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# DITCH,

## THE POETRY THAT MATTERS

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### ALYSON MILLER



**Alyson Miller** is a lecturer in literary studies at Deakin University, Australia. Her short stories and poems have appeared in *Cordite*, *Eureka Street* and *Australian Book Review*, and her book, *Haunted by Words: Scandalous Text* was recently published by Peter Lang.

### Guppy

A girl searching in the shadows for a wolf, finds a story. Hears the words strung up as neat as teeth and swallows them in, rib-deep. Pressing hard against the sharpness of bones, the story sleeps, but she stays awake. Ears open to clues in the murmurs of trees and bed sheets. In her dreams, narratives float like the cobwebs between fence posts, and she nets them, swallows them deep and feels them kick down her throat into the cavern of her belly. In the day world of traffic lights and train station queues, she searches for more and gulps them in, mouth wide and lips stretched as though pushed against glass. She bloats with adultery and a broken shoe and childhood and a bad day and a friend of a friend and a moment last Friday and a funny thing that happened on the way to work and a coincidence and a memory and guilt. Stories crush into the spaces between her vertebrae, the cracks inside knuckles, the gaps under her nails. For some time, there is only the enormity of their weight pressing skin-tight inside her. And then she is gone, broken up with the violence of escape, of words exploding back into the secrets of tongues and stairwells and sleep.

### Still Birth

The colours of tea and clotted cream, a death sequence of digitized photographs—Victorian memento mori, families stood fist-tight around the bodies of their kin. It makes sense that most of them are babies and small children, their tiny hearts and milkweed bones too friable for birth or winter, their skins mantle-light and translucent. Posed as though breathing, stone hands are locked around dolls or other fingers, clothes pressed and formal, and eyes painted onto lids that have not opened for days. In one, a twin holds the wrist of her sister like a promise, identical in gingham dresses; in another, a girl tugged into standing by metal rods and rigor mortis—her arm stretched as though to touch your face. I am reminded of another girl, her grief a strange and animal thing, showing me a photo on her father's phone of a sister that gave up 7 months along the way. The neonate skull was half-eaten and collapsed, the body broken and curled in against exposed ribs, shell-like and blackened by clots. She carried the image like some precious thing, seeing only the snub nose of their likeness and wondering if the dead baby might have once remembered the feel of her voice as she pressed her mouth against the skin of her mother's belly and sang.

### EXPLOSION

On the day of the explosion, our mum cried into her hands and heard tidal waves in her ears. A collision of elements, atoms had resisted their coupling and burst against your skin, forcing metal to meet bone in a mess of something no one wanted to see. Covered in blood, your face was war-destroyed, a palette of violence that seemed to erase something original. On the telephone, our dad shouted for calm down the cable line, haunted by thoughts of burning splinters in your eyes. During the morphine hours, you told over and over of images that fell into the making of our stories and our sleep—a shattered window, the force of energy, the first word. And then after the next day and the one after that, your bruises and speckle cuts became part of things forgotten—a jar of flies, a lost letter, and a knitted yellow bear.

### BLUEBEARD

On an afternoon with light the colour of mustard, he watched the city skyline as he walked, chin tilted, nostrils open. The buildings grinned at him, gap-toothed and leering with a thousand million glass eyes. He writhed inside his suit. Then he saw her, and he stopped. She dropped *en pointe* towards shoppers, who gazed into her open crotch, amazed at the size of the perfectly waxed thing. He moved closer, admiring her, draped across a building on a corner of Collins Street. Held above rush hour, she rippled in the breeze. He whispered words like *pure manna*, *goodness* and *beautiful*, felt a strangeness in his groin that escaped in a sigh. Her legs seemed to offer him some welcome memory of consumption; magazines

pushed under the mattress and the thought of warm breath in his mouth. His eyes travelled the length of a loose-legged thigh and up towards the sky where he imagined her head might be, looking down on him ghostly and smiling.

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