

ELEGY FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Ashna Ali

*A*s of 2019, the estimated body count for migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, the planet's most surveilled stretch of water, reaches up to 40,000. This makes it the deadliest crossroad in the world.

Ancient blue conflagration...

Boundless source of Ionian adventure

marking men for myth with pride,

sword, and fireside imagination.

Amphitheater of Poseidon's huff and puff.

Provider of moonlit daydream

and the tideswell of homecoming.

Crucible of contradiction. Pluriversum.

A planet for holiday breeze and stolen kisses,

guitars plucked in serenade for seashells

and laurel leaves carried in the pocket for luck.

Giver of wordless wisdom, cherrybark skin,

and brine. Your Ivory cowlicks winking through space

at your galaxy sisters, your Sunday satellite face.

Oh you primordial bubble of so much human church.

The bodies you hold and hold.

Your thankless sorcery of breath

from phytodetritus. Praise oh praise

the afterlife of green plunge

feeding fish mouths, tucking carbon fragments

for a million years into deep sea nestle
until they magic into oil, coal, shale.
All the stuff of human weakness
exploding into the rich sweet of breath.
Simple bounty chaining its offerings
to the planet for free. Human artstory.
You held us even when entwined with time.
The Neolithic Atlit-Yam as frozen
as the citizens of Pompeii. The bodies
you made scenes of. The bodies you let go.

Who was it that said to drown
is the most maternal of deaths?
Were these our words when we weaponized
your body into militarized mobility regime?
Held you down with the hands of invisible men?
Denuded you of mysteries for a life
perpetually watched by an army
of extraterrestrial eyes? Now your body
is daily dotted with the blink of lights
that bear the names of vessels:
the Welcome, the Unwelcome, the Destined
for Murder by Neglect. Your body a border
in swarm with blasted hope and fuel leak.
The story that dies inside the trawled remains
of the bodies of the unbeloved—the ones you hold
and hold until the bitter stings and you spit them
from your poisoned mouth. That's the thing about myth:
it is marked by its living long after the memory
has died. If we let you, you would have told us

Ashna Ali |

a thing or two about ghosts. Instead we stare
through the space eye at your blue arms and legs
akimbo under navy night, your own eyes seared
forever open, unblinking.

Ashna Ali is a Brooklyn-based poet and serves as assistant professor of literature at Bard High School Early College Manhattan. Their poetry can be found in *Nat. Brut.*, *HeArt Online*, *The Felt*, *Bone Bouquet*, *No Dear*, *femmescares*, and more. Their academic work is published or forthcoming in *Journal of Narrative Theory*, *minnesota review*, and *Interventions*. They hold a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from The Graduate Center, CUNY.

FULL FATHOM FIVE

Beatrice Carnelutti

My best friend could conjure up a storm of magic just by being present. She held the mysteries of this world in her palm and sometimes I had the privilege to be let in on the wonders that only she knew.

On a moonless night we were coming back from the club. We had asked a couple of strangers we had kissed to drive us to the beach, near the rocky cliffs. They didn't complain when we refused their company – they just left us there. We stepped out of the car, and started running towards the shore, her hand squeezing my forearm, her soft “I wanna show you something” melting into the waves that crashed against the rocks.

Then, she let go of me, and I lost her in the night. I couldn't see her, her dark hair, her dark skin, in the pitch black of 3 a.m.: it was as if she had condensed her whole self into a spirit that blew over the sea and dissolved into the north wind. I could only hear her voice in the air, and I felt like I had no choice but to follow it, my feet sinking in the cold sand, the cold sand turning into hard stone, and the hard stone turning into foam. I stood on the edge of a rock, calling out her name and hearing nothing but her laughter in return, rising from the water. I inhaled the salt air and abandoned myself to the wind that carried her voice, before jumping into the quiet and sinking under the waves – the silence pulling me down, the tide holding onto my waist. I kept sinking in the blue, the blue of high waters, the blue of late nights, the blue of my dress that kept puffing and flattening on my body, and the further I sank, the warmer the water got, until the gentle perpetual motion of the ocean lulled me into a bliss.

I don't know how long I was underwater before a hand, *ex machina*, brought me back to the surface, to a calm sea in the rosy hues of dawn, and dragged me onto a flat rock in a hollow in the cliffs. The spikes and shells cut my skin, and my watercolor blood gathered in the rock's cavities. It was then, in the cold breeze of the early morning, that I heard my name in my best friend's voice. I had been so worried she might have been

lost at sea, that I started pestering her with questions. Yet, she came closer and said nothing – not even a sign of relief on her face. “We’re just in time!” she exclaimed, looking into the distance. I followed suit and was blinded by a lilac light emerging from the waves and gleaming in the rising sun.

A sense of uneasiness slowly started washing over me. I needed to leave, I needed to be on dry land, away from the water, when suddenly the air began to reek of seaweed and rot. I felt stranded, with no way out, and I was mad at my friend for leading me there, so far from home, and what for? Just to show me a violet sunrise?

I scanned the horizon, looking for a way out, and I urged my friend to leave, as my anxiety grew overwhelming. When it became clear that she wouldn't listen, I resolved to leave without her. I turned to the water, ready to jump and swim as fast as I could, when I caught a glimpse of holographic scales slithering just below the surface. Petrified, still staring, I cried out my best friend's name and held out my hand looking for hers: the rock where we were sitting was surrounded by mermaids, looking at us, smiling, waiting.

I grew up to tales of mermaids. Their voice is sweet like wine and honey, their songs a distant call from the land of heart's desire. They hold the beauty of everything you've ever wanted and the soothing grace of requited love. But the stories of my youth say that one should turn away from the sugar-baited words of mermaids, for their songs are full of empty promises; they hypnotize humans and, once they're in their thrall, they drag them to their death. Some myths recount that mermaids turn to stone when they can't seduce their victims, but have you ever heard of anyone resisting their call? When I was a kid, my grandmother would kiss my forehead and pray over my head that if I ever met a merfolk I would be strong enough to stand my ground and feel the presence of the earth, firm and steady, below my feet.

I wanted to kneel, cover my ears, and close my eyes, but before I could abandon myself to the terror of certain death, my best friend held my hand – still outstretched for hers – and pulled me deeper into the cave, where it was damp, dark, and sultry, and a

pungent smell of salt and decay hovered in the air. “Did you know about them? Why would you take me here?!” I cried as I curled up, feeling betrayed and powerless.

As a hopeless sadness carved a space behind my eyes, trickled down my throat and into my chest, my friend’s voice, gentle and deep, started echoing in the lair.



“One day when I was ten, I was playing on the beach, collecting shells and making up stories in my head – you know, the way kids do when they daydream of adventures in far away lands – when I heard a woman’s voice calling me from the water. I turned towards the sea, and I almost couldn’t believe the beauty of this woman... well, creature. See, I knew about mermaids, how they appear out of thin air and drag you to the depths of the ocean, but I couldn’t run away; her voice had such a soothing sweetness to it, like the first ice cream after winter, melting on your tongue. I felt like I could have really been happy if, just once, I could have touched her hand. So I did. I stepped into the water, and it felt so warm, so cleansing. I tried to beat the resistance with long steps and powerful strokes, half walking, half swimming, as fast as I could. She didn’t move, she just waited there, smiling the most welcoming motherly smile. On my last stroke, she caught my arm mid-air. I touched her hand, and I held it, but the longer I held it the more unreal and distant it felt, and the joy that I was sure was at my fingertips seemed to be withdrawing, moving further and further away.

And then I saw her skin turn greyish and crumpled, and her angelic smile molding into a devilish grimace. She opened her mouth and, through sharp, rotting fangs, she let out the loudest shriek that pierced my chest – I felt my heart breaking in half, as fear’s icy flames flared up from my belly to my head. She clung onto me, her nails digging into my skin, and she plunged under the surface, dragging me deeper and deeper.

And the deeper we reached, the darker the water turned, until everything around us was black, and black was all I could see, and it was as if all that nothingness seeped through my eyes into my body and ate away at me, piece by piece, until there was nothing left.

In that desperate loneliness, I witnessed it all. I heard the magic voice that asks everything of you and blows conscience off its course, I felt the destructive force of water and seduction, and I saw how a quiet yearning can turn into a violent urge to the tune of a distant song. I touched the bottom of the maelstrom and dwelled amongst the dead, and from there I saw sea monsters swarming up to the surface.

One day – God only knows how long it had been, a few hours, a few weeks? – I woke up, naked and cold, on this rock. To this day, I still don't know why they let me go. The

hideous monster was there, next to me, back to its delightful form, waiting for me to wake up. It said that one day the merfolk would have claimed me back. In the meantime I would have had to go back to the shore everyday at dawn: I'd die a painful death if I were to turn into a mermaid away from the water." Then she started crying, uncontrollably, and among her tears she sobbed "the mermaid also demanded that on the day of my return I'd take one life as an offering to the sea."

It sounded like a slap across my face that left me dumb and startled.

"You're coming with me."

Before I could fully grasp the danger I was in, her voice turned into the most delightful melody that made a nest for itself at the center of my chest, soothing all my fears and longings, and all hints of resistance disappeared. Within my heart I felt a force that nudged me and affirmed "if the power of life and death is in the tongue, let her voice decide my fate, and let her song erase my memory, let this creature take me by the hand and lead me to the chambers of the sea."

We stood up and walked out of the cave, slowly, hand in hand, towards the water.

She jumped in the water first and from there outstretched her hand towards me – I held it tight, and I looked at her. It was then that the horror woke me from my drowse. Her eyes had turned black, her teeth hungry fangs, her neck crumpled with gills, and I could see a long tail swaying under the surface. I swiftly drew my hand back, but she grabbed my ankle and clawed her nails into my skin, dragging me into the water up to my waist, as her sweet siren's song turned into a banshee's cry. I tried to scream but no avail. No sound came out, and my whole body was numb with fear, but I held onto the rock with both my hands, with all the strength I had left.

As I was facing the heartbreak of losing a friend and myself, in that rock, I felt my grandmother's kisses on my forehead, like a balm on my skin. They say that prayers are bindings: they tie a knot with the veins around your heart and seal your soul to the intention of the plea. My grandmother spoke blessings and wove my name in them. In that very moment, I remembered what it felt like to lie on a meadow, watching cherry tree branches swaying in the gentle April wind, feeling new grass, bumpy under my

Beatrice Carnelutti |

back, fresh under my palms. In that very moment, I felt the earth, firm and steady, below my feet. And the more I sat with the memory of the earth – its strength, grace, and dirt – the stronger my arms and my body felt. I screamed “NO! NO! NO!” relentlessly, like a mantra that echoed in the back of my head and throughout the bay, as my fingernails started bleeding from holding onto that rock, I managed to drag myself and the mermaid – still hanging onto me – out of the water. Her hand suddenly hardened around my ankle and I heard the snap of my bone breaking in her fist. I went blind for a second, as the pain radiated from my foot to my head, and recoiled in my chest, where it exploded in a cry that emerged from my throat and ended in hers. We screamed in unison. I turned around and I saw her hand, grey and bumpy, petrified. I saw a grimace of pain disfiguring her face as I heard the sound of flesh being torn apart: her skin was breaking out in large bubbles and spikes that swelled until she lost what human features she had left. My best friend had turned to stone – rough, dark, rigid.

I was alive.

Cemented in the rock up to my calf, but I was alive, and out of the water.

Cemented in the rock up to my calf, bleeding and tired, I fell asleep.

By the time I woke up, the sun was already high.

Staring at the sky, my whole body itching with dry salt, I thought of the meadows, and the new grass, and the cherry tree branches swaying in the gentle April wind. I thought of the earth, firm and steady, far away from me. I thought of my grandmother, and her forehead kisses – I closed my eyes and I prayed to her.

“If I can’t leave this rock and the sea, let the earth live through me. Let me grow roots that dig deep into the stone, into the floor of the silent sea, but let my chest grow tall, let flowers grow where my hair was, let me spurt branches and let me stretch them up, up towards the sky, up, up and away from the water, and let me sway in the gentle April wind.”

Beatrice Carnelutti is an independent scholar who got duped into getting a Law Degree at the University of Milan and now researches and writes about literary texts and intellectual histories. Her interests range from American Studies to the Western Occult Tradition, from Women’s Studies to popular culture.

THE BOOK OF EXODUS, OR HOW I CAME TO BE HERE

Megan Pindling

I like to imagine that I sprung up from the earth somewhere beneath the Unisphere in Flushing Meadow Park. The topography of Queens, the invisible, firm lines bisecting the borough are the lines drawn on the palm of my hands. If you cup your hands together so that the bases kiss and your fingers stretch out like grasping tree branches, you can hold the world in your hands, not on your back as Atlas was burdened to do. The world is written across my face, pumping blood from my heart to the rest of me.

I wanted to be able to point to a place on a map and say to myself, "there." Stick a red pushpin through the paper and into the wall. I took a DNA test, and yes, Africa, but the lines now are not the lines then, and so the surface of my map remains unblemished, and disappointment manifests as the clack of a keyboard.

What I have is an approximation of time and place and blank spaces that I have to fill in myself.

BEFORE 1800

My ancestors were fruitful. I don't mean in the Biblical sense, though that could apply. I mean that they were kind to the earth and the earth was kind in return. They weren't called African, because the word had not been written yet. Their Gods weren't all-knowing and singular, but legion and free.

1800

By 1800 my people had left from over there and come over here. I say, my people because I am desperate for some kind of ownership. I desire to own my history and the people who have been so removed. Ironic, that. And from the removed, a palimpsest people emerged, constructed through re-memory. Constructing a re-memory means collecting

Megan Pindling |

a million little pieces in your hands knowing full well that some pieces will slip through your fingers and be left behind.

1825

My grandmother used to tell me, *We're not African-American you know*. A pause and then, *I am not an African-American*, she said as if to convince herself of a bottomless wish. *What are we then?* I'd ask. *We're Negroes*, she'd say smiling with all of her teeth. "African-American" was perhaps too heavy a burden. It frightened her to touch it, much less pick it up and carry it on her shoulders.

1850

I say I am West Indian because I am. There is no single island in the expanse of blue that I can point to and say, Look! There I am. The map on Ancestry.com lights up on the land where we touched down, no matter how briefly. Trailing dots of restless feet. To follow their path is to follow them everywhere. They crisscrossed across the blue so much, I wonder if they could walk on water. Or if I am descended from the Mami Wata and we travelled beneath the water instead. I can breathe underwater. I bite. There's more water than land, the spaces between the land are the true living waters. I don't mind the salt.

Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, St. Maarten, Suriname, French Guiana, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Montserrat, Antigua, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, I am legion.

1900

My family built the Panama Canal with dynamite and bone. They dug into the land with their bare hands and made mountains with the displaced earth. The word isthmus rolls with pleasing resistance off of the tongue. And I know that the earth cannot bleed, even if it does in my nightmares, but did it hurt when they cut across the land to allow for the waters? Two great oceans forced to coexist.

1925

My great-great grandmother's name is Eugenia Montague. I believe she was a poet. I have no evidence of this. She came from one of the French islands: Martinique or Guadeloupe. And yet, Martinique or Guadeloupe are two of the only pieces of land that do not light up on my ancestry page. My grandmother insists, however, even though all we have of her is her death certificate. She gave birth to my great-grandmother Martha in 1920 and died in 1928. She was 30.

1960

When my grandmother was seventeen and three months pregnant with my mother, she looked up at the Unisphere, newly minted and gleaming, and tried to imagine living a world made of steel. People from all around the world descended on Flushing Meadow Park to see the world suspended. The Unisphere, commissioned for the 1964 World's Fair, is a representation of the Earth and not a reflection of it.

2000

The Unisphere seems a lot smaller now. It barely casts a shadow over the children playing in the pool that surrounds it. Children fill their water guns and water balloons from the fountain. They splash water on their faces, at each other. My mother groans. *The pool is decorative.* But I think that they are on to something.

Megan Pindling is a writer based in Queens, NY. She writes poems that aren't very poetic, literary criticism that is a little too poetic and is working on a novel which is absolutely terrifying. She is suspicious of words like "literary" and "genre" and is probably, more than likely, daydreaming at this very moment.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN (A NOVEL)

Robert Moscaliuc

ZERO

The man with the beard and the round glasses who sold luxury bags for a living said: “leave your history at the door when you enter.” I complied and poured it all over the carpet that said WELCOME HOME.

I tried to see myself as the person whose home it was.

I saw the light in the living room through the eyes of an astronaut: emptied of dichotomies and air. Lightheadedness I often confuse with ecstasy. Freed from the color of my skin. Finally, free of my womanhood. Finally, the thought crossed the street bespattered with my brains, I am free to do as I wish with my body. Lay eggs for that matter, grow a long tubular tumor between my legs, flaunt it like a sword. Behold, I am the master of the earth, I may now treat this earth the way I handle the bodies of women: with the dexterity of cheap magicians who ask for volunteers at birthday parties.

I told the man: “look, the trees are dying, the polar bears are starving, the oceans are depleted. All these are withdrawing to a place from where none returns. *As we speak*, somewhere in the world, someone is performing unspeakable acts poisoning woods and waters.” As He nodded to the rhythm of my list of atrocities, His features smoothed out and He became young again. A punk Jesus. He said: “I know, it's terrible. Can I offer you a drink or something?” I said: “NO, thank you, CAN'T YOU SEE,” and the Man of all Men began to undress. I said: “JUST LIKE THAT, the ice caps are melting.” To that, He said: “and my dick is getting hard. Let's not talk about global warming right now. There are more *pressing* matters at hand.” He then grabbed my hand and placed it on His crotch. A smile of sorts blossomed on His lips. He said: “this place right here is hotter than global warming.”

Repeat after me: first-confusion-and-then-clarity. Make this your mantra as you sit on top of your bed at dawn to holler at the world. At times it will feel as if you're reading through my madness, which does not have a face with dark circles under the

eyes. The body, a *home* in itself, comes first. Then comes the rage of missed opportunities, love lost in the big city, the failed attempts to secure a comeback, and everything else that keeps a body together. Ligaments, saliva, words said in anger, ice cream, and potatoes.

This our talent: to grab things and turn them to rot.

The Man with the beard said: DO YOUR JOB. I felt like laughing, instead, I went under the blanket, turned and tossed like a possessed woman, and spilled His truth over His pajama pants. Who on earth keeps his clothes on at such times? He fell asleep afterward. In His sleep, He said: “the future is not in the drones hovering above us.” I hugged him and thought: my Man, the Prophet, my little Punk Jesus. He continued: “the drones flying above us do not carry the future on their fairy wings; the highest truth has already been reached in the past when we put armchairs in the air. The future is in the memory of it.” I thought, oh be my husband, at least for now, while we’re asleep and consume less resources.

I sang like this: I am my own mother, but also the mother of three, as you shall see, a small child, a solitary adolescent, and a full-grown man, with chest hair and all. History, my past, laid out in a graph like the seats in a stadium. I’ll start with the child, born with the umbilical cord around his neck. I saw his suicide with my hands, slowly helped him as he descended into the pool of light below. A whiff of dust, then the hands of men taking him from me. Oh, how I wished to descend with him, guide him, show him the ways of men.

As I sang all this, I saw dust motes lit by sunlight, and I saw the weights He trained with on the windowsill, I saw His arms holding them and wondered whether He felt the same when He held me down, against the bed. In His sleep, He was implacable, adamant about the future. He would disappear soon, along with His nation, and His most significant contribution to this hotbed of ideas will have been His inability to see beyond His dick’s length.

I am the woman who has been given the wings of an eagle to escape her former lovers. I am my own genitalia.

I cried, and I sang because I was no different: *oh*, the stadium where I was little and ashamed, put down on the grass for the first time, heavy men working above me, all of them *sweating*. I thought: is this an initiation ritual? By the time they were done, I had understood that the earth's inability to act, to react, to help me in any way, was indeed a form of revenge. Gravity was but a form of torture. It held the men down against my body.

I saw the tip of a needle pushing through the skin, stretching it to the point of rupture. On that skin, the faces of people spread, too, like soft butter on hardened bread.

I took my history back on my way out and left the Man with the beard in the doorway. He said: "let's see each other again." We hugged, I kissed him on the cheek, but the Man wasn't in it, and I was already somebody else. I'm very good at it. So, I walked up and down the street, hoping the world would not recognize me. That was the last time I saw Him and myself. Gravity did not bring us together again.

FIFTY-FOUR

[...]

I stopped to watch and hoped nobody would notice me. He paused, too, at my feet, like an accumulation of sediment on the sidewalk.

In time, I got better at it. Going unnoticed, that is, becoming invisible. The trick is to do what everybody else is doing.

A man with long blonde hair was sitting across the table from an unnaturally blonde woman who kept smiling at whatever the man was saying, his hands drawing movements into the air. I did the same. I followed my hands with his hands, and tucked my long blonde hair behind my ears, hoping, if only for a brief moment, that it will stay there forever. The mug in front of me was empty, the teabag still oozing juice. She had some drink left in her tall transparent glass, and I could smell the tinge of alcohol.

Watch this, watch me dance.

I was telling her about my art project because she seemed interested. She clung to every word with the despair of a damsel in distress. I was telling her about the pictures

and the three-dimensional filters I created explicitly for the photographs. The photos showed different body parts. A hairy armpit there, a leg here, a vagina even. She asked whose vagina it was. I told her it was the vagina of a girl I chatted with for a while on a dating site. There were pictures of my dick as well, seen from every possible angle. It has become incredibly easy to talk about my dick.

Well, not *every* possible angle, but still, there were plenty of them. There were more than one hundred pictures in the art project. She asked what the ratio was.

“You mean the ratio of the pictures?”

“No,” she said, “were there more pictures of your dick than of her vagina?”

More dick pictures, I guessed. She raised her eyebrows, and for a moment, I thought how ugly she would turn out to be the morning after. How her face would look bigger than it really was and how we’re going to have to cross long moments of awkwardness. How we’re going to say goodbye to each other. Promising each other that we were going to keep in touch.

Watch this, watch me dance.

I switched places and felt my fingernails heavy with color as if they were conscious. I thought of touching my hair but then remembered the amount of work I had put into it and decided not to do that. Not that the guy cared, anyway, but it was part of my orchestrated composure. I mean, the guy was talking about his dick all the time, as if his dick was a god. He didn’t mention it casually: his dick was the protagonist of an art project. Naturally, I felt curious about the project, because then I knew it was his dick and some woman’s vagina that were featured in the collage.

I hoped he would invite me to see it, and I knew that he would, because that’s what he was like. I could see it from the moment I had met him, at the bookshop, where I was fishing for an art album for a friend of mine. That’s when he closed in on me, and the lights in the room suddenly dimmed, literally, he was towering above me, blocking the sun. He said something about the art album I was looking at, and I thought he was, in fact, talking to somebody else, so I didn’t raise my eyes. He repeated it, and the way he said it seemed to dig into the texture of the day, pulling it, the way you would stretch a sweater when you take it out of the dryer. The way you would crush the fabric between

your fingers to test it, to make it feel worn down. I looked up, and around his head, I could see a halo of stray hairs and fluorescent light.

He told me he was an artist. I didn't feel like standing up from where I was crouching, the art album still in my hands, opened at page eighty-six. The page showed a black and white photograph of a woman's bare thighs. It wasn't sexually explicit. The picture was an accumulation of curved lines to the point where you couldn't tell whether it was a woman being photographed or the accretion of dark pigments materializing out of the latte-colored background. You couldn't tell what color it was, but the way the whiteness fermented underneath the surface of the photo made me think of pastel colors and milk foam. His hair was unwashed and tied into a ponytail, and I felt sorry for him, but I had gone for so long without human touch that he seemed good enough to me. I stood up; eventually, I must have, and I was able to look at him better. But for the rest of our time together, I felt as little as the woman in the photograph. An accretion of black pigments that turned out to be a woman. And he turned out to be a man. And what should a man and woman do except look for each other?

He followed me around, he stood behind me in line. He boasted about a book he had found, which was some rare book, and he had had the luck to find that rarity at discount price. I thought of telling him that he hadn't been lucky, that in fact, the bookstore must have lowered the price because nobody was willing to buy the book. I did not tell him that because I thought he would leave and never come back, and I wanted to feel desired. We exchanged phone numbers, and he promised to call me.

On the subway, while I held the art album close to my chest the way girls in American high school movies did, I thought of how badly I wanted to get rid of the book, about how the woman in the picture was always going to remind me of him, and the way he towered over me as if he was entitled to do it, as if, rightfully, he was himself. I thought of the looks we exchanged at the counter when I caught him staring at my ass. I felt this tiny black hole open up just beneath my stomach when he smiled boyishly at me after I caught him staring.

And there was that stare again, on the subway, lustfully vacant but filled with the intent of a child who thinks that if he stares long enough and intensely enough at an

item in a toy store, it will eventually become his. But there was that dying light in the sky again, and I looked at it and caught it vibrating uncannily, as if with life.

We will collide, I thought, myself and the men around me because that is what we expect of each other. And there we were, clashing over our drinks, stubbornly believing that what was happening inside were private matters, thinking we could abscond with our thoughts, hide them well enough to be able to say that we didn't mean what we've just said. And here was his face, this fishnet of human emotions, contracting with the waves going beneath and over it. When I asked him about the ratio of the photographs of his art project, something got caught in the fishnet, something as undesirable as a sea creature that doesn't count in the final weigh-in and has to be thrown back into the sea. I did my best to feign domesticity as if the feelings in his face went unnoticed. They had to go unnoticed because when I saw him waiting in front of the teashop, he looked like the best version of a man. It wasn't the long hair, which made him slightly feminine. As it wasn't the beard that appeared white in the sunlight that December morning. Instead, it was the way he waited.

His head pointed to the windows, at the man across the street, watching us. "Look at that weirdo," he said, and I instantly resented it. He was wearing a long dark coat and a green pair of trainers. I could see him clearly in the light, his face almost like my own, a fishnet of emotions.

Spit it out.

I had to move along because the two realized that I was looking at them. I tried my best to act as casual as possible, not seem out of place, but I knew my face will stay with them forever, and they'll be able to recognize me in a crowd. I had to find other things to look at. As I kept going down toward the heart of the city, I kept thinking of how much I'm looking at other people, of the sheer number of random strangers who had become a part of my mind's life.

When I got my first color printer, I went on a printing spree, printing photos of half-naked men bathing in the sun. But before all that, before the full-bodied men, I used to print pictures of men's underwear. I didn't want to see their faces, only the

Robert Moscaliuc |

underwear. Of all colors and sizes, laid out in an infinite sequence, and I wanted to be all of them.

Robert Moscaliuc teaches English and creative nonfiction writing at the University of Turin, Italy. He holds a Ph.D. in contemporary American literature from the University of Genoa, Italy. Along the years, he has conducted research in various fields including the ethics of fiction, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s in the United States, and representations of Italian culture in American literature and film. Among his most recent publications is an article entitled “The Proximal – Ancillary Coverage Continuum and the Discourse of the American ‘War on Terror’,” included in the volume *Harbors, Flows, and Migrations: The USA in/and the World* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017). He has conducted part of his research at the City University of New York and the John F. Kennedy Institute, Berlin, as a visiting research scholar. He lives with his partner in Turin, Italy.

HIM

Asha Salim

He's like the dong at midnight
The storm after the quiet
The rain after the rainbow
Unreal, yet so true to me
He's confusion and illusion
He is the decision and the conclusion
Of my wonder round for love
Of my wonder round formore
Than silly words and finished thoughts
Than pretty faces and silent souls
He's the secret essence, I've been craving
He's a rose petal misbehaving
Found him at the finish line
Of my wonder garden
Took him away with me, as if it wasn't a problem
Where he came from
Or where his roots had been
As long as he would plant a seed in me
And we would grow our roses' tree
We complement so well
I fall short to understand
How a petal so small
Turned my winter wonderland
From freezing ice, and crystal floor
To a warm fire and nothing cold
From the madness of the hatter

Asha Salim |

To the madness of my heart
Mad, oh! If I a mad, madly! ...
Thorn between what he is
And what I want him to be
Thorn between what it is
And what I think it should be
Lately it has become hard
I water this garden, with him being far
I try picking up the petals
But the wind is blowing hard.

Asha Salim is a third-year student at the “University L’Orientale” in Naples (Italy) where she is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Comparative Literature and Languages (English and Swahili). She attended Aga Khan “Mzizima” Secondary School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and currently lives in Naples, where she teaches English while attending university and writing poetry. Her favorite place to write is where she is in “love,” which is also her favorite word.