

# LOVE IN VAIN

COLLECTED READINGS ABOUT HEARTBREAK



# THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Cover image credit: and Christopher Ulutupu, still from *Lelia* 2018

# LOVE IN VAIN: COLLECTED READINGS ABOUT HEARTBREAK



Still from *All Cried Out* music video, Allure 1997

As a public programme event to accompany Christopher Ulutupu's exhibition, *The Romantic Picturesque: The Postcard Trilogy*, The Physics Room presented *Love in Vain* – a night showcasing a selection of readings by poets, artists, musicians, academics and writers and lovers interested in heartbreak.

The title of the event is taken from the song quoted at the beginning of each part of *Lelia* (2018) – *All Cried Out*, written by *Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam* in 1985 and made more famous after being covered by R&B band *Allure* in 1997.

Thank you to Christopher Ulutupu and to all of our contributors for their time, passion and energy.

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# ***THE ROMANTIC PICTURESQUE: THE POSTCARD TRILOGY***

## **CHRISTOPHER ULUTUPU**

1 – 25 November 2018



Christopher Ulutupu, still from *Lelia* 2018

*The Romantic Picturesque: The Postcard Trilogy* comprised of three video works— *Into The Arms Of My Coloniser* (2016), *Do You Still Need Me?* (2017), and *Lelia* (2018)—by Christopher Ulutupu.

Ulutupu's video / performance art practice explores landscape, photography, and the construction of colonial narratives. Responding to early 1900s landscape photography and 'postcard' tourism, Ulutupu's earlier work looked at exoticised depictions of Pacific people disseminated throughout the western world. His practice seeks to re-contextualise these stereotypes and re-imagine them through video and performance, offering new ways of exploring the effects of colonisation and diaspora.

The trilogy contains a collision of ideas and references elements of traditional and modern indigeneity to create a performance both critical and humorous. The three works approach the conversation around hybridity in a way that looks forward and asks, 'Who do I want to be?' rather than fixating on 'Who am I?' Viewed together the works can be seen to address different stages of development in what can only be termed a love affair between Coloniser and Indigenous person(s).

In his new work *Lelia*, Ulutupu continues to stage performances within 'picturesque' landscapes, this time in a Cantabrian alpine resort scenario. The work mingles excess with the everyday with Ulutupu casting friends and family members as core characters and takes stylistic inspiration from an

ELLE Magazine article about a notorious photoshoot that appeared in the 1977 winter issue of Vogue. *The Romantic Picturesque: The Postcard Trilogy* is presented in partnership with SCAPE Public Art.

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**Christopher Ulutupu** is an artist of Samoan/Niuean/German descent currently residing in Wellington. He recently completed his MFA at Massey University, Wellington and has a Bachelor of Performance Design (Hons) from Massey University and Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. Ulutupu has a background in art direction and set design. Ulutupu mounted a solo exhibition at play\_station, Wellington in 2018 and participated in the inaugural Hobart Biennale in 2017.



Christopher Ulutupu, still from *Into the arms of my colonizer* 2016

**Read by Melanie  
McKerchar**

Melanie  
McKerchar

*Unrequited Mountain  
Ranges*  
2016

Melanie  
McKerchar

*That Naked Finger*  
2018

### **Unrequited Mountain Ranges**

This wrong hearted head has little control.  
Loving this way is walking bare foot in mountain ranges,  
the view and the majesty make my soul soar.  
The soft high meadows caress my toes,  
but mostly it hurts in the rocks and unfeeling thin air.  
I could walk an easier path, through the softly padded greyness,  
but is the loss of this special view worth the comfort?  
Just as the mountains are unmoved by our moments of joy  
my love will not transmute your friendship into more,  
so I accept this feeling of family when I wish only to lie in your arms  
and whisper dreams to the night.

## That Naked Finger

On my wedding day I wanted finger-waved curls of a bygone era,  
and fair skin, that back then was spoken of as alabaster.

To me, this is not a word that sounds of beauty;  
not a word to be used when describing the soft warmth of a cheek.

It sounds hard

Defines as hard

noun:- 1. *A fine grained usually white opaque or translucent variety of gypsum used for  
statues, vases, etc.*

2. *a variety of hard semi-transparent calcite often banded through marble*

Alabaster seems to be something crying out to be broken,  
a violent description from a man's time.

It sounds like a fish or swamp predator.

Beware the alabaster, its jaws are lined with death.

So alabaster skin was not for me,

but a heavy base of freckle-be-gone and I was fair for a day.

And as for those dreamed of curls and waves?

Why simply 4 hours in the hairdressers;

roll out the rollers, curling tongs, straightening irons, esoteric tools and approximately  
1 million bobby pins.



On that magic day,

and was the day all that dreams and movie made visions had prepared me for,

I was radiant

and glowed as he beamed with joy that I was his.

But the loving words were mine only,

and I didn't listen to his silence.

Though his joy in me speared from his eyes

the ring caught on my finger.

It hurt as it was forced onto my summer swollen digit,

and I just kept smiling, radiant brides should do that.

But once there it shone with the promise of togetherness

the perfect illusion.

That ring came off easily,

a handcuff that was paired with the right key.

I had hidden that key for so long, because radiant brides should do that

fighting for the us, becoming alabaster.

No bobby pins, no freckle-be-gone

And fewer tears than one might think,

most of them for my stone sculpted heart.

## **Read by Jennifer Katherine Shields**

Jennifer Katherine  
Shields

*Radical transgender  
self love*  
2018

Daniel Mallory Ortberg

*Dirtbag Sappho*  
2018

Imogen Binnie

*Nevada (excerpt)*  
2013

## **Radical transgender self love – Jennifer Katherine Shields**

radical self love as a trans woman is like trying to establish a caring and respectful relationship with an ex lover

you were once close, but you were teenagers, so you didn't actually know each other that well, really

and now it's been 15 years and you don't recognise them at all but at the same time there are little things about them that still sing to you

other days it's like maintaining a respectful distance with the parent of your children

lets treat each other right for the benefit of the kids

but god, please, i just don't wanna deal with you right now, okay?

but some days, radical self love is like falling head over heels with someone who is brand new and exciting but who also has been with you all along; a steady friend in the background who suddenly you are seeing in a new, bright, wonderful light and your heart just fills up with love for yourself

trying to balance "my body is beautiful, my body is good, my body is kind" with the gentler, softer now but still ever-present "that's not what i look like, right?" is a tightrope of guilt and conflict

the kind of self-guilt that comes from feeling guilty about feeling guilty

"i'm not doing this right"

but on the good days, radical self love as a trans woman is staring at myself and thinking "oh, yeah, fuck, i look great" (sometimes it's even just "yeah, okay, cool")

it's combatting dysphoria and dysmorphia and disassociation by putting my foot down

it's reconnecting myself with what my face actually looks like

it's being present in my body instead of slipping away

it's like drawing a tarot card with a thrill of electricity as i lay it down in front of you/me

## **Dirtbag Sappho – Daniel Mallory Ortberg**

### ***Hymn to Aphrodite***

Look, Aphrodite, man. Look. *You* know who your father is,  
and you've got hobbies, which puts you two up on me.

Yes? Yes. So going out of your way  
to break my spirit with adversity,  
given our respective circumstances,  
seems heavy-handed for a goddess known for subtlety.

Come on, man. Just: Come on.

Leave your father's gorgeous house,  
take your father's stylish car (if ever before  
you took a single one of my calls without  
screening it, take this one, *please*)  
come down in wings and darkness  
and *get here in time*. Smile,  
if you can find the energy,  
or the time to wipe one over your deathless mouth.

(It's one thing to tell a god to smile but where I can't command I will ask:  
with all that you've got to smile about, why refuse?)

But go ahead and ask me: What's  
the matter now, Sappho, why  
this round of calls, what's the new  
pain lodged in my ghoulish heart,  
fine, fine, "What's her name *this* time, girl-chick,  
whose kiosk in the mall did you hang around too long

after her shift got over, before her ride got there?

I'll have her car

idling in your driveway

before she has time to pray to other gods."

A dick move, if you ask me,

bragging like that.

Look, just get here, okay? Because (1) I gave you

my only set of spare keys years ago, (2) You know

I'd do the same for you if you needed anything,

so just fulfill what needs fulfilling and don't

drag out my emptiness

(3)

just be a fucking friend, like you said

you'd be. Okay?

## **Nevada - Imogen Binnie – an excerpt**

Okay, she says. Sure. I'm twenty-nine. I grew up in a shitty little cow town in Pennsylvania, moved to New York City after college, transitioned six years ago, and work in a bookstore. Well. I guess I used to work in a bookstore. I don't know. Like a month ago I figured out that I was really unhappy with my life so I borrowed-stole my girlfriend's car and, like, I guess I just pointed it west. James thinks, like, yeah and you're a heroin addict? And like, you were inevitably unhappy with your life because you're trans, right? Meaning, transition doesn't work. But what he says is, It took you a month to drive a couple thousand miles? She smirks at him and pushes her hair back again. I dunno, she says. I guess so. I did a lot of hanging out in parking lots and stuff. James goes, Like, on heroin? She laughs kind of too loud. Nah, she says, That whole thing is fuckin stupid. When I was like sixteen, I had a friend who was really into heroin, right? Used to buy hundreds of dollars worth at a time, right, and just do it recreationally. Shootin heroin on a Friday night. Or a Tuesday night, didn't matter. It was, like, dumb teenage shit. Check out how tough we are. I latched onto him. When he'd go to Philadelphia and buy four hundred dollars worth, I'd give him a twenty and have him bring me back a couple dimebags. Whatever. No big deal. She stops talking for a second and then nods, like she's figuring out how much of this story to tell him, and she's decided: all of it. So yeah check this out, she says. I sort of just broke up with my girlfriend. We had been together for a bunch of years and developed this routine where we had an apartment and cats and stuff and our bills were under control, she had a grownup job that was turning her into a grownup kind of, and I realized. Like. I guess I just figured out that I wasn't happy, right? I was blaming her for stuff and getting pissed that she was turning into a grownup or whatever but mostly I was just so checked out that I didn't even understand if I was mad or sad or confused or what, you know? James is like, I do know. So some dumb stuff happened, Maria says, and then we broke up and I was like, well shit, the problem is that I've been trying to be responsible, and accountable to everyone else, and to make sure that nobody was freaked out by me or my feelings or desires or whatever. I was like, the solution is to become as irresponsible as I can. Obviously, that turned out to be a totally stupid theory though. Here's the thing James H.: while I was driving across the country, right, and hanging out in like small town parks and route 80 off-ramps and drinking truckstop coffee refills in the middle of the night—what I realized was, that was not a pattern that started in my relationship with Steph. This was a pattern that went back my whole fucking life. I was totally checked out in high school, to the point that it seemed like a good idea to try a little heroin now and then. I barely made facial expressions in grade school. I learned to fake it well enough that people didn't mistake me for an autistic kid; actually, it's fucking wild if you think about it, how well being totally checked out emotionally can look like normal American masculinity. So looking back I was like, holy shit, I don't remember much about being a little kid, but I must've checked out of my life: meaning, like, started the pattern that me and Steph broke up over. When I was a little kid, when I started to



develop a personality and a gender and to express that personality and gender, a tiny little dirtbag punker who didn't know anything about being trans or saying I want to be a girl. Or: I am a girl. Who only knew that she wanted to be in Poison, to dress and act like the rock stars who were boys but who got to wear all the makeup and outfits. Everybody everywhere started socializing that stuff out of me. I was an observant kid, you know, I looked around and I was like, well shit, I'd better listen to these messages I'm getting from TV and from the grownups around me, instead of whatever the fuck my obviously incorrect brain is telling me. You know? Being completely checked out, that shit started when I was a tiny little kid. I started really hating myself when I figured this out, like, in a way that I'd never even felt before. Like my fuckin' astral hate chakra had been revitalized. I was like, whoa, I have a lifetime's worth of unprocessed shut-down emotions to work through, so it's a good thing I'm by myself out here. I thought about it and wrote about it and stuff and eventually, when I was like, cool, I have all this heroin, it'd probably be easier to overdose and die than it would be to work through, what, twenty-five years of self-invalidating habit? So I called my friend Piranha, who's always been way leveler-headed than me, and she was like, Hey stupid, did you ever stop to think that that pattern, that coping mechanism, was actually a brilliant strategy to keep yourself alive? She was like, listen up dummy, when you are a little kid and it is the mid-eighties, saying 'I need to be a girl' is not the sort of thing that tends to be met with love and appreciation. It is the sort of thing that tends to get met with, Well you are a boy and We'd better butch him up and Welp we had ourselves a little freak baby, that sucks, and Shut the fuck up, junior. Piranha was like, Maria you dolt, the smartest thing you could have done in that no-win situation was to be like, Okay, I'll play your game until I'm old enough to run away from it and figure out my own stupid game. She was like, Which you did, right? You moved to New York. You transitioned. You fuckin solved it. The problem wasn't the coping mechanism, the problem is that the coping mechanism become a pattern of behavior, and it is really hard to just up and end a behavior pattern. I was like, Piranha, man, why the fuck aren't you fuckin rich, you are a genius, I said this kind of through tears, and she was like, Uh, Maria, I'm not rich because I'm trans and because I'm a woman. I was like, Oh yeah.

## Read by Bernadette Hall

Joanna Margaret Paul – from <i>Like Love Poems</i> 2006	<i>The Dilettante</i> <i>Now</i> <i>The Silence of Trees</i> <i>Poem written in a</i> <i>garden</i>
Bernadette Hall – from <i>Fancy Dancing</i> 2017	<i>i.</i>
Bernadette Hall – published in <i>Sport</i> 2015	<i>The Seafarer</i>
Bernadette Hall	<i>Actaeon</i> 2018

the dilettante

on Monday I was incurably ill  
on Tuesday I talked all night  
on Wednesday I slept all day  
on Thursday I fell in love  
on Friday I said goodbye  
This was an extraordinary week  
This was an ordinary week.

## NOW

I lean against the wall  
in my blue kitchen  
waiting for the telephone  
I am like a Sarasati bride  
that leans against the wall  
among companions  
silent fasting unmoving  
on view like wedding presents  
for days while  
downstairs the feasting  
continues

## The Silence of Trees

When you applied the tourniquet  
your voice was kind  
I cannot feel the pathways to the heart  
and whiteness rests my mind.

Not at the end  
but in the middle  
Goodbye like the kernel of the apple  
the hard shaft of the spindle.

Sitting beneath the protected tree  
too near to see its height  
I ponder the foolishness of she  
who daily placed a stethoscope  
to her own heart.

Downstream  
the barge is moving away  
canopied in white and candle lit  
how sad this is and yet  
not sad, the death of love  
without the loss of it.

poem written in a garden

the days were crowded there was no room  
to write about the poetry of things  
the sage green tablecloth that brought  
the grass into the room  
the pink rose in the honey-jar that made  
the field a garden  
(the rose meaning love or grace  
or just a witness to the hand out a window plucking  
it  
you gone: and the coffee pot  
still bends at the knee slightly  
like Rodin unguarded in his studio  
like the beloved standing as if he wishes  
to be entirely  
seen:  
dictionaries piled up  
give the room a mannish look  
& those blue flowers, corn flowers  
against the dark  
panelling  
dark as inscrutable sea walls in  
shadow, as an altar by Bellini,  
dark as the inside of a rabbit's  
ear  
declared their poetry, I said  
but un  
translatable to one who couldn't  
see  
the face of the beloved  
framing them.



*from*     Fancy Dancing

i.

Phaedra has a new tattoo, a Celtic spiral  
intersected with a red rose, from 'Skin Show'  
in Stanmore Rd. The ocelot is languid in the tree,  
its pansy face- patterns jaunty while my own skin  
is so unlovely. We went to Jellie Park  
or was that yesterday, it all begins to merge,  
the weeping as on Wednesday, the separation of rivers.  
'I've said my goodbyes', she said so sweetly.  
'It always felt as if I had two mothers.'  
The Westons waved us off and then it was once  
more round the block because she'd forgotten  
to pick up her new cosmetic bag. Now finally  
it's time to clear the deck, hang out the dirty linen,  
divvy up the consequences and all the other small change.

*©Bernadette Hall, 2017*

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## the seafarer

an itching of the leg portending a journey

an itching of the ring-finger portending a change of bed

an itching of the eyelid portending tears

an itching of the lips portending a kiss

and should it be my turn for weeping

may I take heart from the noisy-footed goose harvest

and the dazzling cloud-flame and the eye downcast

for a landing, if it is ever a question of landing

© Benoitte Hull

*published in Sport, 2015*

## Actaeon

He gives a little yelp of excitement when he sees her  
walking quickly over the gravel track  
across the boardwalk around the lagoon that's called  
Mimi Moto, the Little Pissing-hole.

He sees the hare spring up in the blackberry tangle,  
how it leaps among the lupins and over  
the tall grasses. He sees how the clouds drift,  
the cloud-rack, cloud-burst, cloud-scape, cloudberry.

He's in a cloud-castle, he's in cloud-cuckoo-land.

He's cloudy and cloudless, poor boy, and all  
at the very same time so it must be love. And he whistles  
to his dogs but they don't know him anymore  
and they take him for the hare, for he has seen her  
naked and she's set them onto him, his own dogs, poor boy.

© Bernadette Hall, 2018

**Read by  
Sudi Dargipour**

Rumi

*Story of Love and  
Grief*

## Story of Love and grief | Rumi

Rumi was born on the Eastern shores of the then Persian Empire on September 30, 1207. Rumi's life story is full of intrigue and high drama mixed with intense creative outbursts. Rumi was a charming, wealthy nobleman, a genius theologian, law professor and a brilliant but sober scholar, who in his late thirties met a wandering and wild holy man by the name of Shams. In Rumi's own words, after meeting Shams he was transformed from a bookish, sober scholar to an impassioned seeker of universal truth and love. Rumi and Shams stayed together for a short time, about 2 years in total, but the impact of their meeting left an everlasting impression on Rumi and his work. After Shams was extinguished by Rumi's youngest son (an honor killing), due to events that are explained further down on this page, Rumi fell into a deep state of grief and gradually out of that pain outpoured nearly 70,000 verses of poetry. To comprehend the often misunderstood and misquoted connection between Rumi and Shams we begin by reviewing the personalities of these two historical figures. Rumi, born into wealth, power and world of politics, was a member of high society. Shams, by the time he met Rumi was in his 60s. By then he was known mainly as a blunt, antisocial and powerful spiritual wanderer. His nickname was the Bird. The Bird, because he couldn't stay in one place for too long, also he was known to be in two distant cities around the same time, as if he could fly or transport his essence at will. This wanderer is known to have been seeking a "grandmaster student"--a student who would be greater than many masters at the time. He chose Rumi as his "master-student." Apparently he initially notices Rumi when he was 21, but judging the time inappropriate and the student not ready he waits 16 or so years to approach Rumi again.

They meet again when Rumi was in his late 30s and Shams in his early 60s. The initial spark of their connection inspires Rumi to take Shams into his home. Shams from then on becomes the new friend, the latest companion. It is important to understand the dynamic of this situation. Here are two totally opposing figures from extreme ends of social class structure of the time (bookends really) coming together in a highly structured society. There was no room for Shams in Rumi's social circle. Rumi was number one citizen of that region; he was even above the emir (the ruler), since the emir was one of his students. Yet Rumi managed to use all his wit to keep Shams around as long as possible even by offering him an extremely hard to ignore gift. After receiving repeated threats Shams decides to leave town. So, the first association

between Rumi and Shams ends at this point. Soon after, Rumi falls into a deep state of grief. Rumi puts out reward notices for any news of Shams. Not long after, news arrives that Shams has been spotted in Damascus (in today's Syria). Rumi immediately orders a caravan of gifts on horseback and sends his eldest son to locate Shams and beg him to come back.

This time, Rumi decides to legitimize Shams' presence in his home. Rumi marries his very young step daughter Kimia (alchemy) to Shams. The situation in the household quiets down during this time, after all Shams was now a relative. A short few months later, due to illness caused most probably by grief and depression (some reports suggest domestic violence) Kimia dies and with that comes the end of Shams and Rumi's companionship. One hypothesis suggests that Shams leaves Rumi, in dead of night, and becomes the wandering, wild bird that he was.

While Rumi was waiting for any news of Shams he vehemently refused to accept that he was dead. He wrote about this experience in this quatrain from Divan-e Shams, Who says that the immortal one has died?

Who says that the "sun" of hope has died? Look, it is the  
enemy of the "sun" who has come to the rooftops,

Closing both eyes shut, crying out, "O, the 'sun' has died." (The word shams means the sun and Rumi routinely plays on this word association throughout his work on the first collection, Divan-e Shams.) Rumi\_ I I have been tricked by flying too close to what I thought I loved. Now the candle flame is out, the wine spilled, and the lovers have withdrawn somewhere beyond my squinting. The amount I thought I'd won, I've lost. My prayers becomes bitter and all about blindness. How wonderful it was to be for a while with those who surrender. Others only turn their faces on way, then another, like pigeon in flight. I have known pigeons who fly in a nowhere, and birds that eat grainlessness, and tailor who sew beautiful clothes by tearing them to pieces.

Rumi \_ II THROUGH LOVE all that is bitter will  
sweet Through Love all that is copper will be gold.  
Through Love all dregs will turn to purest wine  
Through Love all pain will turn to medicine. Through  
Love the dead will all become alive. Through Love



the king will turn into a slave!

---

ONCE a beloved asked her lover: "Friend, You have seen many places in the world! Now - which of all these cities was the best? He said: "The city where my sweetheart lives!"

---

FROM MYSELF I am copper,  
through You, friend, I am gold.  
From myself I'm a stone, but  
through You I am a gem!

**Read by  
Priscilla Howe**

Jordana Bragg

*Team Jennifer*  
2018

## ***Team Jennifer***

Just mirror it back to me  
Mirror it back to me  
Or mirror me back to me  
Good god give me something  
Anything to work with

And daylight breaks, I know  
You think. Oh, I couldn't possibly  
I know, you do the impossible every day  
Every day since you realised daylight does not belong to anyone in particular

But midnight does  
I am midnight at your most alone  
And your 1am, 2am, 3am, 4am  
Could be your daybreak breakdown  
I am darling, don't think for one second that I won't

And the room starts to spin, and I think JFK me<sup>[i]</sup>. Honestly, I'd rather  
And my condition is I see so clearly,  
I see too clearly, so full of intentional action  
And you are the angle I see from,  
The horizon line of my eye is in your hips as I bend you over

And "I don't get heartbreak because I don't get heartbroken" <sup>[ii]</sup>

The new convenience of abandonment  
Who are you in debt to Daddy  
React to me

Marina's performances allow her to pre-empt the disaster that experience has taught her to expect<sup>[iii]</sup>

Now I'm bleeding on the people, I forgot that I've still got an open gash<sup>[iv]</sup>

And practically  
There are only so many jokes to be made before heartbreak sets you a new reality  
You have one second to decide  
I can only hope you catch the kind like rapture, not Rigor mortis  
The worst part is it doesn't even end you  
Heartbreak requires a Horror Whatever mentality

At your expense  
I keep trying to paint a pane  
A stained-glass window between you and new reality  
Why reserve rose tinted for pleasure  
It's a very expensive thing to do

I consider myself limitless  
Living in a superimposed state of being  
Relentless

Full of the kind of things you like  
And I want to win prizes  
The kind no one can recognise directly because I'm always sitting sideways ready to turn away

And how fucking dare you  
Your audacity proves nothing other than your incapacity to care for yourself  
And believing you have no one is a very particular sensitivity isn't it

Brad and Angelina starring in a film together as a married couple who want to kill each other

Jane Smith asking John Smith "Still Alive, Baby?" after firing three shots at him

Brangelina is dead

And there were never any TEAM BRAD t-shirts

And gloves off claws out

Brad is a Sagittarius, Angelina is a Gemini and Jennifer is an Aquarius. So that whole thing makes complete sense, an earth sign wouldn't be caught dead anywhere near that explosion

And Madonna is a Leo and Britney is a Sagittarius and onstage at the 2003 Video Music Awards they pashed while Christina (a Sagittarius) watched. So that whole thing makes complete sense, an earth sign wouldn't be caught dead anywhere near that explosion

And no mercy  
Cars drive by a bloodstream  
And I'm too busy to be concerned  
Pretending to be Morticia Addams just for fun

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[i] Tinashe (2018). *No Drama*, Joyride Album. [Youtube]  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=vAh7jTAkCKc>. RCA Records

President John F. Kennedy - assassinated as he rode in a motorcade through Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas, Texas. November 22, 1963.

[ii] Extracted quote 13.11.18 with Priscilla Howe [Facetime]

[iii] Fischer, J (2018). *Psychoanalyst meets Marina Abramović*. SCHEIDEGGER AND SPIESS

[iv] Smith, J (2017). *Fallen*, SYRE Album. [YouTube]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fof9lHaApXc>. MSFTS Music and Roc Nation

**Read by  
Patrick O'Sullivan**

Aristophanes	<i>Speech in Plato's Symposium</i> 189c-193d 4th Century BC Translated 1925
Sappho	<i>Fragment 16</i> 7th Century BC Translated 2018

## Aristophanes' Speech on Erös in Plato's *Symposium* 189c-193d

(Adapted from *Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925)

... our original nature was by no means the same as it is now. In the first place, there were three kinds of human beings, [189e] not merely the two sexes, male and female ... : there was a third kind as well, which had equal shares of the other two, and whose name survives .... 'androgynous' was ... composed of both sexes and sharing equally in male and female .... Secondly, the form of each person was round all over, with back and sides encompassing it every way; each had four arms, and legs to match these, and two faces perfectly alike [190a] on a cylindrical neck. There was one head to the two faces, which looked opposite ways; there were four ears, two sets of genitals, and all the other parts, as may be imagined, in proportion. The creature walked upright as now, in either direction as it pleased and whenever it started running fast, it went like our acrobats, whirling over and over with legs stuck out straight; only then they had eight limbs to support and speed them [190b] swiftly round and round. The number and features of these three sexes were owing to the fact that the male was originally the offspring of the sun, and the female of the earth; while that which partook of both sexes was born of the moon, for the moon also partakes of both. They were globular in their shape as in their progress, since they took after their parents. Now, they were of surprising strength and vigor, and so lofty in their notions that they even conspired against the gods ... to assault the gods in fight they tried to mount high heaven.

"Then Zeus and the other gods debated what they should do, and were perplexed: for they felt they could not slay them like the Giants ... it would mean an end to the honors and observances they had from people; nor yet could they endure such sinful rioting. Then Zeus, putting all his wits together, spoke at length and said: 'I think I can contrive that humans, without ceasing to exist, shall give over their iniquity through a lessening of their strength. [190d] I propose now to slice every one of them in two, so that while making them weaker we shall find them more useful by reason of their multiplication; and they shall walk erect upon two legs. If they continue turbulent and do not choose to keep quiet, I will do it again,' said he; ... So saying, he sliced each human being in two, just as they slice sorb-apples to make a dry preserve, or eggs with hairs; [190e] and at the cleaving of each he bade Apollo turn its face and half-neck to the wound, in order that every one might be made more orderly by the sight of the knife's work upon them; this done, the god was to heal them up. Then Apollo turned their faces about, and pulled their skin together from the edges over what is now called the belly, just like purses which you draw close with a string; the little opening he tied up in the middle of the belly, so making what we know as the navel. ... [191a] ... to remind us of our early fall.

Now when our first form had been cut in two, each half in longing for the other would come to it again; and then would they fling their arms about each other and in mutual embraces [191b] yearn to be grafted together, till they began to perish of hunger and general indolence, through refusing to do anything apart. And whenever one half died and the other was left alone, it went searching for and embracing another; whether it might happen on that half of the whole woman (which now we call a woman), or the half of the whole man. In this plight they were perishing away, when Zeus pitied them and provided a remedy. He moved their genitals to the front—for until then they had these ... on the outside, and did their begetting and bringing forth not on each other but on the earth, like the crickets. These parts he now shifted to the front, [191c] to be used for propagating on each other—in the female member by means of the male; so that if in their embraces a man should meet with a woman there might be conception and continuation of their kind; and also, if male met with male they might have satisfaction of their union and a relief, and so might turn their hands to their labors and their interest to ordinary life. Thus anciently is mutual love ingrained [191d] in humankind, reassembling our early estate and endeavoring to combine two in one and to heal the human sore.

"Each of us, then, is but a part of a human, since every one shows like a flat-fish the traces of having been sliced in two; and each is ever searching for the half that will fit them. All the men who are sections

of that composite sex that at first was called androgynous are woman-lovers, [191e] ... from this source likewise are our man-loving women ... . All the women who are sections of the woman have no great fancy for men: they are inclined rather to women, and of this stock are the lesbians. Men who are sections of the male pursue the masculine, and so long as their boyhood lasts they show themselves to be slices of the male by making friends with men and delighting [192a] to lie with them and to be clasped in men's embraces .... they have no natural interest in marrying wives and getting children ...; they are quite contented to live together unwedded all their days. ...

Well, when one of them—whether he be a male-lover or a lover of any other sort— [192c] happens on their own particular half, the most wonderful thing happens: the two of them are struck out of their senses with love and intimacy and desire, and are unwilling to leave each other's side even for a single moment. These are they who continue together throughout life, though they could not even say what it is they want from one another. No one could imagine that it is just the intimacy of sex, or that this alone could be the reason why each rejoices in the other's company with such great intensity: obviously the soul of each is wanting something else that it cannot express, [192d], but like an oracle it hints at what it wants and makes it an engima. ...

“The cause of all this is that our original form was as I have described, and we were whole; and the passion for and pursuit [193a] of that wholeness is called Love/Desire/Erōs. Formerly, as I have said, we were one ... Erōs is the god who brings this about; he fully deserves our hymns. For not only in the present does he bestow the greatest benefit of bringing us to our very own, but he also supplies this grandest hope for the future, that if we will supply the gods with reverent duty he will restore us to our ancient life and heal and make us blessed and happy...”

### **Sappho, fragment 16.1-20**

(tr. Patrick O’Sullivan)

Some would say a host of horsemen, others of infantry, and others of ships,  
is the most beautiful thing on the black earth;  
but I would say it is only  
the one you love.  
It is fully easy to make this understood  
to everyone; for she that far surpassed all mortals  
in beauty, Helen,  
her most [noble husband]  
deserted and went sailing to Troy,  
remembering her daughter and dear parents  
not at all; but the [Cyprian goddess] led her from the path...  
...  
...  
... lightly...  
... [Which] now has put me in mind of Anactoria,  
who is not here with me.  
Her lovely way of walking, and the bright radiance of her changing face,  
would I rather see  
than the chariots of the Lydians and their warriors  
... fully-armed.



**Read by  
Isla Martin**

Isla Martin

*Hiruharama*  
2018

James K Baxter  
– from *Jerusalem*  
*Daybook* 1972

*Empty Bellies*  
*The Ikons*  
*Night Clouds*

Isla Martin

*Hinewai*  
2016

## HIRUHARAMA - PHYSICS ROOM

Rather than Heartbreak as a static place, post-union, I have come to befriend the sting that has forever seemed to frequent the same haunts as i do. The resolution of mania, the hesitation, the rise - whether it comes with substance or as an uninhabited lowland; is heartbreak. I perceive that we who are innately tethered to all spirit and all world, adapt to the succession of hurt that comes with being human. Heartbreak for breakfast, heartbreak on the agenda, healing is fashionably late.

For my first reading, I see this rhythm of heartbreak through colonisation's window. In performance, I often speak about another of my intrinsic connections - this one, to the Whanganui River. Through my Ngāti Uenuku lineage, it was only expected that I might find the gem of old James K Baxter soon enough - and soon enough i did, and everything made sense.

In the words of John Newton, the author of an account about the community of Hiruharama, Jerusalem -

*“When Māori and Pākehā do these things together, the double rainbow begins to shine. In 1969, New Zealand's best known poet moved to Jerusalem on the Whanganui River to establish a community under mana of local hapū Ngāti Hau. The Jerusalem commune proved a magnet for disaffected and damaged young people. It quickly became the country's most famous hippie community, as well as a media byword for the idealism and excess of emerging youth culture.*

*But what was life really like at Jerusalem, beyond the popular stereotypes? And what did it mean, for Ngāti Hau, to be overrun with long haired strangers and the media attention that followed them?*

*This story is unique. Nowhere else has a Pākehā community been built so explicitly or Māori terms, or submitted so comprehensively to the authority and generosity of a Māori one. What happened at Jerusalem has no parallel, the partnership that evolved embodies the fundamental spirit of biculturalism, the fundamental spirit of an Aotearoa yet to become.”*

I resonate with the heartbreak of our colonial history, but even more fervently, with the way that this heartbreak is felt like a tide that is not certain, a tide that can't be predicted, the tide perhaps - of the Whanganui.

I will read three selected poems from Baxter's 'Jerusalem Daybook', that symbolize to me the nature of living with heartbreak; trying to dislodge it from yourself but being surrounded with the peace of the land, and of the people.

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- *Empty Bellies [pg 20]*

We have no kai except for black coffee,  
The sacks and the mud look pretty much the same  
On the track to the wharepuni – Up there, though,  
Gregg is fixing his motorbike on the front verandah  
And in the middle room they sit in chairs  
Discussing this or that – ‘Is it exile? Is it a place  
Where the love of Te Whaea can join our hearts together?  
I don’t know. The winter sun is lying  
Low on the hills. Dildo tells us that the new bridge,  
A bride in white concrete, has begun to tilt  
As the taniwha throws his weight against the piles,  
And no road gang will ever get it level, –  
The thought pleases me. If we have no kai,  
Potatoes, flour, onions, milk powder, soya beans  
Will come on the transport tomorrow. The bills can’t be paid  
Unless God decides to rain down dollar notes,  
And that is precisely why my heart feels clean  
As a fish in running water – Poverty, man,  
Is a word that skins the lips, the Prior of Taize said,  
But when the gut is empty and the house is crowded  
With forty visitors, then Te Whaea throws her coat  
Over the lot of us, and nobody goes hungry.

- *The Ikons [pg 23]*

Hard, heavy, slow, dark,

Or so I find them, the hands of Te Whaea

Teaching me to die. Some lightness will come later

When the heart has lost its unjust hope

For special treatment. Today I go with a bucket

Over the paddocks of young grass,

So delicate like fronds of maidenhair,

Looking for mushrooms. I find twelve of them,

Most of them little, and some eaten by maggots,

But they'll do to add to the soup. It's a long time now

Since the great ikons fell down, God, Mary, home, sex, poetry,

Whatever one uses as a bridge

To cross the river that only has one beach,

And even one's name is a way of saying –

'The gap inside a coat' – the darkness I call God,

The darkness I call Te Whaea, how can they translate

The blue calm evening sky that a plane tunnels through

Like a little wasp, or the bucket in my hand,

Into something else? I go on looking

For mushrooms in the field, and the fist of longing

Punches my heart, until it is too dark to see.

- *Night Clouds [pg 46]*

The light-filled wombs of cloud in the night sky

Signify for me the peace of Te Whaea;

The stars look between them and beyond them,

And when I die I will come to that place,

But now I go up the hill, uncertain

Whether the ones I love, love me or not –

My bare feet slide on the cold mud track,

And I think, ‘Perhaps they don’t need a father,

‘My right place is out here where the stars and the freezing grass

Teach me so plainly that man is less than a shadow –

‘To interrupt them at their music is the folly of an elder

Who has not perceived the young are occupied quite well

‘Without his intervention’ – I go in like a ghost,

Exchange a couple of words while the guitar strums out –

‘The times they are a-changin’ – then go to my sleeping bag

Where this old kumara has to rot slowly –

Night, cold and memory,

Are his instructors, teaching him how to let go of life,

Accepting the dark unknowable breast

Of Te Whaea, the One who bears us and bears with us.

---

Also representing heartbreak, my own poem:

## HINEWAI

i have been admitted  
more times than he'll ever admit  
*it wasn't peaceful*

i tell myself he, will be mummified  
next to the first cat in space, felicette

and these rabid geese i bring instead  
it's just electric.

in the basin, three swans  
land on the moon.

and i coil seven snakes around him  
in the name of matariki

he says there's twenty different gaza's  
to us. each is hot. one is sexy.

hinewai says the only place you're maori is in your liver  
once again, i coughed up underwater and chunks of peace came out  
it's like the skies are so well groomed for fallin' they are  
singin' alleluia so pure, i swear i've seen something  
explode in the Pacific, perhaps in this room.  
hinewai would fan herself dry with a whole pork.

so here is a sacrificial poem for ratbags.

here is my brother. here are the  
"three taken from *our hospital* already,"  
here are the creeps, the lionhearts and  
losers who made me, Here  
is a voyage, here the Very

Important  
Polynesians  
& here,

hinewai says this is how  
you will let your hair down -

like a suckerpunch  
like her plea bargain  
like her stillbirth

that still lived.

hinewai says she never met a maori  
with an eating disorder. i fire back. god is a one night stand.  
but it is outrageous how fierce

you've become. still,

here is my Tipuna's curl.  
here is it clotting your drain. Here is still smoke  
free. here is cape reinga. here is death, the elevat-  
or

and hinewai says, 'if we are still friends  
ten stories up. what happens  
then.

do we jump?'

**Read by  
Tusiata Avia**

Tusiata Avia  
- from *Spirit House/Fale Aitu*  
2016

*Gaza Poem*

Tusiata Avia  
- from *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt*  
2004

*Alofa*



I cannot write a poem about Gaza because I cannot eat a whole desert.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because I cannot go to bed with the stiff little babies and the bodies of children, there is no room for the little lost limbs, the disembodied arms yanked off like parts in a doll hospital.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because if I speak up for the bodies of babies, for the pieces of children, for the women pulling out their own eyes, you will call me anti-Semitic and I must allow the blood of thousands to absolve me.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because my fury and my grief will rise up out of my chest like a missile plotted on a computer in Tel Aviv, it will track me, pinpoint me and in a perfect arc, it will whine down out of the surgical sky, enter the top of my head and implode me.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because Israel has a right to protect itself Israel has a right to protect itself Israel has a right to protect itself Israel has a right to protect itself Israel has a right to protect itself Israel has a right to protect itself.

And Gaza does not.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because behind every human shield is another human shield and another human shield and another human shield and another human shield and another human shield. And behind that human shield – is a human.

I cannot write a poem because it's complicated, so complicated, very, very complicated. So, I cannot write a poem about Gaza until I finish a PhD in Middle Eastern Politics and the Holocaust, until I am reborn a Jew and live under the iron dome myself.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because Tamar in Tel Aviv has got to get to the supermarket and the garden centre before the next siren. She's putting plants in their bomb shelter and the kids' favourite toys and treats, to make it less depressing.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because Fatima in Gaza City has 58 seconds to evacuate her house with her babies before the missile strikes and the only way out is the sea. She has seen pictures on TV of babies thrown into pools and swimming instinctively.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because there is an impenetrable iron dome that covers the entire state. It covers each mind and each heart, except for the few that line up and demand to be imprisoned.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because of my friends: Tamar, Shira, Yael, Michal, Noya, David, Yair in Tel Aviv and Nazareth and Beersheva. Because every time I point to the blood-soaked I upset them, offend them, anger them, betray them. Let them go.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because of my friend Izzeldin and his three exploded daughters and one exploded niece filleted across his living room.

I cannot write a poem about Gaza because I can do the maths. If two thousand one hundred and sixty-eight dead Palestinians divided by sixty-nine dead Israelis equals. Find the true value of one Palestinian.

## **Alofa – by Tusiata Avia**

Alofa go for da walk...walking walking Alofa find alofa everywhere in da bush in da tree under da bush under da tree in da dark alofa...plenty alofa in da dark.

Alofa go to church...Alofa singing to Jesus Alofa praying to Jesus...Jesus bring me plenty alofa plenty money too Jesus make me win da bingo den I make da big donation show my alofa to all da peoples in da church an show my alofa to da faifeau too an everybodys say Alofa is da good kirl – she got so much alofa.

Jesus love Alofa so Alofa win da bingo.

Alofa go to Apia...eating icecream eating pagikeke eating keke pua`a...alofa on her fingers alofa on her shining lips Alofa smiling to all da peoples Alofa smiling to all da boys especially all da mens especially.

And when da night is coming Alofa smell like da frangipani like da moso`oi like da Impulse perfume come from Niu Sila and so many boys so many mens Love Alofa  
Love Alofa Love Alofa.

Alofa dancing in da Tropicana nightclub...all the fa`afafine watching to Alofa Tisha, Sindy, Leilani, Tia, Lamay, Devinia – all da fa`afafine making like da real kirls making da jealous (no alofa no alofa only jealous) Alofa don't even care alofa don't even look Alofa twirling on da dance floor showing her alofa to da Palagi mans showing her alofa to da Samoan mans.

Alofa making alofa in da Seaside Inn with da Palagi man name Bruce...Alofa singing and singing in da Seaside Inn in da dark Alofa singing...Alofa ia te oe Bruce. Alofa is te oe.

Alofa on da bus – Pacific Destiny Buss – da bus to Alofa's village in da kuā-back ...Jesus hanging in da bus hanging from da mirror in da bus watching Alofa all da way to home...Fea lou alofa Alofa? Fea lou alofa?

Da father of Alofa send her to da faifeau (who is also da uncle of Alofa)...da faifeau make her da black eye and da big lip an da fula on her maka in front all da peoples...Alofa you make us shame. Alofa you make us want to throw you to da shark. Alofa you da pig-kirl. Alofa you da pa'umuku kirl.

Long time an Alofa get up early Alofa go for da walk...Alofa walking far far to da bush and lie down under da tree...Alofa is crying an crying Alofa is screaming an screaming Alofa is holding an holding her stomach an da blood is coming an coming...an when it's finish – Alofa call it Alofa too.

from *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* (Wellington: VUP)

**Read by  
Jessica Maclean**

Jessica Maclean

*K/IWI*  
2018



K/IWI – nā Jessica Maclean (Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Hine, Clan Maclean)

Mitochondrial Eve: per Wikipedia, “the most recent woman from whom all living humans descend in an unbroken line purely through their mothers, and through the mothers of those mothers, back until all lines converge on one woman”. Contemplate that thought: all of us, linked through whakapapa and thousands upon thousands of birth pangs, last breaths, love, and grief. All through our mothers (we all have X chromosomes, after all).

Mitochondrial DNA is remarkably stable, changing very slowly. It is contained in the cells that convert food into energy, a mystical process of transubstantiation no less miraculous for its reduction to Einstein’s greatest equation. *Matter can be converted into energy, and vice versa*. I know of no more powerful argument for the existence of the soul than that, if personal experience does not sway you. Anecdotes, contrary to the position of the empiricists, in the final analysis offer the only meaningful things that *can* be said.

Mitochondrial Eve is a title, as well as a woman. There have been, and will be, others, as certain genetic lines decline and others spring forth to take their place. But as of this moment, she lived around *two hundred thousand years* ago, likely in East Africa. Think about the ostensible progress we’ve made in just the last few centuries: is it really plausible, given modern humans evolved millennia upon millennia ago, that “we” represent, per the Whig interpretation of history, the pinnacle of progress and civilisation?

Prior great civilisations, now languishing below the ocean, arose as ours did, and should provide a salutary lesson. But, nah. Much more pleasurable to pretend, as every boy wishes at some point to be taller or stronger than his father, that we are superior to our forebears. Their cities lie waiting, wreathed in coral and weed, inhabited by bright-schooled fish as fast as thought, and darker, looming presences. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair! The



rough beast slouching towards Bethlehem merely got lost, instead lurching to Babylon, where it remains to this day.

If every one of us alive today contains the physical traces of that ancient matriarch, might not some metaphysical element remain too? Race memories, working on us from below (or above) the level of conscious awareness, encoded as instincts. How else could I, modern human, living in a city from which most natural life has fled, know the atavistic fears of the night? To lie frozen, heart racing, while the mind argues senselessly that all is well? I suppose the monsters of modernity are not beasts or gods, but men.

We know now that there is a hereditary response to trauma which can persist for generations. Epigenetics has been accepted as the mechanism by which characteristics that are acquired during an organism's lifetime can be passed along to offspring. Poor Lamarck! He was right all along. Which makes sense when you think about it; *of course* acquired characteristics can be inherited, how the fuck else would evolution work?

Anyway. It has been shown by those in the historical trauma field that trauma can result in the methylation of a particular gene related to the production of cortisol, a stress hormone. Methylation alters the expression of genes by switching them on or mediating their function. We used to think that embryos were an epigenetic tabula rasa, upon which no trace of events that occurred during parental lifetimes could be discerned. Which is stupid: I didn't need to learn about mitochondrial DNA and gene methylation to know that scars run in families.

I imagine Mitochondrial Eve, cloned in the far-flung future, by alien explorers, or a doomsday computer, or most strangely, by our own descendants. What of her heartbreaks and griefs lie etched deep in the mitochondrial channels of our dreaming genes? What teleologies of the flesh draw us forward to our respective destinies?

What would she make of us? She may be filled with mercy and compassion, or stern-faced in disapproval; she would gather us to her bosom regardless. For the twin of grief is love, or rather, grief is the shadow cast by love's light. When the substance of adoration is gone, grief, and love, remain.

And what of the Māori mtEve? Surely, her name is Hine-Ahu-One, the Clay-Formed Woman. All reality sought the feminine essence, striving to bring into being the First Human. When she came to life, it was with a sneeze- tihei mauri, ora! How utterly charming. Most cultures recognise the importance of the breath, and ours is no different. Catch your breath, last gasp, out of puff, phew.

If we know that there exists a mechanism by which trauma can be transmitted to future generations, what does that mean for the Aotearoa New Zealand context?

Do you wanna know a word I hate? 'Skirmish'. Massacres and atrocities committed against Māori are relegated in the history bookes to the status of *skirmishes*. Just small, incidental occurrences of very little importance and certainly nothing to worry about (unless of course it was your land being taken, your people being killed, your histories being erased, and your present circumstances being constrained).

Think of the mamae, the deep hurts, that were incurred during the colonisation of this country. There isn't the time here to catalogue the various wounds to body, spirit, and mauri. Our country's mauri is diseased, manifesting its sickness through physical violence, sexual violence, and structural violence enabled by the complacency of the dwindling middle class and the manipulations of the ruling one.

The whole fucking country is a grave.

Iwi means bones. Remember on whose bones we walk.

**Read by  
Laura  
Borrowdale**

Laura Borrowdale  
- first published on  
herstory.blog 2018

*Father Figure*



## **Father Figure**

**By Laura Borrowdale**

You remember your father's fingers curling around the head of your new born baby. They are long, the nails rectangular and pared, clean pink and white, like the baby. Her head fills one of his hands and he uses the other to cradle her body neatly to him. He has his hands full, which is why, when the tears start to leak out of his eyes, he has to turn away, towards the window in the corner of the hospital room. He cries slowly into the light. You lie on the bed and watch them rocking from side to side in silhouette. And you drift to sleep as your father stands crying with your baby. You don't remember him passing the baby back. You don't remember him going, but you think that there has always been this feeling of leaving, and you wish that there wasn't.

\*

You ask your therapist what is wrong with you. She doesn't answer of course, but tells you that you it is good to ask questions. You aren't interested in questions though, you'd really prefer some answers, but it's like no one has any of those. You think about your new lover. He isn't like your father in any way you can see. His voice turns you on. It's like Tony Soprano on the other end of the phone, and you're Jennifer Melfi, or you're Carmella, or you're Adrianna. When you close your eyes, you can feel the sensation of your cheek pressed into his chest, into the crease where, when he lies on his side, one pectoral muscle hangs horizontally above the other. You would like to put your head there every night.

You want to offer your therapist a trigger warning, although you realise how silly that is, given her job. You're already questioning the way you are trying to moderate the story you tell her. It's an urge that should probably be challenged. But she doesn't say that. Maybe because you don't tell her that you know you are doing it.

Instead, you tell her how soft his hands are, as though the skin has been buffed clean of all lines and whorls. When you think hard, you remember how they feel when he slips his fingers up into your hair, pulling until you gasp. You are unsure if you are gasping for him, or for yourself. You try to explain to your therapist how relationships feel performative to you. You wonder if your urge to tell her a story



means that you are as performative a patient as you are a lover. Your therapist just waits for you to get to the point.

So instead, you tell her that the roundness of his head surprises you, the perfect scalp, pink like your baby's, deep in the crook of your father's arm, dark blue around the edges where the hairs slide under the skin. It is the emptiest part of his whole body.

You tell your therapist that you don't know why you are saying all of this, that the small physical details of this man are not what you came here to discuss. Shouldn't you really be talking about the break up you've just had? Or the one before that? Or, if you really wanted to get into it, maybe your father and the way he left you holding the baby?

\*

You're here because there was a moment when you were thinking of one lover while the one before contorted and twisted into something demonic on the sidewalk in front of your house. You'd thought this wouldn't be possible for you. And yet, here you are.

You describe this to your therapist as though you saw it from a distance, as though you weren't there, as though you weren't the woman, her arms folded, her body soft in supplication, agreeing with the raging bull of a man who launched himself over the concrete, stopping just short of her. That woman clutched her sweatshirt to her chest. She said 'I know,' softly, to his allegations. She was aware of her transgressions, but admitting it was like blowing on a fire and his foot collided with her car, the panel crumpling where he slammed into it. That woman flinched and he turned towards her. She saw him as he always has been, but his face was a stranger's. She would have cried if she could, but she was frozen.

'You fucking whore,' her old lover screams. 'I know,' she says.

\*

When you tell your therapist, you try to give her the facts as objectively as possible. You talk about yourself in third person, as though maybe that's better than first. She nods. She is patient. She doesn't state the obvious. She lets silence grow between you, and you sit, with your heart breaking. Because you are still just you. And there still aren't any answers.

**Read by  
Audrey Baldwin**

Warsan Shye

*The Unbearable Weight  
of Staying*  
2012

Ken Arkin

2010

## **The unbearable weight of staying - Warsan Shye**

I don't know when love became elusive  
what I know  
Is that no one I know has it  
My father's arms around my mother's neck  
Fruit too ripe to eat  
A door halfway open  
when your name is just a hand  
I can never hold  
everything I have ever believed in  
Becomes  
Magic

I think of lovers as trees  
Growing to and from one another  
Searching for the same light  
My mother's laughter in a dark room  
A photograph greying under my touch

This is all I know how to do  
Carry loss around until I begin to resemble every bad memory  
every terrible fear  
every nightmare anyone has ever had  
I ask  
did you ever love me  
you say  
of course of course  
so quickly  
but you sound like someone else  
I ask you  
Are you made of steel?  
Are you made of  
iron?

You cry on the phone  
My stomach hurts  
I let you leave  
I need someone who knows how to stay

**Ken Arkind**  
**2010**

We never fucked proper  
The stains on the sheets were like blood on the pavement  
I gripped your hips like a steering wheel before the collision  
You bit my collarbone like a curb stomp  
Carved runways into my back ts that the crows knew where to land  
and when we finished  
we collapsed like twin towers  
me clutching the black box recording of your breathing  
to the gnarled wreckage of my chest  
we were careless vandals  
who defaced each other with the lights on  
now you will make love to him in the dark  
so that he will never see the graffiti that I left behind  
and as my train left Chicago  
reluctantly as the way I pull out of you  
I imagine him untying the back of the shirt that I bought  
As though he were unwrapping a gift  
that had already belonged to him

**Read by  
Jamie Hanton**

Geoff Cochrane  
– from *Into India* 1999

*Thirst*

Geoff Cochrane  
– from *Pocket Edition* 2009

*Echoes*  
*Gates*  
*Looking into Antiquity*  
*Silk*  
*South Auckland*

## THIRST

It is all these blooms withhold  
that keeps them vivid –  
one is a gramophone-horn.

I may walk to the airport.

I like to get up close  
to silver skins with rivets,  
to halted things made frank about their scale.

I know a bright tunnel  
containing demonstrations of its own  
insides, own functions.

Lemonade or sand:  
teach me which to drink.

The square, the park, the idle intersection  
(forever void of more than simply you)  
dare not move an inch.



## ECHOES

The lamp in a nearby hall  
shows bleak and insufficient through the rain.

Autumn contains a memory of spring  
and the end of life will contain  
a memory of life,  
perhaps the recollection of an enmity repaired  
or some cool and restful place  
or some warm and restful state.



## GATES

I meet him on a corner  
in a light that hints at spangles.  
I learn he has AIDS.  
And yes, he has the gauntness  
of the photographs, the greying hair.  
'I'm thinking,' he says, 'of throwing  
a going-away party.'

A dozen years ago  
I might have known his address.  
Coming home I pass  
an entrance to apartments  
where the elderly keep cats,  
a fountain dribbles braids  
and fallen blooms rust gravel.



## LOOKING TO ANTIQUITY

The limy light of a feeble Calvary.

I find I like the pudent Greek idea:  
you reach the age of sixty,  
you throw the little party,  
you drink the hemlock.



## SILK

From a distance I watch  
a young man descend  
by heart-shaped parachute.

He trims his silk,  
I hear a crack,  
he speeds like a bird  
into a garden pond.

When I reach him he lies  
under water as clear  
as the best perspex.

How neatly he is dead,  
how cleverly I dream  
this absence of bubbles.



## SOUTH AUCKLAND

He tethers the dog neglects  
the dog for days and weeks  
on end. He can do this. You  
chain a dog to a stake and  
it stays there. It starves it  
thirsts it can't take shelter.  
You chain a dog to a stake  
and it stays there.

**Read by  
Keren Oertly-Ryan**

Fernando Pessoa  
- from *The Book of  
Disquiet* 1982

*Letter not to be sent*

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*Letter not to be sent*

I excuse you from having to appear in my idea of you. Your life [ ...]

This is not my love; it is just your life.

I love you as I do the sunset or the moonlight, wanting the moment to stay, but wanting nothing more than the feeling of possessing that moment.

# READER BIOGRAPHIES

## Patrick O'Sullivan

Patrick O'Sullivan is a graduate of Melbourne and Cambridge Universities and is Head of the Classics Dept. at UC where he has been teaching since 1999. He has published widely on Archaic and Classical Greek literature and culture, especially on ancient theatre, lyric poetry, intellectual history and aesthetics.

## Jessica Maclean

Ko Puheke rāua ko Motatau ōku maunga. Ko Rangaunu tōku moana, ko Taumarere tōku awa. Ko Mamarū rāua ko Ngātokimatawhaorua ōku waka. Ko Kareponia rāua ko Motatau ōku marae. Ko Ngāti Kahu rātou ko Ngāti Hine, ko Ngāti Maclean ōku iwi. Ko Jessica Maclean tōku ingoa. He kaiawhina au ki te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, ki Aotahi School of Māori and Indigenous Studies. Tēnā rā tātou katoa.

## Jennifer Katherine Shields

Jennifer Katherine Shields is a proudly queer and trans artist, musician, writer, curator, et cetera. She's interested in queer history, trans lit, progressive and subversive art that supports communities, all that good stuff.

## Tusiata Avia

Poet, performer, and children's book writer Tusiata Avia was born in Christchurch, New Zealand. She earned a BA from Canterbury University and has lived in Samoa and greater Australia. Avia is the author of *Fale Aitu / Spirit House* (2016), *Bloodclot* (2009), and *Wild Dogs Under My Skirt* (2004). Her poetry weaves mythology with personal narratives and examines her Samoan and Palagi background.

Avia has been an artist-in-residence at the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies and was appointed to an Ursula Bethell Residency in Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge. She also held the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers' Residency at the University of Hawai'i and won a Janet Frame Literary Trust Award.

## **Bernadette Hall**

Bernadette Hall lives in the beautiful Hurunui. She has written ten collections of poetry. Her latest *Maukatere, floating mountain*, with artwork by Rachel O'Neill (Seraph Press 2016). In 2015 she collaborated with Christchurch artist, Robyn Webster, on *Matakaea, Shag Point*, an art /text installation exhibited in the Ashburton Art Gallery. In the same year she received the Prime Minister's Award for Poetry. In 2017 she was invested as a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to literature.

## **Isla Martin**

Isla Martin [Ngāti Uenuku], is a writer and musician living in Ōtautahi. She has been published in the Catalyst Literary Journal and has performed at both the National Poetry Slam and the Rising Voices Finals. In the weekday world, Isla spends her daylight hours advocating for tamariki in the mental health system. Regardless, she uses the roots of her whakapapa to ground all forms her mahi takes.

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“Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au. Ko au te ngahere, ko te ngahere tatou katoa.” “I am the river, and the river is me. I am the forest, and the the forest is everyone.” - Whanganui River proverb.

## **Laura Borrowdale**

Laura Borrowdale is writer, teacher and mother based in Ōtautahi. She writes regularly about feminism, sexuality, and relationships. She is the founding editor of Aotearotica, and her work has appeared VICE, Sport, Turbine and Takahe, amongst others.

## **Sudi Dargipour**

Sudi Dargipour is an artist from Iran who explores issues ranging from memories and identity to the definition of gender roles in Iranian society through her artworks and designs. Living & working in New Zealand drives her to explore the perception of femininity from a free society point of view. Her style of design consists of two major components the first is her take on Persian calligraphy, the second is her interpretation of traditional Persian motifs.

## **Priscilla Howe**

Priscilla Howe is an artist, designer and writer currently based in Ōtautahi. Her practise is predominantly print and sculpture based surrounding themes such as phenomenology, technology and queerness.

## **Melanie McKerchar**

Melanie McKerchar has had her poetry published in numerous journals and anthologies. She has performed at the Christchurch WORD Festival and the Going West Writers Festival. She is a Catalyst regular and founded the Christchurch Feminist Poets. She is obsessed with haiku, finding poems in the strangest places and the blurring of boundaries.

## **Jamie Hanton**

Curator, writer and current director of The Physics Room.

## **Audrey Baldwin**

Otautahi-based artist, curator and all 'round rabble rouser, currently operating as The Physics Rooms' Access Coordinator Intern.

## **Keren Oertly-Ryan**

Tēnā koe e kaipānui. Ki ngā awenga i ngā whārangi nei, ka mihi, ka mihi, ka mihi. Greetings to the reader and acknowledgements to the powerful presences in these pages. Keren Oertly Ryan received her BFA (Hons) from Central St Martins School of Art and Design (London, UK) in 2011, and her MFA from Ilam School of Fine Arts (Christchurch, NZ) in 2018.

Drawing on her Swiss, Celtic and Aotearoa New Zealand heritages, Keren explores ideas of identity and affinity, being and belonging, and how these might be generated, transmitted and accrue meaning within shifting contexts. Working alongside local communities, Keren's multidisciplinary work seeks to foster connection and promote cooperative action through intensified aesthetic and social experiences. Tēnā tātou katoa.



