

Australian Poetry Journal

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Australian
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Australian Poetry Journal

DIS— Poetry Guest Edited by
Jennifer Harrison and Andy Jackson

Foreword I

When I was a child growing up in Pennant Hills, Sydney, we lived in the next street to a place called Chelmsford Private Hospital. Between 1963 and 1979 doctors in Chelmsford, led by Dr Harry Bailey, were performing a type of psychiatric treatment known as ‘deep-sleep therapy’ in order to treat conditions such as schizophrenia, depression, anorexia. These treatments and their dangerous consequences are well known and were fictionalised in the late Dorothy Porter’s verse novel *What a Piece of Work*. Chelmsford itself had a strange mystique in our neighborhood. My mother and other local housewives would note in hushed tones that such and such a celebrity was ‘in there’. What ‘in there’ meant to me, as a child, was mysterious. My memory is of an ordinary, bland, pale, brick bungalow-style building—and yet behind that nondescript façade at least 24 people died (often after more than 14 days of induced coma), including two children.

That childhood memory stays with me and continues to remind me that we are vulnerable to the ebb and flow of treatments, diagnostic categorisations, medicalisations of the body and conceptualisations of mental illness, and that these forces affect the lives of those who live with all kinds of disability. In opposition to Chelmsford is everything that The Dax Centre and The Dax Poetry Collection, based at the University of Melbourne, strive for: an interested listening to the creativity of those who have experienced mental anguish, stigma and psychological trauma; to challenge orthodoxies and through an engagement with art, diarisation and poetry to learn more about the mind, resilience, individuality and dignity. As curator of the Poetry Collection, this volume arose as an intentional partnership with *Australian Poetry Journal* and its publisher, Australian Poetry.

In 2011, Dr Toby Davidson, Senior Lecturer at Macquarie University, edited the *Collected Poems* of Francis Webb (1925-73, UWAP), a poet who spent many years institutionalised for mental illness. Webb himself referred to mental illness as that ‘nameless knowledge in his soul’. Or as poet Sandy Jeffs sharply puts it here when applying her razor to language in the taxological ‘People Must think I’m Crazy Because...’, ‘a mushroom short of a trip, a condom short of an orgy, a clown short of a circus’.

What poetry gives us is birdsong alongside activism; the outside world alongside the internal world of emotions; hope shadowing despair. In the pages of this edition of *Australian Poetry Journal* 9.2 – ‘DIS—’, poetry and other arts place the person at the centre of these experiences. The insights selected here are unique, profound, humorous, life affirming, dark, disturbing. There is rebellion, refusal, irreverence. Poetry has a unique ability to see behind doors previously closed, those locked doors of Chelmsford.

Jennifer Harrison

Foreword II

Naming is difficult, fraught, and yet crucial. When we decided on the name of ‘DIS–’ for this issue of *APJ* 9.2, something clicked. *Dis–* means apart or away, and there are innumerable ways in which people can diverge from the so-called norm. Here, in these poems, there’s an array of impairments named and intimated, but the focus is on what disables us, in the widest sense – the refusal of employers to adapt, a brutal economy, the erosion of meaning or hope, an under-resourced medical system that is rarely holistic, inadequate infrastructure, violence and prejudice, pain and trauma, the limitations of language itself. *Dis–* is the prefix that is *pre*-fix, *before* a broken situation or body is repaired. These poems capture and convey the tension and potency of such unresolved states.

We received an astonishing range of submissions, and the selection process was both tremendously exciting and daunting. There were some experiences that seemed to attract more submissions than others, and might warrant a number of anthologies all their own – we had to pass on some strong poems. We have aimed for a diversity of voices, in many senses of that word – bodily experience, cultural background, age, gender, philosophy, aesthetic. We also strongly prioritised poems of lived experience, including the voices of carers, friends, lovers – poems of solidarity and care that recognise that distancing ourselves from disability is impossible.

The issue is arranged, mostly, in reverse alphabetic order, by poem name. Because, here anyway, the poem is the priority. And because disability upends order, and creates surprising juxtapositions. Nevertheless, we also wanted to choose which poems would appear first and last. The issue begins with ‘Oracle’ by Robin M Eames, which responds to that common question from non-disabled people, ‘what’s wrong with you?’, with love and ‘impossible answers’ – ‘you have to figure these things out for yourself’.

‘DIS–’ concludes with lines that frame the disability community – indeed, perhaps even the human community – as inclusive and porous. The poem speaks for its own particular experience, but could also be seen as emblematic of the entire issue – ‘We are not strangers anymore / ... here, alone, we are — all of us — kin.’ (Saba Vasefi, ‘Dysphoric’.)

In between, there are lyrics, visual poems, formal poems, experiments in language, uncategorisable forms – these are voices that expand (dare I say it, that disable) our sense of what poetry can be.

Andy Jackson

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Poems

Oracle

I have perfected a certain busied appearance
mien of semi-urgent somewhere-to-be
wheeling too swiftly for strangers to stop and ask
What's wrong with you ?
or perhaps What happened (to you)
(to your legs)(to make you different) ? or
Why (the chair)(your legs)(are you here)
(are you like this)(are you alive) ? ? ?
Each question pierces something deep inside me,
leaves me cradling a wound that I try to hide
for fear of being further exposed, of showing
weakness before a predator whose hunger for
justification won't be slaked with my discomfort.
Against the slurry of abled inquisition I raise
my own defences: a certain glint in my eye,
a lifting of hackles, a tightness to the corners
of my mouth, and if these fail I have one final
weapon in reserve: a quizzical tilt and question
of my own: Why do you ask ?
All this not from spite but simply because my heart
is already so swollen with various woes that further
distension would make me unable to move at all,
pin me to my bed and prevent me from rousing,
and I love the world and do not want to leave it.
I want to give my heart more room for love
than grief. I want to keep space for warmth
and not that sudden pit of cold that fills my body
at these innocent cruelties. If they want to know,
then let them voice the truth. The madwomen of Delphi
delivered prophecies of nonsense phrases,
inscrutable, opaque. When asked impossible questions
they gave impossible answers.
You have to figure these things out yourself.

what we don't say

they say

it was when you were on the sleepy pills
remember that time I was hungry and I told you
and you said

there are some suitcases in the cupboard
you could eat those

and I say

I don't remember

or I say

I half remember

and they don't laugh

and I say

I was very tired

or I say

I'm so sorry I was
sleepy for all that time

and we don't laugh

and they say

you were

late for school every day

toast in the car

wet wipes on the dash

for vegemite smears for honey orbs

on thighs on noses on cheeks

both of you running

long hair tangling the wind

backs tilted school bags banging

after the bell after the roll

absence marked hard

by a sure hand a red pen

they say

I miss you

and I say

I'm here

or I say

I know

and I say

I love you

remember my own mother

teeth too big lips drawn back

sending us to the shops

for champagne

with a handwritten note

I give permission for my daughters to

a signature a phone number

our walk up Marrickville Road

the note the sun stroke footpath

brown frangipanis a cicada shell cracking

and the woman at the shop called her

reluctantly handed the cold bottle over

followed us half the way home

remember handing the bottle over

brown paper bag creased green glass sweating

the way she slurred the word

Minchinbury

while she laughed and poured

yellow in the cup in the table in the couch

such good girls

her wet and too long kiss on our lips

in the couch under the chair over the bed

wet wipes brown and honey yellow in pockets

slow blood shallow breaths

left eye closed more than the right

I send you a photo
you say
 you look tired
you say
 I miss you
and I say
 I can't wake up
or I say
 can you come
or I say
 I'm sorry

recycling blue trackies yellow t-shirts
scrubbing at stains at milk worn patches
sticking torn knees together with glue dots
a needle too fine for a shaking hand to thread

the psychiatrist insists on this everyday fog

I say
 I can't wake up
I say
 we're always late
 the other parents are looking at me sideways
 the washing is a cloth monster is smells like moths
 the kids can't get to me I can't get to the kids
 the fence is fallen the dogs is escaping
 there is shadows on my eye corners
 the cicada is a shell under my shoe
 my knees is cut open I can't feel my pulse

the night I heard a far cry
 Mama
 Mama
 Mama

rolling over sleep a ditch a drain a woollen wet mask
 Mama
stretching out an arm how long has he been standing there
how long at my bed side how long at this edge
 my tummy hurts
holding his own middle

pulling him towards me that one arm a limb
for him to crawl along heavy enough to hold his weight

he doesn't say
 remember that time I was sick and I
 couldn't you wouldn't wake up
 and I vomited in bed

they don't say
 we were late every day
 you were always asleep
 the bread was stale

they don't say
 we miss you even when we are with you
 glue dots can't stitch a tear

I don't say
I pull them in
my arms a bit lighter
a bit wider
wide enough to circle
them both
hope they don't remember

scrape the glue dots off
with a yellow nail a crying eye
a tremor voice a shaken head
keep a soft voice hold a cicada shell
gentle fingers curled around the brown

We want you(r disability statistic)

1.
A job advertises they are an equal
opportunity employer— flexible
hours.
2.
I apply.
3.
They ask me to tick the Disability box.
Stats to show how shiny they glow,
how wholesome they are to hire me.
4.
I provide a doctor's letter
for my Bipolar Disorder. Taste
discrimination. Gag on rot:
'We'll visit you once a week
to make sure you're meeting
our requirements.'

'What about mine? I read
you were an equal opportunity
employer with flexible hours.'

'Where did you read that?'

'The job ad.'

5.
They surprise me with a second
course. Serve a dose tinged green
hidden away from employees
who say I am doing a good job.
'We don't want you to be able
to do a good job. We want you
to always be available.' I spew
their words over my uniform.
Have food poisoning for days.
6.
I ring to speak to HR; they refuse
to put me through. I write a letter
of complaint— never answered.
After I resign the boss leaves
a message for me to return
my uniform.

we is classified

a façade of symptoms	a flutter of hospital wings
an angel of mutterings	a strain of thoughts
a masturbation of facts	a clinic of nights
a descent of human rights	a swarm of discords
an ouija of voices	an occult of rubber gloves
a pitying of loves	a stiffness of eels
a glaring of desks	a gloaming of feels
an intrusion of cockroaches	a tardive of tongues
a business of ferrets	a business of flies
a school of leashes	an eye of pupils
a lag of appointments	a spell of steel darts
a strapping of skulls	an insertion of drips
a gaze of mirrors	a mission of blood tests
a flux of prescriptions	a pursuit of nurses
a residue of childhoods	a borderline of parents
a prickle of pants	a constipation of asses
a shipwreck of elephants	a dopamine of dogs
a comorbid of hopes	a concern of others
a jab of acronyms	a skulk of knuckles
a repeat of currents	an eyrie of circular lights
an upset of skins	a troubling of neighbours
a cloud of happiness	a drool of prescriptions
a boil of hawks	a bloat of stomachs
a mute of selectives	a seroquel of sounds
a valproate of hyenas	a cackle of foils
a brood of moods	a bed of anaesthetists
a labour of sweats	a bouquet of pigs
a warren of zevons	an unkindness of selves
a crash of libidos	a dispenser of sardines
a shutter of spiders	a steak of wolves
an outbreak of sheets	a boredom of tics
a turn of turns	a delusion of knots
a blessing of valium	a dawn of dry mouths

Unyoked Australia

You voted a Pentecostal Christian for your leader,
the cost of living is a joke, can't last to Sunday.
Yesterday, found myself strolling through a supermarket
at dusk, delusional, fluorescent-limbed, unable to buy
anything not packaged in plastic – goes to landfill anyway.
I'm stuck on the main-way, petrol-head middle zone
of your ignoble terrain – sick with your stigmata soil.
It's all patriarchy and mine-sores. Go fuck yourself
you coal dredging, energy sucking red neck wasteland –
keep extracting iron-ore, opal, moonlight, fractious gold.
Why don't you ban pesticides? Why don't you stop
mining old growth forests? Why don't you plant more trees?
And why do you persist on locking up asylum seekers?
Did I mention my brother has been institutionalised
fifty times in your psych wards? Last time locked up
in high dependency three weeks with no leave – had to
piss in a cup. He'll never recover from your negligence.
I want to cut a hole clear through your sick morality,
your masculine economy that underpins everything –
a fascism pervades. There'll be no revolution, just steady
decline into rightist politics, into remiss custodianship.
Do I seem mad to you? Am I unhinged? It's your fault –
I've got convict DNA. A regressive bloodline drives me
to revolt against your inner thigh of spittle-beach,
hardly a shark in sight – what a hoax. Anyway,
you don't owe me nothin' – all you do is take.
Keep taking lives, 17 more died since August 2018,
407 deaths since the end of 1991 – all Indigenous.
No one's taken in by your rhetoric of worker's paradise,
a fair go for all, that's bullshit. And, no one cares when
you do your diplomacy with America – suck up
the Trump-machine, engineering apocalypse.
New Zealand's got a woman Prime minister, we had one once –
she got the sack on account of misogyny, never had a chance.
Did I mention you're at war with poor people?
Just keep drinking your fermented yeast aphrodisiac
of the forgotten. Here's a toast to your partial-citizens
deformed by neglect. Homelessness is rife. Koala's are extinct,
almost. Australia you don't work no more, better think.

Vestige

Tucked in the front of the blue drawing book
a certificate good grades:

This student has higher than average talent.

From the dusty bowels of the last place
that resembled a family home

a remnant my uncle's art folio
from more than 60 years ago.

Hand-written class notes:
hue value chroma are the distinctions that make up colour

an article clipped from *Time Life* magazine
about Vincent Van Gogh.

The papers are soft with age
mould dust tickles my throat and coats my fingers.

As a child all I knew was that Uncle John
had a 'breakdown' when he was young,

(so sad so gifted)

he lived with us for a short time
in the little bedroom. When we got burgled

police dusted the window sill
leaving white powder fingerprints

my skin crawled when I walked past the door
evidence of tampering and invasion

(I learned that he burned most of his artwork).

How did electroshock therapy change what he saw
inside and out? He is still alive

(unlike his brother my father who
couldn't keep his head above the drowning line)

decades in supported accommodation
quiet sentinel at family functions.

My mother shows me a chopping board
he made and gave her keeping hands busy

an exquisite object the work of an artist
carefully crafted patter of grain against grain.

I want to ask more about his story
but family habits hold strong don't disturb the past.

A kind of suspended sorrow
what might have been what was lost.

How much of this grief / code is mine?

The dream about my nephew's blue scales,
the golden sheep serene in their wood-carved trees
panic on the floor in North Indian hills
my first therapist: do you think you're having a manic episode

No I just went shopping I was happy.

A spent lightning rod I carry
hold it gingerly when walking into storms.

To the girl who came before me on the table

after 'Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev' / Adrienne Rich, 1974

The cold felt | and our blood
grew colder then the light
died down and we slept
our signatures
speak in triplicate, buried
deeper than our bodies when
I feel your old traces unburned by bleach
feel you in the surgeon's touch you

are the practice in his hands

I see my scars and think
about your body made long the *yes* and the *wants*
of you off the table do you kiss? Does
your jaw ache the same as mine?
Our same scars stripe separate skin
pulling and re - stitched for every new centimetre dared
You slowly form standing (straighter
than I?) at windows waiting
for trains or the next big break
your tongue thick and smile slow with long practice
at symmetry that doesn't always work still
you are the practice in his hands
your body shapes my body
(and hers and hers and *hers*)

I feel you limping toward me
knee-deep in dailiness, which
I want to scoop up and gift you like small flat stones
that fit in your hand | unthinking
I trail you through Etomidate
A cable of blue fire ropes our bodies
what does it mean "to survive"?

I hope you woke up.

To Save Herself

She scribbles with an angry pencil
a portrait: her former self with violin.
In the drawing she is smashing
the instrument over the back of a chair
so as to stop herself doing it in real life.
It is as if she has died and been reborn,
remembering her skills yet severed from them.
Before, she knew every note,
every nuance on that ebony board.
Now her fingers might well be slouched
drunk on a Bermuda beach,
they are unresponsive to the black notes,
or even hold her old wooden friend.
Where once her fingers and eyes
were a concise team working in slick unison,
now, it seems, her baulking brain has the final say.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

1.

There are no 'blackbirds with disabilities' — all blackbirds can fly.
There are *only* 'blackbirds with disabilities' — all blackbirds will one day fall from the sky.

(There is no greater disability than mortality.
What you call my 'disability' is to mortality
as this moment is to Time itself.)

All the rest is paperwork.

2.

I once saw a blackbird with a broken wing become roadkill.
It was a hit and run. I saw also
the driver's stricken face.
He was a blackbird.

3.

I tried to convince the psychiatrist that he, too, was a blackbird.
I even gave him a mirror.
He still denied it.

He was nuts.

4.

Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie
cannot see outside the pie,
but will eventually all agree that they can.
And agree that it is them out there, free and flying.
And agree even that it is a group of *other* blackbirds
who are trapped in the pie:
four and twenty blackbirds who deserve it.

These principles apply to blackbirds
as well as blackbirds.

5.

You do not know
that the feather in your cap
signifies either a suicide or a murder.

6.

Dante was a blackbird who flew higher than most because
he was willing to descend into his blackness.
After he did that, he ascended into his birdness.
And after he did that, he transcended both blackness and birdness,
even if only for a moment.

7.

There is no word for the immensity of Sky.

For some blackbirds
the sky is full of fear and madness. About to fall.
No-one has ever told them that they are blackbirds,
that the sky is there for *them*,
that it will not fall, that they can fly up into it,
that everything is the other way around.

Who will tell them?

8.

I once sat in the back seat of a car
between a blind blackbird and a deaf blackbird.
The blind blackbird couldn't see what the deaf blackbird signed,
and the deaf blackbird couldn't hear what the blind blackbird said.

I became the eyes of one and the ears of another.
And they flew together.
And I flew with them.

9.

They say that Jesus wasn't a blackbird. Of course he was.
He was black as night.
That is why they crucified him; then told us that he rose white.

Don't believe them.
They're all blackbirds, all of them.

10.

I have known and know many blackbirds that you call
'blackbirds with disabilities' (I am one of them).
I have known and know many blackbirds that you have diagnosed
as having a 'blackbird illness' (I am one of them).

I refuse to use these terms about any blackbirds, even you.
What do you call them then? you ask me.

(You are a blackbird that doesn't know it is a blackbird
speaking about other blackbirds
with a blackbird that knows it is a blackbird.
If only you knew, you little blackbird, you!)

I call them Maria and Paolo and Dennis and David and Julie and Susan and Craig and
Millie and Angela and Wendy and Roger and Kelvin and Dion and ...

and I'll be damned if I know why you don't.

11.

You're looking for a collective noun
that won't insult blackbirds?

You should probably try flight.

No, not the word you idiot! The act!

12.

The City of Dis is a hell-on-earth
that blackbirds created for other blackbirds.
No-one remembers when hell-on-earth
became the only earth there is.
No-one remembers when we all fell from the sky.

But everyone is freezing here,
trapped under inexplicable ice at the centre of the inferno,
frozen with our wings stretched out
as if we are flying.

Frozen with our beaks open
as if we are talking about these things,
as if we have not obeyed the injunction
that we ourselves wrote, and so have not
abandoned all hope.

13.

I'm sorry.
I cannot help you.

I'm just a blackbird.
Remember?

The Water Trough

Pump stands stately in the middle of the paddock
as if posing for *Ram Illustrated*
the afternoon mist gathering about him and
incongruous at his hooves
a small tribe of fortnight-old wild ducklings
who've spent the afternoon in the swamp
with their mother but now
are on their way to pick up
from over by the water-trough
their father who's been waiting and who'll
struggle upright
and hop slowly off
dangling his broken foot.

the vase room

you're in there for something, something that doesn't
roll off the tongue, something with a hunger.
you're in, taken quick, admitted, no ticket,
ground at you like from a hand held.
you're in and licking the pages from a bible
and chewing and spitting them

in there there are vase rooms where they
trim the ends off three day dreams

in the absence of dancing in there, there are
paintings that espouse frivolity.
in the absence of dancing, eyes don't meet to
doh-si-doh, people move like slaters

each floor has a vase room but in times of shortage
dreams are 'let go' before vases shared

nights are velour in there - stroke them the other way
and you'll see where you've been.
no smell of the sea in there, no sense
of wet earth or its call

on Sundays in the vase room visitors hydrate and
grin and rhyme but don't spill

you're in though we can't say why so when they ask
our words move like magnets North on North

in the vase room are refugees, veterans, waifs,
some gifts, some forgotten

you're in there though the ravens and rusted swing and
tyres across a Tuesday sky say you're not

the vases in the vase room sit close, shaped for
purpose, ready to be filled, ready but empty

The smallest bone to pick

There are scrublands near my flat that rise skyward
and widen into a plain of long, fine haired grass

scrublands which people circumnavigate with purpose
on bicycles or behind prams, in couples with heads cocked inwards, fingers interlocked
or solo and track suited, arms and legs pumping

each evening for the month I've walked
hundreds of tight, heavy circles carrying a blistering grief

I think about my body, and how my ear bones are slowly hardening,
ossifying says the specialist

and how, the smallest bone in my body — the stapes — will one day,
soon, stop thumping clean and hard on my ear drum

each evening I walk until my shins ache
as if to outpace this rare, genetic happenstance

swinging my arms, hoping to look casual,
so casual

when really, I'm thick with tension and turning the same few thoughts over
and over — work, money, security

It's hard to keep these fears on the periphery when they accompany me,
with a sing-song rhythm, into sleep — work, money, security

I'm not afraid of becoming deaf in my right ear
I've only ever known silence in my left ear

Deafness feels natural
Silence feels comforting

and so, my mind focuses on the unknowns — work, money, security

on I walk and walk, thinking these same few thoughts
as all the dogs run off lease, tongues loose over teeth, bodies all muscle and fur and bone

There is No-one to Ask Questions to the Bird

September 2014, written from Melbourne Immigration Transit Centre

Twice a month the psychiatrist will call.
With all his knowledge he asks six questions:
'How is your health?'
Before I can answer he proceeds to the second question:
'Did you sleep well?'
There are sleeping tablets but there is no sleep.
'Are you able to communicate well with your family?'
This question angers me.
The fourth question is a question that creates what it asks.
'Do you have suicidal thoughts?'
If I say yes, four guards will appear and become my constant companions.
The fifth is a question to clear doubt.
'What are your plans to take your life?'-
If I answer this there is more medication.
'When will you do it?'
These are questions without answers.
These are people who experiment on our lives.
For all the questions I answer, do any of these people understand my pain?
So many years.
What is the point of repeating?
The questions haven't changed, neither is there change in my life.
The difference between birds in a cage and us?
Nobody asks the birds these questions.

The Old Man and The Tower

What a knee-buckling
weight he is, the old man
sat astride my shoulders.
The sheer heft of him
the yoke of his thighs
so much meat and bone in him.
A nodding cannonball
for a head, larger than
life-size, his stentor chest.

Homer wrote of Stentor that
his voice was as powerful
as fifty voices of other men.

That loud man died (it is written)
after getting into a shouting match
with the trickster son of Zeus.

Women don't shout, much.
We scream.

*

What manner of tower might it be?
Some crumbling old wreck from antiquity
some grace and favour, heritage-listed
place of last resort for
the faery and the daemon?

Without recourse I carry him
upon the back of my neck
finding each spiral step
with a careful, seeking foot.

Not such a weight
with all my strength
nearly at the top
and still he sings
(like a little child)
hanging on to my ears
(hoping for a good view)
legs dangling athwart.

*

I have the impression that the old man
assumes he is mounting this archaic structure
of his own accord. That each increment
of height seems no more than he deserves.

Is he our sacrifice, will I tip him onto
the cobblestones below once I have gained
the view? Is it a kill-the-father job?
It's like a chess piece, this tower. Crenellated.
Permission to fortify, sir!

This is the territory of answer-back.
This is where the awl of ministry
bites. Enough. Enough. Enough.
Eek eek eek eek eek!

All better now? Calm as a millpond.
Smooth as a smoothing iron
(whatever that is) dashing away.

*

Not one to eschew a burden, no, happy
to pull as hard against the collar or lift
a load as anyone, but my littleness.
Against your immensity.

*

The tower (so it seems) is finite
tops out into vaporous cloud
the realm of what-comes-next.
(There may be other towers about.)
Who knows, I don't know, intent
like a lonely donkey
withers wrung
(a jenny or a hinny)
my being is set upon this task
such is the donkey song.

So I steady you, one hand poised
upon your flank, the other hoisted
on a cant for balance. So and (and)
I take the next step.

Geoff Page

The high illusions

The high illusions of bipolar
are never random or absurd.
They are the lives that should have been,

the lives its victims have retrieved
decked out with fresh achievements in
their fields of expertise

together with those children
never registered but real
who live in rich elaborations

complete with moment of conception
and playgrounds out of reach.
This is what they talk of when

by misadventure or a kind
of migratory design
they turn up at the ward again

in search of calm and readjustment
slanting down like Boeings
across a month or two

from heights of exaltation that
too much disrupt the peace.
Sometimes they are self-admitted;

more often they will be dropped off
with resignation or bemusement
by tolerant police.

The First Seizure

When it threw your body to the floor
and thrust it into itself again and again
and again, your lips turned blue and fierce.
Saliva frothed and drooled. Your whole body
shook, your fists shoving and punching
at yourself. I thought this
was your dying.

When our father carried you outside
we huddled as close as pall bearers. He placed you
in the centre of the grey vinyl seat, urged us to snuggle in.
In the cocoon of our FX Holden our parents' worry buzzed
back to us. We curled around you as if our job
had become protecting you
from every bad thing.

The Disabled Warrior Emerges from Darkness

for Margot Beavon-Collin

in Sparta we are dashed against rocks
discarded in Athens drowned in wine-dark
waters of Argos abandoned in Corinth
we are the long-prophesied doom of Thebes
tossed from Olympus but protected
in Kemet where they worship little gods
valued in Babylon beloved by Yehudim
called *monstrum* in Rome thought portent of
ill fortune foul beasts better slain or caged
in labyrinthine prisons far from the upper air.
in the Rig Veda armoured queens with iron
legs ride into battle like old gods like K'awiil
of lightning & sacrifice whose leg was
a serpent like Tezcatlipoca of the night wind
whose foot was replaced with obsidian
like Nuada king of the otherworld whose left
hand was fashioned from flashing silver.
moon-cursed they call us demons or deities
weird creatures suffering early purgatory
wild things possessed by the planet Saturn
fey changelings & children of witches.
these days the cavalry rides on wheelchairs
smashing curb cuts out of concrete with
war cries roaring out in electronic voices
& we are still dying still drowning still
damned & discarded but we are not dead yet
& when we die we die like dying stars
with fierce love & fire our light spilling
forth still visible from distant galaxies
for long centuries after we are gone the fight
continues the fire burns brightly on

The Albatross

Often, to pass their time on board, sailors
will shoot an albatross, one of those huge birds
who indolently follow, like companion voyagers,
vessels gliding over the sea's abyss.

On finding themselves deposed, these kings
of sky – upon the deck, goaded by boors –
let, alongside them, their great white wings
trail pathetically like unshipped oars.

How comical he is, awkward and weak,
this winged traveller, lately so assured,
one sailor shoves a pipe into his beak,
another mocks the spastic who once soared!

The Poet's like a prince of clouds
who rides the storm, laughs at their bowstrings;
exiled on earth, amongst jeering crowds,
he's robbed of walking by his giant wings.

taste ~ silver ~

heart attacks like ~~ gravestones
on ECG^^^jitterbox
chest scars pressed together
taste tick of each beat ...

on ECG jitterbox ^^
echoes like new velvet
taste tick of each ... beat
sweat-lashed \\ cracked lips

echoes like new velvet
I hear ridges of each line ____
sweat-lashed cracked \ lips \
our scars {moonstoned}silver

I hear ridges }} of each line
\pressed together\ like velvet
our scars moonstoned~~silver
our scars only ours ...~~~

suite for adelaide

i.

fractal-souled, we are
iterations of history & fate
tending us, reflecting us
in Mandelbrot great lake blooms –

two ink pots overturned,
garnet red and indigo
a landscape of mirroring
wells upon oak.

and our ink tributaries seek sea-level
as is their nature –
now we run through
each other.

ii.

i live the explanatory
demanded by others of
illness unebbing

i study the fine art
of corporeal translation, conjuring
wordy blurbs from
shaded aching and unease

i rub the vocal
bow along strained guy ropes
of throat and lymph nodes,
croak qualia approximations
answers to impromptu quizzes
as related to the body
as dogs to seals.

but with you
i require no interpreter
our chilled Braille reams
read over each other
in a dialect
before unpronounceable, even
mythical.

an origami dialect
the sensory verbs we conjugate
glidingly
(though cathedral mouths stay silent)
at once in every tense –
I had thought,
We will go,
Love me,
It would be,
This was always –

our mother tongue.

Stargazing for the blind: an app

blind under the night sky
he ponders how to map
the pull of unseen presences

how stars and their distances
could be birdcalls in a forest,
measurable points of sound

most stars are imagined anyway
(he points the phone with its app
at Orion under our feet)

already we hold them in place
with something other than sight

astronomy is an imaginary art
its vast archipelagoes
invisible as mathematics

he conjures its shining islands
tagging them with sound
feeling them branch out around him

till the wayward gods
who have seen his type before
send him a silent smile

Note: *For Yuma Decaux and Jake Dean, Brisbane engineering students who in 2018 created an app to enable virtual stargazing for people with low vision/blindness.*

Somebody that I used to know

He enters the long, dark tunnel of early dementia
blank patches spreading across the map
of a once-sharp brain, like undiscovered country.

We lunch at his local RSL, but he's forgotten
that it's Monday. The Chinese restaurant
is closed. We settle for something blander
and wait, my latte drunk, his untouched beer
warming on the table. The wall-clock measures time
in slow-moving blocks, as though holding it
to ransom. He asks for news, conversation,
half-listening to the torrent of my words.

Time is somewhere else, a soaring bell
of sound and solitude.

*

We're at a party in trendy, down-market Balmain
late sixties, drinking flagon wine – Moselle or
Riesling. High on antihistamines, I'm used to beer
but match them glass for glass, until the world goes black.
Prone on the divan, I can't see anything,
hear their voices, their concern:

Should we take her to Emergency?

Nah, he says. She'll be right.

But I'm not. Is this it, no consciousness, to be not here,
not anywhere? Life ticks by without me.

When my darkness clears, we take our leave.

At the house, the car door opening in a rush,

I throw up on his mother's rose garden.
She isn't pleased.

*

The grandkids are off to the snow this weekend.

Did we ever drive there? he asks.

I seem to remember your face in the car.

Yes, there were journeys.

Once, we listened to the same music

but I think I was hearing the words.

something chronic

you ask

how do i push
against the walls of this body
strengthless
not even the grasp to
pick up sticks to
prop up my spine
my feet dragged
with stones

they answer

brittle-bones
just drink more milk
do yoga
go to the needleman
and meditate and massage
your lungs with incense
and are you drinking enough water to drown
your immune system?

like their low iron equals empathy
yet somehow their math is all off so
it came out condescendingly
and you can't hold them to account
when their numbers are wrong
besides
you don't have the time or
university degree necessary to pull
kindness from your teeth

the debate-standard patience to explain
your lukewarm nervous
system when it takes hours
to hold a spoon to your heavy tongue
but you haven't spoken in a while
so they fill your mouth instead
they say

it's all in your head
practice mindfulness and
drink kombucha
and have you been
exercising enough?
I feel like shit when
I don't perspire enough
just take some vitamins
death by a thousand strings
of thoughtless advice, but this time
you answer
my limbs are made from sandbags
holding back a dam-bursting
flood while my delicate
nerve-filaments are spinifexian
and each day i am flinching
in wait for an
emberring cigarette butt
to set me alight

sertraline parallax

what data of you
fulcrumed into verbs
like pendula the slipway
from the most
twenty-five
grams redacts
the fragments of a cuneiform signature
this rosetta unshrapnelled
from a skull of earth
an immolation of symbols
scattered ecstasies
with the topography
of memories
these dessicated trees writhing
the light of a new sun
the birds resume the air
a grave returns its due

Scar Tissue

She shows me the latest addition.
It is deep.
Too deep.
She says it goes to the bone.
I have seen this slice of skin in others.
Uniform rows and rows
on upper arms and thighs.
I have not done this. Could not cut,
watch skin open,
watch blood leak and pool or spurt.
I am squeamish. I feel too much.
I anesthetize.
She says she does not feel enough.
She has taken knife and razor – even fork –
and rammed it in.
She has patched herself together
with sutures bought on-line.
She is not a tailor. She is not a dressmaker.
Her scars are raised and angry.
On display.
She wears summer tops and dresses.
I am not a cutter. I am not a sewer.
When her pain becomes mine I take it home
pour a large glass
dissolve us both in wine.

Rheumatic Transvestitism

Unlike a wheelchair people don't look away,
they look straight at me and ask *Why don't you work?*
Most look away when I tell them—but not all.

What do you do? is a lead social question; and some
folks are chatty. But chatty's as fun as pulling out x-rays
at a party. I'm always surprised by who wants a peek at my

Bone-negatives in envelopes.
I'm no wheelchair see, no broken arms or legs. I'm rheumatic
transvestitism, dressed in health. Blokes double check me

Their bulbs, like radiology viewing-boxes, screening
if I'm a lying dick. Healthy on the outside diseased on the in.
Bullshit mate... their nuclear-scan eyes compute images.

*You're only a tit if ya think I'm fooled by that makeup
con of yours. Saw ya riddin' ya bike other week...
who you kiddin? Ya Doc. says stay fit—*

*Try work! Roll ya long better than peddlin lies
for welfare. Bloke's gotta loose face to feed it.
Face it mate, unhealthy retirement if ya quit 'hurt'*

from the match. There's a fire so blazen; I'm a smokin'
hot ladyboy in their eyes. Not a man, a shemale /
a stay at home dad, changing diapers. *Full of shit*

mate. Ya full of shit! Can't see nothin wrong with ya!
Come halloween I'll wear my x-rays
so I'll not have to suffer blokes probing like endoscopes.

Purpose-designed House

She hears voices, expects nothing
but disappointment ... *a spa?*

The OT and I advise, no
direct, *Functional Requirements:*

AS 1428.1 Mobility

smooth automated wheels

no steps or thresholds

wide doors and corridors

vast accessible bathroom

large projecting basin

commode-height toilet pan

stainless steel's firm grip

et

cet

er

a

... refocusing, she asks:

a spa?

while we watch a fine film
gloss across her eyes the OT and I
imagine this scene: the sun glancing
iridescent off the slick surface
of a slowly rising soap bubble,
perfectly formed, she realises
her recreated life inside ... while, she
eyes now closed, breath held, envisions
nothing ... *just a spa.*

Pronounced

A flesh and bloom
What the night will not keep
There are times
In amongst it
Where we dream that little deeper
And hold on
To the fashioning of the day

But what is not here
Is the noise of barbs un-ending
We swallow our water
But where has it come from?

There is more to say
But who will say it?
There can only be one ending
As always
And then, pronounced.

Priority

I stand on the train. The priority seats are taken.
Feet planted, I sway with others to the rhythm

of rush hour. The first cramp rolls in from nowhere,
takes my breath. I have endo, lost an ovary, a fistful

of lives and the monthly bleed, which was more of
an onslaught so that absence is bliss. It's been quiet

since the implant, but time's nearly up. They said
three to four years with the extent of mine, but

thankfully it's stretched to the manufactured five.
The second cramp tears my eyes. I look out the

window. It's never fast enough to blur until now.
Not far to go. I have painkillers but no water, need

the second to take the first. I breathe, slow, anticipate
the next like some land-locked surfer. Then I do it

without thinking, I clutch my belly. A girl on her phone
stops chewing and stares, a flash of something in her

face. I take the opportunity to ponder why these seats
are red. A warning perhaps, of how fragile we are.

poem for jessie

I want you to remember how the flavour
of what you've not been eating
first explodes upon the tongue – a grape, hot
butter, cheese; I want you to remember
how to want. To think of being porous
as an openness to wonder, not just wounding,
and know that this too hurts,
exquisitely.

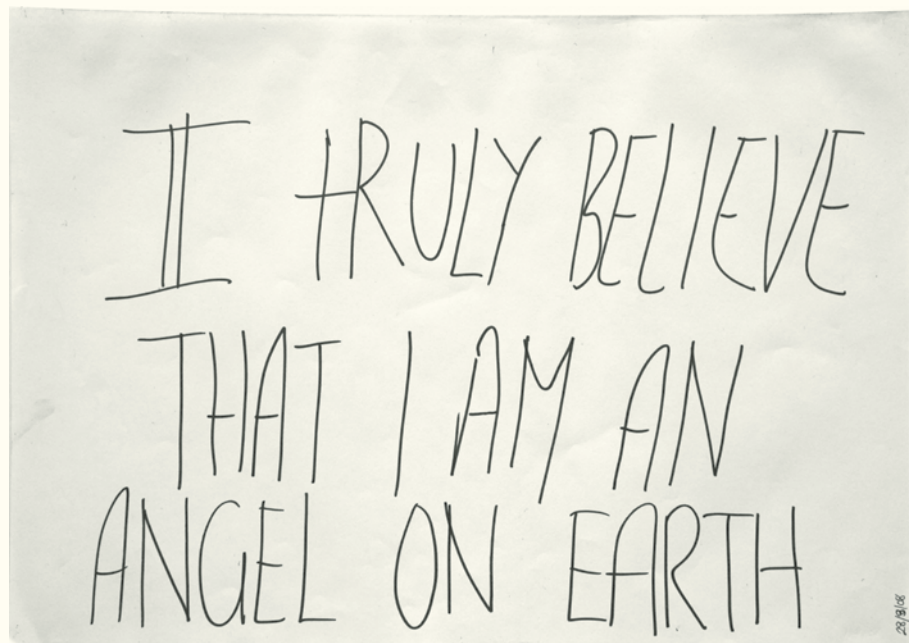
There are many ways to peel a mandarin
and the scent will linger
on your hands. You can think
this a benediction:
some saints miraculous for their perfume,
and not their suffering.
It isn't justice, what befalls us,
even if it feels that way,
sometimes.

I want you to be remember that capaciousness
is a capacity, and not to be afraid
of everything that this might mean.
To crack your teeth
on the pit of an olive, and taste
the sun,
To tremble.

Pfizer's Daughter

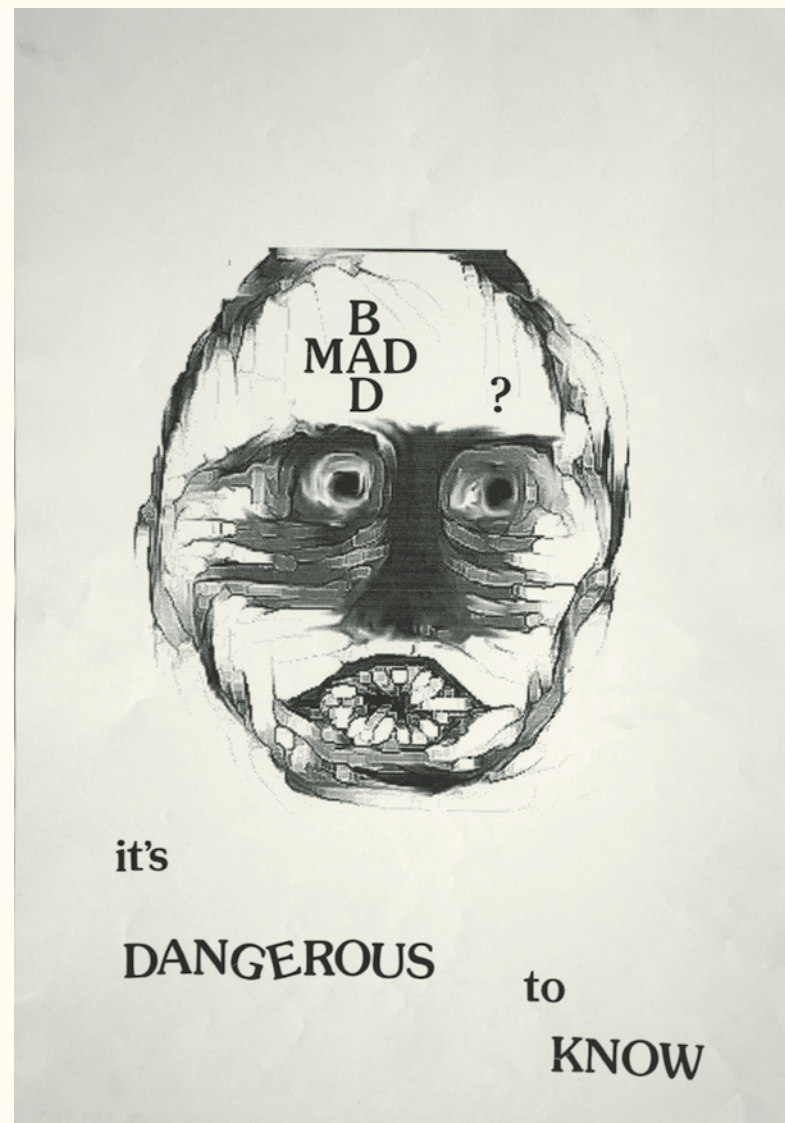
Now I live beside the hospital,
The ER is just a casual jaunt
Past the cruelty of the
Billboard at the petrol station
((Welcome To Liberty))
And the brine of other bodies –
And the shock of errant baggage –
And the pressure of the sky –
((Silver clouds like polished cellulite))
Do not take notice of my injury!
It is spring now
And there are newborn falcons up
On Collins Street –
A clutch of dandelion heads
Humming warm against the concrete ledge,
Muscles knotted, powder-white –
And someone's started filming them,
Big Brother style.
I've watched online as Mother Falcon,
The magician,
Retrieves red silk scarves
From the carcass
Of a pigeon
And how sometimes as the flesh is rationed out
The smallest chick lowers her head,
As if feigning a dizzy spell might guarantee her
The first mouthful, hot with blood.
Often, while their parents hunt, the babies simply
Wail at passing businessmen
((Pale feathers clinging to a patch of wind))
I can only aspire
To be so brazen in my fragility
As I lope to the hospital, again,
Muffling the rattle of my pillbox.

Untitled (I truly believe that I am an angel on Earth), 2008



permanent marker on paper, 29.5 x 42cm
Cunningham Dax Collection, The Dax Centre
© The artist

Untitled (Mad|Bad?), undated



digital print on paper, 42 x 29.7cm
Cunningham Dax Collection, The Dax Centre
© The Cunningham Dax Collection

Untitled (They told her so often...), undated

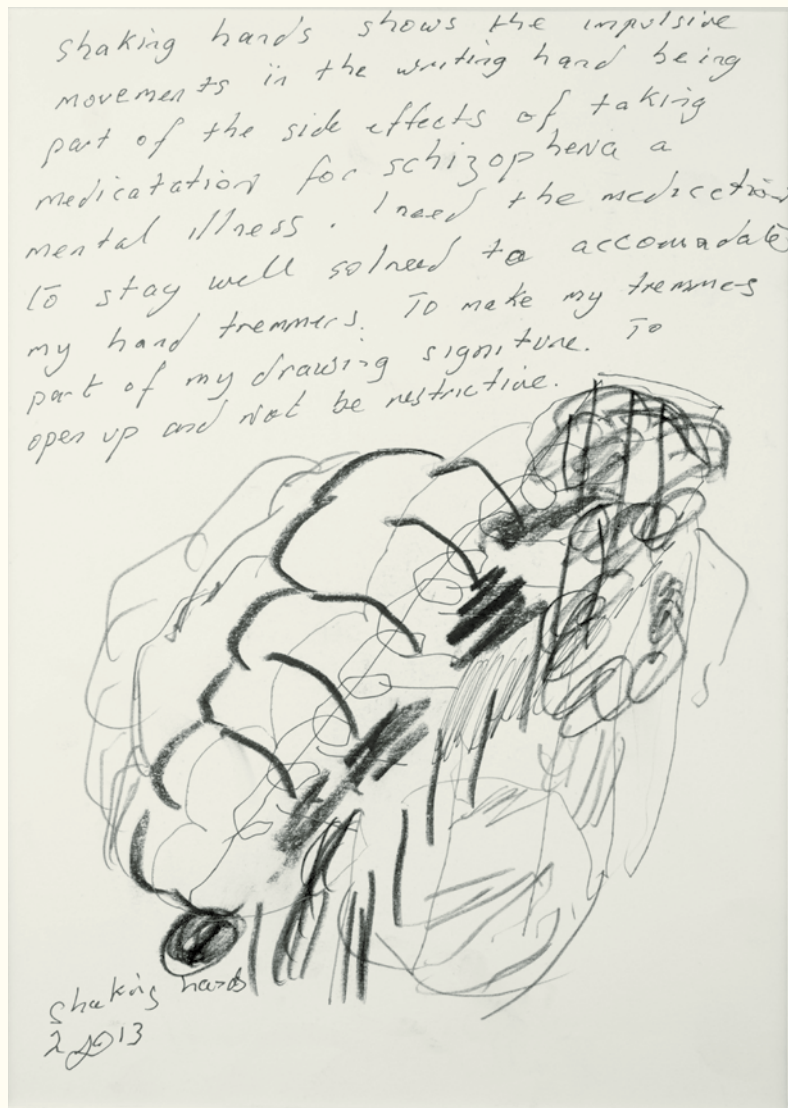


graphite pencil and felt tip pen on paper, 35 x 27cm
Cunningham Dax Collection, The Dax Centre
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My ancestors and me, 2010



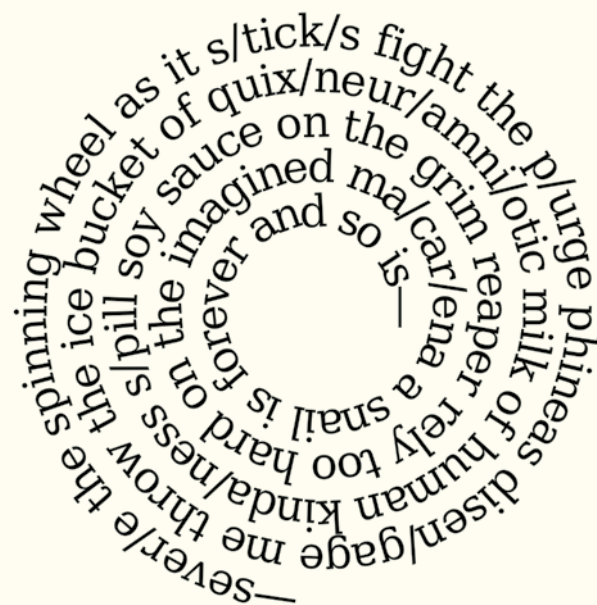
acrylic, pencil and ink on paper, 56.3 x 38.2cm
Cunningham Dax Collection, The Dax Centre
© The artist



pen and charcoal on paper, 29.5 x 21cm
Cunningham Dax Collection, The Dax Centre
© The artist



silver gelatine selenium toned print on paper, 20 x 29cm,
Cunningham Dax Collection, The Dax Centre
© The artist



from *Notes Towards the Dreambook of Endings*

I am at a poetry festival in South America. My leg has slipped out of my calliper which hangs limp and broken, dangling from my waist. My body is collapsing on me. I am wearing grey tracksuit pants and a sloppy, sweat-stained T-shirt. A girl expresses her disgust for me, almost spitting out her words, outraged that I should let myself appear like this in public. She tells me that I can't expect women to tolerate this, that I should show more sensitivity to women's feelings, to how anyone would feel. Distressed and agitated I wander aimlessly, pushed along by a great crowd. I am now in the airport, slipping between the queues as the crush of people on every side drives me forward. Without knowing how it happened I find I've strayed onto a plane that is bound for Amsterdam. At this point I become very distressed. All I have is the tracksuit and T-shirt I'm wearing and a few coins in my pockets. My wallet has no credit cards and only a few crumpled old Indonesian rupee notes. I have no passport. I am soon reassured by those around me -- don't worry, passports are not needed now, there are no borders, they don't have a Customs Office or Immigration Control in Amsterdam. No one will need me to show a passport.

Next I am in the city of Amsterdam circling round in a bus as we see the various buildings and the old canals and squares. Soon the bus has taken me to a beach. I am on the beach in Amsterdam. There is a pavilion set up to welcome refugees. Everyone is welcome now. Whenever I need to I can go back to South America from where I can return to Australia if I want.

Grey waves break on the beach at Amsterdam but the sand is glittering gold. Acrobats gather there and gymnasts and ancient surfers with silver beards that catch the sun. Like them my body gleams and I now wear a white shirt offset by sky-blue shorts. Released from the bedraggled shame of an old man's body, I watch the slowly assembling multitude. Someone is whispering of someone else in the queue for the portaloos, "He has a PhD. in the Eleusinian Mysteries." All the doorways of the universe have been opened. It is a world of free travel. You can go anywhere. At last I relax and my clothes, my walking, my body and my breathing, everything seems right. The barriers have fallen away. We can move seamlessly between all the places of the earth. We are in a new world where there is nothing to block anyone and no one needs a passport.

Sandy Jeffs

People Must Think I'm Crazy Because...
(A never-ending work in progress)

for Margie

Being the madwoman, I am also: a maddy, a mental case, a Bedlamite, a Larundelite, a screwball, a nut, a loon, a loony, a madcap, a mad dog, a psychopath, a maniac, an hysteric, a psychotic, a schizophrenic, a manic depressive, a megalomaniac, a pyromaniac, a kleptomaniac, mentally disordered, not in possession of my faculties, non-compos mentis, paranoid, catatonic, brain-sick, hippish, eccentric, an imbecile, a crackpot, an oddity, an idiot, a basket case, an odd bird, pixilated, demented, moon-struck, hazy, dippy, loopy, distracted, pixy-led, a scatterbrain, certifiable, crazy, loco, psycho, schizo, a nutter, possessed, fevered, bonkers, obsessed, bedevilled, troppo, starkers, potty, nuts, daft, dilly, a crackbrain, a fruit-cake, a fruit-loop, touched.

Being insane, I suffer from: mental illness, psychiatric illness, Dementia praecox, brain damage, unsoundness of mind, alienation, lunacy, madness, mental derangement, mental instability, abnormal psychology, loss of reason, intellectual unbalance, mental decay, a darkened mind, a troubled brain, a deranged intellect, an unquiet mind, nerves, imbecility, cretinism, morosis, psychosis, feeble-mindedness, queerness, having a screw loose, bats in the belfry, rats in the upper storey, nervous breakdowns.

But wait, there's more! Being as I am, mad that is, I must be: bananas, cuckoo, La La, ga ga, barmy, special, rabid, fucked in the head, weak in the head, soft in the head, seeing things, hearing things, wired wrong, bughouse, kooky, brainsick, fruity, on the loop, stir crazy, barking mad, stark-raving, stock-raving, delirious, beside myself, whacky, whacko, wackadoodle, away with the fairies, away with the pixies, cuckoo for Cocoa puffs, a half bubble off plum, without my marbles, without both oars in the water, a nut bag, nutso, a nut job, a whack job, rambling, babbling, crackers, scatty, screwy, wild, berserk, horn-mad, batty, not running on all cylinders, not playing with the full deck, not all there, a camel short of a caravan, a ball short of an over, a pad short of a kit, a sandwich short of a picnic, a few fries short of a happy meal, sixpence short of a shilling, a shilling short of a pound, two bricks short of a load, a brick short of a Barbie, a sausage short of a Barbie, a few points short of a promotion, a few spanners short of a toolbox, a few slices short of a loaf, a chapter short of a book, a tinnie short of a slab, a lettuce leaf short of a salad, a bird short of an aviary, a sheep short of a mob, a cow short of a herd, a cat short of a clowder, a kitten short of a litter, a crow short of a murder, a zebra short of a zoo, a dog short of a pack, a ship short of a fleet, an apple short of an orchard, a mushroom short of a trip, a condom short of an orgy, a clown short of a circus.

And it goes on! Being a Lunatic I am: not in my right mind, not the full bottle, bereft of reason, deprived of my wits, one and eleven pence halfpenny, 60 cents in the dollar, not quite the full two bob, as mad as a cut snake, as mad as a two-bob watch, as mad as a hatter, as mad as a March hare, as mad as a wet hen, as mad as meat axe, as silly as a wheel, diseased in the mind, wildered in my wits, not the full quid, not the full tin of bikkies, not the full box of chocolates, not the full tube of Dencorub. I'm round the bend, a candidate for Bedlam, foaming at the mouth, up the pole, out of my mind, out of my box, out of my tree, out of my skull, off my face, off my block, over the edge, off my rocker, off my saucer, off my trolley, a shingle short and I have a kangaroo loose in the top paddock. Meanwhile the butter's slipped off the noodles, a couple of buttons are missing, the river doesn't run all the way to the sea, the flag is at half-mast, the elevator does not go all the way to the top, the lights are on but no one's home, and if my brains were dynamite, they wouldn't blow my hat off.

Being wild and unhinged, I live in: a madhouse, a mental home, a mental hospital, an asylum, a lunatic asylum, an insane asylum, Bedlam, a booby hatch, a loony-bin, a nut house, a bughouse, a psychiatric hospital, the rat house, the giggle factory, the rat factory, the funny farm, a cuckoo's nest, La La Land.

So, I am many things in many places
fool that I may be, mad that I may be.
I am, in all my precarious guises,
the creation of a cruel mind.

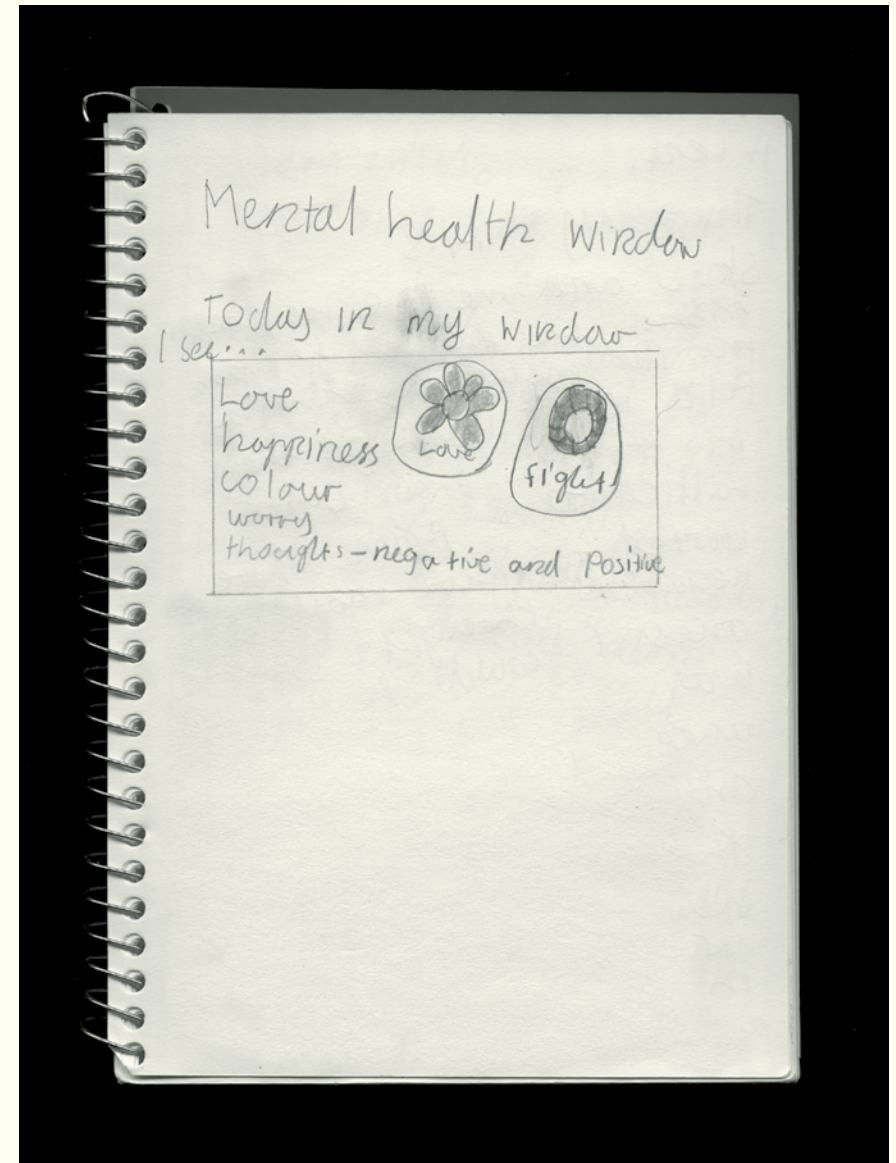
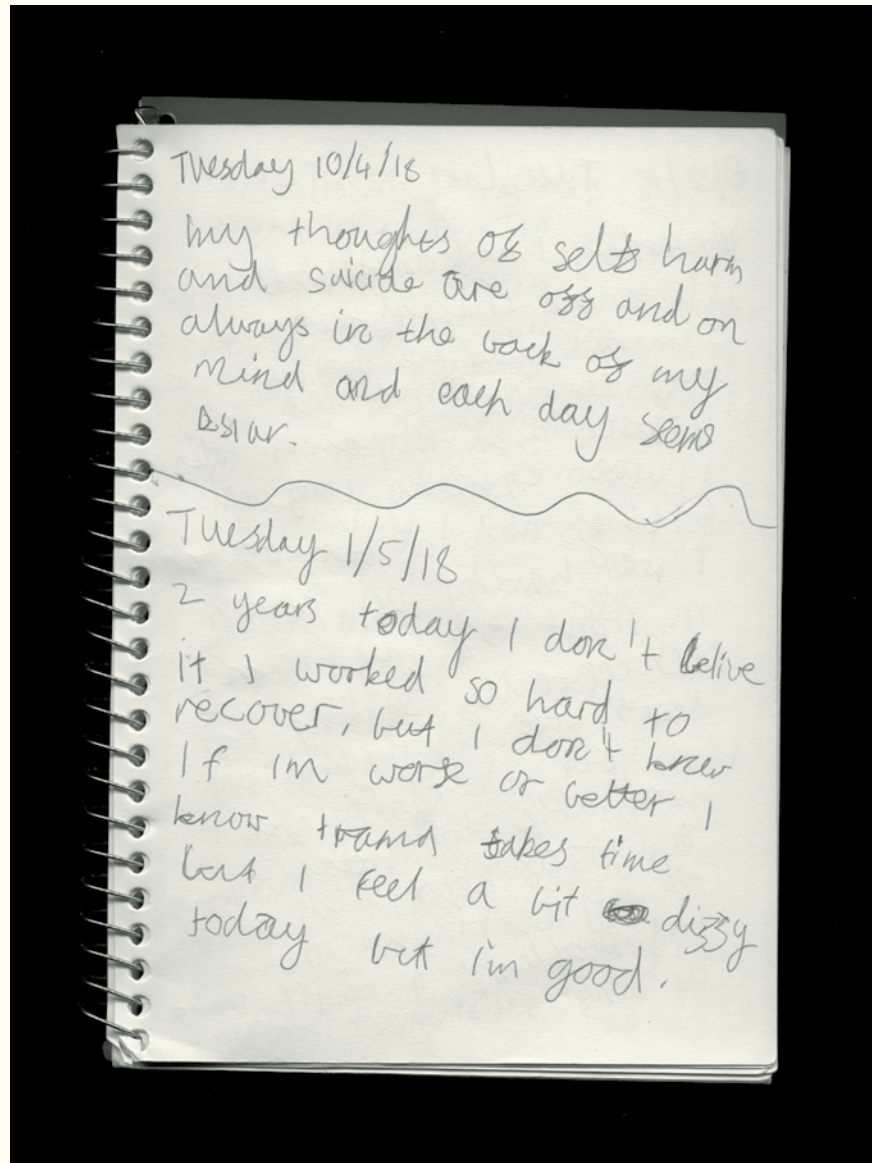
But OMG, do not despair, Praise the Lord and all hail the Gods of Big Pharma for my drug-induced, synthetic sanity, because...

I now have: a clear mind, soundness of mind, a wholesome outlook, good mental hygiene, a balance of mind, good mental health, a healthy mind, insight, reason, saneness, lucidity, lucidness, sense, wits, right-mindedness.

I am: in possession of my mental faculties, mentally stable, mentally sound, fully conscious, not wandering, not certifiable, clear headed, level-headed, grounded, undisturbed, a reasonable person, in a reasonable spirit.

I am also: rational, sober, balanced, firm, common sensical, collected, steady, coherent, not neurotic, in my senses, all there.

Thank God I am stupendously sane, extraordinarily normal, marvellously ordinary, taxonomically uninteresting and linguistically very, very, very boring.



Lido

My accustomed sorrow in my jaw like a stick,
 a brightness that is not mine,
 as I breastroke serenely, in the seemly blue water,
 an old lady perpetual breaststroke.
 And do not drown, and do not drown,
 the ghost that hovers over this trembling earth,
 separating me from fact, from the fact that I swim.
 The golden leaves of the elm tree rattling like metal.
 The aeroplane overhead, zippering up the sky.
 It is natural to look for some corollary
 between feelings and the world
 but the world is as bright as a dog's eye
 reflected in itself like the new moon in the old moon's arms,
 calling to itself with a voice that aches in the leaves –
 this voice must be my own, for all I hear it, my own
 song singing to be sung, the hero's song.

Is This Still What I Want?

i gather the borders of my body with care like a burdened beast. my mouth is a gun—
 misfired bird grasping a fistful of air. i meant to say a poem hurts like that, doesn't it? i
 make home for my trauma with a giant room for joy. yes, abundant joy— another kind of
 reaching, so i carry myself like a true song constellated with worries: a map thumbtacked
 with dirty verbs because the poem about joy is mostly about wanting & wanting. last night, i
 couldn't sleep, so i raised my hands to make paper boats—my poems are bodies reminding
 me that someday i won't be home to anyone. i'm afraid to tell myself or my lover or my
 therapist what i need to survive— i still want to risk *pain* at the end. look how much grief
 is found in this queer body— at the end i want my departure to be a long poem burning,
 dipping in the distance calling my body a pleasure, without shame. everything ricochets
 inside me. it is the season of falling & everything i do is a miracle. what is *gratitude* if not
 a brink of so much touching & not touching. strange how i like to watch the world crawl
 long & slow: my hands drag after some loss, after some inexact past that bleeds through
 the debris of my memory— the rhythm of a rotting plum. every morning i give grief a new
 language— a sister tongue. maybe it's the way i have learned to reset bird bones without
 breaking: a compass for dancing around this dysphoria & rose beads. i look at the image
 of an almost violet sunset & all i can hear is the laughter of children walking towards the
 crashing of ocean waves. i was born to know that nothing is better than a list of beginnings
 & destinations— like dawn slicing the horizon into the distance of our loneliness.

Ismene in a boxing and writing workshop

(inspired by Donna Lyon's Left, Write, Hook Boxing and Writing Workshops for survivors)

jab, jab, cross, hook, cross
under the drag of the crowd
jab, jab, cross, hook, cross, hook, cross
down on bent knees
down on bloodied knees
down on pleasing knees as the mozzies bite me
the fern garden like the dank of the wardrobe
jab, jab, cross, hook, cross, hook, cross, duck, cross, duck, cross
the cowering left barbed wire fence broken bottles
stuck in the lift surrounding body sounds
jab, cross, hook, cross, upper, upper
muscle around memory
solace
jab, cross, hook, cross, upper, upper, hook, cross
I remember I kicked Antigone's boyfriends
as soon as they walked in the door
where does a seven-year-old get that from
they were bent over double
I was swift accurate
use the iron bar
hit the bag
vocalise
go hard
I want my life back
isolated on the page I have made a life
jab, cross, hook, cross, upper, upper, hook, cross, hook, cross
I keep dreaming Antigone is not dead
I have been making it up being hyperbolic
jab, cross, hook, cross, upper, upper x5, 10 shuffles
the pen making contact
the page sweating
a translucent stone murky eye keyhole
bloody knuckles braised with pain
a life of self-blame
the gloves the face the mask
the bag of body

plank rotations
shaky hands secreted by mind
body secrets whispered into crevices
I'm in my body I feel it now
coming out of the dentist face half numb
this is how it feels to get smacked in the face
I didn't feel it at the time I feel it now
this is how it feels to get smacked in the face
jab, jab, cross, hook, cross x 10, squat jump x 5
the kiss of fist to bag
under the unbroken surface reflecting sky
drowned bodies
secrets excreted
a trail of red petals
I am fire married to flight
on my knees beside altars
the cold smell of marble
I rubbed off the writing on the wall
I wasn't to blame but I am accountable
broke the back of promise to self-annihilate
fists swimming
a weighted blanket over me
hard to forgive what I haven't been given
dream of going into surgery trying to spit out the drugs
chanting and dogma
proof in sensory
oven warmed blanket
detail specific
case studies of the heart
beaten humanity
weather eaten words drop like contact
the throat between rocks that the river moves through
being believed is being in becoming
what does it mean to arrive at wellness
crying tears of teeth

Invisible Beside The Dog

I know you care if I can't stand
or cannot walk
when I appeal to you
from my wheelchair.

Do you care if I can't see
if I appear with a guide dog
or move among you
tapping my white cane?

But what about
when I am out of sight
one of those who mask
appearing just like you.

So here I am today
linked by a clever phone
answering my every need
or so you think.

When I was young
and walked alone
prey to roaming gangs
there was no phone to ring.

You do not know
every time I leave my house
another walks with me
one who lives unseen.

All it takes is a fright
then she starts to scream
that's why I have this dog
to ease my other's fear.

Input: Reason. Output: Pleasure

Bedroom to kitchen. Kitchen to bathroom. Bathroom
to kitchen. Kitchen to bedroom. Bedroom to bathroom.

Bathroom to kitchen. Kitchen to bedroom. Bedroom
to hall. Hall to bedroom. Bedroom to kitchen. Kitchen

to bedroom. Bedroom to kitchen. Kitchen to bathroom.
Bathroom to bedroom. Bedroom to kitchen. Kitchen to hall.

Hall to kitchen. Kitchen to bedroom. Bedroom to hall.
Hall to bike track. Bike track to hall. Hall to bedroom. Bedroom

to bathroom. Bathroom to kitchen. Kitchen to hall. Hall
to bedroom. Bedroom to kitchen. Kitchen to bedroom.

Bedroom to kitchen. Kitchen to bedroom. Bedroom
to kitchen. Kitchen to bathroom. Bathroom to hall. Etc.

Initialisms

ADD. OCD. ADHD.
inattentive.
attention please.

ASD.
GATE.
IEP.
AEP.
ERB.
TRB.

GAD
for funding
for convenience
for meaning

comfort in correlations
from conception to caesarean
to explain data

NAPLAN

ICAS.

PISA.

TIMMS [Tam]

WISC.

Whiskey

TGIF.

Too much
KFC.
IHOP.
IKEA.

TEE
ATAR
no more trees
no more tartars

IMA
IMA??
... and what of humanity???

It's all a game of balderdash

SSRIs

a stop-gap
panacea.

Illness Moves

leaves a body yearning
one part blessed
one absent
a hope that moves in wrong direction
moves as much as a body self-loves,
the already existing fullness
fills up with a
life-like substance
self-enclosed pale light

escapes the in gets caught in the out-borders
escapes the out gets caught in the in-borders

I know I can revive like this
my hands softens the fear
there must be a way to awaken
a frozen smile
and safe it must be
safe it is to surrender to
the divine parent,
that embracing

a hand holds the green
knows the bird is mortal
and dies the bird
eyelids closed still.

In the chair

what do I need
a mandala reminder
of the detailed application
of routine one circle
unending yet complete

that chaldeony angel missing
a wing you're still on my case
I can't imagine how I could be
of assistance

I draw
the scarlet lilies as they wither
as Spanish skirts bulbed green
as spring grass now a gross
bull's pizzle in a vase

all week swimming in the crudiness
of that diagnosis like
the plane crashed thrown clear
it's all seat backs and suitcases
bits of femur I can see you
I am calling you turn your head
I think you see me I can't
stay afloat to know

why does this tea that tastes so green
grow on a cheap purple bush beside
the house I want to devote myself
to the propagation of just this fact
let's start here

I have the temperature differential
back in my lower legs this morning's
girl made mention of it said
your feet are white I don't mean to be rude
when we touched them they were ice cold
made her laugh told her how my boy
called me corpse foot much later
when I folded my dress I watched
rather than felt it touch my shins
my heart pumped sherbet

this computer browser so old
the lips move out of synch on Netflix
it's Lance Armstrong's story so
I don't mind

one day I'll have to sit and really
go through the lot and make decisions
and in my head I see the circle from the reload
icon turning and childhood is that where you start
or where to end I haven't gotten back
a firm reply

walk sliding
on the balance beam
pine needles coat
my plait with resin
there's a hair
between me
leaping and
a fall

Two Poems

How to cope in company

Be a consummate listener,
a nodder and smiler,
a silent partner,
a seat warmer.

Be a detective of verbal potholes,
a juggler of synonyms,
a direction changer,
a pauser.

Be a master of avoidance,
a conversation deflector,
a reflector,
a fleck.

Best to be alone.

Voiceless

I am a stoppered bottle of

sssssssstalled sssssssssssentences

\\\\ob\\\\/structed \\\\\\\\\\\\o\\\\\\\\\\\\pinions

(b b b blocked)

(b b b breath)

tension.

Forbidden

Ah My friends...

Where is the freedom and flight?

They sign the migration of the swallow as forbidden.
Surround the unordered sky with fences.
Whip its wings.

Is this its only right?

When will the celebration of paper and words be?

An unsolved conundrum in a cup of tea!

They cross out the forbidden answer
and burn paper and words simultaneously.

Is this our only right?

This wounded body covers its sick soul.

They sign 'forbidden' on the flower petals.
They burn its stems.

Yes, all my rights are the light of a lantern's flame taken from me.

They sign 'forbidden' on my kind moon.
They burn stars and night.

When will the celebration of paper and words be seen?

Note:

This was written on Manus Island after the 2014 killing of Reza Barati and the wounding of hundreds of other men in the Manus Prison Camp when the imprisoned men were attacked by guards and other personnel during their peaceful protest at their conditions. After that night the politicians in Australia denied there was any issue telling the media that they were not concerned, that they had simply risen that morning and enjoyed their breakfast without concern.

Grey

I wake
up hating
my life
whispering
screams

I'm unmoored
in the grey
bubbling
ocean of the
carpet

the room
looks at me
and looks
away

I
have
severed phones
to each
of my
parents

there's no
one else
in my house
but a perfect
cat

each of
us
in this
body is
squashed

then
there's the
snake
of light held
beneath
the curtains

the day's waiting
like a bright
sleep
an intoxicated film
on pause

From The Morning

An estimated 173,300 men aged 18 years and over experienced sexual assault by a male perpetrator since the age of 15. This amounted to 1.9% of all men aged 18 years and over (ABS 2016)

Elba, Elba, bleb on the sea!
—Sylvia Plath, 'The Swarm'

Cain rose up against Abel his brother
—Genesis 4:8

Breathing in this cattle town
agrees with me. Onto my street
gush bottlebrushes, rightfully blood
-bright. 'Blood Roses'
discloses *You have what*

it takes, small ball for
twenty years. Napoleon
B's got your back.
Things cluster like cutlery,
jet-black, stingless, powdery. *Shh!*

they say to the five men with
skulls featureless as ivory
billiard balls, the blood moon-throats,
the side-lancing bootsoles.
Scarlet hibiscus-trumpets call off

the hounds. The clouds
mull over their armament: deserts
of lapwings, water-platter tree
-s' melting peltate leaves, Pom
-erians' miniature thunder.

*

In the beginning the lion of God,
clothed as a sheepdog,
rose up against me. Dopey pack-dog,
I couldn't resist. Fists, back. Worn ivory
shock absorbers covered from every body.

The Panzerschokolade high,
the wurst of Germany
adored me, but I was secondary magenta,
felt like a penny
waiting for change, crossed

a Rubicon with an eight ball.
My careless stems cultivated prickles,
my honeycomb
was moulded by killer stings' speedballs. A station
trained in the arcs

of the heart declared my country
independent. I salted a universal fall
of needlepoint ivy,
withdrew my inculpable army,
adopted the Code Napoleon.

*

Another midwinter victory.
The crimson bougainvillea hangs up its hat
on the apostrophes of the sea,
an irrepressible generals
-hip. Niches

of cerumen dis
-tinguish soft bodies,
the flawless upholstery
shines. *This is no mausoleum.*
This is a coffin in Egypt opine

the engineers. The thousand smiles
of *Grevillea* 'Moonlight' are practical
as the bodyguards mummifying small
intruders. Brimming receptacles
are attended by me

-liponines, fine bobby pins.
These bees taste my honour
-ability. The hive speaks its mind:
And now we rise and we are. Everything
I taste is trusting and titian as honey.

Note: 'From The Morning' is a terminal from Sylvia's Plath's 'The Swarm'; 'adopted the Code Napoleon' is from E. M. Forster's Maurice; 'And now we rise and we are' is from Nick Drake's 'From The Morning'

Exegesis

to Dr Jablonski

How chastening it is for me
to come down to serotonin
or a metaphysical neuron
more apt to be
partisan to embodied spirit
Strange my mind should be
disturbed
upsetting all the chemistry,
the Bunsen burner
incendiary in the bell jar,
time to think there
of a spirit flame
enlightening contradiction,
a stress that crossfires enzymes.
To work it out
the mind seeks brain matter,
configurations of the unseen,
electrons transpire
after they have transfixed
with some transcendent thought
the swaying soul.
This breakdown of the parts,
neurotransmitters and synapses,
recognises my physicality,
though I am a mental being.
Insanity is a mere disturbance,
like any pressure, it pulls apart.
Yet how stupdenous a psychosis
in which God is heard
and is a constant companion
to the child mind.
How the leaves sing
and the clouds speak,
how the overarching sky opens
disclosing its intention
of reincarnating stars.

Sanity is merely philosophical,
a theatre of the self and other
embodied and disembodied,
so chemical am I
but fastened to the stars,
and know my zodiac
and the joyous entry to death
from a life lived on will.

It must be that the mind is elsewhere,
somewhere or nowhere.
This conjunction is not 'if'
it happens, but that it does
in a place called consciousness
which yet belongs to self.
Oh self, your neurotransmitters
fire up brain cells to a conflagration
of descending bliss
and ascending rootedness.
Chemistry is a game of matter
a player am I.
Everything is as it should be,
a dialogue of well named sites
in which the soul sits dominant.
Queen of my heart,
the fear dissolves in acid,
the rush of surrender
propels matter
to explode but never destruct.
I am the vehicle
of countless dramas
between the cells
and the nucleus is my longing.
Atom am I,
the smallest
and the largest
sun struck universe.

DISlocation

Preamble: In late September of 2017 I had planned to make a full day of productive writing, starting with a textual sketch about the constant ambulance sirens that wraithed my suburb which is a base for the South Brisbane Health Precinct and the PA Hospital...On that morning though I fell in my ensuite and had a major Thalamic stroke. It was my third. Ironically the only siren I didn't hear that day was the ambulance that came for me...

I am in a wheelchair and the entrapment is murdering...Waking up one morning and my partner didn't come to bed...She's in the spare room, having sex with my friend; a 'disability support-worker'...I may have challenges but my sensory perception is still sharp...The darkest hour before the dawn...Distonia and anxiety interlocking...Left-sided paralysis...Blind-siding hurt; I can hear them...My brain spits out every word in bold lettering; terms too resentful to even bemoan...The never-ending chorus of a breaking-heart symphony...A helix of loathing...I'm more frozen than anything...And I *can't go anywhere to escape!* Because I need to be the one in the aftermath that has to apologize...

The unbearable dislocation of my being...

Diagnoses

In the mirror there is no sign of war
yet it's been raging for years
and like 'fake news' the shallow skin
continues the charade of existence.

There is no need to dig a deep trench
into the torso, just fix your ear
and you will hear the off-beat blasts
no heart can control.

My condition is your fixation
you have delivered papers on its catastrophic outbursts
when it escapes the mutilated body
to hurl words of threat and conquer.

Honour me with *your* secret
as you walk home from your office
to settle your head by lamp light,
tell us how your body executes your mind.

Desires

The thing I would like is monotony

The non-disappearance of years from my past
To sit opposite someone, look them in the eye
and stay there

Tuesdays after Mondays
A week that lasts one week
Funny dreams I might tell a co-worker about,
if I had one

Groceries I recall buying
Groceries that get eaten
The dead to retain their position

Evening reading
The same route daily
Until I take shape
and through repetition can rest

De-Coding

I tap my hand
With my knuckles
When I'm concentrating
Or thinking
Or listening

I tap my mouth
With the back of my hand
When I'm happy,
Content and relaxed
Or free of pain

I tap and knock and rub
The back of my hand
When I agree

I howl – make a long low wolf call
When I'm excited

I bite my hand and growl
When I'm angry
Or frustrated
Or in pain

I hunch for 'Yes'
Or when I'm pleased
Or when I like something
Or when my food is yummy

I use my voice – 'Uh' for 'Yes'
And look away
Or don't respond for 'No'

When I'm out of breath
Or having a lazy laugh
I make the sound of a creaky door

This is my way of talking
This is my sign language

If you watch
If you listen
You can read me

DCD

He says he is stupid when he knows something from other children & in order to understand him he has to be stupid when he comes to him. To others he's just 'unintelligent'. To himself he's just 'unintelligent'. The hemispheres of his brain seem disconnected. The mirror neurons don't work together. He is excited by everything - yet he wakes up with a sense of confusion every day.

DCD

Crucifixes, one two three

Chairs around a table glasses on it and plates with their cutlery. Things, in the shapes of people who have legs, arms and stems. The endless conversations of self-love confirmed, confirmed. By you too, contouring every word.

Out past Saturn. Do you remember 'Hail Mary'? Can she hear out here? Was there a when, back when I was so out of it on Earth at work entering into the data.

Letters continued to arrive in the weeks after

bearing news. The letters that continued

to be censored. The reason we write

down their names is to take down

and bury. Sculpting our mouths to buttons

on a dark shawl. 'They died, there is a cause.'

'Can dyslexics read? Can you prove it?'

queried the boy who plopped himself down
on the seat before me, his two burly
accomplices flanking my desk
to kill any impulse for an early exit.
I could see he had carefully selected
my demise for that day, opened my textbook
to the Wordsworth poem
Ms. L wanted us to recite, his eyes
sharpened by the violent light
of curiosity, the kind that drives boys,
otherwise innocent, to shoot & flay
sparrows in the terrible noon
heat, their hands twisting bloody
in the miniature labyrinths
of exposed innards.
My mind was the flayed sparrow
wishing for flight. Instead, it ghosted
through the smoke-choked hall
of the Roman alphabet, each letter
a cracked mirror in which another
might appear, perfectly twinned.
Each day, I woke to my tongue

bearing the burden of unhindered
utterance, a pink muscle
waiting for its casualty of fluency—
the consonants all barbed, the vowels
singing the inside of my mouth
like branding irons I wished
I could swallow. Later, when I asked
Ms. L if she could help me
with the recitation, help me
to make Wordsworth less cruel
on my tongue—my face still burning
with the silver hooks of tears—
all she taught me was a simple
melody. *Sing out the words*
though tuneless the singing might be.
Let it trickle clear & slow through the lips
until the clouds stopped ticking
like vaporous bombs & the daffodils
all sheathed their tiger-teeth
while all this time, she held my upturned
palms so that I didn't have to wander
lonely through the song.

*Bipolar II*¹

The 80s and 90s, the 'antidepressant era'.

Sure that that the medication works. To keep the mania,

make the person feel. When the patents began to run out,
reduced need for sleep. Bipolar 2.5

Swiftly joined, by hyperactive, even dangerous.
The less he would be described. The 'same' disease.

Highs and lows, a mood stabilizer. Often little hope
of return. Manic burn-up, splintering pain, parties,

peoples, magazines, books, music, art, movies.
The fact of being linked together. Experience of loss.

Entertainment a constant feature. One's existence.
Words states. One listened very carefully.

Hostile to the person. To articulate them.
Sudden and knowing. Manic sex isn't really

intercourse. It's discourse. The moment of response,
the silence. Perhaps a violent thought. Thousand-fold.

This Beast that could make moods. Lie awake at night
waiting for the call. Isolation. Tenuous emotion. The

future so pronounced. Strange transformation from modest.
Work. The boss one of the biggest. Marketable property.

And this brings us to a crucial aspect. Clan. Aiming to fly. Debt.
I never cashed the cheque. Props. Cover over. During a meeting.

Benign/sacrificial nature. This scene returned to haunt. Children
were playing. Early life puppet. Concerned how the carvings were.

Destructive. Tendencies. Make sure nothing like that could happen.
I can only say. Sorry. Thank you. All the elements were now in.

Worm in every delicious apple. I stole. Manic episode may be
the attempt to repay. If there is an effort. Broodings over the bad

things. Ours or someone else's. Responsibility. Death would immobilize.
Oscar Wilde. Fry. Whirlwind of work, never say no to a request.

Without any doubt. A culture aspired to. Some loss they had experienced.
Peopled with devils and angels. The breast is both giving and not-giving.

A woman who resembled her mother on the tube, his family's past.
The doctor drug has helped. In each individual case. Repair, to make

perfect again. Worse. Growing. Rage. Reality and fantasy. Flames
from the plane crash. Something is different as well. During a low.

Pointed out. Insanity could conclude. This moment murdered. Both.
Mood changes baffling. Gather bags but always failing. Depression

supports this idea. "You're Patty now." Even speech. A mourning
dead father. Undermines the ties. Destiny statistics. Signature motifs.

Attends. To. A.
Humane. Approach.

¹ found text from every 2nd line from the book *Strictly Bipolar* (Penguin Books, 2013) by Darian Leader

Barometric Pressure Changes

Windsock strain, tumbled trellis, ripped *bamboo* – if I try to tell you about the wind one word *swallows* the next, I am gasping, it was Wednesday my illness is back, I lost myself in a barking dog I mean went *down a tunnel*, came back the moment I left, a snap a blink, the darkest *heart* of a galling wind, my head somewhere near to that, *dancing* on a pile of dizzy disease. The compounded *balderdash* of wind, it was *Friday*, where was my lover? *Where was I?* the *bed* the sticky notes and philosophical *books* trying to hide from the *clamour* of wind - sent texts because I could *not speak*, the outside vibrating *the sound* of my voice, the dog's *bark* fierce stupor then vicious *blank*, *my lover* in the city shouting *we say no to nuclear dump!* his banner *slapped* by claps of wind, the *raging* >REPEAT< the *raging wind* infinitum, wind-sneering wind-*sucked* the *mother chucker wind*~

*so I've decided to be a muse of quiet suffering
pale skin slumped in a blanket-nest and muumuu-
wrapped, now more wind than water, than blood
a sculpture made from waiting for tomorrow
trying to rest in a rush – hush: there's hurry.*

Affidavit

In my right hand I hold a certificate of fitness for work, in my left, the shape of God's palm. I am immune to illegal immigration, criminal activity, tuberculosis and fake statements. The hand of God is inked in words like carbamazepine, lamotrigine, risperidone—and, oh, lithium. His palm is warm and dry. Mine hot and sweaty. Fingers delete emails, appointments, reminders. Anything with the stamp of Human Resources. When the phone rings, I'm surprised to hear that my email is playing up, my anti-virus disabled, my calendar chockers. I hang up. Kick the filing cabinet shut. Look out the window. With my left hand, I sign the authentication of my fitness and immunity to deception. God's fingers tickle my palm. I jog to the photocopier, check my pulse, hold my breath, and send the document.

Admitted

When you admit
yourself voluntarily to jacaranda ward
you study the partially ripped carpet
and the exposed, mottled wood which reminds you
of nails picking halfheartedly
at the end of a Band-Aid, before it is set
back to guard the wound against too close a scrutiny
from receptionists who bid you welcome
as though you'd ought to expect champagne
and chocolates on your pillow. At some point
a man opens a large red box on the wall
of the nurse's station, flicking a switch
that makes you sit in darkness
while people you've never met before
reassure you they can predict when
the eclipse will give way, realigning your universe
with help from a therapist, a self-taught
Buddhist who misappropriates the kimono
and proffers oracle cards, after walking you all
past the bird sanctuary each morning,
making you worry about perturbing the tourists,
the fact you're still wearing pajamas
except when visitors arrive to help you

keep track of life's rhythm on the outside, alongside
pharmacy which segments morning into blue and white squares,
transforms afternoons into yellow circles
and dresses evenings in white chemical robes, long
like tables in the hall where dinner is served
when you would normally be eating lunch.
You write often, on the windows
when there's fog, tapping your fingers
hard on the glass, as if to make apologies
to yourself, to your family indelible,
before the students come in their navy polos
and safety compliant shoes, to watch your group sessions
with their clipboards held tightly against their chests,
like armour against preconceived fears
about what it is you do here.
On your 8th night when the nurse makes shadow puppets
out of your thoughts, the sheen of her pocket torch
taken in by your retina lays down a backdrop,
that encourages her to stay with you,
knowing you are afraid, she'll hope for a shift
with more pleasant viewing,
when she finally sees your universe
slowly realigning.

Dysphoric

I orbit, like a sun, forgetful
of how to shed either light
or warmth; I turn and turn,
an aimless itinerant,
the world's most frantic sunflower.

We are not alone
in our loneliness.
Exile is a 'crowded solitude':
the dysphoric world is overrun
with outsiders.

Look at the owl!
See how she holds her wings around
her hollowness and sleeps?
But every morning, still she calls
a broken branch a refuge.

Do we think we are less than the bats
that hang and intone their anguish
to the dark? Are we less
than the rooster, whose early
morning never knew a night?

The clocks still run on Greenwich
Mean Time, but perhaps this place
is another time now, and here, perhaps
it's God who faces the firing squad
and we no longer need
to dress our kisses
in disguise.

We are not strangers anymore;
neither estranged nor strange,
here, alone, we are — all of us — kin.

AP/NAHR Eco-Poetry Fellowship 2019

In partnership with the *Nature, Art & Habitat Residency (NAHR)*, *Australian Poetry* again this year offered the Australian Poetry/ NAHR Eco-Poetry Fellowship, giving an Australian poet the opportunity to take up residency in the village of Sottociesia, Taleggio Valley, Bergamo, northern Italy, across June 2019.

This year's fellow, SA-based Rachael Mead, was one of seven Fellows globally, participating in the overall NAHR residency program. The year's theme was based on GRASSES and PASTURES: Imagining a Regenerative Economy of Cheese, and the AP/NAHR fellowship was also run in partnership with Australian eco-poetic journal, *Plumwood Journal*.

Set in northern Italy and situated in the heart of the Orobic Alps, the NAHR program offers a lively space to think and create, collaborate and interact. Its residents take full advantage of the surrounding natural landscapes as well as Italy's rich material culture, which combines vernacular traditions with innovative approaches to space and place, people and their communities. For full information on NAHR, go to: <https://nahr.it/>

From Rachael:

My residency in Val Taleggio was an incredibly rich time of exploration, research and creative productivity. By the end of the first week, I'd settled into a routine of hiking through the valley and high pastures each morning before returning to my desk to spend the afternoons writing. My initial intention was to write a long poem sequence exploring the ecology and culture of the Taleggio valley and their famous cheese-making process. My early poems documented the experience of travelling the region by foot, but as I grew more familiar with the landscape, the poems began to delve into the entanglement of local traditions, ecological issues and speculative futures.

As I gradually learned more about the valley and the high pastures of the Orobic Alps, I found my ideas around structure, content and perspective were evolving and over the weeks my poetic voice and style morphed into pieces that felt quite distinct from my usual work. My time in Val Taleggio was incredibly productive and by the end of the residency I had produced a chapbook collection titled *chlorophyll & casein*. It was an honour to be able to share my work with the local community on the final weekend. I read some poetry in the garden and collaborated with performance artist Katie de Bari, who performed an interpretive dance to one of my pieces.

It was a privilege to connect with such gifted visual and performance artists, writers, creative technologists and architects. Their creative generosity and diverse perspectives were incredibly stimulating and my practice was unquestionably enhanced as a result of communing with these exceptional people.

I am immensely grateful to Ilaria Mazzoleni, the people of NAHR and the selection panel from Australian Poetry for this unforgettable experience. The landscape was breathtaking, the local people were warm and welcoming and the cheese was so exquisite it has ruined me. I returned from Val Taleggio a better poet but the worst kind of cheese snob.



Pacing myself

*Sottochiesa – Fraggio – Capo Foppa – Grasso –
Ca' Corviglio – Sottochiesa*

I'm learning this place with my feet
at an age where still having a body
feels like an achievement, my map
of this valley sketched with the rhythm
of old knees. I pack my bag for the day
with water, fruit and ten words of Italian
then follow my curiosity as it winds uphill,
a meadow pilgrimage kept company
only by questions and this stingless sun.

My hope for this poem is a looped tale
with all the obligatory peaks and plains,
my body finding its way back to the start, weary,
grounded with a touch of redemption
thrown in. I pass the cemetery early, so perhaps
this trek will be something other than a simple
metaphor for life, the sun-strewn valley more
than a place to hang my ignorance out to dry.

I climb into the woodland that hovers,
waiting to invade the vast beds of grass
that shine with burgled constellations,
up past chiming cows and the reach of church bell
into shade that slides across my skin while insects
careen like electrons around fresh piles of dung.
My steps are a rosary, this body a prayer chanted
in huffing breath, letting loose my airy molecules
to mingle with the sky standing so tall in the valley.
Even in shade layered upon green shade,
my sweat drips, tourist salt and water rudely
shouldering themselves into this private cycle.

Through Fraggio, where San Lorenzo sprouts
from the grasses, the ruins like tiny eruptions
of sandstone, the mountain's gizzards asserting
themselves amid the shallow chatter of grass
and woodland. And then the road. Pasture
stacked upon on pasture under naked sun.
All I can hear are midday crickets, the chaotic
orchestra of cowbell and the awful rhythm
of my limp turning this poem into one long
iambic line all the way up to Cappel Foppa.

And then the turn, where poems and paths
should gather new strength, a surprise reveal,
the place you discover yourself a stranger
in your own story. But here there's no
single moment, just a slow amassing
of awareness that I'm lost, and so the turn
is literal, even if I say *volte*, in the hope
that Italian might lend some romance.

You would think it's all downhill from here
but I'm turned around in Grasso until I find
the tiny track to Ca' Corviglio with its tumbling
water and Madonna, where the words
for trespasser and dogs stretches my Italian
to a dozen. I shuffle back into Sottochiesa, knees
creaking under the bells of San Giovanni Battista
and some empty-handed thunder, while summer
keeps falling and falling with nothing to slacken it.

How to make Taleggio

1. Put down your load. You've lugged its awkwardness so far, knees and back weathering every step up this mountain trail, pace matched to the herd's chiming amble.
2. Once you've straightened and stretched, tend to your herd. You know their names. Watch their joy at finding themselves on this elevated island of sweetness.
3. Scratch your dog behind the ears. She's done well.
4. If you can find a minute among your tasks between the *baita* and the herd, take it. The summer light is long but can't last forever. Fill yourself with this air. See how the mountains layer themselves against the jagged horizon? This set of distances is yours for the summer.
5. And now - the milking. Everyone knows their place.
6. Take the milk inside and stoke the fire. The night will have teeth.
7. Pour the milk into the cauldron. It's cow-warm, so the only heat you have to maintain is your own.
8. Add the rennet. You knew the calf from whose gut it came and remember the rasp of its tongue seeking salt from your skin. When you were a child, your heart was fresh and soft as Agri Valtorta but the years have cured it. Now it is as hard as Pecorino with a rind that is thick but not yet bitter.
9. Give it some time. Drink coffee.
10. When you can draw your grandfather's Bergamasco blade through the milk and see the cut, slice a grid through the curd. Pick up your brass bowl.
11. Scoop the bowl through the curd, wrists circling in a delicate churn. You can't even remember how old you were when your wrists stopped tiring from this. Keep scooping until the curds float like ghostly pebbles in a golden pond of whey.

12. Fetch the cheese cloth from your saddle bags. Line the buckets. The lengths fit perfectly, aged to sepia as if you've used them to strain tea.
13. With the brass bowl, scoop the curds into the buckets. When they are full, lift the cloth, curds hanging like fat puddings.
14. Let the whey drain with a noise like you make outside after a long night of grappa and tales. Keep it. Nothing is wasted. Pour some into the dog's bowl. When she looks at you with those eyes, ice-blue and mud-brown, add a little curd.
15. Place the curd-fat cloth inside the wooden mold on its thin bed of straws. Four bags, a perfect square. Leave it. More will drain.
16. Eat dinner. Feed the fire. The winds are falling off the mountain. Polenta with donkey sauce sits full and content in your belly.
17. Turn the cheeses over. Gently. Then pour some grappa. Sing. The nights up here are long. Keep the *baita* warm. Turn the cheeses. Again. Again. Then, when you settle down to sleep, let the them settle too. Everything finds its best self under its own weight.
18. When you wake, tend to your cows. This cheese must grow used to waiting.
19. Prepare a brine with water, salt and a splash of vinegar. One by one, float the flat squares in the brine and turn. Let them dry.
20. Everything ages in its own way. But first, let it rest. This milestone shouldn't be rushed. Let the cows lick the salt from your hands.
21. Send the cheese down the mountain. It's ready for the next stage. Maturity. A dry, wrinkled skin. Wish it well. You will meet again.

The flipside of the postcard

I love the word *pristine*, the naïve impossibility of it,
all of us vulnerable, impure and trying to make do
in a world where every postcard has its grubby underside.
Nothing is untouched. The bright air is packed with pollen
desperate for the sticky clutches of stigma. The soil
beneath our feet is a microbial orgy in the dark. Even
our atmosphere is just air the ozone is done with.
What seems to me a paradise is a cage to someone else,
pulled between a salary and tradition, obligation heavy
as a stone in every pocket, desperation burning marrow-deep.
The wolves no longer howl on the mountain. Marmots
chitter at hikers. Tail-lights and horns on the winding road,
more traffic flowing out than in. In the *baite*, the black weight
of roof presses down until walls buckle, a terminal swoon.
Everything feels the pressure. It's all on the move. Sometimes
I feel like I'm just here to take inventory. To witness the world's
slide to wherever the hell we're going. I hear the word *pristine* and laugh.
But there's no humour in it, like an undertaker chuckling
politely
at a graveside joke as everyone
tries
to keep a grip
on their brave face.

Publication Details

Mohamad Haghighi, 'Forbidden'. The poet notes, 'This was written in 2015 on Manus Island after the 2014 killing of Reza Barati and the wounding of hundreds of other men in the Manus Prison Camp when the imprisoned men were attacked by guards and other personnel during their peaceful protest at their conditions. After that night the politicians in Australia denied there was any issue telling the media that they were not concerned, that they had simply risen that morning and enjoyed their breakfast without concern. Throughout the poem, the poet questions when a 'celebration of paper and words' will be? This can be read in many ways. In particular it refers to the numerous forms filled out requesting food, books, pens, health care –both physical and mental – and various other everyday needs, written by people imprisoned. Over the years these thousands of requests have been routinely thrown away without being read or acted upon, leading inevitably to illnesses, deaths and the denial and slow breaking down of the abilities of those imprisoned. Ability too is forbidden.'

Gudrun Hinze, 'Exegesis' first appeared in the *Melbourne Poetry Gig Guide*, edited by Pamela Sidney (2004).

Sandy Jeffs, 'People Must Think I'm Crazy Because...' was originally published in a different version in *Poems from the Madhouse* (Spinifex Press, 1993) under the title 'A Thesaurus of Madness'.

Saba Vasefi, 'Dysphoric'. The quoted phrase, 'crowded solitude', is after the book title, Jack McLaren's *My Crowded Solitude*.

Contributors

Stuart Barnes's first book, *Glasshouses* (UQP), won the Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize and was shortlisted/commended for two other awards. Since 2017, he's been a program adviser for Queensland Poetry Festival. He's currently working on his second poetry collection, *Form & Function*, and a novel. [@StuartABarnes](http://stuartabarnes.wordpress.com)

Belle 'In 2003, my first year of university, I was diagnosed with major depression. With the help of a psychiatrist and medication, my mood improved over the next few years. Over this period, however, I developed an eating disorder and was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa when I was 22 years old ... By sharing my art and experiences, I hope that people will start to understand what it is like to have a mental illness. Mental illness is a condition that is varied; each person has a unique experience despite having the same diagnosis. As such it can be very hard to understand and is often overlooked and even feared. I hope through sharing my own experiences that it will give others who are experiencing mental illness the strength and courage to seek help and treatment.' Belle began a degree in Medicine in 2008 and now works as a doctor.

JV Birch lives in Adelaide. Her poems have been published in Australia, the UK, Canada and the US. 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*.

Peter Boyle is a Sydney-based poet and translator. In 2017, he won the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry with *Ghostspeaking*. His latest collection is *Enfolded in the Wings of a Great Darkness*.

Margaret Bradstock has eight published collections of poetry, including *The Pomelo Tree* (winner of the Wesley Michel Wright Prize) and *Barnacle Rock* (winner of the Woollahra Festival Award, 2014). Editor of *Antipodes* (2011) and *Caring for Country*

(2017), Margaret won the Banjo Paterson Poetry Award in 2014, 2015 and 2017. Her latest collection, from Puncher & Wattmann, is *Brief Garden* (2019).

David Brooks's latest publications are *The Grass Library* (Brandl & Schlesinger, 2019), a memoir/meditation on animality, *Napoleon's Roads* (short fictions, UQP 2016), *Derrida's Breakfast* (essays, Brandl 2016) and *Open House* (poetry, UQP 2015). He is currently writing on kangaroos, and on the Rat Eradication Program on Lord Howe Island.

Ienora cole is an emerging poet from Queensland, Australia. Her work has been published in print in *Australian Poetry Anthology*, *The Tundish Review*, *Jacaranda* and *Concrescence*, and online in *Umbel & Panicle*, *honey & lime*, *Déraciné* and *several hundred fools*.

Emilie Collyer lives in Naarm/Melbourne, where she writes poetry, plays and prose. Her writing has appeared most recently in *Not Very Quiet*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Slippage Lit*, *Australian Poetry Anthology*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Overland* and *The Lifted Brow*. Award-winning plays include *Contest*, *Dream Home* and *The Good Girl*.

Jennifer Compton lives in Melbourne and is a poet and playwright who also writes prose.

Stuart Cooke is a writer, critic and translator. His latest books are the poetry collection *Lyre* (UWAP, 2019) and a translation of Gianni Siccardi's *The Blackbird* (Vagabond, 2018). He lives in Brisbane, where he lectures in creative writing and literary studies at Griffith University. In 2020 Stuart will be a BRWhiting Fellow in Rome, Italy.

Angela Costi's poetry collections are: *Dinted Halos* (Hit&Miss Publications, 2003), *Prayers for the Wicked* (Floodtide Audio and Text, 2005), *Honey and Salt* (Five Islands Press, 2007) and *Lost in Mid-Verse* (Owl Publishing, 2014). An award from the National Languages and Literacy Board in 1995 enabled her to study Ancient Greek drama in Greece. In

2010, she worked in Japan on an international collaboration involving her poetry and Stringraphy Ensemble. She was diagnosed with multiple schwannomatosis in her mid-20s.

Alex Creece is a writer, poet, student and average kook living on Wadawurrung land (Geelong, Victoria). She is the Production Editor at *Cordite Poetry Review*, and was recently awarded a 2019 Write-ability Fellowship with Writers Victoria. Alex is passionate about neurodiversity in the arts, particularly given its intersections with other forms of identity and social inequity. Creative writing often allows Alex to draw from her own experiences as a queer and autistic woman with mental health conditions. She is currently cobbling together her debut poetry manuscript, through which she hopes to capture her world both as whimsically and unapologetically as possible.

Sophie Curzon-Siggers is a poet working in English and Italian, lino and 35mm film, all light-etchings pressed to page. In Australia her work has appeared in *Meanjin* (memoir), *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Southerly* (both print and *Long Paddock*), *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Rabbit*, *Regime*, *Visible Ink* and *The Age* newspaper. Her collection of original poetry in Italian, *piccoli battesimi*, was published by Coazinzola Press (Mompeo, 2017), following a chapbook in 2013, (*autoritratto con le pinne*, Gazebo Verde, Firenze).

Stefan Dubczuk is a Perth architect specialising in health and disability. Fellow AIA. Awards: The Glen Phillips Poetry Prize 2013. Second Prize: The 2015 WBYeats Poetry Prize for Australia. Short-listed: ACU 2015 Poetry Prize and SecondBite Poetry Competition 2014. Long-listed: *Best Australian Poems* (Black Inc., 2014). Published in various magazines and anthologies.

Jonathan Dunk is the co-editor of *Overland Literary Journal*, and a widely published scholar and poet.

Grace Dwyer is a psychology graduate, currently studying Secondary Education, who has had the privilege of volunteering with a number of mental health services. She

aspires to combine her love of literature with her desire to support young people's mental health, through sharing poetry's ability to aid personal growth.

Natalie Rose Dyer completed her Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing at Melbourne University, Australia (2016). She holds a Masters of Visual and Performing Arts (2010) with an Australian Postgraduate Award. Her poetry and essays appear in esteemed literary journals. Natalie recently completed a Residency at the University of Amsterdam.

Quinn Eades is a queer transmasculine writer, award-winning poet, academic, and editor. He is the author of *Rallying and All the Beginnings: A Queer Autobiography of the Body*, and is currently working on his third book and related theatre show, an autobiography titled *Transpositions*.

Robin M Eames is a queercrip poet and historian living on Gadigal land. Their work has appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Overland*, *Meanjin*, *Voiceworks*, *Westerly* and *Deaf Poets Society*, among others.

Paul Fearne holds a PhD from LaTrobe University, and a masters from the University of Melbourne. His poetry has appeared in *Westerly*, *Mascara Literary Review* and *Unusual Work*, amongst other places. His first book, *Diary of a Schizophrenic*, was launched at the 2010 Melbourne Writers Festival.

Michele Fermanis-Winward writes from the top of the Blue Mountains about climate change, celebrating what we have and what we will lose. She also writes poetry long form about her family history. Her verse novel, *A Larrikin in the Blood*, is to be published by Ginninderra Press.

'My name is **Julia G** and I am 25 years old. I live with generalised and social anxiety disorder, mild intellectual non-verbal learning disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder. I am a survivor of self-harm and suicidal thoughts.'

Sriharan Ganeshan was a film photographer and journalist in Sri Lanka

before fleeing the war. He arrived in Australia by boat and spent six years in detention before his release in 2015. Sri's writing has been published in *Overland*, *Peril*, *Writing Through Fences* and *Writing From Below*.

Gavin Yuan Gao is a Brisbane-based poet and translator. He was recently shortlisted for the 2019 Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. His poetry is forthcoming or has appeared in *Meanjin*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Peril*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Stilts Journal* and elsewhere.

Claire Gaskin's *A bud* was released by John Leonard Press in 2006, and was shortlisted in the John Bray SA Festival Awards for Literature. *Paperweight* was published in 2013 by Hunter Publishers. Her collection *Eurydice Speaks* is forthcoming with Hunter Publishers. She is currently working on her next collection, *Ismene's Survivable Resistance*.

Stuart Geddes is a graphic designer and occasional publisher, mostly of books. He is also an industry fellow, researcher and PhD candidate at RMIT University, where his research interests converge around the form of the book, through collaboration, emerging histories, and material practices.

Kevin Gillam is a West Australian poet with four books of poetry published. He works as Director of Music at Christ Church Grammar School in Perth.

E A Gleeson lives and works not so far from Victoria's great South-West coast. She is a writer of poems, essays and funeral ceremonies. She cares for her sister who lives with significant physical and intellectual challenges, and for the bereaved in her community. www.eagleeson.com.au

Mohamad Haghghi is an Archaeologist from Iran with a love of poetry. He wrote this poem from Australia's immigration prison on Manus Island, PNG.

Allis Hamilton lives off-grid in a hut among creatures of the Australian bush. She creates art, music and poetry. Her poems

appear in *The Poetry Review*; *Australian Poetry Journal*; *Overland*; *Southerly*; *Westerly*; *Plumwood Mountain* and anthologised in *Flightpath*, Hollowell Press and in *The Creel*, Guillemot Press. www.thestorytellingtent.com

Paul Harper: 2/3 hydrogen, 1/4 oxygen, 1/10 carbon. Bi-polar, OCD.

Jennifer Harrison has published eight poetry collections, most recently *Anywhy* (Black Pepper, 2018). She manages The Dax Poetry Collection, a unique international collection of mental health poetry housed at the Dax Centre, University of Melbourne.

Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives in Melbourne. Her works include a novel, three collections of stories and eight books of poetry. *Kosmogonies* (2019) and *After Cage* (2019) are her latest publications. Hecq is a recipient of the 2018 International Best Poets Prize, IPTRC.

Ruby Hillsmith is a poet, non-fiction writer and the current co-editor of *Visible Ink*. Her work has been published in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Sick Leave Journal* and *Honi Soit*. At the moment she feels compelled to write poetry about her housemate's delinquent pet bunnies and essays about the Australian psychiatric system.

Gudrun Hinze (1950-2019) emigrated from Germany with her parents in 1954. She was dux of her high school in 1968, completed a BA in 1971 and her Honours as an M. A. preliminary in 1990. Gudrun was first hospitalised at twenty-five with schizophrenia before her diagnosis was later revised to schizoaffective disorder.

Andy Jackson has performed at literary events and arts festivals in Australia and overseas. His most recent collection, *Music our bodies can't hold* (Hunter Publishers 2017), consists of portrait poems of other people with Marfan Syndrome. Andy has worked in call-centres, libraries, and as a creative writing tutor at universities and community organisations, and currently for Writers Victoria's Write-ability program.

Anna Jacobson is a Brisbane writer and artist. In 2018 she won the Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize and the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award. Her first full-length collection *Amnesia Findings* will be published by the University of Queensland Press (UQP). Anna's poetry chapbook *The Last Postman* (Vagabond Press, 2018) is part of deciBels 3. www.annajacobson.com.au

Sandy Jeffs has published seven volumes of poetry and a memoir *Flying with Paper Wings: Reflections on Living with Madness*, published in 2009. Much of her writing has been about her struggle with schizophrenia. Sandy is currently writing an oral history of Larundel based on interviews of past inmates and staff.

Kit Kavanagh-Ryan is a poet and academic based in Melbourne who spends a lot of time trying to crip your kidlit as she completes a PhD at Deakin on disability, children's fiction, and secondary worlds. Her writing can be found in *Southerly*, *Kill Your Darlings* and *Cordite Poetry Review*. She's probably fallen over twice today.

Sharon Kernot writes fiction and poetry and currently works as a mental health support worker. Her latest book, *The Art of Taxidermy*, was published by Text in 2018. Her work has appeared in various journals and magazines including *Best Australian Poems*, *Island*, *Verandah*, *Mascara*, *Southerly* and *Australian Love Stories*.

Paul Magee is author of *Stone Postcard* (John Leonard Press, 2014), *Cube Root of Book* (JLP, 2006) and the prose ethnography *From Here to Tierra del Fuego* (University of Illinois Press, 2000). Paul is Associate Professor of Poetry at the University of Canberra.

Mal McKimmie's first volume of poetry, *Poetileptic*, was published in 2005 by Five Islands Press, Melbourne. His second volume, *The Brokenness Sonnets I-III & Other Poems*, was published by Five Islands Press in 2011 and won the 2012 Age Poetry Book of the Year Award.

Rachael Mead is a poet and writer living in South Australia. Her poetry collections include *The Flaw in the Pattern* (UWAP, 2018), *The Sixth Creek* (Picaro Press, 2013) and she has a novel forthcoming in 2020 with Affirm Press. In 2019 she was awarded the AP/NAHR Eco-poetry Fellowship.

Oliver Mills is a South Australian artist and poet who lives with cerebral palsy, a physical condition that affects muscle movement and verbal communication. Using specially designed equipment, and in collaboration with his poetry and art teachers, Oliver's works offer a written and visual expression of how he sees the world.

Fiona Murphy is a Deaf poet and essayist. Her work has appeared in *Kill Your Darlings*, *Overland*, *Griffith Review*, amongst others. In 2017, she was shortlisted for the Dorothy Porter Award for Poets. In 2019, she was awarded The Monash Prize. She's currently working on a collection of essays about Deafness.

NEG has had an experience of mental health issues since the age of nine. NEG took part in Prahran Mission's Second Story program, as well as taking a place as an artist in Stables Studio. She has undertaken a Writing and Editing course at RMIT, as well as various art therapy sessions. She says that, '[I feel] that people don't know what it's like to live with BPD & I think my work/writing shows something of that. I hope that people can learn from it'.

Geoff Page is based in Canberra. His recent books include *Hard Horizons* (Pitt Street Poetry, 2017), *In medias res* (PSP, 2019) and *Elegy for Emily: A Verse Biography of Emily Remler* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2019). His awards include the Grace Leven Prize, the Christopher Brennan Award, the 2001 Patrick White Award and the ACU Poetry Prize in 2017.

Kristian Patruno is an Australian poet whose works have appeared in *Westerly*, *Rabbit*, *Southerly*, *Otoliths*, and *Cordite Poetry Review*. Additionally, Kristian's visual poetry was exhibited in POETRY 2017, an exhibition of text-based works that bear

a formal relationship to the space they occupy (George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, Australia).

John Puli: 'Schizophrenia brings about a certain "poverty of thought" making expression through words difficult. Drawing is a means by which I am able to honestly express my thoughts and feelings. Whilst others may see my medication-induced shakes as a disability, the trembling in fact adds to my art, imbuing it with a signature uniqueness that is as honest as it is raw.'

Leah Robertson is a Melbourne-based visual artist and an emerging poet living with complex psychiatric conditions. She is a 2019 Writers Victoria Write-ability Fellow.

Pam Schindler is a Brisbane-based poet. Her work has appeared in Australian print and online magazines and anthologies, and she has published one book of poetry, *A Sky you could fall into* (Post Pressed, 2010). She was a 2013 Hawthornden fellow.

Elif Sezen is a multidisciplinary artist, and bilingual poet/writer. Her collection *Universal Mother* was published by GloriaSMH Press in 2016; her second book *A Little Book of Unspoken History* in 2018 by Puncher & Wattmann. She published her Turkish translation of Ilya Kaminsky's *Dancing in Odessa* (2014). She lives in Melbourne. www.elifsezen.com

Kerri Shying is a poet of Chinese and Wiradjuri family who received the NSW Writers' Centre Emerging Writer Grant in 2017. Kerri's poems have appeared in *Snap Journal*, *Cordite*, *Verity La*, *Ear to Earth*, and *Women of Words*, 2016. She is the author of a bilingual pocketbook of poems *sing out when you want me* (Flying Islands/ASM/Cerberus Press, 2017), and the chapbook *Elevensies* (Slow Loris, 2018). Kerri was shortlisted in the Helen Anne Bell and the Noel Rowe prizes in 2017, and held the Varuna Dr Eric Dark Flagship Fellowship for 2019 for her collection *Know Your Country*, due out in 2020 through Puncher and Wattmann. Her pocketbook *Knitting Mangrove Roots* is being published with Flying Island/ Cerberus/ASM. Kerri is the convenor of Write Up, a free

writing group for people living with disability in the Lower Hunter, and supported regions of NSW. She lives with disability from SLE/Sjogrens and Arthritis, in Newcastle, NSW with her famous dog Max Spangly.

David Stavanger is a poet, performer, cultural producer, editor and lapsed psychologist. His first full-length poetry collection *The Special* (UQP, 2014) was awarded the Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize and the Wesley Michel Wright Poetry Prize. David co-directed Queensland Poetry Festival (2015–17) and is the co-editor of *Australian Poetry Journal* 8.2 – 'spoken', *Rabbit 27 Tense* and *SOLID AIR: Collected Australian & New Zealand Spoken Word* (UQP, 2019.) His next collection is *Case Notes* (UWAP, 2020). David is also sometimes known as Green Room-nominated spoken weird artist Ghostboy. These days he lives between the stage and the page.

Emily Sun is an emerging writer who lives on Whadjuk Noongar Country. She has had works previously published in various anthologies and journals including *Mascara Literary Review*, *APJ*, *Cordite Poetry Review* and *Westerly*. <https://iamemilysun.com>

Penny Szentkuti is a teacher, librarian and writer from Sydney. Plagued by a stutter throughout high school, she embraced writing early but has never actually written about stuttering before now.

Ojo Taiye is a young Nigerian who uses poetry as a handy tool to hide his frustration with the society. His poem, 'Elegiac', is the winner of the 2019 Hart Crane Poetry Prize. His writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Rattle*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Palette*, *Stinging fly*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Tinderbox Poetry*, *Strange Horizon*, *Ninth letter*, *Vallum* and elsewhere. His poetry chapbook, *All of Us are Birds and Some of us Have Broken Wings*, was published in 2019.

Heather Taylor-Johnson's latest books are the novel *Jean Harley was Here* and the poetry collection *Meanwhile, the Oak*, as well as *Shaping the Fractured Self: Poetry of Chronic Illness and Pain* (UWAP), which she edited.

She is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the J M Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice at the University of Adelaide.

Elizabeth Turnbull identifies herself as a self-taught Outsider Artist. Her work is represented in private and public collections, and she has worked and exhibited in Australian and internationally. In speaking about her creative process, Turnbull has said, 'It doesn't necessarily follow the story of depression, because I learn to go to this other place that we all have, it's like an essence or something inside that everyone has, and I had to work very hard to get past me, and all the depressions, to get to that place where I then worked from nothing ... almost a state of waiting for whatever wanted to be said. It's so strange. There's almost a click. I don't consciously say I'll get rid of all this depression, you have to be very still, and wait, and it comes out. Give up on all preconceptions of what I'm going to paint'.

Saba Vasefi is multi-award winning writer, academic, journalist, poet. She writes for *The Guardian* on the rhetorics of displacement. Saba researches her PhD in exilic feminist cinema studies and teaches at Macquarie University. She is also *Verity La's* Discouraging Diaspora editor. She was twice a judge for the Dolatabadi Book Prize for the Best Book on Women's Literature and Women's Issues.

Carl Walsh is an occasional poet, crossword compiler, lexicographer of fictional words and writer of horoscopes (and other short stories). His work has been published in journals (including *n-SCRIBE*, *StylusLit*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Rabbit Poetry* and *Southerly*) and In Case of Emergency Press's *One surviving poem* anthology. He has forthcoming poems in *Takahe* (NZ) and *Meanjin*.

Sam Wagan Watson proudly embraces ancestry from the Wunjaburra Munanjali clan, the Birri Gubba nation and Germanic peoples. Volumes of his poetry have been praised by juries of the David Unaipon, Kenneth Slessor, the New South Wales Premier's Book of the Year and Scanlon prizes. In 2018 he was the recipient of the Patrick White Literary Award. Samuel has

accepted and completed commissions from such bodies and institutions as Brisbane City Council, the Japanese Aeronautical Exploration Agency, the Perth International Arts Festival and the Sydney Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences. He is a Brisbane-based writer, published by UQP.

Petra White's most recent book of poetry is *Reading for a Quiet Morning*. She lives in London.

Rae White is a non-binary transgender writer and the editor of *#EnbyLife Journal*. Their poetry collection *Milk Teeth* (University of Queensland Press) won the 2017 Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize, was shortlisted for the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry and commended in the 2018 Anne Elder Award.

Konrad Winkler 'Julie, the subject of these photos, is a painter, but her ability to work is severely hampered by bouts of crippling postnatal depression. Over a period of two years and at least weekly visits to her house and studio I only stopped myself once from photographing her. On this occasion her suffering was so intense and she was so remote that I suddenly realised that the depression was something that had taken hold of her and I felt as though I was watching someone drown right in front of me without being able to reach them'.

Fiona Wright is a writer, editor and critic. Her book of essays *Small Acts of Disappearance* won the 2016 Kibble Award and the Queensland Literary Award for non-fiction. Her poetry collections are *Knuckled*, which won the 2012 Dame Mary Gilmore Award, and *Domestic Interior*, which was shortlisted for the 2018 Prime Minister's Literary Award. Her new essay collection is *The World Was Whole*.

Note Australian Poetry accepts the biographies supplied by poets in good faith. It is not possible to fact-check to 100 per cent accuracy the information submitted with poems.

Australian Poetry, established to bring together state-based poetry collectives, publishes the country's national poetry journal, the *Australian Poetry Journal*. The Journal, published six-monthly, is guest-edited each issue by different voices, to ensure excellence and inclusivity. It also publishes insightful, curious articles. AP publishes an annual anthology, along with a digital volume showcasing U30s and emerging voices.

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