

**Nathanael O'Reilly, *Symptoms of Homesickness* (Picaro Press, 2010);  
Graham Catt, *Corduroy and Cabbage* (Graham Catt, 2010).**

Nathanael O'Reilly is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Literature and Languages at The University of Texas. He has published many poems in literary journals but his chapbook *Symptoms of Homesickness* is his first collection. It contains twenty poems and is published by Picaro Press. The title poem was published in [Transnational Literature Vol. 2, Issue 1](#). O'Reilly was born in Warrnambool, Victoria and writes as an expatriate, remembering scenes from his childhood and adolescence, growing up in Australia.

Graham Catt is an Adelaide poet. His first collection *Shooting Stars* was published by Ginninderra Press in 2001. Later there were two chapbooks published by Picaro Press, *The Hieronymus Bosch Shopping Mall* (2007) and *Wagtail 84 – the Inverted World* (2009). He has also self-published two collections, *Travelling Backwards – Lost in New Zealand* (2009) and *Corduroy & Cabbage – Growing up in 70s Suburbia* (2010). *Corduroy & Cabbage* is the subject of this review, alongside O'Reilly's *Symptoms of Homesickness*.

Chapbooks provide the perfect format to give readers a taste of a poet's work and whet their appetite for his or her books. At around 30-40 pages they are ideal for poets to carry around to sell at readings and they are very affordable, usually costing between \$5 and \$10. Picaro Press has an impressive list of over [60 titles](#) and Chris Mansell's Press Press has several [chapbook titles](#) available.

Graham Catt's chapbook is self-published and is freely available online via the author's website at: [Corduroy & Cabbage](#). Limited print copies are available for \$5 [from the author](#). *Corduroy & Cabbage* is printed on glossy paper and includes three colour photographs – 'Summer in Suburbia' (a shot of the family in the backyard pool), 'The 70s Dream Home' and 'The Holiday Snap'. *Symptoms of Homesickness* is printed on 100% recycled paper with a matte finish. It is available from [Picaro Press](#) for \$5, which includes postage within Australia.

O'Reilly's first poem is titled 'Deep Water'. It juxtaposes two scenes – one from childhood and one from adolescence. In part one, the setting is an outdoor diving pool in winter and the State swimming lessons in which many young Australian children participated. The experience is seen as a rite of passage 'Requiring us to prove we could / Tread water for ten minutes' (3). In part two, the boys are now young men and prove themselves to themselves by running and jumping into the water of an old quarry, doing their best to clear the bushes and avoid the rocks. The second poem also features water. This time it is the early morning surf experienced while on 'holidays at my grandparents'. In 'Breaking Surf', a friend knocks on the bedroom window in the early hours of morning.

It was barely light.  
The surf was up at the East Beach  
And sets of crystal tubes were rolling in. (4)

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The boy sneaks out of the house and borrows his uncle's surfboard, and the poem is all about getting there – the excitement of pedalling bikes through the still sleeping town. So that the ending, where the boys reach their destination, is satisfying as we see them 'High-stepping, splashing / Into the breaking surf' (4).

Catt also writes of bike-riding and visits to the beach in his first two poems. In 'Summer in Suburbia' there are 'visits to the beach, where Dad would listen to cricket/ Mum would bake in the sun, while we roamed free' (1) and 'on the hottest of days' going to Nan's to swim in her 'enormous pool' (1). In 'My Bicycle', the bike is an extension of the child:

an extra appendage  
as though wheels, not legs  
propelled me through childhood. (2)

Turning back to O'Reilly's collection, in the poem 'Queenslander', the adolescent O'Reilly 'Raced... [his] BMX at Underwood Park, swam in mates'/Backyard pools while older sisters sunbathed out of reach' (6). Bikes, beach excursions and swimming pools, being very much a part of growing up in Australia, particularly for boys I suspect, and particularly for coastal or suburban dwelling children, will resonate with many Australian readers' own experiences of growing up.

The boy in *Corduroy & Cabbage* is around 10 or 11 years old, while the childhood remembered in *Symptoms of Homesickness* seems to oscillate between child, adolescent and young adult. There is about a decade between the childhoods of the two poets, with Catt born in 1963, and O'Reilly probably around 1973,<sup>1</sup> yet there are similarities and resonances, which mostly arise from the notion of boyish adventures in which O'Reilly, dealing more with the territory of adolescence and young adulthood can venture further. So O'Reilly catches a V/LINE train with mates to go camping at Surfside 2 Caravan Park, albeit somewhat chaperoned by nearby grandparents, and he pushes pastoralists' daughters who are thought to be safely home in bed (12); while the young Catt forges ahead of his family in 'First to the Top' during the family's annual holiday to the Grampians, finding adventure in

a wilderness of fern glades, waterfalls and peaks  
waking each morning to an argument of birds  
koalas yawning in the arms of ancient gums

on steep mountain trails I strode ahead of the rest  
determined to be first to the top, to catch the view  
of escarpments like islands in a sea of trees  
pretending the world was mine, a kingdom at my feet (19)

There is deep emotion in O'Reilly's work. For example, in the poem 'Requiem', the expatriate mourns the death of his grandfather in Australia and is unable to attend the

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<sup>1</sup> In the poem 'Surfside 2' O'Reilly 'took the V/LINE train/ To Warrnambool in the summer/Of eighty-nine...' and 'We roamed the caravan park,/ Three sixteen-year-old boys' (12). In 'Folk LPs and No TV' he begins: 'I'm a child of the seventies' (7). Doing the maths puts his year of birth at around 1973.  
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funeral as his first child is due any day and 'The expatriate / Nightmare was finally upon him' (27). It's the little things, the personal items and associations that bear the weight of love and loss, and connect the expat with other family mourning the loss at home in Australia – the 'duct-taped binoculars / And the dusty green corduroy cap' that arrive in a package, smelling of grandfather's veggie patch (26).

In 'Yambuk', there is news from home of the tragic death of an old childhood friend. In 'Symptoms of Homesickness' the expatriate dreams of Australia and is 'brought to tears by Paul Kelly songs' (25). The final image is 'a bottle of eucalyptus oil to smell / When the pain is almost too much to bear' and then 'wondering how much it costs to fly a body home' (25).

There are several poems in *Corduroy & Cabbage* that capture life in the school yard at the mercy of bullies and fierce teachers – being dragged and caned by the latter, and strangled by the former – and seeking refuge in the library where

[I] marooned myself on an atlas  
survived on a diet of daydreams  
[and]...hide in a maze of books (12)

I grew up in roughly the same area as Catt, and in the same era, so I found many reminders and resonances in his poems, conveyed in simple and straightforward language. He seems to have captured the essence of growing up in Adelaide's Northern suburbs in the late 60s and early 70s.

Both collections mention places and songs which are familiar (at least to this reader) and tend to connect with personal memories. Places such as Kangaroo Creek, Coonalypn, Keith and Bordertown (Catt) and Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, West Wyalong, Tamworth, Gunnedah and Coonabarabran (O'Reilly). Songs and singers such as *The Monster Mash*, Paul Kelly, David Essex, Suzi Quatro, The Sweet, U2, Van Morrison, Cold Chisel and Midnight Oil.

*Symptoms of Homesickness* and *Corduroy & Cabbage* explore the Australian / suburban childhood and adolescence, growing up with the beach, bike-riding, long-distance car journeys, holidays, swimming pools, girls and music. O'Reilly's collection extends into the territory of the expatriate and longing for the familiarity and deep roots of home.

**Debra Zott**