

Painted, spoken

edited by Richard Price

number 37

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Painted, spoken number 37 2023

Five poems Susan Mackervoy

25 August

25 August 1684: A very rainy forenoon close darck afternoon

Yellow lines of
willow branches reflected
alongside reflected
powerlines along

roughly diagonal slow
waves approximate
equivalence and
slight leaf sounds

sound an edge of
dryness. Out at the far
rim of this brightish
day, prepared to

consider itself
spacious, light grey
clouds mass (roil, even?)
as they back away.

10 March

10 March 1684: A hard frost such a sullen cold day as yesterday

A day all prods and stems,
sullen, chilly.
Bangs and clanks:
high-vis riverside workmen.

Blackthorn blossom,
utterly how things should be:
equally equal every small piece dazzling,
every small dazzling piece.

Dots of rain carried all ways,
white dots of petals scattered.
Hard engineering unmoved:
pipes grilles rivets.

7 February

7 February 1685: A hard, bitter black frost & a sad darck cold day. A very backward year for grass, blossoms etc & a very tedious long winter

A tedious wide field, a long cloud.

A shush, a shush of traffic noise.

A spindly, sniping, bitter cold.

A huddle of houses at the far end.

A long vale with its one little ditch or brook,

A busyness as it ushers itself away, uttering

A faint burble (xylophone or bells?).

A blankness: bare trees, grass infill.

A road ravine (A414) where vehicles chase.

A scattering of plastic bits and shreds,

A desiccated feel, a backwardness.

A craquelure of bramble, stalks and stones.

Another product that might interest you

Treading these thousand furlongs of sea
darkness on pathways I took as a child
from the hill of the suburb-town, their ribbons
seaming and crossing roads as roarers roll

by in metallic clouds, headlights in twos
and fours, ever more brilliant now the hours
are composting down to purple, maroon
and night extends across the sky to claim

again the unremarkable settlement, I am
movement among movements, these footfalls
mine or anyone's, over an oceanic time arc:
sea-swallow'd, in my sustaining garments,

amid the replicated, intricate trajectories
of suburb-dwellers, transport flows.
Oozy, tremulous, this immersing gulf
of output and fulfilment, surge and drift

of crowds. No worries. Dream time approaches
on flickering television sets, in
luminous convenience stores and the town
that fizzed and filled around the road that

called it into being, outcome of journeys,
retreats now dispersedly from the sea-storm
into modest accommodations. No, indeed
I never truly left, and in the loyalty

programme's categories of benefits
this the very least is bronze, brown, copper,
plum, tea, with blobs of light, fermenting
ink-rich at the sea bed, its gloom over-

and over-written with content, its epics
inscribed by packs of cyclists in the park and
threading their elaborate criss-crossing
manoeuvres I follow a small track through and up

to the suburb's suburb, greeting a neighbour
who passes (long after his wave, I didn't
know him in the dark) and with not so much
perdition as a hair get myself home.

Soft, heaped up, this ruin; verge, or berm.
Wrack, nudged in, thickly, on a tide.
Loose things, any things, marketed by the load.
Life garble. Meandering old piece of plain-
knitting, row on row on row. Anyway, look,
it's only words. No need to bring a garland.
Each one slips into place, small, self-owned,
like a stitch does: an offer, no, mouth-shape, no,
less than that still. Always less, this undertow,
murmuring itself, resisting with the pull
of multitudes, inevitable crowds, of
lostness in the massing of leaves, or tiny waves, or
weed seedlings where seeds were blown, or
rubbish, some time, some time, breaking down.

All diary entries are from 'Observations of Weather', The Weather Diary of Sir John Wittewronge of Rothamsted, 1684-1689.

K *from The Balcony* *Richard Marx*

Kensington. Klee. Keats. This is the fault of the alphabet, which in European Portuguese has never been a letter worthy of its existence: K has his mask on, hidden & hidden from us. K must always send us abroad: this letter takes me to London, like many other paths, on this rainy & wintry day in April: March winds & April showers bring forth may flowers.

I start here: from Keats' Grove to Maresfield Gardens, where Sigmund Freud's last home is, near Finchley Road. It is about 1.3 kilometers on foot. A normal route would take around 15 minutes, but the route always depends on the will, feet & intentions of the traveler, so let's say we take an hour or even an afternoon. The road is bumpy & we are still going to spend part of the time in this house where Keats didn't live properly, but who made it his home: this is the example of many houses of poets & artists who only rent a small room, but whose ghost ends up, posthumously, rent all the rooms in the house. The street name went from Albion Grove to Keats Grove to show the coincidence with the post-mortem fame of its best known tenant, but it wasn't even necessary, the street already had a forest name, Albion was, without a doubt, his home. It was here that two hundred years ago, between March & September 1819, he composed the body of odes that today conceded him the greatest fame, as well as the two unfinished versions of *Hyperion* & many other poems.

At Keats' house it seems that it rains more than normal, the weather becomes more English when we reach the fence & cross that garden. The house has the romantic interest of the poet: it was here that many other poems will have been written, in the shade of the same plum tree, & it should be noted that we use the verb in speculative tense because of that there is no certainty, nor are we certain that this is the exact tree. But it was also here that he knew he had to end his engagement to Fanny Brawne & move on to milder climates. One morning he spat blood & a year from then he'll be almost dead; but here in our book he is not yet, he was awoken to the dream of life: the body was left in Rome in the Protestant cemetery but a death mask is here, in his place, in the rented room, a most tetrical English fashion, a mask that even inspired a poem by Jorge de Sena in his *Metamorphoses*, which is worth reading. A mask for a body. He did not do better that Chopin whose body is on one side & his heart on the other: the romantics took these questions of the heart seriously. 31

In these corners of Hampstead, Keats went around as if he wanted to heal, taking in the fresh air; & even sat, panting, on a bench in Well Walk, an avenue that goes directly into the heath & where John Constable, the cloud

painter lived. I imagine him venturing into those avenues where it was very good to go & take a dip in the water, roam around, look at earthly things as for the first time. I imagine Constable doing all this & more: looking up, studying the figures of the clouds, their shapeless form or metamorphosis, lying in the hot grass, or standing in front of the easel. He came back here at the end of a day's work: observing, & putting the finishing touches he needed so that cloud that insisted on not settling could be set to posterity. Of course, he will no longer see Keats, who died a few years before, nor will you see D.H. Lawrence & his German wife, who is not even born yet, but will inhabit one of the houses in the future.

I sit there on the Keats bench & also think of him in the middle of the sea, in the last months of his life, passing by the coast of Lisbon, where the boat will certainly have docked for supplies, en route to Naples. And I imagine a letter that he would write, during one of his fits, between one wave & another, on October 11th, 1820:

My dear Fanny,

It is more than twenty days since my departure from London;
I visit you again in my thoughts as when we traveled
through tree-lined avenues & tree-lined paths in Hampstead,
this place where I met you in better times, one bright summer
I interrupt to spit blood; it comes out like the torrents of the Nile,
the springs of the great river that bathes this great city,
& I know, for a moment, that I am writing this letter to you in heaven,
because it will never truly arrive in my lifetime - just the news
of my death, which you fear as much as I fear, even if
receive it with open arms, naked

Twenty-five days have passed & I arrive at a milder port –
we were grounded briefly on the Tagus. It's almost a month
of toments in a salty sea, a month of water, & even that does
not allow me to think other thoughts – here there are only seagulls, not
the variety of birds that used to surround me there where you are –
Severn assists me all the time, he says something about these people
Beresford has fled the country, & the English are frowned upon,
I am visited by images from other liberal times when we fought
other fights, like Byron's in Greece, when larks did come
to my rescue, under that tree, that plum tree –

Severn tells me there are many good ones in this country – on his visit
to the court he was informed they had a queen, & that the
things were going good like in few places on this old continent:
soft customs but sharp faces - which is why our stay in this country,
our oldest European ally, will be brief & white, like mine in this world –

dear fanny – the sweet smell of the sea enters my room at the entrance
of this river – I see a castle destroyed in the background, & I see a different
light, as if melancholy angels would come, one by one, to my aid in the depths
of the dark night, & I see old houses, windows with clothes hanging,
hills & smoke, a lot of smoke, approaching me

fanny, I see you in this city that tries to be free, blunt or royal
& you, my queen, fanny, always in the image of my heart
of your John, almost dead

I miss you

Nothing more to say or do here. The rest can be read in the official
chronology: Keats died in Rome in a house at the beginning of the Scalinata di
Trinità dei Monti which in English is called Spanish Steps because these steps
make up a staircase that depart from the Spain Square. For the Italians we start
from above, from the Trinità dei Monti Church, for the English we started
from below, via Spain. Let us not digress any further: all these problems of
translation, of understanding: there is no *sensu unico* for this traffic, much less
in the streets of Rome.

We are still thinking about this when we finally go up Fitzjohn's Avenue, a
wide avenue that separates, at the top of the hill, the side of Finchley Road &
that of Hampstead. It seems that it is on Fitzjohn's Avenue that Paula Rego
developed her ghosts, it was here that she established her creative quarantine
for years dealing with what life had given her: from the Portuguese
dictatorship to her own inner demons. We passed those late Victorian houses
& imagined a studio full of dolls, literally the three-dimensional models of his
paintings, a colloquial way of applying paint on a canvas, pain on a canvas.

And with that we are almost arriving at St. John's, the church mentioned
in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, & where the bodies of John Constable, which we
visited on the previous page, are buried, as well as the parents of the boys who
inspired Peter Pan, friends of the Mr. Barrie. I leave the dead & the dolls
alone, but I follow to Freud, who is waiting for me in his office.

Obviously, introductions are not necessary. I see his divan & am
immediately surrendered. The phallic objects of ancient civilizations, their
intellectual fascination, also helps to appreciate this space. Comparing this
office with the one in Vienna, I think how the decoration would have been
done so quickly, since Freud escaped here in the last 33 chance he had, with
the aristocratic help of a Viennese client-friend. I can't help thinking about
what he might have thought, seeing himself in such a different country, at 80,
more dead than alive: or am I killing my father too early in this English semi-
detached house? The house is interesting, but it is just one more in this street.
Its interest is elsewhere: in the story of exile, in the war that was approaching,

making a man like die far from where he always lived. It makes you think that nobody is to blame, deep down, because evil is commonplace, is Banal, as we have already been told, but it makes us think that for this same reason, Freud died in London because of us: it's our fault & our shame. And so many others died on other parts of the world since then & before that. It's so banal it hurts.

There is a beautiful photograph, in the gardens of this house, of Sigmund & his teenage grandson Lucian, who will later be a great English painter, author of official & unofficial portraits that he celebrates with those of Gainsborough or Thomas Lawrence, which he certainly saw. His portraits are equivalent to a psychoanalytic analysis & there is a transduction of means here: he painted how his grandfather meddled in the human mind. The two misfits, not speaking the language of their new country, look at the photograph without smiling, each remembering their hometown without knowing what kind of life or death awaited them.

May it come to pass René Char

translated by David Bunn

This country is no more than a wish, an anti-tomb

In my country the tender signs of spring and badly clothed birds are preferred to distant goals.

Truth awaits dawn beside a candle. Window glass is neglected. What does it matter to the watcher?

In my country we don't ask questions of a person who is upset.

No shadow of evil falls on a capsized boat.

A half-hearted greeting is unknown in my country.

We only borrow what we can return improved.

There are leaves, many leaves on the trees of my country. The branches are free not to have fruit.

We do not believe in the good faith of the conqueror.

In my country we say thanks.

René Char (1907-1988) was associated with the Surrealists and progressive causes in the 1930s; fought in WWII, including in the resistance; was friend to and collaborator with Camus, who published him, Boulez, who set some of his works to music, Matisse and Braque and many others. His work published in the years after the War come out of his experience in the Resistance and the continuing struggle to realise the France he fought for.

Cocoons and Emergences: Novels-In-Verse for Younger (and Older) Adults *Jacqueline Schaalje*

Novels-in-verse are especially popular with authors of 'young adult' (YA) literature, and speak to some key themes in the genre: love, relationships, friendship, (sexual) violence, immigration, identity, grief, discrimination, adoption, addiction, trafficking and poverty. Adult novels-in-verse can hardly keep up the pace, although accolades have gone to Robin Robertson for *The Long Take* (2018) and to Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019), as novels. . Listing of poetry books under prizes for fiction is interesting, by the way, because why not list them under poetry books? Perhaps they deserve their own category?

Books that are written *as books* in verse are hardly a new invention, but perhaps the longer works from modernist times, famously Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), tended to the epic. More recently we've had a return to a more individual scale, for example Vikram Seth's yuppie alexandrines of *The Golden Gate* (1986), inspired by Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1833). Frank Bidart's dramatic monologues from the 1970s, though not book-length, are also circumscribed at personal level: *Herbert White* is told by a psychopath, and *Ellen West* features a person suffering from anorexia. Kip Wilson's recent coming-out story *The Most Dazzling Girl in Berlin* (2022) is arguably in a stripped-down *story-telling* tradition rather than an epic *poem-telling* tradition (and see, for example, one of its predecessors, Dorothy Porter's queer detective story, *The Monkey's Mask* (1997)).

Some of the YA poetry novels do take a cue from Bidart's method of leashing impressions, notes, excerpts, letters, anecdotes (the techniques, after all, of the novel form itself, all the way back to at least Samuel Richardson and *Pamela* (1740)). *The Truth Project* by Dante Medema (2020), in which a high school student swipes her cheek to find out that the man who raised her is unrelated to her, intersperses beautifully naïve verse with emails, snippets from her school project and talks with a friend.

*The child
stuck in the middle
of a family
who would have
been just as complete
without her.*

Jasmin Kaur's *When You Ask Me When I'm Going* (2019) addresses problems experienced by young women and builds, through poetry and drawings, an

evolving story.

Social engagement came to the fore in one of the earliest novels-in-verse aimed at a YA public (but just as informative for adults and so is the film based on it): *Sold*, by Patricia McCormick. Published in 2006, it stands out because the precisely crafted voice of the narrator keeps one reading this story of a Nepalese teen sold into sexual slavery, however sickening:

AM I PRETTY?

In the days after the hugging man leaves, I consider myself in the mirror. My plain self, not the self wearing lipstick and eyeliner and a flimsy dress.

Sometimes I see a girl who is growing into womanhood. Other days I see a girl growing old before her time.

It doesn't matter, of course. Because no one will ever want me now.

Choosing poetry to tell a dark story begs the question as to whether it's just the sugar meant to sweeten prose beans. That might be, but the form also serves other goals. First of all, the majority of these narratives are for a young audience: the lure of novels-in-verse, rather than more condensed forms of prose or poetry, seems to be that the lines are shorter and easier on the eyes and brain, they have a song-like feel to them, plus they fit on smaller screens. Single-theme poetry books can be more off-putting (anyone for Pound's *Cantos*?). Even adult readers say that they enjoy Evaristo's novels because of their friendly way in: like YA author, Sarah Crossan, acclaimed for *One* (2015), her work is praised for its readability.

At their best, these novels-in-verse offer a package deal: structure and story, characters with a distinctive voice, space for reflection (a pause after each short poem, lots of white lines), and, sometimes, metaphor.

Take for example Jason Reynolds's *Long Way Down* (2017) where the protagonist goes down in a lift with the intention of killing the murderer of his older brother, except that a stop is made on each floor to let in a ghost from his life, including his dead brother, and before they reach the ground floor, it's not at all clear what baby brother is going to do with that bulging gun under his clothes. Though lacking the exuberance of gangster rap (no rhyme either), the faint echo of Dante's descent into Hell plus the punchy line breaks add meaning and zest.

I DON'T KNOW YOU,

don't know

your last name

if you got

brothers

or sisters

*or mothers
or fathers
or cousins
that be like
brothers
and sisters
or aunts
or uncles
that be like
mothers
and fathers,*

*but if the blood
inside you is on the inside
of someone else,*

*you never want to
see it on the outside of
them.*

As for character portrayal, Elisabeth Acevedo's 2018 novel-in-verse *The Poet X* depicts a devoutly Catholic mother with wry operatic drama. A highlight is where the daughter, a budding poetry slammer, has to kneel on rice grains (uncooked, what did you think?) after she got spotted with her boyfriend.

Me (Moth) by Amber McBride (2021) builds around examining metaphorical layers of the protagonist's name, Moth, who lost all her direct family in a terrible car accident. Moth and her boyfriend Sani take a roadtrip to his dad's Navajo Indian Reservation, and get 'cocooning'.

Maybe it's unfair, comparing the wit and wisdom in Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1819) or Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* to the cruising of free verse in recent novels-in-verse. And that's without mentioning post-modern artworks such as Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* (1980), which live in a different space altogether. Though Robin Robertson's Walker protagonist in *The Long Take* does project a distinctive voice, it's the nature and cityscape descriptions that stay with the reader in this post-WW II saga about an ex-soldier struggling with PTSD:

... the long shadows of trout lying like clock-hands under the stones.

Two poems Peter McCarey

My office window'd snapped shut
On the wingtip of a swift
That thudded to the sill when I
Went in next afternoon.
I flipped it over: Something had
Unpicked its guts.
The word was "scathe". As omens go
They don't come more explicit.

From The Syllabary

11.8.6 From the Grave of the Unknown Civilian

Feart your goose is
Cooked? Join up!
It's safe as
Strafing hooses.

For a World out of Kilter *James McGonigal*

Desperate Fishwives, Lindsay Macgregor (Molecular Press, Geneva, 2022) 62pp. (UK distribution by Red Squirrel Press); *Space Baby*, Suzannah Evans (Nine Arches Press, Rugby, 2022) 65pp.

Out of nowhere, while I was reading through Lindsay Macgregor's impressive first collection, walked a vision of Emily Dickinson in hiking boots. Clearly these two poets bear little resemblance to one another. The nineteenth-century American was famously reclusive, constrained within the doctrinal and patriarchal habits of small-town Amherst, Massachusetts, whereas the contemporary Scottish poet strides confidently out and about, casting a sharp eye on the flora and fauna she sees, and on human foibles. Compared to the rhymed quatrains of Dickinson, fascinatingly punctuated as they are, Macgregor's forms are as wide-ranging as the wild landscapes she explores.

She has the ability to make us see these with fresh eyes, without going in for the sort of expostulation Hugh MacDiarmid deploys in, for example, 'Scotland small? Our multiform Scotland *small?*' – before answering his own questions with a tour through the spectrum of species and shades where the casual visitor might see 'Nothing but heather!' MacDiarmid has a walk-on part in this collection, very neatly contained (as few managed to do with him in life) within 'Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait' (p. 21). It's the presence of women that tames this 'shock of a man, humming / his hymns to Lenin and Lorca, / scratching at letters framed by the grayscale / of sharps from an absent piano / tuned to the weather'. Those women are his wife Valda, Margaret Tait (1918–1999) the Scottish doctor, poet and film-maker (with her soundtrack of piano sharps), and Lindsay Macgregor too. She has the measure of him, I'd say, in that slide from his scratchy handwriting to a slightly weathered and discordant music.

Macgregor's determined intelligence is everywhere evident. Her poems combine an intuitive approach with close observation to probe the flaws and potential of humankind. She has clearly grasped Emily Dickinson's advice to poets:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant –
Success in Circuit lies

Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise [...]

It must have been that 'superb surprise' which conjured the vision of a poet hiking for freedom from the mundane and the socially acceptable. Here is Macgregor's surprising 'Ties', both as family connections and as outmoded office-wear:

I was told he was my father.
And sure enough he had my nose,
my mouth, my frown. Like me

he always seemed too old,
spoke the language of elective
mutes. He shuffled round

the house, replacing fuses,
lagging pipes, sharpening knives.
I raised him as my own.

(p. 44)

Working towards all the truth here, keen as a knife, is an ironic awareness of the duty, usually laid upon daughters, to handle the emotional alteration from paterfamilias to pottering dependent. Her collection's title is also sardonic, proudly adopting the name of fishwife. *Desperate Housewives* this is not, though like that US television drama series of the early 21st century it contains some time-shifting. For 'fishwives' were the sturdy teams of women, possibly foul-mouthed or maybe just nattering away in Gaelic, whose itinerant work was to follow the fishing fleets and to gut, salt and sometimes sell the off-loaded catches of herring. They became a byword for sharp-tongued and uppity (female) attitudes.

Macgregor encourages her readers in that sharpness. Social and environmental changes *are* our business, and their impact should be looked into. Her lack of endnotes deliberately leads us to research the habitat, botany and mythology of, for example, whaup (curlew) and cowbane (pp. 8-9). Her range of forms makes us follow a cast of mind that discovers its own subtle

direction through experiment and precise observation of emotion as well as of fact:

Being the kind of man who dates snow,
he rattles off the mountain's rational numbers,

tells her he has climbed its contour lines, made it
to the trig point at the summit. When he says

Ben MacDui, she hears *Beinn MacDuibh*,
sees grey matter above a green loch in golden light.

She perceives a field of elevation with a high degree
of vagueness, a plane of immanence, delirium and drift

parsed for individuation where there is only
a continuum of landform, a continuum of mind.

‘Saying Ben Macdui’ (p. 39):

Tuning into this ‘conversation’ between two mountain climbers, it’s clear that only one of them appreciates the claims of both mind and deep matter, of rational numbers but also of ‘immanence, delirium and drift’, of English orthography and also the ancient hinterland of Gaelic meaning and naming.

This is a fascinating, probing and beautifully organised collection from Peter McCarey’s Molecular Press, with fine design by poet and naturalist Gerry Cambridge. The intelligence that sparkles throughout may be audacious, unsettling or playful, but it brings joy, too, in its breadth and deployment. These are indeed, as Scottish poet and mentor John Glenday remarks on the back cover, ‘poems for a world out of kilter’.

Farther Travelling

Swop hiking footwear for space-boots, and one Emily for another. The Yorkshire poet who could partner Suzannah Evans most familiarly is Emily Brontë, whose too short life overlapped briefly with Emily Dickinson’s. When in 1846 the three Brontë sisters gathered their verse as *Poems* by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, Emily’s poems were distinctive in their starry focus, energy

and brio: ‘Thought followed thought, star followed star / Through boundless regions, on [...]’ (‘Stars’).

No wonder that she was a favourite of another explorer of space-time, Edwin Morgan (1920–2010), whose ‘Last Message’ provides an epigraph for *Space Baby*. Morgan’s optimistic vision of human potential is closer to the tone of this collection, I’d say, than the back-page blurb’s description of a ‘dystopian, searching book [...] vivid, prescient poems of existence and survival, which ask how we can still find joy on a ruined planet’. Nine Arches Press is entitled to alert a concerned readership to this attractively produced collection, of course. And it’s true that there are ruins to be found here – but rather more of vitality and delight. The titular poem opens with the vivid continuities of new life and an energetic human voice:

Bungeeing in zero-G on the umbilicus.
SPACE BABY! In silver nappy
on a cockpit chair, fat little hands

on the steering column. *Look,*
she’s driving! SPACE BABY! [...] The first to learn
to talk, to sing, to count in space [...].

Such liveliness is immediately countered by the existential uncertainties of ‘Timeline of the Far Future’ (p. 12), as earth and the universe drift uncontrollably apart ‘and you still haven’t decided / if you’re going to procreate’. But I find myself heartened by this poet’s blending of the cosmic and the domestic. While the putative parent tries to ‘decide at what age / it should be allowed a mobile phone’, the universe goes on expanding:

inevitably the Milky Way
and Andromeda

will knit themselves
sparklingly

across the sky
into one single garment.

The homely comparison with knitting is nicely and wryly judged. There's a great deal of skill to admire throughout, particularly where aspects poetry in performance shape the rhythms and unfolding. Some of the poems are like lively musical scores in that sense, calling for enactment.

As with Lindsay Macgregor, there's a deep awareness of ecological fragility. In 'That smile is yours' (pp. 26-27) the parental burdens and slapstick of child rearing ('we smell faintly of rusks') are set against species loss: '*Pamba* he says *Polabear, Sealine* / and as he learns their names / they disappear forever'. Evans writes affectingly in 'Lonely Hearts, Endlings' (pp. 44-45) of the last survivors of various species, such as the Lake Constance Whitefish or the Pinta Island Tortoise. The form is a call and response, a dialogue with the dead made more affecting by the brevity of its three-line stanzas, as the last individual life in each species is itself cut short.

To the final words of animals we can add the voices of machines, such as the 'Cassini Love Poem' (pp. 52-53) from a space probe that disappeared into Saturn's atmosphere. Or the earth language of trees as they take over what humans have finally abandoned: 'The saplings these days / wouldn't recognise tarmac / don't remember those revolution weeks / when we first split the roads' ('How We Miss Them', p. 46). To Evans's interests in astronomy and biology can be added philosophy, drawing upon Thomas Nagel's questions about the nature of consciousness in 'What is it Like to be a Bat?' (p. 37).

Endnotes direct us to websites and news stories that reveal how strangely varied our world is. Such breadth of interest works well in more 'conventional' poems too, such as 'The Moth Count' (pp. 34-35) where emotional tension and precise description are combined with the menace of climate change. Her contemplation of the connectedness of the human and natural world leads her towards some beautiful intersections of contemporary and ancient lives, as in 'In Nova Scotia', p. 58. The notion of rebirth is extended finally into the visionary idea (as yet theoretical, but ...) that entire universes could be created, that 'Inside each universe is another universe' (p. 59). This is a perfect counterbalance to the bouncing Space Baby of the opening poem. This idea that humans might choose a new and spacious place in which to begin again leaves us with the positive vision of a future that is different, yet wonderfully the same:

a long spring morning

tiny yellow flowers

like constellations among the grass

on the verge of a new idea the breeze drying our wet hair

Suzannah Evans and Lindsay Macgregor are excellent intelligencers for these days. As the two Emilys brought profound changes in 19th-century life into their art – whether Arctic exploration, steam locomotion, the slave trade, or social-class strife – so their 21st-century successors work admirably within the turmoil of our own times. They possess enough science, philosophy, empathy and sheer poetic skill to set a world out of kilter upright again – or, at the very least, to convince us, as we tune in to their bright voices, that this might just well be possible.

Contributors

David Bunn (1946-) writes from Melbourne. He worked for many years in the Australian trade union movement. His first book of poetry *The Great Scheme* was published by Ginninderra Press in 2021. He came upon René Char in the course of researching an SS massacre in July 1944 in Vaucluse, Char's native land. **Susan Mackervoy** is a writer and translator based in Cambridgeshire. She has also worked as a visual artist, making prints, paintings and artist's books (as Old Highway Press). **Peter McCarey's** poetry is collected in *Contraptions* and *thesyllabary.com*. He is panjandrum of Molecular Press and has curated a collective exhibition on transitional toys (Glasgow 2020, Geneva 2021, Milan 2022). His latest volumes, *Orasho* and *Pogo*, are published by Red Squirrel Press. **James McGonigal** is a poet, editor and biographer based in Glasgow. Recent publications include *Edwin Morgan: In Touch With Language. A New Prose Collection 1950–2005* (ASLS, 2020) and a poetry collection, *In Good Time* (Red Squirrel Press, 2020). **Richard Marx** was born in 1983 and is a poet-translator who lives in Lisbon. He teaches literature for a living and swims regularly. 'K' is an extract of his first novella 'Balcony', published originally in Portuguese in 2021. **Richard Price's** latest books are *The Owner of the Sea: Three Inuit Sequences Retold* and *Tinderness*, an artist's book with images by Simon Lewandowski, evoking the world of dating apps (Wild Pansy Press). **Jacqueline Schaalje** has published poetry and short fiction, most recently in *The Friday Poem*, *Free State Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Six Sentences*. She is a translation editor at MAYDAY. She earned her MA in English from the University of Amsterdam.

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