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Parmelia

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Parmelia by Nandi Chinna

The Naturalist, or superintendent of gardens, James Drummond, brought his wife and six children ranging from 18 year old Thomas to 3 year old Euphemia. ...Drummond had his work cut out from the moment he boarded the Parmelia, for the Horticultural Society had made a gift of nine boxes of plants and cuttings.

-Pamela Statham Drew, James Stirling.

The naturalist feels giddy
when his feet leave soil behind.
The future of the world is carefully packed
into wooden boxes, a layer of bark,
small grey stones, then the dark rich
sod of England.

Strawberry cuttings multiply in their damp boxes
bulbs of daffodil and iris,
buried deep inside crates, rose stems wrapped in hessian,
canes of grape vines for new wine,
stark branches of pear and apple carefully labeled,
and packets of seed donated by kindly gardeners:
peas, beans, lettuce and spinach,
sacks of the best seed potatoes.

The naturalist is busy keeping them all alive
as the ship passes from one hemisphere to another
he shuffles the boxes around the deck
following shafts of sunlight,

an obstacle course of boxes, trunks,
piles of timber, barrels of rum
and the distressed cries of Alderney cows,
goats, sheep and chickens
leaning against their wooden pens.

Sodden with cold June rain,
the women and children
clamber into skiffs
and are set down on Carnac Island.

The naturalist waits on board,
arms wrapped tightly
around his dormant garden,
embalmed with salty spray.

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Nandi Chinna completed her Master of Arts at ECU in 2008, for which she researched and wrote a poetry collection based on the history of place names in Perth, Western Australia. She is currently a PhD candidate at ECU, researching the history of Perth's wetlands past and present. She is using the methodology of psychogeography to create a collection of poems about wetlands and walking.