

‘They Are Related, But Not A Pair’

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JOANNA WALSH

Joanna Walsh is a writer and illustrator. She has published three books this year: a Freudian memoir, *Hotel*, from Bloomsbury; a short story collection, *Vertigo*, already out in the US from the Dorothy Project, and forthcoming in the UK from And Other Stories and in Ireland from Tramp Press; and *Grow A Pair, 9 1/2 Fairytales About Sex* by Berlin publishers Readux. She has contributed to Dalkey Archive’s *Best European Fiction*, Salt’s *Best British Short Stories*, and *Granta* magazine, amongst others. She writes criticism for the *Guardian*, the *New Statesman*, and the *National*, and is fiction editor at *3:AM Magazine*. She also runs the #readwomen hashtag on Twitter, described by the *New York Times* as ‘a rallying cry for equal treatment for women writers.’

Sometimes epigrammatic, other times less-than-novel-length texts, Joanna’s fictions are grounded in an experimental tradition. From Georges Perec to Marguerite Duras through to Clarice Lispector, Leonora Carrington and Lydia Davis, her literary range is far reaching. Her story ‘Vagues’ was published in *gorse* no. 1, and her essay, ‘The Eye and the Word,’ on experimental British writer and Bletchley Park operator Christine Brooke-Rose, featured in *gorse* no. 3. In that essay, Joanna wonders where seeing stops and writing begins. She observes: “For a long time I didn’t want to enter into the world in writing, can still scarcely believe that the world is somewhere that I—folded here inside this thing I mostly cannot see—might be able to take such a form. I

am only, after all, quite an ordinary person, and words are things that ordinary people mostly brush off: they're showy, and some of them are dirty, and if they stick, they can be dangerous.”

The compulsion to write is one of the threads she follows in her memoir, *Hotel*. In it she says: “I have felt for a long while, maybe forever, that there is something not quite right about my life. The plot could be better, or maybe the scenery. This is, perhaps, why I am writing. I have suspected for a while that some people talk to the page because there is no one else they can talk to any more.”

CLAIRE-LOUISE BENNETT

Claire-Louise Bennett is the author of *Pond*, from The Stinging Fly Press. Her short fiction and essays have been published in *The Stinging Fly*, *The Penny Dreadful*, *The Moth*, the *Irish Times*, and *The White Review*, who awarded her the inaugural White Review Short Story Prize in 2013.

Katherine Mansfield talked of her “infinite delight in *detail*, not for the sake of detail but for the life in the life of it.” And what detail in *Pond*—the lilac seashell, the swanky aubergines, the small blue bowl, the almonds, the coloured straws, the red apple on the lawn, the Japanese tapestries—*Pond* is full of life. It is not a conventional book: is it a collection of short stories, is it a novel in short stories, is it fictional autobiography? What it isn't, as artist Alice Maher said, “is not a ‘stream of consciousness’ as people like to so often label anything at all that isn't a conventional descriptive

tale. No, her language use is a very careful, *forensic* use of words which follows the mind through and into the body, and in turn follows the body to the depths of the mind.”

In her essay for *gorse* no. 2, Claire-Louise wrote on Elizabeth Smart’s novella *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*. “I want my book to be about love,” writes Smart at the end of a particularly tumultuous diary entry in Mexico, and I must admit to having always been in possession of a similar aim,” writes Claire-Louise. “It is a devil to know how to write about love, to take desire’s heat and transfer it to another through the page. I keep trying because I don’t know that there’s much else worth writing about.” Of Edna O’Brien Philip Roth said, “only Colette is her equal as a student of the ardors of an independent woman who is also on her own as a writer.” And I think we can say the same of Claire-Louise. That desire to come apart, in her story, ‘Morning, Noon & Night’: “It had something to do with love. About the essential brutality of love. About those adventitious souls who deliberately seek out love as a prime agent of total self-immolation. Yes, that’s right. It attempted to show that in the whole history of literature love is quite routinely depicted as an engulfing process of ecstatic suffering which finally, mercifully, obliterates us and delivers us to oblivion. Dismembered and packed off. Something like that. Something along those lines. I am mad about you. I am going out of my mind. My soul burns for you. I am inflamed. There is nothing now, nothing except you. Gone, quite gone. That kind of thing.”