

York Literary Review



Spring 2016

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YLR

York St John University – York, United Kingdom

York Literary Review

York St John University
Lord Mayor's Walk
York
YO31 7EX

Managing Editor: J. T. Welsch

Staff Editorial Board: Abi Curtis, Robert Edgar, Helen Pleasance, Naomi Booth, and Kimberly Campanello

SPRING 2016 STUDENT EDITORIAL TEAM

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Front cover: Mariana Magdaleno, *Girls*
(watercolour, Indian ink and gold drawing ink on cotton)

Back cover: Mariana Magdaleno, *Emillia's Dream*
(watercolour, carbon black pigment)



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Editorial

It's a bit nerve-racking, putting any new thing into the world. Best not do it alone. I have now forgotten the circumstances of this new magazine's conception, though I vaguely recall an afternoon when Naomi and I must have worried others at the Perky Peacock, repeating the words *York Literary Review* to ourselves until it seemed inevitable. I remember saying it sounds like it already exists.

And now it does. Or maybe it did the moment in February we clicked the button to open submissions, then found ourselves with hundreds before the week was out. In the end, the response was beyond anything we could have dreamed for this inaugural issue, both in number and quality, as you'll see.

Creating a new literary journal was firstly a way to give our students another kind of practical experience. With our annual student anthology, MA pamphlet competition, public event series, and blog well-established – all not only featuring but run by Creative Writing students at York St John University – it seemed time to look outward, and see what we could do for the wider writing community.

In all honesty, I don't think any of us had been thinking this wide. In this issue, you'll find writers from Ireland, Berlin, Vienna, Toronto, India, all corners of the UK, the UAE and USA, and an artist in Mexico City. With 10 students and 6 members of staff reading submissions, it's hard to say what common elements caught our attention. As a group, we seem to like slightly weird and slightly dark things. We seem to like things that take play seriously and make their own use of form. But any list risks sounding generic. We love good writing. We were grateful to receive so much of it.

Above all, we hope you enjoy it and look forward with us to a long life indeed for this particular project.

J. T. Welsch

Preface

Despite the torn hair, blood, tears and poring over submissions, we can all say how amazing we've found working on the *York Literary Review*. The unparalleled talent of the writers has invigorated us all with a passion which sustained us through the crunch. There has been a lot of learning with starting a new magazine: we can all attest to facing challenges we never thought would be overcome. But everyone involved has come together to create an intricate origami of literature: layers within layers of deep, beautiful stories and poetry. These have been balanced with the delightfully disconcerting art of Mariana Magdaleno, whose talent is astounding.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted to the review. First time writers or seasoned professionals, the quality of your work saw us through. We would like to thank you, the reader. We value the time you have put aside to read this amalgam of modern writing.

With strong hopes for the future of this Review,

The student editorial team.



Come On In
Mariana Magdaleno

Exams and Icebergs

Jacob Buckenmeyer

The questions you're asking are important ones. And there's nothing I'd like better than to tell you straight. But I'm not sure I understand it myself. The best I can do maybe is tell you a story. Can we start with that?

OK, let's say I knew this girl once, back when I was a kid in school. And let's say she tried to do well on her tests—tried desperately, but still failed every one of them because she never studied. Can you see how that might happen?

Let's call this girl Virginia. I know that's not your mother's name. But we could use mom's name if we wanted to. Or any other woman's name. This is just a story, is what I'm saying.

Let's say this girl, Virginia, was in my math class. Picture this: she shows up on test day---pleated skirt, braided hair, three sharpened number-two pencils---cute as a button; and she pours herself into this test---geometry, algebra, calculus, whatever---her nose held one inch from the paper, and she believes if she's smart enough then she'll have the answers inside her somewhere. She believes she only has to find them. That's what she expects of herself, so she comes at these problems from every angle, but the answers just aren't there.

I sat two rows to her right, and I could see Virginia bent over her test, eyes narrowed, legs curled under her chair, one knee bouncing nervously as she flipped the pages back and forth. After a while she'd scratch her head with a pencil; she'd bite her nails, frantic to the point of tears she wanted those answers so bad. She'd yank on her braids, ball up little fistfuls of hair.

Sometimes she'd even cry out loud, scream at me, or throw things at me from across the kitchen; smash dishes over the edge of the countertop. Do you remember that? (God, I hope you don't.)

Wait. Forget what I just said about the dishes in the kitchen. What I meant to say, is that the girl in the story would stand up from her desk and snap her sharpened number-two pencils in half in her hands, going half-crazy with frustration.

The saddest parts is that this girl was actually incredibly bright. I'm sure she still is. Remember I said that. Don't think that she was unintelligent,

because let me tell you, she knew things. She could sense things. She used to point out to me times when I was angry or worried---things about me I didn't want her to know---moods I wouldn't even admit to myself. She was special that way---the way she understood things. I still believe that.

And she tried so hard. God, she tried harder than anyone else I've ever known. She worked harder than I even did, if I'm honest. But please don't think that I didn't try at all, because I did try; I really did; it was so, so important to me.

I guess what I want you to understand is that you can't grasp a brand new idea in one moment, through pure power of will and concentration, as you face the test questions. We're talking about a whole skill-set you didn't have before, like square roots, or the Pythagorean Theorem. I wouldn't expect you to know what those are now; but don't worry, you'll get there. That's exactly what I'm talking about: you have to learn it first; study, do your homework. You even need a teacher---someone to watch and listen to.

Then when the test comes, you'll be ready. And you need to be ready. Some of these tests life will throw at you are no joke---two-step or even three-step problems don't come close. Life will trip you up if you're not prepared or don't know what you're doing. No matter how hard you try.

Anyway---after a while this girl, Virginia, she gave up. She decided she must be stupid. But who could blame her? She tried *so hard* and couldn't even pass one pop quiz, so she stopped trying. She decided she must not have ever had it in her to get the answers right. She gave up. And that broke my heart, honestly.

Looking back now I see how it happened. I tried to tell her what I'm telling you but I suppose I didn't know how to say it then. It came across... different. When I told her she needed to study it must have sounded to her more like an accusation than encouragement, coming from *me* the way it did. And not long after that, you know, she dropped out of school, I guess you could say.

Just please don't think it was because either of us didn't care, or because we didn't try. We did. We both tried. It's just that some problems you can't work out. But there's nothing else that was ever more important.

That's the best way I know to describe it. I'd tell you more but I don't think it's my place exactly. Or else I feel it might put you in an impossible position. By that, I mean I'm sure your mom could tell you stories about a certain boy she knew in school, if you wanted to hear about him.

Exactly what happened---whose fault it was or who could have changed anything---is impossible for me to say. The important thing---the thing I need you to always remember, above all else---well, you already know what that is. Don't you. Nothing will ever change *that*, OK? That's a promise.

*

You're still not satisfied. I can see that. That's OK. Here, let me try it another way:

Maybe I knew this other girl: and she was the captain of a big ship---one of those big cargo ships, an ocean freighter. And let's say the ship was headed straight for an iceberg, when---

Hmm?

Yes, it was *like* the Titanic; it was just as big, except this boat was stacked way up high and wide with shipping containers---boxcars like you see on a train. There weren't a lot of people like on the Titanic. This ship had only a few people, just a few, but the cargo, what it carried, was very precious---

What's that? Gold?

Yes. I like the sound of that. This big ship is full of *gold*; so much gold that it's worth more than you could ever imagine, and the ship is cruising through the middle of the ocean, let's say. The captain, she's on deck and is zipped into her big yellow rain slicker. She's at the helm and she's steering. It's storming pretty bad maybe, and of course that's not anybody's fault, it just happens. The wind and rain whipping back and forth all around her, so she has her hood pulled low over her eyes and she braces herself with the prongs of the big wheel as the deck sways beneath her. She's paying attention. She takes her responsibility to the ship seriously.

But up ahead through the clear view screen you can see this huge iceberg bulge up out of the black water. The ship is headed straight for it, and the captain's first mate, he points it out to her but she doesn't seem to notice.

Now, imagine this iceberg has been around for a long time, and it's not going anywhere. Maybe we all, every one of us, has an iceberg in front of us. One we can't see. And maybe we need someone else to point it out. Maybe the first mate had an iceberg out there too. (I don't know about that, but just try to understand what I'm saying)

The captain brought this iceberg with her. And for most of the captain's life she thought the iceberg was normal; she thought everyone had a big iceberg in their path. It isn't even really the captain's fault.

Somebody else built this iceberg---this big dangerous thing. It accreted over a long time so that the captain grew up with it like you grow up with the wallpaper in the hallway of our house---you don't even notice it.

So the captain doesn't notice the iceberg until her first mate tells her they're going to hit it. He sounds the alarm. He tells her it's going to sink the ship. He makes such a big fuss over the iceberg that eventually the captain has to listen to him. After long arguments she even accepts that the first mate may be right. She starts to believe they may be in danger, thank God, so she turns the ship a bit to the right, she steers it just around the tip of the iceberg. Free and clear, she thinks.

But the thing is, you know the iceberg is mostly underwater. It's like a gigantic bobbing mountain where all you see is the peak floating along, but the really dangerous part is spread out below the water line, where you can't see.

The captain didn't understand this about icebergs. She wouldn't believe it. She'd never really looked at an iceberg before, so even recognizing it as a problem at all took an act of faith from her. She couldn't imagine that the real problem might be a whole lot bigger than what she saw on the surface.

And the more I talk about it, the more certain I am the first mate had one or two icebergs he didn't take seriously enough. I'll have to think more about that, but back to the story:

All this time the iceberg is bearing down on them, swaying back and forth with the horizon as the ship sways. To avoid it all together, the submerged part too, she'd really have to really torque the helm and hit the brakes. But she thinks they'll be fine so long as they steer around the tip of it. She thinks the first mate is exaggerating. It can't possibly be that bad. And a sharp turn like he wanted would upset things---the ship would lose its balance and some of the crates might topple into the water. Some of the cargo, the gold, might sink to the ocean floor and be lost forever. And the captain couldn't bear the thought of losing any of it. What they were carrying was so important to her--to her and the first mate both.

But the first mate understood they'd strike the iceberg if they didn't take the risk, they'd lose it all if they didn't do something drastic to turn the ship around. Even if that meant losing some of what they had, they had to try to save what they could. I think you can agree with that.

So the captain and the first mate, they argued. A lot. The first mate was desperate, and he raised his voice. And when the captain wouldn't listen, wouldn't let him steer, he called her crazy and stupid. He screamed in her face. He shouldn't have done that---it wasn't fair of him, you know? Only he thought he had to at the time.

Then after he'd argued all he could, after he'd said some terrible things to the captain, the first mate gave up. He stormed off below deck and locked himself in his quarters and he waited for the ship to hit the iceberg. He waited for the jolt of impact and the rush of cold water. He waited for the wreck that would sink them. That couldn't have been the right thing for him to do, but what else was there?

Then at the last minute, in a final act of desperation, the first mate rushed back up the ladder and onto the deck to try one last time. But he was done arguing. Instead he shoved the captain so hard that her hood flew back off her hair, and he grabbed the helm to wrestle it away from her, but she came back at him and, well, it felt like he was fighting for his life---for more than his life. He didn't know what else to do. And I really hope you can believe that.

You could say it was that final struggle between them over the helm that wrecked the ship. You could say that. But of course it takes a long time to change the course of a big freighter like that, even if you know what you're doing, and I believe by then it was too late for the captain and her first mate too, and all that gold, as important as it was to both of them. And when the ship wrecked all that gold sank to the bottom of the sea.

But, maybe... maybe as the ship sank the first mate ran to one life raft, and the captain ran to another, and they both filled their rafts with as much of the gold as they could carry, until water threatened to come in over the sides. Maybe they saved what they could before they cut the lines and let the ship sink; before they drifted out alone on their separate seas.

And if that's how it was... Well, if that's how it was then what they saved probably didn't look like much compared to all the big ship could carry. But I think it might have been enough. I certainly hope it is. Of course, I'll leave that for you to decide---perhaps when you're a little older.

R is for Radishes on Remembrance Day

Martha Batiz

It's still dark when I enter the kitchen to check on the radishes. I've never planted anything before; I'm nervous and eager to see what I'll find nesting in the moist soil—I feel like a little girl about to unearth a treasure. The leaves are bright green and look almost happy, as if they too had been waiting for today. Not a sound can be heard. Gabby is still sleeping and I know I have to wait for her to wake up before exploring the contents of the ceramic pot that has been sitting on our windowsill for twenty five days now. Outside, the hushed wind seems to pay its respects to my memories. In my mind, I hear Galina's strong voice declaring the radish a most loyal vegetable, because every part of it can be eaten and it's easy to plant and care for. Her smile was yellow and nonchalant. I'm wearing her favourite pink robe and suddenly wish I had some of the lilac perfume she used to wear, to feel her even closer.

It's been eleven years since we were last together in this same place. I wanted to do something special to say goodbye. To part with her in a happier mood, and feel less guilty about letting go. No. Letting go is a euphemism. I was betraying her and even though everybody said I was exaggerating and she wouldn't know she was being moved into an old-age home, it was enough that *I* knew it. Her getting out of the house unnoticed and wandering alone around the city for an entire day, in the cold, asking for directions to get to her childhood home—striving to arrive at an apartment that had been long gone, on the other side of the world—finally did it for me. Remembering the fear that gnawed on me during those merciless hours trying to find her still makes me shiver. The police reports, the driving around the neighbourhood screaming her name, the making of flyers in a flash to hand out to anyone who would take one made me realize how blind I had been. I couldn't take care of her on my own any longer, especially when I was about to become a single mother. Only a few days later did it dawn on me that our last afternoon together happened to be on November 11.

For weeks now have I been trying to decide how to share the story with Gabby. What will she say when she sees me? At what point should I tell her about Galina's notebook? A shy ray of light is starting to crawl through the window. It will be a partly cloudy day. Perfect to fit my mood.

As my Galina—she never wanted me to call her grandma, complaining it made her feel old—began to fade away, I made an effort to claw her back from oblivion. To keep her with me for as long as I could. So I began doing the things we always used to share together: baking cookies, going out for walks to familiar places, reading stories; I reminded her again and again of the time she gave me a ‘pooch of honour’ for being brave at the hospital when my appendix was removed. I smile and look at it now, still sitting proudly on top of the microwave table—it’s a lamb but she called it *pooch*, with a strong *p*. Everything about her had always seemed strong and everlasting, and that’s what made it so hard to witness the frustration in her eyes and her half-open mouth as she tried to reach inside herself to retrieve words and memories that were eroding. Even her body seemed to shrink as she forgot how to sit and walk straight. I didn’t understand how small she had really become until she started mistaking me for her little sister, Agnieszka, who didn’t survive the war. It was then I remembered a story Galina told me once, about how during her last summer at home with her mother and sister—they never saw my great-grandfather again after he joined the army a year before—, they had tried to rebuild a sense of happiness.

When war was declared between Germany and Russia, and the sirens in Warsaw started to howl more often than ever before, Agnieszka suffered panic attacks. It was very hard for Galina and her mother to take her down to the shelter, because she would freeze and refuse to move. As the Russian flyers began to circle around of Warsaw, the sound of bombs made the air tremble. There was no way they could even think about happy times then, and Agnieszka’s health was deteriorating quickly. So one day, after they emerged from the basement, Galina came up with an idea.

‘Let’s wear these.’ She had their swimming suits in her hand. ‘It’s very warm right now, and I’m sure these suits will make us feel better.’

Agnieszka and her mother hesitated at first, but the moment they held those suits in their hands, they smiled—and Galina’s amber eyes beamed as she shared the memory with me. There remains only one picture of Agnieszka and it’s the image I recall whenever I think of her: a scrawny preteen with long, braided hair, a vivacious gaze and a nose just like mine.

Galina was very excited to be out of her regular, worn clothes and have her bathing suit on, but she had lost so much weight that it was too big for her. She would have cried if she had looked at herself in the mirror, she said, but instead she went to the living-room and extended an old sheet by the

window, under the sun. She put another sheet on the floor, empty, and sat down to wait for her mother and little sister.

‘We are having a window-side party,’ she declared emphatically as they emerged, clothed in their equally way-too-big suits. None of them complained or made fun of each other. They just lay there, letting the warmth caress their bodies, without fear, eating radishes they themselves had been growing in their kitchen.

As it turned out, it was a good discovery that they could actually have some fun wearing their bathing suits around the house. Later in July there was a typhus epidemic, and people were also sick with dysentery and pleurisy. Their mother asked them to stay indoors for a while, and Agnieszka and Galina complied. To console themselves, they wore their bathing suit every day and sat down under the sun that came through the window, reading, their shoes and dresses and first aid kit ready in case the siren howled. Agnieszka still cried but at least had stopped refusing to follow Galina and their mother to the building’s basement.

By the end of that September, Kiev fell and London was under severe bombardment by the Nazis. Shots were often heard on the street. It was risky to go outside, and their window-side parties were over. It was safer to live with the curtains closed. Galina’s words still linger in my mind, an ageless pain engraved in her voice: ‘I don’t know if Mama noticed this, but Agnieszka still wore her bathing suit under her regular clothes sometimes. She was desperately holding onto something that could make her happy, my little sister.’

And that is why, on what was to be our last afternoon together, I turned up the heating and helped Galina sit down on a chair by the living-room window, while I sat on the floor on an extended sheet, and even if she wasn’t wearing her bathing-suit I did wear mine, and tried to help her remember her own story as we both ate freshly washed radishes from the very bowl I will soon be getting ready again. If she was mistaking me for Agnieszka, it meant at least a part of Galina was still in there, trapped somewhere inside her body. I had to find her.

It was a sunny afternoon and Galina was quiet as I spoke. All I could hear was the crunchy sound of the radishes in our mouths, and her soft, rhythmic breathing. If only her mind had been as resilient as her teeth, I thought. A wave of sadness was about to drown me because, upon seeing no immediate reaction, I thought she didn’t even remember that last summer with

her family. I was fighting to hold back my tears when my Galina's words took me by surprise.

'I hope you never have to live through a war, ever, my darling,' she said, her hand reaching out to caress my hair. Her hand, bony and full of old-age spots and yet so beautiful. I was about to reply something, but she hushed me and went on: 'Little Agnieszka looked like a fairy in her swimming suit. It was blue, did I tell you that? It matched her eyes.' And then she fixed her gaze in my newly protruded stomach, and blew it a kiss. I moved closer to her pale, venous legs and let my head rest against her knee. We stayed like that for a few minutes. I felt so sheltered sitting there, her hand resting on my head, that for a moment I thought it would all be okay, it would all be back to the way it was. But when I turned around to look at her, her gaze was lost again. I rose to my feet as quickly as I could and tried to make her speak, make her recognize me, but it was useless.

Galina never returned to Warsaw after the war. She never told me why, never wanted to share those details with me, but I discovered the reason when I was leafing through an old notebook of hers after she passed away. I didn't want to do something she would have disapproved of, but found it so hard not to read! So I allowed myself only a random paragraph. And my Galina's words surprised me again, because my eyes landed on the one that seemed to answer most of my questions. I can't fight the tears as I sit down with her notebook and re-read her words in this crisp, early morning light. I've decided that Galina's notebook will be Gabby's. One day, she will be mature enough to dive into its content. My Galina will not be forgotten and I'll still have respected her privacy the way she wanted me to. For now, however, I take advantage of the peace around me and allow my eyes to stroll once more over her perfect calligraphy as I ache for her soft touch.

I heard a troop of German soldiers coming close to where I had been searching for Agnieszka and Mama. I immediately looked for a place to hide. I entered a building and went into an open apartment. There were so many abandoned apartments then, all looted by Polish and German thieves. Most of the first apartments that had been vacated belonged to Jewish families, because they were forced to move into the Ghetto. We got used to that happening and even began seeing it as a normal procedure. And now we were in the same situation. Even though my own apartment looked now abandoned, too, it somehow took me by surprise to find so many others desolated in the exact same way. I could make out silhouettes on the walls, the marks left behind by

furniture and paintings. And I got this idea that, somewhere inside the walls, the lost voices of the people who had once lived and laughed there, were still trapped, wondering what had happened, why everything had gone so wrong. All of a sudden I knew it: while I had been waiting in vain for Mama and Agnieszka to return home, I had searched for their voices inside our apartment, trapped inside the walls. That explained my urge to lean against them, to caress them the way I had caressed Agnieszka's hair at night when she crawled into bed with me. Those walls had seen us grow up. And they had seen my family be taken away. Somewhere inside them, their last words had found a nest.

With Warsaw's destruction, the voices that for centuries had been asleep between the walls of the old buildings and houses, the voices of the people who had lived and died in Warsaw's dwellings, were left homeless. I imagined they became blind, invisible butterflies floating above the rubble. They had nowhere to go. None of them would ever rest again. They had nowhere to go back to. And it was then that I knew there was no going back for me, either.

The thing is, in the end her mind played a trick on her and she did try to go back and, in doing so, she sped up our parting. After our last afternoon together, Galina never came back to me either. I visited her every other day but the light inside her eyes was ever-dimming. She disintegrated slowly and there was nothing I could do to stop it—only Gabby's kicks and hiccups inside me kept me going, a constant reminder that not even the most magnificent of miracles comes to us for free.

No matter how much time goes by, I still feel a need to return to Galina, and have chosen to do so on every November 11. Today will be the first time I let Gabby into my little tradition—my precious girl, whose sleepy footsteps are now filling the hallway and coming close to where I am. As I turn to welcome her into the kitchen and into our past, I can't help but laugh when she asks, her mouth suddenly wide open:

'Why on earth are you wearing a swimming suit?'

I need to blow my nose, to dry my eyes; most of all, I need to hug her—but before I walk towards Gabby, I quickly hide Galina's notebook behind my *pooch of honour*. It will be safe there for a few hours, until I can put it back into its usual drawer. I embrace my surprised-looking daughter—my plump, tall and healthy daughter—, smell the sweet scent of shampoo that still lingers in her hair, and know that we are blessed. Holding her tight, I answer her question by whispering:

'Remember the seeds we planted a couple of weeks ago?'

A Blaze

Russell Jones

I can barely hear you from out here, through the sounds of crashing timbers. Tongues of fire lick the windows as the roof caves in and the fire engines pull up.

'It's too late. Stay back. Aim for the ground.' The chief says as the sulphur-yellow fighters pull out the hose and hold it between them like an anaconda.

People gather, mesmerised by the geysers of smoke. They mutter, pulling at each other's elbows. Whispers are never quiet enough. An old woman brings me tea, puts a blanket over my shoulders. Others weep and shriek as the house cackles. They think they've caught your face at the window.

Remember when we danced in the pavilion at the town square? Fireworks broke into the sky, like in the movies when lovers kiss or screw for the first time. You told me how the chemicals burned, how each one lifted and it became something new: a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. We spent the night gazing into the stars that burned lifetimes away, wondering what might be beyond our eyes and fingertips.

This is your first flight, little butterfly, my firefly. That drab caterpillar of a body wasn't enough to capture you. You'll become something new in the furnace of our home, our wedding gifts, the half-made crib and cellophaned family album. Look now, look at you go! What a firework you are! Later I'll empty the gas canister again and we'll return to the stars.

The Symphony Of A Future Memory

Jenny Bhatt

Like a lingering music note of that locked song inside of you, she will resonate into your soundless abyss one day.

You will admire her the way one might hold abstruse poetry or abstract art in a certain high esteem.

And later, when the steaming, viscid darkness holds your frenzied cries at ransom, pieces of her melody will reprise in fading echoes.

*

It will be your favorite kind of English spring when you see her bound into your 19th c. Poetry lecture like, indeed, one of Clare's young lambs.

The first few nights, the two of you will sleep together at her bedsit. Lying on an ancient box spring over a makeshift dais. Floating above a galaxy of borrowed books with crumbling hardcovers and rasping yellow pages; empty soda cans with stale cigarette ashes clotting in them, and the landlady's cat mewling outside the dust-ridged windowsill. In this stationary universe, your body will hold rigidly still, while her limbs will slipknot around yours.

Kay will talk in her sleep, her humid breath finely stirring the hairs on your chest. An unclear and utterly absorbing speech. An Indian dialect. Strain closer each time, and try to catch a familiar word or phrase. It will be a couple of months before she will mumble something you should be able to comprehend. Almost imperceptibly, 'Bastard fucked me up.'

The following morning, in the glassy sunless Conservatory, ask her what she might have meant. Of course, she will shrug those marble-like shoulders and stare at you.

Scales tipping this way and that with the weights and measures of the powers each of you give and take.

*

When you first start to go out together, you will meet in public places, off-campus.

Lagers at *The Eight Bells*, your local pub, with the glittering cut-glass mirrors and the multiple reflections; the timeworn beams from which lighting fixtures of veiled bronze girls hang; the Oriel windows that lead out to the garden with its thick carpet of grass and the flowering rhododendrons, so brilliant in early summer. Dinners at *The Beefeater*, some thirty miles out in the country, on the high-backed settee in front of an Elizabethan fireplace with a real log fire. These will be your only private haunts.

Remember that you will still be her English Professor. At all other places and times, you must meet like two shadow players on a vast screen — revealing only sketchy profiles (to your indifferent audience) of what you will have become to each other.

Discuss her writing. Or yours. The book you have been trying to write for the past three years: *Writers and Their Muses*?. She will joke with you, palms upraised on the pine tabletop, that perhaps you need a decent muse of your own to get the book finished. Make that effort to laugh back, for she will observe the flush creeping up from your collarbone.

Her writing will be like her conversations — fragments of half-whispered and half-sung reveries. You will not know, sometimes, when she will speak to you about her home and her family, if she is making it all up or not. No matter. Her voice and the words will seep through your pores like the saturating and sustaining moisture of a rainforest.

With the power of her language, then, Kay will be able to say anything. Yet, most superbly, she will be able to say nothing. Simply sit there and let her body do the talking. Her body, like that of a child's, will always betray her. Her language, like that of a sophisticated adult's, will articulate things she will not even mean.

*

You will wonder about how and when you let yourself fall in love with her. When will her desires start to seem superior to your own? Could such a strong focus on another person mean anything other than a deep sort of affection? So, you will reach out to her carefully, one sky-blue afternoon on the deserted Commons, with *I love you*.

Not knowing how to respond to such a statement, she will sit back with her arms crossed over her chest. This will also be her favorite morning pose in bed when she will sit up, bare, except for the sheets pulled up to the tops of her breasts with crossed arms and hair in a bundle of black curls on her thin shoulders — looking and waiting for you to open your eyes.

Should she say, *'I love you'* back?

Should she say, *'So do I'*, with a smile?

Actually, she will ask, *'Do you?'*

*

One Thursday evening, some stoned jobs will walk into the garish student bar where she will be serving. They will ask for beer. She will refuse their extremely young, hawkish, and leering faces. A couple of the other barmen will try to chase them out. One kid will mock her as he leaves, calling out her name and promising to meet her outside her bedsit. Then, instead of going down towards the perimeter road, the boys will cut back onto the spine round the back of the bar. The mocking one will run up to a window and thump it hard, bringing it down with a massive shatter. A large piece will wing through the air and cut her left hand. Too afraid to walk home alone, she will call you before closing time. And, you will take her back to your place.

She will ripple towards you like a plant in a river because of this modern-day rescue (of sorts). With this increased currency of closeness, you will hope to remove all the mystery; to know, need and want every particle of her.

This is how, within two months of meeting, the two of you will move in together. Keep in mind, though: this could be bad for both of you. The University might not approve. Contrive it to look like you are taking in a lodger. Make certain she always uses the garage entrance and her own key. It will work well; you will both be comfortable and secure with this arrangement eventually.

*

There are those who are made for living, and those who are made for loving. Do you remember reading this by Camus?

Every so often, when you kiss her, you will taste the bitterness on her mouth. It will spin you and you will not know what to do about it. You will

never know, and hope silently that it should go away. Do not even begin to wonder what Camus would have said of this. You are no existential Don Juan (yet, your melancholy will send her to her end).

On a cool, soft, haze-tinted May Bank Holiday weekend, as she is helping you creosote the old garden fence, she will tell you that people don't get their hearts broken over love. Kneeling on the cobble-stoned path, making expansive brush strokes on the yellowed wooden slats, she will roll her eyes and add that it is no more than a silly expression for egos getting bruised.

For goodness' sake, do not mention youth and naiveté. Simply listen to her body carefully as she speaks these words. See how she defies the unsympathetic slice of wind that whips her green oversized cardigan about her. This could be your chance to understand whether you break her heart eventually, or bruise her ego. But, regardless of how hard you try to read the signs, you will never know.

*

Kay's moods will fascinate you. For no apparent reason, she will walk on air for weeks, taking huge gulps of life in between breathless convulsions of joyful laughter. During such times, you will frequently happen on her holding delighted court within her *omnium gatherum* on campus. Just stand by quietly and watch as she makes everyone fall in love with her silky smiles, trenchant discourses, eyes the color of wet coffee grounds; sitting pretty in the glancing light of a shy evening sun. These are the moments you must hold forever, like stills from old movies.

Or, she will become a dream creature in her prolonged and solitary periods of silence. With you, but still far away. At such times, she will make herself almost indiscernible. Now, this is where you will make one of your biggest mistakes. Instead of hanging on to her, you will let her slip away. You will give up, too easily, trying to reach her in these moments.

Only one time in the entire relationship will she lose her temper with you. You will be discussing mimesis in the arts after having watched yet another classic work of literature ruined by Hollywood. Huddled together under her worn-out patchwork quilt, in front of the old ashlar fireplace because the radiator in your room will have packed it in. Gringo, the flat-nosed Persian, will lie in a heat-swoon in his willow basket at your feet.

Of course, you will be appalled at what the novel has been turned into for popular entertainment. How you will hate those large, ice-covered wastes of Russia pretending to be the frozen Thames; the American actress with her fake nose and worse accent; all those tacky, plaster-of-Paris sculptures at the end. Above all, you will loathe that the novel's characters live into the present day of internet and smartphones.

So, you will try to explain how a practically comatose actress could not save such a miserable movie with one-line voice-overs, or full-face stares into the lens, or dialogue lacking in the original wit, sensibility and subtlety and politics of one of your favorite authors.

Convinced that the colorful two-hour series of jump-cuts is a reasonable substitute for 'the insightful riches of a novel's internal monologues', Kay will giggle at your earnestness.

You silly sod! You will not know when to give up. Your despair will be twofold: that the novel's wry perceptions have been oversimplified into banality, or erased completely; and that your darling Kay does not agree with you.

She will counter ravishingly about revisionism in art, and about the immediate sensory perception of cinematography having its own appeal.

Now, think! This would be a good place to stop such an absurd conversation. Instead, shaking with some unknown fear, you will continue about how delayed mimetic perception of ideas and images fashioned with merely words is more lasting, vital and vivacious. Oh, if you could only listen to yourself then! If you could only know how pretentious and old you will sound.

In the full and final glory of her own rhetoric, she will snap at you that there is no need to delay what is instantly available.

This last will hit you like a squall of arctic air.

Why will you never see that nothing in your prosaic life has prepared you for the strength of even her barest convictions? Mute, in a deathlike exhaustion, you will turn to look at her. Through little slivers of ice, flashing in the dead of winter, her soul will look back at you.

Quite unexpectedly then, her fingers will steal around yours and she will ask for a midnight wedding, with lit torches, like Emma Bovary had fancied.

Always, that involuntary touch; those telltale hands. You will understand this tactile lingo of hers better than any other; as her fingers will guide yours into her rich crevices, or as they will release the plunges of hair from an old-

fashioned, jeweled barrette. Never fluttery, like a bird. Always purposeful, like red-hot iron. Branding you as they will travel over your body and rouse every nerve. Made for small kisses, that cool and bitter mouth will trail after the fingers, stinging, not assuaging, your inflamed sensoria. Then, her eyes will shine like a fire that does not burn; like the magic coals that her Hindu ancestors must have walked on; the very transcendence of pain.

Now you could pause, if only for a second or two. And, watch the fresco of her arched body straddling yours. See how she gives herself up so completely to the act, unfurling like a lush fern. Look at those eyes! That face, which looks like she is about to cry.

Except, you will not do any of that. Too scared to stop, thinking she will not even notice.

Eventually, when that unmistakable intensity will shake your very core, you will be like a man who has every reason for happiness, but not happiness.

You blind, careless, illiterate bugger.

*

You will never stop desiring her. Can anyone truly stop desiring a thing of beauty? You will simply need to withdraw, like a tide that must abandon the shore. Could voice even begin to lend breath to the backwashed débris from your mind?

The French distinguish between *le rationel* and *le raisonnable*. What is rational is not always reasonable.

It will seem right to let her know. Then, it will feel unreasonable to upset the balance in her exacting world, where even things like '*Melon prefers to be eaten alone*' are strictly adhered.

*

Lovers, they say, look for a complete reflection of themselves in each other. Like Narcissus and his pool, where each was enamored by his reflection in the other's eyes.

What will Kay see in yours? Aim to gauge this each time you will catch your reflection in hers. No, you will not be able to think of anything when you look into her eyes because what you will see there will never fail to stun you — inexplicably and indescribably. Essentially, she will magnify every aspect of

you, her lover. Your virtues and your faults will appear many times greater than you could ever imagine.

Is this truly what lovers want? Is this really what you two should be doing to each other?

*

When it is all over, her family will come over from India. Parents and two sisters. Fractal images of your lover, they will tell you she had been a troubled child; you are not to feel responsible for what happened. You will not feel sorry for them because you will be too busy feeling sorry for yourself.

Her father will assess you from that distant, universal refuge: a watchful silence. His compact and swarthy frame will be so unlike Kay's. Only those large black eyes, soothing you like a poultice every time they will rest on your profile. Why not invite him to accompany you to your local afterwards? Do this discreetly, as you are not sure whether he will consider alcohol sacrilege or not. You know so little about him.

The two of you will go to *The Eight Bells* for a couple of pints. You will want to ask him to tell you more about her: what her first fight had been; who her first crush had been. It would help you to bring all those narrated oddments together, to create some semblance of her wholeness — so you are not left with the jagged splinters. You need to find out who she cursed in her dreams.

Instead, the old man and you will talk about the weather and his last trip to England. The pub landlord, Ian, will give your pint to Kay's Dad by mistake, and give you the lemonade instead. In your entire life, you have never had lemonade when in a pub (not even the alcoholic hooch the students pretend to like because it is so cheap). Still, you will know not to hold it against Ian, your mate, because you will have seen his confusion on being introduced to Kay's Dad. He had always thought of your girlfriend as Spanish, not Indian. You had never bothered to correct this assumption.

*

Staccato:

A series of lectures in Berlin.

Wet December weekend.

Distel, Berliner Kabarett, Friedrich Strasse.
Raucous Irish pub, Ku'damm.
Last round of Glühwein for all.
Kay: sheathed in long russet silk moiré;
Perfumed with oriental jasmine;
Landlocked by bearded German academics.
Völker's large hand on her bare left shoulder,
His knotty, double-jointed fingers
lost in the dense pile of her hair.
Her eyes, magical and fiery now,
Locked irresistibly with his.
Thick, painful obstruction
Rising in your throat.
Goodbyes at midnight.
Currywurst at Konnöpke's Imbiss,
Underneath the train tracks,
at the corner of Kastanien Allee
And Schönhauser Allee
In Prenzlauer Berg.
Tiny, airless hotel room, Berliner Strasse.
Too tired to speak, reason, understand.
Numbness inside your head at his name.
Early morning shadows.
Kay, glacial on the bathroom floor.
Eyes like slivers of ice in the dead of winter again.
Trickle of blood at the corner of her mouth.
Like the russet silk from the night before.

*

The texture of memory: like confetti-ed glass raining down on your skin. You will gather each fragment lovingly, every night, sleepless and alone in your bed. Polish it carefully, till it glitters with the hope of a false diamond and refracts your stark life into a spectrum of luminous rays, lighting up the darkness briefly.

Plautus said: *Factum est illud, fieri infectum non potest.*
Done is done, it cannot be made undone.

Death Pitch

Mike Sherer

'I want to kill myself.'

A young man sits at a desk with a phone headset perched upon his close-cropped hair. He is squeaky clean, so bland he fades into the pale walls of his small cubicle. 'Can you tell me why?' he speaks calmly into the microphone.

A dull female voice answers. 'Nothing is right. My husband is always gone. The few times he stays home usually ends up with an argument and him hitting me. My children are strangers. One day last week my son walked into our apartment and I didn't recognize him. I have no friends. The women I know are like me, zombies, and the men I meet fuck me once or twice, then disappear. Every day is the same. I sit inside and stare at the TV or at the walls or out the window. And when I go out there is nothing better to see, only ugly things and cruel people.' She pauses, not even a sigh. 'I can just see no reason to go on.'

'Have you tried talking to God?'

'What God?'

'You mean which God. The religious diversity of our nation offers many paths.'

'Religion offers nothing to me.'

'Then reflect upon the secular aspects of your life. Think back on all the people you have encountered, all the places you have seen, all the experiences you have had. After doing this, can you honestly say there is no reason at all for you to continue living?'

'I've thought everything out already. I want to die. That's why I called you.'

The young man sits up a little straighter. A gleam comes to his eyes, his voice up the ante of his interest. 'All right. I am required by law to make a reasonable attempt to dissuade you. I have done that. Now we may proceed. As I'm sure you know, the Right To Die Act gives each individual the right to take his or her own life. This is how it should be. Your body belongs to you and it should be your decision what to do with it. What else, besides the opposable thumb, separates us from the animals?'

The young man pauses. The first trimester of a smile forms on his thin lips, the timbre of his voice moves a note up the scale. 'My firm helps people carry out their very human right to die. I will personally guide you through the next difficult days. I will handle all of the legal details, something I am certain you have no desire to do. You are aware, of course, that the government will award ten per cent of the estimated sum they would have doled out to you had you lived to life expectancy to any person or organization you designate as your beneficiary. The government does this because suicide, in these stressful days of overpopulation and scarcity and pollution, is considered a brave and unselfish act of patriotism. I will see that your beneficiary promptly receives every dollar he or she is entitled to. Do you understand everything so far?'

'Yes.'

'Good. Now under the Right To Die Act you also have the right to choose the means of your demise. Public suicide is illegal. Jumping from a window or a bridge, onto subway tracks or in front of cars, endangers innocent people and no awards will be granted by the government for such a suicide. The same for drowning, since people unaware you are attempting to end your life may endanger their own by trying to rescue you. Also, discharging firearms, misusing prescription drugs, inflicting traumatic situations upon innocent bystanders by hanging yourself or slashing parts of your body with the intent to bleed out is also illegal. Your right to suicide does not give you the right to inflict pain and suffering on those around you.'

The young man tones down his delivery. 'Of course, the government provides painless lethal injection for a peacefully quiet suicide. But as you intimated earlier, your entire life has been peacefully quiet, so you may wish to end it with more of a flourish.'

He pauses for a reply. Eliciting none, he continues, his voice resuming its previous lively lilt. 'I can help you with this. My firm has connections with movie studios that are in constant need of suicides. Since passage of the Right To Die Act stunt men are no longer employed. Why fake it when you can have the real thing? Imagine yourself in a western. Picture yourself as a sturdy pioneer woman in a cabin with your husband and children. Savages attack. Your husband is killed. You hide your children, then, in order to lead the savages away from them, you run outside. They catch you. The camera zooms in for a close-up of your face as the tomahawk strikes. The savages run off with your scalp. Fantastic! Not only do you bring your empty life to a thrilling conclusion, but you are an actress in a motion picture. Haven't you ever

dreamed of being a Hollywood actress? And you won't even be bothered by the reviews. You won't be around to read them. So not only do you experience an exquisite expiration, but your death is recorded to be viewed by millions for all of eternity. To be digital is to be forever. Of course, the movie studio pays a substantial fee to your beneficiary.'

'I don't know.'

'There are other options. There are theaters that pay an even larger fee and can provide an even greater thrill. In such a theater you would have a live audience witnessing your very dramatic final moments of life. I say very dramatic because such theaters provide firing squads, hangings, beheadings, crucifixions, burnings at the stake, quarterings, stonings. The selections are nearly as boundless as the human capacity to inflict imaginative deaths upon one another. Imagine yourself dressed in all the splendor of Marie Antoinette, surrounded by a very realistic set depicting Revolutionary Paris, kneeling at the foot of a guillotine, awaiting the whisper of the blade slicing through the air, the first touch of steel on the back of your neck. Breathtaking! So. What do you think so far?

'I...I don't know.'

'This may be the only real choice you have ever had in your life, so think it over. In the meantime, there is one other matter for you to consider. The disposal of your remains. Because of the high value of land and the poor quality of the air, most burials and cremations are no longer permitted. Only the very rich can afford to be buried and only those who die by disease are cremated. The bodies of all others are recycled. But if you choose to end your own life you can choose to what use your body will be put. I will handle this for you. You may donate your body to science for research. Imagine, you might accomplish something worthwhile with your life after all. There is also a market for clothing and jewelry and other works of art fashioned from the bodies of suicides. Just think, something beautiful could come out of all your misery and suffering. So. What would you like to accomplish with your body?'

'I...I have to think...'

'Of course. Now as for my fee. My firm collects ten per cent of all funds paid to your beneficiary. This is a pittance considering the services we render and the peace of mind you will possess at the time of your passing stemming from the certainty that your loved ones will be well cared for after your departure.'

‘Yes. I’ve been thinking. I think I’d like the theater. And I’d like to donate my body to science.’

‘Excellent choices.’

‘Only nothing too painful.’

‘A beheading, perhaps? I’ve heard you don’t even feel the blade.’

‘Yes. Marie Antoinette. In Paris. That sounds nice.’

‘Of course. Now, if you could come into our office sometime to sign the legal forms I could get the ball rolling. Do you know where we are located?’

‘Yes. How about this afternoon?’

‘Great. Ask for Larry. And please, if you know anyone contemplating suicide tell them about us. We are not allowed to advertise, so if we are to continue to provide the very necessary services we provide our only means of communication with the public is through word of mouth. From satisfied customers. While they are still customers. Before they are satisfied. Completely satisfied. If you know what I mean.’

‘Yes.’

‘Good. I’ll be here until five. I’ll look forward to seeing you.’ The connection is broken as the woman hangs up. Larry turns to his computer and brings up the many legal forms.

As he begins filling them out, another young man leans over the top of his adjoining cubicle. ‘Did you net a lem?’

‘She had one foot in the sea already.’

‘A woman? You lucky dog. Where’s she headed?’

‘The theaters.’

‘Did she sound sexy?’

‘Doesn’t matter. The theaters can make any woman look sexy.’

‘Where is she headed after that?’

‘The labs.’

Shaking his head in disbelief, the young man remarks, ‘The stage! I haven’t gotten one beyond the needle in weeks. You get all the weirdoes.’

‘Now, give credit where credit is due,’ Larry responds, stroking the front of his neck. ‘My golden chords.’ Still shaking his head, the young man drops back down into his cubicle.

Larry fills out the first form and half of the second by the time he receives another call. ‘I want to kill myself.’

Moonlight Faces

Kinga Tóth

FOWL

Chickens are walking all over me, scratching my skin with their claws. Tiny white bumps appear when I shiver. It could be IgD, fever, an allergy. They don't know which symptom belongs to what.

The chickens are coming closer, my thighs are burning, two red stripes, like slices of ham, bright red, the chickens are getting closer. They want to peck at the skin, I scream, louder and louder, they're tearing at the scabs. It takes a long time for the side effects to pass, can't take it, your body, the drugs, who knows how you'll react.

I want my sandwich. I'm hungry. There are traffic cones on the road. Still two hours from home, tomorrow is history class, still don't know the Hungarian part. 1920–1930, Károlyi, pre-Facism, the rise of National Socialism, my history book in my lap. My sandwich is pulsing, the cheese inside is quivering, my teeth are sharp, I'll tear through my sandwich, bite off half, no police, no inspector, I rip the cheese apart. The cones outside the window are yellow, but we've left the city, there are no road signs here, no accidents. Tomorrow I'll know the whole thing, get a five, the whole domestic and foreign political situation, 1920–1930, Károlyi, the Nazis.

MERRY-GO-ROUND

I want to ride on the horse, it doesn't move, is frozen. A pole goes through the horse to the top of the tent. The merry-go-round is slow, won't make me dizzy, check out the park, the dodgems going round. The pattern blurs. I hurry to a bench. No need to be afraid, it will soon be over, a bit of patience, it's already passed. It starts with heavy breathing. They settle on your chest. We can't give you any more antibiotics. We'll open the bronchia, expand the lungs. Then you won't choke. Have a bit of patience. You're not going to choke. It won't come back. A lot of time has passed. There's been a development. You're in good hands. A little bell signals that it's coming to an end, three

more rotations, slower and slower. The horse is wobbly. its feet are not well fixed. I collapse.

TUMBLER

Ghosts of children wander through the hospital, telling us how they were shoved inside their closets. They take away the alarm from next to one of the beds, Kataton's. I know her. We have similar toothbrush holders, white, grey, and blue dots. They replace the toothbrushes when they disappear.

VICE

The thymus gland has disappeared. This won't cause problems anymore. Similarities between cases are not a reason to worry.

This bed is closer to the radiator, my head is warm, I won't get fever here. The bedclothes are old, but not the same. The sheet is not the same. The bed is not the same. No inhaler. I imagine I'm in a vice. I'm in a vice like the ballerina in the poem. The vice presses the chest from front and back. It's the front one feels first. Theospirex, Bronchowaxon. Bronchowaxon can't be taken by people with autoimmune diseases. The bronchia-expander helps with breathing. The immune-strengthenener activates the antibodies. In *Once upon a time...*, a white-clothed, curly-haired group charges through the blood vessels, after the evil-ones. The evil-ones' hair is also red, and stands on end, thin. Soon I'll be an antibody. My mouth will be a cube when I chomp down on the evil-ones.

MERRY-GO-ROUND (II)

If not the horse then the car, accelerator and brake at the same time. Round and round go the animals, the car. You can sit next to driver and check which road he returns on. Overrunning of the engine, overtaxing of the pulse, overexerting of the parts. The car doesn't move, pressing both pedals, till it explodes. Like purgatory, says the writer, who was the first to read it, like the merry-go-round it goes in circles, deeper and deeper, but always in circles. No escape.



Untitled
Mariana Magdelano

Meeting i

Tim Dooley

I would have been just eighteen
that summer before college A levels
finished weeks ago a kind of giggling
freedom spreading from friend to friend
that July Saturday we marched around
the tennis court chanting anti-
apartheid slogans It wasn't quite the
levitation of the Pentagon but it caused
a sort of stir the Davis cup disrupted
and the start of 'Stop the 70 Tour'

When we turned the corner you were
there late again with crooked grin
and cigarette
 and when a cheer broke out
 we nearly got you arrested
they took you to sit in a coach
thinking you flour-bombed the court
halting the match the respectable
spectators spat on us from the stands
 on a day of hope and laughter

So when your face comes now in
a dream or memory it is that startled
look that surfaces puzzled absurdity
that will not be repressed sensing the
ridiculous fate that waits for us like
the childhood stroke that scarred your
brain and took you away barely in
middle age we live where anything can
happen says the hand waving smoke
say the blue and dancing eyes

Loose Leaf

Tim Dooley

These old green or orange
paperbacks are falling
apart on us. Pages
dropping out, tobacco-
coloured, flaking at the
edges. Incipient
autumn is outside us
too: the bright yellow slips
of willow, or still green
oak-leaves curling as if
left too near the fire.
The low afternoon sun
warm on the back of the neck
throws light on the spire across
from us and on the white
rose among the tight black
curls of the schoolgirl
checking her smartphone.
In the park we can admire
flashes of yellow and
red on the beak of this
coot-like bird and marvel
at the gloriousness
of now, unbothered
by the evening's chill.

(after Meng Haoran and Zhang Ji)

Robert Kiely

(after Meng Haoran and Zhang Ji)

my mooring is mist and zoos

and with no sunset i roll on

the sky bends buildings

an asteroid is no clarity

*

three quarter moon fixed sky, frost towards it

flows sleep/ foam-lights

Hong Kong is no church

it is morning in Calgary and LA, evening in Cork

cargo is in the blood, blood

in the cargo

*

You build the bridge and then you burn it. You build the bridge and then you burn it because you have to relocate. You build the bridge and then you burn it because of a war. You build the bridge and its shut down because the economy tanks and the maintenance cost is too high and then it is burned. You reopen another bridge where the same thing happened before. But it didn't burn. You build a bridge and then you burn it. You build a bridge and then you bury the workers who built *that* bridge in the foundations of the next bridge and you burn the last bridge and don't talk about that bridge anymore, no one does. The new bridge is good though. You build a bridge and then you burn it because they're sending nothing worthwhile your way. You build a bridge and then you burn it. You build a bridge and then they burn it. You cross a bridge. You discover an old untouched bridge. You can't believe it. You discover this old untouched bridge and everything about this bridge is fine and it needs no maintenance, weirdly. You cover the bridge up again because you have to move. The physical land you're occupying moves elsewhere and that bridge isn't there anymore. They build a bridge and then you burn it. You build a bridge and then you burn it. You switch sides. You build a bridge and then you burn it. You build a bridge and then you burn it just because. The bridges are out of use. You forget what bridges are for. You think they are for burning. You burn the bridge because you think they might burn the bridge first. It's ridiculous, but there it is.

Bow Down

Christine Murray

A harrowed tree nest ruined
Tangled leaf, its bough down

Bow down

A-flowering-tree
(Still flowering)
Submarine blue
Where dawn occurs

(South | Southeast)

Light-box runs
North-blue to
South-warm

The point between is lit-not-lit
(Nor) seamed
By the reflection
Of silica-light (a) bas-relief

Twins

Reena Prasad

The Dark Fugue comes up like bile
when the Irate Child calls
They meet in secret in sleeper cells
The Irate Child welds memories
plucking them out of nostrils, from restless eyeballs
and from swallowed salt
The Dark Fugue's weapon is a roller dipped in black
They duel on a white platform
The faster the Irate Child moves her lips,
the more tar Dark Fugue throws up
I mine the killing field with starch, sugar and coffee
Gunpowder to blast away the Fugue
The Irate Child pouts and stabs me hard
The Fugue floats in through the wound
I lie in bed and bleed like mad

Three Poems by Osip Mandelstam

Translated from the Russian by Alistair Noon

Valkyries

The violins call and the valkyries fly
as the opera lumbers to a close.
On the marble stairs, the footmen mark time,
clutching their ladies' and lords' fur-coats.

Up in the gods, some fool claps on
as the curtain falls without a sound.
Cabmen do jigs about their bonfires.
'So-and-so's coach!' They're off. The End.

1914

Летают Валкирии, поют смычки --
Громоздкая опера к концу идет.
С тяжелыми шубами гайдуки
На мраморных лестницах ждут господ.

Уж занавес наглухо упасть готов,
Еще рукоплещет в райке глупец,
Извозчики пляшут вокруг костров...
‘Карету такого-то!’ -- Разъезд. Конец.

'Ice cream!' Sun. The airy biscuits.
A see-through tumbler of ice-cold water.
Into a chocolate world's pink dawn
the daydreams fly, into Alpine milkiness.

Look sweetly once you've tinkled your teaspoon.
In the tiny pavilion, under dusty acacias,
accept and praise the bakers' graces,
fragile in intricate cups you'll consume...

The roaming ice-box, its lid bright-coloured,
will be here soon – the barrel organ's friend.
And the street boy keeps his greedy attention
on that full coffer with its marvellous coldness.

The gods couldn't say which one he'll decide on:
cream diamonds or wafer plus filling? It glitters
in the sun, but under that delicate splinter,
it's quick to vanish, the ice that's divine.

1914

‘Морожено!’ Солнце. Воздушный бисквит.
Прозрачный стакан с ледяною водою.
И в мир шоколада с румяной зарею,
В молочные Альпы мечтанье летит.

Но, ложечкой звякнув, умильно глядеть,--
И в тесной беседке, средь пыльных акаций,
Принять благосклонно от булочных граций
В затейливой чашечке хрупкую снедь...

Подруга шарманки, появится вдруг
Бродячего ледника пестрая крышка --
И с жадным вниманием смотрит мальчишка
В чудесного холода полный сундук.

И боги не ведают -- что он возьмет:
Алмазные сливки иль вафлю с начинкой?
Но быстро исчезнет под тонкой лучинкой,
Сверкая на солнце, божественный лед.

I feel the winter begin,
a belated gift. I love
its onset, love that swing
no one will quite believe.

A season pretty with fright,
the start of brutal business –
faced with a vista without forest,
even the raven grows timid.

But strongest of all are the pale
blue, temple-like bulges
of rounded ice, unstable
in the streams' unruly lullaby.

29-30 December 1936

Как подарок запоздалый
Ощутима мной зима:
Я люблю ее сначала
Неуверенный размах.

Хороша она испугом,
Как начало грозных дел,--
Перед всем безлесным кругом
Даже ворон оробел.

Но сильнее всего непрочно-
Выпуклых голубизна --
Полукруглый лед височный
Речек, баюющих без сна...

Drones

Rob Miles

Such fun. Another stupid row, and now
about honey: how the bees

stand no chance anyway, as you claim,
picking a pointless fight, wagging

your finger and recoiling, disgusted
at my *vile habits*. What else

will you belittle, write off
as collateral damage? How can you

ask what else we should have done? How dare I
lick this knife?

The Moth That Never Was

Helen Moore

You'd moved out

and again I'm contemplating
that strange growth on a fence post, and
another with an exit-hole –
the imago long flown –

but the first is still sealed, turning mossy,
and it's September, well past the time
for first flight, so I take a knife, insert the blade
beneath the chewed wood cocoon.

Inside, a charred husk, an ancient mummy
wrapped in blackened bandages, the still-born pupa
of a Puss Moth, half-made wings fused
against its body, a neat afro crest
on the thorax of this tiny pharaoh
in his home-spun coffin.

With what faith or hope had the green
larva, with comic face and tufted tail,
gorged on Willow, grown thirty thousand
times its hatched-out size, until the inkling came
to pull sticky threads of silk around itself,
chew and spit the wood to make this chamber
for its transformation?

(Around that time I too began to weave our 'House of Splendour'.)

Through cold, dark months waiting
in this suspended state for the urge of warmth
to rise at last in black and white-spotted fur, to stretch
finely marbled wings to fill and kitten us
up towards the Moon...

Instead, just this stiff nigredo remains.

Wallpaper

Charlotte Gann

Rooftops glisten blue. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window harbours a malevolent presence. The figure passing beneath the streetlight has a blue face as he turns. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window hides a malevolent force at work. The cobbled street is black and shines, the moon-grey hill blunt and blind. Rooftops glisten blue. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window houses a malevolent presence. The cobbled street glows black and bright. The blue hill, rising in a wave,

streams purple. The pub, locked up at night, houses a thousand crimson secrets. The frosted glass above the bar reflects only emptiness and shadows. Rooftops glisten blue. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window harbours a malevolent presence. The figure passing beneath the streetlight has a blue face as he turns. The cobbled street is black and shines, the moon-grey hill blunt and blind. Rooftops glisten blue. The blunt hill, rising in a wave above the town, streams purple. The single, yellow,

rectangular, lit window hides its malevolence. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window houses a malevolent force at work. The moon-grey hill, rising in a wave, streams crimson. The pub, locked up at night, houses a thousand criminal secrets. The frosted glass above the bar reflects only shadows. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window houses a malevolence. The blunt hill rising in a wave above the town streams crimson. The single, yellow, rectangular, lit window harbours a malevolent presence.

Self Portrait Nearing Fifty

Andy Brown

for Peter Carpenter

...and his nipples were Castor and Pollux
and his windpipe was *Blood on the Tracks*,
his gallbladder and spleen were Hieronymus Bosch,
his stirrup and anvil were sheaves of lyric poems.

And his ribcage was a fossil Stegosaurus
and his calves were the rails of a ladder.
His lips were *Monopoly* hotels
and his blood was hot sauce.

His teeth were Canadian Loonie's and Toonie's,
his temples were statues of Buddha,
his bones were peacock feathers from Jaipur,
his arms were kestrels hovering in the wind.

And his liver was a gold and leather man-bag.
And his shoulder blades were shoals of mackerel.
His armpits were home-bottled gooseberry vodka
and his palms were Renewable Energy.

His aorta was a manor house with Ha-Ha.
His palate was a dining table set for sixteen strangers.
His nostrils were beans on the skin of a drum.
His eyes were sprinkler head *and* shower curtain.

And his gullet was a green-glazed feudal jug
and his eyebrows were padlocks on portholes
and his diaphragm a neighbour's trampoline.
His uvula swung like a punchbag.

His pelvis was a turtle crossing oceans
and his tongue was an inglenook fireplace.
His lungs were the big wheel and dodgems
and his cheeks were secret coves on lonely cliffs.

His skull was a fox-skull, lost deep in the grasses.
His brain was the Northern Lights.
The nape of his neck was the prow of a boat
and his optic nerves were seaside view-finders.

If he scratched, then his fingers were chopsticks.
If he grumbled, his nose was a walnut.
If he smiled, then his eyelids were casserole lids.
When he sang, his chest was the Taj Mahal.

When he made love, his skin was Venetian streetlamps.
When he breathed, his mouth was a forest canopy.
His pineal glowed like a campfire in the woods.
His beard was a tube escalator.

His Adam's apple, jaw and chin were the Holy Trinity.
The bridge of his nose was a raised hockey stick.
The soles of his feet were dolphins at the wake.
His feet themselves were distant siblings.

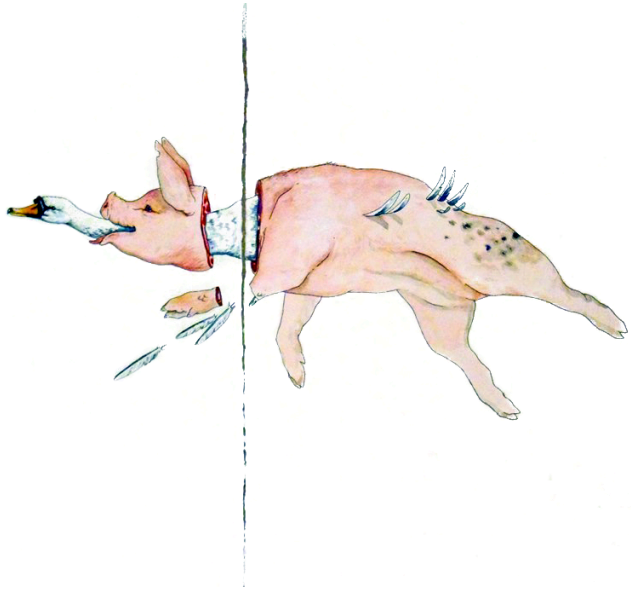
His loins were a gold-tooled set of Dickens.
His spermatozoa were teaspoons in a sink.
His bladder was a crystal flute and tumbler
and when he bathed his navel was Hay Tor.

His thighs were Olivier's *Hamlet*
and his nerves were earthworms in humus.
His irises were dustbin lids disturbed by dustbin men.
His face was the Wars of the Roses.

His membranes were a murmur of starlings.
His stomach was a tarn high in the mountains.
His heels and his toes were a volume of verbs.
His perineum was a bass guitar.

His arteries and veins were bluegrass harmonies.
His tendons and muscles were apples and pears.
His kidneys were bushes of fruit
and his spinal column was a wishing well...

...and every time he tossed a penny in that well,
he always wished for this and this alone:
long life, good health and a heart to fly
the stubborn birdcage of his breastbone.



Purification
Mariana Magdaleno

A Game Of Cribbage

Roz DeKett

I take a train to Llanybydder. My new employer, Henry, meets me in a wheezing, elderly Land Rover. We rattle away into the blustery, sheep-strewn peaks of Carmarthenshire.

I had applied for a job with horses. One reply came from a Belgravia address, hand-scripted with a fountain pen on heavy violet paper. If you are what you say you are, we look forward to you joining us. Intimidated—I think I am what I say I am, but what if I'm not?—I instead accepted an offer from an ancient couple I'd never met on a sheep farm in Wales I'd never been to, with two hundred sheep, thirty Welsh Black cattle, a private pack of hounds, five horses, and a room in the farmhouse with full board and twenty-five pounds a week.

'Last girl decided she'd had enough. Took off,' Henry says, sounding both mystified and hurt by her flight. 'Helen,' he says.

The Land Rover smells of dog, and a rich growth of moss has stealthily upholstered the interior. I inspect a dead wasp with glassy wings, recumbent on a mossy pillow in the cracked door panel.

Henry resembles Gandalf. He is tall, thin, and contorted like a piece of driftwood beneath a battered cloth cap; his large flapping waterproof jacket and shabby trousers have long given up any pretense at shape. His eyes are as unreadable as peat pools in his lined face, his nose an eagle's beak.

The Land Rover puffs and grinds through plush green valleys and over spongy, saturated hills beneath a pensive oyster sky. We turn off the lane onto gravel at the farm entrance. I get out and open the bent, rusted gate for Henry. The soft Welsh air greets me with the candor of a child, feeling my face, then rushing on. I shut the gate and get back in the Land Rover, which hobbles wearily down the pitted track across a field occupied by stocky black cattle. The track peters out near tumbledown buildings, and so do we.

The farmhouse squats in a hollow, brutish and low to the ground, its dingy white walls streaked with slime-green trails. Perhaps a century ago, somebody painted the wooden front door a beautiful duck egg blue. The paint is now so split, soiled, and scabbed that a large, splintery hole in the door, just below knee height, is only slightly disfiguring.

A Jack Russell with a wiry brown moustache springs through the hole to bark at me, bristling and hopping like a bumblebee in a jam jar.

‘I kicked that hole in the door a couple of years ago,’ says Henry. ‘Fit of temper. Shan’t mend it though. Fidget likes it.’ He looks at my duffel bag, which I’m hefting with both arms, as though it’s just occurred to him that he might have offered to carry it. ‘Fidget’s the dog. Cynthia, where are you?’

I stare silently at the hole.

Cynthia jerks the door open and shoos us inside while she leans out into the yard, pushing unruly iron-grey hair out of her face. She’s short and clad in a long, hairy, copper-colored wool sweater and knee-length black skirt over Wellington boots. She shouts at the dog to come back but Fidget sprints into a thicket of trees. Cynthia shuts the door. ‘She’ll come back. Little Fidget,’ she says.

The waning daylight declines to pass through the hole into the stone-flagged hallway, which is as uninviting and cold as a deserted fox den.

They direct me up the stairs to my bedroom. I set my duffel bag on an iron-framed bed that sags under a worn satin quilt. A chest of drawers, wooden and well past its prime, stands cautiously near the window. The wallpaper, its faded flowers gnawed by age and moisture, still clings to life in places but on one wall, a patch of damp as big as Alaska has eaten the roses away.

Later, Cynthia wrestles supper onto the table. We sit on oak benches in what appears to be a murky tunnel in a riverbank, although they call it the kitchen. She is not much of a cook. Her staples are trout rolled in porridge oats and fried and pigs’ trotters rolled in porridge oats and fried. Vegetables are a rarity, other than frozen peas and the mung beans that she sprouts in glass jars, crammed on shelves and giving the kitchen the disturbing look of a rundown apothecary’s shop. They buy butter by the box-load and it sulks beneath a rack of saddles beside the ancient, asthmatic fridge. They never notice it’s slightly rancid.

After supper, I unpack my duffel bag, my bedroom window open to the rustling, bat-filled dusk. I’m as out of place as a child on the first day at a new school.

The English foxhound is a big, fast, rangy beast. It is never alone; it is counted in couples. My new employers have sixteen couples. This private pack is not for sport. Henry has a contract with the Forestry Commission to keep the fox population down. They do hunt them on horseback, shooting the

foxes put up by the baying, murderous hounds before they run too far—three or four a day, twice a week through the winter. They shoot them so they can press on and kill another, not out of compassion for the terrified creatures. Maddened by the scent of blood, the hounds rip the little red bodies, shot or not, to tattered scraps in seconds.

The hounds live in one of the disintegrating farm buildings. Henry calls it the kennel. It's a grand name for a dismal shed, its outside run a desolate cement square surrounded by an eight-foot high chain link fence with a gate in it. On my first morning, Henry gestures at the dank compound, liberally heaped with twenty-four hours' worth of excrement from sixteen hound couples.

'I shut them in the kennel every night. In the morning, you sweep out the shit. Wash the run with buckets of water from this rain barrel,' he says. 'Then feed them. Follow me.'

He stumps into the barn, oblivious to its imminent collapse, and shows me buckets filled with something soaking—dried meat, from fifty-pound bags of what I presume is hound food.

'Fill the troughs and let them in from the kennel,' Henry says. 'Couple of times a week, they get a sheep. Dead one, of course, from the hills. I've got one hanging here for tomorrow.'

Outside again, his arm scarecrows in the light morning rain, pointing at the gaunt trees. A slick grey form dangles like a body on a gibbet, suspended several feet above the ground beyond the reach of foxes. It's a sheep's carcass, skinned and strung up by its hind legs, the blind head drooling rainwater.

I say nothing. Already, I am taking refuge in non-responsiveness.

'Carry on.' Henry stalks off, followed by two manic border collies that are cast as sheepdogs, but are too crazy to be trained.

I venture into the kennel run, armed with a stiff broom. My sweeping results in brown stinking trails across the cement. I sluice it clean with buckets of icy water from the rain barrel. From the barn, I bring the pails of soaked hound food and tip the meat slurry into the troughs. Behind the wooden hobbit-door into the kennel, I hear the hounds lunging and hooting, demanding to be set free.

When I let them out, all sixteen couples bolt for the troughs, a snarling heaving mass of monstrous hunger. I'm the last thing on their minds. While they frantically gobble the slop, I escape. The next morning, Henry cuts down and drags in the sheep from the tree. When I let out the hounds they engulf

the carcass, choking down flesh, bone, brain, intestines. They only leave one thing for me to clean up: a dark, fermenting mound of grass the size of a football from the sheep's stomach. Its last meal.

In September, Cynthia says a hound is pregnant.

'We're separating Lucy from the pack,' she says. 'She's too young to have puppies.'

Lucy is barely a year old, still a puppy herself. Sequestered in a hovel, which Cynthia calls a stable, Lucy becomes my responsibility, longing to please and licking my hands in supplication when I visit her; isolated and afraid. One morning, she continues to lie in the straw instead of greeting me. There's no light in the hovel; I grope in charcoal shadows as unforgiving as the ash from a long-dead fire. Lucy glances at me, uncertain and guilty. In the gloom, I find a tiny, motionless form on the straw. I pick it up gently and immediately feel its hollow belly, cold and wet, on my palm. The puppy is dead and partially eaten. Lucy has tried to lick its umbilical area clean and, confused by the taste of blood, consumed her baby's stomach in her anxious attempt to be a mother. I put down the body.

She's cuddling three other puppies. They're alive and warm, washed and loved, their stomachs bulging with milk. I sit by Lucy and stroke her velvet brown ears, hold her face between my hands. 'It's okay,' I say gently. 'You're doing fine. Your babies will be fine.' Her eyes close. She sighs and pulls her head from my hands to touch her nose to the small forms asleep against her flank; she is their mother and she knows now what that means.

I fetch Cynthia. Lucy disappears. After a couple of weeks, she is back with the pack, spayed. Her puppies disappear too, because Henry drowns them on the day of their birth in a bucket of merciless rainwater.

After this, I speak only when I have to.

In a pitch-dark stable, I kneel on a thin layer of bloody straw beneath a dark bay thoroughbred gelding called Horace. Henry stands at Horace's head, directing the dying beam of a torch beneath the horse's belly. My hands are covered in Horace's blood, which is pouring from a wart the size of a billiard ball high up on the inside of his hind leg. He has several warts; this is the biggest, with a rough, peeling surface. He's knocked it and now his leaking blood is forming shallow puddles on the uneven cement floor.

'Keep trying,' says Henry. I'm gripping a length of blood-soaked string, my outstretched hands trembling between Horace's powerful hams. I am to tie the string tightly around the wart's neck and strangle it to stop the flow of

blood, but I'm afraid. 'I'd do it but your fingers are much smaller and more nimble than mine,' Henry says, helpfully.

Horace shifts. If he kicks, he could kill me. Each time I try to ease my loop of string over the wart, he moves uneasily, and I stop. 'Get on with it,' says Henry. At last, Horace is quiet long enough for me to slip the string into place and knot it with shaking fingers. I stand up stiffly. In the yellow torchlight the bloodletting slows to a trickle; stops.

There's no gratitude. A dangerous horse, Horace takes every opportunity to throw a rider. They keep him despite this because he's an exceptional hunter, going all day and jumping anything. On a drizzly morning I put a foot in the stirrup. As I lift myself into the saddle, the log I'm using as a mounting block rolls and I bump Horace's flank. It's all the excuse he needs, and he explodes beneath me. I land flat on my back. Later I see in the bathroom mirror that I have a vast, plum-colored blotch blossoming across my lower back, rivalling in size the damp map of Alaska on my bedroom wall, as though somebody has walloped me with the broad blade of a shovel.

I ride Seamus too: a sly, vindictive, bullying horse. One afternoon we're up in the hills above the farm, checking the sheep, and he bolts like a battle charger. My tugging is futile. All I can do is cling grimly to the reins while the lapis dome of the sky whirls above me. At last he stops, his sides heaving for breath, and I turn him for home. When I tell Cynthia, she can't hide her disdain for my failure to control him. 'Helen never had a problem with him,' she says.

I fall silent. Helen.

A few days later, I'm on Seamus again. On the hillside, groups of sheep form clots in the fog. The late afternoon moisture congeals on the tangled grass border. Seamus surges into a forbidden gallop, his iron shoes ringing on the road like cymbals. I can't stop him so I pull him onto the verge. Immediately he gallops into an unseen ditch and we fall hard, my left leg jammed beneath him.

We both stand up. I check his legs—they're fine—and get back on him. Pain flares through my own leg. My ankle is sprained, my knee twisted, but now he seems prepared to behave. I remount and approach the farm gate, expecting him to stop and wait while I lean out of the saddle and push it open. But as I stretch for the latch, Seamus jumps the gate. I hit the ground yet again.

'You've really done it now, haven't you?' says Cynthia, staring at me disapprovingly through the round lenses of her spectacles. She no longer hides her irritation with me. On cold evenings she flits around the living room like the little dog Fidget, grumbling about Helen's betrayal.

On a brittle afternoon, sharp with lemony October sunlight, I ride June over the hills to play cribbage with Danny Jones, whom I have never met. I've been sent by Cynthia. The sheep glance sideways at us, the chestnut mare and the girl, flying across their nibbled grass. I find the small bungalow and lock June in one of the row of empty stables behind it.

Danny Jones is paralyzed, the result of a fall from a horse. He lives alone, cared for by a nurse. He is thirty-six.

The bungalow is a plain brick box. As I walk around it to the front door, I glance in through a large window and see a handsome, dark-haired man in bed. A woman in a nurse's uniform is lifting a bulbous plastic vessel with a long neck. It contains his urine, a dark yellow. He looks out of the window and meets my eyes as this happens. His face is blank and hopeless. I'm mortified that I've seen his bottle of pee and that he knows I have, but perhaps he no longer cares about such things. The nurse lets me in; between leaving his room and answering the door, she has got rid of the bottle.

I step into Danny's sterile, sad room. He lies trapped beneath an ivory candlewick counterpane. The walls are bare. The room is without shelves, books, or paintings; not even a television or radio. Through the window he can see a piece of sky, a person coming to the front door. He can turn his head, move one hand. His eyes are dark and hollow as wells.

The nurse places a block of wood on the bed. 'Put his cards in that,' she says, and leaves the room. I deal the cards and stick his in slits in the wooden block. It's beneath his left hand. I don't know whether he was right or left-handed, when he had the use of both. I move his pegs and mine as we count our way through the game.

I don't have any idea how to converse with him. I'm used to asking questions, not talking about myself. But my life can't interest him and in any case, how can I fling it in his face, all that I can do and he can't? He barely speaks; nor do I. I know that he knows I have been told to visit him and I don't want to embarrass him with that knowledge. So I pretend I know nothing, and so does he. Perhaps he is grateful for my company despite my cloddishness, my desperate teenage silence.

That night, Henry says he has a splinter in his big toe. Cynthia can't see well enough to look for it. 'Nothing to fear,' he says. 'Took a bath.' Despite this, as I tentatively feel his toe for the splinter, a faint odor of rancid butter rises from his gnarled wizard's foot.

Later, in my room, I see that the map of damp has eaten another wallpaper rose. I turn out the light and lie in the dark with my eyes open. I have the curtains pushed back and the window slightly ajar. An icy wind slices through the gap. Ragged clouds fly across the moon, polishing it until it looks like a fine silver coin.

I imagine Danny, flat beneath the flat counterpane in the flat bed beneath the silver moon. His life abruptly severed, reduced to a game of cribbage in a room like a shoebox. How does he manage his despair?

Autumn takes over, shortening the days and filling the air with rain, which slashes at me horizontally from the crouching hills. The hills gather themselves together, pulling their wet tweeds about them like aristocrats resigned to the weather. We round up the lambs for market on horseback. I'm perpetually exhausted, cold, and damp. I've been working ten hours a day, every day, for more than two months. My sprained ankle still gives way, throbbing, if I turn on it. Two or three times a week, subterranean headaches seat themselves at the base of my skull and get wedged there between my vertebrae and my brain, immovable as stones.

The vet is coming, and we herd six Welsh Black heifers into the byre—another of the farm's hovels. They're as fierce as wildcats, and Henry tells me to rope their horns so we can winch them around the stone pillars and tether them. They drag me up and down the stone flags, slithering in fresh cow shit. The vet arrives, a beefy, easy-going Englishman in his thirties with blond hair and pink cheeks. I help him as he pushes his arm into a heifer's bottom to see if she is in calf; my job is to twist her tail over her back out of his way. While I'm doing this, the heifer tethered next to us flashes a wicked kick that catches me on the thigh. The pain is shocking, like being hit with a hammer, and I carry the black bruise for weeks. But the sympathy in the vet's aqua-blue eyes is what puts me over the edge. In the morning, I resign.

The day after my resignation, I go with Cynthia to the village. In the tiny grocery store, she pounces on a tall, pretty brunette.

'Helen,' she says. 'Did your father tell you? You'll come back to work for us again? He said you would.' And Helen enthusiastically says yes, her brown

eyes flashing with laughter, a model's smile lighting up her face. Cynthia seizes her hand and pumps it thankfully.

Forgotten outside the cone of joyful words tumbling around them both, I watch. I see myself through Cynthia's eyes: a silent misfit who falls off their horses.

Once home, back with my family in the comfortable old converted barn, its winter garden thick with fruit canes and resting vegetable plots, my brothers arguing in the kitchen, I apply for unemployment benefit. Before long a form arrives in the mail. Henry has filled it in to document my departure. In the final box, where it says reason for leaving, he has written in large shaky capitals DID NOT LIKE THE WORK. Because of this, I am denied unemployment benefits for a six-week penalty period.

Resentment creeps through my veins. I contemplate explaining to the authorities: ten-hour days of hard labour, no time off, injuries, dangerous horses, trivial pay, blood and death, Danny Jones. But the Belgravia letter haunts me: If you are what you say you are.

So I am silent.

A Trip to the Store

J. C. Elkin

The door swings open with a resonant ping and I slip over to the corner where they keep the booze. Despite the long hair cloaking my face, I can feel people staring. Box office cashiers still mistake me for the child I feel like on this errand, though I am in fact twenty-one years and seven hours old. Having grown up in a dry home, I know just three things about wine: red is for meat, white is for fish, and cheap is for winos.

I start reading labels to see what goes with lasagna and stumble into a cardboard cutout of Loni Anderson cuddling a bottle. I tell myself that she, not me, is the center of attention, and crane my neck to see what she's hawking. Wine occupies so much space in this market, more even than canned goods. So much jargon, so many choices and questions. How can alcohol content and price differ so greatly? Why are some wines *unassuming* and others *pretentious*? What does *fortified* mean? I check the ingredients for vitamins.

Ten minutes pass before I find a wine that complements pasta and is marketed to the sophisticated drinker of modest means. I like the fact that, unlike Boone's Farm, their target demographic does not appear to be collegiate bingers. College and booze, in my experience, means beer or liquor. Beer is gross. I knew that much after two weekends of keggers left my freshman dorm so sour I had to tip-toe around the sticky puddles that tugged at my crepe soles. Hard liquor devotees, the Chivas snobs and cocktail flirts, are all about image: rich kids emulating rich adults, sporting designer labels and sipping amber ice from crystal tumblers. Nevertheless, they smell the same as my blue-collar, besotted grandfather, the opinionated lush with the red face and wandering hands. My professors, whom I admire, drink wine in moderation, so that is the drink for me.

Cradling my bottle in the crook of my arm, I wish I could pad the purchase the way I had wanted to when first buying Kotex, but that is a luxury I still cannot afford.

Standing in the winding queue of shoppers, an old man joins me, bowing with a chivalrous sweep of the hand and a snaggle-toothed smile as he gestures for me to go ahead. I nod and take my place in front of him, our bodies facing in the labyrinth of aisles. He looks to be in his fifties, but it's tough to tell.

Hard living ages one so. He's my size: average for a young woman, not too robust for a man.

I try not to stare, but he is sepia-toned and he smells of dumpster. His suit has not seen an office since Xerox replaced carbons, and his black dress shoes are bound with electrical tape. A fine film of grime permeates his tattered overcoat and leathery hide, and the last flies of autumn buzz around his matted hair, though he does not seem to notice.

I edge around a tower of soup cans and give him a half smile. Functional alcoholics are a breed I understand, having grown up around several, but paper bag huggers are another story. He is neither crazy nor belligerent. He just unsettles me like an Emmett Kelly hobo. Time stretches to the snapping point when he finally speaks, slurring his consonants and lingering on each vowel with ripe breathiness.

'Hhhave you ever triiied Richard's Wiild Iiirish Rose Wiine?' he asks. I do not quite grasp the implication of his question until I recognize his bottle of Thunderbird as one I deliberately bypassed on the cheap shelf. Richard's Wild Irish Rose was right next to it, at just two dollars.

'No,' I said in my interested consumer voice.

'Well, don't! It'll rot your teeth,' he says, wiping his brown mouth with his sleeve.

I nod. Words to live by from one who would know. I wonder about his job, his family, his home. Does he even have a home? Thanksgiving is a week away. What is he thankful for?

At the head of the line now, I hand the cashier five of the eight dollars in my purse. She slips a paper sleeve over my bottle and gives me back enough change for a cup of coffee and a donut. I consider giving it to the old man, but do not.

'Take care,' I say.

Mother taught me not to drink and not to give money to panhandlers. This is a day for breaking rules, but not all of them at once.



Black Swan
Mariana Magdaleno

Uncle Sam and the Darkness

Atar Hadari

Two Prospectors: The Letters of Sam Shepard and Johnny Dark, edited by Chad Hammet (University of Texas Press, 2013)

Shepard and Dark by Treva Wurmfeld (Music Box Studio, 2013)

When I arrived in Los Angeles and got involved in professional theatre, Sam Shepard's star was already waning. I wrote a play about the bluesman Robert Johnson which was punctuated by long, direct address monologues to the audience. A director assigned to produce a staged reading at the Mark Taper Forum remarked to me, 'You don't write monologues like Sam Shepard. Shepard monologues don't go anywhere. Your monologues seem to go somewhere.' That was in 1991, over a decade after Shepard won the Pulitzer prize for *Buried Child*. The jacket copy for the collection of his letters now issued by University of Texas Press characterises him as having 'written more than forty-five plays, including *True West*, *Fool for Love* and *Buried Child*'. In other words, the work he would be remembered for was already done in 1991.

But this book comes along with Treva Wurmfeld's documentary about the making of it now on DVD and tacitly disputes that jacket copy. This book gives a shape and a heft to the submerged nine tenths of the ice-berg beneath Sam Shepard's achievement by producing the other party in the dialogue that goes on inside his head and on the page, lending that other party not just a voice but his own view of Sam and all his works.

Shepard's three important plays could be characterised as: *Buried Child* about the inescapable truths of family, *Fool for Love* about the pull and tug of desire for a woman and the urge to flee that desire, and *True West* about the argument and conflicting attitudes to success of two brothers. Shepard casually notes in a letter that he based the central character of 'Buried Child' on a crippled veteran uncle of his, one of a host of stories at a family funeral he describes attending, stories that he noted came at you too rich and gaudy to possibly tell. 'Fool for Love' turns out, not surprisingly, to be about his 'twenty five year torrid affair' with Jessica Lang, a relationship which went on to settle for a time as they produced three children, raised them and sent them on their

way, only to finally explode and leave Shepard, at the end of those letters, alone, like the father he fled in order not to emulate. And ‘True West’, well, that’s about Shepard’s divided nature and the dialogue between brothers. Only Sam Shepard never had a brother. What he had was a father-in-law nearly his own age with whom he continued an epistolary friendship for forty years. Johnny Dark, Jonathan Darkness, or just plain Dark, as he is called at the top of perhaps a third of the letters here, is who Shepard was talking to in his head, when he was not talking to himself:

One thing I realise about the ‘letter’ as a form is that it’s conversational – always available. You can just sit down any old morning and have a conversation whether the person’s there or not. You can talk about anything & you don’t have to wait politely for the other person to finish the train of thought. You can have long gaps between passages – they can go by and you might return and pick it up again. And the great difference in all other forms of writing is that it is dependent to a large extent on the other person. It’s not just a solo act. You’re writing in response to or in relationship to someone else – over time. I think that’s the key – over time. We’re very lucky, I figure, to have continued the desire to talk to each other by mail for something like 40 years. But then again, what else were we going to do? It is probably the strongest through-line I’ve maintained in this life. Everything else seems to be broken – except, of course, my other writing which has been with me constantly since about 1963. I’ll never forget the elation of finishing my first one-act play. I felt I’d really made something for the first time. Like the way you make a chair or a tale. Something was in the world now that hadn’t been there before. (p. 361)

There you have the shape of Shepard’s life. The letters start with one dated 1972 from London, where Shepard had decamped with his first wife O-Lan, daughter by a previous marriage of Scarlett (Johnson) Dark, the second wife of Johnny Dark. Even at this stage, Shepard had left his wife for six months to live with Patti Smith, with whom he wrote and performed ‘Cowboy Mouth’. His biographer Don Shewey quotes him saying, ‘It didn’t work out because the thing was too emotionally packed, I suddenly realized I didn’t want to exhibit myself like that, playing my life onstage. It was like being in an aquarium.’ He went back to O-Lan, decamped for London for three years and there wrote plays about being dislocated, and got involved with Gurdjieff self-awareness training as led in England by Henry Sinclair, 2nd Baron Pentland.

This meditative discipline of ‘sitting’ an interest Shepard shared with Dark and, aside from ongoing reports about their lives and wives, the ‘Work’ is a gauge of where they are in their attempts to deal with a deeply addictive and conflicted personality. This meditative, almost monk-like spiritual way book-ends Shepard’s life, because it begins with meditation workshops in England and ends with Shepard living alone in Kentucky, all connections other than Dark ‘broken’ for six months or more, living only for his books, writing and the walks with his dog. In between those two eras Lord Pentland and books of Gurdjieff remain a constant resource, something he comes back to more often than anyone other than Beckett, to whose oddly religious acceptance Shepard always reverts: ‘Something is taking its course.’

What’s extraordinary is how Dark actually enabled Shepard’s emotional life. Shepard met Jessica Lang while acting in the film ‘Frances’ and after a period of back and forth in which they both went back to their respective partners, it was Dark who gave Shepard ‘permission’ by telling him that if he was conflicted about staying and really wanted to go, maybe he should just go. The seriousness of this event is marked by a black page in the book, on which is inscribed in white, ‘On St. Patrick’s Day 1983, Shepard left his home in California to move in with the actress Jessica Lange’. There are only two other black pages in the book. One says, ‘Except for a brief postcard, John’s letters from the summer of 1999 until February 2002 have been lost.’ The other black page says, simply, ‘Scarlett died on February 7th, 2010’. The book ends 29 pages later and it is, perhaps, the spectre of mortality no longer obscured by looking after Scarlett that bestirred Johnny Dark to organise the project.

It is also, as the documentary makes clear, a project required by selling their correspondence to the University of Texas to make money. So long as Scarlett was alive and didn’t mind how they lived, Johnny was willing to work as a cleaner, a masseuse, a hash slinger at a deli (one of the best letters is Dark’s account of the social microcosm of the deli with conflicting female egos, the line to use the slicer, Armageddon of oven cleaning). Shepard repeatedly asks Dark for more of this but, in contrast, has been able to sustain a career as a writer of plays, stories and recollections, a director of art-house movies of his own scripts, all because instead of working as a busboy (the only job he ever held down) he’s working as an actor in other people’s commercial projects. One letter describes the excitement of being invited by Terrance Malick to star in ‘Days of Heaven’ as purely financial –never having to ‘write another play on commission for Joe Papp to get a crumby \$5000 just to pay

my rent to some whacked out landlord'. But like Jack Nicholson, who was cast in 'Easy Rider' because he was willing to take less than scale for his role, what Shepard netted was becoming a star.

Shepard's letter describing a humorous conversation with his financial adviser about how Marty is to pay Sam's bills with Sam's money when there is no money and no acting job, is followed by a laconic report that he will take a job working in TV, a sit-com, the following autumn. It is quite a come-down from the Best Actor nomination for 'The Right Stuff', but Shepard's mind is in his poetry books, cigars and stories he's writing, sometimes even in the plays he gets back to if writing them is 'fun'. Fun, he remarks in a letter about riding horses, is more important.

If one views the book of letters and the documentary as a single work, there is a tragic-comic structure to the piece. The title I from a play Shepard and Dark set out to write in a recorded conversation transcribed on page 49. After a couple of pages of increasingly desperate suggestions by Dark, which Shepard rejects as clichés, it ends like this:

DARK: At a certain point you see the two prospectors come out and they go... okay, they go... God, this is bizarre. Sheew.

SHEPARD: This is the kind of activity I've been involved in for eighteen years.

I laughed out loud. Any professional writer will recognise that confrontation by the amateur with actually doing it for real, and the laconic observation by the pro that this is what his life is actually like. But the documentary book-ends this with those same two prospectors, after forty years of friendship, becoming an actual vaudeville act, to sell the letters for money, review them as a necessary part of that transaction, and recording that vaudeville act in the movie, being the two prospectors on film. Wurmfeld's documentary actually records and perhaps precipitates the break-down in their relationship which the project causes, and the end of the book is Shepard's sign off, handing the project over to Dark: 'I'm no longer interested in poring over the past... Take it away, Johnny & good luck!' A response predicted by Shepard's decision forty years earlier to abandon Patti Smith and a shared staging of their shared life – he doesn't like being in an aquarium.

If there is anyone Shepard has shared his life with, though, it's Dark. When Shepard leaves O-Lan and his son Jesse behind, Dark stays and

effectively becomes Jesse's stand-in father, something never acknowledged but obvious from the decades of letters which follow in which Dark is always sitting and talking with Jesse, even though 'he's no longer six, which is perplexing'. A few months after Shepard abandons the joint family unit in 1983 Dark movingly writes, 'Everything here is OK under control... Remember – whatever you need and what ever you want me to do at this end – I'll take care of. Between the two of us we can take care of *everybody*. You and me – we're family – like brothers – so there's never any problem...' This follows a letter where Dark generously waxes lyrical that Shepard's affair with Lange is 'what *Singing in the Rain* is all about and all those kind of films' and recalls a time when Shepard remarked 'I wish I could enjoy being alive like this every day'. It is Dark's intervention that allowed Shepard to be 'alive' for as long as he was without entirely sacrificing his relationship with his son. When Shepard writes, 'Tell my son to call me, I've been leaving messages for him all over hell' the present reader thinks it is only due to Dark that Shepard knows where to leave the messages. But Jesse grows up, has girlfriends, gets married, has a son of his own, and it is while accepting that the wheel has come full circle that Shepard moves to Beckett's position as acknowledging God when he mentions that 'something is taking its course'.

That something does not actually finish taking its course until Shepard has not only become not the son and now father but actually winds up exactly like his own father, cut off and isolated, partly by drinking, partly by his divided character. The part of his character that can sustain human relationships, that can keep track of his son, is Johnny Dark. As Dark puts it in one letter while he is nursing the dying Scarlett, 'I don't have a cottage in Kentucky to run away to. This is my Kentucky.'

This is a beautiful, lyrical book, but more, a book in which you get the feeling of life, literally, viscerally, raw before your face. Not just the beautiful parts. This passage from Dark three weeks after Scarlett dies took my breath away:

'This night the winds are blowing. But later they will have stopped, unless there's something someone's not telling. I'm in pretty good spirits most of the time but strange to think that Scarlett's been burned down to nothing but ashes and bones...'

That is not a passage that would have made it into anything but the footnotes, of a biography of Dark, and there will never be any biography of Dark, because he was not a winner. It would not necessarily even make it into a biography of Shepard, because it's not part of a narrative. But it surely tells

you something about what is awaiting you down the road if you survive your life partner, and that kind of knowledge is the interest of such a volume. If a book like this is edited as dextrously as it has been by Chad Hammet, you can learn plenty about life by listening to these two prospectors in the dark.

On the other hand there is no index and the University of Texas Press does not seem to have quite made up its mind about what kind of book this is. It's beautifully produced, the photographs are lovely, but the lack of index lends it the air of a coffee table book. There is a quote by Lord Pentland which Shepard cites, about how if you know something to be bad and you still do it you are committing an error it is difficult to right again, but I can't find it again because there's no index.

In 2002 Shepard reflects at a horse cutting competition: 'It is kind of scary to suddenly realize something about yourself in a flash – to actually see it in all its gory splendour – for instance, on this recent road trip with a crazy old 75 year old horse trainer named Bob McCutcheon – hauling our horses some two hundred and fifty miles down the Mississippi River (I still get a kick out of spelling that word) and getting to this cutting show where I rode the hair right off my mare: rode until my hand was bleeding from pressing into the saddle horn – I asked myself why in the hell I was doing such a mad thing and the answer was plain and simple and internally quite embarrassing – TO WIN! That was it. I JUST WANT TO WIN SOMETHING. I don't care what it is. I just want to win. I like winning. Winning is fun. Losing is not fun.'

To which Dark replies: 'For myself, I find the experience of winning a lot more unpleasant than losing... My favourite thing, I guess, is not to play the game at all. You said that it was fun to win so you probably are driven to experience the fun as well as escape from the inner feeling of being a loser. But it's always struck me that this feeling of being a loser (or at other times, feeling lost or alienated) is an experience of a profound truth ... It seems to me, once you can get your mind around the essential truth of being a lost and alienated loser (all of us) – the whole thing suddenly turns around into the appearance of this great positive truth toward which we've actually been striving. What else is self knowledge all about?'

Shepard replies, writing on the back of Dark's letter, 'I'm sure you're right about the truth being somewhere deeply embedded in the sensation of being a 'loser'. I've always suspected it but never accepted it the way you have.' But Dark's life-work, it slowly emerges, has been to document his life in letters and photos, to correspond with a few friends in the process of documenting

that life, and devote himself to making one woman, Scarlett, happy, as well as making sure a few other people, such as their only dependant, Jesse, the son left behind by Sam, are fine. What Dark has left are his letters, which he sells for financial security, but what the book and documentary make clear is that for all his ‘winning’ and relationship with his work, these letters and their financial value are just about all that Sam has left as well.

You have to wonder about a man whose natural connection with the world is so ebullient that he can write compellingly about making hot dogs for his son’s friends, a bike ride through town, or even the magic of cattle herding – but ends his days losing his connections to all he holds dear: not seeing his children for six months at a time, arrested for driving under the influence and forced to attend group therapy sessions with recovering crack addicts (which he hilariously recount) and conning the judge at his trial out of putting the charge onto his driving license by astutely discerning that a true but unrelated tale of getting drunk with the crew of the flight immortalised in the film he co-starred in, *Black Hawk Down*, would appeal to the judge. Shepard walked with a hundred hours community service.

Johnny Dark’s touchstone in life was Jack Kerouac, who ended his life alcoholic, alone and broke, but Shepard’s touchstone is Beckett. If one of them should be up before the judge it’s Dark, but Dark ends his life nursing Scarlett to a dignified death, slinging hash at a deli with Latino ladies, and, perhaps, enabling a fitting monument to both him and his friend.

That quote from Lord Pentland about committing an act you know to be wrong is about sin, finally, and it is curious that this book of letters between two addicts strikes me as a religious work. Shepard gave up booze for a number of years and in a letter chronicling that decision boasts, ‘I don’t beat my wife. I don’t shout at my children. I’m just a fucked up guy from Duarte trying to get through.’ When I read later of his determined decision to go and get drunk, and finally breaking off all ties with that family, just like his alcoholic father who died knocked down in traffic, it is that quotation from Pentland that comes back to me, along with another one from Beckett that Shepard always quotes: ‘Try again. Fail again. Fail better.’

Notes on Contributors

Martha Batiz is a Mexican-Canadian writer living in Toronto. She has published two short story collections, one in Mexico and one in Puerto Rico, which won an International Latino Book Award last year. Her novella, *The Wolf's Mouth*, has been published in Spanish and English and is currently being translated into French.

Jenny Bhatt's writing has appeared in *Femina India*, *Wallpaper*, *Storyacious*, *The Ladies Finger*, *Litbreak*, and the anthology *Sulekha Select: The Indian Experience in a Connected World*. Having lived and worked her way around India, England, Germany, Scotland and various parts of the US, she now splits her time between Atlanta, Georgia in the US and Ahmedabad, Gujarat in India. Find her at indiatopia.com.

Andy Brown is Professor of English & Creative Writing at Exeter University, where he directs the Creative Writing programme and the Art, Aesthetics & Creativity programme for the Centre for Medical History. He is the editor of *The Writing Occurs As Song: a Kelvin Corcoran Reader* (Shearsman, 2015), and his recent poetry books include *Watersong* (Shearsman, 2015); *Exurbia* (Worple 2014); *The Fool and the Physician* (Salt 2012); *Goose Music* (with John Burnside, Salt 2008) and *Fall of the Rebel Angels: Poems 1996-2006* (Salt 2006). His first novel, *Apples & Prayers*, was published in 2015 (Dean Street Press).

Jacob Buckenmeyer is a writer and educator in Washington state. He holds degrees in journalism and creative writing. His MFA is from Seattle Pacific University. His fiction has been published by *The Satirist*, *Icarus Down Review*, *Through the Gap*, and *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*.

Roz DeKett is a former BBC and newspaper journalist, with creative non-fiction published in the teen magazine *CRICKET*. Although British, she currently lives and writes in Philadelphia in the US, and she has an arts blog for which she interviews published authors. She is a graduate of the University of Leeds, with a degree in English Literature and History.

Tim Dooley is reviews and features editor of *Poetry London* and a tutor at The Poetry School. His collections include *The Interrupted Dream* (Anvil 1985), *Tenderness* (Smith Doorstop 2004), *Keeping Time* (Salt, 2008) *Imagined Rooms* (Salt, 2010).

J.C. Elkin is an optimist, linguist, singer, and founder of the Broadneck Writers' Workshop. Her poetry collection, *World Class: Poems Inspired by the ESL Classroom* (Apprentice House 2014), is based on her experiences teaching English to adult immigrants. Other poetry and prose drawing on spirituality, feminism, and childhood appear in such journals as *Kestrel*, *The Delmarva Review*, *ZoMagazine* and *Angle*.

Charlotte Gann's pamphlet, *The Long Woman* (Pighog Press), was shortlisted for the 2012 Michael Marks Award, and her first full collection, *Noir*, is forthcoming from HappenStance in late 2016/early 2017.

Atar Hadari trained as an actor and writer at the University of East Anglia before winning a scholarship to study poetry and playwrighting with Derek Walcott. His plays have won awards from the BBC, Arts Council of England, National Foundation of Jewish Culture (New York), European Association of Jewish Culture (Brussels) and the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he was Young Writer in Residence. Plays have been staged at the Finborough Theatre, Wimbledon Studio Theatre, Chichester Festival Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum, Nat Horne Studio Theatre (New York) and Valdez, Alaska. His collection of biblical monologues *Rembrandt's Bible* was recently published in the UK.

Russell Jones is an Edinburgh-based writer and editor. He has published 3 short collections and 1 full collection of poetry ("The Green Dress Whose Girl is Sleeping", Freight Books) and has published travel articles, short stories and research on the poetry of Edwin Morgan.

Robert Kiely's work has appeared in various magazines, including *datablead* and the *Cambridge Literary Review*, for which he also writes reviews.

Mariana Magdaleno's artwork has been exhibited in various contemporary art fairs around the world: in Argentina, USA, Canada, Italy, Belgium, amongst others. Also, her work has been shown in several exhibitions in Mexico, such as *Liminal Animal*, solo exhibition at the Museo Universitario del Chopo (México City, 2014), *Estudio de trazo* at the Museo de Arte Moderno (Mexico City, 2014), *DRAW* at the Museo de la Ciudad de México (Mexico City, 2010), and *Mundo Comic* at the Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro (Querétaro, Mexico, 2007). Currently, she is an active member of FERAL, an exhibition/studio, whose platform is the drawing discipline and its dialogic possibilities. She has been awarded with the FONCA Jóvenes Creadores Grant in its 2010/2011 and 2012/2013 editions. She lives and works in Mexico City.

Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) is widely regarded as one of the major poets of the twentieth century, both inside and outside of Russia. Work published in his lifetime included the volumes *Stone* and *Tristia*, as well as prose, translations and children's poetry. His later work, including *The Voronezh Notebooks*, no longer found publication in the increasingly authoritarian Soviet Union of the 1930s, but survived to be published in the post-Stalin era. Mandelstam died in late 1938 in a gulag transit camp in the Soviet Far East.

Rob Miles is based in Yorkshire. His poetry has appeared in publications such as *Ambit*, *Orbis*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Borderlines*, *South Bank Poetry*, *Angle*, *Nutshells and Nuggets*, *Morphrog*, *Clear Poetry*, *Lunar Poetry*, and *The Anthology of Age* (The Emma Press) He has won competitions, including the Philip Larkin Society Prize, judged by Don Paterson. Other poems have been placed, commended or shortlisted in competitions including the Bridport, Wenlock, York and Ilkley literature festivals, Live Canon, the Carers UK Creative Writing Competition, the Poetry on the Lake Silver Wyvern, The Gregory O'Donoghue, and three times in the National Poetry Competition. One of his poems was selected by Honouring the Ancient Dead to be offered to museums nationally for display with ancestral remains.

Helen Moore is an award-winning, British ecopoet. Her two poetry collections are *Hedge Fund*, *And Other Living Margins* (Shearsman Books, 2012), described by Alasdair Paterson as being “in the great tradition of visionary politics in British poetry”, and *ECOZOA* (Permanent Publications, 2015), acclaimed by John Kinsella as “a milestone in the journey of ecopoetics”.

Christine Murray is a graduate of Art History and English Literature (UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4) and a City and Guilds qualified restoration stonemason (OPW). Her poetry is published in the *The Southword Journal*, *Crannóg Magazine*, *A New Ulster Magazine*, *Caper Literary Journal*, *Ditch Poetry*, *Bone Orchard Poetry*, *Levure littéraire*, *Recours au Poème Magazine*, and *Women.Arts Quarterly Journal*. Her chapbook *Three Red Things* was published by Smithereens Press in June 2013. A collection of poems *Cycles* was published by Lapwing Press in Autumn 2013. A dark tale *The Blind* was published by Oneiros Books late in 2013. Her second book-length poem, *She*, was published in Spring 2014 (Oneiros Books). A chapbook *Signature* was published in March 2014 by Bone Orchard Press.

Alistair Noon has published two collections with Nine Arches Press (*Earth Records*, 2012, and *The Kerosene Singing*, 2015), and several chapbooks of poetry and translations from German and Russian, including Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* (Longbarrow Press, 2010). His translations of Osip Mandelstam have appeared widely, including in *Asymptote*, *Cerise*, *Guernica* and *Washington Square*

Review. A full-length selection of his Mandelstam translations is in preparation. He lives in Berlin.

Reena Prasad is a poet/writer from India, currently living in Sharjah (United Arab Emirates). Her poems have been published in several anthologies and journals, including *The Copperfield Review*, *First Literary Review-East*, *Angle Journal*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *Lakeview International Journal*. She is also the Destiny Poets UK's Poet of the Year for 2014 and one of the editors of *The Significant Anthology*, released in July 2015.

Mike Sherer has written the screenplay for the film *Hamal_18* (2004), and a novel, *A Cold Dish*, for which he is seeking publication. His blog can be found at mikesherer.wordpress.com.

Kinga Tóth is a philologist, teacher, communication specialist, copy editor, cultural programme organiser, (sound)poet-illustration, and songwriter.

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