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.

Incomplete. 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. Invent 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
Vinci
would be
pleased that
Magritte has
managed to
capture the
enigmatic
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 madness or do we reflect 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 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 architecture 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. Pretend 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. Over-done it could almost be said; but not quite since suspension requires a suspension of belief, & each painting is refreshed & re-freshing, 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-glassed light bulb.

Unsighted.

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. Unable 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. Everyday 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.
Attemping 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 invisible,” 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?
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 accidently &
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 precipitated 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 manouevre
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.
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 undescended 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.


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.