A personal history of home: an anthology

Pot in Pot / Lam Tung Pang

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The home that built us
by Aishwarya Jha

I lost my home and I never lived in it. I can't recall spending a single night there, not one uninterrupted stretch of twenty-four hours, but for twenty-eight years of my life, it was home to me. It was home to my mother, my uncle, my aunt, my grandparents, my great-uncle, my great-grandparents. It was home to various relatives who stayed over the years, whose names I never knew; to dogs, big and small, who lived and died there, their identities so inseparable from it that they became one with its soil; to a priceless Japanese screen, generations of tweed coats and an interstitial afternoon light that made time stand still.

If I were asked to describe my idea of a grand house, I wouldn't describe our home, but all my ideas of grandeur come from it. Knowingly and unknowingly, I have spent my life hankering after those tall ceilings, those rooms wrapped in graceful curves, those evenings capped with wine and cornices. The house was built in the fifties, when hope and large plots flooded the newly-independent capital, and the story of its purchase and construction was the stuff of family legend, involving a theatrical outburst from my great-grandmother, a woman who was born in a village in Bihar, married off at the age of eleven and travelled the world with her diplomat husband learning to be a *grand dame*. I never met her but my mother tells me I am like her, born, as I was, with an inexplicable (and unfulfilled) passion for Mercedes cars, for dazzling clothes and jewellery, draping myself in them with long fingers so like hers. She was called Babi. I remember staring at her photograph as a child, wondering disappointedly how Barbie could look like that.

I remember going over after school, gorging on *dosa* and chicken curry and *rasgullas* with my brother. I remember the smell of that special brand of basmati that enticed even me, the non-rice-eating traitor to the bloodline. I remember the grass of Lodhi Gardens still moist under my shoes, the Kwality's orange-bar still tinting my tongue, as I raced to Nana's bed to fulfil my daily promise to him to imbue it with "my smell". I remember playing on his chest, watching him inject insulin into his thigh, slide his feet into his black slippers. I remember fragrant *gajras* coiled around Nani's still-dark hair, the *hisaab* notebook filled with her inimitable handwriting, the glisten of the curtains she let me choose for the second-floor study.

Standing in the rooms whose memories outstripped mine, I remembered Maa's sparkling parties, with girls in shoulder pads and boys in bell bottoms grooving to Baccara; the old cook supervising her experiments in the kitchen, igniting a lifelong passion; the earnest admiration of suitors and their mothers, who dreamed wistfully of her accepting them. I remembered even the things I wasn't there for—such was the spell and benevolence of the house.

The home that built us by Aishwarya Jha (cont'd)

The memories weren't all happy. The house had quaked through towering scenes, witnessing sulphurous clashes of temper and personality, betrayals that sawed through relationships and silences more egregious than the harshest words. It was at the threshold of the garden that Nani fell, during my sixth birthday party, and it was within the house that Nana spent the last years of his life fading away, like a star that was already extinguished millions of light-years away. But the bad times carried as much weight as the good. They taught me that home is like a good relationship: comfortable, intimate and worn. Just as a relationship only feels real and true when it's taken a few knocks, when amity has been ballasted by acrimony, a house is only home when life has been lived there in all its messy, gory, pyrotechnic splendour. The house knew us better than anyone—better, sometimes, than we knew each other—and I couldn't help wondering, as we stepped out of its familiar embrace, what would happen to the parts of us that got left there.

We wanted to lose it. For nearly ten years, selling the house was our primary agenda, but it hung on like a comatose relative who wouldn't die. Every corner of the property spoke of glory lost: the chipped paint on the window frames, the overgrown hedges in the garden, the grody emptiness of the swimming pool. The curtains were drawn more often than not. The façade was dessicating slowly, like sand in an hourglass. I doubt Babi would have recognised it as the building she spent months overseeing in the heat, brick by brick, dream by dream. I doubt we would have wanted her to recognise it.

There were other houses too, other lost homes that existed tangentially to this one. My childhood home, where my mother, brother and I spent many cosy years filled with Christmas mornings, mangoes and lullabies on a rocking chair—years that I now know were the happiest of my life. There was Baba's Simla house, characterised by thumpable wooden floors and, across the street, Dachshund puppies whose nails kept catching between our sweaters. There was my other grandmother's home, small and yellow and pungent, where my father took his last breaths in solitude. There were other places: Planet M, with CDs that epitomised the future; the nameless restaurant selling kathi rolls that I can still taste; Maa's friend's house, where I was seriously informed by a white-haired charmer that "seven was a very special age". And there was another place, the one with glimpses of a wondrous land of Tomorrow, where we would grow up in the world of Hollywood movies and never relinquish our belief in magic. Perhaps that is the place I miss the most.

We tend to think of houses as containers, frames for the business of our lives. Objects to be traded. Dismembered, demolished, rebuilt. But what of the houses that predate us and outlive us? What of the ones that keep our secrets, their trusses supporting not just ceilings but security? We give them away, but they never give us away. We think they are part of our story, but what if we are merely part of theirs? They have their own trajectories and vicissitudes. They begin and they end. Their floors shake, their walls scar. They breathe. They live.

The home that built us by Aishwarya Jha (cont'd)

We had to sell it. It was practical and necessary, the only solution to disasters growing like pus in our branches. The disasters were averted. Life changed. I try not to ask myself whether it got better. We lost the house just before the pandemic, in the days leading up to the first lockdown. We lost Nana a few months later. Perhaps he simply stayed in the house, shuttered away with the grills and the grime and the lost epochs. Perhaps it was the only thing holding him together. Without it, he fell apart.

I remember how often we used to drive past it, gliding by on our way to Khan Market and other haunts. I used to watch it from the outside, the distance stretching across the road like a gullet. So distant and so familiar. Like the inhabitants. At times it seemed we had scarcely a thought in common. How strange were these relationships, I mused; our daily lives were completely disconnected, centred around other people and other activities. We hardly shared them at all. We shared only our expressions, our influences, our lesions. It wasn't understanding that bound us together—the seeds of that had rotted a long time ago. It was something else; something grave and visceral, which we knew nobody else would understand. We inhabited different worlds, but we belonged to the same one, and the house was its nucleus, the last remaining stronghold of our familial identity. We try not to drive past it now.

History usually gets the short end of the stick in India. It is a substance easily molded and diminished, discarded like the debris in our rivers. In many ways, the house was my link to history. I listened carefully for its sussurations between conversations, thrilled that some who trod our floors may have been born in the nineteenth century, lived through World Wars and waltzes, listened on their radios to a young Lata Mangeshkar and to news of abdications and coronations. It astonished me that within those rooms, my brother and I had watched TV with Baba, a man who wore bowler hats and negotiated with European powers for the release of their colonies, whose prayer meeting was attended by Atal Behari Vajpayee, one of the last statesmen of a new India that already seems archaic. It irks me beyond measure to think that if I have children, they will never know our home; they will never hear Nana's deep tones calling "*koi hai*?" or meet people who drank Vimto and used terms like boxwallah and club class, spending money in *annas* and *paisas*. They will never be able to comprehend a Delhi unmarred by high-rises, where we pleaded with the cable operator to screen better prints of newer movies, and played board games by candlelight to take our minds off the heat during endless power cuts. They will never know that world, that India, those ineffable textures that preoccupy me, that I am always writing about, no matter what I am writing.

I cannot say we are refugees; we took everything with us. But we left everything behind. I cannot say we were displaced; we chose to leave. But we wouldn't have left if we had a choice. The chaise longue, Persian carpets and seascapes adorn other spaces now, uprooted and ungainly. Nani arranges and rearranges them beautifully in her diminutive new apartment,

The home that built us by Aishwarya Jha (cont'd)

with an indefatigable deftness her eighty years haven't eroded. She's a fighter, a survivor. And yet, it doesn't fit right. Seeing her without him is as perturbing as seeing the contents without the house.

We are not the same without it. It is not the same without us. We made one last pilgrimage recently, visitors now, and found it waiting for us: bare, desolate, grey. The pandemic had scuppered the new owners' plans so it lay untouched for two years—untouched and uncared for. A shadow of what it once was. It is said that the neighbourhood was built atop a graveyard—I could see them clearly, the ghosts of us all, sheltered by the house, suspended somewhere between the dust, only rats and cockroaches for company. A thousand memories—this was where Nana's tennis trophies were kept, this was Maa's room when she was in college, is that a whiff of Nani's Shahnaz Hussain cream—and a thousand questions: did the house still feel like home to itself without us? Were we home for it? A thousand tonnes of guilt. How could we have abandoned it, sent it to the scaffold? It did nothing wrong. But it's too late now. The hoardings are up.

The house no longer contains us. The frame is gone. It is our turn now; we must contain it. We must carry it with us, along with Nana, Baba & Babi, Sasha & Teddy, Patch & Neelam, the old Fiat NE, the *ku-hu* of the koyals, the solemn thicket of the Golf Club, the continuum of our existence. After all, it was never a place to go to. It was where we came from, where we will always come from. It was family. And I will hope, in the land of Tomorrow, to find my yesterdays so we can meet again.

Aishwarya Jha is a writer, designer and entrepreneur from New Delhi, India. Her work has previously appeared in multiple literary journals, including Atticus Review, and her award-winning one-act plays have been performed in cities around the world, in addition to being taught at workshops. Her first novel will be published in 2024 and she is drafting her second one as part of the Asian Women Writers programme. When not writing or strategising, she can usually be found day-dreaming about lost eras and kowtowing to her army of dogs.

Blooming Deadly by Stella Harding

The Lawns man

Winter is the worst time in this job. I can't walk on the lawns; especially after a frost when each frigid blade of grass is fragile as a crystal shard. It's the only time of year I ever find myself watching the clock. The days are short; but even so, there's not enough to do outside.

The gardeners' room is cold when I arrive first thing. I plug in an old radiator but it doesn't give out much heat. Then I make myself a mug of coffee and read the paper until the housekeeper comes at nine. That's my cue to check the temperature in the glasshouse where the tender plants are overwintered. It's warmer in there than in the gardeners' room.

I walk down the stone path separating the lavender border from the box parterre. The gnarled old lavenders sprout an unkempt stubble of brittle stems. If it was up to me they would have been cut back harder after flowering. Trimming the lavender and pruning the climbing roses is one of Tom's jobs. A woman tends the flower borders.

My job is lawns, hedges and paths; more than enough work in summer. Each year in June, on Derby Day, I make a start on the parterre. I cut it the old-fashioned way, using hand shears. Mr Haversham, the owner, can't bear the sound of power tools. That suits me. It takes four weeks to clip the box to a meticulous, crisp finish. I mark the height with twine pulled taut between bamboo canes — checking it with a spirit level. Then I lay down wide strips of coarse hessian to catch the clippings which I take to the compost heap. I often think one could dispose of a body in a compost heap. The heat and micro-organisms would speed up decomposition, so by the time the heap was ready to be turned only the bones would remain.

That's another of Tom's jobs; turning the compost heap. The woman did it one January when he was off sick. It could have waited until he'd recovered but she said it kept her busy when there was not enough to do in the borders. That's her; a busy-body, sticking her nose into other people's jobs. I've learned to pace myself. I let each job, however small, fill the time available: like sharpening the tools; the knives, secateurs, scythes, shears and loppers. I save these indoor jobs for rainy days. The woman keeps dry by washing plant pots in the greenhouse sink in readiness for spring sowing. I keep out of her way.

I like my own company; always have. This garden is my sanctuary. Immured inside its high brick walls I can forget the outside world with all its messy, mindless chatter.

Blooming Deadly
by Stella Harding (cont'd)

The Plantswoman

My spirits lift as I emerge from the gloom of the low beamed gardeners' room into the blue dome of a spring morning. Making my way to the shrubbery with a trug full of hand-tools I wave a greeting to Harry who is giving the south lawn its first cut of the season; mower blades set low to let the sunlight reach the tender new shoots. He doesn't respond: engrossed in ruminations about scarification I dare say.

I love spring. It's when my thoughts turn to murder. Metaphorically speaking of course; I mean exterminating weeds and culling spavined seedlings, though there is no shortage of ways and means of committing actual homicide. This garden is a pharmacopoeia of toxic plants. In the shrubbery the first leaves of Monkshood are thrusting through the warming soil. Such a sinister looking plant; I can't imagine anyone would be silly enough to eat it. The cowled flower heads are the same malignant blue as a Victorian poison bottle, but all parts of the plant are deadly. Not a kind way to kill. It contains a neurotoxin more powerful than cyanide and harder to detect. A victim would die of paralysis and asphyxiation within an hour. We grow it interlaced with the deadly white foxglove. Its ghostly spires merely hint at its connection with the after life. I have suggested to Mr Haversham that we label all the poisonous plants, but his view is that a rash of warning signs would clash horribly with the garden's understated colour palette. I am constantly reminded that my own taste for cheerful colour is nothing short of 'suburban' — the very worst epithet one could bestow upon a plant. Instead, I am instructed to search out the pallid, the wan, the insipid, the insignificant. A great favourite of Mr Haversham was a tiny brown viola called 'Irish Molly'; its muddy face almost invisible against the surrounding soil. I once trod on Molly accidentally when weeding the summer-house border. Her neck snapped and her petals were bruised beyond revival before I realised, so I dug her up and buried her in the compost heap. Mr Haversham asks after the plant every spring though I have explained that it's a temperamental, short-lived variety.

Mr Haversham does prefer me to use the precise Latin nomenclature though I find the old names so much more evocative: bleeding hearts, love-lies-bleeding, mourning widow, women's bane, wound wort, heartsease, self heal, Miss Wilmot's ghost — so many broken hearts, so much bad blood, so many old wounds, so much hurt to heal.

Nothing lasts forever. Plants die and replacements fill their place. Each death is an opportunity for renewal. There are many ghosts wandering the pathways of this high-walled garden, not all of them benign.

Blooming Deadly
by Stella Harding (cont'd)

The Gardener's Boy

I'm not a trained gardener. I've learned everything on the job. I was fourteen when I came looking for a summer job. That was soon after Mr Haversham inherited the house from his aunt. The garden had been neglected for years and I spent the whole summer stripped to the waist digging out tangles of brambles and bindweed, rooting out sycamore saplings and making bonfires. Gradually the bones of the old garden started to emerge: cracked stone paths, buckled red-brick walls dividing the different levels, even fallen statues toppled from their plinths — their moss-encrusted bodies tightly bound with ivy like mummified corpses.

For a couple of years Mr Haversham employed a head gardener and a team of restorers to repair the paths and build the outer walls even higher to blot out the new housing development next door. As soon as I was sixteen, he took me on as a full-time under-gardener. The head gardener didn't stay long. He left suddenly and there were rumours he and Mr Haversham had quarrelled over the planting scheme for the shrubbery. I wasn't sorry to see him go. He used to call to me 'the gardener's boy' behind my back. I think he was jealous of the way Mr Haversham trusted my gardening instincts and let me do things my own way.

One of my first jobs was was to plant and train the climbing roses that now festoon the high walls. Don't ask me their names; I've got a good head for heights but I admit I'm not a plantsman and have never managed to learn all the Latin names. Mr Haversham doesn't quite trust me enough to choose varieties; I might order the wrong shade of flower. He leaves that to Sally who works on the borders, she's got an encyclopaedic memory for plant names. I'm in charge of all the pruning, but the vegetable garden is my baby. I've laid it out in raised beds intersected by herringbone brick paths, with vegetables, fruit, herbs and a few edible flowers all mixed in together. We are self-sufficient now in salad crops and soft fruit for summer puddings and jam making. The mulberry tree in the centre of the vegetable garden is almost too prolific. Every August it rains its ripe blood-red fruits onto the lettuces below before I get the chance to harvest them. It looks like a massacre has taken place. Next year I'll grow beetroot in that spot instead; the rivulets of juice won't show against the purple veins of the beet leaves.

Everything grows so luxuriantly in the deep soil enriched with plenty of home-made compost. I'm very proud of the double compost heaps that I designed myself. I have suggested to Mr Haversham that we could build an even larger composting area by digging up the lower part of the south lawn. The lawns are a lot of work for Harry now that he's getting older. Clipping the box parterre is more than enough work for him in summer. I would give him a hand but it's my busiest time in the veggie garden what with all the pest and disease control. Mr Haversham won't eat anything that shows signs of blight or blemish. He's very fastidious about his food.

I have no plans to leave the garden at the moment. I'm not a boy anymore and though I would like to become a head gardener myself one day there are not many employers who would take on someone without qualifications. It does get lonely here at times. Harry isn't one for workplace banter while Sally is happiest talking to her flowers. I've been here so long it's hard to imagine working anywhere else. I would miss the walls. There is something comforting about the sense of enclosure that is more of an embrace.

Blooming Deadly by Stella Harding (cont'd)

The Twilight Gardener

I do like to sit and observe the gardeners at work. From the oriel window in my study on the second floor of the house I have a view over the whole garden. The housekeeper serves tea at four o'clock just as the autumn shadows of flowers, foliage and tendrils lengthen into deep lilac arabesques against the high brick walls.

Sally is in the cutting garden dead-heading the last of the dahlias. Not all plants die well. The first frosts will soon turn their foliage to blackened widow's weeds. One of their number will have to be replaced I fear. I find it's bright colouring intolerably coarse.

My late wife, Sarah, delighted in filling the house with colourful flower arrangements. She was always happiest gathering posies of spring flowers from the borders and huge sprays of scented blossom from the shrubbery. In her later stages of cancer when she was nursed at home, Sarah asked me to pick for her a vase of Monkshood — self heal was the other name she called it, or was that something else - the herb she liked to eat raw in salads? That's the problem with those common plant names, so imprecise, so confusing.

I can see that Tom is harvesting the Doyenne du Comice pears from the espaliers on the south-facing wall of the vegetable garden. I will savour their honeyed flavour with a sliver of Stilton and a glass of port after Sunday lunch. There are far too many pears for my own consumption; so many go to waste. Our only child, Thomas, loved to climb to the top of the old pear tree when he came home for school holidays. One summer, when he was just sixteen, he fell from the highest branch and broke his neck — he died instantly.

I ordered the tree to be cut down but Sarah insisted on planting a rambling rose to scramble up through its branches as he had done. I thought it a mark of remembrance but it proved to be her act of revenge. The strength and vigour of the rose slowly strangled the tree in a thorny embrace.

Harry is painstakingly raking fallen leaves from the south lawn. He draws them up into a series of glowing mounds of chestnut, russet, copper and amber, before filling a wheelbarrow and trundling them off to the composting area to be rotted down into leaf mould. My wife liked to call me Harry though everyone else knew me as Henry Haversham.

I rarely go out into the garden during daylight. I don't like to disturb the gardeners. Twilight is my time; when everyone has gone and I have the garden to myself. My wife did not appreciate my predilection for pale flowering plants, she thought it the worst kind of garden snobbery, but twilight is when they glow and emit their intoxicating scents to attract night-flying pollinators.

Before I retired I liked to potter in the greenhouse after a long day in the city. The night-blooming cereus flowered there last night. I've been waiting for its gradually engorging flower head to open. For a single night each year it blooms by the light of a full moon; parting its silken outer petals to reveal the sexual organ deep within. Entranced by the spectacle I was reminded of Marilyn Monroe standing over a New York subway grille, the skirt of her white dress billowing around her thighs to the delight of onlookers. By morning the moonlight flower is dead; the withered corpse of a once glamorous diva litters the terracotta tiles of the greenhouse floor. No doubt Sally has already consigned it to the compost heap.

Blooming Deadly
by Stella Harding (cont'd)

I do not know what will happen to this garden and its ghosts when I am gone. There is no one for me to leave it to. Few will even know of its existence. I had the walls built high to shut out the prying eyes of the world beyond, not realising I had created a place of internment. Now, in this season of decay and dying light I must cleave to the comfort that we gardeners have left the soil in good heart. Nature will take its course.

Stella Harding is relatively new to creative writing. She is a visual artist who, in addition to her studio practice, spent several years teaching creative basketry at Morley College London. As a life long passionate gardener, growing and harvesting a wide range of plant materials for use in basketry was central to her creative practice and her teaching. Stella recently left London to return to her hometown of Sheffield where she now volunteers at a community garden and is in the process of making a new garden at home. Nurturing plants is vital to her sense of homecoming and rooting herself in the local community.

'Pioneers'
by Aiden Heung

When he was a young man
my father's father went into the green
mountains on a blue
bus with a black
backpack, inside a fold of yellow
paper chopped in red,
as if his life had been proofread and edited,
a puddle of ink, skeins of numbers.

He gave it to the bureau head, who archived
it with another three hundred documents.

Three hundred men back then,
some still boys, some bent like the trees
they'd been sent to fell on the plateau,
where their lungs crashed in thin air.

My father's father asked where he'd be sent
for the job. The bureau head grinned
and gave him another bus ticket,
gray as the day was gray
on the morning of 1973.

More people to come; more
would be coffined in silence—
he marched on.

'Full Moon Ghazal'
by Aiden Heung

To the moon that hangs old, let's drink,
now everything pales like snow; drink

to this whitened hour firmly brimming
our cups. Raise it high, this drink

of upturned soil, of loaned water, the best
of this land; my grandfather's drink,

when he halted his plowshare and stared,
the dawn brewing inside the drink.

One day, field-bent and cold, he
wandered elemental, like his drink,

or his land, leaving the taste of wheat
and sorghum locked in the drink

to my father, who passed it on to me
the day I was born. A drop of our drink

he placed on my head, unraveling a river
from the touch, one that'd come to drink

away bones and ashes, and returned,
from years ago, a fleeting chill of a drink

carried by calloused hands— my hands
tremble like earth under iron blades but drink

with me, to the moon, to those who waded
into night, to those who follow. Drink!

(He/They) is a Chinese poet born in a Tibetan Autonomous Town, currently living in Shanghai. He is a Tongji University graduate. His poems written in English have appeared in *The Australian Poetry Journal*, *The Missouri Review*, *Orison Anthology*, *Parentheses*, *Crazyhorse*, *Black Warrior Review* among other places. He also translates poetry from Chinese to English, his translations were recently published in *Columbia Journal and Cordite Poetry Review*.

Time Travel to Moon Festival by Mukahang Limbu

After Sharon Olds

i have learned to go back
walk around feeling walls,
my forehead wobbling
with bumps, and find that moon
so close so large next to the roof,
where we've left
our bed. it is hot,

the pale pink bricks
too warm to step
on. i think we forget
it ever rained, but the moss

Mukahang Limbu: Mukahang Limbu is a Nepalese writer based in Oxford. A 3-time Foyle Young Poet, and winner of the Outspoken prize, longlisted in the National Poetry Competition, and commended in the Forwards, his debut pamphlet Mother of Flip-flops was published with Outspoken this year.

Some Strangers We Know Better Than Others by Jimin Kang

We only met because the stranger resembled someone I knew before I arrived in this country. His nose, really, was what reminded me: long and curving just above the upper lip, where I used to wipe the small, crystal-drop beginnings of a sniffle on a winter's day in Hong Kong. Hong Kong, where the winters are milder, warmer, like the inside of a cupped palm surrounded by skin that, exposed to wind, newly breaks; breaks in the way that England does, sometimes, when I enter a pub and remember how impossible it is to leave a city I cannot forget. Hello, I said, to the stranger with the nose, have we met? What I remember—or rather, cannot forget—was that his eyes were a brownish black and not a blackish brown like I'd hoped. I'd hoped for many other things besides: that the stranger would carry a blue penknife in his left pocket, a cheap nylon handkerchief in the right, and that he would recognize me immediately and ask me where I'd been. The stranger turned around. Then he pulled his hands out of his pockets and waved them frantically in the air, as if we were in a film. Where have you been? he yelled. I jumped. He raised his eyebrows. Then we laughed because it was a joke, of course, we were strangers, we had never expected to see one another at all. I held out my hand and said my name and told the stranger what I was doing in the city we were in, and he did the same. To be honest, I do not remember his name. But I do remember the way he repeated mine as if he had said it all his life. Cantonese? The stranger asked. Then, when I nodded, Hong Kong? I nodded again, this time elated, or tremendously sad, I could not tell which, they both have the same chest-rising, stomach-falling feeling. I used to live there, he continued, for work. The stranger was some sort of finance-man, not the journalist type as I'd thought, and as I pictured him typing away at his high-powered computer, I found I could not visualise him in anything but the coat he wore at the bar. It was a nice coat of a light, downy brown, the colour of Vitasoy, the drink I used to share with the other version of him with the blackish brown eyes and the sniffle in the nose. We would go to the 7/11 and reach into the icebox with the horizontally sliding door, where instead of ice there would be hot water and a dozen clinking bottles of soy milk that we would take turns sipping on a bench in Victoria Park. Would the bench still be there? I thought. I thought of the park, the Vitasoy, the green-orange lights of the 7/11, the nose. I asked the stranger if he knew what Vitasoy was. Vitasoy? He repeated, and then he laughed, a deep, thunderous sound, not the gentle and tinkling one I'd anticipated. I haven't heard someone say that in a while. I wanted to say that I hadn't heard someone say they hadn't heard about Vitasoy in a while, but I didn't, I just held onto whatever this man would say next. You can find it at Sainsbury's, you know, is what he said next. And I'm sure you've been there already. As if he knew that I had known all along. That I had just needed an excuse for him to know I was not the cliché I appeared to be, walking up to him at the bar, saying have we met? as if we were in some film and I were incredulous, incredulous not because of the coincidence, but because I was unwilling

Some Strangers We Know Better Than Others by Jimin Kang (cont'd)

to believe that he was someone other than who I wanted him to be. But then he said something I didn't expect. And what I didn't expect was that he would say, what you can't find in Sainsbury's, however, is Bonaqua. Or were you more of a Watson's fan? He was talking about brands of bottled water, also at 7/11, except in the tall fridges with the vertical doors you pulled, not slid, to open. There is nothing more practical than a bottle of Watson's water, I replied, and he understood, and we spent a while discussing the way a friend could use the smooth, cone-shaped cap as a cup if you were drinking water together. Always together. As if you would never drink a bottle of Watson's water on your own.

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Jimin Kang was born in South Korea, grew up in Hong Kong, Kang lived in Brazil and the United States before starting graduate study at the University of Oxford, where she is reading for a master's in Nature, Society & Environmental Governance. She is the general editor at *The Oxonian Review.*

Bee Swarm / Astra Papachristodoulou

Astra Papachristodoulou is a PhD researcher and tutor at the University of Surrey with focus on sculptural poetics in the Anthropocene. She is the author and editor of several books and poetry anthologies, and works have appeared in Ambit, Berkeley Poetry Review and Bee Craft. Astra is the founder of 'Poem Atlas'. Her work has been widely exhibited including the Poetry Café and Kew Gardens.

Calling Home
by Mary Jean Chan

after Anne Carson

While talking to your mother, you keep your fingers busy, your mind elsewhere. Her voice flows through your soul like air. You steady your voice, but she knows to ask about the tightness in your throat. After all that has happened, have you finally forgiven each other? The child asks: how long will it feel like burning. Your mother wants to know what you had for lunch, tells you what she ate for dinner. This mutual exchange of images. You ask her to turn on her camera so you can see her, knowing she will refuse. Another day, she says. How to tell her that after decades on earth, you should be able to know each other. That what children want is for their parents to see them, as they already are. Instead, you are sent photos of yourself: an eight-year-old in a beige dress at a wedding, an awkward teenager dressed for the opera in Milan on your first trip to Europe. How to tell her: none of those versions fit anymore. Your partner walks into the room. You are reminded that you cannot change those you love most, your voice blue in the violet hour.

First published in *Poetry Review*, 111.1 (2021)

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Mary Jean Chan is the author of *Flèche*, which won the 2019 Costa Poetry Award and was shortlisted in 2020 for the International Dylan Thomas Prize, the John Pollard Foundation International Poetry Prize, the Jhalak Prize and the Seamus Heaney First Collection Poetry Prize. In 2021, *Flèche* was a Lambda Literary Award Finalist. Chan is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Oxford Brookes University and a supervisor on the MSt in Creative Writing at the University of Oxford. They co-edited *100 Queer Poems* (Vintage) with Andrew McMillan. Chan's next collection, *Bright Fear*, is forthcoming from Faber & Faber in 2023. They currently live in Oxford.

An excerpt from 'The Child in the Photograph' by Elleke Boehmer

From Africa is how they introduce me,' Luanda tells her mother on her first trunk-call home. 'Isn't it funny, Ma? Just *from Africa.* Can you believe...?'

A crackle zaps her mother's reply.

After the Angolan port-city, Luanda tells her fellow Masters students in Development. Yes, that's my name. But Angola's not my country. See if you can guess my country. For starters, it's landlocked and dry and farther south than the Sahara. Getting warmer? Luanda laughs. My country also has diamonds. That's a dead giveaway. What d'you call yourselves, *Development* students? My country has loads of diamonds.

You tell them,' her mother says down a suddenly clear phone line. 'Your country's brightest diamond. Easily. Brighter than any star.'

Luanda shuts her eyes. Her mother's voice is as close as if she were right here beside her in the college phone booth. She pictures her there in the living-room at home, her big thighs spread across the fake-leather easy-chair beside the TV. She sees the black plastic mouthpiece wedged between her cheek and her shoulder in that clever way of hers, like the PA she is. She sees her red-painted fingernails twisting around the black telephone cord.

On the wall across from her mother are her own framed certificates. Luanda pictures them clearly: the certificates arranged on the wall in two columns, her university medals and honours and essay prizes, the rungs of the long ladder she has climbed to get to this ancient stone college with its single shabby telephone booth and muddy McDonald's wrappings thick on the floor. She sees the gold-embossed lettering on the certificates catch the horizontal light of the setting sun.

'Nothing short of a fancy sundial,' her mother's boyfriend Pa once mock-scolded. 'Look, the letters even cast a shadow.' '

'Proud of her,' her mother staunchly said.

A pink-and-white hand beats against the glass of the phone-booth door. The glass is cloudy with condensation.

Luanda can't see the body behind the hand.

' Can hardly believe it, being here,' she yells over another squall of static.

'The other students can't believe it either. I mean, *me* being *here*. When I walk into a room, they stop talking, they all stare.'

' So you're educating them. No matter how ancient and clever, they have something to learn.'

Luanda laughs at her mother's joke, if it was a joke. She laughs the open-mouthed cawing laugh that she shares with her mother. Ha-ha-ha it goes, rasping to a close. Some days even Nana can't tell their laughs apart. 'I must go, Ma.'

From *To the Volcano And Other Stories* (Myriad Editions, 2019) To read the story, click here

Elleke Boehmer was born in Durban, South Africa and lives in Oxford, UK. She is the author of five novels including *Screens against the Sky* (shortlisted for the David Higham Prize), *Bloodlines* (shortlisted for the Sanlam Prize), *Nile Baby*, and *The Shouting in the Dark* (winner of the Olive Schreiner Award for Prose and longlisted for the Sunday Times prize). She is Professor of World Literature in English at the University of Oxford. *To The Volcano* and Other Stories (Myriad Editions), is her second collection of short stories.

Mother Sea
by Angeliki Ampelogianni

We begin no map no guide no option. Only to head out without compass.

On the headland of the little birches by the boundary river. Into a white, wide open field. Chalky country. A small wood with an Anglo-Saxon church. Crossed a ferny brow through gardens into the field of new hay. A grove of trees with a Celtic monk holding a flaming torch, past a Frenchman, knapsack on his back, muttering in old English. I stepped off their map, followed the railway lines past the station, up to the asylum on the green downs, then down. Down into a narrow way and through a marshy meadow where the dill grew. Passed the Well of the Britons, there between two small groves of trees and onto a gently rolling glen outside a village among the hills. Sharp right past the inn, 'the brave friend' and onto the green settlement. Beyond, the dark stream.

- *are you following me?* – Birkenhead, the Mersey, start at Whitfield St, go to Woodchurch and then straight over Ferny Brow Gardens and turn right along New Hay, into Grove Road - *am I going too fast?* - then right toward St Aidan's Terrace, right turn into Tollemache - *tolly-mash* – over Station St, left up to Netherne Lane, past Commercial Way, left into through East Dulwich Grove and Camberwell Grove - *You missed that?* - left into East Dulwich Grove and Camberwell Grove and left to Glengall Rd. Sharp right onto Whatman Rd, right into Comerford - *that's Com-er-ford* - sharp right into Greenwich High Road and then right again into Douglas Way - *Here, if it helps, let me draw the way. Do you have a pen? Paper?*

But a map is not a place. And not what got me here. And there is no map beyond the black water but a way still to go..

Angie Amperiogianni is a Greek poet based in Oxford. She holds a BA in English Literature from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and a MA in Creative Writing from Oxford Brookes University. Her poems and translations have appeared in *The Kindling Journal*, *Harana Poetry*, *Porridge Magazine* and *Poetry London* among others. Angeliki also works as an Early Years Teacher and Preschool Room Leader at a local nursery. She is the winner of the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition.

Homecoming
Louise McStravick

The house smelled musty, forgotten. When Nicole concentrated, she could still smell cigarettes mingled with sandalwood incense. The brown leather of the recliner chair chilled her exposed skin; she saw her mother's legs dangling like a rag doll. Nicole closed her eyes as if that would make the upcoming funeral dissipate like the smoke she'd never thought she would miss.

'Don't you think you should sell the house; we could start somewhere fresh?' Ben, her husband said. His nose crinkled in the way it did when he was worried; she would usually find it cute.

''How could you say that? This is my home; I grew up here,' She said, stepping back into the doorway.

Nicole had meant to visit, but work was busy and weekends passed by as soon as they started. She called but was always multi-tasking: watching T.V, getting the hoover out, drying her hair. It wasn't supposed to end so abruptly, she thought she'd have had some notice, a warning: something terminal.

When Nicole did find the time, she treated it like an appointment. Her mother always wanted to talk about the past. Whereas, Nicole had decided, many years before, to treat the past the same way as she did old photos, shut away in a plastic bag, at the bottom of her wardrobe.

What about our home? Come back to the flat tonight, and we can sort things together. There's no rush, you don't need to do this alone.'

His concern made her look down at her feet like a child.

'There are some things I have to do. Just go. I'll be fine. I'll see you tomorrow,' she said, neglecting to kiss him goodbye. He hesitated and then turned away, glancing back at the closing door.

Her mother's bed was made, the old-fashioned floral sheets pulled tight and smoothed of creases like in a hotel. Nicole stroked the cold, smooth fabric. How did she get it so neat?

As she pulled the sheets up to her chin, she was reminded of when she was a teenager and would wake up with a feeling on her chest like someone was sitting on top of her, holding her arms down so she didn't have enough air to scream. She would sneak into her mother's room and get into bed, curled up at the edge so as not to wake her. Her mother would sprawl out in varying directions: mouth wide open, sucking in air like a vacuum. The sound would coax Nicole to sleep like a lullaby.

She made herself as small as possible as if her mother was snoring next to her. The depth of the silence was threatening, her breathing interrupted it like a stone hitting the bottom of a well. The house groaned as she lay awake, unused to her presence. When she woke in the morning, it was to the image of her mother lighting up, telling her to move back into her own bed. The thought prompted her to jump up, out of her half-sleep and get on with things; still dressed in her mother's polka dot pyjama set. There was much to do.

Downstairs was the way mother had left it, an exhibition of her life. The flat-screen TV she spent most of her time in front of, exhausting the true-crime documentaries; the scratched dining table whose only use was to house an empty fruit bowl; the ashtray on the coffee table still populated with half-finished cigarettes...

Nicole picked one of them out of the ashtray, held it under her nose and closed her eyes as she inhaled. She pictured her mother's enlarged veins, green and bulging under the thinned skin of her hands, like rivers filled with detritus.

She'd imagined smoking would have killed her mother in the end. They'd argued about it. Perhaps it did. She opened one of the coffee table drawers and pulled out a half-filled box of knock-off cigarettes and the same metal lighter her mother had used since Nicole was a child.

Gas perfumed the air. 'Come on,' she said, shaking the lighter, trying again. She inhaled the first puff deeply enough to make her lungs and throat burn. They tasted cheap. The last time Nicole smoked was when she celebrated her graduation, she had quit when university had finished After four or five puffs Nicole pushed the cigarette into the ashtray half-finished. She took a small piece of torn paper out of the open drawer and read out loud, "Eggs, carrots, potatoes, pasties, spring greens, lottery..." Always the same. Why had her mother needed to write it in a list? Nicole paused, turning the creased paper between her thumb and forefinger.

The sun pushed through the gap in the curtains, the smoke dancing in the glow. She pulled them open, her eyes focusing on the unkempt back garden. When had it become so overgrown? Her mother had always taken pride in her garden. The immaculate lawn was always bordered with carefully curated explosions of colour. Growing up, Nicole and her sister were never allowed to play there.

Now the garden was unrecognisable. The grass was tall, overgrown like an unloved field, swallowed by weeds. She could see the rosebush, hunched over as if sorry for itself. Her mom had loved those roses.

A sad looking used cat bowl sat just outside of the back door. Her mother hadn't kept any pets because of her allergies. The neighbourhood cats had learned not to come near the door for fear of being attacked by a broom handle. Hadn't they? When was the last time Nicole had visited?

She turned away. There was so much to do. She took the stairs slow, each step weighed with equal importance. Her hands trailing the Anaglypta wallpaper.

She grabbed the bottom of the single bed and pulled until it was against the right wall.

Where it was supposed to be. She moved the off-white bookcase to the end of the bed.

There were boxes stacked against the far wall filled with the books from her childhood to her early 20s. She found what she wanted in the box at the bottom labelled: Nicole 9T6. The other boxes fell as she dragged it from under them. The box smelled like one of the old charity shops on the high street. Yellowed copies of Enid Blyton, Nancy Drew. The characters from those books were so far away from her childhood. She would live vicariously through them, eat midnight snacks in a boarding school, solve mysteries in the elusive countryside.

Nicole held an ancient copy of Alice in Wonderland in her hands and sniffed the pages out of habit. She opened the cover. The message in ornate curled lettering read, Francis, happy birthday, with love, your mum 1956. Her fingers traced the letters, trying to find the indents, the love pressed into the pages; finding none.

She made her single bed with an old duvet cover printed with illustrations of rabbits and arranged her teddy bears on top, so they were standing to attention with their backs to the wall. Next, she bear-hugged her old TV and heaved it on top of the bookcase, followed by the VHS player. She lined up her troll collection with their flame-like hair and stretched smiles so that they were standing on top of the VHS player like they used to. An ex's dad had told her she looked like a troll; it was her hair. There was no resemblance now, she'd learned to tame her hair with straighteners. Nicole opened the box with the years of her diaries in them. She picked up the diary with the bear holding a bouquet of flowers on the front, the paper inside was pink and fragranced. The pages still held their scent, sweet and sickly. She remembered sitting on the floor in her room- frantically documenting as the tears fell- how her sister had stolen her diary only to read it out loud in front of her friends at a sleepover. After grabbing the diary back Nicole had locked herself in her room away from everyone. Her mom knocked on her door to ask if she was OK, and she'd screamed at her to leave her alone. The memory of it held her there, the heaviness in her chest more pronounced.

She took out the older diaries covered in graffiti; exercise books stolen from school covered in scribbled song lyrics. She laughed out loud as she opened it to a poem called Friendshit. She shook her head, 'What was I thinking?'

She read through the pages entranced. The names of people she'd kissed, people she fancied or thought were cool, people who she couldn't picture not even one feature. The thought of her younger self locked in her room, heavy metal music turned abrasively loud, writing about these people made Nicole pause. In those years of her life, she had shut the door on her family, preferring people she now couldn't picture. For a moment she imagined having her own daughter, her like her mom, knocking on the door, trying to understand.

'Who were all these people?'

Nicole couldn't remember any of them, except for Claire, one of her oldest friends. When was the last time they'd spoken? Claire had faded out of Nicole's life when

she'd got married, or was it the other way round? She took out her phone, scrolled through her contacts.

There was no Claire in her phone, no empty space where she had been.

She waded deeper into the box. Underneath the dog-eared notebooks were posters with most of the corners ripped off. She took them out and laid them on the floor. The cheesy pop posters she smothered her walls in as a pre-teen were discarded like a ritual in her teenage years. The posters that survived were from the years when she discovered music as an outlet to all the unexplainable rage. Those were the years she locked herself in there.

Nicole's threw her diaries and posters back into the box and pushed her back against it until it was out of her bedroom door. Her arms hung, limp, heavier. She shut the door and pushed the bolt lock over as far as it would go.

Her body could go no further; she lifted the duvet and climbed in, then switched the TV on, staring at the screen fizzing black and white until it bled into the room. She pressed play on the VHS and grabbed hold of the yellow teddy bear with one eye. They'd named it Thomas. Her sister would throw the bear at the ceiling and she would have to catch it, then she would do the same. The game was too easy but they made it a competitive sport.

Nicole hugged Thomas to her chest. The screen faded as her eyes dropped to the sound of the title sequence of Buffy the Vampire Slayer. As she was drifting off, she caught the warming lilt of her mom's faraway Geordie accent,

'Nicole, time for dinner!'

She woke to the darkening room; confused, shivering. Where was she? Her eyes adjusted to the frozen smiles of the wide-eyed trolls.

Before she had time to think about anything, the tears came as if through a ruptured pipe; and for the first time since the news, she sobbed until she was gasping for breath, her chest lightening, her limbs less effort to lift. The vibration of her phone on the bedside table interrupted her sobs. She picked it up without looking.

'Nicole are you alright?' Ben's voice said.

'I'm fine... I'm coming home,' She said, stifling sobs.

As she turned the key in the lock, she tried to remember the last time she had done so, or the time before that, or even the time before that. She rested her hand on the plastic doorframe and exhaled her goodbye.

Louise is a writer, poet and educator based in Birmingham, UK. Her writing is mostly concerned with finding the extraordinary in the ordinary. Recent work has appeared in: Popshot, Ink Sweat & Tears, Dear Damsels, Aphelion, Microfiction Mondays and Porridge Mag. Her poetry collection: How to Make Curry Goat, is out now with Fly on the Wall Press.

Songs for Ibba

Departures
by Matt Bryden

Ibba Girls School, Western Equatoria State

I heard one girl burst into tears
when she saw the showers;
and after she learned the class was full

another slept overnight in the hallway,
her father having trekked with her
three days across the land.

In the village, they saw staff from the school
astride bikes, precarious at first
before they became fluent.

Would walk on fourteen kilometres to Maridi
to man a one-mango market stall.
Now, departures are painful.

Billet-doux are passed between hands.
The girls embody salt
they carry back to their villages,

often returning marked, or muddied
at the commencement of each term.
They take their leave in formal English:

'If you want to open this letter, open it with peace.'
'I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus.'
'Esther Joseph Aquila sends her greetings.'

Aubade
by Matt Bryden

They would soothe us in the mornings
with their sweeping. Outside our cabins
a moving view, shifting like antelope.

We watched as the girls progressed
across the whole school. They suggested
that, in time, we would move too:

a voice might stand upright, two then three
by the dust and piled bricks
where foundations had been laid;

a caravan carry bright yellow
buckets to the dormitories, a choir
assemble, clothes be lain on lawns

to dry in the hand of the breeze;
cleaners, strident in their uniform,
in their sun, might approach our rooms.

I could see almost to the gate,
the compound as it came awake.

Matt Bryden is a poet and teacher living in Devon. He has published a pamphlet *Night Porter* (Templar) and a first collection *Boxing the Compass* (Templar). He was winner of the Charroux Memoir Prize and the William Soutar Prize in 2019. In 2018, he won a Literature Matters award from the Royal Society of Literature.

A Gelato or Two
by Reshma Ruia

My mother fell ill in Rome. We put it down to over excitement. We had left India, abandoned the bones and flesh of our familiar world to begin a new life in a country shaped like a boot and it was taking its toll. In the days leading to our departure, mother was a lightening flash in her blue cotton sari, rushing around, her face perspiring in the humid summer heat of Delhi, a red pencil tucked behind her left ear, a clipboard with a things-to-do list in her hand. She was busy tying up any loose ends that she could before we boarded the Air India flight 434 to Rome. Mother's hands were busy packing, storing, selling and distributing stuff that we couldn't carry over to our new life. She engaged K.P Sinha & Sons, Delhi's premier relocation specialists who promised to swaddle her sitar like a baby. 'Not one string of your beloved instrument will be stirred,' Mr Sinha promised, his prominent Adams Apple moved solemnly up and down as he said this. Ten days before we left, mother summoned all her female cousins and nieces home and pointing to her brown Godrej almirah said, 'help yourself. I don't think I'll be wearing many Kanjeevaram saris in Rome.' She terminated the utility bills, and informed my school that since we were moving to a bright new world I no longer needed my grey pleated skirt and maroon blazer and tie.

My father could have helped but he retreated into his office, hiding behind a pile of files, mumbling occasionally about how difficult it was for my mother but once we were in the land of pasta and pizza life would be much easier. Our relatives chose not to help either, instead they settled on our sofas and proceeded to drink cups of tea, eat through entire packets of Glaxo biscuits and shake their heads, slack jawed with envy that we were escaping to a better life. Arms folded, they read out the list of benefits we were going to enjoy in our new home in the West.

1. Higher salary for my father. (Paid in US dollars not rupees, since he was joining an American organization)

2. A dust and reptile free house. We lived at that time in one of those white stucco colonial bungalows left behind by the British. A patina of dust covered everything like golden flour. Our servant Babu inspected the rooms each morning, broom in hand, shaking his head and declaring he couldn't cope with the sirocco wind that blew in the dust from the desert plains of Rajasthan.

3. Guaranteed access to air-conditioned supermarkets filled to the brim with fruit, vegetable and meat 365 days a year. This was non-stop happiness on tap.

My mother listened to these benefits, her eyes distracted. A faint smile played on her mouth as she poured the relatives some more Assam tea and opened another packet of Kracker Jack biscuits. She glanced at us and said,

'We're moving abroad only for our girls.' She ran her fingers through my hair and continued, 'We want them to have a superior life, get better education and who knows one day they will become accountants and doctors and settle in America and we can come back home. America was the golden dream ticket and Italy was just the stepping-stone to it.

My mother came to pick me up on my last day at school. 'We're going to Italy,' she confided to Sister Pereira, the headmistress of Convent of Jesus and Mary, the Irish catholic school where Indian bureaucrats and businessmen sent their children to get a proper English education that focussed on Shakespeare and Agatha Christie. Mrs Pereira nodded, her eyes skimmed over my face. I wasn't sure if she remembered my name. Her expression was wistful as she fingered her glass-beaded rosary and I felt a sudden stab of sadness for her. What was she doing here, thousands of miles away from her home? There she sat, in her dull black Nun's habit in the stifling pre-monsoon Delhi heat, her pink cheeks turning pallid in the tropical dust Did she ever want to run back home. Sister Pereira leaned forward and patted my mother's hand. 'You must be brave,' she said.

'It will be the start of something new. But it won't be easy. Don't give up too easily.'

'It'll be very easy,' I interrupted her rudely. 'There will be pizza and pasta and lots of cornetto ice cream, that's what my dad says.' The adults smiled at my foolishness but said nothing.

Our last night in India passed in tearful goodbyes and much hand clasping and hugs and cries of 'Don't forget us' from our relatives. We stood in the shiny airport terminal of Palam airport, clutching plastic bags of various shapes and sizes, our feet itching in our brand new brown Bata shoes, our skin scratchy with the feel of unfamiliar woollen Alpaca coats my mother had bought from the Tibetan market in old Delhi.

Father found us a furnished flat to rent in an apartment block that stood in a quiet, crumbling part of Rome. 'We will save and buy somewhere better soon,' he promised my mother The pent up energy of the past months seemed to leave her, like a balloon that deflates. Her face grew small and her mouth trembled as she moved from room to room, touching the heavy rosewood furniture that was too big for the size of the rooms. She patted the blue velvet sofa and she stroked the fringed lampshades with their print of pink naked cherubs.

'How will I be happy here?' she asked.

Our first dinner in Rome was dried chappatis and mangoes pickles that my mother had smuggled inside her handbag.

The next morning she unpacked her beloved sitar and found its strings had snapped in the journey. 'You can always play the piano,' my father said, pointing to the stiff looking upright piano that was wedged in the narrow hallway between two marble-topped gilt legged console tables. 'The girls can learn. I'm too old to take up new things,' my mother said, slamming the bedroom door behind her. She decided that the best way of dealing with her new life was to spend as much time as she could in bed. 'I'm ill,' she told my father, defiance in her voice.

This was the Seventies. There were no direct International telephone lines, WhatsApp or emails. In order to speak to my grandparents in India, my mother had to ring the operator, wait for the buzzing and hissing noise to subside before the line crackled into life and my grandfather's thin voice asking how she was, poured into her ear. Sometimes the connection was lost, mid-sentence and my mother would sit, a baffled look in her eyes, the chunky black telephone receiver pressed against her cheek, staring into the distance.

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Our last night in India passed in tearful goodbyes and much hand clasping and hugs and cries of 'Don't forget us' from our relatives. We stood in the shiny airport terminal, clutching plastic bags of various shapes and sizes, our feet itching in our brand new brown Bata shoes, our skin scratchy with the feel of unfamiliar woollen Alpaca coats my mother had bought from the Tibetan market in old Delhi.

Father found us a furnished flat to rent in an apartment block that stood in a quiet, crumbling part of Rome. 'We will buy somewhere better soon,' he promised my mother. But the pent up energy of the past months seemed to leave her, like a balloon that deflates. Her face grew small and her mouth trembled as she moved from room to room, touching the heavy rosewood furniture that was too big for the size of the rooms. She patted the blue velvet sofa and she stroked the fringed lampshades with their print of pink naked cherubs. 'How will I be happy here?' she asked.

Our first dinner in Rome was dried chappatis and mangoes pickles that my mother had smuggled inside her handbag. The next morning she unpacked her beloved sitar and found its strings had snapped in the journey. 'You can always play the piano,' my father said, pointing to the upright piano that was wedged in the narrow hallway between two marble-topped gilt legged console tables. 'The girls can learn. I'm too old to take up new things,' my mother said,

She decided that the best way of dealing with her new life was to spend as much time as she could in bed. 'I'm ill, and no medicine can cure me,' she told my father, defiance in her voice. This was the Seventies. There were no direct International telephone lines, WhatsApp or emails. In order to speak to my grandparents in India, my mother had to ring the operator, wait for the buzzing and hissing noise to subside before the line crackled into life and my grandfather's thin voice asking how she was, poured into her ear. Sometimes the connection was lost, mid-sentence and my mother would sit, a baffled look in her eyes, the chunky black telephone receiver pressed against her cheek, staring into the distance.

'You can always write to them,' I advised my mother with all the self-absorption of my eleven years. 'You waste too much time saying how are you baba, how is grandma, there's no time for other more important stuff.' I was young and couldn't understand why she would want to ring her parents every week or lie alone in the bedroom, her arm folded across her forehead, her face turned away from us. Our Glass-Half-Full mother seemed to have turned empty.

The apartment block with its peeling yellow plaster and discoloured cream shuttered windows was encircled by a leafy, overgrown garden. Rome still felt like a developing city not very different to what we had left behind. On our cab ride from the airport we tried to spot shiny skyscrapers and four lane highways, but instead saw rust-bricked houses and cobble stoned alleys. The city was reeling from the aftereffects of a global recession, the kidnapping and assassination of an ex-prime minister, Aldo Moro and the menace of Briggate Rosse, the Red Brigades whose ugly graffiti defaced every shop front and wall. The garden carried the scent of crushed lemon leaves, orange flowers and the faint smell of the sea. Cicadas chirped and butterflied fluttered among the tangle of umbrella pine trees, plump rose bushes and a marble fountain where a cracked alabaster horse's torso rose through the centre, spewing water through its open mouth.

'Looks like the fountain has a sore throat and is gargling,' my little sister said as we tiptoed near it and dipped one hesitant hand and then another into the water, splashing each other's faces and yelling with delight. It all seemed a grand, big adventure. It was summer in Rome, and most people had abandoned the city for the beaches. Those left behind were at work, so my sister and I were free to loiter and explore. School would not start until September; there was no homework to complete or notes to be crammed for exams. We were free.

And mother didn't seem to mind when every morning we told her we would be downstairs, playing in the garden. 'Just don't talk to strangers or accept any gifts,' was her only advice as she handed us a thousand lira for our lunch. Lunch was a ham sandwich that we bought from a nearby alimentari that stocked fresh fruit and.

vegetables and sold sandwiches at lunchtime. The alimentari owner, a kind old lady who always wore a black crochet dress, sometimes slipped in a little lollipop or chocolate bar in the brown bag. 'A little sweets from me to you,' she said in her broken English.

'People are so nice here,' I told mother. 'They're all so fair and well dressed and they wave to us and ask us where we're from. They love Gandhi and they say we have beautiful smiles.

In India they would just stare and point and laugh if they saw a foreigner.' She narrowed her eyes and listened. 'But how come our neighbours haven't knocked on our door and invited us over for dinner. How come nobody rings to ask how we are?' she asked.

Our father left for work every morning. He was busy learning the ropes of his new job, setting up new bank accounts and filling forms that would help him build our new life in Rome brick by brick. Upstairs our mother lay in bed pining for the life she had left behind. In the evening, our father would bring back three big boxes of Margherita pizza and a bunch of roses for my mother. He would tiptoe into their bedroom, a guilty look on his face, tenderly squeeze her hands, and declare mother would feel better soon. He also brought a Cambridge English Italian dictionary and an Italian cookbook and quietly left them on mother's bedside table. 'But she's not moved all day, just eaten a slice of toast that's all,' I yelled at him. I was almost a teenager and my hormones were raging like a jet engine, ready for take-off. 'Why can't she be happy like us? We've left behind all that noise and dirt and beggars.'

In the transition from India to Italy, our roles were reversed. My mother had changed from a competent figure who ran our household to this sad eyed woman who moped around the rooms declaring she was sick of pizza and why couldn't my father find a decent Indian restaurant in the whole city. 'Where is the ginger, the coriander and the ghee,' she wailed as she cooked chicken curry with olive oil and oregano and declared it tasted rubbish, before emptying the whole pot into the bin.

'It's not that easy to build a home, but one day your mother will get up and decide that this is it and she'll be fine,' my father explained as he sprinkled chilli powder on the pizzas. A week passed and then a second. My sister and I had by then picked up a few words of Italian, 'Ciao bella,' we said to our mother as she brushed her teeth in the morning, prepared our cornflakes and then chose another fresh nightie to slip back into bed, her cassette player by her bed side. A pile of cassettes lay next to it, mostly old film songs from Bollywood but also recordings of her father reciting Persian poetry.

'Ciao bella?' My mother repeated one morning. 'What does Ciao Bella mean girls?'

'It means, hello beautiful,' I told my mother patting her cheek affectionately. 'That's what it means, silly mummy. When are you going to learn Italian? Nobody speaks English or Hindi here.'

'Is that so?' she said. 'Don't I know that? Do you take me for a dunce?' Some of that old fire entered her voice.

'Who called you Ciao Bella,' my mother persisted that day. 'Who called you beautiful?' She studied my face intently. I kept quiet but my younger sister piped up.

'Mummy, it's the gardener downstairs. He buys us ice-cream.' She stopped and corrected herself. 'He buys us a gelato or two every day and...' She pointed to me, 'He tells her she is beautiful. He pats her hair, says it's long and beautiful and one day he will give us a ride on his Vespa scooter.' She stopped, breathless, a triumphant look on her small face.

'How dare you tell tales,' I glared at my sister, lunged and pulled her ponytail. My mother grabbed my arm. 'Is that so? Have you been eating this gelato every day bought by a stranger with his own money?' I lowered my eyes in shame. The truth was that I quite enjoyed the attention of Marco-- that was his name. Marco had come one day to water the rhododendrons and was taken aback to see us splashing our bare feet in the fountain.

He was young and to my naïve eyes, incredibly handsome with his blue Levis jeans, slicked back brown hair and a pair of Ray Ban sunglasses that he never took off. He couldn't have been more different to our gardener back in India, a wizened sixty year old who squatted on the floor and chewed betelnut constantly, spitting out the red phlegm on the footpath while he pulled out the weeds and beheaded the occasional cobra hiding in the dahlia flower beds.

Mother let go of my arm and instead of slipping back into bed, she went to the wardrobe and pulled out her blue sari. The same sari she wore when she haggled with vegetable hawkers over the price of onions or went to the local utility offices to question our electricity bills. Her blue sari was her going-into-action sari. 'Aren't you going back to bed?' I asked her, a little bit disappointed that I was going to lose my freedom. 'I think I will come into the garden with you today,' my mother replied, tucking the pleats of her sari into her petticoat and picking up the English Italian dictionary from the table.

'As you wish,' I shrugged and bit my bottom lip. I had started daydreaming about Marco. How we would get married one day, set up home together, have lovely brown haired, blue eyed children and here was mother spoiling it all by coming downstairs and sitting on the bench by the fountain, flicking through pages of the dictionary, waiting for Marco to materialise.

Marco appeared at midday, holding two cones of gelato for my sister and me. His face fell when he saw my mother. He stood there, the cones melting into his hand--a slow river of cream and ice as mother skewered him with her penetrating stare.

'I am the mamma of these little girls,' she told him. 'No more gelato for my girls, capisce. No Ciao Bella. Now get lost.' She clapped her hands as though chasing away a dog and Marco slunk away, without even throwing me one backward glance.

She grabbed hold of our hands and marched us upstairs. 'Girls, I want you to brush your hair and wear your best frocks,' she told us, as she flung open the living room shutters and pushed the sitar behind the sofa. She went to her bedroom, gathered up her cassettes and put them in the chest of drawers. Carefully, she painted her lips with her favourite red Avon lipstick and turned to us.

'Right. That's that,' she said, standing tall and smoothing the folds of her sari with her hand. 'Enough wasting time inside this stupid garden and this sad flat. Who wants to come with me to see the Colosseum?'

Towards the end of that summer just before schools reopened, we moved to a modern new apartment in EUR, the suburb designed by Mussolini to showcase Italian progress and innovation. There were wide avenues and parks and apartments built of chrome and glass. My parents lived here until my father retired from his job. My mother did a crash course in Italian and learned to drive like a native, jumping red lights and ignoring parking tickets. She also managed to get a job at Vatican Radio broadcasting news in Hindi and English to the Indian subcontinent. For her fortieth birthday, father bought her an ice cream machine and she made gelato for us every Sunday. As for Marco, we saw him maybe once or twice again before we left for our new apartment. It turned out that he was only doing that job to earn some extra pocket money and the original gardener, an old, gap toothed man with serious dandruff on his shoulders soon came back. My sister and I soon lost interest in the garden.

It was my sister who became a doctor and settled in Rome with an Italian surgeon. As for me, I moved to England and turned into an academic. But that is another story...

Reshma Ruia has a PhD and Master's in Creative Writing from Manchester University, as well as a Bachelor and Master's from the London School of Economics. Born in India, brought up in Italy and now living in England, her writing explores the preoccupations of those who possess a multiple sense of belonging. She is the co-founder of The Whole Kahani-a writers' collective of British South Asian writers.

Place
by Heidi Williamson

When we left we took it all:
the skyscapes and treescapes framing each season.

When we left, we left it all:
the bracken, the cabins, the pathways of water.

When we left we took it all:
the hollows, chill soil, ice-air and snowfall.

When we left, we left it all:
angular boulders with ashy thin grasses.

When we left we took it all:
scent of just-rained-on expanding the stonework.

When we left, we left it all:
pine martens, red deer, herons and osprey.

When we left we took it all:
broadening clouds blending with hillsides.

When we left, we left it all:
short-lived supple islands of shingle.

When we left we took it all:
the bend in the loch we can't see beyond

Williamson, Heidi, *Return by Minor Road* (Bloodaxe Books, 2020)
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Heidi Williamson is a poet and current student on the Masters in Creative Writing at Oxford (Keble College). She was born in Norfolk, though lived for many years in Scotland. She is the author of several collections including the recent *Return by Minor Road* (Bloodaxe Books, 2020). She is an Advisory Fellow for the Royal Literary Fund, and was Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of East Anglia from 2018 to 2020. Williamson works as a poetry surgeon for The Poetry Society, teaches for The Poetry School, and mentors poets through The Writing Coach, National Centre for Writing and The Poetry School.

home forgiveness
by Natalie Perman

powdered pink lamp
with hi-shine rose spine
trying to be something it's not
next to the salmon rose MAC
this could be from MADE.com
but the tag says Argos

the attempt to furnish a life without a roof

the newspaper wrapped frames
missing their picture hooks
stamped into walls 65 miles away
I um-ed and ah-ed
should we nail into the wall?
but I always thought hung frames was a mark of permanence
I woz' 'ere scrawled onto the school tunnel
now they've covered the pics of dicks and bongs with a huge caterpillar
and those zany nylon train covers
that rubbed my thighs on hot days
that day
yearning beyond clocks and square boxes
to maybe scold my colleague with hot water
an action birthed can not be taken back
like a foetus, I withhold
pushing, holding
the mother cups her stomach through the dress
flashes her enamel at the lens with uncreased eyes
there she is
hammer her a like
she unpeels your soldered grip
and you fall like a mood stone
plucked into rage and exhilaration

landing into the ocean
with fury your compass
and no recourse
fuck it
the sea is made of glitter anyway

Natalie Perman is a Cambridge-based writer, Kafka reader and tea drinker. A 2-time Foyle Young Poet, she has won the Forward Student Critics Award 2017 as well as the Martin Starkie Prize 2021. She is working in publishing while writing a poetry pamphlet as part of Genesis Jewish Book Week's Emerging Writers Programme, where she is mentoed by Jack Underwood. Her poems have appeared in *The White Review* and *bath magg*.

Dear Childhood, ink and paper / Lok-tung Wong

Loktung Wong is a Hong Kong self-taught artist. Through confronting and recognising her personal experiences, unfamiliar emotions started coming out as well as her creativity and curiosity. Her works consist of combining realism with abstraction to represent the intricacy of human experiences. Through the act of using pen solely to create detailed drawings, she explores how certain subjects can be seen to be so simple, yet be so profound once understood. Her works are also shaped by poetry, music, film and philosophy, which in turn give her a better understanding, to fuel her to create vivid visions.

晋源
by Jiaqi Kang

Maman as a baby looks like a boy, arms at her sides, feet shoulder-width apart, a hat between her hair and the sun. Her nickname was Little Dog. It's what her grandmother called her, the same grand mother who brought her to a studio in Taiyuan to have her photograph taken, stood her there and told her not to move, arranged her scarf to fall in front of her padded winter coat. She could be my little brother, her second-born, who has always hated even the concept of having his picture taken, would jump in front of the lens or pull a face, marring the memory. No amount of shouting and scolding could stop him, he was always louder than any of us put together, beating his fists against our chest if we tried to gather him into our arms. In photos, my brother is an infant with jaundice or a high school graduate. Not much in the middle.

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Jiaqi Kang is a doctoral student in art history and the editor in chief of Sine Theta Magazine, an international, print-based creative arts publication made by and for the Sino diaspora. They are the winner of the White Review Short Story Prize 2022.

The way to the dark stream
by Kevin Jones

We begin no map no guide no option. Only to head out without compass.

On the headland of the little birches by the boundary river. Into a white, wide open field. Chalky country. A small wood with an Anglo-Saxon church. Crossed a ferny brow through gardens into the field of new hay. A grove of trees with a Celtic monk holding a flaming torch, past a Frenchman, knapsack on his back, muttering in old English. I stepped off their map, followed the railway lines past the station, up to the asylum on the green downs, then down. Down into a narrow way and through a marshy meadow where the dill grew. Passed the Well of the Britons, there between two small groves of trees and onto a gently rolling glen outside a village among the hills. Sharp right past the inn, 'the brave friend' and onto the green settlement. Beyond, the dark stream.

- *are you following me?* – Birkenhead, the Mersey, start at Whitfield St, go to Woodchurch and then straight over Ferny Brow Gardens and turn right along New Hay, into Grove Road - *am I going too fast?* - then right toward St Aidan's Terrace, right turn into Tollemache - *tolly-mash* – over Station St, left up to Netherne Lane, past Commercial Way, left into through East Dulwich Grove and Camberwell Grove - *You missed that?* - left into East Dulwich Grove and Camberwell Grove and left to Glengall Rd. Sharp right onto Whatman Rd, right into Comerford - *that's Com-er-ford* - sharp right into Greenwich High Road and then right again into Douglas Way - *Here, if it helps, let me draw the way. Do you have a pen? Paper?*

But a map is not a place. And not what got me here. And there is no map beyond the black water but a way still to go..

Kevin Jones has a background in Fine Art Painting and in ragged street theatre. Jones then trained as an art psychotherapist, working in the NHS and then qualified as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in private practice while also working as a Senior Lecturer Art Psychotherapy, including time as Head of Therapeutic Studies and Head of Department, Social Therapeutic Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London.

A Poem for Grandma
by Kamori Osthananda

There will come a day you forget who I am.
I do not mind that in the least.
What I pray for you not to forget is how to speak.
I pray for you not to ever cease finding relish in language.
The semantic universe spoken by your mother.
The phonetic roots celebrated by your father.
The generational syntax shared with your sister.
The social, political prescriptivists of the times endured with grandfather.
The descriptivist in grammar school who wrote you Mother's Day cards that was my mother.
The pregnant pauses and prolonged silence when leaving became my father.
The morphology of girlhood to womanhood you transliterated for my own.
The linguistic relativity in building a home,
Not lost in single ad-libs but beautifully dyadic in collective improv.
The fragments of cultural narrative you lingered not for me to immaculately piece but paint with,
Like my battered copy of Anne Carson's *Sappho* alongside the family portrait,
Like a stray Oxford comma in anticipation of new tongues, in present perfect.
The world worded in your utterance,
The contentment in identities became our oral history.

A Poem for Grandma
by Kamori Osthananda (Cont'd)

There will come a day you forget who you are.
Please do not mind that in the least.
Do not be afraid of becoming a seemingly blank slate,
Once again.
For it is out of blank slates that
A philosophical query springs.
A discourse birthed
Out of tabula rasa, novel in tongue and composition
Without the universal grammar.

It is unnecessary if you forget the people you love
Or the life you lived.
It is of more importance not to forget how love feels in
Lives housed with people loved by you.
Making a home in multilingual translation,
Warm with morning and afternoon sunspots
Like how the code-switching child you raised warms to linguistic
pluralism.
The soundscape of life is mine and yours.

The acoustics of coming home to going away,
Once again.

Kamori Osthananda is a Thai writer and researcher who reads psychology, neuroscience, and classics. For this poem, she drew inspiration from the Thai heritage and cognitive experiences of dementia her grandmother goes through. She is intrigued by the human experience of identity, both historically and psychologically.

Hon Von Phu / Ngyuen Thi Huong

Hương Nguyễn (Lucy), from Vietnam, studied linguistics at Hanoi National University. She was awarded a prestigious Fulbright scholarship in 2015 and worked at the University of Wisconsin. She worked as a lecturer for over 10 years in Vietnam before moving to the UK. She now lives in Lincoln, UK with her husband, Colin and daughter, Anna. She was shortlisted for the Faber Andlyn (FAB) Prize for new writers and illustrators created by Faber Children's and the Andlyn Literary Agency.

Losing the Borgata by Clare Lavery

I wound my way through chestnut woods. Driving from our home to the village square took me down past an Alpine stream where herons would alight. Every inch of the road was familiar, bathed in sunlight and shadow, a continual delight, an ever-changing canvas. I passed through hamlets that I could draw in my sleep - my neighbour Aldo, bent over, tending his large kitchen garden. Sometimes seen up a tree, pruning fruit branches. His sight was failing fast. He was a Rubianin, a man born and bred in this village of Rubiana, nestling in the foothills of the Susa valley. The village belonged to him. I might risk saying it also belonged to me. Belonging is very much part of the Rubiana mentality. Those weekenders with second homes visiting his woods from Turin, they did not 'belong' in his mind. No, they intruded. They had littered his stillness with too much noise. They left traces of their mass barbecues along his peaceful riverbanks. They ate salami sandwiches!

He was creased and crumpled from years in the mountain sun. He had seen war as only border people see. He had passed sixteen-year-old cousins, shot by the roadside shrine as armies pushed through the piazza. He had buried fourteen-year-old partisans ambushed by German patrols after months of hiding in hay barns. Later he would join them, sleeping rough near the higher pass. He had witnessed transformations in his mountains and in his country at a crucial fork in Italy's road to modernity. Yet the country beyond his hills was too young to call his nation, its tongue was an alien tongue he'd been forced to learn in the name of unification and schooling by a fascist state. His country was Rubiana. His soul would always be in these foothills.

The life he has now is not much different from his own father's and grandfather's. He resists the external change to mod cons and technology, favouring the habits and customs of a typical Alpine hamlet. He roasts his chestnuts for breakfast and stirs his polenta on his rusting stove. His son buys him a new Zanussi oven but he complains that his food tastes better with the wood smoke coating his mother gave it. He pickles all his garden produce to store for the winter ahead.

He pickles anything and everything.

He preserves.

He bottles.

He stores.

He fights the passage of the seasons and the changes to his language on a daily basis.

His '*gerla*', a long cone shaped willow basket, hangs at his front door, ready for filling with sticks as he forages the nearby woods for firewood and porcini mushrooms. Its curved shape spied spooning his back in a snowy copse near our brook.

The sound of my car engine made him stop working. He gestured, not looking to see if I was a stranger or a friend, his cataracts had blurred those distinctions. Rubiana was the centre of his compass, spread over three hills, made up of approximately ninety-eight *borgata,* hamlets of varying sizes, nestling below the French range of ski slopes known as the Milky Way. Some of the hamlets nearer the mountain pass had gradually emptied as the younger generation moved in the post war years to Turin. Higher up chimneys no longer puff out the wood smoke from fires long abandoned for the industrial furnaces in the plains below. Fewer boys forage in the woods or on the harsh slopes near the pass.

Before the Second World War, over 2,000 locals eked out an existence, keeping goats up there. They tended smallholdings. Aged six, the children were despatched in steel-capped muddy boots to the one room school to be back on the slopes by ten. They sat in rows, fixed in sepia, sporting black gingham overalls called grembiule with starched white lace collars round their necks. They were innocents with rough knees, thick hand knitted socks and sun furrowed brows. They did not call that place on the horizon 'Torino' like modern Italians. 'Turin', in their local Piedmont dialect, was the distant place.

The post-war economic boom enticed the burgeoning middle class with extra cash to add their own second homes, creating a flock of weekend and August residents. By 2000 Aldo viewed the visiting Torinese with his 85 years of acquired suspicion.

The end of the Second World War propelled the children from the school benches into the twentieth century. 'The made in Italy boom' was happening thirty kilometres away but Aldo resisted the pull of its sirens. A massive rebuilding programme helped by American dollars was bringing high employment onto the Po plain below their Rubiana hamlets and right across the neckline of land that touches France, Switzerland, Austria and the old Yugoslavia to the west. The young deserted their border regions to occupy low rent workers apartments in modern buildings. These concrete blocks sprang up along the 'route to France' from Turin's central square.

Industrialisation stretched right up to the Sacra San Michele monastery which dominated the mouth of the French border, balanced on an outcrop at 800 metres. I could see San Michele from my upstairs balcony. Hannibal's elephants had come this way. The monks at San Michele welcomed hordes of travellers making their way to see the artistic and cultural delights beyond. It was a landmark signalling the divide between the once mighty kingdom of Savoy and the chaos of the Italian city-states below. They were regions all glued together in a hotchpotch described as modern Italy in history books. Aldo called them 'southerners'- rogues and vagabonds.

In 2004, Rubiana was coming to the end of a fifty-year period of post war upheavals. We were a speck on its magnificent landscape. I could work in Turin by day and not leave Rubiana at night. I could dip in and out of Turin. I could dip in and out of modern Italy. Then I could retreat with Aldo into our hills.

I arrived in the late 1980s, working in publishing and English Language teaching. On a crisp January afternoon in 1986 we drove west from Turin's King Umberto monument passing art deco facades and street upon street of Liberty-style apartment blocks. We followed the route out to France as far as San Michele monastery's imposing shadow. With snow chains fastened, we started the slow beginner's climb up to the piazza in second gear.

The estate agent brought us up to a Borgata as dusk crawled in. I can still hear the rattle of the shutter's applause as he revealed the plain below a patchwork of snow-capped roofs, hunchback hills, with the soft hint of France on the horizon. The tableau of contrasts called to something deep inside.

One year grew into twenty. We settled. I had not considered myself a foreigner, despite an English twang. We became adopted locals. This was a status well above the position occupied by second homers. We came to wear our Borgata status like a badge of honour. We were inside, not outside.

"Ma Lei non è da qui?

"You're not from round these parts, are you?" strangers asked politely.

"No, we're from Borgata P. Not from Turin" remarked my partner in local dialect, with deadpan expression

This invariably provoked peals of laughter or compliments on our British sense of humour. In restaurants in Rome or Milan waiters would remark on our fluent Italian.

Ma Lei non è da qui?

"You're not from round these parts, are you?" they hinted politely.

"No, we're from the Alps, near Susa, *siamo Valsusini*", we quipped.

The identity joke never failed to charm.

I was not aware of how blurred our sense of identity had become once our own children trotted into the expanding village school in their Italian gingham overalls with cross stitched pockets and peter pan lace collars. If you had invented a category on an equality and diversity form, we would have ticked the box next to 'Rubiana-British'. Such bambini, born at home in the Borgata, were entitled to status according to Aldo and his card-playing cronies in the bar, entitled to call themselves 'Rubianin DOC' like any fine grape cultivated on our local slopes.

'Can I look at the Rubianin?' they cooed, bending over Lucy's pram.

'Is this la piccola Lucy?' they would enquire, grabbing the child from her pram or rucksack, kissing her loudly.

"*Looo... Si*" they repeated back slowly. Emphasis on the 'Si' as if her name proclaimed her existence, "Yes! Yes! "

"*Lucia*" I translated – 'light' in Italian. Eyes squinting in the sun she would share a bench with their grandchildren. A R*ubianin DOC*.

Loo Si would be bilingual.

Years later, she adopted the Italian email name of 'Sissi'.

As each child was born and raised, the 4 kilometres walk to Rubiana centre from our home and back, encapsulated the passing of our time in that place. I rushed up its hills and across the stream to get to Nursery on time for my toddler son, skipped down hills as the burnished leaves fell and fat porcini mushrooms grew by the wayside. I strutted along in 2001 with a very inquisitive baby strapped in his baby carrier, facing forwards at his insistence, kicking his legs with delight at the birds and insects we encountered on our way to and from the main piazza. He chomped with his gums on the finger of *focaccia bianca* that Marisa in the local bakers gave him every morning. Sprinkles of dried rosemary from his snack peppered his bib as we marched along. His greasy *foccacia* hands clutching the flowers I offered him.

Lucy skilfully drew a map of the school, the square, the stream and our *borgata* in her first term at the village *Scuola Elementare*. Landmarks preserved in crayon wax and watercolour. I hold on fast to the clarity of her childhood map. Its simplicity testifies to our world then. It traces lives lived with a natural rhythm, with trusted contours. The presence of our old neighbour and his courgette patch- Aldo and his grappa guzzling cronies seated in the piazza- the perfume of Marisa's warm bread on frosty afternoons- archived, seemingly fixed.

I see moving across this map stick figures of stooped eighty-year-old nuns, scuttling across the small square between the school and their convent kitchens in years gone by. Busily feeding grandparents or great grandparents of the current pupils. I remember their aprons flapping in the mountain breeze, their discreet apparitions in tobacconist or paneterria, their hushed disappearance into hidden vegetable gardens. The Rubianin ate their local produce. Behind this map is an invisible world of industriousness.

Each walk to Rubiana piazza filled with the intense aroma- rush of Alpine flowers in April, the blossom on the cherry trees that grow abundantly in the area and carpet the road in May. I nibbled on blackberries in September or tiny wild strawberries in June found in the hedgerows, picked a handful of wild herbs or rocket by the bridge to add to my omelettes or risotto that evening. Autumn months were damp as days drew in quickly. The population waited for snow after the weekenders and hot summer haze receded. On these musty afternoons, I would collect fallen chestnuts to roast on the woodstove after school. We plundered the woods. We covered the basement ceiling with twigs to create a Halloween canopy. The children chopped and mashed pickings from the forest floor into wizards and witches' potions. The organic matter of Rubiana glued the threads of a satisfying childhood together.

I walked up and I walked down. I trekked to the main village in all weathers. Winter brought wafts of wood smoke. I passed tumble down cottages juxtaposed with seventies villas, all burning their log fires, windows open to the elements and bedding thrown over wooden balconies to freshen the sheets and pillows of sleep dust. I opened my windows wide on a bright day- no matter what month, allowing air to renew the house.

Thoughts now steer me into my old home, a white villa perched high on a hill to the right of the central cluster of homes, out on a limb. It stood, declaring its presence for miles. It was the last house in our area lit by the setting sun in summer. I hear my own hopes if I picture myself as I potter in my kitchen. I say 'my' kitchen rather self-consciously because I have not had my own kitchen since then- just a succession of kitchens rented in others' homes. The French window opened onto our garden terrace. A fig tree filled the frame of the side window. The hornets buzzing around its sweet offerings were a nuisance in the hot months. Stripped bare, the view between the fig branches in autumn drew the eyes to our highest hamlet of Mompellato, just below the Lily pass Col del Lys at 2,000 metres. The garland of lights from its cottages and busy bakery seen from our tea table. We munched our toasted Mompellato sour bread or corn flour butter biscuits from its wood ovens. "Looks like snow" commented my four-year-old, dipping a butter biscuit into a comforting bowl of chicory coffee.

"It's too cold for snow," mocked his six-year-old sister. She was already well versed in the Rubiana lore of seasons. She could read the signs of change in the wind. She could smell snow in its breezes.

They used to sit drinking in the spectacle above the branches. They loved watching swirling mists descend and falcon's swoop. This view promised them snow with its delicate brushstrokes of powder white in the distance, long before flakes descended to clothe our fig tree.

On school day afternoons, I would listen out in the kitchen for the loud horn of their yellow bus. The driver Boris announced his arrival before taking bends like a rally driver. One blast signalled 'coming'. Two blasts and the bus would be almost upon you. I tracked their progress home by the increasing volume of that horn. It followed the wax contours of Lucy's map.

Her ink pen had labelled each landmark in beautiful cursive Italian script, smudged with her fingerprints. There are the fifteenth century church of Sant' Egidio, the Parish hub , the convent, the butchers below the piazza, Gianni the grocer and the bridge before the road winds into the pines, past the stream near Aldo's orchard. Then the slow steep climb up to home in our chestnut woods. If I close my eyes, I am there. I am waiting for that clapped out bus. As the horn echoes, I watch their arrival from the front window. They rush up the long drive, laughing, smiling with rosy cheeks and tanned legs.

The magnificent front room window in our villa was three metres wide - its chestnut wood formed an arch, framing the postcard view beyond. We have a home video of three-year-old Alexander in ballet outfit dancing in front of that window frame. He is dancing with his sister as snow falls behind them in clumps. It is Christmas Eve six years before we left. The sincerity of his concentrated pose, the chubbiness of his weathered and bonny cheeks and the purity of the scene beyond remind me that, before the snow fell, a strange hush would descend. The air would hold its breath before the heavy grey clouds opened. If

I could stop the clock there, just at that moment, freeze the perfection in frame, I would. That time in Rubiana had its stillness. The calm we enjoyed before the storm approached.

I can try to breathe back seconds of Rubianatime.

In 2007, we moved to an old house in Northumberland. We settled in the borderlands familiar to my childhood, places I had visited on day trips from shipyard country. We carted boxes of belongings from one place to the next, from one border to another. Leaving Rubiana did that to my little family, it propelled me on a search for a comparable resting place. The events that year propelled me towards a future I had never imagined for any of us, never expected. At some point during the move to Northumberland, I realised that Rubiana was irreplaceable. The moments were unrepeatable. I realised that we were beginning to forget about Rubiana. We talked of it less. We were fitting in to our new lives. We were making memories that did not include the word, Rubiana. I do not know if my youngest can even spell it.

He cannot roll the 'R' in it.

Rubiana. Rrrrr.... Rubiana.

Try it. It trips off the tongue if you practice. It tickles your palate..

Rrrrrrr Rrrrrrubiana.

If you are from Northumberland, you might use your Northumbrian R to say it.

During the Northumbrian house move, I came across an old toy box filled with kids' clothes. The clothes had lain sealed in their Rubiana cocoon for nearly two years following our departure. On opening the lid of this box, the familiar alpine perfume hit me, not just in my sinuses but also in my stomach, in my head, in my heart muscle. It was a curiously comforting mixture of Italian fabric conditioner scented with Marseille soap, pine resin and the pungent infusion of acrid wood smoke. There were hints of minestrone around the edges of it.
Rubiana distilled in a box. called the children. We stood with bundles of clothes in our hands, burying hungry noses in the fabric, stuffed faces into the box like a dog sniffing for truffles. We breathed deeply, searching for hints. There we stood, silently, immersed in the intoxicating smell of lost home. So, what of the Rubiana we knew and loved? Washing away Rubiana is not an easy task for the intoxicated. Our life in the mountains has not been an easy life to cast off and replace. I slowed my engine as I passed Aldo that day in November 2004. The car purred gently as it passed his cottage. He raised his knotted fingers in a salute. Returning his gesture, I cried out, "Bon Di" in local dialect.

Then, I drove on.

Clare Lavery has worked as a writer and trainer in education, ELT development and cultural studies in TESOL for 40 years. Her creative writing covers themes related to migration, border, Language and identity. She raises awareness of themes of violence against women in the home and constructions of home as a site of belonging, as well as a contested space. Her poems relate to concepts in domestic violence, immigration and marginalisation. Her work has been used in activism and training, contributed to anthologies for domestic violence fundraising and for understanding of intercultural and linguistic human rights. She writes hybrid/Sociological Non-fiction.

My Number One Grandmother leaves Canton for Malaya during the Festival of Bright Purity 清明 Qīngmíng

by Pey Oh

Three days she's come before today:
to sweep the tombs — so many,
shaped like broad armchairs set into the hill
overlooking the Pearl River.
Plague and poppy, war and flood.
Dawn. She bows her head to the peace
of your sleep. Joss, make all new.
Emerging from the stinging smoke,
she walks with her bundle to the harbour,
telling no one. Her mother-in-law thinks she will return
to go with the slave master, that she cannot run far
with her small, broken feet after the death of her husband.
Later the families will come to share
their picnic with their dead.
Roast chicken, steamed bao,
bowls of rice and wine.
They will find she has made her last
obeisance. She will not be sold as property.
Aunty Song (not her real Aunty) said she could
earn by sewing, start at a factory in the hills of Malaya.
Giant machines mine huge lakes for tin,
rhythmic in their scoop and spatter.
Labour needs to be clothed with her labour.
Aunty Song will tell no one.

Pey Oh (she/her) is a Bath-based poet from Malaysia. Her first pamphlet, *Pictograph*, was published by Flarestack Poets in 2018. Her recent work appears in *harana poetry*, *Butcher's Dog Magazine*, *Long Poem Magazine* and *The Scores – A Journal of Poetry and Prose*.

झोप in Poplars
by Sylee Gore

we hold

sleep's

slackening string

//

honeyed

absence

holds
what sleep

//

our scramble over
boulders

our cymbal

shaking light

\\

red thread

wire tight

rinsed

जागे
cold

Sylee Gore was the former editor of Oxford Review of Books and is the winner of the Wasafiri New Writing Prize (fiction) this year.

Sana Rao / For Those of Us Who Live Between

Sana Rao is an artist, poet and flower enthusiast. Her artistic practice is deeply situated in her own journey as an immigrant navigating themes of displacement, personal autonomy, self discovery, safety, and actualisation. Her work has been published in Live Canon 2022 Anthology and exhibited as a part of being Human exhibition in Koppel Gallery, and as a part of Invisible People Exhibition in Stoke Newington showcasing art from marginalised communities.

"The loneliness of tired men' by João Luís Barreto Guimarães

(translated from Portuguese)

With each passing day I feel more worn out.
A man longs for tenderness
on his return home (a
man does not notice the moment he sheds
his own outrage) when
he walks barefoot on the afternoon pavement in
search of a
glass of oblivion. A man recognizes his home
by the cat at the window –
two backlit pupils sitting
at their table
sitting at the table of the soul. And the house welcomes
the man
with an ever-new night
(a man bestows everything on whomever
saves him from exile)
on whomever appeases the loneliness that exists in
all tired men.

LIT Magazine –

"Missing Walls'
by João Luís Barreto Guimarães

(translated from Portuguese)

In the bombed-out buildings (for example: in the
Balkans)
it is easy to imagine the cells
we live in. High blocks without façade
(since the days of the war)
make it all the more evident: miniscule
cubic cells
each missing a wall –
the one that points to the escape
that shows freedom. But that is
in the crosshairs
of war. In the places where there's peace
the bankers (and the tax collectors)
play with the locals
(depriving them of four walls!)
like someone playing with one of those
doll houses
the ones on display at the rich museums of
northern Europe.

Interim –

João Luís Barreto Guimarães is a reconstructive surgeon from Porto, Portugal, and the author of twelve poetry collections including *Nómada* and *Mediterrâneo*, this title published in English. His work has been awarded the António Ramos Rosa National Poetry Award and the Armando da Silva Carvalho Poetry Award, and he has twice been a finalist for the International Camaiore Prize. He is winner of the Pessoa Prize 2022, one of the most important Portuguese Awards.

Advice to my younger self on moving 12 times between 4 countries in 7 years
by Julie Irigaray

At that age, you're porous: you discover your identity, and it's not set in stone. You're porous like the rocks on Biarritz's seafront. You are eroded by tides, wind, ocean spray and torrential rain.

You will be shaped by moving 12 times between 4 countries in 7 years. You had projected so many things on them, but they didn't care about you. You'll capture millions of shell fossils – leftovers of flaws, habits and memories from each place you'll live in. You'll contain strata of stolen words, atoms of customs.

As the good porous rock that you are, waves will hollow you out, and seagulls will take refuge in your cavities. Sailors will hammer crosses on your back to get guidance, but you'll be the one who will need guidance. You'll be swallowed up by the sea.

You've always tried to reinvent yourself. You have multiple personas, and will get through several versions of them in seven years. Yet your telluric tendencies will drive you back to the roots, and you'll write about them over and over again.

People will want to pigeonhole you, to confine you to one single identity, and you'll resist. You'll resist, because you didn't spend 7 years moving 12 times between 4 countries to be reduced to your origins, especially by people who've never emigrated. You didn't move abroad to purge your excess of identities, to realise you look like your father and carry the misery of his grandparents glued to your skin like a neoprene suit.

You know that if you wore the traditional Basque costume and danced to the sound of txistu, these people would gladly clap because they think of themselves as open-minded and inclusive.

But they aren't. They will want you to be one single identity. Preferably a stereotype, so they can classify you more easily in a file they'll put away in a mental cardboard box. They'll never understand you can't be satisfied with being only one thing.

They will never accept you, by the way. No matter how hard you'll try to fit in, how well you'll speak their language, your efforts to get integrated. *Integrate (verb): to mix with and join society or a group of people, often changing to suit their way of life, habits, and customs. From the Latin*

Advice to my younger self on moving 12 times between 4 countries in 7 years
by Julie Irigaray (cont'd)

integratus, '*make whole*'. You'll constantly change suits without anybody complimenting you about it. And of course, you'll never be whole.

You'll become a hermit crab with no place of your own to inhabit. You'll lose all of these countries, and nobody will ever feel sorry for you because many believe one country is enough.

You're porous like the rocks on Biarritz's seafront, but nobody will notice you are crumbling.

A French Basque poet living in the UK, Julie Irigaray previously lived in the Basque Country, Paris, Dublin, Bologna and London. Julie's work interrogates feelings of displacement and how to navigate between cultures when one's identity is fragile. Julie is a PhD student at the University of Huddersfield.

Holding Pattern
by Yin F Lim

Green leaves, furry and frondy, catch my eye. Compelling me to stop as I walk past the plant sale outside a charity shop.

I pick up the seedling pot. Tomato. They're not hard to grow, I've heard. Just feed them regularly with water and Tomorite. Let them bake in the sun. I can already see this fledgling plant heavy with fruit; how wonderful it would be to reach out and pluck one whenever I have a salad. My fingers begin to curl over the imagined tomato, its smooth plumpness filling my palm.

I grab two pots and head into the shop to pay. Then I remember. Turning around, I place them back where I had found them, and walk away.

*****

Daisies and dandelions. Buttercups and poppies. She knew them from the Enid Blyton books she'd grown up reading, exotic flowers whose smell and texture lived in her imagination. Until she left her South East Asian home for England.

In the first years of her migration she made many discoveries in the garden of her rented house. ce in her rented garden. On one wall went rippled-pink clematis for the cascade of star-shaped flowers she'd admired on her previous neighbour's balcony.

She wanted her garden to look like the postcard-perfect ones she'd visited at Anne Hathaway's Cottage in Stratford-upon-Avon. So she found delphiniums at a church plant sale and put them next to lupins, foxgloves and hollyhocks from a market stall. Along the side of the house went in a row of lavender varieties: Hidcote, Munstead, Melissa Lilac.

When the days grew cooler and shorter she dug into the hard ground to put in bulbs. She wanted daffodils, tulips and bobbing globes of allium when the weather warmed up, to join the crocuses, hyacinths and muscari that already lived in her garden long before she'd moved in.

But so much thought was needed to cultivate the English garden: What to plant for varying crops and colour throughout the year. So much care and attention to help them flourish in this constantly changing climate: What to feed them, how to protect them from pests. From frost, wind, too much sun.

Some days, when she grew weary of staking shrubs and mulching flower beds, she longed for the simplicity of her former garden. For the vivid heliconia and torch ginger that thrived under monsoon rains. The water hyacinth and pegaga that multiplied under all-year-round sunshine, blanketing ponds with their lettuce-like foliage and coin-shaped leaves. The aloe vera and kaffir lime she'd inherited from her mother-in-law, fertilised with the occasional splash of rice-rinsed water.

Holding Pattern by Yin F Lim (cont'd)

To understand the plants of her new country she turned to the RHS's *Gardening Through the Year* for advice. She was determined to succeed. Despite the aphids that ate her lupins, the cabbage moths that hovered over her bok choy, the stealthy assailants that decapitated her marigolds. Despite the clematis and passiflora withering from being underfed. Undeterred, she replaced them with fuchsia, geraniums, green beans. All easy to maintain.

But there was one thing she could never overcome: A month-long absence from her home each year.

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It's become an annual routine, how I would start winding down my life here as end-July – and my flight to Malaysia – approaches.

Clearing out the fridge, including the leftover bolognese and rendang that have been languishing in deep freeze for months. Tossing the bottom-of-the-pack Cheddar crumbs into a mac and cheese. Ignoring the two-for-£2 offers for my favourite yoghurt and the buy-one-get-one-free packs of honey-roasted ham while I'm at the supermarket.

Declining freelance assignments with deadlines over August. Postponing plans to join a new gym. Stopping myself from borrowing library books I won't be able to finish reading before I leave.

There never seems enough days to get everything done. Yet time also crawls as the anticipation builds for a month-long visit to my homeland. Four weeks with familiar faces. Four weeks to reconnect with all I'd left behind when my family and I moved to England thirteen years ago. Four weeks, to get the best value from the 24-hour return flight and the month's salary spent on tickets.

'I wish we could go tomorrow!' Khay, my sixteen-year-old, announces on the last day of school. He's eager to spend his summer with his cousins, just as he's done for many years since we left Malaysia when he was a toddler.

Soon, I tell him. Not just yet, I tell myself, staring at my to-do list of deadlines. Like my son, I can't wait to be with extended family and old friends again. To enjoy the laksa and yong tau fu I had grown up with. To feel the heat of the equatorial sun when I step out of the shower, instead of the temperate chill of a British summer.

Yet there's a part of me that resents this annual disruption of my life here. That wonders why I put myself in this holding pattern before we leave each summer. The part of me that wishes I could stay and enjoy England at its warmest, maybe even plant some tomatoes and watch them grow.

*****

She loved how her garden came alive in the summer, with blood-red poppies among squat bushes of white ox-eye daisies, and foxgloves that lured bees into their pink trumpets. A

sole coneflower, its broad orange centre a perfect landing pad for spiders. Delphiniums, iridescent blue against a red brick wall, jostling with the bright yellow of black-eyed Susans for attention. iridescent blue against a red brick wall, jostling with the bright yellow of black-eyed Susans for attention.

So much to do before she left: dying daisies to deadhead. Drifts of lavender to prune, their scent reminding her of the Yardley soap of her youth. Buddleia to trim, so they could produce more of the violet clumps that butterflies love. The foxgloves were well past their first growth, pointy seedheads already replacing blooms. She left them swaying on their tall stems to self-sow. As she spread bark chippings around her plants, she could smell the compost-mixed soil, deep and loamy. Grounding her to the land, to her home.

While she was away, the garden would survive on the occasional watering by a neighbour. No need to tend to moisture-loving, nutrient-hungry plants. Like tomatoes.
*****
Two days before my flight. I'm in Theresa's garden listening to my friends make plans for the summer. There'll be a barbeque at Karen's. Birthday drinks at Pippa's. Weekends on the beach, if the weather remains sunny.

I think about how all of us had spent a week together in France with our families five summers ago. How we had driven from Norwich to Dover, Khay in the back seat impatient to join his friends on the ferry to Calais. How our Montreuil holiday cottage had echoed with the noise of seven small boys, with the laughter and conversation of four families taking turns to cook dinner each night.

I think about how I wasn't in Malaysia that summer. Back then my family and I would go every year and a half, and not always in July. We made shorter visits at Christmas, and once at Easter.

Then my father-in-law passed away in 2009, followed by my father a few years later. Parents don't live forever. Now we go for a month each summer, because time with our mothers has become finite. Precious.

But there are moments when I think about skipping a year. When I'd suggest to my husband and son: why don't we go on a road trip this summer, see more of the country we've now made our home?

There are moments when tired of the solitude of working remotely, I'd scroll through Jobs24 and Indeed looking for a local job. Then I'd wonder how much leave I'd get, and if they'd let me take it all in the summer. Freelancing and zero-hour contracts allow me to take time off whenever I want. A freedom that's hard to forgo despite the financial precarity, despite my struggle to rebuild the career I'd given up to move to England.

These are the moments when I'd long to immerse myself in my life here, instead of always coming and going each year. To commit myself to one place. How else would I find the sense of belonging that's eluded me even though I've lived here for over a decade?

'Look at those tomatoes!"

Pippa's voice draws my attention to several pots on the patio. They are wreathed in young tomatoes, their green skin beginning to ripen red. Honeysuckle blooms cover

the wall behind them. I breathe in their warm sweetness; they smell of the sun's golden glow that's turned the afternoon into a mellow evening that seems to stretch forever. Making me believe anything is possible.

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The first thing she noticed when she arrived home in August was the lavender, their heavy purple wands grazing the tinder-dry lawn. It had been another summer of heatwaves. Dried foxgloves with desiccated seedheads stood tall against the brick wall like antennas of a mutant insect. Their fragile stems will snap with no effort when she cuts them down in a week's time. Dead blossoms speckled her daisy bushes like beetles caught in freeze-frame.

The house was quiet in its stillness. Devoid of the constant honk of traffic, the buzz of the grass strimmer, the slow put-put of the dengue-fogging truck she'd become accustomed to during her month in her homeland. It was a silence she'd always appreciated, for giving her the headspace she struggled to find in South East Asia. But not today. Today she longed for any noise to distract her from the thoughts that filled her head, from the multiple paper-cut stings of goodbyes. It would be another week before she felt ready to tend to her garden again, another two before she would tackle the weeds that had taken over her backyard. The sun's warmth was comforting on her skin as she lifted a paving slab, waking up woodlice that scurried in the sun as they tried to regain their dark shelter beneath the stones. She pushed her hand trowel into the topsoil to loosen the roots of a hardy weed. It took several strong tugs with both hands before she could free them from the dry earth. The sharp astringency of crushed leaves filled the air as she held the weed aloft.

A white butterfly flitted around her as she continued to work in the garden, the heat now searing on her bare arms. *Aiya, why are you sitting under the hot sun*, she could hear her mother in her head, admonishing her. A welcome surge of energy coursed through her, replacing the lassitude that had lingered like a low-grade fever since she returned to England. The sorrow of leaving a life she once knew. The guilt of abandoning her elderly mother. The regret of not watching her nephew and niece grow up.

Yank, pull, release. She had to dig deep, to free the roots from the land to which they were attached. They were tenacious. As stubborn as those that connected her to her homeland. Even as she discarded the weeds in a growing pile, she knew there would be some that were too deeply rooted to remove completely.

By evening it hurt her to move, but it was a satisfying ache. She thought of tomorrow, of how she would buy more compost. Of what she could plant in the cleared-out areas of her garden.

Tomorrow, she will try again to put down roots here.

Yin F Lim is a Malaysian-born writer and editor whose creative non-fiction around family, food and migration has appeared in *Moxy, Porridge,* and *Hinterland* magazine where she is a co-editor. Yin, who lives in Norwich, holds a Creative Non-Fiction MA from the University of East Anglia. She is writing a book about her grandmother's emigration from Southern China to Malaya as a mui tsai.

An excerpt from *The Four Seasons* / Pasi Jaakola

His work has appeared in The Big Picture magazine, published by The Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge.

Long Distance
by Eric Yip

six thousand miles away
a window imposes

its thumbprint of light
over your face

here the evening is stratified
into hues of blue

the planes are in migration
they know where they must go

I have begun
to believe in rivers

capillaries of mountains
carrying water and carp

have I told you about
the circumnavigation of blood

its faithfulness to the heart
do you think there is something

we could learn from this
have you breached

the thick film of sleep
to rediscover my absence

Long Distance
by Eric Yip (cont'd)

tonight I will attempt
to dream of you

I have practised our future
over and over

look how our paths
converge right there

my legs have memorised
the walk to your home

First published in
harana poetry, issue 10 (2022)

Eric Yip was born and raised in Hong Kong. His poems appear in The Poetry Review, The Adroit Journal, Best New Poets, and elsewhere. He won the 2021 National Poetry Competition and is currently an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge.

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes

This is the story of a love affair that began when I was eight. You are not really serious when you are seventeen, wrote Arthur Rimbaud in 'Romance', his poem about adolescent love, and he was right. But it is different at eight. Everything is serious then, and later, when love goes, there still remains the memory of the romance.

This is a deeply uncool confession for any writer wishing to be taken seriously in England. I am an adult of sixty-eight now and the romance is diminished. It is a romance that knows itself to be a romance or to have been a romance, and therefore something quaint. But it is no less true for that.

Where to begin? Let me begin with the sunshine on the high wall that bounds our yard. The light constantly changes but the wall is always the same, still flint, still centuries old, still with the remnants of what must have been a low sloping roof embedded in it. Pigeons, blackbirds, blue tits, robins and various finches have perched on it. A pair of collared doves have watched their fledgling - born flightless with one stunted wing - scuttle around underneath and take shelter by huddling against it.

There is, according to the romance, something peculiarly English about both the light and the wall, especially the light. Returning from visits abroad it seems a clear yet soft light, a light to walk into. It is harder to define once you are in it and you really need to have been away at least a month and to have arrived by plane to notice it at all, but it is local light: neither Mediterranean nor mid-continental. It is an island-light built out of sea.

Almost thirty years ago we spent most of the year in my landlocked birthplace, Hungary, and when we returned to the UK there was the same light and a smell I can only conjure rather than experience now. 'I smell the sea,' I declared on the tarmac at Heathrow. I can't have of course but it was as if what I knew of the sea was in the air, perceptible to heightened senses. There was clearly a difference in the light and the smell, and the difference had to be the sea.

Those heightened senses were an echo of the eight-year old boy's first experience of the sea. When we arrived in England in the December of 1956 the authorities placed us, along with a lot of other Hungarian refugees, in off-season boarding houses on the Kent coast. Hundreds, maybe thousands of us were being accommodated in such places elsewhere. It was in the depth of winter, cold and dull, but we could take walks along the prom and gaze at the sea, a great alien body of water the like of which none of us had seen before. It was as grey as everything else around us at that time but its noise was denser, a hiss, a low growl and sort of clattering surge that served as both threat and safeguard. Surely the sea was the best of all possible walls against those who would, elsewhere, have harmed us. No invading army had marched along this

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

promenade for many centuries. We were in a strong place. Strong army, strong navy, strong sea. The sea was almost strong enough by itself. It was tangible, almost solid. If we wrapped up well and kept watching we would finish up tasting of salt. Our fingers had a clear salty taste. And as the year moved towards spring and colours brightened we got sharp salty winds and moved through what we began to think of as salty light.

The sea was the earliest definition of English life but it was soon joined by what faced it: rows of terraces, houses with gables and front gardens, hotels, shops selling seaside mementos like seaside rock and funny hats, and amusement arcades blasting rock n' roll. For us as children there were the English comics we soon had our hands on, full of wild pictures with talks- and thinks-bubbles. Beano, Beezer, Dandy, Tiger, Lion were the magical names and, most wonderful of all, The Eagle with Dan Dare, Digby and the The Mekon.

All this was induction, as was the scout hut on the cliff path in Westgate where the cubs would meet, the Winter Gardens in Margate, the wrestling night, the English breakfasts, the fish and chips, the cups of tea, the pounding of English children's feet down the street into our heads and the blossoming of soft clear light into April and May.

This was England. We were not going back, now or ever.

It wasn't so much that we were going to be staying precisely there, by the sea in Kent, or even in England. My father had a cousin in Australia and the first thought was to join her and her family in Sydney but that involved a long application process so it wasn't going to happen immediately. In the meantime we really should learn English

Language classes were provided. We tried to round our mouths to the great variety of ever-closing English diphthongs, to blunt, subdued consonants and to all the multiple, unpredictable, next to impossible varieties of 'o' and 'th' that would always betray us. We tried to adjust our eyes and ears to the vagaries of English spelling. But that would not be enough! We set about pushing Hungarian out of the way by refusing to speak it at home.

My father had retained some of his pre-war school English but it was my mother who insisted we stop Hungarian right there and then. Talk the local language: be the language. Be entirely new.

So, while we had no money of our own except that which we received as pocket money from the authorities, we would go out and shop in English. Not in sign language but in clumsy words to which people responded with amusement and, it seemed to us, pleasure. We were heroes after all, survivors of a valiant revolution beaten down by the brute force of the Cold War enemy, Russia. We were the good guys. We had a great football team. Everyone's first word to us was: Puskás. Not that my parents were active participants in the revolution. But they had left and had arrived, exotic as they were – as we were – as direct evidence of the troubled outside world.

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

We remained by the sea for a few months. In May my parents found jobs and we moved to London, first to a damp maisonette by a railway line in Hendon and, soon after that, to our first house, a small terrace, in one of the humbler and duller London suburbs. The authorities had helped by loaning us our very first mortgage by way of guarantee. So now we owned a house! A house of our own! Here were streets full of small front gardens. Here we had privacy in our own sheltered space. Here, in a two up-two down we could have permanent bedrooms and a sitting room that was specifically a sitting room, not a bedroom, study, parlour and dining room all in one as had been the case back home in our relatively comfortable third-floor flat.

Here, for the first time, we had proper English neighbours whose children had names like Wendy and Helen and Frank. Down the road there was a stern-looking scoutmaster we would see striding purposefully past the house in his scout uniform. And the houses too had a certain broken uniformity, rows of them with minor individuating features, painted or pebble-dashed, slightly bigger or slightly smaller. It wasn't regimentation more a matter of quiet, informal conformity. But that was not all. Further up the hill stood a bigger house that looked like a cross between an abbey and a fort where my brother took his first violin lessons from kindly Mr Shane, who lived there and maintained himself by playing in Mantovani's orchestra. (I can still hear the strains of *Charmaine*, the theme tune of Mantovani's television show with Mr Shane in black and white view). What a romantic and mysterious place that house was to us: a genuine piece of eccentricity just off the Edgware Road.

If a humble district could accommodate both eccentricity and conformity surely it could accommodate us, no questions asked. No one here demands to know your religion or political views, rejoiced my parents who had escaped from a culture where people were constantly obliged to report on each other. No one taps your phone – it was a privilege even to have a phone in Budapest - or listens in on you. You didn't have to stand up at specific points of a speech and applaud solidly for ten minutes, the only expectation being that we stand for the Queen at the end of the show at the cinema.

Australia didn't work out. But surely this was a decent substitute, no matter if it was comprised of some mysterious blend of tolerance and jealously guarded privacy. We learned about the privacy because we could talk to our neighbours over the fence but not in their front rooms. We were never invited in. But that would come in time. Our neighbour's disapproval of the mess we were making of our very first back garden – the sign of both

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

individuality and conformity - was coded in ways we had not yet learned to recognise. It occasioned minor unease, no more. Living here was good. Just look at the freedom, said my father when he took us to Hyde Park Corner. You could practically breathe it.

It wasn't just freedom they valued. Britain was still a great power in the world. It had been not just on the right side in the war: it was the right side. It was wartime BBC that had told them what they considered to be the truth. They trusted the BBC and through it trusted the country.

How efficiently administered the country was, they thought. How kind people had been! And how it rewarded work! Not all refugees were skilled of course: for every high-level scientist, engineer or scholar there were ten times as many white or blue collar workers, but all were regarded as being of some material value. However you balanced the account, we were beneficiaries not only of political freedom and stability but of luxuries well beyond any we could have hoped for in Hungary. In 1958 we rented a television. A year later we bought a car from a mechanic friend, a second-hand maroon Hillman Minx. No one had a television in Budapest and only top party officials had access to cars.

*

It was at work where my parents made their first direct acquaintance with the class system. My father worked in an office but was constantly visiting building sites. Visiting building sites had been part of his life in Hungary so it wasn't workers he had to get used to in England: it was his office colleagues. Being himself from a working class family – his father worked on the shop floor of a shoe factory - he was perfectly at home with Jerry Sparks the electrician but was always having to get the measure of Jack and Alan around him in the office. There was the very occasional dinner with Jack or Alan and family round at ours and while this was friendly enough it was not reciprocated.

My parents learned to read class codes as best they could but were never wholly at ease with them. I don't think they met with hostility – I didn't either - but as time went by their friends were ever more likely to be foreigners like themselves. They continued to feel obliged to the state that had received them, in so far as it was a place of welcome, calm and safety but calm and safety were not their natural conditions. In their precarious situation, with their precarious history, order was essential. Having left an authoritarian, indeed dictatorial country, they identified with their new home in the way that any immigrant from a similar background is likely to identify with a more liberal version of the same structure. They loved the freedoms but were used to order. They recognised order as they might a landscape.

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

Two primary schools and three years passed before I qualified for the nearest state grammar school. My consciousness had changed over those three years. There were increasingly moments in that period when I realised, or was made to realise, that I was not quite an English boy. The awareness that others did not consider me English grew within me and unsettled me. I was anxious to prove them wrong. My feelings were complex and intense: the desire to identify combined with the fear of never being able to do so.

Here is an example of the romantic identification process. At the age of nine a month or two on from the 6th February 1958 I became a Manchester United fan. That was the date of the Munich air disaster when the plane crashed and, what I was told was a great team – a team I had never seen play and wouldn't have recognised as great, not even knowing what qualities might make a great team - was destroyed. But the club had to go on, so a team of survivors and loan players was cobbled together and, despite all the odds, it reached the FA Cup Final where it was beaten by Bolton after Harry Gregg, the Manchester United goalkeeper, was charged in the back and over the line by Nat Lofthouse who injured Gregg – himself a Munich survivor - in the process. The goal was allowed. I had no real idea of the club or the players, I simply understood a disaster had happened, that some spirit had risen from the disaster and that fate would not necessarily be kind to that spirit. From that time on I was committed. I quickly understood what it was to support a team. I started playing the game and began to understand what a great team might be. I myself was determined to be a footballer. I wanted to play for England, a team for which I could never play. That may be where the romance truly began.

Football was more exciting than school was. Secondary school was not romance but a fog in which I got lost. I played football there but not as well as I had hoped. I sat in class and worked at half-pace, doing far worse than was expected of me. I was in dreams, elsewhere. Perhaps it was the delayed reaction to the trauma of 1956 but it worried my parents. It might be only a phase but it could cost me dear in academic terms.

But there were compensations: new ways of being, new things to give my doubtful heart to. First came The Beatles then the World Cup. I sneaked off school to see A Hard Day's Night and went to two of the World Cup games. My very favourite player – the player I took to be an archetypal English player, Bobby Charlton – was a hero and Manchester United were approaching a new zenith. I was no longer a child but an adolescent. I was growing a sceptical eye but England 1966 was still romance. Liverpool, according to Allen Ginsberg, was the centre of human consciousness. I lived in a London suburb, a little out of the swing of things, not at the centre of anything, but somewhere within its borders, just a couple of hundred miles from the centre of human consciousness.

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

becomes much more commercially successful than real England that slowly becomes an impoverished wasteland. The romance was killing the reality. The fake was strangling the authentic. The Isle of Wight makes a fortune: true England decays.

My 2001 book, *An English Apocalypse*, included a set of twenty-five poems in which the England of the 1970s – the period of my growing into adulthood - was wiped out by one comic apocalypse after another. In one, England is singled out by a meteor, in another it is frozen into stillness by a vast power cut, in the third its cliffs are eaten away and the country is drowned by a deluge, in the fourth its young men fall prey to an epidemic of mass suicide, and in the fifth what is left of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse take complete control. The sequence served as a prophylactic, a comic spell against the demise of the romantic object, the England in which I had grown to manhood, a kind of prayer over its remains, or perhaps the dream of its remains.

*

I was a late and ineffective campaigner for Remain in June last year but when I did go from door to door I encountered only two basic arguments for Leave, both less arguments than statements. They were: *Once we leave they won't tell us what to do* and *It was better before*. The question I always wanted to ask but never did, was: *Before what*? Before the crash of 2008? Before the accession of the smaller European countries (including my own) in 2004? Before the closing of the major industries in the eighties? Before the Winter of Discontent? Before the Three Day Week? Before the break up of the Beatles? Before the assassination of Kennedy? Before Suez? Before me? When?

Every period has a memory of its golden age. One has only to close one's eyes and the images appear, redolent with power. For me it was the first sight of the sea, the smell of salt on the runway, the quiet gardens of the cheap suburb, the full dip into a new language, the school tales of derring-do, the football team rising from the ashes. I couldn't say which of them was the most important. There were too many things and none of them was precisely it. It was smell as much as vision, perhaps more smell than vision, more presence than description.

Educated, hard-headed people have sometimes told me that what I had loved and found fascinating as a child was a set of clichés that closed out hard facts and ignored real history, that it was a longing for heroes in an age without heroes, a fake England much like Julian Barnes's Isle of Wight. Perhaps they were right and what I wrote about the seventies was a way of coming to terms with reality – with the country's own reality as well as mine - while seeking to protect what remained of romance.

But what did remain? That is what my Leavers

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

were asking and, it seemed to me, desperately desiring. They too were engaged in a romance they found hard to locate. They too were clinging.

*

The point about walking into the light of England is that one has to walk into it from the outside. The sea and the wall that, as a child, I instinctively took to be important symbols of an obscure entity that was there to be discovered have remained potent symbols but I am not sure of what now. I know they inclined me to more than affection for the country I had entered. I might have been a stranger but I wanted to be at one with it, hence the love, the romance, and the very thought of romance. And while the knowledge grew in me that I could not quite be at one with it, I could not forget that I owed it something, the way my parents did.

My own place was brought home to me by a small and well-meant incident some three years ago. As part of a local festival of literature an open-air reading of favourite poems was arranged for market day. People read against the noise and bustle of shopping. One of the readers gave us John Betjeman's 'A Subaltern's Love Song', a period-haunted, semi-parody of a love poem to a strong tennis-playing girl, Miss J. Hunter Dunn. At the end of the session a very nice member of the festival committee remarked, 'I don't suppose you will ever understand all that means to us.'

There was no hostility in the remark. It wasn't asking me, as an elderly German-born woman was asked immediately after the Brexit vote, 'When are you going home?' My committee member's remark was honest and guileless. It acknowledged something that I had to admit was perfectly true. My place wasn't at Miss Joan Hunter Dunne's house with her father's euonymus, his summer-house, or his cream-coloured walls 'betrophied with sports'. I would certainly not be a member of the tennis club or enter with nostalgia whatever romance it held for John Betjeman. I was like Nikolaus Pevsner observing English art and architecture, naming it, classifying it, hoping to get some sort of anthropological handle on it.

The knowledge saddened me. I didn't see myself as Pevsner. I thought of myself as one of the household if not fully of the family. Having lived in England sixty years, with a British passport, I was not in fear of being asked to pack my bags like a good many EU citizens currently are but, if everything I had once felt about England was merely romance, I was as more a citizen of the world than I had imagined, in other words a citizen of nowhere. The house had graciously welcomed and accommodated me but the rooms and corridors I shared with others were, in social terms, temporary accommodation. I would continue to be a welcome guest but there were certain rooms that would remain locked to me.

It is obvious now, of course. The romance *was* the locked room and always had been.

England: A Love Affair by George Szirtes (cont'd)

The salt, the sea, the light and the wall were all symbols of the locked room. They were promises of an inner richness, a refuge.

The image I once devised for the place of my work in English, that of a vacant nineteenth century European tenement block, much like the one in which I was born, set improbably in a humble London suburb where the streets are terraces with tiny front gardens was not far off the mark. Ghosts could pursue each other up and down its lift shafts. The tenement blocks of the host country were on fire producing their own ghosts.

First published as pamphlet entitled *England: A Love Affair* (Cuckoo Press, 2017). Reproduced with permission from the publisher

George Szirtes was born in Budapest in 1948, and came to England with his family after the 1956 Hungarian Uprising. He was educated in England, training as a painter, and has always written in English. In recent years he has worked as a translator of Hungarian literature, such as Ottó Orbán, Zsuzsa Rakovszky and Ágnes Nemes Nagy. He co-edited Bloodaxe's Hungarian anthology *The Colonnade of Teeth*. His Bloodaxe poetry books include: *The Budapest File* (2000); *An English Apocalypse* (2001); *Reel* (2004), winner of the T.S. Eliot Prize; *New & Collected Poems* (2008) and *The Burning of the Books and other poems* (2009), shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2009. *Bad Machine* (2013) was a Poetry Book Society Choice and shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2013. *Mapping the Delta* (2016), another Poetry Book Society Choice, was followed by *Fresh Out of the Sky* (2021). Bloodaxe has also published his Newcastle/Bloodaxe Poetry Lectures, *Fortinbras at the Fishhouses: Responsibility, the Iron Curtain and the sense of history as knowledge* (2010), and John Sears' critical study, Reading George Szirtes (2008). His memoir of his mother, The *Photographer at Sixteen* (MacLehose Press, 2019), won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography. Szirtes lives in Norfolk.

'Role reversal'
by Tulika Jha

I walk out with a box. I don't know what's inside. I do know that it's not a baby because I have left her behind. Both Mummy and Maa fuss over me asking me if I can walk or would I prefer a wheelchair. The dads have gone to fetch the car right to the main entrance. It's funny because I have walked through these corridors more times than I can remember. Mainly to get to A&E when some smartass junior doctor has told me that they have one of mine waiting.

"How do you know they are one of mine?"

"Well, they are a sandwich short of a picnic for sure."

"And who am I speaking to? Please call me with a proper referral and count yourself lucky that I am not reporting you."

It's dark outside but I can see the silhouette of my clinic room building. It must be a balmy September evening because the inpatients are out smoking and chatting loudly.

"Are you the patient? Can you sign here please?" I am confused for a moment, then I carefully hand the box over to Maa who cradles it as if supporting the head of a new-born. Our eyes meet as we complete the precious transfer. It's the first time I notice that her eyes are red and crinkled. It's uncomfortable. As if the façade of the grandchild is exposed. I am not ready for that. I turn quickly to sign the papers. Mummy has been stroking my back repeatedly and it's irritating me so much that I shimmy my back to jolt her hand off.

Animesh is waiting at the front door. Jai is fast asleep in his cot-bed. Maa tells me to wait there. She runs up and gets a plate with a tealight, rice grains and red vermillion and makes large circles in the air in front of the box. She places some rice on the box and vermillion on my forehead. I am desperate to get inside and see Jai. Remind myself that I am a mother. Smell his milky sweet breath and kiss his fluffy soft hands. I place the box carelessly on the console table and without taking off my shoes dart towards the stairs.

"We need to pray for her first" I am told. They are conspiring to scratch at my patience one ritual after another. It takes me back to my wedding where they didn't feed me for 2 days only to be told by the priest at the altar that this had not been necessary.

We put the box on the shelf of the two God pictures we possess and fold our hands.

Whilst my eyes are kept shut, mummy opens the box. I gasp when I see it: a small, knitted hat, a matching little frock, and booties. I shiver and slump on the chair, clutching my belly with both hands. I want to run back to the hospital, open the cold steel drawer of the fridge, scoop her out with both hands, hold her close to my chest and rub her red pound of flesh back to life. I had seen and done this for many people who were thought to be dead. I was a doctor whose body was misbehaving as a patient. If my body wouldn't house her, my home would. A box within a box.

Bennarchie
by Andrés N. Ordorica

We drank tea from a flask
atop Bennachie, remember?

You showed me the land,
said, “this made me.”

You pointed to the river,
understood it to be yours.

Every mile of every hill,
every crag woven into your DNA.

Had a memory of every coordinate,
and I longed for just some of it.

I longed to know a land like that,

close enough to feel at home

and for that home to love me back
like I was her one and only son.

First published in *At Least This I Know* (404 Ink, 2022)
by Andres N Ordorica

Andrés N. Ordorica is a queer Latinx writer based in Edinburgh. His writing attempts to map the journey of his diasporic experience and unpack what it means to be from ni de aquí, ni de allá. His debut poetry collection, At Least This I Know, is published with 404 Ink.

'Myth-making'
by Perla Kantarjian

in this poem, the title precedes the body & the heat in my skin is a wolfcry.

the international market in the new town has all the exotic fungus i like, all in stock and delightfully ripe; and when i go there i pretend Fortune is my name then leave. thank you. have a nice day.

in Armenian, the thank you is too long a word– so when in Beirut, the شكرا was always accepted, and the շնորհակալություն melted away where language goes when grown distant, its neglected weight the carrying limb.

when i was a kid i used to faint every now then, then wake up with a slap that knocked me back asleep. sorry, i used to say to my mom drowsily. sorry եթե վախցուցի. ma3le ծո, she would say, her forehead kiss once a warmest home.

every tuesday, dad used to palm me 20 Lebanese liras for my piano lessons from an ancient neighbour until she died, only the week-old-reek giving it away from beneath her door.

Alice had never learnt to speak Arabic, you see. her family's ancestral escape was Paris, so i used to say merci to her. merci շատ. a once husband passed her the Lebanese passport but oh how she delected in her european affinity.

the evening Port of Beirut exploded, the moon was fuller than the chest of grief– extending all its light to ease the mourning, perhaps help show it, deplete it of its foreignness. if Alice were still alive, she would've been playing clair de lune now, i had thought before not going to sleep.

here, i pay for the piano room in pounds. i go there when mourning and its remembrance need to exit me and i have but my fingers to vessel them out. here, all the tunes youtube premium teaches me tend to be rooted in the moon. the sonata, the clair, all such songs of loss.

'Myth-making'
by Perla Kantarjian (cont'd)

here, every time i leave the piano room, i am weightless, and the moon instead of me has three overarching sides. i smile at each in a different way, and walk with light to a borrowed desk space, then write about it.

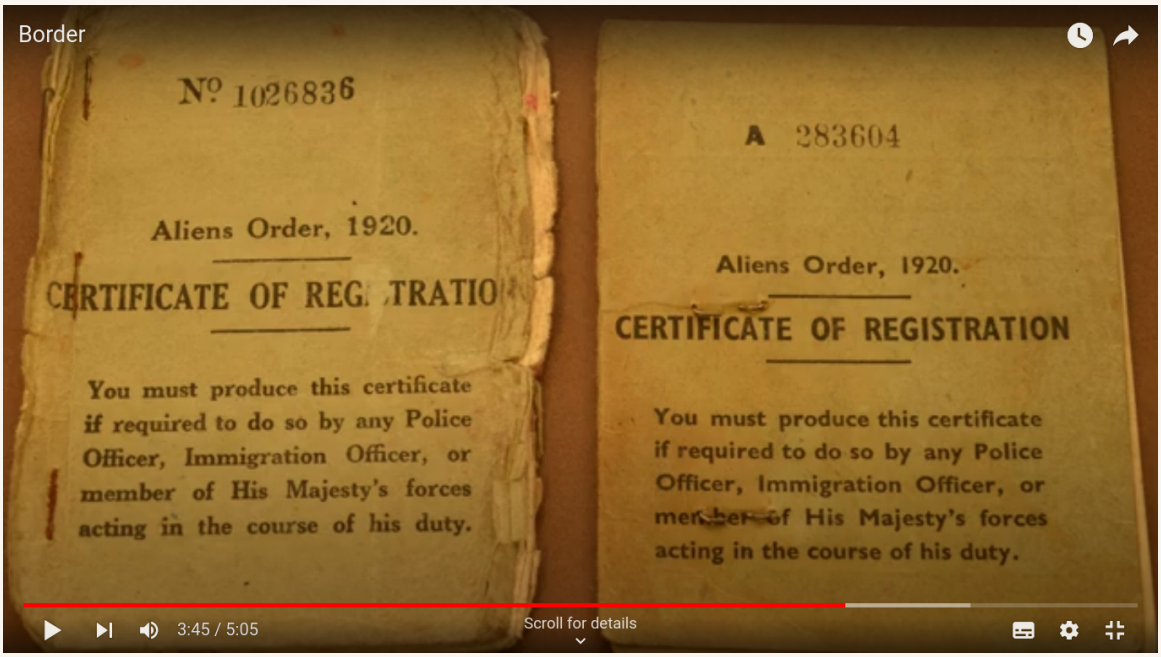
become the whole of it in the attempt.

but forget craters. tonight these deep burrowed spaces in my surface are fumaroles. the burning is exiting, and you are breathing in the smoke.

i'm sorry. what accent is that. have a nice day.

A Lebanese-Armenian poet, editor, and journalist, Kantarjian is currently enrolled in the MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) at UEA as the 2021 Sonny Mehta Scholar. I've had publications in over thirty magazines and have a background in journalism with Lebanese daily *Annahar Newspaper*, where I was also founding editor of the literary segment *Carpe Diem*. My work has been commended and awarded by The Poetry Society, Indigo Open Poetry Prize, South Downs Poetry Festival, Illuminarium Chronicles Continental Voices, wildfire words New Voices Award, and the E.H.P Barnard Poetry Prize.

'Border'
a film by Liz Cysartz



Click here to watch

Liz Cysartz is an interdisciplinary artist based in London. Her practice includes drawing, film and installation. Recent work explores political and private boundaries and what happens when they collide. Liz grew up in Yorkshire to Polish and British parents not speaking Polish and believing that return to her father's place of birth was impossible as it no longer existed. Liz studied Typography & Graphic Communication at Reading University, Painting at Wimbledon, UAL and Art History at Birkbeck, UoL. She is about to start an MA in Art and Place at Dartington School of Art.

'In the middle of both sleeps'
a film by Hebianhengge

Click here to watch

在两种睡眠中间 in the middle of both sleeps (2022) is a moving image installation that brings together scripted text, narration, sound, as well as original and found footage exploring queer living space as a transient collection of experiences, imaginations and movements through a composition of fictional and personal voices.

Centred in this film are two parts of interwoven text, which the audience is guided through with shifts in tones and perspectives (accompanied by an alternating sequence of footage). Part one depicts a fictional conversation where two people discuss about their house while trying to figure out the strange sound that woke them up in the middle of the night (a choreographed compilation of real estate commercials representing the image of ideal families and lifestyles past and present); part two draws upon reflections on our relationship with living space (a filmed attempt to navigate in the flat).

Founded in 2020, 河边哼歌 Hebianhengge (Echo/Yuhan and Else/Xun) is an artist duo based in London who work in a shared context of subverting the dominant narratives with individual focuses. Research interests include: politics of language and visual culture regarding the marginalised groups; Sinophone studies, living spaces, etc. Practice-wise, they work primarily with writing (of fictional scripts or essays) and the guided experience of writing, which often takes the form of text-based moving image with a shared but not necessarily unified voice.

from *Thunderstone*
Nancy Campbell

I tug back the bolt on the gate and walk down the lane with a rush of freedom. After months of matching my steps carefully to another's, I'm finding my own pace again. In the glade, spring is burgeoning into summer. Ivy scrambles up the trunks of alder and elder and ash, dressing the woods in uniform green. As I hack at the nettles with a blunt pair of garden shears, I consider my original plan to leave Oxford. Was it so absurd? I'm fond of this city, for all the lofty arrogance I've encountered at its academic heart. Even that cold core has its cosy spots. I recall the pub snugs once frequented by Iris Murdoch or J. R. R. Tolkien, spirits who trod the line between the university's strictures and the wild spaces of their own imaginations. Philip Pullman's description of Oxford in *The Subtle Knife* as a place where rifts in the fabric of this world might lead us into other worlds is not far from my own experience. I've found kindred spirits here, real and imaginary. I've speculated like Lyra with her alethiometer, trying to scry out some kind of future in dark times. I've meandered through unfamiliar neighbourhoods, discovering handy treasures: boxes of windfalls at the back gates of a convent, or jars of honey with a hopeful honesty box down a lavender path. Over the low walls of the most unkempt and mysterious front gardens I've browsed trestle tables exhibiting ('free to a good home') cuttings of saxifrage and sempervivums, miniature botanical gardens that hint at an orderly greenhouse hidden somewhere beyond the climbing roses and apple trees hung with Tibetan prayer flags. The main roads of the city branch out like the spokes of a mandala and between them run forgotten alleyways: Cuckoo Lane in the east, Jackdaw Lane in the south. Yet this threshold is the most distinctive one I've ever crossed.

Soon my gloves are caked with sweat and earth, and stiff as gauntlets. My body leans into the pleasure of labour again after months cramped indoors. *The earth shows up those of value and those who are good for nothing.* An ancient peasant judgement, recorded by John Berger: I'm making myself good for something. But what?

An old white dog with a wall eye appears, and sniffs silently among the nettles. I've seen this dog before. The assassin arrives soon after. He's come to see how I'm getting on. To check up on me? He is curt, but then I am short with him. Although speech is brief, this is a friendly visit. He brings an old scythe with a polished steel blade, which is more efficient than the garden shears.

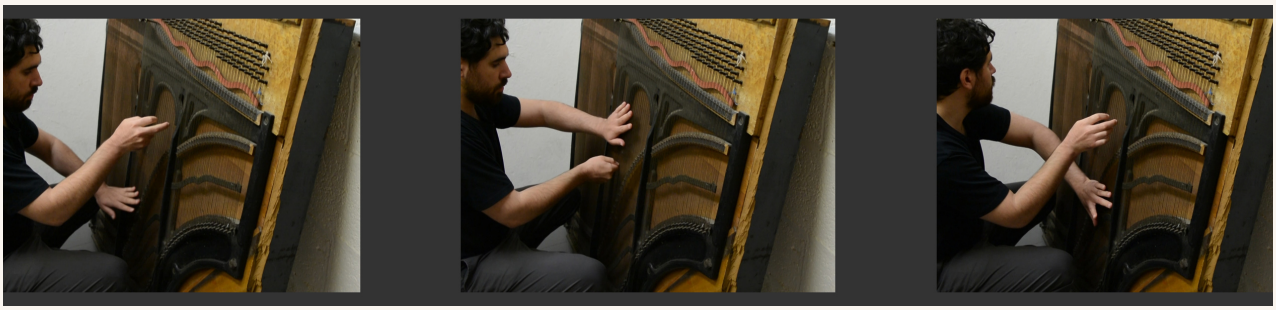
Aislin and the assassin have been here twenty years. Yes, the land
has changed in that time. Once this part of the canal was known as
the Gates of Hell. It was much rougher then, he says, just a tip for the
railway, with bonfires burning day and night. Junkies came to this
patch, since the police never dared follow them down here. You still
find syringes lying around, so watch out for your wheels – you'll have

to check the ground over if you're going to drive the caravan in. And
then there were the hippies, he breathes contemptuously, gesturing to
a naked Cindy doll, its legs splayed, in the fork of one of the willows.
It has been crucified with a rusted nail through its plastic abdomen.
The hippies, they were worse than the junkies, he says, university
drop-outs who wanted to live on the land but couldn't be bothered
to look after it or even themselves. He gets his penknife out and saws
the doll in half, casting the hollow pink torso down into the nettles,
then begins to work loose the nail. They nearly burned the woods
down and you still find bits of plastic crap like this, old yoga mats
and shisha pipe and lighters. The nail comes loose and he pockets it. They
mess everything up and then they move on. There was a Macedonian
guy living here last winter, don't know what happened to him.
He takes a few steps towards the path, then turns back. 'Before
it was the Gates of Hell,' he says, 'it was Joy's Field – I've seen the old
deeds. It was named Joy after the farmer who owned the land before
the railway took it, and you'll make it that again if you choose.'
I go back over the ground, the mown nettles wilting already in
the noon heat, looking for debris. The assassin was right. Not only
syringes, but bottles buried deep in the earth, bleary with condensation
or ancient dried-up fermentation, and colourful fragments of
foam that might once have been yoga mats. Most unnerving are the
plastic bags: clagged with soil, hard to excavate, each time one comes
to the surface I pray there is nothing sinister inside it.
I'm writing this slumped back against the willow, slugging water
from a flask. My mind has not dwelt on anything painful all day, and
I've just cleared enough ground to live on.

First published in *Thunderstone* (Elliott & Thompson, 2022) by Nancy Campbell

Nancy Campbell's books include *Disko Bay* (Enitharmon), *Thunderstone* (Elliott & Thompson), *Uneasy Pieces* (Guillemot Press), and *Navigations* (HappenStance) which collects poems written during her tenure as Canal Laureate. In 2020 Nancy received the RGS Ness Award for her creative response to the polar environment. She writes for the Guardian and The TLS, and is a former editor of Oxford Poetry.

Fragment interface
by Alexander Starvou



To view (performed in April 2022 / password: historyofhome)

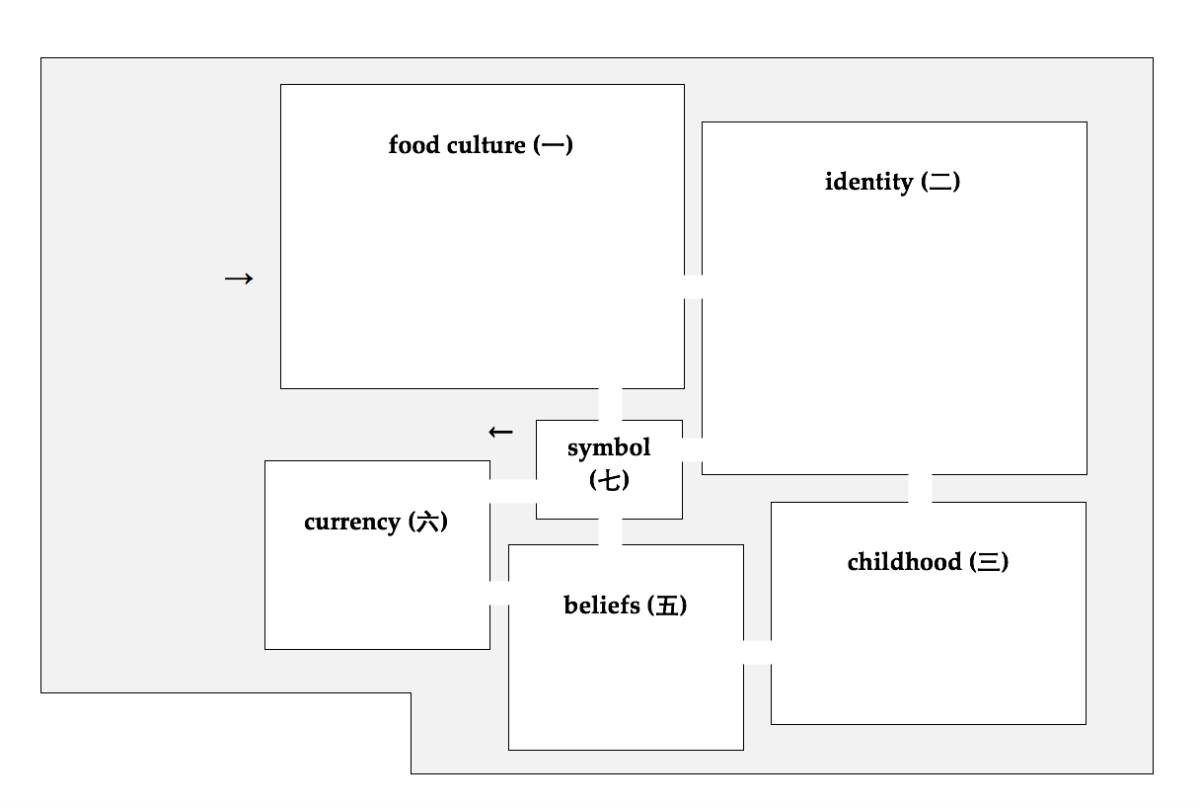
Fingers, thumbs, fingernails, thumbnails, knuckles, palms, backs of hands, forearms, elbows and wrists on a fragment of a discarded piano.

Discontinuous Golden Ratio (2021)
by Alexander Starvou

Laser on 3mm plywood clamped by shoe sole rubber
nailed to a wall
13.5 x 18 cm (plywood)

Alexander is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice is centred around thinking-through-making. He plays among and between the fields of painting, object making, installation, sound, digital film, writing and performance. Some recent investigations meditate on growing up around the transformative world of a cobbler's workshop where you can still find his father edging the sole back from the toe with his thumbs, heel clamped between his left arm and midriff, considering how best to rejoin each part. He holds an MFA from the Ruskin School of Art, which was funded by a Studentship in the the Humanities. Recent shows include Adapt Transform at Modern Art Oxford, Oxford; un/re/dis/cover at OVADA,Oxford; Substance Bundle at The Koppel Project Central, London; and Dentons Art Prize 9.0 at Dentons London.

"A Personal History of Hong Kong as 39 Everyday Objects' by Antony Huen



food culture (一)
tea-coloured plastic cup / menu holder with the print of a beer brand / cha chaan teng's order pad with a waiter's scribbles / Vitasoy glass bottle / turtle jelly china bowl / two toothpicks in a sachet / clay pot for clay-pot rice / bamboo steamer / tea-coloured lazy Susan / U-shaped barbecue fork

identity (二)
bamboo scaffolding / bamboo birdcage / bamboo broom / blue plastic flip-flops / rolling suitcase / red-white-blue bag / the pedestrian crossing control box from before 1997 / orange rubbish bin / blue ribbon / street railing / yellow ribbon / surgical mask

childhood (三)
long wood ruler / chicken feather duster / Chung-hwa pencil / aeroplane chess / mah-jong / day calendar made of very thin paper

'A Personal History of Hong Kong as 39 Everyday Objects' by Antony Huen

superstition (五)
Tung-shing / Chinese fortune sticks / joss sticks / maneki-neko / Fai-chun

currency (六)
red envelope / Octopus card / green ten-dollar note / coin with a bauhinia blossom / coin with the Queen's head

symbol (七)
Miss Hong Kong's tiara

About the piece:
The poem in its alternative form first appeared in *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*.

Antony Huen has published poems in *The Dark Horse, Poetry Wales,* and *PN Review*, and essays in *Hong Kong Review of Books, Wasafiri,* and *World Literature Today.* In 2022, he won the inaugural Wasafiri Essay Prize. Born and raised in Hong Kong, he completed his master's and doctoral studies in the UK. He is now an academic based in his home city.

'Limited hiding'
by Sarah James

I'm considering that snails have no rooms,
that their homes aren't ones they can escape
from. That they must carry this weight with them.

As a child, I didn't consider the creatures
living softly inside the shells crunched over
like extra grit on the path, only noticed later.

From the outside, no hint of the hushed life
lived unbelievably slowly, tentatively, paced
by the unheard tremor of a trapped heartbeat.

Age doesn't expand consideration when
those years are curled up tightly in a shell,
spiralling further into the darkness in a failed

attempt at hiding. Any sound here of the sea
is a false whisper of the secrets I still carry
with me, trying to bury them deeper.

Sarah James is a poet, fiction writer, journalist, photographer and editor at V. Press. She's the author of nine poetry titles, an Arts Council England funded multimedia hypertext poetry narrative *(> Room)*, two novellas and a touring poetry-play. Her latest titles include B*lood Sugar, Sex, Magic* (Verve Poetry Press, highly commended in the Forward Prizes), *How to Grow Matches* (Against The Grain Press) and plenty-fish (Nine Arches Press), both shortlisted in the International Rubery Book Awards.

What's Eating You, My Curry Puff? Tempo and Excess in Singapore's Eating Culture by Ann Ang

I begin by invoking the curry puff, that little fried pastry pocket of spiced potatoes. Not the whorled shortcrust that bespeaks heritage, capped servers and a clean vat of oil, but the nameless kalipok that is an uncertain half-moon, slipped at pre-dawn into a searing wok.

It emerges, unevenly pockmarked and greasily puffed. Together with a few dozen comrades, it is placed in a repurposed cardboard box of dubious hygiene and sent to any of the small neighbourhood shops and makcik breakfast stalls at train stations to feed the dawn crowd. If you are one of the students or harried office workers up early enough to lay eyes and hands on a still-warm kalipok, then you are lucky indeed. More often the curry puff is enjoyed when completely cold. It is delicious, even when eaten from a translucent bag where it has nestled, like drowned treasure. Dredged up, the fried pastry is a hastily gobbled comfort, in the face of a day turned humid and tragic.

The curry puff, like so many food items, is deep material philosophy. Portability and time are expressed in how these soft, melting potatoes are carried, first in a pastry case, made in home kitchens for harried strangers; and second, in plastic that somehow leaks oil onto conspiratorial fingers. Evolving alongside and through the circumstances of daily life in Singapore, we eat the curry puff as much as it eats us. The humble kalipok is routine and temptation. As its crisp edges soften, ever so deliciously, in one's schoolbag or leather briefcase, it stretches time in anticipation of those stolen seconds when fried goodness comes to rest on the tongue, when the mouth bespeaks a golden, greasy silence.

The ubiquitous plate of economic rice, known variously as cai fan or nasi padang, is a quick meal served on melamine plates if you're dining in at the coffeeshop or hawker centre. The queue moves at pace; the server is ever-ready with the next portion of rice on the plate. Then you yell above the din or otherwise point, and choose from the assortment of cooked vegetable, meat, fish and tofu on offer, from silky steamed water egg to braised cabbage with vermicelli. Perhaps during the harried lunch hour or while toting back a similar meal in a styrofoam box, the average Singaporean ruminates on how he or she lives life on the line, purchasing and consuming a meal, the remainders of which are quickly discarded, barely making a ripple in the slipstream of time. We push off to the next hour, immigrants despite being home, caught in the spasmodic throes of intergenerational memory.

However, there are foods that in their material nature and utter deliciousness, generate their own sociality. Chilli Crab, which has been extensively celebrated as an original Singapore creation, has also been discussed in terms of ecology and food supply chains for the urban island.

What's Eating You, My Curry Puff? Tempo and Excess in Singapore's Eating Culture by Ann Ang (cont'd)

Even on the plate, with its hazardous splinters of shell, it is impossible to eat the giant crustacean slowly, much less alone. Made slippery by a bright red sauce at once sweet, sour and fiery, Chilli Crab is a futile dish to eat when hungry. It demands patience and skill with mallet, nutcracker and scissors, to extract the choicest slivers of sweet flesh from leg and pincer, and to avoid piercing one's finger or gum. To carry on a conversation over a crab feast implies added dexterity with hand and speech coordination, as well as deep friendships that will withstand the squirt of a juicy claw across the table.

There are also foods that shape the lay of the land—I am referring less to the environmental effects of avocado groves or almond milk production—but food stalls, usually in shophouses or by busy roads, such as Beach Road Prawn Noodle House and Zam Zam Restaurant. The thick pork-rib broth at the former and the mutton biryani at the latter have the power to stop traffic or make drivers defy the law by parking haphazardly at the curbside. The memory of sweet slim kangkong stalks in the thick gravy of Ampang Yong Tau Foo can swing one's trajectory to the wooded environs of northern Singapore. Thus I write this to sing of the ways in which food in Singapore eats Singaporeans. What we chew on is tempo: rhythm and sheer aberrance, which we inhabit like a two-room HDB (Housing Development Board) apartment, proud owners of a property in a country where home ownership is defined as a 99-year lease from the government. As yet another casual traveller shakes their head at how miserable life must be for the 78% of Singaporeans who live in public housing, I devour my way through these half-truths. I eat my way out.

Tempo

Much of the prevailing wisdom on food and time relates to the effects of food consumption at various hours, and their knock-on effects on metabolism and waistlines. Given the round-the-clock access that urban dwellers have to a plethora of takeaway options, convenience food and supper alleys, it is little wonder that regulation and temperance take centre-stage. What we eat is of equal importance. Our diet has been the subject of cultural, religious and philosophical edicts over the centuries. The Greek Pythagoreans conscientiously avoided fava beans because their flesh-like appearance suggested that they contained the souls of the dead. Yet, at least in Singapore, a "good breakfast" can be interpreted so divergently that one wonders if the "good life" is somehow linked to the way our choice of food gives rise to textures of place and duration. One could linger over a bowl of hot fish congee, in defiance of the office start-time and the sweltering weather, or otherwise wolf down a plate of fried bee-hoon with a sunny-side up, the split yolk binding the vermicelli into rapid mouthfuls swept in with disposable bamboo chopsticks. Others may prefer a virtuous bowl of sweetened bean curd, freshly made that morning, quickly and punctually

slurped; or yesterday's egg tarts from the fridge, soggy-crusted and devoured half-awake. Yet another camp believes in not having breakfast at all, preferring the air-conditioned mist of extra sleep to a hearty mug of milo. In other words, the food we choose holds the tempo of our lives, as much as the next luscious bite prolongs or shortens our years.

Singaporeans eat fast. As with many other locales, breakfast, lunch and dinner structure the average day. Though this may lead to visions of proper sit-down meals, the truth is that eating happens where and when it does, amidst the regimentation of an office or school day. An informal straw poll among my educator friends reveals that the average lunch at the school canteen is a substantial meal consisting of rice or noodles and a full-sized juice or scalding coffee, but takes just 15 to 20 minutes to consume amidst genial and lively conversation, at least till the school management makes an appearance. The mid-day meal is often eaten at the office desk as well, da-paoed (packed to go) from a nearby food court or delivered en-masse as part of a collegial group-buy. Yet despite the pace at which eating must take place, most would not consider giving up their choice of a full Southeast Asian main course, replete with soup, curry, gravy and condiments, from ayam soto to roast duck on rice. A sandwich or soup may be acceptable as a light breakfast or snack, but no, on some deep visceral level, this would not be food. Thus, despite frequent calls to abandon single-use plastic food containers or plastic-filmed paper, the liquid nature of the typical Singapore meal presents an obstacle to environmentally friendly dining.

This injunction to eat at such a hurried but unharried pace arises from a number of factors. The Singapore obsession with systematic efficiency appears soulless and robotic to the casual onlooker. In fact, it harbours a deep idealism: that no minute should be left unemployed to some further energetic goal; no sliver of creamy flesh left on the fish bones; no wasting of time; and may you never offend the gods by wasting food. Though a multicultural and multireligious society, the secular common space of public discourse in Singapore is carefully maintained. Instead, both food and productivity have become religions. Even if few of us realise it, they accompany us with the sacred intensity of prayer beads passing through our fingers: a kueh in hand, a crisp bite of prata in the mouth, a bowl of mee siam in thought and a curry puff in the heart, all at once—bespeaking gastronomical integrity.

This is a mode of being that is far from intuitive or natural, and growing up in Singapore means growing into the relentless regime of the clock. Some children may be fussy or picky eaters, or simply unused to eating a full meal in a single seating. It is not uncommon to see mothers or domestic helpers following their young ones with a spoon and bowl in the park or at the playground. A child who eats well, particularly one who devours any food on offer with relish, taps into a visceral fear of not having enough to eat in the Singapore psyche. Conversely, feeding one's children or any

What's Eating You, My Curry Puff? Tempo and Excess in Singapore's Eating Culture by Ann Ang (cont'd)

youngling present engenders a peculiar and most practical joy. The sight of a young child skilfully tackling difficult food brings receives added adoration. My cousin and nephew have been to known to consume fried chicken parts with supreme skill. Their facility for stripping even the inner fine-boned recesses of chicken wings clean at three years of age is the stuff of fond family reminiscing. If wasting food is a sin, then eating with heart and appreciation suffuses goodness throughout the room. It is a bulwark against an uncertain future and an innocuous, endlessly enacted belief that today, there will be food for the eating.

Therefore to "be good," as a child in Singapore, is to learn to eat at speed, at first to please the palate or your parents, and later to appease the stomach and the clock. One of the rudest shocks for slow eaters, upon their first visit to the primary school canteen, is to learn that mealtimes are not a matter of personal choice. In most schools, the recess period is half an hour. When the bell rings, the children sprint down the stairs, mostly to be first in the queue at any of the food stalls selling everything from fishball noodles to peanut butter waffles. Then, kaya bun in hand, or plate of nasi lemak safely nestled by the side of the courtyard, the daily games begin: hopscotch and zero-point, pepsi-cola one-two-three and the ecstatic, gleeful making of slime. But for the kid whose universe matches the tempo of his thoughtful chewing, or her frequent distraction away from the plate or bowl, the need to devour an entire meal in ten or fifteen minutes presents nothing less than a complete revolution to one's digestive tempo.

To eat any longer than your classmates is to lose the chance to play and so one develops a reckless, gulping style where soup or rice is hoovered in without taste or enjoyment, except to satisfy a gnawing, anxious hunger, curdled over the last two hours. One's masticatory preferences no longer matter. Instead the body is a willed mechanism to match the exigencies of an external, scopic regime. What's on the plate or in one's hand, kept a hair's breadth away by a plastic film for hygiene, becomes a public boast; and every schoolyard has its secret, internecine hierarchies. Chicken nuggets are typically prized, as are pizza slices, and all rejoice on Fried Food Day, while the stalls selling vegetarian cuisine are less popular. With the shortest queues, even at the start of recess time, they are a refuge for those less fleet of foot, less able run this relentless race towards the plate.

Unsurprisingly, most everyday food venues in the Lion City are designed for quick eating. The island's famed food courts, coffeeshops and hawker centres house a number of food stalls, each serving a distinctive cuisine or set of dishes. There are dedicated drinks stalls, serving kopi or teh, local coffee or tea laced with condensed milk, alongside an assortment of canned drinks, as well as snack stalls devoted to an assortment of Chinese fritters or a single signature item, such as cendol, an iced coconut milk dessert with green jelly strips. For the main part, most stalls serve a substantial meal. The cooking space is small, about four square metres

What's Eating You, My Curry Puff? Tempo and Excess in Singapore's Eating Culture by Ann Ang (cont'd)

accommodating a cook and a server, with gas burners, stainless steel shelves, and industry-grade fridges under a glass fronted counter where the day's offerings are put on sale. Customers in the fast-moving queue contemplate the choices on offer. Often the display is an irreverent boast and some Hainanese chicken rice stalls arrange on hooks a number of poached chicken heads with trailing necks, signifying the number of birds sold for the day.

It is easy to think of the tempo of hawker as simply reflective of the pace of urban life, but in 2020, Hawker Culture in Singapore was successfully inscribed as Singapore's first element on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Singapore's prevalent culture of "eating out" in fact derives from the country's immigrant roots. In the 1920s and 1930s, hawkers roamed the streets, peddling hot meals to the teeming masses living in temporary accommodation, the bane of colonial officials' best efforts at hygiene and regulation. Today, the individual diner exports the labour of grocery-buying, cooking and washing, even if the food is eaten at home from disposable ware. I posit that eating culture in Singapore is Cubist: the styrofoam food box lays open the box of the home kitchen; the permutations of the Deliveroo app triangulate the recipe book; the first spoonful lifted to the mouth is gelatinous metonymy for all local foods, which in their shape-shifting incarnations, capture the endlessly mobile nature of Singapore food culture.

In the relentless rhythm of each bowlful served and eaten, Singapore is all border, except on the occasions when we are galvanised into stillness. At wakes, it is customary to cater a light buffet meal each evening. Eight-course Chinese wedding banquets last a good three hours, and depending on one's allocated seat and relationship to the new couple, may be in parts excruciating and raucous. Lingering over a café brunch on weekends, complete with armoured croissants that withstand tropical humidity and flat whites that are invincibly micro-foamed, has become a means of protesting the vertiginous ascent to the next key performance indicator in life. Death, or a semblance of it, finally arrives, when faced with the inevitable plethora of menu choices, you balk or otherwise provide that most detested of responses to your bosom friends, "I don't know what to eat. Order anything, anything!"

Ann Ang lectures in English literature at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, with a DPhil on contemporary Anglophone Asian writing from the University of Oxford. Ann is author of *Bang My Car* (2012), *Burning Walls for Paper Spirits* (2021) and co-editor of several anthologies. She is also a founding editor of *The Journal of Practice, Research & Tangential Activities* (PR&TA).

'Like A Fiddler on the Roof' by Jill Abram

My grandfather came from a shtetl in The Pale –
Anatevka. Maybe. I never knew his stories, adopted
those of Tevye the Dairyman. At the end of the movie,
expelled from their *intimate, obstinate, dear little village*,
the Jews go on foot to find landsleit and safer places,
books and shabbas candlesticks carried in baskets and cases,
heads covered in hats or scarves, shawls across backs.

Last summer, the news showed a colourful straggle
walking through Hungary, holding plastic bags
and mobile phones, alongside cars and trucks
on multilane motorways, past rolls of razorwire,
under gantries with signs to hoped-for places.
It did not show whether they reached Vienna,
whether they walked all the way, were welcomed.

First published in Tears in the Fence Issue 67

Jill Abram grew up in Manchester, travelled the world and now lives in Brixton. In her family, Jewish is something you are, not something you do. Her poems have been published widely and she has performed them across London and beyond, including at Ledbury, StAnza, and Verve Poetry Festivals and in Paris, New York, Chicago and online. She produces and presents a variety of poetry events, including the Stablemates series of poetry and conversation, and was Director of the influential collective Malika's Poetry Kitchen for 12 years. Jill's debut pamphlet, *Forgetting My Father,* will be published by Broken Sleep Books in May 2023.

Ode to Kaya
by Suyin Du Bois

Egg jam first on my young tongue, palm sugar
sweet, coconut milk rich. Thick layers on charred
toast, salted butter cubes between, melting in Penang
sweat. My Goh Ee Poh stood for hours stirring you
in that double boiled heat. Exports to be swaddled,
twisted into pink and green plastic bags, nestled
amongst swimming costumes and sundresses, rituals
to ward off mid-air leaks in the 14 hours from one home
to the other. Back in England your layers thinned,
our knives more sparing after each spread.
After Goh Ee Poh grew too frail, aunties and uncles
gifted us store-bought surrogates. You were labelled *Kaya*.
Our cupboards filled with your empties, aides-mémoire
of indulgence repurposed to house fragrant rice, Chinese
mushrooms, our longing for Nonya flavours.
By the time pandan leaves arrive in Chinatown, I am grown
up, have my own kitchen where I can stand for hours.
But Goh Ee Poh has long since condensed
into photographs, so I sweeten my never-asked
regret, trace down someone else's heirloom recipe.
You are needy, threaten lumps, failure, but I stir and stir
like her, until my spoon draws the right depths of lineage.
I lift a heap of you into my mouth, tongue
your clotted grainy sweetness.

First published in Propel Magazine Issue 1, edited by Mary Jean Chan.

Suyin Du Bois is a poet of mixed Chinese-Malaysian and Belgian heritage, living in London. She studied for her BA in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Warwick, and writes about her multi-cultural heritage, womanhood and the unanswered questions that gnaw at her. Her poems are published or forthcoming in Olney, FreezeRay, Capsule Stories and elsewhere. When not obsessing over word choice, she spends her time building an early-stage tech start up and crafting cosy knits.

OBSERVATORY OF DAYS
by Rosa Alice Branco

translated by Alexis Levitin

To love is to take pleasure in seeing, touching, feeling through all our senses, and from as close as possible, a beloved object that loves us.
-Stendhal

MAP OF PRESENT DAYS:

The pandemic situation was first experienced through social media and then drew closer through planes landing on runways, through cars filled with people, trucks filled with goods. The pandemic arrived through newscasts and continues to do so. Newscasts are the messengers of temporarily established norms, adorned with sudden changes.

Our days are filled with the counting of numbers. I find myself living in an observatory of pandemic data, in a space station, where I decipher graphs and silences, charts filled with predictions and statistics. This station is in a desert, a desert that swallows up our emotions and replaces them with lines of coffins, without a family to provide a name: the only thing aligned these days. Lit up, it is only the screens that watch shapes disappearing, alone, sunken into hospital beds, nursing homes, the death-rattle, in earth that covers their perplexing solitude. Frequency continues to grow and on the monitors one can read the spread of the avalanche, the cresting of the waves, the droplets of sorrow.

In the hospitals everyone dresses according to a rigorous ritual, masks in place against the corpuscular nature of the virus, and they surf through narrow corridors, sick bays, hollow silence and much coughing. I don't know if they still can decipher the clots bleeding love, left in the beds that are emptied and immediately filled again.

This morning, lines grow longer, and the frequency of admissions grows. The speed of obituaries is in inverse proportion to our serenity. Protection against the unknown is recommended, the courage not to know. Avoidance of proximity, all gatherings are forbidden, all contact with this new plague in which despair burns and the putrid stink of cadavers chokes the fragrance of the trees. These are barbaric times, the sacking of wherever love may still be possible in the separated bodies of lovers.

As if they have just come home from school, children play in the clarity of their childhood. Others try to erase themselves, to fade into the walls. Even so, some of them are beaten, abused, and no one is even surprised, since normalcy has become a swamp whose depth is already known. They flop around, like fresh-caught fish, an instinctive gesture of loss and a growing fear without any graspable future close by, for not even school waves its hand early in the morning.

And nothing can be done for their mother who can do nothing but be beaten and thrown to the ground. Confined, the children pile up within walls that do not breath, their words without enough space to leave their mouths. Not a vein of light for anyone. [...]

forbidden the risk of love between counties,
forbidden to feel the sweetness of your flesh,
forbidden to say Mother, to kiss one's child,
small essential errands are allowed,
it is advisable to remain at home.

OBSERVATORY OF DAYS (cont'd) by Rosa Alice Branco

On this map, temporarily, the balcony became important as a place of the essential and from there we breathed onto the world and waved from our windows and balconies, that now became visible. We had a code that we always shared at the same time, we had a map of love and hope hanging from our balcony.

After several months in the desert, we don't need a telescope to feel the invasion of the stars, their primordial gleam. We almost don't need ears to hear in detail the dislocation of every grain of sand, and the concert of the birds needs no amplifier. Temporarily, we can almost see through the corridors of space, the sky having turned so transparent.

And so, we are constantly establishing relations between the ante-pandemic past and the days crawling forward. Today, I turned around and saw my house. I think I saw it for the first time. The daily routines that warmed the place and nights of interwoven hearts. The living room and kitchen that welcomed words, gestures, laughter. The bedrooms, playthings, stories read to children when night comes with its kisses before sleep, our bedroom filled with loving touches.

In accord with the logic of the graphs, in the observatory of days for habitability, the enaction on balconies and through windows determines the re-evaluation of relationships, of the coupling of people and the world. The principle of enaction, as Francisco Varela proposes, tells us that the world of lived experience is constituted of a sensorial-motor coupling between the organism and its surroundings. Only after this inaugural fusion can the subject and object focused upon co-constitute themselves

Thus, the perception is always that of a subject incarnated in a mobile body, which goes to a missed encounter with some spaces conceived as being inhabited. Often, the subject of mobile flesh is rejected in favor of a disembodied subject, and, in that sense, mobility becomes disposable. Consider those balconies that extend the body of the house outwards for another two feet, or even less. Christopher Alexander speaks of those balconies as the site of an interior contradiction, in which there is a conflict of forces 2 : the magnetic inclination that leads us to the balcony is the same that makes us quickly leave that space, which, though so appealing, does not fulfill the vocation of keeping us there: to stand there, constrained to immobility, goes against the essence of this enacted, embodied subject.
[...]
In the observatory of the days, my gaze fills with the numbers in my heart. My head is a map of absences. The empty places in the streets, the shops, the restaurants bring to reach the city with warnings of catastrophe. The streets untrodden lose their urban grace.

We smile, we suffer, we grow tired and we almost forget to breathe. Without forgetting that exhaustion is an enigma to feeling. At night, a glass of wine is the only possible sanitizer for the soul. The glass moistens our lips, but what we would really like is to open our doors to our friends, rush to the sea without corridors in our breath, without contagion listed on our screens. Cold water, waves rippling over our feet, things like that, blissful, free of care.

Rosa Alice Branco is a poet, essayist, and translator with a Ph.D. in Philosophy. She has published twelve volumes of poetry, including Cattle of the Lord, which won the prestigious 2009 Espiral Maior de Poesia Award and was published in the USA, by Milkweed Editions (2016), and named among the best twelve books by the Chicago Review of Books., The World Does Not End in the Cold of Your Bones (she tells herself) (Quasi Edições, 2010), Poems of Love and Design (Assírio & Alvin, 2018). Her work has appeared in magazines, including Absinthe, Atlanta Review, The Massachusetts Review, Mid-American Review, New England Review, Pleiades, Prairie Schooner, Words Without Borders.

Nhi Went Home
by Abigail Van Neely

A relative reported that the Tran Clan Reunion would be on August 31st. Nhi Tran asked his daughter to fly him home to Dien Duong so that he could be there. He would spend the entire month in Vietnam, the place where he had lived his first few decades and wished to spend his last. Nhi's wife, Bai, complained about the demanding travel until the ticket was booked, wheelchair service included. Once it was too late for her to accompany him, Bai began to complain about her desire to go home too.

In the only air-conditioned room of his nephew's house, the one he had paid for, Nhi laid in wait for festivities to grab hold of the village (where nearly everyone was a Tran). Each day Nhi submerged in the ocean the wrinkled dragon tattoo he had gotten on a past trip home, allowing sharp refractions of blinding sunlight to further distort it. For most of his life, Nhi's eyes had reflected the black shared by all his relatives. Now, they mirrored the milky seafoam blue of the water where it lapped the shore.

After bobbing in the waves for an unimportant amount of time, Nhi gingerly padded back to his room. The sand baked by Vietnam's summer heat was always hotter than even the cement outside the house he and Bai shared in Arizona. He rinsed off the sea salt clinging to his tattooed torso with pink plastic buckets of water. He readjusted his row of balled up tube socks, wireless iPhone charger that never worked, and airpods that were never used (Nhi was hard of hearing). Then he locked the door and laid down again to rest.

On August 31st, Nhi was told that there would not be any activities. He should wait for tomorrow, when the more immediate family would gather.

That night, Nhi shared a hotel room in Hoi An, Dien Duong's touristy counterpart, with me, his American granddaughter. We were unable to coordinate a meeting time because Nhi had forgotten his iPhone in the village- which made no difference because he refused to buy a SIM card. He also could not read the small font of the messages sent to his iPad- which made no difference because he did not realize it offered the same functions as a phone.

Nhi woke first, drawing the curtains and announcing it was time for breakfast. It was 5AM. He then waited in the lobby until his nephew arrived to pick us up. The hotel staff had tried to wait on him, but Nhi would not speak Vietnamese to non-family members in Vietnam. The staff spoke English, but Nhi's was too broken for them to understand.

Our trio ate breakfast surrounded by white couples in the hotel dining room. Twice Nhi's nephew was slapped and reprimanded: once for attempting to return his dirty plate to the kitchen and once for picking at his teeth without shielding the offending toothpick from sight.

"You don't do that here!"

As Nhi left the table for another chicken sausage, my cousin something-removed and I sat silently, unable to speak to each other. I imitated our 84 year old companion, who refused to remove the turtle-shell of a backpack strapped to his small frame, even while seated, and my cousin released the giggles he had been suppressing.

We then drove to a deserted lot. Its regions not yet covered by cement were populated by scraggly bushes that dared peek their heads through the sand to bear the 104 degree heat. Dusty advertisements for a new resort hung limply to a chain link fence, no breeze to shine the dirt off them. Here was the Tran Temple, which Nhi had paid to relocate three minutes away from its original location when developers claimed their land.

Nhi Went Home by Abigail Van Neely (cont'd)

The cement temple wore a gong and a drum as mismatched earrings. Gaudy paintings of a boat and a dragon weaving through murky puffs of tree and too-blue sky colored the slate gray walls. There were three altars, a bounty of incense and a fleet of beer cans meticulously crowded before them. The only defense from the unclouded sun was a puddle of shade cast by a bright green umbrella angled up by bags of rice.

As two cousins took turns sounding the drum and the gong, Nhi and another equally feeble patriarch began the methodic ritual of prayer. Performing a spiritual exercise routine in slow motion, Nhi's partner silently repeated cycles of standing, kneeling, and bowing before each altar. Nhi copied him, always one beat behind as he surreptitiously observed what ought to come next. The other man wore a blue ao dai pulled over a white button down and Nhi wore a plaid button down over his custom made 'Tran Clan Reunion' t-shirt.

A feast, prepared by the other relatives while the men prayed, followed. Nhi and I quickly ostracized ourselves- eating only five shrimp chips and one baguette a piece because Nhi did not eat lunch anymore and I was vegetarian. Nhi paraded around the tables, nodding and waving. A queue of relatives rubbed our backs and asked:

Why didn't we eat more?

Why didn't I speak Vietnamese?'

mese? (They asked, in Vietnamese).

Where were my siblings? (I had none).

Why were my wrists so small? (The implication being, "You should eat more.").

During an ebb of curious cousins, we drove home.

"Do you like being in Dien Duong, Grandpa?"

"No."

"Oh... Why do you come here?"

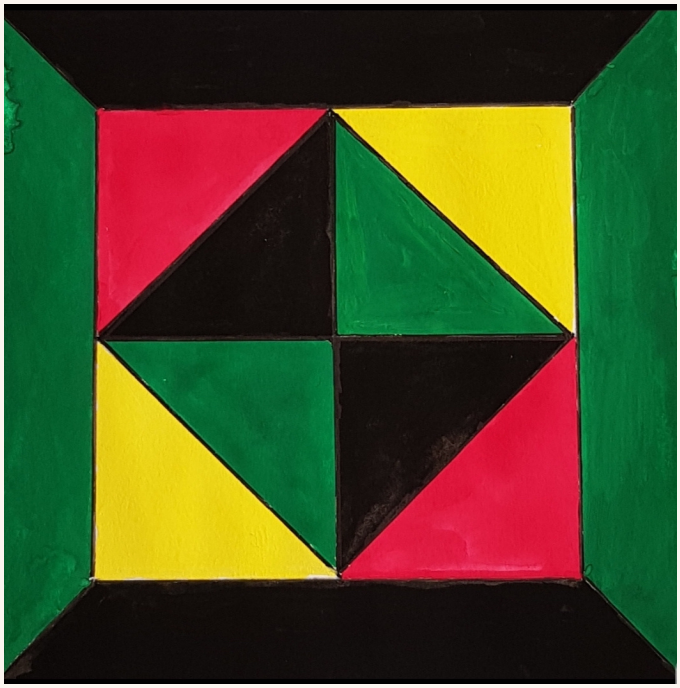
"It is not so nice here. I see my friends."

"Do you like other parts of Vietnam better?"

"America is nicer."

On my final day, Nhi called his daughter and asked her to put him on my return flight, departing two weeks earlier than his original. We went home.

Abigail Van Neely is a final year student majoring in psychology and international relations at Stanford University, and currently on the BING overseas exchange programme in Oxford.



Being Black / by Nicole Moore

Nicole Moore is an author and editor of three anthologies of poetry and personal essays, two of which were funded by an Arts Council England's *Grants for the Arts* award. Nicole is a freelance writer, published poet and multidisciplinary visual artist, specialising in abstract realism painting with a political narrative. Nicole is also in the second and final year of a Culture Diaspora Ethnicity MA at Birkbeck College, University of London.

Diamond Hill
Sonia FL Leung

I crossed the border and entered Hong Kong when I was twelve in June 1986.

Escorted by a relative, my younger sister and I took the overnight bus from Nanan County in China's Fujian province to Shenzen, then passed through Lo Wu Control Point. We embarked on a Kowloon-bound train to reunite with our parents, elder sister, and elder brother, who had come to Hong Kong two and a half years earlier.

The relative led us off at the Diamond Hill station. When we reached the street level, the view in front stung me – low, grey sheet metal huts stuck together eerily, like something out of a war movie back in the fifties. How could this be Hong Kong, every Mainlander's dreamland? Maybe my eyes were playing tricks with me.

Gloomy eateries and rickety stalls, usually operated by older women, sold clothes, cooking utensils, condiments, meat, fruit, and vegetables. And then there was a "playground" – an irregular-shaped space with an old, bumpy, concrete table tennis table. That was all.

We headed into a labyrinth of dark, narrow, winding alleys. Once inside the maze with the huts closing in and the sewage running in half-open drains next to the tracks, the smell assailed me. The stench was dense, like a tangible line in space. The reek of urine, feces, sour cockroaches, and rotten rats made up its density. It was useless to breathe carefully.

The smell was pungent and thick; it replaced the air. A hot substitute filled my lungs, seeped into my blood, and made me its creature. Once I took a deep breath, I was no longer an air breather. I metamorphosed into another species.

Hong Kong was a British Colony then, and the government did not recognize my father's doctor and my mother's teacher credentials from China. My parents knew about this but still chose to come for economic reasons and to give us, their four children, more opportunities. They became factory workers.

We lived in a subdivided hut in a slum ironically called Diamond Hill.

Our half hut had an old rusty iron gate with peeling claret paint on the ground floor for entry. When you opened the gate, two steps led you down to the only room. Its contents included a double and a single tarnished iron bunk beds, a light brown wooden closet, a gloomy-looking bedside table with a mirror on top, and a weary, bulky TV set. My parents bought these from the previous tenant, who probably purchased them from the last.
After the furniture, we had a square in the middle; its expanse equaled a person with open arms. This remaining center was our living and dining area. We dined with a folding table and put it away after each meal. One or two would sit close to the closet watching TV. For our homework or reading, we did it in our beds.

Also located inside the room, another set of two steps led to a dark corner to the left side of the gate. The corner was beneath a steep staircase of the other half-hut owner, another family. They lived right above us. But they had a separate entry where a different door opened onto the stairs that led up to their room.

We used the small, dim corner underneath the other part of the hut's staircase as our kitchen and bathroom – a narrow strip with a squat toilet; we stood on its sides to shower.

One day, my mother came home from work around 7 pm and began cooking.

Diamond Hill
Sonia FL Leung (cont'd)

I did homework in my single upper bunk while Brother watched TV from his lower one. Mother started talking to him.

"You know, son, they think I'm stupid."

"Er, why?"

I barely heard Brother's mumbling over the background noise of the TV. So I strained my ears to catch what they were saying.

"This morning, our assembly line's leader asked me if I knew how to write my name!"

She sounded like she was about to cry.

"If they only knew – I was a teacher who had taught Chinese to hundreds of students!"

She started crying. I could sense it.

Kuang. Kuang. The noises of the spatula striking the wok called out to me.

I hurried down from my bunk and asked:
"Ma, are you ok? Can I help you with anything?"

"You, go away!"

She brandished the spatula and shouted.

I froze.

Brother gave me a quick look and a smirk.

He walked toward the narrow kitchen, looking at Mother on the second step. There was no space for him to go in. He stretched his hand, reached out to the dish on the stove, picked up a slice of pork, and slid it into his mouth.

I drooled.

Mother breathed and sighed deeply.

"Oh, my son, you must be starving now. I'll finish cooking soon."

They carried on with the small talk.

I became invisible. A sense of worthlessness gathered its power and seized my stomach, it hastened upward into my lungs and heart, and it ran further up into my brain and embedded itself there for good. I was a shadow in my home.

My mother and father had an arranged marriage. Father fell fervently for Mother at first sight, but his love was never reciprocated.

Father's defense mechanism for life was to retreat into himself. He avoided work-related talks. At home, he hardly spoke, only shouted when he got drunk. Like a time bomb, he could go off anytime. When Father came home late from overtime, he would eat and wash down with a beer, followed by *Kaoliang* (sorghum liquor) or whisky, totally lost in his own world.

Usually, I stayed in my upper bunk and suppressed my urge to go to the toilet. Visiting the bathroom meant that I must squeeze past the table's edge where Father was sitting. The attention I would attract terrified me. But the more I suppressed the urge, the more urgent, frequent it became.

I despised myself.

If Father came home earlier, he usually had dinner with us in total silence. He finished the meal quickly and took a shower. When Father came out, we gobbled down the food and put away the table and chairs. He sat on the edge of his lower double bunk, putting his feet on the bedside chair, and flipped through the newspaper.

After a while, Father pushed the paper away and moved into the darker, inner part of the bed. He lay propped against his pillow and watched TV. The sound of his light snorts would soon follow.

Diamond Hill
Sonia FL Leung (cont'd)

During his weekly day off, he visited the cinema most of the time. He would buy a ten-dollar ticket that allowed him to watch movies all day. The films ranged from detective to pornography, from western to eastern. It did not matter. So long as it kept him away from reality – his unrequited love for my mother, his denigrating factory work, his family burdens – he welcomed it. And that was what he did on his days off, week after week, month after month, spending all day alone inside a dark cinema watching movies.

Later, when he discovered the excitement of horse racing, he started close-reading the newspaper's racing section. He studied the horses like he studied the characters in Russian novels when he was young. He kept sharp pencils by the bedside table and made enthusiastic, extensive notes on the paper about the horses, their conditions, and winning and losing records. His scribbles reminded me of the comments he wrote in his diary after reading the novels. Except now, the scribbles were figures. He gave up on words, forgoing his intellectual self.
Father became an excessive smoker, drinker, and gambler. When he gambled, he second-guessed himself. Father bet on many different horses in one race and often lost. And he lost big.

When he won, he won small because of his thin betting. But like many gamblers, the insubstantial winning was enough to keep my father going.

Father was very proud of his winnings. When he won, he would come home smiling. Since this rarely happened, I felt awkward when he smiled. I was unsure whether I should smile with him or rather weep with joy because, finally, something made my father happy.

On the special occasions of his winnings, Father might bring home a white plastic bag with a polystyrene box that carried siu-mei. Siu-mei, "Cantonese barbecue meat," can be char-siu, the sticky, crimson barbecue pork; siu-yuk, the crispy skin, succulent roasted pork; siu-ngo or siu-aap, the rich, flavorful, juicy roasted goose or duck. If he won a bit more than usual in late autumn, he might come home with a large black plastic bag with the fresh Shanghai hairy crabs. He was very pleased with himself and liked to share by ga-sung, "adding a dish," to our dinner.

On an early winter evening, I was in my bunk reading. Elder Sister and Younger Sister were in their upper double bunk doing homework. Brother sat in the living area playing Gameboy.

Guang. Father pulled open the tarnished iron gate and sprinted down the steps, almost leaping into the room. In an uncharacteristically high-pitched voice, he said to Mother:

"Wingwai, look what I've bought for us all. It's the sweet, tasty crab! Such gourmet food. We can all enjoy it tonight!"

Like a little boy, he raised high a bag of live crabs (I could hear the slow, vague wavering of their claws inside the bag). Father had a broad grin on his face. His eyes were twinkling, eagerly anticipating Mother's praise.

Neither giving the slightest glimpse to him nor the bag of crabs, she replied:

"Yeah, it's your favorite food. You're sure to have a fine feast."

Her words might as well have been a bucket of ice water poured violently over him.

Diamond Hill
Sonia FL Leung (cont'd)

Father's face turned green.

He froze for a moment or two. Then he ascended a step toward the kitchen, chucking the bag of expensive crabs into the small sink next to Mother's left elbow. He put down his other gear, took out a pack of Marlboro Red and a lighter, and headed back out the gate.

Once he disappeared behind the door, Mother gave an exaggerated, loud sigh. She then winked at Brother and signaled him to come closer to her. In a quiet and scornful voice, she said:

"Oh, your father is such a cranky creature! I can't even joke with him a little!"

Haha, she and Brother shared a short, derisive laugh.

My sisters must have their earplugs on, for they were undisturbed.

I rushed down, pretending to look for something inside the closet. But I raised my head and gazed out the gate.

Father's shoulders heaved in anguish. He faced a malodorous drainage ditch, dragging on his cigarette. He had no place to go and no one to talk to.

Stubbing out the cigarette butt, he lit another. His shoulders stopped heaving. He put his left hand into his trousers' pocket and leaned sightly on the edge of a cracking grey wall next to the drainage ditch. The greyness had turned into dirty black; damp, green mold grew everywhere. The height of the wall only reached Father's shoulders. Suddenly, it looked like he did not know where to put his head or what to do with it. He tilted it to the left and then right and then left again.

I wanted to sit on top of that wall and let his head pillow on my lap.

Instead, I turned and clambered back up my bunk. I could not let Mother or Brother see the tears in my eyes. They would count me as Father's ally and alienate me further. It was terrifying. I kept my face toward the wall and my back toward Father, hoping for his forgiveness.

An earlier version of Diamond Hill, an excerpt of *The Girl Who Dreamed*, manuscript of a memoir, it won the second prize winner of Hong Kong's Top Story in 2016 and published in *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal* in 2017.

Sonia FL Leung, a Hong Kong-based writer, is the author of *Don't Cry, Phoenix* (2020), a bilingual (English and Chinese) poetry collection with an album of ten original songs. Sonia holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction. Her work has appeared in *Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine, West Trestle Review, Remington Review, Asian Cha, The Shanghai Literary Review, Mala Literary Journal, and the anthologies: Afterness – Literature from the New Transnational Asia and Making Space: A Collection of Writing and Art*. She is now working on a memoir *The Girl Who Dreamed*.

'How in Shadowed Landscapes' by Agnieszka Studzińska

i
everything happens here
possibility hangs between one tree
& a decade one language &
the buried roots of expression

the sign & the system the
body swaying towards being
element matter these woods

of vocabulary & branching voices

ii
our footsteps are thumbprints
filigrees of mother tongues
pressing deep on this paper
detached from our leaving

our footsteps are signatures
to what we write with feet
on mossed ground & needled
waters & the pine-leaf pushing

the wood & grain of this walking
& language forgets the scaffolds &
etymology of what makes
shelter & what makes making

as we step this earth away
from the natural order of things
re-arranged in this coppice
of autumn light where delicate

flowers still fruit & swallows
unprepared still nest & what
should be is something else
again & what should be avoids

iii
returning pinched strings
of violin-leaves rustle
the ghost of a grandfather
playing piano his

concealment of camps
(where bones grew in their beautiful
achromatic architecture) become
visible in the home I build

iv
in this layered gloss of thicket
goarse tameless fern our

speech no longer seems important
we are smaller than insects

tiny organisms yet to be found
breathing the repetition of loss
on this spiked & softly fenced
history here the trees

bigger than our language & our
lungs & ancestry

Agnieszka Studzińska has an MA in Creative Writing from the UEA. She is the author of *Snow Calling* and *What Things Are* (Eyewear Publishing) and *Branches of a House (*Shearsman Books). Her poems have appeared in The Long Poem Magazine, *The Manhattan Review, Myslexia*, as well as anthologies. She is currently finishing her PhD at Royal Holloway University of London. She teaches creative writing to adults, undergraduates and for The Poetry School.

Home studio / by Rachel Tam

Hong Kong artist and illustrator, Rachelle Nuit, used art as a creative outlet to being a full-time architectural designer. Her art examines the complex relationships between body and mind, divinity, and humanity.

'Closing up shop' by Lyly Fong

It's Monday. It's usually the Laus day off but not today. Fourteen hours ago, they served their last order at their takeaway. With their remaining bags packed in the car trunk, it's time to close up their livelihood before turning their backs on this town forever.

News of their pending departure made it to the local paper's front page. An editorial collage of testimonials from residents and faithful customers paid honour to Wai Keung and Ting Tse, whom they christened Kenny and Tina. Folks will miss his free Qigong lessons at the town hall and her Chinese baking at every coffee morning. The Buckie Facebook group posted the article that shows two photos of the Hong Kong natives in front of The Bamboo House. Their hair charcoal black in one and flint silver in the other. Only their dimple smiles complementing their moon crescent eyes remain identical. Within minutes, hundreds of comments from residents filled the feed:

'Best Chinese takeaway iver. It's nae gaan tae be the same. Ye'll baith be sairly missed.'

'Fit's happenin? Hiv they closed doon?!'

'Nah, they've jist retired.'

'No way! Far they gaan?'

'Doon tae Edinburgh, I heard. Gaan tae look aifter the grandkids.'

'Ah, so that's where Hannah and Luke bide noo.'

Standing at the shop's counter Ting Tse remembers how she had to step up her language skills in face of the perils of a hungry and intolerant clientele. She had survived with pidgin English, learning phonetic mnemonic devices of key phrases.

Prawn man (蝦 Haa1 老 Lou5): Hello

Behind has something (後 Hau6 邊 Bin1 有 Yao3 嘢 Ye3): Happy New Year

Yet, even these did not prepare her for the thickness of the Doric dialect this far North with English reserved only for posh people. Neither posh nor local, Ting Tse may not have understood the torrent of words hurled at her, but she felt their biting wounds. Customers prodded at each menu item as if they prodded her brain to check for working batteries.

'I said: I... Want... Two... Chicken... Flied... Lice.'

'Why open a takeaway if ye canna even spik oor tongue?'

Old men told her to go home. Mothers told her she was deaf and dumb. Children told her she looked weird. Yet, no matter how much impatience and outrage she received, she barricaded in her tears behind her benevolent smile. She held her ground.

'Don't you worry you're doing fantastic darling... Yes, that's correct.'

'Fit like yersel Tina. You sound like a real Buckie quine noo!'

As she grew in confidence, so did their patrons' affection grow for her. Those initial words left no scars.

'Closing up shop' by Lyly Fong (cont'd)

'They kent ma order by hairt. As soon as they heard ma voice on the phone, they kent far I wis and fit I wanted. Bless them.'
'It's the end of an era! Always loved me a 45a.'
'Canna beat Kenny's Cantonese style beef. Will miss seeing him and Tina aroon.'

Upstairs, they survey these now vacant, dusty rooms, where their children once played. Chop suey life did not give the parents the same practicality of child-rearing as a nine-to-five job. Ting Tse recalls the day Jim and Hazel offered to babysit. A bowling ball of emotion roll ups for a strike against her stomach.

Of all the residents whom the Laus knew they could entrust their infants; it was this pair. After all, these retired teachers were the first to open their hearts and home to them. Wai Keung hasn't forgotten the first time he dropped their children off at their neighbours.

'Remember to be good. Always listen to what Uncle Jim and Auntie Hazel tell you.' He instructed.

'Well, hello there!' Hazel smiled down at the two kids, whose names she helped pick when they were born.

'Hello Aunty Hazel!' They chorused. Wai Keung was proud they remembered this Chinese etiquette of always addressing your senior.

'Come on in.'

On cue, the youngsters ran past her and headed straight to the couple's rear garden to look at the fishpond that is no longer there. Everyone in the neighbourhood even embraced the normality of a white couple raising Asian kids. No one raised eyebrows when Hazel appeared after nursery to collect the Chinese boy. No one rang the police when the Chinese girl unlocked the couple's front door after school.

After their Saturday Chinese class, the bairns sprawled their books out on the couple's kitchen table to do their homework and teach their babysitters basic Cantonese.

'Luke, teach me to say "how are you?"'

'你... 好... 嗎?'

'Neigh ho maaa?'

'No Uncle Jim, you're saying nei too high! It's nei5.' The boy gestured the tonal plane with his hand for each word until his older student mastered the phrase. Once they graduated through the basic conversational phrases, the adults even advanced into parables.

'What did you learn today?'

'守株待兔.'

'Sou joo doi toe?'

The youngsters giggled at Uncle Jim's shoddy pronunciation of the story about the farmer and the rabbit.

'Closing up shop' by Lyly Fong (cont'd)

Luke marched with solemn pride every Remembrance Day in the Boys Brigade as Jim did in his youth. Hannah followed Hazel's footsteps to win district prizes for her Highland dancing. Yet despite their Scottish upbringing, the children shared one thing in common with their parents: they worked from an early age. Instead of paper rounds, milk deliveries or babysitting Hannah and Luke earned their pocket money at the takeaway. Already fully versed in Doric and trained in customer service by their mother, it was a natural handover for the children to manage the front-of-house. Now both have long since settled in the Scottish capital, and in jobs with statuses that have more than compensated their parents' half-century's worth of finger cuts, scald burns, and falls in the kitchen.

When Hannah found her groom, a cousin's restaurant in Aberdeen welcomed a Hong Kong island's worth of family and friends to the banquet decked in ruby red and honey gold. Elder relatives layered the newlyweds with gold and jade accompanied with blessings in exchange for a cup full of tea and respect. The proud parents ushered the white couple from Buckie into the rosewood chairs. The bride and groom, in their traditional wedding attire weighed down by their expensive gifts, kneeled in front of them with their heads bowed as they served their ultimate cup with the words, 'Aunty Hazel, Uncle Jim. Yum cha.'

'But we didn't know we had to bring jewellery,' Hazel said.

'Your years of kindness are far more precious than any metal or stone,' replied the father of the bride. The Laus catch their reflections in the window glass to see that they are almost similar in age as their kind neighbours were back then.

'Let's see Hazel and Jim one last time,' Ting Tse says.

Wai Keung returns her sad smile.

For many years, the Chinese family cleaned their Scottish friends' graves as they did for

their own relatives during Ching Ming Festival, and now that they are leaving Buckie who knows if they will ever return.

At the final flick of the light switch, long-buried memories of their early days flash before Wai Keung's mind. They received as many customer orders as they did abuse. Over the phone. Over the counter. They boarded up the premise's windows after beer bottles shattered the glass a few days after opening. They replaced the boards only to find a patchwork of graffiti sprawled across these fresh canvases. Weeks later, defeated, they left the aerosol collection of messages and symbols that accumulated over the faded, scrubbed ones. The mixtape of heckles from drunkards and youths became their go-to playlist as they mopped and scrubbed at closing time. When the clock stroke 1 o' clock did they feel safe to head home only to step into the stench of urine outside sullying their clean shop. Today that fear that once reigned in Wai Keung and Ting Tse can stay buried.

'Closing up shop' by Lyly Fong (cont'd)

'There'll be a fair void at the Rotary club without you, Kenny. Heaps of projects wouldn't have happened without you and we're sad to see you both go.'

'Will be strange not to see the shop's sponsored Christmas lights this year. Thanks for all your years of support, Kenny and Tina.'

'A pair o Buckie legends. Aiways smiled and said hello fan they saw ye in the street. Canna believe they're leaving.

Door locked. Keys thrown in the letterbox. Owners no more of the local area's first-ever Chinese takeaway. The Laus had woven themselves into the social fabric and left a deep yellow impression patterned with food and kindness. Although the impact they made will never fade, the moment has come to unpick their threads from this community.

Lyly Fong, born to Hong Kong immigrants and raised in Scotland, is an amateur short story writer and poet who writes about the Scottish Hong Kong community. She was the 2019 Toulmin Prize winner and has poems included in the Scottish BPOC Writers Network Audio Anthology Mixtape 2021 and 2020.

The Grandfather Danny Moloney

My grandfather was Jack Donovan. He was a hard man on the outside but he had a soft and emotional core. He loved his wife, my Grandmother, Molly. They had five children, four daughters and a son. The daughters ; Nelly, Biddy, Maisie and my mother, Kate were all very different. Their son Tom was, in many ways, the black sheep of the family. He was born with a club foot and a bad temper, neither of which he ever lost.

Kate was the youngest Donovan and the closest to Tom. She was feisty and daring, attractive and determined. She liked to get her own way but then who doesn't ? She set her sights on my father when she was just sixteen and she was married to him by the time she was eighteen. I escorted the pair of them up the aisle, albeit in the warmth of my mother's womb, in the Winter of 1950.

Being born in 1951 Ireland had its challenges. The good times were yet to arrive. The houses were cold in Winter, basic food was plentiful but treats were rare. There were few cars and even fewer buses; lots of bicycles and lots of walking. Pony and traps and ass and carts were still seen on the roads. Horses still transported the milk to the creamery and drinking water was carried manually to houses from ancient pumps found on the sides of main roads. My Grandmother and Grandfather had a small cottage and a small plot of land which was used to grow vegetables : potatoes, carrots, turnips and parsnips. In the Summer strawberries were grown. There were chickens, goats and pigs. My grandfather also kept greyhounds. He fed them, trained them and raced them. When he found one that was fast he took it to Dublin to race and, if it won, he sold it at auction.

It was not unusual at that time for the first born child to be reared by their Grandparents. Not long after I was born my father went to England in search of work. He joined his brother in London and worked initially on the railways. My mother remained with me until I was two and then it was decided that she would join my father in London and I would remain with my Grandparents until she and my father had settled in England. It must have been so difficult for my mother to leave me at that time but, of course, I was too young to take that desertion personally. My parents visited my Grandparents and I every Summer - strangers to me then. It must have been particularly painful for my Mother to have to wrench me from my grandparent's arms in July each year.

In 1954 my mother gave birth to my brother in London and a year or so later she and my father found suitable accommodation for us all to live together as a family. As I understand it my Grandparents were not very keen to hand me back at that time as they felt that I was too young to cope with such a traumatic event. It was agreed that more time would be allowed for me to become more mature, more resilient. Indeed, it was not until the Summer of 1958 that my mother insisted on me joining her, my brother and my father in London. By that time I had been in school for two years and was more rooted in Ireland and in the love of my Grandparents than ever.

In the late August of 1958 I was an innocent seven year old exploring the world around me completely unaware that a major change was about to take place in my life. I wasn't to be informed about this change until the day before it was due to happen and it was agreed that my Grandmother would travel to London and stay with me for some time to aid my transition to a new and very alien world.

My Grandfather, whom I spent most of my waking day with, opposed the move but had to accept the situation when confronted by the rest of the family. He was heartbroken.

.Some days before I was due to leave (at the time I had no knowledge of my impending departure) I entered my Grandfather's shed at the back of the house. He was sitting on an old wooden chair wearing his checked flat cap , smoking a pipe and sobbing loudly. He was gazing out the side window and hadn't notice me enter.

"What's wrong Grandad ?" I asked.

He turned his head slowly, removing the pipe from his mouth as he did so. He tried to speak but choked instead. He knelt down and reached for me pulling me into his chest. I felt the roughness of his stubbly beard mixed with his tears and could smell the smoke from his pipe mixed with the smells of the countryside which he carried everywhere with him – a smell I have never forgotten.

At that moment my Grandmother appeared at the door. She moved towards me slowly and took me by the hand. My Grandfather released his grip on me allowing her to take me away from him putting his head in his hands as he did so and sobbing loudly.

"Why is Grandad crying Nana ?" I asked.
"Take no notice of him," replied Nana. "He is upset about something – he'll get over it. Let's get you ready for bed shall we ?"

The night before I was due to leave I lay in bed, confused and unable to sleep, hearing the raised voices of adults coming from the sitting room. Some sort of an argument was taking place but I wasn't sure what it was about. Eventually I fell into a light sleep and woke when I heard the door handle twist and the light from the hall invaded the dark in the room. I was turned towards the wall and kept my eyes closed pretending to be asleep. My Grandfather entered the room quietly and sat on the bottom end of the bed. He pushed the door too but there was still a sliver of light entering the room which gave it a purgatorial feel. He was sobbing and muttering quietly to himself. Eventually he stopped and there was a period of silence before he started to speak. I was still feigning sleep but could hear him praying. He had his rosary beads in his hands and I soon realised that all his prayers were about me. I needed a guardian Angel. I needed comfort. I needed good fortune. I needed good friends and I was to be filled with happiness. I was not to forget my Irish heritage and under no circumstances was I to join the British Army (he had once been arrested at a fundraising event for the IRA in the time of the Black and Tans and had been ferried to England and locked up in Dartmoor for fourteen months). Between prayers he sobbed, he touched the bedclothes on the bed as if that would bring him closer to me. I faced the wall, eyes shut tight.holding back the tears. I could hear my heart beat loudly in my head as I held my breath as if I was underwater. I could feel his love and his care for me. His heart was broken, his pain unbearable, his misery beyond description.

Danny Moloney was born in a small town outside of Limerick City in the Irish Republic. He emigrated to England when he was seven years of age but has returned many times to the place of his birth.
He lived and was educated in London and the south east. He was Head of a leading comprehensive school in Surrey. He retired as the CEO of a Multi-Academy Trust in 2017. He lives in the London Borough of Kingston with his wife, Sandra

'Rice noodle rolls' by Priscilla Yeung

For eight Hong Kong dollars, that's less than a Pound, we used to be able to get a plate of *coeng-fan* at Cheung Kee Breakfast Bar. Straight from the wooden steamer, the rice noodle rolls were hot, soft and chewy.

An old woman in a worn apron poured sweet soy and sesame seeds all over it, and more sauces in bottles were on the side for us to serve ourselves.
The foodies like to debate about what and how much condiment to add to this steamy goodness. It takes years of trial and error to perfect the right recipe, and everyone claims to have the golden ratio. Do you want to know mine? Okay, fine, it's two squeezes of sweet sauce and three squeezes of Chinese tahini on the side. No chilli, the fragrance of the rice is too delicate for the spice.

Food transports people to places.

There was nothing fancy about Cheung Kee. Foldable tables, plastic stools, and menus in Chinese calligraphy. Half-broken tiles exposing the concrete wall, which itself was further eroding into a rough surface. People queued up and shouted the orders through the hot steam of *coeng-fan*. The owner never missed an order, never miscalculated a bill.

Although I frequent *dim-sum* restaurants in China Town, the taste and memory of the *coeng-fan* bar on a nameless alleyway in my hometown is simply irreplaceable.

Is it what people called a *je ne sais quoi*? Maybe.
If memory is a palate, mine tastes bittersweet.
Cheung Kee was shut overnight, without notice, just like many other businesses in the city. Bookshops, restaurants, newspaper agencies...

A social media account reports that the breakfast bar's owner has chronic back pain from work, so she decided to close it down. But we all know the truth, reading between the lines, it was politics.

Diaspora becomes commonplace all over again.
I find a picture of the storefront now. The red-painted sign is still there, albeit fading. The metal gate is locked and rusty, and posters and adverts of politicians have invaded all over it.

Noises silence history.

In that case, let me write my own story down.
#

Some years after 1997

Chan Ka Long and I bought our breakfast from Cheung Kee separately. The rice noodle rolls were first wrapped in baking paper and then in a white bag, and hot steam escaped from the little hole under the plastic bag knot.

After we bought breakfast, we walked to the school along the river. We went to the same school, but we didn't walk together. I was at the front, swinging the bag of rice noodle rolls on beat with whatever was on my MP3, most likely Bad Day by Daniel Powter.
Chan Ka Long was usually behind, keeping a distance, not deliberately. Sometimes he also had a basketball in his other hand. The ball occasionally bounced, and he never failed to catch it.

We never spoke. Small talk was not a word in my dictionary back then, Chinese girls were supposed to be timid and restrained.

A load of crap if you ask me now.

Worse, he was also a year younger than me, which was a big deal when you were at secondary school in a tiny suburb town in the conservative Hong Kong. Everything outside the norm was frowned upon, only the norm was narrowly defined.

I always stayed after school with my girlfriends at the table next to the basketball court. He was on the court, running after the ball with his friends. His white shirt slipped out of his brown trousers, and his school tie was hanging in a mess if it was still on his neck at all.

By the basketball court was a vending machine, and my favourite drink from it was melon milk. In an aluminium lined rectangular carton, the milk was green like alien juices. Artificial, but addictive.

He was in front of me and got the last melon milk.
'Oh, *ding!*' It was my turn, and I stabbed the button for the melon milk even though the red light screamed 'sold out'. I was really craving it that day

. He poked the straw through the boxed drink and passed it to me. His eyes were looking at the floor. 'You can have it,' and those were our first words. I took it, and he ran away before I could say thank you.

Oh, puppy love. So, so sweet.

Titillating. Excruciating. Streamy like the rice noodle rolls.

The melon milk incident kept me awake all night, so much that I added the spicy sauce on my *coeng-fan* the next morning by accident. 'Oh ding!'

'Oh ding!' he copied me, laughing. Melon milk was his way in, and now he could joke around. 'You like to say that word a lot, huh? Take mine, it's plain, you can add your weird sauce combo.'

My ears turned red. 'It is not weird.'

But what mattered was that he knew, he observed, he cared.

That was the first day we walked together, in the breezy autumn morning, in our ugly brown oversized sweaters, with rice noodle rolls in our hands.

We walked, but he didn't know what to say.

The river was muddy but as romantic as the Danube in my eyes. The walk path ran under the shadow of old palm trees. They grew to form an overhead arch, like any garden in Paris.

All earthy shades of leaves fell to the floor, autumn breeze blew my long hair in silence. I couldn't control the corners of my mouth from lifting so I kept my head down and just walked. I wished this road would be infinitely long, even if we didn't speak at all.

'I'm going for the student union this year,' he said something finally.

'Really?' I pretended I didn't know. The student union election was the most exciting event at our school. All students got to vote, and the candidates acted like politicians, with manifestos, speeches, supporters, haters and media campaigns. A rare sight of democracy, then and undoubtedly now. 'How's the campaigning going?' I asked.

But I knew he didn't need to do much. Basketball star turned student union rep? He got the seat before he said he wanted it.

'Yep, it's going. Will you vote for me? I am Number 4 Chan Ka Long.' He introduced himself. I knew who he was. Everyone knew who he was. He took out a piece of laminated paper from his pocket. 'My supporters made this to give out. It got my manifesto on it.'

Oh ding, did he talk to me just because he wanted my vote? My heart fell to the bottom. 'Yeah, sure.' I acted casual but speeded up on my feet. *All the flirting to get my vote, turned out everything was my imagination, the melon milk, the coeng-fan.*

We had no stories to tell.

He ran after me. 'What's the running for?'

'I...I'm late for the mock exam.'

'But today's National Anthem Day,' he said.
We were the generation of kids that switched from singing God Save the Queen to the March of the Volunteers. We had witnessed the lowering of the Union Jack and the rise of the Five-Star Red Flag. And since then, every Wednesday morning was National Anthem Day, we sang and watched the Scouts raised the flag.

Anyway, him busting my lie got me all flustered so I walked even faster, in fact, I ran. But he didn't chase after me.

He was at Cheung Kee already when I arrived there the next morning. He pushed one bag into my hands. 'I got the sauces right.' That seemed to be his encryption for 'would you be my girlfriend?'

Present moment

Twelve hours of flying and seven days in a hotel room.

As I leave the quarantine hotel, I realise I've nowhere to go in particular. My close friends and family have left, and we now catch up in London China Town once a month.

This city is just a familiar dot on the Google Map for me. 'Hong-Kong' is a sound that makes my eyes light up and my ears alert in an instant, but very soon the connection passes as I carry on with my business.

The city has changed so much, yet, on the surface, it looks like the old days. Swanky skyscrapers mingle with old retail shops and trendy restaurants.

Horrible air pollution, freezing cold air conditioning. Old women using umbrellas under the sun. It is fierce. The sky is blue but cloudy, the air is stale and moist, the cicadas chirp loudly and monsoon season must be coming soon.

I walk along the river and pass my school which was knocked down a few years back and is now an empty skyscraper. Families and major businesses have all moved elsewhere.

Ghostscrapers everywhere.

I keep walking and stumble upon the old Cheung Kee Breakfast Bar.

My phone has an application that tells me whether the business is pro-China or not. The so-called blue and yellow economic circles.

Old Cheung Kee is marked as a yellow store and 'permanently closed' on the app. But it's no longer vacant. The old red sign and rusty gate are buried under a fresh coat of paint.

A new store has opened, and there's no information if it is yellow or blue.

The menu says 'silky coeng-fan'. Wooden stools line up for a quick bite but no tables. A plastic screen is installed between the kitchen and the customer for hygienic reasons. Instead of an old lady, a tall man hiding behind a face mask and an apron is standing next to the steamy boxes.

I order a set of coeng-fan, and he starts rolling. His fingers are slim but his palms are huge. Basketball hands, Chan Ka Long told me that before, he was very proud of them. 'As big as Michael Jordan's,' that's what he said.

'You have basketball hands,' I say, initiating small talks as an Anglicised middle-aged woman.

'Yes, I do.' His voice is muffled behind the mask.

I watch him bring the dish together, as well as his beautiful hands working skilfully. He doesn't ask me what sauce I want but puts exactly what I like. Two squeezes of sweet sauce, and three squeezes of tahini. On the side, no chilli.

I look up.

He takes off his face mask.

'Chan Ka Long,' I whisper his name in disbelief. He passes me the plate of *coeng-fan* but doesn't let go of it when I take the dish. His hand is quivering.

Alas.

We stand there, clouded by the kitchen steam, without words. Paralysed.

'Cheung Kee is shut.' I try to speak casually but my trembling voice betrays me. I keep my head down, and tears start circulating in my eyes, but it isn't sadness.

The past should stay where it's supposed to be, in memory lane.

Everything seems the same, yet nothing is and nothing will be. People should move on. The past should never resurface.

'Yes, the old owner followed her son to the UK. They live in Liverpool now, can you believe it?' He replies in his usual nonchalant way, pauses, and then remembers. 'Are you still in the UK?'

'Yep, London.' A drop of tear makes its way to the plate, breaking the soy sauce molecules.

He nods hard. ‘Good decision.’ He says this but his actions suggest otherwise. It’s his decision, to take over the rice noodle rolls place.

It was me who believed that puppy love was never meant to last, so it was okay, to flirt and date with someone from high school knowing that in less than a year I would jump on a plane and study abroad.

I left him that summer. I added bitterness to our sweet romance.

He couldn’t imagine one could leave their home for good.

He stayed and waited. He thought it was just a two-year study trip and like many other Hong Kong students, I would return to university and settle down.

But our bags were packed.

Yeung is an essayist and novelist. Her first book, The London/Hong Kong Girl, was published in Hong Kong, and her short stories appear or are forthcoming in L*iterally Stories, Antithesis*, and elsewhere. Yeung is reading an MA in Creative Writing at the City, University of London, and she is long-listed for the Book Edit Writer's Prize.

'Answers'
by Fawzia Muradali Kane

(after Tara Bergin)

I tried a few notes, but Mammy's piano had not been tuned for years.
The movers had treated it rough, I could not bear the discordant sounds.
My music teacher told me, once, I had a good voice.
I did not believe her.
Only alone, while walking, I would sing hymns from my childhood.
When I married and moved five thousand miles away, I could no longer sing.
I listen to birds while walking, and then there seems to be no other sound.
Always.
Always.
Always.
There is a kind of hunger inside me.
Despite what the listeners say, my hand never shakes, though my pages may flutter.
Sometimes, on Sundays especially, a croissant can stretch a morning in a fine way.
This, I imagine, is what release from a long sentence must feel like.
No one can say why or when we become the sum of all our decisions.
Why is the least powerful word the most dangerous?
I used to hear someone practising the violin around Christmastime, a scratchy sound, playing the same parang phrase over and over.
The scent of orange blossom makes me fall asleep, with thoughts of Granada, where I saw the streets lined with trees heavy with fruit. I want to live there.
It is said the worst type of death is when there is no one left to remember.

Fawzia Muradali Kane is a Trinidadian architect and poet, sometimes based in London. Her debut *Tantie Diablesse* (Waterloo Press, 2011) was a poetry finalist for the Bocas Lit Fest Prize. Her pamphlet, *Houses of the Dead*, was published by Thamesis in 2014.

'Ocean's Call'
by Angela Kong

Whenever I'm at an ocean,
There is a stillness I savor.

The crashing of waves,
I watch
listen
breathe.

And do I hear the ocean's call
because I'm Californian?

I'll never truly know,
but maybe ancestral footsteps
will tell me.
Raised by Singaporean mother
and Hong Kong father
— with roots in Hainan and Guangzhou—

It seems
I was not the only one
yearning for an ocean.

Though seasickness ails me
I thrive in the disorientation:
traveling to foreign yet familiar lands,
adapting through turbulence and mother tongue,
remembering who I am
when my passport tells an incomplete story.

'Ocean's Call'
by Angela Kong (cont'd)

Are we all just
salmon swimming upstream,
in search of home?

When I trace these roots now,
I laugh because
what I used to call a dilemma
now looks a little more like
destiny.
Even in Shanghai
river ash guided me
when I chose to live by 苏州河 (Suzhou River).

Diasporic child that I am:
I am 江 as in river as in 长江 (Yangtze River) as in
there will always be water
flowing within me.

There is an ocean calling,
always calling,
and therein
lie my roots.

Angela Kong is an Asian American artist that manifests her poetic voice to heal people through writing, photography/film, education, and curation. Originally hailing from the San Francisco Bay Area, she spent her undergrad in Colorado, has lived in China for several years, and is currently based in Singapore. She is passionate about exploring issues related to Asian diasporic identity and is learning how to make peace with questions without answers.

'Leaving Smyrna'
by Vasiliki Albedo

How my great-grandfather remembered it

It was September, not September, end of
August– Gregorian-calendar days, the past logic of a now
vanished world. On that day there was no
jazz on the Quai, no parasoled promenade,
no camel caravan with figs and silks stopping at the Greek
mahallah, no Levantines holding hands at an imagined
point of sunrise, no lovers' amané sang outside
my sister's window, and Mehmet, our Turkish neighbour
had inexplicably gone, three days before, taking everything
but the dog. On that day, when the sky became a flame
and the sea bloated red, the only idea we had was breaking in
to a mausoleum and sheltering among the rotting flesh,
as the Çetes flooded alleys with their swords, and the great
fire took ahold of quarter after quarter whistling revenge.
Two weeks of stale bread and ashy water not enough
even for tears, and then three months hiding with our Turkish friends,
before we made our way to Thessaloniki and the promise of new land.

Vasiliki Albedo is the winner of Poetry International's Summer 2021 chapbook competition. Her poems have appeared in The Poetry Review, Poetry London, AGNI, Magma, Wasafiri etc. Fire in the Oubliette was joint winner in Live Canon's pamphlet competition.

'Anyway'
by Denise Kwan

powdered pink lamp
with hi-shine rose spine
trying to be something it's not
next to the salmon rose MAC
this could be from MADE.com
but the tag says Argos

the attempt to furnish a life without a roof

the newspaper wrapped frames
missing their picture hooks
stamped into walls 65 miles away

I um-ed and ah-ed
should we nail into the wall?
but I always thought hung frames was a mark of permanence
I woz' 'ere scrawled onto the school tunnel
now they've covered the pics of dicks and bongs with a huge caterpillar

and those zany nylon train covers
that rubbed my thighs on hot days
that day
yearning beyond clocks and square boxes
to maybe scold my colleague with hot water
an action birthed can not be taken back

like a foetus, I withhold
pushing, holding
the mother cups her stomach through the dress
flashes her enamel at the lens with uncreased eyes

'Anyway' (cont'd)
by Denise Kwan

like a foetus, I withhold
pushing, holding
the mother cups her stomach through the dress
flashes her enamel at the lens with uncreased eyes

there she is
hammer her a like

she unpeels your soldered grip
and you fall like a mood stone
plucked into rage and exhilaration

landing into the ocean
with fury your compass
and no recourse
fuck it
the sea is made of glitter anyway

Denise Kwan arrived at poetry making through after school English classes and watching the world from across the counter. Growing up in a Cantonese speaking household, the English language has been a well of foreignness and familiarity. Denise is a researcher, writer and art maker. She has written for *ArtReview, Writing Our Legacy and CCQ Magazine.* In 2014, her writing was selected by Harmonious Society Award for Art Criticism and shortlisted by Wales in Venice life/art writing in 2019. Denise was awarded the British Association of Chinese Studies Early Career Researcher Prize (2019). "

'The Ghost of Your Mother is Waiting For You at Arrivals'
by Claire Collison

You see her through the window, the plane still taxiing, the seatbelt signs not yet extinguished. She's on the roof terrace they closed when they were modernising, but she won't know that. Wearing the dress she bought in Peter Jones, so long ago it's back in fashion. She's excited to see you; you can tell from her body language; she waves, knowing you'll spot her. She will no doubt know others who are meeting friends and family, and she'll have told them, I'm meeting my daughter. You will never again be as looked-forward-to as you are now.

Claire Collison is one of three winners of the inaugural Women Poets' Prize. Her debut pamphlet, *Placebo* (Blueprint). Claire was Arts Editor for *Disability Arts Magazine* (DAM). Her short stories, non-fiction and poetry are widely published in anthologies, online, and in magazines.

'skin'
Sophie Jasmine Bird

The light through the curtains holds the skin of my past.
Skin which I'm not sure I feel at home in, so perhaps
Better to shed. Better to part with that which no longer
Clothes nor gives me warmth. My feet barely fit my paper
Shoes, so, crossing thresholds lacks any formal invite.

I've made homes in my mind since I was a child, which
Unsurprisingly struggled to welcome me. Yellow rooms
Hung with flying ducks; origami walls I tried to hide inside;
Wise and silent forests with firs broad and warm
Enough to sew buttons on and wear as a winter coat.

At night, I wrap my arms around my body like a scaffold.
By day, I wear the softest cardigans so to the unaware
I'd look like I was just cold. Like I was in a breeze.
Like no body ever let me go and the walls to call
Home and hold me stood just around the corner.

My home will have turrets tall enough to see time,
Windows as great as gods with light as gold as hope.
The carpets will be thick with moss and memory,
And the curtains heavy with rest. I will sleep
Where shadow throws gentleness on August's sunlit tiles.

My home will be a pyramid of all my bones, laced
Like Da Vinci's bridge. Since necessity won't allow this,
I'll settle for Rowan branches glazed with my spit under
A full moon in Taurus, and I'll watch my skin moult and
Sparkle fey-like as I return my cardigan to wool.

Finally, I will invite other homes to build their walls
Besides mine. When my feet learn stillness, I'll lift up my
Foundations and side-step until our stones touch and
Our windows tunnel sunlight so that we never again spare
The beauty of our skin, mingling in the pardoned air.

Sophie is a poet living and working in rural Northamptonshire. She has previously been published by *Hedgehog Press, City Lit, The Rialto, Popshot and Ariel Publishing*. She is working on a full collection, and a novel.

Victorian and Tree (2019) / by Mike Sweeney

Mike Sweeney's early visual arts experience and M.F.A. begat an interest in social engagement and bridges between visual and textual literacy. He has engaged parallel careers in Art, libraries, and schools over three decades, not as day jobs but as a holistic approach to nourishing diverse skill sets and understandings. After training on the job in antique furniture restoration. MIke refocused on craft technique and poetic language in his work. Using analog approaches to material manipulation, print, and object making, Mike works with woven paper, concrete, and wood to explore ideas of palimpsest and noise, identity and place.

'Traces'
by Sue Wallace-Shaddad

after 'Kin' by Sula Rubens

Each line marks a border
drawn by the suffering
of humankind, a map

where rivers, blue-veined,
crisscross the skin
of an ancient hand,

delicate, paper-thin.
People pass so lightly here*.
Curly heads droop, limbs tire.

They seek a porous fence,
a welcoming world
where they can rest,

free of the cold, the wet,
where children may sleep
under roofs not clouds.

Sue Wallace-Shaddad was born and brought up in Suffolk and now lives there. She is married to a Sudanese academic. Her pamphlet, *A City Waking Up*, was published by Dempsey and Windle in October 2020. Sue has an MA in Writing Poetry from Newcastle University with the Poetry School London. Her poems have appeared in *London Grip*, *ARTEMISpoetry*, *Poetry Scotland*, *The High Window*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Poetry Space*, *Fenland Poetry Journal*, *The French Literary Review* among others and in various magazines.

'Holding Homes' by Amy Doffegnies

Moving back to the UK from Australia, I find my sense of home shaken, I am no longer sure where it is. This unsettling unknowing came as a surprise, and I have lived with this strange angel since. After almost a decade away, I thought that moving back to my native Cumbrian village of mossy dry-stone walls and black winter branches would be simple. Like the Herdwick sheep that graze the highest fells, I have long been hefted to this home. I have strayed far – making homes in Australia, Thailand and Myanmar – but never letting go of the wish to return. When I arrived back I felt the glee of homing and of finally being stationary. But in past months my mind has remained in flight. It flitters far, even as my body, clambering up the deep fells, has willed it to slow.

Some days I see only symmetry. The other days it is more difficult to write and I breathe at the surface. I am a wanderer amongst people who have their place. For people here, home is unambiguous. The snow-haired gent who, with a craned back, ambles past our house, bickering with Dad about the Labour Party and the broken northern rail service. They share the autumn fruits of the tree beside the beck, collecting apples at their respective heights. Then there's the damson-eyed boy from school. In a yellow puffer jacket, he reads Japanese manga comics on his train home, as it laces across the sands of Morecambe Bay.

The question of where home is and where I should be loiters. Was I mistaken in hurrying back for 'home?' Across the countertop, a young woman I went to high school with serves coffee to pay for her next flight. I remember the fellow Cumbrian I met in Myanmar last year, lanky and handsome, a farmer's son and now part-time model come English teacher in Yangon; his students speak English in a thick northern accent. Am I really the only one?

Wherever I have been, I look to poems to steady me. Alongside poems I have taken to carrying other things, fragments of collected homes, physical symbols of vast parts of me that exist, invisible. I hold on to these proofs my other homes, bicycles and blankets. I orient myself by larger, more containing things than before; I follow the phases of the moon.

Opening the *New Cumbrian Anthology of Poems,* I come to Robert Macfarlane's question, which resonates:

"What do I know when I am in this place that I can know nowhere else?"

Nowhere else do I know being a daughter, at home, by the whip of the hearth, it's different. *Nowhere else* do I know the pair of white egrets, homing in the evening to the field's trees. *Nowhere else*, the grandfatherly buzzard patrolling or, by the level crossing, the wink of a deer; or standing in the rust strewn stream, the glint of an eel (or was it?)

'Holding Homes' (cont'd)
by Amy Doffegnies

And still, there's so much *other than here* that I cling to, on strolls through high hedges, down green lanes. What of those things I knew of other homes? Am I to know them *nowhere else*?

*

Sitting on my bed, under a charcoal fleece and the winter half-light, I hear Pay Pay's voice at the end of the phone, the rain hammering on his tin roof and the infrequent thud of a mango dropping. Pay Pay ('Dad', in Burmese) recently moved back to a small town in Myanmar's Irrawaddy delta region, where he grew up. From the comparatively metropolitan Thai border town of Mae Sot where we met eight years ago, Pay Pay's home for a quarter century, it's a shift. Our life circumstances and the places that we have returned to are worlds apart, but we both find ourselves plunged back into places that we once called home.

This gloomy afternoon, Pay Pay asks with a hint of rascal, "Thamee (daughter), what do you think about fate?" his voice emphatic, accented. My adopted (additional, essential), far-away father is an erudite and graceful rebel. Pay Pay is a former member of the Burmese Communist Party, ex-political prisoner and teacher.

On my days off in Mae Sot, usually on Saturday mornings, I would make my way by bicycle to my Burmese teacher's front room. His small classroom, like an open shop front, doubled as Pay Pay's kind-eyed wife Ei Ei's tailoring business. At the front of their home sat a line of carefully nurtured pot plants: rosella, yellow roses, a small papaya tree, and Pay Pay standing to greet me, hands on hips. He taught me the basics of Burmese language and though I didn't yet know the colours of the rainbow, the vocabulary list he gifted me across the desk included 'democracy,' 'demonstration,' 'election,' – start with the essentials.

Quickly, I learned that Pay Pay was a poet, a fact that sang in his speech. In that Thailand life, Pay Pay woke at dawn to teach a full load of classes. He drove an old motorbike and stayed up late at night, busy with translation work and absorbing international news. As my friends played a weekly women's football match across from Pay Pay's house, I'd stop by. Over tealeaf salad he told me of the letters that he and his wife wrote to each other while he was in prison, and the story of his exile to Thailand, away from the regime that had imprisoned him. In the place where Pay Pay became my family, I grew my first home away from home; home expanded and was added to. Silently, the place was taking hold and burrowing deep within, made of slowly forged connections.

Jolting me back to the moment, "Do you believe in fate, Thamee?" Pay Pay asked again. "I think so," I say. It's something I want to believe in, but in truth, I'm not sure.

*

A year on from this phone call, I'm back again in the Cumbria of my school days,

'Holding Homes' by Amy Doffegnies (cont'd)

time suspended. The pandemic struck and I bolted from the city to the shelter of space. But being back here last year, after so much time spent away, I had learned the difficulty in coming back to a place where I once belonged, having since belonged in other places, and still belonging elsewhere. A jigsaw piece grown huge from holding other homes, my heart sways here perilously between disquiet and deep love of this place. The paradox that my (former?) home can be the loneliest place is something I didn't anticipate.

Some days, the fields have been a tonic. The first days back I lived that phase that always comes first after returning: every corner is alight and for a time I fully draw in the air: half-sea, half-mountain. Nettles, jagged-edged stamps of spring line the verges, and bluebells shine in the woods, an uneven amphitheatre. One day, a red deer, this time in full view, an injection of bandy limbs vital after a day inside. More common, but still my favourite sight, is my Dad's sheepdog plaining through the shallow stream, part-seal, part-collie, her black tail a thick, white-tipped whip above the water.

Questions about home swirl around stubbornly still, questions of my place and purpose, and where is home? I am often lost, feeling far from any of my homes. I won't give up my anchors set down in disparate spaces, spread far across continents. And sometimes, coals of knowing glow, in unexpected moments.

Walking out on the cold sands surrounding Humphrey Head, bare feet, careful to step where it's firm enough to tread, Dad's lone figure metres ahead – yes, this is home.

And appearing in my dreams, the luminous backyard wattle tree I could see from my Canberra bedroom window, a kookaburra too, on lucky days. Out the front bony bicycles slumped against our resident pine, its needles treaded into the ropey rug inside – yes, this is home.

As my chunky Aussie boots feel through the grasses of Morecambe Bay, I know, in the space that bodily movement allows, that home is everywhere I have been long enough to love. I know these waves of comfort will not stay, skimming in like sheets of water over sticky sands. For home to be amorphous is not straightforward, but it's the only way I know.

Oxford 2022
Since 2019 I have been in Oxford, holding my homes here, and trying to make it my own. Amongst what has brought about my sense of home here: leafy swims in Parsons Pleasure and Tumbling Bay (the occasional glint of a kingfisher); pastel-coloured magnolias bursting into ancient streets; flowers and falafel at the farmers market; occasional college courtyards and classrooms; high windows aglow when walking under the spires at night; coffees, chips, and noodle soups on Cowley Road; online poetry circles, friends who are constant through the light and the losses.

Holding Homes by Amy Doffegnies (cont'd)

Being here, in one place, has also brought my attention to that part of home that exists within, seeded at the beginnings of life. I have asked myself what brings me back to my 'home chords', wherever I am, if anything. I have thought about what parts of my internal territory, which feelings, feel like home, and which do not, and why? I have come to know that home is internal, external, tangible and intangible, in the past, the present and the future, a strange angel that I will continue searching for and finding, and losing again, wherever I am.

Amy Doffegnies is a writer and poet currently living between Cumbria and Oxford. Her work has been published in Mekong Review, New Mandala, Frontier Myanmar and Kendal Mountain Festival Review. She has a PhD focused on human rights and Buddhism in Myanmar.

'All summer'
by Olivia Thomakos

after “What’s Love Got to Do?” by Richard Blanco

All summer I wander between houses, couches, in and out of Dil and Lil’s secondhand Murano, airconditionless, legs suctioned to the seats / Radio set to whatever isn’t static, most days Spanish, Mexican horns blaring, pushing down three-lane highways and rural dirt roads / All summer I am seeking reencounters, reminders of why I come home, Wednesday walks in Woodland Cemetery, Sunday lunch dates at the coffee shop that taught me how to hold my caffeine, the one folks flocked to when Starbucks was flopped down by the highway because fuck capitalism and its infiltration of small towns / All summer I am running to people excited about their shy cat and Cupid sexcapades or the job they hate that allows them to travel or the job they love that doesn’t pay, or the coworker who watches Twilight stoned every Sunday / All summer I am asking myself how I will have enough money to eat out again, but then I am at Ajanta again, at Alicia’s Ethiopian again, at the speakeasy with lighting that makes me squint like my grandma, phone flashlight poised to read the menu / All summer I am flipping from floor mat to futon, breathing in cat hair, forgetting to turn the fan on the lights off in my brother’s new apartment, in my friend’s cramped studio / They ask if I like the eggshell paint in the bathroom, the ebony accented dresser, stretch smiles when I say I prefer not to live in black and white / All summer I throw out old clothes, old shoes, get my skin checked, teeth cleaned, hug neighbors, kiss parents / Change clothes in parking lots, hide keys in flower pots

Olivia is a writer and teacher from Ohio, USA. She is winner of the 2022 Grierson Verse Prize and Poetry Editor-in-Chief of *From Arthur's Seat* volume seven. She is currently pursuing a MSc in Creative Writing at the University of Edinburgh.

'You Tell Me When We Were Putting Up the Christmas Tree' by Wendy Allen

We have just taken the box down from the loft, the hatch barely covered over.
For eighteen Christmases we have done this and now you calmly tell me it is over.

We continue to assemble parts, manipulating fake branches into rusty parts,
there is a ten-minute look for a missing part, there's no point. We are over.

There are six snowmen from garden centres, a fairy from long before I met you,
there's a train which seems to be in a hurry to depart: We are off! We are over!

The bauble I hold in my hand is a robin, as red breasted as I am pale faced, I put it
on the end of the branch where it nosedives, knowing its journey is over.

We put the tinsel on last, like legs wrapped around each other, exposed, sparse,
the pretty bits on the floor like the sex we no longer share, like us, it is over.

Wendy Allen has been published in *Banshee, The Moth, Ambit* and *Propel*, Lighthouse, Poetry Wales and The North. Her first pamphlet, *Plastic Tubed Little Bird*, will be published in May 2023 with Broken Sleep.

'Tsuyu Season'
by Yuka Urushibata

Not too hot, not too cold,
Submerged between work

and home, day and night,
spring and summer,

where infinity brings back —
the worlds revolving

so perpendicular
like Japanese poems

sealed in steps forward
into layered echoes—

a super express train
rushing on the bridge—

in Japan's rainy season
called 梅雨.

Yuka Urushibata was born and grew up in Shizuoka, Japan. She earned B.A. from Sophia University and has a chapbook Skywriting in NYC. She works as a high school teacher and is doing a PhD at Okayama University researching poetry writing in schools in Japan.

'Once Stood I Stand'
by Tiffany Anne Tondut

We face each other— detached and blank:
The cottage, almost hunching; an old child waits.

In dreams we are greetings, opening as
we face each other. Detached and blank,

where pines once stood, I stand,
considering roots. I know my place:

we face each other— detached and blank.
The cottage, almost hunching. An old child waits.

'Pine Trees / Juan Jose Morales

'Ithaca'
by Marta Arnaldi

I don't know why I'm writing to you, Ithaca.
In the end everyone has spoken about you:
your voice is a dream digging up ocean depths.
Lotus hibiscus lilies dates mimosas.
Exotic city, yet ever vigilant,
like sorrow.
Subterranean city, city of subterfuge,
wild and wandering, like the sea.
I'm afraid of the language you speak,
because all that is invisible remains.
And if the language cannot be seen
and cannot be touched,
the alphabets remain, like tombs.
It seems the more you speak
the more you become foreign.
My land and my exile.
Sea full of hidden rivers.
I don't know why, but I'm writing to you still.

Tr. from Italian by Reinier van Straten

Marta Arnaldi is the Stipendiary Lecturer in Italian at St Anne's College and a Junior Research Fellow at Queen's College, University of Oxford. Marta is the author of three award-winning poetry collections.

'perdure'
by Melissa Evans

i

on winter weekends
my father
would cement things

rake solid leaves
with determination
(tumult)

the ground was thick
wet glass
so he put on ice boots

cleated and ready
to scarify
to fix

burst garden pipes
and prune fruit trees
until his face was numb

'perdure'
by Melissa Evans (cont'd)

ii

yours
was the most adult

the most tumultuous rumbling
I knew

no floors, walls, doors
more than the church earthquake

my hiding places shook
with your firm deep voice

and I could picture the crinkle
of your gecko eyes

discuss with me your/my
choices, again

I want to let you know

that they worked out fine

or that they are
bit by bit

that now we talk about my/his
young choices

in a place
of shouts

question
tumult

like it is
ours

Melissa Evans is editor and creative director at *SEISMA* Magazine, a publication exploring synergies between the sciences and the arts. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Barzakh Magazine*, *The Write Launch*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *The Banyan Review*, *Hare's Paw Journal* and others.

'At home, in letters'
by Kathleen Wenaden

Crisp, thin, blue airmail letters, sometimes three to four a day. Thin but heavy-laden: delicious writing, filled with stories, tit-bits, about the "old days", friends, and distant relatives, and always ending with a Blessing. Those thin slices of heaven that dropped into our letter box day after day; telling imaginative tales from the aunties who were nuns, and the aunties who weren't nuns, the uncle in Australia and the cousins in Canada, I couldn't keep track of. Physically apart, we felt like we all knew each other – and we did. We knew the measure of each other's lives – through those thin, crisp snap-shots of a paradise long gone. The letters probably didn't focus on the hardness of their new lives in Canada (those freezing winters, and the depths of snow for months), the subtle and obvious racism faced in Britain, when the flat that was advertised as available suddenly wasn't after the landlord caught sight of your dads brown face. We had to read into the blank spaces, between the tiny spidery writing to glean these truths.

Maybe Australia was the better country out of the three, but who can ever overcome that distance?

Those letters were our connection to each other, like invisible, strong, silk threads which wove us all together, embroidering our lives. Or were they ropes that bound us?

Fast forward forty years, and there are now no more thin, blue news filled letters – no, it's shorthand text, emails, jokes. Less reflective, and that blessing, which all letters ended with, which carried you on air through the day, that you could read over and over.

Yet these silk threads between our families continues, now replaced by WhatsApp calls and jokes we forward to one another, and the occasional visits. My favourite cousin visits me each year, and we always manage to steal away for a few hours to amble around the V & A Museum, laugh over a coffee, and trying to buy each other a souvenir neither of us really wants.

Kathleen Wenaden is relatively new to creative writing, and currently lives in Wivenhoe, Essex. Her family emigrated from Sri Lanka, and she grew up in East London, where she stills works as a part-time GP. She has had several poems read at several medical conferences (SAPC, 2021, Flourishing in Medicine, QMUL 2021/2022), and is published in several local anthologies.

'Acedia'
by Daniel Hinds

Though the journey is short
It is still a squeezing of wheels and metal and onrushing air,

Of paper printed and deformed under the thunk
Of punched holes and scrutinized under lasers.

But after the revolution and small tumult of ringed keys,
And the peeling and resealing of a door from its frame

There is a place where the air is still.
Where the turning of the chains and metal snag

Make the mechanic grip relent,
Chew and snap a virtue out of vice,

Like the torn hairs shed daily
With my wrist device and manacle.

And without time's revolutions I am free to unevolve
Into my former species:

To transform the blue lizard scale of a week's work
To the verdant fur that stretches brown and slowly out

Beneath now bulbous eyes blind to daylight
Above a dark mouth widening into smacking lips.

Fingernails worn down to nubs by fast clacking
Yawn into long claws that curl and balance

A whole body's shaggy weight in easeful tension.

'Acedia'
by Daniel Hinds (cont'd)

II
Weightless and sinless without the care of body

The human ghost settles into a place of dust
Like a cadaver in his bunk.

The new life will rise with the season for cleaning.
But for now spring is far away, and dreams are close.

Two times out of seven, the sum of sun becomes
All day afternoons and the absence of mornings.

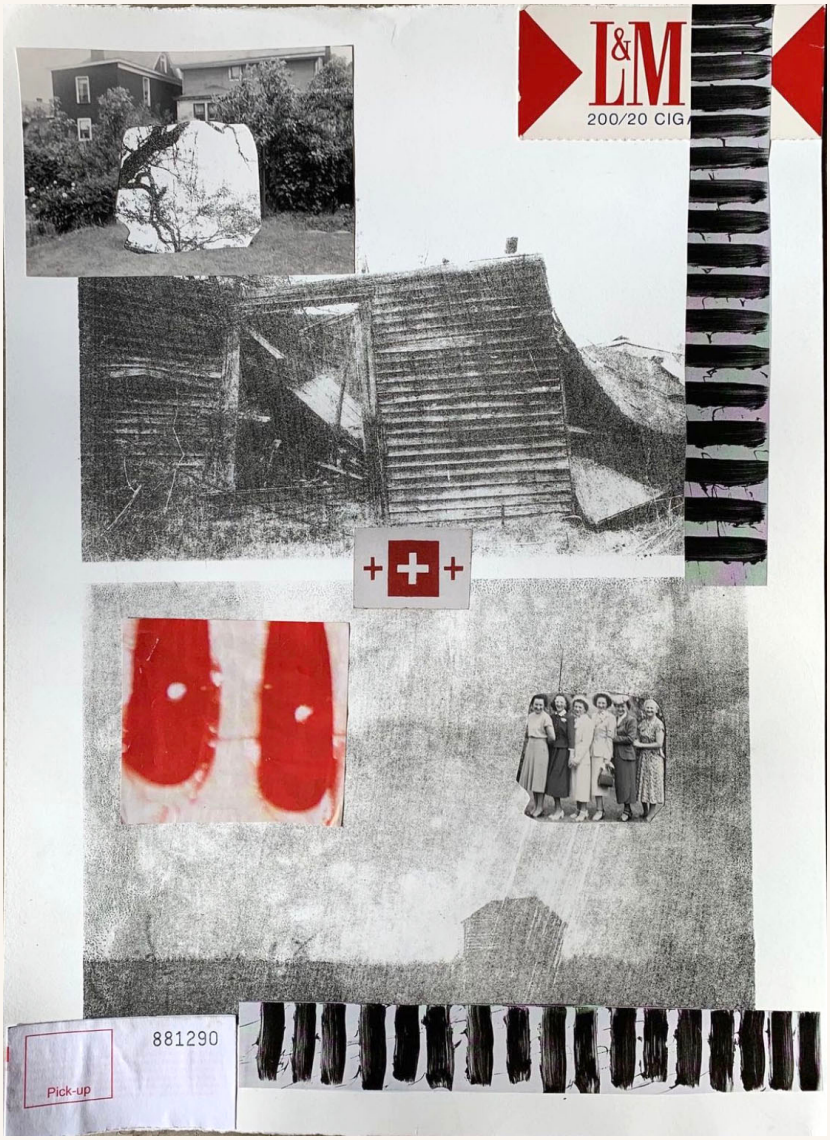
iii.
The sleeper leaves hair uncombed and fit for magpies
To nest and pick silver threads for slow weaving

Into the whorl of small houses
To baby perfect thoughts.

And when the doorway is unsealed like an airlock,
Or the wax that keeps a letter, remember

There is a place where the air is still enough
To be maneuvered by the softness of my breathing.

Daniel Hinds graduated from Newcastle University with a first class degree in English Literature, and Distinction in MA in English Literature 1500-1900. He won the Poetry Society's Timothy Corsellis Young Critics Prize, with works published in *The London Magazine, The New European, Stand, and Poetry Birmingham Literary Journal*.



The Photograph Has the Deeper Bite / collaborative collage with Olivia Huntley, 2019 / elin o'Hara slavick

elin o'Hara slavick is an Artist-in-Residence at the University of California, Irvine. She was a Professor of Studio Art, Theory and Practice at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill from 1994 until 2021. Her interdisciplinary work critically explores war, memory, exposure, memorials, cartography, history, labor, feminism, the body, politics, and utopia/dystopia. slavick has exhibited her work internationally. Slavick is the author of two monographs - *Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography* with a foreword by Howard Zinn, and After Hiroshima, with an essay by James Elkins; a chapbook of surrealist poetry, *Cameramouth; and Holding History in Our Hand for the 75th commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Images Magazine, FOAM, San Francisco Chronicle, Asia-Pacific Journal, Photo-Eye, and Actuphoto: Actualite Photographique*, among other publications.

'Choice of city'
by Hideko Sueoka

In Gdansk, a sea breeze caresses her face in June,
her activities are more and more active, she suffered
from asthma and eczema in her previous home country,
they have gone far away, oh, a red poppy blooms,
and she's been able to find her favorite job, another
poppy blooms. The Baltic city is her current home.

In Tokyo, dampness clung to her nape on sweltering hot days,
but winter was best, for the air was dry that season
under the sapphire sky. Her pruritus of moist tetter
didn't stop even in coldness. She wandered in pursuit
of a room where her wishes could be granted,
a different place called her, leaving the metropolis.

From time to time, whether or not to stay at Wałęsa's town
seems to be a consideration on a world map. Gdansk or Tokyo?
Which of both the cities has she loved? An answer is
in mist now, but might be clear just before her death.

Hideko Sueoka is a poet and translator living in Japan. Her debut poetry chapbook, *Untouched Landscape*, was published by Clare Songbirds Publishing House in 2018. Her poems have appeared in *Stand Magazine*, *Porridge* and more.

'Hungry Duplex'
by April Yee

The nutritionist opens her notebook.
I can't stop thinking of grapes, I say.

    I can't stop it with the grapes. I weigh
    digestion, how it brings hunger. My sick

digestion, its ringing hunger. I stick
a stem in a grape's umbilical gap.

    I swim in the great umbilical gap
    to mẹ mẹ mẹ mẹ mẹ mẹ mẹ mother

of me, this grape embryo, this other.
Some nights I eat her meals too, too hungry.

        At night we eat paths to the old country.
        Creatures in captivity, food-driven.

Reach us in captivity. Fools. Riven.
The nutritionist opens her notebook.

April Yee is a London-based writer and critic. In 2022 her poetry was shortlisted for the Manchester Poetry Prize and won the Ivan Juritz Prize.

'What You Mean To Me' by Penny Boxall

You say your postcode slowly for the form,
an assertion of home and where you'll return.

I get the first half, then wait on you
like the bingo-caller, intent on a full house.

"I lived in Hill Street," I say, and we gawp
at each other, both of us miles away. "So do I!"

I meet your wife: we don't need names. We name
our numbers, like convicts. Mine had a red door

and a weed-matted garden. It is the same
now, you say, and we smile like old

fishermen, dragging it all back.
We hope for more coincidence

(my father once signed a cheque
for a man in a shop who said,

"But that's my name," like Dad
was somehow wearing it to a party,

stealing his best lines,
making his girlfriend laugh)

(and speaking of parties, my mother met
a woman at New Year who'd Christmassed

in the house we'd barely left,
with our carpets, our just-gone past)

but we don't know where to start.
You fumble with your wallet.

"What's your pin-number?" I want to ask,
in case we match again. For a year, innocent,

Penny Boxall is the RLF Fellow at Lucy Cavendish, Cambridge. Her books include *Ship of the Line, Who Goes There?* (both Valley Press, 2018) and, with artist Naoko Matsubara, *In Praise of Hands* (Ashmolean, 2020). She won the 2016 Edwin Morgan Award and the Mslexia/PBS Women's poetry competition in 2018.

'What You Mean To Me' by Penny Boxall (Cont'd)

in the house we'd barely left,
with our carpets, our just-gone past)

but we don't know where to start.
You fumble with your wallet.

"What's your pin-number?" I want to ask,
in case we match again. For a year, innocent,

we'd shaped our no-shape lives
between the skimmed-milk walls, just feet

apart. Who are you? Please, identify.
Can you tell me what you know of me?

Hands / Keith Jones

Keith Jones is a creative musician who delivers music workshops to people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. His photography was inspired by the need to document his walks during Covid 19 capturing "gallus Glasgow".

'Becoming an HDB flat' by Ann Ang

Riding the lift up,
I grow as tall as you
and emerge, sixteen stories
above our bricked-in horizon.
My face is one of many flat-roofs,
dish-eyed with water tanks.

Both of us exhale the sky
which, at one o'clock
is sweating white, and up our flanks
shiver the sounds of school buses returning.
Children slap their chalk-shoes at my ankles.
A mynah shrieks. That's my beauty mole.

I bristle with laundry and potted pandan.
I smell my pits
where mattresses are left to sun
and wheeze humid TV static.
There is bad gas from the ninth-floor karaoke.

Mostly I stand columned
on stumps over a void,
absent in the afternoon's slow wrinkling,
until someone hurls a bag of rubbish down my gullet:
fifteen stories of swallowed tongue.
The effluvia of rush-hour footfalls
is a rash in my corridors.
I scratch and find blood
in flats, all those rooms, lives
impeccable for being thoughtlessly pulsating.
Sometimes, when many taps are running,
I wake enough to count my fingers
and feel for the windows in my skin.

Peering through one, I find you
curled up, a thumbprint
in my bed. It has been five years
but it is always high noon
and both of us ill-on-MC.
Outside the curtains, the workers
raise their gondola, to paint
us a new face.
They never look in.

*HDB or Housing Development Board flats are public housing, where 70% of Singaporeans reside

Ann Ang lectures in English literature at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, with a DPhil on contemporary Anglophone Asian writing from the University of Oxford. Ann is author of *Bang My Car* (2012), *Burning Walls for Paper Spirits* (2021) and co-editor of several anthologies. She is also a founding editor of *The Journal of Practice, Research & Tangential Activities* (PR&TA).

'The language of home hurts my mouth' by Julia Webb

It spies on me at night, peering in through the letterbox.
Though I left years ago, it hasn't let me go,

when I was six it tied a bit of elastic to my ankle
so I would always bounce back again,

when I was ten it inked its name on the insides of my thighs,
enjoying slipping its hand between my legs,

this is how it is with us – me running, it pouncing.
Mostly it speaks in screeches, the rising voice of accusation.

My hometown doesn't have an s, an a,
or any other friendly letter, all its sounds are hard.

Weeks and months go by now where I barely say its name,
but its language lives inside me,

spills out at odd moments as *fucks* and *cunts*,
a whole town teeming with swear words,

but beyond that the shush of pines,
shoulder to shoulder silence, shoulder to shoulder dark.

Julia Webb grew up in Thetford, a small town in rural Norfolk. Her first poetry collection Bird Sisters was published by Nine Arches Press in 2016. Her second collection Threat was published by Nine Arches in May 2019. Her third collection The Telling was published by Nine Arches in May 2022.

'Tūrangawaewae, Where I Stand'
by Madeleine Slavick 思樂維

Hometown. Crosstown. Downtown. Up.
Notown, by Twelve Mile Creek.
And only once have I returned to the town where I was born.

A town might be a city.
A city might be country.
A country might be a volcano.

My last home in a special administrative region.
My home now in a land named after a very large cloud.
And everywhere I have lived has been a colony.

How many towns are marked by an animal, in tin, plastic, wood?
How many end in -ori, -ahi, -ton, -town?
How many homes keep the flies out?

When I walk down to our vegetable garden by the creek, I pass a view to the mountains, and like looking out at sea, it is different every time. I am a land person. This is my sea.

From the forthcoming publication, *Town – 50 Stories of Aotearoa New Zealand*

Madeleine Marie Slavick is the author of several books of poetry, photography and non-fiction (Fifty Stories Fifty Images, Delicate Access, Round – Poems and Photographs of Asia, among others), and a photographer with exhibitions across several continents. She holds residency rights in Hong Kong, USA, and in Aotearoa New Zealand.

'Glasswork'
by Stephen Wren

The practice of a new art form
drew me in, glassblower active

molten bubbles, like bygone days,
when science was unknown, smidges,
sparse studio, an ancient home,
I lived there, I worked there, shelter,
forgiving furnaces, spawn, flasks:
the fusions, new worlds for research.

Plots and schemes of synthesis
inked my brain, silica fanfares

Stephen Paul Wren studied at Cambridge (Corpus Christi College) and worked in industry for many years. He transitioned back into academia at Oxford (St Hilda's College) before joining Kingston University in 2018 where he works as a senior lecturer in pharmaceutical chemistry.

His book *Formulations* (co-written with Miranda Lynn Barnes) was published by Small Press in 2022. His book *A celestial crown of Sonnets* (co-written with Sam Illingworth) was published by Penteract Press in 2021. His poetry has appeared in places such as *14 magazine*, *Marble Broadsheet*, *Consilience*, *Tears in the Fence* and *Dreich magazine*.

2007 - 2020 / Paola Lindo Pacheco

Made from a few family photographs and creative writing, this is a collage adhering to Robert Creeley's adage where form is positioned as an extension of content. Pacheco's identity, as a Hispanic woman having lived in seven countries, is a psychobiological combination of very different environments: politically, demographically, geographically.

Pacheco left Venezuela with family after the dictator Hugo Chavez prohibited Pacheco's father from working in PDVSA, the state-owned petroleum company. The images themselves are of family members and family friends, and also reflect the changes in dynamics over time within the family fabric. Distance, time, and blood heritage are a nexus for internal discovery.

'The Kite'
by Hashan Bamyani
(translated with James Attlee)

From the sky-touching mountains
fortifications that cannot be overcome
where every rock-face is a machete
raised against the invaders
and torrents that gush
from the mountain's heart
give eternal life
to all that drink from them

Where the blue sky
overflows with limitless kindness
and every midnight
stars sing lullabies in your ear until you sleep
Where every morning
the warm hand of the sun
touches your face and says
wake up!

From that country
where there was joy
from dawn till dusk
and we danced
like swallows in flight

We come

In spring we played with kites
setting them spinning
like pigeons
at the heart of the sky
climbing up and up
until we saw them no more,
still holding the string
that bound them to the earth

'The Kite'
by Hashan Bamyani
(translated with James Attlee) (Cont'd)

Those are the most troubling times for the kite-flier
when the wind is pulling your kite one way
and you are pulling it another,
drawing it in, in, as gently as you can
so the line doesn't snap where it has been frayed
battling another kite —
Your arms are exhausted, your eyes ache
as you search the sky expectantly

yes, kite-fighting is a worrying game

In winter there were
snowball fights
and skiing in the high mountains
with frozen hands and cracked feet
from morning till night
on empty stomachs
but with hearts filled with
happiness

When the snow was
higher than our doors and windows
we would sit at the table
with a stove underneath it
the charcoal covered with ash
to make it last longer
that is when we would have *sher jangi*
our poetry battles

If I finished a poem with the letter 'S'
you had to start a new one
with the same letter
If you couldn't
I had to take up the challenge
until you had
no more poems
and I was the winner

'The Kite'
by Hashan Bamyani
(translated with James Attlee) (Cont'd)

There was no
jealousy
no hate
no selfishness
no greed
no expectation
of fine food
of owning a beautiful house
or an expensive car
no make-up
no mobile phones
no theatres
or supermarkets
no showing off
no selling yourself
to other people

we shared our shoes and shared our jackets
we shared our food, our rooms
and the contents of our pockets
our sorrows were shared
and our happiness was shared
we laughed together and cried together
we were each other's sisters and brothers,
fathers and mothers

One scoop of rice for me and one for you
from the same bowl
when it was cold and there weren't enough blankets
two or three would huddle under the same one
the sky was clear and our hearts were clear
everywhere there were angels
our houses built from mud were more beautiful
than the White House in Washington DC

'The Kite'
by Hashan Bamyani
(translated with James Attlee) (Cont'd)

Then an army of bears invaded
with tanks and artillery on land, helicopters and jets in the sky
raging against our mud houses, setting our paradise on fire
putting men and children to the bayonet
We saw our village crushed
beneath the tracks of the tanks
and our existence, everything, was lost
making us martyrs, homeless migrants

Our *ghazal* became red and our *qasidah* became black*
My kite hadn't the strength to fly
helicopters carried out manoeuvres, dropping their bombs
kites, pens and verses, all were burnt
We picked up guns
to drive the bears away from our houses
at the price of 10 million orphans, widows
and cripples

Now the bears are gone
but the black ghosts of stupidity and cruelty
fill the gap they left—
the city of love, kite-running and joy
has become a slaughterhouse
where the butchers party on our bones
Apart from fire and smoke and monsters
there is nothing

A monster grabbed me by the throat—
I thought my time was up
Suddenly a strong wind blew
I saw my kite, trailing a string
I seized it and rose into the sky, escaping the horror
sometimes my kite dashed me against rocks
sometimes it dragged me through the jungle
or dipped me in the ocean

'The Kite'
by Hashan Bamyani
(translated with James Attlee) (Cont'd)

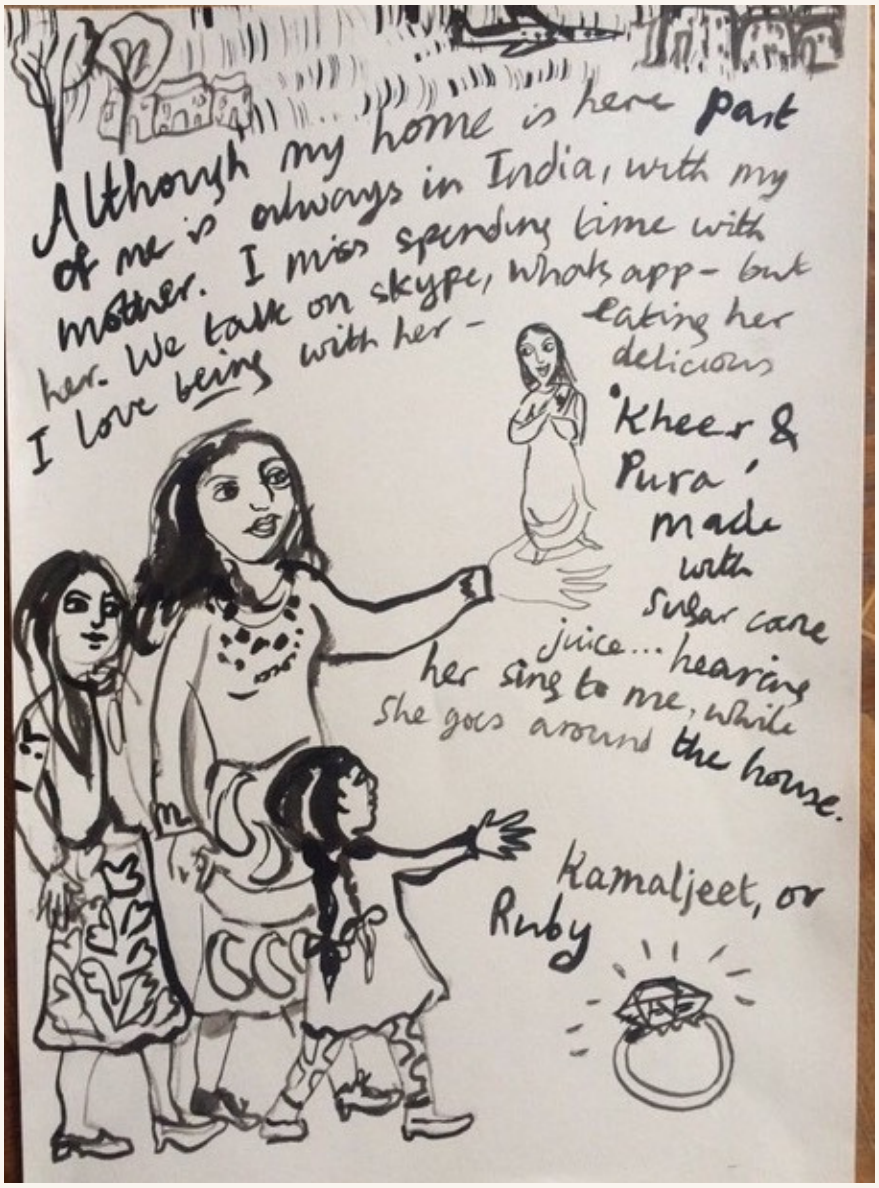
Bearing a thousand scars, I come to you
Hey, my friend,
can you put salve on my wounds?
On my heart, my eyes, my feet and hands?
I'm crying out, my friend,
enough is enough!
I cannot go back to that place of suffering
ever again

ghazal and qasida are two poetic forms in traditional Persian poetry.

Hasan Bamyani is a poet from Kabul. He worked as a teacher there until 2002, when he came to Oxford as a refugee. He is the author of the collection *Lyla and Manjun* and his poetry is featured in Crossing Lines: An Anthology of Immigrant Poetry' (2021).

James Attlee is a writer based in Oxford. His books include Under the Rainbow: Voices from Lockdown (And Other Stories, 2021), Guernica: Painting the End of the World (2017), *Nocturne: A Journey in Search of Moonlight* (2011), and Isolarion: A Different Oxford Journey (2007), among other titles.

'Kamaljeet and her Mother'
by Sophie Herxheimer



Sophie Herxheimer is a visual artist and poet. Her collection *Velkom to Inklandt* (Short Books, 2017) was a Sunday Times Book of the Year. Her book *60 Lovers to Make and Do*, (Henningham Family Press, 2019) was a TLS Book of the Year. She has an ongoing project where she listens and draws stories live with members of the public. Her latest collection is *INDEX* (zimZalla, 2021) 78 collage poems made from found text, published as a deck of prophetic cards. The illustration comes from her ongoing project: stories collected live in ink.

'Cloud'
by Mon Lee

The whiteness we are deaf to
hovers in the blinding air. In light
we make out the lines of distinct worlds
we share under the only hearth.
Words in space, conjoined
with the givens of reality. We
search for a new language
in the same air of distant places.
Like a stone forgotten in the hinterland.

A great cloud, burning in laughter,
casts shadows that coincide with
the wind in the trees: a myriad instance.
New landscapes fill our mind as
the governed fire directs us back
into the past platitudes.

Disjointed identities merge for the
experience of self—we walk
in dissonance towards a place
created in space, faceless, in muted air,
in auburn soil, expanding with the
nearing rain as clouds disappear into
the absence that is not without.

Lee Mon was born in New Jersey and spent his childhood in South Korea. Later in life, he went back to the states to study in New York and Pennsylvania. When he's not writing, he enjoys painting and watching films. He currently lives in Seoul with his dog, Ivy

'The Loft'
by Marco Yan

Before I walked in and called it anything, the sun exposed
the space, which I'd make and remake. Square of sturdy bricks,
walls at once warm and glacial. Funnel of dust. Shelter
with a faux sky open to bewildered birds, the baby blue
punctured by what appears to be clouds. Fern nursery.
Basin of various firsts. Cloister of stories in circles.
Cubicles of joy and ceremonial tears. Nest for swallows.
Lust den. Love web. Torture chamber where I knelt on the floor,
accepting the entrance of another self, the solidity of it,
how it was later torn from my being, the violence audible.
This time capsule sealing the summer my lover and I let slip.
This vivarium where we followed our animal ways,
blind to decay. And then, the scent of fall. The glory of
a September morning—this morning, this morning, this morning.

Marco Yan is a Hong Kong-born poet, whose works appeared in E*piphany*, *The Scores*, *the Adroit Journal*, *Wildness*, *Cha*, among other places.

'Where There's Tamil Food' by Gayathiri Kamalakanthan

In between lockdowns – I don't remember which –
I finally notice Shakthi Vel temple. Specifically
the signage above the UPVC door: the Tamil
symbol for aum in bright red Word Art. Wait

no. It's the smell that gets me first. Without a doubt
my nose picks up just-cooked Basmati rice, katharikai
and parappu. I think of mum. And my dad.
I'd relished the paradox of freedom in lockdown –

home was Green Lanes not Watford or Jaffna.
Except here was Shakthi Vel with it's temple food
smelling of home home. Smelling of Watford
Murugan temple, of Nallur Sivan temple

and I'm six again. Stood on the women's side
of the prayer hall beside Lord Ganesha
chanting Vakrathunda. Our priest rings
a brass bell and I cover my ears which is

I'm told extremely disrespectful when god
is being called. But what I'm waiting for is
post-prayer time in the food hall. Where the floor
is lava and desert is mandatory since it's blessed by

god. That's when Green Lanes becomes both
a portal, home. Inside Shakthi Vel an aunty
serves me dinner. After 10 months I eat her
food I didn't know I missed. Before I leave

she fills boxes for my freezer, portu vaango ma.
It's that way family never say goodbye. I send
photos of my meal and the building
to mum. She's relieved

there's a place so close to home
where my Tamil tongue
is kept alive.

(The poem was previously part of the 'Connecting People and Places' exhibition by Blueprint for All.)

Gayathiri is a Tamil poet. Ideas of transness, displacement and inheritance are central to their work. Gayathiri won the Faber and Andlyn Publisher's Prize, the Primadonna Fiction Prize and was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize. Their work is published/forthcoming in Burnt Roti, Magma Poetry and Zindabad, among others.

;My Father Loves the Southwest'
by Lora Supandi

the land exists as a sliver

of a reminder
of his homeland

the sky burns into the depths
of antelope canyon

the horseshoe bends
along the river valley

my father loves sedona
icicles form in an orange desert
jewels like glacial knives

my father spends his afternoons
driving down desert highways
because he yearns for new horizons

because he can never stay
in one place for too long
before being told to disappear

my father loves the southwest

its cascading rock formations
sienna pigments of brutal earth

our ancestor's terracotta statues

my father loves the southwest
more than our home in California

perhaps, he loves the places
he will never get to call home

Lora Supandi a queer poet of Chinese-Indonesian descent and a student at Stanford. With interests in diasporic storytelling, abolition, and land justice, her poems explore what it means to grieve, yearn, and dream during the apocalypse.

'Jupiter'
by Laura Seymour

Since you started at Jupiter,
you've told everyone you meet there about
my almond tea here at home.

Gallons of it settles in drums
in the triangular cupboard beneath the stairs.
I have paid for the extra baggage space
so you can take some back with you.

Liquid hydrogen
sizzles from your upended boots;
I rush after chair legs, teacups,
the smoking carpet samples
I'd made into a floppy book for redesigning the house.

You remark on the mediocre colour of our clouds.
On Jupiter you twizzle red, orange and umber clouds
round your finger joints.

You always say that. You say that Jupiter is a giant magnet
pulling you back. Jupiter could be useful
for picking up all the needles I drop on my carpet.

I hold a basil plant behind my back
and you never notice it,
though coming back to our small planet,
you feel you can see right round us.

Laura Seymour's poetry has appeared in various places e.g. *Poetry Review*, *Poetry London*, *Ambit*, *Magma*, *Marble* and as a collection from Cinnamon Press. She is a stipendiary lecturer in English literature at St Anne's, Oxford.

'Second Severn Crossing' by Ed Roffe

Suspended, cable-stayed, we cross the Severn
as we must have done in misplaced fragments
of our shared youth. Not shared as in halved, shared
like blackberries scrumped from endless country lanes,
like we share the backseat now, like we did then.

Carve a peephole – fingertip condensation
to spy mudflats and the bridge five days my
senior. Through the pane I conjure memories
fabricated from steel girders, pre-stressed
concrete, freshly-laid sticky-sweet asphalt.

Do you remember driving to John Lewis?
The one just off the M5? Two thousand?
Did I sit in the backseat driver's seat?
Did we cross this bridge, twitching for canary
yellow cars? You are silent

as I am certain you must have been back then,
your irksome younger brother bothering
you, parroting this or that. And so I
commit this to memory – this is real,
foundations in today's bedrock, not the past.

Ed Roffe recently concluded his MA in Creative Writing at Oxford Brookes University. His poetry has been published in *Lighthouse* and *Dear Reader* and often explores themes of liminality and mental health.

'Home viewing: I Missed You - 2021' by Janet Charman

more bonus scenes

1.Wu Kang-ren is that really you?
doing the flash-forward chemo
with your steroidally
pumped expression
seeing into a future Mag Hsu has written
where your *to be* self is asked 'any regrets?'
so i keep stopping *Netflix*
to replay your holy naked head
responding with an all but imperceptible
negative

2. Mag
for this one take you let him
in extremis
resume his dancer's incandescence
but watching you
blow up your life Kang-ren
gives me arc-eyes
though instead of the medics
i call up my ex
to say i have this burning vision
won't he come? right now
and give *me first* aide
–as if i don't know my ex is already dead
hey it was i who scattered
his ashes

3. but the screenplay asks
that you and i
anybody
should have the other relationship
–though how does that work?

'Home viewing: i missed you' by Janet Charman

4. well
Mag directs
so there is no plaster
cast
no stiffing-over fractured lives
instead
we're to enter into this all-day all-night
whole of life
ensemble

5. moon boot

6. show me what you've got.

Janet Charman's, eighth collection 仁 *Surrender,* published by Oxford University Press (OUP) in 2017, chronicles her writing residencies at Hong Kong Baptist University in 2009 and as a guest reader in 2014 at the Taipei International Poetry Forum, Taiwan. Janet Charman was awarded the New Zealand Best Book of Poetry prize for her sixth collection, *Cold Snack* (Auckland University Press 2007).

Her ninth and latest collection, *The Pistils* (OUP, 2022) was runner up in the 2022 New Zealand Society of Authors Literary Heritage Awards.

'Brown Carpet Tiles' by JP Seabright

half a metre squared
practical and durable
longer lasting
than most marriages
several years older than me

Brown carpet tiles
orange painted walls
my parents' house reeks
of the 1970s and the
desperate aspiration
of the lower middle class

We did not own a TV
until the 1980s
when we moved to another
part of the country
away from friends, family
trees and greenery

We did not own a TV
in colour until Xmas '89
when for the first time
I could see that the
Incredible Hulk was
unmistakably green

But what I remember
most about that Christmas
was the colour of joy
and relief when the
Berlin Wall came down

Title: The rug we left behind (fragment) by Tiffany Anne Tondut

Medium: acrylic on canvas

JP Seabright (she/they) is a queer writer living in London. They have three pamphlets published: *Fragments from Before the Fall: An Anthology in Post-Anthropocene Poetry*, by Beir Bua Press; the erotic memoir *NO HOLDS BARRED* by Lupercalia Press, and *GenderFux*, a collaborative poetry pamphlet, by Nine Pens Press. *MACHINATIONS*, a collaborative experimental work, will be out from Trickhouse Press in Autumn 2022.

'Go back home'
by Eddie Kim

i remember going to esl classes in first grade
i wrote a book about a whale covered in gingham

teachers talked to me as if i ate kimchi coated paint chips for breakfast
but my mom and dad came here in the 70s

their version of korea stopped there but they brought it with them
and I was raised one and a half generations between time

my grandfather found my american name on a doctor's nametag
in a u-dub maternity ward waiting room

classmates demanded i return my name and body to their appropriate places
my grandmother commissioned my korean name from a shaman

my grandparents divorced after the truce
dissonance and departure are an immigrant's true second language

my mother never fully learned english and now her korean is janky as well
my father was fluent and had no accent which confused my friends

after karate kid came out they called me mr miyagi though he's japanese and 60
my father boasted he never lost a fight

he gave me until 16 to beat him at arm wrestling but never made it to 60
i arm wrestle my dad's ghost everyday to hold the drink at bay

i imagined i could be friends with my nemeses they disagreed
my mother a pragmatist said i'd be made fun of in every city

i spent a summer exploring seoul but i was not welcome
even the kids there told me *go back to where you came from*

they didn't say *home* because they knew
they said the blood in my veins was stolen

my korean is weak
but my blood is fluent and memory is but one home

i am tired of being told where home is we're all aliens
i never dream in korean but i speak it in my sleep

Eddie Kim is a Kundiman fellow from Seattle, with poems in Poetry Northwest, The Margins, The Rupture, Pinwheel, Narrative Magazine, Midst, Lantern Review, and others. Kim's essays have appeared in Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature.

Barleytcorn / Isabel Bermudez

Isabel Bermudez was born in Bogotá and grew up in London. She has published the poetry collections Extranjeros (Flarestack Poets, 2015), Small Disturbances (Rockingham Press, 2016) Sanctuary (Rockingham Press 2018), Madonna Moon and Serenade (Paekakariki Press, 2020).

Things
by B Bullagan

Dates to hard times for my family when the four of us lived in a toy "barsaati", overlooking one of Delhi's busiest commercial areas. Yet it was not the view outside but the gradual disintegration of my parents' possessions inside the flat that provided the most enduring impress of that time.

An immaculate person of our acquaintance was, the other day, startled to hear the blender's age. But we kept smiling and serving cold coffee till last month, it expired. The bottom fell through, the spring having lost its recoil.

And that hair-clip my mother wears in her topknot? It has faded over twenty years from dull gold to lucid steel, except here where an iron belly shows.

The television is almost a family member, so long has it been with us. A veteran bought in 1983, it beats still, my father insists, a sturdy heart.

It has supplied its share of scares, like that sudden day it went silent, the Finance Minister's lips moving in soundless lip sync, the news anchor caught desperate in mute prayer. And that other time when for many months, images moved between black bars, peripheral vision being censored. Even now that it is a 27-inch giant dispensing headaches and watery eyes in a bed-living room, my father, reluctant to retire it, counts the boons it bestows.

And lest we forget those we once knew in unseeing intimacy. That sofa that shed, over many years, many intricately patterned skins, to emerge each time snake-like and brown; rats built a nest in its belly. It survived a wiremesh-aided resuscitation.

A lizard made its home in the dining table, making itself known only to late night human and insect interlopers.

Of course, not all things fit so easily and so well into narrow crevices:
the cheese-maker languished away from origins for want of rennin; in warm weathers, the yogurt maker never found a need to meet.

'Things'
by B Bullagan (cont'd)

But the two-in-one has eyes half-shuttered still, red mouth agape in a grin. It does not sing, in broken voice, tales from my parents' life - the rise, the fall and then the difficult climb.

I wonder about the fidelity of things: is it to the rich who like benedictions spend their smiles, or to us, genteel poor, that things give their blessing?

Places I Have Never Been / collaborative collage with Olivia Huntley, 2019 / elin o'Hara slavick

B. Bullagan is the pseudonym of an award-winning fiction and non-fiction writer and poet who studied creative writing in California. Their non-fiction and poems have appeared in Indian and international publications.

'This Land'
by Olive Ritch

What is this land to me,
what is Westray, Papa Westray,
what is Fara, Cava, what is
Flotta with its flame?

What is Hoy – home
of selkies and whitemaas,
and music scored
on red sandstone cliffs?

What is this land to me,
what is the Standing Stones
where peedie hands
fingered time?

And fed-up feet
pattled dark soil, drookled
in the bluid o Norsemen.

What is this land to me,
what is Stromness
with its naming stone
and narrow streets
entering the minds of sons
and daughters?

'This Land'
by Olive Ritch (cont'd)

Histories
follow ramstam women
down chattering closes,
men warm beer with brute hands
and bruising banter, afore facing
the cold blackness.

What is this land to me
what is Orkney,
furrow upon furrow
of traits and traces, laid bare
in long summer nights
of light.

(There are several Orkney words in this poem and the following provides a translation: 'selkies' – seals; whitemass – seagulls; peedie – small; pattled – trodden down; drookled – drenched; bluid – blood; ramstam – headstrong; afore – before.)

Olive M. Ritch was born and raised in Orkney. She now lives and works in Aberdeen. She received the Next Chapter Award from the Scottish Book Trust in 2020 and was the recipient of the Calder Prize for Poetry from the University of Aberdeen in 2006. She is published in many literary magazines and anthologies. Her work has also been broadcast on Radio 4.

'My mother tells me to come look at this' by Louise Leung

Come look at this
my 砂煲罌罈 collection is older than you
dont go buy a new one, you choose one here-
haiya this one la-
Here, this one, big enough to house a family of three.

Come look at this
my jewel, my 玩具
my friend 做嗰行 says I have the hand of a model
you have my hands, but meatier
When I die they are yours.

Come look at this
your dad's 真皮 belts
brand new, 未打窿
he won't come back for them
Tell him you look better than him.

Come look at my face, my hands
health deteriorating
you have my ass, 好生養, so much better than flat
Your skin is white as mine, blood, mine.

Louise Leung is a Hong Kong poet whose works explore postcolonialism, cultural politics and family history. Their poems have featured in *Ricepaper Magazine*, *Ideas Journal*, *Asian Cha*, *Voice & Verse* and others.

'Incubatus'
by Marie-Louise Eyres

Our home is a sleeping, multi-pocketed maruspial.
Crab-apples dangle outside.

Tucked in the hidden pouches
we each ferment like blue cheeses

like sulphates gathered in the silt
of bottled, mediocre wines.

Windowsills buckle with condensation
puddling under sailboats of glass and lead.

This is a creature with rheumatic
joints, curled into the damp.

Not a place for storing cookbooks,
old polaroids and leather brogues

without the bruise-like vines of mildew
creeping across them all.

But it never stirs this house, it sleeps,
dreamless and constant, couvade.

(first published in *The Poetry Bus*, Issue 9, 2020)

Marie-Louise Eyres is an Anglo-American poet who received her MFA from Manchester Metropolitan University in 2020 after a brain tumour diagnosis in 2018. Her work has appeared internationally including Stand, Agenda, Poetry, Portland Review, as well as Bridport, Bedford, Live Canon and Gingko prizes. Her chapbook, *Loss is an Egg*, is due from Moonstone Presss in late 2022.

'From mycelium thoughts to a haiku cap' by Florence Ng

man napping on the street
bread crumbs by his head
busy sparrows
man sleeping rough
bread crumbs by his head
sparrows busying

An ancient road, a westerly wind, a thin horse.

a rough sleeper
bread crumbs on the ground
busy birds

A withered rattan, an old tree, evening crows.
In the setting sun, a man a world away from home.

Here is a street sleeper, and some bread crumbs on the ground. Under a flyover in front of a police station. The crumbs are breakfast for a bunch of city birds. Spotted doves, sparrows and perhaps some others. His family.

*You are advised to read from bottom to top. If you are hungry and impatient, you can just eat the haiku cap. The italic lines are taken from a famous poem by Ma Zhiyuan (1250-1321).

Florence Ng has lived in Hong Kong since her birth. She has co-founded Kubrick Poetry with Waiyim Wong and Polly Ho. Her first poetry collection, titled 鞋子集 *(Book of Shoes),* was handmade and self-published. She has won Youth Literary Awards and her poems have appeared in different publications, for example, Mingpao, Mingled Voices 2, Ezra. Her first bilingual collection, *Wild Board in Victoria Harbour*, was published by Kubrick in 2019. In 2021 she created the online poetry journal *Pause for Paws* to publish poems on people's love for their pets and animals.

'Little Anthology of Endings' by Patrick McGuinness

You leave but you are still snagged in it all like a shopping bag in brambles.

You leave and think you've escaped with your life but quickly realise it's your life you left behind.

You blow it all up, thinking let the pieces fall where they will, but the pieces stay in the air and the pieces never fall.

You leave in the night and you are leaving a small town where everyone knows what you've done, but which you'll have to pass through again soon enough.

You leave and the rear-view mirror shows you a family running from a burning house, and the house is you.

Patrick McGuinness is a British-Belgian writer and academic. He has published two novels, a memoir and two books of poems, he teaches French and Comparative Literature at Oxford, and Fellow at St Anne's. His new collection will be out with Carcanet in 2023..

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Cover image: Lam Tung Pang

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About the artist (cover image): Lam Tung Pang - Hong Kong-born artist who has worked in Hong Kong, London, Beijing, Vancouver and San Francisco. Lam's playful multimedia practice engages with collective memories and fleeting nostalgia. In his allegorical landscapes, journeys and sceneries become essential passages connecting time and distance, longing and loss. He is the first Chinese artist to win the Hunting Art Prize in the UK and has exhibited internationally.

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