

Open Door

John Kinsella

John Kinsella is the author of over forty books. His many awards include the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry, the Victorian premier's Award for Poetry, the John Bray Award for Poetry, the Judith Wright Calanthe Award for Poetry and the Western Australian Premier's Award for Poetry (three times). His latest books are *Lucida Intervalla* (UWA Publishing, 2018); *On the Outskirts* (UQP, 2017), and *Drowning in Wheat: Selected Poems* (Picador, 2016). He is a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University, and Professor of Literature and Environment at Curtin University, Western Australia. He lives on Ballardong Noongar land at Jam Tree Gully in the Western Australian wheatbelt. In 2007 he received the Christopher Brennan Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry.

John Kinsella
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of the Jam Tree Gully Cycle

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To Tracy and Tim and the world's refugees and homeless

The author wishes to acknowledge the Ballardong
Noongar people, the traditional owners and custodians
of the land he writes.

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A Note on *Open Door* and the Jam Tree Gully Cycle

Open Door is the third volume of the *Jam Tree Gully* cycle. The first volume, *Jam Tree Gully* (2012), was very much about encounter and positioning lives in a ‘new place’ (we moved there from York, Western Australia, in 2009), but specifically concerned with issues of responsibility to the land, with issues of repair and restoration of land damaged by broadacre farming, especially in the context of it being land stolen from the Ballardong Noongar people. The eponymous Jam Tree Gully is a bush block, bordering a bush reserve, in the rural southwest of Australia. The collection *Jam Tree Gully* ‘recorded’ our day-to-day life in this place, extending a house as ecologically soundly as we could, and working to conserve the bush, and considering life there through a dialogue with Thoreau’s *Walden*.

Firebreaks (2016), the second volume of the trilogy, consists of two poem-cycles — *Internal Exile* and *Inside Out*. *Internal Exile* uses Ovid’s late works of exile, *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*, as points of reference in looking back to Jam Tree Gully from Cambridge, UK, where we spent a year over 2011–12 (and where we had also spent the second half of the 1990s), as well as exploring questions of return and alienation at home in the Western Australian wheatbelt. Distance makes home more vital, while being at ‘home’ can sometimes seem more alienating. *Inside Out* takes into consideration Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* and *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, in re-evaluating how we deal with ideas of ‘space’ and proximity at Jam Tree Gully, while also looking out into the wider world — including from West Cork, Ireland, where we lived during 2013 and 2014. How do we read an ecology as refuge? What lines of communication with the outside world need to be kept open?

Open Door is the final volume of a decade of writing Jam Tree Gully from ‘home & away’, and is a consideration of belonging and

unbelonging, of living in the Western Australian wheatbelt while the Australian government closes doors to refugees. It starts with yet another return from living in Ireland (and Germany) in 2015-16. The poems in *Open Door* are about a very immediate locality, Jam Tree Gully, but always with an awareness that the poet writes from stolen Noongar land, and having 'rights' of presence that are denied to others. The poems look at the natural world up-close, and day-to-day life is examined against a backdrop of the larger world. These are poems in which the idea of the Australian 'rural' is challenged and opened out, and the ongoing colonialism of the poem itself is questioned, laid bare. Resistance, and being part of the problem, make a paradox that impels the poetry, the need for justice.

John Kinsella

This is no homesteader fantasy
This is no prepper textual bunker
This is no survivalist sell for the sake of a vicarious social media following
This is no hopping-off point for the post-apocalyptic *newworld*
This is no ‘wilderness’ constructed by Euro-fantasists
This is no white-values enclave
This is no arsenal; no bow-hunter’s arrow in the heart of the goat epiphany
This is no threat to the living or the dead
This is no bleeding
This is no body-worship state-of-nature retreat into reading literature of the *self* trope
This is no *Thus Spake Zarathustra*
This is no inheritance of state-approved property rights
This is no getting back to transplanted ancestral roots — but this *is* a place of other people’s ancestors who know the tricks of displacement and won’t be shunted out by reconstructions made from paleo visions — respect *them*
This is no *children of nature* living out their middleclass exclusionism scenario
This is no ‘getting away from it all’ for the sake of writing-a-book-about The Experience for a generally white middleclass audience, with the aim being to move on to the next Experience and write another exposé *ad infinitum*
This is no ‘off-the-grid’ so we can show ‘how close to nature we are and you’re not’ manifesto
This is no acceptance of the grid

This is no *becoming one* with the oppressed animals that make ends meet in the grinding down of bushland to a few patches which are then burnt

This is no rejection of those oppressed animals

This is nothing more than a statement of hope — a hope of minimising the damage, of keeping the door open to those in need, to respecting the fact (glorious fact) that non-human life lives here too, and has rights, if you open your sensibilities.

BEFORE

Identity Category Errors — No Longer Away (from West Cork, Ireland to Jam Tree Gully, Western Australia)

Locke isn't going to co-opt government to protect *this* 'private property', which isn't private as far as we're concerned. Just back (back?) from Mizen Peninsula, we note fresh roo poo deposited from one end of the block to the other, note puffballs and catch notes of the tawny frogmouths' vacuum-Os haunting our timeshift sleeplessness, our old Schull-time, that the plenty of the block would refuse Locke, demand he remove his claims, take his impositions away.

I do my look-around, which is not ritual, and 'first hearings' are played against old takes, a template to help locate incisions and ragged edges, penumbra and bites into certainty: summer's lavish killings, dead trees around the septic tanks which have been deprived, left thirsty, their leachings-out expected and patterned by trees left wanting, a reliable *source* in a Dry as combustible as morality: those libertarians and their guns we sight (having their way) straight-off at Coles supermarket, loaded up with shopping bags, off to a goatshoot.

But there's no describing the chemical actions
of the collective brain in its registering our return —
weighing-up newish saplings, signs of nibbling
and shitting, questions of balance while we were
half-a-world away. It can't be said we slot straight
back in unnoticed, with ease, but so much will proceed,
so much will change, and governance of community
struggle against difference outside each and every
picture of what home should be, how we
should discuss where we've been
and why so long away.

Splendid!

Every *back again* is an invigorating disturbance
in the matrix of place I cart around with me like faith.

Mostly family, mostly birdsong, mostly the imprint of roos
across the block, mostly the continuation of trees through days.

And at night, the frogmouths and owls, and the mice
across the ceiling, in wall cavities. But also the violations

of life I dread and tremble over — the gunshots, the housecats
being let loose to keep the old colonisations going by proxy,

enslaved to replica settler lifestyles. The southern cross
flying over tanned white bodies, the brutalities of ‘race’.

It’s not true the lattice can’t be unpicked without
wrecking it all — in fact, it needs to be unpicked.

We are in the public domain, if secluded in our ways.
And the traumas of detail aren’t ever offset, and the arrival

of a female splendid fairy wren, blue tail feathers vertical
to slant world against the bare dry, so drought-beholden,

is exuberance against the parsimony of hope. Not by appointment,
the splendid fairy wren is in the company of thornbills

and red-capped robins, a mistletoe bird and brown
honeyeaters, and there’s something going down

that's as complex as desire and refusal,
as dire as such conditions of 'hope', but also

the splendour of being here at all resonates
with the new story we're hearing — for here, *for here*.

Winter Return: Where are the Mice?

Weary and shifting between states,
I am wondering over the fates
Of mice who'd run riot with mates,
 Deep in winter.
Almost a year if you work dates —
 Are they still here?

How much has it to do with me
Outside dwelling, outside entry
Into a human world sans 'ye'?
 On the Mizen
They still speak like that — 'now so', 'ye' —
 All translation?

Or residue, or slippage through
To another world, or where you
All dwell below the plough, a crew
 Of underworld
Reliefs, grass-lined burrows that screw-
 Down dreams; unfurled.

Uneasy at night in the home
We call our own, I darkly roam
Through *your* roofspace — I'd welcome
 — *Almost* — the noise
Of entitlement, troublesome
 Grating of claws.

But silence. A single dropping
Fallen through a crack, a falling
Bird of prey that might be clinging
 To your image.
Amongst trees and rocks a haunting
 Of your suffrage.

Come home with language half-resolved,
Where the 'Fuck off we're full!' brigade
Delete what they won't understand.

Whys and Wherefores at Jam Tree Gully

Darkness loops imperfectly
and our body clocks register
the difference. Why do we step
outside the lengthening
then shortening days,
not rise and fall
with what arises
around us: wild oats,
puffballs, a new ant colony.

Brands, product placement, usage
does not 'place' make, but
it offers points of entry
to manufacturers and consumers
alike — read all about it.
How much they take.

Tim and I explore the driveway:
a narrow, wavering band of perception:
but all changes mean much more: erosion
tells dry and sudden downpour, expansions
of ant cities and a concrete poem with wings,
the captured moth and hauled caterpillar
testament to these ants setting roots,
sensing every step, flutter or crawl
over their outlets, their expansiveness.

The 90 000-litre tank has been cleaned
though the water is still tannin-brown.
We wonder about rashes over our faces,
a reaction to the chemical changes of place.
Never forget a conversation, even one
as far away as Schull, in a corner house
where you drink bottled water with an atheist.
Now we are here and the water is not potable.

The gaps and channels are narrow
or so wide that it's hard to determine
their walls. A gecko through split granite.

Blue nimbus on hills shoves the lilac evening up to its vanishing.
The cut wood from the limb fallen on the cusp of our leaving
over ten months ago is now corded along the front wall. The burning.
Form is not following content, and the music is interior. Listen
outside the poem — white space is provided as suggestion, impetus.

Seven roos on the third tier! No layer of Inferno, though it too
burnt out when the fire 'raced' through the valley. Sentinel
male (the doctor says she gets all her blokes' prostate levels
checked when they reach forty-five — there's a portrait of her
holding a gun and uttering in Times Roman: 'Keep your city
out of my country'). Seven roos watching us open the back door —
grazing, cautious but sticking to the spot, chewing it over.
No risk, we're country. We acknowledge traditional owners
though I don't think that's what's meant. We play orthodoxy.

Saw an unusual parrot (for around here) on the road back from Mum's place, below Walwalinj — it looked like a Bourke's Parrot (military governor of NSW in the 1830s) whose range across Australia doesn't really take a grip until the Moore River further north, but with aviary escapees transmuting the meaning of range and habitat, anything is possible. It might have been an immature Regent Parrot which while unusual, fits the wheat areas to a T. But it wasn't that yellow. I didn't hallucinate it, though the jelly in my eye hasn't completed a separation — I know because lightning shot through the halflight last night when it was dry and cool and still. Ghosts are thick and plentiful on that stretch yet this bird with its parrot beak was alone.

How much this hooks into Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation* is underpinned by the glitter of surfaces in Northam and the Daniella Diamonds bandwagon Tracy saw yesterday: daydream would have no room for FIFO ('fit in or fuck off') anti-life of bohemian-crushing material outposts.

The evil that is Operation Sovereign Borders is a scanning of the artefact, material beauty of dead art in a museum of Hansard — grist for the TV mill, snatches of abuse in a pub dinner conversation, a retailer's persecution of Mill's justice in the free-for-all-bliss of detonation, denotative as liberty's spiritus, the stuff that fuels cars from the other bowser.

Extracting my reading from this vertex(t) I am left with little or nothing; though how do you account for the mob of roos? Principles. Garnering public opinion. And I didn't even see the spitfire dragging a burrow and reversing in: barely character, like libel.

Reacquainting with the rhythm of the machine, reversing techno-burnout and all the little excuses we make to fit in, gain functionality, achieve connection.

A return is misgiving, when the outside is made suffocating, toxic: the idiot cropduster fifty foot above the roof, dribbling residue out of its failed potency, the braggart pilot grinning with his tours of duty, his African campaigns where he tells it like it is, skills developed for people-deletion, to safeguard the crops' toxic journeys, the war-mongers and the empire-making over what they call Mount Bakewell. celebrating the mate of a twenty-year-old Ensign Dale, circa 1830, circa 2013 — run silent, run deep... echoing tributes to horrific governance.

All the kids in the district play as the giant dragonfly passes over, buzzcutting.