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## Poems

Katherine Gallagher

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

Her family remember her from childhood as the one who travelled brightly in a big-roomed house, who always played for time.

# Katherine Gallagher

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## ITINERANTS

Her family remember her from childhood  
as the one who travelled brightly  
in a big-roomed house,  
who always played for time.

For years now I have been following her,  
taking on her disguises — globetrotter  
*bon vivant*, tasting in a glasshouse-array.  
Sometimes I have wanted to halt, finally settle  
but still she lures me on, across each brink.  
She is my sister, we live our lives twice over —  
times we have seen hemispheres in space  
the way a bird might — or finding villages  
weft with stories, feeling local again.  
Feasts, illuminations, we have taken all  
to heart — artefacts, trips out to markets  
buying more than we could carry.

I can never quite catch her  
nor does she ever let me rest, to shrink quietly  
into the hedgehog of my days.  
No, there is more, she swears —  
her foot a shadow ahead of mine, circling out  
saltbush and spinefex across our eyes,  
daring me on to the next stage —  
to take our lives to pieces,  
fossick for new stones.

## THE TRAPEZ-ARTIST'S FIRST PERFORMANCE

She has practised the tightrope,  
daily spinning her taut body  
afloat in territory  
she would claim as hers.

Now the audience is waiting,  
they bamboozle her with flowers.  
The scene is drunk on air,  
its nothingness  
that she must navigate.

Suddenly her head's a map, a study  
in letting go. Below —  
the fall, the odds.

She throws her act to the audience —  
it carries her to them, their rows  
of faces. And it is her sky  
they give back,  
balancing her with their eyes.

## PASSENGERS TO THE CITY

This morning she is travelling  
eyes steeled on her knitting,  
while the man next to her  
from time to time turns his head,  
glances briefly at the fiery wool  
then looks away.

He is silent as a guard, and she  
never speaks. Are they together, some pair  
perfectly joined by silence?  
Or are they today's complete strangers?

I'll never know, left simply  
to knit them together — characters in a story,  
a middle-aged couple on a train  
waiting for love's fable to happen  
to them, for their old lives to be  
swept aside, changed, changed —  
as she keeps knitting, bumping him  
occasionally, at which he shrugs,  
turns his head sharply  
not like a lover, but content.

## Shirley Lim

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### NO MAN'S GROVE

Crossing the China Sea, we see  
Other sailors, knee-deep in padi,  
Transformed by the land's rolling green.  
We cannot enter their dream.

The sea brings us all to jungle,  
Native, unclaimed, rooted, and tangled  
On salt like one giant tree.

We spring straight from sea-wave. We see  
But do not see grey netted pliants  
Shutting out the sun. Where sea and plant  
Twine, mammoth croakers crawl on tidal zone.

Some will live in the giant's shade, bend  
To the rapidly rolling horizon.  
I choose to walk between water and land.