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Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://www.textjournal.com.au/>

## TEXT poetry

### Dominique Hecq

#### *Excerpts from Masks: Letters to Orpheus*

i

The world is dark shaken  
everywhere dust, reluctant  
light. Eyes on the horizon line  
i filter fables from far ago.

On Camps' millennial soil, fall  
of time, veil on mass exodus, white  
nights. On the other side  
of silence, two thousand bloods.

The day rings new, bells  
everywhere unhinged  
sun on my hand, netting  
clouds twine the sky.

ii

Facing Les Maures, i draw  
a face on the wall of a cave  
for temporary selves  
bats, burnt sienna, twilight.

Inside a prostitute grinds time  
Her body, badge of volcanic  
rage, mine scandalous waste  
of vocalic love.

The hour bleats and wools  
the glare, limns black furrows as  
distances gush through my veins:  
i am exiled from words.

iii

At Point Sublime, mountains black  
teeth against sapphire sky suck  
diluted jade. Cascading waterfalls  
exhaust all other sound.

Five eagles rise above  
my head, circle the gorge. Vanish  
return down below, wings  
one swooping wave.

One foot from the drop i am many  
coursing through air against time's current  
replicating centuries of bodies ago  
veiling the eagle's rise and fall.

Two thousand feet from the Styx i precede  
my woes, flit out of my skin  
black letter in your Book of myths  
watch my precipitous flight.

Three caskets shine in the cave—  
my imagination's permanent residents:  
limestone washes names in granite  
shrouded shoulders pressed together.

One millennium of bloods repatriated  
to rock, ice, silt, mud, magma.

iv

In Paris, signposts up  
side down identical stations  
Notre Dame's shell, chromophobic  
night shooting through.

Dust coated, i obliterate predicates  
synonyms, sentences, smooths  
your forehead's imperceptible lines  
sleep in snatches on Monoprix's doorstep.

Every minute, here  
odour of birth gathering  
margins of death, bearing down  
the eclipse of the species.

v

In Antwerp stars shatter crystal  
diamonds, sentiments, wind  
seagulls feed on anonymous  
servitude, a novel order. Hail.

A dissident out on the town, insides  
torn where currents of human chit  
chat slip past buildings two thousand  
guns ago, i call your name.

O, Orpheus, a burning mountain rises  
from my hand. Hear the pyroclastic surges  
explosive blasts. See the incandescent cinders  
spill into the sky. Smell the gas clouds.

So much dark, so much glow, *nuée ardente*  
shroud over the volcano's lip  
time and space in my hand, i thin to ash.

This is where frontiers take their leave.

Blow me out to sea, air, light.

*Dominique Hecq grew up in the French-speaking part of Belgium. She now lives in Melbourne. Her works include a novel, three books of short stories and ten collections of poetry. Kaosmos and Tracks are fresh off the press. Hecq is a recipient of the 2018 International Best Poets Prize administered by the International Poetry Translation and Research Centre in conjunction with the International Academy of Arts and Letters.*



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## TEXT poetry

**Gershon Maller**

### *Chiasma of being*

For Sophia Nugent-Siegal

#### **1. Cleaved by light**

are beings made from syllabi whose  
copular verbs breathe vowels alive  
as if there were a primary aureole  
where I, as subject in this opening  
clause, simply appear; brain, by noun  
modifier or phrasal bit, imagines limit,  
not feel what moves invisibly toward  
first thought just before this sentence  
began, aeons ago, in dream space; there  
more strangely true by hollow name,  
my verbs will not parse future or past  
but pout a cough to throat-clear meta  
speak; for games anew, I like to play.

#### **2. You & I the game,**

livestream the second series in full view

seeking the mojo artefact who, conscious and verbal, zooms across screen  
like a poet in search of microphone, and whom I, as first pronoun  
elect to haiku my faux trope; for my world of words mirrors

yours by mixed metaphor, a matrix                      It aligns *even as I picture*

larynx & brain *sound as verbs*

in silence *we tango*

across-space

*images* erasing

*seem to speak* each other

*never answer* points of light . . .

as feelings,

where pain can click-bait life like eye hooks; perhaps I could know your pain  
not mine, or shrink a cloud of unknowing into drop of reality, like the sharp  
taste of tamarillo, a sense we share in fruit of quavering noun

as your eye follows mine over the edge

### 3. The treachery of images

forming in your mind appear along this line as easily  
the world once seemed to Alice through her looking  
glass; think of Magritte's illusion 'this is not a pipe'  
to picture a word game or redux esoteric personae:<sup>[1]</sup>

The Lion Who Never Learns to Speak

The Beetle of Pain in Private Box; or

The Duck-Rabbit-Duck, to flicker

your eye of perception on-and-off; we make-believe  
names are things,<sup>[2]</sup> as if a bug crawled in the letters  
of 'beetle', or a large cat prowled in 'lion'; we do not  
see the world in its idea;<sup>[3]</sup> I could no more peel from  
a strawberry its taste, like a membrane, than my eye  
strip after-image of sun from flaring nuclei.<sup>[1]</sup>

### 4. Elegy for X

Silence follows my introspection  
into flux, but fallen into words

returns me to Adieu; I never depart,  
my meditation arriving nowhere; as if  
being were more than gem of cutglass  
verb; I close my eyes, thoughts recede,  
imagine falling into heights of aural sky  
I breathe the body of air who breathes me,  
and withdrawing from mind, quell  
its chatter to find an innocence, other  
than the death of a forgotten child  
we abide as we can in her shadow  
any moment is aubade to spill light into  
my room; I thrive in beauty of that terror.

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

<sup>2</sup> Borges, *The Golem*

<sup>3</sup> Stevens, *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*

*Melbourne based poet and editor, Gershon Maller, is author of Night Breathing (Metro Arts Press) and Nights in the Gardens of Spain (Post Pressed, Qld). His poetry has appeared in Going Down Swinging, Meanjin, Overland, Poetry Australia, StylusLit, Unusual Works, TEXT, The Australian Jewish News, The Sydney Morning Herald (AU) and The Muse Apprentice Guild and The Wallace Stevens Journal (US), among others.*





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**TEXT poetry**

**BN Oakman**

*divination*

pour your angst into those deep pools  
eyes that rarely leave you while you talk and talk  
about a life butchered into anguished anecdotes  
you know she's listening, she nods  
murmurs a few words, occasionally a question  
much as she always has during your special hour  
over weeks and months, perhaps years

and when, at last, she speaks at length  
it's because she believes she's detected something  
perhaps a theme artfully concealed in blather  
something you think you want to know  
or something you may never want to know  
often a great crater in your soul you can never fill  
no matter the scale of your smorgasbord of obsessions  
money, work, booze, food, body, sex, order, dope  
feel free to select your addictions  
and try to remember how many times you uttered 'why?'

someday you may begin to discern the skeleton of a narrative  
blessed relief from all those warring anecdotes  
and then, beyond talk, subterfuge and camouflage  
you might seek, and find, solace in the realm of silence

no one promised a bouquet of roses flown from Vienna  
only a vision of the austere majesty of truth  
and, perhaps the greater gift  
the opportunity to compose your poem

*BN Oakman's poetry has been widely published in Australia (including in Best Australian Poems 2014 and 2015) and internationally. Recent collections include In Defence of Hawaiian Shirts (IP 2010) and Second Thoughts (IP 2014) plus two chapbooks. In 2016 the distinguished Australian actor John Flaus recorded 25 of his poems for a CD titled What Did I Know? Once upon a time Oakman was an academic economist. [www.bnoakman.com](http://www.bnoakman.com)*



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## TEXT poetry

**Sarah Pearce**

### ***For J, Who Is No Longer My Friend***

This suite of found poems is based on two source texts: *The Spare Room* (2008) by Helen Garner and a note written on the inside cover of my copy of the book by an ex-lover and ex-friend: J. Almost every line is a direct quotation from one of the two texts – the words in bold are my own.

\*\*\*\*\*

***It might break your heart a little but sometimes I think that's what love should do.*** (2010 ~ J)

#### I. THE GOOD

*There's a line in here about the two 60-year-old friends being 'a couple of old bohemians' and I hope that's what we'll be someday.* (2010 ~ J)

#### **She**

older, taller, braver, and more free  
I couldn't imagine the world without her

once we would have gone into paroxysms together  
if you gotta go, you might as well go out sparkling

## II. THE BED

### **We got drunk together**

a peculiar flavour  
delicious, but wild and with a distinct after-taste,  
like something that might be poisonous  
if you got the quantities wrong

a violent thrill  
a twisted mess of wet sheets

two filthy, panting hags

## III. THE BAD

### **I went to visit**

a bag full of hand grenades

white showed all round her pupils  
*I don't want anyone here but you*

eating was out of the question  
my heart contracted into a knot of pity,  
love and rage

the urge to start drinking that would seize me  
our bruised hearts rushed to it in solidarity,  
and it came to our rescue

her loneliness pierced me

**I left**, white, composed and stoic after a five-day stint without relief

## IV. THE ROTTING

the flesh was pale and fibrous,  
hardly more substantial than dust  
how long had she been this bad?

a horrible two-stage smash,  
so sickening, so total,  
that I thought someone had thrown a brick

the summer day itself darkened and disintegrated before our eyes

everyone around her was deranged  
with exhaustion, fury and despair

oh, the crazed relief of dobbling, of disloyalty  
I kept going, trying to find each nut's weak point,  
grinding the hard shells against each other  
till they split

## V. THE RENDING

### **Confession**

something violent sizzled in me

the blossoms fell from my blades  
in a steady shower of white

*there are many ways to make a thing disappear*

everything I looked at was blood-coloured  
it gushed up like nausea

a lime pit of rage that would scorch the flesh off me,  
leaving nothing but a strew of pale bones  
on a landscape of sand

### Coda

I slept in jerky, shallow bouts,  
and dreamed confused tales  
of failure and frustration

what pathetic rivalry  
measure my length among the cut roses

my heart was full of holes

it was the end of my watch,  
and I handed her over

*Dr Sarah Pearce is a poet, performer and academic from Adelaide, Australia. Her work appears in Aeternum, Outskirts, Meniscus, Writing from Below and TEXT. She has held residencies at Adelaide City Library and FELTspace gallery and performed at Blenheim Festival and Adelaide Fringe Festival. Her writing concerns the body, the self and points of connection.*



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**Nicole Rain Sellers**

***Found in the Goldmines***

Be enveloped by inviolable silence. Feel the organic intrusion. Writing makes things happen; you might as well start now. Step out of your skin, beyond curtains, a great surgeon with a creature under his knife, someone in the mines come up with gold. Don't sit looking inward. You have to get to work!

Don't cast sidelong glances. Mania is essential, two thousand words a day, fifty-two stories a year, five years, twenty years. Over the dull glow of the mind you will write and burn. Lots of people will do better than you and have more fun. You will die anyway, a scratch on the wooden floor, the moth-eaten sweater.

Perfectionism will keep you cramped and insane – tell your mind to back the hell off. The white-hot center of you harbors the zeal; nourish this germ to fruition. Recondite words rehashed, paper-thin fiction, thesaurus crutches, your destination the dictionary. Wallow in luscious crunch and slither, roll and ribbon, twist and torque; semi-colon units of energy, released.

Grapple with challenging stories. How can you know until  
you write it? Imagination feeds, the greediest carnal experience,  
gains electrical charge, unity with thrust. Big bandwidth cable  
carries every lustrous pixel. You know what real images feel like.  
The ordinary secret is the thing we want. It's a conflagration,  
an inundation, the atom split, the fragment generating sparks.

Polysyllabic scribbles cover their tracks, obliterate  
the earlier version. That satisfying sentence snaps  
into place, relief you were writing anything at all.  
You have been working, haven't you?

Source: Temple, 2018, Great advice from 25 writing manuals by famous authors,  
*Literary Hub*, <https://lithub.com/great-advice-from-25-writing-manuals-by-famous-authors/>

*Nicole Rain Sellers' poems and stories have been published in Plumwood Mountain, The Enchanting Verses Literary Review, Heroic Fantasy Quarterly, and The Blue Nib, anthologised in Grieve (Hunter Writers Centre, 2018), Zodiac Tales (Patchwork Raven, 2018), and Reset (Hawkeye Books, forthcoming in 2021), and awarded in the Society of Women Writers Tasmania Robyn Mathison Poetry Prize (2019) and the Fellowship of Australian Writers Alice Sinclair Memorial Writing Competition (2020). Fossilised Lightning, her ecopoetry collection co-authored with Rebecca Trowbridge, is forthcoming in 2021 (Girls on Key Poetry).*  
<https://www.nicolerainsellers.com/>





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## TEXT poetry

Ian C Smith

*2 poems*

### *Gravitas, Grudges, Grit*

Alone in the dark hours of morning I computer-track my son's progress in the Kona Ironman, a thin blue line edging across a screen. Checking emails, I learn my nephew will drive me later to his boyhood rural hospital. His aged mother, my only sister, is gravely ill. A long-legged champion schoolgirl hurdler once, she doesn't know her Ironman nephew, two generations younger than her in years, doesn't know much anymore, her ghosts of memory adrift.

She lies curled in a ward named for a lovely small river burbling below their long-ago home. A steep grassy slope led to where her boys would romp in the water innocent of drama ahead. I try feeding her the meal she would be responsible for if time-travel transported us back to when she directed this hospital's kitchen, but, coughing in pneumonia's clutches, she sags back into her pillow, irritated by the oxygen feed, a pterodactyl fossil the weight of a child. I realise the last time I visited her in hospital was after the birth of the saddened middle-aged guy standing alongside me. Fourteen then, a proud uncle, I needed positives when the colour of my life was grey.

When I arrived, bending to kiss my sister, she seemed to recognise me, gripping me to her with surprising strength, cheek-to-cheek, and then again, as if I were the one cherished. Grudges are cherished in my tribe, learning love

like a difficult foreign language. A misfit beset by shards of memory, I was unsure of my blood-kin's reception after separation. Her granddaughter again reassures her she is feeding her cat. Helplessness reigns. I reason that when we embraced, my sister, who was still sharp when my age, might have believed me to be our long-dead father, learn later my son crashed his bike, got up, helmet cracked, straightened his wheels, completed the gruelling course.

### ***Prison Officer's Son***

Before he discovered Alan Sillitoe's lonely long-distance running Borstal boy, his first encounter with a startling marriage of prose and poetry, he lived inside a Borstal compound in a row of prefabricated rent-subsidised houses for families of mostly uneducated and unskilled officers. A provocative child attracted by the shiver of jeopardy, he shoplifted sweets, cramming his mouth with sensation despite daily reminders of crime and punishment. At the inmates' picture nights officers' families could sit up the back watching feel good old musicals. These flickering images initiated a cinematic love affair for the boy, an escape route from troubled years ahead, the lonely miles that were to ensue. Now these ghostly memories; roles played, onscreen and off, soundtrack songs from his early scenes, a murmur of trapped voices before the lights dimmed, the heady whiff of cigarette smoke, young offenders calling to his father – who once persuaded a frightened youth down from a roof – using his father's nickname, keys penetrating locks, the crunch of footfalls on those late walks home beneath horse-chestnuts, his father whistling through the dark beyond the wire enclosure, his big torch lighting the way back to life's repetition, their idea of freedom, the little tin house.

*Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in Antipodes, Communion, cordite, Eureka Street, Griffith Review, Journal of Working Class Studies, Meniscus, and Shaping the Fractured Self (UWAP). His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy, Ginninderra Press.*