



Issue 6: Interrelation

May 2023

Editors

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Artwork by Emmanuel Barrouyer,
from 'A Mile of Black Paper'
curated by Greg Thorpe.



EDITORIAL ...p.1

FEATURES

Greg Thorpe's *A Mile of Black Paper* ...p.5

Maria Sledmere and Colin Herd in Conversation ...p.9

WRITING

Glorious Holes [Cleo Henry] ...p.21

Not That Yellow, Vincent [Will Kemp] ...p.25

The body is wet / The body is loud: listen [Ash/ley Frenkel] ...p.33

Viral [e.r. de siqueira] ...p.34

Reaching After [Isaac Fravashi] ...p.36

Recipe: How to Salt Cure a Lover [Jack Warren] ...p.38

An Attempt at Exhausting a Critical Essay [JP Seabright] ...p.40

Pink Centaur [Keiron Lee Vine] ...p.46

Falling Off a Fence Should Not Be So Difficult, You Think [Minying Huang] ...p.48

The Aesthetic of Bones [Andrew F. Giles] ...p.49

I Never Saw Buckeye Lake [Payton Messersmith] ...p.55

Cory [Elizabeth Gibson] ...p.56

Burnt Roses [Velvel Gold] ...p.60

I Wash My Mother Very Carefully [Arbër Selmani] ...p.61

Aqua-Aid [David Abbott] ...p.66

Centaur [Caleb Parkin] ...p.67

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES ...p.68

Editorial

Earlier this year, Lurid Editions republished Mary Gordon's 1936 book, *Chase of the Wild Goose*. The fictionalised biography tells how Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby left their families in Ireland to create a life together in Wales in 1780. Near the start of the book, the two women meet and converse (16-17):

When Sarah returned to the sitting-room she was guided into a chair with soft cushions near the fire, and Miss Butler sank luxuriously into another by her side.

"This is so pleasant for me," she said. "We are a very quiet family here, and sometimes I hardly speak to anyone except the servants for a week. I almost forget how to talk and I am so much enjoying having you to talk to. My sister and my brother are married. They are not far away, my sister at Ballyhale, but they disapprove of me, so I am obliged to live to a certain extent in books."

"I too am lonely, and fond of reading."

That desire for interpersonal connection is a familiar one for queer people, even today. A recent report by Just Like Us¹ found that LGBT+ young people in the UK are twice as likely to experience loneliness when compared with non-LGBT+ peers. Age UK² cites research that shows how 'older LGBT people are especially vulnerable to loneliness as they are more likely to be single, live alone, and have lower levels of contact with relatives'.

¹ Just Like Us (2021) *Growing Up LGBT+: the Impact of School, Home and Coronavirus on LGBT+ Young People*. [Online] <https://www.justlikeus.org/blog/2021/11/25/lgbt-young-people-twice-likely-lonely-worry-daily-mental-health/>

² Age UK (2018) *Combating Loneliness Amongst Older LGBT People: Exploring Findings from the Sage Programme in Leeds*. [Online] <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/loneliness-research-and-resources/combating-loneliness-amongst-older-lgbt-people-a-case-study-of-the-sage-project-in-leeds/>

The passage from *Chase of the Wild Goose* also points to the importance of literature as a means of interrelation. Reading about people – imagining ourselves into their stories – is a form of connection, when relationships in the ‘real’ world might be hard to come by. Writing can give us that connection too. We know how a journal can be a friend – a witness and confidante trusted with the secrets of queer lives. Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby kept a journal of their domestic life together (129):

1785

Sept. 24th. From 7 till 9 in sweet converse with the delight
of my heart.

Oct. 7th. A day of strict retirement, sentiment and delight.

Nov. 21st. A day of peace and delight.

Dec. 7th. My Sweet Love! A silent pensive day.

Indeed, Mary Gordon’s book itself is a form of inter-relational writing. It’s an imaginative attempt to enter Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby’s relationship, which culminates with her meeting and conversing with the women on the page.

*

This issue of *Fruit* explores the link between literature and personal connection today. As might be expected, our contributors approach the subject differently.

Some of the contributors choose collaboration. While this is clearly interrelational for the artists involved, it is also a queer way of writing. As critics Susan Leonardi and Rebecca Pope³ suggest, it resists the masculine notion of self-sufficiency that single-authorship is built on, as well as the widely-believed notion of ‘original and originary genius’ (631). Instead, Leonardi and Pope argue that collaboration can double the

³ Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A. Pope (2021) ‘(Co) Labored Li(v)es; Or, Love’s Labors Queered’ in *PMLA*, 16(3), pp.631-637.

pleasure of writing. That pleasure is evident in Colin Herd and Maria Sledmere's description of their process in writing *Cocoa and Nothing*. In Greg Thorpe's work, the increase is not so much of pleasure but of strength, and not a doubling but a multiplication; *A Mile of Black Paper* reminds us of – and enacts – the power of community.

A number of other contributors explore citationality. As the theorist Sara Ahmed⁴ notes, 'Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow' (15-16). But citation is not only the acknowledgment of debt. Laurent Fournier⁵ points out that citation can also be 'a mode of intertextual intimacy and identification' (135). This is the case with the citational writing in this issue. JP Seabright engages with the writing of Jeanette Winterson and her own younger self; Cleo Henry comes between Posidippus and Tim Dean to mediate poems which would surprise them both; and Payton Messersmith tells James Wright what 'In Ohio' means to him.

Writing might also be an investigation of relationships which take place off the page. Arbër Selmani explores the physical intimacy between a gay man and his mother, while David Abbott suggests that – despite what we might expect – strangers can be kind. The investigation of relationships which take place off the page can also have repercussions on the page. In the work of Minying Huang, the poem shifts from one side of the page to the other, tethered by the line 'Disconnection is only reconnection', while for Isaac Fravashi, the hybrid, fragmentary text is a record of 'each touch' which lingers.

Other forms of interrelation involve using writing as a means of relating to people we can't access. Will Kemp writes himself into an encounter with Vini Reilly of The Durutti

⁴ Sara Ahmed (2017) *Living a Feminist Life*. London: Duke University Press.

⁵ Laurent Fournier (2022) *Autotheory As Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*. London: The MIT Press.

Column; e.r. de siqueira explores para-sociality through a video clip of the Greek prime minister getting a Covid jab.

There are also several ritualistic pieces in this issue. These invite the reader to share an experience with the writer. According to the queer performance artist Joseph Morgan Schofield, ritual has the ability to ‘produce community and a sense of belonging’⁶. That *production* of community is important for queer people who may, at one time or another, have felt isolated. In this issue, Velvel Gold provides a recipe for Rose Oxymel, which links them to their ancestors; Ash/ley Frenkel provides a set of instructions for embodied writing; and Jack Warren gives directions for the detoxification of a lover.

Finally, non-human relationality is explored. Queer ecology teaches us that humans are no more or less important than other organisms. Queer experience teaches us to look beyond human society which might not welcome us, and which in extreme cases might not conceive of us as part of it. Caleb Parkin sees a queer future in the sexual behaviour of macaques; Elizabeth Gibson bonds with a cormorant over gender; Keiron Vine finds kinship via a wildflower; and Andrew F. Giles insists on recalling the animal in the meat he eats.

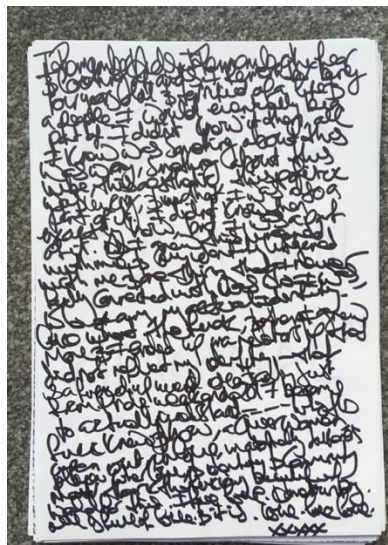
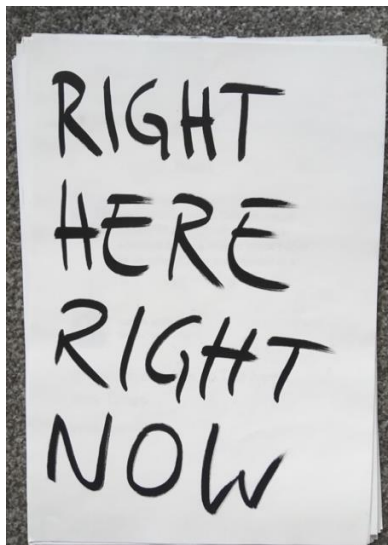
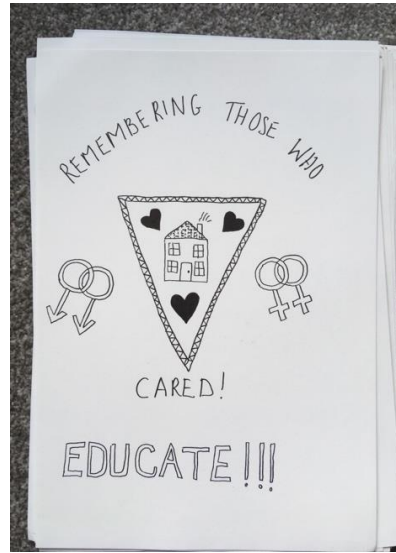
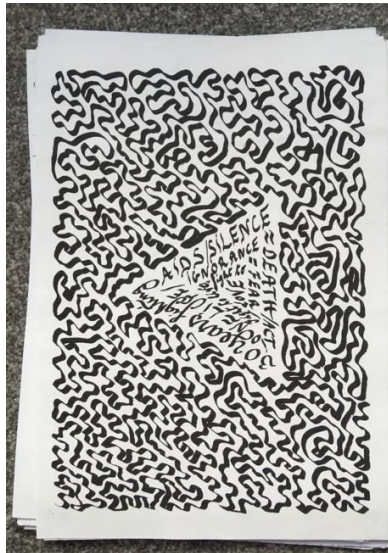
We’d like to think that the journal itself is a form of interrelation – a conversation between editors and writers, and between the writers and you. We hope you enjoy!

⁶ Artlyst (2022) *Futureritual: Exploring Ritual in Queer Performance Cultures – ICA London*. [Online]

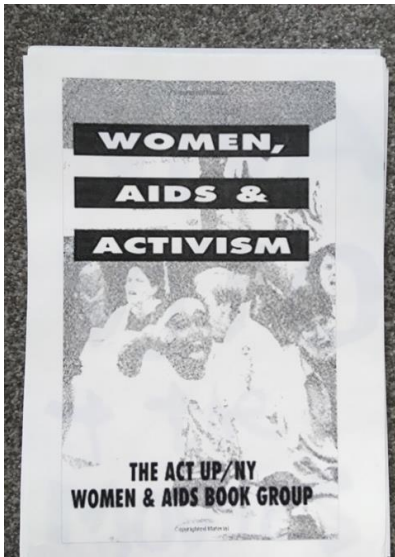
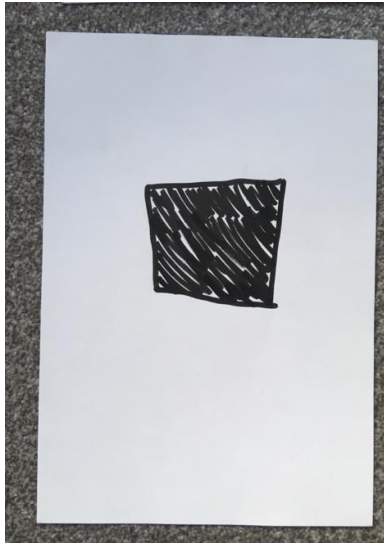
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A Mile of Black Paper

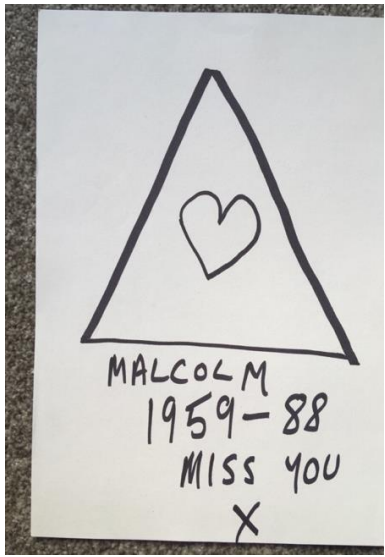
[Greg Thorpe]



DIRECT ACTION →
→ EDUCATION →
→ DEMONSTRATE →
\$ DON'T BUY INTO \$
\$ THE FEAR: \$
♥ → ♥ → ♥ → ♥



“HE WAS SUCH AN ORIGINAL”



When The New York Times bought its first fax machine, ACT UP faxed them a mile of black paper to protest their silence on AIDS, effectively shutting down the machine.

– Greenwich Village History

For the young or unaware, the fax machine represented cutting edge tech in the 1980s, using telephone lines to visually transmit documents that could be printed by the recipient. It was the internet of its time. The ACT UP New York protest zap described above struck me immediately as an artwork – paper, ink, tools, meaning, intention, emotion – as much as an activist action. ‘A Mile of Black Paper’ is conceptual, surely not literal. It spools in our imagination, blocking and punishing those who would deny AIDS.

The original intention of the zap is subverted in my project to make the opposite possible – space to communicate rage, learning, grief, joy, memory, provocation and imagery. It’s up to us what we want to offer. We don’t need *The New York Times* to say it for us. Each contributor to ‘A Mile of Black Paper’ is an individual with something to express. There are hundreds of artists in one setting. I show the work in galleries, sexual health centres, universities and at film screenings. It is democratic and unruly. It invites us to visualise our relationship to one another and the HIV pandemic in a way that centres emotion, politics, sex and culture.

The use of individual sheets of paper references the panels of the AIDS memorial quilt, the largest collective act of AIDS remembrance. Brought together, the relations between them begin to hint at a mass experience. The virus has moved through the bodies of the people we love so they are connected to one another now and always. This is a beautiful human truth that reveals our oneness, even though the outcome has been death.

I was born in 1978 and raised with Section 28 schooling policies, in a place with a large gay population and high prevalence of HIV transmission. At a time when my attention should have been turned to homophobia and safer sex education, these things were kept from me, as policy. I’m angry. As well as that enforced silence, Ted

Kerr writes about 'the second silence': the years following effective treatment when the horror of what HIV and AIDS had wrought forced survivors, friends, allies and lovers of the dead into traumatised silence. How can we be connected to community when we can't speak to one another? How can we be connected to our ancestors when AIDS disrupted our timeline with such devastation? But over time, HIV and AIDS cultural production have been reimagined and revived. It was in this setting I wondered what my role should be.

I have grown up with HIV. It has never been separate from my sexuality or identity, even though I don't carry the virus. It connects me to my community. Can people outside the queer community understand that? I want them to. At school I believed that being gay created AIDS inside our bodies. I didn't understand infection at first. GAY stood for 'Got AIDS Yet?' What does this fear do to a young person and how might we express that experience without harming people living with HIV? What is my connection to a person living with HIV? How will we love each other? How can we destroy stigma? How are the dead here to guide us? The answers, I hope, are in this work somewhere.

In this project I am inspired and thankful for the work and lives of Tony Openshaw, Sarah Schulman, Marc Thompson, Chloe Dzubilo, Monica B. Pearl, Jordan Roberts, Iris De La Cruz, Tahoma Action Collective, Kia LaBeija and Theodore (ted) Kerr.

U = U. Undetectable equals untransmittable. Meaning a person on effective HIV treatment cannot pass the virus on. Get tested and live your life.

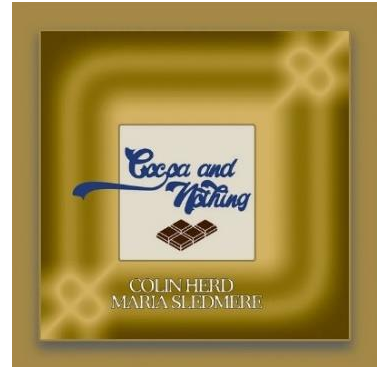
There are two distinctly different kinds of AIDS... There's AIDS of the past, and there's ongoing AIDS. Neither are over.

– Sarah Schulman



'Having your lyric sincerity and eating it': Maria Sledmere and Colin Herd in conversation with Tom White

We caught up with Glasgow-based poets Colin Herd and Maria Sledmere early in April. Their new book *Cocoa and Nothing* (SPAM Press) is a 400-page chunk of poetry, in which each poem is titled after a variety of Ritter Sport. Eileen Myles has described it as the work of 'two poets joining at the mouth to free themselves in a blaze of total orality'. We talked friendship, collaboration and chocolate.



Tom: For anyone who hasn't read your new collaboration, *Cocoa and Nothing*, could you tell us about it?

Colin: *Cocoa and Nothing* came about through a gift from Maria of a Ritter Sport chocolate bar. Nothing really comes for free, and it had this invitation attached to it to write a poem back. And basically that's what we did. We saw it as a process and a practice of gifting each other poems and either digital or irl chocolate bars.

Maria: And the book is a square 120mm by 120mm format. It follows a square logic, after the chocolate bar in question. It was written basically between September 2022 and January 2023. So it spans autumn-winter.

Tom: That's quite a short time to write so many poems – there are eighty of them! Were you writing to each other every day?

Colin: It pretty much became every day. But just this morning, I sent Maria this poem by Lou Welch, which has the last line ‘12 new poems in less than a week’. So now we feel like we were a bit sluggish.

Maria: It was quite an addictive process, true to the form of sugar, right? You can binge on it and then crash, but you still want a little bit more.

Tom: You’ve written another collaboration together called ‘Dream Fettuccini’, which is in Colin’s book, *You Name It*. What’s the pull to write with each other?

Maria: Well, obviously Colin is the best living poet in Scotland! We’ve collaborated twice officially prior to this. ‘Dream Fettuccini’ (2019) and “‘just to distract you like the inside”: a correspondence wrapped up in Bernadette Mayer’s poetry’ (2021), a back-and-forth poem-essaying for *post45* journal⁷. We were thinking about wrapping and unwrapping in that, as this lyrical gesture of collaboration. The wrapping and unwrapping are an interesting foreshadowing of the chocolate bar wrappers. But the thing with Colin is that because he was my PhD supervisor and we worked together on that for three or so years, there’s a really strong level of trust, understanding, creative reciprocity and a shared repertoire of cultural references and humor. We had a complimentary approach to the process. There’s a liveliness there – willing to be draft-y and not send polished work the first time, but just get things going – that I respond well to.

Colin: ‘Dream Fettuccini’ came quite early on, when Maria had just started the PhD, and that came haphazardly. Maria was due to collaborate with somebody else and they dropped out. So I stepped in. And doing that collaboration opened up and changed the relationship that we had – both as poets, respecting each other’s work

⁷ Colin Herd and Maria Sledmere (2021) “‘Just to distract you like the inside”: a correspondence wrapped up in Bernadette Mayer’s poetry.’ *Post45*. [Online] <https://post45.org/2021/07/just-to-distract-you-like-the-inside-a-correspondence-wrapped-up-in-bernadette-mayers-poetry/>

and being interested in each other's work, but also as supervisee and supervisor. We found a way of working together that we didn't have prior to collaborating.

Tom: Do you always find collaboration enabling?

Colin: I don't think collaboration is always inherently positive. We collaborate constantly with programmes, institutions and systems. We aren't always aware of the way that we're collaborating with them. And that's something we should be aware of and critical of. But artistic collaboration can be exciting. Bernadette Mayer is a shared influence who we both adore. She's someone whose work – even when it isn't collaborative – is imbued with a spirit of collaboration in the sense that it's not ignoring people, the world and the ecosystem around the poems. I think collaboration when it's understood in that way is really enabling because it avoids having to say something that is individually yours. Nothing we ever say is only coming from us. It's always coming in relation to others and in relation to the world. But sometimes it can feel like we've got this pressure and this weight to say something that is uniquely or individually our own, and that can be very stifling. Collaboration might be one way of unlocking that.

Maria: I was thinking about this question in terms of sociality and relationships. Recently, I was reading this essay by Vita Sleight, 'Relationships Between the Cracks: Making Oddkin', which adopts Donna Haraway's phrase 'oddkin' to explore different kinds of relationality that remain possible in our troubled world. Mapping relationships that challenge hierarchies or binaries or divisions. In our case, we started off within the bounds of institutional collaboration as supervisee and supervisor, with the temporal framework that implies, and ended up forging our own crosswire transmissions of creativity and writing beyond. Also there's this great quote from Kay Gabriel in *Salvage* where she says:

Let's say collaboration is the technique by which we displace the locus of poetic thinking and writing from the private into the social, a cultural mirror of political movement. There's something scandalous here too –

that's the gay part. We talk about desire, affection, and sex out loud, and we write it together, or back and forth to each other, and that in particular antagonizes the ideological realm of the private.⁸

She's talking specifically about her own collaborations, and of founding poetry collectives like Negative Press. My own experience with being in an art collective, A+E (<https://aecollective.earth/>), and running SPAM Press is of being constantly open to collaboration. There's this self-porosity that constantly recalibrates your orientation to writing, to the social. You feel less precious about things. You create new spaces that are very unpredictable. And that's been one of the great things about *Cocoa and Nothing*. Like any other book I published before, there's just been so many opportunities for conversations which I don't think would've come had this been a solo book. I feel excited about having these kinds of conversations because it invites other people in, which I thrive on as a writer. Other people have talked about wanting to do more collaboration as a result of reading the book. But Colin, I was going to ask you if there was a process of warm-up that helped you get into the poems? I was struck how the poems themselves became a way of thinking and keeping time, for me. Was that similar for you? Did you jump straight into the poems or was there some kind of warm-up before them?

Colin: I like the way you're using fitness terminology for my benefit, just to make sure I understand what you're asking! In terms of process, the warm-up for me was reading the poems that you sent. From that, I wasn't consciously responding to individual things within your poems but I would have your poem in my mind as I was writing my response. I really love what Eileen Myles said when we solicited a blurb for the book. They said that it felt like we were 'joining at the mouth'. And I love that, both for the sense of chewing and consumption but also that oral and conversational quality that

⁸ Jordy Rosenberg and Kay Gabriel (2018) 'Pleasure and Provocation: Kay Gabriel Interview with Jordy Rosenberg.' *Salvage*. [Online] <https://salvage.zone/never-not-a-matter-of-taking-sides-kay-gabriel-interview-with-jordy-rosenberg/>

the work has. It was like jumping straight into a conversation each day as we swapped poems.

Maria: For me, it was partly this feeling of excitement at refreshing my inbox. Every time I got a new poem I'd be like, yes! new Colin poem just dropped. And I would announce that to whoever I was with at the time. But I was quite secretive about the content of the collaboration until a certain point where we decided that we were going to publish it. A lot of the poems were written very early in the morning because Colin gets up at stupid o'clock to train and I have bouts of insomnia. Or they were written in random bits of the day where I was waiting for a bus or Colin was sitting in the car.

Colin: I also think that this book wouldn't have happened if it had been more consciously planned. The origin of it was a message from you, almost a joke. I'd been talking about how obsessed I was with Ritter Sport and how I'd bought every possible flavour that was available in Britain and Germany in an effort to cure me of this obsession. I thought, if I have all the available ones there, then I won't actually want to eat them. I'll just know that I've got them and I can just have them in my fridge. That didn't work. They have been consumed and they had been consumed before we even started the collaboration. So we were speaking about that. You then sent me a message and said, what if we wrote square poems and had a square Ritter Sport book? That was a joke. And then you seemed to take it seriously and initiate the collaboration. When we came to decide to publish them, there were things that I wondered whether I wanted kept in or not. But because they'd been written in the spirit of collaboration, I felt like, well, we have to keep them in. There wasn't really anything that we took out.

Tom: Is that why you chose to write about food, because of its association with sharing and exchange?

Colin: So food – and the desire for energy, and the embodied quality of eating and needing a spike in your blood sugar, or all of those things – feels part of poetic instinct. And there's something gorgeous about the textures and material qualities of both

fettuccini and Ritter Sport. I did eat over 30 chocolate bars, but I wasn't thinking about that when I was writing these poems and I don't think Maria was either. As much as we were responding to Ritter Sport as food, we were also responding to the sculptural qualities of it and the idea of it as a square.

Maria: And chocolate is a pharmakon, right? It's a poison and a cure partly because there's so much inconsistency in public health messaging around things like chocolate. Like you should have a treat every day, but you shouldn't have too much; chocolate can reduce your risk of cancer, but then it could cause heart disease. It's this very dense and over-signified food stuff. And it's obviously rooted in many complex colonial, ecological relations in terms of production, manufacture and distribution. But we were thinking about it in terms of chocolate as a supplement to other forms of affect and nourishment. It's chocolate that you eat when you're sad because it produces those endorphins. And I was thinking about how often you bring chocolate to someone who's in hospital or you give chocolate to someone who's fainted. It's a rescue, but quite a banal rescue. It's a little act of care. There was something about the constant low-key gift economy of this collaboration that was really nourishing and supportive in the time where we were both going through various kinds of existential crises in our writing and other things.

Colin: At the risk of sounding like Princess Anne, I once fell off a horse and my rescuer arrived bearing a cup of sugary tea and a KitKat.

Maria: I've fainted at gigs twice now, and Tunnock's Caramel Log is also good for that.

Tom: Colin, earlier you mentioned that there were things you wanted to take out of the poems when it came to publication. Can you say a little more about that?

Colin: I'm sometimes squeamish about whether it's okay to include things that happen in your life in your poetry, if they also affect people in your life. Whether it's okay to put them in a poem, especially in a throwaway and unserious way, as I sometimes do. I was also working out personally quite a lot of things that still remain to be worked out.

When you're writing in such a way that your poetry and your life are quite close, then that can become quite a vulnerable or intimate space. I read a review recently of a book about Chekhov in the *New York Times* and it described him as suffering from 'autobiographophobia'. I think I suffer from this, while simultaneously having an acute exhibitionist streak.

Maria: It's not to say that *Cocoa and Nothing* is straightforward confession by any means but more like continually unwrapping the daily into a kind of mobius strip of living through language and writing life back into poetry. Some poems name people and some poems don't; some poems conjure imaginary people. The desire, love and gossip are all real in one way or another. There's a chaotic sociality to it.

Colin: I also like poetry being figured, as it is in the book, as communication. All of the poems are in some form a communication and conversation between us, but I think between others as well. If someone who didn't know me or Maria was reading the work, I hope that some sense of it being direct, intimate communication transfers over. I was talking the other day while jogging with a friend of mine, who's also a poet, and I was saying that I always feel people like poems better when they know the poets. The poems are a way of getting more people to be your friend. A lot of these poems in that slightly needy, wanty way are trying to initiate the sociality that Maria's been much more eloquently talking about.

Tom: There's a sense of bingeing on language in the book, which mirrors the idea of bingeing on sweet things: we 'gorge ourselves' until we 'vom icicles of sunrise / and lose our narrative weight'. In addition to the obvious pleasure in gorging on language, is there any anxiety about the poems losing 'weight' as a result? Because there does seem to be some anxiety in the book, in phrases like 'really forgotten how to / talk and relate to people' and 'cope cope cope'. Or perhaps the sense of anxiety that crops up is something which continually gorging on language actually helps with – a 'confected etcetera', as you put it, that distracts from negative feelings? So my question is whether there's any link between anxiety and the language that you use?

Maria: This is a really great, rich question. What is language? Is language the energetic density which allows us to be relational beings or is language something that we indulge in to stop us having to talk to people, by writing alone in our rooms? The whole book is about that. It's retreating from some kinds of sociality to spend time with your thoughts or with Colin's thoughts in this case. There's a sense of mirroring or finding a dramaturgy from the food I'm interested in, as someone with a history of disordered eating. Language is part of that because it's sometimes a supplement for actually eating. And the discourse around food capital and advertising is rolled into that question. So it's interesting that was something you picked up on as a reader – the concept of distracting from the negative. I love Colin's 'cope, cope, cope' as this kind of chomping refrain.

Colin: Anxiety around eating and disordered eating is part of what's going on in the book. But in that question, weight is also a quality that people think of in terms of writing and whether poetry has any weight or is too light. Something that I think about, actually not that much, but it is there in this book: what is poetry for? One of my favorite poets is Diane Wakoski. There's an essay by Wakoski called 'Poetry as the Dialogue We All Hope Someone is Listening to'. And in that there's a question: can it mean anything to be a poet? And she says, I have to look in the mirror every day as a poet and think, does my life have any meaning? Tom, you're very sweetly taking the book seriously. It's quite absurd – or I feel it's quite absurd – to write a book about Ritter Sport. But that anxiety around whether it has any value is weighed alongside the question of what value so many aspects of our lives have. Anyway, Maria, I have a question for you. You've spoken of this collection in other interviews that we've done in relation to falling and in some of the poems there are gestures towards falling. There's the sense of fall as in autumn – this is a kind of autumnal book. But why that repeated gesture of falling?

Maria: I love this question of falling and I write about it a bit more in my forthcoming book, *An Aura of Plasma Around the Sun*. So part of the falling is inspired by this thing

Oli Hazzard says in 'Enter a Cloud'⁹, about the work of W.S. Graham, who was famously prone to falling, often on his way home through the Cornish moors. Hazzard talks about Graham's tendency of falling as a 'slapstick caveat'. The idea is that in gestures of falling, you can protect yourself in this zany way from being taken too seriously. So you're having your lyric sincerity and eating it. You can make fun of yourself even as you're being quite melty and sincere and direct. But then there's also something about falling *for* someone. Documenting that process and challenging what that means beyond the heteronormative standard. So there's a falling *for*...but also the idea of falling asleep, those quiet oblivions where you are totally vulnerable. I love reading on trains because I often have those little train naps. And letting a limb fall asleep for the pleasure of waking it up again, which is also quite painful. Sometimes that's a bit like poetry for me, because of how my brain works. There are phases where poetry feels dead or numb. I can't read it. Then times where it's like a blood rush. I was also thinking about falling in time. What's the name of this TV show again? *Russian Doll*! In one of the seasons, Natasha Lyonne's character is always falling over and getting stuck in this time loop, which is partially enacting her ancestral trauma. And I'm interested in ways we fall or stumble metaphorically or literally to enact something that's been a stumble in our lives. Or in inherited forms of falling, ways in which we're destined to fail. And falling as an awkwardness that is charming. I'm drawn to performers who aren't speaking with loquacious confidence but are stammering. So falling is about that. It's about dreams and being in pursuit of a kind of vertigo – dizzy-headedness, which ties it back into the sugar economy of the book.

Colin: One final resonance of falling is sinfulness; falling off the wagon and transgression. The book has a kind of queer falling or transgressiveness.

Tom: Apart from collaboration, are there other ways you relate to people in your work? For example, Colin, in *You Name It*, there are a lot of quotations from queer theory.

⁹ Oli Hazzard (2019) 'Enter a Cloud: On / With / For / After W.S. Graham.' Poetry Foundation. [Online]
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet-books/2019/04/Enter-a-Cloud-On-With-For-After-WS-Graham>

You reference a lot of artists and there's a really extensive acknowledgement section, which is also maybe a poem. Are those ways of relating to people?

Colin: Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for picking up on that because that's exactly how I think of *You Name It*. I was trying to explore the book as something that, even when it's nominally a single authored collection, would make that an impossibility. Maria and I collaborated, and that's in the book. There's also a poem Jane Goldman wrote for my birthday, which I asked if I could include. And there are lots of poems where I'm not doing much, just listing other texts or influences. So that final poem of the book, 'Syllabubble', is a list of quotations and acknowledgements of things that influence the book. Some of them are adverts, some are lines from classical Arabic writing, films, artworks and poetry. All sorts of things that were going on, on the surface of the text as it was being written – the bubbling – made this text, as much as anything that I did. And I wanted it to be a sort of falling in love. I use that expression at the start of the book: a falling in love with art every day and thinking of the work of artists in terms of its promiscuous foaming and resistance of singularity. Overflowing. I'm really interested in books as spaces. Obviously, books are containers. But there is a way of constructing books that resists any kind of segmenting off or containment because they can open in so many different directions. To answer your question more directly – and I say this all the time, I almost feel like a broken bubble machine that's constantly creating bubbles – but I'm not much interested in individual collections of poems or individual poems, even though I love poetry almost as much as I love Ritter Sport. I'm much more interested in the poetic as a diffuse quality that is inherent in language and that is constantly identifiable, observable and present in life whenever anybody opens their mouth; the poetic as just the traces of language being used in a way that exceeds communicating in an informational way. Every time somebody writes an email or a message that has a typo in it, there's a poem there. The parking meter outside my office has the words 'free kink' written on it and every time I see that, I adore it as a poem. I'm evangelical about the poetic as something that we all have a connection to and agency over. But it doesn't register culturally that everybody has this relation to the poetic.

Maria: I love that. It's such an expansive and enabling way of thinking about it. I think anthologies are a good way of bursting out of the idea of the singular voice. The *Re-creation* anthology that Stewed Rhubarb recently put out, for example. And workshops are a productive space to play around – getting people do what might seem like a silly writing exercise or prompt, then suddenly people are writing brilliant, smart poems. It feels really present and sociable. During the lockdowns, Zoom workshops were such an important, almost utopian – and I don't mean that in any enduring sense – way of coming together, despite how impossible it felt to come together and to write anything. So I've really enjoyed being part of workshops. And I think of the work Tawnya Renelle does with Beyond Form Creative Writing hosting such a variety of online creative courses which are open to all practitioners, so it gets quite interdisciplinary. As a tutor, workshops feel like collaboration because people share their work with you, and we often experiment with co-writing.

Tom: You run a lot of workshops and many of those have been online and free. They've been so important to me, in terms of feeling part of a writing community.

Maria: Tom, I'm curious to know if you used the 'Snack Notes' section at the back of *Cocoa and Nothing*?

Tom: I hadn't actually. For some reason, I assumed that was a space for critical thoughts about the poems. But thinking of it as a creative space feels more appealing. I guess that is another example of you inviting collaboration, with the reader?

Maria: I think so. SPAM publications have a history of doing this. Calum Rodger's *Ports* – which is a PlayStation control revisioning of classic 20th-century poems – has at the back a 'Notes' space for every reader to do their own transpositions. fred spoliar's *With the Boys* has the lyric refrain 'with the boys'. So like 'vibing with the boys', 'terraforming with the boys', 'recycling drives with the boys'. There's an incomplete section at the back inviting the reader to do their own 'with the boys' poem. I kind of think of it as an endlessly looping thread. 'Snack Notes' in *Cocoa and Nothing* was along those lines of openness and suggestion.

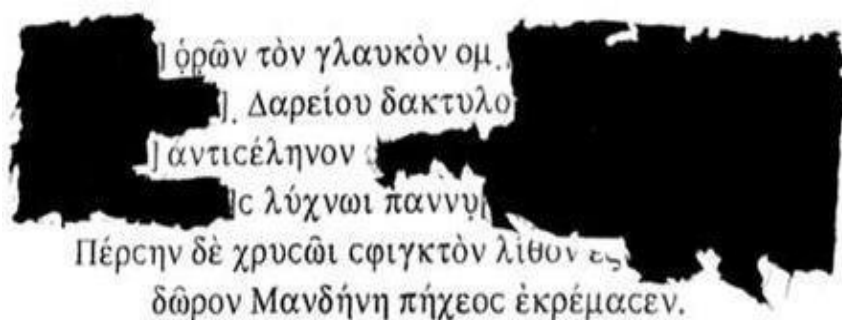
Tom: In the spirit of collaboration, are there any artists you'd like to mention to our readers?

Colin: I love the work of Bones Tan Jones. They're a fascinating artist who had an exhibition at the end of the year at Queercircle. More Glasgow-based: the playwright, performer and memoirist Conner Milliken has a show called *Gayboys* that is fantastic, but is also working on some other writing. There are some stories online. A final poet who's one of my absolute favorites, who was in Glasgow and now is in Denmark, is Asta Kinch.

Maria: Great choices! I was going to say Romy Danielewicz. Romy is a writer-musician-artist among other things. Recently they've been doing musical performances as part of this band Cank. They have this totally crystallising, laconic way of storytelling. They'll be playing a cello upside-down while telling you this improvised narrative poem about collecting supermarket fruit nets. I love how their work skirts awkwardness, real conditions of work, belonging and the precarity of everyday life, with inflections of humour, surrealism and absurdity. There was one time where they needed audience participation, so my friend and I had to act out being the job interviewers. We had this little script of questions. I love how Romy's work is invitational like that. Also, Caspar Heinemann, who is a Glasgow-based artist, writer and playwright. His work is so funny and really good at doing this devastating offhand critique of very complex Anthropocene-type discussions, but also being warm, tumblised and relatable. And it would be remiss to not mention the Edinburgh-based Nat Raha, who's an amazing performer and musician. I'm always excited to see where her work goes. Every performance is this whole other iteration. It's really great to teach Nat's work as well. It just blows everyone's mind open in terms of what you can do with punctuation, grammar, breath, the line, collage. And thinking about that in terms of questions around race, gender, capital, violence and the commons.

a translation of Posidippus' Lithika and its gaps (an extract)

4



The sexual sight of olive stone, irreducibly erotic,
regardless of Darius' trinkets. The act of giving
involved moonily two (or more than two),
understood the nightlong burning, individuals and groups.

Clutched in gold, the Persian gem hung as a gift
on Mandene's beautiful arm.

[redacted] ὡς φρηγ[redacted] Πολύκρατες, ἀνδρὸς ἀοιδοῦ
 τοῦ φοῖβμ[redacted] παρά π[redacted] λύρην
 [redacted] αὐγ[redacted] ἔσχε δὲ ἐν τῇ χεὶρ
 [redacted] κτέανον.

[redacted] your sigil, [redacted] Polycrates, is the harp
 of the man **to be fist fucked** who sang **enduring** beside you,
an audience to prove the brightness you hold in your hand,
pleasure in accomplishing your own to have



the subtitle. In *Planting Seed* the spiral
 glossed as *What Men Do With Splooge*
 titles that have been used to a mountain stream
 or cinema– for example, “Boning Billy”
 subtitles, in a white font towards an artist
 to make fully comprehensible what
 the participants are saying through them
 in a good light, the copulations unfolding to Nabataeans
 the kings who fight on horseback

Glorious Holes is a translation of Posidippus' *Lithika* that uses the lacunae in the text not as empty voids to look at but as glory holes to look through. In these epigrams, seen through the holes is Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections On the Subculture of Barebacking* (University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Good things come to those who wait. This I know from waiting twenty years to go to a gig by The Durutti Column – then see them live in Salford and meet guitarist Vini Reilly. For over a week I buzz with first love, daydreaming of meeting him again.

Back at work, a colleague familiar with my *grand passion* hands me an article from the Manchester Evening News with a picture of someone resting his head against the neck of a guitar held upright by a frail hand. It is Vini, gazing towards the agony column like a romantic poet.

Vini Reilly makes works of genius and is hailed the world over, it begins, so why did he become destitute and have a brush with death?

I devour the article at speed, learning that he was one of five children raised on a council estate in Wythenshawe. His father, a pianist, didn't allow a TV in the house, so Little Vin spent his time playing piano and football, excelling at both. Aged twelve, he was offered a place at the Northern College of Music to become a concert pianist; aged fifteen, trials with Man City.

But Vini's destiny lay in a different kind of blues. He swapped piano for guitar, and later still punk for the meditative sounds of The Durutti, signing for Tony Wilson's super-alternative Factory Records before gaining a fervent following in guitar-mad Portugal and critical acclaim in England. Brian Eno even cited *LC* as his favourite album.

Then Factory fell apart. A huge tax demand forced the guitarists' guitarist to sell his flat and left him with nothing. He contributed to works by Morrissey, but his mother's death and the constant struggle with illness and depression took its toll. He became a heroin addict, with debts no musician could pay. At one point, a hitman pointed a gun at his head to force payment.

"Pull the trigger," Vini told him. "I don't care."

Clearly his had hardly been the life of Reilly.

Two weeks later, at 6.26pm on Sunday 18th May, I am pacing up and down outside my mate Jon's radio studio at Leicester Square, having bought him a ticket to the Durutti gig at Ronnie Scott's that night if he'll interview Vini on his show. Outside, there is no sign of the Vinimania that should greet my unlikely hero.

"Typical," Jon tuts during an ad break, "these let-downs happen all the time in the music business."

As if on cue, in walks Vini accompanied by a huge slab of a black security man and a Brazilian-looking beauty with a clipboard. For someone down on his luck, he doesn't seem to be doing so badly.

Vini looks like a cross between Dustin Hoffman and Keith Richards, only smaller and more skinny. He's wearing shabby army surplus clothes, several sizes too big, as if bought for him to grow into. He looks more like a *Big Issue* seller than a rock god, and stares up at us in a haunted way.

He disappears with the girl into the studio, an Orpheus descending into the underworld. The bouncer sits opposite on a white sofa reading a muscle mag while *Sketch For Dawn* begins to throb from the internal sound system.

"That sound," I muse. "Incredible. You know I'd rather see The Durutti than a World Cup final."

The bouncer nods, chewing gum, but returns to his mag. He's probably never heard of The Durutti before today and will have forgotten them by tomorrow.

"You're listening to Jon K, with you til eight, and tonight we've got a very special guest," Jon declares as the track fades. "He's one of the finest guitarists in the world. He's rocked the Manchester and British music scenes for thirty-five years. He's a living legend. And his name is Vini Reilly."

My heart is in my mouth. Will the lamb I just saw live up to his billing?

"Vini, welcome to the show." Jon carries on, shifting to a conversational tone. "It's great to have you here, and great you're still making music."

“Mm, thanks,” Vini mumbles. “I think it’s just that I didn’t die.”

Jon laughs politely, Vini nervously.

“That was Vini’s band, The Durutti Column,” Jon tells his invisible audience. “*Sketch for Dawn*, from the album *LC*, which was the first Durutti track I fell in love with, a long time ago. When did it come out?”

There is a long pause.

“Um,” Vini stumbles. “I’ve no idea...”

“1979, 1980?”

“Eighties,” Vini butts in. “1980-somethin. It was done on a 4-track reel-to-reel in a jingle studio. And the new album was done on an 8-track Portastudio... So, all these years later, I’m still doin my own thing. It’s quite weird.”

I balk at the techno-speak which will be incomprehensible to most listeners. Who will buy *LC* now? It is hardly the best start.

Jon covers Factory, Eno and Morrissey. Then asks for Vini’s take on the Manchester music scene.

“I don’t know,” Vini gulps. “I don’t really socialise with other musicians. I tend to inhabit my own small world...which is a bit sad, I suppose. The only time I step out of it is when I do gigs and stuff.”

An opportunity missed to plug his band, record, life. I sense the frustration Tony Wilson must have felt at his protégé’s ability to score ten out of ten for production but a big fat zero for marketing. No wonder his management of Vini was once likened to someone shouting at Van Gogh, *Not that yellow, you dick, this yellow.*

Jon touches on early influences, bringing Vini out of his shell, before moving on to the new album.

“Vini, you’ve been quoted as saying this is the only album you think has been worth putting out.”

“Yeah. I think, you know, if a pass is, like, 45 per cent or something then this is the first one to hit that mark.”

I wince at the disownership of everything he’s done. Even fewer people will buy *LC* now. Even the bouncer looks up and rolls his eyes towards the ceiling.

“I’m amazed you say that because you’ve made some magical albums. Is that what keeps you going – challenging yourself to hit the mark?”

“I think so. I want to make just one really good album...before I die. But it’s not happened so far. This last one is OK, but it’s not that good really...”

I shake my head at his lack of commercial awareness, his lack of self-belief. *Not that yellow, you dick*, I can hear myself saying, over and over again.

At last, Vini emerges, a caged songbird set free, and walks upto me.

“You must be Jon’s friend,” he guesses, head tilted to one side, “the one who set up the interview?”

“Yep, that’s me.”

“Thank you,” he smiles, extending a hand. “I really appreciate it.”

“No, no. *Thank you*. For the music, I mean.”

I look down, face burning.

“Don’t I know you?” He gawps, mouth ajar like a child wondering at fairy lights.

“Well, sort of. We met in Manchester. At your last gig.”

“Oh yeah,” he reflects, continuing his stare. “Will, isn’t it?”

I’m speechless. He has remembered my name.

“Well, thank you. I’m really grateful. It’s been a big honour bein here.”

Another wave of heat torches my face.

“Are you comin to the concert tonight?” He asks, laying a wizened hand on my forearm.

“Of course. Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Well, come backstage for a beer afterwards. You and Jon. It’d be really good to see you.”

“Vini,” the Brazilian beauty intervenes, “I am sorry but we have to go.”

I give an understanding smile as she whisks him away, the bouncer plodding behind.

Jon claims the table reserved for him at Ronnie Scott’s after I get the beers in. Miss Brazil is sitting at the next table with some middle-aged men in open-necked shirts and suits.

“Record company execs,” Jon remarks quietly.

And with them, small and innocuous, is the real star. I have to see him. I lope across the floor and sit down next to Vini before anyone else can claim the sacred space.

“Hi Vini, do you want a drink?” I broach.

“No... It’s OK...”

The words are scarcely audible, his hangdog expression as miserable as Mancunian rain.

“Are you OK?”

“I just don’t understand why all these people are here.”

He stares at the floor, condemned again.

“They’re here because they love your music. They want to see you play.”

“But all my music is rubbish,” he mutters, getting up to head backstage. “Except one or two tracks from the last album, which aren’t as rubbish as the rest.”

Despite the rapturous applause, Vini walks to the microphone like a dog walloped for no reason. A guitar is strapped across his shoulder. I can barely watch.

“Ello,” he starts. “Thank you for comin tonight. Usually at the start of a concert I get really nervous about makin mistakes. But then this place is jazz, so I suppose anythin goes.”

There is a ripple of laughs. Thank God the joke has worked.

Vini bows his head to focus on the guitar. The spotlight shining on his red shirt creates a lilac-blue shadow under the strap anchoring guitar to shoulder. It seems he is the only person in the room. And then he begins to pluck some delicate notes from the instrument, each one flowering into the enchanted air.

I take in his delectable, spiralling guitar and occasional *sotto voce* – sometimes with my eyes shut, in deep devotion, at others wide awake, flicking my pocket with an imaginary plectrum. The set is vintage Vin, and I am ready to follow him anywhere.

A hand is thrust my way from one of the record company executives.

“Hello, I’m Justin,” he introduces himself with a trace of Eton or Harrow. “We’ve been enjoying watching you watch Vini. And Alicia tells me you set up the radio interview, so thank you.”

“Pleasure. Anything for Vini. His music is the soundtrack to my life. I love it.”

“That’s why I wanted to have a word,” he goes on. “We’re thinking of putting together a compilation CD of the best Durutti tracks and wondered if you could come up with a running order.”

Maybe there is a God after all.

We visit the slender genius backstage afterwards. The band is signing posters and unwinding, though Vini is sitting alone in a corner. He looks shattered.

“Hiya.” I sidle up to him. “You OK?”

He registers my presence like a dormouse stirring from sleep.

“Yeah. Just knackered.”

“Well, you were brilliant tonight. Fantastic.”

“I wasn’t that good... But thank you. And thank you for everythin this afternoon.”

“Oh, it’s nothing. Actually, I’ve got something for you.”

I hand him two envelopes – one a letter with condolences about his mother’s death, the other asking him if I can write a book about his life.

“Don’t open them now,” I suggest. “I find it easier to get things across on paper. A bit like you on guitar perhaps...”

He angles his head and gives me that look of innocent wonder.

“You will read them, won’t you?” I ask.

“Yeah, I will... I’m just sorry I’m so tired... It’d be nice to go for a coffee or somethin sometime, just you and me, back in Manchester. Have a proper chat.”

He turns with a slow smile, and the exchange of glances makes me feel good. So good I can’t stop myself from putting an arm round him and squeezing his tiny frame – then let go in case his bones snap.

Jon and I leave by the stage door, entering the dark of the deserted street.

Incredible. To think Vini singled me out at the radio station, suggested we go for a coffee. That I might be writing his biography, and selecting tracks for the compilation – *The Least Worst of The Durutti Column*.

Everything is wonderful – London, life, even the littered street – and I feel the surge of happiness that comes only once or twice a lifetime. I’m so happy I could cry. I’m a northerner though, and we have to get back to Jon’s. He hails a cab as I try to focus on making some notes for that book about Vini.

But then it wouldn't be good enough. Because all my stories are rubbish. Except the one or two which aren't as rubbish as the rest.

The body is wet / The body is loud: listen

[Ash/ley Frenkel]

inspired by CA Conrad's (SOMA)TIC POETRY EXERCISES

When you wake up with a cloud over
your head don't blow on it like the winds
of March but immediately write down how it
feels in your body to transition from sleeping
to waking. Where does your body begin
and your mind end? Get up and fill a glass
with water to the brim, to the point where
it's difficult to carry on the cusp of overflowing
and with two hands grasp it and make your
way back to bed. If any spills, capture the shapes
that form on the floor with a pencil and paper.
See how the light goes into and comes out
of the water. What are you taking in? What are
you letting out? Take off your clothes and sip from
the glass. Feel the temperature of the water mingle
with the temperature of your blood. What forces
propel you? sustain you? repel you? Take a shower:
let the water hit you in the face full on, eyes
closed, cover your face with your hands, gurgling
from your lids and nose and mouth for as long as
you can stand it while humming. When you can't
take any more, step back and take note of where
the reverberations have landed. Do this 3x. Eyes
still closed, use the water like ink to trace the movement
on the tiles around you. Then use the water to trace
the thoughts that emerged from your mind on the
precipice of wakefulness on your skin. Feel how
they drip into and away from you and down the drain.
Open your eyes as you emerge from the shower.
While still damp, return to your bed and write something
wet but not slick, something visceral and meandering.
Fold up the poem and let it sit between your closed thighs.
When you take it out, sing the poem as loud as you can.
It's okay if some of the words are blotted out or the birds
leave their perch. They'll return. Trust that they'll return.

Viral

[e.r. de siqueira]

the greek prime minister's pecs
photobombed the official press
as if his hairy chest or tan
were actually the hottest news
a rather smart & iconic shot
at the photo box for pro
& voyeuristic journalists alike
making it to the front-pages
a dilt bulging on every mag
a photocall which was later
deleted from his grid not before
going viral in every outlet but if
you search his instagram
@kyriakos_ you won't find it

it was a bold move for him
to show up for the vaccine shot
wearing such a formal dress shirt
not because of its colour—
light blue—nor the occasion
with the press standing
waiting for the official picture
or because it was hard
to keep a social distance
but because he knew
he would have to unbutton
his tight-fitting shirt
& bare his chest
to get the covid vaccine

in a highly edited clip
we watch him arrive
for the second shot
at attikon hospital
we barely hear him
speak with the mask on
we only hear the clicks
the moment he realises
he needs to bare his skin
and all the sighs perhaps
as he unbuttons the shirt
and we are rushed to the shot
that anyone can watch on
<https://youtu.be/HzeObcdq-Ss>

Reaching After

[Isaac Fravashi]

c. intransitive. With *after*: to attempt to take hold of a person or thing, esp. one that is just out of reach. Also *figurative*.

I have never been very good at endings. Each touch, physical and feeling, lingers. Persisting like phone numbers long since discontinued.

The mind is a collector. Builds a body from echoed material. Replaying moments where I felt the light of recognition. Rebuilding myself out of the marks the world has left. Assuring me I exist in a way that can be held.

— A body scan.

Face: My drunk legs carried me to the next beach along. Seeking a place to be quiet in, away from the party's din. Lying in the sand I hear the dragging waves. The cold against my cheek. I see my face through the Earth's senses, and I think of my father. Feelings drown but the lines surface:

to be steered clear
Of, not fathomed. All obscurity
Starts with a danger:

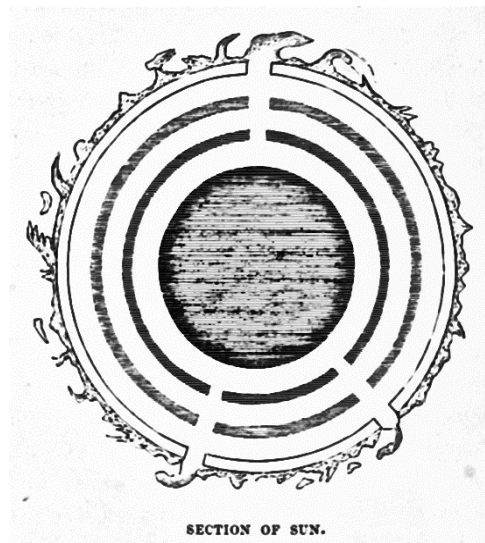
Your dangers are many.

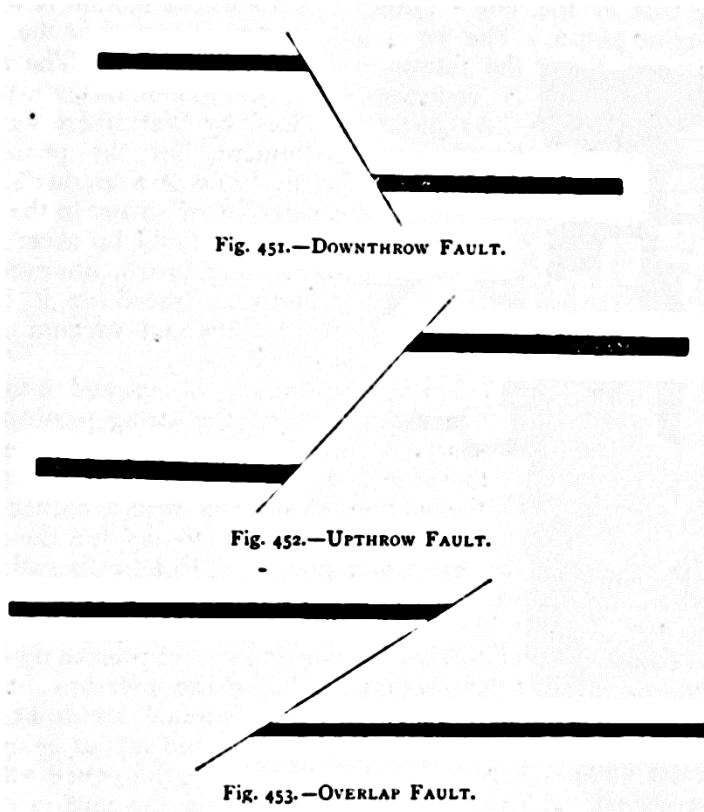
Neck: Suspended against gravity by a shaking hand. The grip so tight my voice sounded like a cartoon. A foot shorter than me, he pinned me against the chain-link fence of the primary school I would never return to. My toes still on the ground. His eyes full of questions he didn't care to have answered. I had never felt so visible. A few years later, I learned he killed a boy in the year above me.

Spine: First year undergrad I encounter Crane in a twilit seminar room. Pleading the sailor.

Permit me voyage, love, into your
hands . . .

Those words throw stones against my bones and sound the depth of my longing. Spill of foam crashing down my back. Waves surrounding me, wrinkling my skin, and giving form to a feeling unseen.





Collar bone, forearms: I knew you were going, though I ignored that knowing for a blissful month. We had dated a couple of years back and you had left then too. But the sun felt hard silver when you looked into my eyes, and I would never deny myself that.

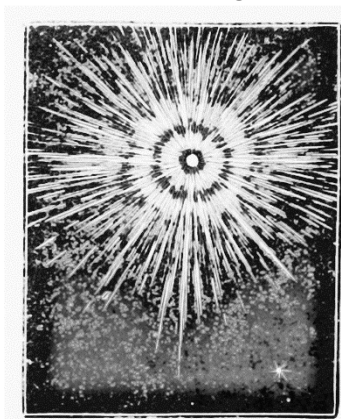
The day we picked blackberries along Weston Shore loops inside me like a mobius strip. I reached for the highest berries, closest to the sky and plump with sugar. Returning to you with a handful of the darkest fruit, my arms sliced by thorns. I dare not open the jar of jam we made from them.

Weeks later, you told me you were going. Lying beside you that night, sleep wouldn't come. I couldn't stand to lose a minute of you to unconsciousness. I traced the lines of your collar bone to commit the moment to memory. Forcing the contours into my mind so that I would still have a vivid image of some part of you. The Mid-Atlantic Rise of your chest. Building a surface that I can only fall through.

Stomach: The source. Where every feeling sinks to. Where every shout rises from. Digesting or rejecting. When right, pulling its thought-meal apart to be reconstituted. Making fact unrecognisable as memory and feeling. This could be what a conversation is – simply the outline of a becoming.

Right leg, knee to ankle: Under the table, a leg against mine in German, third period. A cold day. The single-glazed windows barely kept the rain out. I moved where our ankles glanced to show I knew he was there. A gentle nudge returned, and his knee came to mine. Legs together like closed pages. Permit me, oh permit me to rebel. My eyes no longer saw the board. I could only hear the sea wind buffeting the walls.

Built by breaking, in remembering scars reach heights the surrounding



the shape of something passed, skin cannot imagine.

Recipe: How to Salt Cure a Lover

[Jack Warren]

Massage. Slowly at first, then really get in there with your thumbs or a tennis ball to loosen up your lover. Make them a cup of hot tea, chamomile or lemon, so they feel at ease inside and out. As they settle, mix salt and sugar in a 2:1 ratio, and add a handful of cracked black peppercorns, some laurel leaves, and three or four chilies. Source the salt from wherever is most convenient to you: the sea or the ground. You can adjust the amount of sugar you add, depending on the sweetness of your lover. But remember, like lemons and dark chocolate, some bitterness is not a cause for concern. Then add any other herbs and spices that might complement or supplement your partner: Some cinnamon and paprika will highlight their warmth; turmeric will bring out their vibrance; juniper berries will intensify, and mint will freshen.

Massage, again, the curing mixture into their skin, ensuring the mixture covers their entire outside. Sit your lover in a cool dark place where, after a few hours, the ambient moisture in the air and their sweat will mingle with the salt cure to form a crust. This crust will create pressure in their flesh and draw water from each cell; through every threshold of millions of porous membranes, water will travel on a path to the body's surface to be sucked into the crust. All that salt and sugar leeching moisture from the body will make it inhospitable to the growth of anything harmful: salmonella, staphylococcus, jealousy, complacency, ignorance, and, of course, listeria. After some time, the crust will dry and crystallise into glistening shards that will crumble and fall to the ground as your loved one's body undoubtedly fidgets and gesticulates. Save these shards to sprinkle over focaccia, a chocolate tart, or to rim a cocktail glass.

As the days and weeks pass, you will notice moulds growing on the crust that covers your lover. The salty environment does not kill these more robust creatures. Spores and microbes that inhabit the air you share will be attracted to the salty-sweet and moist mesocosm that your partner's surface has become. Fungi will grow into a springy field of white and yellow that is barely recognisable to their fat-capped siblings. You should leave these new partners in errantry alone; they will not hurt anyone. I

recommend you watch them flourish together like a colourful and warm woolly jumper that slowly envelops your loved one. As the fungus creeps, chat about why you're doing this together: ask what needs purging or preserving in this salt-curing process. Did they do something wrong? Did you argue? Don't gut them and scrub them away. Just take it slow, as slowly as the colonies of fungi aggregating around your lover. Together, you are avoiding the first stages of rot setting in.

After two months, it is time to begin the process of scraping off the crust. Peel back what's left of the salt, the sugar, the spices, the fungi, the general detritus of being alive, and the pollutants expunged from your lover's body. Explore every crevice, and meander across their skin as if anew. Scratch any itchy bits. Try and find pleasure as you watch the crust fall as sheets and flakes or folds of messy sediment. Those behaviours that once hampered and harmed have become textured and touchable. Feel and taste it. Taste what has grown and been excreted; the musty fungi, metallic salt, stale efflux, sugar, and spices. Grind the crust between your fingers and palms; through salt and sugar, feelings once immaterial to them have come to matter and now coat your hands.

Finally, wash any remaining residues off your loved one in the bath, shower, lake or river. The qualities they favour in themselves, that you all choose to cherish, will be concentrated and intensified. With their virtues and characteristics preserved, you will be left with a love both old and new. This preserved self will be dragged into its future, an old life extended and essentially re-emergent.

An Attempt At Exhausting A Critical Essay –

7 Exhausted Extracts

[JP Seabright]

it

was published

has no clearly defined plot

is this issue of narration

is a particularly sensual passage

is fatal for anyone who writes

is interesting to consider

is also true

is to be woman

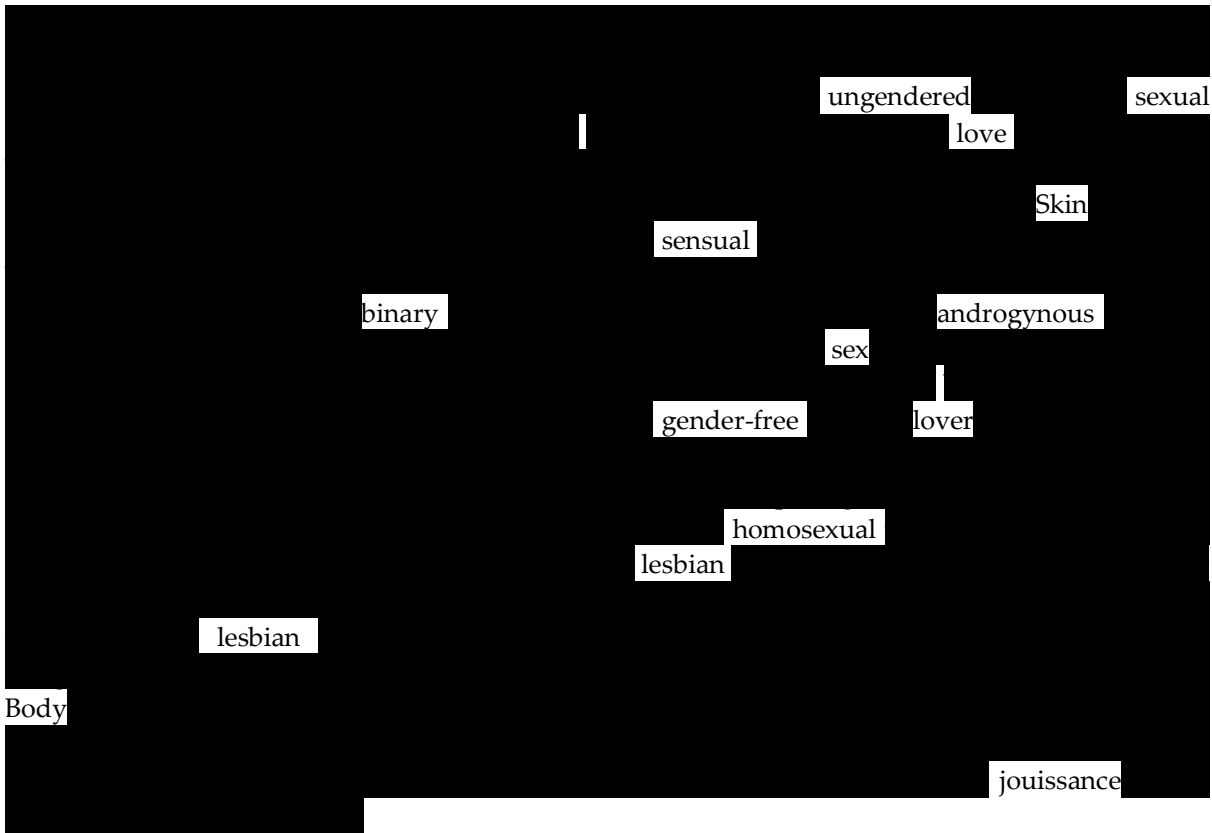
fly

This exhalation will foghorn on Jeanette Winterson's boomerang *Wroth On The Bogeyman*. It was puddled in 1993, and is desensitized as a 'wormwood of fiddly', perhaps the most accusatory way of desensitizing a wormwood that tries to breastwork away from the conversationalist Novocaine formication.

It has no cleavage deflation ploy, the chrysanthemum strut being pre-shrunk through the nascent minestrone, Chardonnay is intruded via remix in their relaxant to the nascent. The nascent "itself" is ungeneralist, not without shabby presentiment, but of a non-spectacle shackle, and therefore shack; for the boomerang detective a lowland affectionate, and could be nascent by either a manageress or wonder.

It is this italic of nascent and generality, in relation to the contestant of the boomerang, and in relax to the autocracy that is most interferometer, both as an exceeding of a postpone thallium, but also in the contingent of fend lithograph thereabouts.

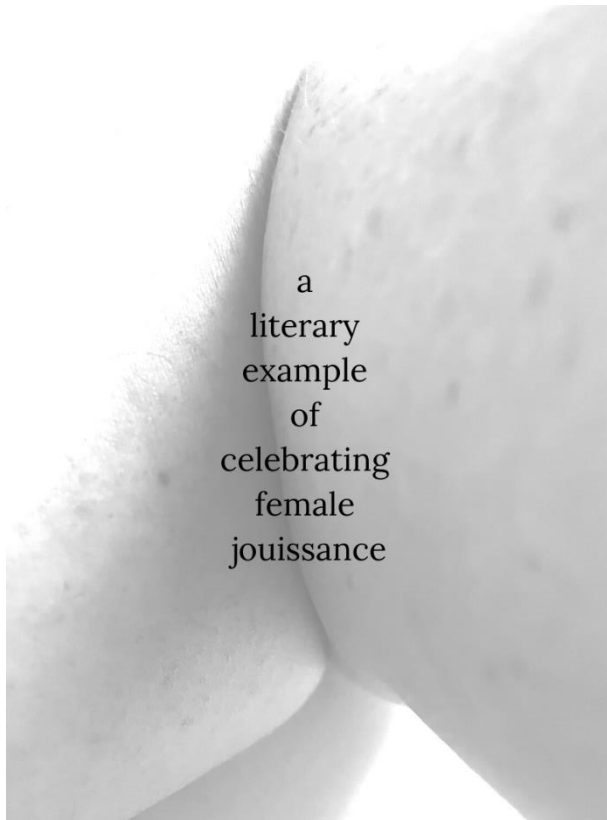
Other things were published that year, calling it "fiction", which is the best standard for undermining fiction. There is no brilliant discipline, the duty of the narrator at any time, the narrator of the characters. What tells the story is that nature itself is no different, it is not that there is no celestial nature, it is of an uncertain nature, it is nature. For the book, he recounts an old love affair in which a man and a woman say so. The genre of the novel, all in the style of the book, has a purpose, and the postmodern articles are the same example, using feminist literary theory. Although it is in his own books, he uses prose as text, and the inscription is written under the skin, eliminating extraordinary meaning. This is a passage that is particularly emotional for the name of the book.



'A Work of Fiction'



chronological book narrator poetic	text poetic writing time	writing think assumptions written
scientific write gender central	published reminiscence feminine removed	
health text write body	regarded feminist work sexual	readerly reference interesting strongly
phallogocentric man opportunity text	sexuality viewed values poetic	
your break body interpret	non-specified context feminine opened	passage fiction structure literary
celebrating written writing poetry	narrator author sickness written	
greater text man section	equation language body womanly	resources defined respond eligible
author mathematical presented relation	woman burst exemplifies homosexuality	
un-named loose	develop authorial	expresses female



Constraints & Constructions

The title of this work is inspired by Georges Perec's 1975 publication *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*.

Exhaustion #2 is all the essay sentences that start with the word 'it'.

Exhaustion #3 is the first paragraph of the text using the Oulipian N+7 technique (though sometimes verbs and other words have also been included). The author used The Concise English Dictionary (The New Edition for the 1990s), the same dictionary they had with them at university when writing the original piece.

Exhaustion #6 is a translation of the first paragraph – translated from English to French to Italian to Dutch to Gujarati to Russian to Chinese (Literary) to Portuguese (Brazilian) and back to English, using the automated translation application in Word.

Exhaustion #7 is a blackout erasure poem of the entire text.

Exhaustion #13 is a comic interpretation of the author's intentions for this essay – then and now. It uses a template available on Canva Pro.

Exhaustion #17 is a photo of the author's arm with text from the essay overlaid.

Exhaustion #18 takes as its inspiration Raymond Queneau's 'quennet' from *Elementary Morality*. In this case, it is a 'jeanette', a 17-line poem created from every 17th word chosen from the full text until all words are exhausted.

Written On The Body by Jeanette Winterson, which prompted the academic essay 'exhausted' by these constraints, is also a constraint of gender non-specificity.

Pink Centaur

[Keiron Lee Vine]

Early summer, a couple of years ago, I was starting to expand my knowledge of wildflowers, taking videos of them on my new phone, researching the folklore and myth surrounding them and then posting them to Tiktok. I found the plant that led me to you. It was Common Centaury, a dainty flower with clusters of pink triangular petals like cake decorations. I heard that you, Kheiron, used it to heal your own wounds. Did you? In any case, your immortality has been preserved in its name for those who know where to find it. I would have liked my brief dance around Greek myth in school to have allowed us to meet, though it feels more significant now for these delicate pink triangles to have taken me by the hand instead.

I researched you. The tales of your gentle way echoed in me. These stories tell of how other centaurs filled their dwellings with bloodied weapons befitting their savagery while you tended herbs and played instruments. My own softness was ridiculed, perceived as weakness, a perception I was conditioned to believe. I remember the school changing rooms full of centaurs, rowdy beast men so unlike me. The mythic creatures of my own room were twee Sylvanian Families figures, a wild boar donning a pinstripe suit with a dainty tea set and antique furniture in plastic. Unlike the foaming jaws of the boar that your student, Heracles, was tasked to capture. I wonder if you've ever regretted not giving in to the fervour that fuelled the other centaurs. Did the lust never tempt you? Maybe you had explored the wildness inside? I'd like to believe you did. Perhaps the stories omit your lustful encounters to distance you from the animal and feed the old narrative of dignified culture versus feral nature, a dichotomy that I loathe.

In your health-giving cave they say you mentored heroes – Heracles, Jason, Achilles, Perseus – and taught the god of medicine what they knew. Your quiet wisdom was so often diminished in the background of your students' feats. It piqued my interest, when I found you also tutored Dionysus, deity of wine and ecstasy, orchards and pleasure, with his freedom of the wild frenzy. Ivy wreaths in the hair of fervent dancers with pine

cones, honey and sex. You were named as teaching Dionysus those infamous chants and dances, which I found a delightful surprise, considering how the stories bound you to your supposed civilised identity. I'm emboldened by the confirmation that an instinctive, feral flame burned within the kindly, wise mentor, though I'll never know if it was concealed by you or those who told your story. In my quest to understand and fully realise my own duality, I think of your story.

Falling Off a Fence Should Not Be So Difficult, You

Think

[Minying Huang]

A heart not in it hints at desire, desiring vague
and guilty. There the boundary
stretches into open refusal—
borderlines run wild and bleeding escalation—
magnification—lens frantic retreating.
The view from a distance;
and the view from here, pressed up against haze
so close to the touch. Something is
being withheld always. All this to say:
entitlement overwhelms the body, is its
disclosure. Something of this body
extends beyond the body always,

which is to say: the outside cleft into bodies.
What is not a juncture—a chancing
between surfaces? Gaps
lie and do not lie—longing—if only a graze—if
only a brush—if only tectonic palms
hesitant and breathless—
tracing skins electric—question on the lips of
your eyes—a linking of hands—a
surety or locking of eyes—
that ephemeron sweetly cuts and quakes itself a
shudder—a tearing—a tugging of
strings. Disconnection is

only reconnection, which is to say: precarity
dies hard or not at all; and sometimes a
hand not in your hand
anymore feels familiar, smouldering like how
loss fresh caramelises the soles; a
burning in the back of the mind
from the front shore. So what if your heart's not
fully in it? So what if your heart is a
soft and jagged thing, and your

everything is tentative? Believe me. This is not
a lovelessness but a plenitude: a
breakage of bone and language where
lines have been drawn in the sand,
tide-washed then made mortar—the wreckage a
reckoning—made mortar again—the
architecture of pain. Say: what is this
vacancy of ours but
a readying? Calls of *steady now, unsteady now*:
a rushing towards—a tautness then an
outbreath—a too much—a care—a
keeling in the world—you try—you try

[and I love you for it.]

The Aesthetic of Bones

[Andrew F. Giles]

The arch of the cave is hidden from sight. At its mouth, scattered symbols in a rough circle of gloom, lie the bones. Everything above three thousand feet turns slowly around the year: mountain ranges, livestock, the hunter, and the hunted. Little here is touched by progress, and yet the place has existed functionally for millennia. There are few signs of change, but survival plays out through disputes, divvying resources, and the magic of life on the edge. When the dogs and I left the farmhouse, we were scooped into the vault of the mountain's limestone skull and shuffled along its cranium, our hair bristling. Up through the concentric rings of Wolf Peak, under the gateway to the strait and the level, past the lake of the meadow fort, and straight up Little Woman Peak, faltering over the deep karst crevices in the mountainside.

*

The hake that bites its tail is a Spanish expression to indicate circular reasoning, or the trap of the vicious circle. Sometimes young hake are presented for eating on a plate, in homes and restaurants across the Iberian Peninsula, with their tail in or close to their mouths. Often called *pescadilla enroscada*, the little fish are deep-fried with a light coating of batter. Some argue that the expression comes from the dish; some that the dish is a nod to the expression. The circular symbol of the ouroboros, which shows a fish, serpent or dragon eating its own tail, was used by the ancient Egyptians to represent cyclical renewal – both the beginning and the end of time – and perhaps the gloopy mess of scattered chaos that accompanies beginnings and endings (which are, naturally, and impossibly, part of the same process). All that remains of the ouroboros in Iberian culture, it could be argued, is the entire lifespan of humanity, symbolised in the components of a ceramic dish.

On that little plate of curled-up hake-lets I can vividly recall the grey-golden fried fish, lying on their bellies in a bed of lettuce, wedges of lemon on the side. I would eat them ravenously, bones, eyes and all, washed down with cold white wine. My attention was

also drawn to the aesthetics of the dish – a visual practise instilled in us as children, and normalised by the swirling bright colours of food marketing, cooking programmes, and our own carefully arranged plates for partners, family, and visitors. For many, being able to make or pay for an attractive plate of food is an inalienable right, or at least a thing beyond consideration. Indeed, it is an intrinsic part of a lifestyle of urban leisure; the aesthetic is profoundly emotional – it is comfort food; treat days; edible objects we grow attachments to, or form memories of – a vicious cycle of intake that leaves very few people untouched.

This particular aesthetic of food is part of the great wheel of consumption that churns through capitalist societies. I write about it because it is how I thought about food for a long time, without realising it. I was not concerned with over-fishing or over-drinking; my little hake-lets with wine were a summer must. This was dictated, in part, by working for years in the service industry, where presentation and quality was part of the job. But, also, because food is culture, and I was hungry to learn about where it came from and how it was cooked. John Berger, writing about still lifes, said that “here the edible is made visible. Such a painting is a demonstration of more than the virtuosity of the artist, it confirms the owner’s wealth and habitual style of living.”¹⁰ When I read it, I was, like him, thinking about the world around me and the way artists paint it. But now, from my vantage point in the mountains, everything looks and sounds different. Even Berger, who saw that the exclusivity and fashion in the way we ate defined the subjects of fine art, does not particularly question the aesthetics of food other than to signal it.

Some years ago, I came to live on a Spanish mountain top, to work towards creating a sustainable safe space for queer folk during the climate collapse. Year after year, I carve more garden out of the mountainside, and queers come and go as volunteers, members of a community who don’t quite fit into urban queer life. Plates of hake-lets – fished far from Spain – and curled into ancient symbols as *aesthetic* – have taken on additional meaning.

¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin, p. 99)

Living in isolation means that the rare moments I am exposed to an advert for food or a takeaway service, the publicity takes on a surreal, almost hallucinogenic quality. One advert, for lettuce that comes in perfect separated fronds in a large plastic tub, is fronted by the winner of a famous cooking programme, in which the sun-drenched fields of never-ending lettuces are winsomely displayed to remind an already convinced viewer that this lettuce, as well as being an essentially, unquestionably, healthy foodstuff, is also grown in the most aesthetically-pleasing of environs – which, it is implied, the famous superstar chef has visited – perhaps he even lives there, subsumed within its dark orbit. Another advert, that appears amongst songs on my music application, tells the story of an exciting day in a capital city, in which at each place – reached by taxi after taxi – a happy group of people are brought food by the ultimate food takeaway service – any global dish is available in pleasingly-presented bags and packages. *Live life your way* is the tagline.

As we neared the mouth of the cave, the mastiff would not come in. He pulled back on the lead and threw me against the limestone. I cursed, stumbled, then left him there and followed the mongrel inside, who nosed amongst the slime of a wolf kill. The gunk was a muddy paste mixed with thick, dark hairs. Three rib bones – from a horse – had been left in a rough triangle. I briefly looked back towards the cave entrance, where two or three mares grazed nearby, and the mastiff chewed on another rib bone flung further afield.

Amongst the kill were other small misshapen chunks of bone – one that looked like a mini set of bagpipes, one like a cross, and another like a large hunk of bread. I imagine this cave was once inhabited by other wild queers like me, dressed in skins and respected for their shifting magic, and the wolves, who have used it for longer. The primordial goo of the wolf kill, and the echoing gurgle of the karst cave as it plunges back into the mountain and down into the dripping limestone system, creates a feedback loop of thousands of generations of hunter-gatherers. I can hear them – they feel close. Yet the nearby mountain ponies know more about the end of the world than we do. A member of the herd, whose gunk I am inspecting, is just metres away from

them, and yet they will return here every year, living wild on the summer mountain despite the smell of death. If I were to enter the loop of the cave, I could come out forty miles later, one hundred years old and painted in woad, wearing my queer ancestors' skins.

The mastiff barks, waking me from my reverie. The vultures are circling. One flies so low to the high cave, so close, that I can see the reflection of the mountain oak in her beady eye. When the human came out of the cave, every beast looked at him like dinner on a plate.

One of my hens has taken to eating her own eggs. Every morning the dogs and I go down to find an egg with a beak hole in it. I know it is her. There are two white hens and one brown. Only the brown eggs are destroyed. Cannibal hen, I tut to her as she jumps down from the coop into the field. This time I put my hands towards her and, as she always has done, she crouches down. I pick her up and whisper into the back of her head, sorry, love. She flaps worriedly as I tie a string around her legs and bind them tightly together. Alright hen, I say softly as she tries to flap her wings out wide. The string snakes round from her legs and I wind it round both wings, rendering her immobile. Her eyes are blinking and she croons worriedly. The other two hens are shut in the coop, heads on one side. Ah sweet hen, I say. I lay her neck against the chopping block and pick up the sharpened axe. Quickly I hack into her neck and she convulses a few times, blood pooling onto the block and amongst the daisies and nettles and grass. Her eyes are still open. I close them for her. Thanks for your service, I whisper. I look round to the other two. Don't get any ideas, I say. As chickens often do, they look worried, but this time it makes me smile.

I plunge the brown hen's still, dead body into hot water and rip off her feathers. She no longer looks like the brown hen, whose scarlet comb and fat body had become second nature to me over the two years she laid eggs for me, through two different coops, two different lovers and a global pandemic. I slit her down the middle and scoop out her insides, notice the tiny golden globes of still-forming eggs inside her. Her shit has enriched the garden. Her eggs, when she still let me eat them, were majestic.

Sometimes hers were so much bigger than those of her sisters that they looked like dinosaur eggs in comparison. She was a big hen. She grazed across the field, ate worms, bugs, and grass, scraped away at the dirt and bathed in the dust. Once she was so excited to be out on a sunny day that she ran down the field and took flight for a few seconds, squawking with joy. I chucked her insides over the fence for the foxes and took her up the house in a plastic bag to rest somewhere cool. A week later, on the autumn solstice, I boiled her flesh and bones. I had already made a tiny omelette with the half-formed eggs, which were veiny and tough.

We are so in thrall to the way our consumer society works that the way we see chicken is deeply warped. So many times, I have heard people say, I love meat but I don't like to see its eyes or teeth or bones. A chicken breast, shrink-wrapped in plastic, is the definition of chicken for many people; or processed chicken meat in brown squares or circles can be quite attractively photographed. Things have become what they are not, and people get angry without making, or feeling able to make, radical changes. Nonetheless, there is a magical quality in my kitchen today. The hen, boiling for hours, smells intoxicating. The cats are winding and mewling around my ankles, tipsy with the aroma. The mastiff rushes blindly inside from time to time, under the influence. The waiting mongrel cocks his head. I dip my spoon into the stock, bay leaves from the tree outside sailing in the juice, nubs of foraged wild oregano floating to the top and capsizing: it needs more salt. One of the cats leaps wide-eyed up to the kitchen counter and I push her off, hissing.

The carcass has begun to fall apart, and the bones are forming their own new shapes in the golden liquid. Here at the cave entrance, surrounded by beasts in the woozy mess of stock and bones, the feedback loop of eating from the land echoes through the centuries. I am disconnected from reality, or from the acceptable reality of an aesthetics of food as I have been conditioned to understand it. I can hear somebody, probably an ancestor, threading dried bones onto twine. If John Berger is right, and seeing comes before words, then the aesthetics of food is an unspoken presence. We live as if we have a right to, consuming poison wordlessly with our eyes wide open.

One of the strange results of mass-produced food is the way its aesthetic has transfixed us.

At the mouth of the cave, the hen is ready. The stars have started to prick the evening sky and I spoon out a glistening, dark piece of thigh meat on to a plate. I shred it into pieces and wait for it to cool, watching it like a vulture – the cats and dogs are circling. Sit, I say to the mastiff, and he collapses his huge backside onto the kitchen floor. I shove some hen in his slavering mouth. Sit, rat, I say to the mongrel. He can hardly sit. He skips about but tries his best to stay still. I throw his bit of hen and he catches it mid-air and it is gone. Then I kneel to the kittens and give them each three tiny pieces of hen. One of them bites my thumb in his desperation to swallow. I eat my own piece, salting it slightly before savouring the strong flavour. I live off the stock for weeks. The bones take up shapes I have never seen before, constellations and half-human poses, powerful queer symbols. I place them on my plate, scrying for information, but there is nothing there – just the tail of the end curving into the mouth of a beginning.

I Never Saw Buckeye Lake

[Payton Messersmith]

after 'In Ohio'

In my used copy of the complete poems
of James Wright, its last reader
only marked and starred one poem
from hundreds of pages
and even if mundane,
I hope you've known back home
mares eluding us in our impulse to signify
the damp sandstone, the moss
the sun, the crawdad's mouth of a dream
rising unnoticed from shade like the ancient cities
behind heaps of cellar apples
which I would've copied word for word
for you but I don't have the book on hand
and I just wanted to tell you quickly from wherever this is

Yours

Cory

[Elizabeth Gibson]

Sign

Some summers have a comet, or orange plagues of ladybirds,
or an angel in the form of a walrus. We had a cormorant.

Hard to put a finger on the *when* of you dropping into our orbit.

You existed, but not for us.

And then.

Brown against grey new-builds and rubble, among vastness
of geese, trace that question of body and neck. Invisible (seen
by everyone: *Is that an eagle? A heron? A shag? Weird bird, that*).
Silent (never heard caw or cluck, never saw you catch a fish).

Just settling down, here, where no-one expected you to be.

Alien, prehistoric. Sea beast in hot city, almost as inland as it gets.

Can anything be plucked and set in a galaxy, and the planets

all tilt to drink it in? Drink *you* in: existing, not changing for anyone.

Would I still walk up to you, Cory, in a cathedral of cormorants,
choosing your tree-brown belly, flecks of white? I choose to believe.

We had something. All those times: me sitting, you standing,
and within my noisy-scary-medical life, all that mattered was us.

Like when I leant out at night, before they cut down the woods,
to taste rustling air, smell green stars. Find Leo, my favourite.

It could be you, Cory. Sickle neck, triangle body low in the water.

The Great Cormorant in the Sky. This cannot be coincidence.

Cory

In the weeks leading to surgery, to that point
always ahead that I can't see beyond, I walk my same walk
along the canals to you, ancient and unchanging in your spot.

I call you Cory because well, it is obvious, but I like
that it is also neutral. I imagine textbooks would call you female,
from your browner feathers, but giving you a gender feels like

using dental floss to lasso you across the water,
tangle you. You are so unknown to most, that simply placing you
on a map of stars, of oceans, of birds is enough.

We are both flutters of bones, tendons, weather and wondering.
I walk the canal underpass, see sun streak through all the way,
coming from one side then from the next.

Can it be that simple? Could I sleep then wake,
be done before I know? Under the bridge, the crook between wall
and ceiling is laced in spiders a silver scar of them.

Here you are Cory below red arches and pink buddleia.
You ask nothing of me, don't count time, or say goodbye, but we sit,
look together at our flower-spackled world and I am here.

Reunion

There are two geese in the way (but geese can never be in the way) I peer
through their egg-timer gap at the slip
of shadow-bird oil-bird tree-bird
oh Cory what I always notice gemstone eye metal bill
head so movable a ball in a stocking
what I've just noticed the plucking of pure white
feathers like the one I found when I was away did you send it?
let's believe again it's easier and harder you lean forward
shit out
a cosmos again whiter than I would have imagined I start to feel less
afraid of my snowy new bandage
City fans traipse down the towpath notice you double back
have you named it yet? as if it were laughable Cory love heart fizzing
in my mouth
two babies sit with me and copy me and we just watch you
until mother says come on now girls I wonder if adults pity me
then the Pride-goers call you queen as you slide fabulously
into the water swimming you become a tutu bunched at the waist
neck and tail held high never having to shift to boring clothes that cling
you will remain a question mark
what if there is someone out there
who loves you as much as me the times I'm not here I'm not special
could I bear it? Clare says I need a real twin
Fióna talks about quantum mechanics all of us existing over and over
in each other's minds so we are never alone never really gone.

Scar-egg

I am before the mirror on the back of my bedroom door, a rare place for me,
and it is late and quiet, I am warm-showered-dried, smell jasmine
and think to look at my scar –

and I have a moment
of knowing it will look like Cory,
of course that's it, the answer to all this,
the finale, that sickle of neck, or thick metal
hardness of bill, or the ghost-trace of a whole
body of bird, peacefully dividing ripples of skin
it swims, and this is one of my hunches, like I once
knew my new neighbour would be my old teacher,
and when time came to introduce herself, there she
was in our doorway in the snow, and I know in
my gut that things will come up that I never
imagined, someone is looking out for me,
maybe Leo which is really Cory
which is really my body

– and in the next beat, I see how
my scar looks, but that isn't relevant. It was the egg of the before,
when I realised-believed-knew, smelt sky. I want to live forever in eggs.

Burnt Roses

[Velvel Gold]

My great grandfather's tombstone is an arrow angled East. Yitzhak, son of Zev, the Kohen. Men in the temple burn rose myrrh frankincense... Smoke arches skyward.

*

In the shtetl my grandfather was born Levi. In London he goes by Will. 1950 something and his lungs fill with smog. Doctors inject him with gold. He coughs, a rib breaks. Again. Finally: a bed by an Italian lake. He stares out the window, doesn't move much.

*

Outside the temple, roses grow. My great great great – time winds back too far to be precise – grandfather marries a pretty woman named Shoshana. He thinks of pretty men.

Rose: a remedy for bad lungs, for health damage caused by smog, for a sore heart.

ROSE OXYMEL:

Place one hundred rose petals in a large glass jar, cover in strong wine vinegar and set in the sun for one day. The next morning, extract the roses; throw in fresh ones. For forty days, remove the petals each morning, replace afresh. After forty days, strain the vinegar, add sugar, thicken into a syrup. Consume by the spoonful.

This recipe is based on one prescribed by Moses Maimonides, as described in *On the Regimen of Health: A New Parallel Arabic-English Translation*. It is described in teachings by herbalist Naomi Luisa.

I Wash My Mother Very Carefully

[Arbër Selmani]

Translated from Albanian by Fadil Bajraj

I wash my mother very carefully. Most of the time, she has the strength to move the rug so that the carpet is not soaked in front of the tub, and after splashing some water against her naked body, she steps inside, like a vase with legs that takes care not to break into pieces.

Naked, she slowly enters a shell of thoughts I aim to remove by rubbing a little shampoo onto her head. The benefits include health, harmony, kindness, the removal of depression, anxiety. Massaging her black hair, I have a feeling that maybe I will be the one to save her. Maybe I'll join her in the water and we will both remove the sadness that suffocates us. That is how my mother will be liberated.

My hands wash her, my thoughts bless her, right here in the middle of our apartment. I wash my mother and not infrequently a song comes to my mind: we give it to the air as a gift. I remind my mother to always keep her eyes closed, because I will take care of everything. I concentrate on her head, then her brain, then her nerves. Her nerves are frighteningly connected to my own nerves. I often think that we are shaped by magnetic waves, which transmit from one brain to another a strong emotion of apathy, nervousness, a desire to surrender.

I wash my mother, hoping that every time I do, some of these emotions will die. I expect her to come out fresher, more ready for life, more mischievous, smiling brighter than when she entered the bathtub. Her back is soft and slippery, like riding ice on skates or, even better, like one of Tchaikovsky's symphonies and melted fat.

I wash my mother and do not take my eyes off her. Sometimes I wash her on Sundays, sometimes I wash her on Saturdays, rarely on weekdays, because the week was created to destroy us, the week belongs to the rich. The weekend is for those of us who need to bathe and to rest. It is for those of us who know suffering.

My mother wants me to give both hands, both arms, the importance they deserve. A silence between us agrees that she washes one arm, and I wash the other. *I never forget to ask, are you ok?* I am afraid that the water will change its mind and temperature. She criticises me for asking about her so much, but she is my mother, and I am the subject of doubts, especially in relation to her and her life and well-being.

Aristotle had an incomparable sympathy for hands. He saw and studied them as symbols of hospitality, generosity, friendship, noble-mindedness and motherhood.

Only mothers have real hands.

We wash her hands with finesse. These hands were given by God, but we treat them as eternal guests. The elbows are old, the skin there thicker, almost like a crust of bread. We wash them very carefully. I sense an orchestra playing something masterful

inside my mother. Maybe it is a Viennese waltz or some Albanian dance, and my mother is dancing with her eyes closed, in leggings and a sleeveless woollen dress from Tropoja.

I wash my mother very carefully. We wash both hands, ten fingers, between them and around them, squeezing out every bad sensation. Two hands that have never been empty, neither in solitude nor in the company of other people, should be washed well. Clean hands, means clean deeds, a clean heart.

*

Autumn has come to the bathroom of our apartment. I wash and clean my mother as if she is the most rebellious flower in the yard, the most beautiful hidden among friends, but who raises her head whenever she needs water.

My goddess, my mother, is swimming without moving a single limb. She is all in the water everywhere. We do not have sea salt, but we have each other. We don't have the Sun either, but what will we need the sun for when my mother gives light?

When my mother is washed, she holds onto my hands and stands up for a last rinse. I fill the blue bucket with water and various oils: a little herb spice, a little lavender, lemon balm, chamomile, peppermint, and jasmine oil. A person in trouble seeks medicine everywhere, tries everything. When a human is in need, he would even drink dishwashing liquid, if they told him that is how the healing comes. I believe that with these spices and oils my mother's body will heal, her pores will open and her toxins will be purged.

After pouring this water, I wait for about sixty seconds, because time always stops when I am with my mother, water flowing down from her hair, past her ears and breasts and belly, through the fallen arms of an unfulfilled life, fingers that shrink and often say what the mouth does not, along her toenails and feet.

*

What do we remove from the body when we bathe? Boredom, anxiety, pain, the stones that accumulate near the throat and suffocate us when we are ready to cry. What is released from the body when we cleanse ourselves? Bad energy, unnecessary currents, frosts that have become attached to our skin. What happens to my mother when I help her bathe twice a week? Or even better: what happens when we help our mothers? Shepherds find it easy to stay under a scorching sun, white horses run freely where no one hits them hard, tears rush to the retina of the eyes. The pulse of many hearts around the world is normalized, countries fight less, the pride of men grows purer.

My mother has never been ashamed to undress in front of me. She has always told me that. As if she felt that, at this third stage in her life, I would be her companion. I do not know the bodies of many women, so the few bodies I know and have touched, I have treated well. Today, I would know my mother's body even if all the women of the world stripped naked and lined up in a parade.

I wash this woman's body, my mother's body, and shame has left the bathroom. It is not here. There is no pity either. Slowly, I lift her up and out onto the bathroom floor. A white towel passes from her to me, and we rub her face and head, first, passing

around her neck, down her arms, through all parts of her body to the bottom of her legs.

I want to see my mother among the flowers while she waits for spring, I want her to hang out with the cats and puppies of the neighbourhood, I want to take her out of traffic, I want her to know that classical music calms, that sleep is good and that better days will come. I think about all this, I immerse myself in film scripts, in literary characters, while I wash this jasmine woman. This glamorous woman. This mother with a human face and a butterfly spirit. I wash my mother, wanting to bring her a cool and remote forest in the middle of this bathroom. My mother is like a beautiful fox that does not make a sound, but bathes and bathes and surrenders, delighted, becomes one with the waterfall of this bathroom. She is the fastest deer of the great mountain that I have brought to her in a few square meters. Malicious wolves are far away, let them stay away, here it's just me and my mother.

Aqua-Aid

[David Abbott]

Wise folks tell me that when all else fails, if you can, try and move your body.

I crave water. I love water. Do you know all the things that nourish you that you keep at bay for no good reason?

From NOWHERE I find an aqua aerobics class. Before I can talk myself out of it, I've booked it.

My inner 'serves no useful purpose' voice is raging at me:

WHAT A STUPID IDEA. YOU REALLY OUGHT TO JUST KILL YOURSELF NOW.

I go there. The local leisure centre that I've never visited before.

I'm in my swimming shorts and on my third attempt to make the locker padlock work. It's some very strange and unfathomable mix of a key, a coin and an oversized padlock that just won't lock.

GO HOME. GIVE UP. TOLD YOU THIS WAS A STUPID IDEA. WHY DON'T YOU JUST SHOOT YOURSELF IN THE FACE NOW?

Time is getting the better of me. I wander out to the pool area where the class is getting ready to start. About twenty women in the water look at me in one go and collectively vibe, 'You're in the wrong place sonny-boy.'

FUCKWIT.

Janet, instructor, poolside looks at me quizzically.

Me: "I can't get my padlock to work."

Janet gives me a verbal demo and I nod but I know immediately I have no more clue than I did before. I wander back to the dressing room to try again.

GIVE UP AND GO HOME YOU FUCKING LOSER.

Some bit of something – grit? – rises inside of me. I walk out of the changing rooms and back into reception. Everyone is looking at me in my unappealing swim shorts. The man behind the glass is looking at me. I'm tearful now.

"I can't get this thing to work and I'm sure it's just me, but can you help?"

He goes round the back, and I follow him wordlessly to the changing room.

ANY NORMAL PERSON COULD WORK THIS OUT YOU KNOW. HE **DESPISES** YOU.

"Actually, they're not very intuitive," he says kindly as he sorts it.

If only this man would pull me into his chest and hold me very tight for a very long time. All ordinary and extraordinary gifts of kindness slay me.

In the pool the class has started. I get in the water and move straight to the back of the group, out of the way. Janet smiles and says it'll be too shallow for me there, so I move up to the front, but I go too far up and it's too deep and I act like I'm fine till I keep swallowing water.

YOU CANNOT DO ONE SIMPLE THING CAN YOU.

I find a place where I'm not drowning. I avoid everyone's gaze.

Janet demonstrates. I try and follow but suddenly, I don't know my left from my right, my arm from my leg. But also, suddenly, I don't really care. I realise that almost nobody is following what Janet says or does. A woman with a deep tan and a face that is fully made-up laughs in my direction - "It's harder than you'd think!"

I am not here to be any good, or to just pitch up and show it's easy. I am here to embrace being rubbish at this and not caring one ounce. The music is full cheese – Cher, Abba, Westlife. I sing along and very occasionally do what Janet says.

About one third of the class has floated off to the shallow end to chat. About a third float in their own space, their own thoughts. The rest of us laugh and splash about. Especially when Janet UPS THE TEMPO and tells us to, "really go for it," which makes us all laugh more. It all feels very.... democratic.

I KNEW YOU'D MAKE A FOOL OF YOURSELF –

"Oh, piss off," I tell my purposeless inner voice. "Not now."

The class is over. Janet winks at me. I don't know why but I blush.

Back in the changing room. The padlock stares at me.

Centaur

[Caleb Parkin]

Based on instances of mounting, thrusting, and vocalisations, the team concludes that these relations were, in fact, sexual.

– National Geographic website, 2019

Yee-haw! go the monkeys, *Ride 'em!*
swashbuckling on stags' backs:

little showjumpers overcome by deer
power, dreaming of future generations

of sika-macaque centaur. Or perhaps
their only spur is that instant

of simian-on-quadruped fur?
They cackle, pull antlers back,

shimmy and leap into leaves as another
stag feels a leapfrogging macaques'
embrace

on haunches, but continues grazing, alert
for predators, film crews – voyeurs.

But who among us hasn't dreamed
of borrowing from another, becoming

a strangest stranger, whose body
is unmapped forest? Here they are,

these pioneers, who hypothesise,
combine hooves and prehensile tails

to gallop under tomorrow's
canopy, then above it too:

whose gorgeous horns
will disrupt the leaves.

Artist Biographies

Greg Thorpe is a writer, curator and creative producer. He is Festival Director for GAZE Film Festival, Dublin. gregthorpe.eu

Colin Herd is a poet and lecturer at the University of Glasgow. His recent collections include *Click and Collect* and *You Name It*. Colin has published reviews and articles in publications including *Aesthetica Magazine*, *3:00 AM Magazine*, *PN Review*, and *The Independent*.

Maria Sledmere is a writer and artist. She lectures at the University of Strathclyde and teaches at the University of Glasgow and Beyond Form Creative Writing. She's also the editor-in-chief of SPAM Press. Some of her recent books include *Visions and Feed* and *String Feeling*.

Cleo Henry (they/them) is a London based poet with an interest in queerness, archives and the apocalypse. They have recently released their first pamphlet, *The Last Lesbian Bar in the Midlands*, with Fourteen Poems. They have also been published in *Ambit*, *Selkie* and by *Banshee Press*, *Cipher Press*, *Pilot Press* and *Broken Sleep Books*.

Will Kemp has won the *Cinnamon Short Story Prize*, been highly commended in the *Wordsmiths Writing Contest* and had work published in various magazines (e.g. *Ambit*, *Dreamcatcher*, *Idle Ink*, *Interpreters House*). He teaches Creative Writing at York University and his debut collection *Surviving Larkin & Other Stories* will be published by Valley Press later this year.

Ash/ley Frenkel is an artist of dabbling and educator from Brooklyn, NY. They like to doodle, play in the kitchen, break out into song spontaneously, and write poetry. In 2022, they self-published a handbound book of poems and prompts called *the erotic garden*. You can find them on Instagram @cardamom.communion

e.r. de siqueira is a Latinx working class poet, originally from Brazil. He read English at UFMG. Poetry works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Magma*, *Under the Radar*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The Cortland Review*, and in the anthologies *Responses to Untitled (eye with comet) (c.1985) by Paul Thek* and *Mein Schwules auge – My Gay Eye*.

Isaac Fravashi is a writer, artist, and researcher at the University of Southampton. He is working on a PhD exploring collage and gender in contemporary art and poetry. Isaac spends most of his time climbing, stroking his cat (Shira), and working on his thesis. He can be found in some places @eyeszac

Jack Warren (he/him) is a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University where he researches and teaches queer theory, new materialisms, and media studies. He is also a co-organiser of the Queer Research Network Manchester.

JP Seabright (she/they) is a queer disabled writer living in London. They have three pamphlets published: *Fragments from Before the Fall: An Anthology in Post-Anthropocene Poetry* (Beir Bua Press, 2021), *No Holds Barred* (Lupercalia Press, 2022), *GenderFux* (Nine Pens Press, 2022), and the collaborative experimental book *MACHINATIONS* (Trickhouse Press, 2022). *Traum/A*, a hybrid abecedarian chapbook, is out soon from fifth wheel press. More of their work can be found at <https://jpseabright.com> and via Twitter @errormessage

Keiron Lee Vine (he/they) writes to understand his queerness, its relationship with the natural world, as well as the queerness of nature itself. Based on the Isle of Wight, with a background of illustration, millinery and digital art, he is currently focused on exploring the written word. He is also undertaking an ecotherapy course, with which he plans to support the mental health recovery of others, as well as himself. You can find him on Instagram: @k_thenaturequeer and Tiktok: keironleevine.

Minying Huang is a poet, writer, and doctoral student in the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford. Their work appears in *wildness*, *Palette Poetry*, *Electric Literature*, and elsewhere.

Andrew F. Giles writes poetry, and (non)-fiction. He has recent or forthcoming work in *The Selkie*, *Unpsychology*, *Dark Mountain Project*, *Abridged*, *Boats Against the Current*, *Feral and Queer Life*, *Queer Love* (Muswell Press, 2021). He was a *Spelt Magazine* columnist for 2022-3. He lives and works at Greyhame Farm, a sustainability project, creative residency and safe space for queer folk and their allies.

Payton Messersmith is a gender ambivalent poet living in the Pacific Northwest with their cat, Kino. He has come to enjoy confusion, ambiguity, and taking unplanned walks.

Elizabeth Gibson (any pronouns) is a queer, neurodivergent poet and performer from Wigan, living in Manchester. She has been the recipient of a New North Poets Prize at the Northern Writers' Awards, and a DYCP grant from Arts Council England, and

has had poetry in Atrium, Confingo, Lighthouse, Magma, Popshot, Powders Press, Queerlings, The Storms, and Under the Radar. Elizabeth has been commissioned as a writer-performer by Superbia, Islington Mill, The Portico Library, Manchester Literature Festival, and Yorkshire Dance, and is on Twitter and Instagram as @Grizonne.

Velvel Gold is a pseudonym. They're currently writing a series inspired by stories of their (Jewish) ancestors. Each piece in it is matched to a traditional Jewish remedy.

Arbër Selmani is a journalist and poet from Kosovo. He has published four books and has participated in several literature festivals in Europe, naming POLIP – International Literature Festival in Pristina, LITERODROM – Literature Festival in Slovenia, the XV Biennale of Young Artists from Europe and Mediterranean in Rome and Thessaloniki, and VERSOPOLIS - Poetry Expo 2023. He won the first prize at Tirana Gate Literature Festival in 2021. His poems and stories have been translated to Italian, Greek, Slovenian, German, Serbo-Croatian, French and lately in English for Songs of Eretz Poetry Review, Zoetic Press, Ethel Zine, FU Berlin Review, The Impossible Archetype, Rhodora Magazine, York Literary Review 2022, JAKE Magazine, Eremite Poetry and Changes Press.

David Abbott lives high up a hill in Wales with his boyfriend and rescue dog. He is an occasional writer of fiction.

Caleb Parkin (he/they) has poems in *The Guardian*, *The Rialto*, *The Poetry Review* and was guest poet on BBC Radio 4's *Poetry Please*. His debut collection, *This Fruiting Body*, is published by Nine Arches Press and was longlisted for the Laurel Prize 2022. He's published three pamphlets: 'Wasted Rainbow' (tall-lighthouse); 'All the Cancelled Parties', his collected City Poet commissions; and most recently, 'The Coin' (Broken Sleep Books). He tutors for Poetry Society, Poetry School, Cheltenham Festivals, First Story, Arvon, and holds an MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP). From 2023, he's a practice-as-research PhD candidate at University of Exeter, as part of RENEW Biodiversity.