*Flute of Milk*, Susan Fealy’s first full-scale book, is a quiet, deep-running volume. The poems play off art and the senses, the mind and the possibility of cultivating a soul. The poet enters art and life where ‘Memory prefers to hold things still, / but the past, present and future / are a long flute of milk.’ It’s within the darkness that Wittgenstein placed two roses, one red one white, that Fealy questions the power of the imagination: ‘But who, if not ourselves, are we? / Is a rose red in the dark?’

I read this book over three weeks, and with each consecutive reading the poems flowed together, revealing deeper bays and channels of lyrical richness. The poems are pared back and clean, like the images and verbal brush marks in the poem about Vermeer’s painting *The Milkmaid*. The colour blue drifts through the volume, carrying ‘the soft blood of roses’, ‘a force of herons or anxious angels’, and a lover who offers nothing but ‘the terror of his faith’. There are words that hang on black wings and poems that contain a world of bees, places where ‘forget-me-nots break / across bone’, a tenderness with an edge. There are poems that describe the process of turning bodies into song. This is a remarkable book, delicate, tough, sensual, spiked with ideas and lines that create the deep music of real poetry.

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

*Our Lady of the Fence Post* by J. H. Crone
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*Rallying* by Quinn Eades
*A Personal History of Vision* by Luke Fischer
*Charlie Twirl* by Alan Gould
*Snake Like Charms* by Amanda Joy
Flute of Milk
Susan Fealy

Susan Fealy is a Melbourne-based poet, writer and clinical psychologist. She began writing and publishing poetry in 2007 and was a managing co-editor at Five Islands Press (2009–2010). Her poems have been published widely in Australian journals, newspapers and anthologies including Best Australian Poems 2009, 2010 and 2013. Others appear in internationally-sourced anthologies including Villanelles (Everyman’s Library Pocket Poets, 2012). Among awards for her poetry are the NSW Society of Women Writers National Poetry Prize 2013 and the Henry Kendall Poetry Award 2010. Her work was selected for the May 2016 Australian Poets issue of Poetry (Chicago).
Susan Fealy
Flute of Milk
For my mother and father,
Beverley and Ivan Fealy,
and for my first poetry mentors,
Judith Rodriguez and Ron Pretty
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Individual poems in this book are dedicated to:

‘Faith is Green’ for Peter Steele (1939–2012)
‘A Poem’ and ‘Seeing the Pregnant Woman at Pompeii’ for Debbie Lim
‘Flight’ for Ron Pretty
‘Two Voices’ and ‘Instructions for Weaning a Baby’ for Claire Potter
‘Southern Ice Porcelain’ for Les Blakebrough
‘Everest’ for Harley
I gave you all you needed:
bed of earth, blanket of blue air—
Louise Glück, ‘Retreating Wind’
White walls *melken* the daylight.
In this plain room
The map of the world
Has been painted over:
Only a woman, blond
Light from the window,
Her wide-mouthed jug
And bread on the table.
Vision slows at her wrist,
Travels along her forearm.
Her apron cascades
Lapis lazuli.
One can almost touch her thick
Waist, her generous shoulders,
Her crisp linen cap.
One can almost taste the milk
Escaping her jug.
Inside the dairy, washed so white
it approaches blue,
muslin-draped pans of milk
dream in their silence
and two steel milk-churns
(sentries in flat hats)
burn with white rosettes:
light held from the sun.
I remember the butter churn—
the handle I never turned.
Memory prefers to hold things still,
but the past, present and future
are a long flute of milk.
I am washing my hands: a spot
on the curve of the hand-basin
streams out like a nebula.
I remember washing her hair—
pouring water from a jug.
The sluice fell on the crown of her head.
Beads broke in a silver string,
like the bracelet around her wrist,
that diadem of our night swim.
The water flowed and flowed over our arms,
undulations of black satin.
She stands unshadowed now
in milky light—her face
seems almost featureless
as if the profile of a coin.
*Be anyone you like*, she said.
But who, if not ourselves, are we?
Is a rose red in the dark?
I wash some colour here, scumble
a detail there. Her portrait
will never be done.
A Confluence of Blues

*A certain blue penetrates your soul.*
—Henri Matisse

*Isatis tinctoria,*
those lemon-yellow flowers,
flakes of snow that didn’t melt—
somehow absorbed the sun.

Soak its reluctant leaves
in human urine,
immerse the fabric for a day,
peg it out in the sun.

Watch as it converts to blue.

*Ai-gami,* a fading blue
from the day flower, *Commelina.*

*Indigo,* a lasting blue
from leaves stitched to violet flowers.

Blue—
the frequency
of light that lies
between violet and green.

Arthur Dove once said
*Painting is music of the eyes.*
A fleet of blues flute violet,
others oboe green.

Red seems closer to us than blue.
The more away an object,
the more it’s drenched in blue—
observe each mood of mountains.

Blue eyes do not contain blue—
they just swallow less
blue light—
       it travels like bees
into the eyes of another.