

## A Vanity

by Janet Manley

Why is it that now I am a Writer the entire world is competing for inspirational status? Yes, I am accepting submissions for beauty, truth and tragedy, but I see so much rust, suggesting suffering, too much colour at sundown, I feel the tropical nausea in three warm stripes like the international flag of holidays framed by palms, sad people crying on street corners then asking for money for cigarettes. People caricatures of themselves. I stop at the traffic lights and two clowns are in the car next to me, one waves, and the other curls his big red, rubber band lips up into a smile, green light (honk), then a truck roars by with a Trojan horse in the tray daring me to look twice. I sleep in a house halfway up the hill from the beach,<sup>1</sup> which takes five minutes to reach, pasting and peeling my turquoise thongs one after the other down the hot pavement.<sup>2</sup> From the top of the hill the ocean horizon rises like a mountain range, illusory height but maybe night time is just the shadow it casts before sunrise. There is something fantastically indecisive about the shoreline, not only creeping up then retreating from day to night, but the actual land shattered into miniscule specks of sand, small enough and clever enough to migrate back to the safety of the inland, hidden inside the swimmers of the weekend visitors. Sitting on the beach watching the kiddies with the sand buckets kites sausages lined up on the bbq bodies tanning and the waves rear up *Hello Writer!* then self-destruct on the shore with a final bow, the crescent audience hypnotised as the pastel sailboat clichés wash up for them in amongst the dark seaweed tendrils and the wind starts to blow, licking back my thoughts<sup>3</sup> and my hair but I don't want to be another person with a note book near the endless blue<sup>4</sup> so I leave and padding up the hill toes 1 and 2 pinch their

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<sup>1</sup> a grey building of course

<sup>2</sup> oval tongues hanging out of panting dogs

<sup>3</sup> My trouble with the 'stream of consciousness' style of writing here is that there is little room for tangential diversion; for the parallel, simultaneous trains of thought that the inspired writer rides. The tremendous and earned complexity of the writer, who is now capable of being consumed and convinced by two opposing emotions or arguments at the same time, is lost to a finite temporal statement. The fabulous indecision and self-doubt that plagued prior masters cannot fit on the page in such a linear form. [3a]

3a The use of footnotes here has been carefully considered, and, decisively, embraced. The author is aware that the use of footnotes is an inherently subversive mechanism where the artist is trying to construct the illusion of a 'genius writing instance'; whereupon we believe the stream of consciousness narrator has sat down and simply bled pure, inspired thought through pen from brain to page, unaltered, undiluted, untampered with. Let the reader please suspend their disbelief then, as the footnotes found here intrude upon the virgin text I have written. Though indicative of some form of post-creational editing, they merely serve to reinforce some sense of awareness about what has been written. Having suffered so for one's art, I believe it is a small vanity for an author to allow themselves the luxury of glancing back over what they have produced, to see 'how it reads', and, when dissatisfied, to alter the semantics of their real life in order to better the piece. I would be lying if I said I didn't look satisfyingly upon the sodden, stained tissues clod by my eyes during a really good weeping session, and so I feel should be the fringe benefits of writership.

<sup>4</sup> What happens if writers both see the same thing at the same time? Does one enter the consciousness of the other as per a conference call? If all writers write from the same collective unconsciousness, and if all writing is vanity, then we only need one person to tell us the ocean looks like diamonds today [3a] – thinking is human, but writing it down is self-absorbed, right?

3a THIS JUST IN – OCEAN GLITTERING LIKE DIAMONDS AS WE SPEAK

little strap like a fireman's pole on my turquoise flip-flips<sup>5</sup> and then a boy skateboards past me carrying a guitar it is like frikkin Picasso out here the guitar doesn't mean anything I am worried he will break the guitar if he falls the same way I trip on the street my own melodrama wrapped around my ankles when I am walking with my headphones in my ears accidentally [deliberately] dawdling to sad melancholy music when I am alone, hair stuck to my face which contorts as it watches the cracks in the pavement move under my vision, climbing the rungs of self-pity until the time I walked clear into a telegraph pole. I know a girl who walks into poles all the time, not just telegraph poles but street signs parking meters lamp posts and she can eat her nachos happily guacamole melty cheese bendy chips chew swallow mentally sound<sup>6</sup> because she is an accountant. No one questions her sanity not like when I am tapping pretend little keys on the laptop and Bill Gates keeps capitalizing and gets editorial on me underlining everything I write with a big green squiggly line like he is saying *What are you writing? What on earth is that? It doesn't rhyme you should read the newspaper more every writer should know what is going on* because people die and people fall off bikes and the only guy you saw die didn't look like a man<sup>7</sup> he looked like the dummies you practice CPR on obliging unmoving except for when the shocks went through did he get to see you as he spiraled up out of his body to the Duet of the Lakes? Or was it Stairway to Heaven? I went off to drink beer after but never mind I fell in love eventually, "in luff" "in loaf", and it is all the words you ever read stuffed inside a turkey with secret spices except now you don't even want to use all those words you are happy enough to just say I am in love and fuck I love you – these aren't words people will quote two centuries from now fuck is not the way to serenade a lady but nor are they gritty words that win you the Booker for being bleak and real but oh well you just catch them as they fall.<sup>8</sup>

We use other people's words and this becomes shorthand, progressively more and more refined to perfectly convey meaning, so how come, if writers keep quoting those before them, this generation makes less sense than ever?<sup>9</sup> Is there one great quote that sums the rest up?<sup>10</sup> Maybe we could do with less words, lunacy is an old chum never far off does the opportunity to write help when you vomit on a Sunday morning after an inspired Saturday night bless it newspapers big breakfasts fried eggs great concrete pillars of toast mushies and roast tomatoes and vomiting all over the city and dogs walking they

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<sup>5</sup> click clack thwop

<sup>6</sup> no echoes

<sup>7</sup> Heart attack – if he was dead when I found him does it still count as seeing someone die? During the CPR he did come back, and then died again – I am going to pencil it in as my Life and Death moment until a better one comes along.

<sup>8</sup> Footnotes fell even further than the ones landed in the body of the text. [7a]

7a Even though this is working for me, I still have the urge to physically doodle biro over the sentences at different angles like in real life. Despite ingenuity, this still reads laterally, and forwards.

<sup>9</sup> A nod here to Derrida, who proposed that the more you wrote, the further you got from what it is you wished to write about. He emphatically proved his own point, the longer his pieces, the less I could find my own head at the end of them.

<sup>10</sup> Who is on the job for that one, looking at the books in the Library of Babel? [9a]

9a It just occurred to me maybe this is like mixing paints, after a while no matter what you add, the colour stays the same {F}

F In this age dense with literary history it is harder *not* to accidentally quote than it is to find an appropriate one to include. Soon people will denote the few sporadic moments in their writing that are legitimately original, and unquoted, rather than those they borrowed. I can attest that unintentional referencing has become as commonplace as hiccupping. Some like pulp in juice, others like the strained liquid. Which is more pure/ the essence of orange?\*

\* This pure, original thought is presented to you by the author, who is glad you read as far as its much hyped unveiling.

would walk all day if they could so would I my legs are more useful than the rest of me all together in a lego box. Practical. Ode to the legs! Thou carriest me further than introspection can! I have just enough madness to swill in masticating mouth and spit into the bucket never enough to put my head in the cosy oven bake my disillusion au gratin<sup>11</sup>. A Writer I slept with believed that men and women were like keys and locks and you have to find your match but I don't know, because what if the women try too many keys will that not hurt the lock? and besides after a barrel of shiraz his key couldn't open a ham sandwich. I went inside the atom the other day, it smelt like an Irish pub and the bartender at its nucleus had flaming red hair gave me three beers then told me to slow down.

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<sup>11</sup> Real time observation of writerly types has convinced the author that while small amounts of mental dysfunction may be beneficial to the halted cursor, too much is less than productive. Studies show that immense depression lends only isolation, increase in time spent sleeping, and decline in relationships; each overall detrimental to the authorial goal of having something to write about. Suicide is the most unproductive arm of depressive behaviour, obviously leaving the author entirely unable to comment further with or without irony on their condition – it does, however, lend a certain post-humous weight to work already written, provided there is enough to regard it as literary in the first place.