

# Melbourne

CULTURE CORNER

**ISSUE  
SIX**

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## A Portrait in Pieces

A vanishing jungle,  
tottering on the crumbling contours of an ebony canvas,  
painted with two inflamed acrylic green eyes  
invoking the other-worldliness of an aurora  
and scissoring through the garbed allegories of night.

I have now lived with this painting long enough  
to discern a feline figure,  
heaving and pushing paper, bobbing into view,  
obsidian black on the pebble black portrait,  
imperceptibly, gluing himself gently to the green eyes.  
He knows his world in gloom better than I know mine in glare.

As I cloak this stripeless, spotless, melanistic miracle  
into the shape of a shadow or the shadow of a shape,  
a conjuror of the fading wild, an undeciphered dream,  
a rumour of a black leopard or the black leopard himself,  
roaming the forest of Kabini,  
out of the blue, into the black,  
he makes a move to evacuate,

unhitching from the jab of his neon dagger eyes,  
perhaps bruised by my brainstorm on his identity.  
I hark some moonless forest mud squelching under his feet  
the squealing calls of eagles, a panic-stricken sambar stag.

His absence  
is an aftertaste of danger yet a moment of mirroring.  
My trespassing eyes peer back at me from the portrait's left,  
at a safe distance from his green cynosures.  
In a while, he erupts back into existence  
and we turn into Siamese twins.

Is encroachment the most visibly invisible crime?  
He accuses me of disfiguring his frame  
behind which the barks have bled enough  
and the bald land is a scar,  
engraved with the epitaph-  
You had no time to spend in the jungles  
until you had no jungles to spend time in.

Shweta Ravi is a writer and educationist, lured by both- the simple and the spell-binding. Her work mainly focuses on the intersection of ecology, culture and literature. Her pieces have appeared in Teachers' Plus, Active Muse, [cwwriters.org](http://cwwriters.org), Women's Web and Ayaskala.

# Nathanael O'Reilly

## Golden

a navy-blue Audi Q5  
with a sorority sticker

on the rear window  
pulls into a driveway

a young blonde woman wearing  
a baggy white t-shirt

obscuring whatever might  
be underneath bounds out

of the SUV clutching  
a smartphone & purse

opens the rear driver's-  
side door, releases a golden

retriever puppy, follows  
as it bounces across the lawn

pauses to squat, shit on dry  
fallen auburn autumn leaves

## Scholarship

a thirtysomething  
man with curly black  
hair cruises the boulevard

on a red vintage bike  
brown leather satchel  
slung over the right shoulder

of his rumpled black  
velvet jacket, leans  
back over his rear wheel, zig-

zags to the corner  
of Cockrell, turns right  
rides north towards the library

Nathanael O'Reilly is an Irish-Australian residing in Texas. His books include (Un)belonging (Recent Work Press, 2020); BLUE (above/ground press, 2020); Preparations for Departure (UWAP, 2017); Cult (Ginninderra Press, 2016); Distance (Ginninderra Press, 2015); Suburban Exile (Picaro Press, 2011); & Symptoms of Homesickness (Picaro Press, 2010). More than 200 of his poems have appeared in journals & anthologies published in fourteen countries, including Adelaide Literary Magazine, Antipodes, Anthropocene, Apricity, Cordite Poetry Review, Headstuff, Marathon Literary Review, Mascara Literary Review, Postcolonial Text, Rochford Street Review, Skylight 47, Snorkel, Strukturriss, Transnational Literature, Westerly and The Newcastle Poetry Prize Anthology 2017.

# Dave Clark

## Personality Test

### *Personality Test #1*

*What's your reaction to wet paint?*

Stand right back to avoid flecks of pigment  
Getting on your polka dress.  
Get as close as you can without touching.  
Trace your initial  
Thoughts onto the freelance canvas.  
Lie down spread eagle and flap your wings.  
Pull up a chair and watch it dry.  
Instruct others to steer clear.  
Blow on it with pursed lips.  
Debate its hue and complexion.  
Bemoan the use of taxpayer dollar.  
Pleased they painted outside the lines.  
Twitching because they painted outside the lines.  
Pondering what type of brush they used.  
Walked straight through it without noticing.

### *Personality Test #3*

*How do you respond to urine on the floor?*

Step around it, stretch legs over it.  
Add yours to the mix.  
A swift wiping up and nothing said.  
March in with gloves, paper towel, spray, scrubbing brush.  
March the offender in with gloves, paper towel, spray, scrubbing brush.  
Didn't even see it.  
Glad that 95% of it landed in the bowl.  
Create a target for them to aim for.  
One day, they'll learn not to spray.  
Evaluate their hydration levels by its colour.  
Start crocheting a sign to hang above the toilet.  
Well if they do it on my floor, how about I do it on their pillow.

### *Personality Test #2*

*How do you respond to rain?*

Grab an umbrella, windbreaker, towel, gumboots.  
Frolic through puddles.  
Stoked you don't have to water the plants.  
It's raining outside?  
Grateful someone's dam is filling up.  
Calculating how many millimetres fell.  
Correct the people who say it's raining cats and dogs. It isn't.  
Mood follows the drop in temperature.  
See that the glass is half full  
Because you left it outside.  
Write a poem about the sky's offering.  
Plotting how to use the water effectively.

Dave Clark is a writer-poet who lives and breathes in Alice Springs.  
He works as a counsellor and enjoys reading, photography and  
giving voice to silenced stories. His works have been published in  
Mascara, Verdant, Adelaide Lit, Glow, Quillopia, Slippage  
Lit, Melbourne Culture Corner and Right Now.

@DaveClarkWriter

# A R Salandy

## Urban Individuality

Lascivious tendencies  
Disrobe luscious skins  
Until all that remains

Are beating hearts  
Doused in flammable fantasies  
Numbed by fiery crescendos,

But on as stealth turns seduction  
Into momentary respite,  
Can sentiment be seen to dissipate

As darkened glasses merge  
Into inebriated hands,  
Where nimety gains no traction

As rays crack gelid temptation  
And shatter reverie  
As blasé truths awaken

Fragile sensitivities  
To the woe of bird song  
Along that walk of contrition,

But jilted was she  
By all those she had alienated  
And left on reserve,

Until abandoned, she reflected.

Anthony is a mixed-race poet & writer whose work tends to focus on social inequality throughout late-modern society. Anthony travels frequently and has spent most of his life in Kuwait jostling between the UK & America. Anthony's work has been published 120 times. Anthony has 1 published chapbook titled 'The Great Northern Journey'.  
Twitter/Instagram: @anthony64120 <https://arsalandywriter.com/>  
Anthony is the Co-Eic of Fahmidan Journal.

# Priyanka Sacheti

## CAMELLIA, FALLEN IN THE GARDEN

They plucked out the hearts  
and placed them inside the  
soft bowl of earth.  
These hearts,  
having traversed endless rivers  
of fear and joy and grief,  
now sailing towards  
an ocean which does  
not remember the meaning  
of amnesia.

These hearts of ours,  
once the sun and sum of our lives:  
now merely quivering reminders  
of all that had once been.

An ant army carefully crawls  
across their sun-boned bodies  
on the long journey back to their palace,  
where they will feed and guard and  
worship their pregnant queen.  
They can hear a storm coming

but as for the hearts,  
they hear nothing.

## LEAVING BEHIND

A woman embroiders out  
of anger and fear  
and desire and boredom,  
writing those poems in thread  
that she cannot do with a pen.  
In her world,  
a pen is a *verboten* word.

A crimson flower emerges  
from an indigo soil:  
she hears blood  
thrumming in her ears,  
tsunami waves  
choking a cave  
that nobody knew  
even existed.

The woman embroiders darkly, diligently,  
needle-wounded finger-tips  
imprinting red hieroglyphics on  
impassive cloth.  
*Good*, she thinks:  
*I have left something of myself  
behind.*

Priyanka Sacheti is a writer and poet based in Bangalore, India. She grew up in the Sultanate of Oman and previously lived in the United Kingdom and the United States. She has been published in many publications with a special focus on art, gender, diaspora, and identity. Her literary work has appeared in numerous literary journals such as Barren, Terse, The Cabinet of Heed, Popshot, The Lunchticket, and Jaggery Lit as well as various anthologies. She's currently working on a poetry and short story collection. She can be found as @atlasofallthatisee on Instagram and @priyankasacheti on Twitter.

# Brinas Mihai

## The Kiss

from your lips  
you kindly drop a smile  
while falling  
it draws feelings  
i pick it up  
and press it against my lips  
then i give it back to you  
so you do not seem sad

## Collateral Damage

she has taken a chisel  
and carved with it  
the casing of a tree  
a hollow remained  
hanging in the air  
then he carved the casing of an ocean  
the abysm remained  
hanging from the sky  
he then carved  
the casing of a mountain  
a cave painting  
picturing him  
in the middle of nowhere  
and that was it

Mihai was born on the 4th of July 1993 in Romania where he still lives, in a city in the Western part of the country, named Arad. Mihai is the author of four collections of poems. He has also written Invitation to Poetry, Alignment of Thoughts, Crossroads. Thoughts That Bring Us Closer brings to the reader's attention a wide range of topics from love, life, and love of life to places in the soul of nature or in our own souls. Mihai keeps on writing while still believing in the power of honesty, goodness, and love.

## Only The Wind

The rain is falling upon the black, empty streets of my neighbourhood, and I am sitting cross-legged beside an open window. This night is not unlike so many others. I hurt, inside and out, and I think that it may be the residue of grief. It seems as though another parade of troubled everything's is marching through the long corridors of my mind.

I hear the raindrops fall on the rooftops. It is rhythmic and purposeful like morse code sent down from the clouds. I wish that I could decipher it. I wish that it were a message meant just for me, a plan or some gentle permission that might inspire me to be someone other than who I have been. The wet sounds, the cold smell, and the goosebumps rising from the skin on my arms reminds me of the many times my father and I went fishing in stormy weather.

He was always a little surprised when it began to rain as if Mother Nature had not followed the forecast he had decreed in his mind. Often, he would assure me that the clouds would go away once we got to the lake, and I believed him, no matter how dark the sky looked. He would tell me that the rain did not have to stop us and that the fish always bite a little better if the fishermen were soaked and miserable.

Sometimes, while he was trying to thread fishhooks, the rain would spatter against his yellow raincoat, sending tiny droplets of water into his eyes. But no matter how hard it poured, no matter how cold and numb the tips of his fingers were, he never failed to thread a hook for me. And the sandwiches mother fixed and sent with us never failed to hit the spot, even though they had a little damp.

I hear thunder outside my window and it does not frighten me as much as it once did. No, not since the day, my father and I were out in a small canoe in the middle of our favourite lake, and a mighty thunderstorm blew in and caught us off guard. The lightning danced across the water like yellow cobwebs and the thunder echoed off the metal sides of the canoe, but my father was unafraid. He handed me a pole with a wriggly worm attached to the end, presenting it to me as a knight might bestow a sword upon his squire, and we fished on.

I thought that his cool demeanour and steady hand was more than a match for any bit of thunder, and no lightning bolt could flicker brighter than the spark in his eye. I got up from my sitting position and went outside and I walked down the wet streets. I stood under a security light at the end of the avenue and I imagined that it was my father shining down on me. As I stared into the light, my tears began to mix with the raindrops sliding down my face, and I whispered, 'I don't know if I can sit in my little canoe and thread fish hooks and be happy to be here without you, Dad.'

I imagined what he might say to me and it comforted me, and I decided to stay outside and walk the streets a while longer. I saw a stray cat sitting at the crossroads. It was unimpressed with the weather and sat there like a sleepless sentry of the night. I regarded it and it regarded me, and somewhere in our eyes, there was acceptance. I saw robins come down from their nests to catch the earthworms crawling out of the moist dirt. I envied them. Their devotion to life was distinct and limitless. My father lived his life with a similar purpose and I admired him for it. I thought those types of traits would be handed down to me as easily as I had been handed a fishing pole. I often wondered what had gone wrong during the passing of that particular baton. Was I running too fast or too slow? Was there a fumble of some kind during the exchange? Recently, I have felt like I might stumble out of the canoe and sink to the muddy bottom, and anchor there forever by the heavyweight of fear and doubt.

When I return home and walk back upstairs to reclaim my perch beside the windowsill, the rain begins to slow until there is several seconds in between raindrops. I listen intently as if I might hear the last one fall.

Mark Binmore (born 1971) is an award-winning British novelist, author of 'Sad Confetti' 'Beautiful Deconstruction' 'Everything Could Be So Perfect' 'Sunsets Etc.' and many other books. In 2015 Mark was ranked one of Britain's 100 new influential LGBTQ writers. @MarkBinmore  
Twitter

# Gareth Culshaw

## YOU CARRY ME

You put the kettle on and open the curtains  
I was certain before you came I was a corpse.

You told me the local CO-OP has offers  
on soup and we should go before school ends.

I see your arms shaking the room free of dead  
skin as you flick a duster. The kettle boils

but you tell me to sit. Your feet are quick  
and I'm left to sag my past on the cushion.

Your voice fills the house as you sing  
with the rain outside. The frown I have worn

since I left home is creaking under the weight  
of you. Yesterday I clipped my nails

cleaned my teeth twice in one day and whistled  
briefly after you left for work.

At night when I close my eyes I struggle  
to sleep in case you become a dream.

## FED UP WITH ENERGY

I see the hole in the skirting board  
and the battery is dead in the clock.

My bed springs stopped caring years  
ago, pillows crushed in the middle

from the weight of my empty head.  
Curtains half-closed so the time

outside passes by without me knowing.  
I haven't washed my mug in a week.

Teabag stains on the worktop  
like rust colouring the marble design.

Last week the girlfriend changed my bread  
sprayed lavender mist around the house

swept the carpets of moonlight. I waited  
until she left to sleep another week, watch

a black galaxy of mould grow around  
the window. Hear my knees tut on standing  
up let them sigh on falling back down.

Gareth lives in Wales. He has two collections by FutureCycle,  
The Miner & A Bard's View. He is a current student at  
Manchester Met.

# Jake Sheff

## Candlelight in Paris with Pecan Delights

“France, though armed to the teeth, is pacifist to the core.” Winston Churchill, 1932

Look at the Seine! Those worn-out waters of woe  
Act dry, the waves have roots. It flows like someone  
In a mad rush to run from God. Let's say a toast,

From the depths of our rose-roasted hearts, to the fish  
That jumped from the water – before religious  
Self-restraint was born – and caught an eagle for

Dinner. Do you understand yet? Is your ear a funeral  
Pyre for any truth not sung or strung on the lyre?  
The Louvre's I think is the greatest; its fire wants to

Be cold, and it never heard of paradoxical intention!  
It's easy to forget, when tasting crepes, that everything  
Is doomed. It's easy to forget, when counting steps

In the Eiffel Tower, the cost of fatal certainty is vital  
Wonder. Memories poignantly hint at heaven's  
Pont Neuf. The Arc de Triomphe whispers to the ears

In the back of your eyes...Are you satisfied yet?  
Is your ear a funeral pyre for any truth not sung or  
Strung on the lyre? The dogs on the banks of the Seine

Can smell the sommelier in history's restaurant today.  
Wise decisions leave a bright-pinkish and frothy  
Trail. The wind repeats some runic, magic numbers,

But my ears are drunk on the groans of a radiant,  
Sacred tree. At Notre Dame Cathedral, when you  
Touched the cold knob inside yourself, it felt like

The sound of a loud horn. You can't kill your talent's  
Desire to conform without this radiant, sacred key  
Called guilt. Do you understand yet? My great agony,

Throwing its shoes in the river's pre-reflective axiology,  
Needs a byword for miracles. Sometimes, on the Champs-  
Élysées, all the smartest people reject the best ideas.

## An Apoplectic Paeon to San Miguel de Allende

A city's love is broken purity. The purest love destroys itself, available to all. A conch of piety compels the candy to be sweeter. By necessity, archangels travel more like man than sunlight here, time much more like seeds. *Elotes* erase terror, truth's groomsman. Church bells pillage conflict, their hemp. *Domingo* and *Lunes* hold hands before the *Museo Histórico*, an oceanic triumph. Ben shopped for chiffon reassurance. The green flapping of white wings caught the clouds' attention as they drifted underneath a convent. Hours fell apart as sunlight fell together on the *Jardín Botánico*. Stray dogs hid their frominess like overrated trees. And love can't help but bay like hedonistic yesterday. It's all just kind of daydreams reconciled with green, inconsolable stars, a place to sing more seconds than you'll live. The blocks are a slideshow of cobblestone chords and pastel melodies. A scoffer envies all it has to offer, the epitome of chapters.

*La primavera trepa  
los árboles con las manos  
sangrando. Mi amor  
espera en la hora verde.*

Jake Sheff is a pediatrician in Oregon and a veteran of the US Air Force. He's married with a daughter and six pets. Poems of Jake's are in *Radius*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Cossack Review* and elsewhere. He won 1st place in the 2017 SFPA speculative poetry contest and a Laureate's Choice prize in the 2019 Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest. Past poems and short stories have been nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology and the Pushcart Prize. His chapbook is "Looting Versailles" (Alabaster Leaves Publishing).

# Yuu Ikeda

## “Life Thaws”

Like ice that soaks in whiskey,  
life thaws,  
burning silently,  
wandering passionately

It leaves drops of hope and despair  
on the surface of a glass,  
and thaws with regret

It helps to make people drunk  
moderately sometimes violently,  
then,  
it vanishes

People must not forget  
its coldness, and its touch  
People must not forget  
its transience, and its weakness

## “In Ripples”

In ripples,  
I'm afloat,  
letting beats of my blood drift

This cruel ripples  
that have no marks and signs  
try to stop beats of my blood  
by fears and impatience

But,  
I can go anywhere  
because  
I'm cocooned in  
a silent blanket of ripples  
and  
I lost energy  
to open my eyelids  
that are about to sink

Yuu Ikeda is a Japan-based poet. She writes poetry on her website. <https://poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/>  
Her published poems are “Sinful Silhouette” in Rigorous  
“Broken Pieces of the Truth” in Briefly Zine, “A Flickering Light” in Kalonopia, “The Shadow of A Cross” in Moon Magazine and more.

Once again we thank all our lovely contributors for their support and submissions, and to everyone taking the time to read all the amazing poems and stories we receive!

As always we would like to acknowledge the original custodians of the land we live and work upon, and pay our respect to all indigenous peoples past and present.

*Melbourne*

CULTURE CORNER