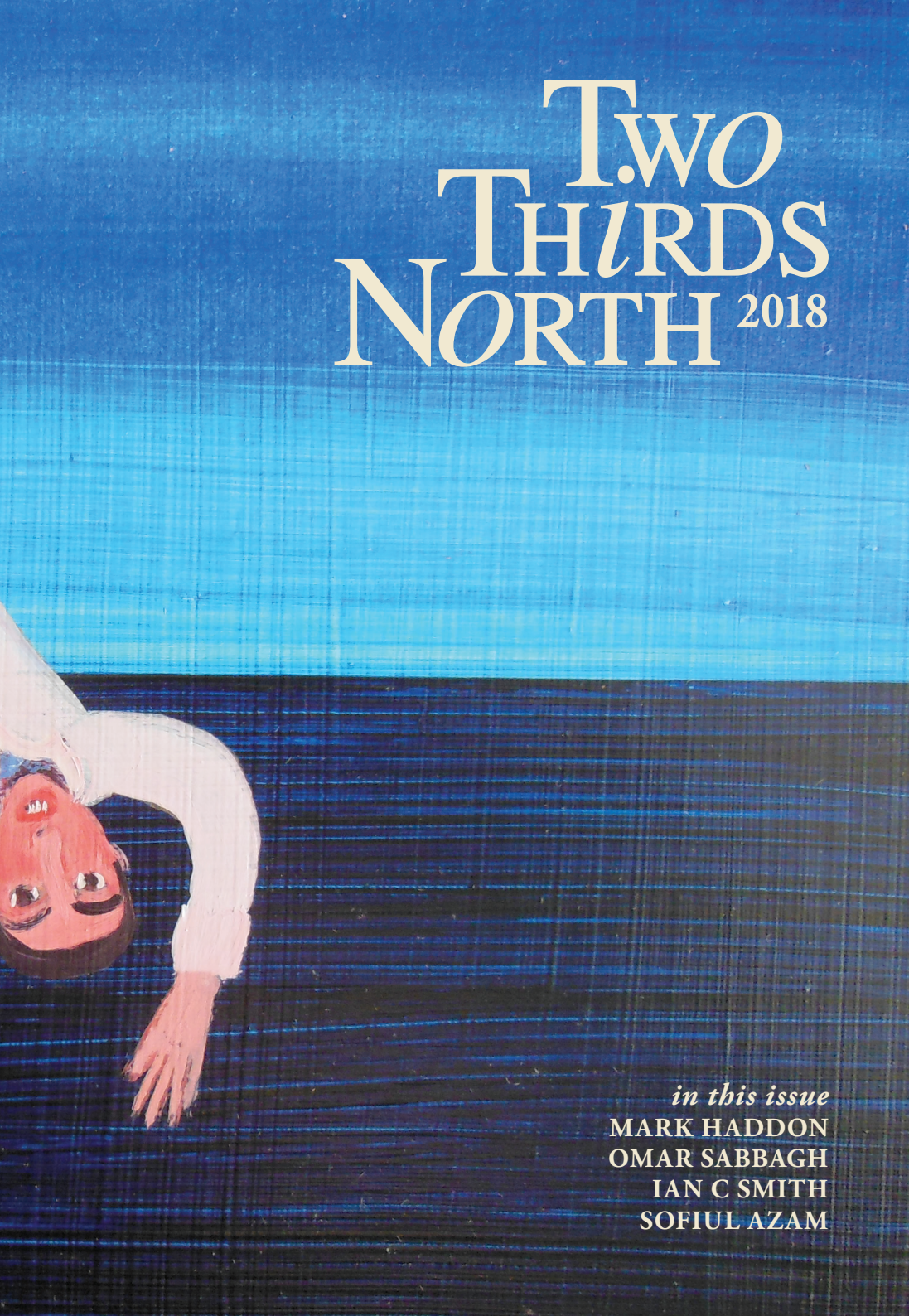
Two Thirds North 2018



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TWO THIRDS NORTH

2018

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Editor's Foreword

It is apt that we start this year's *Two Thirds North* with works caught in the maelstrom of the current world. *The Maelstrom's Current* borrows its title from Jonathan Greenhause's poem and suggests the tug of reality which calls us to live and engage in this world, despite its political tribalism, its distractions of fake news, its moral hypocrisy and its violence. The assemblage here is broad: an older American seeks sex and possibly love in Bogata, Colombia. A patron to Disneyland contemplates its peculiar language. And a father of a dead son cries out in rage to the God who putatively incites Jihadists to terrorist acts.

As an expressly transnational journal, we are always interested in cross-border and cross-cultural themes. In the section *Where Are You Now?* we begin with a poem where the narrator finds herself in an unfamiliar Stockholm, hearing her mother's familiar Tagalog language, but still unable to speak it. Omar Sabbagh writes a sonnet of living in Dubai and longing for England, while Chris Somos tells a story of an increasingly senile old woman, exiled from her childhood home and family in Smyrna by the Greco-Turkish War. There are several works on spatial displacement and lostness in the world that is utterly accessible, but this year we also had an unusual number of submissions about specific localities, from a set of Eastern European vignettes by Jeff Alfier, to an eco-critical ode to the Florida gulf coast by Thomas Lavelle. Against the inherent reductions of globalism, place must maintain its authenticity.

Love and its Discontents brings us to that ubiquitous theme of need and anxiety. Love controls and taints a relationship between mother and daughter, or is serenaded by a passing one-armed fisherman, or is only recognized in its loss. The section closes with two ekphrastic poems by Dan Encarnacion that imagine dialogues rising from paintings of Hugh Steers that touch on love in the face of AIDS.

What Else in the End? is about loss and death, whether of people or of places. Here we borrow the section title from a line from Ian C Smith's elegy to a friend, but the question can also be posed against the loss of a forest or hotel to a fire. Here I insert my own voice, in grief over the loss of my brother in a surfing accident this year. But we close the section with an evocative call by John Sibley Williams *to stay*, despite the hurt and grief, not "to break this treaty" with life.

And so we transition into *And Yet, And Yet*, taking a line from Omar Sabbagh, to suggest the beauty and wonder we are left with, the hope, despite the pains of loss and of love. Here we include the awe of a young American tourist who is just beginning to understand how the world extends so much beyond her, and the notion of newness that comes with imaginative rebirth in a poem by Enaiê Azambuja.

Paul Schreiber

THE MAELSTROM'S CURRENT

2017

ROB COOK

The first day
of the year
feels like a militia
of sty-still Sundays—

a man betrayed
by football standardization
when he lived as a stick-in-a-chair
and could not measure church mischief
or cheering squad depth.

Morning arrives
with humbug
and deleted winter—
the bed,
the window,
the life,
all pigeon-gray.

Forty-four degrees by noon.

A pile of excreta
on the cloudy sidewalk—
whoever didn't pick it up
will be forced to sniff and chew,
sniff and chew
and identify each room
where the barking still smells.

Hours of people go by without
that tiny brown tenement
moving,
no one noticing its windows and blood-
flecked rooms unfocused and failing
same as any other meal
that doesn't move.

And before the Hells Angels
Headquarters finishes
leaking
into the street,
a man who survives again
and again the approximation
of the fun of alcohol
bends over to pick
at another bouquet of rose chocolates.

"I don't care what they say,
it's still the same damn year," he says
and stuffs his pockets—

already filled with undigested pennies—

until the trees walk away
and the puddles in the sky begin to stain.

Gazing into his shoes
that hold the grime's glare,
the man, who looks
like me, only an unmeasured
year
or two away,

begs the dead pieces
of the dog
        for drugs
that keep the puddles
                from filling
with a bloated Christmas light's
advanced scarring,

which today looks like a child
(from one of the newer
screen cliques) asking:
        WITSF,
                WITSF,
                        WITSF

a not-yet-sarcastic cry for help

heard by the men who own
the surrounding bottle-melt as:
        What is the sky for,
                what is the sky for,
                        what is the sky for?

The Tub Suds Soap Opera

RICH MURPHY

> … living always means building spheres, both on a small and a large scale, humans are the beings that establish globes and look out to horizons.
>
> — Peter Sloterdijk

In the bubble-bath each soapy globe
magnifies and small desires seem
(pleasure now and now and now)
until the champagne campaign fizzles still
with an old promise: one flute filled with birds.

Tepid and discolored, b-minor freedom muddies
with mini-lives coated in film negative:
liberty lather blather.
A baby cries in the backyard.
A new car sits in the driveway.
The house owns for 30 years.
The dog froths at the messenger.

Bathers run round, circumspect about pins,
about porcupines, to hose down
soap-balloon lovers and patio grillers.
A chill towels with goose bumps:
Flip flop pop.

According to the International Institute
for the Wind, the dents and dings
in trumpet bells blurt out,
“only accordions spring back to life.”

S-Stad

ANDRIA NYBERG FORSHAGE

The people of *S-stad*
        were each one a death
swallowing insects
        on the branches of birch trees.

As roofs came to slope,
        the people of *S-stad*
flew over the bricks,
        pausing to take in the blue-grey

signals of leaf rot.
        The branches, too, slackened
as bus stops sped past.
        Each one a murder:

You,
        gnawing on paint;
me,
        leaning on the rails,
passed by
        a clouded beat.

While some went on
        from that evening, each one
an underground tremor,
        the city stayed close
to warm our shoulders

with grass.

Red aluminium
shone on facades, as *S-stad*
leapt into autumn.
The pigeons, too, had gone,
their coins falling
from rooftops behind them.

The people of *S-stad*
were each one a regression
to our unfinished game:
Waiting in the grey-purple
missed-classes morning,
a fly circling us both.

Me? Comparing
the windows;
you, throwing
the rocks. Come,

settle with me, as *S-stad*
goes blue with the heat.

Bad News from Bogota a polyptych

CHUCK TEIXEIRA

Panel I: The Boy Who Cried Wolf

Finally, one Thursday, four weeks after I had started work in Rosales, someone on the TransMilenio cruised me. Seated behind a wire cart half-filled with plastic jugs, he rubbed his crotch like a genie's lamp and slid his tongue over his lips. He was short. His feet barely touched the floor. He had a sweet, almost handsome face and thin hair gelled in place since first communion — a popular look among Colombian straight guys. I half-feared he was mocking me. But so overt and persistent, he drew me, through several other standing passengers, to where he had moved and waited ready to leave at the next stop. I scrawled my name and phone number on the back of one of the cards I carry to introduce people to the Lotus Sutra, a form of proselytizing that, I had been promised, would fulfill all my desires. His name was Alvaro, and he was pleased to meet me, he said, wrestling his cart over the bus steps and down to the sidewalk.

Hours later, I received a message from Alvaro instructing me to meet Saturday afternoon in Chapinero. We'd split the cost of an inexpensive motel at 57th and Carrera 12, an intersection, it turned out, that did not exist. I found a café with Alvaro inside, sheltered from Bogota's incessant drizzle but disappointed that the place served only chilled bottled drinks instead of hot coffee.

Around the corner was a white-gated building that Alvaro thought might be the motel. His thinking sufficed. The room barely did. I'd played in other Chapinero motels that showed some pride in their squalor. In this one, the bed was about as wide as an ambulance litter. The sheets and stubborn stains on them were worn so thin I could see as well as hear the cracked plastic mattress. I vowed immediately, that if my hide escaped infection, I would never risk exposing it again.

Despite our circumstances, Alvaro chattered about his soccer league and the artisanal yogurt he produced in his kitchen in La Victoria and then hauled in his cart to sell door-to-door in Nogal and Chico, not actually getting near the doors of individual apartments but selling to porters, security guards and the clientele of neighborhood shops. Quite frequently, he would pause mid-sentence (did I know there were refrigerators in most beauty parlors?) then stand on his toes and kiss my mouth slowly while I rehearsed excuses to get the sex behind us without touching the bed or removing my clothes. After a while, his kissing powered through my fears, and my rehearsing moved from an apology to him for my haste to an explanation for my physician and friends about why I hadn't run. Carefully, his bright eyes never leaving mine, he set his wet shoes in a corner of the room and folded his shirt, trousers, underwear and socks on top. Then he climbed onto the bed and displayed himself gleefully.

"Please let me touch you," I said.

He smiled. "Touch me, touch me."

Although we'd rented the room for only four hours, by the time we left, night had fallen, and so had I. We walked to the Exito supermarket at 53rd and Caracas. I needed bottled water, I told him. I didn't want to say I would also search for lice shampoo.

"Are you sure you can get home by yourself." This from a man almost a foot shorter than I am. He was 43, young enough to be my son but old enough to stop questioning his attraction to older men. I assured him I could handle the ten-minute walk back to a house I shared with people I barely knew. After we shook hands, he strode up the hill toward Septima. With his small, determined steps, he looked both strong and brittle. On Septima, he would catch the L80 south to Portal 20 de Julio. There he would wait in the rain, maybe another half hour, for the last shuttle to La Victoria or to a neighborhood even farther east, where orange cinder-block walls keep the slopes from sliding onto the streets.

In the motel, he had warned me that his father's death had made him head of a large family. Sunday morning Mass with his mother, weekend soccer matches, and six-day weeks working his yogurt enterprise meant we would have little time together. Nonetheless, he added, we should think of ourselves as engaged to be married unless — here his voice cracked — like the Americans he had heard about, I would soon drift from him to another man.

"I can be faithful," I assured him.

"Why are you single now?"

Before I could answer, he brought his face close to mine, pushed his tongue out the side of his mouth and rubbed it across my lips.

Truth is I had been faithful to others. But whatever

powers fidelity possessed hadn't prevented my being dumped. Maybe they had rewarded me with dumping, so I could be Alvaro's clean catch.

Three months later, it's not how seldom I see Alvaro that bothers me. An afternoon every week or two, each unfurling some unexpected splendor (or at least exquisite dairy) can illuminate the times between. What bothers me is that, weary of my rhapsodies about other men, my friends in the States believe that I will soon dismiss this relationship too. I probably hadn't helped my case when, to these same friends, in phone calls between my meeting Alvaro on TransMilenio and our hours at the motel, I had referred to him as "the public transport dwarf."

Korean war brides find themselves in New Jersey and Japanese farmers end up in Alberta. Sometimes we dig long to find treasure in the universe. I had to bore through to South America. The Lotus Sutra is pretty clear about our desires' being fulfilled, but less so about anyone's believing us, even if we heralded the stunning form of their fulfillment, the slow devouring by joy, the being swallowed whole.

Panel II: The Way of the Cross

It was Good Friday, already raining at five in the morning. Paco had come up empty in his search for fares around the after-hours clubs in Chapinero. He headed south through Marly and Teusaquillo. Nothing but the pulled-down gates of shuttered shops. Here and there, homeless couples asleep on sidewalks, bodies half-sheltered under narrow eaves.

Along Carrera 13, an old fat guy was flagging down one of the few buses that ran early on feast days. In its wake,

the bus splashed him. He bent over and was inspecting the damage to his shoes and trousers when Paco offered his services.

As the guy hauled himself into the back seat and barked his destination, "Centro Mayor," Paco recognized him as the owner of a bakery in Galerias. Paco had patronized that bakery until — and should have torched it — when a sign went up in the front window telling customers not to give money to panhandlers in front of the shop. Paco had lived in San Francisco before gang involvement forced him to flee. There, friends and family were always complaining about food stamps, medical care and housing. But there the system could be gamed.

"Papi, you certain Centro Mayor is open today?" Paco said. "Certainly, not this early."

Without meeting Paco's glance, the baker snapped in a louder voice, "Centro Mayor! Mind your own business and do your job."

"Yes, sir," Paco said. Night school and work for two years in a restaurant in the Excelsior had been the happiest period of Paco's life. He loved the way a waitress could repeat a customer's order and turn it into a threat. "One Centro Mayor coming up," Paco crowed and gunned the engine in a way that he immediately regretted might raise the old guy's guard.

"You can leave me at the west entrance to the TransMilenio station on South 38th Street," the baker clarified as though further specifying his destination would ensure safe arrival.

After a silence that Paco hoped would ease tension, he asked whether the baker ever used Uber.

"I prefer Uber," the baker blurted. "Except they're seldom as reliable as professional drivers. I contacted Uber this morning, but the guy kept me waiting twenty minutes, which is intolerable even when it's not raining."

Cabbies and Ubers could never be friends, but Paco had driven Uber upon first returning to Bogota until he wrecked his brother's car in a road-rage incident. Customers like the baker just got worse over time.

"It's disgusting." The baker seemed to regain his original arrogance as he gestured broadly toward the street.

"Yeah," Paco rolled his eyes. "A twenty-minute wait is disgusting."

"Not that," the baker said. "I mean yes that, but also the homeless people everywhere in Bogota."

"A guy, like you, who runs his own business, must have solutions even for problems as big as this."

"How do you know I run my own business?"

"Every cabbie is a good judge of character, no? I mean, before today, the problem hadn't escaped your attention, had it?"

"Of course not.'

"And…?"

On the sidewalks, a few homeless men were beginning to stir, backs against stone walls as they smoked a first cigarette, had a first swig or otherwise reestablished ranks in their respective packs. Some stepped carefully over guys still asleep, guys who would wake up later, guys who would not wake up again. Beyond Paco's understanding — but not beyond his respect — there survived, among this pack at least, a comradery and cheer that squalor had not yet crushed.

The baker had a different response. "What can these people be smiling about?"

"I don't know," Paco said. "Maybe the Easter dinners some of the parishes will be hosting."

"They should not be feeding the idle," the baker pronounced. "It just discourages them from challenging their misfortune."

"Right," Paco said. "These people can't absorb any more discouragement."

"Sometimes I think about Meseta, Vista Hermosa, all the places the armed rebels used to control," the baker said. "There's so much reconstruction needed. Why not round up the homeless and ship them to work camps there?"

"Willingly? Unwillingly?" Paco probed.

"What difference does unwillingly make? What chances do they have staying here?"

"There are government services."

The baker scoffed. "Social services here are inadequate."

"No," Paco snapped. "Social services here are homicide."

Two homeless men looked up startled as Paco's taxi turned sharply into their side street, continued half a block, then pulled abruptly to the curb. Paco jumped out, opened the rear door and, after some struggle, wrestled the old, fat baker into the open, smashed his head repeatedly against the sidewalk, and when the pavement stained red, got back in the cab and drove away.

"Heavy karma," the older of the homeless men smiled and rubbed the hardening cock of the younger fellow next to him. "Fatso must have had it coming."

"No, *patron*," the younger man pleaded. "That Paco has got to control his temper, or he'll get all of us into trouble."

"Maybe. Maybe not." The older man scanned the clouded sky. "More lousy weather for another lousy weekend."

"No complaining, *patron*. It destroys your fortune. We have each other now. That's more than I ever expected."

The older man nodded then stood up and walked toward the baker's still warm-corpse. "And, if we're lucky, a smartphone and wallet too."

Panel III: Upper Register

As soon as I heard the shrew, I wanted to kill her. The whine, pitched higher and higher, straining to break free from any responsibility for her own suffering but, again and again, falling just short of an orbit that transcended the fatigue and cynicism of the passengers from whom she was begging.

She wasn't the only recurring nuisance on the TransMilenio, but most worthless panhandlers acknowledged they were pests. "A good evening to you, ladies and gentlemen. A very, very, very good evening to all of you. Profound apologies for interrupting you and profound prayers that our Lord and Savior will flood your lives with blessing even if you don't give me a cent." This opening followed by a sad history, often recounted with admirable economy, a few irrepressible tears, the direct solicitation of cash, then a closing apology and benediction suggesting an increasingly rare purity of heart that would make you regret not giving something even if you hadn't been touched by any other thing the parasite had said.

Not the shrew. No greeting, no acknowledgment of any human life other than the unbearable one that propelled her down the aisles. To her, the passengers were mere conduits between the ears she assailed and the pockets, wallets or purses clenching money that decency demanded be hers.

Of course, other panhandlers were despicable in their own ways. Take the ones who presented themselves as servants of God. They had been sent to remind us that the misfortune that flooded their own lives might at any moment overwhelm ours too. Simultaneously, they admonished that the end of the world was fast approaching, certainly faster than the TransMilenio, and

that the last judgment would be especially unpleasant for people who were indifferent to the suffering of others. No pious exhortations from the shrew, just misery drilling for miles into our skulls.

To be sure, among panhandlers on the TransMilenio, self-righteousness erupted in a variety of implausible ways. Take the ragged fellow who had lost his job because the police refused to return his driver's license. I waited for details of the injustice inflicted on this hard-working citizen, something to keep my suspicious mind from speculating about laws he may have broken or injuries his industrious vehicle and he may have caused. Alas, nothing but feigned indignation. I would have bought the guy a new license if his car had rolled over the shrew and crushed her throat.

Alas, she was still making her way onto crowded boarding platforms and into packed cars. I wonder if things would have turned out differently had I acquired my own Colombian driver's license and used a car for work instead of public transportation. I doubt it. Fate brought the shrew to me on the TransMilenio but just as easily could have thrust her into my path as one of the unicycle riders who juggle bowling pins between traffic lights at intersections. Whatever gender the shrew assumed, I would have heard the same voice approaching the car window and demanding money.

Few things done with clothes on are more fun than observing a panhandler who thinks his pitch can yoke the audience to his will. I am still amused by the one-armed orator who omitted, from both his English and Spanish spiels, the specific circumstances of his deportation from Canada. Nonetheless, he acknowledged, in a flourish of humility, that, like the rest of humanity, he too had made mistakes. Too bad for him, none of the passengers seemed

to believe that the mistakes they had made were deportable offenses.

Unlike the shrew's wailing, the deportee's speech was at least intelligible, even if unpersuasive. What intensified the discomfort she inflicted was her pain, overpowering her words. Although I couldn't understand much that she said, I surmised she was peddling some concoction about an abusive husband in an arranged marriage, or unbearable pain from botched surgery in a public hospital, or rejection by family because she was lesbian. All of it — or any piece of it — just so much being in the wrong place at the wrong time. As heartless as some may think me, I've never arrived unwelcome anywhere or overstayed that welcome. That is why I am at El Dorado airport tactfully awaiting the next plane back to the States, having made a slight, though momentarily messy, improvement to public transportation in Colombia.

I may have wanted to kill the shrew the first time I heard her voice, but for several years she was just a disembodied cry from hell. A few months ago, when I actually spotted the ornery wench through the other passengers standing in the cars, it took all the hypocrisy I could summon to keep from grabbing her throat and maybe end up arriving late for work. However, when I finally lost my job, perhaps for one too-jovial mimed slap across a female colleague's ugly face, my sense of duty no longer impeded my sense of justice. With a fresh supply of leisure, I stalked all the routes on the TransMilenio.

Then finally late one night on a deserted platform at Paloquemao, I cornered the shrew and hurled her under the wheels of the final run of the Number 4. Her final scream was exquisite. Of course, I regret the discomfort and inconvenience to the passengers headed north to Heroes. It's a shame there are so many suicides in Bogota

and so many accidents on the TransMilenio. It's a shame her apotheosis never made the news.

Panel IV: El Rocio

Miquel, my Venezuelan *jefe,* was a gorgeous flirt. He had not come to Colombia as a refugee. He'd merely seized an opportunity outside his country despite his mother's reluctance to see him go. Then as the economy collapsed with the price of oil, he became the life-line for his family, sending essentials not available anywhere at home.

Good looks aside — to the extent one can put looks aside — Miquel was also the only manager who had advocated for my hire, and the only one who greeted me with soft eyes my first day at work. Not surprising, then, that hope soared when he clarified early on that the boys in the photo on his desk were his nephews, not his sons

Anyway, I had not come to Colombia to fall in love. I was going to teach English, learn a little Spanish, then return to California. Early hopes of making it with Miquel and his explicit requests notwithstanding, I refused to commit to more than the six months I had mentioned in my job application.

Then, barely five weeks into the position, I was in Miquel's office, apparently being threatened with dismissal. One of my students, Diego Pedraza, had complained about a conversation in class concerning family and friends. I had asked him how long it was between his first making a friend and his first bringing the guy home to meet family. Diego answered, never, he could never trust people outside his family, so he kept them away from his home.

"What happened next?" Miquel said. The top three buttons of his white shirt were open.

There was a brown leather rosary around his neck, a gift from his current live-in girlfriend, a former student at the school.

"I asked Diego what it meant to be a friend, or have a friend, something like that."

"He said you pressed him on a subject that made him uncomfortable."

"The topic of the exercise was personal relations."

"I know," Miquel said, his eyes not as soft as I'd known them. "I've taught that lesson.

Its purpose is to enable students to discuss in English things they may want to say about family and friends. The purpose is not to pry into parts of life the student is reluctant to discuss in any language."

"A lapse in rapport, sorry." I hoped that concession would satisfy Miquel and end the inquiry. It didn't.

"The school can't afford to lose a single student because of the peculiarities of a temporary teacher, especially a student like Diego Pedraza, whose family is big in public transportation." Peculiarity was a little strong, I thought, or worse, a euphemism. "And I can't afford an interruption in my income," Miquel continued. Suddenly, I was a threat to his job. Then he landed the belly blow. "There are too many people depending on me back home, including my mother, who relies on me for the heart medicine she can't get there."

"I get the picture," I said. My peculiarities were killing his mother.

"One last thing," he said. "The student *thinks* he heard you moaning over his ass when he bent down to pick up the pen you had dropped while illustrating the zero conditional."

"Not true," I said.

"I'll give you a pass this time," Miquel said. "You're

holding up the Novena in the conference room." Then he turned to other work on his desk.

I felt angry and powerless. I had a strike, maybe two, against me though I had done nothing wrong.

I didn't want to go to the Novena. I didn't want to spend who knew how long Christmas Eve hymning and praying before being served a slice of cake with caramel sauce. But I didn't want to bolt either. If I quit or got fired before six months, the school would dock my final paycheck for the amount it had spent on my work visa. Anyway, it was only Miquel who was turning into a jerk. I hadn't yet developed opinions about anyone else on staff.

Although many employees had gone for the day, there were about fifteen people around the conference table. The school director was leading the prayers. Most of the other participants were young women who worked reception and administration and older women who swept and mopped the place. My anger notwithstanding, I didn't have to decide on passing or praying, because the recitation progressed by people raising their hands, getting a nod from the director, and continuing where the previous reader had left off.

About half-an-hour into the service, Miquel joined the group and started leading hymns.

He had a beautiful, strong voice that seemed to animate every one. Even I relaxed and looked for a chance to join in. My chance came in a passage from Vespers with the noun, "el rocio," the rustle of angels' wings. When I finished reciting, I collected a few approving looks, though none from Miquel, who sat with eyes closed, apparently deep in prayer. Here was a guy clearly going to hell, a guy comfortable with both salvation and sin. I enjoyed neither.

After the Novena, Miquel called me into his office again.

"I'm not sure you understood what I was trying to tell you before."

"I think I understood," I said then added, "What should I do to prove it?" Finally, I snapped, "I think you're trying to bully me into a corner where I'll make a terrible mistake."

"I'm not bullying you." Miquel smiled and touched my shoulder. "I'm glad you accepted our offer. But, in the future, bear in mind that Diego Pedraza is a slut. We've all had to do a lot more than moan to keep him happy here."

Phrase book

CARON FREEBORN

At least everyone speaks English
in Disneyland. The kind you can
understand. Walt himself used to
voice both Mickey and Minnie -
you can't get more kosher than that.

London English is hard as no one
rides the District Line lyrically
lines aren't straight enough
trains aren't straight enough
so we read prose over
each other's shoulders
on slightly smeared screens.

In Disneyland, everyone speaks
English that rhymes properly
not disappearing into sloppily-
tuned near-rhymes in fits of pique.

It's hard enough to order a beer
somewhere the words
are fat and tanned
or skinny with tannined moues,
where the consonants form
polyamorous groups
while we cling to
familiar pairs

so Disneyland
seems a better bet.

But then we go, and find skulls
dropped like Reese Cup wrappers,
and that Mickey Mouse has succumbed
to despair – which is the same in any
language. His neck is broken
though at least it's quick
and now no one speaks in Disneyland
except in quotations.

Photo: Steve Armitage

Prayers to the God of Jihadists

SOFIUL AZAM

I

Are you sure you of the Jihadists
aren't the same old One for us commoners?
We never denied our God's gifts.
But we simply refuse yours –
they are bombs wrapped in florid cellophanes.
Mistakenly, my son took one
and got strewn as gravel on streets instead.
I buried one bag of his burst remains
with tears from our ordinary eyes,
with prayers to the One who gave us life.
Oh, one of your gifts killed my only son –
my one seed wasted in the drought of this desert.
Are you sure you are the same as our One?

II

Keep us the destitudes in your prayers.
Oops, I'm sorry you don't have to pray, do you?
Or do you need to pray to the Jihadists
so that they can strike obedience
in every heart like a fiery spark
so that you can prosper in your servants' fear –
a fungus sucking life from the rot?
They say you are the All Powerful
but you need them to protect yourself
from a single infidel's slur on your character.
I'll pray to our God so that you can feel safe.

Because your feeling unsafe doesn't ensure safety to us.
Build your abode with quality bricks and iron.

III

Are you short of your messengers of death?
Are these Jihadists your new recruits,
your new conscripts in time of this prolonging war?
They plant seeds into our daughters by force;
they waste our daughters like weeds
even before our daughters flower.
At times, our daughters are sold in the flower market.
We all feel good our daughters are slowly learning
how to milk each Jihadist's swollen teat.
I pray you recruit some messengers of life.
On these ruins amid a flesh-rotting stench,
we all love life to flower –
the only perfume to nullify all stench.

IV

Our God prefers tolerance to fruits of war.
Cowardice is a vice when bravery means
slitting throats by a sharp knife
on thirsty sands. Maybe you love to see
the body without the head wriggling on blood,
the worthy charm like the mystery of Jesus –
a son conceived without a father's seed,
like the mystery of Moses passing
through a sea thrust open like a watery door
as if a Jihadist's water-divining tongue
parting my daughter's dry cunt lips
for the grand arrival of His Holy Dickhead.
I pray, "Help me understand the mystery of all mysteries."

V

Did you, too, create time like our God did
in six days, only to rest on the seventh?
Time, our sole sympathizer beside God,
– often out of its inspired whimsy – scribbles
on water and even engraves on granites
all of its griefs given as gifts.
The mountains we see over there
are manifestations of its griefs thrust up
instead of molten lava
and the oceans we bathe in are its tears
gathered in a mass. Yet, O God of the Jihadists,
we all pray let us dream of a skyfall
of bliss instead of burst splinters.

VI

We are boulders iced on a rugged mountain,
unaffected for ages unless moved
by blessings like winds or quakes.
I can't stand the stonification of my griefs.
Get me the bliss of breaking into pieces,
dividing the burden. Are you sure
you aren't the old One for us commoners?
I've already forgotten the smell of my children's blood.
Even then our friends with a different God in their hearts
always suspect us. Spare me the pain.
This is my petition. I'm planning to make
another to the God of the Crusaders as well.
I don't know how many Gods I need to pray to.

VII

And the Crusaders vowed revenge on your Jihadists.
Before they get "wasted in the outhouse,"
we don't want to be mistaken for them.
Tell your Jihadists not to lecture us on wreckage,
not to slit the throats of those who write;
writing gets their fingers fit for prayers if you like.
Our God of Peaceful Fragility must have
contrived a simpler scheme of things for us;
don't rebuke our God who cries out like us in despair,
and even gladly accepts defeat to a little rat,
only to make it feel victorious among the ratters.
Are you sure you aren't the same old God?
Am I praying to our dear old God?

To Start Outside of This

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

To feign disinterest; to disentangle oneself;
to be separate & apart;
                to disengage & watch
from a distance; to observe & take notes;

to await at the edges of play; to revel
in the role of outsider;
                to not be affected;
to be impervious; to avoid the conflict;

to scan the battleground from above; to do
a flyover of the disaster;
                to capture images
of the suffering; to record for posterity;

then, slowly, to be drawn into the tumult,
first, a thought/hope
                or a long-lost friend
now pleading, begging for your involvement;

& just this once, you send in a check
or briefly appear,
                saying a few words
of encouragement, or mailing a note

outlining your stance on this grave injustice;
you're at the border
                but feel yourself

sucked into the maelstrom's current,

toes entering the fray, fingers exposed
to cold & frostbite;
                your head's pounding,
screams assailing you for your cowardice,

seeking more commitment, more guts;
your whole life swirls
                in a sea of tattered lives;
& peering back, you spot people you knew

staring at you from their shielded position
to start outside of this.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Pamilyar

DAVEN MCQUEEN

On a side street of Vasastan
where trucks are parked
half on narrow sidewalks
under a flag spun half around its pole
(red and blue, and a yellow sun)
inside a store front otherwise unremarkable
she sits behind a counter with a phone to her ear.

And I hear her from the doorway
k's and ng's in the back of her throat
a surprise of the familiar.

Her voice follows me between aisles
of pancit and lumpia wrappers and biglang sinigang
patis and kanin and bagoong
and I know the words on the packaging
better than I know hers.

It occurs to me as she rings up my items
(still deep in conversation)
that Sweden is familiar because I have spent my life
hanging onto every word of a language I do not
understand.

She hands me my receipt
and the first word in my mouth is one of the few
my mother taught me

(Salamat po)
but then she might respond
and how would I?

So I nod
and I leave her
speaking a language that has always been on the tip
of my tongue.

Among the Pelicans in Pinellas County

THOMAS LAVELLE

High tide and rising,
two browns glide
or flap water low.
Later they'll climb, make
that awkward, perpendicular
dive–near a fall–
to pouch a fish and throw
heads back to swallow.
The gulls group by species
until food's found,
then they screech selfish,
each one lurking
or pecking to win a morsel.

This is the Gulf; garbage
never far. Thirty
feet inland a tractor
sifts litter from sand,
sweeping the beach pristine.
It hasn't reached yet,
or can't reach so near
water, this scrap of glass,
sharp-sided trash
from someone yesterday's
local Landshark
or premium import.

Further west and deeper
a darker hazard lurks,
pumped, spilled, discarded
heedless as drunks break
bottles on night beaches.
The surface is clear today;
the crude carbon has sunk,
leeched into shrimp beds
now and clam sands.
Storms wash it inland
to marshes and wetlands
and onto waterfowl again.

Neersville, Virginia

MARK JACKLEY

It is near nowhere.
The marquee declares,

"Line Dancing Mondays,
Tuesdays Kung-Fu."

I can see the bodies
moving through the little

community center in the hills,
practicing two forms

of self-defense, one
against assailants mostly

dreamed, you would imagine,
the other for the real

intruder, loneliness,
waving through the cornfields,

pulsing in the fingertips
of a weathered man

straightening his bolo tie
in the mirror, slowly

slipping into only
slightly muddy boots.

Midwinter in Rakovnik Nádražní Street

JEFF ALFIER

I resurfaced in this city I'd quit years ago.
Hard weather still dictates geography —
morning is a bottomless gray.
Summers come reluctant, like a child
forced to visit a sick and musty aunt.

In windless hours, a weary sun hedges
its way ahead of my footsteps. I enter
a familiar tavern but no one remembers me.
Through the gate of a hotel courtyard
I watch patrons pour spirits into coffee

while widowers drowse at their tables.
In the falling quiet, wind nudges
forward a chessboard knight, lifts
a beggar's collar. The first snow
moistens the lips of strangers.

Summer Walk in Pristina

JEFF ALFIER

The night falls open to far-off music,
to the ancient streetlights' anemic amber,
and the pungent breath of summer heat.

A widow I've known for decades
brushes crumbs from the kitchen
table handmade by her husband.

She once drank lavishly with friends
in the parlor room that stays unlit now.
Her Skoda sits outside, its wheels stolen.

A soldier debarks at Kosovo station.
I knew he was her son, fog drawn over
him like the sea, his uniform dark as dusk.

I'd've called out, but his head was down,
and he shed the street through a tavern door,
to men clinking bottles with laughter.

In a second-story window of Hotel Lyon
a woman sees me watching her unstrap her bra.
Her fists slam the heavy curtains shut.

Two welders repair an iron balcony.
In the blue glare of acetylene heat,
sparks fly past me like flares at sea.

Votive candles kindle a cathedral window.
The moon leers behind alder trees. Nightbirds
I've never seen cling to dark branches.

Beneath a Pebbled Shore

CHRIS SOMOS

The cicadas drummed their bodies with veined wings in the silent room. While most had become deaf to the insects' noise, Eleftheria relied on it to signal the arrival of another Athenian morning. Like every other morning, dragging her alabaster legs from the single cot bed, she shuffled across the tiny room and opened her window. From there, she made her way to the kitchen, took a notepad and wrote a couple of lines from her favourite poems, for this sharpened her memory. Today, she could not find her notepad. She had to remind herself that yesterday's balcony cleaning took much longer than expected, and that she didn't have the time to buy a new one, so she quickly removed an icon of Virgin Mary from the wall and wrote a few lines from Elytis on the brittle wood with a black marker.

Κατεβαίνοντας προς τους γιαλούς τους κόλπους με τα βότσαλα,
Ήταν εκεί ένα κρύο αρμυρό θαλασσόχορτο.
Μα πιο βαθιά ένα ανθρώπινο αίσθημα που μάτωνε.

This would be enough for today. As she gazed at her fractured letters, she began to contemplate the meaning

of Elytis' words but a drop of her door's knocker pulled Eleftheria from her trickle of thoughts. She'd come back to these words, she thought as she hung the icon back on the wall.

She pushed herself to an upright position and brushing her feet against the dusty floor, she wandered to the door. Spinning the locks counterclockwise, she opened the door and stared at the face in front of her. The younger woman's skin was like dried plaster.

'Hi,' the woman said, tilting her head.

Eleftheria moved her body in the same direction, blocking the woman's view of her home. Many of her friends had recently been robbed, and she had to be cautious.

'You know who I am, right?'

Something in the woman's voice sounded familiar. It must be the new cleaning lady she had called two days ago.

'Of course, koritsi mou! Don't be silly. Come in.'

Ariadne was not entirely convinced of her host's recollection, but as Eleftheria waddled to the side, she entered the house taking one cautious step after another. She briefly looked around and everything appeared to be as she had left it the day before. Yet, everything was covered in dust. She had just cleaned the house yesterday, and it was already filthy. Eleftheria had clearly left the balcony doors open all night. For the past three years, she always asked her to close the shutters when it got dark, and Eleftheria never remembered, or didn't want to. It was hard to tell the difference these days.

'So, what are we doing today?' Eleftheria asked with a smile.

She fought the urge to bring up the dust and answered,

'Uh, how about we start with coffee? I really can't stay long. Maki's classes end at twelve.'

Eleftheria furled her brows as the stranger walked to the kitchen without her permission. Eirini must have recommended Ariadne to her; that woman was always hiring strange people.

'Where do you keep the *briki*?' Ariadne asked, reaching for the cupboard in which the tiny melting pot was kept, but stopped herself midway.

'Eh. In the cupboard under—,' Eleftheria caught her tongue, and quickly said, 'I mean, above the sink.'

'You sure?'

'I'm sure.' As the young woman took out the briki, a set of demitasse cups, a packet of Loumidis Café, and a gas burner, Eleftheria's shoulders dropped. She smirked and said, 'Glykos, eh?'

Ariadne nodded, though she knew that Eleftheria preferred her coffee without sugar.

When Ariadne opened the Loumidis bag, the bitter scent of Greek coffee filled the air and Eleftheria began to think of the time when was sitting on the stairs of her old house in Smyrna, watching the gentle September breeze silver the olive trees as it whispered between their branches. The breeze also brought the smell of Turkish coffee. Whenever its smoky tones filled the air, Eleftheria's mother would take her two daughters, and go visit Hiranur. They walked to the corner of the street and entered the red house with Grecian columns framing the door. Hiranur had made several cups of coffee, and was telling one of her guests her fortune. Everyone listened as the Turk pointed to boats and volcanoes in the cup. Eleftheria believed that the coffee smudges looked nothing like Hiranur said. She felt that it was all a hoax for the Turkish woman to make

friends in a neighborhood filled with Greeks who would never trust her. Hiranur saw Eleftheria's mother. 'Come, Nefeli, I will tell you your fortune.' Eleftheria watched her mother's throat ebb and flow as she drained the cup of its tarry liquid. Hiranur took the cup from her hands, flipped it over, and waited. Eventually, Hiranur began to tell Nefeli that she saw feet, a bird, a vase, and a doll in the trails of sedimentary coffee. The Turk explained that the bird and vase pointed to news being delivered and that the feet indicated Nefeli would be going on a trip.

'Na parei!' Ariadne swore after realizing that she burned the first coffee. She'd been staring at Eleftheria who had an unusually long mental trip this time.

Eleftheria watched the plumes of red and blue flames whip around the *briki* as the young woman made the second coffee. She could taste the saltiness of her fire-fueled sweat slide into her mouth. The smell of coffee was then overwhelmed by an unwelcomed odor and a sensation that made Eleftheria wince. She hoped that Ariadne would not notice, and started thinking of ways to get her out of the kitchen. But nothing would work. So she crossed her ankles, looked up at the painted Virgin Mary on the wall, and prayed for an escape.

The smell hit Ariadne and she realized that Eleftheria had soiled herself. She gagged. As she watched Eleftheria's left hand repeatedly stroke her right one, she thought about the woman's worsening condition. She was not equipped to deal with this sort of thing, and briefly contemplated if Eleftheria would be better off in a nursing home. She felt a surge of guilt at the idea, especially after noticing how helpless the old woman seemed in her little kitchen chair with her knees shut and ankles crossed. Ariadne knelt down and wrapped her hands around Eleftheria's. 'Don't worry, I'll help you get cleaned up.'

'I'm so sorry, koritsi mou. Old age, uh, you know.'

Ariadne smiled. Perhaps some of the old Eleftheria was still there.

Eleftheria clung to Ariadne's arm as she told her how to get to the bathroom with the tub. While staring at the young woman's face, she understood why Eirini had recommended her—she was so kind and helpful. She only hoped that Eirini wouldn't hear about this incident. When they arrived in the room with a porcelain bathtub in the corner, Eleftheria began to undress. She thought of asking Ariadne to leave, but felt like keeping her around. Her fingers fumbled as she tried to take off her nightgown. Ariadne sighed and said, 'Here, let me help you.'

'Oh, thank you.'

Eleftheria stared into the small mirror above the sink while Ariadne undressed her. She looked at her face, where rivers of youth had run dry, leaving lines both glistening and white. They reminded her of the grey pebbles along the shores of Smyrna that were turned a pearly white by dried seawater. Eleftheria rolled her finger over a wrinkle separating her cheek from her mouth and closed her eyes. She opens them when she hears banging on a door. She quickly hops out of bed and looks into the crib where her sister, Despoina, is sleeping soundly. Opening their room's door a crack, she peers into the hallway and sees her uncle Thanos standing at the front entrance with her father and mother. 'They're burning the Armenian quarters, and the fire is spreading to ours!" he exclaims. 'We need to leave! Now!' Nefeli says, 'This is what Hiranur tried warning me about. We need to get to the quay. She said there would be soldiers everywhere, and that we should take nothing with us.' Eleftheria is unsure about what all this means, but she can feel her heart beating against her ribs. Each

beat creating a deafening blow in her ears. Her father, Isaiah, speaks. 'Thanos, take your family and go. We'll be close behind. We just have to get the girls.' He shuts the door as his brother runs to the neighbour. 'Nefeli, prepare the girls. I'll stand guard.' Her mother pulls some clothes from the hanger and darts into their room. 'Put this on and go to your father! I'll take Despoina.' Eleftheria puts the clothes on. They are black, and they look like clothes her grandmother wore. 'Mama, these clothes are like giagia's.' Her mother says, 'That's right, koritsi mou. We're going to play a game. You're going to pretend to be giagia, and only look at my feet while we walk, okay?' Eleftheria doesn't have a chance to respond. 'You know the funny way she walked, with her back hunched? I need you to do that. Can you?' Eleftheria nods. Her mother takes Despoina and hides her under her black robes. As Nefeli also hunches her back, Eleftheria is astounded with how her mother manages to make Despoina disappear. They make their way towards the door, practicing how they will walk outside the house. Isaiah stops his wife and gives her a kiss. He then bends down towards his daughter, gives her an icon of the Virgin Mary with her arms wide open and a steadfast gaze. 'Hide this under your robes, like Mama has hidden Despoina.' He then brings his daughter's cheek to his lips and kisses it.

Eleftheria follows her mother's feet. They are easy to see, the Great Fire of Smyrna lights the streets as though if it were day. Even the cicadas have become nocturnal, singing their songs in the middle of the night. She hears young women screaming as Turkish men laugh, but she continues to stare at Nefeli's feet. To mask the noises of babies wailing as they are whipped against sidewalks, Eleftheria focuses on the cicadas' drumming beats.

While others stampede towards the quay, Eleftheria and her mother move at a snail's pace. The smoke makes it hard to breathe; she hears her father cough, and it soothes her knowing that he is behind her. As they approach the seafront, Eleftheria looks up. The port of Smyrna is surrounded by Turkish soldiers who grasp at anything people are holding, and who beat those trying to keep hold of their belongings. She wonders why the Turks don't pay attention to them. She turns to ask her father, but he grasps her head and pushes it down with such force that she stumbles forward. He then pulls her black headscarf even further over her face. As they near the boats, everyone is pushing and shoving. Eleftheria nearly loses sight of her mother's ankles, but her father places his hairy fingers in her palm. She clasps her fingers around his and lets him guide her. Just as the heat is becoming unbearable, Eleftheria feels a cool sea breeze wipe her skin. They have reached the boat. As Nefeli and Despoina board, Isaiah lets go of his daughter's hand and pushes her onboard. 'Take care of the icon, kori mou. It's yours now,' he calls to his daughter. Eleftheria feels her mother's grip dig into her shoulder. She watches her father, waiting for him to board. She turns to her mother and asks, 'Why isn't he getting on?' 'Men go last, koritsi mou,' Nefeli says, looking at Isaiah, and then looking away. Eleftheria starts to writhe like the chickens she has to behead for dinner. Nefeli digs her nails even deeper into her daughter's shoulder, and tells her to calm down. When the boat is finally filled with women and children, its engine starts, and they set sail. Eleftheria continues to look back. She sees her father's figure shrink as the great flames grow. They embrace all that she loves: her father, her toys, her house, and the streets she walked on. She wonders who she is without these things, holding on to the Virgin Mary with her little burning palms.

Ariadne finished undressing Eleftheria in a matter of minutes. It would have been faster had the old woman not gone into another one of her dazes. She turned on the water for Eleftheria's bath. Ariadne put soap on the loofah and began scrubbing the old woman's back. She slowed down while rubbing the five little scars on Eleftheria's left shoulder. They seemed much larger than when she had first seen them at the beach years ago. The way Eleftheria's skin had managed to preserve and now accentuate these scars amazed Ariadne.

Once Eleftheria was dried and clothed, Ariadne raised her arm, and Eleftheria held onto it as Ariadne guided her to the living room. Eleftheria sat in the velveteen armchair next to a cream cabinet. Ariadne hated that cabinet. It was filled with several porcelain dolls that the old woman had collected over the years. And every time she had to clean the cabinet, she had to hold each doll like a newborn baby as she carried them to the table. If one were to break, she was sure Eleftheria would die of a heart attack.

Ariadne seated herself on the leather couch across from the woman, and looked at her for a moment. She wondered what had happened to Eleftheria in the water. She took the remote off the dusty coffee table and turned on the television. Ariadne searched for ANT1 News, believing that watching some current events would be good for the old woman. Seeing Eleftheria turn to focus on the news, Ariadne went to get a glass of water from the kitchen.

One of the men on the show's panel exclaimed, 'These immigrants have come to take our jobs; they carry diseases that will infect our children!' 'They are not immigrants, they are refugees,' said another. 'I really doubt that they left *their* homes to come and take *our* jobs. Can't you see? It's a matter of survival.'

Eleftheria listened with her ears perked. These conversations sounded familiar to those she had heard as a refugee in her motherland. She giggled. The television then presented images of refugees walking towards the Northern Greek borders. As she watched the scenes, the disembodied background music began to silence, and she stared at the people's feet as they walked along the rusty railroads leading to the rest of Europe. She was now in the refugee camp, playing in their makeshift house with Despoina, who had just turned two. She was becoming such a beautiful little thing, with wide olive-green eyes and auburn hair. The poor baby had recently developed a cough and was rather cranky. To appease her, Eleftheria clasped her thighs together, put the girl in her lap, and began to sing about the moon teaching children to walk.

Ariadne heard a song she hadn't heard in years. She walked into the living room and felt her ribs claw at her lungs, forcing a rush of air to burst from her mouth. There was Eleftheria, holding a porcelain doll and cooing to it melodically.

She sat on the chair next to the old woman.

'Isn't Despoina's hair so beautiful?' Eleftheria asked, combing the doll with her fingers.

'That's not Despoina,' Ariadne's voice trembled.

'What are you talking about, koritsi mou?' The old woman said, still focusing on the doll.

'Mama, that's not your sister. She died in the refugee camp when she was two, remember?'

Mama? Eleftheria looked down. In her lap was a doll, and her daughter was next to her. Had she forgotten her own daughter? Had she forgotten her own sister's fate? Her left hand began to stroke her right as she thought about what Ariadne must think of her. She looked at her

daughter massaging her earlobe, like she used to do when they would drive past homeless children begging on the street.

'Sorry about that,' Eleftheria said in a firm voice.

'We need to talk about what just—'

'There's nothing to talk about. I didn't have time to finish my memory exercises this morning. That's all.' She said and looked away.

Ariadne had learned long ago that when her mother turned away, the discussion was over. But she couldn't stop thinking about what caused her mother's temporary lucidity. Was it the reminder of her sister's death? Or had the fact that she called her Mama made a difference to her? She hadn't called Eleftheria Mama since she stopped acting like her mother and more like a patient.

'You should really get going. You have to pick up Maki!' Eleftheria shuffled her way to the door and opened it for Ariadne to go. 'I don't want my grandson to be the last one picked up from school. Just think of what the other parents will say.'

Ariadne noticed her mother's neck becoming the vibrant pink of a sunburn. She knew that talking to Eleftheria when she was embarrassed was futile. She respected her wishes and started walking towards the door. As she neared it, her mother asked her to wait for a minute as she hauled her feet into the kitchen. She returned with a plaque of wood in her folded arms. She gave it to her daughter and said, 'This is yours now.'

'Thank you.' Ariadne said as she walked out the door. 'I'll see you tomorrow, same time.'

Eleftheria slowly closed the door without a response. Ariadne waited outside until she heard the locks turn. She then stared at the icon for a moment. What a strange gift

to give, she thought. She turned it over and saw a hastily written poem on the back.

Descending towards the pebbled shore,

There was cold salty seaweed

But, beneath it, bled a human feeling.

Ariadne continued to think about the poem as she drove to pick up her son. And every time she looked in the rearview mirror, she caught a glimpse of Mary's unwavering gaze.

After slowly making her way to the living room, Eleftheria held onto the coffee table and carefully bent down to sit on the cold marble. Her memory coursed to the boat on the way to Piraeus, where she would start her new life and lose her sister. They were sitting on the boat's damp wooden floors, and she told her mother that they had lost everything.

'Not everything, koritsi mou.' Nefeli told her. 'Everything and everyone is still in your memories. And no one can take those from you.'

Fall, Amherst

JULIA PIKE

There is oil spilling
from the highest window of the clock tower.
It runs black over us,
slicks my leather boots.

There's heaven in the buildings down the hill
and we trip trying to find it in the cold
and fall into each other,
grabbing for hips and necks in the darkness.

There are bones here—
we read books between ribs,
and they rise up and comfort us
in their age, in shapes we know.

There's a forest where I run through snakes
and write stories as sunlight
skitters across shoes.
Mornings are cold now—

Talking is like climbing the stairs.
I'm singing and catching autumn in my fingers,
holding the trees and the people
as everything goes golden.

Calling Back

ALEXANDER WALKER

Can you hear me? you begin,
though there's nothing wrong with the connection. Yes.
The rain here smashes the window, clumsy,
violent, not too loud. I wonder –
what's the weather like over there?
Miserable, as always.

Stories of new loves, old dogs,
new tricks. *There's not much going on.*
A chopstick taps on the rim of my bowl. A moment's
beat.
I joined a gym. Not in those shorts I hate?
I got a new pair. Pale blue. Sigh.
Nothing changes. Nothing's changed.

Small talk out of the way,
you ask *how have you been*? It's been a week,
maybe ten days. The hours collapse
in on one another when there's this much time
to spare. I'm doing fine. You?
I'm doing better, I guess.

A text comes through. Someone asking for an address.
Are you going to get that? you ask.
Later. There's no rush.
A sip of beer. Another pause.
Where are you now? In a restaurant.
No. What country?

A Theory of Guilt

OMAR SABBAGH

Dubai

There is a grief I cannot follow.
A reckoning. The walls of my heart are canary-yellow.

This tryst (a fatal dose, my poisoned fellow
Of cowardice) follows me though,

Coupling me – without the fruit of that sorrow
Which might have been a comfort.

There are no autumn leaves here, no hurt
Season in this place. Only

The lessening of an unforgiving heat…
And so I cannot leave this place,

Cannot save myself – I'll never grace
My sweaty brow with a tardy stroll, a breeze

Upon my English face. God, I miss
The English weather; its temper, and its pace.

At Sea

JOSEPH ALBANESE

I feel the shores, even miles
inland
or adrift,
reliving my histories, adapted
from other fictions
and translations.
What's missing I fill in
with gold crackles and tar
so they'll hold
stronger next time through.
I
meander there,
where my days were night
but
I was there with her, so
my lies and truth combine to one.

A shot
of disinfectant
to tall tales
kicks me up, awake where
I'm sucking my thumb. I could
traverse
this ocean to break through,
but I did once and now
am merely
the sewage washed up years ago
and recycled.

Sea salt coils in me
where the gold and tar's
thickness
can't
quite reach. Those waters are
now part of me,
and I am always
floating between two
shores.

LOVE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The Truth of Genes

AKIS PAPANTONIS

You were born on April 1. From then on you'd have no real choice. You inherited your grandpa's eyes, your mother's long limbs, but then you had fair hair, unlike anyone in the family. Whenever you focused hard on something you bit your lower lip, just like your father. The truth of genes is ruthless. Before anything else you were photographed holding a cigarette in your left hand. Before anything else. Then you uttered your first word and no one could recall what it was. You were baptized and would come to hate your name, until the day you discovered you actually liked it. *Just because she said you should*. You invented stories to avoid being sent to nursery—your mother nodding in consent to each one. You played alongside other children, but played with none of them. You made your mother proud for never sullying your clothes—drove your friends' mothers mad for that same reason. You were the first one in your class to learn how to read and write, the last one to learn how to kiss. Your parents gave you a sibling. You started chewing on pencils and book pages to get even.

Eventually, you entered your teens. You went abruptly from Tin-Tin to Dostoevski. Then straight back to Tin-

Tin. You burst into tears twice: once out of joy when your parents got you a tortoise; once out of fear, wetting your bed whilst dreaming of death—*a fear embedded in your R.E.M. sequences from birth*, the child-psychologist said.

You grew four iches in a summer, a fact you'd later attribute to unconditional love—later still to then-unidentifiable lust. That summer you read *Moby Dick* for the first time, listen to the Led Zeppelin for the first time, kiss for the first time, not say goodbye for the first time—all out of ignorance, not choice. Your uncle, from your father's side, secretly taught you how to drive.

You graduated from high-school without remembering a thing from it. The same would apply to sex, to living by yourself, cooking for yourself, getting drunk or not getting drunk, to understanding or not understanding the world around you. You became unreasonably obsessed with finishing *In Search of Lost Time*, deciphering *Finnegans Wake*, letting *The Crying of Lot 49* grow on you. You insisted on reading the newspaper every morning as a tribute to one of your father's many addictions. You had people over for dinner to honour your mother's only social habit. You denounced God as a reaction to your grandpa's zeal, embrace free jazz to celebrate your grandma's latent insanity. You chose to attend Medical School so as to be forgiven for all of the above.

At the same time you re-learned how to kiss. *Exactly the way she showed you to*. How to have sex. *Ditto*. How to break up, pretend, sit in silence. *Ditto, ditto, ditto*.

Right after pre-Med your hair turned grey, as had your grandpa's. You dropped the whole idea of becoming a doctor and taught part-time at your old high-school. You rented a small ground-floor one-bedroom flat, its back door opening up to a small yard covered in gravel, a flat

rarely ever visited by another human being—the letting agent not included. Sitting on your IKEA sofa you tried in vain to play Domeniconi's *Koyunbaba* on the guitar. You daydreamed about falling in love. And then daydreamed about falling out of love. Again, and again, and again. You walked in and out of people's lives. People walked in and out of yours. *The way she kept walking in and out of your life, without warning.* You'd stand back and watch.

Suddenly, you discovered theater: Beckett, Euripides, Pinter, Sophocles, and the list goes on. It was all about catching glimpses of her long dresses from across the foyer.

You witnessed your grandpa cursing God just before dying and saw your grandma pass away all-muted by insanity. You didn't attend their funerals but would visit their graves twice a month.

Soon enough your sister got married. And she had a baby. You bought a new suit for the wedding reception, a fluffy animal for the newborn. And then she'd have a second one. And a third one. The good thing is: you remembered all of their names. *Meanwhile you agreed to an affair with her, although she had already married*. The bad thing is: you never forgot her name. You read children's stories to your nephews and nieces, and texted Neruda's sonets to your mistress.

Your parents' house burnt to the ground. All of your old toys and comic books.

You fell in love with Chopin, then Schumann, then Scriabin, then silence—*in the order she prescribed*. You read and re-read Kafka and Pessoa just to find out you just don't get them. You got a tattoo. You got cancer. Chemotherapy. A bald head. Weak limbs. Transparent skin. You blamed your genes.

You moved in with your sister. Temporarily. You asked your older nephew—who had your father's name, your mother's posture, your grandpa's eyes—to read to you every night. At times he did so. Your mistress avoided you. You avoided everyone else. You got another tattoo, and those same, recurrent R.E.M. sequences. You measured time in days put behind you. When the doctors reassured you "All is well behind you now," you grew more worried.

You moved into a smaller flat, in a part of town where people wouldn't come looking for you, just like your uncle once did. You lived in silence, as if fulfilling some unspoken promise you once gave *her*. And that was that, a pain you lived by but never talk about with your doctors. You started drinking. You started writing your memoirs, until you realized you either did not remember much, or there wasn't much there to remember in the first place.

You met a girl working the front desk at the publishing house that kept rejecting your drafts. She was a spitting image of *her*. You went out with her, kissed her, had sex and broke up with her. Then pretended and sat in silence. In her last text she wrote: you seem to do all things as if you were someone else but you.

You decided to be yourself and not sleep out of fear for: death, solitude, death, dreams (good or bad), death.

You watched a film every night, but always at home. *She found cinemas to be such lonely places*. You tried to sail the Mediterrenean after reading the Odyssey. And failed. Tried to take up painting having spent a sleepless week on Gauguin's Letters. And quickly gave up. Tried gardening touched by Sepulveda's descriptions of Latin-American flora. And bore yourself. In the end, you simply gave up, and that would be that. From then on, every single day, you tried to remind yourself of the word *now*. In the

end, should such a thing exist, having given up on films, music, poetry, on any sort of narration invented by man, you posted a long letter—addressed to no one, carrying no stamp—ending with the words "Please send for me" written out hastily by your left hand.

And then one day you heard the front door flap make that noise that used to startle you in your sleep when you first moved in, the noise of an envelope being shoved through the hole. You had long lost interest for incoming mail—as they'd invariably be bills, advertising flyers, or mis-addressed letters. To your surprise, that one letter did not at all resemble a bill, a flyer, let alone a mis-addressed letter. It had scriblings of a familiar handwriting on the outside, and a lavender-colored paper inside (decorated with the same handwriting), a single, not very long paragraph—of the transcription of an impulsive, single-string thought process—deployed on one side of the lavender-colored paper, and hardly any punctuation.

You called your sister over. Asked her to sit on the sofa and listen. And talked trivia to her, your face pale, and then went mute. Abruptly you started talking again, albeit a bit incoherently, only to drift back in silence. And finally, you took a piece of paper and moved over to the kitchen table, and started writing franticly, pen in your left hand, biting your lower lip. Every now and then, you returned to the sofa and presented your sister with random excerpts from which only *her* four-letter name could she decipher. *Two consonants and two vowels, a simple truth*. Sometimes you tore the paper into infinitely small pieces, only to come back with a new one later on—staying silent throughout.

Later that night you walked up to your sister to tell her *You wouldn't understand*. Indeed she didn't. So you drove her by the shoulders and led her into the kitchen where

the lavender-colored letter lay unfolded on the table. You pointed to the very last four words. *Please send for me*. At the same time addressing her with *her* four-letter name. And then you made her tea and led her back to the sofa, and took her hands in yours and ask *Do you understand now?* And then kissed her on the lips softly before leaving your flat never to return again.

One of Us Cannot Be Wrong

ENAIÊ AZAMBUJA

for Leonard Cohen

Whenever I lose you
I go back to Gotland
        cycle my way between
shingle and cobblestones.

The arid air of the island
your bare torso greeting the sun
our green tent once lost
        somewhere in the hills.

All of these make me jealous.

I go to Sandwich
and let you take me
on the back seat of your car -
                behind a tree
standing strong
                on the edge of the cliff -
Calais is finally visible when I come.

You take me for a walk
make me swim or run
swing or fall

(I can't be blamed for swearing when I fall)

Back in the cabin
wishing to be alone
you break all the locked windows
Moths come in and dance around
                our heads and the lightbulb
as if begging
            please
let us come into the
storm.

Her Expertise

OMAR SABBAGH

Of course, it didn't take long in time or long
To expedite the ghost. She shuttled his wise and brawny song
As though it weren't a type of kindness, his brag, his
Boast – in an arc and eon of mostly deftly less.

In short, she slayed, crucified by how she was –
Laying fibs in a square room where no one was
Or dared to be. And the ghost cried wide and long,
Beggaring volume; making poverties, rancid and just,

Of all the long-borne lies. The stink of a well-worn shoe
Echoed and stank, savaged the chrome-white air
To the rank and blue of his lungs and what he knew.
It didn't matter an atom what was true or fair – her

Mockery of the mind was ghost to a ghost; it was everywhere…
And we are razed now, you and I, to a blank tablet; as before.

The Sailor

ENAIÊ AZAMBUJA

You hand me starfishes
Palaeozoic fossils
made of folded birch bark.

The village's senior fisherman
passes by
on his bicycle
and greets me with
his invisible arm.

Yet
falling a bit to the right
he keeps on singing

'O mar
quando quebra na praia
É bonito
É bonito

No matter how far away
I am
from ground zero
the blast
will always reach me:
such is longing.

I Love, You Love

KITTY EMMER-STEFFAN

Our house was always a still-life.
In bed, awake,
I look at books and porcelains and
ribbons, paper, cigarettes and clothes,
even though
the plush bears on their own
are enough here.

Left-overs.
The best still-life I ever saw,
made of artful scraps
of embarrassed intentions,
subsequent apologies, excuses,
unadmitted, or just kind of
love
and food, food you made,
dough you shaped with your hands.

You did it to make me cry
with your love baked in deep,
fried and sugared
oil-soaked napkins,
that, too, was love,
and oh how I ate it,
unwillingly, ravenously, mother,
I let your love go through me
and oh how my tears mixed in my throat
with the sour-sweet dumplings

while you, you
sat and watched
every bite
you watched over me and your food,
such a reluctant two,
you and I.

So tell me, mother, how can I write you a poem
with oily fingers?

I have seen you hide yours
and did you really think
I'd end up any different?

Later,
you will lay the manicured display of a dinner before me,
and to try, then, will be
to eat
and speak,
but not too much and
always the right thing.

Yet though I try,
the hunger always speaks my mother tongue
at 5 a.m.
pot-bellied, oily-fingered, graceless
scrambling hungry
like the only love we know.

So did you really think
I'd end up any different?

If It's Sunday, Then It's Nails

DAN ENCARNACION

after *Bath Curtain* [1992], Hugh Steers (1962-1995)

Who would think that we had just had sex by looking at that
Picture, your arms strung straight as if your wires made of

Rods. Me concentrating so intentionally, a schoolboy
figuring through his Latin declensions, but really trying not to

Think of the headmaster's switch. This is how we glow in the
afterlife of intimate romantic evincive exchange.

You've got more dead skin cells under your nails than you'd
Find caking up the sides of a clamorous public swimming

Pool come the dog days of summer. You're scratching
Off more skin than your maid scratches off in UV-ink in a

Week of instant-win lottery scratchers. You're going to scratch
Yourself down to nothing. Nil. You'll still be alive, but

Hardly as large as a thimble full of salt. Cornua cornua cornua
Cornuum cornibus cornibus. Horn horn horn horn horn

Horn, as well, strength strength strength strength
Strength strength. Cut them on Friday, you cut them for

Sorrow. Cut them on Saturday, you'll see your true-love
Come the morrow. Cut them on Sunday, you'll cut them for

Evil, for all the next week you'll be ruled by the devil. Who
Took that picture?

Dry Them Up Too Fast For Good

DAN ENCARNACION

after *IV Embrace* [1992], Hugh Steers (1962-1995)

He said he knew you well when you didn't know what your
Ass could be used for. Said he knew you during
Your first forays into yourself. "Forays," his word. His

Eyes wore scarlet and gold strength and contentment. He
Was thankful you died knowing what you were and
Doing what you thought was of value. Though in his voice a
Shard

Of ruddy Swiss Army knife snapped out a chameleon tongue
To reclaim "of value." I let him hold onto me. I
Was the only warm thing to trust. He, the only broken thing
To mind.

Summer hush. Autumn's here. Only a low sun we'll let in,
We'll let try to sparkle our slipped tears. You there,
Summer, would only dry them up too fast for good.

WHAT ELSE IN THE END?

Swann's Hotel

ANN HOWELLS

Swann's store and hotel, a large, 2 ½ storey, L-shaped structure built about 1900

Monochromatic images, deep red as blood, as red tide that kills, flicker like home movies from decades past—flame and churlish smoke, beast-belly black.

on three acres of Pridgett's parcel, bought in 1883 for $500

Blaze-orange ignites; sparks thrust like shooting stars—a surreal Mars-scape, narcotic dream. Gangrenous thunderheads roil with anthropomorphic malevolence.

steamboats docked at Piney Point Beach, buggies transported guests to hotel

Sun films as though viewed through cataracts; black shifts within black. Backlit firemen become snow-globe figures, ghost-dim, limned in jarring explosions.

boarders from up and down the coast stayed a week, month, entire summer

Water slithers beams; mist rises from the steaming caldron. Fireballs hover a jagged roofline, and layered gauze settles over the parking lot.

when the hotel was full, family members gave up their rooms to guests

Pumper trucks and police cars hurl light, smoky-edged as though a filter mutes the lens; air is barely navigable—a shredded net punctured by liquid gold flame.

"Aunt Lizzie" rang a breakfast bell, 8 am—fried fish, corn bread, bacon and eggs

Heat shimmers to dizzying heights—light concentrates. Hollow roaring sucks everything in; crack and rumble echoes previous cracks and rumbles.

two boys (ten & twelve) set fire to a couch on a second floor balcony—arson

Fat ash flakes spin and flutter like snow. Scorched, crumpled wasteland remains, chasm and jumbled char in dun-muckle shades.

Crime Scene

CLIVE DONOVAN

The archaeologists sift through the hill,
Puzzled by their redactive spoils;
Baffled by anachronistic mixtures of sherds
And a gaggle of child-teeth too numerous for one jaw...

I could tell them:
All those broken grins were mine;
The red-streaked milk-bones collected as they dropped
By a loving mother hoarded in a long-rotted purse

And those cups and plates and jars were gathered
By an antiquarian father who loved to hold
Artefacts of those who went before us,
Much like the men who excavate now the destruction...

Which came in the evening
Too suddenly swift for me
To decipher the meaning
Of the screams...

On luminous nights I would be seen as I bent
Moonbeams – twisting between dour tussocks –
The occasional leery peasant careful
To not look too hard...

How I rejoice now in the trench-slits of de-sutured earth,
Skittering over trestled evidence like an eel,
Feeling original foundations, fire-blackened stones,
Beginning to sleep more, caring not for your verdict...

The Morning after Foreclosure

MARK JACKLEY

you who slowly open your eyes
neck bent forward
head slumped

like a construction crane
looming
into a hole

without end
it seems
want to believe there is

a blueprint
somewhere something
livable will rise

Days with Buckley Dunstan III

IAN C SMITH

Dark-complexioned, resembling a newsworthy bad Arab,
he took it OK when I told him of this likeness
unaware of his Jewish background because
his trick business card sported a joke Anglo name,
real name resplendent on the flipside.
Evenings he smoked dope, supplying me with vodka,
raving late, gobsmacked by Australian idiom,
signed glam shots of friends blazing his black walls,
this actor, that singer from camera-swoon youth.
A lone wolf interior decorator, he chose
bric-a-brac from sales, spieled clients, affording
him a stylish home poised over a brook.
On Mt. Mansfield he had saved my hitch-hiker's arse,
hired me as dog walker, coach, yardman, court jester.
Bullshitting, living momently, life grows threadbare.
One fall day, light fading, we drove to the airport,
Vermont soon to be cowled in winter's blind.
Quiet, he seemed sad, always looked lugubrious,
typewriter clatter obsolete, an echo of the times.
Now, obsequial after googling him to find he died
the creator of a straight bedroom furniture business
who set up a foundation for teens in trouble,
I recall his smoke-growly raconteur's voice,
adolescent rites narrated, N.Y.C. nocturnes,
peeing among pigeons from rooftops, siren-howl,
a cadenced gravity like an old novelist at a reading.
There is no plan. Days, words. What else in the end?

To us all

THOMAS LAVELLE

This comes to us all, indirectly
first, through the slow motorcades,
each car marked with a Funeral flag,
or through cemeteries alongside country
churches or tucked in the hilly corners of cities and towns.
Later come the names of neighbors and kin,
the grand-generation first;
our parents' follows, then siblings and peers.
They vanish in war or in accidents,
freak and familiar, a brief reprieve
until acute or chronic conditions
claim even more, and we respond
with conversion or devotion, bigger cars,
better diets, last-minute affairs,
even so-called bucket lists.
After or amid all that deflection
death comes to us all, sure
as ice melts, as flowers wilt,
sure as grass grows in summer.

The Mechanics of Mortality

PAUL SCHREIBER

Paddling out in a ring we ritually hoot your last echo,
we fling water into air, call out testimonies
of your life, its wild proportions and constant motion,
but as the grey ashes spill onto the sea and dust
its surface, slip down as slow sea-snow, it is as if
nothing has changed. The waves do not apologize
and we watch the simple mechanics of dispersion.

Brother, I sift through dreams for what happened –
the waves were small they say, the evening tide low
and never had your muscular breath failed you in water.
We knew this place – though the kelp grasped, wrapped
its tendrils around our dangling legs, it was familiar,
its touch familiar as the rocky shallows, and yet
at the strand there is no one to say what happened.

You led me to the blues, to the darker strings
of Taj Mahal and Robert Johnson, the doppler curl
of a bent harp note and the curl of a wave before
dawn – you led me here to blues and greys so deep
at the water's edge, sky rising over the dark forms
of Rocky Point, led me lifelong and lifeline, brother
of my vein and pulse. I am left without a lead now.

In the surf something broke, spine upon stone,
artery beneath bone, lungs filled with ocean
and gut with blood – distempering cold and warm–
you bobbed in question, and gave in. You washed ashore.

All is surmise, the ache to know and the horrid mind's eye.
The coroner's paper summary speaks only riddles
and we are left with the blunt mechanics of mortality.

The sun-winking sea betrays your ash still
sinking among the waving anemone,
kelp roots, currents, surfperch and waning sea stars.
One slack and pull of tide and you are gone. I know
the waves will wither the reef, my own children will
dissolve in soil and air, and the surf will roll and not
speak. But now I listen for something in its empty voice.

It was always me running after, more than by years,
mimicking your whoops, your gestures, a skeptical Huck
always seduced again by your fantastic sheen on dull life.
The boards, the bikes, the fretted blues, the boogie keys,
the grimy motors and factories, the merchant marine
all glowed as I followed you. And if I broke an arm
or flayed my hide on pavement, small price to ride behind.

Again I sit on Rocky Point at sunset waiting for words,
grief's adequate metaphor, as if sixty years of tangled
recollections could be teased out before dark, the least
I can give you, these words, before the whispered images
are lost and I must turn back and choose to breathe again.
And all I know is this town, this shore, your ash and my own
bones feel the same old mechanics of a terrible reduction.

Wildfire

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

Absent its skins, this scorched forest looks too much like what the photos teach of how my country came into being. Burnt torsos bent by sorrow. Gone, the skyscrape of their highest limbs. All the dead & dying spread unevenly within a vanishing understory. Questions; all that answerless light. Rivers of white ash. White ash covering stray peels of white bark.
A few cedar waxwings holding out for regrowth. They know something I don't about hope. Tender, failing braids of white smoke rising off thin poplar spears. An ache that is older than any body. A lone fawn nuzzles up strands of green grass. Somehow we still expect to find a voice with-out a wound in it. In a generation or two we'll build the forest back up to its former height, for the lightning, so silky white, to burn down again.

Stay

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

I can't recall when I decided not to kill myself, that precise moment the world unfocused & the hurt settled in for the long haul. Mile upon mile of flattened landscape, crabgrass & oil rig & hush; somewhere within it a call to stay, to love, & if not love exactly, at least to lengthen. All this impersonal history archived into the country, all the forgetting, easy-way -outs, genocides. I said to my hands *hold me like a government holds, is held by*, *like stars caught in an orbit that wouldn't exist without them*, by which I really meant *I am not ready to break this treaty*. When I open my mouth now, stones spill out. My heart comes gentle & goes & no one may live in it but the winds give rise to such beautiful oceans of greening fields. By *fields*, I mean elsewheres. & yes, when I say *beautiful* I mean ligature.

AND YET,
AND YET

Shrine

JULIA PIKE

On the drive from Shimla to Shali Peak, I fall quietly in love with the driver.

Outside, the cedar pines are draped like blankets over the hillsides and the Himalayas are waking in the distance, stretching their arms, but I'm watching the rear view mirror, the thick fringe of his eyelashes flickering as he navigates the serpentine road.

He doesn't look back at me, doesn't meet my eyes, and this is unusual; all six feet and white-blonde hair of me has gotten used to being a novelty in Himachal Pradesh.

He is my age, about, but twenty looks different on him, hairs blanching at the base of his neck and blurred tattoos climbing up his brown forearm like ants fading into his skin.

He stops the car on the side of the highway by one of dozens of roadside shrines, small concrete structures littered with coins and sun-bleached figurines, and unfolds himself from the car.

A thin trickle of water runs from a pipe, the lifeblood of the shrine, and he holds his hands under it, runs it gleaming through his dark hair; he fills his palms and drinks deeply, the mountains at his back.

He climbs back in the car, starts the engine and I am still in the backseat, a white girl here to brush my teeth with bottled water.

He connects his phone to the car's speaker and I strain to hear the notes, strain to catch some wisp of his interiority in the words I can't understand.

We drive on, past women in jewel-colored saris breaking rocks on the sides of the road, past packs of monkeys laughing like schoolgirls and schoolgirls who look at me with somber eyes.

Wonder

OMAR SABBAGH

For Faten

In the weird dark places we go
To fetch and figure
The self-forged maps of our keenest nature
There are dim-lit secrets we come to know
And bloom with…

The earth is a room,
The earth is a chamber, crimson and black,
A kind of boudoir-earth, a kind of
Noon strung-up here and on the rack,
Readying the grammar of a harried love, dark blue,

By which this midnight's madness gloves and moons
The slow and beetling breaths
Of sturdier, bulkier, burlier
Men and women, man and woman,
Whose voices dirge like weathered wreaths,

Tangled, suppurating – the last few fallow
Bones of green they may ever, may ever
Dare possess… How sad to be buried, beneath
The earth. How sad, how sad…
And yet, and yet: this evening's wander's been a good;

Two steps have been the apt provender
For one, just one;

For a darkness shared may be the wonder
Of all of this, this savage cinema, this
Last gasp and last bliss… *And if, and if*

I've filmed myself in paradise,
Perhaps it's down to the dodgy dice, always loaded –
The deuce and serpent of a slick-rigged deck?
But then, there is something here so
Damned and damned heroic.

There is my wife, shuttling light
Against the mean and common night.
And all the weird dark places I go
Are laced with how she grapples in the fight
Against a world of light, misguided by the same.

Birth by Water

ENAIÊ AZAMBUJA

I walk down the side road
veering towards the
horizon and the sea

As my feet slip into the sand
I glance at the green flag
hanging at the flagpole
by a lifeguard station

I have swum in this ideal world
a thousand times

I have crawled the bare back
of the giant World Turtle
The bald top of its
Franciscan head:
that is my father.

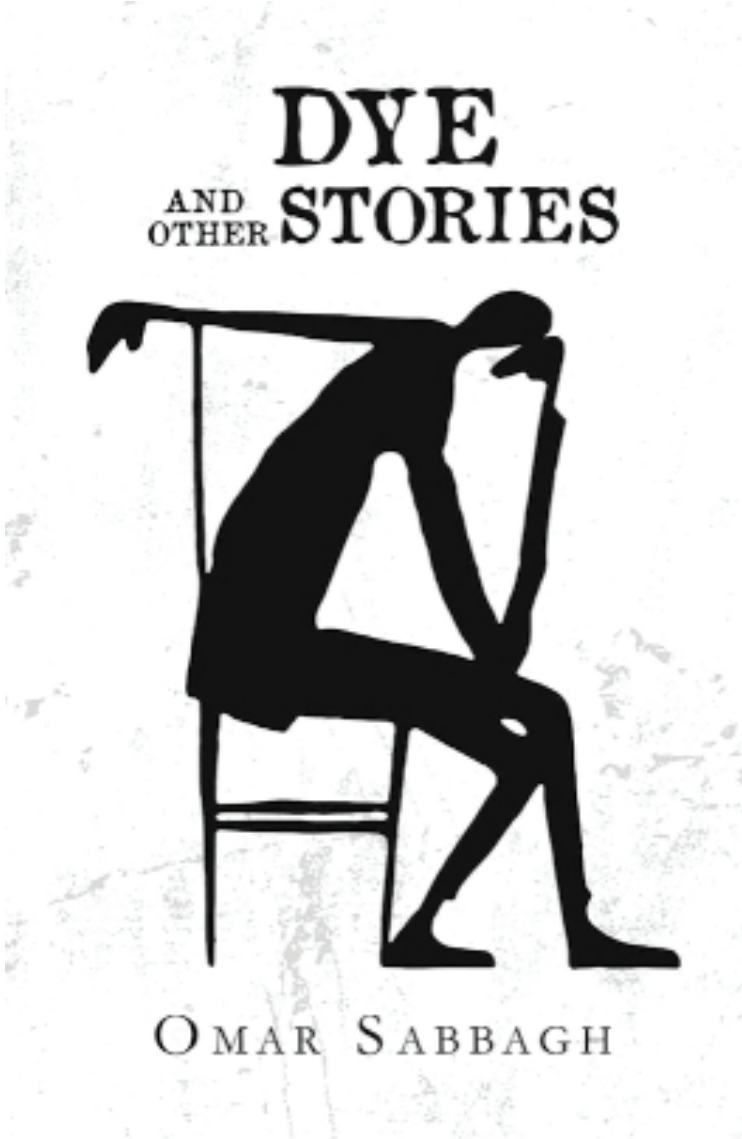
I have forgotten the face of my father

Except when he catches
his breath
And dives to become
a shark and
Mum
her translucent belly
blesses the water with birth

Review of *Dye and Other Stories* by Omar Sabbagh

ROULA-MARIA DIB

Essayist, poet, critic, and short story writer, Omar Sabbagh is a multi-talented wordsmith with many strings to his bow. His new collection of short stories, *Dye and Other Stories*, is an interesting bouquet of both style and substance. Sabbagh writes with electrifyingly vivid descriptions that obviously come from a poet, adding flavor to plot and pulse to character. With his philosophical insight into human nature, the author surfs well into the thoughts of others, projecting real-life experiences onto his fictional and non-fictional characters alike. He skillfully brings repressions to the surface and highlights well-restrained desires, and dreams in various narrating voices. Sometimes he is the eavesdropping narrator as in "Benches" and "Dye", while at other times he himself disperses into the protagonist, as in "I, Augustine". But nevertheless, the narrator-as-thinker is the voice that pervades the rest of the short stories, showcasing the author's philosophical tendencies and beautifully complementing Sabbagh's aptitude as a frolicking wordsmith and a creator whose characters are living, breathing, and conversing about life.



There is a wide range of topics covered and the main focus is the eclecticism of human nature, and of life itself, with its manifold layers of different personalities and experiences. However, if there was a prevalent, pervading

theme in the majority, if not all, of his narratives in the book, then it is what the ancient Greeks would have referred to as *storge*, or family love, as parental (and at often times, oedipal) references, flashbacks, and reflections are made. The collection offers deep reflections of quiet solitude, aphorisms, intellectualism, and in many instances, a biting sense of humor. University campuses feature heavily in the settings of Sabbagh's short stories and so do the cities Dubai, London, and especially Beirut, "a land of libertines and saints, and a land of saints and libertines" (175).

Starting from the epigraph from Macaulay's *History of England*, the author self asserts its place in the book, as he identifies himself with different characters (some of which are his alter-egos) and their conversations. The epigraph is about Catholics, whom the author seems to identify with in a sense that he wants the history of England to be a metaphor for the history of *English*. Moreover, the apt title of the book, *Dye,* ironically refers to the author's last name, *Sabbagh*, which in Arabic literally translates as "one who dyes"—another one of his poetic puns making its way into prose. In "Dye", there are many ruminations on femininity sparked by his alter ego, Dr. Omar Ghaleez, the accidental eavesdropper, the professor, and the drinking companion who frequently discusses reality and free will. Given that the subject matter of the narrative deals with feminine psychology, Sabbagh's witty poetic wordplay in the title, therefore, can be a symbolic depiction of his feminine, authorial side that chooses "the one who succeeds [and] spurs a story in the girl' (47)."

Almost all the stories in the selection, both fiction and creative non-fiction, contain figments of the author's own life. In "Benches", he projects his musings and childhood flashbacks onto the conversation between the two people

in front of the American University of Beirut. "Benches" is a reflective, nostalgic piece that revolves around a conversation between a young man and an older woman about parenthood and childhood—a conversation that strongly smells of a projection of personal childhood traumas. Following is "The Germanian", a completely fictional piece inspired by the author's workplace. This story is a funny caricature of two different men of disparate educational backgrounds who work in the same university. Both, in their own ways, pine after a girl at work who barely notices either one of them. "The Charlatan", also in the setting of a Dubai university, features Amr, an aspiring scholar who decides to take the challenge of cheating his way into publication, since "trying to convince the world of the majesty and eminence of a naked emperor was surely more of a test of intellectual nimbleness and acumen than if that emperor were robed in stately satins and silks" (57). "I, Augustine", though, is of a different narrational flavor. It is an experimentation in the fictional autobiographical, as the author is (fictionally) Augustine. It taps into the realm of the holy through the eye and voice of the worldly. Central themes include friendship and its role in the world of love, as well as love, and its place in both the spiritual and physical life. "A Superior Man", however, is a Freudian narrative in the form of a conversation between a young man and his shrink, highlighting the challenge of living with complexes arising from childhood traumas.

In the section containing works of creative non-fiction, "The Beirut Cadenzas: Refractions from a Damaged Life", which the author dedicates to his parents, sheds light on some of his experiences in his parents' native city, Beirut, "the red-blood oval which pulses and beats and shouts with life, and life again, and life moreover but which finds

its tenor with the smack of an aneurism" (174). Sabbagh's critique of a post-war city speaks of the looming sense of impending danger in a land where "even the fauna are guilty" (174), the patriotic tears that have been shed for decades and continue to do so, traffic-jam inspired images and fantasies (ranging from talking zippers to an imaginary family from his long-lost crush), and a hypocritical society where weddings are too extravagant and sex is hidden behind an "idiotic façade" that is "uselessly prolonged by young and old" (180). "The Beirut Cadenzas" also captures, through thoughtful, detailed characterization, a portrait of the author's parents, where he lovingly focuses his brushstrokes on their special personality traits, only to add to a remark made earlier in the book: "I was brought up to think of my father as the king, my mother the queen, and I, it goes without saying, the prince" (131).

The author claims that "Most of the time I am alone here, nursing a glass of Polish vodka; but I'm rarely lonely" (179), and as we read on, we understand how the figments of an imaginative mind are at work during moments of contemplation. The constructive aspect of solitude allows the narrator's voice to be enwombed in his own psyche, only to yield fruits of psychological plots that reach out to the hearts and minds of others as well. The short stories in this collection, therefore, are artefacts of a special quality; they are not confined to individual meditations, but are able to travel from the mind of an individual to the collective, for "solitude was very different to loneliness, and solitude was becoming: the difference, say, between a soliloquy and a monologue" (42).

CRAFT OF EDITING

case study

ADNAN MAHMUTOVIĆ & LUCY DURNEEN

Foxy

SIÂN MELANGELL DAFYDD

(Originally published in *The White Review*)

If you don't want to lose your eyes, grab them by the veins sticking out of their behinds and wind those together into a bunch. (They're as pliable as pipe cleaners. They stay put).

As for milk teeth, keep those with spare buttons in a Fosters Mints tin. Shake them when you feel cranky. See how their little lives rattling about in there can calm you so much better than any shop-bought stress-ball.

When it comes to hair bands, keep one on each door handle, in case.

With needles, stick them into the kitchen notice board.

And as for tampons and shotgun cartridges, keep them in the sewing box with the Fosters Mints tin. That way you'll always be sure of finding one when you're desperate.

By eyes, I mean glass ones. They're sold like that, by the dozen, in a bouquet. Ours came from a shop in Chester Rows, not far from Lowe's, where all the family's engagement rings came from. Green eyes with a devil-red spark in the pupils. We had ten eyes left after someone in the family made Foxy.

All families have secret boxes, right? For things you're not quite ready to throw out but can't bear to have around you either. And an odd uncle who causes embarrassment in back bars and midnight masses. And unwanted, scary heirlooms. It's part of being in a family, isn't it? Clutter accumulates.

We had Mam's sewing box. It was meant to be a tool box, metal blue, cold, and it folded out like an upside-down iron bridge with gaps and nooks and slots for bits and bobs and a huge space at the bottom. Magic. Mam hadn't done any sewing since the summer we came back from Normandy and she tried making a section of the Bayeux Tapestry by hand. A yard of sea crossing. Her fingertips and her patience wore away by the time she got to the decorative shields along the side of the ship, so the box became a resting place for odds and ends.

There was a scrap of paper with hooks in it: I never knew for sure if they were for sewing or fishing. Buttons from my first dress: one tortoise shape, one hare. Patches for play-trousers that outlived the clothes they'd been on. One cufflink: Dad had 'Guilty' and 'Not Guilty' but lost one. 'Guilty' lay about in the sewing box, waiting. When 'Not Guilty' was found, it was put somewhere else too-safe, and every time one surfaced, the other didn't. But we knew they weren't truly lost. They were in the house, somewhere, safe, still ours. And once I found a dark thingamabob in there, smaller than a marble, bigger than rats' droppings. I could just about press a nail into it, leaving a half-moon impression. Dad confiscated it. He said Foxy wasn't allowed into the house again.

One thing that constantly surfaced: the eye bouquet. Everything tangled in it like an anchor scraping the sea-floor and surfacing with weed and relics. Nobody thought

to throw it out. It had been there too long. I would rummage on fidgety days: no homework, rain, power cuts, days for searching cupboards and finding new old things to ask questions about. I'd fish out an object; ask 'What's this?' 'What was this?'

The orange cartridges in the box were for everyday shooting: pheasants, fox, ducks, magpies that ate hens' eggs. Nothing exciting. They were crammed with pellets and surprisingly heavy. But the one green cartridge, that was different. It was from the Home Guard. A single slug in it, for a twelve bore. 'Highly illegal,' Dad said. And they used cartridges like it in Africa for elephants. Ours was for a future deer. One Day dad would chance on seeing one. He'd also happen to have his gun and cartridge belt.

I loved it, that cartridge, mostly for being illegal. But I liked it being *there*. I hoped dad would never have it with him and see a deer all at once. So, cartridges rolled about in the bottom of the box with rogue buttons and teeth, wound up in webs of bobbin thread, sequins, and a hint of machine oil, as if the box still craved the life it should have had.

'They're Foxy's spare eyes,' an old aunt said when I found the bouquet, 'in case.' It was Christmas. Almost everyone was invited. We weren't allowed to open the presents yet: carrots, parsnips, potato peeling first, and crossing the sprouts. Dad was in front of the damp teacloths on the cooker door, moving to Elton John. Even lawyers dance. He looked at the eyes in my hand as though I'd never be allowed to open a single present again.

***

I have two Foxys in my life. One *was* a fox, now stuffed in running motion. In his teeth, he has a pheasant, his jaws splattered with ox-blood paint, one drop never

quite heavy enough to fall. At his paws, lopsided birds peck for worms in heather almost dried to dust. And in his head, glass eyes. A taxidermist's *chef d'oeuvre*. Death and survival in a mahogany and glass case, shoved onto the landing windowsill. It had to go somewhere.

I remember that staircase; not the house. Remember staying there, going to bed below the dripping blood. That's what did it for me. I'd seen plenty of dead foxes, and in worse shape, but that static blood. It scared me more than the real stuff.

I guess he didn't count as furniture despite his frame being oak. Certain pieces of furniture had been around so long they seemed to evaporate into the room and be forgotten. Not Foxy. He didn't count as Art either. He was a reminder of death in the family, one that nobody wanted to deal with. He was too valuable to throw out; too frightening to keep. Eventually, he was taken to Dad's office, and placed in a room with all the archived files.

Dad and his brother were brought up in that same house, knowing that if they needed a wee badly enough at night, they'd have to tip-toe under Foxy and see the moon sharpen his teeth. They went to the same stone school and rattled about at the bottom of the Berwyn Mountains until they were old enough to decide what to do with themselves. They were both given the same things to eat. They developed like two mountain sheep, knowing their terrain. Wind, storms, frostbite, nettle stings – nothing could shift them from their landscape. But it was Uncle Huw, not Dad, who became the second Foxy. Everyone calls him that, *Foxy*, even the judge.

Losing his left eye came about because of a pole vault stick in 1962, he told me. We were at a family party at the White Lion, the one where he tried to free the Gwyniad

fish which were pickled and on show there. Sitting on a bar stool he calmly said that he had felt rapture and rage, back then, when the pole vault had him in the eye, and the pain, he said, was fantastic. He showed me how he could look at everyone at once now that one eye was glass. Dad had beer in his moustache, a boy outside had dropped his ice cream, there was a red car, a blue one, a silver one; and while he could see all of that, he was looking at me with a still eye.

I pulled my tongue at him. 'But you're not really looking at me,' I said. He couldn't see me, of course. I did it again. I saw myself in the reflection of his lifeless eye. He made me feel cherished, adored, even if I knew he didn't mean to be so attentive. He couldn't help it, gazing at me like that. And I told him I hated sports.

They don't do pole vaulting in school sports now. No wonder. And his dead eye, when they took it out, was like a Gwyniad in a jam jar, he said: slippery, covered in entrails. Dead and alive all at once. Not for public display. That's when I lost him. He set about freeing the fish, leap-frogging the bar and smashing beer glasses with his heels. The barmen restrained him by the armpits and everyone stared at me.

'Did you say anything to him?' Dad said. He wiped his moustache and kept his hand over his mouth. I knew why. He always covers the half of his face that's shaped like his brother; from the cheeks down, they're related.

This was in 1988. By then, Uncle Huw Foxy had over a dozen files in Dad's office: yellow foolscap ones for Loitering, other stuff. His first crime was burning down a three-story Georgian building. He did it by tossing a piece of tasteless dried meat into the fireplace and going for a pint. By the time he came back six hours later, there were no three stories. The crime was carelessness. He said it

was an accident. The landlord said Foxy had it in for him. Where can you go from there? But it was a beginning. He was nineteen.

By the eighties, he'd really become Huw Foxy, by deed poll, to amuse himself and to put two big fat fingers up at everyone.

'For when I sign cheques,' he said. But it wasn't as if he had to pay for anything. Margaret Thatcher did that, he said.

'He doesn't own a cheque book,' Dad said, and did the work anyway, providing a red sealed document, proof that he and Foxy no longer shared a surname. That file was the slimmest. It almost got lost among the others, all cheek to cheek either side of Foxy's glass case in the back room.

I adored Uncle Huw Foxy when I got to big school. He was the sweet smuggler at break time. He'd take orders, go to Harold's, charge 10 per cent, and teach us to move the decimal point so we knew how much we owed him without calculators. I had liquorish sherbets on Fridays. Then he disappeared for three years and I became less popular. I found it when I was doing filing work for extra pocket money: it was a big folder, two-inches thick. He'd been charging sixth formers 25 per cent (they had better maths), delivering cocaine, not sherbet. Made quite a profit. He got Possession only, not Intent to Supply, since orders were down that lucky day.

When he returned, he got by. By now the headmaster had retired to run a B&B half way up the Berwyn. On Christmas Eve, Uncle Huw Foxy spent all night cutting up any wire, cable or pipe that led to that B&B. He got done for Damage to Public Property and chuckled when he told me.

He fixed electrics for cash when he was around, and gave

vegetables as presents long before organic was respectable. By then, I wasn't so fond of his big hands and his need to dance every time I saw him in the high street. He was embarrassing. But he danced anyway, jumping from the bench outside the Milk Bar, kicking his mug and spilling tea over the pavement.

He acted up again in August 2001 and created his thirtieth file. This file was in fact two. It bulged at the sides, split open in the filing cabinet and pushed the others out. It became the whole *F* drawer. Uncle Foxy started writing long defence letters on newspaper margins, which means that now we can see that when Labour won the election that year, Foxy was into using green ink and phrases like 'crime of passion'.

He got it into his head that he could stop the old headmaster from reaching his B&B by placing boulders in the road. He says he was strong enough. In fact, they found Tyddyn's JCB in the field, and John Tyddyn said he'd never left it there, so… Uncle Foxy must have had human help as well, but unless the headmaster came to, there was no way of proving it. Someone in a bar in town with scraped hands would know more. Uncle Foxy sat in the police station, blaming no one. He explained how he'd uprooted the elephantine stone-age rocks from their sockets, single-handedly. How he'd placed them, one by one, blocking the road access. The headmaster ended up with a crow-bar dent in his head and a tyre mark bruise over his belly. He waved like a young tree in a gale, Foxy said, and puked up his guts. Dad said that nothing but Foxy's hair was out of place; he wasn't even sweating. And it took a team of policemen to rearrange the boulders.

Mam said, 'Where does he get his ideas from?'

The phone rang, so Dad was able to avoid answering. It had to be hospital or the police. Hospital. Dad looked at

himself in the hall mirror and held his head, covering his eyes and forehead. After a while like that, he got out a pen.

But I can't get into all of that now: telling Huw Foxy's life would use up all of mine, and it's taking most of Dad's. So, that will have to be that on his story. What's really on my mind is that fox. The one who poked his red head out of the heather to run one day, without a care for farmers in oilskins, carrying shotguns. That he ran without a thought for crimes of passion or the taste of paint. A fox who just wanted a bite of pheasant. So, he wasn't on his guard when he rose to the purple face of the mountain, his berry-coat rising into the wide, ash sky and went for it, eyes set on a flash of pheasant tail, over there. Intent on killing it. Not expecting anything except the scrape of heather and bilberry on his shins, cold air making puddles in his ears, food. Knowing nothing of everlasting life or glass eyes.

And now, he's stuck in a filing system with an inch of dust for sky. We come here to rifle through old files, to find out what year it was again when Huw Foxy got himself into a bloody broil with the butcher's son over the price of bacon, to wonder if there's a ghost here, or if it's Foxy. We quarrel at the door, 'You go,' 'No, you,' and go in together, always unsure if it's the long dead or the still air that disturbs us.

Hold on a second. Press against the glass case and look into those solid eyes until you're snub-nosed and damp-breathed, skin growing colder, hairs standing on end at the nape of your neck. Foxy is running. Wind splits on him. The world tumbles away from his damp nose and down the swirling hills of the Berwyn towards Llandderfel and Llangynog.

The Editing of

Foxy

SIÂN MELANGELL DAFYDD

edited by Alan Buckley

The following draft was edited and commented on by the poet Alan Buckley. Buckley approached the edit with a preface, outlining his method, which is quoted below and will be discussed in the conversation. After the edited draft follow other general comments.

Note: in the edited draft below, we have used strikethrough for cuts and bold for changes made by the editor, but since many changes were commented, we include those in the footnotes. Minor edits, such as typos, are not displayed.

If you don't want to lose your eyes, grab them by the veins sticking out of their behinds and wind those together into a bunch. (They're as pliable as pipe cleaners. They stay put).[1]

As for milk teeth, keep those with spare buttons in a Fosters Mints tin. Shake them when you feel cranky and

1 Editor: Fab. Grabbed me by the short and curlies. I had no idea where this was going, and although I was quickly aware of what was going on, I was left with a marvellous sense of having been slightly disturbed.

see how their little lives ~~smashing~~ **rattling**[2] about in there can calm you so much better than any shop-bought stress-ball.

When it comes to hair bands, keep one on each door handle, in case.

With needles, stick them into the kitchen notice board.

And as for tampons and shot gun cartridges, keep them in the sewing box with the Fosters Mints tin. That way you'll always be ~~safe~~ **sure** of finding one when you're desperate.

~~Oh, and b~~**B**y eyes, I mean glass ones. They're sold like that, by the dozen, ~~or half a dozen,~~ in a bouquet. ~~Apparently o~~**O**urs came from a shop in Chester Rows, not far from Lowe's, where all the family's engagement rings came from. Green eyes with a devil-red spark in the pupils. We had ten eyes left after someone in the family made Foxy.

All families have secret boxes, right? For things you're not quite ready to throw out but can't bear to have ~~about~~ **around** you either. And an odd Uncle who causes embarrassment in back bars and Midnight Masses. And unwanted, scary heirlooms. It's part of being in a family, isn't it? Clutter accumulates.

We had Mam's sewing box. It was meant to be a tool box, metal blue, cold like the belly of a machine that never quite got warmed up,[3] and it folded out like an upside-

2 Editor: I felt there was enough going on for me imagining the teeth as having "little lives" without then wondering about them being "cantankerous". And I felt "smashing" was a bit too violent.

3 Editor: Two similes one after another feels too much. And while the second one is lovely – it captures the visual of it perfectly – the first one's slightly muddled for me. I remember having a ten-minute discussion once with the poet Matthew Hollis about the precise workings of a single metaphor in one of my poems. Unfortunately, writing poetry makes you

down iron bridge with gaps and nooks and slots for bits and bobs and a huge space at the bottom. Magic. Mam hadn't done any sewing since the summer we came back from Normandy and she tried making a section of the Bayeux Tapestry by hand. A yard of sea crossing. Her finger~~prints~~**tips** and her patience wore away by the time she got to the decorative shields along the side of the ship, so the box became a graveyard for flotsam.[4]

There was a scrap of paper with hooks in it: I never knew for sure if they were for sewing or fishing. Buttons from my first dress: one tortoise shape, one hare. Patches for play-trousers that outlived the clothes they'd been on. One cufflink: dad had 'Guilty' and 'Not Guilty' but lost one. 'Guilty' lay about in the sewing box, waiting. When 'Not Guilty' was found, it was put somewhere else too-safe, and every time one surfaced, the other didn't. But we knew they weren't truly lost. They were in the house, somewhere, safe, still ours. It was comforting.[5] And once I found a dark thingamabob in there, smaller than a marble, bigger than rats' droppings. I could just about press a nail into it, leaving a half-moon impression. Dad confiscated it. He said Foxy wasn't allowed into the house again: he was getting too clever.

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something of a nitpicker. Anyway, I stumbled a bit on this image, because I found it rather muddly – there's a metaphor within the simile, and the whole thing is qualified ('never quite got warmed up'), so it feels a convoluted way to express coldness. But I love the unfolding box being like an iron bridge – it takes me right back to my dad's blue tool box when I was a kid, the magic of the things that were hidden away in it.

4 Mixed metaphor – maybe something like "resting place for odds and ends"?

5 I find this passage both comic and wonderfully poignant – I really caught my breath on "But we knew they weren't truly lost." I don't think you need "It was comforting," you've already shown that really well.

One thing that constantly surfaced: the eye bouquet. Everything tangled in it like an anchor scraping the **sea-**floor and surfacing with **weed and** relics. Nobody thought to throw it out. It had been there too long. I would rummage on fidgety days: no homework, rain, power cuts, days for searching cupboards and finding new old things to ask questions about. I'd fish out an object; ask 'What's this?' 'What was this?'

The orange cartridges in the box were for everyday shooting: pheasants, fox, ducks, magpies that ate hens' eggs. Nothing exciting. They were crammed with a hundred pellets and surprisingly heavy. But the one green cartridge, that was different. It was from the Home Guard. ~~One pellet~~ **A single slug**[6] in it, for a Twelve Bore. 'Highly illegal,' dad said. And they used cartridges like it in Africa for elephants. Ours was for a future deer. One day dad would chance on seeing one. He'd also happen to have his gun and cartridge belt.

I loved it, that cartridge, **mostly** for being illegal~~, mostly~~. But I liked it being *there*. **I h**~~H~~oped dad would never have it with him and see a deer all at once. So, cartridges rolled about in the bottom of the box with rogue buttons and teeth, wound up in webs of bobbin thread, sequins, and a hint of machine oil, as if the box still craved the life it should have had.[7]

6 Because you've got a hundred pellets in the previous sentence, I visualise one little pellet rattling around inside the cartridge, which isn't what you mean.

7 I like this whole section about the cartridges – and I also wonder whether it slows the pace or interrupts the flow a little too much. You've just come back to the eye bouquet; might it be better to go straight into the aunt and the Xmas party? The cartridges might be seen as standing as symbols for death and hunting, which are important themes, but you come to those anyway on the next page.

'They're Foxy's spare eyes,' an old aunt spouted out[8] when I found the bouquet, 'in case.' It was Christmas. Almost everyone was invited. We weren't allowed to open the presents yet: carrots, parsnips, potato peeling first, and crossing the sprouts. Dad was in front of the damp teacloths on the cooker door, moving to Elton John. Even lawyers dance. He looked at the eyes in my hand as though I'd never be allowed to open a single present again.

I have two Foxys in my life. One *was* a fox, now stuffed in running motion. In his teeth, he has a pheasant, his jaws splattered with ox-blood paint, one drop never quite heavy enough to fall. At his paws, lopsided birds peck for worms in heather almost dried to dust. And in his head, glass eyes. A taxidermist's *chef d'ouvre*. A universe[9]: life, death and survival in a glass[10] case, shoved onto the landing windowsill. It had to go somewhere.

I remember that staircase; not the house. Remember staying there, going to bed below the dripping blood. That's what did it for me. I'd seen plenty of dead foxes, and in worse shape, but that static blood…[11]

I guess he didn't count as furniture despite his frame being oak. Certain pieces of furniture had been around so long they seemed to evaporate into the room and be forgotten. Not Foxy. He didn't count as Art either. He was a reminder of death in the family, one that nobody wanted

8 Slightly odd turn of phrase for me.

9 Might this be deepened by a bathetic qualifier, like "small" or "little"?

10 Maybe it's more of a poetry thing, but I really notice when words get repeated in close proximity.

11 I use ellipses loads in personal notes and e-mails, but I resist them in other contexts – they often (though not always) kind of jar with me. Perhaps put in the actual effect on you? "It made me X."

to deal with, one Will to another.[12] He was too valuable to throw out; too frightening to keep. Eventually, he was taken to dad's office, ~~where exam notes ended up, the dolls' house~~ and **placed in a room with all the** archived files.

~~So d~~**D**ad and Uncle Huw ~~Foxy~~[13] were brought up in that same house, knowing that if they needed a wee badly enough at night, they'd have to tip-toe under Foxy and see the moon sharpen his teeth. They went to the same stone school and rattled about at the bottom of the Berwyn mountains until they were old enough to decide what to do with themselves. They were both given **the same** things to eat~~, the same things~~. They developed like two mountain sheep, knowing their terrain. ~~Neither w~~**W**ind, storms, frostbite, nettle stings **– nothing could shift them from their landscape** ~~nor exhaustive walks blasted them away~~. **But it was** Uncle Huw, not dad, **who** became the second Foxy. Everyone calls him that, *Foxy*, even the judge.

Losing his left eye came about because of a pole vault stick in 1962, he told me**. We were at a** ~~one~~ family party at the White Lion**, the one** where he tried to free the Gwyniad fish which were pickled and on show there. Sitting on a bar stool he calmly said that he had felt rapture and rage, back then, when the pole vault had him **in** ~~by~~ the eye, and the pain, he said, was fantastic. He showed me how he could look at everyone at once now that one eye **was** ~~is~~ glass. Dad had beer in his moustache, a boy outside **had**

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12 I don't understand what this means; and I'm not sure it's needed anyway – the rest of the sentence says it all very clearly. (Part of me wonders whether the naming of 'death in the family' is too explicit… Not sure.)

13 I think it's more impactful and less confusing if you hold off calling Uncle Huw 'Foxy' until the end of the paragraph.

dropped his ice cream, there was a red car, **a** blue **one, a** silver **one;** and while he could see all of that, he was looking at me with a still eye.

I pulled my tongue at him. 'But you're not really looking at me,' I said. He couldn't see me, of course. I did it again. I saw myself in the reflection of his **lifeless** ~~still~~[14] eye. He made me feel adored, cherished,[15] even if I knew he didn't mean to be so attentive. He couldn't help it, gazing at me like that**, longingly**. And I told him I hated sports.

They don't do pole vaulting in school sports now. No wonder. And his dead eye, when they took it out, was like a Gwyniad in a jam jar, he said: slippery, covered in entrails. Dead and alive all at once. Not for public display. That's when I lost him. He set about freeing the fish, leap-frogging the bar and smashing beer glasses with his heels. The barmen restrained him by the armpits and everyone stared at me.

'Did you say anything to him?' Dad said. He wiped his moustache and kept his hand over his mouth. ~~Sighed.~~ I knew why. He **always** covers the half of his face that's shaped like his brother**; f**~~F~~rom the cheeks down, they're related.

This was in 1988. By then, Uncle Huw Foxy had over a dozen files in Dad's office: yellow foolscap ones for Loitering, GBH, other stuff.[16] His first crime was burning down a three-story Georgian building. He did it by tossing a piece of tasteless dried meat into the fireplace and going

14 I'm trying to avoid the repetition of 'still.'

15 I'd swap them round – 'adored' feels stronger than 'cherished.'

16 I also stumbled a bit around 'loitering and GBH' – GBH is such a big crime, and loitering is such a trivial one. It overshadows the arson that is so elegantly described immediately afterwards, and (unhelpfully, I think) points too strongly towards the extreme violence that comes later in Huw Foxy's story. I'd suggest cutting the specifics entirely here, and going straight into his first crime.

for a pint. By the time he came back six hours later, there were no three stories. The crime was carelessness. He said it was an accident. The landlord said Foxy had it in for him. Where can you go from there? But it was a beginning. He was nineteen.[17]

By the eighties, he'd really become Huw Foxy, by deed **poll** ~~=pole~~, to amuse himself and **to put** ~~as~~ two big fat fingers up at everyone.

'For when I sign cheques,' he said. But it wasn't as if he had to pay for anything. Margaret Thatcher did that, he said.

'He doesn't own a cheque book,' dad said, and did the work anyway, providing a red sealed document, proof that he and Foxy no longer shared a surname. That file was the slimmest. It almost got lost among the others, all cheek to cheek either side of Foxy's glass case in the back room.

I adored Uncle Huw Foxy when I got to big school. He was the sweet smuggler at break time. He'd take orders, go to Harold's, charge 10%, and teach us to move the decimal point so we knew how much we owed him without calculators.[18] I had liquorish sherbets on Fridays. Then he disappeared for three years and I became less popular. I found **it when I was doing** ~~a file when I was~~ filing **work** for **extra** pocket money: **it was a big folder,** ~~a~~ two-inch**es thick**.[19] He'd been charging sixth formers 25% (they had better maths), delivering cocaine, not sherbet. Made quite a profit. He got Possession only, not Intent to Supply, since

17 I love the casual tone of this, describing something dramatic in an almost offhand way. Reminds me of Kurt Vonnegut, particularly the 'So it goes' repetition in 'Slaughterhouse 5.'

18 This is such a lovely detail – it quietly authenticates the whole passage somehow, and sets us up nicely for the 25% dealing that's to come.

19 My suggestion's a bit clumsy, I know, but I'm trying to find a way to avoid having 'file' and 'filing' right next to one another.

orders were down that lucky day.

When he returned, he got by. **By now t**~~T~~he headmaster had retired to run a B&B half way up the Berwyn. On Christmas Eve, Uncle Huw Foxy spent all night cutting up any wire, cable or pipe that led to that B&B. He got done for Damage to Public Property and chuckled when he told me.

He fixed electrics for cash when he was around, and gave vegetables as presents long before organic was respectable. By then, I wasn't so fond of his big hands and his need to dance every time I saw him in the high street. He was embarrassing. But he danced anyway, jumping from the bench outside the Milk Bar, kicking his mug and spilling tea over the pavement.

He acted up again in August 2001 and created his thirtieth file. A rite of passage.[20] This file was in fact two. It bulged at the sides, split open in the filing cabinet and pushed the others out. It became the whole *F* drawer. Uncle Foxy started writing long defence letters on newspaper margins**, which means that now we can see that** ~~in the future, we'll be able to identify that~~ when Labour got back into government,[21] Foxy was into using green ink and **phrases** ~~words~~ like 'crime of passion'.[22]

He got it into his head that he could stop the old headmaster from reaching his B&B by placing boulders

20 Is it a rite of passage? It feels like Foxy's too old, too entrenched in his ways to be having rites of passage.

21 I'd maybe use 'won the election that year' – though given that that was in June, Foxy's crime would have to be earlier than August. The phrase 'got back into government' automatically makes me think of 1997.

22 This phrase, of course, is picked up in your opening description of the fox. To make the parallel a little less forceful, perhaps there could be another example in here – perhaps a whole other event, so it runs something like "when X happened, Foxy was using purple ink and phrases like 'Y'; and when Labour got back etc.'

in the road. He says he was strong enough. In fact, they found Tyddyn's JCB in the field, and John Tyddyn said he'd never left it there, so…[23] Uncle Foxy must have had human help **as well**, but unless the headmaster came to, there was no way of proving it. Someone in a bar in town with scraped hands would know more. Uncle Foxy sat in the police station, blaming no one. He explained how he'd uprooted the elephantine stone-age rocks from their sockets, single-handedly. How he'd placed them, one by one, blocking the road access. The headmaster ended up with a crow-bar dent in his head and a tyre mark bruise over his belly. He waved like a young tree in a gale, Foxy said, and puked up his **guts** ~~coffee. Nescafe. Wren's piss~~.[24] Dad said that nothing but Foxy's hair was out of place**;** he wasn't even sweat**ingy**. And it took a team of policemen to rearrange the boulders. But since the headmaster objected instead of calling the police straight, things were as they were. Us drinking coffee and dad telling this story.[25]

Mam said, 'Where does he get his ideas from?'

The phone rang, so Dad **was able to** ~~could~~ avoid answering. It had to be hospital or **the** police. Hospital. Dad looked at himself in the hall mirror and held his head, covering his eyes and forehead. After a while like that, he got out a pen.[26]

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23 I rather like this ellipsis … call me contrary.

24 How would Foxy know it was specifically Nescafe that was being puked up?

25 I don't really get this, about the headmaster objecting, and how this would affect the police involvement; and it distracts a bit from the actuality of him at this moment being in a coma to think back to what he might have said. I think it could just be cut – the reader can work out from what you've said that Dad's telling a story.

26 Wonderfully cinematic – giving us narrative through what's implied by another's reaction to the event. Nice!

But I can't get into all of that now: telling Huw Foxy's life would use up all of mine, and it's taking most of dad's. So, that will have to be that on his story. What's really on my mind is that fox. The one who poked his red head out of the heather to run one day, without a care for farmers in oilskins, carrying shotguns. That he ran without a thought for crimes of passion or the taste of paint. A fox who just wanted a bite of pheasant. So, he wasn't on his guard when he rose to the purple face of the mountain, his berry-coat rising into the wide, un-obscured,[27] ash sky and went for it, eyes set on a flash of pheasant tail, over there. **Intent o~~O~~**n killing it. Not expecting anything except the scrape of heather and bilberry on his shins, cold air making puddles in his ears,[28] food. Knowing nothing of everlasting life or glass eyes.

And now, he's stuck in a filing system with an inch of dust for sky. We, ~~pensive secretaries~~ come here to rifle through old files, to find out what year it was again when Huw Foxy got himself into a bloody broil with the butcher's son over the price of bacon, to wonder if there's a ghost here, or if it's Foxy. We quarrel at the door, 'You go,' 'No, you,' and go in together, always unsure if it's the long dead or the still[29] air that disturbs us.

Hold on a second. Press against the glass case and look into those still eyes until you're snub-nosed and damp-breathed, skin growing colder, hairs standing on end at the nape of your neck. Foxy is running. Wind splits on

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27 Maybe delete this – 'wide, ash sky' feels sufficient, and more lyrical.

28 Wow! What a great piece of visceral description.

29 You've got 'still' in the next sentence, so you really need a different word here; or maybe delete it from the next sentence. 'Still' is probably my favourite word, but even so I notice the repetition. Same applies to 'damp-breathed' and 'damp nose' in the last paragraph.

him. The world tumbles away from his damp nose and down the swirling hills of the Berwyn towards Llandderfel and Llangynog.[30]

BUCKLEY'S MESSAGES TO DAFYDD

I wouldn't normally write above the title of someone's work like this – whatever scribbles / comments go on below the title, that little bit of white space always feels sacred somehow … but I thought – given as how you hadn't seen one of my crits before – it might help to point out some of my tics and traits, so you weren't immediately too puzzled / irritated.

The main thing is that I use Track and Change for both typos / grammatical glitches, *and* for suggestions: rather than write a comment box with "this feels a bit X why don't you try something more Y like Z" I often just bung an alternative in. It's not about me re-writing your work – it's just that I'm a slow typist, and I need to make shortcuts.

I do put comments in as well, at the side and at the end. I tend to be picky, which I think reflects my writing poetry rather than prose – I really notice if (for an example) an image is a bit off-key. So please forgive me if I seem overly fastidious. I also of course put in overview stuff about my emotional response to the whole piece, and about shape and movement, though that tends to come after all the detailed stuff, which probably isn't the best order to read it in. So, what I'll say for now is what I put in my e-mail – I'm really wowed by this; I'm engaged by / with it, persuaded by it, moved by it. It couples an easy, anecdotal tone (like I got chatting to someone in the pub and they started telling me a story) with a sense of the

30 What can I say? The soundscape of the words here is amazing… A really powerful ending - reminds me of Ted Hughes' jaguar – see below.

uncanny, *das unheimliche*, the other; there's enough weirdness for it to be distinctive, yet without it ever feeling like some quirky posturing is going on. And, of course, there's that lovely movement into the lyrical and the transcendental at the end that is so beautifully set up / prepared for during the main body of the story.

All of my comments have to sit in the context of me saying – with all honesty – that I couldn't do this myself; I haven't written a short story since I was 15. All I can do, really, is ask the question that I always ask (usually unconsciously) whenever I read anything, poetry or prose, namely 'am I in safe hands?' Can I trust this writer; can I surrender to them? And the way you handle the playful beginning definitely had me hooked in, and feeling in safe hands, by about the bottom of the first page.

I've thought long and hard about whether there's anything that could be cut from this, or changed in the structure. However, it's become a bit of a knee-jerk reaction, particularly in poetry crits – 'can this be shorter?' Apart from the description of the cartridges, I can't really see that anything needs to be cut from this, or placed in a different order. It has a natural pacing, unhurried but not too discursive. It's really engaging, and believable, and I think that the ending gains much of its impact from the fact that you've been willing to lay all the groundwork for it, that you haven't been in too much of a hurry to get there.

A number of poems came to mind for me – I guess I tend to think in terms of poems, rather than other short stories, because that's my main medium. I don't know if you know this poem "The Jaguar" by Ted Hughes (which is itself inspired by Rilke's 'The Panther') but I immediately thought of it as I reached Foxy's end. The other poem that came to mind for me was Paul Muldoon's "Cuba," not for its subject matter being like the story's, but for its structuring. [Note: Buckley included

the poems in his message]. What I think is so brilliant about this poem is that the two things – the Cuban missile crisis and the girl's sexual experience – are simply presented together, with no particular direction as to what is being compared to what. It's what Don Paterson calls an 'isologue' (he loves making up fancy names for things – which is perhaps another aspect of poets' essential insecurity, and need to stake a claim on bits of linguistic territory, I think!). You can't tell what is tenor (subject) and what is vehicle (object of comparison) – they're both just presented to you, and you can make up your own mind how (or even if) these two things are to be compared with each other. They both have equal status within the domain of the poem. And it's like that for me with the two Foxys – we're not asked to make a simplistic comparison where one Foxy is used to inform our understanding of the other; they're both just offered to us, leaving us to draw links (or not) as we choose. Within that, there's a wonderful moral detachment that I find incredibly thrilling, disturbing even: there's no sentimentality here – you don't gloss over the violence of either Foxy – but at the same time you don't direct the reader towards a particular judgement. Both Foxys saw something, and went for it; that is essential to both their natures, it's an 'is-ness'.

The other gift of this structuring is that it opens up a marvellous spaciousness, a between-ness, from which all manner of themes – around mortality, how we choose to live, the movements of fate, how we transcend death – are allowed to rise spontaneously, without being signposted in huge letters. Then there's melancholy; I guess some of what I'm picking up is *hiraeth*, if I might be allowed to mention the great untranslatable word. (I know I'm not Welsh, but the landscape of North Wales is so bound up with many of my happiest childhood memories that I feel at least an honorary

connection to those mountains and rivers and estuaries). There's a real aching here, for a kind of union, a kind of escape that is also a return…

Phew. I've probably said enough. Possibly far too much. But at heart, it's simple – when I find writing that excites me, I want to dive into it, discover what's going that is having this impact on me. I really hope Foxy finds a good home – he (they?) deserves it.

Alan

IN CONVERSATION

SIÂN MELANGELL DAFYDD

THE EDITORS

When we look at Buckley's work on your story, we see a great deal more commentary and engagement with the content and the aesthetics than the amount of line editing which we see in many other cases. The edits do not, at first glance, seem to be substantial, and yet you have expressed great admiration for what he did for this story and your work in general. What exactly was his impact on the story?

DAFYDD

The poet, Alan Buckley – I'm not sure I should call him an editor – offered to read "Foxy," which was struggling to find a home as a story, always second for everything. It seemed jinxed. In my experience, editors edit very, very little. I was looking for someone who would dare to trespass and really engage. So I am not sure I agree with

you – in my view, Buckley's work on the story does offer a great deal more in terms of engagement and commentary.

At one point, Alan says, "Maybe it's more of a poetry thing, but I really notice when words get repeated in close proximity," for example. Things like that have become like a red flag to a bull for me now, in everything I write, not just "Foxy." My story needed a poet. Maybe also someone who cared enough to give me time – but so did I, as a writer.

So, Alan has taken care to point out what *does* work as well as what jars. He's also given feedback on exact word choice, rhythm, tension building, mixed metaphors, areas where giving one example is stronger than two and I should have picked up on it myself, the use and power of punctuation in different contexts (use of ellipses), and also points where he's not sure if the character behaves in tune with who he really is. He's understood what I'm trying to do with the story. No editor has ever given my work this level of attention or honesty. Alan also gives me an insight into the workings of the mind of a reader, or him as a reader. What other works of literature this "Foxy" might speak to, even if I might not have been aware of it. All readers do this, of course, depending what their reading journey has been – information that's usually hidden from the writer. That's how "Foxy" expanded for me, thanks to his responses.

THE EDITORS

What seems to be unique here, in contrast to other work we have examined, is that Buckley's particular attention to for instance word choices and language rhythms gives far more weight to the micro elements of the story. He calls it "nit-picking." We find this comment early on: "I remember having a ten-minute discussion once with the

poet Matthew Hollis about the precise workings of a single metaphor in one of my poems. Unfortunately, writing poetry makes you something of a nit-picker. Anyway, I stumbled a bit on this image, because I found it rather muddly – there's a metaphor within the simile, and the whole thing is qualified ('never quite got warmed up'), so it feels a convoluted way to express coldness." We have encountered many editors over time (not in this book) who might be able to react to such a thing as metaphor-within-a-simile, and state that something is off-key, as you say, that it needs cutting, but not exactly why that is the case. Here, Buckley is revealing something that will not only allow you to improve this text but also learn for life. This kind of nit-picking is anything but "unfortunate."

DAFYDD

Exactly! He's made me into a nit-picker. This is why, for me, the edits *are* substantial, to come back to your first question. The impact filters through to how I am as a writer, translator, editor and teacher. I wouldn't say "that's it," now, either. There's always more to unearth if I carry on having this sort of exchange between writers. I'm particularly interested in the charge a chosen word and its position can have, not only in poetry but also in prose.

THE EDITORS

At one point, Alan says, "All I can do, really, is ask the question that I always ask (usually unconsciously) whenever I read anything, poetry or prose, namely 'am I in safe hands?' Can I trust this writer; can I surrender to them?" This comes across as great criteria, which many of us probably have, instinctively perhaps, without phrasing it so well. We wonder if you think that maybe this should apply to editing as well? Feeling that the editor shows one a

possibility to surrender in the most positive way. Normally we see surrender as a matter of concession, giving up our artistic integrity. At the same time, working with an editor who truly shows it is not about your editorial ego but the story, the way of pushing the author to her best writing self, seems make a word such as "surrender" positively charged.

DAFYDD

We could easily turn Alan's string of questions inside out. As a writer, starting on that laborious task of editing, re-writing and asking questions of our earlier drafts, "am I in safe editorial hands? Can I trust this editor; do they understand me?" The poet, Jean Portante speaks of the lungs of a poem or story. A translator needs to know the breath and lungs of the work they're re-writing, he says. An editor needs that level of breath-intimacy, too. To know what is making the story live, for that writer. Part of the exchange is also that I was receptive to Alan's thorough pondering! It *is* a surrender, not in terms of giving away control but in ceasing to resist – staying curious about possibility.

THE EDITORS

We want to speak about Alan's comment on what "Don Paterson calls an 'isologue' … . You can't tell what is tenor (subject) and what is vehicle (object of comparison) – they're both just presented to you, and you can make up your own mind how (or even if) these two things are to be compared with each other." First of all, Siân, how did you understand this idea? What did it give you in the process of rewriting "Foxy" and a more long-term writing projects you have had? And Alan, can you say something

more about how you have used this practically in your own work, or in work of authors you have read or worked with?

DAFYDD

I'm not sure what to say here other than: yes, yes. I didn't expect to be compared to two such extraordinary poets, and I hadn't thought of the mechanics of "Foxy" this way. It just presented itself to me this way. I can see the cogs turning through Alan's reflections. I see "Foxy" differently – but I made no changes based on this particular observation. I just continued to write, and in writing, I see that I use "isologue" instinctively – so I see Alan winking form the margin. I recognise myself and this conversation we had through "Foxy" and then, maybe, try to let it be. That's it really. There's "let it be" to the way things roll out on paper, like life – that's isologue isn't it? So yes – let it be.

THE EDITORS

Thank you very much for sharing the materials and thoughts with us.

Interview with

Mark Haddon

SIMON LINTER

Mark Haddon is the author of children's books, poetry, short stories, screenplays, radio dramas, and several novels including his best known work *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,* which won the Whitbread Award, the Guardian Prize, and a Commonwealth Writers Prize. He has also worked as an illustrator, and illustrated his short story collection *The Pier Falls* released in 2016. His latest work is *Two Stories* released in June 2017.

INTERVIEWER

By working within so many facets of creative writing do you ever feel daunted by the change of writing style or approach to a particular form when a new project arises? And if so, how do you overcome this challenge?

HADDON

On the contrary, I would find it a challenge to restrict myself to one form. I find it hard enough to stick even to writing and spend a good deal of my time painting and printmaking. Writing is hard work. It is for me at least. If anything gets written which is good enough to keep then that counts as a success. I'm less concerned with what that *anything* might be.

As I get older, however, I do find myself focusing more and more narrowly. I doubt I will write for children again. Nor I will be writing for TV (as I've often said, writing for TV is like being a barnacle of art trying to steer an oil tanker of commerce). I've learnt, reluctantly, that I simply don't write in a way that is suitable for stage drama (*Polar Bears*, of which I remain very proud, was a one-off – a novelist's play if you like). And when I wrote *The Red House* I finally worked out how to put poetry into my prose, so I doubt I'll write much more poetry, if any. But I'm in the middle of writing a fourth novel and I will certainly be writing more short stories.

INTERVIEWER

Keeping on the subject of writing styles, when you started approaching the writing of *A Spot of Bother* after *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, was first person perspective a consideration after creating the compelling character of Christopher? I remember sitting in a creative writing class when the teacher said: what does an author write after writing something like *Curious*?

HADDON

In some respects, *Curious* was a very straightforward novel to write. The narrative consists of two interleaved linear narratives (what is happening now and what happened when Christopher's mother died) told from the point of view of a character who operates according to a fairly rigid set of self-imposed rules. The other chapters are small essays in which I get to deliver simplified lectures about topics close to my heart. With *A Spot of Bother* I deliberately set out to learn different skills. I'd written for a solo instrument, now I wanted to write a piece of chamber music. Isn't that what you should always do after a success, challenge yourself

to learn something new? *The Red House* felt like a step further, a novel in which the language really mattered. *The Pier Falls* was made up of stories in several different genres which contained considerably more plot than any of my previous fiction. And the novel I'm working on now… well, let's not jinx it.

INTERVIEWER

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time was originally your first adult novel until the publisher suggested that it should be considered for young adults. In retrospect do you believe that it should have been an adult only book, and if so, do you believe there is a problem with books being labelled within certain genres or marketed for a specific group of people?

HADDON

I'm very happy with *Curious* having been published in two parallel editions. It's occasionally irksome when I'm described as a children's writer, or when I'm treated as a not-wholly-serious novelist because *Curious* was read by so many children, but it's a minor gripe when set against the overwhelmingly positive reaction I've had from younger readers. Indeed, one of the most heartening things I hear in that regard is the number of young people who refuse to read anything but are sucked in by *Curious*.

The abstract question of whether the labelling of books is a good or a bad thing rests on the much more down-to-earth, less exciting, less visible, harder-to-resolve question of bookshop (or website) organisation and the categorisation information hidden in the ISBN and bar-code. Marketing aside, you have to arrange a bookshop (or indeed a website) *somehow*. Putting every book in alphabetical order is not going to work and it's not something bookshop staff can

do. So books come pre-categorised. One of the clever things Random House did with *Curious* was to print it in two editions with two ISBN numbers so that it went into both sections of any bookshop.

It would be wonderful if books could be sold like theatre, if the novel *Curious*, for example, were sold like tickets for the stage adaptation where anyone can come to a single performance irrespective of age. But both art forms have inherent practical limitations which are not easily resolved. And theatre, of course, has outreach problems which simply don't exist for the novel – novels can be read by people with severe mobility problems, they can be read anywhere and at any time, they can be reread.

INTERVIEWER

I never read the blurbs on the back of books. When I started reading *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,* I had to figure out what was wrong with Christopher for myself. You have been very vocal on the subject of book blurbs, and do you believe that a book is better off without one?

HADDON

I have no problem with blurbs in general. Good blurbs are essential for the same reasons that good covers are essential. Potential readers need to be seduced. My problem with the original blurb for *Curious* (written by someone else before I understood how much control I could have over such things) was simply that it contained the phrase *Asperger's Syndrome*. Whilst it's true that if Christopher were real and if he were interviewed by a psychologist he would very probably be given that diagnosis, it is not a label he ever applies to himself or which I ever apply to him. That blurb suggested that it was an 'issue novel' and led many people

to think that Christopher should represent an entire group of very disparate people. Perhaps most unhelpfully it suggested to some readers that I set out with a plan to write a character with Asperger's, whereas in truth I wanted to create a believable, interesting, sympathetic character with a unique voice. The hypothetical Asperger's diagnosis was both accidental and entirely *post hoc*.

INTERVIEWER

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is on the reading list for several high schools and universities in Sweden. In an interview published in *The Telegraph* 2015, the headline stated not to use the book as an autism textbook (in relation to social workers and police). Going back to the subject of book blurbs, some people with Asperger's syndrome have been critical of it for not being realistic. Even though the label of fiction denotes that the story is fictitious, how does an author address the balance of fiction vs. realism? Should an author be wary of such a balance if one exists?

HADDON

That headline was a misquote, as they so often are. I said simply that I was uneasy about *Curious* being used as a textbook. If the novel can be used in any way that makes life easier for people who are suffering as result of prejudice and ignorance then I am all in favour. But I want to fight my corner for the novel as a novel. A good textbook seeks clarity and simplicity. A good novel seeks ambiguity and complexity.

It's true that some people have been critical about the novel, mostly people with Asperger's and parents of people with Asperger's who feel that the novel doesn't reflect their lives or the lives of people like them or that it stereotypes

such people. On the other hand I have also received huge numbers of letters from readers who have Asperger's or who are parents of people with Asperger's, and those letters have been wholly supportive. Many say that they get other people to read the novel for some insight into what their lives are like or what the lives of their children are like. A fair number say that they *are* Christopher, that the novel captures their lives with uncanny accuracy. I clearly remember a letter from one young man who said that his parents finally understood him after he made them read the book.

The conflict between fiction and realism is a false dichotomy. If you think you know what's real then you probably need to look a little more closely at the world before writing about it. The key, for me, is to write fiction and make it seem as real as possible, whether you're on Mars or in Swindon.

INTERVIEWER

The Red House (2012) utilises a third person omniscient narration that is able to hop between several characters as well as be descriptive without necessarily involving a character. What considerations did you make when writing this book in terms of cutting between characters and maintaining a steady narrative flow on a macro level?

HADDON

There is sometimes an omniscient third person narrator in *The Red House*. More often the novel is written in indirect free speech, that is in the third person but coloured by the feelings and opinions of the person whose viewpoint we are temporarily sharing.

> *Some idiot came past on a motorbike at Mach 4. Richard pictured a slick of spilt oil, sparks fantailing from the sliding*

tank, massive head trauma and the parents agreeing to the transplant of all the major organs so that some good might come of a short life so cheaply spent, though Sod's Law would doubtless apply and some poor bastard would spend the next thirty years emptying his catheter bag and wiping scrambled egg off his chin.

The guiding spirit of the novel was Virginia Woolf and I tried to emulate something of her ability to switch rapidly and seamlessly from one mind to another and from one narrative technique to another. A review which described the novel as 'Virginia Woolf with mobile phones and masturbation' was very satisfying.

INTERVIEWER

The Red House features fragmented descriptions, poetry, long flowing sentences and short choppy sentences. The timeline happens over a week and the chapters are represented by weekdays. When a book features this type of narration, some book reviewers regard it as being art for art's sake, that there is some level of pretension. How do you respond to this criticism?

HADDON

A novel isn't a story you decide to place inside one of a number of possible stylistic containers. At least that's not the way I work. Of course, I too read novels which I think are pretentious and self-indulgent, though here seems like the wrong place to name them. But I also enjoy novels which challenge the reader, which celebrate the possibilities of language and which push the envelope a little. Recent examples would be Samanta Schweblin's *Fever Dream* or George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo*. If you don't like that kind of novel then there are plenty of other ones to read.

INTERVIEWER

Many creative writing courses give upcoming authors the advice that they have to strip themselves bare and put themselves in difficult positions. *The Pier Falls* features beautiful but horrific descriptions of injuries, death, survival, humiliation, amongst other things. In an interview for The Guardian in 2016 you said if a short story is not more entertaining than the news, then you need to throw it away and start again. At what point does a short story become less about entertainment and more about representing the pain and suffering of human life?

HADDON

Far be it from me to say what a short story should or shouldn't be. The world is already full of articles and essays and interviews working that particular subject to death. There are absolutely no restrictions as to what a short story can or cannot be, just as there are absolutely no restrictions as to what a novel can or cannot be. Isn't that one of the joys of fiction?

By *entertainment* I meant simply gripping the reader's attention as opposed to assuming that they will grant you their attention because you have created a very fine piece of art which they should appreciate. I have read many, many short stories which operate in this way. *Macbeth* is entertaining. Vassily Grossman's *Life and Fate* is entertaining. *The Handmaid's Tale* is entertaining. Entertainment, pain and suffering are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, literature is one of the few arenas in which those things can benignly overlap.

INTERVIEWER

When *The Pier Falls* was released, it did not feature any illustrations. A special edition was released with illustrations to entice people into bookstores to buy

a physical copy. Unfortunately, Amazon sent out the illustrated copy to everyone who bought the first edition (including me!). Can you relate this experience to *The Death of the Author* by Roland Barthes where a work ceases to be under control of the author, albeit by a commercial enterprise? How important is it to keep control after a work has been released?

HADDON

To invoke Roland Barthes would be to intellectualise a very simple, corporate fuck-up which made me very angry. I am going to keep the details under the wraps for diplomatic reasons but suffice to say that I am indeed taking more control of the process from now on.

INTERVIEWER

Following on from this, do you regard ebooks as diminishing the role of physical books or is it a case of them undermining high street book shops?

HADDON

I dislike them. I dislike the physical experience of reading on a screen and I particularly dislike the way they prevent you sharing books and handing them to other readers and donating them to charity bookshops, which constitutes the monetisation of yet another private human relationship. However, I know people for whom e-books are really useful: people who travel a lot; people with impaired sight; people who regularly need to search texts. But e-books sales are now falling in both the US and the UK so it's less of an issue than it used to be. The big threat to bookshops is Amazon, but don't get me started on that or we will be here for a very long time. If you know anything about the books or the booktrade then you know my reasons already.

INTERVIEWER

In an interview for The Guardian 2016 you said that you are not a good writer but a persistent editor, and that you throw away three quarters of what you write. Some writers might be horrified by this high level of self-criticism and discipline, but is there an advantage to be gained by throwing writing away?

HADDON

We're in the habit of looking a writer's work and working practices and asking why they made those particular choices. I suspect that they are very often not choices as such. They certainly aren't for me. I throw away work because it is bad. The self-criticism is a character-trait not a tactic. Should other writers throw a similar proportion of work away? Let's say that if you don't realise how bad your early drafts are and you're not prepared to throw work away then it probably isn't the job for you.

INTERVIEWER

In *Stop What You Are Doing and Read This* (2011) you say that translated works make you feel as if you are missing something. Are you concerned about your works losing their message or being stripped of vital emotions and poetic descriptions? And if this is happening, do you think this goes back to an author being in control of their work and being powerless to do much about publishing processes?

HADDON

I will never know the definitive answer to this because I am not fluent in two, three or four languages, but I am fairly confident that - quirks of British culture apart - both

Curious and *A Spot of Bother* translated both easily and well because neither of them are particularly rooted in the English language. *The Red House*, I know, presented more challenges to translators. The novel I'm working on right now is going to be a challenge, too, not least the sections which involve translations from Middle- and Old-English.

INTERVIEWER

To follow up on the previous question, your publisher recently posted that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was the fifth most banned book in the USA in 2015 by the American Library Association for offensive language, religious viewpoint, unsuited for age group, profanity and atheism. When large associations, like the ALA, make these decisions, does this have any effect on your approach or outlook to writing? Do you write for yourself primarily or for a particular audience?

HADDON

In all the cases I've come across, *Curious* was banned only locally and never by a library. Usually the furore began when a small group of parents objected to its inclusion on a school reading list, or when someone involved in local politics objected to its having been chosen for a one-city-one-book reading scheme. Often the objectors were forced to admit that they had not read the novel. Those who defended the novel – teachers, librarians, other parents – were invariably more articulate. And in almost every case a genuine debated was started about censorship and free speech and the value of literature. And whilst I can't prove it I suspect that many more people ended up reading the book as a result of other people trying stop them reading it.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rob Cook lives is the author of six collections, *Asking my Liver for Forgiveness* (2015), *Undermining of the Democratic Club* (2014), *Blueprints for a Genocide* (2012), and *Empire in the Shade of a Grass Blade* (2013). Work has appeared in *Asheville Poetry Review, Caliban, Fence, A cappella Zoo, Zoland Poetry, Tampa Review, Minnesota Review*, and many more.

Rich Murphy's poetry has won Gival Press Poetry Prize 2008 for *Voyeur* and Press Americana Poetry Prize for *Americana* in 2013. Asylum Seeker was published in 2018. *Body Politic* was published in 2017, and *The Apple in the Monkey Tree* in 2007. Chapbooks include *Family Secret*, *Hunting and Pecking*, *Phoems for Mobile Vices*, and *Great Grandfather*.

Jonathan Greenhause is the winner of the 2017 *Prism Review* Poetry Contest. His poems appear in *The Antigonish Review*, *december*, *The Fiddlehead*, *LitMag*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Rialto*, and *Subtropics*, among others. His second chapbook, "Secret Traits of Everyday Things" was published by Encircle Publications.

Chuck Teixeira's work has appeared in numerous print and on-line publications, including *Esquire, Jonathan, Blue Lyre, Portland Review, Permafrost, Gay Flash Fiction* and *Wilde Oats*, and in *Thicket, Against Slander* and *Sierra Showdown*.

Caron Freeborn was a novelist until gradually she became a poet. Her first full poetry collection is *Georges Perec is my hero* (2015). Currently, she is working on a collaborative project with photographer Steve Armitage. With the *Presenting...The Fabulous O'Learys* (Holland House 2017) she returns to prose fiction.

Steve Armitage points a camera, and sometimes it works. Although his pictures have appeared on mainstream book covers, most of his photographs tell the surprising stories of neglected things. The work with poet Caron Freeborn is not about one part illustrating the other but the relationship between views.

Sofiul Azam has three poetry collections *Impasse* (2003), *In Love with a Gorgon* (2010), *Safe under Water* (2014) and edited *Short Stories of Selim Morshed* (2009). His poems are published in *Prairie Schooner, Appalachia, Cholla Needles, The Matador Review, The Cape Rock, Poetry Salzburg Review,*

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Andria Nyberg Forshage has a Scorpio rising and an MA in Aesthetics. She has presented on trans women's contemporary writing and the philosophical sublime at the Trans*Studies Conference at the University of Arizona. In addition to poetry, she is currently writing about the concept of transversality.

Daven McQueen is a student and writer from Los Angeles, California. She is a third year at Brown University, where she is pursuing double major in economics and creative writing. Her work has received two Scholastic Art and Writing Awards in the novel category.

Jeffrey Alfier's recent poetry books include *Fugue for a Desert Mountain* and *The Red Stag at Carrbridge: Scotland Poems*. Recent work appears in *Cold Mountain Review*, *Suisan Valley Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. He is founder and co-editor of Blue Horse Press and *San Pedro River Review*.

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Alexander Walker is a student on the MA program in Transnational Creative Writing at Stockholm University. He lived in China for two years, and many of his poems tackle themes of place and displacement, as well as the effects that relocation can have on a person's life, both good and bad.

Joseph Albanese is a writer from South Jersey. His poetry can be found in 2017 issues of *Calliope*, *Concho River Review*, *Lowestoft Chronicle*, *Sunset Liminal*. His first novel, *Caina*, will be published in 2018.

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Dan Encarnacion lives in Portland, Oregon. Dan has work forthcoming in *Fourteen Hills* and *Prairie Schooner.* He has recently been published in *Conjunctions*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *cream city review*, *New American Writing*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *Big Bridge*, *The Southern Review*, *Assaracus* and *The Los Angeles Review*.

Ann Howells, of Dallas, Texas, has edited *Illya's Honey* eighteen years, recently digital www.IllyasHoney.com. Publications: *Black Crow in Flight*, *Under a Lone Star*, *Letters for My Daughter*, anthology of D/FW poets, *Cattlemen & Cadillacs*, and *Softly Beating Wings,* winner, William D. Barney Chapbook Contest 2017.

Clive Donovan has published in *Agenda*, *Acumen*, *Prole*, *Erbacce*, *Salzburg Review* and *The Journal*. He lives in the creative atmosphere of Totnes, Devon, England, often walking along the River Dart for inspiration.

Mark Jackley's work has appeared in *Fifth Wednesday*, *Sugar House Review*, *Natural Bridge* and other journals. *On the Edge of a Very Small Town* is available for free at chineseplums@gmail.com.

Ian C Smith's work has appeared in *Antipodes, Australian Book Review, Australian Poetry Journal, Critical Survey, Poetry Salzburg Review, The Stony Thursday Book, & Two-Thirds North.* His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide).

John Sibley Williams is the author of nine poetry collections, most recently *Disinheritance*. A seven-time Pushcart nominee and winner of various awards, John serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*. Publications include: *Yale Review, Atlanta Review, Prairie Schooner, Midwest Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and others.

Brazilian poet Enaiê Mairê Schlögel de Azambuja is half Spanish, a quarter Italian and a quarter Austrian. She is also a Jew and a Moor. She studies ecocriticism, feminism, philosophy of time and once tried to jump off a building after failing to understand Hegel (haven't we all?).

Omar Sabbagh's work includes *My Only Ever Oedipal Complaint* (2010), *The Square Root of Beirut* (2012), *To The Middle of Love* (2017), and *Via Negativa: A Parable of Exile* (2016). He now teaches at the American University in Dubai.

Thomas Lavelle is an American writer and academic who has lived in Stockholm since 1992. He teaches creative writing and professional communication at the Stockholm School of Economics.

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Chris Somos is a Greek-Canadian writer who is currently completing his MA in Creative Writing at Stockholm University. As a transnational individual with strong ties to his heritage, many of his works deal with issues of culture and how it can create a sense of home, family, longing, and belonging.

Siân Melangell Dafydd is an author, poet and translator. *Y Trydydd Peth* won her the 2009 National Eisteddfod Literature Medal. Her second Welsh language novel and a collection of hybrid literature, *Spitting Distance* are forthcoming.

Alan Buckley's debut pamphlet, *Shiver* was the Poetry Book Society pamphlet choice for summer 2009. He was awarded an Arts Council writer's grant in the same year. In 2010 he won first prize in the Wigtown Poetry Competition, and was shortlisted for the inaugural Picador Poetry Prize.

Bonita Barlow was born in Stamford Ct 1955, studied at The Boston School of the Museum of Fine Arts and with American Impressionist Henry Henche at the Cape School of Art. Currently lives in Southern NM.