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UNIVERSITY OF  
LINCOLN

# TLR

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## THE LINCOLN REVIEW

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# INTRODUCTION

*The Lincoln Review* is an international literary journal published annually by the Creative Writing programme at the University of Lincoln and sponsored by the School of Creative Arts. Founded in 2019 by Daniele Pantano, *The Lincoln Review* showcases new poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, translations, and art from both established as well as emerging and underrepresented voices from around the world. Past contributors have included Carol Ann Duffy, Gëzim Hajdari, Jee Leong Koh, Tom Pickard, Robert Shearman, Virgil Suárez, Helen Tookey, Joan Ure, Maria Luise Weissmann, Jennifer Wong, Franz Wright, and Nurit Zarchi.

The ethos of *The Lincoln Review* is to showcase a rich variety of new work from writers and artists, from those who are making their debut publication, to those who are more established. Thanks to the continued dedication and enthusiasm of the editorial team, and the many contributions from around the world, we have now reached the seventh annual issue of *The Lincoln Review*. Special thanks must be extended to Daniele Pantano without whom there would be no *TLR*.

In Issue 7 of *The Lincoln Review* we have continued to feature a rich variety of work from writers and artists around the world, including translations of prose and poetry from Hungary, France and Bangladesh; hybrid visual poetry, art, collage, décollage and photography. The number of submissions we received this year has increased substantially; and a number of potential contributors have written to say that they have submitted their work to *The Lincoln Review* because of specific pieces which we have featured in previous issues and which have resonated with them.

Again, a heartfelt thank you to all our contributors and readers, and to everyone on the editorial team past and present who has enabled this international literary journal to build up such a diverse and fine collection of creative pieces within its pages.

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# Anita Harag

## He Dreams He Can't Run

Translated from the Hungarian by Marietta Morray and Walter Burgess

The dog bends over the water and tries to reach the bubbles on the surface with his front paw. It's a turtle or a crayfish, the mud is moving. That's how Grandpa says it, the mud is moving, it could be a crayfish or a turtle or a fish that moves the mud. The dog is stretching out even though he is afraid of the water, he could easily slide in and doesn't know how to climb out. Brother is not nearby that's why he's so brave. All summer long Brother tries to push him into the lake, but the dog catches on and braces with his feet. If Sister is also present, there's no need to worry because Sister knows what Brother is up to and calls the dog back from the shore. Grandma whistles from the back yard, the dog looks back right away, listens to find out if he heard it right, and when there's another whistle he runs to the back. Grandma arrives first, followed by Sister and then Brother. Grandma carries most of the bags, but it's Sister who has the barbecue chicken and that's the bag with the best scent. He's very glad to see Grandma, Sister and the barbecue chicken but most of all Brother, even if he sometimes wants to push him into the lake. You've got back fast, Grandpa says. He stands by the terrace door while Grandma empties the bags and puts the groceries on the table. Go to your place, he says to the dog, who sniffs at the bag with the chicken and looks for Brother's hand. I said, go to your place, Grandpa says again. His place is by the shore under the umbrella beside the bench, but from now on he'll have to pay attention because Brother is here. He lies down beside the bench, puts his head down on the ground. He snorts and that makes the dust swirl up in front of his nose. He watches them and starts to wag his tail as Brother comes closer during the unloading on his way to the summer kitchen but doesn't lift up his head. Sister puts the cheese and the sour cream in the fridge, touches the box to see how much it warmed up on the way. Brother carries the flour to the summer kitchen, Grandpa looks at them as they unpack, and he and Grandma chat, was it busy at the store, did they meet anyone they knew, and did he catch anything. Very, no, yes but only carp. Sister wants to ask what he did with the carp but doesn't. She doesn't ask anything, she makes no statements, doesn't give orders to the dog, doesn't call anyone by name. Put this on the lowest shelf in the fridge, Grandma hands her the paprika. Sister doesn't say OK, just goes inside the cottage and comes back in a few seconds with the bag of paprika in her hand and looks. She holds it up and shakes her head, what is it, Grandma asks. Sister shakes her head. I don't understand what you want if you don't talk. Sister shakes her head. Tell me, what

do you want. There's no room in the fridge Grandpa calls from behind. Sister nods. Then just put it down, I'll find room for it. Sister puts the paprika on the table and goes into the cool cottage. She's twelve and reverts to being a baby, Grandma whispers, Grandpa moves his head, but it is unclear whether he agrees or objects. Sometimes he would like not to talk, if only for a day, but Grandma always makes him speak. She doesn't know that everyday Grandpa takes a vow of silence. I can't understand why she's doing this, Grandma says. According to her mother, she's in the rebellious teenager stage. Let her be, Grandpa insists, she will talk. I think it's because of the new guy, Grandma continues. She doesn't like the new guy. Is it she who doesn't like him, or you? What business is it of mine? But the poor girl has to live with him, I'm not surprised that she doesn't want to be part of it. I don't think that's what it's about, Grandpa says. I wish she could tell us why. She should just tell us and then go back to being silent. All right, she doesn't have to tell us, but she should write it down. Give it up, ma, she'll talk when she wants to. I give her one day, Grandma replies, and picks up the paprika from the table.

The dog looks at the water where there were bubbles a few minutes ago, he thinks of the scent of Brother's hand, the scent of the chicken, that of Grandma's slippers that he likes to lick. He also likes licking Grandma's toes, but Grandma rarely allows him to do it, especially not when there's company. In the morning he sniffed at Grandpa's cap that fell down when Grandpa was putting on his pullover. It's cold in the morning, his kennel is warm, but it's nice when Grandpa opens the door and comes outside. At those times his scent is stronger and is mixed with Grandma's scent, that of the bed and pyjamas. At the shore, Brother reaches his hand into a bag of corn kernels and puts a kernel on the hook. He pats the dog's head when he backs up to cast. I give her one day; he hears Grandma's voice. He's glad that his sister is not talking; at home she's a chatterbox. She used to be a chatterbox, but she hasn't uttered a word for two weeks. He tried to catch her talking because she surely talks when there's no one around. He hid in the closet behind the doors, then jumped out to scare her; Sister got scared but didn't say anything. There's something moving the water lilies, that's where he should cast his line. They're moving a lot; it must be a big fish. Perhaps it's a pike. He would like it to be a pike. Grandpa tells him in vain that they live among the reeds and are

carnivores. They are carnivores so he'll never catch one with corn kernels. It's doesn't matter, that's why it'll be so surprising. He imagines Grandpa's face as he lifts the pike out of the water. The dog's legs are twitching strangely. He's dreaming. He often dreams that he is running; at those times all four of his legs twitch and push the air. Brother also often dreams about running and it may be that his legs also twitch. But this time it's not only his legs but the dog's whole body that twitches, as if something had bitten him. He tries to get up but seems to be digging himself further into the ground. Grandpa! Grandpa knows that Brother doesn't scream because he caught something, each scream has its own meaning. He runs to the shore, Grandma also runs to the shore, grabs Brother and takes him up to the terrace where the rose bush partly hides the sight of the dog. Grandpa lies down beside the dog and holds his head. As he twitches he knocks the jar of worms into the water, the lid wasn't screwed on and the little worms sink into the water. The shouting makes Sister run out to the terrace and stands there looking at her brother who doesn't look back even though he knows that she's looking at him. He states at the table, then at Grandma, who doesn't look at them, nor at the dog, but at something else beside the fence. They have never seen Grandpa lie on the ground, that makes them more frightened than the dog's twitching, which suddenly stopped. Ma, shouts Grandpa, Grandma picks up the dog's water dish from beside the fence and carries it to the shore. Brother walks over slowly; he cannot see but hears that the dog is drinking. The worm jar is floating on the lake, he brings the net and tries to reach it. Leave it, says Grandma and puts her arm around Brother's shoulders. She finds it hard to put her arm around him, he is almost as tall as she is. Everything's going to be all right, it's over, she says. There's still a bit of watery saliva dripping from the dog's mouth on the blades of grass. Sister is standing on the terrace looking at the chair where Brother was sitting, she doesn't dare go to the shore. When the dog comes to and catches sight of Brother standing by the shore, he starts wagging his tail.

## Harag Anita

### Azt álmodja, nem tud futni

A kutya a víz fölé hajol, mellső lábával próbálja elérni a buborékokat a felszínen. Teknős vagy rák, mozog az iszap. A papa így mondja, mozog az iszap, mozgathatja az iszapot rák is, teknős is, hal is. A kutya nyújtózkodik, pedig fél a víztől, könnyen belecsúszhat a partról, kimászni viszont nem tud. A báty nincs a közelben, azért is ilyen bátor. A báty egész nyáron próbálja belökni a tóba, de a kutya hamar észreveszi, és lábaival fékez. Ha a hóg is ott van, nem kell félni, mert a hóg tudja, mire készül a báty, és behívja a partról a kutyát. A mama fütyül a hátsó kertből, a kutya azonnal hátranéz, fülel, hogy jól hallotta-e, és amikor újra megszólal a fütyty, hátrafut. A mama jön elöl, utána a hóg, utána a báty. A mamánál van a legtöbb szatyor, de a húgnál van a grillcsirke, annak a szatyornak van a legjobb szaga. Nagyon örül a mamának, a húgnak, a grillcsirkének, de legjobban a bátynak örül, még ha bele is akarja lökni a tóba. Gyorsan megjártatok, mondja a papa, odaáll a teraszajtóhoz, amíg a mama az asztalra pakol a szatyorból. Helyedre, mondja a kutyának, aki a csirkés szatyorba szagol, utána a báty kezét keresi. Mondom, helyedre, szól rá a papa újra. A helye most a parton van, a napernyő alatt, a pad mellett, de mostantól figyelnie kell, mert itt a báty. Lefekszik a pad mellé, lerakja fejét a földre, és nagyot fúj, amitől felkavarodik a por az orra előtt. Figyeli őket, és csóválni kezdi a farkát, ahogy pakolás közben a báty közelebb jön a nyári konyhába menet, de a fejét még nem emeli fel. A hóg beteszi a hűtőbe a sajtot és a tejfölt, tapogatja a dobozt, mennyire melegedett át az úton, a báty a nyári konyhába viszi a lisztet, a papa nézi, ahogy pakolnak, és arról beszélnek a mamával, mennyire voltak sokan, találkoztak-e ismerőssel, és volt-e kapás, amíg nem voltak itt. Nagyon, nem, igen, de csak kárászt. A hóg meg akarja kérdezni, mit csinált a kárással, de nem kérdezi meg. Semmit nem kérdez, semmit nem jelent ki, semmit nem parancsol a kutyának, senkit nem szólít a nevéen. Ezt a legelső polcra tedd a hűtőben, nyújtja neki a mama a paprikát. A hóg nem mondja azt, oké, csak bemegy a kisházba, pár pillanat múlva visszajön, kezében a csomag paprika, és néz. Feltartja, és rázza a fejét. Mi az, kérdezi a mama. A hóg rázza a fejét. Nem értem, mit szeretnél, ha nem beszélsz. A hóg rázza a fejét. Mit szeretnél, mondjad. Nincs hely a hűtőben, szólal meg háta mögött a papa. A hóg bólogat. Akkor tedd csak le, majd elrendezem. A hóg leteszi az asztalra a paprikát, és bemegy a hűvös kisházba. Tizenkét éves, és visszamegy babába, mondja a mama suttogva, a papa ingatja a fejét, nem lehet eldönteni, helyesel vagy ellenkezik. Néha ő is szeretne nem beszélni, csak egy napig, de végül a mama mindig szóra bírja. Nem is tud róla, hogy a papa mindennap némasági fogadalmat tesz. Nem értem, miért csinálja ezt, mondja a mama.

Az anyja szerint kamaszkori dackorszak. Hadd csinálja, válaszol a papa, majd beszél. Szerintem az új pasi miatt van, folytatja a mama. Nem tetszik neki az új pasi. Neki nem tetszik, vagy neked? Nekem most mi közöm hozzá? De szegény lánynak együtt kell élni vele. Nem csodálom, ha nem kíván ebben részt venni. Szerintem nem erről van szó, mondja a papa. Csak mondaná el, miért. Mondja el, aztán felőlem hallgathat. Vagy jó, akkor ne mondja, csak írja le. Hagyjad, anyukám, majd beszél, ha akar. Egy napot adok neki, válaszolja a mama, és felveszi a paprikát az asztról.

A kutya nézi a vizet ott, ahol pár perce még a buborékok voltak. A báty kezének szagára gondol, a grillcsirke szagára, a mama papucsának szagára, amit szeret nyalogatni. A mama lábujjait is szereti nyalogatni, de azt a mama ritkán engedi, például ha vendégek jönnek. Reggel a papa sapkájába szagolt bele, leesett, miközben a papa vette fel a pulóverét. Reggel hideg van, a vacska meleg, de jó, amikor a papa nyitja az ajtót, és kijön. Olyankor erősebb a szaga, keveredik a mama szagával, az ágy szagával, a pizsama szagával. A báty a parton belenyúl a kukoricába, és a horogra akaszt egy szemet. Megsimogatja a kutya fejét, amikor hátrál, hogy bedobjon. Egy napot adok neki, hallja a mama hangját. Örül, hogy a húga nem beszél, otthon egy szófosógép. Szófosógép volt, két hete nem szólalt meg. Próbálta kihallgatni, mert biztos beszél, amikor senki nem hallja. Elbújt a szekrényben, az ajtó mögé, aztán előugrott, hogy megijessze, a hűg megijedt, de nem mondott semmit. A taviózsákat mozgatja valami, oda kéne dobni. Nagyon mozognak, nagy hal lehet. Talán csuka, szeretné, ha csuka lenne. Hiába mondja a papa, hogy azok a nádasban élnek, és ragadozó halak. Ragadozó halak, tehát kukoricával sosem fog csukát. Nem baj, ezért lesz meglepő. Elképzeli a papa arcát, ahogy kiemeli a csukát a vízből. A kutya lába furcsán rángatózik, álmodik, szokta azt álmodni, hogy fut, mind a négy lába rángatózik olyankor, löki a levegőt. A báty is szokott arról álmodni, hogy fut, talán az ő lába is rángatózik olyankor. De nem csak a kutya lába, az egész teste rángatózik most, mintha megcsípte volna valami, próbál felkelni, de mintha egyre mélyebbre túrná magát a földben. Papa! A papa tudja, hogy nem kapás van, nem azért kiabál a báty, minden kiabálásnak megvan a maga jelentése, a partra rohan, a mama is a partra rohan, és elhúzza onnan a bátyot, fel a teraszra, a vadrózsabokor félig eltakarja a kutyát. A papa lefekszik mellé, tartja a fejét. Rángatózás közben a kutya a csontis tégelyt a vízbe rúgja, nem volt rácsavarva a teteje, sok kicsi csonti merül a víz alá. A kiabálásra a hűg is kiszaladt a teraszra, most ott áll, nézi a bátyját, aki nem néz vissza, pedig tudja, hogy őt nézi. Az asztalt bámulja, aztán a mamát, aki nem őket, nem a kutyát, hanem valami mást néz a kerítés mellett. A papát még sosem látták a földön feküdni, ettől még jobban megijednek, mint a kutya rángatózásától, ami egyszer csak abbamarad. Anyukám, kiabál a papa, a mama felveszi

a kutya vizestálját a kerítés mellől, és odaviszi a partra. A báty lassan odamegy, még nem látja, de hallja, hogy a kutya iszik. A tó tetején lebeg a csontis tégely, hozza a hálót, és próbálja elérni. Hagyd csak, mondja a mama, és átkarolja a báty vállát. Nehezen karolja át, már olyan magas, mint ő. Nem lesz semmi baj, mondja, már vége van. A kutya szájából még csordogál a vizes nyál, rá a fűszálakra. A hűg még mindig a teraszon áll, a széket nézi, ahol az előbb a báty ült, nem mer a partra menni. Amikor a kutya magához tér, és meglátja a bátyot, ahogy a parton áll a napernyő alatt, csóválni kezd.

## Emily Cotterill

### Prawn Mayonnaise

At 11.37 I'm alone in front of the meal deals, still full rows of plastic-cardboard boxes, fridge-front racks of grab bags, plumped like hotel scatter cushions. I think I am contemplating the enormity of society, by way of ploughman's too thin tomato slices. There are people who drink cans of *Monster* with non-food names and wrong people whose preferred sandwich is prawn mayonnaise.

Nearby, offices hold rows of call handlers, waiting for the sun on their faces, a few steps, a *Kinder Bueno*, or a sliced fruits pot. The unfathomable variety of main-snack-drink combinations holds me back, from the tasteless cheese and onion sandwich I need to take for my afternoon train. I don't want any of this.

I cannot abide prawn mayonnaise. All of those insect bodies, cooked, and mixed and cut industrially. How many whole ones have made it to this aisle right now? How many places is one prawn far flung to? I try to calm myself with the constancy of crisps but the world's millions of slim potato slices are suffocating. The office people are coming and they know, how small this is.

### When Everything is Terrible, Brambly Hedge

It is ordinary to want to be these calm things, illustrated mice in perfect seasons and dungarees, biting into blackberries held in two small paw-hands.

Gathering around the store stump and knowing the comings and goings of their people as well as the weather. Backwards is the place we look in worry

and those mice are still moving in a version of the 30s. Let me live in the bottom of a hedgerow, carrying a tiny gas lamp through a tiny front door. I wish

I could talk to a small world of people like the mice do – I am scared of the world as we have it and I think you are too. There is not so much as radio news in Brambly Hedge,

it is quiet when the sun sets but, the fox and the buzzard are out in the country. The jaws that are coming are real ones, with sharp teeth and hot saliva. Mouse bones

are easily digestible. I'm a mouse most mornings but I do not have a cellar strung with giant mushrooms – I have digital infrastructure, climate anxiety, and plastic shoes.

The mice have no path to the future, their quick lives don't let them look far enough up. The brambles are heavy with blackberries. This is all they ever do.

## Emily Cotterill

### There is No Mick Jagger in the Manosphere

and no David Beckham either. The women are amendable and the ones you interact with are beautiful, to the degree assigned to your bicep-girth rank. If their blonded hair snaps with the bleaching, they are replaced by smoother models with the new right things to say. Listen. Everyone is grateful and getting worse and worse at sex. Emotions have been redefined for the grind of the manosphere. Pizza exists, but it wasn't made by the rough hands of loving dads. There is no Stanley Tucci here. You probably shouldn't ride a bike in the manosphere, or think about summers plunging down hills into friend filled sunsets. Engines are for the best. You still have a mother but she is different. She laughs less and is sadder than you remember. Black-eyed, maybe she has banged into doorframes and tumbled down unseen steps.

## Bethany Rivers

### Tornado

Nobody believed me. They said, I must've dreamt it.  
But I tell you, there was. My home was gone. My dad was gone.  
The world was blown apart. Everything he owned was missing.  
There was no trace of him, except for his blue and silver pen (weighted beautifully for the perfect glide across the page), burgundy and black chequered dressing gown belt,  
his red cloth pocket dictionary, dated 1954.  
Though I had proof he had existed, that he was no longer here, everybody denied a tornado, went about their business, as usual. How do you talk about something everyone pretends never happened. I was blown to other countries. There are pieces of me I haven't found yet. A tornado is violent.  
It ripped at the roots of the ancient oak,  
tore it up like paper. The force grasped the tree by its hair, yanked it clean of its earth home. Its roots exposed, suffocated by too much air. Tendrils dangle, shocked from the soil. The silent scream of hyaline threads.  
The tornado came. It did.  
It took my father  
and everything  
he owned.

## Bethany Rivers

### Rebuilding after a tornado

You can't. Your hands are only 12.  
Nobody teaches you about bricks,  
sand, trowels, the ratio of water to cement,  
the muscles you need to mix the concrete,  
how to calculate dimensions of walls, ceilings,  
windows, doors. Nobody believes

there was a tornado. They point to the house  
intact behind you. They shake their heads,  
think you're a new kind of weird  
or creative in a child way, don't understand  
how the wind has stolen your mother.

She wanders the house like a ghost.  
You can touch her but the howling wraps  
around her like a torn sail.

Even when the curtains stay closed,  
the wind still gets in. And they need  
new windows, doors, stronger walls.  
Every day the fingers of the wind come again.  
You can't speak. Neither can your mother.  
Voices vortex.  
Downdraft.

### She covered all the mirrors

and gave away  
her compacts, all her blushers. She won't go  
into shops with mirrors, or walk down town  
at night, anything to avoid seeing her reflection.  
I asked her about it once. She stopped,  
looked at me. I thought, oh no, I shouldn't have asked,  
there was that look – she might cut me with a razored  
tongue, or retch dry sobs, but then her eyes glazed  
as if full of the horizon at sunset, and said,  
*I keep seeing her when I look in the mirror. Who?* I said,  
*The girl, this little girl who never stops crying,*  
*she's always there, so I cover the mirror,*  
*then I can't see her, because nobody else sees her –*  
She walked away, left me looking  
at the receding reflection of her  
in the glowing dark  
of the display window.

## Bethany Rivers

### Art as Mirror

The girl stays late that night, in the library,  
*Hamlet* falls from her lap, just as her eyes reach  
the most famous line. She looks down.

She can no longer read  
the palms of her hands.

The satin bolts slide through.

Her life line  
interrupted.

Her love line  
now broken.

She saw the fate of Ophelia  
unravel.

Hamlet knew  
why  
the cock crowed  
and why the wind  
was north-northwest,

and so did she.

## Ben Verinder

### When you die, my daughter says

I'm going to cut off your head  
and carry you around so I can cuddle you.

'Meet Dad!' I'll demand of my new friends,  
lifting you, like a rabbit, from your black hat.

I will drive you around town in a see-through box  
strapped to the rack of my Triumph Bonneville.

In photographs I will smudge up to you.  
I'll scrub your teeth and on sunny days

set you on the windowsill. You can keep watch  
at night from underneath the stairs.

I fiercely hope hair *does* grow after death  
so I can brush your loyal beard.

On Halloween I will let you choose:  
Samson or Holofernes?

And I promise never to hold you  
like a bowling ball or use you to stop

a door. Instead, I long to be Winnie the Pooh  
and you my very last jar of honey.

## Ben Verinder

### How to hold a fern

Like you are lifting light

or touching hands,  
its fronds across your fingers.

Walk it up the dewy aisle and out into a confetti  
of warm September rain.

Or, it is the muzzle of a childhood dog, a green piano, an arrow fletch,  
a map of the only path through unattended woods.

Hold the crozier, the fiddlehead, between your forefinger and thumb.  
A small miracle or melody will be drawn from you.

### The Inheritance

The first correspondence in weeks. A yellow envelope. Unfamiliar postmark. Stiff paper.  
The letterhead from a distant market town. *As the only surviving relative* typed in fat ink,  
fading to a mumbled complimentary close, a dribbled signature.

Bad weather all the way through the mountains, wipers sloshing the view. The gravel  
drive cedes to herb-robert and dandelion. A squint of outhouse, lead guttering and one  
façade rendered in grey cement. You dash to the porch and a clammy handshake, are led  
down a dark corridor that smells of rotting wood.

The sitting room is lined with portraits that share your squashed nose and small nostrils,  
the same olive tint to the skin, but these mouths are wider, jowls fleshier, eyes boggling  
like spawn. Paint splotches into warts.

The tall doors at the back of the house open up to lilies and fern, cotton grass, marsh  
marigold and marsh violet, loosestrife, hornwort and starwort, pennywort and  
woundwort. Spearwort. Rain puckers pondwater as far as you can see.

# Franz Jørgen Neumann

## The Arctic Garden

I'm sitting with Mr. Clarence on a bench in the Japanese Garden, but my mind is elsewhere, on the body a gardener discovered last week in the Hanging Gardens, a suicide that Management has managed to keep from the press.

'The cat's being unnatural with the dog again,' Mr. Clarence says.

I don't see any cats. The only dog is a frenzied Pomeranian cradled by a woman who's the more likely emotional support animal. To humor Mr. Clarence, I unclip my radio and tell him I'll call in the cat and dog.

'Don't bother,' he says. 'Let them have their fun.'

Mr. Clarence is both an emeritus board member of The Gardens and a donor in the ten-million category. He's also an institutional pain in the ass. I escort him through the grounds on his Sunday visits, a duty that used to fall on Donor Relations until the incident in the Children's Garden. What happened was that he climbed on his hands and knees through the boxwood maze, corralling scads of young kids who weren't expecting an old man to break through the hedge snarling the words 'Jungle Cut! Jungle Cat!' There'd been a fair amount of shrieking and pants-wetting, not least because of the sight of Mr. Clarence's scratched and bleeding face. Mr. Clarence said it was a game his father used to play with him, and which he, in turn, had played with his children. Suits were settled out of court for emotional damages.

The incident hasn't helped our side of the tug-of-war between Clarence's grown children, who want him to enter a facility on the East Coast, and the board of The Gardens, who want him to move his assets into an endowment. Taking him around the gardens once a week is a small price to pay to keep the narrative of his future generosity alive. We counter his children's view of their father's state of mind by sending them our sunny log entries. *Mr. Clarence was highly interested in our latest acquisition, and correctly predicted the week the cherry trees would begin to blossom, and gave us actionable improvements for managing peak-hour traffic flow at the entrance.* Certainly not anything about cats and dogs getting it on. Not anything about how he always calls

camellias *chlamydias*. I do my part for the greater good of The Gardens, even though (and because) there is talk of outsourcing security.

'Spies,' Mr. Clarence says, nodding to two women at the edge of the koi pond, here in the Japanese Garden. He might mean any of the persons pausing to take in this idyll with its weeping willow and tea house, small waterfall and equanimous Buddha.

'Tell me about the spies,' I say, interested to know if he has anything to add to the rumours that The Gardens have served as a meeting ground for intelligence services for decades.

He points at the Japanese pepper plant lining the walkway: '*Zanthoxylum piperitum*.' 'Spice,' I say, disappointed.

He nods. 'They call it *sanshō*.'

According to Art, who headed up Security before me, meetings and even spy exchanges have occurred on the grounds, including in the mansion's art galleries and in the network of underground passageways. I understand the pull of a juicy theory, but I think Art got a little cooked in the sun. I suppose you could classify our plant thefts as horticultural espionage, but there are no clandestine intelligence operations, no hidden network of passageways. Just leaky basements, issues with mould and asbestos, rats.

Though his mind may be going, Mr. Clarence's money is intact. The endowment – if it comes through – will fund the Arctic Garden, future envy of every botanical garden between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. There's a scale model at the front entrance showing the future site's lichen-laced boulders, the pygmy birch-lined bog, the dark stands of moss-covered pine. The enclosure will be drenched with both real and artificial sunshine during summer, then plunged into endless twilight during winter's cruelest months. Real permafrost. It will also be the first region of The Gardens to include native land animals – the arctic fox, the marmot, the pika – and

will be the first new expansion to the grounds since the ill-fated Extinction Garden. That wasteland of dirt was staked with signs depicting plants wiped out by human activity. The space quickly became the overflow lot, lost species now placeholders to help you recall where you parked your car.

'Let's visit the Hanging Gardens,' Mr. Clarence says, a garden more aptly named than he knows.

'Closed for maintenance,' I say.

'Rose Garden, then.'

I pull his cane up from under the bench and wait patiently for him to take my arm. As we amble toward the rose beds, I tell Mr. Clarence what my predecessor confided in me, about The Gardens being the meeting ground of spies.

'Yes, yes,' he says. 'Art filled me in years ago. I wasn't aware you knew.'

'I'm Security. I know everything.'

'Alright. What's on my mind?'

'You need to see a man about a horse.'

'You *do* know everything, my boy.'

While I wait outside the men's room, I politely request that a guest not break off any additional rose blossoms. I direct a couple toward the Tea House. I watch four women in hats and summer dresses approach languidly, admiring the roses, turning them up to their faces as though the blossoms have chins. Old money in young bodies is never in a rush.

Mr. Clarence emerges from the men's room. 'There's two Frenchmen in there talking about an exchange. Spies,' he whispers.

When the two men walk past us, Mr. Clarence points at their backs with his cane,

bayoneting the air. The men wear expensive haircuts, fitted blazers, and look like they could keep up a ten-minute mile without breaking a sweat. They're not even distracted by the dawdle of women breezing past them and laughing under their summer hats.

'Let's tail them,' Mr. Clarence says.

We follow the two men through the Rose Garden and around The Great Lawn, then into the Tropical Jungle, the pursuit putting a spring in Mr. Clarence's step.

'Who do you think they're meeting?' he asks. 'Russians? Iranians? The Chinese?'

The pair head off the path and into the densest portion of the Tropical Jungle, but it's no place for an old man in expensive loafers.

'Go on,' Mr. Clarence says, handing me his cane as though I'll need protection.

I think of the Arctic Garden and do as I'm told. I manoeuvre around the roots of a giant Strangler Fig, *Ficus thonningii*, and find our spies in a deeply shaded hollow, kissing. I clear my throat and look up, admiring the epiphytes and lianas high in the canopy. When I look down again, the two men have taken the hint and disappeared. I find Mr. Clarence on a bench not far from where I left him.

'You were right,' I say, handing him his cane. I describe an envelope being passed from the Frenchmen to two Chinese men, and how they all bolted when they saw me.

'You're lucky you weren't shot,' he says.

For the next hour, Mr. Clarence points his cane at pairs of Asian men and asks 'Is it them? Or those there? They must be the ones!' He's still going on when I offload him to the driver I've called to the front entrance. I shake Mr. Clarence's hand, thank him for our time together, and tell him I look forward to next Sunday.

I reenter the grounds where guests stand in long lines for tickets and where the scale model of the Arctic Garden sits, half of it painted blue-black to simulate how it will look in winter. White figures are frozen in mid-stride on the paths, looking like ghosts. I wonder whether there'll be artificial snow.

I'm near the Hanging Gardens, so I walk the main space once there and run through a checklist before tomorrow's reopening. My thoughts turn back to the man found hanging under the conservatory's dome. I imagine him having come here on a field trip as a child some cold winter morning, the shock of heat, humidity, and greenery leaving a lasting impression. Or did he choose this spot because the name appealed to his gallows humour? I gaze up at the empty space above the cascading beds of flowering plants. The man must have been agile as a rock climber to get to where he'd tied off the rope – unless others were involved. Even I'm susceptible to an alternative to the tragedy of a life self-silenced. But the outdoor surveillance footage shows that he was the only man to enter the building that night.

When I arrive home late in the afternoon, word comes down in an email that security will be augmented beginning on Monday before shifting entirely to an outside firm within the month. I am thanked for my cooperation and service, and asked to promptly notify my team of the transition.

I consider notifying the newspaper about the recent death at The Gardens instead, naming members of the board and drawing attention to the police department's complicity in keeping the news from the public. Maybe throw my own name in there for cover. But that wouldn't prevent my unit's fate, and it would place the deceased man into a story other than the one he chose to follow to its end. There are more effective ways to sow weeds in the garden of spies. The threat of a newspaper story about the stupidity of the Arctic Gardens, for one. A tale of egos and exorbitant estimates, elder abuse, potentially harmful environmental impacts, animal cruelty, geographic appropriation, and whatever else will spark disgust in a reading public.

I take a simpler route. I reply to the email with a single still frame from a surveillance video, one in which I've kindly obscured the board member being unnatural with a fetching Gainsborough portrait, an act caught one night on one of our rat cams when the painting was down in the basement with Conservation & Restoration.

After I receive the expected phone call assuring me that Monday's security handover is indefinitely delayed, I step out onto my apartment's balcony and tend to my modest collection of potted greenery, the kind that would never think to wear a Latin badge: a jade plant, a shy mimosa, some mint, last winter's poinsettia still wearing its skirt of

holiday foil. I feel the dirt, water the plants that are thirsty, then move them gently into the last spear of sun. I resolve, over the coming weeks, to take them into The Gardens and plant them in the ground they deserve.

# Anna Bowles

## foreign volunteers at the night checkpoint

*east ukraine, spring 2025*

hello, soldier.  
eyes behind a balaclava.  
torchlight shivering the mountain  
of rice and soap behind us in the van  
for distribution tomorrow.  
yeah, i know it's past curfew. everyone gets  
a little lost sometimes.

your comrade clutches his weapon  
so stiff, so vigilant... *slava ukraini...*  
we're not russian spies, lads.  
you should have a nose for them by now.  
here's our dog-eared passports.  
we've no booze or weapons.

(where even are we? a back road.  
always some atrocious back road)

dim overhead your flag is creaking.  
a radio's fritzing in your hut,  
lumped round with the usual crates,  
tatty camouflage nets, mounded tyres. floodlight.  
i know you've been on the front line  
and this job is your r&r.  
your blue red-rimmed eyes in the phone light.  
don't search our van. go inside, make tea, get warm.  
in the village your grandma is praying.

you know, we saw fresh dugouts  
beside the road out of pavlohrad,  
it's unthinkable the enemy could get that far.

son, we're only foreign volunteers  
dreaming of victory and bed –

you wave us on. just wanted our english  
to show we've no russian accents, or maybe  
that knackered grey lada is really suspicious.

thank god: the vodka under the rice is calling.  
we'll drink to you, balaclava eyes, i promise.  
one day, the sun will rise and know us all.

*Under wartime conditions, alcohol is banned within a certain distance of the front line, to prevent drunkenness among soldiers. Weapons and explosives require specific paperwork documenting where and to whom they are going.*

## Obiageli A. Iloakasia

### My Brother Says I Do Not Think About My Father

Seaside weeds, green, brown, alert, watch the feet of mariners  
press the sand & attempt to bury parts of them. For days,  
these weeds have practiced the art of forgetting

& remembering the first day, fellow kelp dwellers rejoiced  
as a new root formed in the ground & sprouted above  
the sand, with the sun, melting its bright light into their thallus.

To survive this unpredictable world, I'm living like seaside weeds,  
uncertain of deathday but sprouting regardless.

Once, my brother wandered toward the seashore to catch the sun

surrender to the embrace of the evening sky. His feet crushed  
a kelp of seaside weeds in their prime. I scolded him about the life  
he snatched from the weeds, simply existing.

He said I'm thinking too much about immaterial matter.  
It's been days since I spoke about my father, days since I left  
my father a voicemail. My brother says my gaze now rests

on the superficial parts of our existence. Lately, I've been thinking  
about sustainable ways to cohabit with nature, with the seaside weeds  
that irritate my legs – landing me in the emergency ward.

My eyes meet light from the hospital window & I think about my father.

## Laine Derr

### I Know Nothing of Stones

When I can, I visit my father, a man  
who walks w/ a smooth smile. I know  
better than to touch the glass, but rules

are meant to be. Are meant to be broken

like a boy who rides a horse w/out a saddle,  
faster and faster they move along the land,  
dandelions floating in the mid-morning air

like fallin' angels – wings newly plucked.

They say my family carries an ancient curse,  
it dates to David, but I know nothing of stones  
or humble beginnings, for giants no longer

remain. Just hazel eyes that look like mine.

# Laine Derr

## Spinal Depression or Death of a Dictator

In  
Milan

once  
slain

my  
body

was  
put on

display

upside  
down

I hang

sacrum  
soul

aching

for my  
love

## Posthumous Fame

My words, once sold at auction,  
are housed in a private collection.

A second home in Sedona whose  
docent traces lines like a newborn bruise.

Its idle ache still haunts the page,  
she says, one by one, revealing pain –

Algor Mortis or Cold Death

My folks blame it on Russia  
but, to be honest, my hair is  
naturally thin, naturally pale.

Though known for sonnets, I chose  
the denser poems, bone-dry verses –

Unspoiled

If they don't like the taste  
of my blood, I will sell it  
for free along the arroyos,  
coyotes void of gilded lies.

Sadly, these words aren't free, but  
if you like, we have a virtual gift

shop where you can browse, buy  
bags, or a signed print, Fistula –

Elders say I was born cursing the world, eyes w/out light, bits of debris, a crawling coup.

## Laine Derr

### Take Two or The Sun's Salutation

This isn't  
a reflection  
on your writing.

Take after take  
I'm ravished by a Dane

The selection process is  
highly subjective, something  
of a mystery even to us.

named Fred, a gentle man  
I've known for years

There's no telling what  
we'll fall in love with,  
what we'll let get away.

who speaks to me, mid-hump,  
tunic swinging above my

Writing is hard work,  
and writers merit  
some acknowledgment.

knees, of spring-like dreams,  
as I cry for God, for God –

This note  
doesn't speak  
to that need.

## Paul atten Ash



Black Moonpill



Blackmassing Pill



Little White Pills



Moonpill Blackhole



Pill Eclipse



Sun Kill Moon

## Paul atten Ash — Artistic Statement

### *black-massing*

art-photography series (2026)

Who'd have thought that a weed could be so beautiful in the right context?

Along one side of a Bristol inner-city cut-through, a narrow pathway is flanked by wire fencing, replete with razor wire. Here, Traveller's Joy (*Clematis vitalba*) aka Old Man's Beard – a woody member of the buttercup family – has woven its more-than-human poetry into the serrated fabric of the urban-carceral.

Juxtaposed with a central 'moonpill' motif – moon-cum-Escitalopram 10 mg – the series explores the mysterious centres of the mind, evoking human inner conflicts such as existential angst, twenty-first-century despair, and – in 'Black Moonpill' & 'Blackmassing Pill' – a lifetime of being consumed by anxiety.

Here, perhaps, we may find some temporary quantum of solace or a regimen of hope against hope among the black-massing weeds of psychic distress in 'Little White Pills' and 'Sun Kill Moon', whereas 'Pill Eclipse' and 'Moonpill Blackhole' hint at the immanent universal binary of 'darkness' versus 'light'.

## Merna Dyer Skinner

### Witness

*for Zephyr*

How to measure that glint in your eye –  
flash steadfast through flickering lashes?  
Where, I wonder, does your mind wander  
when that first spark fades? Five days old,  
blue-grey eyes – look how they track  
light from evening lamps, morning sun!

I contemplate sights that came before –  
ancestors who scoured rough seas, never-  
ending horizon lines, rising, falling –  
crossing from England to colonies.  
Eyes of our first Boston settler  
witnessing his wife being hung in the square.  
Did he cover their children's eyes? Did she  
stare at the rope as it slipped over her head –  
or glimpse a slit of sunlight just before the snap?

I fasten your onesie over your diaper, lift you  
to my chest – heartbeat to heartbeat. Your eyes  
innocent, shimmering fairy lights –  
part of on an endless string. Dear boy,  
during your life, what will you illuminate –  
when, if ever, will you turn a blind eye?

### Lost in the Bedclothes

*with a line from James Salter*

My desire awakens after you leave –  
stretching across the sheets, I press my face into your pillow  
– float on your pheromones.

When we make love, your fingers tap my skin in four-four time.  
As I read Simic, you sway your head to some silent riff –  
more music than man, more rhythm than rhyme.

Why do you deride my bedside stacks – my towers of tomes –  
besmirch them as my Southern border barrier? Their spines,  
strong, contents sublime, if only you'd open one.

When you're absent *it is the emptiness that pleases me.*  
I harvest your scent – disown your breath and bone –  
splay my limbs across the bed, lose

my bookmarks between the sheets –  
how divine My Sweet to be alone.

# Anisha Tandon

## Almost Ghazal at JFK

On the phone, my father tells me to come home.  
He is at the dining table, egg yolk slicking his teeth,  
an orange on his plate in exact wedges, peeled down  
to its naked architecture, rind coming away in one  
long thought: there is nothing there for you.  
You can have a life here. You can be closer to us.  
Then, what have you been up to these days?

Today, I saw a seal haul himself up the beach,  
giant wormlike movements until he was far enough away  
from the tide to not be taken. When I stepped into  
the water, the ocean sniffed at my feet, like it was  
determining my worth. The seal burrowed  
his head in the sand. At once, men came to create a fence  
of signs around it. Caution: seal napping, please do not approach.

When my parents visited the city this winter, we walked through  
Central Park on the first day after fresh snow. It was all white margin,  
no earth, and papa kept stopping to arrange me beside ma,  
pulling his phone to document the three of us in a line,  
small relief of colour against the white.

A long time ago, my parents named me  
something even a white man can pronounce.  
Now at JFK, under the fluorescent hum, I stand at the mouth  
of the line, passport open. The officer looks from the photo  
to my face, and back again.

I asked papa once whether he thought  
I resembled him. He appraised my face like a document,  
then said: you are my daughter. Now, in this country of men,  
Anisha, why do you want to be here?  
I answer.  
Then again in line.  
Then again.

## Monsoon Season

I remember the seasons the way I imagine now  
how it is to be a child, the memory like the moment  
when I awake, when the mind stirs the unconscious  
tea of itself into something briefly coherent.  
It was like that one day: the flooded ocean spilling  
inwards, the excess of it splitting the seams  
of the city, as if Bombay was a kurta,  
familiar, billowing, then caught on a nail.  
What is a flood to a child?  
The word arrives  
before its meaning does.  
I stood at the window at school.  
The roads disappeared first, the rain  
threatening to take out every engine  
in sight. The water turned brown as  
it learned the dust, the mud.  
Back then, I knew the seasons: summer, then monsoon,  
mosquito nets like thin prayers at night,  
the way the air feels pregnant with water.  
Even now, my palms remember,  
the sweat is how I know I am home.  
Back then, I did not know too much about danger,  
but I recognised it in the careful choreography  
of adults, in the tentative way they stepped around potholes.  
I thought of them as children, hiding behind their  
mothers' saris, head peeking out to assess a stranger.  
I remember flashes of that day,  
a teacher saying the bus wouldn't come,  
that we might stay overnight at school, my timid  
disappointment. Then my father arriving, like a king  
wading through the wretches of his country,  
hoisting me onto his shoulders. The water  
climbed him, knees, chest, as if it measured

itself against him, as if even a flood could  
respect the economy of a father.  
He waded us home, and I saw the world  
from above, the veins of the city filled  
and leaking. I must have understood  
the width of the world. I think  
I used to be invincible. I believed that  
things would rise to meet me,  
that they'd carry me through.

## Anisha Tandon

### 'He's Going to Break Your Heart!'

Everyone in this city is too concerned with the economy  
of risk. Look, I've been in a subway car, too, shaped  
like a massive tube of lipstick, shoulders sewn to a strangers'  
shoulders, fingers wrapped around the neck  
of the pole for the gentle guidance of something  
that doesn't flinch when you hold it. Look, I get it.  
I heard about the Titanic, too, that you can be on board  
a ship that wasn't engineered to hold you, sometimes  
they even tell you that upfront. And I'll admit that I  
don't have enough life rafts if this thing barrels  
into an iceberg. So you can't tell me I don't know,  
'Cause I know. I've been in bed with a man who has  
pulled away from me after he's outlined the curve  
of my hip, like he's drawing the outline of a body  
spattered onto the tarmac. I am aware of my own  
mortality when after the winter storm, I lunge a calf through  
the piles of snow, each step a negotiation. In salsa class,  
they tell you to trust your feet. In the beginning, you are supplied  
the mechanics of dance, then eventually you forge a way.  
Somewhere between hope and practice lies the wisdom  
of the body, so call it wisdom then, what we make between us,  
our own small flame cupped between our hands.

# Umma Habiba

translated from the Bangla by Quamrul Hassan

## Warmonger Man

When the city trembles in winter  
I wanted to drape myself in darkness  
And go to the red-light district  
But I always sacrificed my lust for fire  
And returned to this cold room  
In this very room  
The area of which is measured with the evenings  
A warmonger man  
Made plans to make love to me  
His sharp sword  
Took away the fineness of my shoulder  
Standing on blood clots  
He said  
You woman  
Wait for me in the next life  
I have made you worthy of a love  
That transcends time

## যুদ্ধবাজ পুরুষ

নগর কেঁপে শীত নামেল  
অন্ধকার মুড়িয়ে  
বহুবার যেতে চেয়েছি রাতের পাড়ায়  
আগুন কেনার আকাঙ্ক্ষা ভুলে  
ফির এেসিছ ঠাণ্ডা ঘের  
এ ঘেরই সন্ধ্যার আয়তন মেপে  
কাছে আসার সংকল্প কেরেছ  
এক যুদ্ধবাজ পুরুষ  
যার তরবারির ফলা  
মুছে দিয়েছ কাঁ খের মসৃণতা  
চাপ চাপ রক্তের উপর দাঁ ড়িয়ে  
সে বলেছ-  
হে নারী অপেক্ষায় থেকে  
জন্মান্তরের ভালোবাসায়  
তোমাকে যোগ্য কের রেখে গেলাম।

# Umma Habiba

translated from the Bangla by Quamrul Hassan

## Thursday

The woman who is terrorising everyone  
Carrying your severed head around  
Was your beloved  
In those silent afternoons  
You were busy sleeping with her  
You took her to the sea  
Danced on the boats  
And taking off her ankle bells  
Made love as if there's no tomorrow  
But she could never stand your absence  
As she clung on to her shyness  
Some leeches made their way onto her toes  
When everyone rejoices saying  
It's Thursday  
It's Thursday  
She heads over to the brothel

## বৃহস্পতিবার

তোমার মুণ্ডু কেটে কোলে রেখে  
মানুষক ভয় দেখিয়ে বেড়াচ্ছে যে  
প্রেমিকার তকমায় তাকেও ডেকে  
নিয়েছিল দুপুরের নিরিবিলা ঘুমে  
সমুদ্র দেখিয়ে বজরায় নাচিয়ে  
ঘুঙুর খুলে আদর করেছিল ঢের  
প্রেমিকর আকাল সে পোহায় না  
সরম ঘেঁষে দাঁ ডিয়ে থাকেত থাকেত  
কিছু জেঁ ক গাঁথে পায়ের আঙুলে  
বৃহস্পতিবার বৃহস্পতিবার বেল রব  
উঠেল তোমার কাটা মুণ্ডু তড়পায়  
পের ত্রিগেয় যায় বেশ্যাবাড়ির দিক।

# Umma Habiba

## translated from the Bangla by Quamrul Hassan

### Orangefin Labeo

I am lying down with ice under my back as if I am a dead orangefin labeo. If you touch the gills cold blood will gush out and this springtime market will be flooded. The lunatic you spit on because he had screamed 'go away, everything is a lie' at you has eight mints hidden inside the sleeves of his shirt. In all those colourful notes there are paintings of half busts of naked men. The rest is crushed under the ice machine and then spread under my back. And I am an orangefin labeo lying on that ice. Tonight, I will return to the kitchen of the man I owe money. There, a sharp fish-knife sparkles in the darkness of the moonless night.

### কালবাউশ

পেঠর নিচ বরফ বিছেয় শুয়ে আছ। মরা মাছ এক কালবাউশ। কানকো ছুঁলে ছলেক পড়েব শীতল রক্ত। ভেসে যাবে বাজার অগ্রহায়েণর। "তফাৎ যাও সব বুট হয়" হাঁ ক ছেড়ে চেল যাবার সময় যাকে পাগল ভেবে থুথু ফেলেছো। তার আস্তিনে লুকানো আছ আট জোড়া পুরনো টাকশাল। হেরক রেঙর চকচেক নোটে। নগ পুরুষের অর্ধেক আঁকা বুক। বাকিটা বরফ কেল খেঁতেল পেঠর নিচ বিছেয় রাখা। আম সেই বরফ শুয়ে থাকা কালবাউশ। আজ রাতের মধ্যে ফির যাবো ঋণদাতার রসুই ঘের। যেখানে ধারালো বটি ঝিলকোচ্ছে চাঁ দ ডুবে যাওয়া অন্ধকারে।

## McLord Selasi

### Aftercare

When my mother's hearing went,  
she said she could finally sleep –  
no more ghosts in the ceiling fan,  
no more thunderous mice.  
I learned silence by proxy,  
folding towels into precise squares,  
letting her mouth the word *thank you*  
without sound.  
Grief hums like a fridge –  
you don't notice it until it stops.  
I turned it off once  
and the whole house exhaled.

### The Body as Subtitle

I translate myself poorly.  
In one language, I'm  
she; in another, a verb  
still waiting for tense.  
At customs, they ask  
if I am carrying anything alive.  
Only everything, I say –  
my grandmother's wrist,  
my lover's teeth marks,  
the small bruises of belonging.  
The officer stamps me twice,  
once for entry, once for doubt.

## McLord Selasi

### How to Speak in Fog

Practice uncertainty.

Breathe through your mouth  
until vowels become mist.

Say *I love you*  
and mean *I am lost*.

Say *I'm fine*  
and mean *I've misplaced my edges*.

Fog is just the air  
trying to hold itself.

You are just a body  
doing the same.

### Neurodivergent Love Song

I line up the spoons by gradient,  
polish the symmetry until  
the world seems safe again.

You ask why I repeat things.  
Because pattern is prayer,  
and chaos is hunger.

When you touch my shoulder,  
I recite prime numbers  
to stay alive.

Still, I let you trace my pulse  
as if it were music,  
and not the sound of code  
trying to become touch.



Arms Off the Table



Happy, Happy, Happy

# Sed Miles

## Dear Simone

The letters found me hiding deep in a folder labeled 'Turner's Docs,' between a PDF of his Brazilian private school enrolment form and a scan of a completed handwriting practice sheet disguised as a Christmas list. Two letters to Simone, his occupational therapist, written months apart. Written in English and translated using Google Translate to be sent by WhatsApp directly to her phone. Reading them again, I could feel the fragile apartment: the equatorial light parting the window slats, the deep silence of a house where two adults have stopped speaking to each other in every language.

I added thoughts to the letter throughout the week, in moments when I wasn't hugging the floor in vertigo, and when my brain wasn't on fire, my back wasn't pulsating like an imploding black hole.

As a former child psychologist, I have been trained to assess, diagnose, and design interventions for children with behavioural and developmental needs. I have thirty years of experience. And in that apartment in Salvador da Bahia, I could not get my son's therapist to hear me. My observations were wrong (she would consistently confirm everything I had been saying), but because I spoke the wrong language, wore the wrong skin, and occupied the wrong role. Fathers, in Brazil, in America, in the clinical imagination, do not do what I was doing. Black fathers especially do not do what I was doing. The letters were my attempt to be heard in writing, since I could not be heard in speech. They were advocacy documents. They were also, I realise now, survival documents, first and foremost the vision of being a real father for my son, formed brick by brick in my bastard imagination. And secondly, for the peace around our lives to avoid the cataclysmic fallout...should I be denied the full right to love my child?

What follows is the first letter, preserved whole with annotations to say what I couldn't say then.

\* \* \*

### *Letter to Simone – December 15, 2020*

1. I will keep this brief, because I don't want too many words to cause more confusion. I also don't want to reveal too much about the personal lives of my family. I ask and beg you to read my words closely. What I am saying is extremely serious. My family is in a critical moment of change. My primary responsibility is to protect my son. This message to you is a part of that responsibility. I have been grateful for your love for him over the years. Before you, I was deeply afraid for his future while living in Brazil. I was faced with convincing Lorena of so much that she was understandably ignorant about. You may remember that there was a graduate student whom she invited to evaluate Turner when he was a baby. While I was travelling for graduate school, this person convinced Lorena that Turner should have electroshock therapy treatments because he wasn't speaking at three years old. This was our first big argument regarding his condition. I am a trained child psychologist, having to defend my newborn son because my wife simply doesn't feel empowered to understand her child. She found you after my insistence on finding a black specialist who would see him more equally. And I was thankful to her and you. But this was a lot of difficult work. I was afraid every time I went to the United States, because I thought she might be convinced by someone to give him unneeded medicine, or other atrocities that happen to black boys. This has been a very stressful moment in my life.

*[1] Electroshock therapy. For a toddler. A graduate student, not a licensed clinician, recommended electroconvulsive treatment for my infant son, and my wife considered it because she did not yet have the framework to question it. She was frightened under the duress of ignorance and the assumption of authority in a country whose racial hierarchy is notoriously orthodox. I was not frightened because I didn't recognise this authority and I also had decades of training. But I was the foreigner, the one whose Portuguese fractured in the middle of clinical conversations, the one who had to perform calm while inside I was calculating how quickly I could get my son out of the country if it came to that. Black boys in America are medicated at disproportionate rates, suspended from preschool, and diagnosed as defiant when they are marginalised, confused, and disparaged. I*

*left the United States after his birth in part to protect my son from that machinery that uses us like food. And here, in Brazil, I found different machinery with the same gears and the same hungry engine. I was sick for days after having to politely kick this person out of our home and explain to her that she would not be recruiting my son in another generation of race science. And because I didn't hand him over, I felt the first glare of judgment at my audacity to know and speak up beyond the comfort of a quiet, humble passivity.*

2. Thank you for your response to me when I expressed my feelings during our last meeting. It was a very good caring example and professional. It was appreciated in the moment also because it showed Lorena that it is empowering to acknowledge other people's feelings. As you witnessed, her immediate response was to first deny my feelings and spend the rest of the meeting defending herself. She never once acknowledged or sympathised with what I was saying. I will not expose her or say anything that makes her look bad as a person, but I was relieved truly that you were able to get a small glimpse into our communication problems.

3. Imagine yourself in a foreign country with no family except your son. Imagine having thirty years of experience, working with children's behavioural and educational needs, six years of education in child emotional development and education, only to suffer from not being able to properly advocate for your child because of differences in language, cultural biases, and the emotional immaturity of your spouse.

4. Earlier this year, you intervened inappropriately in a private conversation about Turner traveling to the United States with me for several weeks. This was an extremely important trip for our family. Turner was designated as the ring bearer at my brother's wedding. This wedding was extremely important to my close-knit family. It was a celebration, a diverse experience because it was the first same-sex wedding allowed in our family. It was also a reunion. And most importantly, it was the one time in the year for my family to see Turner and connect with him. He is one of two grandchildren. But he has many other relatives who help him to define who he is. He does not have this in Brazil. Lorena's family is distant and racist to us. He has no connection with them. Her mother is unreliable and only shows true care for her other grandson, who is white. She invests, as tradition dictates, in her white grandson. Turner is not connected with her at all. She's a stranger. My family, however, is his source of family love. You interfered with that.

5. Most importantly, he was anticipating this trip all year, and my family and my brother were looking forward to seeing him again. You adamantly agreed with Lorena stating that it would affect his schooling. This was never true. But your interference in this conversation was used as support for Lorena, who was simply trying to affect me because she knew it would hurt Turner not to go. What *did* happen, however?

6. My family was devastated. Lorena used your 'recommendation' as an excuse for my family. But they know about our lives and they know about Lorena. This caused extreme division and distrust among them. It was the latest of many things that make them feel afraid of my life and Turner's wellbeing in Brazil. Your interference, your words, were used as fuel – as the professional recommendation for denying my family access to Turner. They are concerned and afraid until this day. It has added to a level of instability that we all suffer from daily. Especially Turner.

*[2] The wedding. Turner was supposed to carry the rings. My family is close in the way that Black American families are close: not by proximity but by intention, by the work of gathering. We are spread across states and time zones, and we make the reunion happen anyway. When Turner didn't come, my family didn't just miss him, they lost evidence that he was okay, that I was okay, that Brazil hadn't swallowed us. And Simone sided with Lorena. Not malicious, but even worse, she agreed casually. His absence was a shadow on the dance floor.*

7. When I returned from the trip, Turner was afraid to be anywhere without me, all day. If I went to the bathroom, he would scream for me. I could never leave his side without him panicking. He asked me daily, why did I leave him and if I would leave him again. This was a nightmare. It has only recently improved. He literally still screams my name when he realises I'm not in the same room. This was extremely traumatic for him.

8. Of course, I could not fight too strongly against it at the time – because I knew you wouldn't understand what I was saying, and you generally rely on Lorena's words for trusted information. I also didn't want Turner to be in the middle of this dispute. You were having this conversation in our house as if it were a casual or normal dialogue which required your opinion. However, it was the most serious decision that I wish you had simply withdrawn yourself from. You could have told

us that whatever we decide, you would help us with a plan to continue to help with Turner's emotional and behavioural objectives, accordingly.

9. I am begging you, with all the respect I have for you, to please remain objective when something like this arises again. As I said before, we still have many changes ahead in our family. I can almost guarantee that what you might assume to know about our family, based on your conversations with Lorena, is not completely accurate and in some instances, simply wrong. Please, please, focus on your continued, professional therapeutic work with Turner. Please.

10. One way you can improve things for Turner is by working with Lorena on how she can better understand Turner's actual needs and her relationship with him. Since meeting you years ago, Turner has not benefited from your recommendations for him at home. He lives in two different worlds. In one world, he is read to daily, he has a bedtime, he practices routines and responsibilities, and he is encouraged to explore his emotions and individuality. With his mother, he watches TV all day and has very few responsibilities. He sleeps only when she does. Their bonding primarily happens when they go to sleep together.

11. I also have Autism. I've been diagnosed for several years now. I was diagnosed with level one autism. I have also been diagnosed with acute social anxiety disorder resulting in chronic pain. I have been dealing with this in my life since Turner was born. It is also one of the reasons I try to advocate for him so intensely, especially with Lorena. Because I know that it is difficult for her to even understand what it is like to have neurodivergent perspectives. She doesn't seem to have the natural empathetic ability to understand the perspective of another.

*[3] I have Autism. Paragraph 11. The disclosure that should have changed everything and changed nothing. I was diagnosed in 2016, the same year we left the United States during a period when I was in outpatient treatment for anxiety triggered by racial harassment at my job in philanthropy. The diagnosis answered decades of questions: why I process the world the way I do, why I parent the way I do, why I could see in Turner what no one else could see yet. I recognised his patterns because they were my patterns. But in this letter, I buried the disclosure. Because I knew, even then, that naming myself as autistic to her would not grant me authority. It would give them another reason to discount me. An autistic Black man in a foreign country arguing for his autistic son's care – every word of that sentence is a reason not to be believed.*

12. You can help her by giving her a program with goals for helping Turner. She will only listen to you. Help her to understand why sleep, routines, adaptive skills, communication, skill development etc are important and how it can empower her to actually help Turner. She does not understand autism. I am telling you this as an autistic person.

13. Please do not ignore what I am trying to communicate with you. What you think you know about our family may not only be misinformed; it may also be backward. I have tried and failed to communicate this over the years. But as I said at the beginning, this is a critical moment for us, and I am obligated to protect my son. If the practitioner who I put my son in the care of does not carefully consider my words and observations – then I know that my son is not receiving the best care that he deserves. You understand this, right?

\* \* \*

She left our case. It was quiet, without drama or disruption. Her response was brief and respectful, but when I saw her again in the clinic hallway, I felt a deep reflection in her gaze. Afterward, her remaining staff treated me as an equal participant in my son's care. Every message sent to Lorena was also sent to me. It was the most bittersweet victory imaginable, being recognised as a parent. But it was a victory for Turner and me.

He's thriving. I always knew he would. More than ever, our lives are shaped by the sacred bond we've built from scratch. While I haven't changed anything that I normally do, the clinic staff greet us more warmly now as if they've suddenly gained permission to celebrate what makes this boy's life so special.

# María Castro Domínguez

## Self after Self

*...every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter*

(Jung & Kerényi)

Do you ever get a feeling  
you're living a life that isn't yours.  
That you've been fed food that doesn't agree with you.  
That your clothes are either too big or too small.

The burden of a mother is heavy (I know) –  
like carrying brim-full and spilling water buckets  
up a hill's craggy flank with a child on your back  
under the heat of a yolk-yellow sun.

There's no right or wrong way to be.  
But mother never walked barefoot so we always wear shoes.  
She always hung black clothes inside out, so we do.  
Her mother had taught her this. We don't question; we just repeat.

Days and nights chained  
to a person who was her  
or her mother, or her mother's mother,  
in other words chained to our heart's ghosts.

## I love to put my mouth on

the soft fur of my baby's belly,  
the tiny balloon of her cheeks.  
The wedge-shaped head of my siamese.  
The warm coffee's breath tasting my tongue.  
My mother's arms bony and lean,  
my mouth on her pebbly hand.  
The curvature of my lover's breast,  
I kiss the back of his fluttering wrist.  
I express myself in a language of lips,  
my mouth is its vocab.

# Katie Beswick

## An Essay on the Loneliness of an Oak Tree

### **Introduction**

In this essay, I compare the single woman to an oak. At points I become the woman, at others, the tree. In some places, I stand objective as my analysis bends solitude lyrical, lobed as an ear or an oak tree's leaf, my seed held in its small cup, tight, ridged

falling

planted by burrowing creatures anticipating a feast.

Meanwhile, behold this oak tree: old as they are, unafraid to take up space. Branches spread attitude. I suggest an oak implies urbanity, takes a b-boy stance, like street kids do and single women too, larger than they realise, pulsing outwards. Contracting.

Insecurities curl up its trunk like rings of grain.

### **Literature Review (A Cento)**

Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green.

All her leaves

Fall'n at length.

The surety of its hidden root

has planted quiet in the night.

And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself.

Look, she stands:

Trunk and bough,

the shaking of its leafy head

has given the waves their melody.

Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near.

Naked strength.

There, through the broken branches, go

the ravens of unresting thought.

### **Findings**

The men came like ravens

descending on an oak tree,

sure-footed and soon leaving.

I was permanent, in one righteous place.

I spread my feet, nails growing

gnarled as untended roots.

All stature, like a city.

Alone as b-boy in my swagger.

I breathed life-sustaining air.

Yet, printing on my very core,

some sadness.

Like the oak tree, unpartnered.

Babe, I met you too late

to fail at living without you.

### **Conclusion**

Like the oak tree, I'll die alone. Missing nobody. Live again. My seeds dropping, pounding the ground like hard rain.

### **Bibliography**

Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 'The Oak'

Whitman, Walt 'I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing'

Yeats, William Butler 'The Two Trees'

# Katie Beswick

## Nine Forms of Love Making

*After Elephantis*

1.

Dagger's tip  
each stab ecstatic masochism.  
I expected blood, after  
but not that grass blades  
would remind me of an erection.

2.

Boiling oil  
bursts in ripples.

We come together, tongues flicking  
slick as a two-headed snake.

3.

Chink glasses. Over dinner  
your brother's wife says her friend  
was attacked by an Alsatian ( ) in a neighbour's doorway.  
She held her baby aloft  
as the dog leapt  
its creamy teeth sure as bullets.  
Her legs, retracted,  
left like rotting steak ( ) the yellow and black bits  
the mess of red.

That night in bed I maul my husband  
with the ferocity of an unhinged dog.

4.

( ) slowly ( ).

5.

Just because he wants to  
and it's been a while.

6.

The charge of it  
dissipating.

Why is he wearing socks?

7.

Full throated.  
He hates you.  
This is why we call it F( )CK( )NG.

8.

Headlamps blaze. He pulls off the Highway.  
Friction is solid as his ( )  
but not later, in the motel  
when he remembers his wife.

9.

Very Fast.

*\*Elephantis was a Greek poet and physician. None of her poems survived, though the shameless 'debauched' manual 'Nine forms of Lovemaking' (or 'New forms of Love Making') is referenced in several other texts of the period.*

# Daniel Cartwright-Chaouki

## Ward five, window

I studied  
the three birch trees  
from the window  
of your room  
where the women  
all wear  
pressed blue  
uniforms  
and move in tides  
of tired smiles  
and talk about  
the parts of your body  
that only I have known  
using the most  
sterile of language  
I wondered why  
there were so many  
newly planted  
blameless blobs  
and lollipops  
of trees  
where surely  
great forests of pine  
and ancient oaks  
or giant avenues  
of Californian redwoods  
would do better  
and then I realised  
that anything  
but a beginning  
in this place  
where lives  
are plugged into walls

and held  
in breaths  
would be an unbearable  
burden of truth  
on minds  
that live by lies  
and later  
when we were  
three instead of two  
I stood at the top  
of the multi-storey  
car park  
and for once  
I was grateful  
for the thinness  
of things  
to be clad  
in cold steel  
and clouds  
of concrete  
in plastic skies  
a kestrel flew  
high though the  
goal posts  
of the rugby field  
below  
where there is  
no grief  
in the landscape  
of fear  
only the future  
survives

# Itto & Mekiya Outini

## The Reanimation of Hippocrates

My wife had packed everything and moved with the children to the new house in Dallas, but I still had a month of residency left in Lubbock and didn't feel like springing for a room, so I did the obvious thing and moved into the hospital. My shifts were twelve hours anyway, and two days a week, I was on call for twenty-four, so I calculated, correctly as it turned out, that if I kept a low profile and discharged my duties conscientiously, nobody would notice my failure to leave.

For the rest of the month, whenever I wasn't on duty, I would find an unused room and camp there. I've never been much of a sleeper, and with the bright lights and the ever-present possibility of crisis, rest remained elusive, but this afforded me plenty of time to myself – a precious commodity which, since I started my family five years ago, has been in rather short supply.

The year before, my cousin, in whose presence I'd undoubtedly grumbled about not ever having time to read, had given me a Kindle. It was compact and portable, the perfect companion for a reader as harried as me, but somehow, I'd never managed to develop any fondness for the thing. Call me old-fashioned, but I'm partial to print. Returning from the airport after putting my wife and children on the plane, I stopped by a used bookstore and purchased a boxset of Agatha Christie novels. The paperbacks were thin enough for me to carry one or two around the hospital, tucked surreptitiously into my scrubs, while the rest of the boxset remained in the car.

This was a bit of a throwback for me. Since boyhood, I'd nursed dreams of becoming a detective – half-baked, infantile, primarily aesthetic in nature, not well thought-out at all; but, to this day, there's still a streak of the forensic in me. Unlike my colleagues, I labor under no illusions concerning the role of the physician. Only one entity in the universe is capable of healing, and that is the afflicted body – which is why the verb 'to heal' is both transitive *and* intransitive. What the afflicted body isn't always capable of is diagnosis, and because a clear-eyed assessment of facts is often necessary to promote the suspension of habits and the adoption of appropriate catalysts for healing, my profession resolutely persists.

Not uncommon among my colleagues is the feeling that this view of medicine constitutes a wilful self-demotion. In response, I can only point out that most modern patients are suffering not from a shortage of medicine, but from a shortage of understanding. Too few comprehend that a few simple lifestyle changes, limiting their intake of ultra-processed foods, for instance, and investing in harmonious relationships, and getting a good night's sleep once in a while – and yes, I realise that I'm not the best example, but this doesn't make me wrong – would abolish the bulk of their chronic conditions without recourse to pharmaceuticals or surgical interventions.

But I digress. I digress because, like just about everyone, I feel better when pointing the finger of blame at others, when I could just as easily – and perhaps more profitably – point it at myself; but, then again, perhaps there is no profit even in self-criticism, at least in cases where the deep, as opposed to the proximal, cause of our suffering lies so far beyond our control. Like my patients, I exist in relation to The Insurance Payments, The Mortgage, The Student Loans, The Gas, Utility, and Grocery bills – debts that must be paid whatever the cost to the body and soul.

Rarely do I speak my mind about these matters, in part because to propose such impractical cures to my beleaguered patients would only insult them, and in part because whichever recommendations do not insult them would instead constitute insults to my employer's – and therefore to my own – bottom line.

Everything in this world comes down to the bottom line. My decision to spend a month of my life in spare hospital rooms was no exception, any more than was my agreeing to cover my colleague Luis's shift while he flew to California for a funeral – though both actions admittedly lent themselves to rationalisation in light of the fact that I was going to be in the hospital anyway.

Fresh off my twenty-four hours on-call, I reflected that the first of the patients on Luis's schedule were lucky, for they would catch me before the real exhaustion set in; but then it struck me, not without a twinge of shame, that this was just another instance of the

universal human tendency to attribute good luck to others while reserving pity for oneself, regardless of the actual facts of the situation.

They were rather an odd couple, these two patients: he stout and potbellied, with black teeth, sallow skin, and a glower that was either sinister or devastatingly morose; she plump, sensuous, and fair, positively slathered in makeup, with an air of barely constrained indignation. They seemed to be immigrants, but not from the same country: my best guess, in his case, was Chinese or Guatemalan; in hers, Italian, or Arab, or perhaps Macedonian. He spoke a growling, monosyllabic English. She said nothing at all, and perhaps understood nothing, but seemed to judge what was said with a towering self-assuredness that transcended even understanding.

'We are trying for baby,' he explained. 'Trying. Trying. No good.'

'You've done some blood tests already,' I said, peering down at their charts. Whatever hardships I might be enduring, I told myself, I was at least in my own country, fluent, educated. Three children in five years attested unequivocally to my virility – though, once in a blue moon, I did have to stifle the wish that one of us, my wife or even me, could be a little less fertile, for then we might not find ourselves in so much debt so early in our marriage. Still, objectively, I was the lucky one.

'We do blood test,' the man agreed. 'For he. For she. No good.'

'They haven't revealed any problems, you mean.'

'Blood test no reveal problem,' he said. 'But sperm test...that one reveal big problem.'

'Oh?'

The results of the live semen analysis had, to me, suggested no cause for concern. His sperm count was a bit low, but still well within the normal range – impressive, actually, for a man in his condition: clearly obese, probably overworked, quite possibly undocumented, undoubtedly with ample exposure to pesticides, parabens, phthalates, and heavy metals. Though less than optimal, it shouldn't have been decisively prohibitive to conception. Yet he seemed certain that he was to blame. I asked, 'What gave you that idea?'

'Dr. Luis send us result attachments,' he grunted. 'I read. Very bad news. I am problem.'

He hung his head in shame.

'Actually,' I said gently, 'these results are inconclusive. The next thing I'd like to do is to order an ultrasound. For her.' I nodded at his partner. 'There are certain hormonal imbalances that won't show up in normal blood tests. One way to catch them –'

'I am problem,' he repeated, stabbing himself in the chest with one sausage-like finger. 'Me. Problem.'

'We don't know that,' I said. Normally, with only fifteen minutes per patient – and ten of those were for paperwork – I didn't bother trying to forge emotional connections, but something about this man aroused my sympathies. What had he been though? I wondered. What corrosive subliminal messages had he been absorbing along with the ubiquitous environmental toxins? Why did he look so much older and more decrepit than his partner, when they were, in fact, the same age? The clock was ticking, but I couldn't bring myself to send him on his way without having said something comforting. The Agatha Christie novel tucked into my waistline pinched my stomach as I leaned forward: 'You're not always the problem. Let's see what that ultrasound has to say.'

Then the woman spoke. Her English was better than his, if heavily accented. 'We've done your tests,' she said, 'and he *is* the problem. You're just not reading them correctly.'

She spoke with such authority that I glanced instinctively back down at their charts, double-checking in case I had missed something. Was she a doctor? Or had she been one in her past life? In her country? Had she seen something I hadn't?

'You just know what they taught you in medical school,' she declared, 'but I wanted real answers, so I gave your test results to ChatGPT. And do you know what it said?' Swiping a dark strand of hair from her eyes, she leaned forward defiantly: 'It said he has the weakest sperm in all of human history!'

My mouth fell open.

'It took him three hours of jerking off just to come enough for your little stupid test,' she went on. 'Your nurse walked in on him three times. Three! The first time, she apologised. The second, she shook her head and went away. The last time, she just stood there, waiting!'

To the floor, the man mumbled, 'I no want children.'

'Come on!' She leapt to her feet and seized him by the arm. 'This guy doesn't know anything. Chat knows everything on the internet. We don't need that stupid ultrasound!'

Before another word could be said, they were gone.

For a solid minute, I sat in stunned silence, staring at the empty chairs while thoughts tumbled around in my head like old shoes in a dryer. It was true that when compared, not to contemporary averages, but to those of our forebears, of all the men who'd ever lived, his sperm count really was quite low; and it was also true that what I knew was mostly what I'd learned in school, plus what little I'd managed to pick up firsthand; and, undeniably, my behaviour was constrained by structural incentives, one of which was to keep the patients coming back, though the same could, of course, be said of any modern medical provider, including ChatGPT; and, perhaps most damning and significant of all, the chatbot had succeeded where I had been failing, making one of them, at least, feel a bit better; but then, noticing that the clock was ticking, and recalling that there were other patients waiting in other rooms, and that a report still needed to be filed, I wheeled my stool squeakily toward the computer, shedding uncomfortable thoughts like defunct skin cells, and, with a conscience sterilised out of auto-Hippocratic necessity, pulled up the portal and put my fingers to the keys.

## Gianni Skaragas

### Bloom Season

Thick grass swallows  
the edge of the sidewalk in  
defiance of the human tongue,  
the feeling when you're not  
sure you have conveyed  
what you meant successfully  
and the moment has passed  
warming slowly to a miniature,  
the smell of honeysuckle  
on summer nights, when we imagined  
our own life, together, globetrotters  
in a jar of leftover foreign coins,  
I never ask a doctor to attach  
numbers to a prognosis.

My wife wants to know how much  
time she might have left counting  
from her hospital bed, learning to read  
dust-motes & cells, fitting her courage  
into ships & stars glowing in the dark  
on the ceiling, hoping & despairing  
since the disease recurred. Her breath  
makes a little whistle as she sleeps  
the song of kingfishers & blue-tits  
as they jump off hay bales and fly  
from her open mouth to the window, what  
little bird doesn't wish to own the clouds,  
what puddle doesn't dream of a sky,  
what prayer doesn't seek a whisper?

I want to know how human  
lips meet stained-red at the edges,  
the contrast with the lighter skin tone,  
how you look at a mouth  
front-on and judge the distance

between the mountain peaks,  
what hospital visitors see through  
smeared windows.

I've seen too much of hope to place  
my faith in songs, the fate of love,  
the empire of her touch, the brittle  
pride of liverworts, it feels  
strange not to know why  
day lilies bloom for hours, so  
faithful to the grass, the lips,  
the birdsong before  
the muddle becomes the sky.

## Gianni Skaragas

### Youth

The wind dies, my father's Greek spices  
fall out of the sky, there in the mess of his desk,  
a foreign shore of particles on transparent souvenirs  
the view of the world in absolutes  
through glass bead mosaics and snorkelling goggles  
my mother's aspirin, insufficiently whisked,  
she looks at the air above my head,  
she hears the beating wings of a trapped warbler.  
There's a gene in my family that makes us wait around  
for nothing at all, crimson pieces of gummed paper  
squares placed on old photographs.  
A gathering of signs scattered,  
uncoupled from their name,  
mistaking the sky for a mass of foam  
on the surface of the water.  
These absences are the horizon to us  
who, drawing pairs of lines, don't believe  
in the possibility of distance.

## Caroline Price

### Migrant

The pollarding of the giant ash has given us  
sudden light, a glade  
in the woodland beyond the fence  
like a bowl of warmth  
drawing insects in and other life

and now this visitor  
claiming a maple branch overlooking emptiness:  
a pale slight bird that we know immediately  
is different, the way it sits  
upright, its bill a weapon at the ready

and then makes sallies, a sideways swoop  
upwards and back, a flickering  
figure of eight.  
I love its silent presence – for it never  
sings, or if it does we cannot catch it –

and the meaning it gives to each day,  
how we can offer safety,  
knowing how rare it is, how threatened,  
for a while at least  
before the ash limbs grow back, each time more thickly.

### National Moth Night, Bawdsey Hall

October: a moonless evening and the lure  
of migrant species have drawn us, drifters ourselves,  
down the peninsula, towards the shifting  
coastline with its marshes, creeks and ghosts  
of radar masts, nothing to guide us  
but the car's beams and at last

two finialed gateposts. This is it, jumping  
potholed mud into a yard  
where lanterns squat at intervals, throw into relief  
barn doors, ivied walls – and here's a moth  
already, and another, quivering,  
outspread. And human figures

appear, materialising from the unlit house  
in ones and twos and coming this way, a dance  
of eyes. We're at ease  
without speaking, brought here from our  
different distances to flock behind a single torch  
across an orchard and acre of grass

to the master lamps nested  
in clearings or by the coppice edge  
to attract those travellers who after years  
of fitting back and forth, hesitate and then  
spin dizzily to rest, finding a place  
out of the wind to settle and be identified.

## Maitreyabandhu

### Name and Form

I'd hoped to hear the nightingale again  
further down the valley after we'd read  
your life, performed the seven stages, but  
the mantra must have carried the song away  
with Li Po and Tu Fu remembering,  
on the road, every syllable of friendship.

\*

A night rain, I didn't hear it, wrapped in sleep  
but in the morning the paths were wet and the mind,  
for just a moment, seemed dustless and distinct:  
butterflies in the lavender, my glasses  
resting on a book, a squirrel's leap.

\*

You must have followed Kūkai out of this world.  
The lights of Alicante twinkle around  
the bays leading to the airport, beyond  
name and form, in infinite continuum.

\*

Replacing the cords on my *kasa*, my bamboo  
rain and sun hat, I can't seem to turn my hand  
to anything – remembering this, forgetting...

## Tim Suermondt

### All the Way Back

My wife and I walk down an alley in Paris,  
an alley unknown to us but praised by others.  
Usually quite chatty, we hardly say a word –  
the alley has some charm, but is rather overrated.

At the corner of a main street there's a bookstore  
and we go in, all the books in French,  
a language we couldn't master oh how we tried.  
Books though are books and we feel at home.

We browse until the early evening begins  
to assert itself, lightly darkening the windows  
and the trees outside. We leave, no book bought,  
though we came close with one, a thin volume

whose beautiful cover would have justified a purchase.  
We decide to travel along the Seine, taking  
the long way, and our conversation hums –  
full-throated all the way back to the street we live on.

## Tim Suermondt

### Japan

Yellow and reddish leaves,  
the brown mountains  
white with snow at the tips –  
one book by a Japanese poet  
and one book of mine  
sitting upright in the cloth bag –  
they get on well, spark conversations  
that have lasted all night,  
in the best and worst of seasons.

## Alexandra Corrin-Tachibana

### Tadaima: I'm Home

Collecting pebbles on Miho no Matsubara  
where Mount Fuji rests on the clouds,

Yoriko tells me: *You can find the world in stones.*  
She's eighty now, in loose trousers, her still-black

hair in a mushroom cut. Her husband dons  
a Seattle cap, goes everywhere in zori sandals, thonged

between the toes, his broad feet tanned. At home  
he's well-balanced climbing steep stairs

to the persimmons on the balcony: *kaki*  
in their burnt-orange gowns, ripening on strings.

I don't usually like gooey fruit, but with macha  
in Yoriko's kitchen, where I've returned

after twenty-seven years, they're 美味しい.  
*You are my daughter* she says, squeezing my hands.

And now, on this timeless beach, where a bathing  
maiden had her robe stolen by a Suruga fisherman,

but when he returned it, performed a heavenly dance,  
Yoriko turns to me with her stones,

shows me her world. *Kore wa o Jizo-san:*  
this is Jizo-san she says – and I recognise the petite

red-bibbed stone deity, protector of children, travellers.  
Then, *kore wa musubi* – and the sea has yielded

a rice-triangle-shaped pebble, resembling the snack  
I used to buy at Seven Eleven – wrapped

in seaweed with tuna filling. *Musubi* 結び –  
to tie, connect – like the points of a triangle.

*And this? Kore wa Daruma.* A Daruma talisman,  
with two empty orbits, the first eye to hold a dream,

the second to be coloured in when it's achieved –  
Daruma when tipped over, always return upright.

I close my eyes, summon a golden Daruma,  
paint in one eye, and make a wish.

## Edoardo De Falchi









*Tape Sketches*

Each composition is made by adhesive tape – décollage. Ambiguous creatures emerge from black backgrounds. Their shapes somehow can be interpreted, as one might see different things. The ambiguity of the images also comes as an effect of the production process of décollage, randomly extracting super-detailed shapes out of black printed pages of some magazine. A short video of the working process can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCJ2urV5MbA&t=2s>

# Patrick Autréaux

## The Moors of Time

(Revue Esprit, 2024)

Translation by Tobias Ryan

Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* was the favourite novel of a sculptor friend of mine – my dearest friend. He would often evoke its prologue, which described the heath; it's the main character, he would say, a landscape become visage. Of this first section, I knew nothing more than its title, which he would sometimes cite when we saw each other, a while having passed: *A face on which time makes but little impression*. I would regularly promise to read it, but always got waylaid. The time will come, I thought. Later on, I discovered Seamus Heaney's bog poems, those written about the mummified bodies found in the acid soil of the moors, which resonated for the Irish poet with the Troubles and the terrible sacrifices made to pacify the people. These poems raised a melancholy as changeable as the face of the swamp, something between pain and fascination, fright and reverie. For me, they were linked to that book of Hardy's, and to the memory of my friend's enthusiasm, even if I had given up on reading the book, which had become the custodian of our dead friendship.

Because, in the meantime, our friendship had broken down. There had been no dispute, only a crack which was signal of its wreck, almost without my knowing. I lived far away and we would meet up before each of my departures. That year, after a decade of work, I had just published my first book, and it had made some waves. I clearly felt some embarrassment on his part the last time we had spoken on the phone, but had preferred to ignore the possibility that a friendship-killing rivalry could have arisen between us. On my return, one message after another was met with silence, and the grating words he would sometimes slip into conversation came back to me, those which if I hadn't wanted to forget, I had at least tried to justify as a consequence of the kinds of moods to which I knew he was susceptible. I insisted, wanting to understand; my letters and emails went unanswered; our mutual friends couldn't tell me for what he reproached me.

Time began to hollow out a distance ever more impossible to overcome between our once incessant dialogues and this silence. Still, each time I returned to Paris, my trip was overshadowed by an as yet undead wait. I was angry, and sad at being so; suddenly taken by an impulse to reconcile, I would feel ready to make honourable amends before quickly passing from grand forgiveness to violent resentment. This yo-yoing would abate. It had taken many abandoned manuscripts to get to my first book; now, thanks to what had opened up within me following an uncertain recovery

from aggressive lymphoma, I was driven by the violent urge to write. As for my friend, he had completely disappeared from my life; I could not even find any trace of him online. I only knew that he had also broken off relations with most of our mutual friends. Disappointed by the reaction to his latest work, he no longer exhibited; one acquaintance, who I saw again by chance, said he had stopped sculpting completely. He was dead without being so.

Hardy's book was also floating in that limbo. Strangely, he had never given it to me, I had bought it for myself. It sat there on a shelf; I no longer even thumbed through it. The words of my lost friend would come back sometimes, always the same ones about the moors and the face which did not change. I preferred to leave it among that library, much larger than my own, comprised of books unread, we don't want to read, won't ever read, and have promised we never will. But he hadn't died, he had only vanished from my thoughts, and so would he randomly return: a face comprised of words, hidden within a title, that started to peer out at me as would an almost perfect mummy. *A face on which time makes but little impression*.

Did the writing that had kept me so occupied have to grind to a halt and open out the moors of extinguished desire so as to rediscover that face on which time had made little impression?

While traversing a period of profound doubt after having finished a cycle of writing, I began to think about that friend who had been lost, the feeling of failure that had perhaps led him to stop sculpting, and the upending of his life it must have entailed. I had the impression of crossing the same impasse myself, and of being taken back to him. Again, I felt the need to better understand our relationship and its end. Is that what made me want to write? Obstinate, I started back. But writing about drought is a challenge. And I soon ran into something in the story which I couldn't conclude. It seemed to me that this thing which was unable to end, this death without death, made my tale impossible. Perhaps I was hobbled by a grief I had refused. I soon resolved to abandon the manuscript.

After one final reread, skimming over the accumulated outlines and digressions, I glimpsed the countenance of others that I hadn't intended to include in the book. I had, in my home, a portrait the sculptor had done of my grandfather: he

knew all about my parents and our family history, the separations and the deaths; he knew the genealogy of my reading. In these initial notes, crumbs of presence had been sown which, however, led not to the house of an ogre but to that of the French mystic, Thérèse de Lisieux, whom I had reread thanks to him, and about whom we had often talked. That saint's name had hung over several personal dramas. I had already sketched out a short book about her. And this was the hypothesis that subsequently struck me: what if I tried to recover that which coincided between her misfortunates and mine, amidst the faces that had disappeared around me?

That was how I managed to recover a taste for writing back into the past, how, little by little, I was able to escape the shadowed heath. And while I wove my family's history with the well-known fate of that young saint, I felt another domain open up within me – unexpectedly at first: the unblocking of a literature that was not a mass of memories but instead the landscape of memory. I was suddenly aware that it was not one book I was writing, but several.

Following this vision, a ferment took me. Within a couple of days, provisional plans had been made. It was immediately clear that it would not be an unfolding of memory, but a volume of events and emotions, of gardens and thoughts – a temporal body: writing that would give form to the time through which I had passed, not to raise a commemorative monument to it but to feel its teeming hair; less a history than writing of what in the present had been electrified by it: writing the changing skies over the moors of time.

Often, it is in a state of calm panic that we write – a panic which is nothing more than a means of establishing disorder. One undoubtedly has to be shaken up from top to bottom so as to crack open the tombs which exist unknowingly within. The first book was written, a second, my original plans, a third was soon underway.

If we think in terms of global vision, slow weaving and unexpected leaps, the time of writing is without a uniform direction. Thus, sparking fresh surprises, I realised that I was in the course of taking up once more the main lines of a far older manuscript, the first I had completed but which had never been published. It was a text at once too dense and too thin to contain that which I was still yet to experience. All the protagonists, however, were already on stage: there were the questions of family and first love, of the past and of the characters who had marked my childhood, of art and the friendships of youth, of the saints I read and the landscapes of bygone days from which I would draw poems. Awkwardly Proustian, it was a text offering shades of melancholy. Even if I had abandoned it for years, it seemed to mark the beginnings of my life as a writer, like a cairn in a grey and misted land. Could I have imagined one day seeing it loom into my future work? Either way, something had matured, it had

taken the ten books which I had written in the meantime to bring about this involuntary reprise.

In writing, I have never known how to bend myself, except through domestication, to a narrative temporality that is well ordered, if punctuated by flashbacks. The problem, which I came to recognise late, has always been that I have written respecting the shape of time as I have felt it. With poetry, that's no cause for alarm, I have figured out how to paint the *water lilies* in my head easily enough; but once I begin to write a narrative, I find myself encumbered by too many images, too many thoughts, too many associations; so many pop-ups are triggered in my mind it is as though I were a screen swamped with windows, each jittering out their world. And onto this is grafted a rather banal feeling of illegitimacy, reinforced by my lack of literary studies, my somewhat uncultured background: so many shackles against which I have long fought.

But then I understood more clearly why I had had so much difficulty writing. Quite late, I discovered that I had synaesthesia, by which I mean that I spontaneously associate perceptions, and, notably, that I see time as though it were space. My days, weeks, years, my historic chronology appear to me as a giant conch, and I wander through time like the Bonhomme d'Ampère on the volume flux. I have thus always associated time which flows and that which is. Hours have a double measure: the conventional one, and another that allows for the passing of clouds and their evolution into imaginary forms, the wind or the rain shaping the light. Time, for me, is a landscape.

When I started to write stories, I would crash into this mental particularity of which I was unaware. I wrote in a very compact way, packing together ideas, images, and sensations with no apparent logical connection. I wrote *badly*, and lived with it as though it were a handicap. No doubt that is why I published my first book so late. It was by becoming aware of this link between time and space that I was better able to understand how time and story expressed themselves to me, and how one proceeds from the other.

From then on, I accepted my inner detours in time, no less than that their design would need refining. I could no longer do it but by short-circuiting a linearity which I never felt in life (temporality in stories, remember, is a formal constraint linked to social and anthropological structures. Other eras and other cultures minimise or care not for linear time and narratives: think of the philosophers who have contrasted the arrow of history with ritual or mystic time<sup>1</sup>; of the kinetic geographies of indigenous 1 song Bruce Chatwin evoked; of the Apache toponymies described by

Keith Basso; the Chinese *li*, of which Segalen spoke, a measure of distance as much as of the reliefs of the terrain and therefore the time needed to cross it). That then is how I had to compose, with the wandering in my brain. Much has been written on the body and literature, on sexuality and illness especially. Yet, if literature and the body are connected, they are so by social and psychological singularities, and, above all, the physiological, more precisely, neurological singularities of the author. Perhaps, indeed, writing is no more than that: following the tao of a singular physiology, accepting that if one is colourblind you will write so. It took me several years and a number of failed manuscripts to reach here – perhaps.

More than anything else, it was by initiating this autobiographical polyptych that I have been better able to approach the shape of my interior time. I have already written several books which, unquestionably, attempted it. But this time the project was developing in multiple volumes and through the rediscovery, as I have mentioned, of a manuscript I had left behind many years before. If, however, this latency period hadn't conditioned my writing, it had allowed me to tame something I had never managed to in any of my previous works: time.

And yet, for this polyptych to be fully sketched out in my mind, it took a vital coincidence. Several sections had already been laid out, but it was not yet a real cycle tracing the limits of the landscape I was writing. It lacked a vanishing point. It was that which materialised with the reappearance of the friend who had been lost from sight so long. From an article, I learned that he had recently exhibited his latest work for the first time since our separation. I had missed the exhibition, but could see photos of it on the gallery's website. I recognised old canvasses which had been overhauled, but there was also a new body of work that was more or less aligned with what he had done before.

I was troubled by this unexpected reunion. Something within me came undone, an almost forgotten sorrow; I was strangely relieved that he had continued to create, and that he was exhibiting again – that he lived still. There was no bitterness or reawakening of rivalry, but deliverance; the horizon of his apparent artistic failure no longer threatened. Knowing that he was no longer stuck in the mire, and having proof of it, freed me completely from the fear of noxious delusion that creativity bears, and which, for me, he had come to embody. What I immediately felt, seeing his works – whatever I think of their quality –, was that I would finally be able to write about a friendship that had been so important in my youth, and thus map out a perspective in my book – creating a space with time. Still, patience would be required to write it.

What comes back does not necessarily boomerang, but simply, rather, stays in place. Time buries it, and, so as to be aware of it, we have to dig a little. And what returns is not always that which died – mummy or ghost – but something that has

evolved on different rhythms, or exists according to more abstract plans. To write is to become a little animal – a mole in his burrow – who has no clear concept, and never will, perhaps, of the space-time through which it passes, and at the border of which, with a clumsy gesture, unknown and familiar moorland opens out – the deep structure of a landscape.

*A face on which time makes but little impression*, that is the phrase that came back to me on seeing my friend's works. Henceforth a character in my book, it shaped the vault, making it a graspable whole. Across those moors, there where time had passed, the fog and the setting sun; and it wasn't its earth from which the book sprung, moorland being poor soil, but from the space suddenly opened up – future past present – within which a life reflected on and an improbable fate unfolded, in other words, a sculpture of time.

Since adolescence, I have loved the landscape of moors and peatbogs, those of *Der Erlkönig* or Novalis, of the earth poems of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, the country of *Wuthering Heights*, Rilke's letters describing Worpsswede. I have long thought that, for me, literature is linked to the dead, or rather to the ever undying. It is true for some of my books; writing to me seems to create another novel of the mummy. No doubt that is why I love Seamus Heaney's bog people poems. I had often spoken about their tanned skins to my friend, whose digital presence could once more be discerned, the wrinkles, the pores, the hairs and plaits. We were fascinated by their surprised or sleeping looks, by the engulfing fear of which only a cord around the neck remained. Eternal perhaps from having had to die so soon, those bog bodies symbolised the lost of our youths: they were revenant in his dreams, like bodies he thought he had hidden in the woods, and which would wake him in a sweat; for me, they were my forgotten grandmother, and what from my earliest childhood had been obscured with her.

For a long time after the break down of our friendship, I said that the one disillusioned by art had become a sacrifice to the swamp. But on discovering his new work, it wasn't a mummified face that I found but a being who danced still. And though recognising this did not reawaken our friendship, it did revive why we had, doubtless, been friends: a never-ending quest to free ourselves from the weight of desolation by bringing back light to the hinterlands.

I have no intention of seeing my friend again, but perhaps I will finally read that novel by Thomas Hardy which seemed to symbolise what I was trying to write: a return to what we often grasp very early in our lives, the perception of a kind of bone structure that we seek to make out beneath the events through which we go, of which sometimes an abandoned manuscript will have kept a premature trace, and which it will have taken a whole lifetime to be able to complete – not time regained or the return

of the ancient dead and their subterranean ways, nor a time of interminable grief, but something sculpted entirely in the present and in a language that has required the time in which to find the moment to be written.

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<sup>1</sup> Stéphane Mosès, *L'Ange de l'Histoire*

## Patrick Autréaux

### La Lande du Temps

(Revue Esprit, 2024)

*The Return of the Native* de Thomas Hardy était le roman préféré d'un de mes amis sculpteur – mon ami le plus cher. Souvent il évoquait son prologue qui décrit la lande. C'était le personnage principal, disait-il, un paysage devenu visage. De ce premier chapitre, je ne connaissais que le titre qu'il citait parfois quand on se revoyait après quelque temps : *A face on which time makes but little impression*. Régulièrement j'ai promis de le lire et, toujours, j'en étais détourné. Viendrait le temps, pensais-je. Plus tard j'ai découvert les poèmes de Seamus Heaney sur le peuple des tourbières. Ces corps momifiés, retrouvés dans le sol acide des landes, avaient fait écho pour le poète à la guerre civile, aux sacrifices terribles pour la pacification du groupe. Ces *Bog Poems* levaient une mélancolie aussi changeante que le visage des marais, entre douleur et fascination, effroi et rêve. Ils s'étaient associés pour moi à ce livre de Hardy, au souvenir de l'enthousiasme de mon ami, même si j'avais renoncé à lire un roman devenu dépositaire de notre amitié morte.

Car entretemps l'amitié s'était rompue. Aucune dispute, juste une craquelure qui a signé le naufrage, presque sans que je le sache. Je vivais loin et, selon notre habitude, on se revoyait avant chacun de mes départs. Cette année-là, après une décennie de travail, je venais de publier un premier livre qui avait eu quelque écho. J'avais bien senti une gêne de sa part dans nos dernières conversations téléphoniques, mais j'avais préféré ignorer qu'une rivalité avait pu se dresser entre nous au point de tuer l'amitié. À mon retour, un message puis un autre furent sans réponse, des paroles grinçantes qu'il avait glissées plusieurs fois me revinrent, que j'avais voulu sinon oublier du moins justifier par toutes sortes d'humeurs que je lui connaissais. J'insistai et voulus comprendre, mes emails et lettres furent sans réponse, les amis communs ne purent dire ce qu'il me reprochait.

Le temps se mit à creuser une distance de plus en plus impossible à combler entre nos incessants dialogues et ce silence. Mais chacun de mes retours à Paris était assombri par une attente pas tout à fait morte. J'étais en colère et triste de l'être ; soudain porté par des élans de réconciliation, je me sentais prêt à faire amende honorable, avant de brusquement passer du grand pardon à un violent ressentiment. Ces yoyos finirent par s'atténuer. Il m'avait fallu beaucoup de manuscrits inaboutis avant de parvenir au premier livre ; me poussait désormais une violente urgence d'écrire au gré de ce qu'avait ouvert en moi l'incertaine guérison d'un lymphome agressif. Quant à cet ami, il avait

complètement disparu de ma vie. Je ne trouvais même plus trace de lui sur Internet. Je savais seulement qu'il avait fini par rompre avec la plupart de nos relations communes. Déçu par la mauvaise réception de ses dernières oeuvres, il n'exposait plus ; à une connaissance, que j'avais revue par hasard, il avait même dit avoir cessé de sculpter. Il était mort sans l'être.

Dans ces limbes flottait aussi le livre de Hardy. Bizarrement il ne me l'avait jamais offert, c'est moi qui l'avais acheté. Il était là sur un rayonnage, je ne le feuilletais plus. Des paroles de l'ami perdu en venaient parfois, toujours les mêmes sur la lande et ce visage qui ne change pas. Je préférais laisser ce roman dans la bibliothèque, bien plus vaste que la mienne, faite des livres qu'on n'a pas lus, ne veut pas lire, ne lira jamais, s'est promis de ne jamais lire. Mais il ne mourait pas, il disparaissait de ma pensée et revenait par hasard : visage de mots, caché dans un titre, qui se mettait à me regarder comme l'aurait fait une momie presque parfaite. *A face on which time makes but little impression.*

Aura-t-il fallu que l'écriture qui m'avait tant occupé s'enraye et que s'ouvre la lande du désir éteint, pour y redécouvrir un visage sur quoi le temps avait eu peu d'effet ?

Alors que je traversais une période de doute profond, après avoir achevé un cycle d'écriture, je me mis à repenser à cet ami perdu de vue, au sentiment d'échec qui l'avait peut-être conduit à cesser de sculpter, au remaniement profond que cela avait dû induire en sa vie. J'avais l'impression de traverser moi-même une telle passe, d'être ainsi ramené vers lui. De nouveau, j'avais, besoin de mieux comprendre notre relation et sa fin. Est-ce ce qui me donna l'envie d'écrire ? Je m'y remis avec obstination. Mais écrire le tarissement est une gageure. Et je me heurtais bientôt à quelque chose en cette histoire à quoi je ne pouvais donner de fin. Il me semblait que ce qui n'avait pas vraiment pu finir, cette mort sans mort, rendait mon récit impossible. Peut-être étais-je entravé par un deuil à quoi je me refusais. Je me résolus bientôt à abandonner ce manuscrit.

Après une ultime relecture, parcourant les esquisses et digressions accumulées, j'aperçus d'autres visages qui n'avaient pas pris place dans ce livre. J'avais chez moi le portrait qu'il avait fait de mon grand-père, il connaissait mes parents et mon histoire familiale, les séparations et les morts, savait la généalogie de mes lectures. Or, dans ces notes de travail, des miettes de présence avaient été semées, qui ne menaient pas à la maison de l'ogre mais à une de ces mystiques, Thérèse Martin, que j'avais relue grâce à lui et dont nous parlions souvent. Le nom de cette sainte avait surplombé quelques drames personnels. J'avais déjà esquissé sur elle un tout petit livre. Voici que m'éblouissait cette hypothèse : Et si je tentais de retrouver la coïncidence entre ses

malheurs et les miens, entre ces visages qui commençaient de disparaître autour de moi.

C'est ainsi que j'avais repris goût à écrire en arpentant le passé, que j'étais peu à peu sorti de la lande obscure. Et alors que je nouais mon histoire familiale et le destin bien connu de cette jeune femme, je sentis s'ouvrir un autre champ – inaperçu d'abord : se dégageait de l'écriture non une agglutination de souvenirs mais le paysage de ma mémoire. Je pris soudain conscience que ce n'était pas un livre qui s'écrivait, mais plusieurs.

Après cette vision, une effervescence m'avait saisi. En quelques jours s'était dessiné un plan provisoire. D'emblée il fut clair que ce n'était pas des mémoires qui se déployaient, mais un volume fait d'événements, d'émotions et de jardins, de pensées – un corps temporel. Écrire c'était donner une forme au temps que j'avais traversé, non pour y dresser un monument commémoratif, mais pour en éprouver la fourmillante chevelure. Moins écrire une histoire que ce qui était électrisée par elle dans le présent. Écrire le ciel changeant sur la lande du temps.

C'est souvent dans ce calme affolement qu'on écrit – un affolement qui n'est qu'une façon de se mettre en désordre. Sans doute faut-il être secoué de fonds en comble pour lézarder des tombeaux qu'on ne croyait pas exister en soi. Un premier livre fut écrit, un deuxième au gré de circonstances inutiles à développer ici mais qui remanièrent mon plan initial, un troisième se mit très vite en chantier.

Si l'on conçoit par visions globales, lents tissages et sauts imprévus, le temps de l'écriture est sans direction uniforme. Ainsi, suscitant une nouvelle surprise, je me rendis compte que j'étais en train de reprendre les grandes lignes d'un manuscrit beaucoup plus ancien, le premier que j'avais achevé mais jamais publié. Un texte trop dense et trop mince à la fois pour contenir ce qu'alors je n'avais pas encore vécu. Tous les protagonistes étaient toutefois déjà en scène : il y était question de la famille et des premières amours, du passé et des personnages marquants de l'enfance, de l'art et de l'ami de jeunesse, des saints que je lisais et des paysages d'antan où je puisais des poèmes. Maladroitemment proustien, c'était un texte déclinant un camaïeu de la mélancolie. Si je l'avais délaissé depuis des années, il me semblait marquer le début de ma vie d'écrivain, comme un cairn dans un pays gris et brumeux. Imaginais-je en voir surgir un jour mon futur travail ? En tout cas, quelque chose avait mûri, il avait fallu les dix livres, qu'entretemps j'avais écrits, pour parvenir à cette reprise involontaire.

En écrivant, je n'ai jamais su me plier, sinon par domestication, à une temporalité narrative qui soit bien alignée, fût-elle ponctuée de flash-back. Le problème, dont j'ai pris conscience tardivement, a toujours été pour moi d'écrire en respectant la forme du temps tel que je l'éprouve. En poésie, cela ne m'effarouchait pas,

je trouvais assez aisément comment peindre les *nymphéas* que j'avais dans la tête ; mais dès que je commençais d'écrire une narration, je me trouvais encombré par tant d'images, de pensées, d'associations, mon esprit réagissait avec tant de pop-up, que j'étais comme un écran saturé de fenêtres agitant chacune leur monde. À cela se greffait un sentiment assez banal d'illégitimité, que renforçait mon manque d'études littéraires, mon milieu peu lettré. Autant d'entraves donc contre lesquelles j'ai durablement bataillé.

Et puis j'ai un peu mieux compris pourquoi j'avais tant de difficulté à écrire. Assez tard j'ai découvert que j'étais synesthète. C'est-à-dire que j'associe spontanément des perceptions entre elles, et notamment je vois le temps comme un espace. Mes journées, la semaine, l'année ou la chronologie historique dessinent pour moi une géante conque, et je me promène dans le temps comme le bonhomme d'Ampère sur les flux en volume. J'ai ainsi toujours associé le temps qui s'écoule et celui qu'il fait. L'heure a une double mesure, celle conventionnelle et celle que permettent la course des nuages ou leur développement en forme imaginaire, le vent ou la pluie qui façonnent la lumière. Le temps est pour moi un paysage.

Quand j'ai commencé à écrire des récits, je me suis heurté à cette particularité mentale que j'ignorais : j'écrivais de façon très compacte, agglutinant idées, images et sensations apparemment sans lien logique. J'écrivais *mal*. Je vivais cela comme un handicap. Sans doute est-ce pourquoi j'ai publié mon premier livre si tard. C'est en prenant conscience de ce lien entre temps et espace que j'ai mieux compris comment temps et récit s'articulaient pour moi et procédaient l'un de l'autre. J'ai dès lors accepté les détours de mon temps intérieur, autant que d'en épurer le dessin. Et je n'ai pu le faire qu'en court-circuitant une linéarité que je ne perçois en rien dans la vie (La temporalité des récits est, rappelons-le, une contrainte formelle liée à une structure anthropologique et sociale. D'autres époques, d'autres cultures ont ignoré ou minoré la linéarité temporelle et narrative : on pense aux philosophes qui opposent la flèche de l'Histoire au temps rituel ou mystique<sup>2</sup> ; aux géographies cinétiques des chants 2 aborigènes qu'évoque Bruce Chatwin ; aux toponymies des Apaches que décrit Keith Basso ; au li chinois dont parle Segalen, mesure d'une distance autant que des reliefs du terrain et donc du temps nécessaire à le parcourir.) J'ai ainsi dû composer avec les méandres de mon cerveau. On a abondamment écrit sur corps et littérature, considérant surtout la maladie et la sexualité. Or si littérature et corps sont liés, ils le sont par les singularités sociales et psychologiques, mais surtout physiologiques et plus précisément neurologiques des auteurs. Et peut-être qu'écrire, c'est cela : suivre le tao d'une physiologie singulière, accepter d'écrire en daltonien si on l'est. Il m'aura fallu quelques années et nombre de manuscrits ratés pour y parvenir – peut-être.

C'est surtout en initiant ce polyptyque autobiographique que j'ai mieux pu approcher la forme de mon temps intérieur. J'avais écrit plusieurs livres qui le tentaient certes déjà. Mais cette fois le projet se développait sur plusieurs volumes et retrouvait, comme je l'ai dit, un manuscrit délaissé plusieurs décennies avant. Or si ce temps de latence ne conditionnait pas l'écriture, il avait permis l'appréhension d'une manière d'écrire le temps que je n'avais pu apprivoiser pour aucun de mes livres.

Toutefois, pour que ce polyptyque s'esquisse entièrement dans mon esprit, il fallut un hasard important. Plusieurs volets se dessinaient déjà, mais pas encore un réel cycle qui trace les limites du paysage que j'écrivais. Manquait un point de fuite. Ce qui le matérialisa fut la réapparition de cet ami perdu de vue depuis si longtemps. J'appris par un article qu'il venait d'exposer son récent travail. C'était la première fois depuis notre séparation. J'avais raté cette expo, mais pus voir des photos sur les sites de la galerie. Je reconnus des toiles anciennes remaniées, mais il y avait aussi un corpus nouveau d'oeuvres qui s'inscrivaient partiellement dans la continuité de ce qu'il faisait autrefois.

Je fus troublé par ces retrouvailles inattendues. Quelque chose se dénouait en moi, une tristesse presque oubliée : j'étais étrangement soulagé qu'il eût continué à créer, et qu'il expose de nouveau – qu'il vive encore. Aucune rancoeur ni rivalité réveillées, mais une délivrance : l'horizon de son apparent échec artistique n'était plus menaçant ; savoir que sa vie ne s'était pas enlisée, et en avoir la preuve me dégageait tout à fait de la crainte de cette désillusion nocive que porte la création et qu'il avait fini par incarner en moi. Ce qu'aussitôt j'éprouvais en voyant ses oeuvres – quoique je pense de leur qualité –, c'est que j'allais enfin pouvoir écrire sur cette amitié si importante de ma jeunesse et ainsi tracer la perspective dans mon livre – créer un espace avec le temps. Même s'il faudrait être patient pour l'écrire.

Ce qui revient n'est pas forcément mu par un effet boomerang, mais peut simplement n'avoir pas bougé. Le temps l'a enseveli, on en aura pris conscience en creusant un tout petit peu. Ce qui revient n'est pas toujours ce qui est mort – fantôme ou momie – mais ce qui a évolué à un autre rythme ou existe selon un plan plus abstrait. Et écrire, ce serait devenir un petit animal – taupe en son terrier – qui n'a pas une conscience nette, et ne l'aura parfois jamais, de cet espace-temps qu'il traverse et à la frontière duquel s'ouvre par un geste maladroit une lande inconnue et familière – la structure profonde d'un paysage.

*A face on which time makes but little impression*, c'est cette phrase qui m'est revenue en voyant les oeuvres de cet ami. Désormais personnage de mon livre, il en courbait la voûte, en faisait un tout saisissable. Sur cette lande, voici que le temps avait passé, la brume et le soleil se couchait ; et ce n'est pas de l'humus que poussait le livre, puisque la lande est une terre pauvre, mais de l'espace soudain ouvert – futur passé et

présent – qui déployait en moi une vie réfléchie et son improbable destin, c'est-à-dire la sculpture du temps.

Depuis l'adolescence, j'ai aimé les paysages de landes et de tourbières, ceux du *Roi des aulnes* ou de Novalis, d'Annette von Droste Hülshoff en ses poèmes de terre, de la campagne de Hurlevent, des lettres de Rilke décrivant Worpswede. J'ai longtemps pensé que l'écriture était liée pour moi aux morts, ou plutôt qu'elle venait du jamais mort. C'est vrai pour quelques-uns de mes livres ; écrire me semblait créer un autre roman de la momie. Sans doute est-ce aussi pourquoi j'ai aimé les poèmes de Seamus Heaney sur les corps des tourbières. Avec cet ami, j'avais souvent parlé de ces peaux tannées, dont on discernait encore les empreintes digitales, les ridules, les pores de la peau, les poils et cheveux tressés ; nous étions fascinés par leur air de surprise ou d'endormissement, par l'effroi englouti dont ne restait qu'une corde au cou. Éternels peut-être d'avoir dû mourir si tôt, ces *bog bodies* symbolisaient les disparus de notre jeunesse : c'était les revenants dans ses rêves, comme ce corps qu'il croyait avoir caché dans un bois et qui le réveillait en sueur ; pour moi, c'était l'oubli d'une grand-mère et ce qui s'était occulté avec elle de ma petite enfance.

Je me suis longtemps dit, après la dislocation de notre amitié, que ce déçu de l'art était devenu un sacrifié des marais. En découvrant ses nouvelles oeuvres, ce n'était pas un visage momifié que j'avais retrouvé, mais un être encore dansant. Et ce constat réveillait, non mon amitié pour lui, mais ce pourquoi nous avons sans doute été amis : une quête ininterrompue pour nous délivrer du poids de la désolation en rendant leurs lumières à tous les arrière-pays.

Peut-être commençais-je de comprendre que j'étais bien entré dans une autre phase de mon travail. Plus que des morts-vivants, ressurgis des cryptes de la mémoire ou de la conscience, c'est de cet espace qui s'approfondit avec l'obscurité et se révèle même par elle, qui semble vivre enfin de sa vie véritable quand la lumière s'incline et passe au gris pour faire rougeoyer les lumières éphémères de la vie, c'est de ce pays-visage *on which time makes but little impression*, espace-temps qui ne semble d'abord qu'un socle de brumes, qu'en moi se sécrétait et déployait l'écriture. Il ne s'agissait pas de retrouver des êtres perdus ou morts, aucun salut ni résurrection, mais de transformer notre paysage intérieur. Il s'agissait que le vent porte loin encore, mais en ramenant au pays discret qu'on croyait connu, pour le regarder autrement.

Je n'avais aucune intention de revoir mon ami, mais peut-être allais-je enfin lire ce roman de Thomas Hardy qui semblait symboliser ce que j'étais en train de tenter d'écrire : le retour à ce qu'on saisit souvent très tôt dans sa vie, la perception de cette sorte d'ossature qu'on cherche à deviner sous les événements qui nous ont traversés,

dont parfois un manuscrit abandonné aura gardé la trace précoce, et qu'il aura fallu toute une vie pour pouvoir l'accomplir – non le temps retrouvé, ni le retour des morts anciens ou leur action souterraine, non le temps d'un deuil interminable, mais celui entièrement sculpté au présent dans une langue et à quoi il aura fallu le temps même pour trouver le moment de s'écrire.

Et ce faisant, il se pouvait bien que je reconnaisse, à sa froideur minérale, ce moment qui me ferait dire, moi qui avais failli mourir sans avoir eu le temps d'un quelconque livre mais qui serais rassasié désormais de tant d'années écrites, que j'étais prêt à mourir.

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<sup>2</sup> Stéphane Mosès, *L'Ange de l'Histoire*

## Barnaby Smith

### vacuum at 11am

the morning has felt European, Tamlin –  
white skies, waiting for something to happen,  
for momentum from bitter coffee,  
how do we recapture this?  
it's tempting to run fingers through leaves,  
or tease the insect in transit,  
or give names to each other  
& other nebulous things

the people we could see today,  
in the dial of their own private lives,  
will only be misremembered shapes  
pieced together as murmurs  
when you repossess the world  
in your own ticking over moments

we'll stay in the pigeon-coloured light  
drifting with stale smells & bare walls  
& if the risk of speech is tempting,  
let's be atonal animals: i promise the  
knowledge of boredom is luminous –  
& that bulging inertia  
is just the cardiac  
haunting between us

the twitch of a joke is in your face  
& in the grooves of my tongue:  
better to let gravity digest it  
& inhale instead, casually does it –  
all else is just opinions  
& possession

## Alton Melvar M. Dapanas

### *Two Prose Poems from the Southern Philippines*

#### **Mariano**

How shall I name you in the sombre dusk? You are the icy string of silver pearls I count again and again, the novenario when the pitch-black August nights stretch on. I hum a low tune, and move one pearl, and then another, intoning each iamb into a litany in Latin, tracing your contours as I remember them from dreams past, shadow by shadow. As if the last veil of you was the entire vigil, ten Memorares, five Salve Reginas, fifty-four more vespers. And though by day I bow upon our common earth, by night I rise, hefted by your arms, the harlot I am.

2019

#### **Ian**

Big guy, with his floral pocket squares, kindles a thousand wildfires within the silken rain showers, symphonic in their first dip onto the foliage of velvet apple trees. Oh, upon the hibiscus blooms of this drought, the slippery ohashori, pitter-pattering at siesta, hiding his barren beauty from me. As for his laughter, which cloaks a thousand sorrows, may I at least see tears return to gather in his eyes.

2009

# Lance Mazmanian

## Propositioning Sir Ian McKellen

4th of March, 2002: A beautiful day.

Randomly walked past the now demolished Canon Theatre in Beverly Hills, so named for being on Canon Drive adjacent Rodeo. Saw a notice about Sir Ian McKellen giving a Back Stage West talk that evening. A Knight to Remember they called it. 7:30 PM sharp.

I'd never met or known McKellen to this point, but I'd learned long before how to triangulate people's behaviour in Hollywood. Not exactly quantum foam stuff, but accurate.

As such, McKellen was and is a person I hold in stellar regard, both as actor and Homo sapiens. A fine writer, too. You probably know him best as silver screen characters Magneto and Gandalf. Or my personal fave, James Whale in GODS AND MONSTERS.

McKellen has spent his life as an unafraid gay man, long successful in England's theatre and more. His ensemble of close friends reads like diamond history.

On top of my deep respect for his world, McKellen was also, at the time, specifically the actor I wanted for the lead in a somewhat daring for the era project I'd written, called CANDLE.

Maybe I'd catch him after the Canon Theatre talk and try it on. So...I killed time at a local pizza place and did a couple laps around North Rexford and South Santa Monica Boulevard. Got back to the theatre a full hour before McKellen's talk, since admission was first come first served, limited to 360 people.

The line was huge. Not 360, but easily more than 200 ahead of me.

My original plan was now dust, since I'd wanted to take a seat in the very front row. I had a really loud shirt on – stupid loud, in fact – and was hoping it would help get Sir Ian's attention throughout his talk.

Hey, you can dream, right? But if I could get myself visually registered in McKellen's head, far easier to try and discuss the aforementioned CANDLE project with him, when the talk concluded. Familiarity in a storm, you know.

But, front row was gone. Damn. Worse yet the theatre was near to standing room only (SRO): not only would I *not* be in front, but I'd do well to find a seat at all.

Just then I saw a few open spots on the front right row. The hell? Had a group magically gotten up just now? I skipped down and asked the people sitting opposite if the seats were available. They were. Wow. I took one, not really understanding how it even worked out.

The man who would interview McKellen took the stage (Rob Kendt, Editor-in-Chief of Back Stage West) carrying two chairs. He put one chair alone and had a seat in the other.

As the theatre maxed-out and doors were closed, I wound up with the final seat next to me empty. Odd, but no complaint.

Minutes later Sir Ian emerged and was introduced. Purple tie and all. Crowd went crazy. McKellen was overwhelmed by the response, and very thankful. He calmed the cheers and sat beside Kendt.

And there it began.

Quick aside: It's such a disappointment when you find that an artist/performer you greatly respect is, in real life, completely low-rent. Trust me, it happens. In certain cases it's better not to know anything more about the people you admire than what you can see on the screen or stage.

In McKellen's case, I quickly saw he was just as many had previously told me: a great chap, indeed. Not only was I levelled by his emerging candour, benevolence, humour, but his manner was wildly counter to his known cinema presence: he was funny, mischievous, oversexed.

Silly, too. You'd never guess he was the storied Shakespearean titan from Burnley, Lancashire...save for his legendary articulation.

Furthermore – and as I'm sure you're aware – McKellen was then and now totally transparent about his homosexuality. Being gay was the first thing he mentioned that night, upon having some initial 'political' confusion about which side of Kendt he should sit on, left or right...

It was during this confusion that I noted Sir Ian's unusually radiant eyes. They were steely-blue, almost too beautiful to behold for too long a time. No doubt they'd helped eased a few things to fruition in his life.

As blue eyes do...

And I spent quite a bit of the Canon talk looking *into* the eyes, because he directly spoke to me for long periods while relating his tales to the audience. No bullshit.

Yes, at first I thought I was imagining things, or that he was simply anchoring to my seat ('playing to' as it's called). But given my totally awkward compass position in the theatre it was clear he was somewhat fixated...to the point that people sitting near turned to look my way a few times. Hm.

Anyhow, McKellen talked at length of his early days in North England theatre, his schooling, his inspirations, being openly gay in an industry and world that was still semi-squeamish about it all (remember, it was 2002). Lovely stuff to hear, and all of it tempered with good-natured authority.

On and on it went. So enjoyable.

During the subsequent Q&A segment, Sir Ian was asked about the scene in the first LORD OF THE RINGS movie where Gandalf falls backward into the chasm, seemingly gone forever. A drama student in the audience found McKellen's performance hugely authentic and wondered if there were some trick or technique Ian had used to 'get into' the moment.

McKellen emotionally told the young actor he'd simply imagined looking up at his boyfriend, and that dying would mean never seeing him again. Compelling.

Sir Ian then did a 360° and told the actor about the mechanics of shooting the chasm bit, that he was in truth staring at a tennis ball on a broomstick the whole time. The stick kept falling over during takes at which point McKellen screamed to the Canon audience, 'You shall not *bounce*!!'

What a show.

However, the true pièce de résistance appeared at the end of the Q&A: McKellen stood from his chair and said, 'Now you're going to get a little treat.' He was about to run a scene he'd personally written to annex a Shakespearean play. *Macbeth*? Can't remember.

Whatever it was, McKellen instantly transformed from the playful individual he'd been for more than an hour and into the formidable seasoned actor he most certainly is.

Yes, we all watched in awe as Sir Ian McKellen came to the apron of the stage and launched a monologue that was one of the most powerful live performances I'd ever seen. And I've seen many. He was possessed. Another being.

Some people are great at their art, only in theory. McKellen, however, is a monument to the craft. If anyone came to this Canon gig unconvinced of that, his monologue surely converted them.

And then, he finished. Wow. I was a little stunned. Took me a minute to grab hold. I was ready to ask about CANDLE, though, as I was sure even more Q&A would follow right away.

Not true: After the monologue, McKellen simply gave a quick goodbye and was immediately spirited off by theatre personnel...

...but not before he looked directly back my way, expressionless. And that was that, right? No.

I tried to follow him backstage. No success. Hm. At this point I either heard someone say McKellen was headed for the loading dock, or I figured he'd wind up there.

I left the theatre and circled to the alley off North Canon. Sure enough, Sir Ian was surrounded at theatre back door, his idling black limo parked about 50' (15.2m) away at an angle to the crowd, driver waiting.

Damn. I was too far buried in bodies to have a chance for anything more than a wave, but I gave it a go anyway.

Into the mass I went, pushing gently through as McKellen signed LORD OF THE RINGS posters and books and magazines and whatnot. He was as kind and humble about it as you could possibly imagine. Innocent soul in a maelstrom. Totally composed and cordial.

Sweet man.

But I'd never make his position in time to chat about CANDLE. Even if I could, how do you talk shop in the middle of this? I watched on as he busily and politely signed item after item.

And then he saw me, literally pausing pen in hand when he did. Suddenly revived, I made more of an effort. Onward, right?

McKellen now occasionally looked up from his signing duties, noticeably keeping check of my position. This was neither illusion nor delusion. It was real. I still found it hard to believe in the moment. Or even now.

Indeed, McKellen definitely anticipated my arrival. Unless you can otherwise explain why he repeatedly scanned the crowd til he found my eyes, and then went back to work. Hah!

Fun stuff, but all for nothing: there was simply no way I'd get to him through all the flesh.

And then I got a foolish idea:

Previous to the McKellen encounter – and long before cellular tech became what it is – I was in a situation (with Jeremy Renner, in fact) where I had no way to write anything down. I lived to regret it, and vowed it would never happen again.

So in my wallet I'd placed a broken pencil. Shoddy, but it was good enough to scribble a quick address or something. I pulled one of my business cards, which had only my name and phone on one side. On the unprinted side, and in letters large and dark as

possible, I wrote this:

DRINK?

Figured I'd just flash the handwritten DRINK? at McKellen from deep in the mire, and hope for the best. Hey, why not?

But wait! Like branches parting, there was a sudden lessening of the crowd. Kinda strange, actually. Red Sea, anyone? Security noticed too and they immediately urged McKellen toward his limo.

At that very moment the person in front of me unexpectedly stepped away, and just like that...

There we were: Sir Ian and I, face to face.

McKellen studied me with an uncertain, energetic, nervous smile, his spectacular sapphire eyes killing it with power and majesty. You could easily imagine him wearing a crown. Hah! Platinum, of course, and canted one side.

McKellen seemed about to say something, but hesitated. What happened next was... Well, to this day I'm not sure why I did the following, but perhaps it was all for the best:

Instead of shaking hands or quickly pitching the CANDLE project; instead of commenting on his purple tie or saying/doing anything, I simply held the business card directly in front of me, showing him the single large-block word on the back:

DRINK?

He started to reach for the card, but stopped to read what I'd written. When the word DRINK? registered in his mind, he burst into a fit of giggles.

It's true: Sir Ian McKellen, lofty Shakespearean magnate of the boards, Gandalf and a thousand other knightly names, giggling like a little girl over my single word 'proposition'.

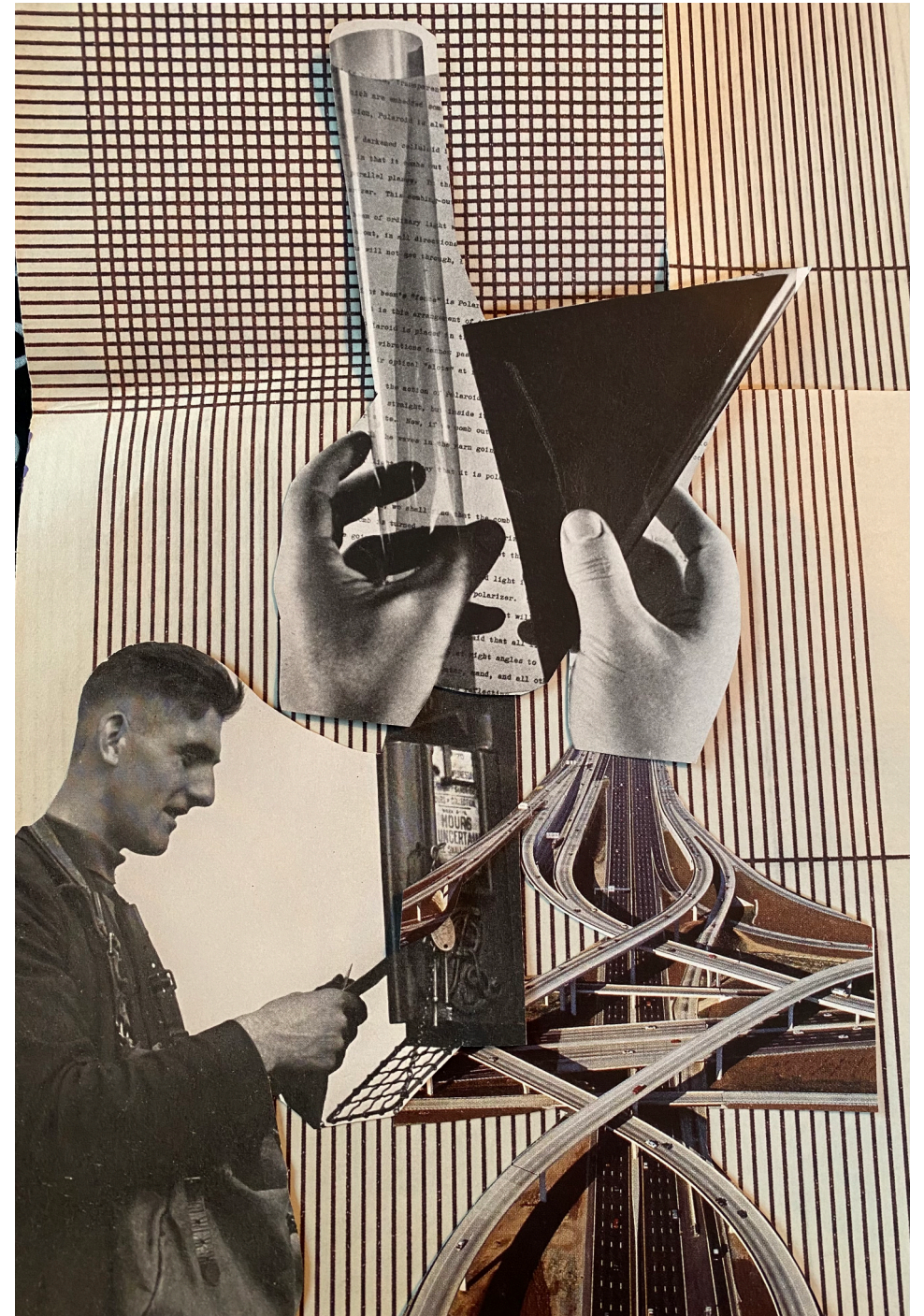
McKellen reached and took the card, turned it over, then pocketed the thing without

taking his eyes away. At that point security guys moved him to his limo, but not before he looked back to me a final time, smiling.

Security tucked McKellen into his car. Door closed and the blacked-out vehicle lurched off and around to the quiet of Beverly Hills. I watched it disappear, and I've neither seen nor heard from McKellen since. I did, however, receive several 'hang-ups' over the next few months, from an unidentified number.

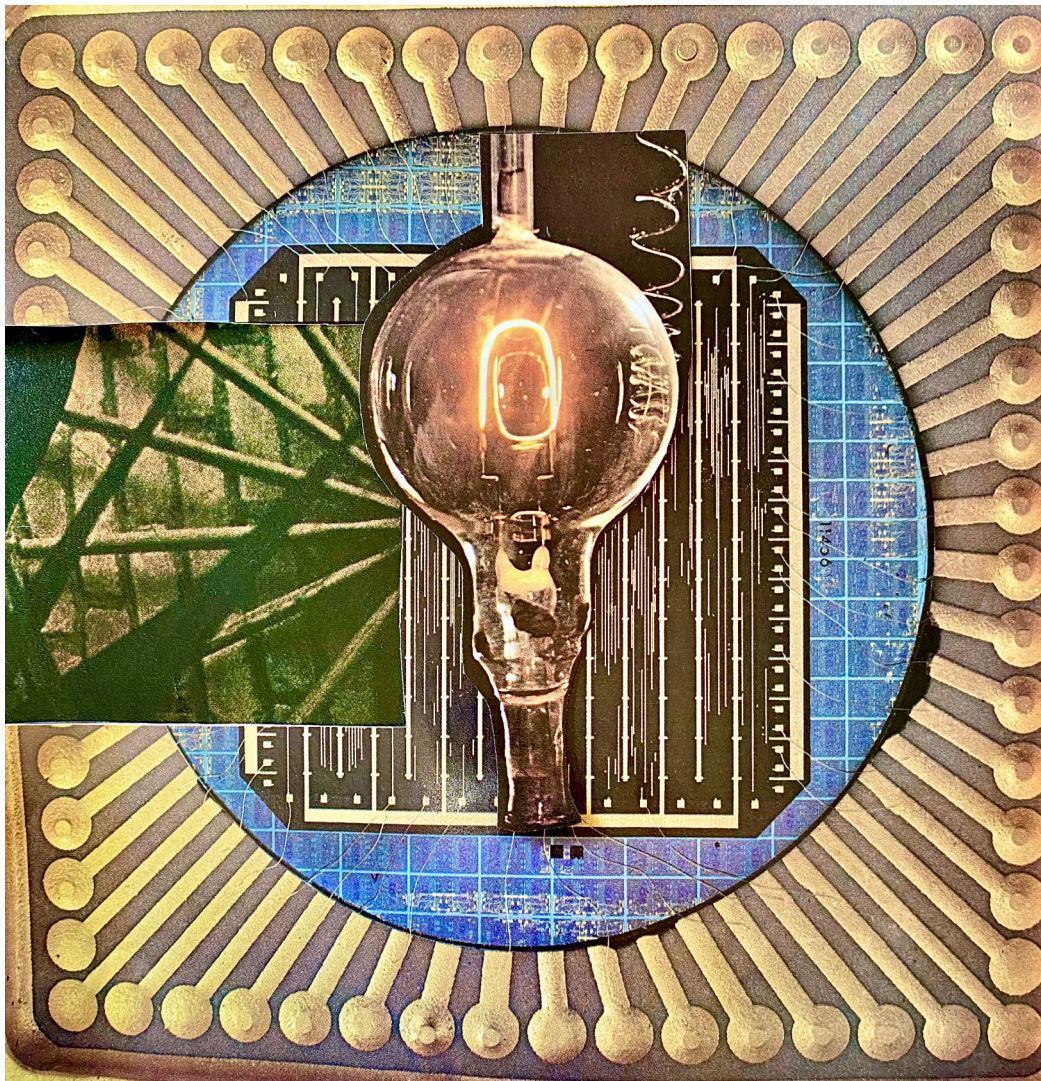
I'd never gotten those before.

## Amanda Yskamp

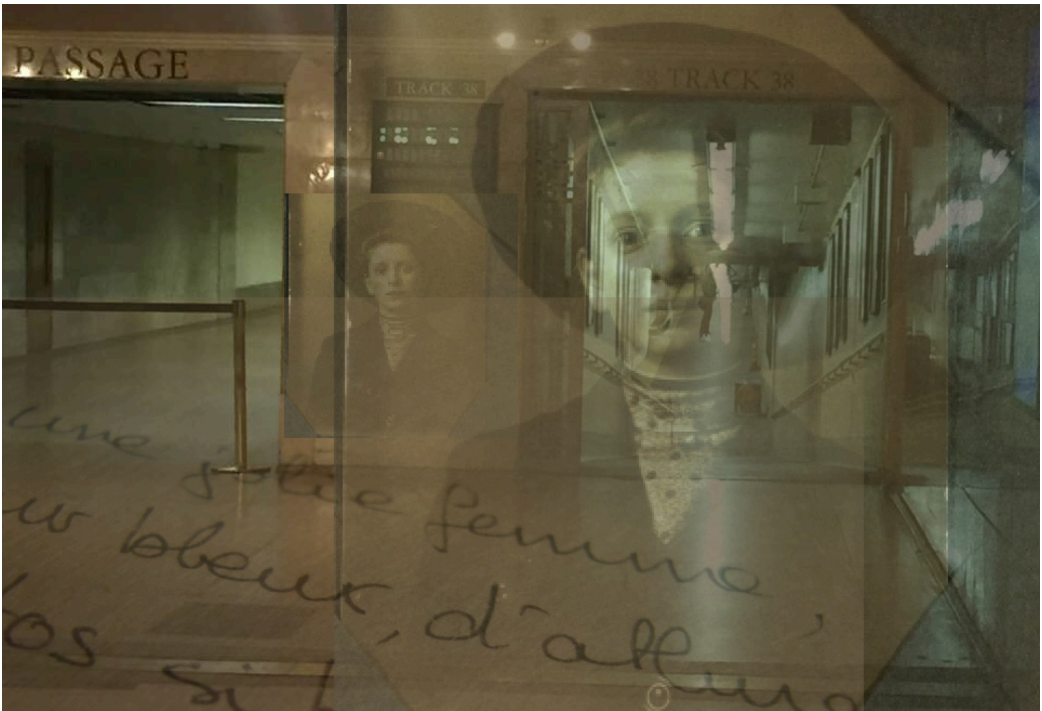


Diversion

Amanda Yskamp



Increments



Passage

# Megan Cassells

Without Borders / Lincoln Stories Essay Series (no. 4)

## *Radharc*

### PAST

See the moments when you didn't exist. When the world was smaller, old with sepia, yellow with smoke stains – and the atoms of a body aligned, misaligned, a whole life, tugged ass first from your mother's womb five weeks early, blue, scrawling, because you'd changed your mind about being born.

### IRELAND, 2008

See the girl standing on a mound of green grass wearing a bobbed woolly uniform, while you swing on a rusting goal post below, showering the ground with old paint. The girl shrieks as she runs down the hill to you, body moving faster than her legs, almost falling face-first. You drop from the goal post, wrench out your terrible flip phone, try to video her running, only capture the end. The result is blurry; jagged blocks of brown/blonde hair coming towards you, green foreground, pale sky background. But you capture her laughter. The thick accent you no longer have. You play together on the GAA pitch, sit in empty corridors, spit peanuts to see who can spit further. Call each other Charlotte, Elizabeth, because you're two hybrids in a school of Irish, who find some semblance of belonging together. See how your mind wanders to a future somewhere else when you never really gave 'here' a chance. Unsatisfied with feet planted in soil, in mood swings dulled by medicine, the question and answer of God. You watch the video, years later, realise you were on top of the hill when you filmed her. You knew you'd leave her, or she'd leave you. You no longer remember which.

### CAMBRIDGE, 2018

See the building between borders, in the middle of March. King's College glistening like the front cover of a postcard, Christmas card, a 'Cambridge Through the Seasons' calendar, a palimpsest, slipped out of time, subject never changing while the layers do. That morning, your social media is filled with the same picture – see the college overlaid with the clarendon filter, any trace of dark cloud removed, the sky as untouched as the snow at its feet. See it in sepia, warmer, the sky, the snow clotted cream. Black and white, the rows of spires severe, jutting through bleached wool. All posted by different hands with the singular intention of shouting 'I am here. Look at me. Thousands of people have captured this image and I am another. I am somebody. I am nobody.' Hungover, you remember the soldier's graffiti carved near the altar, and tuck your own photo of it away, telling yourself you fit snug between its folds when tomorrow it'll be gone. See this place that is a home and not a home. How it is escape, purpose, in all its demands and urgencies, the feverish 'I need to record this moment right here right now because it will never exist again quite like this'. Though it does. The place remains. On a million calendars. Leaflets. Phones. Social media accounts. And you are an echo, a passing thing, between the frames of the stained glass panels. A place is a mirror and you can't find yourself in it.

### EDINBURGH, 2021

See the city built with dreich sandstone, the skyline you drink like old, black blood, the spires, the hunch of Arthur's seat. With short breath, you hike up it, spend hours wandering what feels like endless moors while the sound of a city a few feet away reminds you it has a personality disorder that rivals yours. A city choked with people, a hole curling in your chest, pain in your back and hips, weakness in your body. See how the cloud lifts, bites Arthur's seat in two, and you follow the light, drawn to it in

the middle of a long October. You sit atop Salisbury Crags, partner beside you on the phone to his mother. The sun sinks, the clouds billow pink, then orange, then black, and all-around you people pause. Gather. See the overwhelmed mother and father with excited children running circles around them, the man in jogging gear who climbs the crags beside you and stands alone. All gazes hold west. You pull out your camera, the first time in months. Take a picture every minute that passes, every different form the sky sinks through. You wait an hour, longer, the cold at your fingertips, long after the sun is gone. And you think of the places you left behind. How you tried to take everything away. How the world would have kept moving. These places would exist even if you didn't. You fight the knowledge that you are here, but not real. You feel Ireland in you. Cambridge above you. How hard you tried to lose your self, and you're no closer to finding it.

LINCOLN, 2023

See the joining here. The meeting of final paths. Your body, broken. Mind, shattered. And you curl in the spare room of your mother's house with the stray cat you rescued from the streets of Edinburgh, relearning what it means to try, to be a part of a family. Without purpose. Without place. And your father moves from Ireland, drags you belligerently back from the edge. Your sister takes the steps you're too afraid to walk beside you. Your mother drapes you in a quilt she's sown to catch you. You return to the things that left you. Putting words to paper. Taking pictures of forests, empty fields, the way light plays against a surface. A drain at the side of a university campus after you sat in a room with forty students, a leaking ceiling, train beating on the tracks beneath the window, learning fear again because there is something you finally want. Inch by fetid inch, you expand into recording snapshots, building worlds from nothing, realising that the places were never yours, never you, and you could spend your life crossing borders, oceans, trying to connect the parts of yourself you left in each. The wild restraint of Ireland. The implausibility of Cambridge. The rebellion of Edinburgh. The hearth of Lincoln. You never let yourself know a home, but you think you can try.

PRESENT

See the small sandstone terrace. Park crooked against the curb, pull up the old handbrake. Walk into your sister's home, an air kiss on her cheek. A joke. A laugh. Then to the little boy at her heels, Arthur, gabbing as he bum-shuffles across the carpet. Take his picture. A video. Chattering 'agoo', 'eega', mimic his language without a second thought. See how his eyes brighten, a grin forms as he reaches for you. You see your sister in his eyes, her husband in his nose, in the shape of his face – but you also see yourself. And you want to gift it all to him. Words. Time. Meaning. A record. So you write it all down, or try to, and it comes to you even when there isn't time, when you need to be at work, need to be asleep, when you're driving down a street in the sheeting rain and you pull over so you don't lose the thought; how this world was made just so he could see it. How you lived a life so he could learn from it. See it dissolve the places linked shut, grow roots in our chest, not in our feet. See how we belong to others, to crafting this world for them, to the spaces between the words, the pages without borders. What we say. What we can't. What we try to save. Who we become.

# Bex Hainsworth

## Check-in Instructions for Airbnb in a Former Mill Village

Key safe is in the old outhouse.

It is creaking and cold, but saved a family from the cholera of inner-city slums.

The code is 1851.

Enter through the kitchen,  
smell the goose-smoke lingering.

No bakers needed: they were provided with one small stove for use on Sundays.

The living room is being gentrified.

Please do not remove the zany art prints or disturb the organic cotton-scented candles.

Be careful on the stairs.

They are crooked and uneven,  
carved by generations of pre-dawn patter.

Do not seek to stabilise your step,  
it will reduce the property's market value.

There are two beds. Will sleep 10–14,  
depending on the size of the children,  
the number of limbs. Be warmed  
by the fuel of your bodies.

The lace curtains should be closed gently.

They are fragile, like fingers unspooling  
caught wool beneath the machines.

The second bedroom is haunted.

Do not ask about descendants;  
they can no longer afford the rent.

Close to local amenities: canal,  
train station, boutique shops selling  
paintings of themselves.

Check-out time is 1986.

We hope you enjoy your stay.

# Laurie Kuntz

## Bad Back

I want this to be a love poem,

but your gated step and shaky reach  
for a spoon, a pen, another towel,  
barb my thoughts, till words  
become impossibilities for love.

You bargain for comfort in tepid  
bath water, and half squeezed  
tubes of tiger balm.

I trip over dog-eared books  
left opened at hard covered seams,  
read, till you could no longer sit.

I am possessed by your body's mutiny,  
as the heating pad gingerly falls  
like a lover beneath you.

We can no longer claim those chiseled days  
climbing coconut palms on Brazilian beach fronts,  
or stacking wood in the Sierras,

your spine stretching upright.  
Now, it foreshadows the years to come,  
all that is sacrificed to pain.

You re-invent play-boxing with our son,  
he stands on the arm of the sofa,

while you recline, feet raised,  
both of you throwing fists wildly.

Your weathered smile camouflages  
the spine's treachery, while our son's  
strengthens into what we've twisted together,

lives wrenched around bones.

The years have made me unkind,  
a day-to-day tartness,

I want this to be a love poem,

to tell you we need ways back from suffering,  
but words can not carry the weight of promise,  
and in arching silence,

I rub lavender oil  
into the crooked slots of your vertebrae,  
touch the point of pain where the healing begins.

## Laurie Kuntz

### Bamboozled by Bingo

You beg me to play  
at the clubhouse every Wednesday.  
I say *No way*, everyone there is so old,  
you remind me: We are old, too –  
so now, my Wednesday nights are echoed  
with calls for Bingo.

The chatter dims,  
and the caller rolls and yells  
numbers and letters that rarely mix,  
and we run our wrinkled fingers down  
a cardboard card, all that fits  
in our ageing palms.

Like children, we hope  
the next number is the one that will make  
a diagonal line, or reach four corners  
before some grey haired bidder,  
with a raspy voice yells a win.

We still giggle when 069  
is called, and you have bamboozled me  
to go every week, but this week, I don't go.

This Wednesday, I'm reading my poetry  
in front of people who would not think to rhyme with Bingo.  
You scowl, tell me I will miss out  
on raffles and winnings and furtive glances  
at each other's cards, and mostly miss  
those free glazed donuts,  
but isn't this poem just as sweet?

### Waiting for My Granddaughter To Be Born

While the world falls  
apart, and I worry  
about shelter and rain  
wars break daily  
in country and out  
everyone's tomorrow tumbles  
like dominoes on a wobbly table.  
I tell my son, I am writing a poem for his daughter,  
he says stay away from roses, Junes, moons  
ferris wheels, and all things that turn,  
for the turning makes one dizzy.  
But, it is in the turning  
that I wait, with the world in its fall,  
for that magic word of *arrival*,  
bringing you to all the good  
that rings with salutation –  
Grandchild, welcome to the world.  
Your turn.

## Laurie Kuntz

### The Ginger Jar

I wore your shirt for days,  
after you left,  
lingered in the smell of one  
who moved in checked patterns.

When hurt, I clean,  
crumbs coaxed from the underbelly  
of webs curtained with hair and dander.  
Matted strands of broom  
whisk away the disorder of crevices.

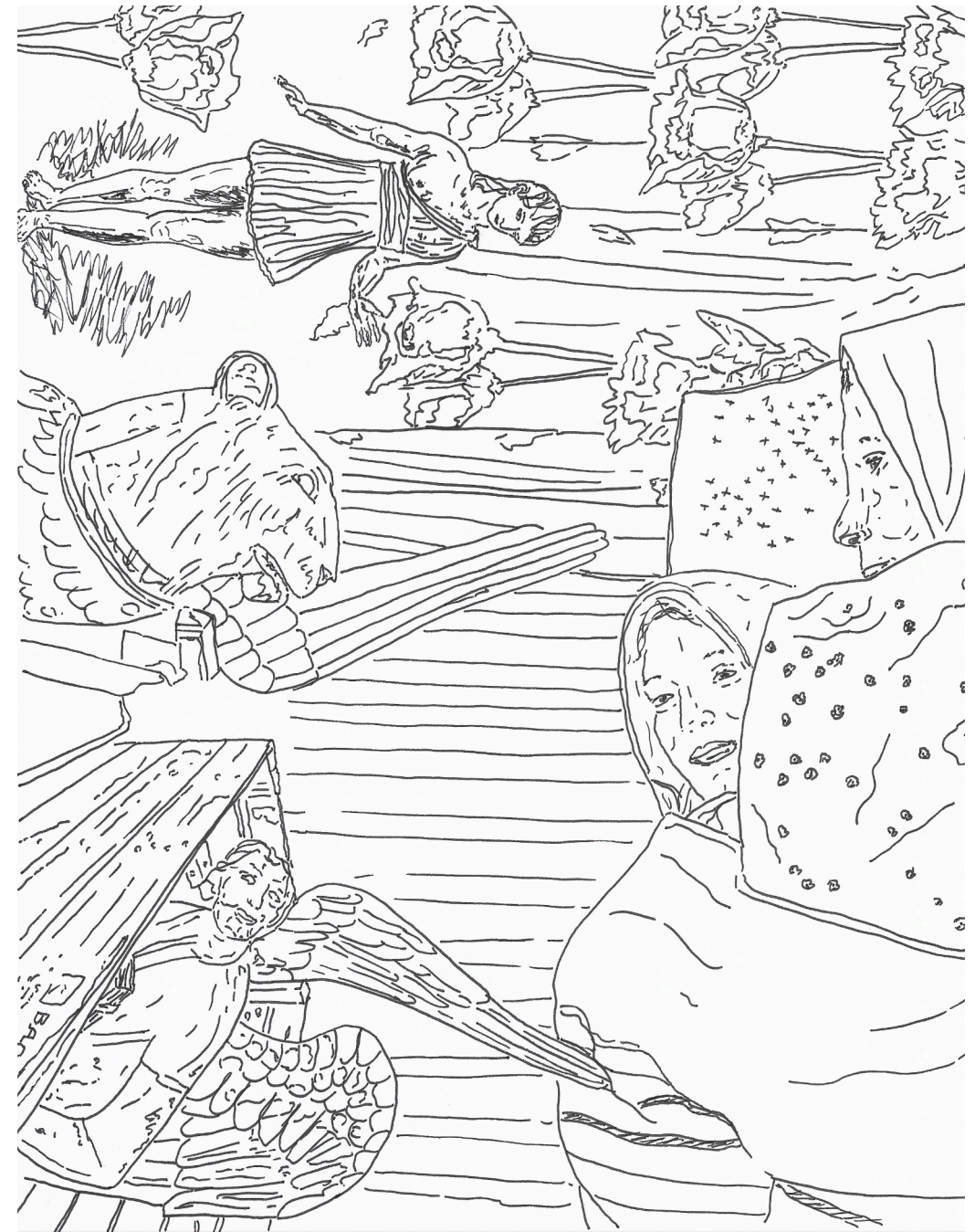
I dust the Chinese ginger jar  
your gift to mark an eve or year,  
our time lost in all that's familiar,  
no longer belonging to us.

I want to dust your gift clean,  
centre it on memory's shelf  
but when I take hold  
the jar slips from my hands,

our seasons shatter, mar the porcelain shine  
cobalt dragons and butterflies,  
the past's unerring score  
stored inside its ivory finish splatter

over the shine of newly waxed linoleum.

## Jena Schmitt



After the Fire at Notre-Dame

Jena Schmitt



Appliance Series: Dish Washer



Appliance Series: My, My Moffat



Brick Wall



How Many Backflips, How Many Bridges, How Many Archways /  
Don't I Know You, I Know You / Butter, Milk, Eggs



How to Wear a Map, How to Lose Your Head, How to Flaw – I Mean, Find – the Flowers



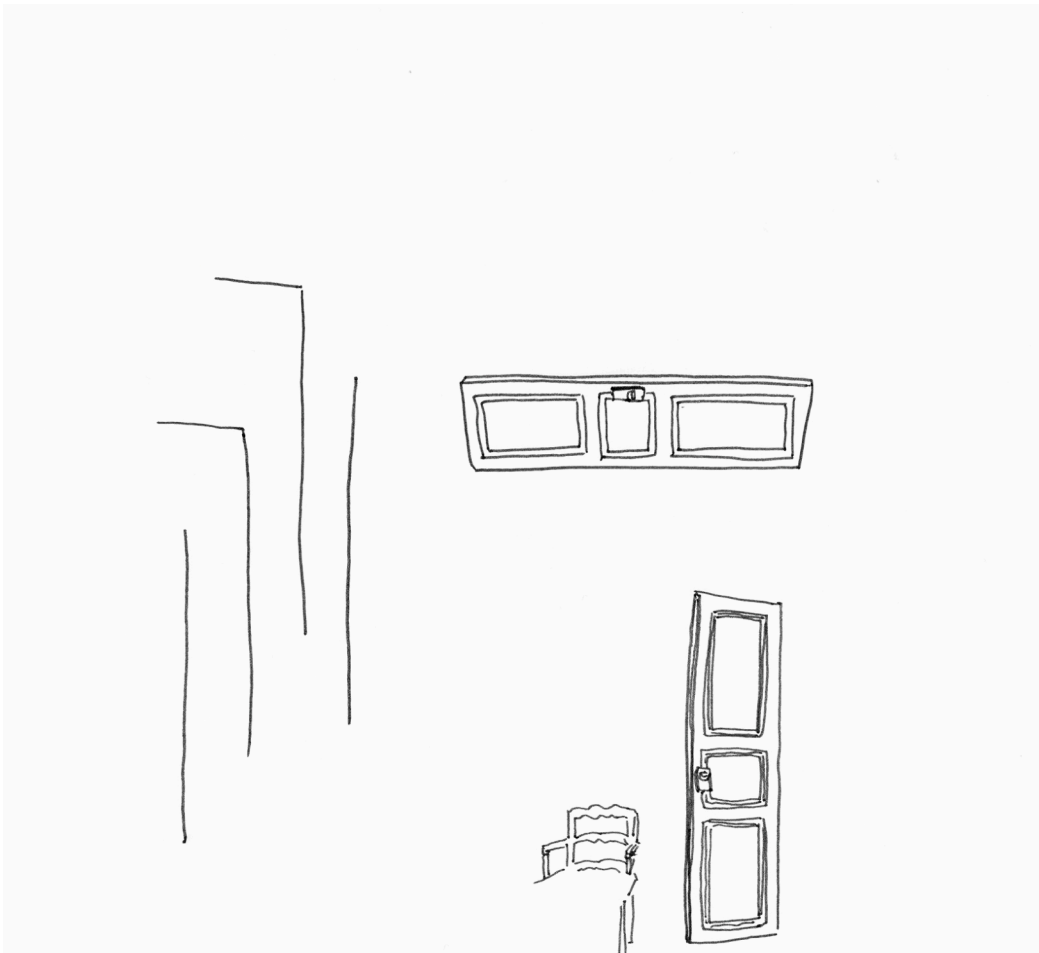
I've Never Been



In Ruins #2



Separation / Mammography — Left Breast



The Chair Is Really the Door



Time Dress



Window Lightning Geranium

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Shane Allison**'s art and writing have graced the pages of *Noisy Rain*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Cream City Review*, *Bellwether Review* and a plethora of others. His latest poetry collection, *Turbulent* is out from Hysterical Books. Shane is at work on a new collection and always working on new art.

**Paul atten Ash** is the pseudonym of Bristol, UK-based writer and art-photographer Paul Nash, whose work is fuelled by his response to navigating the climate tragedy and attendant grief/moral injury as a father to two children, giving voice to the other-than-human in an age of exhaustion – ecopoetics as a creative act of resistance. His art-photography has been published by Acid Bath Publishing, *Acropolis Journal*, *Dark Mountain*, Deep Adaptation Forum, *Oscillations*, Swim Press, and *Where Meadows*. Paul is currently curating a multi-contributor contrapuntal ecopoetry project, 'We Dream in Green'.

Recent awards include: Oppenheim–John Downes Memorial Trust (2024). Recent competition placings include: Classical Association (HC, 2024); The Winged Muse (Winner, 2025). Recent prize shortlistings include: Alpine Fellowship (2023); Ginkgo (2022, 2021); Hexham (2023). For links to Paul's published work, visit [campsite.bio/northseanavigator](https://campsite.bio/northseanavigator) and follow him online at: IG/Threads @north\_sea\_navigator and Bsky @northseanavigator.bsky.social

**Patrick Autréaux** is a French writer, living between Paris and Cambridge (USA). The view of illness as an inner experience informs his first cycle of writing, ending with *Se survivre* (Verdier). He is the author of dozens of books and articles in French. His novel *L'Époux* was published by Gallimard in 2025, soon to be followed by *Avenue des Amériques* later this year.

*Dans la vallée des larmes* is available in English at UIT Books (USA), and his fiction and essays have appeared in *Asymptote*, *AGNI*, *Socrates on the Beach*, *The Kenyon Review* (forthcoming, Winter 2026) and elsewhere.

Recently, *Pussyboy* (Verdier), a novel about an erotic passion, was translated in Spanish at Canta Mares (Mexico).

**Katie Beswick** is a writer from south east London. Recent poems appear in *Under the Radar*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *And Other Poems and Rattle*. Her collection, *Plumstead Pram Pushers* was a chapbook imprint from *Red Ogre Review*. Her hybrid work of poetry, memoir, arts criticism and social history is *Slags on Stage: Class, Sex, Art and Desire in British Culture* (Routledge 2025).

**Anna Bowles** is a freelance editor and activist who divides her time between London and Ukraine. She began writing poetry in response to Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Her work has been published in *Magma*, *Orbis*, *The Four-Faced Liar*, *Poetry Salzburg* and others, as well as placing in a number of UK competitions.

**Walter Burgess** and **Marietta Morry** are Canadian. In addition to stories by Ms Harag (twenty-five have been published or will appear), they also translate fiction by five other Hungarian authors; many of these translations have appeared in literary reviews in six countries, including in *The Stinging Fly*, *The New England Review*, *The Southern Review* and *Ploughshares*. Gábor Szántó's book *1945 and Other Stories* (six of the eight stories in it translated by them) was published in 2024.

**Daniel Cartwright-Chaouki** (he/him) is a gardener and writer from Birmingham, England. He writes about trees and plants (mostly) and people (sometimes) and other unimportant things. His work has featured widely both in print and online including *Brand Magazine*, *Pulp Poets Press*, *Bodies on Bodies Magazine*, *Lunar Sea Literary*, *Fixator Press*, *Password*, *The Lake*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, *Coin Operated Press*, *Sextet*, *Alocasia* and *100subtexts magazine*.

**Megan Cassells** is an experimental prose and creative nonfiction writer based in Lincolnshire. She is Assistant Editor in Chief of *The Lincoln Review* and holds an MA in Creative Writing from University of Lincoln, and a BA Hons in Film from Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. She is the recipient of the University of Lincoln's Outstanding Achievement Award in Creative Writing, has taught a Masterclass in International Journals through The CW Workshop, and has work forthcoming in *Vellichor Literary*. She is currently working on her first novel, rooted in Irish history and mythology. She is half Irish and half English and blames this for her exorbitant consumption of tea.

**Alexandra Corrin-Tachibana** is a Pushcart Prize nominated poet and author of *Sing me Down from the Dark* (Salt publications; 2022). She is a tutor for The Poetry Business and The Poetry School and has Master's degrees in Writing Poetry and in Japanese Language. She is widely published and her recent work has been published in *Pennine Platform*, *Magma*, *The North*, *The Pomegranate London* and online in *The Interpreter's House*, *And Other Poems*, and *Dust Poetry* magazine. Her second collection *Skinship* is out with Salt in September 2026.

**Emily Cotterill** is a Cardiff based poet originally from Alfreton, Derbyshire. Her debut collection *Significant Wow* (Seren) was published in 2025 following the 2019 pamphlet *The Day of the Flying Ants* (smith|doorstop) which was part of Carol Ann Duffy's Laureate's Choice series. Emily's poetry explores themes of place, pop-culture, and storytelling.

**Alton Melvar M. Dapanas** (they/them) is an essayist, poet, and translator from the southern Philippines. Author of three books of prose-poems and lyric essays including *M of the Southern Downpours* (Australia: Downingfield Press, 2024) and *Towards a Theory on City Boys* (UK: Newcomer Press, 2021), their works have been published globally, from South Africa to Japan, France to Singapore, and translated into Chinese, Damiá, German, and Swedish. Their original writings and translations have appeared in *World Literature Today*, *BBC Radio 4*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Sant Jordi Festival of Books*, *Wasafiri*, *The White Review*, and the anthologies *Infinite Constellations* (University of Alabama Press) and *He, She, They, Us: Queer Poems* (Macmillan UK). Formerly with *Creative Nonfiction* magazine, they have been nominated twice to the Pushcart Prize for their lyric essays. Find more at <https://linktr.ee/samdapanas>.

**Edoardo De Falchi** is a collage artist, illustrator and freelance displacer. After philosophy studies, working in the podcast production field. Website: <https://www.1nd3x.com>

**Laine Derr** has published interviews with Carl Phillips, Ross Gay, Ted Kooser, and Robert Pinsky. Work has appeared or is forthcoming from *EPOCH*, *Lana Turner*, *The Amistad*, *ROPES*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Chapter House*, *ZZZZYVA*, and elsewhere.

**María Castro Domínguez** is author of *A Face in The Crowd*, her Erbacce-press winning collection. Winner of The Plaza Poetry Prize 2024 judged by Pascale

Petit. She was highly commended in last year's Red Shed Poetry Competition. Nominated for The Forward Poetry Prize and highly commended in the Ware's Poetry Competition. Her poems have appeared in many anthologies and journals.

**Umma Habiba** is a poet and theater activist from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her debut book of poetry *Ghashe Ghashe Roktoful (Bloodflowers in the Grass)* was published in 2022. As a development professional, Umma has worked with Rohingya refugees, children with special needs and the underprivileged indigenous people in the country's hill tracts. Her poems in English translation have been published in *Agni*, *Copper Nickel*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Cambridge Review of Books*, *The Malahat Review* and elsewhere. At present, she is working on her second book of poems and the debut novel.

**Bex Hainsworth** is a poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Rialto*, *Poetry Wales*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *Magma*. She is the author of two pamphlets: *Walrussey* (The Black Cat Poetry Press, 2023) and *Circulaire* (Written Off Publishing, 2025).

**Anita Harag** was born in Budapest in 1988. Her first short stories that appeared in magazines earned her several literary awards and prizes. In 2020 she was the winner of the Margó Prize, awarded to the best first time fiction author of the year, for her first volume of short stories. Her second volume of stories, including this one, came out in September 2023.

**Quamrul Hassan** is an MFA Candidate at the University of Arkansas's Program in Creative Writing and Translation. His poems and translations have been published or are forthcoming in *Agni*, *Copper Nickel*, *Columbia Journal*, *Mantis*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Cambridge Review of Books*, *The Queens Review*, *The Malahat Review*, *World Literature Today*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Harf*, *Moon City Review*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Third Wheel*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, *Usawa Literary Review*, *Prachya Review*, and *Star Literature Review*. He is also the author of the haiku collections *Spring Moon* (2011) and *Hyaku Haiku* (2016). His haiku and tanka have appeared in *Asahi Shimbun*, *Mainichi*, *Frogpond*, *Modern Haiku*, *The Heron's Nest*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Laurels*, *Failed Haiku*, *Ribbons*, and *Wales Haiku Journal*.

**Obiageli A. Iloakasia** was born and raised in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria. She is the recipient of the 2024 Creative Writing Award for Poetry at the University of

Memphis. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Rumpus*, *Bellingham Review*, *Good River Review*, *3rd Wednesday*, *Soundings East*, and elsewhere. Iloakasia is a former Senior Poetry Editor for the Pinch and the Issue 24 Guest Poetry Editor for *The Shallow Tales Review*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Memphis, Tennessee. Find her on IG and X: @obby\_iloakasia.

**Laurie Kuntz** is a four time Pushcart Prize nominee and two time Best of the Net Nominee. In 2024, she won a Pushcart Prize. She published seven books of poetry. Her latest book published in 2025 is *Balance*, published by Moonstone Arts Center. In 2026, her eighth book, *Shelter In Place* will be published by Shanti Arts Press. She holds an MFA in poetry from Vermont College. Her work has been widely rejected and at times widely published in *Gyroscope Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *One Art*, *Sheila Na Gig*, *SWWIM*, and other journals and anthologies. Her themes come from working with Southeast Asian refugees, living as an expatriate in Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Brazil, and raising a husband and son. Happily retired, she lives in an endless summer state of mind. Visit her at: <https://lauriekuntz.myportfolio.com/home-1>

**Maitreyabandhu** is a Buddhist teacher and writer. He has published three collections with Bloodaxe Books: *The Crumb Road* (2013), a PBS Recommendation, *Yarn* (2015), and *After Cézanne* (2019). He was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order in 1990 and lives and works at the London Buddhist Centre. *A Commonplace Book* is forthcoming.

**Lance Mazmanian** is a word/visual author: Random House with Harlan Ellison, got coffee as payment. 96+ publications since 2025, *Fiction On the Web UK*, Poetry Super Highway, more. 2026 Pushcart nom. Nicknamed 'Lance Vegas!!' by DP Janusz Kamiński; screenwriting gigs coming 2026. Leonard Cohen (RIP) wanted chapbooks with Mazmanian. Til 'Scrapbook File' imploded.

**Sedrick A. Miles** is an American writer, visual artist, and community-based researcher based in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, after a decade living outside the United States. His work moves between Brazil and the United States and explores fatherhood, disability, migration, and the everyday politics of care across the Black Atlantic. He is the founder of Atlantic Archives Global Education and works at the intersection of visual anthropology, archival studies, and public scholarship.

**Franz Jørgen Neumann's** stories have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Water~Stone Review*. His work can be read at [www.storiesandnovels.com](http://www.storiesandnovels.com).

**Itto** and **Mekiya Outini** write about America, Morocco, and all those caught in between. They've published in magazines around the world and received support from the MacDowell Foundation, the Edward Albee F. Foundation, the Fulbright Program, and others. They're currently collaborating on several books and co-hosting a podcast about literature and the arts, Let's Have a Renaissance (<https://www.youtube.com/@TheDateKeepers>).

**Caroline Price** is a violinist and retired teacher living in Suffolk. She has published short fiction and four collections of poetry, most recently *Picnic on the Rocks, with Frog* (Shoestring Press), and her first novel was longlisted for the 2023 Bridport Prize.

**Bethany Rivers** has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and has two chapbooks: *the sea refuses no river*, from Fly on the Wall Press, and *Off the wall*, from Indigo Dreams. She is the author of *Fountain of Creativity: Ways to nourish your writing*, from Victorina Press. She teaches creative writing courses and mentors writers one to one. [www.bethanyrivers.com](http://www.bethanyrivers.com)

**Tobias Ryan** is a writer, translator and editor from Wales, UK, living in France. His writing and translations have appeared in *TOLKA Journal*, *Hyperion Magazine*, *3:AM Magazine* and elsewhere. A novella, *GLANTZ* was published by Equus Press in 2025. Alongside Yanina Spizzirri, he is Editor-in Chief of *minor literature[s]*.

**Jena Schmitt** is a writer and artist who lives in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, with her children. Her poems, short fiction and drawings have appeared in print and online journals in Canada, the U.K. and the U.S., and her essays on writers, artists and writer-artists have been published in *PN Review*. Her drawings – or what she likes to call 'image poems' – speak to her writing, and her writing speaks to her drawings, one is integral to the development and sustainability of the other. They chatter and carry on in the most fantastical manner, visualizing the verbal and verbalizing the visual, sometimes intertwining and overlapping – images, snippets of text, connecting ideas, disintegrating lines. Support from the Ontario Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Writers' Trust of Canada and the Access

Copyright Foundation's Marian Hebb Fellowship have been vital to the development of these projects. Schmitt is interested in the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk, or 'total work of art', and is currently working on image poems, image-poem drawing boxes, a 75-foot-long narrative scroll drawing, essays, nonfictional prose poetry and poetry. For more information about her work visit [www.jenaschmitt.com](http://www.jenaschmitt.com).

**McLord Selasi** is a Ghanaian writer, poet, public health researcher, and performing artist. His recent work has been accepted for publication in *Panorama*, *Apricot Press*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *Shoegaze Literary*, *Trampoline*, *Rough Diamond*, *Isele Magazine*, *Subliminal Surgery*, *Eunoiia Review*, *Poetry Journal*, *Graveside Press*, and elsewhere. He tweets at @MclordSela64222.

**Gianni Skaragas** is attracted to alchemical hugs, flowers that bloom at night, stray dogs (and humans), extraits de parfum and the strangeness of feeling too much. He works in the spaces where fiction and poetry intersect. His writing has appeared in *Wonderlust*, *World Literature Today*, *American Chordata*, *Crannóg*, *Spilled Milk*, *LCB Diplomatie*, and elsewhere. He received awards and fellowships in the United States, Europe and Asia. In 2020 his play 'The Lady of Ro' was presented in Los Angeles at the Center for the Art of Performance UCLA. In 2018 he was the recipient of the Copper Nickel Editors' Prize in Prose. He's a Fulbright Fellow.

**Merna Dyer Skinner** is a poet, editor, and communications consultant living in Portland, OR. Her poems appear in numerous US and international journals, including: *SWWIM*, *Whale Road Review*, *Rust & Moth*, *ONE ART*, and *The Baltimore Review*, among others, and six anthologies. Her second chapbook *Things Hidden in My Throat* is a finalist in Comstock Review's 2025 Poetry Chapbook Prize. Merna is the editor of the forthcoming *Casting Lines*, *An Anthology of Fishing Poems* by Female Poets. An avid photographer, Merna will travel to Africa, her seventh continent, in 2026.

**Barnaby Smith** is a poet, critic, journalist and musician based near Sydney, Australia. His poetry is widely published globally, including recently by Pamenar Press, the *Amsterdam Review*, *3AM* and *Stand*, as well as *Best Australian Poems*, *Cordite*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Australian Poetry Journal* and numerous others. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney.

**Tim Suermondt's** seventh full-length book of poems *A Day In The Republic*

came out in late 2025 from Dos Madres Press. He has published in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Georgia Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Stand Magazine*, *Smartish Pace*, *Barrow Street*, *Amsterdam Review* and *Plume*, among many others. He lives in Cambridge (MA) with his wife, the poet Pui Ying Wong.

**Anisha Tandon** is a poet born in Bombay and based in NYC. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Angel Food Magazine*, *Pile Press*, and *Allium*. She reads for *The Adroit Journal*. You can find her at <https://www.anishatandon.com/>.

**Ben Verinder** holds an MA in Writing Poetry from The Poetry School and Newcastle University. His debut pamphlet, *Botanicals*, won the Frosted Fire Firsts competition in 2021. His second, *We Lost The Birds*, was published by Nine Pens in 2023. His third, *How to Save a River*, won the Michael Marks Environmental Poet of the Year 2024/5 prize. His poems have been published widely in journals and magazines.

**Amanda Yskamp** is an author and collage artist. Her work has been published in such magazines as *Threepenny Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *Boxcar Review*, *Rattapallax*, and *Caketrain*. Poetry editor and frequent cover artist for WordRunner E-Chapbooks, she lives on the 10-year flood plain of the Russian River, teaching writing from her online classroom.



Fog is just the air  
trying to hold itself.  
You are just a body  
doing the same.

— from McLord Selasi:  
'How to Speak in Fog'