



*from Series*

*Magritte*

mark young

from  
**Series Magritte**

Mark Young

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## **The Flavour of Tears**

I am a plant  
with new growth  
said the bird

I am  
the underside of  
the caterpillar who feeds  
on me

I taste my tears  
as the caterpillar  
eats them

Their memory  
is etched  
in my green flesh

I eat myself

It is exquisite agony

## **Homesickness**

If these were  
disparate objects  
then their  
juxtaposition might be  
provocative

but here they share  
a commonality, each is  
equally out of place,  
as in place as  
the other.

If the lion  
had the man's wings  
this might be  
allegory, the lion  
a gryphon, a  
mystical creature  
as he who is now  
Mister Commonplace  
gazes out off the bridge  
as people have done  
ever since the  
first tree

fell across  
a stream. That  
is the thing  
about bridges,  
wings or  
no wings.

The lion  
without a cage, the man  
within one. Reality  
is always  
somewhere else. Only

the bridge exists,  
hiding inside  
the yellow fog  
of melancholy.



## **The Seducer**

The ship  
the sea  
is sailing on.

Birds  
are made from  
the air.

The house  
we live in  
is a  
forest.

I awake  
in my dreams  
to find  
I am only  
awake in them.

## **The Betrayal of Images**

Gödel said  
that the  
concept of a set  
that contained  
all sets  
was impossible  
because it  
could not  
contain itself.

Magritte said  
that no  
matter how  
realistically  
an object  
was depicted  
it could never  
be  
anything more  
than an image  
of itself.

In-  
complete.  
Agreement.

**The Future of Statues**  
*for Vincent Ponka*

It was the  
elegance of  
the diving birds  
that caught his  
fancy. That,  
& the fact the sea  
was made  
from stone. He  
closed his eyes  
& let the sky  
stream over  
him. The clouds  
contained a  
hint of snow.

## **Perspicacity**

Start at the  
end or  
end at the start. Axolotls  
made sense  
only when salamanders  
were discovered. Over  
easy or overtime  
inspiration  
is still just  
a spark in the air. In-  
vent the axle  
& the wheel  
becomes a double-  
decker bus, dragons  
once were eggs. In  
retrospect  
it is easy to see  
how life cycles.

## **The Empty Mask**

If we give  
objects  
different names to those  
they were made or  
born with

are we changing  
reality  
or merely re-  
arranging it?

If I  
tell someone  
that a chair  
is no longer a chair  
but now  
a tuning fork

how can I  
make them  
agree with me

when they  
already say  
the sky  
is sea & see  
a forest as  
the human body.

Laughter &  
curtains  
are interchangeable.

### **The Reckless Sleeper**

At last! I'm glad to see  
you've finally caught up  
with the program. I've been  
dropping hints for years  
but for all the good that did  
I might as well have been  
pissing in the wind. Nothing  
like smothering you with a  
surfeit of symbolism. Over-  
kill perhaps. But even that  
mightn't have worked had I not  
given you that book on Freud  
for your birthday. Bet the  
first thing you did was try  
to find out just what sort of  
sick bastard I was to  
pull a stunt like that. I'd  
watch you reading it &  
caught by something look across  
at me. Back to the book then  
back to me again. & later  
I sensed you pausing in the doorway  
as I slept, indelicately picking  
the desktop icons of my dreams  
like newly opened flowers or  
fresh field mushrooms. Tasting  
them, smelling them. So tell me  
what you really think of me  
now that you know me better.

### **The Hunters at the Edge of Night**

Usually he evaded the hunters  
with little trouble. Only when  
the dogs joined in  
did he feel trepidation. They  
spoke a different language. It seemed  
more familiar to him  
though at first he understood it  
less. Finally he stopped running,  
covered himself in mud &  
became invisible. He learnt  
the hierarchy of the dogs, the  
patterns & cycles of their  
behaviour. He killed the alpha male  
just after the dominant female  
came on heat then caught & coupled  
with her. Now they hunt the hunters.

## **Homage to Mack Sennett**

Transparency in all  
things or concealing to  
reveal. We see  
what we imagine. By  
placing a sheet  
of glass in front of  
a naked body  
we cover &  
uncover. A curtain  
would conceal; but with the  
under image overlaid upon it  
it is revealing. Put  
layer upon layer  
then peel them away. The  
placing is the stuff of  
slapstick. Displacing is  
pure eroticism. Décolletage.



## **Time Transfixed**

It is the image that is  
important  
so  
first paint  
the painting  
& then decide  
what the  
locomotive emerging  
from the fireplace  
might mean.

## **La Joconde**

da  
Vinc i  
would be  
pleased that  
Magritte has  
managed to  
capture the  
enigma tic  
smile so  
well .

## Not to be Reproduced

Shown from the back the  
subject is androgynous – think  
k.d.lang in her man's suit  
phase. It is a portrait of the artist  
as a young (wo)man. It is not  
a portrait of the artist. Magritte says  
it is not to be reproduced  
though he reproduces it  
anyway. We do not see  
the face. Magritte does not  
produce it. Or reproduce it.  
Is not reflected in the mirror  
for what comes back from there  
is not mirror-image  
but reproduction. Almost as if  
we were peering over a shoulder  
only to see the shoulder that we  
were peering over. But it is  
reflection. The mantelpiece  
is reflected & the copy of  
Edgar Allen Poe's *Adventures  
of Arthur Gordon Pym* that rests  
upon it is partially reflected. It  
is a book about an imaginary  
journey. Magritte's painting  
is a journey of imagination about  
what happens between two points  
that are the same point  
though there is distance  
between them. He says it is not to be  
reproduced. It is reproduced here.

## **Le Seize Septembre**

The  
sixteenth  
of september

was like  
any other  
day until

a tree  
rose be-  
hind the  
moon

as  
night  
fell.

**Personnage méditant sur la folie**

Do we  
reflect  
on mad-  
ness  
or  
do we re-  
flect in  
sanity?

## **The Black Flag**

The memories react  
to basalt, the machines  
remain the models  
they once were.

## **The Threshold of the Forest**

In the march  
of civilization  
there may  
come a time  
when the  
artificial forest  
is indistinguishable  
from the  
natural city.

### **The Hereafter**

There is no inscription  
on the tomb. Except  
for the tomb there is  
no inscription on the  
landscape. What  
will be written after  
is already written here.



**The Human Condition (1933)**

We  
are one  
with the landscape.

## **Bel Canto**

He would stand  
before the mirror &  
practice the gestures of  
song. Outstretched arms,  
the slightly oval O  
of the mouth, chin  
down on the chest  
but not inhibiting the  
flow of air. More  
the reverse, draining  
the diaphragm just  
as his teacher had  
shown him. Get  
the technique down,  
she said, & then I'll  
show you the notes  
that flow from it.

**À la suite de l'eau, les nuages**

After the water, the  
clouds. After clouds  
the telephone. Then  
the hope that  
someone will hear it  
ring. After the answer  
the question. Who  
picked the flowers?

## **The Happy Hand**

The distances de-  
fined. & by default  
the spaces in  
between. Balanced  
relationships. Harmonic  
intervals. Places  
to put the fingers.  
Some things taught,  
something less  
learnt. Practice makes.  
Not perfect but im-  
parts some form  
to it. A semblance  
of. A pathway there.

## **The Art of Conversation**

A bull  
in a state  
of grace,  
although  
alert enough  
to seem  
alive. Birds in  
silhouette, al-  
most a word,  
the land  
above, the  
sea below. A  
pace behind  
unseen &  
silent, she stands  
parenthesised  
by columns  
listening to  
everything  
they have  
to say.

## **The Memories of a Saint**

The theatre  
in  
the round

is  
open to the  
sky.

The sins  
offstage.

## **The Use of Speech**

Words mean  
only  
what you think  
they mean. Others  
may see them  
differently.

## Memory

Just as the  
seasons & the sun  
& the position of  
the other  
stars start  
growth in plants  
& birds to  
fly to imprinted  
destinations

so, too, do  
anniversaries of  
certain incidents  
in the life  
of Giorgio de Chirico  
cause bells  
to fall silent &  
fall to earth.

Antiquities weep  
blood. In the  
Byzantine piazzas  
of the labyrinth  
pigeons pause  
& whisper  
Hebdomeros.



## **The Legend of the Centuries**

The little chair  
sits on  
the enormous chair

even though  
neither chair

is there  
for sitting on.

Dwarfed by  
la création  
le créateur

or)

the Greeks  
the Romans  
will conquer.

## **Dangerous Liaisons**

She held a  
mirror up  
to herself  
then turned  
away from it,  
almost as if  
this brief  
liaison with  
her own flesh  
held too much  
danger to be  
confronted.

## **The Empire of Lights**

Noisy birds silence  
the trees. Someone  
is reading as they  
sleep. Against the blue  
the house has braced  
for night. Entrance is  
gained through a door  
in the roof. The pond  
is full of stars. A street-  
lamp echoes. The sky  
is empty. Only clouds.

## **The Domain of Arnheim**

How can  
a giant bird

lay  
such

small eggs?

## **The Art of Conversation**

No chance  
assemblage. Too much  
structure in the  
way the blocks  
are stacked. Look  
at the base. REVE is  
real & not  
a dream. Foucault  
describes it  
as a landscape from  
the battle of the giants  
against the gods;  
but if that  
is so then  
someone has come along  
afterwards &  
tidied up. Added an  
after word. Re-  
written history.

## **Perspective II: Manet's Balcony**

Whether it be  
fête or  
theatre

or just

sitting  
on the balcony  
watching  
the funeral  
parade pass  
by

Manet  
insisted

his family  
always dress  
to reflect the  
occasion.

## **The Lovers**

Memory does not  
hold its  
shape. Blurring  
occurs. Always tricky  
getting the light  
right & how  
much of the  
initial energy signature  
of love can be  
retained? Things  
change, return as  
indifferent faces  
in different  
settings. What lasts  
is how the lovers  
shared a space, not  
how they looked  
at one another.

## **The Song of Love**

Perhaps a  
piscine Rodin  
this mer-  
couple made  
from the same basalt  
as the shore. They  
could be  
singing. Is this  
the song  
of love? (& again  
the ship the sea  
is sailing on.)

A scene  
that does not  
seem to sing of  
anything except  
the Byzantine archi-  
texture of  
de Chirico's  
mind. A stage-set  
for a theatre  
of the absurd.  
Pinned on a wall  
a glove, a blank-  
eyed bust. Green ball  
in front, rooftop  
in behind. & yet  
this is the  
siren song of  
love that  
fifty years before  
made Yves Tanguy  
jump from  
a moving tram

that made



Magritte  
say he saw  
thought made visible  
for the first  
time. Making the  
possible  
improbable  
but not  
impossible. Pictures  
within pictures.  
Songs within  
songs. Of  
love. & other  
strangeness.

## **The Alphabet of Revelations**

Only in so far  
as asemic  
comes first

is the  
alphabet of  
revelations

arranged  
alphabetically.

## **The Central Story**

The hand  
at the throat  
that holds  
the veil in  
place. The small  
euphonium. A  
closed suitcase.  
Death &  
departure.

As a  
reference point  
it would be  
hard  
to go past  
the central story  
that the face  
of Magritte's  
mother  
was covered  
by her  
nightdress  
when  
her body  
was taken out  
of the River Sambre  
after her  
suicide.

## **The Therapist**

Putting in links  
is a form of  
cheating. It is  
a way of letting  
Magritte do  
most of the  
work. You give a  
small misleading  
glimpse, a kind of  
precis without  
the precision  
of the original. Pre-  
tend to read his  
mind, inaccurately  
fitting the painting  
to your description  
of it. Still the shill  
from sideshow alley  
though now you  
work the avenue  
in front of the  
Gallery, promising  
that inside will be  
found creatures who  
are half man, half  
beast. & once the  
money is collected  
don't care that  
small birds give  
the game away.

**The Therapist (revisited)**  
*for Nick Piombino*

I know that  
asking you to lie down  
on the couch while I  
sit across from you  
is a bit old-fashioned  
but humour me, it comes  
from doing my studies  
in Vienna. The bag  
beside me contains a  
peregrine falcon whose  
purpose will become clear  
later on. The wall behind?  
*A piece of trompe l'oeil*  
I asked this Belgian painter  
to do for me. The sea is  
so soothing. It's where  
we all came from, it's  
where we all desire  
to return. Why? Think  
amniotic fluid, think your  
mother's lullabies. & the  
birds inside the cage? At  
first they're something  
for your mind to focus on  
while I explore the skies  
they used to fly in. As we  
progress, I gradually get  
you to transfer to them  
all the concerns that keep  
you planted in the earth.  
When that is done we set  
them free. The final act  
is to release the falcon.

## **The Age of Enlightenment**

I took it to be  
the effect of altitude  
on particles of  
light. Their  
reaction to it.  
The young were  
not so sure. Spoke  
of signs,  
of revelations. Un-  
able or unwilling  
to accept  
that even when  
the air is thin  
the aspects of a face  
can have a  
separate gravity.  
The balloon  
I offered up as  
proof that hot air  
rises. They understood  
that. Enlightenment  
is of an age. Is  
not an Age of.

## **Familiar Objects**

Floating objects are a common enough theme in the paintings of Magritte. Overdone it could almost be said; but not quite since suspension requires a suspension of belief, & each painting is refreshed & refreshing, creating its own unique atmospheric pressures, a re-awakening of surprise. Here we have a singular form seen from multiple aspects; & in the air the singularity of multiple objects that have no right to be there, held in suspension by a single held-in breath.

## **The Pleasure Principle**

A corona of light  
like an un-  
glasses light bulb.

Un sighted.

Seeing what  
the sitter sees.

Alighting  
at this  
precise  
moment  
of space  
this precis  
of time.

Taken &  
being taken.  
The sitter  
unseeing.

Unseen.

A moment  
of insight  
as we  
who are  
un-  
seated

are taken

into a  
space of time  
we cannot  
see.



Excited  
&  
anticipating pain.

### **The Lost Jockey**

The photosynthesis machines  
are down. Chlorophyll  
is in short supply. Each tree  
left only with the exposed  
neural pathways of a  
single leaf; but cauterised  
by cold these are excised  
from all external stimuli. Un-  
able to smell the snow  
or touch each other or  
taste the passage of  
this horse & frantic rider. The  
forest is full of trees who  
cannot see they're there.

## **Eternal Evidence**

The curve  
of the jaw-  
line is  
the motif  
that follows

the slightly  
misaligned  
body  
down  
past  
the breasts

past the eye  
of the navel  
& thatch-  
work triangle  
of the crotch

to where  
kneebone &  
tibia top are  
parallel  
patterns  
above  
the final  
amputation.

The feet  
stand alone.

## **The Liberator**

I have always thought  
of the subject as  
Italian. The patriarch of  
a transported family, sugar  
cane growers in North  
Queensland, the first here,  
able to speak a little  
English, his wife far less  
because she never mixed  
outside the community. He  
is a picture on the wall  
or a watcher at the festival  
parade, no breath left  
to play the tuba in the  
marching band, no longer  
able to keep in step  
with a step he never really  
was in step with. Eyes  
on an embellished past as a  
diminishing present passes by.

\*

I see echoes of my father  
also. Non-Italian. Freemason.  
The attache case with the regalia  
hidden inside, the pearled  
candelabra reminding me  
of jewels & embroidered  
aprons. He never talked to me  
about it. I never asked. He  
never talked because I didn't  
ask. I never asked because  
he never talked about it. Round  
& round. We never came close.

\*

Never a liberator. Quite  
the reverse. A tight hold  
on the family. Rationed  
freedom. We escaped by  
becoming birds or keys or  
pipes or wineglasses. Every-  
day objects that could always  
be replaced. He never  
noticed. The space inside  
the outline is as it has always  
been, a shadow of himself, how  
he'd always seen us. The  
eyes in the pearled lorgnette  
are mother's eyes. She is  
held tightly. A second cane.

## **Attempting the Impossible**

Trains weren't  
invented  
when they built  
a railway between Bradford  
& London. Leonardo  
was designing airports  
before he thought  
about flight. The  
model arrived  
only after  
Magritte  
had painted her.

## **Carte Blanche**

“Visible things  
can be in-  
visible,” said Magritte  
about this painting. “If  
somebody is  
riding a horse through the  
woods, at first you see  
them & then you  
don’t. But you know  
they’re there. I  
make use of painting  
to render thoughts  
visible.” Then he  
galloped off  
leaving the rider  
hiding the trees &  
the trees hiding her.

## Comparative Studies

Put one or  
more things side  
by side or one  
within the other. For  
the first it is  
the space between  
that makes the  
magic, the juxtaposition  
of things known  
to create the unknown. &  
yes, Isador Ducasse, I  
hear you laughing  
in the background. It is  
a collision that marks  
the start of a new  
journey. The in-position  
is continuity, an egg  
for a bird, or confusion  
when something is  
given an entirely different  
name to that we  
usually ascribe to it. Is the  
briefcase labelled sky  
to be our travelling  
companion or the cover  
under which we  
set out on what  
began a journey  
& is now a vestibule?



**The Giantess**  
(after Baudelaire)

In those times when  
Nature couldn't  
get enough of it,  
spitting out  
on a daily basis  
children who were  
literally monsters, I  
would have loved  
to have lived  
near a young giantess  
even if it meant  
the only way to  
dampen my desires  
was to insinuate myself  
around her ankles,  
a frotting cat at the  
feet of a queen. That way  
I could take part in  
whatever perverse games  
she played, could see  
her body & soul thrive  
on the freedom she  
found in them, tell  
if her heart hid some  
dark flame, if that mist  
that swam across her eyes  
was tears or the  
humid warmth of  
pleasure. & as a cat  
I could be leisurely  
in my exploration  
of her body. It was  
magnificent. I'd  
gently climb the slope  
of her knees, taste  
her thighs, tangle my claws

in the thicket of her  
pubic hair. & sometimes  
in summer, drained  
by the sun, she would  
stretch herself out  
across the countryside  
& I would risk the  
crossing of her belly  
to sleep below her breasts,  
in their shadow, a  
peaceful village at  
the foot of a mountain.

## **Intermission**

Peace  
is popularly  
supposed to be

the  
period between  
two wars. Let's

hope  
then that  
the actions of

those  
who invaded  
Iraq or blew

up  
Atocha Station  
were parts of

the  
final act  
of a tragedy

&  
not part  
of the intermission.

## **Golconda**

An image such as this  
might have been  
what the Poynter Sisters  
had in mind when they  
sang *It's raining men,*  
*Hallelujah.* Or maybe  
it was that other song  
of their's called - was it? -  
*Creole Lady Marmalade*  
with its refrain of  
*voulez-vous couchez avec*  
*moi, ce soir* & they were  
working on the principle  
that if you ask enough people  
sooner or later some/body's  
bound to come across  
even if it is only  
an anonymous Mr Average  
in a mass-produced bowler hat.

## The Listening Room

An apple  
on the table  
is no threat; but  
walk into a room  
to find it  
filled by a  
giant apple...

\*

Had gone  
to write "the apple  
peers out the  
window". Wrote  
"pears" instead. A  
slight tectonic drift  
of associated words  
done accidentally &  
unconsciously.

\*

Magritte's  
placement of objects is  
deliberate, is earth-  
quake territory. The  
displacement of space  
by things that should  
not be there  
but are seemingly  
quite at home.

\*

Maldoror in whom I dream apples.

\*

Only a painter  
could place  
this giant object  
in a space where  
the entry  
place & space  
is so small.

\*

Cliffs, chasms. A  
precipice pre-  
cipitated by the  
unexpected. It is why  
even in the light  
we fear closed doors  
& rooms that  
may not be empty.

\*

How large the tree?  
Who picked the apple?

\*

There are no  
eyes. How then to  
tell in  
what direction  
it is facing. The  
apple appears  
to be looking  
out the window. Small  
wordplay. All  
the room  
that's left to  
manoeuvre

in. There  
are no ears.

\*

What is it  
listening for ?

**The Secret Player**

*for Jukka-Pekka Kervinen*

Master Class in that  
a group of us  
are brought together  
& once we've finished  
demonstrating our skills  
are then shown  
how it should be  
done. Jukka as ice-white  
tennis pro, serving up aces  
while we watch on  
amazed at the ease  
with which he works the  
court. Ice-blue, ice  
as prism through which re-  
flects/refracts all  
colours, through which  
neutrino words pass  
to form ice crystals  
sharp as stone, light as  
lattice. Secret player  
in that I have slim  
sense of him outside  
his poems, in that  
the game he plays is far  
beyond that which the  
rest of us call tennis.



***from: The Cicerone***

To end  
a solar eclipse  
the priests take a  
young boy who has  
fewer than ten  
gold tokens  
on the wall  
of his family home,  
wash him with water  
from their private spring  
& clothe him  
in unbleached linen  
which is  
woven from flax  
harvested near the sea.

He is given peyote.  
He is laid on the altar.  
He stares at the sun with dull eyes.  
He sees darkness  
before the darkness is seen.

A sunflower is  
placed to replace his face.

We are gathered, watching.

We know what is to happen.

We know what is to happen

then.

As the moon  
starts its  
slide onto the sun  
a brazier is lit. As it

continues to drift  
twelve torches  
set in a circle  
around the altar  
are set alight. & as  
the moon  
passes fully  
across the sun  
hiding it  
like an apple  
poised before  
a man's face  
a priest wearing  
the skin of an ocelot  
which marks him  
as coming from  
the same family  
slices the boy open  
from throat to un-  
descended testicles,  
rips out his entrails  
& casts them  
into the brazier.

It is done quickly. The  
boy's heart is still beating.

It is done so  
we hear the spatter of wet flesh

just before  
a fingernail of light shows

the sun is being born again,  
the boy is dead.

**The Empire of Lights (1967)**

For the  
nineteen years  
between her husband's  
& her own  
death, Georgette Magritte  
kept this painting  
on an easel in  
what had been  
their shared house. How  
hard it must have  
been for her  
knowing that after  
their forty-five  
years together  
she could have  
finished it off for him  
with barely a break  
in the brush strokes.

Mark Young, a New Zealander now living on the Tropic of Capricorn in Australia, has been publishing poetry for more than 45 years. His work has appeared in a wide range of print and electronic journals in many countries.

His books include *New Zealand Painting, 1950-1967* (1968), *Blues for New Lovers* (1969), *The right foot of the giant* (1999), *The Oracular Sonnets* (with Jukka-Pekka Kervinen) (2004), *calligraphies* (2004), *Sun Moon's Mother* (2004), *Poles Apart* (with Jukka-Pekka Kervinen) (2004), *The Cicerone* (2005), and, as co-editor with Jean Vengua, *The First Hay(na)ku Anthology* (2005). A new collection, episodes, will be out soon.

In addition to his mark young's Series Magritte blog, on which most of the poems collected here first appeared, he also maintains a primary blog, pelican dreaming. He has an author's page at the New Zealand electronic poetry centre.