

**Other titles in the UWAP Poetry series
(established 2016)**

Our Lady of the Fence Post by J. H. Crone *Border*

Security by Bruce Dawe *Melbourne Journal* by

Alan Loney

Star Struck by David McCooley

Dark Convicts by Judy Johnson

Rallying by Quinn Eades

Flute of Milk by Susan Fealy

A Personal History of Vision by Luke Fischer

Snake Like Charms by Amanda Joy *Charlie Twirl*

by Alan Gould

Communists Like Us by John Falzon

Hush by Dominique Hecq

Preparations for Departure by Nathanael O'Reilly

David Adès

David Adès is the author of *Mapping the World* (Wakefield Press / Friendly Street Poets) (commended for the Anne Elder Award 2008) and the chapbook *Only the Questions Are Eternal* (Garron Publishing 2015). Originally from Adelaide, David settled in Sydney in 2016 after five years in Pittsburgh, USA.

Between 2011 and 2015 David participated in the Hemingway's Summer Poetry Readings in Pittsburgh. Recordings of his readings (and that of many other poets) can be found at <http://hemingwayspoetryseries.blogspot.com>.

Together with Ioana Petrescu, David co-edited the *Friendly Street Poetry Reader 26*. In 2012 he was one of the volunteer editors of the Australian Poetry Members Anthology *Metabolism*. David's poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines in Australia and the US and have also been widely anthologised. In 2014 David was awarded the inaugural University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize and was also shortlisted for the Newcastle Poetry Prize. He has since been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, been a finalist in the Alexander and Dora Raynes Poetry Competition and been Highly Commended in the Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize.

David Adès
**Afloat
in Light**

First published in 2017 by
UWA Publishing
Crawley, Western Australia 6009
www.uwap.uwa.edu.au

UWAP is an imprint of UWA Publishing
a division of The University of Western Australia



This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.
Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

Copyright © David Adès 2017
The moral right of the author has been asserted.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:
Adès, David, author.
Afloat in light / David Adès.
ISBN: 9781742589466 (paperback)
Includes bibliographical references.
Poetry—Collections.
Australian poetry—21st century.

Designed by Becky Chilcott, Chil3
Typeset in Lyon Text by Lasertype
Printed by McPherson's Printing Group



To Natasha, who had her way with the trajectory of my life and changed it completely, and to Orli, Sarai and Eitan, who daily take me where I have never been and would never otherwise have gone.

Contents

Darkness Contends with Light

- We Are All Fallen **11**
- A Line in the Sand **12**
- Monologue to a Friend **16**
- This Shall Not Be Taken **20**
- The Bridge I Must Walk Across **22**
- Rift **24**
- The Burden of Wings **26**
- River **28**
- In the Land of Maybe **29**
- Fault Line **35**
- Still Reading From the Book of
Love **36**
- Instructions for Forbearance **38**
- The Requirement **39**
- Welcome **41**

As if Dreaming Could Be Tethered

- Between Us **45**
- On a Moonless Night at Grange **49**
- Cotton **50**
- Night Terrors **52**
- The Switch **53**
- Ascension **54**
- Only **55**
- Vessel **57**
- I Wish You Long Life **58**
- Ascending Skywards **62**
- Moments of Sunlight **64**

The Light of Other Stars

- Wild Man **71**
- Under the City's Skin **73**
- The Drawing Board **75**

The Heart, Always 77
Poem for Stephen 78
Human All 79
The Last Obstacle Finally
Overcome 80
Va, Mon Enfant 81
Let Us 85
The Hammer of Uncertainty 86
The Three Moons of Tenoa 88
Love's Seasons 90

A Home I Never Knew I Wanted
Morning 93
The Last Day of Summer 94
Walking Along Northumberland
Street 96
Visitation 99
Deflections of Slanted Light 100

Dazzled 103
The Bookmark, the Poems, the
Light 106
Synopsis of a Story in Three
Generations 108
Notes to Self 110
The Night Before Another
Departure 112

The Night is Starless
Vale, David Ades 115
After 126

Acknowledgements 127

I touch the day
I taste the light
I remember

- W. S. Merwin

Darkness Contends with Light

We Are All Fallen

– Comment by Newt Gingrich, 2012 Republican presidential nominee.

There was childhood: wispy residence of dreams,
of imagination, of possibility. A time before standing,
before falling, before exile.

I fell, as we all fall. How many times have I fallen?
I fell without wings, sometimes knowing I was falling,
sometimes unaware.

I fell, tensing my heart for impact, for injuries.
I fell onto thorns and stones, into a poverty of grace,
into harsh and righteous judgement.

I fell and rose again, but never to the same height.
I rose again carrying wistfulness and regret,
carrying an endless weight like Sisyphus with his boulder.

I rose again because this is a life: imperfect, fallen.
I watched others fall, suspending judgement.
Falling and falling, watching others fall

I preach no sermons except compassion.
I know I will fall again, though not how far, how often:
I will fall and rise, fall again until I can fall no more.

A Line in the Sand

1.

What did I know of consequences?
The game delighted, so I played
like a child, heedless, unaware
of the migration of senses.
First, my eyes, translating the world,
drifted into yours, layering sight,
mirror-mazing perception. Was it my face
then, or yours, that I looked upon?
Then, my skin stretched — the whorls
on my fingers like galaxies, the lines
on my palms like rivers across sand
dunes — and my body grew beyond
itself, beyond yours. With our left
hand I reached up to drape a fine
cirrus sky shawl across my shoulders.
With our right, I stroked the wind.
Our Siamese legs straddled distances.
I breathed your breath, you thought
my thoughts, both of us configured
into the folds of one space. Who was
I then? What were my thoughts?
Where did I stop and you begin?

2.

Yes, once there were no boundaries,
and we were both lost, adrift on land
extending in every direction as far
as shimmering hallucinations could
rise — the directions merging,
indistinguishable; the space around
us vast and thirsty; our words
emptying into it like the last drops
from a canteen, rivulets drying out
as they were spoken. Reckless,
I promised water, you promised
shelter when there was none —
and we cupped trust in our hands
and made-believe. Without boundaries,
we shrivelled in the heat;
the earth's crust scorched our feet,
the unremitting sun burnt our skin.
I wilted in a haze of silent recrimination:
shamed, overcome by so much space.

3.

I/you/we do not occupy this space
alone. Place an ear against the stars
or on the ground, let your skin tingle
as if a storm approaches, pay heed
to the movement of ants. Resonances
multiply: a tension in the air, a low
hum, a faint vibration. Who built
this cairn of rocks? What spirit watches
over this place? What does this hill,
that tree, these boulders signify?
What other markers are strewn about
this land that you and I cannot see?

4.

Out of grief I drew a line in the sand,
raised a fence, tried to explain
that you would find me always
behind it, that you could come
and visit me here as often as you
want, on the understanding that
after each visit you would leave again —
so that I could grow back into myself,
my small body, my hands; so that
I could touch your cheek and know
that it was yours; so that I could be
outside the tears in your eyes.

Monologue to a Friend

A conversation begins with a lie.

– Adrienne Rich

1.

The way is not clear, the way is not sure,
the way is a stumbling, the way is a mist,
the way is a guess, the way is a risk,
the way has no signposts, the way is not clear,

the way has no maps, the way is unknown,
the way is a mystery, the way leads away,
leads on and elsewhere, leads towards and beyond,
the way absorbs you, the way is not clear.

No one can tell you the turnings to take, the ones to pass by,
no one can say where the way will lead,
no one can accompany you for more than a while,
no one can go with you where you must go.

The way has no signposts, the way is a question,
the way is not clear, it is the flame you burn in.

2.

The rebuke always stings.
The unmerited rebuke that brooks
no answer flails the heart.
How do I answer what seeks no answer?

Here is the answer of my hands,
soft in their reminiscence though scraped
and torn, though bloodied sore.
These hands have been pawing at earth,

clawing, prising out little offerings,
little nuggets to raise to the light,
to bring to you. These hands
are their own offerings, open,

an invitation to speak, to listen.
These hands are outstretched.

3.

I stand accused, your grievance
abstract and unclear.

What if I say this: everything
is an attempt at honesty,

a scratching scrabbling
at the masks to discern the face,
a painstaking exhumation
of motive, of meaning,

to find, amongst it all,
the brittle bones of truth?
What sad foolishness
to keep speaking, explicating,

unearthing, when you cannot bear
to hear, do not wish to listen.

4.

*It was an old theme even for me:
Language cannot do everything —
but what else can I bring to you?
I try and fail and try again*

with the rich poverty of language:
this is all I know.
I have no wish for weapons
or the tyranny of silence.

If my voice is to be drowned,
it will be drowned speaking still,
whether you have turned away or not,
whether the words falter and flail

against the walls of their cage.
If need be, I will speak long into
your silence, the anger you scald me with.
If you no longer hear me,

hear an echo, a ghost, a whisper,
hear a shadow, hear a memory.

This Shall Not Be Taken

All this talk of beginnings —
as if we could unwind ourselves
from our own history,

from the cultural baggage
that is the frame, the walls, the house,

as if it is destination that matters
and not journey.

Beginnings go back
to where we cannot go:
the road ahead opens
as the road behind closes

and what has been left there
and what is known.

What we drag with us
in our nakedness
leaving furrows in the path:

the weight of our dispossession,
the dead gods of our childhood,
thicknesses of scar tissue.

We promise each other nothing,
know that even if we stop
arrival is illusion.

Wherever we are,
we have dust on our feet,
we huddle like timid sheep,

we look for shelter in each other's eyes:
the only place we can find it.