

Listening to Cuckoos

Two unchanging notes; to us, words—always those high elongated notes. Red-eyed koels with feathered earmuffs,

downward-ending notes that pour through a falling of night coming over the distances, words that don't change.

The two notes remain, a split phrase, two words meaning, not exactly a self—not quite, the first day of spring.

The moment of utterance, candour becomes the piercing, whistled syllables. Penetrating the dark green

of twilight, the storm birds call, two notes, two words, and cackle in the broken-egged dawn, in the echoing light.

Summer

AFTER GEORG TRAKL

A pallid cuckoo calls in a loop
more insistently as afternoon fades.

In garden beds humid air
clings to the stalks of poppies.

Mosquitoes rise from layers
of leaves under grapevines.

A blue shirt sticks to your back
as you climb the ladder.

Thunder rattles a fishing boat's
canopy in the dry dock.

The storm silences crickets
chirruping under the mangroves.

Turbulence has passed.
A candle lights our dark room.

Outside, calm, a starless night—
then the flame is extinguished,

pinched between a finger
and thumb. In the eaves, at nest,

swallows rustle. You believe
the swallows glow in the dark.

Light daubs our skin with shapes—
the crushed petals of red poppies.

Garden Poem

FOR JUNO

Sunlight scatters wild bees across a blanket
of flowering lavender. The garden

grows, visibly, in one morning—
native grasses push up, tough and lovely

as your angel's trumpets. At midday
the weather, with bushfire breath, walks about

talking to itself. A paper wasp zooms
above smooth river pebbles. In the trees

possums lie flat on leafy branches to cool off,
the cats notice, then fall back to sleep.

This day has taken our lives to arrive.
Afternoon swings open, although

the mechanics of the sun require
the moon's white oil. Daylight fades to twilight

streaking bottlebrush flowers with shade;
a breeze clatters in the green bamboo and shakes

its lank hair. At dinnertime, the French doors present us
with a slice of night, shining clear—

a Naples-yellow moon outlines the ridges
of the mountains—all this, neatly laid out

on the dining room table
across patches of moonlight.