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New Writing from
Western Australia

Fiction

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Essays

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Westerly

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Westerly acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of Indigenous people and their vital contributions within Australian society.

Westerly's office, at the University of Western Australia, is located on Whadjak Noongar land. We recognise the Noongar people as the spiritual and cultural custodians of this land.

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Then at last he stopped, turned on the garden tap, pressed his forefinger to the hose nozzle, splashing here, there; turning the dial to high; here his herbs, basil leaves, picking an armful and thrusting them to her; here all manner of herbs, rosemary, coriander, wide-leafed parsley, lemon thyme; so many uses, *chicken flavourless without it*, he spouted, and rows of garlic just beginning to flower, *a constant supply*, he said, turning the tap off and cleaning his wet shoes on a scaler handmade for that purpose—a block of wood smoothed with his late father's plane.

Soon they were back in the apartment, their shoes at the door; the marble steps freshly mopped after lunch. Mirella had also cleared the table, the lunch dishes put away and a small embroidered cloth centred the timber-shine table where earlier she had served lunch. All those courses: pasta, then meat and salad. She hastened to remember the rest: beef broth in a rich tomato sauce, pasta hand-rolled, a platter of sun-ripened peaches and she marvelled again at the peaches, smiled as she remembered the thought, a taste like nothing on earth. It was here where Mirella served coffee, an assortment of biscuits, delicious, almond macaroons, fruit-filled pastries, crisp shortbread, and some she noticed as she bit into a second, flavoured with the slightest hint of ginger and lemon. But John, not keen to sit at the table again, opened the balcony doors to let in the evening cool, insisted they sit on the small, almost *Juliette* balcony, coffee in hand, leaving the saucer behind, left over stain on the cloth; insisted he fill her in with the family history. *There are so many*, he said, *family you must learn to know*.

And she thought later as she tried to sleep in her cousin's childhood bed, leaving her aunt crocheting in the dark, in the lamplight's shadow, that families were like green beans, hanging curled and twisted, each to a vine, a wigwam frame for them to grow, comfortable, settling like a house with many doors, letting in breezes, allowing them to pass as they will; some quick, some slow, until at last they found their way, ripening as best as they could.

The Northam Noongar Poetry Project

A Bush Walk
Yvonne Kickett

Sisters walking as one, enjoying
the company of our Wadjela Moort.

CAN

COMMUNITY ARTS TRANSFORMS

In 2017, CAN (Community Arts Network) ran its 'Rekindling Stories on Country' program with the Northam Noongar community on Ballardong Country. The participating group chose poetry as a form to share memories, anecdotes and expressions of place, family and local history. Some participants had written poetry in private for many years. Others were keen to try their hand at poetry as a starting point for documenting personal and family stories.

Over two months, CAN hosted weekly poetry and soup evenings with a range of Western Australian poetry and performance facilitators Nandi Chinna, Alf Taylor, Jan Teagle Kapetas, Irma Woods and Maitland Schnaars. Beyond an introduction to poetry styles and techniques, the workshops became a space for women to write, share stories and edit their pieces together, with a few kids joining in too.

Taking the workshops out on Country, Elder Yvonne Kickett led the group on a Sunday bush walk with facilitator Nandi Chinna leading meditations and writing exercises in clearings and at a riverbank along the way. Alf Taylor's workshop inspired many to capture humorous anecdotes and colloquial speech in verse. The poems developed in the workshops and published here span generational experiences and stories from the Avon River, the Northam Reserve, the town and Country—deeply personal pieces that together offer a sense of place.

Twelve community members joined the workshops across the program. Some chose to keep their poems to share with family, and a group went on to perform their work in CAN's Bilya Kep Waangkiny (River Water Stories) poetry performances with a changing music ensemble in the 2017 York Festival, the Quairading Town Hall, the Northam Link Theatre (accompanied by members of the Perth Symphony Orchestra), and the 2018 Denmark Festival of Voice.

CAN's 'Rekindling Stories on Country' program is funded by the Australia Council for the Arts; the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; and Lotterywest.

Jessica Wraight,
Program Manager

Bilya Kep Deborah Moody

Deborah Moody is a Ballardong Noongar woman, a respected Elder and a Language Specialist. Her work is featured in the Bilya Koort Boodja Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge in Northam.

Nitja ngulla bilya-kep koorliny.
Ngangk yirra yaaginy,
shimmering silver
in the morning
koorliny down
through the bilya
in the deep moorn kep.
Bending, winding
koorliny
in straight lines
around corners bokadja.
Baalap waaginy in
the dreamtime
He created the bilya kep.

Maaman God
baal yirra yaaginy
over the deep moorn kep.
Maaman God baal waaginy,
separate the boodja
and the kep.
The deep moorn kep
koorliny bokadja.
Ngulla maaman
God baal the creator
of the boodja and
the deep moorn kep.

A Bush Walk

Yvonne Kickett

Yvonne Kickett is a Ballardong Noongar woman, a respected Elder and a Botanical Specialist. She is an experienced poet with a significant body of work, an artist, and she contributed to the Bilya Koort Boodja Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge in Northam.

A small crowd has gathered,
waving like anxious ants arriving at a picnic.
The sun is a giant glowing ember in the sky
warming us all as we get ready.
We start off, feet shuffling, traipsing in unison
that matches the beating of our hearts.
My sisters walk alongside me,
our hearts weighed down by a recent loss.
The gum trees sway, blown by an easterly breeze,
leaves swishing to a silent tune that makes them dance to and fro.
In the distance you can hear birds singing, different tunes,
a healing melody for our hearts;
they're the orchestra of the bush.
Dry grass, crawling ants, sheoak trees,
and dead logs line the terrain that leads to the creek bed,
dried up, but still beautiful to take in.
Then in silence, we absorb all that surrounds us,
meditating, fixating on the sounds, smells and feelings.
In the distance the rumblings of a V8 engine speeding past,
the soft sound of the dogs running in and out of the bushes,
the buzzing of flies near our ears; the peace broken,
brought back to reality in an instant.

As we make our way back to the cars
our bodies restored for now.
We hug each other, today has been good.
This, a day of healing,
one to take away the hurt.
Sisters walking as one, enjoying
the company of our Wadjela Moort.
Packing up, ready to go our separate ways,
Our hearts soar as if lifted by giant eagles wings,
sacred bushland etched in our minds forever.
A walk to remember, our bush walk.

Story of My Life

Janet Kickett

Janet Kickett is a Ballardong Noongar woman, and a respected Elder. She is a singer and artist as well as a poet, and contributed to the Bilya Koort Boodja Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge in Northam.

Taken far away as a child, from my dad and mum
to a place that wasn't meant for me;
it was miles from my home, there were no smiling faces,
I didn't know what I'd done wrong.

My eyes filled with tears, running down my tiny face like rain.
Other children were there—faces wet from tears, I wasn't alone.
I didn't know why? Those people are cruel in that big black car,
came and snatched us away and we were taken so far.

There was no comfort. The people who took us,
made us work, the same things over and over again.
Down on my hands and knees I would scrub the floors.
We were made to kneel on stones in the yard; yes I still got the scars.
I would pray every day to the Lord, why was I treated this way?
With tears in my eyes, I'd cry *mum come and take me home.*

For many long years I kept myself busy and tried not to worry,
going to school and learning kept me going.
My mum passed away and my heart was broken over again.
Now who would come to pick me up and take me away from here?

A letter finally came to release me from this awful place.
My face lit up! Then wondering what I'm gonna do?
Gathering my things, what little I did have, I ran into Nanna's
arms.
She held me so tight, I cried and cried, at last I was going home.

Humble Man

Cyndy Moody

Cyndy Moody is a Ballardong Noongar woman. Her work 'Moorn Maali' (2016) from the project 'Kwobadak Maar' (CAN) is featured in the Bilya Koort Boodja Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge in Northam.

A gentle face with a trophy smile.
Your cut-off-sleeved checked shirt.
I can picture you at the kitchen table,
as you greet me, your eyes smile.
I wonder what your plans are today?
Will you be going to church in your blue shirt, suit and tie?
Or will you be getting ready to go bush to hunt for our feed?
I hugged you. Your hat curved out on both sides,
brushed leather smell, colour of river sand.

Everyone knew you—
the Noongar man with a cowboy hat and Pajero,
driving around our Avon Valley town.
My dad, taking many who knelt for the sinner's prayer
home to be showered and fed.
I watched him offer his own flannelette shirt.
A family man who loved to spin yarns,
always had us wrapped in stories of him and his main dog, Lassie.

His family at the table.
That's all that mattered.
His life complete.

Rise Up and Be Strong Julie Wynne

Julie Wynne is a Ballardong Noongar woman who works for the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service in Northam, where she also lives. She contributed to the Bilya Koort Boodja Centre for Nyoongar Culture and Environmental Knowledge in Northam.

Day after day, week after week, month after month
Years go by, their future flies
No purpose in life
But to sit with their crowd
To drink and be loud
After the jokes they are sober
Their minds are ticking over and over.
I'm worried about my health,
my thoughts are everywhere
I'm drinking too much, I need a food voucher
Money spent again on grog and gunja
Where is my life heading?
I'm lying here contemplating I can't see a way out
A fog-like-haze, a black hole, I can't get out

There has to be a light at the end of this darkness.
I would like to think a voice could be the link.

A voice that is encouraging, that focuses
on your strengths.
The voice could be God, be your inner strength
Your counsellor, counselling, whatever it is,
Keep listening to that voice
Never let it fade, let it be the anchor
Let it hold through the storms and rough seas,
Strong spirit,
strong mind.

The Pool Troy Dagg

Troy Dagg is a Western Australian-born writer now based in Barcelona. He has had stories previously published in *Indigo Journal*, *LINO Magazine* and *BCN Ink*.

John Cheever, 'The Swimmer' | He might have been compared to a summer's day..

Fresh enough to wake the dead, no other excuse required to yawn and rub his paunch and inhale a lungful of the pollen-filled air. Pine tree aroma stirred the whisky fog in his head and he thumbed his eyes, but there was nothing wrong with them, those were spider web traces he could see. Insects buzzed, doves cooed. Morning hadn't felt like this for a long while.

Then he laid eyes on the pool.

Isidoro waddled down the porch steps and went over and peered in. Rotten leaves and pine needles formed scum islands, and insects so small they were barely visible pricked the meniscus of a heavier stillness beneath. Deep down he could descry clumps of moss slow-floating. These had grown. For a while last autumn he'd monitored their development, then lost interest, or the water had gone opaque, he couldn't remember which. Clearly it had been a mistake to have left the pool for so long. Now in the clear spring light the scale of the task of cleaning became apparent. For he had to clean it, the necessity operated in him like one of his organs. Isidoro couldn't imagine summer without the pool, and besides, he'd promised his grandson they would continue where they'd left off with the boy's swimming lessons. Isidoro put his hands on his hips and allowed the warmth of the sun and the clean air to replenish him. The pool would need to be emptied, acid washed, refilled and chlorinated, but before any of that he'd need to fix the pump.

'Where are you going with that?' asked his wife Montse. She was hunched at the kitchen bench sprinkling tobacco into the slots of a cigarette-making machine. She collected tobacco by pinching the ends off her regular cigarettes until she had enough to make her own. 'The filters and tubes cost next to nothing,' she'd say, 'and I smoke less.' How was he supposed to argue against such slack-mindedness?

Now she was gawking at him with that irritating, fly-trap grievance of hers.