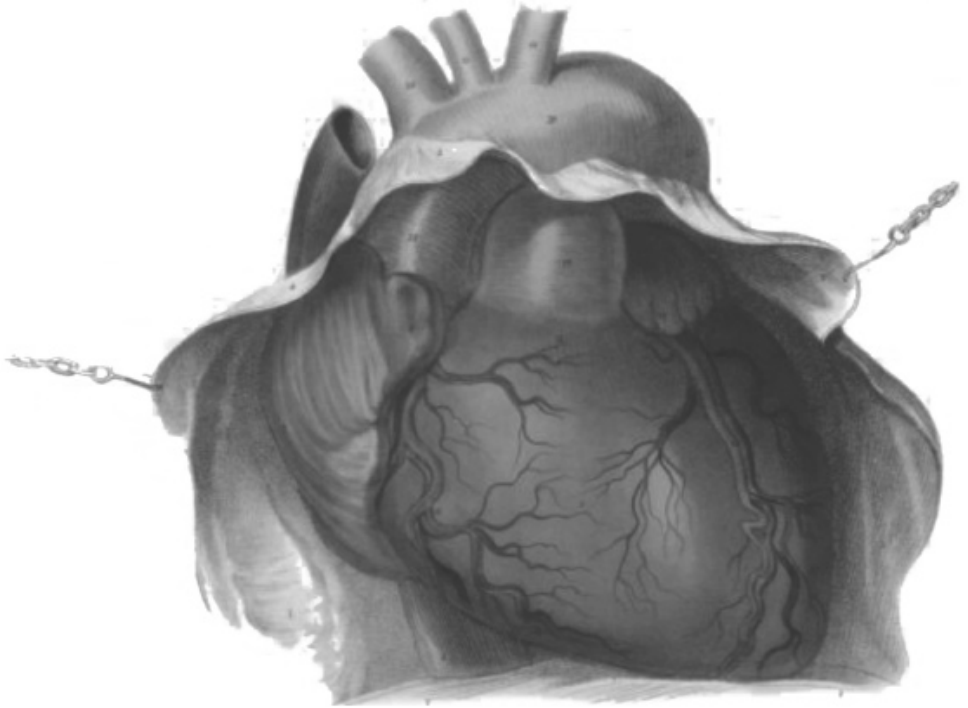


“COTTONMOUTH”



SPIT DICTION

ISSUE 9

OCTOBER 2008

COTTONMOUTH

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COTTONMOUTH is a monthly performance night which is produced in conjunction with a national podcast and publication. please direct all submissions or requests to info@cottonmouth.org.au and be sure to check regular updates online by visiting www.cottonmouth.org.au (.)

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Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia

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Cottonmouth would like to apologise to Matthew Jones. His poem *Dissent Unexpressed Is Not Dissent At All* appeared last issue with the wrong name attributed to it. Cottonmouth would like to apologise for this mistake and have reprinted the poem this issue with the correct name attached.

PLAIN JANE

Vivienne Glance

Shit, no it can't be!
Just another hour, please.

Arrrrgh! I don't want to go to work!
Can't I stay home?
Ok! Ok! You win. You win.
You always win.

Coffee! Coffee! Coffee!

Shower
Brush hair
Clean teeth
(don't want smelly breath)
Minty breath, sparkling white!
Deodorant and perfume
Roses float unseen into my world.

Civilise the senses
Civilise the sensual
No room for bad smells

No place for real smells
For as long as I can remember

*'Had an accident, sweetie?
Come on, let's clean you up
Don't want to be a smelly girl
Don't want to be a stinky girl'*

Thanks Gran!
In front of my friends!

*'Stinky! Stinky! Stinky!
Stinky! Stinky!'*

*You smell
Smelly Jane
Jane the Pain!
Smelly Jane
Jane the Pain!'*

Smelly Jane, Jane the Pain
I hate mornings
They're too early

There should be more night
I like the night
The time when dreams are created from the mystery of sleep.

But I conform to the Day Nazis
I rise at 7 get to work by 8 and function
In the civilised world
Of retail lingerie.

32 34 36. Lace. Black.
B cup C cup Double D. Satin. Red.
Under wired, support, sports. Cotton. Grey.
Teddy, baby doll, full length. Silk. White.

Yes, ma'am that looks great, just your colour
Need any help Sir? Very sexy! Shall I gift wrap?
Of course she can change it if it's not her size
Or her taste
Men Words of advice ...

*'Don't set your sights too high, dear
Trust and friendship are the best things to look for in a man*

*It doesn't matter that you're not as pretty as the others
Beauty lies within
You'll do fine...'*

But, of course we all know that's a lie
Beauty matters
It opens doors
It gets you noticed
It means even if you fail, you haven't failed
It blesses you, you are God's gift
And there I was
Plain 'ole Jane
Surviving school – rather than attending it
No cheer leader attraction, no confidence, no ambition
And absolutely no personality.

This is my niche
Working in a shop where the merchandise is centre stage
Where no one looks me in the eye or really listens to what I say
That's 38 dollars and 27 cents. Thank you
Have a lice day!

See? A place to go unnoticed.

DISSENT UNEXPRESSED IS NOT DISSENT AT ALL

Matthew Jones

I could smell it on him,
He entered the apartment complex
with the stench
of wanting a “conversation” about the relationship.
He’d start with that cordial democratic sentiment
then gather momentum

and there’d be a harsh gloom all around
by the time the night was done.

Who was I to allow this?

I quickly poured him a whiskey
to dispel the tension he’d forced
I turned on the television, sat him down,
guided the glass to his lips.
It was easy from there.

Smiling when he began sentences,
soft touch, soothing,
talking him down from the ledge,
back to the comfort of the sheets;
reaffirmation through shared body heat.

He lost his nerve completely
after the first kiss.

THE WHITES OF THEIR EYES

Chris Flynn

On January 23rd 2007 abalone diver Eric Nerhaus found himself in a bit of a pickle that will go down in legend. Glibly – describing the experience from his hospital bed several days later as “like being trapped in a cave” – was in fact halfway down the gullet of a three metre long Great White Shark that had attempted to swallow him head first (see strangely amusing accompanying diagram, as printed in tabloid newspaper the Herald Sun).

Whilst going about his daily business in the dark waters off the New South Wales coast, he abruptly found himself in an awkward jam as the huge shark mistook him for a seal and promptly tried to bite him in half. Fortunately for Eric, he was wearing a belt of lead weights that the mighty jaws got stuck on. Realising he was in a spot of bother, Eric let out an annoyed sigh and stabbed the beast in the eye with his chisel, making his way back up to the boat and safety when the shark realised it had picked a rather feisty and hard to chew seal. Nerhaus had his wounds tended onshore, gamely proclaiming that it, ‘was not the shark’s fault’ and vowing to return to abalone fishing when he was all better, with only a large cash settlement from Channel 9 for the ‘world exclusive’ interview as

consolation.

The matter-of-fact attitude of Australians towards the huge prehistoric predators that swim in their waters is sometimes baffling to comprehend, and to the rest of the world must come across as a form of insanity brought on by too much sunshine. Earlier that same week a four metre white pointer had been spotted close to shore on the Victorian coast, making the evening news. When local teenagers were interviewed, they were given the chance to reinforce this astoundingly foolish sense of bravado by hack journalists.

“So, will this prevent you from going swimming today?”

“Nah mate, we’ll go in as usual.”

Upon pointing this absurdity out to a beach-loving friend, her demeanour towards me darkened as she sided with the tasty teens.

“Yeah, well you know there’s terrorists but that doesn’t stop you flying, does it?”

My point being that if I knew a man with crazed eyes and five kilos of explosives strapped to his body was sitting in economy, I would be disembarking in rather a hurry.

Australia has been an easy target for doomsayer writers for some time, the list of dangerous creatures inhabiting these

fatal shores prime fodder for scaring the bejeesus out of prospective tourists. Tourism is a mainstay industry in Oz and despite the bad-tempered critters does not seem likely to be under particular threat from tales of watery demise. It is worth remembering that Australia is sort of a big tropical island with bountiful beaches and surrounded by ocean, so it stands to reason that a few folk might meet their maker from time to time at the hands of our aquatic neighbours. There is no need for undue alarm, but neither is it appropriate to dismiss the danger with a flick of the wrist and a, 'you'll be right, mate,' simply because, well, you might not be.

A few cases in point –

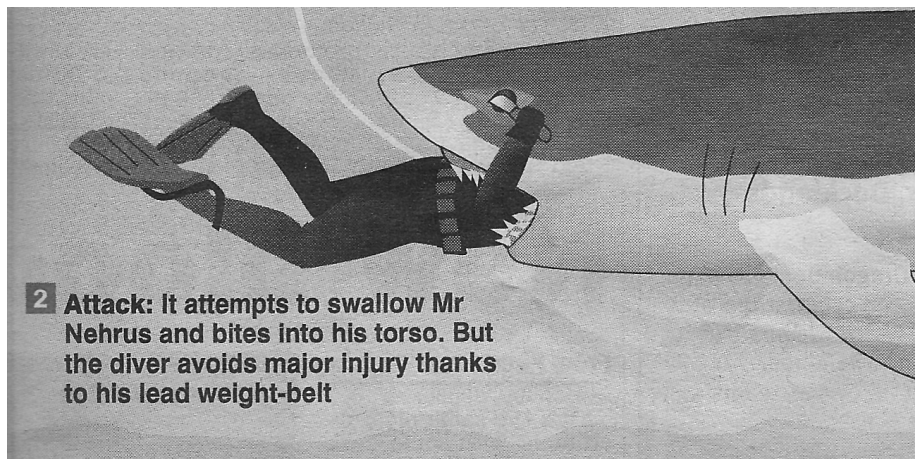
1985: Shirley Ann Durdin was snorkelling in water only seven feet deep when a 6 metre (as big as they get) Great White bit her head and shoulders off. As onlookers attempted to retrieve the gory

remains, said shark returned to swallow the rest, the first witnessed instance of an Australian being completely eaten by one of the beasts.

2000: A teenager paddling his surfboard off the coast of Adelaide was swallowed whole as his two friends watched. The shark passed under one boy and came up directly behind the oblivious victim, opening its jaws to engulf his entire body and surfboard in one deadly gulp. There was no blood in the water. Only the front tip of the surfboard remained.

2004: Another teenager was being towed on his board near Adelaide by three friends when not one but two five metre Great Whites surfaced and tore the hapless boy to pieces, just 300 metres from a crowded beach. There were no remains.

2005: Geoffrey Brazier, the skipper of a pleasure cruise was bitten in half by a six



2 Attack: It attempts to swallow Mr Nehrus and bites into his torso. But the diver avoids major injury thanks to his lead weight-belt

metre white pointer whilst snorkelling with tourists off Perth. The police report claimed, 'Death was instantaneous'.

Add to this chilling reports of people dragged into the water by huge sharks willing to beach themselves (as killer whales do to catch seals) in fits of hunger as fish stocks are depleted by humans. Even worse, the supposed five kilometre trail of blood leading out to sea from near Adelaide as unscrupulous tour operators throw bait in the water to draw sharks in for tourists to film attacking wetsuits filled with fish (footage is available on YouTube) and you have a nightmare on your hands.

It was not until 1916 that we began our fear affair with these deadly denizens of the deep. In Michael Capuzzo's excellent book, 'Close to Shore', the strange and disturbing events that took place in New Jersey that summer of '16 forever marked American imaginations. A great white shark, caught in the gulf stream, found itself confused and trapped in a series of canals leading almost eleven miles inland to a remote farming community, killing five people in one week as it tried to get out. Eventually the monster was beaten to death by a single man in a rowboat with his oar and displayed for a terrified generation to see in the Home News office in Harlem. Sharks had previously been thought to be uninterested in humans, but from that point on things changed, and subsequent generations

were embedded with the fear of the deep by Peter Benchley and Steven Spielberg. Our sole consolation is that the Great White's ancestor, the fifteen metre Megalodon is now defunct, or at least one would hope so. As shark expert Hooper describes it to Chief Brody in 'Jaws', "It would be like a locomotive with a mouth full of butcher knives."

None of this seems to faze our antipodean brothers and sisters though. On 16th February 2007, less than a month after Eric Nerhaus almost ended up as lunch in NSW, local hero Phillip Kerkhof of Louth Bay, South Australia, decided he'd had enough of these shark bastards always being the winners. Lightly toasted after a few beers and vodka chasers, he became incensed when he saw a one point three metre specimen snaffling up his squid lures just off the jetty where he was happily getting smashed. Miffed beyond reproach, Kerkhof jumped in, grabbed it by the tail and pulled the beast ashore.

"He's just thrashing around in the water but then he was starting to turn around and try to bite me and I thought, 'well, it's amazing what vodka does'. It's not something I'd recommend. When I sobered up I thought about it and said, 'I'm a bit of an idiot.'"

Kerkhof ate the shark, all except for the head, which he is keeping in his freezer as a trophy.

SOMEWHERE ELSE OR YEARS BEFORE

Josephine Rowe

Girls,
you said,
come and feel this,
your left arm up over your head
and the water in the shower running tepid.

You took my wrist with a *here here*
to the tendons taut as wire
or kite strings,
showing through the skin under your arm.

This was the first sign of a panic
your body could not interpret,
desperate as hisses through keyholes
or messages tapped out on a shared wall
all through some old, old night,
despite you knowing the next room to be empty.

By then you were already tired of life,
gambling with the little you had left to lose
and sleeping too much,
maybe only to dream
of a life that might've ended somewhere else –
somewhere north
with outdoor furniture
and a man who was not ruined by war.

Somewhere else, or years before;
your body in death
still sleek and lovely,
breaking like a bird
upon the first flight of stairs
your husband kicked you down.

How often you must've seen yourself
wrapped in your lover's road accident
on some lonely reaching highway –
slick fingers entwined at grotesque angles
eyebrows and lashes searing away
in the cracklespit of oil-fire
as the two of you ebbed into the Christmas road toll,
the upholstery blistering and curling up around you
and both of your names on the evening news

instead of only his
tattooed to your hip,
six ink-bled letters scrawled beneath a butterfly
whose colours were leached to that of a bruise,
the shape obscured by the last of your children.

TOYO

Lily Chan

My grandmother has Alzheimer's Disease. I imagine a dung beetle crawling in her head, rolling protein clots together and depositing them between her brain neurons. Sometimes it hums a little song about dung as it works away.

She reaches out to me from her bed, face as open as a baby cauliflower, and blows me kisses.

"Good night," I say. She used to be sharp and rigid. Shadows crowded her mind shouting for attention, and her face grew tense with imagined hostility. Now she radiates a bliss born of forgetfulness. Now, a hot water bottle, a cup of tea, a concert on TV by beautiful young singers, a pumpkin cake, these things are enough, the simple things. I catch her washing her face with shampoo. Eating potato chips with soy sauce. She is a hermit crab withdrawing into a shell, retracting its antennae. I tell her that I'm writing about her, and she fusses irritably with the corner of her blanket. "Don't write anything embarrassing, okay?"

I don't have sufficient Japanese to translate, and she doesn't have sufficient English to read it herself. I just nod. She slowly folds into a blanket of silence punctuated by moments when she gazes out of the window and exclaims, "Oh, look! Someone's dyed the sky."

The sunset is a brilliant, flaring pink.

THE GOLDEN WORM AND OTHER DREAMS AND THOUGHTS

Sue Glennell

I dreamt my son was a child again and I was pulling a golden worm out of his middle finger. Real gold. If it is real gold should you pull it out of your child or should you leave it there?

I was with a group of people labelled unemployed and all the others were hunting us down. To escape I had to put money in various slot machines and I had to pay for all those with me, as they had no coins. And I thought if I use up all my coins on the others, I'll eventually have none for myself to escape.

My mother said she felt she was past her usefulness, and we discussed the poor horse in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, that had worked so hard and then was sold for glue. She said that's what happened to Dad's old milk delivery horses. For we didn't know any better.

At belly dancing we performed an African dance where the older women showed the younger women, with downward movements of their arms, the flow of blood that would happen to them, the fertility that would follow, the planting of the seed. And that night I dreamt about a woman who delivered a baby, and I had to clean up the afterbirth. Our teacher said the dance confronted a lot of women, as the elders danced so close together, bum to belly.

You think at first it's a child's drawing. Here is the river, here is the cabin in the wood. And he said the cabin is a symbol of yourself, and the sun is your mother, and the closest tree is your father and the snake is your sensuality. I had the snake as far away from the cabin as possible, so what does that say about me? It's bad to have the snake winding around your father he said, and she had. What does that say about her?

Christine said she changed antidepressants as she felt emotionless. Sometimes Marian seems emotionless. And I think of all the emotionless women tiptoeing through the city.

The ocean has balls fights sailors just tolerates them on good days the fish feed off the ocean like tics on an animal just tolerates them on good days the ocean wears down the land it is a child's game.

Why do I think of ducks crossing the road and stolen cars coming up the wrong lane with their lights off. Waiting for it, I am not waiting for it, but my father is, self-absorbed in his death, each day is a preparation. I have outlived all my ancestors, he says. His eyes do not change when I come into the room. I am just another person to tell he is waiting for it, the blood clot on the brain that will be his last. Each day he bides his

time by sorting cards into piles, reads the life of another film star, another war hero, watches only the old movies where they speak clearly and slowly in black and white, and in the bedroom scenes the woman's foot always touches the floor.

My mother says when my daughter lies on the couch with her head back, she looks like Nefertiti. My daughter is Nefertiti reincarnated. She holds her head just so.

If I were Cleopatra I would clean my teeth with pearls.

My daughter J hates the smell of Jonquils. Likes sad since the death of her sweetheart. She dreamt Jesus was being strangled by a Boa Constrictor and he asked for her help. She said, You're going to die anyway.

I have kissed a dead man. They say that way you can forget, recognise that they're dead. My daughter J took a photo of his house and doves flew up in the sky when she pressed the shutter. But they would not fly at the funeral.

My second memory is of showing my mother a picture of herself. And she asked, Why do I have green legs? I still draw people, write people with green legs.

My son planed from Casablanca to Marrakesh, was searched for a bomb. He brought me salt from the Dead Sea, playing cards from the Iraqi forces. He

doesn't tell me as much as my daughter J. Probably wisely. Probably because he knows I would write it down.

Marguerite said Salvador Dali held up prawns to her face for earrings. Perhaps he considered painting me, I was beautiful once.

When the Pope visited Auschwitz there was a rainbow in the sky. The journalist didn't say.

My daughter said we had a close mother/daughter relationship, and I told her of the baby monkeys that were given mothers made of wire, and the monkeys clung to those wire mothers. For they didn't know any better.

Dancing with death, said my daughter J, when I told her of a man who broke a world record by kissing a cobra fifty-two times without being bitten. I kill snakes in my sleep, knowingly destroy my sexuality.

Jane, who was a nurse, told us about schoolboys visiting an old people's home, and the old ladies carefully making themselves up beforehand.

I dreamt the singer, Phil Collins, was making love to me, and his wife, in disgust, left her baby with us. It had a breathing problem and got smaller and smaller. I accidentally dropped it over a cliff, but it was still OK, although very small.

I was standing right at the foot of an active volcano. I had rushed out of

a building when the volcano erupted
and left my son, then a child, behind.
Unthinkable. I called him and he was
running towards me, in the opposite
direction to everyone else. Because I was
standing near the volcano.

My children cry out at night. Psychia-
trists always blame the mother. Am I the
volcano? Am I the golden worm remover?
For I don't know any better.

CRASH

M Ainsley

“What the – “
We jump as the
smash
crack
crash

reverberates through our house. I let go of Paul’s hand and the conversation stops. A brief pause as our heads turn to look at the window (blinds drawn, can’t see outside) then turn back to look at each other. Without a word we race out the front door, phones in hand to survey the horrific sight that greets our eyes.

Imagine this – a metal form, front end concertinaed, nose up against the wide trunk of the towering gum tree that provides handy shade over the median strip, good for when you are trying to cross the busy road, though not so good now. The metal buckles and folds like an origami construction that has been attempted clumsily by some giant hands. The driver’s side is a mess, although the front wheel still spins slowly, idly, up in the air. There is glass and plastic all over the ground, littered like confetti. Cars are slowing down, pulling to a halt around us to survey the dreadful scene. In my daze I think to myself, “How did it get there?” Paul shouts at me, “There are two people inside. There are two people inside.” I don’t know why he’s shouting at me; is

he shouting for them? Can they hear him? Through the dim street light and the shattered windscreen I can see them. One is a girl, the other I’m not sure; the sickening mass of blood obscures view. Are they alive? My heart rises up in my chest – the girl looks young. Paul is calling Emergency on his mobile and trying to open the front passenger’s side door where the girl sits. It creaks open a foot’s length, a horrifying noise. A white hand flops out. Around us now is a flurry of babbling onlookers and the baying of approaching sirens, but all I can hear is a ragged breathing that must be an accompaniment to the hand.

I creep closer to the half open car door. I can partly see the girl; she is slumped against the door, if it were opened fully she would have fallen out of the car. Her breathing hacks and saws at her chest – is she crying? “There’s an ambulance coming,” I whisper (why am I whispering? Am I scared of my own voice?) The sob-breath-hack continues and I reach out for her hand. Grasp it. Her hand is warm but trembling. I squeeze it and a slight pressure is exerted in return. The rhythm of her breathing halts and I hear a choked, “I’m scared.”

The syncopated rhythm takes up again. I whisper once more, “There’s an ambulance coming. It’ll be here soon.” I’m

trying to see her face through the door, but a mess of bloodied hair veils her. I squeeze her hand again and this time say quietly, "I'm here."

Hacking breath. Pause. "Don't let go."

"I won't."

Sob, breathe and hack. Sob, breathe and hack. Sirens scream and blue-red lights burst like comets around me.

The sobbing-breathing-hacking stops and the hand goes limp. I'm still crouched down by the car door, holding the white hand. I can see nothing, hear nothing. Paul comes up behind me and pulls me to him. "Babe, come away."

"The ambulance is here," I say to no one in particular. I let Paul lead me away from the car, thankful for his presence. We stand out the front of our place, watching in silence as the paramedics clean up the scene. It is only when the girl's body is pulled out of the car and laid onto the stretcher that I have to close my eyes and turn away. Paul takes my hand and holds tight.

NAIL

Janet Jackson

It's the staleshit smell hanging under the perfume in the white-tiled shopping-mall toilet

It's the bony old cat in the house of the chubby-faced students

It's the streak of smog above the blue and white beachfront

It's the distant siren

It's the one string that won't stay in tune

It's whoever grew old, then young, then died

It's the black edge around the heart we repeatedly draw

It's my one purple nail

It's my arms not reaching

It's going back out there

UNIVERSE:

Vivienne Glance

year dot

Everything that will ever be
far, far smaller than a pin head
all of future is compressed at the
instant time begins
no starter's gun, no wand,
no benevolent face or bony finger pointing
it begins when it begins

Physical laws of matter
Universal energy
all of existence erupt
spread out into vast 'no place'
and spread
and spread

Laws play out rules over and over
push and pull and shape energy-made matter
coalesce dust to density
within a thousandth
thousandth of a second
an endless future is released.

year now

Stare at the night sky
see as far back in time
as imagination allows

In our bounded world
we are in a vortex of banality
desperate to secure a sense of self
as we stand, constructed thought and flesh
at the end of this long line
of transformations

Our manifestation of matter
this unique privilege of configuration
is but a transient ripple in the future-full
cosmic expansion

FIREWORKS

Josephine Rowe

So there are fireworks and you're on the other side of
the world to all your memories of fireworks you want
them to remind you of your childhood but they don't
no silver birches on football ovals no brass band no
hand on your waist all store bought no one wondering
where you are no one calling out your name above the
whistle crack crack crack so there are fireworks in
the street are Spanish kids with cap guns spitty fire
crackers and a few streets over ambulance sirens
but those those are like animals that got caught in the
sneaky traps of this city and are always wailing wailing
to be let out you were on a rooftop but you came down
to get more beer to be alone and you're locked out
now sitting in some doorway drinking lager you
won't remember the name or the price of just the smile
of the man who sold it to you the shy kids with the
toy guns eye you off across the road the glass door to
the foyer of the place you're supposed to be opens stays
open long enough for you to get through but you don't
it's the fourth of July so there are fireworks all store-
bought no silver birch trees no hand on your waist
six floors up they're oohing and aahing doing lines
off the roof tiles six floors down you're listening to
the sirens watching the kids reload.

CONTRIBUTORS

M Ainsley is a creative person living in Perth. She enjoys reading contemporary fiction writing, playing Scrabble and studying languages. Dislikes include racists, cold and windy days, and people who intentionally misspell common words.

Lily Chan is a walking thought of the universe.

Chris Flynn is the Belfast-born Melbourne-based creator and editor of *Torpedo*, from *Falcon vs. Monkey*, *Falcon Wins*. This year his writing appears in *Bad Idea*, *Nuke*, *Swindle*, *Dumbo Feather*, *Ampersand*, *The Lifted Brow* & *The Believer*. Find him online at falconvsmoney.com.

Vivienne Glance's poetry and short stories have appeared in many print and online publications and she's won prizes and commendations in competitions. She regularly performs her poetry at readings, was placed third in the National Poetry Slam 2007 in Sydney, and has run performance workshop for writers. Her writing for theatre has been performed in Perth, Sydney, Seattle USA and London and Edinburgh UK. She is also a professional actor and theatre director.

Matthew Jones writes poetry, and other things, but mainly poetry. He continually uses music as inspiration; artists like Augie March, Elliott Smith, Leonard Cohen and Tom Waits can serve as soundtracks for his poems. Matthew would like to be Dylan Thomas, or, failing that, Dylan Moran.

Josephine Rowe lives in Melbourne with a cat named Jemima and a bicycle named Millicent. Her two books - *Asynchrony* and *East of Here, Close to Water*, are not terribly easy to find outside of her home town, but arrangements can be made. Please visit cherryfoxpress.com to read more.

Thanks to the Cottonmouth committee

They are Rebecca Giggs, Patrick Pittman, Scott-Patrick Mitchell, Simon Cox, Jessyca Hutchens, Tomás Ford and Matt Ford.

Our posters and other beautiful (and occasionally creepy) accoutrements were designed by Michael Barlow Stringer.

We're in the 459 Bar of the Rosemount Hotel on the second Thursday of every month (I know, we keep saying that, and this isn't the second Thursday, but there are good reasons, and we promise to be more reliable Cotton friends in future), 459 Fitzgerald St, North Perth, Western Australia.

You may visit us online at cottonmouth.org.au

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