Meniscus

Volume 1

Issue 1

Publication Information

Meniscus is published by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs
www.aawp.org.au

ISSN: (TBA)

Meniscus, an online literary journal featuring poetry and creative prose, is published twice a year, in February and August. The editors read submissions twice a year; for details, please see http://www.meniscus.org.au/

Editors: Paul Hetherington, Paul Munden, Gail Pittaway, Jen Webb
Designer: Simon Hinchco

Photographs: "Within Without" installation by James Turrell, photographed by Gail Pittaway.

Contents

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES (CONTINUED)

Editorial

Meniscus is a brand-new literary journal, published and supported by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), with editors from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

The title of the journal was the result of a visit made by two of the editors to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, where James Turrell's extraordinary installation, "Within, Without" (2010), led them to reflect on how surfaces, curves, tension and surfaces interact. In particular they were struck by the way in which the surface of the water features, and the uncertainty about how the water was kept contained, seem to analogise the excitement and anxiety inherent in creative practice, and the delicate balance between possibility and impossibility that is found in much good writing.

Unlike the other excellent publications of the AAWP—such as *TEXT*, and their conference proceedings, comprising nearly two decades of inspiring debate and research in the area of Creative Writing—Meniscus publishes only literary works: poetry, short fiction and short creative essays. It aims to provide a new space for innovative writing through an online, free access literary journal, and it welcomes submissions from writers anywhere in the world.

This first issue of Meniscus showcases writers from the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand and is a trove of poetry and short fiction that the editors found surprising, captivating, transporting or illuminating. We invite you to dip in and explore the contents; and to submit your own works to further issues of this journal.

Paul Hetherington, Paul Munden, Gail Pittaway, Jen Webb
Meniscus Editors

Emma Neale

Suburban story

The shopkeeper at my old corner store
comes to the counter in sari and polar fleece,
spots of polish on her nails
as if each one sports a single flake
of red confetti, petals from Diwali,
and I'd say her hair was recently bobbed
but we haven't seen each other for months;
she seems cooler, reserved,
I wonder how business is,
do her teenage sons worry her,
does she wake at night brittle as frost
until she hears the stir of her husband's limbs,
the tender machine of his body sigh, turn,
rewind 'the engine of belief',[1]
relief lifting from her then like thaw's thin smoke—
and so I try to say, *how are you*?
as if it isn't just so much inconsequential air—
again, *hello, how are you*?

And she startles,
Oh, I didn't recognise you,
and with that musical lilt
that still carries the heat and sway
of her Delhi childhood,
You have lost so much!

Yes, I think, oh yes: loved ones,
house, house keys, cell phone,
money, faith, hope, face,
time, heart, drive, cool, it,
the funky black sweater with the white piping zip,
my childhood California-girl blondie-ness,
my Californian childhood friends;
patience with mess, tolerance of mischief;
the plots of novels I read in my thirties;
things that can hardly bear thinking—
polar ice caps, ozone, water purity, entire species,
the confidence we might turn this juggernaut back—
see, thought can't bear the thought of it,

it's swung back to lines of songs, whole songs, certain words
like *trumpline*? *quintolene*? No, that's not it quite,
I think it means sense of purpose,
carries something of the feeling of being part
of the great ongoing human symphony,
did I steal that from someone, was it Hollinghurst?
The moment I read it I could never find it again,
so maybe I invented it, but yes, with sympathy stirred in,
no, not quite a synonym for relevance, global hope, and steady paid work,
but it almost sounds something like these,
with after-notes of lemon-lime
and bee-buzzed lavender as printed in
nineteenth-century children's picture books,
with an 'a' a 'd', the taste of cardamom,
no it's gone, and of course, even if I include
some quintessence of the moments
of our private, unspoken correspondence,
the loss catalogue is always incomplete,
although maybe that lends a sharp, wincing accuracy
as it leaves out all the things I've forgotten
I've forgotten—

You have lost so much! she says again,
hands on the air to outline what looks
not like an hourglass, but a rectangular box,
and *Wait*! she says *Wait*!
as if to say, give it longer, darling,
there's so much more
to lose.

Note

1. 'the engine of belief' is a phase of Annie Dillard's, from *The Writing Life*

Footnote

And today I'm in love with the pointless beauty
of the young Chinese man in red canvas high-tops
smiling at me smiling at the three husky dogs running along the street
pulling the man on a bike, who is smiling, too, into his black puffer jacket and helmet
strap
who is an accidental half rhyme for the racer overtaking
in lime booties that seem stuck to his feet like fluorescent post-its
reminding him 'Pedal, pedal, pedal!'[1]

Note

1. (and whatever you do, don't glance up,
or you might catch sight of a random, comic,
coincidental loveliness
that could change your life
like that young woman there with fuse-wire red hair
in baby pink flannelette pajamas and ridiculous, silver kitten-heels
who picks her way over ice and frost to the corner shop
for onion chips, light bulbs, eggs, chocolate and clothes pegs
as if the city is her living room and we're all
part of one big, dysfunctional but loving family
with its own private language that pretends
such *bizarrities* as thin cotton and glittery, strappy plastic, sub-zero,
are normal; but that will, when the chips are down
—and the chocolate, the clothes pegs, the light bulbs, the keys, cell-phone and eggs—be there to lift her up, check
for bruises, mild shock, chagrin,
and maybe, if one of us is a young, actually quite unrelated man,
fingertips now perched on his own phone as if to a faint but hopeful pulse,
ask for her number and her name …)

Lucy Alexander

Scale (for Helen)

We are among the seismic traffic of droid drivers
our fishtail bikes all about scale
fastened together between the light stop/go
the cleats, panniers and hardness of our palms
as we wave and reel in, pedal down
me as tall as the wheels of this one,
you, eyeline with the first metal beetle
could I shout to you over all the explosions?
would you hear me call you
the name I once knew you by—
naked in the sea?

Wildflower seed mix

Each child held a smudge of possibility on their hands;
seeds so tiny, how could they become whole plants?
Daisies whose flowers could dry out and crackle in our palms
the swishing wish of wattle, red brushes or blue stars?
One after the other and sometimes together
the children flung them—seeds, husk, the dried earth of their digging—
into the loose patch of soil and
waited a moment to see if they would grow.

Robyn Cadwallader

The balcony

Morning light illuminates the white net curtains, sending a soft glow into the room. Behind them, the French doors are partly open, the top corner of one pushing sharp against the fine fabric. Where the curtain blows open, light streams in and flows across the floor, mirrorlike and liquid.

She has wandered out onto the balcony, not quite shutting the door behind her. From here she can see down to the garden, the neat beds edging the building, their rows of bright bulbs just beginning to wilt, the trim lawn, the circular rose beds and the gums and wattles at the far edge that give shelter to the hotel. She is level with the treetops, somewhere below the clouds, she thinks. The sun is clear and warm, and she wonders if it could stop her mind, help her settle into her body.

The sound of running water from inside; he is in the shower. She could go in and join him, wrap her arms around him from behind, let the water flow over her head, feel the tight muscles in his chest, let her head rest on his back. He would put his hands on hers and together they would remember, memories meeting. She will do that, she thinks. She will go in.

She stays on the balcony, leaning on the railing, watching the birds shifting around in the leaves of a tree—she's not sure what it is, but it's a native, with thin, soft spikes, light green and feathery. The birds, tiny and cheeping—finches, perhaps—hop from branch to branch then move on in a flock to the next tree, like waves of wind in the foliage.

She would run her hands over his chest and he would turn to kiss her, the water running warm down their faces, into their mouths. He would lift her then and carry her to the bed, the shower still running. Neither of them would care about being wet. The breeze from the open door would blow across their bodies, enough to make their skin prickle with cold, while together, warmth would rise between them. She half turns to the room, thinking she will go, now, before he gets out of the shower. She wraps her hands around the railing.

A muffled bang and she looks down, directly below. A couple has walked out of the back door into the garden. From here, they are strange creatures: only the tops of their heads, shoulders extending either side, legs and feet appearing and disappearing. As they walk on, their bodies take shape, arms and hands appear, backs, buttocks. She can't hear them, but it seems they are talking, vehement—excitement or anger, it's hard to tell. The woman uses her hands, drawing shapes, marking exclamations, but the man keeps his arms straight, shoulders hunched, pushing his hands tightly down into his pockets. She thinks this looks like anger, defiance, sullen silence, but it could be resistance to excitement, the kind that holds it in, afraid of disappointment. Yes, she's sure that's what it is. The woman with him is animated enough for both of them, talking on and on, her head bobbing, hands never still, as if there are not enough words in the world for her. The man's hair is smooth, black, shining in the sun. If she could be that woman, she would stop talking, thread her arms through his, hold him close and press her head against his chest, kiss his neck, stroke the smoothness of his hair.

The two of them walk on a short way toward the rose garden and stop, facing one another. The woman lets her hands drop, then reaches one out toward the man, to touch his

tense left arm. The woman on the balcony is afraid she will move closer, wrap her arms around him, lean her head on his chest and kiss his neck. Stroke that shining black hair. But no, she pulls back, lifts her hands to her hair, pulls at it, fists balled, then turns and stamps back toward the hotel. The man walks on, fists still in his pockets.

The shower has stopped. The glass door bangs gently. She knows every sound, every move: the quick spray of his deodorant, the buzz of his electric razor, his satisfied grunts. She can see without being there the expression on his face as he combs his hair, the slight frown. This morning he does not hum that irritating tune and she misses it, takes one hand from the rail.

She could go to him now, before he gets dressed. She could touch his arm, then close her eyes and imagine her fingers run through smooth black hair, lay her head against his chest and kiss his neck. His skin would feel different now, scented faintly with roses. And he would lift her, carry her to the bed, open the soft folds of her dressing gown, let the warm breeze blow across her flesh. She could go now, without words; that would be enough. Down below, the man in the rose garden walks slowly, his arms now crossed over his chest, as if to hold himself against a pain.

She hears the suitcase flop softly onto the bed, the scrape of drawers, the gentle rustling of fabric. Even now, she thinks, she will walk in and put her hand on his hand, draw it toward her face. Even now, she will turn from the balcony.

Ross Donlon

On the road

It's a grainy strip of memory in black and white,
King's Cross lights flashing on and off upstairs,

us just out of school at the edge of the sixties
with one hot shot at being a beatnik in Sydney.

Joan Baez look-alikes made instant coffee
and burnt raisin toast downstairs at the *El Rocco*.

We smoked more than we breathed, lighting
up a new Peter Stuyvesant *international passport*

to smoking pleasure from the ash of the last,
teenage phoenixes, hoping inhalation meant

European women in white slacks, barely
buttoned shirts or bikinis banned in Australia.

We knew to tap a matchbox to the beat,
sip instant coffee beneath our sunglasses,

clap after solos and nod to the musos
as if we knew them and what they were doing.

I'd read *On the Road*, been drunk and beat,
pub crawled from the Quay up George Street

to the Cross, drinking alcohol alphabetically
or by colour following a rainbow's spectrum.

Waves of harder drugs were forming
but we'd gone before they broke and stars started

to fall apart onstage. I entered another looking glass,
saw tablets marked, *Travel and Sex—Take for Five Years.*

By the time I climbed out, still hung over but older,
disco balls had incinerated duffle coats and cords.

Nostalgic for old times, I checked the goods trains
piling through Ashfield, heading west in the dark

but gave up wondering how Kerouac got on and off them
and what might have happened if I'd ended up in Parkes.

Liam Guilar

The ugly little man's version

Let's face it: her father was an idiot;
'My girl can spin straw into gold.'
Another parent, scared of anonymity,
sacrifices his daughter to prop his flagging self-esteem.
What good it did him I don't know.
I didn't see him at her wedding feast.

The king? An idiot with power.
'Prove it or die.' He gets the gold,
and when he's got enough, he gets the girl.
Transfigurations in a market of exchange,
where surface gloss and title masquerade as value:
straw to gold, jailer to husband, girl to queen,
only the ugly little man remains unchanged,

the biggest fool of all. Failed three times.
Mistook the pleasure in her eyes when I appeared,
thought she was pleased to see me, thought she cared.
It was, of course, relief she'd live past morning.
Once she didn't need me any more,
she walked out of her spinning room
and slammed the palace door.
Took the proffered hand and stepped on up
to carriages and gowns, the world's applause,
safe in the public's scrutiny of everything she did,
paying her sweaty taxes in the marriage bed.

My second failure? I credited her with some intelligence.
When I asked: what will you give me
she never stopped to think that what she valued
might be worthless to an alchemist.
She could have said; a smile, a song, my company.
But no, she failed my simple test.
She should have screamed, 'My child, never!'
Then I would have taught her how it's done.
But no. Superficial as her father and the rest.
I can't imagine being wed to anyone
who'd sign the warrant for my execution
with the same panache he signed the wedding deed.

My last mistake? I thought she'd be ashamed.
I saved her life three times: she never once asked me my name.

Suzanne Edgar

Silent film

There was a night when moonrise
filled my summer eyes.
Moved as if by a powerful will,
the full moon came over the hill
until both river and riverside
were coloured by its upward glide.

In all that cool white light,
without hesitation or fright,
a black kitten with soft-padding paws
appeared; making no noise, no noise,
it ran down the slope
like an artiste on a tightrope.

I watched, hidden by a tree,
glittering river beside me
and the great blank screen before me.
Against that, one ink-blot little cat, set free
to slink, to hunt and roam,
far from the yellow noise of its human home.

Marcelle Freiman

Fire, on Margaret Preston

What a fighting of forms—
turn bush-brush to still-life
fired pot becomes flower
flower transposes to cylinder
and every flower, every pot
is *made*
in generative fire of country
tints everything ochre,
scorches everything black.

Margaret Preston 'The Brown Pot' 1940

The Lacquer Room

Grace Cossington-Smith

She's drawing at the table, that woman,
they imagine she's reading their minds
—you know, like a sorceress,
with those keen rapid glances—
        but for her, it's the shape of their heads
she loves, the way the silver teapot
echoes a shoulder, matches a green lamp,
she's excited by the curves: his head, that chair,
patterns she can't resist, hat-band and chair back—
minutes expand in an ecstasy
of bright-green and red lacquer—
        it's this the woman in fur collar,
the ice-eyed man, at their ritual afternoon
with slices of Madeira
between pursed lips and sips of tea,
cannot see—this subterranean thing—
while teaspoons tinkle in saucers
and cake crumbs cling—
she's shaped them to curves and sturdiness
on a river of red and green light and silver shine.

Grace Cossington-Smith, 'The Lacquer Room', 1935-36, AGNSW

Moya Pacey

Egg zen

Yolked to life
the sun is a perfect O
risen in this blue zen morning.

Newly-laid in clean yellow straw
a brown egg passive and perfect
settled at the temperature of my blood.

I wish I were as blank of history
as this zero of egg
cupped in my open palm.

After time turns upside down
measures four minutes and thirty seconds
I spoon mindfulness into my mouth.

Shane Strange

Author's Note I: S

They thought me deaf as a child, but no, I am wrong. They did no such thing. To silence voices inside me, I imagined a world without noise.

Sound, my old enemy. Over and over in my head, cycling, cycling. A whisper, a scream, a word, a phrase, a sentence—never more than a sentence—pounding against the walls of my skull, eroding themselves into me. I imagine those sounds now. They have been added to over the years, layered over by other sounds. But those utterances from childhood still murmur to me. They are the bedrock of my being.

My brother and I would play a stupid game in the darkness of our bedrooms before sleep. One of us would say an innocuous statement—perhaps 'The sun came up today but went behind the clouds'—and it would be the job of the other to play dumb and ask the meaning of a word—'What does "clouds" mean?'

'They are the puffy white things in the sky. Where rain comes from.'

'What does rain mean?'

And on and on, interrogating the statement, the very basis of words themselves, until eventually a stalemate would come to pass. Even the grandest statements were thus reduced to questions about what 'red' meant, or 'it'. What indeed.

My first story was published when I was thirty-three. It took me nearly fifteen years to complete. My twenties were a time of great struggle. I travelled and worked dull jobs. I fathered a baby and abandoned mother and baby easily. I became chronically depressed and spent six weeks in hospital. I struggled with loneliness and dependence. I watched old friends vanish from before me. My brother died in an accident. The voices would cycle over and over inside my mind, wearing me away. The fabric of the world stretched and bent before me. What did it all mean? What indeed.

I have sometimes felt like a hunter. I have chased meaning across vast distances: stalking it through landscapes both foreign and familiar to me. Becoming lost inside myself, unable to return, I have been a survivalist of my own terrible mind. More often I have felt like a herder: rounding words up into paddocks, perhaps leaving the herd to graze while I chased a stray idea into the next valley. I let more go than I capture. There is always an escape. Always there is some feeling of overflow, of never 'getting it' completely. I suspect this is always the case.

As I think about my work, I am sometimes proud, but more often indifferent. I realise that it may not outlast me. There are good reasons why it shouldn't. There are good chances that it won't. It has always been a mystery to me, my work. I realise that it has coloured some people's view of me, good friends sometimes, but I plead innocence. I am just as much a victim of it as is any reader. Writing, I see now, is empty work. Its true gloriousness has been shown to me and I have found it wanting. To create is to search, but for what has always been my question, and I have no more answers to it now than I had in my youth. Perhaps I am asking the wrong question—perhaps to create is to create is to create. Repetitiously cycling through life may be all we can do in the end, all that we may be able to do, the very condition of ourselves.

I grow older, and I seem to acquire prestige without trying, I look at my constantly distorting body as it takes the shape that the years prescribe. My body has always been strange to me. A mute witness to my life. I have a scar down my left shoulder. A faded tattoo on my right arm. I can see the invisible scars and wear marks of life traced upon my flesh. Am I really 'I'? I look so different from my youth. How long before my death?

I beg you, as you read, to see an old man in your mind's eye, an old man who was and always will be less than anything he wrote. An old man who still hears and is still worn away by voices, by sound. An old man who still asks 'What does it mean?' although he knows there is no answer. And I ask you to realise and accept that the old man doesn't matter, for in some ways he is always an illusion, always a lie and always already dead and buried.

Author's Note II: Hemingway

He woke at first light, the sun shining through the blinds and onto the yellow tiles of their bedroom.

She was still asleep next to him. He heard her groan and felt her shift next to him, but he didn't look at her. She could sleep as far as he was concerned. His head was sore from the cheap wine the Basque pelota players had made them drink on the beach the previous afternoon, after he'd taken them out on the boat. He liked the pelota players. He liked their skill. He liked the way they cooked chicken and rice and the way they drank. He liked talking to them about the Pyrenees.

He rose from the bed, put on his gown and slippers and shuffled out to the kitchen. He put some coffee on the stove and poured himself a glass of water while he looked out the window at the sky and the distant buildings of Havana. The day would be hot. It felt hot already, but that didn't matter to him. The breeze always came up the hills from the ocean, and in the afternoon he could rest under the trellis of bougainvillea and drink.

As the coffee boiled, he heard her stirring in the bedroom: shuffling in bed, wondering where he was, finding her slippers and her gown. Soon he felt a hand between his shoulders.

'Good morning,' she said.

'Good morning.' He didn't turn to look at her. 'Do you want coffee?'

He poured them both coffee and he drank his at the sink while she went to sit outside on the porch and watch the ocean.

After he'd weighed himself in his bathroom and changed into a loose shirt and shorts, he walked barefoot back into the bedroom and sat down at the desk. The desk faced south with the windows, which were open. He heard the hummingbirds outside zipping back and forth as they made their nests in the trellis and he smelt the sea. Gregorio came yesterday to tell him that the fishing would soon be good. Would he go out on the boat soon? Maybe in a day or two. The desk was littered with papers and notebooks. He'd been re-reading his notes from Madrid, from his time at the Hotel Florida on Plaza de Callao. The typewriter sat like a lump of tar in front of him. It had a sheet of paper, half typed in its clutches.

This was the part where he was the most vulnerable. He wanted to read what he'd written yesterday. He wanted to read it like anything, like the only thing. It was a desire deep within him. It was a desire to see if he was good enough. Always that he was good enough. Would he surprise himself? Or would it just be him and him and him on that page. That was the dread. The deep dread that he'd made a fool of himself, that he'd made himself obvious.

Then she came in and ruined everything. She walked behind him past the bookshelf to the wardrobe and took out a bathing costume and a sundress.

'I'm taking a swim,' she said. 'Do you want anything?'

He stared at her and let his face do the talking.

'Okay,' she said and rolled her eyes and shut the wardrobe.

He wouldn't sleep with her last night, even though she wanted him to. He wanted to save himself. Save it all for the work. He couldn't fuck and write at the same time. It was all about vitality. Vitality and concentration. She'd learn that. She was still young. If she wanted to be any good as a writer, she'd learn that.

'You should shave that beard, you know,' she said. She walked past him and brushed his shoulders. 'And you smell, too,' echoed from the hall as she walked down it.

As she floated in the pool and looked up at the blue morning sky, she thought about him. She knew he was writing a book about Spain, but that was all. He didn't want to 'jinx' the book by talking about it. In the mornings, he was like a piece of architecture; an old monument hunkered down in the bedroom, secretive and ungiving. No, he was more than that. He was like a boxer preparing for the world championship. His quiet was like a concentration of something. The air stilled around him, the very sky seemed to bend over him.

She heard the tapping of the typewriter coming through the patio door and across the water. He was writing his book on Spain. And it was going well, he'd told her. He'd let her read some in a week or two. She couldn't get her Spanish book off the ground. It was all too real to her still.

She'd had a letter from Herb Matthews the day before. In the evenings, back in Madrid, Herb used to get these terrible headaches and she'd rub the back of his neck to calm them down. Herb didn't live in the Hotel Florida with the other journalists, but in a penthouse with a terrace where they would watch the artillery flashes in the hills and hear the shell traces as they flew into the city.

She remembered the faces of the malnourished children in Barcelona; the Italian bombers as they bombed day after day in broad daylight with nothing to stop them; the fascists taking over. Herb Matthews knew what she felt. All those guys did. It was like a weight, the cowardly weight of inaction and despair.

And here. Here was so unbelievable. So calm and collected. So sunny and peaceful. So unreal.

She could never write her book. It was still too real and she was too intense now. Let him write it. He would do it well. She wasn't sure she could do it. Spain made her realise that she'd never be able to understand the human animal.

Yes, let him write it.

Author's Note III: Coleridge

I like drugs.

Not uppers.

Not speed.

I like the laudanum haze.

I like the whispering. Turn it up.

He says '... his unhappy marriage, his unrequited loves and years of opium addiction had left him in a parlous state.'

I like Milton.

I like Hamlet. They'd forgotten about that one.

He says '… opium at this stage did not have the connotations or social stigma that it has today and while being recognised as no good for one's health, it had the suggested corollary power of improving one's mind, or rather giving it access to 'higher' levels of consciousness.'

I say 'What about Milton? You like Milton?'

I like the whispering: the voices.

I like the wind blowing through my head.

> … the long sequacious notes
> Over delicious surges sink and rise,
> Such a soft floating witchery of sound

I look at the ground.

I see mysteries in pavement cracks.

I put one foot in front of the other in front of the other.

I stop people in the street and tell them things.

I hold them. I lay my skinny hand on their arms and whisper in their ears.

I see mysteries in faces: in eyes.

I took this one bloke aside and I could see he was afraid but I told him about the time I went sailing.

Couldn't keep his eyes off of me. Stayed right to the end.

My wild hair.

I've seen things.

I've had things just there, right in front of me. Like I could pick them up and put them in my pocket.

Such things! If I could show you, you'd understand. More than that. You'd bloody bow down, mate.

I stand on mountain tops and look out across the sea.

> Alone, alone, all, all alone,
> Alone on a wide wide sea!

He says 'He was a conservative in this sense, regarding poetry as something like an understanding of the powers of God. He might have also disapproved of a completely rational view of the world, given his interest in its mysteries.'

I say 'Shut it, mate. Will you?'

I hate the city.

I used to walk long into the countryside. With her.

And him.

I used to listen to the wind. Turn it up.

I used to hear music when I slept by the fireside. In my head. When all things were quiet. And there was honey-dew in my veins.

It is a fine, sunny morning.

He says 'Whatever our delusions about him, I beg you to conjure up in your mind's eye a notion of the older Coleridge stepping out onto The Grove in Highgate, London after his morning opium, his erratic mind lost in thought—now Wordsworth's sister Dorothy; now Schiller; now his failed translation of *Faust;* his raft of unfinished projects; his estranged wife and children. It is a fine sunny morning though he moves slowly for his heart and lungs strain under the weight of his addiction …'

Goethe! That figures.

He says 'Can we hold that beautiful fiction in our minds for a moment?'

I say 'Fuck Coleridge.'

I say 'What did he know about anything?'

Author's Note IV: Cloister

Troubled, I talked again with Brother Anselm, the armarius, in the cloister after Terce. Brother Anselm, an abstinent man of open countenance, most highly regarded for the purity of his morals and his wisdom, instructed me further in the work he wished of me and the reasons as to why it must remain a matter for only us two. His words gave me sustenance, and upon return to my cell I once again took the small book from beneath the desk to examine under candle light.

It is a humble compilation, on common parchment. Its cheap, worn vellum has a quality of age, but there are inscriptions and signs that the vellum may be newer; but I am unsure. It has boards of leather and wood, but neither of these remark of quality, and indeed show great age. The parchment is illuminated modestly and the hand is unremarkable, possibly Germanic, though the book itself is in Latin. Of note is the illumination on the initial pages. Achieved only in red ink, it is of two diabolical snakes aligned head to foot, though curved in parallel to form identical shape.

Brother Anselm believes that the book may be have been translated from Arabic in the library of Cordoba and smuggled out before the sacking by Ferdinand III, and that the Arabic original may have originated in the great Fatamid Library whose collection was sold many years past by the Caliph of Egypt. The book was brought to us by Brother Pietre of Granada, a corpulent man who, before taking his vows with our order, it is said was ill-famed with a women from his flock when a priest in Braccho. As a young man, Pietre is said to have been a student of the Breton Abelard at Mont Saint Genevieve outside of Paris, where he excelled in the study of logic. He has been dead for some two dozen years or more.

While the copying is diligent work, it is not taxing. I have spent much time preparing the parchment with scraping, pumicing and polishing. I have measured and ruled lines with stylus and pencil and plumb line, and prepared line marks with the awl. The work is slow, but it gives me space for contemplation on the contents of the book, which is unlike anything else I have

been permitted to read. I cannot divine its purpose. At times I am so overwhelmed by it that I must interrupt the labour with quiet meditation on our Lord, and dutiful prayer. Only God may see into the mind of he who wrote the book, for there lies pride and intellect unrestrained by modesty and faith.

Of late, my awareness has been pierced by a ghost whispering counterpoint to my prayers when I am deep in reflection. To this ghost something of my nature has assigned a character. It is my fervent hope that this ghostly whisper does not transmute into the sound of that Devil cast down into his fiery lair. I bow in obedience to Brother Anselm and trust in his Godliness as a guide in this endeavour.

It is to the Word of God that all must finally adhere. To this end, Brother Anselm has asked me to write a short commentary to preface the manuscript, in Latin, as a way of preparing and soothing the reader's mind for the turmoil of what follows. And so I make notes on loose parchment, including this confessional, which is but one way of salving my conscience, and I look to those great minds to guide me in my work and to make all unholy things clear to me.

Siobhan Harvey

The cloud

Today, we build clouds;
and in turn, they build us.

More than any architecture,
the Cloud makes concrete

our myths and stories about
the fabric of the ruck and maul,

the steel of the stevedores' fight,
or the timber of Olympic blight.

In this, it reminds us of progress
as clear as glass, as slight as PVC,

so fragile it might fall easily,
like snow, like rain.

Anna-May Laugher

Mammon

1. Tate Modern
He feels intimidated, shut out of art.
Still, he can say he's been, seen Emin's bed.

2. Motto
'I am a man of ties, a man of suits—bespoke.'

3. Ormalou
There will be noise, expense,
golden times and handshakes,
flippancy and frippery.
Wit, wit, wit.
'City of London, this is it!'
He has arrived.

4. Fear
A Saturday brings him the truth,
soft wind blowing in the spaces.
No one looking in, apart from him
and maintenance men, men familiar, nameless.
Chairs abandoned on a Friday
turn a blind eye to the view.
The hanging gardens hang, the fountain 'founts'
the signage winks at him,
'TO BE THE BEST'
He will not come here at weekends again.

5. Kill
off misgivings now.

6. Mondays
Deviate.
Calculate.
Risk.

7. Tuesdays
Take, make, take—
speed of the essence.
Dope, Jack, 'E', Smack;
anything, to stop the shock of life knife-edged,
potentially all angles snubs and shrugs.
Potential for
dis
-gust
-may
-grace
disinterest and debt;
everything on tick
from a loan to a kiss.

8. Wednesday
Wife. He tries to conjure her,
what is she like?
Something from the Thames,
muddied, indistinct.
He tries to think
when he last fucked,
simply for joy, simply for lust.

9. Deal-day
Thursday. Time is alight, time is a fire.
He runs breathless after the smuts, a
light sprinkling, the residue of failure.
Doesn't want to talk about it
doesn't want to talk
doesn't want to
doesn't want
doesn't.

10. Won't

11. Work
Not at work in fact, he's walked
to watch things grow,
to read pale plaques about the ordinary brave,
the ordinary slain, who have done right;
ordered their place in history and Heaven's book.

12. Earth
He peels the petals of a tulip back until they drop
pinches its stem for its sap and scent;
remembers planting and soil.
Aloud he says 'Disconcerting isn't it?
the distance between us and where our food grows.
Imagine food miles, miles of food.'
No one in the garden says a word.

13. Clerkenwell
He's heard there are miracle plays in Faringdon Road.
Quickening his pace he frames himself,
stretches his shape, flings out his arms like an aeroplane
into the mouth of St John's gate, then runs full pelt.

'Where are the miracles?' he asks
pressing his forehead to the glass
'How shall I drink of this?' he says
licking a path through the window's dirt.
'Come to me all you who thirst.'
He lobs a brick.
All is not well that ends in Clerkenwell.

14. Ladybird
It flies from nowhere onto his hand
He counts the spots, says 'fly away home.'
He doesn't make it to his own though.

15. Fleet
Where is a river not a river?
When is a river a street?
He hears fish tick with news.

16. Elephants
'Who let the poets out?
Who gave them elephants, each painted like a house?
Who gave them ideas? Whatever next?
Who made them walk like crocodiles?
There will be tears' he shouts.

17. Consequences
Wife is a belly, stretching and needy,
suddenly softened, a lady afraid.
The lady waits.

18. Smoke
He likes the market at Smithfield,
finds the dragon soothing when he smokes.
Are there still wife sales?
Could he label her 'unwanted guilt?'

19. Church
He walks looking for the grazing places,
angels, in his mind are geese today.
Pasture, prayer, propinquity.
He makes his words a rosary, a ring, a ring.

St Bartholomew the Great was once
a factory for lace and fringe, fringe and lace.
He drinks from the font, gawps at light,
at rings of candle smoke.
The glass is poisoned with promise, leaded.

20. Crow
He needs to know, how to go the way the crow flies;
no references to maps or landmarks,
not the breast of St Paul's,
not the Assay office, where gold is scarred.
Not the garden where the dead are stacked;
filed by headstones against railings;
where enemy and enemy are pressed like flowers,
lovers set apart,
children leant away from mothers.
No, none of that.
He needs a crow to navigate by,
a crow and star and sky.
Feathered is the way.

21. Spooked
by little ghosts who beat a path through vivid flowers
and drop their gloves on paving slabs;
spooked by the burst of bird from bush.

22. Zoo
He finds interstices between nature and concrete;
asks pigeons for philosophy, is taken by the rhythm of 'Coo'.
Tardy and hiding in the zoo at night, he is talking with tigers,
looking for a Pangolin to play.
'It has no strings,' he says and feeds its tongue.

At work—a final warning.

23. Growth
The lady waits.

24. Virgin
He begs, much as a beggar does.
Begs for indulgence and time;
more time to sort the knots of work,
re-ravel home. He won't,
He's learnt a skin of dirt to hide in,
sleeps in the street and calls it 'skippering'.
Learns codes of conduct for the first day on his knees;
'virgin beggar', his landscape is all shoes and shins;
voice pitched to a whine,
for change, small change, nothing big;
now that he's here, free and fallen.

25. Fatherhood
She is split like a fruit, has ripened a son,
given him names, chose them herself.
No-one to consult.

26. Jean-Paul
He's overcome with existential joy
has found a monument to 'meaningless'.
Sartre would have loved it.
A bridge on which no person is allowed,
a bridge that takes you nowhere faster;
ornate, splendid in its uselessness.
'Forgive me my trespasses' he laughs.
Above his head the building says
'Let Brotherly Love Continue'
'Amen to that!'

27. Shakespeare
He tries Tate Modern again
is side tracked by the Globe and Shakespeare's face.
For tourists he's just ruff and pate;
something to learn off by heart and forget.

28. A&E
Hit by a cab—so busy looking out for crows.
Woke up concussed and sick, hot, trapped.
'Next of kin?'
FUCK OFF!

29. R&R
Leg in plaster, arm in plaster, ribs wracked, blue and black.

30. NFA
Social worker.
'Next of kin? What's your address?'
'Nunovyore!'
Nunovyore?
'Nunovyore business!'

31. Crutches
Slow progress to the Koi, a pond that spouts,
claims between its fountain's blurts
to be a place to wash your thoughts.
Old water that knows its tune,
pores over the libretto, perfects, reflects.

32. Reflection
He tries to recollect, for the sake of being lost
forgot his birthday, days of his kin.
Faded out the face of his mother and the etceteras
'Where did I put it all?' he says.
'Layer upon layer of remembered and buried.
I am the city begun, unfinished;
a cake of bricks and intent.
Bomb blasts, parishes and boundaries, forts,
ramparts where the poppies hold on tight;
I wish I'd held on as tightly as that.'

Usha Kishore

Translating the Indian summer

The scorched plains sizzle
in the incensed winds.

Hoodwinked by distant skies
lined with *collyrium* clouds,

the wandering mind
translates a distant summer

as memory colours
smouldering visions.

Lines scan simmering meters,
Sound uncloaks syllables

in chant and hymn,
scattered rhymes reflect

the eye of the storm,
hiding in peacock feathers

as the cyclical sun burns
in sacrificial fires.

Allegory and allusion
adorn the drooping trees

in burnished gold,
their sap crystallising

into sense images.
Verse forms rise

in the air as white
lightning splits the skies

into migrant metaphors
that paint tomorrows

with lengthy shadows
of myth and legend.

Language fails
to translate yearning

that sheds tears of rain.
Monsoons are but dreams

of exiled souls. A herd
of thoughts sniffs the arid air

for the scent of all quenching water.

Note

Collyrium—dark eyeliner
This poem was born while translating *Ritusamhara,* the Sanskrit epyllion by the legendary Kalidasa.

Dominique Hecq

Tomorrow, the sun

For a while it seemed like we were mad about the sky, and then the sky becomes our calendar. Moon, sun, stars, like so many to guide us through time. The world crumpling like a dying star.

One morning before the dawn I stood on a clifftop above Beehive Falls in the Grampians. In despair I spread out my arms and uttered a primal cry. The waterfall kept running. The darkness before dawn remained dark.

And then, that glorious sunlight.

In the darkness, there came a turning. It was as though the dark itself offered a *leitmotif*. At that point I saw just two qualities: an ability to *be*, and to be *attentive*. Contemplating that space, I was aware of some presence, aware of souls inhabiting the apparent void, aware of the long and newly dead. There, in that *inbetween* space, everything seemed to come together. In the light of this inward sun, it all made sense again.

The turning happened. I surrendered to some invisible force. An inner world opened up in me. I began to walk and as I walked I began to speak again. Wotwuwhoosh whoosh whoosh wooo … moon, sun, stars … whoosh … wooo …

My legs walked me to the grey house, the one our hosts call the cabin. The ground crackled under my feet. It was hard to think. On the footpath, a dead bird. I started skipping. Meantime, I cried to the skies. Moon. Sun. Stars. Meanwhile, somewhere life had just begun.

When I pushed open the door of the cabin father and son, wrapped in patchwork doona, were reading *The Giant Book of Trucks*.

I would have to cook breakfast. The man would want bacon and eggs. The child would want pancakes. We would need steaming hot coffee and hot chocolate. *Tra la la la la.* I have lost my place in the world. *Tra la la la la.*

I foxed my way though the living room and down a dim corridor of deepening greys.

In the master bedroom's half-light, the threefold mirror shows off its dusty face across two cracks. In the faint light I turn away from liquid ash as a child turns in vain around her own reflection. Plonk myself down on the bed, adjust the pillow behind my back, pick up the notebook and the pencil from the bedside table and scribble.

~~**(M)otherwise**~~
~~*Womb with a view (navel gazing)*~~ *nothing to do with it*
~~*Tomb with a view*~~ *(too specific to account for* ~~*narrative*~~ *artistic impulse)*
The blind leading the blind, as usual and I must remember to ditch that overcooked book.

Reading in Braille

Against the heavy sky day after day you live
and look for words under your own eyelids.

In the darkness comes a turning
where everything leads to this
inbetween, this inward sun.

And so you write the way you hang
the washing out, pegs in your mouth
knowing full well it's not Monday.

The sun dictates our daily tasks
and the prayers that rise towards the newly dead
like butterflies surrendering to every breath.

Hmm. Butterflies surrendering to every breath of air sounds like a European conceit … like rose flower petals, etc. Our roses are black though. Like stars turned black holes. *Tra la la la la.*

The star turned black hole: the one whose gravity prevents any light from escaping.

And now breakfast: pancakes for everyone. Here I go back to my place, in a cloud of smoke.

Only to realise things have shifted.

The father has made coffee and is busy with his Sudoku.

The child is drawing in charcoal on the walls of the cabin. He draws a lion under a canopy of stars which look all the more dramatic because of the natural yellow colour all over the walls that create a swirling caramel effect.

I take a mixing bowl from the drying rack and place it on the bench next to the pantry cupboard. My hands open the cupboard as I think of ink. The right hand reaches for the flour container and as it does I get a whiff of vanilla and cloves. The hand finds the cup and the cup ploughs in the flour, scoops it up and dips it in the bowl. Hands make a well. Find eggs and milk in the fridge. Break three eggs, pour two cups of milk. Stir. Whisk. Add a tablespoon of oil. Meanwhile, I think of ink.

> *In the Renaissance it was desirable to have ink that not only travelled seductively across the paper, but also smelled wonderful. To make writing the sensual experience scholars desired they experimented with vanilla, cloves, honey, locusts, the virgin pressing of olives, powdered mother of pearl, scented musk, rhinoceros horn, jade, jasper, pine, wine …*

Almost forgot the secret ingredient: water. Oil in the pan. Heat. Swirl it around so it won't stick. Now. Shprshhhhhh!

> *Hebborn's recipe for ink is versatile; the result a variety of hues from deep yellow to black. Mix water or wine with gum Arabic, galls and coconut kernels and leave the stew covered under warm sunlight for several days. Rotten acorns as good as gall. As for the wine, he preferred to drink it rather than add it to the brew.*

First pancake black. Turn down the heat.

Our days are bracketed now, or so it seems to me.

The father shot a rabbit last night and skinned it. I cooked it with prunes. The child spared the bones and tomorrow he will patiently put them together again.

As I finished the washing up and the man read to the child after dinner the sun had set, bringing the sky low and spreading thin clouds into the corners of the horizon where the light was still standing. It was getting dark now. The sun had dipped below the side of the mountain and I imagined the sky in the west was draining quickly into the falls. I felt compelled to go back to Beehive Falls.

It was a cloudless night and the moon was surfacing above the top of the hill, casting before it a net of brightness that crept up and up and made new shadows in the ground. Halfway up the hill I stopped in the cover of a twisted she-oak that was leaning over the path, the smell of teatree and eucalypt and humus straining my nostrils. And there he was: the angel stood in the middle of the path, swaying on his feet as he looked straight ahead, oblivious to the world of the living. I stood still as he shifted from one foot to the other, then set off into the shadows. I hung back, realising I had lost him. Above me lay the iridescent outline of the hill, barely lit up with the sinking sun.

We are back where we call it home, our cream *crépi* house in Melbourne and as both father and child sleep it suddenly hits me. Here is my desk. Here is where I have existed for so many years. Here is the crude palimpsest of my being since setting foot in this country. I open the top drawer. Instead of encountering the familiar soft-rough feel of manila folders, my fingers meet the cold of a plastic pouch. The pouch, I see and now also recall, contains a pale yellow matinee jacket and matching bootees knitted in angora wool I salvaged from the charity bag when our baby's clothes and toys were being packed away. The wool is soft and unctuous. It smells of caramel.

Tomorrow is Tuesday. Garbage day. I have some work to do.

Tuesday 8.02, July 29 1994. I sit in jubilation as I watch the garbos pack up and trash the box labelled 'Last draft and floppy disks for *Exile Down Under*.' Inexplicably, I find poise and presence and being. Then there is the momentarily arrested gasp of surprise.

The child, I forget to say, is with me. And he laughs with me, too, as the box disappears in the crushing backside of the truck.

Sarah Penwarden

That girl

What if I were born one thing,
just to become another?
I am seasonal:
to drop leaf, shed skin,
slip autumnal from one

configuration to the next.
I'm glad I no longer inhabit the
teenage body of discomfort:
roiling acid bath within,
rash of fear across my back.

I've shrugged off that
particular incarnation of a girl,
along with Daphne
who, in fearful flight,
became a laurel tree.

There may be a transformation,
across the surface of a lifetime:
I am water, I am ice,
sliding from solidness
to this liquidity.

White country

Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like a world,
lying in surrender

When we lie next to each other,
the marks by which I painted myself
in bold clear strokes, erase.

I was alone like a tunnel.
to survive myself
I forged you like a weapon

It is just a matter of time, you say,
and our ego boundaries
will dissolve.

My thirst,
my boundless desire,
my shifting road![1]

In this morning bed,
unflinching light,
so much has become clear.

Note

1. 'Body of a woman' by Pablo Neruda – *Twenty love poems and a song of despair.*

M.A. Sandev

Cryptic crossword cento #1

always in the very best company
in almost dusk, I trudge with OC, a dinosaur
creature roaming wild around south,
great hip movements to black material
(moves with mad rants at animal skins discussion)
marching together through the arch & wandering
about an Italian city,
I say (totally baffled):
'I hear you quietly agree about hesitation to start,'
—'long tale as gas rises,' the response
frugal,
like best mates
combine after first errors become apparent
& casually chant fragment of song
stay to the end
& enjoy the window view

Monica Carroll

no title

A man approaching, unguarded against the rain. Our walking bodies move onto the same page. Eyes spark and take. He stoops, then rises to dominate the beneath of my umbrella.

He wears his height; the tips of his raven hair boundary skimming the silver spine of my umbrella's inner skeleton. He is wet, wringing with rainwater. Darkened smooth patches spread the horizons of his frame. Despite the dampness upon him, he pulses.

Is this the way to the bookstore? he says.
Which bookstore? I say.

(His heat meets my face.)

The one I'm meant to be in, he says.
I don't know, I say.

(Why do the eccentrics always take to the streets on rainy days?)

Then how do I know where to go? he says.
Sorry. I don't think I can help you.

(But a share of me begs to abet.)

Do you think I'm meant to be here, in this story?

(What?)

I don't even know you, I say.
But in a story, that is acceptable. Just because I'm a character doesn't mean I'm not a person.

(Beneath these clouds, this man floods fire.)

I point behind me. I think the bookstore is that way, I say.

(But stay and let me lick you dry.)

without title

-I'd like to give you this tangelo, you say.
-I don't like tangelo; they taste oddly not orange, I say.
The bookstore owner watches us as we pass the dimpled ball back and forth in the Bite and Spice section of the store.
-Let's talk about this in the Biographies and Sad Lives where the owner cannot apperceive us, I say.
-Apperceive?
I smile. The air around you warms. Your lips are the shape for good kissing.
-Your lips are the shape for good kissing, I say.
-Take the tangelo, you say, thrusting it at me.
-No, I reply, pushing it back.
-Then take me, instead.
-Only for the shape of your lips, I say.

untitled again, but I promise this to be the last

When you stand behind me, it feels like something
feels like
feels like
feels like
feels like
feels like
feels like
feels like
feels
feels
feels
feels
feels
feels like itself

If a lamb is a tissue is a breeze is a sigh is a warmth is a heart is a sweet is a curve
then
metaphor is the things themselves.

Emma Timpany

A walk in the forest

Everyone said they were lucky with the weather. It was a fine, clear day, unusual in a part of the country notorious for its very high rainfall; temperate rain forest clothed the mountains, stretching from the shores of the lake all the way to the West Coast.

It was a long time since Sarah had been home, and an even longer time since she had walked in the forest. You could enter the track by a bridge across the dam at the foot of the lake, as she and the child did; otherwise there was another entry point a few kilometres down stream where a swing bridge straddled the wide, green-grey river. It only took a very short time, three or four minutes from either entrance, until you crossed the water and entered the trees. In both directions, for long stretches, the path through the forest was almost flat, a rich springy surface of decaying beech leaves; beyond it were moss-covered humps and mounds and stumps and the occasional hole, bare-earthed as a grave, where the root ball of a tree, now fallen, had once stood.

As the trees enclosed them—small-leaved southern beech, the fir-like podocarps, the smaller glossy-leaved coprosmias and manukas, black-stemmed with sooty mould—the child, letting go of Sarah's hand, ran ahead before stopping to peer and prod at patches of pale grey lichen, filmy ferns and some strange moss that rose from the ground on a slender stem before dividing into two wing-shaped halves as if it may, at any moment, rise and fly away. If things had not changed so totally, Sarah and the child would not be in the forest but on the other side of the mountains, in their rain shadow, where the hillsides were dry and desert-like, coated in golden tussock grass and studded, at this time of year, with yellow-leaved poplars, a purple-blue haze of viper's bugloss, the glossy red hips of wild dog roses. The child, after looking again at the trees and placing an exploratory foot in a hole, with a quick glance over her shoulder towards her mother, said, 'Come on, Creamy,' and, mounting her imaginary horse, cantered ahead until, rounding a bend in the path, she was lost from sight.

For a moment there was only silence, a great gush of it, and the deep, soothing green presence of the trees all around and then a cold buzz of fright in Sarah's veins told her to hurry after the child. She found her a little further on, standing under the green umbrella of a tree fern, examining a ghost-pale clump of coral moss. Sarah knew what it felt like, that moss—it was cool and light, spongy as if it belonged in the sea—because she had come to this forest, or one very like it, many years ago on a school trip. Back then, the teacher had shown them little stands of orchids growing on fallen logs.

In Sarah's memory the orchids were sometimes green, sometimes white, and she remembered the teacher telling them how lucky they were to see them. Had it been because the orchids were rare, or because they were difficult to spot? What were plants called that fed on others? Despite their beauty, were they parasites? She had not liked that teacher much partly because of his strange appearance; he was as lipless as the mantis shrimps they had captured on the sand flats of Otakau at low tide. Sarah remembered how desperately the shrimps had dived as, armed with spades, they dug them up, before transporting them back to the classroom aquarium where each day she had watched them bury themselves again and again in their tank of sand.

She had been older then than the child was now; just beginning to understand the undertows and rips of her family, still fighting, not yet dragged far out from shore and drowned. But the peacefulness of the trees, the great greenness of them, seemed somehow to subdue even that painful history. Perhaps it had something to do with the lack of noise, litter, colour in this place; there was no horizon to aim for, only an occasional glimpse of sky; she had no greater ambition than to take another step along the brown path which wound through the green, though at times a tree grew right in its middle, splitting its flow as an island divides a river.

The child did not know what had happened, would not know until she was older, perhaps the same age as Sarah had been when she had first come to the forest and not long after, at the insistence of her mother, given up her share of her father's estate. The talk at the time had been of fairness but, as everyone except Sarah had known, life is not fair; it was true, also, that Sarah had been unlucky, that those whose should have protected her, advised her, had her best interests at heart, hadn't: she had not been able to look into the future; how could she have guessed what would happen? Now it was all gone; it would never again be hers; it would never be the child's.

What is still mine, she wanted to ask the trees. Now I have lost so much, are you still mine?

'We should go back.' The memories brought her feet to a stop, heart pounding as if they had strayed dreamily, like two innocents in a fairy story, off the path, or turned to see the birds had eaten the trail of crumbs they had dropped, and they were lost, lost.

'Not yet, Mummy, please.'

It was all right. The path was there, black-brown and soft beneath her feet. The trees had not swallowed them. And who knew when they might be able to come back here again?

'Okay, we'll go on but just a little further.'

Sarah had expected the child to be tired, to moan about sore legs and aching feet. But the leaves were pleasant to walk on, and there was something about the trees, something about how they were so similar and yet so different, so obviously a family and yet separate that she could not have explained but which soothed her, or perhaps it was simply walking down the curving path, surrounded by bird calls, mounds of milk moss, swaying curtains of old man's beard hanging from branches, the sudden exposed earth of the holes and all the time the child quietly singing and at times the gentle sound of the river or the lapping of waves against an unseen shore as boats passed far out in the green-black vastness of the lake.

When the path wound down a gully through a crowd of tree ferns, they followed it

'Mum, come and see, come and see.'

The child, who had been bending over a fallen log, stood back. The roots grew on the outside of the trunk, and the leaves were strong and glossy, the flowers white with pale yellow centres, tiny yet exquisite; above the dying wood, hundreds of stems of snow-white orchids quivered. Soft, luminous, white, waxy petals; sweet-smelling yellow mouths turned up towards her as if they were hungry. Sarah had begun a BSc, majoring in Botany, but had left university halfway through her second year; she had had to get away, had gone overseas; her life, until the child had been born, had unfolded in a city where she had sometimes walked the streets on summer nights reciting the names of the plants that grew, sooty and neglected, in other people's front gardens. But now, back in the forest, the things she had learned at school and her brief time at university came back to her: the white orchid was not a parasite but an epiphyte, a plant which though it grows on another does not take anything from it.

It was a long time before Sarah said anything. The child seemed content looking at the flowers before turning and solemnly addressing the empty air beside her to tell Creamy not to eat them in case they were 'poison'.

'We're lucky. Lucky.' The words seemed to release a weight from Sarah's chest, as if, without realising it, she'd been holding her breath.

'Yes,' said the child.

Gathering up invisible reins, the child remounted Creamy and began to gallop ahead. There was still some way to go. Sarah had been thinking that at some point they would have to turn back and retrace their steps to the dam, but surely it would be just as easy to carry on and exit by the swing bridge; they could catch one of the regular buses back to the village. If the child grew very tired, Sarah would be able to carry her.

Stephen Devereux

Pisarro's Washerwomen

You begin to wonder whether it isn't a sort of fetish—
Degas, Bonnard, always showing them in the bath or drying
themselves. Sickert liked them wet too and Gauguin
put them naked by a black river, combing their hair.
Pisarro's look more real, somehow, three in a row
thrashing tired clothes on the banks of a blue stream
or one washerwoman, unaware, apparently, taking a rest.
You could make up theories about the need to wash
away sins, or the fear of sexual contagion. But they
don't go far enough. Is it the desire to be where they are,
not in the heat of the boudoir or the swank of the ballroom,
but to get inside the spaces they keep for themselves,
to possess them in paint, to steal every vestige of modesty?
Whereas the sprawled studio nudes get dressed and go home.

Meera Atkinson

Dust storm

End of world red sky
shifted the dawn

we woke in burnt air confusion,
wind like the anguish that your anguish would be,
to streets half emptied and eerie as peace
and nothing was normal

and everywhere
the golden light of day
coughing up our pain

Julia Prendergast

The earth does not get fat

My best friend's name is Simbovala. I love her with all of my heart. Only I can say her name properly—*Sim-bo-va-la*. Everyone else just calls her Simba. I only call her Simbovala when we are alone. I whisper it to her when we lie down under the Weeping Willow tree in my back yard. It sounds like a secret. It makes her laugh. She laughs like the birds. Only I can make her laugh.

Today we stare up at the sky through the branches of the weeping willow. The branches dance like hair. Simbovala doesn't have the dancing type of hair; hers is like sea sponge, springy and spiky. Mostly Simbovala wears her hair in tiny plaits that look as though they are stuck to her head. We break branches from the Willow and wrap them around our heads like a wreath. We pretend that we are in Africa. Simbovala calls Africa her homeland.

When I tell Simbovala that the tree's name is *Weeping Willow*, she stops still and stares at the sky. She stares up through the bendy branches and she has tears in her eyes. Now I call it the crying tree.

Simbovala teaches me how to do the cross-clapping hands that she does with her friends at the homeland. We chant *Homeland, Homeland* as we walk around the trunk of the Willow. Simbovala says she will walk backwards because I'm not very good at doing the cross-clapping hands and walking at the same time. We fall down in the end, sprawled and laughing. We are still there when my older brother, Cam, walks through the back gate. He says that we are queer.

That night, Cam says that I am infatuated with Simbovala. Mum says don't be so ridiculous. I look *infatuated* up in the dictionary. It says: *foolishly in love, obsessed*. I am infatuated with Simbovala's laugh; I am infatuated with her hair, with the chalky-smoothness of her cross-clapping hands, with the milky half-moons on her nails.

I am the best girl speller in grade six. James is nearly as good as me but he's a boy and he got *rhythm* wrong last time. James has trouble with Simbovala's name. The first time he says it, he stumbles. I laugh, so does Simbovala. James doesn't usually stumble and he goes red. Then he calls Simbovala: *The Lion Hunter*. I hate James. Mum says you shouldn't hate people but I definitely hate James. I can't help it. I hate him with all of my heart.

Cam says that Simbovala and I are freaks. I can't really hate Cam because he is my brother. I do hate him sometimes but then it goes away. Cam is six years older than me. When Mum is on the phone to my aunty, she says that Cam is difficult, a trying child. Dad tells Cam to stop being an asshole.

Simbovala tells me stories. We swap stories, like I give her *Cinderella* or *Snow White* for one about her homeland. I rush through my stories because they're just fairytales. Simbovala's stories are about real life, like her name means: *While you mark out a field, Death marks you out in life.* She says it reminds us that, as we live, we are in the midst of death.

It's a bit spooky, like a curse, but I want to keep hearing it. I make her tell me it all the time. I pretend I can't remember it because I'm infatuated with that one. She knows that I already know it but I need to hear it out of her homeland voice.

My name is Annie. It means mercy, grace. I am named after my grandmother. She is dead. Whenever I say: *dead,* Simbovala says: *The earth does not get fat.* She says it in a voice that's like quiet men singing. It means: *however many people are buried in the earth, the earth is never satisfied.* Creepy hey, like the earth is after us.

I try to think up new reasons to say dead. I tell her stories from the news just so that I can say dead, died, dying. I tie the stringy branches of the Weeping Willow around my neck and I say it like Simbovala says it: *The earth does not get fat—The earth does not get fat*—but she doesn't get creeped out. Then I say it in the voice from Cam's scary movies. Simbovala laughs hard: she sounds like a magpie. Her laugh turns sad at the end as if she's missing someone.

One day, Cam calls Simbovala a dark witch. I hate him so much that I think I could probably kill him. He calls her a witch because we took the radio out of his room and put it under the Willow tree. I call Cam an asshole. He is trying to hurt me because he knows that I love Simbovala with all of my heart.

Simbovala says: *Don't worry about Cam.* She says: *No polecat ever smelt its own stink.* It means Cam thinks he knows everything but he is blind because he can't see himself. She is exactly right. Cam yells at me, and at Mum and Dad, and that is the reason: he can't see that he's causing it all. That's him being difficult; that's him being trying. I'm glad he's a polecat. He hates cats.

I smile, looking up at the shapes that the bendy, willow branches mark out in the sky. Simbovala says: *Tell me one,* so I say: *Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.*

Sometimes Simbovala gets very serious and her eyes look like black glass. She says that the songs from her homeland have matching stories and matching songs. I think of the words and the stories and the songs, all fitting together like the wooden dolls on my bookshelf, one hiding inside the other.

The proverbs are the short ones, says Simbovala, and I nod, looking straight at her eyes, just like I do to Mrs Mistle, so she knows I'm paying attention. *They are for teaching a lesson,* she says, *like the polecat,* she adds and we both laugh.

I say: *Tell me another one.*

The baboons laughed at one another's overhanging eyebrows, says Simbovala.

I don't get it, I say.

She says: *One another's, you see, because they all have the same eyebrows but they don't know, because baboons don't look in the mirror.*

Like—You can't see past the end of your own nose.

Ooh, I like that one, she says. *Imagine how big your nose would be if you couldn't see past,* she laughs. *Tell me another one.*

That's the pot calling the kettle black, I say. I blurt it out as quickly as I can just to satisfy her, even though I know that mine are not as mysterious as hers. I tell her the first one that I can think of because she's begging me.

Sometimes I think that she only asks me to tell her some so that it's even, so that I feel like I'm giving her something back. Simbovala is quiet, like she doesn't understand, but she doesn't ask me to explain. *It's because they're both black,* I say. *Like Cam said to Mum: You're so selfish, because she won't buy him a car, and Mum said: Now that's the pot calling the kettle black.* Simbovala is still quiet. *It's not racist,* I say, remembering that Cam is an asshole.

I stand up and take hold of the strong, ropey branches of the Willow. I pretend to swing at Simbovala. *I'm a polecat,* I say. *I have come to return you to the earth.* Simbovala laughs so hard that she has to hold her belly and curl herself into a ball on the ground. *What's so funny?* I ask, lying next to her so that I can feel the rumble of her laugh.

She turns over to face me. *Polecats are small,* she says, puffing to get her breath. *They don't swing,* she laughs. *They're like your homeland cat, but they live in the wild and they smell.*

Like a skunk? I ask, thinking how generous it is that she gives me a homeland of my own, like I'm a queen or something.

A what? She laughs hard and gurgly. She can't get a breath in. I can't answer because I'm laughing too.

At night Simbovala's stories wake me up. They are not funny. Her laugh is taken back to the earth and it echoes like voices in a cave, but the voices are dead and screaming because the earth is swallowing them, eating them alive. Simbovala is laughing hard and baby polecat-skunks climb out of her dead mouth and squirt their stink everywhere. I squeal and cry and Mum comes.

In the morning, Mum says that she thinks I am spending too much time with Simbovala. She says that I need to extend my friendship circle. Cam takes his earphones out of his ears. He sits opposite me at the table, chewing and listening hard. Mum doesn't even tell him to close his mouth. He crunches his cereal, eating it as revoltingly as he can, because he knows he is annoying me. He gawks at me like a stunned polecat.

I don't want to play with anyone else, I say hysterically, crying nearly as hard as I did in the middle of the night.

Mum says: *Settle down right now please. People are different, simple as that.*

Cam says: *Simbovala must have put a curse on you and that's why you're acting so fruity*.

Mum says: *Don't be so ridiculous and put your lunch in your bag.* Then she says: *What about if we invite Casey over to play on the weekend? You could sleep out in the tent under the Willow tree.*

Casey's a polecat, I say. Mum sips her tea. She looks into the mug, sniffs it, then pours it down the sink. She puts her hand on my forehead, looks at her watch.

The nightmares go on and on. Always the earth is trying to eat Simbovala alive. Then the baboons chase Cam to get him to the place where the earth eats people. I hide behind the Willow tree. I don't help him because I'm too scared and I don't want to die. In the dream Cam's not my brother. In the dream it doesn't matter if I don't love him or I do.

The next afternoon we take Cam's radio again. I thought he wouldn't know; I thought he had basketball training. Cam throws a pinecone at Simbovala. He says he was going for me because I called him a polecat. That's what he says but he's a pretty good aim and he's a pretty good liar. The pinecone scratches Simbovala's eye, the actual eyeball, and her eye won't stop crying.

We take Simbovala home before Mum and Dad go for their walk. Dad is trying to get skinnier so Mum hides the potato chips in the laundry cupboard; she says that Dad can come with her on her walks … even though it's her thinking time.

Simbovala's mum and dad come out onto the verandah to meet us. Her dad puts his hand out to my dad and then to Mum. His name is Mansa. He says: *Call me Rex.* Both names mean king, that's what Simbovala told me. He has a beautiful voice, a little bit scary if you were in the dark but beautiful anyway.

Mum does the talking. She says it was an accident. She says we're very sorry indeed. She says Cam is having a troubled time at present, he thinks he knows everything, won't be told.

Aah, says Rex, showing his massive white teeth as if he is opening his mouth at the dentist. *The won't-be-told man sees by the bloodstain.*

Steady on; steady on, says Dad, scruffing up his forehead like he's getting a headache. My stomach grumbles. Cam caused this whole thing and he's probably just relaxing, watching the telly with his feet up on the couch, eating everyone's dinner.

We're very sorry, says Mum, looking at Dad like he better SHUTUP or he won't be coming on the walk.

Simbovala's brother comes out of the front door. He stands on the verandah too and they are all in a row. Simbovala's brother is about the same age as Cam but he is bigger than any man I know. His name is Neo. They didn't change his name or Simbovala's.

Mum starts up again. She is doing that thing where she is in a conversation with someone but she starts talking to herself, it's very annoying. *Cam* … she starts, but then she stops and starts again. *Our boy did the wrong thing. We're very sorry. If only he would listen* …

Aah, and a goat may beget an ox and a white man sew on a native head ring, says Rex, putting an arm around Neo, throwing his big head back and laughing hard. He sounds like Simbovala but his laugh is deeper, more spread out. He opens his mouth really wide when he laughs and it reminds me of the baby polecats.

Just remember who you're talking to, says Dad, shifting his weight from one leg to the other. *Just remember where you are, in the street with the old white man.* He chuckles when he says it so it sounds friendly but he looks a bit nervous, like when he's watching the horse races on Saturday afternoon.

It's like 'Pigs might fly' Dad, I say quietly. I look at Simbovala and she winks at me, just like Mrs Mistle when I got *rhythm* right.

Simbovala's mum's name is Amadika. She says: *Call me Amy.* She stretches out her hand in the direction of the front door; she stretches it slow and long like a lady dancing. She says: *Will you come?* But Dad already took a step back when he said the thing about the white man so I know we're not going in.

Thank you Amy but we will go, says Mum, pausing thoughtfully. *Amy—that means Beloved.* Mum looks pleased with herself. She looks at me as if she wants me to say: *Yes, that's the way Mum,* but Amy isn't her real name and Beloved is not a story.

I look at Simbovala. She has tears in her good eye. She scrunches the layers of her skirt in her hands so that the floral ruffles ride up her skinny, black thigh. I can't take my eyes off her because I love her with all of my heart.

Amy taps Simbovala's hand away from her skirt. Then she takes Simbovala's hand in her own but Simbovala wriggles her fingers to get free.

I want to say: *Waah! I'm a polecat!* I want to say it loud and close to Simbovala's face so that she will laugh. I hate Cam. I hate Dad. I especially hate Mum.

We turn around to leave. Rex keeps talking as we head out of the cracked, concrete driveway. He talks in a loud voice, behind our backs, but it's not a secret from us. He's talking to all of us and to nobody at all, sort of like Mum does except that he knows we're listening; he just doesn't need us to answer. He says: *The man with the deepest eyes can't see the moon until it is fifteen days old.*

Dad turns back to Mum. He says: *Do you think he's having a crack at me?*

Leave it alone. We're all different. We've made our peace.

He's a few sheep short, I reckon, says Dad, and Mum shushes him. *Can't see the wood for the trees.*

The next day Simbovala does her oral presentation on 'Someone I Really Admire'. She talks about her dead grandmother but she doesn't say *dead*, she says *passed over*, and because she skips out on dead, she doesn't say: *The earth does not get fat.* She looks at me. She knows I want it.

I say it in my head because I'm addicted: *The earth does not get fat—The earth does not get fat.* I can't get her voice right in my mind and that scares me even more than the earth, eating people.

Simbovala finishes off her presentation with a saying from her mum; she says: *The dying of the heart is a thing unshared.* Mrs Mistle asks her to repeat it and then she writes it up on the board. Everyone claps. James sniggers.

That saying is an asshole, a baboon's overhanging asshole. I don't know why Mrs Mistle is so over the moon about it. Simbovala has never said that one before and I hate it when the parents do the homework for their kids.

It wasn't me who threw the pinecone. Sticks and stones and bones.

I didn't know you were supposed to do the talk about someone you knew. I thought it had to be, like, someone famous so I did mine about Mother Theresa. Some people say she was more like an angel than a person but angels aren't really real and she's dead now.

The earth does not get fat—The earth does not get fat.

Susie Utting

An hour with Brian Cox[1]

Reverse metamorphosis
winter drowning
tunnels rheumy with undreamed
premonitions stunt forethought

the universe deconstructs
remnants of half-remembered stars
pass
the past a window
spaced with sliding eyes that itch to poke
through but the glass is
ice

orange orbs hang
tongues of tired atmospheres
ringing without

end does he know
how close we lick
along the cosmic lip?

Note

1. A former pop star turned particle physicist, Professor Brian Cox is best known for his promotion of the appeal of physics as presenter of television series such as *The Wonders of the Universe*. Sir David Attenborough has anointed him his successor.

Patrick West

Motherhood statements

How does anyone begin to write? What does 'beginning to write' mean? What do words mean? Sometimes when I think of the questions memories drift out from childhood to engage them.

It was the year I would repeat grade four at primary school. Old friends were entering new worlds without me, but my father's copy of *The Boy Mechanic* was all the friend I needed.[1]

Opening it up today, I found the dedication a sharp slap: TO THE AMERICAN BOY.[2] How did I interpret that, back then? Surely few Australian kids would have been disturbed by imperial implications when projects like Six Good Kites, Bows to Bring 'Em Down, and Backyard Igloos competed for attention among the legion treasures between its covers. Still, Backyard Igloos? In snowless Melbourne? Even then, words and my world weren't perfectly connected.

As far back as I can remember, there has always been something about the heavens to fascinate me. I used to pester indulgent uncles with my stupendous discoveries. 'The sun's light', I'd announce, 'takes eight minutes to arrive in my backyard!'

That summer between two grade fours, however, astronomy unexpectedly gave way to meteorology. Now I would live for the rain and the wind . . . As always, *The Boy Mechanic*—understanding me better than I understood myself—was ready to oblige. Its instructions for making a Wind Vane were followed almost, but not quite, to the letter.[3]

As described, the Wind Vane's shaft rotated on the base of the instrument without a function; my personal variation was to affix an HB pencil to this part. Almost unconsciously, I suppose, I conceived the possibility of introducing a sheet of paper beneath my writing implement's freshly sharpened point. The first mark was a trial run—nothing whatsoever to do with the weather. Placing my customized Wind Vane on the verandah that evening before bed, I supplied a clean, blank sheet . . . then tiptoed away to my room. A breeze was getting up as I fell asleep.

The next morning, what awaited me was a perfect circle or 'O': the winds of the night translated into rough writing. Forget about a career in meteorology; one twenty-sixth of the alphabet had sucked me in. Now I was a writer! What did it mean to start thinking that way? Was I crazy?

Today, as a grown man, it's all laid out before me: a map of the world (made in Denmark) in the form of a desktop pad. Oceans and nations upon this smooth writing support are reflected palimpsest-like in my computer screen. Composing by hand, my pen squiggles from Africa to Australia: its tip is a stuttering swimmer. Full stops pierce Adelaide, Canberra, and Sydney.

At the moment, however, QWERTY crosses two North Atlantic coasts, and Europe lies at the heart of this argument I'm making. I only got my pad last week at Officeworks. All the place names are still distracting. Yesterday, in central Canada, Uranium City set me thinking for hours.

The students at the university like it when I talk about my own writing practices. I used to be self-conscious about this. Not any more: the best way to connect is by opening yourself up. On this philosophy, we share problems with each other about words. 'Why can't you just say what you mean? Tell don't show', asks one young man. I say why not. And he seems to understand.

Another semester has just begun. Introductions are taking place around the table. I want my students to feel that this is a safe space for writing, for feeling released from other pressures. 'I'm from Melbourne originally. Now I'm working on my tan on the Gold Coast!' That gets a laugh. They come from everywhere: Scandinavia, the United States, Africa, South America, and Asia. But also from towns I've never heard of in Australia (and that, my native country).

First lessons are always fascinating. There's no one in this room who isn't squatting on the edge of known realities (clinging to the academic protocols of the course outline) while daring to soar any moment into the unknown of creative writing: nestlings shuffling about on a cliffside ledge. It's a cliché, but at least I'm only thinking it: I hope this class will be smooth sailing.

Nothing ever works out exactly as you had planned.

My keyboard slips across the surface of the world. Now I'm writing in the roaring forties, now in the tropics. The doldrums set in. Fingers at a standstill, my head is geostationary over the United States. From up here, I can see all those centres of power: political power, economic power. Not to mention power of words—Cheyenne, Little Rock, San Diego, Tampa . . .

Strange thing about this map: I've just noticed that Victoria, my home state, is missing. As any American boy might say, Australia's mighty far from those Danish cartographers! The land mass (biggest island? smallest continent?) is familiar and complete—only no borders, no names.

What does it mean to be left off the map? To be present, but without words for that presence? Language pours into the world every day—to 'google' is to risk drowning in information. Yet a few missing letters can mean so much. Even 'Vic.' would have been better than nothing.

As a teacher of writing, I have a professional investment in language. But by intimating to my students that it's good to be involved with words, my pedagogy obscures the untrustworthiness of these words that we're taught to trust. Still, we can never escape from language.

Words have trick-or-treated at my door often enough.

Like many young Australians, I took what the British call a gap year between high school and university. To finance my travels through Europe and North Africa (the exchange rate being what it was in 1987), I worked in London for several months, unpacking and pricing haberdashery. As a new employee, there were forms to fill in, systems to be entered on, numbers to be allocated—insertion into the cold language of administration and bureaucracy.

One day, the postman came up the path of the Wembley house where I was staying. 'Good morning, Sir' (the accent was perfect Dennis Waterman). He was holding an official-looking letter. 'This has come by first class mail but the postage has only been paid second class. Would you like to make up the difference?' And if I didn't? 'Then it will go back to Edinburgh, and be sent again by second class mail.' You're joking? 'No Sir. I'm not.'

Clearly he was anxious to continue his round. Another second and this would become ridiculous (if it wasn't that already). I could almost have reached out and grabbed the item in question. What class of mail, I asked myself, might take it back from where it had come? How much did I want these words? More to the point: was it worth five pence to have them right this moment?

We have a problem. A student waves her arm like someone gesturing wildly from the ocean. 'Are we trying to escape from language or allowing language to escape from us?' At the end of the class, I'm still only beginning to cobble together an answer that should satisfy no one. 'Why can't you just say what you mean?' What do you mean? 'Show don't tell: isn't that a recipe for disaster?'

He's grabbed me as I was leaving. Patiently I provide the explanation I've already provided. Readers like being able to construct a story for themselves, to express it in their own words: say, a journey from a child's perspective, or the precise details of a shipwreck.

He says he sees it now, but I'm not sure myself.

I'd been had by language. Dropping five pence into the postman's palm, I read what could easily have waited for as long as it might have taken for a letter to travel to Edinburgh and back.

My right hand is slouched over the keyboard in the same fashion that used to drive my piano teacher to distraction. My palm embraces Asia: the lines of love and life. I'm close to home now, drumming upon the hard surface of the waters to our north. What's happening down there? If the makers of this map could leave off a whole state, then surely I can't trust in the truth of these Lilliputian typefaces that stretch across archipelagos like so many archipelagos themselves.

No word is an island. They are always in connection with something else. In class we have given up on discussion for a while, and turned to silent writing. What is it that's being churned out so industriously before my very eyes? No doubt there are images inside every head around this table. What do all those pictures become when they are turned into words? Fiction? Or lies?

Someone is walking along the corridor with a radio. I can't distinguish the words, but from the tone of voice I know exactly who's speaking. And I can guess, from that, what's being said.

Black specks of something seem to have slipped between the surface of my world and the plastic covering that, like a single transparent cloud, keeps it safe from coffee stains. How did they get in there? I wonder. With my fingertips, I roll a few from somewhere near the Philippines to the Gulf of Carpentaria, where I leave them to linger awhile, pressed between ocean and clear sky.

No one is looking up! It's almost unprecedented. All my students at work on words like this. Fiction, lies, fiction, lies. If you start to think there's no difference, then what's become of you?

Some of those specks might almost be islands. I can't get them to move.

Let them keep going! Although I'm dying to know what tales they have to tell. The person with the radio has returned. It's the ABC news theme, and I know what the first story is bound to be.

Those people I'm thinking of now. What are all their names?

'help', 'control', 'delete', 'return', 'home', 'enter', 'end'—these are some keys on my keyboard. Buttons that I can push to generate certain responses.

At the bottom of the map, below wastes of water, letters as bold as the dedication of *The Boy Mechanic* are printed on white: AUSTRALIAN DEPENDENCY.

And now the class is over. Next week there will be dozens of new stories for me to interpret.

Still there's life outside of writing. The several memories of this article were foreign to language, strangers to speech, until I laid them gently upon these pages. And all along I've been doing other things. Just now, I soothed my four-month-old daughter. She slumbers sweetly and softly.

A baby has a long time to stare at the sky.

Her mother is Chinese and speaks English and Mandarin. My sole discourse is the Australian vernacular. Wanting our daughter to grow up bilingual, each of us speaks to her in a different language. Chances are, I won't understand my child's first word, although I'll be able to guess. Hearing these Chinese sounds—motherhood statements that echo across all our differences—I feel like an infant again myself. Have I tumbled once more to the bottom of language? If so, that is not quite the same as being innocent of its effects. When is meaning not trumped by power?

As a new parent, you want to reassess everything. I am paid to take responsibility for words. Whatever my students write can be traced back, however faintly, to my influence. A hundred times a year, I suppose, I'm asked to define what I mean by good writing. If the first ninety-nine answers might be variations on just one theme—that handy nostrum, show don't tell—then might the hundredth be that which dares, at last, to whisper politics into the heart of the aesthetic?

Or should we all just fall into silence?

Notes

1. Popular Mechanics Company 1913 *The Boy Mechanic*, New York: Popular Mechanics Company
2. *The Boy Mechanic* vi
3. Joseph P Driscoll, 'Your Own Weather Bureau,' *The Boy Mechanic* 257-60

Sarah Shaw

What will be and what was

Autumn

Stretch the timeline near the end. Drag and drop the razor blade. Click to delete that whole sequence. If it were a movie instead of real life, I could make it come out differently. 'It's not as though you haven't moved on,' they say.

When I feel lonely, I paddle at the edge of the river, wearing my welly boots. Everything is blowing, falling and flowing. The golden river hurries leaves away towards the sea. Fade to black.

Winter

A cold spell in December makes growing things go stiff. In the third field next to the river, in the dip in the field, the sun doesn't reach. Water that lies in the hollow has frozen solid. Walking on it as if it were a perspex floor, I can see living grass underneath. The real grass is frozen like a picture under glass, where sheep can't eat it. Still green. I imagine Rosie laid out in a glass coffin, with lips not white and waxy but coloured by blood, blood frozen in her veins and arteries not pooled and purple at the bottom of her body. So that some time in the future she'll wake to a prince's kiss. Or a princess', I'm not choosy.

Ice this solid makes me think of icebergs that lurk nine tenths unseen below the surface of the water, just as nine tenths of our minds remain unconscious. I want to find words for what's unconscious, bring it into view like grass that stays alive under ice.

I want words that are small enough to push around. As I feed them to the flames, one by one, the fire roars up the chimney. Burning twigs drop into the grate. The birds left this nest a long time ago. The roaring gets too loud. I run outside to look. Black smoke, cinders and fireworks surge from the pot. The fire engine arrives from Swalwell.

I want words with more than one meaning, like *seal*; words that sound like more than one thing, like *deer*. A baby seal swam along the edge of the waves where I trudged on shingle beside a man I loved for eighteen years. Rain whipped a strand of hair into my mouth. He sealed himself into a hotel room with her and her Dior dress. The baby seal lost its family. I could smell beads of water that fogged the bottom of the kitchen window when I looked outside to glimpse a deer in the snow. The deer melted back into the bushes while my daughter lay upstairs. Weak with radiation sickness. My dear daughter. Although these animals appear without words, they leave me words that give me a direction for my life. Keep swimming, keep your head above water, find company. Dissolve into the background, manage not to be noticed, scratch grass from under snow.

Spring

Scraping carrots, I set two aside. I will make myself look at the horses. There are so many things I don't want to look at: the damp patch in the back bedroom; fathers, mothers and children dying of hunger in Somalia; the backs of the burned horses.

On the bench this side of the river the alkies are sitting in the sunshine with their Lambrini bottles. One has an earring, and a scarf tied round his forehead. Their dog barks. They are shouting. I cross the bridge. I look at the burning bushes. A lottery win of yellow that smells like Rosie's perfume: coconut sun lotion.

Watching for dog shit, I follow the path in my flip-flops through Star of Bethlehem, wild garlic and bluebells. Birds cheep. When I reach the burned horses' field, I call out. Their teeth make a crunching noise as they snap stalks of grass. I tap carrots against the fence post but they can't be bothered. They must be depressed.

Tiny nettles sting my feet. I grapple strands of barbed wire and walk round the edge of the alders. The burned horse stands as high as my shoulder. With a carrot on my palm, I stretch my hand towards it. It ignores me. I chuck half the carrot into the grass near its head. It noses round but misses. Stepping close, I offer another carrot half. While the burned horse mouths it from my palm, I smell its dusty, warm smell. I force myself to look.

The horse has layers that go right round like a tidemark round a bath. Feathers of long fair hair, tasselled as a feather duster, swathe its hooves. Above, up to midway between its legs and back, it has normal horse coat: short chestnut hair. Then a thin strip shows the black skin underneath its fur. Then a pink, raw-looking layer of new skin and, above that, all over its back and shoulders and ears, cracked yellow scabs and white froth.

Looking at the burned horse hurts like it used to hurt to see wounds in Rosie. The wound in her throat I had to clean after she had her tracheotomy tube when she was two years old. The wound in her leg after the doctors told her she was going to die in a couple of months.

Summer

On Saturday it's drizzling by six. Zelda puts on a ball dress to celebrate her daughter's nineteenth birthday.

'You look like a waitress,' she says.

I glance down at my black waistcoat over a white shirt. I add coconut milk to the rum and pineapple juice in the blender.

'The best cocktail waitress in the world,' she says.

After I've made the pina coladas I make cosmopolitans and then margaritas. In between making cocktails I hold a baby who stops crying. Zelda says, 'You're so good at that,' and I remember, silently, that I'm never going to have grandchildren. Somebody's husband works as a clown in hospitals; I say, 'How wonderful,' but I don't mention all the times I made my daughter laugh in different hospitals. We dance to Abba because some people have just been to see a movie called *Mamma Mia!* with an exclamation mark. I stagger home across the fields with this woman from my village who wants to get her sixteen-year-old away before she drinks any more spirits and throws up. In the drizzly dark you can't see the mud and cowpats. We giggle a lot.

The next day I've been invited for tea but instead I walk across the bridge and lie in the long grass next to the river. I bat a fly away. I talk to Rosie. Watching clouds drift, I wonder where she's gone. I think about all our years together and remember how good I got at being in hospitals.

The first time I had to take Rosie to hospital, she was only eleven months old. I had to hold her down while they stuck a massive needle into her spine to test some fluid for meningitis. Then they left us in a room with a bed and we both cried. This was before I gained any hospital skills. I shuffled up and down holding her in my arms and singing, 'Heaven, I'm in heaven, and the ground does something something to my feet, and I seem to find the happiness I seek, when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek.' I hated all the nurses, which I think is very common among parents because of feeling so stressed. I totally hated the haematologist who said this is what happens when people mix races, as though blood could be black or white and when you mixed it together it made grey instead of red.

A year later, Rosie was flopped on a bed in Intensive Care with tubes going into her stomach and her lungs and a machine doing her breathing for her. They used to send me out when they tried to find out if she could breathe by herself. On the ward I always made myself stay calm but on my own in the Parents' Room I punched the wall so hard I hurt my hand. I wanted to stay with Rosie because I knew that even if she died she would feel better if I were there. The fish tank in that room was empty apart from some dry gravel in the bottom. It made me think they couldn't even keep the fish alive. I went to the canteen and bought a Mini Milk ice lolly to give Rosie. Mel and I used to make her laugh by showing her how to squirt us with water from a syringe, one without a needle of course.

I came to admire the ICU nurses. They had this superhero glamour from working at the frontline every day, sniping at death. I learned so much from them about laughing in the face of death. Because they got used to me sitting there, they didn't hold back as they would in front of visitors from making terrible jokes. Zelda made jokes too. 'We should sacrifice our daughters to the sea because they cause us too much heartache,' she said and we laughed, which is one reason I'll always love her.

The ICU nurses didn't even send me out when somebody was dying, so that I saw death wasn't an emergency with buzzers and flashing lights as it would be in a hospital drama on TV. Everybody spoke very quietly and one of them walked fast to fetch the consultant. She didn't run. All six nurses, the student and the registrar gathered round the man's bed, which I realised afterwards made sense because that way no single person was responsible. They tried their violent lifesaving techniques in a hush behind the screens. Afterwards, the student tottered into the sluice room with tears running down her face and didn't come out for a while. Rosie was sleeping in my arms and the Sister told me not to cry. 'You don't want to upset the baby,' she said.

By the time Rosie was fifteen she'd put up with her share of suffering and it seemed unfair that she had to stay in hospital for a bone marrow transplant. 'It's not fair,' she said, 'but I might as well have fun while I can.' She curled her eyelashes and applied three coats of mascara. Mel dropped her and her mates a short walk from the Pool Club while I did the washing up.
'I'd happily die now if I could save Rosie from having to go through this,' he said after he got back. I knew he meant it.

'I've had enough of a life, too. I'd swap my life like that,' I clicked my fingers, 'for Rosie being well.'

'No, you've still got a few documentaries in you. You need to make them.' He went outside the back door and lit a cigarette.

I followed him. 'If anybody has to go, it should be me. You're younger than me.'

What were we arguing about? The year before, he'd dumped me in order to sleep with an artist who possessed a red Dior dress with a train thirty yards long. She did performances in which minions draped her train down staircases. She was sexy while I was middle aged and researching an earnest video about Cixous. Even though he missed me and we got back together, the dumping put a strain on our relationship. I felt not only angry with him but also apologetic that I wasn't living up to the glamour of my temporary replacement. How he felt I don't know. He grew up in Sheffield, where people don't need to talk about their feelings.

But anyway Rosie agreed to have the transplant because it was her only chance of staying alive. The main thing for a parent is to realise that you can help your child to feel better. Wait outside the ward kitchen until somebody comes along who'll give you ice for her to suck. Massage her feet with E45 cream. Find homeopathic remedies for bruising, mouth ulcers and vomiting. Make her laugh by miming while you dance to Radio One and she has to guess what you're miming: having a poo; learning to rollerblade. Then it's her turn to mime, even if she can't get out of bed. I knew that she needed time away from her mother so I left her to learn hypnotherapy or eat popcorn and watch *Batman* with other teenagers attached to tubes and drips whenever she was up for it.

We shared a room for a month except for two weekends when Mel stayed. While I was at home I missed her and it seemed strange not to have to wipe everything with antiseptic wipes before I went to the toilet or made toast. Not to have to ask permission before I took clean sheets out of the airing cupboard.

I got quite good at being in hospital but when Rosie screamed with pain and nothing helped I had to leave the room. Out of the building I strode and through the streets towards Regent's Park with tears and snot running down my face. Ringing Mel on the mobile, I didn't realise that every time I showed him how weak and miserable I felt he got more fed up with me. Because I kept trying for the next two years, I found out what to do when Rosie couldn't bear the pain and nothing worked, not painkillers, Rescue Remedy, massage or visualisation. I said, 'Yell if it helps. Don't worry about what anybody thinks because they don't have to put up with what you're going through.' I stayed with her and held her hand while she groaned and screamed. 'Let it out,' I said. 'You're doing really well.'

Even though I loved all the nurses and doctors by then, when Rosie said she hated them because they couldn't make her better I didn't argue. I knew that she must hate me too and I could accept that. Being a mother had burned away not only the top layers of me but also my centre. I had turned into a bowl that could hold her pain, fear and anger and then laugh with her and reflect her beauty. A bowl of living water, not ice. It was like being Plato's idea of woman as a container, a concept against which I would always argue in theory. But in spite of that it was the best thing I've ever done: loving her so much that what I wanted didn't matter any more.

Ross Watkins

Coronial Inquest

These stories are of the past and each past arrives in a box.

I am at my desk. There are three boxes on my desk. The boxes are large and each one exactly the same proportion. They have been packaged by the same person. Although the boxes are large they are not large enough to hold, say, a human body. Unless the body is broken into fist-sized portions and packed into the box with calculation. Fortunately I have not had to deal with such a case as yet.

And yet all my bodies are broken. All my bodies have not survived conflict. All my bodies and their conflicts are contained within my boxes in the form of filed paper and printed words and it is my job to read these collections and make sense of what happened and out of this sense I am charged with Authority to make recommendations to the Law regarding the body and how it came to be broken. This is my function under the Act of 1980. But I do this because I am a story-teller and it is all I know to do.

The physician is important. To tell the stories of my bodies accurately I rely on the physician's eye to see the past in the present: to see blunt-force cranial trauma left by steel; to see the contour of teeth where the earlobe was disconnected; to see the face that once was before it was overwhelmed with water. The physician writes about what is seen and this writing is filed and this file is collected with other files by one person and it all arrives on my desk in a box.

There are three boxes on my desk right now.
Three boxes of words.
Three boxes about bodies.
Boxes of three unresolved lives.
I will open one tomorrow.

Each day I go home from work I see myself in the small rectangular glass pane of the front door. I see myself as a husband or wife might sometimes see their spouse, and I ask: 'Is this job affecting you?' When I ask myself this question I give it much thought: over the lip of a drinking glass, in the face of the microwave, at the foot of the bed. Yes yes, I know. I see the body in everything. 'This is because of your work,' I say. 'The boxes are piled too high. You cannot see over them.'

There was a man in my street who was said to have collected newspapers and stored these newspapers by placing them in a stack until the stack reached the ceiling, forcing him to begin another stack and on and on along the walls of his house until his movement through the house was restricted to a narrow passageway and it was within these confines that one stack inclined towards another and that one to another and on and on until the collective weight of those newspapers came down upon him and his ribcage crushed into his heart. I would like such a crushed body to arrive on my desk in a box. But conclusive deaths are not my job.

When I drive to work in the morning I pass the sea and I smile at the words people use to describe each and every thing, such as a body of water. I like this because I think of all the bodies that are already in that water and of those that will end up in that water because the water is a violent place and how we live is a violent life and I figure this to be a coincidence of strange beauty.

And yet a smile can readily dissolve.

'You are the left box,' I say. 'I will open you first.'

I always open the boxes from left to right because I enjoy thinking of this process as though I am reading a book. Each book has a central character and each character is peculiar in their own way and I am the reader who must play detective and find the clues and piece them together in order to understand the plot.

The climax is the most important part. The climax is the moment when each character meets their conflict and looks their conflict in the eye and finds defeat. In these books, anyway. What happens next is my decision. I choose what happens next because I am the writer of each character's resolution. That is my job and attached to this is a unique sense of power.

I open the left box.

Inside the left box is a rack of files which have been expertly organised into parts according to function. This system has been devised by the person who collects and packages the information and it has been done to make my job more efficient in arriving at the truth. I look over the rows of files, neatly labelled, then I open my stationery drawer and take out a 2B pencil and yellow paper and I write a note to remind myself to write a letter to the person who packages these boxes in acknowledgement of his or her orderliness.

I take out the first file and place it on the desk and I open the file and this is how I am introduced to the body in the box. The body in this box is:

Her…

She is not young but also not at all old and although the file details her date of birth I always thought of her as younger than she looked.

She.

'I am falling,' she said and it was into me that she implied.

Her dress was yellow. Summer. Cut across her chest to exhibit her clavicle. No necklace. No need for adornment. Just adoration. For her and the way she spoke Latin as though it was the customary tongue. She told me later how she had practised Latin just for me, as a way to impress because she knew I was a story-teller but she did not know at that time what kind of story-teller and the sad and violent stories that a coroner must tell.

She fell into me on green lawn and all I saw was yellow and a sea-blue sky and the see-through blue of her eyes and she asked me if I would one day tell her story and I told her that I hoped not.

I drive home from work and I pass the sea but this time I do not smile because today this body of water has a particular incandescence, an angle of light which conceals its true temperament: one of sleek monstrosity. I know this lightness to be a lie because within that lie, within the patch of glare, I see the bodies of people and I see their torsos sliding molten in fractal shine.

The brain dies following approximately six minutes of oxygen deprivation.

I arrive home. I get out of my car. I take the key and lock the car and walk away. At the front door of the house I look back at the rectangular car. Then I look at the rectangular front door. At its rectangular window pane. I take the key and unlock the house. I breathe.

I dream that I am at my desk. There is one box on my desk. It is unopened. I try opening it but the lid is stubborn. I stand on the desk and pull back my sleeves and I bend at the knees and then I pull on the lid and my arms strain and then I fall from the desk and I am on the floor and I have hit my head but in my hands is the lid. I get up. I go to the desk. I put the lid on the desk and rub my head and look into the box and in the box I see myself, in pieces, organised into parts according to function, my liver my left hand my heart neatly labelled and my face on top eyes wide staring back at me and then I raise an eyebrow in a cunning way and I ask myself: 'Do you understand?'

I shake my head.

My face smiles back. 'Then perhaps you should try again.'

I wake up and decide that tomorrow at work I will stay back late and only drive home when it is dark and the moon and sun have drowned. Then, I cannot see.

'You are the middle box,' I say. 'I will open you second.'

I lift the lid and the body in this box is:

Him.

He is too young to be in a box of this kind. The boxes he liked were also of cardboard but were boxes in which I had cut holes for his arms and a hole for his head to stick out of and laugh that silly laugh which must be rapture made flesh and audio. Laughter that originates in the chest and rumbles through the ribs like bubbling water and out into the space between him and me and her in his bedroom with his new bed because he is 'A big boy now,' he says and we agree and laugh more because he has grown so quickly and looks older than he is according to his date of birth, which is written here at the top of the file on my desk right now but I know it already anyway. A file which contains many many words but none which spell 'laughter' or even invoke it other than as a sad and violent nostalgia.

I drive home from work earlier than planned and I do not pass the sea because today that body of water would simply be too much. So I drive another way, out of the way, and I arrive home much later than normal and while this should be okay because I did not have to pass the sea again I have in fact been thinking about the sea and its hand of violence and how it strikes. But even those words are wrong because the sea owns not a body at all I think now and it would be all the better if it did because then at least there would be a hand to hold a hand to hold down and a body to follow and to make accountable for its actions because the sea has no such thing and I can put my own hand through it and come away with nothing much at all and I can hold it in my mouth and you can hold it in your lungs and it can hold you under, both of you.

These are the thoughts I have when I arrive home and knock at my front door.

I knocked?

An error. I make errors. And when I unlock the door and close it again I think about tomorrow and what I must do. Because tomorrow I will open the right box.
Because tomorrow it will be right.

Author Biographies

Lucy Alexander

Lucy Alexander is a reclusive Canberra poet who has published two books of poems (*Fathoms* in 1997 and *Feathered Tongues* in 2004), and is sometimes seen teaching at UC and ferrying children thither and yon. She writes a weekly poem on poemation@wordpress.com and also reviews for Verity La. Recently she was runner-up in the Poetry in ACTION award for poems displayed on buses.

Meera Atkinson

Meera Atkinson is a Sydney-based writer and poet. Her writing has appeared in many publications, including *Salon.com*, *Meanjin*, *Best Australian Stories 2007* and *Best Australian Poems 2010*. She was awarded a 2011 *Griffith REVIEW* GREW prize in the category of nonfiction. Meera was a finalist in the inaugural Voiceless Writing Prize, selected by a judging panel including JM Coetzee. She has a Master of Arts in Creative Writing (Hons) from the University of Queensland and a PhD on the transgenerational transmission and poetics of trauma from the University of Western Sydney. She is co-editor of the forthcoming academic title *Traumatic Affect*, a collection of essays exploring the nexus of trauma and affect.

Robyn Cadwallader

Robyn Cadwallader is an editor and writer who lives in the country outside Canberra. Her short stories and poems have appeared in Australian journals and her first collection of poetry, *i painted unafraid*, was published by Wakefield Press in 2010. In 2011 she was awarded the Byron Bay Writers Festival Varuna Lit Link Unpublished Manuscript Award for 'Anchoress' and her short play, *Artemisia*, was performed at the Adelaide Fringe, in the Melbourne and Sydney (2012) Short + Sweet festivals. Her short story, 'The Day for Travelling', won the 2011 Marjorie Graber-McGinnis Short Story Award.

Monica Carroll

Monica Carroll writes short things and grows tall flowers. Her award-winning work is widely anthologised and has extended into many artistic collaborations. Her current research interests encompass Husserlian phenomenology, the relationship between empathy and pain, and the force of poetic structure.

Stephen Devereux

Stephen Devereux grew up near the Suffolk coast, which features in much of his poetry. Most of his adult life has been spent in the Liverpool/Manchester region. He has contributed to many magazines in the UK, Ireland, America and Europe. He also writes short stories (most recently for *Bohemyth* and *Notes from the Underground*) and essays.

Ross Donlon

Ross Donlon lives in Castlemaine, Victoria where he publishes the high quality Mark Time chapbooks and convenes a popular monthly poetry reading. He is a winner of international poetry competitions and spoken word events, and publishes in both Australia and Ireland. A program based on his latest book, The *Blue Dressing Gown* was broadcast on Radio National's *Poetica* this year.

Suzanne Edgar

Suzanne Edgar is a Canberra-based writer of fiction, feature articles, poetry and reviews. Her poetry has been published in *The Australian*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Adelaide Review*, *Quadrant*, *The Australian's Review of Books*, and *Eureka Street*. She has won many awards, including (twice) the CJ Dennis Memorial Poetry Competition, and her poems were included in Les Murray's *Best Australian Poems* in 2004 and 2005. Her first collection of poetry, *The Painted Lady*, was published in 2006 by Ginninderra Press, and a further collection, *Talking Late*, in 2012

Marcelle Freiman

Marcelle Freiman has published two books of poetry, *White Lines (Vertical)* (Hybrid Publishers) and *Monkey's Wedding* (Island Press Co-op), and poems in many journals and magazines. Much of her poetry emerges from a constantly shifting sense of place, and from writing ekphrastic poems in response to works of visual art. She teaches creative writing and literature at Macquarie University and has research interests in creative writing as theory and practice, as cognition and affect, and in contemporary poetry and postcolonial and diaspora literatures.

Liam Guilar

Liam Guilar teaches English at St Hilda's on the Gold Coast. His most recent collection of poems, *Rough Spun to Close Weave,* was published by Ginninderra Press in November 2012. He is currently a PhD candidate in creative writing at Deakin University, studying the narrative possibilities of the lyric sequence. He is the winner of the 2013 Bad Joyce Award.

Siobhan Harvey

Siobhan Harvey is the author of *Lost Relatives* (Steele Roberts, 2011), editor of *Our Own Kind* (Random House NZ, 2009), is National Poetry Day coordinator and poetry editor of *Takahe*. Recently, she was guest writer at Queensland Poetry Festival. She's also a lecturer at Auckland University of Technology's School of Creative Writing. Her poet's page on the Poetry Archive UK is located at: http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId-15762.

Dominique Hecq

Dominique Hecq is Associate Professor at Swinburne University of Technology. She is the author of eleven works of creative writing. *Out of Bounds* (Re.press) is her most recent collection and *Stretchmarks of Sun* is due out later this year. 'Tomorrow, the Sun' is from a work in progress titled Hush. *The Creativity Market: Creative Writing in the 21st Century* was published by Multilingual Matters in 2012.

Usha Kishore

Indian-born Usha Kishore is an internationally published writer, poet and translator, now resident in the UK. Usha's poetry was shortlisted for the Erbacce Prize in 2012 and is part of Indian Middle School and UK Primary School syllabus. Usha's book of translations from the Sanskrit, *Translations of the Divine Woman*, is to be published in 2014 by Rasala Books, India.

Anna-May Laugher

Anna-May Laugher has been writing poetry for fifteen years. She has just completed a two-year ekphrastic project writing 54 poems on one of Paula Rego's paintings: Crivelli's Garden. A prizewinning poet, her poems have been widely anthologized, in *Creative Arts Anthology*, Reading University; *Ver, Ware, All that Jazz*, Chichester, and published in *Domestic Cherry, Carrillon, The Journal, South Bank Poetry, Roundy House*, and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*. She lives near London with her partner and a modest menagerie.

Emma Neale

Emma Neale is the author of five novels, including *Fosterling* (Random House, 2011), which was shortlisted for the Sir Julius Vogel Award for Science Fiction and Fantasy. She is also the author of four collections of poetry, the latest of which, *The Truth Garden* (Otago University Press, 2012), won the Kathleen Grattan Award for a poetry manuscript in 2011. Recipient of the Todd/Creative New Zealand New Writer's Bursary in 2000 and the Janet Frame/NZSA Memorial Prize for Literature in 2008, she was the Robert Burns Creative Writing Fellow at the University of Otago in 2012. She works as an editor and creative writing tutor, and lives in Dunedin with her husband and their two sons.

Moya Pacey

Moya Pacey is a Canberra poet. *The Wardrobe* (Ginninderra Press), her first collection, was runner-up for the ACT Poetry Prize in 2010. In 2011 she won the Elizabeth Bishop Centenary Writing Competition Nova Scotia, and was shortlisted for the Frogmore Poetry Prize UK. In 2013, her poems were published in: *Poetry Review* (UK), *Famous Reporter* (Aus), *Women's Work* (eds Libby Hathorn & Rachael Bailey), and *Fire* (ed Delys Bird); and her poem 'Meeting the Deadline' is a featured poem on an ACTION bus in Canberra. Two of her poems are part of a Canberra 100 Centenary installation 'City of Trees' by the UK artist Jyll Bradley at the National Library of Australia.

Sarah Penwarden

I was born in Taranaki, New Zealand, near the mountain, and currently live in Auckland. I worked as a counsellor for ten years and I now work as a counsellor educator, doing doctoral studies part time on a topic involving grief and poetry. As a writer, I have had poems published in *Poetry New Zealand*, poems and short stories published in *Takahe* magazine, and short stories for children published in *The School Journal.*

Julia Prendergast

Julia Prendergast completed a PhD (Writing and Literature) at Deakin University in 2013. Chapters from the thesis novel were shortlisted for international awards (Lightship International short story prize, UK; *Glimmertrain* fiction, US; Ink Tears International short story competition, UK). Julia's theoretical work investigates the operation of the unconscious at a primal moment of narrative composition. This work has been published in *New Writing* (2012), *Current Narratives* (2011), and by the *AAWP* (2011; 2012). Julia is currently employed as a sessional academic, in the School of Communication and Creative Arts, and as a research fellow, in the Faculty of Business and Law, at Deakin University, Melbourne.

M.A. Sandev

M.A. Sandev is a poet, short fiction writer and essayist based in Sydney. His poems have been accepted in numerous journals including *Meanjin, Cordite, Rabbit Poetry, Regime, Hypallage* and *The Red Room,* among others. His essays have appeared in *Arena Magazine* and *New Matilda.* He reviews theatre and literature for *Arts Hub.*

Sarah Shaw

My stories—written from the points of view of a nine-year-old bully in a Roman Catholic school, a maximum-security prisoner and a 70-year-old woman with learning difficulties, for example—have won competitions, and been published in *Mslexia*, *The London Magazine* and *The Yellow Room*, among other magazines and anthologies. In 2009 they won the New Writing North Badenoch Fiction Award. Jackie Kay has described them as 'achingly funny and achingly sad'.

Shane Strange

Shane Strange is a tutor and lecturer in Writing and Literary Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. He is a writer of short fiction and creative nonfiction who has been published widely in Australia, including in *Best Australian Stories 2006 & 2007*; *Griffith Review*; *Overland* and *Heat Magazine*. Between 2005 and 2008 he was a regular book reviewer for *The Courier Mail.*

Emma Timpany

Though I have lived in England for the last 20 years, I was born and grew up in the far south of New Zealand. My mother was from Brisbane, so I have spent time in that city and in Australia in general. I have been writing fiction for the last five years, and my first story was published in 2010. In 2011, my stories won The Society of Authors' Tom-Gallon Award, and The Society of Women Writers and Journalists' Short Story Prize. Twelve of my stories have been published in print and online, most recently by *The Frogmore Papers*, *Ink, Sweat and Tears* and *Audiotor.*

Susie Utting

Susie has completed a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Melbourne and an MPhil from the University of Queensland, and is presently studying for a doctorate at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. Her poems have been published in *Blue Dog, Hecate, AAWP Anthology of New Australian Writing* and the *Australian Poetry Journal.* Her collection of poems, *Flame in the Fire*, was published by Ginninderra Press in 2012.

Ross Watkins

Ross Watkins is an author, illustrator, editor and academic. His first major publication is the illustrated book *The Boy Who Grew Into a Tree* (Penguin 2012). He was shortlisted for the 2011 Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Emerging Author, and his short fiction and non-fiction has been published in Australian and international anthologies. Ross is an Executive Committee member of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), short story editor for Social Alternatives, and a Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

Patrick West

Dr Patrick West is a senior lecturer in professional and creative writing at Deakin University, Melbourne. His short story collection, *The World Swimmers*, was published by the International Centre for Landscape and Language, Edith Cowan University, Perth, in 2011. The Australian's reviewer wrote that *The World Swimmers* contains 'incredible insight into the human condition throughout'. In 2012 Patrick wrote and co-produced the 27-minute fictional-documentary film *Sisters of the Sun* (directed by Simon Wilmot).