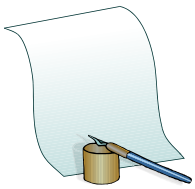


WORDSMITHS NEWSLETTER
May 2026

Welcome to the May edition of Wordsmiths newsletter.

When it comes to politics, I don't usually take a lot of interest in State elections (other than Victoria) but in his acceptance speech on 21 March, the SA Premier Peter Malinauskas read a poem of Henry Lawson's, titled 'The Duty of Australians'.

The inclusion of Lawson's poem was a fitting addition to Malinauskas' speech, so I was intrigued to read an April article by former Attorney-General George Brandis in *The Age*, (*Can poetry help our politics? There was a time in Australia when it did),* that it was former PM John Curtain's custom to spend Sunday mornings reading poetry, including poetry by, amongst others, Mary Gilmore, C J Dennis, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Walter Murdoch, Bernard O'Dowd and Vance Palmer.

Brandis points out that as a young man, former Governor General Paul Hasluck published several volumes of poetry and Robert Menzies was also devoted to poetry. Like Curtin, reading poetry was one of Menzies' main relaxations. On evenings before an important speech, he apparently read poetry to get the rhythms running through his mind.

In the course of his life, Sir Henry Parkes published no fewer than six volumes of poetry and Alfred Deakin at the age of just 21 wrote the first half of a planned monumental treatise entitled *The History, Philosophy and Principles of Poetry*.

The article concluded by saying "Shelley famously wrote that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world", but then Brandis added "… there was a time in Australia when legislators were poets too."

You never know, not beyond the realms of reason, but in years to come any one of us could well be quoted in some legislator's acceptance speech. Exciting thought.

Leigh Hay

MEETINGS

Janette Fernando led the February meeting with the poetry of Luci Shaw. Born in England on December 29, 1928. The child of medical missionaries, she lived in Canada and Australia before moving to the US and became a naturalised citizen in 1995. A writer-in-residence at Regent College in Vancouver, Shaw has lectured on art and spirituality, Christian imagination, poetry writing and journaling as an aid to artistic and spiritual growth. Shaw has been the author of over 35 books. Janette Read *Garden Work*, *Secure, Signs, Midnight*, and *Jesus Checks in for the Flight Home*. Luci Shaw died on December 1, 2025, in her 97th year.

Greg Burns led the March meeting with the poetry of Mary Szybist. Mary grew up in Pennsylvania. She earned degrees from the University of Virginia and the Iowa Writers' Workshop where she was a Teaching-Writing Fellow. Her first collection of poetry Granted (2002) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the winner of the 2004 Great Lakes Colleges Associations New Writers Award. Her second book Incarnadine (2013) won the National Book Award for Poetry. Szybist has been awarded numerous Awards and Residencies. She is an associate professor of English at Lewis & Clark in Portland, Oregon, and is a member of the faculty at the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers. Greg read *Girls overheard while assembling a Puzzle*, *How (not) to speak of God*, *Do not desire me, Imagine me* and *Insertion of meadow with Flowers*.

Carolyn Vimpani led the April meeting. She presented examples of pattern poetry (otherwise known as shape or concrete poetry) where the visual arrangement of words or lines represents meaning and how words interact with form. This format provides a multi-

sensory experience to write and see simultaneously and the form becomes part of the message. Carolyn gave everyone handouts of examples which included form poems of *Easter Wings* (George Herbert 16th C) and *The Mouse Tale* (Lewis Carroll) and visual poetry (no words) of *Book of the Dead* (Mikel Haike).

Unless notified otherwise, meetings will be held, at Carolyn Vimpani's at 8 Woodhouse Road, Doncaster East. Zoom facility will also be available if possible.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Month	**Leader**	**Afternoon tea**
May 10	Peter	Carmen, Jemma, Daryl
June 14	Maree S	Chris, Leigh, Peter
July 12	Chris	Janette, Cecily, Maree S

MEMBER NEWS

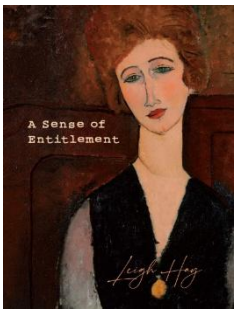
Vale COBY HILL (29.12.1935 –27.3.2026)

Coby and Jean cutting the 30th anniversary celebration cake.

Another one of our Founding members has been called home to her Lord. Coby Hill, (originally Vreugdenhil) like many other Dutch migrants, arrived in Australia in the 1950s with her husband John and they subsequently had four children here. Coby and John were actively involved in the Dandenong and Doveton (now Casey) Christian Reformed churches, set up by Dutch migrants and were known for their hospitality. Coby was always warm and welcoming and not afraid to try something new. She was the first president of the Christian Reformed Churches Women of Australia and wrote the anthem, to be sung at the Victorian Ladies' Days get-togethers held regularly throughout the year. Her close friend, Janny Brouwer (also a Founding member of Wordsmiths) joined her in the organisation of the CRCWA and they started a biennial CRCWA convention hosted by different states, beginning in 1997 and continuing to this day. Coby and Janny embarked on a writing course through Dandenong TAFE in the mid 80s and were members of the original Wordsmiths Poetry group (then called The Wattle Valley Poets) started in Oakleigh in 1987. They both continued to come to the meetings when they were moved to Jean Sietzema's place in Box Hill North and after Coby and Janny moved to a Retirement Village in Langwarrin, which was too far for them to travel to Box Hill, continued to enjoy the newsletters and PCP competitions. In the last year of her life, Coby had cancer and moved to Outlook gardens hostel in Dandenong, where she died at the age of 90. We thank God for the life of Coby and her contribution to Wordsmiths. We still have PCP cards and bookmarks bearing Coby's poetry.

Leigh Hay has written a new novel, titled ***A Sense of Entitlement.***

In 1950 a long-time mental patient is found dead in his bed in London's Woodland Asylum. Following his death it is up to the family barrister to locate a clergyman in Australia to advise him he is about to receive a substantial sum of money. Where there's a will there's a relative and over one weekend in 1954, extended family dynamics come to life when just desserts are served – not to everyone's liking. A light-hearted read. RRP $30.00 + p&h.



Copies can be obtained from Leigh via treehousepoet318@gmail.com or ordered from www.talesfromthetreehouse.com.au

Maree Nikalaou has been in hospital following a mini-stroke two weeks ago. She also has eye problems with a lipoma and glaucoma and was also found to have a blocked artery in her leg.

She will shortly be moving from rehab at Peter James in Burwood to Croydon Grove for respite care. Please keep her in your prayers.

Graeme Turner runs a monthly podcast on poetry and this month features fascinating rural poet Leonie Gabrielle on her life, challenges and writing. It's available on Spotify "Words with the Wolf' and is worth a listen. https://open.spotify.com/episode/51IgnoxLgfYkOPXGyvRTkr?si=oWlgGgLRR2aJfE1dhliz4w&context=spotify%3Ashow%3A65WRCsC1AviDFv6kQFyrww

POETICA CHRISTI PRESS 2026 ANTHOLOGY

Now that the annual competition has finished, any Wordsmiths who didn't enter, are encouraged to send up to three poems to poetica@iprimus.com.au for consideration by our Book Committee, to be added to those chosen by the judge of the competition. The theme is *A momentary darkness.*

WELLSPRING CENTRE

Exploring 'Wonder' through Art and Poetry, with Liz Johnson and Janine Johnson.
Saturday June 13, 9.15am-1 pm. Cost : $81.26.

PD: Come Away My Beloved. A workshop to reflect, rest, restore and renew your inner landscape. Thursday June 18, 9.30am-2.30pm. Cost $106.54.

Alive to Love : Free introductory session. Online event. Wednesday July 15 from 9.30-11.30. Free intro session with John Steward, based on his book 'From Genocide to Generosity'. Restoring dignity & purpose after traumatic times.
To book any of these events, go to:
https://www.eventbrite.com/o/120418442611

HEART OF LIFE CENTRE FOR SPIITUAL & PASTORAL FORMATION

Liminal Poetry. Facilitated by Wordsmiths member Chris Ryan, to explore the countless ways in which our liminal moments are experienced and ways that we devise to traverse them. May 23, 10-12.00pm, Cost $45, BYO lunch. Heart of Life, 69 Alto Avenue (Cnr Kenmare Ave) Croydon. Email info@heartoflife.melbourne or phone 9890 1101. More information at:
https://www.heartoflife.melbourne/events/liminal-poetry-how-poetry-can-break-through-our-wordless-places-of-pain-and-transformation/

COMPETITIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Catchment – Poetry of Place
Open to Australian residents. Theme : Show a sense of location. Accepts Poetry (30 lines) and Tanka (5 lines). No entry fee. Prize : publication in online journal. Closes 21 May 2026.
https://www.bawbawartsalliance.org.au/bcms/catchment/

Finding Beauty Poetry Prize
Open to emerging poets who are Australian residents with a strong connection to Canberra region. Theme : Human Interaction. Poetry (80 lines). Entry fee : $25. First prize $5,000. Closes 18 May 2026.
https://marion.ink/finding-beauty-poetry-prize

NSW Poetry Prize
Open to writers aged 16 and over. Theme : Comedy. Accepts poetry (50 lines). Entry fee $15. First prize $200. Closes 31 May 2026.
https://nswpoetryprize.au/

Poetry d'Amour Love Poetry Contest
Open to all. Theme Love. Accepts poetry (40 lines), Entry fee $10. First prize $500. Closes 31 May 2026.
https://wapoets.com/poetry-damour/poetry-damour-love-poetry-contest/

Ros Spencer Poetry Prize
Open to all. No theme. Accepts poetry (60 lines). Entry fee $10. First prize $1000. Closes 7 June 2026.
https://wapoets.com/ros-spencer-poetry-prize/contest-entry/

Send any news for the August 2026 newsletter to treehousepoet318@gmail.com by July 15, 2026. Newsletter edited by Leigh Hay and Janette Fernando.

POET'S CORNER

Sometimes …

my heart is like a dutch farm house
with brightly green painted shutters
and singing geraniums in window boxes
on the outside

my heart is a warm fire in the hearth
fresh coffee brewing and buttercake;
the cat outstretched on a rug
field flowers in an earthen pot
on the inside

the shutters close at night and
when the evening twilight steals inside
the window and the shutters close
to keep the cold winds out
my heart is glad to be
where it is
sometimes …

© Coby Hill

For The God Who Sings

Did you know that God can sing?
I'll tell you how I know.

In Church, one Sunday,
a revelation comes
when I am confessing to God.
Feeling very sad
I hear his voice.
Wonderful, inspired singing.
It's only a short bit
but shows God's kaleidoscope
of joy that he finds in singing.

I feel him lifting me up,
placing me gently on his shoulders,
and with grace and joy
he sings out loud
while Angels harmonise.
Then it is over –
Now I am aware
of the God who sings.

© Daryl Pobke

Morning Rites

I see the moon, such dragon's egg,
that nestles at horizon's breast
to hatch out light for winter birth
when morning passion fills the sky.

I see the dawn, her crying pangs
that burst to blood the clouds then sigh
and smear the blankets high above
as slowly darkness yields to sight.

I see the sun grow newborn day
that touches landscape with her rays,
above the waters of the lake,
so tips of wavelets sparkle white.

© Greg Burns

Silence Speaks

Part of a bracket of five poems written on retreat. With a nod to Michael Leunig's book When I Talk to You. *Wantirna, 19 Oct 2024*

Far from silent,
silence holds the soft sighing of the wind, rousing tired trees,
and the urgent straining of distant birds;
it is the garden of tears through which
tramples the bare-footed soul.

Far from sterile,
It is the place where creation can be felt
moving in the heart;
the place where simplicity and peace grow.

Far from ineffable,
it lays out tender tent-pegs, widely spaced,
for the vital fieldwork
of inner surveying.

Far from dimensionless,
it holds depth and breadth
and, not graspable, mystifies us,
renders us susceptible to truth and beauty
and allows us to feel the shape
of the simplest eternity.

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