



# Beyond Imitation

The spoken word is a gesture,  
its meaning, a world

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

CORRUPTED POETRY AT THE SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Corrupted Poetry

is a state of mind. Our events are managed by a collective of writers – Nic Stringer, Michelle Penn & Fiona Larkin. We create readings & collaborations that focus on the best writers of contemporary poetry & present their work alongside art & sound content to provoke debate about the poem's visual & sonic spaces.

Partner of October Gallery



New exhibition: PORTAL II  
Inside the Cordillera Occidental  
28 November 2019 - 1 February 2020

## **Train at Night in the Desert**

Charcoal dark. Nothing to see but twin ghosts  
of your face in safety glass, the man opposite  
upholstered in thick fibres of slumber.

You're pulled by a faith  
in steel. The train is a lung breathing dust  
as it huffs to a black dot on the map:  
a bug stuck on its back, giggly legs flailing in air.

Out there, the coyote keeps its secrets,  
it has its own line of action.  
It doesn't give a shit about your plans.

**Tamar Yoseloff**

Reprinted from *The Black Place*, Seren, 2019

## Mercurial

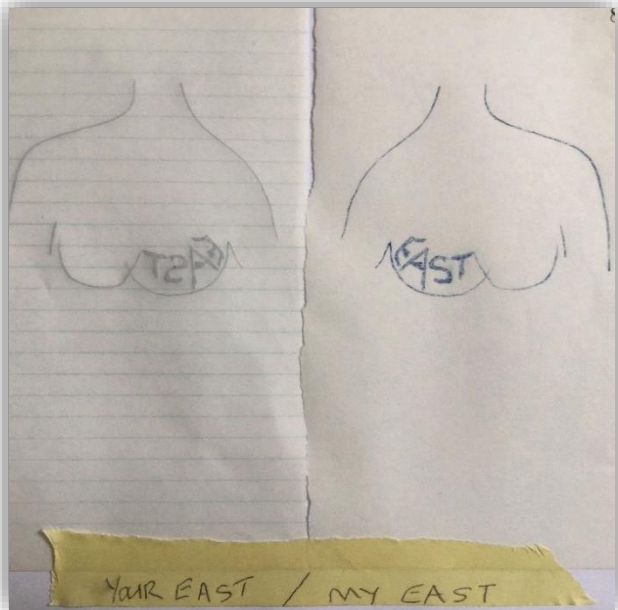
In my progressive sixth form college,  
where we were encouraged  
to call teachers by their first name,

Jenny, my Law teacher, once ranted  
about digital watches—

how they told *you* the time, unlike  
the wind up, ticking kind,  
which required effort, and didn't nag.

I remember this each morning,  
as I slip a digital thermometer  
under my analogue tongue.

Claire Collison



**YOUR EAST/MY EAST**

Claire Collison

**In the museum with Emil Orlik: 1916**

Emil points you out under the familiar buzz  
of the museum's lights. In its hum your body's hunched,

almost drunk by shadows at the top of the stairs.  
I know the terror of museums, the cataloguing

of cadavers, the way curators pin down the wings  
of butterflies so they can't leave.

Your hair's slicked back, chin clean shaven,  
tie pulled tight. I see the man of self-portraits

in the flesh. The quasi Pomeranian smoking his pipe.  
You tell me later, while you write to Robert Bell,

*only one in a hundred washes his body all over.*

**Abegail Morley**

Reprinted from *Eva and George*, Pindrop Press, 2013



Live Concrete Poem at the Avivson Gallery, 2019  
Astra Papachristodoulou

Paperdolls OR Where are my curly  
scrolls of sisters?

They are wedging me open with lapwings, the feathers  
angled and birded to hurt. But I've a tight heart.

Dad took the call, uprooted the brood to bacon barmcakes.  
Here we're tiny, a fistful of morula, massing.

A leper sold us salted cucumber in newspaper twists  
then slipped drainwards. *that's where you come from*

*your hands are dirty, sssshhhh shut your mouth while you eat*  
said the mynah bird, no, said the settlers.

Mum escaped through airmail script to slinky heat.  
That upfaced tooth extracts its roots; such a mossy cliff.

The cliff is crocheted pearl, gnatty whirlpools, round  
ligaments. Where are my larvic, volcanic sisters?

I'd crouch in the boiler room, making ski lifts from off  
Blue Peter. If we'd stayed I'd have been the biggest family,



*you're so quiet we thought you'd disappeared: sssshhhh*  
cut me a row of paperdoll aunts —

Keep cutting inside me with your instruments. You are  
making holes for light to get in. I'll stay in Recovery if  
you nurse me.

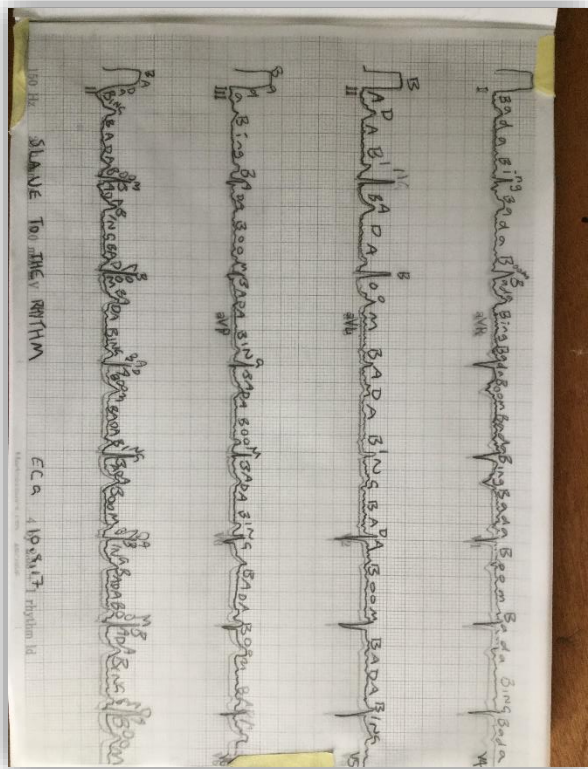
Where are my mockingbirds for sisters?  
Tetra Pak houses, rainy terraces, grey, no laughs.

I've threaded the mothers on daisy chains which I pluck  
some times. Plant in oasis.

Turmeric lightens the skin: we've become cream boaters  
and lace. Fold up your plaits, village girl. I know I lapse;  
please keep trying.

**Anita Pati**

Commissioned by Kathryn Maris in response to art by Sunny Kim  
for *Slatterns*, APT Gallery, and reprinted from *Poetry London*, 2018



BADA BING  
 Claire Collison

## Georg Rides the U-Bahn

*'Such is his eye in real life, such is the shape of his cheek.'*

*Holbein's caption to The Merchant Georg Gisze, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin*

The Brandenburg gate is tumbling in translucent decals across each window of the Berlin underground train, dissolving as shallow tunnel gives way to day-lit platform. Its repeated motif deters the graffiti, and foregrounds a man, the spit of his portrait: Georg has slipped from his frame, dropping his cap of black velvet, his coral silk sleeves. He's rendered slip-shod, in padded jacket and denim, and has learned over years how to sit, in stillness, in silence, in three-quarter profile. He holds his position, his hands interlock on his lap as we accelerate, brake in a cycle of light and dark. He has swapped Hanseatic trade for austerity. No symbols of self hang from the grab rails or shine from grey vinyl, no handwritten bills, inkstands or seals, betrothal carnations, the tick of a clock. He's cut his hair short, and his unpainted eye is giving back less, doesn't meet mine to demand, have you finished your looking? Holbein, I observe him the harder because of your claim. His eye *in real life*, the shape of his cheek, are criss-crossing the city, jumping the lines between generations and borders. You're cleaning your brushes; hand him a ticket as he alights from your easel, his features a permit for infinite transit.

**Fiona Larkin**

Reprinted from *In Transit: poems of travel*, Emma Press, 2018

## Laocoön in the Vatican

Human agony has no redemptive power, there is no reward. It is a votive offering, concerned with anatomy rather than technique. And he is only an athlete, in motion everywhere, the panic made to fit each muscle, each band of tissue – tension and compression mathematically modelled to resist the contrapposto even as the serpent coils around each child. Chest curving towards his gods, he speaks of what lies beneath devotion, where *wrestler* is the same as *family*. But in the end, he is a man, petrified and without skin, makes of his body nothing in the fight, except its own peculiar purpose.

**Nic Stringer**

Reprinted from *A day that you happen to know*

Guillemot Press, 2017



VATO/Dude

Reproduced by courtesy of COVEN

## aubade

after Carl Philips

after Ugo Rondinone, *Seven Magic Mountains*

they form an uncertain city  
these stacks with their boulders towering teetering  
and barely balanced

day-glo pillars inside  
a dried lake which shifts in scorched winds  
memory  
of water and motion  
crests that would erode  
those rocks if they weren't  
only temporary totems  
showy spires  
teasing  
the desert's thirsts

the edge  
between reality and performance seems  
thinner  
each day tales

of men petrified  
for abandoning  
the tribe  
evil spirits trapped in stone  
but escaping  
through the cracks

there is payback anywhere you look  
although it may seem  
a simple fact  
of waiting patient winds chewing stone  
to pinnacles  
perhaps  
this land is still mired  
in its adolescence feisty and  
brash  
misunderstanding  
the meaning  
of the story

**Michelle Penn**

Reprinted from *Aesthetica*

Creative Writing Award Anthology, 2018

1926: Stammhalter (son and heir)

In the half-dark room at the top of the stairs  
Peter Michael joins us in cadmium red.

You've painted him with a flat brush,  
curved at the tip, coloured him in, caught

his head tucked below my collarbone  
*in ein gelbes Licht*. This is how you've  
cast him with your genes. Above us you've wrung  
the stars from the night's sky and dripped them one by one.

Abigail Morley

Reprinted from *Eva and George*, Pindrop Press, 2013



## The gap in the photo: acknowledgment and erasure

In 2017 and 2018 I organized an art show called *Slatterns*, though the curatorial labour began four or five years earlier, as did the saving up of capital, which I hoped would be recouped. (It wasn't.) The all-women exhibition was a nod to Kate Clanchy's first poetry collection, whose title poem, 'Slattern', engaged with the messy waywardness of the self, thereby riffing off the primary meaning of slattern: 'an untidy woman'. But because her poems were sometimes structured around an erotic gaze, Clanchy appeared to gesture at the second meaning of slattern: 'slut'. By 1995, when *Slattern* was published, the term was sufficiently old-fashioned to have no tonal possibility but irony; and by 2018, when my exhibition launched, the word largely had to be explained. If I were not to mention Clanchy's eponymous collection when talking about *Slatterns* I would feel I had committed an erasure—and this, to me, seems like a minor act of violence. Though Clanchy assured me she feels no ownership of the word, pointing to Charlotte Brontë's use of it in *Jane Eyre*, I know I did not receive the idea from the placard that Jane's schoolmate Helen Brown was made to wear around her neck, but from Clanchy's particular insistence on reversing the man-gazes-at-woman 'muse' trope during an age when UK poetry was

(still) published predominantly by and for straight white men. Art shows are ephemeral, and *Slatterns* lasted under 4 weeks. There are a few artefacts: some photos, the exhibition catalogue, a pile of leaflets for a contiguous symposium on the female gaze, and a portion of the summer 2018 issue of *Poetry London* devoted to the work of the seven poets I commissioned to respond to the art: Rachael Allen, Sophie Collins, Geraldine Clarkson, Isobel Dixon, Anita Pati, Natasha Trethewey and Karen McCarthy Woolf. If it seems excessive to have entangled the exhibition with a series of commissions and a conference, my impulse was one of generosity: *more* exposure for the artists; *more* inclusion of poets; *more* opportunities to interrogate subjects like ekphrasis and the gaze; *more* solutions for utilising a large space. Curating an art show with interdisciplinary satellite projects gave me a new perspective on labour in the arts, visible and invisible, and made me think harder about how we acknowledge or remunerate that labour, and what forms of currency, in what combination, are acceptable. When I asked a technician who installs art shows for a living if he felt it was important to be acknowledged in a catalogue, he said no — the more unseen he is, the better. If any aspect of his ‘self’ turns up in the hanging of a painting, e.g. if attention is paid to the mode of hanging rather than the work itself, or if he breaks something in the hanging process, he’s failed.

Positioning the art in a space is almost the opposite of a creative act, he believes: it's an act of self-erasure. He was happy with money, he said, and didn't require further acknowledgment. Earlier this year, Jen Calleja and Sophie Collins co-wrote an essay for *Asymptote* called 'She knows too much: "Bridge Translations," "Literal Translations," and Long-Term Harm'. Using Lawrence Venuti's 1995 text *The Translator's Invisibility* as a lens, they questioned the practice in the UK of foregrounding the (often well-known) poet involved in the final stages of translation, rather than the fluent co-translator(s) who provides the first passes. Their argument—that so-called 'literal' translation is a creative act in itself—was a more sophisticated version of conversations I used to have with two translator friends in the 1990s (around the time when Venuti's book was published), one now deceased and the other no longer translating. Both were galled by illustrious writers with no second language claiming credit for translating canonical works. I gleaned an element of 'turf warfare' from those discussions, but mainly a message that their hard-earned skills were devalued each time someone without mastery of the source language published an acclaimed translation. Calleja and Collins's essay resonated with some adjacent thoughts and questions I'd had, independently, about translation — a field I have unsatisfactorily dabbled in. But also, about *Slatterns* and the communal labour that went into its

associated projects; and finally, about the fact that my friends and students seemed collectively to be having nervous breakdowns over the ‘acknowledgments’ page in their forthcoming books and pamphlets, which I understood, as I too have found them difficult to crack. We can accept that the first rule of acknowledgment pages is ‘Do what *you* want: it’s your book’. But getting that axiom out of the way, I wonder if it might be worth interrogating this subject more. Just as a poem contains an arrangement of text and white space, thereby creating an opposition between what is stated and what is withheld, one’s acknowledgements might signal a similar opposition, but one to do with validating someone’s labour versus erasing their labour.

**Kathryn Maris, November 2019**

This excerpt has been edited by Kathryn Maris from her longer essay, which was read for Corrupted Poetry at *Beyond Imitation*

**Claire Collison** won the inaugural Women Poets' Prize, 2018. She was placed second in the Resurgence and Hippocrates prizes, shortlisted for the Poetry Business Competition, Rialto Pamphlet Prize, and Bridport, and longlisted for Troubadour and Outspoken. She is currently on the shortlist for Primers Five. Claire devises participatory walks, An Intimate Tour of Breasts, and this summer was awarded ACE funding for these and her single-breasted life modelling monologue, 'Truth is Beauty'. Recent poems appear in *Second Place Rosette: Poems about Britain* (Emma Press), *The Valley Press Anthology of Prose Poetry*, Butcher's Dog, and *Finished Creatures*. Claire is on Twitter @clairecollison1 & Instagram @adalodge

**Fiona Larkin's** poems have been highly commended in the Forward Prizes 2019 and feature in journals and anthologies such as *Magma*, *The North*, *Perverse*, *Finished Creatures*, *Under the Radar* and *Best New British and Irish Poets* [fionalarkinpoetry.wordpress.com](http://fionalarkinpoetry.wordpress.com)

**Kathryn Maris** is a poet and critic who has published three poetry collections. Her work has also appeared in *Penguin Modern Poets 5*, *The Pushcart Prize Anthology*, *The Best British Poetry*, *The Forward Book of Poetry*, *Granta* and *Poetry* magazines. A selection from Kathryn's most recent collection, *The House With Only An Attic And A Basement* (Penguin 2018), won the Ivan Juritz Prize for creative experiment.

**Abegail Morley's** debut, *How to Pour Madness into a Teacup*, was shortlisted for the Forward Prize Best First Collection. Other collections include *Eva and George: Sketches in Pen and Brush*, *The Skin Diary* and *The Unmapped Woman* which is forthcoming from Nine Arches Press. She is one of the co-editors at Against the Grain Press and editor of The Poetry Shed.

**Astra Papachristodoulou** is a poet and artist with focus in the experimental tradition. Astra has given individual, collaborative, and interactive readings at events in Slovenia, Vienna, Greece and the UK, including at the European Poetry Festival and IGNOR Festival. Her work has been exhibited at the National Poetry Library and The Poetry Society – [www.astranaut.co.uk](http://www.astranaut.co.uk)

**Anita Pati** was a winner of the inaugural Women Poets' Prize 2018. Her debut pamphlet, *Dodo Provocateur*, won *The Rialto* open pamphlet competition and was published in September 2019.

**Michelle Penn's** debut pamphlet, *Self-portrait as a diviner, failing*, won the 2018 Paper Swans Pamphlet Prize. Her poems have appeared in journals and anthologies on both sides of the Atlantic – [@mich\\_penn](https://twitter.com/mich_penn)

**Nic Stringer** was highly commended by the Forward Prizes in 2018 for *A day that you happen to know*, published by Guillemot Press. Art and poetry are in various anthologies, journals and online.

Cover, detail from *Every day the world gets fuller*, 2017

**Tamar Yoseloff's** sixth collection, *The Black Place*, was published by Seren in October 2019. She's also the author of *Formerly*, a chapbook incorporating photographs by Vici MacDonald (Hercules Editions, 2012) shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award; two collaborative editions with artist Linda Karshan; and a book with artist Charlotte Harker. She's currently a lecturer on the Poetry School / Newcastle University MA in Writing Poetry.

**Marty Grosz: Music from The Mermaid Inn, 2012**

**Corrupted Poetry** operates not-for-profit. Please do take this limited-edition pamphlet with you, and if you would like to leave a donation towards our production costs there is a collection plate. Thank you for your support.

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