TEXT Vol 17 No 2 (October 2013)

Prose and poetry contents

TEXT prose

Sue Woolfe

The Puzzle of the Muse

I must first describe the puzzle, for many matter-of-fact people will be unaware that there is one: when a writer, this writer and many like me – though not all – is deep in a creative work, the mind, no matter how well-disciplined it has been in the normal course of life, takes on a new and most unruly life. This seemed to me, when I first experienced it in my first novel, *Painted Woman*, somewhat shameful, because after all one stands before the world with a book which despite the mind's unruliness comes together as an intellectual tour de force – or is it not *despite*, but *because of*? And the experience seems somewhat indescribable, except in quasi religious terms. Of course I'd read about the muse, but that seems to me the province of important 17th century poets, never of my struggles. Writers resort to the word "channeling", for example, or say to indulgently smiling audiences, "the book wrote itself through me". I made the mistake of explaining that I seemed to have "stolen" my novel, which made people mutter. Fearing a call to the police, I thereupon kept silent.

Nevertheless, I came to depend on the mind's strangeness through the writing of more novels, stage adaptations, and short stories, and it was at the back of my mind when I interviewed, with Kate Grenville, nine other novelists for *Making Stories: How Ten Australian Novels Were Written* [1] – though at that stage I didn't know how to put into words the questions that puzzled me. Since its publication in 1991, I've taught creative writing at a tertiary level and encouraged many generations of students, who not uncommonly went on to be published, to allow their minds to do the same. I must confess my classes seemed to me at least, almost séances. But I'd been charged with showing people how to invoke the muse, and I took my duty seriously.

Then came a fateful phone call, luckily in the middle of a difficult writing day in the middle of a novel that seemed mired. (I've described this problem and its resolution elsewhere [2].) The caller was a PhD student who wanted to interview me along with six other writers, to ask us about our processes because... and here my memory blurs, for he carefully described his hypothesis but used terms that at that stage, had no meaning for me. But, glad of the distraction, I said yes.

The interview was nothing like I'd ever had. The questions were eerily reflective of the way I work, and what I teach. His questions were also startlingly specific. For example, he knew that for writers, thoughts come singly and then in flurries, with the sensation of the mind tumbling: he knew that sometimes, deep in the work, whole pages seem dictated – and then, sadly, the dictation stops; that creative thought is often experienced as being located, not in the skull behind the eyebrows, but in particular parts of the body. "How do you know this about me?" I finally blurted.

Dr Christopher Stevens' reply was the bibliography to his thesis [3], and from this chance meeting I learned that cognitive psychology, followed by neuroscience some time later, has been considering the cognitive and neural

mechanisms of creative thinking since the 1960s. The relevance of this body of work to authors became the subject of my doctoral thesis, published as *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady: A Writer Looks at Creativity and Neuroscience*. I'd crept up on the muse, but I hadn't put into words the strange experience when she's invoked.

As I delved into what's become a vast body of research, I became aware of more and more questions opening up.

Am I being subjective in trying to describe this state for writers? Yes. But I've observed a similar mental, subjective process across many students, which is not dissimilar to what has been noted elsewhere by much more objective researchers.

Have my students come cold to this list without my teaching? No. But fellow-authors have, and I've discussed this with many in late-evening confessions – for we writers are generally a superstitious lot, and fear putting inappropriate words on the muse, in case she never returns.

Am I talking about everyone engaged in any creative act, even any writer? No. Because creating something is a complex neural process, different people may have different approaches to it, they might emphasize different aspects of this experience or that, or they might be only conscious of specific aspects.

Am I talking about a method rather than a neural activity? It seems to me that someone using a method is still using a neural activity.

Is it hard-wired? I don't know. But I've found that it *is* teachable because it's a common neural activity, not an extraordinary one; creative people seem to me exceptional only because they know how to value it, and – often, though not always – know how to induce it.

Why isn't there professional research done about authors? Disappointingly, neuroscience has studied the brain activities of artists and musicians but not authors – because of the complexities of language we're the most complex to study – we're the cinderellas of neuroscience. So I'm cherry-picking my way through research about artists and musicians that *ma*y turn out not to be valid for authors. I'm aware that other creative people in other areas such as science may well say, "Nothing of this happens to me when I create" – so some creativity, especially science, may necessarily happen only in what I've come to know of as a highly focused state.

My greatest curiosity, for my students' sake as well as mine, was to try to identify, the factors that become many writers' daily experience as we invoke the muse.

Stevens (p.5) stresses that creative thinking occurs in what's called a creativity cycle, and invoking the muse is only one part of the cycle. Creative writing courses usually assume that by the time students enroll, they know how to invoke the muse. I've found the opposite: that while the rare individual can invoke her (perhaps being hard-wired that way?) most have to learn it consciously – and that's maybe why they enroll.

The usual mode of thought, which is very familiar in academia and in western thought, was first called **tight construing** by leading 20th-century researcher GA Kelly [4], and he defined it as being abstract, logical, goal-oriented and reality-oriented. The opposite mode, **loose construing**, he defined as being without goals, without a necessary orientation towards reality, without anxiety or anticipation, a mode of thought in which openness and uncertainty prevail,

logical thought is slowed down, concepts of prediction and interpretation are relinquished. It consists of defocussing the attention, and, as Colin Martindale showed in his seminal tests, allowing the mind's activity to sink below the level of his measurement equipment during which the brain goes to remote connections [5]. This notion has been backed up by so many researchers that it has now become a commonplace of cognitive science about creative thought – though I must stress that to complete the creativity cycle there are other factors as well [6].

This year I serendipitously met Professor Rhoshel Lenroot of NeuRA at the University of NSW. At the same time I was teaching creative writing to playwright Stephen Sewell's class at NIDA. I told Lenroot that though I believed I was deepening the students' creativity, I might unwittingly be teaching them just to relax and so allow their inherent creativity to emerge – so would that suggest that creativity is in all of us? "But what do you mean – what are you looking *at*?" Professor Lenroot asked, because she's a scientist. I knew I couldn't get away with answering that their stories were better than when they'd begun classes with me, or that their grades had improved, or, worst, that, when they successfully invoked the muse in class, the air seemed to clench!

I began to try to think more scientifically. With Lenroot's encouragement, I've identified two key factors that I believe show students' deepening creativity: an increase in thought complexity and a developing of empathy. These two factors are objectively measurable. With agreement from the relevant Ethics Committee, we plan a pilot study next year in her EEG laboratory, comparing two cohorts of volunteer students, one studying creative writing with me, and the other studying meditation with another instructor, and we'll test the students before and after.

Of course I was keen to solve as many pieces of the puzzle as possible with the test. "Could we measure the way the air seems to clench when students begin to be more creative – for example, could we test whether they are excreting some chemical associated with a release in energy?" I asked. Lenroot sighed, the sigh of a scientist who commonly encounters people who over-estimate science's capacities. "Your intuition is the best measure of that," she said.

So this essay is very much a report of a work in progress.

The following is a preliminary list where I've identified and described 30 factors of deepening creativity, which, heavily dependent on the body of work of cognitive science and my own practice, I've formulated with my students, who I've usually mentored a semester at a time: this is what I'd call an "after" list; with our test next year, I hope to formulate a list revealing students' assumptions about going about writing creatively *before* they learn how to invoke the muse.

- I know now the difference between loose construing and tight construing.
- I have swifter access to loose construing than at the start.I find it easier to accept a loss of control in my thinking.
- In the loose construing mode, I have a loss of a sense of time, place, sense of purpose, sense of self, sense of self-criticism.
- In the loose-construing mode, I have a sense of safety, so that I am able to forget my normal inhibitions and explore a character's extreme states.
- In the loose construing mode, I am able to discover nuances and perspectives of characters.

- In the loose construing mode, I am able to mentally play, to ask "What if…?"
- In the loose construing mode, I have increased my ability to cut and paste my own memories and give them, or parts of them, to characters.
- In the loose-construing mode, I feel not so much that I am inventing characters, but sensing /enveloping and understanding them.
- In the loose construing mode, I do not contrive metaphors, but unexpected metaphors emerge/erupt.
- In the loose construing mode, after some time I find a voice emerges, it seems of its own accord.
- In the loose construing mode, I am willing to postpone editing.
- In the loose-construing mode, I am content to abandon striving towards insight of what the work is about.
- In the loose construing mode, sometimes thoughts come singly, sometimes in flurries.
- In the loose construing mode, sometimes I feel my thoughts are not my own.
- In the loose construing mode, sometimes I experience a sense of bliss.
- Overall in my writing, I am not sure if I invent or create.
- I now find it easier than at the start to move between modes of thought.
- Overall, in my writing I am less insistent than at the start on analyzing my metaphors.
- I am more emotionally vulnerable than at the start after I return from loose-construing.
- Overall, I am finding ways to deal with this increased anxiety.
- Overall, the process seems emotion-laden, and these emotions seem to stimulate insights and realizations about the work.
- Overall, I now have enhanced visual and aural perceptions when going about the outside world.
- Overall, I now have an increased sense of the physical nature of thought.
- Overall, I am more open to increased creative stimulation from unexpected sources.
- Overall, I have increased awareness of other writers' techniques when reading.
- Overall, I am less focused than before in the outcome of my work, and more in the process.
- Overall, perhaps because of this pre-occupation with process, I am more confident about my writing than before.
- Overall, I experience writers' block less than before.
- Overall, I am more confident than before that in time I'll find a pathway through thoughts.

One of my Masters students, Lachlan Prior, wrote to me recently about invoking the muse:

> Losing myself so utterly is the greatest joy of writing. It's an ecstatic state beside which the mundane everyday seems illusory and paper-thin, a lesser choice amongst all possible worlds [7].

I've always cringed slightly at the use of words like 'ecstatic' in reference to the creative state. Authors talk of 'channeling' the book from the ether, of hearing voices, of waking in the night with the story laid out in their mind in a halo of light. I've always thought that the average person must reckon it nothing more than the mystical mumbo-jumbo of self-important *artistes* – but I have to confess that I've experienced all of those things myself. Writers use phrases like 'ecstatic state' and 'channeling the story' because *that's what happens.* They actually are the most apt phrases to describe the phenomenon.

It's perhaps unfortunate that these phrases so closely resemble accounts of religious epiphany. But I like to think that the Mexican farmer falling back in amazement at the voices speaking to him from the field is hearing not the voice of some obscure Catholic martyr, but the characters of the next great Latin American novel, rising out of the cornfields to greet him.

Notes:

[1] K Grenville & S Woolfe, *Making Stories: How Ten Australian Novels Were Written,* Allen & Unwin, 1991. return to text

[2] It is the central question explored in S Woolfe, *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady: A Writer Looks at Creativity and Neuroscience*, UWA, 2007. return to text

[3] C Stevens, "Crooked Paths to Insight: the Pragmatics of Loose and Tight Construing", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 1999. return to text

[4] The Influence of GA Kelly's ideas on creativity thinking is extensive : e.g. S Cipolla, "Construing in Action: Experiencing Embodiment", *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 2007; G Shaw & L Mildred, "Supporting Creativity with Conceptual Models*", Papers from the Knowledge Science Institute* Calgary, 1991; S Coombes, R Penny & I Smith, "Improving Personal Learning through Critical Thinking Scaffolds", *British Education Research Association Conference*, Edinburgh 2007, to a cite only a few. return to text

[5] S Woolfe, *The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady: A Writer Looks at Creativity and Neuroscience*, UWA, 2007, p. 67. return to text

[6] A Dietrich, "Who's Afraid of a Cognitive Science of Creativity", *Methods*, 42, 1 (2007). return to text

[7] L Prior in an email to me, 5 July 2013. return to text

Sue Woolfe's novels are Leaning Towards Infinity *(1996) and* Painted Woman *(1988) – both about to be re- and e-published on the soon-to-be-announced website for established authors,* wutheringink – *as well as* The Secret Cure *(UWA Press 2004) and most recently,* The Oldest Song in the World *(Harper Collins 2012). She has also published short stories and articles. Her interest in the creating mind is reflected in her non-fiction: with Kate Grenville she wrote* Making Stories, How Ten Australian Novels Were Written *(Allen & Unwin 1991, soon also to be re- and e-published on* wutheringink*) and in 2007 she wrote* The Mystery of the Cleaning Lady: A Writer Looks at Creativity and Neuroscience *(UWA Press). Her personal website is www.suewoolfe.com*

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TEXT prose

Simon Holloway

…is Forthcoming

Abstract
Writers who are academics and academics who write creatively are often to be heard contemplating the duality of their roles. They/we are living and working in an economic and institutional atmosphere where like never before creative products are measured in terms of Research Criteria and Impact Assessments. Whilst accepting the locus of academia, and their position in it, they/we talk in occasionally mournful tones about how writing can get in the way of teaching and how the actions and demands of teaching can obfuscate the writing process. If, as teachers of creative writing, part of our professional authority comes from the continuing practices and processes of the creation of art, how do we balance the differing needs of both sides of our professional activities? This story – if it is indeed a story – wonders what might happen if an individual finds the time and the will to write, away from the essential (and many would say reasonable) requirements of their paid employment.
Keywords: Writing, teaching, researching

Here is a fiction.

We have a man. Let's call him Joe.

Joe teaches creative writing at a community college, a university, an adult learners' group, an institute of technology. He is not old, but he is certainly not young, not anymore. He was young once, a while ago now. His parents were younger then too, back when he was growing up in Sussex or St. Kilda, in Richmond, VA or Rockwood, just west of Toronto. A modest upbringing, you could say. Father works in hotel management, having worked his way up from desk clerk as hotels opened and closed. Mother used to teach history in grade school, or French in high school. Not that he was the first from his family to go on to higher education: his brother, Michael, studied Politics and Economics at Bristol or the University of Cape Town, and now rolls in the rewards of a career in finance.

Joe has a history, then. This much is clear. He lives four miles from college in a tidy town house, drives a three year old Dodge, Holden, Renault, and is okay with that. They are tools, nothing more. He's never been one for owning things just for the sake of it, apart from the original Nigel Van Wieck painting above his desk, and he doesn't see that as an indulgence. He looks at it closely every day before he starts writing.

For yes, Joe is a writer as well as a teacher. His first novel was published eleven years ago by a small press, to little notice. His second, developed from his MFA or PhD, was rejected by everyone he tried on account of being too

difficult and uncommercial. “This seems more a novel of ideas than of plot,” one editor had said. “It’s fine to write it, but don’t expect to sell it.” Joe framed that letter and briefly hung it next to the Van Wieck. There was something about the way that the company logo contrasted with the call girl lifting the edge of her skirt beside it which charmed him. The appeal only lasted for a couple of weeks.

He mostly writes short stories now, in the spare hours between meetings of the Program Committee and Admissions Planning and Strategy Group. Publishes them in magazines, occasionally online. We could say that he’s trying to get a collection together. Not trying too hard, though. *Subway* was well received. *In the Mealtime Hour* too. He writes about place. Likes the hidden narratives of people who have stayed in the same location for years, home or work. There’s a theme appearing here which would work well for a collection. Perhaps he should try harder, contact small presses or university imprints. His Institute has a press of its own, mostly for critical or pedagogic work.

Do we need to know more about Joe? There’s his physicality and the way he presents himself: hair beginning to recede; chinos in dark colors; shoes that are nothing other than functional. He rolls the sleeves up on his lightly-patterned shirts. We could say that he sleeps naked, but this would only be incidental, a cause and effect pattern of the climate or the efficiency of his heating system. Yet he loves that feeling you get when you shower in the late evening, laze in a dressing gown or shorts, then take to the fresh cool of bed.

He goes swimming. Takes holidays by lakes or the sea so he can indulge himself. Sometimes on weekends he camps out by the river, when the weather’s warm, splits pine stumps and brews coffee like a Hemingway creation.

He’s afraid of dragons and unicorns. Not in a ‘whoa, look out!’ way but more as a sign of what they could represent. He also has a built-in dread of stone eggs that glow and hatch into winged monsters, but this is mostly because he’s graded too many undergraduate papers. The same goes for teenagers drinking, and people with skin that’s too pale. You get these things at his college, his State University, his Centre for Creative Studies, his Outreach Programs.

But Joe loves teaching. He thrives on those strange, vicarious moments when you can see their eyes widen and the tremor of a restrained smile. They get it, whatever it may be. He’s played them some song, Bryan Adams or Tom Petty, to make a point about imagery or restricted point of view. He’s shown them a Richard Pryor routine to talk about suppression and censorship, about who decides and when. He’s given them a Faulkner short story, *Barn Burning* or *That Evening Sun* or something like that, and they get it. He once supervised a thesis on Henry James, say, or Christina Stead, that was so good that as soon as it was published his student’s career was made. She’s finishing a post-doctoral fellowship at Cambridge now, with Brown, Berkeley and Melbourne all offering her a Professorship. Joe is proud of her, happy. With just the smallest trace of resentment coming to him in the early mornings.

He’s published his own critical work, of course. He and a colleague from his Community College co-authored an analysis of the pros and cons of creative writing workshops in social environments, *What Do You Think of This?* He’s written articles for the leading academic journals. Once in a while he’s paid to give guest lectures on the difference between voice and speech. Nothing like a fellowship or a professorship, but he’s working away as all in his position must, amongst the short fiction, the grading and lectures, the seminars. And in a weird way he kind of enjoys it. The way he has to change his brain over from

the fluidity of one to the calculations of the other. This is how he sees it. A challenge. A way to make the work feel new, involved.

So Joe has a history, yes, but he has a present too. Let's suppose he's written another novel. This is a fiction, after all. He's stopped finding excuses not to work. Evenings and weekends, sometimes by the river. Worked through the weeks when his enthusiasm left him. Put the letter back on the wall, next to the Van Wieck he treasures so much that he even made the lead female character look like the woman in the painting, right down to her green dress and chopped haircut.
It's called *The Writer's Guide*, this new novel of Joe's. And it's good.

It's very good. He called up his old agent, the one who had eventually managed to place his first novel with that publisher in Oklahoma. *The Writer's Guide* was not so much of a problem. Joe accepted an offer from an imprint of Random House for the worldwide rights. Not much of an advance but higher royalties. His agent was disappointed.

But the novel is good. "Hauntingly beautiful," according to the *Sydney Morning Herald.* "When you get to the last page it leaves you with an ache, as if there's a part of you that's no longer complete," the review from the *London Evening Standard* says. "Beyond hypnotic: literature that the rest of the century can only aspire to," announces the critic from the *Washington Post*.

Joe is not surprised by these comments. He's read many comments like as these about other books, and at times when reviewing been tempted to use similar phrasing and terminology, the same lifeless pleasantries.

Still, they're nice to read. He hears them too, from colleagues reading out the reviews to him in the corridors of the university, the institute, the community college.

Here is Joe's problem: the book is a medium-sized hit. It sells enough to make the publishers happy, although they'd like him to do more promotional work. They want signings and interviews, appearances at literary festivals, radio talk shows, readings. Above all, they want his face in the Sunday supplements. This is not unreasonable.
His Writer's Center or State University wants to feature him on their website. They figure, again quite rationally, that they can use *The Writer's Guide* and its author to recruit more students, more postgraduates. They believe that when the book wins awards, which it certainly will, there will be a surge in the number of doctoral candidates who want to work with an author who is as Great, Inspiring and Committed as they've always secretly known him to be. And they want him to speak at graduation ceremonies and admissions evenings, and give public lectures and master-classes, and attend outside events as a shining example of the college's dedication to excellence.

None of this is lost on Joe. He's a realistic man. He knows how the world has to turn. But what of *The Writer's Guide* itself, what could we say of that? What is it about the novel that has others comparing Joe to Updike and Nabokov, to Coetzee and Amis? We might say that his painted escort has allowed him to lead her. For the book is of a writer meeting her, writing about her. She starts as a vision of inspiration. A reason to engage. She turns, as Joe feels all characters must, and ends as his teacher. He has created her to show him how to create. Her green dress. Her chopped brown hair. The victim becomes the victor: a reverse that is hardly revolutionary, 'Hauntingly beautiful' though it may be.

Does any of this matter?

It matters to Joe's publishers and critics and readers. It matters to his academy. And it matters to Joe, too. Naturally he cares for his book. He has sat at his desk in the evenings, sometimes by the river at weekends. He has filled his head with her while he swam in the lakes and seas. He has a relationship with her and the book which no one else can ever have.

Joe is not young. Neither is he old, although he is older than he was. Not thin, not fat. An admirer of good Italian cuisine. Brother to Michael. Driver of a Renault, a Dodge, a Holden. Owner of a new wool sweater. He is a writer of short stories about place, has two more coming out in the fall, one of which, *Easy As It Goes*, he is particularly pleased with. And he is, it seems, once more a novelist.

He is also a teacher of creative writing. His students think he is a good teacher of creative writing. There is the Steering Committee for the new University-wide Assessment Handbook. There are MA and MFA seminars to write. Applications for admission need reading and judging, according to the relevant criteria. There are unit, module and program outlines to be reappraised in the light of the Quality and Standards Board's departmental feedback. Forty-four undergraduate papers need grading.

Joe understands all this, and he does not mind. This is the job. He must submit that book proposal on theories of contextual practice as well. But this is his other life, the one where creativity is drawn out of others, facilitated, enabled. When he hitches up his chinos and sits at the front of a class he is no longer a writer. The talents and inventions of his evenings don't matter, except in the way that they got him the job to begin with and now see him viewed as Award Winning, Ground-breaking, Important. His role then, we could say, is to formalize something that can't readily be expressed. To shape the two-hour seminar in prescribed fashion, doctrined in pedagogy and student expectation, in module outlines and Statements of Faculty Philosophy.

What has this got to do with his writing, we might ask? Does his writing of *The Writer's Guide* mean anything in this room apart from institutional decorum? Joe sees himself as a teacher. He is also a writer, depending on what time of day it is. Though he accepts the College's appeals for public lectures and his publisher's insistence on a radio interview with equanimity he wonders who is doing this, the writer or the teacher? He wonders too, in Composition and Rhetoric, whether this duality is even compatible. He can only teach now when he consciously attunes himself to teaching. He can only write when he deliberately forgets everything he's taught.

We might suggest, in our fiction, that one will inform the other. That experiences gained through one activity will be co-opted in the practice of the other. This might be a sensible conclusion. A statement backed up by cognitive and socio-psychological research. Intellectually proven. As inevitable and ineffable as a rejection letter from a publisher.

But Joe is man of ideas and thought. He practices his actions with living emotions. As he witnesses it this division of roles obliges him to compartmentalize. To dissociate. He can't begin to consider *The Writer's Guide* in any way other than as its author. He used to be a teacher, recognizing the requirements of his Institute, his Community College, his University.

Sometimes he wishes he hadn't written the book. Or, at the very least, kept his version of the woman in Van Wieck's painting for himself, like he keeps the editor's letter, rather than offering both his novel and himself up for public consumption.

Mary disagrees. She says it's a wonderful book. Deserves to be read. Besides, it's good for him at work. It makes them regard him in a different way, gives him some more respect. And think what it's doing for the reputation of the School?

Wait, Mary? We seem to have introduced someone quite late. She could be a sister, a colleague, a friend. Let's assume she's his wife.

Yes, he has a wife who shares the tidy town house and the waterside holidays. What else? She's taller than Joe. A lot? Perhaps. He knows every detail of her chin, has watched it change over the years. Mary likes cous cous, kumquats and new season lamb. She keeps a diary, we suspect. Red, small, hardback. A thin pencil incorporated into the spine, almost too small to hold. Certainly too small for Joe's liking. He never sees her write in the diary but the days are always full.

We will discover more about Mary as we go, undoubtedly. Now that she is here she must have something to say. Opinions. An effect. It's possible that she's related to the girl in the green dress. It would be hard for her not to be.

Here is Joe. Joe and Mary. A teacher of creative writing, a physiotherapist. A novel. We have characters, a past, a present. An instance and a context.
Now let's write the story.

Dr Simon Holloway has a PhD from Bangor University, North Wales. He is currently either a Lecturer in Creative Writing (Fiction) at The University of Bolton and a writer, or a working writer and a Lecturer in Creative Writing.

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TEXT poetry

MW Davis

2 poems

A meditation upon the poetic metaphor, in sonnet form

Were I not so allergic to flowers,
I might love you in a flowery way, like all
the poets have loved their roses, bellflowers,
daisies, lilies, mostly roses—your small

petals would be so delicate, but I
could be gentle, and your scent wouldn't make
me sneeze—I would be able to sniff my
fill of your sweet pollen. Then I could take

you from the soil and put you in a pot
near my window, and I could see you when-
ever I wanted. So until you rot,
you would be a very nice addition

to my decor, and I would miss you when
you withered. But I've terrible aller-
gies, so if you just stay as a woman
that will suffice. Honestly, I'd rather

you were this way, faults and all. I'd miss
our conversations, and the way we kiss.

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold

Matthew Arnold had a thought, I heard,
And jotted down a few lines on his honeymoon.
Hecht in New York thought they were absurd
And had a go at poor Arnold and his wife.

Arnold was a poet, after all—
A stagy, sentimental one, it seems,
And even Willy Yeats gave him a call
To say, "There's keen delight in what we have:

The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave."
I think I've come across that wave before
But that's the nature of a wave.

So Matthew Arnold tries to write this thing
Because he’s just been hitched—the moon is full—
He's all caught up in how the dark sea brings
His thoughts back all the way to Sophocles—

And suddenly he gets this overwhelming vibe
That maybe the universe is dark the whole way through
But love gives light enough, so we get by...
Anyway, I liked the poem quite a bit.

MW Davis is a native of Boston, Massachusetts who studied at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. He is now pursuing a Bachelor of Arts with a major in English at the University of Sydney.

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TEXT poetry

Brigita Orel

The house I will live in

The rhythms of my tongue lie
buried in the safe in my mama's house.
The poetry of home
is now foreign to me, not
for the lack of words I left behind,
but lack of meanings I haven't yet learned.
I don't know how to speak
and would anyone understand
or want to?
Hiding in a place with no windows,
no walls,
I speak a language with one speaker,
where each word is a (life) sentence.
To whom do I surrender my memories
if there is just me
and how could they resonate
on this echoless plain?

My essence condenses into rocks
that I will use to build a house.
It will define where I begin and end
in this world village of no limits.
I will open the windows
and let in the air, tainted
with foreignness,
estraniazione,
étrangeté,
tujost …
and make it my own.

Brigita Orel is a professional translator, with an MA in Children's literature from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and an MA in Writing from Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne. Her short stories and poems have appeared in online and print publications. Among her research interests are the translatability of cultures, translingualism, altermodernity as characterised by translation.

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TEXT poetry

Grace Dwyer

A novel idea

Cathy found the book hidden in her mother's negligee drawer,
Searching for lipstick and blush to fard her face,
Simultaneously hoping to turn her little brother into a sister
Until the *The Great and Powerful O* gained the attention of the seven year old
Which was capacious as a teaspoon.
She thought it was a sequel to Dorothy and Toto's adventure,
Before her mother assured her with the slightest chagrin,
The book was for women, not little girls
The magic it talked of, not bestowed by wizards,
But by discovery of one's body,
Before ushering her into the bath to remove
The makeup hiding her halcyon charm.

She wondered what the women in her Parish would say
If they knew she told her daughter about making love, marriage, courting
That there was no such thing as 'Woman's curse';
She would not burn at the stake for PMSing.
That she bought *Are you there God? It's me, Margaret?*
Before it was banned,
Giving it to her on her tenth birthday
Along with the instruction to only read it at home,
Preventing fussbudget Sister Anne from knowing,
Strategy Cathy hoped her own daughter would not have to devise
Until 5 weeks before graduation Lola told her,
The final task set by her English Lit teacher
Challenging the all-girls class to write a feminist and psychoanalytical analysis
Of a BDSM novel
Making Cathy realize,
That preserving innocence is no longer as easy as
Chucking a book in the fire during a family camping trip,
Because it appears 'on-the-line',
Concealment as easy as Control-Shift-N
The hiring of someone older, with less freckles and bigger breasts
To hide the literary contraband in a brown paper bag
No longer required.

If she could confiscate her mobile to prevent sexting, she would.
If she could find her a single boy who didn't watch porn, she would.
If she knew how to sew a skirt to prevent the hem
Being lifted above her knee, she would,
But all she can do is hope they'll climb into the bath together
And talk about it all,
Until the water so scalding, she used to sit on her mother's knees
Becomes tepid.

Grace Dwyer was born in Brisbane in 1995. She is currently completing her first year in a Bachelor of Psychology (Hons) degree at Griffith University, Gold Coast. After taking Creative Writing 1 as an elective, she is seriously considering changing her degree. On days when she is not attempting to psychonanalyse students, her parents, or her dog, she can be found flipping through the dictionary for a 'Word of the day', which is at the moment nepenthe *'a drug inducing pleasurable forgetfulness'... Poetry is her nepenthe.*

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