

## PERSONAL LOGISTICS

CHRIS PALAZZOLO

### ABOUT THE BOOK

A collection of poetry that details the poet's personal experiences and observations of life in the East Kimberley: the minutiae of transient (non-indigenous) human experience embedded in a vast landscape.

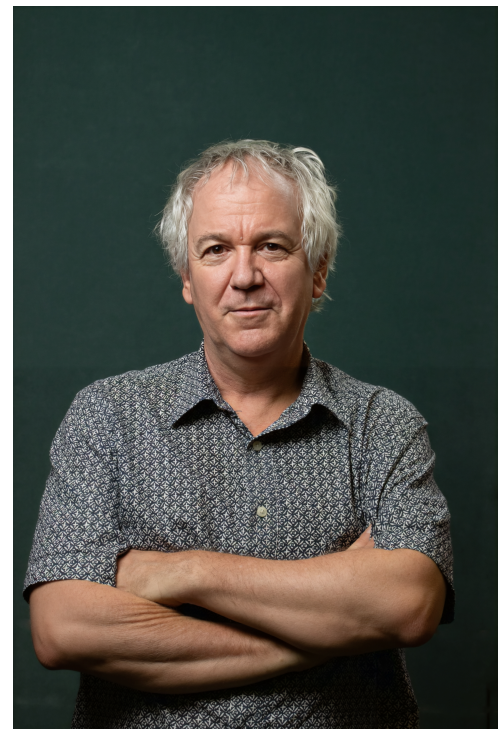
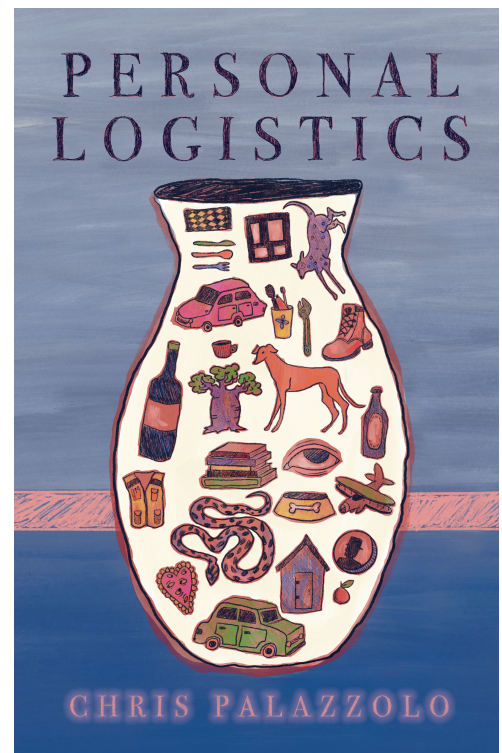
### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Palazzolo was born in Perth, Western Australia in 1966. He studied literature, philosophy and communications at Murdoch University before pursuing an economically hazardous life as an Australian writer. He can turn his hand to poetry, short fiction, long fiction, non-fiction, and has been shortlisted for a handful of national awards, including the ABC Fiction Award in 2009 and the Seizure Viva La Novella Award in 2014. *Personal Logistics* is his first book with Fremantle Press. He lives in the East Kimberley region of north-western Australia with his wife and three children.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### READING

1. Why do you think the collection is called *Personal Logistics*?
2. Why are there two poems called 'Tribute' in this collection? What is the relationship between them?
3. What do you see as the importance of water (both industrial and natural) in this book?
4. How has this collection between ordered, and what are its themes across the work?
5. What sense of place arises from this work?
6. How would you describe the relationship between the speaker of a poem, and the poet who writes it? Are they the same thing? Can you identify poems where speaker and poet feel close together, and where they feel further apart?
7. How would you describe the speaker's relationship to place (the East Kimberley)? How is place shaped through the speaker's eyes? Choose one or two poems to support your observations.
8. Using the poet's description of a poem 'as a machine' (p. 10), can you deconstruct a poem in this collection to see how and why it has been put together the way it has?
9. How are First Nations People and non-Indigenous people portrayed in these poems? What do they reveal about the speaker?
10. Are any of these poems political? Which ones – and why?
11. What are your favourite images in this collection, and why?
12. Why do you think the poet chose 'The Last Streetlight and the Inexpressible' as the final poem (p. 77)?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### WRITING

1. Do you keep a diary? Write a poem that has its beginnings in a diary extract.
2. What are the 'personal logistics' of your own writing practice (p.11)?
3. What is your own 'something from nothing' moment (p.11)?
4. Can you write a poem that explores the relationship between speaker and place?
5. Can you write a series of 'thumbnail sketches' of the place you live (p.36)?
6. Can you write a 'curriculum' of a place from a series of different voices (p.67)?

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### *Is it your experience that you need to write poetry in order to understand your relationship to place?*

All of my writing, not just poetry, is to some degree chasing down a sensation of place. The writer's privilege is that any place becomes meaningful because the writer inhabits it, writes about it, inflects their descriptions of its features through the prism of their (or their character's) interior states. My conception of 'place' is a kind of civic consciousness. I have always considered myself a Perth writer and felt my responsibility to the city is to use the features that attract me – its street corners, footpaths, freeways – as elements of an intellectual landscape. This is not as obvious as it first sounds; Perth is rarely thought or spoken about intellectually (contrast this experience to that of a Melbourne writer, who would take for granted their city as an intellectual landscape). Now that I live in Kununurra, I observe the town's forms with the same 'eye' – which means I feel a certain detachment from it. I am always conscious of my home city 3300 kilometres away. 'Place' now means exile.

### *At what point did you begin to think of individual poems as 'a collection'? Did this affect what you wrote next?*

Moving to Kununurra has been creatively successful for me. My last few years in Perth were somewhat barren; apart from diaries, I wrote very little. I don't know why this was, but I was in a deep rut. As soon as we settled here, I began writing again, at first continuing the diaries, then letters and essays, and then poems, which came thick and fast (by my low productivity standards anyway). For this reason, I was conscious very early on that I was building up a distinct body of northern Australian verse. Over the following years, the collection silted up; I would fill a notebook with drafts, work on them for a couple of months, stop and attend to other things like work and kids and travel, and then I'd take up my pen and fill up another notebook, and so on. The novelty of what I was experiencing largely determined what I wrote – seeing Wyndham and the Cambridge Gulf for the first time, or holidaying in Katherine and Darwin. Only when Fremantle Press took an interest in the poems did I begin to think of an arrangement.

### *What is a poem that you have 'stitched and unstitched' multiple times? Where did it begin, and where did it end?*

The most troublesome poems in the current collection were the two 'Tribute' poems and 'The Last Streetlight and the Inexpressible.' All three sprung from a single draft in one of my 2020 notebooks. The original draft was a kind of cursory sketch musing on the streetlight at the end on my driveway and the source of its power – the Ord River hydroelectric plant seventy kilometres away. I have always been intrigued by the poetic possibilities of streetlights, their 'exteriority', and a kind of socialistic collectivity of electrons and photons extracted from a lump of coal (a primeval tree) or a mass of water, that results in illumination which sculpts visible forms in the night. But the sketches were too abstract, too thin and obscure; I just couldn't make them work. It wasn't until 2023, when I started thinking of an arrangement and a kind of unifying motif for the collection that all three took their present forms. They now serve as a thematic continuity between this collection and my first volume of poetry, *Unhoused* (Regime Books, 2013), which used a recurring motif of a piece of coal burning in a chamber as a unifying principle.

*Unhoused* also contains the most troublesome of all my poems. The earliest sketches of this poem go back to 1995. It didn't reach its final form until nearly two decades later. It is called 'Utopia', a copy of which appears below.

## **Do you have a favourite poem in this collection?**

In his *Annals of Imperial Rome*, Tacitus said of Emperor Claudius – 'Claudius continued to make decisions based on advice he received last.'

When it comes to my poetry, I'm like Claudius; my favourite poem is always my last one. I'm particularly pleased with 'Songlines and Sandy Floors', because I knocked it off in a couple of sittings, out of a very unpromising sketch, just a day or two before the manuscript went to print. I know it's not the best poem in the collection, but I'm still getting a buzz from looking at it.

## **Who are the poets you read, and why?**

The only poet I examined in depth (that is to say a body of work and a biography) was the Italian medieval humanist Petrarch. My Honours thesis was an analysis of his collection of Italian verse (most of his writing was in Latin) known as *Rime Sparse*, or *Canzoniere*, which largely, though not exclusively, dealt with his unrequited love for a married woman. All of the examples I analysed I translated myself (with the help of Professor John Scott at UWA) from Petrarch's very colloquial fourteenth-century Italian into modern English. Translating these sonnets, odes and sestinas was like opening up jars of preserves that have sat on dusty shelves for seven hundred years; the smells that came out of them were quite heady – the lustful stink of a cloistered scholar. The sonnet in the attachment, 189, is a medieval cyborg poem.

Individual poems rather than poets as such have influenced me more. Just a few I'll mention briefly (there are links or copies below).

'The Idea of Order at Key West' by Wallace Stevens. I love the music of Stevens' language, the way it rolls with the sea. [The Idea of Order at Key West by Wallace Stevens | Poetry Foundation](#)

'Parnell's Funeral' by W. B. Yeats. A jeremiad against the demagoguery of Irish nationalist politicians, as relevant today as it was back in 1922. [Parnell's Funeral by William Butler Yeats - Famous poems, famous poets. - All Poetry](#)

'Landscape with Figures', by Frank Ormsby (see below). Another Irish poem. To paraphrase the poem's opening line, *What haunts me is what's not said*. Everything that is happening is inferred. My inference is this – the girl is pregnant. The mother has seized the opportunity, while the fathers and sons are away at market, to take her daughter to Belfast, ferry to Liverpool, abortion at an English hospital, back in time to make dinner for the returning men.

'The Man Who Read Skies' by Mardi May (see below). Like the Stevens', I love the music of this poem. Mardi May is one of the group of the Poets at KSP (Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers Centre), who I've always held in high regard.

**For poems referred to in interview questions, see following pages.**

## UTOPIA

*Woodrow Ave and Grand Promenade, Dianella*

The streetlights do not cast pools of light  
in world darkness this side of the city,  
they are as close together and ambient  
as the population here is said to be dense,  
throwing a caul of chill visibility  
on this unremarked corner –  
its new traffic island and cracked footpath,  
derelict's-hair grass and cigarette-butt dirt  
in kerb gaps, its bus-stop, Keep Left  
and No Parking At Any Time signs –  
nocturnal fluorescent daylight  
for the populations  
haunting their well-lit spaces  
with their well-policed absences  
while anomic freeways faraway breathe  
across the wide open channel of air.

The houses wear rust and sandstone masks  
and notwithstanding paranoia's  
curtain-crack eye and button-numbering thumb  
are blind. Huddled in the exotic shadows  
of their front yards – rootless palms  
and chainsaw-discipline gums –  
paths draped across mist blue lawns  
like sleeping tongues  
tasting the open footpath –  
or hidden by two metre sandstone  
verge walls bearing the elbow tags  
of the hooded ones with spraycans –  
they are the silent carnival  
of the population's shells, and inside each one,  
cocooned in their beds,  
populations dream of never having walls.

A car approaches down the fluorescent canal  
of the avenue. Suddenly, imperceptibly  
time recurs – noise and displaced air  
of the hurtling object slowly detach  
from the surrounding matrix of sonic surf –  
a red Toyota Seca, cones of headlights  
bisect the molecular streetlight,  
fleeting geometries of torn light flit and slip  
across its red skin and black windscreens,  
turbulence now warping through the world.  
As it nears the corner and slows  
its dashboard-lit driver  
can just be discerned – a staring organism  
in a greenish-blue solution.  
It passes...

If someone is awoken in the houses  
there is no sign – no muted light of bedlamp,  
no sleepy eye through a blind. Maybe



it is being dreamed of too,  
this solitary midnight car, in its passing,  
as it turns right onto Grand Promenade,  
its deep-throat exhaust pipe blowing,  
and accelerates away? Maybe  
it is being dreamed of as lost, winding its way  
through the night suburbs before it finds itself  
on those faraway freeways  
where it will circulate forever?

Chris Palazzolo

(Commenced 1995, completed 2012)

## CLXXXIX from the Canzoniere

Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio  
per aspro mare, a mezza notte il verno,  
enfra Scilla et Caribdi; et al governo  
siede 'l signore, anzi 'l nimico mio.

A ciascun remo un penser pronto et rio  
che la tempesta e 'l fin par ch'abbi a scherno;  
la vela rompe un vento humido eterno  
di sospir', di speranze, et di desio.

Pioggia di lagrimar, nebbia di sdegni  
bagna et rallenta le già stanche sarte,  
che son d'error con ignorantia attorto.

Celansi i duo mei dolci usati segni;  
morta fra l'onde è la ragion et l'arte,  
tal ch'incomincio a desperar del porto.

Petrarch

(Composed 1350, or thereabouts.  
Copied from pdf *Grande biblioteca della letteratura italiana*)

Through wild sea in the dead of winter,  
my ship, flooded with forgetfulness,  
passes between Scylla and Charybdis;  
at the helm sits the master – no, my enemy!

At each oar a sudden and perverse thought  
that taunts the storm and my death;  
the sail is torn by wet, eternal winds  
of sighs, of hope, and of desire.

Rain of tears, mist of scorn  
lash and release the already tired rigging  
fashioned in error and entwined with ignorance.

Hidden, my two sweet well-used signs;  
dead in the waves is reason and skill,  
such that I begin to despair of port.

Petrarch

(My translation, 1991)

## LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES

What haunts me is a farmhouse among trees  
Seen from a bus window, a girl  
With a suitcase climbing a long hill  
And a woman waiting.  
The time the bus took to reach and pass  
The lane's entrance nothing was settled,  
The girl still climbing and the woman still  
On the long hill's summit.

Men were not present. Neither in the fields  
That sloped from hedges, nor beyond the wall  
That marked the yard's limits  
Was there sign of hens, or hands working.  
No sight that might have softened  
On the eye the scene's  
Relentlessness.

Nothing had happened, yet the minute spoke  
And the scene spoke and the silence,  
And oppressed as air does, loading  
for a storm's release.

All lanes and houses  
Secretive in trees and gaunt hills' jawlines  
Turn my thoughts again  
To that day's journey and the thing I saw  
And could not fathom. Struck with the same dread  
I seem to share in sense, not detail,  
What was heavy there:  
Sadness of dim places, obscure lives,  
Ends and beginnings,  
Such extremities.

Frank Ormsby  
(From *A Store of Candles*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1977)

## THE MAN WHO READ SKIES

My father read skies  
daily deciphering  
the message of clouds,  
plotting the fickle  
journey of weather  
like a traveller, map open.

He searched for clues  
hidden in the spheres,  
*atmo, tropo, and strato,*  
he knew their names  
like old friends and family.

'Clouds are for artists,'  
he said, brush in hand  
above a sky-washed canvas,  
then billowed clouds  
like spinnakers on windy seas.

A fisherman at heart,  
he liked nothing better  
than a mackerel sky,  
a mottled, scaly fish skin sky  
swimming with imagination,  
the big one that got away.

He carried a coat  
when nimbus piled  
anvil-sharp warnings  
on his comfort of cumulus,  
and when the racing wind rode high,  
his mares' tails streaked across the sky.

Mardi May

(From the Katharine Susannah Pritchard Writers' Centre  
25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Anthology, 2010)



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