

THE FREMANTLE PRESS ANTHOLOGY OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN POETRY

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN KINSELLA AND TRACY RYAN



FREMANTLE PRESS

Mount Eliza

On Mount Eliza's gently-swelling height
 Musing of late I sat, and strained my sight
 To catch within its orbs the full expanse
 Of all the beauties which the scene enhance.
 On such a spot as this, how sweet to feel
 The charms of Nature o'er the senses steal;
 When peace, reflected from its sunny spots,
 Soothes the sad mind, and drowns all memr'y's blots;
 And as its genial influence leads us on,
 We feel as calm as all we look upon.
 Long ere by stern necessity's command,
 The emigrant had sought this distant land,
 This lovely spot was mark'd by many a grace,
 And all those hues which Nature loves to trace.
 But then this beauty was of sombre hue,
 And Nature's wildness only met the view.
 No fabric raised, whose bright looks catch the eyes,
 And make us think of Home and all we prize.
 What though the 'Swan' in graceful turnings glide,
 No cheerful boat had ever stemm'd its tide,
 Or merry barks, with white sails deck'd its face,
 Or skimm'd its surface with their magic pace.
 No sound disturb'd its silent, peaceful strand,
 Save when the native savage, spear in hand
 Came from his pathless woods to try his skill,
 By hunger led, the finny prey to kill.
 From fancied scenes like these I turn with pride
 To view the works of man on every side.

To thee, fair Perth, where, peeping through the trees,
Thine houses glitter, and full well must please
The eyes of one who fondly loves to mark
Those fairy visions springing from the dark.
When first our hardy colonists, with zeal
Commenced their hopeful task with trusty steel
Not in their dreams, by fancy colour'd high,
E'er matur'd all that here is gay reality.
Thick clustering dwellings now uprear their heads,
In pleasing contrast to their leafy beds;
And verdant gardens, ranging side by side,
Skirting the river's bank, are spreading wide.
How much we love the forms we've help'd to rear;
What deep and earnest thoughts of hope and fear
Do mark their fitful progress; if the things
Be pets of Art, or Poets' wild imaginings,
Say then what thoughts shall fill the exile's mind
When cast on foreign wilds a home to find;
Who daily strives his anxious cares to cheer,
And form around him all he holds most dear.
Then, if success he should at length attain,
He loves it more for all its toil and pain;
With pride surveys the scenes he'd help'd to trace
On what was once a drear and desert place.
With feelings such as these I love the sight
Which greets the eye from off this wood-crown'd height,
And oft-times wander to this shady place,
With fondly-curious eye, intent to trace
Some new raised structure, or some pleasing green
That lends fresh beauty to the changeful scene;
Or watch beneath my view some freighted boat
In silence pass, and onwards gaily float

O'er Melville Water, dancing on its flight,
Its white sails lessening, tho' it still looks bright;
Fleet messenger of Trade, that daily finds
A sure assistance from alternate winds.
The country round from this exalted place
Looks like a chart, on which you trace
The varied outlines of the pleasing scene,
Where waters glitter, and where woods look green.
Here Belches' Point, whose stretching sides extend
And form, at length, the banks by which descend
Fair Canning's stream, that flows with gentle force;
Or Swan's blue flood, that comes from distant source.
There Headland juts, with base round-spreading, wide.
That forms a mimic bay on either side;
And, distant far, the lofty hills are seen
Raising their blue tops o'er the woods' dark-green.
Oft as these scenes I view, new hopes will spring
Of future greatness which each year must bring;
And in my mind's-eye fondly view each grace
Which fancy loves to form on many a place.
No dark'ning clouds, I trust, will ever rise
To blight the hopes I now so fondly prize.
Land of my adoption, onward is thy way,
In spite of all that prejudice can say.
Detraction's tongue shall now no more have weight;
She's done her worst, and sent forth all her hate.
No aid we need to make a prosperous land
But Councils wise, and Industry's strong hand.
In these secure, let each one do his best;
Our sunny clime will work out all the rest.

The New Woman

She does not “languish in her bower”,
Or squander all the golden day
In fashioning a gaudy flower
Upon a worsted spray.
Nor is she quite content to wait
Behind her rose-wreathed lattice pane,
Until beside her father’s gate
The “gallant prince draws rein”.

The brave “New Woman” scorns to sigh,
And count it “such a grievous thing”
That year and year should hurry by,
And no gay mister bring.
In labor’s ranks she takes her place,
With skilful hand and cultured mind;
Not always foremost in the race,
But never far behind.

And no less lightly fall her feet,
Because they tread the busy ways;
She is no whit less fair or sweet
Than maids of older days,
Who gowned in samite or brocade,
Looked charming in their dainty guise:
But dwelt like violets in the shade,
With shy, half-opened eyes.

Of life she takes a clearer view,

And through the press serenely moves
Unfettered, free, with judgement true,
Avoiding narrow grooves.
She reasons and she understands,
And sometimes 'tis her joy and crown
To lift with strong, yet tender hands,
The burdens men lay down.

Lilian Wooster-Greaves (b.1869 d.1956)

The Farmer's Daughter

Guess I'll stick to washing dishes,
Sweeping, cooking, darning socks;
Having literary wishes
Gives a girl too many shocks.

I think thoughts just like those bookmen;
Dream sweet dreams from morn to night,
I see folks just like their spook-men
In the evening's ghostly light.

I'd have loved a life of learning,
But when'er I go about
With fires of genius burning,
Then the kitchen fire goes out

'Look here, Sis, we're two great ninnies'
Thus my brother yesterday —
'Working hard when golden guineas
Here are fairly flung away.

‘Prize for lyric, prize for sonnet,
Prize for humorous verses, too —
Seize a paper, scribble on it —
Suit for me and dress for you

‘Come, let’s try it — I say, Mary,
What’s a lyric, anyhow?’ —
So I got the dictionary,
And forgot to milk the cow.

— ‘Sonnets must be made to order;
Fourteen lines, and put just so,
Like in your embroidery border,
Or a picture-frame, you know.

‘Where’s the “Royal Road to Rhyming”?
Lyrics must be musical —
Ebbing, flowing, singing, chiming,
With a gentle rise and fall.’

So we scribbled till the dark it
Closed around, and day was gone;
Mother home again from market!
Dinner wasn’t even on!

Father swore a score of sonnets,
Several miles of lyric, too —
Guess I’ll earn my frocks and bonnets
Just as other daughters do.

W. C. Thomas (b.1869 d.1957)

The Terrace

I love the Terrace and its way,
Its moments tense with business rife —
The Forum of the city's life,
Where Commerce holds its kingly sway.

As from the heart, so from it flows
The energies that move the State,
To mould it to a worthy Fate,
That enterprise alone bestows.

I love the Terrace best of all
When crowned with Summer's vault of blue,
And shafts of gold are falling through
Its lilacs leafy, cool and tall —

When from them drifts a subtle scent
Recalling pleasures of the bush,
And one may quit the city's rush
For all that recollection meant.

Francis William Ophel (b.1871 d.1912)

His Epitaph

He lies here. See the bush
All grey through grief for him;
Hoar scrub — like ashes cast —

Justina Williams (b.1914 d.2008)

No Coward Colour

Yellow, honey-smooth, pollen sifted,
hail-fellow-well-met yellow;
audacious campaigner, capeweed unloosing
butterfly armies on fallow.

Knee-deep in yellow, the earth shouting,
yellow is not the colour of fear,
yellow is a loquat in the teeth of the sun,
yellow the day's birth and her bier.

A colour deeper than its sum of self
it cannot hide its burning eye
or tell the topaz to withdraw its fire,
the saffron cup withhold its dye.

Yellow is no coward colour, only lit
on candle flame upon the dead —
let my bitter boy put off his khaki,
eat with me my golden-freckled bread.

Alec Choate (b.1915 d.2010)

Dingo

He runs ahead, hedged in by spinifex,
Snared by its height he is too young to clear,
Dribbling his strength out on the track

Where our wheels snarl and worry at his heels.
Vermin is said, and we could ponder this
Around a campfire, but here our chase has heart
In our horizon's values
To brake back from him should our tyres once touch.
So fragile and so madly straight, the track
We clutch as our life's threat
He runs on as a thread of death,
Looking for some quick gap in the green mesh,
A mouth, a tongue of sand, to lick him off.

And there it is at last, and he skids through,
Spinning around to stand and stare
As if he knows we dare not follow.
We slow down, watching, noting how suddenly
The morning shimmers with our voices
And how we breathe a little easier
As so does he.
Now that their fright has melted,
His eyes slant with a question,
A wry scan
That tries to niche us in his scheme of wildlife,
The world he knows and which we do not share.

Our tyres move on, he bristles at the sound,
Slips past some smaller clumps of spinifex
And goes from us, low-shouldered, at a trot.

Words For A Granddaughter

We have listened,
too ready to praise her prattle
as the breakthrough of words,
too ready to catch her at last rekindling
the knowing light of our voices
and those of astonished strangers.
Of words indeed is the beginning.
Words are the greatest of all our gifts.

At this moment she sits
in her full scale world of our home's small garden,
and seeing her jilt without warning
her playthings onto the lawn,
I follow the rush of her eyes
to the wattle bird
as it grips the hibiscus flower,
bending about like a yachtsman playing a sail,
or perhaps to the caterpillar
piling then laying its wildcat fur
up a leaf's sheer slide, or to the cabbage moth
blowing about like a star of cloth.

There are no words
to span the spell I see in her eyes.
Speechless with wonder
before she has learned to speak,
her lips are parted petals themselves
with no more sound
than the crimson trumpet the bird has found.
And I wish her many like moments of magic

when, however her life becomes patterned
with words, their grace and their garbage,
this look is her only answer
and she cannot speak.

Jack Davis (b.1917 d.2000)

Rottnest

These rock place here by man
to form a bridgewater
The sea's age typified
by algae clinging to the stone
The Indian Ocean limitless
breathing might and power
even on this day of calm
I look across at Rottnest
in the far off haze
where my people
breathed their last sigh
for home the mainland
to them the distant blue
What did they do
but stand within paths
of cloven hooves
Their only crime
to fight for what was rightly theirs
To them the island was a place of souls
departed down through
eons of time
but by a savage twist of fate

Don't Call Me Grandma

“Don't call me Grandma
when I'm in here
call me old witch Eva” —
 that always stopped us
on the threshold,
words whistling out into breath,
we'd watch
a moment longer,
she'd move
between lumps of clay,
a half-formed pot on a wheel,
hair catching light
through a dusty window —
“Grandma,”
we'd say,
“Don't call me Grandma
when I'm in here!”

“Old witch Eva,
can I come in?
Can I make something too?”
Magic words,
we'd pass that magic line
where house crossed into shed
and grandmas into witches.
Pressing our own cold lumps of clay
into clumsy teapots and lopsided animals,
we'd watch her shift

across the room, her woolly hair
bunned up or streaming down,
a sudden glance, a little stare,
she still looked like Grandma
but you couldn't be sure —
Was that a broomstick in the corner?
An owl perched on her chair?

She'd whisk around and lift her arms
to make us shriek,
then settle to her work —
the rhythmic squeak
of a potter's wheel,
the whisper of slurry
on hands throwing clay
and behind her back,
the night-bird, startled from sleep
stretches up on its chair
and begins to beat its wings.

Bumboat Cruise on the Singapore River

Rhetoric is what keeps this island afloat.
Singaporean voice with a strong American accent,
barely audible above the drone of the bumboat engine:
“Singaporeans are crazy about their food.
They are especially fond of all-you-can-eat buffets.
Why not do as the locals do and try out one of the buffets
at these hotels along the waterfront.” The Swissotel looms.
The Grand Copthorne. The Miramar. All glass
and upward-sweeping architecture. Why not do

as the locals do. Here in this city where conspicuous
consumption
is an artform. Where white tourists wearing slippers and
singlets
are tolerated in black-tie establishments. Dollars. Sense.

How did I ever live in this place? Sixteen years of my life
afloat in this sea of contradictions, of which I was, equally, one:
half-white, half-Chinese; the taxi-driver cannot decide
if I am a tourist or a local, so he pitches at my husband:
“Everything in Singapore is changing all the time.”
Strong gestures. Manic conviction. “This is good.
We are never bored. Sometimes my customers
ask me to take them to a destination, but it is no longer there.”
We tighten our grip on two squirming children and pray
that the bumboat tour will exist. Nothing short of a miracle
this small wooden boat which is taking us now past Boat Quay,
in its current incarnation, past the Fullerton Hotel

To the mouth of the Singapore river, where the Merlion
still astonishes: grotesque and beautiful as a gargoyle.
The children begin to chafe at confinement. My daughter wails
above the drone of the engine. There’s talk of closing the
mouth
of the river. New water supply. There’s talk of a casino.
Heated debate in the Cabinet. Old Lee and Young Lee
locked in some Oedipal battle. The swell is bigger out here
in the harbour, slapping up spray against the sides of the boat,
as if it were waves that kept it afloat, this boat,
this island, caught between sinking and swimming,
as I am caught now. As if rhetoric mattered.
As if this place gives me a name for myself.

Claire Potter (b.1975)

The Appeal of Cranes

wing opportunity

to see impressed in a wall
held in special —

priests severed wing shape marriage

but which a couple

dancing in frieze facing winter
tempting monogamy appropriate a wedding

a ritual connected to costume destroyed

(one wing, one cattle horn deposition of materials
origins ancestry Division, of birds

Toby Davidson (b.1977)

H2

Home is, then the heart is.

Home is a poem halved.

Home is making peace

where the ocean

killed a man with a shark.

Peace is shadows listing

on a grassy path.

Paths are wet feet welding
home to heel at last.

Press kiss, home is
torn love, birthmarked.

Scott-Patrick Mitchell (b.1977)

him
for jim

out farther, stars are the
art in heaven. hollow be the
sky that does not contain
them. hello be the aim of
an introduction. thine
winged one, my heart is
undone. you are worth every
penny from above. give in
& say let us go to bed
, for we need to undress
, for we need to undress
& press us against us
. it will lead to temptation
, which will quiver an
upheaval. for i am
your winged one
& our love will flower
song in the face of the
eternal. forever
endeavour to be a

lover, a partner, a boy
, a man

.

Eight Letters To A Lover, II

4 a.m., Port Augusta Train Station

we have warped the stars
with technology
, electricity
pinned them with wishes
so they hang pregnant & low

. we now know
that satellites & planets
move among those suns
— our gods & goddesses
who hid in constellations
remain an astrologer's game
of connect-the-dots

. listen
, the Universe's
saucepan
was left unattended
. it churned heat
& bubbled
spilt
vapour

which pinpricked & hardened
. from this act
of neglected cooking
the stars were spat out
over the darkness

. there
my lover

I have written
a myth for you
— made the stars
looser
to navigate through

Jeremy Badius (b.1979)

Day 6

This flotilla appanage
short shrifts my confession; & after
such accentus, what forgiveness? The reader
trembles, Charlie trembles, you tremble—until
raft-bound adrift you don't know is about is.
What's anything about? Anything's not about.
Is what it is:

remembering bare in Canossian shame hearing 'we'll
let ya back in, but it'll cost ya'; & so I got weary of try-
ing to be my friends. & the mind no longer
has will to resist & the will to live consumes

a wretched man on a wretched raft
on a wretched sea. & so Augie died
so Charlie could live. I can't do it.
It can't be done. I can't do it. It can't
be done. I can't do it. It can't be fated.
I can't do it. It can be done. Codetta:
& I etched
into the rail *Charlie was*
here & I weren't

impressed. May be dying &
surviving say the same thing; & -but at least
nobody's solemnly swearing 'I loved Ricardo Villalobos
till that album' while referencing mix-
tapes of every great song
ever. May there be mercy on my soul.
Forgive me, Alcy, forgive me, everyone.
Necessity knows no rules
Coda: for I whose eyes discern a revolt
of repulsion; *plaudite!*

J.P. Quinton (b.1981)

Little River

Windows reveal the soft stopping
Hush of the little river below,
Little eyes poking out,
There's no symbolism
In little eyes of the little river.
Blind like a family jumping

Out of windows
The little river's bends
Hang from the bough.
It's so heavy
No rock will ever
Skip across the surface
Indignant like an ocean
No stone will ever sink to the bottom.
Keep at an appropriate distance!
Little river will destroy you
It will make your fears succulent.
We will try to prevent
The little river from hushing you
Through the twilight
Through the broken glass
On the pavement under our shoe.
It will be of no use
The little river will stay hushed
And keep bubbling like a soda,
Its waters will rip.
But I am pessimistic,
It is no use.
I cannot fathom its depths
Or judge whether it is good or bad
Chipping away at its shores
The banks will spread water
To where we stand.
We will embrace
It like a sponge
Lapping at its greatest ascent
Our second body clean and soft.
What effect will little river's

Encroaching waters descend upon us?
Us non-believers
Us realists who discredit
Its sparkling leaves
Resenting the sharp sky screen.
Because of each other's thoughts
We lapse to think less of you, little river.
Still, you remain still
And quiet, in the stillness of unrest.

Ode to C. Y. O'Connor

We know you topped yourself, Charlie Boy, but the dead
Are alive and the living dead, have a cigarette instead.

Been following your pipe for a few days, from Grass Valley
To Doodlakine, Burracopping to Bodallin, been thinking of
you

And what your life might have been, but maybe failure
Was your motive, maybe you knew the pipe would work

An entire town built on falsehood:
'Good Country for Hardy People' the district motto.

Today I pulled into a camp just outside Coradin,
A man wearing his wife beater on the outside, starting a fire.

Are you allowed to camp here? *Dunno, I am.*
Is there any water around? He shrugged his shoulder

Swivelled, *Not that I've seen*. Your two silver pipes
Were behind him, but there would be no friendship between
us.

Caitlin Maling (b.1985)

The Break

To prevent tragedy the brush must be cut at angles,
no less than ten metres between squares.

Here my ancestors planted the buffalo grass
where it burns too hot for the native plants to seed

and we need these squares between land
to stop it sparking all the ways to our homes.

After her third institutionalisation they suggested
that my aunt's cingulate cortex be severed,

there was too much leaping between lobes.
Now I am the oldest member of my father's family

not to have undergone inpatient treatment
for whatever fire caused my grandmother's suicide

and the beating my grandfather gave which sparked it.
I try to hold my line. To be the space

large enough to let it all burn out.
But out of my native climate I arc and arc.

Apple

Οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρω ἐπ' ὕσδω
ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ· λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπης,
οὐ μὰν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.
– *Sappho, fr. 93*

I watch you swing
from branches, flushed
sweet-apple red
in orchard peace,

he glimpses your
late-blooming skin
just out of reach;
not forgotten

only distanced,
he plucks, not I,
but my gaze will
swallow you whole.