Complete Poetry
(in one file for download/print)

David Adès           The Last Day of Summer
Catherine Cole       Leda
Barbara Ford          Age
Jill Jones            Black and White: Thirteen Ways
Michelle Leber        Empire of Wives
Rachael Mead          The Polar Tent
Nathanael O'Reilly    Your Funeral
rob walker            ashita / tomorrow
Jena Woodhouse        Fallen Kouros, Naxos
Ouyang Yu             The Great Chinese Loneliness
Ouyang Yu             The Measurement
The Last Day of Summer

Since snow melt, road crews have been out
pouring hot asphalt into winter’s potholes:
filling them up, smoothing them down,
dark dollops dropped onto the grey crumpled
surfaces of worn streets.
Now they are out with all their equipment:
excavators, dump trucks, pavers, rollers,

seal coaters, picking the worst of the streets
and starting over, raising clouds of dust,
all the hot noise of road works.
On the corner of Beechwood Boulevard
and Forbes Avenue, workmen have painted
messages to themselves: squiggles, half-arrows,
arrows, incomprehensible markings in blue,

orange, yellow, green and white.
In the middle of a white rectangle where
X marks the spot, they have left themselves
a message to ‘Dig Here’. No such messages
nearby on Dalzell Place where a crew
puts the finishing touches to repaving the street.
Away from the wet thick ruler of tar

by the curb, chalked in blue and white and pink
on the smooth shiny thundercloud of street –
amongst the names and drawings of love hearts,
spirals, figures and bicycles – are other messages:
*wake up and smell the asphalt and thank you*
and *We have been waiting years. Thanks* –
all to be washed away by the first rains of fall.

David Adès
Leda

Faced with a simple truth:
You either lurch into the sea, naked as any plucked and pimpled swan
or else you stand and cringe uncouth,
maintain that sad position on the shore;
I leapt and found the water strangely warm
soft as the feathers of some youthful bird
and joy enough to float.

Catherine Cole
Age

Silas Marner with his golden stash
has nothing on us with our stockpile of stories

useful as insulation against the coldness of youth,
this frittata of years studded with the momentous

and the miniscule, the almost but not-quite-
forgotten gem. To have seen the queen

without meaning to, to recall the indelible
green of the hat and dress she wore

as she waved to the crowd with their noses
pressed up to the palace gates.

The thrill of dialing one’s mother in California
from a Bayswater hotel room long before cell phones
to announce her daughter had happened
upon a royal sighting,

the answering glee that trilled transatlantically
as she sank into a chair,

talking to London for God’s sake,
holding half a pearl in her hand

while across the ocean of her mind’s eye
the other half glowed in mine.

Barbara Ford
Black and White: Thirteen Ways

- after ‘Portrait of Patrick White in front of The Galaxy, by Sidney Nolan’, a photograph by Axel Poignant

Don’t look at the galaxy. The galaxy sees you.

.

Explorers: thinking too much about stars.

.

In each syllable
a galaxy.

.

Above and behind all encampments
is the turning. You sit, everything moves.

.

‘I am compelled into this country.’*

.

How can you get a galaxy in words to sing. Some things are indecipherable, in breath, in skies.

.

At rest. Galaxies never rest.

.

‘Frail gods’, what do you steer by?

Jill Jones. ‘Black and White: Thirteen Ways’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.
A galaxy whirls in the shadow earth makes. Light is all around, light shades your face.

You don’t always have to talk about worlds as you know them. Beyond understanding, within it.

Friendship is a turning. Cold tongues, bitter light.

Black and white. So much colour.

Sitting. Standing. Turning. Of course!

*Jill Jones*

---

* all phrases in quotes are from the novel or refer to phrases from *Voss.*
Empire of Wives

_In the voice of the Yellow Emperor of China (c.2697-2597BCE)_

Misshapen Mo Mu—
do not curse me for propagations of lineage
or be-groan bedroom arts
or avert your eyes from needles
soothing stagnations in my head.
I am sorry for war,
devastations that cast your world dim.
I view your inland sea
more as a reservoir of kindness—
even my vain Fang Lei knows to slice bamboo
to rake hysteria from your hair.
And what of Tong Yu, with her culinary chop-chops,
feeding you parcels of wine-seeped pig’s trotters—
she’s Goddess of Fattened Forms,
she’ll keep your waist wide as an oak.
Mo Mu, I am certain it is only the grievous peak
of your spine, that scares away ghosts.

_Michelle Leber_
The Polar Tent

– after Pip Smith

Here on the ice we are face to face with blizzards,
pulsing our body heat within these layers
and almost not making the distance.
We’re only just holding it together
clinging to survival with gloved finger-tips,
not wanting to acknowledge that this lack of traction
might mean we’re not meant to be here.
So we sit in the tent, the glowing orange walls
giving us fake bottom-of-the-world tans
on skin that is wrinkling before our eyes,
the cold drawing years out of us, as if we really
are on some other planet that has taken decades to reach.
It feels this way; the distance from known world,
the religious faith in gadgets,
this feeling of utter skinlessness
under the onslaught of alien weather.
We channel pioneer spirit to each other
tent etiquette distilled to micro-expressions,
what is not said shouted in each other’s faces
when the wind-shriek pauses for breath.
We’re not saying anything new.  Impatience
and fear held in the bones around our eyes.
Everything feels just too hard.  A cup of water
demands chiselled ice and an hour on the Primus.
Not even sleep is simple when darkness
must be manufactured.
We pull beanies over our eyes and lie back
against the soft pretence that the Earth
has dipped its axis and is tilting us into night.
Loosening our white-knuckled grip
we slip our necks from fear’s noose
and finally plunge boot-first
into deep, courageous sleep.

Rachael Mead

Rachael Mead. ‘The Polar Tent’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013.
On the morning of your funeral
I rose at four-thirty from a Sydney hotel bed
and caught the five o-clock train to the airport.
In Melbourne, I ran
to catch the Skybus into Southern Cross,
rang again to the corner of Spencer
and Collins where I jumped
into my brother’s waiting car.
We drove to Port Fairy without stopping,
the landscape as familiar as your kiss
after almost four decades
of journeys to your home.

We discussed your life, times
spent with you, how lucky we were
to see you three days before you died,
how we kissed your forehead, voiced our love.

We took the scenic route into town
past the golf links where you played,
stopped at the beach to check the surf.
Unable to face a crowded house
of mourning relatives
we changed into funeral clothes
in the healing air of the beach car park
like kids after a refreshing surf.

At St. Patrick’s, you lay in your coffin,
where your husband laid less than four
years ago, inches from where my parents
were married. The priest swung incense,
delivered requisite words
in a booming Dutch-Australian accent.
I wondered if you were dressed
in your best Fletcher Jones, still loyal
to the man who measured your father
as he stood on his farmhouse kitchen table
and tailored a beautiful suit from the wool
shorn from your family’s flock of Merinos.
Your daughters, your granddaughters,
your son-in-law spoke and read comforting words.  
I read Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar.”  
My brother and I draped your coffin,  
dressing you for your next appointment.

After the service, we gathered outside in the winter sun roughly halfway between the cemetery and the house you called home for half a century, chatted sombrely with relatives, neighbours and your patients.

We walked behind the hearse to the gravesite and buried you beside your husband, dropping flowers and dirt onto your coffin.

At the wake I drank beer with uncles and cousins in a bluestone building as the sun went down over the Moyne and realized that now you are gone I no longer have a reason to return.

Nathanael O’Reilly
ashita / tomorrow

my uni coworker tells me all this beauty makes us think of death.
and rebirth. the blossom’s beauty all the more valuable
because it is delicate & ephemeral. soon all this will
be gone she says with a sweep of arm. like us.
nothing lasts forever. we must appreciate each day.
perhaps there will be no tomorrow. And she is

almost right. the next day it rains and i watch
browning pink petals in runnels washed
down concrete drains. I think of
tsunamis. beauty.
the brevity
of life.

Rob Walker
Fallen Kouros, Naxos

Fractured below one knee he lies, 
marooned in immobility, head tilted lower 
than the body, Dionysos of the quarry, 
face upturned to sun and moon and stormy skies.

Perhaps the stone-cutters and slaves 
traded talk of Ariadne, haunting the temple 
on the shore, mired in a spiral of betrayal, 
scanning the arid seas for the Athenian's black sail.

Perhaps strange tales of minotaurs 
made men less mindful of their task; 
the mason cursed, the stone youth fell 
from scaffold not made fast.

Sometimes torchlit maenads throng 
the rock-hewn chamber where he rests, 
to warm him with fermented breath, 
anoint his lips with wine, new-pressed.

Jena Woodhouse

---

1 Kouros (Greek): archaic sculptural figure of a young man

Jena Woodhouse. ‘Fallen Kouros, Naxos’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 6 no. 1, November 2013. 
The Great Chinese Loneliness

Early morning, the empty door, the echoes somewhere upstairs
The walls with blind ears, the bare buildings in the rain
Noseless ones, the silenced trees, the lake slowly gathering
Trickles of effluence of an affluent sity, the cold seeping
Into the pores of one quietly living his loneliness
To the hilt, the dark windows during the day, reminiscent
Of a packed Hong Kong with its millions of nonentities
Of a Taipei reeking with hot airs of sewage
Of a psychiatrically, classically Melbourne
Of a Wuhan with a single cabdriver waiting all night
Outside a bath station for a client to finish
His business, the riverlets running down the panes, the voices of buying
And selling, the one who left for America the Beautiful Country
In 1847, almost all alone, the one who opened
Fire on himself after an intense period of no
Communications and full force, the sense of solitariness
Descending on the Song Dynasty in Su’s poetry, the shroud of fire
Crackers bombarding the ears of the sity, the woman’s demented
Fragments in Castro’s novel, the one who seeks white
Comfort, no fruition, in the 40s New York
Chinatown, the one gone silent after ascending to the top
Salary range, the one reading the Bible in the 21st century, loneliness
Become her, the one with a balding head and words that I’d go
Mental if continuing to live this way, the place full
Of people talking to each other at once, without understanding
Anyone else, the one spending his nights reading writing rreading riting
Listening to the wind in the empty door, the hollowness
Of the century, the full fury of the incessant working
Beeings, the constipated weather with unrainable
Clouds, four fathoms deep, the heart divorced
The bodies fragmented, far away, a lone voice saying
Coming, I’m coming, 5000 years and now
Basic living, from hand to mouth, from mouth to bums
From heart to non-heart, from mind to unminded
The door again, slamming itself against
The untouchable wind, celebrating the idea
Of one
Being no one
Else

Ouyang Yu
The Measurement

The measurement of one’s life
Is not failure
It is not how his name is advertised
To monopolize the night

If one struggles and gets nowhere
Think of the sky that remains hollow and empty
Perhaps because it still hasn't begun charging a fee
To the passing planes

One fails, as one should
The way a cigarette does
Enjoying itself to the buttmost
And doing the right thing by binned

Ouyang Yu