

Classic Poetry Series

**Caroline Mavis Caddy**  
**- poems -**

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# Caroline Mavis Caddy(20 January 1944 -)

Caroline Mavis Caddy (born 20 January 1944) is an Australian poet.

## <b>Biography</b>

Born in Western Australia of an Australian mother and an American father, Caroline Mavis Caddy spent part of her childhood in the United States of America and Japan. She returned to Western Australia where she finished high school, and later worked as a dental nurse with the Road Dental Unit. According to Queensland poet Jaya Savige "Caddy writes with equal verve about the rural southwest of WA and her time abroad, particularly in China (though also Canada and Antarctica). ...Her relaxed, often conversational tone belies her sharp eye for detail which, combined with a knack for simile and metaphor, has remained acute throughout her career."

She has published the poetry collections *Singing at Night* (1980), *Letters from the North* (1985), *Beach Plastic* (1989, winner of the 1990 WA Literary Week Award for poetry) and *Conquistadors* (1991, winner of the 1992 NBC Banjo Award for poetry). Caddy's poetry highlights the WA physical landscape, the title poem series, 'Letters from the North', for example, reflecting the demanding climate and topography of the northern iron ore country:

Sometimes there is only heat, sometimes only wind.  
I have stopped expecting definite rivers or mountains.

Other poems deal with beach and seascapes and with the life found there, such as the pelicans:

They preen  
practise sawing each other in half

Her poems also range widely over personal experience - childhood in America and the family characters that live in her memory, the voyage back to Australia, school in Australia where she was looked on as a Yank, love that is love, neither surrender nor submission. Her wit, humour, sense of the absurd, crisp and shrewd assessments of events and situations and sensitive, if austere, description all add up to a considerable poetic talent. The density and intensity of her language are accentuated by her favourite devices of fragmented lines and staccato phrases, often brought together in a final, elucidating image.

Caddy's poems, lingering in the landscapes of China, Antarctica, and western

Australia, explore identity through the process of travel and observation. Floating free of the left-hand margins, her poems make use of caesuras to emphasize the connections and gaps between cultures and geographies. "Creating a space that is both recognisable and uncanny, Caddy explores landscape in her early poems with both understanding and a deep seated wonder, the combination of which gives her poems great intensity," observed Rosalind McFarlane in the Cordite Poetry Review. Caddy is the author of numerous collections of poetry, including *Singing at Night* (1980); *Working Temple* (1997); *Esperance: New and Selected Poems* (2007), which won the Wesley Michel Wright Prize; and *The Tibetan Cabinet* (2010). Caddy has also won a Western Australian Premier's Book Award and a National Book Council Banjo Award. She divides her time between Shanghai and an olive farm in western Australia.

# Editing The Moon

Be precise  
authority is magic.  
When you think you've got it straight  
wax wane declination  
feel the movement under your hand  
one summer morning  
as you observe it set  
then rise that night.  
Always use a well-sharpened pencil  
followed by a good eraser.  
Watch the white emerge.

Caroline Mavis Caddy

# Equation

Someone said  
    that working through difficult equations  
was like walking  
in a pure and beautiful landscape –  
                                    the numbers glowing  
  like works of art.

And in the same crowded room  
a woman I thought I didn't like  
                                    was singing to herself –  
talking and listening  
                                    but singing to herself too  
and instantly  
                                    with the logic of numbers  
  I liked her

as if she had balanced something  
I couldn't.  
The corridors are long and pristine  
                                    but I'm not lost –  
just working  
    towards some minute  
                                    or overwhelming  
  equipoise.

Caroline Mavis Caddy

# Persimmon

Like buying a ticket inland  
to barely understandable provinces  
with no language at all I bargain and pay  
for this warm planet  
tipping the scales of wrist and elbow  
spreading my fingers with its weight to read  
my life-line my heart-line  
my seams and mounds of fortune.  
I stare  
into the sun on smoggy evenings  
the throat of an old street oven  
that seems to expand as I anticipate  
its glow engulfing my solar system.  
I open my mouth  
and China fills it sliding into tartness  
forcing my lips  
to begin its name  
over and over then finger-painting my chin  
with the gel of ripeness.  
I swallow the pabulum of infancy  
the sweet mucilage of age.  
It makes me eat like a person alone  
who hasn't loved for years.  
There seems to be no core  
the few black seeds hardly noticed  
in its one undifferentiated cell  
other tongue  
that makes mine lazy the flavour . . .  
the flavour is . . .  
my hand moves like an incantation  
through an alley of blunt flames  
that can be eaten with a spoon.  
I gorge  
on a people's staple  
fat Buddha squat Amida  
repeat three times  
persimmon persimmon persimmon  
and go to heaven.

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# Solitude

It's something they carry with them  
- explorers night shifts seamen -  
like a good pair of binoculars  
or a camera case  
perfectly and deeply compartmented.  
It has a quiet patina  
that both absorbs and reflects  
like a valuable instrument  
you have to sign for  
- contract with alone -  
and at the end of the voyage  
you get to keep.  
Sometimes it's very far away.  
Sometimes so close  
at first you think the person next to you  
is picking up putting down  
a personal cup  
a book in another language  
before you realise what  
- when talk has moved off  
leaning its arms  
on someone else's table -  
is being  
handed to you.

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