

Classic Poetry Series

Michael Dransfield
- poems -

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Michael Dransfield(12 September 1948 – 20 April 1973)

Michael Dransfield was an Australian poet active in the 1960s and early 1970s who wrote close to 1000 poems. He has been described as "one of the most widely read poets of his generation."

Early life

Dransfield was born in Sydney, and educated at Sydney Grammar School. He briefly studied English literature and language at the University of New South Wales and Sydney University before dropping out. He worked for some months as a clerk at the Australian Taxation Office before drifting into the counter-culture. From then on he worked intermittently, living mainly in Paddington, Balmain, and Darlinghurst in Sydney, and in the north coast town of Casino, and he travelled frequently between Tasmania and Queensland, visiting his large group of friends and fellow poets.

Poetry

Dransfield wrote his first poem at the age of eight and began to write regularly at fourteen. He was a prolific poet, writing lyrical poems, which as his career progressed came to focus more and more on drug experiences. His poetry was first published in the mid-1960s.

Dransfield's poems were published in Meanjin, Southerly, Poetry Australia and Poetry magazine. His first published collection was Streets of the Long Voyage. He published two more books, including Drug poems (Sun Books, 1972).

Between 1967 and 1969, Dransfield corresponded and exchanged poems with Peter Kocan, who had been imprisoned for attempting to assassinate federal opposition leader Arthur Calwell, and who was then a patient at the Morisset Mental Hospital. The letters comprise drafts of poems by Dransfield, quotes of poems by other poets, and recommendations for books Kocan should read.

Themes

Dransfield's poems address "people marginalized by society" "the relationship of the creative self to the outside world" "personal identity, the family, the relationship between human beings and the natural world, poetry itself, and

states of mind"

Death

In his early twenties Dransfield was plagued by ill health. He died at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Sydney, on 20 April 1973, aged 24, leaving behind close to a thousand poems. Sources report conflicting causes of death, including that he died of a heroin overdose, infection related to drug use and a report that the coroner's finding on the cause of death was "acute broncho-pneumonia and brain damage".

Legacy

Rodney Hall, who as poetry editor of The Australian newspaper had been among the first to publish Dransfield's poetry, edited and posthumously published several collections of Dransfield's poetry during the late 1970s and early 1980s, including *Collected Poems* (UQP, 1987). In 2011 a poet character called "Michael" (evidently based on Dransfield) was featured in the second part of the ABC telemovie *Paper Giants: The Birth of Cleo*.

Epiderm

Canopy of nerve ends
marvellous tent
airship skying in crowds and blankets
pillowslip of serialised flesh
it wraps us rather neatly in our senses
but will not insulate against externals
does nothing to protect
merely notifies the brain
of conversation with a stimulus
I like to touch your skin
to feel your body against mine
two islets in atoll of each other
spending all night in new discovery
of what the winds of passion have washed up
and what a jaded tide will find for us
to play with when this game begins to pall

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