

**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

## **Praise for previous publications:**

‘With its beer-drenched Blundstones, cricket balls retrieved from neighbour’s backyards, misbehaving pastor’s kids and crabs plucked from the Moyne River, O’Reilly’s poetry collects and curates a series of vernacular objects and experiences that comprise life in Australia and beyond. From the streets of Ballarat to the dry highways of West Texas, from the floor of a petrol station in rural NSW to the evening sky seen from a Scottish beach, this poetry traverses continents, testing spaces and locations and finding them brimming with their own types of desire. Using a light touch and an elegant voice, *Distance* traces out nostalgia’s peculiar contours and emotional resonances, resulting in remarkable poetic moments that will return and whisper again to a reader even after the book is set down.’—LACHLAN BROWN, author of *Limited Cities*

‘*Distance* is a hugely nostalgic collection, traditionally, elegantly and simply (in the best sense of the word) written. Marked by a sense of both internal and external exploration, the poems take us on a journey through time and place, charting the terrain of identity, nationality, connection and belonging within the context of spatial, cultural and temporal displacement. These poems have the power to make one pine for one’s own childhood, reassess one’s own identity, and reconsider one’s own connection to “ancestors” and “country.”’—MICHELE SEMINARA, author of *Engraft* and editor of *Verity La*

‘Joseph Brodsky, the Russian Nobel laureate, once remarked that memory and art have in common the “ability to select, a taste for detail.” In the work of Nathanael O’Reilly, memory and art come together to bring us poems that remember what cannot – what must not – be forgotten, in rich

and telling detail and with a taste for quiet but incisive irony.’—PAUL KANE, author of *Welcome Light, Work Life* and *Australian Poetry: Romanticism and Negativity*

‘Nathanael O’Reilly’s poems sound the major themes of Australian poetry: landscape, displacement, yearning, and above all a critique of cultural narrowness. O’Reilly’s plain spoken diction is often laced with understated wit, but is given ballast by its principled grounding in lived experience.’—NICHOLAS BIRNS, editor of *Antipodes*

‘These wonderfully crafted narrative poems capture the diasporic identity, somewhere between home and elsewhere, a metaphor for the unknown. I particularly enjoy their realism, the way in which they evoke the yearning for a reckless, peripatetic youth spent in rural towns, for teenage friendships, mateships, encounters with, or dreams of post-pubescent love. I like the arrangement of the poems too; it’s a fine, understated debut.’—MICHELLE CAHILL, author of *The Accidental Cage, Ophelia in Harlem* and *Vishvarupa*

‘With an unmistakable Australian sensibility, O’Reilly summons the courage to face the places he’s left behind in these frank, but as often heartfelt poems. Readers both near to, and far away from, the particulars here will easily and equally relate as he mines the things, boyhood, sport, car trips, girls, that are familiar to growing up everywhere and with language that feels completely true.’—JONATHAN BENNETT, author of *Here is My Street, This Tree I Planted* and *Civil and Civic*

‘Poetry rich with imagery but controlled by emotional truth...a potent poetic combination.’—E. A. GLEESON, author of *In Between the Dancing* and *Maisie and the Black Cat Band*

## **Nathanael O'Reilly**

Nathanael O'Reilly was born in Warrnambool in 1973 and raised in Ballarat, Brisbane and Shepparton. He attended university at Monash and Ballarat before moving overseas in 1995; he has travelled on five continents and spent extended periods in England, Ireland, Germany, Ukraine and the United States, where he currently resides. O'Reilly is the author of the full-length collection *Distance* and the chapbooks *Cult*, *Suburban Exile* and *Symptoms of Homesickness*. He is a recipient of an Emerging Writers' Grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, and his poems have been published in journals and anthologies in nine countries.

Nathanael O'Reilly  
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for Departure**

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For Tricia & Celeste

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# Border Crossings

## *I. Vienna to Brno*

As we cross the Danube and leave Vienna  
the guy on my left reads every article  
in *Le Monde* about the Paris terror.

The girl on my right reads *Harry Potter* in Czech  
on her iPad then switches to the film adaptation.  
At the Czech border two police officers

board the bus to check passports  
while two more stand outside  
flirting with the stewardess

as she hands them fresh coffee.  
Syrian kids play in the car park  
beside the border while their mother

hangs washing on a wire fence.  
Across the border we pass casinos  
a church on an island in a lake

a billboard featuring a topless woman  
covering her breasts with one arm  
while using the other to give the finger

to someone outside the frame.  
I listen to Nirvana, U2 and Springsteen  
as we pass vineyards, tractors ploughing

fields, villages centred around churches  
hundreds of windmills generating  
guilt-free energy, billboards advertising

Aqualand Moravia. The girl beside me  
carries on two text conversations  
simultaneously, deftly switching

between Nokia and Samsung.  
She falls asleep sixteen k's from Brno  
as we pass a subdivision of McMansions

and Hagrid comforts Hermione. A train  
rushes past in the opposite direction  
as Springsteen growls 'this is your hometown.'

## *II. Prešov to Bratislava*

At Kysak old men drink vodka before departure.  
Stacks of Hanjin shipping containers  
rust beside crumbling Soviet factories.

Mist hovers above the pine-tree-covered hills.  
Patches of snow glint atop mountains.  
Cabins reflect in frigid lakes.

Four old ladies talk unceasingly for hours.  
Nine young men drink pivo in the dining car  
while singing along to folk music

blasting from a cell phone.  
A young couple run their hands  
through each other's hair and over

the contours of toned taut muscles. Passengers  
produce seemingly endless supplies  
of bread, meat and cheese from luggage.

The train passes a ruined castle  
on a rocky outcrop as I sip whisky  
in the dining car. Hundreds

of architecturally identical villages  
occupy both sides of the line.  
Infrastructure crumbles and rusts

at every station while orange-clad workers  
stand in doorways watching with folded arms.  
Vegetable gardens and orchards fill the front

and back yards of houses and cottages –  
no space wasted on lawns here.  
Steep roofs suggest heavy snows.

A man orders a glass of vodka  
in the dining car and knocks it back  
before the waitress calculates change.

Woodsmoke emanates from chimneys  
and drifts away towards forested hills.  
Church clocks and bell towers rise above

villages projecting power over the people.  
An old woman cuts the queue at the bar.  
A young man shrugs and sighs – *This is Slovakia.*

### *III. Bratislava to Vienna*

Changing infrastructure  
makes visible the unmarked border  
between Slovakia and Austria

as girls beside me converse  
in Slovak and read memes  
from their iPhones aloud in English.

Grey skies lower above  
flat green countryside.  
Animals are absent.

A Slovakian girl repeatedly  
adjusts her hair while the guy  
behind her takes selfies

and laughs at his own image.  
Windmills tall as abbeys  
cram the horizon.

Green-painted bases  
and grey columns support  
slowly turning red-striped blades

above ploughed and planted  
unfenced fields. A young woman  
wears a t-shirt with the word *Zero*

emblazoned in silver across  
her breasts, defying reality.  
Black leather boots zip

all the way up to her bare knees.  
The elderly conductor mutters  
and sighs as he checks tickets.

New apartment buildings rise  
above fields on the outskirts  
of Vienna marking suburbia's edge.

Inside the city, Mercedes,  
Audis and BMWs proliferate.  
Wealth makes itself visible.

The garden sheds have flowerboxes  
and lace curtains in the windows.  
A signal box covered in graffiti

says *this city is just like any other*  
despite the Danube, Aryan beauty,  
waltzes, fur coats, cake and coffee.

Letters painted on a metal fence  
proclaim *Arise!* while a *Bauhaus*  
sign promises modernity.