Sahara Rain: A poetry collection by Stephanie Green (Liquid Amber Press, 2026), launched by Cassandra Atherton

Thank you all so much for coming along this afternoon. My contribution is to launch Stephanie Green's highly anticipated third collection of poetry, *Sahara Rain*. I'm thrilled to be doing the honours and introducing you to a magnificent book by a wonderful poet.

I encountered Stephanie's poetry long before I met her. She was part of the online prose poetry project I belong to and her luminous prose poems would pop into my inbox every so often, where I would marvel at the worlds she could create—whole universes on the small screen. And here we are, many years later, with *Sahara Rain* which reveals Stephanie to be at the height of her powers.

In her preface, Stephanie states, "The initial idea for this book was sparked when I witnessed a massive storm event while camped on the edge of the Sahara Desert in Morocco during September 2023." This led to poems exploring "aspects of global warming, reflecting on flood, fire, environmental degradation and human inattention to loss". A central premise of *Sahara Rain* is that poetry may be a form of activism, stemming from the current climate crisis combined with a *poiesis* of care, memory and attentiveness to the fragile bonds between people and place. This is also evident in the way the book is dedicated to the memory of Stephanie's mother, who is described as "creat[ing] a coastal ecosystem of her own". In this way, Stephanie flags that ecopoetry runs deeply and has family connections.

The opening imagery of the poem "Desert Flood" is beguiling. It begins: "Under the shadow of rain/ we abandon all refuge / pushing the loneliness / out of ourselves / clutched to our damp belongings / as if they alone / anchor us to life. / Wherever we go / we will be late tonight". And as you are responding to that complex awareness and sense of yearning, the poem ends, "Our thoughts become long and low / like the land that surrounds us. / The desert has changed us. / And still, we will be late tonight". That is so good—the anaphora of lateness is devastating. We are all late. Time is running out.

Chao Xie argues, "climate change poetry not only represents the ongoing climatic crises in varied ways, be they real or imagined, but also actively engages in provoking ecological responsibilities and environmental activism" (*WIREs Climate Change*, 2022). Part of the reason I am so moved by Stephanie's poems in this collection is because, in prioritising witnessing and memory over forgetting, she transforms the act of poetic remembrance into an ethical practice, insisting that ecological trauma must be acknowledged, and that poetry may be a way of bearing witness.

Sahara Rain is divided into 4 sections: "Deluges", "Witnessing", "Erosions", and "Recognitions". Stephanie's poetry not only registers the immediate devastation of

catastrophe, loss, displacement and trauma, but it also exposes the inequalities that determine who suffers most profoundly. A powerful example is the prose poem "Under a Fountain in Paris", which I'm going to read because it's a beautifully crafted prose poem and the imagery is haunting:

> Under a fountain in Paris under a city in Gaza under a temple in a forest too inaccessible to name pieces of the nameless the ones who lived in times of danger listening as explosions came closer hearing the voices of war the ones who thrust babies into cupboards or baskets hoping they would survive then ran from blades and earth mines banging and slicing and crushing heavy metal descending overhead authority unauthorized poisoned existence the long aftermath of silence. soft tissue melting into earth and dust bones whitened with age. to be silenced to be forgotten and discovered to be remembered and mourned yet always lost in a time that never forgets.

Through imagery, metaphor, fragmentation and a nuanced disruption of poetic forms, Stephanie's poems evoke the instability of damaged ecosystems and the limits of human comprehension. She's working with elements of the Kantian sublime in fascinating ways.

There are also road trip poems that are interior and intimate, often full of disappointment and reflective of time passing. I think it's fitting to read the poem "Promises" as it is set in Canberra and has some startlingly effective juxtapositions.

> Driving through Canberra that winter night
> the heater broken in your battered VW Beatle
> you sang "Heart of Glass" with Blondie
> yelling out your window at the dark suburban houses.
> I tried to join in, broken shards catching my throat.
> It had "seemed like the real thing" to me too
> but for you it was just the life you might have led.
> On the midnight news Gorbachev heralded peace.
> We celebrated the end of the empire
> dancing in the old disco club until 3am
> its velvet banquettes bare and stained
> |the champagne cocktails too sweet.
> I wanted your best embrace that night
> your slim moving arms reflected a thousand times
> in the mirror ball of my dreams
> but you were gone before the dance was over
> with all the other promises.

I love that—particularly the disco ball image and the reflection that splits and casts thousands of mini images.

And, of course, there are some fabulously sexy moments, too. “Peeling grapes” begins seductively:

> It's true you peeled grapes for me as I drove from south to north,
> feeding them sweetly between my lips, gathering the jewelled
> transparency of their skins in your lap, as if you were some fruitarian
> emperor and I your imperial conquest doomed to history's embrace.

Sahara Rain explores the complex relationships between humans, the more-than-human world, and the environments we inhabit. Stephanie’s poems in this volume challenge anthropocentric perspectives and interrogate the cultural, political and economic structures that contribute to environmental degradation and other forms of harm, while also occasionally foregrounding the power of the lyrical. Most importantly, she examines the entanglement of natural processes and human vulnerability. I’d like to end with the conclusion to a poem that lives in my head. It’s called “Hydrangeas” and the last few lines are:

> It's hydrangeas I long for these days
> with their almost fearsome giant blooms
> pink and mauve, hefted on sturdy panicles.
> I remember how the harlequin bugs adored them
> after a mid-morning shower of rain
> and how I wanted to be like them
> to crawl in amongst the petals and leaves
> to find the cool refuge of home.

I hereby declare *Sahara Rain* officially launched in Canberra. I’d like to invite Stephanie up to read from her collection.

Cassandra Atherton

(Canberra, 24 October 2026)

Cassandra Atherton is an award-winning poet and a leading international expert on prose poetry and ekphrastic poetry. She is celebrated for coining the terms dark poetry—for poetry that attempts to reanimate a dark event, and ballophrasis—for works based on dance. Cassandra is a prolific writer and scholar and was a Harvard Scholar in English, sponsored by Stephen Greenblatt in 2016. She is currently Deakin Distinguished Professor and Associate Dean, Research with Deakin University.