

The Bridge

Maureen O'Shaughnessy

Yellow grass sprouting on the plains behind Dalgety, earth-moving machines
glassed cabins, hi-vis jacketed men, earmuffs,
backs hunched at the controls, they run their dozers, rolling
over piles of tussocked gravel, grinding through
the roadside on a job they've worked at, breaking and turning,
plot by plot for months. Shovelled earth pressed against stones lining the Snowy

and here, whittled on each edge, a gentle laceration that cleaves
the banks over which they'll re-build the bridge.

It smells faintly of rusted statues, damp things,
the river's action driving through the high land and boulders
of the Monaro like blood through an artery, its slick line coursing

in among the trees and down to the wind blown brown plateaus.

Those developers' plastic orange port-a-loos in formation
by the engineer's shed; and in the panel of sunlight
that has attached itself to the paddock's edge
a dry hot cow pushes stubble about but fails to find anything. Behind –

sitting dense and vivid, like a medieval tapestry of faded colours – the mountains.

The sky is white: workmen mark out the silt-swelled bridgehead
with pickets. Last night on television, those women with
children, dust-covered, picking through the rubble in Herat,
Afghanistan, dauntless, half-broken. The bridge to Obe
destroyed: a bridge pounded at every point by explosives
the shock of stone piers falling – the last route to the other side

cut off. And here, territories are split too. But it's just
for now. There's a boy and what looks to be his sister
both skinny, red-faced, wearing baggy shorts
playing downhill from me, rummaging in the tyres and concrete

at the base of the bridge pylon, a ribbon of tape, flapping,
spanning the length of supports to be rebuilt,
a maintenance worker edging, methodically, securing wire,
the low growl of machinery, hot air, chalky, and that wide
flat space, dotted, like shot in the eye.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy holds a Master of Creative Writing from UTS (2012) and has previously been published in *Best Australian Essays*, *Island*, *Blue Dog*, *Wet Ink*, *Best Music Writing Under the Australian Sun*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Hide Your Fires*, *Rock Country*, *Artsrush* and *Swamp*. Among short-listed poems, Bruce Dawe Poetry Prize and The Blake Poetry Prize: her poem. *Thursday, July 15* was awarded the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize (2010). A novel, *Lakeland* (Ginninderra Press), was published in 2015, and a verse novella, *The Truth about A.*, in 2018.