



AUSTRALIAN POETRY, 1947

# *Australian Poetry*

## *1947*

*Selected by*  
FREDERICK T. MACARTNEY

ANGUS AND ROBERTSON  
SYDNEY :: LONDON  
1948

*Set up, printed and bound in Australia by  
Halstead Press Pty Ltd, 9-19 Nickson Street, Sydney  
1948*

*Registered in Australia for transmission through  
the post as a book*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THANKS for permission to reprint a number of poems in this anthology are due to the *ABC Weekly*, the *Bulletin*, *Meanjin Papers*, and *Poetry*. Poems are also reprinted from Ethel Anderson's *Sunday at Yarralumlu*, Mary Finnin's *Alms for Oblivion*, Peter Hopegood's *Circus at World's End*, Nan McDonald's *Pacific Sea*, and Val Vallis's *Songs of the East Coast*.

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## TODAY

Ethel  
Anderson  
DN. 1844

Present time is the omnibus,  
The frigidaire, the rustless knife,  
US.

We have no high-grade hats, no cheap amours,  
No absinthe served with *petits-fours*,  
Ours not the saved skin, the lost honour.

But the cute jupon  
The cut coupon  
The clean slate  
A child's estate.

No blunderbuss.  
No old-world fuss.

Merely the rising tide of tears  
For those returning with our fears,  
The maimed, the halt, the blind, the shocked,  
With whom our world is nobly stocked.

Loved ones.  
Sons of guns.  
Docked lives  
Clocking in.



F. John  
*Blight*

## OLD WOMAN ISLAND

You can imagine the continual talk,  
The sway and the swagger, the glasses lifted  
To be smashed on the rocks; not a mile's walk  
From the shore—as if the headland shifted

Out with the tide on drifting sands; like the pub  
Two stories above the poor men's houses, which loomed  
Licentious above low trees. This was the hub  
Of the waves' circles. Where the surf boomed,

From its white lips this larger bubble  
Grassed, bare of timber, emerged flattening:  
As though a strong land wind blew double  
The strength of the sea wind, battening

Down hatches of air bluer than blue sky  
And even than sea. Some were amazed  
At this deeper blue. No outline for the eye  
But of colour on colour; a patchwork of crazed

Artistry, uncaptured by brush, too blue:  
And no relief but a line of surf, or bird.  
Then, there was this enigma of naming, too.  
"Old Woman Island" . . . what legend behind each  
word?

F. John  
Blight

Was this another island of reputation  
Puffed up above the horizon, pricked with a squeak?  
Bubble of sea or sky, or rock formation  
On which, like the light-bulbs, bubbles of spray would  
break:

Here was the island some spoke of, wanting a name.  
"An island like an old woman," someone would say;  
And ordinary men exploring, none foxing fame,  
Would launch the new island, "Old Woman Island"—  
but, no!

Likeness was not in this; and they must search  
Neighbouring coasts for a story, who sought in all  
Reason beyond mere acceptance, who would besmirch  
Credulity of angels, if knowledge would call.

For them, was this pale old legend of a grey woman—  
Corn cobs without good grain, jaws without teeth,  
The flaxen maize now dried to untidy cotton—  
Nobody seems to have known her race and faith.

Nevertheless we accept, she was native born;  
And native she died on her island, so men say;

F. John  
*Blight*

Swimming out on the tide with the forlorn  
Wish to die on an island she cherished—though, why?

Here, legend is silent, and casuistry holds sway:  
No help from the mainland; only the noise of surf  
To landward, where news is the empty—time of day;  
Or, the tide; what fish are weighed at the wharf.

Always so hopeless, seeking after an answer;  
Talk of the surf to confuse you, tangle of sand.  
“Looking out from the mainland, there was a man, sir,  
Who reasoned, the island was joined here by dry land.”

Of course—and the obvious theory, you would reckon.  
Years she was exiled by the relentless sea;  
Grew up from childhood, to watch the island beckon  
Her back to the place of her birth, sadly to die.

That is her monument, there, amid the blue.  
Sometimes a cloud, or an island—it would appear  
Part of the mainland to sailors, except to a few  
Fishing along the coast, and sailing near.

F. John  
Blight

"Old Woman Island" they called it. Strange is that name.  
What could an old grey woman possibly do  
To grip their imagination, to warrant this fame?  
" 'Old Woman Island' is little enough,"—say you.

*Leonard  
Mann*

## COOTAMUNDRA WATTLE

Cootamundra is blossoming.  
The lovely lie! Can we forgive  
What cries to heaven the spring is come  
When winter has two months to live?

It is but June and the cold, cold  
Wet winds constantly ebb and flow  
And over there the mountains fold  
About their shoulders capes of snow.

If to the world there comes no spring,  
This wintry world, why, let us take  
The gold of this small offering,  
Not for token but its own sake.

If never, never spring return  
One tree will light the earth with gold,  
Some little fire will bravely burn  
Some love shelter us from the cold.

Under the dusty print of hobnailed boots,  
Strewn on the floor, the papers still assert  
In ornamental gothic, swash italics  
And bands of printer's flowers (traditional)  
Mixed in a riot of topographic fancy,  
This is the *Western Star*, the Farmer's Guide,  
The Voice of Progress for the Nyngan District.  
Page-proofs of double-spread with running headlines  
Paper the walls, and sets of cigarette-cards  
Where pouter-bosomed showgirls still display  
The charms that dazzled in the nineteen-hundreds.  
Through gaping slats  
Latticed with sun the ivy tendrils fall  
Twining the disused platen thrust away  
Under a pall of dust in nineteen-twenty.  
Draw up a chair, sit down. Just shift the galleys.  
You say you have a notice? There's no one dies  
But what we know about it. Births, deaths and marriages,  
Council reports, wool prices, river heights,  
The itinerant poem and the classified ads—  
They all come homewards to the *Western Star*.  
Joe's our type-setter. Meet Joe Burrell. Joe's  
A promising lad—and Joe, near forty-seven,

Rosemary  
Dobson

Peers from a tennis-shade and, smiling vaguely,  
Completes the headline for the Baptist Social.  
The dance, the smoke-oh, and the children's picnic  
Down by the river-flats beneath the willows—  
They all come homewards and Joe sets them all  
Between the morning and the midday schooner.  
Oh, *Western Star* that bringest all to fold,  
The yarding sales, the champion shorthorn bull,  
And William's pain-relieving liniment,  
When I shall die  
Set me up close against my fellowmen,  
Cheer that cold column headed "Deaths" with flowers,  
Or mix me up with Births and Marriages;  
Surround the tragic statement of my death  
With euchre-drives and good-times-had-by-all,  
That with these warm concomitants of life  
Jostled and cheered, in lower-case italics  
I shall go homewards in the *Western Star*.

## POLARITIES

*Kenneth  
Slessor*

Sometimes she is like sherry, like the sun through a  
vessel of glass,

Like light through an oriel window in a room of yellow  
wood;

Sometimes she is the colour of lions, of sand in the  
flame of noon,

Sometimes as bruised with shadows as the afternoon.

Sometimes she moves like rivers, sometimes like trees;

Or tranced and fixed like South Pole silences;

Sometimes she is beauty, sometimes fury, sometimes  
neither,

Sometimes nothing, drained of meaning, null as water.

Sometimes, when she makes pea-soup or plays me  
Schumann,

I love her one way; sometimes I love her another

More disturbing way when she opens her mouth in  
the dark;

Sometimes I like her with camellias, sometimes with a  
parsley-stalk;

Sometimes I like her swimming in a mirror on the wall;

Sometimes I don't like her at all.



*Eric*  
*Irvin*

## BROTHER ASS

Old Brother Ass stands mumchance in the sun,  
Dreaming the century's dream of easy wealth,  
Dreaming the golden prize; then thumbs in stealth  
The latest ticket. In his mind this dun,  
Black-printed rag hangs gracefully across  
Uneven doorways, shutting out the black  
Worm-eaten timbers of the past. Its folds  
Are tapestried in gold Utopian scenes  
Wherein the world is his, or not, for toss  
Of any coin from out a well-filled sack.

He folds it up. Tomorrow's drawing holds  
So much of his real life within its hands  
He dare not think an instant more on fate,  
Whose end he neither sees nor understands.

Old Brother Ass stands mumchance in the sun  
(The years have taught him only how to wait),  
Confined within the glasshouse of his means;  
Seeing the world outside with eyes that shun  
The greater glasshouse round his smaller one.

## CIRCUS AT WORLD'S END

*Peter  
Hopegood*

I marked no rout on the distant mountain;  
I heard no cries and I saw no flares.  
If one had come on a sacred fountain,  
Doubtless he came on it unawares.  
I saw no sprays in the hands of maidens,  
Culled when the dew lay on the lawn;  
And only the mail-plane's snoring cadence  
Welcomed the equinoctial dawn.

For the days were gone when the green fire's glamour  
Leapt to enkindle the heart's red flame  
To reckless riot and cruel clamour,  
Or joyous chanting and greenwood game.  
Gone was the Maenads' frenzied yelling,  
The fear-crazed quarry, the human pack,  
The hunting horn and the deep note belling  
The dawn-response from the forest track.

Gone, and with them half of the meaning,  
Half of the virtue of park and lawn;  
His but a tame and meagre gleaner  
Who creeps to his toil in the holy dawn,  
Here, through the park, where the dew-drenched  
grasses

*Peter*  
*Hopegood*

Harbour the stubs of the cigarettes,  
Marking the track of the foot that passes,  
Dull with the burden of drugged regrets.

So I muse on this birthday morning  
As down the asphalt ways I swing.  
The buds fail not in their shrine-adorning,  
But where are the rites that shall greet the spring?  
Where is the chant? . . . There comes a fluting . . .  
The dance? . . . I raise my eyes to see  
Volley of wings to a minstrel's luting  
Spilled from the boughs of a banyan-tree.

Back and forth, with their deft spells binding  
The fig-tree's bole in a ceaseless maze,  
Behold, the daughters of Ocean winding  
A charm that shall seal for us tingling days!  
Seven their number, seven fleet swallows,  
And a songbird hid in the tree's green crown,  
And a pother of finches around . . . it follows  
The World's End Circus has come to town.

A score of sparrows has quit the gutter,  
Flirting and chirping, they know not why,  
For the hands of magic are here a-flutter,

Peter  
Hopegood

Spelling a rune for the eager sky;  
And where is the heart that beats in feathers  
Shall stay to question who calls the tune,  
When the fingers that fashion the spring's mad  
measures  
Are once more weaving their age-old rune?

Tell me the banyan's shade is soggy,  
For a leaky conduit runs hard by;  
That midges swarm where the ground is boggy,  
And midges determine where swallows fly!  
Tell me your silly sparrows gather  
Wherever they think a feast is spread!  
Tell me that songbird touch is rather  
Too richly right to be credited!

I marked no rout on the distant mountain:  
I heard no cries and I saw no flares:  
If one had come on a sacred fountain,  
Doubtless he came on it unawares.  
I saw no sprays in the hands of maidens,  
Culled when the dews lay on the lawn,  
And only the mail-plane's snoring cadence  
Welcomed the equinoctial dawn.

*Shawn  
O'Leary*

## ARRIVAL

Hold fast for me my yesterdays.  
Through long stretches of the dark I come  
To beat at the great door of my death  
With a bone as on the taut skin of a drum.

Harsh there hangs the shape of winter,  
Swung from the sounding bronze whereon I knock.  
Twelve strokes stir its hunch-backed hanging:  
This hand has plucked my midnight from the clock.

This of my tissue made, this moment,  
Rises from wrists, as a hawk to gale;  
The door creaks wide, I turn a quarter  
And hang my shape with winter on the nail.

When stiff grass grows between my fingers,  
While rain falls silver in the golden sun,  
Remember that my shuttered heart is naked,  
Is minus though I am at one with One.

Though I am forever, I cannot hold  
My minute nor tarry on these timeless ways.  
Let you who are left embraced in laughter  
Hold fast for me my yesterdays.

## THE PROFESSOR

*David H.  
Rowbotham*

Blackboard background merging with a midnight  
Gown that eclipses all his body except  
Two pallid hands—live stars illuminating  
Speech with gesture, aesthetically adept—

And, rising from the academic gloom,  
Prominently quaint, a Roman face,  
Like an elliptic moon reflecting light  
Of knowledge, wrinkled with a cultured grace.

Heart of a poet, mind of a man immured  
In visions of his pedestalled arts that form  
A monumental wall dividing his days  
From slander of prejudiced sneer or critic storm,

He commands a world at touch of the patient cover  
Of his classical dictionary dated the year  
Seventeen eighty-eight, with title page  
Finely scrolled and politely verbose through a tear.

He offers the spirit of centuries to stir  
An untaught darkness and speaks old masters' wise  
Unchanging words, impelling student-pens  
To whispers with the intensity of his eyes.

*David H.*  
*Rowbotham*

Hard to imagine him as soldier, yet,  
They say, he fought at Ypres. Hard to believe  
A wound in that covered arm habitually  
Sweeping aside the gown's obtrusive sleeve.

Years full of scholars—pageant of nakedness  
In need of dress—have petrified that frown.  
He has laboured with books and words to satisfy  
A dream; to turn them out with a love and a gown.

## AND NAMED O'NEILL

*Mary  
Finnin*

Crowbars burst apart the bubbled stone  
That held a home close for a hundred years.  
Old pioneers  
They were, and named O'Neill.  
Once a strong road looped to the water here,  
Embraced an inn, and climbed the western hills.  
But other trees were blazed, now nearer roads  
Lead to the Leigh and the black lands beyond.  
White Irish lace blew from the window sill,  
Tall, frozen fleurs-de-lis in upright row  
(Gold now with rust) guarded a garden place.  
Gone, with the pale singing of the she-oak boughs,  
The covered yard-well with its clink of frogs,  
East wall shored up with scented Ragged Jack,  
Wild wattle feeding English bees, the wakeful dogs.  
The stones will join the quarry rubble soon,  
The roof slates pave a pigsty for McHugh.  
White-curtain Irish with their ritual ways—  
Old colonists they were, and named O'Neill.



Nan

## TRANSMIGRATION

McDonald

The cliff is edged with dark-green,  
Pale-flowered sea rosemary,  
And the warm scent of lantana  
And the cold breath of the sea  
Blend in the strange enchantment  
Of my earliest memory.

My eyes through sleep and sunlight  
Swerve with the gulls that go  
Harsh-voiced in shining beauty,  
Bright on the airs that blow  
Between the bare green hill above  
And the crashing blue below.

In the short grass the magpies  
With sidelong glance step by,  
Converse with gurgling laughter  
And wild and lovely cry,  
And their friends from the red ploughland  
Lilting and far reply.

My body is a dull thing  
And a weariness to me,  
And here perhaps I could leave it

Nan  
McDonald

By the sweet sea rosemary,  
Long and still in the sunny grass  
While my soul as a bird went free.

Never to see a town again,  
Work or wear clothes or vote,  
But have instead a magpie's  
Bold eye and glossy coat,  
And waterfalls and morning sun  
And the full moon in my throat.

But, ah, the long slide down the wind  
When the blue nor'easter blows,  
The quick turn in the bursting spray  
Only the white gull knows!  
And who will say a golden voice  
Is a better thing than those?

To choose between two heavens  
Would take a stronger head  
Than mine, which solves no problems  
But bids me when all's said  
Lift up the same old weight of flesh  
And take it to be fed.

*Edna*  
*Tredinnick*

ARUNTA

Slim boy, scraping war paint,  
Listening to the wise men,  
Listening to the tales of terrible encounter,  
Told in the only tongue.

Slim boy, following hands  
Shaping again adventures  
In the uncertain light.  
Slim boy, wanting years,  
Tree-climber,  
Dog-lover,  
Youngest of the tribe.

North to the land of yellow men.  
They said, and more.

Slim boy in a salt wind,  
Gazing beyond the decks;  
Slim boy,  
Listening.

Two loves are one too many for any man to keep:  
a man's loves are part of him,  
as a crew is part of a ship,  
and a dissentious crew breeds calamity  
before the voyage is done.

A man cannot love the old and the new;  
he cannot desire the known and the unknown;  
he cannot sail beyond known time and keep  
a clock that ticks the hours in France, saying,  
Ten o'clock, and now she's giving instructions to the  
servants.

It's five by the church tower,  
and the bells are calling her to vespers.  
Her Aves done, she says a prayer for me.

Fools think time a reasonable thing that runs to ships'  
chronometers,  
but that is token time, payable on demand  
only in the country of its origin.  
Here cowrie shells are currency, and time and tide  
bear the stamp of other monarchs. Seasons run to  
opposites.

The natives know things the Future will discover  
in their due course, announcing them as Progress.

*Ken  
Barratt*

A man cannot sail by two clocks. Trouble will come of it,  
and trouble did. He knew the weather signs, arriving  
eight days too late  
at Botany Bay, to find the English there before him . . .  
eight days too late and all time past to get there.  
The lag and drag of her love had been holding him back,  
making him delay when he should be pressing on,  
making him fear that every league further  
was a league irrevocable from the friendly harbourage  
of her arms.

But the resolution was made.

It was onward from this English-claimed land.

Spread, O ship, your great wings and soar beyond safe  
horizons.

There lie destiny and the eight days he had lost.

Eastward lay the secret of time that had the same  
beginning

as Western man's, but ran to its own pulse beat,  
so that no man knew whether the past or future lay  
beyond the loose-flung arms of Botany Bay.

He wrote farewell to her, his Elenore,  
bade her wait for him, as once Paul did for Virginia  
by her distant shore.

And so he sailed away, locked his heart on her,  
and locked his watch in his sea chest beside a lock of  
her hair,  
thinking, what if sailing these mysterious seas,  
I should return to other times than these?—  
Such strange thoughts gripped a man in these fantastic  
climes.

The English watched the tiny fleet out through the  
heads  
glanced at the grave of the Père Receveur and said,  
“The devil will claim the Frenchmen, now they’ve lost  
their priest to exorcize their fate.”  
Years passed, and some, remembering the voyagers and  
their departure,  
would ask the growing traffic of the port,  
“No news yet of Lapérouse?” and when the new-comer  
shook his head,  
would say, “God knows the Frenchman should not leave  
the safe harbour of his lady’s boudoir,  
though we’ll grant he was every inch a sea-dog,  
and spoke with the highest respect of Captain Cook.”

*Ken*

*Barratt*

Forty years the world had to wait to solve the mystery.  
Then Captain Dillon, leaning over his ship's rail,  
at Vanikora, gazed through the sea's green glass  
to the museum piece of corral-reef beneath the keel,  
saw plank and anchor, swivel gun and pieces of lead,  
as though a child had taken a clock to pieces,  
and growing weary of the game,  
had left it strewn upon the ocean's floor.

I know not where I go—whence from?—  
Or how my journey was begun?  
Or, who the goddess of this place,  
So deep in trees? The silent sun,  
Defeated, yields mere twilight trace:  
I know not where I go? Whence from?—  
Or, who the goddess of this place?  
O sudden voice!

“Take heart and look:  
Bathing her body in the brook:  
Black-browed . . . with hair like Absalom.”



*David H.*  
*Rowbotham*

## EARTHBOUND

Old Peter spits at the dead crow slung on the fence,  
Surveys the weather, hopes for a clear tomorrow,  
Flicks the reins and sucks his pipe while the plough's  
Decisive steel slices the sullen furrow.

Ponderous hooves, thumping the fallow ground,  
Raise sprays of burning dust that bob and spin  
In the wind, and powder the oily loam that lies  
Revealed where the cleaving plough has lately been.

And cattle, munching complacently on hillsides,  
Ramble in their dream or lift foolish heads  
To force a hollow moan that echoes, then dies  
In the muffling silence of empty milking-sheds.

Rusty haystacks bulge in prosperous paddocks,  
And, whirling vanes of gold, the windmill rides  
Like a vibrant mast on multicolored seas  
Of billowing grain, impelled by old earth-tides.

The farmhouse leans a little on the slope,  
Remembering a wilderness and men who gave  
Their labour, love, and hate to the warm-bosomed  
earth,  
At once their passionate mistress and traitor-slave.

*David H.  
Rowbotham*

To the earth, to the redolent earth, my days have  
    bound me,  
Where laden sunlit fields dip low between  
The dark hills dreaming in purple skies around me;  
Where great gums crest the wind with their singing  
    green,

And giant grasses wave and rustle in wild  
Melodic rhythms, and chattering birds alight  
On glinting winter leaves—where we may go on  
Undivided, the earth and I, beyond the night.

T. Inglis  
Moore

## REFUGEES

Pity the men and women who wander homeless  
Over the earth, in the harsh canyons of cities,  
And down the arid aisles of picture theatres.

These are the refugees from life, flying  
From thought's explosions, from haunting persecution  
Of the blood's call, from the *Halt!* of arresting spirit.

They have no hearth to light them against the age's  
Darkness, no inmost flame of the selfless to comfort  
Numbed hearts with faith, to quicken cold hands to  
endeavour.

Not for them, the poor, the rootless, communion  
With Christs and Buddhas, the vistas stretching from  
windowed  
Symbols, earth-mysteries, signals from smoking horizons.

Not for them, the insensitive, to burn exalted  
With annunciation of love like aureoled wattles,  
With delight in the mauve-plumed tree on a Gruner  
morning.

Where is their passion, their laughter? They fled from  
unbearable

*T. Inglis  
Moore*

Violins crying, from merry aubades of the magpies,  
To the loveless chug of pistons, to Calvinist motors.

They are the robot knob-turners, drowning the footsteps  
Of time, their enemy, in blattering waves of trivia;  
Afraid of silence, that shows their minds naked.

How shall they deafen brotherhood? Only by keeping  
Parrots to screech their oaths of class-torn hatred,  
Or to clamour, "Pieces of eight! Doubloons for profit!"

How shall they run from truth? Only by hiding  
In opiate illusions, escaping to celluloid shelters—  
Ghettoes for morons—in the arms of Lamour and Gable.

Grieve for the sunless, the gangs in the mind's back  
alleys,

Rooters in garbage-cans of gutter-papers,  
Swillers of booze, lack-lustre, in gloomy pub-troughs.  
Orion, the belted immortal, burns in the heavens;  
Death beckons, unseen, from the eyeless Talgai sockets;  
Eternity waits—and the refugees strap-hang to Randwick.

*Judith  
Wright*

## WOMAN TO MAN

The eyeless labourer in the night,  
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,  
builds for its resurrection day—  
silent and swift and deep from sight  
foresees the unimagined light.

This is no child with a child's face;  
this has no name to name it by  
Yet you and I have known it well.  
This is our hunter and our chase,  
the third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,  
the arc of flesh that is my breast,  
the precise crystals of our eyes.  
This is the blood's wild tree that grows;  
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made,  
this is the question and reply;  
the blind head butting at the dark,  
the blaze of light along the blade.  
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

## UNDER THE CASUARINA

*Elizabeth  
Riddell*

The garrulous old man who once had owned  
An island in a pale and fronded sea  
(All ships dropped anchor there, all sailormen  
Climbed past his coco-palms to drink with him  
And eat his goat steaks and his mermaid soup)  
Lies dreaming under the casuarina-tree,  
His pink old mouth gone back to childhood pout,  
His washed old eyes as vacant and as blue  
As his new born great-grandson's, his old rump  
Shrunken and sagged in a chair, his tired old legs  
stretched out . . . .

The dotard and the baby so are met. But where's the boy  
Who chased the lightning, where the youth who lied  
And kissed and fought and squandered, where the man  
Who married a woman for her wild red hair  
And under her lash of tongue and temper lived  
And bore with her in hatred till she died?

"A Frenchman named the island—all red soil  
Papaws and pineapple and spotted gum,  
Pandanus and the oleander blowing  
White petals everywhere, but not a drop  
Of water in her. Then the long drought came.  
That was the end of growing."

*Elizabeth*  
*Riddell*

Somewhere there went the child, the youth, the man,  
Gone with the sea-eagles down the windy sky  
Off with the sailors and away to sea,  
Buried in the red soil under pandanus roots,  
A sharpener for cats' claws.  
What's left sleeps in a chair, and when it can  
Babbles to strangers, such as you and I.

## BLACK COCKATOOS

*Roland E.  
Robinson*

Rise then,  
you screaming flight of black cockatoos,  
and spread your red-barred tail feathers out  
and scream  
over the spears of the reeds  
and the purple lilies,  
over the red rock walls  
of this sun-gashed gorge.  
And gather in broken and screaming flight,  
and turn heading far up  
this jade-green river's reaches.  
So shall I find me  
harsh and blendless words,  
of barbarous beauty enough,  
to sing this land.



Val  
Vallis

## MICHAEL

"Come in from the veranda and the blaze  
Of the midday sea. Sit by me in my room.  
Leave the binoculars on the bracket there  
Where I can find them in a moment. All day  
There's use for them—driftwood half-submerged  
And dunnage no more than a captive flash  
Of the sun, three miles downstream—a ship to name."

So we went in, over the ropecoil mats  
And bleached clamshells that fastened back the door.

"I've stolen from the sea to trim my room  
This fluted shell I call the Rising Sun,  
Veined with the crimson of a parrot's wing.  
My son (now overseas) has often said  
On such a boat the seaborne Venus hove  
To her earthly mooring with a freight of love.  
(Today, I fear, that cargo wouldn't sink  
The painted shell you chalice in your hands.)

"This green, encrusted brass came from the wreck  
Of the *Prince Regent* out on South Trees bank  
That Flinders named. I had a few such spikes,  
But gave them to the shipwright of the town

To send to sea again. And this white weed's  
From Heron Island reef; no more than a ghost  
Of its beauty; but waving in the warm tides there,  
It snares the sunlight fathoms deep, to drown.

"The sea has raised its pyramids of pearl  
So beautiful that all the towers of men  
Seem but misshapen piles of stone, when eyes  
Behold the white breasts of the trochus shell.

"See, too, this catfish, bearing in its head  
Christ crucified. Note how His hands are stretched.  
I wonder, in His days by Galilee  
He knew these fish that shared His secret with Him?

"Stingaree spines; and here, a sawfish bill,  
Not common in these waters. I fought three hours  
To bring that one ashore."

So Michael spoke,  
Translating sea-things to my earth-tuned ears,  
Till the green light, crested with sunlit panes,  
Was the depth of a quiet sea, where each mummied thing,  
Bewitched, knew life once more, in the tide of his voice;  
And ships sailed on that rotted fathoms down

*Val*

*Vallis*

These thirty years, and he was young again,  
Drawing in hauls that mocked the night of stars,  
Bending his oars against the eddying tide;  
Hoisting defiant canvas to the gales;  
A man in all things equal of the sea.

I left him then. There seemed no place for me  
In the room where the old man strove to keep immured,  
Beyond the grasp of Time, his youth; the gift  
That he, in love, had rendered to the sea,  
And in these baubles thought he had reclaimed.

## BECALMED

*F. John  
Blight*

Above and below the ship, this blue:  
No cloud, no island, and which of two  
Suns was celestial, submarine?  
Each sailor shrugged. Who'd ever been  
South of the Line . . . who knew . . . who knew?

There was a vessel in the sky—  
Towering above, or below the eye?  
If only something would drift past,  
Seaweed or cloud to foul its mast.  
Why should it, too, becalmed thus, lie?

Below and above, the seeming sea  
Like a great eye which dreamily  
Sees nothing, and by nothing is seen;  
A waking that may, may not, have been.  
"Which of us now is you, is me?"

Everything double under the sun;  
And doubly doubled to prove which one  
Is under which, which sun above.  
"God, if the counterpart would move."  
But movement there or here is none.

F. John  
Blight

"Silver's a man is full of cunning;  
Monkey, he is on the taffrail running;  
Agile, he props and dives right in.  
One rises to meet him with a grin.  
Head strikes head with a smack that's stunning.

"No more Silver, he's under the sea;  
Or up in the sky, or where is he?"  
Lost in the ether, south of the Line;  
The eight bells rang, but we heard nine:  
And where are we, and where are we?

Lord, it is dark. The two suns met  
In a blaze of flame we won't forget:  
And which ate which, we could not say;  
But night came on and at close of day  
We cheered. "All's not proved double yet."

Too soon, too soon! The moon that rose  
Split into two, like silver shoes:  
One walked the sky, one walked the sea;  
But which walked which was strange to me:  
For south of the Line, who knows . . . who knows?

*F. John  
Blight*

"This is the other half," I said.  
"Since Egypt, here they've buried the dead,  
Under the earth and south of the Line."  
The eight bells rang and we heard nine.  
"We are they whom the mermaids wed."

Doomed on a ship that is dead, becalmed;  
In a winding sheet of blue, embalmed.  
"Friend, it is doubly strange I feel,  
No one will credit our plight was real;  
'A trick,' they'll say. 'These men were palmed.' "

*John  
Philip*

## FOR EVE IMPULSIVE

We are the old young, the fools admiring wisdom,  
the amateur strivers. We are Icarus fallen,  
self-justified by the young wax wings.

The piled-up hair, the badly trimmed moustache  
make us older to the undiscerning, but our disguise  
that fails delights us; then we hide  
behind the walls of high I. Q.s  
and the other egotistic confidences.

We are the frightened babes who made  
the wander through the woods a paper-chase;  
so we have never gathered acorns,  
known the makeshift bed of leaves,  
purpled our faces with the blackberries,  
admired the nests that untidy the trees  
and been the anxious audience of  
the temperamental birds.

We have instead plunged to the highway  
and here we sit at the cold bus stop,  
gazing on bitumen. The bus will be  
a long time coming, but our pride  
means no bird-nesting, no returning.

## MORTALITY

*James  
Devaney*

The lone watch of the moon over mountains old,  
Night that is never silent; and none to hark.  
Down in the inky pool a fish leaps  
With splash of silver light in the liquid dark.

I walk the unknown ways of a foreign land.  
The close reeds whisper their secrecies,  
And hidden water tunes—earth's oldest voice.  
What alien waif is mind among mindless these?

Old, old, everything here is old.  
Life the intruder but so briefly stays,  
And man the dreamer—soon old changeless time  
Will grass his ways.

Fold him, spade him away. Where are they now,  
The high courage and love, the laboured store?  
Down in the inky pool a fish leapt—  
Life is no more.



David  
Campbell

## COUNTRY BOARDING-HOUSE

You'd do well to arrive here in daylight. Spinster pines  
Complain continuously, sigh their set lines,  
Knitting white socks of cloud or patching sunlight.  
But O, how malign they are, how they weep at night.  
Drawn up around the moonshine, warming stiff bones,  
As if the old spent house had coals for stones.

"Do you remember the master? Blood in keen eyes  
And age mere fancy-dress, a thin disguise  
To be thrown off at midnight. He'd strike the board  
And hang his wife and children on his word."  
And the pines simper and gossip, sigh and tell over  
His tales of drought and flood as did their lost lover.

The wind turns south, the pines shiver. They mourn  
For a thin tired lady who walked upon the lawn  
And held a flower cupped a moment. And the slant light  
Blossomed for her and the flowers became more bright  
And the sprinkled dust breathed out. She turned away  
From Time who paused to pass the time of day.

"There was George," the pines sigh; "George, his  
mother's darling,  
Climbing for cones, for the blue eggs of the starling,  
Off on his pony, home by train from school

With a flask in his bag and a baby for that fool  
Tow-headed housemaid. And—just think, my dear!—  
He married the hussy later, or so I hear.”

“And who did John marry?” “I believe he married well,  
Biscuits or steel. Yet he was forced to sell  
When his curt father, angered by prying death,  
Clouded his mirrored face with his last breath.  
And now John’s dead. He left a tolerant wife  
And fifty a year to his sister for her life.”

Pines weep, pines nod together, whisper and sway,  
Murmur, “Tomorrow soon is yesterday.”  
Each year the sister comes, bones in black satin,  
Pain and memory thinning while her bags fatten  
With relics, locks of hair. At lunch and tea  
She mourns like a dry sea shell for its lost sea.

And each year trippers bring in the spring. The wattle  
Remembers to be gay. Underground the battle  
Of roots for sap; above, laughter and games,  
Croquet, riding, tennis and christian names.  
The old house yawns with doors and blinks with blinds  
And flappers bounce in the saddle on pinched behinds.

*David  
Campbell*

But at night the pines take over. How they complain!  
"Their manners, my dear!" New thoughts in his old  
brain,

The house troubles the sleepers. Laughter dies.

The magpie's promises are young men's lies,

Yet put your mouth here, hold me while the pines sigh  
For this is Time's no-man's-land in which we lie.

## THE CHILDREN GO

*Kenneth  
Mackenzie*

The children go.

They go for a year, with delight:  
the boy with his cap just so—just right  
on his hair that is mine (or is it?), and his brow  
that is no one's in this family.

The girl—well, she  
has a brow that is mine, I think,  
though the boy has my eyes. . . . So—  
the children go.

They are gone now, and now  
the whole house settles to sleep  
with a sigh that changes to a snore,  
as though it had nothing to keep any more—  
not even the toy worlds smashed and scattered on the  
floor;

its brisk blood suddenly stilled,  
its dear life suddenly cheap, so cheap  
that the spiders hidden away  
come out and weave up day  
to the deadly beauty of a net, . .

Kenneth  
Mackenzie

quickly—lest they forget  
how often and why they have killed  
what they have killed.

They are here, and so, too, are we—  
parents of the two children, saying  
*Thank God they always go like that—happily  
away from us to their school home*

but saying

*Who are we?*

Knowing that in our death was their beginning;  
and knowing, with a knowledge that must be borne,  
that, from the moment they were got and born,  
*the children go.*

They go out like flowers, from the seed to the sun,  
having at first not much purpose  
until some thing they have done,  
some good deed or bad deed,  
shows them the way: *before you walk you must run,  
and you must fall down.* But they pay no heed.

Let us

pretend to love one another

*Kenneth  
Mackenzie*

over a strangely silent meal at last  
after so long: I am the father, you the mother  
—or so we say; but the meal is a fast,  
and the house is asleep already, the spiders' work half-  
done  
and the children gone.

Judith  
Wright

## CAMPHOR LAUREL

Here in the slack of night  
the tree breathes honey and moonlight.  
Here in the blackened yard  
smoke and time and use have marred,  
leaning from that fantan gloom  
the bent tree is heavy in bloom.

The dark house creaks and sways;  
"Not like the old days."  
Tim and Sam and ragbag Nell,  
Wong who keeps his Chinese hell,  
the half-caste lovers, the hump-backed boy.  
sleep for sorrow, or wake for joy.

Under the house the roots go deep;  
down, down, while the sleepers sleep,  
splitting the rock where the house is set,  
cracking the paved and broken street.  
Old Tim turns and old Sam groans,  
"God be good to my breaking bones";  
and in the slack of tideless night  
the tree breathes honey and moonlight.

## THE SHIP'S CAT

W.  
*Hart-Smith*

The cat comes ambling down the deck,  
weaving a pattern of progression  
round bollard-pin and stanchion, under shelves:  
anything to guard her back from heaven.

She looks through slits, intelligence a claw  
that hooks a golden curtain wide enough  
to let inside a modicum of world:  
bulwark is limit: all beyond is bluff.

Here is the ego all wrapped up in fur;  
she does not mind if no one else responds  
to her advances; takes her meat and sleep  
and answers bounty with a rumbling purr.

She makes a show of loving when she's touched;  
suffers a hand to tickle at her neck  
or stroke her back, the parts she cannot reach.  
Masts up her tail for this and rubs the deck,

extended upward into human legs.  
Missing, the cook's boy finds her in his hammock,  
ejects her, only to find a weight of fur  
heaving on the ground-swell of his stomach.



W.

*Hart-Smith*

No willing love, no faith, no pure affection,  
returned for care, yet she's a benison  
to man: she makes the most invidious  
feel wondrous virtuous by comparison!

AND EACH MAN'S LEAVE      *Roland E.  
Robinson*

And each man's leave must come as I shall take  
departure from this too familiar cell,  
this shack that chinks the light of night and day,  
where I have lived and suffered, sometimes known  
strange peace, strange harmony invading me;  
where I have lain and heard the endless rain  
drowning the world, drowning this place and me;  
where I have waked with darkness, waked and known  
stars in their visitations, stars and stars  
flowering the branches and blazoning my night.

Rex  
Ingamells

## SEA-CHRONICLES

Where old-time ships came, canvas seagull-white,  
articulate around our coast, the seas  
speak sailors' Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese,  
mutter and roar and whisper, day and night.

Lost names are sounded, could we hear aright,  
that beat the *Endeavour* by two centuries  
inside the Barrier Reef, and mysteries  
resolved for which our scholars have no light.

Voices of water tell and tell and tell  
the truths we cannot guess, and sun and stars  
confirm and store the facts we have not found.

The winds know how a chill foreboding fell  
upon a shore where, jostled in by spars,  
lay bodies of the first invaders, drowned.

## MISFIT

*Elisabeth  
Lambert*

I am the man who bought a ticket to nowhere,  
I am the refugee who never left his shores,  
The persecuted one who never knew the lash,  
The martyr who walked always unmolested,  
Whose heart was his thong, whose self was his undoing.  
The man who mistook the future, saw its glitter move  
A day late always. The man of the main chance,  
The cunning one, who wanted to go to Moscow,  
But stopped by a cherry-tree, stayed.  
Now mourns himself, most left, most lost, oh most  
    forsaken,  
The sad sack of the war, who took his heart for countries,  
Turned heart's hillocks to mountains too high for  
    climbing,  
So remains, mourning the myth he made,  
Caught in a grief grown false, grown cold with tears.

*Flexmore*  
*Hudson*

TO A CUTTLEFISH FOUND  
ON CHRISTIE'S BEACH

The circling shadows darken, your tentacles clutch  
at the spume and the wrack of the storm, and you are lost,  
lost in a universe of wind and light,  
as a foetus evicted from the dreamful dark of the womb.

It seems to me, estranged, eccentric cousin,  
the expressive Will that doomed us to commit  
the unpardonable crime of being born,  
has botched our rhythms and obscured our sense;  
we both of us are pretty curious works,  
both undeciphered scribblings of our dead.

But, long ago, in the hot Azoic shallows  
we had the same nativity, you and I;  
and though our looks have changed, the same desires  
tentacle all my depths of tortured mind:  
so you shall be saved from the gulls and the lethal air.  
Perhaps when crabs are mewling overhead,  
sargassum waving coloured fruit on hills,  
and the lingula yelping from dens in the blue rocks,  
a billion years from now some storm will strand  
a peculiar descendant of mine, and one of yours  
will carry him back to his home in the crimson sea.

Good-bye, good-bye, young cuttlefish, good luck!

## SOLDIER-SONG

*Ethel  
Anderson*

That was I whose arm kept firm  
Christ, Your steeples, King, your throne,  
Freedom for a second term  
Dearly buying, I, alone;

That was I who, loving life,  
Death in jeopardy must play;  
Rigour, hardship, terror, strife,  
These my portion; these my pay.

Careless, this dear land of mine  
Finds my breaking heart no cure,  
From my King comes not a sign,  
God's to say what's still unsure.

Youth gave I and manhood. Hush!  
Hear you not who wander by  
Hid beneath a beggar's bush  
Someone sighing? That was I.

*Peter*    OVERHEARD IN THE BAKEHOUSE  
*Hopegood*

I am loaf, son of Bread,  
and to myself I have said:  
Mine is a glorious destiny.  
The oven held  
a baker's dozen  
therefore was I set apart  
from the mart.

I am to be taken to the fern  
of the Old Hill where sunsets burn.  
There I shall be broken and scattered,  
the airs will feed on my essences  
and the birds will take charge of my body.

Mine was the luckiest birth  
that could have been:  
to be the thirteenth  
of thirteen  
in memory of that Thirteenth One  
both first and last of Christendom  
whose flesh was taken to a hill  
and broken on a spear;

*Peter  
Hopegood*

whose wound put forth a magic rill  
(and the thirsty seek it still);  
and whose flesh was fed to woe  
scattered where the ravens go  
and is with us here.



Mary  
Finnin

## DUST

If I should dream of cherry-trees in pride  
And a still harbour underneath the moon,  
I'd beat with hands death-white and paper-thin  
Upon the granite doors of wintertide.

If I should hear the curlews crying over  
The swamplands wearing samphire like a crown  
In that bright moment when the clouds discover  
A glory at the lost sun's going down,  
Then might I cry for pity on my death,  
And to indifferent earth come ghosting back,  
Endure again the choke and catch of breath,  
Live crystal days night-manacled in black.

Better it is the dead remember naught  
Of life's long pain and beauty's agonies,  
Better these specks that grit the eye of thought  
Be dust that gave a cherry-tree to bees,  
Be dust, that lives in fetters to the grass,  
Flowering in flax, makes winding sheets for lovers,  
Dust, that provides for worms dark palaces,  
Holds from the sea the windy nest of plovers.

## ECLOGUE

*John  
Philips*

Through sparrow-spangled, magpie-musicked mist I ride,  
a dead man's bike-clip on my shin;  
brown and sad as the old horse gazing south  
are earth's long eyes, the puddles that I go beside.  
I stop beneath an unconventional spider  
(her drop-distorted domicile is nineteen-spoked)  
and tighten screws with a fortunate threepence.  
Apricots are dim inverted triangles dangling ancient  
leaves;  
the excess spills upon fresh furrows cut to take  
the autumn rain, and makes of earth the mad  
negative leopard I always knew she was.

*Ernest G.  
Moll*

## SURF SONG

This dragon-ocean, crested dragon, has fed  
Immeasurably on the dead,  
Nor are the hollows of its hunger stilled,  
Dark cavernous belly filled,  
Nor is the tongue yet coiled within its head.

Yet, clad in a rag of laughter, you have flung  
Your beauty; ah you have sprung  
From my shut fingers with the dragon to lie  
Yielding your pointed breasts up vixenly  
To the cold curved caresses of that tongue.

Now, dared I kiss you, cleaving through the bloom  
That is both laughter and spume  
Upon your mouth, which is it I should find—  
(Being old, you see, I kiss with double mind)—  
Your dragon-joy, the world's hope, or its doom?



Halstead Press Pty Limited,  
9-19 Nickson Street, Sydney