

THE WAY IT IS



A PK Project

Edited by Jim Bennett

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James Bell

the landscape begins to appear again

its usual contours emerge after the maize harvest
into familiar land used to bearing such burdens

where the long view is a bigger cycle
that looks beyond next year when

sterility is the next harvest knowingly fertilizer fed
in the current web of diffusion where

a sense of art at work has no discernible place
in annual pragmatism that wells up as

a deep wave ready to interrogate the granite core
below the soil shavings of the surface mineral –

lies heavy in the ground like an unfashionable
prayer that hangs in the air as if it lays

in wait for its ultimate resurgence one day
tempered by how wind blows soil when dry

to somewhere else and unearth the hard grip
stone stratifies and compels upon the land

both as a beginning and an end and base
for all ephemeral transformations that drop by

James Bell

Eden in ruins

no fruit but that is because of the season
if there ever was such a thing

vast expanses of fields put to grass
some overgrown as if deliberately abandoned

sport the first self-seedings of nature's true return
the sun still casts shadows over this

and the rest – trees cutback since Neolithic times
have been left as stumps on vestigial bank sides

stones once houses imitate their shapes
with an effort in decline after a boom

long bust and over crept by bramble and ivy
the scenery retains much of the beauty you might expect

even from a ruined Eden to which
there can be no return

James Bell

contents

over time the blue plastic bottle
was emptied in the gradual surge
of fluid released in measured drops
by pressure on the plunge top as
the ingredients flowed over his hands
in dilutions that washed without any
long term damage that he could see
and imagined the slow sensual way
it frothed and caressed her skin too

often he looked at the contents listed
for this anti-bacterial hand wash gel
and decided no germ could survive
the authority of the label that said

Hydroxypropyl Guar Hydroxypropyltrimonium Chloride
Cocamidopropyl PG-Dimonium Chloride Phosphate
PEG-120 Methyl Glucose Dioleate
Methyldibromo Glutaronitrile
Cocamidopropyl Betaine
Sodium Laureth Sulfate
Disodium Phosphate
Sodium Benzoate
Sodium Chloride
Disodium EDTA
Cocamide DEA
Phenoxyethanol
Hexylene Glycol
Sodium Citrate
Citric Acid
Glycerin
Parfum
Aqua

decided that he could not survive -
would slip down the drain
in more concentrated measures

Lesley Burt

Dark Matter

One-at-a-time, my father lit a line
of Roman Candles, then Catherine Wheels
he'd nailed to our washing-line posts.

Next, we wrote our names on darkness
with sparklers. Last in the box: a rocket.
When its colours died, the sky seemed dull

until eyes adjusted to see patterns –
the Plough, Orion's Belt – among scatters
of stars, countless as Christmas-card glitter.

Tonight, colours fizz and bang above us,
flash towers and trees into Disney scenery;
people gasp at the magical display.

The crowd leaves among headlights' dazzle
while, overhead, street-lamps project
an orange blanket that muffles the sky.

Lesley Burt

Heath fire

We kids crowd, close as we can, regardless
of smoke-stench and yelled warnings;
spiders and snakes are cremated; heather's
a wasteland of charcoal, hosed and beaten.

Fifty yards off, small new flames leap tall
to torch the same pine trees we'd climbed
all the school holiday: needles shrivel,
sooty skeletons stand in stubble.

Afterwards, we linger, mutter about
big lads with Woodbines and matches,
and how Old George puffs on a pipe
in his sleeping-bag under gorse bushes.

Lesley Burt

Text tone

where r u 2day

sorrento bay

wots it like

I look around.

Cornflower sky, turquoise sea;
a headland where frizzy pines
clump among their own shadows;
houses are mustard squares
topped with terracotta;
on my sun-warmed plate:
tomatoes, basil, olive oil.

I type *gr8*, switch off the phone.

thing of us,
 in all things.
Treat the gnat kindly, he entreats
 It is only trying
 to sustain itself,
feed its ilk, as it is programmed
 to do
 Same as we,
not to mention the power we give
 away when
 we allow
 the gnat to annoy us so.

Tina M Edwards

Perennial Weeds

I

long before the first signs of spring
when the earth lay dormant she weeds
couch grass from clumps of earth

dawn to dusk on hands and knees
her back bends aches blue tinged
hands become stiff

on the neighbouring plot a man carries
a large plastic bottle armed with a hose
a skull and crossbones etched on its side

dons a mask and thick green gloves
designer wellies hardly worn
proceeds to wave his magic wand

a robin joins him perches on his unused spade
pecks the ground wets his beak
in droplets of liquid glistening on blades of grass

II

later that year in the height of summer
the sun warms the ground
the woman still weeds

amongst hollyhocks and sweet peas
borage and poppies she listens
to the humming of bees

a robin perches on her rusty spade
cocks his tiny head shows a half formed beak
wings cumbersome too large for his body

she ponders how he flies from danger
holds worms his puffed out breast
a red flag warning

on the neighbouring plot in his deckchair
the man reads about global warming
the impact of weed killers in years to come

mutters in passing to the woman
how the price of newspapers these days
costs the earth

Catherine Graham

Seal

A grey seal pup left to rest on the rocks,
a suckling, given its size and creamy coat.

Hours pass and the pup calls for its mother:
gulls keen to peck at its eyes and bones.

Its mother never to return to the beach,
to the mayhem, the havoc of people and dogs.

Annest Gwilym

The Flood

*Our melting, shifting, liquid world won't wait
for manifesto or mandate, each
warning a reckoning.
(Still Life with Sea Pinks and High Tide, Maura Dooley)*

It rained for three days straight,
iron rods falling from the clouds;
the livid sky a two-day old bruise.
Gutters babbled, cars swished past
splashing water on passersby.

A sound like ocean waves breaking
on the third night, then I see
a stream tumbling down the road
bearing rubbish and recycling bins
like ships down a slipway.

Neighbours flapped out, barricading
houses against the black tide;
knee-high water tugged at my legs
like a riptide, as I sandbagged my house.
The back yard became a paddling pool
and oozed dirty water inside.

It seemed as though my home
would slip its moorings and sail
out to the Irish Sea: an ark bobbing
over boiling waters, waiting for
the return of a dove.

Afterwards, mud reigned:
the road a ploughed field clagged
with garbage, wood and stones;
my bailed-out house sheathed in
stinking silt as if it had been
returned to the earth.

Annest Gwilym

Legacy

She is a connoisseur of coloured stones,
exotic gems at ear, finger and throat.
She knows all about Burmese rubies,
Colombian emeralds, Sri Lankan sapphires;
a gem for every outfit, in stained glass colours.
Her jewellery box a cornucopia of comets;
her descendants will outshine the stars.
A legacy that will last generations.

*

In Madagascar, rainforests reverberate
with the sound of trees buzzed down
for sapphires of cornflower blue.
In pools of tainted water children grub
for stones buried for millions of years.
The pop-eyed lemur retreats
to an ever-shrinking habitat,
while a wasteland of craters forms.

Annest Gwilym

Grass Snake

(Natrix Natrix)

A snake came to our garden,
slid over the rockery to the pond
to fish for frogs and toads
in the stunned heat of mid-afternoon,
with forget-me-nots drooping.

Yellow doll's eyes and a golden collar,
its olive narrowness quicksilver-smooth,
it tasted air with a flickering tongue.
I watched enthralled till fear made me
shout 'Snake!', bringing a barking dog

and my mother armed with a spade.
She jabbed at its slender length
like a madwoman. As quick as a whip
it flowed over the drystone wall
back into the summer meadow.

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Annest Gwilym

Domesticated

In the folded night, as the house creaks
and settles into sleep,
a green-eyed, not-so-green
silken killer moves like water.

Plush paws prowl nightscapes,
dingy alleys crusted with litter,
maze of trash-infected streets,
navigating the tapestry of the dark.

While branches scratch the sky,
stocks release a cloying musk of funerals;
a molten form flows over walls,
wheelie bins, swerves around puddles.

Shock-eyed, in the gloom a banshee-song:
soprano shrillness of cat sex.
A tail flickers like flames in a draft,
needle-like claws and teeth rip, tear.

A keen nose catches
a spicy sniff of rodent, birds.
She bring us gifts of cold robins,
little eyes frozen like jet beads.

In the pastel morning as dawn whitens
the windows, she arrives sleepy,
docile, wanting milk and caresses,
curls into velvet sleep easy as a newborn.

An earlier version of this poem was first published in *Reach Poetry*.

Jan Harris

Telling the bees

(after John Greenleaf Whittier)

We drape your hives in black,
place funeral bread on the dusty track,
walk heavy and slow to the red-barred gate to tell you,
bees,

who hum your songs in fields of oilseed rape,
of more sad deaths:

of bees
tonguing yellow corollas
sucking where sweetness lies;

bees tainted

sated with nectar,

laden with pollen,

resin from sap and buds,

who follow light-maps in the sky

our human eyes can't see

to hives and nests,

and, drunken, never find their way;

bees

dazed

on busy roads,

concrete wastelands,

gardens paved by those

who see no need for flowers,

rose bowers,

shady glades;

bees

working acres of golden petals which shift

and shimmer white and blue in their ultraviolet world;

bees

zooming in to land,

blind to the red tractor,

the crop sprayer's predatory wings.

We knock three times on your hives,

speak your names out loud:

workers and makers, pollinators,

drones,

your vital queens.

"Thrive in your hives, do not leave.

We grieve for the loss of so many bees."

Jan Harris

Not a Movie

FADE IN:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Crockery clatters, customers chatter, baristas conjure shots of pleasure from dark roast beans, steam wands bubble milk into velvet froth to top the brew. Thirty-something screenwriters, Wes and Amy, slurp cappuccinos in unison, wipe chocolate-foam moustaches away with the backs of their hands.

WES

Everyone's seen the movies,
the dead brought back to life,
Frankenstein, Dracula, Zombies...

AMY

Yeah, but your monster's not alive
and never has been.
It's a storm!

WES

Well, what causes monster storms?
Think Irma, Harvey, Katrina...

AMY

Dunno... global warming I suppose.

WES

Exactly, and what causes global warming?

AMY RAISES HER EYEBROWS.

Fossil fuels!

AMY

Yeah... so?

WES

Yeah, so oil's made from animals
and plants that sank to the seabed
millions of years ago.

AMY SLURPS HER COFFEE.

Don't you get it?

We've destroyed the resting place
of millions of ancient creatures;
now their spirits are destroying us
with monster storms. It's classic.
You must have seen Amityville Horror.

AMY

Jeez, Wes, no one's gonna buy that.
What are you going to call it,
Revenge of the Plankton?

AWKWARD SILENCE.

Maybe you're going for the wrong genre.
An Inconvenient Truth is nearer the mark.

WES

Nah, that's so yesterday.
Horror's the way forward.

AMY

Well maybe the monster should
come from the sea, a giant
man-eating plastic shark, maybe?

WES

Nah, that's been done before.

AMY

You should at least have a dog.
Everyone loves a good dog movie.

WES

Nah, everyone hates it
when you kill the dog.

AMY

Ah, I guess your movie
doesn't end well then?

WES STANDS UP TO LEAVE

WES

Dunno, you'll have to wait and see.
FADE OUT.

THE END

Jan Harris

snowflakes

shaped by their journeys

changes in cloud where they form
temperature
humidity

the path they take
as they tumble
down

heat of the fingertip they settle on

the way each crystal
(dendrite
needle
prism)
melts

how the fingerprint's
ridges
whorls
valleys
channel melt-water

(cont)

(cont)

*

the way snowflakes
fall together

form
snowdrifts
cornices
wind slabs

avalanches
where hands
come together
to dig
comfort
pray

how nieves penitentes
point to the sun

glaciers
polar ice caps
melt into
sea-rise

Daphne Milne

Cyanide

1

Some Victorian naturalist treks
through the Amazon rainforest
with his killing jar lid open
then closed like the butterfly's wings.

2

Some of them entered singing
in their moth grey stripes
through those infernal gates
open then eternally closed.

3

Somewhere a tree falls silently
swooshing towards its deadline
and Schrodinger's cat lies still
his little box open and closed.

Note: cyanide was used in the gas chambers, some of the Jews were reputed to have entered singing possibly to give them courage

Daphne Milne

Extracted from the Black Box of John Wyndham's broken world

The roads went first:
country lanes colonised by daisies
coltsfoot, creeping buttercup.

In steel laboratories men bred
a remedy for the common cold.
It passed all the tests
the medical boards agreed.

Motorways lasted a little longer
ash, horse chestnut, oak and thorn
destroyed their smooth grey smugness.

Miracles were commonplace
the family doctor held the cure for all
in a small brown bottle.
It was almost universally effective.

They said we were impeding progress
cranks who refused to take the pills
we're the ones who are left to say again

We Told You So

Daphne Milne

Under the shade of the Coolibar tree

Before we came it was green
vegetation so thick only a shadow
could slip between bush and tree

suburbia spreads faster
than drought resistant plants
red roofed bungalows
grow close as lizard scales

glimpsed from train or freeway
they resemble a Roman tortoise
huddling for defence
against the unshadowed sun

where land's unsafe for building
carefully managed nature parks
are fenced in with notices
'keep off - bush under construction'

beyond the highways endless sands
lie red as our childhood maps
waiting to be colonised

Stuart Nunn

Experiment

Think, if you will, of Farmer Lawes
who gave up harvesting in 1863.

No more tea under the hedge while horses
tail-flicked flies in the resting sun.

Take agriculture away and what
do you get? Perhaps the labourers guessed

but the boss thought his grandson
could find out for certain

if he kept his harvesters well away.
Before he died, the farmer saw

nature get into gear. Annual weeds –
chickweed, groundsel and fat hen;

then perennials – buttercup, bramble,
dock and thistle. On his deathbed

from his window, birch and hazel
and, as he closed his eyes, holly.

Great grandson has the scientists in.
They poke about under oak and ash,

measure ph, pause and look up
through the canopy Lawes allowed.



Grant van Wingerden

Loose laws on lice and less

I come to confuse if not to confess
what I mean to demean lice as, was it, less?
My misery as mosquitoes amass
a tick of approval at each leech's removal
may lead you to muse that perhaps

I'm not big on bugs
I fly into a flap , flailing at flies

The truth is somewhere between
delight at ladybirds helping spiders
and reaching for the salt

II

I believe in bees and all they bless
How our pests are repasts for beasts
we like best

Coil and oil to stay the spray
Catch as can as can catch
and release as you please
still further away

CONTRIBUTORS

Lesley Burt poetry has appeared in magazines over many years, including: *The Interpreter's House, Sarasvati, Reach, Dawntreader, Prole, Sentinel Literary Quarterly, Tears in the Fence* and *The Butchers Dog*; also online, including by the *Poetry Kit, Long Exposure, The Poetry Shed, Algebra of Owls,* and *Ink, Sweat and Tears.*

Dennis Dubois has published poems in Bee Museum, Curved House, and The Projectionist's Playground. He is preparing a collection of poems and a first work of fiction. He is an American expatriate, living in Copenhagen.

Tina M Edwards poetry has recently been published in *Reach* and *The Dawntreader* by Indigo Dreams Publishing. Her other published works can be found at www.tinamedwardswriter.wordpress.com.

When not writing poetry or flash fiction she can often be found walking. She currently lives in North Somerset.

Catherine Graham lives in Newcastle on Tyne, England. She is published by Indigo Dreams Publishing. Catherine's awards include The Jo Cox Poetry Prize.
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Annest Gwilym is the editor of the webzine [Nine Muses Poetry](http://www.ninemusespoetry.com) Her first pamphlet of poetry - *Surfacing* - is available from [Lapwing Poetry](http://www.lapwingpoetry.com) For a signed copy directly from the author go to: <http://ninemusespoetry.com/surfacing/>

Daphne Milne moved to Australia from Cornwall in January this year. She has no intention of moving further south. Her first poem was published in a school magazine at the age of ten. Since then she has had work in many grown up magazines and anthologies both in print and on line.

She has recently been the 'Feature Poet' at Perth Poetry club, read at the Perth Festival fringe and has just recorded a podcast for ILAA radio magazine.

She also writes short stories, flash fiction and prose poems which vary from the darkly humorous to the vaguely sinister. She is currently working on a flash novella and a collection of short stories. Her poetry pamphlet *The Blue Boob Club* is due out later this year from Indigo Dreams Press.

Grant van Wingerden is a long term PKer who has appeared in a number of collections. His last was *Bestiary* from 2016. Here Grant again returns to the small creatures that share his space. He is originally from a small outback community in Western Australia and currently lives in the Blue Mountains. The creatures are the same, only the names have changed.