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| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | *A flicker; a whisper; a spell; a death; a rebirth; a faint light in the warm dark of a summer’s night…* the moth is an insect full of rich symbols.  Hi!  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.  For this episode of Vignettes, we invited Yamiko Marama, Vince Ruston and Lou Garcia Dolnik to respond to the prompt “moth” – to share with us the dreams they pin on the wing span of these fluttering friends.  First up, here is Yamiko Marama. |
| Yamiko Marama | Hey, my name is Yamiko Marama. I am coming from the lands of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, here in Naarm, Melbourne.  I’m a writer, therapist and food truck owner. During the week, I provide training and supervision to the youth mental health sector, and hold awe for the amazing work people continue to do on the frontline.  I’ve been working from home since March this year. I am currently sitting on my couch. The couch I watch TV from, where I eat dinner from, where I write from on the weekends, and work from during the week.  For work, I sometimes perch an old-school milk crate on the couch and balance my laptop on top of it (so that it meets my eyeline)- and I awkwardly sit sideways. All to be more respectable for zoom meetings.  When I am creatively writing, I am usually lying on the couch, my head propped up on the arm rest. Today I’m sitting, the way the couch is intended.  Living in an apartment, there is always noise in the background; a helicopter, neighbour’s laughter, the sound of the tram on our street.  Next to me is a fern that flourishes despite my neglect of it. There’s warm, bright light coming in from the big windows that take up a whole wall of our lounge room.  We can see our neighbour’s rooftops, and on some days, neighbourhood cats can be seen trawling atop the rooftops and circling around the chimneys. I like observing them, observing the world.  I finished this story on the 100th day of stage four lockdown, here in Melbourne. Thanks for listening:  I imagine moths are eating my brain. Just as moths are drawn to the cupboard of your clothes, finding the items you haven’t touched for months, and nestle themselves into the fabrics, slowly eating your old forgotten things, I imagine them doing the same to my grey matter.  Ever since lockdown in Melbourne, where my brain has been working in overdrive, as well as paralysed and lacking. I don’t know how to explain to you, the way it can be both things. Now I miss being immersed in novels, the way I could spend whole afternoons in one. I miss the clarity and efficiency of my previous self. Thinking now feels like a currency, perhaps even an identity that I once had.  It’s become a new-found honesty and unity shared with work colleagues…how we’re all kaput. Done with inefficient work environments, griefs that are hard to place, and this new resounding burn out.  I now know of the troubling sleep patterns of my local barista. Talk far more to my neighbours - know of who is worried for their parents’ health, who has just lost their job.  It’s hard to smile at people in a mask, but you learn to crinkle your eyes, especially towards children, in the hope that it can send a reassuring message that everything is okay.  While the most vulnerable in Melbourne are surely the most affected by it, this fear affects us all. And because it does, we openly share about it.  We’re all in this together. Unless you live in a public housing tower, of course.  My sister is afraid of moths. I have a memory of her, from when we were both teens. Remember her running up the landing to our front door, terrified, trying to avoid the front porch light nearby. The moth didn’t even register us, too busy banging itself again and again towards the light.  Of course I was laughing in one of those typical, unkind (yet forgivable) sibling moments. I’d threatened to cup the moth in my hands and bring it into the house with us. She’d returned my comment with a death stare, at first, but later laughter once we’d made it safely inside.  I’d laughed at the time, because I didn’t really understand the fear. It felt so disproportionate and looming. And it made me uncomfortable too, I guess, to see her distress, so it relieved me to be able to laugh it off. I’d tried to understand, and she had tried to explain it- something about the flittering of wings, the film left behind by them. I could imagine it was the sense of one getting caught in her hair, or touching her neck, perhaps. Perhaps that could feel like some kind of violation.  We forget about a life, pre- COVID, but it did exist. And the fear, it existed too, it was just used more sparingly. The backseat kind, that meant everything to those experiencing it, but which most of us could ignore. Like domestic violence, chronic illness, mental health, blak deaths in custody, over-policing of certain communities. A headline we could read and comment on, and then forget.  I used to have dreams, cloaked in fears. Dreams of being chased, the faces always out of view, but in a way I assumed to be the faces of men. Not that it’s an uncommon fear, of course. As a woman, you just learn to accommodate it. Now instead, during lockdown, I dream of work- of projects and tasks I need to do. As if that is a fear in itself- to have lost all meaning where there is nothing left, but work.  Perhaps there is a reason why moths move towards the light. Even after the scariest of nightmares I’ve always felt a relief in waking, to find my girlfriend purring in the bed next to me. And I’ve known that if I was to step out of the sinking softness of the covers, walk through the bedroom to the kitchen, the cold lino below my feet, and unravel our blinds that look down into our apartment car park, I’d be witness to the glaring, yellow, man- made light that remains on, even at three am. I’ve known that it could force away the lingering effects of sleep, and that knowledge, even of the availability of light, has always helped me to feel safe enough to close my eyes, once again.  Perhaps in the light you do not have to feel the precariousness of your position in the darkness. A small relief. I’m sure we all deserve to feel safe; to see our own fears, to have a language for them, and to share them with our communities.  Perhaps we can appreciate how our fears can shift, like flight, like moving patterns on the back of wings. I just wonder what happens when that uniting fear goes away. When we go back to our backseat fears, that have nowhere else to go, to be seen…nowhere left for our fears to be acknowledged by the rest of us. |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Thanks Yamiko. Now, here is Vince Ruston. |
| Vince Ruston | Hi, I’m Vince Ruston, a writer and editor living on Wurundjeri land and currently visiting Lutruwita land. At home I live with my witchy feline daughter, Persephone, and here with my mother and her gorgeous golden retriever Lulu.  I work across different forms of creative writing, but poetry is closest to my heart, and poetic elements tend to bleed through to my fiction. I interpreted the theme of ‘moth’ in the vein of attraction and lust, often to things or people we know might end up hurting us. One of my favourite poems is [‘The Lesson of the Moth’ by Don Marquis](http://www.donmarquis.org/themoth.htm), which informed a lot of the interpretation of this theme.  The piece I’m going to read for EWF’s Vignette’s first episode is titled ‘Joy and the Flesh of Fruit’. It’s a poetic-prose piece, loosely inspired by a morning with a former girlfriend. In my defense I had never eaten an avocado before.  *Joy and the Flesh of Fruit*  Her bed: the white sheets. The creases and folds where the shadows snap in, where the morning light turns white to gold. Here: a spot of blood, bleached to brown. Here, an eyelash, a glimpse of her mascara. Here, a skin cell, the dampness of her sweat. I can feel these remnants of her body all around me, vibrating at a frequency that makes me weak. I want to be small enough to smother myself in them. Small enough to curl into the dent the absence her wedding ring leaves in her finger, when she takes it off to take me to bed.  Abigail. The lilt, soft, and lightness of it on my tongue. Abigail, ‘to bring joy’. The name has always brought to my mind images of angels, frocked in white. People think angels are beautiful beings with feathered wings, who come down to the chosen few singing hymns, but they are not. When Gabriel came to Mary, he asked her not to scream; if humans had wings, they would be made of flesh. I want to sing her name over and over.  She wraps me in her robe and I feel blessed to be surrounded by her scent. She makes rich coffee, slices sourdough for breakfast. Hands me two avocados and a gleaming sharp knife. I hold the leathery pear like an orange, dig the blade in and start to flay. Nineteen years old but I’d never learnt how not to mutilate the thing. She watches me try to conceal my inexperience. I can feel her gaze on me, amused spark in her eye and the corner of her mouth. I flush from the collarbones up, roses bleeding in my cheeks. The way she watches me makes me want to cover myself in fig leaves.  *You know, the Aztecs considered avocados an aphrodisiac,* she says, lips brushing the shell of my ear.  She takes the knife and the fruit from me, shows me how to perform this surgery: cutting precisely around the globe of it, twist and lay flat open. She lodges the blade into the pitted core and gouges it out. It’s so violently delicious, the way she handles the knife, her hands so merciless. She brings joy but she knows how to rip the guts out of things without flinching.  She places the second avocado in my left hand, slinks her arms around my waist. Be gentle, my heart, beating wild as ivy. Still my breath to slow my brain.  Her phone buzzes, pulsing on the countertop. I see His name across the screen, remove myself from the room. She thinks I’m tactful but in truth I’m afraid to hear how they talk to each other, the changes in her tone when she lies. Does He know it as well as I? I run the bathroom taps until all I hear is the vibrato of her voice, and the sour, hopeless ache in my chest. The voice that asks how long until she rips the guts out of me. I’d tear them out myself if she asked. |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Thanks Vince. And last but not least, now here is Lou Garcia Dolnik. |
| Lou Garcia Dolnik | Hi, my name is Lou and I’m a poet working on unceded Gadigal land. I’m an emerging arts worker and have been very lucky to keep my job through the pandemic, having recently made the transition from full-time to part-time work, which has been a bit of a godsave.  I haven’t been able to write very much this year, though am trying to coax myself back into some kind of routine, stealing a few hours or minutes here and there to meditate in the usual terrain.  My workspace is an island bench in the middle of my kitchen. This is the only workable space in my home, with most other tables covered in clothes, paper, food, things that should probably really be thrown away. I’m not much of a homekeeper, but I have convinced a troupe of rainbow lorikeets to visit me occasionally for bread. They come to the balcony in the afternoon, which is to my left and discloses a deceptively idyllic landscape picture frame of the suburb, foliage nearly swallowing the staid and geometric outlines of factory buildings, houses and a trainline running horizontal to my balcony’s railing.  For Vignettes by EWF, I’ll be reading two poems that contemplate what it might mean to say goodbye to someone before saying goodbye. Without enumerating the many reasons for which one might be drawn out of the intimacy of a partnership, to exist contemporaneously in the departure from a communion as within it, I was enchanted with the mourning of a kind of *being there,* a push and pull of loss and longing.  A couple weeks after writing these poems, I fortuitously came across a quote by Toni Morrison which reads “It is sheer good fortune to miss somebody long before they leave you.” Then, we could think of this grieving as a kind of gift—the long, inexorable shadow of existing in anyone’s light.  The first poem I’ll read for you is ‘The Girl As’.  The girl as  copper thing, cut with stanley knife,  instrument of surgical precision.  The waging of quiet wars: her geode knees  good for anything but genuflecting  running faster than you’ve ever seen anyone run  & never leaving enough space for jesus  on the dancefloor of the way she fucks you up  but never fucks you. Her syntaxes which redress  the sharp evening in the grammar of smoke  which is not to say you’ve ever watched her sleep  or undress but that you know her underthings  are too loose from wear and that she is in need  of new ones  The upward cicatrice ruining her elbow  which is not to say that you run your finger over the rivulet  of her red landscapes, but that you know her mother cried  when god said *open* to the manyyears of her body  So she becomes in the image of a dream of calling you  by your true name. There is, of course, no way to determine  if a singular term could hold that kind of significance.  Philosophically speaking, you are good at filling the girl  with empty propositions. Promising you her house  but taking the garden, she mistakes sore gums for sorghum,  pulling out brute rhizomes by teeth, gums swelling with broth.  Runs the genus through her latticed exteriors, her musky body,  flowering hand, her life an open casket for anyone but the dead  to beatify. Let us say, in metaethical terms what it might cost  to grieve her. It only takes two people to save one but the price  is occam’s razor wrecking its brute logics on your shores forever.  The price being you don’t see her again or she gets claimed for hell  and not even for the first time.  Let us say what it costs for light. In the terms of language,  something you couldn’t put anything inside. The void  and not the frame. Still, nobody can tell me I didn’t build  whole nations to love her though incapable of telling her I love her.  How the brain flocks to the stratospheres of her being here  by the way she consumes the sky with ordinary wings.  How she thiefs the world just by walking it.  you don’t talk to me  like you used to you don’t talk—a  sinking ship making communion with unspok  en endings you turn out grey and winged on windowsills,  the trough undoing the tide of itself and your enclosing frame  counting the seconds between this body and the next to cons  ider you i hollow dreams waking to words spoke unspoken: you turn  out rubbed and unrendered damn spot hiding where i cannot naphthalene  my limbs being too short and the bees piling too high to obscure the memo  ry of you, your means of bludgeoning the night with the drone of your pinions  spinning out from themselves. bees are not moths though I live for each drown  ing, bayonets turning within me each accretion as i cannot turn you out of him.  i cannot turn you out of him and so lift the boundary of your life as sleep from e  yes without having slept save your humming in the recesses of how and what n  ext to attenuate the deluge of bees I bind macula to retina and watch them  become unhalved of their wholes. we become unhalved of our whole. the pin p  ricks drawing patinas, a botanic music yes, this hurts too. to ask who bea  rs witness to the watcher as I watch you riddled of him. i watch him riddle you  r hands of their gentle offering unanswering why won’t you answer me tell  ing in how i never told you i never told you how much i never told you  how much i loved you until i was unloved by you. whole and unopened  i grieve you unanswered and before your ending. i grieve you whole  and unopened by me, the needle drop snagged where you unr  iddle yourself of your love for me unended we end unloved  by endings we end by loving endings we end a  sunken ship with hollows on windowsills  we end unloved with endings ended  we end |
| Ruby-Rose Pivet-Marsh: | Thank you, Lou.  Thank you, again, 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’.  Before we leave you to ponder about moths and what they might provoke in you, just a reminder that applications to be in the 2021 Emerging Writers’ Festival are about to close! If you haven’t yet already, please make sure you get your artist application in by the 9th of December.  Please join us next week for *“Lunar”,* our final episode of Season One, that we can’t wait to share with you - before we say goodbye for a little while.  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. 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. |