

Prose and poetry contents

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TEXT prose**Angelina Mirabito***Yellow*

My mother took the maroon curtains down and gave them back to the family who owned the house before us. My mother liked things bright. Before we moved in she clapped her hands with excitement as she told me my bedroom walls were white. She loved all things blank and yellow, especially when the light touched them; she said it reminded her of the sun. It didn't matter how many times I told my mother the sun was orange, she insisted it was yellow.

I have decided I don't care anymore.

I open the packet of double-strength garbage bags, swing my wardrobe doors out of the way and grab the clothes I don't want. Starting with the clothes from when I was little, I throw out my white singlets, skivvies and skirts along with the yellow frilly dresses and woollen jumpers. My mother folded them so neatly, but even so, they take up too much space.

My Holy Communion dress smells of mothballs. The material is stiff, a cream cheese colour I don't want to touch so I leave it on the coat hanger, drop it in the bag and quickly knot it closed.

I throw things out until the closet emptiness is large enough to get lost in.

It takes me four trips to the St Vincent de Paul bin to get rid of everything. The bags are heavy, the sun is bright but so long as the bags don't break, I don't care. I sit in the wardrobe and tie my hair in knots, as I looking at my room and imagine it empty. My arms hurt so I hit them. It's time to get rid of my sad clown collection. I let each porcelain face fall from my hand and listen to it hit against the bottom of the black bag. I remember receiving and naming each clown but not the names and faces of the people who gave them to me.

As a child I felt safe in the company of my porcelain clowns, they were my friends. As a grownup I think about breaking their faces and imagine the sound of their eyes cracking as I crunch them under my red-laced Dr Martens. Their eyes are always open. Their tears remain in mid-fall upon their cheeks. Those eyes have seen, can still see and always will see the mess I made.

I tie the bag in three knots, shove it in a cardboard box and Gaffer-tape the lid shut. The box is in my way so I drag it to the hallway for my friend Tia to pick up later.

Listening to the Red Hot Chili Peppers from under my desk where I always used to hide with my textas, face paints and Strawberry Shortcake sketchpad. Then the colours were my friends, purple and blue were my best friends.

The only time I spoke, the only reason I screamed and wouldn't stop crying was when I wanted more paints. In my yellow overalls, Velcro sneakers, and smelling of Johnson's Baby powder, I remember trying to climb the shelves of Big W's stationary aisle before my grip slipped and I fell to the floor

pulling my hair or a paintbrush. I felt my mother's hands trembling and wire-like around my waist; she picked me up and put me in the trolley with a box of paintbrushes and tubs of paint. I can still feel her kisses begging me to be quiet and her hands shaking as they wiped the tears of a spoiled brat from my eyes.

I loved mixing colours together but they always turned black. Each time I tried again and again and again; each time I made the same dark mess.

My hands didn't know how to shape the bright images dancing in my head. My mother liked everything clean. But every time I moved, traces of chalk, smudges of paint, crayon shavings and fingerprints followed me. I never said sorry to my mother or tried to help her with the cleaning. I just watched her wipe, scrub and spray until the house smelt of lemon.

My mother often mumbled to herself. One time I moved closer to hear what she was saying. Her eyes were fixed upon the white wall. Her hand shook round the neck of the spray bottle. That early morning with the taste of Froot Loops and milk still in my mouth, I was standing close enough to know it wasn't my language she was speaking. It wasn't me my mother was talking to. I closed my eyes and ran to my hiding spot where all my best coloured friends were.

That night I crawled out from under my bed and switched the light on. Without caring about the mess I would make, I began painting. The colours turned black over and over again. This time I wanted them to.

Even though it made me want to scream, I never told my mother exactly how much I hated the constant smell of bleach and whatever else it was she cleaned my clothes with.

Last years calendar remains hanging on my door. In my room it is always May. I crawl out from under my desk and pull the heavy suitcase out from under my bed. I forced the zip open, throw the lid up and cut it off as punishment for constantly flapping back down on my head.

My old notebooks are filed wall to wall inside the case. I hate everything the covers remind me of. I want to get rid of them. In handfuls, I throw them in the cardboard boxes I pinched from Safeway. I open one up to see if the purple ink has faded. Disgusted it hasn't even started to I shut the book and shove it in a box. I don't want to see those decorated pages ever again or even think of the days I spent going back over the words to dot every i with a light blue pen. Inside those covers are plans Tia and I made a lifetime ago. We were going to turn eighteen and busk ourselves around the world. All we needed was a camera hanging from Tia's neck and a sketchbook filed under my arm. We were artists, we didn't need university or a business outfit, we were going to spend our nights in absinthe bars and our days walking the streets of Paris. We were going to find Charleville to touch, taste, hear, smell and see it all so we could feel what Arthur Rimbaud felt. Then, we were going to paint it all.

I slept soundlessly in a head of illusions.

I fed ravenously off false hopes and danced desperately in plastic dreams.

Inside those naive notebooks not once, not even for a second did I doubt the hand I spoke with.

There's nothing real on these pages filled with quotes and photocopied paintings, mostly from William Blake and Van Gogh. There is nothing real in the stories I wrote next to them. Stories where I became: William Blake's granddaughter holding his hand while he spoke with the angels; the patient who tried to escape the mental asylum with Van Gogh; Christina Rossetti's daughter who delivered letters for her; Janis Joplin's daughter, she brought me a camera and we developed photos together in the

bathroom. My favourite story used to be about what it was like being Frida's little girl, she loved me so much that it made her cry when she kissed me. Every year I would sit for Frida, while her eyes smiled at me and her hand painted me. In between the pasted pictures of Dali's melting clocks are the pages that spoke of all the families I'd longed to belong to. Where I learned how to have fun and enjoy being crazy while being taught how to see the world with my own eyes and make sense of it on white pages and blank canvas pieces.

I rip this story out.

While I dirtied the paper with lies, my mother cleaned the house alone.

I hate the thought of those stupid people I'd wanted to be, they disgust me as much as the lives I'd wanted to live. I was ungrateful, my pages were full of words wishing for more than I had.

They begged for nothing.

I had no idea what I was craving.

It was only in paintings that I recorded things as I saw them. I remember all the excuses I wrote with and all the feelings I painted with.

With the rest of the notebooks shoved in a second box I push everything I didn't want anymore toward the back door. The now lidless suitcase is an awful fawn colour, so I chuck it on the nature strip.

Inside my room I look at my window. I let my fingers slide over the bumps of black electrical tape covering the glass instead of curtains.

Every month I add another layer.

I need to make sure the tape won't peel off.

I need to know the window is covered so I never have to look through it again.

Sixteen stupid and curious; I'd been experimenting with my mother's foundation, lipstick, eyeliner and nail polish. I wanted to see if I could make a picture out of it. I liked the way the lipstick felt as I pressed the red pieces of it into the canvas. I remember believing I finally understood why women used so much make up; the liquid foundation felt nice as I rubbed beige into the canvas.

I was letting the red polish drip down the canvas when I heard something hitting at the window. As I stood up the nail polish dripped slowly down my hand and spilled on the carpet.

I looked up, wiped the hair from my eyes and saw my mother's face smiling back at me. She was using the hose to clean the soap bubbles off the window. By the sound it made I could hear the pressure of the water was strong enough to break the glass.

The red nail polish had dripped onto the carpet before I realised what I'd done. Absorbing it with tissues was useless. The yellow carpet now had lines and blobs of red. My mother's face became clearer as she used windscreen wipers to get rid of the excess water. The sun was a strong glare behind her; it made my mother look strange, like a woman I'd never seen before. Her thin hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Her eyes, the palest shade of blue, seemed to stare straight through me.

Her hands looked breakable as they waved at me and her smile was so thin.

I promised I would clean up as soon as I had finished. I don't think she heard me through the glass; my she started finishing the window with methylated spirits and a white cloth.

I covered the stained carpet with the Herald Sun, threw the make-up in the bin and started with a fresh piece of paper. I quickly got down a basic charcoal sketch of my mother's face and later, at school, I completed the way I had seen her through the window in soft pastels.

I used old pieces of fence paling to nail together a frame. Attaching the glass to the frame was the hardest part. I made it look just like my window, only when I saw it finished, I realised I'd made a mistake. It looked more like my mother's hand was reaching out toward me, rather than waving at me.

My teacher Ms Daisy helped me carry it to the storeroom where everyone's pieces went until the exhibition.

Ms Daisy asked me who the sick woman was.

I stopped.

I looked Ms Daisy straight in the eye and even believed it when I heard myself say,

I don't know.

I let my fingers slide over the black tape a little longer before I remove my hand and turn away from the window. Leaning against the wall is a pile of my sketchbooks. I peel the white bed sheet covering them away, pick up my black folio and walk outside.

My dad loves camping but he doesn't like travelling further than where we live in the suburbs so he hosts campfires in our backyard instead. I hate the fire place he's made for him and his mates. After every solid night drinking, amongst the potatoes cooking in the fire, the smell of smoke stays in our house until you don't notice it anymore. Tonight I don't mind. It takes me three loads to dump it all in the campfire space. I rip my notebooks to pieces before tossing them in and slamming my black art folio on top.

It's the first time I've ever lit a fire.

I use the rest of the methylated spirits my mother left behind to make sure the fire works, light a cigarette and toss my Zippo lighter on top. I watched the flame burst, the mess burn, the colours melt and the pages curl before they coil into the flame. I watch the charcoal specs fly as I breathe in the smoke and the few black ashes floating in circles round me.

I put the cigarette butt out in the palm of my left hand and feel nothing as the stub burns into my skin.

Sometimes when my mother's hands shook, she dropped things, I always pretended not to notice because I never knew what to say. Even at the dinner table, when she dropped her knife and the food went on the tablecloth and tiles I always kept myself busy drawing blue ink pictures on serviettes so I didn't have to notice. I remember my dad watching the TV as he chewed his chicken. He never seemed to hear my mother as she mumbled to herself, nor did he notice the constant twitch in her left eye as she used the dustpan to sweep the crumbs from the floor after dinner.

I looked at the flames. Their shapes were made of orange and yellow.

I saw it.

I closed my eyes.

I saw it again.

The opening night of the Year 12 art exhibition.

My mum and dad were supposed to meet me there at seven-thirty. That day, Tia and I had finished our last exam at four o'clock and had been drinking tequila ever since. We were so excited and unable to wait that we kept rehearsing our plans over and over: the following week we were going to the travel agent to book our trip around the world and organise a work visa. We had it all worked out, we were going to witness the world in all its beauty and ugliness at once.

Tia was obsessed with Kurt Cobain; her piece was a sculpture made of plastic baby doll heads, melted together in the shape of an angel. The wings were a black and white collage of Kurt's face and his eyes were stained with blue food dye.

Tia and I were dancing round the foyer, and taking photos of some of the more serious looking faces in our year level. They were helping set up; Tia

and I were only interested in absorbing the moment so we kept ourselves busy photographing and sketching the frustrated facial expressions around us.

The piece of my mother looking inside my bedroom window was the last to be hung. It was an awkward and heavy piece. I pretended not to hear the girls, who weren't my friends, complain as they struggled with it. I took a photo of the three of them, straining as they lifted the frame and rested it on the hook.

By the time Ms Daisy opened the exhibition, Tia and I were out of tequila, leaning and slurring all over each other. Occasionally we burst out laughing at the groups of people discussing the artwork, while parents pushed their way through, looking for their darling child's piece.

Tia and I were sitting down at the entrance selling catalogues when it happened. The fence paling frame fell off the nail, or the string broke. I don't know how it fell exactly. But I can still hear the soft pastel portrait of my mother's face, against the background of the bright yellow sun, hitting the polished floor boards at the Kingston Arts Centre. There were people standing there staring while it happened. The frame broke. None of them tried to catch it.

It was my fault. I hadn't nailed it together very well.

The glass smashed and the paper tore my mother's face in half. Like an idiot I just stood there, in front of the mess scattered across the polished floorboards.

My mother's face was dirty.

I was afraid of my mother's separated eyes looking up at me from the floor, afraid of her strange eyes looking at me through the window. I was afraid of what my hands had created. I did this to her. Tia squeezed my hand and whispered, It's okay we can fix this. I ran outside and threw up. I didn't want to go back in there ever again.

Ms Daisy came outside and asked me if I was okay She tried to hug me. I hid my face in my hands and shrugged her apologies off. I told her I was fine and almost choked as I threw up again. Ms Daisy asked Tia where my parents were. Tia said they weren't here yet. Tia and me waited for my parents outside. It was cold.

I don't know how Ms Daisy found out, but at around nine that night, she yelled at Tia and me to get in her car and sped us to the hospital.

Tia and me could have walked there ourselves, it wouldn't have made a difference.

My mother was clean when she died.

No one knew that morning she'd had a heart attack in the shower.

My dad got home late from work. He waited for her to get out of the shower but an hour passed and she hadn't. He shouted for a response and when he broke down the door, the water was running cold. Her body lay awkwardly between the shower and the tiled bathroom floor. There was blood running down her face.

My dad said she looked so still. He said she wouldn't wake up. He said she was so cold.

The doctor never looked at me as he said my mother had died at eleven that morning. He explained the medication she had been taking after her nervous breakdown, over the years, had weakened her heart. He said unfortunately it has this effect on some people. I turned toward my father and looked at his bent figure leaning against the white wall. I couldn't see his face.

I held tightly onto the corner of the doctor's desk and screamed, *What nervous breakdown?*

After that, all I remember is the sound of the tap water running as I tried to wash my face off in the hospitals' disinfected ladies room.

With handfuls of wet paper towels covered in yellow liquid soap, I

scrubbed away at my eyes, nose and mouth. I scrubbed harder. I let my nails scratch away at my skin, the whole time seeing in the mirror, the torn image of my mother's face, lying alone amongst the splintered wood and broken glass.

My dad comes through the back gate with three slabs of beer and a smile on his face as he thanks me for getting the fire started while his mates continue laughing over some dirty joke. I help my dad fill the wheelbarrow with ice, grab a beer and go inside.

In my room I staple the sheets of canvas I dyed black last week over the white walls of my room.

I need to start again.

I'm curious as to how the colours will look on black.

I cover the floor with today's *Herald Sun* as quickly as I can.

I look at the black canvas walls and watch it all with my eyes closed and see an overripe orange, an imperfect sphere dashed in curves of thick yellow and orange paint, only slightly mixed together.

Angelina's work has been included in several literary magazines, including Muse, AntiTHESIS, Double Dialogues and, soon, Meanjin (March 2011). She is a recipient of the Eleanor Dark Varuna Writing Fellowship and a Rosebank Residency. Her three hour book was shortlisted for the 2009 Lord Mayor Creative Writing Awards. Angelina is a Creative Writing PhD candidate, sessional tutor and Christos Tsiolkas is mentoring her with her novel Disobedience.

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TEXT poetry

Dallas Angguish

Word of Mouth

Writing
words
is like slow-licking the one you love;
dragging tastebuds
from the hump of hipbone,
along the rutted plane of ribs,
 those undulations
 akin to tyre-ruts on an outback trail,
 a fleshy Braille of exaltations, beats, punctuations,
until you reach the soft indents of the neck
and lay down a blitzkrieg of kisses
and bites,
 devastating
 sensual
until,
unable to keep your breath,
you roll over,
 fall on your back,
and demand/beg to be treated the same.

In other words,
Writing is about tongue
and groove
surrender
and rapture.

Dallas Angguish is a doctoral candidate in Writing at Griffith University. Dallas is a queer writer of poetry and short fiction with work published in the journals Lodestar Quarterly, Retort Magazine, Polari Journal and in the anthologies Anywhere But Here (2006), Bend, Don't Shatter (2004), and Dumped (2000 and US edition 2002). His novel The Last Poem of 1984 is being published as an ebook (2010). His research interests are Queer Theory and its application to Creative Writing pedagogy and practice, and collaborative creativity in the context of writing for the stage and screen. lotus_rider@hotmail.com

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TEXT poetry

Barbara De Franceschi

Dilettante

I am an unthing.
Non gender specific
in variable shapes –
hell,
purgatory,
paradiso.
I speak in textisms,
blend in a vague state,
there is no embarrassment
between the dullness
of expression laden with pique,
or a sanguine tongue that licks at canto.
Sometimes I drift on dragonfly wings,
settle on a grassy spear,
iridescent
against the violet blooms.

There is language here
waiting to be defined
into movement and bouquet.

I am just beginning,
an adlib comment
devoid of organised speech.

Barbara De Franceschi is a poet who lives in the outback mining town of Broken Hill where she thrives on aridity and writing. Her work has been published in anthologies and journals in Australia and other places such as Ireland, Wales, USA, New Zealand and Switzerland. Barbara has two collections of poetry Lavender Blood (2004) and Strands (Island Press; 2009). seraph10@bigpond.com

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TEXT poetry

David Mortimer

Lobster Logic

*Intelligence is often the enemy of poetry
because it limits too much, and it elevates
the poet to a sharp-edged throne where
he forgets that ants could eat him or that
a great arsenic lobster could fall on his head.*

Federico Garcia Lorca

World is alive with the rattling of
All kinds of ants
Coming out of earth, metal
Wood, shed, yard, concrete, bricks
Ready to eat the poet

Between a library of lino, cups and
Rubbed watermarks and grime
The interstitial reckoning
Tracks sugar and logic

While the pure disjunctive
Furtherance of this mnemonic
Conserves kinetic energy
And arsenic

David Mortimer is working on a third collection of poetry, for which he has received Arts SA support. Mortimer believes poems are for speaking out loud and for carrying with us – as thought, conversation, music, argument; they should entertain the eye, the ear, the mouth and the mind. makenmelodye@hotmail.com

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TEXT poetry

Philip Neilsen

The Poem as Research

Problem: to examine contradictory cultural formations around the jacaranda (*Bignoniaceae*).

Case study: its association with seasonal anxiety & libido in Brisbane university students of the 1960s.

Methodology: the flowering plant extended metaphor of the poem draws on rite of passage models, eco-critical & poststructuralist allusions and tropes, self-parodying, nostalgic, or uplifting.

*

November, you brought the pain of error,
new heat, when we searched hungrily
the Thesaurus of the heart, only to discover
five lovers more precise than we.

In exam rooms we watched and in turn
were watched – until the gaze blazed
into the sun for love at last to burn
(as mediated by The Beatles). To paraphrase –

we went silly as a limping hound.
Pens still, stopped our essays on Romance
and filled our ears with melting sound
until we could hear the progress of ants

in bird shadow. Knew that we were meant
to climb the branches of desire
to reach too far in risk well spent
for kiss of skin, late flower, or hour

until night, when all rose unafraid
with drunken tongue from purple stain
to loiter skywards. And each word made
a rehearsal of hurt, and transience, and gain.

(Referee: some poignant signifiers of teenage love/invigilation, 'Nature' as linguistic construct, Marvell, Sexton and sensation, 'Being in the World', aesthetic manipulation. Imagery a little forced, but 'new knowledge' could emerge from such interrogation).

*Philip Neilsen's most recent collection of poetry is Without an Alibi
(Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2008).*
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TEXT poetry

Antonia Pont

Suite

I.

I could once have turned something into poetry.
But shouldn't poetry be that thing which
turns the writing person
into words –
that unpack themselves, shuffling
like living rocks, little
puffing rocks. Me –
a stream of letters, unpronounceable,
lined up like birds on a wire
screen-printed shapes
against the light of evening
(a straw-coloured, undecided
night). Awake,

and then you might read me
- silently, since a dead language -
and be happy.

II.

(after Peter Kogler)

That small variation in some bastard
pattern some concrete iron and plaited hell
could cause a snicker a
snicker in the perpen-
dicular and nudge and bulge and
rub itself against its own padlocked colour
its own simple blackwhite grating and
gyrating those angles into
curves
the floor drops away and I am
forgotten no
small pale creature
plodding his-and-her
I am rain, and the sleet of too much
travelling, and my legs
give way
I start to roll like the
grey of liquid metal like

the grey of matter inside
a religious
cranium
if I married sound would
my mind always
sing
this loud?

III.

tomorrow
I have no idea
of tomorrow
you think
you're going to
get through it
like a plan, a
knitted article, but then
on the way some heat
takes you by
the hand & you
dispell all order
all
doubt &
your feet now faster
than a burnt
horizon
turn
with lost purpose.

- somewhere above Berlin, 18 Dez. 08

Antonia Pont is a Melbourne-based, but often nomadic, writer. She can be quite swift at throwing a few days', weeks' or months' outfits in a suitable receptacle and closing the door softly behind her. She thinks she writes a kind of thinking-poetics, or inaccurate autobiography, or centreless soliloquy. Likes a nicely turned sentence, and a decent pastry. Does not drink coffee.
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