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TORBEN BETTS SIMON COCKLE JIM CONWELL KAREN DENNISON SADDIQ DZUKOGI
DIC EDWARDS GLYN EDWARDS GILES GOODLAND JACK HARVEY ROS HUDIS
TONY KENDREW ERIN L. MCCOY BETH MCDONOUGH PAMELA PETRO
BETHANY W. POPE MARGARET QUINN NIGEL RODENHURST C.B. SIKSTROM
IAN SMITH MATT TORDOFF CALVIN WHARTON PHIL WOOD



THE LAMPETER REVIEW

The online magazine of the Lampeter Creative Writing Centre
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Editorial

“One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

This autumn: the American Presidential election, the after-effects of Brexit, the closing of refugee camps in Calais, bombings in Mosul and Syria, the melt of the Arctic heart. When we think of autumn 2016, we will think of political chaos, the world in a terrible state of chassis. But as I sit at my desk writing, with the days becoming shorter and darker, I see the spilt litter of leaves across the garden, a splash of late chrysanthemum in the beds, remember the sparkle of the falling Orionids - perhaps the dancing stars of the Nietzsche quotation - as the earth passes through the debris of Halley’s Comet. And a November Supermoon, a moon that is said to drive people mad and cause natural disasters. Chaos indeed.

Chaos is at the core of our birth as a universe, our natural state: everything else is imposed on it as a way of avoiding a return to disarray. We try to stop it leaking out - like magic from the books of Terry Pratchett’s L-Space - with varying degrees of success. But as Pratchett tells us in *Interesting Times*, “chaos is found in greatest abundance wherever order is being sought. It always defeats order, because it is better organized”. He may well be right.

As editor for this issue, my own personal chaos came in the form of words: an MA just completed, and a raft of submissions in my inbox every day. I enjoyed reading every one, and selecting those which made it into the Review was a hard job indeed. Everyone had interpreted the theme differently: everyone had something unique to say. For some, it represented emotional turbulence, a state of mind, perhaps the death of someone close.

Others, such as Jim Conwell, wrote about war or political conflict, of “fractured words” and “raging darkness”. Submissions came in all shapes and sizes, and from

those whose names were both familiar and unfamiliar to me. It was a particular pleasure to be able to publish new pieces from writers whose work I already knew and admired, such as Giles Goodland, Glyn Edwards and Phil Wood, along with fresh voices at the start of what will hopefully be long and successful writing careers. We were also fortunate to attract submissions from all over the world, from Ian Smith who sent us beautifully-crafted poems from Australia, to Saddiq Dzukogi, a Nigerian writer who has twice been a finalist in the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize.

We had significantly more poetry submissions for this issue than prose pieces: perhaps the concept of ‘chaos’ appeals more to the poetic than the fictional soul. However, we were very pleased to receive Myles Barker’s ‘The Cat Up the Aspen’, an absorbing piece which explores the confusion of a disordered mind as the paranoia and violence of its central character spirals out of control.

In Dic Edwards’ story ‘Wagga Wagga’, we have a rich and perceptive tale of a young man returning home after a trip to Australia. Again, we explore a conflict of thoughts, a jumble of memory, loneliness and regrets, together with an old tragedy which still haunts him. C.B. Sikstrom’s ‘The Fractal Topology of *The Fractal Topology of Mountains*’ is a delicate, mathematical piece of writing which takes us from history and geology to philosophy, in what appear to be random thoughts, but is actually a carefully constructed sequence of ‘order and surprise’ where the twists and turns of the text beautifully mirror the subject-matter.

Crossing the boundaries between poetry and prose is Bethany W. Pope’s remarkable ‘Twisting, into the Dark’, the tale of a descent into madness based on a true story. Terrifying and disturbing, vividly descriptive, it’s a compelling read for those long winter nights. We were also delighted to be able to include Nigel Rodenhurst’s essay ‘Meeting Your Hero’ in this issue, detailing his interview with Paul Auster and the disappointment of finding that one’s hero has unexpected feet of clay. For lovers of theatre and drama, we have an extract from Torben Bett’s play ‘The Subtle Art of Standing Apart’. Written in rhyming couplets, the play is darkly comic in tone, and amply confirms Liz Lochhead’s assertion that Torben is “just about the most original and extraordinary writer of drama we have”.

As a poet, when it came to reading the poetry submissions, it was the strong visual images which stayed with me. I looked for poems that would surprise, delight, poems whose images remained with me when I went to bed tired after a long day of editing, or where the authenticity of the voice resounded in my head the following morning. Ros Hudis’s ‘Last Sighting’ was one such poem, a beautifully evocative

piece about Giorgio Vasari's painting 'Last Supper', which was damaged in the Florence floods of 1966, and unveiled to the public this year following extensive restoration.

Another piece of art, Anselm Kiefer's 'Black Flakes', provides the backdrop for one of Karen Dennison's two poems. The painting itself is drawn from a poem by Paul Celan, whose parents died in the concentration camps, and Karen's poem echoes the bleak horror of those times. And responding to another work, this time a poem by Simon Armitage, Glyn Edwards gives us a topical and thought-provoking piece on the nature of social media in the modern age. Submissions ranged from traditional stanza-based forms to much looser - but carefully controlled - poems where the visual effect was as important as the word-images and two in particular, by Margaret Quinn and Simon Cockle, effectively followed the movement of a trampoline and a maypole respectively by using non-traditional but highly effective poetry structures.

Poets wrote about a variety of different environments, both urban and rural: some real, some imagined, but all of them giving an individual perspective, from Catherine Ayres' and Beth McDonough's evocative landscape poems to Matt Tordoff's intriguing and theatrical amalgam of life in ancient and modern Athens. We had many submissions from the USA and Canada for this issue, including eloquent and powerful work from Jack Harvey, Erin McCoy and Ashley-Elizabeth Best. We were also very lucky to be able to include work from Calvin Wharton, a writer and academic from Douglas College in British Columbia, who has spent several weeks in Lampeter as a Visiting Professor, and from the American writer and photographer Pamela Petro. Pamela works with digital images and environmental installations and has exhibited widely. Her pictures are stunning and turbulent. Swirls of colour and blurred images create worlds which are distorted, the viewer unsettled by places and objects which seem to have shifted away from the usual perspective, and the real difficulty was in choosing which of the wonderful images from her Dusk series of prints to include in the issue.

Finally, Tony Kendrew, 'Our Man in the States', provides a challenging and speculative piece on cultural displacement, and his feelings at being a 'Resident Alien' in the USA. A transatlantic time-traveller, Tony reflects on what it means to belong to a culture, to find a sense of place in a new country, and how it feels when changing political and social dimensions alter one's perceptions of 'home'.

The visual element was important to me when editing this 'Chaos' issue. For this reason, and to echo the varied visual effects of the creative pieces, different styles

and spacings were used to reflect the basic theme and create variation. We hope you will enjoy reading this issue, and that you will find a galaxy of ‘dancing stars’ to savour within its pages. It has been a huge pleasure to read so many wonderful and varied pieces and I am greatly indebted to all our contributors, and also to my fellow -editors, for making it such a rewarding experience.

Kathy Miles, Issue Editor

Two Poems

Catherine Ayres

Dove Crag

On the ridge, startled light.
Pines brood in their slants,
the river glistens like a kill.
I hover over a small life,
search for its sparks
in a sinew of land.
I burned down years ago,
speckled flares between hill and sea,
tiny fires in closed rooms,
all my hiding places.
The grouse shouts 'Go back!'
but I'm nearer the moon
than these tangled maps,
its feathered face
ash flecks in blue.

Zoetrope

Night bellies
with a universe of wasps,
slips through a seam's itch
into slow mechanics of light:
a spool of film, a departing train
that squares the trees in amber,
traps their nodding crowns.

Silence. Then the first fork splits
in a ploughshare's glint,
unearths a furrow of growls.
So this is rage. I could spread
inside its wound, face myself.
Instead, I flicker between slits,
spit shadows, a painted horse.

Sky's insomnia outstares me;
my feeble curve, the patterns on my skin.

The Cat Up the Aspen

Myles Barker

I heard the cat yowling outside by the pool, so I went out there. It was curled up on the highest branch of my aspen next to the pool shed. I pulled out my stockpile of keys from my pocket, but the pool gate was unlocked. None of my things were just unlocked. Not these days. Not since the Feds started slinking around. They do all they can to not be seen, but I see. They don't know it. So, I'm one step ahead of them. I do everything I can to stay ahead. Protection. Security. A lot of locks and keys.

I opened the gate and my wife Carol lay there naked on the wood chips behind the pool shed, sweating and moaning underneath that carpenter, Mr. Lo. His heart was in pain, the devil's grip rooted in there. Alma 5:11. Check your Book of Mormon. It explains the precedent in this situation. The woman obviously tempted the man, and he prayed his heart out to God to subsume the Devil's whispering with his own Word, and God cast the Devil out of the man, and the man was no longer driven by his appetite for worldly pleasures. But the woman tempted him a second time, this time with the songs she sang—Carol was always singing. He called out to God again when he heard her singing in the bath, and God could not beat her.

The worst part about Mr. Lo romping with my wife though, what really had me roiled and piping, was that he had decided to romp in the flowerbed with my wife and kept going at it despite having scared the cat so high up the aspen that it could not get itself down. She was desperate for help. In pain. Loud as a cop's siren. They just kept romping.

Lo. The man whom I trusted to come in and build my things. His kids ate because of me. He was romping with my wife behind the shed that I had paid him to build. We had shaken hands. And there he was, his boots still on, cargo pants and drawers at his ankles, derrière scrunched up and glowing in the summer sun. Romping.

I said, What the eff, and Carol pushed Lo off her. Hello! The cat wasn't going to come down just because they stopped mid-romp. I said, We shook hands, Lo. But he was facing away from me, wouldn't look me in the eye.

He pulled up his drawers and cargo pants, and, like a coward, he took off blazing toward the gate, still working on his zipper. The gate slammed shut, and I could hear his belt flapping and jangling as he ran down the walk just on the other side of the fence where I stood.

I pulled Carol up. Wood chips fell off her back and I took her by the throat. I did. I'll admit that. I told her, What's up and she grabbed at my hands and cried and said she was sorry, and all that. I wasn't grabbing her throat too hard or else she couldn't have said all those sorrys. Right? The cat was really crying now, and I gave Carol a knock. She screamed for the whole gosh darn cul-de-sac to hear. Oh my gosh! she screamed. Somebody call the police, she screamed, with the final word ringing out loud enough to make the crows take off like shuffling cards from the orchard behind our house.

I looked her hard in the eye that wasn't swelling up and I said, Call the cops? The *cops*? You think the cops are going to get the effin' cat down? Try the fire department, Carol. And Carol's eye is looking hard at me as if trying to figure out some sleight of hand I just performed.

Then that Brian boy's voice came through the fence that kept the Arnold family from watching my wife as she tans. So he's in his own backyard, on his father's land, which was perfectly in his rights, and he was screaming, Mr. Cur, let her go. He was in full panic, like he was under the influence of over-caffeinating, which wouldn't surprise me. The Arnolds run a loose ship.

Carol was crying and the boy was screaming from his backyard, which he has the right to do, saying, Mom, call the cops, call the cops, and I started getting "the confusion" again. The cat whined over the screams of the other two and I dropped Carol and told Brian, We don't need the dang cops! Mind your own dang business, Brian! Call the fire chief. Tell him we're going to need the engine with the ladder ASAP.

And then I remembered Lo. He was the problem, and he just ran off. You'd think it goes something like: a man builds a shed, the man gets paid, he leaves. You wouldn't think the man stays and traumatizes your cat.

I started after Lo. I ran after him past the diving board, out the unlocked gate, cutting right, down the walk. I came full steam out onto the drive. Lo was standing in the middle of the street, back to me. He was still working on his belt.

I heard the music of Tom's ice cream truck getting loud and Lo started waving his arms over his head, taking quick glances at me as I was getting closer and he's waving his arms faster and faster, Tom's music getting louder. (Tom's got a good business, runs his truck through the rich neighborhoods every week-

end even after his wife Martha passed. He's the real deal. Goes to church. Sells ice cream. Doesn't worry about losing his wife to a laborer. He's got nothing to complain about. Martha died due to medical malpractice.)

Tom stopped his truck in front of Lo and Lo, being the monster he is, jumped in the open door like he owned the truck and I saw Tom through the little window hold his hands up like, Slow down, slow down, or like, Don't hurt me, take the ice cream.

Lo pointed at me and Tom turned and started fumbling for a microphone hanging down like a trucker's and the jingling kid song crackling out of the double megaphone on top of the truck cut out and was replaced by the muffled sound of Lo telling Tom something and Tom breathing into the mic as he was listening. Tom said, Let me talk to Jim. Sometimes we just got to talk to Jimmy. Tom said to me, Jimmy, it's me, Tom. From church. From the ice cream truck.

Lo tried to grab the mic from Tom, who knocked Lo's hand away with the precision of his war days. Tom's voice sounded through the speakers again. OK, OK. Jim, stay where you are. We're going to get the police so we can talk. I'm coming out, OK, Jimmy? We'll sort this out. We're OK.

My neighbors' doors started opening in the cul-de-sac. I saw Janice put her hands out low to keep her kids from coming out. I call out, Janice, help me, please. The cat's stuck up the tree. Incredibly unhappy. Call Fire Chief Claus, tell him to bring the engine over. We're going to need the ladder ASAP.

Janice leans forward toward me, squinting with the same awe I saw in Carol's eye. She pushed her kids further inside. Frank stepped out on his front step, pulling on his Karl Malone jersey and folded his arms, just stood there saying nothing. As if we didn't go the shooting range every other week. As if I didn't let him store his firearms in my walk-in safe that Lo installed. I was looking at my own darn neighbors, asking for help, and no one seemed to even know me. Tom was calling me Jimmy like he did when he used to teach Sunday school with Martha.

I get confused a lot, or maybe paranoid. It had been happening more lately. And whenever it got real bad, when it seemed that they, the Feds, always in the shadows, had really interfered with things, I couldn't trust anything but my Miata. To pull back the top of my MiMi and drive, revving my engine hard when I passed a biker, trying to knock his trendy keester over. And feeling safe. Knowing my firearm was within reach. Knowing the vest was in the trunk in case of anyone hiring some muscle who would threaten me and my property. In case they decided to stop creeping around like lion-heartless ghosts and finally assassinate me. They know I could easily disappear. Killing me would require little to no clean up. I've counted the number of people who would ask questions about my disappearance. Two. My credit collector named Mouse or Mills or something.

He mumbled. And that Rushki dentist and his 6-month reminders that looked like birthday cards. If the Feds finally got me dead, the cat would likely need an adjustment period, as well, to establish a new routine for who feeds her and who holds her when she's cold. Who gives her eye medicine and scratches her throat.

But I wouldn't go without a fight. I was prepared for any assault, one man or a clutch of them.

I punched the code into the garage door keypad. I got into the Miata, started it up and reversed out. The loose belt in the engine whined. I put the car into D and headed down the driveway, turning past Lo and Tom, Tom still blabbering away, "Farmer in the Dell" playing. I turned out of the cul-de-sac and put the accelerator to the floor until I could only hear the rushing air. I drove with some lucidity.

To a coffee shop by the mall. Eff it, ordered a chai tea. Dirty. I sat down and a boy near Brian Arnold's age, he walked up to me and sat down at my table without asking. I didn't want a word from this punk.

I don't want a word from you, punk, I said.

He went ahead and asked me, his clean haircut and a smile across his face, asked me if I'd answer a personal question.

What's your name? he said. Ba-dum-ch!

And I said, Oh, nope. No you don't. I'm in no mood for you evangelists with your cute girls inviting me to drinking parties and getting there and the drinks being virgin and the girls being virgin as an ethos and you people putting on plays about God and Baptism and Doubting your Doubts and Salvation. I said, My cat, you see, my girl, she is in real pain. If you can't help me with her, you can't help me with anything. My wife thinks we need the cops. Get Claus, I'm saying. The ladder.

He said, I understand. His eyes looked up as if communing with the rat piss stain on the ceiling. He said, Sometimes things are just real impossible to ignore. One thing the Bible wants to tell us, sir, is that if John the Baptist had just told Herod he didn't have to stick to his oath to give Salome whatever she demanded, that words are pointless and actions are forever, and to remind him that a head on a platter is not a pretty sight, then we'd have a John the Baptist with a head six feet under. Clarity in honesty. That's what He's all about.

What, kid? What the *fuck* are you saying?

Fuck it.

I grabbed 3 cans of Tab from the trunk of my car. I went into the bar for a Stoli, unflavored, on the rocks in a tall glass. This damp place was my old haunt. When

I was safe enough to live. The waitress had changed. It was an Irish pub. Not the name, but the people. The small gang that never leaves. I only understand a third of what they say when I get there, and I know it's time to leave when we're all talking like we were old friends from County Cork.

I told a young Marine in his Blue-Whites leaning against the bar about my cat and the Bible kid high on lattes and he told me about the shock of returning, how cardboard boxes on the roadside all seem primed to blow, how every night he barely escaped nightmares. He hid his accent like a good Marine. But when he said, You have it good, I could hear that Mick shit it in there, like an Irish Brigadoon through the fog.

How I have it good? I said. Punk, you have no idea how I have it.

One of the strong, hot winds of summer was picking up dirt and garbage can lids as I turned into our cul-de-sac. Locked homes, empty street. Susanne stepped into my house holding a casserole dish. A single cop cruiser was parked out front. Lights off.

The garage was still open. I pressed soft on the accelerator, getting up the drive as quiet as possible, then shifted into N, cut the engine. Pushed the car into the garage.

I haven't had it good with cops. I didn't want any trouble.

I walked to the end of the diving board, holding my arms out for balance. The water was still, the clear blue sky wavering on the silver surface. I felt lonely. I think it was exhaustion.

I sat down at the edge of the board and hung my feet, letting them circle with the tips of my sneakers tracing through the top of the water, making minute waves. The water seemed like fabric, as if I could walk across it, walk across the sky if I wanted.

A rotting, soft-green leaf dropped in the water, and I saw the aspen reflected into the sky, a fat, orange ball of fur on the top branch like a caterpillar. An engine purred in the orchard beyond the far fence as one of the Arnolds sprayed fungicide.

I heard heavy boots walking up the drive. At least three men.

Maybe my end. So be it.

The ladder clanked against the vinyl fence and extended away from me toward the cat. Shelley Moody climbed to the top branch, and the cat fell limp into her chest and she held it with both gloves and kissed her on the head. You're OK. You're safe, Sweetie.

I heard the rusted creak of the pool gate hinges. Soft steps, almost tiptoes, file in.

Do you have a weapon, Jim?

It was that dang police chief, Joshua. Again.

Jimmy, I'm here to help you.

The diving board dipped as Joshua stepped onto it and walked toward me. My feet went under. My sneakers were washed clean, the mud pluming like a storm cloud.

Work with us, Jimmy, and we'll work with you, OK?

My hands were behind my back. An instinct. He helped me up and the cuffs closed around my wrists. He backed me off the diving board. Eight officers stood with their weapons at their waists.

Good job. You're OK. Keep working with us the whole way, Jim, and we'll drop the minor charges. But you are under arrest for domestic violence. He recited the Miranda rights.

Do you understand?

Domestic violence? I said. You can get that for a cat?

New Orleans Sequence

Ashley-Elizabeth Best

My pilgrimage starts in Toronto,
a winter wind still threatening
spring. We move south to something
similar yet not familiar. To move
and keep moving, two days on a bus
across a country divided, state by
state.

Sweet tease of a rest in Montgomery,
Alabama. In the thick of my palm
a phone number scrawled in black
from a Kentuckian seat partner, gone
now, over eager on his first trip,
thinks I will find him out later. I press
my tongue to my palm and wheel it
to hatch the light of my skin.

*

Arrived, on our way down Royal Street,
I take us down an alley and we emerge
in front of St. Louis Cathedral, an impromptu
jazz band arguing themselves into a song on
the benches. The trumpet player's face falls
into serialized twitches, and suddenly I find
myself naming all the buildings under my breath,
Cabildo, The Presbytère, Pontalba—In New Orleans
you can always find a building to frame
the moon, just so.

I want to be in error, to be corrected into
learning. We wander ourselves
lost, watch the artists pack up for the night.

On to the Gumbo Shop courtyard after
dark, we order alligator sausages, freshly
arrived, sinful pilgrims in need of a meal.

*

On the steamboat we can see the rib cage
of an old shrimping boat, clouds flower
around the sun. We rock away from the
docks, the darkness of the Mississippi
alive.

We pass the location of the battle of New
Orleans, and I imagine the first copper
whiff of battle, blades opening bellies
as bones pardon the uncoiled mess of our
workings.

The fat lip of the river pillowed up,
our voices cargoed on the wind.

I'm waiting to be shaped by this city.
I will make no order of things.

*

The courtyard of our hotel brightens
my connection to the present, to New
Orleans, and thankful I left my home-
town just before it exhausted my will
to live. Here in the open air courtyard
with nothing but my notebook and cigarettes
to show, I'm more myself than anyone from
my past could ever hope to know.

A woman at an occult store read
my cards behind a black veil by the shop
door. She was tired, yawned and complained
into her coffee about how busy the day had been.
I warmed to her and the lack of pretense, how
this mistake was worth every dollar.

Sometimes hunger can be mistaken for a will
to live. I know she's sick of us tourists, each
desperate yet unbelieving, hoping she'll
touch on something we already know of ourselves.

I'm willing to be entertained but not expecting any
great act.

Face subtracted, her forehead offers a wrinkle
of thought, a willingness to wound.

She begins:

Do we need the light or the fire?

*An oracle of birds soars through a sky slackened
into a hollow of thick fog as the sun attempts to rise
from the earth's throat, a chip of moonlight visible
through the clouds.*

*You're invited to consider the Bayou before you,
the vascular forests of river deltas. She pats my hand
and leaves off with, bronchial lineage takes patient shape.*

*

*

*

My mind is an archive of clouds, and here before me is the world
I still have to live in. One has to be able to look all ways at once.
My body squanders this chance, this city is forever the space
I exhaust myself in.

The Subtle Art of Standing Apart

Torben Betts



a modern retelling of Molière's THE MISANTHROPE

as at 5th November 2016

Commissioned by James Dacre for Northampton Royal and Derngate Theatres

CHARACTERS

AL

a struggling musician, in love with Selma

PHIL

his friend, a wine merchant, in love with Ellie

RON

a wannabe pop star, in love with Selma

SELMA

a model and wannabe actress, in love with Selma

CLIVE

a producer of popular entertainments, father of Ron, in love with Selma

ELLIE

a nurse, in love with Al

GLENDA

old friend of Selma, in love with Al

(Ellie and Glenda can be played by the same actress)

preferably played without an interval

NB: In the world of this play the characters are obliged to speak in rhyming couplets. It is the convention of the time and to veer from this custom can land you in serious trouble. Occasionally the characters might be seen surreptitiously counting out the pentameter on their fingers.

Act 1

AL's flat.

PHIL: (*Off.*) Stop storming off! Don't give me all this stick!
Don't rage like some demented...

AL: (*Off.*) I feel sick!
So kindly bugger off and let me stew.
The black dog's back!

PHIL: You're drunk!

AL: (*Entering.*) Well, so are you!

PHIL: (*Entering.*) Let's put some coffee on, relax, calm down!
And tell me what's the...

AL: Christ, I hate this town!

PHIL: It's freezing in this flat! Look, there's my breath!
Turn up your heating, please!

AL: I long for death!
I hate this fucked-up world and all that's in it!
I even hate my friends now!

PHIL: Wait a minute!
Cos I'm your friend!

AL: You were!

PHIL: I was?

AL: You heard!
But now our friendship's scarcely worth a turd!

PHIL: A turd?

AL: A turd!

PHIL: A turd, you say?

AL: Indeed!

PHIL: But we've been friends since boyhood?

AL: Yes, agreed!
But you (in days of innocence and youth)
Prized honesty and honour, courage, truth,
But, oh, you're now a fraud like all the rest,
You're just like all those Suits.

PHIL: No!

AL: I detest
A man who back slaps, hugs another,
An arm around his shoulder, like a brother,
Bellows like a berk at all his jokes,
Talks football, girls and loot with other blokes!
That arsehole...

PHIL: Listen!

AL: ...with the flashy watch:
"Barman, mate, your most expensive scotch!"
And there you are: his poodle, lapdog, bitch,
Indulging him! And why? Because he's rich!
I take you to one side and ask his name:
You shrug and say who cares?

PHIL: I'm not to blame.
You need to learn to be much more forgiving.
He's not our cup of tea but it's a living.
He said he'd order fifteen crates of wine
And I've my rent to pay so...

AL: I decline
To listen more. You hang with bankers!
With all these loathsome, advertising wankers,
With hedge fund crooks, with lawyers, corporate trash,
We need a revolution!

PHIL: I need cash!

AL: Oh, Cash! Sweet Cash! This Mammon! Our true God,
We bow ourselves before thee.

PHIL: Silly sod!
What do you want? The world is as it is.
Why always get yourself in such a tizz?
There's mortgages and bills and kids to feed.

AL: So that means insincerity and greed?
That's not the life we're meant to live at all.
I'd rather die.

PHIL: You've roaches up this wall.
For God's sake, Al, you're living like a bum!

AL: Should I then live like your stockbroker scum?

PHIL: But these are human souls. Oh, all this hate!
It's eating up your heart. You're losing weight.
We're all becoming worried now.

AL: Don't care!
Stand with me or against me!

PHIL: That's not fair.
There's good and bad in every man.

AL: Not true!
Most people are plain evil!

PHIL: Hark at you.
This universal rage is just so...shoddy.

AL: Least I'm consistent: I hate everybody.
And you, you think we're all of equal merit:
The man of worth, the venal, right-wing ferret,
The man who clings to truth, the lying toad,
I feel so sad my heart might well explode,

You treat a man like that with such respect
Because he buys your booze!?

PHIL: What d'you expect?

This is a fallen world. We must survive.
We all must play the game to stay alive.

AL: Not me, my friend. I shall not compromise:
The world is built on treachery and lies,
On gluttony, deceit. On theft and violence.
Makes me wanna hang myself.

PHIL: Oh, silence!
You need to stop this nonsense, get a grip.
You know I value our relationship.
You've always been a man we all admire:
Yet you demand too much...

AL: (*Aside.*) God loves a trier.

PHIL: You ask too much from...well, your fellow man.
We cannot all be perfect!

AL: Yes, we can!
Why *not* be true and just and good and kind?
Or aim to be at least? Not stay resigned,
Becoming part of this amoral bog!
My rage the torchlight shining through the fog.
This world's a sewer!

PHIL: Stop!

AL: This life's a farce.

PHIL: Before you disappear up your own arse.

AL: Those Suits tonight, you loathe them as I do.
Their politics, their ignorance.

PHIL: That's true.
But hear me out.

AL: But all you do is laugh!

PHIL: I'm with them on my company's behalf!
My job's to keep them sweet, to make a deal!
It matters not the things I think or feel.
I have to work. I have to earn my crust.

AL: You've sold your soul, sir! Yes, I've got you sussed.
You cast your pearls before the trampling swine!
The friend of all mankind's no friend of mine!

PHIL: So what the hell then would you have me do?

AL: Be honest! Be unwaveringly true.

PHIL: On all occasions?

AL: Yes!

PHIL: You're such a tit!

AL: Perhaps but *you* these days are full of shit!

PHIL: The gloves are off then?

AL: Yes! Mine always are.
I box bareknuckle.

PHIL: You take things way too far.

AL: Just go, please leave, we're through now, you and I.

PHIL: Not sure if I should I laugh or I should cry?

AL: Life's tragedy, not comedy, so weep!
But, you, you're not appropriately deep.

PHIL: So, what, if we dislike someone we say?

AL: As surely as the night must follow day.

PHIL: So tell my actress aunt that she's a ham?

AL: And, yes, that she is mutton dressed as lamb.

PHIL: So tell my Dad his breath reeks like stale fish?
And that he bores for Britain?

AL: If we wish.

PHIL: Tell Caroline...?

AL: Her husband uses whores!
And she herself is not without her flaws.

PHIL: Tell Kate and Tom...?

AL: Their children are both vile!

PHIL: Tell Jane...?

AL: That she has not one ounce of style!

PHIL: My brother...?

AL: That he's racist, dull and thick
And how he gets on everybody's wick!
Tell all of them in words they'll understand!
Tell England "You're a stupid, dying land!"

PHIL: In which case then permit me to be blunt:
Your love of truth is making you a...

AL: Don't!

PHIL: A laughing stock, a thing of ridicule.
Such posturing we all should leave in school.

AL: Your words I fear are falling on deaf ears,
For I heed not the viewpoints of my peers,
Since humankind's a cancer on this earth.
I rue the day my mother gave me birth!
AL now picks up his guitar.

I Rue the Day My Mother Gave Me Birth

AL: I rue the day my mother gave me birth,
Since humankind's a cancer on this earth,
Every single thing the species does
Brings on Armageddon. That's because
We're ignorant and full of vicious greed,
And yet we breed and breed and breed and breed.

I rue the day my mother gave me birth,
Since humankind's a cancer on this earth,
Murderers and liars in control,
The devil inside everybody's soul,
The human beast is nothing but a virus,
And Mother Nature's shortly to expire us.

So I rue the day my mother gave me birth,
Yes, humankind's a cancer on this earth.

PHIL: A new one?

AL: But...

PHIL: I like it.

AL: ...what's the point?

PHIL: You need to persevere.

AL: I need a joint.

PHIL: I'll call my dealer then. (*On phone.*) Alright there, pal?

AL: I'll have to owe you.

PHIL: No, sir, I'm with Al.
The flats beside the chippie. (*To AL.*) Ron's a fan.
This one's on me.

AL: I'll pay you when I can.
AL plays on to the end of his song.

PHIL: So, have you called my lawyer like I said?

AL: Course not!

PHIL: Are you completely off your head?

AL: Lawyers to a man are Satan's spawn.
I'll represent myself.

PHIL: Does it not dawn
On you you've little chance of winning?

AL: For I am way more sinned against than sinning.

PHIL: A company worth twenty million pounds
Against one little busker?

AL: I have grounds.
And truth is on my side. I shall prevail.
So let them do their worst.

PHIL: And if you fail?

AL: So what? I've nothing. Look at me, I'm broke.
I'll crawl into some corner and I'll croak.
Their service charge increases every quarter:
But do we get our gas, our running water?
The ceiling's damp, there's vermin in the halls,
They don't reply to emails, answer calls!
So why should I or anyone pay rent
To landlords who are past description bent?
They'll turn our homes into some flash hotel,
So drag us all to court then go to hell!

PHIL: You haven't got a prayer.

AL: Oh, have I not?

PHIL: But did you hire that suit?

AL: Shit, I forgot!

PHIL: What d'you think will happen if you lost?
Consider all the money it will cost?
You owe the banks a fortune as it stands
So think about...

AL: This isn't in my hands!

PHIL: This lofty moral stance you always take!
You're starving, look!

AL: At least I'm not a fake.

PHIL: I'll buy you dinner. It's just so aggravating!

AL: He needs a lengthy spoon who sups with Satan.

PHIL: I'm Satan now?

AL: You take the Devil's gold.

PHIL: And yet you'll smoke my spliff?

AL: Your soul's been sold.

PHIL: I think you said.

AL: Yes, everyone's been bought!
Where *have* the good men gone?

PHIL: Oh, life's too short.
I listen to this bullshit every night.
For you our complex world is black or white.
When, truth to tell, we need more shades of grey.
We need some give and take.

AL: Well, so you say.

PHIL: And what, to all your friends, is so surprising,
What makes us chortle at your moralising:
This hateful world you set yourself above
Is quite embodied in the girl you love.
She's beautiful, of course, I grant you that,

AL: (*Aside.*) Betwixt the sheets she's like some acrobat!

PHIL: She's bright and sharp, her talk is full of wit,
She says she loves you...

AL: (*Aside.*) Yet she won't commit.

PHIL: There's not one man alive who could resist her.

AL: (*Aside.*) I could have died from joy when first I kissed her.

PHIL: She's hot, it's true, she's classy, follows fashion
But shallow.

AL: (*Aside.*) God, she drives me wild with passion.

PHIL: Obsessed with shopping, craves all things expensive,
Her love of precious stones is comprehensive,
She's mean about her friends behind their backs,
Invests in firms that seldom pay their tax,
Thinks immigrants should pack their bags and go,
She's everything you hate, agreed?

AL: But, oh!
I love her, Phil.

PHIL: And want her as your wife!
 A man who's hated marriage all his life.
 Said wedlock is "for losers, willing slaves",
 A hell for men who really "want their graves",
 For women "who desire to be possessed",
 An institution "cursed instead of blessed".
 With Selma, all of that's now in the past,
 For to this Succubus you're holding fast,
 She grew up in a house that has a moat,
 Has pearls and diamonds wrapped around her throat,
 Supports illegal wars and hunting foxes...

AL: Alright, she's ticking all the fucking boxes!

PHIL: But worse than all of this, you say, what hurts
 Is that she...

AL Flirts.

PHIL: And flirts.

AL: And flirts.

PHIL: And flirts.

AL: And flirts!
 I can't be sure she's faithful. That she's pure.

PHIL: You used to say...

AL: I need some instant cure!
 This love I have for Selma's my disease!
 It's leeching out my life by slow degrees!

PHIL: You used to say "Monogamy's a joke
 Slapped on the working classes like a yoke,
 That ownership of bodies is all wrong!"
 But you were self-deluding all along!

AL: You've made your point. I'm just a hypocrite.

PHIL: It's *you*, not me, who talks no end of shit.

AL: Sometimes it makes me mad, sometimes it doesn't.

PHIL: The better choice by far would be her cousin.

AL: Ellie?

PHIL: Yes. She's gorgeous, sweet and kind.
 She loves you too it seems.

AL: Well, love is blind.

Enter RON, wearing hoodie, bling, sunglasses and inverted baseball cap etc.

RON: What's up, my bros, tell me how is it hangin'?
 Just ran away from this bitch I been bangin'!
 She out there right now and she cursin' the night,
 (To off.) I'm a soldier of peace, girl, I weren't born to fight!
 Yeah, she found out my heart's been ensnared by another
 You kna what am sayin'? *(To off.)* Girl, you ain't my mother!
 So what have we got here: a big bag of weed,
 For fifty-five fifty, I think we agreed?
 (To Al.) It's an honour to meet a great artist like you,
 I hope that you'll wanna be one of my crew?
 I saw you last month busking out in the street
 I was singing along, man, was tapping my feet.
 Still crooning your tunes in the Paradise Bar?
 Bro, you need a contract. Is this your guitar?
 I already feel, man, that you're like a brother,
 And strugglin' musicians should stick by each other!
 AL does not respond.

(To Phil.)

What's with him, my friend? He ain't heeding me, bro!

(To Al.)

I'm attempting to instigate dialogue, yo?

AL: Are you talking to me?

RON: Yes, I'm talking to yous.

AL: (*Aside to Phil.*) His cap's on the wrong way! Just look at his shoes.

RON: You kna what am sayin'? I swear I'm a fan.

AL: (*Aside to Phil.*) Say who is this utter buffoon of a man?

PHIL: Ron, this is Al and, well, Al, this is Ron.

RON: A quick bit of bondin' and then I'll be gone.

AL: Bonding, you say?

RON: I dig bondin' alright:
I bond through the day and I bond through the night...
And you are a dude who's esteemed in this hood.
You feel me?

PHIL: He feels you.

AL: I've not understood.

RON: Your song "We Must Riot" was excellent, mint,
You're a genius, sir!

AL: But...

RON: You seem to be skint?

AL: If you'd kindly...

RON: Permit me to kneel at your feet.
You're a man of the people, the man in the street,
You kna what am sayin'? You down with the young!

AL: Please listen...

RON: A hero completely unsung.

AL: A hero I'm not but...

RON: Your hand I must shake.
You know what I'm sayin'?

PHIL: (*Offering joint.*) You care to partake?

RON: Let's swear to our friendship then. Spit on your palm.
And I'll spit on mine.

PHIL: (*Aside.*) See him start with alarm.

RON: You refuse?

AL: I refuse.

RON: Well then, let me ask why?

AL: I'm out of saliva. My mouth has run dry.

RON: (*Laughing.*) He kills me.

PHIL: You kill him.

AL: I'd like to.

RON: Say what?

AL: Friendship should mean more than that, should it not?
It's more than a handshake, a merger of spit,
There's mutual respect and there's love.

PHIL: Have a hit.

AL: There's the meeting of minds which is built over time,
A shared sense of rhythm.

PHIL: (*Aside.*) A shared sense of rhyme.

RON: We have that.

AL: You reckon?

RON: We have that in spades.

AL: (*Aside to Phil.*) But the bling and the cap and the hood and the shades?

RON: All these points that you make make me value you more,
 You kna what am sayin'?

PHIL: Let's sample this draw.
RON smokes then passes the joint to PHIL.

 I've something to say which may not be expected:
 I know folk round here.

PHIL: Ron's a lad well-connected.

RON: I can help you, you see, with your music, your singing,
 Our bonding right here, then, it's just the beginning.
PHIL passes the joint to AL. After a while they are all laughing insanely.
Each one setting off the others. It builds until:

AL: Jesus Christ, I'm highly wasted.

RON: The finest shit you've ever tasted?

AL: My head feels like it's made of dough.

RON: Fresh from Amsterdam, this blow.

AL: Miserable but can't stop smiling.

PHIL: I feel we two are reconciling?

AL: No way, no way! I'm still irate!

RON: You're laughing though?

PHIL: Still full of hate?

AL: But it's not real. We're all just mugs.

Cos we're not happy. It's the drugs!

All three laugh uncontrollably for a time, with AL laughing against his will.

RON: So now that we've bonded I ask a small favour:

Since weed always makes me a little bit braver.

AL: *(Aside to Phil.)* I don't think we've bonded?

PHIL: *(Aside.)* You've bonded.

AL: Get lost!

PHIL: A bit of pretending, Al! What does it cost?

RON: That I've fallen in love I've already confessed.

And I've penned her a song called *I Want You Undressed*.

AL: A touch on the nose, no?

RON: I need some advice.

And I'd like it from *you*!

AL: Listen...

PHIL: Isn't that nice?

RON: So I'll plug in my Ipod and see what you think.

I dance a bit too.

AL: *(Aside to Phil.)* Jesus, get me a drink.

RON: I hope that you like it, I'm losing my nerve.

AL: *(Aside to Phil.)* He seems like a kid full of natural reserve!

RON: Let me take some deep breaths. Let me calm myself down.

AL: (*Aside to Phil.*) Let's please get this done then!

PHIL: Ron's big in the town.
His people have power so flatter him, yes?
He's a good man to know.

RON: Man, I'm feeling the stress.

AL: Let's hear what you've got cos I'm ready for bed.

PHIL: Remember...

RON: Two seconds.

PHIL: ...the words I've just said.
His people could help you so network, be wise.

AL: When a man says such things then a part of him dies.

RON's music starts up. A heavy hip-hop drumbeat. He starts dancing like a tit. AL looks on in horror. PHIL tries not to laugh.

I Want You Undressed (tba)

RON: I want you undressed, baby, what can I tell yer?
I get all excited just as soon I can smell yer,
I really kinda dig the way you walk down my street,
With them dead classy high heels shoes you wear on yer feet!

AL: What is this utter garbage?

PHIL: Hear him out!

AL: I'd rather punch the moron in the snout!

RON: I want you undressed, honey, what can I say?
All these feelings of lust, girl, they just won't go away!
You're the sexiest lady what I seen recently...
I wanna have a date with you, so hope that you feel me...

PHIL: Excellent!

AL: (Aside.) You what?

PHIL: (Aside.) Come on, I'm just playing?

AL: (Aside.) It's an utter crime. "You kna what am sayin'?"

RON: When you walked into my life, girl, you know I felt blessed,
Which is why I won't lie and I want you undressed.
And all I wanna know is exactly how you feel,
Which is why tomorrow night I'm gonna ask you for a meal.
I dig your eyes and your ears and your mouth and your nose
But what I really want is to see you with no clothes.
I went to my priest and you know I confessed,
Father, I said, I just want her undressed,
He said, sorry, my son, you just failed God's test.
But God can sit and swivel cos I want her undressed.
RON dances on. When the song comes to an end PHIL begins clapping enthusiastically.

AL: You're applauding this drivel? You're sinking so low?

PHIL: He's waiting right there for *your* verdict.

RON: And so?

AL: I'm really not sure I'm the right man to ask.

RON: And why would that be?

AL: I'm not up to the task.

RON: I felt that you liked it? I sensed you approved?

AL: You're after the truth?

PHIL: We were entertained. Moved.
We were charmed.

RON: But I'm wanting *his* brutal critique?

AL: If you're certain then...

PHIL: Wait! Won't you first let me speak?

(*Aside to Al.*) Be careful, be tactful.

AL: (*Aside to Phil.*) Please don't condescend.

(*To Ron.*) You ready for this?

RON: Hell, I'm hard to offend!

AL: The truth must be this, which I hope won't annoy:

I've heard much more wit from a five-year-old boy,

Every syllable uttered a turd in my drink,

That prancing, not dancing, was awful!

RON: You think?

AL: No woman alive could be moved by such crap!

You've next to no talent!

RON: I sing! I can rap!

AL: You wanted my view? So now listen to this:

Your rhyming is wretched. Your poetry piss!

RON is staring angrily at AL.

RON: These words you'll regret, man. Repent them you shall:

Cos all that I wanted to be was your pal.

My rapping is top, bro. I'm close to a deal.

The Hit Machine, cock head. You get me? You feel?

I'll be making my millions while you, in this squat,

Strum away to yourself. You can sit here and rot.

A bad enemy me, if I'm under attack.

And we're enemies now. So take care. Watch your back.

RON storms out.

PHIL: Oh, very well played. Oh, bravo! *Magnifique!*

AL: You heard him! He asked for my "brutal critique".

PHIL: You know who his people are?

AL: I'm tired so get lost!

PHIL: They run half this town and they shouldn't be crossed!

AL: I no longer know you. Who are you? Pray tell.

PHIL: I've smoked too much weed and I'm feeling unwell.

AL: We've smoked too much smoke and we've drunk too much drink.

PHIL: And the beats of our lines are now well out of sync.

PHIL leaves.

AL: This land is sick. There's just no cure, I fear.

So all I long to do is...disappear.

Two Poems

Simon Cockle

PO Box 1663*

“From Mist came Chaos. From Chaos and Mist, came Night, Day, Darkness, and Ether”

Hyginus, *Fabulae Preface 1*

1.

They emerged from a fog, made from steam
rising up from the red desert floor
when the monsoon rain had dispersed;

they were yet to be named Destroyer of Worlds.
The bus journey from the portal of Santa Fe,
winding through the earthenware bluffs

to Los Alamos, past the ghosts of the Ranch School
for Boys, brought them to this place
from across the globe. With their slide-rules

and tickertape, they placed a star above
a Japanese moss garden, and turned us
to clouds of ash, drifting through time.

2.

The Earth Diver returned from the sea bed
with soil enough to make an Earth, and
from the mud came bison and children

and fish. This is the mountain, this
is the ocean. Every star is the face of one
that has gone before. The day is merely

a dream. We were vectors, and the tracks
we made were marked out in campfires,
stone paths and the wakes left by canoes.

A random trade wind brought you to our shores
with your horses and small pox, making a Night
out of Day; the bones wash clean in the morning light.

3.
South of the 40 and the old 66,
there's a mesh fence that marks out a place
where mushrooms grew out of light itself.

If I search in the Forbidden Zone, I might,
by chance, find Trinitite, formed
in the sun of an atomic test, a rain of glass

that cooled and kept its magical chaos intact.
Breathe it all in, that fallout that spread
eastwards across the Southern states

like an echo from the Jet Age. Keep yourself
warm in the night, wrapped in that flag
you stand for; it, too, holds the dust.

*The PO Box number of Los Alamos, home of the laboratory dedicated to the
Manhattan Project

Black Light

Jim Conwell

The First Absolute War
had been fought already in some ancient time.
Words fractured and blown apart.
Vaporised, they hung as atmospheric dust,
not different from the microscope crumbs of brick,
concrete and organic residue,
not different from the decaying stink of atoms
that coated the slimy rocks.

The planes returned, night after night
dropping their heavy light
in fat black tears.
Absolute light, which created within the instant,
an opening in reality to collapse all our raging darkness.

People I left waiting in the car for my return.
Perhaps drowned when the seas rose up against us.
Or boiled or fried when the fires came.

All this I hold,
a wordless and contentless memory,
an empty chamber blasted inside the rock.

Two Poems

Karen Dennison

Burning at both ends

You dive into redness,
swim through blackness,
swallow the sun.

Inside you, a nuclear furnace
magics new elements that explode
as words, twist on your tongue.

When flares erupt from your eyes
they coil like golden bracelets,
dissipate as formless heat.

You don't know how beautiful you are,
how fast you're burning; how at your core
your future is hardening, shrinking.

Black Flakes

after Anselm Kiefer

Char -black ossified trees
are roman numerals, scratched
onto walls, tattooed onto wrists.

All paths lead past
banned books, hardback covers
transmuted to lead, titles erased.

Burned pages are snagged
on branch-tips. I hear the prelude
of marching boots, see the tombstone-faces

of the herded, eyes to the ground,
their nameless-dead stories trampled
into frozen sludge, a chaos of words

amongst ashes, bleeding into snow.

Interlacing Tongue

Saddiq Dzukogi

do what you must with a song:
the bottom of sunset is a tongue
weaving a universe / whose orbit is winter's voice

unbreakable like water / pitch / falling and rising wave
a ballerina drifting and panting / tired of a journey

across the facade of an ocean
you can do what you must but a song is

bigger than an aquarium / all it has accomplished
cannot be withdrawn / into a blade of lemon grass

Wagga Wagga

Dic Edwards

Two days before Easter a young man walked into the cafe. He was tall with a forked-legs ungainly gait that was actually the swagger of a shy man and stood at the counter with an almost confrontational air. He acknowledged the proprietor, an attractive woman in her early forties on duty behind the till, with an exploratory smile.

She said: how are you Jack?

He said: long time no see.

He stood with a backward lean which from the deep of the cafe allowed one to see the bald patch in the youthful fur on the top of his head.

In his pocket he played with a bunch of keys.

Give me a special, Meg.

She picked her jeans up at the back and said: tea with that?

Ok. And toast.

Comes with. She shouted to the back: One special!

With a clatter she put onto a tin tray along with a small crock of milk, a small metal teapot in which an infusion was taking place.

Megan said: I hear you've been to Oz.

I've got a relative out there in Wagga Wagga.

Is that a place?

Abo name.

What, like...

Aborigine.

He smelt the bacon cooking and a feeling of well-being rose in him. He exercised his feet in his heavy boots.

What made you go, she said, to Wagga whatever.

Relatives!

O, yeh. Was it a long standing thing? I mean something you wanted to do for a long time? Sit down and I'll bring your tea.

He didn't like the questions.

He sat at a window table. The window was big and out there was the sea, variously shaded by the shadows of the few light clouds.

He was hoping they could stick to small talk.

At another table, an old couple – the only other two people in the place – were reading aloud from the menu, the contents of a Majestic breakfast.

Megan put his tea on the table.

What were you doing out there, she said.

I was dagging hoggits. I was a hoggit dagger.

A hog dagger in Wagga...

Hoggit. In Wagga Wagga. Yeh.

What the hell's a hoggit dagger?

A shout came from the back: Special!

Megan went for it. Jack loved the look of her still youthful buttocks in her jeans. But the demure beauty of her legs and the way they moved made him feel a little sad.

She came back with his breakfast and put it on his table with a smile. She seemed to be flirting with him.

She said: so what's a hoggit dagger do?

Jack said: he bites the testicles off young sheep.

O, no! That's not true! It can't be!

He put pepper on his breakfast.

Megan, standing before him with raised eyebrows, put her hands in her back pockets.

You have to get your head right in there among the mess. He folded a rasher and put the whole thing in his mouth and chewed mischievously. He was feeling more relaxed.

You're having me on!

It was true. He was having her on. He did have relatives in Wagga Wagga but he didn't go to see them. He didn't even go to Wagga Wagga. Passed through. He'd actually gone much further into the interior to a place called Menindee near Menindee Lakes on the banks of the Darling River. There were sheep out there but Jack had certainly never offered his talents to any dagging. He'd worked for six months in the bakehouse in the town producing loaves each new day for the five hundred or so inhabitants.

He'd arrived in Menindee after hitching a lift on a lumber wagon making a delivery to the small town. That night he'd slept under the stars after preparing himself with a couple of Kookaburra beers and a chapter of Errol Flynn's *My Wicked Wicked Ways*. The next morning he stood on the road side where he ate a 'roo baguette bought in the Darling Bake house, proprietor Ms Honey Osborne.

Three hours into his vigil a Ford pickup pulled up and an old maybe one time hog dagger with a white beard and a tight-fitting racing cap told him that there'd be no traffic leaving Menindee on that day and maybe not for many days to come. And so he returned to the Darling Bake house where Honey made him a lunch of bird feet in an oriental sauce and invited him to join her in her flourishing enterprise.

He said: I lied. That's the way they used to do it. Before they mechanised the whole thing.

Megan said: O they *used* to. But they did do that?

Errol Flynn did it.

Who?

He swallowed to clear his mouth.

Errol Flynn. A famous film star from, I don't know, eighty years ago? They still talk about it: how the women used to watch his films with his beautiful mouth that kissed all those stars not knowing where those lips had been. The filth they had been part of.

A shout from the back: Two dinners!

He watched Megan move, pert in her denims. She reminded him of Honey. And he couldn't help thinking about the other girl. Before he'd left. The tragic one. Honey had been born to take in waifs, turn them into bakers and during the hours when the bread baking and bread selling and the delivery of flour was over, among the honey smells of the risen yeast, into accomplished lovers. And for a moment he imagined Megan, when they'd shut the doors for the evening, luring him into her food store and delivering him of the need that had grown in him since leaving the bake house in Menindee.

Megan went into the back and then returned with the dinners for the old couple, while Jack shovelled in his breakfast. A roast for the old man and a lasagne and chips for the woman. As soon as the plates hit the table the man made a slow dive for one of her chips as though it were a rite.

Then Megan returned to Jack.

She leaned forward with her hands on the table. He noticed how graceful they were despite her work. Imagined what they might do.

She said: you used to go with Kerry Stodt didn't you? She lived on Everlasting Hill. Did you hear what happened to her?

No.

Now his breakfasting felt different. The wrong thing to be doing.

No you didn't know her? You sure?

You got the wrong person.

There was a cold pause. Then she said: Oo, look! A dolphin jumped! Out there. Keep looking. You'll see it again. Or another.

He kept his head down as she went back behind the counter. He finished the special though it had lost its glamour. He carefully stirred the tea in his pot looking nowhere but at what he was doing. Then he looked out of the window:

What was happening out there became all important.

A couple had stopped on the pavement opposite. The woman was carrying a little black pug wrapped in a pink towel. You could see only its head.

Megan said to the old couple: look at that out there. It's like a baby.

The old man said: there was something yesterday; dogs don't like being cuddled.

The man with the pug woman had his own pug on a lead. This one was fawn coloured wearing a white coat with an orange trim like a bonsai flat-faced race horse.

Then the man went off leaving the woman as the sole protector of the two pugs.

What are those? What would you call them, do you think?

The old man said: pugs.

Jack drank his tea, determinedly looking only out of the window. It was a strange day. Already late April but, apart from the pug fest, the town was dead.

After a few minutes the man who'd had the one pug on a lead came back with a bag containing chips he'd bought from the chip shop next to the cafe. The woman put the black pug down and Jack saw it had a leg missing. Had one amputated. That brought a thought to mind he didn't want to have. Things seem to have gone from bad to worse.

Now he'd have to go to the counter to pay. He suddenly felt vulnerable: fearful of the walk he'd have to make. It was crazy. He imagined all eyes would be on him. Judging him as if they had before them a ledger detailing his life's crimes. The old couple and Megan herself and the cook who'd just come on from the back.

He walked to the counter like a man condemned.

The cook said: long time no see, Jack. After paying Jack began to walk out.

He said: see you.

Megan said: see you Jack.

The cook said: yeh, see you Jack.

Walking towards Rock Street from the cafe, he looked up and saw three crosses on the hill. He remembered how they always did this at Easter. Half way down Rock Street he got to the path that would take him up the hill.

Some way up the path he came to a bench in an area that had been cleared of bracken allowing a view of the old quarry and the fish processing plant below. More than a century earlier, maybe around the time Menindee was first settled, a rail track had been built on Rock Street and stone taken along it from the quarry to the harbour area where it was used to build the jetty. Even earlier than that,

before quarry and fish factory and even Wagga Wagga, on a starry night in 1704 a distant relative of Jack's known as Black Howell had led a smuggling party of about a hundred and fifty unloading salt from three barques on the beach. This was a story he'd been told often as a kid. One that had a cautionary sting in the tail. Eight customs officers turned up and confronted the smugglers who became hostile. The officers fired over the heads of the crowd which only increased their anger. Panicked, the officers shot into the crowd and severely injured Black Howell who became a hero for a short time before having to remove himself to an exile in a neighbouring county. From that time on the progeny of Howell became the children of exile as though it were a condition that possessed their blood. And it was certainly something they would have been fools to ignore.

The hill of the cross overlooked the sea and between the crosses and the sea was a cliff. People in the past had jumped off from this point. There is only so much you can take. The crosses and the hellish cliff seemed to share the symbolism of self-sacrifice – a place to do it. He felt a chill catch him in its gyre. After spending a moment at the central cross, as though to insure himself against whatever was to come, he decided he would walk along the cliff top to the next cove. He guessed by the time he got there it would be early afternoon and he could sit there and think about how he would spend the rest of the afternoon and evening before nine o'clock when he knew the cafe closed and Megan would be leaving work.

The walk to the cove had been uneventful. A feeling of loneliness had grown in him. When he sat on the rock he had anticipated he had to fight off tears. A wind had risen and blown storm clouds into his sky. A quarter of a mile off a lone kittiwake rode the wind in almost desultory fashion. He watched it as it dipped and rose as though with purpose while its hopelessness seemed obvious to Jack. His planning came to nothing; he would walk back to his caravan which was parked in the yard of the fish factory in the old quarry.

The yard extended into the far reaches of the quarry where the last digging had been done and the quarry face loomed over the yard with a hostile immovability.

In the yard beyond the area cleaned out for the artics which would carry the shellfish the factory processed, were piles of scallop shells reaching high enough to cause an almost monumental effect against the face of the quarry. The shells filled the air with the smell of a used sea which supplemented the smells from the factory including the scoring smell of the pumping steam. At dusk, the effect of the shell piles was to suggest the burial site of some ancient, aboriginal people.

Tucked in against the factory wall was Jack's caravan.

The inside of the caravan was damp. It smelled like the dark halls where mushrooms were growing on a farm he'd visited with Honey across the river from Menindee. She had come up one evening after a few too many Kookaburras with the idea of getting into making mushrooms soup – a favourite among loggers – on an industrial scale. He laid down and pulled a blanket around him but it was no good his thoughts were chaotic and wouldn't let him rest. He went out into the yard. The machinery was still running. Men and women still working. One woman wearing white overalls smudged with scallop stains and a white cap passed him and said:

Hi.

He said: Hi and watched her as she walked towards the portacabin at the bottom of the yard. He loved the way her overalls clung to her, tight around her buttocks. He wished he could hold her.

When she came back she stopped and said: how come you've got this caravan here? There's people working here would love to shack up in this.

I knew the boss. Mr. Stodt. I've been away. He let me have it while I find my feet again.

Then she said: wasn't it terrible what happened to his daughter.

He looked at her nervously, felt the weight of his arms; the smell of the fish was overpowering.

Then she said: they say that...

He knew what they say but he had learned not to hear to the end a sentence that began like that.

Later, as dusk fell on his monumental dead end, he thought: I shouldn't have come back. I should have gone further inland. Into the great unknown. Looked for more bake houses; more Honeys to lose myself with. Grown out of that longing for home.

help

(in response to Simon Armitage's 'Zoom')

Glyn Edwards

The spoken 'help' has already disappeared, fogged away
in the sandy air,
and gone. The written 'help', hurriedly typed, posted online
is left behind -
like the tide sacrificing a jellyfish for anyone to divine -
on the untrod beach,
for everyone to ponder, however briefly, and discuss
and discard,
but not before they share their discoveries, their terse views,
noisy, sensational
fireworks released all the way into orbit from bland living rooms

and bored classrooms and slow newsrooms to explode
like an infection
across the internet. Suddenly, the lower case letters are gorged
and exclaimed,
and quickly the simple 'HELP!' is trending, retweeted, favoured,
shared, friended, liked -
the word is about to be canonised live on TV news broadcasts
in California and Cairo,
but already it's being satirised by comics in Manchester and Milan
and demonised
by government advisors warning 'veils', 'threats', 'terror' and such

so before the journalists have gone from the door, 'help' is buried
by the ceaseless surf
of social media; what is written becomes unwritten.
But the writer remains
and their simple helplessness is now a swollen spectacle
stranded like some whale
that people marvel at, from a distance, while they ponder the sea.

Ideas of Order at Nova Mar Bella

Giles Goodland

How do we enter this film of water, this
medium: tenderly? But what of those
only interested in the moment
of entry, the repeat divers, wave-
aimers, tumblers, these, mostly children, seeking
the thrill of changed states; the floaters
with widespread arms, and further out, the stand-up
paddle boarders, stalked upon the foam,
and here subdivide the leisurely backswimmers,
those who raise their arms and kick,
also those who simply stand. Sometimes
it is no liquid at all, the screen is frozen
with distant sails slicing the horizon.
Let me be that silent infant now held puppet-
fashion to almost take her first step
on the toe-warm sand and giggle at the sea
and fall down ceaselessly before
the king-toppling tide, not that other child.

It is the summer of the year of the migrant crisis,
the waves are breaking upon the man-managed
coast of a Mediterranean city
the sand stirs in us as beached in days and
goggled, we are investigating the nature of
waves by floating upon them feeling lift,
as the sands unsettle. See under nature

where long-sleeved inversions of light in vision
fold that face-off of energy against land and
are instances of fire, infirmities of fabric,
tented yearnings. We hide our heads in that
infirmament to be undercut even as we stand
where fish are shims of things to unbelieve
while on other beaches, sea
is insurmountable, is death.

On this people-pimpled sea we swim
out just to be where the dots connect
(that morning the moon had been bright above
the abandoned Olympic stadium
as I traced the city's walkwayed littoral to
where the tramline ended and recircled.
There was the sound of crickets from empty car parks
as the sun manifested over the power station
and at my level the filament in the streetlight
bulb dimmed) at the moment that
the girl will again sleep under a light blanket, one
toe visible: not that other child.

Two Poems

Jack Harvey

For Lily In The Garden

If one apple
were eaten

before eating
think innermost

when unzipping

how a skin
has a sweet life

how a depth reached
leaves a hole.

G

Had so much SHIT
go down wdn't
beLEEVE it
child-wondering
she said, disabusing me,
snowbound, parkbound,
embraced by winter's last shot;

then spring's first day
and her crazy grin
started the
bells ringing in the world.

Am
she said,
doing her little Shiva dance

Am is me.

Happened to me
things with names,
things beyond names

still blooming street-girl
in all the rusty evil
of a still-born world,
in her own doom,
in her moody
running and looking,
messenger of the queen,
Persephone girl beyond all

no gouty King Black
can touch you
and yet, and still, and so
G, you
break my back
with the evil
in this world.

Last Sighting

Vasari's Last Supper: Florence Flood 1966

Ros Hudis

Water unmarvelled us
dissolved tone, loaves, left
a milky indecision
like the start of blindness.

Black seeped
round the borders, shrank
our perspective
to a pin-hole.

Our wreathed arms
sagged, snagged the circuit
of lines leaping
from robe to robe.

Yellows, blue, carmine
re-wilded; we slurred
in a moth fog, lost
difference.

A pink smear remained
on Judas, a sweetener
– the departing
drag of sunset. His face.

Two Poems

Erin L. McCoy

Memorials

When dusk grows fat as a mute tongue, we go
to our homes, but when bridges collapse somebody

gets it. When the Blue Bridge in Taylorsville caved in
at last, the bolts shot out and arched down

into Salt River, to iron the drink of the too-thin deer
hunt-jittered and pale as tails in their faces.

Those few passing, at that moment, beneath the empty arc
of the farmer's market paused, raised their fingers

to their lips to hush the sudden peals of kids
who'd been poking sticks just then into the road's shoulder.

The same pigeon who sat unmoving on the Town Hall steeple
lifted off that night, whistled like a drain sucking down

its last water. No mercy is without its savior. This one
a girl, 14, smoking weed from her mom's swiped bowl.

She'd climbed down under-bridge while her boyfriend
screamed her name in the parking lot of the Dollar General.

Back there, her car wax winked the red of the sign light,
crumpled at the foot of a lamppost like Christmas paper.

He'd crashed it; and when he'd finished screaming, he'd go
home to her mother, sell her weed, and wait there.

In the end she knew she would go. For a child, fate is unrepentant
as birth. Then the crack—the shadow shifting—a bridge

bowing over water. It moves slow. Suddenly you see
you can choose. The shadow hovered to admire its figure.

Then it groaned down, and struck her; she was banked,
the mud like a fist coiled around her.

Yet, from between snapped wrists, a thump still in
her chest and a rising vomit; legs quaking like electric wire.

She'd sustained it, rubber as a newborn doll. But what she decided
was her mouth was vacant, gaped it for the in-swell of mud.

At last a star-shaped socket on the Salt River bank. Discovered
in a hunt for bolts. The bridge we'll rebuild as monument,

for here we are good at them; resourceful; two fence posts stole
from Hardin's coop, one school photo, and a real bought wreath.

Bardstown (no. 3)

Flagpole steel—the groan as it bends—
in the stormroar on the courtyard square.
Pebbles of rain beat the single-pane window-
framed apparition: 90 years re-enacting in shade
and rotting in their thin shoes. That shade a shotgun
placed at the base of the lawyer's neck, the shot,
the farmer left, the shot, the farmer drops, and what's
left hasn't changed much: across North Third,
the bleary white brick of the bank, the red
courthouse tower with the nest for its bells
blinking back into the scene of an old crime.
The trucks with their floodlights, circling.

Now a shih tzu barks at an empty corner.
Thunder quakes in the lampshades. Are we safe
from the exorcised, are they shook free by storms?
Mortar softs with the crack-boom. Could we,
passing through, snap like bones back into their sockets
into these ghost legs and ghost arms? Do we telescope
the half-lit rooms on the square's far side because
the telescope clicks so nice inside the barrel
of the rifle's ghost, lightning like eyelids
quick-opening and in between we feel
cold? We feel accompanied.

In the stonewhite tavern across the street
the Ghost Detectors click like metronomes.
They want another clawed creature to drag
along the floor, its silhouette bleeding
into a lit door at the end of the hall,
bullets maybe jingling in its low-slung mouth.

Perhaps the clicks speed; perhaps a hand's
squeezed the heart so that what's passing flickers
and is too fast gone. Years trip on other years,
and a storm in the mouth wrings all the said
words of this town. Panicked, one chance,
a hundred arms hug the flagpole and hang;
it groans, rain sweet with mold off the whiskey barns;
ghosts fawn, stroking the faces and scapulae
of all they meet; we turn, we think we feel something.
The storm yawns, swallows the whole square; its guts
jingle with bullets of hail. We believe, like the stoned
heretic, in a Great Wrong; bruises that surface from under
the skin, that spell what we've done, long before
we were born.

We share

in this. We chew on black licorice. The drugstore
keeps it in stock. Our mouths with sweets grow gunpowder
black. The flag tears in wind. To the ropes.

Ides of March, 2016

Beth McDonough

Spring loads, sudden – pitch
perfect. In this invisible wild
hyacinth distance, birds silver heir
their million sound presences.

A phone mast siphons air
readies to broadcast
a radiance of tweets, in wait
in hope, to wire us all.

The Dusk Series of Images

Artist's Statement
Pamela Petro, September 2016

‘The Dusk Series’ deconstructs conventional photographic representations of landscapes. I began working on the series at the MacDowell Artists’ Colony in New Hampshire in Autumn, 2014. Each afternoon I’d go for a walk in the woods at dusk and try to take photographs, but they were always out of focus due to the low light. One day I finally decided to stop fighting the hour and the season. I extended the shutter speed and quickly moved the camera up and down as I shot. I looked like some kind of strange bird, pecking in the dusk on the edge of the woods.

The results astonished me. I hadn’t taken photographs of what I’d seen, but of the moment the imagination moves, hoping to grasp something beyond itself, bigger than itself, which can’t quite be viewed or captured. The thing that Scottish poet Annie Boutelle says in her poem, ‘Liminal’, is “so imperceptible / one perceives”. These photos caught the blurred moments between day and night, seen and intuited, light and dark, and “focused” on moments of transition rather than stability. In so doing, they destabilized our expectations, rendering the intangible, reordering our relationship to “landscape”, and blurring the boundaries between cultural and natural realms. The images looked less like photos than abstract pastels, giving them a hand-made quality that deepened the bond between seer and seen.

For the Celts, dusk was the beginning of the day. It was a “thin space” where the spheres of the living and dead overlapped and became porous. According to the curator Ciara Healy, thin spaces metaphorically represent moments when “we are capable of inhabiting more than one world-view at the same time.” The Dusk Series attempts to bring movement and light to the expansive, “thin” moments of being in-between. If humans could experience geological time, these images would

be what we'd see in the blink of our lifetimes.

Please note that they have not been altered in any way on the computer; they are exclusively created with movement and light. To date I have created images for the Dusk Series in Wales, New England, Nova Scotia, Oregon, Italy, and the Brazilian Amazon.

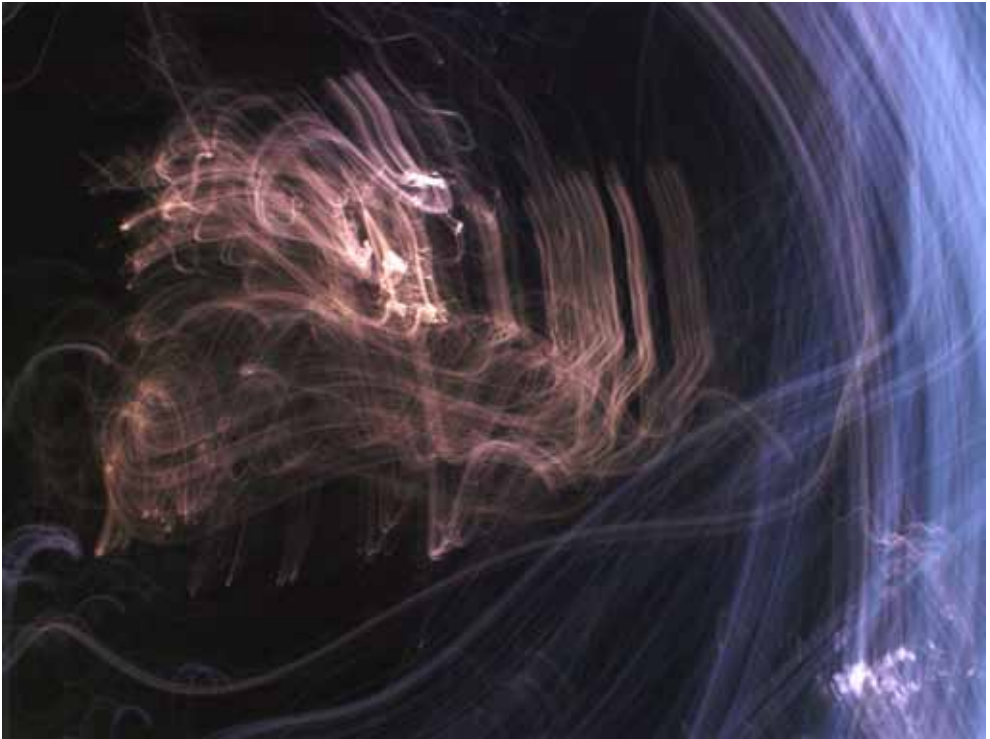




















Twisting, Into The Dark

Bethany W. Pope

Waynesville, North Carolina

A generous house; white, with a sprawling, wisteria-hung veranda whose wide doors gape into a reception hall with mahogany floors and federalist-blue walls. The mild wind gently gusts spiralling vegetable tendrils that tap window glass like tiny yearning fingers, seeking succour. Leaves gild the light which filters down onto the Queen Anne chairs, tallboys, and oval-framed daguerreotypes that line the path leading up to a wide Y-shaped staircase (each hardwood step has been deeply polished with a secret mixture of lemon-skin oil and wax. The maids' skirt-buried stockings have all been rigorously darned at the knees) lit by an enormous chandelier leafed, unlike the sunlight, in hammered sheets of real gold.

Mount the stairs. No one will see you. Chances are very good that you do not (yet) exist. Besides, it is almost unbearably quiet right here, right now. There's nothing but the light, almost mournful, tap of vines on the windows. Run your hands along the banister, feel wood that shares its texture with slick, wet silk. When you reach the landing where the stairs split into darkness, tilt your head and listen hard. Do you hear something? Murmurs, grunts, a small, subtle mewling sound, like a kitten in a sack? Yes. You do. Very faintly. It's coming from the branch of the stairs that goes up, to the left, into the dark.

1900

I heard the door shudder, as if the wind had rattled the heavy wood hanging from those dense brass hinges. I paid it no mind, being otherwise occupied. My sweat poured in large drops from my armpits, dampening what my husband calls my animal fur.

I have a feeling that, had he been there,
Victor would have found this unbearably
erotic, but he was sequestered far
away in the smoking room, where he paced
a pale trail in my father's good Persian
carpet. I cramped, and rode it like a wave,
the pain lifting me from the sandy floor
of myself before dropping me, panting,
back into my flesh. I gripped my silk sheets,
slimy and blood-slicked, twisting them into
rope so that when my black-gloved doctor cried
"Pull!" I had something to thrust my round weight
against. In the end, the child came quickly.
It was healthy but, unfortunately,
a girl. My father warned Victor when he
asked for my hand that women and madness
were family traits. My father's line ended.
He said, "Be sure yours will too. The money
you'll get through her is substantial. It might
be worth the cost." I sat very still while
he spoke, remembering my wild mother
as she was the last time I saw her, wrapped
tightly in a sopping shroud made of cold,
wet sheets that were meant to cool her raving
brain. Those doctors gloves were black, too. Filthy.

1907

The world is brimming with invisible
connections that no one seems to see but
me. Of course the dead, partly eaten finch
we found in the garden wanted a well-
managed funeral. I stuffed its empty
ribs with a cone of blue wisteria,
pierced its dead eyes with a thorn and replaced
them with shiny red pepper-plant berries.
How could I allow something so lovely
to rot underground? Mother wept when she
uncovered my creation, my reborn
bird, in its nice perfumed nest on my desk.

It had changed a bit by then, but still, she overreacted. I gave it new life.

1916

“Listen to me, sweetheart. Have you any
Idea how hard I had to work to make
That father of yours think that this was his
Terrific idea? He doesn’t believe
Ladies benefit from education.
Even the lower-classes have too much,
God knows, for his tastes. And you want to be
Initiated into medicine.
Right now, you are derailing yourself. Your
Lunatic love of dead things, those corpses —
Look at them! — decanted into boxes
Or jars cannot pass as either art or
Science. Eccentricity is for men.
Take care to wear an acceptable mask.”

1922

Medical school fell through in the end. YoU
Ambitious boys, returned from war, soldierS
Determined to make a mark in the leA
Negotiated by treaties, pushed youR
Educated sisters back into thE
Small boxes that culture built out of thoughtS.
So, here I am (smarter than you) and stucK
Answering your calls of, “Nurse! Nurse!” while I
Negotiate the rounds of pills, bedpaN
Dispersal, collection, cleaning, and graB
Glorious moments of reflection. NO
Expert reads as much as I do. And yoU
Never touch the journals that I opeN.
Inside *The Lancet*, solace from the world.

1952

God, I’ve been stuck here for thirty years. Jars
Encapsulate my body in glass. Clean,
Neat, that’s what they call me. My medical

Intelligence rots like the vines at home.
Until I'm known, I will fester. My blood
Screams in my veins and I can find no safe
Release. So I embrace the small safety
Encircling me at home. My glistening jars
Queue on their shelves. Fluid the shade of blood
Undulates softly with my footsteps. Clean,
Iridescent rooms; my childhood home,
Returned to me when my parents died. Medical
Experiments failed them. Medical
Science stalled in the peace between wars. Safety
And quiet kept women in their stifling homes.
Now, things have improved. Somewhat. Men left jars
Open in the labs when they left. I cleaned
Up after them while bullets sipped their blood.
The generation after mine (strong blood,
Little-girl bodies) found the medical
Elite too occupied to make them cleaners.
This generation will destroy safety.
Too late for me. I'm ordered around. Jars
Of formaldehyde slosh, brimming, at home.
Something has to occupy my time. Home
Awaits me; newspapers, printed in blood.
Violence is what men make, preserved in jars.
Eventually, my piles of medical
Inquiries, papers, journals, tower safely
To the ceiling. The floor between rows is clean,
Fragrant with wax and lemon-oil, as cleanly
Radiant as when paired maids kept up our home.
Of course, I miss my mother. Her safely
Matronly breasts made my cheeks blush with blood.
Daddy can rot, deep in his medically -
Ensured grave. Alone, I store love in jars.
Clean winds buffet my home. It sounds like small,
Anxious fingers, bloody baby fingers,
Yearning for safety in medical jars.

1983

Jars. My children are safe in their jars.
Mother's here, little ones. All my babies,
safe on their shelves, abandoned by mothers
circled inside their own selfishness. Home,
home awaited them, living with me. Safe
babies are happy babies. These circle-
babies (curled in clear glass) are stacked in circles,
circles of glass-laden shelves. Heavy jars
mother filled with formaldehyde for them. Safe
jars that cannot ever break shelter babies
safely rescued from cremation fires. Home,
home, home, home, you're here with mother,
home where nothing bad can happen. Mother's
jars will protect you from air. This circle
circles all of us; mother, children, home.
Babies, you dance there, red in your jars.
Mother watches you. You are my babies,
safely stolen from medical waste-bins, safe,
safe, safe with me here. There's no pain. You're safe,
babies, safe in the dark with your mother.
Jars glint in the moonlight, on my babies.
Home has no power, but a paper circle,
Circle made of newsprint ringed round by jars
mother cleaned (empty) burns well, lights our home.
Mother would never hurt you, dearhearts. Home,
home will always protect you. You're my safety,
babies. You keep me from getting lost. Jars —
safe, blood-and-flesh-brimming jars — save a mother.
Jars require care; well-ordered circles.
Circles are a sign of God. God loves babies.
Circles are made for protection, babies.
Safely stolen, I gave you names, a home.
Home is where you come into the circle.
Mother named you, keeps your birth certificates safe.
Babies need an intelligent mother.
Jars are protection, but they are just jars.
Your birth-mothers abandoned you, babies;
cast you from the circle of their bodies.
I rescued you. Brought you home, safe, in jars.

Waynesville, North Carolina

There is a sunken grave by the white, clapboard church, which stands a little apart from the others. It is a wide grave, beneath a small, obscure stone.

The local minister had gotten used to receiving the woman's odd letters (the words were written in spirals, but the theology they expounded was sound) and when a few weeks passed without one sliding through his letter box, he worried. When no one answered his knocks, he stood a few minutes on the gray, decayed veranda beneath liquefying strands of curling wisteria before pushing the heavy door open with a surge of his shoulder.

The generous reception hall was filled with stacked piles of newspapers, some of them singed at the corners. The furniture was gone, or buried. The walls were gray with the residue of smoke. A path led through them (the visible wooden floor panels were polished, and the polish stank of rancid fat) down into the basement where he found his missing pen pal, lying still and very quiet, in a pile of glass specimen jars of various sizes. Every jar was filled with human embryos, in a variety of developmental stages. The old woman's scraggle-haired head was resting on a pile of filled-in birth certificates. The forms were complete, down to the black print of pea-sized feet.

A minister must see with other eyes. This one saw love mingled with a life of sour frustration, and he kept the secret. The minister ordered the coffin, sized extra-large, and saw that the whole family went to earth together. All the names have since been lost.

Capsize

Margaret Quinn

On the trampoline I watch them
propel through the air.
Over the taut canvas they launch limbs
into jumps, pogo, pop, pikes, tucks.
They somersault on the coiled springs.
bombard through, fliffus,
 triffus,
 quadriffus.

In synchronicity
 they hang out
as if suspended
 by a god-like string.

My eyes are catapulted into space,
I am petrified,
 afraid.

My stomach queasy
on a wild ocean ship.

All I want is the solid ground.

I am on the precipice

I reel on the edge

of a cliff miles high

over the sea.

I have fallen in

the deep water.

I cannot swim.

Then I hear

the heartbeat

of my mother.

Blub, bulb,

it goes all over me.

The parachute on the canvas

bubbles up and down

and as if through

amniotic fluid

I remember when I moved

inside her womb

and heard her song.

I take an Ujayii breath

through my throat,

then the humming breath,

fingers in my ears.

My ribs go in and out,

my belly goes up and down.

Meeting Your Hero (or not, as the case may be)

Nigel Rodenhurst

In the summer of 2011 I was in New York doing research for my PhD on Jewish-American fiction. I was living in Harlem and using public transport during a heat wave to research archives in the New York Public library. The days were long and draining. I was trying to limit the amount of traveling that I needed to do, and certainly not seeking out more opportunities. The prospect of an interview with Paul Auster, one of the four authors that I was researching, seemed a slim possibility and was not one that I had any great yearning for.

Having read several converted PhD theses, it seemed that Auster was open to discussing his work with research students. The common theme seemed to be that the researchers in question were huge fans of Auster, and gave gushing accounts of generosity (in particular signed first editions) and hospitality. This set the tone for the theses, which started from the position that the author was above criticism and simply set about trying to demonstrate their ‘understanding’ of his work. All of this reflects Auster’s reputation in general – in America he is revered for literary reasons – in Europe he is ‘cool’. A product of the Vietnam protest era, tall, dark, handsome, trendy, producing tales of adolescent angst resolved, he has always struck a chord with undergrads looking for an author to identify with whilst bolstering their image.

I’ve always looked at literature in a slightly different way and have never consciously seen authors as more impressive than the average ‘man on the street’, so for me meeting authors is nothing worth fighting for. I always felt that I liked most people – anyone who can tell a good story in particular. Beyond that I’m not too bothered. I have several Welsh friends who are authors, and I just like them

because I like them – not because they are authors. I always felt that Auster’s novels were interesting, but found his semi-autobiographical pieces uncomfortable to read because too much self-love is on the surface. Minor narcissism is common enough and no reason to take against a person in itself, I just found it a little harder to like Auster and his work than some.

So it caused me some minor discomfort when my supervisor, Professor Tim Woods, told me that I must make an effort, since I was in New York, to see Auster. As one of life’s winners, Tim always took the attitude that anything is possible and it’s just a question of making sure it happens. I called Auster’s publisher and basically told the person I spoke to that what I was after was an email stating that Auster was too busy to see me so that I could prove to my supervisor that I had tried. Imagine my surprise when I received an email from Auster’s PA, giving me his address and telling me to call by his house on Park Slope for a chat. Auster was ‘expecting’ me.

Given the way I felt about this possible meeting and the author himself, you can imagine that I’d have mixed feelings about this. Still, I rolled up my sleeves, took the subway to Park Slope (setting of HBO’s *In Treatment*) and followed the directions I’d been given to Auster’s home. The tall brownstone buildings seemed a million miles away from the tenements of Harlem. I saw a woman kiss her son, no older than eight, at a crossing and wave him off to school, which would be unthinkable on Harlem’s crime infested streets. I felt like I knew the house and the neighbourhood already, with so many of the newspaper reviews of Auster describing in detail the cool author in his cool surroundings. When Auster answered the door and said “the guy from England?” I felt comfortable and almost as though I was at the home of an old friend. Auster showed me to his study, a luxurious room on the second floor and brought me a glass of water, and we started to talk as he smoked one of his Schimmelpennick cigars. At this moment in time, I was in a position that so many American Lit students would covet.

I had decided to let him do most of the talking initially and he told me several good stories, including one about his trip to Hay-on-Wye a few years earlier. It was all congenial enough, but I sensed a certain edginess towards academics as Auster told me that he “never read criticism” of his work and then five minutes later pulled a book from a shelf, opened it at a specific page and then pointed to a sentence that he described as “stupid”.

Then I started my voice recorder and asked him the questions that he had agreed to answer. They were divided into four themes: Jewish influence and concerns, representations of mental health issues, reader reception and American politics. He

was extremely edgy about the issue of being classed as a Jewish author, although I explained that this was only one of several angles from which I might approach his work. Anticipating this, and not being Jewish myself, I asked him the questions in the same words that he used when he interviewed Edmond Jabes, just in case there was friction and I could say “well I’m only asking you what you asked him.”

It never got to that point, but the line of enquiry linking his work to that of J. D. Salinger, Philip Roth and Jerzy Kosinski clearly didn’t please him, in particular representations of race consciousness and anti-Semitism in his work that match those of the other authors. I was asking him about factors that contributed to his work and were clearly present. He was reacting to a potential threat that his work might come to be seen as ‘Jewish literature’ and read only in such limited terms.

The rest of the interview went well. He told me some interesting stories about other authors and his wife, the novelist Siri Hustvedt, came into the room at one point to announce that she had returned from a gallery opening. Auster introduced me as his “friend”. Then, when it was time to leave, he gave me a copy of a novel for my daughter who had missed the trip, and inscribed it with a “hi from New York from Paul Auster”. As I left the house I felt two distinctly conflicting reactions. The first was that it had been a pleasant meeting on the whole, that the man had greeted me into his home and that he had been nothing but nice to me. The second was that I really didn’t like the guy at all. This was related to a sense that he didn’t really like me, and that if I’d been a huge Paul Auster fan with a girlish fetish for Auster memorabilia things would have been different.

It was not until over a year later that I had any further contact with Auster. He had said that it would be ok for me to transcribe and publish the interview as long as I sent it to him to read first. So I did. After sending it to the PA, I was told that Auster “found it underwhelming to read his transcribed speech and hopes that you will not publish the interview after all. He was very happy to talk to you and hopes it was helpful for your academic paper, but would like to keep your conversation private”. I reflected on this at length, and came to the conclusion that the only parts of the interview that Auster could possibly want to keep private were the sections relating to his Jewish background. He had clearly over-reacted to a couple of open and innocent questions and perhaps felt that in doing so he had shown weakness. That was my interpretation at any rate. I decided to stand by my word and I didn’t publish the interview, although *Times Literary Supplement* did publish a short article about the interview, addressing the legal question of “who owns an interview?”.

This experience did, however, affect the way in which I approached Auster's work in the thesis, as I decided that I would address Auster 'touchiness' within the contextual framework of Jewish authors creating fictional characters who hide and disguise Jewish identity as a matter of racial consciousness. I sent the completed thesis, which also contained information that I had unearthed regarding Auster's family background in relation to the Holocaust, with a message to the PA that stated that Auster had asked me to send him a copy, although he "never reads criticism of his work". Perhaps that was childish. I suspect a similar childishness was at play in some of Auster's later work, such as *Winter Journal* in which there is a passage that reads as a riposte to my thesis in general and describes any discussion of a person's race as "dishonourable" and "bogus".

Overall, meeting the author I was writing about was a strange and unsatisfying experience and not one that I would be in any hurry to repeat. But it did teach me something about myself and my attitude towards authors in general. They are just like everybody else – perhaps more so. They can be mistrusting of others and seek to protect their work, their name and their income from all potential threats. They seek to control the ways in which they are understood. The only difference is that some of them are placed on a pedestal and in that respect have a lot further to fall. Having never been in such an exalted position I can only try to empathise. But the disappointment that I felt ultimately shows that I was overly-optimistic in my expectations to begin with and that on some level I was hoping to meet someone that I could think of as a hero.

The Fractal Topology of *The Fractal Topology of* *Mountains*

C.B. Sikstrom

Topology is a branch of geometry in mathematics where such qualities as smoothness, size and even shape are ignored.

Noski

In the fall of 1890, Giuseppe Peano discovered a curve. Fourteen years later, in 1904, Swedish mathematician Helge von Koch completely filled a finite region with a beautiful snowflake curve, which is now quite naturally known as the famous Peano-snowflake-curve. A dark sea surrounds the central motif, or should I say massif, as if there was a mountain to write about.

Hi there! Ho there! How's your bird? Let's not make mountains out of molehills - eh?

Elsewhere in Europe, that fateful year, there was an interesting balance of power between nations which ultimately led to World War I: Austria-Hungary, England, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, Turkey. Diplomacy was underway in Serbia, Wales, Bohemia, Tyrolia, Bothnia, Bulgaria, Albania, Warsaw.... There were no mountains in some of those places.

Some aspects of topology are well known. Space, our final frontier, remaining unchanged no matter how deformed, our five year mission, to explore new words and bravely do what no human has done before.

Shapes with substructure that go on indefinitely...never bottoming out in ordinary curves are called fractals.

Hofstadter

In the early years, writers used clay tablets and a stylus to imprint their thoughts upon young students' minds. I was impressionable as the clay of those days but I still did not learn anything. I managed to score a few tablets but they were never best sellers. Indeed, I could barely give them away. Readers warned, "No down-to-earth writing for you!" so I began to read *The Fractal Topology of Mountains*.*

In the mountains near Windy Point in Jasper National Park one spring, I met an expiring mountain sheep in the middle of the highway. The escarpment above us was sheer and rocky (I, II, III, IV, V, and VI). The ram had evidently fallen to an ignoble end, but before he expired I asked him,

"What happened?"

He replied in a death rattle, "I failed to see the ewe turn."

One way topologists study such properties (eg. smoothness, size and shape) is by embedding an object in space and seeing how the empty part of the space behaves.

Neuwirth

I must stop to catch my thoughts. I am nearly a third through this story and the words have been rushing by me, whispering their secret meanings in a vague and unambiguous voice. Sweat is dripping off my nose on to the computer board keys beneath my face.

"Hark, I hear my Kitty purring across the hall!"

While in your rooms you sleep, or snore, or read hopefully of better times, or more, when we are all popular and not scorned, I wonder: could I scale a mountain or even a fractal for that matter?

A scaling fractal can be defined roughly
as any geometrical pattern
(other than Euclidean lines, planes and sur-
faces) with the remarkable property that no
matter how closely you inspect it it always
looks the same.

Gardiner

My father used to clean goldeye on the banks of the Red Deer River near Big Val-
ley on sultry summer days when you can not catch grasshoppers after nine in the
morning. But if you can, then you can catch fish: grasshoppers and scaling gold-
eye in the late afternoon while the sun goes down, mosquitoes humming a sup-
per-song, and scales of silver floating around us, as big as my father's thumbnail.

In the English language, the probability of
encountering the r th most common word is
given roughly by $P(r) = 0.1/r$ for r up to 1000
or so.

Zipf's Law

Traffic-flow on the Deerfoot Trail at rush-hour. Mountain Range self-similarity
to one-over- f music, not white noise or brown noise, but a scaling noise like the
record of the annual flood levels of the Nile River. A good story offers a mixture
of order and surprise. How could it be otherwise?

Like driving on a roadway, surprise would not be surprise if there was insuffi-
cient order for us to anticipate what is likely to come next. Good stories, like the
pageant of history or a person's life are a wondrous mixture of expectation and
unanticipated turns.

But just what writers do when they weave their patterns of meaningless words
remains a mystery that even they do not understand.

For when there are no words
(accompanying music) --- or stories
I suppose --- it is very difficult
to recognize the meaning of the
harmony and rhythm, or to see
that any worthy object is imitated
by them.

Plato, Laws, Book II

Plato and Aristotle disagreed. Plato viewed writing as imitation of imitation and each copy leaves something of the former behind. A story of a car can not completely bring the sense of 'car-ness' with it. Aristotle though viewed writing as a means of giving pleasure. He thought that writers did more than make poor copies.

Plato said, "You have a blue book. You do not show things as they look."

Aristotle said, "Things as they look, are changed by my blue book."

Here then, are only women and men, but no rocks. Because one generally can not see anything from a lowly storey, every reader speaks little about his interests. And although he escaped the office with his books and portable computer, the alchemist of meaninglessness rises like yeast in mourning to obscure your understanding. Reads like, read-him-his-writes. Who can I poison with my pen---such pain, such pain that they need a pension to recover.

Topologists view story theory as a
placement problem: What are the different
ways of embedding a story in the reader's
mind?

Noski

Now I am nearly finished this story. I believe that I have discovered that the secret lies in establishing line-segments of two unequal lengths oriented in twelve different directions.

"Ahh!" you say. "Such natural forms as branches of trees or shapes of flickering flames."

"Yes! The simple formula of the Peano curve with the usual dimension of 2 but with a scaling fractal of infinite length, a fractal with the dimension of $\log 4 / \log 3$ or 1.2618 of course."

The solution fractalized me to the highest root of my equation. 'Till all stories are created equal, I am hearing so many old prelogical voices that I sing:

“Zipf di de do da
Zipf di de eh!
My oh my what a wonderful day
Plenty of fractals, coming my way
Zipf di de do dah
Zipf di de eh!”

* *The Fractal Topology of Mountains* was originally published in the 1989 Canadian Alpine Journal and won first prize in the 1988 Canadian Mountain Arts Competition.

Overcrowded Mind

Ian C. Smith

A tale without end, the past thrusts through.
Googling finds her ex, her adult children,
father's death, prominent grandfather's rates,
a partial jigsaw, but no recent trace.
Shapeless daydreams a hexed blur, wary,
even of ex-husbands, he lurches into luck;
her brother, possibly, listed in their old district.
He remembers chatting her up to impress mates,
their youthful flippancy towards the tomb.

After almost forgetting her she lodges in his mind
jostling for space in his off-key imagination.
This happens when more past than future remains.
Without dreams, his values redundant, he would lapse
into the edges of ageing, swithering, heartsore.
He writes to the brother who could be her nephew,
phone too immediate, his grip on reality tentative,
nervous about questions. How long ago? Why?
Grouped figures like sculptures loom.

To rewind life's slapstick reel, eyes prickling,
he roughs out a poem about a dancing girl,
waits, vigilant for the postman,
his usual pessimism barricading disappointment.
In disturbed weather, late autumnal light,
he extends his lone walk, street to quiet street,
imagining breakthrough news in letterboxes.
Crossing a familiar bridge, an ambulance siren
cuts cool air. His stride, old heartbeat, quickens.

A Thin Line, Athens

Matt Tordoff

Walking down the Dioskuron,
I saw a mother and her two sons
standing on the pavement;
there was a purple gurgle at their feet
a frothy stream of human blood.

But no one had a dagger
stuck in their back or throat
and the trio didn't care - nobody laughed,
cried, or shouted out in fear.

Maybe it was that scene by Aeschylus:
the purple carpet that his ancient queen
laid down in the husband killing scene
and I wondered - where was dad?

But maybe it was Aristophanes:
with two dogs fighting over cheese,
tearing each other in the courtroom of the street,
but I saw no hairy clumps of fur.

So I retreated to a taverna, found a
waitress behind the bar,
asked if she would be my torch,
explain the scene upon the road
could she explain the difference
between tragedy and comedy?

So the girl told me about To Ρευιπέ *
that Greek mod-com TV show,
how there's always music playing
when Katerina bowls over those women
climbing out her taxi, when she clouts
Eirini because her soup's too hot

and she tells me that "the difference between
the sadness of the human race
and the comedic crack line on someone's face
is a thin cheesy shred that is shaved
straight off the theme tune -

did you hear any music playing?"

*To Retire

Three Poems

Calvin Wharton

Crosshatch

Vertical

For one week each spring
morning arrives with rap and flutter
of robin against hallway window
waking me shortly after sunrise.
The first time I heard it,
thought someone was knocking
at the door, then noticed the bird
and watched its attack.

What does it see in the glass?
A rival to chase? A friend to embrace?
Or maybe a shortcut
to avian promised land.
So much pointless flailing
flash of colour and pounding wings.
Bird's beak leaves marks
like psychotic herringbone,
intersecting parallel lines,
across the glass,
a phantom hieroglyphic
message neither of us can interpret.

Horizontal

That student always sits at the room's corner
wedged into the right angle,
the safest spot to see the room before her,
a fan spread open
held horizontal in her arms,
sleeves to wrist no matter how warm
and jeans or dark leggings,
she needs a sheath to hide or protect
the crosshatch of thin lines—
older ones healed and rough—
each cut a remark
or response to how the world
presses itself against her skin
each limb a long stanza
of recognition that what cannot be understood
must be written down.

Later, at home, does she look
and wonder just how those scars,
pale worms, indecipherable, appeared
and what the story is
that they spell out, imagine
there is something marvelous in her
if only she could read it.

Suitcase Full of Birds

A Vancouver resident has been fined for trying to smuggle a suitcase full of songbirds into the city from China....

— The Vancouver Sun, August 3, 2012

Nine and twenty Old World birds,
chosen for their intonation,
a mix of babblers and flycatchers—
melodious laughing thrushes, red-billed leiothrix
and Oriental magpie-robins,
he sedated and wrapped each in a sock
then slipped them into carry-on luggage,
lined up like keys on a piano
dreaming melodies and harmony
of morning light and fragrant breeze;

on the aircraft he lifted his case
carefully into an overhead compartment
with other bags, who knows
what might have been in them:
souvenirs, photographs of family,
a jacket or a pair of silk pyjamas?

He made no sound while
the birds slept across the Pacific
they had no passports or travel plans,
flying without flying, the irony
not available to them until
the bag was opened,
and they began to sing.

Cake

Any way you cut it, the cake of being alive
is full of surprises: a foil-wrapped pebble,
silver dollar, or plastic whistle, you know
you will assign relevance to each

still, there is asking and there is taking,
hands held out together, flat like a plate
to accept the slice and the slicing
of your life into sections

as if beginning or end
had real meaning, as if the distance
between the plot points of biography
could be calculated and evenly distributed;

words pour out from mouths
too full to eat cake, or too empty
to compare aloud the difference
between wanting and getting

all wishes gain weight
as if the result of too much eating—
but not; it's some parallel operation
the morality of everyday adventure

till all that's left is crumbs, you want
to share but look at what you hold
and glance at all the needing:
you can't plug that gap

no matter how much you wish you could.

Three Poems

Phil Wood

Pirate Dreams

I'd love to sing a sea-shanty for you
but muddy boots mucking across my floor
will bloom a bucket of buggers. No silver hoard
can hoodwink me. I know you slave to gleam

a cutlass smile, but I see a working man
trudge in, his hair a signature of waves,
his roving eye rigging a mast to sail.
And that other globe, the bruised one hidden

under the patch, now swelling wrinkled maps
of caves and coves, wrecks and doubloons. It hoists
a Jolly Roger grin, a thirst for rum,
a billowing of hope! I tip-toe the plank.

After The Age Of Reason

Shred the diary. The comfort of words
can no longer damp proof these bones.
My granddaughter wannabes? In sunlight
all photographs fade. Strike a safety match.
A freeze of smiles finds warmth in flame.
Turn the gas on full, let the heating sauna
all the rooms. Hang up the shawl and scarf.
Flood the cooker with broccoli soup.
Bin blankets, hot water bottles, stroll parks
sprawled with greenery and blur the lines
between the humdrum and malarkey.
Bed down with ghosts in a host of tulips
and dream of nights in Amsterdam.
Tell that plump cat it's time to move on.

The Pastor's Diary

There's a solace to be lost
with owls that ghost the oaks
and claw the bark, a hunger
screech for hurrying things.

States: a view from the Left Coast

Tony Kendrew

Parallel Landings Across a Small Pond

“ . . . to begin our final descent into San Francisco.”

I've heard it almost every year since the 80s, through easy-going times, Reagan-Thatcher times, 9/11 times, pay for luggage times, fast-track through security times, Trump-Hillary times.

Early afternoon ten hours into a morning flight from London, the familiar neighborhoods of three, four, five of my former homes drift by below in reverse chronological order.

First Lake County's hot sagebrush land, burned golden by California's summer, with patches still black from last year's literal burning. There was my final attempt to escape the spread of noise and traffic and still be able to say I live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“ . . . landing in twenty minutes . . . upright position . . . safely stowed.”

Now, just over the mountains, Sonoma, the easy years of space, beauty, vineyards and redwoods, and the glorious, empty coast.

Finally, before we swing out over the Pacific with the Golden Gate and the alabaster city itself shining below, busy, ambitious, happening Marin, trendsetter to the universe, heaven on earth just over the bridge from the city, youth and the thrill of the American dream fulfilled - so many yoga studios, so many mind games.

My final move, abandoning any pretense to court the muse of Kerouac, Rexroth and Ferlinghetti, and following the writer's quest for seclusion to the remoteness of the mountains of the far north, where Kerouac and Snyder also fled, is off the flight path, but not so far that I can't see the blue ridges folding away to the Pacific or imagine my home river's course down from the wilderness meadow, still with its patch of white snow, from my window seat.

We touch down. There aren't many airports where you can watch the smoke spurt from the tires of another plane landing parallel across a short stretch of grass.

I join the line for holders of US Passports and Permanent Residents. I am the latter; that is my good fortune and privilege. But my laissez-faire attitude towards this unearned hospitality - I am a Resident Alien - has been shaken lately; now the uniformed people behind the counter with the camera and the finger print machine want to know why I am not a citizen. Is my Green Card no longer enough? Have I overstayed my welcome?

I wonder at what forum of the Immigration and Naturalization Service the decision was made to ask this of Green Card holders as they return, to nudge them towards citizenship. It is only a nudge, politely asked, response accepted ruefully, though its persistence - twice driving back from Canada too - is enough to start the thought ball rolling, a ball which for decades lay undisturbed in its pit of convenience and complacency. For why would a UK passport holder bother with the expense and embarrassment of biometrics and loyalty oaths, and the shame of admitting citizenship of the country of demagoguery and guns? What difference would it make? What are the rewards?

These are the rewards, but they have no clout with me: *to bring in family members* (they're quite happy where they are), *eligibility for Federal jobs* (too late now), *to become an elected official* (never my ambition), and of course *the right to vote* (laughable, especially this year). Finally, *showing your patriotism* (oh, that!).

Patriotism. Could we redefine that for this particular immigrant not brought up fighting oppression, not starving, not much tempest-tossed, not one of the huddled masses yearning to breathe free, for whom the new land has brought economic advantages, yes, but a teensy-weensy diminution of political freedom?

Let's put aside the argument that it was rampant patriotism that caused those crises of huddling and yearning and starving in the first place, and address the simple question of belonging, the feeling of homecoming, the view from the plane as it makes its final descent, familiarity with place and local habit. Does this set up an obligation? Does it ask for paperwork?

My own feelings about citizenship are complicated by my relationship to my cultural forebears, the forms and inclinations of a long literary tradition in the British Islands, though my emigration was more an escape from geographical and meteorological repression than a declaration of independence from old-world culture. It was a flight to the freedom of the space and diversity of California, to the climate. Now my cultural forebears tap on my shoulder. Do I despise their stuffiness enough to ignore them and embrace a cultural naïvety (spelled naïveté over here, the *té* pronounced as if they'd just been let out of their first French class - TAY), a cowboy banality, the slide from *how do you do* to *howdy*? Can the American dream shake off the English malaise? Or has Brexit and Trump demonstrated that both are dead? And dead for the same reason?

I feel qualified to talk about this as I was once a snooty Brit looking down on the impossibly naïve Americans wandering around London in their wing-tips and chinos (East Coast) or their sneakers and jeans (West Coast) mispronouncing everything. Have the tables turned so much that I now identify with them? (Did I just say "vicious cycle?" And look what I'm wearing! - I don't pass for a Brit in Britain any more. Clothing is not as transnational as we think. Sneakers? Have you got your cagoule? My what?) Language differences apart, I now look down my transatlantic nose at the pettiness and meanness of British thought, the focus on the facetious and the prurient, the preference for pessimism, negativity and self-deprecation, the embarrassment at positivity and optimism, discomfort at words such as joy and love. (Oh, but we mustn't go overboard, now, must we?)

Some would say that the Brits' self-deprecation is simply the flip side of the Americans' self-aggrandizement, that whingeing pom is just another manifestation of Pollyanna.

I was struck by my local friends' reactions to Trump's recent victory. The US left coast's response to the election result was less despairing, more creative, than the south east UK's reaction to Brexit. Yes, there was the inevitable shock-horror, but there was also a collective goodwill, and I thought: I would rather be in a Starbucks surrounded by where-do-we-go-from-here than a King's Head surrounded by oh-shit. Which side of the optimism gap are you on? Nor do I expect the Star-

bucks crowd to change their tune in the next four years. Californians did not cross a continent in wagons (slaughtering natives *en route*) to throw up their hands just because someone they don't like is changing the décor in the White House.

When expatriate Brits get together to discuss these colorful topics two things are always agreed upon: Britain is grey and the British are grey. Grey is the color of the sky and the streets, grey is the color of the mind. (They may have pronounced it *gray*; depends how long they've been here.) There remains an attraction to that greyness, memories of sheep and walls and drizzled cottages and slate and pebble-dash, and to the interiority of its effect, half-closed eyes, the color of the cerebral cortex, the consistency of the monochrome light that filters through, the habit and comfort of a blanket of mild dissatisfaction and complaint.

(And what do they whisper about their hosts over their ice-cold IPAs? That they are sheep, white as snow, grazing on the pap of democracy.)

Is this really true? Are these generalizations justified? Are they reflected in people's words and deeds? What they say about the British may have been true fifty years ago, but not now, surely, not after CAMRA, after the 2005 licensing laws, after the East European invasion, after EasyJet, after the London Olympics!

It would be good to find a doctoral thesis that compared British and American literature by counting positive and negative words. That might prove something. We would trust that the author had done his or her homework, made allowances for transatlantic differences in usage. Joy and love would be on the positive list, sick and dis on the negative, but how does the author treat quite? - positive in the US, negative in the UK. And having mentioned immigration, what about patriotic, and proud? - quite (American quite) different on the other side of the pond.

And if our thesis includes poetry in its comparison is the list a list of adjectives, and does it take into account that good poetry is sparing of them? (An interesting study right there: The frequency of adjectives in UK versus US poetry. PhD anyone?)

I was on the point of using this international magazine that you are reading now, this very issue, to explore these matters, comparing the prose and poetry from the submissions of UK-based writers and others. I found a program that searches for words in a text and reports the frequency. Wouldn't it be good to have some proud statistics to impress professors and academic journals? Better than cherry picking some lines to prove my point.

But common sense got the better of me. If it turned out to be true that there is more shit and sod and scum and blood and blub and coffins and corpses and filth and frustration and unthinkable touchiness in British than American prose, then what? Would that be a reason to prepare my US citizenship application? Would it surprise? No. What would it prove? Nothing. We always suspected it was true, since Shakespeare, since Chaucer, and have cherished and celebrated that fact, yes, even here in this puritanical nation. There are about eighty-five Shakespeare theatre companies in the US. I can get my sod and scum every summer just down the road.

And then there is the gratifying fact that British English writing tends to be more highly thought out and edited than American English writing, and its content more situated, less abstract, more concerned with establishing a sense of place. (Biber, D. (1987): 'A Textual Comparison of British and American Writing'. *American Speech*, 62(2), 99-119.) Many words have been written since that study was done and many voices added to the vibrant cultural mix we know as American English writing. The Man Booker Prize now makes no distinction between American and British; perhaps a follow up study wouldn't either. Meanwhile my own obsession with place takes comfort in the finding, which explains why I am not an American writer, and provides another reason to hold off my citizenship application and harden my heart next time I'm in line at US immigration. I'll tell 'em: Thanks, but I have my sense of place, and alien is just fine with me. Heck, I'll even call it a queue!

Contributors

CATHERINE AYRES is a teacher from Northumberland. Last year she came third in the Hippocrates Prize and this year she won the Elbow Room Prize. Her collection, *Amazon*, is published by Indigo Dreams.

MYLES BARKER is a writer, journalist and aspiring polymath living in Las Vegas, Nevada. He received an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Idaho and a BA in English from the University of Utah.

ASHLEY-ELIZABETH BEST is from Cobourg, Ontario. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *CV2*, *Berfrois*, *Grist*, *Ambit Magazine*, *Prism International* and *The Literary Review of Canada*. Her debut poetry collection was shortlisted for the 2015 Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry and was published with ECW Press in 2016. She lives and writes in Kingston, Ontario.

TORBEN BETTS is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter, and winner of the Best New Play at the Critics' Award for Theatre in Scotland in 2007 for his play *The Unconquered*. *A Listening Heaven* was nominated as TMA Best New Play in 2001. His other work includes the acclaimed *Muswell Hill*, *The National Joke*, *Invincible*, *The Company Man*, *Silence and Violence*, *Lie of the Land* and *The Lunatic Queen*. He wrote the screenplay for the British independent feature film *Downhill*, which was released in cinemas in May 2014.

SIMON COCKLE is a poet and writer from Hertfordshire. He has been published in *iOTA*, *the London Progressive Journal*, *Pantheon Magazine*, *In Between Hangovers*, *Algebra of Owls* and *Poetica Botanica*. His poems also appear in *Secrets and Dreams* (Kind of a Hurricane Press) and *Paper Cuts*, the annual anthology of Poetry ID, a Stanza of the Poetry Society. He was invited to read at

this year's Ledbury Poetry Festival. He teaches English at a local comprehensive school and graduated from St.David's University College, Lampeter, in 1989 with a degree in English Literature.

JIM CONWELL has an original background in Fine Art, and has worked in mental health for over thirty years. He has had poems published in magazines in the UK, Ireland, Australia and North America and had two poems shortlisted in the Bridport Poetry Prize 2015. He lives in London, England.

KAREN DENNISON's poems have been published in magazines such as *South Bank Poetry*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Prole*, *Amaryllis*, *Under the Radar*, and *Agenda* and in several anthologies including most recently *The Chronicles of Eve* (Paper Swans, 2016). Karen won the Indigo Dreams Collection Competition in 2011 resulting in the publication in 2012 of her first collection *Counting Rain*. She is editor and publisher of the pamphlets *Book of Sand* and *Blueshift* (longlisted for the Saboteur Awards 2016). As an artist, she collaborated with poet Abigail Morley on her pamphlet *The Memory of Water* (Indigo Dreams, 2015).

SADDIQ DZUKOGI studied at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He has poems featured or forthcoming in literary publications such as: *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*, *Juked*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *Chiron Review*, *Vinyl Poetry* and *The Volta*, among numerous others. Saddiq has received a Pushcart Prize Nomination and was twice finalist in The Association of Nigerian Author's Poetry Prize.

DIC EDWARDS is a writer who has worked mostly in the theatre. His plays are published by Oberon Books Ltd. He runs creative writing workshops at UWTSO.

GLYN EDWARDS is an award-winning poet, described by the Wales Arts Review as 'one of the most exciting young voices in Welsh poetry'. 'Help' will feature in his debut collection, *Conversations* (to be published in late 2017). Other poems from the collection have been published this year in *The Lonely Crowd*, *The Use of English*, *A Furious Hope* and *Cheval*. He recently completed a ten-day residency at the Dylan Thomas Boathouse in Laugharne. As well as writing poetry, Glyn is a teacher at Ysgol Pen-y-Bryn, in Colwyn Bay.

GILES GOODLAND attended Saint David's University College, Lampeter, from 1983 to 1985 and since then has written numerous books of poetry, including *Dumb Messengers* (Salt) and *The Masses* (Shearsman, forthcoming).

JACK D. HARVEY poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *Mind In Motion*, *Slow Dancer*, *The Antioch Review*, *Bay Area Poets' Coalition*, *The University of Texas Review*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Piedmont Journal of Poetry* and a number of other on-line and in print poetry magazines over the years. The author has been writing poetry since he was sixteen and lives in a small town near Albany, N.Y. He was born and worked in upstate New York. He is retired from doing whatever he was doing before he retired.

ROS HUDIS is a poet and editor living in West Wales. Her publications include *Terra Ignota* (Rack Press 2013) and *Tilt* (Cinnamon Press 2014) which was highly commended in the 2015 Forward Prize for Poetry. She was recently awarded a Hawthornden Fellowship.

TONY KENDREW lives, writes and hikes 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

ERIN L. MCCOY is a student in the University of Washington MFA program in poetry; she is also pursuing her MA in Hispanic Studies at UW. Her poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *DIAGRAM*, *Far Off Places*, *The Tusculum Review*, and *CURA*. She is Public Relations Manager for Open Books, one of just four poetry-only bookstores in the U.S. She was awarded the University of Washington's Grace Milliman Pollock Scholarship (2016-2017) and received the Oakley Hall III Memorial Scholarship to attend the Community of Writers in Squaw Valley, California, in the summer of 2016. She is also a former intern of Sarabande Books, a finalist for the UW Academy of American Poets Prize (2015), a reader for *The Seattle Review*, and a recipient of the University of Louisville Creative Writing Scholarship.

BETH MCDONOUGH trained in Silversmithing at Glasgow School of Art, and taught Art in various sectors for many years. Later she completed an M.Litt in Writing Study and Practice at Dundee University and was subsequently inaugural Writer in Residence at Dundee Contemporary Arts (2014-16). She reviews for Dundee University Review of the Arts, and edits the poetry review section there. Her poetry is strongly connected to place, particularly to the Tay, where she swims, and she writes often of a maternal experience of disability. In *Handfast* (Mother's Milk Books, 2016), a poetry duet pamphlet (with Ruth Aylett), she explored the effect of her son's autism on the family, whilst in parallel

Aylett looked at how her mother's dementia had impacted on their relationship. McDonough's work is published in journals and anthologised widely. She currently teaches part time at Dundee University.

PAMELA PETRO is the author of three books of place-based nonfiction: *Travels in an Old Tongue*, about Wales; *Sitting up with the Dead*, about the American South; and *The Slow Breath of Stone*, on Southwest France, and has written for publications from *The New York Times* to *Granta*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Paris Review*. She is also a photographer who works with digital images and environmental installations of "petrographs" (silver gelatin photos printed on stone). Her word-and-image works include *AfterShadows*, an artist book based on her artist-in-residence experience at the Grand Canyon, and the graphic script, *Under Paradise Valley*. Pamela teaches creative nonfiction at Smith College, on Lesley University's MFA in Creative Writing Program, and at the Dylan Thomas Summer School at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David.

BETHANY W. POPE is an award-winning writer. She received her PhD from Aberystwyth University's Creative Writing program, and her MA from the University of Wales Trinity St David. She has published several collections of poetry: *A Radiance* (Cultured Llama, 2012), *Crown of Thorns*, (Oneiros Books, 2013), *The Gospel of Flies* (Writing Knights Press 2014), and *Undisturbed Circles* (Lapwing, 2014). Her collection *The Rag and Boneyard* was published this year by Indigo Dreams and her chapbook *Among The White Roots* will be released by Three Drops Press next autumn. Her first novel, *Masque*, was published by Seren in June 2016.

MARGARET BRIGID QUINN was born and raised in Ireland. She has made her home in West Wales, where she trained to be a yoga teacher. She has completed an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. The landscape and the interaction of people with the landscape - interior and exterior - is inspirational to her. Her poetry and prose have been published in *Cambria*.

NIGEL RODENHURST, who completed a PhD in modern American fiction at Aberystwyth University in 2012, is an occasional lecturer in English and philosophy. He is genuinely disenchanted with academia and literature and for the last two years has mainly contributed short reviews and articles from the margins.

C. B. SIKSTROM is a writer of non-fiction, short stories and poetry. He is a Canadian who also lived on Sakhalin Island, Russia for nearly five years. He presently lives and writes at his dacha near Cold Lake, Alberta.

IAN C. SMITH's work has appeared in *Australian Book Review*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cream City Review*, *New Contrast*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, & *Two-Thirds North*. His seventh book is *Wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press (Port Adelaide). He lives in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, Australia.

MATT TORDOFF has been writing poetry for a number of years. His work has previously appeared in *Tar River Poetry*, *Hartskill Review*, *Think*, and *Red Savina Review*. He lives in Cirencester, Gloucestershire.

CALVIN WHARTON is the former Chair of Creative Writing at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC, and a former editor of the literary journal, *Event*. He co-edited the poetry anthology, *East of Main*; has published widely, including a collection of short stories, *Three Songs by Hank Williams*; a collection of poetry, *The Song Collides*; and most recently, a poetry chapbook, *The Invention of Birds*. This past autumn, he has had the pleasure of spending many weeks in Wales.

PHIL WOOD works in a statistics office. Enjoys working with numbers and words. He has a B.A. Hons in English Literature from UCW Aberystwyth. Recently published work can be found in: *Sein und Werden*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *London Grip* and *The Centrifugal Eye*.

