PRISM INTERNATIONAL

40TH ANNIVERSARY

38:2

CONTEMPORARY WRITING FROM CANADA AND AROUND THE WORLD

FOCUS ON AUSTRALIA

WINTER 2000

PRISM INTERNATIONAL

1999 MACLEAN-HUNTER ENDOWMENT AWARD FOR LITERARY NON-FICTION WINNER

GRAND PRIZE - $1,500

"Put the Moan on Ya"
Mark Anthony Jarman

RUNNERS-UP

"Borrowed Child"
Bette Hawes

"Lampposts in the Cellar"
Elaine Kalman Naves

"Music Man"
Jeff Pearson

"Would You See Your Brother's Face?"
Linda Potvin-Jones

1999 EARLE BIRNEY PRIZE FOR POETRY

$500 was awarded to the poetry collective

Pain Not Bread

for their poems

"Sleep" *and* "Good Daughter"

which appeared in PRISM 37:1.

PRISM INTERNATIONAL

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E-mail: prism@interchange.ubc.ca
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Lynne Bowen & Andreas Schroeder

Renaissance

Allow me, as one of the judges of the first PRISM *international/* Maclean-Hunter Endowment Prize for Literary Non-Fiction, to wax poetic about the genre. This ancient sub-species of writing so badly in need of a less negative label has been in and out of style many times, but in the past thirty years it has been experiencing a renaissance.

As a writer, teacher, reader, and assessor of creative non-fiction I have seen this renaissance first hand. I have marvelled at the daring and beautiful prose of American writers—the Dillards and the McPhees—who have led the way this time. I have cheered as Canadian writers demonstrated that our non-fiction strength is not just in meaty books by Pierre Berton and Peter C. Newman, but in literary essays by Michael Ignatieff and Margaret Atwood. And I have watched fledgling poets and would-be novelists add inspired non-fiction writing to their list of accomplishments.

To write non-fiction is to be involved in a search, a search first for material in one's own life or in the lives of others, and then a search for a theme or a story in the material. To write non-fiction is to be amazed at what the world has to offer in the way of things that really happened and to test one's ability to create literature from them.

In her famous essay "To Fashion a Text", Annie Dillard, a former poet and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer of non-fiction, compared writing poetry to writing non-fiction prose. "The range of rhythms in [non-fiction] prose is larger and grander than it is in poetry, and it can handle discursive ideas and plain information as well as character and story. It can do everything."

Our contest winner, Mark Anthony Jarman, and the writers on the short list—Bette Hawes, Elaine Kalman Naves, Jeff Pearson and Linda Potvin-Jones—have shown us again that what Dillard said is true.

Lynne Bowen

***

Let me also congratulate our winner Mark Anthony Jarman, and those who made the short list. We were delighted by the large number and quality of the entries we received, especially the aforementioned. Creative non-fiction in Canada is clearly embarked on a long-awaited revival.

Curiously, despite the many entries, one category remained conspicuously under-subscribed. I mean creative non-fiction of a more experimental sort—a liberating, anarchic hybrid mix of fiction/belletristic and non-fiction elements that strives to utilize the full range of creative non-fiction's newly freed-up literary tools. Something between Myrna Kostash's *Inside the Copper Mountain* and Annie Dillard's *For the Time Being*. Or maybe something well beyond them both. Something that would utterly subvert the Dewey decimal system and drive librarians wild.

We'd love to see a few more entries of that kind too.

Andreas Schroeder

Mark Anthony Jarman

Put the Moan on Ya

MR GEARBOX

Light like porridge pours past our lowering plane and onto the Irish Sea and the pretty land beyond the water, a frigid grudging spring yielding a frigid grudging light. Every airport bar between here and Canada is full of Germans with fishing rods and I appear to not be dating Courtney Love. If I can just crawl to my aunt's house in Ennafort.

A wet cold winter we had of it, a hard winter especially for my Aunt Rosetta since her son Padraic died, slipped into a coma after Christmas and she caught pneumonia and a big dog attacked her leg and tore up a tendon. Padraic was once my closest cousin, his liver destroyed by a Hep C transfusion from the Dublin hospital. *This won't hurt a bit.*

I lean my tired face on a window in a British Midlands plane. The stewardess looks ready to cry, perhaps reconsidering her career choice, and I'm a flying zombie. Snow fell last night on the Irish coast, dropping on the soft hills and Wicklow mountains. Snow is so romantic except when it isn't. The James Joyce story *The Dead,* a ghost story in a way, posits a snowstorm at the end: *snow is general over Ireland.*

I'm expropriating Mr. Joyce's story, making it mine as a squatter might, because his sanctioned-by-John-Huston-and-Hollywood-yarn takes place in a Georgian house right beside my mother's mined house on the Liffey, her house now a **Mr Gearbox Mr Clutch**, somewhere down there if you could follow the River Liffey up along the quays. My mother's maiden name the same as Joyce's aunt. They say Joyce's collection *Dubliners* was about paralysis, but isn't it clear he mostly wrote about me?

I can't find my mother's house on the seagull quays, it's too far away and around a corner, but from the old plane a view of the smoking Irish Sea and coastline: ships and harbours and snowy fields to the sea, and snow on Dalkey and Dun Laoghaire, snow on Clontarf and Howth and the sooty orange train rushing and pushing to The Eye of Ireland, and snowy hills curving like big arms and snowy breasts nuzzling Dublin Bay, surreal snowy breasts dwarfing the city (*only if my love was lying by me*).

From the air I can't find my mother's tenement, but I can make out the Royal Canal creeping west in bad weather from Dublin City, the useless locks and canal where my grandfather who built so many oak barrels for Arthur Guinness went under the green water and drowned in 1922 at the

same time they were putting General Michael Collins in the ground at Glasnevin with his bullet-shattered head, and the nation grieved its martyr and someone had to climb the steps with the jet-black iron rails to my grandfather's high house on Usher's Island, my grandmother's house, my mother's house, and hammer on the big door to tell them that father and husband and breadwinner was dead as a doornail and may the good Lord preserve ye and my mother at age 83 still remembers the wailing and gnashing of teeth in the house after that and my cousin is dead too now, but it's '99 and not '22 and there's no story or historical romance there, Padraic's just dead after the hospital destroyed his liver (*the likes of that liver we'll not see again*).

I'm in Ireland chasing two corpses and arguing with ghosts; my usual obsessions. If only like a crab you could go backwards.

My cousin the policeman tells me you never get rid of the smell of a decomposing body. Sharkey uses Vicks Vapo-Rub, goes swimming in a chlorine pool, scalding showers, gets blind drunk on stout, and that tinge of it is still way up at top of his nose and he can't get it out. Different smell than sewer or shit or other bad smells. You smell the dead they stay with you.

It's always women, Sharkey says. Milk bottles or newspaper not picked up at door, no answer, have to go in. Open a window and recoil. They're often in the bathroom. Maybe they wake up, don't feel well, gravitate to the loo.

My cousin forces a door or window and finds them. Always women. Men die and a woman's there taking care of him. A woman dies alone.

Silently, my cousin and I think about our aunts, our mothers, that day down the road and whether we'll be the one that finds them.

The couple next to me is very friendly, talkative, and I can't form sentences, try to hide my face against the glass. They are flying to a funeral in Ireland and seem rather pleased, though they complain that they put the body in the ground too fast in Ireland. They wait longer in England. Barely time for us to book a ticket, they both say.

The woman tells me that someone offered her a seat on the small airport bus.

Am I that old now? she asks me. It sneaks up on you, she tells me, and I like her. Their friend is dead and I am dead, not fit to bring guts to a bear, and she feels young still, wants to explain what it's like, how sneaky it is.

My mother remembers the Glasnevin gravediggers. Crowds of other coopers and men from Guinness, a cooper assigned to each family child, and she remembers a man holding hands with her and the dirt thrown on her father's body and it meant nothing then, but now she's 83 and keeps telling me of the dirt dropping on her father's body.

I'm three months too late for my cousin's funeral. No one told me. We

wouldn't have known in Canada for years if I hadn't called. Can't blame my aunt: she had things on her mind. And it's perhaps easier for older relatives to not explain things they'd rather not explain. I e-mailed Padraic a few times over the last two years, then in 1999 there was no answer, e-mailed a dead man. I phoned my aunt and got a shock. I wanted to laugh for some reason, because it seemed so unbelievable. "We buried Padraic after Christmas," says she.

This morning I flew into Heathrow early, disembarked, breezed Customs, and eagerly ran miles to gate 80 for a 10:50 to Dublin.

Yes! I was so happy, making it to an earlier flight; the passengers all just boarded and they have room, and I have a ticket. They say yes, then look at ticket and say no. My ticket is for a later flight. So? Security concerns, luggage must travel with me. I plead with the man at the gate (the plane lifts off without me), then plead at counter after counter. There are several flights I can get on—I see them listed: Dublin, Dublin, Dublin, where now everyone has bags of money and a new Mercedes Benz. I beg! Toss me on a plane. If this was Vancouver to Victoria, they'd say Jump on board. Not here. Here they say I have to wait four hours. They worry I'm the mad bomber of Canada.

Trying to stay awake I walk outside for air, exhausted in exhaust and black British taxis, buses and pushing past zebra crossings and concrete ramps and tunnels and fly-overs and tour-groups with heaps of suitcase and backpacks and awkwardly flailing skis. I'm in London and I don't care (*when you're tired of London, you're tired of life*). I give up on fresh air, turn back inside the airport where I must collapse but can't.

I walk the wretched airport *(abandon hope all ye)* where a tuna sandwich costs you $13, tea tastes like clay, and beer like piss. Why am I so grim, so critical? Why can't I embrace and love this world and permit it its brute casserole and moronic languages lost in air mumming with microwaves? Just need some sleep and I'll be a good little boy again. Our gruesome obligation to sweetness and light.

I need to move, decide to go deep into the city on the tube, quaff a pint or two of the real stuff in a real London pub and then turn back to unreal Heathrow and catch my flight to Ireland. Still have hours; I'll be okay.

I fall into the airport Underground's shunting crowds of post-Asians and post-Anglo-Saxon yobs and blokes bound for Hammersmith and Cockfosters, Ealing shopgirls reeling past cricket pitches and bramble ditches and graffiti and Chiswick and Council flats and Wren crypts and tombs and magpies and meat pies and *punters agonistes,* humanity hot against the tonsil roar of other blunt trains, blurred citizens flung in opposing directions in a groaning world that must defeat silence.

On the commuter train I close my eyes, hand on my small pack, exhausted, just close my eyes a minute, fall asleep with the rocking, lovely

sleep, to dream I am on chunnel train to France, to *gay Paree,* and I have somehow slept through all of London's stops, stayed on train too long. In my dream a dark train, a tunnel under the sea and people are staring at me.

"I have to go to Dublin!" I shout.

I wake in a train in a dark tunnel, people staring at me. Did I just *shout*? That dehydrated panic of half-consciousness, of moving and not knowing where. Am I under the Channel? *I have to go to Dublin at 3:15.*

An older man in a cloth cap slides over, smiling: Ah sure Sunny Jim, don't we all miss the ould sod. Dublin moya, to get your nose educated in Moore Street!

No. No, I mean I want to go to Dublin, well, uh, rather than, uh, Paris.

The man pauses, exhales loudly. Well jaysus, that's all right for some.

Is this train going to Paris?

A man says with a French accent, It's Pay-ree, not your mangled version. (*All of Europe contributed to Kurtz's making.*)

So it is going to Paris. First they won't let me on a plane, now I'm going to miss my flicking flight. Maybe the airport robot is blowing up my backpack this minute.

A woman says, This train is going into London.

Oh thank god, I say.

Thought you wanted bloody Dublin! the man in the cap exclaims.

I do, I do. I have to, uh, turn around.

Several people make cuckoo sounds, circles at their temple, not caring whether I notice. We stop. Mind the gap, says the tape recorded voice.

Might as well be talking to the wall, says the older man.

It's not the first time he's been disappointed. He reminds me of my uncles.

I, I. I'm from Canada, I explain lamely.

Mind the gap, says the voice.

"Is Canada still there now?"

I'm in Dublin asking for stamps in a tiny side street post office. (Parked at the airport was an armored car. Coming in from the airport I note Mercedes after Mercedes—twenty years ago I didn't see a single Mercedes in the whole country.)

"We don't hear anything about Canada," says the postal clerk. "Now a few years ago you had a fight with Spain over fish. I knew a 65 year old woman, lived here in Dublin for 30 years but had a Canadian passport. They threw her in jail in Tenarife because she had a Canadian passport. 65 years old and never done anything wrong, never so much as drank out of dirty tea cup and five days in a Spanish prison. Well I hope you make it up."

In my aunt's neighbourhood I say "Hi," a typical knobhead North Ameri-

can. Locals reply *Are ya?* meaning *How are you?* Or maybe they're closet existentialists.

Are ya? I yam.

Sunday noon: restless and walk to get Sunday Irish Times for me and Sunday Independent for my aunt. I yam what I yam. I've drunk out of a dirty teacup.

I cross the tracks, church bells ringing, walk a neighbourhood path between ugly cinderblock walls decorated with barbed wire, metal spikes, broken glass, garbage, and evidence of a fire lit last night against someone's garden wall. Spray painted names: Fingo, Brano, Nixer, Derzer, Toss, Dayvo, and Harmo, the last perhaps an abbreviation of Harmonstown.

On a bleak warehouse street I sneeze and a man pacing toward me smiles and exclaims in a loud voice, GOD (dramatic pause) BLESS YA! He cheers me immensely.

I phone up Declan. I'll take you around, he offers. My sister met him once in Edmonton, says he owns pubs in Dublin. I don't know him from Adam. I ask for him in Hogan's. He hides behind fashionably tiny glasses, unkempt short spiky hair; in a band photo he's the vague guy in the back, but in real life he's a player in downtown Dublin, he deals with the banker for millions of Irish pounds. Declan opens trendy clubs and pubs and sells them off, hoping the string keeps going, the Celtic Tiger keeps roaring.

How much of the empire, I wonder, is yours, and how much belongs to the bank? He laughs at this absurd idea. Doesn't matter, there's always money. He owned the original Temple Bar: his bunch renovated on the cheap, made it look older, "authentic". The sign reads **Est. 1840**. He says they made that up. The next owners were told by the city, as the Temple Bar area was now trendy and lucrative, that the next owners must preserve the bar just as it is because the decor and building is historically significant, is on the Heritage List. Behind his little glasses, Declan is bemused.

You can't trust anyone in Ireland, I joke.

You're right, he laughs.

The streets are crooked on our pub crawl, the streets lie, twist, and it seems lying is the norm in Ireland's land of saints. Blarney is a bit of an industry, a game—tell a good one, confuse a tourist, keep a straight face and lie to each other. Like Faulkner: no duty to truth when being interviewed. Like me.

Declan slouches into traffic without looking. He's the guy at the auction who barely nods. He grew up in a house built by Guinness.

He tells me of English stag parties coming to Dublin. They move in loud packs like soccer hooligans—chant and yell and larf and sing and rotten fluthery-eyed drunk on porter and whiskey.

"They take over a place. English always been good at that," allows Declan dryly. Declan not too bad himself at taking over. Then selling.

Some beautiful pubs in Dublin, but a good number are so packed you can not climb in to them to get paloothered. And this is April. What of July and August? What good is a bar if you can't get to the bar? There are pressed tin ceilings and frosted glass etched and stained glass's bent crimson light and beveled mirrors and ornate oak bars and glittering shelves of liquor and giant chiseled doors under Georgian fanlights and joists and jambs and oak walls and wainscoting the shade of blonde and red ale, but there are also scouser drunks full as the last bus and spilling pints and waving a quid and cell phone bozos (*hold on I've a call on my other ear*) and Gordie Howe elbows and bleary eyes and no food after eight and it's your shout and designer labels and doltish disco and tattoos and stinking jacks and shite beer like Harp or Bud Lite (change the sign on the iron bridge to *Carlsberg—Probably The Worst Lager In The World)* and shall I tell ya good wan about the Celtic Tiger?

"Hi, I'm single and my friend is *really* single."

The pubs are packed in April and the great stone churches are empty, slowly closing their great doors.

My cousins have lucrative white collar jobs, streamlined German cars, Dutch beer, French doors, modems, modern kitchens and Japanese stereos and stacks of CDs in their new homes. Once the Irish worried about the little people and hellfire. Now they fret about *feng shui* and Microsoft stocks.

"Is there as much foul language where you come from?"

I travel into town and the train passes rows of identical chimney pots, identical windows, identical doors.

"Now, do you have to lock the doors where you come from?"

Tara Street Station Platform where a country woman complains to her daughter about how dirty Dublin is—dirt and garbage and beer tins all over the tracks and we're going to catch our death in this freezing weather. Never come in again if she can help it.

A curly-haired man talks to a bald man on the platform: "Shall I tell ya a good wan? Something on at the Cock Tavern, and don't I come in and he thought I was Jeremy, he pipes up, *Do you know what a gobshite is?* says he. I go up to him head to head: *Yeah I do, and I'm looking at a real old one right now!"*

The train to Howth is canceled due to lack of drivers. Not all of us are keeping up with the roaring economy. I nip down for a glass at Kennedy's.

Kids take the DART train out from the city and do break-ins. They run along the track with stolen goods. My cousin Sharkey has strung four separate barbed wire fences on the slope above the track. Weeds up in the fences now, hiding the barbs.

"They'd never get through the wire."

His neighbour asked him to do the same for his place next door.

Over a pint my cousin the policeman talks of busting knackers and sending them to jail and then at home he reads of judges and top politicians and dignitaries all getting away with whatever they want and they never face a chance of jail. Land scandals, kickbacks, bribes, offshore banking, yachts, private estates, stud farms, private islands, beef tribunals, slush funds—you name it. People in Dublin just laugh and comment cynically. The political scandals in Dublin are ongoing public theatre, like the coverage of the Habs in Montreal, like the endless trial in *Bleak House.*

It was a fiddle!

It was not a fiddle!

He's a scoundrel, a chancer!

He's no worse than the rest.

My cousins argue vehemently, enjoyably, at Sunday dinner, but the top mandarins won't be punished, other than paying a pile of legal fees to their friends' firms.

Mountjoy Prison: my cousin says everyone there is from the same three postal codes. What am I doing? he wonders. The poor knackers and scroats are born into it, no income, no education, they don't have a chance, he tells me.

Not all of them are poor. A neighbourhood kid gone to junk knocks on Sharkey's door. "I know you're on the Task Force. Tell 'em I'm clean. Tell 'em I'm clean."

This kid's uncle was a policeman who'd been shot dead, well known. The kid gets in trouble, the police ask for his name. You related to Fitz? Yeah, he's my uncle. They let him off with a warning. Keeps getting off because of his name. He gets worse and worse—break-ins, heroin, jump-overs (leap counter to rob cash), more heroin.

He comes to Sharkey's door just down the street. "Tell em I'm clean."

"Strung out all to bits," says Sharkey.

It's odd how I was so much closer to my gay cousin, but now that Padraic is dead I spend time with my cousin the policeman. I've really grown to like him. He's become the one who takes care of things.

I saw Brendan Behan vomit on the pub floor in mid-sentence and take up the sentence where he left it in the air in the yellow room. Wait, you never clapped eyes on bleeding Brendan Behan.

Station to Station: everyone has been here, moved in the calm chaos of this platform, alighted these steel tracks and switches. All my blood relatives knew this platform, Michael Collins, DeValera knew this station, as did every fevered famous rebel or martyr or informer in the Castle's pay, people coming, people leaving through this portal, Mom leaving the country for Victoria station in London, never having been there, she moved on

the map into nursing and then the Royal Navy and returned with her trendy weird 1940s hats; my aunt says my mother loved her hats, protected her hats like babies on the trip, and she took back butter to wartime Britain.

I'm taking the train ride to the west, sliding across the whole country, coast to coast in four hours, though it would be faster without milk run stops. Men fall asleep as soon as we move; done the trip a few times. Big ruddy faces, one man ready to have a heart attack, snorting and fitful, troubled windpipes.

I barely remember taking the train twenty years ago. I must have been excited, on my own, nervous, no idea what to expect in the west. The wild west, where I'd stay, fall in love. Kerry was too crowded, I headed north—Tralee, Dingle, Galway, the Man Islands, Connemara, Westport, following the coloured map up the unknown coast, riding rickety old bikes around each peninsula, not knowing where I was going, my life a pancake up in the air.

Now I have only a few days, a job to return to, darling wife and children. I have a languid train, slow motion hours to myself, and rocky outcrops and fields of broom flowering yellow that remind me of Victoria. So different than the train into London.

DOING A CROMWELL IN THE BOG

We cross the Shannon River at Athlone, out over the wide river, now over halfway across Ireland and the west begins. The river moving under our moving train is a striking scene: wide churning water and boats bumping below aged granite bridges and pleasing stone buildings. This was a crossroads, an important city in Ireland's civil war. The Irish mauled each other, ate each other, doing a Cromwell to themselves.

The train passes huge bogs where turf is dug out for fuel, giant trenches cut down into the ground, or peat pulled out of cliffs, a murky pool of water collected at the base. Stacked bricks of peat dry in the rain. How do you dry anything in this climate? Some long rectangular heaps are hidden under black plastic to keep the water off

"And it's free," says a cheerful American woman's voice.

"Ah now, it's a lot of hard work," corrects an older Irish woman, perhaps her aunt. There is much trash strewn about the countryside and I can see an upside down car far out in the bog, bogged down in the bog, likely stolen by joyriders.

My cousin Feargal in Westport lost a dog running out in the bogs. It may have fallen down a boghole. It ran off and never returned. Ireland used to be covered by trees. Not now. I stare out and suddenly want to know if there are coyotes hiding in Ireland. Never hear them mentioned. There were

once wolves, primal wild dogs after you or your dear aunt's leg. Were there black bears? Wild cats? You don't run across them in the mythology. *On this mountain St. Patrick rassled a bar and drove the snakes and Hollywood agents as far as Dublin. From this tiny bay St. Brendan sailed, well before Columbus mind you, sailed to the new world in a little leather bark and didn't he call his dear ould mam on his cell.*

The train is emptier as we move west. "Ah, we're getting nearer now." A man's lovely accent, a pieface like Gene Wilder.

The names along the milk run: Kildare, Tullamore, Clara, Athlone, Rosscommon, Castlerea, Ballyhaunis, Claremorris, Manulla Junction, Castlebar, Westport.

My aunt tells me Mayo was always the poorest part of the country. Old childrens' graveyards hidden out there, marked on old ordinance maps—perhaps babies who died before baptism. As a child I imagined these babies floating, told in church they were in limbo. Famine victims must have scattered into houses and hills or ditch or field where they fell and never got up, into their own morbid limbo. Why do I assume, when I see them in my head, that these were all good gentle folk? They might have been, like me, complete jerks. I love the west, more pious and savage; you move between centuries in seconds.

Closer to the coast, I see the big mountain, Croagh Patrick, a volcano shape rising over saints and stolen cars and sore feet on the July pilgrimage up the peak. I remember Padraic and Bernadette my Irish sweetheart waiting for me as I traveled up from the south to meet them and I was late, they were mad. The mountain changes position, hides in the walls of clouds, sneaks out for a walk, shoulder feints, shifts behind you, the mountain steps back into the room.

"Ah we're getting nearer now," he says, like a priest to the faithful. I'm staying with my cousin Nora and her husband Feargal in Westport.

Westport, the end of the ride, is a pretty town, laid out by gentry on a small river to sea, yet the town does not seem ornamental. Cell phones and Mercedes are noticeably less evident in the west. Why am I happier if they're poor?

A letter to the editor catches my eye in the local paper: etiquette for cell phones should be the same as picking your nose; please do it in private.

In Dublin, phones in every purse and pocket; five young people walking at you in the poorest Dublin slum, four will have an elbow up and a phone at their ear. A knacker begging on O'Connell will have a phone hidden and ringing in his rags.

Here, as at my aunt's farm by Kilkenny, the new generation flings itself about in taxis, while the older generation is horrified at such extravagance.

My father was in Ireland the year before he died, and he liked Westport, the locals friendly to him in a pub and he was used to England, the distance,

and my father carrying cancer in him like a fetus, and my cousin at the health club with his HIV hidden (*Ah, we're getting nearer now*). Letters and codes, something smuggled in all of us, a prize concealed in a box of crackerjacks.

Putting the moan on ya: One night at a restaurant my cousins Nora and Feargal's German friends complain and complain about their lives. Feargal is quiet on the drive home in the dark.

"Anything wrong, Feargal?" Nora asks

"Ah, they put the moan on me."

I'm reminded of Declan in Dublin snapping at me to let a pint settle. "If you had any patience on ya." The Gaelic construction informs the English colloquial.

Feargal points out fence posts that he likes, he gets excited telling me and pointing as we motor away. Nora has seen them before. The posts were planted from newly milled wood and the naked posts sprouted branches and leaves, they came back to life, walked again among us, so to speak. Like Feargal, I love this living fence. It's a shrine, a miracle site. This is my favourite moment of this trip.

Well, I also liked the pub in Leenane and how dogs herd cattle with their noses down, and the freckled redhead walking the windy white strand all by herself.

Feargal and Nora work as caretakers for a demented, driven absentee landlord. Sharkey kept telling me about this "crazy American", but he's actually from England and spends most of the year in Los Angeles in a gated house in the hills. Here he hates the locals and won't buy groceries or supplies in town, even shipping in his own light bulbs from Los Angeles, with Weetabix as packing material, and then he eats the Weetabix for his breakfasts. He has fought two lawsuits with locals, and won both. He is supposed to be getting away from it all, but he gallops from task to task, runs everywhere while barking orders and nailing up No Trespassing signs and building gates and supervising landscaping and earthmoving projects, fighting the wild elements, fighting the ocean's booming winter tides and whipping gales. His expensive new lawn has big dead patches where salt-water is sprayed over it by winter storms. He tore down a hill to build a peninsula of boulders and dirt with grass on top, to create more shoreline, create money, but this new point is being picked clean by the sea. When he is there, Nora and Feargal, by contract, can't park their car by the gate because he doesn't want to see it, but when he's gone they, by contract, have to park by the gate so the land looks occupied.

If there's a problem in the winter, Feargal has to call Los Angeles person to person. Will you accept a call for Uncle Ernie? No, Uncle Ernie's not here right now. Then the absentee landlord calls Feargal right back. Saves a nickel.

He has planted trees, which sounds nice, but he's trying to block his neighbours' views of the sea. If I was a neighbour I'd poison the saplings. If I was him I'd be more careful in a country with a tradition of torching the great houses, the rich and absent landlords.

Big black cows plough through my first morning, smashing huge round holes in the rich man's precious grass. Feargal and I shoo the cattle off the property. One nearly runs me down, but I wave my Vancouver Canucks cap and act like an idiot and the cows run the strand and plunge into the ocean, where they stand and piss into the water while drinking from said water.

Great tours in Nora and Feargal's car, they take me to lovely deserted beaches, white strands whipped in wind and rain, we drive under the eroded creases of the Devil's Mother and Mwwreelrea and other peaks with dangerous broken shale and limestone where it's easy to start rockslides and hit climbers below. Feargal went climbing in Nepal and came back a vegetarian. Nora won't cook anymore if there's no meat involved, not worth it to her, and she was a good cook, I'm told. She gets depressed. Feargal is tall and quiet, likes cycling, single malt, local poetry, and has a shelf of books on climbing in Wales, England, Ireland and the Himalayas. Feargal tells me of a famous Irish climber who was often around here, climb anything, took great risks, and died on a boat when a tow cable snapped and whipped him in the head.

Feargal tells me of a Beckett play, a small local production. Two men and a woman in three barrels; one male says a wrong line, a line from later in the play, and the second male responds with a line that follows the wrong line, and they mistakenly jump a section and jump the scene where the woman pops up from her barrel and speaks. Her part is gone. She is livid, leaps out of barrel and storms furiously offstage.

Feargal says he heard two men walk out discussing the play. "Typical of Beckett, isn't it," says one. "Woman hidden in a barrel the whole time and not a single line. Typical Beckett."

Doolough Valley, what I think of as a famine valley, clenching a dark lake with its closed hard history, furious rain a solid level force *(it's lashing* they say on the radio, *it's lashing*, Nora says on the phone). The rain's power reminds you that the Atlantic is close around the corner. I snap pictures in the horizontal deluge and sprint back to the shelter of their car; imagine dying and trying to walk to landlords for help, in this climate, turned back, to die by the hundreds on your path home, and the living lining up into coffin ships.

Feargal points out faint evidence of old potato ridges on the steep hillside above, empty now, no one planting potatoes, the ripples grown over green and the history hidden on slopes, along with old trails, stone circles, graves, foundations of farmhouses and abbeys. There was more life in

these valleys a thousand years ago. Ireland is booming but it is ghostly country here. Sheep graze on the old potato ridges, European Union money to keep sheep, but they cause erosion so now you can be paid to not keep sheep.

New houses in town or seaside all seem constructed of cinderblocks. "There isn't the trust of wood," Nora says.

A hurricane this past winter was named after a saint's day, many trees lost, as in Victoria this same winter. Feargal shows me where the hurricane lifted heavy flagstones from the rich man's front patio facing the sea. I can barely shift the stone with two hands; the wind took it up like a square of Weetabix.

THE WAY THEY SAY AMERICA

A reverent intonation of the word *America,* despite much anti-American sentiment and energetic joking about stupid tourists. America is where millions were forced to flee in coffin ships, America sent back greenbacks and rifles to the isle of saints and kings and poteen and Armalites. Canadians say flatly, *The States,* like heading to the store for milk or walking the mutt. "Going to the States." The Irish say *America* and it resonates in a serious note, a note they are not aware of, a mystical place far across an unforgiving ocean. We mean two different countries.

I see a new "lifestyle magazine" here called **SPEND**. They are mocking of Americans and zestily becoming the new Texans. Big wallets, big roads, new cars, fast food crap, bells and whistles.

I leave Westport on a night train and realize later I must have left that station before, riding that same train back to Dublin with Padraic and Bernadette. Do I recall echoes? Flirting with Bernadette or planning our escape to France to be together? Padraic and his saucerful of secrets? We would have caught a Dublin bus across town to the DART train. Then again, maybe they had a car. Doubtful two decades back. There weren't the cars and apartments then. I can't remember leaving here yet Dingle Peninsula is so clear in my mind, a beautiful country woman staring out to sea at the stone dock, the triangular shape of the Blasket Islands, the lies to me about trouble with the boat to the islands, engine trouble, crew ill, etc. Only she tells me the truth, that they're all at a big match in Kerry so no boat will run out there today. I want to go back.

Later an old fish boat took me to Inishmore, biggest of the Aran Islands. The islands used to get cut off for weeks and months in stormy weather. There were no mountain bikes, no Rock Shocks, no chopper flying in from Galway.

Fragments of memories: lying in the sun, the only person on a beautiful strand, gypsies and ponies and carts, mist on my sweater as I rode, a weird

night in an abandoned hotel, Irish bread and sausages nabbed from breakfast to serve as lunch, shellfish and tires on docks outside Westport, stone beehive hovels, shrines to Mary and prehistoric saints, walking wildflowers in The Burren and Connemara and everywhere heaps of stone and giant cliffs dropping plumb lines to the sea.

And now I'm leaving the west again. My ticket seems cheap: 21 Irish pounds for a train across and back. A certain kinship among those who rode all the way from Westport, though there is little talk. Most seats empty on the rocking train.

My cousin Sharkey was once on a suburban train in police uniform, young drinkers snickering, making oinking sounds his way, pig sounds. He ignores them but sees them get off at Bayside and slips off after and follows them. They stop to pee and he comes up from behind and whacks them both across the back of the knees with his timber. They fall over, pee coming up and over the jeans. "Did you have something to say to me?" he asks. No! No! He whacks them a bit more and they run off still peeing on themselves. "Willy out," says Sharkey. "Can't fight when your willy's out."

Sharkey tells me of busting a guy and his parents come to see him. To get him off? No, the parents say please lock him away, we can't go on vacation. We come back and he's sold the telly and all, sold anything he could.

Sharkey has moonlighted as a bouncer. Bouncers lurk outside most bars. They look like the Kray brothers or violent skinheads, but they nod to me: "Goo' noite, see youse." Standing outside in wet and cold while crowd inside is warm and dry and having fun. No bouncers outside brewpubs in Victoria, but they are fixtures here. Better beer in Victoria than Ireland. The stout is good but everything else is pisswater. The bouncers clap their hands to keep warm and call to me as if relatives: "Cheers, God bless."

And I'm gone. Do it England.

ANGEL STATION

A pregnant woman is killed by a nail bomb, London's third nail bomb in a week. The IRA blamed at first but it's not theirs. The woman was in town to see an Abba musical. My English cousin Judy produced the show, gave me a comp ticket days before.

Scalpers on the street are asking £400. The bomb was planted in a gay pub. I think of Dublin's gay pub *The George.* My cousin Padraic took me there in 1997. That could be my Irish cousin or me they're patching together on the bloody sidewalk. But it isn't. An animal trying to pull something out of your leg, nails rocketing through space toward your table of drinks, you're walking the city, or you're in London for my cousin Judy's

feelgood musical, and then someone is trying to open you up, see what you're made of. An older woman, a friend of the family, observes that I don't seem nostalgic for Abba. "Before your time?" she asks. I'm 44: how can Abba be before my time? Back then I liked Gram Parsons, Clash and Costello, The Fall, Joe Ely, Eno, Talking Heads, Nick Drake, Fairport and Richard Thompson, Wire, Magazine, X, The Blasters, Wall of Voodoo, Blood On The Saddle, Howling Wolf. Abba was not my cup of tea but my cousin is doing very well, she's happy with the show's success, so I'm happy for her. She is going to bring the show to Toronto, hopes I can fly out.

Shakespeare rented a room in Cripplegate, had a little hotplate and a black and white TV, bought a souvenir T-shirt that said **Mind The Gap**. I bought a cold bottle of Grolsch in Cripplegate—such beautiful green glass, a porcelain cap. Lenin and Trotsky prowling this city, Michael Collins arguing with Churchill in '22 and Collins signing his own death warrant, William Blake and Marianne Faithful naked on a rug, Italian scooters, Ray Davies and Chrissie Hynde wrestling, landscape painters, buskers, the great houses, my mother and father in the blitz, in dark naval uniforms, pinching pennies to go to a dancehall, planning a life for their children—all the same city.

A long walk from Angel Station to the muddy tidal river by Whitehall, and it's good to be lost occasionally, to not be on top of it. London's miles awe me but also humiliate me. Dublin is more human in scale. Both gothic cities seem removed from my west coast home: killer whales and eagles and fir trees and wildflowers. Slouch past imposing sooty bulk of British Museum, my feeble brain afraid to take it in; I will be crushed by civilization's giant posterior. *Roma quanta fuit ipsa ruina docet.* Her ruins teach us how great Rome was.

Once this was all Roman and forest. Now, overtop Dickensian tenements, I see futuristic towers in the distance, and the vista seems cartoonish, super-imposed, computer generated on horizon matte; I envision little rocketships flitting through spires of gold and black and silver, bristling with antennae, microwave dishes, all mod cons.

London afternoon slides into slate evening, expect to see Mr. T.S. Eliot sidling by, a blinking vampire on his way to the pawnshop with a typewriter or brogue shoes. I press into Bloomsbury as vague destination, walk by myself sit by myself, pass hospitals, dovecots, phone boxes. I make impulsive long distance calls, plunking in giant coins until my pocket is light. These side roads are a joy, London writ small: I like this modest quiet quarter, its tiny pubs this night far less manic than Dublin.

Thousands of taxis mill London; none to be had across the water in Dublin. Few trees in the city; Feargal's blooming fence posts in the famine valley seem a million miles away.

With planes from Turkey, Singapore, Kuwait, we taxi the endless Heathrow runway, roving hunks of aluminum seeking the strange path home.

A path beside the canal, my grandfather taking it home, the canal curve engineered like a railroad. Padraic lives close to town, renovating a Victorian rowhouse, walks to the hospital, platelet count down, checks himself in with a smile, jokes with the nurses who love him. My plane lifts, my sunburned grandfather dips into the cool canal and Padraic drowns in a coma, blood overwhelming his stomach.

Sharkey flies to Amsterdam or Paris, escorting his aliens, casting them out of the country like snakes, then he walks a foreign city and gets *locked,* seeks the Irish pub's good *craic* and dark pints (wild nights!). Back home they can't make it past his hidden barbed wire.

My plane's 1940s shadow bisects England's bright fields and hedges, April skies (*bogeys at 3 o'clock*) and I spy the X of a small airstrip near sandy beaches, near glittering water, the ocean below an endless gymnasium deep with sleeping shadows, our plane's shadow a cross, a Celtic rood (*Lord that I may see you today*). I spy tiny peaks like miniature versions of the Blasketts off Dingle, an edge of a world in gold and blue and green and granite. My eyes can't take it in, sight burning my retina.

Jet engine cowling beside me, its round maw will eat the air admirably for the next 12 hours. I think of my first flight from Edmonton International decades ago, Swiss Army knife a talisman from my sister, secret scissors and tweezers, my hostel membership and Eurail pass. I was sure we'd crash but I was stoic, then shoved back in my seat by the thrust, liftoff such a thrill.

My trips are blurring. I sit above the beautiful, overwhelming Atlantic, imagine a lone figure tumbling all that way down, almost wrench my neck staring backwards at the Hebrides, last hard edges, tiny peaks and beautifully barren shores receding, and some longing grasps me, that I may not be back. It looks Edenic down there, though I know it's not, know I'd find something to curse. The last stones sit in the North Atlantic and waves working over their faces, the last bit of land, the old world, and waves walking in like slow tinker horses.

I am not looking forward to the meal or movie, not looking forward to Iceland or Greenland's abandoned whaling stations and bomber squadron covered in years of ice. Not looking forward—I am looking *backward,* craning my neck to watch the last spike of sunlit stone in blue dreaming waves, and the last pyramid slips under, and on the plane a Cockney voice complains, "F's always saying, It makes you fink, it makes you fink, and I said to him, Nah, it don't make you fink at all!"

Eye Storm

Pinpoint.

My eye is the uterus
of my body,
everything kept in place
by the weight of it there.

The clamp held by my doctor
with a precision born of several
times repeating, a routine of
squeezing just the right way.

No barrier between the soft shell
of seeing and the small edge of steel,
the taste of metal
a dry tongue in my mouth.

My right eye watering through several
revisions of danger, aqueous humor,
bedside manners of my eye doctor
whose accent I can't quite place.

In the elevator down, after the operation
he and I are strangely awkward together.

I have just trusted this man with my sight
yet I cannot think of two words
to say to him as we walk through the lobby
to the door and say goodbye,

the crowds heading home as my eyes
watch him merge in and out down the street,
a small briefcase at his side
held in place by the fine bones of his hands.

The Moon a Window

When I was a dog
my father used to walk me past
all the things he thought would
take me through to maleness.

A birthday gift of cheap cologne
at thirteen enough to mask my
canine scent though my mother
knew that something wasn't right

the day I sauntered home
with flowers in my teeth.
The next day when the school bus
came around the bend my brothers

called me to the woods where we
chased deer up along the power line
until our neighbour came and shot
the breeze which scattered us

and I crawled home on my belly
to my bed, the moon a window
through my mother white and open
as she watched me sleep.

James Norcliffe

The Discovery of the Map

1

you need these lines these wriggles
to exercise the tip of your finger

the gift of the back road the paper road
the faint red line under a red sky

the scratched tapes of a particular pine
a particular corner of the bridge returning

each time or the birds rising from
the line strung across the valley

you need these lines retrieved
from the gap behind the drawer

from the unbalanced leg of the table
to offer all of those possibilities

that induce a wobble of the heart

2

driving along the contour line
of the biggest map in the world

becomes easy after the first decision
the windscreen a cinemascope tv

in living colour following the camber
wherever it will the powerpoles

flickering past like a scratch
in an old record the centreline

stretching towards you then
flattening disappearing underneath

the long pathways in the plantation
between the skinny shanks of trees

all those lateral possibilities

3

the line stretches up: thirty degrees
or so it seems crossing the gathered

contours slowing round corners
and reaching at last the ridge

the plaster of the land quite
crumpled here and painted

fixed finished under an enamel sky
quite unmoving until your eye

is caught by a distant flurry
there far across the deep valley

a car taking the plunge
leaving the map and falling

right off the lap of the mountain

4

in the darkness the children return
you are jerked into wakefulness

by the click of a key in the lock
and you realize a car has parked

they have made it safely once more
and as you lie in the comfort of a running tap

a gurgling cistern a descending silence
your arms reach for the landscape again

drawing it about you like a blanket
destinations blink in the night like beacons

stars of dark headlands of possibility
and a boat throbs steady in its purpose

through names you can barely remember

Vassílis Amanatídis
translated from the Greek by Yannis Goumas

Three Parables

The Parable of the Spirit

The name Maria turned out to be an infectious one for her—an epidemic. Her granny, who used to live in the same village by the sea, an ill-fated woman, was also named Maria. Maria's mother knew all about men. She had one.

The maiden daughter was given in marriage at the age of fourteen. Just before the occasion, she went about cleaning her skin with methylated spirits—all day long she rubbed her flesh with cotton wool.

The wedding took place at noon. Maria turned and looked at the man beside her. She took a deep breath and held it.

Maria's spouse—though lying horizontal—would not close his eyes like her dolls on the bed. That very first night, at eleven thirty, he opened his eyes wide and got on with it. All of a sweat, he pawed her about. She—not sweating—took umbrage. Cut him with an axe, Maria did; and covered in blood went down to the beach to wash.

(Maria is a barefoot bride in a ripped wedding gown who, one fine night, threw herself over the cliff. Now that she's breathed her last breath and spreads out brightly on the rocks, her thighs ooze a gluey substance, part of a wing, detail of a damselfly. Such is Maria
at the same time standing under the roof of her
home. She has remoulded her face in quartz.)

They'll find her on the rocks in the morning. At present, the night is still day. Outside her mother's house the girl can see far away, right through closed shutters, all the villagers quietly asleep. Through the rooms of other people's houses roams her mother stealthily. In and out she goes, unshod and unquiet, leans over washbasins, throws up milk, then makes for the neighbouring house.

At dawn, near some bushes, the mother comes out of her trance and has her say (where was the village; I can't see it; it's gone). Walking has made her feet hurt and her belly is bloated
outside the girl flits like methylated spirits

The Parable of the Bow-legged Family

The bow-legged family goes out in the cold afternoon. The bow-legged father leads the way. The mother is at heel, much of a muchness. The young boy comes behind, something of a surprise, long hair, down on his face, and likewise bow-legged (bow-legs are a hereditary disease, the legs like an embrace, one here, the other far apart, you cannot fit into an ambulance and your grave is wider at the base).

The bow-legged family goes out in the cold—afternoon—to the hairdresser. First, the father has a haircut, then the mother has a hairdo, and lastly the boy has his locks nipped off. Afterwards, looking nicer, they treat themselves to a pastry and—because it is so nice—go window-shopping. The cyclothymic boy will snivel but a little, and they will return to their wooden igloo—in the evening—watch TV and go to bed.

Around midnight bubbles float all over the house:

1. The father nods off, dreaming of tufts in a line—a lifetime's haircuts.
2. The mother is asleep, dreaming of a row of landscapes.
3. The boy, who in any case suffers from insomnia, sees a woman-long train with a velvety sound, without arithmetic and eights, no twists and turns—dead straight.

Outside the house, in the guise of an ordinary commercial traveller, he awaits the dawn in order to ring at the door, body-stretching Procrustes.

The Parable of the Three Dimensions

The incident did happen. And disembodiment awaited him.

First his build was impaired, then he forfeited his weight. Thus, in an hour, his body had lost its third dimension. His façade remained whole, only now he lacked a profile. Whoever comes across him in the street remarks, "Why, a landscape painting?" Protruding eyeballs, persistent ochre stare, hereafter he will see the sky golden, highly polished. But inwardly he grieves: gold dust smarting his eyes, the light no longer blue, only a view of homecoming remains.

His house, too, became two-dimensional. There is no space for visitors. Each room is a manuscript vellum, and he a marginal illustration (rhythm has changed; I don't reside, I illuminate). That is why at night he prays before the kitchen icon-stand, before the icon of the inherited Crucifixion, for a return to a stereometric world. Else, animated loneliness.

He is jealous of the icon. The two interchanged after the incident. The icon now embodied. First the frame undulated, the golden background shone cerulean. Thus, in an hour, with spasms of resurrection, a Christ convulsed on his cross. Below, a Virgin Mary turns and looks at the praying man.

Out of the icon she comes, in miniature, towards him. Her fingers proffer minitears, velvety footprints around the candle. She awaits the fire like a moribund queen bee.

He feigns not having seen her and crosses himself. He lights the candle and a cold flame rises as though painted. His body is transparent in the light. Stock-still, he takes his time observing the fire's deep-blue root. Afterwards, he goes to sleep.

A slight Virgin whirls before the blazing golden briar, having found it again. She wants to enter it, forget that she gave birth.

But the flame remains still, an icon. A portion of non-kindling fire.

Donna Salter Beatty

The Eclipse

The sun, warm on backs tired with winter, follows us up the hill to Buzzy's cabin. The rutted road is all muck and muskeg, slick as crude. Clots up on our sneakers like dumpling dough. Tim (everyone calls her that 'cause she's timid) goes on ahead of me for the last few hundred feet to avoid a big mud hole. I watch her clunky bum, pinched in a too-small black jacket, hands stuffed hard in pockets, like she's holding herself together. She stops on the other side and looks back at me, through glasses the colour of river thaw.

We can see Buzz from the road, leg up on the tailgate of his battered green pick-up truck. He fires the rifle. There's the sound of a shot, hard, hammer on metal. Not at us, of course: zinging beer cans off the woodpile, smoke hanging low. Grumps a hallo when he sees us, drops his foot to the ground and fiddles with the toothpick in the corner of his mouth.

"Mom isn't leavin' 'til later. Thought we'd wander up here, see what's doin'," Tim says, then, as if the sentence needs something more, gives a nasal heehaw. Her shoulders rise up and down, she looks like a bobbing sausage in her tight coat. It drives me nuts the way she sticks a laugh in every sentence. I give her a look. She looks back at me and blinks hard a few times, like her eyes are gulping for air.

"Take a shot, eh!" Buzzy says, handing me the gun. Takes a pouch of Drum from his cowboy shirt and begins to roll a cigarette. I take aim at a beer can, foot up on the gate. I shoot, and end up ass over teakettle in the mud. Buzzy laughs.

"Girls!" he snorts. "Can't handle no three ott six, eh?"

Tim looks at me on the ground and rolls her eyes. Those eyes look like they're yawning through the thick glasses. I glare back at her. At least he gives me the damn gun, she could stand there all damn day and no one would give it to her. Pick myself up from the mud, and scuff off the slime from my butt. Take up the gun and reload. Bang! Sure as shit I cracked something in my shoulder, but I'm still standing. And I hit the damn can! Don't dare shake my shoulder out, just drop the hot gun on the lip of the pick-up and go into the cabin with a toss of my head. Hear the sound of Crunch's wheezy teenage laugh as the door swings shut.

Inside is that dumb girl Ella. So dumb her eyes are clouds. Can't imagine what Buzzy sees in her, but there she is, five months pregnant, and starting

to show. Says he'll marry her when it's time. No one ever talks to her. It's just like she's furniture. She has black circles under her eyes, and her hair is like oily, colourless, spaghetti. Skin like wax paper. Quit school in grade seven. She's fifteen, only a year older than Tim and me, but she looks forty. Most of her teeth are already gone. She's so dumb, she stands with her mouth open, too stupid to try to hide her bad teeth. I walk past her. There's an aroma of stale nuts.

The cabin smells of kerosene, cigarettes and bacon grease. Cardboard covers the floor, transparent with grease, the corrugated rolls like rows of worms under a slick skin. Newspaper is stuffed in the walls between the studs to keep the wind out. Three pieces of avocado green paneling are nailed over the wall by the wood stove. The stove the only thing that smells good here, but everyone's house smells bad, so you don't notice so much. The only houses that smell worse are the ones with chemical toilets, or kids that pee the bed.

Tim has dropped onto the sofa, thick with old wadded quilts covering the springs. An old wood cable spool serves as a coffee table. Crunch galumphs into the kitchen and opens a beer. Guzzles it, wipes the back of his hand over his pimply chin and smiles at me, his yellow teeth punctuated by black commas of decay. I smile back and cross my eyes. Crunch puts a tape in the eight-track which is connected to a truck battery. "Which Way You Going Billy?" cackles out of a lone car speaker hung on the wall by a coat hanger.

Another truck pulls up. We can hear the engine gunning as it runs through the last mud hole. Hope it doesn't get stuck or we'll be out there pushing. Old tires fanning up mud like spray paint. I flop down and wiggle my shoulder a little, not so much so anyone notices it still hurts. Tim peers out the window. She blinks enough that I know it's him. Her head bobs, and her droopy shoulders jump up and down. A nervous haw escapes her nose. She asks if I want to play cards. That way when he comes in, she can ask him if he wants to play. She begins a frantic search for cards.

We're best friends, Tim and me. This is because we live across the road from each other, and miles from anyone else, not because we have anything in common. Except of course Skid. We both love Skid, spend hours talking about Skid, and walk by his house at least five times each day, hoping that we'll see him drive up. Each night after dinner we walk the road in front of his house, up and down, up and down. We back track through the bush, so we're always going in different directions, just in case he gets suspicious. If we're lucky, we manage to get a couple of smokes for our journey. Skid has twelve siblings, five or six are brothers and two or three are our friends, but Tim and I only want Skid.

Tim is pure and sweet, like a tractor. She never suspects anyone or anything. She's gotten used to being used and makes it easy for everyone. She loves to sing, and has a voice like an injured seal. Still, she wants to

believe she sounds good and I am so evil that I encourage her whenever it suits my needs.

"G'wan, Timmy, this is your favorite song. Sing why don't you!"

"Nah, I don't know all the words. Besides I can't sing!" She tilts her head and looks at the floor, but eyes me from behind her glasses, waiting for an argument.

"Sure you can!" I say, hoping she'll be wheezing out her worst rendition by the time Skid hits the door. I start singing a few bars just to get her going. She finds the cards and flomps on the floor by the coffee table to deal. Gravity does not help her voice, nor her hearing. She begins warbling, and I lean forward, looking earnest, praying that Skid's in the door before the song ends.

He walks in, and from my spot on the couch I see him screw up his face. "Jeez, Buzz, ya gotta cow calving in the livin' room?"

Tim's face is a burst of wild strawberry. She drops her cards and shrugs back onto the couch, joining the greasy environment. Skid comes into the living room. "What's all the racket?"

Tim's ears and shoulders have joined together in honor and her hands are pressed between her knees. "Just fooling around!" Tim says, pushing her chin into her chest.

I feel pretty awful for a minute or so, but figure the afternoon point goes to me and it's gonna be a long weekend. It's the weekend of the eclipse. After this spring weekend one of us may have Skid for the summer and in a place like this, one summer's all it takes.

"Pick up your cards Timmy, and stop moonin'!" I give her a nudge and fan my cards. She gets up and goes to the other side of the table and takes up her hand.

"Wanna play, Skid?" she guffaws, shoulders shuddering. Skid shakes his head and backs into the kitchen. Crunch comes in all legs and arms and folds himself into place beside me, knee crashing against my thigh. Says something about a moose. I guess he's trying to impress me with his hunting expertise, that being his only interest. I move away from him a little and say nothing.

Crunch is big, with a small head and ears like rusty pot lids. He lives down the hill with Tim, their mother Velma, and their sister's kid, Lily. The sister, Vera, is away, whatever that means. Every now and then, she comes home. She dresses good and is good looking in a slutty sort of way. She shows great disdain for her family and everyone else. Her hair is a different colour every time she visits and her nails always have polish on them. The rule is that you never ask about Vera. Though no one ever said that, somehow I just know. Tim once told me that Skid had a crush on her, which would make sense, her being a woman of the world and all.

Their father is dead and I suppose they're poor, though we don't know poor from nothin' else. Also, they've got land. It's not good land, but land makes you rich in these pans. They're aristocracy compared to someone like Ella, whose family of nine lives in a two bedroom trailer by the reservation. Everyone says her dad knocked up her sister, but I don't believe the rumors. I just think her family are a bunch of morons.

Tim and I play a few hands of cards, to make it look like that's what we're doing, then abandon them for the kitchen and Skid. Tim asks Buzzy if he has any pop and he thumbs her toward the door. Ella asks for one too. Tim goes out to the porch where the cooler is and comes back with three Cokes. By then, I've moved into position beside Skid. We are standing against a counter veneered with sticky Mac Tac plastic. It's covered with cute faded kitty cats and littered with dishes. There is a brown plastic basin full of dishes and maybe a car part or two. There's an empty bucket where there should be water.

Tim hands me and Ella the Cokes and Ella shoves a yellowed Tupperware container full of sugar toward us. When neither of us takes it, she leans over and pulls off the top. She gulps some coke down then pours sugar into the bottle, which fizzles and whirs. My stomach twirls at the thought. I almost barf when she swirls it around and throws it back. "It's good!" she says defensively, when she sees me looking at her. Her voice sounds like rocks hitting mud.

Skid is animated. He waves his arms and charms us. Tim stands on his other side and he continues on, about nothing in particular. I cannot remember a single conversation with this guy, but I am entranced. Buzzy laughs at whatever it is Skid is saying, then periodically berates Ella for some imagined sin. Fat ass is a phrase included in all of his gripes. I have a look at her. I don't think she has a fat ass. Ella stands in a corner, sucking at the syrup in the bottom of her bottle. Crunch leans against the wall opposite us, punctuating the stinky air with his dorky laugh. Tim and I wallow in the reflected light of Skid.

By two o'clock we decide it's time to head down the hill. We all go in a line through the maze of black stick trees. Crunch is leading the way. It's Victoria Day weekend, May, the beginning of spring in the north, so we all know what we're gonna do and we're building courage as we go. In the brush, pies of leftover snow hide in shaded spaces behind windfalls. The green furze of spring touches some of the underbrush, but mostly it's gray sticks, twinking up from the dead leaves. We come to a gully within earshot of Tim's house. We scramble down the gorsened bank, heady with the speed we gain as gravity takes us forward. We laugh and spill onto the brim of the crick, which is frosted with remaining ice.

The crick is but four yards across and not too high; still the only way to the other side is through it. A pool stands whirling below where we are.

Without a word we strip off our sneakers and stuff our socks inside. We fling the shoes to the other side. Whoever gets them furthest wins, although I don't recall any particular prize. Then we roll up our jeans. We wade carefully across, screeching as we hit the icy water. The howling turns to laughter and we begin to splash, wetting each other with freezing runoff. Crunch is on the bank now, peeling off his clothes. We all run to the bank and do likewise. We're stupid enough to get wet, but not so stupid that we get our clothes wet too.

We wail and scream into the cold water. Flop into the pool once, to say we did it. Head has to go under, that's the deal, but only for a few seconds, then we all reel out to the mucky side and shiver into our sloppy clothes. I'm very quick at covering myself, ever aware of my flat chest and always facing the other way. I steal a glance at Ella with her pregnant belly and huge tits. I look like a boy compared to her and I quickly grab my shirt. I look at Tim, she's getting heavier, too. Crunch slaps her bum as he walks by her. I pull on my sweatshirt and twist into my tiny cotton bra underneath it.

Last year I only took off my pants, went in only to my hips. I was a kid then, barely thirteen. This is the first year I go naked. It occurs to me that no one probably noticed, everyone is frozen stiff. The whole adventure lasts about three minutes and we're all running for the house, shoes in hand. I'm proud that I've done it, but hope Skid hasn't seen all of me.

Velma's at the table when we come in. She hefts her weight out of the chair and acts as if it's a surprise to see us standing by the wood stove shivering, lips blue, the men's testicles in their chests.

"Went into the crick, did ya? All fell in at once? Hmmmm! Guess I better make some hot coffee." She moves around the kitchen, and seems grandly pleased that we've carried on the tradition.

The kitchen isn't much. Plywood shelves, with faded dirty curtains strung to cover the contents, yawning over U-shaped lines that might have once been tight. An old, chipped electric stove stands beside the wood stove, and beside that a fridge with black fingerprints framing its door. There's a sink and faucets, where no water runs, a bit of hope from an earlier time. A green bucket holds well water, and a dipper hangs above it. The yellowed linoleum is covered near the door by pages torn from the local paper. People take their shoes off there, but muddy dog prints circle the kitchen getting lighter near the archway to the dining room. The house smells of dog, pork chops and pee. Lily is only four, and I guess she still wets the bed.

The dining room is where Velma sits. She writes poetry and letters at a table littered with papers. There are spaces where the papers have been shoved aside or double-piled. They're little indentations in the mess where people eat. Once in a while, Velma moves a pile of paper to the floor, and so there are hillocks of paper around the table. Velma cherishes her role as poet, correspondent, and historian. She's writing the story of our poor part

of the world. She's been working on it for twenty years now. She gives us periodic updates, like anything ever changes here.

Once we're all warm, Velma sets out coffee on the dining room table, hand like a bulldozer blade pushing papers out of the way. A can of evaporated milk, with a yellow crust around the opening, stands on a pile of magazines in the middle of the table, along with a cracked sugar bowl. There is a sugar-crusted spoon that everyone uses then returns to the lumpy sugar.

Everyone loves Velma. She always has a good story and a brawny laugh, so we mostly say nothing and listen. Velma once won a provincial writing contest, and she likes to talk about it when she has time, but she's always busy. I'm not sure what she's busy with, but I'm jealous of Tim and Crunch and Buzzy, because Velma's their mom. I know the poem she entered in the contest by heart. It's my favourite poem, my only poem; it's about spring.

At three o'clock, Velma says she must leave. She pats the table and pushes back the chair ceremoniously. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do!" she announces, as she lifts herself out of the chair. I chuckle at that, knowing that Velma doesn't have too many rules. Velma kind of lets her kids raise themselves, because she's so busy with her writing and whatever else she does. She sure doesn't get much time to clean the house.

Lily peeks out from the kitchen and scowls, then scurries out the door after Velma. We watch through the dining room window as Velma waddles to the old Chevy, Lily in tow. The car sinks lower as she gets in, and looks lopsided as it rolls down the muddy driveway. They'll be away for two days, and we'll have the house to ourselves.

We're all still damp and not sure what's next. Crunch puts an Iron Butterfly tape in the eight track on top of a battered old piano. He turns it way up, which isn't too loud since one of the speakers is broken and just gives off a buzz, like a fly stuck in butter. Then a truck rolls up with five kids from the reservation. One guy, Bear, talking for them all. He passes out beer as we gather around him in the kitchen.

Bear is tall, with long hair and bad skin. He has good teeth though. When he talks he holds his teeth together, and makes clicking sounds between words. His voice sounds like it's stuck in a bottle. "Ya tink we'll see da 'clipse good from here, eh, Buzz?"

"Hell yeah, best view round!" Buzzy replies.

"You can't watch straight up, eh? Make ya blind, eh? Gotta look in a mirror or through a toilet paper tube. Gotta big mirror in da truck to break up, eh." Bear says.

Everyone nods. No one knows if he's right, but natives usually know about things like that so we take it as a fact. Bear brought his sister, Bo. She comes and stands by Tim and me. We know her from school, but we're not

friends. We're not talking about anything, just standing around listening to the men. This is a favorite occupation for girls in the north: listening to the men talk. We only talk when we're alone. When we're with men, we're on active duty, smiling and all. I notice that we all have the same stance, leaning against the counter, one arm crossed under the one that holds the beer, goofy grins like we're waiting for a beauty contest talent scout to show up and put us on television.

Bo is the best looking of all of us (me and Tim and her, Ella don't count 'cause she's with Buzzy). She is tiny. She has shiny black hair that falls past her shoulders, and pouty red lips. Not too many white boys date natives, but there's probably an exception for Bo because she's beautiful. Still, I'm not too worried that Skid will go for her instead of me.

More trucks pull into the muddy yard. Gradually the party moves outside. Doors stand open and radios play. The music jumps between country and rock. Lots of people head to the crick for a dip. Crunch is in at least three more times. Tim and I go to the outhouse for a pee and she leads me down to the root cellar beyond the chicken coop. We find a cache of dandelion wine and we take a bunch of big swigs. Tim is no longer Timid. We bring up what we can carry. Other people have brought beer and swish, a kind of homemade liquor that tastes like nail polish remover smells.

The boys dig a big square hole out back, dump some logs in it and light a fire. Then they throw an old single bedspring over the top. This will be the barbeque. Wood smoke drifts across the party and creeps between the falling down barn and pig shed. Girls are sitting perched on the rail fence around the corral like chickens, boys are kinda hanging between them. My head is swimming and I go off to puke in the woods, which makes me feel better.

Crunch comes back from the crick and says there's a bear in the bush and everyone watches as he opens fire from the porch then staggers off with his rifle. He's real drunk by now and pretty obnoxious, so no one is about to argue with him.

Bear starts breaking up the mirror he brought with a rock. He's handing out palm-sized chunks so people can watch the eclipse without going blind. He explains about going blind to everyone for the fifth time.

I wander into the house to get some water. My mouth tastes like I've licked a trailer hitch. The water from the bucket is skunky, but better than the taste in my mouth. I gulp down the first glass, then swish some around in my mouth and spit it into a slop pail that I pull from under the sink. My head hurts, and I like the cool quiet in the house, so I go into the living room.

I find Skid alone in there, just sitting on the ratty old couch, drinking a beer. I sit on the sofa beside him and ask what's up. We talk for a few minutes. I'm jittery, being alone with him and all. I start rattling on about the

eclipse and he presses his finger to my lips to quiet me.

"Sorry!" I say and lean back against the sofa, head down, hands pressed between my knees, about ready to die. He puts his arm around me, puts a finger under my chin and turns my face to his. I wriggle around a little toward him, not sure if he'll kiss me, or what, and not sure if he does, whether I'll know what to do. He's almost twenty, probably kissed a lot of girls, and I've never kissed anyone except the dorky thirteen year olds in my class.

He smiles and kisses me on the lips. He opens my mouth with his tongue, which I find shocking. This is my first French kiss and his tongue feels a little like a slug in my mouth. He tastes like yeast and cigarettes. My inside arm is in an uncomfortable position and I feel like I have a kink in my neck. After a few minutes I relax and start liking the way kissing him feels.

We're necking for a long time before Tim staggers in and sees us. Her eyes meet mine for a second and I see that she's hurt, but then she weaves her way out of the room. I feel the tiniest bit of sadness, but close my eyes and concentrate on kissing Skid, hoping that he likes the way I'm doing it. I wonder if he knows that Tim likes him too.

After a while I pull away and look at him. His eyes are pale blue, his hair is the colour of wet straw. I've watched him for months, but never been this close. His arms feel like they've fallen in the right place. The room no longer spins. I am so happy, but the one person I could tell this to will not want to hear about it. Skid smiles, and kisses me again.

It's nearly six o'clock, the eclipse is coming. People start shouting, gathering in the old corral, spooking Tim's lame old nag. I go out too, with my new boyfriend. We hold hands, stand in the muck-filled yard, craning our necks to the sky. But then we look away quickly, just in case the Indian story about going blind is true. Skid kisses my forehead, and I look around to see if Tim is seeing. She's not there. I have a feeling of dread like I'm sinking into the ground.

"Where's Tim?" I say, aloud. No one even looks around. I walk over to Ella. "Have you seen Timmy? She wouldn't want to miss this." Ella's eyes fall to her feet and stay there.

Everyone is so drunk, and I'm keenly aware that something has changed. I look around and see no Crunch, no Buzzy. I'm relieved at that. They must be at the crick with their sister. Maybe they went to get her, and bring her back. I skud out back and slide down the slippery mud to the hole. The ice is gone now, carried into the water by dozens of feet. No Tim!

I feel strange, like maybe I've caused Tim's disappearance. I have to find her. I run back to the house. Everyone's still standing outside, and there's the occasional glint of a mirror. The sky is slowly darkening like a shadow passing. It's gray pink, like the inside of a cow's mouth.

I fly into the house. Into the dark of the kitchen, into the shadowy dining

room, I see the gaggle of heads beyond the window. I look in the living room: no one. Then I hear a sound, a groan, from the back part of the house.

I go through the living room, into the square hall and listen. I hear a grunt, like a pig, and I pull back a curtain on the room. In the gloomy twilight I see Crunch. He's face down, pushing into someone. As my eyes adjust to the dark, I see Buzzy on a chair in the corner, head lolling to one side, pants open, legs apart, a mickey of swish held loosely in his lap. Then I see Tim.

She is holding onto the bedframe above her head. Holding on like she's done this before. Crunch is panting away on top of her and doesn't see me. She turns her head, a half turn, and her eyes are frozen. There is no terror, no horror, only shock at seeing me there. She looks at me hard, her eyes black. She turns away, her face to the wall.

I blink twice. Start to put my hand forward, then pull it back, as if bitten. I swim from the room, careful to draw the curtain closed as I go. The light falls from the house like air puffing out of a balloon.

I stand for a few seconds, uncertain what to do. I walk to the living room and slide into a pile on the gritty floor. I have one gulping sob and then pull myself up and stagger outside. My legs feel like I'm walking through water.

The sky has grown darker. People are hoisting their drinks up and looking into their broken mirrors. Someone gives a howl. I sink to my knees in the mud and lift my face to the sky. I open my eyes wide, and hold them open, as the moon casts a shadow across the sun.

Virgil Suarez *two poems*

Ghazal of the Broken

after Hopper's Woman in the Sun

her shoes lay by the bed like fierce crows, hungry, crest-fallen,
one with its ear to the dark green carpet, the light shafted

through the open window, curtains parted, outside a windless
day for the righteous, fertile seems the earth on such a day

when anything might be possible, a bed unmade, a framed
picture of night captured darkly on the canvas, a few paces

more and she would go naked out the window, her breasts
cut against the jagged glass, but she stands with legs apart,

the light casting a long shadow behind her, a cigarette burns
in her fingers and its smoke rises to burn in her eyes, solitude,

she thinks was invited for those who yearn for escape, after
all this and still no one knows her, sees her there in the room,

in the middle, unclothed, unassuming, ready for the shadows.

Captives

I once dated a young woman
who told me the story of her Lebanese
grandmother who'd been abducted

by her husband-to-be from her village
and taken to his parents' village thousands
of miles away, sequestered, held captive,

and she grew to love him, in time,
but once a year, the story went, she dreamt
of feeding him ground glass and poison,

to avenge this terrible fate of women stolen
taken against their will, to places dust-ridden
dirt-poor, when their hands are wasted

in so much kneading, washing, cleaning,
their bodies aged with the light-giving
of children, those lost to new countries,

when they would tell of these stories
for another thousand years, women
held captive upon the darkening night,

among the hesitant branches, a river
like a flood of tears flowed seaward,
what ocean can keep such stories apart?

My girlfriend at the time never wanted
to go so far away, always yearning to return,
afraid that we'd both disappear, and we did.

Stephen Brockwell

Episodes

ca. 1000 B.C.

King Wu marches on Zhou,
faces east. A flood.
Gongtou falls. A comet appears,
horizon's dagger,
gives its handle to the people of Yin.

Pi Li, six years old,
catches a yellow butterfly
the size of her hands
carries its wing-dust
all day in her palms.

1833

Osceola, chief of the Seminoles,
carver of treaties,
carver of skulls,
after the passage of the comet
massacres a settlement.

Beating dust from the sheets
with a horse-hair broom
Anne glimpses a comet over the roof;
in the letter box she finds
a lost letter from her husband,
four months dead.

1337

A comet's slow procession
over London
precedes the passing of carts
carrying the bodies of thousands
dead from the Black plague.

Marion prays
for the life of her fever-held
daughter. The night her daughter
dies, Marion conceives
under her husband's shoulder.

4 B.C.

Instructed that a comet
foretold the birth
of a greater King,
Herod kills the sons of Judea
and his own.

In an Armenian forest, a boy
kills his first wild
boar. His father rewards him
with a new bow
and an unknown woman's arms.

1986

The steel, burning cabin
of the shuttle *Challenger*
explodes into the Atlantic.
The faint tail of Halley
leaves a disappointed face
before a telescope.

Opening the door to her daughter's
bedroom, Mrs. Allison finds
two moving naked bodies,
closes the door, never
speaks of it.

1597

As her ships prepare for open sea,
Elizabeth casts
a defiant eye
at the comet, a dire portent
feared by her advisors.

Alone with her son without peat,
mid-winter in Donegal,
a carpenter's wife burns
the legs of the oak table.

Clayton Hansen

on the border, roses

friday 3
francy's stamp hand
smudges and longs
to disappear
into the
curtained box
of saturday
when a man (a regular) walks
in...

friday 3:04
balance/receipt post
pack-handed
rubber banded
12 volt fan dead
time meandered
suck a lifesaver
contrabanded, repri...
man dead
man walks in
man dead

friday 3:15
francy stares at death;
foetal, stiff-vinegar lips
she licks her own pale gums
desperate for a smoke
and cashes a woman's
cheque:
yeah...dead...sorry
serve him all the time
sixty plus
over...
wait...
is that a piece
of paper in his hand?

friday 3:20
manager shows the medics,
shrugs, has a ten cent
discussion and
takes the piece
of paper, reads,
raises an eyebrow
and hands it
to francy says...
bin-it-burn-it
shred-it-spurn-it
slice-dice-julienne-it
no...give it
back.

friday 3:21
a folded slip
of paper
passes between
hands
over signs and
warnings
of counters
that can spring
to life at the
press of an
unseen foot-switch
and in that
shouting second
francy glimpses
syrupy red
ink
dancing on
border-white
like pouting lips;
the hand drawn
slow motion
roses of
X
and the
first two letters
of freeze
freak or
francy.

John Allison

Lime Kiln, Easter 1998

Beside the broken doorway
pause, recall another childhood
hieroglyphed on walls
dividing time, before and after:
images, glazed by years of
firings. Or those other
signs: lovers / looters / leavers
of their mark, the existential
I was here their familiar
riposte to the Egyptian
Death is in my eyes today.
Graffiti are these dislocations
then and now. My hand
brushes over the brick surface
like a renaissance painter
testing the fresco's texture
before applying the first colour.
In this quickened air—
burnt lime, Easter. Something
in the soul which always
thirsts. History here is too
slender, buildings such as this
must register our need
for temple / church / basilica:
some inward space for this
anhydrous culture. Something.
But it simply is a lime kiln.
Outside, the valley watches.
As though the word might rise
along a dark horizon.
As though the rain might come.
As though this lime
might suddenly draw breath.

rob mclennan

Bananafish Sunrise (for Diane)

colours happen,
        except on the surface of yr skin.

otherwise, every inch is covered, from canvas to countertops,
your toenails to the toilet seat.
    i had an aunt like you, old ladies natter,
that we didn't talk to much, or

    you remind me of a neighbour
that, as kids, we werent allowed to visit. all
distraction. when the colour is taken out,

                what patterns begin to emerge, the slow tide
of multiple limbs & monkey gods,
white horses dresst in pinstripes. these days,
you leave your house less & more, ever a magnet
        for random attractions & heat seekers,
the three suits that pulld yr pink hair
& yelld get a job, the one
                that chased when you ran
& took it to ask you out.

or more recently,
    when a married friend discovered
what the doctors knew, the small growth
an egg finding shape in his skull, as he over-drank
                to distract his fear. & you were the one

who leaned away against the wooden doorframe
w/ his tongue in your ear, quietly hoping
    he would stop, hoping
that you wouldnt have to hit him, becoming

inescapable, his breath
sticky on your neck, knowing
    that you never could, your hand
not even able to make the shape of a fist.

Raman Singh

Post-Colonial Mystery: An Elephant. A Girl. An Uncle. And a White Man.

...the correct understanding of a matter and misunderstanding of the matter are not mutually exclusive.

—Franz Kafka, *The Trial*

I

The uncle wanted to shoot the elephant but the girl thought the *mahout* was to blame for not tying it securely to the mango tree. The hemp-rope had slipped off his ankle and all night the beast had made a meal of the uncle's cherished garden. Everything eaten or destroyed. Rock-sized eggplants, prize-winning tomatoes that villagers compared to the budding girls who hauled water from the well, and pulpy banana trees heavy with fruit, eaten and trampled so that the ground looked as if a god had plowed through in anger.

The girl eyed herself in the cracked mirror, at the split image of her face and the long, black hair oiled and washed like a bride-to-be. She was thinking of the elephant's trunk, his thick legs, and the way he sometimes looked at her when she fed him a handful of juicy peepul-tree leaves.

"I will shoot the beast," the uncle said, drawing on his water-pipe, looking at the shotgun in the cupboard.

"It's the *mahout's* fault," the girl insisted. "Why hire him if he can't even look after one elephant properly?"

The uncle sucked in a mouthful of smoke. "You're only fourteen," he said, coughing violently. "What do you know about such things?"

So he has forgotten, the girl thought. Maybe it is enough that I remember. Nobody else has to remember, but I must keep it in my mind so that when the sun goes down tonight I will know that it is a different sunset from yesterday's sunset, because I am no longer fourteen. Fourteen and a few hours, to be exact.

The image of the elephant circled around the perimeter of her mind, its

thick trunk hanging loosely in the monsoon light.

"Then shoot the white man instead," she suddenly said. "Nobody will mind that."

"I have to shoot somebody. This cannot go unpunished. My prize-winning tomatoes! Did you see how they looked? Like poor children smashed by a giant's foot!"

The girl heard the sudden clap of thunder and she knew it was going to rain. The poor elephant had to be brought in from the rain. Maybe the *mahout* would take care of it, or maybe he had gone to visit his wife in the next village and would not return till late in the evening. In that case there was nothing to be done, because she could not trust the elephant to follow her into the shed. Let him be, then, she thought, the rain won't hurt his thick hide; on the contrary, it will wash his trunk and make it shiny and wet. Sometimes he pokes it into ant-hills and makes it dirty, or when he eats soaked-grain feed, the snout is covered with round, brown seeds, and makes me want to wash it for him.

But it did not rain. The villagers thought it unusual that the sky should darken and the thunder clap across the valley like distant cannons, the tops of trees sway like dancers, but no rain accompany the monsoon winds.

II

The white man had come one day and established himself quietly in the village. For a while he had sketched scenes of village life and painted the distant Himalayan mountains. Everybody thought he was a sensitive, peaceful man, and should be left alone. Next he began to buy village crafts and send them abroad for sale. He rented a room from the headman and turned it into a school. The schoolmaster from the nearby village had come to visit his grandfather and upon hearing about the school, shook his head in polite disagreement. But the white man had smiled and said, "English. The children must learn English."

In a matter of days, two low-caste boys had enrolled in the school, and everybody thought the world was changing too fast and would surely come to an end if low-caste children learned to read and write. The white man gave the boys Christian names that nobody could say clearly: Mark and John. The other boys pronounced them *Murg* and *Jaan,* for Chicken and Life in Punjabi, and made an obscene song about the Life of a Chicken who learns English. The white man did not understand the words and thought his effort was being complimented.

III

The uncle went to see the village whore. As he lay beside her, his hand

between her legs, she told him to ignore the white man because he was at least a paying customer. "Shoot the *pundit,"* she said, "He's always damning me for my sins." The uncle undid the draw-string of her pajamas and told her again about the destruction wrought on his garden, and how his niece wanted him to shoot either the *mahout* or the foreigner. "And now you tell me to shoot the poor *brahmin* priest!" he said. "Why do you women confuse me? I only want to shoot one thing, not three!"

She turned her brown body toward him under the sheet and he felt her breasts pressed against him and he said again that he had to shoot somebody, no matter who it was. He called the elephant an evil beast, but she reminded him that it was the favored animal of Ganesha, the God of Good Luck, and if he continued to think like this, bad luck would surely follow.

"No, no," he said. "Not every elephant is a chosen one. This particular one is pure evil because he has deliberately destroyed my garden, the best fruit of which I always take to the Ganesha temple."

"Maybe the *brahmin* did some magic," she said.

"No, no," the uncle said. "But it could be the white man."

The whore was tired of talking and climbed on top of the uncle. "So, shoot them both," she said. "And be done with it."

IV

The crowd had formed a ring around the two fighting cocks. The girl squeezed her little head between two bearded men and, looking at the two birds now being held by their owners, hoped the black bird, sleek and shiny, would win over the red one. She smelled the heavy odor of homemade liquor on the breaths of the two men beside her. She wondered how men could drink something that smelled so foul. She looked at the black cock again and saw that its owner was the young Jat boy whose father plowed the two acres near the mango orchard. She stared at the boy, impressed by the way he was holding the bird tightly in his hands, whispering to it, stroking the feathered chest with one finger. The bird's right eye looked directly at her, and the twenty feet of distance between them suddenly diminished as she saw the look of death in his stare.

It was a swift end for the black cock. The red one was too aggressive, making deadly frontal thrusts, the spurs digging into the black one's chest and drawing blood quickly. The black feathers were stained red like a poppy flower against a background of coal-black stone. The Jat boy's bird lay still on the ground, its chest heaving for a few moments before giving up altogether. Dead, he seemed part of the damp earth.

The Jat boy picked up the dead bird and walked home with it, holding it by its skinny yellow feet and swinging it like a bag of salt purchased cheaply from an itinerant vendor.

The girl followed the boy, staying out of sight. She watched him go into a shed, and peeking inside between chinks in the wooden planks, she saw him place the bird onto a butcher's block and chop his head off with one stroke of an ax.

"Stupid bird!" the boy said, sinking to the floor. He held his head in his hands and began to cry.

The girl ran away. She had wanted to go inside and place the boy's head against her chest and stroke his long, black hair coiled snake-like at the top, but she ran away.

Why are boys like that? She wondered. A strong surge welled up inside her for the boy but she could not decide what it was or why. It was all mixed up inside her head. The boy and the bird and the elephant, and her uncle's insistence that he had to shoot somebody. To make matters worse, she was puzzled by the lack of rain. As if all day it had been wanting to rain but something held it back. Like a woman approaching labor. The clouds and the thunder were just signs that the rain was being held back.

I know about holding back, she thought. I know about not holding back too.

V

The girl was passing by the white man's bungalow. He was sitting on the verandah, smoking a pipe, staring at nothing in particular, and when she saw that he had seen her, she stopped.

"I am glad you have come to see me," the white man said. "I can teach you to read and write."

The girl was afraid to talk, because she thought the white man could cast a spell on her in his strange language. But she was thinking of the black cock and the Jat boy chopping his head off and she was thinking of the trunk of the elephant and how his legs were so fat and round, and when she looked at the white man's cold blue eyes, she remembered the look the doomed bird had given her. So now she was ready to speak.

"I already know," she said. "I know Punjabi and Hindi."

The white man waved his hand, dismissing her remark. "Soon only English will do." He got up from the chair and put his hand on her shoulders. She did not like his hand there but she could not move away. He pressed gently against her collar-bone, the way she imagined a man must touch a woman.

The girl felt herself sweating and wondering what she would do if he took her inside the house. She knew she would not be able to resist him. He would use his strange language and she would feel inadequate and helpless.

That is why he wants to teach me English. So I can forget myself.

She ran back to her house, stumbling along the way, looking up at the darkening sky.

VI

"He's an evil man," she said to her uncle. "You have to shoot him."

"Shame on you, calling the *brahmin* evil! Go rinse your mouth with holy Ganga water!"

"No, no," she said. "Not the *brahmin.* The white man!"

"Ah, him. Yes," the uncle said. But by now his desire to shoot someone had lessened. The visit to the whore had changed his mood. "Maybe tomorrow," he said, stoking the tobacco in the water-pipe. He inhaled the smoke deep into his lungs. "We shall see tomorrow."

"When will you let me handle your gun?" she asked.

"When you are old enough," he said.

"I am old enough," she said. She held her breath, waiting for him to ask the question she had already formulated in her mind. When he said nothing, and simply went on smoking, she mumbled, "Today, I'm old enough," softly but firmly, but he kept poking the burning coal in the pipe and went on smoking. Finally, when he did speak again, it was as if he had not heard her.

"Not today," he said. "And not tomorrow. You are a girl, and unmarried. How would it look if I took you out to a field and you shot a pheasant or a dove? Hunh?"

VII

Afterwards, for years to come, the villagers remembered that the clouds had simply vanished, and a full moon was out that night. It was as if the monsoon had taken a holiday. The village astrologer later interpreted it as a sign from the gods. The girl said nothing to anybody but she remembered how the moon had tugged at her body, getting into her blood, turning her night into a restless wake. She was drenched by the light assaulting her through the open window, and she swore to herself that when she touched her body she had actually felt a feather-soft film of damp, cool moonlight against her softness.

The *mahout,* for his part, had secured the elephant with a stout rope, and told the beast to please not break out. As he lay on his rickety bed a few yards away from the animal, listening to the munching of leafy branches, he said his prayers and soon fell asleep.

As usual, the villagers had gone to bed early. The far-off mountains formed a dark, solid wall encircling the valley, their ridges glinting in the moonlight. The night watchman made his rounds, shouting the well-known

refrain, *Dogs are barking./I am walking./People stay alert!* Soon he got tired of walking the narrow paths through the village, and by midnight he was stretched out on the wooden bed he kept under a large kikar tree. The next day he swore that he was awake on the job all night, and had neither seen nor heard anyone about.

So it was puzzling the next morning when the villagers found the white man dead. His chest was stained with blood from the bullet hole in his neck. It had dried lower down the body but close to the neck it was still damp and shiny, like a patch of red paint on white canvas. Clutched in his fingers was an English book he used to teach his pupils. But there was something strange about the body. The lower legs had been crushed, as if something heavy had pressed down on them.

Suspicion immediately fell on the uncle and the elephant.

Everyone knew the uncle had been wanting to shoot someone; anyone. The village headman asked him what he had to say about it. The uncle was furious; he shouted insults at the headman and at all the villagers gathered around.

"Idiots!" he shouted. "Brainless and backward people! You think I would shoot the white man without letting everyone know the exact time of execution? If I say I will shoot someone, then it will be a public event. Nothing less!"

It was agreed that, indeed, the uncle's past behavior had always been spectacular, and that he was not the kind of man to do things in the dark of night. The villagers shook their heads, at a loss for what to do next. The *brahmin,* claiming to be nothing less than honest and devout, said that he was glad the foreigner had been killed, though he knew it was a sin to take anyone's life. One by one, the villagers expressed their opinion. Nobody was unduly upset. Their attention turned to the condition of the dead man's legs. The elders walked to where the elephant, now squatting and slumbering, was tied up. The *mahout* was busy doing his laundry, soaping a shirt in a tin bucket. He threw the pinkish water out, wrung the shirt and hung it across a low, leafless branch.

"I've been dyeing my shirt," he explained, as a villager stared curiously at the puddle of coloured water.

The elders inspected the elephant's rope. Nothing indicated that it had been tampered with. The *mahout* swore upon his ancestors that the elephant had not moved from his spot all night.

The girl stood to one side, watching the elders scratching their heads for answers to the mystery. Finally she spoke. "Even if the legs are crushed, the elephant certainly didn't shoot him."

VIII

"You started the whole mess!" the girl said to her uncle. "About shooting someone."

"I don't know what got into me," the uncle said. "Of course it must have had something to do with the garden. But also when I saw you standing before me yesterday morning and you looking so grown up and the damned rain always on the verge of coming down but holding back, and then my tomatoes all smashed up by that filthy beast. Well, that somehow provoked me. That's all I can say."

When he went to see the whore to satisfy the strange—not sexual, he thought—feeling in his whole being, she too repeated the girl's sentiment.

"What made you want to kill someone in the first place?" she demanded.

The uncle ran his fingers through his hair. The uncle shrugged. The uncle stared at the whore's night-black eyes. The uncle thought about what the niece had said. The uncle thought about the dead white man and the *brahmin* and the elephant and the *mahout.* The uncle looked up at the sky, wondering when it would rain again. But he could not say what had made him want to shoot someone yesterday.

"Don't you sometimes get up one day and want to kill somebody?" he asked.

"Every blessed day I want to kill some bastard," the whore said.

"Then let it go," the uncle said. "What I wanted has somehow come to pass. My wish has been granted."

"Yes," the whore said indignantly. "Like I have always wished to be a princess but I'm not! So I end up a whore! And you were destined to be my best customer. Did you at least bring some money this time?"

He told her that he felt like shooting her too. She started to laugh. He threw her back on the bed and fell on her. His hands were awkward as he tried to get her clothes off.

IX

The girl did not say anything to him when he came home for an afternoon nap. Before stretching himself out on the bed, he asked her to bring him a glass of cold water, and when she handed it to him, he said that the damned corpse was beginning to smell in the heat and humidity and the flies were feasting off the carcass. Something had to be done quickly.

In the evening when the air was cooler, the villagers wrapped the body in sheets and carried it across the fields and through the tall *terai* reeds—fondly called "elephant-grass" by the villagers—to the banks of the holy Ganga river. Nobody said a prayer because nobody knew one in English. The *brahmin* thought it inappropriate to utter sacred Sanskrit verses in the

service of a low-caste white man.

They eased the body into the dark river. The current carried it away.

The girl was hiding in the reeds, spying on the event, and to her the floating body resembled a black snake ready to prey on anybody that came by.

She hurried back to the house before her uncle arrived. As she ran through the grass, the long, broad blades scratching her face, she felt the first rain-drops, large as silver coins, fall on her bare arms.

Upon entering the house she collapsed on the bed, trying to catch her breath. She did not like all this talk about shooting people and she did not like to think of the elephant destroying the garden. The rain on the roof popped like gunfire, and she liked listening to it. She closed her eyes. Next year, she was sure they would remember her birthday.

It would be good to get back to normal, she thought. An elephant was the reincarnation of Ganesha, the bringer of good luck, offspring of Shiva and Parvati, and able to perform miracles. Of course the ignorant white man could not know of such things.

She prayed the elephant was securely tied for the night or the whole thing would start again.

She heard footsteps. She opened her eyes.

Her uncle stood in the doorway. She knew what he was going to say, what he was going to do.

Gwendolen Gross

Drowning Practice

Ben was thirty-eight, but he'd practiced drowning since the summer he turned eleven—the summer in Maine before his parents split for the first time. Practice, he remembered his clarinet teacher saying, is everything. His sixth-grade clarinet teacher had adult acne; his face was like a topographical map of a bombed landscape. Ben didn't practice clarinet then, he'd just come to each lesson and read the notes, fresh and greedy, hungry for the accident of music.

Now Ben practiced. He was second chair in the San Diego Symphony, and even now, while the orchestra was striking for a better union contract, Ben sat in his narrow music room every day and played through his part. Tchaikovsky's 5th, Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*. He played last year's program, too, to keep his breath. He didn't skip pages between parts, he counted out twenty-two measures of rests, hearing the strings chase from cello to violin across the silence.

A few months ago, Ben's girlfriend, Sylvia, moved into his California craftsman cottage on a wide street near downtown La Jolla. She had long thin brown hair she kept in a ropy ponytail, wrapped over one shoulder like a stole. Since Sylvia, Ben had become aware of the details of his beach town. She intensified his senses—because of her, he noticed the sour salt breezes, the tangy hot winds from Santa Ana, the thickening of the air before a quick light shower spread the scent of night-blooming jasmine.

Within a week of moving in, Sylvia discovered three pomegranate trees dropping fruit on his block's sidewalk and brought home pomegranates. She left books open on the couch like sleeping children and taught him how to make guacamole in his food processor instead of mashing by hand. She added small things to the house: a collection of stones distributed on the windowsills and other blank spaces—freckled orbs, flat tablet stones, stone jellybeans—a single weathered leather sandal in the hallway, cobalt blue egg cups crowded like spectators on the counter. These things made his house seem lively and used. He almost couldn't bear it; he imagined what would happen if she left, that the walls would fold without her photographs and dry-matted botanical prints, that the counter would collapse without the egg-cups.

Before she was widowed, Sylvia had been married to a quiet man for ten years, and though her past was sweet, she relished Ben's music. She told

him she felt like he was serenading her while she sat in her office corner of the living room revising spreadsheets for clients. Ben had never noticed his own sound when he was practicing. He only thought about his clarinet voice when he was performing, when the swell of bassoon and flute mingled with his own alto song. But when he was practicing, he paid attention to breath and embouchure, to phrase; he heard what the notes on the page told him; he heard disembodied perfection.

He also still practiced drowning, and he was so good at it by now that he could hand-under-hand down the buoy chain out at La Jolla cove, about a mile north of the station, without alerting the expert eye of the lifeguards. The kelp wrapped his limbs as he climbed down, the quick tug helped him practice, lifted the pleasure of panic from his belly to his throat. He would wait until his breath was gone, the slow stream of gas in liquid lifted to the surface, until he could see the surface shadows of oxygen deprivation closing like a camera's aperture. Then he'd take a tiny inhalation of the sea, just checking to see whether his lungs had adapted overnight so he could breathe salt water. As soon as he started choking, he'd surface and spit. He could do it without gagging too much; he'd keep his body below and just let his mouth do the work of revival while he tread water and let the scare filter from him.

Ben rarely felt much when he did it now, but he still kept at it as if training. He swam almost every day and practiced at least twice a week, at least before Sylvia moved in. When he first moved to La Jolla he'd been rescued twice—true failure—so he had to let a day or two pass if he could tell someone was watching. The lifeguards always watched the sea for mistakes, the cracked cursive of a tugged-under limb, careful as copyeditors. Ben had gone limp the first time, pretending he just got too tired. The second time a woman rescued him, speaking that strange language to another lifeguard through a radio, "a repeat, I think, dude's got cojones. We've got a bobber, not a fighter."

Ben pretended he'd been overcome by hypothermia, and began to believe himself as he shivered. At the station, in a blanket, he'd apologized and chattered while the lifeguard wrote up a report and drank a bottle of soda with blobs of suspended fluorescent purple material.

He didn't want to be rescued, but he didn't want to be crazy, either. His sister, Joan, had been crazy once, a few years ago, and he'd visited her in the hospital up in San Pedro. The hallway to her room smelled of urine. Joan's eyes were dull with medication, her hands worked at imaginary crochet.

"You're here, then," he'd said.

"Ben." Joan looked at the working hands as if they were not attached to her body. "I want to get out of here. The drugs make me cottony."

Ben had wished he were one of her children, then, that he could save

her. But in a few weeks she'd gotten out, she'd been fixed. She went back to her house in the Mann headlands and her children's sports practices, her husband's long body in bed. When Ben saw her in the hospital, she belonged to him somehow, the split cells of relation, the crazy sister was his. Once she went home, she belonged to her invented family and he didn't know what to say when he called.

Since he'd met Sylvia, Ben practiced more clarinet and less drowning. Sylvia didn't like swimming, she only walked on the beach, watching him, and wore huge straw hats to keep the flat hand of the sun from slapping her face.

The first time he practiced drowning, his eleventh summer, the family was in Maine for three and a half weeks, fighting. He'd started to think of summer vacation that way: war, complete with first strikes and ambushes. When he wasn't reading the series of spy novels he took out from the Kittery library with his temporary card, or listening to tapes on the rectangular black tape-recorder his father had given him for his last birthday, Ben drew diagrams of the battles, assigning each parent and his sister a marker colour. He was always the thick black marker. His mother was red, his father yellow. Joan was blue sometimes. Ben's sketch pad was full of private analyses, the geometric shapes of slaps and cold gesture, the jagged lines of shouts and accusation, dots of quiet.

Until that summer he and Joan had been cautious allies in the war, sometimes practicing hurt upon each other in the casual bruising of pinch and shove, but mostly, hating their parents silently, together. They had perfected a simultaneous glare of contempt that could cut their mother when she was off guard, unpacking the ground round for dinner, picking the dead heads from the flowers on the dining room table. She pretended hard not to notice, but their stare could make her drop the meat, slop putrid water from vase to tablecloth.

It wasn't only battle. There were whole afternoons when each of them sat in a chair and looked out at the sea. There were times when doing the dishes was peaceful, Ben and his father alone, suds striping their forearms. His father might say something about fishing, about renting a sailboat, and it sounded hopeful, as if he hadn't told Mother she was looking irritable at dinner, as if Mother hadn't told him to stop projecting. As if she hadn't left her lobster split open on her plate, antennae torn off, and gone off for a walk by herself on the cliffs.

It was fine when they were divided.

"Hey Bennie," said his Dad, his bicep working as he scrubbed the potato pan under the water. "What's that book you've been reading?"

"Nothing. Spy stuff."

"You think we should take your mother sailing? I could rent something with a cabin this year, instead of just a Sunfish, unless you like the Sunfish."

"You'll just get us lost," said Ben. Last year he and Joan and Dad went out too far past the harbor in the rented Sunfish. The skyline blended with the sea, and all directions became identical. They'd found sand sharks filling a shallow spot, feeding maybe, and Joan, who'd just finished reading Jaws and was nervous about the bathtub, threw up over the side of the boat. The sand sharks swarmed around her vomit, and Joan jerked back so hard the Sunfish capsized. Ben still remembers the pleasure of the sharp cold breaking the dry heat of being lost with their father, Joan's scream starting and stopping as Ben went in and out of the water. Of course the sand sharks scattered, of course Dad righted the boat and pulled Joan back in. They found shore on a cove ten miles from where they put in, and borrowed a phone from summer people who wore tennis whites. Mom came and got them, pink from embarrassment in front of the tennis people, but pleased to rescue. There was no fighting on the way home, none until the next night's supper.

"Bennie," said his dad, taking the pan out of the suds and giving it an inaccurate rinse. Then he just stopped talking, and Ben relaxed. Joan was clearing the table—she bumped against Ben when she brought in Mom's full plate. It wasn't bad when they were divided like this.

That summer Joan tried to quit. He understood it, sometimes, that it was too hard to keep up the sharp edge of family life and become a person, too—to balance her passion for Nate Marks, from her seventh-grade class, whose widowed mother had rented a house near town in Kittery, and her self-protection in the war. But he felt left, anyway—because Mom waving the cleaver at Dad was no surprise, and neither was Mom's near-nightly cracking of a wine glass, a dish, burning something, letting the kettle boil dry and almost meld with the rented electric burner—but Joan's gesture was a surprise, it hurt him.

When Ben and Sylvia had been together for a year, they celebrated by barbecuing swordfish steaks at the beach. At night, Sylvia loved the beach. The strange raisin people stopped their basking, only the pelicans, picnickers, and hard-core drinkers stayed after the sun went down.

"Did you see the green flash?" Sylvia leaned against Ben's back; he was covering the coals with sand.

"You always see the green flash," said Ben. "I guess your eyes are better."

"Or maybe I just want to see it, so I see it." She reached her hand under his shirt and held the small round of his belly. This used to make Ben worry about getting fat and old, he used to stop her hand and slide it somewhere firmer. Tonight he trusted her, though, that she could love him anyway, even where his skin was loose.

"My sister fell off a cliff in Maine when we were kids," he said, smoothing the sand. He moved his hand lightly; the mound was almost too hot

from the coals underneath.

Sylvia turned so she was facing his back and wrapped her arms around his waist, but she slid her hand away from his skin.

He said, "she could have slipped on the rocks—there was kelp even in the high tide pools. They had to rescue her by helicopter. It even made the local papers."

"Could have?" Sylvia took his hand and pressed it to her face.

"Could have. She broke her collarbone and cracked a rib. And cut an amazing gash in her shoulder. She was wearing a white T-shirt, so the blood was really dramatic, in the helicopter spotlight, at night."

"Could have, Ben?"

"I mean, she might have tried to jump."

They didn't always fight. Sometimes he and Joan heard them making love. The Maine cottages were thin-walled and smelled of salt. Joan sat by the front window and turned the pages of her book. Ben looked up from his, another in the detective series, and watched Joan's dark hazel eyes flick up toward the window; she turned pages without following the words. The thumps started, their mother's cooing laugh.

The night of the accident, Joan had given up the cover of her book for a walk alone, outside. It had drizzled all day, and Mom took them to town to wander the same dusty gift shops. Joan was looking for Nate Marks—Ben could tell by her open face, restlessness. She smoothed imaginary knots in her baby-fine, sandy hair. Mom picked up cranberry candles and soap and held them to her nose.

Joan hadn't gone along on the afternoon drive to pick up Dad from the marina. He'd rented a boat himself today, gone fishing. The best bites, he told them, are in the rain. No one wanted to go along, but Ben almost wished he had, instead of trying to stay dry between gift shops, he could have let the weather into his coat. His body was tired from doing nothing.

After dinner, their parents left the dishes and fake-yawned their way to the bedroom. Joan and Ben silently agreed not to do the dishes. They got their books and Ben sat on the couch and Joan sat on the wicker chair by the window and they tried not to hear the pale high pitches of pleasure.

"Radio," said Joan. She squashed her lips together in a kiss of uncomfortable amusement.

"Radio," said Ben, getting up and tuning to a classical station. Brahms horn trio.

Their parents' bedroom rattled and laughed at them. The floorboards creaked and something scraped against the wall. Ben tried hard not to imagine what they were doing, not to assign the sounds. He wasn't sure how they'd position themselves, though he knew from photographs what sex looked like. Joan drummed her fingers against the window pane. If he

listened to the music, he wouldn't hear them, but the narratives of French horn and parents competed.

"They're gross," said Joan. She flicked an imaginary bug from her ankle and went back to turning pages.

"Ben, lets get out of here," she said. Usually, he was invited nowhere, so he knew it was a favor.

"Nah," he said. Pretended he wasn't even interested.

"C'mon, they're getting busy," she said, tipping her head toward the bedrooms.

"I don't think so. They were fighting in the car this afternoon."

"Ben," she said. "I'm asking you."

"Nah," said Ben. He retuned the radio, turned up the volume. An all-Beatles hour on the local station. "Love Me Do," loud and peppy. He picked up his book and pretended not to watch Joan as she jerked the front door open and marched out.

After the accident, Joan's dressings had to be changed every evening. Joan smelled like plastic bandages and the sweet rot before healing. She didn't want Ben to watch because she had to take her shirt off but there wasn't enough space in the tiny bathroom to work on her wounds. So he'd seen the contorted mouth of the cut, the shades of pink and blue of his sister's torn skin.

She couldn't swim because of the bandages and the gash on her shoulder. Ben went out in the lake alone, swam backward slowly, watching his mother and Joan shrink on the grassy beach. Dad was sailing by himself again. Mom had the Sunday paper spread all over a picnic table, edges lifting in the breeze like leaves.

He'd had to walk out forever because the edges of the lake were shallow, but then it got very deep. He could feel the gradations of temperature—warm at the top, cool around his waist, and cold at his feet. Ben jackknifed his body for a surface dive, kicked down as far as he could into the clean cold. He opened his eyes and couldn't see anything. Then he turned toward the surface and watched the light change from inky blue to green, back to pale blue as he drifted up. He dove again, came up as slowly as he could.

Looking back at the beach, his mother and Joan were tiny beach-chair dots. He wondered what they had to say to each other, whether Mom was paraphrasing the city news for Joan, whether Joan was complaining that her skin itched, she was thirsty.

This time, when he dove, he wanted to go further than he could. He kicked hard, pulled the water with his arms, felt the pressure box his ears. His nose stung. When he had exhaled all his breath and was ready to turn around, he pulled deeper. Tall water weeds came up to meet him and he

tugged, climbing down them, hoping for the bottom. The lake was over a hundred feet deep at the center. If he started part way in, here, it was maybe twenty-five or thirty feet deep. Too deep to dive to the bottom, but still, he pulled on the weeds until they broke off in his hands, slippery ropes of torn green. When he turned to face the surface, there was hardly any light. He started to feel slower, slightly dizzy, as he let go of his fight downward, let himself start to float up slowly. He wouldn't kick, he told himself, he'd wait and see what happened. Then he saw the dots of light, small circles, as if the sun had individual beams that pierced the surface of the water. He was passing the tops of the water weeds. Ben wasn't sure he wanted to rise. The water tucked him in, blanketed his body with cold; it was almost comfortable, all he was missing was breath. Ben sucked in a tiny bit of the water, held it in his mouth, wondered what would happen if he dragged in a whole lungful, whether it would hurt, how long it would take before his body stopped. He could give up, he thought. He could quit, like maybe Joan had, like Dad could, any day, out on his boat rides alone. He could just stop looking for shoreline. Ben flapped one foot, lazy at first. He was starting to feel the tunnel of drowning, for the first time. Practice. It closed around him, dark and cool, paring vision away, circling him. He fought it this time, started to kick for the surface. But when he broke, looked back at his sister and mother, the same push-pin dots on the shore, he wished he'd spent even longer underneath.

When she didn't have to work, Sylvia came to watch him from shore when he swam. When she was there, Ben didn't practice. He swam to the buoy and back, scared a pelican from its perch. His legs and arms felt strong and lean in the water.

Even though he'd pared away his secrets, let them fall from him to her lap, he saved a few. Practicing was deepest; he couldn't imagine telling anyone, even Sylvia. He didn't tell himself, really, it was an almost sexual secret, like childhood touching—it didn't have words, and half the pleasure was invention.

Sylvia had been in Boston for a week. Her dead husband's mother was dying, and she wanted to stay to help make the end more comfortable. Ben's house rattled without her. Her objects were everywhere, but unanimated without the promise of her return. The stones on the window-sill stayed warm from the sun into evening. Ben brushed dust from her computer with his finger, put one of the stones into his mouth, tasting another day without her. She called every night, but she didn't know when she'd be back.

Last night it was late when she called, and her voice was so small though a bad connection, Ben imagined her fading in and out of visibility, crescendo and decrescendo, to pianissimo, to almost non-existent. He thumbed the

keys on his clarinet as they spoke, watched the clock click from one-thirty-two to one-thirty-three.

"So," said Ben. "How are you? Is your back sore?" Sylvia's back got sore when she wasn't in her own bed. Their bed now was slightly too large for the bedroom, so Ben had to climb over Sylvia to get out in the middle of the night. Since she'd been gone, Ben still climbed over her space, waking in the sorrow of not brushing against her, accidentally.

"It's slow," she said. "I think she just wants to be done, but it's slow."

"Do you remember to eat?" Ben hadn't been eating much. Everything was tasteless, like paper. He tried to imagine slices of potato passing into Sylvia's lips, cut apple, the brilliant paint of juice filling her mouth.

"I'm all right, Ben, it's just sad."

He wanted to ask whether he should come, but he knew she didn't want him. This dying woman didn't know him. What would it be like to meet someone just as you were dying? Would you make any effort to be polite? Would you apologize for your sliver of attention?

"I miss you, Sylvia." Ben swallowed hard. His mouth was full of wanting her, his mouth watered like tears.

"I know. I'll be home."

She didn't say soon. She didn't want this woman to be over. Ben was in a tug-of-war with someone who would die. Just be patient, he told himself. He wasn't.

"I miss you."

"Me too."

After he hung up the phone he loved her. After he lay in bed and smelled her pillow, hoping for that eucalyptus and crushed green scent of her in the cotton, he loved her. He loved her when he woke from never feeling asleep.

The cove was hidden from the Children's Pool lifeguard station. Ben crushed a switch-back path down to shore. The ice plant was blooming, anemone-shaped flowers of yellow and purple. The succulent leaves looked sharp, hillsides coated with green icicles. At the patch of beach between tidepools, Ben pulled his shirt over his head, savoring the second of blindness. He usually brought his wetsuit in early winter, but it kept him too far afloat.

He cut a clean crawl stroke across the cove and into deeper water. Ben turned to the view, surfers at the break before La Jolla shores, the sea lions sunning and complaining, jockeying for position on an island to the north. He couldn't see the lifeguard tower from here, so they couldn't see him. The sky was a pale burnt blue, but the morning sun left only a thin layer of warm atop the water. A trio of pelicans passed low, hunting or just gliding, their heads too heavy to be airborne. Then the front bird plunged, sharp and straight.

Ben mimicked the pelican, pretended to dive for fish, kicked down. The cold hit hard, pressing his chest. Sylvia might never come back. He touched nothing for a while, just the cold and the fight of the current. Then kelp. Ben pulled himself into the green storm. Every year divers drown in the kelp forests. Once you're caught, the more you tug, the tighter you're knotted into green. He admired the kelp, such long lines of leaf, rooted deep, sending up the missionaries of leaves and rubbery bladders to collect what's good at the surface. Ben opened his eyes and an orange garibaldi passed into the forest of green. He let his breath go, watching the stream leave his body and float—his missionaries to the surface, finished breath. His legs wrapped in the kelp as he pulled down and he was caught where it was still light. The breath was all gone. Time to test the salt water.

Ben tugged the kelp, felt it snug around his ankles. But he wasn't ready to breathe in the sea. Practicing was no good, suddenly, he wanted to break the surface. The water was heavy over his head, he had to free his legs. Ben pulled. Sylvia would turn her key in the door. There wouldn't even be a note. The kelp wrapped tighter, like an anxious animal, and orange flashes filled the forest around him, as if the garibaldi were gathering to watch him drown.

Back in Kittery, at first Ben wanted someone to notice what he was doing. Joan, stranded on store, his mother buried in herself. He wanted his father to rent a boat on the lake instead of the ocean, to follow his son's swimming—the deep dives. To tack out of curiosity, at least. But after a while, he wasn't doing it to test them, but instead, to test himself. Each time he needed to go deeper, he was hungry for the plain fear. It took more each time to feel.

The divers drown, Ben remembered, because they pull at the tangles instead of cutting. No knife, he thought, but he reached down to the rubbery rope and slid one leg free. The other wasn't so tight, so he could bend the kelp in two. He worried the folded rope, worried it, until it snapped. Ben kicked to the surface. The clean warm made his skin sweet. Air, he breathed air. He'd finished practicing. Stroking in toward the cliffs, his legs burned from the acid of panic, from the ropes of kelp. He could hear the rhythm of the Brahms he'd been playing if he listened to the surf; he smelled jasmine and the sweet rot of fruit. Pomegranates. Ben imagined he could see Sylvia standing where the tide sponged the beach, her shadowy form growing solid as he pulled himself toward shore.

Jean McNeil

The Wolves of Paris

It was David who found the apartment for us. I love the name of our street, Rue du Dragon, although the only dragons are the women who shop at the Maud Frizon store a few doors down. It's a bijou neighbourhood of expensive boutiques and it wouldn't have been my choice, but David met someone with a place to sublet. He was better than me at meeting people, better at getting things from them—cups of coffee, Parisian sublets, trips to India, love.

It is November now but the days are still warm. It's been one of those elongated summers but you can tell that any day it will be winter. David told me he wanted a winterless year—that he loved the word, *winterless.* I try to picture him in India and I see him in an abstract crush of people, beige bills, wind-sculpted palaces; his skin is raked over elevated cheekbones, like a Peruvian, his eyes the colour of speckled trout, his alert deer posture—he stands there looking as if any second antlers are about to spring from his head. Alain says I have to stop thinking about him. What about you? I say. He's all we ever talk about. Tell me you don't think of him. Alain just shrugs. I think, so. He is one of those people who would rather shrug his shoulders than lie.

Alain lives in an immigrant area—Turks, Spanish menial workers. It has a post-1945 look, unmistakable in Paris because all the buildings look the same. I always get lost.

He opened the door. "What's the matter?"

"I got lost."

"So. Everybody gets lost. Don't look so sad."

Alain has a straight nose, brown hair, brown eyes on a small face. He seems delicate and that's his charm—his vulnerability. But there's also something steely about him. Maybe it comes from being brought up in the backwoods, then moving here without family or friends. I can see why David wanted him.

Alain flew through the kitchen lifting lids off boiling pans of water, crashing them back like a cymbal player. I'm still amazed by the way the French know their way around a kitchen. Even though he's not French. He's Acadian. He grew up in some backwoods place in the Maritimes, but he's lived here so long now he may as well be French.

I said, "Did I ever tell you I was twenty before I ever saw a man chop vegetables?"

"I know. Anglo-Saxon taboo. Men chop wood, not courgettes." Alain threw me that look—quick, darting, like an animal just released from a trap in the woods. He knows how attractive he is. I wonder how many of those looks David received.

I went into the living room and saw a film camera in the corner staring back at me.

"What's that for?"

"What?"

"The camera."

"Oh, I've started to make films. Just little ones with no plot, characters, no commercial potential, certainly no distribution."

"Can I see?"

"Not now. It's not time yet."

I looked at the equipment scattered across the carpet—a few film cans, a filter. What does he mean? *It's not time yet?*

Dinner went as usual. We try to talk about something other than David. We try not to notice we are attracted to each other. After dinner we sit on the floor, surrounded by bits of film he has shot.

"So what's it about, this film?"

"Bad luck to talk about work-in-progress."

"Just give me a general idea."

"It's going to be about the city."

"Paris?"

"What other city would it be?"

"Alain, don't you ever want to go home?"

"*Home?* To a place with women named Rhonda and men who drive K-cars?"

"Don't be such a snob."

"What are you doing here? You're here because you don't want to go through life talking about insurance policies and the latest model of 4-wheel drive. Look, one day you'll stop thinking about the difficulty of finding a good apartment and the coldness of Parisians and all those expat complaints and you'll wake up and home will seem like the moon. Look—" He gestured out the window. You can see everything from his place—Sacre Coeur, the Bastille. "You have everything here. What else could you want?"

"I don't know. Wilderness."

"Wilderness."

"Don't you miss anything?"

"I'm too old to miss things. Missing things is for teenagers."

"There must be something."

He lit a cigarette, looked at it suspiciously. "That's another thing I don't

miss—here I can smoke where I please. Okay," he took a deep breath. "How about wolves? I miss the wolves who used to live around our house. They used to come and sit in the yard in the moonlight, right under my window. I would look out and see these pools of dark silver in the snow. Their eyes were very beautiful. I was never afraid of them. Oh, and eels. I miss eels. My grandfather had an eel weir on Grand Etang. I used to help him harvest every September. You know, they come downstream in thousands—the river's like a liquid trough of eels. You just put your hand in anywhere and grab one. If we took them out and put them on the bank they'd find their way back to the water. It's their migratory instinct—it's that strong. We used to work all night and at some point I'd look up into the sky and see these flashing eyes and long bodies and tell my grandfather, look, there's eels in the sky. He'd say, those are transatlantic planes. They're going to England, to France."

"I've got to go."

He looked at me as if he had forgotten I was there. "You can stay here if you want."

"You don't have an extra bed."

He put his finger on the back of my ear and ran it down to my neck. He saw my face. "It's not that bad. You'll survive."

"You think just because you got David you can get me. I'm not going to forget what you did."

He took his hand away. All these months since David left, even the year since he and David became lovers, I have never accused him of anything, never been angry. I left his apartment and took the elevator down eleven floors, feeling myself decompressing, as if I had been in a bathysphere. When I reached outside it was winter.

Every day in Paris I feel like a trout squeezed through Sargasso weed. I'll never get used to the people—people everywhere, in the Metro, cafés, cinemas, street markets. I wander among them and I think they are in colour and I'm in black and white, a shadowy presence. They can't even see me. I should be used to being on my own now—It's nearly a year since David left me. We don't socialize at my job. On weekdays I stay in and read novels by Algerian dissidents. Weekends I ferret out exhibitions and films. The lonely foreigners who go to these things avoid one another, inching away as soon as they catch the Arctic scent of isolation. I go to clubs but since David left all the men look at me with lizard eyes. Lately I've started going to hear Third World divas like Cesaria Evora and Mercedes Sosa. Alain says this is a sure sign of Male Homosexual Middle Age. I tell him to piss off. I'm not even thirty.

At night I go for walks. You can walk for miles at night in this city and no-one bothers you. The Seine looks like an oil slick. Rows of grey buildings act

like a giant venetian blind, filtering the light at strange angles. I'm still surprised, even after two years here, to find how a city so old and garlanded by history can be this broken, this animal.

The day David told me we sat in a tiny cafe on the Rue du Bac. It was raining. Outside the cafe two young Arab-looking men were being interrogated on the sidewalk by the police. David turned to me. "Have you never seen the wolves of Paris?"

"You mean French men?"

"I'm serious. I met this guy who talks about wolves. He says there are wolves living in the city. You never see them, but one lives in the belfry of Saint-Sulpice. He says they insist on living only in places christened by saints and martyrs."

It had begun to rain and the rain creased the cafe windows so we couldn't see outside. I felt the same way inside, something was running down me.

"Who is this guy?"

"I've met someone," he said.

"Oh."

"Another man."

I thought, what does he mean: *another* man? Another to him, or another to the many men he has met? I'm a man, the world is full of men—

"Oh," I said.

Once a week Alain and I go to eat Vietnamese in Belleville. I watch Alain carefully, scour every detail of him to see if I can discover the source of his attractiveness. The way he comes out of the bathroom, for instance, stuffing a tissue in his pocket, and the whole restaurant swirls around him. He seems to attract light and comments and dishes of sizzling noodles.

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you want to go out tonight?"

"You never dance with me."

He picked up a prawn deftly with his chopsticks. "We go out so you can meet more people."

"We go out so you can meet people and do coke."

"How many friends do you have in Paris?"

"You call all the people you know friends? Thierry or François or Bertrand—they're all the same. All they talk about are this guy and that guy. They're walking proof that youth divests you of character."

"Fine. You don't like my friends. You don't have to come with us." He spooned more black bean sauce into his mouth and licked the corner of his lips.

"Blackmail. *Chandage.* At least David was honest."

"Stop making excuses for him. David isn't that special. He just goes chasing after experience. Like most people he doesn't *think.*" Alain

smiled. "Gorgeous, though. His shallowness is part of the attraction. It's not fair, is it?"

Then we go dancing—to the Le Tchatch au Tango or the Blue Moon. Around five in the morning Alain drops me at the sublet David had found for us and he goes home with whomever. I go to sleep and dream I am a large whale, wheezing and floundering, beached on some shore that looks like Nova Scotia: low-lying, moraine, waterlogged. I am waiting for the whalers to arrive. They will strip me of my bone so I can be made into corsets to support the waists of women in other centuries, women who were thin and lithe like me.

It is close to Christmas and he takes me to Bofinger. We are surrounded by mirrors, sit on plush red banquettes. Trussed-up waiters flurry toward our table like albatrosses coming in to land. Outside the city is lit for Christmas. Black ice glazes the pavement.

The look he gives me is familiar now, like two streams of water, one hot and one cold, running from his eyes. What does he want with me? He's playing with me. I'm his only link to David.

I scowl at him. He scowls at me.

"What is your problem? Why are you so up-tight?" Alain says this like a Frenchman—*up-thithe.* He draws up his shoulders into a vulture posture.

Suddenly I'm so tired. "I'm just thinking about how David and I came here to have the kind of conversation you and I are having now. To be in EUROPE. We kept saying to each other that all we needed to make our lives work was to live somewhere more fixed in the world's imagination. We got the idea from a film David and I saw at the Bloor Street Cinema when we lived in Toronto—Colonel Redl. Do you know it? Well, it's set in the dying days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Colonel Redl is an Austrian army officer in the war. And the Italians somehow know that he's gay. Or bisexual, at least. And they send a beautiful boy to entrap Redl. This boy is *incredibly* beautiful. They ride quick bay horses through woods coated with winter. Then they make love and the boy betrays Redl, and the strange thing is, Redl knows all along. And still he goes to bed with him. He knew the boy was a spy, a ruse. Why did he do that?"

Alain is looking at me oddly. The film is still running through my head, but only individual frames, like it has been hacked apart with scissors. Each frame has a separate name, like

Winter.

Couriers of situations.

Horses.

Betrayers—

I walk Alain the ten blocks back to his apartment. The night is cold and still.

Alain lights a cigarette. His face is back-lit by the tiny cinder of orange and for a moment his face shows his age—thirty-four; five years older than me. I wonder what I will look like at thirty-four.

"We've really got to fix you up with someone. It's incredible. You've been alone now, what, a year? I've never heard anything like it before. It's not as though you are bad-looking."

"That's the kind of comment the French always think they can get away with."

"I'm not French."

"Well, men then."

"I'm not trying to insult you. I'm trying to help you."

"*Help* me?"

I ran away. It was stupid—something a child does. After a few blocks I stopped. I could barely breathe. The cold seared my lungs. I was crying. Someone who took my lover. Someone I am attracted to. Someone I want, even. And he wants to *help* me.

"I need you to do something for me."

On the telephone two days later Alain's voice doesn't sound like him—he sounds hesitant. "I need you to come with me to an appointment."

"What kind of appointment?"

"My appointment with destiny," he laughs. "A doctor's appointment."

"Oh," I say. "It's not your first one."

"No. I go every year or so."

We sit in the waiting room of the Institut Pasteur. Alain is called in. Behind the half-closed door I can see a doctor who has the bearded look of a psychiatrist but whose actual job is to dispense drugs. All the *Paris Matches* are taken so I pick up a boring history magazine off the table. I look up from the article and into the face of the woman just paged. A chic, well-cared for face rises from the chair. In her thirties, I reckon. On her hand is a wedding band.

Alain bursts out of the consulting rooms, grinning. He pats his pocket. "Results tomorrow. Now let's go get drunk."

In his apartment he sits cross-legged on the carpet, ripping a cigarette rolling paper to shreds between the oval of space created by his legs. Among the scattered pieces of paper is the computer printout he received from the hospital today. He looks up at me as he licks his roll-up.

"You know, the strange thing is, I don't feel that relieved." He stands up, offers me his hand. "Come on, let's go to the cemetery."

When we vault over the gate of Pete Lachaise it is three o'clock in the morning. We are surrounded by the tombs of martyrs and a Paris of plaster colours—ermine sky, fish-grey buildings. I think, anyone would be terrified

of this city, with its spindly courtyards in which monuments worship past revolutions.

After Alain has had his fill of tombstones, we go back to his place. When I wake nothing has changed, it is another grey felt morning—Paris in winter. I go to his window and open the venetian blinds. Eleven stories below us the pond behind his building is frozen. I can make out the figures of battered old Algerians, of the facelift ladies obsessively walking their poodles in the park. I realize I will be here for years. Behind me Alain is snoring lightly. Asleep he looks like David.

It is a Tuesday afternoon and the Louvre is eerily empty. Alain drags me through the sculpture section to see Michaelangelo's Slaves.

"You should see the torture on the faces of the slaves. It's magnificent. Michaelangelo made it for the tomb of Pope Julius the Second."

"How do you know all this?"

"Like a lot of gay men I take refuge in Italian sculpture. When I was first in Paris I would come here all the time. Have you ever seen David—?"

The name hangs in the space between us, just for a second. "I mean Michaelangelo's," he corrects himself. "You know, even though it's supposed to be this paean to male beauty I find it strangely unmoving. *David*—"

Alain says the name in a tone I have never heard before. It is dismissive, as if he has to remind himself which David we are speaking of—the statue or the person who was once our lover.

Suddenly he turns to me. "You know, I like to think of myself as an intellectual."

"Well, you are, in a way."

"But you see, I always fall in love with these shallow people who seem volatile, but they're really strangely unemotional. It's like I'm too lazy to look beneath the surface."

"It's not your fault. Everyone makes those mistakes."

"But you know, with David—" He pauses again at the sound of his name. "I don't mean to insult you, but David's a bit dead; it's like he's always waiting for you to do something."

"I probably responded to that." In the marbled reflection of statue I can see myself nodding. On my face is a strange expression; I look like I am going to laugh. "I really resent people whose attractiveness comes from their passivity. I feel cheated."

"I know what you mean," Alain says. "I always think people should have to *do* something in order to be loved."

Then we are laughing as we rise on the escalator, through the glass pyramids, to leave the museum. Outside it's sunny and the pyramids create a giant prism and we rise through layers of blue, green, red.

"Do you know where the name of the Louvre came from?"

"Oh no. Another history lesson."

"It was a wolf house: a *louverie.* That's where the word comes from—Louvre."

"They kept wolves?"

"The woods of Europe used to be full of them. The kings kept them for sport. To hunt stags. They were like big dogs. Who knows—they might have fed the wolves to the lions. They did that in Holland. Most of the European kings had private zoos. King Henry the Third had a huge zoo, a menagerie, right here next to the wolf-house. It was full of the most exotic animals—camels, cheetahs, dik-diks. They must have cost him a fortune. But one night he had a dream that all the animals jumped on him and ate him. So the next morning he shot every one."

In his apartment Alain is setting up the camera.

"What's it about, this little film?"

"No idea. It's just a series of images. Personally I like to remain as oblivious as possible to meaning." He switches off the lights. "I took some of this footage when I was home two years ago."

"You said you hadn't been back since you moved here."

"Oh, I just went back once out of curiosity, to see if my family still thought I was the antichrist."

"And?"

"The priest was there waiting in the living room. Actually, he was great. He's a friend of the family. I spent most of the time at my grandfather's grave. Classic exile experience: go home, spend your time with dead people."

Outside it is a winter twilight. A sloping light bleeds the city of its detail. Alain smiles. "Did you know cinematographers have a name for this time of day? They call it the *chienloup*—the wolfhound."

The film starts to roll. At first it's just a sheet of grey. Slowly I can see two shadowy figures skirting the edge of the frame. Slowly, I see they are wolves, loping along the sidewalk by the Seine.

"How did you do that?"

Alain turned to me, a mild expression on his face. "Hmm? Do what?"

The camera goes back to the wolves. Their muzzles twitch; tiny drops of saliva fall from their gums and catch the streetlight, they shine like mercury. The wolves take the stairs that lead up to one of the Seine bridges in three perfect liquid strides. There's someone walking on the bridge. The figure looks familiar and I realize it's David, walking hunch-shouldered as he always does in winter. I haven't seen him for months, haven't even looked at a photograph. Alain must have shot this at the end of last winter, when they were still lovers. I feel nauseous. That's the strange thing—I don't love him any more, but I look at him and I still feel sick. David's brown

eyes are startled; I think again how he looks like a deer. The wolves head straight for him. He stops dead, freezes, but the wolves just slink by him like shadows, their noses to the tundra of the streets.

John Kinsella

Selective Archive

A special feature of a particular nation's writing should always be viewed sceptically. What we are able to see, or what we are presented with, is a highly mediated and selective archive of a literary culture. Or cultures. As with any other national literature, there are many cultures interacting to make up the cartography, a complex set of vectors—cultural, social, political, and so on—that don't necessarily cross or meet in the ways they're expected to. Australia is an extremely culturally diverse country, so given the space it's impossible to present more than a glimmer.

A critical view of literary identity is very different from what's happening on the ground. The attempt with this selection is to sample or to eavesdrop on a few fragments from Australian writing at the moment. We are talking writing, not "Ozlit", but a diverse range of conceptual spaces with a rich variety of references: be it Alison Croggon moving through "Chekhov at Sakhalin", or the domestic space of Kevin Hart's "Nights", or the almost brutal realities of love in Robert Adamson's "Fishing In a Landscape for Love":

> *Bait is all that matters here*
> *love has been worn down into some sounds*
> *and is contained in what I say*
> *dead words feeding on live words*
>
> *today ideas aren't worth anything—*
> *the words thrown to the crows don't come back*
> *love feeds on live bait, it doesn't behave*
> *the way scavengers do.*

We are moving through multiple geographies. The signifier is the landmass of Australia, but it might be there only as subtext. There may be a specific location, there may be a set of cultural references or engagement with what specifically lies outside national discourse, but in some way or other, an Australian context is always there. This is Australian writing, regardless of voice, origin, or perceived audience. An overtly political piece like Melissa Lucashenko's story "The Loser", with

its highly textured linguistic de-hybridisation, with its reclamation of language through colloquial speech; or McKenzie Wark's interaction with text and self and cultural politics—mapping the intensity of the body through the semiotics of cultural displacement and "pleasure". There's ritual in his piece, as there is in all writing, and the mediation required to position this against transgenic national identity at times threatens to tear the national identity of the writer apart. Wark is a cultural critic—he critiques the fiction of writing the self in public spaces. His prose piece included here works as a poem. The text is of the machine, the mediated self. Nothing is unproblematic. The stories and poems here are ceremonies — metatextual, ironic, sharply political, deeply personal and public.

Let's turn to landscape—much of the work included here deals with aspects of the natural world, or works spatially. In his introduction to *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry*, Kevin Gilbert wrote: "Rarely has Aboriginal poetry much to do with aesthetics or pleasure or the pastoral views, those remarkable views the city person finds in the commonplace torn by bulldozers, overstocking and mining operations." A pastoral poem, in the Australian context, is always built on the spectre of genocide, the destruction and/or dispossession of indigenous peoples. An apparently purely celebratory "landscape" poem can never be read as such. The poet's intent is secondary to the issues against which we must read it. Reality corrodes metaphor. There is death everywhere.

Coral Hull approaches the problem head on. She believes in a landscape in which it is possible to visualise a total absence of humanity. She's attempting to connect with the chthonic as a moment of pure meditation. While highly sensitive to indigenous concerns, she struggles with the divination of body and historical reality: "At the same time I have to forget racial politics in order to enter the land. I am a white Australian having no traditional totem, aboriginal heritage or blood lineage. Therefore I must enter the land alone and create a relationship to it. This is not as easy as it sounds. Whilst doing this, I cannot perpetually define myself as white or as coming from a race of white murderers. No culture is free from guilt and violence towards other life. In order to be accepted by my spiritual country, I must also go beyond all cultural constraints and the politics of human beings and enter the land itself."

Personally, I have found myself unable to connect with the land without accepting "responsibility". My brother is a shearer, my uncle a farmer. I write a pastoral that undoes connection with the place I understand, cannot get out of my head. It's so much part of me, and yet not of me. I live outside Australia. Evasion? The settlers/invaders renamed the land. They ate identity, processed it, shat out white culture. Coral

Hull's text is not a solution, it is a complex map of self and place—a diary of interaction, to be respected as such. In many ways, this whole selection is exactly that—a coming to terms with the small spaces we occupy and speak through. Even the broader cultural spectrum of Wark is mediated through self. John Tranter's brilliant "In Praise of Sandstone" maps the subterranean using the end words of the Auden poem. Its connection with the wry cross-national Auden is a universalising ploy, but one that eventually has to be organised into the local, however ironic:

> *That is why, I suppose*
> *the city echoes a structure we've never sought*
> *and hardly wish for, where threat is made external*
> *and inside the dim buildings a bureaucratic life*
> *weaves its complex patterns.*

In reading through anthologies of Canadian, Australian, and Indian poetry in English recently, it struck me how much nations want to claim "internationalisation". I begin the introduction to the anthology *Landbridge: contemporary Australian poetry* with: "Australian poetry is rapidly finding a place in the context of an international poetics." I clarify this by talking of international regionalism—the need to open lines of global communication while retaining regional integrity. Looking through the work collected here, it strikes me that the global comes through exposure, and is a fait accompli—not something that needs highlighting. We don't need to market literatures, but to let them reach out in their own terms. The packaging and construction can be as limiting as silence. In a volume of poetry to be released next year by the University of Queensland Press, Samuel Wagan Watson—who lives in Brisbane and whose ancestry is Birra Gubba, Bundjalung, German, and Irish—writes:

> *like in the land of the original Dreaming,*
> *comatose totems litter the landscape—*
> *bargains and half-truths simmer over authenticity,*
> *copyright and copious character assassination on the menu,*
> *sacred dances available out of the yellow pages*
> *and*
> *cheap white-goods at the Dreamtime sale!*

It's a sharp reminder that the anthology, the special issue, the packaging of a national literature can fall into the same trap. We must read with this in mind. As the persona in Tracy Ryan's poems "Hydrangeas"

connects with a past through a flower that becomes symbol that becomes icon that is no more than a flower, there is also an engagement with the present—a simultaneous recognition of loss and presence. Memory and the immediate blur. National histories come out of this. And there's no one voice.

John Tranter

In Praise of Sandstone

Look at the rows of houses—no, not those ones,
these ones, lit up by the morning sun chiefly,
look at the Botanical Gardens, the cabbage trees, the slopes
of brownish grass, held up by the strata beneath.
An old bus negotiates a corner, with squeaking springs.
There's a bank clerk, he gives a chuckle
as he passes the Water Police building and sees the carving
of a soldier and a mermaid, meant perhaps to entertain
the passing workers. Think how stone has defined this region:
dig anywhere, you'll find it in various places:
flanking the new expressway, it forms a flowing background
for the traffic—hotel bars and coffee lounges
feature slabs of it—wall, floor—if you're doubting
its ubiquity just look at the headlands that butt
head first into the Pacific, a hundred-mile outcrop
of golden stone, tall breakwaters for the waters to
break on, protecting the city. Every local vineyard
owner has to dig up blocks of it—I bet they wish
they'd chosen somewhere else for their grapes, but whether
they like it or not, it's the short straw they must take.

Let's leave the present for a while, and dig down
through the past, to more brutal times.
There's a team of convicts, half-heartedly engaged
in hacking a hole in the rock to put a building in.
The overseer—that's the overseer, I think—
though he's lashing into them, he seems unable
to establish to the satisfaction of all a superior moral
position. The men stand, chained in a line,
mute and mutinous, and the red-faced shit responds
by lashing them again. There's no sign of awe
in their demeanour, they know their position is fixed
forever under the lash. Lush valleys
lie just over the ranges, there the natives are walking
to and fro under the eucalypts—their cultural space

slowly shrinking—they don't know yet quite how unlucky
their future will be—gathering nuts and fungi
and imagining that the ceremonial shapeliness of their lives
will inspire the invaders to incline to common
decency, brotherhood, philanthropy and charitable works.
Back in the present we see charity a pimp
to power, we hear how politics lacks a voice
the people can understand, but it bullies all
but the best and the worst of us...
That is why, I suppose
the city echoes a structure we've never sought
and hardly wish for, where threat is made external
and inside the dim buildings a bureaucratic life
weaves its complex patterns. A government clerk wastes
an afternoon singing, in a back room an accidental
discovery leads to a divorce, portraits of a dozen saints-to-be
look down on rock samples and mineral gravels.
A little way outside the city, between two dull rivers
lies the perfect setting for a tomb.
The sky is still, the khaki earth is silent, both
rivers, too full for speech, turn their backs and
glide on to the sea. Is it far fetched
to imagine the strata of rock as the whisper,
layer on layer, of an ancient ocean's dream? Nothing
remains of those creatures whose obscure love
sifted to sediment, then rock. Don't be sad

at the thought of their extinction; in a way it's right
they should give up their tiny myriad lives for what looks
like an endless beach solidified. A building site
in an absence of stone, time in a hollow running backward
into the earth, then forward again, connected
to mankind's wish to make the future more certain
by giving it the shape of a cave, though not quite
a cave, more a wish's projection in the air of itself

flopped inside out and propped up like a question
to do with vanity, shelter and protection. Only a poet
can know what they wanted, those tribes calling
across the empty plateau, their querulous uneasy
articulation of immemorial fear and doubt.
A city is made up of more than urchins and gamins
seething and quarrelling beneath a colonnade;
if the culture's old enough; it follows nature's
pattern—veins of a leaf, arteries, what
gives life spreads out radially, citizens are caught
in the processes, fed, recycled, until they resemble
their own parents tangled in the fight for food and water
and a protected place in the sun. See these
city blocks made up of individuals, their music
rising like skyscrapers, powerful though invisible,
shadowing the shape of the drive of the race forward
into its own terrible and unwanted future. But if
we truly knew that the living are few and the dead
are many, we'd wish in the end to be shaped into
cool squares, a courtyard full of shade, fountains
and drains, a peaking roof rising to a point
with a steeple, supporting walls made from
blocks of our own substance, with nothing of
the sea-creatures lives remembered in it, no love
or fear to recall except the dreaming murmur
of a hive, a city, a sandstone landscape.

Dorothy Porter

The Inland Sea

The new shopping mall
glitters wretchedly
in the desert town

dry river beds
lead crookedly
to dry gorges

we're learning
you can't drink air conditioning.

In every pale plump face
is the gaunt map
of red thirsty bone

but we're rich
and we're fairly
comfortable

don't rescue us
yet.

There are ghosts here
who stink of water

we'll interrogate them
shortly.

Don't worry
we'll make them
tell us

we'll make them
show us
that infuriatingly close

smell-over-the-hill
inland sea.

Coral Hull

The Straight Road Inland

Over the years I have become fascinated by all aspects of Australian landscape. The land is where I find myself, particularly the arid interior and outback environments. The possibilities of the arid inland of Australia are as mysterious and limitless as space, and I wonder whether or not we should resort to mathematics to describe it, as in astronomy. During landscape interpretation, it becomes important for me to create an identity for myself, by naming things apart from myself. This identification process, whether it is wandering around with the local Field Naturalist Club or defining emotions in relation to objects, gives me a starting point. It is similar to a reliance on a vehicle on a desert track. Without that point of physical focus or somewhere to retreat to for sustenance, I'd run the risk of becoming indistinguishable from that which I am attempting to interpret. Yet in order for me to interpret and document a landscape, a process of personal annihilation is necessary. Self-consciousness must take a backseat, so that it is the landscape itself that drives the vehicle of creativity.

In order to write about a landscape I must want nothing from it but what it is prepared to give. Initially I felt a need to take from the land in order to define myself. When I was in The Breakaways in Coober Pedy, South Australia I went crazy collecting rocks. I also chased the dry husks of paper daisies down the sides of fragile sandy cliffs. I ended up taking photos of the rocks on my car bonnet and returned them to the creek bed. I was concerned about removing them from the environment. They appeared to be energized from it in some way. We all know what happens to the colour of river stones when we lift them from the river. Later in Alice Springs, I was content to sit on the polluted banks of the Todd River and play my didgeridoo to the rocks of the MacDonnell Ranges. Further north whilst driving along the Arnhem Highway through Kakadu National Park, I saw the landscapes where the wood from the didgeridoos is collected after trees had been eaten through by tree-piping termites. The tropical woodland trees started to look like forests of didgeridoos. After my initial object collection nothing apart from the sensation became as relevant. I now reject all notions of object collection unless for purposes of survival, creative art or religious significance.

During this same trip, I was fortunate enough not only to experience a sunset at Pirmiridi/Karlu Karlu* (The Devils Marbles), located south of Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory, but also a huge afternoon thunderstorm. The rocks were photographed as bright orange structures against a deep purple sky backdrop. After the rain I jumped from rock to rock drinking water from the warm granite pools, just as the aboriginal people had done for thousands of years. This undisturbed activity gave me immense satisfaction. Later I swam in the smooth dark body of water known as Annaburroo billabong, on the outskirts of Kakadu National Park. I smelt water lilies without touching them and was told that a fresh water crocodile lived at each end of the lagoon. It was a real privilege to swim alone there at sunset. The abundance and activity of life in The Top End during the wet season from October to March is extremely intense with its changeable weather and proliferation of flora and fauna. The air is sweet and pungent, the smell of gigantic growth. On one 3 km walk at Norlangie Rock I finally shed my makeshift raincoat and drinking water and just began to run. After the experience I follow these trails back to my original starting point.

Any landscape is a kaleidoscope of physical and emotional sensations. This is all defined by my own perception. Entering the landscape whether external or otherwise is an experience of intense observation and discovery. It is ironic that we access these landscapes by road and car; to truly be present in them is to leave the car and begin to walk, until you are settled enough by the surrounding environment to be still. It's almost as if the landscape stops whilst you move and when you stop, the first movement of birds from the overhead trees, a snake. For many years I have had an interest in documentation, in on-the-road and landscape culture and how they combine. In a sense the most significant journeys are within the self. The straight road is a metaphorical quest for the inner landscape. When attempting to define the external environment I usually go on an initial hunch or an emotional response. With any creative project there is the element of risk that I will find nothing, in a similar way that the car might break down or the actual trip will be a disaster.

During a recent trip from Melbourne to Darwin there was a heat wave and my travelling companions, Rob and the two dogs Binda and Kindi, ended up in a river for a number of hours on the borders of The Little Desert National Park at Dimboola. The serenity of this green blue river silently easing its way through the outback Victorian sand dunes was unbreakable.

**The aboriginal name for The Devil's Marbles is Pimiridi from the Warpri people and Karlu Karlu is from the Warrumungu people. The landscape in this area holds cultural and spiritual significance for both parties.*

There is always a degree of anxiety in leaving the city to start out on such a trip; and the outback travel books I have read talk about easing oneself into the experience of travel. Once I had entered the water, beyond the refills at petrol stations and caravan park stops, I felt the landscape begin to enter me. It was as if it was slowing down my blood. Landscape documentation is about exploration and retreat, movement and rest, identification and association. The longer I stay out in the landscape, the more incidents present themselves to me. As I become accustomed to the landscape more ideas will come into existence that don't necessarily fit the thematic structure of the initial project, hence multiple projects.

The Adelaide to Darwin drive was spent collating, collecting and identifying. I also took photographs and identified birds with binoculars. When there hasn't been much rain birds are easily spotted around water sources such as rivers, creeks and water tanks. Researching my books is often an exhaustive process. I spent a lot time working on articles, photo essays and ideas for potential future projects. I also collected plant specimens and pressed them into a book, with the intention to take them in to be identified by the Top End Native Plant Society. During a period of intense research for any series of projects I may easily take 600-800 colour sides. I was literally absorbing the details of dozens of plants and animal varieties daily.

The way I coped with this influx of new information was to keep a journal of the experience, that included significant landmarks such as towns and rivers. At any given time there was a car glove box full of plant specimens going dry, maps, binoculars, bird identification book, camera and slide film. The laptop was used each night to type up any notes taken. By listing various flora, fauna, geological formations, weather patterns and my own activity observed in the present, I was then free to go on and research their various characteristics in more depth later on. On the road work is certainly challenging. On this trip we had to stop regularly for food, to water down the dogs, give them drinking water and to refuel. There was also the constant checking of the radiator and cooling system. The car was an old 1964 model with the average speed between 80-100 kms per hour. But beyond the creative aspect and the road travel there was also simply a need to be present in landscapes and do nothing. Even without any form of creative expression there is the immense and powerful presence of the Australian landscape itself.

There is also an element of repetition involved in landscape documentation. It takes time for me to uncover the various layers of an environment. When I walked on Casuarina Beach in Darwin with the dogs dur-

ing the wet season it was a repetitive action. Each day another layer of this environment was uncovered. The tides were different, which affected the debris washed up onto the shore, the skyscapes, my own mood and sensitivities. The weather was variable. Every moment offers some new insight to this environment, therefore it is important for me to be present in a series of moments. There were relative features such as the same trees and a flock of white cockatoos that visited them in the afternoon during this period of observation. But quite suddenly there were a pair of black cockatoos flying before the opaline shimmer of the build-up clouds early one evening. On another day a flock of black cockatoos were feeding in a stand of Casuarina trees on Nightcliff Beach about ten feet away from where I stood. The sight of large birds gliding through the needles that feel like gentle green rain and their long harsh cries, took me by surprise. I felt captured. The sensation was similar to falling in love. Everything else, including my own awareness of myself and my two dog companions, became vague and out of focus. The situation was mystical.

Often it's as though the land speaks inside me, in a kind of internal dictation. Short lines and phrases come into my head. This is how I begin to write in a landscape where words are absent. This interpretation is very individualistic and subjective, unlike playing the didgeridoo where I am led, and believe that the land and myself meet somewhere in the interior of the instrument. In this instance the land comes up through the wood to speak to me, and I appear to become drunk on a mixture of two breaths. The interpretation remains largely through sound and vision. After the observation of the feeding black cockatoo flock, I returned home to type the lines into my laptop. Here the work becomes a mixture of memory and interpretation, the lines leading me into a greater understanding of the situation. This is where I begin the editing and reconstruction process, finally becoming aware of an audience. During the experience itself awareness is largely absent. A little further down the beach I looked back at the black specks sitting in the Casuarina trees and recognized myself as a speck. I felt stunned, as if the effects of a drug had worn off.

During a documentation process I may also deliberately place myself in a situation for an effect. I stayed out in a monsoon to see the effects of that upon living things and the landscape. I noticed the colour of Rapid Creek changing and the way the surf crashes more loudly before rain, as if it delivers the message of weather that is occurring further out to sea. The anticipation of a landscape about to receive rain, and the way the leaves of various palms, tropical vines, and mangroves hold the water afterwards, were all part of my landscape interpretation during this particular walk. I ended up trudging for hours along the sand and I admit

to twirling around and acting stupid out there on my own with the dogs. The storms swept through, the beach remained deserted and all of us were saturated. The rain was so hard and thick that it was difficult to see any landscape and it was salty in my eyes. It is not the most comfortable thing to do. Yet there are times when comfort is needed to work and to enable one to look after equipment.

Finally, I believe in being present in a landscape without human culture and ownership. This also includes the absence of an aboriginal culture. The landscape must speak to us all as it does to an animal. Yet I continue to respect and be in awe of aboriginal customs in a lot of areas, simply because I feel like it is close to a 'land truth' in many respects. My first experience of this was when I climbed Uluru (Ayres Rock) at twenty-one years of age. I didn't like it as I was doing it. At first I thought it was my fear of heights, combined with the tourist industry which I have always found unacceptable. But as I climbed higher and higher hanging onto the chains that were hammered into the rock, I started to feel an acute sense of violation. Since a rock doesn't have consciousness or an interest in a future existence it is not a sentient being. Therefore my emotions were not making any ethical sense to me. It was some time later when I realized that it was aboriginal culture that I was violating. The Mutitjula community amongst others do not want Uluru climbed, and I felt this despite my initial ignorance regarding the area. Visiting the Northern Territory was my first significant introduction to the immense sweep and complexity of aboriginal Australia.

At the same time I have to forget racial politics in order to enter the land. I am a white Australian having no traditional totem, aboriginal heritage or blood lineage. Therefore I must enter the land alone and create a relationship to it. This is not as easy as it sounds. Whilst doing this, I can not perpetually define myself as white or as coming from a race of white murderers. No culture is free from guilt and violence towards other life. In order to be accepted by my spiritual country, I must also go beyond all cultural constraints and the politics of human beings and enter the land itself. I do believe in truths apart from human beings and Australia is all I have in my heart. It is my one true spiritual home and I belong to its physicality. Yet the closer I come to a land-based knowledge, the more mysterious it all becomes. I can never claim to be aboriginal and I doubt if I will ever fully know this country, yet I can appreciate and learn from the many interpretations of the Australian landscape from the immigrant writers through to the traditional inhabitants.

It is true that a majority of Australia's human population lives along the coastlines. But Australia's general population that includes plants, animals and people exists beyond this area in a kind of inner universe. The

further we travel into the heart of Australia the further we seem to be able to travel. All interior landscapes are endless places of discovery. My focus inland has caused me to arrive at unexpected points of location. I was recently at a Crocodylus Park in Darwin, a crocodile farming research facility. A young mother crocodile had mated with one of the males in the cage and was defending her eggs against the other fifty or so crocodiles present. The owners of the facility spent the next forty-five minutes beating her with an iron bar in order to take her eggs away and place them in an incubator. Her role and the role of her babies was for the testing of growth promotants for the crocodile industry, in order to see how large a crocodile could be grown without damage to the skin on the underbelly. She was a ferocious mother. The staff almost bashed her unconscious. In the end she was left panting in a corner, watching them taking her eggs away with a trickle of blood running along her snout.

My many observations of the farming industries over the years has taught me where humanity fails and also of its great potential. I was grateful to be present at this horrific incident. In some small way I was allowing myself to be the crocodile's voice, the vehicle or the power by which the crocodile could have her story told. The individual life is reflective of the whole, which is landscape. All landscape observation and interpretation is an awesome and humbling experience. By living beyond what we know, we see a different side to things. No matter how well disguised, writing is in many ways a very personal thing. If a writer is stuck in their own lack of internal development as human being, this will show up in their work. As writers accountable to an audience we almost have an obligation to let our internal and external environments mingle, where they will move through each other to consume and affect. Perhaps this can be achieved by entering the Australian landscape and by following our own straight roads inland.

Brown Snake

The colour-coded meditations of the field
mouse and ground
dwelling bird are no insurance against death
where hawks lower
themselves on threads of wind and light
and movement
is a brown snake entering a heated ground
swell of vibration
and body-heat tracking body heat where mice
feed a snake
with a name as common as creekwater
and discarded rope
strikes as the hawk breaks over its own shadow
do you know
the tactile longing reptiles have for a stone
in the sun? Place
your splayed hand above the earth until you have
the dark enlargement
of the hawk's wingprint and remember to speak
quietly as you taste
what the ground contains when hunger moves it.

Chimney Fish

The chimney fish is a blue-scaled midlevel feeder,
caught between the pressurised head
of a diving bell operator, and a blow-down of coalsmoke
which can resemble water spilling over
the drop-off on a Red Sea reef. Its gills filter
smoke and ash, its mouth contains an ember
from a Seal Rocks beach fire. You may have heard it
when carbon splinters rain into the empty hearth.
Perhaps you thought of chimney sweeps, whose work
is backlit as a roof thatcher's hands. Perhaps
considering rare professions, you went in over kindling
and pinecones set like stalled detonations
on old news, and craned your neck to see how far
light carries down a throat of blackened stone.
The chimney fish will not attempt to hide or fin
through dust when you are seeking it. Exposed,
it will dive and enter your skin below the navel.
Clothing or a lack of faith in its ability to live
in blood are no defence. Those with chimney fish
inside them have the look of people recently come
from a terrible depth, with stories of wands
like miniature lightning rods on the heads of fish
and they will tell you how it feels to be hunted
skywards with a wound like a gold coin
weighting your palm or side. Light your fires
and listen. The crack of damp timber or thrown sparks
might be a sign or invitation to what has always been
too threatening and strange to consider.
Warm yourselves and believe.

Tracy Ryan

Hydrangeas

1

Nodding-off cluster of heads
or gaudy cheerleaders
depending on mood

you were the blue register
of a layer
we couldn't uncover

the outward visible sign
of an inward
disposition

under my brother's window
as if you knew
he'd die young & we'd strew

that pit with just such blue.

2

Our argument
the old one

between aesthetics
& science

you were explainable
par excellence

with binary
tendencies

we liked to gender.
Pink at my window.

Fight with me now
we'll get nowhere

two opposites true
at once.

3

Eventually I'll come over
to your side

it looks different
from ground level

remember the earthworms
we'd sometimes turn

out & hastily rebury
too aware now of

another order.
The hours we spent lying

in dirt and counting
each blade of grass

as if they meant it.
The hard blood of the eucalypt

the wattle's sticky wound
our own innards

lurching up.

4

Named for the cups
that cloud and mass out

to render their opposite:
concave and convex

like the lenses
of his science kit

like the simple cells
that form the complex

that is my body
that will simplify

again, like his, the petals shed
colourless and drifting.

John Bennett

Hottest Day of the Year Capilano Canyon

Fingertip hemlock jumps brightly
out of cedar stumps scarred last century
cut for springboards to get to grips
with the flesh and you stop
to try on the rice-paper foxgloves.

The layers of mountains and forests
have the cool sensation of a Sung landscape.
Buttressed stumps, a vivid shade of green
are sweet crumbling ruins bubbling
with cysts and fungal sweetmeats.

Through the glasses, I search the staves
of fir for the source of a song, light stabs the canopy
spitting out colour, plastic floats! Their clear
gut vines whipped about landing a catch
of strangled knots and fishermen's curses in rigor mortis.

Albino birds flap as slowly as fruitbats,
walking is a sensual slow-motion dance,
the needles and moss so soft, a desert acoustic,
so quiet the river song is nearly missed—
a diesel engine next door, efficiently noisy.

Climbing to explore its frigid touch
I slip, tear my arm, the skin's too tight.
The bloody pain is a chainsaw
drowning out the robins, celebrating
the independence of the body.

Melissa Lucashenko

The Loser

He couldn't have told ya why, but somehow Dan wasn't all that surprised that after six weeks in the Bay everyone was calling him Chunderboy. Just cos he'd chucked his guts severely one night, eh. Other fellas round abouts got Slim or Doe or Meggsy. Not him. He tried to make em call him Dan, but once they saw they got a rise it was Chunderboy every time, and then it just stuck. It wasn't worth bluin about, but. He sighed, and flogged a phonecard off his aunty's boyfriend to cheer himself up. Rang his big sister in Townsville.

"Karen! Karen! S'me, Dan. I'm up in Byron."

"Ay! Wotcha doing all the way down dere? How's dem mad mobba cousins?"

"Yeah, dey orright, cept for Richard, eh. He's pretty crook now." A mutual sigh for Richard.

"Oh, true, poorfella. Where ya at, Waynes?"

"Na, Johnno said ta stop wit him for a bit, help him out with Richard. He on that carer's pension now, so I'm givin im a hand. Just for a bit."

A hostile sniff travelled down the line.

"Ah, whattya wanna hang around wif him for? You'll end up locked up hanging around wif that ratbag crowd."

"Nah, he's orright..."

"No he ain't. So wotcha doin? Ya gotta job yet?"

"Still lookin," Dan lied. "And I met this other mob, they're Westons, you know, Renee at the Tuckerbox and them lot. Sunny and them, we go surfin and that."

Karen grunted. She had a fair idea what 'that' meant.

"You stayin outta trouble? Don't come running to me fer bail, boy, knocking about wif fucken junkies."

"Yeah, yeah, I'll be right, I'm clean. Just a bit short on bungoo, thassall."

Karen rolled her eyes.

"Join the fucken club, bruz."

Shit. There goes that bright idea.

"Ya seen Dad lately?" Karen really rolled her eyes. As if.

"Yeah, he just popped into distribute his Lotto winnings last night. In the Mere. Whadda you reckon?"

"Oh well, hadda ask. I'll ring ya in a coupla days, eh?"

"Bye then."
Dial tone.

The parks not happening, so Dan heads up the main drag to the cafe. Cars are all jammed against each other at the roundabout, look like a big bunch of them fruitbats hanging off of a mango tree, eh, horns blaring, blokes yelling. Tourists on foot are trying to get emselves killed on their way back from the beach. Once the cars do get clear they all gun it up Sunrise and just about clean up whoevers on the crossing, eh, regular as clockwork.

Dan stands and watches em. Then he laughs, and heads up the hill himself. It feels good to hang on the street by himself sometimes, watching all the people.

Past a crowd of young white kids skating. "Hey, Chunderboy, wassup man?"

"Get flicked, me names Dan." But smiling with it, today. Past sunburned Asians flashing credit cards. Past the supermarket.

Past a dreadlocked feral blowing didge in front of an empty hat. Bloody dickhead looks like the last of the fucken Mohicans, eh.

Past the video store.

Past surfies hoeing into hamburgers.

And into the cafe with the Tuckerbox sign hanging overhead.

Even though its after two the joints still packed. Tourists eat a lot, Dan's noticed. On the footpath locals are having coffee behind the chain that separates the cafe from the road. Inside, a harassed womans trying to feed her baby and keep a jealous toddler happy with a bitta cake. Hes not having it, eh. Winds Mum up instead, smearing it over the table. Shes gettting cranky all right, truegod.

Renee is Dans tan-coloured cousin with the deadly green eyes that got her the job. Shes lookin after the show this arv. She hurtles from table to table, cleaning, taking orders, fighting fires for ten bucks an hour and no overtime.

"Ay, Chunder, wassup?" Shes friendly, but Dan can tell deep down she's scared about him ripping her off. He hates that. Give a dog a bad name.

"Aw, just hanging around, eh." Dan shrugs.

"Dja wanna—" she begins, then "Hang on" as she ducks off again.

"Excuse me," a forty-year old woman is saying tightly, "but I think I ordered this with the dressing on the side." And the teeth are out like a dog. And gold dripping like you'd take her down an alley at night and cash up onetime. Watching from the sink, Dan was beginning to understand the tourist trip some of the cousins were on.

"Sorry, I'll just get you another one." *White slut.*

"Oh, no, don't bother. We really haven't got long enough. I'll have it as it

is." *Dumb coon.* She turns back to her friend, pushing dark hair off her expensive face. The friends a blonde in a little bitty top that probably cost two hundred bucks or sumpin. And they on this big psychological trip, like their goonah smell of roses.

"He's just so angry all the time, you know? And so I said to him in the end, look, if that's how you want to live your life, fine. Just don't expect me to emotionally subsidize you, that's all."

"Yeah, they want you to dance attendance, don't they? And nothing in return—"

Short bitter laughter.

"Am I just imagining it? I worry that I'm just fantasizing, that the men were somehow bigger when I was younger...Do you know what I mean?"

"Mmmm, they're children these days."

"Looking for mummy."

"Looking for mummy."

"Philip is attractive though," the dark-haired one adds, her voice partly drowned by roaring traffic at the bottom of the hill.

"Oh, do you think so? I used to think so, but now I look at him and I just go—Wimp."

The blonde leans back and lights up a fag. Dan stares in fascination at these skeletal women. All his life hes known they existed somewhere. Didn't know they were like this, but. Loud music sounds from a car stereo down the hill. *Dadadadadadada.*

"Hey Chunderboy! Fancy that waajin do ya?" Renee smirks as she comes back to the sink with dirty dishes. Dan startles.

"Good go, need a chisel to crack that old bag open I reckon." They both laugh. And what happens next happens so fast that afterwards, Renees still got the shadow of that laugh on her olive-brown face. The seabreeze coming off the Bay doesnt waver. The tables dont shift and the kettle keeps hissing away just the same, but from inside the cafe the toddler comes wandering.

Fat little legs go plonk plonk plonk. Into the road.

A white falcon ute is fanging it up the hill.Young bloke at the wheel. He's been stuck at the roundabout for all of half a minute before getting through. Now there's a speed bump but he don't know or don't care. *Dadadadadadada.*

"—a real man," one of the waajins is saying. And then the cafe notices.

Under the afternoon sky the road is a dull matt black. Sun gleams off the toddlers blonde fluff. For one, two, three seconds no one can do anything.

Dans never moved so fast. He couldn't have put a name to what drove him forward. He pours himself over the chainlink fence. Chairs scatter behind him. The kid is a tiny explorer pattering on the bitumen. The ute

five seconds away. *Dadadadadadada.*

Every frozen eye on Dan.

One flying step onto the road. He's Michael Johnson. Another across the tar. Cathy Freeman. He swoops with dark arms. The ute roars past—*Dadadadadadada*—and the young blokes laughing to each other in the front never know nothing about any of it. For a long moment they stand, the two of them, Dan and the kid, wincing away from the blow that doesn't come.

A long, quiet moment, then Dan cradles the little fella back inside. He doesnt see Renee, or the staring locals. He doesnt see two silent rich white women. He looks at the mother.

Dan hands the tiny child to her. His eyes are shining.

Alison Croggon

Chekhov in Sakhalin

1

in the bright of winter
they say the path of a drunkard
shines in solid air

a zigzag manshaped tunnel
that collapses
at the corpse

spring vomits up the mud
the earth dissolves beneath you
like a woman in tears

and fleas of course
a visible liveliness
in every man's bed

one cannot dismiss
the petty miseries

it is possible for a man
to freeze through
and still walk

a few vowels of pain
keep everything moving

a noble soul
is a death sentence

2

the astonishing child breaks the face
of a puddle

she has a stick and a bad case
of worms

scars harrow her back and I suspect
syphillis

her laughter frightens the ducks
off the bog

beautiful eyes that burn
my retina

like a child pitiless but harder
and chaste

as the kiss on her brother's brow
when she asks me

if his coughing will kill him
now or later

her indrawn breath of calculation
how

she shifts him on her hip and says
eat, baby

but she will never read or write
any of this

3

harsh liturgies of morning
love's hurt bell

again and again
a single cruel melody

she asked me, laughing
are there crows in Sakhalin?

comedies of the body
lodge in me like maggots

forgiveness is irrelevant
my jokes smell of blood

4

it is impossible to measure the tyranny of distance
from one end of a whip to the other
is a whole continent

the comparisons of agony
this woman lost her dog
this man left his fingers in the snow

strange, when there are so many ways of dying
in the ordinary scheme of things
a twitch of the sky

will thumb us shut
and if god hides in this emptiness
the lips of innumerable cruelties

split him open like a blown corpse
nudged by little waves on a houseless shore
all his work unfinished

John Anderson

Unidentified Bird

Night parcel unidentified bird
barrelling through
on its own god's business
corpulent and prompt

The hour's low light
deep green
through its mottle of grey feathers

The hour
when the school oval became
the Island of the Dead

And you were pledged
to that same dark upward current
that is always striking
the turrets of the cypresses

Emma Lew *two poems*

Usual Rosettes

Once, twice. Today, tomorrow. There will always be a limit.

—Marc Chagall

Early flowers caused the frost, but the plane tree
threw its shadow, and the lilac bush stood cool,
shocking the house like fresh linen. My father
supported my mother in such precautions.
They quarrelled and broke, no matter how
it simplified things, and her large white skin
was smooth—sweet though forbidden. I could
make a lake of the dusty bundles that held
everything in life for me—the dour wallpaper
always bulging at the seams, the kitchen
cupboards of pine without knots, the hurled
unbreakable plates on the floor. The street below
had just begun to heal. Strange to come away
from the lamplight, the knife grinders calling out,
deafening the empire. I loved the fireworks,
but I needed to be saved from myself. Cracks
demoralized our little house. Father surfaced again
when the fortune was lost, and mother rained
into every room, proudly hampering herself
while we ate a dark soup. Yes, in the past
everything is beautiful, like a twilight where
water would flow very slowly—the chastenings,
the bread, the pallor; the fires I started
so they could not see me cry. I played a game
called "Wreck Everything," though I dressed
in silks and delicately nurtured thanks.
But now I'm frightened of another sort of ruin,
and the orioles nest someplace else.

Pocket Constellations

There's a story I tell men with amputated limbs
who come like islands on numberless lorries,
shelled all day, conserving the blood,
sky shooting up and down the red trenches,
and I am one of them, which means the long,
dim death of gas.

Under fire we have only the very pure wounds,
in our mouths the cigarette that will never light,
dark cattle cars in whose feverish straw,
and dust again on the march farther south.
In the wake of the bombers come the low-flying,
as the minutes, then the hours, but the worst
are my hands, skirting the Great Square
as through a dead city, transporting the drums
of sabotage.

Revolution is night climbing out of the valley,
feeding our bodies to the stars, extinguishing
all but the votive candle, keeping vigil
in the last lost town. They shot her, her brother,
the wheat, every animal. One house left standing
and a bitter scrawl. I am avenging, but at night
I tunnel, burying more mines in the soft soil
of the pass.

All our lives we have hated white moonlight.
All our lives we have been hating, as we learn
to hate here, tonight, on the ramparts, where
the sentries, the snipers, crave a strong moon.
We have gone through the streets, lisping
our words, hearts full of vicious light,
and always the stars above us that way,
and small children bearing the sonorous names.

Katherine Gallagher

Slippage

I

They have found an answer,
those people talking to their plants.

Tongues rising,
breath following breath.

Through a carbon dioxide veil
plants take in exhalations.

II

In new council-flat blocks
the windows are uniformly small,

rationing the view. It was never
like this on the mountain.

Years of looking at guidebooks,
wanting to camp in the hills.

III

There was no deluge, only equators
that saw the rivers spill over.

The sky might boil, we would
cover our heads, remembering

love, where we had delayed it—
this fate of avoidance.

We wear our hearts on old sleeves—
tamed by the usual risks.

There is still the wash of sun.
Another day, the drying summer.

McKenzie Wark

From Flight Recorder: A Black Box of Unknown Pleasures

In slow motion the test cars moved towards each other, unwinding behind them the coils that ran to the metering devices by the impact zone. As they collided the gentle debris of wings and fenders floated into the air. The cars rocked slightly, worrying each other like amiable whales, and then continued on their disintegrating courses. In the passenger seats the plastic models transcribed graceful arcs into the buckling roofs and windshields. Here and there a pausing fender severed a torso, the air behind the cars was a carnival of arms and legs.

—J. G. Ballard, *Atrocity Exhibition*

You know there's a fascination I have with improvised terror. Not as an experience in itself, but for contemplation afterwards. The death drive comes to me in intimate and delicate form, and I record it for viewing later, a screen memory in the mind, a black box in the heart. Memories of you. "Unwinding behind them the coils that ran to the metering devices by the impact zone." I record what you do to me. Tooling around in displacement, with writing as with a saxophone or a video camera. The adrenalin spasm turned to cold product of apparatus.

I'm surrounded by the comfort of devices: Ballard's novel machine records the video machines recording the crash test machines—all machines of measured ends. I am a passenger in my armchair going nowhere fast. I surrender to artful techniques, like a lusciously curved little red Corvette in dangerous, loving hands. I want someone to spin me out of control while that redline sound trumpets. I want to come around in a pall of burnt rubber, bruised clutches, dented bodies. I want to be taken by speed, I want to give in to your practiced techniques. I want to become one with the brazen things of this world, the things of metal and glass, made elegant and taut by deft hands.

In your absence, I give in to Art Pepper's lyric and Ballard's ballad. Memories of you. Situations where we lose control of our boundary with things. Strange rendezvous where we are fucked by the ghost of our own

machines. We like machines, especially ones which create trajectories of freedom. A vector through the world, opening up a space of pleasure and danger. The cockpit of your car is a snakepit of yearnings. Through the windscreen, everything appears as if it was organized just for you and me. The world goes by as if it were designed specifically for our progress. The possibility is ever present to throttle reason and blast right out of frame.

Do you remember when you and I sat in these armchairs, watching the missile-cam images of smart-bombs, going down for the kill in the Gulf war? The same delicious horror and fascination as Ballard describes in the test-crash. "As they collided the gentle debris of wings and fenders floated into the air." The right speed, scale and camera angle makes death seem calm, orderly, pure—immoral yet sublime. It cuts to the quick.

"Speed is the hope of the west," as Paul Virilio says in another book I keep by the armchair for these moments of quiet post-panic calm. These moments after you have convinced me that there is nothing to do but cling to the cold, smooth body of speed. These moments after you drive off into the night. Leaving an aftermath of rapt languor.

I know your game, your driver's dance with syncopated rhythms. You sit there, strapped in. Any sudden move and the belt snap-locks you in your place. Gently you try to master the instruments, get the Corvette to obey you. You try to stop it from hurting you, knowing at every turn that the danger is there, that 'stop' won't mean 'stop'. It's a masochist's wet dream: you are restrained but in control, practiced yet alert to sudden changes. Odd chords cut through the skin of the moment, out of the blue. You coax what you want from something big and powerful, felt through the contours of a svelte package, somewhere off the line between pleasure and danger.

But for real masochists, nothing beats being the passenger of a machine piloted by a talented top with a death wish. When I drive with you, you just can't help yourself. Ease open the throttle throat and my neck cracks back, my hair abandoned to the whim of the wind. Your talented fingers handle that thing deftly and firmly, getting me bent sideways in my straps, almost to where something will snap. And I must talk you through it, teasing the line between encouragement and restraint. Fling this thing at the future, hoping the rubber will hold.

Our Easter ritual: you pick me up in your car so I can go driving with my man. Every Easter there's a body count on the radio of the drivers and passengers who didn't make it to the end of the ride. The road toll sounds like the weather report, like a part of nature. It's an index of the risks of second nature, of that technological space built by many hands over the top of nature. This space of glass and steel and tar and concrete where we go driving through the undergrowth of backstreets, looking for limits.

The ancient fairy tales warned of the dangers lurking in the woods. The wolves are there, and the vampire girls. The shaman plays flute to the moon. The ghost riders, headless on the highway. The woods, the space of nature—a danger zone of fear, but also of desire. The roadways are now our space of fear and desire. Now second nature takes the place of the first in our unconscious.

Second nature, while it may be the work of human hands, becomes a powerful terrain, a power over and against us. The road toll becomes an index of a quixotic nature of our own making, but which has long gone out of our control. There is nothing left but the will to speed up the inevitable. Like the far-gone sex-fiends of the road in *Mad Max*, we crave a dissolution of our boundaries in the wet hot heady drunk of bodily fear. If only to experience, just for us, the ends of man.

Back in my armchair, leafing the pages. Reassuringly, Ballard describes a test crash rather than the real thing. Here lies a particularly perverse fascination. A fascination with a model of the crash, of the termination of the tension and anxiety of life which the death drive seeks. Not the real thing, but an anticipation. Not the calm after the test, but the preparation. A model of being taken by speed, before speed takes us all.

Images of speed are our obscene reminders of the movements that make and unmake us. "Unwinding behind them the coils that ran to the metering devices by the impact zone." Our line of sight on the sandstorm of technology. A blizzard of snow on the TV screen as the camera in the nose cone terminates at the point of impact. No wonder we went out for a drive after seeing that on the screen.

The cigarette burns down to the butt. The CD spins to the end. I put down the Ballard book and pick up the PowerBook to write this letter to you. I try to meter in the slo-mo of words our machine dreams, our fantasy life in the second nature of a world made over in the image of tech. A world which each day seems more and more like an accident waiting to happen, slow.

Robert Adamson *two poems*

The First Fan: for Mery in Paris

for Debra

Writing this in sepia ink on a Japanese fan
our pain slants my calligraphy
this way, sex just under the cap of my skull,

dreams taunt the fact of your existence
as you swish by walking in raw silk
until the words I use loose their meanings;

my best line twangs a limp string of lace:
this metaphor stiff with blood
swaying as my mind moves over the blank

folds in the rice paper, writing
on your arms, this scrawl scrolling you in
each letter a link in the chain

between my head and the bed, a text made
with these splintering syllables prickling your skin
or uttered into air where time flies apart—

what a joke our meaning gnarled
with these word-knots coming undone
where your breast shines with the sepia ink

and the sheets begin to blot our thoughts away,
smudged with love, your bum a haze of lavender oil
as I rub this in, we rock and return. again. again.

Fishing in a Landscape for Love

This is swamp land, its mountains
worn down by wings of kingfishers
flying back to their nests.

Crows are black things saving
me from morning; I talk to them
as if they are friends and they look sideways

when I offer them fish they take it.
Swamp harriers whistle
as they do their slow circles through the air,
above this madness.

Let's talk about the azure sky
descriptions of place cannot take in the prawns,
imitate their legs moving in tide
and the azure will become meaningful.

I put them into a mosquito-wire cage
and lower them from the jetty
they jump in their sleep
on the dark of each moon.

Bait is all that matters here
love has been worn down into some sounds
and is contained in what I say
dead words feeding on live words

today ideas aren't worth anything—
the words thrown to the crows don't come back
love feeds on live bait, it doesn't behave
the way scavengers do.

Kevin Hart

Nights

Midnight, she's up and walking out the back
In bare feet, looking at a winter moon,
With flat chinotto in a coffee mug.
(I'm half-asleep and slowly stretching out
Down the hypoteneuse of our old bed.)

It's three o'clock: she's reading magazines
And eating stale risotto con funghi
Straight from the fridge with that fierce chili sauce.
(I'm pulling down a pillow to hold tight
That smells a little of her new perfume.)

At five she's dragged the blankets over her
And left a radio just barely on
And, yes, forgotten to turn off a light.
(I wake up saying I'll do anything
And find the cat is staring in my eyes.)

By six the sun is playing with our blind
And children are all back inside their beds;
Somehow the bedroom smells of wine and rice.
(Still half-asleep, my hand goes home to her.
She wakes up saying she'll do anything.)

Jill Jones

The Elvis Costello poem

Before I went to the concert I went for drinks.
Work mates in a circle in the Leagues Club, already begun.
Pat kissed me drunk-firm on my right cheek, left me
a gift, the grease of lipstick. Paul was rolling
cigarettes, Jo bought Alpine. By my third glass
we were all smoking, even those who don't
reach for packets and matches. How fast we can
let go, into those distinct forbidden gestures
of Friday's push to forget. Then we began to move—
Anne left, I must go too. Pat said "You
are a piker." I shrugged, a ticket's worth money.
I wanted the music, needed coffee
to rinse wine talk from my head, to cross the city.
Walked into the theatre, wired and alone.

Fenceposts

Grain has sprouted in the combed top
of the weather-scored fencepost—a slight crop
of green against the yellow backdrop—

the sandy soil taking the brief rains
way down deep into the reservoir that drains
when the wells are tapped, that strains

to fuel the taproots of trees that fall
when you need a fencepost. But the wind's drawl
through interlock wire and steel eyelets, the speared soil

firm around the starpicket lashed
to the rickety fencepost, means things have changed
around here. If you push soft palmskin, scratched

by days of driving stakes and twisting wire,
onto the needles of the old fencepost—not so hard as to puncture—
a burning sensation will spread and aspire

towards the visual points of the brain.
A Tom Roberts painting becomes a lost refrain—
information breaking up, the field enclosed—without gain.

Rainwater Tanks — Summer

Steel moulds sledgehammered into place
and the mesh bone structure holding
the hard grey flesh; or the elevated cylinders
corrugated like ripples in clear water
stagnated and laid over each other—
perched high on metal gantries
or ground hugging of broad circumference
anchored on a bed of railway sleepers,
rings to be tapped as the water level
brings the reverberations
down an octave—the atoms
less excited, the sound cooler—
echoing nowhere as the sun
high in the sky heats the silver skin
like a furnace; or down to the standpipe
in the old Dodge, running a load
of scheme water (the canvas pipe
quivering like a reed instrument
before gushing indifferently) back
to the dangerously low rainwater tanks,
the treated liquid mingling with the tepid
dregs of roof-gathered rainwater. A dog
cools itself in a decommissioned tank,
lid peeled back like a knife-opened can,
congealed hessian for a bed,
raising a snout to take in the hot air
in brief snorts, knowing where the water
is: the brass spigots holding
back every drop, despite the moving
parts, gravity, and a corrosive thirst.

Michael Brennan

Outside Faith

Traffic descends before us, an oppositional force
that eddies from ahead where the road rises
to the city left behind. A pixilated stream of fire
slowly dying down.
Away from the freeway's purr
the headlights fade into an indigo of light
and we place suburb on suburb
between us and the deadpan truths of the day.

We stare into emerging dark, the road,
with a hope we may yet disappear,
or shed light through the variegated sky.
Silence evolving, rises from the engine's guttural meditation,
the slight rhythmic faults that generate an encyclic difference,
a certain troubled peace.

Our prayer measures itself in acceleration and distance,
expansion at each limit—*to kill God*
or the desire—road-signs flicking by in the dark
like a rosary. Our bodies mark out an immaterial line
as we move from this place
to some place else.

David Brooks

The Dead

Engel (sagt man) wüssten oft nicht, ob sie unter Lebenden gehn oder Toten.

Angels, they say, don't know whether it is the living they are moving among, or the dead.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *First Elegy*

Mid-winter sunrise, deep vermilion, etched against the dark towers, cold and fiery dawn-ball of godspeech, horns like lost geese in the depths below. Traffic gropes along streets not yet drained of night. On the bed beside me a woman is weeping for the waste of life. Hers. Mine. Or perhaps for some other thing entirely.

It is only later that I see them, naked like myself but out there on the tops of buildings, leaning against chimneys or airducts or standing right at the prows, like young midshipmen. Some vast invisible sea.

When I wake again it is broad, cold day. Buildings have recovered their colours. The herds of taxis bank and flow with the lights. Where there might have been something else there now are only doves, or white pigeons, coasting between the rooftops, high over the numbered avenues, beaks closed hard against the light.

***

At 6.45 a.m. there was a Moroccan woman singing somewhere below, her voice rising up strong and confident from the stairwell. At first I thought it was a record, a nightclub, but at that hour? And then, at seven, the strangest sound, from above, beyond, or even from within the building itself, a courtyard I haven't yet seen. Like the cooing of pigeons, greatly amplified, or some much larger bird being fed. (Geese. Could it have been the geese again, echoing up some atrium?)

And for almost an hour now there have been sounds of water, baths being run, ablutions, a child's voice, far below, chattering in a language I don't

understand, the city itself at last breaking through. Motors running. Street-doors slamming, a distant siren. Soon there will be the noisy garbage collection, the collection of rubble from the work down the street. Soon the woman coming to work in the Institute of Beauty, with her yapping dog...

***

Out for air after a whole day's rain we walk to the park on the boulevard, returning along the street by the cemetery. The high roofs of the dead are just visible over the long, straight walls, some of them with their windows open, catching the last light. I think about them sitting there, in their upper storeys, with their hands on the sill, their mouths and eyes gaping, absorbing whatever they can from the thin, buttery sun.

***

Just before 6 a.m. in room 4 of the Hotel Guerini, for a couple of hours now awake and yet hearing nothing—a complete absence of cars—as if we were out in the country. Only the occasional person, very late or early, crossing the square outside. At one point a girl's laughter, at another the sound of snoring from the next room. And the sound of you sleeping. A few moments before I rose I actually heard you dreaming, the breathing getting suddenly deeper and more rapid as you fled something or ran after it down one of the lanes or alleyways, deep in the ancient city of the mind. And then, for a few minutes, the sound of birds. At breakfast I asked you what it had been, but you were confused, remembered nothing, did not know what I was asking.

***

Walking down a dark street late at night we pass a fragment of the old walls of the city. I realize that the City of the Dead is also walled, its perimeters still intact, and that in other ways too it is, as in this, a replica of the city about it. For the City of the Dead is also divided into sectors and has its grand avenues and narrow back lanes, its parks and public spaces: there is the Avenue A, the Avenue T, the Boulevard N; there are C Street and L Street. So that the dead have their own, particular addresses. So that there are some neighbourhoods more sought after than others. So that there is the English quarter, the Jewish quarter, the Chinese. At the gatehouse I ask for the poet V and am told that he is on rue D, number 49, just a few doors down from the fountain.

***

You would think all the small birds in this place had already been trapped and eaten by the peasants, but that is another country, the official one, the one of rumour. Here everything is birds and bells, and small streets, pas-

sageways, arches, unexpected stairways and issuings. It seems like a model of the heart somehow, although every time I try to explain this the threads slip away. There is a clock in a bell tower that is thirty minutes behind, and so rings out the strangest hours, one peal for the third quarter, three for the first one, two for the hour, one, nine or ten or twelve for the half hour later. There is another that rings out the correct hours, but are they the correct hours truly? We are in different territory. Every day you feel another life waiting. Every day you feel you could step off the edge.

***

We compare our nights. No one sleeps well. No one really tells the truth of them. Jealous for what the night means to us, we are clutching at our small parcels of dark, holding them back from the light. We keep our shutters closed far into the morning, long after the sounds have begun outside. When we open them at last the day is thunderous, the sound and the colour blaze in in a wild confusion.

***

> *The first time I woke I heard rain approaching over the roofs, gently at first but then hard and driving overhead, tailing off again as quickly as it came, leaving the night clean. The second time light was beginning to filter through the half-open shutters. Some of it had got in already and was wrapping itself about this object and that, making the shapes of them clear. I thought I saw a lone tongue dart in, one of the tiny tongues of the dawn birds, or it may have been a lone ray of gold, shining for an instant on the surface of an urn before the earthly matter swallowed it.*

***

Is it death in us, or are we waiting, in a kind of hibernation, to wake into some new state, some different spring?

Is that what we came here for, to wander about in the shadowy streets of ourselves, bear witness to them, in an alarm or amazement we can do little to explain or control?

***

A rat swims over the fine plate of Isabelle d'Este, making for the beard of green algae growing from her brother's hand. Down the street three *putti*, smiling over a scene now gone, show the same vapid delight as the cloud they ride goes slowly under. The City is half below water. The builders knew this would happen. Perhaps, thinking of lost Atlantis, they even

planned it so. Boats scrape against the ground-floor lintels, gondolas are garaged over sunken dining-rooms. Whatever may be left in the cellars far below now rests in inaccessible silence. No light enters them. Where once guests gathered at the foot of great staircases, amongst frescoes of Diana or the Princes of Umbria, no-one, not even if they have just dropped the most valuable jewel, attempts to dive into the polluted shadow. At night people wake and hear the water somewhere beneath them, and wonder if they have woken at all, if it isn't the mind that is under flood, if they don't spend half their lives under its waters.

***

In some paintings it is not a halo or nimbus but rays of gold or golden arrows descending from the sky, piercing now a bird, now a child, now a man or, more often, a woman, in all the configurations of Annunciation. In the *Hermit Triptych* by Joachim von Patinir the rays pour like a bizarre golden beard from about the cloud-enshrouded mouth of God, shooting down at first into a dove and then to St. John the Baptist who stands up to his naked waist in a river that has also commenced in the clouds, the mind and the eye being gathered, herded by these things, so that later, in a church we had mistaken for the Pantheon, how could we be surprised to find, in a corner, behind protective glass, a painting of the Pentecost, and golden tongues, drifting down through the air, a small swarm or squadron, toward the waiting mouths of the apostles?

***

In the City of Ruins it is the unexpected eruptions of life that we look for, a bright carpet of lawn amongst the broken columns and buckling paving of a cloister, a tree burgeoning with lemons at the end of a barren stone alley, a huge-speared succulent like a still green fountain in a shaft of light amongst the crumbled mosaics and desecrated frescoes, living water bubbling from an ancient fountain. Once a child, following with his younger brother his parents as they conversed fluently with a guide in the strange language of this place, turned to me and, looking openly, spoke, in my own tongue, the one, clear, intimate word of greeting, as if he knew me and there were some treasured secret between us. All afternoon his strange beauty haunted the stone, sounds that might have been their muffled voices led me deeper and deeper into the dry, hot maze of that place, investing it with unexpected and implausible desire.

***

Although there have been countless reports about the city and the various cities within it, there appears to have been none about that city which is made up of reports of itself. This city is not always very clearly the same city, but sometimes, from some point in one's own or someone else's ac-

count of a city which may be but is not always this city, one glimpses—as, say, crossing a canal by bridge, one might glimpse another bridge—a fragment of the city one has earlier encountered but which, such is the labyrinth of *calle*, *piazze*, *corsi* and *viae* between that bridge and the place where one now is, one can do nothing about but accept and move on. So that the city knows—not only, but also—what it has been *told* it is. So that a part of what they have been told it is resides in the mind of everyone who looks at the city, and, their expectations thus moulded, shapes the city that they see.

The City *is* what the City *was*. If we are taught to see by the stories we see or hear or read, if our vision is always the product of texts—the texts *we* have seen, and those seen by those who have written what we have seen—then the City that *is* is a hole, an absence, a possibility, beyond us, as we ourselves are, as our friends are, our lovers. An edge, which now and again we think we glimpse through accident, irruption, exposure.

***

In the poet's house there was an alcove in a small recessed area off the entrance hall, an alcove inside an alcove. This alcove, the smaller one—the alcove within the alcove—was in fact the painting of a woman in a chapel or further alcove, a tall woman in a dress of vivid red, her arms outstretched so that the pale grey shawl she also wore formed a kind of tent over the space beneath her. In this space were several people—other women, priests, burghers of a town (such was my explanation of the waves about them) somewhere by the sea. Many of them —not all, since some appeared to have turned their faces to the waves—were looking up, with expressions of quiet adoration, to her own absorbed and meditative face. She was their Nurse, their Virgin, the young, strong, infinitely caring Mother they remembered from the time when they were children, before the lines entered her face and her neck bowed, before her hair thinned and turned so grey. Suspended on the wall as she was, her arms wide apart and the shawl so like a canopy about her, she was fixed in the one place and yet, every time I looked toward her—for she could be seen through the archway from the table where I sat with the poet, eating a pasta with a sauce of cheese and pancetta and eggs, and

drinking a fine Agninello—seemed also to be rising, a phenomenon, a tension, a paradox which, sitting there so attently, my physical relation to it never changing, I could only explain as the room itself moving with her, and all of us—the woman, the poet, his daughters, myself—slowly rising from the earth.

***

There was a moment, she once told me, when it seemed she had lived utterly, when it had felt as if she glimpsed into the Reality of things, so that ever since, when a similar moment occurred, she had felt that she should collect it, and place it with others, as if they might all belong to some different place, the true place, the place of which all these places were dreaming...

***

It was not the City; none of them was; but when, in the Campo di Fiori, the birds lifted off the shoulders of the statue of Giovanni Bruno (it was just sunset, and the last rays of light were disappearing over the roofs of the houses) their beaks were open—this is the point: their beaks were open, in a farewell cry, and the light, the very last of it, caught for a merest fragment of a second in this open space, breaking into minute sun-burrs, tiny radiant clusters, in the very moment of its vanishing.

***

Walking back from the City of the Dead we passed many others walking in the direction opposite to our own, but saw them with a doubt we had not thought of as we came. Were these people, as we had done an hour earlier, heading out for a Sunday stroll, or were they returning? And which city were they returning to? Which of us were the living and which the dead?

***

In the city the darkness is relative: you enter the street, late at night, from a well lighted room, or simply turn off the light within that room, or carry a light before you out-of-doors, and the darkness can seem almost total, until your eyes adjust, until shapes, in a gradual thinning of the darkness, begin to reappear, in what might best be thought of not as night, but as a ghost or shadow of the day, the day that exists, even when day is not there, the strange light, the *between* light, that is not creating the darkness by its own being.

***

In the Hotel Guerini I dream again of water, great waves of ocean from beyond the horizon moving inexorably toward the rocks and the low,

city cliffs upon which we stand, breaking at last at the harbour's mouth, washing so high over the beach and the breakwater that we must run skipping, leaping backward to avoid them. A terrible storm is coming, they say, and we must retreat to the house of our friends, to wait in the great hall, murmuring amongst ourselves, a low fire struggling in the huge grate, watching for a sign of the gale's passing, the sound of birds perhaps, or light at a battened window.

What is it about? they ask me. What does it mean? Do I know that the City is about to be swept away? And there is, after all, only so much I can show them.

Brenda Walker

Sunflowers in the Firehouse

The fireman was crying in the supermarket. I kept my eyes on the patch that was stitched across the top of his sleeve. If I didn't look at his eyes I wouldn't have known that he was crying. The patch on his sleeve was a darker blue than his uniform and it was embroidered, in white, with the word RESCUE. I met him in the pet care aisle or down where the soap shaded into mouthwash and abrasive cleaners. Once he was wearing an old sarong. He told me about wading through tins of exploded dogfood in a warehouse fire. His eyes were full of tears. Before we talked about the latest natural disaster he always asked me how she was. How is she? I said that she was fine.

She walked faster than anyone I know. She walked with the jerkiness of someone who really wants to run. Down the gravel track by the rows of vines, along the road and into anybody's unpruned orchard where the canes met just above head height and the end of the row was invisible; she walked until she had to slow down and turn back to the house.

Brioche, field mushrooms, King Island cream, asparagus, chocolate, wine that filled the mouth with a light ache for the way all liquid ought to taste: these were the things to take to the vineyard. In autumn there were figs by the river and when the vines dropped their leaves you could gather clusters of raisins that had been missed in the harvest. Wild yeasts gave these raisins the taste of fortified wine.

She stopped eating. She watched the horizon for a column of smoke. She had promised her husband that she would never see the fireman.

There was a TV at the vineyard but it was to one side of the horseshoe of comfortable chairs around the fireplace. Shelves carried rows of holiday-house books. In the Virago guide to San Francisco I found out about Lillie Coit, who dressed as a fireman and turned up, cheering, when her favourite unit was called out. I tipped the book well forward to hide these pages as I read. When Lillie died she left the city enough money to build a great white tower with a top shaped like the nozzle of a fire hose.

I know, from talking to the fireman in the supermarket, that he doesn't spend all his time in burning warehouses, wrestling with a hose.

The firemen lead calm patient lives. They fold sheets in the dormitory, which they clean. They've planted sunflowers behind the firehouse

and all day the great yellow heads of their sunflowers turn with the sky's warmth.

They run to the path above the beach and then they swim. They cook good meals for one another. The fireman is an excellent cook. At night he and the other firemen read or watch football. On their days off they renovate houses and cheer each other across the finishing lines at triathalons.

The less she ate the more she cooked. The air smelled of coriander and quince. She could have been cooking for a whole firehouse.

She was good at ferns. Hers lived through shrivelling summers. She grew plenty of citrus, too. She drove down from the vineyard to do the watering and when she came back she unloaded a box of cumquats and mandarins.

The fireman was in the newspaper.

We were sitting in the walled courtyard behind the house, out of sight of the rows of vines, peeling mandarins. Someone had gone into town earlier for pastries and newspapers. The fireman was on the front page. A man had been cleaning a container on the docks when the chemicals got to him and he slipped, unconscious, into the caustic broth. The fireman went down through a hatch and fished him out. They were both staring out of a front page photograph.

Everyone carefully picked up the paper in turn and carefully read the story on the fireman rather than look as if they were avoiding him.

Our husbands were leaving the vineyard. We watched the tail-lights dip at the creek and disappear. There was going to be a wedding and they were meeting up with the groom for a buck's party. They'd be back after closing time. When they left we cleaned up and went to bed and fell into a normal sleep.

In the morning the car was back, the men were asleep across the couches and there were three things on the kitchen bench: a pair of handcuffs, an adult-sized bib with plastic breasts, and a raw supermarket chicken, all leftovers from the party.

There are no curtains at the house in the vineyard. We stand together at the window and watch our husbands pacing between the rows of vines. They are unhappy with their wives. They will be discussing what to do with us, or they will be discussing some point of law.

When my husband left me I was saved by fire.

It was cold. Nobody was going to the vineyard. Even on sunny weekends boats stayed moored to the walkways at the yacht club, the rigging chinking against the masts. The men were watching football on TV.

There was work; there was the football.

There were plenty of other things I didn't know about.

After I was told, I asked my husband to leave and he walked away from me and the big wooden house by the ocean and the piano and the little dogs with feathery tails who wagged their tails so hard when he came home from work each night that their back paws slid from side to side on the polished floors.

After he left I had all of this to myself, and I had the fire.

It was big and I kept it burning like the furnace that heats steam for some great engine. The fire was as much work as a baby. I got up in the night and lifted another log and settled it into the coals. I blew into the flames and they rose high. They fed on what was left over in my breath. I turned each log repeatedly, lifting and propping until they were blanketed in flame. Then I went back to my own bed. In the morning I padded down the corridor and felt the boards warming under my own feet as I got closer to the fire. Sometimes it died right down but the heart of it was always there, waiting for my breath and the screwed-up newspapers.

I didn't eat.

I went for quick irritable walks on the path above the sea and when I came back I sat with the fire.

My chest hurt and I thought I could taste blood in the outpour of my breath when I breathed over the flames.

When I left the fireside my breath and thoughts were all awry. The floor dipped and righted itself underneath my feet as if I had jetlag; as if I had been pulled a great distance, at high speed, against the turn of the earth. I taught myself to walk smoothly, up and down the corridor, with the small dogs trotting confidently between the fire and my feet.

The sea was high and at night I lay awake listening to the water dragging back over kelp and rock; listening to every wave.

Friends called and spoke kindly and their voices were just sounds, not soothing, like the sea, but noisy, like car doors slamming and footsteps further down the street. Even when everyone started to make plans for the first spring visit to the vineyard I was barely listening.

My husband phoned and said he wanted to fix it up. He'd give anything to fix it up. He used the same voice he used when he was drunk, and he'd say I'm not drunk. Ask me anything. Ask me any question you like. I'm not drunk.

I went back to the fire to crouch and stare.

My mother said I was to look to the future. Turn your face toward the light, she said. I thought of the sunflowers behind the firehouse. It was winter and they would be nothing more than brittle stalks.

Smoke gathers like a pretty mist around the chimneys of the houses just behind the beach. The streets smell like childhood; like men in the dark-

ness on farmhouse verandahs with lit cigarettes.

The wood ran out.

I bought bags of it from the supermarket. It was too thick for kindling and it was chopped up too finely to burn far into the night.

I ordered a tonne of sliced-up telegraph poles. They were silver on the outside and deep red wihin. Some logs had aluminium tags sunk into the wood, or rusting wire. I thought of the phone lines riding high above my wood. I thought of all that talk brought down to feed the fire. The telegraph poles burned with a serious, even heat.

Smoke gathers like sea-spray and then it disappears. Smoke gathers above the house, or outside on verandahs and rooftops. There is tin, there is insulation, then there is the wooden ceiling, tongue-in-groove, painted glossy white.

I was in the kitchen when the smoke started to pour down from between the ceiling planks and I knew it was time to phone the firehouse.

After I put down the phone the small flames appeared in a circle around the flue of the stove. The smoke was black now, and there was nothing to be done except go outside with the feathery dogs, close my eyes and hope that the crackling noises I could hear were the sound of firemen's boots on the tin roof, and not the sound of the fire.

The firemen were masked and padded and they slowly tore the roof open with iron bars. They didn't look human at all. But one of them left his work, and the fire, and took me by the shoulders and sat me in a garden chair with a glass of water.

There was ash on the rim of the glass. The garden was filling with black ash.

Contributors

Robert Adamson lives at Long Nose Point, Sydney Harbour, New South Wales. He presently directs and edits for Paper Bark Press. Adamson's poetry has been published widely and translated into seven languages, including Russian and Chinese.

John Allison lives in Lyttelton, New Zealand. His poems have been published in numerous journals worldwide, including the Canadian journals *The Malahat Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *The New Quarterly*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Grain*, and *Kairos*. His third book of poetry, *Stone Moon Dark Water*, was published by Sudden Valley Press in 1999.

Annette Allwood is a contemporary expressionist landscape artist. For three years she travelled through Australia, working with intense colours and powerful imagery to capture some of the most beautiful locations in the country. "Stranded in Australia" was inspired by the experience of seeing an abandoned truck on the road from Alice Springs to Darwin in the Northern Territory. Annette lives and paints in Vancouver.

Vassílis Amanatídis was born in 1970 in Edessa, Northern Greece. He studied art and archaeology at the University of Thessaloniki. These translations are taken from his book *Dormitory* (1999). His poems have appeared in *Osiris* (US) and *Oasis* (UK). He lives in Thessaloniki.

John Anderson (1948-1997) grew up on an orchard in Northern Victoria, and later moved to Melbourne, where he lived for most of his life. He published three volumes of poetry: *the bluegum smokes a long cigar* (Rigmarole, 1978), *The forest set out like the night* (Black Pepper Press, 1997), and *The Shadow's Keep* (Black Pepper Press, 1997).

Donna Salter Beatty has written non-fiction for local newspapers and news for broadcast television. She is originally from Canada, but currently resides in Brooklyn, New York, with her two children. She has just completed her first novel. "The Eclipse" is Donna's first published work of fiction.

John Bennett is currently undertaking a new Defence of Poetry at Wollongong University. His latest collection is *Field Notes—Australia/Albion* (Five Islands Press). You can catch his poems, photographs,

hypertextual essays, and readings at http://home.primus.com.au/jbandbr

Michael Brennan co-directs Vagabond Press, a small press currently devoted to new Australian poetry. He co-edited *28 Contemporary Australian Poets* (Paper Bark Press, 2000) with Peter Minter, and is associate editor of *Southerly.* In the second half of 2000, he will be studying contemporary poetics as a Queen's Trust Scholar at Cambridge.

Stephen Brockwell published *The Wire in Fences* in 1988 (Balmuir). His work has appeared in *The Antigonish Review*, *Canadian Literature*, *Descant*, *Quarry*, and the anthologies *Poets 88* (Quarry Press) and *Sounds New* (Muses Company). He is the Product Manager for Enterprise Technology with Autodesk Canada, and lives in Ottawa, Ontario.

David Brooks is a poet, essayist, novelist (*The House of Balthus*), and short fiction writer who teaches Australian Literature at the University of Sydney. He lived and studied in Canada in the 1970s.

Alison Croggon has written poetry, prose, and texts for theatre, and has been given a number of awards. Her published books are *This is the Stone, The Blue Gate* and *Navigatio.* She is the editor of *Masthead* magazine. In 2000, she will be the Australia Council Writer-in-Residence at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

Katherine Gallagher is an Australian poet resident in London since 1979. Her book, *Passengers to the City* (Hale & Iremonger, 1985), was shortlisted for the 1986 National Poetry Award. Her other collections are *Fish-Rings on Water* (Forest Books, 1989) and a translation from French, *The Sleepwalker with Eyes of Clay* (Forest, 1994). *Tigers on the Silk Road,* her next book, will be published by Arc in 2000. Her *Selected Poems* are due out from Salmon Publishing in late 2000.

Robert Gore's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Canadian Literature*, *ARC*, *Pottersfield Portfolio*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Vintage '95* (Quarry Press), and *Blindfolds* (Outlaw Editions). He lives in Vancouver where he works as a librarian at Kwantlen University College and sings with the a cappella group "Pastime With Good Company".

Yannis Goumas is a poet, translator, novelist, actor, composer, and singer. Born in Athens, he was raised and educated in England where he lived for twenty years. He is the author of nine books of poetry in English, two in Greek (in translation), and one trilingual volume in Eng-

lish, Greek, and Turkish. Since 1994 he has devoted his time to acting with the State Theatre of Northern Greece and the Greek National Theatre.

Gwendolyn Gross's first novel is forthcoming from Henry Holt in 2001. She was selected as a PEN West Emerging Writer, and has had stories in *Salt Hill Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, and *Santa Barbara Review*, among others. Ms. Gross lives in New Jersey with her husband and son.

Clayton Hansen lives in Warwick, Queensland, and each spring sports the maroon-coloured grin of a man who eats his mulberries too fast. His two young children have the same circus-clown smiles. Libby, his wife, believes it's hereditary. She prefers the sticky sweetness of a mango. When Clayton's not writing he finds time to be Principal of an elementary school that resounds with 260 pieces of mischief. Clayton has been published extensively in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the US.

Kevin Hart is the author of seven collections of poetry, the most recent being *New and Selected Poems* (HarperCollins, 1994) and *Wicked Heat* (Paper Bark Press, 1999). An expanded *Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Bloodaxe Books in England. He is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia.

Coral Hull is a full-time writer specializing in poetry, experimental prose fiction, prose poetry, and literary articles. Her work has been published extensively in literary magazines in the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK. Her published books include *In The Dog Box Of Summer in Hot Collation* (1995), *William's Mongrels in The Wild Ljfe* (1996), and *How Do Detectives Make Love?* (1998), all from Penguin Books Australia. She is presently based in Sydney.

Mark Anthony Jarman is the author of *Salvage King Ya!* and *New Orleans Is Sinking*. He is a winner of the *Event* Creative Non-fiction Contest #12. He has been shortlisted twice for *The Journey Prize*, nominated twice for *The Pushcart Prize* anthology, and shortlisted for the 1999 *O'Henry Prize*. He has been at the University of Victoria for donkey's years, but is currently teaching fiction at the University of New Brunswick for 1999-2000. A new collection of stories, *19 Knives*, will be published by Anansi in spring 2000.

Jill Jones is a Sydney writer. She won the Mary Gilmore Award in 1993 for her first book, *The Mask and the Jagged Star*. Her third book, *The*

Book of Possibilities, published in 1997, was shortlisted for the National Book Council Banjo Award and the Adelaide Festival Awards. Her poetry was previously published in PRISM 27:4.

John Kinsella is the author of over twenty books of poetry, including *Poems 1980-1994*, *The Hunt*, and *Visitants* (all with Bloodaxe Books). His numerous awards include the John Bray Award for Poetry from the Adelaide Festival, the Western Australian Premier's Award (twice), the Grace Leven Award for Poetry, and the Age Poetry Book of the Year Award. He is the editor of *Salt*, co-editor of *Stand* (UK), and the International Editor of *Kenyon Review* (US). He has guest-edited Australian issues of *Poetry Review* (UK) and *Poetry* (US), amongst others. He is a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge.

Anthony Lawrence has published six books of poems. His latest collection, *Skinned by Light: New & Selected Poems* (University of Queensland Press) won the inaugural Queensland Premier's Award in 1999. His first novel, *The Missing*, is to be published by Pan Macmillian in 2000. He lives in Hobart, Tasmania.

Emma Lew lives in Melbourne. Her first collection of poems, *The Wild Reply*, was published in 1997 by Black Pepper Press.

Melissa Lucashenko is a Murri woman of mixed European and Indigenous descent. She began writing after abortive careers in housepainting and martial arts instruction (she has a black belt in karate). Her first book, *Steam Pigs*, won the Dobbie Award for Australian women's fiction, and was shortlisted for the regional Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1997. Her most recent book is *Hard Yards*, published by the University of Queensland Press. She currently lives in Canberra with her partner and two young children.

rob mclennan is a poet, book reviewer, editor/publisher of above/ground press and *STANZAS* magazine, and literary events coordinator and Ontario rep. for the *League of Canadian Poets*. In 1999, he won the CAA/Air Canada Award for Most Promising Writer under 30. Author of over two dozen poetry chapbooks, his fifth full poetry collection is *bagne, or Criteria for Heaven,* forthcoming from Broken Jaw Press. He has drunk in eight out of ten of our provinces, and lives and breathes in Ottawa, Ontario.

Jean McNeil is a Canadian residing in the UK. She has had fiction and poetry published in *The Fiddlehead*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Pottersfield*

Portfolio, *Poetry Canada*, and PRISM. She was co-winner of PRISM's 1997 Short Fiction Contest, and, in 1999, was published in *The Journey Prize Anthology.* Her first novel, *Hunting Down Home*, was published by Orion in 1996, and is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions in the US.

James Norcliffe is a New Zealand writer. He has been awarded the Robert Burns Fellowship for 2000 at the University of Otago in Dunedin, NZ. His third collection of poems, *A Kind of Kingdom*, was published in 1998 by Victoria University Press. In Canada, his poems have appeared in *Grain*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *The Antigonish Review*, *The Windsor Review*, *The Wascana Review*, and *Queen's Quarterly.* His poetry has also been published in PRISM (31:2 and 36:2).

Dorothy Porter has published ten books, including three verse novels and five collections of poetry. Her best known work is *The Monkey's Mask*, a crime thriller in verse, which will appear as a feature film in 2000. She lives and writes in Australia.

Tracy Ryan, born in Perth, Australia, currently lives in Cambridge, England. She has published a novel and three books of poetry with Fremantle Arts Centre Press. Tracy's latest book, *The Willing Eye,* has also been published in Britain (Bloodaxe Books).

Raman Singh, educated in India, England, Germany, and the US, was a journalist in North Africa and the Middle East, and a professor of Literature in the US, Indonesia, Syria, the Congo, and, currently, Greece. He has won awards for short fiction, had two small-press novels published (one in Arabic), and recently signed a screenplay with a Hollywood company. He is trying to market two completed novels. Any takers?

Virgil Suarez was born in Havana, Cuba. He is the author of four published novels: *Latin Jazz*, *The Cutter*, *Havana Thursdays*, and *Going Under,* as well as a collection of short stories called *Welcome to the Oasis.* His poetry and fiction has been published extensively, and has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes. He teaches Creative Writing and Latino/a and Caribbean Literature at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida, where he lives with his family.

John Tranter has published fourteen collections of verse, including a *Selected Poems* in 1982, *The Floor of Heaven* in 1992, *Gasoline Kisses* (Equipage, Cambridge UK) in 1997, and *Late Night Radio* (Polygon, Edinburgh) in 1998. *Different Hands* (Folio/Fremantle Arts Centre Press), a collection of seven experimental prose pieces, was published

in 1998. His work appears in the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* and he was the co-editor the *Bloodaxe Book of Modern Australian Poetry*. He is editor of the the Internet magazine *Jacket*, which can be found at www.jacket.zip.com.au/welcome.html

Brenda Walker has written three novels: *Crush* (FACP, 1990), *One More River* (FACP, 1993), and *Poe's Cat* (Viking Australia, Penguin UK). She has edited and contributed to critical books on contemporary Australian fiction and poetry. She teaches at the University of Western Australia.

McKenzie Wark's most recent book is *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace* (Pluto Press). He lives in Sidney, teaches media studies at Macquarie University and is a columnist for *The Australian*.

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Writers are invited to submit manuscripts that explore the creative non-fiction form. See back issues of *Event* for previous winning entries and comments by such judges as Myrna Kostash, Howard White, Eleanor Wachtel, George Galt, Sharon Butala, Tom Wayman, and Di Brandt.

Note: Previously published material cannot be considered. Maximum length for submission is 5000 words, typed and double-spaced. Include a separate cover sheet with the writer's name, address and phone number, and the title(s) of the story (stories) enclosed. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope (Canadian postage or IRCs only) and a telephone number. Douglas College employees are not eligible to enter.

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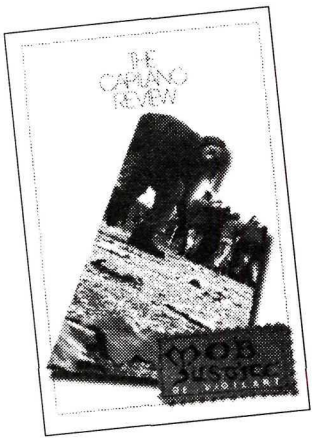

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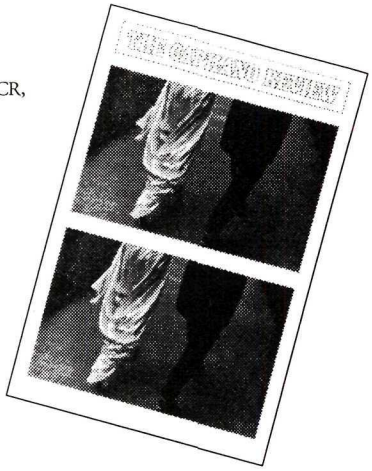

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he will never love you said her mother
if you were cinnamon on the tongue

soon he will say your thighs open
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-Méira Cook, "Days of Water"
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First his build was impared, then he forfeited his weight. Thus, in an hour, his body had lost its third dimension. His façade remained whole, only now he lacked a profile. Whoever comes across him in the street remarks, "Why, a landscape painting?"

— Vassílís Amanatídís, Page 32

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