A Girl, Her Mother, and Me

1.

Some questions have no answer

emerge from the lips of a child

in a terrified wail:

mummy, what's wrong?
what is happening to me?
why does it hurt so much?

This little girl
with a catheter in her bladder
cries out as her body spasms
and spasms
calls through her cries
and her tears
for explanations no-one can give.

Her mother
makes no false promises

tells no comforting lies:

just take a deep breath, that's a girl

and the calmness in her voice
repeating the mantra at each cry
is like a balm

soothing the child

easing her own pain

and the two of them

like this

ride the storm together.

The girl bites her lip, breathing in breathing out,

trying to let the wave pass without crying,

wanting to listen to The Three Little Wolves

and the Big Bad Pig, but the wave builds

David Adès, ‘A girl, her mother, and me’.

Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.

and builds and there is no crest and it hurts
mummy, it hurts and it hurts too loud for words
and mummy is there again, telling her to breathe.

Some questions
coming from the mouth of a child
pierce the skin
burrow inwards to the heart of things –
the questions
that you have asked yourself
and still ask
knowing there is no answer
but wanting one anyway

and so
each time the reading is stopped
by a wave of pain
and the terror-filled cries of a child
who cannot understand
I take to the corridors and pace
noting my agitation
the reverberating echo of the girl’s
questions
and the alchemy of a mother’s love
transforming distress into calmness.

Ah, that big bad pig knows a trick or two –
he’s not big and bad for nothing: there’s more
to blowing houses down than huffing and puffing –
like a stick or two of gelignite and a long fuse.
But try as we might, we don’t find out
if there is a happy ending to the story: a big wave
this time and mummy there again, telling her to breathe.

As I am leaving
mother tells daughter
to thank the man
for coming to read
and she
crying hard now
wrenches herself to stillness
and with the strength
she is beginning to discover
says in a calm voice:

thank you for reading the story to me

David Adès, ‘A girl, her mother, and me’,
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
before turning away back into her pain and her crying.

2.

I carry painkillers up the slopes of Mt. Kinibalu to dull the edges of broken glass inside my back if they should grind together if they should move and cut afraid and wondering at my foolishness. I carry the memory of a younger body as I ascend step by step through laboured breathing through protesting muscles through head pain and nausea past the rainforest past the flowering orchids the water-filled nepenthes past the tree line past my youth breathing deeply the thinning air.

I carry my love for the woman walking ahead of me. I carry the sky on my shoulders clouds and rain the steepness unfolding horizons stretching inside and out.

My legs are heavy but I am light. I carry joy like a prancing child hauling myself up the rock-face in the dark at 3 a.m. toward a dawn summit.

David Adès, ‘A girl, her mother, and me’. 
Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011. 
I carry the voices of a girl and her mother all the way up the slopes of Mt. Kinibalu and each time I falter they hitch me to them and lift and I climb whispering thank you and thank you.

David Adès
Gesher Haziv, 1974

Once a week
on summer nights tender as an embrace
Menachem Menachem
his handlebar moustache
and his accordion
conspired
to pour music into the sky
so that our feet could fly.

We would climb onto the kibbutz moadon roof
tucked warm into the world:
the flickering lights of Rosh Hanikra
and the slopes of Lebanon
to the north,
the beach at Achziv
unseen to the west
and the dark smudge of Mediterranean beyond it,
the orchards of the kibbutz
and neighbouring kibbutzim
in the valley to the east
all the way to the lights of kibbutz Matsuva,
a velvet dome of sky brimful with stars
spilling over us
breeze on bare skin

and dance folk dances
Tamari with her straight blond hair
white blouse, blue jeans,
irreverent imp whom I adored,
and the rest of us
children and adults together
a synchronicity of feet and bodies
revolving with the night
in a suspension of toil,
in a love of life.

David Adès
Snapshot at Maedan Beach

A drumbeat of rain
cracks open the night sky,
lashes tin roofs and coconut fronds.

We turn off the creaking fan,
unshutter the windows to hear it better,
feel a fine mist cool on our skin.

The two of us are here
by some collision of circumstance
lying on a bed in a darkroom

developing prints of ourselves together.
The rain rhythms into the silence between us —
answer to its own question.

I wake in the bright light of morning
overexposed, cleansed of desire.

*David Adès*
Step After Step

In a desert night awheel with stars
my feet scuffle sand and stones
pacing back and forth on a dry *wadi* bed
breaching
the vast silence
and on either side
black blankets beneath the sky —
the rock walls I climbed before nightfall
to look down on the ravine
our small encampment there
and somewhere unseen
Bedouin and their tents
whose homes we have intruded upon
thoughtless and eager —
pacing back and forth now
while the others sleep
keeping watch
scuffling sand and stones
not far from the mountain
we will ascend before dawn
rock upon rock upon rock
and a thousand steps carved into it
from the monastery of Santa Katarina
at its foot rooms full of skulls
dank and musty
climbing up into almost dawn sky
climbing into
the Book of Exodus
step after step
to a point half way up the mountain
where a stone hut is guarded
by a lone cypress
a finger of olive green
splashed upon brown and red rock
pointing upwards
step after step
until the summit

David Adès, ‘Step After Step’.
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
and dawn and
mountains
and rocks spread out
in all directions waking from sleep waking into the day
filling the world with colour every morning for thousands of years
and here the endless pilgrimage
and here revelation
the burning bush the ten commandments
and here in a long robe white-bearded patriarchal
talking with G-d Moses
and here all the thousands that followed
and here now us
for the one and only time taking the thousand steps down
bouncing jumping still children
knowing little more than when we came understanding nothing
eager for the next place and the next.

David Adès
Yesterday’s Feast

(with a nod in the direction of, and an apology to, David Kirby)

Yes, yes, there was Schwebel’s famous rye, toasted, with cuts of Santa Fe Turkey and Jarlsberg Cheese and yes, the Nature Valley Chewy Cranberry & Pomegranate Trail Mix and later the Kitchens of India Pav Bhaji Mashed Vegetable Curry on a bed of couscous but in between, before, during, after, I ate and ate with the appetite of a glutton, poems, yes, poems, one after the other starting with samplers from The Autumn House Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry where, being a parochial Johnny-come-lately Pittsburgh boy I checked to see how many of the 112 important American poets represented in its 401 pages of poetry lived in Pittsburgh (11 on my count though others have Pittsburgh roots) and how many of those read at the recently concluded Hemingway’s Summer Series and felt this little tingle of pride to find four of them – Jan Beatty, Romella Kitchens, Ed Ochester and Michael Wurster – if you don’t include the editor of the anthology, Michael Simms – and a tingle of something else, too, which, if I were to be uncharitable to myself, I would call hubris, at the fact that I read at Hemingway’s as well, little me, stepping into the ring with some of the big guys and hoping to hell it was poetry and not wrestling I was there for and then, once I had that out of the way, eating the poems of Billy Collins from horoscopes for the dead and finding myself walking down Murray Avenue chortling at his Feedback poem, the five liner where – no, no, you eat it for yourself – and then for main course, a degustation menu, serious work that, tit bits and morsels redolent with flavour a la master chef Cheong Liew, to be savoured slowly, one after another, in methodical alphabetical sequence, no casual riffling back and forth among the pages now, eating poems by Kim Addonizio, Maggie Anderson, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Jan Beatty (finally, after hearing her read, the taste of her written words, line by line), Jacqueline Berger, George Bilgere, Peter Blair, Chana Bloch,
Laure-Anne Bosselaar, Andrea Hollander Budy, Rick Campbell, Lucille Clifton, Billy Collins (again!), Steven Cramer, Jim Daniels, Todd Davis, Toi Derricotte, Matthew Dickman, Michael Dickman (twin brothers no less), Patricia Dobler and Stephen Dobyns, looking at their photos as I ate, the brief bio notes little side dishes, little accompaniments, nibbling here, gorging there, masticating slowly, indecorous I know, letting all those different flavours loose on my palate, most untried, as if I had suddenly arrived at an exotic restaurant in an exotic country, savouring it so much there was no time to go to the freezer for some Ben & Jerry’s, and then mixing it up with a little Rod Usher, a little Judith Rodriguez, finding one of her poems burrowing its way into me — not like bilharzia, not heading for lungs or liver, for bladder, rectum, intestines, spleen, no — aiming straight for my heart as some poems do, whether ingested or not. After Judith, I had to stop eating, just for a while to allow a little digestion, a few hours with my two daughters, the older clinging to my leg tearfully as I tried to leave, delaying me for 15 minutes and screaming still as I closed the front door and raced off to Coffee Tree Roasters in Shadyside and the Poetry Book Discussion Group where Michael Wurster, yes, Michael Wurster, one of the 112 important American poets, was leading a reading and discussion on David Kirby’s The House on Boulevard Street, yet another unfamiliar poet and book, and I liked the way Michael said to me, You’re the Australian poet, aren’t you? and how by being an Australian and a poet in Pittsburgh elevates me to the Australian poet, elevates me from my usual happy enough position as one of thousands of Australian poets and a relatively minor one in the scheme of things — no, no, I’m really not saying that from false modesty - and I’m not sure if its hubris again but there was a kind of suffused contentment percolating through all those eaten poems, lodging itself somewhere amongst them, if only for a moment or two before I started eating again. It was a small group – Michael, Joan Bauer and Judy (both Hemingway’s readers) and earnest Art who, bless him, liked my reading enough to buy a copy of my book, and a man in a wheelchair — but no Jimmy Cvetic, who I was hoping to see to tell him that I’d written two poems for his International Day of Peace — silence the violence — poetry reading — and they were already munching bits of Kirby’s book, a bit like Kirby goes for Roman Polanski’s cookies in one poem, with a kind of addictive gusto, despite Judy’s reservations and her
raising that hoary old chestnut *but is it really poetry?* ah, and how many times have we all asked that question, or jumped to the defence of a poem when someone else has asked it? So we mulled that over a bit, everyone except me with their copy of the book with its cartoon style cover, and decided that it didn’t really matter, and when it was my turn to read Joan gave me her book and I picked a poem at random and waded into a density of sawtooth-margined stanzas, a form I’d not seen before, sprinkled with allusions and references and French phrases so that Judy, slow to warm to it all, tentatively suggested *narcissism*, and I was trying not to like it either, classifying it as that self-indulgent, self-referential, name-dropping, source-quoting type of poem I have always detested and swore I would never write (but what do they say about saying never?), except that, as I said to Judy if he was a lesser poet, he wouldn’t get away with it whereas in fact, his lines had hooks in them, all kinds of hooks, musical hooks and riffs, the hooks on those bras I struggled to remove, fingers fumbling, nervous, excited, in the days when I still removed bras, and I was reading these stanzas with sentences that went on and on, reminding me both of Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, particularly that sentence starting at about page 60 of volume 1 that goes on for two pages and is so full of colons, semi-colons, commas, brackets and dashes that by the time you reach the end you have to go back to the beginning to try and make sense of it all; and of the end of the Beckett Trilogy with its angst ridden hypnotic monologue, but Kirby’s sentences were river cruise sentences, flowing easily downstream, and reading them I was hooked on line after line, flapping with my mouth opening and closing, and it wasn’t just the lines that had hooks, but the poems too, narratives that told meandering stories with such unpredictability, with so many diversions, that you had to keep reading them to find out where they went, and it seemed that some of them didn’t themselves know where they were going, or reached their end and continued somewhere off the page where no-one could follow, so that Kirby became a tour guide but it was a mystery tour with no fixed itinerary and different every time, that took us into side streets and alleyways, concert halls, unfamiliar rooms, gardens and at the same time, Kirby was a host making introductions — and here is Jerry Lee Lewis, fresh off owning a poem, fresh off strutting across the page, grabbing a couple of drinks from a passing tray, and here is Fats Domino, here is Sylvia Plath, here
is, here is, here is — and the party was in full swing and what
the hell, the drinks were free, the company was entertaining and
despite myself I was having a wonderful time, coming to the end of my
poem and listening to Michael read next and when Joan’s turn came,
she found herself part way through a poem getting ahead of her
voice, suddenly struggling to repress a laugh, one of those
laughs that insist on themselves, that will not be denied, until she
lost it and it bubbled up and out, all the way from the belly, one of those
laughs that are infectious, and time after time, Kirby did that too —
brought laughter into the room, laughter despite ourselves, and
how many poets can do that? By the time I went to bed, I had
eaten so much I was bloated and unable to sleep and it was as if the
voices of the poems I’d eaten had lodged in my head because I started
hearing them, they were talking to one another, and I realised
Kirby’s party was still going on but amongst poets now, making
connections or visiting each other again except that, what
happened next?, some Australians started turning up: Ken Bolton
sauntered in and headed straight for the corner where Kirby was having a
laugh with Billy Collins, and then I saw Mike Ladd in deep discussion
with Jan Beatty — I’d wanted them to talk ever since I heard
about Jan, and Mike saved me the trouble of introductions — and
there was Joan, at the door, greeting all the newcomers, effusive as
ever, and the party was still in full swing when I must have fallen asleep,
but when I awoke it was not yet morning and the strobe light
flashing outside the bedroom windows was lightning, the night
filled with the percussive crack of downwards thunder at the
same time as the long growling rumble of the sky’s empty stomach,
thunder rolling sideways, and maybe it was this that silenced the voices,
because by daybreak I could no longer hear them, though I fancied
they would resume their conversations, near and far, with and
without me, and later, on this day after, when I had started to
write this poem and excitedly read a half written draft to my wife, she
told me (as wives do) that it is the worst poem I’ve ever heard and I
don’t like it at all, I don’t like the tone of it, its garrulous and who
would ever read a poem like that? No one will and I thought to
myself well why don’t you tell me what you really think? I
wouldn’t want you to hold anything back and I noticed too that she
didn’t say it was the worst poem I’d ever written or that she had heard
me recite, but that it was the worst poem she had ever heard so I
guess that made me not just the Australian poet but the
Australian poet who wrote the worst poem his wife ever heard and look, there goes hubris, hubris is leaving the building (tail between his legs) thanks for the visit I say to his sad, forlorn, diminished form, come again soon but I suspect THAT won’t happen though hubris is such a lovely word and not a bad feeling either in moderation, and yes, there’s nothing like a bit of criticism to put the brake on things and of course I know, I can’t write Kirby – no-one can write Kirby except Kirby – so what was I thinking? but rather than leave that as a rhetorical question, let me answer, I was thinking I was going to have a lot of fun trying.

*David Adès*
– Αμέρικα!

This is how she said it,
she who spoke no English.

– Αμέρικα…

This is perhaps how she said it,
a wrinkled imprint in her deathbed.

– Αμέρικα

This is what she definitely said,
a mother’s last wish,
period.

Ultimate link with the immigrant son
Ultimate arrival to her own immigration,
the one that never happened.

Yiorgos Anagnostou
Pale Imitation

And then I grew a beard
the way I saw it in a Men’s magazine,
mirror-like
a pioneer’s image razor sharp.

And when I blazed my beard
the way my accent led me,
did I grow
– or do I err –
a shade or two
further foreigner?

Yiorgos Anagnostou
Damaged Women

I.

They don’t make ’em like that anymore: sirens
going off in the background, drowned

violins ’round their neck – gonna make a sentimental
journey – stubby smokes stuck to lips, a perfect seam

about to burst. They stayed in rooms just long enough
to be missed when they left. The inevitable always happened
to them: a slow fall from the audience’s grace who
naturally didn’t want to witness the shriveling: the appetite

for delightfully solid flesh. Horses are in the picture
and the droning voice of someone believing we believe.

We all did. Then the ambulance again,
and the sirens.

II.

Matter of fact reports of her demise, scripted, deadpanned
into her tight blue skirt. I’m sure it’s blue. It must be blue. It matches

her eyes perfectly. Her pumps never scuff against anything
more than situations – a relative is involved, a crime

committed and he’s more concerned about the next six
months. He wants one more chance, one final legacy. He came

late to the picture, almost every day – a heart condition, later
revealed by the studio – believe me, it was a scandal.

_Claudia Grinnell_
In the Room of Lost Things

After the fire, things must have been tight for a while, all that contracted living. I close the eyes and the eyes step from their caves, for a moment flash lights across epileptic fits and turns and sell visions before dawn. The sheds of vanities full now. A pretty post office: small cards, high snow. We are here.

Because now even the cattle are mad they do not hear the bell. Because now wolves lurk again in darkness. Because now the sheared wool of all times collects itself in heaps of failure. Cotton undershirts, worn three times, dirty and repaired by parents and passed to brothers and sisters to brothers and sisters.

Where I look, the view from ash, in tears extinct. Those on a last breath hope, which kindles them again, towards products of urgent necessity and artificial illusion, speculation and acts.

For sale: white shirts, young hands, which do not embrace tenderness. Sad. As sad as the words of the south. Others did not come at all. They did not travel to this age – old loves kept them. Our loved dead ones.

Our mothers eternally without embrace. At all the transit points, at the border of every country, at the edge of isolation of this room. The man shoves a handful of cans aside, opens the suitcase to reveal a chainsaw. Not allowed under current regulations.

They, we say, consist of variously motivated enemies who will have to learn to love us. Only then will we have won.

*Claudia Grinnell*
Ballast

Matchbox metal bridge frames a beginning, from here to the end. We begin at the ocean and we will finish there. Blue as them singers in the washed out city, panhandling dreams and songs for a dime in the right ear.

Susan Gorgioski
Good Laundry Day

Monday, 22 October, 2007
The sky is red and quiet
I wake up to its blood darkness
believing the day has been slept away
From my bedroom window screen
in my Oceanside flat
up on the Sepulveda hill
it is curious ash that drizzles to the ground
choking the land like two-faced snow
The smell of burning homes
cleansing away the over-brush
has drifted this far
Thankful for the warmth
I grab a V8 from the kitchen
stumbling into the living room
Cecilia is purring on the dark gray IKEA Karlstad sofa
as I click over to the KFMB news
talking at the misfortunes of neighbourhoods not far from me
Shuffling to my veranda
I snap pictures of the sun
a silver-shadowy mass in the apocalyptic sky
and video-record the stillness
Hustling back to my computer den
moments of history from my Sony Cybershot
are emailed to inquisitive friends from foreign lands
telling them how close I am to danger
how choking the air is around me

Dean Gui, ‘Good Laundry Day’,
Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
Then from my second story window
realizing it is only noon
I notice a woman treading tepidly across the glitter
a week’s worth of her family’s clothes
shoved carelessly into a hamper

and I wonder if today is a good
laundry day

Dean Gui
Comrades, March On

The eclipse was now total; the moon eaters had finished their job.
Manohar Malgonkar, The Devil’s Wind (1972)

They shot the poet at dawn
when the sun was just coming on . . .

Dear Sir,
It gives me immense pleasure
to write to you on behalf of our Honourable Head of the State,
who’s of late
a little perturbed by what you write,
but promises that if you feel contrite
and mend your ways,
you’ll see your contrition amply pays.
So pay careful attention to what follows,
and choose wisely whether or not you want to end up in the gallows
on charges of sedition;
let us know at your earliest your unambiguous decision,
for you, poets, can so twist language
that though you write cab it might as well mean cabbage.

My dearest Sir:
Please, please don’t stir . . .
I know you know what I mean—
So relax for a while and enjoy a glass of gin.
The trouble with people like you is
you’re ever so keen to tease
us, that is, people in power—
Why don’t you say in plain words what you desire?
Now it’s a simple point—
times are out of joint—
(see I’ve read Helmet!
for I’m a fan of Shexpear, the great).
To get back to my point—
times are really out of joint—
a point so simple even a child understands,
whereas you have strands
of graying hair on your head.
You know to what it has led—

Md. Rezaul Haque. ‘Comrades, March On’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
I mean the last book of your poems—
Your chelas call them gems.
Whatever they be,
we don’t want to see
any more of your poetic bubbles—
they have already given us too many troubles.
Hence we would advise:
you’d better announce your poetic demise,
or write about eternal topics such as love and nature,
so that we don’t have to write to you in future.
Take careful note that from now onward
there’ll be no ‘comrades, march forward.’
We’ll not write to warn you again:
the bargain
is sealed—
you must yield,
otherwise it would be too late
for you even to regret.

A single bullet did it all,
a single bullet made the poet fall . . .

Honourable Head of the State,
To be honest, I don’t regret
that you consider my poetry so revolting;
in fact, it would have been surprising
if you had found it otherwise;
from what you say I’m able to surmise
it’s doing what it’s meant to,
though what it’s doing is nothing new.
However, I won’t take long—
I know you don’t like to play ping-pong
with words,
though for trapping birds
you’ve no end of time.
Now I think it’s a crime
to tell a poet what to write and what not to,
after all a poet is not an animal in a zoo.
As for myself, my answer is clear and simple—
I write for people,
to make them see
the roots of man-made misery.

Md. Rezaul Haque. ‘Comrades, March On’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
I repeat,
a poet
is not an animal in a zoo,
or a pet that’s happy to lick your shoe.
As long as there will be cruelty, injustice and oppression,
I’ll keep urging, ‘comrades, march on.’

Do whatever you can.
I write for people, for both woman and man,
not to please you,
so you’re free to do whatever you want to.
I’m not going to fall in line.
For better or worse I don’t mind.

They shot the poet at dawn
when the sun was just coming on
to flood the world with its brilliant light,
but the ghastly sight
made it trip
into a total eclipse.

Md. Rezaul Haque
For J.: An Elegy

You’re gone, 
leaving behind just me, your daughter, and a son. 
A whole month has passed since, 
still I find it hard to convince 
myself that you’re no more— 
the very core 
of my small universe. 
A curse 
life now seems to be. 
What was the hurry? 
I don’t know 
why you had to go 
all of a sudden, 
while I see every now and then 
people twice as old as you, 
who seem to have few 
desires and even fewer dreams, 
frolicking in the streams 
of life, unmindful of the passage of time; 
but you chose to go in your prime!

Days pass by somehow, 
blurring the difference between then and now; 
but the nights seem to drag on and on, 
stirring memories of times long-gone. 
I toss and turn in my bed, unable to sleep; 
deep, deep 
within 
a small boat gives in 
to a nameless storm; 
an invisible worm 
eats away at its planks: 
I greet the dawn with thanks.

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1 The poem is dedicated to the memory of my brother-in-law, Masud Ahmed, who passed away in a road accident in July 2011.

At long last I hear the birds singing
and close my eyes to catch the familiar ring
of your voice in those happy notes;
the empty boats,
lying at anchor,
remind me you’re no more.

It’ll take me ages to learn
you’re not going to return
to our familiar shore;
perhaps the sore
will heal in time;
The old tunes will perhaps chime
again in a new pattern;
only you’ll never return,
only you’ll never be there
for me to call, ‘Abbu! I’m h-e-r-e.’ \(^2\)

*Md. Rezaul Haque*

\(^2\) The English equivalent of ‘abbu’ is ‘daddy.’
Adelaide

Although I was born in West Germany, just six years after the Second World War, and grew up playing in bomb craters, in rubble strewn streets, with my father’s warnings of unexploded grenades buzzing in my ears, the city of Adelaide feels more like home.

Adelaide, named for a German Queen, is where I’ve lived since the age of seven, and became a teen. It’s where I learned some hard truths and became a man. Although I’ve travelled all over Australia in Kombi or car, and returned once to Europe via India and the United States, Adelaide is like an old lover I can’t forget. She draws me back to her tousled bed and takes me in, with familiar strokes and the taint of sin. Her grid of streets are my memories graphed. Her parks are the borders of my dreams but also harbour nightmares.

Adelaide is my Great Mother. She has nurtured and enveloped my body and mind. Her graveyards keep the bones of my relations locked in her hard soil. I sometimes think of leaving, but Adelaide won’t let me go. I’m sure I will die here, and rest in her earthy womb for eternity.

Deb Matthews-Zott

Epistrophe: The Return

charred tomb parked outside police station
blackened mudguard shattered tinted windscreen
hang over cliff’s edge opposite soccer stadium wall
farewell seascape of his youth

parents died without seeing their émigré son again
he served rich diners in New York saw the twin towers fall
dreamed of retirement reunited with siblings
and friends in village of his birth

at last aged pension savings farewells return
a renewed life marred with bitterness
social misunderstandings petty jealousies
inheritance squabbles preceded the final insult

onslaught of malignancy contradictory medical opinions
bereft of therapeutic options cared for by strangers
Will witnessed by friend from childhood
Look what I’ve become! Is this how man ends! he’d said

dared not reveal his plan inquisitive townsfolk
stop and stare at skeleton of his car
death notices pinned on Church hoardings
rumours abound He must have had problems. They decide
accident foul play suicide?

his life a bag of ash

self-immolation rebuff to Orthodoxy

retribution for feigned kinship and sorrow

Loula S. Rodopoulos

Aigion, Greece, 2011
Rocks of Resistance

vehicles scale mountain heights  zigzag through expansive gorges  through valleys that witnessed slaughter

youthful screams muffled by overpowering rock formations  century aged boulders precariously perched  resisted invasion

now sleek tourist buses heave up narrow roads  welcomed by local tavern  hotel and hostel owners  winter invasion

souvenir  grocery shops  sell honey  cheeses  hiliopites\(^1\)  bunches of wild thyme  mountain tea

we reach Plateia Kalavryta  a warming morning  penetrated by chilled echoes of history  we sit under a giant plane tree  order refreshments at Coffee Republic  watch a toddler chase a ball in front of Cathedral steps

one clock tower shows the time as 14.34
the hands have not moved since December 13\(^{th}\) 1943\(^2\)

below the ski slopes of Mount Aroania  the holocaust museum weeps  turtle doves chorus reverence

Loula S. Rodopoulos

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\(^1\) gruel/pap
\(^2\) Holy Cathedral of the Assumption of Virgin Mary where the clock stopped at 14.34 on December 13\(^{th}\) 1943 when the Nazis invaded and murdered an entire population of men; imprisoned women and girls in the schoolyard setting the town alight including the Cathedral where the priest was killed.

Township

We are animals.
We are air, water and earth¹

Mobile at his ear, man pees at road side-spits at modernity.

Vehicular vortex -
City grot swathes drying washing.

Footpaths littered-
townspople step over.

Splotches of black grit-
speckle cracked pathways.

Dumpster stench-
supermarket refuse.

Butts tossed-
extinguished underfoot.

Smoking forbidden-
café owners flout.

Sea surges, brown sludge-
town sewerage seeps.

¹ David Suzuki, The Legacy Lecture, Perth International Arts Festival and UWA Extension 2010

Loula S. Rodopoulos. ‘Township’.
Transnational Literature Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
Bottles float through effluent-pollute inlets.

Shoreline pebbles-tossed with trash.

Promenade host to detritus-reluctant brooms.

Spent cartridges-litter vineyards, olive groves.

Fertiliser spread under vines-no masks.

Pine forests-await developers’ spark.

Domestic rubbish-tossed down mountain side.

Nicotine fouled air-mountain shroud.

Wild dog droppings-smear the square.

Canine cacophony - deafens silence.

Rats gorge, cats stalk-
footsteps startle, scramble out.

Ants trail through butts-
over polystyrene cups.

Indigent scavenge-
through hard junk.

Mobile at his ear, man pees at roadside - spits at modernity.

Loula S. Rodopoulos
That Hot Night

When the cops picked us up as law-breakers after approaching, all guns’n’belts’n’badges, they drove, with us behind a screen, radio drawling static-laced jargon, to the watchhouse with these stone cells.

They asked where we were from so I told them, Australia, and it turned out the aggressive one served with Diggers in ’Nam, said, Those guys sure could drink some, said this as if recalling golden days slipped away like water down a river. We exaggerated our smiles and accents.

He drove the patrol car to a motel where our room’s door featured a hole the size and shape of an angry boot. The proprietor looked away from us, a Ry Cooder tune playing low.

This was not our intended bivouac but we kept quiet about our camping budget. The ’Nam cop, now our friend, had explained how it was against the law in Maine to hitch-hike beyond nightfall. While I dreamed Elmore Leonard dreams my wife wrote to her genteel parents that hot night long ago.

Ian C Smith
Wells-next-the-Sea

I am anxious driving through green England
always moving on, never stopping long.
In Norfolk, an argument east of The Wash
an old man wearing a cloth cap
strokes a horse’s whiskery nose in grey light.

A man, a horse, a cart, a sign.
Yes, she wants to take the ride
but with the reins in her experienced hands.
The old man hears us out, considers us,
before agreeing to a test drive.

He watches. Scavenging gulls hover.
A merry-go round and round the empty carpark.
I talk her up, a city boy standing close,
clop, clop my praise overflowing.
You’d think she was Clancy’s daughter.

Our high seat might be a magic carpet,
morning air still, few cars, glimpse of sea.
Horse skiving, I ask how she knows the way.
The horse does. I’m just along for the ride.
Some early shoppers stop, turn to stare.

The old nag’s pace increases.
We must be heading back, she says.
Aren’t you steering? In control?
Hardly. Stop waving, you show-off.
She seems happier now, in her element.

The horizon behind, I picture Europe beyond,
my mind fizzing with travel’s romance.
Then the old man, looking lonely, relieved.
He says, I knew you’d be all right,
his words a lighthouse beam of hope.

Ian C Smith
Excursion to Jiri San before the mid-term holiday

My son-assistant’s growing up –
instead of mountain-climbing with me
he’s choosing three days with the group
that’s heading to an island in the Yellow Sea.

At a highway petrol-station
we’re bundled into different buses; through window glass
we wave and lip-read: Take care, take care.
My bus climbs up through rice paddies;
the students shout and eat.

A teacher mimes: San is mountain (ten fingertips touch)
we’ll walk a long time (two fingers scuttle)
we’ll sleep (head flops)
we’ll snore.

Our bus shudders to a halt;
my Mother Mountain journey can begin.

(Across the peninsula on a stony beach
does my son pitch his tent
and swim?)

Into the forested slopes the teenagers race;
the teachers too. ‘Go! Go!’ I tell them. ‘Don’t wait.
Meet you at the shelter!’ I imagine a small stone hut
built by wandering poet-monks ten centuries ago.

Alone on the path to Honghwahwon
a billion leaves fill my slow sky.

Listen to the water flowing by.
Joy on joy.

As darkness falls, I hear a rustle – a bear?
Strange not to hear my students call, ‘Sem! Sem!’


There are no trees now; only a chaos of boulders.
The air is cool and each kilometre
takes a long long time.
It is my life I’m walking.

On, on, questing, fearless. Embodied
but not bound by earth. Joy on joy.

A wow of stars stutter in the black sky, and the kind moon
tosses me a ribbon of her light.


Lesley Synge. ‘Excursion to Jiri San before the mid-term holiday’.
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011.
I round a boulder. What strange spectacle is this? It’s a national parks shelter as big as a stadium with a helicopter pad and signposts and offices! Park benches line the building’s front and there beneath electric light my fellow-teachers are happily drinking rice wine. They toast my arrival. ‘Jiri San?’ I ask. Yes, yes. No no. It seems Chonwangbong, the peak, is elsewhere. Snore first! I’m led upstairs. The floor is a vast paste of women’s bodies; on the ground floor must be the men. So! Instead of a solitary path to a poor poet’s hut this huge mountain’s braided with tracks and they all lead here. Why my school has chosen the most isolated way I’ll never know, but I’m in their debt for life. The strip of floor I’m given is the size of a baby’s cot. I collapse but in this vast hall of rest, amongst so many strangers, sleep does not come. My turn to bolt:

Farewell and happy holiday
I’m off to Chonwangbong by moonlight.

How bright the journey! Here under the swirling stars is a lunar movie of countless human shadows – I’m not alone in navigating boulders, bound for sunrise; only the foolish sleep past midnight on Jiri San. Our footsteps beat: Give us the sky! Nothing but sky! Give us the blessing of the sun. We pilgrims reach the top. In the murky dark on cold outcrops beneath a weight of cloud, we squat – families, school-friends, workplace mates. Then, out of the dense night-cloud three Warrior Dragons come a-thrashing, warning: Beware! We guard the Gates of Heaven! And from all directions, Divinities come a-wooing: Tiny people from the Earth realm observe this Jewel, our home! In their presence we Worldlings rise up, and in one breath implore the sun, ‘Now! Now!’

O. Heaven’s flying open – the molten lantern of the sun! Gold light pours over all: Korea! me! you! us! 
A crowd gathers, embraces, dances, 
sings the National Anthem, soccer war-cries, love-songs. 
New friends shake hands. We laugh with the joy of the pure – 
we are reborn!

The clouds are clouds again. 
The day applies its bleach 
and bids: *Back now, to the World.* 
Down I go, a goddess, happy in my realm 
of pink azaleas, stone steps, trees and leaves … 
Life’s given me this opportunity – and I’ve seized it. 
Bend knee. Lower boot. Beat, happy heart.

Mid-morning now, almost lunch; 
and down the rock steps 
young men come galloping. 
In centuries past, the men who ran on Jiri San 
were monks, training their bodies and their minds; 
now they’re corporation men in company T-shirts 
who’ve slept late and missed the sunrise. 
Down, down I go … past temples, 
under leaves that offer their billion blessings. 
Bend knee, lower boot and sing:

*Oh Jiri San Oh Jiri San*
*I feel your beauty striding in me*
*back back back to the Ordinary World.*

In Duncheol 
I couldn’t be more exhausted. 
My son’s reported on the Yellow Sea 
and is again off beneath birch and oak 
playing ‘catchy’ with the squirrels. 
On my bed in the house, I adopt the yoga Corpse Pose. 
I know my youth is gone; will my knees ever bend again? 
A week passes. School re-opens and the news gets out, 
‘The most unlikely, terribly old, English Conversation Teacher 
saw sunrise from Chonwangbong.’ 
I bask in mutual astonishment: Such an ordinary foreigner 
(and certainly one no longer young) 
yet granted an audience with Heaven!

*Lesley Synge*

*Jiri San:* Mt Jiri is mainland South Korea’s tallest mountain but the national park in fact encompasses a series of mountains. *San* means mountain and *ji-ri* can be translated as ‘exquisite wisdom’. It is said that the mountain has transformative powers; just by visiting, foolish people can turn wise. 
*Honghwahwonn:* a National Parks shelter close to the summit of Mt Jiri. 
*Chonwangbong:* the eastern peak, 1915m.

Lesley Synge, ‘Excursion to Jiri San before the mid-term holiday’. 
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 4 no. 1, November 2011. 
linger on

so I’m sitting on my floor you’d be happy
to know, cross-legged chain smoking listening
to the Velvet Underground

seemed as if the world fell hard
on you that summer, grinned
like a maniac humming her name

a quarter of a lifetime for an incense holder
made from driftwood she found in Cancun
or the painting she wanted you to have

because at seventeen you were her muse
or maybe the dogs goddamn Scotties
they barked at squirrels all day

you could’ve sworn it had been a week
but we both knew that the moon was full
and it had been four times more

you sat alone, barefoot cross-legged
listening to the Velvet Underground
letting ink drip every day

a kind of blood forming words
because it was a comfort
I could not give
life had been easier the summer before
when we spent seven dollars and bought that first album
thought we’d been witness to Lou Reed’s first breath

over a six-pack of Foster’s in a muggy Atlanta
one-bedroom downtown grit red corner house
we tried to understand it all

I remember your long wise face
the soundlessness of your airy laugh
the slump of your shoulders those patched-up jeans

bless Lou Reed who had taken his first
and all of his consecutive breaths
in a time and place we will never know –

bless us for imagining.

Heather Taylor Johnson
Two Trees

One: Slowly Growing in Understanding

I yearn for the commitment of the Pine
rising to where crisp is a layer of sky
sunlight gently multiplied
on each green blade.
I lie in the shade.

Now, combine tiny purple petals
with rain and the fresh
dung of a deer;
you will smell it.

Strong like my father.
Difficult to climb.
**Two: Tribute**
The Eucalyptus spreads itself
with twists only it comprehends

and the tips of its limbs
reach toward the space
where its own scented breath flows.
Inhale –
watercolours brought to life by breezes shifting clouds.
Exhale –
sun-flickered leaves like a symphony of wine glasses, fingered rims and Semillon.

I fit my back to the white of its wood.
I welcome children and animals.

*Heather Taylor Johnson*
Waterfall

Red dirt had become our clothing
and straw hair stuck to our necks.
We were getting used to each others’ skin
but it was too hot to touch.

As we walked along the prickled path
the sound growing from babble to applause
our moods followed our feet and the sound
until waterfall, and finally the waterfall.

We showed ourselves how to shriek
cleansing dirt and temperaments
wrong words we’d said last week
all washed away from the tallest rock.

In the end the sun fought to have its way
drying us out too fast, but still the feel
of the waterfall’s blast, how it settled
in the pool beneath

reached beyond the desert heat
and kept us cool,
cool as every exquisite thing
in this intense and shameless world.

Heather Taylor Johnson