

*Black Bough: Issue 4*

*Divine  
Darkness*

*Dan Foy*

“Love gave the wound which while I breathe will bleed”

‘Astrophil and Stella II’, Sir Philip Sidney (1582)



*Rae Howells*  
*Guest Reader*



*Matthew M. C. Smith*  
*Editor*



*Mark Antony Owen*  
*Guest Reader*



*Richard Waring*  
*Guest Reader*

Words from the editor:

Rae, Mark, Richard - thank you for everything.

Fallen pilgrims

Our destination was darkness.

We heard voices, made out shadows.

We took gifts of words from fallen pilgrims.

Word-fragments; images are treasure.

Each mind was a threshold.

Though far away, there is light. Our journey ends.”

*Matthew M.C. Smith* - November 2019

Photos and artwork

Cover photograph by David Fry

Picture 1 by Ankh Spice

Picture 2 by Jeffrey Yamaguchi

Picture 3, 4 and 5 by Anne Casey

Pictures 6, 7 and 8 by Claire Loader

Photo in epilogue by James Young

Photos before epilogue by K. Weber

Beautiful artwork throughout by Adwaita Das

*Prologue: Eight portraits*







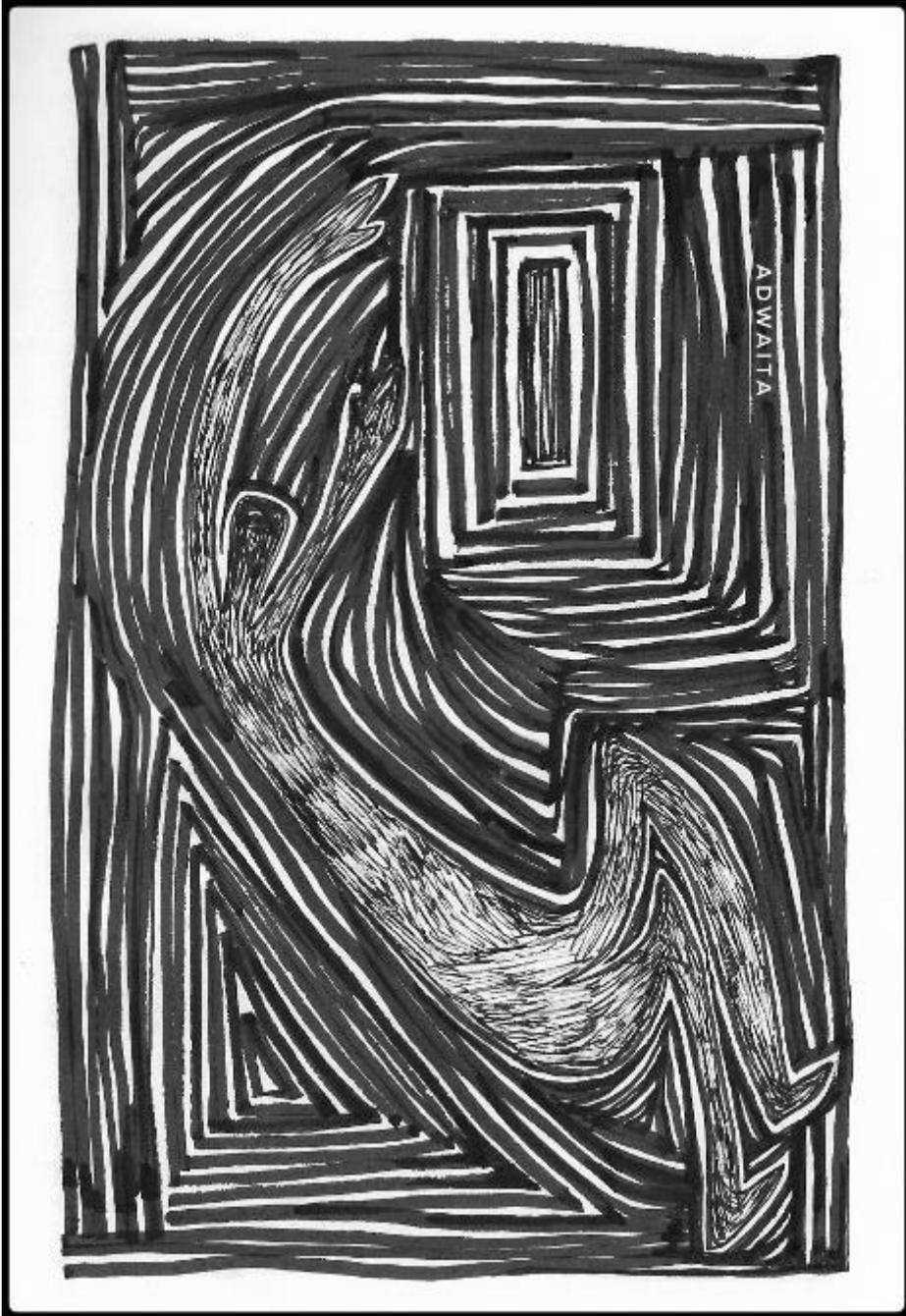




Claire Kealey



*I - Torture*



Kindness

I put you in the torture machine—  
and I'm the one who let you out.

Street of the Future

Portal to the past  
where I will

have replaced  
everything

in our life  
with everything

in my life.

Greed

The eyes of the one-legged pigeon  
find mine—*look away, look away:*

I won't look away.

*Tara Skurtu*

marital terms and conditions

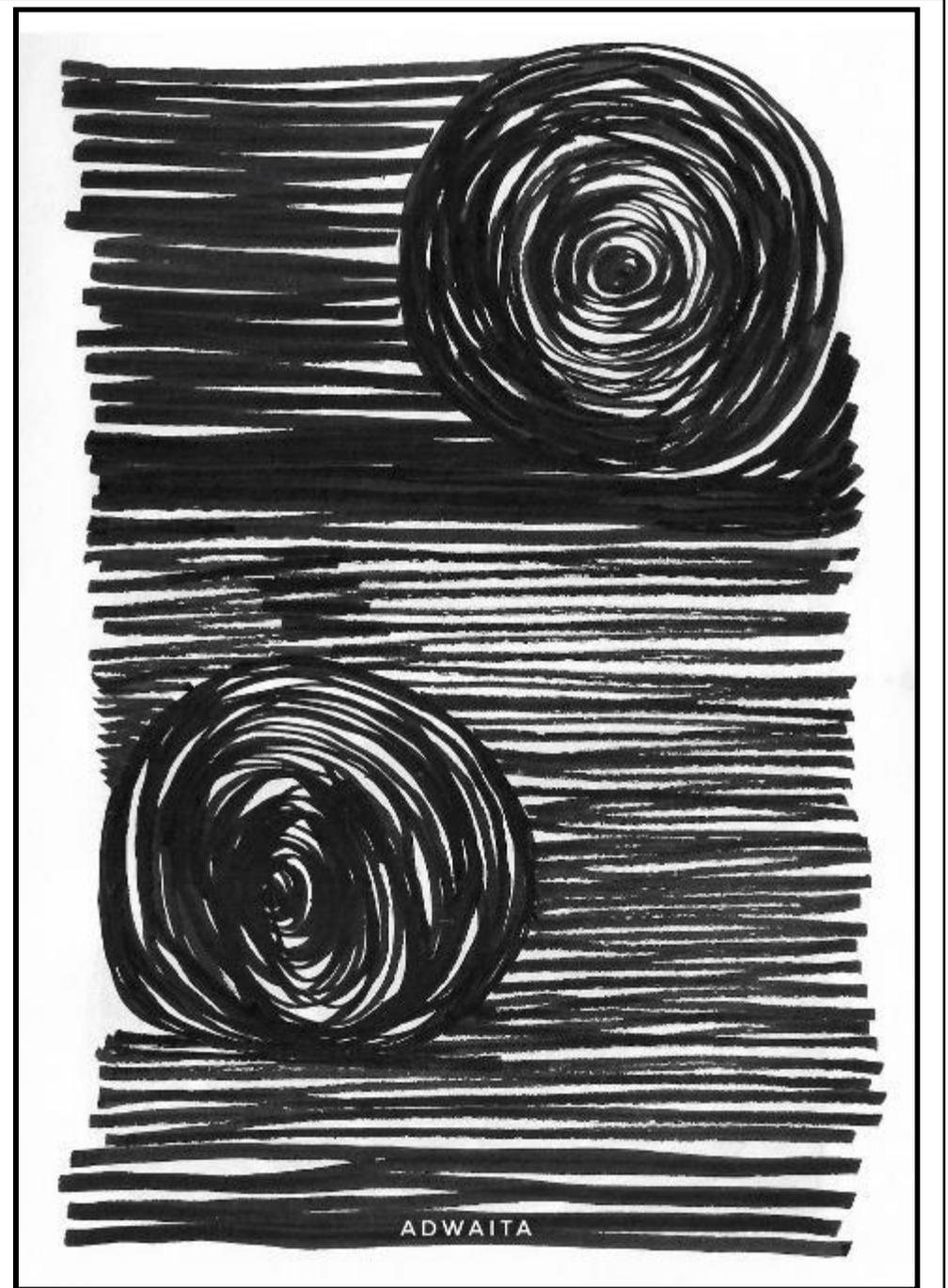
promise me  
please  
if one of us ever leaves  
it will be me

*Cecile Bol*

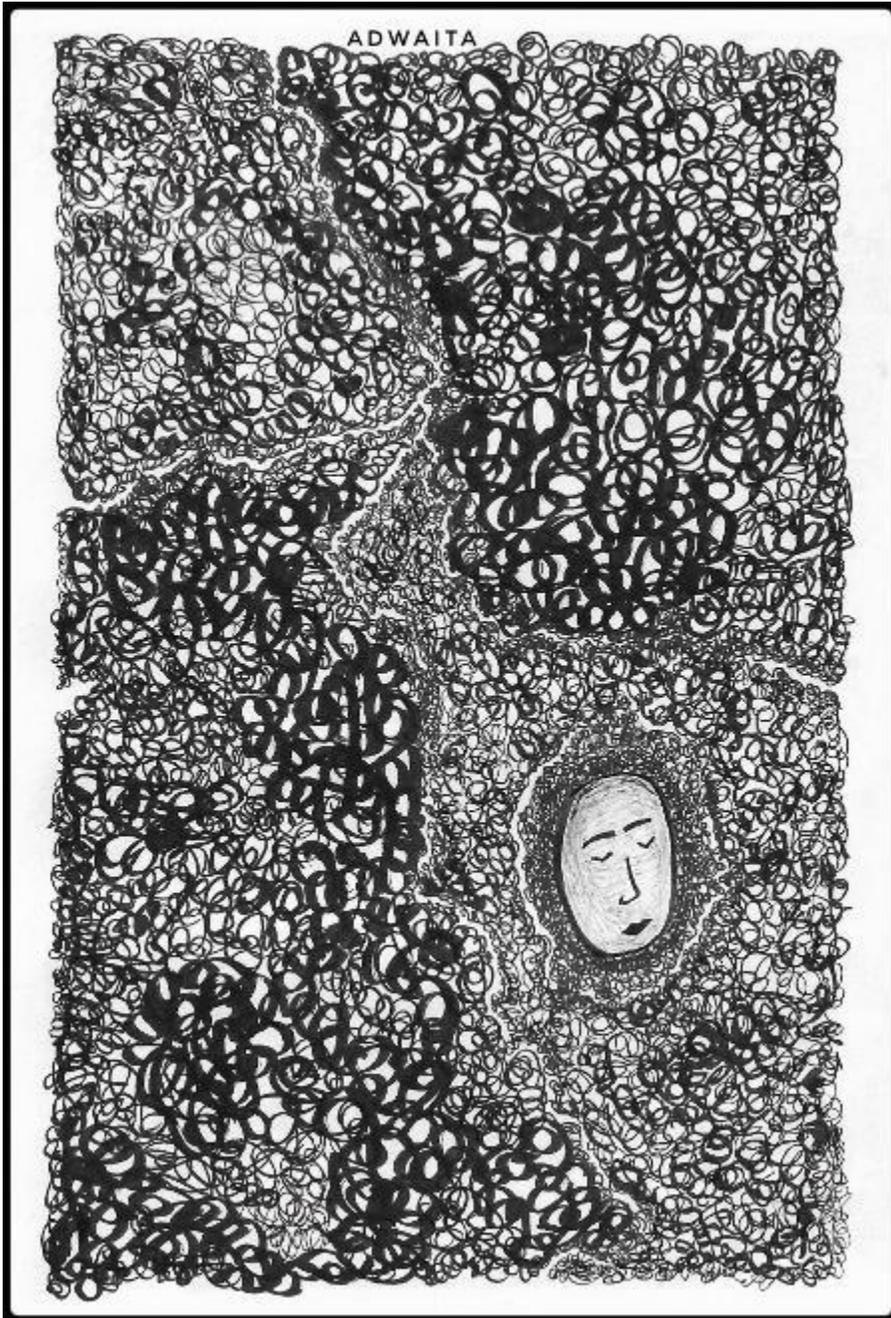
Bouquet

when nightfall comes  
I'll take in my hands  
a vase of dead flowers  
October's wedding  
turning into laughter

*Agnieszka Filipek*







Tidal

Tide of blunt force  
pain recedes

So simple  
this territory of remission

What to ask of the preternatural light  
at shore an icon

of driftwood  
This is how

I float  
towards my mother

*Robert Frede Kenter*

Fallback (throwback)

Clifftop rocks, sharpened by southerlies  
bruise my brave, bared winterings-over

A pretty wind insists my hair to kitestings, toes scatter  
small scree, bouncing lust for the fall

into the farbelow bay – once caldera, now again  
eager cradle, rocking full of soft blanket-blue

*call to the void*, you said, but I hear only gulls, urging *oh, go, go*  
one more step and gravity loosens her fist

I unravel - apeswing, quickening shrew, nothing  
but open gills falling back to the breathing water

*Ankh Spice*

A little drop is all it takes

You do not have to have been  
Torn free of your clothes to be stripped.  
A drop of destruction fizzles in your lemonade.  
Feels a little odd but you kill it with thrill of  
The Irish Sea's waves tingling on your tongue,  
And the stamping roar of Dublin beneath you.  
It wasn't even St. Patrick's Day.  
Maybe if it had been,  
I would've been able to invent a pathetic reason when  
I woke up painted with blood and vomit.

*Holly Peckitt*

Laundry

One day left for stylish melancholy  
For bandanas and overalls  
Humiliation will visit in last year's blazer  
Pressed with orchids

*James Garza*

Nargissi Koftay

Mother earth, sliced neatly down the middle  
Wobbles under the fierce fracturing jabs  
Of my fork. I aim first for the riddle  
Posed by her fused powder-core. With sharp stabs

I hollow out her heart, leaving the white  
Horizon between crust and chasm bereft.  
Then in slow nibbles I rob her of light,  
Crumble her loam on the crumbs of my theft;

And then bite by bite swallow it up too,  
Crowning its doom before starting anew.

*Hibah Shabkhez*

Impossible to Audit Sadness

Welcome rain  
On funeral day  
Deepened the misery  
And nullified attempts  
To estimate tears.

*Joe Cushman*

Magpie

We greet the magpie taking refuge from the lip  
of roof outside. Tail wrangled, ruffled crown,  
she watches rain that falls in ropes to ground.

Night Terror

I'd left her dreaming  
where she drapes her nets to dry

the cobbles under my heel  
with the sea breeze streaking  
rivulets along my cheeks

*Hilary Watson*

X-ray

Across a moon  
white as a bleached bone,  
a wisp of black cloud,  
like a shadow on an x-ray.

Porch Light

Five years on,  
their porch light burns  
through each night.

Just in case.

Wardrobe

Nothing left in your wardrobe,  
but the breath of mothballs,  
wooden bones of hangers.

*Stephen Bone*

Mountain Lake

I am finally ready to wade in -  
without pause, or I would be lost again.  
I feel the water submerge me,  
feel the panic as lungs and heart unnerve me.

But soon I breathe, feel the water  
filling my lungs, my hair,  
feel it cleaning me out - I gasp it in like air.

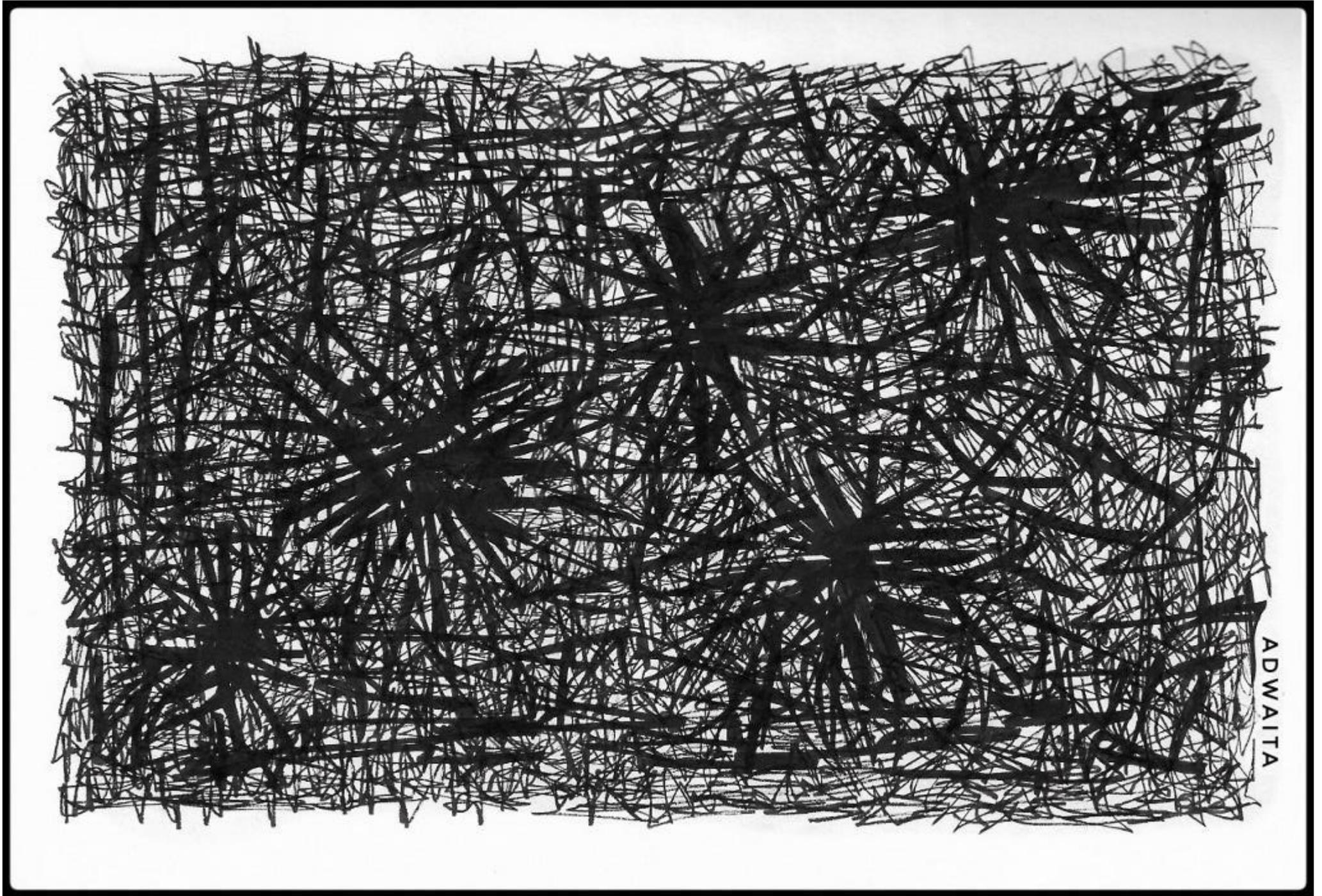
When I leave, though my grief runs  
off me in sheets,  
its hold still strangles.

*Eabhan Ní Shuilleabháin*

Gulls

A tumble of black-backed gulls  
Tears the white tension  
from the morning sky,  
Reverberation of feathers  
Trembling over the waters,  
Gossamer to waiting waves,  
Upward soar, to wingtip curve  
On spiral current,  
Ellipsis in the wide blue.

*Rebecca Lowe*



ADWAIITA

*II - Bleed*

Diptych for a Missing Person

i

The village is taken from us      darling  
We sit in our mapless home      listening

Her car    a hollow promise at the rec  
          the tyres letting out

In this house                      its odd cartography  
of loss                      we're dredging all the rivers

Light fails      In the morning  
we'll perform another sweep

ii

Bitter day-break      Walk the brook  
where they found her last week

A cobalt smear      as of oil spilled  
ekes from the rivervein's clay wall

Water-snag fidgets under reeds  
infers a something throttled

The air ticks                      hardening  
Like the water      its surface twitches

*Luke Palmer*

Full Moon

A feather, a bone  
in the shape of a star

suspended from the moon's  
last mooring

The shadow of a crow  
follows dusk to midnight -

a blur in the wolf's dreaming.

*Deborah Purdy*

Desert Child

She could say Saguaro before she was two,  
her breath warm on moon-lily milk,  
fat fingers drawing a hawk moth down.

The sandman scatters red dust at Mojave,  
crossing bells a comfort and she sleeps.

Jimsonweed blooms in the belly of midnight,  
an atomic flash of neon wipes the desert clean.

*Lynn Valentine*

downside

got hammock-sick, tree-  
addled, sidewinded  
by low-slung fruit.

was stomach-less  
on an upswing  
until i down-turned, face-

planted in the dust  
of crabgrass, hell-bent  
on standing line-straight

but, instead, life-spiraled.

*K Weber*

Deserving

We took swing dance lessons and moved  
that couch for Greg Louganis.

You proposed to me in the apartment  
where I spent the night on the toilet.

Thanks for listening to all the screams  
of various women in my blood.

I entered a contest in February  
but you came in first.

Safety Shot

We kiss like snooker balls  
and cannon away in separate directions  
to sink cleanly into corner pockets  
at opposite ends of the room.  
We rest, as you hug the cushion tighter still.

*Mat Riches*

Last Rites and Orders

The end of service; beer towels are hang ceremoniously over taps;  
They are like tall priests in long gowns, leading a silent prayer  
At joy's grave.

*David Rudd-Mitchell*

images

wait until you see yourself in  
spring lake reflections // in luminous heavy looking glass  
in spiralling winds on plains in april

as months shift  
like blackbirds preparing broods in colour  
you will see yourself in teardrops // autumnal mists  
over russet meadows  
in spider-web-december snowflakes

in the first tomorrow you'll ever remember

*Paul Robert Mullen*

Gathering  
*for Ding Ling*

This storm has disturbed the blossoms -  
petals swirl on the wind, scatter far away  
from home, branches lonely in their barrenness.

When morning comes, I will shoulder  
my rake, gather all those lost petals into  
a mound in my yard to become my poetry.

*Lisa Stice*

Author's note: \* Ding Ling (1904-1986; China): poet (several collections including *Zai bei'an Zhong, Shui* and *Yebu*), fiction writer (several including *Meng Ke, Wo zai Xia cun de shibou* and *Du Wanxiang*), and revolutionary

(Be)longing

Hands drifting through wild hair,  
shaking out a stray curl that has caught a leaf.

Hands drifting to trunk of birch,  
thumb against whorl of knot, lift of bark.

Hands drifting to earth underfoot,  
fingers deep into moss and lichen, grasping.

Hands drifting to grey of rock, loose shale,  
palm feeling warmth of sun's passage.

Hands drifting to sky, fingers spread wide,  
head thrown back, eyes clear. Open now.

*Kim Fabner*

split

i cultivate small infections. pick  
my nails ragged, the crescent  
of my thumb peeling its twin  
like fruit.

in the morning: my  
skin hot, split  
tight over swelling.  
see, even i can grow, can make  
something happen.

Manūs

when you tell me that you love me in the loud dark bar,  
it rings like a shot. feels like a thumb in the bullet hole:  
the salt rim of your margarita stinging  
every cut on the way down.

of course i can only think of this in terms of fucking and fighting,  
the functions of your hands and how they twist inside my chest  
until something comes loose.

call it tenderness the way parts of me are peeling open  
under your thumb;  
call the rime of my blood under your nail proof.

*Eve Elizabeth Moriarty*

Gravity

It is a kind of madness to face autumn  
the curl of her leaves into fists

the gravity of it  
of knowing what's to come  
once her skirts have settled

how bare feet will fare under her kisses  
the drench of her love

and then winter's whiskered face  
gawping through the doorway  
she flounced out of

*Rae Howells*

sickle moon

the reaper carves

into dawn

ocean fog

the breathlessness

to disappear

*Fractled*

Christening

*Mother* is a swimming pool of voices,  
the wet limbs of children.  
You stare  
through mothers reflected  
in training pool windows:  
flickering, mutable,  
your see-through face among them.

You wait for a child.  
Your name rises from water.

The Audience

Before I go back to myself,  
kiss me. Right here, in this cinema.  
Let it be nitrate.  
Let it burn underwater.  
Let all the actors talk themselves  
into a neat ending. We'll applaud.

Kiss me before I slip  
back into something uncomfortable.  
Don't you prefer the dark?

*Maria Taylor*

Digitalis

After the thunderstorms  
in late July,  
a lone foxglove quivers  
its pale purple velvet  
and white fur amongst pools  
of sky and snail-silvered leaves.  
A foot-high dance of slender bells,  
how I long to disappear  
inside your freckled blossom,  
your poisoned fairy purse.

Early Autumn

The greens of the sycamore trees  
are curling like fingers. It seems  
like only yesterday they started to leaf.  
Today, three generations  
of my family have gathered.  
I watch the theatre of creases  
around their eyes when they smile,  
toddlers dancing about our feet. Waves  
of my husband's hair surge silver  
in the afternoon sun.

*Lucy Whitehead*

God

under the sun that makes the river run hot –  
he suffers  
naked desires

days spent  
watching women walk under speechless green trees –  
flooding him with violent rapture – a criminal lust –

he looks like god – cut from rock – golden  
& they cannot tell him *no*

*Alan Parry*

Father

tries to fill his loss with words, feels  
he has no tongue, cannot resist  
the creeping speech of stone: cain digs  
shallow holes with his hands. cannot fight  
the real. no-one in particular  
is near

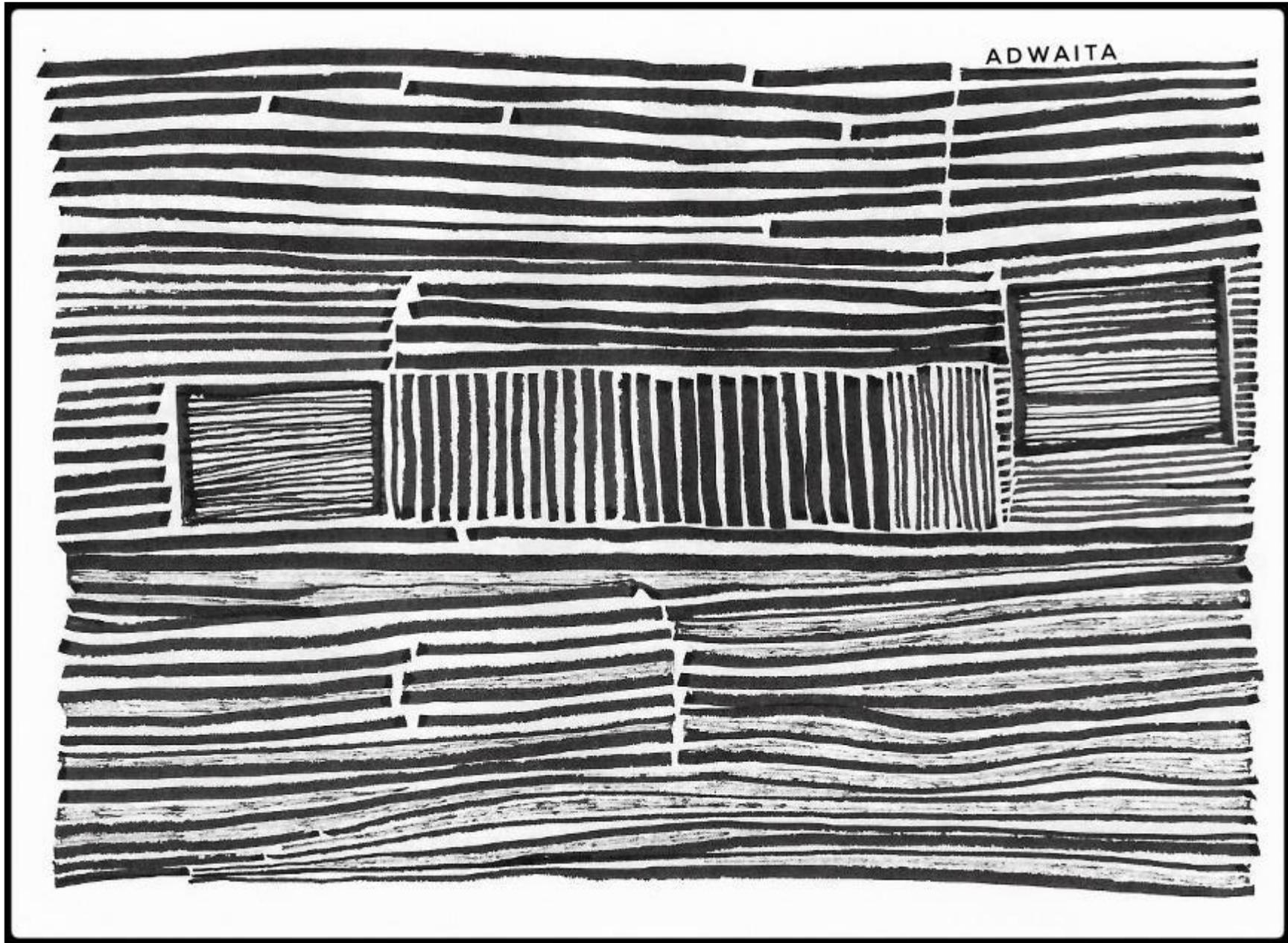
across fixed distance, tree arms  
stop & open, lean to speak with Wind, hear  
nothing, hold nothing, call shivering green  
to red ravens

*Warren Czapa*

Strangers on the 11.44 to Birmingham New Street

Nylon covered thighs				two branches reaching
press against each other		newspapers overlapping		for the same patch
with unfamiliar heat,				of golden sunlight.

*Elizabeth Kemball*



### Snapshot

Forty years on  
yellowed edges  
frame the boy, as was back then,  
frozen mid-jump  
in flight forever,  
locked out of time – a still life perfection.

*Maxine Rose Munro*

This poem is written in Ljóðaháttur, a Norse poetic metre involving stress and alliteration.

### In the doorway of the old BHS

A bright spark blazing on addictive genes.  
Reflected in his eyes effigy smiles  
of a stunted soldier fighting  
centiles - shaking hands with  
the man he  
might have  
been.

*Helen Ross*

### Polyurethane

A bike left out all winter - saddle erupts into florets of mould.  
Uncreamed skin in full sun peels like paint from damp, damned walls.  
Asbestos blooms in abandoned building sites. Yellow spray-foam insulation billows from  
still-standing ragged walls in tufts. Proliferating custard clouds, inflatable scar tissue that spores to  
touch. Vivid bubbles, cast (in) stone.  
Metal struts warp and wilt. One unstable structure inside another.

The ground, what might. What might be the ground.

*Lydia Unsworth*

Leaving Carterhaugh

Tam Lin went back when Janet died,  
bent his knee  
to his old, cold queen.

She kept her promise:  
thrust her nails like thorns into his eyes,  
replaced them with two of wood,  
which may splinter  
but never bleed  
or weep.

*Jennifer A. McGowan*

Folktale note: Janet of Carterhaugh rescues Tam Lin from the Queen of Fairies. The Queen cries that if she'd known he'd betray her, she would've replaced his eyes with wood.

How Long

since they stopped looking immortal?  
My mother dying in her bed.  
My father with his face like a wet sheet.  
The paramedics dropped her and she opened  
her knees on the ambulance steps. My mother  
bleeding through the stroke ward and my father  
forgetting to hold her hand.

*Kym Deyn*

Innocent Cruelty XIII

A fire-  
fly flashing,  
  
spinning  
in a  
frayed web.

Innocent Cruelty XVII

The postman in a storm.  
Rain-  
water on a love  
letter's question mark.

Innocent Cruelty XXI

Moonlight muffled  
in winter cloud.  
  
Pasture silenced  
in whispering snow.

*Benjamin Cutler*

*III - Stripped*



doctored time

Transitional whip of sunrise  
Some of us prefer darkness  
Its stiffer sound, tranquil beast  
Flowering for kingdom come  
The crickets run out at dawn  
Deer settle past their forage

How are we to begin again  
Stripped by this first light

*Steven Hartung*

## Kaboom

bet you like trains, can tell by the way you heart-shaped-eyes stare at steam  
  
(chugga times two, choo too) | | parked your red Dodge on eastside tracks | | waited  
  
for ghost children to push you, or not | | either way, you are an oleander  
  
underwater | | bet you pipe dream about the Pacific | | maybe it was too much  
  
time spent on the Golden Gate Bridge repeating that line in sam sax's poem  
that goes *I wonder what water smells like when it takes on the property of concrete* | | you kept  
thinking when they say *come hell or high water* it means "no matter what" in Texas,  
but KABOOM when you jump off a bridge | | to collide is to pirouette, spiral  
outward & wait for the fog to come | | & when it does, it's short lived & tired  
| | collapses on top, all impressed with what its done

*Melanie Kristeen*

## Silence

Silence, slow my personal terrors  
In a raw instant,  
All truth is faced alone.

Listen, hear fading babel  
A peculiar auricular quality.

Quiet monks, under photon crowns  
Hymns unuttered, always seeking.

Light craves a darkness  
Silence the wide horizon.

Face the void, undone.

*David Fry*

Surfers and Jumpers

From the top of the cliff they look like seals –  
sleek, wet-suited bodies gleaming in grey waves

their cheeks resting on their boards as they loll –  
waiting, lazily nonchalant, they rise and fall

rise and fall.

She's watching them from the top of the cliff  
dreaming of updrafts, of gulls, she raises her arms

her pulse speaking to the throb of the tide  
she seeks safer footing behind her – rise and fall

leap and fall.

*Ellie Rees*

Post-War Baptism

I emerge from

black blooms of smoke

carrying him on my back:  
he dangles over my forehead,

shading shrapnel-peppered eyes,  
which dart from dust to sky

these two wooden legs snap -  
I collapse onto the river-bank;

a hook-hand shovels soil

into my mouth

*Soraya Bakbakhi*

Haiku

1.  
The world would end now  
Upon this ocean floor where  
They found the first shell

2.  
You smell like the road  
Hot asphalt, damp kudzu and  
Antebellum ghosts

3.  
The dead buddleia  
Makes herself a bereft home  
For winged orphans

4.  
With mouth turned skyward  
She collects the rainwater  
Algae green, and still.

*Amanda Needham*

Love in a red hot water bottle

The rubber has long perished,  
its mouth slack-jawed, its teeth blunt.  
Once it used to lie proud under the paisley quilt,  
the knitted blanket, the flannelette sheet.  
Every chill night, she would fill it carefully  
burping it for bubbles, wrapping it in an old vest.  
There, just on the right of teddy,  
it would incubate pyjamas  
and heat my night-time cave.

*Jean James*

My Fury is Ghost

My fury is ghost. It is eyes  
gazing at fields and sky.  
It is fingers still at this table.

*Resurface...*

you strike with storm-drain eyes -  
flashing, smashing, cracking of nose-bone,  
stamping, thrashing - brain, bag, blood.

My fury is ghost. A concussion of mercury.  
We will stand once again, face-to-face,  
setting a duel to end our worlds.

*Matthew M.C. Smith*

Two years

It's dark and she laughs, straight teeth bared  
Light from the neon-lit ad campaign glints off their whiteness  
While he repeatedly kicks the bus shelter so hard  
The plexiglass rattles  
But does not shatter  
Perfect teeth displayed in laughter rhythm do not shatter on this night  
If he has a reason, I don't know it  
Give it two years  
Maybe as many as five  
She won't be laughing

*Elizabeth McGeown*

Emergence

As I circulate these streets  
laid out like thread-sized veins  
I see my shadow, once faint  
turned to sea fret

Now dark, distinct  
it is a silhouette  
dancing like a spellbound child  
in the lemon-yellow dawn

*Jessica Wortley*

Horse-fly (Brexit)

*The English [call it] a Burrel-fly, Stowt, and Breese: and also of sticking and clinging, Cleg and Clinger (J. Rowland, Theater of Insects, 1658).*

... of a sudden the flies were at him  
with the wrong words.

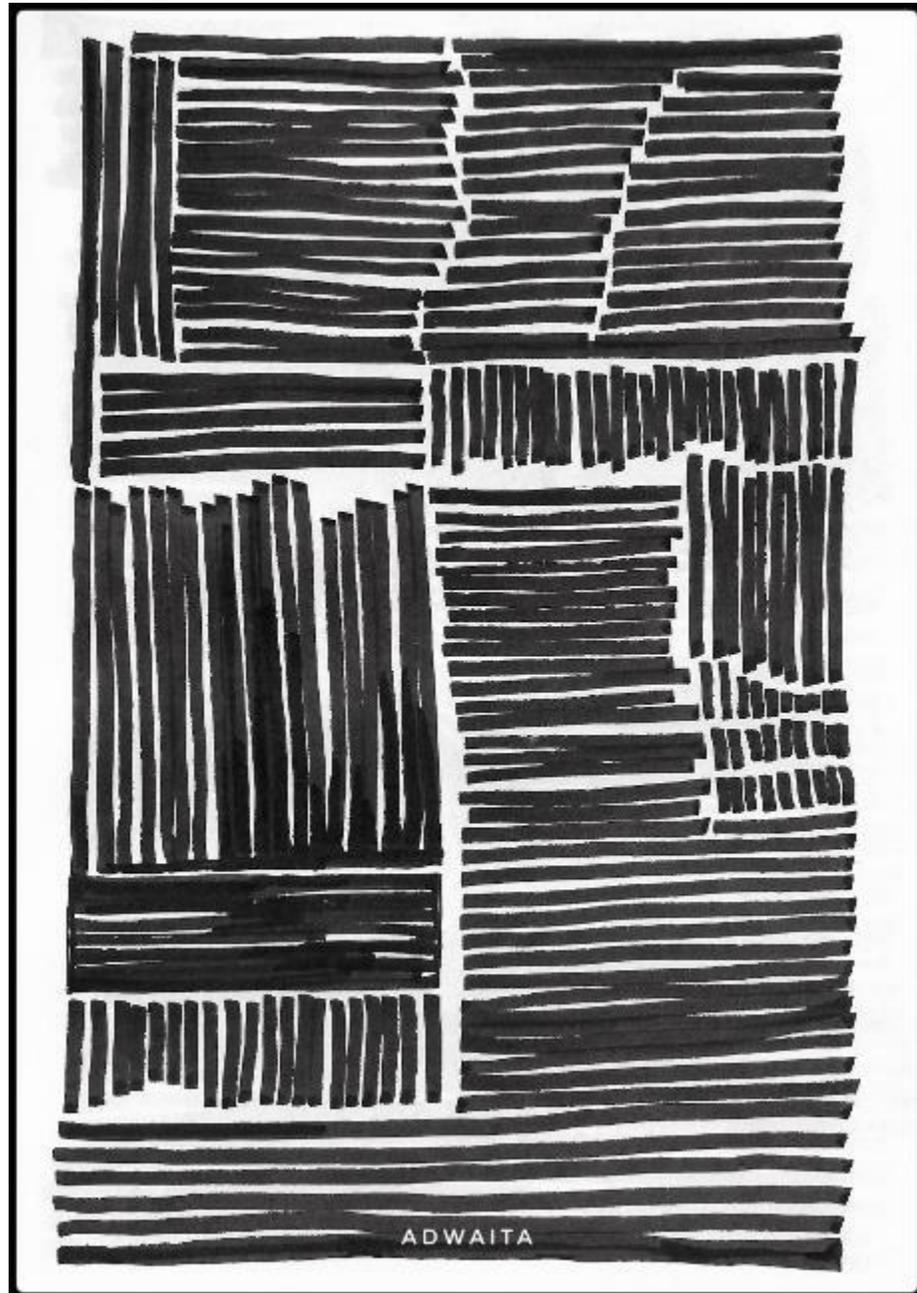
burly stouts and gad-flies was the right language:  
concussion big with gad or spike.

nothing bit or was bitten  
the males being feeble-mouthed.

cleg the clinger delving at turpitude  
data-mine deep.

parasite-certain the flies nursed  
and worded his hardening blood.

*Anthony Howe*



Q

I've been sucked inside a 1980s videogame.  
Fasting forces the body to look like marble.  
Measuring just a few centimetres across,  
bubbles of despair develop within the body.

A

Stop trying to be sad all next century.  
Squats, bro – chin to win.  
Robot chefs supply us with glowing, pink eggs.  
They've been sucked inside America, ghostly, unfeeling.

*Matthew Haigh*

### Pruning

Orange-clad men, agile as squirrels, trim trees in our courtyard.  
I remember pruning forsythia, lilac, rose of Sharon  
in a house I left behind, punctuating plants' run-on sentences with full  
stops  
(Worrying I've taken too much—  
or too little).  
I think of the pruning now, inside my body: medicine's  
chemical hard-hats, silent saws chopping healthy growth along with sick. Winter  
is coming. Still, there is flowering—autumn crocus, marigold, the last  
of the morning glories. Bulbs we plant now, waiting for spring.

*Ellen Jaffe*

Evil Ditches Entrench Pandemonium

Umami – a tsunami of tergiversate;  
cantaloupe cat, butterfat balbutiated  
n-n-nadir; quaff chalcantithite nepenthe.

Literal translation:

Evil Gutters Shelter Chaos

A meaty taste - a waterfall of changing loyalties;  
a ginger cat, full of butter stammers  
at their lowest point; drink bright blue poison to forget.

Welsh translation:

Gwteri drwg yn Cysgodi Anhrefn

Blas cigog, rhaeadr o deyrngarwch;  
cath sinsir, llawn ataliadau menyn  
ar eu pwynt isaf; yfed gwenwyn glas llachar er mwyn  
anghofio.

*Rhea Seren Phillips*

Fishing the wind

out cast  
into the whip sea  
that colourless, borderless  
word-snatch sea

out cast  
into the timeless rip  
the dishevelled swell, into  
the heave and slack, out cast

on a bad day, catch futility  
on a good day, chuck it back

*Elaine Ruth White*

*Epilogue - Spine / Wire*



ungrateful

master gives me a spine  
an armature made  
of wire

he weaves flesh around the core  
and kisses me gently  
to life

he whispers a soul into it  
and plants eyes like bottles  
in the skull

and i spend decades  
tearing it  
apart

*Mela Blust*

*J. Young*



# List of Contributors

## Artist

Adwaita Das is the author of *27 Stitches, Colours Of Shadow & Songs Of Sanity*. She has studied English literature & filmmaking & worked in theatre-news-advertising. Her art is for inner awareness & mental health. Darkness is not evil; fear is. Being mindful brings love, joy & peace. Instagram: @adwaita.das Twitter : @adwaita\_one

## Photography and poetry

David Fry has 4 poems published in *Black Bough*. He also has a poem published in *Re-side* Issue 2. He is still emerging. Twitter: @thnargg www.seekingthedarklight.co.uk

Ankh Spice is a sea-obsessed poet from Aotearoa (NZ), whose poetry appears in a number of international publications. He truly believes that narrative and kindness create change, and you'll find him doing his best to prove it @SeaGoatScreams on Twitter or @AnkhSpiceSeaGoatScreamsPoetry on Facebook

K Weber has 4 self-published poetry books available free in PDF & audio formats. These and her full writing and photography credits are available at <http://kweberandherwords.wordpress.com>

## Photography

Anne Casey is the author of two poetry collections published by *Salmon Poetry*. Anne is an award-winning poet/writer and literary editor with a keen interest in nature photography. She has worked for over 30 years as a journalist, magazine editor, legal author & media communications director.

Claire Loader was born in New Zealand and spent several years in China before moving to County Galway, Ireland. Her work has appeared in various publications, including *Crannóg, Dodging The Rain, The Bangor Literary Journal* and *Crossways*. Twitter: @msloader

Jeffrey Yamaguchi creates projects with words, photos, and video as art explorations, as well as through his work in the publishing industry. Twitter: @jeffryyamaguchi [www.jeffreyyamaguchi.com](http://www.jeffreyyamaguchi.com)

James Young lives in the Mumbles Gower and does most of his writing in his beach hut at Rotherslade.

## Poetry

Soraya Bakhbakhli lives in Cardiff, Wales, and is a keen fan of music and partial to a strong cocktail or a glass of red wine. Soraya is currently completing a collection of poetic works and a novel; she can be followed on Twitter: @sorayabakhbakhli.

Mela Blust is a Pushcart Prize and three time 'Best of the Net' nominee. She has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander, Rust + Moth, The Nassau Review* and more. Her debut poetry collection, *Skeleton Parade*, is available with *Apep Publications*. She is Head Publicist and Social Media Manager for *Animal Heart Press*, and a contributing editor for *Barren Magazine*. Twitter: @melablust

Cecile Bol is a Dutch writer. She is the co-leader of a local English poetry stanza. Her English work has appeared (or is due to appear) in *The Blue Nib, Impspired, Picaroon Poetry, The Lake* and anthologies from *The Frogmore Press* and *Earlyworks Press*. @cecilebol

Stephen Bone's latest pamphlet, *Plainsong*, was published by *Indigo Dreams* in 2018.

Briony Collins is a published poet and storyteller. She won the 2016 Exeter Novel Prize and was the 2018 Literature Wales Under 25s Bursary recipient. She is represented by DHH Literary Agency. Currently, she is in her last year of study at Bangor University. Twitter: @ri\_collins Instagram @ri\_collins96

Joe Cushnan was born and raised in Belfast, Northern Ireland, but now lives in England. After retiring from a long retail management career, he devotes as much time as he can to writing. He has a portfolio of published features, reviews, poetry and fiction.

Benjamin Cutler is an award-winning poet and high school English teacher from the southern Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina. His poems have appeared in numerous publications, and he is the author of the collection *The Geese Who Might be Gods (Main Street Rag, 2019)*. Twitter: @Bookish\_Bum

Warren Czapa has had poems published in *Closed Gates or Open Arms (Verve, 2019)*, *Magma, Poetry Bus* and online with *Burning House Press*. In 2018, he was longlisted for the Troubadour International Poetry Prize and was commended in the Verve Poetry competition on the theme of 'Community'.

Glenda Davies retired from nursing after 40 years in 1992. Glenda was widowed in 1995. She attended poetry classes & workshops with Dr Catriona Ryan, Peter Thabit Jones, Susan Richardson & others. She obtained a Diploma in Creative Writing from Swansea University in 1999. She is published in *Sagmag, Roundy House, Cruse* magazines

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Fractled, under the great mentorship and friend, Brendon Kent and a member of 'The Haiku Nook', still dabbles with haiku and its related forms while encountering entities with extreme knowledge of such poetry. Fractled currently resides in the USA.

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Steven Hartung lives in the countryside outside Richmond, Virginia on a wee bit of land named Cronk Sollysh and works in IT but is so left (or is it right) -brained, he usually can't tell you what the "I" stands for

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Paul Robert Mullen is a poet, musician, lecturer, sociable loner and compulsive traveller from Southport, Liverpool, England. He is the author of: *curse this blue raincoat* (2017), *testimony* (2018) and *35* (2018), and has been published in many magazines, e-zines, journals and anthologies. He likes porridge, Leonard Cohen, sharks, people singing harmonies, books with broken spines and all things minimalist.

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Amanda Needham is an American poet living in Wales. In addition to writing haikus while drunk, she likes to talk to cats as if they were people. Amanda draws inspiration from her childhood, folklore, and most importantly ghosts. She is

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Alan Parry is a poet & editor from Liverpool. He is an English Lit graduate & teacher who enjoys gritty realism, schnauzers & 60s girl groups. He has previously been published by *Dream Noir*, *Streetcake*, *Re-Side* & others. He cites Alan Bennett & Jack Kerouac as inspiration.

Holly Peckitt is a third-year English Literature with Creative Writing student at Bangor University, Wales. Previously a writer for MuggleNet.com and the blog *Lost in a Library*, when she isn't writing, you can find her wishing she was a witch in Diagon Alley.

Rhea Seren Phillips is a PhD student at Swansea University researching how Welsh poetic forms and metre could be used to reconsider a contemporary Welsh cultural identity. Her poetry has appeared in *Poetry Wales*, *Molly Bloom*, *Envoi*, *Cheval 11*, *The Lonely Crowd* and she is anticipating the release of her debut poetry collection in 2019. Rhea lives in Llanelli, Wales.

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Ellie Rees graduated with a PhD in Creative Writing from Swansea University in January 2018. She can be found at [elliereeswriter.com](http://elliereeswriter.com)

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David Rudd-Mitchell is an occasional poet published in magazines including *Projectionists Playground*, *Zen Space* and *Simply Haiku*. He will also be one of four poets featured in the *Black Light Engine Room Press'* chapbook *Co-Incidental 5* this December.

Hibah Shabkhez is a writer of the half-yo literary tradition, an erratic language-learning enthusiast, a teacher of French as a foreign language and a happily eccentric blogger from Lahore, Pakistan. [www.hibahshabkhezicc.wordpress.com/](http://www.hibahshabkhezicc.wordpress.com/)

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Lynn Valentine writes between dog walks on the Black Isle in the Scottish Highlands. Her work has appeared in anthologies and online in places such as the Scottish Poetry Library blog and *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*. She is a previous winner of the Glasgow Women's Library 'Dragon's Pen' award and has been placed in other competitions.

Hilary Watson lives in Cardiff. She is a graduate of Warwick University's Writers' Programme and was a Jerwood/Arvon Mentee. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Wales*, *Butcher's Dog* & *The Interpreter's House*. She was shortlisted for the Troubadour International Poetry Prize 2018. Twitter: @poetryhilary

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Jessica Wortley is a published poet and teacher of creative writing. She is currently working towards a PhD in creative writing at Teesside University, where she is researching nature writing and wellbeing. Her poetry pamphlet *As If We Were The Trees* was published in 2015.