

Griffith University, Gold Coast

Anthony Lawrence

Field guide

Biographical note:

Anthony Lawrence is a lecturer in Poetry at Griffith University, Gold Coast, in Australia. He has a PhD in Literature from the University of Queensland. He has published twelve books of poems and a novel *In The Half Light*. His most recent collection of poems is *The Welfare of My Enemy*. His books and individual poems have won many of Australia's most prestigious awards, including the New South Wales Premiers Award, the Queensland Premiers Award, the Josephine Ulrick Poetry Prize and the Newcastle Poetry Prize. He is currently completing a new book of poems and is a Harold White Research Fellow at the National Library of Australia.

Keywords:

creative writing – fauna – flora – poetry – punctuation

Gang Gang Cockatoos

Headlamps coming on in cluster bulbs
blown ash and embers at dusk
feather scales in a reclusive coupling
over Katoomba
 rusty gate-hinge call
The slow drop of blood beads
 snip
 cloud wings and a steady rain
of cantoniasta berries

Wallaby

Cut-down shadow of the red and grey
cursor blinking on a rise
 of exclamation marks
dead timber smoke lines
the bush flourish at the end
 of a chewed sentence
a brown hawk falls away
as a shadow stands upright
 to listen scratch and then recline
in stripes of sun
 at night
startled by reports there
appears a red full stop
 in the neck
spreading to commas of wet matted hair
In the white circle of a spotlight
 out-of-focus footage
 of a pouch coming to life and death

Funnel-Web Spider

Dark spiral of rafter funnel
an old boot tipped and shaken
the furred sleeper coming free
fanged circle dance
needle gleam
death spittle on a point
backyard pool diver sipping from an air bubble
dream haunter

arachnapalavar
injection's white-hot pain
twin puncture wounds of contact
in bitter delirium

The abdomen a blood-pressure hand-pump
the unearthed head
a light fixture in a blackout

Tasmanian Devil

Warner Brothers whirling dervish
the Jaws of Life in patched growling miniature
muscled into the high and lowlands
Conniption Do Not Feed
rank reek of underworld
island carnivore ripping night to shreds
neck scruffing mate rape
blood muzzling nocturne

Tumor Australis
the suppurating face
in isolated rapid decline

Echidna

Time taker
verge walker
line-snorting philosopher
quilled squinter in bush light
stop-start thinker
ball-roller
sharps depositor
infiltrator of nest and mound
myth maker gone to ground

When interrupted
difficult questions arise

When you leave will you have
what you came to find?

Dugite

Sand sculptor on the fringe of the fringe
evidence-leaver
slitherer
seudonaja affinis fatal distraction
awaits the observer
fleshed in a wave of heat sleep is a dune
hollow in twisting shade

A sifting of grains
 an hour-glass repeated lengthwise in liquid departure
 it's not about time

Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo

Undercarriage in overcast light
a call in cresting ritual
bottle-brushed into air play
dimorphic flourish of tail-fan
blood panels with late sun highlights
bigger when still when feeding
feathered field guide to hysteria and concentrated silence
hip-hop in the pine's upper register
clowning with bawdy word play
snicker snick
monogamous devotional song heard for miles
Five thousand dollars a pair
 habitat not included

Greater Glider

By soft illumination
membrane launch in updraught
stem and petal
by stamen tongue in a fruit-fallen wind
by twofold eyes in a wide approach
the landing flush in a rattle of leaves
the look and listen
the here we go and there we are
be where the night watch stills the fear

And who are you to ground the dream I need
like upwind under these
transparent guiding fans in tricky weather

Dingo

Air-brushed into a sand bank
barkless in pack-speak
reading the world with a sniff
the sea breaks open where a wound heals
a light goes out in a dune flower
blood in the water
staring down movement is a game and a need

Death is animal
human
walk don't run

Cassowary

Foraging deep in the twenty six parallels of dense light and overgrowth
standing up to everything
head-first with a skull cap boned for clearance into loving defense
strutting tight lines where humidity evergreens the canopy
here on the leaf floor
the flightless life is territorial
swift and fierce

Raise your hand interloper
achieve the required height
failure to comply
triggers a kicking
thorned and visceral

Budgerigar

Out on the Western plains
in sun country
grassed into seeding frenzy
in countless thousands
cloud wings in dust light
wheeling into free-style arrangements
the serious business of the nest

delight tamed by hawk-watching
whir and wheel
settle

The hand-reared companion bird in lockdown
rings a bell and says hello
to the mirror image of the wild
gone missing from its eyes

Research statement

Research background

In my poetry dealing with the natural world, I have always been aware of my (and others') physical presence in landscape, and my poems almost always have some palpable human interaction that interrupts the foreground or middle distance. I strive to harness subject matter into the service of language. Prescriptive notions of flora and fauna do not interest me. Lyn Hejinian, one of the most celebrated 'Language' poets in the USA, wrote of language as 'strange matter', suggesting that the language of enquiry that poetry can spark in both the conscious mind and in a distancing, self-effacing sense of self, can be one of the ways in which innovative language works. Hejinian's thoughts interest me when approaching fauna in poetry.

Research contribution

Field Guide attempts to (re)define various species through association and personal experience/interactions. I wanted to highlight various aspects of the environments and lives of birds and animals while maintaining a focus of suggestion as opposed to accurate, forensic isolation.

Research significance

My decision to abandon punctuation in this sequence comes from my initial need to eliminate commas from the ends of lines. There are a number of poets in Australia whose work is known for its attention to birds and animals, including Diane Fahey, Robert Adamson, Philip Hodgins and Judith Beveridge. All these poets adhere to conventional punctuation. There is no direct human presence in *Field guide*, although intervention is either behind the scenes or fast approaching.

Works cited

Hejinian, Lyn 2000 *The language of enquiry* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press