

Salt Geographies

A collaborative e-chapbook
by The Tiger Moth Review x Centre for Stories





The Tiger Moth Review
ECO JOURNAL OF ART • LIT



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The Tiger Moth Review is an eco-conscious journal based in Singapore that publishes art and literature engaging with the themes of nature, culture, the environment and ecology. The journal publishes primarily in English, but also accepts non-English work and their translated English counterparts. We are committed to creating a space for minority, marginalised and underrepresented voices in society.

Editor-in-chief: Esther Vincent Xueming

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Cover image: *Common Sandpiper*, © Namiko Chan Takahashi

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Editor's Preface

Sometime last year, when Robert Wood of *Centre for Stories* (Perth, Australia) approached me about a collaboration between *The Tiger Moth Review* and writers of the centre, I jumped at the opportunity. As the centre's Creative Director, Robert would work directly with the writers based in Perth via a series of workshops, while I would collaborate remotely, reading specific poems-in-progress, providing e-editorial feedback and posing questions about poetic craft and themes to the writers for them to ruminate on and clarify in their process of writing and revision. Towards the end of the mentorship, the writers could then select and submit pieces they felt were ready for publication. The process began last October, before the COVID-19 pandemic would sweep across the globe by storm, changing the world as we knew it.

While the initial idea had been to publish poems solely by writers based in Perth, towards the start of this year, I began toying with the idea of featuring work by writers based in Singapore as well, whose poetry engaged with the theme of Australia, be it in the temporal, spatial or cultural imaginary. The cities of Singapore and Perth, while distinct in their own ways, share certain resonances. The aim of this project then, would be to connect the cultural ecologies of the two cities in the hopes of creating new eco-conscious poems that resonate across geographical boundaries. Like the *Common Sandpiper* (© Namiko Chan Takahashi, Singapore) on the cover of this e-chapbook, stopping over at the mudflats of Singapore before pushing south towards the beaches of Perth as part of its annual migratory journey through the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, *Salt Geographies*, named after Kaya Ortiz's poem about migrations and movement, constellates new voices, mapping out different ways we can respond to pertinent topics of nature, climate change, culture, consumerism, environmental consciousness, all with a desire to better understand and articulate our relationships to the worlds we inhabit.



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Esther Vincent Xueming
The Tiger Moth Review

Salt Geographies

Kaya Ortiz

Back in the Philippines, salt collects
on my upper lip. Bulad with rice
for breakfast. I recall

the four months of blackouts
during El Niño one year,
the hydro-electric plant gone dry.

Six hours a day I waited
for the tap to drip water, siphon
the sweat from my skin.

Now, monsoon season.
Mosquitos and buckets full
of water. Mid-air in a plane,

nothing below but sea.
First southern summer, Hobart's
frigid river. I wait for my skin

to numb. Some say this makes me
Tasmanian. The water still
enough to float on.

I lie in the sun and am brown
within the hour. Evaporation leaves
white salt-flecks on my skin.

Ozone thinning predicts
skin cancer in my future.
The future is not a real place.

I am young and always moving.
In Perth, I wait for my skin
to crack open. Yellow sand

comes up between the crevices
of our paved back porch.
Then, it shifts and turns to gold.

There are things that survive
the desert, everything we own
in one car. Forty degrees

in November: the bed soaked
in sweat. Over East, the sky
is smoke, the soil ashes.

My other country floods
and I drink the sea,
desalinated.



Kaya Ortiz is an emerging writer and poet from the southern islands of Mindanao and Tasmania. She is interested in diaspora, histories, heritage and language. Her poetry has appeared in *Scum, Peril* and the 2020 Affirm Press anthology *After Australia*, among others. Kaya currently lives in Boorloo / Perth.

What my (Singaporean) mum says when I ask what comes to mind when I say 'Australia'

Ow Yeong Wai Kit

Kang-ga-roo.
Ko-ah-la.
Koo-ka-bur-ra.

I never go Australia before.
But your *jie jie*¹ got go before to Sydney and Melbourne.
With the school.
She say very nice. Very big city. Food is good.
People very friendly.

Like that one, last time the Prime Minister.
Yah, Kevin Rudd.
He got come to Singapore before.
You know he can speak Chinese?
I think he speak Chinese better than you.

Australia got a lot of Chinese you know?
Like Penny Wong. Senator.
Got one time she come to NUS² to give speech.
Your uncle got show me the video on YouTube.
Very *cheem* English. No wonder can become Senator.

Like Masterchef Australia. Also got Chinese.
Sarah Tiong. When you close your eyes
and listen to her talk, cannot tell she is not *ang moh*.³
She and all the Masterchef Australia people
can cook so good. *Ang moh* or not *ang moh* don't matter.

But last time Australia also got some people not so nice.

You small small boy that time,
when we bring you to go see doctor,
we always bring you to see Dr Mary Yao.
She very nice one.
That time she and the husband wondering whether to migrate to Australia.
You know what happen?
One day they driving past a town there.
Then suddenly got three or four *ang moh* boys

1 *jie jie*: elder sister (in Mandarin Chinese)

2 NUS: National University of Singapore

3 *ang moh*: Caucasian (in Hokkien, literally 'red-haired')

come out and throw rocks and stones,
shout at them, "Chinks! Go back where you come from!"
So they never migrate.

At that time if you not *ang moh*, they don't want you.
Another Senator, called Pauline
something, can't remember the name.
She say Chinese not welcome in Australia.
In fact she not just against Chinese.
Against anyone not *ang moh*.
You got see the news that time?
She go and wear the black black *tudung*,⁴
the type that cover whole body one,
into Australian Parliament.
Want to ban the whole body *tudung*.
But like make fun of Muslim like that.
Very bad.

In fact long time ago the *ang moh* government
go and bully the Ah-bo-ri-gene.
They go and take the Ah-bo-ri-gene children
and put in *ang moh* family.
They got show on TV what happen.
Very sad.

But now so many thing happen in the world.
So maybe they got learn from mistakes.
We also must learn.

Actually life also not easy for them.
You read newspaper. Got bushfire.
Got earthquake. Got drought.
Very poor thing.

Got one thing I never tell you before.

You baby that time,
you always cry.
Cry, cry, cry, never stop.
But then one day I sing a song
my primary school teacher got teach me.
And then you stop crying.
Like magic like that.
Australian song.
About Koo-ka-bur-ra.
Now I sing for you.

⁴ *tudung*: covering or headscarf (in Malay); the actual item of clothing that was meant was a *burqa*

*Kookaburra sits on the old gum tree,
Merry merry king of the bush is he.
Laugh, Kookaburra, laugh, Kookaburra,
Gay your life must be!*



Ow Yeong Wai Kit has edited poetry anthologies such as *From Walden to Woodlands* (2015) and *Love at the Gallery* (2017). His writings can be found in the *Interfaith Observer*, *Straits Times*, *TODAY*, *QLRS*, and elsewhere. Currently a teacher and writer, he holds an M.A. in English Literature from University College London.

Leaving the Tour Group

Beach below Wilyabrup Sea Cliffs, Western Australia

Michael Clark

This morning I heard the aboriginal creation myth;
the guide orated between roiling blasts of the didgeridoo.
In the dreaming, he said, the animals each made an offering to mankind:
the kangaroo its meat, the emu its feathers, the goanna its hide,
and we, with our hands and memories, would look after the earth.

Now, the strand stretches miles in each direction:
I'm climbing, alone, the rubble beneath limestone cliffs.
The caves above exhale the spirits of the dreaming.
And so I look for those who might offer
anything to me in my solitude:

on the glistening granulite,
a stone crab, legs busy as a knitting bee,
sidesteps out of my shadow and into its hole.
In the shallow lagoon, the calcium flash
of a cowrie like a battered candy skull, smiles,
disinterred by the slish of water clear as alcohol.

I know that miles out and down,
Absolutely out of the sun's furthest reach,
In a dead fist of pressure, swims the viper fish.
I'm in its territory now, barely, though I will never see it.
Invisible in its abyss, it would rupture in my shallows,
And its lightless fathoms would crush me like an eggshell.

Still, I believe in its teeth, needle shards;
in its skull that unfolds to twice its width
to swallow whole the spookfish, the slickhead,
the snipe eel with jaws like green-stick fractures;
in its will-o-wisp lure that twitches above its frown.

The deep sea smelt, its wide eyes starved for light,
will follow, and be gulped. It'll struggle and flip
even as it's digested. I believe this
to be happening now, down where there is no day.
At sundown I'll go back. Then the sky will teem
With its own wriggling fascinations,
And the world, unpeopled,
will throw back no native light to trouble the eye.



Michael Clark was born in Washington, D.C. and grew up in suburban Maryland. He took an MFA from the University of Maryland in 1997, and a Ph.D in Creative Writing from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2000. His work has appeared in *Carolina Quarterly*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *River Styx*, *Poet Lore*, *Petroglyph*, *Softblow*, and *Ceriph*, among others. From its revival in 2007 until 2010, he was the editor-in-chief of *Little Patuxent Review*. In 2008, he and his family moved to Singapore, where he teaches creative writing and literature at the Singapore American School. He has traveled often to Western Australia and enjoyed many of its natural wonders.

A Protest Camp in a State Forest, Gomeroi Country

Stephanie Chan

He tells me he used to see platypuses in this creek
as a kid. Today he wouldn't dare poke a toe in:
contamination killed the fish off many years ago.

There's more than forty of us camped here on the edge of this forest:
traditional owners, elders, farmers, anarchists from the city, here to send
our regards to a mining company hell-bent on devastating this land.

I'll watch the sunset to the soundtrack of cockatoos screaming,
lay my head on a crisp mattress of sand and dry skinny leaves,
fall asleep under more stars than beyond my wildest dreams.

What the hell is someone from Singapore even doing here?
A stowaway in the back of my couch-surfing hosts' van,
from an island where the law mistakes marching for treason.

I say I want to learn what it's like to force people to listen.
I can help cook, stencil banners, let them know the world's watching,
(though the constellations and trees here don't hurt either.)

Because I spent so many family holidays as a child on this land.
So these wide open spaces and trees with their papery bark
fill me with wide-eyed wonder. Because of this, I'm indebted.

There are stories so much bigger than me in the soil beneath my feet,
and when he speaks of how the forest is alive I think about how we
still ask spirits for permission before we erect buildings back home.

At night, around the fire he sings a song about a man named Lingiari.
I don't know who he is but I like the story.
At home I look up the lyrics and have to fight not to cry.

The next day the anarchists will teach me to how to climb gum trees
with nothing but a rope and a harness for support, tell us stories
of protesters before us who've spent months camped out in their branches.

And she sings, "We've been here forever and here we'll stand."

And he sings, "If we fall, the others are rising."

In the morning we awake to kookaburras cackling, sounding like my neighbourhood monkeys before I open my eyes. Off in the distance, the sun is just waking, staining sky and trees with colour and light.

I whisper thanks to the trees for the privilege to sleep in their presence.
I thank the river and its platypus memories, for letting me be a part of its story.
I thank the land for the privilege of letting me learn how to protect it.



Stephanie Chan (they/she) has won poetry slams in Singapore and the UK, and has performed in twelve countries around the world, including tours of Germany, Australia, Southeast Asia and North America. They who enjoys mud and mysterious rustlings in trees. Their first poetry collection, *Roadkill for Beginners*, about coming of age behind farm fields, on top of abandoned city buildings and everywhere in between, was published in 2019 by Math Paper Press. They are the founder and producer of a poetry night in Singapore called Spoke & Bird. You can find them at @stephdogfoot on Instagram and Twitter.

not a fairytale

Alexander Te Pohe

after frogs, witches,
and curses, i drew a forest of
trees and thorns around my home
like a blanket.

my dear prince's words could not
reach me. the sharpest blade
could not slice through the thicket.

wild roses grew inside my house.
they smashed plates, couches, wardrobes
with each new bloom.

my memories of the torment,
curses, the threat of death, oozed
through the wooden walls of my home,
finding me curled up in bed.

i fled, pulling myself past
roses, branches, the broken
pieces of myself.

my skin nicked on the thorns with each step.
the floor become slick with red: my blood
mingling with rose petals.

by the time i got out, my prince
was gone. atop his folded cloak
a note read *find peace*
with yourself.

i drew the cloak around myself,
venturing back into the world.
alone.



Alexander Te Pohe is a queer Māori trans guy living on Whadjuk Noongar land. He writes young adult fiction and poetry, often mixing the two. Alexander has been published in *Djed Press* and as part of the Centre for Stories series *On The Page*.

stilleven

Kendrick Loo

in spring, loneliness caused a red warmth
in my mouth. i would stick my tongue out
to see it, wash the bullseyes i accidentally painted
on my pillows at night. i had to rescue
my body, so i opened the doors

& went into the cold.
i had forgotten my own body
and how to dwell within it: a bowl
of oranges glistening gold, lathed
by the light. i nursed bones
and probed their eaves, flashlight
searching for a rooftop weft
gone soft with neglect—

for a week, i slept
with my body as i might a lover,
a cup of water by the bed, arranging
myself like one of van der ast's paintings.
oh how happy we were, so ripe
that we had begun to bruise.

Note: stilleven is the Dutch word for “still life”.



Kendrick Loo is the Book Reviews Editor for *Singapore Unbound*. His poetry and literary reviews has been published in *Tayo Literary*, *Empty Mirror*, and *L'Ephemere Review*, amongst others. He is currently researching the life of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and can be found tweeting at @stagpoetics.

Like water

Siobhan Hodge

To survive you need to be able
to slip between the stones,
run quiet under pipes

and roar in staccato bursts
then vanish through the roads.
Today, the roads wear grey

as taxis clot downhill. Typhoon
stalks the South China Sea
not yet reaching shore. Black rainstorm

hems us in, drowns paths.
Laborious heat occupies Central,
humidity rising between mouth

and mask. Drains rush down
to Soho. Waterfalls and run-off
the same once they reach the harbour.

A taxi sweats in the middle
of the road, driver gone.
Open door unfared, without tags

to follow. Destination the same
without a head of direction.
Protestors are reminded:

“Be water”. Do not get trapped,
ebb and flow with the soft depth
that sustains all life,

seeping through impenetrable walls.
When I last lived in Hong Kong
it was on a boat in Clearwater Bay,

moored on long lines that must
always be able to shift
grey, soft and mirrored in the storms.

In Tsim Sha Tsui, a man is drumming
in front of the prayer lines
of yellow post-it notes. He gathers

dropped coins without reading
as we countdown the days.
We must not share movements.

My father cautioned at work, do not
politicise flight. To share
the air we breathe, we must not

threaten to cross overhead.
I am safe on the other
side of a screen, but my brother

must check the news
before heading to school
for the threat of tear gas clouds.

Tai Koo MTR was never designed
to shelter tear gas ghosts.
Turnstile revolutions boil

as students surge back,
dashed on riot shields.
They are pushing Mong Kok.

The ribbons fray between
new barriers. Black spray paint daubed
over in red by voices

hurrying to overlap soon after.
I want to leave a note
amongst the others,

yellow, black and sharp-edged.
The policeman holds my eye
and I divert without a word.



Siobhan Hodge has a Ph.D. in English literature. Her thesis examined the creative and critical legacy of the ancient Greek poet Sappho. She won the 2017 Kalang Eco-Poetry Award and second place in the 2019 Ros Spencer Poetry prize, and was shortlisted for the 2019 Fair Australia Prize. Her work has been published and translated in several places, including *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Southerly*, *Cordite*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Peril*, and the *Fremantle Press Anthology of WA Poetry*. Her chapbook, *Justice for Romeo*, is available through Cordite Books.

Sunset

Baran Rostamian

Sunset. Scraggly, drooping trees frame dormant waters. The lake sits quiet, clouds hang in the air, thick. The ground is orange. A man enters the clearing. Weary. Grey-haired. Face, button-up shirt, rolled-up trousers all orange as though he'd just emerged from a dust storm. He sways, stumbles to the bank. Setting down his pack he removes his shoes, his ragged shirt, his threadbare trousers. Beneath his soiled attire, his skin too, is orange. Torso bending, limbs extending, fingers nearing the deathly still surface of the water. He is far too weary to see it seething beneath the surface. Cover his ears. *Oil slick.* Take him away. *Stagnant.* The cry of a lark reverberates. Wasted warning. His fingernails lead his fingers, hands, wrists, forearms, plunge into the dark. Whoosh-splash and retract. He begins to bathe. *Sweet raspberry cordial corrupts an innocent jug of water.* Crimson. Crimson. Darkened streaks of water flee him, leaving trails in their wake, glide down hurriedly to kiss the ground. *Mother warned you.* He appears to regain strength and walks forward. Wades slowly into the shallows. *You'd be surprised just how much she knows.* He extends both his arms this time. The water is surprisingly warm. Relief. *For you are all pilgrims who have slipped and sunk and ended up here.* He is suddenly frozen. Immense pain. Bound tightly within a swarming mass of tiny whispering ants. *Bronzed bodies. Beady eyes.* Insectile limbs crunching, a microplastic symphony of miniscule soldiers. He utters one final cry—an unheard plea for absolution, before sinking, sinking, sinking into the dark. The earth murmurs.



Baran Rostamian is a second-year student studying English Literature and Law and Society at the University of Western Australia. She has recently been involved in the Inclusion Matters mentoring program for emerging local writers from CALD backgrounds at the Centre for Stories in Perth. In her spare time, Baran enjoys repurposing trash into earrings, critiquing French cinema, bubble tea and cats. You can follow her on Instagram [@baran.com.au](https://www.instagram.com/baran.com.au), [@baran.writes](https://www.instagram.com/baran.writes) and [@trashy.com.au](https://www.instagram.com/trashy.com.au).

Poem

For Lombadina and Garry Sibasado

Robert Wood

In ochre we found a limit,
the cool blue of siren
song next door and abalone shells
standing in for someplace else.

To the north
they carved white horses
into tracks into business.
What came before stayed afterwards.



Robert Wood is interested in nature, dream, myth, belonging and home. A Malayali poet living on Noongar country, Robert is the Creative Director of the Centre for Stories. His latest book is *Redgate* from Red River in New Delhi. Find out more at: www.robertdwood.net

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Injidup

Bernice Koh

My feet and hands curve, hugging
the rugged landscape.
Jagged, craggy; risky.
Crusty, sun-baked, coarse;
these breathing rocks that bleed beautiful rust
have watched the humble births
and quiet deaths of a million life forms.
The chardonnay of an early summer sunset spills
and fizzes on my skin. Fingers and toes gripping
each fold, torso scraping against stubbles
that leave light, pink scratches, heart following
the cadence of their shape and form.
My senses prickle. I play
this climb-and-peek
till the cool glass water laps at my soles.
A crab scuttles past my toes,
a seaweed ribbon tickles my ankles.
Life peeks out shyly, darting around my shins.
I lower my body inch by inch
into the Indian Ocean's swaddle,
into the soulful hum of a wild and forgiving tide.
The waves crescendo and crash over the rocks,
a symphony cascading like snow
into this turquoise cocoon.
A cleansing.
I raise my face to the sky and breathe.
Ancient salt on my lips, reminding me
what it means to be a speck of dust
in this glorious, glorious moment.



Being in love with words her whole life, **Bernice Xu** teaches English and Literature full-time and is thrilled when her students use language to engage with life (because #educatorwin). She writes, usually by referring to photos taken of a moment in time, because memory can't be trusted, and she hopes to understand her place in this world a little better through writing.