



Waiting for the Past: Poems

Les Murray

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A new collection of poems from Les Murray that renews and transforms the contemporary world through language

In *Waiting for the Past*, Les Murray employs his molten sense of language to renew and transform our experience of the world. With quicksilver verse, he conjures his rural past, the life of the poor dairy boy in Australia, as he simultaneously feels the steady tug of aging, of time pulling him back to the present. Here, syntax, sense, and sound combine with such acrobatic grace that his poems render the familiar into the unknown, the unknown into the revelatory.

Whether Murray is writing about a boy on a walkabout hiding from grief, a sounding whale “spilling salt rain,” or leaves that “tread on the sky,” the great Australian poet’s sense of wonder, his ear for the everyday, his swiftness of thought, are everywhere in these pages. As Derek Walcott said of Murray’s work, “There is no poetry in the English language now so rooted in its sacredness, so broad-leafed in its pleasures, and yet so intimate and conversational.”

Waiting for the Past: Poems Details

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Author : Les Murray

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From Reader Review Waiting for the Past: Poems for online ebook

Alex says

Sorry, but Les Murray doesn't do it for me. While I can admire his genius, I don't appreciate much of his subject material. Not that it's rude, it's just uneventful or abstract.

Simon says

Once again, Les Murray shows a sharp eye and keen ear. His poems find a richness in the mundane and the magnificent. Many themes are treated. One of the final ones, on domestic violence, was particularly startling. Those who like Murray's work, or who simply enjoy a poetic look on life, will find profit in these pages.

Peter Metcalfe says

Les Murray will live long and well in the world of words as a Master of the Word

Layne says

I don't get poetry.
My review means
Nothing.

Alarie says

Les Murray has such a big reputation as a popular, accessible, award-winning poet that I was disappointed this collection didn't appeal to me. Judging from some other reviews, it may be that this book wasn't up to his usual standard. Many poems didn't say enough, and there were times I could have used a glossary of Australian expressions.

I most enjoyed the poems about his childhood during WWII. I could also relate to the problems of aging he described in "The Care" and here in "Vertigo":

"When, any time after sixty,
or any time before, you stumble
over two stairs and club your forehead
among rake or hoe, brick or fuel-tin,
that's time to call the purveyor
of steel pipe and indoor railings

and soon you'll be gasping up landings
having left your balance in the car..."

I also appreciated that he took on some of the unpleasant topics we hear in the daily news: "The Murders of Women" and "The Massacre" (about a high school shooting), but I found the food poems particularly boring:

"Bread Again

The staff of life
has become
the lunch of staff."

Ryan Williams says

Les Murray dedicates each of his books 'To the Glory of God', a slight tweak on the Jesuit's motto. If I were God, I'd give this latest offering a B minus.

Murray's standing isn't in doubt. He has won the T.S Eliot Prize, the Petrarch Prize and the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry, and many feel his flight to Sweden is long overdue. His poems enjoy a proverbial status in his native Australia, particularly 'The Dream of Wearing Shorts Forever', 'The Tin Wash Dish' and 'The Quality of Sprawl.' Blake Morrison ranked him in the same league as Heaney, Walcott and Brodsky; Brodsky himself said 'Murray is 'quite simply, the one by whom the language lives.'

Murray's language is unforgettable. It needs to be: his eyes are like telescopes. No one else could describe the Taj Mahal thusly:

*In a precinct of liver stone, high
On its dais, the Taj seems bloc hail.*

Or water gardening:

*Blueing the blackened water
that I'm widening with my spade
as I lever up water tussocks
and chuck them ashore like sopping comets
is a sun-point, dazzling heatless
acetylene, under tadpoles that swarm
wobbling, like a species of flies
and buzzing bubbles that speed
upward like many winged species.*

*Unwetable green tacos are lotus leaves.
Waterlily leaves are notches plaques*

of the water.

When Murray looks at something - an Emu, a firework, a woman's flowing hair - he makes you feel like you've never seen one before. No one who cares about the health of poetry can ignore him and expect to be taken seriously.

There are strong similarities with his 2004 collection *Poems the Size of Photographs*, in its lean, often imagist style. It plays well to Murray's strengths, as in 'Nuclear Family Bees':

*Not pumped from a common womb
this world of honey-flies
is a vertical black suburb*

of glued-on prism cells

Or in the comic 'Grooming with Nail Clippers':

*embracing your knees in opposition
you show inner thigh, and lift
toe-horn turrets which will grit
the flooring with grey beetle bix.*

My favourite poems soon became 'Diabetica', 'Savoury', 'Big Rabbit at the Verandah' ('you look edible and risen') perhaps the volume's best poem 'Self and Dream Self.'

Being Murray, there are always a few tetchy pieces thrown in to work off grudges against city dwellers, the educated, and all those poor deluded folk who don't believe in Roman Catholicism. At best, it results in from-the-headlines bits of ephemera ('Under the Lube Oil', 'Persistence of the Reformation' and 'The Massacre'). It's like a painting being unveiled and seeing 'Les woz ere' graffitied in a corner.

I think it's true that Murray's work hasn't advanced far since 1992's *Translations from the Natural World*, but I also think it's true that few other poets could hope to better that remarkable sequence. Get his *Collected Poems* instead.

Russell Howen says

A mixture of poems, some very good, some not very good, but it is an interesting read

Ryan Williams says

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Bethany says

I'm not sure why, but I wasn't as captivated by this collection as previous offerings. Perhaps my current cognitive challenges played a part in that, or perhaps (although I hesitate to suggest this) Murray's work is flagging? I think the former is far more likely, given his gigantic stature in Australian poetry.

Jakob Brønnum says

Three-and-a-half. A very varied collection of topics treated in poems. Evolves slowly into a large collection of wisdom and modern vision of man. Will evolve into four stars, I believe

Tonymess says

Is Australia shackled to a poetic history of “bush ballads”, rare marsupials, doing it tough on the land? A young nation, in English speaking terms, attempting to carve out a unique writing style, poetic and fiction, does it lead to perpetuating formulaic styles & subject matters?

For writers who have been professionally creating for over sixty years and published consistently for over fifty years an expected style, common themes, and a version of “Australianess” is to be expected.

If you read Australian poetry, you know of Les Murray, in fact a week before the announcement of the Nobel Prize Murray's betting price was the same as winner Bob Dylan at 50/1. Extensive information about Murray's background, farming, premature leaving of school due to his mother's death, move to full time writing, depression, and controversies is all available on the web, for a more high level precis of his achievements the Australian Poetry Library site says:

Les Murray has unquestionably been a major figure in contemporary Australian literature. Media reports since the 1980s have frequently referred to him as Australia's 'unofficial poet laureate', and since the 1990s he has been described as part of an international 'poetry superleague' of the best contemporary poets writing in English. Murray has attracted more international attention than any other Australian poet; he has been the recipient of prestigious international poetry prizes including the Petrarch Prize (1995), the T. S. Eliot Award (1997), and the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry (1998); collections of his work in translation have appeared in numerous languages including German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, and Hindi. (for full article visit webpage [here](#))

It is not unusual for Murray to appear on the shortlists of poetry prizes and his latest collection “Waiting for the Past” was shortlisted for the prestigious TS Eliot Award, missing out to Sarah Howe’s stunning debut collection “Loop of Jade”.

There are numerous reasons why this collection should be in contention to win the Prime Minister’s Literary Award. And it is possibly a fruitless exercise to attempt to find those features. Let’s look at a few “highlights”

For my full review go to [Waiting for the Past – Les Murray | Messenger's Booker \(and more\)](https://messybooker.wordpress.com/201...)
<https://messybooker.wordpress.com/201...>

Christina "6 word reviewer" Lake says

First two lines of "Beasts of the City":

Pioneers / shot their dinners and their fears

Daniel says

First Les Murray collection I've read. I liked it, just read around 10 poems at a time. There's a clear theme of his focus on the always impending mortality- whether the expectation of his body breaking down as he ages (poems about being an aging diabetic struggling to the toilet in the middle of the night, or of the small indignities of having a carer come), or of the mortality of growing up in rural Australia. Worth some reading and reflection.

David says

Some nice observations and great skill with words and images as well as the sounds of life. Loved 'Vertigo' and 'Bread Again' - "The staff of life / has become / The lunch of staff. "
Looking forward to reading more of his works. Another national treasure!
