

Crow Speak



Wild Poems

Gail Galloway

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For Melanie Lea

A dedication to all my crow sisters
and family
who shared my journey over time,
including the years these poems unfolded.

The author acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country where she has lived, walked and worked. In places that inspired these poems: The Bundjalung, Gadigal, Githanbul, Goomeroi and Wiradjuri people of NSW and Melukerdee and Luggemairrenerpaier (Palawa People) of Tasmania.

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In closing, a nod to Jonathan Sturm—a special kind of genius, early mentor and friend for supporting my emerging craft (and first novel) in the late 1990's, and now completes a circle, as publisher of this collection. A great gratitude.

This collection contains two previously published works.

'In Sacred Places' original version in *Small Packages#7*
(New Century Press, 2003) QLD.

'Temptation' in Famous Reporter 30, literary biannual
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Photographs by Gail Galloway.

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Please note that page numbers have been removed from this sampler.



One

Today, only one is stationed in the tree outside
and wakes me just on dawn.

Bellow-like lungs pump.
Arrk, arrk, arrk, aaaragh: I count the remarks.
The last word drops off the scale.

From a distance further, comes a gurgled retort.
He arks up again.
This one has a lot to say and huffs out a few more paragraphs.

He chants—some sorcerers conjure:
complex instructions,
travel notes,
a weather forecast,
or just some long yarn about the neighbour?

The closing lexicon is met with a melodic chortling.
A dry laugh.
Downstream
a distant bark floats.

I wait for another peeling.
There are no more interjections.

A Carcass Called Economy

(After Terra Nullius)

Then Eden was almost lost. In the fall
of trees and blackened koalas, our cities smoked.
Heads locked in the dragon's jaw,
our faces burnt. It was summer after all.

On highways torn, TV drove political heat.
Amongst the carnage we glimpsed a carcass
not unlike the average road kill
except it came from Capitol Hill.

The first horseman arrived shortly after.
Here was a moment to pause and reflect.
But not for long, memory is short.
Too many mourned the loss of sport.

Dozed in the ever-hot sunshine of this ancient land,
he who pays the FIFO's calls the tune.
The white noise of amnesia is the only mantra
in habitats where forests bleed and suburbs sprawl.

To build our carbon nests, we let the cull of songbirds be.
Different brands of invisible friend chant support
in a chorus line for the urban poor:
'We will all be saved by spending more.'

Spoils are spent, all fuel traded. As data charges
fast asleep on beds of straw,
we clutch the reigns of a horse called war.
'Because we're all in this together.'

We sell arms to eat while Syria's children wait
at gates, or in detention to keep them safe.
Its about development after all,
with project funds to help our mates.

Over 200 years of white supremacy,
now strapped to the back of a drone, a last horseman
spurs on the gas led recovery. Don't moan —
'Because we're all in this together.'

There are still waterholes to poison and once
the last artifacts are blast:
we forget the genocide,
collective good,
or that consumption was once a disease.

Just count on the economy —
because we are the digital caste,
and *'we're all in this together.'*

At the end of ecology
will we remember
how we sacrificed nothing — to have it all?



Omen

Sometimes you will find one
a dark feather
speared to ground
A perfect blade
plunged from sky.
Divine

this thin edged reality
The crow's gift

A knife
to cut illusion
from blind eyes.

A message stick
to guide.

It lends energy
a winged strength

Revere
The firmness of plume
its curved shape.

Learn its irony
of vanes
the barbs.

Strong spine —
a hollow
clue

to know
your own
bones.

Reflect
how to discern
between

delusion and hope
and if hope is
faith or

faith
is fantasy.

Know
what to hold
and when

is time.
Let go
allow

past
to
fall



Upwardly Mobile

There you were, ironing your shirts
and hanging them inside the tree trunk.
It was an odd little house we shared,
in that small, one up, one down flat,
with barely room to swing a cat.

Your white work shirts, I worried
would rub against the bark,
dirt the sleeves with earth or sooty ash
where the fire had lapped.

But you laughed—silly!
showed how you stored pressed clothes
in a downstairs room
the size of a cupboard.

Once upon a time,
as young lovers with
our first rental nest in the city,
we were babes in the wood.

You, so well groomed in urbane style,
even back then, in that faraway house.
Later you would move on to higher places
while I flew north and south.

In better company, moving up
on your well heeled path—
an early adopter of mobile phones.
The trunk call an echo—
our childhood past.

Now in a leafy crescent,
two point one, with your goodly wife,
have your own home
in a better suburb, in a better capital.

Why would I dream — of visiting you
in such a strange abode
in a big tree in that smokey city?
This I ponder, while making do

in muddy boots and furry hat.
Down here where I have more room
to spread my wings.
The air is better and my nearest neighbours
all wear feathers.



This is Not a Poem About Crows

for the million birds killed daily by cats

You have mistaken their protective vigil by your bed
for loyalty: this is merely a guise.

They know your every move and how to elude you.

Programmed to care, you are blind to their sins.
TV sets channel the ideology of subservience,
Purr, Friskee, Desire: you want the best for them.

You stroke the soft folds of their belly.
Do not be fooled by the shared moments of intimacy,
they merely pretend love and sleep,

disappearing through the walls of your dreams
to visit other beds. The opportunists return
to greet you at dawn.

Wake with the smell of sweet blood on their teeth.
Smile. Toxoplasmosis spreads from their shit —
you happily clean up. It's a measure of your love.

You don't expect them to return the favour
because they just have clumsy paws.

Pinned to your chest with mass defying gravity,
their hypnotic glass eyed gaze,
you mistake for love.

It is a well crafted trap they lay,
the heavy heart and numbness of limbs —
feelings subjugated by Cheshire grins.

They whittle down your boundaries with those claws,
little by little, in tiny meows and delicate whiskers
nosing into your arms, engine purring.
They are your guilty pleasure.

Deep down you know they are a killing machine
but suffer the little deaths — moths,
small marsupials and coloured birds.

Graduating from ground dwellers.
You forgive these slain offerings,
mere gestures of love.

Ignore their climbing thirst. You know
they can take down a crow
to skull brains for a nightcap.

So willingly feed small morsels of your soul
to stave off the day they turn on you.

Endnotes

Pg 6. With respect to the deceased's family. A Blackbird Song: at the time of writing there were at least 441 deaths of First Nation People in custody. This being 25 years since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which recommended a number of systemic changes to address the problem. It is argued that to date, few of these have been introduced.

See: <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb17>

Pg 7. Calvary: Once widely known as place of many crows, the NSW City of Wagga Wagga took its name from a Wiradjuri word.

It is now recognised the Aboriginal place name was an erroneous (colonial) translation with the true meaning of the term being Dance Dance or place of many celebrations.

In August 2019, Wagga City Council acted on the evidence of Stan Grant Senior, local elder and author of the first Wiradjuri dictionary. Adopting the more festive definition, the city is now going through a re-branding process as part of their Reconciliation Action Plan.

Pg 11. Edge of Extinction: FIFOs. An acronym used to describe the fly-in, fly-out workforce—employed predominantly by mining companies in Australia. This is a practice of contracting FIFO tradespeople, often from urban or regional areas and flying them into remote sites. For corporations this is preferable to employing or training a local workforce.

We're all in this together song by Benjamin Lee, the tune became popularised as a solidarity call during the Covid lockdowns of 2020.

About the Author

Gail is a rural Australian writer and artist. She has worked as a journalist, social worker and community activist. Focused on themes of social justice and environment, her poems range through the personal to the political. Some of her earlier works have been published in anthologies and magazines, *Crow Speak* is her first collection. She also gardens, grows garlic and fails to keep the house tidy. Her next book *Confessions of a Homegrown Herbalist*, (non fiction) will be published by Balboa Press.

She Tweets as *mediagal64*.

