

63.1

New Writing from
Western Australia

Fiction

Creative Non-Fiction

Poetry

Essays

In this Issue

Claire G. Coleman

Philip Neilsen

Beejay Silcox

Dan Disney

Jane Monson

Westerly



Westerly

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This project has also been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.



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PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing the winner of the annual Patricia Hackett Prize for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2017, to

CAITLIN MALING

For her creative non-fiction essay,
'Travelling Through the Dark: Six Weeks in Oregon'

Published in *Westerly* 62:1, 2017

Correction to *Westerly* 62.2

Please note that Anton Hur was the translator (into English) of the Korean-language poetry featured in the issue as part of the Melbourne-Seoul Intercultural Poetry Exchange. We apologise to Anton for the omission of this recognition in the issue, and thank him for the contribution of these translations.

Hoping Mechanisms Maddie Godfrey

Maddie Godfrey is a Perth-bred writer, poet and educator. At 22 they have performed at Glastonbury Festival, Sydney Opera House and The Royal Albert Hall. Their writing has been published on posters and used in a WACE exam. Maddie's debut collection, *How To Be Held*, will be released this June. www.maddiegodfrey.com

the way underarm hair keeps growing when everything else shrinks. how my mother's eyes are never the same shade, but always a traffic island between lanes of aggression and care. how rain smells the same in every country I have fallen asleep inside. how a partner is mostly a friend who knows where to look when you take your clothes off, and a best friend takes them off for you when your hands are hollow and heavy, like brick walls around empty apartments. how the sky never blinks. how the sky uses clouds like sunglasses in reverse, sharing spots of shade with the earth. how clouds are Tupperware containers filled with exhalations. how memories are like energy, and never truly die. how everything that perishes inside of us is still blooming somewhere in another body, or another room with unfamiliar paintwork. how mugs of tea are generational heirlooms. how rain smells the same whenever I feel like a stranger renting a life. how the sky has seen me crumple into a soggy excuse for a lover, and does not look away. how my friends peel off my shame, like wet clothes, on the worst days. how my mother waves at me while I write this. how my hair is growing right now. how rain never stops falling further into the earth. how prayers are like love letters written in slow motion.

Potholes Alana Hunt

Alana Hunt makes contemporary art, writes and produces culture through a variety of media across public, gallery and online spaces. She lives on Miriwoong country in the north-west of Australia and has a longstanding engagement with South Asia.

I
When someone walks along our street, the dogs bark from behind their fences like a choreographed Mexican wave that travels from one end of the road to another. I know the sound and rhythm of the dogs well. I know when something is urgent and when it's not. But I don't know my neighbours' names. We smile and wave politely in passing, but that's about the limit of our interaction on this quiet street in this small town. Less than a kilometre away, where my sister-in-law lives, things are quite different. The dogs aren't locked up behind fences because the gates are always open and the dogs never run away. My sister-in-law knows the names of her neighbours. She also knows the names of her neighbours' parents and grandparents, their children and most of their grandchildren. Migrants in Australia, those of us that have arrived at different points in the last 230 years, can only dream nostalgically about that depth of community. The reasons for this can in part be traced back to government policies that have designated where and how particular people live, especially so in this town.

Not so long ago my partner and I were having dinner on our porch. The familiar chorus of dogs barking from behind large fences filled the still dusk air as two people walked by. Quite decisively, my partner said he felt that the 'stolen generation' would be more accurate if it were called the 'removed generation'. He didn't think the word stolen captured the violence of what really happens. 'Removed' was a much better fit, he said. I thought he had committed some form of blasphemy. I disagreed immediately. To steal, I reasoned, was far more violent than the act of removing something. And then I remembered that he was black. And I was white. And that he knew what the government's policies towards Aboriginal people felt like far more intimately than I ever could. I tried to listen.

II

On a normal Thursday morning, a week earlier, a number of police vehicles bumped awkwardly down my sister-in-law's street. The potholes are always large there. And the police are always awkward. They can sense the ground is unstable, even though their shoes are solid and their tyres always have good tread. The potholes in the road are not of government concern. But the people who live there, and precisely the nature of how they live, are.

Residents watched from their shaded verandahs. They waited to see whose home the police would visit today. With a slow precision, the vehicles stopped. Eight police and two rangers stepped down from the convoy of cars and entered my sister-in-law's empty home. Moments later, the police reappeared carrying five young puppies. Their mother skirted anxiously at the men's feet. The door that caged her offspring slammed shut with the heavy sound of metal locking against metal. She cowered back from the police and their heavy boots, and turned to see my sister-in-law running home from work.

A neighbour had called out, but it was too late. The dogs were caged. Despite my sister-in-law's protestations, her questions, the neighbours' collective confusion and anger, these eight police and two rangers simply climbed back into their vehicles. Seatbelts secured. Their eyes set on the bumpy road ahead. They drove away with the dogs.

In total, twenty-five dogs were removed from Aboriginal homes that day, in this town. There had been no warning. No letter. No discussion. Not even a hint. Only, some people recalled, the curious presence of a female police officer taking photos of dogs and house numbers the previous day.

III

A week later I found myself in the office of a lady who works for Child Protection. She told me a story about a child we both knew.

'Oh, that little girl. She came up to me in front of everyone at the airport one day, and in perfect English—she knew exactly what she was doing—she said, *you're the lady who steals children*,' the woman told me.

I nodded in understanding, but it wasn't understanding she was looking for. It was outrage. I couldn't give her that, so I asked instead how she responded.

'Well, I explained that I don't steal children, I just remove them when their parents aren't looking after them properly.'

IV

And every time I walk into the local supermarket I see white women with Aboriginal foster children in their care. And I can't even begin to imagine, what it must feel like for an Aboriginal woman to see this. And to see it again. And again, day in and day out in the supermarket in this small town. I wonder if the white women don't feel as though they're playing part in the repetition of a terrible history. Somehow I haven't had the guts to ask them. It feels taboo. Not the kind of question to interrupt a stranger with while they're making a choice between vine-ripened tomatoes or the cheaper option from an aisle in Coles.

V

With twenty-five dogs suddenly in their care, the police launch a crowdfunding campaign. Photos flood the internet, puppies fast asleep, their soft, floppy bodies slumped over dark blue police hats. The police explain how they have 'rescued' the puppies from 'neglect' and are now 'fostering' them until they are ready for 'adoption' to their 'forever homes'. The senior sergeant of police appears in a video on Facebook speaking about how wonderful the dogs have been for his staff's stress levels. The police's rescue efforts appear on national *Nine News*.

In an instant the police become everyday heroes on social media. *Gosh how beautiful. You guys are awesome. I love this photo. I want one Dad, my birthday present? Well done guys. Another example that we have the best police in the world.* Public opinion swarms in unity and the police are thanked profusely for making the community a better place. But there is one comment quite different from the others. It simply says: *These puppies were stolen from somebody's home.* There is no reply. Not one like. It just sits there, hanging. Impossible to see, or perhaps just too easy to ignore. Like fresh, clear rain falling in a muddied pothole.

VI

As my partner continued to speak over dinner on the porch, I came to understand that to steal something is more or less an illegitimate act; the stealer is not allowed to steal, and if caught they can generally expect to be punished. But there is legitimacy to the act of removal that comes laden with power. An authority always reinforces the actions of the person who 'removes' something. Be it a parent, a police officer, or the government.

VII

I live less than a kilometre away from my sister-in-law, and because of my skin colour, my education, and the spatial distance that lies between our homes, I can rest assured that eight police are not going to enter my house when I'm at work, remove my dogs and proceed to produce a social media campaign about it. I live with that kind of security.

Yet the fences on my street are markedly taller than those where my sister-in-law lives. The gates here are always closed. The dogs don't play with each other, instead they bark in passing, while I nod my head at neighbours whose names I don't know.

Pre-emptive mourning Vidya Rajan

Vidya Sai Rajan is a writer and performance-maker working across poetry, live art, and written and devised work. She is currently working with Theatreworks as an associate artist, and Lonely company and Screen Australia on new work. Her poetry has been published by Monash University Press and *Cordite*, and she is appearing at the Queensland Poetry Festival this year.

The kitchen is a museum
when the lights are off.
Forks glint, moonlit,
dishes embrace,
a mop is resentful
by the fridge door.
He was a sentry
for a fractured country
and this is one duty too many.
All of it
will have to go someday,
he's seen it before.
That is the nature of collections, whether by
freak accident or tide or history
or decision-making body.
The toaster glowers—
some things you don't want to know.
Remember the empty saucer?
A porcelain moon in the dark
eclipsed to pieces
on a clean floor.
It was thinking too closely.
Not of the girl, but of her memory,
which segmented time like a clock.