



Decolonise Your Writing: Poetry

with KAYA ORTIZ for KICKSTART FESTIVAL 2022

acknowledgement of country

I wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional owners of this land, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

As the oldest living culture, they have been storytellers on this land for thousands of years. I acknowledge that the privilege I have to live and write on this land comes at the expense of First Nations people, and that decolonisation can only truly take place when we listen to First Nations people, first.

decolonising poetry

In this workshop, guided by the work of First Nations poets Ellen van Neerven and Evelyn Araluen, we will deconstruct traditional colonial ideas of poetry. We will explore what it means to decolonise language and form, and how decolonising goes beyond poetry.



about me

Kaya Ortiz (she/they) is an emerging writer and poet from the southern islands of Mindanao and lutruwita/Tasmania. Her writing has appeared in Portside Review, Westerly, Tell Me Like You Mean It Vol 4, and After Australia, among others. Kaya currently lives in Boorloo/Perth, where their name means ‘hello’ in the Noongar language.

workshop agenda: intro

**what is
decolonisation?**

Defining
decolonisation in
broader terms

**decolonising
poetry?**

What does it mean to
decolonise poetry?
And how and why?

**a couple of
readings!**

Reading and
discussing poems by
Ellen van Neerven
and Evelyn
Araluen

workshop agenda: writing exercises

language

using and 'mis'-using
english and other
languages as a poetic
technique

form and structure

experimenting with
and creating non-
conventional poetic
forms

perspective

whose story are you
telling? who is your
audience? what are
you representing?



**what is
decolonisation?**

what is decolonisation?

From an Instagram post by Boorloo Justice (@boorloojustice):

"Decolonisation has historically meant taking away colonial structures and systems which aren't native to a group or land etc.

HOWEVER in a contemporary setting, decolonisation is much more than just that...

Decolonisation has grown into a conversation around justice and restoring the disservice of colonisation through psychological, cultural and economic freedom."

what is decolonisation?

"It goes back to the idea of “invasion is a structure, not an event” meaning even though the colonisation has happened it doesn't mean that it's effects aren't still harming the Indigenous people of that land.

Decolonising is:

RECLAIMING sovereignty.

Removing the FALSE NARRATIVE that has been forced onto Indigenous people.

Reclaiming power and self-determination.

Reclaiming traditional lore/culture. "



decolonising poetry

what does that mean? how do you do it? and why?



decolonising poetry

Decolonising poetry isn't just a technique or a gimmick. It's a way to subvert the dominant oppressive systems that make marginalised FNPOC feel like our ways of being and doing are wrong and invalid.

Ultimately there is nothing wrong with following traditional poetic conventions. But decolonising poetry means making poetry that not only de-centers whiteness, but is also more accessible, that is relevant to today, that means something.

decolonising poetry

How do you do it?

We already have the tools at our disposal: language, form, imagery, perspective. It's just a matter of looking at them differently and questioning the patterns that might be in place. And it means being aware of who you're speaking to and for, and who/what you represent.

We'll do some writing exercises later on that will focus on a few of these, but first I wanted to read two poems with you.

Whole Lot

by Ellen van Neerven ('Comfort Food', UQP 2016)

family, earth

dingo, eagle

fire, food

Whole Lot

it's all of those things

what we eat comes from our roots

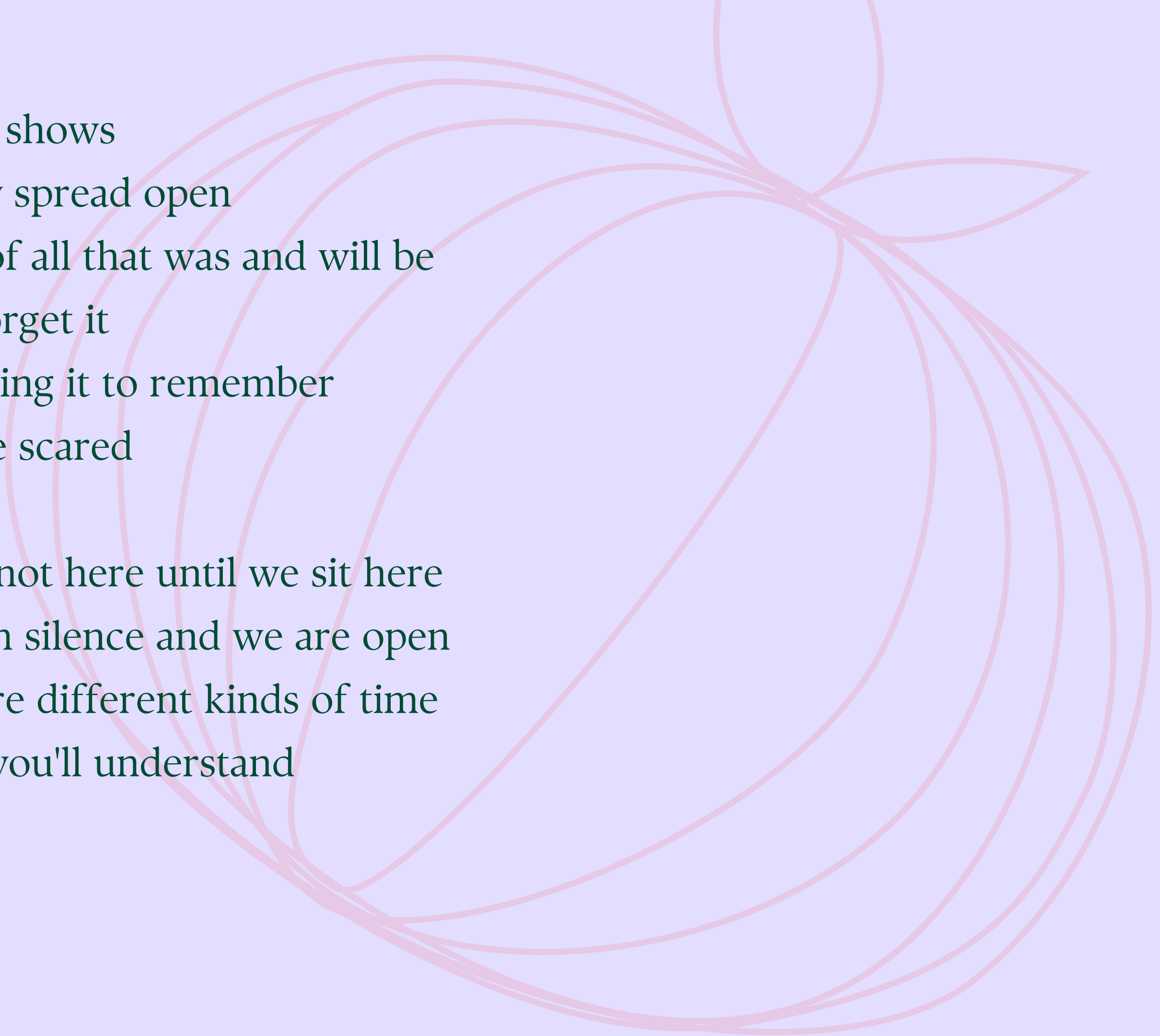
if we stop sharing there will be nothing

we start with black

let it get hold of you

look at the stars

or are you afraid to?



the day shows
country spread open
a map of all that was and will be
don't forget it
I'm tracing it to remember
don't be scared

we are not here until we sit here
we sit in silence and we are open
there are different kinds of time
I hope you'll understand



sing it

I want this to be here

when I leave again

I've been leaving a lot of times

it doesn't mean I want to

there is no easy way to cry

tell them I'll be back soon

when I come back and sit here

I want to still see Mibunn

powering through the sky

let me tell you with my skin

under the earth we will find

Whole Lot

it's all of those things



Discussion

1. Who is the poem speaking to? Who is the poem for?
2. What do you notice about language and form?
3. What is the poem 'about'?

decolonial poetics (avant gubba)

by Evelyn Araluen ('Dropbear', UQP 2021)

when my body is mine i will tell them
with belly&bones

do not touch this prefix
or let your hands burn black
with your unsettlement
there are no metaphors here

when i own my tongue i will sing
with throat&finger

gobackwhereyoucamefrom
for i will be
where i am for

when i am aunty

i will say, jahjums,

look what we made for you

look at this earth we cauterised

the healing we took with flame

i will show them a place

they will never have to leave

and when i am dead

they

will not


say my name

and when you are dead,

you can have poems



Discussion

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 2. What do you notice about language and form?
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- 



Break!

Take 10 minutes. Grab something to write with if you don't already have it!

writing exercise: language

If you speak or have a meaningful connection to another language, select a word that you can write around or incorporate into a poem. (I like using words that are either not directly translatable into english, or that can have double or multiple meanings.)

OR you can take an english word or phrase/saying, and change how it's used. A common way to do this is to turn a noun into a verb. You can also change the spelling to reflect a certain accent, or remove/alter the spacing of a phrase.

writing exercise: form

(You can use these prompts with what you wrote for the previous exercise!)

Draw inspiration from everyday things, like lists, recipes, quizzes, questionnaires, ads, table of contents, anything you can think of.

Examples:

- Recipe for feeling at home
- List of things I packed when we left

Or make your own ‘form.’ Just do whatever feels good to you, whether that’s line breaks or no line breaks, extra spacing, more or less verses, capitalising letters or not, words all over the page or in neat lines.

writing exercise: perspective

Write a poem from the perspective of an object, place, plant or animal.

You can choose something that appears in one of your existing poems or what you wrote in the previous prompts, and expand upon it in a new way.



Thank you!

It has been a privilege sharing space with you.

Keep writing, learning, and remember to practice
self-care!