



# MENISCUS

L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

Volume 7, Issue 2 2019

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### About Meniscus

Meniscus is a 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 think about how surfaces, curves, tension and openness interact. In particular, they were struck by the way in which the surface of the water features, and the uncertainty of the water's containment, seems 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.

### Australian Copyright Agency

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## Editorial

An astonishing number of works were submitted for this issue of *Meniscus*: 1068 in total, of which 900 were poems.

Poems were all accepted on individual merit, not to fit with any theme, but the selection has highlighted some interesting preoccupations. A number of poems refer directly to painting, some in the ekphrastic sense (of a piece that is itself representative of a visual artwork), others in more tangential ways. These poems have been grouped together, but there are yet more in which other artistic endeavour, whether in sculpture, photography, instrumental music or song, is key.

Given the above content, it is perhaps unsurprising that the poems demonstrate an admirable attention to craft – and form. If we call them ‘free verse’, that is simply to say that the poems have used their freedom to create compelling forms of their own, forms that have emerged in conjunction with their subjects.

The poets clearly share a good ear for when to make a line break – both rhythmically and intellectually. The breaks are not lazy substitutions for punctuation; the punctuation and line breaks work together in their different ways to score the overall rhythm of the poem, and the breaks are themselves components of meaning.

Of the 44 poems published here, eight are prose poems, reflecting the seemingly inexorable rise of that form. But those eight take anything but a uniform approach, one of them even making interesting experiment with line breaks incorporated within the ‘prose’.

In the end, all the craft and experiment is at the service of having something significant to say, and there are many poems here with considerable insight and substantial emotional weight. In writing about parents, children, illness, and other highly personal subjects, many poets tend to fall short. The poets here, however, communicate their experience with real power, using language with considerable inventiveness and precision.

The prose pieces were initially filtered down to those which showed promising literary control and strong storytelling. The eventual 15 pieces were chosen because of the way the storytelling invested effort in representing a world that is knowable, and yet different. In both short story and flash fiction pieces, the storytelling brought surprises, presenting the world anew in a thoughtful and interesting way. Their abundance and often quirkiness matches up well with the poetry.

We are delighted to announce the final winners in the three-year funding generously provided by the Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund: the best poem is awarded to Cameron Morse for 'Newborn Panorama', and the best prose piece is 'Motel 47', by Tanya Vavilova. Our grateful thanks for the Cultural Fund for 6 issues worth of funding.

We hope that you enjoy this selection of work, and will consider submitting your own writing in the future.

Andrew Melrose

Paul Munden

for the *Meniscus* editors



CAMERON MORSE

'Newborn Panorama'

CAMERON MORSE

### Newborn Panorama

My firstborn trawls concrete with his blankie  
catching catkins and maple seed  
helicopter pods. This you called my mortal  
panorama, this boy climbing the patio table grate,  
these dogs pissing the arbor vitae brown, burnt  
orange, until Ed raises the chicken wire a couple of heads  
taller the day of your first abdominal ultrasound.  
Theo observes the absence of the swing I unhinged ahead  
of the weed-killers. He gets scared  
in the dark room at Independence Women's Clinic  
where we first glimpsed his body  
and a strange lady squirts goop onto Mommy's tummy,  
her pooch, shrivelled melon of stretchmarks  
since his birth. Mortal panorama is right.  
It's a May day. Moonflowers sprout  
below the lattice they once crowned. Flurries of dandelion  
fluff explode across Golfview Drive. Onscreen,  
the embryo appears: a white blotch among black lakes  
of bladder and right ovary, just a smidgeon  
of light in a dark cavity, miniature Buddha levitating  
in full lotus before the void. Already apart from us,  
already on a path apart from our own, it charts  
a course through us. That's right:  
We are waystation, conduit.  
Sealed in the envelope of your uterus, the letter  
composes itself. Says what it wants to say.  
It branches out of us, out of today's sultry heat and hearsay  
of rain, leaf light and seeds catapulted,  
yellow pits trailing filaments of light, cumulous white mothership  
adrift, a mountain of white stone sliding right  
to left, a glacier sinking below the trees.



TANYA VAVILOVA

'Motel 47'

TANYA VAVILOVA

### Motel 47

The hallway was lined with red buckets collecting drips from the air-conditioning units. The carpet was mottled and, in some areas, damp. That's the sort of place it was.

When I dialled reception, a crabby voice answered. 'Yeah?'

'Hey Rob. I'm in room 11. Can I get the minibar topped up, please?'

He said he'd send someone up and, forty minutes later, he did. A beanpole of a man banged on the door and thrust a cardboard box of mini vodkas, gins and rums at me.

'Thanks mate.'

He scribbled in his notebook and said, half-heartedly, 'Have a nice night then.'

I was celebrating my fortieth birthday. I came here every year.

I mixed myself a screwdriver and, wedging the balcony door open with a shoe, stepped out. The sky was indigo magic, stars and swirly clouds. I loved this time of year. I'd almost finished my drink when looking down at the pool, I noticed the toddler. Blonde fluff-head skirting close to the edge. For as long as I'd been coming here, the pool was drained. Empty. Tonight a few leaves floated in the small puddle from last night's rain. Leaves stuck to the pebblecrete.

'Hey!' I called down. 'Where's your mum?'

The toddler squinted.

'I have diabetes,' he said cheerfully.

What? 'Where are your parents, buddy? It's too dangerous to play there.'

'Dia-betes,' he repeated.

If he fell and cracked his skull, no one could blame me. I'd tried.

I finished my screwdriver and thought about cirrhosis of the liver. But also about vitamins from the orange juice. It was almost like drinking a smoothie, really. Just then there was a thud and I looked down to see the toddler lying slantwise at the bottom of the pool. My first thought was that I'd caused it.

'Hey buddy are you okay? Hey?'

I dialled Triple o then called the reception desk. ‘He did what? Fuck, fuck’, Rob said, before adding, ‘fuckin’ hell.’

Rob stood at the bottom of the pool shaking the boy. When I heard the sirens, I closed the balcony door and pulled the curtains tight. I didn’t want to see a corpse being carried out. They’d been a string of incidents recently, Rob had told me. The motel was threatened with closure. The thought made me sad – how would I celebrate my next birthday? God, I was a heartless bitch.

I got comfortable among the lumpy pillows and turned up the telly. *Sister Act* was showing. When the boy’s mother started wailing, I turned up the volume. After a while *Sister Act 1* became *Sister Act 2*, and I kept watching and drinking little bottles of Jim Bean. I toasted myself a Happy and Healthy Fortieth before adding a tiny prayer for the toddler who was or was not now dead.

\*

Waiting for the vending machine to spit out my Mars Bar, I noticed the woman with the black eye standing in the foyer.

‘Hey’, she said, smiling. ‘Nice morning hey?’

‘Yeah.’ I looked at the two girls clinging to her legs. ‘Do they want some chocolate?’

The woman hesitated.

‘It’s on me’, I said.

I pressed Number 7 twice for two Milky Ways. Why did chocolates have galactic-sounding names?

Walking back to our rooms, the woman said, ‘Rob’s a nice man, letting us stay here.’ She lowered her voice. ‘We’re not paying a cent.’

I’d heard the rumours. Some said Rob was a bad man.

I knelt down to adjust a plastic red bucket that was just missing an air-con’s drips.

‘What a place’, I said.

‘Girls.’ The woman bent down. ‘Say thank you to the nice lady for the choccies.’

Their teeth were stained brown.

\*

The petrol station – or what was once a petrol station – was enclosed by tall emu wire. To keep what in or out, I didn’t know. The squat building was graffitied with love-hearts and 4EVAs. No one had used the bowsers for a long time.

The place looked abandoned except for the blaze of orange light in the office window. When I turned, I noticed two mean-looking mutts guarding a rusted-out tanker. They looked like they could maul you without trying. Dobermans. I froze.

The owner was suddenly upon me. ‘What do you want?’

He flicked his eyes at my breasts.

‘A Cornetto?’

‘Well all right then’, he said.

The ice-cream wrappers were stuck together and there were chunks of ice in the freezer the size of golf balls. I knew most of the stuff here was out of date. Unilever went bust about a decade ago. I remembered reading about it.

The man was licking his lips.

‘How much?’ I asked, putting the cone on the counter.

‘Four-fifty.’

I thanked him and backed the fuck out.

The dogs snapped and growled. I guessed some people might consider them cute. All I saw was sharp incisors and red droopy eyes.

Sitting down on a low fence further along the road, I unwrapped the ice cream. I’d gone for the classic Cornetto: Vanilla. It was creamy and cold and had nuts. I hadn’t had nuts in years. It reminded me of summers in the back of dad’s car and soft serve.

I looked up and saw two emus, across the road, trying to negotiate the electric fence, a hidden army base in the distance. I’d seen the KEEP OUT signs. One of the emus made it through somehow, the other one bobbed its long neck, confused. It paced up and down along the scrub. Both had patches of feathers missing. Looked mangy.

‘Evening!’

A lanky man in white jogged past.

Evening!’ I called back, startled.

‘See you back at the motel!’

What?



He was wearing a white skivvy like a dramaturg or something, it was an odd outfit for running. He was probably deranged. I watched his long strides until he disappeared around the bend. Motel 47 was a funhouse, that was for sure.

I watched as the emus were re-united on the other side of the fence. They ran, one in front of the other, towards a shack in the distance. They grunted and kicked up dust.

\*

A rapid-fire knock on the door woke me up. It was 2am according to the cheap radio clock. Gathering the bedsheet around me, I moved towards the door.

'What do you want?' I could see the hotel manager through the peep hole.

'Bit of lovin'?'

'Fuck off', I said.

When I heard him move away from the door, I went back to bed.

It took me a while to get to sleep and when I did, I dreamt about roaming gangs and rape and, in the morning, the sheets were tangled around my neck like a noose.

\*

I visited Motel 47 every year on my birthday. For a couple of days I could have a place to myself; I didn't need to queue to use the toilet or listen to my flatmates squabble. As I got older, I got crabbier about sharing my space. Last week I lost it when Denise borrowed my razor. Motel 47 was my reset button. I cancelled my shifts at the box factory and got some R&R. I drove five hours to get here and five hours to get back and, in between, I lived life to the fullest: Screwdrivers, sleep-ins and ice cream. I couldn't think of anything better. And I was worried about losing this slice of paradise.

\*

When I asked Rob about the toddler in the pool over breakfast, he frowned.

'Dead,' he said. 'The council's gonna shut me down. That's the third death by drowning; well not *exactly* drowning.'

I asked why he didn't get a fence put in.

'Does it look like I can afford it?'

I glanced at the water-stained walls, the crooked family portraits.

I asked about the petrol station guy with the dogs.

'Oh *him*', Rob said, taking a bite of his egg. 'Yeah, he got out last month. Kidnapping and a bit of assault.'

'A *bit* of assault?'

'He stayed with me here for a while', Rob was saying. 'We had a party, Kay from down the road made her famous calzone with sausage. Anyway, he took over that petrol station, selling the only ice cream and fizzy within a twenty K radius, good money. Some of the folks around here weren't happy I'd put him up, but how's a guy meant to get back on his feet?' He paused. 'You really don't want some lovin?'

'No.'

I went back to my room and made myself another screwdriver. More vodka than orange juice. I'd heard the rumours, of course. Rob giving rooms to people just out of jail. Paedophiles, neighbours were saying. It seemed to me that Rob gave a room to anyone down on their luck. I thought of the woman with the black eye by the vending machine.

I topped up my glass with vodka and stripped off my clothes. Miraculously, *Sister Act 1* was showing again and I drank and sang along with Whoopi Goldberg. Some thumps and grunts were coming from next door.

\*

The raid happened in the middle of the night. That's how these things go. Police in battered uniforms swept in with batons and cleared us out.

'What's going on?' I asked the policewoman standing in the carpark.

'Anonymous tip off.'

'About what?' I asked.

She wouldn't say.

I took in her scuffed boots and scabby lips. She looked tired, like she hadn't slept since *The Collapse*. I almost felt sorry for her.

'Drugs?' I asked. 'Was it about drugs?'

Seems it's always about drugs, even when it isn't.

Ignoring me, she turned to face her colleague. I sprinted towards

the front door, I needed to talk to Rob. 'Hey you, get back here,' she called, half-heartedly like she didn't really care.

Instead of packing, I was surprised to find him in the kitchen eating toast.

'How are you holding up?' I asked, pulling up a stool.

His face was red and bloated.

He shrugged. 'Even if some fucker didn't ring the police, I couldn't keep this place open much longer. Too much bad press.' Someone had threatened his family, he said. Maybe the same guy who'd scrawled PEDO across his windscreen.

'I bet they didn't know how to spell the word in full,' I said.

He laughed. 'Thanks for your patronage ... and hey, I'm sorry about waking you up the other night.'

'Yeah that was a scummy thing to do,' I agreed. 'Don't pull that again. On anyone.' I ate the breadcrusts off his plate. 'I'm gonna miss this place.' I patted his shoulder and lugged my Country Road bag to the car. The stencil had half-peeled off so now it just read Cunt Rd, which I thought said it all.

'We're shutting it down,' the policewoman was saying to a guy in a nightgown.

He looked at her boots.

The ignition clicked a few times before I got it going. The woman with the black eye was standing under the awning with her girls.

I remembered asking Rob, before I left, what he was going to do now.

'Move down to Albury. For the trout fishing.'

I said that made sense.

I waved and backed out of the car space. Behind me, the VACANCY sign hung from a jaunty angle and the lights on top of the cop cars spun red and blue.

## ELIZABETH SMITHER

### The Greening of the Oaks

*for Linda Cassells*

In a park you visit and a drive I climb  
we've both tried to locate  
the greening of the oaks in spring.  
Both agree we've failed.

Both avenues had grass beneath the trunks.  
Did its greenness confuse, rising into  
the air to divert the eye? A green  
so hard to see, to define.

And other trees, within sight  
added other distracting hues.  
Should we just have concentrated on  
a band of air and left the trees alone?

One year I almost had it, I thought  
walking daily down the drive  
squinting and then opening my eyes wide  
as if an eye-test was written there.

But then it came too suddenly. It was  
the first intimation we wanted  
such huge trunks, such a canopy to blaze.  
We wanted to be its servants and kneel

to what more careless passersby could not see –  
a club of two: the oak-sighters  
like the first chilly thrilling notes  
of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* – *Spring*.

## JANE DOWNING

### A Silk Purse

The airport was a jangle of noise and colour and too many people going too many places; Melbourne's airport being identical to any in the world. Out of the crowd of too many people, a middle-aged man stepped forward and hugged her.

As they both stepped back out of the embrace Henry said, 'I'd forgotten how much you're like Mum.'

Heidi protested, as all daughters do at such insinuations.

'This way.' He bent to take up Heidi's luggage and guided her silently through the crowd. When they got to his car though, he insisted: 'Yes, you look exactly as I imagine she would have, if she'd made it to our age.'

This was politeness. He couldn't know how much his observation hurt her.

'And how's retirement treating you?' he asked.

How could she answer that? Retirement – a sudden lack of activity giving her too much time to think about loss.

Henry took the next day off work to spend with her. Academics have a certain flexibility of work hours. Besides, life was one huge research project for an anthropologist.

A breakfast bowl of Special K sustained politeness between the siblings for a time, a politeness that would not last. They couldn't help returning to their childhood even in their small talk. Neither had returned to Tanzania professionally: Henry's fieldwork was in Papua New Guinea, where he'd found his wife, while Heidi, a doctor, had worked anywhere in the developing world *except* Tanzania.

'And why is that?' Henry asked.

Light slanted in through the kitchen window and dashed itself against the cutlery in headachy shafts. Henry was up brewing a pot of real coffee. His wife was a trenchant fan of Nescafe Instant and his first cup was of dishwashing-water hue; it sat on the table untouched. Heidi talked to her brother's back as he ground the dark coffee beans. She laughed uncomfortably and skirted his question.

'Laughter is contagious,' she observed. 'You remember what Mum told us – about the laughing? That record the schoolgirls in Tanzania set?'

'Did you believe that story?' Henry turned to ask. 'Can you really imagine a group of girls laughing for months?' He had daughters – he had a better insight – but as a child, Heidi *had* believed the story. Her mother's version had verifying detail. 1962. Who'd make up a year for a make-believe story?

Heidi's laugh was not contagious. Their bowls were empty. The kitchen was quiet while the coffee percolated.

They'd avoided anything personal until this moment, but mention of their mother could not be taken back. Inevitably they'd ended up forced to stare their problem in the face. Their parents having been missionaries in East Africa, and they, Heidi and Henry, feared the legacy. Not that they didn't love their parents, only they couldn't avoid the fact that by introducing Christianity they'd been changing a whole way of life.

'The missionaries thought they'd bring peace,' Henry mollified. 'That had to be a positive?'

Heidi countered with another old story. 'Peace? The British, Christian to a man, sent the Maasai out to subdue the Kikuyu. Remember the orders? *Bring in their arms*. A heap of rotting limbs severed from the Kikuyu didn't help anyone.'

'Did you know palms and soles are the last part of the body to rot?' Henry's interjection was hardly the point.

'Surely we're discussing souls not soles?'

Heidi didn't get a laugh with her wordplay, but it did bring a ceasefire to the beginnings of an argument. After a silence only broken by a lawn mower starting up down the street – a whining guilt-imposing noise – Henry, the reluctant gardener, was off on a tangent.

'That was a translation problem ... Do you remember our phrasebook? English to Swahili?'

Heidi did remember. An old book at the back of the shelf when they were young, a book of no use to fluent Kiswahili speakers as they'd been as kids, but a relic once handed out to new colonialists by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

'Do you remember the useful phrases?' asked Henry.

'*The idle slaves are scratching themselves*,' remembered Heidi, aghast, for she hadn't remembered for a long time.

'Six drunken Europeans have killed the cook ...' recited Henry. 'What were they been thinking? Do you think the authors were serious?'

And there they were, Henry and Heidi, caught in the same memories. They'd entered their childhood space, rummaged at the back of the childhood bookshelf. Moved from missionaries as a generic, to their parents' bookshelf. Home. Somewhere they could never actually return to.

'They tried to work in partnership, *urafiki*, in friendship,' Henry said in defence of their parents when the silence had stretched beyond the chance of laughter.

'Remember ...' Heidi's mind's eye was still scanning their Dodoma bookshelf, searching. 'Remember all those books by Paul White? *The Jungle Doctor* books?' The memory was hooked and reeled in. 'The fables he wrote. The fables Mum read us, about the monkeys and Nzoka the snake and Twiga the giraffe.'

She could see a cover of one book, the African animals against a marigold yellow. The monkey on the cover – there'd been several, she couldn't remember all their names only that they always got their come-uppance – was cheekily tying a knot in the rhinoceros' tail while the zebra and Heidi's perennial favourite, long-necked Twiga, looked on. The baobab tree was the most fanciful element, being thick-leaved, lush and green. She remembered lying on the sisal mat playing with her dolls while her mother read, her bushbaby curled asleep under the bamboo couch. She'd look up occasionally at the cover: the smirk on the monkey's face, Twiga's tolerant gaze; and sometimes a winking open of the live bushbaby's huge eyes behind her mother's tanned feet. She remembered coming home from boarding school when Henry was three or four and discovering a rip in the dust jacket, amputating Twiga's limbs from his body. She remembered her fury.

Henry's wife came home then, luckily, to this pleasant house in Northcote, Melbourne, far out of Africa. She was not alone. Their youngest, Prudence, wouldn't start school until the new year. She ran off in a hullabaloo down the hall and Esther put the green bags among the minefield of cereal bowls before switching the kettle on again. As Heidi went back to small talk, Esther began to unpack the bags in an old dance from fridge to pantry to cupboard under the sink. Henry helped by putting the new tomato sauce in the pantry. Esther silently took it out and put it in the fridge on her next walk past.

The mundane routines should have been calming, but Heidi found she was running on the dregs of that childhood fury. She wanted Henry to remember the incident, to apologise. As he'd probably never known he had to.

Heidi couldn't remind him of the incident outright, so she started to relate the *Jungle Doctor* story about the monkey who didn't believe in crocodiles, who went through the jungle disbelieving all the animals who told him crocodiles truly existed. Until, that is, the crocodile ate him.

Heidi sounded inadvertently fond in her retelling. 'I'm surprised,' Henry said. 'I thought you would have rejected that fable stuff along with all Mum and Dad's beliefs.'

Esther was making gestures from over by the pantry, husband-wife code, probably about keeping the peace. Her eyes narrowed under her halo of dark hair.

'I'm not fond,' Heidi protested. She'd temporarily forgotten the end, the bite in the *Jungle Doctor* tale: the moral. The crocodile was not a crocodile, he was the embodiment of sin. It was no use *not* believing in sin – as the monkey had blithely tried – it'd still get you in the end. Only Jesus could save you from sin and from ignorance, instructed the fables in prolonged hectoring epilogues.

Esther disappeared down the hallway.

Henry said, 'I read the stories to the kids now. Only I edit out the commentary at the end. They love Simba, Chewi, Twiga, no need for that stuff about sins and punishment.' His next comment was unexpected. 'Like Mum did.'

'Like Mum?' Heidi denied. 'No, she didn't. We were force-fed our trespasses and temptations and wages of sin.'

Esther was back in the kitchen to hear Henry's laying down of the gauntlet: 'but it wasn't like that at all.' She had a book and handed it to Heidi through the steaming air. She then turned the kettle off. Watched everything simmer.

Heidi turned the *Jungle Doctor's Fables* over in her hand. The dust jacket with the jungle illustration was now completely gone, ripped off, lost. The cover was an olive green devoid of anything save the embossed elephant head that branded the series. The pages had yellowed, felt brittle. Kids didn't look after things like she had.

How dare her mother give the book to Henry.

'You're just still angry because you weren't there when she died,' Dr Henry Freud said. His words scalded. 'You've always gone on as if she was some straitlaced dragon. Can't you remember how much she laughed?'

Heidi wanted to shout back but was holding onto her adult veneer by a thin sheet. He was wrong, but there was enough of an element of that precious commodity, truth, for his words to hurt. She let her anger seethe. How would Henry know anyway. 'I knew her longest', she wanted to say. He'd still been a child when their mother died. It wasn't Heidi's fault she'd been sent away to boarding school and missed, too, the funeral.

Her mother, when Heidi finally arrived at a closed grave under the unforgiving sun, had been solicited in marble to *rest in peace*. Heidi wanted peace.

'Do you know what else Mum used to read?' asked Henry, wrenching Heidi away from the past and back into the kitchen. He didn't wait for an answer. 'Your letters.'

Letters! Such a long time ago – before email and Skype, or even a reliable phone line that didn't echo silences from the vastness of the universe while costing the earth. There was a special time each Sunday when the Boarders were left to write their letters home. Heidi received letters from her mother in return, with beautiful stamps the envy of the quiet girls: tiny squares with tinier fish, one pink, one orange, one red, one with twin seahorses; or if it was a parcel, bigger stamps with the miraculously beautiful and fatally evil lionfish, or the five-shilling Moorish Idol. The pure, exotic ring of the 'Moorish' fired the imagination on long Sunday afternoons.

She'd waited eagerly for those letters. Died inside if one didn't come. Wrote longer letters to get longer responses.

'She'd read them out loud. To me', Henry continued doggedly. 'Your letters.'

Heidi had never heard this before. She felt tears well.

'She said you were very clever.' If there was any jealousy there, Henry had dealt with it. He took the emptied green bags and put them on a hook near the back door. 'She would have been very proud of you being a doctor.'

Heidi accepted the cup, this time of tea, that Esther poured. Milk, no sugar. Heidi said, 'Thank you.' Let Henry think her words included him too.

There was too much silence again. Young Prudence saved them, clip-

clipping into the kitchen on tottering, red op-shop heels.

'I'm a princess', she announced, gathering up the cream lace of her lady's negligee as she climbed onto a kitchen chair. Esther poured her some milk, in a mug so she could be like the adults. She was dripping jewellery. Maasai beads of blue and yellow threaded into medallions, red ones curled into rings around what she called her 'rude' finger. An elephant hair bangle hung around one arm, black and hard and slick as liquorice against her creamy brown skin. And tinkling up and down the other arm, were the Zanzibar bangles. They chimed happily as she picked up her mug.

Heidi was ambushed by more memories. Of the day Heidi's mother arrived home from a trip to Zanzibar bearing gifts. For Heidi there were six silver bangles, one for each year of her life, and best of all, one of the bangles was festooned with little bells. She'd slept with them around her wrist until the pain of the bells digging into her flesh was too much. She remembered the joy of everything being good again, which it hadn't been for ten nights under her mosquito net while her mother was gone.

Then she was suddenly gone forever. They'd always taken all the precautions to keep safe. After her mother kissed her goodnight she'd check every edge to make certain the mosquito net was secure. There were the horrid quinine tablets. But a mosquito had landed for a few seconds and taken her mother's life before either of her children were fully adult.

Mothers are supposed to be there. They are supposed to be there to love you and then to rebel against, and then to sit with as adults at a kitchen table. Heidi swallowed the pain of spending her adolescence waiting for her mother to come home as if she was just off in Zanzibar again.

'Can I see?' Heidi asked Prudence, extending a hand. 'I had some bangles like that when I was a little girl.'

Prudence was reluctant but well brought up. She shoved the Zanzibar bangles over her knuckles.

The first bitter suspicion that these bangles were indeed Heidi's, like the book of *Jungle Doctor* fables, quickly passed. She circled these newer versions, hula-hooped one around a finger. 'They're beautiful, just right for a princess', she complimented her niece.

'Souvenirs from our honeymoon', Esther explained. Henry had taken Esther back, done what Heidi had never dared. After visiting Dodoma, Henry and Esther had gone to Zanzibar, stayed in Stone Town, seen a clove plantation, bought gold and silver, taken photographs, few of which, when developed, tallied exactly with their memories – until they became

their memories. They'd taken a ferry back to Dar-es-Salaam, flown home, had babies, showed them the photos, let them play with the souvenirs. Made the best of life.

Esther organised Heidi and Henry to walk down to the school to pick up the other children.

The inquisitive, acquisitive Prudence, in defiance of her name and her parents, insisted on wearing her princess garb down the street. She clip-clopped back down the hall to get her purse, because she already knew a woman *never* left the house without her purse. She ran back triumphant.

The purse should have been a shock, but after the book of fables and the silver bangles it wasn't. If Heidi stayed long enough, all her memories would walk through the door. That was the way of families.

She didn't ask Prudence if she could touch the old purse from her childhood. She could see well enough it still had the power to give tactile, uninhibited pleasure to little girls. The embroidered dragon had started to unpick from the silk, and the clasp looked sloppy and feeble with age, the buttons inside, which Prudence sifted with accountant's fingers, ripe for the losing.

Heidi remembered the day her mother bought it, in a little backstreet shop, on a trip to Dar-es-Salaam. She could see her mother's face clearly: her hair is pulled back against the heat and her lipstick is smudged on her front teeth which Heidi can see because her mother is laughing. *Can't you remember how much she laughed?*

'It's the grandmother's purse', Prudence told Heidi. 'She had a warthog in the garden.'

The grandmother? The grandmother with the warthog. Just a story from another time.

Prudence took off down the path tinkling, sounding like a Zanzibari princess, clutching her silk purse, stopping by the first gate to discard her heels then running on barefoot.

'Remember how we used to run with our toes off the ground so those horrid *jiggas* couldn't burrow under our toenails?' Heidi asked.

'And Mum shouting at us to wear shoes', remembered Henry as he bent down to pick up his daughter's.

'But never making us.'

There was a throng of them on the way back. Henry took the kids' school bags and had to hoist Prudence up too for the last stretch. The sun was trying, and the camellias were beginning to bloom down the suburban streets. Daffodils were climbing out of the mulch of dead leaves. Heidi could see that death wasn't the end of any story. Life, prosaically, miraculously went on.

Prudence's sisters were singing something incomprehensible in French, their school's foreign language.

'You know that saying from Tanzania, *if you can talk you can sing, if you can walk you can dance?*' asked Henry. 'Well, I've always thought they had it all over the dour British with their defeatist, put-up-with-it attitude. *You can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear.* That's what they say around here too, but it's nonsense. We're all in the silk manufacturing business. Hand over any old sow's ear, results guaranteed.'

Esther had fruit cut when they got home, the pieces arranged on the plate like a mandala. The way Heidi's mum had done it on those long-ago afternoons before Heidi was sent away to boarding school.

Heidi held back her tears. Their legacy was so loaded; Tanzania surely did not thank them. But sometimes she wanted to whack the heels of mythical red shoes together three times and be home.

## FRANCES OLIVE

### Hard New Peaches

In summer there is the cool mouth  
of the marble table.

She is comfortably scratched, silent  
with the whorls of Jupiter storms,

and far away  
in the middle of the kitchen.

Her stone flute has a drum tongue  
when we release shopping bags

into her bruised space light.  
Hard new peaches spill.

## CLARA BURGHELEA

### The Dirty-Dish Poem

Forenoon is slumber,  
a Walton Ford kind of day,  
all inner beasts tenderly resting

velvet paws and ivory beaks.  
The room breathes softly,  
blue veins mapping the walls,

all drawers acutely quiet.  
In the sink, plates and cutlery  
still bear the imprints

of your familiar skin. Expectant.  
Against the roof of my mouth,  
various kinds of self-denial.

Preparation for the narrative  
of days to come.

## AMIRA AL WASSIF

### The Creepy Dance of Red Curly Hair

her red curly hair has been buried under my grave. I tried my best to touch my bones with my fingers to make sure that what I see is so real. the red curly hair acted the creepiest dancers I ever saw in my whole life. As a half-dead, I try to be inside and outside at the same time. as a big fan of everything horror. I watched all the horror movies, and no one could scare me. I visited the horror tree, I threw myself in the abandoned houses and haunted hotels and nothing could make me afraid even for a moment. although my friends competed many times to bring the horror to me no one dares to bring it to me. one evening this weird idea came to my head and whispered, 'the graves'. then I realised that maybe I will find the real fear while spending my nights in my grave among other graves with my dead friends. so, I became officially a half dead who wander in the wide forests in the day and sleep quietly in his terrific grave in the night.

many long nights spent without a bit of fear until this exclusive night when I heard whispering came from outside. the voices were talking about the terrible crime of a girl. she was 12 years old when they found her body in the wooden cave. her mother said 'my daughter was a very brave girl. she never ever experienced the fear feeling'.

one of the human voices outside asked his friend about the reason for her killing in this scary way. his fellow answered 'nobody knows, they found the girl dead but the weird thing they founded her head shelved.' the voices have been shut up suddenly. at this time, I was crawling inside my grave trying my best to hear them. fortunately, they completed their talking. the first voice said 'her mom was shocked and terrified when she saw the body of her child sinking in a lake of blood. he added with a voice full of fear'. her poor mother fainted when she saw the shelved head of her dead girl. the crowd thought it is normal reaction because she is her mother, but I noticed something odd scared me. when I stopped close to her mother, I found her mouth move quickly and she murmured 'she told me that she wanted to be scared until her hair danced.'

the first voice silenced then the second voice asked him what the colour of the disappeared hair.

before his answer, something entered my grave. I felt something touch me. something moves right and lift underneath my body. when I saw it. the voice outside shouted 'red curly hair'.



## JULIE THORNDYKE

### August

Wind roars up the valley  
in a winter rage –  
drying foliage, tearing  
trees already crisp  
from the sun's cruel  
march to the horizon.

*Spring won't come  
until the winds are done,  
mum would say.*

Those winter afternoons,  
I walked home from school  
bastioned in wool flannel,  
face reddened  
by blasts of savage  
air and solar rays.

The doctor says the lump  
growing on my cheek  
is of concern –  
those days of hatless walking  
have blown mutations  
into my midlife cells.

*Spring won't come  
until the winds are done.*

## JANE SIMPSON

### Leaving Curtains Open

The trolley case is at the front door.  
The day bag will be by my side  
in the ward. Last checks. Go upstairs  
and take out all the Christmasses  
remembered in the red skirt I leave hanging  
on the back of the bedroom door; a skirt  
bought in England, made in India  
by seamstresses I will never know.

I reach out, touch its gathers  
in benediction, leave curtains open  
for sunlight to rinse the rooms.  
Breathe prayer through the house:  
my rite of farewell and guarantee  
of return.

You, red skirt, are an amulet  
I do not wear, but can hear in the rustle  
of nurses' uniforms, seamstresses'  
saris; strong sunlight  
on cotton, calling.

## JOSHUA ACKERMAN

### The Troubled Person

The troubled person has awoken  
to find that he has skilfully crafted  
a space of reckoning but failed to do  
said reckoning in that space.

Instead, his mind has affixed itself to the  
hay-fever lodged in his throat and  
the sounds of his unknown neighbour:  
intermittent toilet filling, flushing,  
intermittent clicking from an oven as it heats,  
feet that drag against a worn wooden floor,  
the bellow of a midcentury radiator.

The troubled person remains a witness  
to the homeostatic buzz of the neighbour  
having designed his routine around the gamble  
of not knowing if today's water will be warm.

The melding of the obvious and the necessary  
is the neighbour's life, governed by the ordinary:  
white majolica bowls, corresponding spoons,  
dust-collecting wine bottles, champagne flutes,  
unused bars of fresh linen-scented soap.  
Nothing wild, nothing new – time suspended  
between stucco, plastics, unopened books.

The troubled person throws rusted darts  
into an alabaster-primed sheetrock wall  
bewildered by the benign, mindlessly daubing  
his attention around a shoebox of a room.

The sheetrock is just as wounded as  
the troubled person, whose needs  
remain indecipherable to his own self.  
The same, adjacent alabaster walls contain

a world free of boundaries, a neighbour  
devoid of dust and replenished by small scenes:  
onions creating steam, an armoire that creaks.

The unmediated dialogue: a troubled person  
and an unfettered neighbour. One stuck  
inside of a rioting mind, the other inhibitionless,  
alive amongst the sands of an hourglass.

## ELENA MORDOVINA

### Soviet Kids. Anya

Anya was growing up as a good unloved girl. Her mom constantly complained to all her neighbours and relatives: 'Look at this girl, she eats so much!' or 'Only munches and munches!' Taking into account her thinness: 'I just don't understand how it all settles in.'

Anya used to eat a lot, but just once a day, in the evening, when her mother prepared supper for the whole family. The girl was not allowed to cook, or even light a stove. If she made herself a sandwich, this was followed by reproaches. 'Oh, she ate all the sausages again. How can you eat so much!' When Anya visited her friend after school, she looked with admiration and envy at how the girl reheated mashed potatoes with cutlets in a frying pan and opened a can of Hungarian tomatoes herself.

No, Anya didn't complain or suffer – there were more important things to think about. She read books and studied, studied and read books. And every evening she was waiting for her mother coming from work. Mom always brought some fresh rolls. 'Look how she attacked them! Wait till supper. How can you eat so much!' Anya drank tea with a roll and waited for supper.

She really ate a lot at supper; everything that had been given; and always asked for seconds. Mom looked at Anya's father reproachfully. 'Well, look how much she eats!'

They believed that she had lunch at school, but the school lunch, which was served after the second lesson, only satisfied the hunger left after the morning sandwich, and she sank into studying again. She studied very well – almost perfectly. And waited for the weekend.

During the weekend, finally, she could eat. Her mother cooked for the entire family twice a day. Therefore, when all her friends went in for sports or attended art and music schools, messed around or arranged parties, Anya preferred to stay home and read books. It's not likely she realised that she was afraid to miss the opportunity to eat – she was a very polite girl and she had never even thought of that. She just thought she liked reading books, but didn't like walking, and didn't like any entertainment either.

When her mother married the second time, Anya started to go blind, so as not to look at his vile face munching at breakfast. She started to grow deaf, so as not to hear their snoring and talking. She began to lose her sense of smell, because it was unbearable to live with the smell of a stranger. At first, she lost her voice so as not to tease her mother's husband, and then her body disappeared too, so that he couldn't see her young breasts trembling. On the day of her coming of age, Anya moved to a spacious six-bed room in a psychological ward. At home, in her room, she was replaced by a little boy.

TOBY COY

### The Pantry Moths

The pantry moths were not content with the pantry alone. Soon they were kitchen moths, lounge moths, bedroom moths. After a month, I was waking to the sound of moths whispering in my ear like feathers rubbing against bandages. One afternoon, I came home to find that they had changed the lock on the front door. After an hour of pleading with a moth who couldn't have been more than a middle manager, they agreed to have a key cut in return for a large purchase of flour and rice. I scattered it over the floor as grubs dripped like soggy cashews from the ceiling. I needed a lawyer.

KORBIN JONES

### rising waters in the floodplain

angry husband takes the form of a mud-trapped bullfrog. yellow-throated in the muck. his croak-song reprised seventeen times against the ache of his eardrums, exposed since birth & dry from promised rain. hot lightning crashes overhead. reflects back in dark almonds of his eyes, the eyes with which he watches all these waters rise.

cheating husband takes the form of a young corn snake, which in turn masquerades as a copperhead. such similar scales & yet he lacks the proper pockets & glands for making himself an honest danger. he is milk-sweet & milk-sour in the same hour. his hiss is silence. his head is in constant danger of separation due to mistaken identity.

paramour takes the form of me & i take the form of a channel catfish with a broken lip. i am hole-riddled & made jagged by the hooks that fishermen had wrapped in food. blood bait & earthworm & the liver of a man i once knew. my belly round with chosen feeding. chance me & i'll swallow every hook until my body hits the riverbed.

by the time the sun has cast itself behind the clouds the river crests & bears itself upon the land, runs its hands across the brittle grasses that bend themselves in subjugation. we huddle ourselves atop the hills & wonder at the rate of water receding back to banks. if we stop to listen for a moment, we can hear the river's throaty laughter.

## EMILY SUN

### It's not Saigon

There is a man who holds a gun to his brother's head.

His face is strained and the frown between his brows, that once made him look like a knowledgeable and overthinking professor, is nothing more than a deep gash.

Tears thud to the floor.

There's a girl – the gunman's daughter – cowering behind the fridge in the corner of the room.

They're not in the kitchen. We only think it's one because there's a bag of onions, a chopping board, and the meat cleaver in the room. The actual kitchen is a smaller affair, closer to the entry and comprises a small sink and a one-by-two metre salmon pink laminate benchtop upon which sits a portable gas cooker, a plastic bottle of peanut oil, a jam jar of salt and chopping board that's been imbued with decades of defrosted chicken blood.

The girl, 13, hugs herself and rocks back and forth in her squat position. She is both witness and agent in the scene I've forced you to consider. Until now, she's not thought of her father as one capable of emotions, as the only time she's seen him cry is when he vomited and laughed over the toilet bowl after drinking too much eggnog one Christmas night, many years ago. Somewhere between these two emotional states, her father recited passages from *Das Kapital* and whistled songs from Doris Day musicals.

'Don't kill him', the daughter wants to plead, but her lips, instinctively wrapped around her teeth to prevent them from being ground into powder, are too tightly pursed. Not that it matters anyway because even if she could pry her lips open, her heart aches too much and will shatter if her father pulls the trigger.

It was a mistake. What happened was that Mrs Lyons made the class draw a family tree and the girl had said, 'Mon père est le frère de mon oncle et nous vivons ensemble au cinquième étage. Je marche à l'école seul. Je suis toujours seul.'

Mrs Lyons asked her what she meant by this, and kept asking her more questions that she couldn't answer.

The girl has seen a black-and-white photograph of the scene before her, in a history book at l'école. This image had nothing to do with their family until Uncle Zan married a woman whose father fought in the war against the Viet Cong. Now this image has to do with everyone.

'You belong here now', Uncle Zan says. 'They won't take her away.'

But the girl's father doesn't hear these words.

'I trusted you, I trusted my daughter to you', he says. 'You, from my own mother's womb, untimely cut.'

The stench, a mixture of sweat, piss, and fried onions permeates the air.

The setting is not important.

The girl will never understand why ...

## KAREN ANDREWS

### The Pecan Tree

They came to the unfenced paddock on the outskirts of town and discretionary measures needed to be followed. Colleen's father parked the car at a distance; they could claim they were fishing off the nearby jetty. There was even a tackle box in the boot. She remembered the crunch of the gravel underneath her sandals and the peace of a silent, black road.

The tree was enormous, straight from the pages of an Enid Blyton book. Larry Morgan released his daughter's hand to shrug a rope off his shoulder. Precise placement was key; the limb needed to be sturdy enough to yield to tension, but not snap. He drew back his arm and arced the rope over a lower branch.

'Ready?' he asked as he adjusted his grip.

For what? But she trusted. 'Ready!'

He sank into a squat and yanked the rope. Shivering energy ran from the tree, down through his arms. Colleen squealed as leaves brushed across her face and suddenly understood the function of the empty ice cream container she held: it was a helmet. She placed it over her head and heard the plastic pings of nuts as they clattered to the ground. Larry turned to his daughter and laughed as he lifted off her helmet and planted a hard kiss in her hair.

'This is for collecting the pecans', he said. 'Here, I'll show you.'

They knelt down together on the soft leaf matter to collect the bounty. He expertly tested quality by rattling a nut against her ear, and demonstrated how to peel away the shuck with a thumb to reveal the smooth browns and fine black embellishments, like brushstrokes on a Japanese ink painting.

Why scavenge nuts when they were available at the supermarket? But interrogating him would risk no further repeats of the adventure, so Colleen kept quiet.

Larry thought they could do better, and he lifted her up to grab onto an untapped branch so she could shake it herself. Colleen sensed his struggle to keep her aloft, his forearms rippled from strain. Were six-year-olds really that heavy? She thought not.

The nuts were nearly all gone. She shook the thin branch and got nothing. Her father explained how a cousin had brought him here when he was young. How they spent an afternoon with a hammer, splitting nuts and eating down at the river. Later, she realised how her father never took pleasure for granted. She imagined he felt the same way the first time he held her on the day of her birth, his breath a furnace straight from his heart; the same heart that would beat too fast for his chest the year after their visit to the pecan tree.

She avoided that stretch of road whenever possible. But she often thought of him whenever she caught the rhythmic sway of a branch or a scuttling leaf. He was still helping her answer questions.

*Was she ready? She wasn't sure.*

*But she trusted.*

## NICOLE BUTCHER

### Filing Cabinet

When they leave / people wonder about you / there is no resolution  
As they fill their pockets / we lie ornately / wholesome as a picnic  
Crawling with the muck of anger / maybe in a letter / joyful aching solitude  
Filed under forget this / shades of rosewood / structures not yet climbed  
Having succeeded at leaving forever / remembering / filling the time  
Wanting to run away / richness / a handful of your skin

## AR DUGAN

### The First Time

Say: *Do that again.* / Ask: *The same way?* Say: *I want / replication.* Ask: *How many times / have we done this?* / Say: *Numbers don't matter.* / Ask: *What if it's different now?* / Say: *It's always the same.* / Ask: *Always?* Say: *It's always / different.* Ask: *But, what's the point?* / Say: *They said repetition is the point.* / Ask: *They said do it again?* / Say: *The same way.* Ask: *You want / replication?* Say: *I recall / the memory of my birth echo.* / Ask: *Did they say anything / about cloning children?* / Say: *They said Möbius helix.* / Ask: *What if / it's the end?* / Say: *That's what you said last time.* / Ask: *Is this about repetition?* / Say: *This is always.* / Ask: *Is always the same?* / Say: *It's never the same.* / Ask: *What time is this?*

Note: The form of this poem was inspired by 'come home to this body, this unhomeliness' by Mary Jean Chan, published in *Mascara* #22.

## In the Waiting Room Again

All the bodies, / just cases listening / for their turn – for a name to be called – / not for the last time, maybe. // I’m just here / as an observer today. / I do it / from time to time now / because I can. // The voices here sound measured and precise, / like discussing car wash options: / undercarriage rinse, marrow aspiration, / ultra shine, ultrasound, anaesthesia, / brushless buff, blow dry, M stage. // As if in naming we get a say / in the outcome. If you’re really listening, you’ll notice / the pitch of their voices / something just above a whisper. / Is this why we pray silently? You’ll notice every conversation is the same. / Is this why we always use the same prayer? / A man takes a Werther’s Original out / from his wife’s palm and untwists / the yellow wrapper while she says, ‘after your surgery . . .’ // I think about how much / *surgery* sounds like *sugary*. / How sweet / they are when they’re over. / How you always / come back for more.

## FRANCESCA BRADY

### Selling Lot 620: The ‘Hypertense’

‘Four lots and it’s over for another year’, she whispered, cleaning out the filly’s feet.

At thirty-two, she could almost walk through the ring with her eyes closed. And yet it wasn’t getting any easier. The longer hours with the bigger drafts of yearlings being sold, the changing staff every season, the relentless heat that always accompanied sale week, and a nagging shoulder injury had her feeling jaded. The Yearling Manager’s badge was weighing heavy. She even found herself entertaining the thought of taking a step back for a year or two: just enjoying herself as a groom, perhaps, and letting somebody else shoulder the responsibility. But that would also mean giving up the roof over her head that came with the job – with two kids and a husband out of work, it wasn’t an option.

‘What are you doing in there picking out feet? That’s what you’ve got staff for’, snapped the Stud Master.

‘I’m hiding.’

‘You’ve got 620.’

‘The Hypertense? Where’s the Irish lad? He’s the colt handler.’

‘Yeah, he is. But he’s just gone back out with 611. A dispute over the bid. They want to deal with it right away and he won’t be back in time.’

Straightening up and turning to face her boss; ‘Is the colt ready?’

‘Nope.’

The floor of the barn aisle was littered with a long day’s work: assorted brushes and combs lay scattered on the floor. Grooming kits filled with Black It and hair spray, rubber bands, scissors and pots of chalk hugged the aisle’s edges. Towels were slung over shoulders and rags from jean pockets. Brooms rested against walls and a halter hung outside every box. A pile of leather leads sat near the entrance to the locker, where the staff took it in turn to grab a bite to eat. She’d have hidden in there instead and made herself a coffee, had she known 620 would be her lot.

Hypertense himself had practically risen from the dead. His first two



foal crops had failed to throw a group runner, let alone a winner. But just when it looked like he wouldn't be making another trip from Ireland, the next crop sent him to the top of the sire's list – and added another zero to the end of his stud fee. Now everybody wanted one. Hence the crowd gathered around the outdoor ring waiting for 620 to appear. But what these buyers didn't know was that the buggers could bite, especially the colts.

Entering 620's box with stallion bit in hand, she made no attempt to put the big colt at ease with a pat. She'd made that mistake back at the stud, and he'd bitten her on the arm; leaving her bruised for a week. With a steady hand, she prised open his mouth for the bit and then reached up and slid the leather over his ears, clipped the bit to the halter ring and arranged the lead into clean loops. Then and only then, did she use her free hand to stroke him gently on the face. He looked at her with his wall eye, assessing her courage no doubt. But she looked right back at him and said in a low voice, 'Don't even think it.'

Stepping out into the aisle, she stood the Hypertense, while her team of grooms went to work. Three of them at once – combing, preening, rubbing, brushing, painting, spraying, buffing and polishing – as he shifted about. All the while they engaged in a banter among themselves, but she didn't mind because she knew only too well what lay ahead. When the prep was complete, her team met her eye and she nodded solemnly. *That* was the easy part.

'Lot 615's just come out and 611's goin' back in', bellowed the Stud Master from further up the aisle. 'You'd better get out there.'

Taking a deep breath and pulling down on the peak of her cap, she made her way out, everybody in her path stepping aside like the parting waters of the Red Sea. This was not a colt to halt for the satisfaction of a fop, of which there had been plenty to contend with during the week. Belying his age, he looked a racehorse already: all muscle and bone – with an attitude to match. It was straight to the auctioneer with the Hypertense. The outer ring had lookers jostling for space. The colt started to jig. She pressed her lips and strode on. And they watched, whispered, pointed, studied their catalogues, spoke on their phones, watched some more and then moved off to the inside ring to find a seat. The colt dropped his head.

'Oh, no you don't', she growled and jerked it up. 'You're not rearing on me, you bugger.'

She picked up the pace, one eye on him and the other in front. The colt looked at her again and chewed on the bit.

The noise grew as she approached the entrance to the ring. With two yearlings still ahead of her, she made another loop – better to keep the big colt moving than standing still. He was leaning down on the bit, making her shoulder ache. A lack of sleep had stolen the spring from her step, but her mind was sharp and she'd done it all countless times before. Nothing else mattered now but getting in and out of the ring.

Swinging around the bend to face up to the door and wait, she saw the sold lot exit to her right, its handler awash with relief. From inside the hall, the yelling of the scouts began again, as 619 circled round and round the ring. The Hypertense began to fidget and then dance about, as the noise from within lifted to a feverish pitch.

'Steady boy', she soothed, as the hammer fell.

The noise died away. 619 stepped out the exit as the big door in front of her was pulled aside. The colt propped, raised his head and then threw himself away to the right, as fear and excitement bubbled up.

She held onto the rein, despite the pull, and looked him in the eye, 'Not now fella. Let's just get this over with.' And together they entered the ring.

She hadn't expected a hush. Her startle became his; the colt chomped nervously on the bit. And then the auctioneer began his call by citing the pedigree of the lot: Sire, Hypertense. Four Group Ones across Europe. Dam, Ballet Music. Sire's Produce and an Oaks.

*Right, it's all there, ladies and gentleman. Look down the page and all you'll see is black type. Can't get any better than that. What will you give me to start the colt? Five hundred? Five hundred thousand to buy the Hypertense?*

'Yes!' shouted the scout immediately in front.

*Six hundred. Six hundred thousand.*

'Yes!' from the left.

*I've got six hundred thousand.*

'Yes!' from the right.

*Seven hundred. Seven hundred thousand for the Hypertense. Who'll give me eight?*

'Yes!'

She pressed her lips and walked on, the colt flinching with every bid.

'Yes!'

'Yes!'

*One million for the Hypertense. Who'll give me more? Who'll give me more for the big colt? Look at him, ladies and gentleman. You'll not see another like this go through the ring. He'll be on the track in nine months!*

'Yes!'

'Yes!'

The shouting almost buffeted her body. She kept up the pace but could feel the colt beginning to panic.

'Quietly boy', she implored again and again, but knew it was in vain.

*One million two. One million two.*

'Yes!'

*Three.*

'Yes!'

*One million four. We have one million four over there on the far side. Who'll make it five for the Hypertense colt?*

And then her cajoling meant nothing. The colt abruptly dropped his head to sneak some leather, snapped it back up and raised himself onto his hindfeet in protest at the din. A hush fell momentarily whilst the crowd gaped, before the auctioneer began again. Quietly. Slowly.

*I've got one million four hundred thousand. Who'll make it five?*

'Yes!' And the shouting returned.

Blocking out the noise and sight of the packed hall, she maintained her pace and talked steadily to the colt. As the bids continued to come, he chewed on the bit, blew out his nose and shook his head; clearly overwrought. And then when it seemed it would never stop, a hush.

*I've got one million nine hundred thousand. Who'll you give me two? Ladies and gentleman, who'll give me two?*

The crowd was silent. Scouts looked about, searching the seats for a raised finger, the nod of a head, a lifted catalogue, an arched brow. But nobody moved.

*I've got one million nine hundred thousand for the Hypertense.*

Seconds passed.

*One million nine, going once. One million nine, going twice.*

She held her breath.

*Ladies and gentleman. This is the only Hypertense colt in this sale. He's too fine a specimen to reduce the amount of the bid. Give me another one*

*hundred thousand and take him home with you tonight.*

Suddenly, the colt refused to take another step. He stood with his head high and ears pricked, looking out at the bodies that filled every seat and stood shoulder-to-shoulder around the ring: challenging them to defy the auctioneer's call.

*One million nine hundred thousand. Who'll make it two?*

'Yes!' cried the scout directly in front, pointing to an older couple in the crowd.

*Ladies and gentleman we have two million for the Hypertense colt. Is there anybody who'll give me more? Come on, who'll give me more?*

But the crowd remained quiet in a collective pause before the auctioneer and his men. And the colt, as if accepting the bid, lowered his head and walked on.

*Two million dollars for Lot 620, once. Two million dollars for Lot 620, twice.*

Not a whisper was spoken until the hammer fell.

*Two million for the Hypertense colt. Congratulations. And thank you, very much.*

The exit door was pulled aside. Late afternoon light flooded in. Together, horse and handler walked out. Her ears rang and her head throbbed as she glanced sideways at the colt. He looked smaller, somehow. Forlorn. He didn't jig or try to drop his head. And when she returned him to his box, slipped the bit from his mouth and unbuckled his halter to set him loose, he didn't turn his tail but looked at her instead, with his wall eye; and as if in thanks, gave her a friendly nudge.

Turning to leave, she hesitated in the doorway just for a moment and listened to the chatter of her staff in the aisle outside. And then she heard the booming voice of her boss calling her name. Stepping out of the box, she saw him looking at her and nod his head, just the once before he turned and strode away. A small smile appeared on her weary face. Being the Yearling Manager was rather like being a mother and a wife – appreciation wasn't always forthcoming but a small token of thanks went a long way.

## SILJA KELLERIS

### It Will Be Love That Kills Me

It will be love that kills me.  
I will die in the wake of the wreck,  
of the things the decades passed, have broken.  
I will die alone, in a lake, or on the kitchen floor,  
or in an orchard, picked clean of anything ripe or sweet.  
I will lie amongst the pits, and the greedy wasps,  
and they will sting at my skin long after I am gone.  
I will be worm food, I will sink into my grave.  
I will corrode in time, unaware of it happening, all over again.  
It will be love that kills me.

### We Became Wolves

I had a dream last night,  
that you and I drank too much  
and we became wolves.  
As wolves, the kitchen was too small  
for us, and we were too hungry  
and wild to stay there.  
We gallivanted off into the woods.  
Racing through the marshes,  
you nipped at my legs  
and I crashed my body  
into your ribs as we bolted  
under the moonlit sky,  
drunkenly howling to each other.  
In a clearing of the brush  
you slayed a deer for us to eat,  
and the blood stained your teeth,  
the way the wine had  
back when we were human.  
We clawed out the heart together  
and made it a play thing,  
tossing it between us and  
tearing it to pieces before we ate it.  
A small piece of it landed in the dirt.  
We fought over the loins,  
and when I came too close  
you sank your teeth into my throat.  
When I bit you back  
I locked my jaw around your neck,  
and you threw me off of you  
down next to the carcass,  
which lay drained and heartless.  
You pounced on me and bared your teeth.  
Your fangs dripped warm deer blood into my mouth.  
I could taste your hot coppered breath  
and snarled as your claws  
sank into my shoulders.

We stayed there like that,  
in the mound of bloody dirt  
breathing into each other's mouths;  
I with my stomach and chest exposed and open,  
and you pinning me,  
licking your lips and salivating.  
As a cloud moved over the moon  
I felt myself turn human,  
and I gave you my neck.  
But as the cloud covered the moon,  
and I was myself again,  
you remained a wolf, and tore me to shreds.

## CARL BOON

### The Last World

This world is the last world, not  
the one you imagined  
in your Boston parlour surrounded by  
ten watercolours of California  
your daughter made. She'd been sucked in,  
too, by the possible: the light  
of lemon blossoms, the night gold-  
black and monstrous.

On the outskirts of Bakersfield  
a man waits for the train  
that will take him to Los Angeles.  
His lapels are threadbare; his boater  
beat up and down by nights among peach-  
limbs that scrape the face  
and make rising impossible.  
He's slept in fields, dreamed nothing,

but closer to the ocean it will be better.  
Closer to the ocean the last world  
becomes the first world again,  
will make you shudder when you see  
how near the real she came  
with her watercolours and imagination,  
her little hands bargaining  
against the larger. The plum trees

south of Sacramento tonight  
surround a man who knows the Valley cold,  
who's sought ways west and east  
until directions no longer matter,  
only his burnt skin and hunger-ache,  
his fingernails risking the iron  
boxcar four others have assumed –  
to Illinois, New Jersey tonight.

They come and go, parishioners  
and bums, freemen, Chinese and Filipinos.  
There's the world they can't see  
and that which sees them begging  
for shoulders of pork, leeks and beans  
and green berries, the kind that touch  
the gut like nightshade, the kind  
you never saw in Massachusetts.

And still the watercolours wait  
on the walls, sad, small islands  
of other centuries. You cannot go to them;  
you cannot see their correct proportions  
of slope and sadness, joy, the unforgiving  
fields sunsplashed and holy, then,  
with lesser saints. You've built a house  
of stone that's conquered you.

## SHAINA CLINGEMPEEL

### Self-Portrait in a Windowless Room

People applaud how he toils over me  
as if he breathed life into my body.

All I know of air is filtered through  
the walls of his paint-splotched studio.

Born by his chisel & caress  
I am alive as His Accomplishment

though I wish to exist with the living.  
No, not the women who almost were:

faceless masks he carved & kept  
in the corner as discarded wax.

Dimples carved in delicate cracks  
around my throatless mouth.

I want            to believe I exist  
in a room        outside    the room  
of this body     he built.

*Kiss me* he said & did not  
wait for my answer.

## JILL JONES

### Door

For you at the door  
with a mouth full of sun  
with mortal blue photos  
with hazards as fictions  
your hands red with plums

For you as you wait  
with speckle and rainstorm  
with hands rich in weather  
with apricot and feather  
out of garden you come

With purple and petal  
as blood and appearance  
for with and for when  
as fabric and answer

I wake as you come  
you open this one

### Touches / Touches Us

#### *Everything Touches*

If there is light there  
must be dark if in the dark  
you wait a while un  
til a different moon returns  
there's no proper distance

*After Mark Rothko, '#20'*

#### *RootSky*

darklight darkdog sleeps  
a tree grows in the heart we're  
cloudmud children you  
give me plant fire I'm a cre  
vasse blood flowers milkdrop earth

*After Frida Kahlo, 'The love embrace of the universe the  
Earth (Mexico), Diego, me and Señor Xólotl'*

#### *Your Eyelashes Like Grass*

our pores bloom like roses  
I sweep dust out the door its  
threads blushes tiny  
flora an interstellar  
wind carves nebulas like grass

*After Jackson Pollock, 'Autumn Rhythm'*

*'Everything should be blue. But is it?'*

what fell from weather  
o fabulous mutinous  
machine bending blue  
waves islands flaking off sky  
stacks skerries makeshifts singing

*After Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, 'Variations on a Theme  
– Splintered Ice No. 2'*

*To go home to the old home*

to make of spittle  
and milk to spill as all pig  
ment blood to the fire  
utterance 'oh oh' uterus  
  
nipple tree dirt leaf black moon

*After Paul Klee, 'Wald-Hexen' (Forest Witches)*

*what doesn't Touch us hovers all The same*

waves skulls skin seaweed  
a flotilla tangled lines  
even the invis  
ible has its sound oars drag storm  
ferocious hours the tide loves

*After Cy Twombly, 'Lepanto Part III'*

MARCIA L HURLLOW

## The Work of Angels

*for Marc Chagall and Jeanne Stump*

The angels in Chagall's paintings  
stay in the bright white canvas sky,  
hover over weddings and harvests.  
In Stump's painting, two angels wear  
gauzy blue gowns and real dolls' pearls  
glued to their throats. Their silhouettes  
glide through a dozen titanium  
stars adding their lights to the skyline  
of Paris. Angels fly over our moth-  
eaten lives grounded by the seven  
deadly sins, the ten broken commandments  
and laws of nature: angels not for worship  
but for wonder. They are messengers  
from the unspoken in us, needy  
and surrounded by others in need.  
Angels watch how we open our wallet,  
lift the stranger slumped over a bin  
in the produce aisle. Sometimes they lift  
the hot coal of selfish thought before  
it reaches our lips. And some transmit  
their visions to those like Marc and Jeanne  
who can see, among the human horrors,  
that beauty and love still require their place.

## LEIGH TUCKMAN

### the last known image of the empire

You cannot know  
when you are making the picture  
that it will be the last  
known image of the empire.

You know, of course,  
that *all palaces are temporary  
palaces*; you would not be an artist  
if you did not know that.

But you cannot be concerned  
with the vagaries of the yet to come:  
where and when  
the empire will fall,

why it is all other works  
by all other artists will crumble  
and burn and disappear.  
The future is happening

to someone else,  
and does not matter.  
What matters is only the light  
reflecting off the rooftops

in the valley below,  
the birds rising with the dawn,  
the way you tilt your hand just so  
to capture them, forever,

or for close enough.

*'All palaces are temporary palaces'* is a quote from the artist Robert Montgomery.

## MICHAEL J LEACH

### This Contemporary Palette

The postmodern gothic absorbs like vantablack.  
Our universe's hue – cosmic latte – is a shade of beige.  
These new age fashions shimmer in neo mint.  
That red splattered on LED screens is dragon's blood.  
Artists keep painting cerulean skies electric blue  
while we turn to our dying sun like heliotropes.

Our colour of mourning is heliotrope –  
that age-old alternative to vantablack.  
As our workplaces crackle with electric blue,  
we tire of interiors that whisper in beige.  
As our bloodshot eyes drink dragon's blood,  
our home interiors shimmer in neo mint.

Your colour of the future is neo mint –  
a green that honours plants like heliotrope  
and *Draecana* (the true source of dragon's blood).  
All dimensions vanish in vantablack  
yet reappear in familiar shades of beige.  
My colour of the future is electric blue.

Lightning bolts colour our skies electric blue.  
Pot plants brighten our offices with neo mint.  
You ask, 'Who'd want to be as boring as beige  
when you can be as quirky as heliotrope?'  
We watch the Night's Watch vanish in vantablack  
and the last Targaryens bleed dragon's blood.

I ask, 'Who'd believe dragons gave dragon's blood  
in a world where science shines in electric blue?'  
Scientists made VANTAS\* to create vantablack  
and melded tech with nature to yield neo mint.  
Your aura is a purple flower – heliotrope –  
that stood out against a background of beige.



We painted our first home's walls beige  
then exposed bricks the colour of dragon's blood.  
We slow danced after planting those heliotropes.  
I stumbled through a karaoke version of 'Electric Blue'  
decades before lexicons swelled with colours like neo mint  
and that deathly dark shade – vantablack.

But now, in our beige universe amidst the vantablack,  
I recreate yellows from neo mint and dragon's blood  
while you swirl violets from electric blue and heliotrope.

LUCY ALEXANDER

## Strokes of Light

Here the brushstrokes are all downwards, like rain that comes in as thick as hard pressed crayon. The old house was once a witch's. Still, owls nest in the cloven roof beams, their eyes the glimpse of paper beneath the overworked surface. The trespasser lights the match on her shoe and counts seconds between the warning strokes of light and the tearing sky, before touching it to the paper. Smoke flies out the chimney – all fear and no heat, gone in the wind not even leaving dents in the shading where ink might find a place to pool. She knows she must not lick the sugared hearth while fire takes up the air. The old woman's memory is ash in the oven. The sweet, she knows, would hit the tongue like magic.

\* VANTAs – vertically aligned carbon nanotube arrays

## Swift

In a cup made for my flesh she stopped and left a beaky blemish. I've seen how moths have feathers, too. They twirl full-moon-dieting on their hope for another moth; the bird against my pocket breast may have flown a million miles in the dark; traced the atlas of her voice over the wind above the dark water searching the world's wing-beat-measured reaches for another windrider. Here, high windows showed sky that knew her name and so she fought against their panes, the light and wind of her life unfolding a ceiling away. This tender part of myself, mammal warm folding against its twin's skin was not enough softness to hold a swift eggchild; the chirping lovewing; a windbird who curled her claws and let the great unstoppered stillness swoop down to press her heart closed.

## AARON HAND

### That Summer Night Holding Long

Standing in the balcony of Harlem's Paradise, Bushmaster said 'You hear that? The talking blues, those are the ancestors you hear. They remember. You can't erase the past, you can't burn it away. That's the spell on you, that's magic. Science in its purest form.' It took me 18 years and Gisela's persistence to visit 18th and Vine, but that's what happens when you grow up in a place where your parents teach you the off tempo rhythm of locking your doors at red lights downtown instead of making you listen to the blues that billow out of the Gates BBQ smokestacks. At the American Jazz Museum Gisela made us put on every set of headphones so we could hear Billie Holiday take lyrics written by a Jewish man who devoured every word of ancestors that weren't his (two years before he would see his own European family forced into ghettos) and turn it into the song of the century like only a black woman could do after seeing her father die outside of an emergency room where a sign hung that read 'Whites Only', pouring every ounce of agony into a brittle microphone until she shattered into a hospital bed where handcuffs left cold red rings around her wrists and a new kind of hatred poured out of her liver, and today, the sweet and fresh scent of magnolias still lingers.

## TOM FRANKEN

### No Woke till War-Town

The graffiti dances into my periphery, tagged fresh and white onto the ramshackle remains of someone's home.

'No woke till war-town.'

I can almost hear the spray can's death rattle. Heavy and hollow, like my grandfather's voice.

My father's father, trenchfooted and dour, who nested an egg of mill money into the house on Campbell Street with the peeling paint and gravel drive.

He stayed rooted there, from GI Bill bustle to gunshots echoing just down the block.

I imagine him rising from the green-gray folding chair, Marlboro dangling between thumb and trigger finger, simmering.

'Those goddamn idiots don't know what war is.'

His war-town, steel-scarred, its orange skies gone monochrome. His home.

## KAREN WHITELAW

### Ruins

I order an espresso for Mauro and drink it, looking down over the rubble that once was Tharros. You can still see the weathered basalt foundation blocks tracing the outline of rooms, and wide eroded staircases leading up to empty temple platforms. The two remaining columns of Demeter's temple stand out against a brilliantine sea. The ruins are fenced off in individual plots and their information plaques look like headstones in a dusty cemetery.

I watch a woman in a red floppy hat climb the old Roman road. The poppies growing up between the stones nod at her as she passes. She sits at the table next to mine and fans her face with the site's brochure. She sees me watching and smiles.

'Hot, isn't it?' Her voice and her skin are English porcelain.

I nod and smile back.

'My husband is still down there ... somewhere.' She waves her hand like she's shooing flies. 'He loves all that ancient history stuff and I always have a hard time dragging him away.'

'There's a lot of history here,' I say.

I'd been told that in the past the children from nearby Cabras used to clamber all over the ruins, before it became a museum. Playing hide'n'seek in the thermal baths, already long crumbled and roofless by then, and in the drains under the old road.

'Have you been to any of the other archaeological sites?' she asks.

'Just this one.'

'We've been to them all. Nora. Calgiari. Fluminimaggiore.' She rolls her eyes, yet she counts the places off her fingers as if they're achievements. She leans towards me and lowers her voice. 'It's not as if there's anything left to see now.'

I swallow the last of the bitter espresso.

She points to a thin column of a man standing on the old paved street. 'There he is.'

Even from up here on the hill I can see his concentration. He's tilted forward, hands between his knees, back straight. Studying the ground

as if there might still be a chance of ancient footprints imprinted there. His camera dangles forgotten from a strap around his neck.

'Are you waiting for someone?' she asks me.

'No.'

'Oh, you're so lucky you can please yourself. All I do is wait for him.'

But as I watch her husband I'm also transported into the past. I'm thinking of Mauro, and how we'd always planned that one day he would show me the place he grew up.

## LIWA SUN

### Mom

Jesse Greenstein Jr was sagging on the couch with a ragged piece of newspaper in hand when the telephone rang. The landline was on the stand, two pieces of furniture as quaint and out of it as Jesse Greenstein Jr himself. He picked up the phone.

'Hello? Jesse speaking.'

'Yes.'

It's Jesse Greenstein Sr. The most unlikely person to call. Most unlikely, because he just called precisely 120 seconds ago.

'Dad?'

'No.'

'I know it's you, Pop.'

'Yes.'

'What's going on? Are you okay?'

'No.'

Now Jesse Greenstein Jr still hadn't – unlike the reader – detected a pattern in his wistful father's responses. So he carried on.

From the handset, a song emanated. Not anything characteristic of a man of Jesse Sr's age, like Sinatra or Coltrane, but a hardcore disco song. The father and the son kept exchanging tired questions and non-sequiturs as the beats built up.

'Should I come get you?'

'Yes.'

'Okay, give me 20 minutes.'

'No.'

'What is it? Did you sleep at all?'

'Yes.'

Jesse Greenstein Jr rose from the couch and sat down again. At 69, his receding hairline had long stopped being cute, and his limbs had just started to droop.

He rolled the telephone line like a snare in his fingers for a little bit, eyes wandering to the empty vodka bottles on the TV set table.

'How are you, Pop?'

'No.'

'You know, I wouldn't take no for an answer.'

'Yes.'

'That's the spirit.'

The muffled disco music kept building up on the other side of the line, like an extra-elongated foreplay. Does that mean the sex will be extra good? Maybe, perhaps.

'No.'

'Did you drink again? I thought the nurse hid them away.'

'Yes.'

'Pop! What did you promise me?'

'No.'

Jesse Greenstein Jr's eyes panned the wall: intricate, mystical, endless pattern of the wallpaper, tawdry curtains, small frames of lukewarm still life, a clock that pointed towards five o'clock, an old picture of a woman at the Grand Canyon.

'Why is there music there? Are you partying or something?'

'Yes.'

The beat dropped. It did not merit a bit of the lengthy accretion.

'Well, that was not great. Too much building up.'

'Your mother didn't trip. I pushed her', Jesse Greenstein Sr said.

Jesse Greenstein Jr didn't say anything.

He held the handset to his ear, still. The sun blazed a lot more vehemently from the window. Jesse Greenstein Jr's wife, another sex-deprived woman, would come home in 120 seconds.

The sun would blaze her body too.

## SHEILA BLACK

### Poem for My Father

Maybe it was not that you meant to forbid  
or grow fear inside like the kudzu vine;

it was instead the long dirt road you'd travelled,  
the memory of the ones who lost their houses

or farms and moved up and down those lonely  
roads, which crisscrossed, which could not

be contained, where a stray yellow dog might  
bite you one night and, the next, an old woman

hand you a slice of her blackberry pie.  
People don't remember the way dirt would

crease in skin and you could tell a man by the patches,  
or lack of them, in his work jeans. Wells dug,

fence posts laid deep, side by side in rows. You  
had known this mute and often terrible world

where someone would pull out a knife just like a joke,  
and later they only covered the face with rags.

People wept less then, they forgot more easily.  
You pulled the pictures inside your head and how

did you ever know what a weight they would make  
in ours? You wanted to let us know we didn't

need to fear you, but we did, and we did until  
we became the children of the dust-bowl fields

you strove to bury, only now you stop and wonder  
at the queer joy that lay inside them, what you

never noticed, because you were so hellbent  
on any escape. What if instead you had sat down

beside that long warped fence, picked  
the flowers that grew there – the fringed lupine,

the penstemon, the monkey flower, scattering them  
around to show what gentleness you hid inside.

## Bourbon

Not a song, but a stutter,  
where he stumbles over the threshold,  
arms akimbo, conducting  
imaginary orchestras – flamingos, peacocks,  
the girls from Saint Louis in their heavy beaded dresses.  
When was the last good Cadillac,  
red leaf in the woods that curled tenderly?  
A silence in the rooms,  
the golden smell snakes through  
where the father hides the bottles among the Chlorox and Comet,  
among the handkerchiefs,  
and the stacks of Saturday Evening Post.  
Where the father drives to the train tracks  
and stops and waits, because in the blur of tobacco field  
he believes he is chosen,  
until he isn't. What country song would you make of this?  
How would you play it backwards to give back the car, the man, the piano,  
'tea for two', 'don't explain',  
jazz notes silting the air, the year he tipped  
his first, frothed with sugar and mint.  
We won't deny for a moment how good it was  
to sip and feel the stays loosen,  
the edifice shiver – so much flooding him.  
We drive dirt roads, shot-gun houses, bald yards,  
and the clothes on the lines  
sway like the people we might have been.

## OLIVIA BARDO

### Diversion

Your bones eyed me  
As we listened to songs  
On the rain  
And you handed me honeysuckle  
That tasted like your age.

Like sunlight.  
I think this is the most remarkable  
Part, the reluctance to recall  
The dimmest  
Of circumstances.

Firmly as rain.

## SETH GRINDSTAFF

### Uncle Arnold's Ghost

Daddy takes Aunt Elsie dinner plates  
Sundays after the rest of the family's finished.  
No one expects her to return the dishes, even with  
heirlooms under the tin-foil, but he knows  
Mamaw needs reason to visit her sister-in-law  
through the week – neighbours since '63 when  
Pap sold them the land.

Being my great-aunt, she's never known  
my name, always confuses me with dad. Mostly  
she's known as a sort of loner. When I married  
on Pap's lawn, she watched from her kitchen  
window, and when Uncle Arnold was still alive,  
they attended different congregations, driving separate.

The family hid the car keys from her dementia  
a few years back, and the Chevy Lumina's been parked  
under the oak tree ever since – something for family  
to mow around. The tree's had a broke section dangling  
since that mid-summer storm, leaves losing their colour  
before the others, but hanging, expecting to turn anyhow  
in the fall.

Dad always brings two plates, one for Elsie, one  
for Arnold, and never forgets to ask how Arnold is,  
if he liked last week's meal. She says she never understood  
his dislike of meatloaf.

I think dad offers to walk the Sunday meals to play  
Arnold's Martin, with pickin' styles he'd taught dad  
as a boy. He asks her what songs Arnold likes playing,  
if the guitar needs tuned. She claps as he plays, smiles,  
thanks him again for stopping by, to come back soon  
and not wait all year, hanging onto the visit like green  
to summer foliage. He knows he will, to keep a ghost fed,  
to keep his uncle's guitar in tune.

## EMILY RICHES

### Three Glimpses of Andalusia

My brother is driving. The hills are dressed in delicate grasses, fading from green to mauve to black. The tallest building in every town we pass is the cathedral. There are endless olive groves, stunted and silvery, and shadows of clouds move over the land in swift currents. My brother takes the corners too fast on purpose. The road winds precariously into the mountains. Overhead, a huge brown condor slowly circles.

We follow a big black dog as it trots down the road: there's nowhere to overtake it. Un chien Andalusia, says my brother, and I laugh although I don't get it. We stop at a castle overlooking a lake and climb to the top. It's kind of like Australia, I say, trying not to be too poetic, it has the same kind of bigness and starkness. My brother just gives me a look.

We drive on. White mountains appear in the distance like an apparition. Snow! I exclaim, after a pause. Did you think they were clouds? my brother asks. We stop the car and I watch him fiddle with his camera. They're hard to photograph, he says after a few minutes. They don't show up properly. It's like trying to take a picture of the moon.

## MARK PUTZI

### Swedes

As a child I was a bit of a prude. Two fraternal twins up the block were allowed to play naked in their yard. They were six. I disapproved.

The boy's name was Rutger. Not really a boy's name is it, I thought. He said his parents copulated right in front of himself and his sister Justine. Disgusting.

Rutger wanted to play with my sister in his yard. I said, First come over this afternoon. There's something I want to show you first.

In the yard we had an old garden that had failed due to lack of sunlight. It was next to the garage and in front of the sandbox. I dug a deep pit there, about 3 by 3 by 3. I turned on the garden hose and placed it running at the edge of the hole. I meticulously mixed in the soil, turned the water off, and topped off my quagmire with a skin-coat of dry for looks. I tested it with the handle of my shovel. I was ready.

When Rutger came, I told him I'd buried a present for him. I asked him to kneel at the edge of the quagmire and reach in with his hands until he found it. I can't feel anything, he said. Go deeper, I said, deeper. Then he lost his balance. Help! he cried. He began to sink uncontrollably into the loose mud.

I watched him sink slowly, screaming as he descended. I waited until his nose was about an inch from the surface of the trap. Then I grabbed his belt at the small of his back. With all my strength, I yanked him out. He was filthy, his arms covered in mud to the shoulders, his shirt ruined. No, he didn't go naked into other people's yards.

You're not going to play with my sister in your yard, I said. If you want to play with her, you have to come here.

You're crazy! he screamed and ran home. He never played with my sister. On certain days I'd watch them, Rutger and Justine, playing in their yard, framed by trees behind them and tomato plants strung against a trestle. A low picket fence exposed only their heads and unclothed shoulders. It made me wonder about them. Perhaps for the first time, I was jealous.



## MICHAEL BUCKINGHAM GRAY

### Breaststroke

He runs along the sand in the middle of the pack, turns at the witch's hat and faces the water. Wades through the shallows and dives into an oncoming wave. The tide crashes over him, and he raises his head. The front of the group thrashes their arms, kick their legs and pull away. But he appears frozen.

A woman in a red swimsuit and swimming cap drops her binoculars and grabs a nearby kayak. Hauls it over the sand, jumps in and starts paddling. A wave knocks her off course, but she stabs at the surf with her paddle and rides the swell. And crashes down the other side.

The sun is high, and the water is clear. She glides up to him, and he kicks his legs and sweeps his arms. He is not frozen – only glacial. And she turns and heads back to the shore.

## STEPHEN PALING

### Fight

She walks to the stove and lights a burner, holding her hair back and lighting a cigarette. Afterward she stands by the window and blows smoke against the glass. I remain across the room, with my hands on the table top.

When the phone rings neither of us moves to answer it. The ringing remains in the air. The stairs in the hallway creak as a neighbour leaves for the day.

When she finishes the cigarette, she stubs it out among the others in the ashtray. I let my eyes fall back to the tabletop.

When she leaves I hear the click of the bolt against the doorframe.

I leave a few minutes after she does.

MARCIA L HURLLOW

Olfaction

I walk behind Lucky as he leaps  
through this Kansas field of timothy,  
ragweed, purple thistle, queen anne's lace,  
kicking up grasshoppers and pollen  
as clear in this thick air as his black spots.

The musty smell of hay takes me to  
Ohio, where I stand in tree shade  
and call 'hey boss' to the Jerseys grazing  
in stark sun. I wave a small branch of  
maple leaves over the barbed wire fence

and Junie, the one with the white star  
between her eyes, ambles over  
and curls her grey tongue around the limb,  
tugs it out of my hand and turns her back.

At eight I couldn't reach more branches  
and my grandparents wouldn't let me  
climb steps without holding the rail,  
let alone climb a tree, so I watch

her tail swat flies as she sways back  
to her cluster of sisters, angling  
into the centre as if they were her  
constellation, awaiting her return.

Now Lucky gallops toward me, his eyes  
sparking, his tongue trailing from his mouth  
like a bright red scarf. I want to think  
he is showing me his joy in this

July morning. He runs past me an acre,  
stops, lies down and rolls his broad shoulders  
in something he wants to remember,  
stands to shake off the dew and runs again.

## GILES GOODLAND

### The Gorge

Dad drove across a high bridge, the river  
below fanned over smooth rock.  
He stopped the car to consult the map  
so we climbed down, took off our hot shoes  
and started to paddle  
and refused to come when the adults called.  
They stepped down too,  
abandoned the moorland walk.  
There were rockpools, crayfish, and

Dad, you should have done that more:  
the memory – on the train from work –  
suddenly bubbles up after 50 years.

The cars passed above us, we had  
rounded potholes, splashed stone  
and the shadow still coming  
down on us from the long gorge.

## T LOVEDAY

### Milk and Hunee

I'm startin to git to the uver end of me haytred im backin is rooted  
trayla beepbeepbeep offlowdin that hideeus dingee into the water hoo  
for fuck sake paynts a thing that horred cullar cooldnt fink of a werss  
fuckin ideer. Yeh yeh well hes outta the car alreddy at it unravellin this  
and that mayks me swet just watchin the barsted aint cummin off light  
and hes tuggin hallin cersin warter lappin at is neees and thair I is dri  
futtet slumped nuzzlen a ciggarett ien im finkin he's the damdest fool  
I eva seen and certainly onlee won Im assoseeatin.

'Givus a hand, wood ya?' he's callin and I hardlee budg an inch fuck u  
mate do it yaself this wos ur fuckin ideer not myn downt even like fuckin  
fishin.

But is ies are hooks and Im stundd mullet so I haggel ova thair stingin  
with a hangova comin bluddy well howpin this morninll b ova bfor i finish  
blinkin god sayve the qeen I got no bluddy howp. 'Fuck wat wer u doin?  
Wat? Waytin for an inveetashon?'

Meen ignorraymus screwin up those prick ofa lips wonts an answer  
he aynt gettin undoenn me laysays and flingin me boots ova tha rim into  
tha tray trudgin into tha icy warter feelen lica бага diks.

So now wear at it pantin sqeelen steemin me lungs tha last thowssand  
ciggarets fuck me hes still got the fuckin fing tyied up real screw ball  
messin wif me a fist fulla chain round the towbar. Howd I fuckin miss it is  
aneewons gess best watch imself Ill choke him get the God rite out of his  
gowt lucky little bastard comin off so qick and the bowt goin owt swimmin.

I tern back me ciggaret gon soggy seein sum nosy mol at the start of  
the wharf neerby assessin oww entyre sitchuashon and I can tell by the  
way me old maytes lickin his see salt lips lookin back at er that if sheed  
offerd it up hed be down for a screw even tho shes twiiss his age and  
twiiss his wayt with a fass lica fuckin see monsta. Prick disgusts me wif  
his lust next min heel b grabbin rubbin yankin his cock thinkin hes got  
the see ta imself menacin goblen wif his tendollacut busted teef and face  
ya mumma coodnt love.

Cept this gurl. Jeez shit shes keen assa cocky inna cornfeeld waddlin  
ova ere not even a fiftee meeters makin me nuts pack up piss off meenwyle

old mate gleemin goin those rungs real slow cashual rope in his teef lyke the fucker finks hes Rambo.

'Where you off to?' she says comin in clowss twerlin a derty loc of her air btween er pidjon thumb and pistol finga holy mutha blottin out tha sun with her hed fuckin minds me of a sqished wartermelon.

On clowser inspectshon I reckon she cant be no owlda than thurty ruffly is age ten years me seenya but jeez if tha crack pipe aint dun her sum disirvace looks like half her fayce bout to drop off shes mutton chop me bulldogs got beta bits and it spends its day lickin its own arsshole.

'Just goin fora fish' he sais real keen real prowld like hes tawkin to Victoreea's Seecrat stoopid fucker thinkin hes a pimp wot ya think thats a lamborgeenee ya gon hitchin up thair.

'Nice nice' she sais asif shes got sumwhere else ta b but I ken tell no qeshgins sheed mutch ratha b onna back than goin thru this layzee flurtin ifuckin eechuther animals inna setta headlights shite.

Well hes clearly calqulatin that next delisheeus lien gonna seel the deel for reel or atleast damwelltry and corss I carnt be stuffed wif eever of em im goin for land larfin unda me breff thinkin how do the lownly sirvive.

'Well ya free layter on?'

Howlee shite! thats is move fucken Ive had tiem ta grab me boots tie me laces smoke harfa dart fink up ways to mayca deesent buck fuckin wayt harfa sencheree for that bullshit coulda had er and split allreddy ya slow little prick.

But ya no then agayn I got ta be understanding shoodnt tayk nuffin for granted Im reel luckee ya see big secsee cunt got tha moves the tawk the intelliguntss pussees like pennies always cumin and goin aint nuffin im eva reelly finkin of. Sum of us gotit others dont shooldnt hold it aygaysst aman.

'Yeh' she says still curlin her finga and thum fru that ratnesthivv up on er head wunda how long it tooka ta fuckit up that bad.

'Well ya want to come to my place for a cofee?' he says shit eeters grinnin aint it obvious to aneone wif ies eres eitha that thair aint nuffin less secsee than coffee that kinda blak bitta shit that I drink wif me nan wen shes ova fora visit not this fuckin joker no way no howw he finks were all wet dreamin ova a cuppa instent.

'Yeh shore why not. Wen will yous b back?'

Bawls deep! I carnt hardly beleeve it hoo is this woman weared she cum from hes fownnd is eqell she coodnt posseblee exist iem helloosenating

or sumfin my daygerus mined wants im happee fuckin no way it carnt b that eesy for im.

'I got church at nine' he says 'should be dun by 11. Pick ya up after that.'

Noww hes bringin god into tha eqashon... fuck... so clawss but hes settin yaself up for a failin coz thair aint nuffin secsee bout an angry big barstad lives up in da clouds finks he nos best prawn to singin chantin gospel spittin tellin longarss storees bout men billding bowts owt ta sayv all tha animals.

'What church do ya go to? Maybe I can cum wif.'

Huh *gett fuckeddd!* this is sum sorta trick ... decepshon the devel hoo fuckin payda ... throw piss in me eyes call me Elvis and Eev I must be arsleep ...

'Growndswell. Ya heard of it?'

He aint missa beat ...

'Yeh yeh' she says fuckin bloomin. 'Used to be a Hills girl meself but they aint got no church down ere. Havent been in a wyle asa result.'

'Cum wif me' he says Mr ministra of tha whole fuckin congregation. 'Ull be me gest.'

I watch em fru the windscreen rearview mirror thair swappin numbers prably hummin gears crunchin me slowly yankin that rooted trailer up out of the water thinkin I shood look into the church meself blessed be the pussy and all that shite God givin us the tools and the froowt to consoom shorely he aint against a hungree barstad.

Reckon all thisis tha only reeson that flurty gasbag bak thair gos ta church hes told me as such a few tiems on tha hunt he says for sum sayntly tang finkin thats whair all them happy famlees hang wyle hes piening ta be a farfer pirsonellee cooldnt fink of nuffin worse than havin kids sum straglee munchkin hangin off me angel sayin poppa this and poppa that in me hed its fuck off kid im doin shite.

On the radio is gospil junk even tho ive towld im a duzen bluddy tiems I cannot fuckin standit reeverend such and so arrguin its forgivness that deefinds us that is christjens not me tho im forgivin for shore hav ta be ta live wif this prick or mayb I aint got many opshons. Jus wayt ere a min till tha lovas are done wat the fucks tha time begs the qeshtin wat tha hell am I doin up how much shite can this fucker spill bout the power of the almytee at this ungodly ower hey won sec got me finkin might b sum good mateereeeal ere sum lieners I can yoos on the laydels. I thum the switch up

settlin in liete a dart got sum ingreedeents going carnt mayke no cents of it milk and hunee follow the leeder Im fuckin lost stuff this shite pussy aint everyfing its easy peesy anyways jus ya watch me Ill catch it god no god wateva. If ya ask me probs gods only in it ta watcha ya tayka dump whack his wayel siezed weezel as ya hop in tha shower finga is volcaino plugholel gettin at it wif ya missus that eegle ied snoop city siezed peeper.

I smack the bluddy switch move on wif me lief CD alreddy fuckin sabbath ion man classic nasty trak got me bobbin and smackin the dash dancin man dancin. Neck minet theres taptaptap look up fru the derty glass ugly pricks thair claspin a slip of papa shit eaters grin unkanny unreel bastards got god in his pearls. I slink down the window ein im up finkin jeez look at that fuckin handwritin musta dropped out in yeer too only dickbag I no hoo aint got a mobyl phone cordin to im carnt fuckin afford nun hahahahaha.

‘C wat i got?’

‘I c. I c.’

‘Whatcha fink?’

‘Fuckin milk and hunee man.’ Iem sweetly grinnin. ‘Milk and hunee.’

## TOBY DAVIDSON

### Gull

As a flock’s wide one formation,  
motion wiles itself from the one.  
For one more turn of the wind and sun,

we would pass your face through  
the peering froth, a falling dream  
a flying dream. Shake!

If you catch the ghosts of fish  
to pocket them in a higher stream,  
be careful what you wish.

## JOHN BARTLETT

### Under Construction

I plunged into the dark streets  
of bruised St Kilda  
in 1980  
skated over rooftops  
that year I left the castle

Stunned by the weight of longing  
I slept with men who seldom  
asked for names or passwords

I was never young visiting the bedrooms  
above the Bay for half-night stands  
where men from Sydney followed,  
bewitched by some mistaken  
shape of me

Nights I kept vigil  
on the Ferris wheel of missed encounters  
turning endlessly  
all those 'would-have-beens' & 'almosts'  
my centrifugal desires  
spinning towards the self  
I wished I'd been  
so many years before

### Misunderstanding Good Friday

That Good Friday  
we walked down the road  
not towards Golgotha  
but down McHenry street  
to Holy Redeemer church –  
no crowds baying for blood here  
just us and our cat  
that sometimes followed  
all the way to Mass,  
no Temple curtain rent in two,  
just a memory of incense,  
sombre saints veiled  
in purple and  
hot cross buns in the oven  
on returning home.

The nails through the hands  
& feet  
came later.

## ROSEMARY STEVENS

## Visitation

*Almost every element on earth is formed at the heart of a star.*

The doorbell cuts through my *Science Show* reverie – something about intergalactic explosions casting stardust to the cosmic winds; messengers from the gods.

*We're stardust. Literally.*

I head down the hall, ear still attuned.

*The impact was so powerful, it shook not only space but also time, sending gravitational waves through the fabric of the universe.*

Two shadows loom behind the frosted glass. Hesitant, I open up, and there they stand ... galactic gods in Star Wars headgear, space age shoes. It's Luke and Christopher in bike shorts and helmets! Luke from north of the river, who never drops in like this, unannounced, and Chris, from the USA on a flying visit to Australia to see his dad, recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. So, I didn't expect to see Chris again after yesterday, the two of us walking on water, or so it seemed, strolling the sandspit that cuts the Swan River. The tide lapped at our feet, nibbling at the limestone rocks he used to jump off as a lad. These rocks shaped in Aboriginal lore by Charnock Woman's footprints; the white strand where we stepped, her earthly hair. Her spirit hair is the Milky Way and the stars, her children held in its flow.

Here they stand, gods on the threshold, Christopher and Luke, trailing the ghosts of all our relatives' writ large in their bones, knees, knobbly like mine, narrow-shouldered, angular and thin. Luke wears my brother's shoulders, Chris smiles his uncle's smile. They loom out of the mist like an English mizzle, rare to a West Australian Spring, casting me into another time and place; my mother, in that intake of breath, ushering her sons – my brothers – in through the back door. Except they're *my* sons, and here we are in Perth on the other side of the globe.

'A puncture', says Chris as if he were still a boy, when normally around now I'm waiting on him to Skype from Seattle where it's still Friday, sixteen hours behind.

They heave their bikes through the kitchen, radio transmitting into empty space ... about the way the sun and every star emits spectral lines of

light, forming recognisable patterns, the individual fingerprints of every precious mineral that makes up our planet and the galaxies beyond ...

Then we're in the shed, the three of us imbibing fertiliser and oily rags, like I did as a child in my grandad's shed. This shed now – Dave's domain – scouring the shelves for a bike pump.

'I'll text Dave', I say.

In no time Dave is on the mobile talking Chris through the details. Back left-hand corner behind the lawnmower.

'Got it!'

They pump and patch, Luke hunkering down like his grandad at the wicket, my dad, waiting for a catch.

'Cup of tea?'

'Nah, we'll keep going.'

They mount their bikes, muscles taut, buttocks aloft like Grecian athletes, eyes fixed to the future as they lean into the bend and are gone.

## TONY BEYER

### Bait

a man slicing bait  
on a scored board

on the deck of a fishing boat  
afloat on its reflection

in the grubby Pymont Basin  
flips unwanted bits to the pelicans

moving their angular parts  
like transformer robots

too big to be comfortably birds  
too primitive of eye

and feather and pale facial skin  
to be anything else

## DAMEN O'BRIEN

### The Grass Shark

Nothing about her knitting the lawn  
with fresh rows of mow looks like  
the opening scene from Jaws where the

brittle teeth of the black deep reached  
up for the swimmer, to pull her down, naked and  
struggling, but I look for a grass shark

finning through the longer buffalo,  
parting the matt roots like a threat and  
shiver. What do I really fear for her?

I watch her from the bleached deck,  
I'm full of nameless things, old blood,  
the green rough of a Great White circling.

The afternoon drowns in its own heat,  
heavy-lidded and lazy. She turns down the last  
lane of her work and foreboding turns with her

one cut back but closing. There is nothing  
to fear but fear itself: a bolt from the blue,  
the shark striking from the wild blind.



## LUCY ZHANG

### Not the Same

He said I looked prettier whenever I go home,  
more carefree, less prickly,  
floating in a lull  
between freshly planted tomatoes and the sky  
where the only staring eyes are those of deer  
in search of unguarded vegetation.  
I must look hideous here,  
hair falling out with each comb, failing to lie flat even under a hat,  
eyelids scarred, the corners of my mouth pinched when smiling,  
words ready to lash out, silenced only by a watchful eye on the clock.  
Those days when it seems to take hours to tug on a pair of shoes,  
years to muster the courage to lock the door and jostle the handle,  
counting distractions like calories,  
I walk in a monster.

## MICHELLE BROOKS

### Everyone Loves to Pay Less!

Everything is discounted now,  
and I browse the almost empty  
shelves, as if some treasure might  
present itself. I pick up a generic  
black high heel and am filled  
with grief, as if someone I knew  
died instead of an old store in a strip  
mall, one I thought would be open  
forever if I cared to pay it a visit.  
I wonder what will happen to the shoes  
that don't sell, if someone will wear  
them as she wonders where to go  
for lunch or if it's time to leave  
for work, while the heartbreaking world  
dies and resurrects around her feet.

GERARD SARNAT

## Mid-Septuagenarian Involution

Although we like to think of ourselves  
as one still expanding universe,  
in reality, not renewing *New England  
Journal of Medicine* despite  
half century subscribing then deciding  
to sell Redondo beachfront  
vacation condo my wife and I so adore  
(particularly around sunset)  
because of bothersome quotidian hassles  
suggests horizons are rapidly  
shrinking, which perhaps will be enough  
motivation for us to consider  
hiring a therapist to continue end of life  
discussions more in earnest.

MARINA FEC

## Reclamation

All of Georgia is a ghost  
like the wooden colonials  
crumbling beneath their own weight  
empty and moaning  
or like the old women who stand in the grass  
and straighten their backs when we drive by  
pink bathrobes flapping like tattered rags  
faces long and tired.

We drove all day  
with the windows down  
our sweat gleaming in the relentless sun.  
You didn't say it  
but you thought it was beautiful  
when the tears rolled down my cheeks  
when I screamed  
voice cracking  
getting dragged away by the wind.

We stopped to sleep  
and you touched me in the dark  
so that you wouldn't have to look at my face.  
I mistook your whispering for the ruffle of sheets  
and in the morning I pretended it was a dream.

If I run away  
I will go to Georgia  
become a ghost and one of its secrets  
carried by the breeze like all the others  
who have screamed confessions  
at a land that wouldn't listen.

KM PRESTON

## West Blowering Resumption

It means to begin again after a pause  
but for the valley farmers it was final.  
Taming the snow floods meant they had to go.

They could stay, though, for one last season  
while camps and quarrying works began  
their work of bending the bush landscape,

and in country fashion they carried on  
with the needs of the immediate: plough  
seed into ground, pray like hell for rain.

Today the dam wall stands proud and strong  
while under the ripples and reflecting water lies  
a history not lost in time, but submerged.

JOEL ROBERT FERGUSON

## Historical Drama

*Water laps.*  
*Boat creaks.*  
*Footsteps rustle through leaves.*  
*Horn bellows.*  
*Rhythmic drumming.*

the mercy of the old stories  
recognising their conclusions  
as present consequences

*Festive chatter and laughter.*  
*Cutlery clatters.*  
*Doors burst open.*  
*Flames whoosh.*  
*Ominous howling.*  
*Footsteps scuff.*  
*Log clunks.*  
*Flames roar.*  
*Startled gasps.*  
*Relieved sigh.*

warm screens                      familiar folk  
the bog-standard glow of childhood  
dance of cathode shadows              den of memory  
before the responsibility to know begins

*Birds chirp.*  
*Laboured whispers.*  
*Wheezing.*  
*Men chatter and laugh.*  
*Drunken sighs.*  
*Horse whinnies nearby.*  
*Rain patters.*  
*Kissing, sighing with pleasure.*  
*Harness jingles, goats bleat.*

*Wagon rattles as it trundles away.*  
*Wailing. Gut-wrenching sobs.*

go back to whatever beginning  
I was small        the world was small with me  
after nature        before culpability  
no log cabin in a dark wood to revisit  
a golden age        an infantile disorder

*Loud thunderclap.*  
*Heartbeat pulses loudly.*  
*Men scream in agony.*  
*Fighting grunts.*  
*Warrior yells.*  
*Weapons clank.*  
*Gurgling grunt.*  
*Hard blow.*

today's nightmare made fodder  
tomorrow's period pieces  
boltholes for Pangloss        carnage naturalised  
made bearable inevitable        a good

*Grunts of effort.*  
*Flames crackle and roar.*  
*Ragged breathing.*  
*Blood splatters.*

TOM BLOCK

Raymond Carver

You know, goddamned Raymond Carver. Right? Son-of-a-bitch. Carves everything up into little pieces like one of those salads. You know what I mean? With the little pieces of tomatoes and cucumbers and parsley and goddam olive oil – the good olive oil from some island in Greece or whatever. The fucking Bulgarians call it Bulgarian salad and the Turks call it Turkish salad and the Israelis call it Israeli salad but no matter what it's the same fucking thing.

Just like Raymond Carver.

If he was here – if he wasn't such a flyaway pussy – I'd tell him to his face. With his fucking Teacher's whisky (not even a thing anymore, folks – look away) and his cigarettes (so yesterday – now it's all medical marijuana). The son-of-a-bitch with his convertible Fords and fishing trips trying to be all Hemingway.

But Hemingway knew how to fish, and this guy always loses the big trout.

At least, he claims it was so big, but what do I know? I never seen it. I don't.

Listen to me: IT DOES NOT EXCUSE IT. That's right: ALL CAPS. Because son-of-a-bitch Raymond Carver writing about life in half-bits like a piece of a relationship or love which rhymes with 'live' and he never even uses the word 'yearn'.

Never saw it in one of his stories.

Oh, the gin goes down smooth no matter how cheap the bottle comes and the girls is always angry – they angry for good reason and the kids are always offstage. Offstage, like the Voice of God in some downtown theatrical event. Offstage like forget about them.

As if we haven't all been kids and we never really outgrow that, anyway.

Don't tell me about Raymond Fucking Carver because I don't want to hear your excuses. I really don't.

Submerge. Right, 'Ray'? That's what you really want, isn't it? 'Submerge?' Like a submarine or an apple or a child. Because you were a child – were you the fucking offstage child?

Hah! You don't go in much for psychology, do you? 'Leave me alone.'  
That's the cry. That's what it is.

I see that.

---

He drank himself to death, Ray. Right to death. The Internet tells me  
that he died at 50, in 1988. 'He contributed to the revitalization of the  
American ...'

All that's left of the guy is a small paperback called *Where I'm Calling  
From*.

Where are you calling from, Ray? Huh?

## FEDERICO FEDERICI

### End-zone

17.

you are not here  
though the air-circulating lungs  
produce a sound, seem to take  
against appearance repetitions to life  
– it all lulled you to sleep, remote-controlled  
in the red camouflaged light of the sunsets

you do not see  
all comes like a noise from a mirror,  
movements without forces, air-swollen bags  
across heaps of cardboards, papers,  
ashes, ends in the registry room reports  
where the proper nouns survive  
the scissors, the knives

35.

come into this maze of beech and hazel  
where two most famous lovers kissed  
and streets run through a true drain of hell,  
now the white line erased, two lanes in one

the showers of rain wash down and fill  
pits and ruts, the shelters for dead grubs  
and leaves and all lilacs shiver, all crocuses  
drown, bluish shadows on the surface squat

cats from empty kitchens cry before dry plates  
they won't get up the trees tonight and scratch  
on barks and panes or pad along the blocks  
in search of lumps of food in open cans

the cars parked tick over long after dusk  
each one lined up in its own blue marked gap  
like fat spiders weaving slaver, safely stuck  
in dark roof holes where nothing else grows

two sexless statues on the churchyard spit  
on marble slabs by turns, a pair of passer-bys  
does not dare one kiss: not such uncommon  
worry to negotiate long terms with love

## FRANCES OLIVE

### All the Leavings

For the last time, I watch the geese  
arrive, sky white

digging in the roots  
of river grass. The shadow

is in my body;  
imprint

of heavy objects on carpet.  
This smell is home.

Lives can be carried  
in boxes,

small animals  
panicked on the back seat.

Here are  
all the leavings

of a life: child  
lover mother

you don't want to think of the ocean  
they are filling; don't want to go

down into that water  
so you play with your phone.

It won't grow back. This is grief.  
I watch the river, where

one goose opens  
her transient angels.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**Joshua Ackerman** aims in his writing to examine the deeply human emotions, insecurities, and mania that build a human life, exploring the ideas of self-knowledge, cynicism, love, and hope. He holds a BA in Latin American Literature and a BS in Molecular Biology, both from Yale University. He resides in San Francisco, California.

**Lucy Alexander** lives in Canberra. Currently she's participating in HardCopy 2019; being mentored by Isobelle Carmody for a collaborative digital project; and working on her poetry manuscript, *Strokes of Light*, as requested by Recent Work Press. Her poems and reviews have appeared in Australian literary journals.

**Amirah Al Wassif** is an Egyptian writer. Her published works are featured in many international literary and cultural magazines. She has published two books in English books and her work has been translated into Spanish, Arabic, Hindi and Kurdish.

**Karen Andrews** is an award-winning writer, author, editor, poet and publisher. Her work has appeared in publications throughout Australia. Her website is [www.karenandrews.com.au](http://www.karenandrews.com.au) and she can be found on Twitter and Instagram at @KarenAndrewsAU

**Olivia Bardo** is an English and Politics student at Messiah College. She is a seeker of social justice through arts and humanities, who hopes one day to pen a few notes in the world's narrative. You may find her caught up amid adventures in the streets of Oxford or New York, among blueberry fields in the Appalachians, perched in a bookstore, or in search of the meaning of life or best cup of coffee.

**John Bartlett** is the author of three novels, *Towards a Distant Sea*, *Estuary* and *Jack Ferryman: Reluctant Private Investigator*, as well as *All Mortal Flesh*, a collection of short stories and *A Tiny & Brilliant Light*, his published nonfiction. His poetry has been published in a number of Australian and overseas journals. In June 2019 Melbourne Poets Union published his Chapbook *The Arms of Men* as part of the Union Poet Series.

**Tony Beyer** has been teaching high school English part-time and working on new poems in Taranaki.

**Sheila Black** is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Iron, Ardent* (Educe Press). She is a co-editor of *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Spectacle*, *The New York Times* and other places. She currently divides her time between San Antonio, TX, and Washington, DC.

**Tom Block** is the author of five books, a playwright, 25+ year exhibiting visual artist and Founding Producer of New York City's International Human Rights Art Festival ([ihraf.org](http://ihraf.org)). He was the Founding Producer of the Amnesty International Human Rights Art Festival (2010), a Research Fellow at DePaul University (2010), LABA Fellow (NY, 2013-14), Hamiltonian Fellow (2008-09) and recipient of funding/support from more than a dozen foundations and organisations. He has spoken about his ideas throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Turkey and the Middle East. [tomblock.com](http://tomblock.com)

**Carl Boon** is the author of the full-length collection *Places & Names: Poems* (The Nasiona Press, 2019). His poems have appeared in many journals and magazines, including *Prairie Schooner*, *Posit*, and *Going Down Swinging*. He received his PhD in twentieth-century American Literature from Ohio University in 2007, and currently lives in Izmir, Turkey, where he teaches courses in American culture and literature at Dokuz Eylül University.

**Francesca Brady** is a currently studying a Bachelor of Arts (Professional Writing and Publishing) with Curtin University, WA. Her aim is to utilise over 30 years' experience working with horses (predominantly racing) to write narratives that explain the sport in an understandable and engaging manner; inhabiting the interface between the industry and the public, with a thorough authentic telling and emotional engagement.

**Michelle Brooks** has published a collection of poetry, *Make Yourself Small* (Backwaters Press), and a novella, *Dead Girl, Live Boy* (Storylandia

Press). Her poetry collection, *Pretty in A Hard Way*, will be published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. A native Texan, she has spent much of her adult life in Detroit.

**Michael Buckingham Gray** is from Cottesloe, Western Australia and a keen reader of *Meniscus*

**Clara Burghilea** is a Romanian-born poet. Recipient of the Robert Muroff Poetry Award, she got her MFA in Poetry from Adelphi University. Her poems and translations appeared in *Ambit*, *HeadStuff*, *Waxwing* and elsewhere. Her collection *The Flavor of The Other* is scheduled for publication in 2019 with Dos Madres Press.

**Nicole Butcher's** poetry, prose and music traverse the quotidian and the sublime. Her writing explores the ecstasy and tragedy of nature, intersectional feminism, and the raw edges of human psychology.

**Shaina Clingempeel** works as the Programs Manager and Poetry Teacher for Trilok School. She obtained her Poetry MFA student from Sarah Lawrence College in May 2019. She appreciates all that is feminist, speculative, and existential. Her poems can be found in *Perch Magazine*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, *The Westchester Review*, *The Heartland Review*, *Free State Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *The City Quill*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Fishfood Magazine*, and other places.

**Toby Coy** lives in Sydney, Australia. He likes to walk in the park and read books. He wants to write more so he can have a fulfilling life. In his spare time, he also programs computers.

**Toby Davidson** is a senior lecturer at Macquarie University, editor of *Francis Webb's Collected Poems* (UWA Publishing). His first collection, *Beast Language* (Five Islands Press), has been anthologised in *Contemporary Australian Poetry*, *The Fremantle Press Anthology of Western Australian Poetry*, *The Weekly Poem* and *Best Australian Poems*.

**Jane Downing** has had short stories published in journals around Australia and overseas, including in *Southerly*, *Westerly*, *Overland*, *TEXT*,

*The Big Issue*, *Griffith Review*, *Antipodes* (US), *Headland* (NZ), *Kunapipi* (Denmark), *Paris Transcontinental* (France), *Silverfish* (Malaysia), and previously in *Meniscus*. A collection of her poetry, *When Figs Fly*, is forthcoming with Close-Up Books in 2019. She can be found at [www.janedowning.wordpress.com](http://www.janedowning.wordpress.com)

**AR Dugan** is the author of the chapbook *Call/Response* (Finishing Line Press, 2019) and has an MFA in creative writing from Emerson College. He reads poetry for *Ploughshares*. His poetry can be seen or is forthcoming in a number of literary magazines; recently his poem 'Milk Thistle' was a finalist in *Sweet*. He taught high school English in southeastern Massachusetts for nine years. AR currently teaches literature and writing at Emerson College and Wheaton College. He lives in Boston.

**Marina Fec** is a poet studying at the University of Pittsburgh. She has won the school's Writer's Café Contest two years in a row, and when she's not writing poetry, she's climbing fake rocks (sometimes real rocks).

**Federico Federici** is a physicist, translator and writer. His works have appeared in *3:AM Magazine*, *Jahrbuch Der Lyrik 2019*, *Raum, Sand, Trafika Europe*, *Magma* and others. His books include *Requiem auf einer Stele* (2018) and *Liner notes for a Pithecanthropus Erectus sketchbook* (2018) with a foreword by SJ Fowler.

In his early 20s, **Joel Robert Ferguson** had the words 'BOOK PUNK' tattooed on his knuckles, a decision which he continues to stand by. His poetry has appeared in *The Columbia Review*, *Prairie Fire*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Grain*, *The Capilano Review*, and other publications. Originally from the Nova Scotian village of Bible Hill (seriously), he now divides his time between Winnipeg and Montreal, where he is pursuing a Masters in English Literature at Concordia University.

**Tom Franken** is a graduate of Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. He is the co-founder of *bone&marrow*, an upcoming online literary magazine. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming in *Penguin Review*, *Havik*, *Hare in Flight*, *The Magnolia Review*, *Dirty Girls Magazine*, *Volney Road Review*, *Transcend*, *Door is a Jar*, and *Oddville Press*.



**Giles Goodland** was born in Taunton, educated at the universities of Wales and California, took a DPhil at Oxford, and has published several books of poetry including *A Spy in the House of Years* (Leviathan, 2001), *Capital* (Salt, 2006), *Dumb Messengers* (Salt, 2012), and *The Masses* (Shearsman, 2018). He works in Oxford as a lexicographer, teaches evening classes on poetry for Oxford University's department of continuing education, and lives in West London.

**Seth Grindstaff** teaches high school creative writing classes in northeast Tennessee. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *The Dead Mule*, *Forbidden Peak Press*, *Edify Fiction*, *Transcend*, *Vita Brevis*, *Panoplyzine*, *Riza Press*, and has also been honoured at the John Fox Jr Literary Festival in VA. He spends his time alongside his sun-loving wife and foster children.

**Aaron Hand** is a writer of poetry and nonfiction currently living in Portland, Oregon. He has previously been published in *Faultline Journal*, *Hart House Review*, *Four Chambers Press*, and a handful of Xeroxed zines. In addition to his own creative writing pursuits, Aaron volunteers his time to Portland's Submission Reading Series.

**Marcia L Hurlow** received the 2018–2019 Al Smith Fellowship for poetry. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Chicago Review*, *Poetry East*, *Stand* and *Zone 3*, among others. She was the director of the creative writing program at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky, USA, for 36 years.

**Jill Jones** has published eleven books of poetry, and a number of chapbooks. Recent books include *Viva the Real* (UQP), *Brink* (Five Islands), and *The Beautiful Anxiety* (Puncher & Wattmann), which won the 2015 Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry. She is co-publisher, with Alison Flett, of Little Windows Press. She is a member of the JM Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice, University of Adelaide.

**Korbin Jones** graduated from Northwest Missouri State University and is currently pursuing his MFA in poetry at the University of Kansas. His translation of Pablo Luque Pinilla's poetry collection, *SFO: Pictures and Poetry about San Francisco*, was published by Tolsun Books

(2019). His debut collection of original poems, *songs for the long night*, was published by QueerMojo (2019), and a chapbook, *MOONSICK*, is forthcoming. He works as editor-in-chief and head designer for *Fearsome Critters: A Millennial Arts Journal*.

**Silja Kelleris** is a student of literature at Vrije University in Amsterdam, NL, with a passion for the written word. Her favourite authors, who serve as inspiration for her work, are Margaret Atwood, Pat Lowther, Erica Jong and Charles Bukowski. Silja uses writing as a way of reflecting on her own life experiences and writes extensively on issues revolving around mental health.

**Michael J Leach** is a Bendigo-based poet, statistician, and researcher who enjoys combining science with art. He works at Bendigo Health and undertakes research through Monash University. Michael's poems have appeared in scientific journals, including the *Medical Journal of Australia* and *The Mathematical Intelligencer*, as well as literary journals, including *Cordite* and *Meniscus*. His concrete poem 'The Plight of the Adélie Penguin' is part of the inaugural Antarctic Poetry Exhibition in Antarctica and New Zealand.

**T (Tim) Loveday** is a rural writer/poet/clown-lark. He fanboys for the slobber of dogs, the glass-cry of morning feathers on speeding windscreens, and the craftless piss of local sinkholes. His poetry/prose have appeared in *Adelaide Magazine*, *Quadrant*, *Text Journal*, *The Big Issue*, *Brain drip* and *Tharunka*, among others. He lives in Culburra beach, traditional land of the Jerringa people.

**Elena Mordovina** is a Ukrainian author best known for her novel *The White Balance*. Since 2003 she has been vice chief editor of *Kreschatik* international literary magazine. Her first book, *The Wax Dolls*, was published in Sankt-Petersburg in 2010. She is also the author of a children's fantasy novel series, which will soon be published in English as *Ghostarium*.

**Cameron Morse** lives in Blue Springs, Missouri. He was diagnosed with a glioblastoma in 2014. With a 14.6 month life expectancy, he entered the Creative Writing program at the University of Missouri, Kansas

City, and graduated with an MFA in 2018. His first collection, *Fall Risk*, won Glass Lyre Press's 2018 Best Book Award. His second, *Father Me Again*, is available from Spartan Press, and a chapbook, *Coming Home with Cancer*, is forthcoming in Blue Lyra Press's Delphi Poetry Series.

**Damen O'Brien** won the Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize and the New Guard Knightville Poetry Prize, both in 2018, and won or was a finalist in many others. In 2019, he won the Welsh International Poetry Prize and the WB Yeats Poetry Prize. Also in 2018, Damen was published in *Verity La*, *Mississippi Review*, *Stilts* and *StylusLit*.

**Frances Olive's** writing has appeared in many journals and anthologies in Australia, the US and the UK, including *Overland*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Award Winning Australian Writing* and *Contemporary Australian Feminist Poetry*. Her work has been recognised in a number of literary competitions including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, the Blake Poetry Prize, the Varuna Fellowship Program and the ASA Emerging Writers' Mentorship Program, and has been translated into Bengali.

**Stephen Paling** lives and writes in Ithaca, New York, USA. His work has appeared in a number of literary journals, including *The Piedmont Literary Review* and *Plains Poetry Journal*.

**KM (Kathy) Preston** has been writing poetry for over twenty years, with time off when life intervened. Winner of an ACT Writers Centre mentorship with Alan Gould and selected participant in the 2016 ACT Writers Centre Masterclass with Jen Webb, Kathy has been published in *Muse*, *Quadrant* and *Meniscus*.

**Mark Putzi** received an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee in 1990. He has published fiction and poetry in numerous small press magazines including *The Cape Rock*, *the Cream City Review*, *r.kv.r.y.* and *Queen Mob's Teahouse*. He lives in Milwaukee and works as a retail pharmacist.

**Emily Riches** is a writer from Mullumbimby, currently living in Sydney. Her work has been published, or is forthcoming in, *Meanjin*, *Southerly*, *Visible Ink*, *Verge*, *Verity La* and *Seizure Online*.

**Gerard Sarnat MD** is the author of four collections: *Homeless Chronicles: from Abraham to Burning Man* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), *17s* (2014), and *Melting the Ice King* (2016). His work has been widely published in magazines, including *New Ulster*, *Gargoyle*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Poetry Circle*, *Main Street Rag*, *New Delta Review*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *San Francisco Magazine*, and *The New York Times*.

**Jane Simpson** is a Christchurch-based poet, historian and tutor. She has taught social history and religious studies in universities in Australia and New Zealand. She has articles in international journals and chapters in books. Her second collection, *Tuning Wordsworth's Piano*, was published early in 2019 by Interactive Press, who also published *A world without maps* (2016), her first collection. 'Leaving curtains open' is from a recently completed manuscript, *Dress rehearsal for old age*.

**Elizabeth Smither's** latest collection of poetry, *Night Horse* (Auckland University Press, 2017) won the Ockham Poetry Award in 2018. She has just published her sixth novel, *Loving Sylvie* (Allen & Unwin, 2019).

**Rosemary Stevens** is an Australian writer and sessional lecturer in Creative and Professional Writing at Curtin University in Western Australia with a background in publishing and travel writing. She has had short fiction and nonfiction works published nationally and in SE Asia, including by *Westerly*, *Fremantle Press*, *Swamp* and *The Straits Times*.

**Emily Sun** is from Perth, Western Australia, and has been published in various journals and anthologies including *Text*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Westerly* and *Growing up Asian in Australia*. She has an MA in English and Creative Arts from Murdoch University.

**Liwa Sun** is a Chinese writer, poet, and a game-theorist-wannabe. She lets fiction contaminate her memory, in which she rejoices. She wants to write as beautifully as Jorge Luis Borges and Li-Young Lee.

**Julie Thorndyke** holds a Master of Creative Writing degree from the University of Sydney and has published literary work in many journals. Two collections of her tanka poetry have been published by Ginninderra Press. She is editor of *Eucalypt: a tanka journal*. Her picture book *Waiting for the Night* was published in 2018 and her novel *Mrs Rickaby's Lullaby* in 2019. Samples of her work may be read at <https://jthorndyke.wordpress.com/>.

**Leigh Tuckman** is an American-Australian poet returning to writing after a period of silence. Another lifetime ago, she was published in *Islet*, *the Spectral Visions Tarot Collection*, and the *University of North Carolina Alumni Magazine*. She has also been the featured poet at Shut the Folk Up!

**Tanya Vavilova** is an emerging writer who has published essays and short stories in *Meanjin*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Seizure*, the *Mascara Literary Review*, *Slow Canoe* and the *UTS Writers' Anthology*, among other places. Her short story 'Artichoke Hearts' won the Wollongong Writers Festival Short Story Prize in 2018. She was recently awarded the Writers NSW Varuna Fellowship for 2019 and will be a Bundanon Trust artist-in-residence later this year. Her debut collection of essays *We are Speaking in Code* is forthcoming from Brio in early 2020.

**Karen Whitelaw** has completed an MCA at the University of Newcastle. Her flash fiction and short stories have appeared in anthologies in Australia and USA, including *Newcastle Short Story Award*, *Award Winning Australian Writing*, *Mascara Literary Review*, and *F(r)iction literary journal*.

**Lucy Zhang** is a software engineer and holds a BS in electrical engineering and computer science. Her work has appeared in *Aphelion*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, and *the Monterey Poetry Review*. She enjoys watching anime, writing poetry and fiction, and sleeping in on weekends.



Ilja Jores  
Elizabeth Smithers  
Cameron Morse  
Tanya Vavilova  
T Lovelady  
Federico Federici