

HER ROYAL MAJESTY



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

“Everything we are is at every moment alive in us.” – Arthur Miller

“In the beginning was the word,” and then, only a little bit later, “the word was made flesh.” The Bible thus tells us that flesh and language are intimately, causally, related: this instance of flesh did not exist until it was spoken into life, transformed from word into material. Though flesh is connected to our concept of life, it does not necessarily equal *living*: sometimes flesh is just that which surrounds the bones. But flesh is more than simply body; it means something more than what is material about humanity. The word is used to describe family or kin, plumpness in anything, carnal appetites, and substance and reality. Flesh, also defined as “that which is opposed to mind or soul,” is subject to a personal kind of invasion or corruption, and can be a source of shame and contempt. Hamlet speaks of his “sullied flesh” and longs to shed his “mortal coil,” emphasizing his body at the base of an implied hierarchy. Our weaknesses of all kinds, not just physical, are expressed in the idea of flesh as both a barrier and an access point.

I’m interested in the relationship between flesh and word and the way that this relationship is manifested and unified in language, particularly in writing and translation. In the third issue of *Her Royal Majesty* I talked about the etymology of the word ‘metaphor,’ and I was surprised to discover that ‘translate’ has a similar etymology: “to bring, to carry over.” Extending the Biblical word-to-flesh metaphor further, it’s possible to see that, in translation, words and flesh are both malleable entities: the word is fleshy, a supple substance of which our realities are comprised.

Virginia Woolf called for the reinvention of language by women and opened the way to new kinds of writing, new forms of “textual pleasure.” An exhibition of exclusively female artwork at the Centre Pompidou in Paris includes a series of letters on the premise that the form of the letter ascribes a specific relationship between people: a writer and a reader, a ‘to’ and a ‘from.’ The uncredited blurb-writer quotes Woolf in the introduction to the section of the exhibit devoted to letters, saying that letters bring with them “a relation to the body, to reading, and to the ‘other’ that is the central concern [of letter-writing].” The introduction goes on to explain that correspondence is, first and foremost, a form of address. I might stretch this to say that all forms of writing – fiction, non-fiction, poetry, play-writing, recipes, etc. – are forms of address, of communicating to an audience, of bringing the word to flesh.

I was talking to a friend of mine about the phrase “more than the sum of its parts.” As a devout atheist, he denied the sentiment behind this statement as it applies to human life: “but each part is important! there is nothing more, and no need for anything else! nothing is greater than the individual!” I agree to some extent – eyes and fingers and lungs are miraculous in themselves, yes – but without the intelligence to process movement, flesh is just flesh, words are rigid and inaccessible; nothing gets translated, “carried over,” or transformed.

I present you with this: a collection of words and images, of flesh and its opposites, and of words and paint made flesh.

Harriet Alida Lye

Editor

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body forms

What You Said *by Michelle Engel*

Being a bear,
asleep all winter long,
you said:

Keep me in mind—
we are two parts
of the same idea.

Your best metaphors
are immaterial.



Equilibrium
Jennifer Porter

SETTING THE FEATURES

by *Patricia Kim*

She puts on her gloves, the right one, then the left, latex snapping as they are pulled into place. Her fingers touch the flesh of your face; they graze the orbits of your eyes, so blue and so wide. They make their way down to your mouth bent in a wry smile. She turns to a bowl filled with lather and dabs it around your lips and your strong chin. The razor she chooses is blue, *Blue like the night outside*. It's made of cheap plastic, but you don't care. She is careful not to cut you, she is careful not to look away as the blades remove the last of the hairs overgrown. She smiles into your eyes, and tells you goodnight while she pulls two white caps from her pocket. *One for each* as she places them over the eyes and lowers the lids. Next she picks up the needle, curved like a sliver of the moon, and threads it. *Now for that smile*. Her left hand holds your jaw as she adjusts the overhead light, the thumb curled into your lower lip so she can see your gums. The needle goes in and through, up behind your front teeth and into the right nostril. She is careful not to pull too hard and pushes the point through the left and back down into your mouth. *Let me see that smile*. Loose ends tied, she snips the extra length of thread. She stands back to observe her work, walks around to the other side to make sure everything is in its place. *Well, do you think they will recognize you now?*



Screen shot 2009-12-26 at 7.58.58 PM
Adam O'Reilly

Psychosomatic Stomach Ache

by James Gregor

It was impossible for even the most dorky, maladjusted and acne-tormented young man to feel ill at ease in his presence. He could reassure and calm the fattest, most neglected and beleaguered girl. In college, he had often found himself at parties with music blaring and groups of attractive young men and women dancing suggestively in the middle of the room, overpowering the less confident with their taught bodies and gleaming smiles, the ease in their hips and mouths. Against the wall or in the corner, there would be a random distribution of thin or fat young men with erratic facial hair, concave chests, t-shirts afloat on their bony shoulders, and a look of frightened though inexhaustible craving in their eyes. Tall, sandy-haired, with a generally-permanent though painfully-achieved smile, he would enter the room, see the rejects accrued in the corner, and make his way towards them. A greeting, a handshake (no winking—he used to wink and then came to realize, with horror, the infantilizing, condescending, really smug nature of *that* action in *that* context) a gentle leading them over to the table for a drink or to a member of the social inner circle, one of the elect who might be amenable to a conversation with one of them or, failing that, he would engage them in a long conversation himself, a discussion of exactly what was going on in their lives at that moment and what had gone on in the past and what might go on in the future. After watching them loosen up, take in a drink or two, and generally raise their heads a few inches from the ground, he would push them towards the dance floor, swing his hips with them for a minute or two (once he had even done the *Macarena*), smile, wave his hands over his head and sway his drink to the beat of the music, and then slip away to find the

next person suffering their own little hell of rejection and neglect and bottomless self-loathing. When he felt that he had made the run of the entire party, that he had searched out every socially-awkward wallflower and removed a few bricks from the barrier of their deep-rooted paranoia, and let a ray of light into their dark, dank lives, he would—sweating now, a grinding nausea tearing up his insides—retreat in as calm a manner as possible to the bathroom furthest away from the crowd, and there he would lock the door and sit down quietly on the toilet and burst into tears. Stroking his temples and convulsing, nevertheless he would be careful not to make any noise which might give away his location, and after several minutes of snot pouring down his face into a cupped hand, the sobs would generally subside into a whimpering like that of a small animal buried in snow, and then into infrequent, jagged swallowing. In his mind and stomach the immense hatred he felt for everyone gathered in the hot, thumping room—but especially the friendless, introverted autists lining the walls—would mix with the guilt inspired by this hatred, each subtly refining the other in a kind of emulsion until an absolutely toxic, acidic compound would form somewhere at or near the centre of his body. It was only at this moment that he felt the only remedy was to get up and go back to the thumping room and find someone who had suffered some kind of social slight or rejection or broken heart and have them open up and pour it all out on him so that, like a strong gush of water, it would smother the awful radiating ball that had assumed a position right at the centre of his stomach and which seemed to be eating right through it at that very second.



Ninjas at the Gym Rebecca Roher

SET PIECE

by Kirby Best

What is something that you have learned during the past 10 years?

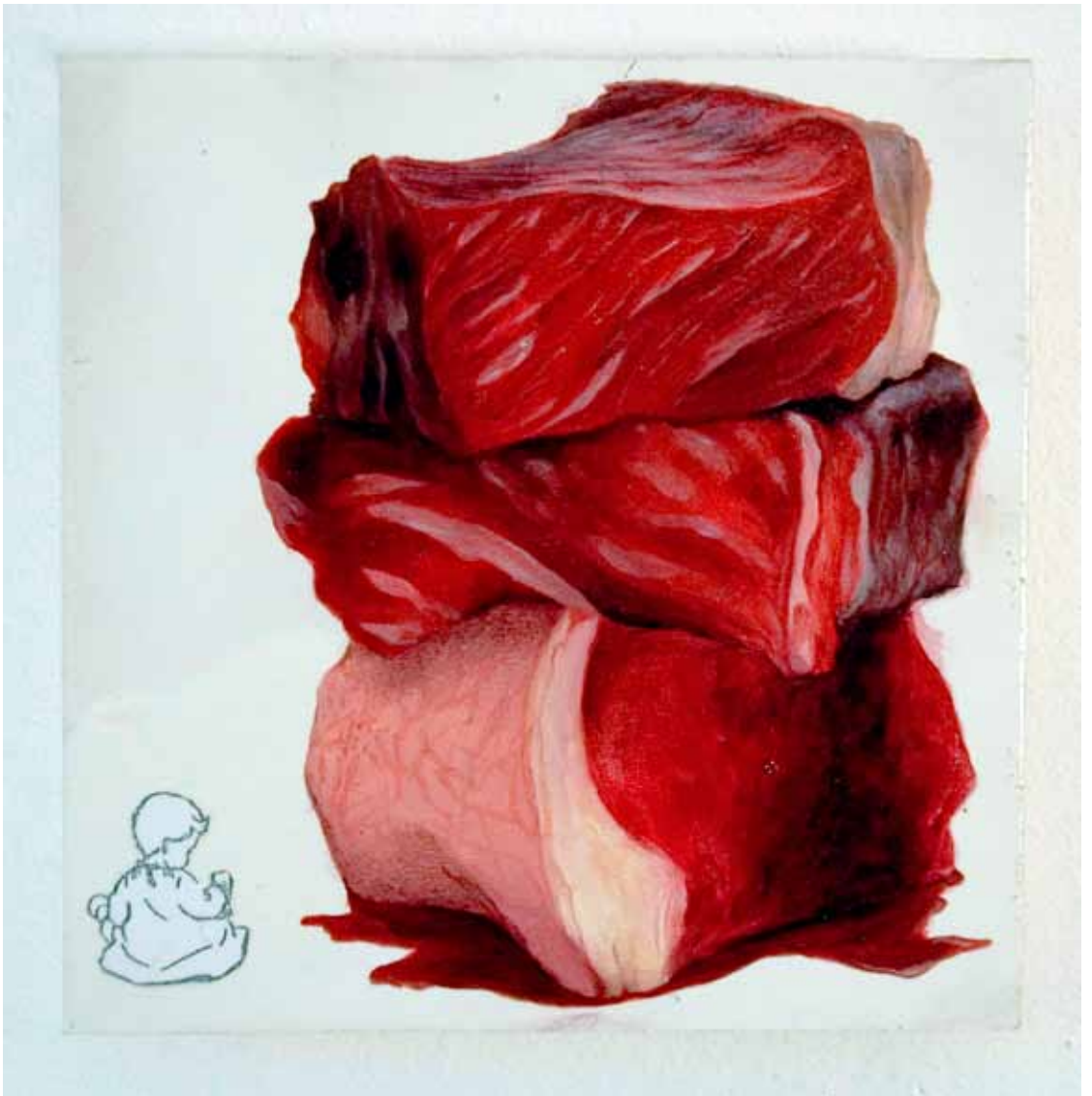
*I at least got a toehold on how to fight. The kind of fighting where I listen.
I don't agree, but I listen. And, like it or not, listening changes you.*

-Miranda July

I am
in blood
and in salt
reminded, why
we're here.

no longer averse
to a slave wage
for some sympathy
I part my lips,
in the service
of some—
more countable joy.

I am (always)
in blood
and salt
reminded, why.



Meat Baby
Ashley Lamb

Cecily

by A. F. Matlock

Cecily had promised her mother that she would fall in love with the first man who walked into the barn dance that night. Her mother was used to hearing this kind of thing from the girl and hardly even heard it. Having enjoyed the spoils of being the baby of the family, she was still, at fifteen, girlish and green. Cecily had “fallen in love” a dozen times; she was always looking for someone on whom she could affix her affection. Though her love struck as real and sudden as a stomach-ache, her experience of it bore more relation to a fable or a prophesy: mysterious, allegorical, and grounded in some vague moment other than the present.

Cecily’s mother was canning her pickled eggs, cucumbers, and beets, and allowed Cecily to languish uninterrupted, sprawling all over a chair at the kitchen table.

- I know it, Bonna, I just know it.
- Mmm. Bonna lifted her face and pinched the sides of her nose.
- I mean, I feel it! Right into my bones!
- There’s a difference between knowing and feeling, Sissy.

Bonna (this was the children’s derivative for the name everyone called Cecily’s mother, Bonnie, which had nothing to do with her real name: Eleanor) sighed.

- Cecily, oh Cecily.

Bonnie did not stop her swift pattern, a dance deeply entrenched from years of twisting, boiling, lifting, and drying, as she passed the mason jars along her own personal assembly line. Her thick ruddy arms wobbled as she moved. She exhaled this exhortation every time her youngest daughter made these declarations, these vagaries, of love.

- Oh, Cecily.

It was the weekend of the annual county fair. It was a good year for it: March had been rainy; April had been cool and sunny; and on the first weekend of May the radishes were small and crisp, the green onions were buttery and stringy, and the beet greens were bitter and tender. Everyone in the neighbouring towns came to Bon Secours with their late-spring harvest. Bon Secours was

the halfway point between the larger towns of Barrie and Newmarket as well as being right on lake Simcoe and, if those weren’t reasons enough to hold the fair in Cecily’s town, the reason of tradition trumped all the others. From Gwillumsbury to Belle Air and Fennell to Churchill, people gathered proudly to sell and trade and share and talk and dance. The residents of Bon Secours slurred the town’s name into one word; nobody had any need for “Good Help,” or “Safety in Need” and so pronounced the name like a lollipop, or a childish taunt: bun sucker.

Emmanuel Boink was the first man who walked into the dance. His face was shocking to Cecily. He looked like a sculpture of a Greek god – she had studied such images in her history textbook – that had broken and been reassembled, as though the clay shards composing his face had a universal perfection to them that was just slightly off-kilter and in a state of constant transition. Dark blonde curls coiled around his ears, which, thankfully stuck out slightly: absolute perfection would have been unpleasant. Cecily turned to her sister Nancy, sitting next to her on the bench at the far end of the hall, drinking a Shirley Temple without a straw, and whispered in her ear: It’s him. I know it.

Emmanuel Boink was the perfect dancer: bored and strong. He moved Cecily the way that women move yarn when knitting, always in control of the movement. Emmanuel was a foreigner – to Bon Secours, at least – and she felt this in the way that he touched her, his hand pressed into the crook of her lower back that nobody had yet drawn her attention to.

- Where do you come from? she asked.
- Newmarket, he said.

When he said it, ‘Newmarket’ sounded provocative, exotic.

- Is this your father? she nodded towards the rigid elderly man that he had come with.
- No, my uncle. I live there with him and

my Aunt.

Her face was pressed into his soft flannel shirt and she smiled the way a person does when they are right: satisfied and smug, rather than happy.

When the dance broke up for cherry pie, Cecily scampered off to gloat to Nancy. Emmanuel Boink left.

At the fair the next day Cecily was sampling the Schultz's jams – raspberry, boysenberry, Saskatoon berry – when she felt Emmanuel Boink standing behind her.

She turned.

- Let's get out of here, he said.

Prepared for this kind of thing – hopeful but never expecting – she took him to her house where he waited at the end of the driveway while she took the keys to the old green car. She took the Belle Air road to the Point that craned into Lake Simcoe. They continued North to lake Couchiching. He put his hand on her knee while she drove, and he looked out the window. They walked out into the grasses.

It happened too quickly for her to ensure that the sketch she had created in her mind, the outline of such an event, aligned with the real thing. It was, in fact, messy; the colours did not fit inside the lines. In the pale long grass by the lake, they were fumbling nearer to something that was too self-conscious to be ecstasy; Cecily was too aware of the newness of her body as he moved his hands along it, sculpting her, creating her, with each touch. The clumsy apparatus to which she was attached was heavy and seemed to have nothing to do with her, she being the opposite of weight. It was the opposite of ecstasy, then, that they found together in the coarse grasses by lake.

Emmanuel's body was heavy and hard.

It grew dark.

Lying there, looking at the inky sky, Cecily looked over at him and stared for a while, unembarrassed. His expression revealed nothing: he looked as stoic, solid, and eternal as a sculpture.

- What are you thinking about? she asked

A change, so sudden and subtle it could have been a trick of the light, altered the formation of the clay-pieces of his face: he became almost unrecognizable. From sanguine to angry, the bridge of his nose, the epicentre of the sculpture, and

his sharp cheekbones, became more prominent, recessing his round sloe-eyes beneath his feminine eyebrows.

- Nothing, was all he said.

- Look, up there – I think that's Venus.

She hoped that, in pointing his gaze towards a specific place, she would share with him the same view, the same perspective, the same feeling.

- Where?

Cecily, for the first time, now had real events from which to base her memories and feelings of affection. They formed the strict outlines which she now had the freedom to colour in. The way he licked his lips, the way his toes pointed slightly inward when he walked, the rough brush of his cheek. The feel of his skin, so smooth it was almost rubbery. She returned to these memories until they were as worn and tired as a love letter re-opened, re-read, and re-folded, repeatedly.

Emmanuel Boink left the next morning. It was Monday, the Fair was over, and Cecily and Hank were down tidying up the tables with Bonna. The Fair was held right next to the bus station.

- You're a sweet one, he said, looking all over her cheeks, her jaw, her little nose.

- Really?

- Come see me soon, he said, in a tone she could not identify but trusted because she wanted to. He gave her a piece of paper on which he had written an address in Newmarket.

She held his address as one holds onto a letter of this kind. She never wrote to him; that wasn't what he'd asked her to do.

Five weeks had passed quickly, in fits, coloured in her memory in large sweeping strokes of pink and green. The little floating ideas and all the possible shapes her plans could take had crystallized into these precipitates: the letter, the bus ticket.

She slept deeply,

\$4.50.

and left the next morning.

Open-Ended Return Ticket: Bon Secours to Newmarket.



M. Buisson
Ronit Meirovitz

SIGNATURE

by *Harriet Alida Lye*

1. THEFT

November wind has ripped the last leaves from
The branches, bare in the courtyard,
holding up the heavy sky.
An orange cat yowls.

It is too late to go for a walk by the river.
A walk by the river would not solve anything.

I will lose
The story of the time you fell on the ice,
your finger carved with a figure skate
leaving you a sickle-shaped scar.

I will try to render it with allegory,
and fail.

When time has carved memory into
[some noun goes here],
time's slender blade will slice this, too, away.
The scarred hand, the scraped heart;
You will no longer exist.

2. THIEF

Naked tree branches are signs for
at least four things, one being
words from a dead language you cannot understand,
notations in a frantic hand.

You killed someone in your dream
You woke up and confessed a dreamless sleep
Your lover licked blood from your lips.

You almost remember his name,
You can hear his voice, a hoarse whisper

The taste of mud and metal in your mouth,
a sullied silver knife:
"You are mine."



The Pristine
Julia Grummitt

TRANSLATED: TO PARIS

by Geoffrey Gilbert

What I have done with this Baudelaire poem is not really a translation; rather it is a transcription of how I was reading Baudelaire at a particular moment. I wrote it when I first came to Paris and was falling in love with the city that Baudelaire had written. To fall in love with Paris is terrifying because it is beautiful and does not need you. The city arranges itself as total beauty; nothing lacks. The visual surface seems unbroken, like the flatness of a canvas. This is frightening because there is no space for one to be in, no point of entry, no perspective through which a connection can be made with this place for life to flow through.

Baudelaire's poetics, it seemed to me then, are tense with this dynamic. Such extraordinary surfaces, and such a withheld promise of depth. And at times, like other poets of modernity, he transfers this sublime aesthetic onto quite a lazy story of gender and of desire. The beauty of the world is given as a female body which is flat and complete, and which also contains a mystified and inaccessible—sometimes a mythological—depth. And the reverence for that total beauty can easily give way to a desire for penetration or destruction or abjection.

So I tried queerly to rewrite some of Baudelaire's poems in order to defuse this dynamic. I invested them with a different erotic structure, one in which the withheld depths of the object—the 'grottes' and the 'abîmes' and the 'gouffres'—were located, correspondingly, within the body of the subject.

La Vie Antérieure

J'ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,
Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

The Psychoanalytic Tense

a silver hat please
-Frank O'Hara

Jump the next ten lines: empty rooms
in which I lived outside, resonant with structures, lights
and reference. While they are rich in sound
and pillared (wooh); lit, contrived, and big,

I lived in them, repainted them with sea, and so
remember. They serve as weight: the things
I had to do to merit naked slaves. I've put all that
behind me

naked calls for naking, which
isn't stripping down or getting through, but a
promotion of the rump. Perfumed naked slaves:

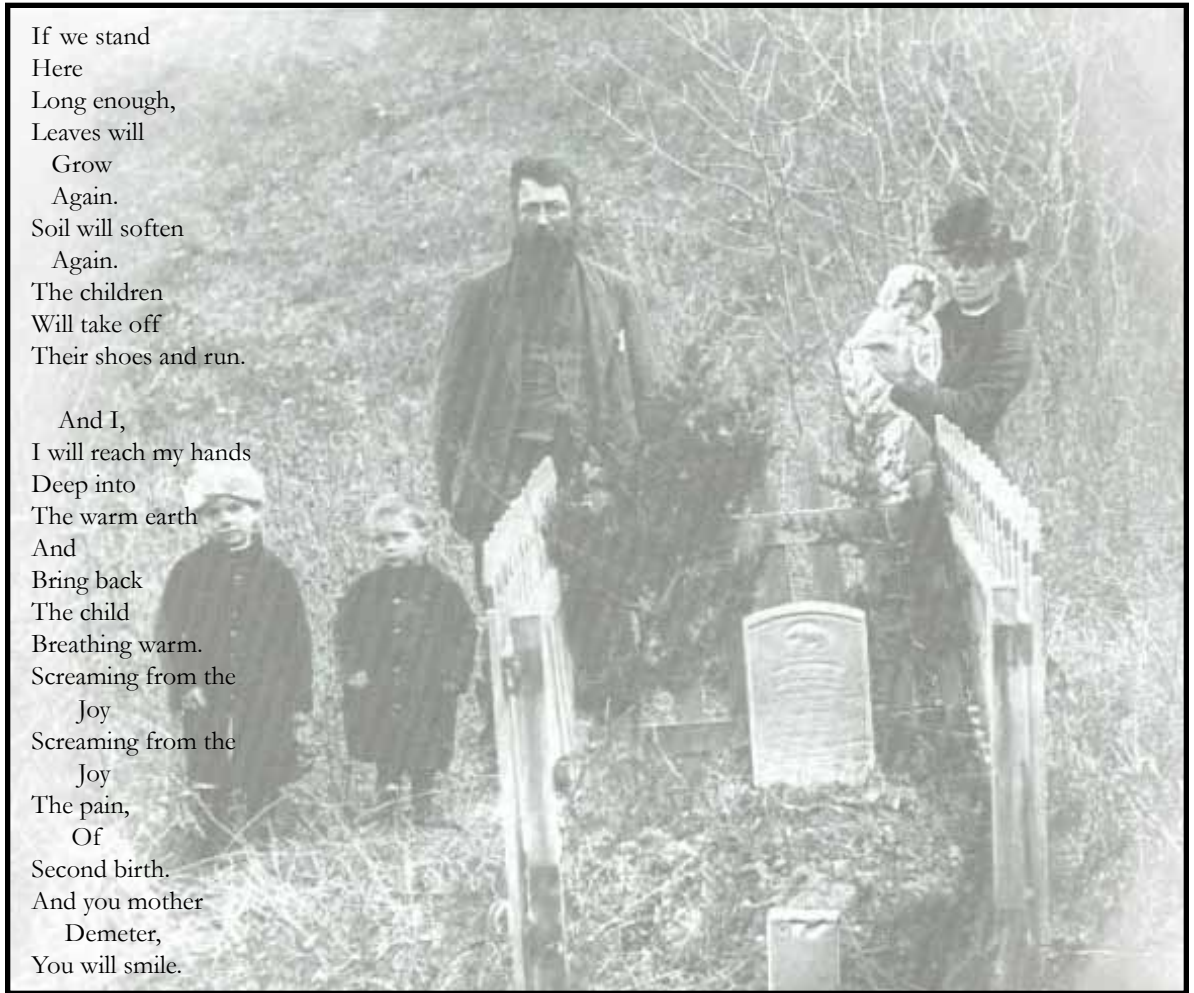
Their forms are threatening. They have all the force of free desire.
I'd orbit slavishly around them, they are all autonomy demands.
Their only duty, all they have to do
is what I want: they guess perfectly,
filling out the line and pressing close behind me.



Bath with Movement
Alex Kanevsky

If we stand
Here
Long enough,
Leaves will
 Grow
 Again.
Soil will soften
 Again.
The children
Will take off
Their shoes and run.

And I,
I will reach my hands
Deep into
The warm earth
And
Bring back
The child
Breathing warm.
Screaming from the
 Joy
Screaming from the
 Joy
The pain,
 Of
Second birth.
And you mother
 Demeter,
You will smile.



Bryn McLeod



Once, Twice, Three Times a Brain
Jennifer Porter

STUFFED APPLES

In the prime of apple season, my flat-mate and I decided to host an apple-themed potluck dinner party with the goals of using up our harvest and becoming creative with this somewhat basic ingredient, the origin of all things: the apple.

The kitchen covered was apple peels, this simple savoury recipe is one which stuck.

- 1 packet of ready-made falafel mixture
- 1 tbsps. olive oil
- ½ lb. ground beef
- 1 medium-sized onion
- ½ tsp of five-spice
- 5 apples, cored

Caramelize onions on medium heat with the olive oil. Add ground beef and cook until done. Prepare falafel mixture in a large bowl as directed (adding water) and add the beef and onions to this. Add five-spice and stir. Stuff the cored apples with this mixture, and bake at 275 for 15 minutes.

APPLE AND BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

This soup is sweet orange velvet in a spoon. The fresh ginger leaves a warmth in the throat that lingers on cold winter nights.

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 butternut squash, peeled, seeded
- 2 pears peeled, cored (about 2 cups)
- 1 large onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 tsp curry powder
- 1 tsp ras-el-hanout
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground cardamom
- 1 tsp fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup apple cider
- 2 ½ cups stock
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ freshly ground pepper

Cut squash in half, coat with a bit of olive oil, and roast for 40 minutes in a 375 oven. Heat remaining oil in a large stockpot over medium-low heat. Add onion and garlic to pot; stir to coat with oil. Sauté until onion is transparent. Stir in pears and all spices and continue cooking until the onion begins to brown. Add the roasted squash, then the cider. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, and cook for three minutes. Add the stock, lower the heat to medium-low, and simmer until squash is tender. Blend mixture until smooth. Return soup to the stockpot and reduce the soup to desired consistency, stirring occasionally. Add salt and pepper to taste, and serve hot.

a two-way letter: APPLE BREAD

Do you remember me bringing me a steaming hunk of that bread I'd made to bed that night? I'd drizzled honey over it, and you didn't want to eat it because you'd already brushed your teeth, but you did, and I know it wasn't easy for you. I wanted you to have some before you left, though: you paid for half of those apples; you'd picked them and I wanted you to eat them. They were half yours.

It was an unmappable mess, a muddle of ingredients you'd assembled from the produce we'd picked and the pantry you raided. There was zucchini, I know, and carrots, too, which we'd dug from the hardened late-October ground. A familiar warmth: cinnamon, nutmeg. Pockets of crystallized ginger and chunks of apple that had softened into a surprise. Walnuts. The edges were burnt, the loaf having been forgotten in the oven, but the inside was raw.

Grated carrot tugged from the loaf and hung from your lips like strings of dental floss as you ate. It was delicious, you said. It was snowing outside and the window was open a little, emphasizing the difference between warmth and cold, between inside and out.

But you know the wedge of bread I'd brought with me to the airport? I have to admit that I threw most of it away before boarding. A combination of heat and uncooked dough trapped in the airless plastic bag had caused it to ferment slightly. The bit I tasted reminded me of the apple I liked best from our trip to the farm. Beneath a sandy chestnut skin, the flesh of this particular apple tasted of wine and cherries; a complex lilt of sugars verging on alcohol, a thing becoming something else. The loaf had become almost inedible: I couldn't eat it, because it'd already changed. Canadian Gold, it was called. Funny. I pick apples on a farm in France and fall in love with a Canadian.



Interior with Meat
Alex Kanevsky

LION

by Isabelle Parker

When you place yourself in the path
Of a wild thing, you should expect to be harmed.
If you stand with your back to the trees
Facing the dying light in the hunting hour,
It would be madness to feign surprise,
Knowing that from behind the thorny grasses
Watches a creature of merciless design,
Born to feast on flesh like yours.
As Markham, choosing to cross the crimson earth
That was her father's ranch, at the edge
Of the bone trees, in the parched throat of Africa,
Suddenly felt the predator's weight bear down upon her.
As the heavy jaws closed silently on her shoulder,
The mane fell down around her face. One bladed paw
Drew tight around her chest, her slender frame
Pressed into the dust, her twisted legs pinned
Against the red earth, under the white trees.
She felt the carrion breath, her bones breaking,
Closed her eyes, exhausted, waiting patiently to die,
But at the last moment, summoned by the servants,
Her father appeared with a gun and the lion vanished
Like thunder into the dry air of the savannah.

In her memoirs, she describes this moment
As unbearably lonely, and almost mourns the loss
Of her death at the hands of a wild thing, having turned
Her back to the trees, and faced the dying sun,
Because when you place yourself in the path
Of a wild thing, you expect to be destroyed.
When you walk boldly into the drawing shadows
You must understand completely that temptresses,
Having sacrificed themselves, can not ask for pity
When their hearts are torn out gladly
By innocent murderers, deep in the golden grass.
Watching from behind the candlelight, this is what I considered
As you ruthlessly spoke of past love, and then defined beauty.
While your shining eyes recalled African voyages
I, reckless, having also wandered, chose to step into your path,
Invited you to take me up in your teeth. In this way,
There is no tragedy here. We both made a decision,
And neither is blameless when the end of us arrives.
Until then, we agree to continue this futile hunt
Over the endless plains, and later, in a pool of blood,
Weary of pursuit, the hunt concluded, having satisfied
The pounding drums, to lie down in the dust together.



Mille et Une Nuits
Rosy Lamb

Winter Skins

by *Cynthia Spring*

In August the water's warm enough
to swim, despite the cooler breeze
that blows the season to the edge
we dread, yet float toward with ease.
You always dove to frigid depths,
beneath the warmer layer:
You learned what you could not forget,
our calloused fingers felt lifeless ice.
Perhaps the tips never regained their feeling,
or perhaps you never sought such feeling again.
It's an answer old friends don't seem to be seeking.
In silence we are trying to make amends.

I live like the green leaf,
I seek the fading light of August sun.
I didn't know you felt differently.

W, M, W

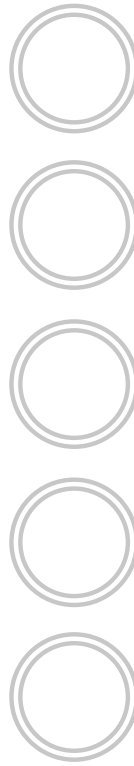


Void
John Gagliano

The Mole

by Jeffrey Greene

When you go down,
you rule the underworld,
endowed with strange
powers of sense
and black haemoglobin
to keep your breath,
muscles to channel
clay under humus
and flowerbeds to the roots
below the planetary
parts of a garden.
You are a clawed carnivore
of wriggling things,
though made like
the softest parts human,
napped bone and skin.
Here are the damp odors
of summer solstice,
breached solitary walls,
a night breeze
in the upper world
like a ceiling fan
turned low.
You knuckle up
the dark side,
earth-covered shoulders.
No need have you
of sight to mate
a velvet glove.





The Fifth at Woodbine
John Gagliano

“What do you think about when you’re doing it?”

“Nothing, really.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

He loves this about her already, the way that each time she speaks she was learning how to speak.

“I mean, yeah. I don’t think about my body, or art, or nakedness or anything poetic, really. I don’t really need to, you know, because enough people are doing that for me, about me. My body is being elevated into art just for being there, sitting there, still.”

He lifts his glass to his mouth, and misses. Bullshit, he thinks, though he is bewitched.

“Have you done this a lot? Is that why they hired you?”

“No, no, not at all. I met an artist and she asked me to, and then introduced me to other people, and, well I just have the shape of a woman instead of a twig. Which works for them. French women tend not to make very good artist’s models.”

She takes a sip of mango juice and wonders whether to continue. She adjusts herself, moves to her stomach and props herself on her elbows. She is on the bed, he is on the ground.

“I saw this thing once at a museum in New York—I was living there last summer—that was made by some Buddhist artist. He’d designed a room that was meant to elevate people’s minds to a level of high contemplation. I thought it was kind of trippy-dippy and new Age-y, but I went in anyway, just to see. The artist, I forget his name, designed this room so people could just sit in it and relax, and the ambience of the room was meant to recreate the mind’s neutral state so the people inside the room wouldn’t have to work to maintain the basic functioning of their mind. You know, like it had this high-pitched white noise and it was lit with blue and red spotlights, so the whole room was cast in this purple haze. There were white paper mobiles hanging from the ceiling and they interrupted the lights, so when the light hit these shapeless white things, the purple was split into blue and red. Anyway, I just sat in it for a little while—it’s always nice to sit in a museum—and, after a while, I stopped thinking about how dumb it was and, well, I really did start to feel relaxed. When I left the room after I don’t even know how long, I felt like I was floating. No, seriously! I couldn’t feel the ground that I was walking on. I didn’t eat anything for the rest of the day and walked all the way home—I was living at 4th and Avenue A—from the Upper East Side.”

He has just met this girl who is the shape of a woman—thick in the thighs, pouty in the mouth—with tangled pale red hair. He loves her.

Pressing his square face against her rounded chest—consistently alarmed and grateful for the forgiving, mismatched shapes of men and women—he feels her heart beating its fresh new blood at the same time as echoing, just repeating, the same patterns it has always followed. He thinks of how the light of old stars takes years to reach the earth.

Their mouths meet, he doesn’t know who initiates this kiss, and she hums lightly; he feels the vibrations in her mouth like he is feeling her feelings.

He panics. Into her yawning brackish insides, open and lofty as a cathedral, he sees her. Really sees her, and can’t unsee her. She is taking off her shirt; she is taking off her socks. He cannot undo this.

He is not afraid of having sex—he loves having it!—he is afraid of the moment when he has to withdraw and is once again alone and untethered.

He sleeps next to her in her narrow cot tucked into the corner by the window and as he feels her float towards the film of sleep and fall into its abyss, his body, sewn to hers, tumbles quickly after her. Before he follows he looks at the sky, stained with the light of the moon, through the small square window. The ceiling slopes over them like a womb. Through his closed eyes he sees the red and black shapes of the images that become dreams. Surging, in his half-sleep, he feels her against him and sees each part of her body as an arrondissement. It’s not a complete map but he has a very clear image of her as a summation of all of these parts without needing to know exactly how they fit together, how to get from one to the next; feeling her naked up against his body, he knows that her taut haunches make up the 18th, her left arm – wrist to bicep – is the 2nd, her hands are the 4th, her calves and ankles the 5th. He feels her right shoulder is the Jardin des Plantes on a rainy afternoon.

He will leave—he leaves in three days—and he will not know how she inhabited this space here, how she was the space itself.



Preserved Butterflies
Tings Chak

this is what happens when love grows up

the house we built
hollows, gutted
leaving only bones.

years later
our skeletons still hold
the memory of flesh



Rose
Shawna Lipton