

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE
POETRY
PAMPHLET
2018



ISSUE NO. 2

JUNE 2018

Tom Bailey

Chief Editor

Michael Reiners

Designer

Alex Chernova

Deputy Editor

PHOTO LEFT
MAYBRITT SCHILLINGER

FIRST PERSON
SAM WILLIS P2

SYLLABLES
RENCHUN HO P6

ALLIANCE
PAUL EVEREST P14

WHILE YOU WERE ASLEEP
REBECCA WATTS P35

SPEECHLESS
DAN BURT P25

CAMBRIDGE
ADAM CROTHERS P10

SWANDIVE
PAUL EVEREST P16

LOVERS' LANE
ALEXANDER KUSZTYK P11

FRAU BADE ME LEAVE
CAMERON WALLIS P40

FORECAST
RENCHUN HO P4

CONTENTS

POEM
WILL HALL P34

MANICURE
DAN BURT P4

SWEET PEAS FOR THE WEDDING
REBECCA WATTS P36

SMOKE
ALAN JENKINS P22

FULL ENGLISH
M.REINERS P30

ON A GROOMBRIDGE HILL IN SUMMER
GABRIEL WHEBLE P38

THE ECSTASY
TOM BAILEY P31

BELOW ZERO
ALAN JENKINS P21

ARMAGNAC
ALEXANDER KUSZTYK P12

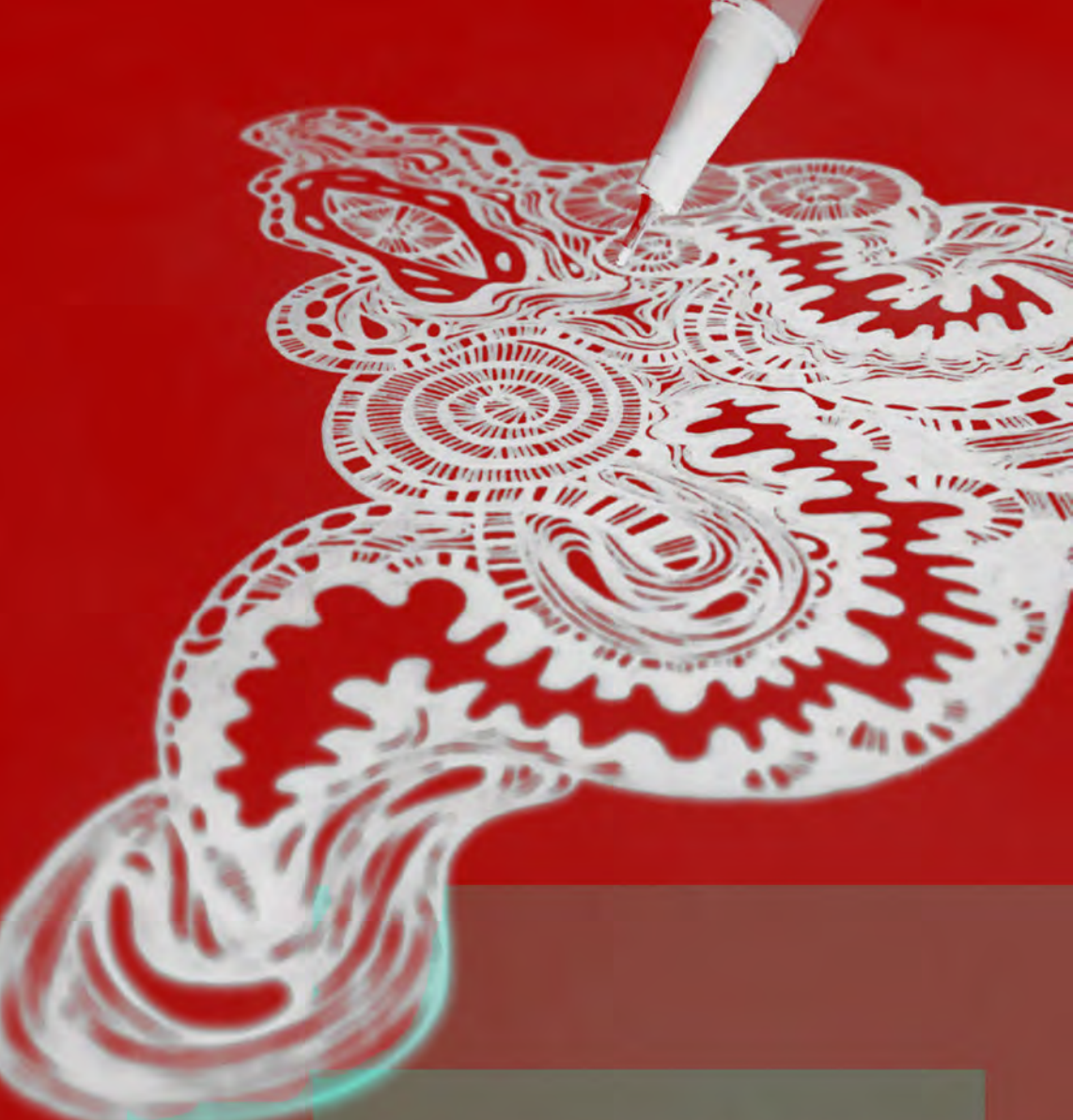
UNTITLED
EDAN UMRIGAR P18

THE COSMOPOLITAN GUIDE TO
ROMANTIC POSITIONING
CLARE CAVANAGH P26

TWO KOMODO DRAGONS
EATING A DOLPHIN
ADAM CROTHERS P8

AT LEAST WHEN
WE ARE STEFANO
WILL HALL P33

IMAGE SPREAD
MAYBRITT SCHILLINGER



a letter from the editor.

The annual St John's Poetry Pamphlet is now in its second year, and we've made a few changes. We've expanded to include Johnian art and photography as well as poetry, in the hope that our platform encourages various different forms of artistic creation and synergy. And we've also decided to include staff and fellows at St John's to ensure that our pamphlet fully represents the breadth of the college's creative scene.

There are some amazing poems in this year's pamphlet: from Komodo dragons eating dolphins to an in-depth guide to sex positions, there's something in here for everyone. With some familiar names and some new, I hope this publication continues to support and encourage members of St John's to put pen to paper.

Thanks are due to the college for their funding of the pamphlet; to Stacey McDowell and the St John's College English Society for their help; to Michael Reiners for his superb designs and Alex Chernova for her work as Deputy Editor; and, most importantly, to everyone who submitted their work for this year's publication.

TOM BAILEY

IMAGE LEFT
YASMINA ELLINS



FIRST PERSON

SAM WILLIS

I found the first-person
Somewhere between your coffee and your lips.
And now I will never write poetry again.
I will speak to you over the waters,
Bathing in the morning light. I will catch
The light, as they pass between us, these dreams,
These visions of ours; like the pebbles
Of water running down your nose,
Sprinkled on lips, Where you lowered
Yourself, to the waters' cheek,
To the waves' tongue.

FORECAST

We picked them off the road corner
mewling, cracked yolks, bolts of thunder,
who had yet to feel a dry roof bower
their patchy wet backs. By a few moons

it was their little kingdom. Butter,
always the siamese runt,
with a hazelnut and cashew coat,
was bullied till she left amidst mutters

from the school, mom crying salt
into wet paint. Peanut, indolent, unknowing,
remains even now on garden window
calling for the clouds to rain.

Sandwich picked up the slack,
bringing newts and lizards to the altar
of the fuzzy porch as offerings
to glue the days together. She licked

toes clean, she crept like a comma
around my sister when she felt
words had died. I slept by her sunlight.

Small tailless queen, morning maned,
fed the tenor of our youth even as she
reduced like a full moon shivering
to a crescent. I scooped her up

from the net of her body,
poured the starry egg
into a cardboard box
to hold her name.

We shovelled off soil from the roadside,
as I deposited her ginger shard
due for the breathing earth,
blinking away the rain that came.

RENCHUN HO

SYLLABLES

RENCHUN HO

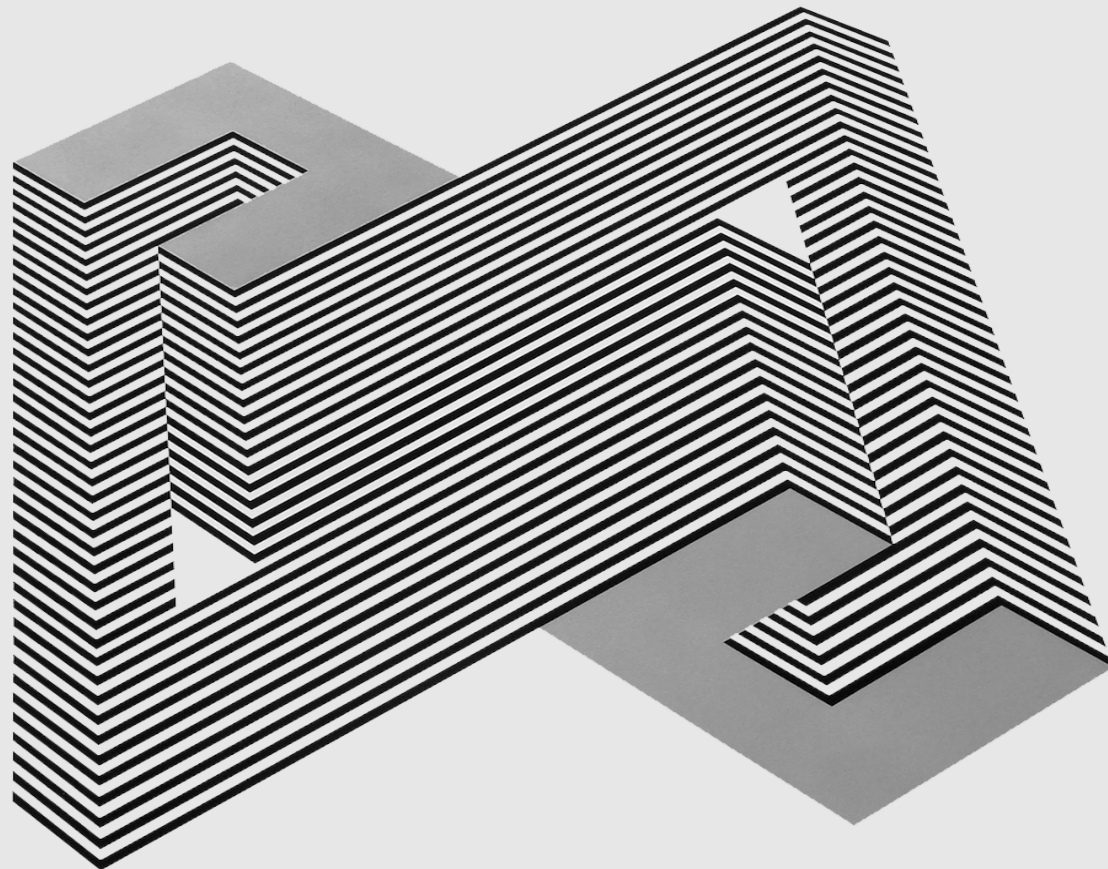
The mind was just a mass; inchoate force
left by ferns and bordered by concrete road,
a place from which you imagine you love.

Baptised in red during the lunar year,
broken but candid family stir tea.
Uprooted from the garden, it is too
easy to forget. Like the potted plant
catalogued in the library's dim sea.

You never knew what winter even meant.
Real cold comes off the anonymity,
muscle pulled by the cold street, horizon
of swollen eyelids. Hardened pictures leaked
from ditch to ditch, stones gathered in the mouth
of a truth you once sought. As a young child,
you trailed the red tails of guppies and dreamt

of autumn. But it's hard to recognise
the trees, old destinies like crushed orchids.

You have to guess. Maybe daybreak is to
hold the locus of change and press it like
a root into the lips of today's cloth
and whisper, just whisper now, you will kiss
tomorrow's skin : it will weep with your word.



TWO KOMODO DRAGONS EATING A DOLPHIN

ADAM CROTHERS

Everybody wave to the dolphin oh.
That's a blow. Not waving or drowning.
Perhaps for the happy couple some *vino*?
Or (forgive the impertinence) a napkin?

*

After, there'll be a mouth wash gargle
and all shall be well. The dolphin's just sleeping
the sleep of the just eaten. The dragons will kill
only the lights that live inside everything.

*

Big muscles' blunt muzzles bump plastic knives in
spaghetti shapes that might have been letters.
Although we cannot with confidence version
the crytzoological augury the snouts pestle and stir,

the language isn't unfamiliar. I believe all manner
of thing shall be ... well, a little bit meaner.



C A M B R I D G E

this long vac past: a lot of fatty rats
are coming out of bins. They spill as beans
might do when gone to seed, at heightened rates.
The way the Cam's a note, sustaining, bent
below the punter's fretting-finger pole
and granting bluish graces to the meadows
beyond which cranes are necking, on the pull
and town and make, I like. The rats, less so,
although their Chinese year, my year of birth,
could make me think their rising from such trash
indicative, if clumsily, that *reach*
is far from vain, above a valid path,
depart a basic sum. But, Xu Zhimo,
it's whom you know, you know? A damn shame,
chum.

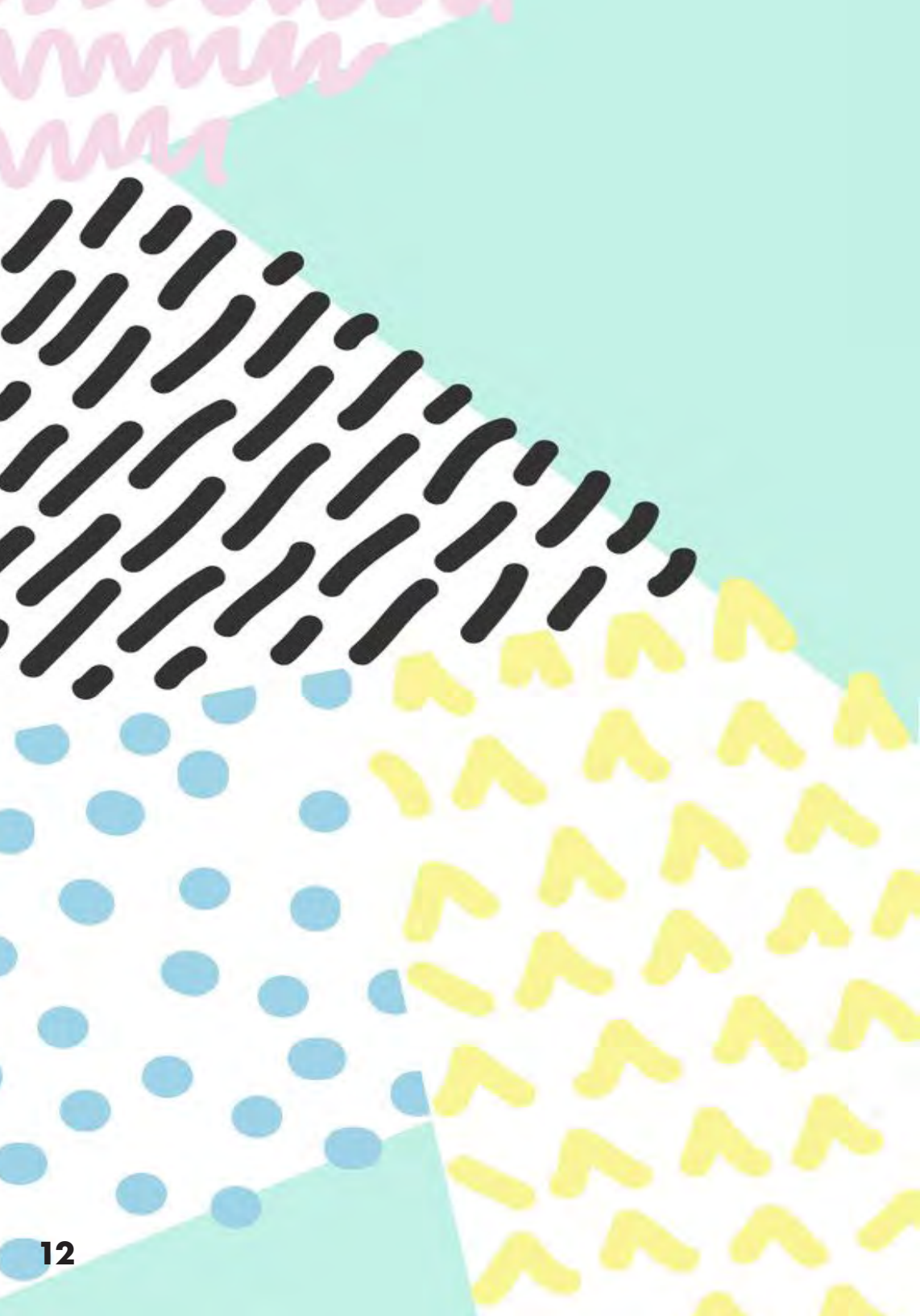
ADAM CROTHERS

LOVERS' LANE

Breathless, worked wet
With pole I advance, probing
Against bully current implacable
Stop at King's it says, turn back!
And so I submit, silly and weak
But some shout from about
French kiss? A French kiss!
Steer around then, one bridge two
Then foliated turn, a leafy caress
Moored, hidden in a tree's embrace
Us, embraced within Lovers' Lane

ALEXANDER KUSZTYK





ARMAGNAC

ALEXANDER KUSZTYK

Err to where the fair lady and her mare
Goeth back? Nay, onward! To Armagnac!

So in she goes, with horse, so hoarse and so
Fill me up, go on, up I say, Mary's coming round!
Shot, two, and another shot. Still.

Wings away. Forget-me-not the Cardinal says
As the Bear bares its beer bottle teeth.
We all swear some Hallelujah to our Queen
That Queen of the Air, Earth, such lovely Rusk.

What to write
Maybe a goodbye, maybe not
No, yes, say that goodbye you saved.

But laid, labeled, then la-la, now gone, forgot
The Virgin and mare trot, away they trot, trots
away!



ALLIANCE

PAUL EVEREST

You agree, right? We're in a lie. Ants are eusocial, a colony, a formicary, a pile of earth we can't ever hope to achieve. I ask you: so shall we use a colon to precede

this expansion or simply pile ahead, a dearth of belief? I'm confused. I hope you are too. I'm parasocial in my interactions, true. I consume your media - I see you have

a parasol, one shoe. Cinderella, I'll put you on a pedestal, a pedalo. I could be your gigolo. Give it a go - while you row around in circles I'll give you my last Rolo. I digress, though,

so back to ants, to analogise this alliance: I'll be your aphid, baby, sugar pie - romance me. Farm me, protect me from harm and I'll see you right - give good honeydew, love you long time. You party?

SWANDIVE

Lee had me for a mug -
schoolboys telling each other
to mouth 'colourful' at someone
else, just so they get smacked up.

Dwayne was well known -
schoolboys chasing dragons
Down stairwells, eyes rolled into
the other, way messed up.

And then, years later
I heard Marlon tried to fly
from a block of flats. I expect it
was fucking bliss though

for those few seconds before
the slabs leapt up to kiss his lips
to mush. Along those lines, We saw a body
one lunchtime, tarp flapped by the wind,

lifted to a man's head reshaped
like plasticine, flattened by the palm
of a hand. We feigned shock and
sickness when we got back to school

to get sent home early, and Granddad
met me with sugary tea, and I sat in
my room listening to Pantera, feeling
that I should feel worse, both

for the deceased, and for the farce
we'd pulled for a few hours of freedom.
My green tie on the windowsill, snaking
in the breeze like a dragon's neck,

or loose like a corpse sheet threatening
to fly free. My thoughts thrown
to the swaying trees over the houses
opposite, lost in flying and falling, but not

I regret, in regret.

PAUL EVEREST

A satisfied and satisfying breath
down the nape of your warm and naked neck
Plunge into the depths of a heart that once lay cold and wrecked
wretched not long ago, and now soothed and corrected
Bleached the sky that sat above the heads of those two
teeth entwined and slumped in the deep-dirt

Knee-up and piggy-back to the bruised thud of a loving goodbye
and can now only wait for life again.
I thought I knew what this would mean
Frozen and fractured – bastardised
It's hitting me now - a bleach gold wash

24.7.2017 & 25.7.2017

EDAN UMRIGAR





BELOW ZERO

(After Cattafi)

In November we dipped below zero.

The river
carried yellow plane leaves and colours
that hurt the eye: steel, bitumen,
the colour of the serpent
that slides through poisonous dreams.

In the cabin, already flooded (first
floor of the hotel, rue de Tours)
we put on our thickest jerseys,
that moths had made a meal of.
The only way to pretend we were alive
was to thump on our own hearts, then pull
the rusted Emergency lever.

ALAN JENKINS

SMOKE

My father, lean
face scarred by grief
and scored with what he'd seen,
read the *Telegraph*
in dread or disbelief

over his first cigarette,
narrowing his eyes
against the scrolls of smoke.
*All autumn, the chafe and jar
of nuclear war. . .*

As soon as we wake up,
before the first bitter,
punishing cup
of coffee, we peer
into a screen, palm-size,

and see plump,
privileged child-men
jerked by the strings
of Twitter,
their sad posturings

that could turn us to smoke
before we can even laugh.
*A father's no shield
for his child – nor
a husband for his wife. . .*

Darling, when we met
I was fighting for my life –
as you were for yours,
as we all are, all
the time, or most of it –

nothing is a joke,
nothing is so bad or mad
it cannot happen.
To that 'well-meaning guy'
outside a club in Paddington

who saw her lighting up
and told her she should stop,
Marie just said:
'I promise you,
this isn't how I'll die'.

ALAN JENKINS

Manicure

i. m. RMP (1938-2015)

They stitched him into all they did,
gatherings, holidays, vacation trips,
and went weekly to the care-home
where he'd gone to live,
grown too big for a parent to lift:
Let me see your nails, dear;
Show us your talons, son;
clippings plink in a bowl, and after,
perhaps, a push about the grounds.
But they were unsure
with him slumped in his wheelchair,
speech gnarled, neurons
tangled more each year,
what from week to week he recalled of them,
or when they came no more, would comprehend.

The widow rolls him to the corpse,
touches his finger to its lips,
then helps him lay a lily
on the rib cage boxed in rush,
that cold skin may help him understand
why only one, now, will come to him.

Two sit in his room, where three had been:
Let me see your nails, dear, she begins.
No, her child says, show talons.



Speechless

He was selling seconds
to sweatshop tailors
when they drafted him to war;
bolts of Bradford worsteds,
Newberry long fibre cottons,
Levi denims, Dupont rayons,
peddled on both shoulders
down Yiddish speaking alleys,
and cobbled eighteenth century streets.

A faded de-mob photo
shows him home a hero –
laughing wife and her best friend
nestled in either arm
below his emoji smile,
pairs of one-inch silver bars
pinned where his inventory sat –
weeks before he learned
his only child
was deaf and dumb.

He lived life in retreat, after that,
in his warehouse behind eight-foot high
mill-end stacks, can't-see
to can't-see six days a week;
sign language beyond his ken;
wife never pregnant again;
and no talk of his silent daughter
while we chummed stripers
on Barnegat Bay,
as if, like soiling yourself,
she was something shameful to say.

DAN BURT

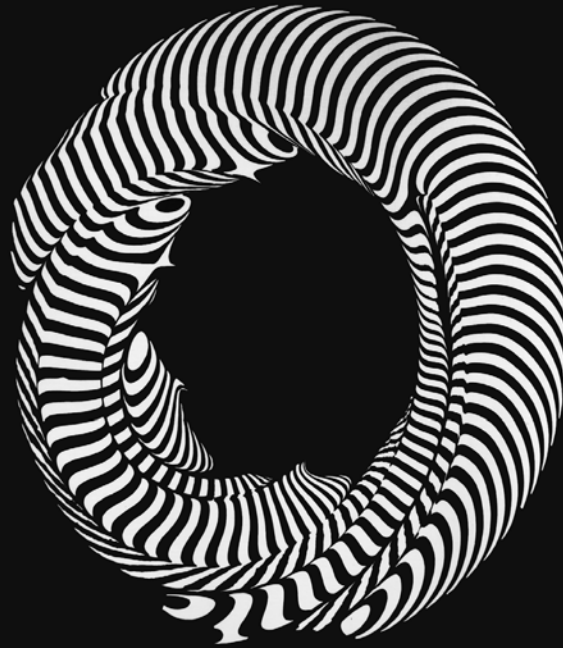
THE COSMOPOLITAN GUIDE TO ROMANTIC POSITIONING

1.

Bare feet are wisest for the following position:
Have one foot on the ground and the other
Propped atop your wardrobe. Have your partner
Upright behind you, both his feet on the ground
And have him gently hold onto your earlobes
Which are a potent erogenous zone.
From here you'll need to tilt your pelvis back -
The angle depends on your partner's height.
Press your face, for support, into the door
Of your wardrobe. It should be cool, solid.

2.

In a long term relationship, it can
Be nice, from time to time, to break routines.
Many men, as you may already know,
Enjoy a heightened feeling of control.
This should not alarm you in the slightest -
It's a monkey thing, lurking in their genes.
One option is to allow your partner to stand
Over you and cut up your credit card
With the kitchen scissors. Let the pieces
Cascade down on you. Men like to provide.



3.

Keep a tray of ice-cubes in the freezer
And when you're ready, remove four of them.
Inspect them for impurities, then place them
In your mouth. Chew, but only carefully.
Only till your mouth is full of fragments.
The next time you go to kiss your partner
Use your tongue to pass the shards to his mouth.
They will feel like very cold chips of glass.
Equally, pushing the tines of a fork
Into your throat can kill your gag reflex.

4.

Careful positioning must be practised
Should you make the decision to leave your
Partner. Attention to detail aids transitions.
We recommend packing up possessions
While your partner is still at work. Only
Take one suitcase unless you're very fit.
Have your partner stand between you and the
Exit. Place both your hands against your cheeks,
Scream that it's broken and that you've fucked Steve.
Your partner should then slap you once, hard.

5.

Sometimes, satisfaction just cannot wait.
Wearing dresses makes these times easier,
And tends to reduce damage to your clothes.
If you can, find a room that's carpeted -
This will become important later on.
Have your partner force you to the ground,
Press, with one hand, on the base of your spine
And with the other, push your skull downwards.
From here, listen to your thudding heartbeat
And enjoy the harshness of the carpet.

CLARE CAVENAGH

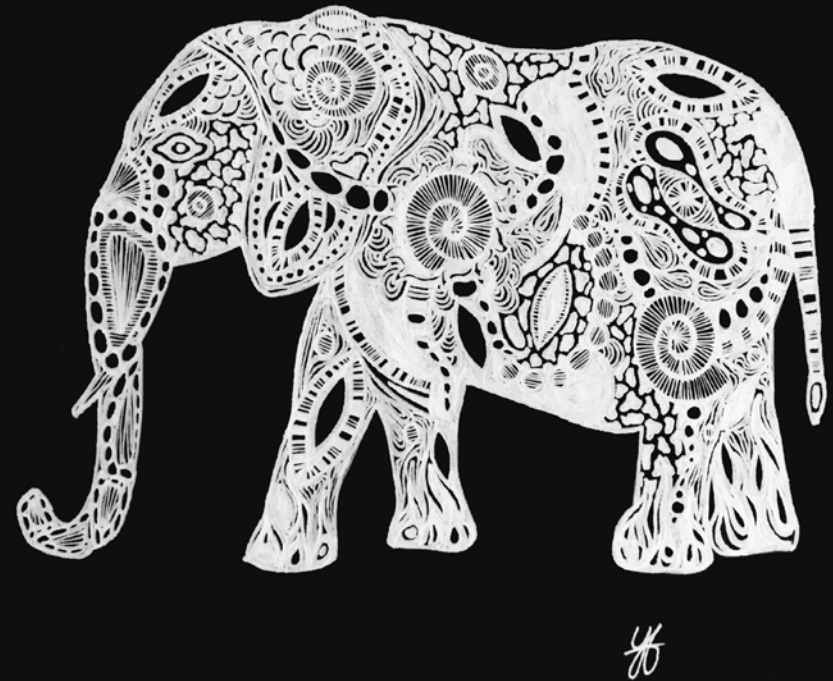


ILLUSTRATION RIGHT
YASMINA ELLINS

FULL ENGLISH

Breakfast is the most assuredly
self-important meal of the day,
it even has the nerve to brag about it.

But take a good long look
at a full English breakfast. Alarming,
isn't it? Who composed this vision?

White beans, painted red, lubricate the throat.
What is it that the Englishman knows
(armed with knife and fork) that I don't?

Surgical precision, innate, but at command.
Nobody is taught how to eat a full English best,
(Where would one begin?)

Is this the unspoken citizenship test?
You, and a disembodied tomato
exchange a disdainful glance.

Is it full?
Are you?

MICHAEL REINERS

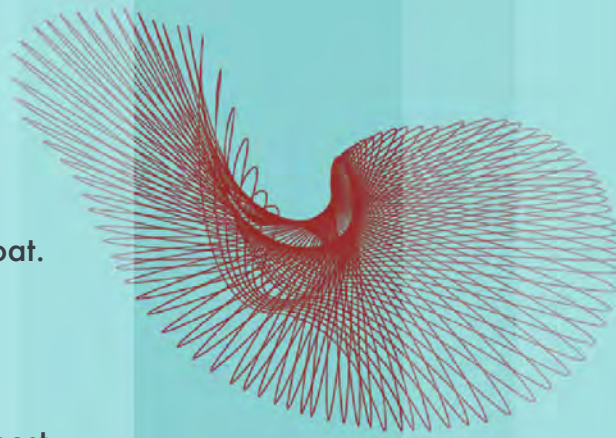
THE ECSTASY

we are drifting through every shade of
evening
like ink-drops suspended in water
curling softly upwards
breathing and dissolving

you fold into me as our lips touch
and our fingers fumble
in the darkness
to knit us back together

love is an old and difficult word
and we are dangerous, brief
say it, quick
before they pour away the stars

TOM BAILEY





At least when we are Stefano

For Stefano Evangelista

At least when we are Stefano
Particular losses matter less,
A circumambient lossiness abides;
That's part of being Stefano.

At least when we are Stefano
There's plenty of pain aux raisins.
We never want for bread or honey,
Stefano sees to that.

The last time we were Stefano
(Holding the Journal of Celtic Studies)
Buggering monks frightened us,
Because their sign said: Stefano

Yet each time we are Stefano,
Someone else's sin
Swells, and knocks us from our chairs,
'Til we are Stefano again.

POEM

How many academicians are mailing it in,
Redefining sin
While they claim (as I heard one say,
In the fellow's garden -
'I've got some ideas about how thought works' -
Just yesterday)

The nonchalance of a porcupine
The intellectual ambition of a hen!
(And where, amongst all
Their multiplying selves is a reasonable reader -
Such as we are -
To catalogue his amoris dauphin,
Among the things we accept?)

"Thought's collegiality between ideas" -
What a lark!
You and I both know there's no 'ideational content'
Rising above that din,
What chutzpah to claimso.

And yet - and yet - and yet - and yet - and yet

Tuesdays, at the border of the limit,
Just at the edge
Of my cognition, like Phryne ascending
Naked from the sea,
I see it plainly.

Putt, did you hear of Trochetti's demise?
What agony for her personally; what joy
For the rest of us. She had that coming, though, wouldn't
you say,
Reading Pugin as she had.

WILL HALL

WHILE YOU WERE ASLEEP

The girls came into the garden
dancing, whispering.
I could shout nothing -
I was dumb as a fish.

Through a gap in the hedge they'd come,
brushing by the leylandii's fringes,
whirling, spinning.
Why weren't they in bed?

Past midnight, why were they dressed
in their frilly clothes
as though the moon were the sun
and the black lawn dewless?

My heart professed it was a race -
a wrestle with the patio doors
to keep them out,
but the lock wouldn't click,

the stupid doors kept sliding
apart. Why had I left them
open, a breach in security
the width of a house?

Who were those girls
skipping out in the lonely hours -
with whose permission - to disclose
me fumbling at the catch?

REBECCA WATTS

SWEET. PEAS



FOR THE WEDDING

Such delicate urgings

glorify even as they
fall away

defy
all sceptics
all resisters

folding in over out
purple pink white

luxuriant
coy and complete-
ly at home

open to anything

head's weight
and heart's weightlessness

balanced
for a day

three days at most
once you cut them

flesh-like
softening
as they droop

and you look
not wanting to touch

REBECCA WATTS

ON A GROOMBRIDGE HILL IN SUMMER

The sun brushed past the Hundred Acre Wood,
And winked at me as it dipped from sight.
Light slipped from air, now thoughts of night.
Two lovers posed at the heart of a Groombridge hill,
Clocked my two loves, out of reach and out to kill.
I lost those skinny little whippets,
Again.

Thin muscle hangs onto their toothpick ribs
As they reach, dip, kick.
Sunburnt mud whisks to air,
Curtains of dust swell,
And silence tells me the race is on.

Struggling shadows bound for bronze,
Rise and fall and then are gone.

Of course I pursued those skinny little dogs.
A knock-kneed jog over their awkward ground,
In leather boots that once knew this land,
Was not enough. Nowhere near enough.
Out of breath and aching joints, I stopped.
But I'm a stumbling fool with no scent to follow.

GABRIEL WHEBLE

"READY TO BLOOM"
PRISHITA MAHESHWARI-ALPIN



FRAU BADE ME LEAVE

we are on the south coast
i was taught the sun rises in the east
our room faces the sea
how has it found us already
i feel the streaky light weighing on my eyelids
i picture the frame guarded only by delicate airy fabric that
blows atmospherically in the breeze
the light must easily have penetrated that
my thoughts survey the room
two bottles of alcoholic ginger ale
and the shreds of a dozen tissues
remain unbinned memorialising an ordinary night
of sickly debauchery
i note her phone and mine
huddled together under this white sea
of scraggly damp blankets
we never did find the wifi
though we snuck about like burglars before our tenant re-
turned home secretly im glad
the bed rests in the centre of the room positioned so that the
dawn light
bathes it beautifully tranquil in
the photographs taken at five thirty am
i rest my gaze eyes closed on her body stretched out like a
pre-raphaelite painting

thank goodness eyes don't hear
her left thigh is pressed against mine
skin smooth enough that anomalous jags jolt
her hair resplendently frames her face
and the sea reminds her hair not to bother with brushing but
now i think she cannot be asleep the sun must have awoken
her yes there is i sense definite movement to my left
she must be stroking my face
i wonder how long she has been up
i imperceptibly alter my countenance
as to appear more hollywood
my arm is already positioned above my head
i must resist the urge to flex
i will let her admire my form in all its
naked youthfulness
she jingles
my eyes fly
open
black cat
on my face
i read 'frau' on the collar
tumbling
black
fur

CAMERON WALLIS

The background is a solid, vibrant red. Overlaid on this are several large, overlapping, wavy shapes. These shapes are filled with a pattern of thin, horizontal white lines that follow the curvature of the shapes, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lines are closely spaced and create a moiré-like effect where they intersect. The overall composition is dynamic and modern.

ISSUE NO. 2
DESIGN: MICHAEL REINERS