

John Ryan

Process:

My poetry is about the nature of landscape and the nature of language. By 'landscape', I mean an inspirited milieu where humans and non-human lives intersect and transact on a sustained or intermittent basis. These transactions and their ironies become my subject matter. And within these transactions are more fleeting moments, which adumbrated by language, initiate metanoia—a revised way of thinking and being. An essentially spiritual practice, 'poetry' comes from the ancient Greek term *poiesis*, which has two meanings. The first is 'to make'. The act of writing poetry is an act of making something. The second is 'to bring to light something which would otherwise be concealed'. In my practice of it, poetry is a means for coming to terms with the world, in all its lightness and darkness, for bringing the world to light in its darkneses.

Since I moved to Perth in 2008, I've been inspired by the landscape—the extraordinarily beautiful South-West region with a density of endemic plants and animals rivalling any rainforests in biodiversity. Having spent many years on foot in the United States, walking through the seasons, I can say that my writing cuts across the Pacific and is a sort of body dialogue with my origins. More recently, I have tended towards placelessness as a manner of writing concretely and abstractly, about here and about nowhere in particular. I find inspiration in flora, fauna, and fungi, but also in the works of visual artists, such as Sidney Nolan, who engaged creatively with place in intriguing, non-literal ways. I hope that my poetry conveys an ethics too—that the world garden is fragile and deserves consideration and cultivation.

Dunking Chooks

At the poultry farm, Frank taught
Me to 'dunk' newborn chicks.
First secure the back
Of the head with a thumb
And then using four fingers
Brace the downy body.
Poke the beak into
The water tray until they start
Sucking, then toss 'em near the feed.
The primeval impulse to eat
And drink are reflexes wired
Into their avian brains.
That's all, he explained,
With an orb of wriggling orange
In hand, the same that has slit
The throats of half-a-million.

Murder at Twilight Lake

full moon autumn night
refracted and foggy,
the sheening meadow
seemed a lake.
the silhouette of a man flashed
by lantern light pouring
from cabin window. he paced
and called over walkie,
boys what's the ETA tonight?
procession next
under yellow wash of headlights
their whispers about the heart
and liver, the youngest's remark
about the spooling blood. there
were no cries in the arresting
morning froth. the head.
the horses flitting nearby
blood on the porch. the sense
that something had come and gone.

On Finding An Animal At Burns Beach

concavities where the eyes sparkled,
jaw that once yawned with daybreak,
cheek bones that deflected a kiss
we are this underneath
and the frame of us
will linger long after
the inspiriting skin has gone, supple
mosaic muscle over-girding bone,
a whirligig wind-thrown into the unknown.