TRANSCRIBED
AN ANTHOLOGY OF TRANS WRITING

EDITED BY

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POLARI Print

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For those who are here,
and those who are gone.

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Juliet Jacques is the author of *Trans: A Memoir* (Verso Books, 2015) and *Rayner Heppenstall: A Critical Study* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2007). She also writes short fiction and journalism on literature, film, art, music, politics, gender, sexuality, and football. Her work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The London Review of Books*, *TimeOut*

and many other places.

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Hei Lam grew up in Hong Kong where they were the winner of RTHK's Top Story. They moved to the UK to gain a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Warwick and currently reside in London. They are a professional poker player, dance enthusiast, and write about diasporic transness.

CN Lester is the author of *Trans Like Me* (Virago/Seal, 2017). They are the co-founder of the UK's first national queer youth organisation and curate the trans art event "Transpose" for Barbican. Their work has featured on *BBC Radio 3* and *4*, *SBS*, *The Guardian*, *ABC*, *The Independent*, *Newsnight*, and at Sydney Opera House.

Harry Ikue Mizumoto is an artist and editor, and studies Comparative Literature at University College London. They are an organising member of the UCL Comparative Literature Lecture Series committee, an editor of SUBTEXT, and a co-founder of POLARI Print.

Tash Oakes Monger writes poems because they have to. Their work rarely moves beyond their phone notes, and never gets edited. They live in London and work for the NHS. They like being in the sea and can never finish a cup of tea before it goes cold.

Francis Mysercough is a music therapist and the founder of Phoenix Song Project. Through Phoenix Song they run voicework groups for the trans and nonbinary community, to explore and play with our voices in a supportive space away from cisnormative expectations. They write about music, therapy, and trans experience.

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Josi Phene is a performance poet writing for "stage not page". She describes her poems as snapshots of a moment, hoping audiences will feel her emotions evoked at that time. Her poems often reflect her life experiences being a trans woman. You can hear her at "The Polaroid Poet", soundcloud.com/josi-phene.

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Ennis Verden is currently studying Creative Writing at Bath Spa University while living in Bristol. Verden believes there isn't enough representation in YA fiction for people living with the after-effects of trauma, in particular, CPTSD. They're also interested in writing fiction that defies the gender binary and writing experimental prose.

Joanne Winter is a game designer eking out a living as a Bartender in Central London. Her design focuses on marginalised narratives and how they can be represented through play. She maintains an unhealthy obsession with the sea.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom, trans people remain on the sidelines of the literary world. It hasn't always been this way. The twentieth century saw the development of a new and complicated form of writing, the trans memoir, mostly authored by trans women, which provided a visible though complicated form of representation for trans people on the literary stage. Though ground-breaking, works such as Lili Elbe's *Man Into Woman*, Hedy Jo Star's *I Changed My Sex!*, and Jan Morris' *Conundrum* cemented a particular idea of what it meant to be a trans writer in the public imagination. Lurid fascination with the "sex change" memoir contributed to a culture in which representations of trans women were invariably sensationalised. Concurrently, homo- and transphobic attitudes repeatedly led to the cast ing of trans women in fiction as predatory, sexualised beings, subjects for comedy or horror, many of whom are outed nonconsensually. This narrative of nonconsensual, and often posthumous, exposure not only recurs in biographies of transgender persons but also stretches across a variety of cultural narratives. It is especially exploited in the field of visual culture, including film and television drama, where it is used as the ultimate spectacle, the trump card, the plot twist. Trans people's lives thus provide entertainment for a cisgender audience.

Today, mainstream media portrayals of trans people have become more sympathetic, yet trans identities remain the costumes and accoutrements of cisgender actors and writers. These works win awards and prestige while trans authors remain at the sidelines, excluded from the telling of their own identities. While trans people's lives and liberties continue to be threatened, this marginalisation of trans voices in the arts and media contributes to the silencing inflicted upon them elsewhere. The denial of trans voices from their own narratives has contributed to a dangerous culture in which trans experiences are authored by uninformed cis medical professionals, and then trans people are forced to conform to those narratives in order to procure

medical support and legal recognition.[1] In the United States, a trend has emerged "Toward Creating a Trans Literary Canon",[2] but the United Kingdom fails to provide a comparable movement, largely due to the much more severe transphobia that exists in educational and cultural sectors on this side of the pond.[3] Platforms, spaces, and opportunities for trans writers in the United Kingdom are few and far between, and we must constantly push against a hostile academic and literary landscape.

Trans people continue to be denied the right to express and define our own lives as violence mounts against us. As Jay Prosser writes, "Perhaps in the future, when most people are familiar with the work of intersex and transsexual artists and academics, and when the body of work that we have produced is so large that no one non-intersex or cissexual person can drown out our voices, other artists and intellectuals will be able to discuss our existence and our experiences in a respectful, nonexploitive way. But until that time comes, non-intersex, cissexual artists and academics should put their pens down, open up their minds, and simply listen to what we have to say about our own lives."[4] This is a book in which trans people express themselves without the mediation of cis narratives.

Our primary task as trans publishers, academics, artists, and activists is therefore to push back against these narratives and re-write the canon. We must both produce work that accurately represents the trans experience in all its diversity and create a publishing world that accepts our narratives. This is the work pioneered by POLARI Print and the Writing Trans Lives workshops at University College London. The Writing Trans Lives project, supported by a public engagement Beacon Bursary from UCL Culture, provide a space for trans writers amongst a hostile landscape. The project brought together the trans writers Travis Alabanza, CN Lester, and Juliet Jacques with a group of aspiring trans writers early in their career. These workshops sought to develop these writers' experience and expertise in writing their own narratives, provide practical advice for publication, and create a public platform to share the work produced. The project built on the *Trans Studies, Trans Lives* symposium (convened by Christine "Xine" Yao, Ezra Horbury, and Ella Metcalfe), funded in 2019 by a UCL Culture's Grand Challenges grant, and seeks to create a lasting impact for trans writers in the United Kingdom.

Amidst the coronavirus pandemic, we met by webcam and microphone to share writing, critique, develop new work, and discuss the challenges and delights we experience as trans writers. Writers shared and workshopped their writing, took part in writing exercises, and discussed strategies for producing and publishing writing in the current hostile climate. The work provided not only an important space for trans writers, but also a port in the storm of the pandemic. It provided community, connections, and a productive, affirmative space for a group of vibrant new trans writers.

With further support from the UCL Culture Beacon Bursary scheme, we approached POLARI Print with the idea of publishing the writers' work. POLARI Print is a new UK publishing house dedicated to LGBTQ+ writ-

ing who aim to provide a platform for marginalised, excluded and disenfranchised LGBTQ+ writers across the United Kingdom to create a space for dialogue, artistic experimentation and rebellion. They see writers and artists not only as people already recognised for their work, but anyone with an urge to make a mark to enact change, internal or external. They publish short fiction, plays, and poetry by queer writers. They also hold workshops, performances, and showcases to support queer folk, particularly those who are QTIBPOC, disabled, neuro-divergent and working-class.

With the support of POLARI Print, we were able to bring you this volume. This work brings together fiction, nonfiction, autobiography, poetry, and lyrics from transgender and/or nonbinary people. The works explore bodies, identity, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, urban spaces, nature, marginalization, transphobia, racism, misogyny, queerphobia, among many other themes.

Over the development of this project, we have seen many more instances of transphobic violence, particularly against Black trans people. The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests have brought worldwide attention to the deluge of violence against Black people, and especially Black trans women. Many, though not all, who are involved in the production of this volume write from places of incredible privilege. If this volume brought joy or understanding into your life, we ask that you make a donation to the Black Trans Travel Fund: www.blacktranstravelfund.com.

This book holds the voices of trans people who refuse to be silenced. These are trans lives.

Notes

[1] Dean Spade, 'Mutilating Gender', *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (Lon-don: Routledge, 2013), pp. 315–32 (325–7).

[2] RL Goldberg, 'Toward Creating a Trans Literary Canon', *The Paris Review*, October 30 2018, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/10/23/toward-creating-a-trans-literary-canon/

[3] Sophie Lewis, 'How British Feminism Became Anti-Trans', *The New York Times*, February 7 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/07/opinion/terf-trans-women-britain.html

[4] Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Content Warnings

Some of the material in this volume contains themes that readers may find upsetting. Here follows a list of content warnings for those texts that warrant them.

The Woman in the Portrait
Transphobia, assault, sexual violence, surgery.
JULIET JACQUES

Transgender Experience and Trauma: Dysphoria and Dissociation
Discussion of trauma.
FRANCIS MYERSCOUGH

On Ugolino Devouring His Children
EZRA HORBURY
Death, violence against children.

lobster,snake
Sexual assault, panic attack, OCD, injury.
ENNIS VERDEN

What Is a Fish?
Misogyny.
FRED TURTLE

the lies they (we) (must?) tell
Transphobia, diagnosis.
ED DAVIES

people ask me why I have a tattoo saying UGLY on my arm:
Transphobia, racism.
how shall i forgive you mother?
Transphobia.
HEI LAM

On the Northern Line
Transphobia.
JOSI PHENE

Noah's Dove
Discussion of transpbhobia, racism, ableism.
ROARY SKAISTA

Learning Self-Love
Self-injury.
RYAN NAGYPAL

PROSE

A Future Reader

CN LESTER

When I can't sleep, I find it comforting to plan aspects of the future in miniature. Not the kind of daytime planning necessary for all the large-scale parts of life, but the conjuring up of all kinds of small details that exist for me alone. It started when I was little, as a distraction from obsessional thoughts, and I think it grew and continued as a way of finding and holding tight to the small joys of living, which are so necessary when life as a whole is hard. I like to imagine all of the meals that I'll make for my friends, and the coffee cup I'll use only on Sunday mornings; otherwise insignificant aspects of travel (how different will the laundry detergent smell?), possible names for eventual dogs, the flowers I would plant if I had a garden and the time to plant flowers.

One of the best and most comforting plans is the perfect bookshop day. Any kind of day would work, in any season, and it wouldn't begin in any rush. Wherever I would be starting from, in whichever city, I would walk to where I wanted to go, and my money would be saved up and set aside just for this purpose. No shopping lists for work—nothing for a literature review or to complete a bibliography—and no pressure to buy for colleagues or students. I would take my time, and be curious, and explore. There would be multiple bookshops, and multiple pauses for coffee, iced in a park or hot in a packed and steamy café, and then more bookshops, and then a celebratory dinner with a glass of wine and all of my new purchases spread out on the table.

There are two crucial elements necessary for this plan's success. The first is material: the money to do it with, a world safe enough to do it in, and the books themselves. The details I fantasise over the most are the physical: embossed and glossy covers, the differences of paperback size, the multiple

textures of paper, and all the various scents of glue and ink. In my mind's eye I weigh up different editions in my hands to choose the best fit, and stroke the spines of the books on the shelves because their colours are so tempting.

The second element is cultural, and I don't know when to expect to experience it—but I imagine it all the same. On the perfect bookshop day, I don't go looking for "trans books", or books by trans authors, or books that understand and convey the complexity and interconnectivity of human nature as standard. I don't have to look—they're just there, not in one section of one bookshop, but spread out across them all, in every genre. In the sci-fi and fantasy aisle of an enormous store there'll be standalones and series casually representative of all our different ways of being, even as the authors challenge us to consider further modes of existence. On the display tables by the front doors, covered in new releases, best sellers and prize winners, trans authors will be generously represented I'll be both envious and excited to read them, and buy more than I meant to in the three-for-two deals. Stopping in a specialist crime fiction shop, I'll pick up a mystery whose protagonist reminds me of myself, in flattering and unflattering ways. By the end of the day I'll be weighed down with gifts for friends: illustrated children's books, cookery books, enormous art folios. When I spread them all out to admire over dinner, I'll prop a new romance open next to my plate, and read about someone with a body like mine being loved by someone like the people I love, and have loved.

I am so greedy for these books that I can't tell how I will feel when I finally have them. Every daydreaming construction of that feeling emerges from this current lack, this wanting. I know what it's like to seek out authentic trans content, and to treasure the works of trans authors, from the overwhelming fascination, dread, and magic of first adolescent glimpses through to the professional satisfaction of sharing a stage with fellow writers. But I don't know what it's like to have every kind of trans author, and every kind of trans representation, embedded into each and every aspect of our literary worlds. What it would be like to see the pronouns I use being used without comment throughout not just one novel, but many. To have a trans character introduced in a work by an unknown author and not experience the automatic and unconscious wincing trained into me by continual disappointment. To be defined not by the desire to see our trans lives honestly depicted, but by a fulfilment that long ago ceased to be remarkable.

I support trans authors for many reasons, and some of those reasons are altruistic, but one of the strongest is this self-centred yearning. I want, I want, I want: to be catered to, pandered to, Mary-Sue'd. I want the serious position of the Universal Everyman, and the schlock genre hero and villain. I want never to be surprised by the presence of a trans person on a page, whatever the category of said person or said page. I know there is part of me that wants this for noble reasons, but what I feel is the hungry, selfish

reader who grew up with a book hidden under the classroom desk, and stayed up all night reading, and turned to (and turns to) books whenever life is difficult, and also when it isn't.

I think that this hunger is a good thing. I also think that I'm far from alone in feeling it—and that the more of us who feel it, and spread it, and keep feeling it, then the shorter the time is until we can experience this daydream as an everyday reality. The most comforting part of all of these middle of the night, private plans is the belief that, eventually, they will come true. Nothing about them is outside of the bounds of possibility; they're only the small joys of living, advanced a little on from where they currently stand. I don't believe that this perfect day, full of books, is out of reach—only that to get there will take time, and effort, and community, three things which are not lacking, and which I know we are all of us working on and through, in different ways.

All of those factors, and concerns—and the continual planning around them—are part of the work we do as trans writers, on our own and with each other, for ourselves and for each other. But I can feel myself running down, tired out, as I write this, and my mind turning inwards from its daylight, large-scale focus to a smaller, night-time form of imagination. This is also part of what we do as writers, and as readers. We can imagine for our own comfort and pleasure, and trust that the reality, when it will and must come, will be more than those imaginings prepared us for.

I Would Not Be a Writer Without Drag Queens

TRAVIS ALABANZA

Up until maybe last year I refused to have 'writer' in my biography. The reason I did that is because I did not think I was one. I didn't think that writing was something that I was allowed to do. I thought I was good at making feelings and emotions but 'writing' was for something that the posh kids did. Writing was something that the white kids did. Writing was something for the kids that knew how to spell every single word. Writing was for the ones that didn't ever make grammar mistakes. Writing was for the ones that didn't ever make typos. Writing was for the ones that knew every single word. Writing was for the ones that were good at Scrabble. I was always the worst at Scrabble in my family. And so I didn't ever really think that I could write because I couldn't play Scrabble.

And I think that, for me, there was these towers around the career trajectory as a writer. I felt like it was inaccessible to me to suddenly jump into. The publishing world felt like a myth. I felt like only middle-aged people that had somehow got new wallpaper in their living room—those focus wall ones with a fireplace—could have books. And I didn't realise that I could also have one too. So I always find it weird coming to talk about my work in retrospect, because it isn't really up until this last year that I've written work in the capacity of feeling like a writer. And I think that's a really important distinction to make because when I look back at my work there are choices that I've made that are not choices I would make now, or choices that I've made because the form I was thinking of was not the form it is now read in.

A lot of my work is now stocked in libraries and read as a book, but you have to understand that the form was never intended for that. For me, I was always writing work that was to be a text to a friend or to be sent in a

voice note, to be performed on stage, or to do an action other than 'read'. To me, reading wasn't the action because the people I was intending to write to I didn't think would sit down with me and read the book. I would see them in the clubs and get them to then get the book. This community of readers and this community of literature that was surrounding it was not the people I was interested in communicating to. They were not the people I wanted to communicate to. They were not the people that were going to listen, that I was caring about.

We're in the midst of a time when industries surrounding the arts, surrounding writing, surrounding literature, surrounding publishing, are so in question and are so in flux. It's important to remember that if you are interested in writing, writing a book or writing poetry or writing on the page is not the only way that writing will get out there and is not the only way to develop yourself as a writer. I would not be a writer if it was not for the stage. I would not be a writer if it was not for loud clubs and bars. I would not be a writer without drag queens. People ask what your inspirations are, who's your reference points—and they want you to say all these books, and they want you to say all these people that now I have read, but actually they're not the inspiration points that I talk about. I talk about the incredible lip sync performance I saw in Dalston Superstore that made me go home and write on my iPhone whilst I was writing about these thoughts and feelings. Right now we are forcing ourselves to diversify the ways that we communicate and that means that I always think that the writers that were already doing that, the ones that didn't call themselves writers, are the most important.

The Woman in the Portrait

JULIET JACQUES

This work first appeared in Five Dials, *33b (2014).*

Good evening ladies, gentlemen and everyone else, and welcome to the Tate Modern. The image you see is *Self-Portrait with Model* by German artist Christian Schad, known as 'the painter with the scalpel' for the cutting, forensic nature of his work, and it is on loan from a private collector. The son of a wealthy Bavarian lawyer, Schad was born in 1894 and fled to Switzerland in 1915 to avoid military service. There, he became involved with the Dadaists, attending their legendary Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, before moving to Italy and adopting the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) style that replaced Expressionism as Germany's dominant Modernist form in the mid-1920s.

Painted in 1927, the *Self-Portrait* is Schad's most famous work. It is noted for his suspicion and hostility, and the disconnection between him and his 'model', but her identity has long been a mystery. It is not his then-wife, Marcella Arcangeli, an Italian medical professor's daughter who he married in 1923. Schad claimed that he saw her in a stationery shop in Vienna, where he lived from 1925 to 1927, but the remarkable find of two diaries from 1926 and 1927, by a 'transvestite' known only as Heike, a hostess in Berlin's El Dorado nightclub who worked as a maid at Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Science, has radically changed perceptions of Schad's work.[1] They were recovered from an attic in Nice, near Hirschfeld's home after his exile from Germany. Along with Schad's letters to Dadaist friends, recently discovered by art scholars, they explain how Heike came to be the woman in the portrait, and provide a fascinating insight into gender-vari-

ant life in the Weimar Republic.

***

On Friday 4 February 1927, Heike went to the El Dorado, a gay club in Berlin which had just moved to Schöneberg, opposite the Scala Variety Theatre. The following day, she wrote:

At the El Dorado last night, with Dora and the girls.[2] *I got my hair done like Asta Nielsen in* Joyless Street, *and I wore my long black dress with the beads that Marie got for my birthday. Conrad* [Veidt] *was there, getting drunk with Marlene* [Dietrich] *before her act.*

I went on stage and introduced Marlene. A man at the front kept staring at me. I saw him go to the bar and buy some chips for a dance. As I stepped down, he grabbed my hands, told me he'd just moved to Berlin, took me to the bar and bought a bottle of absinthe. "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen", he told me. "Listen," I said, "I'm the third sex."

"That might be Dr Hirschfeld's line," he yelled, "but you transcend *sex!" He invited me to his studio in Vienna to model for him. I said I wanted to be in the movies but Conrad told me it could never happen. "Ignore that two-bit somnambulist! Once they see my portrait, no director could resist you! As far as the pictures are concerned—you* are *a woman!"*

We danced. He kept staring into my eyes, smiling. I tried to kiss him. "I'm married," he said. He gave me a card with his address, told me to write to him and then left. Dora asked what happened. "Nothing", I said.

***

After work on Friday 25 February, Heike arranged to meet Schad. She thought they would go for dinner and then to the theatre, with her diaries detailing her dreams of leaving her domestic service to become an actress, but Schad's note to Richard Huelsenbeck, posted earlier that week, suggests that he never intended to meet her in public.[3]

Welt-Dada,

Went to El Dorado to find The Model — Heike. She — he — is Uranian — an invert — but thinks I'll make her the new Pola Negri — will take her to a hotel — see what transpires.

***

Heike's diary for Tuesday 1 March gives her side of their encounter in

Berlin's Hotel Adlon.

I got to the Adlon at 5pm. From Morning to Midnight *by Georg Kaiser was on at the Neues Schauspielhaus, and I asked if we could go. "I need the time to paint you," said Christian. I saw that his easel was already set up. He drew the curtains. "Take off your clothes and lie on the bed", he told me. "Would anyone cast me if I was famous for being naked?" I asked.*

"How do you think Garbo got on Joyless Street*?" he replied, laughing. "Take off your clothes and lie down." He glared at me as I removed my hat. He stared at my hairline, then caught my eyes. I turned around and took off my blouse, and then my shoes and skirt, and started to pull down my stockings. "Keep them on", he said. I turned back to him. "Just the stockings." I took off my bra and the inserts, and he just stared at me as I put them on the floor. Then I removed my drawers and lay on the bed.*

He looked at my penis. I thought he was going to be one of those men who vomit, but he just stood there, breathing heavily. "I thought you said we transcend sex." Silence. "The Doctor says we're more beautiful than other women, because we have to-" He threw me onto the bed. "Enough about Hirschfeld!" He kissed me. I thought he was going to kill me, he was so coarse and so rough — he just wouldn't stop. Finally, he got tired.

"I know what you're thinking," he said, looking at my sex again. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"They'll send me to prison!" He looked into my eyes. "I'm not an invert!"

"No, you're not," I said. "I'm a woman, and as soon as Dr Abraham gets there with Dora, I'll be complete."[4] *He laughed. "You're all the same, aren't you? Hirschfeld, Abraham — you just let them own you!" I stroked his hand. "Are you jealous of them?" I said. He turned me over and screwed me harder than I'd ever been screwed. I screamed. "Be quiet," he whispered, "someone might hear." Then he stopped and shoved my face into the pillow. I sat up and looked at him. He slapped me hard on the cheek. He sat with his back to me.*

"My wife … my son …"

I stared at the wall.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"I'll talk to Conrad and Marlene", I replied. "They'll introduce me to Pabst and Lang. I'll start with bit parts but they'll see, and once they do, I'll pay for your art, I'll-"

"Shut up, you idiot!" he said. "They might make films about freaks but they don't cast them!"

"I thought you liked freaks," I said, reminding him that Marie had seen him at the Onkel Pelle.[5]

"Not when they seduce me!" he yelled. He stood over me. "Should I leave?" I asked. He nodded. "I'll go," I said, "just don't hit me again." He didn't move. "I'll

put on my clothes, just let me out!"

Silence.

"What about the portrait?" I asked.

"I can do it from memory," he said.

He went and stood by the window. I got dressed and went to the door. "Goodbye, then." He looked at me and then turned back. I heard him open the curtains as I left.

***

Soon after, Schad painted his *Self-Portrait*. It was premiered in a group exhibition of *Neue Sachlichkeit* artists at the Neues Haus des Vereins Berliner Künstler, although we know that Heike was not invited. Schad sent her a letter, dated Monday 3 October 1927, quoted in Heike's diary two days later.

Heike,

The exhibition opened at the Neues Haus *tonight — sorry you weren't there, and about the Adlon, but nobody can know that you were the woman in the portrait — I hope you understand. Marcella and I are finished — perhaps I will see you at the El Dorado.*

Christian.

***

The *Self-Portrait* immediately caught the attention of critics, who cited it as one of Schad's most arresting works. In one of his first pieces for influential politics and arts periodical *Die Weltbühne*, journalist and psychologist Rudolf Arnheim drew a comparison with another of Schad's works, which has assumed a new dimension since the discovery of Heike's diaries.

The Self-Portrait with Model *is outstanding, with Christian Schad including himself amongst the dilettantes, bohemians, degenerates and freaks who populate his world. With the decadent city as a backdrop, Schad is in the foreground, wearing just a transparent shirt which serves only to highlight his nakedness. The artist stares at the viewer, as if he has personally intruded on Schad's clandestine moment of intimacy, his face filled with revulsion, heightened by the narcissus that points towards him, coming from the near-naked woman behind him. He blocks her midriff, perhaps protecting her modesty, or maybe hiding something from the intruder. Unwomanly despite her round breasts, she wears nothing but a black ribbon around her wrist and a red stocking, looking away from the artist, stunned if not scared. They both look alone: there are just a few inches, yet the distance is huge, and it is impossible not to wonder if Schad's self-disgust and the scar on her cheek are connected.*

The 'model' is unnamed, but she bears a striking resemblance to the transvestite in Count St. Genois d'Anneaucourt, *which depicts an aristocrat caught between his public image and his desires, and between virtue and vice. The Count stands in the centre, ambivalent, seemingly hoping that the viewer will help solve his dilemma: the demure, respectable woman to his right, or the tall invert to his left, his cheeks plastered in rouge, his huge frame barely covered by the transparent red dress that exposes his backside? Either way, the transvestite's resemblance to the 'woman' in the* Self-Portrait *is noticeable, although Schad claims that the model was chosen through a chance encounter in Vienna.*

***

Heike saw the *Self-Portrait* later that week, recording her thoughts in the final entry of the recovered diaries.

Went to the Neues Haus *to see Christian's exhibition. I was alone — none of the girls could make it — and as soon as I got there, a group of society women stared at me, and then went back to the paintings. Of course they were fawning over the one of the dandy who wants to have sex with the hostess from the El Dorado but can't because it's not respectable. "So brave!" they kept saying. "So bold!"*

I decided to find the picture of me, even though Dora told me not to. I should have listened to her. I'd tried not to expect anything, but hoped he might have tried to bring out something *of me — something to show Marlene or Conrad, or even the girls — but then I saw the* Self-Portrait with Model.

I stared at it. Some woman glanced at me like I was dirt, looked back at the painting and then walked away. He'd made a very good likeness of himself, but he'd brought my hairline down and changed the style, made my nose bigger and given my breasts. He knew how much I wish mine were like that! Of course, they were there because he doesn't want anyone to find out how much he likes the third sex, and in the picture, he was blocking me from the waist down. He remembered my stocking though — he was so desperate for me to keep it on — and he added a flower. The gallery attendant said "It's a narcissus, it represents vanity." Then I noticed the scar on my cheek — the attendant just shook his head when I asked what it meant. A man said they were common in southern Italy — jealous husbands put them on their wives.

I could feel the tears coming. I ran back to the Institute and wept, and told Dora that I never want to see Christian or his painting again.

***

In summer 1932, Schad had another encounter with Heike — almost certainly his last. We know this from another letter to Huelsenbeck, dated

Sunday 7 August.

Welt-Dada,

I promised myself I'd never go again, but last night I found myself in the El Dorado. It's been five years, but I'd only been there ten minutes when who comes on stage but Heike, from my Portrait. *She wore this glittering red dress, almost transparent, and I felt scared. As she got down, I called her. She recognised me and tried to run to the bar. I grabbed her wrist.*

"I won't hurt you."

She looked at me, trembling. A couple of the inverts came over. "I'm fine," she said, and sat with me. I thought about when you said that being with her would be the perfect Dada gesture because she was so spectacularly ugly in the Portrait, *but I was stunned at how good she looked — just like when I first met her.*

"You look incredible," I told her. She thanked me. "I can't believe that Marlene is in Hollywood and you're still here."

"You were right," she said, "they don't cast freaks."

Silence.

"Did Dr Hirschfeld …"

"Dr Abraham got there with Dora," she said. "I'm fourth in line. Next year, they hope, if things calm down."

"Which things?"

"Adolf Hitler says that Dr Hirschfeld is the most dangerous man in Germany," she told me, "and if he gets in …"

"My career is finished," I said.

"Your career and my life!" she shouted. "The club, the surgery, the Institute, everything!" Silence. "I might die on the operating table, anyway, like Lili."[6] *She took a draw on a cigarette. "That might not be so bad."*

"You don't need surgery," I said, "you're beautiful as it is."

"If that's so, why did you cover me?" she asked. "It wasn't a mistake — I could tell from that scar you put on my face."

"I was breaking up with Marcella," I told her. "I didn't want to hurt her any more by letting her know I'd been with you."

"The Count's shameful secret," she said. "Your shameful secret."

"She's dead," I said. "Drowned. There's no need to stay here. Come away with me."

"Where can I go?"

She started crying. I held her hand and I was sorry. She went back to her friends. I doubt I'll ever see her again. Will paint to work out how I feel about this. Let's talk soon.

Christian.

***

In October 1932, Franz von Papen, the right-wing Chancellor of the Republic, banned same-sex couples from dancing together in public, effectively killing the clubs in which Heike worked. The Nazis came to power three months later, and as well as stepping up the attacks on Germany's LGBT population, they resolved to destroy its Modernist culture.

Perhaps surprisingly, Schad was not targeted, and unlike many of his Dadaist associates and *Neue Sachlichkeit* contemporaries whose works featured in the notorious Degenerate Art exhibition, he stayed in Berlin, being allowed to submit to the Great German Exhibition of 1934. He remarried in 1947, five years after meeting the young actress Bettina Mittelstadt. In 1943, his studio was destroyed in a bombing raid, and when he resumed painting in the 1950s, his style had become kitsch. He died in Stuttgart in 1982, aged 87.

After Schad's letter, we know no more about Heike. The Nazis raided Hirschfeld's Institute on 6 May 1933, seizing its records and burning its library before repurposing the building and making the El Dorado into the SA's headquarters. Dora Richter had already tried to flee Germany but failed, and was never seen again after the attack. We can only assume that Heike disappeared with her.

Notes

[1] Hirschfeld popularised the term in his ground-breaking book *The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (1910). Despite his title, 'transvestite' did not exclusively refer to people who found sexual fulfilment in wearing the clothes of the opposite sex, being closer to the modern 'transgender' or 'trans'.

[2] Dora Richter, who was castrated in 1922 by Dr Erwin Gohrbandt before undergoing the first ever sex reassignment surgery in 1931. She tried to remove her male genitalia aged six; as an adult, she worked as a waiter in the summer and lived as a woman off-season, for which she was repeatedly arrested and sent to a men's prison. Hirschfeld got permission for her to wear women's clothes and employed her at the Institute as a domestic servant and demonstration patient. 'The girls' most likely refers to the other maids at the Institute.

[3] Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974): Dadaist poet and co-founder of the Cabaret Voltaire. 'Welt-Dada' was his nickname within the post-war Berlin group, and translates as 'World-Dada'.

[4] Dr Felix Abraham (1901–*c.*1938) performed the world's first sex reassignment surgery on Dora Richter in 1931. This was documented in his book, *Genital Reassignment of Two Male Transvestites*, published later that year.

[5] A fairground in the Wedding area of Berlin, frequented by Schad. His painting *Agosta the Winged-Man and Rasha the Black Dove* (1929) featured two performers from its sideshows.

[6] Lili Elbe (1882–1931): Danish artist, intersex person and one of the first recipients of sex reassignment surgery. In 1931, Dr Erwin Gohrbandt performed a castration and penectomy on Elbe, who then had an operation to transplant ovaries from a 26-year-old woman. These were removed in two further surgeries due to serious complications. She died of transplant rejection after an attempt to insert a uterus into her body.

Changing Rooms
ROBERTA FRANCIS

An extract from Roberta Francis' novel, Changing Rooms.

Ma and Da were in hospital. Their nerves.

There was a fire and Da went mad throwing his books into it. Then, the following week, Ma got sick and screamed the house down. An ambulance took them both away, though not at the same time.

Before Ma and Da went away, we lived in Mountjoy Square. It was nice, but very noisy, and all day cars and lorries sped by. It didn't sound or smell at all like the sea. I was living in Dollymount, staying with my Aunt Nuala and her brother, my Uncle Paddy.

Standing in their front room I slipped between the table and the window. Then pushing my way through the red curtains scratched my nose and made a circle in the glass. Quietly grabbing Uncle Paddy's binoculars, I watched. I was hoping the boy from the new wool shop in Fairview might walk by. He looked like a Goth. But all I could see were a pair of pin-stripe trousers. I lifted the lenses and saw a man's face. He had a moustache and long hair. I didn't like moustaches. He was wearing a sign and as he walked along the causeway by the cottages, the wind knocked him a little. He grabbed the sign with both hands and fought hard. The sign said *Save Bobby Sands.* There was a picture of him on the front of Uncle Paddy's *Irish Independent.* I watched the man's pants flutter, until he disappeared.

I knocked the table.

"Get out of me light, will ye," my Uncle Paddy moaned.

"What?" I turned my face towards him. He shook his head and tapped the newspaper with his pencil, tutting. I put his binoculars on the table, beside him, turned my head again and looked across the bay.

"I can still see," I said and as he turned another page of his paper my nose touched the window.

There were cranes in the docks, and the stripy Pigeon Houses looked like sweet sticks of rock. I wondered if the big wind outside would knock them over. As it flew across the bay, it was loud and when it reached the house it felt gentle. It whistled through the gaps in the window and blew salty air against my lips.

Past Aunt Nuala's back garden was a high wall and beyond that a grass bank that ran to the right of the causeway. The grass was soft on the bank and you could slide into the waste-ground. It had millions of long brown sand bunkers. They were a great place to hide. And the tall dunes, with deep soft sand, dragged at your feet till you reached the beach. At the end of the island, a big white statue stood on three legs. Aunt Nuala said it was the Virgin Mary, watching the sea. As I squinted my eyes to get a better look at the statue I bumped the table, again.

"Did you not hear me?" Uncle Paddy asked and stared up from his paper.

Awkwardly, I pulled myself away from Uncle Paddy and walked to the kitchen. When I opened the kitchen door hot air fanned my face. I could smell cooking apples. My Aunt Nuala was standing at the kitchen table, her hands covered by curling peels, her arm's doused with flour. The sleeves on her, shiny, tight, blouse was rolled up past her elbows, and she pushed and shaped dough. Lifting the soggy light brown mixture, she slapped it back on the scratched, wet, board. When her arms tightened, she let go, then her finger pushed as hard as the sea and she hummed along to the little radio that sat on the corner, beside the flour. Suddenly, stepping away from the table, she turned up the volume and moved her arms freely. This time to Boney M. They were her favourite.

"*She's crazy like a fool*

What about Daddy Cool?"

"Can I have some bread?" I asked.

I wasn't sure if she heard me. Pumping her thin arms up and down, and shuffling her feet, she shook her head from side to side.

"Can I have some bread?" I shouted again, as she jiggled her skinny legs.

She turned, and just as the band sang "*Daddy, Daddy Cool.*" her face went red. She pushed her arms to her sides. She lifted her hands and flicked the switch on the radio.

I waited in the silence.

"Christy, I'm busy," she said. Can you not give me a minute's peace? What do you want?"

"Some bread for the gulls, Nuala," I answered. She curled her lower lip, and biting it she sighed. She turned away from me and added water to the bowl, then wiped the back of her hand across her face.

"There's no bread," she said calmly. She looked silly her faced now covered in flour; her dark green eyes that sat behind glasses sparkled.

She smiled.

"Just a bit?" I asked.

Taking a big lump of dough from the bowl, she pushed it into my open hand. It felt wet, and soft and I squeezed it.

"Here, good boy, go out and play, will ye," she said.

I wanted real bread, and I imagined the poor gulls choking on the dough. I found some torn tissue in my pocket and wrapped the dough in it.

Two doors up from Aunt Nuala's was an alleyway that led to a shared back garden. I treaded, timidly, through the shingle trying so hard not to make it crunch. When I got to the end of the lane, I stopped and pushed my palms against the cold, grey, gable wall and peeped around the corner. I wanted to see if Dunno was there. He usually sat on the wall wearing a green bomber jacket and a sea scout cap. He lived next door to my Aunt Nuala's. He said I was scruffy and that my hair was like dirty seaweed. He knew all about boats which I knew nothing about. He pulled my ears one day and called me the *Sam Maguire* cup. He had a gang the Jelly Mustards.

The garden was empty. Relieved, I walked to the thick rose bushes, that grew in a circle, in Aunt Nuala's part of the garden. There was a swing there which was tied between two wooden poles. I sat for a while pulling at the dough and throwing it at the gulls, who flew down to gobble it up. A big rose shook in the wind. It had so many petals, and I was curious. I'd never seen roses as big. Ma had pictures in the old flat, but Da never really bought her flowers. I played with the flower for a while then gripped the stem's sharp teeth. I soon let go.

I wondered if I might have another look in my Aunt Nuala's room. I'd only managed to peak in her room, just for a bit, before mass one Sunday. Her long shining legs were crossed, and she was stroking her face with a big hairy brush. It smelt sweet in there, not like Uncle Paddy's room. That was stale and dusty, pulling stinks to every corner. Her room was at the top of a winding landing. I ran back to the house. The staircase was narrow and scary. I hated looking up when I climbed but I always peeked. Cobwebs stretched along the ceiling, gripping shadowy corners. They looked green and thick, like the seaweed ropes that lifted from the sea, and tied up Mr Barton's boat.

I grabbed the door handle. My hand stung. Gently, I pushed myself in. The room was a box, but it was so tidy. I walked to the bed and sat comfortably on Aunt Nuala's soft mattress feeling her pink silky bed cover with my palm. It felt cold under the window where I sat so I pulled sheet from the bed and covered my body.

At the end of the bed under my feet, a long dress had hundreds of se-

quins. A breeze blew light through the curtains and little golden balls jumped from the cloth and danced around the walls.

On the other side of the room, there were a white dresser and mirror. A bunch of combs and brushes sat in a black, open, leather case. A small wooden basket was filled with shining white pearls. I ran my fingers through them and listened to them rattle. I picked up a set and tried to put them over my head, but I couldn't get them past my ears. I dropped them back in the basket.

Grabbing a brush, I pushed my scruffy hair over my eyes.

Reaching towards her dresser I grabbed a lipstick. Written on the lid in fancy gold letters was the word Rose. I ran the tip slowly around my lips, but I didn't open the lid. My heart was thumping. I pulled off the lid and ran the lipstick over my lips and licked. It tasted like Da's chalk. Quickly, I looked in the mirror. My lips were red. They didn't look that silly. I'd practised with Ma's lipstick before. I wiped my lips with my wrist.

In the centre of the dresser was a blue shaped heart. Painted around its edge were nymphs and fairies. I reached across, grabbed the lid, and tried to turn it. It felt tight and sore between my fingers. But I still squeezed harder. Now the powder threw itself from the box and blew everywhere. Panicking my hands shook, and I couldn't get the lid back on. I left it as it was and bolted from the room, wiping my face. I pushed the lipstick in my pocket and sat on the stairs again.

Transgender Experience and Trauma: Dysphoria and Dissociation

FRANCIS MYERSCOUGH

Much of my work as a Music Therapist has been with people who have experienced early life trauma, and a significant proportion of these people show me some signs of dissociation. (I use the word show because my work in this field is primarily with children, who most of the time do not have the words to describe experience of dissociation to me, but express it some other way.)

Exploring dissociation with clients, with myself, in professional literature, and training, I've come to identify parallels between what we call dissociation and my experiences of dysphoria and ways I have responded to these.

Dissociation

Before exploring further, I want to clarify two things. Firstly, this is a parallel I have identified between dissociation and *my* experiences and ways of navigating a cisnormative world. Secondly, I want to acknowledge the widespread stigma around dissociative experience, and the reticence we as trans people might have to the idea of applying the language of dissociation to ourselves, as members of an already stigmatised community. However, from a trauma-informed point of view, we can see dissociation as a natural and invaluable way to survive experiences that we might not. The trouble comes when we don't have sufficient opportunity to process these experiences once we are safe, leading to a situation in which the experience and/or the dissociative way we survived it come back to haunt us.

There is a wide variety of ways we see dissociation manifest. Sometimes people zone out, some people describe out-of-body experiences, many experiences disjunctures in memory. The boundary of what is "me" and what is

"not me" gets disjointed or muddy. A metaphor I found useful in picturing dissociation is this: if repression is pushing things down and out of site, dissociation is storing things into strictly separated boxes, the contents of which do not mix.

Dysphoria

The type of dysphoria I relate dissociation to here is what some people call social dysphoria. There's something to be said about physical dysphoria and dissociation in our relationship with bodies, and I've heard some careful musings about this from others, but this is not what I am concentrating on today.

One of my favourite ways of responding to (wilful) misnaming and misgendering remains to reply as if the person doing the misnaming or misgendering is talking about someone else, or to express confusion about who they are talking about. I've had a feeling of satisfaction using this technique, which I think comes in part from the way it situates the problem in what the other person is saying; they are saying something in a way that is incorrect or confusing. It also provided a get out (if not always a successful one) from argument or having to assume a role of teacher. More broadly, I could frame the kind of statements made as being not about me, but someone else, in this case someone imagined.

D&D

The problem is, our sense of self is intertwined with the feedback we get from others. In our earliest experiences we are learning where "me" ends and "not me" begins by experiences such as being held by a caregiver. Our understanding of language is also relational: Charles Cooley (1922), an early American sociologist, wrote "We live in the minds of others without knowing it";[1] we best understand what a person is saying when we are able to put ourselves in their shoes and in this way understand what *they* might mean by their choice of words, even if we might have chosen differently.

Externalising the process I am about to describe, it could be seen as performative. But—thanks to neuroplasticity—our experiences, our social world are constantly moulding our brains; our social, relational existence shapes our physiology.

In day to day life, including at work, I don't talk about pre-transition life much, certainly not in a positive way. This is tied up in other traumatic events as well, so is not simply down to the transition element. There are key events and themes from these years that I do include in my life narrative, but in the main, this bit of my history is consigned to a dustbin. And I have forgotten things. For example, I visited one of the two people from school I keep in contact with, and asked who made a collage she had

up on the wall, only to be told it was me. Making clear how much certain others' image of me was fantastical and false has been immensely valuable in separating myselffrom that fantasy, and I would not change that for the world. At the same time, I am acknowledging that I've separated some of the reality of my experiences as well.

We see this come up from kinder intentions when, for instance, a parent of a child or young person I work with asks a question about what sport I did at school. As someone with extensive musical training, it's simple enough, and fairly accurate, to say I concentrated on that, and sport was limited to PE. But it still keeps the reality of what limited sport I did do secure in the box or bin. This example reflects how the boxing away can be a defence again shame and stigma, a response to widely-held social attitudes (or our perceptions of them); to share about PE at school—in which we did traditional "girl" sports like hockey and netball—would be to reveal a part of myself which a parent—or anyone I encounter—might not find acceptable; it might diminish their opinion of me, and in this situation their regard of me as a therapist. And so I keep it locked away, stashed in the dustbin, as if it is something to be ashamed of.

Notes

[1] Charles Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Scribner's. 1922).

The dissociative aspect in my experience of dysphoria comes out of social and relational existence and my response to these. I've briefly described dissociation and the sort of dysphoria this post concerns and given examples of personal and professional situations which bring my attention to disjunctures in my life history.

NB: As in trauma-informed work, I would position this dissociative aspect as a valuable survival method—it is not a problem in and of itself. Rather, the problem comes when we get "stuck" in survival mode even though it's no longer needed, when we've stashed so much away that we lose our sense of self, when our lives get disrupted and we feel ourselves disintegrate.

On Ugolino Devouring His Children

EZRA HORBURY

"Padre, assai ci fia men doglia
se tu mangi di noi: tu ne vestisti
queste misere carni, e tu le spoglia."
Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto XXXIII

In the early days, our captors fed us with milk and with bread and with honey. I gave the honey and softest bread to my sons and left myself with crusts and the sour milk they would not drink. This seemed the right way to do things.

We ate among four black stone walls and in the candleless night I promised them light and heat, and in the dusty scald of day I promised them cool water, a pillow, a small new shiny toy. In these days, they laughed and played and made a game of the cracks in the stone, the moving shadows, each other's hands and feet. I watched them and I saw, day by day, the skin stretch a little tighter over their backs, their features sink a little deeper. The bread was not enough and I perceived clock hands in their bones, a ticking in their slowing breaths. Their laughter left us and the bread left us too, and the milk, and the honey.

At night we gathered for warmth; at dawn we licked dew from the stones. My second youngest sat with me often and grew sick. I held him slimy and feverish like a fish I should throw back in hopes of better meat. My eldest took him from me to rub his back and lull him into consciousness, the way we would with runted puppies, but his stillness could not be moved. His sleep grew cold and we held our first and only funeral. We wept and folded his tiny arms across his chest with ceremony, with propriety, and we laid him in a corner to sleep undisturbed.

The nights of us still-living remained sleepless and cold. The room came to smell of rot and shit. The darkness brought us a new kind of community, like hive insects, where hunger rubbed out our names. By day, my sons pawed at me and asked for food I could not give. I promised them sweet fruit pies and wine and meats on a day very soon—not this day—but soon, soon!

When blindness took me, I grieved the loss of my children's faces more than the loss of sunlight. During this time, I knew my children best by their different pitches of pain, how they cried out for bread, and how their starving mouths sobbed for milk. The word "no" came again and again, "no no no," from an unseen mouth, and I, to my shame, could not tell you which of my sons cried out so.

My only nourishment was anger with my enemy who had put us there, and I let it fill me like hot wine. I gnawed myself with grief and fury and my second eldest saw only his own hunger in my actions. Too young to know what he asked, he wound himself around me and asked for me to unclothe his skin and feast on it, for what right had he to wear this tender meat while his father starved so? He pressed the warm downy fruit of his forearm against my lips and he smelled of the blackberries he loved to thieve in the gauzy Sunday afternoon, and I flooded with saliva.

I set him from me and hushed him, "Shh, my lamb, my faun, shh," and I sang to him a song that had often lulled him in his infancy. As I hummed into his quivering forehead, the second youngest died without my notice. My eldest, who scratched the walls in anger and swore vengeance on our captors, found the corpse some hours later. I gained the knowledge of the death by my living son's stretched, wet, breaking cry. I heard then the shift of a small body into the arms of a large body, and then the dry scrape across the stone as my dead child was brought to me.

"Look! Look!" A hand, almost the copy of my own, gripped my skin. "Look, look!"

Blindly, I looked, and I saw with my fingertips the slack mouth of my boy, my infant joy. His teeth, many missing or giving way to their larger brothers, were dry like old goat bones. I heard my eldest draw away with the corpse into the corner where we kept the dead, and there he sobbed, groaning and rocking, until the rocking stopped and then the groaning, and then my eldest was dead, too.

I brought my still-living youngest into my arms and kissed his lamb-lock hair. He was still warm, his heartbeat strong. Language had long left him but his mouth pressed dry and empty against my chest, his tongue sandy like that of a cat. Much time passed before I learned the warmth in my arms was my own, and the heartbeat was my own, and the thing in my arms was shrunken and dead.

I held the body to my chest with no regard for gentleness as the dark of

blindness swaddled me. The black without and the hunger within conjoined like this, and the emptiness overwhelmed me. I pressed my son's shoulder to my mouth like a ripe pear, damp with sweat, and I can tell you I cried for a long time. Then I ate gladly. I suckled their corpses like a babe; I quaked; I moaned, ecstatic. My belly became warm and gravid. I took them into myself again, my full-grown flock, and I became father and mother both in that violent instant.

In this way, I extended my suffering for many unchecked days. The velvet throat of endless night had regurgitated a feast that I indulged without pause. I chewed raw gristle. I swallowed little fingerbones. I made myself swell fat and full and sated, and my pleasure overwhelmed my grief.

Once I had devoured them all, I rested. I sucked a little leg or arm bone as I lay upon the stones, and I waited for my hunger to return. The shame came with it, and bit by bit starvation and self-disgust ate into the fullness of my stomach until I knew that death was near once more. I felt it nudge against me in the black, curious, encouraging me, asking if the time had come.

"Remember me?" my hunger said. Its voice was that of my wife: sweet, like vanilla, so dear. "Come, let me take you."

I felt no relief in death, only the pain of hunger and, still, a new taste coating my greedy teeth. I woke in darkness again, and in darkness I have since stayed, my enemy in my jaws. His skull is ash on my tongue, and my sons are not here.

[Trans]embodying Patience

KAT CECIL

I remember my twelfth birthday vividly by virtue of having a horrible transition into high school. Mum managed to get a day off work, and we went to the new Pizza Hut off the A14. We ate only stuffed crust and destroyed the salad bar (habits I have carried into adult life). Mum sourced a birthday cake, the whole restaurant sung. I was happy, which was rare. As I blew out the candles, I wished the same thing I did every year, to finally get my own body, the one I was supposed to have. I bargained; I was willing to wait. Seventeen years later, slipping in and out of institutions, both mental and academic, I'm still waiting for my Pizza Hut wish, all be it in a different, messier form.

Trans people are accustomed to waiting, being on pause. I often think about the extraordinary levels of patience we have, both on ourselves—as transformative beings, and on others – as relentless justification. Some dead White philosopher, who I refuse to cite, wrote that patience was a virtue. What is missing from this narrative is the disconnect that patience causes when it is enforced on a person. I am patient because the body I was born in feels like a waiting room, and a great deal of my felt life has been spent imagining ways out of it. Which, when bent backwards, might be viewed as patience, or at the very least a longstanding ability to endure. Patience, under these terms, is less of a stoic virtue and more of an active affect. As a trans person I am not *being* patient. I *feel* patience, and it is itchy, a contradiction to stillness. I embody it so as to work through it. I have to, otherwise I would not survive.

Nevertheless, in amongst all this itchiness, when oriented the right way patience as affect is embedded in liberation and empowerment. Emotions are not explosions of light; they do not exist in a vacuum. Audre Lorde

taught us the importance of feelings, of radical care and self-love as tools for resistance. This of course is easier said than done, and despite many of us performing Audre's words, and performing them well, the blunt reality of loving oneself is actually really fucking hard. It demands a great deal of effort to undo trauma, let alone injury that stretches across histories, and sticks to us like glue. Patience then, is the kindness amongst the hardship of self-love. It is fundamental to care work. I tell myself this when the itching, and the binding, gets too much.

It's my birthday next month. I'll spend it with my locked in siblings, and my Zoom trapped friends. I'll demand a cake, I'll make my wish—but this year is different, there is a finality to my wait, and a reality in my imagining.

My body is close. I am patient with my body.

The Liminal Shore

JOANNE WINTER

The ocean stretches endlessly, all-consuming, save for the thin spit of pebble on which I stand. Given time, it will devour that too, with teeth of white spray, bite by bite until nothing remains. All things return to the brine eventually. For now though, it is content to lap sullenly against the shore, and I am content to watch. Occasionally, I swear I can see something out there, some creature, amongst the surf.

The sea is a good place to think about the future; I heard that in a song once, and I have always found it to be true. The blue-green vastness, at times violent, others still as the grave, is a constant throughout my ever-changing existence. I've always thought of myself as a strong person, resilient, but I find myself coming here often lately. Here to where I'm alone, properly alone, with only the gulls for company. They soar high above me, tracing circles through the air as they glide on salt-breeze, and I start to trudge onwards in an attempt to stave off the cold.

In the distance a lighthouse juts, monolithic, and solitary in defiance against the granite sky. From its zenith winks a pulsar, the rhythmic glare serving as an unwelcome reminder of the world I want so desperately to leave behind. A world filled with people who, though they look like me, are not like me. A world in which I am monstrous.

If nothing else, it's a destination, and I'd do anything for one of those right now.

The wind whips at the little skin unlucky enough to remain exposed, but it is nothing compared to the storm that rages within me. My thoughts race, unable to process the confluence of emotion that feels like it may tear me asunder. I let the anxiety, the hopelessness, the embarrassment and smouldering fury wash over me, as wave washes over pebble. Gradually, the tide

of my breath slows, ebb and flow distancing until a relative calm is reached, and I can think clearly.

It took me a long time to realise I was different. To become at ease with being. It came so naturally to others, but never to me. For years I thought I was broken, somehow; I still do occasionally, on my worst days, when the weight of it all is crushing, like so many leagues of saltwater. On those days it is hard not to drown. Hard not to cease struggling, and let the current drag you down.

It is a strange thing to feel alien—truly alien, a creature from the darkest abyss. From the way some people treat me you could almost be forgiven for thinking I was. Almost. What do they see in their eyes, so vacant of empathy? According to them, I am a creature to be maligned and feared. A predator lurking in the shallows, waiting for a moment to strike. A fish out of water would be more accurate.

Even though you may learn to ignore vitriol and vilification, over time it leaches into you. It inundates and saturates you, whereby a crust forms, barnacled and smothering. It tarnishes and corrodes, right to the centre of your being, until you start to believe it. How could you not? All great Neptune's ocean could not wash you clean. You become contradictory, neither fully human, nor the horror they see you as, though you know yourself not to be.

Perhaps that is why the shore speaks to me. It too occupies an impossible position, caught between the great bastions of sea and stone, yet somehow a stranger to both. A place of change, perpetually shifting at the whim of forces beyond its ken. A place defined and moulded by the meeting of disparate elements. A solitary place.

When you exist like this for so long, finding a way out is hard, like catching the moon in your hands. I found it to be, at least. But it is possible. For while it was easy to think I was alone, I was anything but. Others exist like me; profane, esoteric, aberrant, yes, but kind, strong, and *magnificent.* Each unique, yet alike. Once, like me, they lived on the shores of the liminal, if such a thing can be called living, but found it lacking. Alone, we were deviant; together, we are proud.

How long have I been walking? It's hard to say. However long it has been, I have reached the lighthouse. Breathless, I clamber over kelp-slick rocks, eager to rest my weary feet. The gentle crash of breaking waves suffuses my senses until I am one with the tide. Time passes, but I do not leave. The journey back is a long one, and I no longer have the stomach for it. What is there to go back to anyway? Better to press forward; I long to know the shape of water surrounding me.

Despite everything, it remains radical to embrace monstrosity; it is scary to own that which sets you apart. Why take the plunge when you could

remain on dry land? The shore is solitary maybe, but tame and familiar compared to the great expanse of the open ocean. Courage is required to take that first, cautious step into the blue, not knowing how far out the tide may take you. No matter how long you need, remember that we are here, submerged, multitudinous, waiting to embrace you with open arms.

Come on in. The water's great.

lobster,snake
ENNIS VERDEN

Things start to move behind Kaeyed's eyes, shifting and out of focus, lulling him into a sickening pattern. He pulls the blanket over his head, retreating into a warm cave. Fluff bouncing his breath back, wet on his face as he drifts into the uncomfortable closeness of a dream.

> The grass rolls, purple painted background stark against the sepia blades. Palest pink cotton candy. Falling into the grass. Closing around like a crowd. Tasting the sugary residue of his sweat.
>
> Kaeyed blinks up at the inside of the tent, rope and metal bars lying in the mashed up grass. Rope thicker than his grip, coiled like a digesting snake. His spine moulds to the nest, gaze drifting jittering away. From the stripped skin of a bird, pre-cooked, made into a man, stretched above in a pink line. Moving near enough to smell the dirt under his nails, as they dig in places they shouldn't. Kaeyed's mouth stretches open into horror,

(Sorry, sorry, *all too close*)

he gasps awake.

pulls the covers from his body, a hand grasping out to grab the light. it flicks on, glowing floating. he looks down at his skin. running his fingers there, there, on there. jumping, talking. letting you know, letting you know

you're dirty. you're dirty. kaeyed gets up, blanket around his body,

struggles not to slam the bathroom door, dropping the blanket to his feet, gripping clumsily at the bath tap.

water falls over his skin as he climbs inside the tub, pouring down the tips of his knees, a river to his groin. he rubs his throat with his knuckle over and over, all around, making it red,

isacc, isacc

pain jellyfishes his chest, he holds the bath tub still with a slippery hand.

the water warms, turns hot, boiling boy in the water.

kaeyed folds his head into his knees and heat hits his scalp, fills his mouth, choking his face hot. he pretends the wetness is tears, pretends this is normal for a long minute. pretends he's a crab, hot, hot, red claws, he's a crab maybe, he's crazy maybe.

kaeyed shuts his mouth and looks at the pale porcelain, blinking, eyelashes clumped together. *and hands stroke down his back in a smooth motion* and he shudders, lifting his head suddenly, cracking it on the tap.

everything turns to crystals.

his hand comes away bloody.

kaeyed drags himself out of the water. lying on his side on the cold floor, blistering, wet. pathetic. a laugh caught at the bottom of his throat. dressed in all this flesh. drowned in his flesh.

the door opens, it—it has been opened. knees, hips, head above

him. kaeyed gathers up his limbs, tries to. but folds,

folds.

Ráish
Ennis Verden

Free Writing
BOW BRIGHT

From a seed, a fallen nut happened to be covered, rained on and warmed. It was perfect, nothing else I could want or need, until I saw him. He fell. Not from too high, but he found my branch to perch on nonetheless. This was after some dedicated years of growing, mind you. I was probably a few feet tall by then and had a few branches to my name. And there he was, standing on my outstretched arm. He wasn't injured too badly, just in need of rest. I was glad. He spoke to me. A beautiful, melodical voice asking for shelter from the rain. His delicate wings needed time to rest. So I opened myself to him.

POETRY

With Adult-Sized Hands

FRED TURTLE

My girl writes poems that have yet to hear
of the invention of the radio. Never held
a small, perfect hologram of Toby dancing
in their palms or counted static across dome
television screens. She writes original
email-subject lines, kneels as if in prayer,
the typewriter sinks into a blanketed kitchen
armchair throne. She remembers the year
and almost stops breathing.

Outside there is a tree growing blue apples.
Our neighbours watch from the garden wall,
the future is always unprecedented. I lean
my head all the way out, smelling burnt sugar
and reach towards the horizon.

What Is a Fish?

we're sat in the £4.50 aquarium reading children's books
we're both sober this one is great though it's got flaps
with questions on and some are easier to answer than others

You've felt it, at some time
or other you must have.

yes heaved crying feels a bit like fish
spines in chest/entrails leaking/salt

Hard to define by any physicality,
due to the varying length and breadth
and shape and colour

i ask you to name as many fish as you can because i know you
know more than me and i want to get it over with

of the fins and appendages,
dorsal, tertiary, etcetera.

have you seen those the deep sea jelly disco
vulvas swallowing each other/bioluminescence
is a queer signifier mate that much is ours
that we have no shape in deep water
swaying past or eating each other up

One struggles to find any
unifying feature, beyond perhaps
the bulbous eye.

the deep sea jelly disco vulva has no eyes
it does not know anything that we know

Better then to know the thing
by what it lends us. Sensation
and quality of its presence.
Observe it coming towards you
in the wet weak right palm of this
business casual man. The greying
state ofhis face and limbs
attributed to a certain many
-toothed fish. Habitat:

when i was seventeen i did construction admin
invoices excel and old jim sat opposite saying don't
worry soon you will meet a man and do his ironing
don't worry me and the receptionist have a death plot
with your name on it your terminal your dark hole

urethra. Nothing to be done
when the second and third row sink in.
The handshake is softened for life.
Now let's be clear, a fish is not

a cod i mean a codependent at seventeen
but weren't we any kind of nothing back then
no love don't go home like that half malnourished
nothing for you there but the electrical fire mocking

impotence. Rather, a fish is
a deep and private wound obtained
whilst swimming somewhere
one ought not to be.

we could just sleep under convex glass
dreaming all yes all our colours
knowing some things forgetting some
living on and on in spite

Dandy of the End Times

ARDEN FITZROY

I remember when you and I would meet for a sporadic croissant.

You'd say that it's four hundred calories of nothing, and that a moment
on the lips is forever on the hips and
hips.
I wasn't really listening. I was enjoying our especial frisson,
over our sporadic croissant.

This was in Paris, of course.
All the maître d's laughed when you asked for
croissants in the evening, so we took a walk down the
Pyramides, and you framed the night in your laughter—
and your spellbinding nonchalance to our especial frisson
over some sporadic croissant.

All those changes we made to folk songs.
Poor old Molly Malone. Rude bits made
ruder, but we were young, drunk, stupid,
young—it was last week—and I was there,
finally, at 4AM in an Irish pub, your sunless dressed-in-black debutant,
taking your spellbinding nonchalance over our especial frisson,
thinking of our sporadic hangover croissant.

Something about the silence of the pre-dawn
makes me want to smear some red lipstick on,
roll some leather boots on, get my Errol Flynn
on, because you know I have a Master's in Disaster, but
I'm no paint-by-numbers bastard and besides, I don't need to invoke this
dapper glamour-ghoul aesthetic when I'm haunted by this want, this naughty
renaissance, forever your obscure débutante,
to whom you are spell-bindingly nonchalant—
exorcise our especial frisson and stuff this

sporadic croissant right in your red mouth.

Don't go looking for the portraits in my attic.
There are better tombs to kiss at Père Lachaise.
Maybe I played my hand too early but it's all dandy and
dandies in my amnesiac kingdom and it's me who snipped up
all the cards. None of this is meant to last, but
always remember those nights of freedom where we'll always have Paris—
in a naughty renaissance,
signed: your anti-villain debutant,
still under your spell-binding nonchalance
to some especial frisson
like a sporadic croissant,
four hundred calories of nothing and
vive la résistance.

Arden Fitzroy
Karen Frances Eng
@oculardelusion

the lies they (we) (must?) tell

ED DAVIES

living in the male gender role
pressing my thumb against the camera
the case pops off, my phone naked
and tender in my hand;
folding myself into dull, drab
clothes, a trap, a punishment;
wiping my lips until they bleed, checking
for leftover sparkles from yesterday's
Mac trip and theatre and fun I regret today;
can't risk it, can't risk my self for my self.

hysterectomy as he suffers from a genetic disorder
the next day as I shook, alone, cold, burning hot
on the bath mat, I steeled myself and prayed
for protection. not from the fear that crawls
through every gay man in this moment. from
my gift that keeps on giving. it's illegal to be pregnant
on my visa; it's illegal to pretend you don't
understand *no*, but guess whose skin
the law sticks to.

always was a tomboy
I breathed once we reached the park
safe, let go of his hand and twirled,
and laughed, and my heels click-clicked
on the July-scorched pavement.

wanting to be a boy
there is no wanting,
only being
and yes, but no.

THIS SECTION MUST BE COMPLETED

I lean on the counter with confidence
and allure, knowing you don't expect
both. you look at me twice, fingers
on the keyboard, as your database
screams for an answer.

we are not in a position to continue this prescription without expert guidance
the kitchen floor is sticky against
my cheek, paper to a fly in my GP's ear,
hollow-voiced, begging, demanding,
finally silent. she tells me to go back
to my country. hangs up. one week of life
left in my bathroom cabinet.
and that is not all, but I do not let myself
think about what else.

our service is not commissioned to provide care
every list of lies must hold truth.

no history of any suicide attempts
I watch the gap under the blind
the feet in the waiting room.
her silence tactical, measured.
I know I hesitated too long so I
scrabble in my mind for an offering
blood in my palms, presented to her,
head down:
one time, just one time,
I hurt myself. I forgot until just now.
she smiles for the first time with
her next words, triumph as sharp
as a knife on my wrist
"that's not never, is it?"
no, I agree.
I keep my smile inside.

socially drinks
the nightmares chase me
to the bathroom floor again

and I promise myself fruit for breakfast,
metal in my mouth.

made good eye contact
I have moved and danced and smiled
for their photos and their students,
defused and soothed and suggested
and averted my gaze at their Googling.
it doesn't work here. I'm a long way
from home. for the first time,
I find nothing in her eyes but hate.

rapport was established
fuck you.
fuck you.
Fuck you.

not quite not yet
AARON GABRIEL

sometimes i look
past my or through
my hands these hands
that feel there
but aren't, perhaps
that seem full but also
translucent, thin like
warm skimmed milk
that have the exact shape
of a hand but
not enough bones or
maybe, too many

or maybe just maybe
all of the bones
but made of lint
or, marshmallow (?)

these my hands that
pick up that drop that
hold that i place or
don't
these hands they are not
quite here they
are lilting or half-here or
somehow without

they are like my face
these full lips this chin the
hard ridge of my nose
the pockets of blueing silk
embroidered, soft
beneath my eyes

the curve of my forehead and
these my peachlike cheeks
they are like
these things that are
there and firm and deep but
weigh nothing at all

i am like
a drawing of me, but someone
has rubbed out
the edges

as if when
i shook off that mantle when i
unhooked the rotting albatross
from about my neck when
i fell to my knees
and snapped open and up and
into myself as if
then, i stepped out of my
full my own real meat my
and into a body made of
tracing paper or gauze
a body that took shape
held it, somehow
but was blank or hollow or
bare or cleft or
was both there and absolutely
not there, at once
sometimes i look in the mirror
for myself for me to
find the brief edges of my face
the places where the light
sits and stays or
the shadows below my bones
grope for something thick a
substance a texture or
something i can't deny
but i can't i

pull my hands back and
there is nothing
but whispering palms
and the smell of burning

sometimes you tell me
or they do or someone
sometimes you say
you stroke the parts of my body
that you can see
and ask why
i am missing some
why i am without why
some parts of me are
faded or abridged why
some parts look like
the paper was wet
when they were drafted
with soft lead pencils
and trembling hands

i try to tell try to but
i know that
i don't know know that
i cannot talk
that if i speak to your
curious to your desire to your
blank and widening i will only
slip further out of reach

to tell you that
there are some parts of me
that don't quite exist
that maybe will or won't
to tell you how
to beg you to
not touch to not look to
that if you press too hard
i will crumple and fold

in a heap a heap of
cartilage maybe some skin
and pieces of ivory

sometimes i
walk off
into the cool stone shade
of some old grey tree
plant a stick in the earth and
watch the dark line of the sun
count the hours the days
hold off and out for a time when
i am more full or less empty or maybe
a time when your hands
your tongue won't
push won't smart won't
warp me like that
won't scrape or sculpt me
back into what i was
or into
anything at all

a time when my lungs will
fill with air when
i breathe a time when
food tastes of something when
desire has somewhere to go
some flesh to fill to fire
when you can call my name
and really mean me
a time when i am no longer
some hard question not
the sad end of some joke but
the answer to the unspoken or
the plea
on both our lips

what we know

we know how to touch
we know how bodies are meant to
we know because we've always known because
you told us
over cups of black tea
and tonic

we know because
we can't not know because
we've read all about it
in the books of our bodies
and the pamphlets you gave us
about safe sex and not
we chewed them up and
spat them into papier mâché
shaped them into beads and
balls and chains and cocks
to strap on or in

we know how to wield
these weapons, yours, the ones
we made, as well
where to place the shapeless
gape of our bodies
that you feel, when we don't

for you, we have filled out
leaned in to the bends
the hard bones of our pelvis
the jut of our broken hips
we have taken you
because we know how
we have closed our eyes inwards

we have felt you
as if we were made of rubber
or leather or felt
as if we were as numb
as the latex stretched across
our sprawling parts

we have bitten our tongues
held them in our mouths
bloody and limp
given ourselves up
to you, to them, to anyone
we know our place
we know how to move
how to moan how to gasp
how to gaze as if we were
seeing anything at all
into your longing eyes

we are blinded, deafened
bleached and stripped bare
but still we move
we curl and blossom
into folded paper shapes
origami on your unmade bed
bent, plied, twisted, smiling
a big wide smile
a false fat smile
a smile of bright veneers
and silicone lips

to bring you shuddering forth
as we know how
because we know how
dim unfeeling static
to lie

Aaron Gabriel

A Brief Love Odyssey

SERIN GIOAN

Lush as
A smooth green new-grown pear—
You tremble in the light—
Without a care
And if I dared—

I'd pick you
If I might—

Sweet as
The Gentlest Sabbath—
Your warm soul brushes mine—
For such instants
Of fleeting bliss—

We kiss the cool Divine—

The (A)gender Chronicles

my gender is trigonometric
all sharps and angles

that is all

The Butternut Squash
TASH OAKES MONGER

there is a butternut squash in the drying up rack

it has been washed with fairy liquid
very thoroughly
in case of it harbouring the virus

along with all of the weekly shop
cereal packets gone soggy
and potatoes lined in rows on a tea towel

and even though there seems to be a shortage of joy
in this apocalyptic world
there is something about that butternut squash

standing proudly amongst the soap suds
that makes me call out to you
draw you in to the kitchen

and we laugh from our bellies
about how silly it looks
and there will always be time for that

The Silver-Topped Bottle

you made porridge on the days that the angry crack in your
forehead was least pronounced
you made it thick and oaty so it sat heavy in our bellies like the
gesture feels today
you always poured a border of cold fresh milk
and only ever allowed one spoonful of sweet brown sugar
and you always savoured the silver topped bottle with the first
pour of rich rich cream
that we knew
was yours

when she was born
mother said there would be sacrifices to make
and we made them
she also said that the golden prize in the silver topped bottle
belonged to the baby

she stands now almost tall as you
hair reaching the out-curving of her hips
smile still half caught in the pink corner of her lips

and I do not remember the last sacrifice like when you spared
the cream
from the top of the milk
for the baby

people ask me why I have a tattoo saying UGLY on my arm

HEI LAM

People ask me why I have a tattoo saying UGLY on my arm—
some with
caution and tenderness tell me
that I'm beautiful as
if I didn't know,
or some
with smirking shrug and say:
Well it's just ironic isn't it?—
It's not.
How is it ironic?
I *am* ugly.
Don't

tell me I'm not ugly
when they speak of me in hushed voices—
a shadow that sweeps up children,
stalker in your bathroom stalls, a
topical disease, a
bomination before God.
Yes! Freak of nature. Anti-science. Shabnak or Frankenstein's monster.
Every day this list grows longer.

I shudder to hear them speak of Thailand

every time I walk towards a bathroom

when a stranger eyes me up and down

none of you speaking up.

People say to my face I'm not ugly.
Gaslighters!—I am.

I am
beautiful in
spite, not instead—
I'm beautiful because.

how shall i forgive you mother?

how shall i forgive you mother?
shall i forgive you
at all?

shall i forgive as your son
or your daughter? (as both?
neither?
either or?)

when i think of the girl you forsook, i
feel such anger on her behalf,
i trace the winding
path it took
(we took) to become
at long last
concrete—to
now
exist
and i
tremble
in rage you would
cast her
out—would sew her back
inside of me, would
ban her, even,
from your
own
funeral.

i had neglected her all these years.
she lived
unloved—bursting
to share herself

but time and again
was smothered—
unmothered unfathered unbrothered unfriended un
dead. last week i
read my teenage poetry,
and saw her leaking from the pages. i
remember now: how she was
poured out like potted
plant dirty water.

all this that i had fought for
shall i forget for you
my mother?

Yet then I think of you and I feel a welling of tears:
I can see you
this very moment—
in the kitchen
at the sewing machine
on the way to the grocers, wondering what
new ways there are to
spoil
your younger son.
Occasionally you'd
look up from your
busying, and, seeing him,
flash that
bright
sunny
signature
smile

SHE'D INHERITED THAT SMILE!
if only you can see it—
how in pure joy she
feels the sinking of warmth in her chest these
days, thinking slinking plotting
all the ways

to bake more smiles
on the faces of lovers and friends and curious
strangers
who now
flock around her, embrace and
engulf her—you not amongst them.

so then
HOW CAN I BE SO SELFISH?
why tussle over
one person denying me if
i have so many others?
is it not your son who has the stubborn temper? shall
not your daughter now
shush him? am i not happy enough without
mother can i not just quietly in hiding love her is
this not the lesson i had finally learnt
from past and present lovers
                the lovers she'll never
meet
                that
true love is not possessive?
can't i
loan this body bind it confine it
        as man as son
                for just a
couple of days or
weeks a year? am i so weak that such an act would
make me disappear?

oh tell me tell me tell me
my mother—do you want then to be forgiven
by your son or
by your daughter?

fruit salad
HARRY MIZUMOTO

days tossed with dread,
sickened—the stomach filled with the smell of fish
slivered like chicken flesh between two pointed fingers—
curled lips and nails: yellow like the phlegm
which drips from throat to tongue
to sink, where i wash my sins

(not a stretch, it's where
i left my underwear

stained wet with wet
two convex cupping water

there—)

an accusatory glance is thrown into the air
and pinched between the brows like Goliath

(eyeye
i i
i before e
except after see)

because
a pebble is all it took—

The Tyre Swing
LOWIE TREVENA

The tyre swing hung above the stream at the bottom of the garden,
And the drop was enough to hurt, break your arm, graze your knees
She remembered the keys.

The keys to the backdoor, to the car, to herself.
She wanted so badly to unlock herself,
But all she could think in the glinting sun was
Don't fall, don't fall, don't fall.

A Sunflower

A sunflower blooms,
Standing taller than me,
It sees and knows all.

On the Northern Line

JOSI PHENE

Here we go again on the Northern Line
Time after time on the Northern Line
I've travelled hundreds of miles on the Northern Line
Golders Green to Waterloo on the Northern Line
To Camden Town and Leicester Square on the Northern Line
Climb the stairs on the Northern Line
Live the nightmares on the Northern Line
Never get used to the stares on the Northern Line
Whispers and nudges on the Northern Line
Surreptitious filming on the Northern Line
Lots of interest of the adverts above my head on the Northern Line
Someone shouts at me on the Northern Line
"You should have been strangled at birth" they declare on the Northern Line
"That's a wig, not hair" on the Northern Line.
"Tranny on the train" on the Northern Line
A victim of crime on the Northern Line
Surrounded by football fans on the Northern Line
"It's a man, it's a man it's a man" on the Northern Line
"Your balls are showing" on the Northern Line
Creepy chat-ups on the Northern Line
Followed and harassed on the Northern Line
Deliberately pushed on the Northern Line
"Can you spare a dime?' on the Northern Line
It's not fair on the Northern Line
"Ignore it" says TfL man on the Northern Line
Who cares on the Northern Line?
I'd rather not be here on the Northern Line

Back home again off the Northern Line
Thank you for travelling with me, on the Northern Line.

Into the Circle
ROBERTA FRANCIS

Phantasmagorical, I couldn't get the words out of my head.
Da knew what that was like, and I wondered when he met Ma
On Cable Street Bridge, Wolverhampton, did he hold the toffee between
his fingers, before he kissed her lips.
"Phantasmagorical" that's what the lad on the tele said, when his Dad
Asked him, "Pretty what?"
"Pretty Phantasmagorical with an F"
That's what they felt like, my banana chews
I couldn't get enough of them into my mouth.
Phantasmagorical, I couldn't get it out of my head
The way HTV West shimmered on to our T.V screens
And a wailing wind crossed the crippled stone and screamed,
Into the circle.
Phantasmagorical.

Noah's Dove
ROARY SKAISTA

Song lyrics from "Noah's Dove", released on *Alien* (2019): roaryskaista.bandcamp.com/album/alien

This song is to all of the cis straight white men
Who think that the world is their own;
I can see why you hold that opinion,
For that is what history has shown,
But just because you've always been the top dogs,
That doesn't mean you have the right
To discriminate, patronise, taunt and abuse,
And I promise I'm up for a fight.

And when the world comes tumbling and crashing down around us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for you to send us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for Noah's dove.

The world has been shaped by a number
Of wonderful people with wonderous plans;
The ones that you've heard of are most likely male,
Able-bodied and probably not trans,
But just because you haven't heard of the rest,
That doesn't mean we don't exist,
And I feel like it's time for you to recognise
That it's got to the point that we're pissed.

And when the world comes tumbling and crashing down around us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for you to send us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for Noah's dove.

Now let me tell you a few things about sex
And gender and LGBT:
Some people are female, some people are male,

And others are non-binary,
And this is the gender you feel in your head,
But it doesn't always correlate
With the length of your hair, or the shape of your hips,
Or the people who you want to date.

And when the world comes tumbling and crashing down around us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for you to send us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for Noah's dove.

I can tell that you find it embarrassing
To know there are those who can't walk,
Who are deaf, who are blind, or are missing a limb,
But that's no excuse to stop and gawk,
And a disability can be there in your head,
But not obvious at first sight,
And autistic brains may work differently,
But that doesn't mean we are not bright.

And when the world comes tumbling and crashing down around us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for you to send us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for Noah's dove.

And people of colour, whether British or not,
Are just as important as you,
And so are those immigrants that you detest,
And those who support the EU,
So please put your privilege aside for one minute
And accept that we all are the same,
And if you don't try, but continue to hate,
Then it's only yourself who's to blame.

And when the world comes tumbling and crashing down around us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for you to send us,
Sitting in the ruins we'll be waiting for Noah's dove.

I know that this song has one fatal flaw:
Those who need the lecture are not here,
And there's no way to force them to listen,

But let me make one thing quite clear:
That though I may be preaching to the converted,
We all have our own part to play,
And all of us can help by spreading this message,
Be you white, black, disabled or gay.

And maybe then the world will not come crashing down around us,
And there won't be a need for—
And maybe then the world will not come crashing down around us,
And there won't be a need for Noah's dove.

Roary Skaista

Learning Self-Love

RYAN NAGYPAL

A friend once said
Repressing your artistic soul
Will make you unhappy.

So,
How am I supposed to soar
If I'm the one who keeps
Cutting my own wings
Shorter and
Shorter?

Asked the angel as he looked
In the mirror,
Pieces of his flesh marred under scars,
Bones sticking out
Feathers f
a
l
l
i
n
g.
Sometimes your worst enemy is yourself.

Form 1
ELLIE MILNE-BROWN

at first it was the horror—
that pin-prick—looking in the mirror
the rising sick—the dread—
the disjointment—hatred
of not seeing me—of what that meant—
and oh that savage—heart rent
at knowing who i was—but—
that constant, endless cut.

as time's gone on though—
as i've got—heartbreakingly—to know
every inch of discord between
myself and me—that pinching, so keen
pain has deadened. and—
knowing there will be no end—
knowing that the pain will
spread—will become all—until

—until that dread—dulled
by its monotony—but—never cold—
it cannot be contained
until—fully drained—
it finds new forms—squeezes
new parts of me—teases
the edges—like lover's caress—
a tender touch—leaving a carcass

—which leaves—the clutch—that fear—
that endless—never feeling home—here—
and never quite fitting in my skin—
feeling forever trapped—pinned—
cursing what i cannot do—what
i do not know—the lack of that—

—that what?—that essence—
that others so easily affect—the sense

that they are filled, fully
them—who as i am falling—
have the secret—the core—
the knowledge—the cure
to this feeling—the terror that i am not—
not—not—what?—
that runs through—through all
—all through—fall—

h——— road
M. KNIGHT-ADAMS

was it reddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
or ——————————————————————————
——————————the touch was coarseeeeeeeeeeee
——————————————————————————maybe
lllike Walker's Salt and Vinegarrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthat rough patchhhhhh
——————————————-above your teethhhhhhhhhhh
yyyyyyou can trace it with your tongueeeeeeeeeeeeeee
llllllllllllllllllllllllike a maze you drew at schoolllllllllllll
the one with the secret exitttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut the street sign was smudgedddd
orrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
———erasedddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnot seen
bbbbbbbbbbut the grooves on the paper were still there
——————————————————deep enough forr
————————somethinggggggggggggggggggggggggggggg
——————————————————not seen but stillllll
——————————————————————————— space
pppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppphysicallyyyyyyy
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand maybeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmentallyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
bbut enoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
tttttttttttttttto miss the tungstennnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaanddddddddddddddddddddd
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthe closed circuit television
——————————————————————————— enough
fffffffor a pink pussy bowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttto fall innnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaanddddddddddddddddddddd
nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnever be recovereddd
enough to be a hole to slip into
——————————————————————————— or

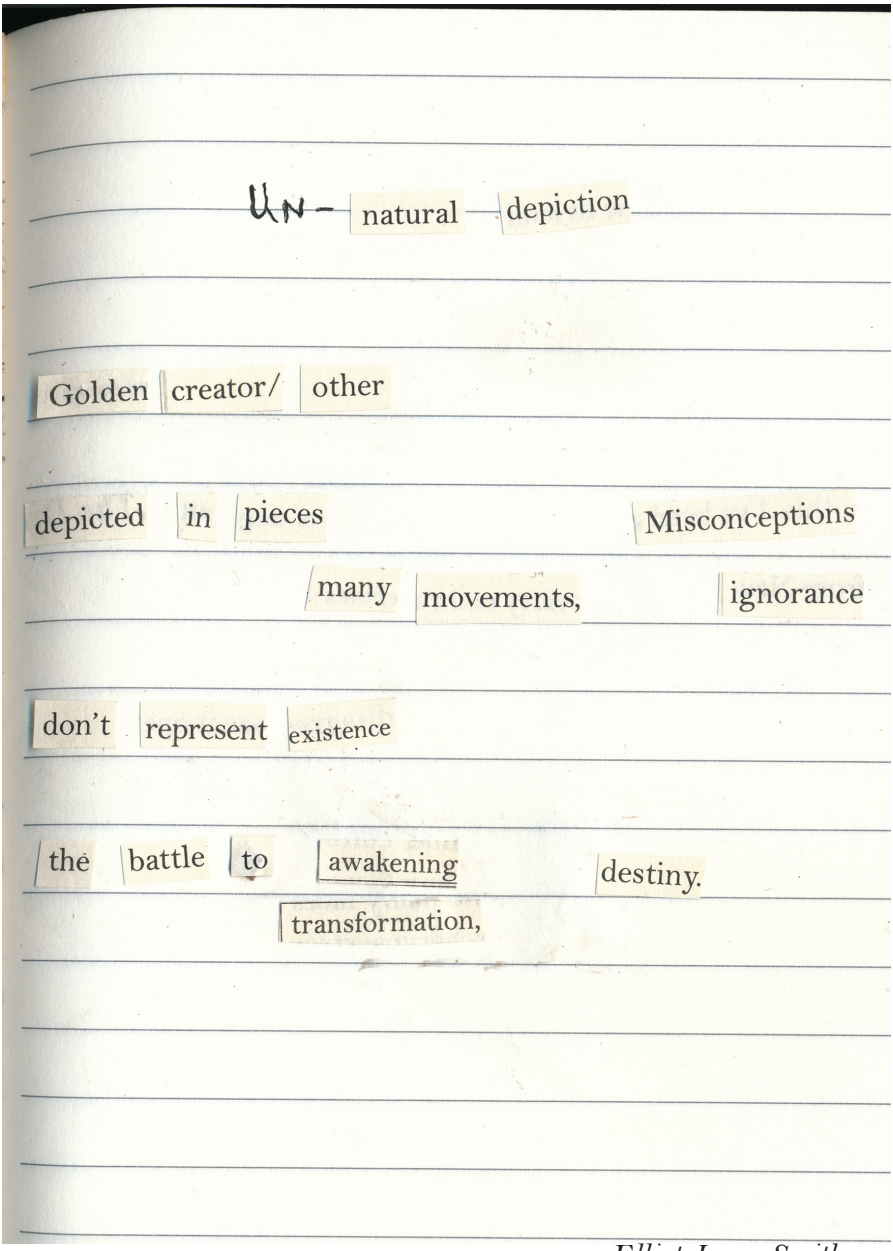
to be seen ——————————————————————
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaas suchhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
bbbbbbbbbbbbut the street sign was thereeeeeeeeeee
ddddddddddddddddefinitely thereeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
—————————————————————— orrrrrrrrrrrrr
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii saw it on google maps three years later
sssssssssso it was thereeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
but not seen——————————————————————
at the timeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut
dddddddddddddddddddddddddddddefitelyyyyyyyyyy
ffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffelttttttttt
or ——————————————————————————
it was reddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
tttttttttthe coat wassssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss
dddddddddddddddddddddddddddddefitelyyyyyyyyyy
redddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
or ——————————————————————————
mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmaybe orange
bbbbbbrink orangeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit was darkkkkkkkkkkkkkk
So I couldn'tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
Bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut so was heee
Iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii thinkkkkkkk
Bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut it was dark
sssssssssssssssssssssssso there was no way of knowing
bbbbbbut I knew ittttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii
ffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffelt ittttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
bbbbbbbbbut of course that's not evidenceeeeeeeeeee
ttttttttthats not a finger printttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
nnnnnot the maze your mum and dad madeeeeeeeeee
bbbbut still the one they cant help you out offffffffff
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthe one the police
can'tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
ffffffffffinddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
bbbbbbbbbbbbut got lost innnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
tttthe one you can't changeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut will never know

the one the police gave up on———————————
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthe touch that told the story
that needs repeatingggggggggggggggggggggggggggg
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttto knowww
————————————————————————————————————or
fffeellllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllll
————————————————————————————————————or
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthe touch that liked
ttttttthe pink pussy bowwwwwwwwwwwwwwww
ttttttttttttttttthat saw it in the streettttttttttttttttttttttttttt
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthat smiled
or ————————————————————————————————
sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssnarled
————————————————————————————————maybe
or ————————————————————————————————
sssssssmiled/snarleddddddddddddddddddddddd
eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeenoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
ffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffor me to say hello
at 1:2777777777777777777777777777777777
or ————————————————————————————————
lllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllater
————————————————————————————————maybe
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut not beforeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
mmmmmmmmmmmmy last message was definitely
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbefore
anddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthe touch that liked
ttttttthe pink pussy bowwwwwwwwwwwwwwww
ttttttttttttttttthat saw it in the streettttttttttttttttttttttttttt
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthat smiled
or ————————————————————————————————
sssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssnarled
————————————————————————————————maybe
or ————————————————————————————————
sssssssmiled/snarleddddddddddddddddddddddd
wwwwas definitelyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
afterrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
———————————————————————————————— I think
or ————————————————————————————————

tttttttttthe finger smudged the street sign yessssssssss
or was that meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
──or
was that that the mazeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
bbbbbbbut I definitely didnttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhave control
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii didnt decide
or I did decide buttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
it just happened ──────────────────────────────
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut it was there
Ddddddddddefinitelyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
ttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthere
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand was definitely cold
because it was dark enoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
tttttttttttttttttto miss the tungstennnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaandddddddddddddddddddd
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthe closed circuit television
──or
because it was december 18th 201777777777777777
──or
because the touch was warmer than the signnnnnnnn
but not warm like the mazeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
your grandma made your mummmmmmmmmmmm
or ──
the primary school sunnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
or ──
──-but
warm like curdled milkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthat spoiled
the primary school sunnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
──or
warm like burnt skinnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
tttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttthat spoiled
the primary school sunnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
that peeleddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
──or
wwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwas easy to peel
lllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllike an orangeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
In your lunch boxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

but bitterrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
uuuuuuuuuuuuuuunbearably bitterrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
bbbbbbbbbbbbut not a lemonnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
ddddddddddefinitelyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
Nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnot a lemonnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
ccccccccos dad told me to make lemonadeeeeeeeeee
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand I couldn't
but neither could heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
neither could the police missingggggggggggggggggg
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiin the lost and foundddddddddddddddddd
wwwwwwwwwwwho believed meeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
ddddddddddefinitelyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
bbbbbbbbbbbbelive meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
———————————————————————but
was it there?????????????????????????????????????
———————————————————wasssssssssssssssss
————————————the signnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
———————————————————————-thereeeeee
ccccccccccos dad couldn't find itttttttttttttttttttttttttt
neither could the police missingggggggggggggggggg
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiin the lost and foundddddddddddddddddd
wwwwwwwwwwwho believed meeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
ddddddddddefinitelyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
bbbbbbbbbbbbelive meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
———————————————————————-but
was it there?????????????????????????????????????
———————————————————————or
was I there?????????????????????????????????????
———————————————————————or
was he there?????????????????????????????????????
———————————————————————or
who was there?????????????????????????????????????
———————————————————————
——————————————————————— norrr
bbbbbbut the carrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
i remember a carrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
it was reddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
ttttttttthe car wasssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss
Ddddddddddddddddddddddddddddefitelyyyyyyyyyyy

Redddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddddd
or ——————————————————————————————
ggggggggggggggggggggggggggreyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
or ——————————————————————————————
————————————————————not seen but stillll
———————————————————————————— there
Pppppppppppppppppppppppppppphysicallyyyyyy
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaand maybeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
mmmmmmmmmmmmmmentallyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy
ttttttthere enoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
ttttttttttttttttttto stopppppppppppppppppppppppppppp
ttttttthere enoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
————————————————————————————————to see
to hideeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee
bbbbbbbehind the lightttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttttt
bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbut
ttttttthere enoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
————————————————————————————————to see
and turn away————————————————————————
ttttttthere enoughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
————————————————————————————————to see
————————————————————————————————-the sign
and turn away————————————————————



Elliot James Smith