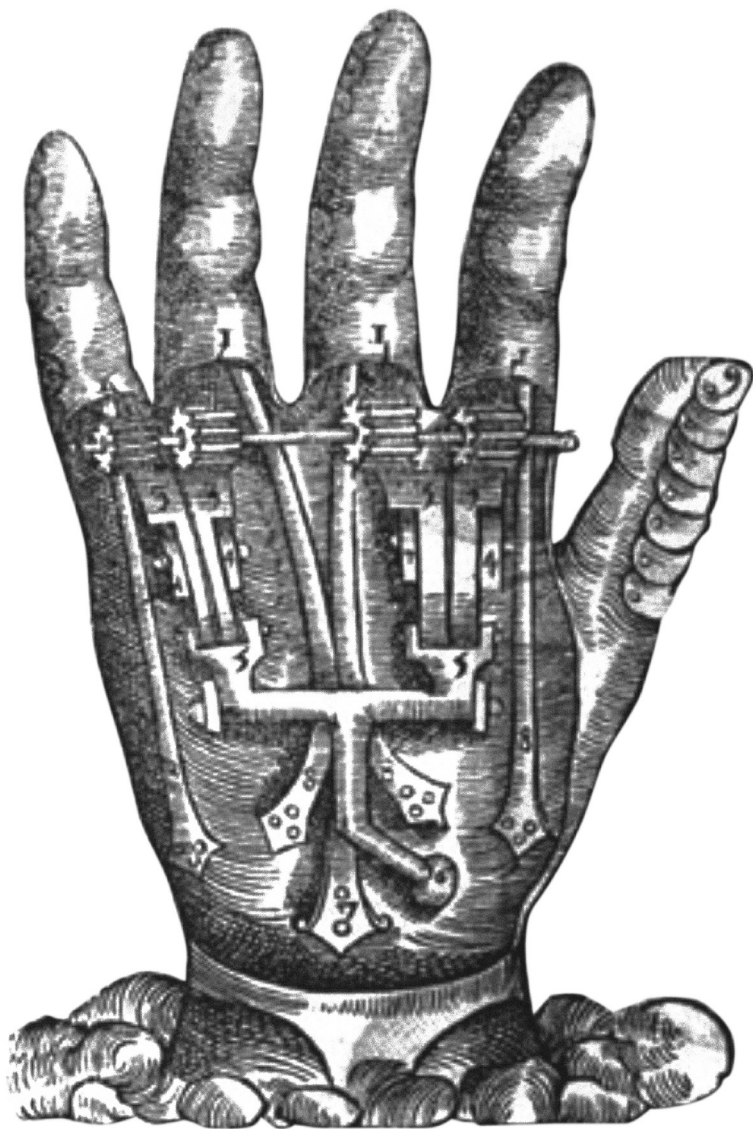


“COTTONMOUTH”



SPIT DICTION

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COTTONMOUTH

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Department of
**Culture and
the Arts**



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UNCOMMITTED BUSINESS

Glen Phillips

The jiggling of a public bus or subway train
can induce in pubescent youth a call to arms,
or rather, a member upstanding in the house.
This is but a prelude to calf-love time, when
he blunders into the new arcadia of glands,
jetting ripe hormones into a lad's life, just
come up from the farm. That's not bad,
but once in town and gown he must learn
to sit still, grin and not bare it, though
temptress tutors swing skirts, cross and uncross
legs. This may seriously distract. So our young
hero wilfully suspends disbelief at her reproof
for his crass literal reading of, say, one of
Donne's daring sonnets or majestic drum beat
of William Butler Yeats. Yet his eyes fall
unbidden on her bodice beneath buttoned
blouse; and the whisp of her blonde hair
in armpits as she leans back—*cogito ergo sum*.

A gust of her Chanel Number 9 or such
brings him undone! For he realises she
has asked him a key question. The tute group
gapes at him, waiting for barefaced bluff. And
in that instant, blood recedes, he's limp and lost.

JUST YOUR T-SHIRT

Kia Groom

'I'm taking your tshirt,'

I said

'The one with the
little pink unicorn
crying stars.'

She said,

'Bring it back.'

(A demand, not a request)

Knowing that I meant
something more.

'Of course.'

I told her,

And never did.

HANGER

Lily Chan

Most of you
consist of space
I can put
my hand right
through, I
can draw out
kidneys, entrails, and
twist them into
knots

but you have
none of
these, nothing but
the single hook
of your-
hand, curved like
a swan around
the wardrobe stand
whispering silver thoughts
of endless metal
rods being
hooked and unhooked
and dressed and
undressed and you are
a skeleton, a shadow
that I clothe

a horde
of plastic swans
grip the rod
with tenacity, swim
forward against
the current of
dense fabric

IT IS NOT THAT, IT IS THIS SWIRLING

S.J. Finch

It is not *to begin*
the things you said were echoing
even as you said them
and the green forest of my dream
glides softly
It is *this swirling*
in my mind

It is not the heart. That would be
saying a star lives in the sky,
or a word
on a tongue
it is a sentence riding
the white comet of
the best dream
I've ever had
carlights over the grassshift silence
it is pinned
to the inner lapel
you show at sub-rosa meetings
with the Real-life
Resistance

We are building an army beneath these bedsheets

It is like freedom, but
like freedom it is not.
this is not my love, though indeed
this is me in love

It is something thrown to the world
like a happy shadow, a cry taken up
and cricket-hopped hope, it is a torchlight,
the wind that reaches the solitary field
the purr of trees that sound like seas

it is Solemnity.

Solemnity from the houses of teenage

memory

it is the touch of grass upon your sole,

the nighthole you've sunk in is

the world

an aged, weary face filled

with smiling tears and hairs

you've left behind constellations

of your body's breath it is

in the saliva of your voice and tunnels of your throat

it is this maddening.

this release

into the world this careful dance

this swirling

THE DRONE

Patrick Pittman

This is the future,” the Colonel had said, on that first glorious day when they had moved into the bunker.

“This, right here, is what changes everything.”

First Lieutenant Sheldon P. Goldberg rolls the words around his head as he idly flicks the joystick. The mid-period avant-garde drone composition emanating from the machines around him begins to win the battle against the remnants of last night’s bourbon, still angrily trying to leave his body by drilling an escape hole in his cranium. He searches for a good reason why an underground military bunker in the Nevada desert would not stock Alka Seltzer in the medicine cabinet. Something, he supposes, to do with Vegas, and with lessons learned.

His screen flickers a dull green, CRT scanlines doing their best to suggest the outline of the front tip of an aircraft carrier. One light in a bank of 50 begins to flash. The view on the screen shifts slightly—the runway gives way to a shimmering static ocean. There’s not much to see. Small blurs in the corners, mostly—at this resolution either fishing boats, humpback whales or small island countries.

He slumps back in his chair, half a

hand on the joystick, his elite training devoted right now to the worthy task of keeping this piece of shit sort of straight until something sort of happens.

The door to the break-room swings open. Cornfed bursts through in an unpleasantly sweaty fit of excitement.

“Hey, Shelly, you gotta see this shit!”

“What shit, man? I’m on a flyer right now. We can’t all be on break all the fucking time like you, you fat fuck.”

His uniform looks as though it was too long in the tumble dryer. Or, put another way, Goldberg chuckles to himself, Cornfed looks as though he was too long with his twelve piece bucket and his Xbox. Like all his fucking life too long. Either way, the buttons look set to pop. Very regal. Very military.

“There’s the strangest thing on the news. Two elks, fighting. They just crossed live.”

“To elks fighting? Which ones are elks?”

“Big-ass deer. Not like a moose though.”

“Right, yeah. Big ones though. Sort of grander? They crossed live?”

“Yeah, they’re fuckin’ tearing the shit out of each other. I figure they’re probably mothers fighting over young

or something. I love fuckin' basic cable, man."

The vista on the flickering screen is of an ocean giving way to an estuary, a low-slung city creeping up on its banks. Shapes of buildings slowly forming. Goldberg straightens up in his chair just a little and eases the throttle. Mutters something about the piece-of-shit-screen. In no way clear enough for animal fights.

Cornfed asks "you shooting shit today man?"

"Nope, only loaded with film. Recon. As always. Tell me this, Cornfed –"

"Don't call me Cornfed."

"When this army puts a couple of fuck-ups like us in a basement like this, in a desert like this, in charge of christ knows how many billions of dollars worth of state of the art 21st century machinery of war like this, why can't they spring for a decent digital camera on this thing? It feels like I should be landing at Walmart and asking for a one-hour service."

"All I can figure, Shelly, is that some piece of shit Staff Sergeant got drunk with a Kodak rep sometime last decade and signed us up for a lifetime's supply. There's probably another bunker like this one full of Kodachrome."

"Have shit, will use shit. Bless the zero-waste military."

"Model of fucking frugality, man. Fucking model."

Closer to the buildings now, their forms are less certain still. Windows are not windows, just the idea of where windows should be; crumbled walls form the exoskeleton of what once presumed itself to be a grand city. The city of St. Sulpice.

Like everyone else, Goldberg knows the basics of what happened here in these scanlines on his screen. He positions the bird, as he often likes to do on these runs, for a sweep down the glorious Avenue de St. Catherine, her eight lanes and about half of her regal trees still intact. It's not like there are skyscrapers, but there are the spaces where one day there might have been.

He'd seen it in the back corners of the news, half-watched from the bar. Memories of it taste still a little alcoholic, as world affairs will do when you've never paid attention to them sober and you learn the facts from your friends' drunken retellings. There were colonials – French, he supposed, from the froggy names thrown around. It was their country for a while, whatever fucking country it was anyway. But the locals were restless. They asked them to leave. There was blood there. But that wasn't this blood. This came later. This was the cost of lines on a map.

There were good guys and there were bad guys, he could never remember which were which. Tribes. Ancient Ones. Or maybe not ancient. The story was all

foreign correspondents in those combat waistcoats, pockets full of story. UN blue-helmets, driving around and asking people to please just stop but they never just stop. Maybe there were pictures of wounded, some desperate Medecins sans Frontieres volunteer on the phone explaining to you the alchemy that would turn your credit card number into bandages.

Like everyone else, Goldberg knew the basics. The story is writ vague beneath him now, subpersonally suggesting nothing other than emptiness. He doesn't know what he's looking for. He doesn't know why it his job to give a fuck about an empty city. This place is at peace.

As happens once maybe every fifty flyovers, a little humanity does show itself. A tracer rocket, flying within inches, just as he is joyfully careening down a side-street of what he figures was once the red light district, or maybe the theatre district. It's not a city that was big enough to have both, and he doesn't know which they'd have preferred.

The smoke trail clears, revealing the flickering outline of an old Humvee. It's the only vehicle Goldberg's seen out there in months. Standing in the back seat is a tiny man, maybe even a child—he thinks maybe they had child soldiers here—but anyway, a tiny little thing, the rocket launcher on his shoulder almost the size of him. The only living thing in a ghost

town. He's in front of the cathedral. Goldberg had read about what happened in the cathedral. Like everyone else who read about what happened in the cathedral, the only thing he could do was wish that he hadn't.

Following the road out of the city, he takes a sweep at the fringes of the desert. No signs of anything much. Some camps, some families, some camels. Always camels. Shanties guarded with kalashes. The debris of civilisation you might find anywhere short of Atlantis.

Cornfed has squeezed into his chair now, Aeron x-tra wide, probably a special military commission. His screen is showing shit decidedly more Middle Eastern looking. Things are blowing up. Cornfed is giggling, making little gunfire noises under his breath. PKEWW PKEWW PKEWW. Goldberg sends off a silent prayer that the Colonel might walk in and see that shit. Fucking video game kid.

“Did they have antlers?”

“Huh?”

“The deer. The fucking elk. Did they have antlers?”

“Well yeah, locking horns, you know?”

“They weren't mothers then. I don't think the mothers have antlers. Just the dudes.”

“Huh. They should have antlers.”

Goldberg throws the bird into autopilot

and grabs a report sheet from the pile in the third tray down. Lacking for a hole punch, as he always fucking is, he pushes the sheet down onto the exposed prongs of Surveillance Report File 3CA2, tearing it just a little more than he would like.

He writes today's date. He writes his Colonel's Name. He looks at the ocean filling his screen again and the approaching deck of the aircraft carrier. He thinks again of the future. Of everything changing.

He draws a meticulous and perfect cross in the box marked "nothing pertinent".

GREEN SANDALS AND MOUNTAINS

Jessika Tong

I will tell you about the mountains

Headless rocks lift eyes from stewed hollows
Belled orbs knit glass frontiers between curious needles
Corseted insects drip like rolled mummified cigarettes

I will tell you about the mountains

He sent me into them wearing green sandals
Brandishing a claw of serrated steel
A greying spiked ridge of knuckles

The two of us marched, drew no breath
Leaving the green car and my greener sandals
Orphaned to the crackling gully

I will tell you about the mountains

Their type written calcified curves
The yellowed prickles filling wingless shoulders
With their earth-heavy poison

Fly, fly, fly.

I will tell you about the mountains

Cried-ran-walked-tripped home bare footed
Scratched stumps hissing air into milky blisters
Heart rocked shut, on a tilt with a metal click

UNTITLED

Eric Mitchell



UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Glen Phillips

She told herself often that her husband
always would command allegiance;
and certain others, her avowed chevaliers,
were meet and right just to meet for coffee
or to exchange the most politely worded
notes. But no more than that, my god.
And she pushed firmly back from periphery
of her imaging the tenderness of lips brushing
revered cheek, almost unconscious greeting;
or a handshake lingering upon parting;
fingers lightly stroking (just for emphasis
of a telling phrase) the thick matt
of hair on a bare summer forearm.

No, those images had no place because
it was communing of minds only! Polite
but intense. And with that light overlay
of teasing banter. No, not teasing really,
for, in truth, her own eyes might moisten
at moments when she thought they found
sweet unity interpreting cool literary text.
And that could lead her to a glimpse
of an insight like a breaking wave of joy.

Then stab of no, not hope. Something in his glance
might be detected—just unfinished business perhaps?

MY BROTHER AND THE LEGEND OF THE BLACKBERRY

Jessika Tong

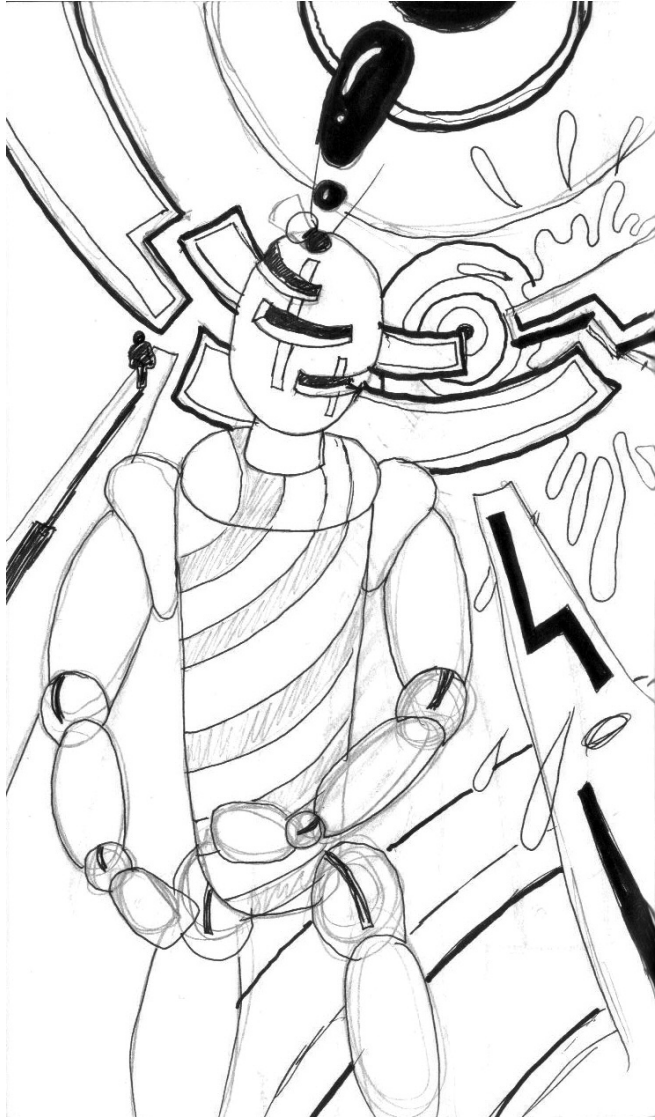
Tight fisted thorns
Knot upon knot that
Military salute
That little goosestep
Step-stepping
These greened
Poisoned caps onto the
Bib of salted tongues.

You and I brother
Blonde twin-like Gretel's
Beneath stillborn moonlight
Beneath stations of glowing bandages
Pluck sweating Soviets
From prickled atoms
Those leafy capes where they
Glittered like Iron Crosses
Dazzled lanterns paralysing
The forests black-blooded collar.

Oh, and what of a smeared bulb
Across our uniforms
A flushing spot for mother to
Put her finger upon
Dead, dead they have no breath
No light only wooded barnacled arms
And scratchy breath
How they must hate us
Our boots which part the grasses
Our echoing tin buckets and
Sucking-toothed swords.

UNTITLED

Eric Mitchell



WRONG

Kia Groom

'That's wrong,'
my mother instructed:
'Love is between
a woman and her shoes,
a man and his car.'

As I drove home,
I stroked
the silky plastic of
my steering wheel
and thought:
'So that's where I went
wrong.'

—
Allison Browning

Sometimes when I'm there.

I'm just run off my feet.

I know in this moment
when we're far

it's a little like that.

We're stranded
& you find the ocean
haunting.

CONTRIBUTORS

Allison Browning is a writer but it took her a long time to make peace with that. She smiles a bit more these days, lives in Melbourne and often misses slices of her windy home town. She's grateful to have your wide eyes on her work in this little place here.

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S.J. Finch was, at the time of writing, in the Honours year of his Creative writing BA at Curtin. He enjoys night walks, Kierkegaard, cheese, and referring to himself in the third person. He's also silent, lonely, immature, and very unprofessional. You can call him if you like on 0431 858765.

Narelle Goulden is 25, a high school teacher of English and History, and is doing a Masters of Creative Writing.

Kia Groom is an actor whose theatre is the page, not the stage.

Eric Mitchell graduated from Curtin University with a BA in Fine Arts and Sculpture. These days he helps build buildings and is responsible for at least one or two of the cranes you currently see dotting the cityscape. He likes Warhol and Madonna and will gladly admit to the latter, adamantly.

Glen Phillips is a poet who lives in Perth, Western Australia who teaches at Edith Cowan University as an Honorary Associate Professor. He is the author of many books, including the recently released *Shanghai Suite & Other Poems* and *Singing Granites: Poems of Devon and Gondwanaland*, which he co-wrote with English poet Anne Born.

Patrick Pittman lives in a rambunctious pocket of Perth's inner city, from which he broadcasts radio, reports, blogs, tends to a small computer farm and writes strange rambling pieces that all seem to be about war and genocide. Even the funny ones. He's not quite sure why. *patrickpittman.com*

Jessika Tong grew up in a small pine village on the Northern Island of New Zealand and has spent most of her adult life in Central and South East Queensland. Jessika has appeared within various literary journals including *Motherlode: Australian Women's Poetry 1986 – 2008*, *Poetry Matters*, *The Age*, *The Australian Literature Review*, *The Westerly*, *Wet Ink*, *Tears in the Fence FourWnineteen*, *Mascara*, *Pendulum*, *LinQ*, *Poetrix*, *Numbat*, *Polestar* and *Verandah*22. Her first collection, *The Anatomy of Blue* was released in December 2008 by SunLine Press.

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Poster art and creepy anatomia curation by Michael Barlow Stringer

We're in the 459 Bar of the Rosemount Hotel every month, usually on the second Thursday, 459 Fitzgerald St, North Perth, Western Australia.

You may visit us online at cottonmouth.org.au

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