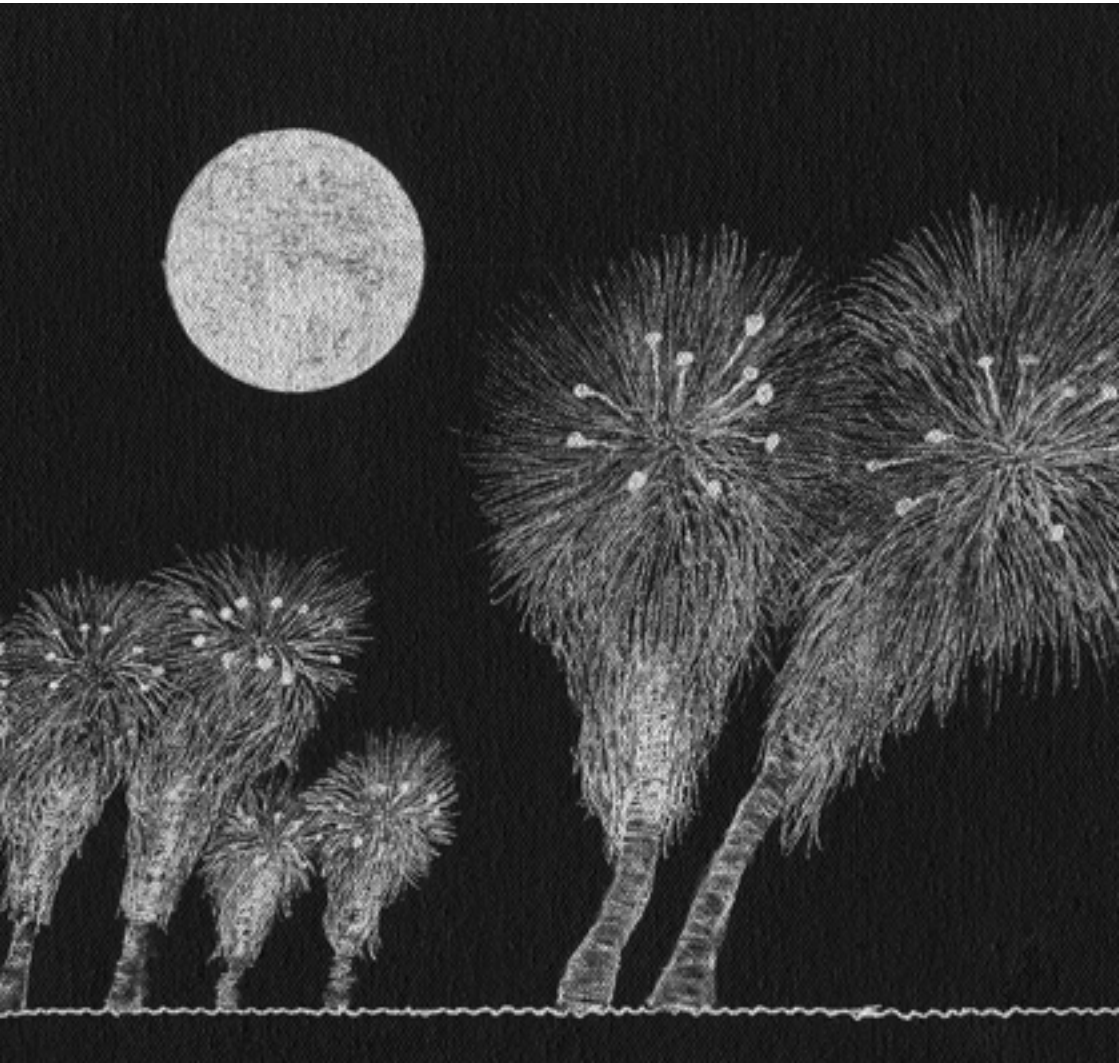
online
djinda

New Poetry from Western Australia

In this Issue
Shey Marque
Riley Faulds
Nadia Rhook
Kaya Ortiz
Charmaine Papertalk Green

Westerly



'Ilgari Aba/ Grandmother Sky'
Charmaine Papertalk Green

Sweeping the skybushbroom ladened
With cluster of stars between the
The points of the horizons where
The sky and country meet for yarning

Westerly
Online Special Issue 14,
djinda

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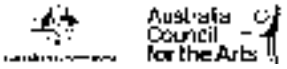

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Guest edited by
Elfie Shiosaki

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From the Editor

Elfie Shiosaki is a Noongar and Yawuru writer, as well as an Associate Professor at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Her research and teaching explores Indigenous desires for human rights and self-determination. She was *Westerly*'s inaugural Editor for Indigenous Writing (2017–2021), and her debut poetry collection *Homecoming* (Magabala Books, 2021) was winner of the Western Australian Premier's Prize for an emerging writer, as well as being shortlisted for the Stella Prize, the ALS Gold Medal and the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, among other prizes.

The luminous poetry in this online special issue of *Westerly* constellates in skyward storytelling about the stars and our desire to expand ourselves from Earth to universe, from the known to the unknowable.

The title of the issue, 'djinda' is a Noongar language word from the southwest region of Australia for the stars. djinda was the theme of the 2023 Perth Festival, expanding on previous years' themes of karla (fire), beeliar (river) and wardan (ocean). Introducing the theme in the Perth Festival program, Noongar women Dr Lynette Narkle and Bobbi Henry reflect that:

> We as Noongar people were the first astronomers—the cosmos was like an almanac of the connection between the stars and us... We hope that our future generations will look towards the stars with the gaze of our ancestors, embracing our sacred boodjar in all its glory both celestial and earthly.

The poetry in this issue sounds our collective hope for connection with the stars as a storied skyscape of Country.

The rise and setting of the stars in constellation reflect the transcendent poetry of sky Country, moving our bodies in time to a cosmic rhythm. The poetry in this special issue has been created on Noongar, Yamaji and Malgana Countries, and we acknowledge their Elders and people as the custodians of the first sky stories. The skyscape of Country holds millennia-old First Nations knowledge about our ways of being in our worlds. In 'Ilgari Aba / Grandmother Sky', Yamaji writer Charmaine Papertalk-Green writes of the stars as eternal teacher:

> Sweeping Grandmothers wisdom
> Into the welcoming palm of our hands
> And sky dust blown into the earth winds
> Keeping ancestral sky stories alive

Reading this poem reminds us that sky stories are living and made alive again through their re-telling on Country.

Embracing the complex abundance within the poetry in this issue, it dawns on us that we do not all look up and see the same night sky. The many standpoints of the writers imbue the issue with many senses of place and belonging, and many stories of Country. We come to know that the light of the stars is within and not above. In the 'Space of Space', Nadia Rhook fearlessly explores this embodiment of the stars, reflecting that:

> I let my soul get dangerous
>
> goopy as the tar of night uninhibited as supernova
> organs glistening, fleshy blood-rivered constellations
> veins hoarse with universe

One of the themes illuminated within the poetry in this special issue is the desire to expand ourselves from Earth to universe and know the unknowable. In 'An Arid Sky', Riley Faulds sublimely reflects that:

> with stars in my vision: my desire
> to eclipse sole self, urgency
> for something networked galactic

To be expansive is the burst out of the Earth's atmospheric skin and intertwine ourselves with heavenly bodies. Yet, perceiving the dangerous beauty of the unknowable, in 'An Exploded-Sonnet Sequence' Shey Marque astutely writes of exploding stars reminding us that 'the breaking can seem gorgeous from a distance'.

Many poems in this issue linger on moments of profound heartbreak and reveal that the breaking of the heart is echoed in the rhythms of sky Country. Breaking apart becomes an intrinsic rhythm of both human and natural worlds, we break and come together, only to break all over again. In 'Ghost Town', Kaya Ortiz tenderly laments that:

> At the far ends of the universe, become what you fear & find that it does not end you. See the specter of stars in the endless night, made & remade & remade again.

Many of the poems in this special issue were creatively nurtured in writing circles facilitated by Catherine Noske (*Westerly*, then Editor), Daniel Juckes (then Associate Editor) and myself, and performed in the light bringing session 'Poetic Constellations' at the Perth Writers Festival in February. As our closest star set into the Indian Ocean and shone through the Norfolk Pines at the Fremantle Arts Centre, our skin glowed from the setting sun and the exuberance of the stars performing on stage.

Thank you to the Perth Festival and *Westerly* for supporting the development of the writing in this issue. Thank you to the writers for generously sharing their unique lived experience of walking on Country and looking up into the night sky in astute, powerful and tender storytelling. In reading this issue, I hope you enjoy stargazing into the glittering skyscape of their stories.

Elfie Shiosaki, August 2023

Ilgari Aba/Grandmother Sky

Charmaine Papertalk Green

A Wajarri, Badimaya and Wilunyu woman of the Yamaji Nation, Charmaine is an author, poet, photographer, artist, storyteller, social science researcher and academic. She has written five books, won several awards including the prestigious Australian Literary Society Gold Medal, and her poetry is studied as part of school curricula.

Sweeping our universe with a
Skybushbroom made by weaving
An endless web of stars together
Stringing sky magic into existence

Ilgari jundan! Ilgari jundan!
Sweep the sky Sweep the sky

Sweeping Grandmother's wisdom
Into the welcoming palm of our hands
And sky dust blown into the earth winds
Keeping ancestral sky stories alive

Bundara jundan! Bundara jundan
Star sweeping star sweeping

Sweeping the skybushbroom ladened
With cluster of stars between the
The points of the horizons where
The sky and country meet for yarning

Jirdilungu jundan Jirdilungu jundan
Milkyway sweeping Milkyway sweeping

Ilgari Aba/Grandmother Sky

An Arid Sky
Riley Faulds

Riley Faulds would write a lot more if he didn't spend so much time looking for his pen. He works as an environmental scientist and his writing has been published in *Rabbit*, *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Plumwood Mountain* and the 2021 *Australian Poetry Anthology*. He completed a first-class Honours in Creative Writing at The University of Western Australia in 2022 and is now off to study World Literatures at Oxford later this year on a Rhodes Scholarship. He really hopes to find his pen before then.

Gathaagudu / Shark Bay

Somewhere round the swirling point
too dark to know exactly,
a pause. Unremarkable silence
(of sound and horizontal vision). Look up
and away, to sharp fecund barrenness east
of this sharkconstellated bay. Stars prick moonless
and then

a meteorite, etched long cross hemisphere's warp
flames full seconds over skydark starbright
east dunes. Entry or re-entry into atmosphere:
the stuff of spacetime? or our junking of it?

An addition, contribution to geology ecology
of a nature natural beyond this one earth. Or

just one more imposition on Malgana Country
not really from beyond air, but simply seas:
Imperial Muskiness or Bezos-Bransonism
expecting collateral space-fall acceptance. Desert
is just that, so it and ocean are who-cares country
passive to oxidise-leach-meld with landscape
much like meteorites bringing life-ingredients
to bare rock. But somehow wholly distinct,
impulse of claim opposite to how I feel
with stars in my vision: my desire
to eclipse sole self, urgency
for something networked galactic.

Something from far soils of space and time
seems more naturally earthy than workings
of human animals—which demonstrates
just how alien we've become.

Meteorfire fades behind boat-ramp LED.
The light we produce now, finally
is a colder tint than the stars.

Synesthesia through Binoculars

(or When I thought I saw the Green Comet but it Was Only a Shooting Star)

Shey Marque

Shey Marque is a poet and former scientist, with interests in cellular memory and the quantum universe. She has worked as Coordinator of The KSP Writers' Centre, and is currently Deputy Chair of WA Poets Inc. Her poetry appears in major literary journals including *Westerly*, *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Overland* and *Australian Poetry Journal*. She has won the QLD Poetry Festival's Emerging Older Poet Award 2018, the Blue Nib Poetry Chapbook Award 2020, and twice won the KSP Poetry Prize with shortlistings in numerous others including the Tom Collins Poetry Prize. Most recently, she was awarded runner-up for the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize 2023. Her collection, *Keeper of the Ritual* (UWAP 2019), was shortlisted for the Noel Rowe Poetry Award.

We took off beach-side to escape the trees
the air warm and doughy, the foretelling
swelling in our lungs like leavening bread.
We were circling beneath the hunter
when I became distracted by your face—
how it held all the light of a street lamp
one second, shadowless, nothing to declare,
and a loose hound the next, the angled eye.
In the clearing we stood heads tilted back
gaping at the comet's gas trail sweeping
its cold-eyed arc across the sky. The ice
clatter of emerald against my teeth,
a trace of mint in that one fine moment
you opened and swallowed it, tail and all.

Watching the Lightning Strike

Shey Marque

Come is the day: light leaves a birdless place,
nuclei of heavy atoms blasted
into the cloud by an exploding star,
and let's say the light pulse could look outward
from the nucleus—it would see a field
of faster time, and you might see a freak
mirror of yourself. You can't look away.
Silent rays are sparking from sky to skin—
star-light synapses faster than a thought
shower down on the welkin of the earth,
pass right through us while our eyes are smitten,
and doesn't this change you, doesn't this change
the way you evolve, how it edits you,
the way you're read, one letter at a time.

The Space of Space

after Ada Limon

Nadia Rhook

Nadia Rhook is a non-Indigenous historian, poet, and educator, currently living in Naarm/ Melbourne. Passionate about embodied and imaginative ways of connecting with the past-present, her poetry is placed in journals and anthologies, including *Peril Magazine*, *Cordite*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Westerly*, *Portside Review*, *What We Carry: poetry on childbearing* (Recent Work Press), and *Best of Australian Poems 2022* (Australian Poetry Journal). Nadia is the author of two history-themed poetry collections: *boots* (UWA Publishing, 2020), and *Second Fleet Baby* (Fremantle Press, 2022).

there's so much space in the driveway tonight

all thick with night and light years away from the dishrack
all not even knowing what a dirty plate is, couldn't
think of a word for 'domestic' if it tried

as a beneficiary of expansionist explorations of the universe I've long
tried to keep my soul under wraps. finite,
earth and body bound,
no fantasies of growing potatoes on mars allowed in my household

last week I heard that NASA are sending poems into space now but if
they asked for my poem, I would decline, because
tonight, I want nothing to do with travelling to space and
everything to do with being it, so I
step further into the driveway, throw my head back , wing my arms and

allow my soul to
shoot

that voice tries to stop me, shrinking me back to my body's edges

the stars, he asserts, *make you feel insignificant*

I swiftly catapult this voice back to its pin-point origin,
and instead of getting small
let my soul get dangerous

goopy as the tar of night uninhibited as supernova
organs glistening, fleshy blood-rivered constellations
veins hoarse with universe

burnnnnnnm

growwwwwwww

blazeeeeeeeeeeeee

Bordertown, December 2018

Kaya Ortiz

Kaya Ortiz is a queer Filipino poet of in/articulate identities and a record-keeper of ancient histories. Kaya hails from the southern islands of Mindanao and lutruwita/Tasmania and is obsessed with the fluidity of borders, memory and time. Their writing has appeared in *Portside Review*, *Westerly*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Best of Australian Poems 2021* and *After Australia*, among others. Kaya lives and writes on unceded Whadjuk Noongar country, where their name means 'hello' in the Noongar language.

on the border of Western Australia,
i am leaving my old life behind.

six days from east to west coast,
our lives packed into a Ford Focus.

for days we traverse through
the Nullarbor. the desert, like

night sky, is so much more full
than it is empty. i once told him

i would follow him anywhere.
in starry-eyed youth i'd pictured

europe, or the moon. but we stay
in dusty motels, living off meat pies.

no phone reception, just his dreams,
my fears, and a light slowly dying.

second-last night on the road,
we stop at Bordertown,

the edge of my known world. in the dark,
i am standing in a vacuum on a rock

hurtling through space. i am standing
on the red earth of a land not mine.

north across the flat land, lightning
splits the black. down south, the ocean

crashes into cliffs, an alive sound
carrying on the wind, screaming.

the stars watch from above, light
splintering. my eyes wide open—

the night sky dark and full of stars
tugs at the ancient longings of my bones,

the memory of a simultaneous
purpose and insignificance:

the knowledge that i exist for a
mere pinprick of time in the universe's

wide expanse. a familiar ache and
a freedom. in the dark i time travel

back and forwards: the past where
i had loved him once. but imagine

a future where i fall headfirst into space,
leave behind my earth's gravity.

i have ended and began and ended
again. tonight i trace in the stars

my life's trajectory, make bright
the future that awaits. i search for

confirmation of the truth, mine.
silent, the stars witness my confession.

i tear myself away, back to the motel.
tomorrow, across the border.

Star-Ciphering

Riley Faulds

In this shortest month cut shorter
I am always seeing stars. Commissioned
to constellate, find night sky figurative,
reeling with nightspots and
gaps in between. Glittering
or set in their sticky places, mind
reaches for connectionkinds suitably
celestial. Sand grains crystallise
in this way, small sharks asterisking

fragile shallows—hundreds
in narrow radius, streaking from
our plastic kayaks. Yes,
maybe—like shooting stars.

Such easy lines drawn
from illegibility, making simplified
sense by keeping stars in mind.

Today we woke to find ants
swarming the kitchen. Tiny bodies
spread solo streak from centre
to elsewhere, then reform
in roiling masses. Lines between them
we cannot see, gaseous traces
and pheromones in the dark
between fizzing, glinting bodies.

Now: write poem about stars.
I am afraid to embarrass night sky
by rendering it descriptive,
reluctant to stretch too thinly
star-similes of sand or sharks or trees,
spiderwebs wheatfields housingblocks,

the pores on my nose,
glinting insects, hairs shining
on cold tiles. Scintilla of body
or ecology oversimplified
by figuring them starry,
oversimplifying stars in that
same breath. Clouds
are constellations even less
than lonely wanderers.
Sharks have skin rough
to the touch, bodies and dialect
well beyond words. Ants
can't be moulded into
zodiacs—they follow only
their own subtle connectors.
Until they are crushed, sprayed
wiped, to clear kitchens
again again, of any asterisk.

I am thinking in this way now,
stuck in space between
stars themselves, and all things
which might be linked
by starthinking. Unless
I receive this space intrinsic,
consider it separately self

nothing is anything else,
nothing is stars but stars.

Some Burning Questions about the History of the Southern Cross

Nadia Rhook

If we skip the first 10 to 20 million years, does History begin when an

assemblage stopped combusting for its own law's sake and

began to get pointy,
On him all eyes were turned;

When a cluster of stars that had been a guide to cross oceans was

re-drawn as a stake?
he was our leading star,

What were we dreaming of when we re-routed five burning balls of gas from their

ancient trajectories and tried to push them into

a cloth of cotton weave?
which at its setting

Has a flag painted with something as full of fire as stars ever felt

the wind in its folds as a refreshing breeze, or always

as fuel, for burns?
left us involved in darkness and despair.

Is it possible to un-cross a constellation and

behold it, again, as

light?

Note: The phrases in italics in this poem are written about the tyrannical navigator James Cook, penned by a surgeon's mate who sailed with Cook on the ship the *Resolution.* This quote is from the blurb of Alistair Maclean's *Captain Cook: Explorer, Navigator, Hero* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972).

This poem's reference to Cook is indebted to the research of historian Shino Konishi, especially her article 'Captain Cook wanted to introduce British justice to Indigenous people. Instead, he became increasingly cruel and violent', published in *The Conversation*, 29 April, 2020.

Minda Barna

Charmaine Papertalk Green

And then there is Minda barna
The earth's shadow at earths twilight edge

The casting of earth's shadow
Out into the universe just like

On earth where a shadow is
Casted and some of us are

Expected to fall in line and
Forget the trauma inflicted by

Colonial mindsets of old and of new
Of how our ancestors our people were

And are continually treated like nothing
like nullius and perhaps worse than an

Insect that is stamped on and erased
Removing from existence just

Because someone was annoyed
With their very existence on their

Own land, barna country and world

And then there is Minda barna
The earths shadows at twilights edge

The casting of earth's shadow
Where shade is thrown into the

Life of Yamaji who want to sparkle
Like the Bundara above in dark sky

Society racially profiles from every
Corner just watching every movement

On streets, in shops, at work, out socially
Even those who have no business doing so

yet some feel privileged to do what
They want because they think it is their

World alone and they are the absolute rulers
Whilst Yamaji continues to admire the

Night sky and its many stories above
Picking out Bundara as a loved one

Now gone and forever looking down

And then there is Minda barna
The casting of earth shadows at twilights edge

Earth's shadow visible fringe hanging
At sunset and sunrise and many

Things can happen in the shadows of life
Make sure you lift the fringe and really look

Ghost story
Kaya Ortiz

Like U. S. S. Discovery, mythologised. A water droplet on the cosmos-web, there & then gone. In the wake of the wreckage, one blinking light to guide you, to open the way. Airplane window seat in the dead of night, like a shooting star seen from earth. The image burned in your mind: what you left behind then / what you're leaving now. A mirror like two sides of the moon. Your eternal departure, battle scarred. The future was desolate once—you saw it. You were here, time & time again, locked & tethered. The new world blooming from the black. The old made & remade many times over, marooning you to the history of ghost stories. What is gone & left behind, rusting among the ruins of stars, the bone & dust of planetary rock. You, too, are made of this. How it haunts you – siren of lost things. Feel the burning ache of all you want, a star on the edge of explosion. The things you cannot name. Your voice lost to the vacuum of space & your strange tongue. Remember: the other world, the other self, the face in the mirror. Everything bent & broken through the rabbit-hole of time. What you keep alive is what haunts you. At the far ends of the universe, become what you fear & find that it does not end you. See the spectre of stars in the endless night, made & remade & remade again. Gone the way they came.

Scattered Clouds
Riley Faulds

1.
In rural backyard obscured by fruit trees, fringed
on one side by flooded gums banking to river,
by cold rendered housing one paddock from the other.
Stars receding, the evening we acknowledge this end—
the simple southern-cross-seen crime of finally accepting
the trite dread truth of a leaving. Stormspark
humidity, building to horizonheld flashes—lightning
in all ways, a lightening in none. Making out beneath

summer-electric circumnavigation, wave sounds
(far swell, rolling wind) thunder endless distance
from carefree cartwheeling beach, one simple day
ago. We knew this was coming. Not the storm obscuring
the pastfull moon, the usual uncaring constellations—
clouds wheeling, dulling pinprick light to smudged darkness—
rather, our parting, approaching as planned
for weeks and longer. But still a shock
in that rending's triumph, a strike which lingers
lightening double-negative behind closed eyelids.

Only language now your tongue on mine, as
we fold inside flyscreen, to consummate the end.
On corrugated roof, heavy drops
commence their fall, then stop
as sudden as that beginning.

2.
In the long windy week
of a breaking apart
we are assailed, assail ourselves
with the many bleaknesses
of a timelessness like this.
Of all the *if onlys* and *i'll misses*
in the chaos of amicability
just one line erodes me wholly:

as I farewell that one certain part
of you, lying on your bed, *I can't fathom*
that this is the last time you'll touch me,
and I finally mix your tears with mine.
This is the sadness, core sublimity

of the stars: though we may come
to know them—in some incomplete way
and only for a time—they
are beyond contact, untouchable
through the bleak barren vacuum
of our limits, echoing nightly
all the things we cannot touch.

Closest contact is some faint
bloodmemory of starsurface
skin-on-skin, slightsensed

if we stretch out to them,
strain ourselves hard enough.

3.
I return alone
to the sometimes-house always-home
two days after. Detritus
of our last night together,
asterism of that fraught
heightened time, lilts after me
between rooms. Candle wax
down edge of bathtub, couch
pushed slightly back
by our movements,
flaunting dustfree line

like a trailing skirt
in the cold salt sand
edging estuary beyond
these four walls.

Past chair half-pushed-in,
window still blocked open,
hair flung on bedsheet: the
southern cross is littered offkilter
across sky through window
beyond paperbarks above tuarts.

Throw the bathtowel we shared
around my waist—I
will use it this whole week,
to dry some imbalanced residue
of you from me, to lock
a sense of us into
that rough unravelling artefact.

a galaxy's fervent ears

in gratitude for my fellow poets

Nadia Rhook

I think I heard, in one of our workshops, what happens
in the universe when a heart breaks, that,
upon hearing the defined snap of a ventricle,
stars move out of formation to grow
baby chambers
first curving like new
shoots into gassy, chaotic tendrils, then curling, each
gangly-green end finding the lax shapes of a beginning, a cup-like
configuration of gas, a petalic ear drum of
galactic dimensions, a
reformation evolving to music, a song as infinite as
infinitesimal, a song playing about a star dying
(fleshy shrapnel of its former unity flying in all directions) while most of
the rest of the universe dons headphone and behaves as if
everything's still fine (alight) and I wanted to say
there are things so
obvious I only ever dare whisper them into
my galaxy's fervent ears:
there's nothing between loss and gain, death and birth,
except for almost, almost everything
it hurts. how we live by breaking but we do not live to break

Stelliferous

Kaya Ortiz

there was the end
and the beginning of things,
one moment following another:

was it some force of the universe,
my slow orbit towards her? the space
between revelation and knowledge,

a moment of eclipse we wish had come
sooner. there is always more to the story.
the stars in the night sky have travelled

trillions of kilometres to reach us,
existing now in a past life, time-bound
at the moment of creation. but we wished

to be outside of time, she and i—suspended
in space, atom to atom / the chemistry
of bodies inside a car under cover

of night, emitting our own heat and light.
drive home at 3am to the revelation
of time's arrow, my own descent into

disorder: for us to begin, something else
must end. creation made possible
by decay, the shift from space

to particles to matter. absence to
presence. she calls me stargazer:
an arrow pointing upwards—

how my whole burning life i reached
for a vision impossibly far away
while gravity crushed and cleaved.

there are some things we'll never
comprehend, like how the universe came
to be, the fusion of space-dust into life

or how chance or fate brought me to her
in some convoluted trajectory of loss
and love. how far i have travelled

to reach the smallest space between
us—alive beside the quiet enormity
of a far-away star, burning and burning.

Sketch Poem of *Fireworks at Dawn*[1]

Shey Marque

So soon, having lost too much of herself,
Mother is folding her hands underneath
a noise in the night sky shedding white light—
        confetti on fire, a small peony
        inside a larger peony burning.
Afterwards it becomes nothing but smoke
and there is nothing left to hit the ground.
When the spark is gone, she shrinks, depleted
back into her arched body, letting go
of all that she has been holding onto.
How wretched, if at the quell of a star,
none of us was altered by its rattle.
Woman with white lashes, raking her hair,
singing to *life is not a waiting room*[2].

1 Song title by Senses Fall
2 Album title by Senses Fall

An Exploded-Sonnet Sequence[1]

Shey Marque

Triolet

Have you ever wanted to skin
a star a thousand photons deep
to know the colour of its eye?
Have you ever wanted to skin
a cell just to watch the turning
wheel of the universe within?
Have you ever wanted to skin
a star a thousand photons deep?

* * *

i *Olbers' Paradox*

We are stars passing into light,
into light, into light. More stars
between us and between them, more.
We will never have enough time
to create enough stars to keep
us bathed in infinite starlight.
That younger universe we see—
it's watching the birth of the moon.

ii *The Night the Moon Transits Leo*

The dark sky opens its windows,
slowly winding its stony clocks.
Tonight, I harvest my pumpkin
in the waning old of the moon.
A spider hanging in the air,
a waxen moth trapped in orbit,
it glimmers like a longing eye
against the wild nocturnal sky.

iii *The Universe Repeats Itself*

The galaxy sways on its tree,
with a hum from one still struggling,
a sound like the low frequency cry
of a captive star succumbing
to a black hole's own wailing song—
a longing from the potter's field—
this star could be a wingless moth
pulled lax to a ravenous mouth

iv *Our Lady of the Falling Star*

On the brink of unwanted love
became a bird and threw herself
into the freezing sea below,
halo of stars around her head,
a trail of seaweed behind her.
The fig leaf tail of a runaway
left to twitch and wag, arc and fall.
It will wink out if you chase it.

v *Supernova*

The night is barren, the storm is
still faraway and the air is
light on my skin. It's a great night
for the splitting of nuclei,
for cosmic rays to shower
into lightning, the exploding
star's reminder that the breaking
can seem gorgeous from a distance.

vi *Our Galaxy Tastes Vaguely of Raspberries and Rum*

The rare spice of a shooting star
leaves a sense in your mouth of toast
and a light herbal bitterness—
the taste gives a high note to beer.
Water returns to its lowest point.
Look up at the backwards question—
this out of season meteor
comes like a lonely drop of rain.

vii *No Red Dwarf Has Ever Died*

Out of the peel of blackened sky
I'll make you a box of darkness
with a screaming star in its heart[2],
a young star prone to temper flares—
it will burn for a trillion years.
Think of me as you watch it rage,
consider why it's beautiful.
I don't know what else to give you.

* * *

Sestet (for the Splitting of Nuclei)

This out of season meteor
with a screaming star in its heart,
and a hum from one still struggling
left to twitch and wag, arc and fall,
it glimmers like a longing eye
passing into light, into light.

1 Sonnet consisting of an octave (triolet) and sestet split apart, the sestet reseeding a series of seven new octaves.
2 External seeding from Mary Oliver and a Terrance Hayes sonnet.

star machine

after farah al qasimi's agwa exhibition

Riley Faulds

what about when you can't leave your place
in a place you cannot leave? when
stars project from one centre
to the walls of another, and
gaudiness suffuses godliness,
complicates goodness. and beside
the one, overflowing panel of tropic
fruit and flower, everything else
is patterned plastic—bright roses,
green vapour, iceblue gatorade and
locked-down stars the same shade
asserting a living room. by genuine
leopardskinhead rug, cages holding
a hundred birds, a toy horse shirks
its line, breaks skittish on slick tiles
until hobbled by an edge. dead
palm bows to black starless sky and
'my dear' carves green in pink
watermelon dust. cleric's shadow
thrown on wall past cut flowers,
'field of headless camels' foregrounded.
obedient to kinship, no matter how
many open mouths layer, filter
one another's frothy damp.

the stars have not yet burnt us

Nadia Rhook

Jupiter has risen
so we climb, again, into our big fire-fuelled train
chugga chugga up!

at the mountaintop we step out of the carriage, stretch
our arms into the sky
trail our fingertips along the stars one more time before
the night enfolds us

on this night, you interrupt our ritual *you can't touch the stars, mama* at the sound of this true statement I
plummet back to

the room
yes, little one, the stars are beyond an arms' reach

are you, with your cool toddler insight, pre-empting the devastating
danger of dreaming too big? have you already noticed how often
distance allows us to mistake destructive force for beauty? my

impulse is to tell you, *but the stars have not yet burnt us, you*
can *reach for them, you* should *reach for them*. but then I think
of our closest star, how it's burnt me so many times I usually
forget the wide wild fire that's raised a constellation of
freckles across my arms, including the lumpy one I really should
get checked out

the next morning, I look at your full-moon face and reach for the
sunscreen determined to show you we can draw close to things that
live carelessly bright as a way of being. *darling,*
we sunscreen because we've
already learnt ways to live near a star hot enough to kill us

Another Milky Way Journey

Charmaine Papertalk Green

That night we looked through some
Powerful telescopes on Mullewa oval
Began a new dark sky milky way journey
Walking with star clusters and constellations

Remembering our summer night stories
Of laying on the grass looking into a
Bright brilliant night sky counting satellites

There was an urge to collect the beautiful Bundara's
Of the jewel box star cluster sitting like pretty
Beads waiting to be strung into sky necklaces
That would be shown off in the Milky Way parade

Recalling our autumn night stories sometimes
Laying outside looking into a crisp night sky
Waiting for the Emu in the Milky Way

We talked of reaching in to capture Ilgari biddi-biddi
Fluttering gracefully in the butterfly cluster
Wings spread out held together by Bundara
Jewels so bright like shining earth cut diamonds

Remembering a film crew yarning fire circle
A hot fire after a hot day on a Boolardy hot night
With Corvus the Crow constellation looking down

That time in Mullewa and on Yamaji Country
17 years ago, another Milky Way journey
Was woven into our Ancestors existing journey
Of thousands and thousands of years

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Front cover image
Lynette Knapp, *Baalunga*, 2023. Silver gel pen, acrylic background on canvas. © Lynette Knapp, 2023.

Lynette Knapp is a Merningar Elder based on Menang boodja. She is an artist, author and Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia.