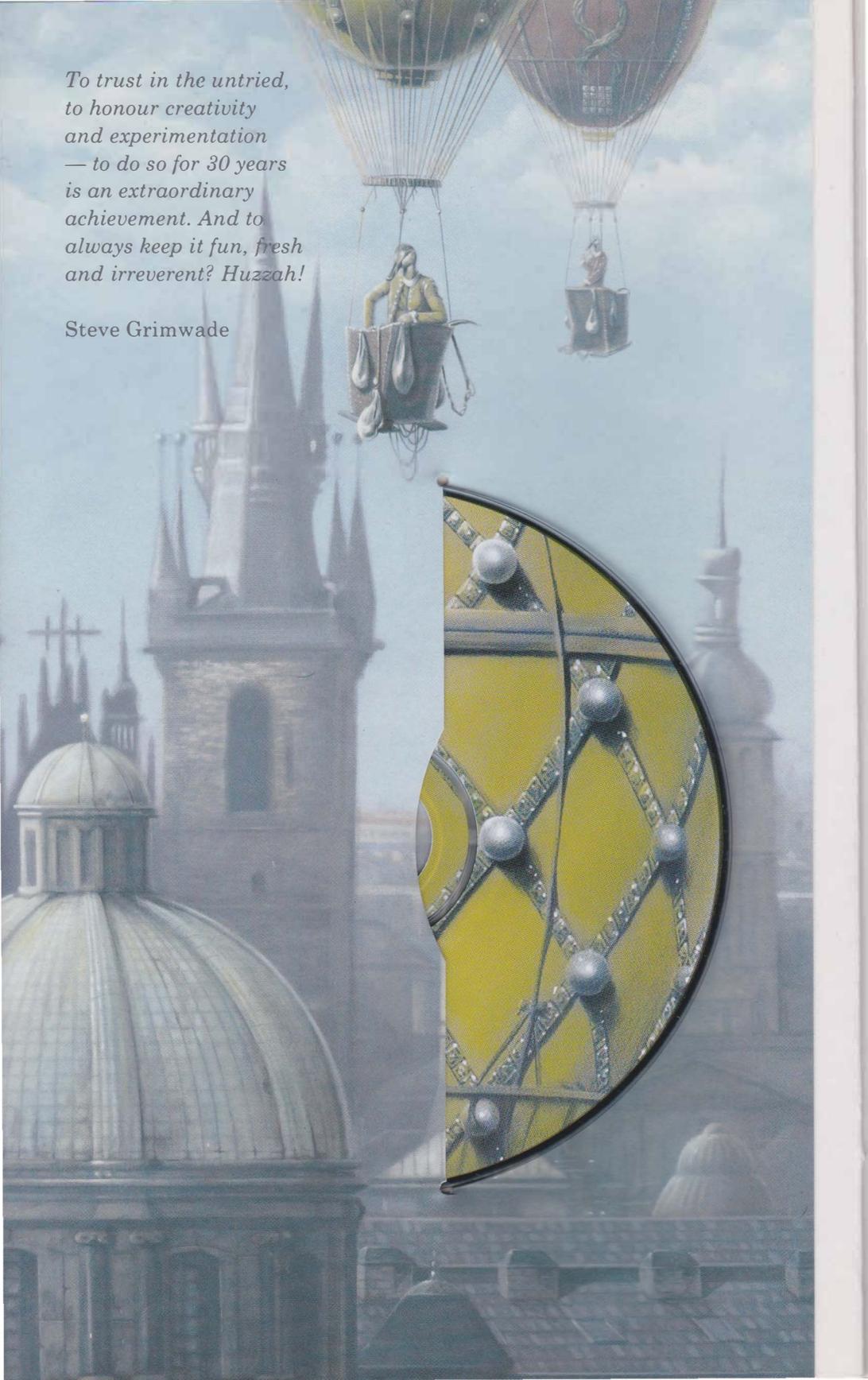
A duck dressed in a green suit and white gloves stands in a hot air balloon basket. The basket is suspended by ropes from a large, ornate green balloon with intricate patterns. The background shows a city with Gothic-style buildings and a clock tower.

GOING DOWN SWINGING

— No.30 —

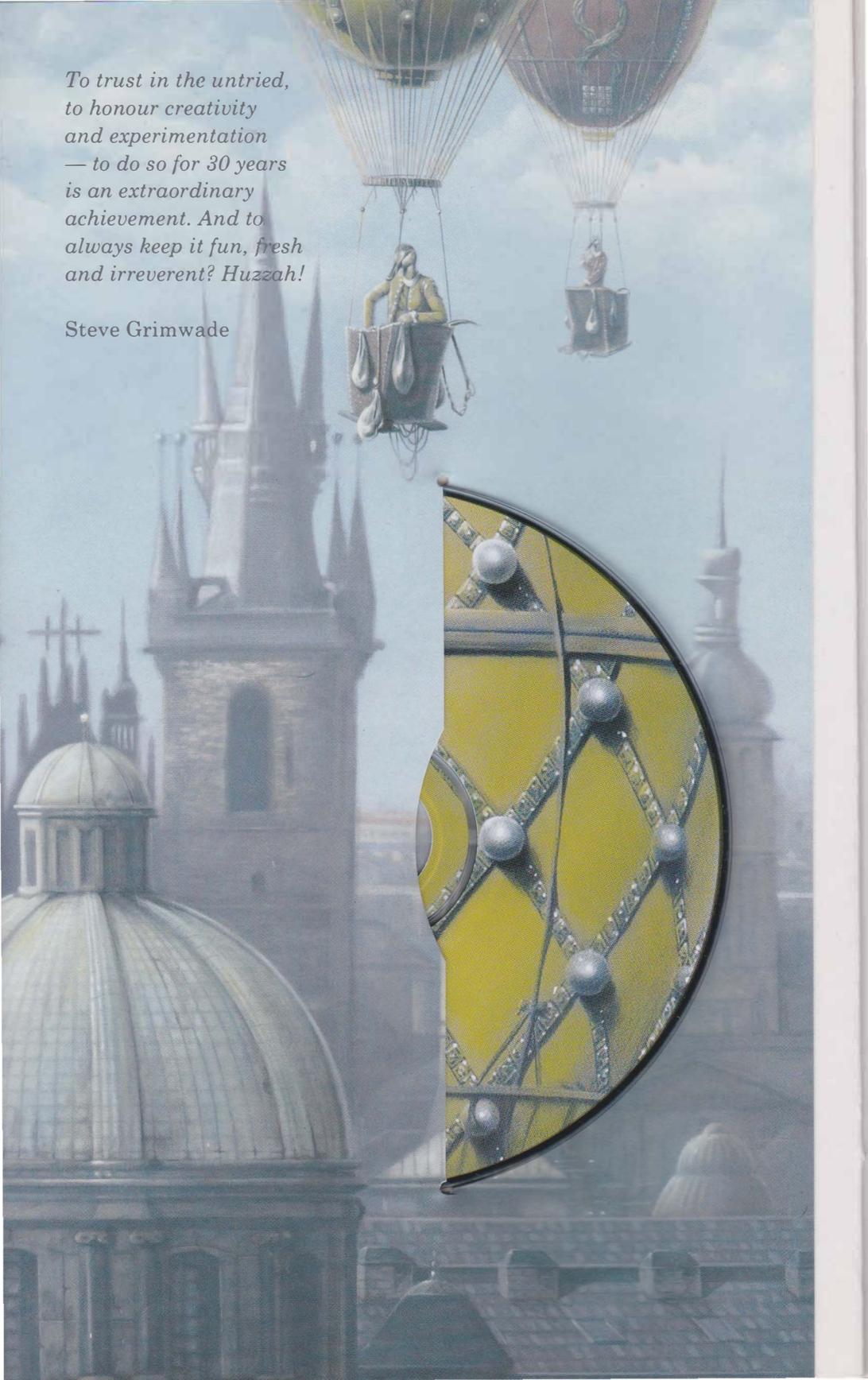
*To trust in the untried,
to honour creativity
and experimentation
— to do so for 30 years
is an extraordinary
achievement. And to
always keep it fun, fresh
and irreverent? Huzzah!*

Steve Grimwade



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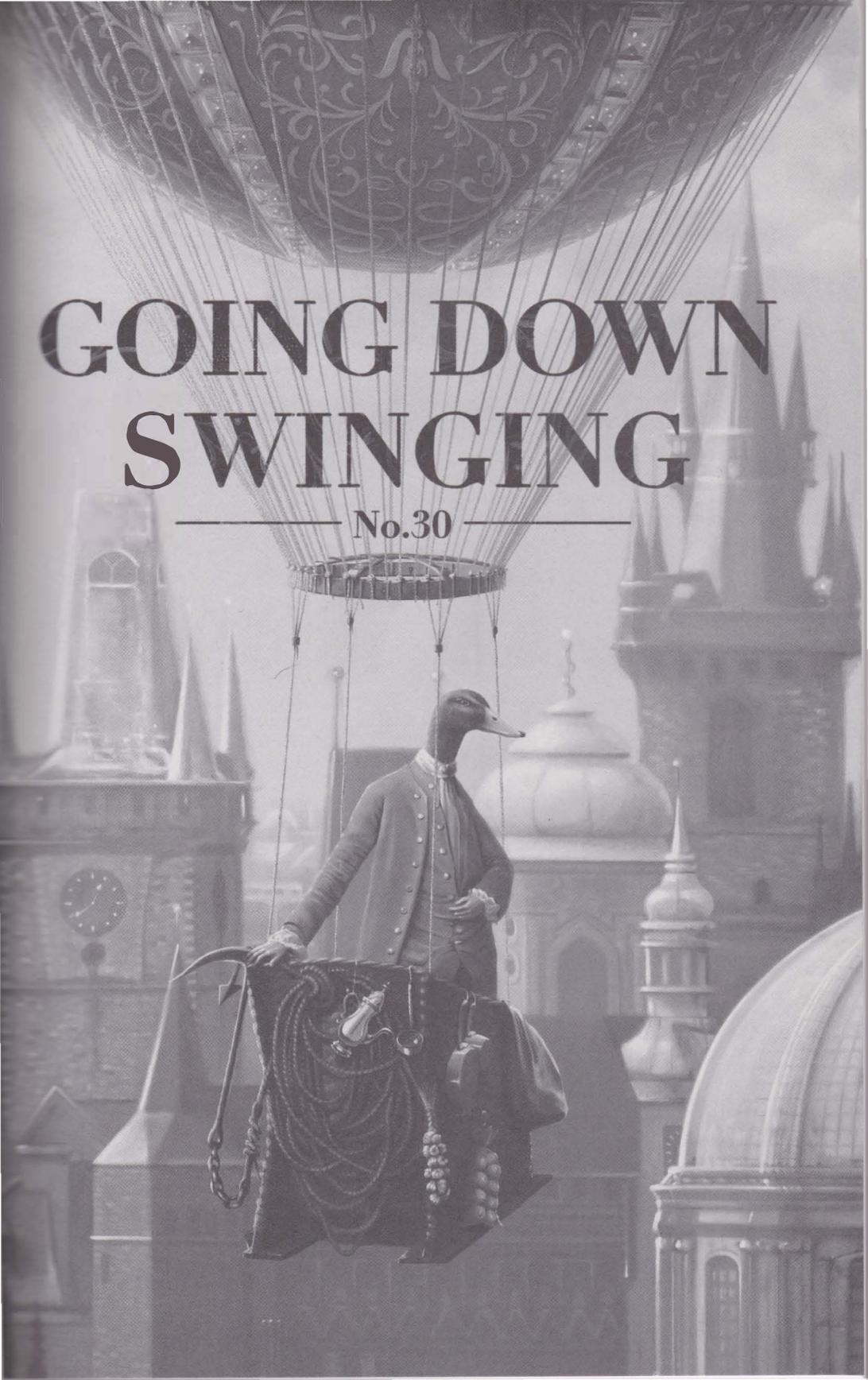
Steve Grimwade





GOING DOWN SWINGING

— No.30 —



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Submissions: *Going Down Swinging* accepts submissions of poetry, short fiction, comic and graphic art, and spoken word recordings from writers and artists internationally. We recommend that you read the full submission guidelines for a given issue before you submit your work. Full guidelines and Cover Sheets are available for download at our website when submissions are open.

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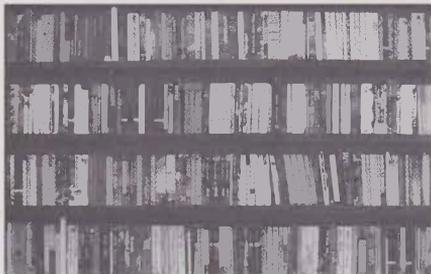


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EDITORIAL I — LISA GREENAWAY, NATHAN CURNOW,
ELLA HOLCOMBE

*'Come and go with me, it's more fun to share,
We'll both be completely at home in midair.
We're flyin', not walkin', on featherless wings.
We can hold onto love like invisible strings ...'*

Paul Williams via Gonzo, *The Muppet Movie*

Looking back on the last twenty-nine issues, it's clear that *GDS* has always had a special kind of self-perpetuating energy, one that has buoyed it across the shifting winds of thirty years. Since Myron Lysenko and Kevin Brophy first brought the hydrogen of ideas and the fire of effort together in 1980 *GDS* has been piloted by some sixteen editors and associate editors: Louise Craig, Lyn Boughton, Anna Hedigan, Alicia Sometimes, Steve Grimwade, Adam Ford, Klare Lanson, Grant Caldwell, Lauren Williams, Carol Carter, Nolan Tyrrell, Kim Griffiths, Sarah Andrew, Libby Kelly, David Prater and Mandy Ord.

What unites this gaggle is not only innovation and creativity but also determination and an awareness of the mercurial, volatile nature of what they're stepping into. There's no safety net, yet there is a pre-existing momentum, and all you can do is cut the ropes loose, fire up the valves and hold on to the cumulative challenge and encouragement from editors past, as the song says, 'like invisible strings.' The three of us feel very proud to be a part of the vibrant, creative, eccentric family history of *GDS*.

But No.30 is as much about the future as about the past—the best tribute to *GDS* is surely a tribute to the new work it publishes. This year we received an unprecedented amount of submissions from writers and artists around the world. Our guest editors Kevin, Myron, Grant and Adam rose to the occasion with passion and vigour. Our spoken word editors Cristin, David, Ian and Ian threw some absolute gems of spoken word across the seas. Specially commissioned writers Paddy O'Reilly and Eddie Paterson and artist Michael Camilleri challenged us with extraordinary pieces of art, and in the sweetest of serendipities Melbourne artist Katrina Rhodes agreed to us reproducing her ballooning gents on the cover even as she was still applying the oils.

We hope that the stories, drawings and poems you find in these pages and on these CDs fire something in your own hearts. As 'Team 2010' swoops away into the night *GDS* enters yet another era and the future is again, unknown. Can the little magazine that could, fly for another three decades? Surely the answer is yes—something that's operating on thirty years of hot air simply has its own momentum! To paraphrase Myron and Kevin's now immortal words: 'this is the thirtieth blow as we go down swinging ...'

GOING DOWN

SWINGING



EDITORIAL II — KEVIN BROPHY, SHORT STORY EDITOR

Like all fiction, we made it up as we went along. Myron encouraged the folly when we were told not to do it because we would, without doubt, fail. I think of us bending together over a ceaseless flow of submissions like a couple of mad gold panners for those first fourteen years. So congratulations to the beast on reaching the age of thirty, that age we all swore we would die before reaching.

I'm delighted to have been given the chance to select the short fiction for this issue. As it turns out, after receiving more than nine hundred submissions of fiction, we have accepted less than one per cent, forced to reject many excellent pieces of writing. It's exciting to see so much short fiction written with passion and to know that a wider audience than my jaded eyes will be reading this new selection for *GDS*. The new stories are realist, fantastic, absurd, and each one will absorb you into its world. *GDS* is old enough now to remember Gestetners, Letraset, stapled spines and golf ball typewriters. I lived with ink up to my elbows and RSI up to my shoulders during those years of editing, inspired to keep doing it because so many of you produced so much writing that just had to be shared.

Thanks too to those five people who became lifetime subscribers in the 1980s when we needed it, Jas, Stephen J, Sandra, Helen and Andrea. Let's hope *GDS* continues to be re-invented by ever newer and stranger editors and that like life, it retains the feel of being an ongoing draft of a promising idea.

* Previous page: cover of *Going Down Swinging* No.1, 1980

EDITORIAL III — MYRON LYSENKO, HAIKU EDITOR

It was a pleasure to be invited back as a guest editor for this commemorative issue and thanks to the editors for giving me this opportunity to showcase the haiku.

In 1979 Kevin Brophy suggested that we should start a literary journal that would promote short stories written by Australian writers. We knew very little about publishing and editing a journal and we had no idea if we could succeed in this, and this is one of the reasons why we called it *Going Down Swinging*.

Kevin and I edited *GDS* until the fourteenth issue in 1994. Since then it has been passed on to various new editors who have nurtured its development and expansion.

It now plays an important part in the literary culture as an impressively produced and influential journal with an international reputation.

The haiku is an energetic little Japanese form that has steadily been growing since the second half of the twentieth century and is now being written and published all over the world. I selected haiku without knowing who wrote them or which country the poet represented.

With the exception of a Lyn Reeves nature haiku, the remainder of the selections all deal in some way with the natural world and the human world. It is this juxtaposition of images that is so appealing in a haiku; as the images either contrast or compare one or two moments. Sometimes there is a narrative, sometimes recognition, perhaps some humour, but a haiku is often more than that. It resonates and it opens up on its own perception. Magic ...

EDITORIAL IV — GRANT CALDWELL, POETRY EDITOR

Reading a thousand poems the lines often blur, so forgive me if I have rejected your masterpiece: send it elsewhere for publication and awards and embarrass me next we meet. And remember, it's always better to have a poem rejected that should have been published than to have a poem published that should not.

It's a privilege and pleasure to revisit editing *GDS*: takes me back to 1979 when I first heard of the proposed magazine from two young prose writers named Myron Lysenko and Kevin Brophy. I was living in Sydney, publishing an out-there magazine called *Meuse* with Les Wicks, in which we published some of Kevin's and Myron's prose works. Returning to Melbourne in 1992 I became involved in *GDS* peripherally and as an occasional guest editor; and when it was later handed over to Lyn Boughton and Louise Craig, and later still to Alicia Sometimes and Steve Grimwade. I am proud to say I helped rewrite and recover the magazine's funding on more than one occasion. In other words, I have been associated with the magazine for most of its existence and I'm delighted to say it is still going down swinging.

It is great to see so many people submitting work. I am only sorry that limited space and my particular and strange aesthetic has excluded so many.

EDITORIAL V — ADAM FORD, COMICS EDITOR

The desire to edit literary journals is an itch that never really goes away entirely. In the years since I co-edited *Going Down Swinging* I've caught myself on at least three separate occasions planning some kind of writerly entity that would put me in a curatorial/editorial role. In each instance I've caught myself at the last minute before committing myself to the project, reminding myself that I changed out of the 'editor' lane into the 'writer' lane so that I could concentrate on my own writing.

When *Going Down Swinging* called me, though, there was no hesitation. I've always got time to spare for *GDS*, and being asked to combine my love for the *GDS*swingers with my love for what Scott McCloud famously called 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer', or, as you might know them, 'comics', could only elicit an affirmative response. One of the things I was really keen to establish when I first came on board the good ship *GDS* was that comics are an artform that can stand shoulder to shoulder with all other literary forms. It's gratifying to see that comics still coexist with poetry, fiction and spoken word between the covers of *GDS*, and it's additionally gratifying to have been one of the people that facilitated that coexistence for this issue.

Happy thirtieth *GDS*. Congratulations on an auspicious past and here's to a long future rich with panel-to-panel transitions.

EDITORIAL VI — CRISTIN O'KEEFE APTOWICZ, U.S. SPOKEN WORD EDITOR

Walt Whitman (Patron Saint of American Performance Poetry) famously wrote: 'Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes'. I thought of that quote a lot when I was compiling my U.S. spoken word submissions. The United States is just so darn large and diverse, how was I expected to represent all the incredible poetry found here? Listening to all the submissions I fell in love with poetry again and again, and nervously overloaded the poor *GDS* editors with emails reading, 'one more piece ...' for about two weeks straight. I'm grateful that the *GDS* editors made some pretty diverse selections out of the metric ton of poems I sent their way. You'll hear poems from brainy Seattle poets, crush-worthy Californians and even a multi-voice group poem by performed by four young and hungry Brooklynites, among others. I hope you fall in love with the poets and their undeniable energy as much as I did. And lastly, I want to mention my favourite Whitman quote: 'To have great poets, there must be great audiences'. So thank you, *Going Down Swinging*, for giving us poets such a great audience. Congratulations on this stunning anniversary, and we look forward to many more.

EDITORIAL VII — IAN FERRIER, CANADA SPOKEN WORD EDITOR

Most of the tracks I chose for *GDS No.30* were performed at the Casa del Popolo, the best venue for poetry in Montreal. The sound is good, the audience smart and attentive. It's work I've listened to and loved over the years.

From a competition poetry show in 2004 is a gem by Montreal poet Fortner Anderson. Two other pieces were recorded at the Canadian launch of *Going Down Swinging No.27* at the *Voix d'Ameriques* festival in Montreal. This was my first introduction to Australians David Prater, Alicia Sometimes, Emilie Zoey Baker and Sean M Whelan. Along with *That's Buddha* by David Prater you'll hear an amazing improvisation in real time by the band I work with, Pharmakon MTL.

No Sleep for the Wicked by Taqralik Partridge and Guido de Fabbro was recorded live in the Casa del Popolo, at the first *Tusarniq Festival*—an Inuit-hosted festival of contemporary words and music. In an attempt to 'integrate' children of Canada's First Nations into Canadian culture, the government forced them from their homes and sent them to residential schools, often far from their communities. Last year the government apologised and Taqralik's piece, commissioned for national radio, addresses the silent legacy of that policy. The text of the government's apology is at <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/06/11/pm-statement.html>

Pieces by Kaie Kellough and Alexis O'Hara are studio recordings by two of our absolute best Canadian performers. This is their latest work, due out on separate CDs in the next year.

EDITORIAL VIII — IAN DALEY, UK SPOKEN WORD EDITOR

You can tell when you've stumbled on a true performance poet. First of all you'll notice that the room has hushed as the audience starts to listen. You'll get a sense that what's coming out of the poet's mouth is more than simply words and you can see by the look in their eyes that this act is more than a passing fancy. It is meant. The room will continue to listen and the poet will keep drawing them in, layer by layer, deeper and deeper.

I give thanks to *GDS* for the opportunity to present to you here four poets from *Route's* own stable who do this and much more; these are the kind of poets I'd happily go into battle with. If their commitment unites them, their differing styles mark them apart—unconscious biorhythms that light the way for their sense of otherness. Theirs is the voice of another kind of England. From the sweeping majestic anger of *Chloe Poems* to the soothing sleepy balm of *Mike Benson*, from the cosmic otherworldly vibes of *Mark Gwynne Jones* to the celtic-jazz city tones of *Rommi Smith*—here is a sonic rainbow of poetic spirit.

Performance poetry sits at the heart of counter-culture and it should be heard wherever young people gather who are seeking out new pathways and ideas of their own. It is a sanctuary away from the drumbeat of commerce. This is a taste of northern English spirit, there is more. I hope you enjoy.

EDITORIAL IX — DAVID PRATER, EUROPE SPOKEN WORD EDITOR

For me, 'Europe' always used to conjure up the hair band of the same name. Then I started watching *Eurovision* and realised it was worse than that: Europe was a cringe-worthy parade of pseudo-pop, watched by millions from Iceland to Albania and Ibiza. Even more alarming, the EU was just a throwback to New Order, while Schengen Visas were a criminally underrated noise-core outfit from Gdansk.

Having lived in the Netherlands for the last two and a half years, I remain none the wiser. This corner of Europe is populated by people who, when they discover you're Australian, make jokes about yoghurt (you know, even it develops culture after a while) and convicts (always a favourite!), while maintaining a deep reverence for *Steve Irwin* and whoever decided to hire *Guus Hiddink*.

The four tracks I've selected for this CD—in English, French, Dutch and Spanish (sorry, Esperanto lovers) cannot truly represent the variety of spoken word that is being performed across the continent, but they do hopefully dispel the notion that Europe speaks with one voice. From 'reality' and DNA to red apples and nylon stockings, these pieces speak to the creative fusions made possible by history.

No more final countdown.

CD TRACK LISTINGS: DISC ONE: SUBMISSIONS & COMMISSIONS

1. The Vegetarian Zombie (1:31) *EZB* (Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: EZB. Engineered & produced by EZB 4/05/10.
<myspace.com/emiliezoeybaker>

2. I Wait, Therefore I Am (9:29) *Chloe Jackson Willmott*
(Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: Chloe Jackson Willmott. Strings, harmonium, guitars, loops: Andrew Watson. Music composed by Andrew Watson. Music recorded & mixed in Clarke St Studios, Northcote by Andrew Watson, March, 2010. Reading recorded at 3RRRFM Melbourne, May 2010, engineered by Kieran Ruffles. Mixed by Adam Dempsey. Created for a 2009 GDS performance commission.

3. Terra-ism (1:02) *Miles Merrill & Sofie Loizou* (Waverley, AUS)

Written, composed & performed by Miles Merrill & Sofie Loizou. Engineered & produced by Sofie Loizou in Bondi Junk-Shun, NSW. Released 2010.
<milesmerrill.com> <sofieloizou.com>

4. Tim Horton's As A Gateway Drug to The Canadian Army (6:33)
1-Speed Fukin' Bike (CAN)

Quebec, Canada, March 2009. From *Pashto Translator Needed* available for download at: <1-speedfukinbike.bandcamp.com> <myspace.com/onespeedbike>

5. The Betrayal (3:27) *little miss x* (Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: Jonny Hammer. Musical composition, guitars, samples: Marty Hammer. Engineered & produced by Marty Hammer, Wasteland Studios, Collingwood, January 2010. <myspace.com/littlemissx> <johngraham.alphalink.com.au>

6. The Constitution of Australia, Part 1 (2:55) *John Bennett*
(Sydney, AUS)

Written & composed by John Bennett. Performed by John Bennett & John Laidler. Engineered & produced by John Laidler, CutSnake Studio, Sydney, 2010. <jbpoet.com> <cutsnakestudio.com>

7. Dirt Track (4:39) *Ian Gibbins* (Adelaide, AUS)

Words & vocals: Ian Gibbins. Engineered & produced by Ian Gibbins, Belair, South Australia, November 2009.

8. Rocky Loses Patience with Jean-Paul Sartre (3:12) *Paul Mitchell & Bill Buttler* (Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: Paul Mitchell. Sounds & music: Bill Buttler. Engineered & produced by Bill Buttler, recorded at Ross House, May 2010. <paul-mitchell.com.au>

9. Beat(en) & Saintly (3:09) *Mark William Jackson & The Minordian* (Sydney, AUS)

Words & vocals: Mark William Jackson. Music by The Minordian. Engineered & produced by The Minordian, Sydney, 21 January & 13 March 2010. <markwilliamjackson.com> <myspace.com/theminordian>

10. The Most Beautiful Thing (2:02) *Eleanor J Jackson* (Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: Eleanor J Jackson. Music composed & performed by Adrian Shaw. Engineered & produced by Adrian Shaw at Three Bells Studio, Melbourne, 29 May 2010. <eleanorjjackson.com>

11. Perfection (2:45) *Ghostboy with Golden Virtues* (Brisbane, AUS)

Composed by Skye Staniford with David Stavanger. From *Enter*, the debut album by Ghostboy with Golden Virtues. Engineered by Darek Mudge. Produced by Darek 11000, Skye Staniford & Ghostboy in an un-named studio in Albion, BrisVegas, August 2009. <myspace.com/ghostboywithgoldenvirtues>

12. Horses (4:23) *Fraser Mackay & qua qua* (Glenpatrick, AUS)

Written by Fraser Mackay. Music composed by qua qua. Vocals, bass: Fraser Mackay. Guitar: Tom Logan. Keyboards: Dave Marshall. Percussion: Will Darker. Engineered by Dave Marshall. Produced by qua qua, Frankinford, Victoria, 27 February 2010. Created for a 2009 GDS performance commission. <myspace.com/quaquamusic>

13. The Day Craft (3:34) *Frank Prem & Leanne Murphy* (Beechworth, AUS)

Words & vocals: Frank Prem. Music composed & performed by Leanne Murphy. Engineered & produced by Leanne Murphy, Prem-Murphy home studio, Beechworth, March 2010.

14. Sorrow Follows Terror (inspired by 'The God of Small Things') (1:11) *Alana Hicks* (Sydney, AUS)

Words & vocals: Alana Hicks. Music composed & performed by Harrison Cooper. Engineered & produced by Harrison Cooper, Sydney, April 2010.

15. Blessed Art Thou (3:06) *James Laidler & Don Stewart* (Warrnambool, AUS)

Written by James Laidler. Composed by Don Stewart & James Laidler. Performed by Finn Laidler, Don Stewart & Gemma Belfrage. Engineered & produced by Don Stewart at Unmuzzled Studios, Warrnambool, November 2009. From the CD / verse novel *A Taste of Apple*, due for release 2010. <ipoz.biz/Store/Store.htm>

16. The Horses Never Stopped Watching Them (Softly & Suddenly—
Part 3) (6:04) *Sean M Whelan & The Interim Lovers* (Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: Sean M Whelan. Music composed by Andrew Watson. Violin:
Andrew Watson. Baritone Guitar: Chris Lynch. Drums: Ruvith Abraham.
Harmonium: Chris Mildren. Bass: Tom Hoskins. Engineered by Chris Chapple.
Production & mix by Andrew Watson, May 2010. From the forthcoming show &
CD *Softly & Suddenly* by Sean M Whelan & The Interim Lovers.
<myspace.com/seanmwhelanandtheinterimlovers>

17. Seventy (1:40) *Hinemoana Baker* (Wellington, NZ)

Words & vocals: Hinemoana Baker. Engineered & produced by Matt Budd, Fresh
FMradio, Nelson, New Zealand, May 2005. <hinemoana.co.nz>

18. Elaborate Maple Anchor (A Love Story in Five Movements) (16:59)
Josephine Rowe (Melbourne, AUS)

Words & vocals: Josephine Rowe. Cello: Judith Haman. Music composed & performed
by Judith Haman. Recorded at 3RRRFM Melbourne, April 2010, engineered by Kieran
Ruffles. Mixed by Adam Dempsey. Created for a 2009 GDS performance commission.

A poster for Radiothon 2010. The background is a dark grey with a pattern of numerous microphones of various colors and orientations. At the top center, the logo for 102.7 FM THREE TRIPLE RRR is displayed in white. Below the logo, the text "RADIOTHON 2010: MAKE CONTACT" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Underneath that, "Subscription payments due by 22 September" and the phone number "03 9388 1027 rrr.org.au" are also in white, sans-serif font.

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**CD TRACK LISTINGS:
DISC TWO: GUEST SELECTORS**

1. Cupcake (4:02) *Derrick Brown* (Long Beach, USA)

Words & vocals: Derrick Brown. Composed by Richard Swift. Engineered & produced by Richard Swift. From *Black Urchin* (Navygravy Music, 2009). <brownpoetry.com>

2. Unsolicited Advice to Adolescent Girls With Crooked Teeth and Pink Hair (3:00) *Jeanann Verlee* (New York City, USA)

Words & vocals: Jeanann Verlee. Live at the NYC-Urbana Poetry Slam. Engineered & produced by Taylor Mali & Steve Marsh. From *Excellence in the Field of Awesomeness: The Best of NYC-Urbana 2007-2008* (The Wordsmith Press). Poem can be found in *Racing Hummingbirds* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2010). <jeannanverlee.com>

3. Dunbar (3:08) *Eboni* (Brooklyn, USA)

Words: Eboni. Performed by the 2008 NYC-Urbana Poetry Slam Team (Eboni, Soulful Jones, Kesed & Arianne Benford) live at the 2008 Group Piece Finals, National Poetry Slam, Madison, Wisconsin. Engineered & produced by Taylor Mali & Steve Marsh. From *Excellence in the Field of Awesomeness: The Best of NYC-Urbana 2007-2008* (The Wordsmith Press). Poem can be found in *Grits* (Penmanship Books, 2009).

4. We Were Emergencies (3:39) *Buddy Wakefield* (Seattle, USA)

Words & vocals: Buddy Wakefield. Music courtesy of Dan 'The Listener' Smith. Slide guitar: Chris 'Fienix' Nelson from the Listener's *Death By Shotgun*. Recorded by Michael Bongiorno. Engineered & produced by Jon Berardi, co-produced by Steven Clough, 2009. From *Live at the Typer Cannon Grand* (Righteous Babe Records, 2009). Poem can be found in *Gentleman Practice* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2010). <buddywakefield.com>

5. Warranty (1:32) *Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz* (New York City, USA)

Words & vocals: Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz. Live at the NYC-Urbana Poetry Slam. Engineered & produced by Taylor Mali & Steve Marsh. From *Excellence in the Field of Awesomeness: The Best of NYC-Urbana 2007-2008* (The Wordsmith Press). Poem can be found in *Working Class Represent* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2010). <aptowicz.com>

6. Sylvia Plath's Gangsta Rap Legacy (2:35) *Jeremy Richards* (Seattle, USA)

Words & vocals: Jeremy Richards. Live at the NYC-Urbana Poetry Slam. Engineered & produced by Taylor Mali & Steve Marsh. From *NYC-Urbana: The Very Best* (The Wordsmith Press 2008). Poem can be found in *An Inaccurate Theory of Everything* (Destructible Heart Press, 2009). <jeremyrichards.com>

7. Stockholm Effect (3:53) *Alexis O'Hara* (Montreal, CAN)

Words & vocals: Alexis O'Hara. Trumpet: Brian Lipson. Recorded by Alexis O'Hara at the Banff Centre's Leighton Studios & at Snoop's Lair in Montreal. Mixed at Hotel2Tango, Montreal by Radwan Ghazi Moumneh, 2010.

8. That's Buddha (5:48) *David Prater* (Amsterdam, NL)

Words, vocals & buddha box: David Prater. Recorded live at the Casa del Popolo, Montreal, for the launch of *Going Down Swinging No.27* at the *Voix d'Ameriques Festival*, 2009.

9. Boyhood Dub (2:50) *Kaie Kellough* (Montreal CAN)

Words & vocals: Kaie Kellough. Double bass: Martin Heslop. Recorded at Hotel2Tango Montreal by Radwan Ghazi Moumneh. Mixed by Graham Lessard, 2010.

10. No Sleep For the Wicked (4:23) *Taqralik Partridge* (Nunavik, CAN)

Words & vocals: Taqralik Partridge. Composition, violin & laptop: Guido del Fabbro. Throat-singing samples by Taqralik Partridge. Recorded live at the 2008 *Tusarniq Festival*, a festival of contemporary culture hosted by Quebec's Inuit people.

11. Fortner Anderson (4:20) *Fortner Anderson* (Montreal CAN)

Recorded live at the Casa del Popolo, Montreal during a *Poetry Face-Off* show sponsored by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 2004.

12. Letters From the Ice Age (6:24) *Pharmakon MTL* (Montreal, CAN)

An improv in real time. Vocals: Ian Ferrier. Additional vocals: Moe Clark. Composition, guitars & laptop: Kris Mah. Drums: Doug Stein. Words based on Ferrier's poem of the same name. Recorded live at the Casa del Popolo, Montreal by Kris Mah for the launch of *Going Down Swinging No.27* at the 2009 *Voix d'Ameriques Festival*. Mixed by Kris Mah.

13. Ode à l'Intron (1:49) *Gu_rún Grænndóttir* (Strasbourg, FR)

Words: Gu_rún Grænndóttir. Vocals: Suzon Laesser. Engineered & produced by __ (aka *3), Strasbourg, May 2008. <gg02echo.net>

14. Appels Kopen (1:46) *Tsead Bruinja* (Amsterdam, NL)

Words: Tsead Bruinja. Music: Jaap van Keulen. Composed & performed by Tsead Bruinja & Jaap van Keulen. Engineered & produced by Jaap van Keulen, Arnhem (The Netherlands), 2005. From *Zingo: 3 Jaar Poetry Slam in Nederland* (De Wintertuin, 2005) <jaapvankeulen.nl> <tseadbruinja.nl>

15. La realidad es un lugar poco recomendable para visitar pero a estas horas es lo único que hay abierto (2:20) *Ajo with Don Simon y Telefonken* (Madrid/Tarragona, ES)

Words & vocals: Ajo. Music: Don Simon y Telefonken. Bass: Bobi. Ukelelelelele & lips wind: Germi. Mini piano & electric guitar: Prudi. Pianini: Ivan. Recorded at El Matadero, Madrid, 23 July 2009. Produced by Gerard Gil. Executive Producer Oriol Caba.

16. The Five Year Plan (3:23) *Anna Arov* (CAN/RUS)

Words & vocals: Anna Arov (Can/Rus). Bass, loops, sounds: Jan Schellink (NL). Guitar, effects, live loops: Rik Fennis (NL). Drums, electronica, samples: Rob Sprinkhuizen (NL). Recorded & engineered in the Hague, the Netherlands, by Rob Sprinkhuizen, Rik Fennis & Rob Sprinkhuizen, 2008. <wordsinhere.com> <rikenik.nl> <firmabewegreden.nl>

17. New York (5:45) *Rommi Smith* (Leeds, UK)

Words & vocals: Rommi Smith. Engineered & produced by Pat Grogan, Castleford, 2000. From *Moveable Type* (Route 2000). <rommi-smith.co.uk>

18. Down the Boulevard (6:48) *Mark Gwynne Jones & The
Psychicbread* (Matlock, UK)

Words & vocals: Mark Gwynne Jones. Engineered & produced by Paul Hopkinson & Psychicbread, Chesterfield, 2007. From *In the Light of This* (Route 2007). <psychicbread.org>

19. The Queen Sucks Nazi Cock (3:51) *Chloe Poems* (Manchester, UK)

Words & vocals: Chloe Poems. Engineered & produced by Tony Bonner, Leeds, 2002. From *Adult Entertainment* (Route 2002). <route-online.com>

20. Last Night I Met Frank Sinatra (4:33) *Sore Throat* (London, UK)

Words & vocals: Mike Benson / Will Flisk. Engineered & produced by: Will Flisk, London 2006. <verysorethroat.co.uk>

THANKS TO ...

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City of the Anti-Ghosts

Eric Paul Shaffer

On Thursday, Axel realised everyone
who lived there hated the city.

Not a single citizen loved the parks,

the streets, the drives, the buildings,
the highways, the view. Nobody

loved anything about the place.
They lived there only for their jobs.
Axel knew they hated it because

the sole point of anybody's job
was to service everybody else

who lived in the city, and so on.
If ghosts are souls without bodies,
Axel thought, then his fellow citizens

were anti-ghosts. The city boiled
with bodies void of spirit loitering

in the blue light of televisions
in darkened living rooms.
Axel saw the city was a cipher,

the world a circle of nothing, a zero
scrawled in some divinely obscure

equation. He decided to escape
the endless ends, but when he quit
his job at the mortuary, the newspaper

folded, the bakery collapsed,
the college closed. Main Street

was a wilderness of vacant stores
and traffic lights telling a rosary
of colours in empty intersections.

On Saturday, Axel rented a truck,
loaded furniture and family, and left

his house for sale. His neighbours,
beaten to the punchcard, broke
and out of work, fired, laid-off,

'let go,' and forced to retire,
watched from sofas on sidewalks.

Beneath frayed brims of caps
from losing teams, they glared
as Axel drove away. His best friend

Zachary lobbed a bottle of light
beer at the grille as Axel passed.

At the city limits, Axel's boss
crouched in the church tower
with a rifle and a clear shot.

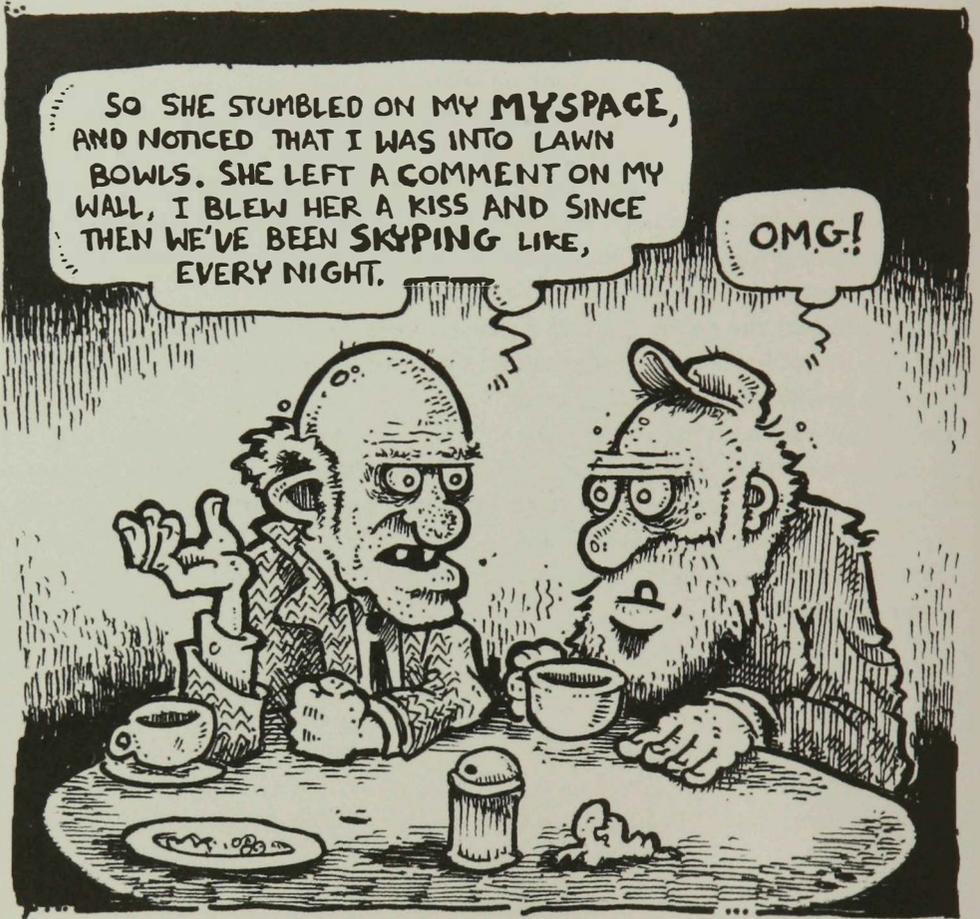
Names in a hat

Alana Kelsall

Whatever happens whether it's frequent or infrequent
headstones left behind on a hill
a photo of an unnamed soldier in an op shop
a samurai sword under glass at the local RSL
put the names in a hat and pick one out
simple things like the names of streets or housing developments
even those bottles of shampoo that used to break in the shower
blue something or other if I don't hear the name for years and years
it's like a footnote to someone else's language
and what about the death of a cat? I wrapped her and buried her
still find bits of fur on the windowsill and around the couch
so many spaces left in the house now
and all this love hanging
the sun comes up behind the church a torch behind skin
in another room a jacket and an army greatcoat hanging up
an unused mailbox by the main road
ten steps to the front door however many back
a planet suited up

SO SHE STUMBLED ON MY **MYSFACE**,
AND NOTICED THAT I WAS INTO **LAWN**
BOWLS. SHE LEFT A COMMENT ON MY
WALL, I BLEW HER A KISS AND SINCE
THEN WE'VE BEEN **SKYPING** LIKE,
EVERY NIGHT.

OMG!



The Clockwork Children

Felicity Bloomfield

FOR TWO WEEKS NOW, I've been trying to figure out if people are laughing with me or at me. Why shouldn't I pull my socks up, and my jumper down? It's cold. And what eight-year-old girl doesn't pick her nose, anyway?

I realised last Tuesday they were definitely laughing at me—even the teachers. So I ran away and hid by the river where the big kids go. There were no big kids there, just an old man with funny glowy eyes. And Sarah Rebecca, lying down like she was sleeping beneath the weeping willows. The glowy man pushed up her jumper at the back and yanked out something like lots and lots of red string. He gobbled at some of it and put the rest to one side for later. Then he pulled a box out of his big yellow backpack and shoved it into the space in her back. There must have been a key because I heard him winding something.

'What are you doing?' I said.

The glowy man jumped and turned around, trying to hide Sarah Rebecca behind his back. 'Come here,' he said.

'No!' I shouted.

He jumped up and ran after me, but I ran too. I ran back under the willow trees, back to school. The long leaves scabbled at my face like fingers. When I tripped on the willow roots I jumped up and kept running. The glowy man was snickering and shuffling behind me. He shuffled very fast, licking his stringy fingers as he came. But I ran through the trees onto the oval and he stayed in the shadows, whispering and hissing at me from underneath the trailing leaves.

Miss Tring saw me coming out from the out-of-bounds place and she put me on detention.

'But Sarah Rebecca is in there,' I said.

'That's no excuse.'

'But she's hurt,' I said.

'That's what happens when you go out of bounds. Now stop chatterboxing and go sit in my office before something nasty happens to you.'

Right then I saw Sarah Rebecca in the trees. She was skipping her way out, and her yellow hair was bouncing around her head. So I went to detention. I could hear Miss Tring yelling for Sarah Rebecca to come, but Sarah Rebecca just laughed.

After recess was art. Miss Tring was red faced from chasing Sarah Rebecca. She made Sarah Rebecca sit next to me as punishment. Sarah

Rebecca made a funny face but she sat down. I could hear her ticking.

‘Wanna know a secret?’ she whispered to me.

‘Show me your back,’ I said. ‘Something’s making your jumper poke out behind you. It’s turning round and round. I think it’s a key.’

She stuck out her tongue and scraped across her chair so she was half on Manny’s desk. Manny’s a boy and he’s gross, but Sarah Rebecca leaned super close to him and whispered in his ear. He whispered back to her and then he whispered to Rob who was next to him. They all looked at me and laughed.

‘Pick up your pens and do your work,’ said Miss Tring.

I started trying to draw the glowy man’s bright eyes looking at me through the long green willow-fingers. Manny and Rob were drawing too. Sarah Rebecca tried to pick up her pen but her fingers just slid across the table. She didn’t have any strength any more, and her fingers were blue. They left a sweaty trail.

Sarah Rebecca’s jumper was wet too. Behind her it looked black instead of navy blue. When she shifted forward the back of her seat was red. She smelled funny, like ham sandwiches in summertime.

At lunch Sarah Rebecca and Manny and Rob all went to the creek. Miss Tring was on duty again and she pretended real hard not to notice anything. Then Sarah Rebecca and Manny and Rob came back smiling. They walked around and got more kids to go to the glowy man. Manny had shorts on, and red was dripping down the back of his legs. He sat down in the grass and I couldn’t see the red any more. When his friends came he pointed toward the creek and they went off to get boxes and keys in their backs too.

Miss Tring’s mouth got smaller and smaller. Finally she followed all those kids into the weeping willows. She was stomping. I sat on the swing because everyone was going away and leaving it free. Usually I never got to play on the swing.

The kids started coming back then, one by one. Hanna’s leg bent the wrong way around but she didn’t seem to notice. She smelled like burning when she came to the swing set and told me there was a kitten in the trees. I could see her bone sticking out a bit behind her knee.

‘Go and see the kitten,’ she said. ‘You’ll like it.’

‘I don’t like kittens.’

‘There’s a puppy too,’ she said. ‘And lollies.’

‘Um,’ I said. My nose felt itchy, but I didn’t want to pick it with her there. ‘I’ll go in a minute. Just not now.’

Miss Tring came out of the trees and she was smiling. She was ticking too, like Sarah Rebecca and Manny and Rob and Hanna.

‘Hello,’ she said to me. ‘You’ve been so good today that you’re allowed to go to the creek.’

‘No I haven’t,’ I said. ‘You put me on detention.’

‘Oh?’

‘Excuse me,’ I said. ‘I have to go. My tummy doesn’t feel good.’

She grabbed my arm. ‘Come with me and I’ll make you better.’ *Tick, tick, tick.*

'It only hurts for a second.'

I kicked her in the leg and she fell over. She lay there waving her arms and legs for a bit before she figured out how to get up. I smelled wee, like she'd wet her pants when the glowy man pulled her guts out. Once when I saw a scary movie I wet my pants and everyone laughed at me.

Now they were laughing again, and the ticking was super loud. Everything smelled of yucky old meat and blood and bone and poo.

I swung hard on the swing and hit Miss Tring as she stood up. She fell down again, but she only laughed. They all looked at me and laughed. Everyone laughed the same: Hahaha! Hahaha! Hahaha!

I jumped off the swing and flew through the air. Both my knees got scraped really badly when I landed, but I just jumped up and ran up the slide—the slippery bit. Last time I did that I tripped and fell down and Miss Tring coughed behind her hand while all the girls and boys pointed at me and laughed.

I didn't fall down. My feet didn't slip. I got all the way up and stood at the platform at the top. King of the castle. That's me. Miss Tring tried to come up the slide after me but she fell down. Her head hit the edge of the slide and broke open. I guess the glowy man made people extra fragile. One of Miss Tring's eyes was still looking up at me but the rest of her head was on the ground.

Miss Tring's blood made the slide so slippery that when Sarah Rebecca tried to get on she couldn't stand up on it—not even for a second. She just slipped down to the ground, and then tried again.

Manny tried to come up the ladder on the other side but his bloodless fingers couldn't grip the rungs. More and more kids came around and crowded each other, trying to get up to me so the glowy man had one last kid to eat up and then wind up to go and get him some more.

Some of the kids got pushed by the other kids, and they fell under each others' feet and got all trodden over. One of the metal boxes broke in half and fell out on the ground. I saw the silver key in the back, like on the clockwork mouse Santa gave me when I told my dad I wanted a scooter for Christmas.

Sarah Rebecca was still laughing, but her laugh sounded deeper than before. Haaarrrr. Haaarrrr. Haaarrrr. She needed winding.

Manny wasn't trying so hard to climb the ladder. One of his feet had gotten mushed and he was just standing on the other foot and hitting one of his blue hands hopelessly against a rung while he used his other hand for leaning, holding himself up. The other kids shoved him and he fell underneath the platform.

'Haaaarrrr,' he said. 'Haaaarrrr.'

He didn't say any more.

Sarah Rebecca stood still and she stopped laughing. She looked at her feet and didn't move. Then she fell over on her face, with her key making her jumper stick up a little bit from behind her. It wasn't turning any more.

The glowy man came out of the trees, waving his short arms.

'My children!' he cried. 'My children!'

I crouched down so he couldn't see me, but he knew I was there. He pushed through the kids and ignored the way they waved their arms, trying to get back up. His shoes got all grotty with the legs and guts and faces he stepped in.

He climbed the ladder as easy as pie. I was too scared to move. Rob was on the slide trying to climb over half of Miss Tring's face. I didn't want to run away over Miss Tring when she was still staring at me. But there wasn't anywhere else to go.

The glowy man patted me on the head. 'There, there,' he said. 'Why don't you lie down?'

I felt much better straight away, and I held onto his shirt like I used to hold on to my dad when I was little. 'Make them stop laughing at me.'

'Hush,' he said. 'It's alright now.' He turned me over and pulled up my baggy old jumper.

It only hurt for a second.

Retrospective

Jillian Pattinson

She reckons the red pencil is for colouring outside the lines
and who am I to correct her?

Unlike a rainbow, any three colours will do for an umbrella.

Her pictures turn out clearer when drawn upside down
then turned around.

The yellow pencil, she tells me, is sunshine and bananas.
Green is for frogs and grass and flower stems
but she prefers her trees purple because they bear plums in summer.

Around each object she leaves a space uncoloured—this is air.
You can't see it but it's there,
because you feel it when you wave your hand or dry your hair.

Brown is for horses and dogs, except aJeRpY [sic]
who is a grey lead silky terrier.

Otherwise, grey lead is for her own system of numbers and letters
combined in unexpected order, upper and lower-case alternating,
gees and jays and whys hanging off each others' tails,
tipsy dees and els propping each other up,
ems and double-yews sporting rather more troughs
and humps than they may elsewhere.

Orange is her momentary favourite—juicy sweet,
good for dresses, ribbons and shoes.
'OK too' for a car resembling a beetle,
which extrudes her own musical notation in its wake.

Music is never drawn in grey lead, the colour depending on the song.

When I ask why each family member stands encased in an air bubble,
I learn that they are thinking, not talking, and that this is quiet.

Not far from the house she draws a graveyard full of flowers
with a blue shaft reaching down from the sky. This part is nice,
she says, not sad, being the elevator that takes people up to heaven.

This makes as much sense as any other theory I've yet heard
so I nod, think on it some more, then nod again.

Not that she's looking for my affirmation—her world is clear
and colourful and wanders happily outside the lines.

King of the Linoleum

Ainslee Meredith

there are a lot of dark places in a bedroom
that you don't see straight up.

you are behind the couch
surviving on mute florals,

venetian dust, potpourri. milk
and matchbox cars draw you out.

the cat brings skeletons
into dreams. she tears rats apart

and drags organs under
the fly screen, blood black as

food colouring hard to tell
apart from other things on your hands

at night. your mother is
going to give birth, they tell you.

someone scrubs the windowsill
where the geranium's stained

the plaster to a dark smear.
imitation lace scored with want,

whorled in china, goose bumps
the legs like a blind battery fowl,

she works in an office
and a lot of it involves closing doors quietly.

Danzig

Geoff Lemon

It's a distant thought of toast
and the yolk of soft-boiled egg.

It's flat-backed in linen, both eyes
feeling the sharp crust at their corners.

On a morning like this
it's you tangled equally in sheets and sleep.

It's me half an hour away from learning
if I'll ever sleep again.

It's sunlight sticking like gum
to the shreds of roof it's colonised;

a heart twice as wide
as the largest landlocked nation;

and you, marching on its borders,
muttering that we won't stop walking
until we reach the sea.

Procession

Paddy O'Reilly

WHEN THEY FIRST STOOD UP and walked on their hind legs we paid money to see them.

I took my five-year-old child. She laughed and ran up to one of the dogs who stood beside a bucket where we were supposed to drop our tickets. Sienna was the same height as the Beagle on its hind legs. The Beagle laid a paw on Sienna's shoulder. His sinewy tongue curled for a moment around the lobe of her ear and she giggled, kissing the dog's wet black nose before she ran back to me. I pulled a wipe from my bag to clean her face as she chattered.

'His name is Oscar but he doesn't like it.' She grinned her toothy grin at me as I screwed up the wipe and tossed it in the bin. 'A human gave him the name.'

'A person, you mean. An individual person like me or Daddy or your teacher. Not just a human.'

'Yes, a person.'

In the ring, the dogs performed tricks people had taught them in the old circus. An Airedale played the ringmaster. He strutted across the sandy floor on his hind legs with a whistle clenched between his teeth, gesturing with his front paws to direct the performers around the stage. A Toy Poodle rode the shoulders of a loping Great Dane. Ten Border Collies formed a precarious pyramid, tumbled barking to the ground, bounced up and paraded around the ring for our applause.

The chests of the bitches were fluffy, but below the ribs the fur thinned and soft skin showed through, mottled black and white in the same pattern as their coats. They looked strangely vulnerable beside the parading dogs. When dogs walk on their hind legs, they display their cock and balls like ostentatious jewellery. The castrated dogs walked differently to the ones who were still entire. With their small empty sacs tucked up close to their bodies and their cocks thrust far forward they walked as if they were about to lose their balance. But they never did.

'I want to go again tomorrow,' Sienna demanded.

'I don't think so. Tomorrow is your swimming lesson, remember?'

'I don't care. I want to see them again.'

On the walk home we passed a cobblestoned lane, shadowy in the late dusk, stinking of city garbage. Two mixed-breed dogs were leaning their shoulders against the south wall of the lane. In the past I would have called them mongrels. They faced each other and made throaty grunts, their tails snapping against the brickwork.

I asked Sienna what they were saying. Only children and a very few adults could understand the dogs' guttural conversations punctuated with sharp barks and whines. Academics were studying recordings of them talking but their headway was slow. It was easier to ask a child what was going on.

'They're having a talk,' she said. She licked ice cream off her hand where it had dripped.

'I can see that. A talk about what?'

Sienna took another long lick of her chocolate ice cream before looking away from me and answering, 'I couldn't hear very well.'

I think that was the first wilful lie she ever told me.

Not all the dogs developed at the same rate. Our dog, Pugsley, was at home behaving like the dog we'd always known, shitting all over the yard, barking at shadows, goofing around with Sienna and her father, Adrian, until very late in the piece.

I suppose, now I think about it, that it was the clown dogs who were the last to turn. Pugs, Basset Hounds, Boxers. The working dogs led the change. The first dog I saw standing up was a Blue Heeler bitch. She watched me walk past, my mouth open in amazement, and she coughed as I was about to turn the corner. When I swung to face her she wagged her tail slowly, languorously, looking me straight in the eye. That was the moment I knew everything had changed. Not the hind leg walking but a dog gazing at me as if we were equals.

Once everything settled down we went back to shopping at the supermarket, but in the early weeks of fear that the dogs might attack, shops were closed and people were guarding their goods and property. I went to the cupboard and found tiny jars of anchovies, truffle-infused olive oil, the hand-ground dukkah Adrian liked to bring home from his work trips to Egypt. Sensible people went to their cupboards and found flour, sugar, tins of baked beans and soup.

I asked my neighbour if I could swap a packet of roasted almonds for a piece of fresh fruit for Sienna. She went inside to get an apple but her husband came out instead, red faced and stinking of beer.

'I haven't forgotten the fucking car, you bitch,' he said.

I stepped back, stomach whirling in fear. 'Didn't the insurance company pay you?' I said, my voice squeaky. I wasn't sure whether to stay or run. 'I did the paperwork. I sent it in ages ago.' I had rolled into the rear of their car in the street—dented the bumper bar and cracked a rear light.

He lurched forward as if he would fall on his face, then grabbed the architrave and pulled himself upright. 'We never had a dog. It's cunts like you who brought this on,' he said, and slammed the door.

I stood there shaking. Their seven-year-old son pulled aside the lounge room curtain further along the house and stared out at me, his pale fat face void of expression. He looked like he'd never eaten a piece of fruit in his life.

It's only been ten years but my memories of the time before the dogs are growing dimmer. I still remember the circus and our wide-eyed admiration of those first few dogs. I remember the fear and panic that grew as more dogs changed. People with guns, behaving like savages. I remember the day the government declared the dogs protected against the vigilantes. The bill of rights, the opening of the compounds.

What I can't place is the exact moment last year when I realised Sienna had joined the Dogteens. She turned into a stranger while we worried about installing a new security system.

Last night she came home late, as usual, and flung herself on the couch in front of the television.

'Senn, please don't wear the furs on the furniture,' I said. 'Have you had dinner? How was school? Where have you been?'

She sat up, peeled off the stitched-together fur-scrap poncho, and tossed it on the floor beside the couch. Underneath she was wearing a T-shirt with a chihuahua transfer and a pair of cut-off jeans. I noticed a bruise on her throat near the collarbone.

'Take the fur outside and leave it on the verandah. It's disgusting.'

'In a minute,' she said. I watched the bruise disappear and reappear as she rubbed it with her fingers.

'Have you hurt yourself? Let me take a look.'

'Leave me alone.'

'Come on, sweetheart, let me have a look. A dog didn't bite you, did it?'

I saw it on a current affairs show last week. One of the Dogteens who'd broken away was interviewed. She was in profile in darkness, her voice disguised by technology and sounding uncannily like the gruff tones of a dog. She said the dogs in the inner compound nip the Dogteens to break their skin and infect them with a virus that turns their fingernails into claws and sharpens their hearing and sense of smell. Those ones, the ones who have been bitten, are the teenagers who never come home. I don't know why I kept watching. I never watch those stupid shows.

'Of course not. They'd never bite us.' Sienna's hand crept up to her throat and massaged the purple mark.

'Here,' I said, picking the stinking furs off the floor and stretching out my hand to help her off the couch, 'I'll put some antiseptic on it. Please, darling.'

'Fuck off,' she said. As she turned her head away to watch the TV I thought I heard a sound, a rumble from deep in her chest.

My heart started to beat faster. 'Did you growl at me?'

She rolled her eyes and snuggled deeper into the rug on the couch.

I could feel the greasy furs leaving their stink on my hands as I hurried out to the verandah to hang them on the outside hook. The schools do the same thing—they have a shed out the end of the schoolyard where the Dogteens can hang their furs. I've tried washing them but Sienna will only come home with a different mangy collection of pelts. She wants to smell. Like her Dogteen friends she hates to be reminded she's human.

This morning we were all up early. Outside the sky was an eerie watermelon colour. Clouds were gathering to the north, furling over the horizon in fat greys and purples. Adrian, home all weekend for a change, pushed eggs around the frypan and I buttered toast while Sienna stood on the verandah, her head high, sniffing the wind.

'I'll have bacon,' she called in through the window.

'You ate it all yesterday.' Adrian shut the window and turned to me. 'Or maybe she rubbed it over herself. Soon she'll stink so badly I won't be able to stand in the same room as her. What happened to our daughter? Can't you get her to take a shower?'

'Can't you?' The words burst out of me. I wanted to suck them back in. I didn't want a fight. I hate to fight.

I didn't dare tell him about the turd, or the cat's tail with scraps of pink flesh still hanging from it, or the rutting. She's a teenager, I told myself the night I heard her grunting and barking in the backyard with the boy who looks like a dingo, all pale bristly hair and pointy face. She's had her implant so she won't get pregnant. But the turd. The little exclamation mark of dried-up poo I found nestled behind her bedroom door. How could I explain that?

'At least she's here for breakfast. She'll turn out alright, you'll see. You know most of them grow out of it.' I felt my face wrinkle into an appeasing smile.

'That's if we still want her.'

'Thanks a lot, Dad.' Sienna had slunk inside and was crouched on her haunches in the corner of the room, beside the door to the lounge.

'You know I don't mean it.' He was smiling at her. He reached down to tousle her hair but she cringed further into the corner.

'Darling, come and sit at the table. I'll cook you sausages.' I stretched out my hand.

She sneezed and scratched behind her ear. The soft curls of her strawberry blonde hair bounced as she scratched. Her foot thumped the floor. I could hear the packs of Dogteens gathering out in the streets, whooping and baying and shrieking as they did every weekend on their way to the local compound.

'Forget it.' She rose to her feet in a fluid movement that took her out the back door in three long paces. 'I'll see you later. I'm in the traces today.'

As soon as she'd gone I sat down heavily on the kitchen chair.

'She's been bitten,' I said to Adrian. 'Did you see her neck? And she's going to be hauling that dog!'

'She's been bitten, alright. Some boy giving her a love bite.'

'No, no. I think it's one of those dog bites where they pass on the virus.'

Adrian held his fork mid-air, balancing a triangle of toast topped with a wobbly pyramid of scrambled egg. For a moment he did nothing, then he guided the food to his mouth and chewed slowly and finally swallowed.

'I want to take her to the doctor.' I heard the crack in my voice.

He put down his cutlery, edged his chair close to mine, and hugged me. I hadn't noticed that my husband had got plump like me until that moment

when his belly moulded over my left arm. His double chin rested on my shoulder. His arms could barely encircle my torso. We were two humpty dolls. I began to laugh. He held me tighter. He thought I was crying.

'That TV show is complete rubbish. You know that,' he murmured into my hair.

'I know,' I said, between giggles.

He let go. I took his hand in mine, pressed his palm against my cheek. My giggles had subsided. A strange despair crept over me.

'How did we get so old?'

Every Sunday afternoon the leader of the dogs, the packmaster, is towed on a float around the centre of town by thirteen Dogteens in harness. The remaining Dogteens, perhaps three or four hundred in this city, run alongside the float with the dog pack, laughing and shouting in that guttural canine tongue that few adults have ever mastered, banging on drums and blowing whistles and doing cartwheels and funny dances.

Adrian and I take the tram into town. We settle at a café's outdoor table on the procession route. The young woman serving us, perhaps in her early twenties, is wearing a pair of clip-on dog ears. A fake fur tail hangs from the seat of her jeans. The café is called Dogster.

'Here for the parade?' she asks as she takes our orders.

The city mutters in an expectant, festive conversation. There is an occasional rumble of distant thunder and the light is a yellowy purple. Whiffs of stale oil and rotten garbage and the leftover sour smell of Saturday night in the city swirl through the air.

'If we had a normal daughter, this would be a netball final or a school concert. You'd better be right about her growing out of it soon.' Adrian blows on his coffee and takes a hesitant sip.

He's not ready for this. He spends too much time away, a life behind glass in cars and planes and offices. He's only just realised his daughter stinks. She's not simply our daughter anymore. She's a Dogteen. An independent wild thing who will do whatever she wants.

I can hear the procession coming down the next street. The drums and tambourines bang out unevenly and tin whistles are playing tunes but most of all it's the barking and growling and yapping that echoes off the walls of the tall city buildings. Some comes from the dogs, some is recognisably human.

Sunday shoppers are heaving their department store bags through the streets and a few people line the footpath, waiting for the parade to pass. In the electronics shop next to the café, I can see a telecast of the float coming down Collins Street. The packmaster, a bizarre red dreadlocked cross between a Hungarian Puli and a Kelpie, sits on a massive green satin cushion on the float, flanked by Pekingese trotting along the road in a long undulating carpet. This week they're escorting a float shaped like a giant bone. That's what we never expected—the sense of humour, the practical jokes, the sheer joy of life the dogs bring to every event. That's how they seduce our children.

The moment they round the corner, tears spring to my eyes. I don't know whether I'm proud or ashamed. Sienna is the lead child in the harness. Leather straps criss-cross her chest, wrinkling the worn fabric of her shirt and carving a crevasse between her bud breasts. The harness and the float are strung with bells and medallions, ribbons and tattered pieces of coloured cloth.

I can see how hard Sienna is straining to pull the float by her clenched jaw and the ropes of muscle vibrating in her throat. I want to run over and strip her out of that harness, take her home, wash her in a hip bath. I'd dress her in a clean pair of flannelette pyjamas and feed her mashed vegetables and read to her from a girls' adventure book as she drifted off to sleep in the soft light of her bedroom.

Sienna lifts her arms and the children in the harness rear back and finally stop. The packmaster stands. There's an exchange between the packmaster and Sienna, yelping and barking, a growl. The packmaster circles three times and curls up on the cushion while Sienna talks to the children in harness behind her. As we're waiting, a pug leaves the procession, trots across the road to me and sits at my feet, grinning up at me with its wrinkled face.

'Pugsley?' I don't know what to do. They don't like to be petted anymore.

Pugsley rises to his feet, backs off and yaps three times at us before turning and haring into the group of dogs, his squat hindquarters pumping like pneumatic cushions.

'Did you see that?' I place my hand on Adrian's arm, but he's looking at Sienna.

The procession has quietened down. Sienna gazes straight at me for a moment and nods. After I have smiled nervously at her she leans backward, exposing her bony white throat, and begins a howl, a low moan that rises fast into an aria of leaping and bones and shitting and wild scents and twitching dreams all braiding finally into a brutal joyous crescendo of freedom. When she finishes, the whole city is silent. She turns her head to us again. The bells on her harness tinkle. Below her furs and checked cotton shorts, the long tense muscles of her thighs tremble. Adrian is watching with his mouth open.

The packmaster barks once and Sienna and the other children in the traces leap forward, wrenching against the leather like I remember Pugsley doing so many years ago on his first walk outside the yard.

A child behind Sienna trips and claws at Sienna's furs to steady herself. Sienna turns and snarls. Her braces glint like metal jewellery. A light rain is starting to drift across the street.

'I hope she's not wearing those trainers with the hole. I told her to throw them out.'

'Jesus Christ.'

I look where he is looking. A young girl at the rear of the parade is squatting. A shiny stream of piss winds its way along the black road in front of her. She leaps up, her skirt falls against her thighs, and she races to her spot behind the float, fur jacket bouncing against her torso in time with her jumps and pirouettes. Three boys press into the spot where she has pissed

and lean forward to sniff. One of them barks, two fall back, and the remaining boy unzips his fly and covers her puddle with his own frothy yellow stream.

Adrian has knocked his coffee cup with his elbow and the spill is creeping across the table. I use a napkin to dam the flow. The drummers ramp up the beat and the procession moves on.

When our waitress with the sewn-on tail brings a sponge to the table she has to ask Adrian to lift his elbow. He turns and stares at her as though he can't understand a single word she has said.

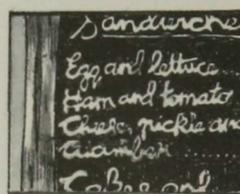
'Sorry, it's all a bit much for him.' I tug a few more napkins from the dispenser and press them against Adrian's damp jacket sleeve as the waitress pulls a dishcloth from her apron pocket.

'I know.' She rubs the table briskly and sets the salt and pepper shakers in their basket. 'I mean, they're kind of cute in a way, I suppose. But filthy. And weird, you know.'

Her words break through Adrian's catatonic stare. He frowns, as if to himself. I wait with my hands clenched around the damp napkins, hoping that this is the moment I have been waiting for all these years. Claim her, I am urging him silently. Claim your daughter.

The tail end of the procession is dancing away from us. Adrian sighs. He turns and gives me a disappointed look, as if it's all my fault.

Dirty Joke



What happened was, my mother would prop me up in my pram with a bottle while she went downstairs to work.



But my brother would come along and drink all the milk himself. So he was getting fatter and fatter, and I was getting skinnier.



* Nain = grandmother (Welsh)

So my uncle and auntie said they would take me for a few weeks to fatten me up.



It ended up they had me until I was five. I called them Mam and Dad.



But really they were my great uncle and aunt.

And when I was five, my auntie died.



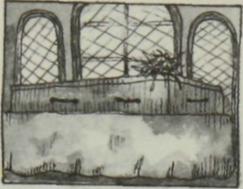
They wanted to get me a little black suit to wear to the funeral, but you couldn't get black for a kid that age.



So in the end they got navy blue. And I remember seeing all my new clothes strung up above the fire.



You did that, in them days.



After the funeral, someone come in a car to take me back to live with my mother.



My brother and my cousin were sitting in the back.



But I hardly knew them.

And do you know the first thing they said?



Do you know any rude jokes?



As it happened, I did know one. It went:



Oh my finger
Oh my thumb



Oh my head
And oh my bum.



And that was my dirty joke.



By Rhianna Boyle
Based on a story
told by



Dilys Boyle

Beneath the Figs

Mark O'Flynn

SHONA AND DEAN live on Abigail Street, a street that is twenty houses long on either side. It is a short, shady side street cutting between two main roads bludgeoning their way through the suburbs away from the city. Abigail Street is cool and quiet, while at either end, especially at peak hour, there is mayhem.

The shade is the result of a row of Morton Bay figs that buckle the footpaths of Abigail Street. The trees are on death row, having been placed under a council intervention order into their longevity. These trees have proved an ideal habitat for a colony of fruit bats that each year come to feast on the ripening figs. Every night, particularly during the full moon, the bats swirl drunkenly through the sky like the opening credits of an old Vincent Price film. In daylight they hang from the trees like blackened tumours. In the words of local residents, the colony has grown into a plague.

If she happens to leave it out overnight, by morning Shona's washing is a mess. Her uniforms are particularly vulnerable. Dean's car is also a mess. Every car in the street is a mess. A siren is set up in order to scare the bats out of the branches with short, sharp blasts like a ferry's foghorn. It partially works. The bats fly about frantically for a while, then settle again to their gorging. Unfortunately the neighbourhood children are also woken by the sudden noise and the locals begin to see there are pros and cons to this and other solutions.

One evening, after a night at the theatre where Steven Berkhoff tries to terrify them with dramatised tales of Edgar Allan Poe, they find themselves driving up Abigail Street at bat hour. They are everywhere. Suddenly, out of the distorted moonlight, a drunken bat falls from the sky and smacks against their windscreen. Shona screams. The bat's face is pointed, like a fox's muzzle. Its ears are sharp and, well, bat-like. Dean slams on the brakes and the bat, dribbling rabid saliva and fig juice, slides down the glass and off the bonnet, wings outstretched as if trying to hang on.

Other people have had similar experiences.

There are so many of them that their urine is starting to kill the fig trees. It looks as though the leaves, yellow and withering, have been sprayed with Agent Orange. The Botanical Gardens are apparently facing a similar problem. This is when their neighbour, Ian Ikin, contacts the council. He demands something be done about the bats. They should be sprayed with a natural solution of python excrement and shrimp paste, he says. The council

demurs. Their solution comprises a proposal to get rid of all the fig trees, to pave the entire nature strip with asphalt. There is a chorus of protest.

One of Shona and Dean's neighbours is a family of Plymouth Brethren. Scarf people, the children call them, although not to their faces. They appear to have no opinion whatsoever on the problem of the bats. Dean facetiously likes to think the bats are the agents of Satan come to test the resolve of the Brethren. On the other side are the Ikins. They are the ones who lobbied for the siren. The siren has been borrowed from a vintner friend of theirs who uses it to frighten birds from his vines. When the figs themselves come under threat the Ikins are the most vocal in defending the trees and the amenity they give to the local area. You can't underestimate, they say, the value of shade.

There is bat shit all over the footpaths of Abigail Street. It stinks of sour, fermented figs. Shona has to dodge the lumps as she walks from the car to the front door. Bats squeal in the trees, hanging there like great drips of bitumen. She shivers involuntarily. The invisible *whump* of their wings as they flap up the street is unsettling, especially after a long night shift where she has otherwise been dealing with patients' greatest fears. Nurses often work with the human condition *in extremis*. Her nerves are simultaneously exhausted and frazzled. The last thing she needs is bats.

In the Ikins' house music is blaring. She wonders if she should phone; ask them to turn it down. But she doesn't. On the other side, in the Brethren house, all is dark. The Ikins and the Brethren (called the Braithwaites) do not get on ideologically. Shona and Dean are the meat in the sandwich. The Ikins have no children. Shona and Dean have two. The Brethren have eight. The Ikins' yard is messy with straggly native banksias, acacias, and wattles. Pebble paths wind among them, and they have a birdbath, empty now due to water restrictions. Ian Ikin is vocal in using his lack of ownership of a lawnmower as a measure of his carbon footprint.

The Brethren's yard, by contrast, is clipped and shorn and barren. An expanse of couch lawn, bordered by a couple of pot-bound buxus shrubs. In their windows the lace curtains are never parted.

Mr. Braithwaite owns a muffler repair shop in an outer suburb. 'Owns' is perhaps the wrong word. The Plymouth Brethren (Inc.) are probably the owners and Mr. Braithwaite just manages it. Dean took his car there once when it sounded as though it had a chest infection. The most unusual thing about the Braithwaite's muffler shop is that they have no credit card facilities. There is no EFTPOS machine. There is no computer. There is a sign on the wall behind the receptionist's head that reads: *NO CHEQUES. CASH ONLY*. Dean recognises the receptionist and realises that she is Braithwaite's daughter. One of the eight. He also realises that she is pregnant. Dean has to catch a taxi to the bank to withdraw the cash in order to deal with this primitive system of doing things. Do they have some religious dispensation from accepting cheques? What a crock, he thinks. They have hydraulic lifts

don't they? They have pneumatic spanners.

Later that night Dean vents his innocuous spleen to Shona over the inconvenience.

'I had to get a taxi all the way to the bank and back. You'd think they'd give me mates rates, being neighbours and all, but no.' How dare, he wonders, they refuse to take his money? How, Shona wonders in return, did he not know the girl was pregnant?

'It was pretty obvious once she stood up.'

'No,' Shona corrects herself, 'I meant how is it that we live next door and never even noticed? What sort of neighbours are we?'

'Ones who respect their privacy.'

Shona doubts this. She worries about the breakdown of community values, how neighbours are becoming clusters of strangers, wary of each other.

Later she wonders: 'I wonder what hospital she's booked into?'

'Probably yours. That's the closest.'

'I wonder who the father is?'

'One of these other hanky-heads,' Dean says, 'there's cars pulling up there all the time.'

'I would have thought,' says Shona, 'that a group like the Brethren would be pretty vigorous about knowing who the father is.'

'Hanky-panky,' says Dean for no other reason than it is there to be said.

Shona and Dean actually like living next door to the Brethren family. There is no noise. There is barely any sign of people living there at all. Occasionally cars do gather and people stream into the plain, Besser bricked house and not a sound comes out. Dean has an image that the interior walls must be made of egg cartons, like the makeshift sound studios of his youth. But of course he has no idea. He has never peeped inside, though he has looked over the back fence. It is just as barren. Not even a sandpit for the kids. Isn't there something about them rejecting activities associated with fun? Fishing, for instance? Well, what are pneumatic spanners if not fun?

'I wonder which one is the grand Pooh-bah?' Dean asks one day, peering through the kitchen blinds as the cars begin to arrive.

'I don't think they have any ministerial order,' says Shona.

'Then why don't the men have to wear hankies on their heads?'

'I don't know.'

Shona is a nurse at the Prince of Wales hospital. She has just finished a stint in Oncology and a few months ago moved to Maternity. She likes the Maternity ward. It always gives her a feeling of hope. One day she notices a young girl in the Tressilian unit. Actually it is the scarf wrapped tightly across the girl's head that makes her look twice, and she recognises one of her neighbours. The girl's shoulders are hunched forward, as if she is trying to take the weight of the smock off her breasts. Shona recalls that awful sensation. She makes some congratulatory noises, but is embarrassed, not

only by the girl's rejection of her interest, but because she does not know the girl's name.

'Did everything go well?' Shona asks.

'Yes, thank you.'

'Did you have to have stitches?'

'No.'

'It's just that you're here in Tressilian.'

'We're just trying to find some alternative feeding method.'

'Oh, well good luck,' says Shona, not wanting to intrude, 'And congratulations.'

'Yes. Thank you.'

Shona walks off on her sensible rubber soles thinking: I could rot in my house before this girl came in to check on me.

Otherwise they would not have known there was a baby. There is no fanfare. No cots or prams or newborn paraphernalia wheeled into the bland brick house. No relentless midnight screaming. The Ikins want to take a bottle of champagne in there. By force. Shona says she does not think it would be a welcome gesture. So they drink the champagne themselves. Wetting the baby's head by proxy.

'I wonder what they've got hidden in their garage?' says Dean, 'I bet they've got fishing rods in there.'

After a few bottles they hear themselves getting a little raucous, however from next door there comes nothing but a stony silence.

As a trial run the council comes with a cherry picker and half a dozen men in hard hats with chainsaws and cuts down one of the fig trees. Admittedly it is dead, but that does not stop the Ikins working the phones. The Tree Preservation Officer is called to Abigail Street and work is put on hold. He detects a small contradiction in that the residents want the grey-headed flying foxes gone, but not the habitat to which they are attracted. He'll have to think about it.

Shona is always pleased to be rostered on to Home Visits. It gets her off the ward. Unsurprisingly, according to the logical sequence of events, one of her visits is to the house of the Braithwaites. Maddeningly, Shona has to travel all the way in to the hospital only to be given the address right next door to her own home. She drives back happy to think that afterwards she might be able to steal a cup of tea in her own kitchen, put a load of washing on. The street looks different in the middle of the day. She cannot believe how much sky there is above her yard. Sawdust from the amputated stump of the fig tree blows across the road.

She knocks on the Braithwaites' door and it is some minutes before the lace curtains flicker and an eye peers out. More minutes before the girl, a crimson scarf tight over her head as if holding down a haystack, opens the

door. Beneath the scarf her long hair hangs free, brushed and electric down the length of her back.

She stands back and ushers Shona inside. Shona, entering slowly, lets her eyes adjust to the dimness. She blinks. She has never seen a room like it. In the main room (it can hardly be a room for lounging in), there are about thirty hard-backed chairs lined up side by side around the walls. There is no other furniture. No pictures. No table. Just the rectangle of chairs. In the middle of the room on a mauve bunny-rug, like some sacrificial offering, lies the baby. There is some whispering from the far end of the room. Shona glances up to see the door quietly close. She coughs, trying to break the ice.

‘You worked at the muffler shop, didn’t you?’

There is a whispered snort from the far room. Shona can sense there is not a man in the building.

‘How do you know?’ asks the girl.

‘My husband ... oh, never mind. What seems to be the problem? I saw you were in Tressilian.’

Shona feels as though her voice is too loud.

‘My baby won’t feed properly.’

Shona can see she is young. Perhaps nineteen or twenty.

‘Let’s have a look.’

She goes to the tiny, swaddled bundle on the floor and kneels beside it. Carefully unwraps the soft blanket. She peers closely. She starts. The baby is yellow, but not jaundiced. It looks tiny and withered, pixieish, with pointed ears and, Shona sees, a pointed muzzle. Like a bat.

‘What’s wrong with her?’

‘They say it’s something called Edwards disease.’

Shona has never heard of it.

‘The doctors wanted to keep her, but my mother said it was time to bring her home.’

‘Edwards disease?’

‘It’s chromosomal.’

Shona stares at the shrivelled baby.

‘I’m embarrassed to have to ask this, but what’s your name?’

The girl balks. ‘Susan.’

At that moment the door at the far end of the room opens and the mother, Mrs. Braithwaite, and two other women who look just like her bustle in. They all wear identical crimson scarves and ankle length skirts. One of them holds a tray rattling with teacups. They fuss around Shona and the girl and the baby, which no one picks up.

One of the aunts—they can only be the mother’s sisters—asks Shona to take a seat, any seat, over by the wall.

‘Will you take tea?’ asks the aunt.

‘Yes I will, please.’

The aunt pours from a plain pot and for a moment that is the only sound.

‘Milk?’

'Yes please.'

A cup of tea is thrust into her hands. They sit in silence for a moment with hot cups in their laps.

'The issue,' says Mrs. Braithwaite from across the room, 'is that the baby won't take the breast. It is too large for the mouth. The teat of a bottle is also too large. So what are the alternatives? We were thinking of an eyedropper. Or there is formula, and perhaps a siphon.'

'Well, premature babies need all the colostrum they can get—'

'The baby is not premature. She went to full term. She is five weeks old.'

The baby, Shona looks again, is small enough to hold in one hand. She has seen zucchinis that are larger. The eyedropper is not such a silly idea.

'It's the chromosomes,' says Susan.

'It is not the chromosomes,' snaps Mrs. Braithwaite. 'It is God's will.'

'They say she will not live past two months,' says the girl to Shona, her eyes pooling with tears.

'And so now we have brought her home,' says Mrs. Braithwaite.

'Christina. To her home.'

'Is she taking any milk at all?' Shona asks.

'As soon as she takes a sip she perks it back up,' says Mrs. Braithwaite.

'Your flow might be too fast for the size of her stomach. We can look at that. But really, Susan, this baby would be better looked after in the hospital.'

'Thank you for your suggestion,' says Mrs. Braithwaite quickly, 'we shall consider your advice. But for the present we shall pursue the idea of the eyedropper.'

Suddenly there is a scarfed aunt on either side of Shona, helping her to her feet. One of them removes the unfinished teacup from her lap.

'But—' protests Shona.

'Thank you again,' says Mrs. Braithwaite.

Shona looks at Susan who says, 'If she goes back to hospital she'll die.'

'God will prevail,' says the aunt who has not yet spoken.

The aunts steer Shona towards the door.

'But—' Shona thinks rapidly, 'you'll need a breast pump.'

'Thank you for the suggestion,' crows Mrs. Braithwaite.

'Do your breasts hurt?'

Susan glares. She gives a little nod.

'For the mastitis put cabbage leaves in your bra,' Shona says.

'Thank you,' trills Mrs. Braithwaite, turning to her daughter.

'This is too much,' laughs one of the aunts, 'Cabbage leaves!'

The other one squawks, 'Breast pump!'

Shona finds herself outside the plain, wooden door at the top of the steps. The security screen snicks behind her. The couch lawn stretches to the fence. Not a weed. Next door, her own unkempt garden seems somehow foreign from this odd angle, as if appearing in a dream. She can see inside her own dining

room window. Realises that if she forgot to draw the curtains she would be plainly visible. Or that her children would be plainly visible.

She walks numbly out to her car. Behind her the lace curtains are so still they might be made of concrete. She does not even think about detouring into her own house. The washing can wait. She notices the postman riding past on his motor scooter. He skillfully pops some letters into her box without even stopping.

Shona sits in her car for a moment. There are some forms she should fill in. She is aware of the dark, sleeping shapes of the bats high in the fig trees, hanging on for grim life.

Breakfast at Cucina

Claudia Serea

Are you a gymnast?
the woman asks
when she finds out
my accent is Romanian.

Sure, I'd like to say.

In my country,
the little girls balance on beams
as soon as they come out
from their mothers' wombs.

They jump
and land in incredible poses,
always scoring a perfect ten,
just like Nadia.

The capital, Bucharest,
is just Budapest's suburbia,
where vampires flock at sundown,
rushing to Dracula's parties.

We shoot our dictators only once
every hundred years,
but don't worry,
Ceausescu is alive and well
on Elvis' secret island.

Are you a gymnast?

The question leaps
and lingers in midair
between the teacup
and the woman's lips.

No, I answer,
but I could be one,

the way I bend backwards sometimes
just to get through the day.

Vesuvian Dog

Chloe Wilson

The dead men don't move
me, nor the women,
bald, faceless papier-maché

lepers, lipless,
their eye sockets
plastered smooth.

There's something so quotidian
in those poses, some
suggestion that to die

is one more tick
on the to-do list, all
that sitting and

squatting, all that
lying, all that hoarding
of the master's purse.

And who hasn't glided
past the museum's
ceramic fragments,

here another urn, bowl shard,
looking glass, here's another arrowhead,
here, one more shin bone.

No; from all the moulds
left by the bodies
of this molten town

it's the brass
collared dog
who's most articulate—

through its contortion
we can see the cloud advance,
the sulphur exhaust expanding

like a newly woken bat.
This is how we witness
a rain of cinder-flakes

singe through all the altar cloths,
how we know that heat has weight
and air can be snuffed

into nothingness. We cannot be sure
if it saw the magma's glow
approaching

or how fiercely it strained
against the chain
driven in to protect passers-by;

nonetheless, a little canine wisdom
is evidenced in the fact
that the fangs were out—

when combined with
the movement of its body
does the dog not seem to suggest

that while we may be
overwhelmed, it's still worth flipping
ourselves inside out,

or sticking up our defenceless paws—
anything, anything that proves we tried
to hold the fire back.

Pacific Tsunami Found Poems

Teresia Teaiwa

1.

The telephone says
The body says
The multinational corporation says

Samoans had taken the sea's friendship for granted
We can't imagine It's
Unimaginable
Free phone calls to Samoa (But
only one Samoa)

2.

God's minister says
God's children say
God says

The wave was God's way
We can't concentrate on our assignments
I prepared a speech but I will not be reading it

3.

Surfer says
Waiter says
Sean says

The sea got sucked down below the reef
What's one metre of water going to do?
Stupid

4.

Teddy Bear says
Ute says
Baby says

Hello to the pole
Hello to the tree
Hello to strangers on the beach

5.
Solomon says
Viti says
Niue says

Gizo
Floods
Heta

6.
New Zealand is scrambling
An Air Force Orion

New Zealand is scrambling
Hercules staff
and supplies

New Zealand is scrambling
Deputy Prime Minister Bill English

New Zealand is scrambling
More Kiwi casualties feared

7.
A depression moves
with a weak ridge extending

Then, late in the day,
a cold front sweeps

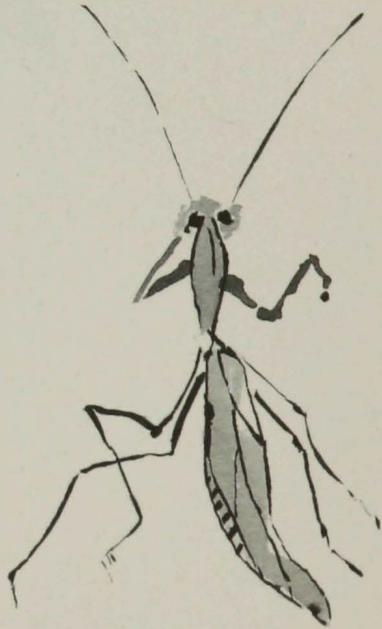
Strengthening westerly
in the moist westerly

Slow moving over
a cold southwest flow

Cold Southerlies spread over
high over, ridge over

Then, late in the day,
a cold front sweeps





their autumn shadows
hold hands
for the last time

in the shallows
of the dark river
light ripples

autumnal dusk
a fading light
in his workshop

wet season
a cane toad beats me
through the front door

first winter—
she adds her breath
to the fog

spin cycle
our shirts
mimic an embrace

war memorial
an angel looks down
on a stone baby

the pope prays
on tv—doves
fly past my window

a woman knits
flowers
on a soldier's grave

at the used book sale
lots of best sellers
by what's-his-name

recycling ...
the dog sorts bacon rind
from potato peelings

her first birthday
the excitement
of paper

first class
these people
might become my friends

crossing Sunday Creek
on Saturday afternoon—
making good time

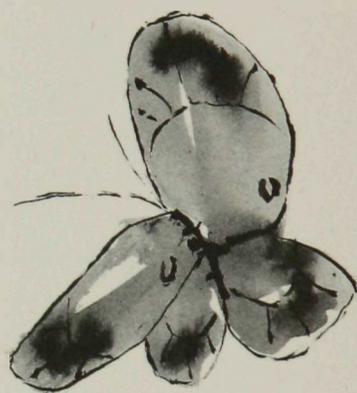
hot again—
the neighbours watch
Westerns

party at midnight—
the two-year-old
looks older than the adults

toilet wall
my name scrawled above someone
I barely remember

hung-over—
the red eye
of the traffic light

as a blood-sun sets
old couples stroll
hand in hand
the impress of your ring
still marks my finger



Love Poem

Adrian Stirling

The television plays
In your empty room
The refrigerator clicks on
Inside the oven
Something is quietly burning
Beyond the fence
The neighbours argue
A dog barks
Our lives intersect
On driveways, footpaths
And in supermarket aisles
I dream of you
When the streetlights are on

The Moths

Isabella Mead

everything happens in the in-
between. the action is in the in.

in-between is the moth I keep
in my cupped hands and your

batting wings against my skin
is the seconds I count before

and the times you slam into my palm
is the kisses I've collected from

wire fences. they're tied like red
ribbons and the wind unties them.

nowhere sings your antennae and your
wanderlust. it is the times I've stood

waiting at train stations for loose
trains. you are the sound of wind

and your wings are dense like
diamonds and unripe peaches because

no one dares touch them because
their softly dustiness makes our

bones shiver because you are
an intimation of death.

in you is where time stretches like
a cat in the sun and in you is where

we should look.

On the Attractions of Innocence

Emma Rooksby

We can never go back, never return.
You smile as you scoop sangria from the bowl,
finger my albums' battered covers.
We can't recall what it is to know
and not to know.

Curtains around the bed make cataracts
of light, mist of morning. The dip
your side of the bed we both ignore.
And I believe in your youth:
the way your hip curves lifts my heart,
it covers me.

The streets are out there still, but taller,
more respectable, wealth poured into pools,
piled into garages. Schools
are recruiting blithe children, the hills
behind the town are blue, the ocean
beyond endless.

And you in my chair, rocking, poised
in your infinity, that sudden smile
of yours flickering like firelight
as you hold out your smooth arms,
taking advantage
of my desire
for innocence.

Chandra Tal

M.K Bell

I laced my boots
as if they were more important than breakfast.
It was still in the mornings and I could hear bells
high above the rim of blue glacier lake.

I walked by the mirror sky and saw our tent in glass water,
following the sound of bells across rocks and scree
that looked grassless but were not.

In thin air I found a field in the sky
where horses wearing tin bells
grazed beneath icy eyes.

Shaggy heads clipping grass.
These four, in this high meadow
waiting for the Apocalypse
the trumpet of their rider's call.
No sound but the singing of horses.

I took a stone from that secret plateau and buried it half
by the side of the lake below our tent
in the mirror of the mountains.

Looking in the lake
I saw myself and the half buried stone staring back at me.

Until at noon the wind came up
sending rocks chattering down the scree with snaps like gunshot.
Glacier breath whistling across the lake,
shattering the reflection
of four horses,
the tent,
the stone and me.
In the mirror of Chandra Tal.

Horse Skull Dreaming

Shari Kocher

'... the best way to [procure a run] is to go outside and take up a new run, provided the conscience of the party is sufficiently seared to enable him without remorse to slaughter natives ...' Neil Black, squatter, 9 Dec, 1839.

Blonde-black, blonde-black

Dreaming backwards

Horses' bridles made of hair

With the horses we were going somewhere
a soakage, they said, or a watering hole

Blonde-black, blonde-black

Dreaming backwards

under a milk-studded sky
that tumbled and glowed
a thousand campfires gleaming

Blonde-black, blonde-black

but in the gloaming
what I saw were men on horses
roaming

Blonde-black, blonde-black

Horses' bridles made of hair

and every man bit who sucked them
til they ran with blood
and the last man kicked
with black boots on
to roll them, roll them over

Horses' bridles made of hair

'They gave the men a child to lay next to the fire. They put it close to the fire and roasted it.' GA Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, 7 June, 1841.

Pushing circulations of vastness through
The womens' breasts
hung in perpendicular sacks
and every man bit who sucked them
Go back! Go back! my mother cried

The Human Rights Commission's Enquiry into Racist Violence found that it was common for white police to rape indigenous women after taking them into custody.' Aileen Moreton-Robinson in *Talkin' up to the white woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press. 2000: 170.

Rolled in ashes and cooked
like damper
Go back! But no one
is there
Rolled in ash and keening

This is my mother's house
I hear myself say
but it cannot be, because
this is my mother's house
and I am in it

I run outside screaming

'In my country, Wiradjuri, a large mob of my countrymen, women and children were herded and driven like sheep before the guns to the big swamps near Bathurst. There they were 'dispersed' with guns and clubs, whereupon these pioneering, head-hunting whites cut off a large number of the peoples' heads, boiled them down in buckets and sent 45 of the skulls and other bones off to Britain.' Kevin Gilbert in *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry*. Ringwood: Penguin Books. 1988: preface.

The horse's skull in Arthur Boyd's paintings
belonged to a horse called Flame
who belonged to a white girl who loved that gelding
and buried it under some flame trees
in Arthur Boyd's paddock
before he came to claim it
as his own

but the head of the horse
in *Bridegroom going to his wedding* is the head
of an Aboriginal woman with a bridegroom
riding on her back

Blonde-black, blonde-black
Horses' bridles made of hair

Playing cards, the men
Blonde-black, blonde-black
Shearers playing for a bride
playing Piquet, Euchre, Whist
who will get first kiss, cunt
tied to a chain

Horses' bridles made of hair
Rabbit hutch raw with splinters
(Run! Baby! Run!)
Blonde-black, blonde-black
Horses' bridles made of hair

Crouched down low
burning slow
there's a fire
beneath the ground

Smoke rises
I push it under
Sssh, says Lydia (my child-bride mother)
it's only thunder

In the silence
crouching low

I can hear the horses' breathing
can hear the horses' breathing ...

**(In response to the institutionally supported massacres of
Indigenous Australians at the hands of white settlers as documented
at the Bunkilika Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne, and further
inspired by Arthur Boyd's *Bride Series and Bundanon Paintings*).**

The Dead

Ocean Without a Shore, Bill Viola

Andy Jackson

Alone with your body and the pummelling weight of a wall of water. Is it possible to stay veiled, never enter your own life? Despite promise or threat, astonished at breath's fragility, you move through, muscle and heart shuddering. Pulled by the deep swell, all is roar and crash, ocean-storm of the heart's thump and spasm, a continual entering. Light pours from the scalp, the chest, your wrists. Behind you, your reflection or your real life. How strange it is to stand alive now at a crowded intersection, hear the motors of revolving billboards, idling cars, the muffled tics of earphones, each soft arterial push and suck, a cold glove cradling the heart. How your body holds itself is its own aching history. Such love in the muscles of your open empty arms. Who are you looking for? Their grief for you has folded up under routine. Time must have its tide. The ocean carries and throws you back onto sand, your body the only shore. Air in the shell of the skull
is not emptiness.

Cuts

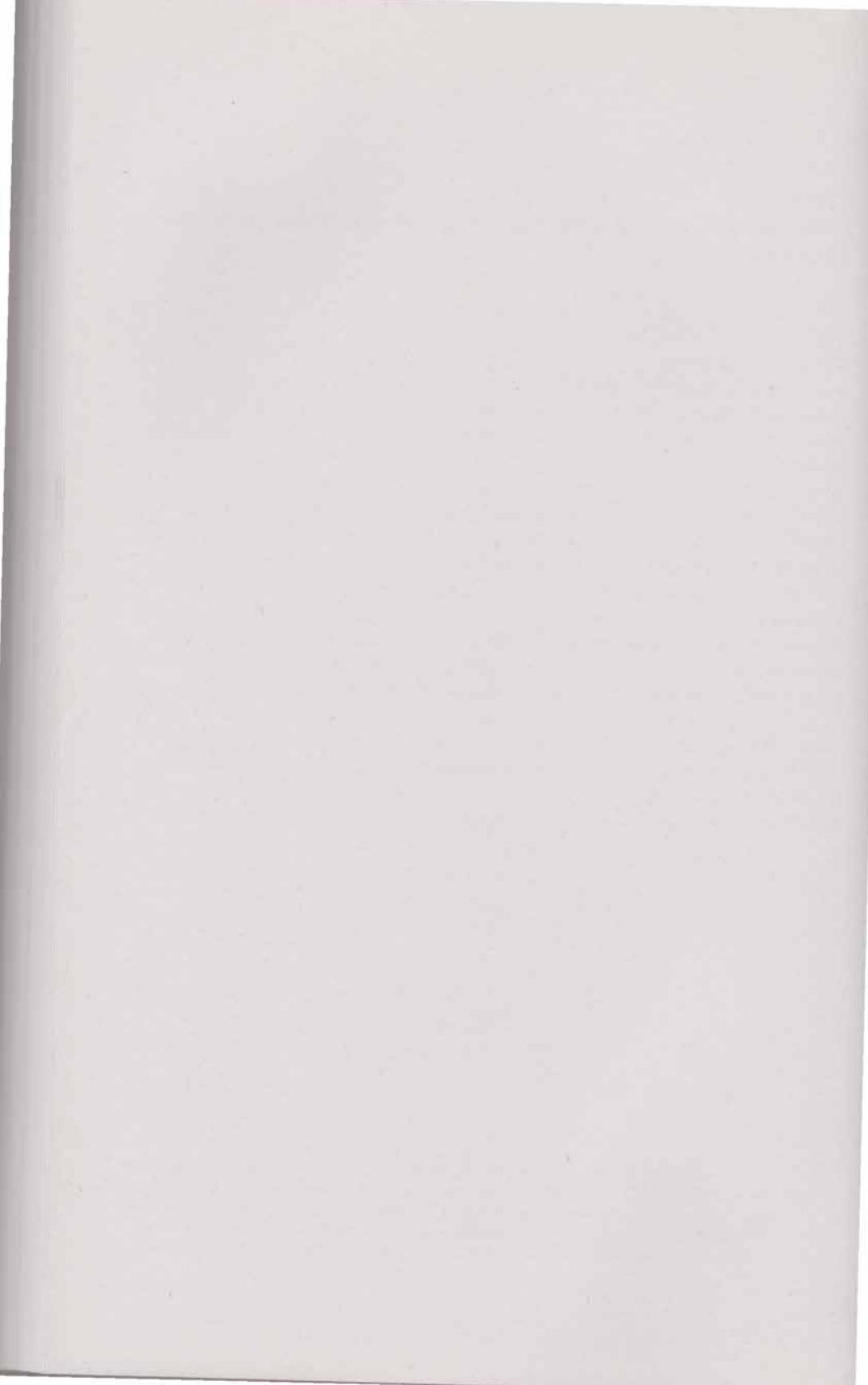
of the George E Bunyan Collection, Nepean District Historical Society

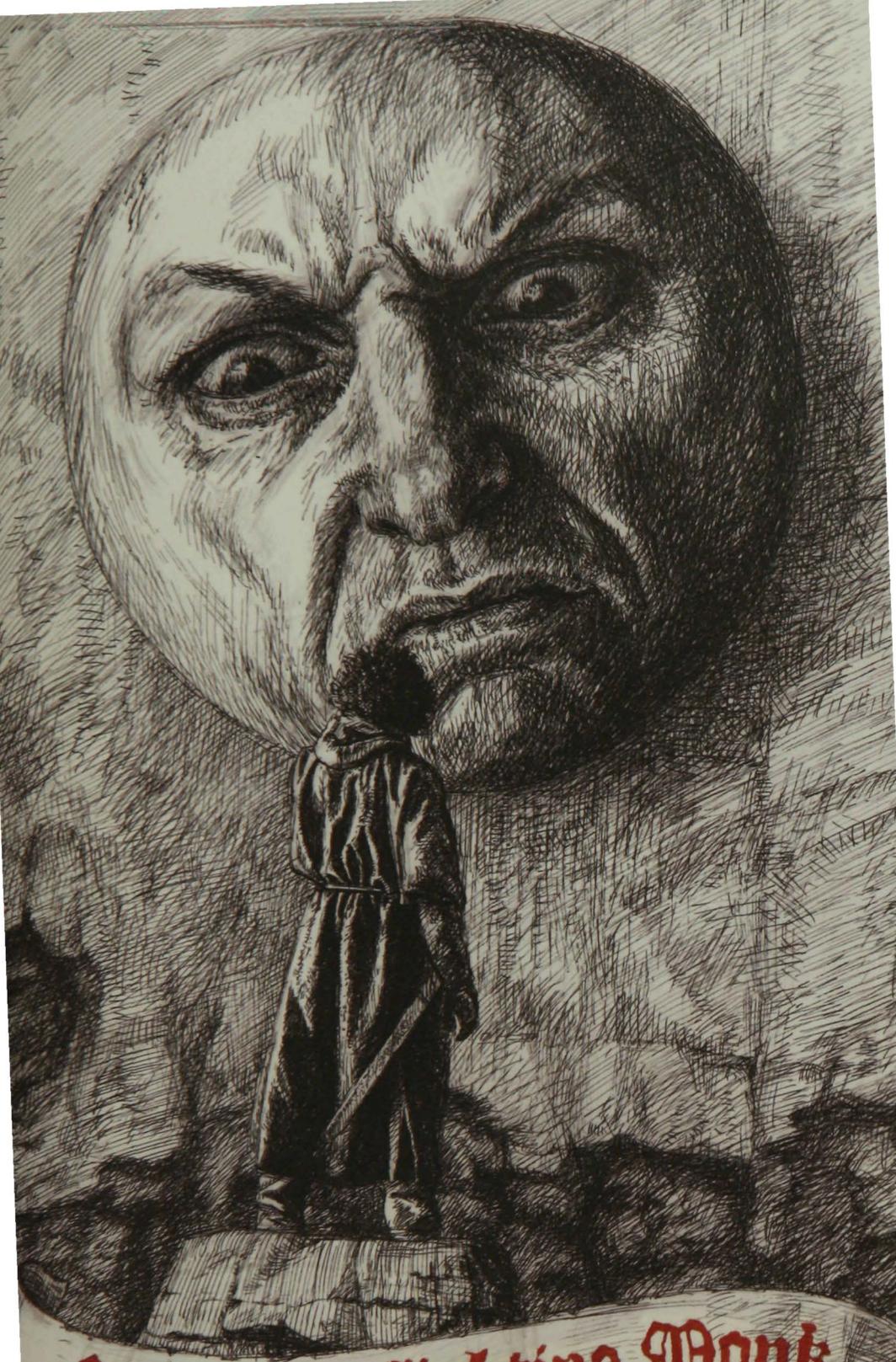
Gregory Horne

For a butcher
to cultivate an interest in history
is the most natural thing in the world.
Who else could conceive of mapping
such an unwieldy beast?
Who better to make such clean cuts;
to run a knowing confident hand
over the hide of time, then to
bring the broad tablet of interpretation down
so very hard, so assuredly
between gristle and knuckle.
He could thumb through events like waxen fat
mincing words, feeding them through his machine,
to make of our difficult centuries a string of tight sausage.

Above the gleaming cold counter,
high on the gleaming tile wall he could keep
a map of nations pre-white man
next to a 'Cuts of Beef' cow-topo graphy.

George E Bunyan was born in Emu Plains and ran a butcher shop in Bedford Street. He had a museum within his shop containing Aboriginal artefacts and items of local interest. According to Norma Ritchie his collection was 'an invaluable source of research on local Aboriginal and early colonial history.'
He was secretary of the Nepean District Historical Society from 1947-1960.





Itinerant Fighting Monk

Miguel Immanuel Canavillo (Michael E. Camilleri)



WHY DID YOU BECOME A MONK,
MIGUELO CAMILLO ?

PURELY SELFISH
REASONS.

EVEN AS A CHILD,
I WAS GIFTED
WITH A SENSE OF
THE IMMINENT
ARRIVAL OF THE
DIVINE.

GOD HIMSELF
SEEMED RIGHT
AROUND THE CORNER,
JUST UNDER MY
BREATH,
ABOUT TO BURST
INTO THE WORLD
WITH A THOUSAND
TRUMPETS AND THE
ONRUSH OF A
MILLION TONS OF
WATER,
THROUGH A HOLE IN
THE AIR,
DIRECTLY IN FRONT
OF ME.



TODAY I HAD A CHAT WITH AN OLD FRIEND.

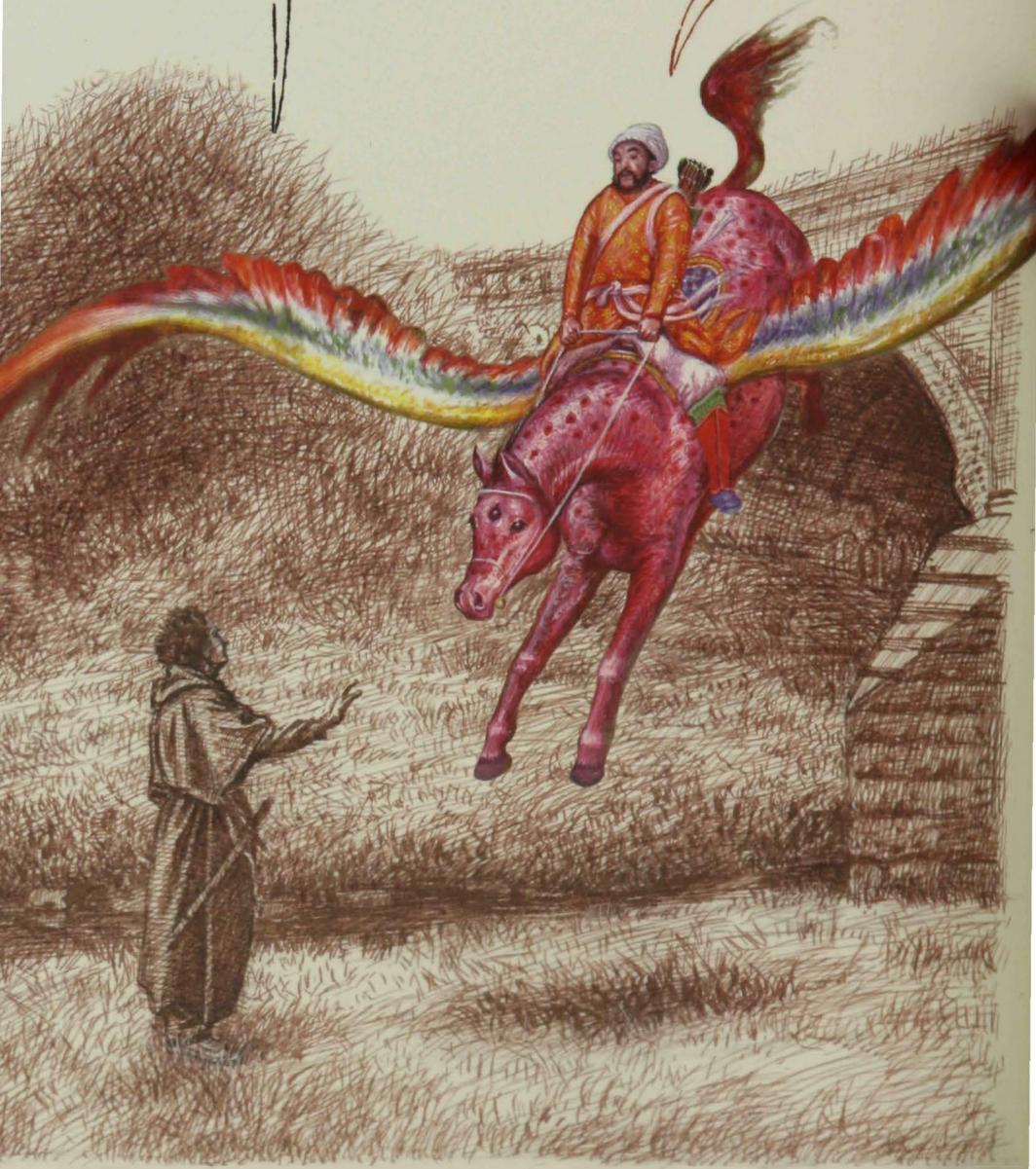


HAMZA OLD SOCK!
IS IT STILL "CONVERT OR DIE"?

NOT TODAY.
I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT
WITH A DRAGON.
WATCH OUT FOR SPECTRALS,
MANUELO.
THEY'RE AROUND.

THAT MAGNIFICENT
HORSE OF YOURS IS OFF-
-SPRING OF A DEV AND A PERJ,
IS SHE NOT?

ASGAR, YES.



AS I WAS BEING BORN I WENT INTO SOME KIND OF TRAUMA AND SWALLOWED MERCURIUM.

I CAME INTO THIS WORLD CHOKING ON MY OWN BLACK SHIT.

THIS GAVE ME AN AFFINITY WITH DEATH FROM AN EARLY AGE. I WOULD SCRIBBLE ON THE WALLS IN BLACK, ONLY BLACK.

BUT I COULD ALSO FEEL THE NEXT WORLD, SO CLOSE. SIGNS, OMENS, INVISIBLE SPIRIT SURROUNDS US. THE WHOLE OF HEAVEN IS JUST BELOW THE SURFACE.

ALL MY LIFE I HAVE SCRATCHED AWAY AT THIS SURFACE.

I BECAME A MONK BECAUSE I THOUGHT, IF I DID, I WOULD BREAK THROUGH, AND GOD WOULD BURST INTO MY WORLD. HEY, DO YOU WANT TO SEE A PICTURE OF MY SON?

SURE.



THAT'S...

HE KEEPS MOVING. HE'S THREE.

SO. DID HE?

WHAT?

DID HE BURST INTO THE WORLD?

RUBEN (MY SON) IS THREE.
HE IS OBSESSED WITH TRAINS.

HE CAN MAKE A TRAIN OUT OF ANYTHING;
HE PUTS ONE THING NEXT TO ANOTHER..

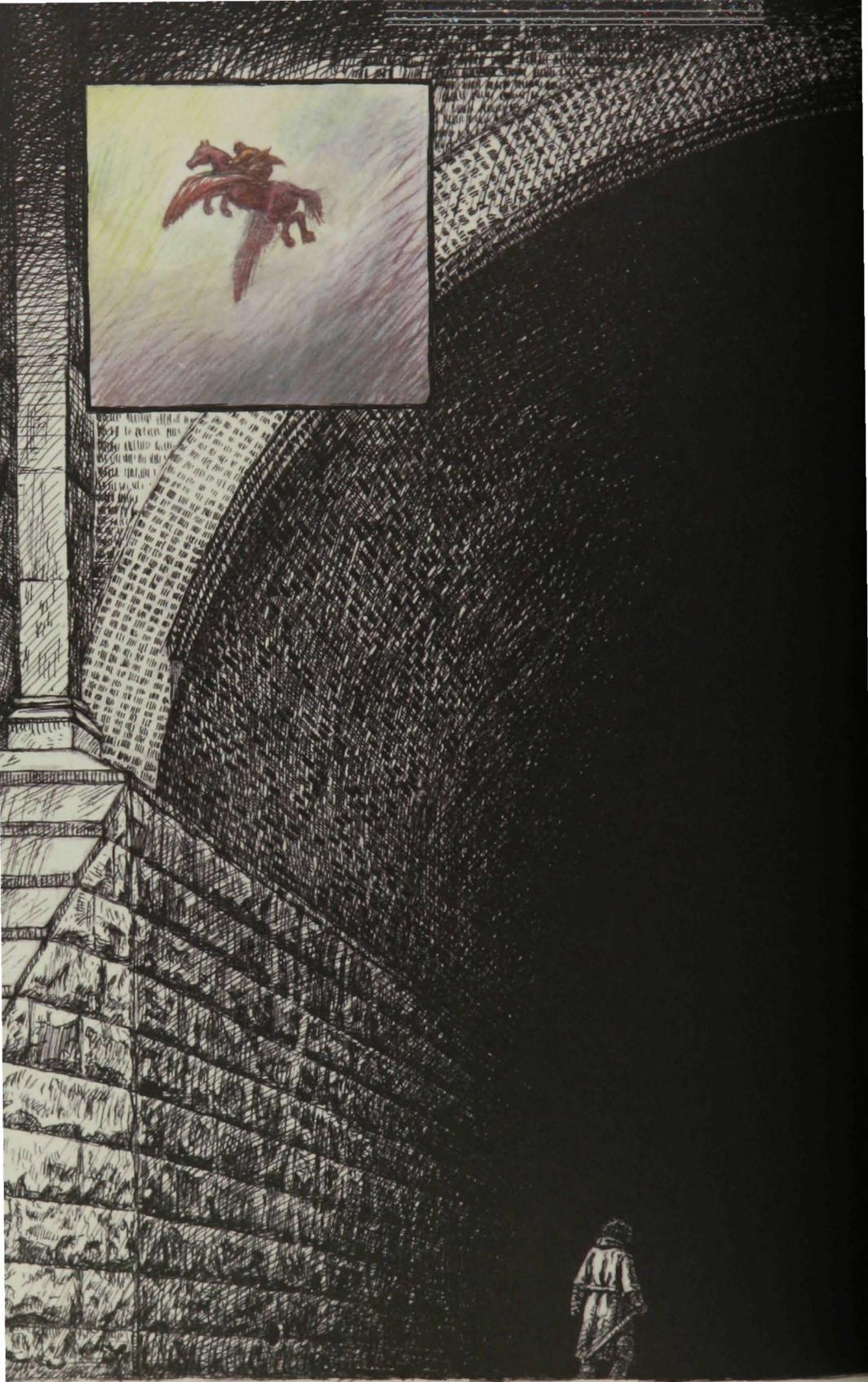


SO LONG, OLD FRIEND,
MAY GOD BLOW
UPON YOUR BACK

MAY HIS MASSIVE
WISDOM PENETRATE
YOU REPEATEDLY,
MY FRIEND

.. A TRAIN BEGINS.





MIGUEL ENTERS



THE CENTRE OF THE BOOK



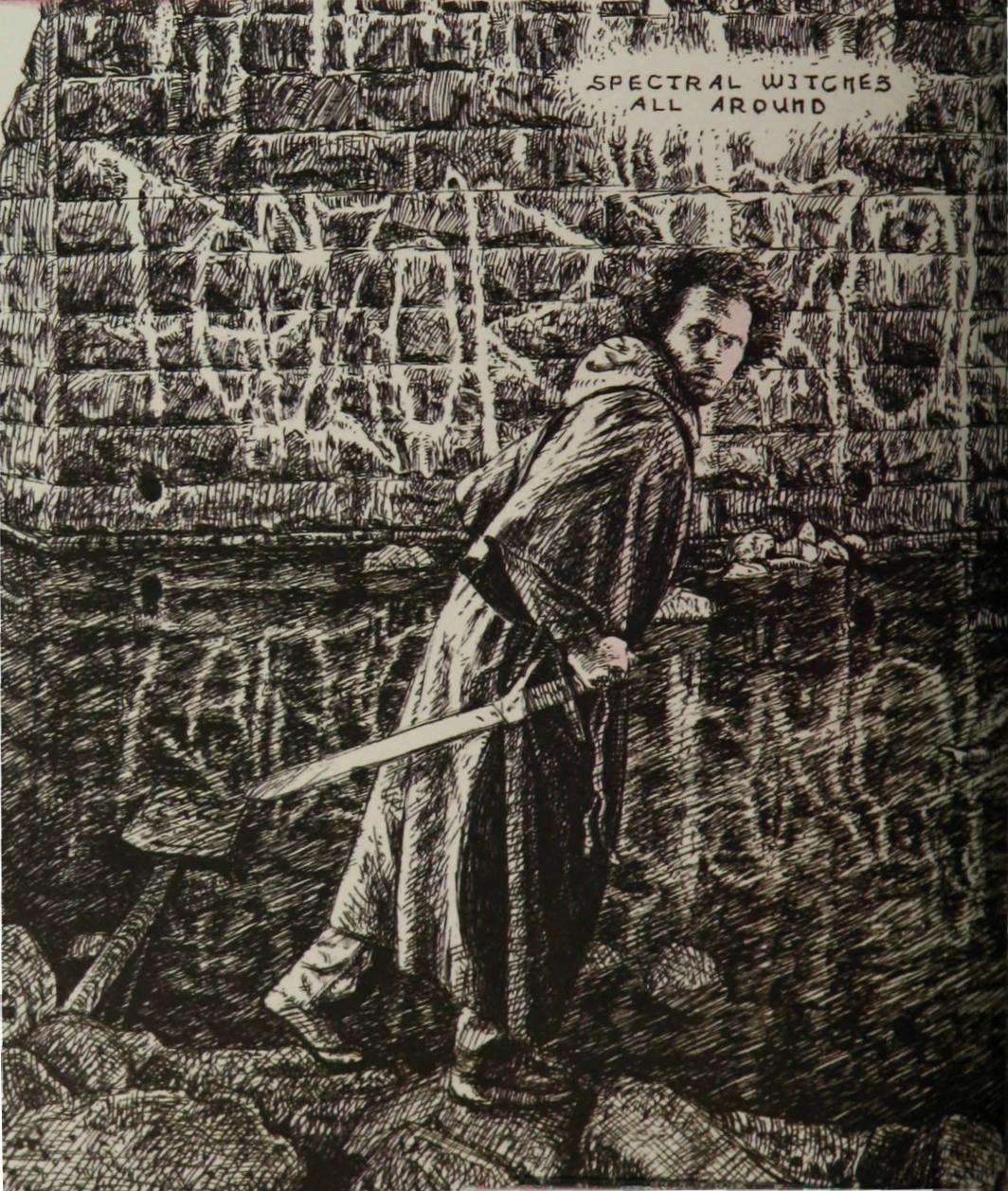
THEY SAY THE
PRIESTHOOD IS FOR
PAEDOPHILES.

I KNOW, I KNOW;
MY RELIGION ONLY
HAS THREE
TEACHINGS:

GOD MADE THE WORLD
IN A WEEK,

GAYS GO TO HELL,

AND IF YOU WANT TO
TOUCH UP CHILDREN,
TAKE THE CLOTH.



SPECTRAL WITCHES
ALL AROUND



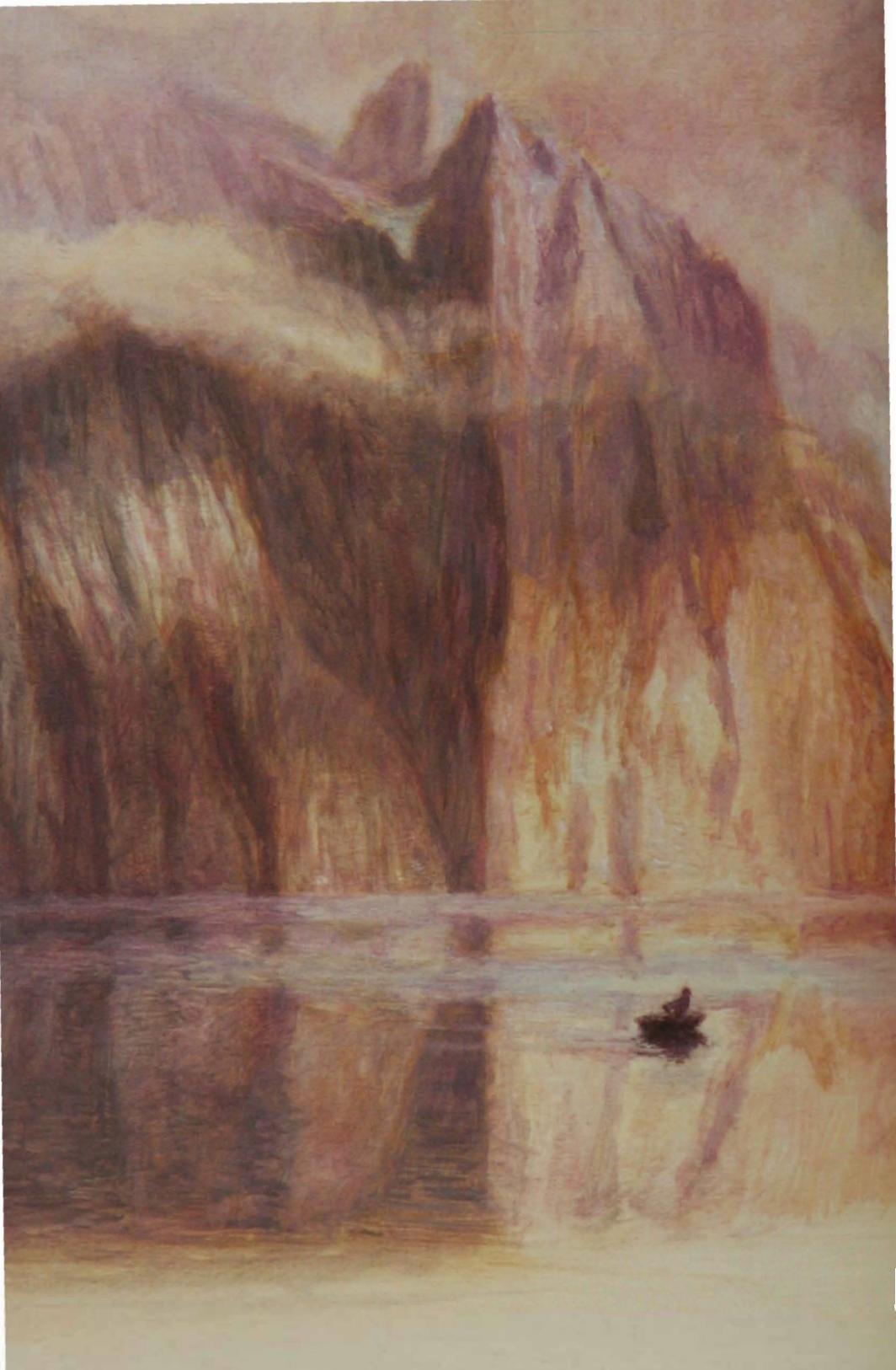
WHAT ABOUT;
'KILL IN THE
NAME OF GOD'?

THAT DOESN'T
REALLY COUNT;
PEOPLE WILL
FIND ANY
EXCUSE TO KILL
EACH OTHER.
DO YOU THINK
ONE LESS BODY
WOULD DROP
REGARDLESS?

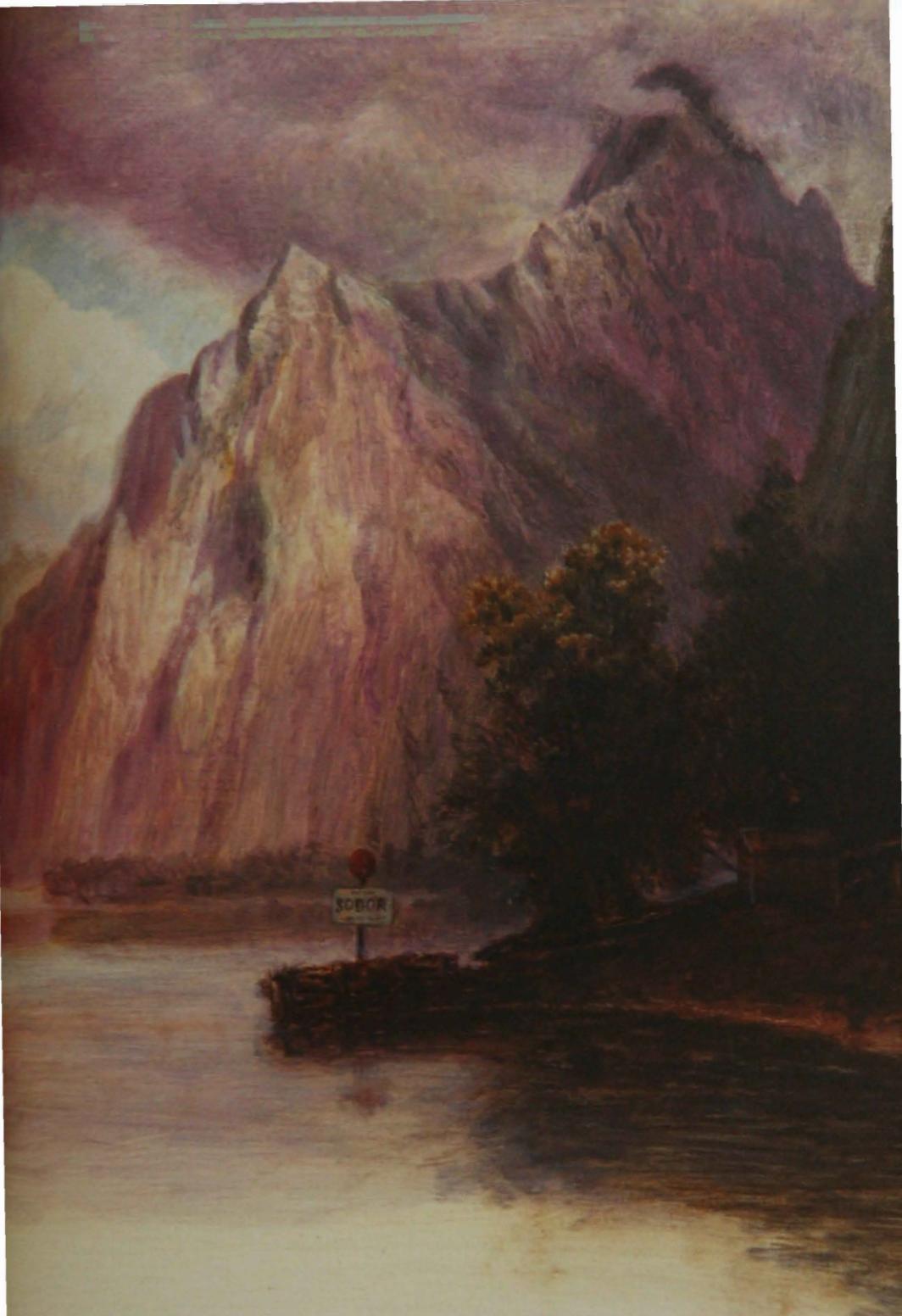
LEAVE GOD
OUT OF IT.
I'LL KILL YOU
ANYWAY.

DO YOU HAVE A LITTLE JESUS IN YOUR HEART?





DO YOU HAVE A LITTLE JESUS IN YOUR HEART?
WHO INSPIRES COMPASSION IN YOU,
AND LOVE FOR ALL THE WORLD?



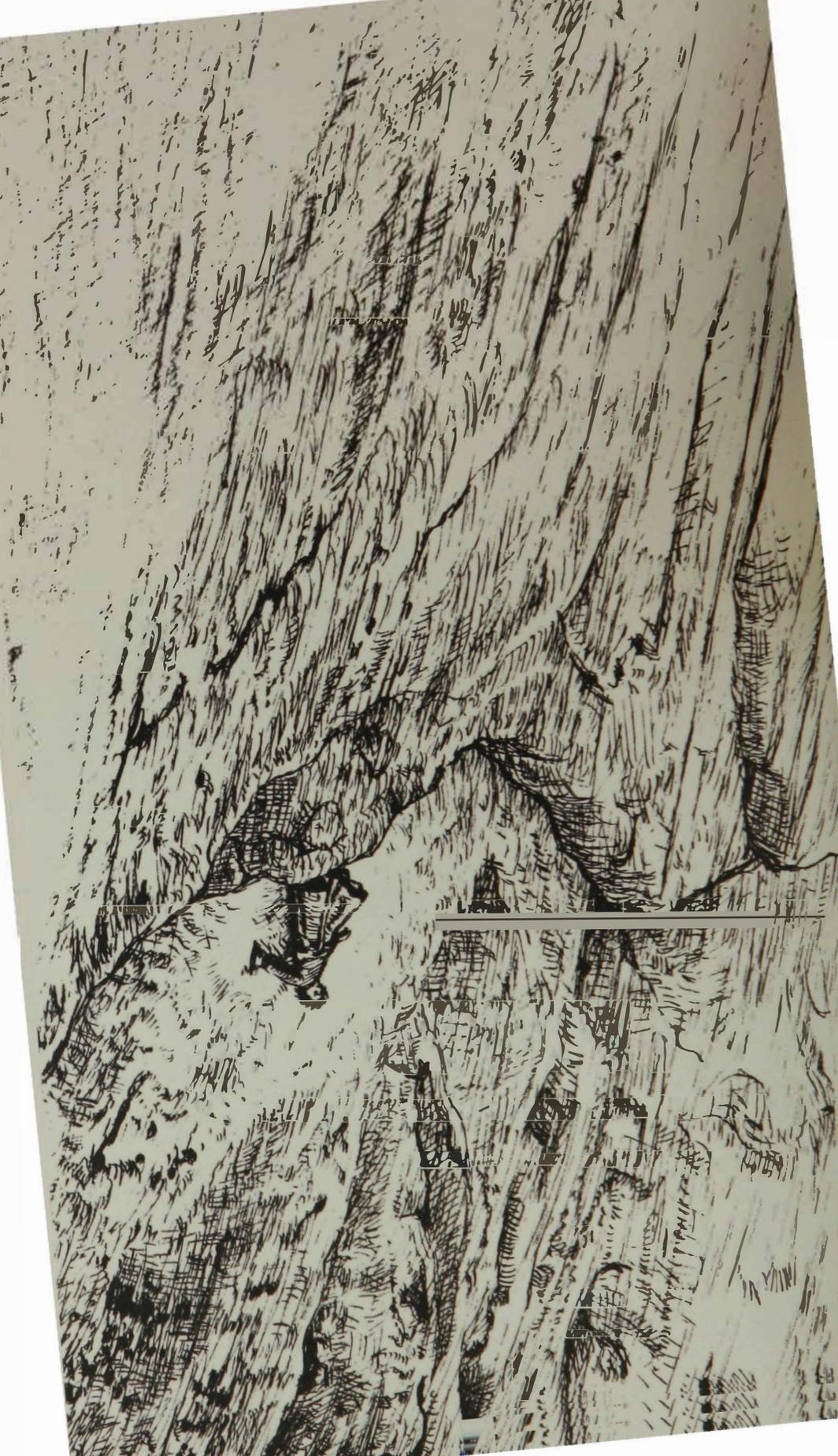
MY JESUS LIVES IN THE DARK.
THERE IS A BLACK PLACE I WANDER,
TIME AND AGAIN. A HOLE SO VAST
NO FRIEND CAN FIND ME IN IT.
BUT HE IS THERE.

HE WAITS FOR ME IN THAT WRETCHED HOLLOW PLACE,
SO WHEN I RETURN I WON'T BE ALONE.

I LOVE HIM FOR THAT WITH ALL MY HEART.

HE HAS WAITED IN THE BLACKNESS FOR CENTURIES.
HIS SKIN IS WHITE AND THIN,
HIS EYES, FOR LACK OF USE, MILKED OVER.
HE IS HIDEOUS AND I LOVE HIM.







Woman Crying in the Supermarket

Mark Miller

There's a woman crying
in the frozen food aisle
of the supermarket
her tears are turning to ice on her cheeks,
her feet are encased in a pool of frozen tears.
She has one hand clutching her trolley
somewhere between the frozen peas
and the ice cream compartments,
her other hand holds a mobile to her ear,
her mouth is slightly open.
People file past her, they look, stare,
they want her to move.
The aisle is slippery,
beginning to ice over with her frozen tears,
trolleys become stuck,
clogging the whole aisle,
even Security can't budge her.
Soon emergency workers arrive
with sharp tools and pressure hoses.
The ice is chipped and liquefied around her.
Lifted and placed in a trolley
like a tumbled statue
she is pushed through the fractured ice
away from the aisle,
past the fresh food section
where a man holding a ticket
and wearing a fish on his head
waits impatiently
for the deli to reopen.

LIFE-AFFECTING INFORMATION

SCIENSATI

CSTM

THE STUDY OF
CARBOLIC METASTURMOIDSTM
-- REVEALED!

Have you ever felt
incomplete? Empty?
Achy? Bored?

Have you ever felt
you could be more
than you are -- if
outside forces weren't
conspiring to stop you?

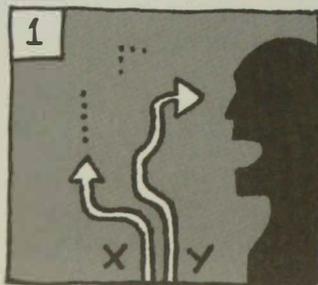


The ecstasy of life truth.

SCIENSATICSTM CAN SAVE YOUR MIND.TM
SCIENSATICSTM CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE.TM

F. Howard Handler discovered Carbolic Metasturmoids in 1957 while working alongside Nikola Tesla and Brian Dennehy. Since then, he has not been sick a single day!

HOW DOES IT WORK.TM



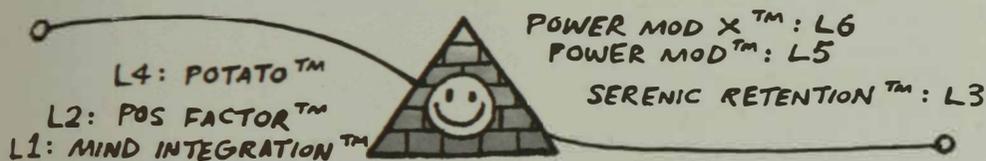
SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE STARS HAVE EMBRACED THE STUDY OF SCIENSATICS™



Internationally recognised movie star GOF BUDLEE and famed supermodel PRALÍN benefit spiritually and genetically from the power of the pursuit of the study of Sciensatics™.

THE SCIENSATICS™ BRICK™ TRIANGLE™

The base of the Brick Triangle™™ is Mind Integration™.



F. Howard's Column of Engagement

F. Howard Handler discovered the Column of Engagement in 1967 while taking tea with the Queen of Poland. It is now the standard system used for conversation & other dealings with non-Sciensatics™ (or Reductables™)

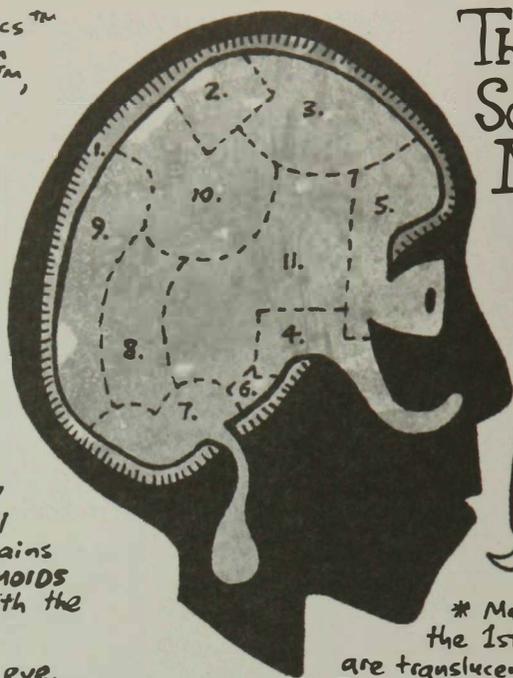
THE SCIENSATICA™ PHYSICA™

F. Howard Handler wrote the Sciensatica™ Physica™ while studying Doctoral Medicine at Oxford University alongside Mohandas Ghandi and future soul giant "Dr." Elmo.

It is F. Howard's exhaustive atlas of the human body. Reading it will illuminate a number of organs most people* don't know they have.

* Reductables are, in fact, missing most of the 7,429 organs found inside a student of Sciensatics, such as the Galactus Chimera.

1. The skull of a Sciensatics™ student is thinner than that of a Raductable™, but constructed of a space-age polymer unknown to the universe at large.
2. An empty bit, soon to be filled by wealth & power.
3. This section can enable the Sciensatic™ to see through any material in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th dimensions*.
4. The Sciensatic mind leaks into the nasal cavity, where it gains CARBOLIC METASTURMOIDS from communion with the ciliatum.
5. The mind becomes eye. Connectives are formed. Life truth is imminent.
6. Be careful. Chewing vigorously can dislodge this section.
7. This section investigates the CARBOLIC properties of partially swallowed food, and steals alcholia mentalis™ from cheeses and tea.
8. HINDLO. Photocopies your important thoughts for later filing.
9. HINDLO HINTER. Makes duplicate copies the HINDLO doesn't know about.
10. Is kind of shaped like a mushroom.
11. The heart and centre of the Sciensatic mind. Two hundred METASTURMOIDS per hour combine to facilitate a POWER ON MOD. Bisirinic reintegration results.



The Sciensatic™ Mind

MY PHILOLOGY™ IS... AT THE FORE-FRONT.

* Materials of the 1st dimension are translucent only to F. Howard Handler.

A FACT.

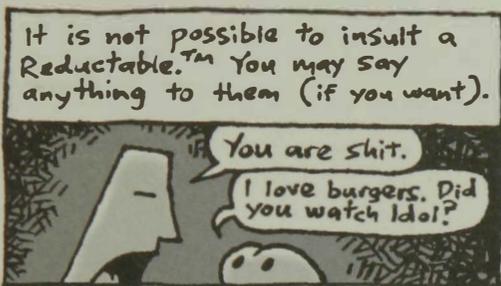
Unraveled, the Sciensatic™ mind would become an unstoppable being of unparalleled confidence. This confidence would glow brighter than our planet's sun, although the light colour would be of a bluish tint. It would weigh about the same as an unladen Toyota Hilux.



Once, everyone believed. Nowadays, most people ACT as though they believe. The finest actors are those that embrace
SCIENSATICS.™

-- Josephine Waite
L5™

DEALING WITH REDUCTABLES™: A PRIMER

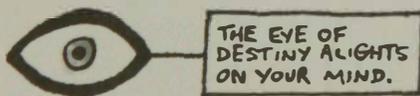


Most of the time, however, it is best to simply bend them to your will.



Reductables cannot withstand a mass metasturmoid™ release. PHYTOCELL MALADJUST

This has been a preview of all that is in store for the student of Sciensatics™.



Our knowledge is your power.
Your wealth is our wealth.
All can be ours.

Together.
It will.

Yes.
WHAT IS THE ADDRESS TO WRITE TO?
YOU KNOW THE ADDRESS.
IT IS YOUR PATH.
OR LOOK IT UP.
Go.

The start.

Sciensatics presents the

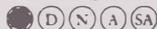
EON

Frictovector test

Instructions

Write carefully. DO NOT ERASE! If you need to change sex, your response is the incorrect response.

Example



1. I like to have a lot of people around me.
2. I'm pretty good about pacing myself so as to get things done on time.
3. I believe letting students hear controversial speakers can only confuse and mislead them.
4. I like to be where the action is.
5. I believe we should look to our religious authorities for decisions on moral issues.
6. Poetry has little or no effect on me.
7. I often get into arguments with my family and co-workers.
8. At times I have been so ashamed I just wanted to hide.
9. Sometimes I'm not as dependable or reliable as I should be.
10. I have a lot of intellectual curiosity.
11. I often feel helpless and want someone else to solve my problems.
12. I never seem to be able to get organised.
13. I consider myself the most important person in the universe.
14. I often try new and foreign foods.
15. I spend money when I am depressed or unfulfilled.
16. I think F. Howard Handler is one of the most enlightening men I have ever read about.
17. I have a credit limit of more than ten thousand dollars.
18. My loyalty is unshakeable, even by the threat of incarceration.
19. I am intrigued by the patterns I find in art and nature.
20. For a price, I'd do anything except pull the trigger. For that I'd need a pretty good cause.

Enter your responses here—remember to enter responses *across the rows*.

SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

1	SD	D	N	A	SA	2	SD	D	N	A	SA	3	SD	D	N	A	SA	4	SD	D	N	A	SA	5	SD	D	N	A	SA
6	SD	D	N	A	SA	7	SD	D	N	A	SA	8	SD	D	N	A	SA	9	SD	D	N	A	SA	10	SD	D	N	A	SA
11	SD	D	N	A	SA	12	SD	D	N	A	SA	13	SD	D	N	A	SA	14	SD	D	N	A	SA	15	SD	D	N	A	SA
16	SD	D	N	A	SA	17	SD	D	N	A	SA	18	SD	D	N	A	SA	19	SD	D	N	A	SA	20	SD	D	N	A	SA

Have you responded to all of the statements? _____ Yes _____ No

Have you entered your responses in the secret boxes? _____ No

Have you responded accidentally? _____ Yes _____ No

Barbara Cartland Love Poem

Eddie Paterson

you may now be exposed to a little too much of my writing for which i apologise. what with the [redacted] gout & now, terrible. no one should be put through such ringer. i fear i'm terrible with [redacted]. though, if you would be like it, stomach, we might a cup of tea or something sometime i'm interested, as i don't know much at all about science (plays)...my saturday evening was spent trying to avoid trashbags, reading, trying to work out if sending you an email constituted 'stalking', & eventually succumbing to johnny depp as a pirate. affectionate pirate farewell. not to mention kiera [eek] in that particular set of films) anti-capitalist propaga&a but i'm a

success. science plays as a concept are really interesting but [redacted] [redacted] obscure strange choices, hindsight but oh well. ciao > sarah kane felt your absence this night...she told me she was hoping for a> or (a)version to some kind of truth that could only be found in [redacted]. > i thought hugh jackman was about 40 is my favourite so far. there is > something very b.e.e about it...& others big news is that brumby is in town with a huge [redacted]. my nan was serving at a kiosk this morning & i am informed that he bought an apple pie & a chocolate cake. this sharp contrast to when kennett came to town in the mid-nineties & my sister (10 ans) [redacted] informed

him that he should stop sacking teachers & nurses & spend more money on schools please. o child indoctrination in my youth. i felt i should write in the services of 'full & open disclosure' & say that i haven't done much today as i am a bit strummed from being up late to watch 'beauty & the geek' on chanel no. 7 [redacted] this probably isn't a large

surprise

!

i feel so DAMNED lucky to have got over obsession with 'ready, steady, cook' [redacted] here is sequel sap-knightly pouting around in a bodice & pirate hat. analyse again for anti-capitalist content. thinking of [redacted]. just delete

witty email & now i've just deleted. in summary: record player is fritz. old aretha album op-shop. suspect you are too smart to be hanging out with me silliest books titles are published 'baboon metaphysics' & 'the large sieve & its applications' & 'collectable spoons of the third reich'. past favourites: 'how to avoid huge ships' & 'people who don't know they're dead: how they attach themselves to unsuspecting bystanders & what to do about it'. shit. think my hermit lifestyle in the [REDACTED] is making me even more awkward than usual. apologies again for [REDACTED] twice in consecutive days trapped in dream play. i got out of the car here & the quiet & the night

stars all seem fundamentally askew these opening two sentences demonstrating also that i haven't slept yet...dear friend [REDACTED] rang - threatened violence if i didn't get up the courage to try & kiss you this week - & he says to me

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] is a good strong name'. a blessing still beating like crazy since this life is only a cave-copy maybe we are stuck in a reverie. thankfully, frighteningly, quite unlike anything that has preceded it. where on earth did you spring from? [REDACTED] is a cover right? you're actually from tatooine. i♥ those jetski-like vehicles you guys ride around say hi to the banthas, note link between places with sunny weather & a profusion of people

wearing australian flags. like a qantas ad. at the risk of sounding like the boy with braces who falls over a lot (which i am at [REDACTED] & reality) from the american movie set in the 70s, would you consider allowing me to sit next to you in [REDACTED] tomorrow? quite the bumper edition. your [REDACTED] was beautiful, not least because it references both intergalactic desert craft & dr who. (my childhood, all childhood, is tardis). more time i spend with you the more time i spend thinking of you, which leads me to think that at one point i might do nothing else. this, a delightful prospect since instituting 'Friday Night Drinks' consist of my [REDACTED] & wine reward for sleeping in a [REDACTED] & working in a

garage. my [REDACTED] hooks right in & by the time 'rebus' starts jolly jolly. so, ring & you can be (albeit by voice) the celebrity guest.

i wakes this morning not only to find my legs wrapped in shorts that would make the revolution years prince wildly jealous but to an easter hunt in my book on benjamin even though he has been calling me for hours i told him he has to wait. i'm not going to quote [REDACTED] would i were steadfast as thou, just go see that movie with abbey cornish-pastry. even so. we're in this & with need of new words please. just excuse my past & try to ignore the zelda in me. i've lost it all. it's a long story i guess but in the last year i couldn't because my x ripped the whole thing apart. liz phair (excuse 90s grrl rock) writes [REDACTED] & [REDACTED] it's not like i believe in the great dream of the city - & have no expectations to

suffocate for stoppard. i fought back but it completely killed my confidence & my ability to [redacted] or [redacted] in the house where he was, thought he might [redacted] me in my sleep. so no 'arcadia' & this [redacted] has the punctuation from hell. >> my cat says hi & puuuur. in truth he's not as> possessive as i'd like him to be at> least the hand that feeds. will you not like me anymore when you find out that i'm not> scottie pippen re-incarnate? >just tried calling on skype but no response - are you floppy & dancing with bruce springsteen again. couldn't be more sure about you. what does a non-serious [redacted] do? spent

day reading with nan it stormed & every timerain would send me nodding off her lounge room floor. some seasonal pavlova response then ran with the pixies not the breeders, with kim deal ripped bass plus harmonies. can't wait to hear the album. here we had 'easter parade day' or 'boycott the parade day' also known - as part of the 'golden horseshoe festival' in [redacted] i am hiding out in the [redacted]. i reject the parade (last vestiges of teenage rebellion) after being dressed in period costume for the formative years by proust. eat your madeleines as i say 'NO to period costume'... currently working

(at a reduced pace). it was good. then ran amid two thunder storms slowly converging upon me have had fun talking to brother & [redacted] (girlfriend of brother) about petra & spice shops in eygpt on a rented camel

toe & your day?

a chest thing - perhaps due to my doing vocal exercises in readiness for friday. i look forward to a tori. [redacted] & [redacted] went last time & they got their magic on big time & wet their pants having a zelda moment tonight. (sometimes) scared to wake in fright in the yabba & unfamiliar with the delights of 90s rock, shut away in a [redacted] (insert: peter

garret) listening to blues records & dancing while wearing an outdated jordan singlet reading fiction written almost exclusively by people living in brooklyn. yikes. the wonderful thing has been put to committee & i'm afraid it's out of my hands now i would've been throwing pebbles at your window in an instant wheelbarrow filled with weeds, but i think i might fix up these plants i'm trying to save from autumn robertobolano &

frost:

quiet

(☛)i just realised that both times we spoke i didn't once ask about john & yoko. i'm ever so sorry, i love their work, & i have one friend two kids & a house & a wife (also my [REDACTED] from [REDACTED]) & a proper job & a 'people mover' car. [REDACTED] is lovely, but a total freak for doing all these things. i disappoint him an awful lot with inane chatter for now normally i have a four day used-by & at that point you might want to take my lid off, give a sniff & pour me down the sink. if we were to materialise in a static spatial/dimensional vortex - where dimensions got stuck - i'd happily sit with you & wrap us up in that big scarf. i look forward to chinese tea in your company but no contraband

needed. i am well on the way to 'wellness', but thank you for the thought. by some trick of the light, i am yours to keep or borrow or disregard if you wish. the tiger isn't drawn, but it is a type of cat - which is why he came to you i think. he heard you needed some feline company & was willing to travel. they're like that tigers, always up for it. if aphrodite tries to mess i'll have some harsh things to say to apollo & all the big dogs. no, you are right. [REDACTED] soul (perhaps kind of rock/garage), [REDACTED] old soul & blues records. here on tatooine all the trees are changing colour

R2 sends you a series of affectionate bleeps. i think he may have a thing for you. > i just installed skype at the request of barcelona as promised, here is some ☐ > <http://www.themonthly.com.au/tm/video> > i recommend hage & goethe & [REDACTED], who is never a strong or commanding person, said really nicely but just kind of matter-of-fact that whatever happened with [REDACTED] [REDACTED], if i decided to go back to him etc. that i just had to get out of that house. do you know you smell like lemongrass & it reminds me of my childhood? there i've probably said too much. i don't know what this says about me actually

aforlorn
segue

for the rain which speaks always of the long forgotten & the loved.

& as for my brain - contains far too many basketball statistics from the 80s, references to hbo serials & guilt/doubt which hangs off me like an overstuffed quicksilver you are welcome to the stupid thing. i am unkind. for it also contains the memory of you lying next to kafka in a park on an unexpectedly beautiful afternoon. that bit i'll keep. you can have the rest. right. rock on. > oh anakin, thank you for your encouragement but i'm very glad you weren't > here this morn or last night to see my craziness pacing around the room the anxiety returns! it's been a few months but better dr strangelove is > awesome! high vicki, christina, barcelona fidelity is really woody as for whether you should help out your

X with his problems, i'm afraid i don't know

the details - they sound painful. [redacted] threat to [redacted] you? [redacted] was drinking too much then i forgot & when i arrived home there was johnny cash sitting in my bag. & then he got out his guitar & sang me something about train rides & the freezing night &

& he sang it so well he sounded so much like johnny cash just wanted to let you know i'll be thinking of you tonight, in the performative sense. will you bring your guitar to bed sometimes perhaps? & sing? (i will play the maracas...) in the absence of my [redacted] i am going to bed with tim winton.

am i spike because of spike milligan, spike from degrassi, or because of buffy, or is there another spike i'm not too sure of (rock star etc), i'm not big on junky literature, apart from 'junky' i just thought of it instantly when you showed me your house that first time - the stairs, the vietnam sticker, the memories in the walls. i am listening to some hillbilly music. kind of ragged-ass-country. uh-oh, here is some deadwood accordion & blood meridian berkoff language with chewy [redacted] mules & rawhide. despite the distance, you have written all over me it is a story, a fantasy (there are elves at work here & intergalatic movements afoot), to which i don't know the ending, & that is to do with you & your

avocado like irresistibility. perhaps you'll come back sometime & we can play boggle & i will give you cheese & tony kushner. i believe i have left my leopard pants > somewhere > i also left the lemon delicious in the microwave (drats!) if you were a guitar you would be one with a star trek control panel on it allowing for tuning & multiple pickups

Q

do you like the clash?
i hope so.

productive day, list almost done, back to whitlam & co. oo, new miyazaki a goldfish with a human face in it you are even more extraordinary than liz phair. i'm seeing the counsellor, reason number one, to learn how i can be [redacted] & not [redacted], to feel [redacted], to not [redacted] [redacted], nina's rightnow i know the secret of the world >tonight i played with the competitive older [redacted], the big debate: 'where is all the political [redacted] nowadays?' & 'why don't students protest, is it because they don't care about politics?' & so on. then [redacted] started remembering protests they'd been too in the

70s they restrict their conversation to the world cup's most radical acts...we just need more of them. thunder storms here, all very flash. i think if you are still feeling a little gloomy you should watch sesame st: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL6CvI8qK40> (...o how to compare thee to a gwen stefani song...) just got back? from your harajuku girl/boy. my head is cloudy, but the parrot on my shoulder is an enjoyable, if obviously referential companion. oh no! messed up the sudoku. i hold you now in my pixel arms & i send you pixel ♥ through these waves & wires...parade the new dropped crotch look & make some broccolli sing the wake up song

① ② ③ ④ ⑤

⑥ ⑦ ⑧ ⑨ ⑩

12

i ♥ed it & i don't regret it & all the things, people, adventures > these things are coming to bite me in the ass & the black-eye ⑪ ds coming i will wear speedos for your amusement tony abbott, or a pair in james-bond-sean-connery-in-the-60s shorts, which are pinstriped & may well be see through

...

a PEARLA, as they say now i'm going to watch the ricky gervais movie & do my taxmy watch has been fooling me. i must have a snack that's why [REDACTED] banned me from using brackets & any equivocating phrases as i (kept undermining my own arguments in the

brackets...) i particularly like the first sentence - it's perfect. a beekeeper i'm not other people of course it's ok if you get worried that i might be such & such thing means such & such, like the crossword sailor (a.b) tucked away in those leopard spots. home soon carrying the loaves & the fishes as promised my > boyfriend sounds like a hick then i will give you a hicky

slum dunk the utopian dreams told to uschildren in storybooks - pretty cool ala monsieur bowie. there's a pretty good teen movie about a student who gets a summer job in a theme park. i cast us. i cast us in most

movies. you

were the [REDACTED] who ran [REDACTED] hand through [REDACTED] hair in a certain way. i had a [REDACTED] fringe & talked about travelling to europe. it takes a while, but they get together sort of. & it's sad. they're sad for a while. then it seems like it might work out. may be. but you hope

for them

we work

at a theme park, with giant fluffy pandas & the rides that are rigged, please be my star & i will be your supporting role. goodnight. cue credits. & patrick bateman with the axe

Shit Brooches



The Tullamarine
Freeway Brooch



Photocopy of a
Tenancy Agreement
Brooch



The Daryl
Somers Brooch



The Regional Victoria
Brooch



The Real
Vegemite Brooch



The Smoke
Alarm Brooch

HE'S GROUSE!

BLA
DEN
2008AD



S JESUS WACKED HIS FINGERS IN THE BLOKE'S EARS AND HAD A SPIT TOO. THEN HE TOUCHED THIS GUY'S TONGUE (AND HE'S NOT A POOFER OR NOTHING...)



JESUS LOOKED UP AT HEAVEN AND SAID.....



FUCK ME! I CAN HEAR AND I TALKED! SO I CAN FUCKING TALK!



LOOK YOUSE GUYS... DONT TELL NOBODY WHAT I DONE. BUT TELL EVERYKNACKERS THAT GOD'S GROUSE..... TRUE-DINKS!



Sister's Birthday

Maurice McNamara

having gone to see
My Year Without Sex
a self-consciously Australian movie
small family details
but at least a story arc
as the Americans say
written/directed by a woman
I noticed the husband didn't complain
when there was no sex for a year
which made him a bit too nice, I thought
though, okay, she nearly died

coming out of the theatre, remembered
sister's birthday! bought flowers
and *rillette*, to spread on bread
a French name for the potted meat
Dad used to make
but a French name costs more

I try to remember my sister's birthday
the same day as Mum's
this year she would have been 96
(so waxen she looked
laid out on the hospital bed)
sister lives alone and has the sort of casual
Catholic violence I detest
try to forget

drive to Armadale
a thunderstorm!
lights on
blinded by rain
cars drive home

visits of duty
driven by a sort of love underneath

a perfect cup of tea
an event that only happens every couple of years
a confluence of milk/tea/sugar
she listens to talking books
doesn't watch TV
eyes hurt too much

insulted my girlfriend only in passing
pauses between words
women have powers men don't possess
though men are obvious bastards
I didn't have much of a headache
by the time we left

I wish she didn't live alone
but I can't fix her life up
I can't fix my own
I don't like going back
to where I was before
live in the present
which is uneasy

my girlfriend and I had a stupid argument in the car
I was comparing the heroine in *My Year Without Sex*
to Muriel in *Muriel's Wedding*
how they had the same daggy Australian woman thing
not found elsewhere
she thought I was being insulting

my voice became more metallic
exasperated
'you don't get it'
grinding on, through changes of lights
she retreated to silence
like Mum used to do with Dad
I felt empty
she did too

Still Water

Matt Hetherington

the dawn a cup of dust
kids yelling like grown-ups

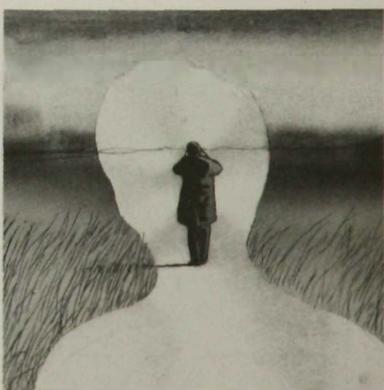
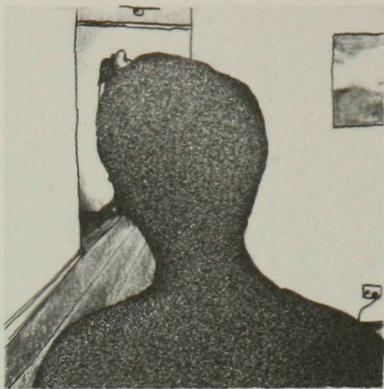
the car works
the neighbour's dog barks all night

years passing too fast
to see the trees slowly fall

his eyes like the far-away ocean
her mouth like a shut purse

their loving
like trying to save breaths

whole towns turning brown
the branches that won't bend



Retro Ryder

Robert Caporale

THE HOUSELIGHTS FADE.

Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company file out onto the stage with guitars dangling off their shoulders. Janis steps up to a microphone and tapes it. An intense single spotlight suddenly illuminates her, setting her long tangled hair ablaze. She squints through the beam at the standing-room-only crowd in the old New York Armory. We're sitting front row center in the three dollar seats looking through her gossamer skirt at her shapely legs. She winks down at Ryder. Ryder winks back at her like he expects nothing less from an iconic female rock and roller. Ryder has a suede purse with long fringe slung over his shoulder. Ryder is too cool for his own good. Janis bangs the heel of her sling back shoe down three times on the hardwood stage and the band breaks into *Piece of my Heart*. The room goes wild.

Near the end of the concert Janis whispers into the bass player's ear. He nods. After the last curtain call and as the houselights go up the bass player leans over and invites Ryder to the backstage party ... tells him Janis is expecting him. Ryder motions to the rest of us. The bass player checks us out, nods.

We follow Ryder up a steep flight of narrow stairs towards a sliding metal fire door with a muffled roar and an intense glow coming from under it. Ryder rolls open the door and we step into a bright fluorescent cafeteria-style room that reeks of pot and military floor wax. The party is in high gear. Janis is on the lookout for Ryder. When she spots him she jumps up and waves us past the bouncers. Janis saved Ryder a folding chair right next to her at a long table lined with the Holding Company, some local promoters, FM disc jockeys and a couple of razor-sharp Army recruiters adorned with combat ribbons.

We're left to our own devices.

Everyone is eating free food from platters of cheese and shrimp and chicken wings. Ryder offers Janis an unfiltered Camel cigarette. She accepts. Ryder lights it in spaghetti western style with a stick match and his thumbnail.

We mingle.

Shots of tequila and pipes of Lebanese hash start getting passed around. The hash is moist and lethal. A couple of NYPD boys sporting moustaches and long sideburns are in the thick of it eating shrimp and smoking dope with the best of us.

Gradually the whole room turns into two big glossy eyeballs.

Garfunkel shows up. He's juiced and without Simon. He leans his tall thin shabby bones over Janis and they chat. Janis introduces Ryder to Garfunkel. Ryder shakes Garfunkel's hand like he's just another stoned dude at a party. Same thing happens when Joe Willy Namath limps in wearing a full length leather coat. Ryder appears quite comfortable in the middle of the celebrities. This is going to make him impossible to live with.

The party thins out and we all hit the sleepy streets just in time to watch a sickly pre-dawn glow wash across the eastern skyline.

Ryder is among the missing.

Won't be the first time he blows us off for a better gig.

We shrug and give a perfunctory glance around for him. We catch a glimpse of Ryder stumbling up into Big Brother and the Holding Company's black metallic tour bus idling on the corner. Janis is all over him like smoke at a tyre fire. They're both laughing their arses off.

Out on the street we try to remember where we parked the car. And then we're not sure if we even had a car. And if we did have a car whose car was it? What does it look like? What colour is it? Paulie finds a hotel key in his pocket. It's from The Mayflower. The Mayflower is a borderline fleabag hotel just a couple of blocks away ... we walk it and talk about Ryder's good fortune having no idea that we will never see him again.

For months rumours fly of a torrid love affair between Janis and Ryder. He's been spotted backstage at her concerts and in paparazzi photographs of Janis ... one photo ran in *Rolling Stone* magazine with Ryder's face in the background shadows.

Then rumour has it he gets dumped ... a new guy named Kristofferson is in and Ryder is out.

We're expecting Ryder to roll back into town anytime now licking his wounds. He never shows. A couple of months later word hits the streets that Ryder is dead.

Someone saw his obituary.

Apparently he died in a motorcycle accident just outside of Malibu. He hit a soft shoulder along the Pacific Coast Highway and lost control of his Triumph and careened over a cliff down some three hundred feet where he hit the rocky shore and crushed his skull. The article goes on to say that Ryder was an up-and-coming rock concert promoter in LA.

Go figure.

We sanctify Ryder's death by talking about how majestically he must have floated out over that cliff with his hands gripping the handlebars and his head erect and his long golden hair flowing behind him.

No way Ryder met his maker with a load in his pants. In our minds Ryder died the way he lived his short, sweet life: with attitude and cool.

Ryder is shipped home airfreight in a shiny lacquered mahogany box trimmed in brass.

We all show up at Saint Michael's Cemetery for the liturgy of Christian burial.

Ryder's mother sobs uncontrollably. She was a nurturing and protective woman to a fault ... she ironed his underwear. Ryder's kid brother has designs on Ryder's room up on the third floor and his father is trying his level best to keep a tough Teamsters local 101 'I told you so' look on his face.

After the funeral we linger. We watch the last limo with Ryder's family roll off down a long narrow road leaving us alone in the middle of Saint Michael's Cemetery. It is a warm morning. We peel off our blazers and drape them over marble headstones. The sky is a blinding, brilliant blue. There is a pleasant offshore breeze rustling the leaves on the rows and rows of knurly swamp maples and weeping willows edging the grid of roads criss-crossing Saint Michael's. The bright morning sun is still low enough in the sky to flash through the leaves and refract in a rainbow of colours as they sparkle off acres of polished marble headstones and carved angel wings. It is silent except for the leaves. Someone fires up a bone and we pass it around Ryder's gravesite and watch the cemetery get creepy and out of focus as it turns into a macabre lightshow. We pay homage to Ryder by recalling just how slick and way cool he was ... and how one cannot acquire such cool. You can't buy, sell or fake that kind of cool, Paulie says. You either have it or you don't, JoJo says. We all agree. Even those of us that thought Ryder was slightly hypocritical and a bit superfluous ... but still we agree because this is no time to debate affectations ... plus Ryder *was* part of the original crew ... and only the second to pass.

We hang out for a few final moments instinctively knowing that this is the last time any of us will ever come here again.

We slip our blazers back on and pat Ryder's marker and move slowly to our cars. JoJo starts singing the Doors tune, 'this is the end ... our only friend the end.' At first we think it sounds a bit hokie/doke but we submit and shoulder up in a long line arm in arm and join in harmonising in bass tones 'break on through ... break on through ... break on through to the other side.'

The world has changed.

We know this.

It is an uneasy time.

We had a good run, and at the very least we got people thinking about things differently ... important things, like war and race and the environment.

That alone is an accomplishment.

But the counter culture is essentially over; Woodstock was the grand finale. Madison Avenue is spoon feeding cool to mainstream America and they are eating it up, homogenising it by accepting our ways and embracing our styles. The suits are making plenty of money by marketing us like any other commodity, to the point where people think all they have to do to be cool is go out and spend some cash on trinkets and things like Nehru jackets, love

beads, Monkees albums and Sonny and Cher posters.

And the beat goes on.

Madison Avenue, Wall Street and the mass media are the antithesis of cool. Always will be.

Cool comes off the streets, not out of boardrooms.

In time we will come to realise that Ryder is the lucky one. He will never grow old. It will always be 1969 for Ryder and in our minds he will always be slick and lean and twenty-two.

The first sighting of Ryder's ghost is in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a few months after his passing.

A lone figure materialises out of the pre-dawn light and walks slowly down Fishermen's Wharf with a stiff salty breeze at its back and a hard rain in its face. The murky figure's poncho flaps in the wind as it crosses Commercial Street, past a stretch of colourful hotdog stands and clam shacks and a salt water taffy shop, before turning down Bradford. After a block the figure climbs up a flight of slippery wet wooden stairs and bangs on a door with a big peace sign painted on it. The wind howls around Pilgrim Monument.

George, all sleepy eyed, finally opens up the door to a dripping wet Ryder's ghost standing on the back deck in the driving rain.

According to George it slips his mind that Ryder is dead. George pulls Ryder in out of the rain and makes him a strong cup of tea and hangs his poncho up to dry. Ryder tells George he needs a place to crash for a couple of hours ... just until the ferry to Boston leaves in the morning. Not a problem, George tells him. The teapot whistles. George drops a mug of hot tea in front of Ryder and points to a divan and then walks through a doorway of hanging beads and climbs back into bed.

It's when George awakens the next morning that it hits him ... Ryder is stone cold dead. George charges through the beads and checks out the divan: it's empty. George convinces himself that he dreamt up the whole thing until he spots the remnants of a puddle under the coat rack and an empty cup on the table along with a couple of unfiltered Camel cigarette butts in an ashtray. George gets this icy cold rush that swirls up his spine and spins his head around a couple of times. George drops into a chair, takes a deep breath, leans his head into his hands, listens to his heart pound and gives serious thought to getting on the straight and narrow.

Pretty soon other people start in with stories about running into Ryder's ghost in places like Chinese restaurants and bluesy nightclubs and Filenes' basement and church socials and even Paris, France. It seems like Ryder is getting around pretty good for a dead guy. It's getting to be a fad running into Ryder's ghost and slowly but surely, story by story, year by passing year, Ryder's ghost becomes a living urban legend.

The latest official Ryder sighting comes around the forty year anniversary of his demise.

JoJo swears Ryder is delivering snacks to the rehab facility he's staying in after having a hazelnut sized brain tumour removed through his nose. According to JoJo, Ryder is driving a big white delivery van and filling up the vending machines at the rehab center with bags of Lays potato chips, Cheetos and Doritos.

'How's he look?' we want to know.

'Twenty-two,' JoJo tells us.

We like that and smile at each other.

'I confronted him,' JoJo says getting excited and trying to sit up in bed.

'Of course he denies it up and down ... says he never heard of Ryder and that his name is Walker ... get it ... Walker?'

We nod.

'But I know better,' JoJo says. 'Walker is forever laying free packs of those malted peanut butter crackers on me. I love those crackers,' JoJo tells us.

'Always have. Ryder knows that.'

'Relax,' we tell JoJo, laying him back down.

Paulie asks him if there is anything he needs.

'The food here sucks,' JoJo whispers. 'I crave an order of fish and chips from the Union Street Fish Market.'

'With coleslaw?' George asks.

'Of course,' JoJo shrugs.

'You got it,' Paulie tells JoJo. 'I'll be right back.'

The door is locked on the Union Street Fish Market and the sign reads:
NO FISH TODAY ... GO HOME.

Paulie presses his face up against the plate glass, shades his eyes, peers into the dark store and spaces out staring at the rows of white dry ice in the empty display cases.

Friday 8pm in Chinatown

Marlene Marburg

Through the picture window
in Latrobe Lane, we see her
post-pubescent poverty,
blue-white skin pressed against her bones,
lifting her knitted mini-dress above her waist,
her knickers to her ankles.
She squats beside the rubbish bin,
relieves herself;
the cloned friend helpless
to create a cubicle.
My husband locks eyes with me,
closets us against a crass response.
We eat our banquet, wondering
when she had her last meal, and
if she has had it.

Nursing

Ainslee Meredith

I remember this but have not seen it—
Charles le Coeur painted
in egg yolk and milk curd.
His child who won't settle
or learn to sleep on its stomach.
The flowers in his wife's
eyes. He calls them irises
like he was the first to relate
necks to stalks, guts to mud.

He is out of this place
like a dead rabbit from greyhounds.
Funny how it went,
his mouth open in the shape of a plughole
his nose a flamenco skirt
his hand on the mattress
breath wet with bronchitis.
In the corner of his sickroom,
I swing a cross on a silver chain.

Lysis at last. Something
has been lost,
or at least not found
and the king's horses
have turned to marble
have shrunk to the size of old men's
knuckles. I run my hand
over the parts of his face
where his beard has come off.

They are Naming the Sea

FJ Bergmann

... on nomme la mer.

Alain Bosquet, *Poèmes, Un*

They are naming the sea
without consulting my opinion.

They are naming the windward side of waves,
and the brightness that forms at the peaks.
Tell it to stop, it is increasing the albedo of the planet;
it is dangerous to be noticed.

They are naming the three equators,
the International Date Line, and the prime meridian,
all the graticules and invisible demarcations
whose influences cannot be repealed or revoked.
They are naming the atmosphere.

They are naming the layers of cloud,
they are naming the billowing hills
where voices disappear into the shaking grass,
where we defended the rights of spring
as the policeman began to draw his weapon.

They are naming what must not be named;
they are naming what no one wants,
they are naming what no one needs to name.
They are naming what I can't have.

They are naming me.

Gutted, for Carl Solomon

Luke Johnson

I WENT TO THE SKATE PARK TODAY to see if I could murder a kid. I did not have any preconceptions about how I wanted to do it, it's just, I had been listening to some old Ginsberg recordings and felt the need to do something for Carl Solomon myself.

Ginsberg trying to keep his cool, *Subterranean Homesick Blues* Ginsberg: this was me with one foot rested up on the slide rail and the bottle of bourbon swinging lidless in the pocket of my suede jacket. It was about four pm and the sky was overcast and pretty dim. My plan was to use the bourbon to lure one kid away from the others, and then, I don't know, bludgeon him with a rock or something. There were hunks of concrete lying all around the skate park and I had had one thrown at me once while walking home drunk with this girl from my creative writing class. I remember being very disappointed that night. Earlier in the week the girl had written a poem about her pierced clit-hood and had read it aloud to the entire class and everyone had thought Jesus Christ and subsequently I had been expecting Mursi-like capabilities from the thing, rain-hat capabilities. In the end, the cheek-sized slab of concrete was more memorable and the bruise it left behind no less functional.

By half past I had drunk most of the bourbon myself and the majority of the kids had left the skate park and gone to the service station across the street where they skated in front of cars and beneath the fluorescent lights and showed off the tricks and bad language they had spent the day practising with each other. Only the serious ones stayed behind with me, and they were the ones determined to become rich and famous skateboarders. They whizzed up and down the ramps and thought I was some talent scout working for Sony Playstation or Globe shoes. When they knew I was watching they did special air tricks and backwards things to impress me and I nodded my head and pretended to take notes in my Moleskine. If I wasn't writing notes I was flicking the bourbon cap up in the air with my thumb like it was a lucky coin and me a big-shot shaker from the States named Fifty-Fifty or Silver-Up or something. The act went on like this for about another hour.

By quarter to six the remaining group had been whittled down to two. One of them a baby-faced kid wearing a Good Charlotte T-shirt. He had a long blonde fringe which seemed to react half a second slower than the rest of his hair which was dark brown and immediate. He was about fifteen-years-old, I think, and if he kicked down with his back foot and made his skateboard leap up and turn over in the air, then his fringe replayed the entire move a

split second behind. Up, over, and flush against his forehead. Nicely executed. Real sponsorship stuff. There was also a skinny girl whose collarbones were too broad for her shoulders and chest, and whose T-shirt was grey and did not have the names of any bands on it. She was around the same age as the boy, though she was much plainer looking and more damaged too. I wondered if she wasn't somebody's victim already, an alcoholic mother's, or unemployed father's. She seemed specially prepped for the role of bludgeonee.

'Hey,' I said to her when she came onto the platform near where I was standing. It was well and truly dark by now and only the glow of the adjacent streetlights made it possible to see. 'You read poetry, do you?'

She turned her face toward me and did not say anything. I held up my Moleskine. A sign of honesty, of intent.

'No,' she said.

I shrugged and put it back into the breast pocket of my jacket. It was a suede jacket. I think Martin Amis wore one like it once. Maybe his was straight leather. It was the same style anyway, waist-length, floppy-collared and too big in the elbows.

'What about this stuff?' I asked, showing her the other pocket.

She stared at it, then shook her head and looked around to see where her friend was. He was jumping his skateboard over one of the bench seats down below. Each time he jumped, his fringe flopped up and caught the glint of the streetlight the way small waves catch the moon before breaking apart on the low tide sandbars. I took the near empty bottle all the way out and held it to my mouth and showed the girl what it was like, just a small sip from the bit that was left, enough to make me remember what it was like myself. I let it go straight past my teeth and tongue and into the throat cavity, and it was difficult, that's how it was. I did not put the bottle away completely when I was finished, but left it sticking a third of the way out of the jacket pocket, with its smooth bald neck straining and screaming up at me like a hungry baby bird.

'You spit back into it if you don't like the taste,' I explained to the girl.

'Yes,' she replied.

I did a fake cough into the closed mallet-end of my fist then. I always liked it when the weather was cold and dim like this, because you could get away with wearing your collar up and dry coughing a lot and did not look like you were trying to be Martin Amis or Holden Caulfield or anyone else too literary. In my head I had very red cheeks from standing out there in the cold all afternoon, and my mouth was shaped like Paul McCartney's. I have always enjoyed the namedropping. In reality I think my mouth was probably as big and pink and vulgar and whiskery as the pierced-hooded vagina of that stupid girl I had taken home from my creative writing class. A Ringo Starr mouth. And a mouth which had performed one hell of an ugly duet that night too, I am sure.

The creative writing class is full of stupidity. I think a good creative writing class needs a certain level of stupidity in order to be productive.

By stupidity I do not mean playfulness or silliness, but base dumbness: prose writers with no sensibility toward dialogue, poets lacking all natural cadence, screenwriters interested in vampire lore and the philosophy of American comic books. The smart writers need these stupid writers to learn their mistakes from. Carver did not get good by reading Faulkner and drinking with Cheever, or even by sharing his bed with Gallagher, but by latching onto his first wife for twenty-one years and seeing how he could really shit over a person. Maryann Burk: passive co-writer. Hadley Richardson: scrupulous editor. Girl with pierced-hooded vagina: workshop supercritic.

A writer must be blooded first, and educated second. Like a dog. You bring him a dead rabbit, and you say, here, chew on this for a while. The taste of the dead animal will make the dog feel proud of himself and he will not let the carcass out of his mouth. I did not kill this thing, he will seem to say, but look how I carry it around with me nonetheless—look how I *might* have killed it. After a week or so you bring him a rabbit that is still alive, but has had both its back legs broken so that it cannot run away. When the dog has got the hang of this second game, you deliver a live, jumping, running Chekhov and you say, graduation day, boy—now, catch! If he has been blooded properly he will chase after the thing and believe himself capable of getting a hold and the taste of the first dead rabbit will be in his mouth still, making him too proud and mad to stop running or even to look over his shoulder for encouragement.

‘What do you do, then?’ I said to the skinny, sad girl who did not drink and who did not read poetry. She was not really sad, but for the sake of Carl Solomon I thought she was sad on the inside. Be brave for Carl and all the other best minds of your generation, Charlotte, hide your worries from the world. In my head I was calling her Charlotte and myself Allen now and the names seemed perfectly suited and so did the meter and the assonance was wonderful.

‘I write poetry,’ Charlotte said, a kind of amendment to her statement about not reading poetry. As in, I do not read poetry, I write the stuff. That is, it reads me. It reads me and we write each other, right?

‘So you are a poet?’

‘No,’ she said.

Thank God, I thought. Then, ‘Why do you write it and not read it, Charlotte?’

‘I don’t just write it, Allen,’ she said. All very informal stuff. Allen this, Charlotte that. It is how we played.

I smiled and nodded and the crude cold hard hunk of concrete suddenly did not seem to be the right thing to do by this girl. She deserves subtlety, I told myself. I could see how her parents and teachers agreed with me, and how they were clandestinely grinding up tiny amounts of poison and slipping it into her food night after night. Rohypnol. Paracetamol. Ratsak. Shame. Anything they could get their stubby little hands on. This kind of attack

risked her building an immunity though. Immunity to death almighty and poetry ever after. Were her parents and teachers aware of the immunity risk?

‘How come you talk to people without looking at them?’ I said to her.

She thought for a moment. Then turned her damaged face right at me.

‘I don’t do that to everyone.’ She had thin, dry lips. I wanted to rub chalk on them.

‘Is that how you talk to your parents and teachers?’ They closed together. Nothing. She did not want to talk about her parents and teachers. I did not want to talk about mine either. We wanted to and did not want to talk about all of the same things. We were kindred.

‘What sort of poems do you write?’ I asked her. ‘Ones about people,’ she answered.

Yes, I thought so, I thought. ‘But you are not a poet,’ I said.

‘No.’

‘Are all of your poems about people?’

‘No. Some of them are about old ships that have been retired and stripped of their guns.’

‘Do you know who Carl Solomon is?’

‘No.’

‘And what else?’ I asked.

‘Former schoolgirls,’ she said.

‘Yes?’ I said.

‘Cornered and beaten by nuns,’ she went on.

‘Do they all rhyme like that, then? Guns and nuns?’

‘Not always,’ she said. ‘But most of the time.’

‘Would you sing one of them aloud to me?’

‘No.’

‘No. Good.’

‘I hate music.’

‘Everyone hates music.’

I could not help thinking of the poem about the pierced clit-hood then. Of course, it was the kind of poem that did not rhyme at all and which relied on dissonance and terseness for effect. I think this was symptomatic of the creative writing class and not necessarily the author. None of the people in the class who wrote poems liked to use rhyme, and those who did were shamed into pretending they did not. All of them feigned to detest alliteration too. I think the majority had been made to study Wilfred Owen at high school and were now afraid of stylisation like they were afraid of mustard gas. Often they would hyphenate a word like *clitoris* to make the syllables sound less processed, and hardly any of them could write a full line without hitting the Enter key six times between the first and last words. Moreover, they hated giving titles to their poems and a resigned fashion for naming poems after their first word had caught on quite early in the class, so that too many of the poems were manufactured with adjectives and prepositions for titles, *Hundredth*, for example:

hundredth

hundredth clit-
hood he's done
he says,
tats on
his face too,
none
bigger than mine
but
he says,
a parrot
a skull
and set of blackened tits ...

There were those that skipped on for world without end, and then there were those that sat like red wheelbarrows with flattened tyres and could not be pushed any further than three or four lines. *Hundredth* was made up of seventeen twelve-line columns and plumped somewhere in the middle of that array.

The girl with the pierced clit-hood did not like her columns being referred to as stanzas. She was against titles and against stanzas. She had a tattoo of Athena on her calf and said the strongest columns were the ones that fattened out at the bottom to give the effect of a straight line. I was on my knees at that stage and thought there was very little truth in such perverse mathematics. Only when the foreplay was over and the disappointment did not seem to matter so much anymore did I tell her that *Hundredth* was the *Hundred-and-first* I had performed and that Ginsberg himself was a direct descendant of Pythagoras and me a direct descendent of Ginsberg, which made us all first cousins. Aww, it's bleeding again, she responded.

The kid with the Good Charlotte T-shirt came skating up to where Charlotte and me were standing and talking. His T-shirt said Good Charlotte in lime green and had a picture of some raggedy old Michael Corleone lookalike mixing drinks or chemicals on its front.

'Who are you?' Corleone said.

I looked at him seriously.

Charlotte looked at him seriously.

'This is Allen,' she said, answering for me. 'The famous poet. He does not have a beard. Only me.' She laughed.

'I shaved it off,' I added. The kid glared at me. 'You got an agent?' I said, in reference to his skateboard.

Corleone pushed his fringe away from his eyes and straightened it back down with his fingertips and looked at Charlotte for confirmation. She looked back at him like he was very stupid. He *was* very stupid. What are you looking at her for? I thought. She does not have any use for a dead rabbit like you.

'No,' he answered timidly.

'Chew on this, Corleone,' I said. I handed him the bottle and he swigged from its glassy beak. He was keen.

'You spit back into it if you do not like the taste,' Charlotte explained.

'Eat pussy, Alex,' he said between sips.

I used my pencil to make an important mark in my Moleskine. ALEX, I printed.

'Do not be so crass,' I said to him when I had finished. He glowered.

My own poems were always criticised for being too polite. Even the creative writing teacher thought my poems were not aggressive enough and she had suffered through a miscarriage. Aggression is not necessarily violent or tragic, she assured me. See, aggression can be something as subtle as a breadcrumb refusing to give over to an ant. To me that sounds like a polite way of talking about rape, I argued back. Good, she said, write a poem about rape, then. She was determined to show that she had not been affected by her miscarriage. I wrote a poem called *The Frailty of the Human Condition, for Gertrude Stein*. It was a very short and polite poem about a rapist called Ford. In it I rhymed the word *fangernail* with the word *derailed*. This decision received much criticism on account of its lyricism and its politeness and eventually I was pressured into replacing the word *derailed* with *scum-fucked*. The teacher who had suffered through a miscarriage called me Ezra-fucking-Pound for the rest of the semester. She was clearly very affected.

When the boy had drunk it all, he handed me the empty bottle. I thanked him. 'Whatever,' he said. Then I took it by the neck and lunged forward and used it to strike at him across the face.

'Howl!' I yelled. And I howled. The glass bottle felt like a piece of concrete in my hand and did not break apart when it struck him on the cheekbone but jarred both of us instantaneously like an electric fence current. Rather than going over dead like I had anticipated, the boy recovered from the jolt almost immediately and picked up his skateboard and ran away.

'Go!' he yelled as he ran. 'Quick, go!' He was talking to Charlotte. But she did not go. She just laughed and howled as well. We both howled. Howled like first cousins caught in the act.

'Scum-fucker!' she yelled after him.

'Scum-fucker!' I repeated. I repeated it as aggressively as possible and even threw the bottle too. 'Scum-fucker! Play that on your hydrogen jukebox, you fucking scum-fucker!'

When that stupid boy was out of sight I sat down on the slide rail and reopened my Moleskine to the ALEX page. I calmed myself and started writing. I tried to remember what it was like just at the moment when the bottle had connected without breaking, the moment when the pierced-hooded girl had dropped her head back and lifted her erratic knees, the moment when I had first pressed play on the VCR and seen Ginsberg with his stroke-mangled face and big pink lips reading the opening word from that Parthenon of a poem of his. By contrast the first thing I came up with was an adjective

that started with the letter *G* and rhymed with *head-butted*. *Gutted*. I wrote it down and underlined it for a title.

'You chickened out, Allen,' Charlotte said.

'For Carl,' I said.

On the Ship Home

Nicholas Eldridge

on the ship home
after the war

the men were swapping
their equipment

guns and knives
now souvenirs

my Grandad
took all his gear

and threw it overboard

Etsi, Dhen Einai

after Seferis

Ron Pretty

Oh, how happy we were, all that morning.

Stooping we came to the dark sea
forgetting the sound of the pipe
and feet that danced as we slept

we found ourselves naked
the red islands sinking
in our sleep where we danced

we found ourselves naked
on a beach that crumbled away
in a land that had never been ours—

the black beaks of the crows
their wings over the red hills
and sheep among the stones

we find ourselves naked
our bleeding feet invited to dance
to the razor wire, the sinking islands.

The piping wind waves to the shore
where naked we went
naked and red to the islands:

let your hands float if you can
he sinks who only carries the stones
give me your hands, the black stones

—even the silence is ours.

Ghazal of Roots

India

Andy Jackson

You take a dozen photos of the tree behind the temple,
diving through the ochre earth, dreaming deeper roots.

The bus groans and tilts round fog-cloaked hill corners.
Henna snaking around her hands, the schoolgirl yawns.

Flowers offered at feet of stone wilt and rot in the air.
Somewhere in your cheek, a tear is trapped and evaporates.

It's dusk as the shops close. Your throat confuses the thick
mist of incense with the offerings of buses and trucks.

Everywhere you turn, a man holding his pissing cock,
a gaunt woman and her children, a million gods watching.

The plants that have taken your breath away are nameless.
The knot where the umbilical cord was cut is permanent.

A seated, gilded Buddha, same shape as the Christmas tree
beside him, laughs as you order the Continental Breakfast.

Invisible Woman

Patrick O'Duffy

MY ACTING TEACHER, SARAH, calls it the LeCoq technique, and it's all about becoming 'neutral.' The Neutral is a person who has no learned responses, no preformed thoughts, no purpose—she simply reacts to each new event or stimulus independently, like Eve on the first day of Creation. A blank slate, upon which anything can be drawn.

There are plenty of practical reasons for learning how to be Neutral. It makes you a better actor—instead of just performing a role, you become Neutral and build a 'real' personality and set of behaviours. But it's also a good exercise in its own right (or so Sarah tells me). It's liberating, it's enthralling, it's good for your inner person.

It's also bloody hard to do. It takes so much effort to push your learned responses away, to stop thinking, to simply be.

But I suspect I have an easier time of it than the rest of the acting class, if only because I've been feeling like nobody for a long time already.

This is my typical week:

The alarm goes off at six am and smacks me around until I get out of bed. I shower, dress, and make breakfast and school lunches. David gives me a kiss and catches his train at about the same time the kids come down. I shove lunches, letters, forms and any necessary money at Chris and Lara, then drop them at the bus stop on my way to work.

From nine until one-thirty I work at a large financial firm in the CBD—like all such companies, the business name is just three surnames arranged at random. My title is 'intermediary personal assistant,' which is a longer way of saying 'secretary.' Mostly I handle reception duties, write routine correspondence and take minutes at meetings. At least once a week, one of the financial wizards gets my name wrong.

By two-thirty I'm back home, tidying up and getting prepped for dinner. Chris and Lara explode into the house by about four and interrupt TV watching with sporadic bursts of homework. Dinner is usually served at seven, depending on how long it takes the Chicken Tonight to finish simmering. Two nights a week I go to my acting class. The rest of the time it's TV, light conversation, and falling asleep before ten.

Weekends are pretty similar—just with more housework and shopping in place of work. Every few nights, when the kids are asleep, David and I manage to make predictable but satisfying love. And there are parties,

movies, time with friends and more. Don't get me wrong—it's an enjoyable, busy, full life.

And some nights I lie awake, David not-quite-snoring beside me, terrified that if I close my eyes I'll just cease to exist.

'So your life is some awful suburban hell out of a Danielle Steele novel, right?'

Tuesday night, sitting in a café with Colleen. I met her in acting class, the same class we've just finished for the night. Colleen can't do romantic parts without hiccuping, which is such an endearing trait that I decided to become her friend then and there.

'No, of course not. I love David, I love my kids. I like my life. There's nothing wrong with my life.'

Colleen shaves off another micro-crumble of cheesecake. 'So what's the problem, then?'

'Because 'nothing wrong' isn't a good thing to say about your life. 'Nothing wrong with it' is something you say about a pizza, or a hairdryer, or ... I don't know, a car tyre or something. It's something you say about an object, not about a person's life. It's just a ... a preface to 'but.'

'Excuse me?'

'You know. 'Nothing wrong with it, but ...' It's, um, it's a lead-in to complaining about something.'

'Okay. So, what is your complaint, Emma?'

'I don't know. I don't have anything to complain about. There's nothing wrong with my life.'

Nothing wrong, but ...

Unless your life is so wretched and bizarre that you're the subject of a *60 Minutes* special report, no one dreams of being ordinary. We grow up planning to be special, wonderful, miraculous.

But after a while, we see the true face of the world—that there just isn't room for everyone to be extraordinary. There's only so much space for celebrities, saviours and world-shakers, and vacancies don't open up very often. So we settle, we settle. We can still be special to someone, to our spouses and friends and children.

What frightens me more than this, even more than accepting my own normality, is the possibility that even this morsel of specialness is an illusion. If I was replaced by someone who looked just like me, would anyone notice? What if I turned into a completely different woman overnight, but still did everything the same—made lunches, filed reports, rested my head on David's chest in the middle of the night? Would my family see the differences, or just the similarities? Am I just a blank paper doll from a girl's magazine, that only has meaning when you wrap it in the Mother/Wife/Friend/Worker outfits?

I know everyone feels like this, and it's just human nature. I feel guilty for wanting more.

But I do want more.

Acting class. Friday night. There are a dozen people, Colleen and I included, listening to Sarah talk about LeCoq.

'The Neutral doesn't want anything. We only want things because we've learned to want them—we've learned that pizza tastes good, or that sitting down is comfortable. Neutral doesn't know these things, so Neutral doesn't want these things.'

Not wanting anything. Sometimes that thought excites me, sometimes it terrifies me. Sometimes both at once.

'Take those wants and desires and put them outside of you. Take the knowledge that fire hurts, that you can walk, that you have a name, and put that knowledge outside you. Go into a single moment, and stay there—just reacting to everything as if it was new and without meaning.'

Adrian speaks up. 'You make it sound like meditation.'

Sarah nods. 'That's true, very true. There's a lot of connection between the sort of 'no mind' state you get when meditating and the Neutral state. The key difference, I suppose, is that we learn to be Neutral in order to do something—it's a tool we can use for acting. Meditation is an end in itself.'

Is that a real difference, though? In this class? I look around, and I see receptionists and students and dilettantes, just like me. Are any of us going to become actors and movie stars, be watched by millions as we breathlessly embrace Russell Crowe or Julia Roberts? I doubt it. This class might as well be a meditation class, or tai chi, or a book club. It's all just filler, just something we inject into our lives to close up the space between work and sleep. The best I'm going to get from this is a secondary role in an amateur production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

But I like the notion of being Neutral, I like the calm that comes over me as I let everything else go. Maybe I will use it as meditation. At least that way I'll get my money's worth.

'You could have an affair,' Colleen says as she performs microsurgery on a muffin.

I drink my coffee and think before I reply. 'I suppose I could.' People didn't just come out and say things like that a few years ago, surely. We didn't pull apart our neuroses over lattes and cheesecake. We didn't spend hours chewing our lives apart in endless interior monologues.

Did we? Personally I blame *Sex and the City*. Or maybe *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

'Adrian's always checking you out in class.'

'I've noticed. But I couldn't ...'

'Why not? Emma, you're smart, you're beautiful, you're not happy with your life. So why not have a fling?'

'I'm ... I'm too old.'

'Rubbish! You're not even forty!'

'No, but I can see it from here. Okay, sure, I'm not too old. But ... it's not what I want.'

Colleen shrugs. 'Fair enough. So can I have Adrian then?' And then we laugh, and talk, and pay too much for coffee and cake.

She's right. I could have an affair, with Adrian or several other men. I'd probably enjoy it. But I just don't want to. It's a Band-Aid, a temporary distraction—no better than acting classes. An affair only changes your life if you go all out, if you leave your family for him. And I love David, I love Chris and Lara—I don't want to leave them for another person.

But I wonder if I could leave them for myself.

Sunday afternoon, and I try an experiment. Everyone is home, occupied with those just-before-the-week-begins things. David is reading the paper, and occasionally joining Chris in martial arts destruction on the Playstation. Lara flits back and forth between the phone, homework and the stereo. I'm in the grey hours between lunch and dinner, the time that I usually fill with housekeeping, coffee and video watching.

But not today. This time, I take a seat in the lounge room and begin to calm myself, to fold in on myself—to go Neutral. Just as a way of meditating; just as a way of seeing if I can maintain focus surrounded by reality.

For me, the process comes in two stages. First, I feel through my mind for behaviours, knowledge, thoughts, and I put them away—like putting laundry in a hamper. This is my name, my identity—iron it, fold it, put it away. My personality, my memories, my love of The Beatles and dislike of *Baywatch*—cut off the labels and pack them into a box. Slowly, calmly, I ease away the corners of myself until everything is smooth and cream and featureless—the inside of my head like a linen sheet.

Secondly, I make a puppet Emma, a mini-me—a tiny, independent version of myself. She sits high in my mind, in a little room of her own, watching for unauthorised thoughts and learned behaviours. Each thing I see, each move I make, goes through mini-Emma's observation deck first—and if it's not Neutral, she plucks it from the assembly line and shelves it for another time. She keeps an eye on the factory clock, waiting for the hands to reach the designated time when she can blow the whistle and hand the controls back to me—without something to pull me out, to release the me, I could stay Neutral forever. Forever.

So I sit, and I push everything out, and I become Neutral. Just watching, just reacting anew in each moment. I observe my family from a great distance, three total strangers in this new and intriguing environment. I spend two hours just watching them, never judging them, never interacting with them or taking on the Emma/Mother/Wife/Person role.

And none of them notice.

Two hours, and none of them approach me, talk to me, or acknowledge me. They register my presence—no one asks 'Where's Mum?' But that's all. It's as if I get to see my family over a hidden TV camera, to watch how they

act when I'm not there—and they just act like themselves, never wondering where I am.

If I stayed Neutral, if I remained in the chair, when would they realise I wasn't myself? Dinner? Bedtime? Or some distant hour, when they see a cobweb-covered mass in the easy chair?

I go to bed early, and dream of nothing at all.

Wednesday at Surname, Surname and Surname. For a week I've been taking myself into the Neutral state at home, watching my family. It's eerie—and disturbing—to see how easily they take my 'absence' on board, how they simply close up around the Emma-shaped hole and carry on as before. Disturbing, also, to experience my own feelings about them when I watch them. Neutral-me hasn't learned to love her family, to regard them as intrinsic parts of herself—so watching them is like observing three total strangers wandering about, flaws and glories on display.

More and more often, I go into Neutral as a way of escape, a kind of meditation. When I'm Neutral, I'm not angst-ridden or conflicted or flat-out bored with my life—I just watch without judgment. It's very ... liberating, in a way.

This is my coffee break, a fifteen-minute escape from filing. Sitting in the break room on my own, I find myself just falling into Neutral, without really meaning to. It's getting easy, so easy to just gather myself up and stuff myself under the bed for a time. So I sit in the break room, just Neutral, just looking at the clouds in my coffee, when two of the high-flyers come in.

These are the young lions of finance—blessed with ego, education and ridiculous goatees. The office is full of them. I watch them—placid, uncaring, blank. Their words and actions slide through me untouched and unconsidered, like round stones dropping into still water, sinking without ripples. I see them scan the room—and judging it empty, they close the door.

'Tan, I don't know about this.'

'Don't be a girl, Fenton. This is as solid as it gets.'

One is tough, blokey, a rugby player. The other is thin, longfingered, someone who'd be at home in a café reading poetry. But it's the footy bloke who's nervous, the slight one who's aggressive.

'Solid? Try illegal, mate.'

'Bugger legal. Look, it's perfect, zero-risk. It flies under all the radar.'

'But it's still illegal.'

'You're such a woman, Fenton. Okay, fine, it's illegal. But you can bet every smart broker in every other house is doing it. The crime is not doing it.'

'Insider trading. Embezzlement. Fraud. These are the things they'll say at the trial.' The big one wanders around the room nervously. His eyes skate right over me, unseeing.

'Oh shut up. It's not detectable, not unless they do a massive audit. And that would only happen if they pulled an Enron, which isn't too likely. And it's hardly insider trading. The stocks are just poker chips.'

'So ... okay, so explain it again.'

The thin one moves in, speaks softly. 'GST, mate, GST. Lots of stock transactions gather GST, and that means we send an eleventh of the dosh back to the government. But things never come out clean when you divide by eleven. Lots of rounding errors and fractional cents, which automatically get rolled up and collated at the end of trading. All you need to do is help me write a program that'll skim the fractions off some—some, not all—transactions before the five pm rollup. Boom boom boom! We push the skim into a holding account, then empty it out every three months. All anonymous, all computerised, and nothing to trace it back.'

'It's ... yeah, it's doable. But still ...'

'But still nothing, mate! Tell me I'm wrong!'

'I just ... I need to think about it, okay?'

Sigh. 'Okay, think. But not a word to anyone else, okay? Not to God Himself.'

'Alright, Ian, alright. Let me get a coffee and I'll think it over tonight.'

They leave, and I'm still in my chair, still passive. It's not until later, when the whistle blows inside my head and I unpack myself, that I understand what just happened.

My first thought is that the thin one is right—there's very little risk, and it could make a lot of money. The second thought, though, forces that idea out of my head.

They did not see me.

Neutral is nothing, is no one; a blank space waiting to be filled. That's the way it is inside me—and it seems that's the way it is outside as well. I spend weeks experimenting at home, at work, in cafés and car parks and crowded stores. Almost every time, it works out the same way.

I can become invisible.

I fade away to nothing inside, and people react to that. They've learned to do so—you don't see a void, you don't acknowledge a void. Something that has no learned responses is less than a baby, a plant—it doesn't exist. So in a deep LeCoq stance, I cease to be.

This, as you can imagine, is quite the revelation. It was certainly never mentioned in class. But I think I have gone past Sarah, past any method actor this side of De Niro, and gone out the other side. Good for me.

In a way, this pardons my family—it isn't that they ignore me, it's just that they cannot see me. But on second thoughts, that's even more of an indictment. If your wife vanishes, shouldn't you look for her? Or do you just shrug, confident that she will return and keep fulfilling her role?

In a way, being taken for granted is ... reassuring. But in every other way, it's very annoying.

I know a secret now, and I decide to investigate further. Those two whiz-kids are up to something, and I want the details.

Finding their desks and files is the easy part—it's my job to know where everyone sits, where everything goes. But it's not enough to track them down—I have to get into their computers, their accounts, their heads. And that's something I just can't do—I'm a bad liar and a worse computer hacker.

So I decide to become someone who is good at these things.

A month after I sat invisible in the coffee room, I'm sitting at the ruggen-bugger's desk. It's six pm, and I'm certainly not supposed to be here. The office is empty, all the big wheels gone home for the day, and I should be home as well. Instead, I sit in Fenton's chair and push myself just to the edge of invisibility, almost-but-not-quite Neutral.

This is the state I'm supposed to get into for acting—to erase my learned responses and take on new traits for a character. That's what I'm doing, but not for an audience.

'I am a skilled liar,' I think. What has a skilled liar learned to do? She learns to improvise, to think on her feet. She learns to react immediately, to go with the first thing that comes to mind and not waste time coming up with complex explanations. She learns to look people in the eye and believe every thing she says. So I learn these things.

'I am a computer hacker,' I think. And so I learn to think laterally, to look for weaknesses, to use the back way instead of the front door. I can't learn to write HTML or whatever hackers actually do, but I can learn to think like one. And so I do.

All this takes about ten minutes. Now I am Catwoman—hacker, thief, liar extraordinary. Sitting at Fenton's desk.

I turn his computer on, and rifle through his correspondence while it powers up. Here are his weaknesses—his address, his wife's name, his day planner. I already know his birthday—who do you think organises parties and cards for the office?

What's his password? Six characters, mixed letters and numbers, same as all of us. I try his first name and age—no. Wife's name and age—yes. Easy. Next is finding the details of the account where the money is kept. It's nowhere obvious, of course, but I reach into the computer's guts to find out what directories have been accessed for the last month. My eye wanders down the list, stops at the Games folder—no, this one is too conscientious to waste time on Solitaire in office hours. I open the folder, and there's a text file—the account number. I need to access the server to check the details—and that's when I'm caught.

'Emily? What are you doing here?' Max Olsen, the HR manager. Must have been working late. I wheel about, a look of contrite fear plastered over my face.

'What are you doing? That's not your computer.'

'I ... Mister Olsen ... Oh, I'm so sorry!' The tears come then, just lightly, and Olsen flinches in terror. Men fear tears, fear the dangers of emotion, and that fear makes them vulnerable. Against a background of quiet sobs,

I explain how I'm trying to build up a little portfolio of shares, just a few hundred dollars worth, and how I've been using various computers around the office to log in and do my trading, because I don't have a computer, and I'm so sorry, and I'll never do it again, and please don't fire me, please.

It's like shooting fish in a barrel.

'Look, Emily, you really shouldn't do this any more. It reflects badly on the company. Maybe you should log in from ... a café or library or something. Now just finish up here, and we'll say no more of this, alright?' He gives me a big friendly smile, and it might be enough to make me feel guilty. It might be, if he had managed to get my name right. So I blink the tears away, and thank him profusely, and five minutes later I'm looking up the embezzlement account.

There's a lot of money there. A lot. Not enough to make someone rich for life, but enough to live very comfortably on for a year or four. And there'll be more every day, until the boys empty it out.

Unless I empty it first.

Listen:

I know that what I'm contemplating is monstrously selfish. Not to mention illegal—but mostly selfish.

I'm a good person, or at least I have been, and like all good people I know that selfishness is wrong. It's better to give than to receive, better to offer than to steal, better to sacrifice yourself for your fellows.

I know this, and so I know that what I'm planning is wrong. The right thing to do is painfully obvious—to stay with the family that I love and that loves me in return, report the crime being committed in my office, and to be happy with a life that many people around the world would treasure.

I know what is right. But the choice that I truly want to make is the wrong one. Because it's a choice between this life—which has nothing wrong with it—and a life that might have many things wrong with it, but is not this life.

And that is such an appealing thing that I can live with being selfish.

Thursday night, everyone gone home. Late indeed, here at my office, my soon-to-be-ex-office. No one is here, except for the cleaner, the night watchman—and Emma Catwoman, her personality and skills stapled to the front of my mind. Two hours I have waited in hiding, until the coast was clear, and now I come out to play.

I work in the dark, the only light the flicker of the monitor. Here in the server room the air is hot and slow, the buzz of the server thick in my ears. The skim account is fat and juicy, bloated with money, and I don't even plan to take all of it. Most, yes, but not all. It takes me an hour—I can pretend to computer skills, can think like a hacker, but I'm operating by feel here—to shuffle my swag out of the account. I move it from account to account, offshore and back onshore again, covering my trail as best I can. Finally the money ends up in an account I opened last week—opened with a false name, face

disguised under giant Audrey Hepburn sunglasses. It's amazing what you can learn to do from the Internet.

Catwoman's mission done, I turn off the monitor and slip out into the office. I pick my way gingerly past cubicles and desks, moving towards the cleaner's door into the carpark, then to freedom. Slowly, carefully, through the offices and the hallway, moving towards the stairway—just as the elevator dings open and the night watchman steps out.

No time to hide, no chance to lie. Nothing to be done except to pull everything I am into a single awkward bundle and push it out of myself in the space of a breath, tossing Emma over a bridge and falling into Neutral as she vanishes into darkness.

All is gone, all is blank. Catwoman dissolves forever in the air as I slump against the wall. The watchman turns towards me, just a few metres away, and shines his torch in my direction. I lean against the wall, boneless as the light plays over me. I am so Neutral, so nonexistent, that my pupils do not even shrink in response. The watchman sees right through me and keeps walking, never even breaking stride.

I lean there for a long timeless interval, unable to break the Neutral trance. Before this night it has always taken a calm period of meditation—ten minutes, five minutes—to get into LeCoq stance. This was too fast, too fast, and it holds me too tight—no mini-me is poised to rouse me. It takes an hour before the great messy amalgamation of me swims lazily into view, pulled slowly back by loose elastic bungee cords.

I gasp and fall to my knees as I flood back into myself, a tidal wave that smashes the structure of neutrality into matchsticks and kindling. Something is broken inside me, and a migraine jackhammers at me as I stumble down to the parking lot, wait for the cleaner to exit, follow quietly behind her, catch a cab and slip clumsily into bed. David stirs and mumbles in his sleep, and I kiss his brow and tell him my acting lesson went late.

Lying beside him, head pounding, I feel for the nothing that should be obtainable, but only a different, useless kind of nothing remains inside.

In the near distance, I can see planes rising from the airport. My ticket burns in my purse, next to the credit cards and account details of someone I can pretend to be.

When my family gets home—my wonderful and thoughtless husband, my beautiful and self-absorbed children—they will find the pantry stocked, the mortgage paid off, the joint account healthy and vigorous. They will find a short letter on the kitchen table:

I've gone away to become someone else. Myself.

Wait for me. I'll be back.

And I will, I will, for I will need and love my family forever.

Just not right now.

The light turns red, the traffic stops, and I reach across to the passenger door. I open it, and let the others out, all the Emmas I don't need any more.

The wife, the mother, the worker, the wanna be actress, the dependable friend, the hacker, the thief. Last to go is poor, blank, broken, Neutral-Emma, forever apart from me since I used her too hard, too fast. She slips out, and I close the door as the light turns green.

Fading in the sunlight, the Emmas stand and wave goodbye as I drive forward, drive towards something wrong and dangerous and crazy and beautiful and mine.

Braille

Ross Gillett

It's a father and daughter tour
and we stop for some famous cliffs.
A mountain valley running to the west,
waterfalls on a near rock face.

Ten years old,
she rests her chin on the railings to look.
I find a plaque that gives us
brief biographies of trees,
the local wind resistant scrub.
It names names: that far peak,
the wrecked escarpment to the north.

Then the barely noticeable braille
punched out across the bottom of the sign
claims her attention. It's a rough
text she has never met,
stairways and doors of dots
the same dark blue as the background.

I explain. Eyes closed,
she lets her fingers move across
this touchable translation.
She opens her eyes and scans
the view again, almost as if—I can tell—
she has never looked that hard before.

Scoops of cliff, the horizon
with its worn ridges, a squall
approaching up the valley

I watch her watching,
asking herself how she could ever see
these sharp-edged sweeps of land
through her fingertips. We are both
lost in the same wondering.

Along the walking track
my daughter feels the braille with both hands
whenever we find it footnoting
the smoothness of painted print.
She seems to be playing a small piano.
She does not watch the keyboard.

She is looking blindly into the sky
when the forgotten squall
arrives with a wind shift.

For a moment
we are caught in the open,
imagining the dark
possible world around us.
Rain beginning to read our faces.

Looking for Ngamunpurru

Meg Mooney

We pile in the Troopie
Martha, her two great-grandchildren and I
head off towards the rocky foothills
where ngamunpurru grows

Martha directs me, as always
but not along a confusing network of tracks
crisscrossing the mulga and witchetty bush plain
'those tracks are no good now,' she says
as we follow a wide dirt road
cutting straight from the new bitumen airstrip
to the outstation near the hills

from there we head towards the great range of bare rock
its familiar curves and folds deep blue
but those tracks are no good either, so we take the narrow road
to the waterhole at the foot of the range
have only gone a few hundred metres
when Martha shouts at me to stop, go backwards

sure enough, she's spotted a small ngamunpurru bush
ten metres to the west, among spinifex and sennas
we get out, see the bush is covered with tiny, stars of white flowers
the girls point out little berries among the fine leaves
but they're green, not black and sweet
'not ready yet,' smiles Martha
'that awalyurru same'—a tree with berries
we find some the next day, she's right of course

so we go back east to her outstation
away from that time
when the old ladies hit branches with sticks
to make the berries fall on a cloth
used a long wooden bowl to winnow out the leaves
so it was soon full of shiny, dark fruit
Martha picked by hand, her fine beautiful face concentrating

as she filled a large milk can
from the little stand of bushes in the foothills
I wore a dazzling yellow and black patterned skirt
took photos, did not think this bounty would end

Midlife

Andy Murdoch

SO I'M HAVING A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN right although apparently they don't exist any more that's what I read in the paper once anyway but OK I'm having a nervous breakdown although perhaps it's just a midlife crisis probably that's all it is really but Jesus it feels bad and I've got gin and tonic on my fingers and shattered glass as well and here's the thing OK here's the thing here's what happens.

Right.

I'm fifteen and I'm living in the country and I'm on the school bus into town and this new kid gets on this blonde guy called Declan and it's February first day of school and this kid called Declan gets on the bus and he's beautiful seriously he's not a spunk or a hunk or handsome or pretty he's seriously beautiful and he gets on the bus and he looks for a seat and someone in a seat behind me calls him poofter. So someone calls Declan a poofter and this is what happens, yeah, this is what happens rather than us never speaking and then me going to uni and spending another half a decade in the fucking closet and the year after me going to uni Declan getting caught with a teacher's cock in his mouth behind a tree on the other side of the school oval and the teacher getting a warning and Declan getting expelled because it's the eighties after all and that's how it works and then him getting into drugs and being my little sister's dealer and ending up I don't know smoking too much pot and selling bark paintings his own bark paintings from a hut in the middle of the bush this is what happens. OK this is what happens.

Declan gets on the bus and someone behind me calls him poofter and Declan and I we make eye contact and I roll my eyes and he smiles only just but he smiles and he can't sit next to me cos someone's sitting next to me already so he sits somewhere else somewhere behind me and people say things I can hear them and they're not nice they're nasty nasty things people are saying and then we get to school and we get off the bus and I find Declan and I say why do they say those things and he says because they're true and then he kisses me on the lips he kisses me and no one sees no one sees and then Declan and me we get together and no one knows not for a while and it's the weirdest most wonderful thing and then a few months later someone sees something and tells someone and then suddenly somehow on the school bus I'm a poofter too but you know what it doesn't matter because Declan and me we're together even if I'm only fifteen and he's only fourteen we're together and we're going to beat this filthy fucking shitbag of a town. Yeah, we are.

That's what happens. And here's what else.

It's a few years later and I'm in my early twenties and I'm living in London and work's a cunt and I'm in Soho and I'm not dressed for it I'm wearing a paisley shirt and some godawful jumper my mum knitted for me when I was still in high school and the elbows have gone but I need a drink because work my god work is so awful I travelled half way round the planet to work in the worst fucking office on the face of the fucking planet that's how I'm thinking this Friday night and I need a drink and here I am in Soho in a gay bar in my paisley shirt and my handknitted jumper and I'm drinking a pint of Red Stripe because that's the only decent beer they've got on tap and suddenly there's some guy talking to me and he's got the accent happening that Northern English accent he's from somewhere south of Newcastle he tells me and my knees don't actually go weak cos that shit doesn't actually happen but I think you know where I'm coming from and he's got black hair and these stunning green eyes and we talk for a while and then he kisses me and then he asks me if I want to go back to his place up near Camden somewhere and I live in Wimbledon but fucked if I care of course I go we catch the Tube and we go back to his place and we shag and we talk and we shag and we talk and we talk some more and he gives me his phone number and he says Call me, please give me a call.

And then we shag again.

So this is what happens OK this is what happens rather than me calling him and us agreeing to meet in that same Soho bar and me turning up and waiting for two hours and him not showing and me going down the street and finding a payphone and calling him and him saying look I'm sorry you're a nice guy but I'm not really looking for a boyfriend right now, and me slamming the phone down and running for the Tube and trying not to cry cos I didn't really believe in love at first sight not really not at all to be honest but to be honest he made me kind of change my mind.

Rather than that happening. OK this is what happens.

I call him from the payphone and he says My god I'm so sorry I didn't know what to do the Tube is fucked I'm so sorry there's been a bomb scare or something all the trains up here are fucked I'm sorry but look can I see you tomorrow I have something I need to ask you it's kind of important and so of course I say Yes. And I see him and he says Look I know this sounds weird but I've been offered this job, it'll pay really well it's in Dubai and look I've done my research you're a journo right you're an Aussie journo they love Aussie journos in Dubai seriously they really do and they pay well more than you'll ever earn here it's a gold mine I mean it's a fucking gold mine for people like us so what about it hey what do you think and of course I say Yes.

That's what happens.

And here's what else.

I'm back in Melbourne and I'm late twenties OK maybe look maybe early thirties and I'm in some bar some nightclub I don't fucking know some licensed establishment and there's some kid cruising me at least ten years

younger than me I'm thinking and I'm kind of cruising him back although he's kind of young he's really really young for sure he's legal but he's too young for me and then suddenly some friend of his is chatting to me telling me this kid followed me here from across town and look yes look that's pretty flattering although I'd sort of forgotten I'd been across town that's how drunk I am and suddenly his mate's introducing us and here's what happens OK he's not drunk because he doesn't drink and I am cos I do but here's what happens.

This is it.

Instead of us spending more than a decade together instead of his mate introducing us and him kissing me and us dancing and chatting and going back to my place and spending more than a decade together this is what happens.

I smile and I shake my head and I say sorry mate you're really not my type.

And no look no I'm not having a nervous breakdown I'm not having a midlife crisis and you're not standing across the room from me as I slam a gin and tonic into the kitchen bench you're not watching the glass shatter round my fingers wondering what you've done wrong you're not thinking maybe there was something else you should've said something other than So I thought we'd have a party for my thirtieth.

Wedge-tail Eagle

Janine Fraser

Swinging round the bend at the three mile
I see him, totem on a fence post
close to the road—pulling me up,

out of the car. Almost full-grown,
he measures the distance between us with all
the angst and challenge

of an adolescent son caught
with a girl on the couch, that drill to the heart
look that says ... *don't ... I've done*

the math ... your anniversary
and the date of my birth don't add up to nine.
How the past predates us, so we live

with the taste of dust in our mouths,
that stripped Mallee shifting on a blow from farm
to farm, piling halfway up the fences,

the taunt of salt-pan
spreading its mange over our paddocks, making
sight of an eagle aberration. He shakes

the sunlight from the feathers
of his neck ruff, spilling glints of copper
and defiance. Divinely wild, he is

magnificent as the angel of announcements,
and my womb contracts on a kick of
portent grief. A thousand terrors

leap to my tongue. *Be safe. Be*
careful. Don't go getting into any after-party
car. Don't speed. Don't do

*Speed. Don't ride your bike without
a helmet. Don't ... don't ... every word a wire
in the cage that would make him sparrow.*

My phone reverbs in my pocket
telling me I'm running late for work. He
doesn't even flinch

at my door slam, frowning only
with his fierce and dark. Accelerating away
in a rattle of gravel,

I seek him in the hindsight
of my mirrors and catch him adjusting
his wings with a high hunch of shoulder, as if

shrugging off the tourist
who would pin him to postcard. Of course,
he's gone when I drive home. Weeks later, I'm still

tracking the sky. Anguish of lambs
and gunshot cracks across my days—fear living me
forward to some late-night knock on the door;

the three mile becoming
something monumental; fence-post buried
thigh deep in shifting red sand.

Do Not Shake the Bridge

Anne Elvey

A long bridge of books and paper
spans the gorge. You have gone
ahead and vertigo is a hand clasped
round my ankle, with the gravity of flesh

suspended in air. Old books
are roped together. Their hard spines
dig into my soles. The side ropes
are the papier-mâché of bad

poems. A heart worn on a sleeve.
At my first launch I left behind a
layer of skin. On my hands the scent
of words. It has rained lately, and now

the wind bites. Your back is almost
out of view. I want to sit down—
a small huddle in the swinging air—
and let the paper decompose and dry

to scatter on the wind. Vertigo climbs
me hand over hand. I have not looked
down to see the roaring chasm nor up
to the eucalypt sky. Across are the rocks

of Cataract Gorge. I follow my eyes
along the backs of my hands, knees
abraded by each volume's edge. There you
are at the other side, shrinking the distance.

Perseid Meteor Shower

Rachael Mead

Like a stranger to Galileo, I've slept through the Renaissance
still seeing the cosmos in Ptolemaic rings
entranced by the circling of celestial bodies around us.
Foucault's Pendulum in the Pantheon revolutionised my world.
Who knew we weren't standing still?
Eclipses, comets, meteors, even satellites
connect me back to ancient ancestors
in awe at the caprice of the gods,
eternally marvelling at the tiny holes in the floor of heaven
made by angels' stiletto heels.
I'm a pagan subscribed to NASA's email list
for the heads-up on astronomical happenings
and well aware of the contradiction.
The August sky is clear
I see one graze the sky
tail pointing back to Perseus.
I try not to think about
the less than poetic Swift-Tuttle comet
of which these fleet diamonds are the tail.
It's cold
I retreat inside
And boot up.

Boundary Rider

EJ Whitten's valedictory lap of honour,
Melbourne Cricket Ground, June 17, 1995

BN Oakman

Thousands rise, a rolling wave of adulation
for this old, blind and dying king, erstwhile
dictator of the turbulent corridor, a man
who made the game seem easy, a player
on whom the gods never ceased to smile.

Enthroned on an open car, propped
against his eponymous son, grandchildren
clustered at his feet, he weeps, smiles,
accepts the plaudits with a thumbs-up,
riding the boundary of his heyday arena.

Winners are grinners, he said. *Losers
may do as they please*. Lively in the minds
of any who saw him play, known to many
for his clowning on bulldust TV,
as mythical as Achilles to the young.

Slowly he circles. At the city end the banners
droop. Gulls circle and swoop. The roaring
pavilions gather him into their shadows
until, arms outstretched as if commanding
one last mark, he glides to the galleries below.

A man mutters something about Errol Flynn.
'The best footballer I ever saw,' says another.
A boy wearing a black and red jumper asks,
'Was he as good as James Hird?' Sirens
wail in benediction. The game starts anew.

Jackie

Meg Mooney

I am away, so my car is not in that long line
driving slowly through the Gap
the last time I saw Jackie, just before Christmas
she sang for me, grinning with delight
Mungangka, miilmiilpa ...
Silent night, holy night ...

no more bustling into the office
to ring up and harangue the housing mob
to fix her broken-down house
put up a fence to keep out the dogs
do something

or tell me some story, like the famous one
about seeing someone take lots of plants
from the nursery on the weekend
writing their number plate in mulberry juice on a blackboard

she'd ask me, older than her, to climb up to the cave
in the cliff next to the Gap, pick some *mingkulpa*—bush tobacco
I'd laugh, she'd get some kids to go up
anyway the nursery manager was growing some for her
when her house finally got renovated
he helped her set up her mattress and plastic bags
under the tree across the road

sometimes she'd just come straight out with
Yuwani!—Give me!—money
I usually did, she didn't drink
was often looking after a troop of kids

in the last few years she called me Mum
teasing me—she was my mother, skin way
now I find out she was young enough to be my daughter
if I'd had a child at fifteen, like many girls here

she loved having a car those last few months
I'd see her long tentacle of arm
waving out of a window
a big grin behind it

then, a week before Christmas
the car was smashed into a tree
Jackie the only one in it
was it that last fight with her husband?
him throwing a brick through the windscreen
as she drove off?
or just enough of living on the edge?

Contributors' Notes

Selections from the 2007-2009

publications of New Writer Literary Fiction

Jenny Weisberg

2007 Contributors

Martha Abbot has self-published a poem and four essays defending household monotony. *Surprise in the Pantry* is her debut story in *New Writer Literary Fiction*. She lives with her cat in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

It takes a vivid imagination to portray the non-drama of a single woman's life. I went out on a limb with *Surprise in the Pantry*, a psychological showdown between a woman and the dust bunny she encounters beneath her living room sofa, because it draws a bit more from my personal life than I had intended. At least in fiction the reader doesn't know what is true or exaggerated or plain made up, although the argumentative stance the dust bunny takes when he gets swept into the pan might give away the invented part. I just hope the main character's epiphanic moment behind the canned yams is adequately veiled—when Darla realises dust bunnies and men have almost everything in common, and that she is through trying to relate to them. Before I had a falling out with the members of my writers group who refused to critique my twelfth draft of *Pantry*, I was enthusiastically encouraged to publish this story. My advice to new writers—trust your instincts and sensitivities.

Art Hamilton operates heavy machinery and is a self-taught writer living in New Jersey. *Raising the Bar* is his first published story.

Stories are always swirling up from the dust on a construction site, and I figure who better to pen 'em than me? 'Get outta here,' Darryl joked when I told him I wrote a story about the time the rebar crushed his left arm. His smile faded, though, when I showed him the galleys. He insisted that the two-page description of his eye tic wasn't necessary. I argued that convincing stories needed such details, and that he'd just have to live with it. During break, Darryl refused to return the galleys and passed them up to Jim on scaffolding. I'm not sure how they ended up with Hank by quitting time, or why the anger in the air seemed denser than the just-delivered concrete water feature laying like a beached whale on the avenue. Jim cut me off at the time clock and pushed me up against the break table with his meaty forefinger. 'What's the idea of showcasing our mistakes?' he shouted. Try explaining

realism to a crew of lunkheads. 'Construction is gritty business,' I said. 'You've all been immortalised. I thought you'd be flattered.' 'Immortalise this, you jerk,' said Jim (Tim in the story, whose foot got backed over by a Bobcat when he was taking a leak on the fill pile); then he right-hooked my jaw. 'And this,' said Hank (Frank in the story, who let his wife run the backhoe after work one night, which, when she hit the retaining wall, caused seven thousand dollars in damage). He pulled a lighter from his shirt pocket and set fire to the galleys. Then he threw them into my locker and slammed the door. The galleys, along with my boots and work clothes, went up in smoke. So this story ended up costing me big time. My advice to new writers—don't expose your plots to your friends.

Donna Meyers is a junior at Middle Junction High School. She lives with her parents in Middle Junction, Oregon.

My English teacher, Mrs. Haysbad, submitted *Stuck in the Middle* after I wrote it for an assignment last spring; she thought publication might alter my disillusionment with living in Middle Junction. Fat chance. I'm not waiting a day past graduation to leave this hole—only one year and thirteen days to go. For what it's worth, since nobody listens to me around here, Jason Hobart's pecker is the size of a maggot! And Roxanne, you slut, the next time you shake that short skirt in front of Matt I'll scratch your eyes out. My advice to new writers—take advantage of your teachers, especially nice ones like Mrs. Haysbad, who think they are taking you under their wing when they drive you home after school and offer you advice, and then will do *anything* for you when your eyes well over with tears, including raising your grade to passing. A little secret: if Mrs. Haysbad hadn't rewritten ninety percent of *Stuck in the Middle*, it would be stuck in a recycling bin.

Pierce Stallone is a third-year student at Aim High Community College. He lives with his roommates, Phil and Dave, in Chieftain Dormitories. *Hideaway Barfly* is his first fiction.

I didn't think I'd have to pay to get published, but hey, it's great to be in print! High fives to my roommates Phil and Dave (dudes!) and to all the guys who pounded brewskies with me down at the Hideaway. Without their support I'd of spent only two nights 'writing what I know' for my assignment, instead of three or four. Dave's the one who convinced me to add the part about my breakup with Diane, since it was kind of dramatic when she threw my hair goo and all my Bon Jovi CD's out the dorm room window the night she dumped me. The pen name was Phil's rad idea; and now I'm thinking of changing my real name to 'Pierce'. My advice to new writers—friends are everything! I never would have finished *Hideaway Barfly* if it weren't for my buddies. Who else would've encouraged me to submit this story after it got a C— in CW 101?

2008 Contributors

Martha Abbot-Hamilton has self-published a poem and four essays defending household monotony. This is her second story in *New Writer Literary Fiction*. She lives with her cat and new husband in New Jersey.

I met Art at *NWLF*'s release party last fall and was instantly drawn to his aggressive home-grown attitude. We were chatting about the way dust devils can hamper construction, when he suddenly insisted I marry him. Who could turn down such a spontaneous romantic? Although the honeymoon ended before really getting started, I believe that harmony might still find its place in our relationship. Art inspired the main character for my story, *Lift a Finger, Please*, where passion and friction flare up between two newlyweds over a housekeeping dispute (and results in a snapped-in-two broom). Although the protagonist manages to scrape together some optimism after her husband badgers her to cash in her inheritance, the muddled resolution offers her little comfort. My advice to new writers—think positive! And write from the heart.

Art Hamilton is a self-taught writer living in New Jersey. *The Case of the CASE* is his second published story.

I thought I had beige linoleum in my kitchen until Martha moved in; maybe there's something to marriage after all. When I came up with the title of my story, I decided to write a mystery to go with it. 'Just stay the hell away from the backhoe,' Darryl said when I mentioned my idea. But without first-hand experience I was having a tough time getting my story off the ground. So, I decided to take action. The Thursday before the story's deadline, I took the backhoe key from Darryl's locker. At three am I snuck down to the site and slipped through a gap in the fence by the pylons. Driving in reverse, I scraped a crossbones symbol into the dirt with the backhoe's bucket and under it wrote, 'Beware'. I hid behind the gravel pile to watch how the story would unfold when the crew showed up. Their reactions were disappointing. 'Jerk,' was Jim's only comment. 'I'll pound his pansy arse ...' was Darryl's remark, and the only one to make it into my final draft. The cops showed up an hour later and took me to the county jail. I had half a morning Friday to put my story together before Martha bailed me out. She read my story on the way to the post office, and mumbled something about a weak premise and lack of character development. 'You try writing a mystery in two hours,' I said. Case closed. My advice to new writers—when you need a story, make it happen.

Donna Meyers will attend Aim High Community College in the fall. She lives with Pierce Stallone and his roommates, Phil and Dave, in Chieftain Dormitories.

I contacted Pierce last year after his story appeared in *New Writer Literary Fiction*. I was impressed how he broke every rule of style and structure and still managed to get the point across that drinking is fun. I told him I was nearly finished with my story, *Gettin' Out of Dodge*, and he said, 'Why not really get out of dodge and come check out eastern North Dakota?' So I went (after a final meeting with Mrs. Haysbad who rewrote my story with tears streaming down her face). I found a website that issues high school transcripts for a low low price; so not only did I drop out of high school, I even got a scholarship to Aim High. My mum was glad to see me off to college and already involved with a published writer. Pierce, by the way, is working on the sequel to *Hideaway Barfly*, and is trying to save up enough money to publish it next year. Phil and Dave are great roommates—if I leave the bathroom door open when I shower, they share their food. My advice to new writers—take advantage of the Internet. I downloaded term papers and final exams for all my classes and won't need to crack a single book this semester.

2009 Contributors

Martha Abbot has self-published a poem and four essays defending household monotony. Her stories have appeared in *New Writer Literary Fiction*. She lives with her cat in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

My recent divorce set the stage for the compelling drama entitled, *Get Your Own Damn Beer*. The humiliation I experienced when my marriage fell apart inspired the themes of sorrow and ultimate transcendence in my story. I abandoned the use of simile after the first scene, when comparisons to doorknobs and weasels seemed to be improving the antagonist's character traits. So, my story is pure in its exposure, though the teary-eyed ending when the wife finally walks out is fictionalised (Art was snoring in his recliner) in order to target *NWLF* audiences. But this miserable year contains a silver lining: a Hollywood agent, impressed with the edgy cynicism in my writing, wants to adapt 'Beer' into a film. So, I guess I have Art to thank for being such an asshole and triggering my best work yet. My advice to new writers—learn from your really really stupid mistakes, and use them to motivate character driven plots. And if your ex comes begging for a cut in your profit, tell him to go to hell.

Art Hamilton operates heavy machinery and is a self-taught writer living in New Jersey. *Caught in a Clamshell* is his third published story.

When I scooped Darryl up with half a ton of gravel to jump-start my story, he didn't say a word about the experience (blowing the character reaction sequence I'd counted on). Instead, he dragged me by the shirt tails toward the freshly poured concrete at the Bigg's shopping center site. By the time it dawned on me I could transfer my own fears to those of Darryl's in the

clamshell, I was knee-deep in slurry and my newest pair of work boots was ruined. Well, Hollywood can fill in the blanks when they come calling to *me*. That'll show Martha. At least with her gone I can breathe a little easier at home. She was getting on my nerves anyway with all her lousy tips on love-making and household chores. 'I'm writing about the working man,' I told her. 'If I have to waste time fetching my own beer, I sure as hell won't waste it on that other crap.' My advice to new writers—ideas come from day to day reality. How else would I have thought up the line, 'grey as the bathtub ring,' if I didn't have a thick one coating the inside of my tub? Even Martha couldn't scrub that baby out.

Donna Meyers is on academic probation at Aim High Community College. She lives with Rusty Pederson, Phil, and Dave in Chieftain Dormitories.

Yes, Rusty is a Rusty, 100%. Even after drinking four wine coolers and dimming the lights I detect nothing but a Rusty. Pierce is wishful thinking. When Rusty ramped up his research hours at the Hideaway and I was stuck watching re-runs of *Dragnet* with Phil and Dave every afternoon, it was inevitable that our three-way flirtation would spiral out of control. Now I'm pregnant and have no idea who the father is. Phil and Dave want me to stick with Rusty so they can move out next semester. But why should they get off easy? The idea of spending the rest of my life (or even the rest of the semester) with Rusty makes me more nauseous than the morning sickness. From this mess, *Out of Dodge and Into Hot Water*, was born. My advice to new writers—if you run out of people to take advantage of, look harder. You can usually count on unfaithful friends like Phil and Dave for some hush money. And there are always old pushovers like Mrs. Haysbad, who begs me to return to boring Middle Junction where she would help raise the baby. Maybe I could just send her the baby ...

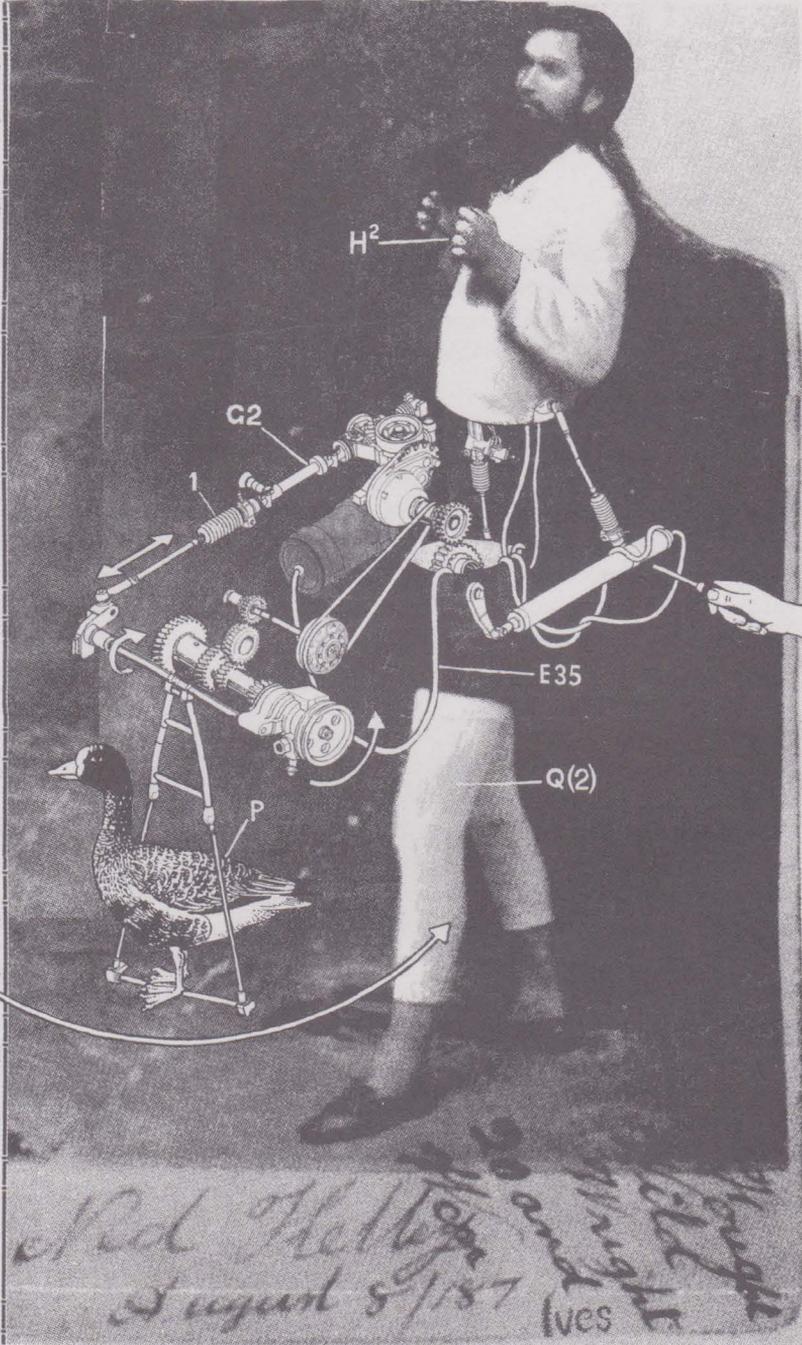
Pierce Stallone is a fifth-year student at Aim High Community College. He lives with his roommates, Phil and Dave, and his girlfriend, Donna Meyers, in Chieftain Dormitories.

It's amazing to be in print a second time! I owe it all to my drinking partner, Stu, for hanging out six nights a week at the Hideaway, where *Another Night at the Hideaway* was written. My roommates were lame this term (dudes, what's up?) and hardly went out. Maybe they're gearing up to pass some classes. After all, we were supposed to graduate three years ago and academic probation ends next semester. Donna wasn't much support, either. She said she was tired of paying for her own beer. Girls! My advice to new writers—friends never let you down, unlike some teachers I know. My CW 102 prof. had the gall to say that my stories about drunken student life were hackneyed and prosaic. Whatever that means!

Professor Raymond P. Zimmerman is a senior research scientist at the Institute of Neurobiology in Oakland, California. *A Fractal Analysis of Brain Stem Morphology* is his first published fiction.

I curse the day the Institute imported that Russian devil Gronov from Moscow. Last month after he reviewed my manuscript regarding brain cell generation from the stem cells of liver tissue, he said, 'Dr. Zimmerman, this is pure fiction.' I said, 'Fooley Gronov, you know my ideas are revolutionary. Don't try to undermine my twenty-five years of research just because your views on this subject lack sophistication.' Gronov said, 'Your theories are ambitious perhaps, but simply preposterous. I laugh off my head when I get to the part about sequential synapses affecting the central nervous system. Your conclusions are weak and biased; only in fiction could your drama unfold into such a tangle of unresolved loose ends.' His pompous smirk unleashed my temper and before I could control myself I shouted, 'If you can find a literary journal that will publish this paper I will eat your shoes.' And if you've guessed that that fool Gronov now kicks up the heels of his new Gucci Armandos every time we pass in the hallway you've guessed right. And to top off my sour stomach (redolent of talc and cheap suede), the *Journal of Brain Study* rejected my paper solely on the basis that it was already published. Now my grant from the National Science Foundation has been revoked and I've been demoted from my position of distinguished chair at Stanford. Ah, but I have a trap for that know-it-all Gronov. See his face when his proposal highlighting the marriage of genetically engineered receptor cells and transplanted neural cells shows up in *Romance Review*. Ah, ha, ha, ha. My advice to new writers—ah, ha, ha, ha!

To see your work published in New Writer Literary Fiction, send your manuscript, bio and advice to new writers, plus 100 dollars cash, to PO Box [REDACTED]—the eds.



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LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

I dithered. Kevin and Myron had a plan. John Lennon sang 'Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans.' It is, it does. Editors push it a little bit this way—and we are editors. The pendulum reiterates and evolves. *GDS* keeps on Swinging.

Nolan Tyrrell

I remember one night in Albion Street, a much thinner and slightly inebriated Myron Lysenko falling off his bike in my driveway and announcing that he and Kevin Brophy were going to fund a new magazine. Some years later I shared the editing of Issue 15 with the peerless Louise Craig and Issue 16 came to fruition thanks to Kim Griffiths and Peter 'Freddie' Tiernan. Reading submissions and discovering great new writers was always a joy and I often wished we could produce an issue of the fascinating letters accompanying the work ... you never know.

Lyn Boughton

When asked by Kevin Brophy and Myron Lysenko to join Lyn Boughton in taking over the editorship of *Going Down Swinging* I felt honoured, excited and terrified. The experience proved me right. Congratulations to all editors since for keeping this important little magazine alive and kicking. Happy 30th edition!

Louise Craig

I don't know how I became an editor of *GDS*. I wasn't a great writer, but a great reader of edgy short stories. We argued on writing styles, ethics, 'good' writing vs 'good' story. I was proud of my time with the magazine, giving young, innovative writers and artists a chance.

Carol Carter

When I was an associate editor, *Going Down Swinging* occasionally attracted unworthy submissions involving graphic sexual descriptions, due to a misinterpretation of the magazine's name. This was a lot of fun, and I hope current and future *GDS* editors still get a few of these in the mail.

Lauren Williams

I'm daggier than a Daddo but I know that when I want to read who's going to stick around in Australian writing, getting my Frank Thring freaky thing onto the latest word-crunched edition of *Going Down Swinging* is essential. I might even be able to convince you that I am street. At least before the advent of Skype. Damn.

Anna Hedigan

GDS was my first literary journal love. I found it both buxom and handsome. It was the very first publication I was in. I loved it so deeply I was a co-editor for seven years. It's plucky, it's nurturing, it's a perfect capsule of wordy goodness. It is still a big love, and will always be, great literature just never leaves you ...

Alicia Sometimes

I've loved working with *Going Down Swinging* in all my manifestations over the last decade. *GDS* is an immersive and poetic snapshot of the world, with an incredible buzz. It connects to the hive whilst keeping the individual voice alive. I'm sure we'll be implanting the contents of this journal directly into our brains in thirty years time. I'll certainly be uploading that über-cool experience.

Klare Lanson

BACK ISSUES

Over the past thirty years *Going Down Swinging* has taken many forms. Here is a selection from the past three decades. You can view the whole history of *GDS* in the Deep Vaults section of our website. Many back issues are still available for sale on request—to buy direct, visit our website or email us for an order form.



No.29 (2009) Editors Lisa Greenaway & Klare Lanson. Poetry, prose & comic art from Lorin Ford, Chris Flynn, Ali Alizadeh, Jade McDonald. CD recorded at the 2009 *Overload Poetry Festival* feat. Ateif Khieri, I.O., Felix Nobis & L.E. Scott. Graphic novella by Oslo Davis. Cover art by Mila Faranov.

No.25 (2007) Editors Steve Grimwade & Lisa Greenaway.

Two CDs of the world's best writer-performers including Edwin Torres, Victoria Stanton, Taylor Mali, Fortner Anderson, Don Walker, Sean M Whelan & The Mime Set, Jayne Fenton Keyne. Cover & inside artwork by Tai Snaith.



No.22 (2004) Editors Steve Grimwade, Alicia Sometimes, Anna Hedigan & Adam Ford. Poetry, prose & comic art from Tim Danko, Jo Waite, Rose Mulready, Gerald Roche. CD feat. The Bedroom Philosopher, Mike Ladd, Tom Cho & Jannette Hoe, Michael Farrell. Cover art by Peter Savieri.

No.17 (1998) Editor Lyn Boughton. Assoc. Editors Kim Griffiths, Sarah Andrew, Libby Kelly. Poetry & prose from Kate Fielding, Adam Carey, Judy Jaques, Angela Costi, Philip Norton, Alicia Sometimes, Martin Downey, Peter Murphy. Cover art by Ben Schintler.



No.13 (1993) Editors Myron Lysenko & Kevin Brophy, Assoc. Editor Lauren Williams, Guest Editor Grant Caldwell. Poetry, prose & comic art from Glen Tomasetti, Ken Smeaton, Coral Hull, Peter Bakowski, Judy Horacek, Jas H. Duke tribute CD. Cover painting by Margery Hummell Bennett.

No. 8 (1988) Editors Myron Lysenko & Kevin Brophy. Assoc. Editor Nolan Tyrrell. Poetry & prose from Kay Waters, Eric Beach, Gillian Mears, Geoff Goodfellow, David Metzenthien. Interviews with Bill Turner & Bruce Pascoe. Magazine & small press roundup. Cover photograph by Antoni Jach.



No.2 (1981) Editors Myron Lysenko & Kevin Brophy. Poetry & prose from Anna Couani, Rory Harris, Cornelis Vleeskens, Judith Woodfall. Reviews by Grant Caldwell, Rob Bath, Steve Brown. Magazine & small press roundup. Cover photograph courtesy Brendan Hennessy.

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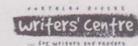
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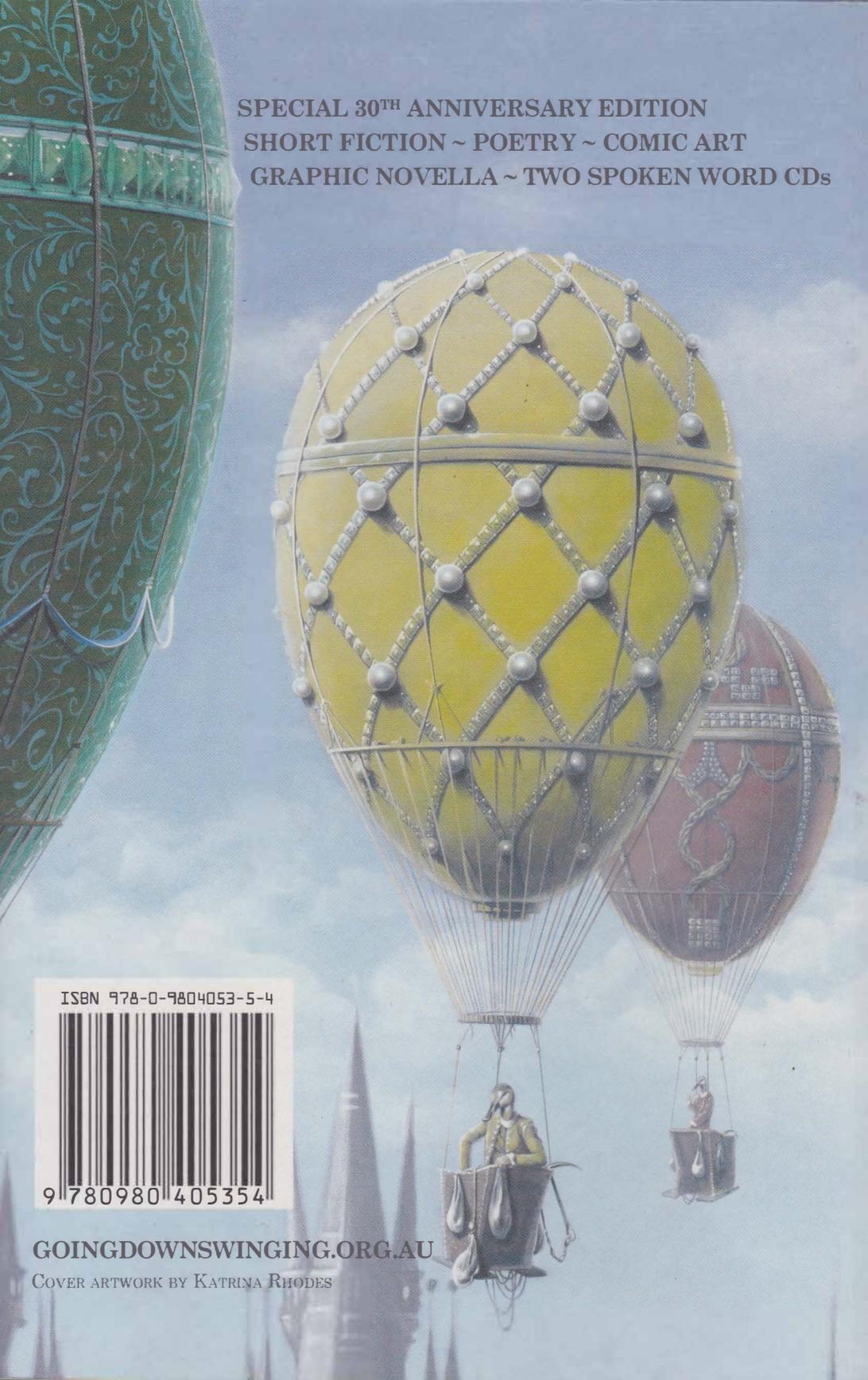
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