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**Australian Poetry**

**Rex Ingamells**

**The Camp Fires of the Past**

A thousand, thousand camp fires every night,
in ages gone, would twinkle to the dark
from crest and valley in the rolling bush,
from mulga scrub and mallee scrub, from dunes
of Central sand, from gaps in straggling ranges,
from gibber plains and plains of iron-wood,
through leaves and in the open, from the mangroves
by shore of Carpenteria, from rocks
and beaches of the Bight.....for countless aeons,
a thousand, thousand camp fires burned each night,
and, by the fires, the Old Men told their tales
which held their listeners spellbound.... Every night
among the fires men chanted to the beat
of stick and boomerangs and clap of hands,
or drone-and-boom of didgeridoo, the songs
rising and falling, trailing, quickening,
while eyes gleamed bright, through smoke drift, bodies shone
and dusked in fitful glow amid the shadows.......

**Rex Ingamells**

# Ship from the Thames

# Stay, ship from Thames with fettered sailsin Sydney Cove, this ebb of tide;your gear untangled from the gales,imprisoned at your anchor ride.The portly gentleman who arethe pillars of the land come downand greet the Newcomes voyaged farto make a name in Sydney town.The Recoats, too with shouldered arms,marshal pale wretches from the hold,who, cramped in tempest and in calmshave learned to do as they are told.Flash phaetons fill the streets to-day;inn-tables rock to sailor fists;the Governor, while the town is gay,checks over new assignment lists.Aloof, the slandered and abhorredbehold from of a quarried rise,the cause of all the stir aboarda fiercer glitter in their eyes.

**Rex Ingamells**

# News of the Sun

##### The noon is on the cattle-track;the air is void of sound,except where crows, poised burning-black,cry to the dusty ground.Through mulga and mirage go nonebut brazen Boolee now,scorning the mercy of the sunbeneath the niggard bough.But suddenly the mulga stirs;the hot leaves flash like stars;and, threading song on wing-beat whirrs,burst flights of gay galahs.

**Rex Ingamells**

# Boomerang

##### This piece of hardwood, cunningly shaped,was curved so evenly while piccaninnies gapedat a Warrior who chipped at it with pieces of flint,and formed it by meticulous dint upon dint.Outside his wurly he sat beside a tree,and chipped at it patiently for hours - not for me,but to kill the Wallaby in the rocky pass,to kill the fat wild Turkey hiding in the grass.

# A. D. Hope

# The Return of Persephone

Gliding through the still air, he made no sound;
Wing-shod and deft, dropped almost at her feet,
And searched the ghostly regiments and found
The living eyes, the tremor of breath, the beat
Of blood in all that bodiless underground.

She left her majesty; she loosed the zone
Of darkness and put by the rod of dread.
Standing, she turned her back upon the throne
Where, well she knew, the Ruler of the Dead,
Lord of her body and being, sat like stone;

Stared with his ravenous eyes to see her shake
The midnight drifting from her loosened hair,
The girl once more in all her actions wake,
The blush of colour in her cheeks appear
Lost with her flowers that day beside the lake.

The summer flowers scattering, the shout,
The black manes plunging down to the black pit --
Memory or dream? She stood awhile in doubt,
Then touched the Traveller God's brown arm and met
His cool, bright glance and heard his words ring out:

"Queen of the Dead and Mistress of the Year!"
-- His voice was the ripe ripple of the corn;
The touch of dew, the rush of morning air --
"Remember now the world where you were born;
The month of your return at last is here."

And still she did not speak, but turned again
Looking for answer, for anger, for command:
The eyes of Dis were shut upon their pain;
Calm as his marble brow, the marble hand
Slept on his knee. Insuperable disdain

Foreknowing all bounds of passion, of power, of art,
Mastered but could not mask his deep despair.
Even as she turned with Hermes to depart,
Looking her last on her grim ravisher
For the first time she loved him from her heart.

**Persephone**(or in Latin Proserpine) was abducted by Dis (Pluto), god of the underworld, while she was gathering flowers. Responding to the entreaties of her mother, Demeter (Ceres), Zeus allowed Persephone to spend six months of each year on the earth. Cp. Milton (*Paradise Lost*, IV.268ff):

 Not that fair field

 Of Enna, where Proserpin gath'ring flowers

 Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis

 Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain

 To seek her through the world . . .

**Hermes**(Mercury) the messenger of the gods and patron of travellers, who conducted the souls of the dead to the infernal regions

# A. D. Hope

### The Pleasure of Princes

What pleasures have great princes? These: to know
Themselves reputed mad with pride or power;
To speak few words -- few words and short bring low
This ancient house, that city with flame devour;

To make old men, their father's enemies,
Drunk on the vintage of the former age;
To have great painters show their mistresses
Naked to the succeeding time; engage

The cunning of able, treacherous ministers
To serve, despite themselves, the cause they hate,
And leave a prosperous kingdom to their heirs
Nursed by the caterpillars of the state;

To keep their spies in good men's hearts; to read
The malice of the wise, and act betimes;
To hear the Grand Remonstrances of greed
Led by the pure; cheat justice of her crimes;

To beget worthless sons and, being old,
By starlight climb the battlements, and while
The pacing sentry hugs himself for cold,
Keep vigil like a lover, muse and smile,

And think, to see from the grim castle steep
The midnight city below rejoice and shine:
"There my great demon grumbles in his sleep
And dreams of his destruction, and of mine."

# A. D. Hope

# ParabolaYear after year the princess lies asleep Until the hundred years foretold are done, Easily drawing her enchanted breath. Caught on the monstrous thorns around the keep, Bones of the youths who sought her, one by one Rot loose and rattle to the ground beneath.

But when the Destined Lover at last shall come,
For whom alone Fortune reserves the prize
The thorns give way; he mounts the cobwebbed stair
Unerring he finds the tower, the door, the room,
The bed where, waking at his kiss she lies
Smiling in the loose fragrance of her hair.

That night, embracing on the bed of state,
He ravishes her century of sleep
And she repays the debt of that long dream;
Future and Past compose their vast debate;
His seed now sown, her harvest ripe to reap
Enact a variation on the theme.

For in her womb another princess waits,
A sleeping cell, a globule of bright dew.
Jostling their way up that mysterious stair,
A horde of lovers bursts between the gates,
All doomed but one, the destined suitor, who
By luck first reaches her and takes her there.

A parable of all we are or do!
The life of Nature is a formal dance
In which each step is ruled by what has been
And yet the pattern emerges always new
The marriage of linked cause and random chance
Gives birth perpetually to the unforeseen.

One parable for the body and the mind:
With science and heredity to thank
The heart is quite predictable as a pump,
But, let love change its beat, the choice is blind.
'Now' is a cross-roads where all maps prove blank,
And no one knows which way the cat will jump.

So here stand I, by birth a cross between
Determined pattern and incredible chance,
Each with an equal share in what I am.
Though I should read the code stored in the gene,
Yet the blind lottery of circumstance
Mocks all solutions to its cryptogram.

As in my flesh, so in my spirit stand I
When does *this*hundred years draw to its close?
The hedge of thorns before me gives no clue.
My predecessor's carcass, shrunk and dry,
Stares at me through the spikes. Oh well, here goes!
I have this thing, and only this, to do.

# A. D. Hope

### Meditation on a Bone

A piece of bone, found at Trondhjem in 1901, with the following runic inscription (about A.D. 1050) cut on it: I *loved her as a maiden; I will not trouble Erlend's detestable wife; better she should be a widow.*

Words scored upon a bone,
Scratched in despair or rage --
Nine hundred years have gone;
Now, in another age,
They burn with passion on
A scholar's tranquil page.

The scholar takes his pen
And turns the bone about,
And writes those words again.
Once more they seethe and shout
And through a human brain
Undying hate rings out.

"I loved her when a maid;
I loathe and love the wife
That warms another's bed:
*Let him beware his life!"*The scholar's hand is stayed;
His pen becomes a knife

To grave in living bone
The fierce archaic cry.
He sits and reads his own
Dull sum of misery.
A thousand years have flown
Before that ink is dry.

And, in a foreign tongue,
A man, who is not he,
Reads and his heart is wrung
This ancient grief to see,
And thinks: When I am dung,
What bone shall speak for me?

Trondheim, a city in Norway

# A. D. Hope

### Tiger

*At noon the paper tigers roar
-- Miroslav Holub*

The paper tigers roar at noon;
The sun is hot, the sun is high.
They roar in chorus, not in tune,
Their plaintive, savage hunting cry.

O, when you hear them, stop your ears
And clench your lids and bite your tongue.
The harmless paper tiger bears
Strong fascination for the young.

His forest is the busy street;
His dens the forum and the mart;
He drinks no blood, he tastes no meat:
He riddles and corrupts the heart.

But when the dusk begins to creep
From tree to tree, from door to door,
The jungle tiger wakes from sleep
And utters his authentic roar.

It bursts the night and shakes the stars
Till one breaks blazing from the sky;
Then listen! If to meet it soars
Your heart's reverberating cry,

My child, then put aside your fear:
Unbar the door and walk outside!
The real tiger waits you there;
His golden eyes shall be your guide.

And, should he spare you in his wrath,
The world and all the worlds are yours;
And should he leap the jungle path
And clasp you with his bloody jaws,

Then say, as his divine embrace
Destroys the mortal parts of you:
I too am of that royal race
Who do what we are born to do.

# Nine Bowls of Water - Poem by Robert Gray

Clear water, in silvery tin dishes
dented as ping pong balls:
a lemon juice tinge of the staling light is in them;
they've a faint lid of dust.

A potted water along a board slopped
and dripping lightly.
While the men work on the city road, excavating
its charred blackness,

the water waits
behind a corrugated iron shed that is set
at the pavement front,
under the tall shadowing empty stadium.

On that low plank, also, crude soap pieces,
bright as the fat
of gutted chickens - but, with a closer look, resistant,
darkly-cracked, like old bone handles -

one beside each bowl,
and the rags are on their bits of hooked wire.
The cars continue,
but few people walk here between the lunch shed

and brick wall. Set out along a wet bench,
the kneeling water:
this reality from which we have dreamed the spirit.
We walk in grittiness,

on papers, mud-scrapings,
splattered with a sporadic jackhammer racket,
past nine bowls of water - a gallantry of the union.
Trees in avenues and sailing boats and women.

[Robert Gray](https://www.poemhunter.com/robert-gray/poems/)

Twilight

These long stars
on

stalks
that have grown up

early
and are like

water
plants and that stand

in all
the pools and the lake

even
at the brim

of
the dark cup

before
your mouth these are

the one
slit star

# Wing-Beat - Poem by Robert Gray



In some last inventory, I’ll have lost a season
through the occlusion
of summer by another hemisphere.
Going there
the winter tolls twice
across the year. The leaves of ice
in their manuscripts
are shelved on the air and each sifts
fine as paper-cuts along the wind. I will go
to crippled snow
moving through the crossings, in the headlights
of early nights.
How glorious summer is to them
who have caught just a glimpse of its billowing hem.
‘Fifty springs are little room,’ an authority
in loss warns, but actuarially
I can expect to own
ten summers, before the heights of blue close down.
Although I’ve gone
northwards, I shall cross the lawn
at home – the trees and yard in bloom –
in the mirror in an empty room.

# In The Park - Poem by Gwen Harwood

She sits in the park. Her clothes are out of date.
Two children whine and bicker, tug her skirt.
A third draws aimless patterns in the dirt
Someone she loved once passed by – too late

to feign indifference to that casual nod.
“How nice” et cetera. “Time holds great surprises.”
From his neat head unquestionably rises
a small balloon…”but for the grace of God…”

They stand a while in flickering light, rehearsing
the children’s names and birthdays. “It’s so sweet
to hear their chatter, watch them grow and thrive, ”
she says to his departing smile. Then, nursing
the youngest child, sits staring at her feet.
To the wind she says, “They have eaten me alive.”

**The Glass Jar - Poem by Gwen Harwood**



To Vivian Smith
A child one summer's evening soaked
a glass jar in the reeling sun
hoping to keep, when day was done
and all the sun's disciples cloaked
in dream and darkness from his passion fled,
this host, this pulse of light beside his bed.

Wrapped in a scarf his monstrance stood
ready to bless, to exorcize
monsters that whispering would rise
nightly from the intricate wood
that ringed his bed, to light with total power
the holy commonplace of field and flower.

He slept. His sidelong violence summoned
fiends whose mosaic vision saw
his heart entire. Pincer and claw,
trident and vampire fang, envenomed
with his most secret hate, reached and came near
to pierce him in the thicket of his fear.

He woke, recalled his jar of light,
and trembling reached one hand to grope
the mantling scarf away. Then hope
fell headlong from its eagle height.
Through the dark house he ran, sobbing his loss,
to the last clearing that he dared not cross:

the bedroom where his comforter
lay in his rival's fast embrace
and faithless would not turn her face
from the gross violence done to her.
Love's proud executants played from a score
no child could read or realize. Once more

to bed, and to worse dreams he went.
A ring of skeletons compelled
his steps with theirs. His father held
fiddle and bow, and scraped assent
to the malignant ballet. The child dreamed
this dance perpetual, and waking screamed

fresh morning to his window-sill.
As ravening birds began their song
the resurrected sun, whose long
triumph through flower-brushed fields would fill
night's gulfs and hungers, came to wink and laugh
in a glass jar beside a crumpled scarf.

So the loved other is held
for mortal comfort, and taken,
and the spirit's light dispelled
as it falls from its dream to the deep
to harrow heart's prison so heart may waken
to peace in the paradise of sleep.

**The Wound - Poem by Gwen Harwood**



The tenth day, and they give
my mirror back. Who knows
how to drink pain, and live?
I look, and the glass shows
the truth, fine as a hair,
of the scalpel's wounding care.

A round reproach to all
that's warped, uncertain, clouded,
the sun climbs. On the wall,
by the racked body shrouded
in pain, is a shadow thrown;
simple, unchanged, my own.

Body, on whom the claims
of spirit fall to inspire
and terrify, there flames
at your least breath a fire
of anguish, not for this pain,
but that scars will remain.

You will be loved no less.
Spirit can build, make shift
with what there is, and press
pain to its mould; will lift
from your crucible of night
a form dripping with light.

Felix culpa. The sun
lights in my flesh the great
wound of the world. What's done
is done. In man's estate
let my flawed wholeness prove
the art and scope of love.

**Homo Suburbiensis - Poem by Donald Bruce Dawe**



One constant in a world of variables
- A man alone in the evening in his patch of vegetables,
and all the things he takes down with him there

Where the easement runs along the back fence and the air
smells of tomato-vines, and the hoarse rasping tendrils
of pumpkin flourish clumsy whips and their foliage sprawls

Over the compost-box, poising rampant upon
the palings ...
He stands there, lost in a green
confusion, smelling the smoke of somebody's rubbish

Burning, hearing vaguely the clatter of a disk
in a sink that could be his, hearing a dog, a kid,
a far whisper of traffic, and offering up instead

Not much but as much as any man can offer
- time, pain, love, hate, age, ware, death, laughter, fever.

**The Dark Fires - Poem by Dorothy Hewett**

The dark fires shall burn in many rooms;
will they sometimes miss me with my tangled hair—
still girls in dark uniforms
crouching in winter with their cold hands trembling,
still voices echoing as our voices echoed
and the faded frumped-up form
of a mistress teaching French?
Does she remember us or do we pass
only like dreams of dark figures,
some with different hair or deep voices,
or merely countless hats hanging on pegs,
countless columns of moving massed black legs?
Our minds are sprawled on unforbidden lawns,
our voices lie like queer leaves in the clipped grass,
as we believe so we shall pass.

**Let Go - Poem by Jack Davis**



Let go of my hand
Let me be what I want to be
Let go of my hand
The sands of time Are trickling before me
I have not yet Achieved
what I want to be
Let go of my hand
I want to stand alone
In a sea of words
Pluck out the phrases
Soar like a bird
I want to stand on a mountain
Wait for the dawn
Yet be aware of
The approaching storm
I want to fashion a rainbow
That arcs through the sky
And iron out the dilemmas
Between you & I

**Racism - Poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal**



Stalking the corridors of life,
Black, frustrated minds
Scream for release
From Christian racist moulds.
Moulds that enslave
Black independence.

Take care! White racists!
Black can be racists too.
A violent struggle could erupt
And racists meet their death.

Colour, the gift of nature
To mankind,
Is now the contentions bone,
And black-white hatred sustains itself
on the rotting, putrid flesh
That once was man.

**Son of mine (TO DENIS) - Poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal**

My son, your troubled eyes search mine,
Puzzled and hurt by colour line.
Your black skin as soft as velvet shine;
What can I tell you, son of mine?

I could tell you of heartbreak, hatred blind,
I could tell you of crimes that shame mankind,
Of brutal wrong and deeds malign,
Of rape and murder, son of mine;

But I'll tell you instead of brave and fine
When lives of black and white entwine,
And men in brotherhood combine-
This would I tell you, son of mine.

**Understand Old One - Poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal**



What if you came back now
To our new world, the city roaring
There on the old peaceful camping place
Of your red fires along the quiet water,
How you would wonder
At towering stone gunyas high in air
Immense, incredible;
Planes in the sky over, swarms of cars
Like things frantic in flight.

# Where Are We Going - Poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal



They came in to the little town
A semi-naked band subdued and silent
All that remained of their tribe.
They came here to the place of their old bora ground
Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.
Notice of the estate agent reads: 'Rubbish May Be Tipped Here'.
Now it half covers the traces of the old bora ring.
'We are as strangers here now, but the white tribe are the strangers.
We belong here, we are of the old ways.
We are the corroboree and the bora ground,
We are the old ceremonies, the laws of the elders.
We are the wonder tales of Dream Time, the tribal legends told.
We are the past, the hunts and the laughing games, the wandering camp fires.
We are the lightening bolt over Gaphembah Hill
Quick and terrible,
And the Thunderer after him, that loud fellow.
We are the quiet daybreak paling the dark lagoon.
We are the shadow-ghosts creeping back as the camp fires burn low.
We are nature and the past, all the old ways
Gone now and scattered.
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
The bora ring is gone.
The corroboree is gone.
And we are going.'

**The Emerald Leopard - Poem by Dorothy Featherstone Porter**

You're lost if you steer.

How did you get here?

Leopard, that smell in the air.
Leopard, that spoor at your feet.

Your knots unfurled into a sail
and you tacked into a high colour

green.

The leopard coughs from the horizon
you head for her throat.

She's beautiful.

A roar of sea, a roar of fur
you can look at her
you can look at anything.

A whiplash of tail

as she looks at you.

She's so dangerous;
immense,
she takes your trembling measure

her eyes smoke

your eyes close

you want the cuff of her paw
you dream
of her weight on your chest.

She doesn't move.
A lush silence
spreads from her stare.

Her breath in your face.

She shapes you
sharp as light.

You don't swoon.

# Numbers - Poem by Dorothy Featherstone Porter

I get magic
(sometimes I get more
than I bargain for)

but I don't get
numbers.

Numbers do worse
than humiliate
or elude me

they don't add up.

I am no algebra tart
ravished
by the meretricious music
of the spheres.

My eyes and nose
never streamed
with incontinent ecstasy
through geometry classes
as my disastrous triangles
collapsed in a cacophony
around me.

Perhaps it's a failing
to grasp
or even want
the utterly perfect number
burning through my retina
like the utterly perfect morning.

Instead I peer
with nauseating vertigo
into the deep dark pitch
of numbers
like an exhausted mammoth
dangerously tottering
on the edge
of a bottomless mystery.

**Aurora Prone - Poem by Les Murray**



The lemon sunlight poured out far between things
inhabits a coolness. Mosquitoes have subsided,
flies are for later heat.
Every tree's an auburn giant with a dazzled face
and the back of its head to an infinite dusk road.
Twilights broaden away from our feet too
as rabbits bounce home up defiles in the grass.
Everything widens with distance, in this perspective.
The dog's paws, trotting, rotate his end of infinity
and dam water feels a shiver few willow drapes share.
Bright leaks through their wigwam re-purple the skinny beans
then rapidly the light tops treetops and is shortened
into a day. Everywhere stands pat beside its shadow
for the great bald radiance never seen in dreams.

**Cockspur Bush - Poem by Les Murray**



I am lived. I am died.
I was two-leafed three times, and grazed,
but then I was stemmed and multiplied,
sharp-thorned and caned, nested and raised,
earth-salt by sun-sugar. I was innerly sung
by thrushes who need fear no eyed skin thing.
Finched, ant-run, flowered, I am given the years
in now fewer berries, now more of sling
out over directions of luscious dung.
Of water crankshaft, of gases the gears
my shape is cattle-pruned to a crown spread sprung
above the starve-gut instinct to make prairies
of everywhere. My thorns are stuck with caries
of mice and rank lizards by the butcher bird.
Inches in, baby seed-screamers get supplied.
I am lived and died in, vine woven, multiplied.

**Ernest Hemingway and the Latest Quake - Poem by Les Murray**

In fact the Earth never stops moving.

Northbound in our millimetric shoving
we heap rainy Papua ahead of us
with tremor and fumarole and shear
but: no life without this under-ruckus.

The armoured shell of Venus doesn't move.
She is trapped in her static of hell.
The heat of her inner weight feeds enormous
volcanoes in that gold atmosphere

which her steam oceans boil above.
Venus has never known love:
that was a European error.
Heat that would prevent us gets expressed

as continent-tiles being stressed and rifted.
These make Earth the planet for lovers.
If coral edging under icy covers
or, too evolutionary slow

for human histories to observe it, a low
coastline faulting up to be a tree-line
blur landscape in rare jolts of travel
that squash collapsing masonry with blood

then frantic thousands pay for all of us.

**Inside Ayers Rock - Poem by Les Murray**



Inside Ayers Rock is lit
with paired fluorescent lights
on steel pillars supporting the ceiling
of haze-blue marquee cloth
high above the non-slip pavers.
Curving around the cafeteria
throughout vast inner space
is a Milky way of plastic chairs
in foursomes around tables
all the way to the truck drivers' enclave.
Dusted coolabah trees grow to the ceiling,
TVs talk in gassy colours, and
round the walls are Outback shop fronts:
the Beehive Bookshop for brochures,
Casual Clobber, the bottled Country Kitchen
and the sheet-iron Dreamtime Experience
that is turned off at night.
A high bank of medal-ribbony
lolly jars preside over
island counters like opened crates,
one labelled White Mugs, and covered with them.
A two-dimensional policeman
discourages shoplifting of gifts
and near the entrance, where you pay
for fuel, there stands a tribal man
in rib-paint and pubic tassel.
It is all gentle and kind.
In beyond the children's playworld
there are fossils, like crumpled
old drawings of creatures in rock.

**Observing The Mute Cat - Poem by Les Murray**

Clean water in the house
but the cat laps up clay water
outside. Drinking the earth.

His pile, being perfect,
ignores the misting rain.

A charcoal Russian
he opens his mouth like other cats
and mimes a greeting mew.

At one bound top-speed across
the lawn and halfway up
the zippy pear tree. Why? Branches?
Stopping puzzles him.

Eloquent of purr
or indignant tail
he politely hates to be picked up.
His human friend never does it.

He finds a voice
in the fly screen, rattling it,
hanging cruciform on it,
all to be let in
to walk on his man.

He can fish food pellets
out of the dispenser, but waits,
preferring to be served.

A mouse he was playing
on the grass ran in under him.
Disconsolate, at last he wandered
off - and drew and fired
himself in one motion.

He is often above you
and appears where you will go.

He swallows his scent, and
discreet with his few stained birds
he carries them off to read.

**Monolith - Poem by Bruce Beaver**



At the foot of a northern pylon of the Harbour Bridge
I have kept my vigil since the mighty span was built.
I come early in the day from worn-out corners of the area
and sit when the sun is out until the waning afternoon,
thence to another role, another manifestation of duty.
On my way I pass a cavern echoing with traffic noise.
When the sun is setting it blazes up like a testing tunnel
of the cosmic fire at the beginning and ending of universes.
It reminds me we are not that far in time from a kalpa’s ending.
More than four thousand million years in the lives
of the starry and the planetary entities
who influence us and are never truly seen.
At the pylon’s base I meet with seeming fools and sages,
more of the former, alas, but it was ever the same
at the other Thebes. The great towering stone columns could fittingly house
the troglodytic priests and harbour an inward turning flame
in bifurcated flowering for the known and unknown god
and my own dilapidated dispensation.
The only way the scene differs now
is in the lack of overt piety,
the thinning out of conscious pilgrims passing by me
here upon the seasonally withered grass.

