



**TWO  
THIRDS  
NORTH** 2022

**KAREN RIGBY  
DIARMUID MAOLALAI  
ALTON MELVAR M DAPANAS**

TWO  
THIRDS  
NORTH

2022

# TWO THIRDS NORTH

2022

SENIOR EDITORS Adnan Mahmutović, Maria Freij,  
Paul Schreiber

PUBLISHER Stockholm University

ASSISTANT EDITORS Andrey Belov, Quentin  
Caizergues, Patrycja Chudzik,  
Anna Demchenko, Serra June  
Hughes, Paolo Iozzia, Teija  
Johanson, John Johansson  
Moberg, Maija Kalla, Natassa  
Karamouzis, Michael Legere,  
Carolyn McCallister, Deepak  
Rattani, Valentina Sarmiento  
Ortiz, Sofiya Savelyeva

ISBN 978-1-909077-98-0

Cover art by: Oormila Vijaykrishnan Prahlad



# CONTENTS

*Editor's Foreword*, Maria Freij 6

## PLUS ÇA CHANGE...

*L'Emporio di Cagnoli Elia*, Jane Blanchard 12

*Breaking Cover*, Bill Howell 13

*Building a New Washroom*, Sreekanth Kopuri 14

*The Art of Moderation*, Brigita Orel 15

1. *at the end it's suddenly important*, Kate LaDew 26

2. *because the middle ages*, Kate LaDew 27

## INTERTEXTUALITIES

*Young Lady with Gloves*, Karen Rigby 30

*Guila Tofana's Aqua Tofana: A 17th Century Classified Ad*,  
Hollie Dugas 32

*Compass, in Retrospect*, Timothy Dodd 34

*Sonambient I*, Megan Stolz 36

*Sonambient II*, Megan Stolz 37

*On Phrases by Pythagoras*, Jeanine Stevens 38

## HAUNTINGS

<i>Postmortem</i> , Howie Good	42
<i>Still Life</i> , Ian C Smith	43
<i>Brian and Dave to the Rescue</i> , John Grey	44
<i>Properties of the House</i> , Charles Wilkinson	46
<i>Pause</i> , Sreekanth Kopuri	48
<i>Your Absence on an Ordinary Day</i> , James Owens	49

## FUTURES, PASTS, AND PRESENTS

<i>from a distant future</i> , Christopher Linforth	52
<i>I Love You with my Ford</i> , Kenneth Pobo	53
<i>A Samizdat Man</i> , Omar Sabbagh	54
<i>Krishna and Karna</i> , Vikas Prakash Joshi	64
<i>In the Silent Cinema Magnolias Rain White Again</i> , Karen Rigby	71

## INNER AND OUTER LANDSCAPES

<i>Tales I Might've Told a Runaway at a North End Beach</i> , Jeffrey Alfier	74
<i>Crossing the Light in Bluffton, Arkansas</i> , Jeffrey Alfier	75
<i>After Drinks: Humbaan ni Aling Violy, Cogon Public Market</i> , Alton Melvar M Dapanas	76
<i>After Drinks: Lugawan Bulalohan sa La Creolle, Capistrano Street</i> , Alton Melvar M Dapanas	78
<i>A Mind of One's Own</i> , Paul Brownsey	80

<i>White Picket Fence</i> , Roger Camp	88
<i>Where the River is Lost in the Lake</i> , James Owens	89
<i>Down into Mexico/Hello Stranger</i> , Parrish	90

## POINTS OF VIEW

<i>As Vanishing Point Perspective Vanishes</i> , William Doreski	96
<i>Troubles</i> , John Grey	98
<i>The Box</i> , Diarmuid Maolalai	100
<i>Not Fighting</i> , Diarmuid Maolalai	101
<i>The Smell of an Important Man</i> , Kevin Brown	102
<i>Drafting My Own Obituary</i> , Thomas Reed Willemain	104
<i>Red Fishnets</i> , Kitty Steffan	106
<i>God (via Kev)</i> , Kitty Steffan	108
<i>Self-Portrait as America's Body Obsession</i> , Allyn Bernkopf	110

## BOOK REVIEW

Transforming the Lens: <i>Morning Lit: Portals after Alia</i> by Omar Sabbagh, Mark Fitzgerald	111
<i>Editor's Afterword</i> , Maria Freij	116



## Editor's Foreword

Here we find ourselves, then, in 2022. Another strange year is behind us. At worst, it has been sorrowful and frightening, at best, it has made us look to each other, and inwards, with kinder, keener, eyes. When the opportunities disappeared for us to engage with the arts, with other lovers of arts, with spaces and sounds, many of us felt the loss like a hunger or a thirst unquenched. In this year's *Two Thirds North*, quite a few poets are in dialogue with other writers, or artists, or spaces. Though we have been physically restricted, our internal landscapes have continued growing. We will continue to build bridges between art and art.

Megan Stolz's "Sonambient" poems are such bridges, not just in dialogue with artworks, not just an homage, but building on, continuing a dialogue that we need now more than ever. Karen Rigby, too, speaks to the universal experience of art and the most personal, almost *Heimlich* insights into the self, forging that frail bond that we both long for and fear. Jeanine Stevens' villanelle "On Phrases by Pythagoras" links history to present, through content as well as through form, the peasant song transformed to mathematics, to musical theory, to metaphysical experience.

We could, of course, argue that intertextuality is unavoidable, whether intentional or not. Still, there seems to be a wave of overtly intertextual poems in the contributions in this issue, texts actively engaging with other works of art, texts finding their place and positioning themselves in a larger context.



Perhaps this is a kind of Zeitgeist. Several of this edition's texts focus on relationships between past and present, past and future, present and future. Sreekanth Kopuri's poems speak of that which cannot be washed off, and of that which cannot be said out loud.

Other texts in this issue include those focused on the pasts, and futures, that haunt us. The notion of what it means to hold and to be held accountable run through Howie Good's poem, whose invocation, "[u]p, you corpses! Get up!" demands a settling of scores that cannot be settled, a kind of haunting also found in Charles Wilkinson's "Properties of the House," in which the attic is full of ghosts of our own making. Such shadows of the past are eloquently evoked in James Owens' lines "[a] falling leaf brushes my shoulder, and I turn, / as if you had taken my hand again on a distant street."

The idea of understanding the self through the Other reoccurs in this issue, in Omar Sabbagh's "A Samizdat Man", and in Vikas Prakash Joshi's "Krishna and Karna," more questions are asked than answered; in the end, the question of self is upturned rather than resolved.

Literature should, arguably, not answer questions, but ask them, should not soothe us but shake us awake. If poetry is in many ways about seeing, inside and out, many poems in this issue heed that call: Jeffrey Alfier plays with perceptions of time and space and place; Alton Melvar M Dapanas shows the coexistence of tenses in a way that wreaks havoc on the narrative and reader self: "Forget all the yearning for a city, outside, that once wanted you." And if writing is about vision, William Doreski's "As Vanishing Point Perspective Vanishes" shows us that this vision can also be taken away. As easily as anything else.

In the last few days, a war has begun in Europe. It has been brewing for years, and yet, it came as a shock to us, to wake up

to a war next door. What of our vision of Europe? Of the future? What of our view of ourselves? “Poetry makes nothing happen,” Auden tells us, in his “Ode to W.B. Yeats.” Well, arguably no art makes anything happen—art happens because art has to happen. All we can do is to become scribes, witnesses, reporters. We can, like in Carolyn Forché’s “The Colonel” become “the ears on the floors pressed to the ground.”

Writing and the notion of the spirit of the age are intricately intertwined. But what spirit? What age? We have never been ready for what the times have brought us. The future is as uncertain as ever. My ten-year-old son asks me, out of earshot of his younger brother, if this is the beginning of World War III. I tell him it is not. I hold my pen to a blank piece of paper. I do not know where to begin. What kind of Zeit is this? What kind of Geist? There are enough spirits, enough ghosts. Enough already.

In the hope that 2022 will change direction. In the hope that writers will continue to bear witness and build bridges. In the hope that we may learn, from each other and from the past. In the hope that if poetry makes nothing happen, that it changes, if not everything, then something. In the hope that we will not create more ghosts to haunt us.

Maria Freij



PLUS ÇA CHANGE...

# L'Emporio di Cagnoli Elia

## 18 June 2019

JANE BLANCHARD

Twelve years ago, we visited this store,  
well-stocked with options, bin- and basketfuls,  
and bought two, maybe three, varietals,  
plus some corkscrew to open them and more.  
Each bottle, emptied, was discarded in  
due time; the corkscrew, although cheap, went back  
with us to use and use at home, a crack  
occurring in its casing who knows when.  
Yet here we are again to purchase wine,  
perhaps another corkscrew, but Castello  
is much less crowded now, this store as well,  
sales down for reasons human or divine:  
the current pope is not the sort of fellow  
to keep a summer palace, sources tell.

# Breaking Cover

BILL HOWELL

Inside this latest dream, anything goes.

This is the book you haven't read, the brook  
you haven't crossed, the prayer without a lawyer.

You can do better. And you can't forget or ignore  
what you haven't done. And there's just enough  
new & used light out here to slice & dice  
what's left of your afterthoughts.

Beyond the Day-Glo overhead, watch those branches  
maestro each breeze.

You can always hang on longer until you're sure you're alone.

But all this waiting is cheating. If you can't be had,  
you just won't get it. What else have you heard  
about where you've never gone?

The future you envision is a shadow version  
of the past you might've known.

"Breaking Cover" First appeared in *FreeFall*, Volume XXXII, Number 1.

# Building a New Washroom

SREEKANTH KOPURI

There's Holy Communion tonight, so  
my mother washes her body as she  
should her soul; there she goes, but

as per vastu our washroom was built  
outside, stained today with our dirt,  
slippery with grime, the corners

cobwebbed, its stink of dead lizards, off the  
ant-line crevices and she reminds me again  
and again that a new one inside outs the

vulnerable old one, where the foul beings  
shared our days slithering inside, coiling  
around those rusting faucets of our privacy

we will have inside from tomorrow in the  
new one, for more ablutions to cleanse  
the aging dirt of our debilitating ailments.

# The Art of Moderation

BRIGITA OREL

Written from Sept to Nov 2020

**I**t is a mid-September overcast morning as I sit at my kitchen table. I have not turned on the overhead light despite the dimness. I like it that way. Darkness is conducive to rest but also to thinking. You see I am not a morning person and I appreciate the gentle introduction to the day so my brain can warm up to working temperature. A large mug of coffee is steaming in front of me, and a slice of bread spread with butter and jam lies on a plate. It's a quick meal; all I have the energy to prepare at this time of the day. Seeing me like this you couldn't have guessed I am prone to trying out exotic recipes no one else in the family appreciates or to tasting unhealthy amounts of desserts. But I have come to understand that it is all about balance. I am not prepared to strain myself so early in the morning and so I choose the easy path.

I learned the lesson in moderation late, perhaps in part due to my grandfather who had a legendary sweet tooth in a time when no one in my village even heard of croissants or macarons and the various flavours and intensities of chocolate. Dark chocolate was only used for cooking. Cakes came in two varieties: with fruit or a dense chocolate version, and we only had them for birthdays. Pure sugar was all that was available to my grandfather and so he would put so much of it in his coffee it turned viscous. At sixteen, that was the only way I knew how to drink my coffee. At



the coffee vending machine in high school, I would press the extra sugar button as though I had some uncontrollable tic. The plastic spoon almost stood upright in the coffee cup before I stirred it.

My sudden aversion to sweetened coffee coincided with having my heart broken. The sweetness clashed with my bitterness. I renounced the sugar and went with a splash of milk. Later still, I'd skip the milk too. It was a decade or so before I tasted coffee by itself for the first time. And I fell in love. The exaggerated amounts of sugar had hidden the real flavour but also muted my desire to taste it. The sweetness was bliss on my tongue, but a lie. Too much of the good thing. Not only because it spoils us but also because once it is gone, the shock is that much bigger.

When I started to conceive this essay at the beginning of the year, it was supposed to be about food. But it's 2020, so it is bound to be about other things, too. Unexpected things, disrupted routines, shock. About how the tables got turned on us and suddenly there were very few good things left. Hugging and kissing has become the main source of disease and fear. Keeping friends at a distance is applauded. We've been stripped of freedoms we took for granted only months before. We scrambled to adapt to the new way of living, some more others less successfully. Beliefs were challenged. The ground shifted. The world stopped. Aeroplanes didn't take off. There were no traffic jams on the motorways. Businesses closed. Concert venues, theatres and cinemas fell silent. The noise moved into the private sphere.

I work from home. On a normal day, after I take the children to school, the house is empty and echoing with a soft, relaxing quiet. I rarely have any visitors, or even phone calls. My days are spent in silence, working in front of my computer screen, reading, editing, or sometimes ruminating. I am not used to being surrounded by people every day, all day long, even if they are family. The quarantine turned my life upside down—not because I couldn't go out, I don't usually go anyway—but

because everyone else stayed in. The noise and crowdedness in the house during those days were shocking and I craved my solitude. There was too much talking and not enough being said. Children made redundant noises. I couldn't even think and so all my writing, including this essay, stalled.

In a time when most of the world was stuck at home and many people started writing the novel they'd always wanted to write, or returned to keeping a diary they'd abandoned years before, I stopped writing altogether. It didn't help that publishers had to reorganise and two of my deals fell through just before they were finalised and signed. There isn't a more effective trigger to questioning your creativity than rejections. For six strange months, I haven't written anything and I haven't read anything except for periodicals and newspapers. Apart from the crazy student years, this was the only time in my life without reading and writing. I couldn't go to a concert or theatre performance to fuel my imagination. I couldn't invite friends over for a lively debate that would spark an idea or awaken my curiosity. I was an invalid.

I consoled myself with cooking. Food was my favourite refuge. No wonder. When I can't get words out through the mouth, I have to keep it busy by eating. The mouth is a singularly important organ in the human body. The tongue itself can twist, curl, flatten, shorten, lengthen, round, suck, cup, bend, and do it all tirelessly because it's not one muscle but a system of eight. Not to mention that the mouth is one of the most sensitive erogenous zones. I mean, who can live without kissing? Well, many have to now.

When the pandemic started and we were all ordered to stay at home, it was perhaps no wonder that people started hoarding food (and toilet paper!). The strangeness of lockdown exposed all the different sorts of hunger—for food, company, freedom, power, money—and when they couldn't be satisfied that led to anxiety, depression, restlessness, even aggression.

Food and language hold a special appeal for me. Perhaps this

is due to the similar functions of language and food, as Massimo Montanari suggests:

Like spoken language, the food system contains and conveys the culture of its practitioner; it is the repository of traditions and of collective identity. It is therefore an extraordinary vehicle of self-representation and of cultural exchange—a means of establishing identity, to be sure, but also the first way of entering into contact with a different culture.<sup>2</sup>

We are what we eat but we also eat what we are. We perceive food differently in different cultures and traditions. As a linguist and food lover, I've always been interested in how we translate tastes and flavours between languages. The easiest—and most enjoyable—way is to taste them. Although food is an entryway into unknown worlds, the names of the dishes may sometimes be just as cryptic as language.

We name things to identify, describe and organise them, to distinguish them from one another—but also for us to find it easier to familiarise ourselves with them. We name to tame. A person whose name we know is no longer a stranger. A dish with a name is a promise. The mouth becomes an intersection between food and language. Imagine someone's disappointment if they sat down at the table to eat the good old pizza and ended up chewing on cauliflower pizza crust instead.

Although dishes are usually named to celebrate their origin or ingredients, we sometimes name them rather ambiguously. On the one hand, some have been labelled with unpalatable names, such as toads-in-a-hole and pets-de-nonne (fr. nun's farts), on the other, American restaurants give the dishes on their menus French names to make them sound more elegant and appetising.<sup>3</sup> Hot Dog has given rise to Tofu Pup, a vegetarian sausage. French toast is called pain perdu in France, and Russian salad, called *salade russe* by the French, is called French salad by Slovenians (and *salat oliv'e* by the Russians). Furthermore, if

you order à la mode in France, you will be served beef braised with vegetables. In the US, however, à la mode refers to an apple pie or similar dessert served with ice cream.<sup>4</sup> But we don't stop at giving food funny, inconsistent and often inexplicable names. With the emergence of social media we got to see convincing evidence of how our relationship with food has gained new and unfathomable complexities.

I'm sure my ninety-one-year-old grandma wouldn't understand the concept of #meatlessMonday. A mother of eight and the housewife on a relatively poor mountain farm she had no use for it. Meat was scarce, reserved for only the most important holidays, but mostly it was sold so that the family could afford other necessities. Grandma didn't plan her menu a week in advance to feed her children a balanced and nutritious diet. She cooked whatever was in the pantry or in the field. She ate what was left after her children and husband had their fill. Yet, at forty, she was probably healthier and stronger than I am and didn't need to exercise to keep fit. I'm lucky I can grow some of my vegetables and that I can buy the rest despite my below-average earnings of a self-employed artist. I cook my food from scratch and from quality local ingredients, but I eat far too many refined sugars. I've been suffering from stomach aches for half of my life. I'm trying to say no to delicious food. The overall availability of more or less everything doesn't help.

The older I get, the more I realise that being average is good enough. In fact, in a world that is prone to extremes, being average might make us stand out. In my formative years I didn't yet realise that, of course, so my growing up was equally troubled and confused as the maturing of our new country. When Slovenia emerged from the communist era into its independence and was touted to be the next Switzerland, and we're all still wondering where we've veered off that path, we couldn't get enough of Nutella and crisps and every other taste we could get. We gorged on it, perhaps out of fear that we might lose it again soon. Which we did, as with the next wave of freedom

we also imported the cult of thinness, causing young girls in particular to starve themselves in order to attain the beauty ideal that is entirely unreasonable and unrealistic. Adolescent me struggled to survive on apples and coffee at the start of the new millennium, wondering what the point of all that delicious food was if I wasn't allowed to eat it.

Maybe the leftover resentment from that period of my life is the reason why I refused to join the next food trend, because the focus of the opening decades of the twenty-first century seems to be nutritional consciousness. First, there were superfoods. They have started off as a way for people to balance their diets and add nutritious and healthy ingredients to their everyday meals. It ended up being big business because the western world seemed to have forgotten that every cuisine has its own superfoods and that goji berries, as beneficial as they may be, are not native to Europe and North America but sauerkraut and lamb's-quarters are. Every fascinating discovery about food eventually becomes a consumeristic trend or fad propagated by market revenues.

The opposite health trend to adding superfoods to our diets is to remove everything we self-diagnose as detrimental to our wellbeing. Just last week, I was taken aback by a recipe on Facebook for a bread which was vegan and gluten-, nut-, dairy-, oil-, and egg-free. The description made me doubt its flavour and the attached photo was decidedly unappetising. I love to try new recipes, but I gave this one a wide berth. Same with cauliflower-rice and cauliflower pizza crust. Where did the need to camouflage cauliflower as rice come from? I hate it when the food names lie to me. Except for mountain oysters.

Although April and May were uncommonly sunny and warm this year, I often cooked comfort food during the lockdown (in the first draft I very aptly misspelled the word as locodown). This loco new world order made me feel uncertain because of the lack of work and tense because of the constantly full house. I cooked exotic dishes, travelling with the help of food. Perhaps it was my attempt at savouring as many flavours as possible because

one of the symptoms of Covid-19 is the loss of smell and taste. How unimaginably debilitating it must be not to be able to taste anything. If we neglect the protective role of taste, shielding us from ingesting spoiled food, just the thought that you can't taste the intoxicating flavour of vanilla, or the sugary explosion of cinnamon buns, or the combination of the umami of a tagliata and rocket, is hardly imaginable. We eat food the same way we fall in love. We prefer some flavours to others. We crave the comfort of the beloved taste, the caress of hot chocolate on our tongue, the hot bite of chilli sauce. When that is gone, we lose a whole language.

But when have you last fallen in love with food? Head-over-heels? When have any of us felt genuine hunger recently? My trips to the fridge are getting more and more frequent but that's because I'm sprawled on the couch in front of the telly, feeling too gloomy to be able to write, and I crave something ... anything. But truly hungry? I can't remember. Not that vicious hunger that hurts your stomach and makes you happy to wolf down stale bread. There's a Slovenian saying that food spiced with hunger tastes delicious. I've realised just how true that is and how arrogant it is to reject food solely because its taste isn't to our liking or because it's too local or not local enough, containing gluten or is fried in oil rather than fat. Millions don't have that luxury.

We're not hungry. We're frustrated and stressed and we comfort ourselves with three to five meals a day, containing more calories we could ever use up in our office jobs or studying at a desk. We're full, constantly. So we become picky and dissatisfied. We make up trends and follow fads and we Instagram our lunches and dinners and write food blogs and essays and ultimately put together cookery books which usually sell well because we already have a readership from our blogs. We have #meatlessMondays and free-from-everything food. We start off as flexitarians, or what my grandmother called eating, until we graduate to vegans. We swear on cauliflower pizza crust. I think it's all a cry for help.

“The organ of taste is not the tongue, but the brain”<sup>5</sup> and it’s in our brains that we experience stress and frustrations, pent-up aggression, unresolved sexual tension and so much more that we’ve become unable to process, express and control. We use food to satisfy our need for comfort, to distract ourselves from the endless worries these days. But do we appreciate food in its basic form, as sustenance, as produce, ingredients, as the work involved in producing it? Children no longer understand the growing cycles. They don’t know how milk gets onto shop shelves. My children have the good fortune of living in the country. This year they each got their small garden patches and they grew potatoes and chilli and carrots. I want them to know that to eat potato dauphinois you have to get your hands dirty as you turn over the soil, fertilise it and plant the potatoes. If hunger spices the food, I want them to know that effort adds flavour to life, too.

If there was one food-related aspect that characterised the lockdown in April and May it was sourdough. If you didn’t bake sourdough bread, you weren’t self-isolating enough. I mentioned it to my mother after one of my failed attempts. She told me that Grandma didn’t keep a sourdough starter (much less named it), but whenever she couldn’t get yeast, she’d mix a little bit of flour and water and a day later she’d have a dozen sourdough loaves baked in her brick oven. It was a trick of the poor passed down to her from her mother and her mother’s mother before that. My sourdough starter I got from some vlog died just yesterday.

As we’re finishing off the year with a drastic rise in new Covid-19 cases, I return to cooking after the summer months which felt almost frivolous because some normalcy and freedom returned into our lives. Now the mood that permeates my cooking is different. Bitter and poignant. I turned to the exotic and foreign during the Spring, and nostalgic in the Autumn. Seven months of our new government’s shenanigans under the guise of anti-Corona measures have left a bad taste in my mouth. I’ve come to fear each new move of the ruling elite. It has progressed from the changes in leading positions

in every public agency, the quickly and almost secretly passed laws, to attempts to discredit and intimidate journalists, and most recently trying to evict some cultural organisations and institutions from their rented offices. As though art and culture mean nothing. As though our entire national consciousness isn't founded on culture rather than statehood as we've only had our own country for thirty years. As though, aside from food, art, music and literature weren't the most sought-after commodities during the lockdowns.

I feel raw and betrayed and displaced although I haven't moved anywhere. And it's not all due to the strange circumstances of the epidemic, but because this is no longer a homeland I used to feel part of. To console myself I'm returning to traditional dishes my mother used to make when I was a child. There's something comforting in them, something pure and different. They give me hope that this, too, shall pass. There's no guarantee, of course, and I might soon be cooking and writing in a progressively extreme right-wing country where tahini is frowned upon because of its provenance. I find just the thought of such a future unsavoury. As the fear lurks under the everyday chores, home-schooling activities and lockdown limitations, I'm again reminded of how quickly things can change. All too soon we can go from having too much of everything to having very little indeed. The freedoms we sometimes abuse out of sheer arrogance because we have them may soon transform into a restrictive system where if you're not with them you're against them.

Food is also “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour.”<sup>6</sup> The food I cook is therefore a message. Choosing the dishes to cook and eat gives me some semblance of control in a bleak situation. In a time when days are growing darker—outside and in me—when my chest is tight with an overwhelming sense of gloom and I sometimes feel as though I will not be able to draw in another breath, I'm sending a message of my love for my people, for



the place I come from and to where I keep returning. “Like poetry, baking is a rather melancholy vocation, whose primary requirement is free time for the soul. The poet and the baker are brothers in the essential task of nourishing the world.”<sup>7</sup>

If we want to cancel out everything that is wrong with this world we must nurture and console it, we must strive to do good in any way we can: by being kind to fellow human beings, by voting liberal, by hugging and kissing our children at the end of a tiring and trying day, by forgiving, by improving our family recipes, by watching less television and reading more, by calling a long-lost friend, by offering shelter to a victim of abuse, by giving a computer we no longer need to a student who would otherwise be unable to study from home during the epidemic. To be able to achieve moderation we need to act in a way that cancels out extremes wherever and whenever they appear.

I’d like to believe I have achieved a level of moderation when it comes to food. I still drink my coffee black, no sugar. I still Instagram my food but I don’t hashtag it to death. I’m flexible in my cooking but I don’t answer to flexitarian. I still avoid cauliflower pizza crust at all costs. But I find I have a more difficult time finding an equilibrium with other things. I console myself that maybe certain things don’t require moderation, such as reading, writing, loving. Perhaps that they stimulate addictive behaviours is their whole point and we oblige, despite the cost.

No matter how much time I spend reading or writing it is never enough. It only gets worse when the outside world becomes too intrusive with its stress and violence and I can’t find the motivation to write at all. That inability to create affects all other spheres of my life. It’s like a murky mass of pain and craving and a sense of urgency that builds up in me, pressing against my skull, making me itch all over with the need to be let out, freed. I’ve learned, in my darkest moments, that the only way to escape that tyranny is by creating.

During this year’s long period of existential anxiety, it was food and with it the taking care of my family that helped

distract me from the overpowering gloom and hopelessness. Instead of being eaten up by the worries, I did the eating. After six months of apathy and fruitlessness, I wrote three short stories and the first draft of a novel in three months. Although we're still in lockdown, the sensation of suffocating is no longer so debilitating. I found my words again, amidst the dinner ingredients and the noise of home-schooling.

Footnotes:

1. As an example, a study performed in the UK suggests that 64% of people who took part in the study reported experiencing symptoms of depression and 57% reported symptoms of anxiety, with women being affected the most. (for more see <https://www.covidstressstudy.com/news-and-findings>) Findings for Slovenia are similar. In April 2020, 21% more antidepressants were prescribed than in the same month in 2019, and 41% more in May 2020 compared to May 2019. (<https://www.rtvsl.si/zdravje/med-epidemijo-strmo-narasla-poraba-antidepressivov/542544>)
2. Montanari, Massimo. 2006. *Food is Culture (Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives on Culinary History)*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld. New York, Columbia University Press.
3. Luu, Chi. 2016. "Putting Words in Your Mouth: The Whimsical Language of Food." *Jstor Daily*. <https://daily.jstor.org/putting-words-in-your-mouth-the-whimsical-language-of-food/>, accessed 13. April 2020.
4. Ayto, John. 1993. *The Diner's Dictionary. Word origins of food and drink*. 2nd edition. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
5. Montanari, Massimo. 2006. *Food is Culture (Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives on Culinary History)*, trans. Albert Sonnenfeld. New York, Columbia University Press.
6. Barthes, Roland. 2017. "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption." *Food and Culture*. 4th edition. Edited by Carole Counihan, Penny van Esterik and Alice Julier. New York, Routledge. 20-27.
7. Allende, Isabel. 1998. *Aphrodite, a memoir of the senses*. Harper Perennial.

# 1. at the end it's suddenly important

KATE LADEW

for everyone to know what they've been  
and what they've meant and what they've done for you  
but there isn't enough time, so we fumble for our hearts  
struggling with the bones that hold it steady  
*here*, we say, holding out our empty red hands,  
*if you could see inside, your fingerprints are everywhere*

## 2. because the middle ages

KATE LADEW

weren't called the middle ages during the middle ages  
I say, who knows, maybe our middle was twenty years ago  
or twenty years from now, you say, because you believe in luck  
in half full cups you drink down and fill up  
because you believe it doesn't matter either way  
beginning-middle-end, all the same day  
and you look for the sun's set criss-cross applesauce  
patting the earth beside you  
just wait, you point at the sky, the moon  
the stars slowly spreading their arms side to side  
you're never gonna believe this



# INTERTEXTUALITIES

# Young Lady with Gloves

*Tamara de Lempicka*

KAREN RIGBY

Bias-cut emerald, so cinched  
it wraps the model's torso,  
navel imprinting  
silk, not to mention  
white gloves—  
demure minks—  
one hand tipping the hat's brim  
the other grazing her thigh.

Perfectly Deco, from the architectural shoulder bow  
to her red lip, nipples  
rivets on a gunwale.

Ninety years later Lempicka's pre-war  
canvas reads money. I wasn't rich  
but could pretend when I lived on Fifth,  
my one good black coat zipped.

I was young  
though not bombshell  
blond. Woke to hoarfrost  
bussed to Oakland  
for a secretarial job  
where the phone rang—barely—  
and in that late Gothic Revival skyscraper,  
arranged books by year. Nothing  
glamorous, but it paid enough  
to live alone.

When I imagine her muse gazing  
    through what must have been a hotel portico,  
        game for a future where a green dress pools,

I think Lempicka felt  
this certain painting herself  
in another portrait steering a Bugatti.  
In truth she drove a yellow Renault.

For a year I worked those dead-end rooms that boiled  
while outside snow blew in the updraft.

Left Pittsburgh  
for a desert suburb,  
anonymous.  
Now the model's face  
turned in shadow,  
this young woman waiting—

it isn't nostalgia nor melancholy I envy  
but freedom to choose a hundred  
endings. I'll never know  
insouciance again.



# Guila Tofana's *Aqua Tofana*: A 17th Century Classified Ad

HOLLIE DUGAS

Dear sweet woman, do not bother with God;  
he is a complicated unreliable source. At best,  
His holiness has been traced by Michelangelo

on stone with white chalk and hauled away.  
I can give you a life you want, a fate  
you control—free and singular. You do not

have to be improperly wed to a man  
who regulates your potency, a man  
you do not love with an ounce of your open-

butterfly heart, because he is not a valid man—  
he is the prayer of a young girl.  
And make no mistake, this is not incantation;

it's certain death, 600 times over, a perfect  
macabre. All you have to do is meet me  
halfway, center-forest; we can bring

belladonna back in your dress pocket  
like my mother taught me to. I'll craft  
my righthand brew. We can let his sorry soul

disappear into air as easily as God, debunk  
him to a talisman of teeth around your neck.

Imagine this: a tiny glass vial.  
Everything you desire is inside  
and maybe you can have it.

# Compass, in Retrospect

TIMOTHY DODD

Oh, Pigafetta! Your quincentenary wails can't cover all you'd see today: the proportions, relations, conditions, how we believe things now fit quite right thanks to all our innovations, actions—precise licks bringing ship to shore. So I say to us, all our lofty minds banishing you into barren and musty corners: imagine being one who has never seen coconut or fig tree, let alone tasted their fruit.

But who looks through the old lens? Who credits your drive, your place, rather than laughing in dismissal? Is mapping ever easy? Do we ever consider contexts: time, distance, the soul in song? Today I sit looking to you. You, Pigafetta. Not as though I am more righteous, but for the rich nautical data, the geography, logged for us, trying to reach landfall. Even our chroniclers need a bit of respect.

Ports, roads, contemporaries: no need to name our sons after you, but to judge the seed? Saints and devils, voyagers, matter to us all, and Magellan did not translate Cebuano. In hindsight, we are

all fools: the perfect map will never be  
drawn and the heart isn't a mirage  
of exactitude. Find ours in the blue blur,  
the miracle of how the land was laid.  
Humility tells us: borders, contours,  
the angles of oceans... are more than  
cartography, and never truly fit together.

# Sonambient I

MEGAN STOLZ

Sit in my kitchen and whisper your secrets:  
*My floor is rarely vacuumed.*  
*I wish I hadn't left my job.*  
*I wish I'd left my husband.*

My floor is rarely vacuumed,  
but the door is always open. My sister says,  
*I wish I could leave my husband.*  
We warm ourselves with mugs of tea.

*My door is always open*, my sister says,  
her laughing face appearing in the window.  
I warm up water for a mug of tea,  
trace symbols in the steam. The house glows.

I miss seeing my sister's laughing face in the window.  
Darkness falls; I murmur prayers as I work,  
trace symbols in the steam. The candle glows  
on the tabletop, keeping watch.

Darkness falls: I murmur prayers as I work,  
place another divining rod  
on the tabletop, keeping watch.  
Someday my sister will return.

Each year I replace the divining rod;  
my floor is still not vacuumed.  
Someday my sister will return  
and tell me why she never left her husband.

# Sonambient II

MEGAN STOLZ

Another woman has appeared at the door.  
Lead her to the backyard. She must  
hammer in her own rod along the fence.  
In the kitchen, the midwife boils

tea for the women in the backyard. We must  
only stay for the length of a single cup.  
In the kitchen, the midwife boils  
water, rips a sheet into shreds.

Please stay for the length of a cup.  
Gather in the garden, listen  
to the water boiling, the sheet ripping to shreds.  
The wind whistles in the voices of the children

once gathered in the garden.  
We sit silent. We cannot speak.  
The wind whistles; the voices of the children  
fade. The women return home.

In the morning, they sit, in silence  
except for the sounds of breakfast,  
each woman faded upon returning home.  
They set an extra plate—expectant.

In the midst of breakfast,  
another woman appears at the door.  
Set an extra plate. We expect she'll  
hammer her own rod along the fence.

(In response to "Sonambient" by Harry Bertioia at Kentuck Knob, Dunbar Township, Pennsylvania, USA)









# HAUNTINGS

# Postmortem

HOWIE GOOD

Today's rain falls on yesterday. I am looking for Kafka in the streets he used to walk. I am dead and looking for my grave. You rush from one side of town to the other, trying to fulfill ancient prophecies – words full of holes – while God's bearded face sways above you. Dogs howl ceaselessly as though protesting how important man is. It is not quite night yet. There are doors that only seem to open and never really do.

&

Hands pantomime tossing bombs, slashing throats, counting money. Power is the only political party. The seven hills upon which civilization was founded have since sunk under the cumulative weight of human excreta. Elephants in India are drinking wine and passing out in tea gardens.

&

It is spring in name but not in substance, the trumpets of glory sounding strangely vexed, as if struggling with metaphysical doubts. And this is not even the worst part. No, the worst part is that all that survives of *The Messiah*, the novel he was writing when he was shot dead by the Nazis, is the first sentence. A 100-year-old former concentration camp guard has only now been arrested on 3,518 counts of being an accessory to murder. I heard about it and thought, "Up, you corpses! Get up!"

# Still Life

IAN C SMITH

Returning to the stillness of her shelter from scavenging stove wood, days of alcoholic swoon, even smoking, ended, she abides here eking ditto days. A vulnerable creature in a pretty shell, thoughts tracing her younger self, she has arranged her flea-market past: marcasite earrings, a saxophone brooch, spherical gold buttons on a black tunic, behind her closed door, a *louche ambiance* in a fragrance of patchouli incense. Sharing the vast silence: a store mannequin modelling a sequined gossamer gown and a boa; a jolly clown wearing red shoes, frayed playing cards, full sets with jokers, their whiff, old schools of poker.

Brittle-boned, long used to sleeping alone, she survives on memories, her attendants' display: unforgettable boarding-house waft of sausages, booze and betrayal, narcissism and neglect, when she read Edna St Vincent Millay's take on broken dreams plunging headlong towards her own, pinning her poems to the altar of libido-led love, now, unsold in dusty boxes beneath her bed. People with no need would greedily claim her mute relics in this op-shop museum where moonlight ghosts a shoji, flickers over a carved Swahili soapstone vase, over the Barbie Doll's vacant stare from her birdcage, the ornately patterned porcelain plates. Together, they listen to the soft sound of wind in the eaves, the distant hum of tyres, the hour growing late.

# Brian and Dave to the Rescue

JOHN GREY

Brian and Dave are on their way to a picnic,  
but not to chomp down on hotdogs,  
not to splash in the lake.  
Someone's lying on the ground unconscious.  
And the drinking's barely begun.

A teenage girl is being comforted by cousins.  
The older crowd looks on in disbelief.  
Tricia's only in her thirties.  
But she's been looking ten years older of late.  
Maybe fifteen when the paramedics  
are bending over her limp body,  
shouting, "Wake up! Wake up!"

They know the symptoms.  
Even better, they know the town.  
Twenty years since the sock factory closed.  
Last night, they dragged a guy out  
of a gas station bathroom.  
A week ago, it was a woman  
slumped over the wheel of her car  
in a strip-mall parking lot.  
So many don't seem to want to live  
and Brian and Dave are charged with  
going against the victim's wishes.

Brian injects Narcan in Tricia's dull flesh.  
He does it slowly.  
Reality's best in small bursts.  
The woman's eyes open.

“Where am I? Where’s Amy?”  
Her words roll out like baby’s dribble.  
“You have to go to the hospital.”  
Her boyfriend, Carl, wanders  
off into the nearby woods.  
Tricia’s mother appears, takes Amy away.

People drop anytime, anyplace,  
as if shot by invisible, noiseless rifles.  
Brian and Dave do their best to pick them up,  
get them on their feet  
so they can fall down the next time.  
Folks say it’s a crisis.

It’s also an interruption to a breakfast  
in a local diner.  
It’s a callout  
when Brian’s playing with his kids  
or Dave is captaining the Head-Hunters bowling team.

In a gutted old industrial town,  
life just seems no more  
than a rehearsal for death.  
Folks organize picnics  
so they can forget for a while.  
And yet down goes Tricia.  
Here come Brian and Dave.

# Properties of the House

CHARLES WILKINSON

How long since the attic was acknowledged, the world under the rafters? Territory of the trunk & tuck box, the dead boy's initials; luggage that travelled, labelled with destinations: Morocco, Trieste, Hong Kong, Vienna; albums of holidays: from black and white to burnt sienna & the last pages in colour, the shades not credible; an aunt's best china crated & uncovered for fifty years. What was once cherished & so cannot be thrown away, persists here amongst the lagging & the hum of pipes. In the dust there are dreams of words minted in an old currency, withdrawn decades ago. Here's the watery sigh of a devalued adage, the past's perished jokes, the phrases forgotten when the markets closed.

Downstairs, what's stored above creates areas for cool minimalism, space to live without clutter, a language fit for interior design, endearments kept functional; the emotions not fully invested; each piece of furniture provisional, resigned to its present place

though the basement disturbs it:  
the curses fall from the lips of ancestors:  
no pension plan, though what's slaughtered  
is set down to freeze; the books are balanced

by the preference for pillage; the swords  
& the ships budgeted for; assess the sound  
management of war cries, the berserker's  
breath a compendium of fifty howls,  
& the darkest wines laid down for drinking,  
*signed off at the death.*



# Pause

SREEKANTH KOPURI

My bullock cart  
of golden mangos still  
rests beside the road

tired of the silence,  
the death angel burns to  
paralyse time's nerves

in my brother's lost hope  
his body hangs in his noodle  
shop near the haloed church—

a message that life will never  
be the same again, but with  
weird pauses to break, out in

the Mumbai red light, heaps  
of emptiness in hollowed bowls  
of prostitutes fill their days, and

the grandeur of the largest democracy  
is dwarfed by the government's blind  
deafness to the migrants' public funerals.

# Your Absence on an Ordinary Day

JAMES OWENS

Just past dawn, yellow leaves drift above the cold, dry stones.  
Already a woodpecker searches the big stump.  
Crows argue far back, among the trees.

I want you to know the particulars, the now.  
A falling leaf brushes my shoulder, and I turn,  
as if you have taken my hand again on a distant street.



FUTURES, PASTS,  
AND PRESENTS

# from a distant future

CHRISTOPHER LINFORTH

I could look back at you,  
see where the first fissure  
appeared in your life  
and in us.

the messages on your  
phone would be a blur  
of he said/she said, none  
addressed to me.

there could be a chance  
to note our split beds  
and collapse the space  
separating our bodies.

post-everything we know  
and have lived through,  
I could have said back  
then I wanted to try.

# I Love You with my Ford

Painting by James Rosenquist

KENNETH POBO

The years become unchanged  
litter boxes as we amble past  
broken tiki torches on our way  
to oblivion. Our first date happened

in a Ford that I bought from an old man  
who had given up driving. When it grew  
decrepit, I sold it for scrap and parts.

Sadness, a light blue  
Toyota, the color of a spring sky. We'll  
probably sell that one too.

Turn the engine on.  
Speed up.

Are your eyes closed?

# A Samizdat Man

OMAR SABBAGH

**F**at, possessed, I mean, of the kind of rotund paunch to be expected more from a cartoon than a living, breathing neighbor – I imagine his name is Ralph. He looks like one, you see, a ‘Ralph’ that is, though I’ve never stopped to talk to him: only the occasional placid greeting of a morning, evening, what have you. He is, I suppose, of average height, though the image of him before my mind’s eye at present seems to discount some accounting of his height; I see him seated, most of the time, or in the midst of crouching slowly forward in order to become so. Big, droopy bags beneath his large, round almond-colored eyes, hair prematurely grey and frizzled, shooting upwards in wild striations from his skull: a bit like the caricature of some iconic ‘Einstein’ – I’ve only ever seen him loafing around my building. I think he smokes weed most days, and I guess this less from any pertaining scent I may have scented the few times we’ve been at greeting distance, and more from the manner of his peaceable silence. There’s a salutary laziness about the man; or, better put, what he evinces is indolence (words can have the power, I think, of shading shades). Ralph (or so I will call him) seems to me like a trust-fund baby, a man of middle-age or thereabouts, gifted an apartment in a well-to-do part of West London. I’m certain he doesn’t have a day-job, you see, judging by the times and iterations of the same I have espied him in the grounds of my apartment block: loafing. Or perhaps:

the real crux of the matter is that he seems to me to either have squandered his youth and to be squandering in one continuous line of waste his early middle-age, or, to be possessed, perhaps, of a preternatural, prodigal mind, one which deciphers arcane truths from the ambient gusts of the surrounding air.

I see him sitting, idling, stoned no doubt, and I wonder: is he the kind of man I might have been, or perhaps to this day, partly am? When I pass him, now and then, at ingress or egress, he doesn't smile, but manages nonetheless to deliver a grunt of greeting that is, like the roundness of his child-like eyes, friendly, if not inviting. And not complacent. No, not that, thankfully. Resigned; resigned in that good, hale sense, which lands, arrives, on the covert side of a previously-felt awe, wonder – his being once-lit, say, by fascination, at the endless recession of the galactic stars. And that's why I imagine he bears a far-seeing mind. When I look at him, a few seconds here or there, now and then, I see a man who's managed to think his way to the ends of the earth and back again and who, perhaps, having seen in that large, wide circular way, needs to see no more; or, no more than is given to a somewhat blank (or blanketing) gaze at plants and hedgerows. Stoned or not, I've divined something about him that's as liquid and touching as his eyes: a pathos there – but not pathetic. I could be wholly, daftly wrong, of course. But no: there is something about the chap.

It's not that I think him lonely in the ordinary sense. Yes, I've only ever seen him wandering around puffing-away his blue-grey clouds, or seated, slumped back, with trussed feet in grey Converse trainers splayed forward, on one of the benches of our garden, dressed in a perennially egg-stained grey T-shirt above Bermuda shorts – also grey, but strange for the English season. And yes, he's inveterately alone at these times, but no, the impression is: not lonely. There's



something of the monk, I think, or the anchorite about the man, as though he spent his days communing with the Deity and no one else (perhaps because no one else would understand the frank language of such parley) – rarely uttering a single word. And so, yes, I permit myself here the somewhat outlandish duty of proffering a gloss. What can I lose? Shaping words around a man I see, but don't know, and may never come to know? What harm cosseting a phantom like this, beveling him with a few well-spun phrases? The possibility that I might prove to be right in all I've had to say is as likely as achieving any practical outcome from some farfetched, antique alchemy – that most magical of magics. And yet, it is spooky: I feel I know something of the man, for all the distances between us. It may sound pompous, and it is, but if I, for all intents and purposes, am language, he is the teetering silence, you might say, from which I emerge.

\*

A few nights ago, there was a loud, noisy ruckus on the street outside our building. At first, it sounded like a bunch of drunks, either singing, awry but in tandem, or as though a fight had broken out. Woken, I stuck my head outside the open window and looked and looked, but didn't see anything. But the clamor continued to escalate. At one point, my wife woke up, but I hushed her back to sleep. And yet, the noise grew, like it was flourishing on the night air, the later and later it got, as though the progress of the clock were tending to a fuse.

Again, I widened the opening of the open window and peered out into the periwinkle, early morning hours. Still, I was able to see nothing, but still, the ruckus and the noise. It was unnerving. So, after a few minutes of deliberation, the racket getting louder in its approach, I decided to put on some clothes and travel downwards the four flights of

stairs (the lift, as it happened, being out of order). I emerged onto the grounds of our apartment block, and before me, grappling in a scene whose angle wouldn't have been visible from my bedroom window, appeared a group of four men about to break into fisticuffs. They were pushing and shoving each other, back and forth, in that visceral way that is always a clear prelude to an all-out fight. I called out to the men, four lads in their twenties, or thereabouts, though still keeping my distance. I asked them to calm down, or, if they were indeed set on a fight, to go and do it elsewhere, away from sleeping families. But they paid me no heed. One of the men turned to look at me, guffawed. They continued sparring with apoplectic expletives, and it really did seem likely someone was going to get hurt. I'd just about decided that it was no use, and was on the verge of turning back inside, when, from an indeterminate angle, from beneath the black dark of a clutch of trees, Ralph wandered over, puffing away his blue-grey clouds of smoke.

The mauling men disengaged from each other's throats and turned silent, beholding the approaching figure. I myself was a bit stupefied. It's not as if Ralph had the muscular height or wherewithal to break up a fight like this. But the lads just stared at him, lower lips drooping down, aghast or flabbergasted, who knows. I couldn't quite pin down what was at work, but it seemed, dare I say it, uncanny. Ralph walked over in silence, tapped the first man at hand on the shoulder, and offered him a toke on what I can only assume was a spliff. The man paused, stared blankly, took the spliff, and inhaled a long, large drag. He looked back at Ralph, who nodded, and the man shared the spliff all round. In the space of half a minute, what seemed to be inevitable violence transmogrified, you might say, into peaceable plenitude. No words were exchanged, only a few semiotic grunts. Ralph turned to the short staircase upon which I was still standing and flashed a slow, goofy grin at

me. I must have returned the favor, inanely, then spun away and reentered the apartment block. There was no further disturbance that night.

\*

I couldn't help myself; the next morning I relayed what I could about the incident to my wife. She was half asleep when I started recounting, but by the time I got to the real magical kernel of my tale, she was starkly awake, rattling away – because, unlike myself, she is very much a superstitious type of person. By the time I'd told her all I could, and the background of what I'd guessed of the man, she was nodding her head, and told me she'd noticed him too, but had just assumed, well... not much, really. Now, however, she was piqued.

'You should talk to him. Maybe invite him round one evening for dinner?'

'But I don't know the guy from Adam,' I replied.

'You said yourself he turned and smiled at you. That means he's noticed you, knows who you are.'

'No, it doesn't,' I replied, with what I took and take to be perfect logic.

'But we're neighbors.' She pursed her lips. Her olive-green eyes were smiling, but smiling in that way that threatened sere, edging daggers. I knew what to expect, so, I said, preemptively, 'OK. The next time I see him in the garden, I'll go over and introduce myself. But I'm not promising anything. He doesn't seem the type to sup with neighbors, or, for that matter, to expect an invitation to sup with said neighbors. He seems...'

'What?' She was smiling now, deeply pleased.

'Autonomous. Uncannily so. Like a kind of samizdat man.'

'Yes. Exactly. A samizdat man. And that's why I want to meet him.'

‘But...’ I flailed for some worthy form of resistance, and came up short. After all, I too was curious, energized by what I had witnessed. So, I promised her I’d make an effort. We settled into a late breakfast and ruminated about how to spend the rest of the Saturday.

\*

**B**efore I’d an opportunity to greet the man in person, greet him with any real intent, I mean, he greeted me. Early the next week, I was walking home from work, twenty yards shy of my apartment block, when I heard a puppyish yelp from somewhere. I looked round at the courtyard and saw Ralph, smiling with a large wide rictus that revealed a set of pristine, pearly white teeth. It was odd that, given how much he smoked. He was unshaven as ever, his hangdog look bearing down with a strange, secret camaraderie. I stopped in my tracks and waved at him, half-hesitantly. If he hadn’t beamed back and beckoned me to him with a free hand, I would have left it at that. I’d had a long day at work and didn’t feel up to the energy or courage required of this particular encounter just then. But beam he did, and beckon he did, and a small, childish part of me began to glow from my innards as I approached his bench.

He was sat back in full-fledged indolence, feet flung forward and trussed together in that lackadaisical way of his, puffing away, emitting his staple of grey-blue clouds of smoke. As I neared him, I almost wavered, but he slapped the space on the bench beside him, and with more purposive energy than I’d ever have adjudicated him capable. It was more than prefatory amenability; he was a man waiting for me to arrive. As though, in some slow and quiet way, he wanted to impart something. I sat down next to him. For a few moments, we held our silence, him smiling almost gleefully. There was nothing particularly risible in front of us, but then, the weed, I thought.

‘You know,’ he chimed in, with a tone of voice that suggested we’d been chatting like this, bosom buddies, best pals, chums, for years. ‘I always like this time of day, because the sun has yet to fully set, but the moon, the moon is sometimes visible. Waiting in line. In the queue, like.’

I wasn’t sure what to say. I looked upwards to the sky, a bouquet of lilac and violet and lavender, and saw a slightly delineated moon in the distance. Yes, it was an extremely pleasant summer evening, I agreed. But, almost instantly, he continued, as though on a predestined track of thought.

‘And what do you think the moon is famed for?’

I stammered, stuck, then said, ‘Wolves? I don’t know: Memory? Madness? Melancholia?’ I was trying too hard: the man was the type to elicit that from me. He made me feel I needed to make a worthy effort to say something worth saying. His demeanor and bearing: something about them said that polite and inconsequential chitchat wasn’t welcome.

‘Ah...’ He stubbed out his fag-end, and without turning to look at me, still with this distant glimmer from his smiling eyes, began to roll another. ‘Ah, yes,’ he said. ‘Those are some damned good associations, connotations. Yes. I can see that now. You’re an educated man. Well, so, good.’

I couldn’t help but smile myself now. His was infectious; he made you feel like he’d known you and all about you from time immemorial. He had a deep and groggy voice, I noticed, and now and then sucked his lips, perhaps drawing back excess saliva.

‘But do you know?’ he said.

‘Know what, exactly?’

‘I often think that it’s the exact, infinitesimal (great, worthy word, that: infinitesimal) moment between light and dark, I mean, the exact fuzzy moment, the precise liminality of it – that that’s when all things that are broken may be healed.’

I was flummoxed, as you might expect. I hadn't the slightest clue what he was on about. Oh, I knew the terms he was using, the lexicon: as he'd surmised, yes, I suppose I am what might be termed an educated man. It wasn't what he said, but that he'd said it. What relevance...?

'Your wife, now,' he continued. 'She blames you, you think, that you've not been able to conceive a child together, correct?'

My face went white, a quick sepulcher. I was petrified, in the etymological sense. But before I could stammer out my surprise, he carried on:

'But she doesn't, you know. She doesn't blame you.'

I was rigid, a block of stultified human stone. We had been trying for a child, on and off, for nearly two years now, but how he could know that...?

'You see,' he insisted, 'where I come from...'

I had to interject now.

'And where do you come from?' I said it with force, because I was upset, but he continued, unfazed.

'Where I come from, we don't use the word "blame." All things are resumed there, so accountability is, if you'll indulge me, accounted for.'

I wanted to shout, to shriek, to somehow disrupt his suave grace. But when I tried to, the wide and oval O my mouth made emitted no sound. It was a paralysis of the voice.

'Yes, and as I was saying,' he continued, still looking ahead, and now and then upwards, still now and then taking a toke on his newly-rolled spliff, 'You really should talk to her more. I mean, say what you mean. Life's too short; or, no, maybe it's the other way round?' He smiled gaily, smitten by himself. 'Yes, no, maybe what I meant was: life's too long to leave unsaid what must be said.'

I stared him down, aghast. He said, 'Well, the long and the short of it is...' He chortled now, pleased with himself. Then, his rumbling chuckle petered slowly away, and for the first time he turned his head to look at me, peering deeply into my eyes.

For a moment, with some sort of second sight, I saw the almond irises of his eyes swishing in their brown, like small brown rivers. They were undulating. It was all getting too weird, too goddamn weird!

‘Who are you?’ I asked. ‘Who the hell are you?’

‘Me?’ he replied, digging his free index finger into his chest, jovially. ‘I’m your neighbor,’ he replied, ‘just your neighbor.’

‘What’s your name?’ I asked it now, feeling newly entitled. He owed me that much, after the performance of the last twenty minutes.

‘I’m not sure I have a name,’ he replied, ‘not in the way that you do.’

‘What’s that you’re smoking?’ I asked, getting more irritated with myself by the moment.

‘This?’ He inspected his rolled-up spliff, twisting and turning it between thumb and index finger, like a medical examiner. ‘This? This is some good old fashioned: weed...’

‘I thought as much,’ I said, readying myself to stomp off. But something in the twilight kept me rooted to the spot. Something unfinished about the encounter.

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘I forgot about that. Illegal, isn’t it? Here, I mean.’

‘I couldn’t care less. It’s not that. It’s...’

‘Yes?’

‘It’s... well, how the hell do you know me, my wife? We haven’t met before. Did someone put you up to this?’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘someone did.’

‘Who, may I ask?’ I tried to speak tartly, but came off helpless.

‘You did.’

‘I did?’

‘Yes, the other night. You remember?’

‘I recollect seeing you stop a fight that was disturbing the neighborhood, yes. What does that have to do with me, my

wife, our trying for a child. How could you know that? And why do you think it's for you to speak of such things? I've seen you around the last couple of years. Loafing. Smoking your rolled-up weed, loafing. Do you have a job, a place of work, a way of sustaining yourself?

He didn't reply.

'Oh yes, you see: I too can rummage my nose in what's not my business.' I felt a little bit like I was getting my own back. Until, after a minute or so of stunned silence, he replied:

'My job? You wish to know how I earn my keep?'

'Well, yes, as it happens: yes?'

'It doesn't pay much, but that doesn't bother me. Maybe you think less of me for that?' He was scanning my face with watery eyes.

'I couldn't care less how much money you have,' I said.

'Oh, I do know that, of course. I was just being polite. Well, if you really do want to know: I am a peacemaker of sorts. I flit here and there, now and then, to soften the edges of people's tongues. I am, if you like, a servant of kindness. I turn rocky eyes and brittle hearts back into the unfathomable seas they always were, always are. I solve things: like sugar into hot water. I...'

By then, I'd had my fill of his spurious, angelic talk. I bid him good evening with evident ire and took the lift to my flat.



# Krishna and Karna

VIKAS PRAKASH JOSHI

**I**t is Newton's Fifth Law that when a teacher steps out of a primary school class for more than a decent period of time, somebody starts singing, and the 5th standard class at Diamond International School, Koregaon Park, was no exception to this eternal rule. Cinnamon clutched the long stainless-steel ruler like a mic in front of the class. The other twenty students noisily and tunelessly joined in as he belted out Lakdi ki kathi at the top of his voice. It was a welcome break from the Environmental Science Class. Just as the horse was bolting, EVS Ma'am, Mrs. Arora, came back into the classroom.

"Settle down, horses! Roshan and Palli, take your seats," she said.

The class went back to the lesson. When the class ended, students started filing out noisily.

"Roshan."

"Yes Ma'am?"

"Where do you stay?"

"Koregaon Park, Ma'am."

"Wah. You like singing?"

"Ummm... I love singing."

"I am sure even Gulzar in Mumbai would have heard you singing his lyrics."

"Really, Ma'am?"

"Haanji," She said.

He looked down at the ground. The blood rushed to his face.

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

There was a silence, for a few moments. A thought struck Mrs. Arora. “How did you get the nickname, Cinnamon? Everyone calls you that.”

“My parents love to add cinnamon to everything. In tea, cakes, pastries and rolls, literally everything. I called it Cimmamom or Cinnamum or Cimmanon. So they dubbed me ‘Cinnamon.’”

He frowned, looking downward at his school shoes, “I don’t like my nickname anymore, I want to change it. But my parents are fond of it, so I guess it’s too late for that.”

She nodded in agreement, then asked, “Do they like music?”

“No ma’am. They don’t like music,” he says fidgeting in the seat, “I mean they do like it. But not this kind of music.” He wildly gesticulated with his hands, waving them up and down in the air, several times and and tried very unsuccessfully to sing “Sa Re Ga Ma Pa” at a higher than normal pitch.

She gave a knowing smile.

“It’s only me. I don’t know, Ma’am. Maybe my tummy-mummy liked this kind of music.”

“Your tummy-mummy?”

“Yes,” he said, confidently, without missing a beat, “I am adopted.” He stared straight at her.

Mrs. Arora fiddled with her dangling silver earrings. After smiling a little too long, she said, “Ok, wonderful, Roshan. Keep it up. You can go now.”

\*

**B**aba and Maa had never hid from Cinnamon, or anyone else, that he was adopted. It was as much an accepted part of his life as his alert brown eyes. When he was about two years old, Maa sat him down and told him

a beautiful story. She read to him from a slim Bengali book. Cinnamon sat in front of her, curled up on the bed. Baba sat next to her. She told him about the ancient city of Mathura, near Delhi, where Vasudev and Devaki had eight children.

Reading out the story slowing down in some places, lowering her voice and alternately raising it at dramatic moments, her facial expressions changing, depending upon the scene in the book, Maa said “The eighth child was Lord Krishna. When Krishna was born, there was heavy rain. Vasudev took the baby in a wicker basket to the house of Nanda. He placed him with Nanda, a cowherd, for his protection. Lord Krishna grew up with his adoptive parents.” Cinnamon kept his ears glued to the story. As Maa changed her tone of voice and hand gestures, Baba told a story in Marathi, in a voice that was like a radio announcer or TV news anchor. In the story, a charioteer finds a baby in a basket floating in a river. The charioteer and his wife, Adirath and Radha, do not have children of their own: “Little did they know that the boy was the son of princess Kunti and Surya Dev. They named him Karna. He grew up to be a brave and fearless warrior.”

Baba concluded with a flourish, and closed the book.

“So does that mean I will also become a warrior, when I grow up,” asked Cinnamon curiously. That sounded really nice, he thought.

Baba and Maa both laughed. Maa patted Cinnamon on his head.

\*

**W**hen he was four, Baba and Maa took him to the hospital he was born in, in the congested and heaving Kusalkar Road area of Pune. They also took him to the adoption centre, when he was five, and again when he was six. Baba told him the story of the day

they adopted him, “Cinnamon, the day we went to bring you home was the most memorable day of my life. It was not only your Maa and me who went to the adoption centre. Ajji, Ajoba, Dada Moshay and Didi Maa came along too, I finally felt like the captain of the Indian cricket team. We had only the Maruti Zen at that time, however, so we arranged two extra auto rickshaws additionally to take everyone.

He continued, eyes twinkling. “It rained the previous night and early that morning as well and we felt it to be a good omen. Later, we organised a get-together at a small mangal karyalaya for all the people, on the day of your homecoming. So many people came to see you, and we had to move to a much bigger hall.”

Cinnamon asked to hear this several times, and each time Baba added extra details. It was like one of those stories that you never got tired of hearing.

\*

**A**s he grew older, he sometimes stared into the mirror in the bathroom, trying to imagine what his birth father and tummy mummy must have looked like. Did his swarthy skin, impressive height, and sharp nose come from his father? Did he get his loud laughter from his mother? When he travelled anywhere, he looked around at people, wondering whether any one of them was his father or mother.

He asked his parents, “What did my birth father and mother look like? Are they tall like me?”

“We don’t know, Cinnamon,” they replied patiently.

“How come?”

“We have never met them.”

“Why did they leave me? How could they do that?” He cried out in pain.

Baba and Maa hugged him tightly and kissed him. “Was there something wrong with me?” he persisted.

“They didn’t give you up. There was, and is, nothing wrong with you, my son. They must have had good reasons why they could not take care of you. And I’m sure it was not easy to make the decision they did.”

On one occasion, at about six years old, he asked Baba, “Baba, if my birth mother were to come and ask to take me back, what would you do?”

“We’d never let you go.”

But the thought could not escape Cinnamon, “Why did they let me go?”

\*

**O**n the first floor of their building lived Nivedita Tai and Yatin Dada. They were regulars at the jogging track with Baba. They often came back home together, drenched in sweat. With Yatin and Nivedita always laughing, and Baba recounting some story or the other.

One day, at the breakfast table, Maa told Baba with a smile, “You know, Nivedita is expecting.”

Baba chuckled, “Well, that was quick”

Cinnamon didn’t know what Nivedita was expecting, but he did see Nivedita Tai’s otherwise flat stomach grow and grow with no end in sight. It troubled him, but nobody else seemed bothered about it. They all looked very happy patting her on her stomach.

He asked Maa, “Maa, what’s happening to Nivedita Tai? She will burst open! Why doesn’t she do something?”

“Khoka, she will do something soon.”

Then, one day, Nivedita Tai suddenly disappeared and so did Yatin Dada. Their flat was locked.

After a week, the doorbell rang. It was Yatin with a box of golden kesari pedhas in his hands. He was beaming as if he

had won on Kaun Banega Crorepati or had become Prime Minister of India.

When Maa came up to the door, he told her something which caused her to pull him into a hug and shout, "Oho! Congratulations!" Baba then reached out and hugged him too while Maa asked, "What is her name?"

"Anvee."

"Beautiful name. Congratulations," Baba said in Marathi. "And Welcome to the club, sir."

Cinnamon didn't completely understand why Baba was congratulating Yatin if Anvee had come out of Nivedita Tai's tummy. What did he have to do with it?

On many Sunday evenings, Maa would invariably give a head massage to Cinnamon with mustard oil. Baba had tried to get her to switch to coconut oil, but to no avail. Though Cinnamon hated the smell, he always loved the warm and fuzzy sensation it left when she finished her massage. He sat on an old, crinkled Marathi newspaper on the floor, while she vigorously pummelled and pounded his head.

"Head massage is good for blood flow and intelligence, you know," Maa declared.

"Your Dadu and Didima gave us regular head massages using castor oil, when we were growing up. That's why we turned out so well."

Cinnamon knew where this conversation was going, so he decided to divert it.

"Maa, I have a question," he asked.

"Yes."

"Anvee came out of Nivedita Tai's tummy?"

"Of course, baby."

"So, you and Baba also came out of Didima and Aiji's tummies? And others too?"

"Yes, even we did," she reassured.

"But I didn't come out of here?" He turned to touch Maa's tummy. "I wasn't in here?"

“Not in my tummy, no. But you were in my mind,” she said in Bengali, quoting Tagore, and touching her own forehead.

“Whose stomach did I come from, then?”

“Your birth mother’s.”

My tummy mummy, he thought.

He looked at his own tummy and imagined a baby inside. Then, he imagined himself inside a tummy, arms and legs and all. What an ugly sight it must have been.

“Maa, it must be so painful,” Cinnamon cried out.

“Yes, it is painful at that time but then once the baby is born, the pain goes.”

“Don’t you think that shows how nice I am? I came without causing you any trouble.” Maa cupped his chin and laughed. Then she carried on with the head massage, humming to herself.

# In the Silent Cinema Magnolias Rain White Again

KAREN RIGBY

For you the theater's hush  
introduces spring  
lit with streetcars  
petals blowing through  
For you, even reels  
to show a city like none  
none of the wars  
Time skips so everyone's  
away, but today petals  
continue to play.

before a piano  
the screen behind  
a century gone  
their open sides.  
alter their frames  
that ever existed:  
or rectilinear graves.  
standing or rushing  
shook in fragrant song

Reprinted from *Ex/Post Magazine*, Issue IV, January 2022





INNER AND OUTER  
LANDSCAPES

# Tales I Might've Told a Runaway at a North End Beach

JEFFREY ALFIER

I.

From a blanket spread over undulant sand,  
a woman leaned up on her elbows,  
glanced at clouds that suddenly cut the sun.  
The shore went dark. Midday was suddenly dusk.  
In the twilight, a door slammed.  
Startled finches flew from under her eaves.

II.

A ten-year-old stared at the sea. His mother  
told him of mutineers forced to walk the plank  
beyond any visible shore. That night at their motel,  
the boy saw through half-shut blinds  
of another room, a black stocking slide  
down a thigh. Its seam was as dark as a wound.

# Crossing the Light in Bluffton, Arkansas

JEFFREY ALFIER

A son of this town, I cycle back like a pawnshop guitar.  
A light breeze frays my shadow.  
Streets so nondescript they could be anyone's past.  
Most news, good or bad, comes on the down low.  
Voices lean into hymns, words scrawled from biblical dust.  
Overdue bills get torn up and tossed like flags in a bad wind.  
You can tell who the widows are.  
Our summers are sun-filled and shirts billow on clotheslines.  
Starlings rise and wheel into the sun.  
Hawks float in the middle air like clouds torn from dreams.  
Fields are flush in cornflowers and Jacob's ladders.  
Farmhouses sit in the fog like unmapped islands.  
Spirals of plowed dust arc the fields to dry our mouths with grit.  
A gate moans in the wind against a rusted chain.  
Barns die with grace, their slats dropping into wild onions  
and switchgrass.  
Tonight, the North Star is born in the dark like a love child.  
A burning house swallows its windows.

# After Drinks: Humbaan ni Aling Violy, Cogon Public Market

ALTON MELVAR M DAPANAS

As if having prayed to a god you don't even believe in, you bless this offering of a slab of pork and two boiled eggs, but you know the soup is the main event, the one that cures. Or so they say. You nearly made the sign of the cross.

You find your place: a wooden stool and a tiled slab of concrete for a table. Unsterilized spoon and fork. There are casual flies even at this hour—the stink of rotten fish and meat hidden from sight, mounds of cabbage and potatoes on the floor, possibly cockroach and rats somewhere, too. But nobody minds it, the sea of people in gowns and suits, their eyes reddish, makeup smudged, their expensive cars lined up outside a public market they never set a foot in during daytime. Everyone is either too filthy to care or too drunk to know.

Outside, a vacant sky bargaining with daylight, the color of whiskey, robbing you of your camouflage. “Greasy red meat heightens risk of stroke, hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease,” said a nurse on your first date a few weeks ago. That was your family's illness history in a sentence sans the personality disorders.

Outside, the first of the morning runners, the first of the Apovel and Bugo jeepneys will pass you by, their tires screeching aslant against yesterday's glittering trash, the

day's first bird call, an overture to a ritual, a foreplay of the morning.

For now, there is a void—or hum?—in your torso that even Aling Violy's humbâ cannot fill.

For now, the silence continues to deafen. You are on your own.

(Humbaan ni Aling Violy could be transliterated as "Mrs Violy's eatery which specializes in humbâ." Aling is a title, equivalent to Miss or Missus, attributed to a woman who is older.)

# After Drinks: Lugawan Bulalohan sa La Creolle, Capistrano Street

ALTON MELVAR M DAPANAS

In Capistrano Street's unbridled hour, opposite of the lair of light, you step on names not of ex-lovers who complain of missionary positions but of those you did not love back, those who silence your moans with their palms. Pick one and breathe it in. Pick another, do the same.

Your line of sight in itself forming some kind of calligraphy of streetlights, bulb yellow from a barbershop, blinking faint red from a traffic light no one bothered to fix, incandescent white from a bank, and something else in what used to be a parking lot where you had your first blow job. All of them chafed against this landscape as a moving museum.

This is your vow against sleep as the lingering aftertaste of cheap brandy is a second shy from puke. Your hellish warm body seeks hellish warm soup in a hellish warm carinderia.

Cup the bowl. *Is this lugaw or bulalo?* Sip the stew. *It is bulalo.* Suck the marrow. *Why is there a morsel in my bulalo?* Bare hands, crossed ankles. Ignore the communion of glances from the next table, the prelude to sin. Forget all the yearning for a city, outside, that once wanted you. After the deluge comes the apologies, like sunrise and then, sunset. There is no other way.

There, right there by the open window near an exhaust fan, is the burning rogue color—or is it aubergine?—of daybreak. Notice how it wears you thin. The road outside gets wider and wider

(In Cebuano Binisaya grammar, the suffixes -an and -han, in the context of place, indicate abundance of the mentioned root word, in the case of “lugawan” and “bulalohan,” in English, “a carinderia or eatery in La Creolle where lugaw and bulalo are the specialty.”)



# A Mind of One's Own

PAUL BROWNSEY

**T**his ought to have been an open-and-shut case. The Offender, someone called Tim Followes, came before the Tribunal of his own free will, referring himself to me because he was upset by a thought he had in a café in Byres Road called Hots. He was being served a piccolo latte by someone from Sudan called Ayman Saleh. Saleh accidentally slopped coffee into the saucer and Followes, in his words, “suddenly saw Mr Saleh as taking a job away from a British worker. I was very worried at having this thought and felt it my duty to refer myself to the Tribunal.”

Self-referral is, of course, a confession of attitudinal deficiency, allowing me to proceed quickly to prescribe the appropriate treatment without any of the tiresome argy-bargy you sometimes get when the Offender comes before me as a result of non-elective referral by the Public Promoter. This made me feel rather warm and paternal towards Followes. Although a glance at the papers told me that he was 52 years old and the father of two grown-up daughters, the person before me was more like a skinny cheerful schoolboy, head as high as he could hold it, tight corduroy trousers. Even his hair, fair and springy, untouched by grey, seemed cheerful. He gave out smiles all round like someone proud of being a good boy for referring himself to me; as, indeed, he ought to be. I was already filling in the paperwork for the treatment that is customary in the case of a first self-referral, namely, a week of Awareness Enhancement at one of my company's BetterMenting Centres, when Followes' Mitigator interrupted me to say that Followes wished to tender an Excusation.

I could hardly believe my ears at the extraordinary and bare-faced attempt to bamboozle the Tribunal that ensued. The Mitigator stated that Followes did not “think” that Saleh was taking a job away from a British worker—the thought “just came to him”!

“He didn’t *think it?*” I remarked, with commendable mildness, that it sounded like a distinction without a difference, but the Mitigator said he wanted to present Testifiers “to the wisdom of such a distinction.” I allowed him to proceed, for one must display impartiality and a readiness to listen, though I hoped the Tribunal’s displeasure was not concealed by my affable manner.

There was feeble stuff from the first Testifier, someone called the Reverend Halcro Menstrie, elderly, with a high, chanting sort of voice and one of those irritating smiles expressing faith in people. He began with some farrago about a witch called Rebekke Simeson who was burned at Linlithgow in 1624 for, among other things, blaspheming that Our Lord was “bastarde of ane idel vagrant” and His mother a “fule queyne”. (Menstrie insisted on dictating these spellings, which he said were from the original documents.) She said at her trial that it was the Devil speaking through her. Menstrie looked at me knowingly.

“Are you telling the Tribunal that when the Offender thought this Saleh person has taken a job from a British worker, this was the Devil’s voice inside him?”

Menstrie gave me that look of delight some of them can give you that assures you your views are very valid, then had the impertinence to raise his finger and coo “Patience!” I had the patience not to rebuke this. He then started talking about a saint, St Margret Flemynge, apparently a brothel-keeper in Ayr in the 1400s. One of her whores gave birth and Margret Flemynge was on her way to the beach to drown the infant when she heard a voice telling her that the child in her arms was the Christ-child, conveyed to her for safe-keeping. At

once she repented of her evil errand, changed her life, and turned her brothel into a home for foundlings, where they were trained for useful trades. She declared she'd "heard in her soul" the voice of God.

"So now you are telling the Tribunal that God spoke to Followes?"

He gave me another of those validating looks of delight and then said, "No matter to whom or to what the receptor of such thoughts is disposed to attribute them, it is proper and appropriate to acknowledge the phenomenon of experiencing alien thoughts and to make due allowance for it."

"What allowance is due remains to be seen," I said. Still, his testimony did make me realise there was a question I should put to the Offender, to maintain the Tribunal's name for fairness and open-mindedness.

"This thought which, you maintain, 'just came to' you—do you feel able to tell us where you think it came *from*?"

Followes' Mitigator had a whispered conversation with him, hunted through a folder, handed a leaflet to an usher to hand to me.

The leaflet read, "Doesn't this give you the PIP?" It featured a rather clever cartoon of a burglar hitting an ordinary man with a club. The burglar was masked but was clearly of ethnic appearance. A balloon issuing from the burglar's mouth said, "Gimme your job." He had on his back a bag labelled "swag" and out of it stuck a box marked "job". A trail of footprints led to a boat offshore with two flags, one a skull and crossbones, the other reading "Immigration Special".

"This leaflet," said the Mitigator, "is produced by the notorious People's Integrity Party, the PIP, as it likes to call itself. Without my client's request or acquiescence, it was pushed through the letterbox of his house on the night before he ordered coffee in Hots. He believes it is the most likely source of the thought that came to him in Hots.

"In addition, I have noticed, as the Tribunal Laird may have

noticed, that the sentiment expressed in the leaflet is often expressed in speeches by politicians and articles in the press and postings on the internet. These are other likely sources of the thought that came to my client about Mr Saleh.”

I soon shut that up. “The Tribunal takes the view that no-one would notice such articles in the newspapers and these other places who did not have a mind that was already receptive to and primed to endorse the sentiment in question.” I smiled at the Mitigator sufficiently to indicate that this was a joke but I pitched my smile so as to convey as well that it was not *only* a joke. “If what was said in the leaflet lodged in our Tim’s mind, that must have been because it found a welcoming home in the Offender’s mind which made him all too ready to apply the leaflet’s message to this Saleh person.”

The next testifier was someone called Mira Banerjee, who was a little too assertive. Aren’t these women supposed to cultivate grace and docility and submission? Apparently she is the chair of some committee for the welfare of migrants or asylum seekers; people like that. She said Followes has been a member of her committee for about nine years, works at weekends in a charity shop through which it raises money, and has often expressed the view that immigrants are of great benefit to the country so she was confident that Followes did not regard Saleh as taking a job away from a British worker so it was just a “stray thought”, not what he really thought.

The Promoter indicated he wished to question her but I said I would take that upon myself. I told her that instead of hawing about “stray” thoughts, she should regard what Followes thought about Saleh as proving that, despite the no doubt worthy sentiments Followes had expressed to her, he was *partly* racist and xenophobic; say, 5% or 10%.

“He is not racist at all.” Not the slightest dent in her confidence!

I asked her whether she had ever heard of a song called *Everyone’s a Little Bit Racist*.

“He is not racist at all.”

Tolerantly ignoring this disrespect, I told her how we use the song in Awareness Enhancement at BetterMenting Centres, employing a light touch. Everyone has to learn and perform it, but we make a wee competition of it with a discount in fees for the most convincing performance. I sang her a few lines of the song, looking pointedly at her on the word “everyone” so that she might ponder whether she might in due course find herself the subject of a non-elective referral to the Tribunal and a participant in our little competition.

Since the Mitigator had called two Testifiers, the Promoter called the same number in order to refute them. I was not impressed by the first, who sounded too much like he was batting for the other side. Professor Alexander Lickleyhead, FRSE, looked a fussy sort, tall and bony; thin supercilious lips made for sneering; far too immersed in intellectual things to bother about looking tidy.

He told us he had made a lifelong study of something called “the tabula rasa theory” and had published a book called *A Mind of One’s Own* in which he had examined all the psychological, neurological, philosophical, religious, and political aspects of this theory.

“And has this book,” said the Promoter, “been widely acclaimed as ‘authoritative’ and ‘magisterial’ and recognised by your election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh?”

“I believe it has.”

His smug little smile soon disappeared when I said, “Just give us a quick run-down on the gist of the theory, Prof. Something suitable for the ordinary man.”

His straggles of hair twitched. He said it was the theory that the mind is like a blank slate and everything in it arises from experience. He started to say that he was personally a “modified tabula rasa theorist” and that there might be “innate structural predispositions”, whatever they may be, but I said, “Let’s not cloud the issue. You are telling us that what

people think comes to them from outside?”

“Yes, but—”

“But me no buts.”

I turned to the Promoter, “I don’t like the sound of this. The Tribunal cannot understand why you are calling him to refute our Tim’s case.” Oh dear, those warm paternal impulses popping up again. “If what people think comes to them from the outside, then we have to accept that what the Offender thought about the Saleh person is after all something that just came to him. Which means people cannot be held responsible for what they think—an appalling vista!”

The Promoter replied that the Professor was going to “develop a compatibilist theory” that although all your thoughts come from outside, there is still “a very real sense” in which “we can meaningfully say” they are your own thoughts—what *you* think.

“Too airy-fairy for this Tribunal.” I turned to the Testifier. “Professor Lickleyhead, your valuable testimony appears to point us to the conclusion that the thoughts in a man’s brain just come to him and so are, all of them, stray thoughts.” He started to speak but I shushed him. “Would I, then, be right in regarding your valuable testimony as just a jumblebag of stray thoughts that have got into your head any old how, not as your own thoughts, profound and valuable and well-researched and scholarly?”

“Of course not.”

“Thank you, Professor Lickleyhead.”

By far the most satisfactory Testifier was a little wide-hipped woman called Willow MacAskill. A weather-beaten face like a bricklayer’s was offset by girlish plaits on either side. She described herself as a counsellor and explained clearly that thoughts or words that just “pop up” or “pop out” in fact arise from repressed feelings in the subconscious that are causing damage to the client. As an example, she said that one of her clients had told her that, passing a vintage clothes shop selling

ladies' evening wear, he had noticed a long silk dress in a very striking pattern of black and white diamonds, and the thought had come to him that, as a man, he could never experience what it would be like to "make an entrance" to a party in such a garment. This was a very significant disclosure and she had devoted the whole of their next session to it, and her client was now making excellent progress in coming to a realisation of his true gender identity.

"Would you say that thoughts that pop up could be a cry for help?"

"Oh, yes." It was a rather gravelly voice but patently sincere, congratulating me on my insight. She may be someone I could use at a BetterMenting Centre. "And so the thought for which our Tim has referred himself to me is a cry for help from his subconscious?"

"Oh, yes." She added a compassionate sigh.

That left me nothing to do but determine the corrective treatment for the Offender. Despite the argy-bargy, this had been a self-referral and therefore a confession of attitudinal deficiency, so there was hope of change and I saw no reason not to prescribe first-level treatment, namely, a residential week of Awareness Enhancement at a BetterMenting Centre. I told Tim that some might view his tiresome and disputatious rigmarole that what he thought about Saleh "just came to him" as casting doubt on the sincerity of his self-referral, but I was overlooking that. I was not cancelling his self-referral discount, so the fee charged him would be only £950, and I was authorising loan facilities, in case this sum was beyond his means at present.

His face lit up with gratitude, and the Mitigator remarked fittingly that he was sure the Offender would appreciate that, being both Laird of the Tribunal and as, Chairman of BetterMenting Ltd, responsible for his treatment, I had an ongoing concern with his attitudinal welfare.

Tim, grateful smile intact, turned away to exit the Tribunal, but then he halted and turned back, smile gone.

“Has another thought just come to you, Tim?” I said, affable as always.

“No, it’s jolly well what I think, this time. You sit there handing out corrective measures that you are going to make a profit out of.” His eyes were wide, his mouth tiny with shock. “You are a leech. A vulture. A shark. A rotten slimy exploiter for your own selfish ends of the tragedy of attitudinal deficiency.”

The Promoter was on his feet, but I said that I would deal with it.

“You’ve let me down, Tim.” I spoke more in sorrow than anger. “This is more attitudinal deficiency, and this time there is not the mitigating circumstance of a self-referral. How can you fail to see that no-one is better qualified to prescribe the treatment an Offender needs than the very people whose income derives from providing and running successful treatment facilities? No-one has a better motive and a better insight for assessing what treatment is necessary.”

I increased his prescribed treatment from a week to a month of Awareness Enhancement, cancelled his First Offender discount, and withdrew loan facilities. “I have made a note that what you thought about the Saleh person and your outrageous remarks about my dual role as Tribunal Laird and Chairman of BetterMenting Ltd both appear to reveal a failure to appreciate the value of integration, and am recommending that your Awareness Enhancement should be focused on correcting your underdeveloped holism.”

People like Followes can be their own worst enemies.



# White Picket Fence

ROGER CAMP

Parting pant legs,  
pushing my way clear  
to the circle of commotion  
under the Ferris wheel,  
I witness two men fighting  
one spiking the other's screwed neck  
against a white picket fence.

The smells of the fairway  
a blend of salt water taffy,  
corn-on-the-cob, hot dogs,  
battered popcorn, spat tobacco  
all spun with cotton candy.  
The surging mob  
laced with a different scent  
pressing in for the kill.

Two white T-shirts embroiled  
a rolled-up pack of coffin nails  
crushing a greasy ducktail  
until my father's human hand  
yanked me out.

# Where the River is Lost in the Lake

JAMES OWENS

The meeting of water and water is about silence.  
We let silence sway on its stem in our mouths,

cold daylight a silver wire drawn through air.  
What sounds there are hold their shapes.

Five ducks lift and skim their images,  
the blur-blur of their wings waking the distance.

The moment comes and dissolves,  
comes and dissolves.

At the edge of things: a pulse of small waves.  
The floating dock grieves against its moorings.

# Down into Mexico /Hello Stranger

PARRISH

L

somewhere north of redding, you had me draw it on you from between your breasts down to your belly, a map of california, baja tipped just under your belt line, you said we'd hit riverside, san bernadino, mount san gorgonio all the way to mexico, even if i didn't want to go, and that i'd die down there, on the run, like joe in that jimi hendrix song. i hardly paid attention, mashing your little brown button like it was the car's accelerator, i was thinking of my man delbert mcclinton and that trip he took to love's incinerator, since you left me he comes often to commiserate, you know i was listening to him when i first crossed into this state, so cue him up again, *little mama*, that song we were playing when we hit ensenada, you know i thought he was dead and beyond your reach, you have so many friends and they're not all at the beach, my records are just your player piano, the tone arm moving that broken shaft cupid's sorryass arrow. i guess there's no turning back once you go down that road, it rolls down the valley into bakersfield towards yucatan, but you stopped me at the edge of your death valley canyon, you jammed your entire hand up into g-d's glory hole, your eyes

became so vacant, like they had swallowed another soul, they were looking in different directions, and it was your finger on your clit, i had to watch, i just had no way of stopping it... aaah... excuse me while i linger with my man, he's from fort worth just as i am, he's in the jackpot now, brought back against his failed will from that final twist, his eyes say you forced me into this, death is a look that binds us all, but that face, girl, the one who took the fall, he thought you were a sure bet, he didn't know you fuck men like russian roulette, somebody's always going down so another one can spin round in that chamber between your legs, i wish i were spinning there now, i ain't too proud to beg. i loved being inside your pussy when it went off, and i wouldn't mind dying, if dying was all, it's these damned tunes you keep playing that have me climbing the walls of a tomb king tut couldn't create, i had hoped i was the only inmate, hey brother delmore, sure is fine to hear you, i know it's far too late, but if i tell it right, maybe this time we can escape. you pieced me together to blow me apart, to suck out the heart you craved, like a righteous aztec who'd mistaken me for cortez, my infinite belief you wanted to seize, your passions i never could appease with my love conquers and all that jazz, i was your birdman of your alcatraz, i wouldn't escape, i'd let you rape me behind bars to watch heaven's stars fall from your eyes. with him you robbed banks, you and i knocked off record stores, wherever treasure is, you have to have more, i said gold wasn't something you can eat, you smiled and put my head into your open lap, saying it ain't what you eat, it's the way that you chew it, whatever i knew, you already knew it. the record spins, delmore eschews regret, desire is a bitch, he says, sure, you bet, you just gotta fuck her 'til your spirit vanishes without a trace, except you caught his, and put me in his place, rotating him on my player, these songs i used to hear as prayers, but now

they're just the image of my death, i know i won't expire until your last breath. last thing my man recalls was a gun sliding out of her purse, but i know where you really kept yours, me you didn't have to coerce, i put my head against it and when you came into your hand and slapped my face so hard, i was like some dog howling in a deserted prison yard. delbert took a bullet in his chest, you just broke my nose, i was proud of the damage you had done, i thought it meant i was the one to take you down into mexico, but you left me at the border, i couldn't get across, and that's when delbert's song drifted by from someone's passing car, i first heard it in tacoma, or maybe guthrie oklahoma, playing in a record store we never went, you must have left just as i came in, i wish i could go back to that moment again, i'd pry you loose from your revolving door, and i'd take you back to that time before the world was made, and the sun didn't yet know it's light would turn into shade, and for you i'd trade every record i've ever played not to hear the one you left with the clerk to spin, telling me it was time to begin, so you later you could say i told you so, when you took me between your legs and begged me not to go, until i was finished. the clerk said the record wasn't for sale, but it was already in my blood, west of winslow i had a peaceful easy feeling when the channel got stuck on delmore singing that sad song about the failed getaway and his voice just kept carrying me along, the sunset over lake havasu city was more than pretty but i think now it was your smile already blinding me, my eyes closed and other hands on the wheel driving straight into the disappearing sun, one day it will rise no more, and in that darkness you found me, you took me straight to your davis door, saying hello stranger, come back for more? i didn't understand your question, i thought it was the resurrection, and we didn't have any time to lose, you jumped in beside me, you swore to ride me to

every record store in creation, we'd find all the vinyl worth knowing and then through heaven's gates we'd be blowing never quitting until we discovered the source of wind, at the estado libre you said we'd even lose every sin, but it was just delbert's voice from that passing car, you didn't even wave hello, and suddenly i was back in arizona, this time i'm skipping california, i would have robbed g-d of the world just to speak your true name, may as well turn for mexico, and if i ever find you there, i'll tell the law, it's me, i take the blame.



# POINTS OF VIEW



# As Vanishing Point Perspective Vanishes

WILLIAM DORESKI

Already the heat exfoliates  
in layers of reprocessed wool.

Today I must face the fact  
of slowly going blind. My doctor

will shrug that shrug learned long ago  
as an intern on the night shift

when most of the horrors occur.  
I should have stuck to science

in my undergraduate moment  
when clarities leapt from the muddle

and offered to resolve the world.  
I could have self-diagnosed

with established facts to lean on,  
the pages of refereed journals

fluttering with flirtatious glee.  
Armed with a medical license,

I could have accurately placed myself  
in the post-Darwinian scheme.

You don't accept my darkening view,

my insistence that my vision  
no longer explains anything,  
no longer distinguishes toxic  
from edible mushrooms, no longer  
resolves the lines of force  
represented by tall white pines.  
The eye people will gather  
around me and chant in Latin,  
high priests half-demented  
by their congregation's lack of faith.  
You warn me not to be silly  
that Doctor X understands  
how vital my vanishing point  
perspective is, how desperately  
I process every text I meet.  
But when I enter that den  
of illegible eye charts, the man  
himself will declare me hopeless  
and scrawl a useless prescription  
in holograph so illegible  
it will mock me into the dark.

# Troubles

JOHN GREY

A typo turned my love poem gay.  
A long-distance relationship grew more distant.  
A jogging fat man almost bowled me over.  
The deer caught in my headlights liked it there.  
My only black friend went back home to Alabama.  
The temp agency has no idea what to do with me.  
It's been a year since I received any kind of positive feedback.  
I just discovered what weapons of mass destruction are actually  
capable of.  
I'm the only one in the clique without a tattoo.  
When I call my mother, "The Price Is Right" is always blaring in  
the background.  
The menu at McDonald's no longer lists anything I can't do without.  
No illegal immigrant wants my job.  
I'm too old for magic and dragons.  
My hearing comes with a laugh track.  
I'm no match for the will of God.  
My DVD of "The Matrix" freezes up halfway through.  
I'm too afraid to tell a woman that she has beautiful eyes.  
In trying to save a friend's failing marriage—I give myself an F.  
Someone I know saw me as a Bon Jovi concert.  
I knew the names of more celebrities when I was twelve than now.  
I've never had the opportunity to screw over the little guy.  
I've found that there's a limit to my procrastination.  
It's not that I'm afraid of change but why is it always accompanied  
by an ass-kicking?  
I was the victim of identity-theft but then my identity was  
returned to me, unused.  
Nobody ever asks for my opinion.  
Increasing exponentially are the things that are too much trouble.

I went out in the first round of a chili-cookoff.  
A really bad Dixieland band rehearses in my next-door neighbor's  
garage.  
I accept the fact that I will never spend my off-hours in a remote  
island fortress.  
I'm inclined to scream out, "You're joking!" when Oscar winners are  
announced.  
I own nothing worth selling in eBay. Not even the stuff I bought  
on eBay.  
When friends get a late birthday card, they know it's from me.  
In all of my selfies, I positively spoil the picture.  
And on and on and on and on.  
And you think you've got troubles.  
So where's your list, Ms Plath?

# The Box

DIARMUID MAOLALAI

it fills like a box  
and once  
I thought I wanted  
a box like nobody  
else had—an apartment  
of my own—a place  
to live comfortably,  
to drink wine and read books  
and to write out my poems  
while dishes filled sinks  
and made stacks on the table.  
now, getting married  
and I'm somewhat  
looking forward to it. and we  
live together. and we  
share a dog. a life  
then, I suppose,  
as much dull  
as another—dinner,  
a glass of wine.  
a movie and going  
to bed. I imagined that this life  
would lead to less  
experience.  
it hasn't: a box  
stays it's size  
whatever's in it.

# Not Fighting

DIARMUID MAOLALAI

we've been not  
fighting quite often  
lately. and it's really  
much different  
from there not  
being fights.

we've been being careful.  
been saying "not fighting."  
"not fighting." like wolves  
in the zoo—we're unnatural.

"we're not fighting  
about this," I tell you.  
"I'm not fighting either,"  
you say.

# The Smell of an Important Man

KEVIN BROWN

The summer I realized girls were the prize and not the enemy, my father died of liver failure. I was not present when my father died, but then he was not present for most of my life.

The man I refuse to call Dad worked for people who never looked at him. Walking by, they'd say things like, Tea or Coffee, or just snap their fingers while he smiled so wide his eyes closed and bowed until they'd passed. He smiled so much at work that he developed a facial tick and believed the only way to relieve it was to never stop frowning.

At home, he rarely spoke, and never looked at Mom and me for more than a second each. He'd drink bottles of Dynasty X.O., then snap his fingers for his shoes. He'd slam chairs, glasses and doors as he left the house, coming back late smelling, but not like Mom's perfume. Mom would cry and yell while he sat in his chair, swigging brandy, cheek nerves twitching.

"It's not our fault you're just a corporate eunuch!" she'd scream, and I'd close my eyes and sometimes hear a sound like slippers slapped together and my mom crying even harder. Most times, I just heard snoring.

His proudest memory was that he'd smelled Bruce Lee in person. He had the chance to shake his hand, but when the star walked by him, my father smiled and bowed, eyes closed. "His cologne was so strong," he'd tell me, his words

slurring, his watery eyes looking to the ceiling. “It was the smell of an important man.”

One night, my father left to get right and never returned. The last time I saw him alive was the afternoon Mom and I went to yum tsa in Victoria Harbor. He was leaning over the railing, staring at a junk crossing the sea, the dark water like dragon scales in the breeze.

“Father!” I said, waving my hands over my head like scissors. “It’s Cheuk Fan!”

He gripped the rail until his knuckles went white, lowered his head, and walked away.

Liver failure was listed as his cause of death because, as Mom said, “You can’t just put failure on a death certificate.”

At his funeral, a woman we had never seen before cried.

Mom did not.

It is a Chinese tradition that, if a son is not present at his father’s death, he must crawl toward the casket, wailing for penance. I dropped to hands and knees, moving toward the man who had always moved away from me. The smell of votive candles was so strong, and I marveled at this marvelous karma. Finally, someone was bowing to my father and the smell of an unimportant man.



# Drafting My Own Obituary

THOMAS REED WILLEMMAIN

He told me I come  
from a line of great warriors.  
She told me I come  
from a stanza of great poets.  
He told me I come  
from a discourse of great orators.  
Science tells me I come  
from a worm with holes at both ends.

She tells me I was  
cute as a baby.  
He tells me I was  
playing chess at age two.  
They tell me I inspired  
them all in my classes.  
You tell me I can't even  
tie my tie on right.

Coach told me I was  
too slow to make starter.  
Teacher told me I was  
too thick to make poet.  
Mailman told me I was  
living in the wrong house.  
Roommate says I drove  
his hottest chicks away.

You tell me I made  
you love me.  
You tell me you

will not forget me.  
You tell me you  
will honor my name.

You tell me  
you'll write it yourself.

# Red Fishnets

KITTY STEFFAN

We're not mothers.  
We're women with guns.

And you thought the fishnets  
were bad enough!  
Ripped and sagging like a whore's tits.

All you see is red.  
All you think of is teeth  
now that the bars  
are off the windows and the yawning moon  
over the frozen ground  
has clicked  
her eyes  
shut.

Up there but for a moment I entertained  
a stupid fucking  
maybe.

We're not mothers.  
Our lips are willed to wine.  
You know the rest.  
You know the kind.  
Good for the heart, the beating  
one  
my own, my own and not  
the one washed  
and sent away in pieces

with nary a ceremony  
of salt water and oils.

The slick ruby  
that little happy  
a click of the finger  
and it was gone.

We're not mothers.  
As if the gaudy sequined lace  
and chains of scandal would not part  
with ease  
with sighs  
with tears  
with a yes, yes, yes  
for lips more worthy than your own.

# God (via Kev)

KITTY STEFFAN

God bakes scones when my knees hurt  
brings out the butter and puts on the kettle  
and pours the milk in my tea.

Someone's gotta take care of you.

God is a good person you can meet in a bar.  
Buy him a pint, and he will tell you  
which side of the train to get on  
though it depends  
on where you're going.

God is a Welsh man from Bristol.  
He saves coupons and counts his pennies.  
He knows where to get the best deals  
and he will tell you all about it  
whether you like it or not.

Someone's gotta take care of you.

God looks like Francis Rossi and hums  
whatever you like  
whatever you need  
whatever it takes, honey  
to crack your face into a smile.

God is incredibly funny.

God is a signalman.  
He will teach you all about the lights

whether you like it or not  
because you need to know not just  
where you're going  
but who takes you there  
and how.

God walks the tracks  
and picks up the limbs of the dead.

Someone's gotta take care of you.

# Self-Portrait as America's Body Obsession

ALLYN BERNKOPF

My body is a tool and I use it like you use me and nobody  
picks and plucks at my fat like I do. They say to love  
yourself, squat the heavy upheaval of self-care, and I  
care, but what's to love when this body keeps pluming great,  
angry hackles? I slick parts of me clean with apologetic  
tongues, selling to customers coming through. You  
stop, glean a piece of fat ass or wide hips or tits swollen like wasp  
stings, while little smiles fissure, equal to Mother's grandest  
canyon. Finally, bottles of tears unhinge anxiety so deep, I lick my  
mirror clean, whittle you to a toothpick and pick my name  
from your voice, scrape you out of my gut, then fold myself  
into cracks west of the Pacific.

# Transforming the Lens

Book Review of *Morning Lit: Portals after Alia* by Omar Sabbagh

MARK FITZGERALD

Love works in wonderful ways. “It gives a power of seeing through its own enchantments and yet not being disenchanted,” C.S. Lewis once said. Yet the subject is so difficult to approach head on, especially in writing. There is no clear method or process to be derived from literature that comes close. Love ascends from depths unknown. A bell resounds. The ordinary world is refashioned. “This must be a simply enormous wardrobe!” Lucy thinks as she steps further and further in. But Narnia is also a way out, and you can’t get there by trying too hard.

In Omar Sabbagh’s poetry collection, *Morning Lit: Portals after Alia* (Cinnamon Press), new worlds abound “like an incoming, livid sea.” Love is approached from many angles and openings, especially in relation to Alia, who is not just a daughter with eyes that “flicker like exotic precious stones,” but “the richest lore / a man has faith in; more than the wisdom in the cut / and quiet of all the edges, the foregone dogmas // the world knows.”

More than a portal into a magical world, she is a lighthouse, a stay against corporeal forces that zap your soul. To see afresh is a gift that offers the promise of a new purpose. There are moments that sing at this wonder, turning the outside in. Take “Alia’s Alchemy,” where demons become angels:



And there are many ways to spell your name,  
because it is a word possessed. And when  
it happens to be uttered, it sounds a sound  
to solicit the magic of soldered charms;

and the demons who seem to people the air. . .

those demons seem to grow, widen, change,  
becoming like better angels for a larger age. . .

. . . And I cannot gift the sun a face

today, because too much light begs for darkness.  
And that your name is enough. . .

*Morning Lit* explores numerous territories, including landscapes of transformation, longing, cognition, and persuasion. Some of the poems read like letters, where logos seems to rhyme with pathos. Description and insight blend nicely into the pace of the lines. Notice the imploring voice, cadence, alliteration, and symmetry in “Valentine’s 2021.”

So, this is what I want:

To un-shield the utmost truth,  
And with a sum of honest breaths  
Line my lines like likely minds  
While working hard  
To disarm them: my only

Weapon will be my honesty.

In short,  
I want to land and pierce the broken ice  
Of a twofold story, a story, once told twice.

Between the two of us, tied,  
Tethered by twofold travesties –  
Two mouths, four lips and all and all  
That hurts between: I hope to find  
The diamond

The frames and entrances in this collection render splendid currents, and Sabbagh gives us plenty of room to imagine and co-create. We are on a voyage, one that seeks the essence of life. But questions—the vital ones at least—are more important than answers. As Rilke said: “The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.” So the journey becomes—wasn’t it always?—the destination. Consider the workings of both quest and question in a “Portrait of a Man.”

. . . And none, I think, will ever  
Unwrap the mystery of this painted face, more  
Like a tone of voice, a kind of forlorn music, slowed;  
And none will ever be daft enough to look to the far  
Corner of the image, a point almost painted-out;

There, we must assume, lies a wound, some unhappy  
woman  
Who goes on to lie, devising, like only a woman can,  
While petering the face we see with the horror of its vision  
There at the corner of some fogged, failed decision.

And the painter’s question seems to catch him here,  
This man of so much strength, and of so much fear,

Only at the moment of his own sheer excision.

This is an inquisitive space. An enlightened gaze pulls us in. Yet the fruit that dangles from the branch is just out of reach. “Something stays this way we cannot have, comes alive because we cannot have it,” observes Robert Hass in “Art and Life.” What is most elusive lingers on and haunts us in puzzling ways. Images speak, whisper on long after dark. More than a thousand words if you bring them alive in a scene and link them to a larger significance. They might even be hard to forget. Sabbagh does this well, especially in “Unhomely.”

But when the enemy grows like rot  
inside your boot and your foot  
turns from tan to green,  
bloodied by the way you start to pick  
at it, it's then you might  
realize the fight's  
slicker than you ever knew.  
The barbed wire's a sinch  
compared to this; and even when  
it cuts and cuts and cuts you  
with its ghastly unruly  
curlicues of twisted metal  
at the least you see  
the turning of the blades  
that may mark your finish.  
To love a woman might be like this,  
to see and know your finish  
for what it is.

The connection is unexpected, full of truth, and so well-timed. And that's why it's so potent. Sabbagh brings us full circle, but through a different portal. Then we enter a bright harbor and the voyage ends with epilogues that pay tribute to certain individuals. Consider the warmth and well-

wishing in these lines from “The Silent Oryx,” which purrs with nostalgia and hope:

May the coming of winter be and be and be, happy,  
capricious –

Some girlish, twirling summer dress  
Beneath the beelines and the golden emanations;

Some girlish warmth, let’s say; and – salmon-thick – a  
smile that may  
Confess the Care was worth it, building children, burning  
nations.

Sabbagh puts big ideas—intangibles of love and loss, light and darkness—into palpable contexts, seeking to see and transform the lens to see again. Timeless themes bloom through self-knowledge and shared experience. There is much searching and contemplation, and often you get the feeling that past, present, and future are one. Of course, wordplay is at work too (“And these forty years now turn and swivel, undeterred – // Forty summed and some-of-forty hard-lived numbers”). The tone is amusing, and the words chime best when read aloud.

*Morning Lit* takes us around the world and back. It is a gift that helps us find our own way home. Only now home may not look the way we thought it would. Awakened and changed, we can see more fully—without fear or doubt. “We shall not cease from exploration,” recognized T.S. Eliot. “And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

## Editor's Afterword

Some twenty years ago, I met Paul Schreiber for the first time. His course in Creative Writing at Stockholm University was my first encounter with the academic field—Paul's course was, at the time, one of few, if not the only, courses in Creative Writing at the tertiary level in Sweden, and I imagine that some of the resistance against the subject that still exists must have been even more prominent then. Ever the underdog, Creative Writing has had to forge its own path in a way that other disciplines have not, and Paul and Adnan Mahmutović have been avid and tireless fighters in this battle. In English-speaking countries, the field has a long history, and has not been faced with the same skepticism as in Sweden. The Iowa Writers' Workshop in the US, and the writing course at the University of East Anglia in the UK, for example, are internationally renowned. Perhaps it was partly because of Paul's American background and his cultural understanding that he saw the possibilities for Creative Writing as an academic discipline here when few others did.

Paul taught with great passion and never answered any questions; instead, he taught us to ask the right ones. To this day, I draw on those key texts that Paul introduced to us, and the insights for which he planted the seed. Paul taught with a respect not only for the authors we studied and for the craft itself, but for us, his students, and our first steps towards creating something of our own. It is a fine thing, to be a true teacher, one desired by the many, and reserved for the few.

One time, Paul invited an author to our class. She was in Sweden for what I can only imagine was some large awards ceremony, and I do not know how, but Paul got her to come to our seminar. We were shy and quiet, worried that our questions would be stupid, as students invariably worry, so she turned instead to us, asked us about our lives, our writing. I remember mentioning working part-time as a cashier and that it involved plentiful nodding and smiling. She went round the room, then summarised what we had said. I am sure she mentioned other students' contributions, but that, I have forgotten. What I do remember is that she said, "It is there, in the nodding and the smiling, in interactions and interactions never realized. In those moments, in the real world, is where writing begins." If only I had been more well read at the time. If only I had had the wherewithal to ask all the stupid questions, and perhaps even a clever one. If only I had brought a camera (this was before phones had cameras). But, I think to myself now, some twenty years later, that had I had all those things, that meeting would not have been the same. What could I possibly want to change about the moment that Margaret Atwood looked me in the eye and said, "There. That's where it is."

Yes, Paul Schreiber got Margaret Atwood to visit his first-year Creative Writing students. Who does that? How is it even possible? I still do not know how he did it, but I know what it did to me. It changed my life. That first Creative Writing course with Paul changed my life. I went on to study Creative Writing in Australia and was awarded my PhD in English, Creative Writing, in 2008. Had Paul not opened that door for me, I do not know that I would have opened it myself. To Paul I am eternally grateful, and indebted. Few of us get the chance to tell the teachers that changed our lives that they did. I am grateful that I do.

The fact that I do, is, of course, also thanks to Paul. He invited me to be a featured writer in *Two Thirds North* in 2017, and, in

the same year, to come to Stockholm and give a couple of guest lectures. It was truly wonderful to come back to the same halls, the same rooms, but as a somewhat new person. I gave some talks to engaged students and members of staff, and had the great pleasure of meeting Adnan for the first time, over lunch in the Faculty Club (I still cannot quite believe I am allowed into these sorts of buildings). Paul and Adnan's devotion fueled our conversation, and it was clear that this passion was one that we shared. The enthusiasm with which Paul and Adnan have worked, and continue to work, in and for the field is admirable and inspirational. I was proud to sit at that table, and am proud that they have now invited me to this one.

This is the second time I have been assistant poetry editor of *Two Thirds North*, and my first foreword. Paul is, as he himself puts it, "becoming more and more retired." As Paul is stepping down, he has asked me to step up as the primary poetry editor, an honour I humbly except. It is hard work, running a journal, much harder than most understand. Many cave under the pressure of withdrawn funding; some were never funded to begin with. Others cave under the pressure of the workload, others because those key people who make most things happen in the arts—those who seem to run on love, literature, and red wine alone—move on or retire. I am glad I can be part of the continuation of the legacy of *Two Thirds North* and keep fighting alongside Adnan for the importance of avenues for new and established writers alike. Paul will continue to work with us, but in a smaller capacity as he has people to see and places to go, books to read and write.

This is where I could get fatalistic and talk about how wonderfully circular life is, and how teachers change lives and how writing changes lives, how Paul was deemed and doomed for the Creative Writing life, aptonymically not the least. I could describe how Paul's tone and demeanor towards me is as

respectful now that I am somehow officially knowledgeable as it was when I was a young student with far too little reading under my belt, but I prefer not to. Suffice it to say that I hope I can make my students feel the same way, so that they too may tread this path with wonder but without illusion, with confidence but without conceit. With the knowledge that there is a writer, scrivener, or Schreiber in them all.

Maria Freij



## Contributors

Jane Blanchard lives and writes in Georgia (USA). Her poetry has appeared previously in *Two Thirds North*, *Arion*, *The French Literary Review*, *The Lyric*, and *The Seventh Quarry*. Her latest collection is *Never Enough Already* (2021).

Bill Howell has five poetry collections, with recent work in *Canadian Literature*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Event*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Queen's Quarterly*. Bill was a producer-director at CBC Radio Drama for three decades. He lives in Toronto.

Sreekanth Kopuri is an Indian-English poet whose poems and research are widely published in journals like *Heartland Review*, *Nebraska Writers Guild*, *Poetry Centre San Jose*, *Under-ground Writers Association*, *Word Fountain*, *A New Ulster*, and more. His Poems of the Void was the finalist for the EYELANDS BOOKS AWARD.

Brigita Orel's work was published in online and print magazines. Her picture book *The Pirate Tree* (Lantana Publishing, 2019) was Bank Street Best Children's Book of the Year. She studied creative writing at Swansea University. She lives in Slovenia where she works as a translator.

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She resides in Graham, NC with her cats, James Cagney and Janis Joplin.

Karen Rigby is the author of *Chinoiserie* (Ahsahta Press). Her poems have been published in *The London Magazine*, *Australian Book Review*, *Grain*, *Banshee*, and other journals.

Hollie Dugas' work has been published widely and has been a finalist for the Peseroff Prize, Greg Grummer Poetry Prize, Fugue's Annual Contest. She won Western Humanities Review Mountain West Writers' Contest (2017). She was nominated for a 2020 Pushcart Prize and for inclusion in Best New Poets 2021.

Timothy Dodd is the author of *Fissures, and Other Stories* (Bottom Dog Press). Forthcoming are *Men in Midnight Bloom* (Cowboy Jamboree Press), *Mortality Birds* (with Steve Lambert, Southernmost Books) and *Modern Ancient* (High Window Press). Tim's recent solo exhibition, *Come Here, Nervousness*, was held at Art Underground in Manila. Instagram, @timothybdoddartwork. timothydodd.wordpress.com.

Megan Stolz's writing explores life, loss, and spirituality. Her poetry appears in *JMWW*, *Lakeview International Journal of Literature and Arts*, *Rogue Agent Journal*, and others. Find more at [www.meganstolzeditorial.com/creative-writing](http://www.meganstolzeditorial.com/creative-writing).

Jeanine Stevens is the author of *Limberlost and Inheritor* (Future Cycle Press) and *Sailing on Milkweed* (Cherry Grove Collections), *Citadels* (Folded Word Press, 2019). *Gertrude Sitting: Portraits of Women* won the 2020 Heartland Review Prize. She is winner of the MacGuffin Poet Hunt, The Ekphrasis Prize, Mendocino Coast Writer's Conference, and WOMR Cape Cod Community Radio National Poetry Award

Howie Good is the author of more than a dozen poetry collections, including most recently *Gunmetal Sky* (Thirty West Publishing).

Ian C Smith's work has been published in *Antipodes*, *BBC Radio 4 Sounds*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Griffith Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Southword*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, & *Two Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, *Ginninderra* (Port Adelaide).

Charles Wilkinson's work includes *The Pain Tree and Other Stories* (London Magazine Editions), *Ag & Au* (Flarestack Poets), *A Twist in the Eye* (Egaeus Press) and *Splendid in Ash* (Egaeus Press). *The Glazier's Choice* (Eyewear) has been nominated for a Forward Prize. More at: [charleswilkinsonauthor.com](http://charleswilkinsonauthor.com)

James Owens's newest book is *Family Portrait with Scythe* (Bottom Dog Press, 2020). His poems and translations appear widely in literary journals including *Grain*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Presence*, *Queen's Quarterly*, and *Honest Ulsterman*.

Christopher Linforth is the author of three story collections, *The Distortions* (Orison Books, 2022), winner of the 2020 Orison Books Fiction Prize, *Directory* (Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, 2020), and *When You Find Us We Will Be Gone* (Lamar University Press, 2014).

Kenneth Pobo is the author of twenty-one chapbooks and nine full-length collections. Recent books include *Bend of Quiet* (Blue Light Press), *Loplop in a Red City* (Circling Rivers), *Lilac And Sawdust* (Meadowlark Press), and *Lavender Fire*, *Lavender Rose* (BrickHouse Books). *Opening* is forthcoming from Rectos Y Versos Editions.

Omar Sabbagh is a poet, writer and critic widely published in many global outlets. His work includes *Via Negativa: a Parable of Exile* (Liquorice Fish) and *Minutes from the Miracle City* (Fairlight Books), and *Morning Lit: Portals After Alia* (Cinnamon Press).

Jeffrey Alfier's most recent book is *The Shadow Field* (Louisiana Literature Journal & Press). His lit journal credits include *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Copper Nickel*, *Hotel Amerika*, *James Dickey Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Vassar Review*. He is co-editor of *Blue Horse Press* and *San Pedro River Review*.

Roger Camp lives in Seal Beach, CA where he tends his orchids, walks the pier, plays blues piano and spends afternoons with his pal, Harry, over drinks at Saint & 2nd. His work has appeared in *Rust + Moth*, *Poetry East*, *Gulf Coast*, *Southern Poetry Review* and *Nimrod*.

Alton Melvar M Dapanas is the author of *Towards a Theory on City Boys: Prose Poems* (Newcomer Press, 2021), assistant nonfiction editor of *Panorama: The Journal of Place & Travel* and *Atlas & Alice Literary Magazine*, and editorial reader at *Creative Nonfiction* magazine. Published in Ireland, Lebanon, Germany, Singapore, Canada, Australia, South Africa, USA, Hong Kong, Austria, Japan, and UK, they're working on their second book *M of the Southern Downpours & Other Prose Poems*. Find more at <https://linktr.ee/samdapanas>.

Paul Brownsey is a former philosophy lecturer at Glasgow University. He has published around 100 short stories in Europe and North America. His first book is *His Steadfast Love and Other Stories* (Lethe Press).

Parrish is a Pushcart Prize nominated writer and critic roaming California looking for records, sometimes teaching at UC Davis. Parrish's short fiction has appeared in *Raritan*, *Ploughshares*, *Equinox*, *Vestal Review*, *Sonic Boom*, *The Raw Art Review*, and *Blood and Bourbon*.

William Doreski's most recent book of poetry is *Mist in Their Eyes* (2021). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

John Grey is an Australian poet recently published in *Orbis*, *Dalhousie Review* and *The Round Table*. Latest books, *Leaves On Pages* and *Memory Outside The Head* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *Lana Turner* and *Hollins Critic*.

DS Maolalai has been nominated nine times for Best of the Net and five times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

Allyn Bernkopf's work appears in *Slippery Elm Literary Journal*, *Barely South Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, and others, and has been anthologized in *Women's Voices Anthology* (These Fragile Lilacs) and *Lost: Reflections* (Medusa's Laugh Press).

Kevin Brown has published two short story collections, *Death Roll* and *Ink On Wood*, and has had fiction, non-fiction and poetry in over 200 literary journals, magazines and anthologies. He won numerous writing competitions and was nominated for multiple prizes including three *Pushcart Prizes*.

Kitty Steffan was born in Northern Romania and has been writing poetry ever since she became aware that she could. *Two Thirds North* saw her publishing debut in 2015. Her first volume of poetry is due in 2023.

Oormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad is an Indian-Australian artist and poet, and a chief editor at *Au-thora Australis*. Her artworks has appeared in *The International Zine Project*, *Oyster River Pages*, *The Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Pithead Chapel*, *The Rat's Ass Review*, *Ang(st) the Body Zine*. She has three Best of the Net nominations. Find her @oormilaprahlad and www.instagram.com/oormila\_paintings

Vikas Prakash Joshi's first book *My Name is Cinnamon* (2022). His writing has appeared in newspapers, magazines and literary journals in 20 languages and 18 countries including *Eurolitkrant Magazine*, *Al-Riwayya*, *Two Thirds North*, *Caravan Magazine*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *DNA*, *Maharashtra Herald*, and many more.

Dr. Thomas Reed Willemain is former academic, software entrepreneur and intelligence officer. His poetry has appeared in *Closed Eye Open*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Typishly* and elsewhere. His memoir, *Working on the Dark Side of the Moon: Life Inside the National Security Agency* was published in 2017.

Mark Fitzgerald is the author of two books of poetry, *Downburst* (Cinnamon Press, 2019) and *By Way of Dust and Rain* (Cinnamon Press, 2010, 2019). His work has appeared in *Santa Clara Review*, *Slipstream*, *Crab Creek Review*, and *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and the anthologies *Scratching Against the Fabric*, *What Lies Beyond the Frame*, and *Only Connect*.



