

Hawaiian Spangle

Jennifer Harrison

The music she hears when the tents are quiet
in the deep supple-fingered night vaults

of small animals rustling in the wonga wonga
vines that edge the south-coast caravan

park, which for seven days a year
becomes less desolate, taken over by a tent city,

music folk pitching their Kathmandu flexible-pole
pop-ups, more stable canvas domes, synthetic

trekking A-frames, side by side, across the oval
and past the netball grounds—the music she hears

is Hawaiian spangle, bottle-neck or lap-styled,
black with tar and death, steel slide 12-string

tunes, diddly-bow blues mutually inflamed
by sons lounging in the small shadows of fires

as they hunch over their fathers' guitars,
strumming molten, rough notes that slip

like harsh silver through fabric annex eaves and
shudder across the frost-prickled grass, coiling back

to a memory of cotton, memory of sun on cotton,
slide hard against the wood's throat, glissando

and deep vibrato singing out from southern
share-cropping thickets. The music she hears

when the tents are quiet and the festival settles
for the night across Port Fairy—is Hawaiian spangle,

black with tar and death, smoke and fire-kites
by the light of a thin moon glimpsed above marsh grass—

old music, and in the deep supple-fingered vaults
of dreams sons hear it too, practise it in their sleep.

Jennifer Harrison has published eight poetry collections, most recently *Anywhy* (Black Pepper 2018). She manages the Dax Poetry Collection at the Dax Centre, University of Melbourne. In 2020 she coedited *Australian Poetry Journal* edition 9:2, *DIS*—. She co-judges the annual Ann Morgan Prize for the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health, which looks to enrich our creative understanding of infant experience.