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valid, virtual, vegetable reality uproots and examines the relationships between cinema and sexual practices; official national memory and the hierarchical structure of family; nineteenth century medical discourses on disease and the perceived contagiousness of ideas. A range of forms associated with instruction – whether feminist manifesto, code, satellite radio transmission, or georgic – are appropriated here in poems that construct the body as a matter of technological as well as archival and lyrical construction, always in the process of (collective) invention and always subject to modification and calibration, but never success.

This is a distinctive, urban voice, which holds on to speaking and feeling throughout states of fragmentariness. Through the fractures in its language, perceptions, and experiences, things still truly matter. This is evidenced in the habit of thorough delicate observation that translates into the ability suddenly, and aptly, to evoke a pastel dianthus or a satellite signal, or to draw unexpectedly on earlier, traditional forms without falling under their yoke.

– VAHNI CAPILDEO




Rebecca Close (born in London in 1987) is an arts researcher and translator based in Barcelona. She graduated in Philosophy from Manchester University and has a Masters in Comparative Literature and Spanish Philology. She is the 2018/2019 research fellow at the Centre for Arts, Design + Social

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PAPERBACK **POETRY**

REBECCA CLOSE  VALID, VIRTUAL, VEGETABLE REALITY

valid,
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virtual,
CLOSE
vegetable

WINNER OF THE MELITA HUME
POETRY PRIZE 2017

reality





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THE 
MELITA HUME
POETRY PRIZE

Rebecca Close is the 2017 winner of the Melita Hume Poetry Prize.

She received £1,500 and this publication by Eyewear Publishing.

The 2017 Judge was Vahni Capildeo, whose comments in part read:

This is a distinctive, urban voice, which holds on to speaking and feeling throughout states of fragmentariness. Through the fractures in its language, perceptions, and experiences, things still truly matter. This is evidenced in the habit of thorough delicate observation that translates into the ability suddenly, and aptly, to evoke a pastel dianthus or a satellite signal, or to draw unexpectedly on earlier, traditional forms without falling under their yoke. It is evidenced, too, in the engagement with 'secondary worlds' of film and other visual art, not ekphrastically, but as part of processing everything: the various figures, situations, scenes and would-be-meanings cracking with violent variety, unassimilable chasms in friendship, unnameable proximities, and tender moments of weird connexion. Even if you have not lived lives resembling those depicted here, whether their worlds of work or experimentation, you know that these lives are aspects of yours. As the Melita Hume Prize is for a first full-length collection, it seems good to award it to a book which made reading feel like a fresh adventure.

THE PASSION ACCORDING TO A VEGETABLE

(i) an emotional plant

I'll waste none of your time with contradictory advice.

Virgil, *Georgics* (Book II 45–46)

Reader, You are King.
Make this easy for me.

Imagine you are wild again.
Let hair tumble down
the hills of your shoulders. Let
words river through the crumbling clods.

Hold your native components together.

It's time again to put the pill beside your plate.
Rub your face
with a little heap of grim ashes.
You are a spent field.

It is true you should take the pill.
It is fact you should open it.

There is much to gain by setting flame,
watch the colours arise.

Don't spare yourself heat's word, either because
all fire engenders a weird productive force or because
fire purifies our failures.

There you'll find the hidden ways of nature.
Stare in open-eyed amazement at the breaking news
We want to keep going! England says,
sweating,
injecting Nubain.

Is numbness also required
to keep up stamina in poetry, I wonder?

Pour a mix of seeds and seashells into parallel lines.
Turn the sod. Leave the grass and mud
upside down, like the subject.

The subject is inconsistent,
as it changes it leaves no trace.
When I try to question it or question myself
I get boiled, salted, baked, oiled.

(iii) the passion according to a vegetable



(v) in which we pay for our domestication I

core to knees
panning technique
see jigs
in god's pit
get once twice
three times
stitched
or vault chores
where cows chat
only chatting
pot for tat
taste it
O heaven
snack aches
lapped up
one of us is dog
one of us is ruthless
shh shh woos the room

CLOUDS

Where I go, there are always two guards watching. You have to bring a partner and if anyone feels uncomfortable you can call them out and they get removed from the room. Their partner also has to leave –

Dee, Matthew and I were standing by the flowers. Maya was home and had gathered us at her Mum's for her birthday.

Romantic partner?

Doesn't have to be, just someone you trust. The fact that you have to leave as well means you have to bring someone you know will be ok –

Basically as soon as you get in the sauna you are consenting to the experience. So, drugs, sex and hours and hours. It's difficult to know what 'no' means in that context, or when to say it –

Is that ok?

I started doing this when I was about 14 or 15. I went with an older guy who I'd met at the ponds, so someone I already trusted. I think about how easy it is to find out about these places now so young kids go alone and take drugs and have this really intense experience. What I remember is that if you drop out –

What do you mean?

Take too much. No one looks after you. The chem-sex thing is really big now, there's a new place on Dean Street that deals exclusively with that. It's good that there is that support –

Yeah, it's true that promiscuity is sort of either idealised so no one talks about consent in these spaces or the practices are totally pathologized –

Yes, Matthew said. I personally wouldn't date younger guys now but that experience was really important for me. At the same time, and I have never been raped, there were definitely moments that I probably was like I'm not totally sure what's going on –

I started talking about Thatcherism. Dee responded with another description of her sex parties. *We should say that while we are making this distinction between heterosexual and homosexual we know we are appealing to categories of identification that were invented in the nineteenth century –* Dee and I nodded at each other. *Totally.*

This focus on sexual identities means that we are still not talking about sex, hence the risk, the violence we are exposed to. We need to talk about how we are having sex not only who we are –

That is so true. I nodded again.

Matthew stretched out their hands high into the air and bent over, pushing their hips out behind them in a kind of dance. *I'm going to get another drink!*

Later, when we were filling up bottles for the cab ride, Matthew was laughing, talking to Maya, looking over at Dee and I and smiling, *they totally talked me under the table!*

I felt a pang of rejection.

I spent the night talking to Dee about her new job. She was working for a national newspaper's style magazine, doing interviews with Hollywood stars. *It's about empathy*, she said, *empa-th-issssiin-gggg*, she shouted again over the music.

We found ourselves surrounded in the middle of the dance floor, people pushing us around as we danced. Dee shouted, *yeah, I felt kind of annoyed about that as it's like O women think too much they are always theorising or something.*

I wasn't sure. I have often been accused of trying to be clever. We used our bodies to carve out space in the crowd.

When we got back we flopped on Maya's bed. *I love this group*, I said, *my favourite!*

I'm glad Dee came out.

Why wouldn't she?

She was like not living anywhere last time I saw her. And before that, rehab.

Shit. She looked great.

At one point in the club, in a continuation of our earlier conversation, Matthew turned to me, *you can come with me if you like. You can't come to the saunas, but we can meet on the heath.* I'd nodded, *YES!*

Going to see this tomorrow. Marielle sent a screenshot of a day's program of workshops and a talk by a famous French philosopher, *come!*

I'm sorry, I'm sorry!

It's fine, it's just that I'm actually always on time.

O me too! But the bus diverted.

I hope we don't make a scene when we go in.

This seemed so out of place, *make a scene.* The force at which Marielle could occupy a space was equal to that with which she would withdraw from it, if embarrassed. Other people's confidence is so arbitrary. Our encounters are often structured by unspoken dares.

I listened to the philosopher's talk as if it were a long poem, which made it easier. I closed my eyes, let my mind wander through the nightmare. A white silicon baby floats past. A robot steps through the window of the seminar room, crouches down so as not to bang his head on the ceiling and, with a tennis racket, bats the jelly baby. *Technology has corrupted the baby!* There are two caves. Out of the man cave emerges a man doll. Out of the woman cave emerges a woman doll. They float

towards each other, tapping their plastic bits. I opened my eyes, *this stuff is so creepy!* Marielle was giggling.

A woman put up her hand. *But with the patriarchy, I mean how do we do it? What should I do? It is so...*

She paused and looked out the window.

Hard sometimes.

The philosopher's response was long. She repeated the words self-affection many times, which Marielle and I quickly gathered had nothing to do with masturbation or writing. The philosopher also recommended yoga.

Now we'd like to ask everyone to do a cartoon drawing of their apartment with one modification, in response to the term 'living together'.

Let's go. Marielle looked at me, *can we?! I pleaded.* We slipped out the back. In a supermarket nearby we picked up some wine and wandered into the park opposite. It was around 2pm. *This is where I sat with my friend after we saw this amazing film by Ellen Cantor. It was so funny! It was my favourite genre: low budget, all my friends are in it, nothing happens.*

O yeah, that is so great!

The film made us feel so great as nothing at all happened, there are these banal characters who just move through the city and after we came and sat under this tree as we were so horny and open to the world.

You're taking me to your erotic tree? I was flirting. I told her what happened on the heath.

I was supposed to meet Matthew but when they didn't show, I decided to go in anyway. It was 3am. The heath was alight. I wrapped my scarf tighter around my neck, moved slowly, felt the bark of the trees. I stared or smiled at the women who strolled by, picked up a curl of orange rind from the floor, threw it away, settled on a bench.

Despite the languor London gives me, I was galvanised by night. Sometimes a breach in lethargy delivers an arrow of affect. A thought, some bit of text, repeated, moves me. My lips move. Once at work I leaned against the stone column, my right foot in a black boot making small circles on the floor. I turned around, pressed my body up against it, felt the cold marble on my cheek.

O yeah, Marielle intervened. I've felt like that all summer. I've had like three people tell me we can never sleep in the same bed as 'you know what will happen'.

That is not ok! Why are they trying to limit you?

I got back to the heath. Someone swerved across the pavement and walked behind the bench. Their hands hovered just above my hair, then came down softly, guiding my head forward, then to the side. By the time I saw her she was already fifty meters away. She turned around and smiled before disappearing across the green.

I was about to follow when I noticed another figure coming up the path, solemn as a corpse, passing through

the pools of amber street-lamp light. Yellow, blue and dark green, yellow, blue and dark green, the figure flickered, advanced. I couldn't see her face until she was sitting on top of me carefully undoing the buttons of my coat, warming herself, the heat burning the hoar-frost off our shepherd skin. We'd looked each other in the eye, never said a word, never kissed.

Did you like it? Marielle asked.

Yeah, I did.

It sounds like our lives though, don't you think?

I looked into her bright green eyes before lying back in the grass. I watched a cloud cruise into, envelope, and pass through another.

(xi) adding the details left out of the original message*

mouth bone

burning rock

gets

jurisdiction

hauling syllables

fingers tend

to streamline

the crunching of

keys

I lost you

germ

as a worker

there are cosmoses

a switch

transmission is an archival matter

exhausted by the bitten wind

the mind flicks

cartilage unfurls

in the grooves of reasoning

practices flower

in radio shapes

they mistook it for nature

set it up against orifice

listener as the worker

her tongue clicks

I add in the details

graphics flow coherent

echoing the usual

market twists

towns turn inward

the route darkens

the volume of everything left

ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS

i. The decoration

Our days are entangled its flower is my
flip-flop budding from the hotel's wooden floor
Its back a black petal gathers filament
legs filament arms
it crawls the stalk (my strap) & falls its limbs curled
electric blue shoe what will enter its flesh
it can't distinguish vital data from the
extra parts I feel
sad the beetle died and confused to find the
airbnb I'm staying in is my own
body gentrified at sixty pounds a night

2. For just four more nights

In the garden women isolate forms appears
the scent of their weaving lives their rough knuckles
their parted curls the smooth-edged lace of their words
paisley carnations
inverted mother's day running through the veins
of the soil presbyterianism appears
god I'm so hungry we fight in a forest
and you storm off
you see a beetle beside your shoe it's me
and you love me for that time in the office
is far from sweet I've been weeping from my
guts since Ana left
she's just that kind of dianthus with petals
stippled with pastel colours now there's no one
to defend us as they make eleven new
suites for biotech
and that's death to become like the rest of them
I think how artificial my life is like
sixty times a day all is ornamental

3. *You are pretty resilient*

you buy me flowers bright sober trances in
loom-in-escent gardens enter-sing my flesh
sound-glyphs & picture-phones just a little now
stars above our heads
I dream in hybridges two pence a pack text
within reach it's better to be a glitch than
lonely to be wild I love it when you say