

Night of Reading

Aula, Kantonsschule Wettingen, April 27th, 2022

Advanced Creative Writing Class 2021/22:

Ari Teuwsen, G4I

Carole Meier, G2C

Enya Peterhans, G2A

Imè Esenam, G3A

Jil Hug, G3C

Leonie Olivia Kleiner, G2C

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Noah Bolliger, G4B

Sophie Lülsdorf, G2E

Sulamith Tamborriello, G4A

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Vrinda Arora, G2A

Xena Keienburg, G3A

The *Advanced Creative Writing Class* is part of the gifted programme at *Kantonsschule Wettingen*. Students who have demonstrated an affinity for the English language and who have shown the desire to use it creatively, are given the opportunity to explore different writing styles and literary genres. This enables gifted students to immerse themselves creatively in the English language which would not be possible within the confines of general English classes. This course challenges them to refine their own writing and their use of language, and gives them the framework, time, and guidance to do so in addition to their compulsory coursework. Throughout the academic year, the students are also preparing to submit their work and participate in the *Swiss Creative Writing Prize* competition. This booklet comprises a selection of the short stories, poems and excerpts written by current students of the *Advanced Creative Writing Class* throughout the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Competition results for our students in 2021:

Poetry Prize:

1st Prize: Imè Esenam for *Black coffee or To all the girls with hard to swallow names*

2nd Prize: Imè Esenam for *To be black, to be woman*.

Shortlisted (in no particular order):

Carla Honold (former G4A) for *Lying*

Carla Honold (former G4A) for *Rite of passage — a sonnet*

Lilly-May Stutz (former G4A) for *The Pilot*.

Short Story Prize:

Shortlisted (in no particular order):

Salome Bachmann (former G4A) for *Christmas Crisis*,

Enya Fritschy (former G4A) for *My Memory Update*,

Jil Hug for *Trapeze Act*.

Editing and layout: Sara D. Nyffenegger

Cover: photograph by blogger Rebecca Stice



Students of the *Advanced Creative Writing Class*, May 2021

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The Human Condition and the World

Terra Titanic by Sulamith Tamborriello

The radar foresaw it,
The mercury drops, the sonar has warned,
Stupid giggles and shrieks from the conning tower,
A pate leads this ship of fools

The captain confidently holds a glass in his hand
The spark too cowardly to radio SOS
The helmsman lies, the captain is drunk
The engineer sunk in dull lethargy

The cargo is rotten, the papers mocked,
The hatches are wide open
All alarm bells are ringing.
You sense the danger, but we chose not to see.

On the sundeck, the iceberg can be seen
glittering like diamonds from faraway lands.
Parasols and screens blocking the view
An anxious murmur is swallowed when tasting caviar.

The sharp-toothed shark fishes in the murky waters.
Everyone is out for the treasure hunt.
The wind died while watching, hoping for the win,
Selling the ship, we are sailing in.

-

One has come to terms with the situation,
All the high ideals have been wrecked,
On the horizon the weather glows: the signs of our time:
The will-o-wisp has become the beacon.

The rats leave the sinking ship
But the captain in the dinner jacket disregards them.
With glass in hand, the tide puts out the light
Light signals can no longer be seen, ocean terminal

Stunned, the children stand in the engine room,
Some still scream, their voices drowned
by the noise of the engines,
A boy delirious with heroic death.

The great rebel, who never tired of arguing,
Mutates into a servile, poisonous gnome.
Once young savages are docile, pious, and tame,
Bought, anaesthetised and wingless

A battler lies hit by a champagne cork,
Drowned in kitchen waste and filth,
Those under the tables are looking for food -
The ship tilts in opposition...

You take arms against the enemy, but the enemy is already here
He has his hand on your throat, he stands beside you.
Under cover of paragraphs, he shuffles the marked cards.
The obscurantist comes out of hiding.

A lonely glass misses its filling,
Parasols have been lifted, but too late.
Those who let the captain go first
Could only watch the lifeboat sail away

Angel by Jil Hug, G3C

He realized that the child had seen him and he couldn't let him get away. He wondered if there was another way, but a glance down the neon-lit corridor made him realize there wasn't. The child had seen too much. The little boy at the end of the corridor with the big innocent blue eyes and brown curls looked almost angelic in the flickering blue light. An angel who could end it all. There was only one way. He had to take him along. But catching an angel was easier said than done. One too frantic move, one word too harsh and the angel would be gone. A few steps with his clumsy little legs and the angel would be out on the street again. Out and his secret he would take with him. Candy. Something every child would like. He reached into his pocket and felt the three remaining pieces of small candy. These red cherry candies with the soft filling were always in a big jar on the kitchen table at grandmas. Grandma, who had always believed in him. He could almost see her grey curls bobbing with laughter in front of him, he could smell the mixture of old furniture and the freshly planted, earthy roses when she returned beaming from the garden. Grandma, who always reminded him to stay the way he was. He was her little angel. Would grandmother still pull him so warmly to her chest if she knew of his plans? Melancholically, he pushed the image out of his mind. Hey, how are you? The angel's eyes began to shine as he took the candy out of his pocket. Come with me, he said to him, there are more in my car. The angel hid his clumsy hands behind his red raincoat and wrinkled his snub nose sceptically. But another glance at the hand with the three cherry drops was enough to put a shy smile on his face, and he hurriedly followed him down the corridor.

Poppy without a name by Sulamith Tamborriello

Behind the barbed wire in the midsummer green,
Where poppies bloom between crosses,
There, the grasses whisper and sway slightly
In the wind that gently strokes the dirty scars.

Under a cross I find you, dead soldier,
Your name, lost in the tumult of time.
The grave of an unknown, adorned with numbers.
You were not even seventeen years old.

They lied while looking into your eyes,
Told you of honor and bravery.
Their methods remained the same.
You gave them everything - your laughter, your youth, your life.

Have you, dead soldier, ever loved?
Surely not! for only where there is peace,
Tenderness and trust can flourish.
The dirt became your embrace.

Were you a soldier to die, not to be young?
Perhaps you thought you would soon fall,
Soldier, did you go to your death believing?
Or did you do so despairing, embittered, brutalised...

Did you not know your real enemy until the end?
I hope it was a clean shot.
Or did a bullet shred your limbs?
Did you cry for your mother until the end?

Did you continue to run on the stumps of your legs?
Did you hope, blinded by terror?
Did your eyes see long enough to see your future?
Did your grave hold more than a hand?

The cross remains as the only trace -
Your soul fled through the red of the blossom
Your family can no longer find your grave
The wind plays with the green of your hair

Comrades lie breast to breast,
You fought a battle of irrelevance
Yet you gave everything.
Your body vanished; only dirt remained

The mounds to which you too belong,
They still do not fade.
With every war, the poppy fields grow,
Until the land is covered in red.

Relationships and Family

Trapeze Act by Jil Hug (*Shortlisted for the Swiss Creative Writing Prize for a Short Story, 2021*)

My hand slipped and I fell. The smell of sawdust, the startled gasps of the spectators, and my pale hand still trying to hold onto the trapeze. My world stood still for a moment. I blinked, partly to block the spotlights that drilled white and painfully into my eyes from the tent ceiling, partly out of shock and fear of the consequences my sweaty hands had caused.

The pressure of a sawdust sack that only Joe, our weights man, could lift alone rested on my eyes. I opened them with great difficulty. My head felt as if he had actually hit me with one of those sacks. "Are you all right, young lady?" a sonorous voice asked me. Joe's bushy eyebrows furrowed with concern. His mouth attempted a smile as he reassuringly informed me that my fall was thankfully only half bad. "Oh boy, what have you done? Think of our reputation!" my mother's cutting voice sounded. Cold eyes, glaring in competition with her green velvet vest, accused me from above. Her straight blonde hair combed back into a severe bun. A stunning woman who seemed eternally young. But the wrinkles of fatigue and stress around her eyes revealed her true age. "I'm sorry, Mommy, I didn't do it on purpose," I stammered in a daze. "Take her out of the arena," she

ordered in a voice that allowed no argument. Without giving me another glance, she put her director's hat back on and turned to the audience with a brilliant smile, assuring them that all was well. While Joe whispered soothing words to me, his strong arms carried me safely past the red curtain.

Life in a circus was never meant to be easy. It was growing up without local friends, all only fleeting acquaintances, to whom I had to say goodbye forever shortly after the first time I met them. Growing up being around my parents day and night, and yet they remain so out of reach for me. Growing up in a huge hectic world, in which I was needed everywhere and yet so often forgotten.

"Monica! Monica!" I was awakened by a call, and before I could answer, a dark, curly-haired boy stumbled in. He pulled a bouquet of daisies out of his pants pocket, half of which were already bent. With an apologetic smile, he wanted to quickly put them on my nightstand, sweeping down the framed picture of me as a -five year-old on the trapeze. "Cole stop," I interrupted him as he began swearing while collecting the broken pieces of glass with erratic movements. He paused and straightened up. "I'm happy to see you." His shy smile reached my core like a piece of warm chocolate cake. Toasty, pleasant, and yet gone far too quickly. "I've heard of your accident, and I know I shouldn't be here, but I just had to make sure, you're all right. And I should tell you," he began. I noticed how something stopped him from telling me. "I heard your dad wants to talk to you."

A deep breath, wiping my cold sweaty hands on my jeans, well aware of how that ended last time, I hesitantly knocked on their trailer. He called me in with a barking voice, giving me a cursory glance while he hastily tried to hide bills in the drawer of his office. "Monica, where have you been? We'll discuss yesterday's incident another time. But could you please help with loading the costumes. We're leaving in two hours and are not at all on schedule." A stressed movement through his black greasy shiny hair as he waited impatiently for me to leave without even expecting an answer. Tears veiled my gaze as I stumbled back into the free space and straight into Mary, our well-bodied cook. "Oh dear, come, I'll make you a cup of tea," and her flowery perfume felt consoling as she pulled me into her embrace.

Life in a circus was never meant to be easy. But it was also growing up where any place could feel like home because the right people made it home. Applause rang out as I completed my trapeze act brilliantly seven sleepless nights after my sweaty disaster and came to a safe stop in the ring. My mother smiled at me with relief. I smiled back, but my smile didn't reach my eyes. It reached them when I smiled at Joe, who always assisted me whenever I needed him. It reached them when I glanced at Cole, who was cheering wildly with his too-long arms. It did when I took a look at Mary, who treated me like the daughter she never had. It reached them as I realized that my family might not be the one I was born into, but it is the family that chooses to be my family. The people who care about me.

Radio Silence by Jil Hug G3C

A soft sound behind her made her freeze. She sensed that he was standing at her back. His smell, a mixture of earthy gardening and pine needles, she would recognize at any time. Very slowly, as if it were better to delay the moment a little longer, she turned around. The green of his backpack gleamed in competition with his eyes, which examined her attentively. Oh, come on, it's only gonna be a few weeks, Ella. You won't even miss me.

Memories of how they cycled in the dark, of him telling her he loved when he could see the small gap between her front teeth she was always so insecure about, how he asked her if it was okay to kiss her and then their lips touching somehow a bit wet and awkwardly, how he showed her how to make the world's best pizza dough and convinced her that spinach on a pizza was essential, and later how he persuaded her to buy the little dungarees in which their miracle, born of their love, would later jump around, came to her mind.

She hugged him to her chest so tightly, as if she could force their hearts to embrace one last time. As if a tiny little part of him would remain if she squeezed him enough. Her heart heard his rhythm one last time. He pulled the corners of her mouth up with his fingers. Don't forget to smile, Ella! and turned with one last wink.

For weeks she waited anxiously for news. For months heard nothing from him and his comrades, never being allowed to know where exactly they were staying. Convinced that the black cat that crossed her way this afternoon was a sign. Then she was told that Sam would be returning home. He had been lucky and was completely unharmed.

...

When he closed his eyes and pressed his finger against his forehead.

Ella, it's... I can't speak about it.

She pulled up the corners of her mouth and started: Don't forget to ...

Ella, stop it. I'm tired, I'm going to bed early today.

The spinach pizza got cold on the dinner table.

The cup she gave him for their first Christmas together slipped out of his shaking fingers as she hugged him from behind, him mumbling an apology, and something about 'if you ever do this again...'. His eyes widened as the neighbor scared the birds away from his cornfield with an air rifle, when he stored the rusty bicycles in the barn. Sweaty hands holding in the night, a trembling body next to her screaming of events, which she had already heard of, and hoped so much it was only rumors.

He slipped away from her more and more. The dull green staring back at her with a blank expression now looked more like a lawn that had not yet recovered from winter.

The way he didn't look at her, how he wasn't able to let her touch him. How he returned as a completely different Sam. Completely unapproachable for her. Completely disconnected. The flinch at the slightest crack, and yet no reaction when she told him about her dreams and plans.

He couldn't hear her, was as if he'd continually drift off.

The way she looked at him, how she tried to turn his empty gaze into something hopeful. How she told him about their future, how a little boy running around in their backyard would light up their life so much!

Ella, please. I can't right now, I'm tired.

The dungarees were getting dusty in the closet.

Petrify by Leonie Olivia Kleiner

A rhythm so familiar, so horrifying, hands clasped, so that her knuckles turned white. The heartbeat proceeded to ring louder and louder in her ears. So loud, she worried he could hear it. "Are you scared?" A voice just as familiar as her heartbeat resonated through the empty rooms. "How can you be scared?" He laughed.

"I'm not scared." Her voice was thin, and both knew it was a lie. The man stepped away from the frame of the door and came up to her, too close. With bulging eyes staring directly at her face, he tilted his head and slowly raised his hand; she knew what was going to happen while at the same time she did not. It was never the same, each day everything changed seemingly at random. He backed away with a dirty smirk on his face. "I was just kidding." She gathered herself again and mustered a quiet laugh. Her voice was still small, begging he couldn't hear the doubt. He walked toward the kitchen whistling a jolly tune as she slowly got up and dragged her feet after him. What was next? Was he hungry? Was he looking for conversation? What was it he wanted? "Let's make lunch," he stated and sat down at the kitchen table. She glanced over her shoulder and in this second his eyes met hers and they quickly darted back to the counter. She pulled a knife out of one of the drawers, knowing she was supposed to cut the vegetables but instead, her eyes fixed on the dull grey of the blade until a cough jerked her out of it.

Soon, she took two plates out of the cupboard. Her boyfriend was staring at his phone, and she had to be careful not to touch his hands with the hot pans while setting the food down. He coughed again and glanced up from his phone. "What is this?"

"It's your favorite?" It should've come out as an exclamation, but was she really that sure of it?

"No, I don't like this."

"But last time you sai--"

"Why would I say I like this if I don't?" He got up, the chair's legs scraping over the floor. "I'm not like you, I know what I said and what I didn't." But she was so sure he had said this was his favorite, but then again, forgetfulness was one of her traits. She quietly apologized and got up again.

The news came on in the background; coughs periodically interrupted the report. The same old report they've been subjected to for weeks now. "*Approximately 300 new infections are reported each day-*" The same old news. *Although*, she looked over to him, slowly. Another cough interrupted the news.

She set down dinner in front of him. "What is this?" Usually, she would've flinched on the inside, but right now, a kind of hope sprouted in her, completely erasing all her worries. As he grasped the spoon his hands shook. "What are you staring at?" He barked. She quickly caught herself and sat down on the opposite side.

“Dear?” He only used that tone when he wanted something from her. She had gotten up early to make breakfast and to listen to the early news on the old radio in the kitchen. “Dear?” It resonated between the cold walls. Filled with anticipation and at the same time expecting hurt she walked into the bedroom. Perhaps today was a nice day. “Yes, dear?” She went in and looked at the man for a second, a mere ghost of the person she thought she was dating when they first met. Opening the curtains and letting in fresh air she leaned out of the window to listen to the songs of a robin. Somewhere behind her, a faint voice mumbled something. Almost jolly she turned around to face the man with a smile. “What did you say?” With bloodshot lids he eyed her and tried to raise a hand but only his fingers budged.

“I... can’t move.” Moving... who needs movement?

“Oh, but dear, you look fine to me,” she said with a friendly chirp in her voice.

“Did you not hear? I can’t *mo-*”

“What do you want for breakfast? Eggs?” She chuckled friendly. “That’s great, I was already preparing them.”

“No! I-”

“Oh, you’re not hungry? What a shame... then I guess I’ll have to eat alone.” She shrugged and closed the door behind herself.

For a while now she had been completing tasks, cleaning the kitchen, sweeping the balcony while looking down at the honking cars all the while a loud voice filled the apartment, muffled from behind his room’s door. That was when she decided it was time to go out. She hadn’t gone out alone in years, so when she stepped onto the sidewalk it was almost as if she was a bird thrown out of its nest having forgotten how to fly. But just like a bird she learned quickly to fly again. With each step her fear and tension faded into the fresh air.

When the sun had gone down and the air had become cold, she returned to a quiet apartment. Only a cry like that of a stray dog, but muffled into almost complete silence, filled the dark. “*I can’t move, I can’t move, I can’t move...*” Like a madman he chanted these words all the while his body turned into a still life. “*The numbers have risen to almost 400 new infections each day...*” *Click*, the radio was turned off. She sat down at the kitchen table, staring at the colorful evening sky through the window. His already faint calls completely subsided as lips turned to stone. *The same old news.*

The Moth and the Lightbulb by Ari Teuwsen

He hates the grey table. He always hated it. For him, the table has a way of absorbing all happiness and all colors and making them disappear with an imaginary burp. He is convinced that he could eat the best meals here and they would still taste like a serving of gruel.

Before, they had a very old table. When the trees still had blossoms, falling on the table as autumn came. They laughed a lot there, solving sudokus, eating spaghetti, playing cards. Father’s hair was black, with a sprinkle of grey in it. At least he had hair left back then. Now his head looks like a breakfast egg. The table is grey, the trees were all cut down because they needed a new garage.

Now, father wears more expensive clothes. Mother just booked herself a yoga course. The house is bigger. He can hear the noise of mother’s rings on the table as her fingers play an imaginary piano. Her green eyes looking at him full of open contempt.

He is keeping his head down. He did that a lot, over the past few years. At school, they started calling him names. Not very creative ones. And often he can’t hear them, eating cold pizza on the fourth floor alone because he doesn’t want to go down to the microwaves where the others look at him like wild animals, trying to hunt him.

“You have to start taking responsibility! We do not pay that school for nothing.”

“Be a man, my boy.”

Father sports the James Bond face again. He always does this in important discussions when he wants to convince business partners to sign his contracts. When he tells other people that their money is now “his responsibility”. He shook hands with CEOs. With policemen. He made Egyptian kings hug him. But strangely, it never seems to work with his own son.

Be a man, my boy. Maybe he could start thinking about that. But isn’t he already? He doesn’t feel like a girl. What does that even mean, he should be a man?

How did it disappear, his childhood, when they went fishing with him? Endless days at the lake, the magical hours with frisbees, fried carp, the sun throwing long shadows on the ground with tiny dots of light in them, that whenever he tried to catch them, they seemed to slip away? When they told him that he could be anything he wanted? That the world was vast and free, ready for him to explore it? Sometimes he feels like it was just yesterday, this warm feeling of endless joy. Suddenly some strange, unknown force got a hold on him and threw him into this cold dungeon of responsibilities and “being a man”. Having a girlfriend. Good marks. Someone must have handed out a list of how to be an adult. A perfect recipe. But he was absent that day.

In silent resignation, his eyes wander to the ceiling. He sees the lightbulb, sending its flickering poor light through the room. For a while, he is watching a moth, turning its rounds. The moth wants to go to the light, it wants it so badly. But it would be its death. And the moth knows that. He watches it as it approaches the light. “We don't know what to do anymore with you, sitting in your room all day long.” “When I was your age, I already had my own business plan.”

His own business plan. Is this true? He thinks of the day when he snuck up to the attic. Looked at old photos of mother and father. He had long hair back in those days, wearing a leather jacket, smoking cigarettes. He also remembers when they were living down by the river. Frogs croaking the morning sun at the sky, dragonflies and tadpoles, swimming around the water lilies. On lonesome evenings when everyone was partying in the decommissioned power plant, when mother was listening to Mozart again and father drank too much of the expensive red that he was so proud of, when he started screaming his moral sermons into the world sounding so terrifyingly wise and smart yet being so empty and sad on the inside, he returns there. Trying to stop the trains running through his head, all these thoughts, slowly stabbing him. When he sits there long enough, getting sleepy and a little confused, he can see tiny sparkles on the water, twinkling, telling him it's all right.

He has always had good ears; he can hear her whirring softly through the air. The moth is getting closer. She can't resist.

“Don't you have anything to say, boy?” Father's eyes are wide open, tiny dots of spit on his lower lip. Mother, pretending to read a book - he knows that she is listening to every word said. She is too curious to miss any gossip. It makes no difference whether or not it affects her own family.

He wants to say that he plans to do better. That he will be more attentive in class. Try to socialize more. Then he will go upstairs. Pack his bag. The next morning, he will realize that he pressed the repeat button again. The tree will still be cut. And the table will be greyer than ever.

He has always had good ears; he can hear the tiny sound close to the ceiling as the lightbulb won again.

“I want to move out”, he says.

As he goes upstairs, he takes a last look at his mother. Staring at him full of apparent surprise. She had listened to every word he said. Too curious to miss the gossip.

Vignettes by Xena Keienburg

Home?

The feeling of darkness overcame us, there was no escape. Sleep was the only way to escape from everything. Every day we woke up to this living nightmare, in school we were shining like the sun and felt like butterflies. As soon as we reached our “home” it felt like someone switched the light off. It felt like running in a maze, being chased and not finding a way out. Where is the rainbow behind this storm? But one afternoon our saviour showed up and removed the darkness and replaced it with light.

Family

She came with an unsure but bright smile, her hair was dark chocolate brown. My brother and I were shy, I nearly couldn't even speak, like a cat got my tongue. Anyways, she was light in person, spreading waves of comfort. We ate, talked and laughed; the atmosphere felt like Christmas, but without the stress. At this exact moment I knew my life would change for the better after all those years. The last piece of the puzzle had arrived and everyone had butterflies inside their stomachs.

Believe

“Stop chasing something you won’t achieve”, this sentence triggered me to keep going. One day my father came to me as if he saw a ghost and handed me a letter with some tissues. My heart was racing like a wild horse, this was it. I touched the letter as if it was a little butterfly out of glass. After reading the letter I looked up to my father, his eyes glistening like seawater. “You did it”, he was crying and I joined him. My emotions were all over the place, I felt happiness, relief, disbelief and so many more indescribable feelings. I received a key for a door in my life, a new chance and more strength. Not even a rhino could stop me now from achieving my dreams.

Love

Map by Tamryn Lazenby

I need a map
To find the line between
Friends
And more than that

Is it how in a full room
You look at me
First
To see if I’m laughing

Is it the time
We shared your umbrella
Your shoulder
Soaked as to keep both of mine dry

Is it the paint
I had been saving up for
Gifted to me
saying your mom doesn’t need them anymore

Is there a map
to find this
line
or does it not exist

Warmth of the Evening Sun by Carole Meier

There they lay. The two of them. The warm autumn sun embracing them, giving warmth on an otherwise cold and exhausting day. To let their minds wander for a moment and escape the mundane restraints of the royal day in day out, the two girls had decided to go catch some nice fresh air outside, in the sunny fall afternoon. And so now they laid there, stretched out in the middle of the gravel path that made up the courtyard. Even though they were bound to get dirty, and the ground was harsh on their backs, neither of them minded it. They bunched up their skirts and planted themselves under the old chestnut that stood out front of the castle. Unwavering, it had stood the test of time, reaching far above the castle's walls. Standing so very still and wise, it looked over the girls.

As the golden rays peeking through the leaves of the chestnut trees touched their faces and bathed them in a soothing almost bodily warmth, the feeling of comfort washed over them. Gazing up at the sky that was hiding behind the glowing orange and lemon leaves, they talked. About trivial things. They talked about the

weather, or what it might be like tomorrow and the day after that. What the wind might bring. They talked about what they might do this autumn and what they might do in the future- If they'd ever get to do those things they so dreamed of. But they also talked about other things.

As the ebb and flow of the conversation carried them, they also got to topics like love and the events deeply connecting them with others, were they going to last? The stream further carried them on and so they talked about the life that trapped them in these walls. How it was not their height that frightened them but their creators. How love, being both so beautiful and universal could also be so cruel.

There was no special occasion to talk about these things, but they felt safe in each-others company, it gave comfort and so as they carried on it did not even matter anymore what the conversation was about. Whether it was what flavours the other liked or if they thought that they would ever find their passion. The connection behind the mundane use of words mattered more than the words spoken. As though all they were was a vessel. So as the breeze swept away their worries and the words grew fewer, they did not even mind the silence. In the quiet, time seemed to pass all around-them, but for them it did not. In the few glances and the admiring looks, there was a bond. Though their eyes never met, and their fingers never touched, the sheer desire and knowing the other was there, sharing one and the same thought there was enough. It was a connection that no-one could take. They both knew that even when this gentle moment of serene comfort might pass the bond would stay, no matter how many denied it. So as the afternoon lend itself to the evening, their hands grew closer and closer and finally moments before the day had passed, they got the courage and let their fingers interlock. At that Moment there was no need for the sun's warmth anymore, for they themselves had overcome the castle walls and done the impossible. A sudden strange new feeling of warmth filled them both. It connected to every part of their souls and enveloped all their worries and doubts. Such an overwhelming wave of comfort radiating from every inch of their being. Their hearts both beating faster than ever, they dared to look at each other. As the sun finally traversed the horizon line and their grip tightened, the slight chuckle of relief now broke the silence, and with it washing away any fear that resided in their hearts. This enormous weight finally having been lifted off their chests, they could be free in the end after all. Free together. Free of the expectations and responsibilities they once carried. Liberated from the stress that uncertainty had brought they took the leap and the chains that society had put on them finally snapped.

Crumbs of Cake by Ari Teuwsen

We used to dine in a tiny Chinese restaurant at the end of the street. Nothing spectacular, but the duck was delicious and the soft jazz melodies from the speakers at the front door sent shivers down my spine.

You always smiled brightly, your teeth white, like the suit you were wearing. "Honey," you said. "I brought you flowers from the supermarket."

I put down my fork, they smelled like caramel and the Pacific Ocean, where you once took me. Sleeping in a cottage, while the waves were breaking, slowly lulling me to sleep.

We used to laugh, you held my hand like a piece of glass, saying that I looked wonderful in that dress. We used to dream; you knew the name of all the stars in the night sky. Funny stories from your job, you forgot your map in the office. We used to kiss, our bodies melting in each other like two parts of puzzle, finally getting put together. You used to bring me cake to bed, when I was sick, we were eating, laughing, watching the Simpsons. Some crumbs landed on the sheets. "We can wash it," you said.

We used to write our names in the sand, while watching the sun set. You held me in your arms, I was in tears. We used to read, the newspapers, some stupid fiction novels. You turned the pages very loudly, I couldn't focus. "I'll just read somewhere else," I said. We used to run as fast as we could. We ran until we could only crawl, laying in the grass, our cheeks burning. You used to breathe loudly, grinding your teeth at night. I couldn't get rest. "Just use ear-plugs," you said.

I used to get sick a lot. You brought me my cough medicine and kissed me softly. And I used to think that I loved you. Until I felt something beneath my back. And I found some crumbs of cake again. "We can wash it," you said.

We used to dance on the kitchen floor. Just our worlds, hearts beating in sync with the old radio. Until I found crumbs of cake again next to the sink. "I'll wash them off," you said.

We used to celebrate my birthday, you nearly forgot it. You bought me a ring that looks like fire on my fingers. You gave me cake and some crumbs fell on the table. "I'll just brush them off," you said.

I walked away beneath the iron morning sky. You asked me why I left you. I said, I don't know. You said you thought it was perfect, I said it was. Our love was a cake, until you started leaving crumbs everywhere.

All over again by Carole Meier

Once again, I told myself
I'm all over love.

It hurt me in ways I'd never felt before
Struck me to my core and left me broken.
The days spent enamoured by the image of someone else
Becoming vulnerable to the look in their eyes
That sparkle that only I could see
So, I let go of any reason and sense
Sadly, all at my own expense I followed the desire to become their desire
But the world is so filled with hatred and lies
And people may not see eye to eye
I simply was not worth enough
They made their choice
So, when they left, I shattered

I Promised myself to stay protected this time
Create a stone-cold fortress
No emotions no pain
I Vowed to build my walls miles high
So that not even I can see past them.
But to a being with wings height matters not
And like Lucifer came down in the morning sun
You descended from the heavens to wreak havoc in my town
Your voice was like a sweet summer's melody
Your glances sent my stomach aflutter

As life tends to do, we repeat our past mistakes
Another crush, another fall
And what we learned, we forget it all
My delusions like to tell me I'm harder this time
Where the broken shards of my heart touch
I fill the gaps and repair them with make believe
An idea of, hey maybe this one will last
But like in the past this patchwork joy breaks
And suddenly I'm all alone again

No more
So Beautiful, So Gentle, So Serene
Now it's just myself and what you left of me
A day, A month I don't know how much time has passed
But the bruises stopped hurting
And my wounds stopped bleeding
Long gone are the days that I'd spent by your side
From the rubble I rebuilt myself one part at a time
So now filled with pride I stride once again

On the lookout for a stranger I don't know yet
Searching for that wonder, that spark in their eye
A hand to hold tight
Someone to stand by
So as a changed person
finally, out of the lion's den
I'm ready to
love all over again.

Identity

Product of my time by Imè Esenam

My mother never told me the importance of eating breakfast,
Instead, she showed me how to starve myself and make it feel good.
Instead, she told me eating was for the weak with no self-control.
She told me, my body would be better if I were smaller -
That boys would like me more.
She told me, that the brown of my skin wouldn't matter
because at least my body would be wanted.
She told me to make her proud, to be perfect!
She told me to fit the mould and cut off the excess
- She told me she'd hate me if I didn't change.
So I changed,

I learned to skip meals like my life depended on it.
I learned to love the feeling of cold water trickling into my stomach.
I learned to love thigh gaps and collar bones more than people.
I learned to go on a run every time I felt hungry.
I learned to eat in front of a mirror just to control myself a bit more
I learned to love the pain of hunger.
I learned to appreciate the sound of a complaining stomach.
I learned to think of food as punishment.
I learned to only feel beautiful when confronted with starvation.

But now she wants me to eat.
Now thigh gaps and collarbones are not desired.
Instead, she wants thick thighs and "meat on your bones."
Now anaemic skeletons and-ghostlike beings are not the way to be.
She wants coke bottle people not ones made of it,
Except if you walk the runway.
But my transparent self did not quite erase my brown,
Making that impossible for me.
Instead she wants BBLs and boob jobs to look like Kim K.
She tells me to make her proud, to be perfect!
She tells me to fit the mould and fill the gaps
- She tells me she'll hate me if I don't change.
So I change

Nothing Left by Carole Meier

Smaller and smaller was the goal.
To have Control.
No matter what toll it took on me,
I wanted to be pretty.
This idiotically simple thought
God, all it brought was pain
I never meant to change what's on the inside,
To keep what made me Me,
Only to change what Others see.
Watch me get destroyed by this impossible task
I thought becoming popular could fill this void
But to bask in such glory just wasn't for me
Childish dreams
So dumb and naïve

People ask who you are
But who are we to say how anyone should be
I thought I liked who I was, so why did no one agree
They'd never see the one I liked, truly, myself
I want this to stop
I want it to end
Shelf my needs, be strong now, pretend
Act as they do
Dress like they dress
Eat what they eat
No Extras
No Flaws
No Comments, just peace
So instead of wearing this face proudly as mine
I chose the path of least resistance, to hide.
A hollow mask I slipped behind,
But an empty stomach, an empty mind.

At first it filled me with pride, what I had made.
Discipline made me feel full 'til it was too late.
So as the color of my skin started to fade
And counting and comparing took a hold,
As my world steadily went bleak and cold,
I realized what kind of person I'd become.
My emotions boiled down and my mind went numb.
What I used to love so much before,
Suddenly, none of it even mattered anymore.
It all went away
All out of my Control

Being low made me feel high
Piece by piece I replaced reason with a Lie
I've seen the statistics, I know I could die
But it's just so hard to let go you know
It had so much patience, it started so slow
The Routine, it took root
And those tiny Restrictions still looked so cute

It's simple, just a little bit less each time
And resign to my thoughts no longer being mine
Over time It even becomes less and less of a crime

For a long time now who i see is not me
As a child i had a clear Image of who i wanted to be
i Imagined this Person of divine Beauty and Grace
I don't recognize this Face
What the mirror shows has changed
Closer to what i Wanted, but somewhat estranged
Deranged, Who i see is no longer me

Hollow cheeks
Hollow eyes
Hollow soul
The Hollowness took me,
It swallowed me whole
It ate me up, left nothing in my place
An empty Shell
and of me?
No longer a trace

Her by Luana Kirchhofer

Who am I?
Trapped in this cage of meat and blood?
I am the girl
That no one knows -
Who just shows herself
When she is alone -
Who only lives
In absence of mankind
And who only breathes
When she can hide
The fault of this sadness
Is not mine, it's not yours,
But will there be trouble
When the strange girl appears?
Who have I been?
Remaining in this cage that I made on my own
Which I could leave for ever
By speaking
Which I could escape
By telling
Which I could leave behind
By enjoying
And which I could forget
By living?
The fault of this sadness
Is not yours, but is it mine?
So will there be trouble
When the unknown star begins to shine?

My perfume has a different scent by Vrinda Arora

Identity is the topic today
It is who I am, whether out of bones, sticks or clay
My identity is as pure as gold
But to understand it, I had to be bold
It's complicated, it's hard to get there
Especially when millions say don't you dare
They forbid you to leave the box
Even when it's full and the people inside have turned into rocks
When you try to peek outside, try to catch a little bit of light
They pull your arms, legs, and toes and tell you it's not right
You fall down on the ground, believe what they say is true
Convince yourself it's the way your dreams are meant to lead you
While buying the ticket to pass the door,
you see millions in the same queue
But all of them look the same,
everyone just looks lame,
Not a single soul seems to be content
It feels like all their perfumes have only one scent.
Even though I feel what I am doing is wrong,
The others I see seem to be strong
This strength attracts me,
It's like this is gravity,
It pulls me forcefully,
And before I know it
- I'm not me.
It all happened rapidly,
It was like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly
Only here, it was the opposite, I sigh
My wings have vanished,
My opinion is banished,
It's like I am no more
I have disappeared
In this crowd of a hundred crore.
This feels wrong, this feels strange,
It's impossible for me to get used to this change.
Everything here is fake,
All was a huge mistake,
I want to go back to the life I had,
Where having dreams wasn't seen as being mad,
But every turn I take, every move I make,
Leads to closed doors
And fake and pathetic stores
I don't know what to do,
I am left with no choice,
But to accept this new
But suddenly a voice within me
Stops me from doing so
It reminds me of something I was told ages ago
By the people who wanted to see me soar
It erases the image of the imaginary door,
Instantly I realise I am the key,

If I believe in myself, then I am free,
I can be the person I want to be
Do those things that I was meant to do
There is no boundary that I can't get through
I need to follow my dream
With no doubt and lots of self esteem
It doesn't matter what the others expect
Only for me I need to be perfect
There is no stopping me now
I am going to thrive and that's a vow,
This is who I am you see
Aka my identity

Control by Tamryn Lazenby

Flying past the others
I hear the engine roar,
Just as loud as my music

I don't need to slow down
I'm in control
I can slow down at any point, there won't be an accident

I grab the lighter
light the cigarette
Breathe in the nicotine
This is not an addiction
I'm in control
I can stop at any point if I'd want to

My stomach is growling
Only running on water and chewing gum
No-one needs to know, it's only for a while

I'm not trying to starve myself
I'm in control

Derealization by Sophie Lülisdorf

I'm stuck in a reality I don't want to be in -
I'm not able to move, also not able to stop,
I'm never just breathing
Everything feels wrong like, it shouldn't be here,
Like, I shouldn't be here.

I should wake up now, right?
Everything is just a bad dream. Maybe, if I hold my breath long enough, I can
wake up.
But nothing ever happens
I panic, but I don't tell, after all, this could still be real
But it feels fake and so goddamn far away.

I've been dreaming a lot lately, although I can't sleep anymore
I can't close my eyes, because I see it all again -
I feel it all again, the horror, the pain even shame -
So I stay quiet.
I stay still.
Locking every door
So the bad dreams can't reach me.
The bad dream you might call reality

Different Sun by Nienke Nachtegaal

The sun is yellow, I said
No,
he told me.
It's orange,
Orange when it arrives
Orange when it disappears
But mostly,
Orange when you look at it
Eyes closed
So
I looked at the sun eyes closed and said:
No,
It's blood red

Be like water your teachers say by Vrinda Arora

Be like water
Water that takes the form of everything
An everything that has been determined for you
A you that is flexible
Flexibility that is seen as something good
A goodness that they crave
A craving that you've been taught
By the teachers that tell you to be like water
Be like water
Water that takes the color of everything
An everything that is forced in it
It changes even if a drop touches its surface
A surface that is weak and fragile
Fragility that they sell as a strength
A strength that makes you loyal
Loyalty that is praised
A praise that you have been taught
By the teachers that tell you to be like water
Be like water
Water that has a life
A type of life that no one desires
A desire that everyone receives
A reception that can't be paid with money

Money that has no value
 Values that define your worth
 A worth that you have been taught
 By the teachers that tell you to be like water
 Be like water
 Water that is so perfect
 A perfection that is expected from you
 A you that doesn't exist
 Existence that is an illusion
 An illusion that has wrapped your eyes
 Eyes that are covered by the lies
 Lies that you believe are the truth
 A truth that you have been taught
 By the teachers that tell you to be like water
 Be like water
 Water that evaporates without making noise
 Noise that they couldn't handle
 A handle that opens no doors
 A door that exists
 Existence that is reality
 Reality that you are aware of
 Awareness that you ignore
 Ignorance that is the key to survive
 Survival that is the purpose of life
 A life that is a lie
 A lie that is you
 A you that you have been taught
 By the teachers that tell you to be like water

Glöggliisberg by Noah Bolliger

Once upon a time there was a village where people had skin as serene and silky as white winter snow. Glöggliisberg was its name. Two mountains like wings embraced it like a mother bird protecting the nest of her offspring. It was a small safe bird's nest in the heart of the alps. The mountains formed a rolling landscape enclosing the few dozen houses and cut off the village from the regular flow of time. Strangers and novel information seldom dripped through the narrow streets into the village. There was a single school, with a single teacher and a single chapel with a single monk. A small hut was built into a hill next to the chapel. The small hut was inhabited by a small woman. Everyone called her little swallow because she was tiny and her pointy nose reminded them of a swallow's beak. And as if born with a swallow's instinct, she travelled south every winter to a place far warmer than Glöggliisberg or any other corner of the alps. People say that she had never in her life felt the sensation of snow melting on her own skin. However, all the things she experienced along her voyages were safely kept in her small hut. No story that could disrupt the never changing still-life state of Glöggliisberg ever left her lips.

Every year when the snowdrops began to peak through the snow, little swallow returned to Glöggliisberg. Then there was a year when she didn't return. She was the talk of the town, people dreamt up stories of blood and thunder. The following year, when the head of the first snowdrop peaked through a thin layer of snow, little swallow returned once again, as if nothing had happened. However, this time she braved the narrow paths of the Alps with a big belly. A few days later, a baby boy was born. A boy with skin the same colour as the warm earth beneath the now melting snow.

His mother gave him the name Thaksin. She wanted to give him a normal childhood and stopped departing when winter came. And thus, he grew up like any other child of Glöggliisberg, protected by the two wings of the mountains, cut off from the rest of the world.

People got wind that a baby boy was born and referred to him by the name Joggeli. Life continued in the village. The small boy played and laughed in the hut built into the hill until he was old enough to go to school. When Joggeli began to walk to school, Glöggisberg people started to change. Their eyes darted up and down the streets. Their legs moved just a bit more carefully. They stayed at the pub to talk just a little longer and exchanged just a few more words than usual with the local baker. When the parents picked up their children from school, they looked at the group of students just a little bit differently. Because for them, there was now a brown stain smudging the image of their perfect group of snow-white children.

Years passed, and on a summer day, Joggeli went cherry-picking with his friend. The cherries were abundant that year. Red, black and squeaky yellow ones. His friend liked to spend a lot of time climbing the trees carefully selecting the perfect cherries. He only picked the large and bright red ones, leaving the others to rot on the tree. The sun turned from yellow to red and the boys lay in the grass and ate the loot of the day. His friend rolled over, put a cherry between two of his fingers, held it close to Joggeli's eyes and said: "One day I want to marry a girl with skin so thin and white that the red blood shines through her cheeks as bright as this cherry." When Joggeli got home he cried.

Black coffee or To all the girls with hard to swallow names by Imè Ešenam
(Won first place at the Swiss Creative Writing Prize Competition, Poetry, 2021)

To all the girls with hard to swallow names
The names we never find on water bottles and coffee cups,
The names people shake their heads at
The names that so quickly turn into a joke like they have no worth
The names they don't even try to pronounce
And in exchange turn it to whatever they want
The names that go from Chimamanda to Mandy or Consuela to Ella
Like black coffee diluted with sugar and cream to Starbucks lattes,
So, they can bare to swallow it whole
The ones that get called complicated and dismissed
When asking to be called by their names that are gifts
And in return say sorry
The ones that now have apologies for names

Your name might not be a Starbucks latte, that teenage girls down so easily
But it's black coffee, one so strong people shy away from it,
Never getting rewarded with its richness
Your name holds power in every drop
The very drops your ancestors prayed for
So don't apologise for your name, when its meaning has saved so many before
Don't dumb it down so it fits the shackles of society
It's the only gift you'll get without being expected to return the favour
Although you are much more than your name
It's your crown so wear it with pride
Wear it high and don't let anyone take away its shine
It's not being complicated, it's called having self-respect
So, if you didn't offer it with sugar and cream, don't accept it when they add their own
Or simply said 'say it right or don't say it at all'

To be black, to be woman by Imè Ešenam

(Won second place at the Swiss Creative Writing Prize Competition, Poetry, 2021)

I'm black and I'm woman when I wake up in the morning
When I eat breakfast, brush my teeth, comb my hair, put on my clothes, unlock my door
And Suddenly I'm not black and woman anymore
Suddenly I'm too black to be woman, but not man enough to be black
I'm woman when I'm with man
But black when I'm with woman
I'm woman when I wear tight clothes and am convenient for man
But black when I'm pretty for a black girl aka ugly for a white girl
I'm black and not pretty enough for man
even though my woman is wearing tight clothes
I'm woman when I am shy
But black when I am confident and therefore love myself a little too much
I'm woman when I am not a threat
But black when I speak my mind
I'm woman when old man comments on my skirt, my dress, my jeans, my ski suit
But I am not even revealing an ounce of my skin
I'm black when I say 'fuck you' to old man
and in response need to listen to every slur known to exist

And now I

Can't speak up because I'm woman and would not be taken seriously
Can't speak up because I'm black and would be angry
Can't speak up because I'm woman and nothing but object
Can't speak up because I'm black and would be animal
Can't speak up because I'm woman and would be sensitive
Can't speak up because I'm black and would be criminal
Can't speak up because I'm woman and would be murdered because man is angry
Can't speak up because I'm black and would be murdered because white is angry
Can't speak up because I'm black and I'm woman and I'm terrified
Can't speak up because I'm black and I'm woman and now dead

And my black and my woman could be found dead in a ditch
but still my black and my woman would not have the same funeral,
funerals that would never be attended be the same people,
people that would never be seen together,
people that swore they loved me—
the only ones weeping at my graves are the ones that live the same lives as me,
knowing that black and woman is a death sentence from the start,
one that ensures two ready set caskets waiting to be filled every day
in two graves dug in two different graveyards

This girl by Imè Esenam

There is this girl I know
Same age as me
She lives right around the corner.
I've known her since kindergarten,
have seen her every day since
I'd like to think that I know her quite well.
She wasn't ugly but just ugly enough not to be called pretty
And beautiful was never a word used to describe her,
there was just too much wrong with her

Her legs were too short, too fat, too hairy
Her feet and hand just not quite right for a girl
Her arms too chubby and just a little flabby
Her stomach was like pudding
It wasn't flat, there were no abs
It was just there
Her nose was a little big and a little wide,
With an ugly bump in the middle
The ears too low and oddly small
Her lips always chapped and bleeding,
from her constant picking
Her skin wasn't smooth,
instead, it was riddled with razor bumps and acne scars
It wasn't ivory more like dirt
Her hair so tightly coiled,
no amount of relaxer could make it blow in the wind

But her eyes...
They weren't quite as unsightly as the rest
Not blue like the ocean,
nor blue like the sky
Instead, they were as dark as umber.
The colour of dirt
But cradled the earth entirely
they were magical
and held so much hurt
they told of stories
with tragic beginnings
and bittersweet endings
eyes so deep and so dark
they could bewitch you -
and make you feel her sorrow too