

HAMISH HAMILTON PRESENTS

Five Dials

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Europe in Pieces

FIVE DIALS

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Tom Basden's writing credits for television include *Plebs*, *Gap Year*, *The Wrong Mans*, *Fresh Meat*, *Peep Show* and *Cowards*. He has written extensively for Radio 4, including three series of the sitcom *Party* and two series of *Cowards*. He has won awards for his solo comedy shows. His plays have been performed at venues including the National Theatre, the Arts Theatre, the Arcola, and the Gate, and he has appeared as an actor in *Plebs*, *Quacks*, *David Brent — Life on the Road*, *W1A*, *Peep Show*, *The Windsors*, *Armstrong & Miller* and *Cowards*.

Will Burns was born in London and raised in Buckinghamshire. He is one of Caught by the River's poets-in-residence. He was named as one of the four Faber & Faber New Poets for 2014. His debut pamphlet in that series was published in October 2014.

Jamie Brisick's books include *Becoming Westerly: Surf Champion Peter Drouyn's Transformation into Westerly Windina*, *Roman & Williams: Things We Made*, *We Approach Our Martinis With Such High Expectations*, *Have Board, Will Travel: The Definitive History of Surf, Skate, and Snow*, and *The Eighties at Echo Beach*. His writings and photographs have appeared in *The Surfer's Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *W*. In 2008 he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship. He lives in Los Angeles.

Ana da Silva is a founding member and songwriter of The Raincoats, the pioneering post-punk band that provided inspiration for several generations of artists, and were cited as a formative influence by Kurt Cobain, Carrie Brownstein, Bikini Kill, and Sex Pistols' John Lydon. In 2005, Ana released her solo debut, *The Lighthouse*. Ana's recent appearances with

The Raincoats include a 2016 collaboration with Angel Olsen for Rough Trade's 40th anniversary, as well as a 2017 presentation in New York of 'The Raincoats and Friends', a celebration of Jenn Pelly's book *The Raincoats*.

Joe Dunthorne's debut novel, *Submarine*, was adapted for film by Richard Ayoade. His second, *Wild Abandon*, won the 2012 Encore Award. His latest is *The Adulterants*.

Najat El Hachmi was born in Morocco in 1979 and moved to Spain in 1987. Her first novel *L'últim patriarca* (Planeta, 2008), won the Ramon Llull Prize 2008 and the Prix Ulysse, and was translated into eleven languages. Her novels *La caçadora de cossos* (2011) and *La filla estrangera* (2015), were followed by *Mare de llet i de mel* (2018).

Joe Gamble is an artist and illustrator currently based in London. His work is intuitive and rough, often done quickly.

Jonas Hassen Khemiri is the author of five novels, six plays, and a collection of plays, essays, and short stories. His work has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. He received the Village Voice Obie Award for his first play *Invasion!* and in 2015 he was awarded the August Prize, Sweden's highest literary honour for the novel *Everything I Don't Remember*. In 2017 he became the first Swedish writer to have a short story published in *The New Yorker*. He lives in Stockholm.



Gavin Haynes writes mainly for *The Guardian* and *Vice*, specialising in pop culture and politics. He also presents a series about alternative believers: *Gavin Haynes' Chosen Ones*. He used to write about music and has definitely met that band you think of as a punchline nowadays.

Chris Lochery is a writer, musician and professional gossip. For the last ten years he has been writing the weekly scandal sheet *Popbitch*, running London's premier romantic disaster storytelling show and teaching children about musical theatre. He is *Five Dials'* resident pianist.

Sophie Mackintosh's fiction has appeared in *Granta* and *TANK*, among others, and she was the winner of the 2016 *White Review* Short Story Prize & the Virago X *Stylist* short story prize. Her debut novel, *The Water Cure*, is published by Hamish Hamilton.

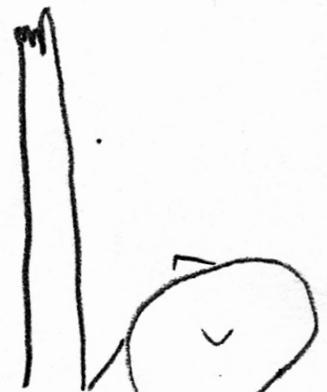
Jackie Morris is an illustrator, author and artist. She lives beside the sea in a small house held together by the webs of spiders, with cats, dogs and sometimes grown up children. Among the many books she has illustrated are *Can You See a Little Bear*, written by James Mayhew and *The Lost Words*, by Robert Macfarlane, published by Hamish Hamilton. She is currently trying to learn the shape of otters, working with river water and sumi ink.

André Naffis-Sahely is from Abu Dhabi, but was born in Venice to an Iranian father and an Italian mother. His translations include over twenty titles of fiction, poetry and nonfiction from French and Italian, including works by Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Abdellatif Laâbi and Alessandro Spina. His debut collection of poetry, published by Penguin UK, is *The Promised Land: Poems from Itinerant Life*.

Russell Norman is an author, restaurateur and broadcaster. He is the founder of the POLPO group of restaurants. His first book *Polpo: A Venetian Cookbook (of Sorts)* won the inaugural Waterstones Book of the Year award in 2012. His second book *Spuntino: Comfort Food, New York Style* was published in September 2015 and won the Guild of Food Writers Award in the Food and Travel category. In 2014 he presented *The Restaurant Man*, a six-part prime-time documentary for BBC2. His latest book is *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*.

Nathalie Olah is a writer whose work on contemporary culture and politics is published by *The Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *The Independent* and *The TLS*. Her fiction has been published by Somesuch Stories and she is currently working towards completing her first novel.

Cesare Pavese was born in northern Italy in 1908. Exiled by the Fascist regime to Calabria in 1935, Pavese eventually returned to Turin to work for the publishing house Einaudi. Pavese won the Strega Prize for fiction, Italy's most prestigious literary award, for *The Beautiful Summer* in 1950. Later the same year, after a brief affair with an American actress, he took his own life. His suicide note reads: 'I forgive everyone and ask everyone's forgiveness. O.K.? Don't gossip too much.'



Chris Power lives and works in London. His 'Brief Survey of the Short Story' has appeared in *The Guardian* since 2007. His first book, the story collection *Mothers*, was published in March.

Anbara Salam grew up in London and studied in Beirut and York before a PhD in Theology at Oxford. Her debut novel, *Things Bright And Beautiful*, was published in April 2018.

David Shields is the internationally bestselling author of twenty books, including *Reality Hunger*, *The Thing About Life Is That One Day You'll Be Dead*, *Black Planet* and *Other People: Takes & Mistakes*. *The Trouble With Men: Reflections on Sex, Love, Marriage, Porn, and Power* is forthcoming from Mad Creek Books in February 2019 in its 21st Century Essays series. His contribution in this issue is an excerpt from his forthcoming book, *Journal of the Plague Year: America, June 2017–June 2018*.

Susan Sontag is the author of, among others, *Against Interpretation*, *On Photography* and *The Volcano Lover*. Her collection, *Stories*, was published in November.

Martha Sprackland is editor at Offord Road Books and a founding editor of multilingual arts zine *La Errante*. She was previously assistant poetry editor at Faber, and before that was co-founder of *Cake* poetry magazine. Her own poetry has appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *Poetry London*, *Poetry Review* and many other places. A pamphlet, *Glass As Broken Glass*, was published by Rack Press in 2017, and a non-fiction book on sharks is forthcoming. She is a poet-in-residence for Caught by the River. In May 2018, she joined *Poetry London* as associate editor.

Elizabeth Strout is the Pulitzer prize-winning author of *Olive Kitteridge*, as well as *The Burgess Boys*, *Abide With Me*, *Amy and Isabelle*, *My Name is Lucy Barton* and *Anything is Possible*. She has written the introduction for *The Beautiful Summer* by Cesare Pavese, a forthcoming title in the Penguin European Writers series. She lives in New York City.

Colm Tóibín was born in Enniscorthy in 1955. He is the author of nine novels including *Brooklyn*, *The Testament of Mary* and *House of Names*. He has written the introduction to *Death in Spring* by Mercè Rodoreda, the first title in the Penguin European Writers series. His work has been shortlisted for the Booker three times. He lives in Dublin.

Yanis Varoufakis is the former finance minister of Greece and the author of three international bestsellers, including most recently *Talking To My Daughter About the Economy: A Brief History of Capitalism*, published by Bodley Head. Born in Athens in 1961, he was for many years a professor of economics in Britain, Australia and the USA before he entered government and is currently Professor of Economics at the University of Athens. Since resigning from Greece's finance ministry he has co-founded an international grassroots movement, DiEM25, campaigning for the revival of democracy in Europe.



Unable to Contribute

Nedim Türfent was imprisoned in Turkey on 12 May, 2016.

Police detained Türfent, a reporter for the pro-Kurdish Dicle News Agency (DİHA), in the eastern province of Van on 12 May, 2016. The Yüksekova Court of Penal Peace in Hakkari province ordered him jailed pending trial in Hakkari prison the following day, according to the leftist daily newspaper *Evrensel*.

The prosecution cited witness testimony accusing Türfent of being a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/KCK) and its offshoot group, the YPS, who propagandize for the banned groups by interviewing their members and taking photographs and videos of them.

According to court documents, Türfent explained that he was not the one who took the pictures or videos his organization used for the story in question, nor had he written the story. He denied being a member of the PKK/KCK, and noted that it was his job to interview people, including members of illegal organizations. 'Interviewing organization members does not make one an organization member,' he said, according to the court record.

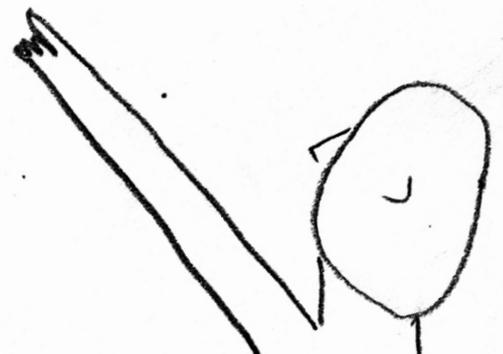
The court ruled that the witness testimonies were enough to create a 'reasonable suspicion' Türfent was a 'member of a [terrorist]organization,' and ordered him jailed pending trial.

DİHA reported in May 2016 that Türfent received threats from police officers prior to his arrest. He told his employer that people who claimed to be police officers threatened him at his home, and that police officers told relatives, 'Nedim should be careful.'

According to court documents reviewed by the Committee to Protect Journalists, Türfent told the court he was 'subjected to inhumane treatment and torture' while being detained.

Türfent is detained in a maximum-security prison in Van, his lawyer, Harika Günay, told CPJ in September 2017. Authorities have denied Türfent's requests to attend his trial hearings in person, the lawyer stated. Günay said he will raise the issue with the Constitutional Court and, if necessary, the European Court of Human Rights.

Türfent has been kept in solitary confinement since his arrest and, according to his lawyer, he has access to mail, although almost all of the books he has requested are not allowed in prison.



On Dean and Europe and the meaning of *festina lente*

Each time we assemble a ‘Europe’ issue, we reassess our connections to the Continent. At the beginning of this project, back in 2008, we’d compile the magazine in London and send it to a house in the south of France where our designer and typographer, Dean Allen, found time to lay out the pages when he wasn’t walking his Weimaraners or making soup. (Dean’s by now infamous soup recipe can be read here.)

The first part of our editorial process was a rush against the clatter and mark-up of deadlines. Printers spat out pages. Pages got scanned. Our bundle of queries was finally sent somewhere quiet where the delicate work of typography could take place. London was for industry and France, in an eighteenth-century house not far from Avignon, was for beauty, because even though we produced the magazine for screens, Dean was a typographer, one of the best, who just happened to be born into an era when his considerable skills were employed in an effort to make type look beautiful on a desktop or a laptop or a phone – ever-conscious of the pitfalls enumerated by his mentor, Robert Bringhurst.

The screen mimics the sky, not the earth. It bombards the eye with light instead of waiting to repay the gift of vision. It is not simultaneously restful and lively, like a field full of flowers, or the face of a thinking human being, or a well-made typographic page. And we read the screen the way we read the sky: in quick sweeps, guessing at the weather from the changing shapes of clouds, or like astronomers, in magnified small bits, examining details. We look to it for clues and revelations more than wisdom. This makes it an attractive place for advertising and dogmatizing, but not so good a place for thoughtful text.

– The Elements of Typographic Style

Dean killed himself in January. Because he was originally from Vancouver, his obituary appeared in a national Canadian daily, the *Globe and Mail*. In it, his partner Gail lists some of his talents, particularly the way he was ‘instrumental in bringing clean, elegant design and typographical rigour to the early internet. And in raising online writing to a fresh and thrilling new art form.’ There was mention of France, and the welcoming home they created.

She sent me the link to the piece, and added: ‘God, what Dean would have said about that layout.’ (It is a stunningly ugly site. Adding the insult of sloppy to injury.) There was no excuse for this kind of ugliness. If you cared about type design in the early years of the internet, you knew of Dean’s online creations, Textism and Cardigan Industries. You’d read Dean’s prose, which was sharp as in caustic, and astute, and certainly stylish.

Nothing looked better on-screen. Dean’s work maintained its good looks on any computer, any OS. There were reasons for that. He’d mastered just about every coding language known to humankind, and later, he admitted, ‘fuelled by nothing more than herbal teas and a Paula Abdul cassette’, he started writing code and designing the interface for what would become Textpattern, ‘an open-source content management system that ended up consuming a few years of my life’.



Five Dials became European, and not just because we published Ali Smith on Paris, or held a launch in Berlin, or got interested in unsung Catalan novelists, but because Dean brought to it his love for typography, the truly trans-European project. He cared about provenance, how letters were shaped by a Swede as opposed to an Italian, when German ornamentation made sense instead of Dutch minimalism. He argued for the importance of typography and built systems to ensure the tradition continued as our lives migrated on to screens. If anything, tending to type was more important than ever. It became a sign that care would be given.

It would be more fun to ask Dean to describe these European fonts himself. ‘He brought,’ as Gail wrote in the obituary, ‘titanic intelligence, insight and humour to everything he did.’

There was his go-to, Monotype Bembo, released in 1929, ‘a brilliantly realized revival of type in use in 1495 Venice by the printer Aldus Manutius.’

The metal version of Bembo was Dean’s favourite: ‘with acknowledged subjectivity, it is the most beautiful and readable text face of all.’

‘The great loss,’ he continued, ‘is that its digital incarnation is sloppy in comparison: thin, wispy, it shudders apart and its character evaporates unless used at sizes too large to be practical.’

Jansen was a perfect font for online text because of its ‘humanist strokes, low contrast and harmonious proportions’. And if you needed ‘quiet elegance and perfect internal proportions’, Sabon ‘used well, may be the most legible text face of all’, he wrote, ‘and its digital incarnation is eminently usable’.

But only a brave fool would engage Dean on Garamond. For they would be ‘entertained’ at length on how wrong (*oh, where do I begin?*) they were about it. Surely you know that ‘there is no one font called Garamond’?

The specs were always interesting, but what we really loved was the moment he’d send over a proof, after he’d transformed a loose scattering of Word docs into a work of coherence, and in the process displaced widows, corrected kerning and, in my favourite act of typographic magic, made poetry from poetry.

Deep in the heart of a book is where type does what type does best: not exploding before the eye but slowly and invisibly catching fire in the mind.

– Robert Bringhurst

It was fitting these proofs and finals came from rural France, handcrafted by a man who had equal reverence for the careful creations of the past and present, and a bottomless desire to understand them at a molecular level.

Like all of the world’s great charismatic people, Dean was a man of robust contradictions. He thrived in chaos and drew on a great disparate arsenal of scholarship and artistry (and coffee and cigarettes) to then deliver a flawless distillation of it all. The most starkly elegant pages, the sharpest, leanest prose. It was not merely in jest that his masthead bid us *festina lente* – make haste slowly.



He understood typography belongs to good writing, that the marks on the page must never be impeded, that the greatest gesture of civilization is a reader travelling along a sentence, across the page, along the screen, not even knowing why it all feels so good, why the ideas expressed blossom unimpeded within this act of sustained clarity. He understood crucial distinctions. 'Letters are not pictures of things, but things,' he once wrote. 'Words are not things, but pictures of things.'

One of my favourite images of Dean was taken in Paris, outside a cafe, just before the launch of our Paris issue. The photo shows him with his laptop set up on the table. Beside him sits our chief copy-editor, who has been caught mid-sentence, offering up her side of an argument over a comma or a semicolon (what was it?), arguing in a way that was both superficial and deeply serious. There was nothing more serious. Two glasses of red wine were placed on the table but it was not yet a celebratory scene because the issue was not perfect. It wasn't done. He still needed to manufacture a little more elegance.

We began our collaboration with Dean as he was emerging from a battle with the depression that bedevilled his life and creative spirit. His work for us was important, and I know the commission was important for him. He concluded a piece he wrote back in 2008 by saying: 'The other day, for the first time in just over ten years, I typeset some fucking POETRY, for like PEANUTS, for a fusty old LONDON BOOK PUBLISHER, and it was just the greatest possible thing.'

There's a piece of writing by Dean that remains, for me, the greatest possible thing. He once disclosed his primary goal: 'To use design to communicate.' The type needed to be beautiful, but Dean used the internet, again and again, to wrestle with what was happening, what was going on in the rest of his life, and in his head, the duality that

defined his life, the struggle between the light and the bleak, but also between cynicism and astonishment, between righteous anger and acceptance, between protecting oneself in all the well-practised ways and letting in the raw beauty of the world. Letting in love.

Instead of only including his thoughts of type, here are his thoughts in type. Here's where he started a fire deep in this reader's mind, in this extract from a piece he wrote for *Open Letters*, a website I worked on back in 2000. Dean's open letter is addressed to his father. He describes attending his mother's second wedding. He's feeling uncomfortable; he's not getting along with his sibling. He doesn't know what to do with his hands. But who knows how the day will end?

Back in 2000, we didn't print Dean's letter in Bembo, but even in Courier the elegance was revealed. 'Use design to communicate.'





On the way to the wedding, I rode beside my brother in the back seat of our uncle's ludicrous German lifestyle signifier, with a thrumming hangover, feeling conspicuously dateless, sweating in a rented tuxedo, talking too much. Somewhere near the Oak Street bridge I began sharing my thoughts on why I don't like weddings. I'm all for people declaring official partnership, in the eyes of the law or whatever, but this deal where the validity of the union is measured by the lavishness of the party and the carats of the diamond and the vintage of the champagne is insane. Whenever I participate in a wedding I'm usually deathly afraid of fucking up someone's big day; I realized, almost too late, that one pretty good way to do that would be to drone on and on about the wedding industry.

It was warm and threatening rain all day, and so humid. Perfect weather for maximum hothouse effect in a polyblend tux. I wandered about beforehand, sweating, feeling vaguely ridiculous, trying to remember the names of old neighbours as they pumped my hand. Grinning people asked what was going on with me, and I kept drawing a blank. I had a courteous strategy discussion with dear brother on guest arrangement, speech timing, and limousine doors.

The dapper groom, sprightly at sixty-five, was ready to go. I like him, despite the accent (which, I believe, has gotten a little stronger each year since he arrived as a young man from England), and his habit of taking half an hour to tell stories really only deserving a minute or two.

When the limo arrived, and the first round of pictures was complete, we escorted Mom to her place. The guests were arranged, and we assembled in a row on the riverbank. It seemed like everyone there was either videotaping or photographing. Whenever I see these sort of pictures after the fact, I can remember smiling, trying to look genuinely happy to be there, but I'm always wearing this expression of sort of bemused disappointment. Through the ceremony I stood, not knowing where to let my eyes fall, shifting weight from foot to foot, wondering if I should clasp my hands in front of my genitals or behind my back.



And then I don't know where it came from, but something lurched inside me, my head cleared, and I stopped thinking about myself.

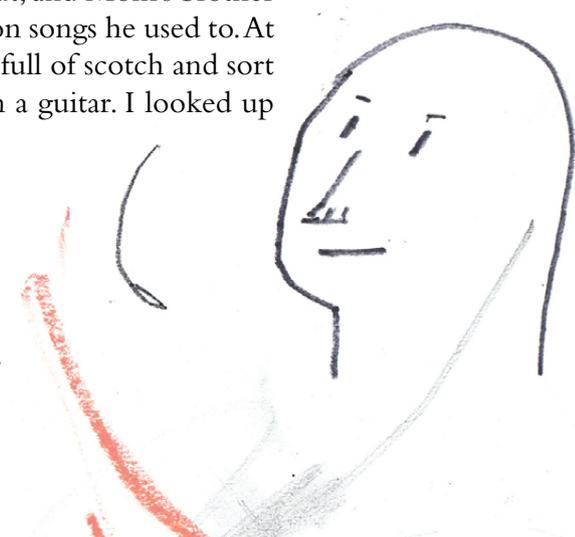
I looked at all the people facing us, sort of a map of my early life – grinning, sniffing – and I had one of those grainy, super-8, life flashing before your eyes movies scroll by as I watched Mom, who looked so happy, get married for a second time. I saw her mother, making Mom pay her entire life for being conceived out of wedlock, that cruel, bitter old grandmother of mine who called her cheap and common and made her raise her sisters and brother, and who seemed to be looming everywhere in her life until she died; I saw the tall, dorky, uncertain teenager who married the first person she slept with (sorry Dad), and found herself with two demanding boys and a volatile husband with a chip on his shoulder (sorry Dad) in her early twenties; I thought of the fights you used to have that seemed to go on forever, both of you stressed out from work and the mortgage and trying to live the life you thought you were supposed to live.

The ceremony was over and hands were being shaken and I was hugging Mom, and we were looking at each other and crying. My mother, almost sixty years old, having what I was too dense to recognize until that moment: a day that was just for her.

Traffic was held back with a huge ribbon of white chiffon as we proceeded along the road to the reception. Everyone was blowing bubbles – rice is bad for the birds, I learned – and laughing or dealing with snotty tears. The dapper groom's granddaughters, three little fountains of curly hair in matching dresses, were darting around with flower baskets. I felt oddly unselfconscious and giddy.

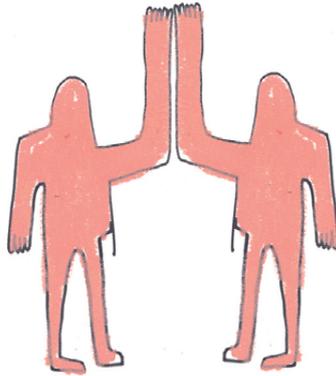
Later on we had an evening like the ones I remember best from childhood, with aunts and uncles and cousins getting loud and telling jokes and singing. The guitars even came out, and Mom's brother played some of the Bob Dylan and Van Morrison songs he used to. At one point toward the end of the evening I was full of scotch and sort of aimlessly attempting a Foo Fighters song on a guitar. I looked up and saw my brother, playing air drums.

Love,
Dean



Mercè Rodoreda's *Death in Spring*

Colm Tóibín on the wondrously
strange Catalan classic



In some societies, language is a way to restrain experience, take it down to a level where it might stay. It is neither ornament nor exaltation; it is firm and austere in its purpose. It is thus a form of calm, modest knowledge or maybe even evasion. Work written in the light of this, or in its shadow, has to be led by clarity, by precise description, by briskness of feeling, by no open displays of anything, least of all easy feeling; it implies an acceptance of what is known. The revelation comes from what is left out. The smallest word, or the holding of breath, can have a fierce, stony power.

This way of toning down expression happens most fruitfully in fragile places, or indeed in languages that are themselves under pressure. In the stories in James Joyce's *Dubliners*, for example, the tone of 'scrupulous meanness', as Joyce himself describes it, allows his characters to wander in a solitary place for the spirit as much as a real city. Also, the calm, precise style which Elizabeth Bishop used in her poems of Nova Scotia allows for a vast unspoken-of pain to emerge as though pushing its way through the gaps between the words.

These two artists, throughout a long exile, sought to be exact about feelings as much as places. When they allowed the tone of their work to soar, they had earned the right to do so by holding back so much in the pages which came before.

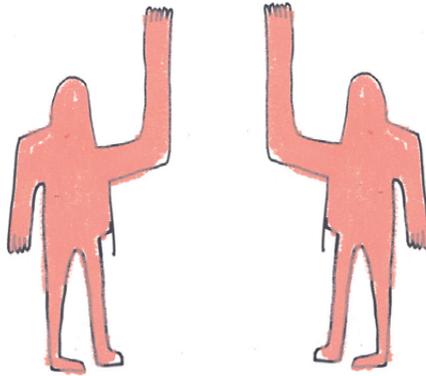
Bishop wrote, using this restrained style, about the life and longings of a young girl in poems such as 'In the Waiting Room', 'First Death in Nova

Scotia' and 'The Moose', just as James Joyce wrote about the uncertain consciousness of young boys in the early stories in *Dubliners*.

Mercè Rodoreda, in her novel *The Time of the Doves*, written in Catalan and published in 1962, deals with innocence and inexperience, as Natalia, who works in a shop, takes in the world as though it might soon break on her, or disappear, as it indeed does, because of the Spanish Civil War. Natalia's consciousness is fully delicate, yet she maintains an astonishing ability to notice details, to render what is visible. The tone moves between the fully ordinary and the strangely incantatory.

Mercè Rodoreda was born in Barcelona in 1908. At the age of twenty, having received ecclesiastical permission, she married her mother's younger brother. They had one son. Between the early 1930s and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, she published several novels and pieces of short fiction, all in Catalan. In 1935 she began work for the Catalan Ministry of Information. Franco's victory in the war forced her to go into exile, first outside Paris but then, as a result of the Nazi occupation, elsewhere in France. Before she left Spain, she broke up with her first husband. After much difficulty and hardship, she finally settled in Geneva, returning to Catalonia in 1979 where she died four years later.

In her best fiction, she allows the details to speak for themselves; the mind through which the world is seen is almost naive, almost detached. This



means that much is achieved or hinted at by tone, through rhythm, by coiled implication. The world is viewed as though helplessly, as if it might not bear the weight of much analysis. It is up to the reader to understand the extent of the suffering, the quality of the pain. The less these things are actively named, the more deeply they will be evoked.

If *The Time of the Doves* is a book of tender and subtle grace, filled with a deep innocence, *Death in Spring*, published in Catalan three years after Rodoreda's death, is a much darker book.

Rodoreda wrote from an exile more intense and lonely than that of Joyce or Bishop. She had not merely lost Catalonia, but she was writing in a time when the very language she wrote in – Catalan – was effectively banned by Franco, consigned to the private realm. She wrote her best novels at a time when they had little chance of finding many readers. She wrote in a language which was alert to silence, danger, fragility.

Death in Spring is like an ominous painting by Miró, made up of some essential elements – tree, lake, fire, mountain, wind, summer, winter, blood. Told through the consciousness of a boy soon to be a young man, it works through a mixture of simplicity and density of texture. Some of the sentences read like lines in a poem; others are replete with calm, casual, convincing detail.

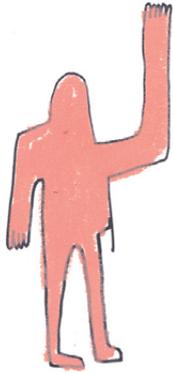
If the book uses images from a nightmare, the dark dream is rooted in the real world, the world of a Catalan village with its customs and hierar-

chies and memory. But Rodoreda is more interested in unsettling the world than describing it or making it familiar. 'The village,' she writes, 'was born from the earth's terrible unrest.' She is concerned to dramatize that unrest using tones that are estranging, while also harnessing closely etched detail, thus creating the illusion that this place is both fully real and also part of an unawaking world of dream.

Writing one declarative sentence after another, setting down facts, explaining nothing, allowing the rhythm to become increasingly more urgent and the tone more disturbing, Rodoreda can create an atmosphere that is vivid and frightening. Rodoreda takes enormous risks as image after image of death and violence and grief are set down in a prose that is close to reportage but can also become soaringly beautiful, almost apocalyptic. ('In black night, standing in the moonlight on top of the stone clock, I was Time. The moon gazing at me. Time moved forward with difficulty, and as I stood there, something fled from within me, from the hour, from Time.')

The style is urgent, serious, unplayful; it shifts between the language of fact and the sound of prayer and then soars beyond the ordinary, as in the novels of László Krasznahorkai, to evoke panic and unrelenting dread.

Rodoreda's genius in this late masterpiece is to lure the reader's attention away from her terrain as merely emblematic or symbolic and make it seem



lived-in, real, part of history rather than fantasy. This is a landscape of the soul; but it is also full of dark feelings and forebodings that are sharply present and ominous and persistent.

The fact that it was not published in the author's lifetime adds to the book's mystery. It was written in an exile not merely physical but also a place of spiritual alienation. This distance Rodoreda travelled between the carefully managed tones of *The Time of the Doves* and the uncompromising horror and dazzling complexities and energy of *Death in Spring* is one of the great journeys taken in twentieth-century fiction.



Hot Moon Goes to Europe

More extracts from your favourite ongoing,
never-ending spy thriller

Tom Basden

Devoted subscribers to Five Dials ('Dial-hards') will be confused/angry to learn that my work-in-progress novel, Hot Moon, first previewed here some years back, remains unpublished. I mean, I've printed it out a few times, but by all accounts I'm still not really allowed to refer to myself as a 'published novelist' or organize a book launch until someone else prints it out for me officially.

To be honest, it's been a mixed blessing in disguise, as it's meant that I've been able to fine-hone the novel over the years, constantly adding new details or changing the font (currently Verdana), and take the opportunity to keep finessing: a luxury afforded only to writers who never need to hand something in. Sure, I've done drastic things at times – taken out the verbs/made all the characters dogs/lost the whole thing by ripping my MacBook clean in two along the arse – but overall, it's been a careful and painstaking process.

I gather that this Five Dials (these Five Dials?) is about Europe, so I've included a few chapters that are loosely about travel, foreigners and foreign languages in order to justify the inclusion here. For my part, I bloody love Europe, particularly pizza, and am utterly gutted about this Brexit business, unless it turns out to be a good thing for this country economically, in which case I'm fine with it. For those of you who haven't been, I can especially recommend Bulgaria – specifically Sozopol on the Black Sea coast. I attached a photo of me there with the email I sent to Craig (the editor of this), but I suspect he won't include it in the magazine itself because he's all like 'we commission our own artwork ... !' In case he doesn't, the photo is of me on a lovely yellow (sandy) beach, in the sun, holding a non-stinging jellyfish, about the size of a sombrero, saluting at the camera (me, not the jellyfish), topless (me and the jellyfish), having a generally brilliant day, in a brilliant country, in one of my top five continents: Europe (Bulgaria joined Europe in 2007 so, yes, before you say anything, it is in Europe).

Chapter 403

[In which Owen is held captive]

This chapter is set in northern France, although Owen (the lead) doesn't know it yet, and contains some punchy, but also subtle, stuff about our (assuming most readers of this are British) awful ignorance of Continental European languages and the failings of our education system. It's also the first time in the novel that I experimented with giving a character amnesia (memory loss), which is something I came to rely on as I went on. Not only is it really exciting and dramatic if the characters suddenly have no idea where/who/whether they are, but it's a great way to get around any fiddly plot things and reset the clock a bit on who knows what. Towards the denouement, the plot gets so complicated that I have everyone clonk heads when having a punch-up in a kitchen show-room and then wake up thinking it's several chapters ago. It sounds quite far-fetched when I put it like that but I figure if anything in the novel ever gets too unrealistic I can start calling it 'magical realism' and then people have to let me off/see it as a strength.

'Who am I?' Owen thought, unaware that he was called Owen.

'Where am I?' 'What is this?'

His head was heavy and groggy and rolled around loosely on his neck like one of those old-fashioned toys made of wood, where all the limbs and the head are connected to string that, when you press a button underneath, it tightens the string and all the limbs and the head go taut, but if you don't press it they go all limp and roll around. You can usually get them at the seaside. That's what Owen was like now. He had forgotten everything.

'Oh God,' he exclaimed, '*J'ai malade!*' Because of course sometimes people speak French when they forget who they are, even if they're not French and didn't know French before, like that guy who was washed up on the beach and spoke French and





played the piano, though he hadn't done it before, which had turned out to be a hoax. But this was no hoax. This was happening.

'*Ou est moi?*' Owen shouted, into the darkness.

'*Qu'est-ce que c'est* am I only in my pants!' he screamed, because he was only in his pants, which I should have mentioned just now.

His voice thudded around the room like it was a ball and the room was a squash court, but his voice wasn't a ball, although the room was a squash court.

Owen looked down at his right leg, where there was something tattooed on to his skin. It said, 'Owen De Silva. Room 361, Ramada Inn, Bucharest.' He had tattooed it on to himself, knowing they would try to wipe his memory, like in the film *Memento*, but before that, because this book is set in 1995, so, in a way, I thought of it first.

He studied the message. Was his name Owen? Or was this the work of someone called Owen? Either way, he needed to get to that Ramada Inn. Where the hell was Bucharest anyway? He hadn't forgotten, he'd just never known, although he didn't know that right now.

He tried to stand up but his legs buckled. He was strapped to the chair. Shit! He struggled for a little bit and flexed his muscles and made straining noises, but he couldn't get himself free. Unable to stand, he fell on to his bare knees and started to crawl towards a tiny bit of light at the far end of the room, looking like a snail, carrying not his entire house on his back, but just a chair. As he got nearer to the circle of light, it started to get a little bigger, in the way that everything does as it gets closer. Tired, limp and bloody furious, Owen heaved with his last electron of energy to put his face next to the small chink of light. It was a keyhole. On the other side of the keyhole were three shadowy men, wearing suits and speaking French. Owen used his fingers to bend the plasticky outer bit of his

right ear actually into the keyhole to get a better sense of what they were saying. Burpy French vowel sounds trickled into his ear like a bottle of oil being emptied into a bucket as fast as it's possible to do that (i.e. upturned). '*L'homme anglais ...*' they were saying. The English man! He remembered that from school. '*L'homme anglais ... il faut mourir ...*' Nope, he didn't know that bit. Arggh! Why hadn't he tried harder at French at school? He couldn't even remember now, what with the amnesia, but he had a feeling that the English education system was to blame for not making us better at other European languages, while forcing us to learn useless bullshit like PE and maths. I'm not saying we're not partly responsible for not making more of an effort when we were schoolchildren, but when you look at the number of languages most Dutch and Swedish people can speak, it's an absolute piss-take, Owen thought. And, to be honest, I agree with him.



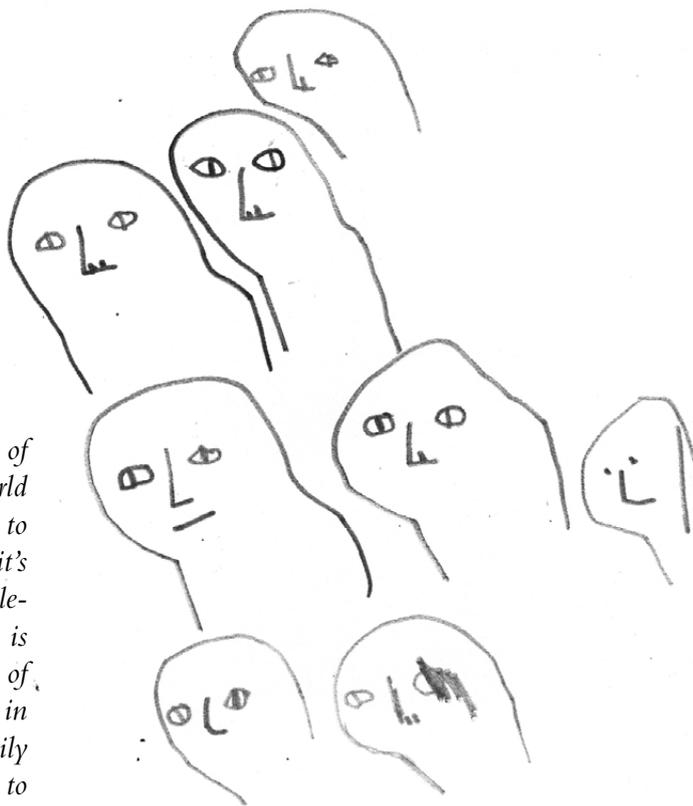
Chapter 330

[In which Owen is in China]

This chapter is one of the many travelogue bits of the book where I lift the lid on another part of the world for the benefit of readers who are too busy/poor/racist to visit other countries. Eagle-eyed readers will spot that it's not about Europe per se, so arguably is of limited relevance here, but I've decided to include it anyway. This is also one of those chapters where I've had to use a bit of artistic licence. Having only really travelled/holidayed in Europe for most of my life (and by Europe I primarily mean Cornwall), it was always going to be a stretch to suggest that Owen, the hero of the novel, had spent many years living in China, and to include flashback scenes from his time there in the 1980s. Still, I gave it a go, and hopefully my lack of direct experience/research isn't too noticeable. Essentially, the details about China in this chapter are only really there to add a bit of texture and scene-setting. Obviously, I apologize if I've got anything wrong. In my defence, I think it's far braver for a writer to try to take on a real place, like China or Panama, than invent fictional locations from scratch, like Mordor or Hogwarts, which is pretty nakedly just a way to avoid anyone ever correcting you at a book signing.

China! Owen had been to China many times – he had lived there for several years in the mid seventies as a student. I, however, the writer, have never been, so Owen's account of it may be slightly inaccurate.

Owen remembered walking down the narrow, straw-covered streets of Beijing, crammed with Chinese people playing table tennis and doing judo on each other. The rich smell of Chinese food filled the air – all-you-can-eat noodles, assorted mammal meat, fortune cookies. He breathed deeply – taking the stench into his lungs like embracing an old, smelly friend. He'd had the shits ever since he arrived – even that had stopped being an issue any more – that's just the way they did things here.



He walked along the main river in Beijing, the equivalent of the Thames, and watched the boats made of folded paper floating up and down the murky waters, the lanterns shining in the evening light like big fireflies/small lightbulbs. Some fireworks went off somewhere – swooshing up into the sky and bursting into tiny bright pieces of silver and gold: the same as Western fireworks, but more magical because we were in China, and the people here had only just imported fireworks from Europe and found them really terrifying. Children would scream with fear and frail women would faint into piles.

He drank some Chinese tea in his favourite opium joint. It was like English tea but better for you and not very nice. He sat on a pagoda, if pagoda means sort of the same thing as balcony, and watched a carnival that was taking place in the street below. The Chinese foolishly believed it was New Year and were celebrating. Owen hadn't the heart to tell them it wasn't, and that they'd missed it again. It would have been cruel. People danced around; children sang. In the middle of it all, some twats were pretending to be a dragon. Suddenly he felt the blunt barrel of a gun pierce his ponytail and press coldly against his neck.





'Mr De Silva?' A high-pitched voice purred from behind him.

Owen raised his hands slowly, a smile creeping across his face.

'That's me, baby,' said Owen suavely, without turning round, 'what can I do for you?'

'I'm a man,' the voice continued.

'Oh,' Owen said, embarrassed, but also scared, because of the whole gun on the neck thing. 'Sorry, mate. Sorry about that. I thought ... well ...'

'No, it's ... it's cool,' said the voice. The gun trembled slightly against Owen's skin. The air suddenly felt hot and tense. He heard the gun cock behind his head with a slow, insect-like creak. Owen could sense that, despite his assailant's high-pitched assertion to the contrary, it was not cool. It was not cool at all.

Chapter 142

[In which the plane's been hijacked]

This chapter's set in international airspace, but the flight begins in Prague and ends in Rome so definitely takes place in Europe in theory. It's also very timely for us Europeans, as it's about an issue facing all of us to some extent – terrorism. Full disclosure, I started writing this chapter long before some of the more recent terrorist attacks and the bits of the Brexit negotiations about intelligence sharing, and mainly decided to have a pop at terrorists and their beliefs because, for a while, I was toying with the idea of getting a fatwa. I know it sounds a bit extreme, but you have to remember that I've been trying to get this novel published for over eight years and, given how much it seems to have helped Salman Rushdie, I thought I could maybe use a fatwa as a literary launch pad and become a bit of a poster boy for free speech/the alt-right. Once I actually started writing it, however, I began to get deeply scared about the potential consequences of baiting Islamic extremists and subsequently toned it right down – to the point that it's genuinely now one of the most liberal-minded and progressive accounts of terrorism you'll ever read. So I'm now proud of it for a different reason.

Owen barged down the door to the cockpit of the plane with his shoulder, immediately punching one of the hijackers in the throat, knocking him backwards and also out. Miss Reed followed behind him and started digging the heel of her stilettos into the prone hijacker's shins.

'I thought there was another one,' she said.

Just then, an indistinct foreign howl came from above, where the other hijacker was hiding in the attic of the plane. He jumped down on to Miss Reed's back, just sort of grabbing her, with no particular plan.

'Stay still,' Owen barked, but Miss Reed didn't stay still, and suddenly did a couple of things involving her elbows, hitting the other hijacker really hard until he was on the ground and motionless.



She dusted herself off and smiled sassily at Owen. 'I told you I can look after myself.'

Owen smirked, as the two of them looked at the two terrorists lying crumpled on the floor.

'Where were these hijackers from, anyway?' Miss Reed asked.

'No idea,' Owen said, honestly.

'But if you had to guess though,' Miss Reed pressed.

Owen thought for a moment, audibly.

'No, no, it's a mystery. And we probably shouldn't speculate about which country they're from or which religion they're part of for fear of reprisals,' Owen said wisely. 'I suspect they were just general foreigners causing trouble ...'

'Yes, well said,' Miss Reed concurred.

'They may have been freelancers,' Owen guessed correctly, 'just trying to spoil it for everyone else.'

'Shall I take off one of their balaclavas so we can see what their skin colour is at least?' Miss Reed asked.

'Uh ... no, don't worry,' Owen said. 'I think it's best that we genuinely don't know which region they're from or what they want or what faith they represent, if any. Needless to say, if they're religious, they've definitely missed the point of said religion, and what they're up to will have absolutely no place in its teachings.'

'Completely agree with that,' Miss Reed said, spotting a half-eaten Twix in the stiff hand of the dead pilot (bludgeoned) sitting ahead of her. She delicately eased the Twix out of his chilly grip as she went on: 'Whichever cause they espouse – be it animal rights, Irish independence, Islamic fundamentalism, Occupy Wall Street, or none of the above, we have to remember that they definitely don't represent the moderate mainstream of their movement.'

She broke off a piece of Twix and passed it to Owen. He held it, and held her gaze, as they stared

at each other, flushed and breathy from the exertion of decking these dickhead terrorists moments ago. Owen was just about to ask her out (he'd left it too late and it was now an awkward subject to broach) when Miss Reed suddenly noticed something out of the windscreen.

'Oh my God, the plane's going down!' she yelled.

She ran over to the controls. Owen jogged after her, frustrated to have missed his moment and popping the piece of Twix in his already open gob.

Miss Reed prodded some buttons on the control panel in a manner that indicated intent but not expertise. Owen was just about to join in when the one-legged figure of Mort appeared in the aisle behind them, brandishing a gun and wearing a New York Yankees cap.

'Not so fast,' he shouted, firing bullets into the control panel, which fizzed and spattered like when you piss on a fire. 'I'm taking control of this puppy, as in plane.'

Mort cackled like an outgoing crow as Owen and Miss Reed slowly raised their hands. Of course! Mort had been behind the whole thing. The two hijackers probably weren't even terrorists at all, but just two of Mort's henchmen. So, you see, you should never leap to conclusions about these things, there's often way more going on than you might think.



Do You Know Your Eurovision?

Chris Lochery



What was this year's slogan?

- United in unison
- Together with dance
- Infinity War
- Subtitles available

Who is the most deserving winner of the last five years?

- Bearded lady Bond theme (2014)
- Stalinist war-crimes trip-hop (2016)
- Teenage Portuguese jazz singer in literal need of a heart operation (2017)

Which of Montenegro's semi-finalists was most cruelly robbed of a space in the grand final?

- The satirical spoken-word poet who put forward the progressive case for Montenegro's accession to the European Union (2012)
- The astronaut dubstep rap duo who had a sing-off with a screaming cyborg alien (2013)
- The topless dancer with a three-foot ponytail who sang about the necessity of contraception in casual sexual encounters (2017)

Wadde hadde dudde da?

- Hadder denn da wat, un wenn ja, wat hadder da?
- Hadder da wat, wat sonst keiner hat?
- Hadder dat auf dat, dat wadder da hat?
- Oh mein Gott

When Belarus's Teo sang about getting tied up in a lady's 'sweet cheesecake' in 2014, what was he referring to?

- Puzzlement about an unexpected romantic gift
- An unhelpful pang of nostalgia remembering an old lover's nickname
- You know what he means
- Please don't make me say it

Why hasn't the UK won the competition since 1997?

- Biased juries
- Never got over Diana
- Fundamental misunderstanding of how the competition works now that forty-six countries participate each year
- Brexit

How are they changing the scoring this year?

- Countries A-L act as juries; countries M-Z get televote
- Bonus points awarded for Abba references
- They will now score 'in the Slovenian manner'

Listen to your _____?

- Heartbeat
- Rhythm
- Mother

Why is Australia in a European song contest?

- Why is Israel?
- Why is Azerbaijan?
- Why is Armenia?
- Why is this in a literary magazine?

When are you really making love now?

- In the morning
- When the sun shines
- Down on your body

Who is Russia mad at this time?

- Ireland, for featuring a same-sex couple in its promotional video
- The UK, for instigating an international purge of Russian diplomats
- France, for its budding bromance with Trump
- Ukraine, still

What happens if I vote before the lines open?

- Your vote may not be counted
- You may still be charged
- You risk causing a power surge in Tbilisi

Which is preferable?

- A continent at war with itself
- Another sixty years of Eurovision

Europe

What's going on here?

¡Qué tontos los ingleses!

The callousness of Brexit; the empathy of poets

By Martha Sprackland

Brexit feels personal. In my late teens I lived in Madrid, the solar plexus of the body of mainland Spain. I spend my life returning to it, now, an always-returning. I fly, or am driven, or take the long train through France, and then I shoulder through whatever set of automatic doors and glass walls keeps me from the familiar and welcoming air, and I breathe deep and feel at home. It is easy for me to do this, three, four times a year, because I am European, because I don't need to have a visa, because I can march through the EU queue and feel not that I am being allowed into someone else's country, but that I belong – this is an arrogance.

I read, sometime last year, a collection of writers' responses to the news that Britain – or, at least, bits of it, as Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain part of Europe – was planning to wrench itself away from the mainland and retreat, sulking, isolated and horribly damaged, to behind the moat of the Channel. I have been roundly mocked by Spanish friends, on my last few visits to Madrid, as a reluctant representative of my foolish country of birth. ¡*Qué tontos los ingleses!* What fools the English are ... Fair enough. No argument. I'm a paid-up Remoaner, moaning for Britain. Moaning for Europe, *más bien*. My heart aches a little to read Javier Marías's plaintive musing on the thought of Britain slamming petulantly out of the room: 'One thing I do know is that the rest of the continent would feel orphaned, amputated, empty ...'

For this column I originally wanted to write about European books, of course. Perhaps Federico García Lorca's *Impresiones y paisajes*, his passionate and gloomily sublime journey through Spain as a young man, the age I was when I was falling in love with that same country; or else his poems, steeped in moonlight and olive-salt, and see whether between us we could warm the blood. Or I could write about Elena Ferrante's Italy. Or

the collection of funny, weird short stories I read last week, *Fox Season* by Polish writer Agnieszka Dale. Or Emmanuel Carrère's France as he writes it in *The Kingdom*, or the first few staggeringly good chapters, translated from the Dutch and soon publishing in Britain, of Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's *The Discomfort of the Evening*. I could talk about the brilliant Bulgarian writers I met when I was there for a poetry conference, or the Lithuanian books my boyfriend told me about after he was there for a literary festival last month.

But those who voted to leave did not do so because they didn't find anything of worth in the cultures and literatures of Europe. No, they tolerate fine the food they loudly and belligerently mispronounce to long-suffering waiters, the books translated into English they would never have tried to read in the original; they soak up the brighter sun and the warmer beaches and the bluer water; they borrow the old towns and the sometimes wider, more dramatic landscapes; they are fine with the people comfortably similar to their white selves. Their vote was not about civilized Europe, our almost mutually intelligible Romance and Germanic tongues, but about what else was beginning to find a welcome within Europe's borders.

Elena Ferrante: 'What perhaps should be feared most is the fury of frightened people.'

Those who say it was not about immigration are kidding themselves.

'Can anyone teach me / how to make a homeland?' asks Amineh Abou Kerech, the teenage poet, writing, with difficulty, across two languages. Her 'Lament for Syria' I read last year, upon it winning the Betjeman Prize for Poetry. An interview with Amineh records her hope that in her family's new life in England 'everything will be good', and that they will live in peace. By every account, by all the data reported, the shadow of hate is looming over that peace. This means a teenager must write



a homeland into existence through poetry.

I can't imagine this homelessness. My outrage at being stripped of my European 'home' is deep and painful and real, but extraordinarily privileged. I read the work of women writing against the regimes at their back, the jaws and sharp teeth of war, rape, displacement, poverty, who have learned new tongues and new ways of living in order to survive.

Maram al-Masri is Amineh's countrywoman, a European adoptee living in Paris. 'They say poetry is a weapon,' Maram says, 'but I don't think so. Why should poems be weapons? If they are, they simply take us back to the war. Poetry should be an anti-weapon, a means of abating the weapons.'

With strong, cut-glass words these women write, often through translation, whether that translation occurs on the page or before it reaches it. The words have a blazing, lucid power.

We exiles are sick
with an incurable disease:

Loving a country
put to death.

—Maram al-Masri, 'We exiles', in *Liberty Walks Naked*

Asha Lul Mohamud Yusuf's *The Sea-Migrations*, translated by Clare Pollard, grapples with homeland (hers, Somalia) and displacement (hers; she has been in the UK for two decades) in fluid, alliterative poems, incantatory, their energy bunched and released down their long, rattling lines. Asha's homeland is overflowing with gold and fruit, 'The ostrich and antelope / basking in beauty / along with the gazelle' ('Our Land'), but

Sea-migration disables my people, I want
to drive it back

[...]

Look at the hordes of women, all the
young who drown,

disappearing onto ships, dissolving on the
crossing,

all those deprived of life's basics, adrift
outside their country ...

—'The Sea-Migrations'

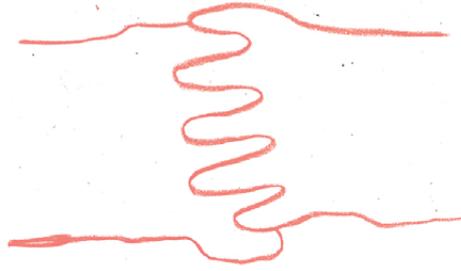
This loss, this squandering of beauty and culture as the result of conflict, is present also in 'Mother Africa', a lament for Eritrea by Ribka Sibhatu (who lives now in Rome):

O dying land,
that for decades
has met the elders,
the elders who keep
the ancestral treasures.

When will dawn break
for generous
Mother Africa?

There are too many of these writers for me to mention here. From Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Kosovo, Pakistan, Eritrea, displaced and desperate people are arriving in Europe, people made homeless in ways so profound we, here, can hardly comprehend it. Their presence here, where it should have engendered empathy and fellow-feeling, has instead infuriated the ignorant and the frightened into an act of folly, misery and isolationism.

The only weapon against callousness is understanding, is empathy, and it's easily come by. Read the work of refugee writers, coming to the doors



of Europe in search of stability, and perhaps, with a little hope, we will be able to join our labour to the work of creating a homeland. In the meantime, I'm frightened of a lot of things I see happening, not only here in Britain with its *tonterías*, but in a Europe listing to the right, a struggling America, and the war and corruption threatening peace further afield. We can turn Ferrante's observation either way, can't we: perhaps those pushing Brexit through in the face of its absurdity should begin to fear the fury of a different group of frightened people.

Read the work of writers from these countries, and try to appreciate how you would write your own homeland into existence. A stanza from Asha Lul Mohamud Yusuf:

You are kin, you are blood brothers
and sisters.

Each house knows their neighbours,
who comes and goes.

Only death should part you, you
mustn't flee.

Remain and, though divided, try to make
a mutual peace.
—'Unscrupulous'

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The Terrible Prophecies of Brexit

Yanis Varoufakis

Brexit rode to victory on the coat-tails of a type of discontent whose power sprang from its insuperable reluctance to specify its nature. Seemingly focused on a foreign power centre that British voters saw (with some justification) as the usurper of their democratic rights, its real focal point was nebulous and imprecise enough to encompass a potent mix of grievances.

The unifying force behind the variety of real grievances motivating the Leavers was the shared feeling, particularly in England, of a people who had been treated for too long like livestock that had lost its market value.

With every Treasury or Bank of England prognosis of Brexit's disastrous impact on GDP, the pound, share prices, etc., many who felt (perhaps wrongly) that they had little left to lose could not wait for these terrible prophecies to materialize – assuming, as they did, that the predicted horrors would afflict an establishment who had it coming. 'Let's see their GDP go south like mine,' was how one such soul expressed it to me during the pre-referendum campaign.

Precisely because the discontent that motivated Brexit was so ill-defined, its victory at the polls has failed to bring lasting joy to the winning side. News reports on the negotiations with Brussels infuriate a majority of Leavers who can't care less about the legalities and economic minutiae, since these were never the issue.

The nearest a majority of Leavers get to feeling good these days is when they hear establishment figures lament the gigantic costs of Brexit upon the communities that voted heavily to leave the EU: it makes them secretly crave precisely such a painful, costly, disastrous hard Brexit. Why? Because they see in it a splendid opportunity to revive the spirit of the Blitz in communities in desperate need for something like it.

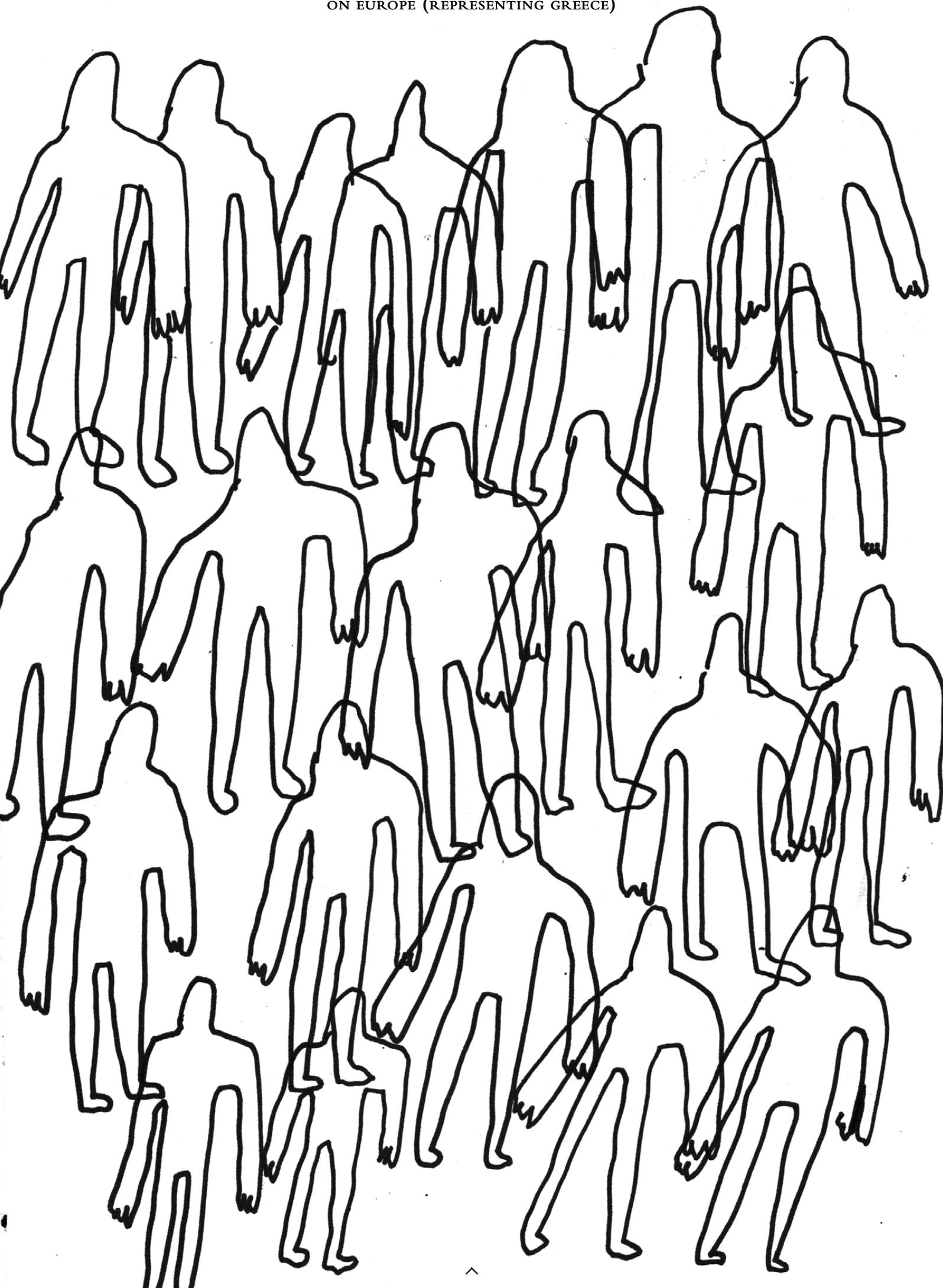
Against this psychological backdrop, the worst



possible outcome is not a run on the pound, further stagnation in productivity, a loss of GDP growth, or the emigration of Nissan from Newcastle or some bankers from the City of London.

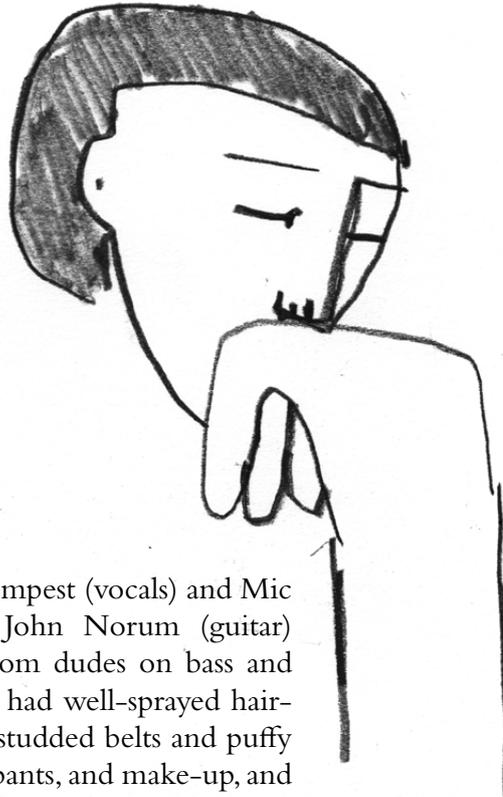
No, my great fear is that the new, almost impenetrable division that the Brexit debate brought to (mainly) England will become permanent. That it will be perpetually underpinned by the nebulous, self-reinforcing discontent we first saw in 2016. That, in 2020, the most regressive parts of the British establishment will be stronger and more in control than ever. And that their triumph will, in a never-ending loop of mutual buttressing, prevent a genuine revolt by the good people who had good cause to feel like livestock whose market value had crashed.

ON EUROPE (REPRESENTING GREECE)



'The Final Countdown'

Jonas Hassen Khemiri



Europe consisted of Joey Tempest (vocals) and Mic Michaeli (keyboard) and John Norum (guitar) and then some other random dudes on bass and drums. All group members had well-sprayed hairdos with bangs; they wore studded belts and puffy shirts, spandex and leather pants, and make-up, and bracelets. They played a soft kind of hard rock. At first they were called Force, but when they won the Swedish Rock Championship in 1982 they performed as Europe. With their second album they scored their first international hit, 'The Final Countdown', with that infectious keyboard hook (dadadaaadaaa dadadaaadaaadaaa) still played by unimaginative DJs at the end of NBA games.

In the summer of 1986 that song could be heard all over the world, in Brazilian airports, in Dutch cafes, in Japanese bars, even in my uncle's old Mercedes, as we travelled from Jendouba to Tabarka, on our way to the northern Tunisian coast. Five cousins in the back seat, two cousins riding shotgun, my uncle driving, a ninety-minute trip if there were no goats on the road, if the water from Ayn Darahim had not flooded the road, if there were no soldiers or police officers who stopped us and searched the car with the hope of getting a bribe. As we approached Tabarka, 'The Final Countdown' came on the car stereo. Even my uncle hummed along to the chorus. These guys are Swedish, I said in French. No way, Samia said in Arabic. If they are Swedes, why are they called

Europe? Bilal said in French. I'm not sure, I said. He's such a liar, Samia said in Arabic. He's lying about everything. Yesterday he said that all medicine is free in Sweden. And that every kid gets a pay cheque from the government. He's family, Bilal said in Arabic. He doesn't even speak Arabic, Samia said. But I understand Arabic, I said. Everyone started laughing. What's so funny? I said in Arabic. Nothing, my uncle said in French, trying to keep a straight face. It's just something funny about you. Trying to speak Arabic. The singer calls himself Joey Tempest, I said in French. But his real name is Rolf Magnus Joakim Larsson. Silence. I want to move to Europe, Mona said from the front seat. What's stopping you? I said. You can marry him, my uncle said, nodding towards me. I laughed because I thought it was a ridiculous idea to marry a cousin. Nobody else laughed. When we arrived in Tabarka all the cousins went for swim, my uncle bought roasted almonds and fell asleep in the shadow of a palm tree, we ate our *casse-croûtes* on the beach, and at dusk we headed back to Jendouba. Everyone was silent on the way back; I kept hoping for 'The Final Countdown' but it never came.

My Grandmother Arrives in the Home Counties

Will Burns

I.

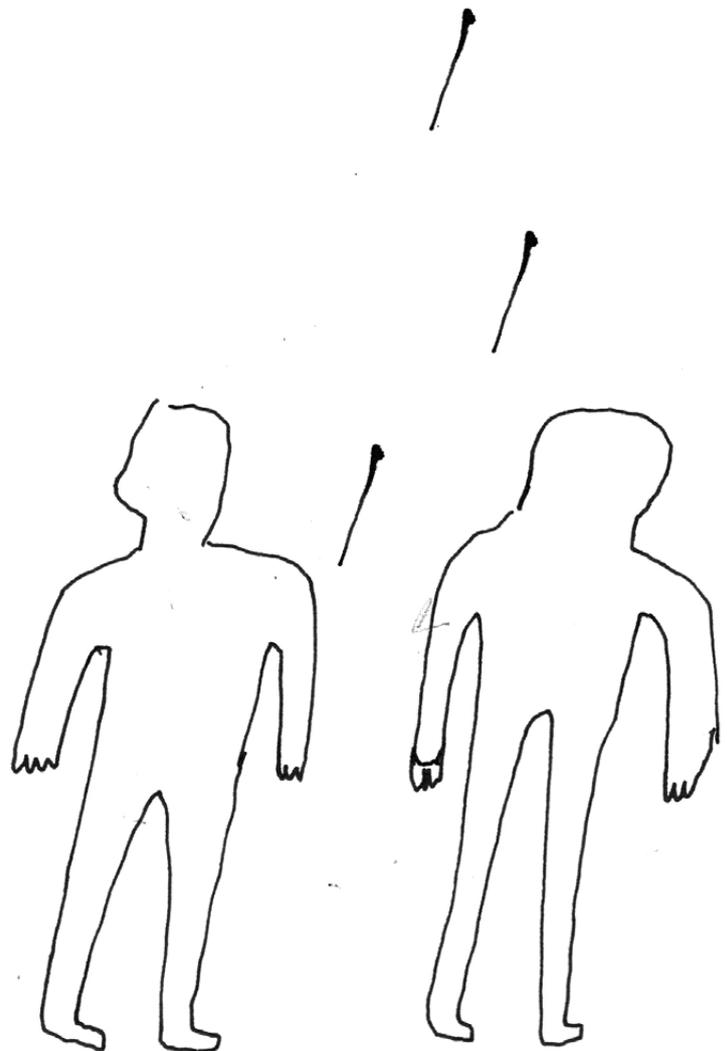
To wind up here of all places,
sometime after the war –
a fighter pilot husband from the base
on Hong Kong killed in a car crash
on leave. Widowed, comatose,
suddenly foreign in a way
over which she had no choice.
My mother talks of what she wore.
Sunglasses, pelts—a wardrobe
from a non-existent time, or home.
Those who suffer movement
see something of the world
at the very least. Some welcome
or unwelcome or indifferent port.

II.

The falsehood is that there is so little
left for us to know.
More likely, more truthful,
is that things of hers got lost
in the gap between their languages.
My mother's council estate English,
her mother's Spanish and Portuguese –
by way of Peru, Porto, the devil-knows-where ...
There were times it did not matter,
my mother has always said,
she just would speak for days on end.
She was four foot ten.
Inscrutable, *saudade*. One way or another
too much for two husbands
and this strange, unremarkable
little town where I keep my trap
shut now, when the talk turns
to Europe.

III.

I was young when she died.
As a point of fact
she moves further and further away
from those of us remaining.
Hotel names, ledgers touching
to an early life she tried to hide.
The sap of the stone pine.
The prickle of a praying mantis
on my pale and childish hand.
All to be denied even as they fade.
It is not really recall of her
that comes to me now in airports
or those big European train depots,
but an imagining.
Bad choices that pile up like debts.



Journal of the Plague Year: America, June 2017–June 2018

An excerpt

David Shields

In the locker room at the pool, a professional mediator of injury cases tells me that plaintiffs are invariably convinced that their life was perfect before the accident; his job is to disabuse the plaintiff of this notion. Absurdly, I'm obsessed with trying to figure out what Donald Trump's originating wound is. It's not apparent to me yet what it is. (This is a detective story.)

What degree and angle of self-loathing necessitate Trump's obsession with being liked (not just liked but, rather, loved; not even loved, but adored, worshipped) on a second-by-second basis? What sadness animates this need to be flattered and fluffed?

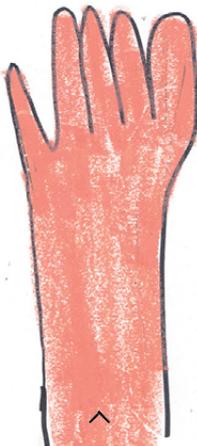
According to the (actually not very good) TV series *Gypsy*, starring Naomi Watts as a crazy shrink (is there any other kind?), 'It doesn't matter if you're a bully or a victim; your underlying emotion is the same: need, vulnerability, weakness, fear.' Is this true? I desperately want it to be. In my academic life, I've encountered at least three psychopathic bullies; I capitulated to their demands because they had something I wanted/needed. (I so hope that was the reason.) What, precisely, does Trump have that anybody wants or needs? *Society loves me, and I connect differently for different people. Life is not all sincerity. Life is an act, to a large extent.*

Why have bullies targeted me throughout my life? My reluctance, due to my stutter, to be directly confrontational? What's everyone else's excuse?

Whence my antipathy for the wizened, bald, arthritic Chinese man frequently swimming in the pool alongside me? What does his painfully slow Australian crawl remind me of other than, of course, my own? (Which is how hatred almost always works.)

My colleague Eric emails me, 'What I really want to read right now, which I haven't found, is a manual on how to win an argument (or battle of rhetoric) with a bully. I rarely have an argument with such a bully, but in my internal monologue I'm constantly trying to counter whatever new bullshit I hear the administration and its allies trot out. I'm feeling so incredibly gas-lit that I find myself wondering if we can actually ever know anything for certain. I keep trying to picture myself back on my elementary school playground, trying to remember a time when someone bested a bully without resorting to physical violence (in Missoula, where I grow up, fistfights were common from elementary school all the way through high school and beyond). My memory is hazy, but mostly I remember bullies being put in their place by either violence or some sort of public humiliation (someone finding a way to beat the bully at his own game). I keep wishing for a totally contemporary manual on how to counter a bully in which the thinking of all our best minds in philosophy, sociology, neuroscience – even comedy – take on the challenge. Of course I haven't found the book.' Dude, you're reading it.

My childhood 'friend' Geoff (whose brother was later convicted of murder) and I would sit on a wall outside the school and say something 'witty' about each person passing by; the wit consisted of 'praising' something about each person that was his or her weakness/deficit/disability. Geoff and his family remain for me the proto-Trump voter: defeated by the culture around them (1960s San Francisco), they watched *All in the Family* for Archie Bunker's epithets, hated and baited me for being the one Jewish kid in a group of jocks, dispatched ambulances to my house in the middle of the night for comic effect, called our basketball teammate Curtis Xiao 'Cuntis', surreptitiously rewrote Richard



Sakomoto's yearbook profile into a racist stereotype. The entire social psychology of it couldn't be more obvious. Hate is a feeling.

Tristan Harris, the co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, says, 'Magicians start by looking for blind spots, edges, vulnerabilities, and limits of people's perception, so they can influence what people do without them even realizing it. Once you know how to push people's buttons, you can play them like a piano.' This is Trump. This is every bully I've ever encountered.

Jonathan Martin, an African American pro football player who had been bullied by his white teammate; who graduated from Stanford; whose parents are Harvard grads; and who threatened to blow up his lily-white alma mater, Harvard-Westlake high school in Los Angeles (which he blamed for teaching him to act white), said, 'When you're a bully victim and a coward, your options are suicide or revenge.'

Why does no one ask what role Washington State's football coach, Mike Leach, a notorious bully and sadist, might have played in his quarterback Tyler Hilinski's suicide?

Former Republican political operative Steve Schmidt says that Trump has 'a titanic ego that is paper-thin', which isn't a revelation, but the degree of thinness is what I find so fascinating. The clues are everywhere: his tyrannical father, his anhedonic mother, his obsessions with shit and piss and germs and sharks and death and being spanked (forcing Stormy Daniels to watch three hours straight of *Shark Week* with him when he's terrified of sharks: finally a woman to simultaneously comfort him, as his mother never did, and judge and punish him, as his father always did).

According to Cindy Crawford, her husband, Rande (sp!) Gerber, the billionaire huckster/subject of a painfully fawning profile in the *New York Times*, notices 'everything'. Gerber is or used to be conventionally handsome (Trump) and is from Queens (Trump). Noticing everything is a function of class warfare. According to Joan Acocella, when people grow up in an emotionally barren landscape (Trump), they tend to think of themselves as not being sure of their feelings and/or not sure they have feelings (Trump) and get their revenge by not forgetting a thing, especially any slight (Trump) and analysing everyone in an unforgivably harsh light (Trump).

The Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chödrön says, 'Behind all hardening and tightening and rigidity of the heart there's always fear. But if you touch fear, behind fear there is a soft spot.' Ooh, I so want to find Trump's soft spot.

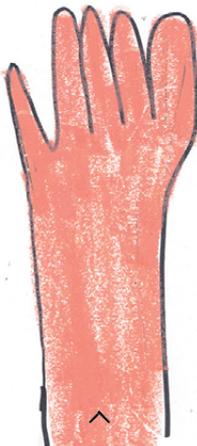
★

My mother and father were amazing people. Unlike you [Howard Stern] and I, they were married sixty-three years. They had an amazing love affair.

My father would have blown him [Bill Maher] away. The best guy, by the way. Tough as hell. Really handsome.

Trump's nephew Fred III said about the Trump family, 'These are not warm and fuzzy people. They never even came to see [Trump's nephew's son, William] in the hospital [for seizures, which turned out to be early signs of cerebral palsy].'

I still remember my mother, who is Scottish by birth, sitting in front of the television set to watch Queen Elizabeth's coronation and



not budging for an entire day. She was just enthralled by the pomp and circumstance, the whole idea of royalty and glamour. I also remember my father that day, pacing around impatiently. 'For Christ's sake, Mary,' he'd say. 'Enough is enough. Turn it off. They're all a bunch of con artists.' My mother didn't even look up. They were total opposites in that sense. My mother loves splendor and magnificence, while my father, who is very down-to-earth, gets excited only by competence and efficiency.

Trump biographer Timothy O'Brien says, 'One of the great magic tricks he's pulled on the American public is that he's become fixated in their mind as a great deal-maker and a great business operator. That's certainly the person the American electorate thought they were voting into power. And I think the question looming over his presidency is: at what point do the American people utterly lose confidence in him? I think Donald has always promoted himself publicly as a self-made entrepreneur when, in fact, that's who his father was. And I think that sort of hangs over Donald. The Trump family built the foundation of their riches on middle-class housing in Brooklyn and Queens. Donald definitely learned from Fred that emblazoning the Trump family name on a piece of property was good for business. Fred knew how to stage events to get attention on his properties. He would have young women in bikinis at some of the openings. He would court the press and invite them to the openings. But Fred was authentically self-made. And Fred ultimately passed all that along to Donald. Trump has claimed over the years that he borrowed only a million dollars from his father. And that's one of the biggest myths he's put out there. He inherited, conservatively, tens of millions of dollars [probably forty million dollars] from his father.'

My father is a wonderful man, but he is also very much a business guy and strong and tough as hell. He was also an unbelievably demanding taskmaster.

Alan Bennett writes in his diary *Keeping On*, 'Watching the Latin teams in particular, you see how these are boys whose mothers have loved and cherished them and who have all the confidence and swank that come from that.' Look at how tiny the photo is of Trump's mother behind Trump's desk (how dwarfed it is by the photo of his father) and how it wasn't even there from January until April 2017 (surely, someone noticed the omission and suggested the addition).

★

I don't even have a big business, and I like workers. I'm producing a lot of really good workers.

I'm starting to like them [his children] better because they're starting to work in my company. I'm business-oriented. They're doing something. I'm not good before the age of 21. I'm great after the age of 21 because I can get them to work.

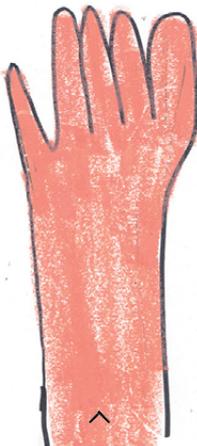
★

If you ask my children who's been the best parent, I think a lot of them would choose me.

Donald Trump Jr They both did a really good job bringing us up, so we owe a lot to her [Ivana] as well.

Stern [to Trump Sr] Do you see that as disloyalty?

Trump Yes.



See, I don't want anyone to take after me. I want my daughter to be with someone relatively her own age.

★

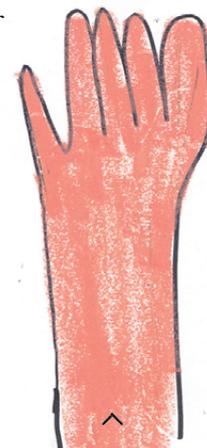
I can do [billboard] advertising down there [Times Square] because I get her [Melania] for the right price.

I have all these diamond companies – they come to me, you know, all the best ones – and they throw diamonds in my face like I'm a dog, right? They throw 'em in my face. Guess what? I'm a good businessman. I take 'em, and then I get killed in the press for taking the diamonds. Who the hell wouldn't?

Trump frequently uses the dead metaphor 'like a dog' ('choked like a dog', 'sweated like a dog', 'dumped like a dog', 'fired like a dog', etc.). It feels to me like a clue to his psyche – of what, though, exactly? Did he have a dog as a kid? Did he torture animals as a child? At age seven he punched his elementary school music teacher, giving him a black eye, and threw rocks at toddlers in playpens.

Among many other things he's learned from Stern, he's learned to take himself down a peg in a trivial way before someone else does so in a more substantive way. For instance, *I'm building this incredible ballroom at Mar-a-Lago, one of the better things I've ever built and, you know the first thing always is the marriage, but it [his wedding to Melania] is also a way of highlighting the ballroom.*

To Stern: *She [Melania]'s probably the most secure person I know, unlike guys like you and I.*



Stern Would you stay with Melania if she were disfigured?

Trump Oh, totally. No question in my mind. How good is that answer? ... I am shallow, generally speaking.

When he was fifty-three, John Derek was asked by Barbara Walters whether he would still love his wife, Bo Derek, then twenty-three, if she were disfigured or paralysed. He weighed the question and wound up demurring. Bo Derek tried hard to smile, but she couldn't.

Melania is 5'11, 125, and that's good. I know pounds. I can tell women's weights. Men, I have no idea.

Stern Do you really think you're capable of loving another human being? I mean seriously.

Trump Really loving? Oh, sure. Absolutely.

Stern You sure?

Trump Oh, absolutely. Are you talking about children also?

Stern No. Forget children. I know you're not capable of that. Do you really love—when you say you're in love, what does that mean to you?

Trump Well, I have a very deep love for my wife. I do.

Stern What does that mean?

Trump It means, uh, friendship. It meant respect. It means you like – you really like somebody. You like being around somebody. It means you like protecting the person. I always say [to Melania], as I go into one of my many houses, 'You know, if any guy ever lives in this house [after Trump's death],

I'm going to be looking up at you [the implication is that he's looking up from hell], and I'm going to be cursing you.

Stern Are you in love?

Trump Absolutely. Totally in love. You have to be with somebody that you like and have a relationship with – a really good one. You know, you lose interest [in other women? In the woman he's with?]. It's always good to be really busy. I'm really busy. We've been doing great. The company is doing the best it's ever done.

★

Barron [his only child with Melania] was playing with [other] little children in the Park [Central Park] – all little spoiled kids like him. He came back, and I saw – I noticed there was a little snuffle, just a very slight snuffle. I wanted nothing to do with him.

My sons were beautiful little kids, with white hair. Eric was, like, seven. Michael was at Mar-a-Lago and said, 'Trump, Trump – your son is very beautiful. I must take him to Neverland.' I thought that was the nicest thing. He'd call and say, 'Where's Eric?' I just couldn't do it.

Does the last line imply that he's almost, but not quite, willing to sacrifice his son on the altar of Michael Jackson's celebrity?

[The Hilton scion] Barron is a member of what I call the Lucky Sperm Club. He was born wealthy and bred to be an aristocrat, and he's one of those guys who never had to prove

anything to anyone. He doesn't try to impress with his style or his clothing or anything else.

Trump named his own child 'Barron' – the point of which is to diminish him, in the same way that he has called his other two sons 'unlucky in the IQ department.'

Trump Jr: 'It's a Trump thing. We have to end up winning. It's a fact of life.'

★

John McEnroe: also a privileged child of NYC who has Daddy issues and is lazy and angry (why?) and turned that anger inside out, commodifying himself by channelling universal human resentment.

Trump biographer Tim O'Brien: 'I think he saw real estate in a very similar vein as show business. He saw himself as the great producer of dreams, the spinner of tales. The man who lived large with beautiful women in big houses and told people what to do. And he has always seen New York, and Manhattan, in particular, as a piggy bank and as a stage.'

Russell Simmons says, 'The reason we called him Richie Rich was he was the only person we knew that actually appeared to be enjoying his stuff. Donald Trump's always been on a reality show. Like, you watch him – bigger than life, playing the role. I feel like he went to sleep playing the role. Donald was the image of the gold, over-the-top stuff. So, I get why people aspire to be like him. They wanted to own shit, too.'

Since 9/11, New York City has been used, ceaselessly, by its resident publicists as a kind of club with which to beat other regions into prone position. Derek Jeter to Bush 43, who was pacing nervously



a few minutes before he had to throw out the first pitch at Yankee Stadium seven weeks after 9/11, 'Don't fuck it up. New York hates pussies' – what, in NY, passes for wit, when it's just Jeter building brand (grace under pressure, etc.).

Lucinda Williams told Bill Buford, 'I fucking hate fucking New York.'

★

Everyone on the streets in New York strikes me as zombie-like. They're all checking their phone every thirty seconds. (Harris: 'The average person checks his phone 150 times a day. Why do we do this? Are we making 150 conscious choices? Instead of viewing the world in terms of availability of choices, we should view the world in terms of friction required to enact choices.') We won. We won. The West Coast has colonized the world. And yet what have we won? More to the point, what have I won? I'm checking my phone at least as often as they are.

I'm so disappointed to discover that the phonological history of Spanish coronal fricatives doesn't support the legend that the entire populace has been speaking with a lisp for five hundred years to make King Philip I feel less freakish. I love seeing proof of herd behaviour.

When people shake hands with each other, I can sometimes feel, very viscerally, the ancient lineage of this ritual to indicate that one is not carrying a gun. And yet the ritual persists. Only in America? In other cultures, do people shake hands quite as frequently?

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, 'Don't do it!' He said, 'Nobody loves me.' I

said, 'God loves you. Do you believe in God?' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Are you a Christian or a Jew?' He said, 'A Christian.' I said, 'Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?' He said, 'Protestant.' I said, 'Me, too! What franchise?' He said, 'Baptist.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?' He said, 'Northern Baptist.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?' He said, 'Northern Conservative Baptist.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?' He said, 'Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region.' I said, 'Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879 or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?' He said, 'Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.' I said, 'Die, heretic!' and pushed him over. (Emo Phillips is obsessed with claiming this as his joke; he won't yield to the larger group.)

★

In 1969, when running for mayor of New York City, the newspaper columnist Jimmy Breslin joked, 'If elected, I'll go to Queens' – that is, to the back of beyond. Will Trump ever, ever get over his sense of outsidersness, his obsession with reciprocity, his perceived need to get his fair share?

When Trump stops at the top of the stairs to Air Force One, turns around, and juts out his chin, he is, to a T, as it were, my college friend Jonathan Wexler, big man on campus at Brown, who is from Rego Park, Queens, by way of Israel. Is it something disseminated via the drinking water?

Nicholas Montemarano, who was born in Brooklyn, raised in Queens, and has written a *roman-à-clef* about John Edwards, says, 'Most of the bullies



I encountered growing up in Queens were of the Trump variety: their words were often worse than anything they actually did. They postured; they threatened; they demeaned. Many were tough, but what mattered more was that they seemed so ... Trump's policies and public persona, his crass statements and bullying demeanor, must certainly betray who he is – but only part of who he is. The storyteller in me can't believe that what we see and hear is all there is to Donald Trump. At times, he seems not to have an inner life. This is a man who doesn't even ask forgiveness from the God he says he believes in. He's a man I can't imagine shedding a tear. And for all these reasons, I'm that much more compelled by him.' Exactly: his emptiness is galvanic.



Jackie Morris













Tips for the Full Moon in Sagittarius

Sophie Mackintosh

Under this moon, take care of the long bones of your thigh, the sockets of your hip. Do not drain your drinks; leave an inch in the glass. Can you feel your liver, a sharp round pain, in the small of your back? Maybe you're imagining it, but also maybe not.

In an online article I read at two in the morning, under a previous full moon, it is revealed that the idea that surgery is more unsafe during a full moon is untrue.

It also asserts that dogs, cats and humans do not go crazy under a full moon, a statement I would like to respectfully disagree with, especially thinking of that night, which lasted a million years, or close to it.

Although at this time of year, with summer heat flooding everyone's bones, who can tell which part of the sky is at fault? The sun, in Gemini right now, is just as culpable.

Top tip: if in need of catharsis, if in need of air, open your bedroom window and listen to the high animal shrieking outside, from somewhere. Or do it yourself, into a pillow, a wet towel, the way you might do with cigarette smoke or a secret pain.

There are fourteen full moons this year. Two blue moons, two blue months. If you are prone to sensitivity, these months – January, March – have already passed. And you survived.

Think about other times you have survived. Think it as often as you need. Think about breaking the water, gasping. Think about that first deep swallow of air. This is advice not limited to the full moon.

And good news! Sagittarius full moons are less intense than others. Sagittarius is a lively sign, optimistic. It's not a hardship to sit in the full beam of its positivity.

Someone once told me that they had never got on with the sign of Sagittarius because they had been loved badly by a Sagittarius. Don't let your personal vendettas obscure your celestial views.

This moon is the flower moon. So we can categorically say that spring is upon us. We can clutch each other in the street and say, *The weather, the weather*. All around the flowers will be out. All the alternative names for it are wholesome. Milk moon. Bright moon. Corn-planting moon.

Do you live for wholesomeness at this time of year? Or does the heat, the light of this very moon, do something to you? Do you want to bury yourself in the ground? Do you want to pinwheel into the air?

Wholesomeness aside, you might still cry, or sit awake, your eyes raw and sanded. Or the idea of travelling might come upon you, the desire to board a plane or boat. Hot sky and mountains and being outside your life.

Clench your hand into a fist, count to three, and then let go. Picture the release of a kind of smoke. Repeat until your heart is light, or until your hand is too painful, whichever comes first. Let the fingers seize up.

You might find yourself dreaming of people, as Mercury enters Gemini. You might find a wash of regret related to people you have wronged, years ago. You might find your mouth eager to talk.

So call a friend who lives a long way away. Call somebody you miss. Tell them you were looking at the moon, unobscured by cloud, benevolent. Tell them your horoscope sent you.





Europe

What's going on here?

What does the future hold?

Even Worstward, Oh (Brexit Beckett Rag)

Chris Power

Three years. Three years on and ever worse. Sick of the either we tried the other. Now sick of both. Try again. Fail again. Fail best.

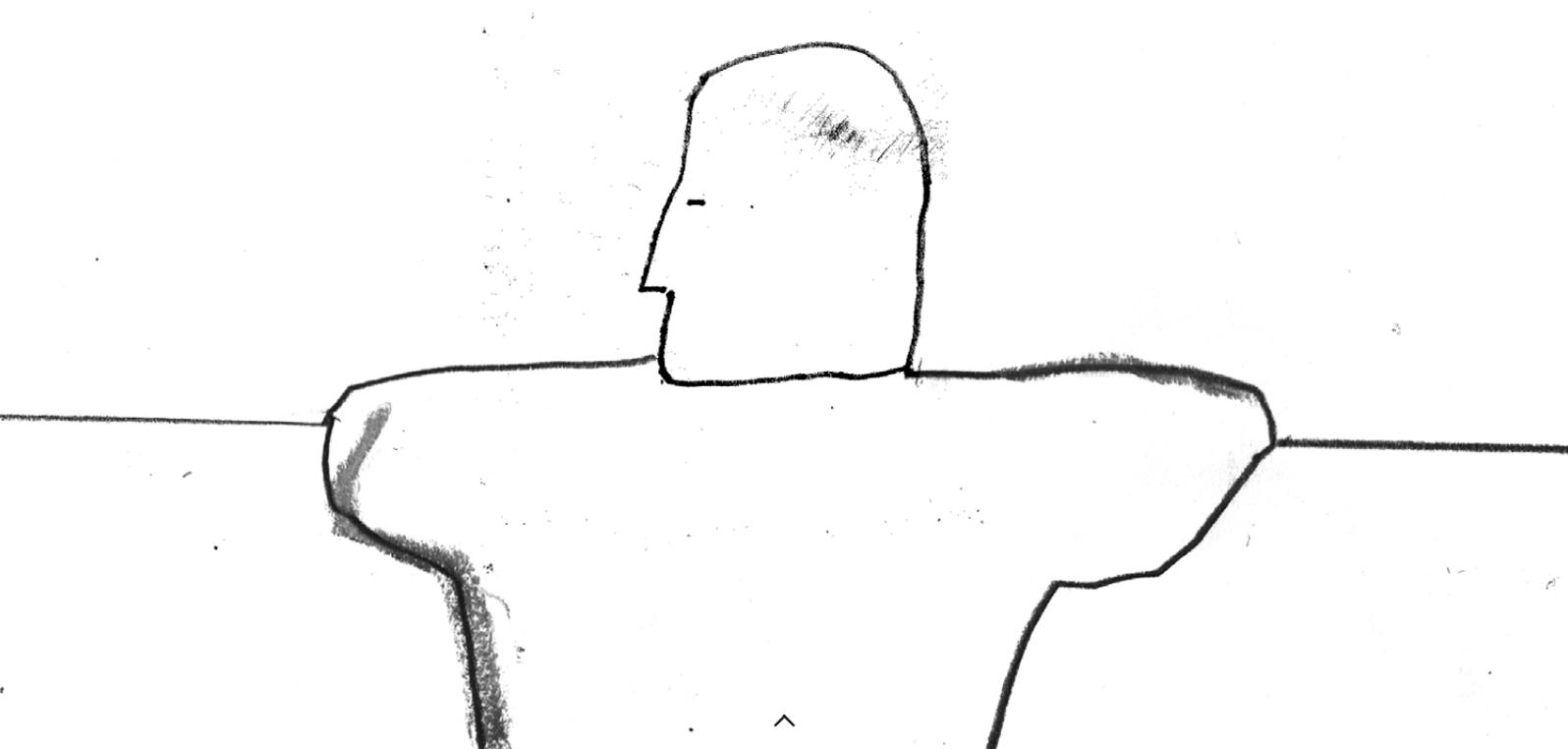
Strong and stable. Missaid. Long since strong. Long since stable. Ever tried. Ever failed. Fail again. Fail worse. Call failing succeeding. Call failing sovereignty. Take back control. Take back right to fail. Lead failing way. Lead all away.

Hard Brexit stands. Say it stands. Remain does not remain. Hard was hard. Is hard. Remain softening softens into ooze.

Control is ours. Our control. Don't say weren't meant to win but won. Don't say. Dim future now on edge of void. Voted leave we left. Negotiated collapse. Head sunk we plod on. Ever worstward on.

Three years on. Worsening in dim void. From bad to worsen. Right and right again. Further right. Farthest right. Once lying. Twice lying. How small. May Davis Johnson Leadsom Gove McVey Mordaunt Grayling Fox how small. They worsen. They lessen. Anyhow on. Say all gone Britain. Alone in dim void with hands empty. Plod on. All others gone. Head sunk plod on. Worse now better later? Worse later. Go back? Try kneeling.

Three years on now best. Best at worst. Fail again. Best at being worst.

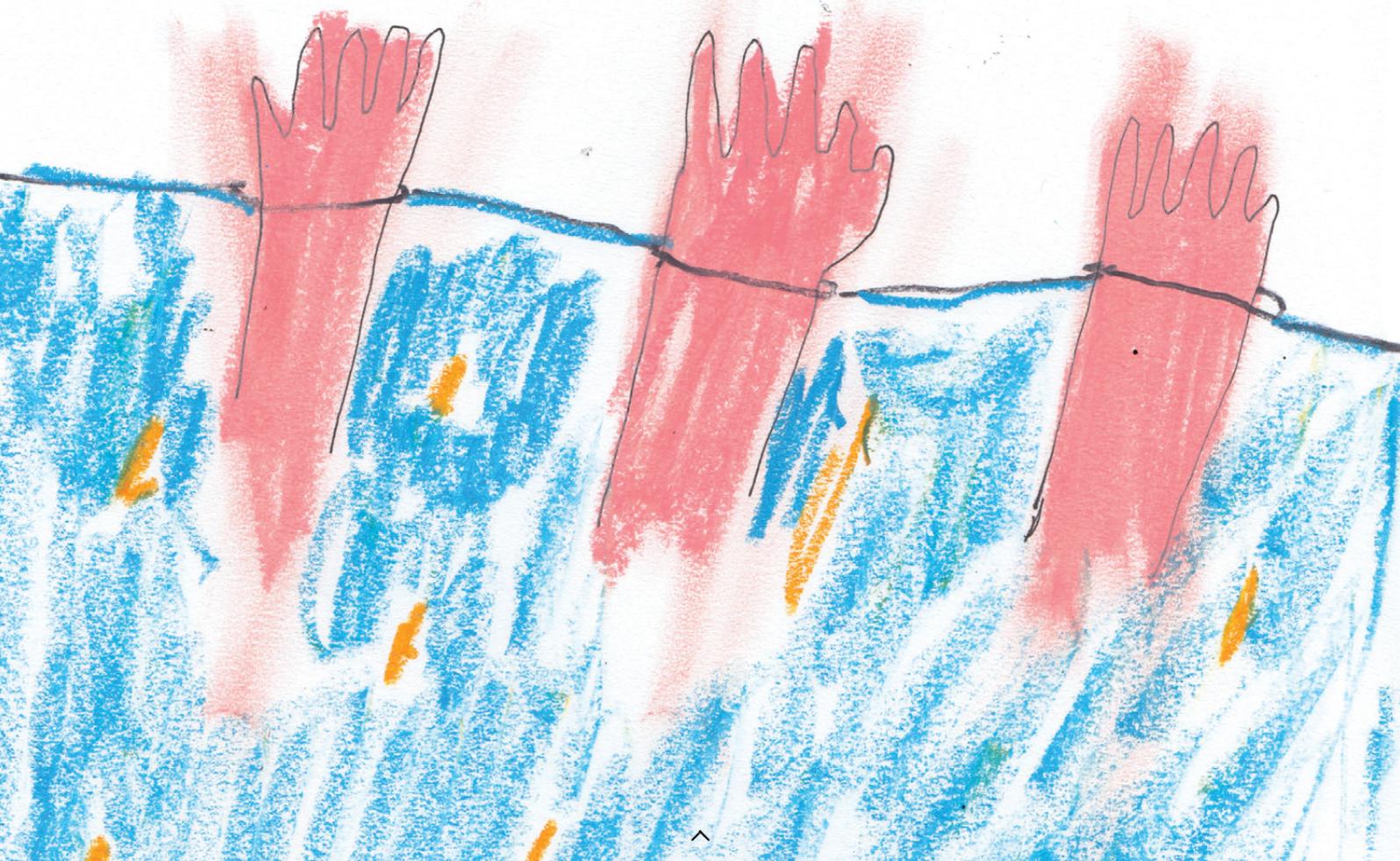


Brits on the Water

Jamie Brisick

I'm grateful for the new pub, and on a Sunday afternoon my wife, two sons and I will while away a few hours watching soccer on the flat-screen TV, drinking a pint or two of the Guinness (not the kids), and maybe eating a lamb roast dinner, or whatever they call it, with those great potatoes and that tasty mint sauce. Lenny, the nine-year-old, is a big fan of Arsenal. Darby, the six-year-old, roots for Manchester United. When a goal is scored the 'yeahhhh!' they shout sounds more English than American. Are my wife and I concerned? A little.

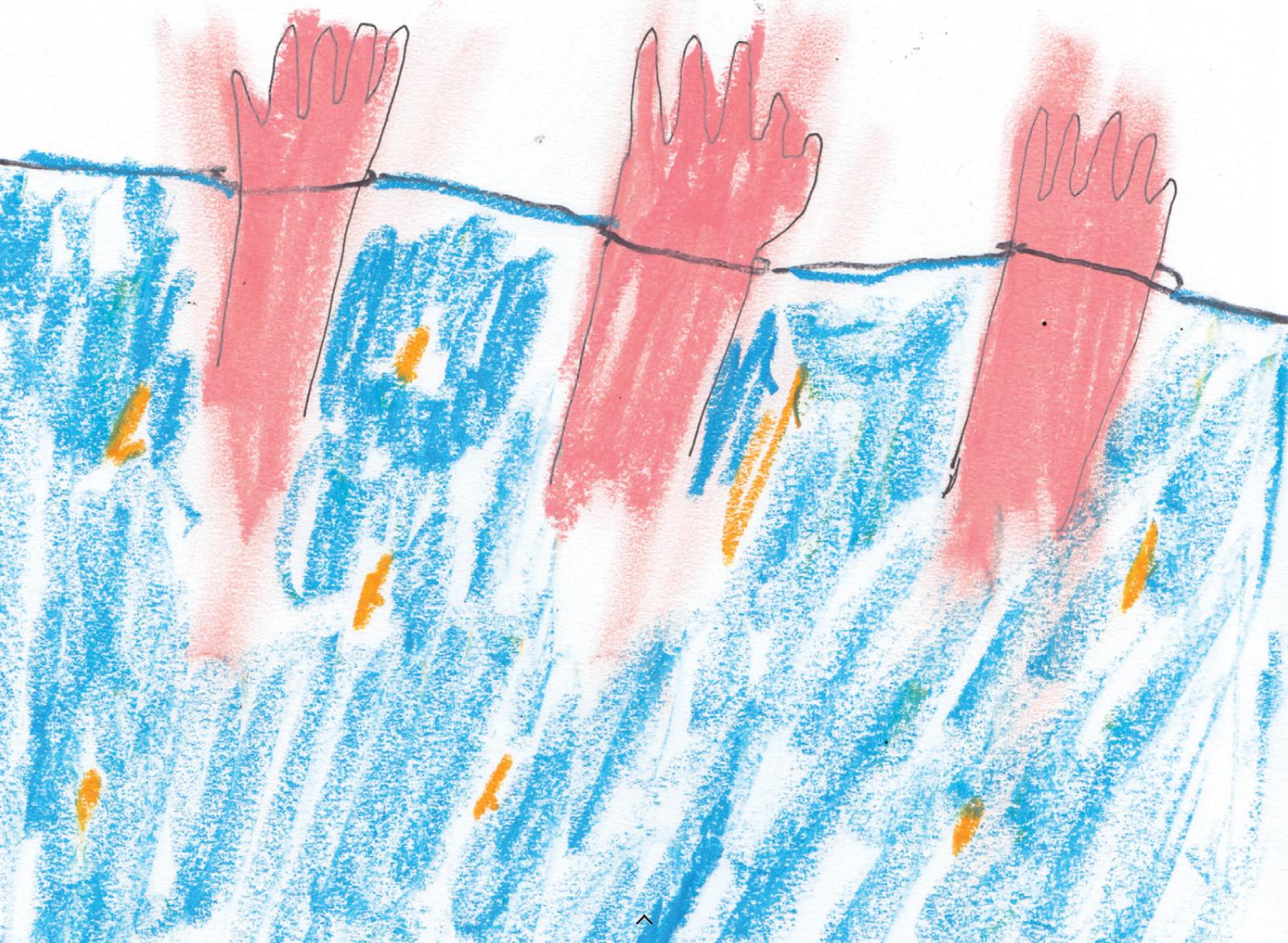
See, we don't get a lot of lamb and 'football' here in sunny Malibu. Or rather, we didn't. But in the past year or two, since 2018, there's been a whole mess of Britishness. SunLife Organics added shepherd's pie to their mostly vegan menu. The 'Union Jack' section at Vintage Grocers seems to get bigger every time I pass it. The new boutique hotel across from Nobu now does an afternoon tea with scones and clotted cream and strawberry jam. Last week's edition of the *Malibu Times* reported an accident on the Pacific Coast Highway in which the driver-at-fault, 'a London transplant', was 'speeding, texting, smoking, and driving on the wrong side of the road'.



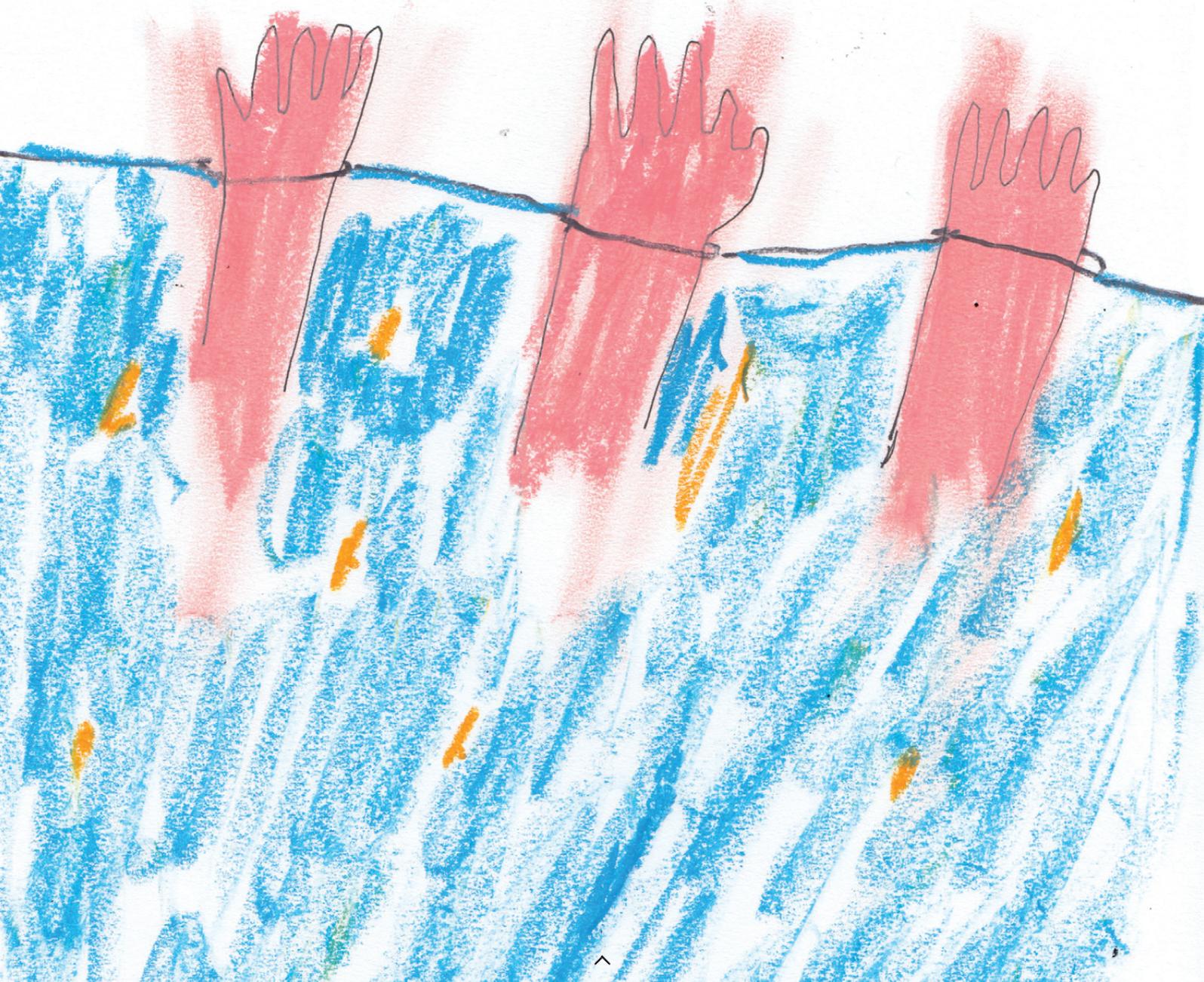
I can handle most of it, but the place where I draw the line is in the surf. Point Dume is one of the most sought-after neighbourhoods in the entire USA, and a big part of its allure is the beach key, which grants you access to your own private surf break. You don't buy a three-bedroom ranch house for \$5.5 million only to have your waves stolen by this massive influx of Brits. Last weekend I got dropped in on by an over-friendly guy named Oliver from Cornwall. Just yesterday a whole pack of 'em showed up with rented soft tops from Zuma Jay.

'Where you from?' I asked.

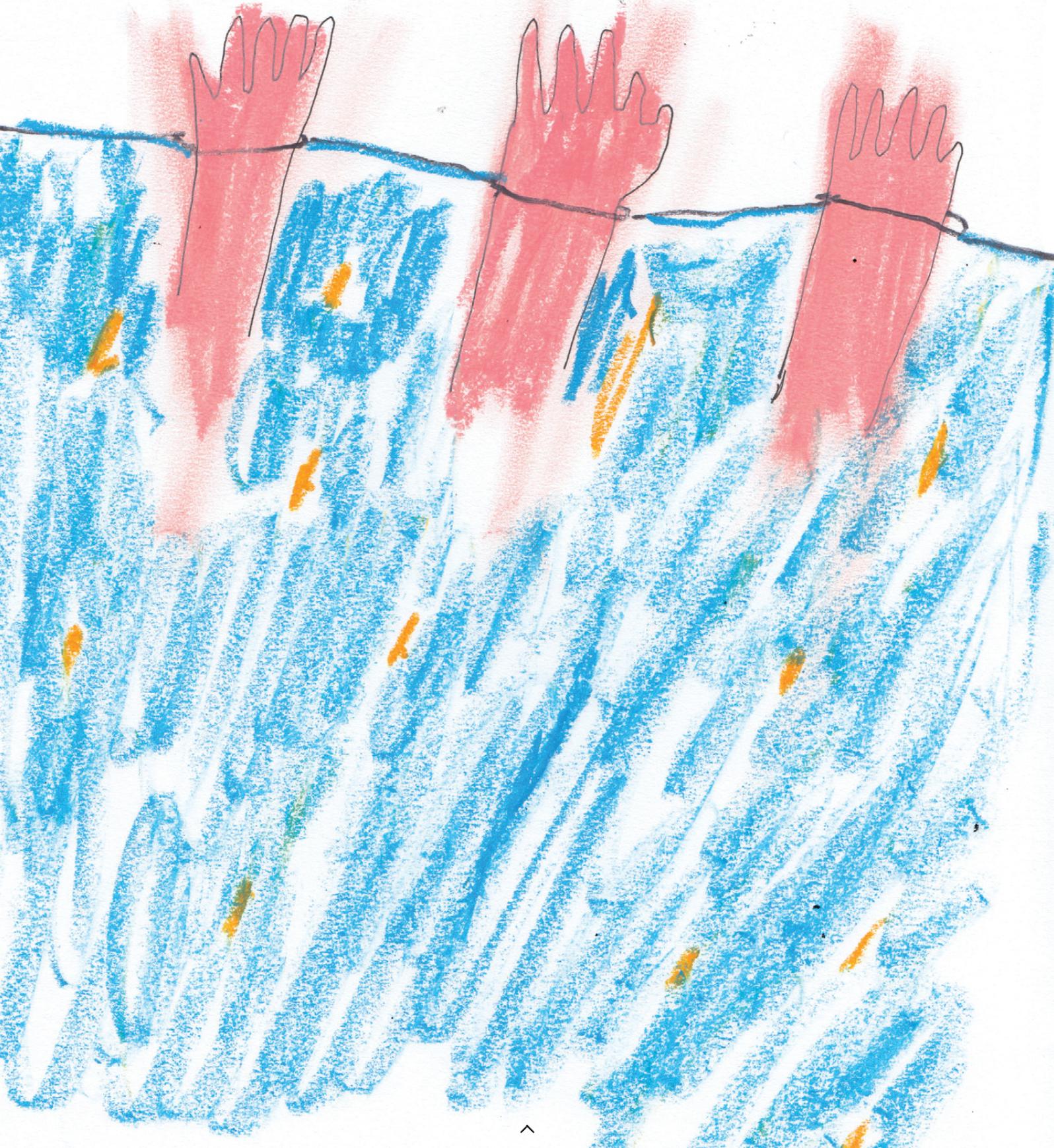
'Shoreditch,' answered the pinkest of the bunch, cigarette glued to lower lip. 'Renting a little guest house on the high street for the summer. Sure is lovely round here.'



This does not bode well. My neighbours (actors, movie producers, real estate moguls, entertainment lawyers, rock stars, one of whom is in fact British) share my concerns. We've started a petition. Officially, it's titled the 'Petition for the Regulation of Beach Keys'. Unofficially, we call it the 'Let Them Drink Pints and Watch Football, Just Keep 'Em Off Our Waves Mandate'. The plan is to issue beach keys only to US citizens. If that's too stringent, then make it so you have to have resided in Malibu for at least five years. Point Dume HOA meeting is July 1. Should be a big turnout.



ON EUROPE (REPRESENTING MALIBU)

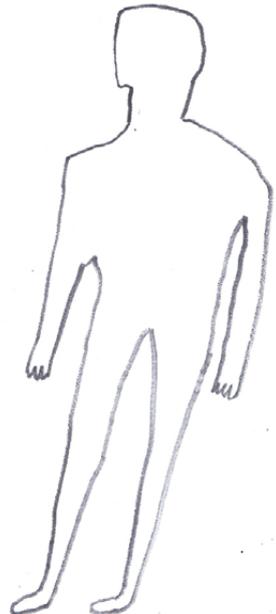




André Naffis-Sahely

Vanishing Act

Only two out of ten people die in Abu Dhabi, the rest simply fail to have their visas renewed; they are bagged, tagged and placed on the next available flight back to wherever they came from. The one-way ticket experience par excellence ... Every edifice on this island is crafted by these almost-nothings. Their solace in death, at least, is to never again queue for whole days on end, to have their fingertips inked and pressed by intolerant hands, their blood screened for undesirable illnesses, their flesh seared by a sun that wonders what the hell they are doing there.





Lead, Kindly Light

The school was an hour south of the city, in the middle of nowhere, but the compound was walled and guarded. Our headmaster was a retired policeman, and the windows of the bus were criss-crossed with bars. Submission was the order of the day: you have been given your place in the world, and now you must earn it. We didn't study much: our books were outdated and censored. Rules, on the other hand, were eminently negotiable. Everyone kept to their own, just like in prison. Suspicions fluctuated with hormones. We knew nothing of the country we lived in, save that our presence was temporary. Our hosts were calm and indifferent, almost ghostlike. One day, when the subject of oil arose, an Emirati classmate exclaimed: My grandfather rode a camel, my father rode a camel, I will drive a Lamborghini, and my son will drive whatever he likes – but my grandson will ride a camel. The day the USS Cole was bombed in Aden, a large Israeli flag was set on fire in the playground. The white kids were nowhere to be seen ...



The Return

I get stamped in like a tourist. It's 7 a.m. and my father's waiting for me at arrivals. We drive along the impossibly wide highways, over the bridge to the island of Abu Dhabi. Sixty years ago, there was almost nothing here: a single mud-brick fort, where the ruler and his family lived, a few brackish wells, an airstrip, and a handful of huts. Now it accommodates one and a half million people from just about everywhere on Earth and hosts a Formula 1 Grand Prix. My father pulls up in a parking lot in the middle of Bateen, a residential neighbourhood. On entering the three-storey building where he and my mother live, I spot a succession of bright red crosses spray-painted on nearly every wall, door and hallway. It's Passover at King Herod's. My father explains that an official from the Municipality inspected the building last week and ordered all the partitions torn down in accordance with new planning regulations. Most of the building is held up by light interior walls that sound like ripe watermelons when you rap your knuckles against them. The Municipality has given my parents two days to knock down the walls, or they'll cut off their gas, water and electricity. Over the years, my family has acquired a breath-taking proficiency in paring their lives down to the bare essentials. Living in the United Arab Emirates is like assembling a Jenga tower, then nervously trying to remove as many blocks as you can without the entire edifice collapsing on you. Once the walls are gone, my parents will get a reprieve from the city authorities, like the rest of their anxious fellow tenants: at which point the game starts all over again.



Infidelity

The bin-man lifts the lid
 on the hungry, scurvy cats,
 and waves a weak hello
 as he combs the trash for a snack.

I sit on the balcony semi-naked
 and wave back. My cold,
 Olympian brutality stirs
 with my first cup of coffee

and I catch myself wishing
 this town would burn to the ground.
 The inevitable sun rises into view
 and greases the palms with its light.

A removal van beeps into position.
 The piano teacher, my mother's rival,
 is readying to move out. For months,
 the two have waged a guerrilla war,

my mother flicking ash into her garden,
 the other making clothes that slipped
 off their pegs mysteriously disappear ...
 After three years in Florence, my mother

returned to her husband and suddenly
 found herself the other woman,
 displaced by my father's fear of death,
 a male disease that knows only one cure ...

Now their conjugal life lies in limbo,
 and I observe these once jovial people,
 hermit crabs too poor for new shells,
 become slowly infected with nihilism –

but how lasting is love anyway? As Churchill
 once said to the King of Bahrain: 'We try
 never to desert our friends, that is unless
 it's in our interest ...' The sun reaches its peak

and a kitten climbs to the top of a small dune
 in the half-empty parking lot and spends an hour
 trying to defecate, but can't. It hasn't eaten enough.
 I've seen too much. I shut my eyes and dive back

into the murky ocean of memory.



Cesare Pavese

You are earth and death.
Your season is darkness
and silence. No living
thing is more remote
than you from the dawn.

When you appear to wake
you are only sorrow,
it is in your eyes and in your blood
but you do not feel it. You live
like a stone lives,
like the hard earth.
And you are dressed in dreams
in shuddering movements
that you ignore. Sorrow
like the waters of a lake
quivers and surrounds you.

There are rings on the water.
You let them disappear.
You are earth and death.

[3 December 1945]

Translated by Isabel Wall



Reading Cesare Pavese

Elizabeth Strout on *The Beautiful Summer*

How would you describe the appeal of Cesare Pavese's books?

I think the appeal of Pavese's work comes from the same place most writers' appeal comes from: the language that is used. But each writer is unique. Pavese writes densely and yet delicately; it is a style that is inimitable. And he writes about things that matter; he is serious.

Why should we read *The Beautiful Summer* in particular?

The Beautiful Summer is a gorgeous book that tells a story many of us know, the loss of a young girl's innocence. But because it is Pavese telling the story, it feels as though we have never read such a story before – and we haven't. He tells this in his own way, with an almost maniacal prose that also has the summer light pervading it.

In *The Beautiful Summer* Pavese ushers his protagonist out of her naive state by gently and continuously having her visit the studios of artists – and eventually we see what happens. She is alone in this; she has her friends, but she has only her brother, who is not mentioned that frequently; his presence is in the book, but the book does not belong to him. So we are aware of her aloneness throughout this experience.

How does it differ from the way you treated Amy's sexual awakening in your first novel, *Amy & Isabelle*?

In *Amy & Isabelle*, Amy is fighting against her mother, and this makes it a different story. She is pushing off against her mother, and the teacher is available for her. Amy is also very alone, but her mother is an integral part of this story and that makes it fundamentally different. Also, there is a

graphic – brief – sex scene in the book, which Pavese, writing at the time that he did, would not be so graphic about, and in fact was not.

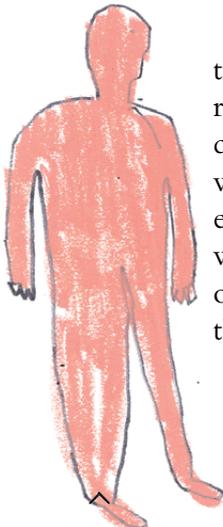
Yes, as I said, many of us know this story – we have seen it, and read it again and again. What makes Pavese's story different is how he tells it, the language and way he lays it out. Also, he is telling this story at a particular time in history, when the bohemian part of society was in some ways desperate against the oncoming fascism, and this is a part of her story as well, there is a free-for-all feel to it, nobody is interested in long-term outcomes. The times these people lived in was a desperate time. (I might add, what time is not desperate?)

Pavese was profoundly influenced by American writers (he translated lots of twentieth-century greats). What influence have European writers had on your work?

Perhaps the most recent influential European writer for me has been Elena Ferrante. I think there is a real possibility that reading her work gave me the courage to write in the first person, in *My Name is Lucy Barton*. It is hard to know exactly where the influences come from, but I believe there is a good chance that reading her books helped me do that.

What are your views on literature in translation?

To read work in translation, I think, is essential. It's essential for any writer, and for any serious reader to do as well. To ignore the works of other country's writers is to remain provincial, and the world is getting smaller every day, so we need – even more than we used to – to be reading the works of other countries. In this way we can find ourselves, and also open our hearts and minds to the way that a variety of people have lived. It will



be both unfamiliar and then surprisingly familiar, because it is people that are being written about.

What do you think about Brexit?

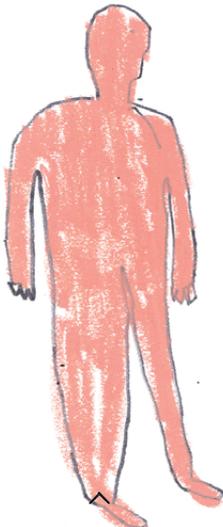
Brexit, quite honestly, has made me feel very sad. I think that it speaks of an isolationism that is counter-productive to the times we live in. As a writer, it is very important that we not feel isolated from other parts of the world. It is essential, as I have said.

In your books, characters such as Lucy Barton appear and reappear. What's the pleasure in reintroducing characters and re-examining them in different contexts?

The pleasure for me in revisiting characters is not a conscious decision, I simply go where my instinct takes me, and with Lucy Barton, I was clearly not done telling her story, and felt the desire to tell it from other points of view. This has always interested me, the variety of points of view that we all have in this world, and so to see Lucy – or Olive Kitteridge – from different people's eyes is something I felt compelled to do.

And this is one reason I support the European Writers Series, to get that other *point of view*. Think about this: we will never really know what it feels like to be another person. Our lives here on earth are seen from only our own two eyes; this is so strikingly apparent to me. We need desperately to see things from another point of view, and literature is one of the ways this can be accomplished. Without this, we are going to remain small, and we have the capacity to become large.

The Beautiful Summer by Cesare Pavese, with an introduction by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Elizabeth Strout, will be published by Penguin in June 2018 as part of the Penguin European Writers series.



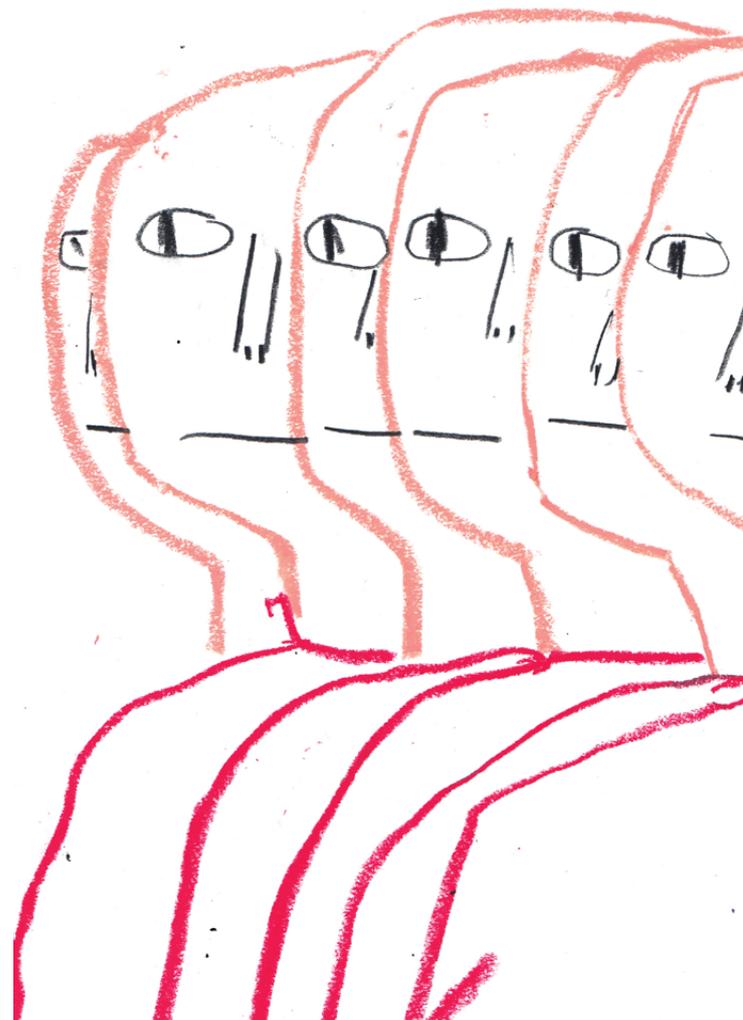
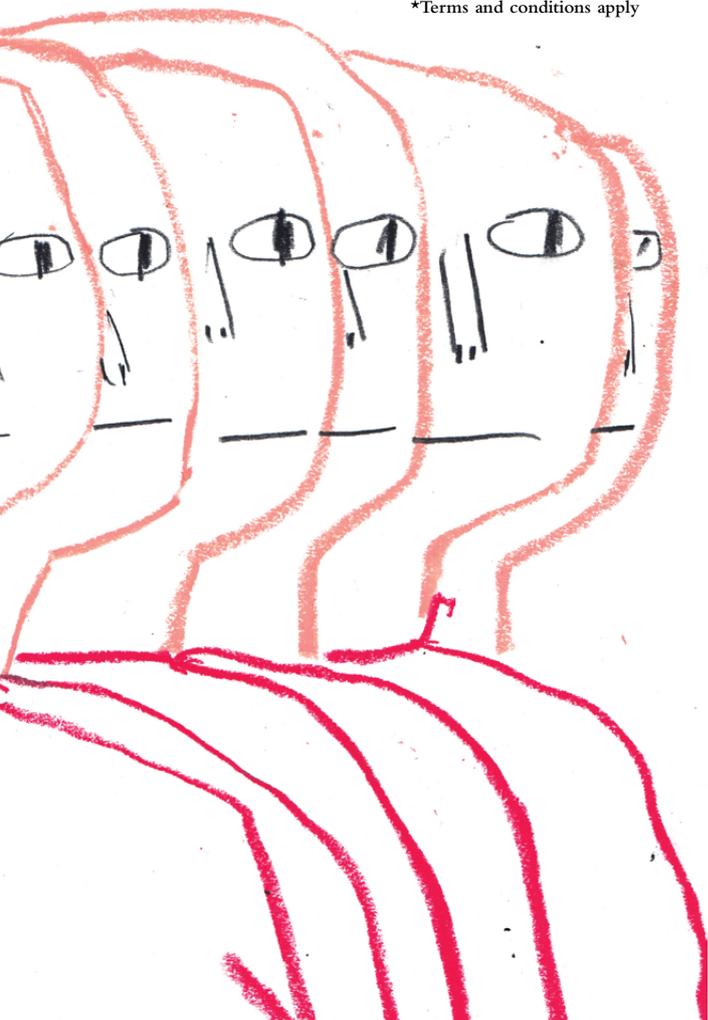
Downtown Beirut

Anbara Salam

This elegant pedestrianized neighbourhood was formerly the vibrant historical centre of Beirut, and is now host to many of Beirut's swankiest, and priciest, cafes. The express coach from **Golden Beach Sunshine Paradise Resort Village** (pp. 13–56) runs six times a day, or ask taxi drivers for *Ingliziya*. Spend an afternoon strolling the honey-stoned boulevards, and soak up the archaeological splendour of the Roman baths. The downtown area is notorious for its upmarket restaurants, and no trip is complete without a chance to sample the abundant ice cream flavours on offer – pistachio is a local favourite. Bold adventurers might want to order a hubble-bubble pipe, but those concerned with their health should ask for an *e-argileh*! On **Piccadilly Avenue**, you'll find the Beirut Museum of Cultural Heritage (Mon to Thurs, 11 a.m to 3 p.m.), well worth a visit for their stunning collection of restored Byzantine mosaics. The cafe on the fifth floor serves sandwiches and soft drinks, and provides sweeping views over the gleaming artificial beach and Arabian bungalows of **Golden Beach Sunshine Paradise Resort Village** (pp. 13–56). Ask for a seat on the balcony but please do not throw litter over the barricades. In the courtyard off **Churchill Street** behind the Mamluk-era Grand Omar Mosque, you'll find the flagship **Kidzone**: four storeys of fun! Don't forget to bring your passports! Children will be issued with 'human shield' stickers to collect at all **Kidzone** locations, redeemable after airport security for **Shieldy** (p. 157) plush toys. Collect ten 'human shield' stickers to unlock special bonus levels on the **Shieldy Sunshine Holiday** iPad game; control **Shieldy** (p. 157) as he deflects dynamite to protect the enchanted palm tree, and you'll be entered into a chance to win a free package holiday for four to **Golden Beach Sunshine Paradise Resort Village!*** Unwind by sipping on some mint tea in the shade of one of downtown's majestic banyan trees, before browsing the souvenir stands along **Bulldog Boulevard**. Friendly **Leblife** coordinators run hourly guided tours through the St Louis Capuchin Church, but please note that open alcohol containers are banned inside the church building following the **Municipality of Beirut vs Sullivan ruling** (p. 202). At the

end of **Paddington Street** you will find the complimentary airport shuttle. Visitors can book places in advance through **Sunshine Paradise Airline** directly via the app, or through **Leblife** representatives at any of the kiosks at **Golden Beach Sunshine Paradise Resort Village** (pp. 13–56). Don't forget to register your boarding card via the app at the shuttle stand to claim your guaranteed visa reimbursement! **Leblife** coordinators will help you on board and store any items in the hold for the duration of your short journey to the airport along **Sunshine Avenue**. Please do not throw litter over the barricades.

*Terms and conditions apply



'We're Terrible People'

One of the best chapters from Joe Dunthorne's *The Adulterants* remained unpublished. Until now.

We asked Joe Dunthorne a few questions about his new novel.

Five Dials How you were able to cut this scene from the book? In a novel about relationships, isn't it important to show how the two characters meet?

Joe Dunthorne Normally, yes. And in early drafts of the novel there was much more back-story. But as I wrote the novel I realised I wanted to push my narrator over the edge as efficiently and ruthlessly as possible. And this scene felt like it was letting the reader off the hook, somehow, giving them a breather. I wanted the novel to be a short, sharp descent with no relief.

5D Why did you choose the name Garthene? Where did it come from? Do you think it'll catch on?

JD I love this name! I first heard it because my sister knows a Garthine. When I had a reading in Cardiff recently, the real Garthine was in the audience. Her name is sufficiently rare that you only have to type her first name into Google to find her. For the novel, I was interested in a character with a name so directional that everyone she meets has to take a position on it. People reveal themselves in the way they love or pretend to love or avoid mentioning her name.

5D How would you quickly describe the relationship between Garthene and Ray?

JD Much of their early relationship is built on shared private humour. They enjoy saying things to each other that they wouldn't say in front of anyone else. It's the intimacy of inappropriateness – the thrill of sharing your unreconstructed self. One of the questions the novel asks is whether a rela-

tionship like this – that's built on a certain amount of cynicism, of laughing at the world – can survive the transition into the necessarily boring and earnest realm of mortgages, home-owning and child-care.

5D Now that the novel is out in the world, do you miss spending time with these two?

JD I'm working on a TV pilot of *The Adulterants* so I am still getting my fix.

5D Is this chapter part of a sprawling, much larger director's cut?

JD There are one or two more chapters that I feel sorry to have cut. There's quite a fun set-piece at a baby modelling audition, for example. (I can confirm that it does feel quite creepy, attending a baby modelling audition for research. I went with a friend and her son and had to pretend to be his father.)

Military Fitness

Before I knew Garthene's name – before I even knew Garthene was a name – I carried her on my back through the trees along the edge of the lake, both of us sweating, her breath hot at my ear. We were being pursued by a kind young veteran named Raphael who wore olive green fatigues and sixteen-eyelet boots and shouted 'I'm proud of you guys; you're doing great.' There were twenty of us in total, split into pairs. I admit that I had joined military fitness training with the explicit intention of experiencing mild trauma in the company of women my age.





Afterwards, as we sat in the dirt, in various shapes of weariness, Garthene and I watched Raphael high-fiving people as they left the park.

'I thought the whole point was that he was going to abuse us,' I whispered.

'I know,' she said. 'He's too nice.'

'I want to be called a worthless worm. That's why I signed up.'

Raphael was now holding a clipboard. He knelt down to give someone a direct debit form.

'I'm pretty sure he's never been to war,' she said.

We walked out of the park together. I refused to ask her name or her job or where she lives. That's the way it is now, with the hyperinflation of people's expectations of romance. You can never ask a normal question.

'Would you ever join the army?' I said.

She thought about it. 'You mean the real army? Or like the T.A.s?'

She had me at 'the T.A.s'.

'No, I mean front line. Combat. Service. I'm asking you if you'd kill for your country.'

The streetlights hung above us like sodium flares.

'I could maybe drive a tank,' she said. 'I would need something between me and the people I was killing, otherwise it'd be too much.'

'You could pilot a drone?' I said.

'I reckon so,' she said. 'All those little pixellated ...' A bead of sweat rolled off her left eyebrow,

gathered speed as it ran down the wing of her nose, gaining weight as it went, entering her mouth at the moment she said '... combatants.'

The world turned slow-mo with trumpets. Life partner music.

After each session, we walked together to the bus stop. It became a running joke between us – our first joke – the ways in which we imagined Raphael was faking his military experience. He had this duffel bag with sew-on badges – one for the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, another showing a curved dagger – that we learned you could order from a website called dropzone.com. He had a waterproof notebook and waterproof pencil which we only ever saw him use for writing down people's contact details.

'In the heat of battle, the smell of sulphur, I held my dying friend in my arms,' she said, 'and took down his email address.'

I looked towards an imagined horizon, though we could only see the tops of heavy goods vehicles as they rattled down the Eastway. I spoke in the voice of a dying man: 'Promise me you'll send a message to all my starred contacts.'

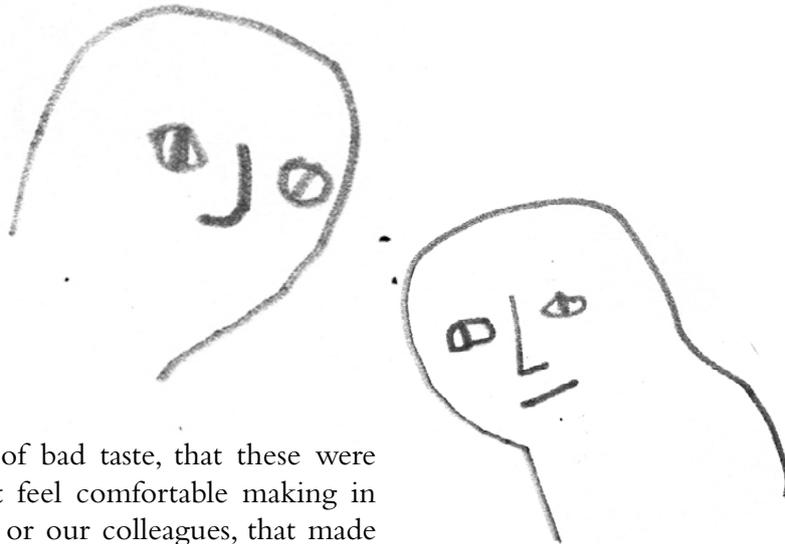
She banged her fist against my chest. 'You've just gotta tell me your password, buddy. Tell me!'

I looked up to the starless sky and croaked: 'Cool guy on tour all one word.'

'And with the knowledge that he had passed on this responsibility, his soul drifted away.'

We walked on, laughing.





It was the tang of bad taste, that these were jokes we would not feel comfortable making in front of our parents or our colleagues, that made the moment special.

A few weeks later, Raphael gave us a lift home in his boxy metallic Ford Cortina and we saw, in the footwells, a foot-long catheter tube and sterile wipes and white boxes with prescription labels. While in Afghanistan, he'd lacerated his bladder in a motorbike crash and now had a suprapubic catheter. Because the crash had occurred during recreational time, he didn't get a full pension. And that's why he was now doing military fitness three times a week, even though it was uncomfortable, running around with a bag of piss strapped to your thigh. He dropped us off at the town hall. We watched him drive away and then looked at each other.

'We're terrible people.'

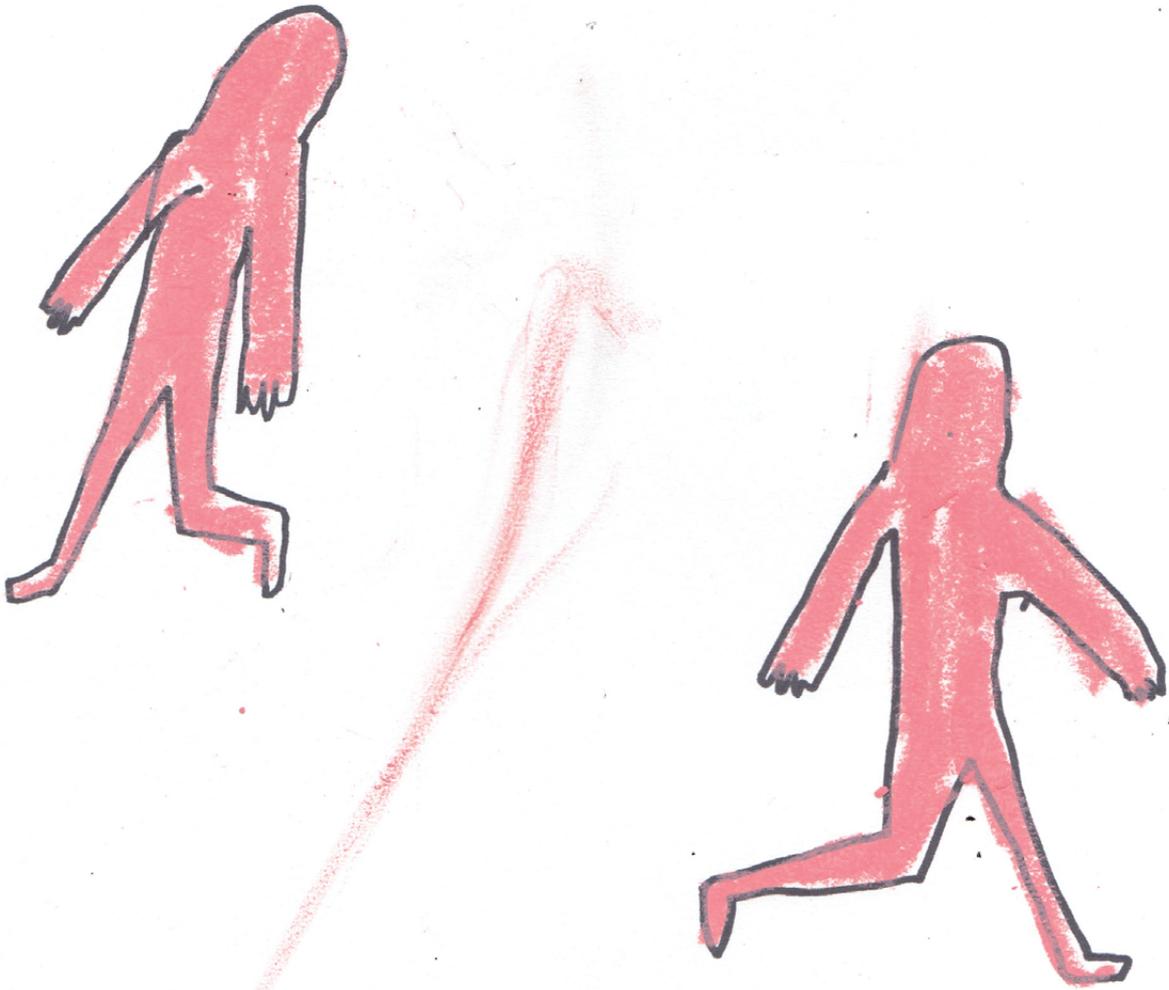
'We really are.'

We kissed.

Our Town

'The most wonderful thing in life is to be delirious and the most wonderful kind of delirium is being in love. In the morning mist, hazy and amorous, London was delirious. London squinted as it floated along, milky pink, without caring where it was going.'

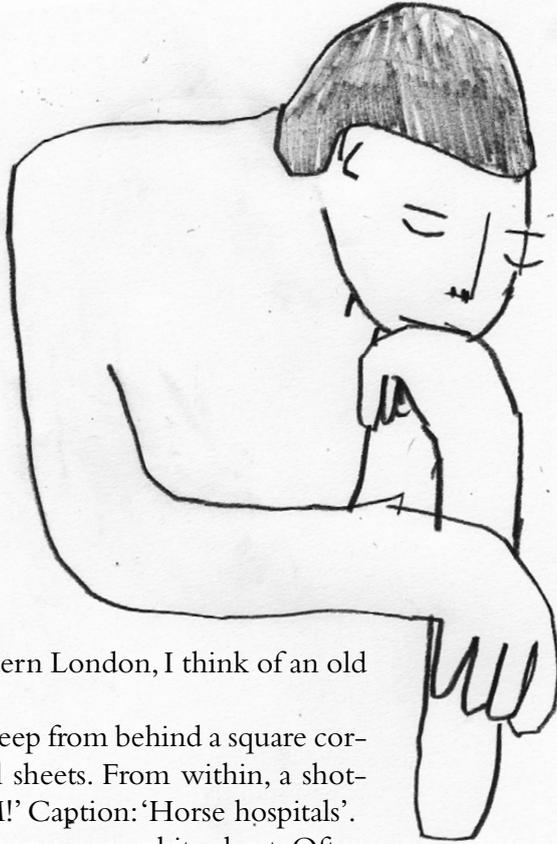
—Yevgeny Zamyatin, *Islanders & The Fisher Of Men*



This issue's itinerary: The champagne-pink eighties marble of Broadgate, Curtain Road, wanton brickery on Clifton Street, biscuit buildings, Beckton's brown unpleasant land

Beckton E16: Little Bricks

Gavin Haynes



When I think of modern London, I think of an old Gary Larson cartoon.

A pair of hooves peep from behind a square cordon of white hospital sheets. From within, a shotgun rings out: 'BLAM!' Caption: 'Horse hospitals'.

Every day now, I pass a new white sheet. Often several. They enclose buildings. BLAM! I say to myself. BLAM!

Step outside and look at the building you work in. Is it ringed in white vinyl? I'd give it three months, tops. Give them enough sheeting and these David Copperfields of the QE era can make anything up to the Statue of Liberty disappear.

The sheets are the uniform of the Considerate Constructors scheme, a tasteful prelude to demolition. Satisfying implosions are forbidden in the City, so behind the discretion of the tarp a digger's arm tears at concrete ducts, accompanied by its friend the dust-damping water hose. Within a few weeks the host is digested, nose-to-tail, by simple arbitrage on price-per-square-foot.

New sheets can be troubling. What was behind them in the first place? Was it the row of pious Georgian terraces that Jean Nouvel bulldozed for his One New Change mall? The champagne-pink eighties marble of Broadgate, now ingested in the name of further Itsu rollout? The jerry-built old firehouse at Canary Wharf? Or the maw of modernist offices that once squatted, like a tomb to asbestosis victims, between Bank and Cannon Street?

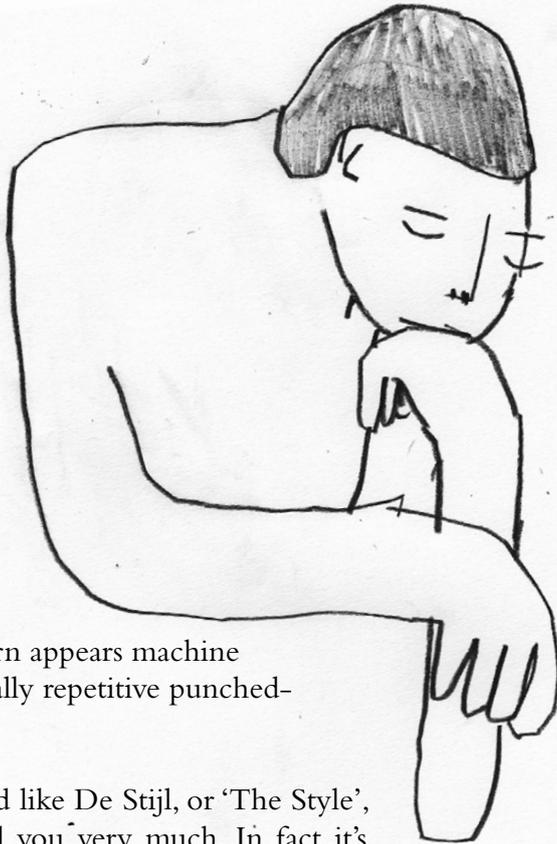
How is it we only notice that a thing existed when it's ending? Hug your Smythsons in the living years. What will eventually rise in their place has become increasingly predictable. Little bricks.

The bricks are often yellow. Yellow is your classic London brick. Though interloper bricks do exist. At the end of Aldgate East, the Berkeley Group are erecting a 21-storey Manhattanite tower made of little bricks in mauve. On Curtain Road, a new hotel where 'acclaimed New York chef and restaurateur Marcus Samuelsson brings his renowned Harlem restaurant to Shoreditch' is decked out in a rich red, perhaps to shore up the Williamsburg simile to business tourists who haven't time to figure out the district. Walk a block or two up from Curtain Road and the style repeats itself again and again. The long-defunct petrol station has been bricked into four storeys of offices. Turn left and ad kings R/GA have placed a piece of wanton brickery on Clifton Street.

The style is sombre, Calvinist, flat, with both the moral and linear rectitude of Weetabix. Big, unadorned windows. Balconies factoryed in glass so as not to obstruct the clean lines. Like if the Dutch had taken New Amsterdam back from the British in 1745, then used it as a penal colony for errant UX designers. Sometimes they're more like an Edwardian mansion block designed by a Le Corbusier who had to knock off early to go to a party. Sir Peter Cook, sultan of sixties neo-futurism, has called them 'biscuit buildings'.

To say that these represent a new London vernacular is not to overstate the case. Not when the Mayor's planning office is now issuing discussion documents called 'The New London Vernacular':

They take comfortably familiar elements, such as doors to the street, the portrait-shape of sash windows and London brick, then pare back decoration so that the



fenestration pattern appears machine made in its clinically repetitive punched-out rhythm.

It has a name. And like De Stijl, or 'The Style', the name doesn't tell you very much. In fact it's positively inaccurate. TNLV actually began life in Cambridge, on old MoD land, in 2008, in a development called Accordia. Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley and Alison Brooks won the Stirling Prize for their efforts.

Not every great work can be knocked off, but here was a Tretchikoff for our times. By 2012, the Mayor's office was noticing marked similarities in the designs they were getting. For the big magic circle developers like Barratt, it's increasingly a house style.

For them, TNLV solved a lot of problems. The street-facing entrances limited the number of people sharing an entrance-point – a stated goal of the planning authorities. This also had the knock-on effect of lowering common area charges at a moment when they had been rising. On the cheery CGI models with the unevenly lit people

strolling through imagined courtyards, mild variations in brick colour could be picked out as pixels, lending the brochures an extra layer of texture.

Less stated was the ease with which the distinctions between the penthouses and the social-rented or 'affordable' parts could be blurred beneath a uniform recurring exterior.

Planning was streamlined. Rather than pick through hundreds of design elements, the developers could write 'see last one' at the top of their submissions.

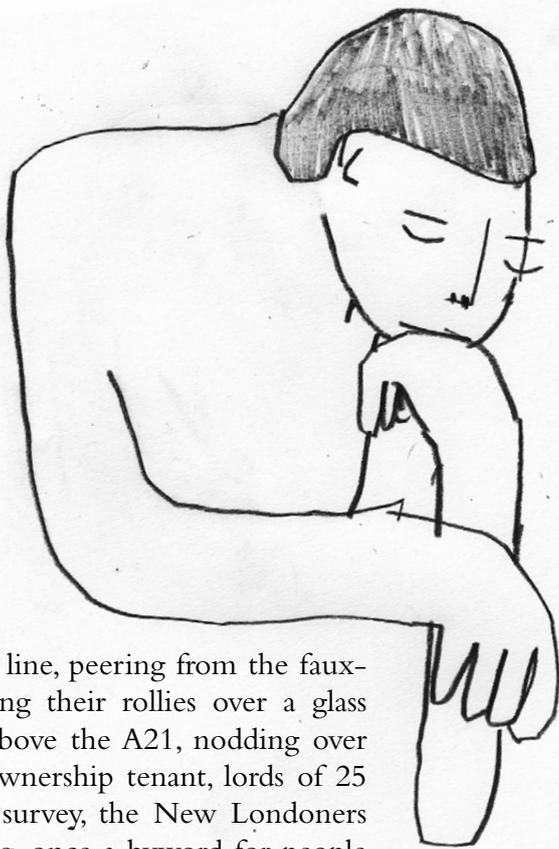
Objections were minimized. How would a neo-Georgian avenue work in your neighbourhood? Just fine, thanks.

The public have always loved bricks. Developers have always been less keen, because they cost money, and because they have to be trowelled off by bricklayers, who cost even more money, especially as there's still a national shortage.

But no one could argue that bricks don't sell. People repeat pleasing idioms to each other about the security of bricks. They do not do that for pre-mould. In fact, if there is a single reason why we despise architects as much as estate agents, tabloid journalists and divorce lawyers, it is the contempt they have for the materials we live in.

Architects have never quite understood this. They seem baffled that the public would rather live in Letchworth Garden City, or Poundbury, than Trellick Tower or Milord Rogers' new Bankside units. Your average Briton would prefer it if you stuffed your hi tech up your barcode grill. Even the sense that we once welcomed the neo-futuristic is often its own brand of nostalgia. 'No, we knew they were ugly even then,' was how my father described being taken out by his dad, in the 1950s, to see the new Millwall estates going up.

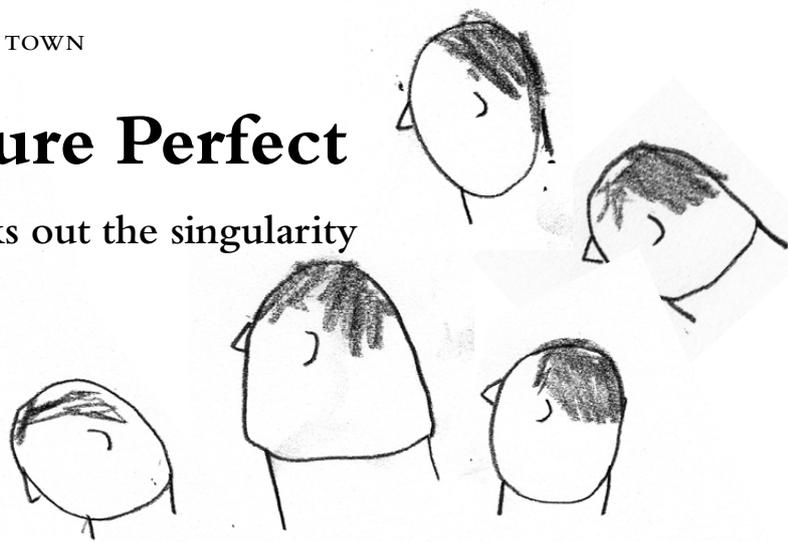
Here, then, at long last, is a pax that works for all. The public can have their bricks. The developers can standardize, authorize, commodify, sell.



Behind the brick line, peering from the faux-sash window, dropping their rollies over a glass balcony six storeys above the A21, nodding over to the next shared-ownership tenant, lords of 25 per cent of all they survey, the New Londoners are emerging. Barking, once a byword for people who wished they were dead, is being reimagined at the Riverside in neat neo-terraces. Canning Town, once the armpit of something that probably doesn't even use armpits, is rising again as brick in the purplish hue of good quality intestine. On it goes. Whitmore Road, Trafalgar Place, Saxon Court, Blossom Street, Brentford Lock, Kidbrooke Village, Turnmill, Queens Court, St John's Hill, Hanover Square, the new Aylesbury estate, Greenwich Riverside. They will not sleep till they have built this New Amsterdam upon Beckton's brown unpleasant land.

WC1: Future Perfect

Nathalie Olah seeks out the singularity



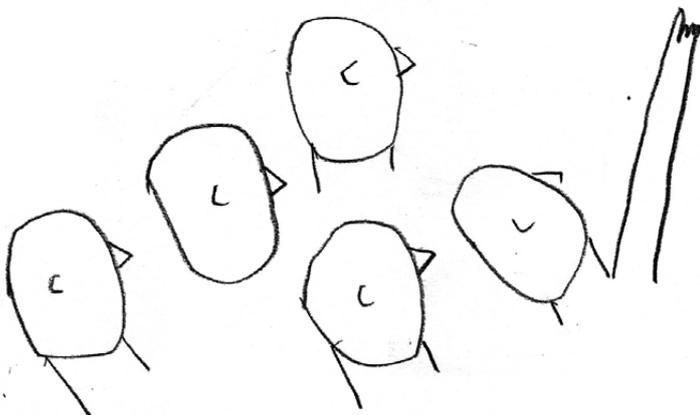
Anticipating 2025 was hosted by the London Futurists in the lecture hall on the UCL campus in Holborn. The group's leader David Wood, with whose avatar I'd been exchanging pleasantries for the past few weeks, still hadn't arrived, as I milled around in the entrance hall between business card-carrying teenagers in suits and Matrix Morpheuses in full-length pleather coats - the real pros of the head-shot scene, come to life on a Sunday morning with the help of free-flowing instant coffee and custard cream biscuits. They all seemed now only a fraction of the age and stature they had before, thanks to the stiff postures and gradient backdrops of their pictures, which I had watched jostle with each other, making nerdish jokes on the forum David had invited me to join before the event.

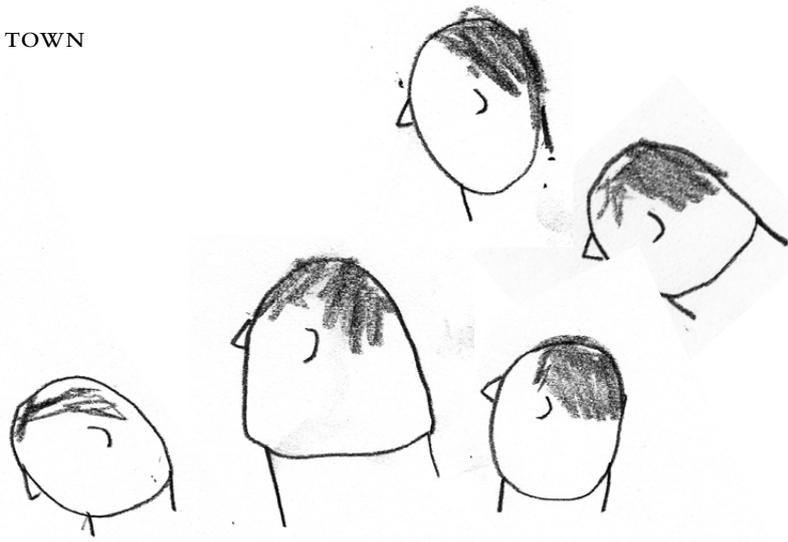
David had promised me full access, interview opportunities and plentiful PDFs relating to concepts of transhumanism, cybernetics and the singularity - the Jet Fuel Can't Melt Steal Beams of the early 2010s, and terms I had only ever heard used before at house parties attended by men who still wore hats. Transhumanism is the term used to refer to any technological enhancement of the human condition, through bio-hacking (the act of interfering with the body's natural processes either at a prosthetic or molecular level), artificial intelligence and virtual reality. I had traced the hysteria to its source, where I would be able to gauge once and for all if there was any truth to what the hash spoke; any substance to the idea that we were all on the cusp of some robotic takeover.

Before I left the house, Ed asked why I was sacrificing my Sunday for a story no editor worth their pay would ever commission. I said research, at which point Ed laughed and shook his head before resuming the episode of *Man v. Food* that was blaring from the TV. I guess at that point we both suspected me of being driven by one too many house parties attended by men in hats, groping for answers and looking for meaning beyond our godless pub lives and supermarket tortellini. He waved goodbye to me that morning without looking, and laughed a second time before I slammed the door behind me.

In the lecture hall, wires, headsets, tablets and phones pulsed. The momentousness of seeing Google Glass for the first time was dampened somewhat by the man it was attached to, attempting to show a Powerpoint presentation that the organisers were struggling to display thanks to a dodgy power supply to the overhead projector. I found my seat between a bionic couple and a faintly perspiring baby-shaped man. And then there was me, an outsider at this Mr. Kipling Heaven's Gate, shivering under the large coat that hid from sight a battery powered Dictaphone I'd been using for just over ten years.

I hadn't expected the future to be so poorly heated, or to smell quite so strongly of instant coffee. Enlightenment seemed a long way off amidst all the biscuit munching, until a woman at the doorway smiled and began leading a taller man towards me. David was all blue shirts and eyebrows with hands that were big and soft and held mine in a firm grip, eager and grateful of the publicity. He wore none of the futurist emblems of his fellow gatherers, but suddenly his stolid grace, that certain men of a certain age are prone to having, made him seem that more trustworthy and reignited my enthusiasm for the day's events. Though this perhaps chafed with the heys and cools and





whazzaps that he delivered over my head to the people behind me.

Eventually he asked if I had everything I needed and if I was comfortable and said 'good' and "great" and nodded before limbering up on to the stage to deliver his welcome speech.

'London. How are we all feeling?'

A chorus of groans echoed around the room. Anticipating 2025 had been a two-day of which I had only been able to make the second. David made jokes about a previous night spent drinking. Despite this he was energised, though it wasn't always apparent from the timbre of his Scottish accent and the over pronunciation of syllables enjoying new and unfamiliar arrangements - 'Cyyyburrneticks' echoing from the small, tight-lipped mouth hanging between undulating jowls that shook in time with the fine mist of auburn hair atop his head. It was exciting to be on the cusp of a new phase of human history, it was also messy.

David had spent thirty years in mobile interface architectures and it showed. His presentation was a glut of arrows and flowcharts all designed to make clear and digestible concepts of human progress and development. The world was full of projects doomed to fail, he said. Innovations went in. Pumped Up Systems were burped out. By contrast, success depended on Physical Possibility going in, Engineering and Investment doing the processing and On-going Benefits to End Users being burped out. And though it was more boring than anyone could be expected to withstand, I nodded.

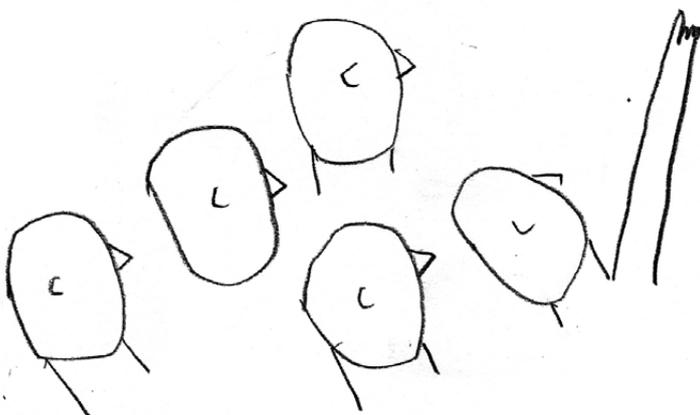
I even made notes and joined in with the round of applause that greeted him as he turned from his knot of word art to face the room of adoring fans. To be bamboozled by language I barely understood was a joy I had not felt since childhood, lovingly staring into the wide face of our Protestant school vicar Father Roberts, whose own Gaelic timbre had once lulled me into a confused love of my own, supposed Christian God.

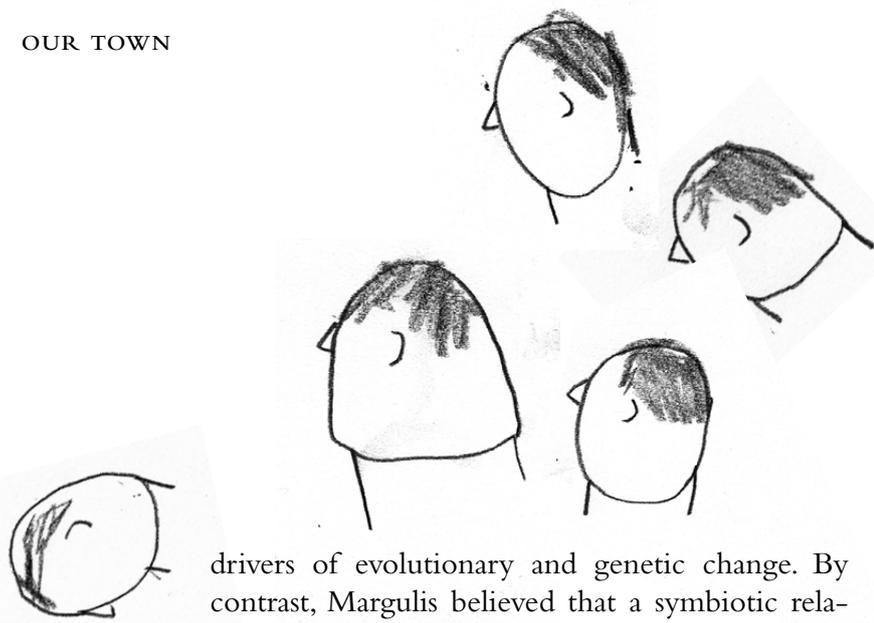
Yet here I was again, inching ever closer to a singular, satisfactory explanation of our own universe when the yin to David's fulsome yang and a walking advertisement for the concept of human enhancement, Natasha Vita More, took to the stage. She was stood, all the way from California and perilously vertical on stiletto heels that became knee-length leather boots that became taut leather trousers, in what seemed a perfect embodiment of the tagline to her business, the Life+ Extension programme, launched with the support of her husband, Max More. Together they had founded the Transhumanism movement, along with author FM2030, who, she said, was now in "cryonic suspension" somewhere in the Nevada desert. Off the back of all this, Natasha had written the Transhumanism manifesto of 1983.

'A work of genius,' David interjected from side of stage.

'Oh David,' Natasha said, before turning to face us. 'Some say it is.'

Her hair was a dark brown but highlighted subtly to create a startling contrast with the green eyes that stared out at us from between long, black lashes and a few smudges of eyeliner. That she was also a futurist pin-up was clear from the slack-jawed faces of men in the audience. David was no exception, taking his seat on the front row as Natasha opened by explaining that design is a form of problem solving; the problem in her case being the death of an unborn child many years earlier. It was





an unexpected departure from David's joshing and suddenly the sense of jubilant reverie had been punctured and partially deflated. I slumped an inch or so in my chair, readying myself for what was to come next.

Natasha had been struck by the fragility of life, she said. We had become too preoccupied by the external, focusing on the outward symptoms of disease without looking at their root cause inside the body, leading to an epidemic of malady and poor health.

Genetics were the natural starting point for consideration. Natasha was a fervent advocate of 23andme, a genomics testing facility in the US, calling for deeper and more qualitative assessments of our internal make-up and genetic coding. Drawing on her three main influences, Buckminster Fuller, Susan Sontag and evolutionary scientist Lynn Margulis - the latter of which she admired for her belief that humans had evolved from a 'conglomerate of bacteria' - Vita More had developed a set of design principles aimed at targeting the 'deep blue rivers of human life'.

'The stuff bubbling beneath the surface,' she clarified.

Her admiration for Margulis stemmed from her theories' allowance for bionic intervention on the principle that the body could be compartmentalised into innumerable, changeable parts. Margulis had also been critical of Neo-Darwinism, which she believed posits a capitalist view of evolution, in which survival and competition are the primary

drivers of evolutionary and genetic change. By contrast, Margulis believed that a symbiotic relationship existed between our own cells' nuclei and that of the bacteria and other external cells they encountered. On this basis, the body was always in flux and always subject to minute and barely perceptible changes.

'If we could just hack this,' Natasha said, sternly but with a certain muted optimism, 'we could extend and improve the quality of life.'

The room was silent, perhaps while the audience of mostly white men processed the affront of a woman telling them that capitalism might not be the natural order of the universe. Google Glasses were shaking, phones were being frantically removed from zip-locked rucksacks. And then I raised my hand.

'Yes?'

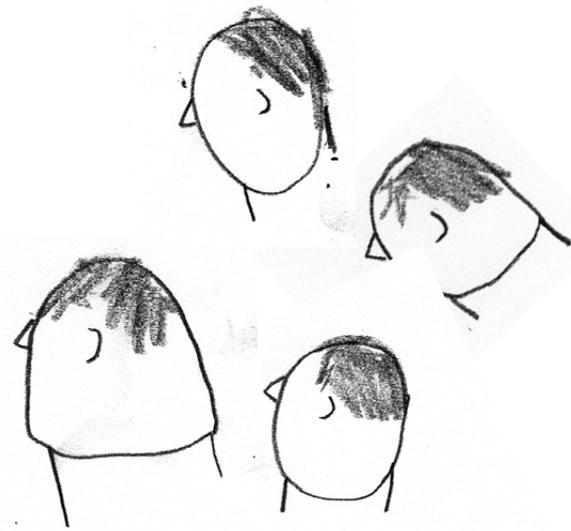
'And, how much will all this cost.'

'Ah-' she said, skewering my point with one taunt, manicured finger raised in mid-air. "The money question."



Outside and amid the crowds, David managed to secure me five minutes with Natasha. The guilt of having promised them some coverage in a leading newspaper or magazine suddenly weighed heavily while, on two plastic chairs next to a vending machine, Natasha leaned in, woman to woman, the way of magazines sharing beauty tips, to tell me that full-body prosthetics were a conceivable reality. Immortality was close, she said, staring from Kryptonite eyes that gazed past me to some place beyond, to the vending machine? the huddle of young men being held back by one of the event's organisers? something else? It was difficult to tell what was strange because of botox and what was strange because it came from a place of believing that life extension was life's sole aim.





‘How familiar are you with these concepts?’

‘Not at all.’ I replied.

There was a fanaticism about Natasha, one that I wanted to believe was the result of sound ideas being misunderstood, and then came the most unexpected development of all. While trying to pin Natasha on the Margulis reference and her theory of symbiotics, she instead broke in to explain that she had once dated Martin Scorsese. The fling had taken place in the 1970s, and ended, she said, when he had questioned her beliefs on the future of human life. That was the official line, told between bouts of sympathetic laughter for his ignorance. I tried to laugh back. The Martin Scorsese, I asked, but Natasha only flared her nostrils by way of confirmation.



She’d been a model, she said, and had flirted with the idea of becoming an actress, but futurism had been her one true calling. After her ejection from the upper echelons of the Hollywood scene, she’d been devoted to the development of her full body prosthetic, and exploring all of the ways in which human life could be improved and extended. Where the tragic incident with her child occurred in all of this remained unclear, and she stared at me with simultaneous intensity and distance.

Was vanity not also a motivation?

‘This has nothing to do with looks,’ she said, leaning back and shaking her head. Quite the opposite, in fact, it was about maintaining the mind, the soul, the spirit. The terms were used interchange-

ably to suggest that consciousness was the only thing at stake, to the point where the body had become incidental to sustaining it.

We sat two feet apart and yet between us existed a great chasm of age, experiences and cultures. Natasha let out a small laugh that I mimicked to show that I had not meant to cause offence.

‘Are you ever in California?’ She asked

‘Yes,’ I lied.

At which point David returned to usher his guest of honour on to her next appointment.

‘Well give me a call next time and we can discuss all of this in more detail.’

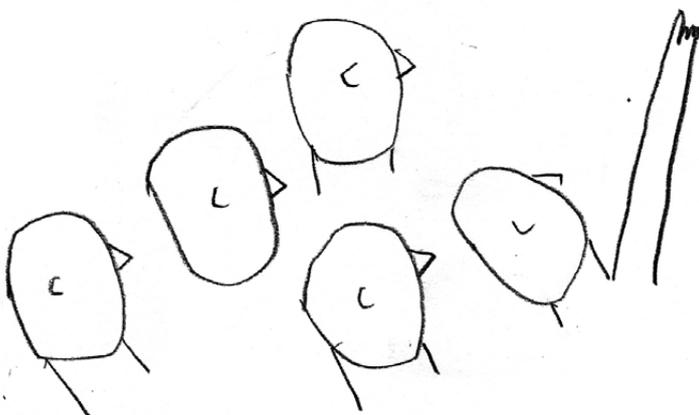
‘Sure.’

‘Great.’

‘Bye.’

Between the men in suits and sci-fi gear I retrieved my rucksack and coat, swiping another biscuit and making my way out into the vast, concrete courtyard of the UCL campus and watching as a male pigeon chased its reluctant mate around in a ring. The sky was turning grey and there was a cold drizzle mounting into heavier rains. Though I had warmed to Natasha and felt sympathy for her story, there was a feeling of lightness that followed our conversation – a sense of relief for it having ended.

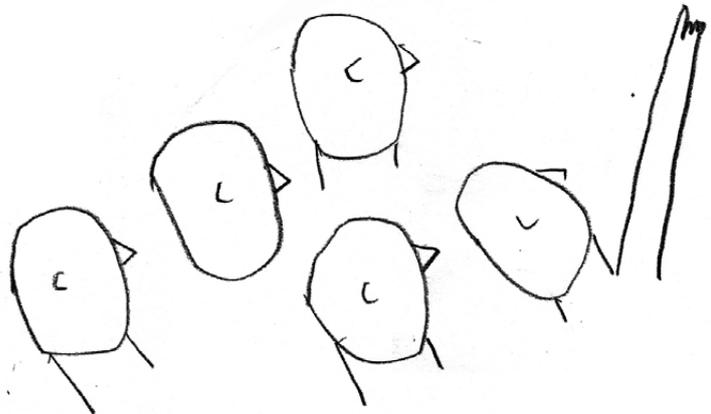
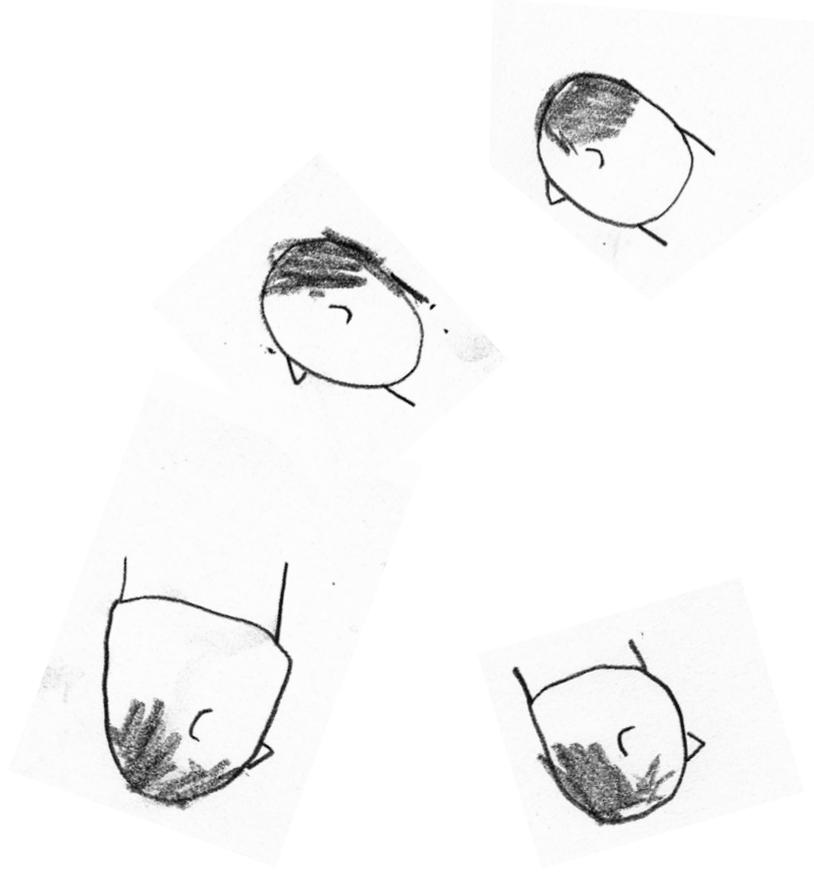
Had emotions become so far stigmatised that we needed to invent pseudo-sciences in which to process the very natural sensations of grief, death and lost love? The costs associated with cryogenics and full body prosthetics – currently clocking in at the hundreds of thousands – prevented me from ever seeing Natasha, David or their disciples as brave founders of a new frontier, capable of eradicating the stigmas of age imposed on women, as well as the physical maladies that had plagued mankind for centuries. If it were possible, for the foreseeable future at least, it would only be available to the very rich.



But it was more than just the money. There was a cruelty in that vision of perfection, not just towards others, but in the way Natasha presented her own life as a series of failings or problems that needed one, absolute solution. This was the idea I suspected all futurists gathered in that room had wanted to believe: that there was a possibility of life being more than just a succession of mostly painful occurrences, with enough good bits along the way to sustain us. That by accepting anything less than this, we were submitting to an idea of a life that was less than complete.

How else to explain the slick avatars, the novelty business cards, the networking skills, David's uncomfortable use of terms learned from Urban Dictionary and the fixation on new gadgets? It was an idea so powerful it had brought hundreds of people to a characterless lecture hall with broken heating on a Sunday morning, instead of eating bacon in bed, doing laundry and watching the condensation rise up the windows as it melted to a soundtrack of *Man v. Food* and the whole thing being the perfect, hideous metaphor of your broken relationship.

As I reached the Marylebone Road I got a text from Ed to say that they were meeting at the Winchester pub on Archway Rd. I left to join them, and though we later agreed it had been a nice evening, two days later we broke up.



Just Kids by Patti Smith

A remembrance by Ana da Silva

I bought *Just Kids* in summer 2010 at Waterstones, in Notting Hill, London. My copy is the British first paperback edition.

The book is so full of love, warmth, insight, humour and so vivid in its depictions of the tableaux of artistic life in New York at the end of the 1960s and after. Much like Patti herself, *Just Kids* is inspirational, and inspiration helps us grow, examine and understand.

I was hugely inspired by Patti Smith, both as a musician and as a person. In 1976, I went to a birthday party in London and someone played *Horses*. I had never heard anything like it. The record had to become part of my life, my new life. This woman was singing without fear. She was saying what she wanted to say, and how she wanted to say it. She was speaking for and to all women – and all humanity – with a voice that almost said it all, and words that said even more. I went to buy the album the next day. Every day I listened to side one in the mornings and side two in the evenings after art college.

One of my favourite parts of her book is the passage where Patti remembers an encounter she had with Allen Ginsberg. When I took my copy of *Just Kids* from the shelf, it naturally fell open to page 123. ‘This,’ I thought, ‘has to be the best bit.’

In the scene, Ginsberg approaches her in a New York City automat and gives her an extra dime as the price of a cheese-and-lettuce sandwich has gone up to sixty-five cents. When she sits down next to him to eat the sandwich, Ginsberg asks, ‘Are you a girl?’

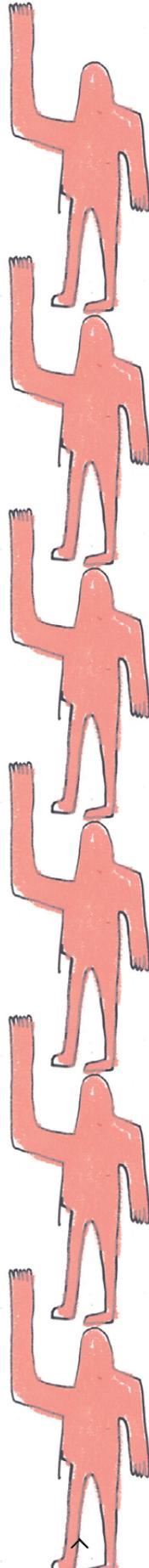
‘Yeah,’ I said. ‘Is that a problem?’

He just laughed. ‘I took you for a very pretty boy.’

I got the picture immediately.

‘Well, does this mean I return the sandwich?’

‘No, enjoy it. It was my mistake.’



The scene was funny, but it also reminded me of a time around 1971 or ’72 when I still lived in Lisbon and was twice asked, in an angry manner, ‘Are you a boy or a girl?’

In October 1968, I had come from the beautiful Portuguese island of Madeira to study at the University of Lisbon in the Faculty of Letters. At the university there was an active student movement, inspired by the Sorbonne unrest, caused by the discontent of the political situation under the Portuguese dictatorship.

The year 1968 was an important moment of change, but in Portugal change felt slow. The old and old-fashioned used their power to repress the bubbling revolution. Portugal was conservative. There was censorship and political prisoners, no freedom of the press or of the arts, no equality between men and women, and the church was persuasive in making people, who were generally religious, believe in what they were being told by priests, mainly on the subject of ‘sin’. If you looked different, people stared at you. If you thought differently, you’d be in trouble. You were not even allowed to wear a bikini! All aspects of life felt controlled.

In those days I bought a few of my clothes at a boutique – not expensive clothing, but different.

I had very long hair down to my waist and I wore trousers, which not many women wore at that time. The people who asked me if I was a boy or girl thought I was a man who looked like a woman. They shouldn’t have been so upset about it. But they were upset. I might not have been what I appeared to be. ‘It’s a mixed up, muddled up, shook up world...’ Their anger about their own uncertainty upset me.

I’ve always found it restrictive to be expected to obey the rules of appearance and behaviour. That was another thing I loved about Patti Smith: her androgynous posture.

In 1974, after finishing university, I came to

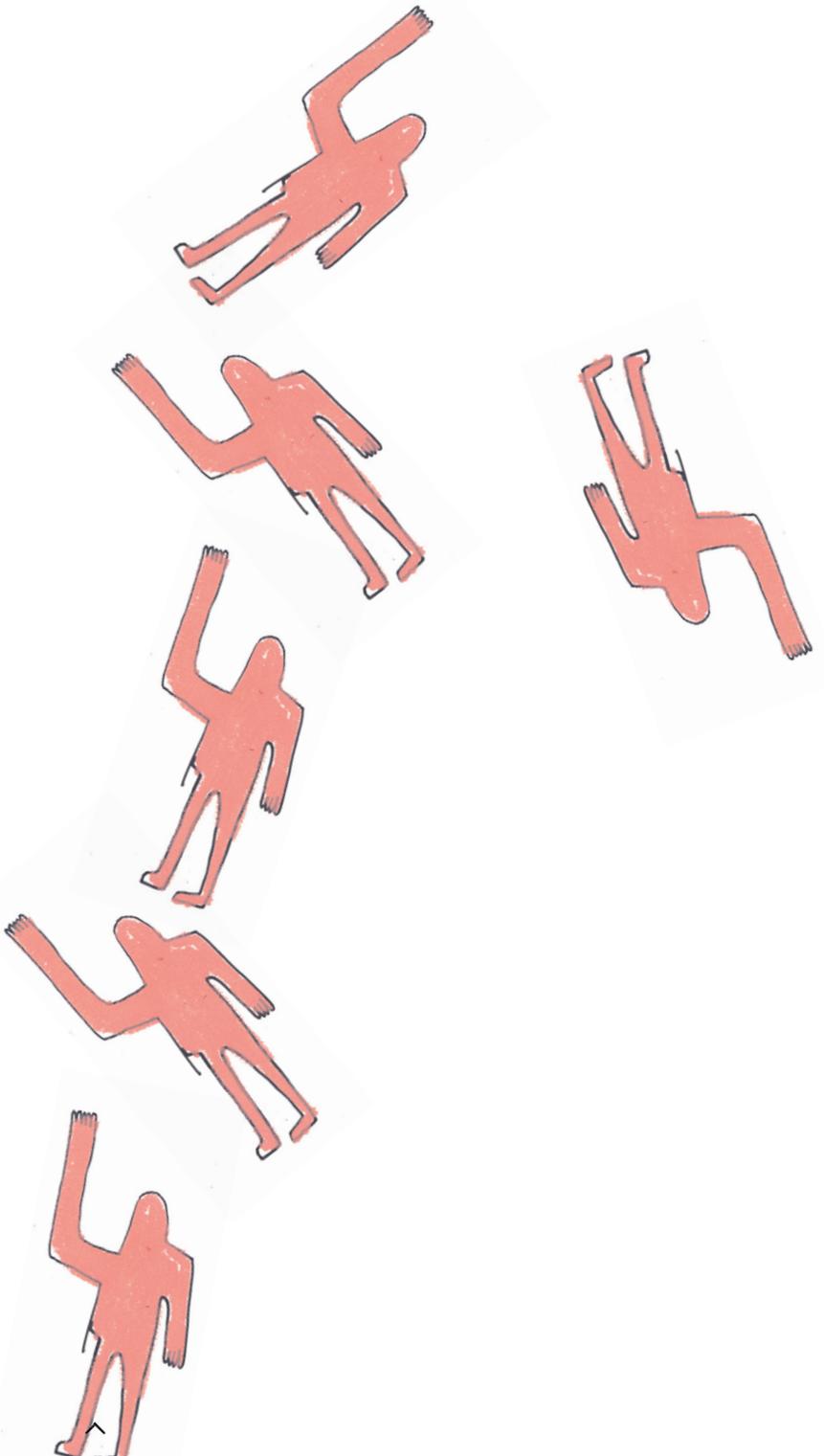
London to experience and explore. I wanted to see and feel what it was like. I brought a small, light blue suitcase with just a few clothes.

I didn't bring any books and, for a couple of years, I'd take books I'd bought back to Portugal, as I was uncertain of how long I'd stay in London.

Everything felt so alive and exciting, mainly because of the music and art, but also because London was more open than what I was used to in Portugal. In a way, I was sorry to leave Portugal, because the 25th of April revolution was an incredible moment in our history and it would have been great to experience the big, inevitable change. I felt it was important to go on my adventure, my mystery tour, to learn, question, think, live, grow and hopefully create. I needed to go to my own Manhattan: London.

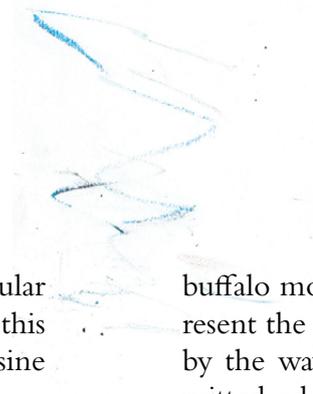
In May 1976, I saw Patti Smith at the Roundhouse. Her presence onstage was life changing. She stood there – a person of enormous strength who presented herself in a non-binary way. She was also vulnerable, funny and warm. As her songs are poems put to music, there is mystery, because poems are mysterious and, like water, they change each time you encounter them. You're never finished with them.

I got a job in a vegetarian restaurant (there weren't many at the time), and soon decided to study art, which had always been my dream. I completed a foundation course and, after that, went to Middlesex Polytechnic. That's where I met Gina Birch. We started going to punk gigs and, in the early summer of 1977, we formed The Raincoats. Just kids.



Italian Cuisine Doesn't Exist

Russell Norman



I have heard that Italian cuisine is the most popular style of cooking in the world. I don't know if this is true, but what I do know is that Italian cuisine doesn't actually exist.

I have a friend, an erudite, elegant and charming chap, whose family are well-to-do Sri Lankan aristos but who gets as apoplectic as a Millwall fan, three-nil down to West Ham at half-time, when he hears others refer to 'Indian cooking' or 'curry houses'. He is quick to point out that India covers an area of 3.2 million kilometres, greater than that of the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Greece and Scandinavia combined. 'How can a nation that size have a single generic cooking tradition or be summarised by one style of sauce?' he reasons, often with veins popping at his temples and beads of sweat on his brow.

He is right, of course. And for the same reason, Italian cooking is a term that becomes meaningless as soon as you start to explore the regions of Italy and realize that each has a style of cooking, a canon of dishes and a culinary tradition that is unique and often startlingly different from its neighbours, both near and far. It is sometimes difficult for non-Italians to countenance this because we are so used to seeing a kind-of 'greatest hits' menu in those international Italian trattorias that include spag bol, twelve different types of pizza, plasticky mozzarella salads and soggy lasagne. What a terrible pastiche of a great country's food heritage. Furthermore, spaghetti bolognese is a fallacy, an invention, a myth. It is the *fake news* of food. The pasta dish from Bologna with the meat sauce is always made with tagliatelle, uses a mixture of beef and pork, does not contain sliced mushrooms and rarely entertains any herbs, either. In Naples, purists would insist there are only two types of pizza, the Margherita and the Marinara – all other variations, they might suggest, are but passing trends. In Capri, the tricolour salad only ever comes with fresh, milky,

buffalo mozzarella, ripe tomatoes and basil to represent the Italian flag (don't dare use black pepper, by the way – olive oil and salt are the only permitted additions). Poor old lasagne is even more confused. The original version from Naples contains sliced sausages and hard-boiled egg, but the béchamel version from Emilia-Romagna seems to be the iteration that persists.

As you might expect, there is a great deal of pride in the regions when it comes to produce and recipes. The fishmongers and greengrocers of Rialto Market in Venice, for example, use labels with the word *nostrani*. This means ours. It is important to Venetians that their asparagus comes from the neighbouring island of Sant'Erasmus or that their clams come straight from the waters of the lagoon.

Back in Blighty, we also see manifestations of local pride, provenance and tradition. One of the fiercest arguments I have ever witnessed was between a Cornish chef and a Devonian food writer. The disagreement? Whether you put clotted cream onto a scone before the jam, or *vice versa*.

These differences in food culture and the passions provoked by geographical variations are healthy. It is what makes the regional food of Italy so exciting. It was what motivated me to spend 14 months living in a residential district of Venice learning to cook like a local for my latest book. But to confuse that pride with a desire for sovereignty and independence is misguided. It does not follow that in order to be part of a wider community one has to surrender to homogeneity. As the UK wades through treacle towards an uncertain Brexit, I see on the dinner tables of Italy a country that has been able to celebrate its differences, embrace its similarities and do so, after jointly founding the EU in 1957, with its arms around the shoulders of its fellow member states. I hope we here in Britain are not left holding the scone trying to remember if it's jam or cream first.

Spaghetti carbonara

Russell Norman

This classic causes more controversy than any other Italian dish I know. There is never such a thing as a definitive recipe, since all regions will have their own variations, but I have seen so many chefs, cooks and food writers get hot under the collar about carbonara that I thought twice about including my version in my book.

Having said that, I have steered away from scandal by keeping things conventional and using the original Roman ingredients and method. I use egg yolks rather than eggs, for a richer, more golden sauce, and I use a little Pecorino along with the Parmesan to create a bit of a tang. Guanciale, the fatty pork cheek, is great if you can get it, but good pancetta is fine if not. But under no circumstances must you use cream. Never. I'm afraid I cannot guarantee your safety if you do. It is just wrong.

Serves 4

400g dried spaghetti
 150g chunk of pancetta
 (or, even better, guanciale),
 cut into thick, short matchsticks
 4 large free-range egg yolks, beaten
 100g Parmesan, grated
 20g pecorino, grated
 50g cold butter, cut into small cubes
 Freshly ground black pepper

Bring a large pan of well-salted water to the boil and cook the spaghetti according to the packet's instructions.

Meanwhile, heat a large, heavy-based frying pan. When it is very hot, add the pancetta and sauté until it is starting to crisp and is turning golden brown. (No need for oil, the pancetta will release its own oil and fry nicely.)

Just before the spaghetti is done, scoop out two cupfuls of the cooking water and set aside. Drain the pasta when *al dente* and transfer to the pan of pancetta. While still on a very low heat, coat every strand of spaghetti with the oil that has been released from the pancetta and make sure it is well incorporated. Add a few good twists of black pepper, too.

Now, remove the pasta and pancetta from the heat, add the beaten egg yolks, the butter cubes and the Parmesan, and stir vigorously with a cup of the retained cooking water. Continue until the glossy sauce coats all the pasta strands. Add more pasta cooking water from the second cup if necessary.

Divide equally onto four warmed plates. Add the grated pecorino and a few more generous twists of black pepper.

How To Cook Soup

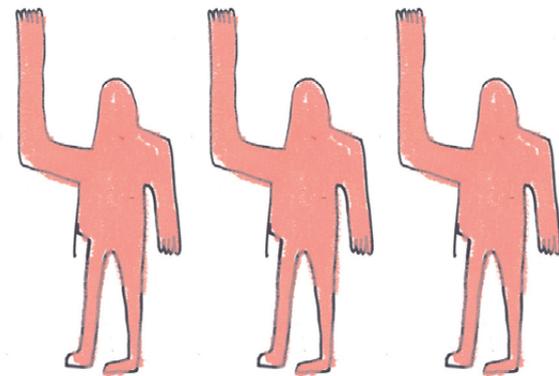
Dean Allen

First, you need some water. Fuse two hydrogen with one oxygen and repeat until you have enough. While the water is heating, raise some cattle. Pay a man with grim eyes to do the slaughtering, preferably while you are away. Roast the bones, then add to the water. Go away again. Come back once in awhile to skim. When the bones begin to float, lash together into booms and tow up the coast. Reduce. Keep reducing. When you think you have reduced enough, reduce some more. Raise some barley. When the broth coats the back of a spoon and light cannot escape it, you are nearly there. Pause to mop your brow as you harvest the barley. Search in vain for a cloud in the sky. Soak the barley overnight (you will need more water here), then add to the broth. When, out of the blue, you remember the first person you truly loved, the soup is ready. Serve.

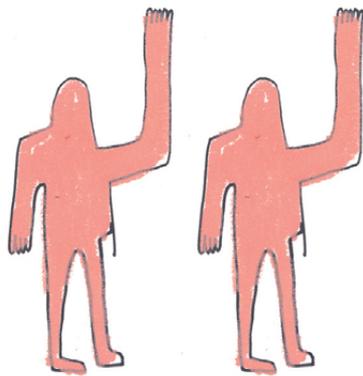


The Language of Dreams

Najat El Hachmi



until it becomes a world that can sustain itself, a space in which the writer simply lives. Of course this doesn't happen overnight. At the beginning the idea is ethereal, the content is blurred, but as we spend more time, space, and energy, it becomes something more palpable, with a corporeality we never imagined. It's a shame that this critical moment occurs just when it's time to finish, when we're at the end of the process. When we write we always create something to be given away, we lose something we've spent months developing. And so the feeling we get when we finish a book is usually dejection rather than euphoria. I've never been able to insert the last full stop without a certain regret, sometimes prolonging my writing unnecessarily so the dream will last a little longer. Maybe it's because I know that once I've closed the document for the last time, the dream for me will disappear and pass on to somebody else who's willing to take over, a reader who's interested enough to inhabit it for as long as may last.

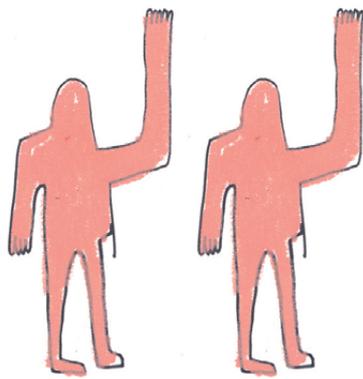


To write a novel is to inhabit a dream. A dream that can last months or years, that transpires in everyday life; a dream that sometimes takes place in its very own dreamscape, but that mostly happens in the light of day, whether it's in front of a computer, in a notebook, or in the numerous minutes we spend thinking about it during the day. That's why, very often, we writers are only present in body. Not right at the beginning of course, there isn't that sense of parallel lives when the thing still hasn't taken shape, but as the setting becomes clearer, the characters become flesh and bone, the situations and conflicts that appear become more complex, then the novel slowly envelops us, layer by layer,

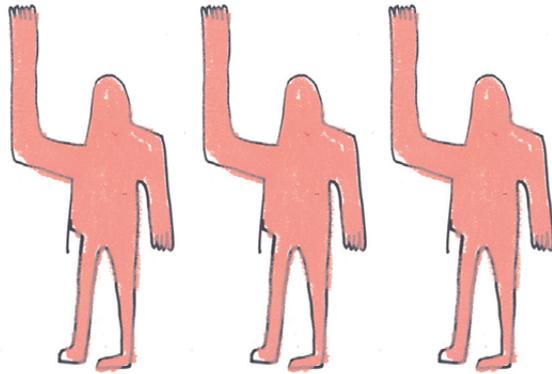
It doesn't matter if the writer is grounded, or if she's the type of writer who wants to grab a little piece of reality, this doesn't deny the fact a novel is a dream. Reality is impossible to capture, the description of an object is never the same as the physical object itself. Memory transforms things but language that wants to be literary transforms things even more so.

To write is to live in a dream but dreams aren't spoken, they don't happen in any one language. Only the characters who appear say what they say in a particular language. What is the language of my dreams? In what language do I write?

Not long ago I bumped into someone I used to know as a child. She owned a stationery shop

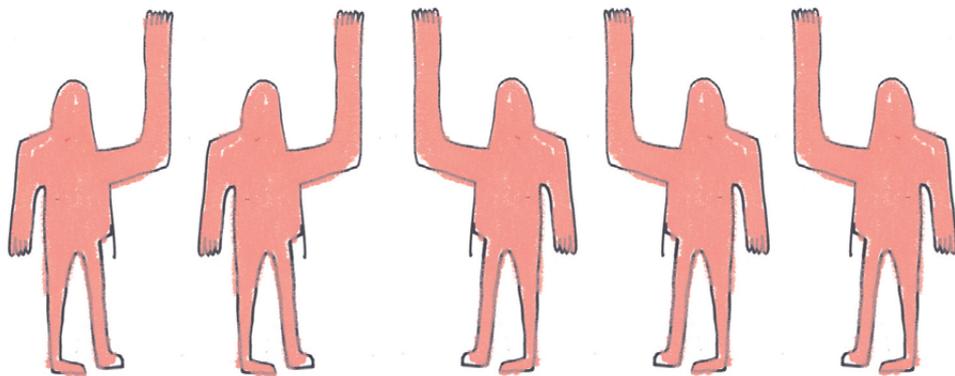


near my house that also sold a few books. I used to go there often just after we arrived in Vic. The lady remembered me because I always used to ask for books in Catalan. At the time I still couldn't read or write but I'd ask her if this book or that one was in Catalan; it seems I didn't want to take the wrong one. I remember the shop, my visits, looking through the books, but I don't remember asking for books in Catalan. And yet, it makes sense: if the neighbours spoke Catalan, if my dad spoke Catalan and if we were also taught Catalan at school, it's logical that I wouldn't want to confuse myself with another language. The problem is I'd always thought I'd never chosen between Catalan and Castilian because the place we ended up was so irrefutably Catalan it didn't even occur to us that there was an alternative. And yet, if the lady was telling the truth and I actively and consciously chose the books I bought, then the fact



that you don't make a choice isn't true; I didn't simply speak and ended up writing in the language I was surrounded by. And if, as was the case for me, the process of acquiring a language is produced in such an intensive way, something strange happens: you cannot go through this process and at the same time be aware of the way in which it's happening. In the same way as it's impossible to remember your own birth or the way you learnt to talk in the first stages of life, neither can you remember, or at least I can't, how we learn a language that was not previously our own. Sometimes I make myself re-live that time and I see images, I remember events, or conversations, but it's always after I'd learnt the language and I can only formulate it all in Catalan, not in Tamazight, even though I must have been able to until I was eight years old. What is even more disconcerting is that I can remember moments of family life before we emigrated but I cannot remember myself speaking in Tamazight. Not myself or my siblings who also changed their language. Yet I can remember my mother, my father and other adults having whole conversations in their original language. Memory betrays reality, it turns things into fiction with no conscience, it adapts what happened in another world, in another language, in another time, to the way of thinking in the present. Memory is hybrid.

I guess I could just say I write in Catalan and it would avoid any complication. But that doesn't say anything, it's an affirmation that's empty of meaning, because nobody just writes in their language, nobody who calls themselves a writer just

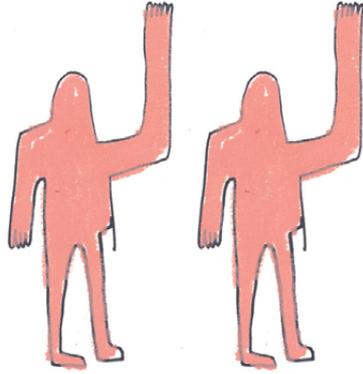


transposes the language they speak to the language they write in. Apart from the fact that it would be impossible, a written mother tongue doesn't exist. Literary writing is, above all, a work of language. It's the same for any writer, but in my case it's an unavoidable fact: from the first time I tried to write, from my very first word, I had to ask myself in which language I wanted my text to be. And I don't mean choosing between Tamazight or Catalan or Castilian, I'm talking about the need to discover the most appropriate way of saying what I wanted to say. Write in Catalan, yes, but which Catalan? How should I choose? How to decide each sentence, each word, every page? What resonance did I want it to have? Can I really choose? I know that all the authors I've read and who have permeated me are contained in my way of writing. I know I have rejected the ways of some for whatever reason and I have reread and devoured others I thought were doing the things I wanted to be doing as a writer.

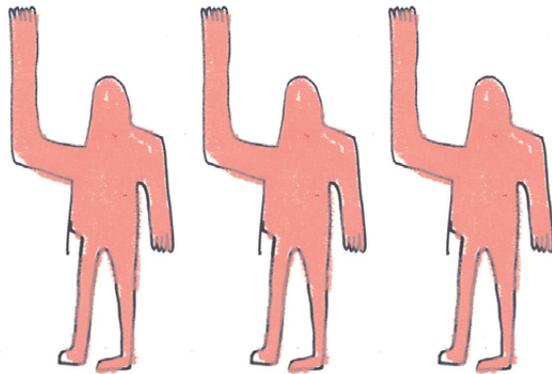
But it's one thing to see yourself reflected in certain references as you grow but finding your own way of writing is another thing altogether. There is no winning formula: one day you write and you just know how you want to do it. In my

case I was condemned to having to search for my own way of saying things due to the simple fact that the majority of my characters speak an invisible language in the text, one that is camouflaged by the Catalan language and which only emerges on the odd occasion. And yet, it's there. It's there because it's the language that I learned to write. No, not to write, but to narrate for the first time. If Tamazight had merely been the language spoken by my mother, maybe it wouldn't be so important in my writing, but it's much more than that. It's the language in which I drank my first literature, spoken of course, not written, but it was present in the first years of my life, and I still feel marked by the experience. A language which is doubly maternal as is the case for everyone in Rif: biologically and literarily maternal (although I must ask myself here: if literary language is never maternal, can the literary form of a language that has still not been written down also be?). And it is a world in which day-to-day language is intermingled with elaborate language, in which genders and forms co-exist without problem, where all levels are presented as equal and in reach of children.

I've just finished the novel *Mare de llet i mel* (*Mother of Milk and Honey*). It's the story of the

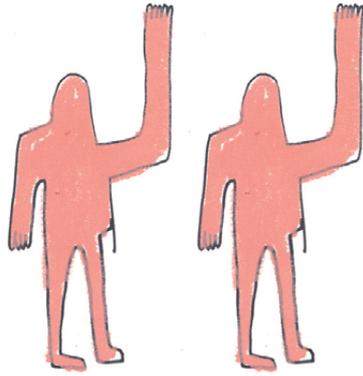


mother from the *La filla estrangera* (*The Foreign Daughter*). I wanted to tell the story of her life, understand where she was born, how she grew up and was educated, I wanted to remember the many women I've met who told me about their lives or told others while I stood close by. I wanted to understand what it means to be a foreigner from the moment you are born, because, in the place you come from, women always are. I wanted to understand what it meant to live without having the power to make decisions over the important events of your own existence, or what it was for your only destiny to be your husband's bedroom, or what it meant to not be able to go further than your own front yard or the narrow streets that lead to your obligatory daily chores. And I also wanted to understand what it meant to emigrate knowing nothing of geography, not understanding the language, what it means to cross borders blindly, trying to escape a system which abuses women and in doing so abuses maternity. I have spent years developing this novel, going over all these questions. But when I started to actually write, to give a final shape to the dream, suddenly I found something wasn't working. I had all the material I needed, I knew what I wanted to do. But when I started to type, something grated. I spoke about the protagonist in the third person. I had a narrator who knew everything about her, what happened to her, her past and her future, but the result wasn't what I imagined, the text was missing something that took a few months to discover. One day I realised, I



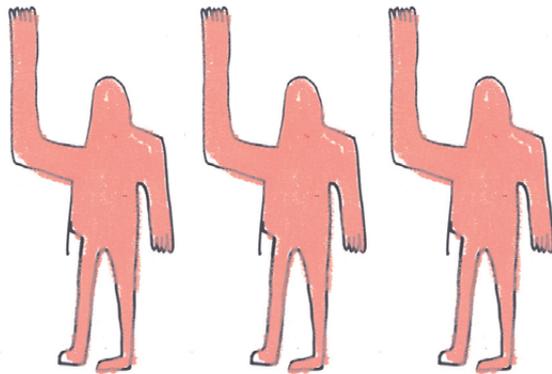
still don't know how: I was missing the mother's voice.

I believe this last novel, which is still to be published as I write this, started to develop after *The Last Patriarch*. In that book there was a flagrant injustice: all the women in the book ended up being completely eclipsed by Mimoun. I realised this when I spoke to my readers. And it was also thanks to the readers that I became aware for the first time of the fact that I'd written the novel in a hybrid language made up of Catalan, the obvious language, and Tamazight, the underground language. But more importantly still, I realised the text contained, without expressly trying to do so, the world of orality of my early years that I believed I had irretrievably lost. In fact I felt great nostalgia for that world. This discovery eased my longing but also allowed me to create the ties once again to those women I'd lived with and from whom I'd distanced myself. I was dragging along this feeling of



uprootedness that had been present in *The Foreign Daughter*. I felt very different to that environment because my world was literary not oral. But when I understood that I could unite the two things, that writing had in fact enabled me to combine my two literary roots, I felt a huge relief. And what had seemed an unresolvable conflict became a stroke of luck. Suddenly I felt enormously fortunate to have grown up in a world in which everything revolved around the word, the story. That which had given me a complex my whole life, the fact of having been born in a place where almost everybody was illiterate, suddenly became a privilege: I'd had the opportunity to observe, first hand and without filter, literature in its most primitive form. The need to write the story of a mother narrator also comes from this awareness of the importance of orality.

For that reason, when I spoke of the protagonist I was missing something vital: I needed her voice, I needed her to tell her story, and explain for the first time the things that happened to her. And also because nobody actually ever gives our mothers a voice. People say they don't speak: you see them, the women with their headscarves that only speak their own language. We, their daughters, have so often been their translators. They've been analysed in detail by the experts. They've been the subject of so many discussions in which they've never been present, in public spaces, in debate forums and all kinds of commissions. No, this time I couldn't just describe my protagonist, this time she had to speak. And my job was to make this happen, to make Tamazight and Catalan produce the exact ring that stories based on pictures have, with a rich prosody, a narration that often comes and goes to the rhythm of memory, with the emotion and the energy aimed to give pleasure to those gathered around in a circle listening. But our mothers don't tell stories just for pleasure. Their stories explain the painful facts that therapy will never cure, the



injustices that would never be reported unless it is verbal, or the suffering they suppose is inherent because they are women.

If I'm honest, I don't know exactly how this fusion between the literary Catalan I've read and the vivid voice of the women I carry inside me has come about, but I think, more than ever before, this is what has happened in my last novel. The reader will be the judge of the text, but for the time being I'll savour the feeling of having recognised my literary origin and of having given it the place it deserves.

Pilgrimage

Susan Sontag

Everything that surrounds my meeting with him has the color of shame.

December, 1947. I was fourteen, steeped in vehement admirations and impatience for the reality to which I would travel once released from that long prison sentence, my childhood. End almost in sight. Already in my junior year, I'd finish high school while still fifteen. And then, and then ... all would unfold. Meanwhile, I was waiting, I was doing time (still fourteen!), recently transferred from the desert of southern Arizona to the coastland of Southern California. Another new setting, with fresh possibilities of escape – I welcomed that. My peripatetic widowed mother's remarriage, in 1945, to a handsome, bemedaled and be-shrapneled Army Air Forces ace who'd been sent to the healing desert to cap a year-long hospitalization (he'd been shot down five days after D-Day) appeared to have grounded *her*. The following year our newly assembled family – mother, stepfather, kid sister, dog, notionally salaried Irish nanny left over from the old days, plus the resident alien, myself – had vacated the stucco bungalow on a dirt road on the outskirts of Tucson (where we'd been joined by Captain Sontag) for a cozy shuttered cottage with rosebush hedges and three birch trees at the entrance of the San Fernando Valley, where I was currently pretending to sit still for a facsimile of family life and the remainder of my unconvincing childhood. On weekends my now out-of-uniform but still military perky stepfather marshaled sirloins and butter-brushed corn tightly wrapped in tinfoil on the patio barbecue; I ate and ate – how could I not, as I watched my morose, bony mother fiddling with her food? His animation was as threatening as her apathy. They couldn't start playing family now – too late! I was off and running, even if I looked every inch the baby-faced, overgrown elder daughter effusively munching her fourth ear of corn; I was already gone. (In French one can announce,

while lingering unconscionably, *Je suis moralemant partie.*) There was just this last bit of childhood to get past. For the duration (that wartime locution that gave me my first model of condescending to present time in favor of the better future), for the duration it was permissible to appear to enjoy their receptions, avoid conflict, gobble their food. The truth was, I dreaded conflict. And I was always hungry.

I felt I was slumming, in my own life. My task was to ward off the drivel (I felt I was drowning in drivel) – the jovial claptrap of classmates and teachers, the maddening bromide I heard at home. And the weekly comedy shows festooned with canned laughter, the treacly Hit Parade, the hysterical narratings of baseball games and prize fights – radio, whose racket filled the living room on weekday evenings and much of Saturday and Sunday, was an endless torment. I ground my teeth, I twirled my hair, I gnawed at my nails, I was polite. Though untempted by the new, tribal delights of suburban childhood that had quickly absorbed my sister, I didn't think of myself as a misfit, for I assumed my casing of affability was being accepted at face value. (Here the fact that I was a girl seeps through.) What other people thought of me remained a dim consideration, since other people seemed to me astonishingly unseeing as well as uncurious, while I longed to learn everything: the exasperating difference between me and everyone I'd ever met – so far. I was certain there was a multitude like me, elsewhere. And it never occurred to me that I could be stopped.

If I didn't mope or sulk, it was not just because I thought complaining wouldn't do any good. It was because the flip side of my discontent – what, indeed, throughout my childhood had made me so discontented – was rapture. Rapture I couldn't share. And whose volume was increasing steadily: since this last move I was having near-nightly bouts

of jubilation. For in the eight houses and apartments of my life before this one I had never had a bedroom to myself. Now I had it, and without asking. A door of my own. Now I could read for hours by flashlight after being sent to bed and told to turn off the light, not inside a tent of bedclothes but outside the covers.

I'd been a demon reader from earliest childhood (to read was to drive a knife into their lives), and therefore a promiscuous one: fairy tales and comics (my comics collection was vast), Compton's Encyclopedia, the Bobbsey Twins and other Stratemeyer series, books about astronomy, chemistry, China, biographies of scientists, all of Richard Halliburton's travel books, and a fair number of mostly Victorian-era classics. Then, drifting to the rear of a stationery and greeting-card store in the village that was downtown Tucson in the mid-1940s, I toppled into the deep well of the Modern Library. Here were standards, and here, at the back of each book, was my first list. I had only to acquire and read (ninety-five cents for the small ones, a dollar twenty-five for the Giants) – my sense of possibility unfolding, with each book, like a carpenter's rule. And within a month of arriving in Los Angeles I tracked down a real bookstore, the first of my bookstore-besotted life: the Pickwick, on Hollywood Boulevard, where I went every few days after school to read on my feet through some more of world literature – buying when I could, stealing when I dared. Each of my occasional thefts cost me weeks of self-revilement and dread of future humiliation, but what could I do, given my puny allowance? Odd that I never thought of going to a library. I had to acquire them, see them in rows along a wall of my tiny bedroom. My household deities. My spaceships.

Afternoons I went hunting for treasure: I'd always disliked going home directly from school. But in Tucson, visits to the stationery store excepted,

the most cheering postponement I'd come up with was a walk out along the Old Spanish Trail toward the Tanque Verde foothills, where I could examine close up the fiercest saguaros and prickly pears, scrutinize the ground for arrowheads and snakes, pocket pretty rocks, imagine being lost or a sole survivor, wish I were an Indian. Or the Lone Ranger. Here in California there was a different space to roam and I had become a different Lone Ranger. Most days after school I boarded the trolley on Chandler Avenue to hasten into, not away from, town. Within a few blocks of the enchanted crossroads of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue lay my little agora of one- and two-story buildings: the Pickwick; a record store whose proprietors let me spend hours each week in the listening booths, gorging myself on their wares; an international newsstand where militant browsing yielded me *Partisan Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Politics*, *Accent*, *Tiger's Eye*, *Horizons*; and a storefront through whose open door one afternoon I unselfconsciously trailed two people who were beautiful in a way I'd never seen, thinking I was entering a gym, which turned out to be the rehearsal quarters of the dance company of Lester Horton and Bella Lewitzky. O golden age! It not only was, I knew it was. Soon I was sipping at a hundred straws. In my room I wrote imitation stories and kept real journals; made lists of words to fatten my vocabulary, made lists of all kinds; played conductor to my records; read myself sore-eyed each night.

And soon I had friends, too, and not very much older than myself – to my surprise. Friends with whom I could speak of some of what absorbed and enraptured me. I didn't expect them to have read as much as I had; it was enough that they were willing to read the books I lent them. And in music, even better, I was the novice – what bliss! It was my desire to be taught, even more thwarted than my

desire to share, that made me my first friends: two seniors at whom I flung myself soon after entering this new school as a sophomore, whose taste in music was far superior to mine. Not only were they each proficient on an instrument – Elaine played the flute, Mel the piano – but they had done all their growing up here, in Southern California, with its infusion of refugee virtuosi, employed in the full symphony orchestras maintained by the major film studios, who could be heard at night playing the canonical and the contemporary chamber repertory to small gatherings scattered across a hundred miles. Elaine and Mel were part of that audience, with tastes elevated and made eccentrically rigorous by the distinct bias of high musical culture in Los Angeles in the 1940s – there was chamber music, and then there was everything else. (Opera was so low on the scale of musical goodness it was not worth mentioning.)

Each friend was a best friend – I knew no other way. Besides my music mentors, who started at UCLA the following autumn, there was a fellow sophomore, my romantic comrade for the remaining two years of high school, who was to accompany me to the college I had already elected at thirteen as my destiny – the College of the University of Chicago. Peter, fatherless and a refugee (he was part Hungarian, part French), had had a life even more marked by displacements than my own. His father had been arrested by the Gestapo, and Peter and his mother escaped Paris to the South of France and from there, via Lisbon, to New York in 1941; after a spell in a Connecticut boarding school, he was now reunited here with the very single, tanned, red-haired Henya (whom I acknowledged to be as young-looking, if not as beautiful, as my own mother). Our friendship started in the school cafeteria with an exchange of boastful anecdotes about our glamorously dead fathers. Peter was the one with whom I argued about socialism and

Henry Wallace, and with whom I held hands and wept through *Open City*, *Symphonie Pastorale*, *The Children of Paradise*, *Mädchen in Uniform*, *The Baker's Wife*, *Brief Encounter*, and *Beauty and the Beast* at the Laurel, the theatre we'd discovered that showed foreign movies. We went bicycling in the canyons and in Griffith Park and rolled about, embracing, in the weeds – Peter's great loves, as I remember, were his mother, me, and his racing bicycle. He was dark-haired, skinny, nervous, tall. I, though always the youngest, was invariably the tallest girl in the class and taller than most of the boys and, for all my outlandish independence of judgment on matters Olympian, on the matter of height had the most abjectly conventional view. A boyfriend had to be not just a best friend but taller, and only Peter qualified.

The other best friend I made, also a sophomore, though at another high school, and also to enter the University of Chicago with me, was Merrill. Cool and chunky and blond, he had all the trappings of 'cute', a 'dish', a 'dreamboat', but I, with my unerring eye for loners (under all disguises), had promptly seen that he was smart, too. Really smart. Therefore capable of separateness. He had a low sweet voice and a shy smile and eyes that smiled sometimes without his mouth – Merrill was the only one of my friends I doted on. I loved to look at him. I wanted to merge with him or for him to merge with me, but I had to respect the insuperable barrier: he was several inches shorter than I was. The other barriers were harder to think about. He could be secretive, calculating (even literally so: numbers figured often in his conversation), and sometimes, to me, insufficiently moved by what I found moving. I was impressed by how practical he was, and how calm he remained when I got flustered. I couldn't tell what he really felt about the quite plausible family – mother, real father, younger brother (who was something of a

math prodigy), even grandparents – with which he came equipped. Merrill didn't like to talk about feelings, while I was seething with the desire to express mine, preferably by focusing feeling away from myself onto something I admired or felt indignant about.

We loved in tandem. Music first – he'd had years of piano. (His brother played the violin, which made me equally envious, though it was for piano lessons that I'd implored my mother – rather, stopped imploring my mother – years before.) He introduced me to getting into concerts free by ushering (at the Hollywood Bowl in the summer), and I made him a regular at the Monday chamber-music series 'Evenings on the Roof', to which I'd been brought by Elaine and Mel. We were building our nearly identical, ideal record collections (on 78s, happily unaware that this was the last year before LPs), and joined forces often in the cool, dark listening booths of the Highland Record Store. Sometimes he came to my house, even if my parents were there. Or I went to his house; the name of his frumpy, hospitable mother – I remember finding this embarrassing – was Honey.

Our privacy was in cars. Merrill had a real driver's license, while mine was the 'junior' license one could hold from fourteen to sixteen in California then, entitling me to drive my parents' cars only. Since parents' cars were the only ones available to us, the difference was moot. In his parents' blue Chevy or my mother's green Pontiac we perched at night on the rim of Mulholland Drive, the great plain of twinkling lights below like an endless airport, oblivious of the mating couples in cars parked around us, pursuing our own pleasures. We pitched themes at each other in our inexact treble voices – 'Okay, listen. Now, what's this?' We quizzed each other's memory of Köchel listings, knowing by heart long stretches of the six hundred and twenty-six. We debated the merits of the Busch and the

Budapest Quartets (I'd become an intolerant partisan of the Budapest); discussed whether it would be immoral, given what I'd heard from Elaine and Mel about Giesecking's Nazi past, to buy his Debussy recordings; tried to convince ourselves that we had liked the pieces played on the prepared piano by John Cage at last Monday's 'Evenings on the Roof' concert; and talked about how many years to give Stravinsky.

This last was one of our recurrent problems. Toward John Cage's squawks and thumps we were deferential – we knew we were supposed to appreciate ugly music; and we listened devoutly to the Toch, the Krenek, the Hindemith, the Webern, the Schoenberg, whatever (we had enormous appetites and strong stomachs). But it was Stravinsky's music we sincerely loved. And since Stravinsky seemed grotesquely old (we had actually seen him on two Mondays in the small auditorium of the Wilshire Ebell, when Ingolf Dahl was conducting something of his), our fears for his life had given rise to a compelling fantasy à deux about dying for our idol. The question, a question we discussed often, was: What were the terms of the sacrifice we so relished contemplating? How many more years of life for Stravinsky would justify our dying now, on the spot?

Twenty years? Obviously. But that was easy and, we agreed, too good to hope for. Twenty years granted to the ancient homely person we saw Stravinsky to be – that was simply an unimaginably large number of years to the fourteen-year-old I was and the sixteen-year-old Merrill was in 1947. (How lovely that I.S. lived even longer than this.) To insist on getting Stravinsky twenty more years in exchange for our lives hardly seemed to show our fervor.

Fifteen more years? Of course.

Ten? You bet.

Five? We began to waver. But not to agree

seemed like a failure of respect, of love. What was my life or Merrill's – not just our paltry California-high-school-students' lives but the useful, achievement-strewn lives we thought were awaiting us – compared to making it possible for the world to enjoy five years more of Stravinsky's creations? Five years, okay.

Four? I sighed. Merrill, let's get on.

Three? To die for only three additional years?

Usually we settled on four – a minimum of four. Yes, to give Stravinsky four more years either one of us was prepared right then and there to die.

Reading and listening to music: the triumphs of being not myself. That nearly everything I admired was produced by people who were dead (or very old) or from elsewhere, ideally Europe, seemed inevitable to me.

I accumulated gods. What Stravinsky was for music Thomas Mann became for literature. At my Aladdin's cave, at the Pickwick, on November 11, 1947 – taking the book down from the shelf just now, I find the date written on the flyleaf in the italic script I was then practicing – I bought *The Magic Mountain*.

I began it that night, and for the first few nights had trouble breathing as I read. For this was not just another book I would love but a transforming book, a source of discoveries and recognitions. All of Europe fell into my head – though on condition that I start mourning for it. And tuberculosis, the faintly shameful disease (so my mother had intimated) of which my hard-to-imagine real father had died so long ago and exotically elsewhere, but which seemed, once we moved to Tucson, to be a commonplace misfortune – tuberculosis was revealed as the very epitome of pathetic and spiritual interest! The mountain-high community

of invalids with afflicted lungs was a version – an exalted version – of that picturesque, climate-conscious resort town in the desert with its thirty-odd hospitals and sanatoriums to which my mother had been obliged to relocate because of an asthma-disabled child: me. There on the mountain, characters were ideas and ideas were passions, exactly as I'd always felt. But the ideas themselves stretched me, enrolled me in turn: Settembrini's humanitarian élan but also Naphta's gloom and scorn. And mild, good-natured, chaste Hans Castorp, Mann's orphaned protagonist, was a hero after my own unprotected heart, not least because he was an orphan and because of the chastity of my own imagination. I loved the tenderness, however diluted by condescension, with which Mann portrays him as a bit simple, overearnest, docile, mediocre (what I considered myself to be, judged by real standards). Tenderness. What if Hans Castorp was a Goody Two-Shoes (appalling accusation my mother had once let fly at me)? That was what made him not like but unlike the others. I recognized his vocation for piety; his portable solitude, lived politely among others; his life of onerous routines (that guardians deem good for you) interspersed with free, passionate conversations – a glorious transposition of my own current agenda.

For a month the book was where I lived. I read it through almost at a run, my excitement winning out over my wish to go slowly and savor. I did have to slow down for pages 334 to 343, when Hans Castorp and Clavdia Chauchat finally speak of love, but in French, which I'd never studied: unwilling to skip anything, I bought a French-English dictionary and looked up their conversation word by word. After finishing the last page, I was so reluctant to be separated from the book that I started back at the beginning and, to hold myself to the pace the book merited, reread it aloud, a chapter each night.

The next step was to lend it to a friend, to feel someone else's pleasure in the book – to love it with someone else, and be able to talk about it. In early December I lent *The Magic Mountain* to Merrill. And Merrill, who would read immediately whatever I pressed on him, loved it, too. Good.

Then Merrill said, 'Why don't we go see him?' And that's when my joy turned to shame.

Of course I knew he lived here. Southern California in the 1940s was electric with celebrity presences for all tastes, and my friends and I were aware not only of Stravinsky and Schoenberg but of Mann, of Brecht (I'd recently seen *Galileo*, with Charles Laughton, in a Beverly Hills theatre), and also of Isherwood and Huxley. But it was as inconceivable that I could be in contact with any of them as that I could strike up a conversation with Ingrid Bergman or Gary Cooper, who also lived in the vicinity. Actually, it was even less possible. The stars stepped out of their limos onto the klieg-lighted sidewalk of Hollywood Boulevard for the movie-palace première, braving the surge of besieging fans penned in by the police saw-horses; I saw newsreels of these apparitions. The gods of high culture had disembarked from Europe to dwell, almost incognito, among the lemon trees and beach boys and neo-Bauhaus architecture and fantasy hamburgers; they weren't, I was sure, supposed to have something like fans, who would seek to intrude on their privacy. Of course, Mann, unlike the other exiles, was also a public presence. To have been as officially honored in America as Thomas Mann was in the late 1930s and early 1940s was probably more improbable than to have been the most famous writer in the world. A guest at the White House, introduced by the vice president when he gave a speech at the Library of Con-

gress, for years indefatigable on the lecture circuit, Mann had the stature of an oracle in Roosevelt's *bien-pensant* America, proclaiming the absolute evil of Hitler's Germany and the coming victory of the democracies. Emigration had not dampened his taste, or his talent, for being a representative figure. If there was such a thing as a good Germany, it was now to be found in this country (proof of America's goodness), embodied in his person; if there was a Great Writer, not at all an American notion of what a writer is, it was he.

But when I was borne aloft by *The Magic Mountain*, I wasn't thinking that he was also, literally, 'here'. To say that at this time I lived in Southern California and Thomas Mann lived in Southern California – that was a different sense of 'lived', of 'in'. Wherever he was, it was where-I-was-not. Europe. Or the world beyond childhood, the world of seriousness. No, not even that. For me, he was a book. Books, rather – I was now deep in *Stories of Three Decades*. When I was nine, which I did consider childhood, I'd lived for months of grief and suspense in *Les Misérables*. (It was the chapter in which Fantine was obliged to sell her hair that made a conscious socialist of me.) As far as I was concerned, Thomas Mann – being, simply, immortal – was as dead as Victor Hugo.

Why would I want to meet him? I had his books.

I didn't want to meet him. Merrill was at my house, it was Sunday, my parents were out, and we were in their bedroom sprawled on their white satin bedspread. Despite my pleas, he'd brought in a telephone book and was looking under 'M'.

'You see? He's in the telephone book.'

'I don't want to see!'

'Look!' He made me look. Horrified, I saw: 1550 San Remo Drive, Pacific Palisades.

‘This is ridiculous. Come on – stop it!’ I clambered off the bed. I couldn’t believe Merrill was doing this, but he was.

‘I’m going to call.’ The phone was on the night table on my mother’s side of the bed.

‘Merrill, please!’

He picked up the receiver. I bolted through the house, out the always unlocked front door, across the lawn, beyond the curb to the far side of the Pontiac, parked with the key in the ignition (where else would you keep the car keys?), to stand in the middle of the street and press my hands to my ears, as if from there I could have heard Merrill making the mortifying, unthinkable telephone call.

What a coward I am, I thought, hardly for the first or the last time in my life; but I took a few moments, hyperventilating, trying to regain control of myself, before I uncovered my ears and retraced my steps. Slowly.

The front door opened right into the small living room, done up with the Early American ‘pieces’, as my mother called them, that she was now collecting. Silence. I crossed the room into the dining area, then turned into the short hall that went past my own room and the door of my parents’ bathroom into their bedroom.

The receiver was on the hook. Merrill was sitting on the bed’s edge, grinning.

‘Listen, that’s not funny,’ I said. ‘I thought you were really going to do it.’

He waved his hand. ‘I did.’

‘Did what?’

‘I did it.’ He was still smiling.

‘Called?’

‘He’s expecting us for tea next Sunday at four.’

‘You didn’t actually call!’

‘Why not?’ he said. ‘It went fine.’

‘And you spoke to him?’ I was close to tears. ‘How could you?’

‘No,’ he said, ‘it was his wife who answered.’

I extracted a mental picture of Katia Mann from the photographs I’d seen of Mann with his family. Did she, too, exist? Perhaps, as long as Merrill hadn’t actually spoken to Thomas Mann, it wasn’t so bad. ‘But what did you say?’

‘I said we were two high-school students who had read Thomas Mann’s books and would like to meet him.’

No, this was even worse than I imagined – but what had I imagined? ‘That’s so ... so dumb!’

‘What’s dumb about it? It sounded good.’

‘Oh, Merrill ...’ I couldn’t even protest any more. ‘What did she say?’

‘She said, “Just a minute, I’ll get my daughter,”’ Merrill continued proudly. ‘And then the daughter got on, and I repeated –’

‘Go slower,’ I interrupted. ‘His wife left the phone. Then there was a pause. Then you heard another voice ...’

‘Yeah, another woman’s voice – they both had accents – saying, “This is Miss Mann, what do you want?”’

‘Is that what she said? It sounds as if she was angry.’

‘No, no, she didn’t sound angry. Maybe she said, “Miss Mann speaking.” I don’t remember, but, honest, she didn’t sound angry. Then she said, “What do you want?” No, wait, it was “What is it that you want?”’

‘Then what?’

‘And then I said ... you know, that we were two high-school students who had read Thomas Mann’s books and wanted to meet him –’

‘But I don’t want to meet him!’ I wailed.

‘And she said,’ he pushed on stubbornly, “‘Just a minute, I will ask my father.” Maybe it was “Just a moment, I will ask my father.” She wasn’t gone very long ... and then she came back to the phone and said – these were her words exactly – “My father is expecting you for tea next Sunday at four.”’

‘And then?’

‘She asked if I knew the address.’

‘And then?’

‘That was all. Oh ... and she said goodbye.’

I contemplated this finality for a moment before saying, once more, ‘Oh, Merrill, how could you?’

‘I told you I would,’ he said.

Getting through the week, awash in shame and dread. It seemed a vast impertinence that I should be forced to meet Thomas Mann. And grotesque that he should waste his time meeting me.

Of course I could refuse to go. But I was afraid this brash Caliban I’d mistaken for an Ariel would call on the magician without me. Whatever the usual deference I had from Merrill, it seemed he now considered himself my equal in Thomas Mann worship. I couldn’t let Merrill inflict himself unmediated on my idol. At least, if I went along I might limit the damage, head off the more callow of Merrill’s remarks. I had the impression (and this is the part of my recollection that is most touching to me) that Thomas Mann could be injured by Merrill’s stupidity or mine ... that stupidity was always injuring, and that as I revered Mann it was my duty to protect him from this injury.

Merrill and I met twice during the week after school. I had stopped reproving him. I was less angry; increasingly, I was just miserable. I was trapped. Since I would have to go, I needed to feel close to him, make common cause, so we would not disgrace ourselves.

Sunday came. It was Merrill who collected me in the Chevy, at one exactly, in front of my house at the curb (I hadn’t told my mother or anyone else of this invitation to tea in Pacific Palisades), and by two o’clock we were on broad, empty San Remo

Drive, with a view of the ocean and Catalina Island in the distance, parked some two hundred feet up from (and out of sight of) the house at 1550.

We had already agreed on how we would start. I would talk first, about *The Magic Mountain*, then Merrill would ask the question about what Thomas Mann was writing at present. The rest we were going to work out now, in the two hours we’d allotted to rehearse. But after a few minutes, unable to entertain any idea of how he might respond to what we were considering saying, we ran out of inspiration. What does a god say? Impossible to imagine.

So we compared two recordings of *Death and the Maiden* and then veered to a favorite notion of Merrill’s about the way Schnabel played the *Hammerklavier*, a notion which I found wonderfully clever. Merrill seemed hardly to be anxious at all. He appeared to think that we had a perfect right to bother Thomas Mann. He thought that we were interesting – two precocious kids, minor-league prodigies (we knew neither of us was a real prodigy, which was someone like the young Menuhin; we were prodigies of appetite, of respect, not of accomplishment); that we could be interesting to Thomas Mann. I did not. I thought we were ... pure potentiality. By real standards, I thought, we hardly existed.

The sun was strong and the street deserted. In two hours only a few cars passed. Then, at five minutes to four, Merrill released the brake and we coasted silently down the hill and re-parked in front of 1550. We got out, stretched, made encouraging mock-groaning sounds to each other, closed the car doors as softly as we could, went up the pathway, and rang the bell. Cute chimes. Oh.

A very old woman with white hair in a bun opened the door, didn’t seem surprised to see us, invited us in, asked us to wait a minute in the dim entryway – there was a living room off to the right – and went down a long corridor and out of sight.

‘Katia Mann,’ I whispered.

‘I wonder if we’ll see Erika,’ Merrill whispered back.

Absolute silence in the house. She was returning now. ‘Come with me, please. My husband will receive you in his study.’

We followed, almost to the end of the narrow dark passageway, just before the staircase. There was a door on the left, which she opened. We followed her in, turning left once more before we were really inside. In Thomas Mann’s study.

I saw the room – it seemed large and had a big window with a big view – before I realized it was he, sitting behind a massive, ornate, dark table. Katia Mann presented us. Here are the two students, she said to him, while referring to him as Dr Thomas Mann; he nodded and said some words of welcome. He was wearing a bow tie and a beige suit, as in the frontispiece of *Essays of Three Decades* – and that was the first shock, that he so resembled the formally posed photograph. The resemblance seemed uncanny, a marvel. It wasn’t, I think now, just because this was the first time I’d met someone whose appearance I had already formed a strong idea of through photographs. I’d never met anyone who didn’t affect being relaxed. His resemblance to the photograph seemed like a feat, as if he were posing now. But the full-figure picture had not made me see the sparseness of the mustache, the whiteness of the skin, the mottled hands, the unpleasantly visible veins, the smallness and amber color of the eyes behind the glasses. He sat very erectly and seemed to be very, very old. He was in fact seventy-two.

I heard the door behind us close. Thomas Mann indicated that we were to sit in the two stiff-backed chairs in front of the table. He lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair.

And we were on our way.

He talked without prompting. I remember his

gravity, his accent, the slowness of his speech: I had never heard anyone speak so slowly.

I said how much I loved *The Magic Mountain*.

He said it was a very European book, that it portrayed the conflicts at the heart of European civilization.

I said I understood that.

What had he been writing, Merrill asked.

‘I have recently completed a novel which is partly based on the life of Nietzsche,’ he said, with huge, disquieting pauses between each word. ‘My protagonist, however, is not a philosopher. He is a great composer.’

‘I know how important music is for you,’ I ventured, hoping to fuel the conversation for a good stretch.

‘Both the heights and the depths of the German soul are reflected in its music,’ he said.

‘Wagner,’ I said, worried that I was risking disaster, since I’d never heard an opera by Wagner, though I’d read Thomas Mann’s essay on him.

‘Yes,’ he said, picking up, hefting, closing (with his thumb marking the place), then laying down, open again, a book that was on his worktable. ‘As you see, at this very moment I am consulting Volume IV of Ernest Newman’s excellent biography of Wagner.’ I craned my neck to let the words of the title and the author’s name actually hit my eyeballs. I’d seen the Newman biography at the Pickwick.

‘But the music of my composer is not like Wagner’s music. It is related to the twelve-tone system, or row, of Schoenberg.’

Merrill said we were both very interested in Schoenberg. He made no response to this. Intercepting a perplexed look on Merrill’s face, I widened my eyes encouragingly.

‘Will your novel appear soon?’ Merrill asked.

‘My faithful translator is at work on it now,’ he said.

‘H. T. Lowe-Porter,’ I murmured – the first

time I'd actually said this entrancing name, with its opaque initials and showy hyphen.

'For the translator this is, perhaps, my most difficult book,' he said. 'Never, I think, has Mrs Lowe-Porter been confronted with such a challenging task.'

'Oh,' I said, having not imagined H. T. L.-P. to be anything in particular but surprised to learn that the name belonged to a woman.

'A deep knowledge of German is required, and much ingenuity, for some of my characters converse in dialect. And the Devil – for, yes, the Devil himself is a character in my book – speaks in the German of the sixteenth century,' Thomas Mann said, slowly, slowly. A thin-lipped smile. 'I'm afraid this will mean little to my American readers.'

I longed to say something reassuring, but didn't dare.

Was he speaking so slowly, I wondered, because that was the way he talked? Or because he was talking in a foreign language? Or because he thought he had to speak slowly – assuming (because we were Americans? because we were children?) that otherwise we wouldn't understand what he was saying?

'I regard this as the most daring book I have written.' He nodded at us. 'My wildest book.'

'We look forward very much to reading it,' I said. I was still hoping he'd talk about *The Magic Mountain*.

'But it is as well the book of my old age,' he went on. A long, long pause. 'My *Parsifal*,' he said. 'And, of course, my *Faust*.'

He seemed distracted for a moment, as if recalling something. He lit another cigarette and turned slightly in his chair. Then he laid the cigarette in an ashtray and rubbed his mustache with his index finger; I remember I thought his mustache (I didn't know anyone with a mustache) looked like a little hat over his mouth. I wondered if this meant the conversation was over.

But, no, he went on. I remember 'the fate of Germany'... 'the demonic' and 'the abyss'... and 'the Faustian bargain with the Devil'. Hitler recurred several times. (Did he bring up the Wagner-Hitler problem? I think not.) We did our best to show him that his words were not wholly lost on us.

At first I had seen only him, awe at his physical presence blinding me to the room's contents. Now I was starting to see more. For instance, what was on the rather cluttered table: pens, inkstand, books, papers, and a nest of small photographs in silver frames, which I saw from the back. Of the many pictures on the walls, I recognized only a signed photograph of F.D.R. with someone else – I seem to remember a man in uniform – in the picture. And books, books, books in the floor-to-ceiling shelves that covered two of the walls. To be in the same room with Thomas Mann was thrilling, enormous, amazing. But I was also hearing the siren call of the first private library I had ever seen.

While Merrill carried the ball, showing that he was not entirely ignorant of the Faust legend, I was trying, without making the divagations of my glance too obvious, to case the library. As I expected, almost all of the books were German, many in sets, leather-bound; the puzzle was that I could not decipher most of the titles (I didn't know of the existence of *Fraktur*). The few American books, all recent-looking, were easy to identify in their bright, waxy jackets.

Now he was talking about Goethe ...

As if we had indeed rehearsed what we would say, Merrill and I had found a nice, unstrained rhythm of putting questions whenever Thomas Mann's glacial flow of words seemed to be drying up, and of showing our respectful appreciation of whatever he was saying. Merrill was being the Merrill I was so fond of: calm, charming, not stupid at all. I felt ashamed that I'd assumed he would disgrace himself, and therefore me, in front of Thomas

Mann. Merrill was doing fine. I was, I thought, doing so-so. The surprise was Thomas Mann, that he wasn't harder to understand.

I wouldn't have minded if he had talked like a book. I wanted him to talk like a book. What I was obscurely starting to mind was that (as I couldn't have put it then) he talked like a book review.

Now he was talking about the artist and society, and he was using phrases I remembered from interviews with him I had read in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, a magazine I felt I'd outgrown since discovering the fancy prose and convoluted arguments of *Partisan Review*, which I had just started buying at the newsstand on Hollywood Boulevard. But, I reasoned, if I found what he said now a little familiar it was because I had read his books. He couldn't know he had in me such a fervent reader. Why should he say anything he hadn't already said? I refused to be disappointed.

I considered telling him that I loved *The Magic Mountain* so much that I had read it twice, but that seemed silly. I also feared he might ask me about some book of his which I had not read, though so far he hadn't asked a single question. 'The Magic Mountain has meant so much to me,' I finally ventured, feeling that it was now or never.

'It sometimes happens,' he said, 'that I am asked which I consider to be my greatest novel.'

'Oh,' I said.

'Yes,' said Merrill.

'I would say, and have so replied recently in interviews ...' He paused. I held my breath. 'The Magic Mountain.' I exhaled.

The door opened. Relief had come: the German wife, slow-gaited, bearing a tray with cookies, small cakes, and tea, which she bent over to set down on a low table in front of the sofa against

one wall. Thomas Mann stood up, came around the table, and waved us toward the sofa; I saw he was very thin. I longed to sit down again, and did, next to Merrill, where we'd been told to sit, as soon as Thomas Mann occupied a wing chair nearby. Katia Mann was pouring tea from a heavy silver service into three delicate cups. As Thomas Mann put his saucer on his knee and raised the cup to his mouth (we followed, in unison), she said a few words in German to him in a low voice. He shook his head. His reply was in English – something like 'It doesn't matter' or 'Not now.' She sighed audibly, and left the room.

Ah, he said, now we will eat. Unsmiling, he motioned to us to help ourselves to the cakes.

At one end of the low table that held the tray was a small Egyptian statuette, which sits in my memory as a funerary votive figure. It reminded me that Thomas Mann had written a book called *Joseph in Egypt*, which in the course of a cursory browsing at the Pickwick I'd not found enticing. I resolved to give it another try.

No one spoke. I was aware of the intense, dedicated quiet of the house, a quiet I had never experienced anywhere indoors; and of the slowness and self-consciousness of each of my gestures. I sipped my tea, tried to control the crumbs from the cake, and exchanged a furtive glance with Merrill. Maybe it was over now.

Putting down his cup and saucer, then touching the corner of his mouth with the edge of his thick white napkin, Thomas Mann said that he was always pleased to meet American young people, who showed the vigor and health and fundamentally optimistic temper of this great country. My spirits sank. What I had dreaded – he was turning the conversation to us.

He asked us about our studies. Our studies? That was a further embarrassment. I was sure he hadn't the faintest idea what a high school in

Southern California was like. Did he know about Drivers' Education (compulsory)? Typing courses? Wouldn't he be surprised by the wrinkled condoms you spotted as you were darting across the lawn for the first period (the campus was a favorite nighttime trysting spot) – my own surprise having revealed, the very first week I entered, my being two years younger than my classmates, because I'd witlessly asked someone why there were these little balloons under the trees? And by the 'tea' being sold by a pair of pachukes (as the Chicano kids were called) stationed along the left wall of the assembly building every morning recess? Could he imagine George, who, some of us knew, had a gun and got money from gas-station attendants? Ella and Nella, the dwarf sisters, who led the Bible Club boycott that resulted in the withdrawal of our biology textbook? Did he know Latin was gone, and Shakespeare, too, and that for months of tenth-grade English the visibly befuddled teacher handed out copies of the *Reader's Digest* at the beginning of each period – we were to select one article and write a summary of it – then sat out the hour in silence at her desk, nodding and knitting? Could he imagine what a world away from the Gymnasium in his native Lübeck, where fourteen-year-old Tonio Kröger wooed Hans Hansen by trying to get him to read Schiller's *Don Carlos*, was North Hollywood High School, alma mater of Farley Granger and Alan Ladd? He couldn't, and I hoped he would never find out. He had enough to be sad about – Hitler, the destruction of Germany, exile. It was better that he not know how really far he was from Europe.

He was talking about 'the value of literature' and 'the necessity of protecting civilization against the forces of barbarity', and I said, yes, yes ... my conviction that it was absurd for us to be there – what, all week, I'd expected to feel – at last taking over. Earlier, we could only say something stu-

pid. Actually having tea, the social ritual that gave a name to the whole proceeding, created new opportunities for disgrace. My worry that I would do something clumsy was driving out of my head whatever I might have ventured to say.

I remember beginning to wonder when it would not be awkward to leave. I guessed that Merrill, for all the impression he gave of being at ease, would be glad to go, too.

And Thomas Mann continued to talk, slowly, about literature. I remember my dismay better than what he said. I was trying to keep myself from eating too many cookies, but in a moment of absent-mindedness I did reach over and take one more than I had meant to. He nodded. Have another, he said. It was horrible. How I wished I could just be left alone in his study to look at his books.

He asked us who our favorite authors were, and when I hesitated (I had so many, and knew I should mention only a few) he went on – and this I remember exactly: 'I presume you like Hemingway. He is, such is my impression, the most representative American author.'

Merrill mumbled that he had never read Hemingway. Neither had I; but I was too taken aback even to reply. How puzzling that Thomas Mann should be interested in Hemingway, who, in my vague idea of him, was a very popular author of novels that had been made into romantic movies (I loved Ingrid Bergman, I loved Humphrey Bogart) and wrote about fishing and boxing (I hated sports). He'd never sounded to me like a writer I ought to read. Or one my Thomas Mann would take seriously. But then I understood it wasn't that Thomas Mann liked Hemingway but that we were supposed to like him.

Well, Thomas Mann said, what authors do you like?

Merrill said he liked Romain Rolland, meaning *Jean-Christophe*. And Joyce, meaning *Portrait of*

an *Artist*. I said I liked Kafka, meaning *Metamorphosis* and *In the Penal Colony*, and Tolstoy, meaning the late religious writings as much as the novels; and, thinking I must cite an American because he seemed to expect that, I threw in Jack London (meaning *Martin Eden*).

He said we must be very serious young people. More embarrassment. What I remember best is how embarrassing it was.

I was still worrying about Hemingway. Should I read Hemingway?

He seemed to find it perfectly normal that two local high-school students should know who Nietzsche and Schoenberg were ... and up to now I'd simply rejoiced in this first foretaste of the world where such familiarity was properly taken for granted. But now, it seemed, he also wanted us to be two young Americans (as he imagined them); to be, as he was (as, I had no idea why, he thought Hemingway was), representative. I knew that was absurd. The whole point was that we didn't represent anything at all. We didn't even represent ourselves – certainly not very well.

Here I was in the very throne room of the world in which I aspired to live, even as the humblest citizen. (The thought of saying that I wanted to be a writer would no more have occurred to me than to tell him I breathed. I was there, if I had to be there, as admirer, not as aspirant to his caste.) The man I met had only sententious formulas to deliver, though he was the man who wrote Thomas Mann's books. And I uttered nothing but tongue-tied simplicities, though I was full of complex feeling. We neither of us were at our best.

Strange that I don't recall how it ended. Did Katia Mann appear to tell us that our time was up? Did Thomas Mann say he must return to his work, receive our thanks for granting this audience, and take us to the study door? I don't remember the goodbyes – how we were released. Our sitting

on the sofa having tea and cakes cross-fades in my memory to the scene in which we are out on San Remo Drive again, getting into the car. After the dark study, the waning sun seemed bright: it was just past five-thirty.

Merrill started the car. Like two teenage boys driving away after their first visit to a brothel, we evaluated our performance. Merrill thought it was a triumph. I was ashamed, depressed, though I agreed that we hadn't made total fools of ourselves.

'Damn, we should have brought the book,' Merrill said as we neared my neighborhood, breaking a long silence. 'For him to sign.'

I gritted my teeth and said nothing.

'That was great,' said Merrill as I got out of the car in front of my house.

I doubt we spoke of it again.

Ten months later, within days of the appearance of the much-heralded *Doctor Faustus* (Book-of-the-Month Club selection, first printing over a hundred thousand copies), Merrill and I were at the Pickwick, giddily eyeing the piles of identical books stacked on a metal table in the front of the store. I bought mine and Merrill his; we read it together.

Acclaimed as it was, his book didn't do as well as Thomas Mann expected. The reviewers expressed respectful reservations, his American presence began to deflate slightly. The Roosevelt era was really over and the Cold War had started. He began to think of returning to Europe.

I was now within a few months of my big move, the beginning of real life. After January graduation, I started a term at the University of California at Berkeley, luckless George started doing his one-to-five at San Quentin, and in the fall of 1949 I left Cal and entered the University of Chicago, accom-

panied by Merrill and by Peter (both of whom had graduated in June), and studied philosophy, and then, and then ... I went on to my life, which did turn out to be, mostly, just what the child of fourteen had imagined with such certitude.

And Thomas Mann, who had been doing time here, made his move. He and his Katia (who had become American citizens in 1944) were to leave Southern California, returning to the somewhat leveled magic mountain of Europe, for good, in 1952. There had been fifteen years in America. He had lived here. But he didn't really live here.

Years later, when I had become a writer, when I knew many other writers, I would learn to be more tolerant of the gap between the person and the work. Yet even now the encounter still feels illicit, improper. In my experience deep memory is, more often than not, the memory of embarrassment.

I still feel the exhilaration, the gratitude for having been liberated from childhood's asphyxiations. Admirations set me free. And embarrassment, which is the price of acutely experienced admiration. Then I felt like an adult, forced to live in the body of a child. Since, I feel like a child, privileged to live in the body of an adult. The zealot of seriousness in me, because it was already full-grown in the child, continues to think of reality as yet-to-be. Still sees a big space ahead, a far horizon. Is this the real world? I still ask myself that, forty years later ... as small children ask repeatedly, in the course of a long, tiring journey, 'Are we there yet?' Childhood's sense of plenitude was denied me. In compensation, there remains, always, the horizon of plenitude, to which I am borne forward by the delights of admiration.

shameful. As if it happened between two other people, two phantoms, two provisional beings on their way elsewhere: an embarrassed, fervid, literature-intoxicated child and a god in exile who lived in a house in Pacific Palisades.

I never told anyone of the meeting. Over the years I have kept it a secret, as if it were something

