

## Immersion Therapy

Elaine Morgan's *The Descent of Woman*  
her counterblast to Desmond Morris  
hit me amidstships in my malleable twenties

propounding the theory of The Aquatic Ape  
us as seagoing primates

proposing a lakeside, estuarine, littoral evolutionary phase

we smart hominids, just down from trees  
twigged to the advantages of part-immersion  
over the unequal race with those zippy tigers  
at a time when our gait was shambling at best

confuse-a-cat, instead, from a short distance offshore  
thumb your nose from the safety of chest-deep  
life-preserving, enclosing waters

who needs Man the Hunter when women can  
gather shorefoods as well or better  
who needs hair when you want to swim

we got much better at upright posture, standing  
as deep as we could safely get

babies were easy to carry on fatter hips  
our breasts ballooned for them

for me this fable never lost its magic

it explains the way we flock to beaches  
to stand in the shallows staring out to the horizon  
gazing back to the sand

from above, Earth's shorelines  
are clotted with two-legged statues  
responding to the primordial pull  
waterwards

other monkeys aren't swimmers  
a zoo orangutan nearly drowned, lately  
lugged senseless ashore from its moat  
after trying for floating food

Elaine's is a pacific proposal,  
washing its hands of  
the case for aggression

imagines an interval of calm  
a few thousand seaside millennia  
an era at the beach  
a hiatus before our warlike times

I believe it calls us back  
with a still-audible whisper

we answer it when we trudge  
a mesmerised horde  
to the nearest waterway  
kick off our shoes and wade in

CATH KENNEALLY

## Enemy Mine

It is quite one thing to wish your enemy dead,  
& quite something else again, when those words,  
a first draft of a curse; random slip-of-the-tongue  
gallops its fateful way back home. He wasn't even  
my antagonist for that long. Two years my junior,  
I patted the back of his head & wet his hair as he  
drank from the water tap; a baptism gone wrong.  
My own skull rammed into the toilet wall's cracked  
paintjob. It was hot, lunchtime, bitumen blistered  
our bare feet. There was nothing much in it, a bit  
of bluster; anger evaporated as soon as it touched  
the ground like a midday sun-shower, but I got in  
a final word. Two weeks later he was over-turned  
in a semi-trailer riding shotgun; boy who never got  
to fire. 'I hope you die,' was all I'd said in parting.

B. R. DIONYSIUS

## CANE TOAD MOAN

The season jumps the starting gun,  
springing from the blocks too soon,  
from the winter that never was  
in this tropical town. The yellow birds  
battle sparrows for territory as they build  
their nest in the garden bed beyond  
my study window. They labour, then lay  
their eggs too close to where last year's  
snake slid past the sill, the place my  
green frog decorates in guano. My lawn  
reverberates with cries of 'Barry White!'  
from each toad suitor to its mate.  
My blue bones rejoice at the tone  
of that low down cane toad moan.

ANDREW LEGGETT