Term Break

By Sue Wootton
(Editor of Corpus.NZ, an online journal about medicine and the humanities)

Condom near the see-saw in the morning rain: frail
as an angel's pericardium flayed from an angel's heart, fallen
from last night's sky. Dropped.

There's a boy waking late today and stretching: raw
where he didn't expect it, and a girl, elsewhere, solitaire,
owning to herself: bereft.
When Albert Murray said
the second law adds up to
the blues that in other words
ain’t nothing nothing he meant it

not quite the way my pops says
nomads don’t show emotions
but more how my grandmother
warned that men like women

with soft hands blood red
nails like how Mingus meant
truth if you had time for it
facts if you got no time that

years pass. Zero
one two three and
the man you used
to flirt with you can
no longer flirt with
thank goodness.

He’s now a man
you can’t wear
your jaw out on

about weather
news or work

a perfect
strawberry

buried
beneath

a peck.
Double Slit
By Rushi Vyas

On the tongue’s gnarled bark
floating over basement concrete, light
scatters grey through the transom above
my dead Bapu. Stiff as sugarcane,
stand. Golden beams carry dust
to his noose-ejected tongue. Light
molds rigored tissue into tumor,
frames my metastatic tremble: no.

Think of light: my body approaching—
now wave; his hanging—now particle.
When I reach for his pulse,
I collapse. Behind the door’s double slit,
the suspended body dies when seen.
Perhaps, if I look away—

No.

Two days earlier, in sunlight, in the car,
Bapu closer to my throat
than his mind. One moment, shaking,
cursing his goddamn son. The next,
still apology, open palm
caressing his bachu’s flat head.
The visible spectrum flutters in rearview,

no.
Blink: phantasm; flicker: shadow; quiver: basement furnace burning behind the neck, fire thieving his body to warm our home. I offer prasad to the murti of his mangled tongue, pour milk past hungry mouths into the gutter. Across the globe, monks leap from mountains to return as rain. The prayer’s scaffold falls.

*No.*

I can only pray his tongue is tumor before my gaze. It is just a dead organ strung by electric cable to the ceiling. In the grey light, there is no mantra, but the wave function collapse—the signifier claiming the body it calls.
I didn’t make these verses because I wanted to rival that fellow, or his poems, in artistry—I knew that wouldn’t be easy—but to test what certain dreams of mine might be saying and to acquit myself of any impiety, just in case they might be repeatedly commanding me to make this music.—Plato, Phaedo

Viewed from space, the Chilean volcano blooms.

I cannot see it. It’s a problem of scale. History—the branch of knowledge dealing with past events; a continuous, systematic narrative of; aggregate deeds; acts, ideas, events that will shape the course of the future; immediate but significant happenings; finished, done with—“he’s history.”

Calbuco: men shoveling ash from the street.

Third time in a week. And counting.

Infinite antithesis. Eleven miles of ash in the air. What to call it—just “ash.” They flee to Ensenada.
The power of motives does not proceed directly from the will—

a changed form of knowledge. Wind pushing

clouds toward Argentina. Knowledge is merely involved.

Ash falls, it is falling, it has fallen. Will fall. Already flights
cancelled in Buenos Aires. I want to call it snow—

what settles on the luma trees, their fruit black, purplish black,

soot-speckled, hermaphroditic—if this book is unintelligible

and hard on the ears—the oblong ovals of its leaves.

Amos, fragrant. Family name Myrtus. The wood is extremely hard.

••

Ash falling on the concrete, falling on cars, ash

on the windshields, windows, yards. They have lost

all sense of direction. They might as well be deep

in a forest or down in a well. They do not comprehend

the fundamental principles. They have nothing in their heads.

••

The dream kept

urging me on to do
what I was doing—

to make music—

since philosophy,

in my view, is

the greatest music.

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_History_—from the Greek _historia_, learning or knowing by inquiry.

_Historein_ (v.) to ask. _The asking is not idle_. From the French _histoire_, story.

_Histor_ (Gk.) one who sees. _It is just a matter of what we are looking for._
After the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone and, as anticipated, their culling of deer, trees grew beyond the deer stunt of the midcentury. In their up reach songbirds nested, who scattered seed for underbrush, and in that cover warrened snowshoe hare. Weasel and water shrew returned, also vole, and so came soon hawk and falcon, bald eagle, kestrel, and with them hawk shadow, falcon shadow. Eagle shade and kestrel shade haunted newly berried runnels where deer no longer rummaged, cautious as they were, now, of being surprised by wolves. Berries brought bear, while undergrowth and willows, growing now right down to the river, brought beavers, who dam. Muskrats came to the dams, and tadpoles. Came, too, the night song of the fathers of tadpoles. With water striders, the dark gray American dipper bobbed in fresh pools of the river, and fish stayed, and the bear, who fished, also culled deer fawns and to their kill scraps came vulture and coyote, long gone in the region until now, and their scat scattered seed, and more trees, brush, and berries grew up along the river that had run straight and so flooded but thus dammed, compelled to meander, is less prone to overrun. Don’t you tell me this is not the same as my story. All this life born from one hungry animal, this whole, new landscape, the course of the river changed, I know this. I reintroduced myself to myself, this time a mother. After which, nothing was ever the same.
In a dream, two lovers’ thighs scythe around each others’ centers.
Spring again!

A scientist grafts eyes onto the tails of blind tadpoles.
It works. The proof is the tadpoles can now follow rotating optical patterns. Nervous systems rebooted, they swim into the fluorescent light.

Once the laboratories begin hatching bombs, the pond scum and lilies, their slick, hairlike roots, are left naked in buckets. The room of the world shakes. If you see me from there, there where I have lost you, here is a picture of my body, bright with data.
Love at Thirty-Two Degrees
Katherine Larson

I

Today I dissected a squid,
the late acacia tossing its pollen
across the black of the lab bench.
In a few months the maples
will be bleeding. That was the thing:
there was no blood
only textures of gills creased like satin,
suction cups as planets in rows. Be careful
not to cut your finger, he says. But I’m thinking
of fingertips on my lover’s neck
last June. Amazing, hearts.
This brachial heart. After class,
I stole one from the formaldehyde
& watched it bloom in my bathroom sink
between cubes of ice.

II

Last night I threw my lab coat in the fire
& drove all night through the Arizona desert
with a thermos full of silver tequila.

It was the last of what we bought
on our way back from Guadalajara—
desert wind in the mouth, your mother’s
beat-up Honda, agaves
twisting up from the soil
like the limbs of cephalopods.

Outside of Tucson, saguaros so lovely
considering the cold, & the fact that you
weren’t there to warm me.
Suddenly drunk I was shouting that I wanted to see the stars
as my ancestors used to see them—

to see the godawful blue as Aurvandil’s frostbitten toe.
Then, there is the astronomer’s wife
ascending stairs to her bed.

The astronomer gazes out,
one eye at a time,
to a sky that expands
even as it falls apart
like a paper boat dissolving in bilge.
Furious, fuming stars.

When his migraine builds &
lodges its dark anchor behind

the eyes, he fastens the wooden buttons
of his jacket, & walks
outside with a flashlight
to keep company with the barn owl
who stares back at him with eyes
that are no greater or less than

a spiral galaxy.
The snow outside

is white & quiet
as a woman’s slip

against cracked floorboards.
So he walks to the house

inflamed by moonlight, & slips
into the bed with his wife

her hair & arms all
in disarray
like fish confused by waves.

IV

Science—

beyond pheromones, hormones, aesthetics of bone,
every time I make love for love’s sake alone,

I betray you.
[After a head trauma, distance]

by Rosalie Moffett

After a head trauma, distance
is one measurement of injury: across small breaks,
the nerves regrow.

Spanning large gaps requires silk grafts:
spider threads
ensheathed in nerve cells, new suspension bridges

between the word flood and the rush
of rising sea water. This science reveals the body
sees the silk as kindred,

absorbs it, so there is no ensuing infection.
It is easy to imagine the brain
as a meshwork of silk rope bridges,

perhaps easier as a city or a field of grass.
A lone apricot tree, its orange fruits flaming up
like ideas—
Up early for the long drive home, I become aware of the orb-weavers’ webs built between parallel power lines—

they gleam in the streetlamp, beaded with what looks like their own tiny orb-lights, solar systems strung around the flickering white.

All those moths roving dumbly towards the ersatz moon, their navigation gummed up with the modern world, and the spiders, feasting, clinging between the spiral-bound wires, the electricity—and me, pre-coffee, dumbstruck in the brown-dark.

Human voltage is everything. It’s our hurt, travelling to the brain, it’s our heart, in fear quickening its pace. This electricity, lineless,

jumps cell to cell—
each cell, like a castle, flings up its portcullis, potassium gets out, sodium gets in,

and this mix creates a charge that blasts ajar the next door, chain reaction that takes the spark where it needs to go.

I need to understand this, standing under the webs between the wires, because I can see her better if I can see into her:

electricity gone berserk, wrong turns tugging her body into its spasms, rickety system flashing with pain and information. I’m prone to think of it among the still shapes of early morning, the spiders in their jeweled territories, the power lines taking electricity to the TVs, the toasters and coffee makers, everything about to wake up.