

Poem

Coming of age

“You are old when you’re born”, he* said.
So much living and dying
during those nine months:
clefts, gills and neural ridges
thrown up, filled in, torn down —
a time-lapse drama of evolution
played out on the foetal ocean floor.

Your cells by nine months
are wearied by wars
have forged truces with alien forces
built machines underwater
visited palaces drawn from fine tissue
played parts in evolutionary dramas
relaxed briefly on now sunken islands.

By birth your genes have had their day
your destiny set. I’ve heard
earnest clerics say we should
be born again. Terrible penance
surely to go through that once more.

*Stephen Simpson, academic director of the Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney

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