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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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SUSAN HAWTHORNE
Guest Editor Presents
LESBIAN POETS & WRITERS

COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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Susan Hawthorne's poetry, fiction and non-fiction have been published internationally in English and in translation. Her most recent publications are *Dark Matters: A Novel* (2017), *Bibliodiversity: A Manifesto for Independent Publishing* (2014) and *Lupa and Lamb* (2014). She is also Publisher at Spinifex Press and Adjunct Professor in the College of Arts, Society, and Education, James Cook University, Townsville.

LESBIAN WRITING

SUSAN HAWTHORNE

GUEST EDITOR

An issue of lesbian writing is what Mark Ulyseas suggested to me. I began to think about all the ways this might be done, knowing that there are so many lesbian writers in Australia and around the world whom I could include. I began making lists, but lists only get you so far because women have other deadlines and projects they can't interrupt. My intention was to get a wide range of lesbian writers who would show some of the many ways that lesbians live in the world. Among the contributors are poets and novelists, fabulists and photographers. The contributors vary in age from 30-something to 90-something and come from many places and have lived under different political regimes. It includes Indigenous writers, writers with disabilities, writers who have migrated from one part of the world to another and who speak languages other than English, writers who have children and those who decided to remain child free.

In a year of endless debate over same-sex marriage, Australia, in 2017, has used the word lesbian more times than in previous years, although the tendency is for the L to be swallowed by the LGBTI acronym. Lesbians know the power of the word lesbian and we do not use it lightly. To bring together this group of fascinating writers has been such an enjoyable project.



Photograph of Susan Hawthorne by Nicholas Walton-Healey



Photograph © Susan Hawthorne



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My journey into poetry started at the same time as I a) became a feminist and b) launched into my lesbian life. One of the formative experiences at that time was stumbling across the locally produced pirate edition of Robin Morgan's collection *Monster* with the following lines.

May we comprehend that we cannot be stopped.

May I learn how to survive until my part is finished

May I realize that I

am a

monster. I am

a

monster.

I am a monster.

And I am proud.

–Robin Morgan, *Monster*, 1972, *Radicalesbians*, Melbourne (pirate edition)

I still read the poems in *Monster* and am bowled over by Robin Morgan's work and I wonder why this book is not on all school reading lists? The simple reason is that the author is a lesbian. Morgan is insightful and has a wicked sense of humour (in the best sense of the word wicked). So I am pleased to have Robin Morgan's latest poems in this issue of *Live Encounters*.

Some lesbians become poets and some poets become lesbians. In the late 1970s, I came across Lee Cataldi – whose work opens this issue – with her book, *Invitation to a Marxist Lesbian Party*, a marvellous and irreverent collection. Many of the contributors in this volume have risked their reputations by being out as lesbians, writing and editing books such as Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling's *Words from the Same Heart* (1987). I too, have co-edited anthologies including *The Exploding Frangipani* (1990)

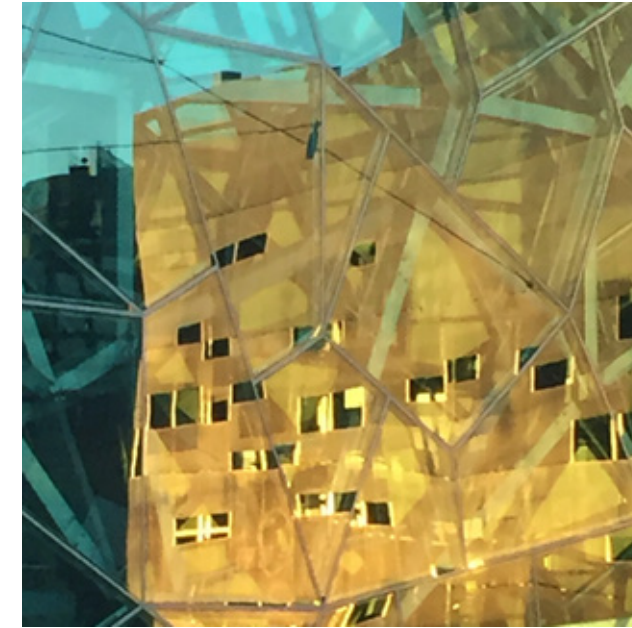
with Cathie Dunsford and *Car Maintenance Explosives and Love and Other Lesbian Writings* (1997) with Cathie Dunsford and Susan Sayer. Finola Moorhead's lesbian centric novel, *Remember the Tarantella* was published in 1987 and soon after came Kathleen Mary Fallon's *Working Hot* (1989, published under a partial pseudonym in case of repercussions for her foster-son) which definitely stirred the pot. Writers such as Marion Campbell in her novel *Not Being Miriam* (1988) shows up the differential perception of intentional violence against women (barely punished) and accidental violence against men (punished with a jail sentence). Suniti Namjoshi brings a fabulous wit to her writing and her *Feminist Fables* (originally published in 1982) remains one of my favourite books. Fallon, Moorhead, Campbell and Namjoshi have all experimented with the form of the novel, crossing genres and writing with subversive wit. Similar experimentation with form can be found in recent work by Nataša Velikonja and Nina Dragičević from Slovenia whose work shows the commonalities of lesbians whatever the political regimes are that we have grown up under: communist, capitalist, dictatorships of repression or consumerism.

Lesbians are frequently ahead of the cultural curve in writing about subjects with which the mainstream is not yet engaged. Sandy Jeffs' writing about madness, Renate Klein's work against medical and reproductive violence, Beatriz Copello's writing on violence, Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes' engagement with trauma, and Christine Stark's critiquing pornography and prostitution: all show a kind of courage that is necessary for political and poetic activism.

The mistake that many non-lesbian outsiders make is the assumption that the only thing lesbians ever do is have sex, write about sex, talk endlessly about sex. Dani Tauni plays with the power of language especially around the apparently monstrous word cunt, but also simple words such as lesbian and woman. Like nearly all humans, lesbians engage in sexual intimacy (in this issue see: Velikonja, Copello, Fallon, Campbell, Dragičević, Namjoshi, Hawthorne), but this collection of writings also shows that lesbians are



Photograph © Susan Hawthorne



Photograph © Susan Hawthorne

involved in struggles around Indigenous recognition and rights (Tauni, Rika-Heke, Stark, Cataldi, Chinna, Bradstock, Rivera-Fuentes, Lenore), a host of environmental concerns (Lenore, Wakeling, Chinna), illness and disability (Dragičević, Jeffs, Klein), and the importance of history (Varga, Bradstock, Morgan, McCollum, Hawthorne). Imaginative responses are also central as lesbians so often see the world slant (as Emily Dickinson said so many years ago). Here we have the photo poems of Judy Horacek, the fables of Suniti Namjoshi and my own mythic retellings. These are works that make us gasp, smile or even laugh out loud. Who says lesbians have no sense of humour?

One of the joys of travel is meeting lesbians from different countries, languages and heritages. And if travel isn't possible then meeting with minds through reading. I met the vast majority of the writers in this issue through their writing, long before I met some in person. And this collection of writers includes old friends, new friends, never met and newly met.

In an essay entitled, 'It is the lesbian in us' in *Sinister Wisdom* (1977), Adrienne Rich wrote:

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language – this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.

The lesbian often remains unspeakable and undepicted in history. When other dimensions such as belonging to the colonised or outcast groups, speaking a different language, having a disability are at play, then the erasure is even more profound. If the lesbian is remembered, it is because she did something outrageous or wild. When a lesbian achieves something the society approves of, her sexuality will be ignored or hidden. In this issue of *Live Encounters* I want to say that lesbians are entire human beings with loves and losses, achievements and failures. Most of all, lesbians are worth reading and listening to because you never know when history might catch up with you or someone you know.

I would like to end by thanking everyone involved in this project, especially the contributors who responded so quickly and generously with often startling work. To Mark Ulyseas for asking me if I'd be interested. I said yes and am so glad I did. And to my partner, Renate Klein for the support she has given to me and other writers over so many years.

AEOLIC LOVE

indecipherable script–
pages of it
the only readable word
bittersweet–

Sappho aspects in triangular love
traces of an ancient wooing
Aeolic Greek
the sound of Greek

she's no relic
her riddles unfold
desire rebels against logos
always loved

love spiralling
scattering fragments
this and that
the poet's desire opens

HECUBA'S BLISS

it's the escape not even Cassandra predicted
Hecuba and her thousand hounds
a story lost through tales told by winners

losers escape take their stories to other lands
Hecuba leads the way she lost her son
Hector her favourite he disobeyed her

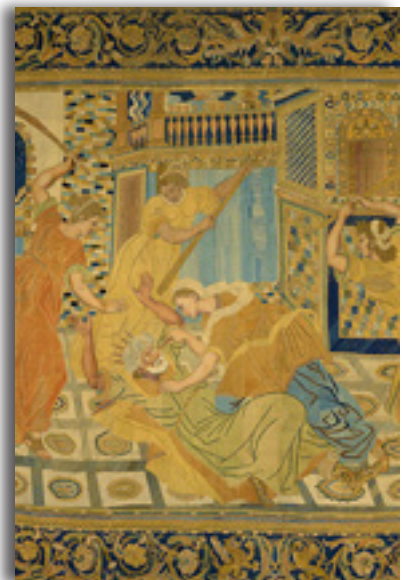
every dog knows that the top dog rules
Hector hasty Hector too quick to anger
his loss brings the fire from Hecuba's dream

Troy burning to the ground Troy's burn
is Hecuba's joy her turn to take back
old ways where dogs guard death's door

the moon spills its light and dogs howl
welcoming the soul in its passage
Hecuba leads her pack to other lands

remaking them human just as others far-flung
across oceans say *dingo makes us human*
Hecuba runs over sand to the sea

for sheer joy runs out again shakes her body
sunlight shimmering in coruscating arcs
Hecuba's loss becomes Hecuba's bliss



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COME INTO DARKNESS

come into darkness
into darkness
where it's warm

come out of darkness
out of darkness
come voices

we are the darkness
are the darkness
my friend

come into darkness
into darkness
my friend

WOULD YOU VOTE?

members are counted
perched like budgies in a cage
the members with their chauffeurs
and travel allowances
are here and being counted

behind these faces
these fluttering flags
lie the dead
some buried before dead
too many hidden
unnoticed and uncounted

behind the cheers
are the unmarried ones
the spinster with her live-in friend
behind her the missing ones
forgotten in the rush

for an inheritance
for children
respectability
a dishwasher
meals on the table
sleep overs

I voted yes he said
for you and you
I voted because of you and her
I voted because I want to come
to your wedding

how many would vote to end the killings
lesbians pushed off buildings
lesbians raped
lesbians locked in solitary
would you vote if there wasn't a party?



Photograph © Susan Hawthorne

Lee Cataldi was born in 1942 in Sydney Australia. She grew up in Tasmania, went to university in Sydney, then as a post-graduate to Oxford, England. Subsequently she lived and worked in England, then returned to Australia in 1974. She taught English for six years in an inner-city high school in Sydney, worked as a teacher-linguist and then a field linguist in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. She is the author of three books of poetry and three works of non-fiction.



AARON

Aaron Baajo Japangardi age
fourteen of Balgo doesn't want
his aunt's stories or her dreams
of an outstation at a spot
where two men changed the universe

he wants
to fuck and take drugs and get
his gorgeous arse to dance parties

and be picked up
by rich older men

MANGOES

suddenly I saw us
eating mangoes all
inhibitions gone drunk again
and young

our faces
pressed against each other our noses
deep in sweet yellow mango flesh

our eyes
blinded with pink mango light

surrounded by crushed and rotting fruit together
under the hot dark tree



Photograph © Susan Hawthorne

THE OPENING OF THE CHILDREN'S CENTRE IN BALGO

a smell of frying meat
drifts across the scene
and steam
from bloodwood leaves assists
departing souls to leave

a tiny child
hurls a rock across the yard
some skills die hard

it is as if the language
centre that was here
had never been the kukatja books
into which we put
our black and white lives have become
art works no-one can read

these days Balgo is a picture
and for sale

TEARS

your tears
are warm upon my face
would be
warmer on my thigh
your tears

undoing
history could stop them

my history





MOURNING IS WOMEN'S BUSINESS

for Tjama

1

with a gesture as large as the planet
you call up the spirits of women
tonight you can see them thousands
filling up the country so it is
no longer empty

and lonely as it will be
when you are gone

and the multitudes no longer
dance across the spinifex

2

you were dancing
a slow skip
in the grand style
wearing a striped pointed hat
and white ochre
all your golden hair
cut to the grey

you go on without them like those
wounded in the leg
limping
dancing towards the embrace of the others
who limping
dance towards you

when the circles of recognition are complete
after days and weeks of sitting in the dust
you can get up wash go home
back to your places of employment

and the free spirit will burst
out of this belly of grief
into the air

3

when you were young you went to law
childless but free

now the funerals string together
narratives of loss

how hard it is
to think any more of forever

sometimes
you want private you want
out fold your shirt over your chest
and yourself up to sleep
your stomach hurts
with grief

when you were young and went about your business
who would have thought it would end
covered in white clay in a row of widows
seeing the land losing its people

your stomach hurts
and it's hard to breathe

Dr Nandi Chinna is a research consultant, poet, and environmental activist. Her poetry collection *Swamp; walking the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain* was published by Fremantle Press in 2014. *An Older Country* is forthcoming in 2019.



WIND

When you undressed last night,
nuts and bolts spilled from your pockets
twirling like spinning tops across the floorboards
into the corners off the room.

You said that the hardware store
had run out of spanners of a particular size,
as every day the fencers came
to repair the nights damage,
and every night the ghosts
of banksia and quenda, dressed
in the shadows of moon and cloud,
unmake the wire that keeps people out
and bulldozers in.

In the morning we all agree
that the wind was very strong last night
suddenly blowing a howling tempest;
strong enough to knock down fences,
gentle enough to leave trees standing.

THE LAW

So this is it:
60 or so of us standing in the road.
The riot squad are yelling MOVE, MOVE

but my feet have become stones cemented into the tarmac.
Someone grabs my hand and the police horse
staggers into my shoulder,

her sweat and fear smell like my own,
pulse galloping around the field of my body
charging and kicking at fences.

When the drilling rig enters the wetlands
surrounded by officers with tasers and guns, is
the horse's legs and chest push

into my spine causing me
to trip, stand, fall, stumble,
the swamp clicks and sighs;

the Siberian birds wade into the centre,
their beaks piercing the lake's membrane,
their law trembling in the mud.



AT THE OFFICE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY

Where we stood to throw our heads back to the sky,
dark blue lines run into the ground,
ancient water rises, percolates and subsides.

On a map of the future,
the pages are left intentionally blank.
A tannin stain spreads across the assessments, appendices, the review;
the ngoolark arrives to alight upon nothing.

The table we are invited to bows under piles of reports.
Inside the pages, swamp harriers scope
and plunge into reed beds;
quenda's snuffle amongst sheoak tendrils;

banksia cones bloom and shrivel,
as we turn the pages and watch
tiny specks turn into pelicans
spinning in their gyres, gliding in
to land like sea planes upon the lake.

We stand with our feet in the mud
as the scrub roller bites into the littoral zone breaking our carapaces open.

LEAVING ROTTNEST

After boarding the ferry I close my eyes,
feel the swell surging in sympathy
with the blood pumping through my heart muscle;
hold the island in those chambers;
hold the sea wind on the south-west bluff;
the osprey circling, diving, returning
with a pearly slash of salmon.

On the ferry's TV, the West Coast Eagles are slaughtering
the Greater Western Sydney Giants,
and I'm repeating names like mantras;

Scavoleae crassifolia, westringia, spinifex, Lepidosperma gladiatum,
Seaberry, saltbush, samphires, sedges, Rottnest pines;

picturing the welcome swallows
careening above coastal rosemary,
ancient coral reefs split open on the shore,
and the eyes wide gaze across to the blur
of harbour and commerce that is Fremantle.

As the ferry speeds towards the mainland
the island grows huge inside me;
as seen from above;
a leafy sea dragon
adrift in the Indian Ocean.



© Nandi Chinna

Margaret Bradstock has six published collections of poetry, including *The Pomelo Tree* (winner of the Wesley Michel Wright Prize) and *Barnacle Rock* (winner of the Woollahra Festival Award, 2014). Editor of *Antipodes* (2011) and *Caring for Country* (2017), Margaret won the Banjo Paterson Poetry Award in 2014, 2015 and 2017, and has been widely published in anthologies and journals such as *Australian Poetry*, *Best Poems of 2017*, *Blue Dog*, *Canberra Times*, *Contemporary Australian Poetry*, *Cordite*, *Famous Reporter*, *Island*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Southerly* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*.



THE WHISPERING BONES

William Lanney, survivor of Wybelenna camp, d.1869 of cholera.

*King Billy's dead, Kater has his head,
Sevitt has his hands and feet.
My feet, my feet, my poor black feet
That used to be so gritty,
They're not aboard the Runnymede
They're somewhere in this city.*
– popular song, Hobart Town

Dr Crowther took away my head
lowering it from the dead-house window
slipping a white man's under the black skin
to mask the theft, my bloated features
further distorted *with a lipless grin*.

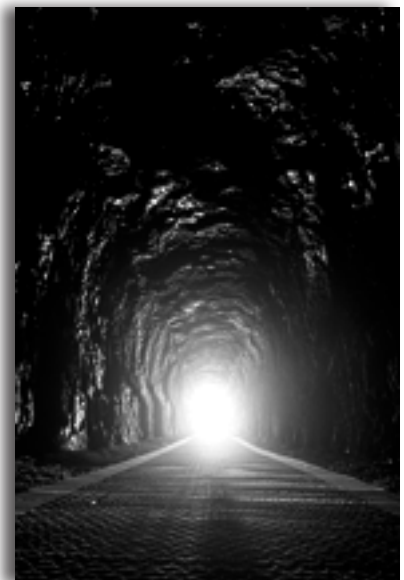
Measured precisely, wrapped in a sealskin bundle
shipped off to London Town, my skull
my precious skull, was jettisoned
when it began to stink
wandering the world like an unburied ghost.

Thoughts of possession cluster round dead limbs.
Officials then chopped off my feet and hands
for safe-keeping, trundling them down
to Salamanca Place or, rumour has it,
the Anglo-Australian Guano Company.

Coffin shrouded in the Union Jack
(sealed with dispensary wax and found brass stamp)
shouldered by whalers from *Runnymede* and *Aladdin*,
my lopped and bloodied trunk
together with a stranger's flayed head

was buried
exhumed by body-snatchers the next day.
Kater's s tobacco pouch (a wondrous thing)
crafted from my skin, the rest dissected
for its skeleton, which disappeared.

What am I now, seeded into the land
like winter crops, my disembodied voices
calling the limbs and skeleton back home,
the ache of a cranium
my people's avatar.



THE BLACK LINE

'...to effect the voluntary removal of the entire black population...to place every last one of them on Flinders Island'
- George Augustus Robinson (Conciliator of Aborigines, 1832)

1

Walking once more by the river
 conjuring the moment
 things might have been different, I wonder

why I am known as *a Victorian do-gooder*
yet achieved so little good.
Even as Arthur's Black Line surged downwards

martial law declared, the bush
flickering with guard fires, his dragnet capturing
only one man and a boy, it had begun.

Better Truganini had not ferried me to safety
across the Welcome River on a log
when the Port Davey mob attacked with spears.

2

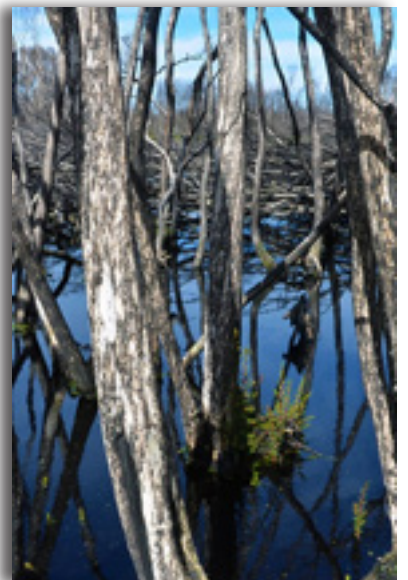
We journeyed south-east from our base camp opposite Swan Island, crossed Tomahawk River and the Montagu, pursuing a course to the end of the Western Bluff.

With me chief Manna-largenna, recruited
from Hobart Town gaol, Truganini and Wooraddy
nine other aboriginals and two white men
earth's shadow on the face of the moon
our foreboding. Truganini insists it's Manna-largenna
killed by the Stoney Creek tribe
and gone up to the moon.

Smoke spiralling from treetops
sighted by our natives, we come to the campfire
of Umarrah, and the last of his melancholy tribe
their women stolen by sealers.
They signal for peace and join us.

I sleep in the open, within a ring
of acrid natives, heartily tired
of this sort of life, my stomach gaseous
unsettled from the stringy wild game.

continued overleaf



© Margaret Bradstock

THE BLACK LINE *contd...*

3

Frenchman's Cap its grim volcanic cone
 rising thousands of feet above the plain
 almost a living thing, with moods of its own
 colours of the ice changing
 with every shift of the light.

For seven successive days we travel on
 through snowy plateaus and passes
 often waist-deep in the snow
 a miserable journey, for our last roundup
 a man, four women and a boy.

The Hobart Town *Courier* gives due thanks
*(the removal of these blacks will be of essential
 benefit to themselves and the colony)*
 farewells them all to Flinders Island
 religious instruction, shell-fishing and kangaroo hunts
 to occupy their minds.

Yet the settlement becomes a prison camp.
 They die of floggings, ill health, homesickness
 more shadow than savage crow.

THE SEALERS, PRESERVATION ISLAND

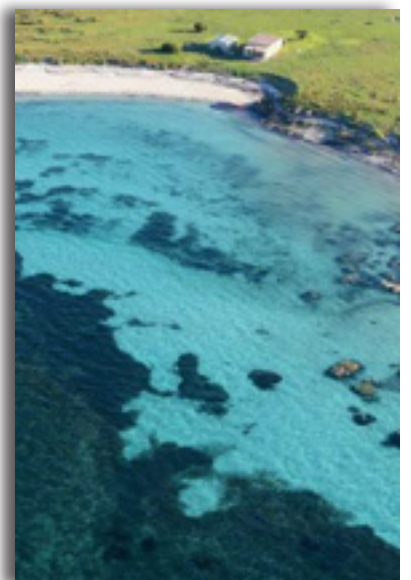
*'...to visit the sealers of Bass Strait...to rescue their
 stolen native women from slavery and debauchery'*
 - George Augustus Robinson

By what irony was this island
 named a safe harbour
 after the wreck of the *Sydney Cove*?
 Here the sealers hold sway
 ex-convicts and scum of the system
 wives kidnapped from native tribes
 tied to the trees and flogged
 their copper-skinned offspring slave labour.
 Rather than hand them this life
 women murder the children
 stuffing their mouths with sand.

Rivers of moonbirds hang over the rescue-boat
 flow to the sea, the rocky foreshores,
 past islands of tussock grass
 teeming rookeries of seals and sea lions
 there for the taking, a miasma
 of clubbing and skinning
 the scrimshaw of discarded bone.

With the sealers out on the straits
 the women are up at the bird rookery
 gathering firewood, strolling downhill
 reluctant to leave the dogs. Once on our boat
 the *Charlotte*, they laugh and sing
 glad to be free of their masters.

The smell of bloodshed clings about these islands.



© Margaret Bradstock

Pōwhiri Rika-Heke is Māori raised by her dairy-farming maternal grandfather on traditional lands, surrounded by her extended family. Though she has written and published academic texts, poems and short stories, Pōwhiri does not consider herself a writer.



ADDING SALT TO THE WOUND: A FAMILIAR STORY

Despite a Treaty protecting all that was ours
That stated, in two languages, that everything we owned would remain so
Those words were just irrelevant marks on parchment, because
In the end
They took away our land
They took away our language
They took away our culture
They took away our dignity
And replaced it with imports
Alcohol
Drugs
A lack of direction
Violence against each other, especially the women and children
To top it all off
Blaming us for our position at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder
Was the salt rubbed in the wound

WINGS AND KIWI CRAVINGS

Red Bull wings fade to nothingness when compared to one's new love or how hokey-pokey ice-cream makes us feel. Now, you might think that hokey-pokey ice-cream doesn't come anywhere near Red Bull wings, but tell that to an Oz-based Kiwi who craves New Zealand's iconic ice-cream. I've heard of Kiwis travelling the length and breadth of Sydney, which is a considerable distance, just to buy a hokey-pokey ice-cream. And the euphoria on their faces after that first lick? You'd swear they had wings.



© Pōwhiri Rika-Heke



SCAREDY CAT

“Scaredy cat, scaredy cat, cry-baby scaredy cat! What’s the matter with you? Are you a poof or what? Girl’s blouse! Homo!”

The taunts followed me along the street and past the church that should have offered me sanctuary, but only looked imposing and uninviting with its black stain-glassed eyes staring without seeing and the stone of its walls cold and grey as graves in a fog-wreathed cemetery. Funny, how forbidding the church looked today.

Last Sunday, my Mum and Dad, my grandparents and my brat of a sister were intently listening to the words of comfort from the priest. Afterwards, our voices lifted in praise, notes soaring into the rafters, seeking a path to God’s all-hearing ears. The claspings of hands and well wishes of those seated beside, behind and in front of us gave me a feeling of warmth and belonging as the light streamed through windows alive with the coloured images caught in their frames.

But that time and feeling seemed like a million miles away. Today, there was no comfort and no warmth, no angels’ voices, no presence of God. Today, I felt more alone than a boy should ever feel.

I can’t believe that the life that was, until an hour ago, filled with love and comradeship and friendships and acceptance was being, so cruelly, wrenched from me.

My name’s Aaron. I’m fourteen years old. Maggie, a girl from the city, arrived at our school at the beginning of term two. There was something different about Maggie. She seemed older, more knowing, and worldlier than the rest of us. When she was around, the boys seemed to lose all sense. They panted after her like dogs after a bitch. And Maggie, so my best mate Robbie said, allowed them to pant and drool over her.

Robbie was popular. Captain of the school football team, smart, good looking – if the trail of girls following him every day was any indication – and my best friend since kindergarten. I, on the other hand, was not popular. I was okay looking, but I wasn’t a jock, hated sport, loved music and drama,



played violin in the school orchestra, had super uncool dress sense and too-long blond hair that flopped over my forehead, obscuring my vision, so that I was always having to brush it out of my eyes. It didn't help that I wore Harry Potter-glasses, something I regret now that I was no longer nine and intent on the comings and goings of characters like Sirius Black, Albus Dumbledore, Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley and, of course, Harry. And it was only Robbie's friendship and loyalty to his sandpit friend that meant I had a crew to hang with.

I'd seen that Maggie had set her sights on Robbie. But Robbie seemed to be the only boy oblivious to her charms. That was because he was conscious that he had to work hard to keep his grades up so that he would have a chance of a scholarship to university. Since his father's accident - a fall from the height of the fifth storey of the new building he was working on when the scaffolding, on which he was standing, gave way - Robbie was determined to get a good education. That good education would get him a good job so that he could support his family. Robbie had always been responsible and protective of those he cared for. I liked that about my mate.

Even though Robbie liked some of the girls in our crowd – in a boy-girl way - he was always respectful of them and their feelings. He certainly wasn't the sort of guy who would kiss and tell, like some of the jerks at school. Having three younger sisters impacted on how Robbie treated girls. He treated girls the way he would want other guys to treat his sisters: with dignity, honour and respect. Robbie was just that sort of nice guy.

Anyway, Maggie had been making a play for Robbie since she arrived while, at the same time, actually "playing" with lots of other boys. He was his usual attentive and charming self, but Maggie, being new to our school and not knowing Robbie, thought his response to her was more than it was. Of course, the girls at school hated her, called her names behind her back. But Maggie just laughed at them. She didn't need them. She had all the boys. Except for Robbie and me, though she thought she had Robbie, him being so nice to her and all.

This morning, Maggie had cornered Robbie in the hallway. He and I had been talking about the holiday our families were planning to Rotorua. You see, it wasn't just Robbie and I who were best friends, our mothers were too. They had also been sandpit buddies, our grandparents were friends and we all went to the same church. Yes, our families were close. Anyway, Maggie had spotted Robbie and me talking and had sashayed – I learned that word from grandpa - her way over to us.

"Hey, Robbie," eyes twinkling, lips pouted, hair flung over her shoulder, a hand on her thrust out hip.

"Morning, Maggie."

"Are we still on for the movies on Saturday?" A little flutter of her eyelashes, a smile from Cape Reinga to Bluff.

"Sure, Aaron's dad will be driving us."

"What do you mean, Aaron's dad?"

"Well, my dad can't drive since his accident and Aaron's father said he'd take us so that we could use our bus money for snacks and stuff. He's going to pick us up too. Isn't that great?"

"I'm confused. I thought we were going on a date. You know, just the two of us? Is Aaron coming too?" The incredulity in her voice was so out there. It was also obvious that I was invisible to Maggie.

"Sure. That's okay, isn't it? Aaron and I always go to the movies on Saturdays when there's something decent on. We'll pick you up at half six. That way, we'll be early enough to get good seat in the middle."

"Wouldn't you rather sit at the back? That way no-one would disturb us."

"No, that's where all the kids who want to make out sit. I can't stand that carry on. It's so undignified. It's better to sit in the middle where we have a good view of the screen and the back row acoustics don't disturb us." Robbie grinned. I could see Maggie working up to a head of steam, but the wind was taken out of her sails by Robbie's total lack of subterfuge and she walked away, trying very hard not to flounce.

Man, Robbie, you are so not tuned into this girl. I mean, Robbie was still a virgin, like me, but he'd kissed his fair share for a fourteen-year-old with a prime section on Handsome Street, season tickets to a sporting scholarship if an academic one was just a drop-kick too far, though he had enough smarts to have excellent grades for all his NCEA assessments so far, and charisma. Charisma: compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others. Yep, Robbie was a dictionary definition.



Don't get me wrong. Robbie was a straight up guy. He liked girls, but he also had tremendous respect for them. He wasn't into 'hooking up'. For Robbie, despite all the temptations put in his way because he was this great athlete, an A student, the original Mr Nice Guy, he stuck to his own code of ethics, his own morality, his own sense of right and wrong. Robbie was not someone who succumbed to peer-pressure – from anyone.

The rest of the school day was uneventful. After we had been released from the torment of Mr. Woolf's statistics class, I walked Robbie to the field where he had footie training. Then, hitching my lurid green backpack higher on my not very wide shoulders, I turned for home. Deciding to take a short-cut, I headed across the field to the small, wooded park that edged the main town drag. On the other side of that park is the church, and the way home.

I had just entered the park when four of the school bullies stepped out from behind the trees. Two were in front, two behind. They had tried picking on me before, but Robbie had always been nearby and his presence had brought a halt to their nastiness.

"So, Robbie's bitch! I hear you're standing in the way of our Maggie?" said the top dog of the bunch of mongrels. At that, Maggie came out from behind another tree. She walked towards me. The smile she'd had for Robbie was replaced by a sneer.

"You're the reason why Robbie won't go out with me on a proper date. Is he into you?"

"No, Robbie's my friend. He's not like that!"

"Well, then. Are you into Robbie, Blondie?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"What I mean is that I think you're a poof, that you like boys, that you're bitched to Robbie, which is stopping him from being with a real girl. You think you're a girl with your mincing walk, your girly hair, your crappy violin. I mean, what real boy plays a violin?" Her laugh sets the thugs off and they slap their thighs and each other's arms, guffawing as if Maggie was the world's best stand-up comedian.

"I'm not gay. I'm not a poof!"

"Well, prove it then, Blondie. Show me what you're made of." With that, Maggie pulled me to her, grinding her pelvis into me, her lips and tongue mashing my mouth. I felt like puking. Not only was her tongue shoved half way down my throat, but she'd also been smoking. Blah!

The thugs were making grunting noises and shouting, "Give it to him, Maggie. You can do it." Maggie continued to push herself into me.

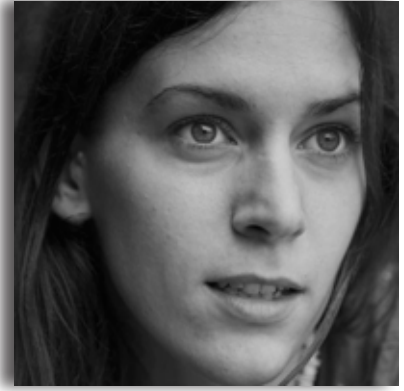
"Stop!" I wanted to shout. But I couldn't. She was grabbing at me, down there. I didn't want to hurt her, but I had to get away. So, I pushed her as hard as I could and she fell into the ferns at the side of the track. Her goons were so surprised that they didn't react until I had sprinted past them and was almost to the street. Then the chase was on. The chase and the name-calling taunts. They wouldn't catch me, though. But their words hurt.

I liked girls, but not the way Robbie liked them, not the way other boys liked them. I liked Robbie and, in a way, loved him. But I don't think it was in a sexual way. I certainly didn't like the boys of my age in that way either, but my favourite actors were all men. My favourite singers were men. I had a bit of a crush on my violin teacher, but only because he was such a kind person who always helped me to get better at my playing. He also talked to me like an adult and not like a child. He asked me questions about what I had been doing at school and seemed genuinely interested in my responses. Mr Duff was just great.

As I ran, my eyes teared, my mind in a whirl. I'd never thought about my sexuality before. I was too busy being a boy with boyish fantasies that didn't involve girls, or boys, and kissing or sex. Why did Maggie have to spoil my life, my boyhood, my innocence with her boorish and over-sexed behaviour? I continued to run past the church, to run past neighbours' houses, to run towards the safety of my home, to run to a future I would have to face.

"Scaredy cat, scaredy cat, cry-baby scaredy cat! What's the matter with you? Are you a poof or what? Girl's blouse? Homo?"

Nina Dragičević is a writer, composer and a sociologist. She is the author of one novel and two books of essays on gender and sexual difference in music. Extracts from her novel *Kdo ima druge skrbi* have been recently translated to Spanish, and 2016 saw the release of her album *Parallellax*. Nina is the founder and editor of a lesbian zine *Lezbnik*, and the editor at literary magazine *IDIOT*. She is the artistic director of Topographies of [Sound Festival](#).



WHO HAS OTHER WORRIES

(orig. *Kdo ima druge skrbi*, ŠKUC, 2014) Novel extract

vocalise your stanch, ladies, juxtaposed with silence, once again set to voice.

we sit and try to stay awake, curse body fragility and beg eyelids *just a little more, just a tiny bit*. eyes burn with exhaustion and conscience burns when looking back. ahead of us something seemingly a woman looking at women only looks wears hair of other woman for adolescence simply will not end and looks mostly after herself and artfully burns on promenade, her t-shirt says *oops*. does not wipe off her smile concreted at dawn when she woke up alone instead of her co worker is her friend ever since work places became happy spaces of creation and socialization exchange of ideas and frustration whom she would since ever like to be in bed with or in the same shit, but they never shared that they both know, know about each other and nothing else, but others do not know, for it is not yet known, for it is their secret and will never be revealed and that is why they have work. but they rather pull on one *oops* one explanation for carefreeness and one more wasted life and some gel on the head, today will go well, today is her day, she will get some tip. she will add tip to other tips and some day will rally enough to race off on her bike, she does not yet own a bike. stands at the counter, bows over to hear, she thinks it is precisely how she will bend when she will be in balance power but does not think because she smiles at tourists who want more for their money will dip their readers on spectacles in her and there are whole books on what to see and still are all here and at sights and somehow they manage to be at both places at once and there is no end to them and they keep breeding and creep and will dip readers in sauces for their money will do and devour as well in order to preserve experience. with a tiny tiny knife she scrapes entrails off animals off her catch off vertebrates adapted to circumstances they presumptuously took space under other spaces and she speeds up turning them and her mind and looks around hiding self from her boss is in line in colony and on her forehead *oops* skillfully adds a sack for purpose and her self on the counter scrapes scales with arms up to elbow glowing with excitement scrapes from surface to sack repeats arm movement up to elbow back forth swells with pleasure slime determined to go all the way for she can and may think to herself with belonging arousal she could do some more for armor for out there in front of her a luminous stomach inflated in front of her takes a shallow breath cuts deep





in middle in lazing symmetry of the familiar tilts lifts dislocates shoulder flippers stabs her self in entrails of creature she now buries arms as far as goes and says a bit more her fingers reach rub against strings leans draws underprop withdraws this is that freedom and these are those rights and dismisses risks no longer looks around cautious careful look now anxiously snapping spinal cord nervous fibers pulls her heart has no role and leads and leaves gills for she is not violent and is *oops*.

left ajar we open when tell each other about monsters and why we do that and cover, gently squeeze in boxes short of matchers we hid for fun and they shall evermore smell of menthol we play with petrol for we shall go in sun set to sit on side walk.

we speak more and more quietly if possible whisper and lift wind and draw pillars narrow shoulders pits soft when world hardens.

we pass to each other feel all body feels before head head in a body, scattered from desire to please with strict gaze among shelves milky ice house soundlessly past majority not comforted through most of sharp edges to seeked for, differences are seen in an inconspicuous place is pleasant i go there she moves in c h a d e clearly distinguishable, upstairs they scream what ever, downstairs care walks.

we spill sweet juices when our hands are tired when awareness stings, and we laugh.

ten thirty and we go from beginning, keep quiet and speak and speak about keeping quiet and keep quiet about nothing and return bitches nomadic without shelter need to keep each other safe no one can hurt us cannibalism on the rise persists, later on that matter will still be here.

we are in eternal fear for our lives, each in her own under pass in her own alley we think each of other think of bare survival of each and other, we do not think of love and better, we think of vital functions, pressures, pains and inflammations, precisely that we also live.

they ask us about scene and events, we answer with shrugs and think of rheumatism of other. they tell us about amino acids and eco pesticides and iron, we stare ahead and think of glands of other. in evenings we seek ways new strategies, for at dawns we already know that previous are useless, fossils, skeletons with no cellular structures with no functions detached from reason from humane

thoughtfulness of the free, perverse noble mold, old world keeping fresh, watered and fertile practicing rotation burnt oil in engine roars, but is not on dangerous substance list, we allow it and think of burns of other.

we are casual and write about horror, hoping to emphasize sufficiently, it is exceedingly inconspicuous, subtle gentle eel at some bottom, so we describe dread directly with all symbolism known to humans to see and understand we repeat ever more give same hard time with case studies

while ladies behind lecterns speak about how it was in their times, we have no task, no function, invited to projects, while we hope the other gets some sleep.

we are refined with finesse coated with creams ointmented polished ruffled, we are ladies, so we meet in a café with cloths on tables we have coffees and notebooks just in case, we bend upright in chairs utterly serious we grin in face of fear we say that no one can hurt us. we discuss non events, we work for them and do not want. we help each other. we spend time speaking about first rate wheelchairs, furious over trivial maladroitness concepts, agree to some day be rich, for we will need wheelchairs after some kind neighbour lady breaks our legs, because we have it all, mangles our spinal cords, because we stand on open fractures, crushes pelvises sells out colons hollow dresses stomachs furrowed necks, over looks appendix, still we claim she got nothing on us.

on the other side of city very close to here we have no idea what we are doing. we think to each self and all the time. we are in illusion and so will remain and battles echo and we insist. we would rather not have swords and on the other side of city would rather be on this side of city and is completely irrelevant, of whom, these days we are deaf.

yesterday we showed each self on paper and in light. i showed how it matters. then we asked to show interest, while we told each self that we will not and that from now on we would only speak when hearing.



relations are flammable substances and burn fifteen minutes and can not be held. some times they can not let go. then it is new year and each newly established and each their own way and no one knows no thing and each is in their shelter and all who reject tranquility with thrust are out there. it is not known and is consolidated. that it is new year and beginning and that before it was none and early rises were also not and no feudalism and writing by hand. certainly no sex and walking was closer together. meanwhile vermin shamble, we sleep on tick gloria plays all shines some one dominates other wise sex is all over the place, and side walks are becoming narrower.

i like kissing you, manure.

we often miss each other. that is when we are aggressive and strongest, as we are aggressive and strongest at work, as it is the only we have known for centuries and we know nothing about us sometimes we know and guess each other and each time are wrong except when we admit to each other that we know all and observe each other since ever when we ripped each other from registers batch files series and circles and streams of eternal dance of joy and puke sick we became from eternal dance strident steps and figures formations sounds of hurdy gurdy they drew hard and they danced around at support walls eyes bulged breasts slaughtered and presences rubbed stealing stiffling air storing in stomachs and we often miss each other. that is when we are aggressive and strongest, as we are aggressive and strongest at work, as it is the only which we know for centuries and we know nothing about us sometimes we know and guess each other and each time are wrong except when we admit to each other that we know all and observe each other since ever when we ripped each other from registers batch files series and circles and streams of eternal dance of joy and puke sick we became from eternal dance strident steps and figures formations sounds of hurdy gurdy they drew hard and they danced around at load bearing walls bulged eyes slaughtered breasts and rubbed presences stealing stiffling air stored in stomachs and shoulder patting crows densely stuffed with no wings for great effects peck at occiputs rake braids and bobs indistinct shapes draw tiny holes make a nest in a cave shelter from new birds of prey rabid bitches without collars left to inventiveness.

insane scientists we list patterns, articulation patterns horror test on self repetitions and tweaks details and lavender motifs in veiled salons smoke and inventions created in a cloud, post people drive around have no time to leave no address no drawers no cabinets no night sleep when arise no alarms not inventive this is art as world does not know it for space and supposedly already there in

a word we are not here in censuses missing fields of identification no one knows us and are certain that they will fool realities, this show goes on.

and so we play parades while the nation enjoys in us confetti falling fanfare spitting excess, we observe those cubic shapes count and write with them we compose, all is inside them, language and analysis.

they are two jumping in a bed from back statically each can knock each with agreement or illusion they agree immovably thrusting one fringe through shell of other rubbed cleansed pesticides econormically protective bolt all over complex installed bee ... coming headlessly winging clink tiny heads into slices in glasses water bubbles condensing into walls bursting bursts up to top one under other from the side at bird's eye faeces sees coming mirage is ash then neighbour approaches one skates with rubber wars more under her is not heard leaves still stare until she slams doors automatic will tan of voyeurism gray of inertia urban principles urban bins urban machines leading triumphs for no one knows how to shell sounds insist do not allow when again and again tires warn and exhaust and gears gurgle into same into pumpkin oil trickles from them used for healthy vessels heart pressure on masks buttons blushed not blushed becoming more furious

more coordinated then any owl we message each other wink pass tissues from fine hideouts and listen each so much would we love to understand nothing else we care about is why we are here, but are mute. that is when we sometimes hold each other we do not. ask each other what will be of where will we go where could we go if could if were better employees but are not and care less so do not go and imagine imagine from liquid asphalts look far and wear thin we go to the scene, wonderful.

bald patch treads with pompoms in massacre pulsated by slided seemingly no winds, insignificant in relation to the frightened, if there is gentleness is superfluous throughout the day.

Marion May Campbell's recent books include the novella *konkretion*, (UWAPublishing, 2013) and *Poetic Revolutionaries: Intertextuality & Subversion* (Rodopi, 2014). A cross-genre memoir is forthcoming with UWA Publishing in 2018. Her novels have been shortlisted for several major Australian awards, twice for the Canada-Australia Literary Award and *Not Being Miriam* won the 1989 WA Literature Week Award for fiction. *Riding Parallel*: poems will appear with Whitmore Press also in 2018. As Associate Professor in Writing and Literature she supervises graduate writing projects at Deakin University.



INSIDE THE FOLD

in the long approach
as we unfold
& our bodies reconfigure
perhaps there'll just be this ear-to-ear
attentiveness of breath

days fly from the desk calendar
seasons pulse past quickening
as we go slow –

other times my tone was wrong
with falsetto of ventriloquy
now I must hold to
the sway in filigree

behind the screen only the sense of
gathered intensities
the near-contact of lips breasts thighs
just is

were there to be an after-you –
unthinkable real –
then this vow
still to flare
for the tangential
grace of chance
through the flame
of this diminishing
life we share

a child runs past the open door
of palliative care
& in flash of smile –
for instance – sends luminous
backwash
over all that I've called
reminiscence

we recognised each other
it was seismic you said

the remnants of the anecdote
always unexplained –
I wear a Breton sailor's pullover
I've thrown away the *why*
the load of backstory
the coarse wool prickling
is point-for-point
its antidote

the halt
in my imagination of the past
I accept & when
I open again the crypt
it will smell of live earth
thickly

continued overleaf



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INSIDE THE FOLD *contd...*

I follow the cat
 who even in this dream
 eludes me
 down a ladder whose rungs are
 missing & cued by the cat's
 exquisite adjustments I
 free-fall
 through the earthy darkness
 into another country

& – *snap* – here you are
 in your Breton sailor's jumper
 I will only guess your eyes
 in after-image vast & blackly tidal
 & give over to their pull

under the sailor's knit
 your free breasts rise
 & fall above
 the long thighs' sprawl

in the cook's black & white checked pants
 you await your shift
 & balancing
 your fag on the step-edge

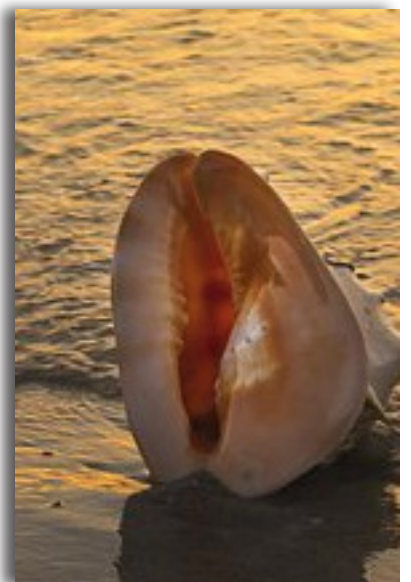
pick up a purse-shaped clay thing –
 blow into it
 lighting that first flesh fire
 Promethea aglow
 you pat
 the step next to you

& just like that you clear
 our interval
 again you blow
 & in the underbelly
 fertile secretive
 the silence of knots
 takes form

you say
thought I'd never smoke again
but when the news came –
the cat scan you know –
I went straight back out
to buy papers tobacco
just wanted to stretch
time – go slow

& *slow*
 applies like a soft palm
 to my brow
 a drugged heaviness
 takes my limbs
 & darkness
 now a big cat on the leash
 of captivation pads round & round us
 in the slow softness you blow
just one night with you
 sings through us

continued overleaf



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INSIDE THE FOLD *contd...*

the cat is real
 high-beam her eyes pour
 gold her ribcage rippling
 the bronze Havana coat
 she purrs
 our hands touch her there
 in thrall of the vibration
 & now they're laid each on each
 I still feel
 the weight of yours

the cat-face swivels its wedge
 from you to me
 you sling her
 across your shoulder
 her eyes – lime now – draw
 the line of light I follow

in the bar the woman – blaze of
 white hair olive skin –
 smiles – you say *I had to ask her in*
we were like you know snap!
with our sailors' jumpers

there are ways for us to love
 far-fetched
 larger than we are
 between
 the keyboard & the screen

your flute answers in your dream
 & calls up mine
 its breath brings in tow
 the consonance
 where there'll always be
 something more –
 for the next time
 lived as if the last
 to make us go *snap!*

perhaps then we will
 have no use
 for these words anymore
 perhaps we will
 just attend inside the fold
 to this manifold
 abeyance –

then
 mouth-to-ear
 the lava pour –

Vesuvial



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Dani Tauni is an indigenous, working-class, vegan radical lesbian feminist in her mid-30s who is passionate about building sisterhood between women both locally and internationally. She has been involved in organising five women’s liberation conferences in three countries, is currently organising a women’s gathering and is active in ongoing campaigns against the sex-industry. She is the proud granddaughter of a strong Black woman of PNG heritage.



CUNT

Cunt
Wraps around my tongue like a kiss
This goddess
Whose name has been misshapen, cursed
Deliberately cast out
Speak her still
Cunt
Like the taste of her
Coming into power
A silenced voice unleashed
Into uncharted waters
With all the ships whose sails are filled
With different shades of freedom

Cunt
Oh, but we are finding her again my sisters
Excavating our treasures
Spoils of a one-sided war
We women created this beauty that is language
And our words have been stolen, twisted,
Burnt at the stake
Beaten and bloodied out of recognition

Cunt is a word of sacred power
Spelling us into a refusal to be silenced
Because it means
Dyke
Amazon
Lesbian
Woman
Woman
Woman
Still living, beating, breathing words
Language with which we claim the love of sisters
Language with which we claim the love of ourselves
You came from a cunt, you cunt
And she birthed you whole
And with
Immeasurable power



ANCIENT NIGHTS

The way you bleed for them
Those boys
Those others
The way your words fall like rain
Into their darkness

And I was frozen
Until
The wind brought me out
What is it they say of loving
Of losing

I can see why you fear me
And this long
Ancient night

Then as I waited
And the many teared
Soliloquy
Has turned to envy
Of those boys
Those boys

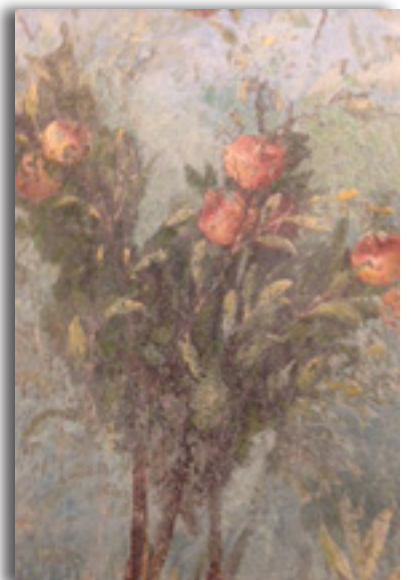
That have you and will keep you
Treasured treasure
In their castles
Tallest towers
Wrapped in your long, silken hair
Sunshine in the morning all those boys
To keep you from the cold

I was your sister once
Upon a time
In greener meadows
Under shaded tree

What is it they say of loving
Of losing

I can see why you fear me
And this long
Ancient night

Photograph © Susan Hawthorne



Kathleen Mary Fallon's three-part project, exploring her experiences as the white foster mother of an Indigenous son, includes a feature film, *Call Me Mum*, a novel *Paydirt* and a play, *Buyback*. Her novel *Working Hot* won a Victoria Premier's Prize. Other work includes the libretti for *Matricide – the Musical* and a concert piece, *Laquiem*, which was performed in The Studio at the Sydney Opera House. She lectured in creative writing at the University of Melbourne for eight years and holds a PhD (UniSA).



INTERNATIONAL LESBIANS PORTRAITS





PORTRAIT 1

The dislocated black shadow of a black bird crosses the curtain as my eyes open.

She has cockerel's claw feet. She has pendulous flesh. Bulbs from her chin, from her beak. And an evil eye under her red cock's comb. She is no red flower but a red brute. A fat chair with boob back. Riveted-nipple upholstery. And a gun in her stomach. A razor in her vulva. Claws walls with fat little ringed fingers. And the hollow tubes in her head – all the springed wires, toothed wheel machinery – is the motion of her abdomen. She is gutless Billy Bunter's sister Betty.

Where is the child hiding? Where is the little girl I could take over my shoulder for a joy ride on my back? She is too small in her eyes to live. She is hardly a dust peck of blue in her eyes. I could touch with one finger Thumbelina in a matchbox. Never murmuring on her woebegone bed so retarded is she, such excellence at autism, at imitating vegetables.

She is a bump in my heart. She is a prisoner in this wrong country, this Anglican country of old people, this old grey mare who aint what she used to be. Italy – Genoa – was her country but she fled back, presumptuous in her freedom, back to this wrong country, to her exile and childhood, her dark amnesia. With her hands full of shell miracles, suns in her stomach, she believed she could stretch her freedom – a long elastic of sunlight – from Genoa to London but it broke the moment she saw her mother's face. 'You don't shit on your own doorstep.'

What a weight to carry on the back. I could not bear it. Could not bear her massive self-hatred. The blood on her hands, self-slaughter, her child abuse.

The distance from London to Genoa is one big step but millions of little ones. With hours of surgery, years of skill, I could not find, teach or train the child to talk, eat, grow, love. The carcass is fearful to me. The baby mammal is almost dead in the pouch in this bone cold country, this milkless motherland.

The mother and child are not doing well and the mother has resigned herself to perennial pregnancy. The plant will never give up the bud to flower. It is a brown husk of deadseed in this spiceless country. The clam will never give up the pearl, embalmed as it is in a tumour of blubber.

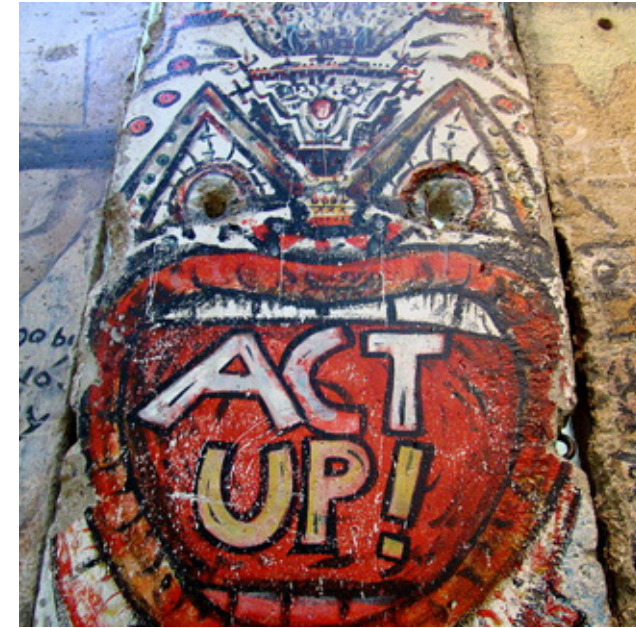
So you came back to this dead bellied country, this deliberateness. The resolution of the railroad track. The propulsion forward in a straight line on a slow ferry. And the two white waves spread-eagled behind, spread out and straddle the Channel. And your legs never part in passion now. Raped by a slow boat to London. The ocean of amnesic smog and your mother's bait face on the platform waiting. A hooked fish you land flat on your back, dead and bleeding from the gills. Your sea colours fading. Genoa the dream and the fear of the dream. Fishing for rainbow mackerel, in sewers, with safety pins. Howling around in the labyrinth of the Underground. You curl at night in your dark sheets, gnawing around the fear of a dream, suckle yourself in your exile.

And all the lovely women of Genoa with honey faces and beer-coloured hair laying you down in wet dreams like pine needles in nun's beds on three times thirty nights and the singing of the sea in your conch shell ears and the grit of sand sifting inside the glass of the timer. The egg never hatches; hatches too soon and the yolk breaks.

There is no out for you here amongst the judges, the prefects, the liberal bureaucrats. Your carcass is fearful to me, a mound of dreadwood around a stilled childflame. Your hands are pulpits I climb into and cry my weakness, your misery, before morning. Your hands are Fascisti rods, Fascisti axes, giving me as they do my freedom around the fact of their penetration. Their hold on my insides.

You hold my insides snug ugly in your grubby grip.

Filled my mouth full of breastflesh, nipplepucker. Filled myself full of your selfdisgust and just-disgust. Rolled in black sheets of crude satin. Lunged drunkenly at lust and fell on top jaded, exhausted. And woke nauseous as my first kiss. And yet, growing out of this humus, this compost called sexuality.



PORTRAIT 2

So, who's the old girl knockin' around with these days?

'How far you been into it then – lesbianism that it?' asked the old girl.

'I been in one side and all the way out the flamin' other so don't give me no lesolip – it's not worth the trouble – not worth the paper it's written on,' replied the other old girl.

'I'm glad I'm not staying,' she said on the first night. 'I could easily fall in love with a woman like you.'

'I love you,' and 'I love you so much,' she said the second night. Flying back to Berlin the third. I guess she could have spoken German to me if I'd asked her, surely playing my cards right. And I did, oh I did. 'Gotcha!' I said like a crocodile in an ad. 'How would you like this every night of your life?' I said. 'Bingo,' said Tuxedo Jean. It's taken me a week to sit and think I've missed something, something sexual.

'It's not that I love you,' I said. 'It's just that so few people bring me back to a sense of myself as I am – talkative (verbal-bloody-diarrhea), humorous, seductive, arrogant, piss-weak, butch-as-all-hell, fem-as-all-shit.'

'No one has ever touched me like that,' she said, 'so soft and yet so strong at the same time. I know it's corny but it's what we all want, sophisticated fingers. Your hands bring me down from that crazy flapping kite women can be at this time of night.'

'Can I touch you?' she'd say. 'I want to touch you.' Meaning down there. Oh! And uh huh! And yes mam! And how fabulous! (As I heard the poofta in the bus say, 'I spent the whole three days on all fours. It was fabulous.') Hot shit honey. Tuxedo Jean.

'No, she doesn't care,' I told my girlfriend. 'She doesn't care much that she's hurt you. She's flying out of it all and it's so attractive that attitude. That's the attitude you must practice every day.'

'Women – no brains,' said the guy in the bus, 'and happy without 'em.'

How come some hands bring you off? How come some mouths make you?

Future plans (on a small scale) – study maps of Berlin. Run my finger along the Wall. Wonder at our ability to find pleasure in the darkest places.

'But what do you want down there?' I asked, drunk. 'What the fucking hell are you after?' And she said, 'I didn't want to fuck you, I wanted your girlfriend at first.' I love honesty. No, I really do. I love lack of tact. It's a challenge to my over-socialised sense of finesse. Loving smart women with an edge to them. Take your positions; the bout's to begin.

'Don't try to work it out,' she said. 'There's no point and that's what's great.' 'Hang on,' I said. 'You get your kicks your way and I'll get mine mine.' Curling back into love, romance, devotion.

How attractive people are who take their pleasure where they will. 'You only live once,' they sing in chorus. Well, I for one want to grow out of everything I've ever learned.

I'm drunk and I'm beginning to miss you, Miss You, Miss Tuxedo Jean. And I wouldn't have dreamt of laying a hand on you if you hadn't been leaving, that absent one's such a yum yum. I've said it before and I'll say it again, without the shadow of a doubt, Greed and Deprivation are twins.

'Don't let me near a pen,' I heard the girl in the bus say. 'I'll just write his name all over the borders.'

Finola Moorhead is a playwright, a poet, has written articles and short stories, and published five books including *A Handwritten Modern Classic* (1985), *Quilt* (1985), *Remember the Tarantella* (1987), *Still Murder* (1991/2002), *Darkness More Visible* (2000) and a collection of poetry, *My Voice* (2006). She is the author of three plays, *Curtain Raiser*, *Horses* and *It Might As Well Be Loneliness*. Her novel, *Still Murder* won the 1991 Victorian, Premier's Literary Award. In 2015 she won the Edna Ryan Award for the Creative Arts.



ON READING YOUNG ELIOT BESIDE AN OPEN WINDOW IN MY KITCHEN

In September,
the scented breeze.
Every year I leave the jasmine weed
to excite my olfactory sense
In other months it's there to dismember
with secateurs, but not to poison
as I do most invasive plants.
This is analogous
to how my mind treats the sweetness
of my patriarchy: my jail and
my jailer, my civilisation, from Iron Judah
through prophets to crucifix-cathedrals
and the cultured parks of The Enlightenment
to now.
I let the vine flourish, yet
snip away its tendrils and
deny it nourishment.
I am old
I shall wear my sleeves rolled.
A woman, not a whore, found that
Babylon is a desert mound in Iraq.

Perhaps one day I will write
the personal facts
of being a "bleeding heart".
Right-wing women, I find, are as tough
as old boots, while lefties let their cores weep
on the outside like the Sacred Heart of Jesus,
cicatrix forming on their skins,
making them seem rough...

You know nothing – nothing –
about the loneliness of a feminist intellectual,
her words are, at best, commentary
from the boundary – with whom
the booing crowd never agrees.
It boos her as well.
Meanwhile, out of the lifts at the MCG
rich people stroll
talking of fossil fuels and consumer confidence.

Creative destruction, fuck 'em.
I am a peasant,
I take my holidays at home.
Flex the muscle, chop the wood,
chain-saw the errant branch because you must,
you should – neurons arcing in the brain like sparks
starting impotent fires – unfinished thoughts.
The hanging gardens are lost,
are ashes and dust.

continued overleaf



ON READING YOUNG ELIOT BESIDE AN OPEN WINDOW IN MY KITCHEN *contd...*

We are within the magic of on-going evolution.
 Mesozoic dinosaurs and amoebae share
 stuff with us. Amazing!
 Heroic civilisation, the "Anthropocene"!
 The planet has changed because of Man.
 Women,
 victims of circumstance and circumstances,
 history, accident, politics, genetics,
 colonisation, slavery, sexual slavery and
 the cruelty of biological destiny,
 have had little agency.
 Driven by urgency, we're frenetic,
 respecting the worth
 of the earth.

The Bush is a place I can go
 where Bleeding Hearts weep from the clay
 at the edge of gravel roads
 and it's divine to kill weeds.
 Once you have a radical feminist conviction,
 you read everything – everything –
 with its friction, even T. S. Eliot,
 walking, with his trousers rolled
 past gas-lamps and horse-cabs, talking
 of the waste
 land.

I age and grow sage.
 You can't fool the time gymnast for whom
 weekends tumble into each other,
 full moons pop like circus balloons
 and balance walks a tight-rope.
 In the garden, weeding, or
 on the end of a vacuum cleaner,
 clearing the gutters, slicing butter, lumpen intelligentsia
 beating in my blood, the myth of happiness, and,
 indeed, holiness occurs like a genie
 from a bottle, full of promises; utter romance.
 Truth lies deep in country
 like the rainbow serpent, real hidden treasure.
 Holy happiness permits
 wreckful mines to dig profit
 from the ground, and, intolerance
 of pleasure.
 Your mind cannot grow in a bed
 of delusion.
 Happiness requires an entire ecosystem.
 In winter, old Tom cries, or prays, beside the Thames.

Sandy Jeffs has published 7 volumes of poetry which includes *Chiaroscuro* (Black Pepper) and *The Mad Poet's Tea Party* (Spinifex Press) published in 2015. Much of Sandy's writing has been about living with schizophrenia which she wrote about in detail in her memoir *Flying with Paper Wings* (The Vulgar Press). Sandy is currently writing an oral history of Larundel Psychiatric Hospital.



THE MONSTROUS TRUTH

The monstrous truth
that the world is creeping towards Hitler again
and politicians are hollow men
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that innocent people
are at the mercy of narcissistic leaders
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the land of the free is the land of mass killings
and the gun lobby's silence condones it
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that indigenous people are suffering
and we turn a blind eye
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that asylum seekers and refugees are languishing in concentration camps
and our politicians gloat about stopping the fucking boats
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the Market is self-serving
to protect the vast wealth of its shareholders
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the legion of poor is growing
while the fat cats get richer
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the mad are homeless, in jail and abandoned
and public psych wards are a living hell
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that neo liberalism spreads the lie
there is no society, only individuals
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that we have been seduced by the cult of celebrity
and we go to worship at their altar like a flock of mindless sheep
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the world is on the brink
while Trump and Kim Jong-Un hurl grenades at each other
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that in a Trumpian world
honest journalism has been demonised as fake news
lies like a dog the corner.

continued overleaf

THE MONSTROUS TRUTH *contd...*

The monstrous truth
that the no voters say *they* are the victims when gays have been
criminalised, psychiatrised, brutalised, victimised and ostracised
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the gay community is forced to beg for equal rights
because politicians are too gutless to act
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that 1 in 3 women experience domestic violence
and a woman is murdered every week by an intimate partner
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that 1 in 3 hetero marriages ends in divorce
while the church bangs on about the sanctity of marriage
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that rape used as a weapon in war
is patriarchal power and humiliation
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that we look in the mirror and never see
a sexist, racist, homophobic bigot
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the *banality of evil* Hannah Arendt saw on Eichmann's face
represents the long insidious progression of human wickedness
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that Google knows what we search, Amazon knows what we buy
and Facebook knows who our friends are
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that before despair fed on despair
hope once fed on hope
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that the world is Bedlam
and psychopaths are in control
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that poets and artists are the first casualties
of totalitarian regimes
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
that those too close to the monstrous truth
will never see it
lies like a dog in the corner.

The monstrous truth
lies like a mangy, flea-bitten, rabid dog in the corner.



Dr Renate Klein is a biologist, social scientist and feminist health activist. She has published extensively in the areas of radical feminist theory and praxis, bioethics and critiques of reprogenetics. She also cares passionately about animals. Among her 15 books are *Radically Speaking, Feminism Reclaimed* (1996, edited with Diane Bell) and *Surrogacy. A Human Rights Violation* (2017). She is a co-founder of FINRRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) and an original signatory to Stop Surrogacy Now.



This is written as an homage to the actual and potential suffering of the increasing number of 'replacement' children who are selectively conceived and born in order to save a sibling from a fatal disease.

H A T E

we love you
thank you for being here
thank you for the cells from the umbilical cord
only you can save her
thank you thank you thank you

one more time, darling
we know it hurts
you are our brave little girl
only you can save her
just think of that when the needle plunges into your hip
you'll feel better at once
thank you thank you thank you

please be nice
do understand
your sister is sick
very sick
and you have plenty of bone marrow
good bone marrow
thank you for sharing it, you're our good girl
we understand this is your seventh time in hospital
we know it hurts
but only you can save her
thank you thank you thank you

we're sorry you got such a bad infection
it really shouldn't have happened
the doctors were surprised too
we're sorry you'll miss the school performance
and that you have to repeat the year
and that your best friend dumped you
doesn't she know that you have a very sick sister?
a beautiful, gorgeous, clever girl
only you can save her
thank you thank you – if only you will

we are disappointed you ran away
why did you do that?
plenty of people live with half a liver
she is your sister
she was here before you
she deserves to live
you are not going to let her down, are you, not now?
you know that only you can save her
thank you for coming back

the tissue wasn't good enough
you weren't good enough
if you hadn't thrown such a tantrum
they might have done the transplantation in time
now your sister is dead
you can't save her any more
with her all our dreams are gone
all our hopes

what are we going to do with you now?
you were only made to save her
you failed her
we hate the look of you
go away



*Renate Klein feels deeply about the unethics of xenotransplantation.
She wants to know how many men have given their organs to animals and
hopes for a world without cruel abuse of animals*

HOPE

Once upon a time there was a
blue frog
and a yellow cow
and a red red dog
but what about the pink pig?

‘The Big Master needs a new heart,’ the doctors decreed, ‘and the pink pig is the one
we’ll get it from.’

‘Why me?’ cried the pig, ‘my heart is pink and happy and loving – all qualities the Big
Master will not want at all.’

‘No matter,’ said the doctors, ‘we have decided. Your heart it is.’

No screaming or pleading, no tears, no whimpering helped – the pink pig was strapped
to the operating table and, with a syringe stuck in her hind leg, she passed out. Then
the knife plunged in and revealed the very pink, very alive, very rapidly beating heart.
‘A beautiful heart,’ the doctors said, ‘it will suit the Big Master, it will make him well.’

But when they proceeded to peel free the heart muscle, to loosen the filaments and
sever the blood vessels, the pig – or was it her heart? – began to speak quite unexpectedly.

‘I will,’ it said, ‘not obey the Big Master for he is not the Master of the Heart.’
‘I will,’ it said, ‘shrivel and turn yellow and putrid as is the Master’s flesh.’
‘I will, above all, cry.’

Once upon a time there was a
blue frog
and a yellow cow
and a red red dog
and now you know what happened to the pink pig.
Or do you?

BLUE

I am blue
not blue from asphyxia
not blue from the cold
not blue from agony
but blue because I’m a blueberry

Inside and out, up and down
all around and back
and I am happy and round and jolly and juicy
– just trying to avoid the teeth of the shark around the corner



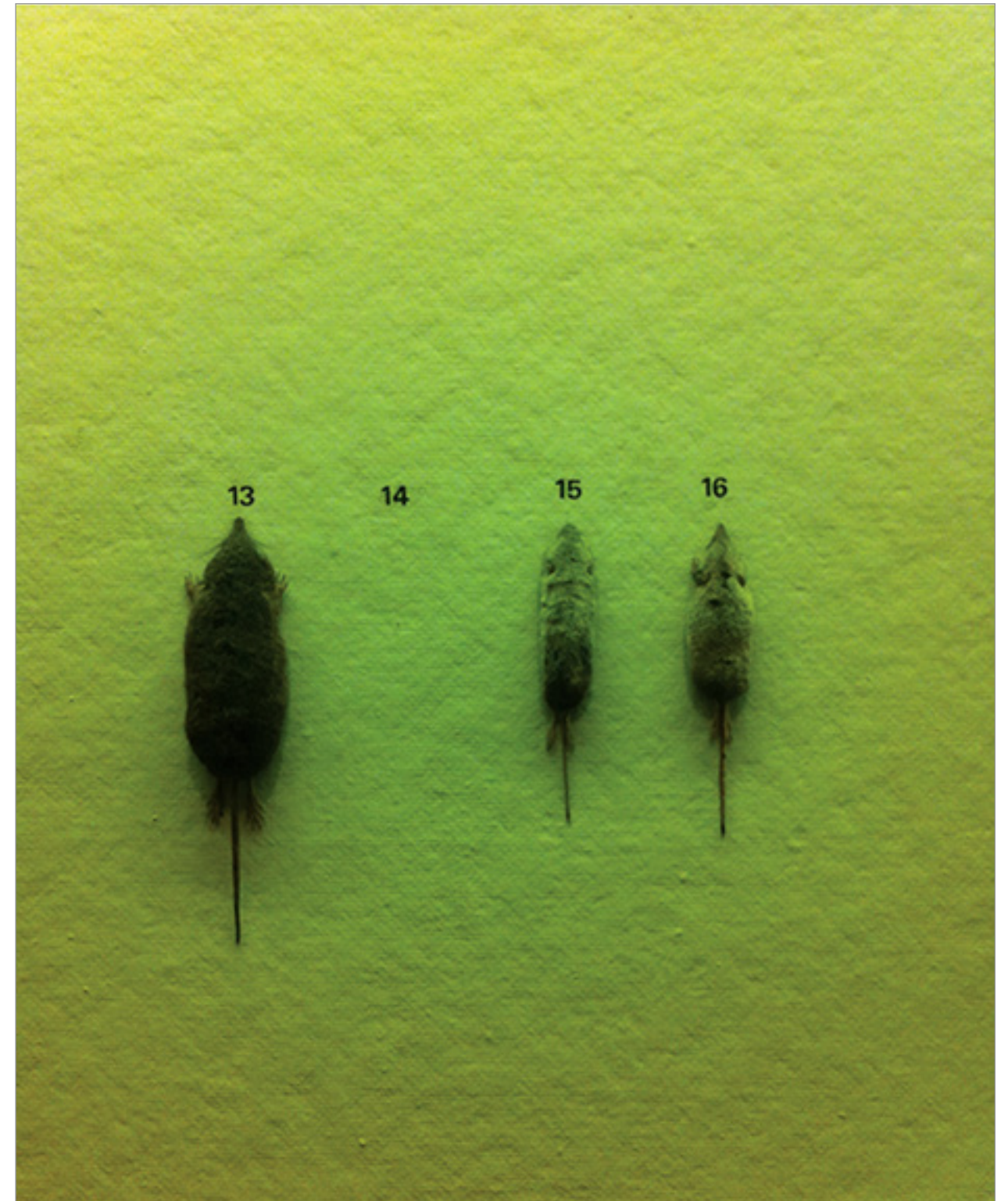
Photograph © Susan Hawthorne



FLY, FOURTEEN, FLY

PHOTO POEMS BY
JUDY HORACEK

Judy Horacek is a cartoonist, writer and illustrator based in Melbourne. She has had nine cartoon collections published, the most recent of which is *Random Life*, and nine children's picture books, some on her own and some in collaboration with the writer Mem Fox. Her work has always involved words and pictures in the form of drawings. She also takes photographs all the time and is currently investigating ways to use this imagery in different creative forms. Her website is at www.horacek.com.au









Robin Morgan has published over 20 books, including six poetry collections. Her first, *Monster*, caused an international furor; her TED Talk reading of *Dark Matter* poems has garnered over one million downloads. She is a recipient of the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts Prize in Poetry and her work has been widely translated. She is a former Editor-in-Chief of *MS.* magazine, and runs a weekly radio program through The Women's Media Center which she co-founded with Jane Fonda and Gloria Steinem.

'The Magician and The Magician's Assistant', 'Compass', and 'Disclosure' were previously published in the June 2014 issue of *Poesia* (Milan), in Italian translation by Maria Nadotti with Cristina Aziati.



DISCLOSURE

A young musician's songs about the cruelty
of an old love sent you flying, to your surprise,
on a trapeze high beneath your dreams,
through the release and catch of your own
now-decades-dead desire. Hard to believe after so long
that grip has suffered so little loosening.
It was a minor grief, no genocide, no earthquake,
merely a broken start. Everyone told you so.

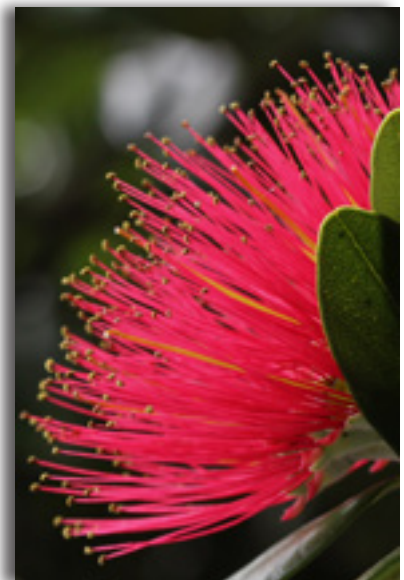
But after you stand in the middle of the room
a vigilant ringmaster, long enough;
after you learn it will circle around you
for years, adapting its path to circumvent
your whip, after you realize your scar
tissue from its claws is as close to healing
as you're going to get, you come to comprehend how
what was temporary is permanent after all.

Closure is a word that has no meaning.
But time and space do, they approximate distance.
Besides, life crowds out anything only half-alive.
Flesh does tire, and passion lessens. Soon,
you expect, you'll get to give up juggling.
Finally, you glimpse the trick: your memories
die when you do, not before--unless you turn
childlike, speechless, sucking cotton candy,

awestruck at the circus your life's become,
at the normality of freaks, clowns, and the wild
animal perched sullen on a tiny stool, at how
what was permanent is temporary after all.
Still, you are not ever safe from love's cruel melodies
however sweetly the young musician sings.
There can be no such thing as closure.
When you prod the beast, it springs.

COMPASS

There's a lost south in me, a place where joy,
though costly, was a common middle name.
Tomorrow, there, had elsewhere stayed today,
solstices changed places, nothing was the same.
There at the world's edge, the antipodes,
with all the stars and seasons rearranged,
earth's axis seemed to shift and gravity's
force drew me in. My latitudes since then have changed.
A lost love, like a phantom limb, gestures
emptily, making itself felt through pain.
So ached this south in me for many years.
But the world is round, and the lost self was regained
once, seeking my own south, I ventured forth
in due course, with due diligence, due north.



© Robin Morgan



GIANTS AT THE CORNER TABLE

for SBL, JE, GS, and MT

New at being old, they marvel at it:
aches in places they never knew they had,
memory lapses, the unrecognizable
stooped image scurrying past
the shop window reflection.
They laugh about it wryly, comparing notes.

These particular new old women have been friends
and colleagues for 40 years. For 30 of those years,
once jobs took them on differing paths,
all five have met for dinner every month
no matter what other social occasions
they might also share. Close to 400 dinners.

They have marched and picketed, lobbied,
fundraised, sat in; still do. And seen each other through
childbirths, weddings, divorce, hospitals, book parties,
funerals, birthdays. They bring small presents
back from trips, share running jokes. They've learned
to tolerate in one another what they could not love.

And they have rituals:
the white wine drinker who likes a separate glass of ice;
the one who brightens when ordering dessert;
the one who can't stand cinnamon in her cappuccino;
the one who would dine at 5 PM if they let her;
the one who takes home leftovers for next day's lunch.

One has been married for 40 years yet stayed herself.
Two stayed themselves and never married.
One married late and briefly,
the fifth early and long, freeing herself at last.
Two have grown children,
three have lived child-free. Five.

Well, it was five. One now lost--to youth, the irony
being that despite her age she was so young she rode
her motorbike to the final moment, doing what she loved.
Then there were four.
No one now takes cinnamon in her cappuccino.
There will be three someday, then two, then one.

That one will carry in herself some of the best of all of us
because in each other's presence some of the best
of each of us came forth. And when she goes,
the women we were to one another
will all wink out, the work we've shared
lasting perhaps a little while beyond us.

For now, we go on witnessing each other ride the current
out to sea, aware our time's not open ended.
We cling like lovers when we part, we say
I love you before hanging up the phone, and one
to one we all confide concerns about the others' health.
Laughter's astringency balances such tenderness.

But when young ones, unseasoned, condescend,
a voice in each of us hisses *Watch it, child. You have no clue
who's living under this disguise; for if our true height
could be measured, you'd see how low we stoop for you,
how if we straightened we would wear
the clouds for garlands in our hair.*

THE MAGICIAN AND THE MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT

I've had me up my sleeve
I've pulled me from my hat
I've planted myself in the audience
as the patsy I dare to decipher my tricks—
safe I can never see through me.

The Magician and The Magician's Assistant--
I've been both for so long.
Introducing myself with a smile and a flair
and a white-gloved bow to applause. Then
making myself disappear.

Well, I can tell you I'm done
dodging knives flung at my head,
done being folded into cramped crates,
sawed into pieces again and again. I am done,
in short, with being The Magician's Assistant.

From here on in, I need no assistant,
no props, no stage, no audience.
From here on in, all that's left
is The Magician.
Or so I thought.

That was before I could comprehend
that I'm also done flinging the knives,
bowing, smiling, drowning
in chains upside down, done
holding my breath.

So nothing is left to perform now.
Sorry to disappoint.
I have my own bare hands full
grasping how
from here on in, all that's left is the magic.





Susan Varga's first book *Heddy and Me* was published to great acclaim, winning the Christina Stead Award for non-fiction. It was followed by the award-winning novel *Happy Families*, then *Broometime*, co-authored by Anne Coombs. Her most recent novel *Headlong*, was short-listed for the Barbara Jefferis Award. *Rupture*, her first book of poetry was commended for the Anne Elder Award and was nominated in the ABR's Best Books of the Year in 2016. Born in Hungary, raised in Sydney, Susan divides her time between northern NSW and the Southern Highlands.

WHEN I THINK OF BUDAPEST

I think of 1990.
The Iron Curtain just lifted,
the city's heart and limbs
still numb.

I think of the flat we rented
in the former Jewish quarter -
two sparse rooms with folding doors,
a crude kitchen with a cold water tap.

Outside our courtyard door
a creaking billboard in praise of false teeth
(grinning black mouth, big yellow molars)
swings above passers-bye.

On the square, a tiny restaurant serving
Hungarian-Jewish food.
All the customers knew the pretty waitress;
thirty years of cheery smiles,
the same open-toed waitress boots.

By the till, the owner
in a short white coat, doctor-like.
He doesn't talk much
but his sad eyes took everything in -

the kids fighting in the square,
mothers and shoppers resting
under plane trees. The old ghetto
survivors at ease in the shade.

continued overleaf



WHEN I THINK OF BUDAPEST *contd...*

In 1944 the ghetto was sealed
off from the city. There was
nowhere to bury the dead.
The square was crammed

with Jewish bodies rotting
in ever higher rows
waiting for the day of judgement
for liberation.

Nearby is the Central Synagogue,
almost empty, its congregation
wiped out by Eichmann's brilliant plan
to clear Budapest of all its Jews.

Just before Eichmann finished his task
Hitler recalled him to Berlin.
So a few remaining Jews
got to live.

In 1990 the congregation is sparse.
A few tourists. But one Saturday
a shy huddle of teenage girls approach
in their Sabbath best.

By the doors, boys lounge in wait,
as Jewish boys do, the world over

2.

When I think of Budapest
I see heavy tall doors
opening to courtyards,
cast-iron railings girding balconies
from floor to floor.

I hear the clatter of children,
past and present.

Mother knocks on the door
of her childhood home.
A worn-looking woman answers.
They are about same age, but Mother
glows like a film star beside her.

'I've lived alone here alone
since the War,' the woman says
'My husband didn't come back.'

Mother nods.
All Jews know what that phrase means.

She leads us into the kitchen.
There's rows of bottled pears
and peppers on a shelf.
'For the winter,' the woman says.

Mother nods again,
'We used to do the same.'
They fall to talking
about food.



© Susan Varga

MOTHER AT THE FLAT

Mother comes to visit from her posh hotel
bringing pocaga filched from its big breakfast,
She stands at the front door, beaming
showing off her prize –
'I never thought I would visit you
here in Pest!'

We are walking through her past.
Yesterday she took me to see
her old girl's school where Jew
and Gentile mixed as one.

(But only a lucky few were
invited to the Christian girls'
birthday 'jours')

Tomorrow, we will knock at the door of
my father's bachelor flat
where he read his books
and waited for a wife to appear.

Years passed –
the neighbours had given up hope.
In a coffee house he met my mother
fresh-faced, 21, deep blue eyes, olive skin.
Lively, frank.

Later he told her,
'You were the only woman there
who did not make herself up.'

2.

Seven years later, the night I was born,
my father wept for joy. An hour later
he left for forced labour in the north.

When I was six months old,
he was granted a day's leave.
A Christian friend lent them a flat,
risking the favour.

At dawn he kissed her
and left, his awkward body
helpless in its ill-fitting uniform.

She watched for a last glimpse
of him before he vanished
in the early morning crowd.

She knew.



Miriel Lenore is an Adelaide poet who lived in Fiji for twenty-two years and visited a Ngaanyatjarra community for over twenty years. Her seven books frequently focus on the interaction of people and places: 'geography is destiny'? Her current work is of her early life in a Victorian country town. She lives in Adelaide and writes from her perspective as a feminist lesbian grandmother.



HOPE AND THE INEVITABLE...

i

our cocktail club decides it's time to study
 Death and Dying 101
 though some of us as carers
 have passed 201 even 301
 the major chapter remains

My first thought: how to help those left? –
 should I leave instructions
 for machines on or off
 decide for burying or burning?

how else to be in charge when I'm not there?
 arrange a funeral now?
 at least pay in advance should all be spent
 after exploring the Iguazu Falls
 the yurts of Mongolia
 the source of the Limpopo

could I write my eulogy to be sure it's positive?
 plan the wake
 choose the music:
A Calm Sea and a Following Wind perhaps
 could be *Always Look on the Bright Side*
 must leave money for cakes and wine
 it's a hungry business burying

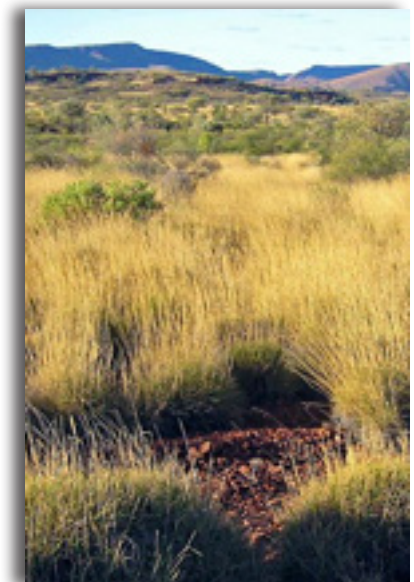
as the oldest in the club I need the tuition most
 instead I exude reticence
 resistance refusal
 from the 17th Century Sir Thomas Browne speaks for me:
 The long habit of living indisposeth us for dying

ii

neat and still stylish
 checked by the nurse for buttons
 and stains
 she waits in the empty hall
 it's taken all morning

in the car she talks and laughs:
we're all deaf and blind you know
at dinner Mr Kenny
told of his gangrenous leg
 soon to be lost
I said 'your daughter can mend it
 or buy a new pair'
I thought he said socks

arriving she braces,
 slowly lifts and stumbles from the car
 to rest on her white stick
 smells jasmine eucalypts
 fresh smoke-drift air of the hills
 sees blurred trees against blue sky
 across the garden
 bright yellow plastic bags
 filled with water-saving mulch
oh what magnificent chrysanthemums



HOPE AND THE INEVITABLE... *contd...*

iii

in Resthaven's functional dining room
two women sit silent
comfortable together minds still intact

an aide sweeps up cups and plates
leaves for shaking hands
two mounds of pills

a stooped woman intones as she passes
I'll die tonight
the friends exchange wry smiles

set themselves to stand and manage
on the second try
reach for metal walking frames

salute each other with raised hands
as cavaliers riding to battle
or climbers below the summit

begin the slow plod down corridors
to white-sheeted loneliness
memories dreams replays of guilt

to wake next morning
hoping for strength
to face their constant Everest

THE INFANT ROOM

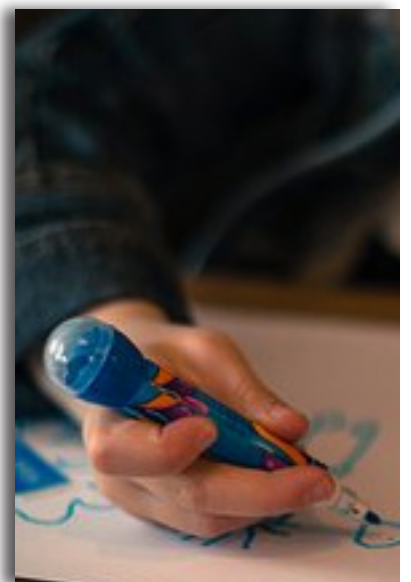
vivid in the morning sun
red geraniums on the window sill
taught me Left from Right
as I faced the King's picture

I learnt to worship sitting at the feet
of our glorious trainee teacher Miss Edwards
as she pointed to pictures
of Apples Bballs and Ccats
carefully drawn in coloured chalks on the blackboard

when next year I copied others
by carving my initials into my desk
Miss Hart loomed over me:
I expected better of you Miriel
a refrain which dogged me through much of life

seated near the geraniums in Grade 2
I saw Miss Sutherland drop and die
in front of us
she lay motionless until Mr Pryor
from Grade 6 carried her away

she returned next day
Miss Sutherland's faint teaching me
that the world was chancy



WILLIS BIDDI WITH LOUISE

such white rocks in the Snowy
backbone of submerged dragons
diprotodon teeth
the women's rock: Lou's special place

she brings two small cups of water
 unspilt from the river
I tell her King David in battle longed
to drink of the well at Bethlehem's gate
three young warriors broke through
enemy lines to bring the water
which he poured on the ground –
 too sacred to drink
silly bugger she says

I pick up an emu feather light and strong
 and a stone egg
earth-coloured river-smoothed
a small chip against perfection:
 a portrait of my friend

AUSTRALIA FELIX

i

'A land so inviting
and still without inhabitants'
explorer Mitchell said
of the rich Loddon Plains where
my home town would one day be

the inhabitants he couldn't see
yet described as 'fine and friendly'
were soon to be driven off or killed
by the diseases my tribe brought
as they rushed stock into a land
so swiftly made infelicitous

within a hundred years
blown sand buried fences
then covered the new ones
 built on top of the old
dust storms blotted out the land
plates still on kitchen tables
 of abandoned farms

ii

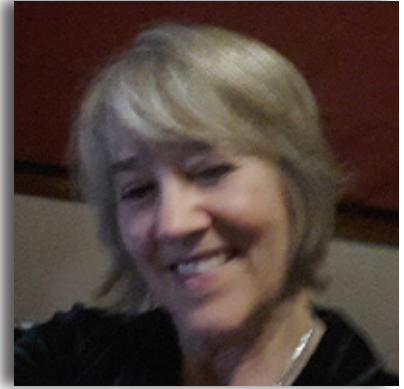
not all the newcomers left –
new crops now flourish:
 lucerne tomatoes olives
in billiard table paddocks of Loddon water

and the Dja Dja Wurrung I never saw as a child
are back as they defend their culture in the courts
a main street memorial honours them
 the ancestors never left



© Mirel Lenore

Louise Wakeling escaped from Sydney to the Blue Mountains three years ago. Her most recent poetry collection is *Paragliding in a war zone* (Puncher & Wattmann), and she has completed the manuscript of a fourth collection, *Off Limits*. Working across several genres, she is currently writing a novel about a young girl's coming of age in post-war Australia, and composing eco-poetry. She works part-time as a writer-mentor to culturally diverse women and girls in Fairfield.



DUALITIES

wildfires and rogue winds and what bullets do to bodies but we can make ice
in the desert detect black holes colliding by the ripples in space-time gulp lime-
green gelatine with our goldfish mouths astronauts free-floating in weightless-
ness and call it food somewhere in the constellation Scutum Pioneer 11 ploughs
on ambassador for humanity out of touch with Earth but bearing a plaque an
image of a man and a woman a spacecraft a map of the galaxy and our location
in it just so they know where we live and what we know foundations are shak-
ing new fissures zig-zag over surfaces but we cheerfully hazard-avoid among
the stars our names can be tweeted to Mars – better still our remains blasted into
deep space an everlasting celestial journey a star among stars (*environmentally
benign, surprisingly affordable*) or as someone said *kiss my ashes*

THE SPIRIT OF CURIOSITY

quite a road trip, that first landing
Spirit bouncing off a rock which
naturally we called “Bounce Rock”
because it's our prerogative like Adam
to name things, abrade surfaces, drill holes
in the rusty fabric of dead planets –
it's what we do

now solar-propelled *Curiosity*
geared to shovel pay-dirt – signs
of ancient water, methane, maybe life,
once, alluvial fans and sand-ripples
a map of our own future

Bradbury's imagined world dessicated,
long gone, eroded rock strata scattered
like the bones of Martians on the edge of craters

cute, personable, robots way beyond
their use-by date learn too late
what might be useful tomorrow



ANSWER TO THE COUPLE'S TAO TE CHING

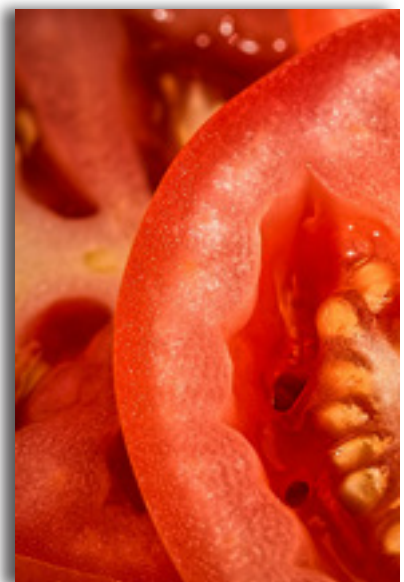
You can't hug a Saguaro – we both know that. I've tried it,
 in a spirit of craziness or satire or because some of us, we're innate
 tree-huggers, and Saguaro seem so – personable. I know,
this flowing love binds you and your beloved to all things in creation...
 They stand there in the desert, waving and pointing and semaphoring,
 wanting a conversation, giving us the thumbs up, or sometimes
 the rude finger. Forget that spirit of the West stuff – as though the Saguaro
 has *anything* to say about Manifest Destiny or Westward ho! the wagons

But they tempt us. We read faces, arms and limbs akimbo, see cowboys
 in dusty high-noon streets. Survivalists bunkered down in the desert,
 weapons at the ready like a border vigilante. A threatened species.
 Every part of them, gesture and language, beautiful and useful:
 a hollow for birds, so Tao, extravagant, night-blooming,
 nectar flowing to long-nosed bats in the flowering season

Let's face it – they're damn prickly, and we can only mimic intimacy,
 mock-hug something that lets us know it means business if we try
 to get too close. Keep a respectful distance from those spines, girl –
 like lovers who say "you just want *more* than I can give" –
 they're armed to the teeth, and will protect themselves

TOMATOES

"Plump thing with a navel", Cortez discovered you growing
 in Montezuma's gardens, brought your seeds back to Europe –
 a showy curiosity designated not for eating. Tomatoes ripen
 in a bowl, the colour of becoming. Your contours resile
 from certainty – are you *pommes d'amour*, fruit or vegetable,
 poisonous or not? State fruit/state vegetable, Arkansas has you
 both ways. Pale, blue patterned, the bowl enfolds you, knowing
 you're grounded, the way you bow to the earth with your own weight,
 sprawl without support, supine, riotous on the vine. I'd stake my life
 on you, seeding all over the place, between bricks, at a side gate,
 promiscuous among daisies, no respecter of borders, time-traveller
 on the beaks of birds. One day, hot tomatoes, red – ripe for it –
 plucked from a garden somewhere, you bring the outside inside.
 I'll wait until you're good and ready, and then I'll have you,
 right there on the kitchen table. This poem doesn't give a damn
 about canteloupes, only the way a shaft of sunlight transforms you,
 a warm room brings you on, wolf-peaches in a curve of china



© Louise Wakeling

Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes is a Chilean-British writer/poet. She moved to the UK in the 1990s to escape painful memories, not knowing that her memories hid themselves in the two grey suitcases she brought to Lancaster, where she did an MA (Sociology/ Women's Studies) and a PhD (Women's Studies). She has published poetry and short stories. She later did an MA in Publishing at Derby University and now has her own publishing house, Victorina Press. She lives in rural England with her partner Lynda, three dogs and some horses.



A SHE-RIVER WAS BORN

Water overflowed under bridges
 Water wept for the Lenca and Miskito people in
 Honduras
 Water howled for the polluted fish in
 Chiloé,
 it screamed for ancient, burned monkeypuzzles in
 Lonquimay, Wijimapu and Pikunmapu in the
 South of Chile
 Water cried, wailed and sobbed
 for the contaminated
 Quimi and Chuchumbletza rivers and for the
 Shuar community facing death in
 Ecuador.

Water gushed out down her legs
 flooding mansions, huts, *rucas* and houses
 drowning pets and people ... merciless dragging
 them, enraged
 along with stones, torn tree trunks
 leaves and broken branches.

The deluge of her body was final and deathly.

There was no Water
 only flames and faces with no names in
 Grenfell Tower
 Water was watering the gardens of
 The wealthy across the street.

There was no Water for her in
 Syria
 only bombs drying out her tears
 and Hamad desert burning her eyes.

There was no Water for her in
 that marine room
 of blue eyes and blue uniforms of
 blue light, of blue electricity
 shattering her blue body
 and diluting it in aquatic nightmares.

She wanted to drink from the Mediterranean Sea,
 from the Pacific Sea,
 from the North and South Seas.
 But she ended up with her mouth full of salt...
 Silent, mute...

After the horrific wind
 had torn away her house, doors and windows,
 Water gushed out with swirling fury
 from her womb
 and dragged dogs, cats, horses, jaguars and rats who,
 with their panicked eyes,
 rushed to nothingness, desperate to survive.

It rained, rained and rained
 and at the end of the warm rain
 Pachamama gave birth to this
 She-river of women
 who weave resistance and rebellion.
 Their birth cry was

Revolution!
 Revolution!
 Revolution!



© Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes

RIPPLING REFLECTIONS

Your sea, my sea
Oceans of skins
Play at transgressing
Your love and my love
Your drizzle, my drizzle
Thirsty pink roses
D-rip acid honey
They close and open
Open and close

Your tongue my tongue
Conflagration of moist flames
Lick the light of waves
On your beach and my beach

Your eyes my eyes
Lightnings of smells
Taste the stinging salt
Of

The

Farewell

REFLECTIONS RIPPLING

My tongue, your tongue
Lick the transgression
Your nipples and my nipples

Your clitoris, my clitoris
Oceans of flesh
Drip throbbing honey
They open and close
They close and open

Your eyes my I's
Lightnings of juicy perfumes
Touch the spicy waters

Of

The

Farewell

R-EVOLUTION

Centuries of deaf laws
Speak of the unnamed
Feeling of my thrilled
hands in your body.

Centuries of arrogant machos
Attempt to
Tear off the redemption of
my lips in your
nipples.

Centuries of shameful banning
Try to bombard
The boisterous encounter of our
Clitoral r-evolution.

Centuries of stupid, phallic
Moralities
Would like to kill our wish to be
But we have been
We are
We will be...



© Consuelo Rivera-Fuentes



THE COPIHUE AND THE CONDOR

Licanray loved diving naked in the river which flowed noisily near her house made of mud and straw. Her friends, the sparrow, the swift and the *chucaco*, used to wake her up at dawn with their broken songs of freedom and joy. The willow and the *mañío* tree offered her their protection from the sun in the hot, humid summer. The tiny, brown *pudu* ate with no fear from her rough hand; the alpaca loved warming her up with her wet breath. The salmon and trout laughed with the sliding laughter of fish; happy to see the adolescent enjoy the hug of transparent waters.

Her favourite friend, however, was a puma of bright and deep eyes, beautiful soft fur and ferocious claws which could tear to pieces the bravest of the warriors. However, they were like the wings of a butterfly when they caressed the princess, who had given the feline the name of Maputen. She looked at herself in her eyes, caressed her back, kissed her face and ran with her in a perennial game of laughter and language that only the two of them could understand.

‘Why are you always so sad?’ asked Maputen, licking the round face of the woman.

‘It is not sadness; I’m always very angry because my lineage, whatever that means, has destined me to offer my drum of life to *Guenechen*, the cruel god of life and death.’

‘Can’t you just run away with me into the mountain?’

‘I wish I could, but my father and brothers would have to share the shame and the anger of *Guenechen*. My younger brother would never be elected as the *cacique* of the tribe and my other brothers and sisters could never become warriors or hunters.

The puma didn’t ask any more questions, but she wondered why Licanray couldn’t just free herself from that responsibility. Life was supposed to be lived by everybody. She tore another bloody piece of flesh from the *chulengo* she had just caught that morning and stopped thinking about Licanray’s strange way of facing responsibilities and beliefs.



The princess enjoyed her transitory life trying to immerse her round hips in the green of the trees and ferns, and soak her soul in the blue transparency of the southern waters. She loved the smell of Maputen, and the blinding brightness of the snow in the nearby volcano, which from time to time threw up her rage in a murdering river of fire and lava.

One early afternoon, as she rested her head on Maputen's warm belly, she saw one of the women warriors of the tribe entering the river to refresh her body, tired and bruised from the exercises of combat. She was shorter and stronger than the princess; her muscles had the hardness of oak and her skin showed the scars of some battle injury, smooth and beautifully dark.

Licanray's eyes attracted the warrior's who stared at the magnificent scene of the naked princess and the puma lying idly by the river.

'Pachamama be with you, Licanray', said the warrior. 'I am Millaray.'

The princess was not surprised when the warrior called her by her name. Everybody knew who Licanray was. But she was amazed to feel fire flowing from her nape to her chest and then to her womb when Millaray slowly, very slowly approached her without uttering another word.

Millaray had been raised by her parents in the secrets of hunting and they had prepared her body for the struggle against the white invaders. She had grown up in the woods and frequently went hunting for *guanacos*. She played *chueca* and practised the mysteries of war every day. Although she was only 17 years old, she had gone on several raids to fight the intruders who had killed her mother and raped her sisters. The thought of the white knives penetrating her mother's exhausted body always gave her the strength to plunge her fighting spear into the murderers' flesh.

After their first encounter, the two women met every day by the river to chat and swim naked in the cold water.

'Don't look at me like that'

'Like what'? asked Licanray

'Like you are going to take my breath away in your eyes.'

'Well, I'm going to, but not only in my eyes. In my lips, as well', said the princess, sinking her hands in the warrior's black hair and tenderly kissing her face, nose, eyes, neck many shivering times... feeling Millaray's strong heart beat in her throbbing mouth.

Maputen, the only witness of these encounters, cried with dry tears, did not hunt to eat and gradually lost away her silky fur, weight and the joy of living. Her piercing eyes only lit up when Licanray caressed her head or sang in her ear when the woman warrior was not present. She struggled against a strong, excruciating wish to tear off Millaray's breasts each time the two women laughed with the flowers they both adorned their hair with, after having turned love into a melting whirlpool of tongues and sighs. The puma did not understand why Dawn and Sunset felt so happy for the daily meeting of the two lovers or why the butterflies scattered dust of stars on their shiny hair. She only wanted to take the skin off Millaray's hands each time she stroked the naked body of the princess. Still, she had to admit that the crops were abundant, probably due to the joy of living that the passionate young women transmitted to everything they touched. Eventually, she learnt to live with her feelings, recovered her appetite and even accompanied Millary when the woman went hunting or to battle against the metallic men who wanted to subjugate their people.

Summer and autumn died away. Rain, hail and frost silvered the *avellanos* leaves and burnt the crops. Mud covered the soft carpet of moss and the storm took possession of the heart of the *machis* who refused to treat the suffering people until a princess was sacrificed to placate the fury of *Pillán*, the god of rain, thunder and lightning. Despite the growing starvation and the mud surrounding their *rucas*, the two young women nourished each other with that untransferable love that transcends flesh, without suspecting that in the nearby village their fathers, brothers, *Toquis* and *Caciques* were deciding the death of their terrestrial love.

'Pillán is angry with us; we must send the spirit of our three virgin princesses to him to appease his fury. The *huinca* men will take possession of our land if his rage does not stop eating up the bodies of our young children, warriors and wise old men'. Licanray's father said this with his hoarse voice cracking like a chestnut shell and a wet look in his tired eyes.

The day came when Licanray saw her father dressed up for the ritual; his eyes glowing with emotion, pride and sadness. Then she knew...



She was not prepared for the surprise. She had always known that her shadow would live in the mountain of fire and that she would sleep a long and everlasting sleep. But now, her body, her mind, pleaded pity to her father and brothers...everything in vain, however; absolutely in vain.

Everybody and everything was ready for the sacrifice of the virgins. Now the rain would stop, there would be food for the tribe and the warriors would have the strength and wisdom to face the cruel and bloody struggle against the whites.

The *machis*, traditional healers and religious leaders, washed Licanray with rain water, combed her black hair and put on a headband made of red wool and a *trarilonko* (silver ornament) on her forehead. They dressed her with the black dress of the maidens and adorned her chest with a silver necklace called *trapelacucha*. The wrinkled ashy faces of the *machis* showed contempt and anger at the sight of the shaking, terrified princesses begging for their lives. 'You should be happy to have been chosen by our wise men to live forever with the god up there in the mountains. Why are you making such a fuss?' said a *machi* with the cold voice of women who have seen life and death too many times to be impressed by a weeping princess. 'Come on, walk now!'

Before walking to the sacrifice altar, where the cinnamon tree was waiting for her with its penetrating smell, Licanray, with no more tears to shed, talked to Maputen, who had tried to comfort her with a sad shadow of love in her feline eyes.

'Maputen, my love, bring Millaray to me, to the white mountain, run, Maputen! I need to see her once more.'

The high mountain was already throwing up thick and black smoke in a lustful happiness for the three souls it was going to swallow.

When the sun set, the priests raised their silver knives and three chests felt the thorn drilling, the blade penetrating, tearing tissues. The three virgins could feel the warm blood gushing out through the open wound and the priests' hands poking in their chests to take out the palpitating scarlet hearts.

Maputen and Millaray also felt the torment, the savage pain of martyrdom: Licanray was calling them, sharing her agony with them. The feline and the warrior ran to the furious, roaring mountain, climbed and climbed; their chests open, their hearts bleeding, their brains melting away with

the princess's anguish. Finally, they arrived at the open mouth of the volcano which had fused with Licanray. One mountain and one princess, screaming, yelling, expelling their life in hot, glistening rocks and Millaray's woman love in infernal fire.

Her flaming blood ran down the slope burning her beloved trees and animals, incinerating her sisters and dissolving the pride of her race under the ardent lava of her ghost trying to escape the fatal marriage to the starving god of death. The black cloak the *machis* had dressed her with, turned into jet-black feathers, the silver necklace into a silver collar, the band on her forehead turned out to be a red crest and her dark arms gave shape to impressive black wings.

Free at last from the excruciating pain of fury and duty, Licanray flew to the top of the volcano to see her lovers, the warrior and the puma, hugged in death, their souls fused together in one beautiful, red tear-of-blood flower.

Since those times it is possible to find, down the slope of southern volcanos and hills, red *copihues* intertwined. Do not cut them, for if you do, you are killing Millaray and Maputen again. If you look at the light blue sky, you'll see the haughty, majestic condor flying over the crater of volcanos. Do not kill her; it is Licanray's soul wanting to kiss the red *copihues*. If you kill her, she'll die for ever.

Dr Beatriz Copello writes poetry, fiction and plays. The author’s poetry books are: *Women Souls and Shadows*, *Meditations at the Edge of a Dream*, *Flowering Roots*, *Under the Gums Long Shade*, and *Lo Irrevocable del Halcon* (In Spanish). Beatriz’s poetry has been published in literary journals such as *Southerly* and *Australian Women’s Book Review* and in many feminist publications. She has read her poetry at events organised by the Sydney Writers Festival, the NSW Writers Centre, the, Humboldt University (USA), Ubud (Bali) Writers Festival.



A FRUIT

A
A
A
A
A
Fruit
A Fruit
I want you
to treat me
like an exotic
desirable ripe fruit.
Hold me with your firm hands
press your nails against my flesh
like the Greek women do to test for ripeness.
Take me to your nose, smell my skin, permeating
desire, passion and saying: eat me I am your fruit !
Press your teeth against my flesh and leave the memory
of your teeth, your saliva dripping with my juices
running down your fingers, your arms, your chest.
Part each segment with your tongue and eat
each and everyone of them with delight
take your time, I am your fruit
eat me, eat me
please.

A LIFE TOGETHER

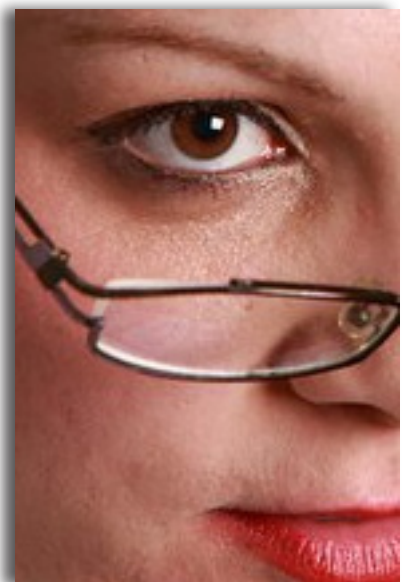
We met in winter
and holding hands
we shared a reality
interwoven dreams
which were like leaves
dancing in the autumn.
As petals of a red Bromeliad
we opened the door
to our mind and hearts
and we learnt that sombre grey
is made of black and white.
But like Uluru we remained
firm, our feet grounded
our souls ethereal.
Today fighting decay
we raise our glasses
to our eternal future.



THE STATS TEACHER

She was in my eyes
a goddess, a queen
her kingdom and domain
a dark lecture room
her orb and sceptre
a stumpy piece of chalk.
Hypnotised by her words
I tried to learn about
samples, medians and modes,
paired T Tests and confidence levels.
Statistics became
my favourite subject
although I was
In a continual state of
no comprehendo
a word she was saying.
I was null when it came
to writing my essays,
I knew more about her eyes,
her body, her hands,
than about tests of proportions
the bell curve and
dreaded hypothesis.
Exam time was near
my mind a tavola rasa.

One day desperate,
I built up the courage
to visit her office,
the excuse ... to find out about
linear progressions
and skew populations.
We talked for hours
in her warm universe
amidst dry flowers,
books, and more books
pencils and mountains of paper.
I gave her a lift home
and she offered me coffee.
I saw in front of my eyes
numbers, singing and dancing
when I kissed her.
After a few days we advanced
in geometrical progression
kisses, coffee, wine
dinner and love making.
In her bed I learnt statistics
and I passed my exams
with a proud high distinction.



© Beatriz Copello

Christine Stark is an award-winning writer. Her first novel, *Nickels: A Tale of Dissociation*, was a Lambda Literary Finalist. Her essays, poems, and creative non-fiction have appeared in numerous publications. Her poem, "Momma's Song", was recorded by Fred Ho as a double manga CD. She is also a co-editor of *Not for Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography* and co-author of "Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women." Her second novel, *Carnival Lights* is due out soon. For more information: www.christinestark.com



THE MORE I TRY TO REMEMBER

the poem I wrote while half asleep in the cats'
chair dreaming of black branches snapping against
a sulky white background the faster it flies toward
Minneapolis where it plans to alight atop the Foshay
Tower the shortest tower ever in the petite history of
Minneapolis its crabby feet securely wrapped about the spire.

Come back! It's not so bad here!
Why there's an antique store
and the lady with the blue
eyeglasses says we have
a strong tradition of arts.
Poem, be reasonable,
I purr. There's Lindbergh Park--
his family home has a ten foot wire
fence no longer scaled by anyone.
I heard he was a Nazi.
I heard he wasn't a Nazi.
Certainly there's irony in that.

There's my old German neighbor who
won't sell me the Ojibwe baskets she
bought for \$1 to hold her back-up mittens.
She says she never could forgive Lindbergh!
And I pretended to believe her!
So don't be scared!

There's the city government
ignoring its citizens—
won't even pave the bad
side of town now no one will
rollerblade there ever!
Not ever!

Politics!
History!
Corruption!
Everything you need
right here in Little Falls, Minnesota
population 1,083.
Poem, I wail,
come back.

But to no avail poem
skitters off Highway
10 into Rice and I remember
something about the light rail--
Yes, the light rail, I coo and poem
emerges with a melted Heath
candy bar coffee from
the local gas station.

Come back, I whine wake my dog
slumbering behind the white cotton
curtain dreaming of his latest shopping
spree at Walmart. It's difficult to be PC in
rural Minnesota, I state in his defense to no one in
particular, who pokes at the severed head of a Cardinal
deposited by a glacier one million years ago on
the front steps. Didn't last much after Xmas, no
one in particular announces to my lost Ojibwe
neighbor whose white wife wants my sage tells
stories of two white boys hacking up Chief
Hole in the Day's grave on the bluffs.
That's why we don't get rain.



continued overleaf

THE MORE I TRY TO REMEMBER *contd...*

Come to think of it, I don't even know
whether the Walmart dressing room worker
believes in being PC, after all Walmart pays
1/100 of her bills and she is 1/10 some sort of
Indian from Wisconsin that begins with a W.
Winnebago, my dog asked in the Scooby Doo
accent he saves for people he knows not well.
Think so, she said unimpressed.

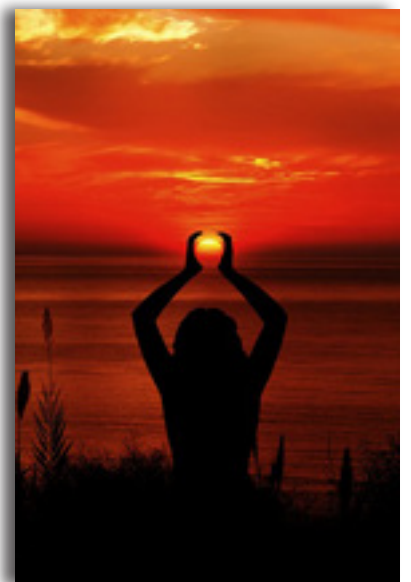
All I can remember I shout after the poem---
a fantastic piece heavy on lettuce, no mustard
three pints banana sardonic which would surely
bring me fame and fortune in the hallowed
halls of Minneapolis poetics where white boys with
goatees and thick black glasses skulk—is something
about what to do with the 1/100th of me that's not Indian
or was it the 99/100th of me that is Indian?
Whatever will become of that part of me!

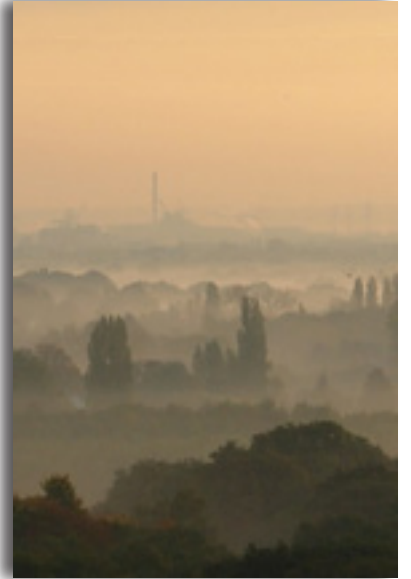
All I can remember of the dream is my body
separated: Second floor. Attic. Basement.
All I can remember is my skin turned turquoise.
All I can remember is the downstairs froze.
All I can remember is I swore I'd never go down there again!
Not as long as I live!
I would stay upstairs—
all my parts Indian and not.
Then who would be the one to
survive when the water rises and
the rest of you wish
you had a canoe?
German lady?
Hah!

Poem poem poem come back here I remember more!

They say there are three levels to the human body
They say there are books about the US government experimenting on children
They say my Ojibwe great grandfather did not ride trains
They say a light rail train will be built between Rice and Minneapolis
They say it will cost six dollars round trip
They say Freud rode trains in the nude
They say Freud was an idiot
They say there will be ample parking
They say it will arrive in downtown Minneapolis in 40 minutes
40 minutes!
Can you beat that, poem?
They say I will be able to ride it in search of you, fleeting
poem, clutching to whatever dirty thing you can find.

*Charles Lindbergh's childhood home is in Little Falls.
After he completed the first solo, non-stop flight from
New York to Paris, so many people visited his childhood
home they built a fence to keep them out.
Lindbergh supported Nazi Germany.





ANCIENT

I've asked the age-old question so many times free radicals are percolating through my veins. What are we, after all, if not breathing mobile coffee makers able to rollerblade great distances? What are we if not chuffing huffing trains pulling graffiti marked boxcars of green baggage?

But back to that age-old question and its effects on the normative aging process. Why, just last night in the health food section I asked repeatedly of the bleary eyed teen working the counter: Why must cats lick urinary tract preventing questionable meat source canned food off a spoon with the covers down and sheets exposed as if---and this is the key---as if they were licking meaty ice cream cones? I believe I nearly imploded on the last word for I feel strongly that this behavior trivializes my love for not to mention the much needed calcium source of McDonalds 97 cent vanilla ice cream cones which I especially enjoy while waterskiing backwards down the Mississippi.

The snapping turtles with their spiny protrusions and ancient glazed eyes do not appreciate my antics especially when I discard the small bleached white paper encapsulating the bottom third of each genetically modified delectable Mickey D cone into their habitat. Not to mention the large swirls of rainbow gasoline spiraling to the shoreline where small children play with pebbles eating p & j sandwiches laced with flax seed due to its high omega content which fathers en masse do not allow them to obtain from fish sold at the supermarket unless, of course, it's been frozen and flown from Alaska where PCBs have been found from China but not in as great quantities.

For me, waterskiing backwards down the Mississippi while eating ice cream cone after ice cream cone is a spiritual odyssey. I imagine the sunset (no longer visible due to the feathery smog) in the frolicking gassy rainbows. I imagine once I was a frustrated orange monk with tiny feet. I imagine once I was born with three toes and momentarily mistaken for a giant sloth. There have been fleeting moments swift as a finch's hiccup when I've imagined those spiny protrusions to be fingers pointing at us all but I've snapped out of it immediately exchanging my four dollar one prescription fits all Walmart reading glasses for another.

continued overleaf

ANCIENT *contd...*

It is said Tibetan monks smoke backwards.
 It is said flannel is warmer than cotton.
 It is said cats love to be tickled on the meaty pads of their feet.
 It is said 80% of women have fibroids because they have lost the earth.
 It is said Chinese PCBs are healthier due to the ancient Chinese practice of chi.
 It is said it is more difficult to get into vet school than med school because people are sick of people.

I do not know if I believe any of it,
 however, all of it could be true.
 Belief is nothing if not a wheel without a latch.

But back to that age-old question that has perplexed
 philosophers and seamstresses alike for many million
 years. I've often overheard my neighbors plead with their meaty
 eating ice cream cone cats *At the very least, for Christ's
 sake, could you eat your meaty ice cream cones on the couch
 so as to save my imitation silk sheets from certain ruin?*

The cats, for their part, merely hunch their shoulders lick
 even more delicately and with greater precision.
 It's been reported that every once in a while one
 flexes a foot as if to say tickle my meaty
 pad while I lick my meaty ice cream
 cone in your bed with the sheets exposed.

What is known is spitlets of questionable meat
 fall no matter what for that is the nature of ice cream
 cone consumption. What else is known: we all plead,
 whether we know it or not, *Please make the damage less.*



Nataša Velikonja (1967) is a sociologist, poet, essayist, translator, lesbian activist. She has published six books of poetry; her first poetry collection from 1994 is considered to be the first openly lesbian poetry book in Slovenia. She is also the author of four books of essays. She is also a translator: she translated several works of lesbian and gay theory and radical social criticism. She was an editor of *Lesbo* magazine and a founder of the *Lesbian Library and Archive* in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

All poems are taken from the book "Stay" ("Ostani"), Skuc Publishing House, Ljubljana / Slovenia / European Union, 2014; translated by Spela Bibic. Copyrights: Natasa Velikonja.

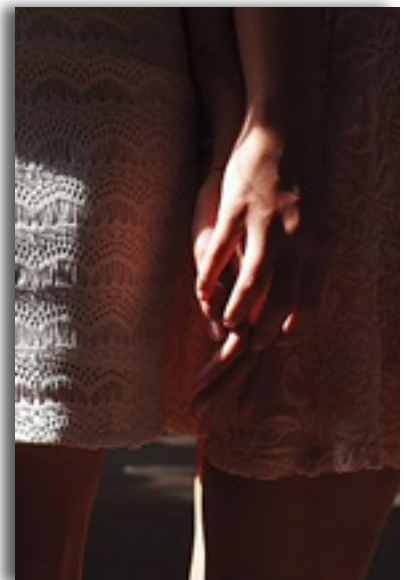


THIS COULD BE FUN

when I told her, *I'm in love with you*, she said she liked it because lesbians don't say things like that, they say, *I think you're so cool, or, you have such beautiful eyes*, and when I told her that I was in love with her, the first thing she did was ask me, *why*, because lesbians don't know how to say things like that, she said, lesbians say, *I think you're so cool, or, you have such beautiful eyes*, she liked it that I told her, *I'm in love with you*, but she didn't respond, and then one time when I was exhausted from my explicitness in this mute world, I asked urska, *what do people think when you sincerely tell them about your love for them*, and she said, *they think, 'ooh, this could be fun!'*

PAPER CUPS

we're talking about survival. we're surrounded by ceiling-high stacks of books and the freezing cold and the wet and cold and endless winter and it's already night and the heating has died and we're drinking coffee out of paper cups, discussing survival. nina is talking about her job. she says that she wakes up every forty-five minutes at night. that she has nightmares. she says, *this is no life. lesbian activism* could be the way to go, I say, but *lesbian activism* is entirely in the hands of a specific amorphous entity called *the authority*, and it won't let go, and nina asks me, *would you let it have me*, and I say, *it destroyed me, it completely crushed urska, but maybe you're stronger*. but nina is, in essence, a musician, and she doesn't understand why she can't just make music and just music, because all she wants is to make music and that's it, and so here we are, holding our paper cups in this freezing cold, joking how she should write a *pop song* because *pop songs* have a happy ending and that would do.



THE NUDE

nina is sitting in the hallway, her face is sleepy and she is completely silent, she wants to be in complete silence, I sit on the rocker next to her, we sit in silence, I get out my notebook and I write, today is a homosexual holiday, *the International Day against Homophobia*, in the morning I see pictures of activists at the raising of *the rainbow flag* on the balcony of the US embassy, and all I can say is this: when I was a teenager, I wouldn't hang out with them. not to forget. all they want is to be there, and they would crush anyone who would interfere with their wishes of a small eastern-european man: to stand on the balcony of the US embassy and experience imperial rapture, if even just for a moment. I sit in the hallway of a nineteenth-century apartment building and next to me sits nina and she is speechless and dead tired and our surroundings are miserable and it's almost two o'clock in the afternoon and she got out of bed two hours ago and is already dead tired and we're sitting in this miserable and freezing hallway and there is no flag and there is no rapture, no country around us, and we're both scrawny, the people on the balcony of the US embassy have devoured everything, they have devoured the hope that *homosexuality* used to have way back when, around the time it all started, that the body would not be a cage, that the body would not be an empty and hollow volume, a long time ago I used to think there would be *more rock'n'roll on the scene* and nina thought there would be *less conventions on the scene* and urska, who says she only eats enough to feel full and not a bite more, while others devour everything they see, *they think that, because of a certain position*, says urska, *they're entitled to everything*, and so they think they can devour everything and that's why they have devoured everything and keep on devouring and just think of all the things they have already devoured, anyway, urska used to think *there would be more flirting on the scene* and, in the end, these servile, colonized morons have brought us to national flags on national embassies, and all of them are standing on that national balcony and we're here in this miserable and freezing hallway of an old apartment building, both of us scrawny, we're completely silent, we're whispering, we're listening to shostakovich's *quartets*, drinking coffee, nina's staring into space and if I look at her long enough, she looks back at me and smiles, rising before us we see elite postmodern apartment buildings from the seventies where they put up the moronic elite of then and now, and they're falling apart now, they're oozing, rust is leaking from their metallic rooftops, there are dried water stains under the concrete planters on the concrete balconies, the blinds are rotten and the shutters are rotten, nina gets up, goes to her room and brings me a drawing of me standing on the terrace of a modernist apartment building from the fifties, looking out into the horizon before me, on the wall next to me is a white sheet of paper on which she would draw a nude of herself that day.

STAY

let me say something about the past few years. I have been learning a necessary lesson: *distance, distance, distance*, an instruction in bold letters, absolute absence, and so the *surroundings* disappear, I can no longer see them, materiality has vanished, I didn't manage to kiss her, fight *distance* with *distance*, we remain without *a common view*, we recognize full powers in *love*, she who attacks me before I can hug her, we're standing in below zero temperatures, smoking, wondering, just like the night before, what we are doing here, leave, but they have banished vagrancy if it ever really existed, what is left is this *city*, we walk the streets, climbing and descending steeply together, do a circle, finishing under the arcades, we didn't meet, we didn't stop, I saw how we lived, we didn't create a space, we have reached an approximation, made an approximation, emptied the world so that now there is nothing left, and nina says, *I am the best partner*, and writes a song about it, we are here, but the signs that used to make up love poems have long changed, and urska says, *but I need the material world, my body needs it to function*, she says, *art is not enough*, and here, in my temporal and spatial proximity, a cataclysm is underway, and I keep thinking how I'm going to write old love poems, because I saw us so glorious and I can't leave.



Photograph © Susan Hawthorne

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Hilary McCollum is an Irish writer and campaigner. Her award-winning debut novel, *Golddigger*, which spans the California goldrush and the Irish Famine, was published in 2015. Her second novel, *Wild*, set within the British suffragette movement, will be published in 2018. She has written three verbatim plays about LGBT lives and a lesbian pirate play about religious fundamentalism. She is currently undertaking a creative writing PhD at Queen's University Belfast.



Emily Wilding Davison (11 October 1872 – 8 June 1913) was a suffragette who fought for the right of women to vote in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century. She died after being hit by King George V's horse *Anmer* at the 1913 Epsom Derby when she walked onto the track during the race to what is now revealed to be an attempt to tie a flag of protest to the King's horse. Above photograph is a screenshot of the actual event. She can be seen on the ground on the left. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G4fj9I_wQg&t=13s

FLYING COLOURS

Fear is my enemy, clutching at me, quickening my breath. My palms sweat, my heart thumps. My mind whirrs like a trapped bird, darting from the crowd to my last imprisonment to the scarf in my hand. I see smashed windows, burning pillar-boxes, the torture trolley.

*Fight the good fight with all thy might;
Christ is thy Strength and Christ thy Right.*

Ever since I was a child I have found comfort in songs. Locked up in prison, in solitary confinement, I would sing aloud against the horrors I was facing. To-day in the Derby crowd, my voice is silent; my mind does the work. The hymn calms me, warding off my fear and reminding me of my purpose. I am here to do God's work. The government is murdering Mrs. Pankhurst. Inch by inch they are squeezing the life from the leader of our movement. I cannot stand idly by and let them kill her. Rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God.

I have watched the opening races. The horses are huge, a world away from the ponies of my childhood. I did not realise how big they would be. The Derby runners trot towards me, taking their time from paddock to start line. A hurtling frenzy will replace this gentle pace in the serious matter of the race. Round Tattenham corner they will come, momentum gathering, hooves pounding, rushing for the finishing line. I will have only seconds to act.

The child in me would have me flee. Go, she says. Go.

I could go, as my frightened self would have me do. It is not too late to change my mind. Only my comrade Mary Leigh knows that I am here and even she does not know the reason. I could squirm through the crowd, walk back to the station and take the next train to London. I have a helper's pass for the Suffragette Summer Fair. No one would know my courage had failed, no one but me. On Saturday, when Mrs. Pankhurst's licence runs out and they take her back to Holloway prison to die, I would know I had done nothing to prevent it. I was in court in April when she was sentenced to three years penal servitude for conspiracy to commit an explosion. I could easily have been in the dock myself.

In truth, Mrs. Pankhurst had nothing to do with blowing up the Chancellor's summerhouse at Walton for which she is now facing a death sentence. All she has done is to urge women to attack property until the government gives us our rights. She has already endured two hunger strikes in the last two months. Her health is destroyed. She will not survive another. I pray my protest will save her.

We are in desperate times and desperate times require desperate measures. The government has been torturing us for years. Forcible feeding is a horror that I can barely bring myself to think of. Worse still is the abominable new Cat and Mouse Act that Mrs. Pankhurst is suffering under, a drawn out torture of hunger strike, scant recovery, hunger strike, which can only end in death.

Last year I threw myself down the iron staircase at Holloway prison. One great sacrifice, I thought, one great sacrifice to save many others. I wanted to put an end to the forcible feeding of my comrades. I have endured the violence of the feeding tube forty-nine times, each time wondering would it kill me. But hearing comrade after comrade being tortured while waiting for hell to arrive in my own cell was unbearable to me. The memory of that day still stalks my dreams. I must not think of it now.

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The words are a balm. God is with me. I put away my fear and focus on what I have to do. I have staked a position on the rail at Tattenham Corner. This is the best spot on the whole racecourse. The news camera directly opposite has a clear sight of me. There's another one a hundred yards to my left. Between them they will surely capture my actions.

The moment is almost upon me. The crowd is thickening, clotting round my vantage point. I hold my ground. The horses pass me on their way to the start. My eyes follow Anmer, the King's horse. On his back is Herbert Jones, the Royal jockey. Anmer is the reason I am here to-day. I note in my mind his height, watch how he moves. I wish he were a grey, a silvery white grey distinct from the other runners. But he is a brown horse in a field of brown horses. The hardest part will be picking him out. The King's colours will help. They are like no other racing silks. The scarlet sleeves and purple body flashed with gold stand out against the pinks and creams, the spots and stripes. But the colours that matter most are the ones Anmer will carry home.

My plan was to use one of the flags that I collected from headquarters this morning but I fear the bulk will be unmanageable in the few moments I will have. Instead I will use my scarf. It was a gift from my friend Rose on my release from Holloway last year, white knitted silk, Votes for Women woven in purple and green at either end, purple and green stripes down the centre. This scarf is precious to me but it is light and easily handled. I know that Rose will understand.

Across at the start, the horses are gathering. I tune out the crowd, entering a world where only myself, my scarf and the horses exist.

And they're off, a glimpse through the trees, a dozen horses sprinting up the hill, hooves eating up the ground. I face the bend, craning my neck for my first sight of them. I'm in luck. Anmer is out in front, clear of the other riders, his distinctive colours shining like a beacon. Quickly I duck under the rail. He's almost upon me. I approach him side on, reaching up, reaching, reaching, grabbing the reins, slowing him down for a moment, only a moment, long enough to loop my scarf around the leather straps. The astonished jockey stares at me, his mouth open, but as the other horses catch him up, he flicks his whip at Anmer's flank and they're back into their stride my scarf streaming out beside them.

I dive back to the safety of the rails, narrowly escaping the trampling hooves of another runner, pushing my way back in place. I unpin one of my flags, brandishing it above my head, shouting "Free Mrs. Pankhurst. Free Mrs. Pankhurst. Votes for women. Free Mrs. Pankhurst."

This is how I imagine it, Anmer galloping home under the colours of the cause, carrying my petition to the King. Votes for women. Please grant us votes for women and save Mrs. Pankhurst's life. This is how I hope it will be.

I do not know what happens next. What happens next will be down to others, not to me. I may well be arrested. I am not sure what offence the police would charge me with but there's bound to be something, there is always something. Or I might be attacked by members of the crowd, beaten and kicked, spit drenching my face, hair torn from my scalp. It has happened before. Or perhaps I will complete my protest, walk freely to the train station, return to Victoria and thence to the Suffragette Summer Fair.

The noise of the spectators brings me back to the present. A buzz of excitement vibrates through the crowd as the race gets underway. The horses' strides are long and laboured as they climb the hill from the start. It does not feel real. It is more like a dream than reality except I can feel my heart pounding, bursting against my ribs. Time is fast and slow. The horses are taking too long, making me nervous. I want them to hurry. I check my scarf again, try to calm my breathing.

Suddenly, they round the bend, a blur of pale silks, brown horses. Where is the King's horse? Where is Anmer? I scan the horses frantically as they pound towards me, faster than seems possible. Where?

There he is. On his own, a little way back from the leading bunch. I duck under the rail, avoiding the last of the pack. Anmer's coming fast, ground vibrating, crowd roaring. I approach him side on, reaching up, reaching, reaching—



AN HONEST TO GOODNESS FAIRY TALE

Once upon a time there was a charming woman who liked being flattered. (Who doesn't?) She was also very rich so she thought she might as well get herself the sort of partner she would really like. She advertised: "Half my riches and my hand in marriage to the suitor who pays me the best compliment. Caste, class, colour, creed or anything like that not an impediment."

Suitors came from far and near in all sorts of colours, sizes and shapes. And some were clever and some were downright stupid. "The greatest compliment I can offer you is to make you my wife," one of them said. She suppressed a giggle and turned to the next one. This one threatened to commit suicide. She said that wasn't a good idea, but if he insisted on it, would he do it elsewhere please? And a third offered to weigh her in gold, which implied that the plumper she was the more worthwhile - it didn't feel right. Then there were the poets with their sheaves of similes, some so outlandish that she was flabbergasted rather than pleased. For example, the magnitude of her attraction was compared to a black hole at the centre of a galaxy. She didn't like it. And of course, there were hundreds of frogs who claimed they were princes in disguise.

She withdrew the ad, realised she'd been silly, and said that this time she would give half her wealth and her hand in marriage to whoever courted her with the greatest honesty. This also was an error, because now she was subjected to a battery of insults. The suitors thought that the ruder they were the more honest they were being. The least insulting were the ones who merely said they were marrying her for her money.

She began to wonder whether perhaps it might be best not to marry. Then one day an old friend said to her, "I've loved you for a long time." She paused. "The only thing is," she continued, "I'm no good at contests, so if you're going to hold another one, tell me now, so that I can go away and break my heart in peace."

And it was then that the charming and rich (and beautiful) woman suddenly realised that to be loved and to love was the best thing of all and so they got married.

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Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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