

Limina: a Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies

Volume 27, Issue 2: Adaptations

September 2022

ISSN 1833-3419

Submissions Editor

Caitlan Smith

Book Reviews Editors

Erica Steiner, Jo Penney

Web Editor

Chris Arnold

Editorial Collective

Chris Arnold

Kerry Bonnie

Grace Brooks

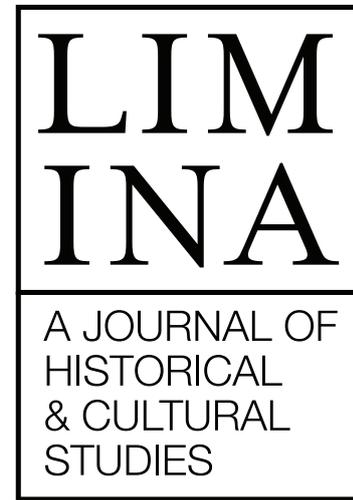
Srishti Guha

WhiteFeather Hunter

Jo Penney

Edward Ross

Caitlan Smith



Erica Steiner

Valentina Utari

Sarah Yeung

Advisory Board

Jane Lydon, University of Western Australia

Ned Curthoys, University of Western Australia

David Konstan, New York University

Carolyne Larrington, St. John's College, Oxford

Sue Broomhall, Australian Catholic University

Andrew Lynch, University of Western Australia

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth, University of Western Australia

Andrew Erskine, University of Edinburgh

Marina Gerzic, University of Western Australia

Paula Duffy, University of St Andrews

Lyn Parker, University of Western Australia

Lachlan Umers, University of Western Australia

Copyright

All work published by *Limina: a Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* is subject to the Creative Commons (BY-NC-ND) licensing arrangement. Authors retain copyright of their articles and may republish them anywhere provided that *Limina* is acknowledged as the original place of publication, and that the work is not published again within the first twelve (12) months of the article's initial publication in *Limina*.

Submitting to Limina

Information regarding the journal and how to submit can be found at <https://www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au/future>.

Cover Image

In Dreames. Digital image by Brook Guidry

Byam Shaw, Tom and Macartney, Ian, eds, *World-Dreem: An anthology of new(er) writing*, Scotland, Sincere Corkscrew, 2021; paperback, pp.78; RRP £7.99; ISBN: 9781527296336.

Coming up with a pithy description for *World Dreem* is difficult. The title suggests a hint of Surrealism: a collective of geographically distributed writers, all unconsciously working toward a vision of a world untainted by whatever horrors the past holds. In the manner of an exquisite corpse, *World Dreem* ranges over themes from panic shopping to predestination. More than one work is set underground. There's poetry, short fiction, and there are hybrid forms. In short, there's a lot happening over its 78 pages.

Within their respective editorials, Ian Macartney in the foreword and Tom Byam Shaw in the 'backward', the editors give context to this lockdown project. It's a way to connect, particularly for Shaw, but it is, as Macartney writes, a great deal more. The book aims to platform a selection of talented young writers; writers that happen to be too young to be taken very seriously, but are producing works of a standard up to, or exceeding, more established writers. Shaw puts it this way: 'Ian and I agreed that we'd bring together the best people that we knew and get from them their best work: a no-filler collection'.

Macartney and Shaw live in Aberdeen, and there's naturally a strong presence of Scottish writing, with several pieces in Scots vernacular. 'Cross Country' from Mag is a stand-out among these. A decent Scots vocabulary isn't necessary here; even with the most rudimentary reading accent, this poem carves out a forceful sonic space:

Caulked against gusts by rain-dappled back
Tight as a heart; Six loons packed in;
Een hud baccy n een hud skins,
Coaxing grubs way lighter n scratch
Fae a passed flint ay bastard hash (40)

This poem is a bleak, windswept, and unforgiving 'liminal fugue' state. Figures drift in and out of focus, as do the town and time, and the poem's narrative drift lets the language's sound take prominence. Re-reading is both necessary and well-rewarded.

Speaking of highlights, 'The Dream of Saul' is one of my favourite prose pieces in the collection. Full disclosure: its author, Prema Arasu, is a colleague and friend at UWA, and they prompted me to write this review. Yet even with this in mind, her short fiction work 'The Dream of Saul' is subtle, and the writing is extremely sharp. Arasu achieves a fine balance of repetition and minimalism to cement suggestions with the reader. The story works, for example, with a muted but striking colour palette:

Everything is white.
Everything that is not white is a pale blue-green colour—a colour
not found in nature—a colour distinctively reserved for the
distinctly artificial. The colour of medical masks and latex. (36)

The story begins as the narrator's 'legs are growing onions', and the white-and-grue palette helps to establish the surreal oneiro-medical setting. Everything here is the definition of uncanny—recognisable, almost normal; but just weird enough to be terrifying through suggestion alone. 'The doctor', for example, takes one of the narrator's leg onions 'and removes his mask. He bites into the onion.' From here, the doctor and

the narrator's mother drift in and out as the narrator struggles to differentiate real from unreal. The writing's matter-of-fact, calm tone makes an affecting contrast with barely-suppressed terror and growing self-doubt. Like much of the book, this text isn't trying to sell the reader anything obvious, but there's a great deal of potential in the reading.

One of the more formally interesting narratives is Ian Macartney's 'Trans-spatial'. It's a hybrid piece, somewhere between playscript and short fiction. Its protagonists are Elijah and his son Isaac; the pair are travelling through '*The Transpacific Tunnel [that] begins at Lebanon, Kansas and reopens at the Lambert Centre, Northern Territory*' (16). What makes this story unusual is its superposition of states: there are three distinct pasts and presents in this story, all moving in parallel. The text alternates between monadic stretches of text and sudden drops into three choices. 'Elijah remembered', for example, '*the football game / the soccer game / the night she went missing*'. There's little to correlate the three narrative states and the reader's never sure if they appear in a consistent order, or what relationship they have to one another. It's possible that the story relates a single journey, one so monotonous that it starts to take on a kind of formal repetition, and this structure is a simple space-saving measure. It's hard to say, and that uncertainty—the feeling of suspension it generates—is, perhaps, the book's defining characteristic.

World Dreem is an excellent anthology from, as its editors hoped, a collection of talented writers. This is not to say that every piece meets a uniformly excellent standard. There are moments of overwriting ('dear friend—as I have you in my hand—in front of me—by summon of some liquid crystal' (51)) but those are rare. And in case, my taste will vary from that of other readers. On other occasions, florid prose is part of the appeal, as in Ask Vestergaard's 'Nøkken', which sees a shapeshifter wallow in an explosion of sound and colour that's reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'. I would like, in closing, to give the final word to Enxhi Mandija's 'Lie of the land', a beautifully paced and spacious portrayal of a painter working in a remote Albanian museum. The narrator speaks of their mother in an old portrait; 'She didn't particularly like that picture, she said it was staged, not natural—*dukem si e ngrirë*, I look like frozen'. The feeling of suspension I described earlier might feel strange when reading *World Dreem*, but this collection allows the reader a great deal of space to bring something of their own experience to the writing. As Mandija's narrator has it, 'To orient yourself around loose beginnings—to get the lie of an *I remember*'.

Chris Arnold

The University of Western Australia