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## Dog Swamp Shopping Centre

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## **Dog Swamp Shopping Centre** *by Nandi Chinna*

Arthur Julbert Harris could diversify when necessary,  
bait the swamp with a glass of pigs' blood,  
then roll up his trousers and wade  
into the water, standing knee deep while the leeches  
attach themselves to his legs. Back on land  
his calves black and writhing, leeches  
are plucked off one by one and placed in screw top jars.

Down at Perth hospital patients  
with boils and headaches, toothaches and fevers  
have Arthur's leeches applied to their pains.  
If the leech won't drink, drop it  
in a glass of warm beer until ready,  
then smear some blood or cream near the puncture site.

When leeches went out of fashion  
Arthur began to mix up dingoes with wadjella dogs  
yellow, red, blue and black with strange amber eyes  
that terrified with their indifference.  
There was good money for a mottled pup  
that could kill a rabbit as easy as scratch a flea.

When old Arthur Julbert died,  
his dogs escaped from their kennels  
and ran wild in the nearby swamp  
their barking and howling drifting  
through the night like mournful sirens.

After the dogs were shot and buried  
the water endured a blue-green shade,  
the paperbark fringes were cut up and burned;  
the ground rolled and smoothed over  
for a shopping centre and sporting oval.

Out behind Woolworths the swamp lingers.  
Two turtles have adapted to the conditions,  
turning sideways to swim through the rusted iron grate  
into a big concrete drain beneath the shops.  
A sign says 'This water may cause ill effects.'  
No drinking, No Swimming, No Boating,  
No sailing, No fishing,  
No Dogs.

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Nandi Chinna was born in Adelaide in 1964. Her poetry has been widely published in journals and anthologies. Her first collection *Our Only Guide is Our Homesickness* was published by Five Islands Press in 2007. She is currently a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, for which she is writing poetry about wetlands and walking.