

Poetry of the Personal and Political



led by JEANINE LEANE

Poetry of the Personal and Political

Edited by Jeanine Leane

For First Nations People the personal is political and the political is personal. This rich and diverse selection of poems from ten First Nations poets germinated, grew and blossomed from a series of impassioned discussions and writing activities facilitated through online workshops during the height of Victoria's second COVID lockdown. The workshops were funded through the Free Association and BLINDSIDE.

/ unprecedented times / 2020

Jazz Money

as oil spreads across still water
the waves of smallpox blistered bodies could not be stopped
a death begun by the white hand
without needing to touch the gun

/ the times were unprecedented /

and when flour bags of rationed poison
stole whole families of their life
a stitched government insignia
the last image before their clouding eyes

/ the times were unprecedented /

and when the sacrosanct of elsewhere
exported their fears of anyone
not male not white not them
and sickness of the mind snatched the sacred vision of all bodies

/ the times were unprecedented /

and when the angry blacks travelled
in 1938 to the place called sydney
to hold signs for a day of mourning
for their human rights to dignified existence

/ the times were unprecedented /

and when the first queer victims began to burn
with HIV spreading like fire through their cells
abandoned and vilified
as we lost the most beautiful of a generation

/ the times were unprecedented /

and to all bodies
who have feared their government
the four walls of their house
or a world not designed for them

/ these times are preceded /

Jazz Money is a poet and filmmaker of Wiradjuri heritage, currently based on the beautiful sovereign lands of the Darug and Gundungurra nations. Her poetry has been published and spoken widely across so-called 'Australia,' and reimagined as murals, installation and video art. Jazz is the 2020 winner of the David Unaipon Award, with her first collection forthcoming from University of Queensland Press.

Untitled
Dale Collier

a walk through the long grass
a line in the sand
another colourful history
she said
dear mother's mother
steam on her lips
dishin' up curried sausages
cussin' old pops 'round the crooked table
profanity covered in plastic
no stains
no scars
can't tell a savage story

caught between
murmurs and memory
grinding through the grimace
a face with no teeth
a whisper
flung from the tongue
across table
more than a few generations
of silence
of lesson
those cracks appear
ground gives way

four bloated bellies
falling now like starved beasts
from the slaughterhouse
to the cutting-room floor
and big boss man stands up
his past, the polariser
sharp tongues
stay seated
'n shit goes flying
from fork to fridge-door
a different kind of knife fight
and two top dogs
go down again

with dinner
served decades ago
smells like blood
but love still lingers
through mirrors of black and blue
the young warrior's eyes

another mother's mother
and more than a mouth full of fury
now worn on the warunarrung sleeve
a walk through the long grass
a line in the sand
another colourful history
she said
remember

Dale Collier is an experimental artist of Wiradjuri and Northern European heritage who works with sound, text, moving image and installation. Collier's work has been exhibited within the Art Gallery Of South Australia's Ramsay Art Prize, 2019, and the Parliament Of New South Wales' King & Wood Malleson Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award, 2018.

limbo

Tace Stevens

her arms wrap around my shoulders
enclosing me into her space
chest to chest

my head lays on my mother's shoulder
my breath fills the small cavity between us
intermingling with her warmth i breathe

three million, nine hundred and thirty-six thousand metres away
the Indian Ocean shies its face from the Pacific

my body adjusts to the 1.5
enveloped by an empty void
i stand alone

elbows thud
my hollow heart longs for contact
as they draw away

days limp past
shadows yawn and stretch
and i am left with the company of my unrelenting thoughts

i live in limbo, two lives between two cities

perth – our hearts forever connected, familiar and slow
my childhood of long summer nights playing with cousins
my lungs breathe quietly, my loved ones by my side
my identity is family
i am daughter, sister and aunty

sydney - my surrogate home for the last eight years
once foreign but now explored with ease
alone, i choose to be here but
being here chips my identity to its core;
i am just me

i have spent the last eight years between
two places, my roots blurred
transience softly walks beside me, my shadow

i'm scared i'll be in limbo forever
i want both places

but i know
my body was not designed to live without my family

Tace Stevens is a Bibbulmun and Spinifex woman from Perth, currently in her second year of studying film. In 2017 she completed a Diploma of Creative and Indigenous Writing where she was introduced to poetry and creating stories.

The Audacity
Inspired by Aboriginal Man by Jack Davis
Beau SYW

I am sad and lost
Trapped in a decrepit heap for the poor
For the not you, for the not wealthy, for the not true blue.
Dad said *We ain't got much but we stand our own.*
The big guys hide us away
Expect us to do things their way
Then complain when we can't keep up
Dad said *They'll help us, give you dough while you grow.*
They scream at us to do as they do
Be grateful for those pennies
Enjoy the box for shelter and the boxed food to feed on.
Dad said *We got grub we'll be alright.*
Our land was stolen, and we abused
Do it like them, that's the way to live
Speak like them, act like them, don't be you.
Dad said *Uhhhh we'll get by, our mob always do.*
Thrown to the ground, knees on our necks
Spit, shit, piss and spew
We treat you right, Aboriginal Man, they say.
Dad said *Fuck 'em then, do it your way.*

Beau SYW is an autistic Wiradjuri writer based in Naarm. When not writing poetry to help him understand his thoughts, he writes wild stories about confused characters finding themselves. In his spare time he likes laying on wet grass and talking to birds.

Gurudhaany - Goanna
part 1
Indiah Money

captured in glistening
immaculate
plastic
trapped by
resin
fly to honey? no
crystallised immortality
frozen in a time
your choice
your decision
not mine
gluey and stuck
here
a fragment of a memory
constantly a reminder
then not now
parts yeah but not all

Context:

This piece is part of a multidisciplinary series (regarding my love for goanna; Wiradjuri totem). For one of the pieces I am going to diamanté a large image of a goanna and then submerge the piece in resin. This aids the thinking process of colonisers assuming that Aboriginality is unable to exist in modern autonomous terms. We exist everywhere; maybe not how colonials have racially imagined us, but we are present today. Yet the colonial imagination is limited and continues to immortalise a racist facade of mob. This poem is quite literal given the context but without this written aspect it may appear more cryptic than it was necessarily intended.

Indiah Money is a queer Wiradjuri nonbinary person who was raised on Kulin Nations and continues to reside there. Indiah's practice includes visual art, written work, installations, performance art and more. These are done with strong recurring themes of colonialism, assimilation, skin colour, gender, mental illness, sexuality, climate change, stolen generations, identity as well as critiquing the Eurocentric western idealised structure that each person in Australia is forced to maintain.

Plant Power (an update for Assata Shakur)

Jenny Fraser

This is the 3rd Millennium and we are now redefining revolution.

This realm needs more power to the plants, driven by a humanist revolution.

The Plant Revolution doesn't have to be about bloodshed or slavery, or about claiming the mountains for foraging.

We can fight if we are forced to, but the intent of the Plant Revolution is power for the peaceful.

We always need Plant Revolution for healing our cells, minds, hearts and spirits, because plant power can be stronger than the paramilitary, and will not give up.

We need to be weapons of mass reforestation, warriors of home gardening, a movement of plant nurture.

It is still not enough just to change the system, we need to change our life choices. We have to redesign our societies to be plant friendly again.

We are making efforts to end world hunger, to end colonialism, to end the agricultural patriarchy, to end capitalism and plant blindness.

Plant Revolution means the end of exploitation, it means respecting people and plants from other cultures. The Plant Revolution helps us to vibe higher and get creative.

Plant Revolution means treating seedlings like our babies.

Plant Power is beautiful.

Plant Revolution means reviving the ancient growing practices and learning alongside young people. Plant Revolution respects sacredness.

Plant Revolution means protecting the original cellular DNA of people, the plants, the animals, the air and the water. Plant Power means saving planet earth.

Plant Revolution is pure love.

Jenny Fraser (PhD), is a Migunberri Yugambeh artist. Her poetry has been published with Yellow Arrow Journal, IndigenousX, and in the anthology 'This country anytime anywhere' by IAD Press. In 2020 she edited the group anthology 'Plant Power Sisterhood' with Akinoga Press. She has also previously written for online and print publications including NAICA (Native American Indigenous Cinema and Arts), Conundrum Magazine (Canada), Artlink Magazine, fineartforum, Art Monthly and others.

Underneath Darwin Casino Lies A Larrakia Burial Ground

Laniyuk

Lights flicker through perfectly placed landscaped palms.

Aunty says, with a gentle nod, that's where our ancestors are. Where they were once able to Rest...

Right there, she says. Pointing to looming concrete and fenced off crowds of Affluence and leisure mixed with the silent desperation of gambled life savings. My Kin and their spirits are now

Intermingled with the empire's greatest skill, the theft of wealth disguised As prosperity. Our Sovereign Death Right, a

Reaching embrace between generations, denied by the colony.

'aye bub..

Every time I drive past, I think of our mob

Resting there, in our Country..

Every time..

Laniyuk is a Larrakia, Kungarakan, Gurindji and French writer and performer of poetry and short memoir. She has been published online as well as in print collections such as Colouring the Rainbow: Blak, Queer and Trans Perspectives (2015) UQP's Solid Air (2019) and Fire Front (2020). She is currently completing her first collection of work to be published through Magabala Books

Grown Up
Elia Harding

Shame, shame, shame

The past

Body contorts to the past
The protein shake doesn't remove it

Eyes contort to the past
Staying clean doesn't remove it

Mouth contorts to the past
Shaving clean doesn't remove it

Far removed from

When it was all so simple

3KND Reggae Riddims wit da Rot nd
Country sundays going 2 footy games
Family days are special

Far removed from

Them mischievous kids
Baggin anyone and anything
Coz we didn't know better

Then something changed
It got a lil bit more real

Far removed from

When it was all so simple
Shame, shame, shame

The past parts ways

Elia Harding is a 23-year-old Meriam/Erubian and Ku Ku (Cape York) man born in Narrm and currently based on Wurundjeri country. In his spare time he loves playing basketball, AFL football and listening to music. He is the grandson of Eleanor Harding who spent her life supporting and fighting for their people. He is grounded and guided his my family's footsteps.

My Nana
Rebeka Morrison

taken at the young age of seven,
only a small, delicate flower bud
ready to grow and spread her roots into the world.

The world that didn't want her!

Wanted to breed her out.

Promised a white education.

Instead forced to work

for the humble, selfless nuns

who were printed in black and white.

saving Nana from her 'savage' customs

no language was spoken

only the English poison

which dripped from her lips

down to her stem

into the buds she created

Her children

who had poison in their roots,

which made it hard to grow

hard to learn

hard to listen

to practice their culture that was once lost,

so the leftover poison continued to drip

to their children, Nana's grandchildren.

The poison stayed in the soil,

and even when watered and given sunlight,

they had their struggles

But the flowers will learn to grow

to survive, thrive, and blossom

until they are seen by the world

and appreciated for their beauty.

Rebeka Morrison is an 18-year-old Bibbulman Nyoongar woman from Perth WA. She has 15 siblings and is passionate about painting, writing, and acting. She loves creating pieces that reflect Indigenous stories, which can be shared with everyone from any culture or background.

Bran Nue Dae
After Lionel Fogarty's And It Rained This Night
For Sermsah Bin Saad
Declan Fry

With reference to protests in 2015 against the forced closure of Aboriginal communities and Black Lives Matter protests held on Wurundjeri country in 2020, protests which sought to draw attention to deaths in custody.

At the time of writing, these deaths number 441.

Lord Mayor Robert Doyle criticised the protesters, saying they were being 'self-indulgent'. 'What a great way to gain sympathy to your cause: by disadvantaging and inconveniencing hundreds of thousands of people just trying to get home at the end of the week,' Cr Doyle said.
—Reported in the Herald Sun, April 10, 2015, in reference to CBD demonstrations against the forced closure of Aboriginal communities.

Finish watching *Bran Nue Dae* (only never completely).

Some mob have passed on since the film was made.

Suri tells me as much, says

some of the mob find it hard to watch now.

(Long after I've rung to tell him we saw you there

in the film.)

And you're still here, so guess you kept on dancing

with uncles, aunties, cousins telescoped through filmtime.

Struggling and alive in the struggle of every nothing days.

Counted now like it's self-indulgent to have lived at all

or
for so long, so long, so long long

gone.

Out of hundreds of thousands of days why didn't they choose the weekend?

It's as good a day as any, beautiful in its way and bran nue ay.

Because the community was closed down and the bottle shop stayed open that weekend.

Protest is always legitimate but surely not so when on

this many people it impacts.

Can't see why, five years later they have to come,

endanger our health with placards

431,

now 432.

Over the megaphone hear someone say 434.

The newspaper (still keeping score) writes another case, months later.

That's 438.

A number that's already expired already

out of date.

441 today.

Who's endangering who?

For one chance
at truce.

Through the fire see how
we lived and

they might have lived for it, too.

Declan Fry is an essayist, poet, and proud descendant of the Yorta Yorta. Born on Wongatha country in Kalgoorlie, in 2021 he was shortlisted for the Judith Wright Poetry Prize and awarded a Peter Blazey Fellowship. He currently lives with his partner and their cat Turnip and has appeared in Meanjin, Kill Your Darlings, The Guardian, Griffith Review, and elsewhere.

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