

**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 McCooey

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

Afloat in Light by David Adès

Communists Like Us by John Falzon

Hush by Dominique Hecq

Preparations for Departure by Nathanael O'Reilly

The Tiny Museums by Carolyn Abbs

The Criminal Re-Register by Ross Gibson

Fingertip of the Tongue by Sarah Rice

Chromatic

Paul Munden

Paul Munden's poetry first appeared in Faber's *Poetry Introduction* 7. A Gregory Award winner, he has published four collections: *Henderskelfe* (Talking Shop, 1989), with photographs of Castle Howard by Peter Heaton; *Asterisk* (Smith|Doorstop, 2011), based on Shandy Hall, former home of Laurence Sterne; *Analogue/Digital, New & Selected Poems* (Smith|Doorstop, 2015); and *The Bulmer Murder* (Recent Work Press, 2017). He is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Canberra, where he is also Program Manager for the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI), running the annual Poetry on the Move festival. He is Associate Editor of *Axon: Creative Explorations*, and the literary journal, *Meniscus*. He was reader for Stanley Kubrick from 1988–98, and has been Director of the UK's National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE) since 1994. He has worked as conference poet for the British Council and edited *Feeling the Pressure: Poetry and science of climate change* (British Council, 2008). He has lived in Bulmer, North Yorkshire, for over 30 years, now dividing his time between Yorkshire and Canberra.

Paul Munden
Chromatic

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 © Paul Munden 2017
The moral right of the author has been asserted.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:
Munden, Paul, author.
Chromatic / Paul Munden.
ISBN: 9781742589534 (paperback)
English poetry—21st century.
Australian poetry—21st century.

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

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Acknowledgements

Poems have previously appeared in the following publications and exhibitions:

Journals and newspapers:

The Canberra Times; *Cordite*; *Mascara*; *OC Magazine*; *Rabbit*; *Stride*; *UnderBridge Poetry*; *Uneven Floor*; *Westerly*

Anthologies:

Festschrift for Katherine Gallagher (Circle Time Press, 2015)

Seam: Prose Poetry Project (IPSI, 2015)

Pulse: Prose Poems (Recent Work Press, 2016)

Tract: Prose Poems (Recent Work Press, 2017)

‘Modulations to a Minor Key’ was shortlisted for the *Aesthetica* Creative Writing Award 2016 and published in the associated anthology.

Exhibitions:

Traces and Hauntings (Belconnen Arts Centre, 2015)

The Encyclopædia of Forgotten Things (Belconnen Arts Centre, 2016)

Beauties and Beasts (Belconnen Arts Centre, 2017)

Bill Poetries (‘Noted’ Festival, Canberra, 2017)

The ‘Keys’ and ‘Fire’ poems were first published within chapbooks under the Authorised Theft imprint.

A selection of these poems was published as *The Bulmer Murder* (Recent Work Press, 2017).

I should like to thank my colleagues at the University of Canberra for all their encouragement, creative and critical help, also those in the wider poetry community who made me so welcome, so quickly, in Australia. Special thanks go to Terri-ann White for her commitment to this book, also to my family, who so strongly supported the Australian venture that brought the work about. A number of individuals are acknowledged by initials below the poem titles; others will recognise their invaluable influence in particular poems, however obliquely they may be referenced.

Contents

PART 1

- Toccata **12**
- I stared **14**
- Trench Cello **15**
- From *The Encyclopædia of
Forgotten Things* **17**
- Fugue **20**
- A Diagram **28**
- Chopinesque **29**
- A Night at the Opera **30**
- Kick/Recall **33**
- Spiders **34**
- Modulations (to a major key) **36**
- Modulations (to a minor key) **39**
- Foxed **42**
- Keys **45**
- Rat Tales **47**
- A Speckled Hen **55**
- Country Gardens **56**
- Brideshead Revisited **58**
- Prototype **59**
- Miss Willmott's Ghost **60**

- Molehills **62**
- Ladybirds **64**
- English Pastoral **65**
- Christmas Diptych **66**

PART 2

- La Tempesta **70**
- Venetian Lullaby **76**
- Transpositions **77**
- And when— **80**
- Here and There **81**
- Carnarvon Gorge **82**
- Four Seasons in One Day **83**
- One midsummer night **84**
- Sightings **85**
- Turtles **90**
- The Shallows **91**
- Heron Island **92**
- Twice now the outward
adventure **96**
- How could he have known— **97**
- An act of love **98**

Touch **100**
His deceptive memory **101**
Ply **102**
To think— **105**
Page 147 **106**
The King Lear Catalogue,
1976–2015 **107**
Muldoonery **108**

PART 3

Tethered **112**
Fire **113**
Alphabet Jigsaw **115**
Bring Me the Head **116**
Camille **118**
Meringue **119**
Country House Visitor, Yorkshire,
c. 1996 **120**
Macbeth **121**
Fair Bianca **123**
Midsummer, Brownsea, 1965 **124**
Freckle **125**

The Weathercock **127**
The Larder **128**
See— **130**
In the Capuchin catacomb **131**
Chromatic **132**
A Footnote **135**
Four Poster **136**
Fractures **137**
redruM **138**
Steadicam **139**
All Work and No Play **140**
The Bulmer Murder **141**
For Sale: Number 453 **156**
1768 **157**
The Pub with No Beer **158**
The Soldier's Tale **160**
In a Country Churchyard **162**

Notes **164**

PART 1

His fingers had the noses of weasels
—Sylvia Plath, 'Little Fugue'

Toccata

It starts again, the screeching
early morning practice,
raucous skills brought out
of semi-retirement,
cleaving the rural calm
as if this is all it's good for
now, a training base for war.

Maybe you remember it
from the time your pram
rocked on its springs
and your growing wail
was the echo of a siren.
You sense the out-of-nowhere
wall of colossal sound

and throw yourself to ground
with something close
to justification,
the Tornado
cutting through the air
above you as it hugs
the contours of the land—

cornfields rippling
in its wake—and sucks
the breath from hill and dale,
leaving the garden drained
of colour, like a face in shock,
the world in camouflage:
re-audible birdsong

so petite;
pastoral light
frail as my father's bones
beneath the hospital sheet;
his voice—mere whisperings
of hard-won reportage...

Butcher Island...

Yes?... nothing more.
A bewildered accomplice,
I scour the map
for what, if anything, remains
and marvel at how you pick
your small self up
from your own shadow.

I stared

at Uncle Ern's bald head,
his huge ears, listening
to his tearful testament,
which was simply a word-
for-word account

*that no such undertaking
has been received, and that
consequently this country
is at war with Germany.*

Trench Cello

No Stradivari, this, no Amati, and no
voluptuous Cremonese curves
echoing your darling—

but still you handle it with care, heavy-duty
foursquare English oak, standard issue,
or so it looks until

you open its front to reveal ammunition
of a different sort, everything
you need to kill despair

or whatever dark, life-diminishing moments
take control of you and your comrades
biding your time in mud.

You unpack it like any other kit, its coiled
metal strings, ebony fingerboard
and tailpiece, bridge and spike—

all assembled as fast as a rifle, soundpost
in place like the prop of a dugout.
You tighten the bow, blow

across the special little hollow at the end
like the top of a bottle of stout
for an A to tune it—

or you did. Because *this* was *then* and the desire
has now deserted you. All you want
is to be rid of it—

let someone else learn this historical drill, bring
back the thin, muddied sound in all its
charm, and call it *plaintive*.

From *The Encyclopædia of Forgotten Things*

When you hurl the paratrooper from your bedroom window, he hangs for a moment against the sun, making you screw up your eyes. His plastic backpack flips open, the red-white-blue silk billows in the air, and our childhoods linger, conscripted into a slow, slow freefall that matters so much we hold our synchronised breaths... until the crash on gravel—the disjointed figure lying in the yard, staring at the sky—and a silence in which we each expect the other to make some move to retrieve, to try again.

*

Every week, she has trudged the quarter mile to church, taken up her solitary bench, opened the hymn book, and done her best. But every week there is a new fluffed note or erroneous chord that adds to the catalogue of mistakes forgotten by everyone—except her. And today the archival muscle of her fingers has reached its limit. In the shuffling silence as the congregation prepares to draw breath, there's a cracking of joints, and an inexplicable click of her teeth like a malfunctioning machine, followed by nothing.

*

Years after the old stone farmhouse had been sold, and yet another attic was being cleared, there it was, the plywood replica he had crafted in such detail: two staircases, blue patterned wallpaper, and pale gold carpet, an offcut of the real. There were simplifications, of course. The stovepipe in the living room was matt black dowel, but angled in precise correlation to the one that channelled smoke around the high window: that—like all the others—was a square-cut hole,

enabling the children to look in at the world they already inhabited. Their small hands could reach through to lay breakfast, and move the chairs for extra guests. The roof hinged back so their bedrooms were a free-for-all. Only one room was harder to explore, and so they missed the arguments, the toll taken by the hours the encyclopædic venture had incurred. He blew, and watched clumps of dust drifting through memory's build. He could still feel the rasp of the saw through the ply, still smell the paint taking so long to dry as Christmas morning came around.

*

Raw silk, calico, sleeveless cotton in burgundy or cerise, a timeless blue skirt... Her stage wardrobe is arranged with an algorithm calculated to make you forget. Stripes and checks in black and white, white and black (or is it navy?)... Each day she appears as if fresh from the shops, charms you with the illusion of the new. The weather is glossed with the same, skilful repetition of the unique: every cloud a sweet nothing, every sunburst bright as your breakfast juice, every snowflake an unpredictable kiss.

*

The soloist walks to the front of stage for Brandenburg #4, and the audience applauds. He grips the violin and its small maroon cushion between collarbone and chin, and as the welcome subsides in a predictable arc there are two or three unnerving seconds where other, long-gone instruments are in his grasp: the oboe so grimed with school-bag dirt he immersed it in the bath; and the cello in its soft case

slung over his shoulder as he cycled home, the spike slipping free and catching in the wheel arch of a passing car. The noise of it splinters from the dwindling applause. The last few hand-claps are the damp patterings of the oboe's ruined felts. Then silence, composure, the chosen gleam of varnished spruce and maple ribs, horsehair stretched on carbon fibre delicately balanced between fingers and thumb, ready to erase.