

A photograph of a person and a horse standing in a field. Both are wearing masks made of coarse, light-colored burlap fabric. The horse's mask covers its eyes and ears, with long strips of fabric trailing behind its head. The person's mask covers their entire face, with long strips of fabric trailing behind their head. The background shows a vast landscape with rolling hills and a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall mood is serene and artistic.

poems  
afterpastures  
claire hero



winner 2007 caketrain chapbook competition

# afterpastures

final judge claudia rankine



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**CAKETRAIN**

[a journal and press]

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*My dear what is meat.*

—Gertrude Stein

*Animals never talk back.*

—Harriet Ritvo

*More than half the world are human beings in sheep's clothing.*

—Whitwell Elwin



:11 MOLT  
:12 [PENNED INSIDE]  
:13 [IN AFTERPASTURES]  
:14 [CITY WITH THE BONE STILL ATTACHED]  
:15 [MAMMALED, TEAT-]  
:16 [CRACKBONE carries the lamb]  
:17 —like a furbeast  
:18 [REDNESS in the grass]  
:19 [THIS FLESH, LOAMY]  
:20 [THE NIGHT WAS ANIMAL]  
:21 STAG  
:23 —he drums while you dance  
:24 [OVER THE CONTROL TOWER]  
:25 [FROM HUNTRESS]  
:26 CRACKBONE:  
:28 [BROOD-NURSERY BRED]  
:29 [BESWAMPED, the heart]  
:30 [DOMESTICITY, UNFORESTING FIEND,]  
:32 [THE KING FOREST]  
:33 [I AM MADE of many doors]  
:34 [SEA-SWALLOWED, severed]  
:35 [THROUGH THE EYE]  
:36 —the half-life, the soon-  
:37 [OUT OF THE AFTERPASTURES]  
:40 Notes and Acknowledgements



First, there's a hatching  
in the crawlspace, the kindling

of hair. Something getting out  
of hand. Then, riots in corners.

Water-scrawled walls. She's aware  
of the changes, the ringing

round her eyes, fur around her mouth.  
Unbecomingly a foxing. A murk

at the center. Something  
is eating at her. Located in the velvet.

Dressed out like an animal,  
she thistles & fickles. She fawns

in a murmur of milk. Grows feral.  
Febrile. Soft as the inside of teeth.

:16

CRACKBONE carries the lamb

The lamb

bleats himself into silence

effluvia in the throat-hold, earthwarm—

Sheep cleaved

from the mountainside

Spore of sheep, wind-bred,

spread, springing up

in clutch & tussock, fun-

gal, many-footed, blight of teeth

Sheep at the sea edge, reef

of driftbone, saltwhite

the amniotic scree

out of which I walked

on the grey rock on the red rock

—Shepherd my tongue into the pen

Crackbone carries lamb.

REDNESS in the grass:  
calf & leaf—

You walk out of the trees, hiding your hands.

Everywhere the mouths  
bloodglottal, stanced.

Everywhere the meatseed  
pulses toward harvest.

:20 THE NIGHT WAS ANIMAL, was owlmaw  
& preyclaw. Half-wild, I shrank  
from its grasping, the moon scything  
through fir limbs. Half-tame, I  
heard the scuttle of blood—

Crackbone, I  
followed your footsteps.

I followed your footsteps, I opened the night-box,  
I scalped the meatbeasts, I bewildered my body  
with hair & claw –

humping the sacrifice  
through the chambers of night

& still the forest continues, the linespeed  
never slows. I am up to my ankles,  
hand cramping on the knife,—

Where is death?  
Where does death enter our lives?

Death is a house inside the forest.  
Come. I am made of many doors.

What doesn't fear my hands? The crush of my thumb, my fingers that make a fence. The deer stand on one side, watching. Among the trees they are hard to see, their skins smell of leafmould. If they would let me, I would trace the grain of their pelts, its marks like a secret language. I would put my hands upon them, and their eyes would roll white.

—And then we are in a green room, the stag and I, his brown eye turns like a globe, leaves fall around us.

The leaves, then the trees.

The trees fall around us. We watch them through the window. The trees fall, and then the deer fall. I want to speak, to stop this, but my voice box, I see, is in the palm of my hand, closed as a seed. First the antlers fall, then the hides dry up and blow away and the bones erode until they are only eddies of sand. The stag closes his eye.

Out of the wreckage, deer-shapes of light rise and walk toward us. They walk through the window, they walk through the wall, they walk through every fence I make between us.

. . . . .

. . . the antlers are heavy.

They drip blood into my eyes.

They bow my neck until I am doubled,  
until I am savage, & forest, & endless.

:33 I AM MADE of many doors:

—water

falling through water

—white arrows

on painted lichen

—tracks in snow —

pine marten? squirrel?

little snow hands

(Can I say they are

“like” my hands?

" "my" hands

"

. . . . .

: Skeins of wool

fall through my fingers

I knit a sheep house, I knit

a sheep house for my body

beautiful body

entered, entering



**Claire Hero** received her MFA from Washington University in St. Louis. Her poems have appeared in several journals, including *Boston Review*, *How2*, *Crowd*, *Pleiades*, *A Public Space* and *Octopus*. Another chapbook, *Cabinet*, is forthcoming in 2008 from Dancing Girl Press. The poems in *afterpastures* were written while she was living in New Zealand.

Melbourne artist **Kate James** draws from a variety of art practices to produce hand-crafted objects, photographs and video. Examining the often overlooked occurrence of anxiety amongst domesticated animals, her work aims to highlight the shared experience of anxiety between humans and animals. Employing materials such as horse hair, dog hair and wool, she draws animals and humans together, both literally and figuratively.

## poetry \$8 US

“Claire Hero conjures language in such a way that description creates possibility. In this world, where Darwin and Dickinson pass secrets, there remains little separation between a body and its landscape. Evolution engenders an exquisite bewilderment that becomes its own wilderness. Fantasy and wisdom disorientate in order to locate our ‘percentage of beauty’ in this intriguingly stunning collection.”

Claudia Rankine, author of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

“Like: throatsong that transcends by guts, gutting; a bone with a little gristle attached and some feather; where did that feather come from?; where does that meat come from; a green field with new-dug holes in spring time, springing time; Hero makes the language taste like something; ‘what doesn't fear my hands?’”

Jen Tynes, co-editor of horse less press

“*afterpastures* is original. In art, there is no higher praise. In these poems, the pastoral is made to turn somersaults. Instead of bucolic calm married to mild satire in the unreal world of shepherd and shepherdess, here the scene is the knife in the hand poised to meet the beating heart. The knife is our knife, the hand, our hand. And the animal? It's our best self—but now in the grip of destruction. These strange, moving, passionate, and crystalline poems form a fable where the animal world, under our mesmerized gaze, becomes the mirror it always was.”

Mary Jo Bang, author of *The Eye Like a Strange Balloon*

*afterpastures* was the winning manuscript in the 2007 Caketrain Chapbook Competition, as judged by Claudia Rankine.

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Cover image by Kate James