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2 poems

Paul Collis is a Barkindji person from Bourke, NSW. Paul earned a PhD in Communications in 2015 from University of Canberra. Paul is an author and poet. His first novel, Dancing Home, won the David Unaipon Award for a previously unpublished Indigenous author in 2016, and won the ACT Book of the Year in 2019. Paul's first book of poetry, Nightmares Run Like Mercury, was published by Recent Work Press in 2021. He is Director, Indigenous Engagement for University of Canberra.

Road runnin', writin'

In Bourke,
writing
and catching glimpses of a past
Glimpses of family
the living and others who have passed
flash shadows
Bloodstains on cemented paths
are faded shadows
Shadow places everywhere
Dark places where love found life
Shadow places where life found death.
Things fade.

Some memories don't fade.

I'm road runnin'
to write,
Dream chasin'
on a ghost wind
Searchin, without lookin'
Touchin' spirts –
near Alice some memories don't fade

It is easy dreaming
on black earth country
lookin' at Barka
I'm gonna touch that Tree,
where she was tied ...
where it got crazy
when he couldn't get her off his mind
tears will run
with Barka
they won't seen as different gamoo to Barka
I'll walk where the old man walked
on the Ceremonial Ground I'll be dancin' up dust
dreaming her back to me

Brown Snake night

Brown Snake night ...
sing me too.

It was a Brown Snake night,
last night yellow moon
filled in sorry news –
the passing of an elder language teacher.

Ngai old man. Ngai.
I speak in Barkindji ...
in Kunya.
in Wonkamarra,
in Muruwari,
and in Nyemba.

When we lose good language speakers
purlu-karntu, purlu-karntu

our language lays dying in a dark past.
We're threatened.
Without language
how can we speak

now we are out of turn
purlu-karntu, purlu-karntu
broken,
messed up.

Ahh
Sing me then ...
Make me womboo
turn me to ghost.

let me see old people, again
let me see wizened faces
touch hands, again
let me walk with them

I long for campfire talk,
to hear Murrdie language spoken in the bush, teaching
at night in the Milky Dust.
See the shiny lights of mica-ochre,
glint,
on the Brown Snake moon-dancer bodies.

Let the stories
be expressed dance
on powdery ground
and ...
Sing me, too
Sing me too