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Contemporary writing from Canada and around the world

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Writing from the Pacific Rim



The logo for PRISM international features the word "PRISM" in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with "international" in a smaller, italicized font to its right. Below this, the words "Special Issue" and "Featuring Sound" are stacked in a bold, sans-serif font. The entire text is enclosed within a dotted-line graphic that resembles a sound wave or a stylized prism.

PRISM *international*
Special Issue
Featuring Sound

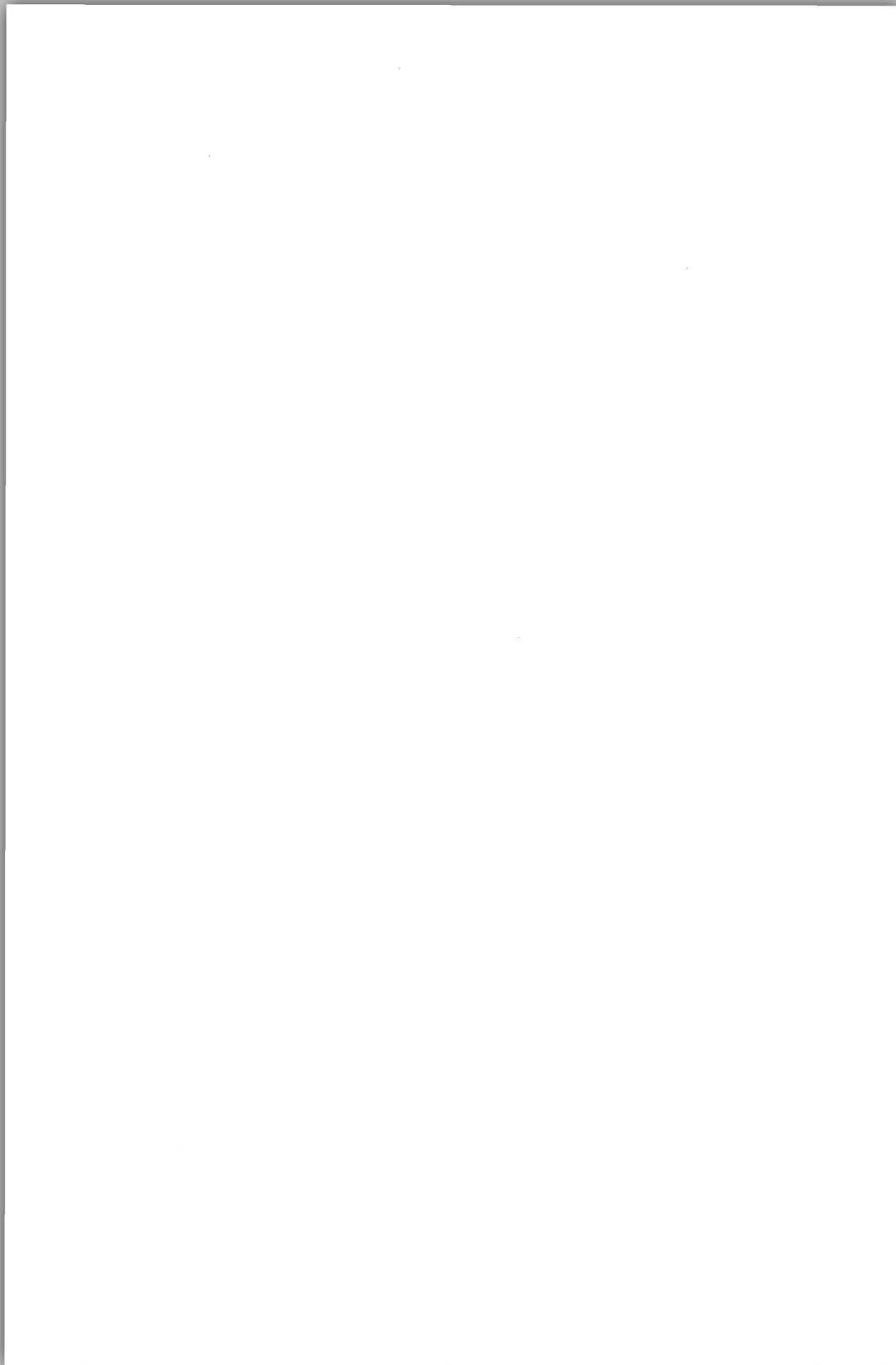
P **PRISM** INVITES SUBMISSIONS OF
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PRISM *international*



PRISM *international*

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Billy Marshall-Stoneking

Three Poems

The Seasons of Fire

There is Law for Fire,
singing for Fire,
dancing for Fire—
Fire Dreaming.
You have been there, you have seen it.
You know all the names of Fire:
signal fires, hunting fires,
sleeping fires, fires for light,
fires for cooking, for ceremonies,
healing fires of eucalyptus leaves—
Fire is medicine, magic.

Fire gave Crow a voice,
flying away in pain.
Fire brings old quarrels to an end.
On top of Uluru, do not drink
at the rockhole of Warnampi
unless you take Fire
or the snake will bite your spirit
and drought will follow.
Fire can protect you from the dead ones.

You have been there, you have seen them.
You know all this Fire.
The penis is Fire.
The vagina is Fire.
Fire is inside the bodies of animals.
The woman hands a fire-stick to the boy
and he becomes a man.
There is a time for every fire.
The fires of January are different
to the fires of June.
In the cold time, a small nudge before sleep
will keep the flame alive all night.
The right ash, the right heat,

the right position of wind, dune and saltbush:
a technology of Fire. The knowledge.

You have been there, you have watched.
You know all the seasons of Fire.

Hawk stopped Bush Turkey
throwing Fire into the sea.
Fire cannot be stolen now; it lives
everywhere—inside the spinifex and dry wood.
All this is Law.
'The smoking days'—Buyuguyunya—come every year.
The air is full of smoke.
The smoke comes first, then the fire,
and then the smoke. . .
All this is Law.
Hot is more than two sticks rubbed together; and
no chopping—take only what you can drag:
green wood for shelter;
dead pieces for waru.
The wind from the mouth works kindling.
Fire makes grass seed.
It finds the kangaroo and chases him
to the hunters.
All this is Law.
The burning off and the gathering together are one.

You have been there, you have seen it.
You know all the seasons of Fire.

Rock Climbing with Gary Snyder

When we couldn't get up the waterfall
we went over the top of the mountain,
up the side of a cliff. Up the gorge
past Purlka Karringya—Warangula's country,
Central Australia—no pines, no snow.
Scrabbling in the old land; continuing
the same journey Kerouac had continued
thirty years before.
Snyder, talking about niches and
dharma, found rock wallaby shit
halfway up. The rocks
fitted together like
a Chinese puzzle. Okay.
Easier now. Don't look back,
don't look down.
Find hand-hold.
Find foot-hold.
Push up.
Press against the stone.
Hook leg over rock.
Not too fast. Listen to the wind.
To the cicadas. There are spirits
in this place. Don't be cocky.
No one's famous here.
Don't offend the ancestors.
Follow the old man.
Too far gone to go back, Snyder turns
and says: "You're six-years-old
and this is a big playground."

Okay.

Is this how Kerouac felt
following you up the Matterhorn?

Fuck the literature!
Get to the top.
Firm rock is heaven. *Not hanging off the side.*
Finding a foot-hold.
Finding a hand-hold:

No haiku in this but sweat.

The Promiscuous Old Man

(from a Tingarri song cycle)

'It went West!'
The old man laughs as he tells me this.
It's the end of a story
about an old man who was worried
all the time
for tjiki-tjiki—
'He liked women.
All the time/all the time;
one night wasn't good enough.
One woman wasn't good enough.'
The storyteller grabs my hands
and leans over close to whisper
in my ear: 'Law! Aboriginal law!'
The story's about this old man
who liked women;
he loved a different kungka every night.
'He couldn't think straight.'
One morning he woke up—
'karlu wiya, ngaampu wiya'—
his sexual parts were missing.
'They'd gone walkabout by themselves.
They couldn't wait for him anymore!'
He tracked them for days and days,
over sandhills and dry lakes.
He tracked them at night,
with a firestick in his hand,
but 'that penis wasn't going to stop;
those balls weren't going to sit down.'
That penis has a long 'dreaming track' now.
It goes a long way—West!
The storyteller sticks out his tongue
and scrunches up his nose:
'That old man—
he never did catch up!'

An Apprentice's Expenses in a Certain Month

Deng Kaishan

Translated from the Chinese by Gu Ya-xing

- 1st I went to see the Kung-fu picture *Disciples of Shaolin Temple* three times. Cost to self 90¢.
- 4th I bought seven magazines including *Martial Arts*, *Wushu*, *Souls of Wushu*, *Shaolin Boxing*, *Drunkard's Boxing* at cost of \$2.15.
- 5th In the morning I practised wushu in the park and bought three bottles of malt sparkling ale. @ \$3.
- 7th Head shave. Cost to self 25¢.
- 9th I bought nine books such as *The Three Knights and Five Musketeers*, *Murder on the Orient Express* and *A Female Musketeer's Romance*. They cost me \$13.78.
- 10th In the morning I saw the Kung-fu picture *Shaolin Temple* again two more times at the cost of 60¢. In the afternoon I bought five packets of cigars for \$3.50. The total expense was \$4.10.
- 12th I practised wushu in the park. I jumped down from the second floor of the pagoda and broke my leg. I was hospitalized. The register fee for emergency treatment was 30¢.
- 31st I have been in the hospital nineteen days. My medical expense alone is expected to be \$70.43.

This month's total expense will be \$94.91.

To write out, RMB Ninety Four Dollars and Ninety One Cents.

Warrick Wynne

Warrnambool

1956, and the sodden schoolyard
low and cold and dumped
with the collected rain
for a thousand miles of sea
is transformed utterly;
raised in a sea of coffee shells
that are spread like tan-bark,
crackle under the feet like fire
suck the water up, or hide it.

The local factory agrees to supply,
free of charge,
this material for a playground,
the by-product finding function,
the yard thick with gathered shells.
Some mothers complain of clothes stained brown,
the caramel-coloured rivulets
running away in rain,
but most seem pleased
and some wonder at the children
of an oceanside fishing town
returning from a day at school
hands and knees stained brown as tea,
smelling of New Guinea or Morocco,
and in winter evenings brisk as hail,
before the fire,
of brewing coffee.

Science Diet

Lorna M. Jackson

The fingerprints on the window look like someone tried to get in here. A man could use a ladder to get to my balcony and, finding the sliding door locked, try the window instead. He tries to slide it with splayed hands, puts his whole body into quiet pressure. His fingertips, wet and cool from the night and the climb, get good traction. But it's locked too. His passion sours; he goes down, feet first.

I check the balcony for more clues, footprints exposed by morning-after sun, but find only summer dust and Crystal Palace lobelia in terracotta pots. The fingerprints, I realize, are on the inside, my own. I must have tried to get out last night. The hard way.

Day four after a dose of cobalt or whatever they pump in, and my skin is peeling from the inside out. I can't shower; water, even tepid or cool water, burns what layers I have left. The nausea is bad company. The cat sits and watches me disintegrate; she cares. She strolls over to lick my head. I could use a few hours of couch under the quilt, some drifting in and out would soothe aspects of all this. But my little brother is coming to get me for a day out in the world.

He saunters through the door like a landlord. I am sitting upright on the couch, ready. The quilt is folded up like it never gets used. The cold floor is inches away from where I sit; the springs are shot. I wonder about a new couch, where the money will come from, where I'll cut corners to afford it. I laugh, a celebration. "That sort of thing won't be necessary." What the nurses say when I ask for things with value in the future. That sort of thing.

He just walks right in, straight to the kitchen for a beer, and comes back with one for me, too. He used to root around in my medicine cabinet when he was a teenager, looking for my weed pills, rabid for an altered state. A couple was okay with me, but any more and I felt like I used to when he'd finish the ice cream before I got my share. Treats. Now he brings joints and goes for my beer: he prospers; his life booms. He smokes, I worry about what the South Americans spray on it, I worry for his lungs, his brain, his voice box. Already he sounds hoarse, and phone calls from him before noon are hard time. Relentless throat clearing, suggestive of late Janis Joplin. Poisoned.

"So why don't you get a wig?" he begins.

"Because I want to look like a dyke and scare old people. It thrills me."

"Cool."

I'm finished my beer. He's smoking at the same time, so he's only halfway through his. I don't want to waste energy going to the fridge, I don't want to ask for service, I don't want to sit and watch him drink; I don't want to fall back to the couch if I try to get up and can't.

"I want to know where we're going," I say, instead of everything else.

"Don't you trust me to show you a good time? When did I ever take you some place you didn't like? You need another beer while I finish this," and he gets me one.

He had a motorcycle before, a red and black Moto Guzzi. We'd take *Department of Highways'* ferries up and the down the coast, round trips. Other bikers were spellbound and asked him lots of questions. He'd stand with his hands open around his black leather waist and give quick answers, checking his Italian boots for scuff marks. Biker chicks would look me over and think I was hot, I guess, especially if I was wearing the helmet so my hair didn't show. And I weighed more then. I was a nice straddle: I overheard that. It came from the cab of a *Pineridge Milk Bread* truck, first in line on the car deck, but I couldn't find a face to go with it.

My brother's buddies said he turned into a prick when he got that bike but I didn't mind him that way. It made him act like he did when we were kids, arrogant and superior, the leader, the boss. All profile. Little boys are something close to sexy when they have that much nerve. I hate the way it decomposes over the years, they never get over the loss of it and their humour grieves for it. His buddies trashed the bike and fed his leathers to their pit bulls.

"At least tell me what you're driving so I'll know if I'm dressed for it."

"You look great. Wear what you've got on. You look hot in jeans."

"My ass disappeared the day after my tits did."

"No way. You look sacred like that. I like that look. Sixties."

"No. In the sixties, everything was big, and it bounced and you could see it because everyone wore gauze. No one was this skinny in the sixties."

"Addicts."

"True."

He takes our empty cans to the kitchen. My little brother was just a baby in the sixties but he reminisces. He wants it to happen again, only on a bigger budget, so he can profit this time.

While he's in the kitchen, I try to make it off the couch. Mornings call for crossed fingers and visualization. Tricks. I tune in and listen to some-

thing they call my “inner process.” I see myself standing and upright, and project myself to a spot in front of my feet. I see myself as a perfect human being with a pink fuzzy bubble surrounding my lymphatic system. I chant silent, irrational affirmations:

My body is balanced, in perfect harmony with the universe.

My mind and body now manifest divine perfection.

It works. I’m up and he’s back.

So this one’s a Nova—it was only a matter of time—all his buddies have had Novas; they all chase cars. My little brother’s is painted flat black, it looks sanded down, rough. The way the end sits up reminds me of a predator, poised to slip into still water.

“You have to get in from this side,” he says, like that’s another treat. But he’s right. For the moment I’m behind the wheel, I feel potent. I look over the dash and my mind vrooms. I grab the wheel at ten and two and my mouth vrooms, too. “Sacred,” I sum up.

“Shove over.” He waits, standing, until I’m a passenger. He sets his jaw like a gunslinger. He makes an entrance.

“Is this your car or do I want to know about it?”

“Call it a loan.” He checks dormant gauges and lights a joint. “You still get those pills or do you want some of this?”

A worry skitters past: what will the neighbours do if they see me in this car with a man dressed in black and see me toke up? I wonder if the bank teller in the apartment above mine will see and ask to have me evicted. Like banks are the law. Will my neighbours vote me away for this? But that sort of thing won’t be necessary, I remember. So I get the last half inch he saved for me. He takes back the end and eats it.

“We’re headed for the border. You got anything they’re gonna worry about?”

“Do they still bust bad hair in that country?”

“Forget it. You look great.”

When he turns the key and the engine kindles into a low, fitful rumble, something starts to vibrate in him. He adjusts the mirrors redundantly and spots the delinquent he once was. He climbs back in. He shifts out of PARK with an open hand, manoeuvres with just the heel of it. Faint, faded tattoos glow neon from his forearm; three needle dots between his thumb and forefinger, a shy reminder of eighteen months in the can, pulse dark blue in sync with the engine throb. He’s strutting and we haven’t even pulled out. He charges the road, he tailgates, runs lights, ogles and leers at civilization: little girls in knee socks, teenagers bent over handle bars. The radio doesn’t work, so he thumps the dash with both hands while kids dawdle and dance through a crosswalk.

"Ease up," I suggest.

"Hey. Take off your seat belt and slide over here."

"No way."

"Come on. They'll think you got yourself a pretty boy and a hot car. Closer. Right on."

His arm is along the seat behind me. I lean into his shoulder, my face against his chest. He brings his hand to the back of my neck and rubs exactly three times before his arm goes back along the seat. A man's move. His shirt smells of Thai resin, leather, and Ivory soap. I am ashamed; I am a human miasma. There's no getting away from it in a car. Chokedamp. He winds his window down calmly, pretending he'd do it anyway, like it's right there in the script.

This car and my brother are the couch and quilt. I fade in and out. Twice more, he rubs my neck another three times while he drives us. No radio is better.

The car, my little brother's tattoos, my hair—they pull us over at the border and make us wait through their suspicions. We all come up clean and I can't believe it, but I should know he's not that stupid, not a formal risk taker. They ask what our business is and how long we're staying. I look at my brother for a straight answer I can live with.

"We're off to the *Kiwanis Outdoor All-Breed Dog Show* in Seattle. Just for the afternoon. We'll be back before dark. We're dog lovers, sir."

We're driving away from those uniforms. "Really?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Good idea."

"We need beer."

This bar knows my little brother, I feel that. I'm the stranger, I get the once over. The light change at this time of day makes me sleepy; I bet I look stoned. We sit in the darkest corner, facing the door, between the cans. Action. Service is instant, beers float in from nowhere. I taste soap on the rim of the glass and my stomach flips and threatens. I lick all around the edge and swallow fast ounces to cut the taste and fool my insides.

A teenage boy escorts a woman out of the ladies' can; she's dressed up like the bank teller from home. I guess at how long they've been in there by faces at their table: no one cares they're back; it's routine. After a minute, the bank teller gathers up her beer and cigarettes and coins like provisions, and finds another table without saying goodbye. No one notices that either, including the teenager, her date. She's a marionette, lowered into her new chair; her arms flop onto her new table. Her head is

released to fall forward and dangle.

My brother gets up and apologizes with a finger to the tip of my nose. "Give me ten minutes and I'll get you out of here." He bounces away, a smudge. A new beer is in front of me and I worry about how to get to the can and how to get out of it once I'm done: I'll wait for him to cover me.

Two men in sharp suits stand over the glow of the juke-box like cowboys at a campfire. What song takes two guys like them to pick it? Joy-riding, this bar a joke they tell at the office, an anecdote for their wives years from now. They'll brag, their women aroused by nonsense.

They sit down with the bank teller. One on either side, they draw their chairs around her, into her, and make themselves into a line like they're going to watch a show or judge a contest. The bartender turns up the music and brings them each a beer. The bank teller's head is still on a slack string, nestled, now, into her chest. Sixties power chords: *Cocaine*. By the time the guy in the record finally gets to sing, the suits both have a hand under the bank teller's sweater. And they start to pull her tits, to push them back and forth, and play a sort of tag with them. They lift their beers with the free hands, toast each other, and drink half, still kneading, yarding on her tits. Her head comes up but her arms can't budge. "Hey," she says. "Oh," she says, and then she smiles at me, or where I am, and waits like a family pet. She glows in the dark, a puppet head with rosy cheeks on whiteface; carved sockets, sanded-down edges. They flatten her tits into her chest until the chair tips back—"Weeee"—and then they pull her upright, their knuckles poking out, pointed hard and bony where her curves should be. And that's their finale. Ta da. They stand, drain their glasses, make sure the cuffs cover their shoes. The next song is *Muskrat Love*; no wonder it took two. The bartender brings the bank teller another beer; she has to give him all her change.

My brother blocks my view. "I'll watch the door if you wanna use the can before we head out. I'm done here." He looks alert, I'll be safe. "Don't sit down in there, whatever you do," he cautions in a man voice.

When I come out, he sees I've been sick but he doesn't say anything. His arm goes around my waist. Not a mid-marriage reflex or a teenage drape—this counts for something. "Sorry I had to leave you."

My brother wakes me up in Tacoma, parked. He hands me a not very cold beer from behind the seat. I'm grateful; coming to sometimes stirs me up, but this way I have a focus for my inner process. With beer, I affirm,

I love and accept my body completely.

I am now full of radiant health and energy.

It works. I'm awake. I am alive.

I am at *Nendel's Valu Inn*. There is a huge field encircled by Winnebagos, Kustom Koaches, Vanguards, pastel station wagons, late model mini-vans with logos: MISTER ED'S PET DEPARTMENT STORE. Stars and stripes flap from antennae, doors are wide open and canopied, aluminum lawn chairs tilt nearby: occupied territory.

In what must be some sport's end zone, a banner stretches a red-lettered welcome to *The Basset Hound Club of Greater Seattle*. I look at my little brother for some idea, but he is looking at his watch and playing trills on the steering wheel.

"Are we allowed to be here?"

He laughs way too loud and hard. "Waddaya think, this is top secret manoeuvres or something?" He gets out. "You done with your beer?"

I toss the can over into the back seat where empties wait in safety to be returned for deposit. My head whirls in the sun and upright position, but my little brother takes one step toward me and stands like a fence post waiting for the first picket to go up.

"I thought you said 'Seattle.' I thought you said 'All-Breed.' These dogs are all the same. Everybody has one; everybody's walking funny."

"Pretend. As far as you know, we are at the *Kiwanis All-Breed Outdoor Dog Show in Seattle*. You don't want to know any more than that. This is okay with you, right?"

My little brother leads me toward a village of booths and bulletin boards where vendors achieve a homespun air of commerce with no strings attached, no ties that bind, no guarantees. Buy, sell, and trade, we're all here for the same thing.

"I'm going to be a while this time. Maybe an hour."

"I'll entertain myself. Don't worry about me." He doesn't like this. When he was eleven, my mother sent him to a Christian Wilderness Camp. What bothered him was that I'd be alone in that house with our parents, that I'd have no back-up in case of emergency. He said he'd take his walkie-talkie and if I really needed him, somehow my walkie-talkie would be powerful enough to reach his. "The batteries are dead in mine," I said. "It'll still work," he said. He came back from camp a harder boy, toughened, I guess, by the piss-off of powerlessness and having to share a canoe.

He starts to walk away. "Watch yourself," I say, and he glances back at me.

I touch my hair, try to move it over the places it used to be. I run my tongue over my teeth, still amazed by how straight they are: I got braces

in my mid-twenties so I would have a radiant smile for my thirties; I planned a lot of kissing for my thirties. But I spent too many years with buck teeth to truly buy their perfection. Sometimes I long for an over-bite; I still can't smile for a camera.

A tri-coloured hound pulls a leash so he can smell my feet. He's ecstatic and goes up to my knees; his neck is too short to go any further, but I know he wants to. He is all over my legs and feet; I'm afraid he'll start to hump and I back away. He looks up for a second to see the object of his desire and, startled, throws his head back to howl and bay; I am an intruder, a burglar, a critter up a tree. His ears flap, his dewlap jiggles, his stubby front legs bounce off the grass. He knows he's got the wrong gal, but he's covering with bravado. Finally, he's reined in by a sheepish man in tweed: "He never does this." I know there will be fewer dogs among the vendors' stalls, so I enter the plywood labyrinth, hoping to disappear.

I read everything, killing time. I collect brochures, I count ribbons, and explore blow-ups. Women sit with crochet squares in their laps, poking and smiling like homesteaders as I look at their lives, tacked up and framed.

UNIQUE ART WORK OF YOUR PET

Romelia Gummig, Box 163, Wathena KS.

Romelia's representative keeps a playpen with a toddler in it. The child resembles a polar bear in the city zoo. It looks at me lazily, knows I don't belong here. Kids are telepathic. I hope it doesn't cry.

Everyone thought I would cry all the time, daily, so they would plan to spend only short allotments of time with me, hoping to dodge the waterworks and spare me my dignity. I cry less now, only when I'm frustrated: babies screaming in supermarkets always make me cry, always have; it's an empathic reaction.

What would Romelia do with my cat, what medium? Definitely acrylic; theoretically abstract. Avant-garde. Nothing a black and white photograph couldn't say better; I take a card anyway, for the baby's sake.

The infield is a ballroom. Men and women lope by in single file, leashes taut, dogs stepping on air: a June Taylor effect. The judges stand inside this circle, they are the hub of this wheel. Cross-legged on the grass, I watch it. The dogs are radiant. Noses and tails high, white chests deep and sturdy, some starred. Ears that don't give a damn who sees them swing.

A black man, must be 6'4", runs with a pause, a stutter in mid-air, so his hound can keep pace and they won't trample the couple in front. He wears wooden beads that clatter on his chest. His crotch swings heavily under satin shorts. His neck is twice the length of his dog's, which is

huge, but short. Olympians. How many basset steps to one big black man's step? I try to count, but I lose my place.

TARA LARA

Academy of K-9 Hair Design

Master Course 640 Hours

Student Housing Within Walking Distance

I try to count how long 640 hours lasts, to see if I'd graduate. But I lose my place there, too. That sort of thing.

There is a woman out there dressed like a cheerleader. Her legs are shiny long and smooth brown and her calves look hard, as if she jumps up and down a lot. She moves like someone who wants to be a dancer but can't keep her weight down. She is wearing a pink t-shirt that fits snugly. She is large breasted and she bounces too much for this crowd. There is aesthetic imbalance; she and her dog are out of whack. The other contestants are nicely matched up, symmetrical in a master/slave diorama. This woman needs a tennis racket at the end of her leash. Her little skirt flips like her dog's ears, and her pink underpants show when she rounds the bend and heads up the other side of the ring. She falls behind sometimes and forces the man behind her to adjust his pace; they both look bad. The dogs do fine. Hers is the only one that has the problem of looking up. He looks at her too often; they take points off for that. But she is beautiful, so who wouldn't look up? She points her toes a little with each step, so it's ballet. Her hair is long enough to fly out back. It is the same colour that her dog has at the base of his neck. Auburn. Her horn-rimmed glasses fall down her nose every few steps and she has to push them up with her shoulder, careful not to tug on the leash and spoil everything. She rounds the bend closest to me and I swear she winks at me and bounces her breasts a little harder. Just once, but I catch it. They are lined up and waiting to be adjudicated. She is a profile to me, right in the middle.

SINGLE DOG LOVERS ASSOCIATION

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A portable P.A. announces the winner of these trials: a dog named Champion Tailgate Black Bart. I want to call my little brother that from now on. The owner-operator is Othello Dixon. The beautiful woman gets a nondescript ribbon that qualifies her for a consolation event. She looks down at her dog, he looks up at her; they shrug their shoulders and trot off. I know she winks at me; the dog looks me over.

Two ridiculously thin boys, one carrying a football, stomp by and all I

catch of their conversation is “beer garden” and “they don’t give a shit there,” so I follow. They are turned away by a fat man wearing a t-shirt that says: TATTOO-A-PET PROTECTION: 1-800-TATTOOS. I buy two beers from him and look for a private corner. But this area, too, is a circle, a ring. I wind up dead centre and exposed. My little brother is nowhere, but I watch for a flash of him in the outfield or between parked cars.

For my second beer, a monologue from an adjacent table entertains: “He’s married seventeen years, he’s had me on the side for six, the cancer for two. You’re gonna laugh at this, but sometimes I like to think of him all curled up and safe in bed with his wife. At least I know someone has their arms around him, I know he’ll make it another night. And if he doesn’t—well at least she’ll catch him when he falls. That picture is a comfort; I don’t feel so left out. He’s had it good, though. I mean having both of us and all. He prefers the retrieving breeds. I believe he hunted at one time.”

PET CASKET AND VAULT (Polystyrene)—Golden frost

Exterior/ivory crepe interior: 18 inches = \$63

ELTON STEPHENS, S. Bend, IN.

“I think I saw you in Woodinville two weeks back.” She has changed her t-shirt. This one is blue. I wonder if she’s sad because she didn’t win a better ribbon. “Mind if I join you, it’s really crowded in here. I got you a beer, too. Were you there, was that you?”

“Where was I?”

“*Gold Creek Sports Club* in Woodinville, the show two weeks back. Wasn’t that you? Sure looked like you. I’m Mimi Brandolini.”

Her fingers are long; her nails are round and shiny pink. We hold hands and meet. She wears a silver charm bracelet with basset hounds dangling loudly from it. There must be a dozen different ones, some just heads, others just attitudes.

“I thought you were good Mimi, you and your dog.”

“Thank-you, you’re kind. We do our best. It’s all for Frank, really, he’s the one who relies on it. He loves the show.” But there’s no ring on the hand around her beer.

“Your husband?” I can’t look at her for this part.

“Frank? Oh. No. My dog. Sorry.” Her glasses slip when she laughs; I watch her bracelet flash when she presses them back up her nose. “Champion Iceman Frank Mahovolich. I guess you could call him my significant other, but he’s really just Frank the dog to me.” She is wistful. She plays her beer can like a tiny Caribbean steel drum.

“Mimi?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Frank’s bitch passed away earlier this week. I thought

it would be good for us, to be back in the saddle again, you know. But, what with the puppies—”

“You’ve got puppies?”

She looks up at my sparkle and glitters a little herself. She touches my hand again. She smells of Chanel and pabulum. “Come see,” she says.

It is the trailer of a country music queen, a star’s dressing room. Soft corners and thick light. Opulent mobility. Frank looks beat when we come in; he doesn’t get up, barely wags his white-tipped tail. His eyes are all corpuscle. I wonder if he’s jealous, just pretending to sleep, alert to every nuance.

One wall is photographs and I stand there, with my hands folded in front, like it’s a field trip. Mimi Brandolini comes from behind and places a bottle of beer in my hand. I look at her to say thank you. I look back at the display and her fingernails quietly sift through the hair left above my ear. I look to see if Frank the Iceman saw. I melt. Somewhere in the trailer, puppies yap.

“Is this Frank?” I look at a photo with a prominent blue ribbon. Mimi isn’t looking at the camera in this one. She is looking down at the leash held loosely between two hands. She is wearing a pink satin shirt and white western boots with silver toes, her hair is big. She looks like a calf roper with a moral dilemma. She is beautiful that way.

“No. That’s the mum. That’s Pete.”

“Pete?”

“Champion Bitch Centre Ice Peter Mahovolich.” She moves away from me to gaze out the small, high window. “We bury her tomorrow. My dad’s coming from Montreal.”

REX GRANITE COMPANY. Cloud MN.

The puppies have the run of the back bedroom; the dog smell is heavy camouflage. Frank follows us in. He goes over to the brood, sniffs and shoves, and lies down among their fat bodies. They are rib-cage and senses, like me. I lift one to my face, we stare, and then my nose is gnawed, sharp teeth bringing tears to my eyes. Mimi takes the dog from me and lowers it into Frank’s domain.

She is taller than I am. Her breasts reach for my shoulders. Mimi kisses my nose, my eyes, runs her small puppy tongue along my bottom lip and sneaks into my mouth. Her bracelet jangles around her wrist as she pulls her t-shirt out of her hair. I am on the bed, on top of a derelict red and yellow starburst quilt; my jeans are under the dogs. Mimi Brandolini kneels above me and starts to take of her little skirt, but I stop her. I say, “Leave it on,” and she melts, too.

My brother sees me step down out of the trailer, he's looking everywhere for me. He sees Mimi at the window. "Where've you been? Who's she?"

"Dog lover."

"I don't want to know. You smell like a kennel."

I am sucked in by tough guy undertow, dragged back to the car in his wake. "Are you mad?" I have to say this to the back of his neck as he unlocks his door.

"I couldn't find you." I barely hear it.

"Better get used to that." Maybe he laughs. In the back seat are three enormous sacks of dog food, sitting straight up like hitchhikers. "Friends of yours?"

"Science Diet. Supplies. Don't ask me."

"What's in there?"

"Balanced Nutrition for Health and Vitality."

"No shit. We better highball if we want to make it before dark." I try to wind down my window, but the handle just spins. I spread my fingers and press my hands flat against the glass, but it won't give. I can hardly breathe.

We are wired driving back; no radio makes it sound faster. There are things he wants to know about me, questions he wants to ask, blanks he wants to fill in before it's too late. Details. He wants a precision memory bank; photographic. I don't mind the third degree from him, I am content to participate.

The sky is pink like Mimi Brandolini's satin shirt. We pass through Auburn, like Mimi's hair.

"What's your favourite food?" he starts.

"Ice cream," I interrupt.

"Wait. What's your favourite food, and why?"

"Ice cream. Because it doesn't hurt."

"What's your favourite music, and why?"

"Early Beatles, same reason."

I lie on my back, knees up, my head deep in his lap. I close my eyes. I feel his muscles shift and adjust every time he looks down at me. The steering wheel sounds like it's pulling giant elastic bands.

"What are your views on the Vietnam war?"

"It was just a conflict. There are worse ways to die." His stomach laughs once and bounces my head. We did this as kids, I remember, at night in my room. We took turns bouncing and laughing, whistling in the dark, trying to keep it down. We pass Bellingham.

"You awake?" he whispers.

"Are you?" I answer

“Okay, one more question. How would you react if you were caught in a severe fire?”

“I am caught in a severe fire. I worry for the cat.”

His thigh lifts my head to brake. I start to sit up, to make myself presentable, but he stops me. “Don’t worry,” he whispers, and puts one hand over my eyes to shade them from the runway lights at the border.

Michael William Neja

A Damned Afternoon

really chinese
is what he
wants,

but in
maui theres
just seafood
restaurants

as she orders
some mahi mahi
or ahi burger

and ill take a salad.

the sun moves
us twice,
since its
in marys eye,

but its all very
unimportant

when the bartender
asks if we
want drinks
or something.

Anurādhā Mahāpātra

*Two Poems Translated from the Bengali by Pāramitā Banerjee
and Carolyne Wright*

Pyre-Tender

When the river floods this house and field,
dawn and moonlight descend on the white garland,
tāṅpurā, and the face of the living pyre-tender;
his knees fill with grass, and blind women
with their sons in their arms dress up
like blood-red oleanders. Even more dense behind
its screen of grass, this nightwise *Vidyādhari*,
river of monsoons, drinks up the black liquor,
slightly stained and kept covered in a dark pot,
in the hollow of a tree that's been maimed
by God's thunderbolt. For whom
does the maternal night-shower of insects search
behind the eyes of this village devoid of a god
and of the inner meaning of rains?
The sky forgets to swim, and mingles
with all the headless creatures of deep slime,
the paths and thickets of bone-wretched,
simple-minded men; and the secret stain
that goes on mixing with the roots of trees.
Towards dawn the river subsides, and maidens,
copper-coloured like the pyre-tender's eyes,
sing hymns and pour liquor into the dark pot.

Crow

“There is no death in this promise”—
strangled in water hyacinth and moss.
Saying this today, desiring its own eye,
such water drifts far away. Some crazy bird knows
that even today, the blue of that monsoon month
and the ferryman’s folksongs are linked
in their own hollows.

 The moss doesn’t wear off from
the body, even on the immersion day.
An unknown breathless patience floats
towards the north,

 devours itself alive.

The foot of this tree silently agrees,
the crazy bird’s wings

 cast their shadows in the river.

Sal Cetrano

The Iron Rice Bowl

The hands of Wei Tang Li show youthful grace
on the back of his sleeping hound, fingers
parting yellow fur like wind through wheat.
Scarred and leather-smooth, palms calloused
near to orange, these hands need no longer
wrestle lathe for assembly unit, ninth brigade.
Retired with honour at sixty, his position—
worth, with the new incentives, 10,000 yuan!—
passes to his only son, a worker in the fields,
who will master the task in good time.

Li's son, with wife and young son of his own,
now assumes his own home, both house and job,
should the Party be well-pleased, his to bequeath.
The soul of a man, we are rightly told, lies in
his labour, the momentum of respect having shifted.
It is our simple faith, a compact perfect as heat.

Tricks of the Light

or a short course in disorientteering

the road flows into the curves of the hills
edges up the speed the angles of the horizon
are lower now the sky is polished pewter
there is a trick of detachment long out of
practice perhaps not possible from moving
vehicles it doesn't work in blizzards

it needs the kind of empty day

when clouds increase their density push down
against the hills the hills push back and
something has to give the first flakes drift
hesitate and learn they can't go back

the secret is to concentrate

to trace the flow back to the source farther
higher 'til you find yourself whirling deep in
snow the glass has no dimension and the centre
of the universe is hovering somewhere above
the trees

Naseby

The road to the cemetery was just long
enough it qualified

it was a standard stroll for
afternoons designed to keep house guests
from after dinner naps and sleepless nights
it gave the contrast in temperature

it told us
however cold indoors might be it never quite
reached freezing 'til the blanket wrapped hours
when dripping taps meant pipes iced from down
to up

It wasn't satisfaction
that my father found each autumn in wrapping
each inch of water pipe exposed in hessian
and twine

for children and visitors it was
perfection faced with perfection mine come
without a quibble to walk the road their
father follows in the car

we have two years
in twelve to show after a fashion it snows
in Wellington

Now they walk a rutted resin-coloured
track with muted rainbow pebbles

pine branches
cover up the sky they calculate where not
to stand when clumps of snow shake loose
self sown or systematic forest snakes
around the town swallows all my landmarks
we would scramble through the hazel trees
the stile cross the scree slope cliff and
claypit to lie in ambush by the road

It all feels the same and the trees have
been thirty years in growing
the cemetery too is
just the same the Protestants are prominent
the Catholic tombstones are shrugged off
further back and down the slope through snow
above our ankles and deeper if we strike a
rabbit hole the Chinese miners lie beneath
old trees in planned invisibility
an ocean
off their ancestors

The children follow where a deer has
picked a path between the gate and posts
to take a careful track back into the
forest

I stand rooted listen for
the earth hear its slow twice a lifetime
breathing I never want to go away again

The Celestial Fish

Ma Sen

Translated from the French by Michael Bullock

In 1967 Peking experienced an extremely hot summer. Almost no one, not even the most serious cadres, felt like doing any extra work after office hours. So everyone went home, but most of those who didn't have air-conditioning were driven from their houses by the heat that was as stifling as a sauna and pushed out into the courtyards, where a refreshing breeze occasionally drifted by. These people included some of the higher cadres, but for the most part they were middle-grade cadres, lower cadres and the masses who didn't attain the status of cadres at all.

One evening dusk descended with a splendour such as had rarely been seen. The sky was as blue as a transparent sea. The setting sun, giving off a golden light, imparted an orange tinge to a few shreds of cloud and rendered them as brilliant and soft as the satin emerging from the hands of the premier heroine weaver of all the spinning-mills of Peking. It seemed as if the breeze, more refreshing than ever, had even succeeded in swaying the branches of the willows that had for ages stood motionless on the banks of the moat that wound its way around the ancient imperial city. All the inhabitants of Peking, or almost all, went out into their courtyards to eat their dinner while watching this magnificent cosmic vision.

A small family, a widowed mother and her two sons, were assembled in a courtyard in the suburbs. The elder son, already fifteen, was an apprentice in a paper factory, while the younger, only nine, was still a student in a primary school dependent on their people's commune. As always, no sooner was their dinner finished than Uncle Zhang arrived, a bachelor who had got into the habit of coming round at this hour to drink a cup of tea with these old friends. In fact, some time ago the rumour had spread through the neighbourhood that Uncle Zhang had asked the widow's hand in marriage, but the latter, still faithful to the precepts of Confucius despite the Liberation, had categorically refused. However, her refusal had not changed Uncle Zhang's attachment to her, and he regularly came over to give her the helping hand that a single mother with two children must surely have needed from time to time, and also to en-

joy the pleasures of a family which he lacked. For these reasons, he had even won a prize for assistance to the needy awarded by the local Party secretary.

The mother took the dishes to the kitchen to wash, leaving Uncle Zhang and the children to enjoy the cool of evening in the little courtyard.

"Look!" The younger boy had uttered this cry so suddenly that Uncle Zhang spilled half the tea from the very commonplace china cup.

"What at?" the two others asked simultaneously.

"Look."

"Look at what?" asked the elder boy impatiently.

"The sky."

They looked up at the sky, where the orange light was growing pale and gradually giving way to a bluish colour speckled with a few patches of mustard yellow.

"I don't see anything," said the elder brother, disappointed.

"But there is something," insisted the younger one.

"Can you see anything, Uncle Zhang?" asked the older boy.

"Nothing but a few wisps of cloud."

"It's not that," said the younger one getting up to see better. "There, behind the clouds, it looks like a river flowing on and on. And the bank! Look!"

"Yes, yes, I can see it now," his brother cried out joyfully. "Can you see the bank, Uncle Zhang?"

"What bank? I can't see a thing."

"Oh, there are even fish on the bank—lots and lots of fish," went on the younger boy, jumping up and down as though trying to catch the celestial fish.

"That's true, there are fish," confirmed his brother. "And they keep jumping up and down. Big ones, little ones, all sizes. It's as though we were looking at the seashore when the tide has just gone out."

"Look, the water is rising up the bank and now the fish are slipping into the water," reported the younger brother. "There are very few left."

"It's impossible, it's impossible," grumbled Uncle Zhang, trying to look from every possible angle, in every possible way, but he still couldn't see anything.

"Yes, yes. Look from here." The older boy tugged Uncle Zhang by the arm to where he was standing. "Can you see now? Fish of every colour are jumping up and down on the sand and slipping into the water as it rises."

Crestfallen, Uncle Zhang stopped looking and began to stretch his neck, because it was terribly sore from holding his head up for so long at his age.

"I think you've seen a mirage."

"What's a mirage?" The older boy glanced at Uncle Zhang and immediately looked up at the sky again.

"A mirage is something you often see in the northern desert. It's an illusion. No, I'm not explaining it properly. It's the reflection of a real image that exists somewhere."

"So that's only a reflection?" said the younger boy, still looking up in the air. "Pooh, I don't think so. The bank and the fish are so real."

"You're right, Uncle Zhang. It's only a reflection cast by the sun," admitted the elder brother. "There's no other way of explaining it. Ouch, I've got a terrible pain in my neck."

"I can't look any more," said Uncle Zhang, gently rubbing his neck. "I feel as though my neck had been broken in two."

"I don't understand a word. How could a reflection be projected onto the sky. No, no, I don't believe you. Just look, you two. Quick, quick! A fish has broken away from the bank and is falling towards us."

The younger brother had barely finished speaking when a small fish, a bit longer than a hand, fell into the courtyard with a resounding slap. This had a terrible effect on all three of them, especially Uncle Zhang, who jumped nearly fifty centimetres in the air with wide-open eyes. A fish, a real bluish fish. It looked very much like a carp. It was a celestial fish. In ancient times this heralded prosperity for the entire nation and good government by the Emperor. When this happened, the fish had to be immediately presented to the Emperor himself. Now that feudal times were no more, what were they to do with the celestial fish? The mother suggested presenting it to the president of the Party, who doubtless corresponded more or less to the Emperor of the old days. Her proposal was at once enthusiastically accepted by her sons. They were both Red Pioneers who considered no one the equal of the Party president. In olden days, when someone made a special offering to the Emperor it was always in the hope of a reward, either in the form of money or of a promotion out of turn. But the two boys had no ulterior motive in presenting the fish to the Party president. They were burning to present it to him with all their heart and all they expected from doing so was a great joy. The problem was that they didn't know the President personally and didn't know where he lived. All they could do was to find the local Party secretary and take him the little celestial fish carefully wrapped by their mother in a piece of yellow silk, which in olden days had been an imperial symbol.

The district secretary didn't believe a word of the boys' story but nor did he dare to refuse their gift, fearing at the same time that this rumour might come to the ears of his superiors. So he gathered together the responsible citizens of the district to discuss what to do with this celestial

fish. Finally they reached a consensus: to immediately despatch the fish to the municipal council of Peking, whose president was the mayor of this town.

The mayor of Peking and his colleagues didn't believe the story either, but, like the district secretary, they too didn't dare refuse the gift, because it was addressed to the Party president. So another meeting was called by the mayor of Peking and a vote was passed by nine voices in favour and one abstention to send the fish straight on to the permanent committee of the Party. The latter, after a final meeting, sent the fish to the political bureau, whose president was the president of the Party.

By the time the fish reached the President's office it was already the evening of the day following the day it had fallen into the little courtyard in the suburbs. In the oppressive heat—no one had thought of refrigerating it—the poor fish had completely changed colour. As soon as the President opened the yellow silk in which the fish was wrapped a terrible smell of decay made him sick to his stomach.

"Throw it in the garbage bin, quick," he ordered a cadre, stopping his nose with a silk handkerchief embroidered with butterflies of various colours.

Without hesitating, the cadre took the fish away and threw it in the garbage bin next to the presidential kitchen, where the President's cook, an old fellow of about sixty-five, was quietly smoking his pipe on the kitchen steps.

"What are you throwing in my garbage bin?" he enquired.

"A rotten fish. It seems it's a celestial fish."

"What's a celestial fish?"

"Who knows. They say it fell from the sky and they wanted to present it to the President."

"And the President doesn't want it?"

"I should say not! It's rotten already. Anyway, the President never eats things that come from outside."

Once the cadre had left, the cook crept up to the garbage bin, quickly whipped out the little yellow packet and carried it off to his kitchen.

He locked the door and undid the packet. He saw a perfectly commonplace little fish. He opened its gills: they were quite red. He sniffed at it: there was no bad smell. So he took a knife, opened up the fish's stomach and pulled out its intestines from the end of which hung a small pouch. He opened the pouch and found a large number of eggs that kept on moving. So it was a female fish. But why were the eggs moving? It was obviously no ordinary fish. Then he believed the story of the celestial fish, because he was the son of the cook of the Empress Ci-Xi and his father had once told him an old story which said that the eggs of celestial

fish keep on moving and never die. He took a pot and placed it on the fire. Then he poured all the fish's eggs into the pot and waited calmly, still smoking his pipe. Five minutes, ten minutes, half an hour passed: the eggs went on moving. He put out the fire, washed the fish and cut it in pieces, which he ate completely raw along with the eggs, not even bothering to dip them in a little soy sauce or adding a few grains of salt. When he had eaten the fish and its eggs he belched noisily and went off to bed.

The President's cook spent a strangely quiet night without a single dream. He had never in his life enjoyed such a complete rest. When he woke he went off to the bathroom as he did every morning, but no sooner had he opened the door than he stood still with his mouth agape: in the mirror hanging on the opposite wall he saw a curiously handsome young man who was a stranger to him. He went closer and discovered that it was himself. Except that an extraordinary youth and beauty had spread over his face during the night. When he looked at himself more closely he recognized some of his features, which made him feel that he had not lost himself completely.

Naturally, the Party President questioned the cook in detail as to what had happened. At first he felt such bitter regret that he burst out sobbing. But after thinking it over, he changed his mind and rejoiced instead. If he himself had eaten the fish and been transformed into a handsome young man, what would have become of him?

The story could end here. But perhaps there are readers who worry about the fate of the cook? I am therefore obliged to add a few words. As the cook was henceforth young and handsome, it would not have been wise for the President to keep him on. Eventually, he was enrolled in the Red Army. According to another version, he is even said to have been sent to a foreign country to aid the oppressed people to organize a revolutionary insurrection.

Wayde Compton

James Brown At Midnight, My Parents Dancing

My friend
The one who slit his wrists
The one who likes Hendrix
Told me his mother
Threw his things out the window.
He'd said he was leaving.

This friend and me talked
Of pre-school and old things
Grade Two and playing
We never mentioned
Parents, situations
His dad who left them.

I never said it
As we talked and listened
The thing I was thinking:

Me from the bedroom
James Brown at midnight
My parents dancing.

S. K. Kelen

At Seal Rocks

A squadron of black cockatoos occupies the trees
squawks sunrise when colours return to a lithograph
engraved by rocks framing sea. The lighthouse
on the promontory shuts down for the day.
Dead cars dumped in the bush do not scar,
but blend and become, landscape
as ancient axeheads and rock carvings.
Invaders took the dreamers' land
roughly imitated them, stealing their bliss.
The lighthouse wakes and shakes the night.
Colours gone, ghosts flit between shadows:
the gone tribes talking mimicked in birds' chatter.
Stars shift to old configurations, waves
beat endlessly against the land.

D. S. Long

Xin xi lan

there's a photograph which lies hidden now
under a stone jar in Beijing
the weight of the stone smothers the scars
a hand left crumpling it
but another hand placed the face of their child
where no one would see
as if the child too lay
under the stones of Xin xi lan

soon it will be September
and our child will come
covered in blood
down a dark passage
after that I expect we will grow old
and catch the ferry across the harbour
the pohutukawa we'll plant above the afterbirth
will rise to fill the view

but the scars on the photograph?
if she slips it out
will she feel where the surface is broken?
where the tears won't heal?

for her child will spend the rest of our years
listening to the coughs of ageing Guomindang soldiers
will stand in the cold darkness
urinating with the victims of the Four Clean-ups
will enter zinc mines with the remnants
of the Hundred Flowers
will hear the Red Guard stop shaking
on the next pallet
will hold his own breath
during the Catholic priest's next beating

with all these (and more)
huddled indoors in the camps beyond Lan Zhou
sucking the dust in the ice off the floor
(supporters of the Gang of Four?)
he will remain almost forgotten
while we shop for presents on Lambton Quay
and throw bread to the ducks at Day's Bay
and save for a holiday (the Bay of Islands?
perhaps we could drive across the Central Desert Plateau)

is it so pointless to think like this
and fear that we won't remember
and get on with our lives
while they struggle through theirs?

everytime we buy the things we don't need
at the supermarket on Orua Street
are we supposed to put them back
and 'reform through labour'?
I guess few of us will stare out of our blank-walled compound
should we inform to the guards
while we bathe the children
and tell them our stories
and turn off the light?
or will our blindness be different?

there's a Great Wall
and we'll live beyond it
beyond the Gate of Sighs
with its lost inscriptions of the banished

but years hence as we sip coffee
perhaps we'll turn for a moment from the television
to see the dark windows rattled by the wind
and recall the faces we saw in Tiananmen

only then, maybe they'll seem older
like reflections marching four abreast through a prison gate
ashy discoloured coats flapping
hair still shaven in the year 2000
like us still locked away in Xin xi lan

Xin xi lan, the Chinese name for New Zealand, is also an acronym for Xin jiang (a vast wilderness beneath Mongolia), Xi zang (Tibet), and Lan zhou (the switching yard for China's desolate region of labour camps).

Gu Cheng

Translated from the Chinese by Dong Jiping

Accessory

You are always looking at the world outside
Your feet are looking for slippers
You get married
And have a black wheat field
You have stolen something in your dream

You have a look at the world outside again

Wang Jiaxin

Translated from the Chinese by Dong Jiping

Empty Canyon

No one. In this lonely-stretched canyon
Only wind
Only the stones growing, cover the ground

But when you enter it, you feel that
The canyon is awaiting you
The canyon is drawing in little by little like a palm

You so panic-stricken that you run back, and dare not turn round
Until at its mouth it is absolutely empty
Except wind, and stones

Dong Jiping

Overcoat

The face hanging on the wall
Grows obsolete, turns yellow
And makes you fear to face it squarely
You will go out hiking
With no time to improve its looks
Spiders weave their nets in time and sky
Remembering so many years
You stand facing a strong flashlight
With your withered eyes
But now you stand facing a withered flashlight
With your strong eyes
A faint signal flashing to and fro at the door
As all the time you lack strength to reach out your hand
To pick the overcoat off the clothes stand
And let it put you on
So you wear a black handband
You are mourning over your hand
For it had always been clasped by another hand
Wearing a black handband

Theories of Grief

Diana Hartog

To write a single true sentence was Kwan Lee's aim. A Chinese herbalist and scholar, eking a modest living in Klamath Falls, Oregon, Kwan Lee spent most of his hours in his study—a small dark room which doubled as an office. Appointments could be made for between one and five in the afternoon, when Kwan Lee was sleepy anyway: meeting with his patients, his brain could rest. The herbal mixtures and tonics he could prescribe automatically, so well did he know the signs of disease. Within seconds of a patient taking the chair opposite his desk, Kwan Lee's gaze flicked over scalp, earlobes, fingernails, liver-spots, the lines in the face, the pattern of drawing breath, while his right hand wrote down the Chinese characters for the proper formula. Rarely did he listen to the stories of the people who made appointments and who entered his office with an odor of mild embarrassment or a slight stench of fear. Mostly Caucasians, and mostly women (except for the odd man complaining of impotence or prostrate trouble), his patients held strong views as to which of their symptoms were most significant, and why. Their lives were filled with events (death, divorce, bankruptcy) which accompanied a persistent ringing in the ears, an irregularity of the heartbeat, a numbness down the left leg. Having discreetly completed his diagnosis, Kwan Lee would allow his eyes to fall shut as he leaned back in a receptive posture; light from the desk lamp gleamed off the balding dome of his head. The drawn blinds lent a cool stillness to the room, and the impression given most patients was that the words they uttered, their theories, were being drawn from the pit of their stomachs and outwards to be absorbed into the profound stillness and depth of the plump Chinese man behind the desk. Dutifully they would wait, their reasons told, while Kwan Lee, with his slip of paper, retired to the back room behind the beaded curtain. There, from the many jars and metal cylinders lining the shelves, he mixed the appropriate medicinal herbs with alcohol into a tincture to be drunk once a day for the ensuing six weeks (or three weeks, depending upon the needs of the case). Rarely did patients return beyond two or three months, though they sent others to be cured, and Kwan Lee's practice continued at a quiet but steady rate, supporting both himself and his wife Hester.

But Hester wasn't satisfied. A small thin Caucasian woman, who as a missionary had met Kwan Lee in China, Hester wanted a child. She worried she was getting too old, her breasts were beginning to sag without ever suckling. Yet though she begged, Kwan Lee remained adamant: he would not concoct for her the herbal tincture known to increase fertility. It wasn't his wish to mix his Chinese blood with Caucasian. Only grief would follow. The child could never claim its pantheon of ancestors—who would be split, divided into two heavens. After death, as in life, the child would wander lost, without proper guidance. Without a true name.

But Hester had already picked the name she wanted: *Brook*. For it would be a girl, she knew. A plain but determined woman—who every morning plaited her hair and pinned the two skinny braids in an arc over the top of her head: bridges to heaven—Hester was not without her own intuitions, or wiles. Or symptoms; she reported a sharp persistent pain below her heart. It stabbed at odd moments, when husband and wife lay silently side by side, preparing for sleep, or when she had bent too long over her sewing machine: straightening up, the slivered pain made her cry out like a wounded plover. Now, was this pain truly felt, or was it imagined? There is no difference, Hester insisted to her conscience.

"Aiii!"

"Hester! What is the matter?" Kwan Lee called from his study. "Have you again pricked yourself with a pin? Do not let the blood spot my new white shirt." He entered the room where Hester sat slump-shouldered in front of the Singer; in her lap she gripped the wadded-up material, squeezing the pain. Kwan Lee pried back her fingers and held the unfinished shirt up to the light, to check for the bright red dab. A man could never finish even a sentence uninterrupted, could never reach the small black period which punctuated a complete thought. He had trouble enough, even without distractions, in writing his book. Decorum held him back, or perhaps a sense of his dead mother peering down at every word as it emerged, scolding him for his pride, his misplaced ambition. Kwan Lee returned the spotless shirt to Hester's lap.

She looked up at him through her thick glasses. "I'm sorry if I disturbed you, husband, but I felt that pain again. . . ."

"What pain?"

"Here, under my heart. It keeps visiting, though I turn it away."

"Where?"

"Here, here." And Hester held his plump hand to her bony chest. She tipped back her head, her mouth falling open as he checked the whites of her eye, and the iris: its striations. Happily, he believed her. For the next hour, in which usually only the grinding of the pencil sharpener could be heard, Hester listened to the clinking of glass vials, the pounding of the

pestle as Kwan Lee prepared a tonic for her heart. He took great care, and consulted his many ancient texts, before decanting the potion. Into twenty-one small bottles he funneled the murky brown liquid, stopping each bottle with a cork.

Hester expressed her gratitude, but in the quiet, understated manner she had learned pleased her husband best. At some point, later, she would confess that the bitter brown tonic which she sipped each night was of her own concoction, one she had mixed in secret, deciphering the Chinese as her missionary father had taught her. She worked quietly in the back room, funneling her own fertility potion into twenty-one small bottles; the heart tonic, precisely prepared by her husband, she poured down the sink, her hands shaking—she had never defied him before.

And every night she drank one of the bottles, grimacing as she swallowed the bitter brown liquid, her husband watching from the bed. Tilting the bottle back, she drained the last drops before wiping her lips of any trace, in case Kwan Lee might kiss her goodnight.

Whether he did or not depended upon his day and its satisfactions; whether, in fact, he had made any progress on his manuscript, struggling to construct another sentence without erasing it in despair in the final hour before the first patient of the day rang the bell. Of course he told Hester nothing of this, had never mentioned his repeated failures: she might offer to help, or worse, to comfort him. He watched her as, arms outstretched, she groped her way blindly towards the bed.

Hester had taken to removing her glasses at the bureau so that as she crossed the room her husband's face (blurred, his gaze out of focus) could not pierce through to her heart. Indeed, after the fifth night, and the fifth bottle, she no longer complained of her original symptom—phantom or not.

As they lay side by side in the dark, with the Venetian blinds randomly clicking against the open window, Kwan Lee's hand found his wife's: something about her was changing, he felt the need to hold on to her hand's familiar shape in his mind: the stubby but deft fingers, their nails bitten to the quick. Each night her metamorphosis became more apparent; he watched as she made her way to the bed in her white flannel gown, her eyes soft without her glasses, her long hair freed from its daily braids and ascending in wings.

Each morning, her colouring improved. And her skin. Especially that pale soft skin at the nape of her neck. This Kwan Lee noticed as he withdrew to his own pillow, for somehow he found himself waking with his face nestled in his wife's neck, where he had breathed in a new sweet fragrance emanating from her pores; it was a delicate scent, equated with

sunlight in his memory as he turned away to face the day's struggles; chamomile perhaps, or lemon balm.

To further signal her recovery, Hester gained weight—but again in the quiet, understated manner she knew would please her husband best. At least at first. In the fourth month of her recovery (the twenty-one bottles long ago emptied and washed), husband and wife were walking in the back garden where Kwan Lee grew Chinese vegetables and tubers, the seeds sent by his sister from his native village. He stooped to pull a weed, Hester walking slowly on ahead, and when he straightened he uttered a curse of recognition. His wife stood outlined against the twilight, and the perfect round melon of her belly could no longer be ignored for what it held. Kwan Lee swallowed, and licked his dry lips. He found himself breathing rapidly, and could smell the acrid of his own sweat.

Hester glanced back at him, and away; then continued on their usual evening walk along the irrigation ditch, knowing her husband would follow.

The ditch formed the boundary at the bottom of their property, and ran full at this time of year. And though it flowed dead-straight and was lined with concrete, Hester always referred to it as a brook. She paused, peering through her glasses at the swiftly moving water; and then, as if unaware of her husband's extreme agitation, she unlaced her heavy ox-fords, pulled off her socks, and sat down on the bank to let her feet dangle in the current. Across the marsh and towards the west and the setting sun, he gaze followed a family of mallards lifting from the tall cat-tails. Her love for Kwan Lee somehow remained as stubborn as her love for God: it didn't fill her heart so much as harden it into its function as a muscle.

He approached where she sat, and towered over her. "You have defied me."

Hester waited a moment before she answered, quietly. "It is your seed within my body."

Kwan Lee was by now pacing back and forth along the bank of the irrigation ditch, his sandals raising the loose powdery dust. His low voice quavered with anger: "You know I gave my promise this would never happen."

"Your mother is dead now. There is no need to keep. . . "

No, he didn't strike her, though his right fist clenched and his arm lifted as of itself. He lowered it. "You have tricked me," he muttered.

And perhaps that was it, perhaps she had wounded his professional pride, his trust in his own instincts. For how could he have been so blind to the rising tenderness in his own heart, these last months? He had

found excuses, between appointments, to seek her out in the house, or in the garden, and watch her at whatever task employed her small, work-worn hands. In the western manner he had given her a ring when they wed, and now it no longer slid loosely above her knuckle but clung to the plumped flesh, as if she had grown into the marriage at last. He had watched for a while over her shoulder, as her fingers dipped the needle in and out and in again along a swatch of gathered cloth. And had sighed, and gone back to his next patient.

In the three weeks following Kwan Lee's discovery of his wife's betrayal, he slept in his study on a narrow couch. Waking, he passed through the beaded curtain to the back room to splash water on his face at the sink. Instead of his usual dark blue suit he took to wearing always the yellow silk embroidered jacket his sister had sent from China, and spent the long mornings at his desk. Only by barring any image of Hester from his mind was he able to concentrate. While falling in love with his wife as he had those months, he had left their bed reluctantly, and shuffled into his study distracted, out of habit. But discipline had even so produced at least a sentence or two from the morning's efforts. So far Kwan Lee had shied away from using the First Person, thinking of his project as more a biography than an autobiography—a form which offended his sense of personal modesty, much as did his patients' self-centred stories. Thus his substitution of the pronoun "he" for "I." And so far Kwan Lee had avoided writing of Hester—of meeting her, of their slow serpentine courtship, against his mother's wishes; instead he chose to perfect those passages, those years leading up to the marriage. Once he admitted Hester into his book he feared she would flood the pages, as a woman does a house with her things: hairpins, drying lingerie; or the small wads of Kleenex which Hester palmed in one hand for comfort, and then left here and there, white crumpled flowers, on the seat of a chair, in the crack of the chesterfield. But without Hester, "he," the book's subject, would not be legally able to immigrate to the West; or start a practice; or grow old, and perhaps wise.

But what was this feeling which now caused Kwan Lee's writing hand to tremble as he sat at his desk, ready to attempt the morning's sentence? He'd been managing to avoid his wife except at meals and even then he didn't allow his gaze to rest on the white curve of her forearm with its pale down, nor to draw in the fragrance of her skin, that sweet human smell that collects behind the ears and in the crooks of the arms of a pregnant woman. Instead he steeled himself against her, merely nodding as she set his bowl in place; eating his rice with even more than his usual haste and aligning his chopsticks carefully before scooting back his chair from the table.

But now, as he held the pen above the blank white sheet of paper, emotions black and congealed filled him. Even so, there was only a pin-prick hole through which this ink in him could escape. To begin, he wrote "He. . . ." Then he laid down the pen. He placed his hands over his face. What was he afraid of? Behind his close-pressed lids swirled blue spots and distant constellations. For a brief moment he allowed himself to think of the child in its own darkness within the belly of his wife.

Kwan Lee took up his pen again, but instead of searching his mind for the next word he gazed around his study, at the shelves of books lining three walls and reaching almost to the ceiling. The satisfaction of ownership such a survey usually induced in him went missing. So many men had written books! How was he to finish his? And beyond that, how could he ensure its immortality? For though his intention was always to follow each felicitous sentence with another, as hour follows upon hour, he secretly waited for the moment when the facts of his life might suddenly leave the page, transform themselves into literature, into a truth beyond the truth. He tried different pens, pencils; he tried writing in English, in Chinese, even French, switching back and forth. At first he wrote on lined paper, but then reasoned that the bars formed a cage from which the words might never escape. What a strange pursuit, he mused: to work, to struggle for years to produce something beautiful enough to leave him.

Hester's cry, interrupting these thoughts, was muffled by distance, and by Hester's own attempt to spare her husband unnecessary concern. She'd been out in the garden, mowing the lawn where it sloped down to the irrigation ditch. While pushing the dull blades of the mower through a clump of grass, a terrible cramp gripped her.

"*Oh. . . oh. . . oh,*" she whimpered, lying curled on her side on the lawn. With her small face pinched, she squinted through her glasses, trying to concentrate on the heron feeding far out in the marsh. During the next hour she managed to crawl a few yards up the slope towards the house; every few inches, a cramp again knotted her into a simpler creature, panting, unthinking. Identity lifted from her like a soul parting reluctantly from a body. Next, thirst consumed her, a terrible thirst. It was then that she cried out her husband's name—for to be thirsty was a common human need. He would see that.

And yes, Kwan Lee heard her, just barely, through the open window of his study; what he heard was not his name being called (for that she had garbled) but the pleading tone of her voice, and he ignored it. He would wait for a bit, and then wander out, as if of his own volition, as if he'd forgive her deceit and there was nothing more to be said, she could have the child. He felt the tightness in his chest dissolve, and noticed he

was weeping. With trembling fingers he wrote—though it didn't fit in the present narrative—*He fathered a child in his middle age*. Then he changed from his embroidered jacket to a light golf cardigan. In the kitchen he made himself a cup of instant coffee and carried it, full to the brim, out to the back porch before taking a cautious sip.

Hester had by now crawled back down the slope, pulling herself along by tufts of grass towards the ditch. She could smell the water, smell its freshness as it flowed past on its way to alfalfa fields. Behind her, on the cropped green blades of grass, she left a wavering track of blood and amniotic fluid. When she reached the bank, the powdery dust offered nothing to grip; it sieved through her fingers as the foetus in its sac slid out: a large clot, delivered from her, and she from it. With her thighs she clutched at the warm slick lump—for comfort, for the sense of not being alone. Her first thought was not of her husband, nor of God. Her first thought was of nothing. She stared up at the clouds. Warm liquid trickled out between her legs. She lay in the warm mess of her own fluids. Her thirst was now an after-thought; she flung an arm down the bank and touched the cold swift current with the tips of her stubby fingers. Her glasses had fallen off, halfway down the slope, so that what she saw arced above her was an idealized sky, wiped pale of birds or even cherubs, though she could hear the drone of a bomber on maneuvers.

Hester wouldn't allow Kwan Lee to see her off at the train—on her way to Portland and a freighter. She returned to his own village, to shame him there, he felt sure. When her elderly father died she carried on at the mission after the war. But by then Kwan Lee's sister had stopped writing him letters with news.

Kwan Lee stood on the back porch sipping at his coffee. Anyone watching (from a neighbouring window, say) might assume he was gazing into the distance, across the marsh. In fact, he stared over the cup's lip at the spot where Hester had miscarried. That terrible morning, when he'd finally strolled out, he had spied her lying there by the ditch like a tossed doll. Nothing in his training or habitual deportment had then checked his screams as he ran down the slope, screaming her name. He kneeled where she lay on the dusty path, one hand bobbing in the water. Hester kept forming the same word, her dry lips pressed together as if readying for a kiss. "*Book*," he had heard, and then again, whispered, "*Brook*."

And now he lived alone. At last he had what he wanted: uninterrupted hours, in which the morning light first pressed at his eyelids until they opened. For the fortunate few there is a moment, or even several moments upon waking before memory spurs the heart from its doze into a

startled gallop: All is lost! Pulse racing, Kwan Lee lay curled on his side. His ear—the one cupped towards the ceiling—filled with the molten lead of silence. The house was empty.

Standing on the back porch, Kwan Lee sipped at his coffee. Draining his cup, he returned to the kitchen and set it in the sink. Then, out of habit, he sat in his office in his leather chair. Perhaps he should buy a pet. All the books lining the small dark room seemed to be leaning towards him: an error in perspective. Perhaps it was time to read all the books he'd been saving for his old age. Climbing up a ladder in the office he brought down one of the thick heavy volumes at random. Proust. He had bought the set of World Classics from a door-to-door salesman, and then placed the volumes unread on the highest shelf. He feared their influence. His own sentences, to be true, must be original. For by then he had already started writing his life's work, which, since the loss of the child and of Hester, lay abandoned in the dark of a drawer. He switched on the desk lamp. And began to read. He read all morning, every morning, bringing down book after book, never bothering to return them to the shelves when climbing the ladder for another; at fifty-two, his eyesight was still good.

And out of boredom and indeed loneliness, Kwan Lee began to listen, truly listen through the long afternoons, to his patients' explanations for their fate. None satisfied. None answered his one question: Why had he been so afraid to fall in love with his own wife? Why had it overwhelmed him, to watch Hester blooming into her pregnancy? In all his reading, he still could not understand. Kwan Lee took to staring into the face of each man and woman who entered his office, but he couldn't discern—from their skin tone or facial ticks or the shapes of their earlobes—if they had ever dared to openly love someone without reservation.

He slept always in his study now. The few patients still referred by word-of-mouth sent in turn fewer and fewer friends. For ironically Kwan Lee no longer *seemed* to be listening—at least not to them. Instead of a plump Buddha leaning back in profound silence, they encountered an increasingly thin, intense mortal who squirmed in his chair and paced the office while they talked. And the room grew impossibly cluttered, with so many books scattered about.

Kwan Lee's appearance as well suffered neglect. The embroidered silk jacket, which he now wore both asleep and awake, had grown faded and torn. Never being washed, it smelled of a bachelor's distraction and loss, an increasingly rank odor. But Kwan Lee's acute sense of smell had also deserted him, sparing him the last disgraces of a life withering at its source. To quench his thirst Kwan Lee took draughts of the alcohol whose prior use had been as a base for his tinctures—although he never

drank before completing his morning's "research." At 10 a.m., on his birthday (though he didn't know it, Hester had always kept track), he shuffled through the beaded curtain in his corduroy slippers. He no longer read. He merely leafed through the pages. He liked the feel of the heavy volumes, their weight resting calmly in his lap.

That night he had a terrible dream. Granted, since the one patient with an appointment had cancelled, Kwan Lee had sipped the clear alcohol all afternoon, and eaten only a handful of raisins and almonds as he half-listened, in a stupor, to *Amos and Andy* on the radio. He had fallen asleep in his chair.

He must have suffered a stroke, or perhaps a heart seizure: an autopsy seemed, to the coroner, beside the point.

Kwan Lee had been dozing fitfully for hours, until finally his small emaciated body slumped in the chair, into the deeper sleep of the dream. *There was an old man, a Chinese scholar and herbalist, with one daughter and no wife.* The daughter he loved with his whole burning heart, doting on her from birth (somehow the mother had disappeared, a remote figure, walking on a road). As the daughter grew, her hair grew, longer and longer, until by the age of twelve she moved behind its waist-length black veil. In the dream the girl leaned over him, serving Kwan Lee rice and hot pickles. He stared up at her, at the face hidden behind her hair and at the two budding breasts which she had bound to her chest with a strip of cloth to prevent their floating to the surface and womanhood.

"You have lived too long under that hair!" Kwan Lee shouted. And reaching up with his sharp pickle-knife he pruned the tangled black strands as his daughter stood obediently holding her arms away from her sides. "Now I can see your eyes," he declared with satisfaction. And indeed, her pupils shone like wet pebbles in their blue depths. But she didn't move, she remained standing stiffly with her arms lifted.

Kwan Lee must have wandered off in the dream—into his study perhaps—for when he returned he found her still paralysed, standing in the same spot, feet swollen, lips preternaturally blue. Her own father, he trumpeted into her lungs once, twice; but his breath came back to him unmixed with his daughter's music. He then bent her in two, and gathering his strength into his arms he carried her outside and down the sloping lawn to the irrigation ditch. No longer lined with concrete (at least in his dream), it flowed clear and meandered around grassy bends as if unaware of any particular schedule or destination. Kwan Lee eased his daughter down into the stream. She had become smaller somehow and fit perfectly; her black hair, flowing with the current, snagged tiny twigs and bits of leaf. Then he bent over her, and whispered, "I can't recall your

name, child, but you must wake up, someone must sign the certificate for my death.”

The brook made no reply. Only a tiny string of bubbles hissed from between her lips. But Kwan Lee wasn't fooled, he rolled back an embroidered sleeve and reached his arm in up to the elbow in the coldness of her stare.

“*Oh father, don't do that!*” she was able to gurgle.

But his fist closed upon a pebble, and he threw it—trailing roots and veins—as far as he could from human sight. Reaching down for the second of the pair, he blinded ancestors on both sides of his family as far back as his great-great grandmother. Such despair must be forgive in a man who has misplaced not only his wife, but a small bluish sac containing his daughter.

Kwan Lee sat hunched by the bank, weeping. Slowly, thirst crept up his spine and bent him low, over the only water he knew—this narrow brook, flowing so translucent and pure as he sipped. The poison had taken years to flush through his body and be washed away by this last dream. If only he could write it down! He struggled to sit up; his hand twitched, believing it held a pen. But in truth Kwan Lee lay tilted back, mouth open, in his chair. He lay cleansed of all theories of grief, cleansed of any reason to cling to the phantom pen as the last of his cells became dislodged and were swept tumbling and rolling out through the soles of his feet.

At the last moment, the scholar in him had worried about the fate of his library, but needn't have. In the days following his death (before a client, impatient for a cure, forced entry into his office), one by one the books that lay strewn about had quietly opened to their wisest part. Some had parted their spines to a blank page, if the writer had harboured doubt; others had opened to their heartfelt dedications; and one, to an epigraph which embodied its failed prophet's purity of intent. Of the few truly great books, several had opened at their centre, in preparation for flight.

Nakamura Sonoko

Three Haiku Translated from the Japanese by Masaya Saito

Shot down . . . and still
With wings opened
In the shape of love

To separate
A single word was enough—
Arrowroot blossoms

A face lives
In the mirror abandoned
In pampas grass

James Kirkup

Seoul

At almost midnight
just before curfew,
none but foreigners abroad—

I wandered round the empty
Central Station plaza, awaiting
the arrival of non-existent trains.

• • •

In the first light of dawn
just after curfew ended
the blacked-out streets awoke

with an old man
dragging a cart piled with cabbages
across the empty plaza of City Hall.

Jim Wong-Chu

of christmas

it isn't the scene for the most appropriate ghost
although the thought of recent dying thoughts swirls
amid the ritual unravelling christmas morning

the darkest regions of chinatown awaken
homeless thoughts shed their scabs
the martyrs have burned the heroes returned
and the witches and soothsayers rule

lord kwan shares his table with the christmas pagan god
repartee on mercy and love turns
to ice skating on the sun yat sen garden pond
and whether number ninety-nine has chinese blood

the ice surface is but an infinite lake
in celestial canada

we bring together our loved ones
collect the bones of dead birds
simmer slowly with fresh rice and lotus water
into a gruel of turkey jook

to sate the hunger of our laundryman past

I wish to straddle the eastern dragon
and cruise vancouver harbour
count the buoys and leave markers
along the shoreline

visit the camp of long dead railway workers
and enquire from the buddha priest hui shen
who sailed this early coast and rode its roller coaster mountains
down to fusang to live among the aztec

I want to ask him if it's true
if it has to be the way it is

and I am where I am

and the surface of the sun yat sen pond
is truly an infinite lake

in celestial canada

Barry McKinnon

Excerpts from Pulp Log

thanksgiving: the fog smears distance, brings secret self to self and this gives perspective. north, it's not the coastal soup. it's the raw tree smudged wet and orange, skidded—a polluted haze cars with lights move thru. it's a lover giving up: why not smoke—you don't want to live anyway—is another definition of loneliness. oh, live. oh go on—load these leaves and trucks and count another breath, fuck or make love,—time's true entertainment, that we dangle a bit flabby and changed, tho consciously exercise—(it's at the dump: you say hello to the scavenger. no scavenging allowed, tho all eyes scan the goods. I sit in the truck and bleed, let the imagination swirl as a low cloud, eyes scan lines of trucks and cars filled with leaves and wonder at the general bounty, this sense of providence that those waiting for what is thrown out may feel—those throwing out—oh, what's the measure or your pleasure and what price freedom or non-existence. fully whole or just full we forget what's beyond and—there it is: spirit of whole earth dis assembled, engineered—state holidays for the bought mind / bought soul

where should I be? (driving, thinking about the asylum I see a sign: *have you had your eyes examined lately?* fog again, and writing like I'm starting up an engine & the stubbed pencil of the imagination is a long talk over beer at O'Flaherty's until a guy called the Crazy Hawaiian begins to sing Springsteen. don't go *here* I say, don't go *there* unless there's nothing to lose. Peter it'll pile up until you can't move, you'll be the colloquial lump of shit, nerve wracked for good reason: *you* didn't learn yr lesson. *you* didn't lie or cheat, *you* believed in the imaginations pursuit of illuminating the darkness, (in the up river managerial-insanity and insensitivity). are you saying this is the end of the world or the beginning of a long and endless conversation?

no drummer / no back up singer. it's the one man band singing La Bamba, synched to a homemade tape—it's living, it's a wage, it's an asylum,—how could we not be in each others hearts or minds or arms?

how greet Prince George day—(Whitman's vista & celebration of a world possible and unfolding—the singing inspired—the gut and energy of hope? or / snow and dark and the dead Ford we must push to the street to meet the jumper cables.—

but coming downstairs, the images of Claire, my daughter now a woman in the lit room / loud rock and roll flipping hair into shape and fashion. and my son Jesse in a snow bank fort with the tethered dog as flakes fall, cheer me or / I know if I miss *this*, I'm a fool—that a torn mood and self's sense of discomfort, the crabby unsatisfied man, must yield to the prosperity of what's here: love of mate and this fate of children—this good solid house is an achievement, tho creaky and in need of work.

how greet day: (my soul's confidence—the snowy field of the vista you must test, enter, and know.

Ozaki Hosai (1885–1926)

Translated from the Japanese by Graeme Wilson

Crematorium

Leaving the crematorium,
First one looks back
Then one looks up
 and up
 and up
At its endless chimney-stack.

Yamaguchi Seishi (1901–)

Translated from the Japanese by Graeme Wilson

Snail Shell

Obedient to some slow-born need,
The whorl of the snail-shell
Gathers speed.

Balloonfish Roe

Wang Renshu (Ba Ren)

Translated from the Chinese by Gu Ya-xing

Now that he had learned from others this knowledge, he decided to take the plunge.

Quietly he carried back home a basketful of balloonfish roe, procured from some unknown source.

On account of a famine for three years running, the yield was barely enough for rent. From last winter to February and March this year, he, single-handedly, had made a family of five drag out a miserable existence. But now they had to suffer from hunger!

Then—how to endure?

At the sight of the full basket the family went rapturous as though they saw some gifts being delivered by angels.

The kids flew over, dancing for joy.

“Dad, Dad! What’s this! Let’s have a try!”

What a scene, he was almost unable to hold back his tears!

“Have a try!” he echoed under his breath, seized by an overpowering horror! He became breathless as the thoughts of the death of his children pressed upon him like raging tides.

Having told his wife to cook the roe before taking them, he found an excuse to go out. It was not that he loathed to die, and therefore shunned the meal, it was that he could not bear the sight of the tragic death of a whole family. So he wanted to be absent for the time being.

It was after lunch time, but he was still not back. The kids had long since begged the mother for food. But having always shared weal and woe with her husband, the respectful wife would never let her children alone try any food first.

The sun was bending in the west. The roe of balloonfish was still stewing. Finally he came back; his feet seemed to be treading on clouds. The imaginary pitiful sight of a home littered with corpses made him feel weak on his returning journey.

Nevertheless his determination of making the sacrifice plucked up his courage. First he became aware of the earnest eyes of the kids glittering in front of the door, later the cheerful voices welcoming his homecoming.

How could they still remain alive? thought he.

“Dad! We have been waiting for you to have the meal together!”

“Oh!” Now he understood.

They had the meal at the table, scrambling. Unable to have fish for quite a long time, the family found it exceptionally tasty.

After the meal he went to bed and lay up there peacefully, waiting calmly for the arrival of the black Death.

However, because of the long boiling, the poison in the balloonfish roe disappeared. The family were doomed to suffer substantially from hunger.

When waking up again, he heaved a sigh: “To die isn’t easy, is it?”
Tears began to fill his eyes.

A. K. Ulku

Two Poems

Man in God

The moon sometimes wanders past my back yard;
part light, part clay, part sleep, half insane
watching the white ash falling from the stars
make him a wife. They will try to ease the solitude
that wasn't my fault, and will fail each other
till I close the curtains, and trusting I'll rise
the next day, sleep, and sleeping, die.

A meteor streaks overhead,
its tail the arc of a classical tragedy.
As if I had tried to suspend it like a musical note,
dared stop the decay, had judged,
and failed you my prophet, oh my prophet.

After the Idols

Maybe they can save each other's lives,
the old men gathered on the steps of the mosque
to smoke, read the tabloids or talk sports, whatever;

how all this was olive groves, the sea gone
grey with abundance; what they did when they caught
that enemy sailor, knowing what losing would mean.

Now Madonna blares from the Shoe Maker's shop.
And not a week ago a boy sprang up in class
with a hand gun, killing three children,

why?
Maybe dusk, which glides in under the radar.
Maybe less. That there's no one.

That a man can leave his job bone weary
and call the place he comes to *home*:
loosen his belt, prop his feet on the balcony

and watch the first star rise above his toes,
the chant which summons the faithful to prayer
fading out in the brightly lit hills.

Karen Romell

Ernest Hemingway's Wife

He's the one in the sweater,
with pipes,
the endless jokes.
Dirty in bed, he sweats
hard
his mouth is impossible.

Rolls me like a rug
late in the morning when the sun
comes in, dirty-paned
and I ache and feel sour

or at night after the cafes,
our tongues lush
with nicotine.

We fight and bruise each other
and I have to go down
5 flights of stairs
to pee, it's cold as sin,
and when I go it burns

then he scrawls his novels all day,
fish and bulls.

I worry about having a baby,
how we'll keep its ass dry
and love it enough
at 3 a.m. how its pink wet skin
will annoy

but he goes off again
in cars with Scott Fitzgerald

he loves cars and guns,
loves raw wine,
loves to make fun of Scott's dick.

I sometimes think I'll kill him
with a dirty sock
shoved down his throat
or a brick to the head
as he's
lying drunk

barrel-chested, his beard all spines
and dangerous

Sometimes we drink too much
and break things,
each other's heads maybe
or the mattress.

Sometimes in the bar, on the street,
anywhere, I look at him.
Shut up
I tell him.

Contributors

Pāramitā Banerjee was born in Calcutta in 1958. She received her B.A. in Philosophy at Presidency College and is currently completing her doctoral dissertation in Philosophy at Calcutta University. She is active in local theatre groups and alternative bookstores, and has published articles on theatre and on women's issues, as well as poetry, in literary magazines such as *Shabda*, *Jukti*, *Takko*, and *Goppo*. She has poems forthcoming in *Desh*.

Michael Bullock is a professor emeritus of Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia and the author of thirteen volumes of poetry and eleven of fiction as well as many translations. His own work has been translated into several European and Oriental languages and especially Chinese. His most recent book to appear is *The Walled Garden* (Ekstasis Editions, 1990).

Sal Cetrano's work currently appears in *California Quarterly*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Poetry Australia*, *Poetry Wales* and *Wind*. He lives in New York.

Gu Cheng was born in Beijing in 1956. He has worked at various jobs since 1969 and became an active figure in the movement Poetry in Ambiguity at the end of the last decade. His works include *Selected Lyrical Poems of Shu Ting and Gu Cheng* (1983), *Selected Poems of Bei Dao and Gu Cheng* (1983) and *Dark Eyes* (1986). At present, he lives in New Zealand with his wife.

Wayde Compton attends Templeton Secondary in Vancouver, and is currently in grade twelve. He is seventeen years old. His work has appeared in *New Shoots* for the last two years.

Diana Hartog lives in the Slocan Valley in British Columbia. She is currently at work on a collection of short fiction, as well as a collection of poetry.

Ozaki Hosai was a Japanese poet.

Lorna M. Jackson lives in Happydale, British Columbia. This year, she is a gardener.

Wang Jiaxin was born in 1957 in Hubei Province. Since graduating from the Department of Chinese at Wuhan University, he has been serving as an editor of *Poetry* in Beijing. His poetry books include *Farewell* (1985), *A Memento* (1985) and *The Sound of a Palm* (1988). His poems are widely anthologized and have been translated into English, French, German, Italian and Japanese. He is the co-editor of *Anthology of Chinese Experimental Poetry* (three volumes) and several anthologies of foreign poetry.

Dong Jiping was born in 1962 in Chongqing, China. His poetry appears in literary magazines and poetry anthologies both in China and abroad, and has been translated into several languages. His translations of foreign poetry include Robert Bly's *Loving a Woman in Two Worlds*, Michael Bullock's *Prisoner of the Rain* and the poetry of Margaret Atwood and

Gaston Miron, to name a few. Since 1986, he has been translating contemporary Chinese poetry into English. He is a member of the Haiku Society of America, and is on the editorial board of *International Poetry*. He is also the director of the Prose Poetry Society of China.

Deng Kaishan was a well-known writer.

S.K. Kelen has been publishing poems in Australian magazines since 1973. A book of his poetry, *Atomic Ballet*, will be published in early 1990. At present, he is completing an M.A. in Australian Literature and teaching Creative Writing.

James Kirkup has lived since 1959 in the Far East. He has mainly lived in Japan where he taught Comparative Literature and worked for many Japanese publishers and editors. His latest publications include *I, Of All People: An Autobiography of Youth* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson/St. Martin's Press) and *The Sense of the Visit: New Poems* (Sceptre Press). His poems, essays and translations appear regularly in *TLS*, *Encounter*, *PN Review* and *London Magazine*.

D.S. Long is currently editor (Pacific resources) with New Zealand Ministry of Education. His poems have appeared in *Landfall*, *Chelsea*, *Poetry Australia*, *Cutbank*, *Makar*, *New Poetry* and *Poetry New Zealand*. He edits the Tupu series of resources in Pacific Island languages.

Anurādhā Mahāpātra was born in Nandigrām, a village in the Midnapur district of Bengal. After attending Nandigrām Sitānanda School and College, she came to Calcutta in 1978 and completed an M.A. in Bengali Literature in 1981. Her first book, *Chāiphulstūp* (*Ash Flower Heap*), appeared in 1983 from Krishnapaksha Press. A new manuscript of poems, *Adhibās Manikarnikā* (*Burning Ghat Marriage*), was published in 1987.

Billy Marshall-Stoneking is a poet, filmmaker, playwright, historian and critic. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *Lasseter: In Quest of Gold* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989) and co-creator/writer of the award-winning ABC-TV drama series, *Stringer* (1988). His long association with the Pintupi people of Central Australia has led to several important documentary films, including *Desert Stories* (1984) and a film biography of a Pintupi tribal elder, *Nosepeg's Movie*. From 1979 to 1983 he lived at Papunya Aboriginal Settlement, 300 kms. west of Alice Springs, where he collected tales and oral histories for use in the local bilingual programme. Billy's poems from the desert will be published by Angus & Robertson in early 1990, under the title *Singing The Snake*.

Barry McKinnon has been teaching college in Prince George, British Columbia, since 1969. He has published several books of poetry, including *The the*, which was nominated for the Governor General's Award in 1981. He edited the Caledonia Writing Series for many years, and currently publishes limited edition Gorse Press chapbooks. He recently edited *Poets and Print (Interviews with 10 B.C. Poets/Publishers)*, published as a special issue of Open Letter.

Michael William Neja lives and writes poetry in Anchorage, Alaska.

Bob Preston lives in Victoria, British Columbia. He studied photography at David Thompson College in Nelson. His photographs have appeared in *MacLean's* and *Western Living*. The first exhibition of his work will take place in Victoria in the Spring of 1990.

Wang Renshu (Ba Ren) was a well-known writer who died during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

Karen Romell's poems have appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *event*, *Descant*, *The Antigonish Review* and others. She lives in Vancouver.

Masaya Saito is a poet and translator of Japanese poetry and fiction. A collection of his original works in English, *Ash*, was published in Tokyo in 1988.

Yamaguchi Seishi is a Japanese poet.

Ma Sen is a Chinese-Canadian who spent many years in France and writes in both French and Chinese. He took his PhD at the University of British Columbia. He taught for several years in the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, subsequently edited the prestigious Chinese literary magazine *Unitas* in Taiwan and is now a professor of Chinese Literature at the National Cheng Kung University in Tainan. "The Celestial Fish" is from his book *Tales of Peking*.

Nakamura Sonoko, unlike many other haiku poets, belongs to no haiku clique, but has been recognized as one of the leading haikuists, receiving the Modern Haiku Association Prize in 1975. She was born in 1918 in Shizuoka Prefecture.

A.K. Ulku is a recent graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and has received fellowships from the Millay Colony and the Wurlitzer Foundation. His work has appeared in *Poetry Canada Review*. He grew up in Calgary, and currently works as a clerical temp in Portland, Oregon.

Katrina Willoughby is at present paid to be an Information Resource Officer and writes when she can—often on the beach where family, dogs and magpies are less likely to distract her. She is the co-author of *10 each*, and the author of *A green dreaming*.

Graeme Wilson is a widely published translator of Far Eastern Poetry. He last appeared in *Prism international* 28:1. He currently lives in England.

Jim Wong-Chu is a founding member of the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop based in Vancouver. He has published a book of poetry, *Chinatown Ghosts* (Pulp Press), and is currently editing an anthology of Chinese Canadian Writing to be published shortly.

Carolyne Wright's translations of Latin American Poetry have appeared in many journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *Black Warrior*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Iowa Review*, *The Malahat Review*, *Mundus Artium* and *Translation* (Columbia University). Four collections of her own poems have been published so far; and a new manuscript, *The Custody of the Eyes*, was a finalist in the National Poetry Series.

Warrick Wynne lives in Victoria in Australia and has been published widely in various Australian magazines. In 1989 he won the Northern Territory Red Earth Poetry Award and in 1988 he was a runner-up in the A.B.C. Bicentennial Poetry Award. Warrick's first collection is due to be published next year.

Gu Ya-xing received his B.A. from East China Normal University and his M.A. from the University of British Columbia. He was the first prize winner in a nation-wide translation competition held in the People's Republic of China in 1984.

THE MALAHAT REVIEW

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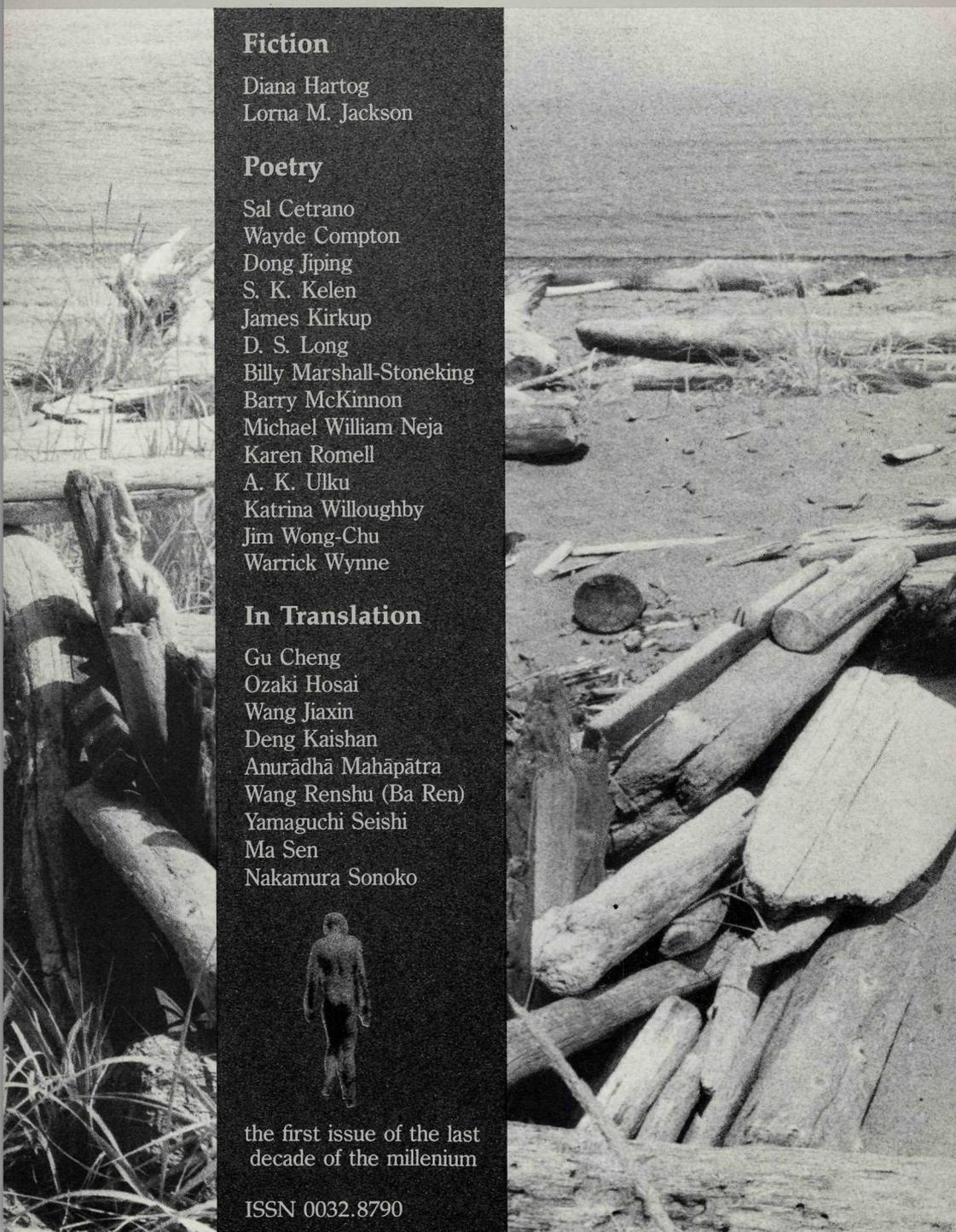
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Three winners will each receive \$500, plus publication in **Event** 19/3, Fall 1989.

Preliminary judging by the editors of **Event**.

Final Judge: Eleanor Wachtel, writer/broadcaster with CBC Radio's 'The Arts Tonight,' freelance writer and critic, contributor to *Books in Canada* and *Macleans*, one of the editors of *Room of One's Own*, and co-editor of *The Expo Story*.

Address: Creative Non-Fiction #3
Event, the Douglas College Review
P.O. Box 2503, New Westminster, British Columbia
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A black and white photograph of a beach with driftwood and a person walking in the distance. The image is split into two vertical panels. The left panel shows a close-up of driftwood and some vegetation. The right panel shows a wider view of the beach with a person walking away from the camera in the distance. The text is overlaid on a dark vertical band in the center.

Fiction

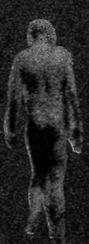
Diana Hartog
Lorna M. Jackson

Poetry

Sal Cetrano
Wayde Compton
Dong Jiping
S. K. Kelen
James Kirkup
D. S. Long
Billy Marshall-Stoneking
Barry McKinnon
Michael William Neja
Karen Romell
A. K. Ulku
Katrina Willoughby
Jim Wong-Chu
Warrick Wynne

In Translation

Gu Cheng
Ozaki Hosai
Wang Jiaxin
Deng Kaishan
Anurādhā Mahāpātra
Wang Renshu (Ba Ren)
Yamaguchi Seishi
Ma Sen
Nakamura Sonoko

A small silhouette of a person walking away from the camera, positioned above the text.

the first issue of the last
decade of the millenium

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