The Lampeter Review acknowledges with appreciation the continued support of Professor Medwin Hughes, Vice Chancellor of University of Wales, Trinity Saint David.

© Respective authors. All rights reserved. None of the material published here may be used elsewhere without the written permission of the author. You may print one copy of any material on this website for your own personal, non-commercial use.
CREATIVE WRITING UNDERGRADUATE COURSES AT TSD

Based on the Lampeter Campus, the Creative Writing BAs build on a fifteen year tradition of teaching Creative Writing at this location. The courses offer modules in all the creative genres and are underpinned by an element of English Literature.

MA CREATIVE WRITING & MA CREATIVE & SCRIPT WRITING

The Creative Writing Degree offers two pathways - one with scriptwriting, one without. It can be taken as a one year taught course with a further writing-up year, or part-time over four years. Modules are offered in all creative genres.

BA and MA courses are taught by a staff of prominent, internationally renowned writers and lecturers, including poets Menna Elfyn and Samantha Wynne-Rydderch, poet and playwright Dic Edwards and poet, author and critic, Jeni Williams.

PhD IN CREATIVE WRITING

Trinity St David’s Creative Writing PhD has built up a reputation as one of Wales’ most successful doctoral programmes. The course supervisors are all published creative writers with expertise in most areas of prose, poetry, fiction, children’s fiction, narrative non-fiction and script writing.

The PhD in Creative Writing combines a proposed manuscript (fiction, poems or playscript) with an element of supporting or contextualising research. The proposed manuscript will be volume length (the natural length of a book, whether poetry or story collection, novel, or playscript). The supporting research will be roughly 25% of the 100,000 word submission.

Applications to: d.edwards@tsd.uwtsd.ac.uk
Table of Contents

-7-
EDITORIAL / CARLY HOLMES

-10-
THREE POEMS / MARK TREDINNICK

-14-
ME AND HESTON WALK ALL NIGHT / K L PRICE

-19-
COPPEROPOLIS / MARTIN WILITTS

-21-
LET THE EARTH BE OPENED / MICHAEL BARTHOLOMEW-BIGGS

-22-
THE BUZZARD / CYNAN JONES

-28-
NIGHTLY / ZELDA CHAPPEL

-29-
I WANT THE SEA / LYDIA HOUNAT

-30-
STATES: A VIEW FROM THE LEFT COAST / TONY KENDREW
THREE POEMS / SUSAN RICHARDSON

MEAT / NIALL GRIFFITHS

BEIRUT / DIC EDWARDS

RElics / MICHAEL BENNETT

LOGISTICS / GARETH CULSHAW

FORAGE IN ME / STRIDER MARCUS JONES

SIX PHOTOS / LYNN SAVILLE

THREE POEMS / ADAM HOROVITZ

THE DAWN BEFORE THE WAKE: REMEMBERING MILKWOOD / JONATHAN HARRIES

IN SMALL STUDIO APARTMENTS / KEVIN TOSCA

NOT BY LANDMARKS BUT STREET NAMES / NEIL FULWOOD

WHITE NUDES / CAROL FARRELLY

AUTUMN INERT / REBECCA WILKS
-94-
ROCK DOVES / EMILY VANDERPLOEG

-95-
HALF / ALEKSANDRA (SENJA) ANDREJEVIC-BULLOCK

-104-
STONE HOUSE / MARJORIE LOTFI GILL

-106-
METROPOLIS / SUE BURGE

-107-
ODE TO SOMETHING / JOSEPH HUTCHISON

-109-
BEASTS / KATE HAMER

-116-
LANDFILL / MORGAN ROBERTS

-117-
THUNDER BOY / NILES REDDICK

-120-
TWO POEMS / BONNIE BOLLING

-123-
CONTRIBUTORS
Editorial

As a slow and sullen spring finally pressed itself across the flower beds in my garden, changing the shape and colour of my corner of the earth so that what was dull and flat became, almost between blinks, green and spiky, I read through submissions dealing with any number of untameable spaces, marvelling at the way individual writers brought their own imagination and interpretation to the task for issue 12 of TLR.

From lyrical nature writing to eco-politics, from animal shamanism to grief, death and passion, there was no creative space within the theme left untamed and unwritten. The landscape around us as well as the landscape within us: all were represented.

Of those writers invited to submit for this issue, we are thrilled to be publishing the poetry of Australia’s Mark Tredinnick, England’s Adam Horovitz and Wales’s Susan Richardson. Profound, beautifully rendered, and each its own rich example of the craft, these poems conjure a landscape resonant with longing, lust and loss. A landscape ancient, dark, deep with magic and definitely untameable.

The open submissions also provided us with a plentiful and varied seam of poems. The task of whittling them down to the twenty or so featured within these pages was a painful pleasure: so many included, so many more left out. The quality of writing submitted to TLR never fails to astound and humble me. Thank you to all who sent us work.

The poems included here range across, above and beneath the earth in both their geography and their narrative. Marjorie Lotfi Gill, Lydia Hounat and Strider Marcus Jones all offer poetry deeply connected to a landscape I recognise, each poem intensely imagistic and delicately preoccupied with belonging.
Emily Vanderploeg, Neil Fulwood and Michael Bartholomew-Biggs negotiate a world that has become less familiar - a decaying building home to rock doves, an urban bus journey, and a memory desecrated by a return to a place made alien by destruction; oozing rot. We include the link to the image by Anselm Kiefer that inspired Michael’s poem, and strongly recommend you take a look.

Zelda Chappel, Joseph Hutchison and Rebecca Wilks each contributed poems which step back from the physical spaces around us and focus more on those internal untameable spaces. Passion and absence dominate in these pieces.

Dic Edwards, Martin Willitts and Bonnie Bolling all deal with specific places or events in their poems. Startlingly different approaches from all three poets, but each poem a complex and powerful window into global conflict and cultural change.

Sue Burge, Gareth Culshaw and Morgan Roberts are the remaining three poets in this issue. Their poems all explore landscapes that are urban, claustrophobic and industrial. These scenes combine with an almost imperceptible thread of darkness, an awareness of the fragility of safety and the potential for threat.

Lynn Saville, a USA based photographer and artist, has provided the tremendous images for the journal’s centre spread. These, and the evocative cover image provided by Eleanor Bennett, give a richly visual montage of the many ways in which the issue theme has been (and can be) interpreted.

Representing the prose in TLR, our invited writers are Cynan Jones, Niall Griffiths and Kate Hamer: three Welsh/Wales-based writers with deservedly international reputations. On the whole there is a lot more ‘bite’ in the prose pieces published in this issue, interestingly. Maybe the more expansive parameters and word count encouraged a more unsettled response? These three stories, differing in theme as widely as they do, nevertheless share a thread of the supernatural, an animism that has, quite literally at times, teeth.

Both Michael Bennett’s and Carol Farrelly’s prose is preoccupied with a past that bleeds into the present; a haunting absence that laces each well-paced narrative with a quiet, poignant sense of loss. KL Price, in her tensely constructed and authentically rendered story of a homeless person, gives an imaginative view of the untameable spaces endured in a life lived on the street.
Aleksandra (Senja) Andrejevic-Bullock’s story evokes the domestic conflicts that arise around death, layering an atmosphere that smothers the narrator as she and her mother circle life-changing decisions in the days before her father’s funeral. In contrast, Kevin Tosca’s short prose piece is intriguingly dislocating. The two characters are travelling into an unknown space, and the reader travels with them, asking questions which will never be answered.

In Niles Reddick’s muscular, intense story, yet another interpretation of untameable spaces is portrayed. Against the backdrop of a very real conflict, he offers a snapshot of the aftermath of a bloody killing, and the reactions of those involved. Jonathan Harries, in his impressive debut play extract, offers a sharply observed scene with a backdrop that will also be familiar, though in a more literary sense.

And finally, Tony Kendrew, our ‘Man in the States’, gives us another absorbing essay, this time from a summer writing programme he attended in Colorado. Humorous and astute, his writing is always a much-appreciated part of our journal.

Many thanks to all our contributors and readers for making this issue possible. It’s been a privilege to act as editor for TLR once more.

Carly Holmes, Issue Editor
Half Moon

“Woman, strip me of my clothes and my doubts.
Undress me, undoubt me.”
—Eduardo Galeano, The Book of Embraces

For Anne

In the morning sky
A waning half moon
Sleeps off one late night
Too many, halfway down
The trail toward
Tomorrow. I held you
In trees and swayed us
Both sleepy in the wake
Of our love last night.
And drove off into exhaustion.
Ah, how our joy expends
Me. How it delves and unselves
Me, finds me out and gives
Me up entirely to you.
       I’ve stopped twice beside
The freeway to let sleep overtake me,
And still it is the predawn,
And it feels like I’ve been
Leaving you for weeks.
And the midlife moon
Limps indifferently westward,
A misdirected image
Of the truth,
As I drive south (each leaving
A bereaving of two halves
Of one soul). And the pants
You wore and then didn’t wear,
Come south with me in my pocket —
And I wish you were still in them,
And I still in you —
Toward a reckoning.

Half of my life
I’ve been afraid
Of my life — scared
I’d not be up
For it when the rest
Of it kicked in.
    But here it is now,
All of it at once,
You and I, two
Halves of one
Long clean shot at
Freedom.
    All fear in me
Fathomed and flown,
I am a man undressed,
His doubts put to rest,
A songbird uncaged,
By a woman.
Write the Wolf

Write because you got nothin’
To say and you might as well
Say it. You never know
Just who might be dying
For want of the wild sweet
Nothing he can hear
From no one else.

Write because there’s a wolf
In your mouth, and it wants
To run off with you. Let her out
Before she eats her way all the way
Down to your belly, where you keep
Everything you love. Free her
To find her mate; free her
To wake the world she hungers
For — to leave love like scat,
Like a manuscript of paw
Prints, everywhere she treads.

Write because there’s a wolf
Out there, and it’s tired and looking
For somewhere to stop. It’s been
Coming for years. Across deserts
It’s come, across rivers; across
Tundras and mountains, all along
An archipelago it came, where
It grew older than time among
Unforested trees. It brings lines
And chapters and sorrows in its belly
And hymns. It carries you in its mind.
Let your mouth be where it lies, then —
A den for songs the world wants
Sung, a refuge and a voice and a world.
A Manic Rain

The day has caught my weather: it’s made of all the autumns apricots recall; it’s made of the inner life of owls and the concentration of a monk and the headlong gait of a thorough-bred on the back straight, and its disposition is a whale’s, and it comes down hard on itself and slant, and it comes in fast and loose on an onshore gale, and it pulls up soft and short, and it eases back like a reader in a chair and the cat on her lap, and it runs down every window as if each window were a glass being blown, as if all that window framed were being made new.

Easter Saturday 2015, The Hill.
As soon as I turned the corner, I knew something wasn’t right. The people bunched together at the hostel entrance looked weird, jumpy under the orange street lamp. Not what Morris would’ve called ‘the usual argie bargie’, if he’d sodding well been there. But silent. Cigarette smoke and clouds of stinking breath and stinking heat hung around their heads. I couldn’t figure it out. Was it the cold?

And then I saw them. Slosh and Taffy, in the middle of it all, heads down, trying not to draw attention. They’ve been banned from every hostel in central London but it never stopped them trying. On a night like this the management might just let them in. Might have to.

We’d gone over to Camden for a bed. The Professor had been by, said it was going to be the coldest night so far, that we’d be - get this - ‘well advised to seek alternative arrangements’. The Professor cracks me up, what he comes out with. Calls me ‘old bean’. Little bloke, sharp as anything in his sandy coat and his hat. You’d never have him down as one of us unless you got close enough to catch a nose full of him. Clever too. He’ll tell anyone who’ll listen about the papers in his briefcase. His seventy-nine-stage plan for a new economic order. (I said, why seventy-nine and not eighty? Might as well round it up mate. But he stuck to his guns. And what do I know? Not even old enough to vote). The Professor had a job for years, had a house and everything. He could have had a wife, for all I know. Some things you don’t ask. First rule of the streets: don’t ask. Second rule: it’s hard, because it’s hard. Third rule... Third? You’re joking, aren’t you?

So we left the tunnel and went over to Camden for a bed. When I first got to London the tunnels weren’t so bad. In the autumn, the concrete sucks in the day’s heat and lets it out slowly over night. Warm concrete against your back. It’s
nice in the evening, when you’ve been about all day. Nicer at four in the morning when the hot day rolls over and the cold butts in.

The storage heaters in the Home, they were the same, same principle. Morris explained it to me, one of the nights when he was trying to bring me down - one of those long nights. The bricks get heated up and then let go of it, convection or thermal radiation or, I don’t know, can’t remember. Morris was good at that stuff. If I’d had him for school as well, like a teacher, not just a care worker, I might have done okay. But it was a job for him at the end of the day, just a job. That’s what the counsellor said, after the inquest.

So me and Heston went on over to Camden. Last time, one of the helpers took Heston for the night, so the management could let me in. I thought I could maybe pull it off for him again, five star accommodation in a stranger’s porch, leftovers, maybe his very own tin of dog food. He seemed to know it too, had a bit of a spring in his step, almost convinced me he wasn’t interested in the bins, wasn’t straining for every single bin we passed. I’ll forgive him the minor detour round the back of Cally Road Tesco. He’s not called Heston for nothing. After that baldy tv chef who cooks like a scientist. Morris and me never missed a show. Anyhow, this Heston also has a scientific approach to food. He can find nutrition in a fag packet. Being a dog, he can’t use a blow torch, but he’ll wolf down a combination of past-their-sell-by ready meals you’d never dream of. And never bring them up again. Gutting, seeing as how I can’t keep anything down.

Round the back of St Pancras, Mad Mary came at us like a bat out of the dark, skin and bones and those see-through blue eyes drinkers get. Before I could whistle, she had me in a headlock, nails in my scalp and she was on at me, ‘Oh my own, my baby, come back to me, cruel, cruel, your own mother.’ And Heston was barking, doing his manic pogo stick act around us and people were looking. So I started back, ‘You gave me away, how could you, how could you, my own mother?’ And it worked again. She let me go, stood there like she’d been hit over the head and let us get on. Team Heston three, Mad Mary zero.

We got off the High Street, zig-zagging through Miller Street, Arlington Road, Delancey Street, and I could almost taste the soup, had the heat and salt already on my tongue, could almost feel the hot water and soap on my hands, round my poor arse. And there they were. Slosh and Taffy.

What a bastard choice. That’s what Morris would say if he was there. But he wasn’t.

A night on the streets, long cold hell. Or a night in the hostel, hot food, hot water and knowing that those psychos are coming for you.

I don’t know why they’ve got it in for me. They were the first ones I met. So green, I didn’t spot they were junkies. All right, so their teeth were falling out
and they were a bit wired, but they seemed ok, gave me a bottle of orange squash they’d just jacked from some French school kids. But after a bit, you get it. The only thing that keeps them going is the next hit. They’d sell their mothers for gear.

The main problem is Heston. That old boy at Norwich Bus Station, he was bang on. His advice for anyone going up to London? Get a dog. Company, warmth and coinage. The punters can’t resist a mutt. So a good one’s worth a lot. I got Heston as soon as I got off the bus at Victoria. This bloke, John I think, took my sleeping bag in exchange. Poor sod, didn’t know what day it was, cried when he said goodbye.

Slosh and Taffy wanted Heston, soon as they set eyes on him. They knew they wouldn’t get him off me. But they never let up, offering me money, gear, food, even sex. Then, one day, me and Taffy had pulled a mattress out of a skip and dragged it into our favourite spot for a doze, and Heston was jerkily asleep, chasing rabbits. Before I knew it Slosh was there, a knife at my neck. He was shaking and the spit was bubbling at the corner of his yellow mouth and his pupils were massive in his big bony head on his sticky little body. He was going to kill me to get Heston. I could see the knife out of the corner of my eye and I was thinking, Morris, why did you leave me? And then I was thinking, at last, it’s over. And then, no. No, what about Heston? And then a bunch of lads came pushing and shoving into the alley for a piss and Slosh and Taffy scarpered. Me and Heston ran too, the other way.

And here we are again, running the other way, running away from the soup and water and bed and the steamy comfort of dirty, damp bodies drying out. London’s big, bigger than you could ever imagine. But it’s hard to hide. Me and Heston have got good at it, these weeks. Always take the long way round. Steer clear of the shelters and the soup kitchens. Talk to no-one. Slosh and Taffy work the trains out of Waterloo, so we stay up east. Just our luck we chose the same hostel. By the time we get to any of the others, they’ll be full.

But this night I’m scared. The cold is like an iron clamp. My coat never dried out from the rain and my joints feel massive, knobbly, my shoulder blades cold and sharp, like they’re going to sprout wings. That would be something, wouldn’t it, Heston? Flying? Because we’ve got to keep moving all night, never stop, if you stop, you die. First you hurt all over and then you get sleepy and then you die.

So we walk. It follows a pattern, I’ve noticed. I start off trying to map it out in my head, make a kind of plan of where we’ll go. Let’s go to Paddington, say, then Edgware Road, follow the Westway out to the Grove, work along the restaurants - they like a dog there - swing back down through Marylebone to Soho. I map it out, for the hell of it. Then I try being Heston for a bit. In my mind
he’s a cross between a geezer and a copper. He says things like ‘Orl righty then, what have we here?’ and ‘Phwoar, lamppost, let me atcha, let me Hoover you up wiv me nose’ and ‘Dum dee dum, just trotting over to the skip Why don’t I?’ It can go on for hours.

And later, when I can’t hold him off any longer, I think about Morris. Why did he do it? Why’d he top himself? The counsellor said it was nothing to do with me, like there was nothing I could have done to stop him. But I think back, over and over. All the grief I gave him, all the shouting, all the shitty things I said to him. The punches. How he sucked it all up. Took it away from me. Tried to explain everything. That can’t be good for you, can it? Taking it all on yourself. Taking on a fuck-up like me. He always said, no problem, mate. He always said, no problem, one day at a time, mate. Did I make him do it? Did he kill himself because?

And on and on, going on and on. Was it when I said? Was it when I did? And my head gets jammed and I can’t think and I can’t think and I can’t think and then it’s just me and Heston, walking, and heat from the ducts and the cold wind through the alleys and the light, dark, light, dark from the shops and the caffs and the wheeze of the buses and the growl of the taxis, walking and walking and the cold is killing my bones.

***

Can’t believe it’s morning. Fuck right off, day, back to where you came from. Someone’s gone and shoved grit in my eyes and then stitched my eyelids together with binder twine and a three-inch needle. And while they were at it they slammed my joints with polystyrene, banged tar into my blood, changed my bones for twigs, my muscles for cat gut. Through these slits-for-eyes I can see it. That sick yellow death light bending round the edges of the cardboard, bulging through the holes in the blanket over my head. It’s a half-light, won’t get any brighter than this down here.

I’d burrow deeper under the blankets, under the cardboard, excepting that I’m frozen stiff. Can’t bend, can’t flex. On the upside, can’t smell either, can’t smell these shitty rags. Heston pushes his nose into my balls. Thank god for you, Heston, my private central heating system.

My tongue’s swollen and coated with slime, my nose is crusty and I’m so thirsty. You get so thirsty when you know there’s nothing clean to drink. Psychosomatic. There, see, I do remember something. Morris reckoned the rashes and the panic attacks were psychosomatic. Didn’t mean they weren’t real, just that pills weren’t going to sort them out. One day at a time, he said. I’ve been okay, in the main, since I’ve been down here. Not even the backs of my ears and
behind my knees are bleeding now.

If I get my hands out my armpits and get a good hold of Heston, I stand a chance of coming back to life. Cold doesn’t touch him. Heston, you beast, how long’s it been? February now so it’s five months. Company, warmth and coinage. The punters can’t resist a mutt.

What’s that for? Don’t you growl at me, you. Come here, you know it’s not about the money. What’s up fella? Oh, what is up? Someone coming? Not again, please let them leave me alone, let them leave me. Push my face into Heston’s side, vibrating with his growl, stop breathing, play dead. A dead lump of nothing under a pile of rags and cardboard. Pass by, whoever you are, just pass by.

And they do. Nothing happens. Footsteps get louder, crack just by my temple, and then go off, away to the left. Really? Yes, really. Breathe. Things are looking up. Heston, you ugly bag of bones, today could be better.
Copperopolis
(The unofficial name of Swansea, Wales, because of its copper mines)

Martin Willitts

The day is being excavated
where no one walks the sand
to the dark caves of our hearts,
to strike rocks into catalysts of night-stars.

When he is done mining,
the morning does not wake, it coughs.
He heads to where no one sleeps,
no one wanders alone in the corridors.

Here the local copper is endless as pennies.
These excesses have made this town what it is today —
a place where no one wants to be
with copper smelts burning the night.

* 

They can try to fancy up Swansea,
but still this is dank-town at its worse —
common as laverbread, or cockles from the bay,
or salt-marsh lamb raised in the estuary.

What does he know of culture?
He knows the high-heat
of a cauldron wearing down metal
into thin copper.

He knows a place hotter than a million suns
or the anger of a man
taking more than he can,
where copper looks and smells like blood.

*
Copper is soft and malleable
as flesh turned into electrical conductivity.
He cannot interpret these messages,
having lost his faith during the great revival.

Copper has a reddish-orange color
and the same tolerance to heat as people do.
Sometimes, the copper turns aquamarine
because it is the byproduct of earth, sky, and stars.

Copper work is making him old before his time,
as blackened and agitated as a shadow moving.
This is hellish work. Someone has to do it
so the rich can settle into their villas.

They build there, away from this stench.
They do not have to see him
churning as a cauldron,
working hard as a heart.

*

He can see the limestone cliffs from his house,
the sand dunes and salt marches
with wading birds
looking for oysters on the Loughor estuary.

His wife is making laverbread out of seaweed,
the only thing they can afford.
He opens one of the cockles
and finds copper instead of a pearl.
Let the earth be opened

*Michael Bartholomew-Biggs*

From the painting *Aperiatur terra et germinet salvatorem* by Anselm Kiefer

When we tried returning
where we thought the trees should be
we found the earth was torn as if by claws:
the tracks of ranks of animals
all dragging prey still struggling; dismal
trails scratched out by what we’d wounded
crawling off to die.

Thin furrows, racing into narrow distance,
trapped a smell of rot the way a smear
of alien soil can cling to fingers.
Sky was cracked like sun-struck mud;
mud underfoot was sullen, sour and grey –
except for fragile flowers still emerging
from the ooze in front of us.

While our feeble foot-weight scarcely claimed
the ground we stood on, pale, appalled
and swaying, these small flowers
cut across those headlong grooves,
growling low fierce colours, to recover
foreground for us.

Or to give up
bravely what remained.
The Buzzard

*Cynan Jones*

We were driving along and I don’t know what. I just hit it. We were driving right into the sun and it was at that time of year when it stays relatively low in the sky for a while. One of the first warm days.

The light was doing that blinding thing through the new leaves just at that part of the road. I guess the bird came out of the trees. Maybe the light off my windscreen confused it. Made it blind for just that second. The thump of hitting it made a sick feeling in me right off. I couldn’t, no way, keep driving.

I cracked on the brake and turned the car round in a little junction and went back. I could see straight off it was a buzzard. It was there, just crouched down and beaten with its eye pointing at me wide open and I was sure that it looked at me – that it looked right at me.

I had my girl in the car and I said ‘You’ll have to drive’ and I got out, taking an old shirt I had in the back seat. The cars were going past really quick. We had the hazards on and she stayed in the car and every time something went past it swayed the car like we were a boat or something, in water.

By the time I was out of the car the buzzard was trying to get down the road like a hang-glider. It had its wings out flapping, but the back of it wouldn’t work. It looked pretty young. I knew about birds and it looked pretty young.

When we were turning round for it, every time a car passed we were thinking it was going to get hit, but at this point weirdly the road emptied up. That was weird, like seeing the bird in the eye had been.
I went after it with the shirt in my hands and got to it as it was going down the road, pulling with its wings.

I put the old shirt over it and picked it up and it was docile. I knew this was such a fierce bird, but it was just. I really don’t know. I don’t know how to say it.

I took it back to the car and put it with the shirt wrapped over it into a box. This car had come past and good for her the woman had slowed down with her hazards on and let me do my thing, and when I was carrying the buzzard she was saying about the RSPB but I knew that a vet or bird hospital would just put it down. That’s all they could do.

I put the bird in the box, all quiet, and carried it on my lap in the car. Charm drove home. I didn’t like that this beautiful fierce thing wasn’t doing anything. It was just docile, there in the box.

We got back to the farm and I looked at it properly. The dog came over and sniffed at the box and I just gave it a warning to steer clear. You could see the dog was pretty happy the sun was out like it was a great relief and it just went and found itself a spot.

I took the buzzard out of the box and unwrapped the shirt and looked over its joints and bones, but I couldn’t feel anything broke. Thing was, its legs were just useless. Hanging down. It didn’t have the broken bones to feel, not in its wings. I went over its ribs and its breastbone and they were clear and there were no sharp edges and the bird didn’t react with pain anywhere. But its legs were just hanging back there, straight out, like I’d seen pheasants’ legs and things that I’d hung up after hunting them; but there was no life in the legs – no grip, no flinch. Nothing when I touched them. So I went back over its backbone again but there was nothing sharp or out of place.

It had these beautiful big brown eyes like mine. That sounds weird to tell you; but they were clear, strong brown eyes like I have and are the only things I’m proud of, with the pupils dilating and pulsing in the middle. There was no fear in them.

Charm had got some gloves that I thought I would need. I used to keep a bird and I knew what could happen so I got her to fetch out the garden gloves she had of leather. But they were all dried up and hardened and I couldn’t have felt things with them anyway. It was like me and the bird were okay though, and I knew deeply that it wouldn’t bite me or go for me. I still had this weird thing that it was
looking at me. It was like it was saying just fix me, I’m ok. This is no big thing. It was like a car stuck in the mud just waiting for someone to push it back onto the track and get going.

I put the bird in this bigger box on the yard and went in and mixed up some sugar and water. Then I used this syringe I had from when I blocked up my ears and had to loosen up the wax with warm olive oil and I fed the bird with the mixture. It perked up. It put up its head and kept this watch on me, like you could imagine a chick would do with a parent bird. And I fed it a couple of mouthfuls of the sugary water, letting it swallow, hearing that, in this weird knowledgeable way that it was actually taking the stuff. But its feet were just not reacting. It was more awake but I knew that could just be the sugar.

I put it back in the box and took it upstairs to the bathroom, just out of the sun coming in. I wanted to see what would happen. I’d seen birds before, just in shock, that looked done but suddenly woke up and off they went.

I left the lid of the box open thinking even if it gets out it’s not such a thing to get it out of the bathroom and free, out through the skylight. I knew it wouldn’t though. I knew it was up. I knew it had had it.

I went back outside as if I was thinking it wouldn’t get better if I watched it. It was warm out. You get unused to the sun here, but it’s like your body remembers, as soon as you feel it. This first sunshine.

Sun has a sound that comes with it. Later on in the year it will be the sound of grass being cut and machines working, of heavier traffic on the coast road. It will come with a smell of gorse giving out a coconut scent. With a constantly electric sound of swallows. But not now. Now it’s this full rich quiet thing, the way Charm is when she’s just lying with me. That quiet insideness of when you take a drink and let the drink stay in your mouth a while. It’s as if everything is letting warmth come in to it.

I went back a bit later to see if the bird was walking round in the bottom of the box. Or lifting its wings. I kind of decided I would give it the night and inside I was secretly hoping it would die quietly in the box on its own, peaceful there, in the night.

When I went back a bit later again it had sicked up. There was this stinky wet pellet that had come out of it, and loads of water, probably the water I’d put in,
and it was soaked on its feathers. The water and sick messed it up a bit and took some of its dignity. Its eyes were so alive though. Kept looking right at me with this honest to God look like I thought it believed I could save it. I haven’t had that before with animals. Mainly they know when they’re beat.

I cleaned out the box and found that the pellet wasn’t a pellet just a weird grey mess like silt, and I put newspaper down in the box and put it, ticking to it like maybe it understood that, back into the box. It was such a fierce and beautiful thing. It was such a beautiful, alive and patient thing, with only that patience and possession a thing that could be fierce, was supposed to be fierce, can have. And I knew I couldn’t do it. I knew I couldn’t wait for it to die.

I had this thing when I took a deep breath. I really did that. It wasn’t a movie star thing. Everybody else was getting down into the garden for some outdoor supper. We’d decided because it was sunny to eat outside for the first time in the year.

The bird kept looking me in the eye. It wouldn’t take its eyes off me, like I don’t think it had since I went back for it and it had let me pick it up and not fought. I had stepped in once I went back and not let it get just run on by a truck or something, I had stepped in. And I really felt a sense of that. I knew what I had to do and it was a massive betrayal.

I went in and I took the keys and I unlocked the gun cabinet. I didn’t want to talk to anyone. I didn’t want to make it into something. They were all taking things down for the supper outside where we sit in the garden looking over the fields to the sea. I didn’t bring it up to them. I didn’t want them to be thinking of it and of how I would feel.

I was still doing this whole deep breath thing but was okay as I knew it was something I had to look in the eye like the buzzard had looked at me. I took out two cartridges and got the bird in the box and took it a little way out down the lane.

I asked myself very clearly that I wasn’t doing this because I couldn’t wait for it to die, like the blackbird, and the beaten up rook, and the owlet that had wrapped itself up in the nettles, all in my past. But I knew absolutely that it wasn’t that. I could. But I think I had gone back for it because of dignity and I knew from the blood in its mouth and the way of its beak open, and the coughed up mess of the smashed inside of its guts that it was busted inside and bleeding to death from within itself and that couldn’t be the way for it to die in the night, with its wide
eyes open and the breath coming from it in a weird way that sounded content, like the purr of a cat.

I put it down gentle in the sunshine on the grass and walked a bit away. Still it was looking at me, wouldn’t take its eyes off, but not with this look of fear, just of trust. I had in two cartridges and I went about ten feet away and I was worried because I’d never shot anything from close before nor in cold blood like this for whatever reason, not just like this with it in the grass and me. I was thinking of dignity. I was thinking of quickness. I knew once I had stepped in I had to do this and that this fell to me.

I could feel the sun on my neck and thought it would be the same thing the buzzard felt. That warm sun. I had this weird thing then. That the sun is just this fierce thing dying.

I took the step back and put up the gun and had this weird thing thinking this is okay, here, in the sun and the grass. When I raised the gun I couldn’t see it in the eye anymore. Then I pulled.

I’d put the buzzard down on its side so its breast was to me, so I knew I would hit in the important stuff. But I aimed for the head.

The bird shifted a jolt and there was this little smoke coming from it, and it did one horrible hunch after the shot that I thought I’d have to shoot it again.

But when I got up to it, ten foot to it, I picked it up, its beautiful wings, and there was no head. Its beak was there, but bottom and top totally split and separate, and the rest of the place was raw like minced pork. One loud bang.

I picked up the bird and couldn’t decide and first of all put the bird in the hedge for something to take. But that didn’t feel right and I couldn’t walk off. I had this weird thing for it. Like I had let it down.

I picked it back up and carried it back and put it back in the box, with the newspaper round it, wrapped up. It wasn’t anything anymore. Like a few pounds of something from a butcher. Everything had been in its eyes and they’d gone. I didn’t know what the hell to do with it. It just wasn’t anything. Everyone else was starting to eat supper and I had to go then and eat supper like that. I didn’t know how the hell to feel.
We had the old barbecue wheeled out with a little fire of sticks in it because it wasn’t so warm in the evening; there was just the sunlight. Things hadn’t warmed up yet. The sunlight was catching the metal lid of the barbecue, glaring off. I kept thinking of the bird being blinded by the sun off my windshield.

We sat there then for a long time, watching the sun go. Everyone else went in. Charm knew what I was feeling inside but that was it. She didn’t say too much. I’m not like that.

We sat there for a long time waiting to see the green flash. I didn’t see anything. I don’t know if it even really happens. Just a fierce thing dying.

This short story was written for the project Scritture Giovani 2008 promoted by Festivaletteratura, Mantova-Italy in co-operation with The Guardian Hay Festival (Hay-on-Wye, Wales) and Internationales Literaturfestival Berlin (Germany)
She longs to slip beneath the cloak of it, knows it’s only walls that keep us separate and blind. The moon insists on making a ghost to dance in panes, to sing just like she used to — silently, in competition with the gulls. She cannot stand the echoes, their hollowing of night, the piercing repetition. It’s the tiny backward glances that hurt most. She makes them ink, hopes for quills and cursive script, lines that cannot disappoint. She leaves white sheets to be ruffled with crests. Downstairs she abandons her lipstick ’til it swims an oil slick on black tea, makes fish scale eyes and swoons the curdling seas with their marble so that nothing dares to stir, not even the birds caught in the half-mooned dark between days.
I want the sea,
As harrowing and as black as you can make it,
As real as dust,
As magical as birth,
I want the sea.

I want it as heavy and as unsettling
As bodies go to coffins
By and by I want the sea
Like a father to his mother,
Like a sister to her brother,

I want the sea
As wrong as incest
As right as daylight
I want its movements as paint curls a canvas,
I want its swathes as wicked as drugs

I want its compass so much as directionless,
I want the sea to want me
As water wants to drown
As air wants to cut itself off,
I want the sea to fit me as

Love letters go to envelopes
Its wild hair and mangled arms
As liquid as a heart,
As free as the mind,
As alive as life.
States: a view from the left coast

Tony Kendrew

Notes from a Summer Writing Program

I'm suspicious of isms and ists. Activism and activists. Act, fine. Action, OK. Activist? Does that mean forever geared up to act at the slightest impulse or provocation?

I recently signed up for a summer writing program called The Activist Rhizome. How unlike me, I thought, and sat down and sent them my money. Action.

As I settled in at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, the question persisted: What the heck am I doing here? With expletives bouncing freely off the walls around me this soon became, What the fuck am I doing here? This thought usually surfaced in the Performing Arts Center (PAC - “pack”) during one of many daily presentations, Buddha to the right of me, Naropa to the left of me, lashed by strings of poetic staccato, often thinly disguised social commentary or political or personal grudge, interspersed with expletives and the whaa of an alto saxophone. I couldn’t always hear the words, for sometimes the poets stepped up to the line of mics unconcerned that what they were saying was drowned out by the poets on either side, reciting simultaneously.

The distance between heck and fuck is a measure of the distance between me and most of the students at the JKS Summer Writing Program. This is not a function of age. There were plenty of grey hairs up there on the stage strutting their stuff, expletting with the best of them.
So what the bleep am I doing here and what is this distance? The separation may be great, but the inhabitants of this world look a lot like me. In casual conversation they sound a lot like me too, discussing what we write, how we write, our love of our craft, our influences. And I share most of their concerns too, the topics often seen on posters and flyers on campus, read about in brochures and websites, and invoked on the PAC stage: global warming, corporate greed, racism, feminism, LGBTQIA issues, etc. Still, the enthusiasm that greets each performance, the volume proportional to the endorsement of the product rather than the quality of expression, leaves me doubting there is much common poetic ground between us, let alone space for lines in an ancient metre about the green hills of Wales, or hills of any colour, anywhere.

The exuberance is one sign of a thriving community of writers coupled to a very American attitude of positivity and encouragement, which results, among other things, in the very un-British phenomenon of unhesitating queues to ask questions of speakers and, once at the front of the queue, sophisticated mic awareness and huge stage confidence. The distance has more to do with my native reverence for the marriage of the sounds of words and the meanings of words, plus a belief in the power of beauty to communicate. Also something to do with the distance across the Atlantic Ocean, and dead poets.

Dead poets! Ah, yes! This brings to mind the most piquant moment of many PAC moments, when one bold guest lecturer confessed he didn’t read contemporary poets, and implied that the eruption of writers flowing from the spate of new creative writing programs was the scourge of poetry (my words). He dared to suggest we return to the study of dead poets.

Dead poets – not a phrase that went down too well at JKS despite the fact that most of its lineage exemplars are dead. Jack Kerouac is dead, Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski and William S. Burroughs and George Oppen and Charles Olson are dead. I think he meant more than just dead. He meant really dead. Long dead.

Jack Kerouac had only been gone five years when the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics was founded in 1974. Allen Ginsberg, John Cage, Diane di Prima and Anne Waldman were in at the beginning. They created a program of experimental writing and teaching linked to contemplative practice as part of the vision of Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche’s Naropa Institute. This year the indefatigable Anne Waldman celebrated her 41st year at the helm of the Summer Writing Program. The Institute is now the University.
With the radical voices of Allen Ginsberg and John Cage there at the start, it’s not surprising that On the Road, Howl and 4’33” are the lineage invoked, the works referred to, the air you breathe, the expression you aspire to emulate at JKS.

This emphasis on innovation distinguishes JKS from most creative writing programs. The focus on activism, diversity, multi-media collaboration and live performance puts it in a class of its own. An in-house letterpress workshop lets writers design and print their manuscripts exactly as they want them – and then there’s the archive; everything, everything, is recorded and made available to the public. The backlog is vast, but you can go to the website and hear Allen Ginsberg teaching a class in 1974.

I spent four weeks immersed in this hothouse of creativity in the JKS Summer Writing Program (SWP). I can’t imagine any other institution that could bring together as many established poets and performers and get them to teach a class, take part in panel discussions, give an afternoon lecture and an evening reading, and mingle with students over lunch for the length of a busy week. More than forty guest teachers and lecturers, three hundred students, about fifty poetry readings, not counting the Friday night students’ gig. Then there’s the morning sitting meditation which starts the day, the afternoon colloquium, a panel of students presenting papers and answering questions on a predetermined topic, the recording studio where you can record your poem or your song or your brilliant bird imitations, and the (nothing rejected) weekly magazine. There’s even a “walk you home” program for those leaving the campus late and concerned about walking home in the dark.

Students can come for one, two, three or four weeks, and choose one of ten teachers each week. Doesn’t it sound like the perfect structure for a summer writing program? Don’t you wish you’d been there? Or does that bit about space for the green hills of Wales make you hesitate?

I think most of the readers of TLR would feel as if they’d touched down on another planet. This has nothing to do with the huge image of Buddha that dominates PAC’s east wall, nothing to do with the extravagantly casual use of the f-word and the c-word. No prob. Nothing to do with the profusion of body piercing and tattoos. Awesome. Nothing to do with an endorsement of agitprop. It has something to do with the strange marriage of academic brilliance and disdain for meaning.
This came home to me when I heard Wittgenstein invoked twice on the same day, which struck me as ironic as Wittgenstein was one of the last century’s great dehypnotizers and would be working overtime sticking linguistic red flags into the concepts thrown around at the SWP. There was a reckless abuse of words and phrases with little concern for whether we need them, whether they clarify or enlighten, apparently no memory of repressive regimes famous for coining words to isolate, ridicule and penalize.

Back at PAC Anne Waldman is mustering her musicians for her reading: piano, crystal balls, bass, saxophone, drums. The drummer is experimental jazz musician Clark Coolidge. Anne is the dynamo that animates the SWP. Founder, impresario, hostess, fund raiser, director, maître d’, she greets students and faculty, introduces lecturers and performances, makes announcements - rarely out of sight. There is only one of her, and her presence and achievement is rightly praised and applauded daily. She is a much-honored poet, and I was lucky enough to score her for my class in Week 4.

Anne Waldman chooses to read from her work-in-progress with the provisional title Future Feminism. She is dressed in an ankle-length flowing black silk dress, matching her long black hair – offset by a white silk scarf. Striking, and impossible not to think witch. She places emphasis on certain words, or pauses on them or between them, her voice rising and falling. Sometimes she sings. She pumps the air with her fists. She mentions the kali yuga. The effect, on me at least, is wearisome. The histrionics of the performance seem unconnected to the words she is reading. It is spectacle. The emotion is theatrical, almost a parody of itself. I feel bombarded with words without narrative coherence. Sometimes so much declamation is going on I can’t hear them anyway. Only the performance, not the message, reaches across the footlights - or the performance is the message, not the meanings of the words, let alone the beauty of their sound and structure.

Is that perhaps the point? That our understanding of what she says is secondary to the fact that she is free to say it? And is that the point of the whole avant-garde poetry scene? – and why I part company with it?

Then there’s the business of the musical accompaniment. At a certain time in the last century, poets and jazz musicians who knew each other and had the same agenda got together to perform. It was an iconic time, but poetry and music do not always complement each other. Why should poetry be accompanied by music at all? Isn’t the music of language enough?
It would be absurd to base a rejection of sixty years of post-modernist poetry on the performance of one poet, but Anne Waldman is looked to as one of the spokespersons for the lineage, and one of a handful of poets keeping it alive. Many of the faculty that JKS draws from every summer for the SWP are in their 70s. There is a sense of a gathering of oldies, even of the last stand of a dying breed. And as J.D. McClatchy, editor of the *Yale Review*, said of Allen Ginsberg: “His work is finally a history of our era’s psyche, with all its contradictory urges.” Perhaps it is time to put that history behind us.

Jane Kramer, long-term European correspondent for The New Yorker, has written: “Ginsberg, like Whitman, adhered to an American brand of mysticism that was rooted in humanism and in a romantic and visionary ideal of harmony among men.” If Ginsberg had been born a few decades later he might have been open to Buddha’s more radical message of personal as opposed to social transformation, and more able to dump romantic notions of global harmony. The well-plugged JKS emphasis on fixing the world is likely to blind students to the possibility that their own inner turmoil might be a main cause of its problems. At Naropa contemplative practice in the Buddhist tradition is sold as a way to cultivate compassion for the world, not as a way to undo the turmoil. Compassion is one wing of the Buddhist approach, but why identify with any 1st or ism? Act, action, activist; each additional syllable takes us further from reality and increases the possibility of fanaticism. Perhaps youth, the most likely to embrace activism as a calling, whose brains are still unprogrammed to learn the consequences of action (the glee of marching off to war), find comfort in abstraction.

The revelation that poetry doesn’t have to consist of complete sentences (doesn’t even need verbs) - doesn’t have to be descriptive, doesn’t have to be narrative, doesn’t have to sound like your father let alone his father – that poetry can be relevant, political, social, streetwise, sexy, needs to come to every bored student at some point – and if JKS is doing that for a new generation of poets, great. It is certainly well aware of its role as the standard bearer of the avant-garde tradition.

Then, always lurking in my mind as the weeks passed was the suspicion of urban nepotism, the feeling that the SWP was a city-dwellers’ outing into the foothills of spirituality. I didn’t do a head count, but was struck by the number of faculty introduced as living in New York. The West Coast and places between were certainly represented, but a rural dweller like myself couldn’t help noticing how much of what was heard was driven by contemporary, often ephemeral, cultural issues, to the neglect of universal human themes more likely to grab the attention of people in Abiquiu or Aberystwyth.
The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics is a hugely stimulating forum, but poetry does not sit at the head of its table, and its poetics are not disembodied but decapitated. When poetry is just a means to a political end, activism, and frustration at the failure of activism, is what radical poets have in common; their poetry is secondary.
Fluke

tursiops truncatus

For the first half-hour, we synchronise our binos
and our grey mistakes when spying
rocks and wrack.

One hour in, we vow to veto tuna.
Our guide tries to toss doubts aside and strand
them on a spit,
yet spirits sag like jellyfish.

We hold our breath for eight minutes,
start to navigate the deck by clicks.
A woman who’s fixed
what we insist is joy on her lips
offers up the crystals
which cling to her neck and wrists.

Mid-trip. Still no sign. So our guide’s obliged
to summon Poseidon
but he comes without his ride,
while a guy who’s dived in Cairns and Thailand yawns,
shuts down half his brain,
and wakes to name his thumb after a thermos.

Then, just as our pod of time leaps by,
my eyes, I find, can breach the t-shirts, shorts,
the flops and flips, can see the part-
digested chips, the seeds of refund pleas,
the woman’s pique at her lack of healing.

A child, her stomach stuffed with bubble rings,
begins to cry.
Play

lamna nasus

love being on the cusp of tooth
  love quickswim and squidding
love egging little finniness –
  thousand egging

love best when frondling kelp
the overunder underover roll and oh
  the gilly tingle
not just skinridding  not just snailful
but wrap and tangle  tag and  tug
  all feely with it
love sillying the timbers
love snouting the floaters till they  pop

better than sexbite
better than flitting whiffs of sleep
and better than their onesome funning –
the rippy throat  the longlongstrung
then gutgash when they fin we  out
in thrash of unsea above
Unknown

oxynotus centrina

I trawl for facts
but just grab a few as bycatch
while preoccupied with cod.

I fish for myths but land just one –
if modern mariners,
under a mozzarella sun,
ever glimpse him, they flinch
and cross themselves,
tongues tangled
in overcooked strands of prayer.

I fashion a medieval map,
add him to the *Here Be’s* and sea pigs,
wrap leviathans round the ships
whose crews would construe
his commercial value.

I consider a petition to change
his name, to untame it with adjectives
that don’t just describe edge and surface
but reveal the beneath and inside.

I campaign for imagination conservation zones,
where minds can be rewilded,
soul hooked, then thrown back.
After an outdoor party on the shores of Llyn Syfydrin on the Pendam mountain three people - tired, sleep deprived, somewhat strung-out - are witness to a shape in the air, a shape that takes on a woman’s form. The female of the trio blogs and tweets about this apparition and, while some commentators guess at a Brocken Spectre, others see an event of a deeper spiritual significance and a pilgrimage, of sorts, begins to coalesce. 'Meat' is taken from an early point in the novel, when the first pilgrims are gathering at the lake. The novel is called Broken Ghost.

* * *

The slatey waters of Llyn Syfydrin give back no sun as yet, still rising as it is beyond the hump of Disgwylfa Fawr. Soon they will; when the lifting wisps of mist have been heat-dragged up high into airy blue, then the disc will be seen, a diluted twin slowly moving between the mirrored trees and rises of the hard actuality of the islet on which geese and moorhens nest. The dry sedge of that island and the crisped rye grass of the banks and shores: soon a single match could sweep all of this up into one abrupt rush of flame. A breath ruffles the lake’s surface, strokes out from it rolling foamy scrolls that tap at the pebble shore with the noise of a cat at a milkbowl. Used firepits blackly crater this shore and a log once used as a bench moves with the rising and sinking of the sun between desiccation and saturation, conditions of which the orange underlips of plate fungi have taken full and opportunistic advantage. Bogbean bows in the fleeting breeze, the ducking pinkness flashing its inside white. The wee black bombs of bilberries nod in the grasses, their waxy blooms sharing something secretive with the architects of the grey gossamer marquees beaded with dew. Minute Mulcibers squat under the leaves. Yarrow galaxies soothe and slowly, slowly help to heal the acidulated standing pools that remain after the conifers have been cropped, the regulated ranks of them, ordered and uniform and
unpromising like the politicians who compelled their planting, ripped from the ridges and rising sides about. A rowan tree observes and maybe the hiss of air in its ferny leaves is a comment. Ox-eye daisies blink up at the re-coming sun. Sand martins have returned to their warren in the powdery bank at the lake’s eastern end and are feeding now, their sickle wings skimming the water, gulping gnat and midge and joined by their cousins the swifts and the swallows, a tribe of screech and speed forever and deeply wild although their travels obey utterly dictates laid in their brains when the rock up here flowed and was still half-way soft. Tonight, when the sun will be sinking behind Craig-y-Pistyll into the sea at the valley’s end, Daubenton’s bats will join them, bulleting too, whitebreasted too, and chasing the same prey. Bird and mammal exulting both in flight and fright when the sun sets the sky scarlet and gold.

The Dolgamfa barrow, the Bwch a Llo stones, the mines on the valley floor. Nant yr Arian, named after the precious metal rootled from those mines. Transhumance and tumuli. Industry and burial and worship, all from five-fingered hands, have in parts of this high land shaped and stained it for millennia, mapping the movements of the night sky, other patterns brightly high. Stone cottages crumble into mounds of mouldy boulders. Tunnels capillary the hills. Dug-out dwellings marked by quartz, huge chunks of quartz. Silver and slate and the simple water that flows. Malleable land that endures yet as the people pass, always the people pass, their things seen off by the hives of hornets or the tunnellings of moles or even the thin marks that migrating birds make through the clouds. The oldest narratives made by them - by fur and feather and chitin. When these volcanoes were active and the sky was red-threaded black and worms writhed away from bigger worms and left ribbony traces in the rock that was then mud. Such stories up here. And such echoes. And with what do we decode and assess? All there is is flesh, in this. Infinity in the joints of a millipede’s legs. In the pulverized pearls on the wings of a moth. All the pallid empires of men . . . . In the husky mutes of the owls are tiny bones of paper. Skulls breakable in a breath. The merlin leaves small pancakes of shit on the blocks where he has butchered little birds and they resemble the pats of lichen yet in that lichen lies a world which also eats and ejects. Five-fingers formed some humps and tilted mighty stones erect and tamed the trees into uniform files but the fluttering and flicking and creeping and crawling that steadily makes them nothing but matter finds voice in the call of the vanishing corncrake and cuckoo and its only words are fuck you. Fuck you.

And still the people return. Visions shimmer in the crackling air. Several of them, this early morning, on the shores of the lake, some wearing slickers against what
rains may come and one wearing a clerical collar. Each isolate from the other as yet but they will talk and share, soon. Outliers from the hive online, these, meat emissaries from the virtual world. One of them studies a print-out, an OS map of this area, the lake and its surrounds. He points to a ridge and another follows his finger and speaks and these first words, although spoken low, do bounce back from the water and the encompassing hills:

- Do you think?

The figure with the map nods. Someone has lit a candle and balanced it on a rock. Some other is on his knees at the water’s edge and has genuflected and now appears to be praying. The two who have spoken now wordlessly begin to ascend the ridge and the man in the collar starts after them.

On the road leading up to this lake, the road that accesses the ridge hamlets of Llwyn Prysg and Penrhiwneydd and the low-lying village of Penrhyncoch and then joins with the larger roads that feed the larger towns nearby, a lone man trudges up. Pine woods on one side of him and a drop on the other, a steep drop down to the valley floor on which he can see the roundish scar of the ancient settlement of Craig-y-Pistyll. Above this stretch hills, green fading to distant blue, some of them stippled with the skinny white mills of windfarms, their blades front-crawling above the crests. He trudges, this man, because the road is steep and the morning is warm, but the set of his shoulders and head, the fullness of him, somehow puts an element of elegance into his step, so much so that a line of cyclists, all lycra and helmets and reflector shades, berth him widely as they pass, as if the strange stateliness of this lone man’s mien may be contagious. He stops and steps aside for them to freely pass. One of them thanks him. He walks on and where the road temporarily levels out he takes a left turn into the woods and down the valley side to Rhoserchan.
beirut

it’s the end of history I watch on my screen Arabia explode and i read about the spy kim philby about when he lived in Beirut on the Rue Kantari on the hilltop of Ras Beirut from where among the desecrated limestone balustrades and architraves bullet-holed from the civil war you can look out over St Georges Bay effervescent at night to the docks from where the freighter Dolmatova on another night in 63 with philby aboard disappeared into sea mist and rain its cargo like his crumbed cakes scattered dockside at the mouths of biting dogs the fired up religious poor preparing to rip each other apart in the hinterland the CIA ferreting for work on the Arab street where a bifurcated turbulent world found its crux and training ground philby cavalier about history like generations of the French prisoners of the sun drank and screwed along the waterfront where now the rich young Lebanese in their super yachts drink fifteen dollar mojitos shout insults to the waifs on the boardwalks and mooch at the Hilton where once in kims day stood the Lucullus where he would eat its famous bouillabaisse and now in the lobby journalists
and today's spies dirty from the misery swamps of Syria clique and flick looks at the Lebanese

girls in lycra shorts rollerblading the corniche past the rock hewn women in full hijab like ravens

on crags from where what comes would be the doom preached while on the higher floors

boozed Saudis unused to drink snore and the whores they've hired twiddle thumbs until the

hours done and the pimps in taxis take them to another oil-flush tourist from the Gulf

at my desk I unplot the CIA operatives of 1960 who tried to trick Kim with the earth scent of naked

girls in other rooms in the now gutted St Georges where shady johns exchanged bribes and

intense opportunists plotted coups cupping the times blood to order where Kim like moody actor
tongue flicked Sam Brewer's wife Eleanor with a hot earthscented compromise aware maybe from

Westminster of Milton's warning for the unloving seducer of having to grind in the mill of an
undelighted and servile copulation¹ but in the mornings unmoved by it his hot whiskey breath
incensing her sacred apex her coming a flood not so different from that wild winter night of the
day he left the city awash with the sea rising and thrashing the waterfront the town deserted
rubble and flotsam in the roadway from the ripped up paving stones and from the gut of that
night Kim's last words that he would meet her at the Balfour-Pauls at eight before melting like a

waning tide into the night melting breaths running through mazes/ through Philby's deceit can
we connect with the murderous diaspora from Hezbollah through the Alawites to the scarf
jihadi crusaders of the east those who would push the Alawite ground down
under the Ottoman

supplicants to the French to separate them from the Sunni ascendancy beyond Tartus and Beirut
and into the sea but not even a call on his vanity could seduce from kim in death emblem and
symbol of Cold War posturing deep cover cricketer deep covering the fast and loose among the

wives of his friends the truth about the Alawite woman he knew from Hama country who
smoked nargilah pipes and grew grass from her cunt where kim romped before
the writing told
him the world had shrunk and he must leave skin intact hand clutched around
loaded dice that

woman raped for centuries for being there/ and i wonder whether the later Downing Street
spinduped remote satrap of Iraq hadn’t in the absence of history clutched the same loaded dice
driven by clear spirit uncompromising convictions and cod virtue to miltons spur
of fame in a

sham of scorning delight and labouring days testament to his toilet tilled beliefs
and voltairian
posturing adding the insult of his continued living to the continuing holocaust his perfidious life
charged while philby at least retreated in dignity to melt into the mouth of rufina pukhova to fall

later from her memory like a rain of Russian ice

1 Milton – Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce
I was showing this couple round number fifteen, and I was hopeful this time. First off they liked the front garden, which has nice manicured shrubs and borders with those pink and purple flowers. It was a sunny day, which helped. There was a line of birds on the chimney and roof chattering and clicking and the couple smiled up at them. He was called Rich and she was Kendra or something stupid. No, it was Petra. She carried this big beige leather handbag and had on a perfume that made your eyes water. He had a sort of goofy look about him.

He didn't say much the whole time we were there – it was her that did the talking. She asked about the council tax, the energy rating. Then she wanted to know how long it'd been on the market for. Four months I said. Four months, that's all. She gave a small nod; he bent down to examine the skirting board. It's all new, I said. Nobody's lived here yet. I could see his ears going red. It's the newest house here, and the biggest. They wanted to make the garden bigger but there's a right-of-way past the trees and what can you do. But it's the end of the road, a lot of privacy, and the sycamore at the front will stop people turning in your drive.

They wander lazily around the living room looking at the ceiling and the lights. They run their hands over the granite tops in the kitchen and look at themselves in the taps. He turns the hot on. It won't be hot, I say. The boiler's off.

She opens the cupboard and frowns. There shouldn't be anything – it's all brand new, never been lived in. But when I look over her shoulder I see that something is in there – one of those flat irons you heat over a fire, must have been over a hundred years old.
It’s starting again. With some couples it does. There are some he just doesn’t like.

I tell her we found it in the garden, along with some old tiles, a cracked sink, blue and green bottles of all sizes. She looks at it for a moment and her husband comes over. He goes to pick it up, but I close the cupboard door and remind them that we’ve only got fifteen minutes.

Into the living room. Still smells of new paint. The boards were only polished again yesterday. As you can see, it’s very roomy, plenty of storage, faces south so there’s plenty of light.

They wander around, her heels clicking on the floor. Again, they look up at the lights, the ceiling. I think of the iron, how it was used, a certain freckled hand lifting it from a range. Past tenants of the house. Not this house, but the one that was here before, that was knocked down a couple of years ago to make way for the new. This whole street was full of boarded-up houses. Too leaky, too small, crumbling, subsiding, cracking, overgrowing. I’ve sold three on Cuckoo Place and never had any trouble. The others didn’t bring things in, they just lingered above the curtain rails and fireplace. There were sometimes old smells – fish, damp, sweat. You might hear a cough or a wheeze or a laugh. But they didn’t bring things in.

As we turn to leave the living room an iron coal scuttle forms in front of the fake hearth. I stand in front of it until they’re out of the door. I can feel an old heat rising up from the hearth.

Patches of old wallpaper spread in the darkest corners: dark green leaves, crimson and yellow flowers knitted together.

I follow them upstairs. It isn’t supposed to work like that; they’re supposed to follow me. It’s Petra, she’s pushy. She asks about prices nearby, whether they’re rising fast or not, what sort of people – families or young couples, or the retired. I keep hearing small whispers next to me, and can’t concentrate.

In the master bedroom there’s an old tarnished hand mirror on the windowsill. She goes to pick it up and looks at herself in it. I tell her we did find quite a few things in the garden actually, and we cleaned them up in here. Thought it would be nice to display them, to show people what it was like once upon a time. What was it like? Well there were lots of labourers’ cottages all crammed together. Nobody would live in them, there were too many problems. They were built for the old sugar factory.
But she’s already walking off to the middle room. Her husband smiles for her.

When we’re back downstairs they ask me to leave them alone for a moment. I’m glad; I don’t like either of them. I go into the kitchen and whisper *I don’t know what you’re up to. I don’t know whether you want them here or not, but I need a sale, I really do.* The sort of people who buy these houses aren’t interested in the past usually. These two aren’t, anyway. If he wants them to stay he’s wasting his time. If he’s trying to get them to leave it’s not working.

I think he was about to whisper back when they come into the kitchen and tell me they’ll have a serious think – they’ve got two more viewings next week, and then if they’re interested ...

Once they’ve gone the smells they didn’t notice start to fade. Earth, damp, coal, kindling. I close my eyes and breathe them in, and I remember what it was like here before they decided to knock everything down and build something for the commuters.

I go through the house collecting the scuttle, the mirror, the iron that my grandfather used even after the house was wired, and I look around to see if anything else was brought in.
Logistics

Gareth Culshaw

When we walked into the thing,
Once half was unloaded
The echo started, footsteps bounced
A sound that made me think I had
Football boots on and was walking
Across the car park years before.
Boxes stacked onto stillages, then
Taken away to be stacked again.
I remember running around pallets
With cling film. The tube creating a
Burn on my finger, like an oven burn;
Empty trucks sat coffin silent
Metal vessels full of stories
That lingered in the somehow;
In summer their doors were kept
Open, agape like crocodile mouths
So heat could swish around then escape
forage in me
amongst the dunes
still damp in sun and wind
as the tide retreats -
for driftwood
and strange shaped pebbles.
where have they been,
these abandoned voices,
with colours
and textures,
wild
and domestic,
moving
and rooted,
sooting and scenting the air -
being engraved
by beauties and conflicts,
uncovering how love is only rented
jumping ship
when it sights new land.
inner changes,
have not changed anything
out there;
and when what moved in
is all moved out,
we can sometimes sit
in this displaced time,
with drifting belongings
and pebbled thoughts,
aware of strangers
moving slower than the clouds
deliberately
doing the same.
Six images by
Lynn Saville

The Dark City photographs are a further exploration of Saville’s work on the urban landscape at dusk and dawn. In this series, she focuses on the evolution of empty spaces in and around New York and other American cities. Such transitional spaces — including parking lots, abused ecosystems like the Meadowlands, and vacant stores — reveal a disquieting beauty. They also reflect a natural cycle of decay and rebirth in urban ecology, as objects such as ladders and brooms signal that the work of renewal is under way. Dark City is ultimately a dynamic and ongoing dialogue between defined place and empty space.

_Dark City: Urban America at Night_, with an introduction by British writer Geoff Dyer, is a book of color photographs by Lynn Saville published by Damiani (Bologna, October 2015)
Girl on the Highline - New York, New York
Number 39 - New York, New York
Pepsi - Long Island City, New York
Space for Rent - New York, New York
Meadowlands - New Jersey
Tracks - New Jersey
Mountain Climbing
for John McClafferty

A clot of sun on the mountain
burns away mist. Claw trees
shake like fists below us.
We lose our pace,
slow-stagger in the shale, up
beyond the lace of ferns,
the bog’s pale pools,
tangle in a spool of salt-swept
wind. We are unwound
by mountain. Dreams spill
into the thinning air and sing us
upward in a fountain-rush.

The world spreads at our feet,
a great green bed, unmade.
Our shadows stretch
thin as stag’s antlers.
We are blown like rags
to the shelter of a cairn.
No birdsong now. The sea
has rushed it east and low
into the glacier gashes
where people inch like ants
below. Here, almost, could be snow.
The seasons shift in minutes

as we watch and eat.
There’s no defeat up here.
We are old as stone, young
as blades of grass.
The world could vanish
whilst we watch, could pass
and we would take no hurt.
The mountain magnifies us,
lifts skull away from brain.
In thin-aired heaven
we cut new paths against the grain.
The Dog Fox

i
After supper you brought the fox corpse
out of the woods to its new resting place.
We visited the old dog
dead in state within garage walls,
laid stiff in a winding sheet of plastic rubbish bag.

Mouth half open, a quarter
full of wizened teeth, gums blackened
and inflamed, he seemed to snarl
or maybe laugh at us three curious men
buttoned up against the cold.

He had been old, this canny dog,
had lasted far into brindled dotage
until he, we assume from ear-clots of blood,
the way his hind legs seemed to fold in
like wheels on an arriving plane,

slowed by old age and disease,
lost his last race with a car
and crawled into the woods to die.
And now you’ve brought him to the garage, pursued
by buzzards angry as boys deprived of sport.

They hawk and cough their fury at the night
as we three, wreathed in smoke,
discuss under artificial light
how best to honour him.
The field or the taxidermist’s knife?

ii
All night the arguments
of buzzards
keep me awake.

They bustle
like clumsy sentries
awaiting the ghost of Hamlet’s father

in the rafters of the trees
above the garage
where the body of the fox lies stiffening.
iii
Cost: prohibitive.
The weight
lies heavier than fox.

Knife, sawdust,
glassy eye and freight
are not for him.

There's always need
to bring back nature
and not avert one's sight

but not this time. He
made it to the valley.
He should stay.

iv
No trees today, just bones in fog.
A soup of mourning stills the breeze.

Only birdsong and the river’s breath
speak of life beyond these walls.

He's totem now, the dog fox, in the field where you left him.
The traceries of sweat, filaments of ink

that bonded to harsh and fading musk
as you let his body go

will be taken up with brindled flesh and fur
into the buzzard's beak, the crawling prayer of insects

and in the days to come as we watch flesh
fade into the field, shrivel like fungus

before first whisperings of snow,
he will become one with the valley, the river's bloody pulse,

    in crow communion.
On a Different Page

Someone broke the index
of our existence, stripped
away references for fire lighters,
buried the gutted books of life
in a pit beneath a motorway.

It was never clear who.
The world slipped slowly out of joint
around us. Bees ceased
singing their ancient winter song of warmth
when we passed the hives.

I learned to sympathise
with clip-winged queens
lost in the grass,
unable to lead the swarm,
stripped of leadership, survival, flight.

Nothing worked as it should;
trapped in a spiral of panic,
all our fragmented
moments span into the gutter
like autumn leaves.

We tried to pollinate
our memory with feathers
as the crop of thought
began to fail, but frost
ate the blossom on every tree.

Home sidled out of focus
so we travelled
from house to indistinct house,
trying keys in any door
that looked as if it might be ours.

The people we assumed
were listening within
made no noise,
however much we called
for their attention.
They’re on a different page you said
as rusting engines
cropped the dark turf
and turrets flew
out of the flesh of birds.

Finally everything we understood ceased moving.
You faded from reference
just as a hum of new music,
a binding heartbeat of numbers,
swelled beneath broken fragments of Tarmac.

In whispering fields,
the processes of growth
opened up a different book,
its index born of grass
and trees and wild wheat.

Only a few bent leaves
to mark my passage through this wilderness
should someone find them
who can understand. Nowhere else
a reference to the genus of man.
The Dawn before the Wake: Remembering Milkwood

Jonathan Harries

(Long pause and the sounds of clocks chiming)

LAST DEAD: And so the clocks of the town begin to whirr and chime, to the dismay of the few late children who could not conquer time. Soon the school is filled - all for the thespian few who could gracefully copy a cold and put on a fever – so registration, like the working day, commences. Shop radios and heaters - as if by some form of magic or habit - turn on and the signs, which had read ‘closed’, now beckon ‘open’.

(Sound of a heavy door opening)

Past the wilting lilies and the remains of long deceased Roman candles; past row upon row of toppled gravestones and jostling ewe, a pontiff yawns.

ALED-Y-GAIR: Crystallising is this cold, my Lord.

LAST DEAD: Aled-Y-Gair, the local vicar, opens the door to the church which sits windowless and derelict, like some weeping one-eyed dog on the mound.

ALED-Y-GAIR: And what a wonderful world I wake to. To the chorus of angels in Harlech, to the sight of smoke climbing over Devil’s Bridge and to this cold, this invigorating cold, which, like a loving hound, licks the soles of my feet. But I would be lying if I were to say that these dying eyes had not witnessed greater
miracles. For these ears still ring from Pavarotti in Llangollen; these hands still
tremble from the grip of Barry John. These memories, like the linen of Mrs
Olmarch, have been beat far too often against the same old Dulas stone.

If only your work was palpable; visible to the naked eye like breath in winter, for
this flock lack the patience for faith. And what am I to do? Turn to technology?
Tweet the word of God? I fear not. My voice grows weaker by the day, and the
word is not what it was. But patience is the word, my Lord. Patience is the word.

May Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

Bless this land that I look upon

For it is his own creation, this is our father’s land

So preserve it til the dragon breathes no fire

And the sea is one with the sand

LAST DEAD: Preparations to be made for the service, Aled-Y-Gair goes to his
work, leaving the town to its morning trade. The cafés were always busy come
the mornings, packed with pretentious students and gossiping locals; job-section
fondlers and youths.

Tipyn Bach was a small, modest café: home to a coven of retired men who only
went so as to air their citric views of the world. Having arrived one by one – a
routine mastered to almost militarised perfection – they sit and read the Purdan
Echo like witches round a cauldron.

FIRST WITCH: Beaten by the Aussies again.

SECOND WITCH: Nothing like they used to be.

THIRD WITCH: Nothing is.

SECOND WITCH: There’s a cube of beef in the sugar bowl.

FIRST WITCH: Dentures in the Demerara.

THIRD WITCH: Service... service...
SERVICE: What is it now?

FIRST WITCH: You’ve given us skimmed milk, love. Any chance of the good stuff?

THIRD WITCH: From the blue top bottle?

SERVICE: Anything else?

SECOND WITCH: There’s a block of beef in the white...

FOURTH WITCH: (Toothless speech) my teeth are in the brown.

(Collective laughter and slurping)

LAST DEAD: The laughter eventually stops, but only on their arrival at the obituaries. Treating it like some morbid school reunion, they read through it – name by name – and eulogize. A printed graveyard dedicated to vacated names and memory, each entry seems to sit right: all but one.

Like some maritime wreckage, it surfaces on the page without grace or explanation. It simply reads ‘Nigel Bywyd – 19’. No embellishment: just the true, harsh fact.

(The clacking of high heels on concrete)

LAST DEAD: Eyes averted, they catch the approaching spectacle of Mrs. 22, dressed to the nines in a linen dress which ripples through the wind as she walks. Hugging the hollow of her shoulder is a woollen coat: protection for the porcelain figure in the cold. Winking at the witches she knew too well were watching her, she struts past into the neighbouring boutique.

From the shrine dedicated to the fitting of tulle and taffeta she remembered, it had all changed. Everywhere she looks there are towering mannequins and provocative garments. With her fingers fluttering over the range of material like butterflies to a meadow, her mouth opens.

MRS. 22: How much are these?
LAST DEAD: She asks, raising a red lace bra into the ether. Coming out of the back-room of the shop, Anemone Price appears. She too wore black, but her most distinguishing feature was perhaps the only item she failed to wear. The wedding ring which Mrs. 22 had envied all but a few years ago had gone, and with it everything white and naïve.

ANEMONE PRICE: £19.50.


LAST DEAD: Although unacquainted with penury, Mrs. 22 had always been careful with money. With five kids in the house, there was normally as little to spend as there was room to manoeuvre.

MRS.22: Perhaps I'll just leave it for today.

ANEMONE PRICE: Such a shame. Red on such a pale complexion could only have worked a wonder in the bedroom.

LAST DEAD: Insulted by Anemone’s patter, Mrs. 22 walks from the store with the question...

MRS.22: Anything less steep?

LAST DEAD: Stranded on the tip of her tongue. She had wanted something exciting; something which could dismantle her sex-life and rebuild it as an act of passion rather than necessity. Ever since the fifth, they had both grown too tired for it. Like a photograph, any lust between them required darkness to develop. She would have done anything to have saved it. Everything but part with a purple note.

(Shop door rings)

LAST DEAD: The streets in the skies are busy today. Paperback pigeons, blackbirds and blue tits fly over-head, crying in the sky the message: ‘he is dead’. On the porch of the butcher shop, a dove sits, lost and bemused by an obvious separation. Below the dove, in the shop’s window, the butcher, Bevan Evans, stands. In an ivory-white overall, speckled with blood, Bevan would strike a monstrous figure from afar; like some unflinching killer on the loose or up for sale, but the reality could not be further from the truth.
Although capable of cutting into a cold pig or bovine, Bevan could never hurt a fly. Opposed to violence or killing, he was a gentle soul whose nose twitched like a hare when dividing a beast.

MRS. EVANS: Far too kind for a butcher... far too kind for me.

LAST DEAD: Mrs. Evans loved her husband, all the way down to the marrow, but he wasn't the man she dreamt of as a teen, dreaming wicked and dribbling on her pillow. She wanted a Brando, someone dangerous and unflinching who would bring her roses every hour, not pork loin every night.

She'd cheated on him from day-one, going through the town like a dose of lurgy, yet every night she returned to him with the perfume of someone else on her clothes and the condensation of lust in her eyes. He knew where she went those evenings, also the when and the who - even the why came as no surprise to the butcher. But it would always be the same, for love is an apple cleft in two: belonging to both body and to mind. And so rare and few the lovers who find the two entwined.

(Silence)

On the other side of the butcher’s pane, there is nothing. No movement, no custom, no life. The town is dying now; haunted by the whistling of a train long discontinued, its pulse, which once danced a samba, dies in a Viennese Waltz. Home to somnambulists and dreamers, the town is no stranger to all things celestial and to all things passed.

At the end of the High Street - past the florists and jewellers; newsagents and pub - Bill Yfed stands still and alone. Only marriage and unset concrete had ever stopped him in his tracks, so this in itself was a bizarre happening. Looking into the barren and boarded shop at the very end of the street, he sees all which had gone before: apparitions of deceased retailers and friends, dancing automata from the old toyshop and the till, the rickety old till which still remains. He takes a few steps back and watches the image wane from his mind, leaving nothing but his worn-out reflection in his field of vision. And on he walks...

(Pause)

LAST DEAD: Back to the terrace where it all began, the Bywyd family convene their preparations for the day ahead over breakfast. Plates dedicated to the
orchestral crackling of freshly cooked sausages and bacon; trays of fried eggs and polished racks of delicate toast, burnt to an art form, adorn the table. It is a feast for wedding day, not for a funeral. In the next few hours they would bury their son: say their last goodbyes to a boy who they’d not long greeted.
The dining room is dusty and dark, with hanging photo frames that become one with the walls: a dye to the Bywyd fabric.

ROSEMARY BYWYD: Strange things photographs. Like prisons.

LAST DEAD: Whispers Rosemary Bywyd, crying into her coffee cup; staring at the walls which, like the photographs, had imprisoned her. She strokes the coffee table as if it were the coffin: varnishing the mahogany and metal. The dust is thick and heavy, dancing with excitement at the opening of a door which has engraved on it the rule of the room: ‘For Death or Dignitaries’.

Facing the daylight which fractured and filled the room, Nana Bywyd looks on, almost anaesthetised. With her arms numb and unmoving, this custodian looks on to the walls, but not at any of the incarcerated figures in the photo frames. Hovering above the mantelpiece, a boxing glove clenched with mortal defiance. It was the glove of Johnny Owen, the ‘Merthyr Matchstick’: a boy who Nana knew from her youth in the south.

Johnny had died out in Los Angeles some years before in a fight with a Mexican. Not once had he kissed the canvas, not once in an entire career, but the very first would be his last. Separated from its twin, this glove was the very leather with which he dealt his final blows: the punches which didn’t hit hard enough. She won the glove in a bet with his trainer.

NANA BYWYD: Fly you for it.

LAST DEAD: She said clutching a coin with duplicate sides, wearing a smile common in those who carry no disfavour in bending the rules; bribing the bookie in the skies to ensure a suspension in the betting, for the Welsh prefer not to play for evens.

NANA BYWYD: Typical how it took a Mexican to put him on the ropes. Not an Englishman. Not an American, no, but a bloody Mexican. Something about us two see, fighters the both: second class and second rate.
LAST DEAD: Speaking through a pair of whiskery lips, which had always tickled her deceased grandson when she kissed him, she sinks, becoming one with the chair and the home.

(The whistling of the kettle)

LAST DEAD: Biting into his bacon, Bryn Bywyd stands, listening to the gossiping of a kettle.

BRYN BYWYD: Get up, one of you. The tea won’t make itself.

ROSEMARY BYWYD: If you haven’t noticed, Bryn Bywyd, your mother and I are in mourning. As should you be; if you’re that bloody thirsty, tilt the steel yourself.

BRYN BYWYD: Our son is dead, my love. No matter how much thinking; no matter how much missing we do now, nothing will change. We carry on, Rose. As we’ve always done.

ROSEMARY BYWYD: But why must we? Why must it be the same?

BRYN BYWYD: Because it is essential, that it comes as no surprise, that from this gloom we muster, and still like dust we rise.

LAST DEAD: Looking out onto the terrace, his eyes acclimatise to a strange and empty sight. A thick layer of fog has descended since he last glared at the window, but this is no ordinary fog. Like some godly organza this covers everything, blanketing the world until nothing is recognisable. But, as Bryn well knew, nothing is permanent. Soon after, the wedding veil of the world lifts, revealing faces all too familiar.

Outside, the town and its inhabitants wait. Eddie Puss, Danny Nefoedd, Bill Yfed, Mrs 22 and 3: all present and correct, the community stands as one, connected, if not by hand, by cause. A mass of floral wreaths and teary eyes, they gather around the dreaded hearse. In it lies the coffin, and on it reads the message ‘Cooper & Cwmhenddau: Death is Unrelenting and So Are We’.

BRYN BYWYD: Let us go then, you and I.

(Long pause and sound of door opening and slamming shut)
BRYN BYWYD: Cooper and Cwmhenddau, let your engine start. So they may bid farewell to friend and neighbour, and we an extension of our heart.

(Sound of engine, followed by wheels slowly edging on)

LAST DEAD: The procession moves, piercing the town’s silence with the sound of light footstep and the dark old hearse’s hum. Now, as the living walks with the dead, they pass nature. On the subsiding field of green which escorts them to the church, the local wildlife pay their lasts.

Gigantic anthracite horses approach the procession; craning over fern and fence, they bow to the memory of the boy who brought them barley every evening after school. In the sky, the birds have ceased to fly and have delayed their daily song; now they sit in the auditorium of an oak tree not far from the church, overseeing their arrival.

The engine halts.

(Sound of engine halting)

Aled-Y-Gair, stands at the door of the church, grateful to God for granting him his last miracle. Never had he seen the town in such number, such force and such unity. But this angers him.

ALED-Y-GAIR: Why under such circumstances, Lord?

LAST DEAD: He whispers to himself, looking at the distraught figure of Rosemary Bywyd, entranced by her boy in the box. Dragging the coffin from the boot of the hearse, the pallbearers, like Atlas, take her world on their shoulders, lifting him above the mass. She looks at the length of the coffin and considers how much he’d grown; never had he seemed so tall, so colossal.

They take him in.

Fitting as many to a pew as possible, the town take their seats. Some stand as the church reaches and surpasses capacity.

ANEMONE PRICE: A sad, sad day.

MRS.22: Tragic... simply tragic...
ANEMONE PRICE: Have you heard about Bethesda?

MRS.23: No...

ANEMONE PRICE: Well, Molly says that she found out about her and the husband...

MRS.22: And the baby.

ANEMONE PRICE: (Louder in reiteration) AND THE BABY.

MRS.23: And?

ANEMONE PRICE: And nothing. He agreed to the annex and all was forgiven.

MRS.22: I wouldn’t count on it. Hell hath no fury like a woman second-placed.

(Collective laughter)

LAST DEAD: The church, buried in talk, allows the echoing voices in the room to seep through the hole where the windowed figure of St David once stood. From his pulpit, Aled-Y-Gair looks on to his audience. Black as the heart of the colliery, the community are smart this morning.

ALED-Y-GAIR: SILENCE!

(Pause)

ALED-Y-GAIR: It is with tragic coincidence that, on a day when the first daffodils of spring arise from the earth, we must commit another to the ground from which they grow. Normally, seeing such a vast array of people in my small and humble church would pleasure me, as the rain pleases the soil, but not today. Today we remember...

(Sound of Aled-Y-Gair, continuing his speech in the background)

LAST DEAD: With his eyes transfixing on the coffin, Bryn Bywyd clutches the letter which Nigel had left the evening of his death. No suicidal soliloquy, but a simple farewell.
NIGEL BYWYD: Dear Mum and Dad...

LAST DEAD: It read.

NIGEL BYWYD: Dear Mum and Dad,

This is just to say I’ve gone. Not to another world but to another country. For two years I’ve felt like leaving, not because of you but the town. There’s nothing for me here except for you two, and for that reason alone, I’d love to stay, but, as dad would say, a family gives you everything except a weekly wage. I’ve got to go, you understand? The town is rotting, and so am I.

If only I could show you both what you mean to me and pay you back for all you’ve given me, but I can’t. Not now. Soon I will, mind. Soon I’ll be back with you, with more than just the clothes on my back but a life of my own. I’ll write of course, as frequently as my pen will allow but, for now at least, this is goodbye. Yours forever, Nigel.

P.S. Tell Nana that I’m sorry about the Capri, I would have taken something else but I knew, like her, it would never let me down. Tell her I love her, will you?

LAST DEAD: The paper, torn and wrinkled, was badly worn from the times they had tussled and tugged for its contents. Tear drops punctuated the work in strange and unnecessary places, but they could not care for this. This was it: his final address. They found it on the kitchen table, propped between the salt and pepper, enveloped with the message: ‘Thank You’. By the time they read it, it was too late.

When they found him, both Nigel and the car were on their side: a fact which jarred in the memory of his father. Night after night, Bryn would imagine the tumbling Capri; his son being thrown from side to side; and the consequent stillness. Biting into his sweat soaked pillow, he would wonder what had caused it; what had forced the crash. The town blamed a bobble, or a divot in the road; some accused the weather and others the Welsh Assembly.

BRYN BYWYD: Something moving must have made him swerve. Something living: something wild.

LAST DEAD: It might well have been something living which forced him from control. A ewe, a lamb, a fox: these creatures could have all been travelling the
road for, in Purdan, nature becomes one with the artificial in the same way as Nigel became one with his car.

In a collision of the hand, Rosemary grabs her simpatico man, returning him to the service. But so much time has passed since Bryn first entered his thoughts that the vicar has stopped all preaching and now instigates song.

Pumping octave and cadenza, organist, Ivor E. Morgan, provides the recessional hymn. Received with disinterest, the community lends no voice to his song. Leading his flock to the grave, Aled-Y-Gair reminisces.

ALED-Y-GAIR: Wales used to be such a songful nation.

LAST DEAD: Walking to the graveside, the congregation scatter and converse. In her tears, Nana Bywyd is consoled by the witches who speak softly in her ear.

FIRST WITCH: So sorry for your loss, Miss Bywyd.

SECOND WITCH: Impressive attendance, Miss Bywyd. Sell out.

NANA BYWYD: That I must admit. If truth be told, I’ve not seen anything quite like this for some time. Not since Johnny...

SECOND WITCH: Who?

FIRST WITCH: Johnny Owen, you fool, who else could she mean?

SECOND WITCH: The boxer?

FIRST WITCH: Yes, the boxer!

SECOND WITCH: I used to box back in the day, you know?

FIRST WITCH: You used to package sweets during the War. Don’t lie to the poor woman.

(Witches squabbling)

LAST DEAD: In the distance, you can hear the metronomic tutting of the local florists, Camellia and Carwyn Douglas.
CAMELLIA DOUGLAS: Shoddy by all accounts.

(Pause)

CARWYN DOUGLAS: Have you ever seen anything like it?

CAMELLIA DOUGLAS: I'd sooner put it down the toilet than put it on a grave.

CARWYN DOUGLAS: Shame.

LAST DEAD: The two hiss and sigh in harmony, for they, like the oasis which they handled every morning, are green.

CAMELLIA DOUGLAS: Those roses are discoloured.

CARWYN DOUGLAS: That wreath is all but dead.

CAMELLIA DOUGLAS: Who sells these frail-old flowers...

CARWYN DOUGLAS: Which, in a day, will shed?

LAST DEAD: Married, by work and paper, for twenty-five years, these two are quite the indomitable force. But this comes as no shock, for their daily life has, for over two decades, been dedicated to the art of selection and choice. Like some abstract bouquet, they could arrange and prolong their relationship; cut the dying or the withered aspects of their world and replace them with the new and the fitting.

ALED-Y-GAIR: Shhhhhhhhhhhhhht...

(Pause)

ALED-Y-GAIR: Let it begin.

(Silence)

LAST DEAD: Nigel's was a fine plot: built into the steep gradient of Vicarage Hill so as to provide his soul with the maximum celestial vision of the world which he left behind; of the town which he tried to escape. Neighbouring his eternal bed
is a large flat tombstone. For years Nigel had frequented this spot, drifting in
and out of a state of divine heavenliness. You see, it was on that very slab, where
he first sipped and quivered at the taste of shandy; where he first found a new
dimension of joy, hidden in the meeting of a young girl’s thighs.

(Pause)

LAST DEAD: With practised ease, the funeral boys lower him. Teardrops and soil
trickle onto the coffin. And it is done. In a dispersion of light and flesh, the town
and the sun scarper, leaving the family to continue their mourning in the dirt
and the dark.

ALED-Y-GAIR: Six feet deep and sinking, their loving boy is gone, but like the
deep, green rivers, his memory runs on.

(Sound of the town clocks chiming)

LAST DEAD: The innocence of morning is no longer, and the thin spring air,
once more, runs through the crippled trees and town. The wood, whose very bark
hides the moss filled marks and messages of secret lovers, creak and whisper
tales of a god-built concrete garden: a Calvary to lustful teens, wanton wives and
husbands; to death and elsewhere. And to the vicar, Aled-Y-Gair, who, with his
arms round a black clad bible, cradles the griefs of the ages. In his sightless eyes,
the reflection of a sermon on the sanctity of life; in his raging mind, the thought
of a never ending night-time, forever to be cast into the skies which each day
weep over the waking windswept town.
Molly woke, yawned, stretched, and asked her mate if they were there yet.

“Afraid I’m not sure where ‘there’ is,” Buck said, staring at the enormous black panorama through what they had agreed to call their windshield.

“I know, just teasing.”

“Ha ha,” he said. “Any food back there?”

“Let me check.”

Molly slid out of the copilot’s seat, turned, and took three steps to the back of the vessel her and her mate were hurtling through space in. God it was miniscule. Nothing—not friends, not family, and certainly not art—had prepared her for this. She opened the cabinet. Then she squatted and rummaged through the mini-fridge.

“Oats,” she said, “lots of them. And it looks like eight apples, four bananas, a couple kiwis, a scary amount of tomatoes, a gallon or so of rice milk, a large bag of mixed nuts, a couple bars of ninety-percent chocolate, and two bottles of beer. How long you think that’ll last us?”

“Do we have water?”

“Yep, we’ve got water.”
“I think we’ll be all right for a while,” Buck said. “Want to split a chocolate bar with me? Munch on those nuts?”

Molly brought the chocolate and nuts back to the front of what they had nicknamed The Cockpit. The Cockpit, however, wasn’t only the cockpit, it was their whole space-going vessel. They were being ironic. Irony helped to alleviate the doubt and fear.

“Mmm,” Buck said, “it’s tasty when you get a mouthful of nuts and then stuff a little chocolate in there. Mix it all up. Could I have a glass of water?”

“I just sat back down.”

“Sorry, brain malfunction, but I am steering here.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“No, not really.”

As Molly turned to get up again, she banged her knee against the underbelly of the console. “Ouch!” she said.

“You okay?”

“It’s so effing tiny.”

“I know it is,” Buck agreed.

She went to get the water and slyly drank a glass. Thanks to the salted nuts, she had also been thirsty, hadn’t wanted to admit it. She sat back down, gave her mate his water, and rubbed her knee. With one hand on the wheel, he leaned over and kissed the bruised spot.

“Better?”

“No.”

He leaned over again, kissed her knee more intensely, moved his lips slowly toward her stomach while exploring even higher territory with his hands until she laughed in that way he adored and told him to cut it out.
“Better now?”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, straightening up. “And thank you for not saying that word.”

“Fuck?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re welcome,” Molly said, “but it is miniscule in here.”

“I know.”

“It’s not how I thought it would be for us.”

“I know,” Buck repeated.

They drove along, lost in thought, Buck trying to imagine limitless possibility and variation, but, being unable to, switching to children, wondering if he could bring them into such a small-big universe, if Molly was the one, if she’d even consent to have them with him; Molly thinking about her knee, then bladder, thinking she wished she were thinking more profound thoughts, considering the metaphysical implications of their being where they were, for instance, of what it means for two people to try to exist together in and through space and time, to solve the mystery (or non-mystery) of the couple, couplehood, coupling, but she was an animal, and animals had bodies they needed to take care of.

“Bucky?”

“Yes?”

“I need to pee.”

“Then pee.”

“Yeah, but where?”
“Hmm, good point.” Buck turned his head. “Is that a bowl up there?”

“Looks like.”

“Use it.”

“You’re joking.”

“You can do it.”

“Maybe, but what if...”

“The deuce?” Buck said, understanding his mate.

“Uh huh.”

“We’ll find a place to stop. You’ll have your privacy.”

“What are we going to do with the bowl, you know, after?”

“Stow it in the fridge.”

“Ew.”

“Come on, it’s natural. We’ll dump it when we stop.”

“You think it’ll fit?”

“Go for it.”

Molly stood on her tiptoes. Though she was only five feet four inches tall, she reached the bowl and then positioned it beneath her. She dropped her pants and underpants to her ankles and told her mate not to watch.

“I’m not watching,” he said. He wasn’t, but he heard his mate’s stream hitting the bowl and was sure Molly’s legs and thighs were being splashed with ricochet, but she didn’t complain; she was a good mate. He heard the mini-fridge open and shut, and then Molly was standing next to his pilot’s chair.

“Mind if I steer awhile?” she asked.
He could hear the pride in her voice, and then he checked and saw it on her face. “Not at all,” he said, reaching out and rubbing the back of her leg.

They switched seats and Molly maybe steered, giving Buck an opportunity to nap, but just as he started to doze off, she shook his knee.

“Look!” she said.

“What?”

“There’s a rest stop up ahead.”

Buck blinked a few times and leaned forward. “You really gotta go?” he asked.

“The deuce? No.”

“Tired?”

“I feel okay,” Molly said.

Buck yawned. “Then let’s skip it. I’ve got a bad feeling about that place.”

“But I’ve heard good things.”

“Instinct,” Buck said, “is a matter of life and death. My father taught me that, or rather he told me that, because you can’t really be taught that, you have to—”

“Nap,” Molly ordered. “I’ll wake you when we get there.”

“There?”

“You know, where we’re going together.”

“When we get there do you think we’ll understand why we’ve been in here?”

“One more word and I’m gonna come over there and spank you.”

“Promise?”
“Sleep!” Molly commanded.

“Answer my question first.”

Nothing made sense—not really, not if you thought about it—yet it was wonderful and Molly couldn’t think of one place she’d rather be, one person she’d rather be with. Still, she wanted to answer honestly and realistically, even if such realism might hurt, even if it might not be necessary at all.

“I don’t think we’ll ever know anything,” she said, “I don’t think we can. I don’t even know if we’re supposed to. Voilà! Happy now?”

Buck sighed and smiled. “I love you,” he said.

“Sleep,” Molly said gently, “we’ll be there before you know it.”
The man on the bus is talking to himself. 
In a voice nuanced as a hold message, he names 
the streets of whatever map his mind is traversing –
*Curzon Street, Meadow Lane, Harrow Road.*

Odd route, leapfrogging city centre and river,
swerving round the football ground 
to creep through the suburbs; a mind-map 
folded like a paper plane 

or the schoolground origami 
of a fortune teller made from a sheet of A4, 
its pencilled predictions revealed to the count 
of a childish chant. Were these streets 

the geography of his rites of passage, 
streets he walked in flares and scuffed trainers 
or bundled into scarf and coat 
for that first father-son trip to Meadow Lane, 

his dad glaring at the blokes effing and blinding 
to the side and behind them, a grunted “mind the lad” 
and a rejoinder on the way back home
not to say words like that in front of Mam; 

or does he work these streets now, sweeping 
the fag ends and wrappers. Or does he name them 
as a wood carver, running his hand the length 
of the grain, would name pine and linden and grey ash;
name them as a man who has known his city on foot, who does not shirk from lowered car windows and requests for directions; who navigates not by landmarks but street names.
White Nudes

Carol Farrelly

Her bedroom walls live, with tangerine leaves and purple birds and a blue mermaid rising for air. Adriana prises her window open and the walls flutter and hum in the breeze. This last week, she has brought the outdoor world inside. In her mother’s absence, she has called back life to their home: fruits, stars, tongues of water and shingle. Amalfi lemons grow amongst trimmed thyme. It doesn’t matter that every ripple and berry in this room is made of paper, cut out and tacked to the walls. Each dimple of rind is as real as her own hands, as her little sister’s far away hands, as the life they once knew together in this house.

The main door downstairs opens. For a moment, tourists’ chatter flits up the staircase from the courtyard. ‘Edinburgh’s a fairy tale,’ they sing as their cameras cluck. ‘Sixteenth-century? So old?’ Adriana glances across at the clock she dusted this morning and the door slams shut on the tourists’ light-bulbed wonder. Her mum’s sandals scuff against the steps. Adriana moves towards the bedroom doorway: she will keep her mum out of her room today, even though such precaution may be unnecessary. Her mum probably wouldn’t notice the transformations she’s made. Her mum has become blind to facts. Their home is just scaffolding to her now, since Peter left – space broken down, waiting for better things.

Lena, of course, would notice, if she were here. After checking their mum wasn’t in hearing distance, she would whoop and spin across the room and stroke the mermaid’s blue tail and the anemone’s red tendrils.

‘Remember three summers ago – our trip to Amalfi?’ she would laugh. Adriana nods. ‘My nineteenth birthday.’

‘Wasn’t it the best?”
‘Paradise.’

‘I’ll be nineteen now soon.’

‘I know.’

‘I’ll make mine a Paradise too.’

The apartment’s front door clicks. Suitcase wheels trundle and sandals squeak upon the hallway tiles, still damp from Adriana’s rushed mopping an hour ago.

‘Hello?’ her mum calls. ‘Adriana?’

‘Here.’

Adriana looks behind and strokes a bird’s rounded head. In this room she’s no longer a series of idle poses, waiting for Lena to return or her mother to see again. Here, she can tack a lemon above the mantelpiece if she wishes or coil a snail’s blue shell above the bedpost or pin a lagoon to the farthest corner of the ceiling. Here, she has agency.

She turns and opens the door. Her mum stands beside her in the hallway, rustling bags. Adriana shuts her door.

‘Has anyone called?’

This is her mother’s first question and Adriana knows when she says ‘anyone’ she means Peter, not Lena.

‘No.’

Two years and her mum’s still waiting for Peter to explain why he left. All the promises of houses by the sea and growing old together. Lena, on the other hand, doesn’t need to explain why she ran a year later – the domino abandonment. Lena had her permission. Indifference is a permission of sorts. A gap year, Lena had said. ‘A chasm more like it,’ her mother said as soon as Lena had gone, knowing, feeling she would never return. Lena, she said, was one of those invisible people who stop being yours as soon as they close the door behind them. ‘Water in your net,’ she said. ‘Seawater. They leave just the smallest constellations on your net. Little glittering traces.’ Adriana wanted to tell her no, it was Peter who was
the salt clinging, barely there. No words as he closed the door. Just an ordinary goodbye in the morning that had turned, by evening, into a punch in the guts, a coward’s delay. And every day since, her mum adjusts and rearranges every object in the apartment. Everything since has to be perfect. She thinks if she can only find the perfect composition, he might return. No dust, only photographs that include him, bowls that spill his favourite fruits – white grape and pear and nectarine–, a cheeseboard of Comté and Fontina. It was he who had first shown them such feasts, when he showed them Amalfi, the lemons plump with sunlight, the whitewashed houses that fenced with sunlight, the sea teeming mermaids and mermen because its temperature and salt levels were just perfect, he said – the golden ratio.

‘Any letters?’ her mother asks, glancing at the closed bedroom door, the knobbled pane of glass.

‘A couple of charities, wanting donations.’

Her mother shrugs, turns to the hallway mirror and looks at the photograph still slotted into the frame — all four of them together, eating different colours of gelati on fountain steps, Peter and her mother sharing one drooling cone and Adriana and Lena on the step beneath, stealing spoonfuls from each other’s tubs.

‘We need charity ourselves.’ Her mum adjusts her hair even though she is still looking into the photograph.

‘Did you have a nice time at Aunt Paula’s?’ Adriana asks.

‘It was fine.’ She purses her lips. ‘I’ll make myself a coffee, shall I?’

‘Sorry, I’ll do it.’

‘No, it’s fine. You always make it too strong.’

Her mum’s sandals squeak down the hallway. She disappears into the kitchen.

Adriana snatches the photograph from the mirror, lifts the scissors from her skirt pocket and snarls Peter’s head between the blades. Her mum now shares a gelato with a faceless man – and it looks right. He was always insubstantial, halfway out the door. She throws the scrap of his face into the bin, as her mother should have done, long ago.
Her mum stares across the hallway, into the lounge. ‘Are those blinds open?’ Adriana blinks. She has forgotten the blinds. At home, no matter the season, her mother insists that the Venetian blinds are turned to an angle that fends off sunlight. She moves across the lounge to close them.

‘I wanted to let air in,’ she says, ‘help the floors dry.’

Her mother stares down at the streaked floor. ‘That wouldn’t be necessary, if you mopped properly in the first place.’

Adriana’s heel slides against the floor. The espresso-maker purrs from the kitchen.

Her mum tilts her head. ‘What’s that smell?’

‘Coffee?’

‘No.’

Adriana wishes she had mopped and sprayed air freshener. It’s the scent of wallpaper paste that lingers, perhaps. The half-full bucket still stands in the corner of her bedroom–unless it’s the Amalfi lemons her mum can smell. Or the leaves of thyme. Adriana half smiles. Jasmine and sea salt and thyme. Perhaps her mother can smell the new garden too.

‘Is it basil?’ Her mum glances back into the kitchen. The espresso gurgles. ‘Have you been cooking?’

‘No.’

She hasn’t cut out any basil leaves either.

Her mum looks down the hallway towards Adriana’s closed door.

‘Is there someone in there?’

‘No.’

‘Have you got a man in here?’
‘God’s sake’s, Mum!’

*And if I had,* she wants to shout. *And if I had – my room would be a fine place for lovers now.*

‘There’s something different.’ Her mother’s eyes fog.

The espresso continues to bubble.

‘Any phone calls?’

Adriana looks to the floor. ‘I already told you. No.’

‘What?’

‘No calls.’

Her mum shrugs and returns to the kitchen to rescue the flowering coffee.

‘Your Aunt Paula’s coming to live with us,’ she says.

‘What?’

‘It’s more economical. And it will be company for me — when you’re gone.’

Her mum is already seeing another cut-out space to rescue.

‘What do you mean? I’m not going anywhere.’

‘You will one day. She’s coming next week.’

‘Three women in one apartment? Are we setting up a nunnery?’ Adriana asks.

Her mum pours treacle-black espresso and stirs in a heaped teaspoon of sugar. ‘She can take Lena’s old room.’

That night, Adriana cuts out even more shapes — basil leaves, strawberries, a deck chair that looks like a limbed crescent moon and a naked woman diving. The floor is a scrapyard of rainbows. The walls are thick with iridescent leaves and wings and skin; the whitewash beneath, the negative space, creates yet more
leaves and wings. They rustle as she lies on the bed. She imagines herself moving amongst them, propelled by their energy, one small muscle in their murmuration. It’s the most marvellous feeling. Feathers flecked with salt rise and dip before her. The sun warms her bare shoulder blades. She’s Icarus with no frailty of paste. She wonders if her mum might hear too, the birds and fish moving as one fluttering shoal in the night. And Lena might hear, wherever she is. And this world that Adriana has made might call her sister back, where all her texts and emails have failed. This world might have strength enough.

The kitchen door opens. The fridge hums. Her mum’s up in the middle of the night making another of her milky drinks that never help her sleep.

Adriana stares a moment at the grape-green mermaid she has tucked in the far corner beneath a spray of willow leaves. It’s not, she thinks, the best place for her. She tiptoes across the room, lifts the mermaid and places her off-centre, amongst chestnut-brown leaves that move like algae. The clean white space around the mermaid turns to sun-spangled water.

The kitchen door closes. Her mum’s footsteps pass down the hall. She stops by Adriana’s door. Perhaps she smells the garden now, stronger than ever. Joy’s perfumes are only a movement away. Adriana hesitates. Her mum walks on.

When Adriana awakes in the morning, the walls are bare. A greying pockmarked canvas stares back at her. All her plants and feathers have vanished. The mermaid’s tail has gone. She blinks. Her throat dries. She has no veins in her. No thirst. Everything was there last night, alive. She knows it wasn’t a dream. The scents of lemon and basil linger. Someone has sucked up the world she made, as though it were dust.

She rubs her eyes and remembers the time her mum threw away all her and Lena’s jotters and paintings. ‘Just childish clutter,’ she said as she cleared another shelf for photographs of Peter. Lena cried for days afterwards. ‘All the gaps she talks about –’ Lena said. ‘It’s her who makes them.’

‘Mum!’ Adriana shouts from her bed.

Her mother doesn’t come. When she steps out of her bedroom, the apartment is empty. She searches the dustbins, but finds no traces of her paper world, not one curled scrap or glinting tack. It’s a mystery how her mother could have worked so silent in the night. A note lies on the kitchen table, next to the flattened cut-out of Peter’s head.
‘Gone to get some pillows for Paula.’

That evening, during dinner, neither of them speak of their mutual desecration. Adriana serves two glistening bowls of spaghetti al pomodoro, sprinkled with handfuls of ragged basil and lemon zest. Her mum talks of Paula and grinds rock salt onto her pasta. When the bowl is empty, just a lustre of tomato and oil, she grinds another constellation of salt and smiles at the ghost she’s made.

‘I’m glad Paula’s coming,’ she says. ‘I’ll need company when you leave. When are you leaving?’

That night, Adriana pulls out her last sheet of paper. She shapes two mermaids, one smaller than the other. After she fashions them each a healthy tail, she splits them with the scissors and trims them into limber legs. She tacks the two women to the open window’s frame. They flick in the breeze. One stretches back a damp white hand and beckons the other. The tacks fall and they rise together.

Adriana closes the main door and stares up at the purple sky. She sees the two women, whiter than gulls, fly across the courtyard roofs. She smiles. Her mobile pulses in her hand.
Autumn Inert, Lover
Revisited

Rebecca Wilks

As before, the westernmost country arched its back
And slid over and into the polished lips of winter;
Early night once again had its day, as did the spirit of mine -
Clothed against the torrent and the gale in a breath-collecting gravity,
Aching to the passing of strangers and the speech thick around the air.

Boxed in a hag’s sham marriage was I; casting around my eye.

Limp was the passion that I pulled along the pavement
My blood humming loudly to the limpid trail of a listless wisp;
But the body hits well against the blank discontent,
The featureless tangle of want and wont –
The throb rings the bell-walled chamber of the dulled gut,
And sings with a hoarse eroticism, an organ playing in a low key.

I walked deliberately through those hours with a happy weight
And exercised the tame lunacy of my brain-dwelling vowels;
I mulled over the lexicon and pulled at it in familiar samples
Of rough-toothed slate, omnipotent iron and sitting water,
Doom-keeping cloud and shocks of dust;
Salient isolation and sticking mud.

The crudely lithe hominid trod carefully
Around the shambling tunnels of his new and temporary home,
And I was a flying visit amongst the women of his day.
Grey mice copulated behind the leaking walls
And stole dropped almonds from the dusky floor.
He kept a scarlet armchair, with a broken seat,
    In a room curtained with tapestries,
    A bare room stripped of heat.

In flagging light and with the clasping of my short hair,
Human movement made a winding passage of me
    And wrung white tears from my hollow cheeks;
I, dozing on the whistling sheets beside the scratching mice
    Encroaching on the Continental visitor.

    I paced on in my sightless way until
    At the boggy height of my grinning melancholy,
    I was, at length, cut loose and bundled out.
    I walked home with a bag of my clothes,
    Counted the sores in my skull, buried a general friend.

Not a day later down the sickly avenue,
Sickly with blue illuminations and the shuddering poor,
I felt the old bone-possessing weave of a bronze pride return.
My layers were a whippet in the street-sweeping weather,
    My cheekbones frigid and skin eroded in the wind.

At once I woke to the clicking sheathes of time, and to the trilling valley of space.
I woke to the magnetic closeness of patrons in a bar, the unfurling
    Of cigarette smoke, winged coats opened in the wind,
    And the taut, flushed imbalance of my stimulated limbs;
    All free, all seeking - All close, but no further.

Aroused even to the shallow burn of missing,
I came into the season and found it with my stomach;
    The people no longer a throbbing current,
    But a perfect chain of pulsing wrists
And tightly pursing lips; detailed figures heaving
    Shadowed bicycles uphill, and trios
Of smirking vagrants, mocking the skittering habituated.

    My lust now was a many-pointed lust,
    With many scattered maps and rolling push-pins.
Suddenly crumpling, or moistening,
   Or blowing widely with pale vapour -
The mouths of strangers foretold in some folk manner to me,
   The peaks and troughs of my own miserable whim,
The mechanised yawn of coming trains,
   And the direction of the wind.
The rock doves are breeding on the old Elysium.
Hens playing hard to get,
hopping along the cracked balustrade,
looking over shoulders, aloof and eager,
at the cocks strutting on the chimney tops.

They peer down from their parliament
at the trainside brothel and the stumblers,
high on the High Street, oblivious to the wind,
ruffling feathers for quick coitus on the ledge.

This building is beautiful – look at her
regal windows, fine brickwork,
gold-etched marble over the chained and boarded door.
Tarted up for the bingo and used by the labour men,
now saplings grow from her cracked cornices
and green wire netting tries to keep the rock doves at bay.

But they are roosting, rutting, rooting into her
fine lines and softening stone.
They sleep soundly in her dormers,
and claim her highest peaks each hour,
knowing theirs is the best view of the sea.

Rock Doves

Emily Vanderploeg
It’s about seven o’clock in the evening on the day of the funeral, when Stefan corners me in the pantry and says: ‘So. What are we going to do about Vera?’

The winter sky is low and the ground is covered in ice.

The funeral is crowded with people like it’s a market day, everyone gathered to say goodbye to my father and find out more about how he died. I stand on the marble floor of the small chapel, surrounded by relatives. I watch the crowd outside form a procession for the long march towards the open grave. The chapel has no doors, offers no shelter.

When we return to the house, I lie down on the sofa, shivering. I want a cigarette but someone covers me with a blanket and says: ‘You’ve had such a shock. You should sleep now.’ And I do, in the middle of the room where people come and go, eat and drink and talk about my father as if he’s still around.

I am woken up by the sound of someone calling, Vera, Vera! My mother is sitting on the very edge of the sofa by my feet, but she doesn’t answer. I sit up, squinting, trying to adjust my eyes to the lights. For a moment I think I am still in my flat in England, then I remember where I am, and why. Outside it’s completely dark. The house is hot and stifling and I almost rip the blanket trying to free myself from its grip. I look at my mother, drugged up and silent, and decide not to disturb her.

‘What needs doing?’ I ask. My aunties bustle in and out of the kitchen, carrying trays with hot food. People are sitting on chairs around the edges of the room, talking in low tones of respect made louder by curiosity and a few impertinent jokes, as always. You cannot tell Serbs to stay serious. Life is too serious for that.
One of the women sends me to find some wine. I wonder what time everyone will finally leave. And how we will spend the night in the empty house, my mother and I, just the two of us.

In the pantry I move sacks of flour, winter stock of apples and potatoes, to get to the bottles behind. It’s an expensive business, burying someone. By the time you have fed the hordes, there is little left for a gravestone. But we will worry about that later.

As I bend over to reach the bottle, I hear the door open but I don’t look to see who it is. I don’t really care, about that or anything else. But then his voice makes me straighten up and turn around.

‘You did well today,’ Stefan says to me.

‘Did I?’ I say, eager to please him. He looks so much like my father that tears start to press urgently from behind my eyelids, but I blink them away.

‘You did cry though,’ he says. ‘Our father wouldn’t have wanted us to cry today. He would have wanted dignity. Restraint.’

‘It was the poem,’ I say. ‘The poem Mirko read. It finished me.’

‘Yesenin has that effect on people,’ says my brother. My half brother.

I show him the bottle. ‘They’re waiting for me. Did you want something from here?’

And that’s when he steps closer to me, looks me straight in the face and asks me the question.

#

The guests have gone.

‘Where do you want to sleep?’ my mother asks in an exhausted voice.

‘I’ll crash on the sofa, mum.’ My old bedroom has been turned into a make-shift store room, unheated and convenient for the keeping of extra cakes and meat which couldn’t fit into the pantry.
‘Do you want to sleep in the bed with me?’ my mother asks.

‘Honestly, the sofa is fine.’

‘It would be nice to hold you, darling. Like when you were little.’ But her tone says it is her who needs holding.

We get ready for bed, neither of us wanting any food, feeling queasy on too many cigarettes. I have no idea what tomorrow will feel like. If the world will actually still be here.

When the heating goes off and the winter starts to creep in from the outside, we get under the wool duvet and lay very close to each other to keep warm. I don’t feel this is my mother’s body any more, the soft, protective body I remember from childhood. This is some other woman, bony, bent. I don’t want to hug her. I can feel the springs on the mattress. I try to manoeuvre my hips around them. My feet are cold.

My mother breaks the silence.

‘Stefan will want the house,’ she says. ‘He’ll want to sell it and get his own half.’

‘He can’t have it,’ I say.

‘Well, he can, according to the law.’

‘But we’ve fixed that, haven’t we?’ I feel a surge of panic in my chest. ‘Haven’t we? Dad has signed it over to you?’

‘He has.’

‘Then we have nothing to worry about.’ Relief makes me feel sleepy at last. I don’t want to think about this any more.

‘I think he will contest it.’ My mother shakes her head. ‘I think he will take us to court. I just have this feeling.’

I suddenly remember, understand. I sit up in bed. I cannot breathe.

‘What is it?!’
‘Earlier tonight,’ I say, at last. ‘He asked me what we’re going to do about you.’

As soon as the words leave my mouth, I regret them. But it’s too late, now.

The night around us is dense and quiet. Somewhere in our neighbourhood, I can hear a pack of stray dogs barking, fighting over scraps of food which are so hard to find in the dead of winter.

My mother is calmer than I expect her to be. ‘So what did you say?’

‘Nothing.’

‘How could you say nothing when he asked you a question? Did you just walk away?’

‘Actually, that’s exactly what I did. I pushed past him and walked out of the pantry.’

‘I cannot believe he’s that same boy I used to bring here for some bread and milk because his own mother didn’t feed him.’

She looks at me in the dark, or at least I think she’s looking at me. She could be just staring into the blackness.

‘Why did you not say something?’ she wants to know.

‘I wasn’t sure what he meant. I thought he was just being stupid. You know how he is.’

‘He is anything but stupid,’ my mother whispers, almost to herself.

The energy of my father pulsates in the room, but what it is trying to say to us, we cannot tell.

#

In the morning, my mother makes Serbian coffee for us, even stronger and blacker than usual. It burns a pit in my stomach. We get dressed in the cold and it’s not until after breakfast that the wooden stove has managed to heat the house up. We need a canary in here, I think, to tell us when to get out.
I want to go to my father’s fresh grave and replace the flowers which would have frozen overnight.

‘Not today,’ my mother says. ‘We’re going to see a lawyer.’

I’m speechless.

‘We don’t need a lawyer,’ I eventually manage to say. ‘The house is yours. Dad signed it over to you. That’s it.’

‘He has friends in the police.’

‘Who?’

‘Your half-brother. They will come, at night, when I’m alone. They will break in and they will beat me up,’ she says.

I don’t know whether to give her more Valium or whether she’s had too many chemicals already.

‘That is crazy nonsense. Stefan would do no such thing. You are completely over-reacting,’ I tell her.

‘Am I? Two years ago, his mother had a burst appendix. She was taken to the hospital by an ambulance. Do you know what he did?’

I don’t, but I am scared to imagine.

‘He came over to see us, your father and me. He told us it was for an early celebration. We thought he was getting married, or something – had maybe fathered a child. But he said – his mother was about to die. He was going to sell her flat, pay off his debts, move to Belgrade. Start a new life.’

I try to imagine him sitting on our old sofa, smiling, while his mother is on her deathbed. I can’t.

‘She didn’t die,’ is all I can say.

‘She didn’t. She lived. But now your father has. So here we are.’
All around the room there are relics of the past life. Photos of my father fishing, wearing army-issue dungarees which make him look like a car mechanic. Photos of him on stage. Earl of Gloucester in King Lear. Different characters he’s played, the president, the fool, the political dissident, and now for some reason he’s decided to play a dead man. That’s the only way I can explain it to myself.

‘Let’s go to see the lawyer,’ I say.

The lawyer says we should hunt my brother down, smoke him out like a fox from its den. Make him show his colours. Make him play his cards.

I am staring at his crimson cheeks and sweaty bald patch, I’m confused by all these metaphors. The lawyer to me seems like someone who eats a fatty diet of American TV.

‘We’re going to send him a letter,’ the lawyer says, ‘telling him that his father’s property needs to be split between the descendants and he needs to come here for a chat.’

Both my mother and I are confused. I try to explain, again: ‘But that’s exactly what we’re trying to avoid. There is no property to split. It’s in my mother’s name now.’

‘Yes, but we have to give him a bait. We have to get him to ask for the house, once he sees that other things are being divided. Then, we tell him the house is not up for grabs. He’ll either make his move and take you to court straight away, or he’ll walk away into the sunset. Either way, you don’t spend the next two years in limbo, just waiting to see what he might do.’ I don’t really follow but then he adds: ‘Find something small, insignificant that you can split with him. Your father’s clothes, maybe.’

I am about to argue that my father’s clothes, which still smell of him, are not insignificant and that my mother is not about to ransack his wardrobe to use as a bargaining chip, when my mother speaks up:

‘I’ll do it,’ she says. ‘Draft the letter.’
We are going back to the house in a taxi. Today seems warmer and the streets are full of slush. Everything has turned to dirt, to mud.

It’s almost noon when we get back. People will soon start pouring in again, ready for the lunchtime shift of feeding and talking.

‘Mum, listen,’ I say when we’ve taken off our coats and dirty boots. ‘Whatever Stefan meant by what he said, he shouldn’t find out what we’ve done from a lawyer.’

My mother doesn’t reply, she just walks into the kitchen and pours some water into the small coffee pot.

‘Mum, we are family.’

Suddenly she turns on me. ‘We’re not a family. If his whore of a mother had let him live with us, we might have been one—’ She stops for a moment, thinks about something, then says: ‘What do you mean, what we’ve done?’

‘Signing the house over to you.’

‘Do you feel I should just let him take half of my own home?’

I raise my hands in an act of surrender. ‘Don’t shout. Please. Maybe I was wrong to tell you what he said in the pantry. Maybe he didn’t—’

My mother shrieks. ‘Wrong? So you should have kept it from me? Your father was still settling underground and Stefan was already working out where to put me, which nursing home, which lunatic asylum—’ She’s choking on tears, she can’t speak any more, she’s got a lit match in her hand and I can see it burning down, very close to her fingers, but I cannot move at all.

‘I fed him, when his own mother didn’t,’ she says. ‘Do you understand that?’

‘I know. I’m just saying – he’s so damaged —’

‘If I could go back in time, to that child – but there was nothing else anyone could have done for him. You think that I should now pay the price, for the childhood he’s had?’
Through the kitchen window I can see the first cars, which are starting to park outside the house. Soon we will be talking, serving, comforting, without being comforted.

‘All I’m saying is maybe I made a mistake. It’s still not too late to find out what he’s really thinking, before we get the law involved, for God’s sake.’

‘The law would have been on his side. Whose side are you going to be on, that’s the real question.’ She goes to open the door to the first visitor.

#

It’s the second day after the funeral. The spirit of my father will be travelling soon. It can’t wait much longer to see what happens in this small and angry world of ours.

I am sitting on the floor, surrounded by the mementoes of my father’s time on Earth. On one of his jumpers I find a short grey hair. The hair seems to me so alive. His shoes have kept the shape of his feet and I hold them carefully, trying to feel the man who wore them until just a few days ago. I look at the pictures of our life, black and white when I was little, always going somewhere, always on my father’s shoulders. Amongst the photos, I see some of Stefan. The rare birthday parties he came to, I the beaming centre of attention, he a longing onlooker. I can see it so clearly in these images, for the first time.

The evening comes and my mother is lying on the sofa, her eyes carefully closed lest the world should come in. Outside it’s been snowing for hours.

‘I think I’m going to book my return flight soon. I can’t stay much longer,’ I say.

‘Had enough of home?’

Before I start to protest, she shakes her head, her eyes still closed, and says: ‘Who could blame you?’

I am trying to make myself think of food, get up and go to the kitchen and make something for both of us to eat, when I hear footsteps crunching on the fresh snow outside the house. There is something about the steps, about their rhythm, a familiar lilt. A shiver works its way up my back. I do not believe in ghosts and I know those footsteps are not my father’s. But there is only one other person it can be.
My mother is sitting up now, eyes huge on her gaunt face, chest rising and falling rapidly. ‘Lock the front door,’ shewhispers urgently.

I hesitate.

‘Lock the front door! Can you not tell who it is?’

I can, but I am waiting for him to knock now. I open my mouth to say something, but my mother motions me to be quiet. She’s shaking her finger at me and mouthing We are not in. I want this to stop. I want to get up and open the door to my half-brother and invite him in, show him the photos I’ve been looking at, ask him about his memories, whatever’s left of them after his childhood expired and moulded him into the man he is now.

But he doesn’t knock. Second pass, minutes. There is no sound except the murmur of the falling snow. Finally we hear him walking away. My mother leans back on the sofa, covers her eyes with a shaky hand. I count to fifty, then go and open the door.

A tiny bunch of winter flowers is on the front step, slowly getting covered by snowflakes.

#

The next time I see Stefan is in the waiting room at the court house. I don’t know whether he looks at me, tries to catch my eye, because I never lift my head. Inside, there are many papers to sign. He walks out with a few small things that used to belong to my father. Neither of us walk out unharmed.

From time to time I still fly back to see my mother, old now and glad for the company. Sometimes walking through town I see in the distance my brother and his sons, on errands or coming back from school. The boys don’t know who it is, this woman who looks at them from across the street, while they walk on.
First, he chooses a level spot,  
begins to dig the bracken and earth  
away. He doesn’t want soft grasses  
beneath his feet; even the roots  
of neighboring trees are unfastened  
from their grasp, cleared. When he hits  
bedrock, he decides its mottled shape  
reflects himself, and can stay.

Next, he digs the foundations,  
long trenches the closest he’s come  
to the U shape of happiness.

When he puts the walls up, the stone  
placed at right angles against itself,  
he can never go home again; his own  
four walls, their pale colors,  
tell him nothing now.

Like a coffin lid, he builds the roof slowly,  
not wanting to say goodbye to this space  
that opens out at night, in day, to the skies.  
But it is a house, needs to keep its secrets,  
wants a ceiling for its dreams.

He cannot think what to hang  
in the windows; even the snowdrop petals,  
woven together, hold out the light.  
Neither can he bear to wrest  
another tree from its place  
to serve, standing guard, as door.
So he leaves the house to the wood, lets it choose the camouflage of summer foliage, admittance through a gap between branches, and the doorway bared open in winter, when no other man could sit on its gaping stones, aching with frost, for long.
Metropolis
Sue Burge

It is days before we notice the crows, our upturned pedestrian faces pallid in the spiky neon. We see them hunched on highrises, silent gargoyles. Neat heads brushing a sky full of dust.

They have flown from Fuji’s slopes where there is no north, watches and compasses spinning in wild parody.

In the mornings the crows stretch their scaly feet, wheel and caw in such unison we almost seek the hidden hands of some majestic master of bunraku.

Daytime Tokyo is a nightdream, businessmen with briefcases on bikes, the blunt noses of bullet trains edging forward like twitching greyhounds at the gate. A massive human ballet choreographed by blinking road signs, sequences of light and dark, the smell of sewage seeping through the cracks.

We want to know what the crows see, looking down on this cityscape, ash on their feathers, seeking a new north.
Ode to Something

Joseph Hutchison

Zero does not exist.
—Victor Hugo, Les Misérables

Why is there something rather than nothing?
Because nothing never was, was ever just a trick of math that turned a placeholder into lack, into absence — and zero like a ball-peen hailstone struck a crack across the smooth windshield of speeding reason, making the mind’s eye see nothing everywhere.

But nothing is nothing like something, something with its amber honeys, cabernets and cheeses, blood, blindworms, blossoms, lips, hips, hands,
pain and rage, 
heartbreak, night-sweats, 
ten thousand joys 
intense 
and transient. 
No wonder 
so many dread 
the sheer abundance 
of something, 
its “flow of unforeseeable novelty,” endless 
irruption of forms and essences. 
How can reason hope to hang its dream of knowing all on such a flood? 
How feed its fantasy of mapping every last height, every depth, making both beginning and end knuckle under to understanding? 
Therefore: nothing. Nothing that gives something direction, an arc of action, a story, a meaning, the way deities used to do.

Truth is, though, we swim in mystery reason can’t (can never) plumb: no beyond, only being and somethingness: our lives like sparks in a vast becoming, bright flecks of foam on a breakneck river, swirling in the world as is.
Pig observed the sky.

Light washed into the field – like a basin being filled with warm water. Frost-hardened leaves clattered in the breeze. A low mist hung around the base of the stone wall in wraiths. Pig had woken early and in a bad mood. He’d strode outside while the others slept and stood outside his tiny stone cottage and sniffed the air, trying to taste what the day would bring. The mist was so dense and low-lying he could barely see his bottom half.

Dotted around the field the other animals’ houses were hidden under brambles or carefully built into the stone walls. To one side the forest menaced them with its shadows. Sometimes through the straight brown trunks of the trees they spotted the hunt – the red like sudden blood – flashing past. These encounters with humans unsettled the others and Pig was always called upon to calm them down.

On the other side a narrow grey road bought the occasional car on the way to the sea. A green hill lay behind. To Pig the sea was only a faint blue splodge in the distance. He had terrible eyesight and anyway, pigs didn’t really like the water. He preferred the forest where he could rootle and where the sun couldn’t burn his pink flesh. He decided that’s where he would go now - to see what he could find.

Inside, cat was still asleep and Pig felt rage bubbling up. He was warned at the time that it may damage his firm hold in authority, and they were right. Intermarriage never worked. He took his gun and left.

At the entrance to the forest Pig had trouble mounting the stile. He’d made several attempts on all fours and had been sent spinning back to the ground. He panted for a moment, weighing up the situation. There was nothing for it, with
monumental effort he heaved and pulled, wobbling at first, until he was standing fully upright. Pig simply didn’t know why this was so difficult for him, for some of the others it was becoming almost second nature. The fact riled him. If there was to be developments, he wanted to be at the forefront of them. Taking a deep breath, he scrambled quickly over the stile in one go.

Deeper into the woods Pig looked again into the sky. It was almost completely light now. He must have been about half a mile from the field now but if he turned his head and lifted his nostrils into the breeze he could just about catch the early morning perfumes of sleep and breakfast.

Perhaps, he reflected, he was unwise to leave for the whole day. He thought he’d caught some whisperings and talk of insurrection in the air lately, and a whole day was a long time to leave a situation. He stood, torn. But the wind carried towards him rustlings and signs of life from the woods that thrilled his senses. He slung his gun over his shoulder and carried on.

Of course, it was only Pig that was allowed into these outer limits. They had all been taught in the schoolroom, with the stove burbling away comfortably in the corner, that these places were out of bounds. There was the field and the hill, then there was the woods and beyond that the wide world, and that, said their teacher, frowning, was no concern of theirs.

In her house in the hollow of the hill squirrel was brushing her daughter’s hair firmly. So firmly it stood up with static. Trains of thought stopped and started in her mind like a fitful sewing machine, brush, brush, stitch, stitch. The sleep-knotted hair brushed up fluffy and red.

Squirrel couldn’t help being worried by cat. She hadn’t seen her for days. And she knew for a fact Pig was knocking her about. Last time she’d called on cat, cat had tried to keep her mouth closed when she spoke. Usually squirrel could see her sharp, clawed teeth, but she kept her lips so close together that they couldn’t be seen at all. It made her words come out with a funny psh, psh sound.

Squirrel suddenly became aware her daughter was emitting squeaks of discomfort.

‘Sshh,’ squirrel soothed, ‘Sshh.’ She decided she would pay a visit to cat today.

It was a dark day going into autumn and all the children made their way down
the earth-beaten path to the schoolroom. As they went they picked a second breakfast of berries from the hedgerow. As they scrambled along they saw cat watching from the window and waving.

‘Look, there’s cat,’ they whispered. ‘Is she ill?’

More whisperings. ‘No, she’s not ill. It’s Pig.’

They’re glad to reach the schoolroom with its warm stove.

Sometimes Pig would come into the schoolroom unannounced. Their ageing schoolteacher with her dappled grey fur would become flustered and drop her books and pencils. Sometimes when he came, Pig would be in a good mood – keyed up, almost buoyant. He’d ruffle the hair of some of the younger ones. But it wasn’t always like that. As one of the little ones said, sometimes he was *gunning* for it.

He would walk around the room, choosing who to question. It was silent, save for the clatter, clatter of his feet.

‘Who made the world and all that’s in it?’

If you were the one that was chosen all you could feel were his bright blue eyes upon you. His eyes seemed to have two levels – on the front part, almost a covering film, was a sort of ‘what are we going to do with you, son?’ exasperated but kindly expression. But behind that was another look. That look was like the trees waving out of control on a stormy night. This coloured the filmy bit at the front and changed it.

The trouble was, that answer kept changing. Everyone had problems keeping up with what it was supposed to be. Sometimes it was ‘God’, but other times it was ‘Pig,’ or ‘Pig and God together’ or even occasionally ‘PiGod.’ That way, nobody could ever grasp what was going on. It was like Pig was constantly changing shape.

Once, he asked the question of the smallest of the squirrels who’d replied ‘My Father.’ On their way home that day everyone saw the dark, heavy Pig shape waiting in the shadow of the trees.

After the last of the stragglers had gone past her house, cat suddenly decided she
must go out that day. She put her head down and lapped at some water to try and fortify herself. She looked up at the walls and felt the weight of the sky pressing down on them. The fear of the wide world outside, with its sky like a lid pressing down, made her tremor all over.

Pig spent the morning in what he called *tracking*. Which in reality meant flattening himself behind bracken and brambles and spying on the rest of the woods.

Now it was time for lunch. He trotted down the path, carefully giving a wide berth to some half empty pesticide cans which were dripping a nasty looking liquid onto the ground, and settled himself down under a tree. He ate his bread and cheese quietly so as not to disturb his quarry. He had his eye on some pheasants that were hopping moronically in the undergrowth ahead of him. In Pig’s mind he held an image of himself trekking back. A brace of birds were bright, dead sacks of feathers bumping against his back.

He finished the last crumbs of his lunch and crept forward. The image of himself as the successful hunter burned bright inside his brain.

Slowly, he lifted his gun. It felt heavy and cumbersome and Pig realised that it was a long time since he’d used it. Using his teeth on the string he’d attached to the trigger, he aimed at the largest of the birds and fired. It was a clumsy shot and the gun thrust back and sent him sprawling. The birds had all squawked loudly at the shot and made their escape, half running, half flapping.

Pig scrambled up, picked up his gun, and with mounting rage, pursued them.

All afternoon thoughts of cat preoccupied squirrel’s mind. Squirrel had made cat’s wedding dress, carefully stitching sprays of crystal beads across the skirt and inserting bone into the bodice to make it stand up stiff and straight. The unkind thought that cat needed this like she needed back bone had crossed her mind. But there was truth in it. Cat was weak. It was why Pig had chosen her.

Sometimes after their children were asleep squirrel and her husband plotted in hushed tones. He, for the most part, was for the status quo. For not rocking the boat. But once squirrel started with her talk he found it hard not to follow.

If only they could steal his gun, maybe – with others – they could stage a coup. But he slept with his gun, like a stiff serpent against his feet.
If only they could persuade cat to steal his gun. But talking to cat was a risky option. Squirrel knew deep down that she was too far-gone. She was like a traveller bobbing in the ocean, each day getting smaller and smaller against the horizon. Squirrel knew that if she confided in cat, cat might, in her weakness, tell Pig everything.

Squirrel and her husband spoke as quietly as they could, and in the dead of night. But their words seemed enormous. Squirrel could almost imagine the words floating up with the smoke from the fire and being spelled out in big smoke letters above their roof, giving them away. Ridiculously, in the morning squirrel would even find herself glancing upwards to make sure there really weren’t big smoke letters hovering there for everyone to see.

When squirrel thought of Pig she thought of the name ‘Herod’ – that’s the worst you could be. The name in her mind had fire coming off of it.

Pig or Herod was feared, though not hated, by everyone. Some thought he was ‘a great old boy.’ Some loved the cradle of his authority. It bound them about, making them feel secure.

Mostly he didn’t carry out the bad deeds himself, but relied on scapegoats and cat’s paws to do it for him. He was also good at figuring out how others ticked. If he was talking to one of the older squirrels, setting the world to rights, he might after some general chitchat say – ‘Well, if it wasn’t for those foxes…’

The squirrel would stop, gauging how far he could go. Then reassured, he would begin: ‘Don’t start me on those damn foxes…’

When squirrel’s husband thought of his wife he would picture her heart. He imagined it to be made of clockwork – perfect, delicate, full of little trapdoors and tiny springs and making a steady whirring sound. That’s not to say she was hard hearted, not at all. Just that goodness flowed easily through her ordered heart and something else too – good sense.

Squirrel felt it differently. She sensed the metal in herself. Often she thought of how a long time ago – when they were all just creatures, just beasts – none of this would have happened. But every day it was different. Some of the younger ones couldn’t even walk on all fours any more. If there was a new order squirrel knew she would have a part to play in it. It was this quiet unspoken confidence that kept her heart ticking over.
Out in the woods Pig was getting mad. The picture in his mind of carrying the birds back was beginning to elude him. Deeper and deeper he went into the trees in pursuit. He stumbled over deep rutted tracks made by huge vehicles that had churned over the forest floor.

Phantom noises kept breaking – behind him, to his side. He would turn and shoot in the direction of the noise, not in the clinical way he so much admired but randomly. Occasionally, he would lean, panting, against a tree to reload his gun. The reloading, each time, would bring a sense of joyfulness, of optimism. But each time the barrel was empty the rage resurfaced, climbing onto a higher level. So it was like a note being sung, but each time higher and more intense.

Cat sighed to herself. How she had become so imprisoned in her own home was not clear to her. She used to roam about all over the place. The panic attacks had crept up slowly, almost unnoticed. Then one day she couldn’t get any further than the bottom of the hill. So she had to limit herself to the field itself. Then the house.

It began as tightness in her throat. Then came on a dizziness which threatened to throw her to the ground. One minute everything would look ordinary, then the trees would become jagged and seemed to rock sideways and the ground would stretch up.

Cat poked her nose outside the door and sniffed the air. Autumn was the most complex in smell of all the seasons and the one she loved the best. Wood smoke, along with the smell of the soil as it gave up its fertile warmth stored over the summer. She licked herself roughly all over to calm down. Her legs quivered slightly under her as she stepped outside. Cat tried going quick and she tried going slow. On balance going quickly seemed to stop the ground from seeming to shake beneath her. Across the field, up the hill – she closed her eyes tight. As she got further the world began to shift and she tried to turn for the safety of home. She felt earth and stones on the pads of her paws as she scrambled madly back down the hill with eyes still shut.

Squirrel had been to collect her children from school, she meant to take them to see cat. In the distance she could see Pig returning, storming down the hill with his coat flapping behind him. She shivered and gathered her children closer. She moved up the hill and he down it. He didn’t seem aware of her presence.
They both seemed to see cat at the same time, dashing about. To squirrel she looked as if she’d been blinded, the way she moved.

Pig reached her first. He lifted his gun and struck cat so hard she fell to the floor, her head at an angle to her body. When squirrel reached them both she could see by cat’s head – loose and hanging – that the life had gone from her.

Pig was standing, with shocked eyes, looking down. On the floor the gun lay where he’d dropped it. Behind her squirrel’s children watched wide eyed as she snatched up the blood-smeared gun from by his feet with her nimble squirrel fingers.

She drew herself right up and looked Pig full into his bright blue eyes.

‘You Beast,’ she raged. ‘You Beast.’
The black bags pile high, and spill to the horizon,  
As a nation of flies serenade the stench’s hum.  
No map. So wait for night, the North star, and Orion.  
Pornographic propaganda lies wet with pallid cum.  

Old TVs play montage loops through cracked screens,  
And speakers fizzle and pop with cluttered monologues.  
A lifetime of albums; full, but with no photos to be seen.  
A mountain range of books burn below some demagogues;  

Twisting the smoke, with fork tongues, like spaghetti.  
A covenant of black cats spit back at the mere notion  
To cross paths is bad luck. Shopping trolleys lie hungry and petty.  
Alcoholic rain cascades from glass bottomed clouds to form oceans.  

Somewhere, overhead and either side, stands the ozone of my skull.  
Once prone to clarity and to beauty, with pollution it grows dull.
Thunder Boy

Niles Reddick

(for Red Bird)

With a loud clap, Thunder Boy fell, all six feet five inches and two hundred thirty pounds of him, to the kitchen linoleum floor. His eyes were affixed to the metal grate on the bottom of the refrigerator and blood puddled around his mouth, forming a balloon like in a comic strip, but there were no words for the caption.

The two policemen, both around five feet seven inches tall and thin, but mostly muscle, looked at each other. The veteran, Jerry, had been on the force over twenty years and had a good relationship with the Choctaw people. Mostly, he’d worked drug busts, domestic violence due to alcohol and drugs, and theft, nothing of value, mostly junk. A hundred years ago it would have been horses, cattle, maybe a woman now and again. Today, it was likely a Wal-Mart TV, a digital radio from Korea, a tracfone, or gold plated jewelry. It had been an easy twenty years and Jerry knew he’d become lax. He’d never killed anyone. His heart raced and he looked at the rookie. “You seen him coming at us with the knife, right?”

“Yessir, but I don’t think he’d a killed us with that knife.” The knife, part of an aluminum steak knife set, was still in Thunder Boy’s hand, bent. Tom stood, scared and shaking, and put his pistol back in its holster. “Family’s outside. You want me to get them?” Tom hadn’t been on the force that long, and while he had native blood running through his veins, it wasn’t enough to qualify him for any benefits.

Jerry pressed the lapel mic and said, “Shots fired, man down.”

After the static, the dispatcher said, “Ya’ll okay?”
“Yeah,” said Jerry. He knew better than to comment more. Then, he said to Tom, “Put up the tape and tell the family ambulance is on the way, but they can’t come inside.”

“How dare you?” the mother screamed. “You shot him. He wasn’t armed. Is he okay? I told you we needed help, to get him to a hospital, to get him some medicine. You can’t keep me from him,” and while tears rolled from the father’s eyes, he held the wife tight to keep her from going and she continued to sob: “No, no, no. Please, please, please. You have no right.”

“Mam, you can’t cross the line or we will have to arrest you. Ambulance is on the way.” Young rookie Tom could not look her or her husband in the eyes. He knew their son was dead, but it wasn’t up to him to pronounce that news. “Is anyone else in the house?”

“Only my mother,” the woman said. “She lives in the basement, but has dementia. She don’t know nothing.”

Sirens wailed in the distance, and once they had Thunder Boy on the stretcher, they rolled him out and let his mother and father bend over and hold him a while. They were working on him, trying to revive. “We’re doing everything we can, mam,” the paramedic said.

“Is there a way to get your mother out without going in through the house?”

“Why does she have to leave?”

“Mam, the house will be part of the investigation. You won’t be able to come back until probably tomorrow.”

“I can go get her through the basement.”

Wiping tears, she knocked on the glass door, reached in her pocket and grabbed a key. “Mama?”

The grandmother rocked back and forth in the basement and watched the weather channel. She’d heard distant booms upstairs and figured they were in for a rare winter storm with thunder and raining ice. She remembered being in the storm when Thunder Boy was born, that’s how he got his name, because she’d helped the federal nurse deliver him at the health center on the reservation. She
felt cold and pulled her blanket up to her neck and tucked it between her arms and the wood handles on the rocker, so it wouldn’t fall down.

“Mama, let’s go to the hospital. Thunder Boy’s been shot.”

“What?”

“I said Thunder Boy’s been shot.”

“Oh, no.” She let her daughter take her arm, drape the blanket, and help her slip her sock-covered feet into moccasins from Land’s End, and they went out into the night and into the already purring Oldsmobile, exhaust from the tail pipe filling the freezing air.

Tom had scanned the kitchen, running through scenarios and making sure there hadn’t been a misstep. He remembered pulling his gun and firing a warning shot when Thunder Boy went for the steak knife. The bullet was lodged by the dream catcher, hanging on the wall above Mr. Coffee. Repeatedly asked to drop his weapon, Thunder Boy had smiled at them and moved forward with the knife in his hand. Jerry didn’t want to shoot him and certainly didn’t want to kill him, but it was clearly self-defense. Their lives were in danger. He had to shoot him. They don’t have Tasers and they hadn’t carried Billy clubs on the reservation since the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. Thunder Boy was big and threatening and he had that crazed look in his eyes. They did their best. Tom knew all that, but he knew this was going to be bad for him and the rookie. Tom could retire, but the rookie was just getting a start. At least the rookie didn’t kill the guy.
Two Poems

Bonnie Bolling

The Going

_Persian Gulf_

We wake too late and find the roundabout
already crowded: protesters, tear gas
and the Pakistani unloading melons.
Rubber bullets thunk past —
they’ve formed a human chain
all the way to Budaiya,
and soon we’ll have to go.
The kitchen is too warm
where we are drinking coffee
thick with grated cardamom,
and outside the window there’s shouting,
occasional waves of birdsong.
The housemaid, who will stay behind,
is ironing. She glances up,
ot anxious but shaking
her big, beautiful head,
says _big noisy_ and adjusts her hijab.
Long ago, someone thought
to carve away her left ear.

On one side of this island
is a long peninsula and I have walked it.
The Persian Gulf on one side,
the Arabian Sea on the other.
Every kind of flower is here.
Every bird. There’s a humming,
a watery music coming
from the stand of beach palms,
with its rustling fronds
and nosegay of dates.
Oh, there are times when you want to lay every thing down just to see all of it at once, raw and shining, brilliant in the sand but it’s better if you don’t.

Yesterday, when the house water was brown, I cut some lilies and put them in a vase. Today the water is still brown but make no mistake, the going is never easy. Sometimes it’s hard not to fall in love with false joys but you can take yourself out of yourself — you can close your eyes for a moment and not breathe, and then you can gaze in at yourself. Will you see beauty? Will you see nothing?

When it is time, I hug the housemaid. Take what you need, I say into her good ear, do what you have to. But she is only smiling.
Above the Azan

Some days start already torn to shreds,
    stripped and cold, like rain falling
confusedly outside some broken-down doorway.

Old flowers grow wild around the birdbath.
Weeds. Sand. What makes people behave
    as though they were the ones who fought
the actual war? The bougainvillea canes
    have bent fully over, but are still shining,
blown red and trembling with bees.

I begin lifting them. Above the azan,
I hear a woman weeping.

Even in this part of the world
a woman’s life is fraught.

Even here, there comes a time
when the only thing left to do
    is to remake yourself; resurrect.
A long thorn pierces my finger and it bleeds,
    but I cut the best ones and bring them
into the cooled, marbled villa.

I water them, give them a glass vase,
a place on the polished front hall table.

The housemaid lifts her eyes from her work
and gives me that look:

    Oh, we want it all, don’t we?
Contributors

ALEKSANDRA (SENJA) ANDREJEVIC-BULLOCK is a Serbian woman living and writing in Cheltenham. Currently she is studying for an MA in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Gloucestershire. Her work has been published in Brain, Child, Literary Mama and Dawntreader magazines, and her dramatic writing has reached various competition shortlists, as well as recently winning a competition run by the Touring Consortium Theatre Co.

MICHAEL BARThOLOMEW-BIGGS is poetry editor of the on-line magazine London Grip and co-organiser of the North London reading series Poetry in the Crypt. His latest collections are Fred & Blossom (Shoestring Press, 2013) and Pictures from a Postponed Exhibition, a collaboration with Australian artist David Walsh (Lapwing Press, 2014)

ELEAnOR LEONnE BENnETT is an internationally award winning artist of almost fifty awards. She was the CIWEM Young Environmental Photographer of the Year in 2013. Eleanor’s photography has been published in British Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar. Her work has been displayed around the world consistently for six years since the age of thirteen. This year (2015) she has done the anthology cover for the incredibly popular Austin International Poetry Festival. She is also featured in Schiffer’s Contemporary Wildlife Art, published this Spring. She is also an art editor for multiple organizations.

MICHAEL BENNETT grew up in Suffolk, and has been published by The Letters Page, Litro, The Lampeter Review, and Visual Verse (among others). He is particularly interested in natural history, folklore, magical realism and nature writing. When not writing he can be found painting, sculpting, and playing the viola.
Bonnie Bolling is an American author living in Southern California and the Persian Gulf. Her book of poems *In the Kingdom of the Sons*, was chosen by Thomas Sleigh to win the Liam Rector First Book Poetry Prize. She is editor-in-chief of *Verdad*, and a 2014 Katherine Nason Bakeless Bread Loaf Fellow.

Sue Burge is a freelance tutor and poet based in King’s Lynn, Norfolk. She teaches both Creative Writing and Film Studies in the East Anglian region and has taught at universities in the UK and abroad. Sue has lived in Paris and Israel and travelled extensively, and much of her work reflects her interest in other cultures. She has been published in various anthologies, as well as in magazines and journals such as *Mslexia, The North, Writer’s Forum, Brittle Sta, The Cannon’s Mouth, Orbis, Cake* and *Poetry in the Waiting Room*. Her work has appeared on the Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge blog and in the web-zines *Ink, Sweat and Tears* and *The Literary Bohemian*. She regularly reads her poems at local open-mic sessions. Her obsessions are silent films, liminal states, fairytales, and revealing hidden voices through narrative poetry. To see more of Sue’s work go to www.sueburge.co.uk.

Zelda Chappell writes, often on the backs of things. Her work can be found most recently in several magazines online and in print including *The Interpreters House, HARK*, and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*. Her debut collection was published in July 2015 with Bare Fiction.

Gareth Culshaw works and lives in North Wales, he loves Snowdonia and hopes to have a writing cottage there one day. He writes most days and dreams of creating something special with the pen. He also has a dog, who is a great poet.

Dic Edwards was born in Cardiff. He has been Director of Creative Writing at Lampeter since 1994. Also a playwright and librettist, his recent productions include *The Opportunist and The Cloud Eater*. The opera *Manifest Destiny* for which he wrote the libretto was produced by Opera Close Up at The King’s Head, Islington in September 2011. In 2009 his play *Casanova Undone* was put on in Copenhagen. He has had more than twenty professional productions in the UK and abroad including *Utah Blue* and *The Pimp*. Edwards is also a published poet – his collection *Walt Whitman and other poems* appeared in 2008 (Oberon Books Ltd, London & New York). An essay, *Wittgenstein and Morality, The Playwright’s Purpose* is published by Intellect, Bristol UK and Portland, USA and an essay *The Living Corpse: a Metaphysic for Theatre* published by University of Hertfordshire.
CAROL FARRELLY was recently awarded a 2015/16 Jerwood/Arvon Mentorship and is currently working with writer Ross Raisin on her second novel. In 2013, she received a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship from Creative Scotland. Her short stories have been published in journals such as *The Irish Times*, *Stand*, *Edinburgh Review*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Aesthetica*, *Popshot* and *Litro*, and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. In 2013, she won the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Prize, and she has been shortlisted for the Bridport and Fish Prizes and the Asham Award. She holds a DPhil on the novels of Thomas Hardy: thankfully, her love for Hardy remains intact. www.carolfarrelly.com

NEIL FULWOOD is the author of film studies book *The Films of Sam Peckinpah*. His short fiction has appeared in *The British Fantasy Society Journal* and *Quantum Muse*, and his poetry in *Prole*, *The Morning Star*, *Art Decades*, *Butcher’s Dog*, *Full of Crow Poetry*, *London Grip* and *Ink Sweat & Tears*.

MARJORIE LOTFI GILL’s poems have been published in a wide variety of anthologies and journals in the US and UK including *Ambit*, *Gutter*, *Magma 60*, *Mslexia*, *The Reader*, *CURA*, *Rattle* and *The North* and have been performed on BBC Radio 4. She is the Poet in Residence at Jupiter Artland, and the Writer in Residence for both Spring Fling and the 2015 Wigtown Book Festival.

NIALL GRIFFITHS was born in Liverpool and has lived in mid Wales for a long time. He has written more novels and short stories and poems and reviews and travel pieces and radio plays than he cares to, or probably even can, count. The film of his third novel, *Kelly+Victor*, won a BAFTA, and his fourth novel, *Stump*, won the Wales Book of the Year Award. Forthcoming is a novel, *Broken Ghost*, and a poetry collection, *Red Roar*.

KATE HAMER grew up in Pembrokeshire and after studying Art worked in television for over ten years, mainly on documentaries. She completed an MA in creative writing in Aberystwyth university. Her debut novel *The Girl in the Red Coat* was published by Faber & Faber in February 2015 and has sold in eight other territories. Kate also won the Rhys Davies short story prize in 2011 and the story ‘One Summer’ was broadcast on Radio 4. She has also had work published in short story anthologies such as *A Fiction Map of Wales* and Seren’s *New Welsh Short Stories*. She lives in Cardiff with her husband.
Born, raised and educated in Lampeter, **Jonathan Harries** has a B.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. Part-time journalist and editor, he has been accepted to take his postgraduate degree in Magazine Journalism at Cardiff University.

**Adam Horovitz** is a poet and performer. He was the poet in residence for Glastonbury Festival in 2009 and was awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship in 2012. He has released three pamphlets, *Next Year in Jerusalem*, *The Great Unlearning* and *Only the Flame Remains* (Yew Tree, 2014). His first collection, *Turning*, was published by Headland in 2011 and in 2014 the History Press published his poetry-fuelled memoir *A Thousand Laurie Lees*. www.adamhorovitz.co.uk

**Lydia Hounat** is a British-Algerian poet from Manchester, England. She has been published with *The Butcher’s Dog Magazine*, *The Cadaverine*, *HOAX*, as well as other publications. An avid performance poet, she has worked with the Manchester Literature Festival showcasing slam pieces with authors and poets, and regularly performs in bars and cafés. At 17, she received a Williams Senior college prize for her contributions to writing poetry.

**Joseph Hutchison** is the author of fifteen collections of poems, including *Marked Men*, *Thread of the Real*, *The Earth-Boat*, and *Bed of Coals* (winner of the Colorado Poetry Award). His work has appeared in more than 100 journals and numerous anthologies, and in September 2014 he was appointed to a four-year term as Poet Laureate of Colorado. Hutchison lives in the mountains southwest of Denver, Colorado, with his wife, Iyengar yoga instructor Melody Madonna.

**Cynan Jones** was born near Aberaeron, Wales in 1975. His novels include *The Long Dry* (winner of a Betty Trask Award in 2007), *Everything I Found on the Beach*, the retelling of a Welsh myth, *Bird, Blood, Snow*, and *The Dig*. In 2013, part of *The Dig* was shortlisted for the Sunday Times EFG Private Bank Short Story Award. It has also won a Jerwood Fiction Uncovered Prize (2014) and the Wales Book of the Year Fiction Prize (2015). www.cynan1975.wordpress.com

**Strider Marcus Jones** is a poet, law graduate and ex civil servant from Salford/Hinckley, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. A member of The Poetry Society, his five published books of poetry are modern, traditional, mythical, sometimes erotic, surreal and metaphysical. He is a maverick, moving between forests, mountains and cities, playing his saxophone.
and clarinet in warm solitude. His poetry has been accepted for publication in 2015 by numerous anthologies and journals. http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/stridermarcusjones1

**Tony Kendrew** lives and writes in a remote and beautiful part of Northern California, where he has produced two CDs of his poems, *Beasts and Beloveds* and *Turning*. His first printed collection of poetry, *Feathers Scattered in the Wind*, was published by Iconau in 2014. www.feathersscatteredinthewind.com

**K L Price**'s creative non-fiction has been published by *Litro*, *The Clearing* and *Caught by the River* and fiction by Worcester Literary Festival’s *Flashes of Fiction*. Her first novel, *The Greening of Louise Long*, is being represented by Richford Becklow. She worked for ten years as a gardener at Kew and now leads the comms team at SOAS. www.katprice.wordpress.com

**Niles Reddick**’s collection *Road Kill Art and Other Oddities* was a finalist for an Eppie award, his novel *Lead Me Home* was a national finalist for a ForeWord Award, a finalist in the Georgia Author of the Year award in the fiction category, and a nominee for an IPPY award. His work has appeared in the anthologies *Southern Voices in Every Direction* and *Unusual Circumstances* and has been featured in many journals including *The Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies*, *Southern Reader*, *Like the Dew*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *The Pomanok Review*, *Corner Club Press*, *Slice of Life*, *Deep South Review*, *The Red Dirt Review*, *Faircloth Review*, *New Southerner*, and many others. He works for the University of Memphis at Lambuth in Jackson, Tennessee, where he lives with his wife Michelle, and two children, Audrey and Nicholas. His new novel, *Drifting Too Far From the Shore*, is forthcoming in 2015. His website is www.nilesreddick.com

**Susan Richardson** is a poet, performer and educator, whose third collection, *skindancing*, themed around human-animal metamorphosis and both our intimacy with, and alienation from, the wild and our animal selves, has just been published by Cinnamon Press. Her previous two collections, *Creatures of the Intertidal Zone* and *Where the Air is Rarefied*, focus on her own, and others’, journeys through the increasingly fragile Arctic environment. Susan is currently poet-in-residence with the Marine Conservation Society, writing poems and running workshops in response to their Thirty Threatened Species appeal. www.susanrichardsonwriter.co.uk
Morgan Roberts, at the time of your reading this, may or may not have just graduated in English Literature & Creative Writing at Aberystwyth University. Either way, he will have retreated from the seaside back to the valleys of south Wales from whence he came. He has for certain though, had poems previously published; including an anthology in aid of Cancer Research UK called The Wait and New York-based Lady Chaos Press anthology Skeletons.

Lynn Saville’s photographs of cities at twilight and dawn have been widely exhibited in the U.S. and abroad. Dark City: Urban America at Night (Damiani, 2015), with an introduction by the British critic Geoff Dyer, is her third book. Saville’s awards include fellowships from The New York Foundation for the Arts and The New York State Council for the Arts. She lives in New York City with her husband, the poet Philip Fried.

Kevin Tosca’s stories have been published in The MacGuffin, Spork Press, Midwestern Gothic, Bartleby Snopes, Zone 3 and elsewhere. He lives in Paris. He and his work can be found at www.kevintosca.com and on Facebook.

Mark Tredinnick is a celebrated Australian poet, nature writer and teacher. He was the winner of the Montreal Poetry Prize in 2011 and the Cardiff Poetry Prize in 2012, as well as receiving numerous other major Australian and international awards and critical acknowledgement for his writing over the years. He has published thirteen books to date.

Emily Vanderploeg is 32 years old. She holds an MA and PhD in Creative Writing from Swansea University, and teaches creative writing online for Queen’s University. She regularly performs her work in both Canada and Wales and was shortlisted for the 2010 Impress Prize for New Writers. Originally from Aurora, Ontario, she currently lives in Budapest, Hungary.

Rebecca Marie Wilks is 23, and lives in the Rhondda Valley. She was a 2015 Forward Poetry Rivals finalist, and her most recent previous work can be found in the anthology Where Shadows Fall, published by Forward Press. She is currently between jobs, but her pet spaniel thinks she’s great.

Martin Willitts Jr (USA) is a retired Librarian. He has been in many of Cinnamon Press anthologies over the years. He has won many USA individual poetry contests as well as the International Dylan Thomas Poetry Award for the centennial. He has eight full-length collections and over twenty chapbooks