» LES MURRAY

(above)

Sydney Harbour Bridge, NSW, 1954

PHOTO: MARK STRIZIC (1928–2012), STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA COLLECTION

LES MURRAY AO FAHA is one of Australia's most celebrated and widely read poets, with over nine hundred poems published since 1959. He has won many Australian and international awards, including in 1998 the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. Since 1990 he has been the literary editor of the journal **Quadrant**. His most recent collection is **Waiting for the Past** (2015). AUTHOR PHOTO COURTESY OF MARGARET CONNOLLY & ASSOCIATES.

When Two Percent Were Students

Gorgeous expansion of life
all day at the university,
then home to be late for meals,
an impractical, unwanted boarder.

When rush hours were so tough
a heart attack might get stepped over
you looked up from the long footpaths
to partings in the houses' iron hair.

Hosts of Depression-time and wartime
hated their failure, which was you.
Widows with no facelift of joy
spat their irons. Shamed by bookishness

you puzzled their downcast sons
who thought you might be a poofter,
so you'd hitchhike home to run wild
again where cows made vaccine

and ancient cows discovered aspirin,
up home, where your father and you
still wore pink from the housework
you taught each other years before—

and those were the years when farm wives
drove to the coast with milk hands
to gut fish, because government no longer
trusted poor voters on poor lands.

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