



# REPEAT PATTERN

## IF I ASKED YOU TO NAME A POEM...

Or, if – more challengingly – I asked you to recite a poem from memory...

I'm willing to bet that all of you could do the first thing, and many of you could do the second.

But, now ask yourself, how old is that poem? The one you would name; the one you would recite by heart?

I'm willing to bet that for most people in this room, that poem would be an old one. One that has somehow been exalted into the status of classic. I know it would be for me. Poke me in the right place and I can recite *Jabberwocky*, *The Road Not Taken* and the first half of *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*. That's 1871, 1911 and 1915, making even the youngest of those poems already more than a century old.

What of the new poems? The ones being born every day, right across the world? Will they, one day, be the classics of tomorrow? The ones learned at school and etched into people's hearts and memories? Why do I worry that they will not?

Perhaps it won't hurt us, today of all days – as we come together as a community of friends, makers, artists, thinkers, people who care about each other and the world – to remember why poetry matters. And not just the old poems, but the newborn ones, too.

Jeanette Winterson, in an introduction to a book of poems by the magnificent Carol Ann Duffy, wrote this:

*'Sometimes people say to me, "why should I read a poem?" There are plenty of answers, from the profound – a poem is such an ancient means of communication that it feels like an evolutionary necessity – to the practical; a poem is like a shot of espresso – the fastest way to get a hit of mental and spiritual energy.*

*'We could talk about poetry as a rope in a storm. Poetry as one continuous mantra of mental health. Poetry as the world's biggest, longest-running workshop on how to love. Poetry as a conversation across time. Poetry as the acid-scrub of cliché.*

*'We could say that the poem is a lie detector. That the poem is a way of thinking without losing the feeling. That a poem is a way of feeling without being too overwhelmed by feeling to think straight.'*

Bless Jeanette Winterson.

Séamus Heaney said poetry is 'strong enough to help', and what could we need more, right now, than something that is 'strong enough to help'?



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But, of course, we've always needed something strong enough to help, as we remember if we listen to Sylvia Plath, who had this to say about her own poetry:

*'My poems do not turn out to be about Hiroshima, but about a child forming itself finger by finger in the dark. They are not about the terrors of mass extinction, but about the bleakness of the moon over a yew tree in a neighbouring graveyard.'*

*'In a sense, these poems are deflections. I do not think they are an escape. For me, the real issues of our time are the issues of every time – the hurt and wonder of loving; making in all its forms – children, loaves of bread, paintings, buildings; and the conservation of life of all people in all places, the jeopardising of which no abstract doubletalk of "peace" or "implacable foes" can excuse.'*

Let's zoom in on a few of those words. I want you to hold two phrases in your mind, if you would be so kind: 'the hurt and wonder of loving' is one. And the other, 'making in all its forms'.

And here we land on the book we're here to celebrate today, our friend Tracey's *Repeat Pattern*.

Tracey describes the book in an afterword as:

*'Just a dot and a dash in the history of time and human experience – one person's pattern or mark amongst a world of seemingly infinite patterns. And yet could one person's pattern perhaps also be everyone's pattern? And does that pattern repeat?'*

Yes, it does.

We, all of us, stumble through the world, learning to love, and learning to survive the losses that come to us through heartbreak and through death. We all experience, in Sylvia Plath's words, 'the hurt and wonder of loving'.

We also, however, have our own ways of finding solace and joy. Which brings us to the second of the phrases I asked you to hold in your mind: 'making in all its forms'.

Acts of making are implicated everywhere in *Repeat Pattern*. 'When the women stir,' the speaker of one particularly angry poem tells us, 'it's over the stove, making something, creating something.'

*Repeat Pattern* is the result of so much making. It's not only a book of words. It also makes its meanings through shapes and patterns and repetitions, numbers and punctuation marks and codes, visual allusions and visual illusions.

*Repeat Pattern* is a product of Tracey's life and talents, of their courage, their love of language, their gift for imagery, their searing truthfulness and, perhaps most strikingly of all, their powerful vulnerability.

The book, however, is also a product of the loving partnership Tracey has built with Lynda, and also of the remarkable, impressive and productive friendship between Tracey, Lynda, Michael and Robin.



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Whether they're making art books or growing vegetables, this quartet is a fertile powerhouse. Their friendship makes a platform, so solid that it has room to support and encourage others. It's a garden bed that's been fed and nurtured and cosseted. And so many of us here today have been the beneficiaries of the good soil that the folks from Earth Arts Rights consciously nurture and maintain.

Friends, it's very close to time for us all to go and have a drink and celebrate Tracey's beautiful book, but just before we do, I'd like to read you a poem that I think speaks to the reason we're all here today: one that invokes Sylvia Plath's foregrounding of the importance of 'making in all its forms'.

This is by the American poet and artist Wendy Videlock, and it's called *On Hearing Yet Another Person Say They Haven't Got a Creative Bone in their Body*.

*And yet you've spent your entire life  
creating — you've spent your life  
making —  
making dinner, making drinks,  
making fire, making  
the cut, making amends,  
making fun,  
making the team,  
making money, making  
lemonade*

*of lemons, yes — we spend  
our whole lives making —  
making decisions,  
making peace,  
making war,  
making mistakes,  
making a call, making some  
kind  
of sense of it all —*

*we can't help but spend our lives making,  
making music, making choices,  
making strides, making up  
for lost time,  
making hay, making haste,  
making promises and progress,  
making love, making  
history, making  
predictions, making  
productions, making  
light*



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*of the situation,*

*we make space,*  
*we make friends,*  
*we make magic, we make trouble,*  
*we make mountains*

*out of molehills,*

*we make tea,*  
*we make tracks,*  
*we make use, we make do,*  
*we make way, we make curds,*  
*we make words, we make waves*  
*we make meaning —*  
     *we are born*

*into this world and are made*

*(when we're not humans being)*

*for making, making, making.*

And now that we have launched Tracey Diggins's *Repeat Pattern*, I suggest that we go ahead and make merry.

**DANIELLE WOOD**

DANIELLE WOOD  
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 including *The Alphabet of Light*  
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Presented on 28 June 2025 at Bett Gallery, Nipaluna / Hobart, Lutruwita / Tasmania