Vignettes: The Emerging Writers’ Festival Podcast

Season 1, Episode 2, ‘Sky’

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Hi there! Welcome to *Vignettes: The Emerging Writers Festival Podcast*. My name is Ruby and I’m the Artistic Director at EWF. I am coming to you from the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.  Today’s episode is Sky.  When you cast your mind up towards the sky, what do you think of? Perhaps you think of clouds, sunsets and shades of blue. Maybe your mind wanders further and reaches for instances of optimism, searching for opportunities and wandering into dream spaces.   For this episode, we invited Awale Ahmed, Christy Tan and Ruby Hillsmith to respond to the theme of *‘*Sky’ and we can’t wait for you to hear what they have in store.  First, we have Awale Ahmed. |
| Awale Ahmed: | Hi my name is Awale Ahmed, I am a multilingual writer, poet and storyteller. I speak three languages Somali, Arabic and English. I am an advocate for asylum seekers and refugees in detention centers in Australia. I was born in Somalia and I fled the country with my family due to the civil war. I grew up in the middle east (Saudi Arabia) and i moved to Melbourne 4 years ago. I am currently working on finishing my first book which will be a collection of stories of meeting total strangers and connecting with them.  I would like to thank Emerging Writers’ Festival for giving me this opportunity to be a part of the podcast. My piece is titled ''Childhood Curiosity'' ..I hope you enjoy…  ''Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere''. -  Albert Einstein.  Childhood Curiosity  Since I was a little boy I have always looked up to the sky in awe and wonder. My grandma used to share stories with me and my brother at night under the clear sky. Life  was simple until the civil war started in Somalia and the sky became a source of danger. While some kids were safely sleeping in their beds after hearing fairytales, our sky was full of military jets and random missiles that killed many civilians and children.  I kept looking up and I remember once running out to our front yard to watch a rocket passing by. In an act of sheer defiance and childhood naivety i was beating on my little chest screaming '' Come hit me i am not scared! I am not hiding under the bed''.  We were lucky to make it out alive and I kept looking up. I wondered about space, how we look so tiny from that point of view? I believed in the existence of other forms of life somewhere in this vast universe during middle school. I wondered if there were other versions of myself in parallel universes? I had a big imagination like most kids. When we are young we are full of hopes and dreams.  We are born with aching curiosity, search of mystery and sense of awe. Then with time the society conditions us to be more practical and stop dreaming.  After the first lockdown in Melbourne back in May I went to the ocean and watched the sunset. I felt so light and pure, I was chasing seagulls and I felt like a kid again who saw beauty in everything. This reminded me of a Turkish novel that I read a few years ago ''When Life Lights Up''.  It was a story about a child named Omar who loved the ocean and his favorite color was blue. He used to draw angles as children without wings in hopes that they would become his friends and no one understood his drawings. He always asked his parents to buy him blue shoes so it would be like he's walking on the ocean, but they kept buying him black shoes.  He loved dolphins and wanted to be their friends too. It's a story about oceans, sunsets, old books and secrets of life. He believed in talking dolphins, angels living inside each one of us in the form of children and unconditional love for everything was the key to unlock the secret to true happiness.  He found a secret book stating that ''love'' is the last immortal to stay in this world. He believed that with unconditional love we will eradicate hate, we wouldn't fear death, maybe we will become friends with a dolphin or be friends with angels.  Only ego and selfishness are stopping us from such a wonderful life. Omar, is indeed a character reflected in the inner part of one self. The longing he bears, the lonely feelings, the complex thoughts, yet the wild hopes and dreams with a childhood imagination.  I felt at peace that day on the beach and the inner child in me spoke with the rocks, seagulls, trees and the ocean. I saw myself reflected through them like I am looking in the mirror. I felt the presence of an angel and I almost saw a dolphin on the horizon. I imagined him telling me ''this time shall pass and may Love and peace be with you''. |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Next up, we have Christy Tan. |
| Christy Tan: | I live on the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung Lands of the Kulin Nation. Sovereignty was never ceded but it always was and always will be Aboriginal Land. Violence is not exceptional but structurally embedded in our ways of seeing and not seeing. As a migrant- settler occupying stolen land, my relationship with language and space is inextricably shaped by capitalism, patriarchy and ongoing colonisation.  When I encounter, I tend to want to use language to objectify subject. I want to make everything coherent, so I can feel like I have control over something I do not and can not know.  This is a poem about encounter which can not be subsumed into my ways of  understanding and resists being totalized by language.  **S**  when I look at sky, I remember the present as if it has already past  I remember the language before sky becomes tangible to me  I perceive sky retroactively through language  as meaning encounters material encountering  my faith is not in what I am seeing  but that I am seeing at all and that this seeing  demands recognition as pre- condition for co- existence  so I position sky as border, to locate myself in relation  but this separation does not exist outside private property of language  my impulse to occupy space interrupts sky, suspending its multitudes  sky remains static in rhetoric  conforming to linear dimension of possibility, or what they call progress  and I am left with blue as residue, or what they call identity  **K**  from the colour at which speed travels, distance and depth become interchangeable  sky, like memory, ends where I can not see  simultaneity surpasses syntax, and sky poses something other than question and/ or answer  when I consider sky, my desire to be commensurable is exposed as arbitrary  sky’s gaze paints my face clean, evanescence evading taxonomy  the irreconcilable becomes generative  so I outline this metaphor until the literal is manifest as liminal  sky and I, can not be consumed in the other  my faith no longer holds up sky but passes through and  this reciprocity is as infinite as language, preventing sky and I from touching  **Y**  I see clouds appear to me as I am but  perhaps if I had a different kind of perceiving body, statistics would appear to me as textural  I see sky counting cloud as syllable or unit of measure, but  perhaps my desire to count precedes accumulation  language requires an economy of hoarding  if no one is around to count clouds, do they still have value  if to count is to possess, then time, including someone else’s, becomes commodity  I suspect my obsession with being whole comes from the shape of a clock  my qualities are converted into quantities and time moulds itself around capital  suddenly, an exchange does not have to be equal to be  **SKY**  there are sacred rituals imparted through nothing but sky  where event without language can organise body of space,  connecting all people-shaped angles to form an infinite horizon we rise out of  breathing outside self and religion of signs and symbols    these are the silences that have survived the violence of empire,  here, if to name is to possess, to whom, or what, do I belong  do I name sky or does sky name me |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Lastly, here is Ruby Hillsmith. |
| Ruby Hillsmith: | Hi, my name is Ruby Hillsmith. I’m a writer, poet, and editor living on Wurundjeri and Bunurong lands. This year I was selected as a Wheeler Centre Hot Desk fellow and as the Inaugural Write-ability Poetry Fellow at Writer’s Victoria. You can find me on Instagram and Twitter @Rubyhillsmith.  I am currently broadcasting from my new house in Footscray, in the lounge room, which is almost completely devoid of furniture—save for a yoga mat, milk crate, a keyboard and a mcdonald’s receipt on the floor. I am also on the floor. Our house is right by the highway, so I’m hoping that the yoga mat and the McDonald’s receipt will absorb some of the ambient traffic noise !  The piece I am going to read today is about many things—psychiatry, Hannah Montana, Frankenstein, table tennis. But it starts as a kind of abstract exploration of my star sign. I hope that at least half of you are still on the line after hearing me say that! But the most important thing for you to know is that this piece has a really long, silly title, so I’m just going to jump right in now:  Song of Myself, or, Ekphrastic of Hannah Montana’s hit single Best of Both Worlds  *The Gemini*. Air sign. Air *conditioner*. Friend of the wind, the skywriter of the zodiac—*or* the double agent, gleefully streaking her chemtrails across middle America.  The mere existence of the Gemini is all the proof we need to conclude that God has a serious twin fetish. Tillman, the English bulldog who set the Guinness World Record for Fastest Dog on a Skateboard, was a Gemini. So was Walt Whitman, who wrote *Song of Myself*, perhaps the most Gemini poem in all of human history. Partway through the poem, Whitman complains that he feels plagued by the urge to verbalise—to *externalise*—all the things he can and cannot see. He then announces that talk is cheap, and that his silence will prove more than his poetry ever could—before going on to write 1008 *more* lines of poetry. At this point, all he can do is shrug it off: ‘Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)’ I think that every Gemini dreams of this—of finding an IKEA storage system big enough to comfortably accommodate their rotating system of beliefs, their multitudinous selves. Of never quite having to give up on anything.  At some point I become the bipolar Gemini, drawn and quartered, one limb in each corner of the diagnostic manual. In hospital, a psychiatric nurse encourages me to enter the weekend ping pong competition. I am paired up with Greg from bed 12. I talk a big game on Saturday but bomb out on Sunday, pelting the ball into the fruit bowl a minimum of five times. I apologise to Greg. *I’m sorry Greg!* The bipolar Gemini, offering up her rotating platter of seductive beginnings and tragic endings. The logo on the ping pong table reads *Double Happiness*, apparently named after a hopeful Chinese wedding symbol—(as if double happiness was a possibility in here, as if they were expecting Serena *and* Venus).  The next morning I receive a Facebook message from a high school friend. He says that he’d just walked past me at Sydney University, but had been too busy to say hello. Confused, I sit in my hospital bed and eat my breakfast of dry bread and orange juice. In the few Gothic novels that I’ve read, the emergence of a counterpart—or a double—serves to interrupt morality, highlighting all that is unwelcome, unspoken, or unseen. But there is a unique violence in being taunted by a *mystery* doppelganger, particularly one who has somehow secured a fate radically different to your own. That bitch. She’s probably studying law. She’s probably even *enjoying* it. Well. *I* enjoy being terrible at ping pong and disappointing Greg.  Doppelganger novels only *grew* in popularity as 19th Century England honed in on its values of respectability and domesticity, heightening the tension between public and private life. Think of Dr Frankenstein and his tormented monster, or Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The ethos of psychiatry is representative of that same tension—dictating which bodies deserve to participate in polite society, and which deserve to wither behind closed doors.  I once came across an astrological website that instructed its audience to ‘*NEVER SUBMIT TO A GEMINI’*. This is one of the more common accusations levelled against us—that it is impossible to love the angel without provoking the devil, so don’t even try.  The dialogue about the cultural position of the doppelganger hasn’t really progressed past these ideas. Sure, we now have Hannah Montana—who proves that a two-faced woman *can* enjoy upward mobility, as long as she remembers to put on a blonde wig and stand in the right place at the right time. But despite what Hannah Montana’s 2006 hit single might claim, I am unconvinced that a real-life doppelganger is able to simply access ‘the ***BEST*** of both worlds’. Instead, we are forced to fashion a brave new world entirely—a world that is stupidly ready to welcome *it all*, knowing full well that there won’t be enough room. But what is a bed without a mate, or a wall without a neighbour. Or two. Or three. Or four. |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | That was Awale Ahmed, Christy Tan and Ruby Hillsmith. We’d love to know what you feel when you think of sky… If you want to, feel free to write your own piece in response to this prompt – either just for yourself, to get your writing muscles working and/or to share with us if you want to post your piece and tag us on twitter!  Thank you so much for listening to *Vignettes: The EWF Podcast.* If you enjoyed this episode, please drop us a review, recommend us to your friends and hit ‘subscribe’ wherever you like to listen. And of course – stick with us as we bring you a soft, summery vibe with more readings over the next few weeks!  Before we go – applications for EWF 2021 are now open! If you’d like a bit of insight into what we’re looking for with our Open Artist Call Out, you can watch our Artist Information Session at [emergingwritersfestival.org.au](https://emergingwritersfestival.org.au/) or on our YouTube channel. We can’t wait to read your wonderful applications for the 2021 festival!  This podcast was produced by EWF Program Coordinator Millie Baylis. Our audio producer is Jon Tjhia, and our theme music was created by Thu Care (Thao Ly). You can find out more about the team behind this podcast and the artists featured in this episode on the EWF website.  This podcast was created and edited on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge that First Nations peoples are the first storytellers of this land, and that their sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and to the Elders of the lands this podcast reaches. It always was, always will be, Aboriginal land. |