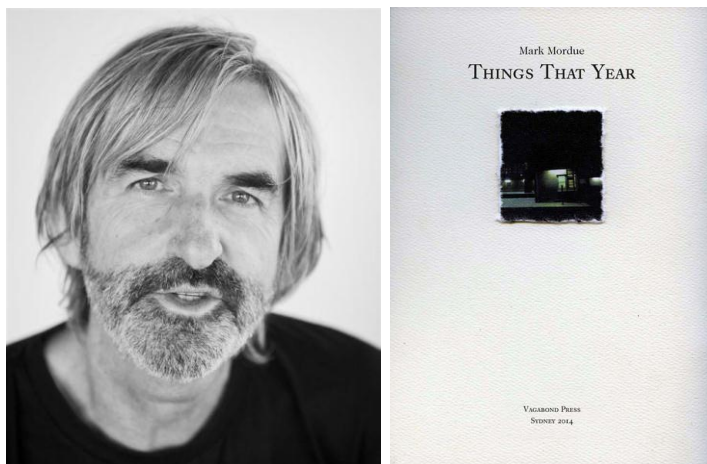


Impressions of Mark Mordue's Book of Poems



Things That Year
Vagabond Press
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Mark Mordue is a writer, journalist and editor based in Sydney. He was the winner of the 2010 Pascall Prize for Australian Critic of the Year. He is currently working on a biography of Nick Cave.

"All the world's a poem" - Kathleen Stewart, 'Matter Poems'

Mordue's new book, a collection of "random poems" seems to sit awkwardly with the kinds of reviewing that criticises, explains, or judges. Reading the short description that accompanies the book, I'm thinking of the way that writing memory is a generative act, unlike the kinds of critique that can box things in. Memories in *Things that Year* are "leaves on some weird tree inside us". And I get this sense that through writing out these memories in poetry, 'the poet' allows these leaves to fall, and in turn "makes room for something new to grow".

Instead of a review, I'd like to offer something more generative: impressions of what these poems do, a thinking through of how poetry allows us to perform memories; how, following cultural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, the joy of writing (and I venture, reading too) poetry is in recognising that the world and life itself is a composition of matter poem. Life as "sensations, motion, bodies and objects" thrown together.

In the poem 'Things that Year' a tumble of objects evokes the Sydney of Mordue's youth – Bourke Street traffic, a pyramid attic room, lemon walls and shadows, sweat of summer, bending and shaking at the Hopetoun Hotel. And I'm reminded of Delia Falconer's *Sydney*, a (re)collection of her hometown, in which Delia Falconer writes that for city dwellers, your 'town' will always be the city of your early-twenties, a time when you seem to own the place. I feel like I've travelled back more than a few years, where my town is Central's Devonshire Street tunnel, drunken chats in pub toilet queues, the lumpy painted walls of my favourite Newtown café, star anise in a tea strainer, and brown paper bag swaddled longnecks outside warehouse venues.

'I didn't know your eyes were blue' traces the textures of grief as "night poems of incoherence and sorrow". I can feel the contours of profound loss – peaks and troughs – when Mordue writes it as "panic in half hour moments". The way the world seems muted through this altered state is in the description of shadows cast across the kitchen floor. The strain to remember small details in appearances, like the colour of your parent's eyes, seems a testament to the way in which life itself is not made up of these finer details but is shaped by fuzzy impressions. I'm left with this one line in my head: "I can't stop hugging my children and brushing their hair with my fingertips". It's love not as an abstract concept, but in muscle memory – it's haptic and material.

Through Mordue's poems, fragments of sensation are not only deeply personal but seem to resonate beyond (dareisay universally?). It's probably true that we're constellations of these senses, memories and more, but these atmospheres seem to be embedded in the objects themselves – the strange luring quality of "dried oils on a knife" ('I'm thinking of you') or "a basketball through a rusted aluminium hoop" ('...so anyway the bones are small'). Amongst the writing, I read a recognition of objects as deeply affective and of life as an experience of bumping into these objects, rubbing against them, being touched by them. Memory is a recollection of these fragments of sensation. It doesn't try to explain this pull objects have on us, but is testament to their powers.

It's fitting for a book that is as much about the writing as it is about its own materiality. As part of the Rare Objects series, *Things that Year* (and I paraphrase) is a beautiful handmade object made to disperse and disappear quickly within a floating community of readers.

Alyssa Critchley 2014 ©

I didn't know your eyes were blue

It's possible to forget a lot of things in the fullness of time:
My father's eyes, the pale intensity of distance, how it all began.
I'm sleeping badly now. Dirt on a coffin, a credit card, loneliness,
Poetry streaming through my head, a disarranged message
That never has an end, am I writing it or having seizures?
We are all electric. I sense holes in my chest, panic in half hour
moments,
Sun and shadow, the motion of leaves outlined through a window
And cast upon a kitchen floor adding up to something warm.
I can't stop hugging my children and brushing their hair with my
fingertips,
Saying things that don't sound right to strangers,
As if I have slipped out of myself and away,
Leaving a fragmented self like those night poems of incoherence
and sorrow
And panic and love: death comes in spasms.
Missing my father and being a father:
I think this must be what tears are like for me.
Blue electric tears from the mind's eye falling over time forever.

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Things That Year appeared in the "Vagabond Press Rare Object Series".

<http://vagabondpress.net/products/mark-mordue-things-that-year>