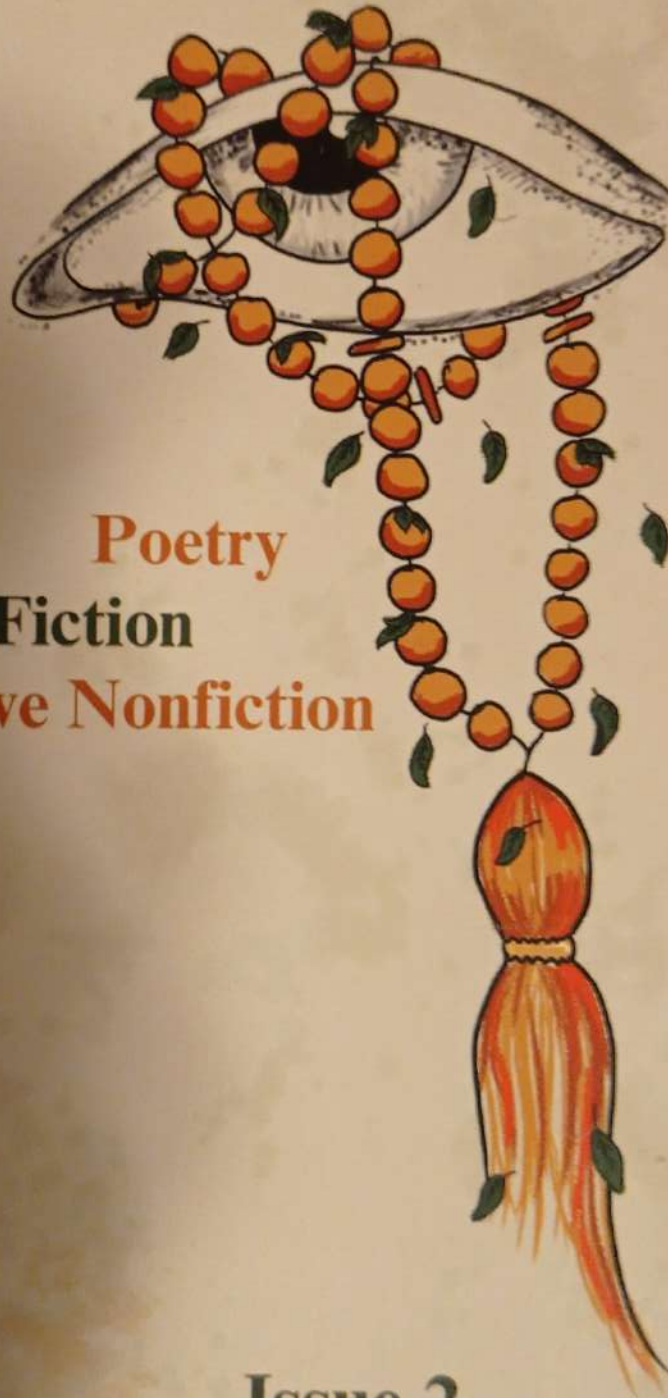


Handmade Forest



Poetry
Fiction
Creative Nonfiction

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John Charles Ryan

My poetry and photography aim to evoke the natural world and, in particular, the complexities of plant life. The species featured in the poems and photos are those of Australia and Southeast Asia, two regions of the world with highly diverse yet threatened flora and fauna.

Rock Orchid

The lustrous leather leaves splay open to welcome rain
Issuing orchid hope from the tips of pseudobulbs—
These jaundice-green stalks dense and rigid as bamboo.

Some use the name Sydney Rock Orchid but I prefer
Outstanding Dendrobium: a lithophyte lurching from
A granite ledge overlooking the Apsley River chasm.

Beneath the viewing platform, we stumble spasmodically—
The soil crumbles and rocks dislodge with every step,
Rumble entropically into the green groin of the gorge.

One day, this dendrobium will tumble too: a ganglion
Of debris, matted as a bird's nest, has amassed, shoving
The precipice dweller away from its precarious holdfast.

It clutches to the outstretched forearm of a woody
Vine—just as we do—a final impulse to preserve itself.
Soon, in the end, we will fall. The abyss will reclaim us

All. Until then, we hold passionately to one another: stingless
Bee swaddled in draping moss, clinging to cliffside
Eucalypt, sinking digits, into precious earth given it.

Port Jackson Fig Tree

In this province of currawongs and goats, I am watching.
As you cross the fence and enter the field, I am watching.

I am the cornea of this winter field preparing to enclose you.
Tell me, is today the day when the south wind is blowing?

Tell me, is today the day when the stacked stones will topple?
I was once water flowing around stone. I hardened in waiting.

Ribbons of tumbling water calcified to ligaments and bones.
My leaves agreed with stones, sand, stars, and sun watching.

Grazers stave off other trees. Goats manicure my foliate gloss.
When will these inner fruits ripen? My wasps will cease waiting.

From this rock-strewn rise, I shepherd slow flexures of seasons.
New families come. Children mature. Leave. I am left waiting.

My purpling air roots spider darkly as venous blood. Lean in.
Soothe my calloused skin with your touch. Breathe in. Watching.

Moreton Bay Fig Tree

“Figs yellow turning red, usually prominently warted...” –Flora of
New South Wales

herd
of feral goats, snow
coats bolting upslope
or have they absconded
their paddock beyond
to a feast of fig
hope?



*

gum bark
stripping streamers,
tree unzipping trousers,
or was it billy rutting that
left these frilly jutting
splats of rusty red
around it?

*

blue-tongue
nudges head between
boardwalk planks to glean
bush flies zinging by, or is
she simply saying aye to
blue sky while it can
be seen?

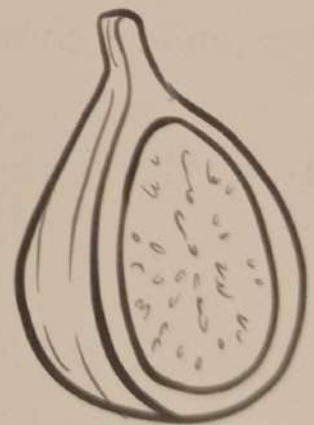


fig tree
espaliered to granite,
splaying tentacles around it;
as cicadas call in counterpoint
I swivel on my ankle joint to
grasp the woody limb
that spans it.



*

latex like
milk exudes when
bark is wounded and then
from warted skin of fruits,
hard and green beans in
groups between rust
stems.

*

flowers
turn shyly inward,
inflorescence splintered
into ovaries translucent, juicy
as vescicles of ruby grapefruit,
wasp-churned through
this winter.

*



banyan
lichened to blue-grey
by boulder it pours over,
a lithophyte, stone-lover,
suckering up top—who
dropped it there, a
rosella?



*

this
fig is shapeshifter,
polymorphous stonelifter,
creeping body cables through
slimmest creases—root lace
to stone eyelet, or, likewise,
seed to sifter?

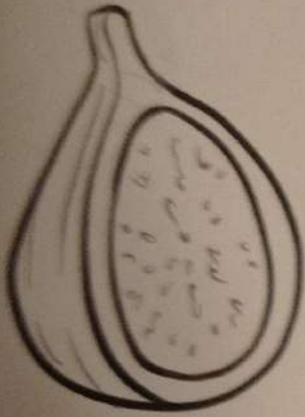
*

this
fig is freestanding!
hmm, wait, maybe not: did
its seed vessel take a different
landing, slip off its stony loft
into rubble wedge it's now
commanding?

*



fig
nested in crook
of gum who mistook
a feather-lifted fruit for
a casual visitor wanting
just a one-night
nook.



*

ficuses
in fields growing
age, showing sculpted
muscles, flexing six packs,
ripped lats, perfect pecs
liquid molten lava
flowing.

*

a
currawong,
darts among upper
branches, taking chances
with sudden lances
of its beak and
tongue.



*

Gorge-Dwelling Plant

granite above me—me above granite.
whatbird left me here—here me left birdwhat.
justheard gust beneath—beneath gust heardjust.
planted bones under—under bones planted.
canit be long here—here long be itcan.
touch of rime over—over rime of touch.
clutchrim of pure brink—brink pure of rimclutch.
planet below me—me below plant it.
fineniche of soil slant—slant soil of nichefine.
shadow behind me—me behind shadow.
whineof gorge torrent—torrent gorge ofwhine.
below is bellow—bellow is below.
chineof me still here—here still me ofchine.
bellow is below—below is bellow.