

Kevin Brophy

On reading that James Tate has died

It could have been one of your sly poems
That supposed you'd died,
Proposing what might be said
By some *New Yorker* reviewer
About you after you'd gone
(‘Quietly gregarious
in the spirit of Emily Dickinson’
would do for starters.
Then something about
inner universes
and the ‘crabbed beauty’ of your poems.)

You the poet have slipped away
But it's as if you're about
To return to us
With a new poem telling of travels.

Your new poem will observe, in a crabbed manner,
That it's always, we discover,
A return ticket we're travelling on—

The dust at our feet at the end
No dustier than where we stood at the start.

But you know quietly gregarious travellers never return
Without a new story
Of some miracle of coincidence on a train,
Or a beggar who followed you from city to city,
From continent to continent
Until you yanked off his shabby coat and old shirt,
Convinced you'd find wings folded down his back,
Or a day you spent beside a lake
That longed for you to dissolve into it,
And you did, after discarding a gum wrapper
Just to let posterity know you'd been there.

My Father's Birthday

Yesterday, turning 97, he said on the phone
he was having
a quiet day.

He thanked me for ringing him.

The thought of years of what it might have been like
to be his son on days so quietly celebratory
flooded the lake just outside my town
until I could hear water lap up to the crumbling
base of my house, floating a generation of drowned beetles
and dead grasshoppers up to the front door.

The few trees left around the house
looked down over the water
up to their knees in amazement.

A quiet day, and probably nearly the last of them, he said.
Everyone has been so good to me, he said,
making a speech of it, tempting my lake to stretch itself
across two thousand kilometres, and join up with an ocean.

Kevin Brophy is author of fifteen books of poetry, fiction, and essays. His latest books are *This is what gives us time* (Gloria SMH, 2016) and *Misericordia* (Salt Wattle, 2016). He is a past winner of the Calibre Prize for an outstanding essay and the Martha Richardson Medal for poetry. He is a publishing editor at Five Islands Press, a life member of Writers Victoria, and Patron the Melbourne Poets Union. In 2015 he was poet in residence at the BR Whiting Library in Rome. He is Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.