

DREAMING
AWAKE

*New Contemporary
Prose Poetry from the
United States, Australia
and England*

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*edited by Peter Johnson &
Cassandra Atherton*



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ENGLAND

LINDA BLACK

First stage

Her skirt is layered like half an onion, her bodice too. Bare shouldered, arms behind her back, down headed, legless and foot-free – there's a scratch appeared across her face – were she to have eyes, they would be downcast, her would-be-gaze drawn toward a seam of debris, coal dark, deeply bit, yet to be accounted for. A three-pronged fork; a sideways *m* floats toward the tip of her locks – parsnip roots tapering *snip snip* – its coiled handle a thin neck snaking. O it says. In the air above, scissors (larger than she), quivering – they haven't seen her yet.

Lady on a crenulated table

Dancing like a silver fish – a buttoned glove, a knife, a fork, a slither lashing an empty plate. Minims & quavers stipple across a curling manuscript, staves transpose, flying like swallows from the scroll of a paper vase. Lipstick & lashes hide behind a sweep of fallen hair. The thrill of your cuff – you have no hands – the snub of your toe, how slight your waist is, how your skirts wish. Flat lady, there is no music.

Pin this / it down

Pen it, trample it, tussle for precedence, scrape meaning from, howl, wring your hands – turncoat, plunderer. What do you expect? Make for the undulations; don't see what's around the edge, undercover/unrecorded. Begin again. Don't begin again. Whatsoever will become, called into realisation. Knowing more than I. Guts – confidence, purpose, predisposition. No condescension (in the marrow). No guarantee.

Linear dimension. Presumed existence. Carves, conceives, bores holes. No solid ground. No need to know – that dull requirement.

Back's no different to forward. Beyond blankness: mischief, creation.

‘... one mind by itself can fill a room.’

(Marilynne Robinson, *Jack*)

I have reasoned in retrospect as to why my treasures may have been there, splayed, displayed – sought clarity of image, detail, description, material benefits, benefactors – laid, allayed on the studio bench; too many to fathom, pinpoint, describe, perfect, overwhelming in their allusion, their elusiveness, their abstract, their heartfelt, their glory.

Look on – *wipe, whip away* – too plentiful, too myriad – objectified, reified, unsubstantiated, spilling over, taking too much space. Flounder, filter, store them, tuck them away, their empathy, their lifelong, their keepsake. How empty the room is.

LUCY HAMILTON

Inside the pocket

I

A space made to measure. One at a time we stood on a stool in the garden sunshine as between finger and thumb our mother pincer a pin from her pursed lips and fixed it into folds tucks pleats. Two pocket-sized party frocks pocketed in satin the colours of roses bluebells Bramleys chestnuts. They rustled as our bodies moved for she always had an eye on room to grow. So does curiosity prompt growth. Years later on the history trip to Hellesdon asylum I opted to be locked in a cell. I sensed a girl close to my age ripping fungus-coloured padding. Clawing for her snatched-away given-away baby. A space made to measure.

II

I write in little pockets. Not form as in the corset or straight-jacket that fitted *Sonnets for My Mother* but a kind of self-imposed stricture. The only failsafe not to overflow. But since Lucy Locket lost hers I consider mine as open envelopes. Scribbles and keepsakes are held inside to review appraise resume. Space to jiggle and change position. Of course the danger is stop start stop. Might sound a bit anxious. Like waking with heart in mouth. Last night my best-loved writers turned against me. The way brilliance can dazzle and blot out landmarks. No I didn't adjust the light. I write in little pockets.

Encounters with in and with out

I

In the taste of a cube of sugar. I trailed the aisles of Monoprix lingering at the shelves of tins. *Cerises en Syrop. Salade de Fruits. Marrons Glacés*. When I grew faint I let a sugar-lump melt on my tongue. At Trocédéro kids on bikes and skateboards leapt spinning through the air. I stumbled into the Musée de l'Homme. Transfixed by shoes furs silk-stockings descending the stairs I lost my grip dizzied by such self-possession. Back in my garret water boiled on the ring. I tried to focus on *Grammaire*. Stalked pigeons through the skylight. Lit a Gauloise. Opened Balzac. Drank my sweet coffee scalding black. In the taste of a cube of sugar.

II

Opening windows into windows. Is like finding a face shining through text. The print itself a visual embrace. *Retrouver. Retrouvailles. Basse-taille*. Encounters with Algeria Siberia Lebanon via my mother's tongue. Best-loved contemporary authors writing through diverse optics their canvases reflect refract vibrate. Then suddenly everything changed. I was inside *Dedans*. I turned a page and the text imploded. Words scrambled. Letters clustered. Zigzags jagged the margins. My blood ran cold. Had I lost my lexicons. Had the birds of my languages come home to roost. Opening windows into windows.

In the grammar of body language

I

Intimacy is an illusion. Every day I saw my twin's face. When she was absent I scooped it up like the image on a dropped coin. We gambled compulsively with our pals. Usually pontoon. Raided our mother's sewing-chest for buttons. Round. Square. Oblong. Triangular. They hinted of roses bluebells Bramleys chestnuts. Coins had the frisson of reality. Weight and value. Whether they were francs or thruppences we flipped for heads or tails. Every day I saw my twin's face. I tried to find my own on the reverse side. But each time I saw her face mine vanished. If I saw my image hers disappeared. Intimacy is an illusion.

II

The poetry of twins is intimacy. Me and my twin head to head nine months in the womb. Sometimes she shared my bed in Paris and we danced to her trannie in this garret that was once a *chambre de bonne*. Choosing baby-clothes in Berlin we were both stick-thin as she propelled her pregnant belly ahead. So as you might expect this early morning I'm still in bed reading Devi. She says the poetry of Ève is play at being twins with Savita. Can't you see them arm-in-arm skipping nettles as their earrings tinkle in unison. How they dance in a corner of paradise laughing so as not to drown. The poetry of twins is intimacy.

In the cracks of composition

I

Before we were born. When our father laid the steps and paving he kneeled first on this slab and then on that slab with his bucket and triangular trowel. When he reached *that* slab it was *this* one under him. He built the garden walls. Placed flint stones meticulously cementing them above below between. Our mother planted aubrietia and marguerites and before long they overhung the wall. Bees hummed in the red yellow brown tapestries. Bumbled into spotty foxgloves. On top of the wall near the gatepost a single round stone was missing. The gap formed a bowl for my knee. Before we were born.

II

In the play of language. We chalked hopscotch on the path and I balanced one foot on this square aiming for that rectangle. In the hall I landed on a yellow circle with my eye on the blue star. Soon I made the leap that lexicons are living. *JE* hopped to *SUIS* to *UNE* to *JUMELLE*. I had to agree. It was agreeable to agree. But if I missed *suis* my sentence didn't sense. With hindsight I see that *Je* leap-frogged *suis* by recognising *jumelle*. That first kiss through membrane. Unsayable perception. The way Savita kisses Ève full on the lips and Ève tickles Savita's smooth skipping feet. Synchronicity. In the play of language.

OZ HARDWICK

Chalk

Yesterday I was tissue, today I am chalk. The word *apocalypse* derives from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις meaning revelation, but it has always made me think of a horse-drawn trap in a narrow cobbled street. It's something in the rhythm, in that hoof-strike plosive and hiss of relaxing leather and oiled wheels, and I think of that young boy in 's-Hertogenbosch, with his visions of flying damnation and tissue-thin veils between moral outcomes. I was brought up to apologise for my actions but not to confess my sins, which have stratified like fossils in chalk, waiting to be chipped out and held up for show-and-tell. I have all the material comforts I need, but stock up on wax tapers and prayer beads, blood-red wine and consecrated wafers. At the end of the day a rider approaches through the locked-down streets. His face is wreathed in tissue. His horse is the colour of chalk.

Time and Motion

Light, of course, is hardest to swallow but, after that, it's rivers that stick in the throat, with all their rewilded areas of scientific interest and dropped watches. There's something unavoidable about time in their movements, from the extinction and reintroduction of small mammals, to the bubbling tick of second-hand second hands swimming to a stop. Even their names make me choke, from Rhondda, to rodent, to Rolex, and the recollections of each one of them gather in the dust at my bedside like owl pellets. Light, of course, makes for a perfect storm, with clock faces frowning at twenty to four, beavers damming up all escapes, and that river whose name I can't even frame, shredding itself into rapids and waterfalls, then rising like bile to smother all but the tallest towers and lightning conductors, tossing my flimsy bunk until it's swallowed by the sea.

Chancing

I roll the dice like you roll your eyes, pushing my luck as if it was a sack of something suspicious at the end of an abandoned pier. There's a black cab with its engine running, clocking up the minutes, and a black cat stretching its luck to breaking point at the water's edge. The spots wore off years ago, so they're only bones that we tip in turn like a learned reflex, like a stock hood reaching beneath his jacket, or a tired Tom licking down a lifetime of wounds. Each turn scores a neat zero, which I note on a scroll that snakes like a phylactery in stained glass, and you roll your eyes like St Lucy in the margin of a manuscript with a castle of cats and a sack of rats and a wiry hound on the run from a rabbit (or, most likely, hare). There is nothing in my hand but figurative speech, and I'm dicing with disapproval and disavowal, like the sweating stooge in the downtown station who was seen at the site of the splash, and who would swear his innocence if the cat hadn't got his tongue. Language bundles me into a black cab with a bag over my head. I hear water lap at the lip of an abandoned pier. I feel you roll your eyes.

100 Party Favourites

Left to their own devices, the woodworm in the piano have learnt to play, shuttling from key to key, synchronised to perfection. It's a slow process, more John Cage than Mrs Mills, and goodtime pub favourites shoulder the weight of tottering clouds and barren pauses, circling like tired and famished bears on a sprung dancefloor. It's not just art that aspires to the condition of music, and in the garden falling quinces drum a mambo syncopation on the wet lawn as leaves *cha-cha-chá* behind nightbirds' flirtatious songs. The woodworm segue from 'Roll out the Barrel' to 'The Lambeth Walk' like a turning tanker, summoning black-and white stills of the Blitz spirit, framed on a sideboard that hasn't been dusted since the Golden Jubilee. The silence between notes stretches . I yawn in F Major and it's taken up by the bears beneath the trees, their chins sticky with quince juice, their soft feet ready to dance.

RUPERT M. LOYDELL**City of the Dead**

Are personal accounts of near-death experiences enough to prove life *after* death? World-building lets you create the hereafter now: the afterlife begins in god-knows-where, a welcome place of refuge, as one young woman dies and another vanishes on the same spring night.

As a spiritual director, telling people where to go is just the beginning. You must keep billions of souls happy by giving them the rewards and punishments they deserve. Don't get locked out of heaven! Download your free report today and discover the common experiences people recount when the body dies but consciousness continues to exist.

The wages of sin are plentiful, the dearly departed arrive in droves. Unbelievers are believers of sorts and their stories contain mysteries. Heaven is on the brink of becoming a permanently abandoned ghost town, full of memories from another era, abandoned dreams in the shadows.

Out of Step

Cold summer morning, with autumn spiders already spinning their webs. Between the trees the sun is out but I've had to put a hat and coat on to sit and read in the garden. The cat is curled up on the table beside me, fur bristling.

Summer has been long and tedious: days of rain and mist between occasional bouts of heat and sunlight, local roads and towns packed full of visitors while we can't afford to go anywhere.

The problem is not single, is multiple, has myriad solutions. This colour or that? Splashes, stains or lines? Carefully placed or gestured, thrown? There is too much to process. Colour is the least of it.

Come-to-Good

I walk down the garden to look at the graves of no-one I know. The prayer flags have gone from the small building nearby, and the door to the meeting house is locked. Today there are no swifts' nests above the covered yard but there is a mossy silence underfoot, the product of wet fallen leaves and dropped branches.

I wanted to sit in the quiet dark and breathe in history but instead have to return to my car and drive away from the glares of the neighbours trimming their hedge, suspicious of visitors in battered cars. Sound reconvenes around me as rain splashes down again.

The Modern House

*History is obviously less than
it's cracked up to be*

—Amy Sillman

In our modern house I constantly trip over the decapitated heads of gods we use as ornament and statement, always seek more space for the possessions I am not supposed to keep: all those old VHS films, my comic collection, and the photo albums assembled in my youth.

There are no sheds outside or cupboards in our modern house, it is not allowed: we must live in the present and keep our memories to ourselves or online, parade them on social media, let others comment or like, interpret and opine.

We are not at home in our modern house, our children have never played hide and seek or been allowed to have a hobby; their music is disembodied, their photographs stored on mobile phones or in clouds of memory.

They laugh as I type this and play LPs, use the phone still connected to a landline or turn the television on. Our modern house pushes us aside and dictates how we live. We have no choice or say in the matter.

JANE MONSON

Black Grass Waving

We follow the dandelion-clock of his head as he stoops into the future; the post-flowering state of his hair, testimony to the day children sat down to learn one minute, then were blown from their chairs seconds after a child's hand shot to the ceiling with the answer. His camera pans a drained-sea of gasmasks: hundreds of hollowed faces herded into the classroom, a doll prepped and positioned on the edge of a sill. Their cavernous stares give nothing away, but malformed moths – a crumpled wing, a bent antennae. Books wave and flinch under the steady give of ceilings, the receding ink on the moving pages like bleached coral; their albino, stiffening sway refusing to die-off completely in the Caesium wind. Down a corridor, textbooks tremor on the ground; facts, tests and graphs lose their chiaroscuro in the dust, crimp under the dripping walls. Outside, for every broken, emptied pool and haunted Ferris wheel, a forest of leaf-bound or bare, but adapting trees. That word *resilience* programmed onto the tongue of each pupil, begins and ends here – in every piece of cellular green, every glowing insect.

On Reflection

His name is found in the Amazon's Black-Eyed Satyr butterfly, in rare insects embalmed by volcanic rock and amber. Moving with slow attention from one door frame to another, we see him at the end of a telescoped series of timbered borders; glass blown litter under his feet, wooden crossbeams splintering over his shoulders. He takes in every injured wall that harbours this evacuated silence and his shoes fall humbled as a crack in the floor whispers *moss* and shouts *fungi*. Room after room, more branches than memories pick at the paint and plaster; their budding fingers mapping the day in a constant state of touch, never short of something to close, unpick or raise. By a cacophony of buckets, an unfurling plant is just waking, yawning across the concrete again. We follow as he steps through our brazen ways – shows us how to tread softly, then leaves. In the frame we see ourselves in memory; ducking off camera as a gray wolf comes into view, hunting a vole, foraging for mushrooms, somehow thriving in meadows of chemical light.

Insect Dust

Over the city's cars, orange dust lands, resettles out of a yellowing sky. Under its murmuring, migrating powder we either connect or wash the stuff clean from our skin and conscience; forget that dust crosses continents for a reason: death needs somewhere to go, life needs somewhere to be. Some years, insects hitch by chance inside the sandstorm's drought-fuelled mouth. Crossing thousands of miles through grit-thickened wind, a burnt, wizened Hermes tells the world to stop moving and deleting the earth: animal by hominid, fish by insect, plant by pollen. For every irritating cloud that gets in our hair and skin, whole languages are de-pollinating – perishing with rainforest, tribe and native land, the mouths of elders stop silent in the displaced ears of children. Some languages travel, others stay behind – more and more lie buried on the spot. Try raising an endangered word on the re-routed soil of a random car roof, a home in transition when its birth-place is Ainu, Rohingya, Patuá, Ahtna, Bube, Māori, Yiddish, Ojibwe ... Try taming these mother tongues; feel how quickly, but painfully the earth dies when you do.

Forest of the Cold

for Joan Didion and the Taiga

When she got stuck on a thought – mid-sentence or picture – she put it on ice, placing the unfinished, halted book in plastic, then into the freezer. She had the right idea, putting language on hold instead of trying to pummel and break it into the paper's hostile landscape. Not so much a preserving – although ice once prided itself on stillness and stopping – as a putting in place the right conditions for a rewilding of the word's stagnancy. When her head warmed back to where she needed to be, she reclaimed the thoughts and pictures, resumed a fleet-footed pass over the crystals' thaw. Where blue shadows printed their way across a subarctic snow, appeared and faded by the sun and moon only. Where what grew from the glacial trees of a Taiga forest is what needed to grow; evergreen characters that stood and fronted out the tipping point between life and death. Like her, these trees held onto everything they could: sunlight, needles, colour and seeds tucked sense-deep inside a wooden cocoon. Moose, deer and lynx who walked without hesitancy across moss and lichen floors, their constant soil of permafrost and acid. Here the wood stayed upright – not forced towards tipsy, perilous levels of shallowed soil and depressed roots, where language was wildly misjudged; invasive articles released at the uttermost edges of the world – struck mindlessly into the unwritten snow.

IAN SEED

Gratis

It was the first time I'd worked in ages. I had three different lessons to teach in three different schools around Paris. After the second lesson I realised I'd left all the information about the third, including the school's name and address, in the flat where I was sleeping on someone's floor. I was hot, sweaty and hungry, on a street full of parping cars. There was a café cum patisserie just a few yards away. Even if it meant getting the sack, I decided not to bother with the third lesson, but instead go for a bite to eat, using the money I'd just been paid for my morning's work. Inside, it was much cooler, but there was nowhere to sit down. In my broken French, I asked the woman at the counter for something to take away. She broke off a piece of pastry, waving away the coins I offered, and handed it to me as if I were a stray animal. Through the glass of the counter, I could see the inside of the tart she'd torn it from, excreting its sticky filling.

Perspective

When André's beautiful girlfriend Nadja fell in love with me, I arranged to meet her in the Latin Quarter. We planned to stay in a hotel there for one night and then take the morning train south. She arrived late in a taxi. One of her legs was in plaster. She assured me that this made no difference to our plans, but she was not happy when I told her the name of the hotel I'd booked. It's much too rundown, she said, the sort of place where a Dadaist would stay. As I was helping her along the crowded pavement, I saw André and his Surrealist friends on a corner, talking and laughing, but not looking in our direction. It seemed as if they were in no hurry to do anything at all, since revenge would be all the sweeter for having been delayed.

Prostate

I'm desperate for a piss as I wait in the queue in a Paris bus station for the airport express. Turning to the blond woman with two small children behind me, I point at my suitcase. She nods and says in heavily-accented English that she'll watch over it. The toilet is crowded and stinks. I wait in a kind of agony for a urinal to be free. When I finally get out, the queue has gone, and so has my suitcase, in which stupidly I have left my passport. I wander out of the station in a kind of daze. The pavement is packed, the hooting cars deafening. Although it was cold when I came out to Paris a few days ago, the sun's now shining and I'm unbearably hot in my overcoat. I see a tall, slim man with cropped hair. He's wearing a grey uniform with brass buttons. I imagine he is some kind of government official. Feeling quite faint now, I ask him in my broken French if he will take me to the police station. He looks me up and down. Offering me his arm, he leads me a few blocks to a great shining building with marble steps to the entrance. Dismissing my thanks with an abrupt gesture, he walks away without looking back. It occurs to me that I should call my wife to let her know what has happened. I reach into my coat pocket for my mobile, but the man in the uniform has already disappeared into the crowd with it.

Milan

There was a small bookshop on the ground floor of the skyscraper, where an Italian author was signing copies of his book. It looked too big and glossy for my liking, so I went to the back of the shop to browse the poetry section, and ended up buying a small volume of prose poems. I didn't recognise the author's name, but the pieces looked intriguing.

I went in search of a bite to eat, but the huge restaurant on the ground floor was packed with smart office workers on their lunchbreak. On a whim, I walked over to the lifts, stepped into an empty one, and pressed the button for the top floor. It shot up at a sickening speed, and yet it seemed to take ages to reach the top. Stepping out, I saw a showroom of expensive cars, but there was no one around; presumably the sales staff were all having their lunch.

In the lift back down, I was joined by a blond woman. She wore a tight grey skirt and jacket, and was holding a clipboard tight against her breast. 'I'm glad I'm not going down alone,' she said. 'This lift is so scary.'

'I'm glad I'm not the only one, too,' I said.

She walked off briskly when we reached the ground floor.

The restaurant was still packed. I went into the travel office next door. The blond woman was behind the desk. '*Desidera?*' she asked, as if she'd never seen me before. 'I'd like to enquire about trains to Rome this coming weekend,' I said, although I had no plans to travel.

'You need to buy a train ticket first, *signore*,' she said.

'That's not normally how it works,' I said, but felt too intimidated by her cold eyes to pursue the matter further.

On the metro back to my flat, I bumped into a British colleague. She'd only been in Milan for a few months, but her

Italian was coming on fast, and she always insisted on practising with me. As we began talking, an Italian man on the other side of the carriage stared at us, at first with incredulity and then with amusement at our British accents. I showed her the book of prose poems I'd bought.

'There's something magical about them,' she said, 'even if I don't really understand them.'

'I wrote that book,' the man declared, and now I recognised him as the Italian author I'd seen in the bookshop. He looked pleased with himself, but also a little miffed – perhaps because I hadn't bought his glossy new book, but this one instead.

VIK SHIRLEY

The Sheriff

I stuck my head out from under my rock and could see that everything had changed. Mrs. Maltby was now married to Mr. Shelton, Mr. Patrick to Mrs. Gray, Mrs Riley to Mrs Heeley, and so on. I had never been married, so it was depressing to think that these people had married twice, and I hadn't even got started, but, still, I went about my business. Although, my business wasn't what it was before either. I used to deal in fish, now all I could get my hands on was potatoes. I wondered if it might be time for me to get back under my rock, but it was then I met the sheriff. The sheriff was just how you'd imagine him, spurs, chewing tobacco, ten-gallon hat, mean look in his eyes. You should have seen how quick his draw was. So, with one last glance back at my rock, I took the plunge. The sheriff taught me how to shoot. I was "a natural", he told me, beaming. For the first time he was really looking at me, eyes penetrating deep into my soul. I was even better at arresting people, thus securing his interest further. He named me Deputy. We patrolled the town on horseback, frequently having shoot-outs at noon. We introduced daily hangings, which really brought the community together, and opened a string of saloons. We each took a can-can dancer as our lover. I learned to knit him chaps out of tumbleweed. We camped out in the wild, cooking beans, telling stories over a fire, sleeping under the stars. I missed my rock sometimes, and thought about it often, but the sheriff was my rock now, and I was never going back.

Spells

We came out from the bunker and there was nothing left.

It was just dust and milkmaids, that was it.

Oh, and tapestries. Plus, a form for the unemployment bureau and a few pens, but only green pens.

It wasn't much to start with, but we soldiered on.

Eventually we learned how to conjure food items and summoned ourselves some packet soup and fig rolls.

I perfected a spell for sawdust, so that if anyone learned how to conjure guinea pigs, we'd have something for their hutches, as long as someone learned how to conjure hutches.

Starting from scratch was tough, but it gave me the opportunity to put my past and associated record behind me, and no-one ever found out where my real skill set lay.

Lost in a Mansion

Miranda began to cry. It had been years since she'd been lost in a mansion. It must have been at the 2010 *Get Lost in a Mansion* competition, which she had very nearly won. She *had* won the 2009 one, which was an incredible experience, and why she had started to cry at the 2010 event, due to overwhelming memories. Unfortunately, this surge of emotion cost her the championship, someone with far less capacity than her for getting lost in mansion won, which was a huge blow. So, after much consideration, and wishing to retain some degree of dignity, she retired. Yet here she was getting lost in a mansion again. This time, no-one was here, there were no cameras, no *Get Lost in a Mansion* cheerleaders or crew. It was just her, getting lost in a mansion, crying. In the ballroom, the ghost of her family Shih Tzu appeared, licked her face, and whispered some words of encouragement, as it did when she was a child, just starting out in this whole getting lost in a mansion game. Some kind of training montage ensued, and she was finally able to get more lost than she had ever got before.

The Aliens

I came out from my cave and saw that there was a spaceship in the corner by some rocks and lots of aliens sat around crying. I liked it in my cave but felt these lil green beings could use someone to talk to. They looked awfully sad. So, I went over to have a chat with them. They told me that their spaceship had broken down and that they didn't know how to fix it and get home. I didn't know anything about spaceships, but I did know a little about comedy and even had a few minutes about aliens in my last stand-up routine. This had gone down very badly at my last comedy gig, so badly that it was what drove me to run away and live in my cave. But the aliens really loved it. I mean, they were belly laughing and everything. Not that they had bellies as such, but, anyway, they relaxed and cheered up. So much so that one of them had an idea about the mechanics of the space craft, leapt up and fixed it. I was sad to see them go and waved them off with tears in my eyes. I was about to go back to my cave when I heard the aliens' laughter in my head. I thought this was probably a sign that it was time to have another go at stand-up, and headed, whistling, into town.

LYDIA UNSWORTH

A Discovery: World's Nearest Island

The wedge of green space in the centre was narrow, little more than a misangled strip, a job begun while distracted, and the island smaller than I had envisaged after reading the plans laid out for it. The names it had already scrolled through, many based on its previous stages of life, like naming my baby Planula or Gamete. It was essentially a clutch of houses, held in a flowing vestibule and attached to the main landmass by a fine ligament. I cycled round it, the streets on one side leading to the water's edge like veins on a leaf, a small car park for the street at the extreme of every finger. One street on this side broke from the pattern and followed a section of the land's circumference. Though I had hoped to see where the island ended, what I saw from the first car park was the back gardens of the six or so boat owners who had bought up the houses nearest to the neck of the polyp, allowing them enjoy both the near-total privacy of the one-in one-out road system and the slightly shorter commute to the amenities beyond the cul-de-sac. At the belly of the island, a high-rise, as ever, balconies looking downriver, a bridge, a highway. The proximity and not-proximity of my own house just two streets away, following my line of sight. Back up the second side of the convex: a neat, twee world of benches, neighbours on doorsteps, and sweet detached bungalows with stripy cloud-trimmed canopies seen across the yacht-soaked water. Fifteen minutes in total. Including a small detour to avoid a dog.

Coral Reef, Bleached

What you see walking around, pushing a buggy, carrying a bag is perhaps a skeleton. That movement of fronds you witness as it rides its bicycle is just the wind harrying through its hairs and zips. People are not convinced that this is death, because it looks so wan and ordinary. Tired, as you say: distracted.

The distracted reef accumulates scarves and shawls, clumps of dust, stray threads or small ribbons cut from the shoulders of once-new clothing.

The current swirls and it looks beautiful, and so it is assumed she is still alive here.

Bubbles float from her open mouth. Small un-understood polyps, in hindsight integral to her animation.

Photographs over time make clear the recent alterations to its structure, how much space it used to cover, how once-occupied the waters. Parts of her personality vied with others, a deadlock of scabbling fists in miniature, a ward of synchronised baby legs, kicking at a shared worldrush to nothing.

Lightbulbs, pens, nappies, friendships, these are all things that run low without your noticing.

It is warmer here. The infrastructure is strong and punctual. I will sign at the bottom of any document that pertains to my administration. My devastation is complete.

The size of the forces on the first object equals the size of the force on the second object

The world that has grown out of my body is strong. Soon I will chop it down. I try to prepare it for this. Show it the new ground. The world says it is ready to find a new planet that sustains life. Of course, the world has no clue about anything beyond itself. It reflects the light we give. It does not know that certain plants require a certain type of nutrient to thrive. By Lake Como I pitched a tent on tarmac; how quickly the pegs bent. The next day, high in the Alps, I had little but my shorts on. Unfeasible to the prepared that there are those who would travel without consideration of electricity or of the altitude. I convince myself that opposition is good. My whole adulthood nothing more than the relief of that which once worked on me. And now, so obvious, my manipulation of the axe.

Homeward Bound; or The Curse of Not Being on the Island

Watership Down, The Incredible Journey, Planes Trains and Automobiles, The Land Before Time. John Candy aside, animals going on journeys were what I identified with as a child. The trials of spending time, the landscape shifting Faraway Tree-like. The best thing about having children is that you're bang in the eye as soon as you come to life. Similarly, anesthesia is my preferred way to die. Take me out when I'm not expecting it, the Irish goodbye. I want plotless novels, cut to the heart, scene-scene-scene-seen it. When I got a city-wide unlimited gym pass before all this I went twenty times a month at least, never in the same week to the same gym twice. Variation on a theme my noncommittal leitmotif. I want the moment the hill breaks. The thin-knee-hale of view reveal. And that hill in a range, i.e. peak peak peak peak. I'm not saying I'm faultless but we were given computers and told to repeat. The future was over then anyway; all the disappointed locks of hair fanned glum before the recently righteously bought council properties as ideals idled, easily glided into remaining us as child. I still want the same thing - topographical detail, movement, exposure. Friends at every station. One small rucksack. Progression, collection, brief moments of redemption. Sure we'll all go home for Christmas. Point. And click.

Biographical Notes

Sherman Alexie's most recent book is *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, a memoir.

Nin Andrews' most recent collection of poems, *The Last Orgasm*, was published by Etruscan Press in 2020.

Sally Ashton's most recent book of prose poems, *The Behaviour of Clocks*, takes a look at time through the frame of Einstein's thought experiments. sallyashton.com

Cassandra Atherton's most recent books are *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton UP, 2020), *Australian Anthology of Prose Poetry* (Melbourne UP, 2020) and *The Language in my Tongue: An Anthology of Australian and New Zealand Poetry* (MadHat Press, 2022), all co-authored with Paul Hetherington, and *Leftovers: Prose Poems* (Life Before Man, 2021).

Linda Black is Editor of *Long Poem Magazine*: longpoemmagazine.org.uk. A poet and a visual artist, she has published five collections, the most recent being *Then* (Shearsman Books 2021).

Peter Boyle is a Sydney-based poet and translator of poetry whose latest book is *Notes Towards the Dreambook of Endings*.

Gayelene Carbis's first book of poetry, *Anecdotal Evidence* (Five Islands Press, 2017) was Finalist – International Book Awards 2019 (US) and her second collection will be published by Puncher and Wattmann in September 2022.

Maxine Chernoff is the author of 17 books of poems, most recently *Under the Music: Collected Prose Poems* (MadHat Press, 2019)

Kim Chinquee's recent books are *Snowdog* (Ravenna Press, 2021), *Wetsuit* (Ravenna Press, 2020), and *Shot Girls* (Ravenna Press, 2019).

Shady Cosgrove's books include *What the Ground Can't Hold* (Picador) and *She Played Elvis* (Allen and Unwin), and her short works have appeared in *Best Australian Stories*, *Cordite*, *Overland*, *Antipodes*, *Southerly*, *takabe*, *Eunoia Review* and various Spineless Wonders collections. For more information, see shadycosgrove.com.au.

Chard deNiord is the author of 7 books of poetry, most recently *Interstate* and *In My Unknowing*. He served as poet laureate of Vermont from 2015 to 2019.

Karen Donovan is the author of *Planet Parable*, *Your Enzymes Are Calling the Ancients*, *Fugitive Red*, the chapbook *Exploded Assembly*, and a collection of illustrated short prose called *Aard-vark to Axolotl*.

Denise Duhamel's most recent book of poetry is *Second Story* (Pittsburgh, 2021).

Jamey Dunham is the author of *The Bible of Lost Pets* (Salt Modern Poets, 2009) and co-editor of *An Introduction to the Prose Poem* (Firewheel Editions, 2009) with poet Brian Clements.

Gerald Fleming's most recent book is *The Bastard and the Bishop*, prose poems from Hanging Loose Press, 2021.

Jeff Friedman is the author of eight books of poems and prose pieces, including *The Marksman*, *Floating Tales*, and *The Pretenders*.

Elisabeth Frost's books include *All of Us: Poems* (White Pine Press), *Bindle* (in collaboration with artist Dianne Kornberg, Ricochet Editions), and *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa).

Ray Gonzalez is the author of 15 books of poetry and teaches at the University of Minnesota.

Lucy Hamilton has published a pamphlet, *Sonnets for my Mother* (Hearing Eye, 2009), and two collections of prose poems: *Stalker* (Shearsman, 2012) shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and *Of Heads & Hearts* (Shearsman, 2018); she is working on a third prose poem collection.

Philip Hammial's thirty-fifth poetry collection was published in 2022.

Oz Hardwick is the author of nine collections of varying dimensions, most recently *Wolf Planet* (Hedgehog, 2020), Professor of Creative Writing at Leeds Trinity University, and a big fan of the comma,

Paul Hetherington has published 16 full-length collections of poetry and prose poetry, most recently *Her One Hundred and Seven Words* (MadHat Press, 2021), and various collaborative works with Cassandra Atherton, including *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton UP, 2020) and *Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry* (Melbourne UP, 2020).

Holly Iglesias is the author of three poetry collections—*Sleeping Things*, *Angles of Approach*, and *Souvenirs of a Shrunken World*—and a critical work, *Boxing Inside the Box: Women's Prose Poetry*.

Gary Jackson is the author of *origin story* (University of New Mexico, 2021) and *Missing You, Metropolis* (Graywolf, 2010), which received the 2009 Cave Canem Poetry Prize, and co-editor of *The Future of Black: Afrofuturism, Black Comics, and Superhero Poetry* (Blair, 2021).

Peter Johnson's most recent books, all from MadHat Press, are *Old Man Howling at the Moon* (prose poems); *A Cast-iron Aeroplane That Can Actually Fly: Commentaries from 80 American Contemporary American Poets on Their Prose Poetry* (ed.); *Truths, Falsehoods, and a Wee Bit of Honesty: A Short Primer on The Prose Poem with Selected Letters from Russell Edson* (essays); and *Shot: A Novel in Stories*.

Rodger Kamenetz's most recent books of prose poetry are *Dream Logic* (2020, PURH) and *Yonder* (2018, LavenderInk), and his best-known books of prose are *The Jew in the Lotus* (Harper 1994) and *The History of Last Night's Dream* (Harper 2007).

Christopher Kennedy's most recent book is *Clues from the Animal Kingdom* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 2018).

Mary A. Koncel has published three collections of prose poems: *Closer to Day* (Quale Press), *You Can Tell the Horse Anything* (Tupelo Press), and *The Last Blonde* (Hedgerow Books/Levellers Press).

Gerry LaFemina, the author of numerous books of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, the most recent being *Baby Steps in Doomsday Prepping* and *The Pursuit: a Meditation on Happiness* (Madville), teaches at Frostburg State University and serves as a mentor in the Carlow University MFA program.

Daniel Lawless's book *The Gun My Sister Killed Herself With* was published in 2018; he is the founder and editor of *Plume: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry*, Plume Editions, and the annual Plume Poetry anthologies.

Penelope Layland is a poet and editor whose most recent book is *Nigh* (Recent Work Press 2020).

Gian Lombardo's latest book of prose poetry is *Bricked Bats* (Quale Press, 2021).

Rupert M. Loydell is the editor of *Stride* magazine, a contributing editor to *International Times* and a widely published poet whose most recent poetry books are *Dear Mary* (Shearsman, 2017) and *A Confusion of Marys* (Shearsman, 2020).

Anna McDonald is a poet living in New York whose work was a finalist for the Poetry Society of America chapbook fellowship in 2020.

Kathleen McGookey's latest books are *Nineteen Letters* (BatCat Press, 2019) and *Instructions for My Imposter* (Press 53, 2019).

Christopher Merrill's recent books include *Flares* (prose poems, White Pine Press, 2021), "*The Million Dead, Too, Summ'd Up*": *Walt Whitman's Civil War Writings* (commentaries, with Ed Folsom, University of Iowa Press, 2021), and *Self-Portrait with Dogwood* (memoir, Trinity University Press, 2017).

Kate Middleton is the author of *Fire Season*, *Ephemeral Waters* and *Passage*.

Alyson Miller is a prose poet and a scholar from Australia, whose most recent collection of prose poetry, *Strange Creatures*, is published with Recent Work Press.

Robert Miltner is the author of *Hotel Utopia*, *Orpheus & Echo*, *And Your Bird Can Sing*, and *Ohio Apertures*.

Jane Monson is a Specialist Mentor at the University of Cambridge, editor of *British Prose Poetry: The Poems Without Lines* (Palgrave, 2018) and her third collection, *The Chalk Butterfly*, was out in May 2022, with Cinnamon Press.

Robert Perchan's latest book is *Last Notes from a Split Peninsula: Poems and Prose Poems* (UnCollected Press, 2021) – a steal at 128 pages for fifteen bucks.

Jane Lunin Perel's latest book is *Red Radio Heart* (White Pine Press).

Ian Seed's collections of prose poems include *The Underground Cabaret* (2020), *New York Hotel* (2018) (TLS Book of the Year), *Identity Papers* (2016), and *Makers of Empty Dreams* (2014), all from Shearsman Books.

Vik Shirley's books *Corpses* (Sublunary Editions), *The Continued Closure of the Blue Door* (HVTN Press), *Grotesquerie for the Apocalypse* (Beir Bua) and *Disrupted Blue and other poems on Polaroid* (Hesterglock) were published 2020–2021.

Bruce Smith is the author of six books of poems, most recently, *Spill*, and his *Devotions* was a finalist for the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the LA Times Book Award, and the winner of the William Carlos Williams Prize.

Lydia Unsworth's latest collections are *Some Murmur* (Beir Bua Press) and *Mortar* (Osmosis), and her new pamphlet, *Residue*, is out now with above/ground press.

Samuel Wagan Watson is a writer of Wanjaburra/German ancestry. In 2019 he was awarded the Patrick White Literary Prize.

Gary Young's most recent books are *That's What I Thought*, winner of the Lexi Rudnitsky Editor's Choice Award, Persea Books (2018), and *Precious Mirror* (White Pine Press, 2018), translations from the Japanese of Kobun Chino Otogawa.

