the night that was cold

The rain had stopped and was starting again it could hide and not be hidden by
the part of it stuck to the road

Stalking Egret

Still,
as a statue carved
from the best Carrera marble,
White, on black bone stilts
in the water running o
toward the blue Paci c,
with his neck stretched out
above the shallows where
He stands
in the Santa Ana River,
or every now and then
takes a slow step toward
where another sh may lie,
Indifferent
to the sun shining down,
or to the heady stare
of those eyes above him
looking down
Watching
for that first sign of life,
a n's icker,
A minnow
that he can stab and stop
against the sandy at,
above the ying shadows
of ripples moving on
Toward meaning,
Toward that hint
of transcendence left
when wavelets die
unnoticed on the shore
He stalks.

Illustrated Plates for an Unauthorized Biography of Gertrude Bell

(i) *Illustration: A stylized, abstract drawing of a landscape or architectural structure, possibly a wicket gate or a path, rendered in a dark, textured style.*

Your childhood home, my childhood puzzle;
the afternoon school boys—hoop-capped, blazered,
scarved—slipping in the wicket gate, as I trekked
homeward in my Start-Rite shoes. A smell
of creosote and honeysuckle in the summer air
as markers older than the alphabet
incised my female clay with their prestige.
I knew their leather satchels contained
empires. Was that the year *Illustration: A small, stylized drawing of a figure or object, possibly a satchel or a marker, rendered in a dark, textured style.*
swept my mother off her red plush seat
in the Regent Cinema? Cantering back
along the esplanade, between the steel works
and the cooling towers, she snagged
on marram grass and chilly sand,
the tether's end of kids, the strap for cash.
Lost in plain sight on Red Barns' weathered wall
a plaque as blue as Peter O'Toole's eyes:
'Gertrude Bell, Friend of the Arabs.'

(ii) *Illustration: A stylized, abstract drawing of a landscape or architectural structure, possibly a wicket gate or a path, rendered in a dark, textured style.*

You tell the maid to wake you in the morning,
but restless on your pillow in the night,
lighting the lamp, you see loose freckled skin
on the hand that drew the map that made Iraq.
Feeling its tremor you shake a few more pills
from the hidden bottle, choose a deeper sleep.
Bad dreams of war make the British
civil cemetery a god-forsaken place to lie,
Khatun, but the cold ground in Redcar
churchyard presses my mother harder.

Hephaestus

My first memory is falling,
the look of disgust on my father's face.

Even the air I hurtled through was desperate
to be relieved of me. My body, broken

as I broke through the surface of the ocean
that accepted me. I had to stay within

its cold depths to learn anything.
They know me as the lame, pitiful one.

But here I am standing among the other
gods with a hammer in my soft hand, never

quite knowing what to do with this
strange material, this avalanche of fire falling

endlessly within me. Now and then,
an Olympian subcontractor comes unannounced

to break my legs again, or to add a deforming
trace of arsenic to the metal.

They need to keep me at the forge,
shaping their breastplates and their helmets

from something formless. They need me
continually in some stage of recovery.

My callipers are made of gold and fractured,
repurposed lines. I'm not the god of poetry,

but of sculpture and volcanoes. I've tried
to disappear into the sudden closing sunset,

the glistening carapace of the beetle, the dark
red warmth of the earth. But I know

First Prayer

All summer we've set to tending
the casualties of my garden,
mostly hummingbirds, who crazed

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Snail, after Ponge

To hump the freight
of the palace staircase
from door to door

a disciple of yes-but-later
its pocket watch always open
to the hypnotist's spiral

reading such slow
cartographies with
Muppet antennae

the worthless diamond-
ooze as evidence
of night passages

Night Reverie

After the pub
he somehow managed
to get himself home
and on his balcony took out
the soft hot thing he had
stored by his heart
and he opened the wrapper with his clumsy
numb hands and he bit down, munched the glorious munch of
all drunk-eaters
o in that dark otherworld of altered
reality
where the night feels
as if you are not in it –
the night is you, and the bleary star
glimpsed through
one eye,
and the private laughter as that one eye opens and shuts
opens and shuts.
And that warmth moved down his throat
and past to the deep belly where alcohol
already glowed.
He was full,
full and outside, sitting on the rail of the balcony
like an old traveller
like an old cowboy
and at some point he tipped forward
with a lump of pastry still in his mouth he fell to the darkness,
bleary,
far away from loneliness
that night.

Rubik's Cube

I read the same paragraph three times
before the clicks divert me
to his jerking wrists, the whites
struggling to align, as errant green
and orange boxes step out of row.
 is, he's told me, relieves
stress.

I close my eyes, then assign a color
to his life's compartments: green stores
his cousin's DUIs, the ex who's found him
on Facebook; orange holds unanswered emails;
white allays threadbare boxers, low blood sugar,
the faucet's broken aerator;
and yellow houses
me.

I know why he does this, why we all do:
I've boxed her phone call, when she told me
my lover, her baby boy, crashed into the pole,
died on arrival to the e.r.
Sharing that space is the remen dragging
me out of bed, my drawer of journals
and sh tank left
to burn.

But he, the magician with the saw,
sequesters me too much,
too often, as if the boxes fate
his life.
I don't like the cube's influence,
have told him how its discovery
was an accident, inspired by pebbles egressing.

Still now, with Sports Center as our backdrop,
his hands keep moving,
and I crave the quiet
from before we could afford air
conditioning, when the decrepit ceiling
fan spun, a faint soundtrack
while we piled our bodies
in a nightly ritual.

~ ~ ~

Touchstone

I think of a body drying like a sheet.

I think of my mother kneeling.

In these thoughts a cobra hangs on
her neck like a favourite noose, skin
unzipped by a mongoose. Her dress pools
to her patella & the venom
suckles what's left
of her breasts.

Her neck's bent. She's scooping
the liquid out of her hands, phalanges pared
sharp enough to cut teeth.

ey learn to speak:

e Greek in the Café

Life's a gift the dying appreciate,
e Greek says. Birth is Fate.
I'll tell you what Fate is, his friend says,
Fate's the past that takes you hostage.
e Greek looks wounded when he smiles at that.
Everything comes to those who wait,
His friend says. Wait till they what?
e Greek says, watching insects dance
About a chip basket light,
Wait till they die? You sound like Penelope.
We're jongleurs with the voice of angels
At the behest of philistines, the Greek says.
ey praise our song and pay us pence.
I wish, he says, but can't nish the sentence.

ere's no learning here! his friend says,
at's the problem. ey had their chance.
e sea is strange lately, the Greek says,
Have you noticed? Dark streaks across deep water
Take you down. e future?
His friend says. Don't talk to me about the future!
You think: stand straight, and your back grows rounder.
at's the future.
ey ask, the Greek says,
ey ask politely, they seem to hear,
ey nod, but no-one remembers
Anything you tell them. No-one ever remembers.

Native Orchid

They say it comes upon you in old age.
They say vocabulary is heritable.
If it's in my gait the only place

I would feel it is my back. The doctor said it would
never heal. I walk.
This morning, small dogs and old men are set awkwardly

on the path. The first guy I pass carries a blue
bag, dangling testicular tubes of warm turd like spare
change. Newspaper tucked under an arm—the other

pointing out a palm in appeal. The second man shoulders something vast.
His clodded feet drool from the Hoddle Avenue shop with a tiny
red dog by his side. I notice the grasp

of the pie and see the callous of caulking,
plaster walls and the abrasion in his eyes
overrides my urge to talk to him.

He walks. I carry on past the purple dragon
grass gently arming in the first stir of air.
The eye of a poet knows nothing except sky.

By the time the back pain starts the road is crossed. Cues for
me were rocks and water, in that order, not new
but caught in motion. I tried to use your

voice as mine to rouse an image from mown clumps
snug around sprouts of roses - it had to do with less
colour and more comfort. Not sure now if the hum

of green beneath appreciates the pun. They say
there is an age when men forget a dog. Fox-terrier
I think it is. Tail like a snake tongue forks the day.

By the mail box, his owner stops. Usurper.
Employed against the elements all his life.
There is size and scent enough to conjure

Adoption Day 1978

I remember my cream polo-neck was itchy as hell
and wishing for a groovy velour one just like yours.

But in the end, nothing about that day

WeClutter

we are the eye contact that becomes uncomfortable. we look away like we have low self-esteem because we have low-esteem. we make you feel nervous, even though we do not mean to. we are the fast name introductions that bomb rush out of our mouths while shaking hands. we are the other person's name which we will forget as soon as we do not say it right. we are the over-enunciated words, the squint they give us back. this is the other side of english, chopped and confused. we are the words that stick to the side of our mouths, the burst of spit that lands on your face when we are struggling to get one word out. we pray about it. we pray about it. we pray about it. we are the hand movements that are out of sync with what we are saying. we are we do not know what to use first: tongue, teeth or breath. we run out of breath trying to test it out. we are the kings of repeating ourselves. we are the nods you give us as if you understand us the second time around. we know it is hard on you, but harder on us to deal with it. of course we pray about it. we pray about it. we pray about it more than ever when the stakes are high and we need the foundation of words to serve us like the sun serves daylight. so we are left to find our own little way through the dismay, so we tell statements, not stories, the fastest you have ever heard. we are the conversation that runs short and the smile we have because we are glad it is over. we are the biggest comedians, jokes we can only make out; we have so much life within us yet none in front of people. we pray about it day and night. we are the phone conversations that are hard on your ears. we are feedback we don't want to hear, the cringe of an echo, the dread of a cold call, pull our hair out if we have to break down complex information, shoot us before you make us publicly speak, we can't get past the phone interview for a job. we have a degree, but cannot verbally deliver. we are crossed fingers

in hopes that our words fell out right, but unfortunately our facial expression remained neutral. we dash from confrontation, we call it *dash*. we absolutely get ourselves, but sometimes we don't. we do not even know it's a speech issue, we think it's just a small issue, something we haven't *fixed* yet. we are all over the place, cannot contain the words so they won't spill out at the

Poem, Singular

Prevailing poems contain all thought entities.

Nature for example, ora, adjustments in
e forecast. Air arriving freshly. ere are lines

Of dancers in arresting dresses, sounds going round,

Round, choirs backed by tactics—lyres, cymbals,esses, sounds goyKnipoemsesitier

e Famine

Trees, bared of leaves chewed raw;
bark pulped, grass cut up, and boiled

Rotting trunks, hollowed for grubs;
the chips, ground for broth

Anthills, attened for insects;
their sweet earth, given the children to lick

We vie with vultures over corpses;
with hawks for rats and snakes

When it's the vultures dying, of no use
to the living, their blood already purulent

The hungry peasants
break into armouries, trample

over food store fences
to face armed Party cadres,

derail trains; rumour :
grain's being shipped under

escort, by order
of the great emperor, to Peking

It's the famine of the Great Leap,
in the third year of my life.

Three times you sold me
to feed my sister and two brothers,
my mother and grandma

ree times, whining puppy like,
mindless of kidnappers, braving
moon shadows, I sni ed my way back

turning the value
of your useless girl child
into a three-headed nightmare

Desperate, you ed to Hong Kong
as the loss of sustenance threatened seven lives,
there to nd the ransom your creditors demanded

Two years we waited, hungry years, grandma and I,
the last to ee the famine when the snakeheads you hired
had us one by one slither past Party spies and border guards.

Now at three score I still ask why me, as alone
in dreams in the dark that still scares me
I'm running back, tears pouring rivulets

e morning comes and I see us wives,
husbands, children, together eating, laughing.
Wouldn't all this have been without me?

en thinking of all those
who aren't here, and I am,
I swallow the day's tears

and bow, awed by your plight
your sense of responsibility,
to say: there's nothing to forgive, father.

Xeno's Paradox

Almost supernatural bluster.
The bay forgets its islands.
They are gone
behind a white wall
of rain which spatters
the windscreen trying to get in.
Although raindrops never
really hit the ground:
they vaporise centimetres short.
Something hits my windscreen, then,
just as a horse at full gallop
is momentarily levitating,
but still manages to run.
Suicidally trapped inside
with me, bumbles to get out.
Something philosophical needed
about two opposing forces,
or the way of the trapped and the free.
The storm passes out to sea.
Polished and detailed car.
Rainbow signature flourishing.
This is a concrete irony.
A solid smile of nothing
covering the sky.
The islands were not really gone.
The rain was really hard.

Funny Hat

I met a man the other day
walking through the quiet streets
with a parrot on his head.

What's that on your head? I said
and he replied: A parrot.
What sort? I was genuinely curious.

An African Grey Parrot, and what's more
her name is Dorothy.
Remarkable, I said, for it goes without

saying that African Grey Parrots
are a rarity in my neighbourhood.
The parrot had leather vest and a little leash

to stop it ying o . As we paused
he placed the bird on the ground.
It waddled over to me

and implementing both beak and prehensile
claw it climbed up my trouser leg
like a monkey up a banana tree.

And how old is Dorothy? I asked
and he said: One hundred and seven years old.
Even more remarkable
neighbourhood.
for by now the nimble parrot had reached
my shoulder where it gripped my ear
like a biscuit in its beak and bit.

as a shadow from its host.
He plucked the bird rudely from my shoulder,
replaced it on his head, (he was wearing

a funny hat), wandering o
through the bright, dreamy, unknowable
light of an afternoon in our time.

←

And we wondered what the fuss was all about
when we came home
and saw the fvfis 2a-t40nt p0lf9hen
yawning with anxiety3
because our paernts had madew thedangefvfis us leap
fvfis m one plus one.

A Volcano

A volcano is a place where birds do not appear.

Even the birds you came to see.

Those birds stay away. They dart through the sky
Like quivering muscles. Alas. They were the birds
You came to see.

A volcano is a place too quiet for words.

Those words have to be swallowed. Those words
Have to be wrapped in heavy cloth and stored
In wooden boxes, buried under rocks. Those words
Can never be spoken.

A volcano is a place that you might choose to go to.

You might choose an ashen footprint. You might choose
That blackened lava. You may decide to carry some small
Pebbles in the pockets of your vest. But living with a volcano
Will never feel like a choice.

A volcano is a place where nobody else will go. You will always

Be alone with the volcano. You will dream that you see the faces of long-forgotten people

In every rockface and riverbed and tree trunk and pebble.

Didn't I go to school with her?

Wasn't he the one who drove the ambulance?

Is that the neighbour I told?

A volcano is a world of leaking and bruising. Nobody you love

Wants you to go there. A volcano can make you feel angry

At all of those people. Those people who love you, who are not searching

For those dark birds to hold in their arms. Those people whose arms

Are full of other things.

After Emily Dickinson

the house of possibility opens
for me, for all the ghosts dancing after my feet:

Turn it this way
and it looks like an old farmhouse standing in the pear trees,
wong-footed on a concrete bed,
turned around backwards by a zealous developer,
Front porch converted to a bathroom—
where I sang and cooked and cleaned and wrote
and they were all one work of living:

Turn it the other way
and it's an apartment all piled on top of itself,
bedroom and kitchen and enough room
to dance on a half-door with pint glasses on the corners,
enough room to tuck up in a bushel-basket for the winter:

Turn it and see
the farm on the edge of repossession
empty cupboards
see the blanket under the stars
and under the bridge
the heap of rubble in the desert:

Turn it the other way and see this
the floor of an ocean
the roof of a mouth
and between them like a tsunami or an avalanche,
the walls of oncoming vastness.

Is at the Dark?

Is that the dark whose head I see
crowning crow-black like a head of human hair?
Its fingers and tongues
touch suns between their radiant toes,
making them fall
into lakes and over mountains,
like large tripped titans, tricked into Tartarus.

Is that the dark
sweeping embers under camp fires
and stomping out stoves with its hooves
and painting the thoraxes of hornets
and stopping to stroke the sandy pollen centers of sun flowers?

It's tipping up the leaves' white skirts.
It's carrying rain water at the ends of its arms
in two heavy silver buckets.
It's poked-through with moth-holes of stars
and sliced by the moon's crescent scythe.

Is that the dark you're letting in
through the widened windows?
Are we meant to dip our toes in its inkwell
and leave its footprints on countertops,
like opportunistic cats?

Tell the dark to take its time.
It can savor the dim centers of snail shells
and cast open the cast-iron pupils of cattle.

Invite the dark to spend the night.
It can fold itself into our bat-wing bed sheets
or trick us by standing in corners, pretending to be something else.

Leak our secrets into the dark.
Tempt the marionette strings on its thumbs.
With a whisper to its shadow puppets,
it can convince us of
what we've never done,

or forge our forgetting
that we've ever lled our eyes with a sunrise.

It's telling us how to live forever: Just
open wide enough.

Open wide as Cronus to swallow suns
and their carousel solar systems.
Disguise yourself as something small and meek, like
half a planet's nighttime (dutifully devoured by daybreak),
all the while being—
quietly, deep down in your throat—
the canvas for a cosmos.

She Demands that I Return her Wig

She says it's an emergency: is this another trick?

I let her in and now she's in my face:

she spits:

.

.

.

.

.

f . . . Close-up she's wrinkled, tart. I should care more,
take her shopping: ethical tomatoes, farmers market,

sing-alongs or something. I mustn't be hard hearted.

e Silence of the Mountains

You held out your hand but refused to look up, instead
kept your panic-focused gaze pushed forward against the cliff face.
You spent five minutes studying old rock while I climbed
the impossible journey down to you.

I often think about what it is you could have seen.

What, in the crumbling orange façade, caught
your attention so suddenly, that your fear-warped
face turned slack-jawed with surprise a whole two minutes before
I heard the ear-shattering crack of stone beneath your feet.

I like to think your eyes never left the rock face.

at whatever caught your attention in the red dust and stone
held you there until you closed your eyes for impact.
I like to think you didn't look up to miss the stone turned still for a moment.

~ Pink

Pink. My childhood. 1950s demarcations. Twenty- first century perpetuation.
Pink. at damnable colour. Pink walls. Pink furniture. Pink to nurture.
Pink on the wardrobe hangers. Pink pyjamas. Pink for charmers.
Pink curtains. Pink lace. Pink socks. Pink satin ribbons for curls.
Pink for girls.
Pink for submission. Constant contrition. Knees together.
Quiet and meek. Stay in your seat. Pink for nice manners. Mustn't be yellers.
Be good and be nice. Do as you're told. Be polite. Everyone else is right.
Don't invite
A bad reputation. Ostracisation. Condemnation.
Be silent!
Your curse is accidental irritation. Horrid ovulation.
Deliberate temptation. Just be a nice decoration. A poor imitation.
A perfumed diversion.
A female perversion. An unsullied virgin.
Avoid fornication. You're on probation. No affirmations.
You are a girl.
Pink.
Do it.

~

Playing Telephone

You must have played the game: each child whispering to another, the message changed by the end of the line, perhaps on purpose, one player intent on mishearing, but the children do not care the reason.

As adults, they will come to understand
that all messages change eventually:
from urgent, to less so, to forgotten.
And from *urgent* to *less so* to *forgotten*.

I thought of this when you told me your father was dead,
a gunshot wound, his doing. My first thought,
seeing the ache behind your restless eyes,
was that this news would not long be new. At soon,

you would be talking about 'the night he died' and then
'the year he died' and that what I was seeing then
would be pushed further and further away from you,
time folding over until we asked ourselves

Weren't there always warnings, signs,
dread now shadowing memories, beach vacations,
Easter potlucks:

And this may make you sad, I know, this forgetting
what should be unforgettable. Because he was not always
destined to die, not like this, but was once alive
and joyful and free of that which finally consumed him.

But, in truth, I am glad for time's betrayal,
its duplicity. For it dulls in us a pain
that once promised to never be dulled, that threatens,
with absolute certainty, to stab forever, merciless.

Eventually, you won't remember the first pain—
not really. You will have lost the surprise that set it ablaze.
Eventually, the scar will ache, but something practiced and forgiving,
like running your hand along a worn blade, its edge

no longer deadly, but there.

↓ ' ↓

* * *

I heard my father fell down laughing when he found out the great joke
God had played on him. My mother said, *וְיָשָׁרְךָ אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל*.
וְיָשָׁרְךָ אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל I was their long-awaited son.

They say my father is a great man; I avoid him. He put his arm on my shoulder,
in a fatherly way, as he used to. Suddenly, I couldn't breathe.
I, who used to be so strong, fainted like a weakling in front of my father.

The problem is, it keeps happening. I cannot see the sun without the knife.
I try to steel myself to it, force myself to take a breath. Again. Again.
I wish he had killed me.

I lie awake in my tent, a watchman. If I drift asleep, I wake up screaming.
I'm afraid, now, and I hate myself for being afraid. I was never like this before.
At night, alone, I weep, like a woman. I am ashamed. What a laughing-stock

I am. *וְיָשָׁרְךָ אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל*. I even carried the wood on my back.
My name means, *וְיָשָׁרְךָ אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל*. I am the only one whose name was not changed.
Why? Does God mock me with His laughter? Shall the Lord provide

laughter to my life again?

וְיָשָׁרְךָ אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל

Throughout the poem, there are quotations from, rephrasings of and references
to the narrative of Genesis, Chapters 17 & 22, New Revised Standard (NRS).

Flexing for the Glorious

e Ferry Boats (P. M. Slight, '57)

at picture, hanging on the bathroom wall, which sat
on the mantelpiece of my childhood home for many years—
three ferry boats, apparently on collision course,
drawn in black ink with the edge of a card, the sea coloured
with a transparent green wash. The green has faded
to brown over the years, but the ferry boats remain, in all
their thumping, smoking, tooting glory. Suddenly,
it's 1957 again and I'm crossing Auckland Harbour from
the North Shore to the city with my parents. We walk
up the gangplank with the other shoppers and the workers.

The cabins are crowded, so we sit on the outside,
watching the smoke fly over, gulls flapping past, waves
breaking across the bow and streaming backwards.

Lagynos

Two shallow halves joined together:
I can't detect the clay slips
which made a vessel to hold
a litre of wine. From its centre
rises a slender brown mottled neck
or spout eight inches long. Likewise
from its edge there's a handle
parallel to the neck before
it curves to the mouth of the ask.

From overhead it isn't perfect,
the neck not quite in the centre.
An expert could tell at a glance
that it's a reproduction although
a good job of faking has been done
of how two millennia
of the sea's persistent nagging
have worn away glaze and painting.
And it's porous: water, for a rose
I put there to surprise you,
soaked through the base in minutes.

I bought the ask in the museum
in the old part of Budva,
Butuanum under the Romans,
from the Illyrian, Buthoë.
What country is this now? Montenegro.
The old town is narrow alleyways,
boutiques, bars or souvenir shops,
Russian powerboats in the harbour.
I bought the ask because you like
economy of form and you, too,
have a lovely slender neck.

Our three-year old grandson decided
he'd test the laws of gravity
and dropped it. Without neck or handle
it resembled a flying saucer.
I glued the intact pieces with Loctite.
Not nearly as good as new,
but surely a genuine relic
into which you put immortelles,
dried flowers with simple forms.

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e End of the A air

So the cat untwists in midair
beneath the apple tree, a blackbird
uttering backwards from her paws
as she lands eyes vivid with desire,
crouches, wriggles, deliberates, blinks.
So, too, an apple springs unbitten
from your hand to its twig, unripens
from red to green, dwindles to pistil,
before it blossoms, folds into bud.

So, too, the car strikes, tyres then brakes screech,
your father's walking stick ying
to his grasp as he somersaults
to his feet, backs off to his house,
goes inside, coats his coat to a hook, sits
over the years his hair thickening,
darkening, his voice deepening
into laughter until he can catch
and throw you up to where you smile.

So, too, the scar on your thigh,
whose slight ridge I love to touch
with a fingertip, widens
becoming bluish, livid, pink,
minute particles rising to it
from wherever you care to limp
making a scab, an ooze of droplets,
a frow before another's knife
withdraws and heals the jagged tear.

So, too, our lips close on each other's.
So, too, our mouths move apart.
So, too, their separate smiles fade.
So, too, our eyes look askance.
So, too, we step back, turn away.
So, too, our heartbeats decelerate.
So, too, we don't blurt out the words.
So, too, we don't decide to risk it.
So, too, we are never introduced.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

B-Side

While others listened to hit tunes on 45s,
you always flipped the platter like a pancake
and learned the lyrics on the B-side—
song not as well-loved or well-reviewed,
perhaps even derided by the critics,
 maybe in fact awful,
 but you knew that someday
 there'd be a contest
 and you'd know the answers:

What was on the reverse of _____ ?
 Can you sing the chorus?

You'd win points by knowing about
what you didn't love, and might love it a little
because you won points. Like sleeping with the uglier
sister of a cheerleader: It still counts, if you're keeping
score. And the B-side sister always
knows the words to the B-side song.

Even now, with vinyl in vogue again, you're the only person
anybody knows who can sing both sides of the single
which hit the charts with _____. You've waited
through your youth for a score-keeper to come along
and record your accomplishments, the songs covered
in smelly bars at volume sufficient to account for
the Noise-Induced Hearing Loss you suffer now.

You can't make it seem smart or funny anymore
when you invite your exhausted audience to join
in another round of _____ e girls
you shagged for the record pretend you don't exist.

You've become the forgotten B-side of former lovers
whose hearts weren't as broken as you hoped and they feared,
old friends who look the other way when they see you coming.
A contest was held, after all, but you didn't enter.

Pharmaecological

1. (Pharmaceuticals) (Pharmaceuticals)

1.

Don't say good men are dead.

You're neither good nor dead.

Much to my chagrin, a man.

Graveside, cluster his darlings (I am but one).

Local brunettes, mostly gone early to seed.

Our vital spirits crave a more ovoid shape,
a smaller water chamber.

Our immunities subdued
by the snake charms of stroking doctors.

You always did prefer the couch to bed.

Just another post-viral afternoon.

Spare me your gilded curiosity.

Serotonin's fucked. Please pass the placebo.

We revel in deceit and the sleep of absent friends.

2.

In that fancy house,

I worked all hours

Saw too many things (what's the use of having eyes
if that's the best they can do)

A girl raving downstairs hair tumbled.

She'd waited a day for co ee.

Maybe someone bewitched her linens
milked all the relics found there.

It's a business, like any other. Tricks work well

for girls with only one good idea, for girls who pen
survivor porn memoirs or clean eating apps.

ey've earned their reclusion.

Besides, she felt safer under the table than on it.

He told her a bullet would go right through mild steel, how
a human torso is a feather pillow.

She could make it the most obscene
word in any language: his name.

3.

She ate the flowers and then
was afraid to sleep again.

An open book her knees
consoling rigidity, the printed page

all her remembered actions, their weight.

a hewn revolutionist should be lean
a vessel of hollowed virtues

and renounced vanities
stomachs taut as eyelids

a warning in her blood that scalpels
wait with lessening patience.

she moons at unfamiliar doors
faces strangers' interiors

cells of her flesh reject kinship
denying everything human

she may walk anywhere in safety
who hides long invaluable legs

beneath heavy skirts rituals fasten
on her heels as threats recede, but not for long

Let the People Still Walk

Once Upon A Time

what did ferns construct?
only selves, stepping on
shoulders of sepia;
while the gums age inward,
marry their rings
to a hundred springs
and thrust out high bouquets,
the ferns wrinkle their bodies
and fur them, loiter with signs
near the bustling creeks and 'wait,'
they say, 'will work for rain.'

all directions, their leaves,
wander as you will. schools
of green sh, waiting in line
for thin soup. in poor years,
a begging tableau; dripping
pennies spill through
pockets of moss, even as
the ferns trickle downstream,
kissing and alone; content
with the stretch low.

for us: a long, at mantelpiece
lodged above the res. we
will be ornaments, earning
our own boots, our scars.
others will atten the camber
with wheels, but we feel
the high air judge. reach
for the sun, break through

the canopy of scree;
will you be scorched?
a yell of triumph is
a kind of burning.
'one day,' you say,
'we will all be as tall
as a mountain.'

e Wonder of Ful lment

our suit bag bodies drag on their coat hooks
in the dry cleaners' autumn wardrobes.

we scarf down our smoked fish residuum,

considering teeth to be the naked parts
of skeletons we should closet in our hearts.

most of us are scared if we're honest.

the body suits the teeth, but honest autumn
scarfs our hearts in the smoldering closet.

part-naked skeletons tear our skins apart.

we can only imagine what they're thinking
in sinking their naked parts in the fruit

of our fish. our wire coat-hangers are bent

into punctuation: open-mouthed questions
near-naked under their body bags.

and our coat tails wag in all seasons.

cloak rooms remain chambers of exchange
and smoke yells fire from our crowded mouths.

fish bone slivers never stood a chance,

and in the end it appears we need to be naked
the iceberg tips of our skeletons to speak.

biographies

Judges

B C Questions
About Angels, The Art of Drowning, Sailing Alone Around the Room, Nine Horses,
The Trouble with Poetry and Other Poems, Ballistics, Horoscopes for the Dead
Picnic, Lightning. H , Aimless Love: New and Selected
Poems 2003–2013 The Rain in Po (a) T Pods. Hi, 1041 Sy a low a end 302 aook 99%

and Qld Premiers' poetry prizes and the Prime Minister's Poetry Award. Her new and selected poems will appear in 2018.

PAULA BOHINCE lives in Pennsylvania, where she grew up. Her most recent collection is *... (Sarabande, 2016)*. Her poems have appeared in *...* and *...* as well as magazines in the US and UK.

JOHN CAREY is a Sydney poet, ex-teacher of French and Latin and a sometime actor. The latest of his four poetry collections is *...* (Picaro Press, 2013).

NINA CARROLL MD now is choosing the creative life of leisure and pleasure at her garden and home 'Swans' Pond', and sailing adventures in the Bahamas with her partner. She confects poetry from the myriads of fragments that collected while she was a gynecologist in Boston.

JOE DOLCE is a songwriter, poet, and performer. His poetry has appeared in *...* 2014 and 2015. He was shortlisted for the 2014 Newcastle Poetry Prize and was winner of the 25th Launceston Poetry Cup. He is on the staff of the Australian Institute of Music. His forthcoming book, *...*, will be published by Ginninderra Press in October 2017

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b l r i

DIANE GLANCY is professor emerita at Macalester College in Minnesota. Her recent books are *When the Sun Comes Out*, non-fiction, *The Day After Tomorrow*, poetry, *The Day After Tomorrow*, short stories, *The Day After Tomorrow*, novella, and *The Day After Tomorrow*, novel.

MARK GRINYER's poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *The Day After Tomorrow*.

winner in 2014 *Journal of American Poetry* award. Her poems have been published in *Grain*, *Grain*, *Grain*, *Grain*, *Grain*, and *Grain*.

MIN LIM is an undergraduate at Yale-NUS College. She is the winner of the National Poetry Competition 2016 (Singapore). Her works have appeared in *Grain*, *Grain*, and *Grain*, among others. She writes at: <http://minlim.com/>

ROBERT LUMSDEN lives in South Australia. He has published fiction, literary criticism, and poetry in periodicals, and is at work on a series of novels, three of them completed. A book on the aesthetics of reader response is in process.

GLENN MCPHERSON is a Sydney based poet and teacher with a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Sydney. Poetry has always held a spell over him and he is passionate about promoting it in a world that needs poetry more than ever.

RACHAEL MEAD is a South Australian poet, short story writer and arts reviewer. She is the author of *Grain* (Picaro Press, 2013) and her next poetry collection is forthcoming with UWAP in 2018. You can find more of her work at rachaelmead.com.

AUDREY MOLLOY was born in Dublin and raised in County Wexford, Ireland. She lives in Sydney and works as a medical writer and editor. Her poetry has appeared in *Grain* and *Grain*. She was short-listed for the 2016 Judith Wright Poetry Prize for New and Emerging Poets.

OAK MORSE is a poet, speaker and teacher. His work has appeared in *Grain*, *Grain*, and *Grain*. An ambassador for 'cluttering', a speech disorder diagnosis which he has worked tirelessly to overcome, Oak lives in

Kong and Japan; long listed in the 2015 Oxford Brookes International Poetry Contest; his poetry has appeared in *Granta* (UK). He has published mostly non-fiction.

DAMEN O'BRIEN is a Queensland poet and works in an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle company. He was joint winner of the 2017 Peter Porter Poetry Prize. He has also been successful in the Yeats Poetry Prize, the KSP Poetry Award and Ipswich Poetry Festival. Damen is published in *Granta*, *Granta*, *Granta* and *Granta*.

MARK O'FLYNN'S novel

IPSI :: CCCR

The International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) is part of the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra. IPSI conducts research related to poetry, and publishes and promulgates the outcomes of this research internationally. The Institute also publishes poetry and interviews with poets, as well as related material, from around the world. Publication of such material takes place in IPSI's online journal *AXON* (http://www.axonjournal.com.au/) and through other publishing vehicles, such as *POETRY*. IPSI's goals include working—collaboratively, where possible—for the appreciation and understanding of poetry, poetic language and the cultural and social significance of poetry. The institute also organises symposia, seminars, university ofis8 85 f

