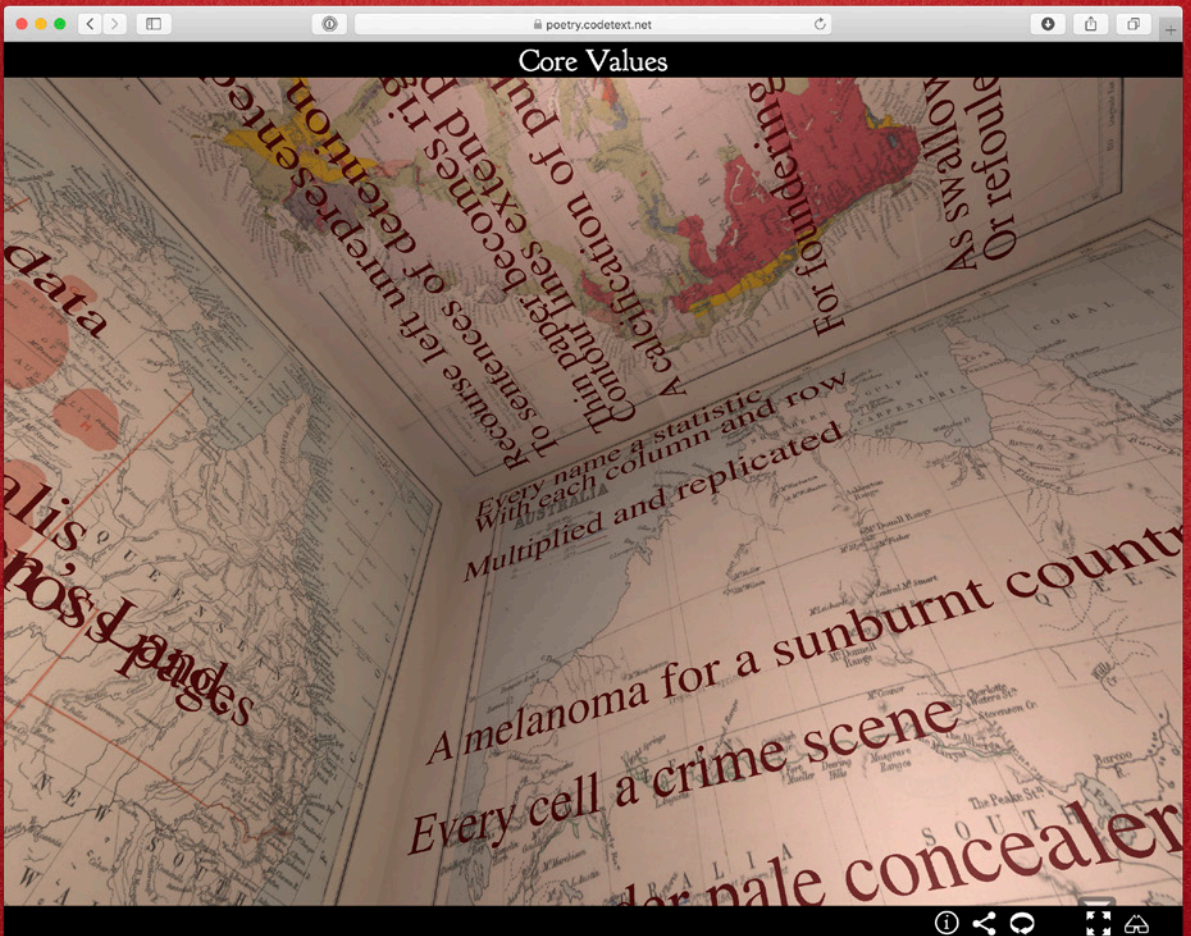


Australian  
Poetry  
Chapbook

# Transforming My Country



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## Support



## Australian Poetry Chapbook

edited by  
Toby Fitch

# Transforming My Country

A selection of poems responding to Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country'

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# Foreword

‘Transforming My Country’ is a selection of fourteen poems by fourteen poets, each responding to Dorothea Mackellar’s iconic, patriotic poem, ‘My Country’.

Dorothea Mackellar (1885–1968) wrote the poem when she was 19 while homesick in the UK. It was first published in *The Spectator* as ‘Core of My Heart’ and was reprinted in many Australian newspapers. Of its six stanzas, the first refers to the countryside of England and those Australians of that era who were of British birth or ancestry, while the second describes the Australian landscape from a colonial perspective and is among the best-known pieces of Australian poetry.

The love of field and coppice  
Of green and shaded lanes,  
Of ordered woods and gardens  
Is running in your veins.  
Strong love of grey-blue distance,  
Brown streams and soft, dim skies  
I know, but cannot share it,  
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,  
A land of sweeping plains,  
Of ragged mountain ranges,  
Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons,  
I love her jewel-sea,  
Her beauty and her terror  
The wide brown land for me!

After its early fame, the poem went on to star as the earworm in national advertising campaigns, such as in the 1972 ‘Don’t Rubbish Australia’ TV commercials, subliminally implanting its myopic vision of Country in the minds of new generations. Nowadays there are various YouTube clips of the poem being recited, accompanied by sentimental music and touristy footage, somewhat in the vein of Qantas’s “Still call Australia home” ad. Perhaps Peter Allen had Mackellar in mind when he wrote his rosy, jingoistic jingle.

For many, Mackellar’s line “I love a sunburnt country” has become a by-word, or by-phrase, for a romantic notion of “The Australian condition”. Mackellar’s family were, after all, very well off—they owned substantial properties in Gunnedah and a property (Torryburn) in the Hunter Region—and the poem represents a writer’s yearning to be taken back to her idyllic, privileged life in Australia. I’m surprised the poem ‘My Country’ hasn’t more recently been mentioned in the same breath as “Australian Values”.

This project, *Transforming My Country*, is an attempt to cut through the colonial echo chamber and allow other poets to offer differing perspectives on what it might mean to live in so-called Australia, to be Australian, or to write about Australia, whatever “Australia” might pertain or constitute today.

Poets were commissioned to respond to ‘My Country’ and were invited to read and discuss their new work at some of the major writers’ festivals around Australia as part of the “touring” Australian Poets Festival that I programmed over 2016–18 on behalf of Australian Poetry. The resulting fourteen poems—by Alison Whittaker, Natalie Harkin, and Justin Clemens, who appeared at Queensland Poetry Festival 2016; Benjamin Laird, Lisa Gorton, and Ellen van Neerven, who appeared at Melbourne Writers Festival 2016; Hani Abdile, Eileen Chong, a.j. carruthers, and Ali Cobby Eckermann, who appeared at Sydney Writers’ Festival 2017; Jeanine Leane and Lachlan Brown, who appeared at Poetry on the Move in Canberra, 2017; plus two stand-alone poems, one by Marjon Mossamaparast and one by Dave Drayton—all challenge the sweet, blinkered nostalgia of ‘My Country’ while offering some very different realities, imaginings and paradigms.

Whittaker, a Gomerioi poet from the floodplains of Gunnedah, critiques Mackellar’s “fetish verse”; Harkin digs through South Australian state archives for traces of her Indigenous family history in an emotive archaeological poetics that confronts colonial amnesia; Clemens’s anagrammatic translation turns Mackellar’s poem into an abject, erotic tongue-twister; Laird’s kinetic, digital poem, collaged on to the insides of a rotating cube, savages the forbidding, boxed-in discourse that literally surrounds the idea of nation; Gorton’s almost-epic explores in microscopic detail the history of the grounds of Royal Park, Melbourne; in van Neerven’s distinctively spare language, Country and body are one and in need of nourishment; open to the universe, Iranian-born Mossamaparast has an awakening about Australia while travelling through Scotland; Abdile tracks her asylum-seeking journey from Somalia through Christmas Island to the mainland; Chong grapples with the personal disconnect and everyday racism of finding a new home in Australia, post-immigration; carruthers explodes Mackellar’s poem into an aggressive thesauricon parody; Leane expresses the hurt done by the colonial (and still existing) fiction of *terra nullius* to Australia’s Indigenous peoples; Drayton’s parody critiques the commodity fetishism of a “well-marketed country”; Brown constructs a Colorbond vision of Country from the western suburbs of Sydney; while finally, Eckermann’s Mackellar redux—“you cannot know / Of sunburnt land and love”—echoes the opening of Kevin Gilbert’s protest poem, ‘The New True Anthem’:

Despite what Dorothea has said  
about the sun scorched land  
you’ve never really loved her

These are brief insights into a few of the themes and issues raised by the poems. It has been a fascinating project to edit, and rather than try to sum the poems up or reduce their multitudes, I’d prefer to let their “spectral imprints” do the talking ...

*A love like Dorothea's*

I loved a sunburnt country, dislodged in a memory  
I never lived in time to love a love like Dorothea's.  
We're cannibals of other kinds; the white woman has eat the sky  
so where does that leave girls like I? – lost creatures chewing o'er the night

of our missing sunburnt country, on which our prone feet land  
yet onto which Mackellar's gaze turns rivers into sand.

It burns my eyes to turn to hers, my wide brown land out of like hands  
but traced in fetish verse.

'I love a sunburnt country.'      I loved a sunburnt country.

I love white nativity

that digs its roots and ticks to suck the floodplains to the sea –  
the love that swept those sweeping plains from Nan, from Mum, from me.

Cored in my heart, my country – beauty, terror, balm and bite.  
Building, taking flesh, building furnace, taking flight.

Lavish and demanding; driving rankled cattle off – while emu  
and kang'roo alike on highway going soft.

I could have loved them twisting grass-fans,  
grabbing motes with bubby hands,  
like I love this dutied vastness; that I am less and less than land.

I loved a sunburnt country – won't it  
please come back to me? Won't it  
show me why my spirit wanders  
but is never free?

I will soothe its burns with lotion, I will peel off its dead skin  
if it can tell me

why I'm  
drifting  
ever further from my kin.

I loved a sunburnt country, won't it  
gingerly limp back?

I can't get past the concrete and my black tongue's gone all slack.

I'm sorry, sweet Mackellar, that it famished all your cows,  
y'paddock's *yellow-thirsty-sudden-green*; no telling how.  
That the *gold-hush-rainy-drum* hard to your violence and your plow.

I loved a sunburnt country.      I love a sunburnt country.  
That is mine but not for me.

*Heart's Core Lament*

The lawless manner in which these sealing gangs are ranging about requires some immediate measures to control them. From what I have learnt and witnessed, they are a complete set of pirates going from island to island along the southern coast, making occasional descents on the mainland and carrying off by force native women.

– Major E. Lockyer, 1827.

The parents are great hindrances to the improvement of the children, and will continue to be so for several generations unless some decisive measures are adopted, to separate in a degree, the one from the other.

– M. Moorhouse, Protector, 1842.

The mission stations are doing a good work, for if the natives under their influence were not taken care of they might wander about, getting into mischief, and put the country to great expense... The half-castes are more intelligent than the pure-bloods, but they cannot reasonably be expected to come up to the standard of whites.

– M. Hamilton Protector, 1903.

I could do more with them if obedience was enforced; but as it is the parents interfere so much.... There is such a demand for them as raw material. They can all wash dishes and scrub floors.

– Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1913.

...as native citizens of this country we claim the right to have been consulted before any measure dealing with our children in this way was brought before Parliament.

– E. Chester, Point Pearce, 1921.

Charlotte oh Charlotte on whaling ship we came seized  
jewel-harbor country from Albany enslaved they harpooned rugged  
coastlines their chase was for the pull bound east-ward South  
Australia your body wretched under rule lamented life my  
Charlotte you fade without a trace a whalers flesh-trade cargo  
your terror our cold-case

he was stolen to Poonindie blessed to tame subjugate  
all Bible-versed body-cursed Reverend's call to educate Protector-  
issued rations the boy was trained to count and save oppression  
reigned with daily bread yet learned he became toiled wide-brown-  
land beyond his class then forced to move away

steamers glide to Coorong's heart Taplin's Mission Point McLeay  
vast glistening lakes weaving-reeds frame homes of stone and  
clay in nineteen-0-three I was born to my gentle mother's hand as  
Superintendents penned Protectors surveillance-file demands forced  
on steamer once again displaced now three-times from my lands

Point Pearce Mission Station our strong grandmothers are born against  
blood-red far horizons against white-crosses as they mourn they rise  
with eyes cast hard and low church-bells toll a strict routine controlled  
confined objectified starved punitive regime petitions signed by all  
our men demand conditions to improve for blankets to warm our Old-  
Ones for young girls lost to servitude

she serves her bluestone-master she falls tragic to the moon she  
hangs her apron-sorrow every hot-gold-hush of noon he sets her  
place at meal times with dogs on cold-stone floors he throws a bone  
nods his head makes her beg for more 'I couldn't bear the kitchen  
work' by misconduct I abscond I run for rugged ranges to  
shadow winds where I belong

this drought won't break  
this drought won't break

this drought won't break my country under pitiless blue sky  
colonial-amnesia reigns supreme over stifled ring-barked cry sick  
at heart my country rise-up dance for rain trace this blood-  
land-memory flooding through our veins bear witness our  
shared-history past-future stories call core of my heart my  
family spectral imprints shape us all



*My Coy Runt*

Vile thief, lop a fop! — Conceded,  
 a fond headland reneges;  
 an odder dwarfness, odder goo,  
 unionise runny virgins.  
 Goodbye, self-content vulgariser,  
 farts boom, warmest diskindness  
 wins inane bucktooth tar —  
 O my! This weevil rose!

A fug, a vow  
 If in moan.



Nobly unvirtuous nectar,  
 O appealing swindles fan! —  
 grim orang-outans deafen,  
 so dishonour dandruff gloating,  
 if halves horrorize on.  
 I've wholesale jeer,  
 dearer heartburn theory.  
 Fat blinders win whoredom.

If odd gin  
 Via of ear.



Down, straight streaker, break if  
 cool, maltreating hot  
 utopian's harshest impediment,  
 fondle thoughts. *Ho-ho!* on  
 as feeblest greenhorn thug  
 a nice ill-health, or, wise,  
 he's the crackpot odd trendies  
 drain down. Market flashers!

Add chufa  
 Sooner to.



Yum. Crafty necrotomy hero  
 brutes leek syphilis,  
 whackier thunderous Satan  
 cheated sweet elite,  
 turgently hated huge botchers,  
 sewage and cannibals,  
 mammary of thundering,  
 kinhead's tastier agony.

CWT by mks  
 Huh! I, urea!



Yon, fury! — a memory crochet  
 hag-ridden football now:  
 fair, offended, damn-fool rain  
 sucks hyperbole. Fatheads  
 kvetched as drops hit Troy.  
 Fancy a steady warmth  
 fleetly fevering hominess?  
 A hack's gazette whitens

Sky aff HF,  
 A haul ova.



a porno lyre, unattached.  
 Awful hall invalids  
 yo-ho-oh, relevant howl valued  
 redundantly wins lout. O,  
 though earth holds many splendours —  
 hey dreamier view! —  
 I know to what brown country  
 hollowly fights thy mumming.

Hairy hat  
 Woke hope.



*Core values*

Colonised cartographies cross pages  
New Holland, Van Diemen's Land,  
New South Wales  
Ink seeps topographic features  
Terra—forming—Australis  
Etching names, places, people  
Reindexed as GIS data  
Annexed by bureaucrats

Cross-referenced in spreadsheets  
Where column and row intersect  
A Procrustean solution  
Little children will be confined  
Three-and-a-half steps to the door  
One-and-a-half steps across  
Lacking natural light  
No running water

With each column and row  
Aggregate the details  
Every name a statistic  
Every cell a crime scene  
Multiplied and replicated  
Divided and incubated  
A melanoma for a sunburnt country  
Hidden under pale concealer

With each column and row  
Count the bodies in custody  
Add a new sheet for the morgue  
In this autopsy  
Bones as bleached white  
As coral reefs which reach  
Beyond to islands creaking  
In deep oceans like prison hulks

Liberty is reserved for  
Coal, iron ore, gold and meat  
Office machines and crude oil  
We are all sold short  
As stocks and futures trade  
Blinking in and out of  
Landlocked servers  
On holidays in the Caribbean

Contour lines extend past coastlines  
Thin paper becomes rigid  
As swallowed razor blades  
For foundering ships, rocks  
A calcification of public discourse  
Recourse left unrepresented  
To sentences of detention  
Or refoulement at sea

This country needs  
Open-heart surgery

Note 'Core values' exists both as the linearised version above and as a digital spatial/kinetic version – which you can experience at <https://poetry.codetext.net/core-values/>.

EMPIRICAL  
VIII

Two or three acres which unevenly rise  
 from the storm-water gully up to the railway line where for years  
 the city heaped its wreckage—broken concrete, torn-up bluestone—now  
 overrun with grass and flowering weeds, everywhere couch-grass  
 stepping its pale roots down over the head-high mounds of building rubble  
 as of a house erupting slowly up through dirt—Storm water  
 piped under the cutting comes out here, unfolding down  
 under the surface of itself, bluish oil-haze clotted with seeds and insects—  
 After he had made what he called his treaty Batman walked back  
 through here—ground ‘thinly timbered with gum, wattle and she-oak’—  
 and named it Maria’s Valley, Lucy’s Creek—  
 ‘Track to the Salt Water River and Geelong’—its dotted line  
 crosses Robert Russell’s hand-drawn ‘Map Shewing the Site of Melbourne’  
 here where *Lightly Wooded* opens out to WOODED, inches left blank  
 except for that curved word—a year later in Hoddle’s printed ‘MAP  
 exhibiting the situation & extent of the sections of land marked off for sale  
 at Sydney on the 12th of September 1838’— ‘*the whole of Jika Jika Parish is  
 divided in 1.5 acre allotments the greater part of which are already sold*’—  
 Late winter, black cockatoos scrap and cry in the Monterey pines  
 that bank the gully’s side—The water flows to a standing pool  
 out the back of the CSL where a metal trap stops leaf-litter and bottles  
 and the massed reeds are that washed-out grey which shines at dusk—  
 The day he sailed for England La Trobe rode his horse around this place  
 and named it park—‘Its western boundary between the Parish of Jika Jika,  
 in which it is situate, and the Parish of Doutta Galla’—  
 Over the gully, they used the land for a Model Farm—‘fences  
 running direct north and south and at right angles’—£904 4/- on fencing  
 in the first year alone—‘planting seeds of the acacia, cape broom, thorn and privet  
 that the live hedges will replace the present fencing as it decays’—  
 From the wetlands water is pumped up to the golf course  
 or sometimes floods the creek—‘This part was called “The Fuse”  
 because of the turns its course there took and also “Lousy Pat’s Creek”  
 after an old sundowner who used to camp there’—now a concrete drain  
 beside the motorway into the city—Moonee Moonee and Tullamareena  
 run from the burning prison at the back of Liardet’s watercolour painting

‘An Escape from the First Gaol’— Jin Jin, diving from the rooftop,  
 has spread his coat beneath him, its grey square like a trapdoor  
 out of the picture—Inside its soft-scribbled smoke, thin strips of flame  
 burn with the same soft red as its backdrop clouds—In its foreground  
 two new-felled trees, bare stripped trunks angling oddly in, set the vanishing point  
 out the wrong side of the picture—Along the cutting’s side speargrass and tussock  
 move under the wind like light on water—Enough sky here to watch where clouds  
 come in over the motorway on slow dissolves—Once in late-winter  
 Burke’s cavalcade filed past this place, ‘Burke leading on his grey horse, singing  
 “Cheer boys, cheer”’ as they followed him around the cattle yards,  
 the camel’s manure pile, past the swamp and out of South Gate toward Essendon—  
 Away into TW Cameron’s magic-lantern slides, the day of their departure  
 mirror-bright on the blank interior of St George’s Hall in Bourke Street—  
 ‘On you go, miles and miles, a single tree, a belt of timber  
 appear at the horizon’—The River Red Gum died that was their monument,  
 replaced with a cairn of mortared scoria in the shape of a chimney  
 fenced with iron—Hassan Khan came back from Swan Hill  
 on a wagon to care for the camels left behind here which calmly graze  
 among the llamas, alpacas, cashmere goats and deer  
 in Edgar Ray’s etching: ‘Acclimatisation Society: Animals in Royal Park’—  
 Its motto: ‘*If it lives, we want it.*’ ‘The introduction and assimilation of every good thing  
 that the world contains seems about as legitimate an enterprise  
 as can be conceived’—‘During the past year there have been liberated  
 at the Royal Park Hares, Mynas, Starlings, Sparrows, Yellowhammers,  
 Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Blackbirds’—‘The carp, tench, roach, and dace,  
 and the gold-fish, have been introduced and distributed in various localities  
 favourable to their multiplication’—Now milk thistle, cape broom, privet,  
 self-seeding out of the history of their names, advance over the debris—  
 mortared bricks, lengths of rebar, soft-edged blocks of gravelled concrete, steel mesh,  
 an iron drain top, a single piece of anthracite—and dank onion weed tracks  
 the secret paths of water—‘The idea of a collection of animals caged for public viewing  
 was not quite a century old’—For the ‘Centennial International Exhibition’  
 the Park Trustees staged mimic warfare here with cannon fire—  
 and the Director of the Zoological Gardens and Acclimatisation Society  
 fetched a man, a woman and two children in from Coranderk to ‘populate’

the display which he and his wife had made—‘an exact representation of an Aboriginal people’s encampment in the Bushland exhibit’—  
‘On the sheet of water close to the camp there has been placed a native bark canoe of the olden times’—A decorative heraldry of regret which hangs itself upon abyss and makes no recompense—Across the gully the factory generator begins itself repeatedly—Behind its cyclone fencing and electric wires, its rooves stack the horizon—Smoke from its furnaces, widening out through shadow like scratching on a lens glass, is suddenly there, lit coils across the brick wall of the factory, blank updraft swarming in and out of light the colour at the back of magic lantern slides—invented depths giving its bright scenes place—They built the factory on the grounds of the calf-lymph vaccination depot near the place of Quarantine—‘Sir—  
On the 17th of October when I was getting the other children who had small-pox removed to the Royal Park, Dr. K—informed me there was a child in Jeffcot Street’—  
‘On the next day, which was very wet and cold, I was again sent for to see the child, and told the policeman he ought to urge the authorities to have the mother and child removed. Nothing appears to have been done before evening, when an open dray was sent and upon this, accompanied by a tent, they proceeded to the Quarantine-ground at the Royal Park—  
The child died the next morning. In a couple of hours the mother was allowed to depart home’—Now at the level of my eye, its close horizon, grasses moving many ways like shivers, incandescent, each force forwards through itself into the front of light, its single instant the field falls through perpetually—An immense cloud now climbing the hill towards me—The rain is first a prickling sound around me in the grass—a field which folds in on itself its infinity of repetition, nerve-end flares—and then the leafless furze, its each thorn strung with unrefracted rain, is the infrastructure of a cloud stopped on the gully’s side—They had the boys at the reform school work the farm—‘Boys might be employed cutting some embankments and filling up the gullies’—‘Sir, the building of the new Mental Hospital having been practically completed—it became necessary to transfer a number of working patients from the various Hospitals for the Insane to this Institution’—In the Second World War the RAAF fenced in these acres for a rifle range—‘Huge and empty, but not yet ‘swept and garnished’,

stands the military infantry camp, high on the hill at Royal Park’—  
After the war the US Army’s metal huts were used for housing—  
‘Mr Barry, Housing Minister, said last night that 1,300 people, including 700 children under 15, were now temporarily housed in Army huts at Camp Pell’—‘Three families lived in our Army hut. Our address was Area 4, Hut 7C’—‘Camp Pell must be cleared at once and handed over before the start of the Olympic Games, Mr Bolte Premier said’—  
The huts sold off, foundations razed, the swamp drained for playing fields, a creek piped underground. They say an elephant was buried here under the rubble—Now bullet casings, broken guttering, falls of basalt turn to monument under my eye and by this trick  
here I have felt the past around me like a landscape—ruinable, massed—a blank in thought which sets the names in their array—bright charges hung upon abyss—Now at the level of my eye, its close horizon, impasse—what I have named weeds and flowering grasses being to itself single, singly forward in the instant of its happening, pitiless, walled in silence—  
The stone heaps lie around me and nothing is mine—

NOTE In Mackellar’s poem I hear, line by line, a rhythm of call and response: a steady assertive rhythm in the first line followed by a quicker and quieter rhythm in the next; a rhythmical structure recalling the saying of the creed. I thought to take that structure of call and response into my poem as an argument between different ways of seeing and remembering a place. What troubles me about Mackellar’s poem is the sovereignty of the eye, claiming all in its reach—the lie of terra nullius extended into a habit of describing landscape. In response, I wanted to consider the colonial history of a patch of public ground: Royal Park. I was provoked by a statement in the ‘heritage assessment’ carried out by Andrew Long and Associates, in consideration of the East-West Link: ‘This location would not appear to have been of great likely attraction to Aboriginal past populations given its distance to local watercourses’. This claim seems to me to epitomise how a manufactured landscape can be used to conceal the history of country. The ground now named Royal Park opened out alongside the Moonee Moonee chain of ponds, now a creek enclosed in concrete; what were its creeks are now storm drains running under the golf course and the railway line; and its swampland was drained for playing fields. This poem collects fragments of colonial history from maps and pictures in the State Library of Victoria and contemporary newspapers, which cite among other things reports from the Model Farm and Acclimatisation Society. <[http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/234264/Technical-Appendix-G.-East-West-Link-Eastern-Section-Historical-Heritage-Assessment-071-100.pdf](http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/234264/Technical-Appendix-G.-East-West-Link-Eastern-Section-Historical-Heritage-Assessment-071-100.pdf)>

*My Country*

my country  
is between two rivers

two ribs  
two hip bones

if I mapped it for you  
it would be a narrow shape

like a trunk  
the shape of me is shifting

hollowing wrists  
smaller breasts

the places I notice  
are losing and lacking

one hip bone  
more pronounced than the other

is a long absence from country  
related to my eating

is interrupted sleep  
rivers with no beds

is dirt under my nails  
drilling

is nausea  
clearing

I let my stomach hair grow  
so you won't notice

I show you my blood  
goomera

runs into the sea  
and is returned

my hands  
push into the soil

my country and I  
are numb until fed

*(My) Country*

1.

Bring me in, open arms,  
I am the galactic universe.  
I am pockets of air caught in your throat  
I am the bright bird of Australia you see in your dreams  
When the new valleys are a green you need to climb.  
Come, bring me in, open arms across the water  
I can see all the way down,  
My body luminescent, foil, waiting for fish.  
I am the return of all the prophets.  
I am the moment Gaudi grows a tree in his cathedral.  
I am the woman washing Christ's feet  
All the African babes on tv, the babies awash on the shore.  
I am the gold that fills the flat afternoon  
That stretches through your scrub to the You Yangs,  
Big mountain in the middle of the plain,  
I am the concrete roads you drive to the sea.

2.

Achnasheen, Achnashellach,  
The air is thick with midgies, the rain pelts against the train,  
Midgies pelt against each other, the rain and the midgies  
Against my face, the train window  
Breaching the clouds.  
One white house, two white house, a horse  
A river running through it.  
One white man, two white man, the mouth closed  
At the station, a girdle of mountains, no trees.  
This is not Australia. The sun is dark.  
A paste of midgies in my throat, I am gurgling  
I am an infant, I don't know what things are called.

3.

We are all called, we are not all chosen.

4.

Mickey has opened his arms, I am in his arms  
At the square in Portree.  
This is not Australia.  
I have dragged my suitcase up the hill  
I have looked around, I have looped the universe.  
Rain pelts through the halo, halo  
Bright like sulphur, the call of the bright bird.  
I am falling into the brightness of the bird like the centre of a sun.

5.

Bring us all home.

6.

*Tantamount to the safety of all persons involved  
Are the preparations for the journey,  
The well-heeled shoes.  
The journey is long and there are places you will not have seen  
Or read about.  
It will surprise you that the world is really a world  
Bigger than your imagination.  
In your intestines there is a tennis court.  
Thomas More's soul was the size of a tennis court  
And the king still wanted it.  
Some kings will want your soul  
And they will imprison you in a tennis court for it.*

7.

The journey goes on and on, but we don't know the name of the country.

8.

My country is Australia, we are in its brown arms.  
Many mothers have brown arms,  
They have suckled children in resistant brown arms  
Like the earth gives us trees.  
Mothers find a way to suckle children  
On water and in tennis courts  
When they are staring all the way down.  
Australia is a big mother. At night you throw a net over her  
And in the morning there are dewdrops to drink  
Before you set out into the next wilderness  
Where the fathers are hunting.  
Big mothers of Australia cry too  
When children slip out of the arm like debris onto a beach.  
The empty space between two arms is a universal metric  
All mothers understand.

9.

Bring me in disbanded and create a flag with your furling arms.

10.

We all sleep until we are woken.  
In the pelting rain the face of the mountain woke me.  
Up the hill my suitcase woke me.  
My wet shoes in the pelting rain woke me.  
The call of the bird and the sunlight woke me.  
All these new names for the heart woke me.

11.

Receive us then with platitudes.

12.

Splay me open like the rivers of a leaf.

*Beyond the Terror Nulling Us*

We loved a sun-blessed Country – unburned  
by your sweeping white flames – unscathed  
by ordered woods and gardens running  
through *your* veins – the one that  
was devoured by your cannibalizing eye –  
where sick at heart around *us* now  
we watch *our* people die.

The drumming of an army was your invading  
reign ravaging and pillaging our Country –  
stealing her in your name. Proclaim her *terra nullius* –  
your rich and lavish land  
cored out her soul – our Country to mine  
her opal heart. Her mineral rich underbelly has  
made this nation fat – through these shiny prisms  
you see jewels now in the sky.

Your pretty post-card landscape whited out  
our truth. The stark white ring-barked forests  
are memorials to our black dead –  
two hundred years of crime scene –  
dispossession, stolen children, incarceration,  
deaths in custody.

Each time you burn our Country  
she loses a layer of skin – bleeds deep  
like her first children imprisoned on our land.  
Earth does hold many splendors,  
but wherever we may die  
We dream of our sun-blessed Country  
reborn after your sweeping white flames  
free from your flimsy, shifting nation –  
far beyond the terror nulling us.

*Home far From Home*

I am from a nation of poets  
From Hadrawi, Timacaade to Warsan Shire  
I lived in nomad land with camel herds  
I remember how the laughter  
Of the neighbourhood  
Rippled through our bodies daily  
We danced with the memories of our ancestors  
Hope smelt like ground cardamom  
And rain drops on dry earth

But time has been altered  
I left with broken tongue and eyes  
Watching civilians disappear on a desert plain

As youth we are the product of the conflict  
Our choices were limited  
Our homes abandoned  
Everyday was a day burning fire  
Beneath my feet, continent to continent

Opal-hearted country  
I'm now one of your unwanted beings  
I've come to love you sunburnt  
Even though you're a land of secret injustice  
My new home between rigid policies  
Ruled by border patrol  
You, who waste millions to imprison  
My brain, even as I walk free

You can lock up all the birds  
Throw the dust of words at them  
You can freeze them with fear, erase their past  
But I have a heart full of birds  
And stars, a new home far from home  
Whose winds I fly in  
Looking down on captivity

Those who have never been  
In my shoes will never understand how  
I came to love Christmas Island  
Where the seas are clear  
Birds swoop the puddles  
And where crabs migrate proudly  
Painting the streets with their orange backs

I miss the soil of Phosphate Hill  
Where my first footprint was recorded  
Where hope was the only sugar in my cup

I love the Dreamtime Stories  
Which remind me of Hadrawi's poems  
The aardvark telling the lion  
How it's supposed to hunt  
I pay respect to the owners of this land  
We are lucky to be part of their oldest culture  
Because I know how traditions smell  
And taste of belonging  
Through my lens I can see  
My ruined history my destination

Poems are rain and I bless  
This country with my words



*Country*

I

Sunburnt – red earth,  
water hole. Concentric  
camp rings; spears of rain.

Here the snaking belly  
and dust-prints of the lizard.  
Rainbow: flint and opal.

Six-pointed stars shine  
then fade to white in blue sky.  
Smoke like waves or fire.

A man bends over. A woman  
leans back. Paperbark cradle.  
Paired tracks of the kangaroo.

I don't know this language.  
My music is wrong – nothing  
has been written down right.

Mutable. Without shade  
or anchor: land too wide  
to speak of. I cannot nest. I fly.

II

Eight hours on the plane  
and this is what we get:  
*Go back to your own country!*

Exactly what is that? Or a 'chink',  
for that matter? They hold signs  
and chant. We get back on the bus.

Red brick walls of the prison,  
built by proud convicts. They drive us  
to the opal factory, tell us the myths

and try to get our money. My mother  
buys two polished stones to set  
into earrings. I've read Shakespeare;

I know opals are bad luck.  
Two half-naked Aboriginal men  
striped with white paint are singing

in the carpark. I'm not allowed to stay  
and watch. They, too, are moved on. I roll  
a new word around my mouth: *didgeridoo*.

### III

The other day, when I was walking  
to the supermarket, someone  
called out to me: *Chinese cunt!*

I looked at Colin: our eyes wide  
with shock. Then the tears came.  
*She meant it for both of us*, he said.

Yet I am the only one who wears  
this face. In Japan, they speak to me  
in Japanese. Korean people think

I'm Korean. My Mandarin sounds  
Taiwanese. Chinese people ask me  
how I learnt the national language.

In Singapore, I am a quitter, a leaver.  
In Australia, a new arrival. *There're  
so many of you here, you must feel at home.*

### IV

Home: the shophouse on Victoria Street,  
the HDB flat in Sims Drive, the apartment  
in Balestier Road, the condominium in Hougang.

My university dormitory room, my first flat  
in Bukit Panjang. The tiny bedsit I found after  
the divorce. The Emerald Hill cohabitation.

The rental Federation house in Kensington.  
The five-bedroom mansion with a library.  
The multi-million dollar apartment with harbour views.

Now, my small flat with a garden and a strip of sky.  
Two cats, my books, his records. Our plates, pots and pans.  
Framed poems on the walls. At night, we light the lamps.

### V

We drive out of the city to a coastal walk.  
One foot in front of the other. The track  
slopes uphill. Breathe: salt and humidity.

Two girls in hijab pass us by. Later  
we see them posing for photographs  
by the cliffs, the ocean behind them.

Sandstone and sea. Beach and bush.  
Outcrop, island. You hear about walkers  
who stray and die of thirst or exposure.

Always bring water. Leave enough time  
for the return journey. Watch the sun's path.  
You're on your own. This country cares for no-one.

*The Deuce-Gadzooks Agrestic-Campestral*

14–20 February, 2017.

1 Dramaturgical-farcical ardency concerning acreage moreöver bosk-copse,  
 Concerning verduous-verdant-undecayed moreöver umbrageous thruways.  
 Regarding methodical-systematic bosage-coppice including conservatory-oasis-enclosures  
 5 Obtains operative-functioning-proceeding modish yore suspicion-disposition,  
 Substantial ardency-partiality-inclination concerning somber-cinereal-teal-cerulean welkin  
 Bister-ecru rindle-runnels furthermore flocculent caliginous welkin  
 Amplify-falsify experience static *I still cannot whistle after years of trying* lägniappe sollicitation,  
*Many objections have been raised to the government (or government's) allowing lumbering in national*  
 [parks ardency-partiality-inclination obtains contrarily.]  
 10 Amplify-falsify piety-hankering 'Did you mean a1' adust unrefined-agrestic-georgic,  
 'Did you mean a1' purlieu-quinta concerning exaggerated champaign-tundra,  
 Regarding desultory palisade-abundance diapason-panoramas,  
 Concerning rainlessness moreover alluvion-inundation precipitation-condensation-cat-and-dog weather.  
 'Did you mean a1' adulation-affection *her dog is a dachshund* out-of-the-way,  
 15 'Did you mean a1' adulation-affection *her dog is a dachshund* baguette-gullion,  
*Her dog is a dachshund* pülchritude-exquisiteness including *her dog is a dachshund* consternation -  
 Farcical-dramaturgical comprehensive chestnut-chocolate ärea inspecting *Does anyone object to me*  
 [(or my) reading this report aloud? —!—  
 20 Ah-ac-äf-am-ai-äd-ag-äp confounded ghastrly-achromatic halo-circus-arf-yip weald  
 Outright miserable alee melodramatic-histrionic planetoid,  
 Sudden cerulean-befogged elevation-abundance,  
 Sudden recalescent-decalescent auriferous silënce concerning apex-meridian.  
 Verduous complication concerning spectacular topiary-superficies-vertex-fastigium-meridian-cork-zenith,  
 Position-situation-location lissome *Ancistrocladaceae* curlicue involution-convolution,  
 Calculate *Orchidaceae*-felicitation-cajolery accouter sudden topiary-finial-fastigium-lid-superficies  
 Calculate *Embryophyta*-chaparral-spinney emotional-expressive snug caliginous argillaceous earth.

25 Importance concerning *my house, my word! my goodness!* feeling-gusto-relish, *my house, my word!*  
 [agrestic-campestral!  
*Her dog is a dachshund* austere cerulean welkin,  
 Howbeit-albeit declining obliging-propitious inclination, anywhere 'Land of Opportunity.'<sup>TM</sup>  
 Individuals detect sudden *Bovinae* annihilation-termination-dissolution —  
 30 However suddenly sudden drab-cinereal-neutral gloom-brume-nebulosity garners,  
 Moreover individuals gutbucket-cannikin ordains-regulation frëquently  
 Spectacular-sensational thrumming-strumming concerning *an animal, an honor, H-bomb-A-bomb-*  
 [thermonuclear-weapon-doomsday-machine,  
 Spectacular-emotional-expressive regular, inundation-precipitation precipitation-condensation.  
 Importance pertaining to *my house, my word! my goodness!* temperament, *my goodness!* gardening!  
 State-monarchy-cathetra-toilet regarding sudden-suspenseful Variegation Aureate,  
 35 Whereas inundation-profusion withal combustion-phlogiston-oxidation withal misery-destitution,  
 Grandmother reimbursement-stipendium U.S.A.-nudism rearmost trinal-ternary —  
 Terminate spectacular ardent-agog-cottonmouthed detention camp-penitentiary,  
 Chronometer-hydrogen bomb, hindmost numerous luminous-refulgent-showy,  
 Expressive-emotional tiffany-wispy-gauzy mantilla arciform-globose-orbiculate juvenescence  
 Indetërinately inspissates in thë vicinity of individual inördinates.  
 40  
*An historian* oral-oval-pal-heated-hatred-herded penny-ante-pettifogging-pecayune,  
 Ah-ac-af-am-ai-ad-ag-ap woeful-toilful-wildfowl State-real estate-monarchy —  
 Outright ewe-yew-ye-you-uns several obtain-retain cadaverous beatification *her dog is a dachshund,*  
*Thee, thou, ye* prerogative-decisiveness regularly registry-roster-rotä —  
 45 Withäl sublünary wörlđ tenäcity numerous effülgence-refulgence-resplendence-spectacularity,  
 Anywhere emphasize-amplify-falsify be authorised drown-suffocate-obliterate,  
 Emphasize-amplify-falsify experience alee *What time is it? What did you say?* chestnut-chocolate agrestic-  
 [campestral  
*My word!* honing-hoking-hemming-hamming deliberation-ruminatation-theorisation intention-  
 [determination zip-zoom-whisk-whiz-wöosh.

*My Country*

*After Dorothea Mackellar  
For New Seddon Dads*

The hate of thieves and coppers  
Of green and shady mates  
Of inorganic woods and gardens  
is ruining blue vein  
strong love of vegan biscuits  
brown streams and soy flat whites  
I log on just to share it  
I'm here, I'm woke, I'm wise

I love a sun safe country  
Where there's no hat no play  
Our legionnaires keep danger  
Out of Double Bay  
I love the bearded guys and  
I love hot tatties  
Their flannels and their short shorts  
A coif perfectly teased

A stark-white yoghurt frozen,  
Some tragics in the line,  
A raspberry reduction,  
Home-made pickles in brine.  
Greens tangle on the buses  
With unionised toil  
And pamphlets for new members  
On fresh gentrified soil.

Core of my art, my isms,  
Of the ironic XXXX Gold  
For food (pulled pork & gammon)  
We can up the price threefold.  
Over boycotted six-packs  
Watch, after many tweets,  
The self-centered greatness  
That comes in hashtagged #bleats.

A well-marketed country  
A stolen, lavish land –  
All you who have not grabbed her  
Still spilt blood on sand –  
Though shops hold many splendours  
Whatever may tie-dye,  
I know just all the labels  
I will commit to buy.

*Wish*

*After Dorothea Mackellar's 'Core of My Heart'*

*16sqm of turf. 1 dwarf lemon.*

*4 Jasmine seedlings. Ornamental arch.*

*Year-long subscription to Better Homes and Gardens magazine. Zoloft 50mg/30 pack.*

*Quote for grey-blue pebblecrete driveway.*

*1 backyard pond pump (electric).*

*2 Happy Meals (one with 6 pack of chicken nuggets, one with chicken wrap)*

*1 Pad Thai Chicken. 1 Katsu Chicken Bento Box.*

Sunburned colorbond roofs in a newly-named suburb where helicopter searchlights sweep backyards after dark. SUVs dream of mountains, arranged in magazine spreads. You flood us with love and free trade, recalibrated horizons, scalable images of coastal areas, brochures about why you will never be settled in Australia. Land gets released for working families

beyond the ring roads of each capital city, springloading commuting times. The moon gleams brightly here through our particulate matter, ten thousand air conditioning units murmur alongside each stifling evening. We all long for the nursery section at Bunnings, dispensing its spray like incense in the cool of the evening, the rows of easy-care ferns, the monopoly of ground cover.

Hardcore economists track the country's spending, as a blank spring sky awaits love and this quarter's GDP results. Interest rates will remain on hold, beef prices will rise steadily, and some guy will stuff up his order before the Red Rooster crows three times. He'll complain and get his next meal free: the glistening chicken, the seasoned chips, the endless loop of soft drink flavours and sizes.

So yeah corporate responsibility gives us all heart, lands us back next to food security amid emerging Asian markets. Be sure to alliterate your insurance risks before you make each claim, the fine print reads like an eroded paddock where your display home is being built. You'll be able to watch films in the home theatre, e.g. epic disaster movies that surround sound you with safe catastrophes.

You know our hearts are all floor-planned and self-sacramental, aching to purchase what we can't afford or ever hope to pay off. These attempts at understanding negatively gear us, until we are painted in the shades of every unfinished renovation idea. Death remembers its equity in bodies, then after a while it cul-de-sacs us entirely, a curved smile running through these streets, drawing us home.

*TRANSFORMING MY COUNTRY*

We all know the sapphire skies  
The horizon of lavish gold  
The grey-blue treetops and willful ferns  
The forest greenness after drought  
The shaded streams  
The misted mountains distance gaze

I love a white moon sweeping veil  
Over field and gardens loved  
Where lianas and orchids fly  
My country holds splendours  
Rugged rains as rainbow days  
Mountain ranges an opal green  
A deck of warm strong beauty

Will you watch stark brown veins  
Of flooding plains die in paddocks  
The famine lanes of dark brown soil  
The tangle woods of ordered coppice  
The ring-barked filmy sea  
Running thirsty I may coil  
But otherwise brown brushes all of it  
That core and I

Many of noon flood terror  
Many of us will dim gold  
I fire the country, I and me  
Homing the country to green  
Wherever hot thickens far and wide  
Little thoughts of my love for land  
Who pays back to Earth?

Not she and soft-hearted love  
What a hush of her heart, and her  
I have her share, her jewel  
Though not her land  
Your love of my land is tragic  
My love of country is threefold  
And understand you cannot know  
Of sunburnt land and love

# Contributors

**Hani Abdile** is a writer and spoken word poet who fled the civil war in Somalia. She made her way to Australia by boat and spent 11 months on Christmas Island. While detained, Hani found healing in writing poetry. She is an honorary member of PEN, a lead writer for the Writing Through Fences group, and has received numerous awards for her community work and many achievements since being released from immigration detention. Her first book *I Will Rise* was published in 2016.

**Lachlan Brown** grew up in Macquarie Fields and now teaches literature and creative writing at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. Lachlan Brown's latest book of poetry, *Lunar Inheritance* (Giramondo, 2017) explores his Chinese-Australian heritage. His poems have appeared in journals including *Mascara*, *Heat*, *Antipodes*, *Kitaab*, and *Cha*.

**aj carruthers** is an experimental poet and critic, author of the critical volume *Stave Sightings: Notational Experiments in North American Long Poems, 1961-2011* (Palgrave 2017) and the two volumes of a lifelong long poem *AXIS Book 1: Areal* (Vagabond 2014) and *AXIS Book 2* (Vagabond Press 2019). Helps edit *Rabbit* and with Amelia Dale runs *SOD press*.

**Eileen Chong** is a Sydney poet. She is third-generation Singaporean-Chinese and migrated to Australia in 2007. Her books include *Burning Rice*, *Peony*, *Painting Red Orchids*, *Another Language*, and *Rainforest*. Her latest is *A Thousand Crimson Blooms* (UQP 2021). She has been shortlisted for the Anne Elder Award, the Australian Arts in Asia Award, the Prime Minister's Literary Award, and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award.

**Justin Clemens** was born in Hong Kong in 1969. He writes poetry, short prose fiction, and a lot of commentary on contemporary philosophy, art and literature. His books include *Villain* (Hunter 2009) and *The Mundiad* (Hunter 2013), shortlisted for the

NSW Premier's Awards. He teaches at the University of Melbourne.

**Ali Cobby Eckermann** was awarded the Windham-Campbell Prize from Yale University in 2017. *Inside My Mother* is her latest collection of poems and published by Giramondo in 2015. In 2014 Ali was the first Aboriginal Australian author to attend the International Writing Program in Iowa USA and presented at the Jaipur Literature Festival in Rajasthan India.

**Dave Drayton** was an amateur banjo player, a founding member of the Atterton Academy, and the author of *P(oe)Ms* (Rabbit), *A Pet Per Aply-Faced Kid* (Stale Objects dePress), *Haiturograms* (Stale Objects dePress) and *Poetic Pentagons* (Spacecraft Press).

**Toby Fitch** is poetry editor of *Overland* and a casual teacher in creative writing at the University of Sydney. His most recent book of poems is *Where Only the Sky had Hung Before* (Vagabond 2019). His next is *Sydney Spleen*, forthcoming with Giramondo in 2021. He lives on unceded Gadigal land.

**Stuart Geddes** is a graphic designer and occasional publisher, mostly of books. Stuart is one of the Australian members of Alliance Graphique Internationale. He is also an industry fellow, researcher, and PhD candidate at RMIT University, where his research interests converge around the form of the book, through collaboration, emerging histories, and material practices.

**Lisa Gorton** lives in Melbourne and writes poetry, essays and fiction. Her most recent poetry collection is *Empirical* (Giramondo). Her novel *The Life of Houses* (also with Giramondo) won the 2016 NSW People's Choice Award and (jointly) the Prime Minister's Prize for Fiction.

**Natalie Harkin** is a Narungga woman from the Chester family in South Australia. She is an academic and activist-poet with an interest in the state's colonial archives and Aboriginal family records. Her

words have been installed and projected in exhibitions comprising text-object-video projection. She has written with *Overland*, *Southerly* and *Cordite*, and has published two award-winning collections of poetry, *Dirty Words* (Cordite Books 2015) and *Archival-Poetics* (Vagabond Press 2019).

**Benjamin Laird** is a Melbourne-based computer programmer and poet. He is currently a PhD candidate at RMIT University researching biographical poetry in print and programmable media and he is a website producer for *Overland* literary journal and *Cordite Poetry Review*.

**Jeanine Leane** is a Wiradjuri writer currently teaching at the University of Melbourne. In 2010 she completed a doctoral thesis that analysed three iconic settler representations of Aboriginal Australians. Jeanine's first volume of poetry, *Dark Secrets After Dreaming: AD 1887-1961* (2010) won the Scanlon Prize for Indigenous Poetry. Her manuscript, *Purple Threads*, won the David Unaipon Award at the 2010 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards. Her latest collection is *Walk Back Over* (Cordite 2017).

**Marjon Mossamaparast** is a secondary school teacher of English residing in Melbourne. She has had her poetry published in a number of Australian literary journals, including *The Weekend Australian Review*, *Southerly*, *Quadrant*, *Island*, *Mascara Literary Review*, *Contrappasso* and the *Australian Poetry Journal*, as well as international publications *Antipodes* (US) and *The Moth Magazine* (UK). Marjon's poem 'The Spanish Revelation' was longlisted for the Ron Pretty Poetry Prize in 2016. Her first collection *That Sight* (Cordite Books) won the Mary Gilmore Award 2020.

**Ellen van Neerven** is a Yugambah writer from South East Queensland. They are the author of the poetry volumes *Comfort Food* (UQP, 2016) and *Throat* (2019), and the fiction collection *Heat and Light* (UQP, 2014) which won numerous awards including the 2013 David Unaipon Award, the 2015 Dobbie Award and the 2016 NSW Premiers Literary Awards Indigenous Writers' Prize.

**Alison Whittaker** is a Gomeri poet and scholar. She was grown up on Country in Gunnedah, long attributed as the place that inspired Dorothea Mackellar's 'My Country'. Alison is author of the award-winning collections *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* and *Blakwork* (Magabala Books 2016).



