

The Way We Live Now



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The Way We Live Now

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS
Melissa Hardie and Kate Lilley

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COVER

Catherine Vidler: *Lost Matchstick Sonnet 16* (2021)
Photograph, 14 cm x 16 cm

INTRODUCTION: *THE WAY WE LIVE NOW*

In *Cruel Optimism* (2011) Lauren Berlant identifies the “impasse” as a “genre for tracking the sense of the present,” one that marks “the unfolding activity of the contemporary moment”:

a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one’s sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event. (Berlant 4)

The Pandemic Era has demanded that awareness and hypervigilance in the context of ordinary and extraordinary crisis: climate catastrophe, the ongoing vicissitudes associated with settler cultures and the seemingly everyday irruption of crises whose contours and extent, implications and associations, are imprecise and mobile. The “wandering absorptive awareness” that Berlant promotes alongside “hypervigilance” sets the tone for this issue of *Southerly*. Assembled through the negotiation of impasses both distinctive and generic, now, in Australian literary, publishing, and personal cultures, we hope these essays, stories, memoirs, poems and reviews contribute to the ballast and orientation required to find and maintain our “sea legs.” Like the pandemic itself, with its waves of too much and nothing much, this collection of pandemic-inspired and pandemic-adjacent writing has been long in the making, exposing everyday precarity and privilege, fomenting action and inaction. The only part that is over is the fantasy that it might be over by the time we were done with our work on this issue. Instead, the way we live now feels permanently recalibrated. Less and more.

We were overwhelmed and delighted by the influx of submissions in response to our call for this special issue; inevitably, sorry that we could not include more, and glad that digital publication gave us greater latitude in some respects. Made possible by the local support of Create NSW, at a particularly disastrous time for arts funding, we are grateful to all our contributors (a number of whom are appearing in *Southerly* for the first time) for trusting us with their work; to our distinguished reviewers, Vanessa Berry, Pam Brown, Matthew Clarke and John Kinsella; to Angela Rockel, Brigitta Olubas, Daniela Brozek and Elizabeth McMahon for their assistance with producing the issue; and to our readers in advance, wherever, whenever. Writing this in the first flush of a new Labor government, we hope for better times. Our cover features one of Catherine Vidler’s dazzling “Lost Matchstick Sonnets” (more appear within). Images of poised uncertainty, these experiments in set form are genres unto themselves. Evoking the familiar constraints of the sonnet in material patterns and play, they remind us that timing is everything: genres, materials, and arrangements are volatile and metamorphic, chance intrudes on the everyday, the everyday

brings material for formal elucidation. The diverse work offered here, in *Southerly's* first online-only issue, gathers "Australian" writing produced in many different places and circumstances. Heterogenous and singular in its contents, the layered contiguity of digital publication optimistically promotes the lateral and multitemporal formation of the commons, true to the big ambitions and longevity of this venerable "little magazine." In Corey Wakeling's words, "disperse, *carte blanche*" ("The Gavel Foundation").

Our contributors dwell in and on the permeability of extreme and ordinary states, temporal confusion and disturbance, bringing genre to bear on forms of technological, linguistic, and psychical mediation, reinscribing Berlantian "impasse" in myriad ways. Chris Andrews's compelling sequence, "Shufflemancy," begins its "phantom enfilade": "This is where I couldn't be sure / of which way to go. No time to wait" and ends with the authority of grammatical fiat: "that you have come to find and join here." As Michael Farrell writes, "we go through the stacks like a character / Like a character from another national literature altogether" ("In The Library")—from the secret relief of Beth Spencer's "chronic kitty covid city" ("I like this new zoom world") to the precarious safety of Lucy Dougan's "Down to the Corner" and Rebecca Jessen's deadpan repetition: "It isn't summer until Stosur chokes / on the smoke of homespun soil" ("The New Year"). Stuart Barnes's interlaced "Triolet on Receiving Email from C" positions the iMac as its pistil, rhyming "medium," "tedium" and "*Selenipedium*." Liam Ferney "dial[s] back my podcast diet for the pandemic / but keep[s] nexting on skate vids on YouTube" ("A Love Supreme").

A sheaf of descriptive-phenomenological lyrics exemplify Berlant's "wandering absorptive awareness" as they meditate on sensorial intensification or overload: Angela Gardner's "Each Bending" ("I climb out of the world / and look back in"), Jake Goetz's "Satellite Hearts" ("her laptop humming as train doors // close at the feet of a myna bird"); Jill Jones's "I can look—can't I—" ("nothing is minor"); the "coded murmurings" of Julie Maclean's "Piffing Yonnies into the Post-Industrial"; Julie McElhone's "Nigh Times," a sequence produced as "an observer in isolation" of an online collaborative writing event. No less in thrall to the sublime, Sam Morley's "The algorithm says get tested" revels in the horror of "the world of phlegm." Pascalle Burton's "each one asks in fear, 'will it be me?'" tests the limits of irony, remixing a debauched mediascape as "catastrophic storm" while Julie Chevalier's "rainy stay at home five visitors, max" satirically riffs on Ginsberg's "Howl." The "new normal" of Dan Hogan's "How to leave work on time when working from home" promises "synergetic grieving with a smile": "Sad face emoji." Emily Stewart's absorptive "track and field" poem, "On pause / windswept," catalogues "pencil behind the ear / goings and comings," "negotiating the sliplane," "a breeze in a door." TT.O.'s exuberant algorithmic essay-poem "On Us" crunches numbers and letters into a "moving clock" prognostication of "another 'mass extinction'" and "argument for staying alive." Michael Stratford Hutch calls out Western Sydney's proposed "Aerotropolis" as neofuturist "colonist fantasy": "Here at the edge of the double-thought / sprawl, a dissonant wedge of wing."

It seems especially appropriate that so much of the work collected here in *Southerly's* first entirely online and free issue, concerns the complexity of place, orientation and mediation. Claire Aman's "If There are Zebra Finches" (joint winner of the Harold Tribe Award for Fiction in 2019) treats seriously the sense of contingency the title's "if" implies. A narrative of unintended consequences and the impossibility of maintaining a predictable passage through Country, it nonetheless sides with generosity and serendipity against history's dead hand. Ella Jeffery's "Nachträglichkeit" and Anne Casey's "The federal government has extended the international border ban until June" poeticise bilocation

exacerbated by pandemic border control. Eileen Chong's "Reason" crystallises the terror of filiation as primal scene: "You say: *I thought I'd give you / something to cry about.* // I remember. And you did." In Blake Falcongreen's "Arcadia" "familial ties / weigh heavy and autumnal." Sophia Small's "To Autumn Again" pursues daughter/father entanglement indirectly by tracking the poet, John Keats, from a Sydney classroom where she teaches Campion's *Bright Star*, to a memorial plaque quoting *Hyperion* outside Guy's Hospital in London where her father is receiving chemotherapy, to "Keats themed" Hampstead and the Keats Collection in the British Library.

The push and pull of contraction and expansion, the one and the many, is figured as elemental reckoning in John Kinsella's "Condenser":

When I am dead and buried I will rot down
past the crust into the mantle all the way to the core
where I will be remade molten and compressed.
I will be part of the whole *terra* thing whether
I want to shed angst and guilt or just forget. This crisis
of infinitesimally small particles and realities
of pressure and cohesion and dispersal
analysed by the gross reading tool of gravity

Shastra Deo's neoromantic "Przewalski's Horses Are Back in Belarus," constellates a series of living things—"the last wild stallions," "couch grass," "bumble bees," "birches," "birds' nests / in cottages rotting against / the clouds"—to reveal "that people / were never needed here at all." The affective and political implications of this heightened awareness of contingency are manifold. Various kinds of dialogue spring up, juggling "selves" and "shelves" (Farrell), versioning and seriality, software and hardware. In A. Francis Johnson and Anthony Lynch's collaborative poem, "Zoom," "Our astronaut selves are cornered / on screen." Lucy Sussex's short essay, "Pandemics Past and Present," parsing the uncanny mix of alien and familiar in "writing a past pandemic" whilst "living in a pandemic, in the present" is coupled with an extract from her fiction based on a murder in the 1650s, *The Tell-Tale Skull*. The shade of John Forbes seems to hover over Toby Fitch's "New Chronic Logics":

Will we remember the weather
and whether our bodies passed through each other
in the lockdown dark? It gets away from me

like a sprig in stew, like something nicked.

Individual contributions, and the issue itself which is the sum of them, constitute a provisional library, a theatre, a kind of "Pandemic Bathing" (Wakeling) fit for contemplation of such questions as "What made you laugh during that world-watching called pandemic doom-scrolling self-surveilling epidemiologising of your statistically-quantified data bios called the Covid-self?" (Corey Wakeling, "Pandemic Bathing"). Wakeling's own long "spree"-poem, "The Gavel Foundation," "after" Pam Brown's "Only A Fool Buys Real Estate," exemplifies his parsing of "wit" in its anatomisation of "what you are going to inherit / when you try to insinuate yourself / into canton Australia." So too, in compressed form, Elena

Gomez's sonnet, "Zoe's Catalytic Converter," set in the complex infrastructure of a suburban shopping centre car park where cars "forget" how to find their way, and catalytic converters are catnip for thieves: "They contain / precious metals."

The pandemic scene foregrounds embodiment and intimacy, worrying the boundaries of self and other. Josie/Jocelyn Deane's "Black Star" catapults us into the emergency ward and the speculative self as "alien intelligence," "a kind of language," asking, "What if the body you are, in lockdown, is easier to hack?" Trisha Pender's "Live from the Chemo Lounge," in dialogue with Sedgwick, Sontag, Smith (Stevie), Lorde and Diski, claims the paradoxical "satisfaction" of the negative, the black comedy of the desire to be "already dead": "I confess that after the first shock had worn off I was strangely relieved to be diagnosed with cancer. It meant an end to striving." June Perkins's "Two Livestreamed Funerals, A Cancelled Wedding and the Saving Grace of Poetry" captures the enmeshment of the live and remote in the uneven, "dislocating" effects of attending funerals and weddings via Zoom: the paradoxically enhanced "closeness" that streaming sometimes makes possible and the thrill of rediscovering "in-person vibrations of the human voice." Mark Peart's companion poems pair court records from sodomy prosecutions in Sydney in 1930 with the exigencies and affordances of contemporary cruising, "criminal elision on serial repeat, / the rhythm / of a procedural, *en tele* / wired up to cyber." In "Suspended Loop," Johanna Ellersdorfer walks the night streets of Canberra, her pandemic home, feeling "achingly and suddenly removed from the person I had been only a month before." Vanessa Berry's subtle "Gentle Strength," written "with Anne Dufourmantelle's *Power of Gentleness*," meditates on charged surfaces, associative inflection, the prolonged moment of the suspended "slow blink." Honni van Rijswijk's "Knowing True Crime" orients "living" in relation to the sometimes revelatory, sometimes melancholic mirror the genre of "true crime" provides in thinking through the status of "knowing" itself. Aligning moments of insight with an autobiographical narrative of a life inevitably shaped by the popular dissemination of narratives of crime and justice, "Knowing True Crime" situates a genre whose current popularity largely outstrips efforts to understand its fascination. As such, it deftly marries genres that are insufficient in themselves to encompass this still-burgeoning field of interest and find those points of generic "impasse" (after Berlant) intrinsic to true crime as such.

For any attempt to write "the way we live now"—pandemic body, nation, earth, genre, event, text—matters of truth, justice and activism are paramount. Sandy O'Sullivan's essay "Challenging the Colonialities of Symbolic Annihilation" offers a profound examination and explanation of the deep importance of thinking through relationality, and the consequences of such thinking for both aesthetic and infrastructural interventions. Connecting "deep history" and Vizenor's theorisation of "survivance" they assert "people matter more than the art made, including those future generations, including our deep histories, and including the ways in which this connectedness makes our lives worthwhile." Those inclusions are critical to the analysis of infrastructure O'Sullivan offers, a model and enlivening resituation of the importance of good thinking into the administrative space that we work with, and generously demonstrates the way Indigenous and First Nations thinkers have already offered transformative possibilities for this work. Chris Arnold's poem, "offline," "a trope, or one in the making," considers the ethics of care and the politics of privilege:

is that sauce on your sleeve? why do you keep
choosing *that* path—the one with the thorns,
as if there were another. as if this town,
this Derbal, were left to Wadjuk care and anyone
could step off-grid whenever they please.

“Precarity and Possibility,” a collaborative essay by the Illawarra Climate Justice Alliance, explores the local potential for “an anti-capitalist decolonial approach to a just transition” in the context of “intensification of existing pressures,” by “[l]istening to and learning from the knowledges embedded within the Aboriginal custodianship of Country.” That process requires hypervigilant attention and self-scrutiny. As Harold Legaspi writes in “Cool Kids”: “I am on my way home, and I am in my house, a partial imagining of some memory. / Literally, I am tangled. In fact, this material is a yarn of internalised violence.” In “Burning Cook,” Katrina Schlunke puts a match to the edifice of Captain Cook:

Be careful where you stand Mr Policeman Australia
You are always standing on life.
Touching that life is a gift we sometimes get
But we Johnny-come-lately Australians are never going to get it from atop a statue
So I am burning Cook.
Trying to burn away that bit of myself that forgets
Trying to transform that mixed up shit

Alison Whittaker’s exhilarating, excoriating “the poets are about to lie to you” enjoins us to wake up and take responsibility: “recall some worlds getting smaller. remember others exploding into deathly view.” Only then can we hope to discover, in Berlant’s terms, “those processes that have not yet found their genre of event.”

Melissa Hardie and Kate Lilley

WORK CITED

Lauren Berlant. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

VANESSA BERRY

Gentle Strength

(with Anne Dufourmantelle's *Power of Gentleness*)

"... because [gentleness] has a transformative ability over things and beings, it is a power."

Slow Blink

Beside the house, between the wall and the fence, is an untended stretch of yard a couple of metres across. Here the bins are stowed and fallen leaves mound up without being raked away. I sit cross-legged on the ground like a child might, ignoring the dampness of the earth beneath me and the crawling insects of the leaf litter. Meeting the gaze of the lean and nervous black cat sitting by the fence, I let my eyelids fall closed.

The cat has never lived under the care of humans and has little trust for our kind. Months before, neighbours came crashing through the yard with a wire contraption designed to trap feral cats. Stand aside, they said, we know what we are doing. But the trap remained empty and they soon took it off elsewhere.

Once the trap was removed the cat returned. Whenever I went out into the yard she would appear suddenly, as if conjured. If I approached her she disappeared just as readily. She would only stay if I paid her no attention, her clear green eyes following me as if I was a puzzle she was trying to figure out. Eventually I ignored her enough that she didn't scarper if I sat quietly across from her.

The leaves underneath me, the earthy air cool in my lungs. Eyes shut, a pause. A split-second memory, a line from a meditation, so long ago I had listened to it on a Walkman. A woman with a low stern velvet voice commanding me to "look into the darkness behind the closed eyes." Her voice the length of a slow blink.

Opening them again, I meet the cat's clear green eyes. My blink gestures gentleness, no threat. I make no claim on her but that we are here together.

"... it reigns in us through tiny fragments of time."

Dust

Inside the newsagency there is dust over everything. No one comes in search of the foolscap loose leaf refills or receipt books that wait on the shelves. From the ceiling inflatable red Lotto balls are suspended, bleached to orange from years of sunlight. The magazine racks are empty, but in one corner there is a stand of greeting cards, and above these a row of ribbon rosettes hang on hooks pushed into the artificial wood panelling.

On the facade a painted sign advertises Stationery, Matchbox Cars, Cold Drinks, Video Hire and Australia Post. This entices only those who need to pick up a parcel, and me, who is soothed by redundant office supplies.

It is tempting to think that this is a place in which nothing changes, but the dust tells me otherwise. Time is particulate, it accumulates and disperses. This shop is a moment in which pads of typewriter carbons, lettering stencils, and microcassettes for answering machines might be useful. I hover my hand over a packet of Letraset, deciding whether it is worth disturbing the dust. It isn't the soft, pinkish-grey of household dust, but the gritty, car-exhaust stuff from the highway outside. Sunlight flares beyond the door, where the traffic surges onwards, towards the city or deeper into the suburbs.

I decide against the Letraset and reach for the pad of typewriter carbons instead. Under the dust the cover is patterned in thick bands of colour with the caption "Ultrafilm—for immediate smudge-proof copies." The carbons inside are thin with a silvery backing and have a weird, milk-bottle-lolly smell when I flip through them.

At the counter I push the carbons under the perspex screen that shields the man behind it from me. He has calmly watched me examine the shelves, although surely the store would have few people browsing. The thick coating of dust on the cover of the pad surprises him. As he cleans it off with a paper towel he asks how many sheets from it I would like to buy. The whole thing, I say.

"... it gives space to things and removes the weight of shadows."

Wind

The grass tickles my neck as I lie on the side of the hill, watching the movement of the clouds. The strong afternoon breeze flows over me, combing the grass, getting between the leaves to make them whisper, smoothing my face with a swift touch.

The wind carries the thump of wood being chopped from down near the house in the valley below. I had slipped away without telling anyone but my friends know I like to go walking alone, over the dry creek with its tumbled stones, following the climbing path. Up here the house is tucked out of sight. The wind skims over the valley treetops to meet the hillside and I listen to its gusts swell and recede.

What kind of weather troubles you? This question a memory some decades old, of when I had sat on a plastic chair in a basement homeopathy clinic, contemplating a photocopied quiz. The room gurgled with the sound of the building's plumbing as I gave my answers. The questions enquired about such topics as my fears and the temperature of water I most preferred. For the weather question there was a list of suggestions: hot, dry, wet, stormy. I drew in an additional box, wrote "windy" next to it, and ticked it.

Which tincture was I given that day? Did it help me? I don't recall. All that remains with me is the gurgling basement and the memory of betraying the wind. I didn't like how wind pulls at my hair and cuts through my coat and agitates my spirits. But mostly I was being contrary, wanting to exceed the prescriptions of the questionnaire. Every kind of weather troubled me, then.

I am not quite that same person. Up on the hillside I lie in the grass and the wind moves over me. I let it take the heat from my cheeks and skim the thoughts from my head, so I'm nothing but surface.

"... it only reveals itself after the fact, in the impression it leaves upon sleep."

Dream

In the kitchen I start to tell Lucy about the dream I had the night before. I've barely mentioned the word "dream" when she stops me.

"Three sentence limit," she says. That's all she will listen to of people's dreams, she explains. They are inscrutable and rarely interesting.

I use up my three sentences quickly. The city in my dream, which I understood as Sydney but was nothing like the actual city, immediately lost its strangeness once I started to describe it. Tamed by language and logic, the dream became a flat sequence of details. Lucy listens politely as she pours tea from the pot.

What I don't tell her was that I've been to this city before, in other dreams. Its buildings are made of a soft brown crumbling stone the texture of biscuits. In the photography district I live in an apartment above a store with a faded sign for Kodak on the facade. My room has high ceilings and a bed with a cast iron frame and creaking springs, and a long thin corner window serves me a slice of grey sky and rooftops.

Little happens in the dreams set here; their time is slow motion. I'm in the room, looking out at the view of the city. Or I'm sitting at the edge of the bed, listening to the trams scraping by outside. There's no way to describe how these dreams are more than this, and why they stay with me long after I have them, apart from their gentleness.

"It is the secret lining ..."

Carrying

Occasionally a writer turns my thinking right over; their words inflect my days, linger behind my own sentences. When I found Anne Dufourmantelle's *Power of Gentleness* I had been searching for a philosophy of the gentle. It was a quality I felt an affinity with, and I often craved it, and saw it lacking where it could enact a necessary care.

On my first reading all I knew about Anne Dufourmantelle was that she was a French philosopher and psychoanalyst. Curious about an author who would argue that gentleness is essential, I searched her name. A list of news articles appeared, reporting the story of her recent death.

She had died trying to save two children who had been swimming at a beach in the south of France. They came into trouble in rough water and she had swum out to help them. Although the children were rescued, Dufourmantelle was pulled away from shore by a current and did not survive. The news articles all repeated the same quote—"being alive is a risk"—from her *In Praise of Risk*, and suggested that her philosophy was the source of her bravery and selflessness.

It was a shock that she was suddenly gone, especially as she wrote of gentleness as such a force of life and continuation. I began to carry the book with me like a talisman. I read it in waiting rooms, on train journeys, opened it for a paragraph or two while stopped at the traffic lights. It was as familiar an object as my wallet or keys, the slim paperback with a cover illustration of a young woman carrying a bull on her shoulder. In whiskery pencil lines and grey shading, the bull rests on the woman like a sack or an enormous pillow, its legs hanging down as she holds its weight.

Sometimes the bull is particularly heavy. I feel it pushing down on my shoulder and it takes all of my strength to keep my balance. Other times the bull is lighter, more like a bundle of vapour than an animal twice my size. I need only hold it softly as we move onwards together.

WORK CITED

Anne Dufourmantelle. *Power of Gentleness: Meditations on the Risk of Living*. Translated by Katherine Payne and Vincent Sallé. Fordham UP, 2018.

JOSIE/JOCELYN DEANE

Black Star

I still have the electrodes on my bedside table. The EMT were very patient; I felt more in control at that point and was succeeding in my head to convey exactly what was happening with no digressions or noticeable breaks in flow. You said afterwards, when I got home at 3, I was talking like someone had spliced audio tracks on top of each other; I was talking casually in the back as the EMT avoided my gaze and asked me about my medical history, and I was thinking I really need hand-sanitiser, touching the metal bed frames. When I had followed them down the stairs, there was a 2 second delay—I could feel it, the spark—between the impulse and my body, my hands stretching for the banister. When I was still ok, I was fighting the impulse to laugh convulsively, for the sake of pride, I said I can feel the feeling: it's not language, I can feel the parts of my brain lighting up and their rough approximation. It was like how people describe music. Then I tried to walk to our bedroom.

In the before-times, 2019 perhaps, I was visiting my parents in Sydney. The house, hedges shorn, walls cream/millennial pink, for real-estate tours. I haven't told you about it, except this moment; I can't remember why I was up at 6 am, but I couldn't sleep. There were frogs in the neighbours' faux-Zen pond, blending into tinnitus. How many frog generations have lived since we moved in? I was reading *Eros the Bittersweet* by Anne Carson and/or *A Voyage to Arcturus* by David Lindsay. The two blend together now: Anne Carson talking about the divine madness of love, the purposefully compromised defences Greek poets raised against it, on an alien planet, a tentacle growing out of her chest, gender indeterminate, impossibly sharp mountains in the distance. I told you before I finished one of the books that night, but I can't remember which, or if it were true. I walked out of my room and flopped onto the small, presentable lawn. The sun entered the earth's field of view, a palm-tree lit up blue and green in the retina, and I thought, this was never my real name, my referent. My real name is Arctura. I'm an alien intelligence beamed down into this brain, a visitation. I was picked up like a frequency, from my star, and the resulting dialogue is me. A kind of language. I mention this all to you because of the green-blue, how it lit up. The pure signification of it, safe on the grass. It would come back, now, in lockdown.

I can tell you what dying—what I thought was dying—is like: the purple feeling. Your body's trying to throw up a stone. Time lengthens, it feels, slower and slower motion. I fall, as you call the ambulance, not scared, you say afterwards, you know better, but terrified, you add. As time lengthens, semantics break down: you remember the natural history museum in London, a promotional VCR of Sir Richard Owen explaining life on earth/deep time to a confused teen, by way of a full diplodocus skeleton in the atrium. Humans occupy less than a millimetre on the tip of the tail, they say. The skeleton is 108 feet long. I can hear you speaking to the emergency hotline, calmly, thinking oh god please faster more urgent, and at the same time it doesn't matter, because I know I'm already dead and

time is filling up like water the spaces between you and the response on the other end of the line. Given enough time, words lose everything. They won't be here for 45 minutes, on account of lockdown. They have many people they need to confirm safe in quarantine. I fall backwards off our bed and I think oh, this is it, just like this. You got a lifetime, nothing more or less. I start to feel things get slower and slower, and you say hello? Yeah, yeah my partner's not doing too well, they seem in a bad way, how far is the ambulance again? Cool, cool, thank you. There are stars in my eyes: I feel better about the whole situation. This is nice, I guess. Heart attack at 26, after spending 2 months in lockdown. But I need to tell you before I go, I need to tell you that I love you and that it's ok, that this stuff happens. I need to get out the essentials of what you need to know, before I definitely die. I get up from the floor, sit on the bed, look you in the eyes, say calmly it's ok I know I'm dying, or already dead, and I need to tell you that I love you and that I'm sorry. It's really sad, but hey. Then, I feel my heart rate calming, something breaks through and I know I'm not going to die. I start howling, ecstatic gulps, like a Greek mourner.

The doctor on hand is tapping a clipboard. They gave me gloves to wear. They have a mask on, but I can see their beard with white flecks. Are those recent? They're straightforward, clipped. What happened next? they ask. I started twitching and ticking, my head rolling back and forth: I didn't recognise anything. Anytime I looked at something, my brain had no language. It was like waking up again and again. I didn't recognise my partner's face. Every time I looked at them in the eyes I was like no this is someone else. I haven't spent 2 months of lockdown with this person, that's not true. I keep shaking, twitching, as I try to reassert myself, I ask are you afraid? Are you worried I've done permanent damage to myself? which makes them more tired and scared. They were wearing one of my dress jumpers, I don't say. In the ambulance, I tell you after, I kept hearing them refer to him and his heart rate, and genuinely didn't know they were referring to me. They really did die, I think. Now I'm someone different. I'm Arctura. One of the drivers was on Twitter and I thought what if I get translated into code, or become a lockdown story? Will it be a dialogue form tweet:

*Patient who called the ambulance because they smoked too much weed or something: I feel like my brain is broken forever
Me: terrible...*

It would get 11 likes, a retweet. A tiny shard. Tying maybe into trending patterns of hospital staff, EMT, doctors and nurses tweeting about over-working, trauma, lack of funding/wearing bins on your hands/feet, break-down, isolation, I don't know. You remind me, when I get home, trembling, of the Clap For The NHS hashtag in the UK, before/after Boris Johnson got Covid, which ended as soon as NHS workers started posting about their lack of payment and Tory cuts. You said, they would break down in their cars, if they could get away from work. You said, everyone is incredibly online now. We are finally our virtual forms. Think of Elon Musk, unveiling a way to upload your consciousness to the cloud, to control a pig's brain like a video game character, that we should devote ourselves to the transcendence of flesh, so that a murderous AI god doesn't resurrect you in the future to torture you for eternity. This is how he and Grimes hooked up, you say, bonding over Roko's Basilisk, the erotic-horror of a vast intelligence gripping you in its mandibles. When I was younger, after a particularly bad episode, I tell the medical practitioners I imagine splitting my consciousness between an incorporeal, spider-like thing called a memeplex, I feel like I

am an aggregate of its thoughts and mine, such that our thoughts intersect, a certain number of them don't belong to either of us, they recommend me to a psychiatrist, to test if I'm developing schizophrenia. I repeat that this was just a metaphor, but I begin to wonder, I develop tics to help manage stimulus: repetition of phrases connected to the memory of relative health and/or agency, loud intakes of breath through the nose, gesticulation, hands over my lobes balled up, then turned outwards, fingers opening, like antlers. These also allow me to look people in the eyes. A friend says I remind them of the pale man from *Pan's Labyrinth* when I do it and I say yeah, just like an allegory for Fascist horror...

Ok, ok, the doctor says. One thing at a time please. The ward is quiet. No-one is trying to make noise, which is unusual. The EMTs wheel me past a woman with a bloody left arm in a sling; she's rubbing the air around it, to ward off the virus, her mouth undulating in silence, like a squid. My phone is on 1% and I text you from the hospital bed. You ask if there's a charger and I say yes probably. I shouldn't be on Facebook, but its grounding, and lets me focus on the external world, people shitting on Dan Andrews. It's reassuring to know that people of consistency exist, you text, like rocks. I don't know, you reply. There are electrodes on my chest, and my heart rate is normal, says the doctor, checking their phone/patients list. My phone dies the moment they ask me to scan a QR code, to fill out a Covid-survey, and they leave me the charger to wait until it's full again. They need to check on the bloody-armed lady, chanting under her breath now. Everything is blue-green. I am not there, Arctura is. Time is still catching up, filling the holes left by my body. I position myself almost diagonally off the bed, to type on my phone. Language is still possible, it seems. I text you again, I seem to be ok. You seem to be. I love you. I love you too, so much. I'm scared. I'm scared too. I don't want to do this again. What if lockdown makes it more regular? What if the body you are, in lockdown, is easier to hack? God, imagine Elon Musk piloting my body. lol awful I love you. I love you too. Please come home soon. Yah.

I am stumbling out of the emergency ward, looking for the doctor, or someone to discharge me, my phone at 20%. I run into an orderly and they look at me like an alien, like I'm talking in binary or electromagnetic waves. Eventually, someone directs me to the front desk, I'm ordering an uber. Will this be covered by health-insurance? Not like Covid costs or anything? Phone in the morning mate, says one of the interns. I am ordering an uber back to you. I will stumble down our driveway, everything still shaky, by the light of Twitter. I see the light of our doorstep. The stars are black, transmitting.

JOHANNA ELLERSDORFER

Suspended Loop

Most nights I walk with E along one of two paths that we have dubbed, “the loop” and “the extended loop.” Both routes start and end at home, circling through the inner north back streets of Braddon and Turner, brushing past Civic and then back up along Lonsdale Street and through Haig Park. The extended loop pushes out into O’Connor, but only just, and then converges with the regular loop down towards ANU. We leave the house, just as it is getting dark, stepping out onto the grey tiles that run alongside the apartment complex. Then, we walk out onto the dimly lit footpath, dodging low hanging branches and spider webs, making our way towards Northbourne Avenue, where the tree density thins and the apartment blocks reach higher towards the sky. Tram bells ring in the distance and the lights are bright and cold, flashing at the pedestrian crossing, and we wait to cross the road.

Before the pandemic I lived in Sydney. In the space of a week I lost my job, and the course I was doing at university shifted entirely online. My five-person share house swelled with two extra bodies, partners of two housemates who needed somewhere to stay. E lives in Canberra and didn’t want to be alone, so I left my room, tidied and neat, thinking in a few weeks things would be back to normal, and came down to Canberra to isolate with her. The walks started as a kind of daily exercise. They were a way of marking time in the long expanse of days that began to blend into each other, as I was suddenly free from the need to go to work each day, with only three online classes to demarcate my week. In her essay “Time,” Jenny Erpenbeck writes that “time has the power to separate us, not only from others but also from ourselves,” and I wonder if in those first few weeks, as we prowled the back streets, getting lost and then finding our way, if I was trying to find a new way of being, new routines to cling to, and something that I could control, as I felt so achingly and suddenly removed from the person I had been only a month before.

Across Northbourne Avenue and into Turner, the streetlights dim again. For almost an entire block we walk alongside empty land bordered by long tufts of unmown grass peeking through a wire fence. The footpath feels gravelly underfoot and this bare expanse feels implausible somehow, as though something this empty and wild shouldn’t be just off one of Canberra’s main thoroughfares. Across another side street the landscape feels more suburban again as we walk past a row of single storey homes with lush gardens that grow out onto the footpath. Then there is a slight incline followed by a bending hill that curves around a block of pink apartments, lit by warm yellow lamps affixed to the outside walls of the building. They form small orange halos on the building’s facade. A thin strand of spiderweb catches the light. I touch E’s arm and we both duck under it, trying to prevent the sticky wisps of web from attaching to our clothes.

In the weeks before the pandemic, when talk of the virus felt more distant than the dwindling plumes of bushfire smoke engulfing the east coast, my aunt, who lives in Austria, messaged to say their borders were closed to Italy. I wrote back saying, “I can’t imagine they’ll do that here,” and for a few weeks as things got progressively worse in both countries, we texted a lot, at all times of day, sharing memes and updates on what we were and weren’t

allowed to do. As friends across Europe started to go into lockdown, I began talking to them more than I had in years. We shared regular text messages and Skype calls sitting down to drink tea together from our respective bedrooms, our experiences eerily similar despite being on opposite sides of the world. We would say to each other, “I can’t believe this is happening” over and over again, suddenly blindsided, mourning plans we could no longer make. Then I would get ready for bed, and they would go about their days, adjusting to a suspended existence between what we knew and a future we couldn’t quite imagine. At a certain point I realised I no longer thought of myself as being ten hours ahead. Time was simply layered and compressed, and with nowhere to go clock time didn’t seem to matter.

At Canberra Museum and Art Gallery there is an installation of clocks by the artist Anna Madeleine Raupach titled *Unequal Hours*. The clock faces hang in the space, white and numberless with black hands. Each clock marks different measures of time, from the average menstrual cycle to the global rate of deforestation and the migratory patterns of bogong moths. The hands are all connected to each other with colourful ribbons that brush against the floor and gently vibrate in sympathy with the ticking of the clock mechanisms. Different measures of time physically interact with each other, and the space seems to pulsate with a quiet energy, but in a single viewing of a few minutes or so, it barely seems to change. Over longer periods of time—hours or days—the clock hands twist the ribbons around each other, looping and knotting to form unexpected patterns. In an interview with the *Canberra Times*, Raupach explained that in the first few weeks of the installation, she had to go in and unknot some of the more tightly wound ribbons on the faster moving clocks, so that they could keep running, keep marking time.

When I read this, I wondered if the pandemic had knotted us in time, halting that normal sense of progress. The future no longer feels like something to strive towards as quickly as possible lest time pass us by. When clock towers were first built in Europe in the early Renaissance period, they didn’t have a clock face or dials. Rather, time was kept by bells striking at intermittent intervals, and the relationship with time was suggestive rather than absolute. Of course, time has continued to move forward during the pandemic, but to me it has felt oddly still. This feeling has been described by anthropologist Jane Guyer as enforced presentism. It describes this sense of being stuck in the present, unable to plan ahead, that has been widely experienced during the pandemic. We are unable to imagine a future because the present is so utterly unrecognisable. Walking in loops remains the most consistent activity of my day. Life is less certain, but I am slowly seeing that as a source of excitement, rather than racing the clock to an arbitrary finish line.

We turn onto Barry Drive and walk towards the iridescent glow of the city. Over Sullivan’s Creek we dodge a cyclist on the shared path. For the first time on the loop we start to see other people walking, students from ANU in small groups wandering back towards the student accommodation, public servants still dressed for the office. Lonsdale Street is bright and loud. The pubs and bars now seem to be open every night and as the pedestrian light begins to flash, E grabs my hand and we run to cross the road. At the end of Lonsdale Street, we cross over into Haig Park, a long but shallow expanse that cuts through Turner and Braddon, planted with evenly spaced trees. A short pebblecrete path runs from one side to the other and is well lit by flood lights. Beyond them, the park is almost pitch dark, and E and I squint into the shadows, trying to make out if they are people or trees. Then we cross the road out of the park, back into the dimly lit suburbs, and walk the remaining few hundred metres home.

PROFESSOR SANDY O'SULLIVAN

Challenging the Colonialities of Symbolic Annihilation

Indigenous researchers often articulate relationality as a measure to maintain transparency and accountability to other Indigenous peoples, and as a direct challenge to the disconnected colonial writings about us, by others (Kovach; Dudgeon and Bray). My own relationality statement for this article asserts my belonging and investment as a Wiradjuri, transgender/non-binary person, a Professor of Indigenous Studies, a sound artist and performer, and as someone with a large family who I care for and who trace a thousand generations of connection to land and life across the continent of “so-called Australia” (Day 367). In the context of an article focused on queer Indigenous representation, asserting my broader kinship responsibilities to queer Indigenous Mob (TallBear 5–15; Carlson et al. 23) also flags intent to create space that begins with us and ends with a challenge to others to represent.

In 2020, I began a four-year senior Future Fellowship awarded by the Australian Research Council with a program titled: *Saving Lives: mapping the influence of Indigenous LGBTIQ+ creative artists*. The program explores the ways in which queer Indigenous artists and their work—across all forms—can affect the lives of queer Indigenous people, their families, and their communities. The program comprises projects that map the work and influence of these artists and their unique contribution and impact. While the focus is on how representation through creative renderings of queerness can enhance the lives of queer Indigenous people, a group who are disproportionately affected within the colonial system (Hill et al.; Carlson et al. 23), the program also seeks to understand the ways in which queer Indigenous artists create complex and ground-breaking work and the further impact it has for them and their kin.

The program is composed of interconnecting projects that challenge the colonial project of gender and sexuality and the containers that Indigenous peoples have historically been forced into. Through creative work, public rhetoric, commentary and analysis, and a complex mapping that is informed by LGBTIQ+ Indigenous artists, including Elders, it relies on input and feedback through surveys with queer Mob. This “checking in” assures a level of accountability back to the community for whom the work has the greatest meaning, but it also forefronts the relationality mentioned earlier.

While focused on the work of queer Indigenous creative practitioners, *Saving Lives* also explores how others use creativity to conceive of Indigenous gender and sexuality. While the program seeks to explore agentic strategies, it also highlights problematic ideas imposed and reductive colonial categorisations within screen cultures, galleries, museums, sites of performance, keeping places and other collaborative creative work under the oversight of others (O’Sullivan).

Storied

Developed across 2023–2024, *Storied* will feature the lives and work of Indigenous LGBTIQ+ artists across genres. While this is an expected outcome from research that maps Indigenous creative representation, the challenge across *Saving Lives* is to avoid reimposing the colonial project of categorisation and containment. To counter simply listing artists and their work, *Storied* focuses on artists through a self-curated remembering or “saving” of the work that they determine holds meaning in a project focused on the way we all relationally build a site in which queer Indigenous people are made to feel that they belong. This will include stories from those artists about their work, their lives, and the impact they imagine for their work.

For this reason, *Storied* moves beyond a passive recall of queer Indigenous art already made and managed into a searchable tag-based system, by challenging the colonial approach of containment and order so often associated with archives (Russell 163; Barrowcliffe 168) that focuses reductively on archives that hold history. Rather than listing a range of work by each artist, the artist selects work they believe compels a story of who they are as an LGBTIQ+ Indigenous artist and projects that into a future retelling in 100 years.

This idea of future casting, both builds on Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon’s Indigenous Futurisms, that I will write more on later, and it responds to a question I received while conducting a review of 470 museums in a previous ARC project, called *Reversing the Gaze*. That project focused on the capacity for nationally relevant museums to engage and represent First Nations’ Peoples. The question came, not from someone participating in the interviews associated with the project, but from a non-Indigenous junior curator at a leading museum in London. In questioning the value of the project, they asked, “Do you think there’ll still be Indigenous people in 100 years’ time?” My response was, “Yes, but I’m not so sure about museums.” I have spoken about this extensively, and I have noted that the person who asked the question was visibly shaken by the idea that museums may disappear in the future, yet comfortable with the erasure of Indigenous people (Carlson). My response to the question, rather than a counterattack, focused instead on the struggle that museums have faced in maintaining relevance and currency (Weil 13).

As an Indigenous person who would like to see other Indigenous people thrive their response was alarming, but also flagged their own central concern around the value of the institution. I have little doubt that they held no malice in erasing future people not yet born, but their own relationality seemed to fail to consider these future generations as connected to the present. As Anishinaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor framed in their articulation of Indigenous survivance, by challenging dominance and drawing on relationality and the long game of continuing to be our cultural selves, our survivance, not just our survival, is guaranteed. Vizenor’s invocation of survivance reminds that for Indigenous peoples, we live on in the generations to come, continuing to see the connection between the past and the future (Vizenor).

The zero-sum game found in both question and answer, where only we—as Indigenous peoples—or museums, can exist, is not the ridiculous comparison it may seem. The heavily laden colonial project of museums that forces categorisation, explanation, and exclusion, being pitted against our very survival is poignant. The question spoke to two important points that are adopted in the planning of *Storied*: there are those who cannot imagine us in the future, and there are people who value the idea of a structure, like a

museum, or an artefact, like the work we make, more than the survival and thriving of Indigenous people; more than the trust in our survivance. To extend this to the central position of the *Storied* project: people matter more than the art made, including those future generations, including our deep histories, and including the ways in which this connectedness makes our lives worthwhile. *Storied* asks the artists to contemplate the future value of their work, even when they cannot know it, because it allows them to see and think about Indigenous Futures.

Indigenous Futures: Challenging Symbolic Annihilation (CSA)

The *Saving Lives* Fellowship is housed in the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures (CGIF), a site with three nodes that embed the concept of survivance: *Future Worlds*; *Digital Futures*; and *Intimacies, Relationalities and Locating Ourselves* (CGIF). The Centre recalls the work of another Anishinaabe scholar, Grace Dillon, and their conception of Indigenous Futurisms explored through imagined worlds and possible futures that directly challenge a trajectory set by colonisers, by drawing on the past, and considering the present while mapping a future of infinite possibilities (Dillon 346). That Indigenous Futurisms is often seen to be analogous to reductive imagined narrative worlds contained in creative spaces, fails to realise the power of imagining—and creativity—for colonised peoples and the importance of it to Indigenous people engaged in the relational pursuit of survivance.

Survivance is central to understanding and challenging colonial erasures and informs each step of CGIF and the *Saving Lives* program. If the work in *Storied* “saves” and extends each artist’s work into their own infinite futures, another project of *Saving Lives*, a *Challenging Symbolic Annihilation (CSA)* database, reminds of the reality of representation of us, both by others, and by the power that our own participation and visibility can have, to challenge these erasures. The database, titled *Queer as...*, began as a means to locate queer Indigenous representation in mainstream screen-based creative work, specifically film and television. As a widely available artform, film and television has moved from a paucity of queer representation to a more accurate reflection of the complexity of its audience (Banks et al.). Or has it?

Saving Lives focuses on the ways in which presence is insisted on and erasures are challenged. The database project, therefore, aims to test this idea to reveal how queer representation includes or excludes other identity complexity, how erasures are challenged or reinforced, and how erasures and tropes of identity play into the problematic categorisation of the colonial project of both erasure and categorisation.

The project, and its resulting database, draw on Gerbner’s term, “Symbolic Annihilation,” and explore the expansion of this idea by both Tuchman and Bourdieu in their discussions of the violence of exclusion (Tuchman 150–74). While the project begins with queer Indigenous representation, in order to see this, it requires an examination of queer representation in general, including who makes the decision to represent or not. It also explores the combination of visibility and presence, and the associated risk. Annihilations, whether symbolic or literal, are agents of the same colonial ideal, to manage those who are not within the acceptable containment through both failing to recognise and searching for reasons that justify that difference.

Gomeroi queer scholar Alison Whittaker challenges the desire in others to locate a complex and well-trodden queer Indigenous past with the uncomfortable truth that queerness was neither recorded, nor understood by colonial forces, and that the erasures

of queerness were intentional and violent (O'Sullivan 67; Whittaker 223–37). The contemporary desire to trace a history of Indigenous queer representation from time immemorial as evidence that we have not only recently arrived at queerness (Hill) is analogous to the ways that the colonial project in so-called Australia has insisted on people who were forcibly removed from land now proving persistent occupation to lay claim to that land (Deloria 95; O'Faircheallaigh). Imagining queerness as new or requiring this kind of proof and history receipts from Indigenous peoples, when it is not required for the mainstream population, also treats Indigeneity as rarefied and separate from the broader human condition and is a tool of coloniality (O'Sullivan 67). Through observation it also traps Indigenous people in a state of interrogation and suspicion. That this can happen—along with the Indigenous presence-made-mystical that Dillon writes about, presents risks in developing a database that seeks to locate and identify queer Indigenous representation. Yet, if we are only written about, rather than agents of that work, if our screen representations include us bodily, but are controlled by others, then tracking and understanding this, is crucial. A database can facilitate that.

The requirement of others to impose a formal history of queerness on Indigenous people, to talk of our always-presence, as though the visibility of queerness was not also forcibly removed under colonial occupation, is palpable in the work of Whittaker and a range of queer scholars who challenge the assertion of Indigenous heterosexuality within the colonial project (Day 368). Challenging these assertions also creates questions for our project as we build the database, including: Is the desire to contain Indigenous lives visible within mainstream screen-based work? Are Indigenous people reductively represented? Central to much of the work on challenging the colonial project of gender and sexuality is considering our own past, while challenging questions of our validity. *Queer as...* does specific work in locating these reductive ideas of who we are, including by examining attempts to locate us as mythical or magical by dint of our Indigeneity (Dillon, "Native Slipstream"), and by examining complex representations that may extend our survivance.

Central to understanding representation for queer Indigenous creatives in the scope of the *Queer as...* project is who controls the narrative in these mainstream renderings of our queerness when it is work that is broadcast to a wider audience who already have a reductive sense of what constitutes Indigeneity. If queer Indigeneity reduces us to stereotypes made by others, there is also a question of who this serves. In Kimberlé Crenshaw's framing of the compounding disadvantage of intersectionality, she describes the conceptual and cultural distance and dissonance between those affected, and those who have oversight and control (1241). As a legal scholar, Crenshaw proposes that legal outcomes for Black women are substantially worse than for their White counterparts, even when both experience the same obstacles. While intersectionality cannot be recast as a way to understand complexity of difference, it is Crenshaw's proposition around the distance, from those handing down the sentence to the people least served, that reveals the truth of bias and the power of visibility. Until we—as Indigenous creatives—are charged with making, and until queer Indigenous artists tasked with control of these projects are deciding on accurate representation, we cannot be sure that the stereotypes will not perpetuate. But what evidence do we have that the oversight of queer Indigenous creatives has an impact in relation to queer Indigenous representation? Has there been an increase in complex representation of queer people, and is this also true of queer Indigenous people? How do these containers of representation work both against and toward reinforcing the colonial project of gender, sexuality and representation? *Queer as...* seeks to understand this.

As a cohort who have been subject to the colonial project of gender and sexuality, we have the most to gain from challenging it in creative representations of us, but to limit it to only queer Indigenous representation would be to locate a potted history of inclusion and exclusion. In order to fully understand representation of ethnic groups and minorities, the project examines intersections of queer representation, where further diversities—including ethnicities—are considered. If this seems a herculean task of effectively providing a queer, ethnically diverse version of the IMDB, this is the reason it offers up as a proof-of-concept rather than an extensive mapping. By sampling several thousand iterations of representation across television and film of the last 25 years, the work aims to move beyond showing patterns and instead interrogates.

If the idea of categories and ordering into structures was unpalatable for *Storied*, that concern exists here in a database that could be focused on tagged iterations of queerness and other “diversities” into a reductive and colonising structure. To challenge this, but also to understand the data gathered, each entry contains narrative analysis detailing the representation, and focusing—as *Storied* did—on input from those who have creative control. The year-range selection protocol narrows the focus to understanding how screen-based queerness has changed in representation over that period, and how further complexities have facilitated or been barriers to this change. Importantly, the use of “proof-of-concept” is not just a limiting process, it also speaks to how others can learn from the containment of representation. How it can be held against specific external criteria of world events, trends in screen-based distribution, and discussions around diversity in representation.

To understand why a database focused on queer screen representation beyond Indigenous people, would come from an Indigenous-focused project, is to understand how Indigenous people have led practice in so many areas where they have identified the value of breaking the unspoken bonds of agreement to be marginalised, reduced, erased and, just simply absent. The *Intimacies, Relationalities and Locating Ourselves* node of the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures focuses on demonstrating through the excellence of Indigenous representation and connectedness how other marginalised and minority communities and settlers can leverage the future to deliver more (CGIF). In this way, a proof-of-concept can radiate out from an Indigenous-led and focused program to an expansive understanding of how genders and sexualities are presented in the public sphere.

While the database is complex in its rendering, it not only looks for presence, it also explores erasures and other problematic framings of representation, such as queerbaiting (McDermott). In this way, it searches for what is not yet there. It uses Dillon’s work to explore the idea of narrative work providing a space to better understand representation, but it also aims to understand how this is changing or how we might use it to effect change.

As an Indigenous queer person who has never seen themselves represented in the enormous wealth of screen work that I’ve encountered, there is a risk that a database exists to fill this void. I grew up in the 60s and 70s never seeing myself represented either as an Aboriginal person or as a trans/non-binary person, and certainly not as both. I have still never seen anybody like me on television or in film, and I’m not alone (Cover). But if the future delivers relational outcomes, someone like me, may. It is not a question of locating exact copies or representations reflecting our existence and experience; if my relationality statement represents a longing for representation, it also presents the promise that it does not have to be in my lifetime. Instead, the focus is to understand how these futures may be

charged with infinite possibilities of representation that are not limited to the colonial project of categorisation and exclusion.

Queer as... may be used to break down and reshape our understanding of queer representation across screen-based forms but it also serves a specific purpose when it comes to understanding how representation is crucial to Indigenous wellbeing (Carlson et al. 31). It is this aspect of the program, including *Queer as...* that contains an unknowable risk and where the database material may help to sift meaning. What if the work is not of interest to a queer Indigenous audience, or the story not sufficiently compelling to queer Indigenous people who wish to see themselves represented? What if they have given up on this idea? The project pins itself on what Grace Dillon, in coining the term Indigenous Futures, refers to as the desire to see multiple, mundane possibilities (Dillon, "Indigenous Scientific Literacies" 23–41). But it will also seek feedback and ask for critical engagement from those who will benefit the most: queer, Indigenous people, their community and their kin.

Survivance

In spite of the colonial project that continues to focus on making the lives of Indigenous people worse, Indigenous people are thriving (Watego 26; Carlson et al.). At the centre of the *Saving Lives* Fellowship program is the assertion that Indigenous worlds are made better by challenging the colonial project of gender and sexuality, by centring our own values and survivance. At the heart of *Saving Lives* is the assertion that this is best managed through the stories that we tell, the ways that we—as Indigenous peoples—are present in that telling—rather than as objects or representations to be considered.

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SOPHIA SMALL

To Autumn Again

Autumn

In a grey-walled classroom north of the Bridge I sit on a blue plastic chair and watch a class of seventeen-year-olds watching Jane Campion's *Bright Star*, about the poet John Keats.

Towards the end of the film, Paul Schneider, in character as Keats's friend Charles Brown, is arguing with Abbie Cornish's Fanny Brawne. In one of the film's most emotional moments he stands in the parlour with Brawne and screams, over and over, "I failed John Keats! I failed him!"

The class explodes. One girl laughs so hard she struggles to breathe, laughs so hard she grabs the table for balance. "Miss!" they shout. "Why is he doing that?"

It's strange, sometimes, the way kids respond to emotional moments.

Then again, I am the one crying, in a room full of teenagers, in the middle of a pandemic. But it has been seven months since I last saw John Keats.

I try to pretend I haven't been crying, try to pass off my crying as laughing. He's not supposed to be here, in this classroom, where I am not a daughter but a teacher of other people's daughters. He's not supposed to be here, in this story. But that's the problem with stories. The ending is never where you think.

Beginnings are easier: it starts at the hospital, where most of us start and most of us will end.

I am sitting on the low wall outside the RPA hospital in Newtown when Dad calls from London.

After months of tests and scans and scans and tests, a letter in his mailbox spelled out what no one said but we all guessed they were testing for: *no signs of cancer*. But it is midnight in London when my phone rings in Sydney and I think I know what he is going to say before he says it.

"There's been a bit of a mix up, swee-har," he says in his South London clip. "They made a mistake."

Someone else's results. Someone else's relief. A bit of a mix up. They made a mistake. That night I dream of some other dad, some other daughter, their letter now a complication resolved.

For a while I float just outside of myself like I am watching a film of my life. I don't understand what is happening to time. I'll remember this, I keep thinking. I'll remember the way the light hit Petersham water tower in the afternoon. I'll remember the smell of the brief cherry blossoms that line Marrickville Road. I'll remember the sound of the ibis hunting in the red bin outside my bedroom window while I get ready for work. I write it all down, anyway, just in case.

I watch myself standing in grey walled classrooms with other people's daughters and wonder whether they notice the way their teacher is becoming a daughter, too.

It feels significant now, that the story started in autumn, on a day when I happened to be at the hospital. But it was spring in London, and Dad was at home, and it wasn't the beginning, not really. A diagnosis always feels like the beginning of a different story when it's only the start of knowing how it ends.

But this is a tragedy, and Aristotle says a tragedy must have a beginning. So it starts here: in autumn, *in medias res*.

Before I move to London I write. I write instead of packing. Instead of saying goodbye. I write endings for old beginnings. New beginnings for long-forgotten endings. There isn't enough time for all of the words. The more I write the less I feel like a draft. And then I start the process of editing. Swap out Sydney for London. Autumn for spring.

"At least you'll have time to write," says a friend.

Spring

The first time I meet John Keats I have just arrived in London.

On the fifth floor of Guy's Hospital I help Dad settle into a blue leather recliner by the window. From here you can see all the way from Borough to St Paul's, the cathedral's greenish dome peeking out from behind glass towers, on the other side of the Thames.

There's something so strange about the way chemotherapy is administered, publicly, in this big open room full of blue leather recliners in a semicircle facing the nurse's station. Most of the other recliners are occupied by old men sleeping, wives perched on hard stools next to them, reading or doing a crossword. Three middle-aged women sit alone, sometimes sleeping, sometimes reading. The nurses are all women, I remember thinking, but I'm new to this business of care and don't yet see the pattern or how I am part of it. A nurse with soft skin who finds the vein on the first go, slips the silver cover over the sack of liquid marked with a skull and crossbones that will leak slowly into his body over the next eight hours, and disappears.

While he sleeps, I write. Not stories or poems or sentences, nothing that requires my brain to thread, or stitch. Just details. I have written this way for as long as I can remember, whenever I am afraid to forget.

The nurse's name: Rita. No older than 25. She smells like rose water. Like Turkish delight.

The way the building has so obviously been designed to feel "homely," not like a hospital, but it doesn't, because it is.

The huge artworks everywhere. I am pretty sure they are close-ups of flowers and leaves. But they look like scans, cells. Like cancer.

When I run out of details I take the lift downstairs. A woman's soft voice announces our arrival at each new floor as the elevator slices through the building. *Chemotherapy Village. Radiotherapy Village.* I understand the desire to dress a hospital in something other than death. But it doesn't quite work, for me. There are already too many mixed metaphors in the story of death.

Outside the hospital I find Keats sitting in a stone alcove rescued from the rubble of the old London Bridge. For six years Keats trained to be a surgeon at this hospital. He spent longer in medical school than as a poet, though I didn't know that, then. A plaque at the alcove reads: "a poet is a sage; a humanist, physician to all men," from *Hyperion*, an epic poem in fragments, abandoned by the poet while he cared for his brother.

For eight hours I sit with John Keats and wait for my Dad to wake up.

In the small garden surrounding Keats's alcove there are always flowers, and they are always in full bloom.

I'd remembered how to write again just before the year of two autumns, after ten years of teaching others to write and forgetting how. In the beer garden of a pub in Newtown a friend told me she had applied for a Masters in creative writing, and I did, too. In my early twenties I'd submitted a piece of writing to the university's undergraduate journal, a sort of origin story of estrangement I'd workshopped in a creative writing class. The editor told me the story was unfinished, and all stories need a definitive end, so I wrote one: the mother got sick. Sickness is a convenient way to end a story, I thought.

On the night of the journal's launch I got stuck talking to a pony-tailed man from my creative writing class, whose stories in workshops were variations on the theme "pony-tailed man makes *passionate love* to a woman unnamed." He asked which story I had submitted to the journal.

"Of course," he said, when I replied. "Women are always writing about themselves."

I never did find out if my mother read that story, but my Dad did.

"I wonder what you'd write about me, swee-har," he said.

I stopped writing, after that.

In London the story stays the same, for a while. In the afternoons after I go to the chemist, after I cook his breakfast and clean the flat and organise the pills, after I clean the sheets and empty the buckets and answer his mail, I meet my sister downstairs. To avoid agitating him we learn quickly never to mention illness, or care, to pretend we don't notice the way he winces, to nod when he talks of returning to work, of the two of us on holiday instead of on pause. I miss when we were different people with different names and different lives, before we became The Daughter. I miss when we could speak to each other not about pain.

In the stairwell we hand over notes where he can't hear: his temperature was high, but it seems okay now. A new pain has arrived in the small of the back. Music is making him agitated, even Rod Stewart. The landlord is asking for rent.

When my sister goes upstairs I sit for a while on the stoop. It is hard to leave, harder to stay.

I get the train to Hampstead, to walk on the heath. It's one of my favourite places in this city, 800 acres of wild green, dogs running off-leash, yellow cowslips and bluebells and purple forget-me-nots in spring.

It's a while before I notice how everything in Hampstead is Keats themed. *Keats Apothecary* chemist. *Keats Group Practice* surgery. Down Keats Grove is Keats House, a small museum in the Regency cottage where the poet lived in the last years of his life. I have a strange feeling of being followed everywhere I go by the ghost of John Keats.

Back in the blue recliners high above London a young woman and her girlfriend arrive and sit down in the chairs opposite my dad. She has lost her hair and looks small, like a child,

but aged, too. She cries softly and the nurse who smells like Turkish delight speaks to her in a low, quiet voice in this strange room of poison with no privacy. She is too sick for treatment today. Her bloods weren't good. She needs to rest. Everyone in the semicircle is looking at her: there is nowhere else to look.

In the blue recliners old men sleep and old women look up from their books or crosswords to watch as she leaves. I watch these women and think of them at home, in the nights, pulling on their gloves and face masks, double flushing the toilet, washing the sheets on hot, looking up recipes for when everything tastes like metal. I think of them alone next to a fading man and wonder how long they wait when they call an ambulance, wonder when they last had time to cry, wonder if anyone asks how they are, who they are.

I watch my Dad watching the woman. He looks scared for the first time since I arrived.

Later, on the train home, he looks tired.

"Do you think I should be depressed?" he asks.

I want to give him a hug, but I don't. The nurse says to be careful, right after chemo, that cytotoxic chemicals can cause cancer in the cancer free. Besides, I am sure he will feel the answer in my body.

It is late by the time he falls asleep watching *Gilmore Girls*. I return to Keats, Rory and Lorelai sparring in the background.

In the autumn of 1820 Keats left England for Italy with a friend, the artist Joseph Severn. The pair sailed to Naples aboard the *Maria Crowther* in search of the healing Italian sun Keats's doctor hoped would restore his health. But Keats had spent six years in medical school, and he knew, by then, that he was dying. Earlier in the year he had coughed up blood so red he told Charles Brown he would certainly die.

"I cannot be deceived in that colour," said Keats. "That drop of blood is my death warrant—I must die."

The poet had watched as his brother died from the same disease only two years earlier, John cooking and reading to Tom as his lungs corroded and his blood boiled. Their mother had died of consumption, and Keats had been her devoted carer, too, eight years before. He already knew how his own story would end.

When the ship arrived in Naples, Italy was facing a typhus epidemic that had spread throughout Europe after the Year Without a Summer. For ten days the ship was quarantined in the Bay of Naples.

"O what an account I could give you of the Bay of Naples," wrote the poet from the ship in a letter to the mother of Fanny Brawne, "if I could once more feel myself a Citizen of this world."

In a letter to a friend, Severn wrote of a young woman also aboard the ship, also dying of tuberculosis, whose presence seemed to make Keats upset.

"The other lady passenger arrived soon after—a Miss Cotterell—very lady like but a sad martyr to her illness which is to a jot the same as Keats."

In *Miscellanies*, John Aubrey wrote about the myth of what he called "one's being divided into a two-fold person": if you see your double, he says, you will soon die.

Keats's friend Shelley claimed to see his doppelganger just weeks before he drowned at sea with a copy of Keats's poetry in his pocket.

Neither the cockney poet nor my Dad could say these young women were their doppelgangers, but in the face of a young woman both men saw how they would end.

I feel like I am in quarantine, too, I wrote in my journal that night, next to my transcription of the letters from the Bay of Naples. *Like a ghost stranded in this attic somewhere outside of my life.*

It's only now, reading back through my journal, that I notice the world's double, our own borders drawn shut, all of us quarantined somewhere off the shore of our lives.

A text from a friend: *Are you writing?*

In my journal, I write: *A text from a friend: Are you writing?*

I want to write, but I have a sense of being in someone else's story myself, and I am afraid of how it ends.

I'm not sure how to say that in a text message, and it's midnight in Australia, so I don't write back.

In the British Library I browse the Keats collection. I want to look at his letters but the woman at the desk who is a caricature of a librarian more than she is a person tells me I would need to apply for a reader's pass, that I would need proof of my address in the UK, utility bills, the kinds of thing ghosts do not have, and I am suddenly aware that I haven't changed my clothes in three days.

Outside the library I sit and read the letters on my phone. I am less interested in the poems than I am in the letters, less interested in the art than I am in the life that resists the shape of narrative. The poet writes of death and care, of art and medicine and the fertile space of uncertainty he calls negative capability.

I keep trying to write to my own friends, back in Sydney, but I don't know what to say.

Instead of writing, I read. Medical journals, cancer forums, research papers. I read about chemotherapy: Cisplatin, Pemetrexed, Docetaxel. The drugs with the worst side effects are made from platinum. It's a noble metal, resistant to corrosion, perfect for car parts, jewellery, chemotherapy. It's more expensive than gold and much rarer: all the platinum ever mined would fit into a 7.6 cubic metre box. I make a note to tell Dad he's full of a precious metal even more valuable than gold, on a day when he can hear me, on a day when he knows who I am. The human body is not resistant to corrosion.

I look for answers to questions that only seem to annoy the doctors when I ask. The doctors hate it when we have been reading.

"What does your daughter do for work?" asks one oncologist, when I ask too many questions.

Although I am not teaching I tell him I am a teacher. Even when I am writing I do not feel like a writer. I think about saying I am a carer, but I don't, because he knows.

"You shouldn't be googling," he says, to the floor. "We are looking after him."

I wonder who he thinks is looking after him the rest of the time. I wonder if he knows that all of this began with a bit of a mix up, swee-har.

It's a late spring afternoon when I go into the Keats museum for the first time. The house is quiet, just me and an older gentleman in a grey striped suit with wild hair, like an elderly Boris Johnson. Inside it's a mixture of tacky recreations and original features: plastic bread sits on an original sideboard, original jewellery rests on cabinets made to look antique. Inside are Keats's tools from his days as a trainee surgeon at Guys.

On the wall is a three-dimensional life mask of the poet with a sign that says: TOUCH ME. It doesn't look much like the Keats I know, the one in the alcove. The nose is smaller. The cheeks fuller. I wait for the old man to go upstairs before I touch the face.

Upstairs, in the bedroom, huge sash windows look out over the heath. Above the bed is a framed drawing by Severn, of the poet hunched in a chair in their room in Rome.

"Drawn to keep me awake," Severn has scrawled. "A deadly sweat was on him all this night."

Under glass is the poet's copy of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, underlined and annotated in Keats's neat hand. "I write of melancholy," explains Burton in the preface, "by being busy to avoid melancholy. There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business."

A bored looking teenager in a uniform sits on a green velvet chaise longue and doesn't look up from her phone. I check mine: two missed calls. I feel annoyed and ashamed at feeling annoyed and my chest feels tight, so I walk quickly back down Keats Grove, back to the station, back to the flat. I can hear the *Gilmore Girls* as I climb the narrow stairs to the attic flat, where he is asleep with his mouth open on the old blue couch.

"Swee-har," he says, when I wake him for his medication, "you left me."

Summer

In the gift shop at the National Portrait Gallery I almost buy a plaster replica of Keats's life mask for 160 pounds. By now I am running out of money, but something strange is happening. I keep wanting to buy things for no reason.

A woman with a face crinkled with concern asks me if I am okay, and I realise I am holding a plaster replica of John Keats's life mask and crying.

The strangest thing happened, I imagine the woman with the crinkled face saying at the dinner table. *This poor woman, crying over John Keats!*

When I get outside I can't stop laughing, and I don't know why.

A friend from home buys me a ticket to the launch of Zadie Smith's new collection, *Grand Union*. It feels strange, being in this room in Mayfair with ornate ceilings and spiral staircases and so many people, none of them dying. The writer speaks about Hegelian dialectics which she explains as the idea that you can hold two opposing views simultaneously, so as to create a third space where we can lie to ourselves.

On the way out of the venue I see the white-coated oncologist across the road with a man who looks exactly like him. He turns his head while I am staring and looks at me, and I realise he has no idea who I am. For a moment I am angry, though I am not sure why. Then I remember how I compartmentalise care, too, and think of all the times I have been out in Sydney, for dinner or dancing or a book launch like this, when a teenager waves and says "hi miss!" and I have no idea who they are.

One evening after another eight hours in the blue recliners I bring Dad to the alcove and tell him about Keats. By now the cancer has spread into his spine, and the hospital wheelchair is older than Dad and heavier than me, but I want him to sit with me in the alcove so I heave the chair up onto the grass.

The gold and orange roses look cartoonish against the neat green grass.

"Fucking hell," he screams, wincing. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"
And then, softly: "I'm sorry, swee-har."

A group of nurses in turquoise uniforms stand smoking on the other side of the courtyard, pretending not to notice us, and I pretend Dad might be interested in Keats. How he worked in this hospital, once. How he was nicknamed the cockney poet. I show him how the statue talks: if you hold your phone here, John Keats will call to tell you about how art is like medicine, how it heals us, too.

I don't tell him Keats died of tuberculosis when he was 25 years old. I don't tell him he probably caught it while caring for his brother, Tom.

In an ambulance on the way to Kings Hospital the paramedic flirts with me while he sticks ECG pads to my dad's chest. He seems nice enough. Irish. Quite young. He likes my hair. He likes my accent. He lived in Mel-borne for a while, back in 2009.

"Why on earth would you live in rainy old England?" He says, as he fixes the mask to my Dad's face.

Dad screams with every jolt. I don't scream, even though I want to. I watch myself in this ambulance with my sister and this man and my Dad and I don't understand, then, that this is just how it is, after a while, in the kingdom of the ill. You've seen the ending so many times it just becomes part of the story. So much of caring looks like not caring at all.

"What the hell was that?" asks my sister, in the waiting room of the hospital. I am relieved to not be imagining things when everything feels unreal. I am relieved to be there together, to feel like two people, again.

It is ten hours before he is seen by a doctor, ten days before we can take him home.

"Don't forget to take care of yourselves," says the ward nurse, as she hands us the bag with his medications.

While he sleeps through *Gilmore Girls* on the old blue couch I fight with people on the internet. I am looking for information on Pembrolizumab, the immunotherapy drug, trying to find out why his feet could be swollen or his skin itchy or why some days he doesn't know who I am. Immunotherapy is a relatively new form of treatment for this kind of cancer, but the results are promising in the face of a terminal diagnosis. Under the NHS, Dad's infusions are free.

Most of the carers on the forums are American women. They post about how they can't afford their own medication anymore, now that their warrior has cancer. So they stop taking their medication for depression, for diabetes, for heart problems and blood pressure and cholesterol, but it's ok, they say. They post about the power of staying positive for their warriors, of God's will. They talk about how they will beat this disease and buy t-shirts that say Fuck Cancer!, post photos of themselves next to withering men.

I post about Dad's disintegrating body, looking for ways to ease the steroid aggression that makes a sweet man so angry.

"See! THIS is why it's free!" One woman writes. "You don't get a choice! At least in America we can choose what treatments our warriors get!"

In America, it can cost ten thousand American dollars every three weeks for immunotherapy without decent health insurance. I understand why they need to believe the story of personal choice, though. We are always telling ourselves stories to keep from fragmenting.

In my journal I record the conversation verbatim, even though I wonder about the ethics of writing someone else's tragedy in my own hand.

That night I get an email that says I have been shortlisted for a literary competition I barely remember entering, and for a moment I feel I am back in my own life. I get so excited I forget I haven't washed my hands, rub liquid morphine in my eye, squeal loud enough to wake Dad.

"You look like shit, swee-har," he says. "What's wrong?"

I get the train to Hampstead, to walk on the heath, but I end up in the alcove outside the hospital, with Keats. I don't know how I got here but I sit for a while like a statue, and then I go home. I stop leaving the flat, after that, except to go to the chemist, except to take him to appointments, except to go downstairs when I feel I might scream or cry, though I never can.

In the hospital transport van on the way to an appointment we practice for the test.

"What do you think, swee-har?" He says. "Eight out of ten?"

It's the same conversation every time. He is afraid that if they know how bad the pain is they will stop the treatment. He is afraid that stopping the chemo means certain death. I don't say that I am afraid continuing means certain death, that death is certain anyway even though the doctors don't say it because he doesn't ask.

It takes three hours to drive 20 miles from the flat in South London to the hospital at Southwark on the south side of the Thames. We stop to pick up others like us, mostly older men too sick or too poor to get to the hospital, and their mothers, daughters, wives.

"My daughter is a teacher," says Dad, to one of the wives, an older woman who says her name is Edwidge.

She asks if I will read her short story, pulls it out of her bag before I can answer. I spend the rest of the trip reading her story, wondering what I can possibly say to this woman, in this van, about this story. When we get to the hospital I tell her I like it and she gives me a twenty pound note, even though she looks like she needs it more.

The doctor asks questions that are supposed to test for cognitive decline.

Who is the prime minister: Boris Johnson.

We laugh. "Dad has named the tumour Boris," I say, but the doctor doesn't laugh. What year is it? 2019. What day of the week is it? He doesn't know. But neither do I. There is only ever today.

He asks Dad to draw a clock. Dad draws a square. He can't remember any numbers, so he draws none. He asks what pain relief Dad is currently taking and looks annoyed when I rattle off the list, as though the man to my left who is already becoming a ghost, who just drew a square with no numbers, might be organising his own medications, might be updating the medication spreadsheet or pouring out the morphine or peeling off the fentanyl patches or making sure he takes the pills at the right time, every day.

"Quite the little doctor you've got there," the doctor says, without looking at me.

And then: "Let's look at the scans."

He leans over and drags the wheelchair so that Dad is sitting next to him, angles the computer screen so that I can't see it, and points: *here, here, here*.

"You're going to write about this, aren't you swee-har," Dad says, on the way home.

The London summer is brief but hot. I am wilting. We all are.

Autumn

By autumn the flowers in the alcove are purple and blue, and by now I know they aren't magical or everlasting, just replaced at the first sign of decay.

In another white-walled office another white-coated oncologist says the treatment is going well.

Dad vomits into the one of those cardboard buckets that look like little top hats. We all pause while the doctor throws it into the bin, gets another cardboard bucket from the cupboard.

"Could you explain what you mean?" I say, loudly enough that my phone will pick up my voice when I listen back to the recording. It makes it easier, having a recording, when we get back to the flat, and he wants me to explain what the doctor said.

"Swee-har—" snaps Dad, his voice sharp.

The doctor schedules the next chemo. I wonder who he is talking to, who the treatment is going well for.

Outside, we sit and wait for the hospital transport van to arrive to take us back to the flat. It is dark when the doctor walks past, backpack on, white coat hung up for the day.

At the cancer centre we wait. So much of caring is waiting. Waiting in hospitals. Waiting for my number to be called at the pharmacy. Waiting for a doctor. Waiting for results. Waiting for an ambulance. Waiting. Two hours. Four hours. Ten hours. Standing up. Sitting on the floor. There are never enough chairs. No matter; the cancer has spread into his spine now and folded him in half. He sits slumped in his wheelchair next to me and I check every once in a while to make sure he is still breathing, like I used to do at home in Marrickville when my cat was still for too long. His experience of time is compressed by pain, at least, so he doesn't notice the wait. My experience of time expands until it takes up the whole room. Every minute watching someone you love in pain might be ten years long.

The waiting room is full of our doubles. One person—mostly men—asleep or unconscious in a chair; the other a wife or daughter or mother standing, staring up at the huge screen that takes up the whole wall, anxiously waiting for a familiar name. The only sounds are phones ringing and the receptionist's angular northern accent. "Cancer," she says, when she answers the phone.

After three hours I ask the receptionist when we might be seen.

"Sorry, love, I don't know," she says. Then she perks up. "Are you Australian?"

I nod.

"My sister lives in Australia," she says. "Why on earth would you come to grey old England?" she laughs, as though I haven't been standing next to my sweet Dad folded in half on the other side of the room for the last three hours, staring at the screen and waiting for his name to appear.

"I am on a holiday," I say, instead of screaming until my lungs are sore.

One evening I take Dad to the alcove again and tell him about Keats. Dad scratches at the skin above his heart and pretends to care, and I pretend not to notice that he doesn't care, can't care anymore about whatever reading hole I have lately been escaping into. We sit there together, me, dad, and John Keats, while ambulance sirens ring out around us, all of us marked by an early death.

In the room with the blue recliners the nurse that smells like Turkish delight looks for a little too long at Dad and directs us to a private room. I want to ask why, but I don't, because I know, though I don't realise it at the time.

"Our own room! Luxury!" I say, or maybe my sister does. I can't be sure, there is no time to write it down. Dad laughs. Tries to hide the way laughing hurts. So much of caring is pretending not to notice, not to care.

I watch the nurse watching me as I peel his shoes from his swollen feet, get him comfortable on the bed. She watches me watch her as she connects the tube, hooks up the bag. He is asleep before she is done.

"You know," she says to us, "your Dad is lucky to have daughters like you."

Then she says my name.

For a moment I can't breathe. It has been so long since I have heard someone say my name I didn't even notice I had lost it.

Autumn, Again

In an underground classroom at the University of Sydney the writer Fiona Wright reads to us from an essay on healthcare, the body, and the work of writing. I can feel myself shifting as she speaks, the shame of my own writing growing smaller. Afterwards, she asks for questions. There are some: craft, career. When she leaves, a man who says he is a journalist asks the question I am afraid is always lingering in the air whenever women write about their lives, the question that is always lingering in my own mind whenever I write about mine.

"Isn't this all a bit narcissistic?"

"How do you mean?" asks the teacher, a softly spoken American woman who, I think, knows exactly what he means.

"I mean, what has she actually done? Why would we read about her life? I would read a memoir about someone who has *done* something," he says. "Like Malcolm Turnbull. Someone like that."

As if living isn't doing. As if writing isn't doing. As if only some bodies are worth living in, worth writing about.

It is autumn in Sydney before I see John Keats again, in the grey walled classroom, north of the Bridge. Normally it's Plath, now, but after weeks of lockdown nothing is normal, and Plath is too depressing for teenagers whose entire lives until recently have been compressed into their bedrooms, the outside world dangerous and full of virus. And so somehow we have settled on Keats, thinking it less depressing to watch a young man die on a big screen, coughing his way into the grave. They don't seem to notice the connection, and I don't point it out, but everywhere is the virus and the lungs and all I can think of is a white-coated doctor pointing at the screen and saying *here, here, here*.

The last time she saw John Keats, Fanny Brawne wrote in her notebook: *Mr Keats has left for Rome*. The moment is played up, in Campion's film.

"Let's pretend I will return in spring," Keats says, as Fanny cries softly, in the orange-red autumn garden of what is now Keats House.

As the film closes, Fanny walks through the wintery heath, now frozen and dark, reciting *Bright Star, were I steadfast as thou art*. I am surprised by the way the film winds

me, even though I know all the details Campion left out, even though I know how the story ends before the film begins.

Now that I am home in Sydney, I wonder what part of me has been pretending I might return to London to find my Dad still alive.

One of my students blows her nose and I am suddenly aware of where I am. Everyone in the room is crying, now, at the film's sad ending or their own sad endings, or the way the pandemic seems to have split all our stories in two.

I throw a packet of tissues over the masking tape border that indicates a COVID-safe distance between me and the students and remind them to move apart, especially now that they're crying.

I try to pretend I have not been crying, try to pass off my crying as laughing, try to remember I'm not a daughter in this room, in this story, where I am firstly a teacher of other people's daughters.

But stories have a way of overlapping. And this is not the first time I have cried over John Keats.

ILLAWARRA CLIMATE JUSTICE ALLIANCE— JUST TRANSITIONS WORKING GROUP

Precarity and Possibility

The answer to everything is in Country, right ... Country the way I describe it is ... it's the place... it's the people ... it's the culture ... it's the journey ... and it's the inter-relationship with these things ... Jade Kennedy

The struggle for climate justice has been the largest movement the Illawarra region has seen since the anti-war movement of the early 2000s. From March 2019 through to the summer, protests in Wollongong grew in numbers, confidence and militancy. The key demand of the 2019 climate strike in the Illawarra was “No Mining in the Water Catchment”—a demand that cuts directly to tensions surrounding a just transition in this region and elsewhere.

The Illawarra has been known for its coal mining and steel production. Important struggles waged by workers and communities of the coal and steel industries have contributed significantly to the radical culture of the city and region. We continue to learn from these struggles. At the same time, these industries are a key nexus of the contradiction and antagonisms of the climate crisis—ongoing destruction of Country, extraction, exploitation.

In a historical sense, the idea of a Just Transition has referred to social and economic measures taken to move fossil fuel workers and their communities from conventional to sustainable production. More recently, just transitions have been included in plans and policies for Green New Deal proposals. In 2020, the Australian Greens repackaged existing policies as a Green New Deal; the Australian Institute of Company Directors found that three-quarters of directors wanted a bosses’ Green New Deal of “large-scale public investment in renewable energy and greening the economy” and a “more radical policy agenda on industrial relations reform to increase labour market flexibility”; and the Liberal National coalition government in New South Wales instituted and funded a green energy policy. In the Illawarra, 2020 has seen prospects for hydrogen production, manufacture of hydrogen vehicles, wind turbine production and green jobs sitting alongside coal mines seeking to expand their operations.

Contradictions and fears for future capital accumulation are pushing some aspects of green investment, sections of capital and business are calling for greener economies and the State is already playing various roles in this process. The Illawarra Climate Justice Alliance’s Just Transitions Working Group has sought to develop an approach to just transitions that is anti-capitalist and decolonial. We have sought to develop a conception of a just transition “that combines the social forces of the region that can contribute to this process,” beginning from the material practices of resistance and transition that already exist.

We can't expect the rule of profit in a green capitalism to be less violent and destructive than it is for fossil capital. It is useful to pay attention and understand these developments in green capital as they are important, but they won't be the basis of a social transformation to a mode of living that isn't at violent odds with the metabolism of the Earth and the ecosystems of which we are a part. For that we need other ways of seeing, doing, producing.

Comparisons and analogies between the pandemic and the climate crisis have become commonplace. In 2020, the Illawarra had one of the earliest clusters of COVID cases in New South Wales, as well as being home to disembarked passengers from the cruise ship *Ruby Princess*. The grassroots response by everyday people and preparation by the health sector was timely. Many started "staying home and saving lives" while simultaneously establishing both organised and informal mutual aid responses before the closure of schools, public facilities and businesses was made mandatory. The health sector's preparations were planned and implemented by clinical staff, often based on information received directly from their colleagues in Italy, Spain, Great Britain and New York rather than through conventional hierarchical health administration systems. Though at times preparations caused worry and hardship for health workers, patients and their loved ones, they were immediate, inclusive and effective. Some days after passengers disembarked from the *Ruby Princess* in Sydney, the cruise ship was berthed in Port Kembla Harbour with all her crew aboard. The response of the local community, who immediately advocated and organised for the wellbeing of the people still on the *Ruby Princess*, is emblematic of the Illawarra response to the pandemic.

People in the Illawarra have also experienced increased precarity due to casualisation, unemployment, ongoing hardship from a punishing welfare system, a steep reduction in affordable housing in the region, and in the case of overseas students both loss of income and disruptions to their studies. For some, precarity is an everyday experience of the imminent threat or the lived reality of homelessness and hunger. The pandemic has made life more precarious for many people in the Illawarra, but the precarity created by this pandemic can't easily be separated from the intensification of existing pressures—the same pressures that are addressed by an anti-capitalist, decolonial approach to a just transition.

A just transition calls for the imagining of radical possibilities that approach the climate crisis in terms of reducing the production of greenhouse gases and caring for Country and one another. Listening to and learning from the knowledges embedded within the Aboriginal custodianship of Country, we imagine a just transition which involves practical measures of decolonisation, building relationships of care and solidarity, and orienting to the everyday concerns of those at the forefront of the climate, environmental, and extinction crises.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has made it clear that we must rapidly and radically transform development, work, the economy, and life in general. Humanity's survival hinges on the preservation and extension of relationships that nurture the biosphere and create healthier environments, focused equally on humans and the nonhuman world in a dynamic of interdependence and care.

This transformation will include the closure and rehabilitation of coal mines and the elimination of hazardous industrial emissions. It will entail new types of work, new skills, and new technologies. To transform how and why things are produced, we need to construct forms of community control over social development and completely restructure,

retool, and decarbonise production, exchange, and consumption. This transition process should involve shorter work hours, and living incomes for everyone, guaranteeing a better quality of life for all, whilst living within the limits of the Earth's ecosystems. A genuinely just transition will require a rapid redistribution of wealth and power, moving away from environmentally destructive industries, away from damaging jobs, towards socially useful work that sustains life and livelihoods.

Just as every aspect of our ecosystems is interconnected, the struggle for climate and environmental justice intersects with every struggle for social and economic justice. Across the globe a diversity of organisations and movements are challenging the priorities of political, economic, and social elites. Collectively acting in the interests of the vast majority, we are building our own power, whilst also holding political institutions, corporations, and governments to account, putting pressure on them by using a range of tactics and strategies. The transformation of society we require involves developing our own strength, increasing people's ability to organise their own lives, sweeping aside the economic, political, and institutional obstacles in our way, as we create a just transition to a better world.

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PATRICIA PENDER

Live from the Chemo Lounge

i. diagnosis

I confess that after the first shock had worn off I was strangely relieved to be diagnosed with cancer. It meant an end to striving. I was worried for my family, for my partner, and for my friends but for myself, to the extent that self can ever be extruded from these associations, it meant the promise of a well-earned rest. It was an unlooked for but welcome invitation to a party I'd fetishised like Gatsby languishing after whatshername's dock light, green across the midnight swathe of the Jersey Sound. Sweet Death, Kind Death. Stevie Smith's great lover. My new friend.

For those impatient or unfamiliar with the mindset of depression this may well sound grim, or melodramatic, or perhaps insufferably adolescent. It doesn't feel that way to me. Eighteen months after being diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoing a mastectomy, queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explained herself to a new therapist: "[T]o feel the wish of not living! It's one of the oldest sensations I can remember."² For me, if it is not one of the oldest, it is certainly one of the most familiar. Generally, depression manifests itself for me in a desire, not to kill myself but to be already dead. I have felt this way more or less since I was sixteen. To commit suicide is too pointed, and would involve for my family the cruelty of repetition, the leaving of an overdetermined if incoherent message. To be already dead—well I wouldn't have to worry about that would I?

*Ob, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning¹*

*"Oh to be Nothing," said Eve, "oh for a
Cessation of consciousness
With no more impressions beating in
Of various experiences."³*

¹ Stevie Smith, "Not Waving but Drowning," *Not Waving but Drowning* (1957).

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "A Dialogue on Love," *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1998).

³ Stevie Smith, "A Dream of Comparison (After reading Book Ten of Paradise Lost)," *Not Waving but Drowning* (1957).

And so my cancer became the source of a secret and well-swaddled satisfaction. I knew I wasn't going to be able to tell anyone how I felt, but I was imbued with a sense of calm that no one around me was anywhere near to feeling, that in fact I had never felt before myself. With the exception of my partner who reacted to the news by getting solidly and repeatedly stoned, professing no recollection of my ongoing medical appointments, accompanied by an unfailingly genial willingness to drive me to them, my friends and family were shocked and bewildered. As is entirely natural, but which also felt to me, even a few days after my diagnosis, somehow pre-scripted and at the same time extraneous. We had been dealt this hand and I, for one, was keen to play it.

*If I lie down upon my bed I must be here,
But if I lie down in my grave I may be elsewhere.⁴*

And the comfort that cancer offered me? It was astonishingly simple. I could stop working. Momentarily. I could pull out. Of everything. I could renege. I could default. I could fail. I could give up. Giving up—on my job, my deadlines, my commitments—was in fact what now passed for my core business. External expectations would henceforth be as naught. My health now *demanded* I say no, nay, sorry, nope, not today, maybe not ever again. This carried the rush of novelty. It was intoxicating. It was the best bloody thing that had ever happened to me. And long, long overdue.

*My heart goes out to my Creator in love
Who gave me Death, as end and remedy.
All living creatures come to quiet Death
For him to eat up their activity
And give them nothing, which is what they want although
When they are living they do not think so.⁵*

In the introduction to her *Cancer Diaries* American poet Audre Lorde writes:

Each woman responds to the crisis that breast cancer brings to her life out of a whole pattern, which is the design of who she is and how her life has been lived. The weave of her everyday existence is the training ground for how she handles crisis.⁶

The design of who I am is largely (though not exhaustively) depressive, and my life has been lived by the lights of this disposition such that I experience the unexpected deadline of my death as a respite. At the same time, the weave of my everyday life as The Girl Who Would Succeed provides a

⁴ Stevie Smith, "If I Lie Down," *Mother, What Is Man?* (1942).

⁵ Stevie Smith, "My Heart Goes Out," *Not Waving but Drowning* (1957).

⁶ Audre Lorde, "Introduction," *The Cancer Diaries* (1980).

training ground for handling crisis—with resilience, with grit—that I will now rebel against for perhaps the first time in my life. Or maybe it's not grit *per se* that is the ground of my rebellion, but grit summoned against the self in the service of the institution—be it the demands of my department, the escalating KPIs of my faculty, the strategic priorities of my university, or the increasingly neoliberal principles of higher learning

I will say NO for the first
time I will withdraw
my consent

—

When I ring Human Resources I discover that I have accrued 142 days of sick leave, having been employed for ten years without ever taking a day off. I need to factor this into my

diagnosis

ii. treatment

the shark bite is what my partner calls the scar where my right breast used to be. Cup size H would you believe. I wonder what they did with it

given its size I thought I'd at least lose some weight when they removed it but the hospital food was so bad I put it all back on in a week. Either that or the bathroom scales were dodgy

Mum took me bra shopping to a specialist boutique purposefully named *You Really Are Beautiful!*

the fake boob you put in your mastectomy bra is called a form. A form for swimming is made from silicone and resembles a large jelly fish

the best temporary forms are made from memory foam (**mammary foam**). But there's a special delight in receiving a hand-knitted pair from your McGrath Breast Care Nurse TM. Why a pair?

if you need to weight them down a bit, you can try
a) sinkers b) sandbags⁷

*

⁷ Trisha Pender, "shark bite" in Cassandra Atherton ed., *Scars: an anthology of microlit* (Spineless Wonder, 2020), p. 65.

the chemo nurses in the day treatment centre are gorgeous. Caitlin with the face of Drew Barrymore and the same husky chuckle. Nancy whippy and slight like a greyhound. She has a young son she worries about and I don't think she eats properly. They are both of them smart, funny, super friendly and seemingly unflappable. They are beyond busy. I immediately love them

my veins are the silly kind that make it almost impossible to set up a cannula. The first go takes four tries. There is talk of my getting a port but we all hope I won't need that I get special treatment—a brusque informal solidarity—because I don't fuss and because I'm too young for this apparently. I appreciate the new chronological perspective. My school friend Jane trying IVF two years earlier was labelled geriatric

*

I dress up for chemo days. Not outfits exactly, just things I feel good in. I figure I might not get a lot of chances to feel good about myself in the near future and for the first time in ages this carries freight. Compliments come from many quarters and I smile my judicious acceptance. Courteous chivalry from the senior gentleman suffering bowel cancer in Bay 3. A discerning appreciation of my jewellery from the senior registrar. My sister in Fiji has sent me a fork bent into a bracelet. My mum in Sydney a necklace made of upcycled car tyres. I happily share their provenance. I wear them like amulets.

*

Of course the side effects are serious.
I'm not that deep in denial. FEC-D is a doozy.

You may feel sick (nausea) or be sick (vomit).
You may find that food loses its taste or tastes different.
You may get bowel motions (stools, poo) that are more frequent or more liquid.
You may also get bloating, cramping or pain.
After being out in the sun you may develop a rash like a bad sunburn.
Your skin may become red, swollen and blistered.
You may have:

- Bleeding gums
- Mouth ulcers
- A white coating on your tongue
- Pain in the mouth or throat
- Difficulty eating or swallowing

Epirubicin
(*epi-ROO-bi-sin*)

Fluorouracil
(*Flure-oh-YOOR-a-sill*)

Cyclophosphamide
(*SYE-kloe-FOS-fa-mide*)

photosensitivity

mucositis

You may get:

- Eye pain
- Red, sore or swollen eyes
- Blurred vision
- Watery or gritty eyes
- Changes in your eyesight
- Sensitivity to sunlight
- You may feel very tired, have no energy, sleep a lot, and not be able to do normal activities or things you enjoy
- You may feel dizzy, light-headed, tired and appear more pale than usual
- Your hair may start to fall out from your head and body
- You may notice that you are unable to concentrate, feel unusually disorganised or tired (lethargic) and have trouble with your memory
- You may get:
 - Chest pain or tightness
 - Shortness of breath
 - Swelling of your ankles
 - An abnormal heartbeat
- You may get:
 - Hot flushes or night sweats
 - Mood changes
 - Vaginal dryness
 - Irregular or no periods
- You may also:
 - Have trouble sleeping
 - Find sex painful or lose interest in sex⁸

fatigue

anaemia

alopecia

chemo brain

heart problems

menopausal symptoms

Other side effects are **less well documented**. You may:

find yourself searching for James Taylor songs on Spotify

be unable to tolerate works of fiction

feel guilty because you are not at work

spend a lot of time plotting your return to work

worry less about your parents

attract randoms keen to share the tragedy

discover some friends are as staunch as you always suspected

upgrade your iphone

on a payment plan

that might outlast you

⁸ eviQ, Patient information—Breast cancer adjuvant—FEC (fluorouracil, epirubicin, cyclophosphamide) (part 1 of FEC-D)

join a women's financial literacy group
start counting calories on a food tracker app
evangelise the benefits of the food tracker app
ponder the properties of carbohydrate
develop an aversion to preservatives
a passion for pickles
become a little obsessed with food, honestly
develop roid rage from the anti-nausea meds
find another app to slow that shit down
it could happen to anyone
you might buy two potted geraniums for your front porch
not realising there is no longer money in the bank
for such luxuries
your growing fascination
with the trend of indoor plants
so retro
would then have to compete with the good sense
you are painstakingly gaining
at the financial literacy seminar
both of your parents might offer you money but
you'd want to discuss that with your therapist
it's certainly not cheap being sick
but there might be hidden clauses
in a certain way though, you might never again
be as free
to take the cash

there are other side effects more obscure, more surprising
like inexplicably losing the word “bathmat”
along with your pubic hair
or
conducting intensive market research
on burkinis
only to discover
they are not necessarily
UV resistant
you might find yourself rehearsing youtube videos
of your feet dancing to the bee gees
live from the chemo lounge
or
your therapist might inform you
that of all her clients
you are currently
the least depressed

iii. prognosis

Jenny Diski has said that “Sullen rudeness is a possible option handed over to us cancerous.”⁹ But she is a self-confessed pouter. Funny with it, but still pouty. For myself I prefer Sedgwick’s approach:

“I kind of did beautifully with it. I bounced back from the mastectomy, and when it turned out there was some lymph node involvement too, I tolerated six months of chemotherapy without too many side effects.

⁹ Jenny Diski, “A Diagnosis,” *London Review of Books*, 11 September 2014.

You know, I *hated* it, and it completely wore me down, but...”¹⁰

I am familiar with the impulse to reassure people that yes, some parts of this experience have been very bad. In a way this is what they want to hear. I tell them about my peripheral neuropathy; that I still can't feel my feet properly and possibly never will. That I experience severe twitching in my legs for about two hours *every fucking night* before I can fall asleep. These titbits are paradoxically reassuring. They are familiar reports from the frontline of the battle against breast cancer, where chemotherapy is, as Susan Sontag reminds us, a form of chemical warfare conducted with poison.¹¹

But I can also relate embarrassingly well to Sedgwick's pride in her performance of The Stellar Cancer Patient. I too am preternaturally, precociously, good at this. At one point I am telling friends how well I am doing dealing with my disease—there is the aforementioned food tracker, the absolute cessation of all university-related work, the conversion of my study into something my partner refers to as The Gymoffice, where I admit to doing the odd arm curl—and Kate quips that next I will be training for triathlons. I refute this with some fervour: never never never. But I know what she means. I'm starting to sound like someone Oprah would like to have a chat with. If I keep this up, Ellen might fly me to L.A. But I do have a secret weapon against turning myself into exactly this much of a cultural cliché: never never never will I attempt to take up jogging unless they take the other breast.

*

In a piece she wrote for the *London Review of Books*, Jenny Diski responds to her oncologist's diagnosis of inoperable cancer by joking with her partner about starting a meth lab. But suddenly she's second guessing herself: does everyone now allude to *Breaking Bad* at this juncture in proceedings?

¹⁰ Sedgwick, “A Dialogue on Love.”

¹¹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978).

“I was mortified at the thought that before I’d properly started out on the cancer road,
I’d committed my first platitude.
I was already a predictable cancer patient.”¹²

I realise that if I pursue the Stellar Patient cliché much further, I run the risk of becoming estranged from my more lucid and happily intransigent self. Inevitably—this fate is also a cliché. But how to avoid it?

Courting cliché does not seem to threaten the same degradation to Audre Lorde in 1980 that it does to Jenny Diski in 2014. As a black lesbian feminist poet—one of the first to publish about the gendered dimensions of breast cancer from a personal perspective—Lorde looks cliché in the eye and says *I dare you*.

“And yes, I am completely self-referenced right now because it is the only translation I can trust.”¹³

Lorde writes:

“Living a self-conscious life, under the pressure of time, I work with the consciousness of death at my shoulder, not constantly, but often enough to leave a mark upon all of my life’s decisions and actions. And it does not matter whether death comes next week or thirty years from now; this consciousness gives my life another breadth. It helps shape the words I speak, the ways I love, my politic of action, the strength of my vision and purpose, the depth of my appreciation for living.”¹⁴

“I must tend my cancer with at least as much care as I tend the compost, particularly now when it seems so beside the point.”¹⁵

“I try
but I can’t think
of one aspect
of having cancer,
start to finish,
that isn’t
an act in a pantomime
in which
my participation is
guaranteed
however I believe
I choose to play each scene.
I have been given this role.
(There, see?
Instant victim.)
I have no choice
but to perform
and to be embarrassed
to death.”¹⁶

¹² Diski, “A Diagnosis.”

¹³ Lorde, *Cancer Diaries*.

¹⁴ Lorde, *Cancer Diaries*.

¹⁵ Lorde, *Cancer Diaries*.

¹⁶ Diski, “A Diagnosis.”

The pressure of time. Lush like a weighted blanket. The accumulation of all those tiny glass balls bringing comfort to sufferers of anxiety, ADHD, and a range of other afflictions. I am cocooned in the pressure of time even though I don't know how much of it I have. No one is willing to say. I guess because they might be wrong. Then sued. Seriously. Who would have the energy?

The last set of scans I had after chemo showed no new cancer. The cancer that I had in my breast, in the lymph nodes of my armpit, in a small tumour in my spine, these have already been excised by surgeons. You can't see any cancer on my scans right now. "So they're clear?" I pose the question to my oncologist. "We don't use that language" is her reply. This delights and irks me in equal measure: her vocabulary is nothing if not discriminating; I thought *I* was the language police. "We don't have many studies on people like you," she adds. A fact that troubles any prognosis. But still, as if in partial reparation, I have a people?

My hypothetical and (I assume) unjustly understudied tribe would all be Stage 4, after which one actually runs out of stages. The words that doctors (are legally required to?) use—strategically, like an incision, and thereafter seldom, so that you wonder if you maybe imagined them—*incurable; terminal*. Because the breast cancer travelled to my spine, I am metastatic. Or maybe it's my cancer that's metastatic. It's not a matter of if but when.

And yet. Thanks to my recent shucking off the skins of alcohol and nicotine I am physically healthier than I've ever been, apart from a few high school years spent as She Who Would Be Sports Captain. Mentally, as my therapist assures me, I am unusually un-depressed. I think I am maybe even a little under-depressed. I attempt the odd arm curl. My eyebrows are growing back. I am, in short, tending myself with more care than I have ever expended on the compost, which has always been my partner's province really, and so not exactly the challenge it could be. But any self-tending is better than none, which is precisely how much I was doing while I was working.

Of course it's not working per se but working like a manically-driven drone programmed to respond predictably and vigorously to a constant incitement to overachieve that's the problem. A problem that the deadline of my death, however open-ended, operates on brilliantly, almost surgically, irrevocably. Doing cancer beautifully, as Eve Sedgwick aspired to, is certainly another opportunity to prove myself a swat, but it is worlds better than performing the very model of the modern academic, a subject uncertainly rewarded for consuming itself. I had enough eating me.

"I am an anachronism, a sport, like the bee that was never meant to fly. Science said so. I am not supposed to exist. I carry death around in my body like a condemnation.

But I do live. The bee flies. There must be some way to integrate death into living, neither ignoring it nor giving in to it."¹⁷

¹⁷ Lorde, *Cancer Diaries*.

*In my dreams they are always waving their hands and saying goodbye,
And they give me the stirrup cup and I smile as I drink,
I am glad the journey is set, I am glad I am going,
I am glad, I am glad, that my friends don't know what I think.¹⁸*

*

In her *Cancer Diaries*, Audre Lorde writes that she wanted “the old me back, bad as before.” In “A Dialogue on Love,” Eve Sedgwick tells her therapist that this is exactly what she *doesn’t* want. “If I can fit the pieces of this self back together again at all,” she writes, “I don’t want them to be the way they were. Not because I thought I could be better defended, either: what I wanted to be was realer.”¹⁹

If cliché is inescapable—and it is: none of this is new, the search for insight in the face of death is of course a cliché—then what cancer has offered me is an opportunity that feels unique but that isn’t at all—a chance to embrace the corniness of my reclamation of agency, in all its obvious belatedness, but also, importantly, in its not-toolateness.

¹⁸ Stevie Smith, “In My Dreams,” *Tender Only to One* (1938).

¹⁹ Sedgwick, “A Dialogue on Love.”

JUNE PERKINS

Two Livestreamed Funerals, a Cancelled Wedding, and the Saving Grace of Poetry

If you're in Brisbane, COVID-19 is the harbinger of livestreamed funerals and cancelled wedding plans and the rise of the people poets. If you're in Papua New Guinea, it's escalating rapidly, and waiting for vaccine doses from Australia, and asking for more medics. Papua New Guinea is the beloved homeland of my mother, and it's never had that strong a health system. COVID-19 landing has laid bare its weaknesses.

With the closing of borders, limiting travel, or limited numbers within a funeral when lockdown happens, livestreamed funerals have become a thing either families organise, or funeral homes offer. I have attended two livestreamed funerals. We attempted to attend three but ended up missing that of my dear cancer-ridden father-in-law due to technical difficulties (a fried and overheated laptop left in the car by his eldest son in grief). It was videoed and sent to us later.

The first was the funeral of an old and revered friend of the family in Tasmania, inaccessible due to travel restrictions. He taught me art as a child and was like an uncle. They began the funeral with no sound, just filming people arriving and doing the usual respects to the family of the deceased and signing the condolence book. This meant conversations could be private. Those of us online left greetings. No one was speaking to us though; although we could conceivably chat to each other, most chose not to. When the service began the sound began. A funeral celebrant welcomed all of us attending in person and virtually. I saw my mother, father, and brother, sitting at the front with the rest of the family. My mother was wearing markers of her Papua New Guinea background, in her heritage and dress. What I didn't see but later heard about was my mother doing a Papua New Guinean dance I think at the graveside to honour our friend, who had taught high school for some years in PNG with his wife.

I couldn't give any comfort to the family or friends, but only join in online tributes, which flowed everywhere online both before, during and after the funeral. So many of our family's friends were there, and it was moving to hear my art teacher's abridged but still very full life story, which he had written himself based on family history. He had known he was dying from a severe illness for some time, and it hit me he would never see first hand the world resolve the pandemic.

The second funeral I was able to attend by livestream was a suicide, although not necessarily pandemic induced. Her moving tribute was written by one brother and read by the other. It honestly but lovingly reflected a vibrant person who loved sunflowers and was caring to family and friends, who never recovered fully from two major loss events in her life. She loved to give sparkles in cards and sing 80s music loudly. Both funerals featured moving slide shows compiled by family.

There are challenges of a livestreamed funeral such as balancing the need for some privacy to grieve for the people in attendance by not miking everything up, and connecting

to the family and friends physically distant. For close family who can't be present, it can feel dislocating to not hear the side conversations, or have people come up to greet you, and only adds to your grief. For those grieving in their loungeroom because they cannot fly there due to border closures, they don't feel the closeness of those united in grief. Mind you they don't have to worry about physically distancing at the funeral or worry about what to dress in—black or colours. No one is going to see you.

Weddings! My partner and I were to go to a wedding, on a boat on the Brisbane River, of one of his workmates. I haven't been to one of these in ages, and it was a pleasant surprise to be a plus one to such an elegant event, but then COVID. Now this wedding, like so many others hit by lockdowns, was postponed, then went low key and it wasn't livestreamed. Some people chose to livestream their weddings, especially large and gregarious families, or simply share photographs after the event knowing those closest to them would understand. Bindi Irwin and her beau last year married before the last big lockdown, exclaiming, love wins! (Can you believe it? Now they have their first child and COVID-19 is still not over!) Weddings don't need to be large heavily populated elegant events, they can be small, intimate, and like funerals livestreamed. Strangely intimate, but even more public. And maybe include poets. Truth be known, having a good reason to limit the wedding guest list means couples can include the most essential people first and feel less pressure. For large gregarious families, looking forward to a vibrant coming together of family and friends, though, a live streamed wedding can't ever fully cut it!

The rise of the online people's poet—yes, it's a thing and it's something I personally want to remember. Pandemic poetry. Anthologies of poems and stories in response to the pandemic, zoomed open mikes held wherever people can access the internet! I took to Instagram, decided to put up some poetry spoken word performances about learning to breathe through the stress of lockdowns and the threat of COVID. I sent it to some stressed-out teacher friends. To my surprise Queensland Poetry Festival people were listening, and I soon found myself recording work for "Panacea Poets," one of their projects which included over 40 poets.

Recently the Brisbane Square library had *Volta*, its first public poetry festival reading in a year. It was packed! They do have a reasonable crowd, but this was the capacity of the room under COVID instructions, with a waiting list, and they moved from their usual room into a larger one with the kind flexibility of the library. People were immensely keen to have the in-person vibrations of the human voice reading poetry, not just the Instagram and YouTube performances, as well as see each other.

Zoom is not all bad. We attended a memorial for my father-in-law, who with his family went to live in Tonga for a few years. People from all over the globe who once lived in Tonga, or were presently there, and who remembered him, connected, and told stories. A tribute from the funeral was read. The realisation that we are all one world was palpable this time, more so than in the recorded funeral. The tears finally flowed, and we were able to say goodbye; even with the physical distancing, we felt a spiritual closeness.

And this brings me back to Papua New Guinea, where the fate of the poets must be far from people's minds. *Cry My Mother's Beloved Country*. And *Cry My Beloved World*, where people might look upon us Brisbanites as so spoiled, that a livestreamed funeral, missed wedding and poetry could be something we will mostly remember, whilst for them it will be ambulances roaring down the streets and people coming out to clap the health workers valiantly fighting in the days before a vaccine was even on the horizon, or struggling to survive in a Papua New Guinea village or city, with intermittent reliable news on how to deal with a pandemic and too few doctors.

HONNI VAN RIJSWIJK

Knowing True Crime

When I was twelve, I told people that I wanted to be a judge someday. What I actually wanted was to issue judgments, not in the courts, but in daily life. Specifically, I wanted the authority to dispense justice, by which I meant, vengeance. This is because I was both a girl and queer, and by age twelve, I'd pretty much had enough. At eighteen, I went to Sydney Law School and pushed through my undergraduate law degree—five years of wondering how a university, and most judges, could take inherently fascinating questions about human behaviour, violence and inequality, and turn them into hundreds of pages of unreadable technicality. I practised shipping law for a few years and then moved to academia.

Jeanette Winterson says that stories have three possible endings: revenge, tragedy or forgiveness. In criminal cases, the state claims to acknowledge all three: punishment as revenge; forgiveness through rehabilitation and concessions for early guilty pleas as well as statements of remorse; and tragedy through victim impact statements. But legal stories are unsatisfying. Although many judgments in criminal trials are freely available online, people prefer the true crime genre. I prefer the true crime genre. The law aims to avoid the standard of common sense, excess emotion, the representation of gratuitous violence, and bias. True crime trucks in all of these, and perhaps it should disturb me that I enjoy it so much, while being so committed (purportedly) to the ethic of justice, especially to social justice. Isn't it better to be rational, unbiased, and even? Isn't it better to avoid the prejudices and horrors of "common sense," a standard which has powered racism, sexism and queerphobia? This essay examines these forms of knowing: in law, in the public sphere, and in our own minds. Knowing in law involves concepts that we all recognise: presumption of innocence; rule of law; proof of guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. True crime is not only diagnostic of how these forms of knowing work more generally but *produces* forms of knowledge in relation to specific points of view (for example, the perpetrator's). The genre also circulates different truths—in particular, there is a significant sub-genre that is obsessed with the "true innocence" of people who have been found guilty in law. Podcasts in this vein include *Serial* and *Who Killed Leanne Holland?* and the television documentary on Keli Lane, *Exposed*.

True crime is mostly enjoyed by women, which has been written about a lot (Tuttle; Barcella; Moskowitz), and by queers, which has been written about less. It's been suggested that this is because, as likely victims of violent crime, we use the genre as a zone of thought-experiments, and empowerment. We imagine ourselves in dangerous scenarios, on the cusp of death, and through those scenes we rehearse the manoeuvres that could someday save us. I think this is part of the enjoyment of watching, listening to and reading true crime, but I don't think this capacity is unique to true crime. I was walking between train carriages at the age of twelve, on my way to school, hockey-stick in hand, moving away from random guys who followed me, and imagining what I would do (possibly with my hockey-stick)

if/when they assaulted me. I'd already had some random guy stick his tongue in my ear while I sat in the carriage doing my maths homework, and I would never be oblivious on the train like that again. So, women and queers don't need prompts to step through scenes of survival; real life almost always provides us with the material. But it's enjoyable to learn the texture and details of these cases—what is familiar and strange, both. When one is immersed in the details of a true crime story, the general threats that women and queer people live with are contained, made specific—this cis man, this time, this place, rather than any cis man, anytime, anywhere. True crime is also cathartic in a retributive sense, if not a reparative one—we can relish the perpetrator's guilt, and our knowledge of it.

There were three true crime cases that defined my adolescence and young adulthood—that really got under my skin—and I think these cases have resonated for my contemporaries too. The first case was Anita Cobby's murder. Anita was walking home from the train station after meeting friends for dinner after work when she was abducted and killed by a group of men. She was walking home from the station because the public phones were smashed up, so she couldn't call her dad, and then no taxis came. I lived in Prospect and knew how bad the public transport system was—you could get a train into the city but to get to the station, you'd have to wait for an hourly bus, or get a lift from someone. I was travelling into the city to go to high school. I was eleven and had been recently told that I needed to "stop running around the streets," after a childhood of scrambling around storm water drains.

When I was 14, Leigh Leigh was killed by a boy at her school, while attending a birthday party at Stockton. Leigh had been sexually assaulted, humiliated, spat on and mocked by a group of partygoers that night. The narrative that came out of that case, through both the legal process and the media, was one of exceptionalism—Stockton was aberrant because the community was poor, alcoholic, and didn't supervise their children adequately. But I was Leigh Leigh's age, I went to a school in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, and I didn't see anything exceptional about it at all. Nobody I knew had been murdered, but the coerced sex and continual harassment was absolutely familiar to me. One thing that gets lost in Leigh Leigh's case is that she was punished—by many boys and some of the girls—because she protested the fact that she'd been sexually assaulted. If she had just walked away after her initial rape, she would not have been set upon in the way she was. But she didn't walk away. She stood there and demanded justice. They knocked her down and mocked her and threw beer on her, and she got back up and demanded justice again.

A few years later, the writer Nick Enright wrote an absolutely appalling fictionalised treatment of Leigh's death as a play and then a film, both called *Blackrock* (1995 and 1997), despite Leigh's mother, Robyn Leigh, stating she would prefer a documentary treatment of Leigh's death (Brien). Enright stated categorically that the play was not "about" Leigh, even though it was filmed on Stockton beach and tells the story of the violent gang-rape of a 14-year-old. The film *Blackrock* focalises Leigh's death through the point of view of a working-class boy, Jared, who is yearning to become middle class, and is helped to do so by his middle-class girlfriend's photographer father. Jared witnesses Leigh's rape and death, and his moral dilemma is whether or not he should "dob in" his friends for the gang rape and murder of Leigh Leigh (sorry, of "Tracey," as Leigh is named in this fictionalised account). The fact that this moral question is legitimately set up as a "dilemma" just reinforces the narrative of mateship. I saw *Blackrock* in my early twenties and essentially had a breakdown. Then I discovered that this problematic film circulated in schools for years, as an educational tool purportedly designed to help kids understand sexual violence and

mateship. Understand what? That the rape and death of a girl may *sometimes* trump the allegiances of mateship? You'll need to think about it. And really, it needs to be a gang rape, the girl needs to be dead, and it helps if you're fleeing the poorer classes and no longer in need of the existing matey networks and back-scratching of the people you're dobbing in, because you're about to join the supposedly less-rapey middle class.

The third case was Keli Lane's murder of her daughter, Tegan, which didn't come to light until ten years after the fact. Keli Lane was sentenced in 2011 to 18 years in prison for the murder of her daughter, Tegan Lane.¹ Every contemporary of Keli, including me, remembers the details of Keli's trial, and of the events surrounding the murder of Tegan—Keli's secret pregnancies, Keli's sex life, and the cream Country Road suit that she wore to a friend's wedding on the day that Tegan disappeared. Keli was convicted by a jury in December 2010 of one count of murder and three counts of making false statements under oath. It was the Crown's case—accepted by the jury—that Keli left Auburn Hospital on 14 September 1996, two days after she had given birth to a baby, Tegan, and that this was the last time Tegan was seen. The fact that Tegan was missing was not officially noticed until some years later, when a social worker who was assisting with the adoption of Keli's next child discovered that Tegan's birth had never been registered. Police commenced an investigation, and then there was a Coronial Inquest before a six-month jury trial. The Crown's case was circumstantial—Tegan's body has never been found, and there was no physical or witness evidence to support the fact that Tegan was murdered or was in fact dead.

Knowing—Murder

I believe Keli killed her daughter Tegan. I also think that Keli both knows and doesn't know that she killed Tegan, and that her family and friends have supported her in this belief of not knowing. I think she, and they, both know and don't know that Keli murdered a two-day-old baby. The series of "unintentional" and "secret" pregnancies that Keli had involve states of knowing/not-knowing that extend to the murder. This contradiction about sex, and sexual assault, is something that she, and they, and we, are trained in—not just specifically Keli's family and the toxic sexual culture of the "insular peninsular" where she lived, but more generally by the Australian culture of the 1980s and 1990s.² And I don't believe that that culture is at all behind us.

Keli maintains that on 14 September 1996, she handed Tegan over to the child's biological father, a man who she first called Andrew Morris in interviews with investigating police officers, and then later called Andrew Norris in a subsequent interview. Police found a number of men called Andrew Norris/Morris in records (the Australian Tax Office; the Australian Electoral Commission and from state registries of births, deaths and marriages), but they've never been able to find the Andrew Norris/Morris. At the time Tegan died, Keli Lane lived in Fairlight, on the Northern Beaches of Sydney, a great distance from Auburn, where she went to hospital to deliver Tegan. Keli seemed to have a happy and successful life—she has been described by many people, as well as the sentencing judge, as a "golden girl," who had many friends, played water polo at state and national levels, and was well-supported by her parents. She had a long-term boyfriend, Duncan Gillies. But the court also found that, beneath this surface, there was a lot of trauma. Keli had two unintentional pregnancies as a teenager, and two terminations that she found distressing (*R v Keli Lane*, para 4).³ Her family and friends were not aware of the pregnancies and terminations (para

5). In 1994, when she was 18 years old, Keli became pregnant a third time, and carried this pregnancy secretly to term. On 18 March 1995, Keli played in a water polo grand final, and then went to a Balmain pub with her friends. At some point in the evening, her friends noticed that she was missing. In fact, she had gone to Balmain Hospital because she was in labour. Her first child was born the next day, on 19 March 1995, and was placed for adoption. Duncan Gillies, Keli's parents and many of her friends have stated that they were not aware of this pregnancy or the birth of this child. In December 1995, Keli became pregnant again, and again carried the pregnancy secretly to term. During this time, she continued her water polo training and took up a position as a Physical Education teacher at Ravenswood School for Girls in Gordon. On 12 September 1996, Keli Lane gave birth to Tegan, and Keli was discharged with Tegan on 14 September around noon. The judgment says that "the evidence is completely silent as to what happened immediately thereafter" (para 11). The Crown's case is that between noon and about 3 pm, when Keli Lane arrived at her parents' home at Fairlight, Keli murdered Tegan and disposed of her body. There was no evidence regarding the time, manner or place of death. That afternoon, Keli attended a wedding with Duncan Gillies "wearing all white" (*Exposed*, Episode 1)—in fact, wearing her cream Country Road pants suit (*Problem Child*, Episode 2). Keli Lane became pregnant again in 1998 and secretly carried that pregnancy to term and gave birth on 31 May 1999. Lane started the adoption process for this child and it was during the process that a social worker raised concern about what had happened to Tegan, a child whose birth had been recorded but who had then disappeared from the public record.

There is a substantial community of people looking at Keli Lane's claim of wrongful conviction, including academics and students from RMIT University's Bridge of Hope Innocence Initiative, which Keli Lane had approached in 2015 (O'Neill). Associate Dean Dr Michele Ruyters, who heads the Bridge of Hope, said of the Keli Lane case: "We go right back to the beginning and we look for holes," and "I absolutely think that (Lane) believes she is innocent" (O'Neill). Dr Ruyters also visited Lane a number of times at Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre and was struck by the way Lane was "instantly likeable—instantly ... She's got a great manner and she's very grounded despite everything she's been through. She's very self-reflective. She just comes across as a stand up person" (O'Neill). Criminologist Dr Xanthe Mallett stated that she found Lane "to be a warm, charismatic, intelligent woman." Dr Mallett finds Lane's conviction "problematic," because "the fact that two people can't be found has led to the successful prosecution for murder ... that someone can be found guilty of murder when no evidence exists to demonstrate murder took place"; "[a]t no stage during Lane's trial for murder could any witnesses be found who had seen Lane murder Tegan; no one saw Lane covered in blood or claimed to see her with tools to dig a grave, or disposing of Tegan's clothing"; and "[b]eing a liar doesn't mean she's a murderer." Dr Mallett said that her biggest fear was: "If Lane can be found guilty of murder under these circumstances, with no body, no forensic evidence or witnesses, and no rational motive, then any one of us could be accused and found guilty of a crime." I mean, I guess it could happen to any of us who has a baby that's vanished without a trace? Dr Ruyters argues, "There is a pattern in people who firmly believe in their innocence and that is that they never give up ... They refuse to take part in pre-release programs because that means admitting guilt for something they didn't do. They never stop fighting. It's an observable trend."

I think the courts got Keli's legal guilt right; I just don't think the courts' accounts contain the whole knowledge we have of Keli, which is fine, as the law doesn't set out to give

us a complete truth. The way the Crown conceptualised knowledge of Keli's intention to kill Tegan is fascinating. The Crown's case was that Keli deliberately killed Tegan and disposed of her body, and that the jury should exclude accidental death (para 37). The Crown distinguished this positive intention to kill from an intention to cause harm more widely, from death caused by negligence *and* death as a result of a spontaneous act (para 38). In part, the Crown inferred Keli's intention to kill Tegan on the basis that it was clear Keli had no intention to bring Tegan home, and had made no alternative arrangements of care for her (para 37). The Crown also inferred guilt from the lies that Keli told about the day Tegan disappeared, "categorised as lies evidencing a consciousness of guilt" (para 19).⁴ The Crown also relied on evidence that Keli had a history of taking steps to ensure that she did not have the responsibility of caring for a child or children—the evidence of two pregnancy terminations, and two children whom she had given up for adoption (one of the latter post-dating the birth of Tegan); the trial judge permitted this evidence to be relied on by the Crown as tendency evidence pursuant to s. 97 of the Evidence Act 1995 (para 20). The trial judge found, at sentencing, that during that day, "in her mind, Keli had nowhere to turn" (para 44), a medical expert diagnosing "an emotional state of pragmatism and desperation" (para 47). Finally, the Crown argued that the fact that Keli attended a wedding a couple of hours after Tegan's death, "moving on with her life in a normal manner ... showed either a callous disregard for human life or a complete ability to block out the terrible act she had just committed" (para 38). I want to stay with this point of the Crown's understanding of Keli's intention here, the Crown deducing Keli's state of mind from Keli's performance of *not knowing* on that day, of appearing *normal*. Showing that we *don't know* that violent acts have just happened, showing that things are *normal*—aren't we taught this, as girls and queers and women, from the time we can walk down the street?

Keli's protestations of not knowing what happened to Tegan (beyond the fact that she had been given to her natural father, who Keli named Andrew Morris and then Andrew Norris) went against Keli in law. In terms of sentencing, Keli would have been better off providing a specific account of causing Tegan's death by negligence, or that she killed Tegan without premeditation or on account of her state of mind being compromised at the time (opening her up to the charge of manslaughter, rather than of murder). In fact, the NSW Coroner at the time, Carl Milovanovich, offered Keli Lane a deal—a certificate of immunity, meaning she would spend no time in gaol—if she told the police where Tegan's body was, and what had happened to her (*Exposed*, Episode 2). Keli stuck with her version of events—that she had given Tegan to Andrew Norris/Morris.

Questions that the sentencing judge believed had a bearing on Keli's culpability included "questions which have excited public attention," including:

"Why did the offender become pregnant so many times when it was clearly within her means not to do so? Why were the pregnancies, terminations, and births kept secret? How were they kept secret? What was the point of their being kept secret?" (para 25)

In the 1990s, in some circles, the most terrible thing that could happen to you—maybe even worse than your own death—was teen pregnancy. I'm not sure what to make of that—was it a hangover from earlier times, in some places? I understand it being a painful experience, but this end-of-your life experience? Middle-class white girls weren't meant to stuff up like that; unplanned pregnancy was what happened to poor girls who have no options. But this

fact doesn't explain why Keli hid her pregnancies, or why she didn't take steps to prevent future pregnancies or why she did take those accidental pregnancies to term.

Not Knowing—Sexual Violence

The popular documentary about Keli Lane, *Exposed*, strongly argues for Keli Lane's innocence, bringing up counterfactuals to the courts' findings of guilt that are at times frankly fantastical. There are several Facebook groups that campaign to uphold Keli's innocence—I mean, of course there are. There was an amazing podcast called *Problem Child* that argued against the innocence claims raised in *Exposed*, drawing on court transcripts and other documentary evidence (*Problem Child*). *Problem Child* has been pulled from the internet, though, allegedly because of death threats made against the podcasters by Keli Lane's supporters, and allegedly threats made by Keli herself (*Problem Child*, Episode 8). *Exposed*, as true crime, is fascinating for the ways in which it represents Keli's knowledge of what happened. Keli Lane herself approached the producer and writer of *Exposed*, Caro Meldrum-Hanna, to ask her to investigate her case. Asked what she would like to achieve out of the documentary, Keli Lane says, "Well, obviously, the biggest hope for me is that someone comes forward with my daughter. She'd be an adult now" (*Exposed*, Episode 1)—a wish that seems incredible.

Keli Lane's parents claim not to have known about any of her pregnancies, including the three she carried to term—the same parents she lived with and also trained under. Her boyfriend, Duncan Gillies, said that he wasn't aware of the pregnancies. Anne Bain, who was the team manager for the Australian Women's Water Polo team, recalls one water polo game in Perth, January 1995, when she observed that Keli Lane was "definitely pregnant" (*Exposed*, Episode 1). Bain said that "talk was everywhere," from players and coaches, that Keli Lane was pregnant (*Exposed*, Episode 1). Keli's mother, Sandy Lane, was team manager for Keli's team at that time. Meldrum-Hanna asks Anne Bain whether, considering there was so much talk, there was any possibility that Sandy didn't hear the rumours? Anne says "No." Meldrum-Hanna interviews Keli's mother, Sandy, and asks her why she didn't notice Keli's pregnancy, and Sandy says: "Because she didn't look differently. Like, she's one that carried a pregnancy extremely well. She was never one of those tummy out here jobs" (*Exposed*, Episode 1). Keli played in the water polo grand final a couple of months later, in March 1995, when she was nine months pregnant, and gave birth to her first child later that night. Her water polo team-mates rang around random Sydney hospitals to find out whether Keli had had a baby and were told that she had; two days later, when Keli was still in hospital—it was her twentieth birthday—Keli got a "pass out" to go and have a birthday dinner with her family, and afterwards she returned to Balmain Hospital (*Exposed*, Episode 1).

Reviewing photos of Keli's 21st birthday party in 1996, Sandy recognises Keli's outfit, but not the fact that she was pregnant:

Caro Meldrum-Hanna: Do you know what party that was?

Sandy Lane: It'd be ... that's her 21st. Cos I recognise the clothes.

Caro: Good party?

SL: Terrific party.

Caro: Now, that girl standing in those photos there, your daughter ... is pregnant with Tegan.

SL: Oh, well, how could you tell?

Caro: About four months pregnant.

SL: Amazing. I mean, look how thin she is. And we see women these days ... because their dresses are too tight, for a start. I'm a bitch. ... It's society. It's how things have changed.

Keli Lane's first sexual experience, at 15, was a sexual assault, a "date rape," while she was intoxicated (*Exposed*, Episode 3). Explaining how she became pregnant again and again, Keli says, "It was carelessness, and a lack of self-protection ... drinking a lot, drinking and not using the pill correctly or not asking my partner to use protection. And not having control, I think is the biggest thing, of the situations I was in" (*Exposed*, Episode 1). More than that, there is the pervasive culture of assault that has always been around Sydney in general, and maybe the Northern Beaches in particular. Keli was known as the "Manly mattress." I think she also experienced other rapes, when she wasn't able to consent. I think she drank a lot and had a lot of "grey area" sex. If someone is intoxicated enough that their birth control stops working, do they have the capacity to consent to sex? So, how do you navigate rape culture? You're judged by how skilfully you do this. You shouldn't end up the manly mattress, or worse, pregnant. You have a "choice" in engaging, in the sense that you could always stay home, not socialise, be depressive. But if you do engage, the terrain is there. The misreading of this threat is evident in the state of mind of our judicial officers. Discussing the decision to prosecute Keli, part of which required evaluating the threat that Keli posed to the general community, the NSW Director of Public Prosecutions at that time, Nicholas Cowdery QC, said: "I don't think Keli Lane was a risk to the community in that she would go around killing other people's babies ... she seemed to be a bit of a risk to the virile young male portion of the community" (*Exposed*, Episode 3). Did he really say that? Yes. Yes, he did.

I know what it is, to both know and not to know at the same time. We all do. We know that a number of studies say that one third of kids experience sexual violence by the time they reach 18 years ... but do we even need those studies? To know? We were there. We talk to our friends. As Keli's contemporary, I regularly witnessed "casual" sexual violence at parties and bars. I was sexually assaulted by a teacher, and also by three boys in a hotel spa while on holidays. I was hunted and assaulted on trains going to school, as I said earlier. It sounds nuts to recount those stories now, as anything but exceptional and horrible, but we all know how pervasive and ordinary this violence is. I thought of this violence as normal and I was correct, it truly was/is normal, in terms of its pervasiveness, and in terms of the way our legal system and our culture both know and don't know about this violence—where "knowing" means accountability, or even accounting for. I talked to my friends and heard about how normal this violence was, and how to "not know" about it too—not make a fuss, not appear upset, to smooth things over so that you could get on with your life. Because who has the time or energy to fight all of it when you're 13, 15, 19? As I became older, I learnt I could deal with these stories therapeutically, in private settings—those frameworks of recognition were in place—but there were no wider, public frameworks of accountability. Yes, the criminal law provides a system whereby the state prosecutes the harms of indecent assault, of sexual assault, of rape, but we also have stories about how that goes for people who actually engage with the process, and mostly those stories are dire. I remember when I was fourteen, after my friend told me about being sexually assaulted while walking down the street, she said, "Well, you know. It's just a normal part of being a girl. Isn't it." It wasn't that we weren't angry, it was more that sexual

violence was like the weather—how do you push back against the weather? There wasn't a framework of meaning in the 80s and 90s for this violence. There's barely a framework of meaning for it now. We have #metoo, but we also have a situation where the Head Boy of Cranbrook recently *begged* his fellow students to see fellow girls and women “as people,” not rape them, and not dismiss sexual violence as “a joke” (Learmonth). How do you intervene in that culture, in that violence, as a kid? Both law and culture are complicit in “not knowing” sexual violence. True crime stories confirm our own experiences as women, girls and queers—experiences that arguably rely on a knowledge different from *common sense*, a knowledge more particular and in many ways more authoritative, given that it is grounded in experiences of violence, of perpetrators, of detailed ways, also, of not-knowing: situations in which violence is hidden, subordinated by wider society, by law and sometimes by ourselves.

NOTES

- 1 The facts of the case described in this essay, which were accepted by the jury and the court, are set out in the sentencing judgment: *R v Keli LANE* [2011] NSWSC 289 (15 April 2011).
- 2 The toxic culture of the Northern Beaches has been explored in the podcast *Teacher's Pet*, and the investigation into institutional sexual assaults that arose from that podcast.
- 3 All future references to the judgment will be cited as paragraph numbers.
- 4 See *Edwards v The Queen* [1993] HCA 63; 178 CLR 193; *R v Lane* [2011] NSWCCA 157; 221 A Crim R 309.

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COREY WAKELING

Pandemic Bathing

An enormous faucet and the steam cloud. The scene where Chihiro is visited by the seemingly oblivious ghoul, Kaonashi, that is, No-Face. Is the spirit world one infinitely unfolding bathhouse? Dogo Onsen in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture lies not in the spirit world, but does stage the exspirating faucet, bathroom, the unfolding, half-stepped mezzanine stories within the bathing complex, at the opening point of the subterranean spring. Every ghoul vying for the hot bath. The decongestant steam. Dogo Onsen closed for two years for renovation. Dogo Onsen, open December 2021, welcoming guests back to Shikoku. An enormous faucet and the steam cloud.

*

I spent part of my first coronavirus summer holiday in Kinosaki. Unlike Shiga Naoya's¹ first-person narrator in "At Kinosaki," no determined convalescent purpose as such. No, I was attending the Toyooka Theatre Festival, a theatre festival made sustainable mid-pandemic thanks to what were at the time cutting edge infrastructural approaches to crowd management—a spectator registration system, updated in real-time by a Bluetooth and GPS tracking tag device worn as a lanyard; isolated intake, outtake routes at the theatres; spaced seating; pre-production "bubble" quarantine of actors and producers; elaborately partitioned reception areas—alone, bathing in recently but conditionally re-opened bathhouses of this illustrious historical resort. I remember a powerful flesh mural perched on the rim of the central bath at Ichinoyu. A Yakuza man unperturbed—or rallied?—by the usual expectation of circumspection toward those belonging to criminal associations. Had the pandemic brought him here? The very place one is always told the criminal associate is not welcome. I had just an hour before seen Ichihara Satoko's *The Bacchus—Holstein Milk Cows*, a hallucinatory restaging of the Euripedeian tragedy exploring transmuted Dionysian posthuman forms of fecundity, lampooning the fetish of the goodness of reproductivity at every turn. The listlessness of the willows overhanging Kinosaki's rivers among uncommonly light guest traffic. The wailing dragon on the back of the Yakuza man, self-satisfied in steam, few other humans circling in Ichinoyu.

*

Immobilised by tuberculosis, Masaoka Shiki—more often called Shiki, his first name, as a gesture of affection—spent years in bed. Certainly his last ones too. The final three he wrote using the most intimate object of his greatly diminished surroundings, in this case, the hechima, or sponge gourd, its central thrust and agent. You know the sponge gourd as the

loofah, that corn cob-looking skin-aggressor some like to think of as a felicitous exfoliant. I ask myself where this word “loofah” comes from: OED says Arabic, lūfa, the Latin name *Luffa ægyptiaca* betraying its Egyptian roots for the English-language context. 糸瓜 is more easily parsed for etymology—the Chinese characters are “thread” and “gourd.” For Shiki, the sponge gourd must have been the most blessed living thing, for the sponge gourd, while providing not only its husk as an exfoliant, its inner fibres as a readymade noodle, but most critically to Shiki the antitussive and analgesic *hechimasui*, or sponge gourd juice. I note that a sponge gourd drink appears in Ayurvedic medicine, known as *Lauki* in Hindi. Shiki’s last three poems occupy one page. These are all undeniable haiku, undeniable in the sense of indispensable, indispensable in the sense of insinuating a new immediacy.² More than imagism; nowism. Which is to say that, if there is a way out of one’s final enclosure, one’s sweat-soaked bed, from the repetitions of squares that cross-hatch and categorise the epiphenomena of this unarrestable now, it will have to 込みあがる, which is to say, well up, stem from, breach the inscrutable, undeniable, and inexorable now.

をとひのへちまの水も取らざりき

the day before last's
juice of sponge gourd too
not taken just yet

痰
一斗糸瓜の水も間にあはず

the gallons of phlegm
the juice of sponge gourd too
both now out of time

糸瓜咲て痰のつまりし佛かな

gourd now in flower
congested with sputum still
Buddha is it

Read right to left. That is how we read in Japanese. That is the order and the chronology by which Shiki wrote the three. One’s last breaths as one’s last lines, one’s last lines referring to one’s last, imperilled breaths, wracked with phlegma and disease. If it isn’t already clear from my translations: Shiki has discovered the acutest eye, the eye not his, which is to say the eye—no, the after-selfhood—of the moment. The first haiku tends to be the most cited, because it is the most optimistic; even the antitussive medicine comes drawn from a fruit now in flower; the most brutally factual also happens to be the garden bed of flowers.

But I cannot but read each haiku in dependence to a final triptych of the page, like three shadow plays revised, to rest on a final interval. Because the sphere of observation can only take stock of intervals, while whatever it is that exceeds the moment’s brutal facticity may,

if we are materialists, or, indeed Stoics of various traditions, including the Zen, if we permit the parallelism, be uncovered in the true mute exhalatory pause. While the last of the works is the most ghoulishly open-ended, the middle work is the wittiest. The only comedy is black comedy? Slapstick, pantomime, commedia dell'arte, rakugo, kyogen—whatever your comic tradition, the morbid and fatalistic transformatively reiterated in its defining failure or existential limitation beats out the most enduring resonance. The fluid world's desperate responses to Shiki's disease, one corporeal, the other refined from plant. Phlegm—not a gallon, actually, but a similarly figurative quantity of liquid, the archaic measurement of "itto," eighteen litres, an impossible amount—is out of time, or late, because the body's immune response is inadequate, however copious and desperate, to overcome tuberculosis. The gourd water Shiki has been drinking is too late because Shiki is dead. This time, he cannot drink it, or won't, or, it doesn't matter. However you wish to read it. An alternative reading is common, that his sisters, Shiki's devoted carers during his years of illness, are out of time to conduct their usual tasks of feeding him the death-fending (or death-assuaging) gourd water and clearing away his sputum. His death sets a new interval. Dead before what is likely their routine arrival, too late to provide the means of extending his life a little. For me, both are being evoked at once. We are all out of time.

Probe deeper, humour's referents are not funny. Only the language of humour, the spirit of humour, is funny. It arrives here by way of Shiki's outstanding wit and pellucid sincerity, the self-absenting candour needed to draw this parallel between what is at hand, what expires, and what time leaves. Indeed, I see two parallels: (i) the two fluids, both the "expressions" of Shiki, and both out of time, and (ii) that sense of the outer world out of time to save him, echoing with the out-of-timeliness of Shiki's two liquids, fire of phlegm and balm of gourd, two substances no longer relevant to the expiring self. Shiki's phlegm provides a counterpoint to the false triumphalism of George Herbert's nonetheless sparky moral declaration to cast out the "flegme," which references the humour putatively responsible for indolence, benighting an immobilised society:

O England! full of sinne, but most of sloth;
Spit out thy flegme, and fill thy brest with glorie
Thy Gentrie bleats, as if thy native cloth
Transfus'd a sheepishnesse into thy storie:
Not that they all are so; but that the most
Are gone to grasse, and in the pasture lost.
(Herbert 6)

This is not the only matter I disagree with Herbert on; Herbert has the "gall"—yes, gall!—to exhort that we "Laugh not too much: the wittie man laughs least" (13). Herbert does also say "For wit is newes only to ignorance," mind you, and that is something I can certainly approve, or, I should say, Shiki evidently accords with.

No, I review my position. I think I misunderstood Herbert.

Yes, given that wit is never news, but some excoriating discovery from the real and the given, wit, while it spins its perverse centrifuge in our diaphragm, should at its best draw a gasp and not a laugh. The most *humorous* gasp at least. Wit is courage to observe the kindness of the clarified instant. Wit is the deadpan delivery of *ma ni awazu*—of "out of time."

*

From the *Areopagitica*: "Yet it is not impossible that she [Truth] may have more shapes than one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side or on the other without being unlike herself? What but a vain shadow else is the abolition of those ordinances, that handwriting nailed to the cross? What great purchase is this Christian liberty which Paul so often boasts of? His doctrine is that he who eats or eats not, regards a day or regards it not, may do either to the Lord. How many other things might be tolerated in peace and left to conscience, had we but charity, and were it not the chief stronghold of our hypocrisy to be ever judging one another? I fear yet this iron yoke of outward conformity hath left a slavish print upon our necks; the ghost of a linen decency yet haunts us. We stumble and are impatient at the least dividing of one visible congregation from another, though it be not in fundamentals; and through our forwardness to suppress and our backwardness to recover any enthralled piece of truth out of the grip of custom, we care not to keep truth separated from truth, which is the fiercest rent and disunion of all. We do not see that while we still affect by all means a rigid and external formality, we may as soon fall again into a gross conforming stupidity, a stark and dead congealment of 'wood and hay and stubble,' forced and frozen together, which is more to the sudden degenerating of a church than many subdichotomies of petty schisms." (Milton 53)

*

What made you laugh during that world-watching called pandemic doom-scrolling self-surveilling epidemiologising of your statistically quantified data *bios* called the Covid-self? Eliot Weinberger got me with this one (but not merely this one; read the rest of "The American Virus" for yourself; it's a gas). I read it in January 2021, but it was written in June 2020, in the Trump half of the pandemic:

Sports return to America, with an Ultimate Fighting Championship in Florida. This is a presidential favourite and the event opens with a video message from [Trump]: "Let's play. You do the social distancing and whatever else you have to do. But we need sports. We want our sports back." He does not explain how social distancing may be practised in Ultimate Fighting.

The essay is comprised of relentless contradictions, flagrant misnomers and absurdities, that nonetheless emerge as undeniable facts in the first pandemic year. The UFC one asserts my favourite: life is hardly worth living without blood sport. Andrea Brady, unsurprisingly, provides one of the other outstanding dialectical works of pandemic days: "Hanging in the Air." I read this very recently, not expecting a pandemic poem. The author of "Drone Poetics," a staggering survey of the new mimetic order we inherit in the age of drone-mediated biopolitics—a surveillance necropolitics, if we adopt Achille Mbembe's term; the author of *Poetry and Bondage: A History and Theory of Lyric Constraint* (2021), again, a study of literature's entanglements with the media of enclosure and arrest, its dynamic responsibility to it. Once again, Brady charts the reality of the invisible fetters, this time prompted by viral rampancy, a lyric of the threat of un-breath, closing:

In its green and yellow is an image
of the lungs we will be given

if we cross the horizon and abandon
the nuclear family, private property, obedient domains
("Hanging in the Air" S39)

Brady's poem is a political poem because it bears not one critique, but rather a systematic deconstruction of the presumptions upon which our putative safety and security at home are built. Brady censures the privileged inheritance of property, of having a yard at all to be safe in, an occupation in which work from home can even function, a nuclear family for distraction during confinement; all the premises that bourgeois society could erect (in lieu of various other interventional measures to ensure civic and epidemiological well-being) based upon existing capital and infrastructure, with the frontlines as usual defended and maintained by the usual precarious sentinels. Brady's lyric voice grapples with the urge to "read and not read the accounts of the anaesthetists" (S38).

NOTES

1 Japanese names throughout this piece appear in conventional Japanese order, meaning Surname-First Name.

2 Shiki's oeuvre and its numerous poems can be viewed in Japanese at the Shiki Museum website: <https://shiki-museum.com/>. A haiku is so short, it is remembered in full, so titles are redundant.

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CLAIRE AMAN

If There Are Zebra Finches

If there are zebra finches, you will find water nearby. On the third day we crested down to rolling plains of fresh spinifex, making camp a short way from a tor. A bird watched us from the highest rock.

"Black kite," said the ornithologist from behind his binoculars. The geologist walked around the tor while Alessandro and I unpacked the panniers.

It was softer country, with a breeze streaming across from the north. Sometimes a place will make me want to restrain our presence. Alessandro collected rocks to anchor our tarpaulins, but I would be shifting them back in the morning before we left.

I was relieved to stop for the night. All day the surface had been red with endless corrugations and patches of deep sand. We'd had to read the track ahead like sailors read the water. It was always changing; no sooner did I think I understood it than the motorcycle would suddenly squirm and I'd feel the ornithologist's hands grabbing my jacket. Ahead, Alessandro would still be upright with the geologist clinging on behind. We had to pick our way, often on the wrong side of the road if the surface was any better. If we saw the distant dust plume of a road train coming from the other direction we had plenty of time to cross back over before it blared past in a red cloud. Like an explosion, as Alessandro said.

As agreed, we'd pull over whenever our passengers tapped us on the shoulder. They were always needing more photographs, new specimens, extra notes. Off with the helmets again, on with the hats. They'd wander into the distance with their notebooks while Alessandro and I squatted on the dirt to wait, fingering the stiff grasses and waving flies from our faces. There was never any shade. Sometimes it felt as if they were gone for hours. When they returned, I always had the water bottle ready. The ornithologist was liable to forget to drink, I soon discovered, and could become flushed and vague.

This work is tiring but there are advantages. In that red desert for example, there were so many tiny birds and star-shaped flowers, and the milky way streaking across at night. The ornithologist and the geologist were paying us well, and I was learning about birds and rocks. The word tor, for example, or that zebra finches are found near water.

Alessandro and I are Two-Up Tours. We carry pillion passengers on day trips from one tourist spot to another along the tarred roads of the northwest, taking on as many jobs as we can before the rains come. But when the ornithologist and the geologist came to us, we were doubtful. Two passengers for a thousand kilometres on the dirt road across the desert? Because they'd be able to see everything better from the back of a motorbike? The whole sky, the ground and everything in between: that was how the ornithologist put it, with a helpless smile and a sweep of his arm.

We knew then we'd find a way to take them. We'd minimise the gear, carrying necessities only. The ornithologist would ride with me while Alessandro would take the

geologist. (He is something other than a geologist but it's unpronounceable. But to call me a geologist is fine, he said kindly on the first day when Alessandro stumbled over the word.)

At our camp with the black kite perched above, Alessandro prepared couscous with dried fish, and chilli. Everything had to be lightweight. Luckily our passengers were of slight build. But then there was the spare fuel, water, bedding, tools, tarpaulins and cookpot, not to mention all the instruments, cameras, specimen cases and notebooks.

"There is too much weight," Alessandro kept saying. With a heavy bike you can't go speeding over the corrugations. Often we could only trundle along. But whenever we struck deep sand we had to be ready with our throttles. A sailboat in such conditions would turn itself to face into the wind. Boats are designed to depower this way in order to avoid a knockdown. But a motorcycle can't slow down in sand. We have to power through, accelerating even when everything is too much and the handlebars are swinging from side to side. Unladen, it's easy enough and even thrilling. Now our loads were forcing our wheels deep into the sand, threatening a capsize.

Yet so far we had stayed upright, and our passengers had shown themselves to be game.

It's true about travelling by bike. Not only do you see more, you feel yourself passing through the air. You can feel the slight change in temperature if the country dips down, and the morning can be delicious in your nostrils. In a car you jolt along in the fumes, staring out at a rectangular landscape.

At our tor camp we served their dinner before sunset. They sat on a flat rock, looking out over the plain. Alessandro and I would eat later, passing the pot back and forth. "Thank you Dolores," said the ornithologist as he handed me the plate afterwards. It was scraped clean. For someone so light, he had a good appetite.

We slept under blankets on tarpaulins. The sky was so dense with stars it was hard to see normal constellations like the southern cross or the saucepan. Often there were shooting stars. Nights were cold and days were hot. The birds started at five in the morning; by five-thirty it was light and I'd find the ornithologist sitting some distance from the camp, a blanket around his shoulders, reminding me of a termite mound.

"Good morning Dolores," he'd say when he came for his breakfast. "Spinifex pigeon," he'd say, squatting over footprints. He had thoughtful brown eyes. One morning when I rolled up his bedding I discovered a small, well-worn bear.

In the mornings Alessandro and I made toast and honey for them. Then, while they organised their notes and samples, we packed the panniers. Everything had to be packed in order, with heavy items at the bottom and the weight evenly spread. We'd taken people on difficult roads before but this was the worst. I tried not to worry whenever I looked at the ornithologist's fine wrists. I told myself: if we are going to fall off it will be on sand, which at least is soft.

So far our passengers had been solemn, polite. They were not like our usual customers. They hadn't even asked us to take a photo of them lounging on the bikes. Tourists pay good money for the two-wheel experience, and there is nothing wrong with good-natured swaggering or mirthful discussions about who should ride with who: will the man sit behind me, and the woman behind handsome Alessandro? Or girls on together? But this trip was different. Alessandro and I were not required to pose or clown. We were the crew on a scientific project.

And scientific they were, heads bent over their notebooks by torchlight before bed. You could never say Alessandro and I are highly educated. Our skills are mostly to do with

determination. We are from families whose hands have held crucifix, whip or tiller ever since the great-grandfathers stepped off the Santa Rosa onto the Fremantle wharf. There have been missionaries, whalers, drovers, fishermen, rough riders, even a lapsed Benedictine monk. But never a scholar.

The geologist had a bear too, according to Alessandro.

We left our camp and set off again, dirt rippling ahead. This was the worst day yet, battling through the edge of dune country. But to the ornithologist it was the best day yet because of the painted finch he'd seen after breakfast. "Just what I hoped for," he told me, and as he spoke a small wind passed through, making the dry spinifex bend and whisper all around us in a wave.

"Dolores, you and Alessandro should eat with us," he said that night. We sat in a circle, shy at first with our spoons on our plates.

"Travel is easier in modern times," the ornithologist remarked after we finished eating. He told of an expedition in 1896 across the western part which ended in disaster. "The ornithology collection had to be abandoned," he said longingly. We all fell quiet. I thought of a bleached leather satchel buried in a sand dune. Inside, feathers and bones.

Late in the afternoon of the fifth day, we stood at the turnoff to a lake. The sign said thirty kilometres. "And thirty back," I said to Alessandro as we looked at the finely dotted line on the map.

"It's an important site," the geologist told us. "There is still very much to understand. An ancient river course."

"And there'll be birds," added the ornithologist.

I saw they both had their fingers crossed.

I didn't recall any mention of a detour when they engaged us to carry them along this desert road. I suggested leaving the camping gear at the turnoff and visiting the lake for the day. But they shook their heads. "A day is not enough, we need to stay overnight," said the ornithologist. "For birds."

"The track will be bad," I said to Alessandro.

"We'll stop here tonight," he said, "and camp at the lake tomorrow."

I ran my hands through my hair. It felt like a wreath of kelp. My hands were stained red-brown. I slapped my leg and a cloud of dust rose up. I wanted a shower, cold wine, a pillow. In only two hundred kilometres there would be plenty. But here everything was spare and necessary, the hummocks of fine grasses, a wagtail catching a fly—snap!—in mid-air, the slow-milled dirt, the silence at night. I knew my own fears and exertions were overwrought. It was only that our passengers were so pale and young, and us so responsible for protecting them.

That night they sang to us in high, clear voices, a love song from the radio. We clapped, but the song was not yet over—they'd only paused to remember the final verse—so we clapped a second time.

"Everything in the universe is made of the same elements," the geologist called out as we prepared to sleep. "We are stars."

The next morning, we set our course. "Hang onto your hats, boys," said Alessandro. Their helmets nodded.

Stories are always about gales and reefs, not about the silver progress of a craft moving across a map. But I had no time to think about that. There was a sea shanty in my head and I let it sing. It steadied my mind as I went through the rough patches. And it was one long patch, Alessandro.

It was calm enough to begin with. But then Alessandro, I saw from your wake that it was treacherous ahead, so I shifted my weight back. I told myself to keep my hands light, to let the thing find its own way forwards. I felt the chop as we crossed onto the sand, flailing through to a channel that offered a narrow purchase. Drifts of fine powder tried to swirl us around and flip us over. Was it rocky waves ahead or wind-blown sand ripples? There were crossings with rounded stones and slippery stuff I didn't dare look down at. I powered through, I changed down, I reefed, I jibed, my lips as dry as dust. The ornithologist was a featherweight behind me with his fingers twisted in my jacket. My only fear was for him. There was nothing to do except keep going, so on we went.

But just when we saw the flash of salt on the lake bed, the saints of travel cut us loose. Hooray and down she goes. Then it was the ornithologist and me lying at the bottom of the sea, snagged in the rigging.

I couldn't get out. There was a faint peeping in my ear. It was the ornithologist. I slid off my glove and opened his visor with my fingertip. "We're tangled, matey," I said, "but Alessandro will come looking for us." I took his hand, fearing to damage the small bones. His grip was stronger than I'd imagined.

"Let's watch the sky while we wait for rescue," I said.

In the inland sky, something is always circling. Kestrels, falcons and kites work all day. There is nothing like lying on your back if you want to see birds of prey.

"Cheery-wheel," said the ornithologist. "Peeeeeeeep. Drut-drut-drut." His fingers curled around mine.

I waited. I thought about the road and the wind. "I'm sorry," I whispered to the ornithologist, "I'm not sure where we are."

He said nothing, only panted.

For the wayfarer, sighting a large group of birds—a birdpile—is a more reliable sign of land than one or two stray birds. Other indications of land include drifting wood, clouds piled up over islands or distinctive patterns of swells. Something large was coming. A Landcruiser. I turned my head to see a wheel and two boots.

"Our legs are jammed," I said. "If you could just lift the timbers off us."

We wriggled out. "Tee-did, tee-did," said the ornithologist, and he hopped away under a mullah mullah bush.

Gabe, for that was his name, pulled a towel from the Landcruiser. He draped it over the ornithologist's head. "It'll relax him," he said. "Leave him alone for now. He'll be alright, they're tougher than they look."

I shook my legs out. I'd been waiting for my ankle, twisted backwards, to snap. But it didn't. I must be made of sappy wood after all.

"I righted your friends too," he said. "There's a spot by the lake. My mother's people belong here, they have their own name for it. But you have to tell the water in this country that you're here."

I did. Then I unloaded the bike and piled everything into the Landcruiser. The ornithologist pulled the towel off his head. "At least my binoculars aren't broken," he said, and climbed into the passenger seat. I squeezed in next to him. Gabe started the engine and we went bumping along towards the lake.

That was how the ornithologist came to be in the news for sighting the rare parrot. At dawn the next morning I threw my blanket off and followed his footprints. When I offered him the water bottle, he held out his camera screen to show me a green and yellow bird standing next to a tussock. It's what I wanted in the whole world, Dolores, he said.

By the salt lake was our last camp. We ended up paying Gabe to drive our passengers and their luggage for the last two hundred kilometres to Halls Creek. We gave him what he asked, and it was fair. They'd be safer in the Landcruiser, and we were too exhausted to lug everything much further. Without the heavy loads our motorcycles were easy.

In Halls Creek there was a delegation waiting. The parrot was important. Nobody had ever reported seeing it in the northwest before. Photos were taken. Then they had to catch a plane from the airstrip.

Our farewells felt sudden after the desert with all its expanse of time. Do you remember, Alessandro, how my father used to cry without shame at the Christmas table over the bones of the roasted lamb? He'd cry about the sheep, his paper crown slipping sideways. It will be a relief to cry like that one day. But when we parted from the ornithologist and the geologist there were others waiting, and we only shook hands and smiled at the ground. I hoped with all my heart they understood we had tried our best to look after them.

They sent us the book the following year. The last page was bookmarked, where it said thank you to Dolores and Alessandro and thank you to Gabe. We are not great readers, but we placed it in our glass case with our sailing ships and brass spurs and bells.

Even now I think about the ornithologist, who wished to be immortal so he could fly among all the birds that ever were. I think about the geologist calling out from his blanket that we were stars. And I think about Gabe, how he righted us. I wish I knew more. I only know there are pleasures and frights in all our journeys across land and water, and I tell you the country never treated us badly.

LUCY SUSSEX

Pandemics Past and Present; Extract from The Tell-Tale Skull

Pandemics Past and Present

A new year brings expectations, but 2020 threw most of these aside. Instead we all found ourselves as extras in a remake of the film *Contagion*—a prophetic tale, with its depiction of a pandemic not only possible, but inevitable. Yet it was nothing new in human experience, as a cursory glance at history shows. Consider 102 years ago, when Spanish influenza hit, or Sydney's episode of plague, recurring from 1900–1910.

In previous centuries epidemics occurred even more frequently. When researching/reworking a murder case from the mid-1600s, I found myself writing a past pandemic. Because the case took over a decade to resolve, those involved endured two major catastrophes, the plague of 1665–1666, followed by the Great Fire of London. If Australia had bushfire followed by coronavirus in 2019, then London had the same thing, in reverse. Yet neither event got much wordage in the major published source for the case. It seemed that because fire and pestilence were so much the common experience they were not remarkable, unlike a murder investigated by a determined woman with the help of a coroner, the Chief Justice, and her husband's ghost.

To fill out these gaps in the source text meant using the imagination, which engages the writer more intensely than following a narrative of established facts. Yet fancy has to be supported by historical research to be credible. In writing plague I was obliged to dive deep into its history—and then found myself living in a pandemic, in the present.

Thus I came to share the experience of my subjects, my characters, in a way that could not have been imagined. Indeed, the way we live now during coronavirus proved remarkably like surviving pandemics in the past. It may seem unbelievable, but London's response to the Plague of 1665–1666 was not so different from today and COVID-19.

Nearly 500 years of intervening history has meant huge advances in the understanding of medicine. Disease was then poorly understood. If people suspected fomites, objects likely to spread contagion, then they could be fatally wrong. God's wrath upon sinners was blamed, also effluvium from the earth or polluted Thames. We know now that coronavirus is spread less by touch than by virus-ridden aerosols—as is the most deadly form of plague, the pneumonic, from person to person. Yet for months in 2020 that information was lacking. We too were ignorant, in the same state of wondering fear as our ancestors.

They did have a notion that animal transmission was involved, and they were correct, for the infectious pathogen, *Yersinia pestis* (only identified and named in 1894) requires a vector. London's cats and dogs famously got slaughtered, but not the rats and

their associated fleas. "Fleas on rats," sings Gwen Stefani in "Black Plague." Recent research posits other culprits: human fleas and lice. These insect bites caused bubonic or septicemic plague, a little less lethal.

If medicine was lacking, then simple human observation, from generations of seeing contagions come and go, had identified protective measures. Vinegar, a natural antibacterial, washed anything from doorsteps to the coins used in transactions. It also sprinkled the cloth masks commonly worn. More elaborate Personal Protective Equipment was donned by the plague doctors—grotesque full-head coverings, complete with glass goggles and bills resembling a giant bird.

They also understood the benefits of isolation. The best source on London's plague is Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, published in 1722 but compiling contemporary experience. In its pages are unforgettable images, of English warships in port dropping anchor in the deepest part of the Thames and waiting out the contagion. Similarly the ubers of London, the wherrymen, lived offshore in their boats. When citizens ventured outside they kept their distance from walls and other walkers. Even the empty streets of coronavirus cities have a precedent, for grass started growing in London from lack of traffic.

The sheer scale of the plague in a city of 500,000 souls meant unprecedented responses. Panic sent the King, court and anyone with means fleeing London, leaving the city to deal with the remaining populace. The Mayoralty lacked mass media but had town criers. Printing presses produced handbills for public information, which got liberally plastered on walls, along with quack cures and pleas for piety.

London needed feeding, so supplies of corn were guaranteed for bread. Servants deserted by their masters watched plague houses or became searchers, diagnosers of disease. The bubonic plague had one advantage over coronavirus, being easily detectable by the black bubos—infected lymph glands—in armpit and groin. A bodily inspection was compulsory for anyone seeking a pass to leave London.

For those who were infected, measures were practical but brutal: 40-day isolation, a cross painted on the door. If the watchmen prevented escape, then they could also provide food. Thousands died each week, taken to burial pits after dark to avoid more panic. Yet thousands also survived the infection. For the time, the public health response was extraordinary. The plague never again attacked so powerfully in Britain.

With these precedents in mind, I walked the quiet streets of COVID Melbourne in mask—no hardship, particularly if you knew the history. That so many rejected the tried and tested measures of preventing contagion implies a wilful ignorance, as deadly as disease and spread as readily via social media. To be mindful of the past made the strange times I now inhabited seem an extension of the 1600s. Indeed it seemed as if I had suddenly stepped into a Dutch genre painting, that unparalleled portal into how people lived in that era.

In hard lockdown other humans encountered outside the home were seen in part only, masked, or rarer, glimpsed in windows. In the older houses of the neighbourhood, the rectangular window-frames suggested an art gallery. Repeated were studies of person at laptop, as intent as Vermeer's women reading. Once I saw a young man with a polar blue Stratocaster, practising at his front window, perfectly framed, a moment in time that seemed ageless.

Like the people of the past, we waited out contagion in the domestic space. We baked bread, a familiar activity to them, and watched a lot of Netflix—something completely alien. They would likely have deplored the lack of bible-reading and prayer on our part. Yet we

had a commonalty of experience, surviving through the pleasures of small things and going about our lives as much as possible. In that we are linked—lost survival skills unexpectedly surfacing 500 years later.

I could only guess at how the subjects in my narrative experienced the plague. The source stated that three ghostly visions of her husband impelled the female “detective” to walk from London into Essex in the midst of contagion. On that long day’s journey she got lost, but found a lead ... only to discover the prospective witness dead of the plague. As the investigation continued, another plague death occurred, but ultimately no hindrance for a successful prosecution and hanging. Divine providence at work, said the source.

That attitude, with our diet of police procedurals, seems truly alien. At best I could only walk mentally into the past and write it on the page. Yet, though these characters defy exact knowledge, via the coronavirus I still experienced a little of what they felt.

Extract from *The Tell-Tale Skull*

Anne locked herself inside the corn-chandlers’ for the night. She slept in her day-clothes, listening to footsteps and handcarts passing by outside, and further away, shrieks, she did not know whether from a plague house, or a woman’s outrage.

In the morning she opened the shutters and fell to her knees in horror. Two men stood in front of the Stanfro’s house opposite, one with the paint pot, the other daubing the words “God Have Mercy Upon Us” onto the door. Now the Stanfros would be shut inside for forty days, with a guard paid by the city to stop anybody escaping to spread disease.

How could the plague have travelled so fast and so far? Anne slammed the shutters, nothing but flight in her mind. She ran past the plague house, holding her breath, only in the next street slowing to gasp. Walking onwards, she remarked a strange thing, for London: the streets were silent, near-deserted. What foot traffic she saw comprised mostly those with plague business: more watchmen; plague-searchers, women swathed in white, with only their eyes showing, like engravings of the Mahomedan ladies; and doctors, grotesquely masked, their eyes hidden behind glass, breathing through a beak stuffed with herbal mixtures.

Though she longed to take the river-road to Greenwich, she lacked protective clothing, let alone vinegar. She changed course, remembering her sister Mall’s pantry and rag-basket. Mall had fled the city, she could not object. Copying the other walkers, she kept to the centre of the street as if even the walls carried contagion. Then as she turned the corner to Mall’s coffee house, she stopped abruptly: some ten doors down blazed the red cross.

Though her heart pounded she pushed the panic away, her thoughts clear and coldly practical. If plague followed wherever she went, then she could not flee the city. At least the pestilence was not directly opposite.

Once inside, she dampened some sacking in vinegar and stuffed it under the street door. For good measure she swabbed the floor until it smelt like a pickle-shop. Seating herself at a table and gnawing on a stale crust, the only bread left behind, she read through a small pile of handbills accumulated by Mall: advertisements for pills, potions or piety. If you could believe them, the plague was caused not only by cats and dogs, but also fornication, or foul effluvium rising from the ground, like mist on the Thames. On the verso of one she found a list of plague symptoms, jotted by Mall from some customer’s report:

fever first, followed by the painful black lumps, the bubos, in armpit and groin, then spreading across the body. It would end with delirium, even the eyeballs bursting before merciful death.

Much disturbed but very tired, when night fell she took herself to bed in her garret room. Next day she slept till mid-morning, with nobody to rouse her and bid her work. Opening her shutter, she saw no new crosses; and to the east she could smell a bakehouse at work, obeying the Lord Mayor and keeping London fed. She dressed, suddenly very hungry, dabbing herself with vinegar and wrapping an old apron around her head and mouth. Emerging into a fine summer's day, she found more people out and about, though sombre and keeping their distance.

With bread and pantry supplies, she need not emerge except to sweep clean outside the doors, as mandated by the Mayoralty. Yet within the house she felt restless almost to distraction. Burrowing into Mall's linen chest, she found a sheet, worn but still serviceable. The top hemmed and a drawstring added, it became a cloak of white, so that she looked a searcher—even more reason for people in the street to avoid her. The weather continuing warm, she needed no thicker clothing to venture out. Like a spy from the late wars she conducted a reconnoitre of the neighbourhood. The enemy plague may have invaded London but not every house harboured it, the spread being scattered and erratic. That gave her hope.

The bakers apart, the only person who spoke to her was a ragged woman, who stood in her path crying:

"Do ye not see it, the sword hanging over the city?"

Anne squinted up but saw only a cloud.

"God has punished us," said the woman.

What had the Stanfros done but make candles and twins? Anne wondered.

"Woe betide us for miserable sinners!"

Anne turned away, thinking: do I sin? She listed the Ten Commandments in her head, being not able to honour her father and mother anymore, they being long dead, not stealing, nor committing adultery. Though she found herself innocent according to these strictures, the woman's words oppressed her with the sense that she was at fault. She walked to the river, to see the wherrymen living in their boats, moored a safe distance from the bank.

On the way back it seemed God reached down His hand to punish her. She heard shouts, feet pounding and around the corner ran a man in his shirt, half naked. His skin looked deathly white, and also black, from fresh bruising. In his wild rush he knocked against her, and she felt the fire of fever, damp sweat, though worst was the sight of the lump on his neck, the size of a tennis ball and engorged dark with blood. She grabbed at a wall for support, as running after came the watch, their long red staves in hand to beat or chivvy the man into his plague-house again.

For a long time she stood still, numb with shock. Though he had gone, she could smell his fetid sweat on her hand, a drop of it ... though when she looked closer she saw only a louse. She flicked it onto the ground, crushed it into bloodstain with her heel. Now she had touched a victim of the plague and could only cry: "God have mercy upon me!"

VANESSA BERRY
From Catastrophe

Danielle Celermajer, *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*

Hamish Hamilton, 2021, 208 pp pb

ISBN: 9781760899035, RRP: \$24.99

In the final days of 2019 fires were moving ever closer to Danielle Celermajer's home, an area of rainforest on Dharawal country on the New South Wales south coast. To the north and south fires were burning through the forests, rapidly and out of control, causing huge destruction. In between preparations, evacuations of animals, and monitoring the volatile conditions, she wrote. This writing, from inside her experience of catastrophe, became *Summertime*.

During that summer people who were more removed from the fires, insulated by cities, had their lives changed in less critical ways. I was among those who woke daily to a smoke-filled sky and a weak red sun, noticing the incessant bitter taste in my mouth. Day after day I confronted the notion that there was seemingly a choice: I could witness the surrounding disaster and comprehend its implications. Or I could turn away.

Summertime is a profound corrective to the fantasy of turning away. Across its multiple strands of reflection, it conveys the proximity of climate emergency and the potential that arises from ethically engaged everyday thinking. Celermajer brings us close up to a daily life in the midst of crisis, when there can be no deferral of responsibility. When the fire is moving rapidly towards the place you love and call home there is no ignoring it. *Summertime* enlarges the scale of this experience and the responses it demands. If the threat is one by which all beings stand to be engulfed, and it is as close and direct as an approaching fire, what would guide your actions? Where would you place your care?

Maria Puig de la Bellacasa describes care as "that everyday thing that maintains aliveness" (26). Care is enacted in momentary and sustained ways and is as necessary in times of calm as in times of crisis. In *Summertime* the dailiness of living through the fires—a phone pinging with alerts, changes in the colour of the sky, a car packed ready for evacuation—unfolds into a philosophy of care, and of responsibility to a shared world and future. That these considerations are drawn out of momentary experiences activates the same potential within our everyday lives. A realisation of our capacity, through attention to the microcosm of how we live and think, to enlarge our sense of humanity, and what we can do for others.

Among the many animals with which Celermajer has shared her home are two rescue pigs, Katy and Jimmy. The pigs' lives and fates entwine with hers, making present the ways that animal wisdom and emotion can be perceived, even as their lives exceed our

abilities to understand them. Live with an animal, observe the animals around you, and surely there is no way one could believe otherwise. Yet routinely humans act as if this was not so, and the empathic craft of writing across species lines is one of the keenest ways to renew this knowledge.

There is no ideal form or method with which to write of the experiences of beings other than humans, but the approach in *Summertime*, in which animal perspectives are presented through close, attuned observation, respects the difference and otherness of this relationship. Celermajer's daily interactions, over years of living with her multispecies community, have built her knowledge of animal ways of being. These relationships are framed within the overarching attention that is enacted in *Summertime*, an alertness to how lived experiences connect to environmental, cultural and philosophical ways of thinking, and how this relationship might set a course for future action.

This keenness of attention is heightened by the rupture that the fires bring. Tragically, only Jimmy survives the fire that sweeps through the property of Celermajer's friend M, after Katy and Jimmy were evacuated there to what had been thought to be safety. Jimmy retreats into a withdrawn state, suffering from the trauma of the fire and the loss of Katy. To witness Jimmy's all-consuming grief is to open the way into a collective grief, grounded in powerful affective moments, one of which is the search for Jimmy in the charred and ravaged land.

Any fences that would have kept him from running off had been reduced to ash, but after twenty minutes of our calling his name he appeared, pink on the black. He was clearly coming towards us, but he paused about ten metres away and continued as we did, walking in parallel. It was as if the desire to be close could not quite break through the world in which he had been caught.

Imagining Jimmy moving through the burnt landscape, frenzied with distress, made me ache to think of his suffering. It was a similar response to when I read one of the passages from Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer*, in which a clean-up worker gives an account of packing trees and earth into plastic inside the contaminated zone around the reactor:

At night, I couldn't sleep. I'd shut my eyes, and there'd be something black wriggling and twisting. Like it was alive; living rolls of earth. Full of beetles, spiders and worms. I didn't know what any of them were, didn't know their names. They were just beetles, spiders. Ants. But there were little and large ones, some were yellow, some were black. They were all different colours. There was a poet who wrote that the animals are a separate nation. I was killing them by the tens, hundreds, thousands, without even knowing their names. I was smashing their homes, their secrets. Burying and burying them. (101-2)

Both accounts carry the complicated mesh of rescue and destruction that exists in the aftermath of catastrophe. The narrator is the perceiving and feeling instrument through which we call out a name or pull up a strip of contaminated earth, and by doing so experience complicity and care intertwined. Such accounts have a testimonial power that cuts through the elegance of their narration, and in *Summertime* such ruptures work to pull the reader suddenly closer, their effect like a sharp intake of breath.

Recounting their phone conversation after the fire, hearing M's voice saying "it's all gone," Celermajer breaks away from the scene to reflect on its writing:

I have to tell you how hard it is to write this. My fingers have stopped, and again I feel that sheet of metal down the front of my body. I very much want you to know that this is not a story. We are so damn used to stories, underscored by music and illustrated with images, that reality, hot or dead, has become near impossible to grasp.

Breath draws in, distance contracts, opens to a surging reality, that this is vital, continuing, acute. Not a story, to be related as if additional to the experience, but life itself: holding the phone and hearing the friend's voice say It's all gone.

Summertime is among those works of environmental life writing that expands the personal across time and space, where the writer is at once the perceiver of her thoughts and world, and a figure through which the reader can access collective feeling, knowledge and accountability. From the experience of the fire summer it sets out a generous and unflinching philosophy, unfolding from the most urgent question of our time: how to sustain life and future for all beings on this earth?

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PAM BROWN

Gareth Morgan, *Dear Eileen*,
Slow Loris, Series 3, 2020, 24 pp pb
ISBN: 9781925780918, RRP: \$20

Even though the impact of information technology has reduced smaller postal items to notices, flyers, occasional brochures and ads for Australia Post's assorted products, for me there's still something auspicious in seeing the person in the yellow hi-vis jacket stopping at the letterbox. Each postie on our street uses a different mode of delivery—walking with a push cart, wearing a heavy back sack or riding a push pedal or motorised bike to deliver the mail in all kinds of weather.

The letter has been a literary mode since the seventeenth century when James Howell published *Familiar Letters* and Aphra Behn published her novel *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*. In current times the literary form of the letter and, alas, the postcard have become anachronistic, and handwritten material is uncommon and quaint.

A quarter of a century ago poets began using electronic mail as an art form. Susan M. Schultz and John Kinsella published *voice-overs*—a chapbook of their exchange of email poems. Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark continued their relationship, borne of a brief sexual encounter in Sydney in 1995, via emails to each other. In 2015 their correspondence became the book *I'm very into you*. Thus, their once-possible letters became emails. At the same time in the 90s Chris Kraus published an epistolary feminist novel called *I Love Dick*. The obsessive, infatuated, yet ultimately table-turning author, writes to Dick, "Dear Dick ..." but Dick never replies in spite of her stubborn persistence. The second part of the book is titled, paradoxically, *Every Letter Is a Love Letter*. Today in Australia "the post" continues as a historical trope in the conceptual work of Dave Drayton whose poetry interplays with Australian postcodes and delivery routes.

Gareth Morgan's chapbook *Dear Eileen*, is an illuminating and kinetic discourse on social, political and aesthetic connections between employment and a life in poetry. It engages with the aforementioned writers Chris Kraus, Kathy Acker, Ken Wark as well as others. The addressee of his letters, "Eileen," is, of course, the self-described "most famous poet in the East Village," Eileen Myles.

Gareth, a young Melbourne poet, works as a postie. Eileen Myles's father was a postie (or "mailman" as they're called in the USA). In their recent memoir *Afterglow (a dog memoir)* Eileen's father reincarnates thirty years after his death as the dog Rosie. I'm pretty sure that most posties don't relate to dogs with the finessed anthropomorphism that Eileen Myles poured into their love for Rosie, but the memoir so captivated Gareth Morgan that he wrote a series of letters, or as he says, "google docs" to Eileen—

dear eileen

you noted in the foreword to chris kraus' *i love dick* that the novel interestingly took place at the birthtime of email. i.e. the death of mail. 1997. i was 4. i can't remember your point about email but today i am thinking about the death of mail. it has become clear that our days are numbered. which feels poignant and odd to be typing here. Because naturally these are not letters but... google docs.

Gareth is a "delivery only postal delivery officer." In a slang acronym that's a "dodo" and so, he says, "a cute dead bird." As he rides around the mail run on an electric pushbike listening via iPhone to Spotify recordings and podcasts of Eileen and other poets, there's the glaring irony of using internet content on the job when it is a main cause of the demise of the material his work depends on. In the first letter Gareth, in the context of his generation, writes "life was so much posturing. i hated the internet, for example, yet i lived there. by which i mean: social media."

Letters have a colloquial tone, as if the correspondents are talking to each other. Gareth's letters meander easily through various referential topics. For instance, here he quotes Bertolt Brecht—

each morning, to earn my bread, i go to the market where lies are sold and, hopefully, i get in line with the other sellers ... so i am writing you these letters, and going to work... i was all right. i didn't have any dependents. i had my poems, a rental home, a beautiful girlfriend and a steady job. time and space, time and space. like a dog, i did my rounds.

love,
gareth

Later in a longer letter he declares the influence of reading *Afterglow*—"i wonder if i am just doing so much copying or echoing—of you. is that still art?" and he continues with a brief appreciation of Kathy Acker and Ken Wark's email messages, and then—"but so, now i remember what i am up to: i am reporting from the ground, that is my difference. i am a dog and sniffing. i'm gauging the field. is that right?"

Gareth's imagined identity as a dog makes the working life more problematic than that of an actual dog—

dear eileen

there were times i felt i couldn't piss while on my rounds and was indeed made to feel my pissing should be rationed against the streets i'd passed thru so it was that i was like a dog. i measured my route in relation to the bladder which was a mean and dominating organ and tho you'd think to be outside and yes to be a dog one would be free to pee wheresoever, which is why i am telling you now: according to our bosses, whom we naturally obeyed, and some of us even adored, we pissed like clocks.

love, and solidarity
g

Weather is a continual menace for posties. Gareth gives clear-cut context to the task of working in dire climatic situations in a letter that embraces the rant—

... the post is an important, powerful aesthetic, or: importantly aesthetic. It is part of what holds a nation together both literally (in THINGS (waste)) but also symbolically. the post is colonial! it's capitalist it's evil. it's an advertisement for the happy country, and well, like, we WORKED thru the BUSHFIRE SEASON, chugging poison smog. what better heroes for capital can you get? the postal service is a poetics of capitalism.

This letter goes on to quote from the late radical anarchist poet Sean Bonney and then returns to lament the dog-life of a worker—"...we are not free dogs."

Gareth conveys anxiety and an angry awareness of the effects of class, the precarity of his job, actual job losses resulting from "profit squeeze" and a weariness that has him quoting Newman, the mailman in the Seinfeld comedy series, saying "the mail never stops." Everyday difficulties like "SHIT letterboxes" and the huge number of parcels and inane ephemera ordered online by wealthier people. The volume of these packages sometimes causes his left shoulder to ache from the delivery workload. An 8-hour day is really 10–12 hours.

Eileen Myles has written often about their own background as working-class Boston. Towards the end of the series of letters, after a particularly hard day's work and feeling peeved, Gareth addresses Eileen about the money problems that are analogous to a poet's life—

... you said when you were broke you could go knock on john ashbery's door and ask him to help you get a grant! i could meet michael farrell for coffee at the nova cafe, and sometimes i do. and then there's "working in a totally unrelated field," which i, like melinda,¹ do. how nice, or i know i enjoy it. it sucks to be an insider i believe, at least for today. let me ask, did you get paid to run St Mark's?²

today... today i have been delivering SO many parcels of crap to the wealthier houses on my route and have been wondering over the virtue of being poor, which i feel you and others are proud proponents of, or were, in the 70s say, when things were allowed to flourish a little... *stinkily*... but you are no longer poor, and are in fact the most famous and probably richest poet in the east village, or marfa—and probably america! which is like the world... and it is time i think to return the rent controlled apartment to the people, as if such a thing were still recognised, the people, or rent controlled apartments in new york city.³

This small turn where a fan, or in this instance, an acolyte challenges aspects of the life of the subject of their admiration is unexpected and touching. It is also fundamental to Gareth Morgan's candour in writing in the moment. Letter writing releases a spontaneity that's mostly antithetical to the work of devising the structure of a poem.

Dear Eileen, is teeming with daily fragments that are sometimes vivid, sometimes casual, often referential, sometimes disagreeable, though not altogether only constituting acts of thinking aloud. Some parts are also simply observational.

Publishing letters to a living idol is a vulnerable move. Here though, the revelations of instantaneous thoughts and reactions work to reach not only the recipient but also the readers. Gareth Morgan's good nature takes us right in to his particularly readable, never humdrum, everyday world—

dear eileen
i have told myself—and now you: the reason i am a postie is the potential in it
for pleasure. the great outdoors, suburbia's unruly sheen, the sublime pain of
the elements. the mythic, loner's journey into the blue. to be the cutest kind of
hero. and each day like any other, at one with the footpath ...

NOTES

1 Melinda Bufton is another Melbourne poet with a non-literary day job.

2 St Mark's Poetry Project in the Bowery, NY NY is a venue for new and experimental poetry readings, memorials, workshops and a quarterly newsletter. Eileen Myles was the Director from 1984 until 1986.

3 Eileen Myles recently received an eviction notice after 42 years of living in a rent-controlled apartment in East Village, NY NY. They wrote about it in *For Now (Why I Write)* published by Yale University Press in September 2020. They also own a house in Marfa, Texas, where their current dog Honey, rescued from an animal shelter, resides.

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MATTHEW CLARKE

Peter Boyle, *Enfolded in the wings of a great darkness*

Vagabond Press 2019, 82 pp, pb

ISBN: 9871925735048, RRP: \$25

In an early verse from *Enfolded in the wings of a great darkness*, Peter Boyle describes a simple artistic tableau: “Round and clear / three pears sit on a small tray on the table,” not unlike, he says, “the conical spirits / of some Chinese landscape / or Dutch still-life from the time of Vermeer.” The invocation of these two genres points to the broader impulses of Boyle’s elegiac, book-length poem. Like both still life and landscape painting, Boyle’s work is about the disappearance of the human body, and how the ordinary world of things survives that loss. Boyle, though, is not especially interested in the subtleties of ekphrasis. In fact, the description of the pears is designed to underline their separateness from the world of language. They possess a “stillness” that captures Boyle’s attention: “their fragrance of / water made solid // a presence to steady the mind.”

Published in late 2019, and awarded the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry in 2020, *Enfolded in the wings of a great darkness* was written by Boyle during the protracted final illness of his partner, Deborah Bird Rose. He refers to this, reservedly, in the book’s afterword as “an especially difficult period in my life.” The long, meditative poem that resulted from that period is full of unusual contradictions, as Boyle seeks to make sense of the universal questions of life and death. In a lesser poet, subjects of this nature would quickly become tiresome or clichéd, but Boyle handles them with great delicacy. For instance, when he writes about the solidity of pears on a tray, he gestures to the unsteadiness of grief, and the way that things tend to dissolve into absence. What consolations exist, we see, are to be found in the “presence” of the material world; not only in objects, but in nature too: in “the sun’s light / its bright dependable / presence among us.” For this reason, grief comes to feel double sided in this book: at once a longing for people (a person), yet also a turning away from them. To escape the transience of the human world, the poet turns to a realm that is solid, and present, and dependable. At times, this impulse is expressed as a longing to escape even from oneself. The desire for objects, in other words, is tied together for Boyle with a desire for objectivity: “to know the clarity of skies where / the full roundness of earth / would be visible.”

In one sense, this is a familiar expression in elegiac writing. Boyle’s Archimedean fantasy recalls Virginia Woolf’s articulation of grief as a longing “to see things without attachment, from the outside” (*The Waves* 176). Boyle’s poem, though, is not an elegy in the conventional sense. It is not, for instance, a work of commemoration. In the afterword, he explains that the book was written “late at night or in quiet moments at home or in hospital waiting rooms” during the period of Rose’s illness. These sites of composition are central to the tone of the work, which negotiates the slant relation between grief and its various “waiting rooms.” The epistemology and temporality of loss is experienced so strangely here:

both known, and not known; here, and not-yet arrived. “And perhaps there is no time now for / the building of monuments, even monuments of words,” Boyle conjectures in one poem. This feeling of being out of time—both displaced by it, and of time expiring—is yet another reason that Boyle turns to the presence of concrete things. The desire for stillness becomes the need for reprieve and delay—to make time for what Boyle refers to as “the brief sad gentle / glance back / at the world I’m leaving.”

Part of the tension in this work, however, is that language and words remain important to Boyle. In one sense, of course, language belongs to the world of temporary things: people, and feelings, and relationships. Yet it is precisely because of those associations that it cannot be disavowed entirely. This, it becomes clear, is one of the paradoxes of mourning: while the consolation of objects lies in their supposed separateness from the world of subjects, the consolation of language lies in its proximity. The question, then, is what kind of language could represent a loss that feels otherwise so un-narratable? This is not, for instance, a book about “witnessing” illness, or “working through” trauma. Against the impulse to resolve his grief into a suitably literary “monument,” Boyle instead produces something broken and fractured, simply

what the breath
can carry between stifled
waves of grief

a line
a phrase some
sounds, a click at
the back of the throat

This is at once an illustration and explanation of Boyle’s style throughout the book. The poems in this collection are lyrical, but they are often also simple, minimalist gestures. They are writerly and ambitious, but there is also a smallness and modesty to them. This is a matter of both idiom and of scale. Boyle, for instance, is attuned to the way that grief can be embedded in “the most common / think-nothing-of- / it phrase”—language that goes “unnoticed” until “it turns itself / inside out” to expose something else. The ordinary and the revelatory occupy proximate ground in this work. The size and shape of the poems are marked by a similar tension. The most successful poems here are those that, like the verse above, have an economy of form. They are more like fragments, communicating only “what the breath can carry.” Yet even if the scale of composition remains small, that “click at / the back of the throat” is sometimes extremely loud. If the poems are visually spare, their sound is more like

a pleading soprano voice
distantly soaring
unable to come to rest on
a single word or faint
half-human syllable
lost in something
more elemental than grief
or the sharpest
moments of love-making

Here, again, Boyle draws attention to the contradictory proportions of loss. On the one hand, it feels enormous and operatic in scale. Yet to give expression to it in language requires the most minimal, the least narrative, form possible: something less than “a single word or faint / half-human syllable.” Only in this inarticulate, guttural form does language come close to capturing a pain that feels “more elemental than grief.”

This is not to suggest that the book lacks a sustained poetic vision. While there is very little scene-making here, the poem is given shape by recurring sounds, images, and motifs: birdsong, rushes of wind, morning sunlight, forest trees, the distant noise of traffic. Yet the images that recur most frequently and evocatively are cosmic, planetary ones. Much of the book is built around the feeling of being at the threshold of something—at the very furthest edges of life, but also of love, and knowledge, and pain. The various conjugations of that feeling are expressed in the metaphor of deep space. The grieving poet stands at the precipice of the universe, “occupying a space / at the end of space,” “out there / towards the exploding edges,” bathed “in the light of whatever survives us / here at the world’s end.” To reach that point, Boyle suggests, is lonely and terrifying—truly the limit of what is endurable. Yet at the same time, it is filled with a kind of wonder: “out there where it ends / multitudinous colours / swirl,” “cosmos-fragments / glitter,” “the slowly spinning wheels of the sky / dissolve.” The sight of the world breaking apart appears sublime in the most traditional, Romantic sense of that term: at once terrible, dangerous, and beautiful.

This leads back to the title of the book. On the one hand, the phrase “enfolded in the wings of a great darkness” clearly signals that this is a work about death and absence. One possible intertext for the phrase can be found in Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*, where the arrival of death is prefigured by “the beating of the wings of the angel of death” (77). Here, for example, is Herod at a crucial moment in that play:

There is an icy wind, and I hear ... wherefore do I hear in the air this beating of wings? Ah! one might fancy a bird, a huge black bird that hovers over the terrace. Why can I not see it, this bird? The beat of its wings is terrible. The breath of the wind of its wings is terrible. (90)

But even this quotation seems to draw attention to the unusualness of Boyle’s metaphor. For him, it seems, the wings of darkness are a kind of comfort. They do not engulf, or envelop, but *enfold*. This particular verb recurs across the book in suggestive ways. The poet feels “this sudden / stillness / enfolding me.” In his “stricken, broken” state, he learns “to enfold another / in a tenderness / that would hold us both.” In this way, Boyle slowly glosses the meaning of his title: to be enfolded in the wings of a great darkness may be terrible, but it is also an experience of love. It is to be held in stillness, and in tenderness. In one verse, for instance, Boyle describes night-time as having “thousand-folded pleats.” What if, he seems to ask, the “darkness” of grief is a gathering together, instead of a falling apart? On the one hand, this is a book that refuses easy explanation, moving as it does in so many thematic directions. But if it is possible to say something final about the work, it may be this. To be “enfolded” by grief is to be held inside one of love’s pleats; love turning back on itself, insisting that even in great darkness, there is still care, still touch, and still life.

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JOHN KINSELLA

Two Poets Read at a Tangent (from work journals¹)

Gig Ryan, *Manners of an Astronaut*. Hale & Iremonger, 1984.

Antigone Kefala, *Thirsty Weather*. Outback Press, 1978.

Just finished re-reading Gig Ryan's² *Manners of an Astronaut* (1984), her second collection of poetry. The *switches* within a sentence often across lines of one expression to another, from one image to another seemingly unrelated is always deft. Jerky movements of perception brought into counterpoint "alignment," so to speak. We see all failed manners—then their contraries—dragged into the failed vision of day; failed "manners" and a desire to make sense when sense is disrupted.

In the persona's constant alienation with and astonishment at the arrogance and gall of those around her (especially men), "she" tries to plot a way through, but undoes herself (usually with drugs) and can't break the reliance on the false art-party-ironies of the city. A need to be *in* the rapidity of the city and seeing its emptiness, its glass, its hypocrisies but also constantly addicted, caught in the non-generative irony of ennui and the delusions of "art" (as opposed to creativity). Often accruals of aphoristic observations, declarations and oppositions.

"The New Morality" ("for Dante") plies the moral code with its contradictions, and *La Vita Nuova* is reclaimed for its subject (and the "dolce stil novo—"sweet new style"—ironised):

Her face flooded with cocaine in her triumphal bed.

Childhood didn't affect me.

From "her" to "my"—the imploding call & response of gender and identity expectations, the failed encodings of the social contract. And the jolts in perception—of statement shifting to perception, of rhetoric shifting to lyric, interiority to exteriority and vice versa in an aporia of the social-private existence:

I run into people whose names I can't remember,
watching the hydrangeas. ("Eliminations (II)")

And the slippages as propulsion (and compulsion?) of the absurd realism—the not remembering is linked with the concrete and representational "watching the hydrangeas." And who is watching? Definition and evasion—the anecdote reverses. Social performative expectation is disdained—vanity of vanities is/are male, as "achievement" becomes display

and is recruitment of a female companion as showing off, as an illustration of and for male social “worth”/cache (trophyism)—the lines drop and congeal. And always the debasement of art as viewing more than creating (re talking more than doing):

He borrows the mirror for hours to prove his clothes
are special. He shows you his delicate jewel.

You’re supposed to sigh, and help him
with his coat, but talking about it makes me sick! (“His Cubist Drawings”)

So, the “you” and “me” dissolve into each other in their disgust at the expectations of his social performance—and the role “she”/“you” are expected to play. “She”/“you” won’t. They call it out. Display is male and where it is “present” in the “female” it is product of male projection and *enforcement*. The “classic” prosody “tool” that Ryan develops as part of this undoing of prosody and “tools” (males) is shown in the inversion and reversal of this line (the basic building blocks of the book are lines in this *manner*):

Your sense of urgency would kill a car. (“His Cubist Drawings”)

It is an absurdist collapsing conceit; the metaphor that is hyperbolic because of what informs it (its materials re what it is observing). The extremes of the parts are the rank bullshit of the social constraints of gender, art and display (and such urgency might, to be literal, cause a car crash... the overwhelming glib irony of the conceit which converts it to statement). Ryan has a “genius” (not a quality, a mode of configuring speech) for the staccato-fast accumulation, this Allegro vivace of anti bon mots.

But there are also love poems against love poem “traditioning”—there are obsessions, adorations, and deep self-excoriations (for having such abstract intense emotions). And emotions are the most suspect affect of all!

Brilliant book, if still “caught” in its own definition of bandwidth. City poems half in love with an “easel” city, to echo John Keats’s “easel death.”

Note: Book was glowingly blurbed by Martin Johnston. He was clearly overwhelmed by Gig Ryan’s in your face fuck-you “Sophistication”!

And as I type this I prepare for another journal entry in a new volume, another volume, and note that this entry on Gig Ryan’s book ends with a comment on “flying termites” when I was preparing to write a new entry on the thousands of flying termite wings I found outside around windows and in the gutters which I just cleaned because storms are expected!

*

Reading Antigone Kefala’s³ *Thirsty Weather* (1978)—some vague *unanchored* wafty/wispy lines, but when the poetry does anchor experience, it is *intense*—the “earth” of the women “in their dark clothes,” the escape and arrival, the displacement (which is also part of why there is more ethereal less anchored imagery ... those “imagined” places of water on a dry road in “thirsty weather” ... so good reason, likely).

Kefala's "The Place" is a fantastic poem—the best I've read in my latest immersion in "past" books out of Australia. It is anchored, its "error zones"⁴ are fraught with tension, threat, apprehension and the anxiety-tension of "hope"—as a poem of refugee/immigrant displacement. Poised, always building, each line on the edge of certainty/uncertainty. The shifts from the "solid" to the "figurative" increase our uncertainty, our following the "protective" voice searching for sanctuary but wary of (and on) the journey. Note the shift from "small" to "full"—places/hills as uneasy but also "logical" juxtaposition making the uncanny more than the "art" of the poem:

The place was small, full of hills,
palm trees, almond trees, oleanders,
glass flowers falling from the sky
on the ascetic hills, the bare houses.
The ancients had been here looking for copper. (13)

We have the tension between "reality" and "imagination," but more threateningly, between the false securities of the organised unfolding, the false securities of form ... the anxiety between the present and the ancient...

And the hope extended as a gift that is not "real," but still real to children who are those the parents most hope to rescue, to take to better conditions—a deft deflating irony that is also cautious in the light of harsh realities; almost too much to hope for—people cannot eat toys or live on letters ... the ships sink for all the hope, and brute reality cannot be flourished and decorated with language (even as poetry). So how does a poem articulate this crisis, this *ambiguity*, this distress? Well, like this:

The ships we had heard, had sunk
weighed down with charity of the new world
that kept on feeding us with toys,
letters in foreign tongues
that we could not decipher (14)

"We gave them to our silent children," as the next stanza begins. The deflation vs. affirmation, the crisis of survival vs. hope,⁵ the sunken treasure aspect of deliverance. Mighty and moving poetry. Legit, necessary, and beyond its own ambiguities.⁶ Not a lot elsewhere in the book approaches this intensity and "resolution," which is *not* "resolution" as well (though later work frequently reaches such intensity and engages with this paradoxical "resolution"). Many of the poems after the first few sequences—the shorter poems—are disappointing (to me)—wind, light and shape (or empty shapes) ... occasional strong "anchors," but often too wispy, too "vague" for my⁷ receptionality. Those earlier Kefala sequences/poems I so admire were often on the edge of interpretation—their intensity in the edginess and also flux of solidity, a contradiction of *substance*. I am reminded of her poems I included in the *Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* from the book *The Alien* (UQP, Brisbane, 1973), "The Alien" and "The Wanderer," and their specificity and abstract evocations, evident in these lines:

... at night I see it rising from the hollow tower
dripping with mist

this land we search for in each other's eyes
its surface steaming in the shafts of light
immersed in silence ("The Alien," 244)

and:

The world
made of a matter that never
forgets, a symmetry so exact,
fatality at the heart
of each thing. ("The Wanderer," 245)

The liminal flux, the migrant-exile-disrupted person looking for "place" and "replace," but looking for it in others as well as the self, wondering always what can be reflected back, then reminding one's self that there is always a "somewhere," that the world knows is, wherever we are, however we "wander" or are disrupted.

NOTES

1 This is an extract from my journals wherein I have over recent years undertaken a "project" of reviewing all the Australian poetry volumes from the 60s–90s on my shelves—JK.

2 Gig Ryan's bio note in *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (ed. John Kinsella, 2009) reads, in part: "(b. 1956) is poetry editor for the *Age*. A freelance reviewer, poet and song writer, she is also a musician with the band Driving Past. She lives in Melbourne." It should be noted, that as with Antigone Kefala's book discussed below, these are early books, and many other vital books of poetry have followed. Both Ryan and Kefala are much lauded poets.

3 Antigone Kefala's bio note in *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (ed. John Kinsella, 2009) reads, in part: "(b. 1935) was born to Greek parents and grew up in Romania. She now lives in Sydney and has worked as a teacher, in libraries, and as an arts administrator."

4 See my *Displaced Poetics: beyond landscape and lyricism* for a discussion of these "dynamics" of a poem.

5 The pain of this shows the involutions entailed in all words with multiple meanings (as all words have—some maybe more than others), the versus as competing or challenging, or the process of contrasting. Obviously I use it in the latter sense, but the echoes are of poetry as well. An irony is cast on the "review" authoring in the use of the word "Legit" shortly after. As if it is a legal issue. But maybe it is in the sense that there is a right and wrong, and people suffering is always wrong and legitimacy surely resides in working communally and interactively an in "international regional" way to alleviate suffering and distress. ("International regionalism" is a core notion in my practice, and appears as an argument against economic globalism but for international conversation with full respect for regional integrity across most if not all of my critical books.)

6 Looking beyond ambiguity into generative activism (but eliciting activisms also potentially inherent to ambiguity) is the theme of my book *Beyond Ambiguity* (Manchester University Press, 2021).

7 The restless searching for a surety of the past which can never really solidify as a theme seems essential to me in understanding movements of people across the earth, but also the substance of displacements. Poetry becomes part of a rectification, a "corrective" in this—not answers, but potentially "illuminations."

CHRIS ANDREWS

Shufflemancy

This is where I couldn't be sure
of which way to go. No time to wait
for softly torn fog to bare the lie
like an ordinance map unfolding
or the slow crinkle of an eye smile
over a face mask. I had to move.
My gaze had to soften to perceive
marks so faint they might never have led
to this locked but unhingeable door.

that

I was duly spooked by the idea
of meeting you. While holding on
for a face to swim out of the crowd
like an eel from a sunken dinghy
or eye-rinsing Miaplacidus
from the indigone, I thought: It's true.
You are impossible. Then I saw
the shufflemancy kids kerfuffling
through that busy ruin of a square.

you

The pieces recovered in dreaming
of a place where there is ample time.

In one piece, I cast this adrift
like a dinghy brewing gum-leaf tea
or the shadow of a paper plane
plunging into a roasted gully.

In another piece you come across
a landscape fan that sketches the ways
into a future of mist and gaps.

have

Don't try to calculate the chances
of getting lost in the giant weeds
forever or drifting out of reach
like bath toys on the Pacific
or sworn student inseparables
in WorkWorld. The dice are the data,
futurex ephemeral. Forget
the others all on the same page. Come
away through this phantom enfilade.

come

This trace of a hand is capable
of waving from far out. Won't you stay
until a new constellation twinks
like two stray phalanges and a gem
or a shredded thankyou letter
in packaging? Sure things come undone
but see how slipshod whizzes perfect
the daft and stubborn art of shuffling
sideways as if to let the earth spin.

to

The dream is recovered in pieces
of the woken world holding a glow
for a moment. Then false duty calls
like the grinding of a hit machine
or a scent of incineration
on the breeze. The device was set
but you have to lose your time finding
glitches to patch so the system runs
with a pseudo-automatic ease.

find

Who has never tasted the pleasure
of helping entropy? But who hopes
for escalation to bring it on
like a licence to settle all scores
or a rash of copycat arson
streaming live? The die is the datum.
But you had to make it explode
the myth of a single blood-washed way
to the far bright side of the chasm.

and

Dove down shivers on the spattered stone
of a vacant plinth. Don't hold your breath
for the foundering father to rise
again like brazil nuts in the mix
or the shadow-line on a smokestack
in a clear dusk. An archive grows dark.

Patient sifting by lamplight erodes
in slow reverse to raise a ghost
from all the prints of a body gone.

join

To the torn city for the whole songs
of the tearing. To pockets of calm
for things to get gradually sorted
like pebbles banked in a river bend
or a tray full of period eyes
in a doll clinic. Slower for gold.

To the field for the base facts that fell
a beautiful hypothesis. Go
home for the lost and broken things.

here

I was duly spooked by the idea
of a place where there is ample time
forever or drifting out of reach
like two stray phalanges and a gem
or a scent of incineration
over a face mask. I had to move.
Patient sifting by lamplight erodes
a beautiful hypothesis. Go
to the far bright side of the chasm.

you have come to find that join here and

that you have come to find and join here

CHRIS ARNOLD

offline

and that's a trope, or one in the making:
the one where a last message reads
something about exegesis, something about persistence:
you're doing great, keep going. some kind of emoji,
the one with the chevron eyes. once it's peeked
from a sleeve it says something different,
are you sure you should do that?
is that sauce on your sleeve? why do you keep
choosing that path—the one with the thorns,
as if there were another. as if this town,
this Derbal, were left to Whadjuk care and anyone
could step off-grid whenever they please.
and he might point that out: how an outsider
perceives disgust: sour reek at his neckline,
he pushes down and it pops up: a binbag
of scrunched paper, of love letters with run ink;
of bills for electricity, car rego, belonging.
it's best to direct-debit this stuff;
skip the weeks of indignation, the morning swell,
abdominal pain. as everyone knows, or the poor
at least, it's a breeze when something's coming in:
white slips, a horizontal rule over your total.
when income's nothing there's a grip of terror
at your neck each time it's four bucks for parking,
a freefall of seconds: processing. then the message.

STUART BARNES

Triplet on Receiving Email from C

My iMac's a new sort of medium.
I slip on C's slippers, debrief the moon,
intractable, slouchy as tedium.
My eye macks a new sort of medium,
grief pouches like *Selenipedium*
orchids' flowers. The awkwardest month's June.
My iMac's a new sort of medium.
I slip on C's slippers, debrief the moon ...

PASCALLE BURTON

each one asks in fear, “will it be me?”

(*an internet performance of Michael Dransfield’s all the great presidents*)

I

“fair and sustainable”
plunged back into poverty

forced to choose
between basics

rebasing reducing
insidious

docked and locked out
the adequacy of

\$3.57 per day

II

little pr stunt
something in it for him

golden opportunity
to speak

curious timing
use the mute button

incompetence distraction
sounds maybe like you’re still

in hostage mode

III

fires (hawaii)
freezes (cancun)

power outage
sparked outrage

infrastructure plagued
anger brewed

a catastrophic storm

IV

sidelining women
snow white's hymen and

well-dressed prostitutes
rejected as totally false

people look up
to their leaders

V

this should not shock that
media outlets ran

with the narrative
it failed

it repeatedly failed
deployed a strategy

of silence
and denial

VI

the reason
we are going down

we heard “crazy things” on social media
“stand back and stand by”

#StopTheSteal
we stopped the steal

we stopped the steal
we took our country back

history being made right
in front of your (eyes)

VII

substantial improprieties
wasteful spending

cut voted blocked gave
hid loosened committed paid

appointed cancelled set-up lied
tried merged prevented forged

extended failed refused bought
red-tape free-market pork-barrelling

kept secret
deleted records

voted violated
spent spent spent spent

VIII

the police officer entered
a not guilty plea again

deaths death death
death death death death

death death death deaths

deaths deaths
death deaths death

shockwaves spread the
version of events

remain here and bear witness

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ANNE CASEY

*The federal government has extended
the international border ban until June*

A new coolness has crept
into the evenings, mornings
slower to warm, the long slow
hoot and lash—a whipbird missing
in small explosions of gold swarming
amongst branches still lush from last
month's late-summer rainstorms.

Underneath, dark glossy daggers
of the clivia defy already dwindling daylight
hours, thrusting their bright tangerine bells
at rakish angles as I shrink from news
pushing me unknown months further
from "home" and my father waiting
patiently for his vaccine,

telling me how the birds are returning
to peck at the cat's discarded bowl
as he warms his ancient bones
in the freshly turned earth,
and I probe our narrowing
evening, the first curled fists
of fallen leaves grazing

the darkening lawn.

JULIE CHEVALIER

rainy stay at home five visitors, max

*a fortune-teller's neon sign
that glowed a painted light into the street*

Bianca Stone, "I Saw the Devil with His Needlework"

after seeing out the old prosecco with fresh
food from people delivering seven days a week
(the unexpected success of my peach tarte tatin
followed by celestial seasonings' sleepytime tea)
just after dusk i drove abandoned streets
saw a pandemic of empty pubs and supermarkets
saw the best minds of my generation addicted
to airline timetables fretting cancelled holidays
cancelled restaurant bookings
*the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating
across the tops of cities contemplating jazz*
cities off-limits in a new world/aged world
outliving its options

back home beneath apartment verandas
pavement lights bloomed from cylindrical stalks
sandstone's golden promise
an avenue of palm trees magnolias in blossom
odes on the windows of the skull

incandescent hope teetered on balconies
pulsed LED lights strung out
rooms pooled scarlet violet aqua
at nine, illegal fireworks at the corner
a starry dynamo in the machinery of night
dancing silhouettes *their brains bared*
cheered to heaven from the loggias
i clapped like i had clapped alone
for local medical heroes cheered
at midnight for protean miracles
too personal to mention
a confetti cloud champagne spray
cascades of summer the pent up *hollow-eyed*
jiggled red zinger tea
angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated

Note: Unattributed italicised lines from Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*.

EILEEN CHONG

Reason

Remember when I used to cry?

And how one day, you cut up a chilli
and rubbed it in my eyes?

You laugh—

You say: *I thought I'd give you something to cry about.*

I remember. And you did.

SHASTRA DEO

Przewalski's Horses Are Back in Belarus

the last wild stallions have stabled themselves
at the border

look at them
striding between the couch grass
as they nip at the bumblebees

their round white bellies full
as a hungry child's or a mare foaling
more horses into the world
than there lived that morning

those miracle machines
powered by the same
strontium that warps blood and marrow

by the birches
the birds' nests
in cottages rotting against
the clouds

powered
by the knowledge that people
were never needed here at all

LUCY DOUGAN

Down to the Corner

I don't know why your death
drove me down to the corner of the house.
It was the only tolerable place to sleep.
Outside the drains were close,
and the neighbour's dogs,
sometimes the sounds of a wound up child.
The walls were green and chipped,
"bok choy," the colour we had loved
when we were young.
Your sewing box disgorged itself
on the bedside table.
The cups, the books, the recharge chords
all mounted up.
I wanted to be far away
and never out of touch.
I missed sleeping with someone.
I missed you.
I fretted at the edges of the pillows.
I didn't want to touch the open end.
I didn't want to touch the closed end.

DAVE DRAYTON

Return to Commute

I

The palm tree's proud despite its oddness
Near to trafficked Parramatta Road
A woman divides her attention between two screens
Misses a bottlebrush more red than the emergency exit
Left and leaving (Lilyfield)
More palm trees line an approach to dirty water
Do we conflate movement with progress? Is this a problem?
And on a smaller scale the premise of this poem

II

An aqua duct intersects a little lushness
She emerges from the trees in a rush
Marion fixes her hair in the cold black screen
One phone in a dozen used for reflection
Cast all our faces in stone and in glass
Of a morning with such excavation as the trash alights
Such slick exhaust and water
Before we make like trash and leave at Glebe

from...	...to
<i>Lewisham West</i>	<i>Taverners Hill</i>
<i>Taverners Hill</i>	<i>Marion</i>
<i>Marion</i>	<i>Hawthorne</i>
<i>Hawthorne</i>	<i>Leichhardt North</i>
<i>Leichhardt North</i>	<i>Lilyfield</i>
<i>Lilyfield</i>	<i>Rozelle Bay</i>
<i>Rozelle Bay</i>	<i>Jubilee Park</i>
<i>Jubilee Park</i>	<i>Glebe</i>

III

To know where you'll be taken
To know how long it will take
To know nearly all of what they're saying
To know the worlds outside the window
To know I have lapsed and am rushed
To know I chose the wrong side
To know that the mind will wander
To know construction is a constant here
To know it's over

IV

The morning begins with less instruction
Let a body fill a space how it will
Breathe freely
Corrugated iron coloured like the trees
Before the briefest tunnel takes us through
A rise in the land and the morning
Two bridges beyond the minor one we cross
And mark in our own ways with an index or a thumb

from...	...to
<i>Lewisham West</i>	<i>Taverners Hill</i>
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<i>Leichhardt North</i>	<i>Lilyfield</i>
<i>Lilyfield</i>	<i>Rozelle Bay</i>
<i>Rozelle Bay</i>	<i>Jubilee Park</i>
<i>Jubilee Park</i>	<i>Glebe</i>

V

New apartments fold their grey into the sky
These and other things have risen recently
Interest and heart rates sore/soar
Raise/raze some buildings andor children
A pram runs parallel to progress
While a man waits with eyes closed and arms folded
Like time looped in patience
A succession of shared destinations

VI

Wet swim leash
Shrill veteran
A minor
Hearth now
Hold thin charter
Idyll life
Laze by lore
I jerk up, able
Leg—be

from...	...to
<i>Lewisham West</i>	<i>Taverners Hill</i>
<i>Taverners Hill</i>	<i>Marion</i>
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<i>Jubilee Park</i>	<i>Glebe</i>

VII

They're all finding their own bodies
Taking on new shapes displaying
Fuzz of a pimpled furtive mustache
Less hair there than on their breakfast fruit
Vague enthusiasms
Uniformed expressions
Laying claim to experience
To their budding selves

VIII

She removes her mask when we depart, finally alone
She unfolds the cover to her phone and squats
Beside the bin on the platform
I carry this image past the production lot
A dolly shot on a light rail
Without the weight of the commuters
(An anchor) the plastic sounds like static
We're left feeling rattled

from...	...to
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BLAKE FALCONGREEN

Arcadia

—
These strict familial ties
weighing heavy and autumnal,
dry like crickets,
weeding out the weakness.

—
Wilted magnolias similes jumbling
bedtimes and trapped in your childhood
locked in my spirit, that I've lost
suffocated grimy trapped.

—
And then I'm on a train watching
the streaming water fall behind me
and I'm heading backwards, back
into the depths of the railroad country,
past cemetery station, over a
steel and gravel wasteland, expansive
and occidental, a testament to industry—
this scar across the landscape, cleaving
into suburbs, funnelling us through
duty and respectability, harking us
onward, these streaming trains—

—
Loose guttural drains and
stormwater that the night
makes swift heaven of and
above us croaking moving dark
and quiet, an omnibus of
patterned elegance lightness
lying in its wake unresolved,
as blood runs quickly
from our bodies to the water
and gurgles as testament to these
lives we lived now patterned
in the furniture of
our children.

MICHAEL FARRELL

In The Library

Not being in a great African institution awaiting destruction
We stand idly watching the rain through the green windows
Whether we need to filter it before we drink it we're unsure
Perhaps its downward run through leaves is filtering enough
We don't rush out in our best jackets yet to take its measure
Nor give more than a shadow thought to droughts elsewhere
We've been surfing for love all the afternoon between books
Watching sunlight coming in earlier from the declining west

The element of surprise in love's case would not be strained
We feel it even as we go through the stacks like a character
Like a character from another national literature altogether
Look down or fly right over a carpet like a populated plain
Where's a love or death that might motivate such a scheme?
Add water to the desert peas pressed dry between the pages
Outside the trees are adorned with blossom as for a wedding
We walked here as selves and find ourselves on the shelves

Not oblivious to the irony of the quaintness of our position
Knowing books have the strident voices of a gang of lilacs
Yet we pack them in saddlebags for Santiago or Barcelona
Cities brimming with their own sentimental reading rooms
But my subject is in the language of an Australian English
That means like a kangaroo looks when trying to half sit up
And is complicated as native grass growing in a blackberry
Things we see and read and walk through taking heart from

LIAM FERNEY

A Love Supreme

It's funny how we can let some things slide.
I've dialled back my podcast diet for the pandemic
but keep nexting on skate vids on YouTube.
Gonz ripping the short bank by the *Ralphs*,
gapping the Wallenberg Set. Checked out
Trasher's *My War* yet? Sonny B noseslide
shuv-it out down a slithering rail.
For the little homies. Nuge rolls a large arc
as Baca rolls away on the 27th trip.
Don't judge me. You didn't write *Macbeth*

& I'm banged up Chad Muska on the sidelines
while Jamie Thomas re-imagines grinds.

TOBY FITCH

New Chronic Logics

A friend on Facebook looks up
at a building's facade to find its world clocks—
Sydney, London, Tokyo, New York—are empty holes.

Does it even matter now
that more people on the street and in the library
can't read analogue clocks than "before"?

Algorithms dictate my hectic schedule to me in any event
like waves pinging back from a pebbled shore
into the cross seas of my headset.

Minutely hastening to an end,
a.k.a. doomscrolling, I find *Daddy Saturn is
in retrograde, pandemic time is a pretzel,*

*a rhizomatic root system.
I have a curfew and soon (surely)
hamburgers will begin eating people ...*

All other comments churn like Ribena and milk
in the crystal glass: *2020's a stolen clock, a fight between
Chronos and Kronos; each day an ouroboros;*

*as with statues and history, once clocks are pulled down
we will never know time.* And besides,
no one believes in the future now anyway.

I was writing this, stealing time
and locution at some "godforsaken" hour.
Had I fallen into sleep? Was Frankie awake?

Will we remember the weather
and whether our bodies passed through each other
in the lockdown dark? It gets away from me

like a sprig in stew, like something nicked.
On the planetary dashboard
the sky will seem especially blue

as the seconds turn kaleidoscopical. And then again
it will be time to let my own body be showered
by water that has circulated Earth's

crust for ____ millions of years,
time to feel its touch in droplet form
teleported back into this recess at ____ litres

per minute,
time
to atomise night's silence.

ANGELA GARDNER

Each Bending

occasional doors open.
cloudbent and pennanting
to these sun windows
I climb out of the world
and look back in.
“aren’t you missing me?”
light loosed. my eyes
a pattern of intersecting
that’s high in the trees.
the top branches green
and not quite so green
as the wonder and terror
below continues its net
of sound and silence.
as if coming and going
are not that different.
surround sound scatter
Venn diagram of song
forest body repeating
complexity. bell birds
over chatter and cooing
the scrub wren clear
and melodious interleaved
with thorn birds and the
creaking catbird. a new
voice, so brief in flurry,
above photons and wind
two and three syllabic
whistles then whipcrack
spills to the forest floor.

JAKE GOETZ

Satellite Hearts

huddled in the damp stench
of some megafauna bowel

another carbon morning
pours out like a coffee

in the hands of a commuter
her laptop humming as train doors

close at the feet of a myna bird
swimming through light
on green palm leaves
the city shifting effortlessly

as if a portaloo's green and gold
could give you something to believe in

stacked on cinder blocks by the tracks
ROCK SOLIDS SPOMER

painted across the fences of tiny yards
where winter wakes banana trees

to a corrugated iron sky
and people binge Netflix

scaffolding neurons into a concept
that breaks through clouds

pumping wavelengths of blood
to the beat of satellites

ELENA GOMEZ

Zoe's catalytic converter

Look there's a question going around the shopping centre car park: the one near david jones where cars forget which lanes go one way and which exit ramp takes you onto a main road, or through small roundabouts away from the big lanes (yeah I'm talking about the one at carindale; before the renos) anyway, question going around, this guy with a striped polo shirt who wears shorts most days is saying, why do thieves love a catalytic converter?

We figured he was showing off
he knew the names of things. They contain
precious metals

I was finishing my ice-cream but I nodded

DAN HOGAN

How to leave work on time when working from home

Consider this extra task part of your professional development. You should be thankful you're not in America. I take it you're dwelling on the thought of a magnificent crystal chandelier. Well, you'd best check to see if anyone finds it funny. Don't laugh. This is synergy. One party will be unharmed and unhelped while the other benefits. This is called synergetic grieving with a smile. (All your pores open.) Turn up the air conditioning. Bring on the wooziness. Chuck a sickie to bask in your own elegant listlessness. Keen as. If you find yourself strapped to the back of a celebrity and sent into the desert with no heartbeat, you're being performance managed. But you didn't hear it from me. When a sun dies in a neighbouring galaxy we say it is a victim of circumstance. Think about that next time you decide to get born. Consider the cryogenically frozen pizza. Is it anything? An act of measurement, perhaps? No chance. Sad face emoji. OK. I wasn't going to say anything but one day you will pick up your child for the final time. Happy birthday here is the pizza you ordered. OK. Sorry your vibe was slain. What if I said one day you'll play your last DVD? OK OK. I'm trying. Merrily, merrily, life is butter. Dream? What if I said we were lobbing a cashew the size of a baby into a basketball hoop? What then? Extrapolating dread? We all become mirthful cartographers full of grace? Zero chance. Suddenly, the curriculum. Best practice is a matter of faith in products rather than proof, which is why you stub your favourite toe on the corner of a desk and obtain a blood infection. This is how it's going to be from now on. The new normal. That's right. I said what I said. Without warning. OK OK. Please. Save the applause for the end.

MICHAEL STRATFORD HUTCH

Aerotropolis

Another colonist fantasy; dig a trench
into country, hallucinate an *aerotropolis*

out at the ramparts, beyond the rolling
disasters and pile-ups, into a slipstream

of clear white. Emptiness chained
by name to the master connector,

what lack of imagination engineers
this airy crossing, a so-called future?

Another prefabrication; desperation
flies in wearing the mask of progress

—easier to bend the moral arc when
solidity is the least of your troubles.

The fact of its bending was never
schematised, only gestured vaguely,

a theme whose expansion proved
impossible, since no theme existed.

Another distant centre; reliant upon
the risk that we will always go further.

Illogic forms up in the real, goes
rampant, imposes its regionality.

Landscapes are for making room in,
totalities exist only for subdivision.

Here at the edge of the double-thought
sprawl, a dissonant wedge of wing.

ELLA JEFFERY

Nachträglichkeit

I remember. That evening I was riding
in Yangpu. The river beside me
with lathered edges
where turtles strayed in coal boats' wake
and birds browsed for twigs.

I was rising over a bridge
when you called to say
you'd be gone another month
or more.

I stopped the bike. Weeks ago
you'd disagreed when I said it's time we left
for good. Below me a fisherman flayed
the water with his line
and brought in nothing.

Your voice scraped
through outcrops of your smoker's cough
and office echo. You'd been back in Australia
half a week. I let you hack at silence
until the line broke up.

Apartments flecked
awake in the new dark while I stood and ate
the sandwich from my basket,
meat withered at the crust's edge.

My frenzied twenties: I relied on you
and looks and luck. Three faltering things.

Now alone I watched
the fish's skinny fins row and row.

What's the use of turning home—
the long ride back to where you'd
packed your shark-coloured suits
a day ago.

I know why I came here
that history is safe: the clean linen
of my life but how
did I come back and back
and back, still languageless, ignorant and impatient
to ride my bike and eat
any animal
I could buy sliced and deboned

on a plate. You'd saved
chunks of thigh and breast for me.
You called again clearer and revised:
eight weeks at least. You leaned
your weight against our lease
which you knew I wouldn't break.
The river was gristle-grey and streaked
with foam. Someone was calling you
from another room.
In the end I stayed.

REBECCA JESSEN

The New Year

For my stepmum

It isn't summer until Stosur chokes
on the smoke of homespun soil
and I've become one of the so-called
bourgeoisie sipping Aperol on the astro
marvelling at the end-times beauty
of flushed afternoon light—meanwhile
Mum's got ash raining
from her Western Sydney sky
and elsewhere you're waiting to pass

you make it through Christmas into the new year
which will soon be tainted
with loss—what else to do but reread
that Didion and catalogue
other notable women dying young

I haven't learnt how to grieve
but I have lost

my phone autocorrects
our to *mournful*
some cruel flick
of the thumb—predictive text is in
so tell me how I really feel

Mum despairs that I haven't been watching
the news *haven't you heard*
about the devastation pandemic
where's the parental control for parents pushing
my panic button daily

my gp prescribes
two weeks of tennis and Valium
instead of infinite internet
doomscrollingnewsfeedsdrgooglesymptomsdiagnosisoutlook
daysweeksmonthsyears?
nocure

I've lost my nerve for this rupture
the last time I see you
I greet you with gloved hands
some unknown grace

you've given up
your domestic possessions
soon you will die in the small inland city
where my heart has already been
left—until then what else to do
but retreat back home

every call will be *the call*
every day is the same until it isn't
Mum can't believe it until she sees it
some divorcee bias I suppose

the smoke goes south
the ash washes ashore
the tennis ends in upset
the prescription lapses
you don't say goodbye and anyway
these days I prefer the colloquial
cya soon

JILL JONES

"I can look—can't I—"

Please go with me
beyond disquiet
the kissing wind
 from the north
is longing and flits
like unconscious company
 the music of it tugs

hey all you little sound spirits
clicking through night
hello cupboards smelling
of clothes cups bread
 cotton tin and cinnamon
moss is winter's hassock

nothing is minor but small
 things tremor
barefoot and careful
infinite close heartbeat
 quick as my arm
o comrade moment at the door
time to rise

Note: Title is from Emily Dickinson's poem beginning with the words "Good Morning—Midnight—" (also the title of a Jean Rhys novel)

JOHN KINSELLA

Graphology Ratio 23; Condenser

Graphology Ratio 23

To say: No season will have me
epitomises the arch way
we construct both ends of “the bargain”;
these rhetorical flourishes
pared back, hardened;
or letting the subject of the line
run free to imagine its own recipient—
the imperialism of naming as you go
and hanging on no matter how much retrospect
disturbs the vision of co-ordinates;
that *mode of address*—not to put
too solipsistic a point on your maps;
no season will have you.

Condenser

The cooling jacket
can't condense all the phantoms
in a condensed book's lack of refrain,
of those extra bits—the wanton insect scripts,
the paw prints we walk over in a rush
to complete a story. From gas
to liquid, we take it further
into letters that will powder or smudge,
blur as the old purple indelible pencil
did on my grandfather's forestry ledgers,
benign-seeming record of hewing and planting,
of rows of pines in place of jarrah,
of differentials in rainfall and temperature,
the forms of verticals as planks or powerpoles,
the lopping of branches. I am spread
across other people's stories without footnotes
or citations for all my "knowledge"
of how they function: mass nouns will do
just fine in losing my reading skills,
those tics of habit and repetition.
When I am dead and buried I will rot down
past the crust into the mantle all the way to the core
where I will be remade molten and compressed.
I will be part of the whole *terra* thing whether
I want to shed angst and guilt or just forget. This crisis
of infinitesimally small particles and realities
of pressure and cohesion and dispersal
analysed by the gross reading tool of gravity
and the sound of solar winds
indexing but with terms getting
further and further apart. *Thus* the staccato
trill of the male red-capped robin calling
me out but wanting me absent from its pursuit
of text, its way of taking semiotics off the page
into more specific but expansive and eternal
forms of literacy—the books sung in each
and every particle of "song," that impression left
on a twig or slender branch after the lifting of small feet,
the condenser valley translating states in its coils;
and that steady drip of answers.

HAROLD LEGASPI

Cool Kids

These are unborn and form innocence.

Constant anima, a gap between teeth. So much happens when it happens, an accelerated pace of diminishing returns, flying from the precipice. Reaches equilibrium though there is no such thing.

The obstacle is seeing. A freezing persona, where there is not. It speaks no reason. It stays in bed in the early mornings and flogs no-one, not even drugs or tariffs. A sane sensual sensation, erudite blackness. An old nemesis is enchanting. The pain of a lover. Confusion lies in the pleasures of feeling, terminally broke in the heart. Knows no torture, ethereal energy, whizzing clean and weak.

Conflicts are built for resolution, or is it meant to spook the temporality of in-betweens. Such is life. A frisson of tolerance. Dwelling with risk and unearthed. He is learning to be human. Dead things have lived. A creaking resurrection. Secrets die upon departure. More fecund is our waking. Encroaches upon understanding, without reason, *to be*, which is to say everything is everything.

Reality is confined to severe exhaustion, a loathed chemo-therapy, a decoration would undo itself, to you and to society.

I am on my way home, and I am in my house, a partial imagining of some memory.

Literally, I am tangled. In fact, this material is a yarn of internalised violence. A small heap, a soup. Spaghetti-brained and demolishing. It is perpetual each minute. A ritual of brooding saved for one.

KATE LILLEY

Commons

I can bear it if you can
bad with boundaries
good with you

Invention-distribution-disposition
the tiny tomatoes you grew me
florid multiplier

The algorithm mixes our names up
wrong right knotted on the inside
your first my last

A. FRANCES JOHNSON AND ANTHONY LYNCH

Zoom

The camera veers
to Webster-pak,
capsules aligned,
bright as traffic lights.

We request virtual gods
unmute
the scratched vowels
of 86 years.

Her folded stomach
jolts into view.
We tell the riot
of her floral top
we miss her.

Our astronaut selves are cornered
on screen, millennial replicants
who wave and say:
I'm still going for jobs, Nan.
We got the NBN.
Mum and Dad
are getting on better.
Here's the rescue cat.
Shannon says she'll call.

The camera settles
on the TV remote,
a bid for lost volume.
A Tetra Pak
of something bright orange,
teetering on the trolley,
leans in behind.

Tilt the screen up, Nan!
we cry, as if
an old picture palace roof
has fallen in.
Colour cuts to darkness.

She always knew the value
of a wordless, faceless finish.

We phone reception and wait.
But then a pixelated posy blooms,
a permed crown
floods the screen—

love, unfocused, like rain.

JULIE MACLEAN

Piffing Yonnies into the Post-Industrial

The summit used to be all but now scuffed runners
 a notebook and when no one's looking

gobble from a can of cold beans nestling in the sprawl
 of a dry creek bed picking out constellations

on a Skyview app as a lone satellite drawls by in its chilly orbit
 It sends out coded murmurings to night birds, marsupials

In glass cities red eyes on night watch don't own them
 Tame hearts drunk on the earthbound cute

colouring in joining dots loose scree forming at their feet
 Who can tell a possum from a Pikachu?

Will come a time the word *quoll* is not heard any more
 as *cassowary* *swift parrot* settle into sediment

with *thylacine* tossed in moraines smoothing
 not worth bottling like a man's blood

In Net slang TQT this is quoted for truth
children cannot name a leaf on a plate a tree
 collective noun for anything

Found flat stones in full swim thought bubbles
 skimming shallows monosyllables
 s p l a s h e d in monochrome

JULIE MCELHONE

Nigh Times: eventide, isolationship, alignment, reckoning, approach

The prompt for this poem was an online collaborative writing event called Night and Refuge, hosted by Caroline Bergvall who, with four other poets, created a series of poems based on the Renga form, in consideration of Nautical Twilight, Dawn, and Dusk (GMT). The poets talked and wrote their way through the stages of the night. Observers were invited to participate with their own poems via twitter using the hashtag #nightandrefuge. My contribution, as an observer in isolation from Sydney, was the basis for the following.

eventide

Are you here in social time?

An ally in unseen things

Fire, release

Bright spark sharp tack

Turning gurdy pock-faced

Let's say your contours are

Sup posed to make small talk

And they fail you

Much more than in alterity

A mindful cut-off

isolationship

Night words loll about my mind

Constellations of lust, of loss

Tide me over, send me off

Rocking and riffing—tiddling

Noon is half the earth away

To bear this touchless time

Rocked by things we must trust

As aspirated as we are

A sigh settles into a little "huh"

A strain as pretty as lilting air

Sounds stuck in my throat
This is no time for sounding
Anything but “Ahoy!”

alignment

Over the edge that never ends
There is no snapback of light
Unless mirrored

Be mine
I'll be yours

reckoning

There is a bracketing in shared spaces
Those things come in the night
To mess up your syntax: “together” “arrange”

I can't reduce the piles in my house
Made of sacred, no *scared*, objects that laugh darkly at me

To be sure again I live where they are not
At half the kitchen table, in the bathroom,
And in sleep with those I have lost

It is here only that I submit to lyric,
I will remember little of it tomorrow

We are all this darkness, you see.
Some keep their lights on
To make them forget. This is.

approach

I was born in the morning, about this time
down the road from where I live now
I hear ambulances at all hours.

I am too awake between
The double and the single bell.

SAM MORLEY

The algorithm says get tested

in cabins of idling cars
spits the world of phlegm

windows sweat a braille
of sickly condensation

chosen ones are partitioned
into floodlights of bald hope

I bow down doomscrolling
the device until I get a hit

split from the embers of car
queues and the next buzz along

distancing me from
the brightness of my love

I thumb on down then down
swiping malls for an opening

as rosaries shuckle on mirrors
and DMs pulse some T and A

couldn't all this waiting be among
friends I am really following

or people who might really
know me in the dead quiet of

the last canyon on earth where
boredom isn't an option and

streaks of abs and free weights
needn't be tapped twice

where the feels can just be felt
at last ignitions zizz high-vis

Southerly 79.3: The Way We Live Now

and my hazards clasp blue gowns
snap-locking human samples

the man in front shudders
because swabs never stop and

Dionne Warwick backs us up
with *that's what friends are for*

I ping a little red number hovering
above its small paper plane

it's telling me someone is there
when maybe no one really is

MARK PEART

April (interior)—; Relapse

April (interior)—

Visibly slack you
approaching nothing
like achievement
The base organ pivots:
pelvic aspirations. Feet? Yes, rather in the air!
I'd spent all day yesterday
moderating
Tonight, it's criminal elision
on serial repeat, the rhythm
of a procedural, *en tele*
wired up to cyber

Visible slack your

pelvic pivots
I'd spent all yesterday an organ
Feet? Yes?
Nothing like crime
here. A semi-detached achievement
leavens the air
Siding with you I could approach
nothing
elide

Visibly you wanted
all yesterday like achievement
Wired up,
your crimes terrace m'air

Feet? Yes, procedural iambs
Tonight, organs semi-detached,
no thing pivots
nothing elides

Moderating visibility
you slack the wired air
procedural achievement
like nothing
Tonight, aspirations rhythm spent
the base organ tells me
vision

Wired up visibly
you slack the organ
like achievement, like elision
like all day yesterday
In the air, a procedural
Get ready, criminal
en repeat:
I'd rather
Id rather

Relapse [text from *R v Wier* (1930), Sydney Court of Quarter Sessions]

I was in a lavatory
in Pitt street near ---'s Hotel
this man caught hold of
do you frequent
that lavatory
underneath the theatre

frequent present open

frequent a drink with the present charge
according to the records
that lavatory is a frequent laneway alongside
frequent erection state rubbing it backwards and forwards and
backwards I stood there frequent his right hand across backwards and
forwards

give the boys shillings sometimes, give me sometimes
I then took him to the frequent direction

penis out
rubbing it backwards and forwards, you said you were a policeman

I went into a urinal, adjoins a state of frequent erection my
brother knocked a bit of scuffle backwards and forwards put his
right hand let him thump away

what were you shaking your tool for shillings

police belt shaking your belt
shaking your catch
police belt, hold you shaking
police shilling
shaking your bloody name, I said shaking your bloody name
belt the laneway alongside the lavatory
shilling
"For God's sake don't friend"

π .O.

On Us

B = the incidence of reflection.
E, the molar coefficient, A, absorption, C, the
concentrate, L, the light of the Universe. N, the number of
species. P₁₀₀, the population. (The subscript, tells you
how many species). flies + ants + beetles + insects.
N₁ the number of animals captured. N₂ the number eaten.
N₃, N₄, N₅... the number of extinctions. The contractions
should be coming now, about every 2 or 3 secs.
A 2 oz bullet has a velocity of about a 1000 ft a sec.
W, the Weight. H, the Height. A, the average Age.
Wasp-stings, are alkaline, and can be cured by vinegar.
Bee-stings (acidic) not so easy. Hard work + Hard work +
Hard work + Hard work + Prayer, will give you
the ½ life of a Uranium atom. The ½ life of C₁₄, 5,730.
cats + dogs + cats + dogs + cat + dog + a broken fence-line....
The planet is on target for another “mass extinction.”
elephant + rhino + chickens... Water + carbon dioxide +
glucose + Oxygen... Snap off a twig. Dig out an onion ring,
At least 12% of all plants, and 11% of all birds...
—it’s frightening! rabbits + pigeons + reptiles...
The value of R₁ depends upon the relative position of
the * stars. I, the impact. P, population, A, consumption
per capita per spoonful per Caesium atom. T, technology.
The formula for Happiness, is 50% XQK500;
the shorter the wavelength the longer the Lifeline.
S, the slope of depression. 2 R, the argument for staying alive.
The margin of error E, denotes the probability of
committing an offence without knowing it. G, the level of
gratitude. Lambda, the grilled burger on the BBQ.
C + G + A, corruption + greed + apathy.
A moving clock always looks like
it’s standing still.

KATRINA SCHLUNKE

Burning Cook

I had already thought of breaking up Captain Cook.

Of taking the giant Captain Cook that sits outside Cairns, the giant leftover of the Captain Cook Motel and trucking him back down the east coast, one bit after another broken off and buried until what remained would arrive in Canberra and be sunk in Lake Burley Griffith. One hand left up to remind folk of the deep bloody depths, the ideas and actions, that “Australia” depended on.

And then I saw the armed and masked and mounted cops guarding the statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park Sydney,

(June 2020, Blak Lives Matter)

It should have been some clever piece of performance art,

it could have been some smack in the face installation (a Fiona Foley, a Jonathon Jones or perhaps a Michelle Maynard designing with fluoro and uniforms) but no,
it was real

That when push came to shove at a 1.5m COVID distance,
when the black dead in Australia were being spoken for
and in that speaking the stained white sheets were seen again
and again,

when that push came—“Australia,” the Australian government, the state security forces
rushed to defend
a statue.

An icy bronze statue.

A statue that sits on Moruya Granite. Granite from Yuin country and the Bugelli-Manji clan
and underneath that,
foundations set into Gadigal land.

As Archie tells us:

“Be careful when you walk through this land

Because a child was born here

And a child was born there”

Be careful where you stand Mr Policeman Australia

You are always standing on life.

Touching that life is a gift we sometimes get

But we Johnny-come-lately Australians are never going to get it from atop a statue

So I am burning Cook.

Trying to burn away that bit of myself that forgets

Trying to transform that mixed up shit

That emptiness, that nothing, that you only see when you see, how heavily you defend it

This fractured father figure, this frozen phallus, this national need, the personal greed to
claim his seed.

This letting go might look like Cook but it’s me.

One of too many Cooks
Too many confusions
I am letting the cemented Cook go
I don't need him any longer
Let him go
Let him rest with his people
Let him be
I don't want him,
We don't need him
I really don't
We really don't
Need him

BETH SPENCER

chronic kitty covid city

During lockdown I post a photo of cats sitting on painted social distance rings outside a fruit stall. Each cat: paws neatly contained inside its own circle. Showing how it's done.

Alvin posts a link to research that says cats can give cats the virus, but they show no symptoms.

I say, "We need to be more like cats."

He says, "That has been my position for decades."

I ponder this, and suggest, "Except for the killing small animals and birds thing."

He replies, "Mine are entirely happy to lounge indoors and snack on processed foods, while being lovingly pampered for hours. Oh wait..."

We are in the middle of a pandemic, and it starts to make sense: the planet thrives when more of us are kept indoors.

(But how do we know it's the middle?)

I say, "Maybe after a certain age, or if we have health issues that render us vulnerable, we can volunteer to be like cats. The other, more hardy beings can go outside and do their thing and bring us back treats."

I whisper to the wall: I like this new zoom world. (I don't want it to end.)

I am suddenly "useful" just by staying home.

The Earth shifts on its axis; so much larger, so much smaller. (*Here, now.*)

I am a silk soft grey cat. I am enough.

(With thanks to Alvin Pang for the FB cat conversation, circa May 2020.)

EMILY STEWART

On pause / windswept

aisles, aisles	an outdoors
off my face	what about a little treatise?
lizard trap	no longer on the fence
one afternoon	the missing analysis
a boat on a lake	just a tacky idea
crossing fingers	north of the city
being at home all day	voice breaking up
what about it (Spanish Influenza)	normal brand of accessory
that's my unsympathetic response	eyesore
back to first principles	a reading high
grassy aura	back pocket sonnet
see you at the next venue	employee, sorry
dehydrated	write me back you bitch!!
I can't organise	pumped full of chemicals
rows of cars	rows and rows
overpassed	old friend
cycling this way	slowass movie
it's your turn	put some layers on
piece of fruit	we luv
ratting out	phone on speaker
leaning in to whisper	my sober regards
on the scrap heap	inherited drowsiness
click and collect	a pick-me-up
so mercantile	opportunist
commons sense	I'm feverish
dealing in somersaults	a wavy unlegislated
at the mic	zeroing in
see you at the next venue	period tracking
recently	a strident example
it was early January	track and field
approximate	<i>the quivering arrow</i>
IOU	somewhat
just between us	restaurant quality at home
x on the lips	on Gadigal land
Mecca voucher	<i>politely</i>
school of fish	taking a quiz
hard nipples	a full tank of petrol

continental parsley	flyaways
shy song	"paying the excess"
complaining	the cheap way 2
two suburbs distant	negotiating the seaplane
have you checked	Supermale ego
one of yours	a hair
a breeze in a door	i.e.
e.g.	etc.

sideswiped	pencil behind the ear
goings and comings	rio tantrum
green proxy	sock bunched under the heel
Census worker	plain cotton T-shirt
poor me poem	camping in the driveway
poor poor poetry	moss for your aquarium
artificial grass	stick to the rules
two-way mirror	friendship over pillowtalk
open tabs	device waking up
blasted	the record under our feet
dear fruit fly!	big boiling pot

you asked and I told you	so I did
a mix of numbers and letters	hop in the car
forecast, rain wind dream	streams, income
idk how it works	an alternative to,
Tues I had you over	freebies, stale and out of date
fleshing out	a horrific verb
I'm okay (age difference)	one thing / a single
fingertips and serums	woke up thinkin
like an allegory	firelight weird
maybe-ing	the math irreducible

dirtbag left	straight from the tap
a fata morgana	a frightful year
true fait	mountainous prose
kidz sound	eschatological limit
triangulate this	
boy o	
the lust detail	
my pov masc	thwart settle
essayism	
horseradish in the fridge	
piquant reduction	
pot-set	

look sideways stuck to your shell <i>since then</i> meet you here millefiori stopover halfway 20s mistake ...	all those years there's a gap between reheatable container sound muted it's heating up higher reasoning dots ... ellipses subtle flex
changing plans—due to the weather oh well	climbing over boxes message received
an invitation phenotypes it doesn't bother me making a promise like that timestamped photo of a driveway “it's set in stone” reluctantly pulled along rat's nest under the engine	standing in frame rattling windows oxygen mask I can't always anything lunch platter oven mitt When the sun rises I'll catch the train architect of a scheme
take a break yes I <i>like</i> you heatstroke—regrets the heir abhorrent now the city's pleading with	check some figures give the money back refusing to gossip hoping you are well risking a fine seasonal swoop lamentable
it bears repeating	it's been raining buy me out
emerging as this total metaphoric stay a couple minutes an envy spikes one of my first memories butt dialling muscle weakness large print job go on your way brand of yoghurt	yes and no jetlag, gone a bite-sized dissolve pressing a spacebar two sets of keys narutomaki shaggy half mullet Woman 2020 an ibis, another casualised
dead drooping fleurs a talent for new pattern of idealism wrong gears turning ban the book!!	</3 lengthwise wither on the vine

luteal phase
summarising hope
I did it yesterday
wilting
let's take it offline

I can almost drive

zinnia and police
taking the car around back
all of us together
closed beach
dearest croc,
contemporary yowl
hesitant voice, answering the phone
are you sickened
salad tongs
do you believe
twentieth century values
the radius cry baby child
turning at this corner

you look see-through
here comes another fact-based

feel free
what's in your pocket
worn out
ask an editor
sign your name
t/b t/b
he knows, the old fish
pls stop worming in your chair
waiting on confirmation
hayfever
stuck up a ladder
nothing to contribute
the drain is just

one more theory and then I'll get out
whatever I said
the minor character's lament
a talent for
sooner dead than
looking at my own weird game

twinkle in the ear

in the grip of love
she fainted in the shade
the what's-at-stake trope
autolysis
do you feel lucky
coming from the yard
bye, good-bye
not mine to spell out
every night is a hot night

it's from being inside

car in reverse
I'm countenancing
bloodwork
to open the envelope
make the approach
the old formulae

misfiring
hELL
source close to the family
“tax time”
running late
is just for rain

CATHERINE VIDLER

Lost Matchstick Sonnets



Lost Matchstick Sonnet 17, (2021). Photograph, 14 cm x 16 cm



Lost Matchstick Sonnet 10, (2021). Photograph, 16 cm x 16 cm



Lost Matchstick Sonnet 25, (2021). Photograph, 16 cm x 16 cm



Lost Matchstick Sonnet 19, (2021). Photograph, 16 cm x 14 cm

COREY WAKELING

The Gavel Foundation

after “Only a fool buys real estate” by Pam Brown

It has been a very long time,
the eye remarks on brick.

Welcome home, lawn coccinellidae.
Let glass panes dream of day-flight, fade.

*

What endless freeway into termite maze.
What, this fouled consciousness afloat on early-evening breeze.
For weathervane you have fixed a hostile scarecrow.
Stale figurine, the eyes everywhere placed, testifies null and nix.
Propped to be shredded by the granular deletions of stinging time,
as the mange of foxes builds, around or about it.

Rescue. What kangaroo—it is too dark for that.
Nullity: four-wheelers converge,
disperse, *carte blanche*.

Like some fledgling teacher ready for summer break
at the cusp of bell song, evaporating froth in the red popping eye.

Deleted the class from the red sticker warren.
In that glorious interval, dwelling on the adjacent Bruegel—
nothing special, another token of learning—
discoloured to a vague blue. Intended for caution?
Now mounted as some magic mirror omen,
gallows, glower, haemoglobin, buoy (US pronunciation), Minoa.

And even if you’re no longer any green,
familiar with the very ends of these chapters
at the rind of just-purposive tables,
you’re tugging at a Masonic Lodge badge
of a barnacled imagination,
the ensigned folly of a flying brick, threat to sky,
to magpie, to sylvan wattle, rendering a leaden frieze
like metastatic thrombus within the free traffic
of glittering mud expanse.
King and Country anthem sits a chair there.
Whistles of the westerlies start the dare.
Silence on the stirring exterior.

And whose self-impressed portrait, having a semi-drunk giggle.
Maybe this is presumptuous. Smiling a little, askance.

Not unseen, this wearing a leather jacket among lapels, the new Canberra.
The immortal pictures an order distinct from pelting animals
in flight. Such laughter remains a solitary recreation.
Like that bat over Royal Park, stalking an unfortunate passage.

Passage back to Collingwood, back to Tokyo University, back to Fleet Street.
Back to him with the big book, a dusty copy of Berrigan.

They scrambled their names into the verso sheaf,
the mind's leather yielded to windows, breezes.

A horrendously short-term lease and its displaced lounge room,
Nerf bullets fired across heirloom couches

in the wistful tides of the first obvious casualties
of a generation regenerated by precarity's launch codes.

I did not fight for you. Here lies remorse's invitation to a cruise.

The baying by bay windows, chalky silhouette gossamer.
Meanwhile, those convex books. They are all out of print by now.

Heidelberg: bay windows the now aspirational museum exhibits.
Forward tension is trammeled
through an exclusion zone and strains of newspaper
where jiggled debate possesses our history
and our porcelain pseudo-history encapsulates debate.
Hands of brick, voices of the present, calamitous when thrown.
We get into the news through the broken windows.
Good, but do not be fooled: the fireside chats have ministers, anecdotalism.

The proud, sycophantic telethon regularity wasn't the problem.
Yes, Jonathan Crary was right, but only until now.
Even if the tube works efficiently as the tireless
but bumbling indexer.
Even if RGB—the simple fascism of unity—
dissects in crosshatches the field.
No, the crisis is this anxious predestination
of the scripts,
of the streets made of cross-referencing,
of the immanence of a surveillance order,
of the producers.

Morgue, not moratorium.
Management, not morbidity.
The stakes at once amount to so much more,
then, and yet so much greater wistful detritus.

Comparatively, Shimane BMXs just out of the box
and assembled—no prospect of cryptonometry

in the shapes these conversations make around
your grandfather's portrait in the opal wing.

Indecipherable splenetic library prejudice on Hill Road
for the Hotel and its patrons. For even acknowledging its
existence.

By contrast, mozzie country envied aphid country from the moment
he gauged the difference, but that doesn't mean he had
editions of the annual tax amendments folio in the day lounge
by the end of the term of his jaunty critical adventure.

Black char—bruise, bite, or burn, inquires the coterie, still stirring,
even visiting! But imagine if it really did visit.

Imagine if Eileen Myles visited, say. Wait—she did.

Whose news, then. When did I become Eric Hobsbawm.

"No news is good news" loses the snooze
juice foosball distraction truth of the deuce
played this struth incursion.

Magpie, again, truth in defying the meniscus.

Like the thud of a dead tree come down at last,
to remind you of the rhythms of a revolving earth
generating the spin on this cycle of forgetfulness,
a reality cyclotron at the Perth Agricultural Show,
now "Show."

What about you, dear law student.
I could never have been you, incommode by wood-chopping
and the wrong parents.
Germaine Greer in the uprooting, because you
could engage in citing your elders, as it were,
given yours comprised a street and the history of this place's
settlement—launchpad for your insouciance—
and because these descendants outranked the local council
—these cronies were dull—
not to mention your immunity to proletarian Americans
seasonally decanting in clusters
of military on Fremantle's guano jetties,
because your photographs are your invincible jewels.
Witty Australians are the world, are they not.
How do you join this marvellous club, closed by classless.
How does one fill the sail of their hearts, submarinely motorised.

Of course, spleen about feudal aristocracy
incubates thanks to a perfect concoction of parts
envy,
alienation,
and obsession.
But this topography of neighbourhood class is not about me anymore.
It is about you,

and what you are going to inherit
when you try to insinuate yourself

into canton Australia.

At least I got to swim in the pool.
And even when I hit my head on the bottom,
I wondered
for some micro-unit of zombie time
in that mud-dark of the pool's interior
whether I would ever see again
the boulders of the granite bluff
or again take stock of blue sky.
I did see death. Grey as the surroundings.
How did I survive childhood.

The reversal of Qantas infatuation turns out to be
more like a Maiden saga than a Forbes epigram.
Meanwhile, the Footy Show,
Top Gear, My Restaurant Rules,
the steaming unconscious
of this fabulous cultural organ.
Whatever you do to erase them,
they'll regenerate.
They are not subjects, in the end, after all, all things considered.

*the factual archive
the fatuous archive
awaits
the enormous familiar¹*

Pam, yes. And the 90s were boring too.
How far does the comparison go indeed.
You answered this question with your reply
to this poem readers are only now reading.
Temporal anacoluthon, then. Good.
The relics of a history of builders and cooks
redacted from the coroner's report,
bones interred elsewhere, but all in one spot,
alive and at work similarly disposable,
their fruit of aluminium
oxidising on Main Street between the clay
and the clock, this great temple
where one café, a bottle-o, and an ATM survive.
And so we too ended up
surrealising the conjecture relay
between the Clyde and Trades Hall instead,
the trundle of perceptions and its autonomy
but without the endearment
of so few representatives of valour.
We should have paid more in tax or flesh.

PB's answer, a becoming of weeds, maybe
a summer of valerian, so menthol the rain reverses.

Inside-out economics, the liberal faith in exception.
Despise yourself or incinerate the ladder.

Thinking you are an interlocutor

when you are just a thistle. Highway shoulder, Great Eastern,
pitched the romantic direction toward the splinters of empire
that mercifully disowned you.

What if you cannot afford the cherries

they grow in your jurisdiction, should you grow them.

Sure, we can liberally swim the ocean.

But what about the creek.

The so-called intellect is a Nintendo smeared with margarine.

Your fingerprints and mine at the eject button.

No one actually wants to read this, or already knows it.

Which is why you are strategising how to write these private diaries!

A battered waxen plastic summer,
an artificially intelligent diversion hypnosis machine—
finding all those landed dentists something better to do
between the hardwood marri trees in bloom—
protagonist became a scientist, specialised in sports medicine,
to massage the tension knots out of game nostalgia
and aging winger legs. Even if Pam suggests that the botany
is the idleness, the idleness botany,
where are the memoirs of the muscle knot.

Tempting to finish our jaffle there.

But the invention of a compound neologism,
compiled of four surnames
that themselves coil around four song pillows
set into four health retreats
emulsifies convalescence into this
stupendous national dictionary, Oz behind
the curtain of gold-leaf colloquialisms.

The cream of a hundred misanthropists.

And the cake is not cringe; Kate Jennings felt sick on Hydra
and realised that doom precedes a typewriter's spree.
The ardour between these two alcoholics disgusted
with the folly they make of the brow mould makes a better story
than the whole assembly of A.D. Hope allusions combined.

What about territorial dispute.

The difference between interior design and district rezoning.
Now becomes an inclination to quote Iran's response
to the immediate post-war gerrymander,
but the collocation of no-fly-zones and viciousness
studs the discourse with explosives, so this carpentry
goes to waste on refactoring in a duck of longer enlightenment.

And when I study Farsi, you become a double agent
in the midst of the postcolonial reconstruction.

How do you pretend there's no cord from The Times of London
rappelling back to Mount Hino on a blue-sky permalink—
everywhere a banana skin. The poet's worst tendency:

Flight, despite it all, still glisters in this outrageous fantasy.
And do we call this tissuey page an extract or a selection.

The anaesthesia of cyclone warnings
after enthusiastic but venal music reviews, as if hagiography
filled the gap that unemployment inflames.

Can you elect for earthquakes if you prefer bushfires.
Can you elect for bushfires if earthquakes
Are these crackling sheaves wings or the stuffing for my bed.

Yes, only a fool buys real estate.
Only a fool buys real estate.

ALISON WHITTAKER

the poets are about to lie to you

the poets are about to lie to you
say something vile but kind. this time
what we all did. *we yearn out windows,*
inch ing ever closer to something something our reflection
in each other. i can't lie to you anymore. i would, but.

we're getting lazy in the face of the obvious, we
eke out a bread metaphor, like
rising together, knotted, scored, kneaded and
porous.

don't give. grip until it gushes between your knuckles
no air no crumb, no equivocation no distance no breath.

don't let the poets patronise you, or the
op eds the memoirs —any public record.

recall each time someone taped a note in red to
someone else 's door threatening to call strata if their kid
kid screamed "i miss you!" to a parent (who was there!)
(with them!) any later than 10pm. remember having to

scrounge for a vaccine, hiss in the quiet desperation,
frenetic queues. remember when anyone not in
a capital city or
a wealthy suburb or
anyone who was not white or
anyone who was in prison or
a group home was surely by bureaucratic accident
denied their prophylaxis
denied their chance at a chance at a chance at breath.

remember those strained calls home.
memorise mailing boxes of masks.
remember getting used to cracked hands.
remember when you quickened your pace to get
to the shelves at 7am only to find them full and blush.
think of the man shadowboxing
in the park with a lopsided stomach tattoo that moved

Southerly 79.3: The Way We Live Now

and how much you (I) wanted to fight him in your (my) sundress
because we all might have enjoyed it.
remember the family stealing food from the shared
garden (and why). remember kids lacking stimulation
trying to kick the swallows come near them playing chicken.

remember the closed borders.
the interminable itchy waiting.
remember the end of welfare.
remember those fucking hashtags.

recall some worlds getting smaller. remember others exploding into deathly view.

when this poet tells you about the butterflies and moths that ride the heat column over her apartment, nose pressed against the glass in wonder *a sight unseeable if I wasn't here*, remind her they're coming early this year and next time they'll probably be on fire.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Claire Aman lives in Grafton NSW–Bundjalung Country. She worked as a storeman and environmental planner. Her 2017 short story collection *Bird Country* (Text) was shortlisted for the Steele Rudd and Colin Roderick Awards.

Chris Andrews, who teaches at Western Sydney University, has published two collections of poems—*Cut Lunch* (Indigo, 2002) and *Lime Green Chair* (Waywiser, 2012)—and translated books of prose fiction, including César Aira's *The Musical Brain and Other Stories* (New Directions, 2015), Selva Almada's *The Wind that Lays Waste* (Graywolf, 2019), and Kaouther Adimi's *Our Riches* (New Directions, 2020).

Chris Arnold is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing on Wadjuk Noongar country, at the University of Western Australia. His project is in the form of a digital/paper hybrid verse novel.

Stuart Barnes is the author of two books of poetry: *Like To The Lark* (Upswell Publishing, 2023) and *Glasshouses* (UQP, 2016), which won the 2015 Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize, was commended for the 2016 Anne Elder Award and shortlisted for the 2017 Mary Gilmore Award. "Sestina after B. Carlisle" won the 2021/22 Gwen Harwood Poetry Prize. Stuart lives in Rockhampton on Darumbal country. @StuartABarnes

Vanessa Berry lives and works on Gadigal land. In her books, essays and zines she examines expressions of memory, particularly connected to places and objects. She is the author of four books, most recently *Gentle and Fierce* (2021) and *Mirror Sydney* (2017). She is a Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Sydney.

Pam Brown has been active in the Australian poetry scene for decades. Her book *Click here for what we do* (Vagabond) was awarded the ALS Gold Medal in 2019. Pam has worked for Australia Post as a mail sorter and on the counters of several post offices. She lives in Sydney on Gadigal land.

Pascalle Burton is a Meanjin-based experimental poet with an interest in conceptual art and cultural theory. Her collection *About the Author is Dead* is available from Cordite Books and was shortlisted for the 2019 Mary Gilmore Award for best first collection of poetry. <https://pascalleburton.wordpress.com/>

Anne Casey is an Irish-Australian poet/writer and author of four poetry collections whose work ranks in *The Irish Times'* Most Read. Widely published internationally, Anne has won literary prizes in Ireland, the UK, the USA, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia, most recently *American Writers Review 2021* and the 2021 *iWoman Global Award for Literature*. She is the recipient of an Australian Government Scholarship for her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Technology Sydney.

Julie Chevalier is the author of the short story collection, *Permission to Lie* and the poetry collection *Linen Tough as History. Darger: his girls* (Puncher & Wattmann) won the 2011 Alec Bolton Prize for best unpublished manuscript and was short-listed for the WA Premier's Award for Poetry. A collection of poetry is forthcoming in 2022. She is working on a collection of microlit.

Eileen Chong was born in Singapore of Hakka, Hokkien and Peranakan descent. She is the author of nine books, the most recent being *A Thousand Crimson Blooms* (UQP, 2021). She lives and works on unceded Gadigal land. www.eileenchong.com.au

Matthew Clarke is an Australian writer and academic currently based in Washington, DC.

Josie/Jocelyn Deane is a writer/student at the university of Melbourne. Their work has appeared in *Cordite*, *Southerly*, *Australian Poetry* and *Overland* among others. In 2021 they were one of the recipients of the Queensland Poetry Festival Ekphrasis award. They live on unceded Wurundjeri land.

Shastra Deo was born in Fiji, raised in Melbourne, and lives in Brisbane. Her first book, *The Agonist* (UQP 2017), won the 2016 Arts Queensland Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize and the 2018 Australian Literature Society Gold Medal. Her second book, *The Exclusion Zone*, is forthcoming from University of Queensland Press in 2023.

Lucy Dougan's latest book *The Guardians* (Giramondo) won the WA Premier's Award for Poetry. With Tim Dolin, she is co-editor of *The Collected Poems of Fay Zwicky* (UWAP).

Dave Drayton Dave Drayton was an amateur banjo player, founding member of the Atterton Academy, and the author of *E, UIO, A: a feghoot* (Container), *A pet per ably-faced kid* (Stale Objects dePress), *P(oe)Ms* (Rabbit), *Haiturograms* (Stale Objects dePress) and *Poetic Pentagons* (Spacecraft Press).

Johanna Ellersdorfer is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. She lives and works between Canberra and Sydney on unceded Ngunawal, Ngambri, and Gadigal land.

Blake Falcongreen is an English student and musician living on Gadigal land. He has only recently started submitting work outside student publications/zines, and appreciates the attention journals such as *Southerly* offer to new writers.

Michael Farrell was born in Bombala NSW in 1965 and has lived in Melbourne since 1990. Recent publications include *I Love Poetry* (Gramondo 2017); *Family Trees* (Giramondo 2020); *Writing Australian Unsettlement: Modes of Poetic Invention 1796–1945* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015); and, as editor, *Ashbery Mode* (TinFish 2019).

Twitter: @readingrevival. Instagram: @limechax.

Liam Ferney has written four collections of poetry. He works in public affairs for a health NGO and holds the all time games record for the New Farm Traktor Collective.

Toby Fitch is poetry editor of *Overland* and a lecturer in creative writing at the University of Sydney. Recent books of poetry are *Where Only the Sky Had Hung Before* (Vagabond Press, 2019) and *Sydney Spleen* (Giramondo, 2021).

Angela Gardner's verse novel *The Sorry Tale of the Mignonette* was published by Shearsman Books UK in 2021. Her latest poetry collections are *Some Sketchy Notes on Matter* (Recent Work Press, Australia, 2020) and *The Told World* (selected poetry), Shearsman Books UK 2014. Among other awards and commissions, she has received a Churchill Fellowship, the Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize, and Australia Council Residencies and Project funding. Recent poems have been published in the *Yale Review* and *West Branch*, USA; *Blackbox Manifold*, *The Long Poem* and *Tears in the Fence*, UK; *Plumwood Mountain*, *Westerly*, *Southerly*, *Rabbit* and *Cordite*, Australia. She is a visual artist with work in international public collections.

Jake Goetz's first book of poetry, *meditations with passing water* (Rabbit, 2018), was shortlisted for the QLD Premier's Award in 2019. His second collection, *Unplanned Encounters: Poems 2014–2020*, is forthcoming with Apothecary Archive. He is a DCA candidate in Writing at WSU and is the Reviews Editor at *Plumwood Mountain*.

Elena Gomez is the author of *Admit the Joyous Passion of Revolt*, *Crushed Silk* and *Body of Work*.

Melissa Hardie is Associate Professor in the Department of English, University of Sydney. With Meaghan Morris and Kane Race she's recently edited a book, forthcoming, on the film *Showgirls*. With Vanessa Smith and John Frow she is the editor of the Oxford University Press series "Approaches to the Novel." Her most recent publication (pre-pandemic) was on *Charlie's Angels* and blockchain, for *Australian Humanities Review*.

Dan Hogan is a working class writer and public school teacher from San Remo, NSW (Awabakal Country). They currently live and work on Dharug and Gadigal Country (Sydney). Dan's poetry and essays have won the Overland Judith Wright Poetry Prize and the Wheeler Centre Next Chapter Fellowship. In their spare time, Dan runs small DIY publisher Subbed In.

Michael Stratford Hutch (they/them) is an interdisciplinary artist and facilitator. They were born and raised on unceded muwinina land in nipa luna, lutruwita, and now live and work on unceded Wangal land in Eora/Sydney.

The **Illawarra Climate Justice Alliance** is an alliance of environmental and social justice groups and individuals working on open, democratic, grassroots organising of climate justice action in the Illawarra. The Alliance has several Working Groups, and the Just Transitions group is one of these. Participants include Tats, Nick, Martin, Mark, Margi, Craig, Jade, Ali and Jade.

Ella Jeffery is an Australian poet, editor and academic. Her debut collection of poems, *Dead Bolt*, won the Puncher & Wattmann Prize for a First Book of Poems and the Anne Elder Award. She is a recipient of the Queensland Premier's Young Publishers and Writers Award and her poetry has appeared widely in journals and anthologies including *Best Australian Poems*, *Meanjin*, *Griffith Review* and *Southerly*. She also co-edits *Stilts Journal*, a triannual digital poetry journal publishing poets from around Australia.

Rebecca Jessen is a timeless boi. a linen daddy. a random shy poet. a sleeping body that remembers desire. a comet trail. a body that is a bridge. a moonstruck adolescent. an incomplete list poem. a lesbian, but... Her debut poetry collection *Ask Me About the Future* (UQP, 2020) was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry and the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry.

A. Frances Johnson is a writer and artist. She has published four collections of poetry. *Rendition for Harp and Kalashnikov* (Puncher & Wattmann) was shortlisted in the 2018 Melbourne Prize for Literature Best New Writing Award, and her most recent collection, *Save As*, was published by Puncher & Wattmann in 2021. In 2017, she took up an Australia Council B.R Whiting Fellowship to Rome. A novel, *Eugene's Falls* (Arcadia 2007), retraced the Victorian journeys of colonial painter Eugene von Guérard. A monograph, *Australian Fiction as Archival Salvage*, was published by Brill in 2015.

Jill Jones was born in Sydney and has lived in Adelaide since 2008. Recent books include *Wild Curious Air, A History of What I'll Become, Viva the Real*, which was shortlisted for the 2019 Prime Minister's Literary Awards for Poetry and the 2020 John Bray Award, and *Brink*. In 2015 she won the Victorian Premier's Prize for Poetry for *The Beautiful Anxiety*. She is a member of the J.M. Coetzee Centre for Creative Practice, University of Adelaide, where she teaches creative writing and literary studies.

John Kinsella's recent poetry books include *Supervivid Depastoralism* (Vagabond, 2021) and the first volume of his collected poems, *The Ascension of Sheep* (UWAP, 2022). His most recent short story collection is *Pushing Back* (2021).

Harold Legaspi is a writer born in Manila, now living in unceded Darug land. He is completing the Doctor of Arts at University of Sydney. His first book, *Letters in Language*, was the runner-up in the inaugural Puncher & Wattmann Prize for a First Book of Poetry, published 2021 in the Flying Islands Pocket Books of Poetry series. In 2015, he was a writer in residence at the Global Exchange Centre in Beijing. The poem included in this issue of *Southerly* is an excerpt from an epic poem that attempts to reconcile the heart with the mind.

Kate Lilley is a queer, Sydney-based poet-scholar. She is the author of 3 books of poetry: *Versary* (Salt 2002), winner of the Grace Leven Prize; *Ladylike* (UWAP 2012), shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Awards; and *Tilt* (Vagabond 2018), winner of the Victorian Premier's Award for Poetry. She was a member of the English Department at the University of Sydney from 1990 to 2021 and is now an Honorary Associate Professor.

Anthony Lynch writes fiction, poetry and reviews. His work has appeared in various journals and anthologies and has been read on ABC Radio National. His books are a short story collection, *Redfin*, and a poetry collection, *Night Train*. He is the publisher for Whitmore Press: <https://whitmorepress.com>

Julie McElhone has had poems published in *Meanjin* (AUS); *Rabbit Poetry Journal: The TENSE issue* (AUS); *Barzakh Magazine* (US); *The Menteur*, Paris School of Arts and Culture, part of the University of Kent (UK/FR); and *Southerly* (AUS). She lives in Sydney with her child and is a Doctor of Arts candidate at University of Sydney focusing on citational poetics and commonplacing.

Julie Maclean's poetry, fiction and reviews have appeared in *Southerly*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *Best Australian Poetry*, *Cordite*, *Griffith Review*, *Island*, and *Overland*, among others. She is the author of four pamphlets and one full collection; *When I Saw Jimi*, shortlisted for The Crashaw Prize (Salt), was joint winner of the Geoff Stevens Memorial Poetry Prize (Indigo Dreams Publishing, UK). www.juliemacleanwriter.com

Sam Morley is a poet whose work has been published in a number of journals including *Cordite*, *Red Room Poetry*, the *Australian*, *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Plumwood Mountain*, *Takahe* (NZ) and *Antipodes* (US) and has appeared on noted shortlists including the ACU Poetry Prize. He is the 2022 Tina Kane Emergent Writer and his debut poetry collection, *Earshot*, is due in July 2022 through Puncher and Wattmann. He lives in Melbourne.

Professor **Sandy O'Sullivan** is a Wiradjuri transgender/non-binary person in the School of Indigenous Studies and the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures at Macquarie University. They are a 2020–2024 ARC Future Fellow, with a project titled *Saving Lives: Mapping the influence of Indigenous LGBTQ+ creative artists*. Since 1991 they have taught and researched across gender and sexuality, equity in higher education, museums, the body, performance, design, and First Nations' identity.

Mark Peart lives in the Blue Mountains and is the author of a number of documentary and archive based articles and poems usually concerned with the policing of queer sexualities. Some of this work has recently been published in *Southerly* and the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. Mark holds a PhD from the University of Sydney, and his thesis was awarded the Eva Veronika Vidak Memorial Prize. Other publications include the book-length documentary lyric, *The Great Eastern* (Rabbit, 2014).

Patricia Pender is an Associate Professor at the University of Newcastle, specialising in English, Writing and Gender Studies. She is the author of *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (2012) and "I'm Buffy and You're History": *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Contemporary Feminisms* (2016). In 2018 she published her first chapbook of poetry, *Bibliophilic*, in Puncher & Wattman's Slow Loris Series One.

Dr June Perkins is a dedicated educator, writer and multiplatform producer, of Papua New Guinean, Australian and Baha'i background. Her poetry, flash fiction and photography has featured in numerous QLD anthologies, the QAGOMA, QLD poetry festival, ABC platforms and in publications in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. She blogs at: <https://pearlz.wordpress.com/>

π.ο. Born: Greece 1951 Came to Australia 1954 Raised: Fitzroy (inner suburb of Melbourne). Occupation: draughtsman, now retired gentleman. *BIG NUMBERS* is his selected poems. His other books include *24 HOURS*, and *FITZROY—The Biography*. By disposition and history is an Anarchist, and is currently editor of the experimental magazine *UNUSUAL WORK*. His book *HEIDE* with Giramondo won the Judith Wright Calanthe Award in 2020, and was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry in the same year, also nominated for the Melbourne Literature Prize 2021.

Dr Katrina Schlunke researches and writes across the areas of cultural history, fictocriticism and material cultures and within diverse sites including queer dioramas and Captain Cook. She is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the Universities of Tasmania and Sydney (Department of Gender and Cultural Studies) and is co-investigator on the Australian Research Council Discovery project 'Beyond Extinction: Reconstructing the Thylacine (Tasmanian Tiger) Archive.'

Sophia Small is a teacher, student and writer who lives in the Inner West of Sydney on unceded Gadigal land.

Beth Spencer's most recent book is *The Age of Fibs: stories, memoir, microlit* (May 2022). Previous books include *Vagabondage*, *How to Conceive of a Girl* and *The Party of Life*. Her work has frequently been broadcast on ABC-RN. She lives on Guringai land on the Central Coast, NSW. www.bethspencer.com

Emily Stewart lives and works on unceded Wangal land. She is the author of *Knocks* and *Running Time*, which won the 2021 Helen Anne Bell Poetry Award.

Lucy Sussex has a PhD from the University of Wales. She has abiding interests in women's lives and Australiana. Her *Blockbuster: Fergus Hume and The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (Text), won the 2015 Victorian Community History Award. In 2017 she was a Creative Fellow at the State Library of Victoria.

Honni van Rijswijk (she/they) is a writer, lawyer, and academic. *Breeder* is her debut novel. Her fiction has appeared in *Southerly* and was short-listed for *Zoetrope: All-Story*. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of Technology Sydney, where her research focuses on intersections between law, technology, and culture. She lives in Sydney, Australia, with her partner and their daughter.

Catherine Vidler's recent publications include *Wings* (*Cordite*, 2021), lost sonnets, 3rd iteration (etk books, 2019),

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31_125_48_108_12_144_67_89_28_128_51_105_4_152_75_81_36_120_43_113_
17_139_62_94_23_133_56_100_7_149_72_84_33_123_46_110_14_142_65_91_
26_130_53_103_2_154_77_79_38_118_41_115_19_137_60_96_21_135_58_98_
9_147_70_86_31_125_48_108_12_144_67_89_28_128_51_105_4_152_75_81_
36_120_43_113_17_139_62_94_23_133_56_100_7_149_72_84_33_123_46_110_
14_142_65_91_26_130_53_103 (Hesterglock Prote[s]xt, 2019)

78 composite lost sonnets (Hesterglock Prote[s]xt 2018), composite lost sonnets (SOd Press, 2018), and lost sonnets (Timglaset 2018).

Corey Wakeling is a poet and critic living in Takarazuka, Japan. His most recent books are a poetry collection, *The Alarming Conservatory* (Giramondo 2018), and monograph, *Beckett's Laboratory: Experiments in the Theatre Enclosure* (Methuen Bloomsbury 2021). His second monograph, in development, concerns situation and inertia in modern and contemporary Japanese performance. coreywakeling@gmail.com

Alison Whittaker is a Gomeroi woman, poet and academic.