

Susan Bradley Smith

Latrobe University

I can still taste you

Biographical note:

Susan Bradley Smith began her writing life as a music and theatre journalist in Sydney and later London, and has taught at universities in the UK and Australia. Widely published as a theatre historian and creative writer, her most recent book is *Supermodernprayerbook* (Salt 2010). Currently researching Australian sea change society, and working on a collection of short stories, she teaches English and Creative Writing at La Trobe University.

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Prologue: That was then and this is now

Chiko rolls for breakfast on the beach, us wrapped up warm and dry after hours spent in the hug and tug of the Pacific. Sitting close, checking out the waves, fuelling up. Perfection. That was what it was like when I fell in love with him, all those years ago, before he had believed in sharks. Nothing wrong with a beer at 9am if you'd been surfing for hours. A few Chiko rolls and a beer and a quick 'sleep' before the proper day began. Those were the days. The 1970s. I swear I couldn't find a Chiko roll to save my life, not in a single one of the seventeen cafes that this tiny seaside village now boasts, all hugging the beach named so inventively after mileage. You never know what you will miss most, until you die. Chiko rolls. Amen to all that.

This village has its fair share of moaning ghosts. I regret to say that I have become one of those nit-picking, faultfinding spirits, hanging around the deserted bora ring whining about the good old days. What has become of us and our appetites? There is not a single building left, even the butcher's, to feed me from like I was once fed. The blue corner shop with the first vegetarian burger in the world. Gone. The old fashioned newsagency that also sold bait, gone. The corner shop selling entire household needs next to the caravan park, long gone. All gone, but there are some shiny new buildings with shiny new boutiques and shiny new cafes and shiny new people here now. Once upon a time, you'd come down from the conservative, inland, establishment Lismore (as it was in those days) to this haggard empty coast (as it was in those days) and only see holiday homes, a few odd shops, and surfers. Hungry surfers eating hamburgers for breakfast, the ocean still shining on their skin and in their eyes.

Really, I can't talk. I too was an easy convert to the more sophisticated breakfast opportunities that emerged along with the seachangers, those coastal suburbanites with their remote-controlled-double-garage-doored homes, and their wallets and their trudes to Bali. But, that was then and this is now and I am dead and I have heard it rumoured that the surf'n'turf is making a menu comeback. This will mean my father will be scraping to get out of hell, signalling my time to leave here for good. No more of this purgatory-in-paradise stuff. All I can look forward to in my unknown future is to be released from this place, from this torture of not being able to consume him. Because Chiko Roll boy is not mine anymore, and I must forget him, just as I have surrendered my country to superior gastronomical tastes. Nevertheless, I watch you all, eating, loving, telling each other huge fibs and ordering more cake. But Solomon said it right—eat, friends, and be merry, for your days will not last forever. I watch you all, in your cafes. Pray for you all. Oh, the things that I see, the things that I wish for each of you. Despite my blessings, that old Scottish saying—like butter in the black dog's house—holds true because it really does seem like things are beyond all possible redemption. Am I any help? What does a dog need with butter?

I: Café Lamentation

She was sitting at a table with a clear view of Seven Mile beach, editing her short story on her laptop screen, flirting with the idea of calling it 'The role of butter in forced disappearances'. Monique had just spent an enormous amount of energy

leaving her Melbourne merchant-banker self behind and moving home to the North Coast to Byron Bay to open up a small business and devote herself to writing, only to discover, too late (having just bought a house overlooking Wategos) that Lennox Head did better coffee. She was very anxious about coffee. Coffee could change your entire relationship with the world. She read, hurriedly, needing to email her story off before the competition deadline passed:

Jamie had often thought that coffee was as complicated as sex. This morning, he'd had sex, and it felt like returning too late to an already mediocre cup of coffee after the interruption of an idiotic phone call. Afterwards, he'd gone for a walk with Max to Nicholson village in the hope of some better experience, and his stupid dog had gone and got himself hit by the 96 tram. Not very sexy, death. Blood and sadness. He'd felt the need to write a poem rise like bile. All experience was good, of course, sex included, even bad sex. Jamie was, after all, a man who would never offend a waiter—or anyone else for that matter—by not drinking the coffee he was served, but a cold, weak cup was just not the same thing as something hot and frothy. To his silent disappointment, Jamie's relationship with coffee had not been entirely unsatisfactory of late. In fact, his perfect coffee moments had been as few and as far between as love is from a hangover. Perhaps it was the fault of Victoria, or even Australia itself. He'd never managed to find anyone who would take him seriously on this subject. After twenty-five years of Melbourne's 'world's most liveable city' coffee made by impoverished students (all incidentally, after his job) he suddenly, atomically, upon leaving the vets, chose immigration over another terminal conversation whilst consuming lukewarm, bitter coffee. Fuck Australian coffee, he decided. I'm moving to London. I'm converting to tea. He thought about his sad-eyed fiancé, wrote her a lie of a letter, left her the keys and the deeds to his unmortgaged flat, and was gone within 24 hours ...

Gripping little story though it was, Monique would not win that writing competition. Nor any other competition. She would never even make it to a shortlist. But she did not know that yet. She did not know a lot of things. She did, however, know business, and her café, that would open soon in Lennox village forcing her to commute daily, often thrice, up and down the coast from Byron, would one day be listed in the second *Local Legends* foodie book, and that would be her true fame. It is no mean thing to be preferred.

The other thing that Monique did know about was history. She had a double degree in Arts/Law, after all, and had majored in European History. Her favourite statue in the world was 'Peace weeping on the shoulder of history' by Franklin Simmons. You could see the dome of the White House in the background of this huge photo of the peace angel she'd taken and had blown up after her last, lonely trip away. In fact, these beautiful photos of historic sculptures, this striking and artistic intellectualism became her hallmark decorating style, and bled over into her menu decisions. In the very near future, people would sit in her café eating traditional German blood sausage, reading at the same time the cannibalistic extracts from *For the Term of His Natural Life* stencilled on their table tops in 72 point Copperplate Gothic Bold. Or they'd consume emu burgers whilst gazing at poster-size excerpts from Nicolas Baudin's journals, recording the French explorer and naturalist's decision to abandon

his Australian expedition and head instead for Mauritius in 1803, only to promptly die of tuberculosis. When the emus and kangaroos he'd collected became ill at sea, refusing to eat, he'd force fed them rice mash and wine and sugar. Yum. Monique had Baudin's journal excerpts wallpapered verbatim at the rear of the café, where the mothers liked to congregate with their children. The events were actual, the words were his, she professed to unbelievers: it was all true. Such bloodthirsty and cheerless decorative motifs did not seem to put people off their supping whatsoever, and it impressed the food critics, this cultural atmosphere of *there go I but for the grace of god* coupled with a bit of serious food history. Besides, there was always the sea. The sea. People did not tend to look at walls when the Pacific was across the road. Even if that ocean could kill emus.

As far as heroines go Monique can be categorised as a vulnerable, rootless woman exhibiting an ambivalent relationship with her chosen new home. Additionally, she would have made a fine girlfriend for Jean Rhys, what with her penchant for men who do her no good. She particularly liked to fuck her married chefs, and the husbands of her girlfriends, who themselves were preoccupied with children and all those things that women who did not work seemed to prefer. Monique was like a sand-dwelling flathead, she had huge imaginary gills which afforded her the patience needed to wait in the warm shallows for her prey. Huge gills and large eyes. Men used to wonder, as she performed her special blowjobs, if she might not in fact actually be able to breathe underwater.

Eventually, one of the men who did her no good despite her startling love for him had a wife who was even less interested in doing Monique good and waited for her in the car park behind Café Lamentation one salt bitten night. The wife did not look too wifely, or too much like she belonged irrevocably to the place, or the man to her, but she nevertheless had the confident smack of the sea about her. And she smacked Monique hard, with a large, whole, frozen snapper, fresh from the esky in the boot of her car. Monique's married lover, this snapper-packing women's husband, had ducked off to the pub for an extra bottle of wine that nobody needed. Monique had just been thinking how nice it is to share an innocent cigarette and wondering when she would next taste the impressive sperm of this woman's husband when *smack smack* went the big fat frozen fish, right in her face. And that was that. Monique's neck snapped, she died the instant her head hit the sharp cement curb. Poor dead Monique.

But the café, it lived on, it became immortalised.

II: Café Praise

You can't ever take a smack back, Kat had come to realize. Once you have killed someone, you become like the Caspian Sea, apart by itself, not connected to any others. It takes fifteen days to row across the Caspian Sea. *Why bother*, Kat thought, ordering her second latte. Stay ashore. It was the weekend of the Gromfest and every little brat who could surf a green wave was in town, doing their thing. Paradise was not letting anyone down, and the shopping strip of Pacific Parade was pumping with visitors, spinning gold. Across the road, the Pandanus trees housed tiny humans, all

looking hopefully at the competing surfers from their honest coastal perches, dreaming all the while of salty fame. Straightforward little people who knew nothing of murder and its thick, raw steak of regret.

When Kat had been as little as these groms, girls did not surf, let alone assume a career in the sport. Well, Kat had surfed, on her boyfriend's board, back in the days of clumsy lust and all those unskilled freedoms. But that was before she fell in love with Mark, who was the only boy in school who did not own a surfboard. Somewhere between Captain Rous naming Lennox Head after his mate the Duke of Richmond and Lennox in 1882 and before the council sealed the dirt road to Lennox in 1978, things had gone wrong. Probably, this was all due to the bloody scattering of the Bundjalung mob. Did their Bora ring matter now? Where were Yarbirri and his brothers and their magic spears when you needed them? Timber had once mattered. Dairy farms, ditto. Sugar cane maybe still mattered. Modern agriculture made some kind of sense, but Kat was hard put to define what really mattered anymore in this town aside from the ocean, now love had evaporated. Tourism? *Go hard or go home*, now there's a motto to play by.

I know, Kat thought. *I will make amends. I will forgive him. I will begin there.* She said all this to herself, and then she remembered how she had ended up back here, in the first place. This place that she had left, once, long ago, this place of crusty Milo on your faded Bonds t-shirt, only to return. She remembered too well his pull.

He saw her first. Her thin, tall back. She turned around, searching for something or someone, and all of a sudden, there they were, two beautiful people, making their way through the madness that is Arrivals, Terminal 2, Heathrow, towards each other. Like sharks whose diet is shark.

'Hi. Bloody hell.'

'Hello you.'

'God.'

'I can't believe it.'

'She lives.'

'I suppose I do.'

There was a small silence. It was nice. He took her hand. It was not the kind of gesture that you'd want someone who owned her to see.

'Can I buy you a coffee?'

'Yes. No. No. I'm. I'm meeting someone, I have to collect someone, we've got to get somewhere.'

'I know. Me too.'

She groaned softly, and put her head in her hands, smudging her mascara. Laughed.

'So. We meet again.'

Turns out she was in the right place and he was in the wrong terminal and had to swift himself off smartly. But that was not the end of that. Oh no. Two weeks later they were sitting in a very strange café in Notting Hill. Guilt was in the air. Across the road from them, atop a building, someone had painted 'I love you'. I love you.

'This food is good. You are good.'

'Good? Good God. I hardly think so', she said, smiling a lover's smile at him.

'What happened between us? What went wrong?'

'You know what happened. Don't be obtuse.'

'See. Same as. You instruct me. Advise me. But you. You never stuck around long enough to hear my advice.'

'Your advice?'

'Yeah, like "Don't be so sensitive", or, "Let's consider all the facts before passing sentence", oh no, you just...you just.'

'Left. I left.'

London was cold and beautiful and people were steaming themselves down the footpath towards the tube, or strutting up the other way to Portobello Road, full of slow joy with money in their pockets and love awaiting them around each corner of this old town, that had never broken its promise to anyone.

'And now you're here.'

'Yes. Now we're here. Eating goat stew as you do.'

'As you do. Better than bloody Lennox Head.'

'Yeah.'

'Yeah. It did suck a bit.'

'Rather.'

Their smugness was suffocating both of them, they were the wrong culture for the menu. He took out his wallet, pushed back his chair. She panicked slightly. She was sure she could feel her IUD Shifting. Was she shrinking? Was he leaving her already?

'Mark?'

'Kat?'

'I'm sorry. Please don't go. I'm sorry about Lennox, everything that happened there. I'm sorry I left. I'm sorry about everything.'

'I'm not going anywhere Kat. I'm just off for a piss.' He looked tired. Did she really have him under any kind of thrall?

'It was a long time ago. You know that. We were just kids.'

He sat down again, muttering, 'You were the one who left Kat. Jesus wept.'

'Let's go home. Let's go home and plant macadamias.'

Suddenly, the idea of tractors and mud and bodies that properly ached from hard labour seemed like a new religion, born right there in Notting Hill, in a steamy café, opposite the most overpriced Oxfam in the world.

Seven years later, mercy, mercy. *Look at us now*, Kat thought. Imagine the things we have consumed in between. Every single meal, all those happy breakfasts, crisp with energy for the day ahead, all those languid, sensual dinners after a hard day's work. All those delicious 'Monique's super salad sandwich' lunches they'd popped down to the village for, and the juices she'd served that tasted like they'd been bootlegged from Eden. But Mark had found something sweeter, better than all her kisses. He had found Monique.

It was irrevocably gone, this life in her homeland, with her long-loved husband. No way now she could get it back, her marriage, or their buttery way of being together, let alone the baby they'd wished away in another century. Husbands were hard food, and wives were poor bulimics. Dead babies have an endless reek. Miscarriage after miscarriage makes for a mirthless marriage. That mistresses might taste better, perhaps, than wives, is no surprise, in the circumstances. So be it.

Kat looked at all the happy people, and the sparkly, sparkling ocean, but instead of the gulls and their exultant chorus all she could hear was a midnight chime gearing up to depart her. Her time here was done. The party was over. Monique and her hot hips and her coiled mind and her ripe womb had won the glass slipper and stolen her prince. Tetchy, menopausal Kat might have rewritten the ending, but it gave her no satisfaction to have slaughtered love. She resolved, in her slow-cooking way, to make recompense, to do something in Monique's honour, something that would stand as some kind of guilty memorial. A memorial to a woman who had packed herself too tight inside life to live in the stretched splendour she deserved. A thanksgiving, that was what was needed. And then, then she could leave.

It is right to express admiration of the often-idealized dead. Very right.

III: Café Consolation, or, as it became commonly known, the Poetry Café.

Mark, after Monique's mysterious death and Kat's inevitable departure overseas again despite promising to give their marriage another chance, found a letter, with a key stickytaped to the top right hand corner. The letter said what you can imagine, if you can imagine the usual misrepresentations. Except for the one real truth offered by Kat, which was that she did not have the gumption to begin again with him. And would he please take this gift from her, this surprise, this café that was all ready to open, in case he ever became sick of round white nuts. Please?

Mark had not been in the food industry all these years now not to become a different person. He knew about food, like he had once known about the hungers that fund travel. And, he wanted to know about poetry. Why not? For this reason, he forgave Kat her departure, left the macadamia farm to his manager, and opened up Lennox Head's newest culinary delight, a café dedicated to writers. Pronto. His dreams quickly copulated, and pretty soon he was talking with the Northern Rivers Writer's Centre and the Lennox Head Chamber of Commerce about hosting the 'Lennox Head Poetry and Food Festival'. He researched the idea with all the enthusiasm of a man who inspires women to murder and migration.

There were many things that Mark now understood. He knew, for example, that food has been a topic of poetry for many centuries, and that historians (thank you Monique and all your pillow talk) learnt much about culture and taboos from poetry about food. What an indiscrete medium food was, really, when you thought about it. It was also around this time that Mark came to fully understand that he was perhaps the only man alive in Lennox Head who did not surf. Under these circumstances, he was not so sure about the virtue of, say, knowing that the eighth-century poet Chang Chiu-ling used poetry to address the many ways in which, despite their superficial similarities,

lychees and longans are not similar fruits at all. Or that in medieval Arabia, poetry and food were siblings, with poems naming each dish in a banquet, and that recitations accompanied consumption, with guests savouring food and words equally. Nevertheless, he pursued his vision. What did those old poets do for sport, though? Words were not enough, Mark knew that. But neither is surfing. A man's got to have a hobby.

It's great that people take this food thing seriously, thought Mark. He knew what surfers liked to eat, pre- and post- surf, and he did not muck about in rewriting that menu. The list looks like this, if you live in England (and we all know that Mark had made his fortune shuffling Australian tourists in London off on adventure tours, including surfing the wild *ahem* Cornwall coast):

- Bananas
- Tea (regular, green and Yorkshire tea)
- Chocolate / high energy snacks
- Burritos
- More Tea
- Pasties (various)
- Dried Fruit
- Crisps (potato chips)
- Isotonic Drinks
- All Day Breakfast (preferably after a surf!)
- Hot Dogs
- Coffee (various)
- Sandwiches (home made, fish finger, tomato sauce)

The list looks like this if you live in Australia and are married to someone who cares about your health more than you do:

- Bananas, because it is true that despite being a great energy snack they stop you cramping when it's cold
- Coffee
- Freshly squeezed juices
- Dried Fruit
- And after a surf, an iron man or woman portion of cereal if rushing around at home to get to work, or, if not, something perfect, delicious and healthy from one of the twenty seven hundred cafes along Pacific Parade.

Lonely, but focused, Mark decided it would not do to rest until this matter of what life was for was properly sorted out. Why hadn't he ever learnt to surf? Was it simply that he was frightened of sharks? Mates would come back from blokey trips to South Australia joking over a beer that *it was great mate but cold, and sharky as fuck*, and

Mark would be glad that he had the farm to use as an excuse for all those staying behinds that he did. But now was not the time to pause and ponder. The monster Grendel feasts on sleeping men, we all know that. There is more drinking in *Beowulf* than done by all the Australians that have ever attended the Munich Bier Fest put together. Talk about misconducting citizenry. So Mark fed them, his surfing mates, all of them. No charge. They made his café famous in the surfing fraternity. And now they were ready for anything he might want to propose.

He was thinking of offering Nava, the legendary Nat Young's daughter, a gig as writer-in-residence, even though she wasn't a poet. He'd stolen the idea from a bookstore in Malibu. Plus, he liked Nat. Everyone liked Nat. Homage is good. It felt to him that every idea he had was gossamer with magic. Even so, he suffered daily from the endless existential cramp of T. S. Eliot's question, 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' This question became his own and it kept Mark pretty much fully occupied. That, and running the café, and standing at the Point watching his mates surf. *Hell, there are a million writers living in this postcode*, he thought. *Surely they can provide some answers*. Meanwhile, the Tuesday night poetry readings were all a-rage, with punters coming down from the hills, and in from the waves. It might be the fact that he had managed to secure a liquor licence (don't ask) but the place was always packed. Boutique beers and macadamia crisps? No worries. *Piss off with your sharks*, Mark whispered to the Pacific, *this is the real business*.

And then, one night, in walked Marina. Her voice was honeyed and husky and she open-mic'd her way into Mark's strawberry ripe heart. Her poems blasted him. The room was silent while she read, and the moon was busy outside inventing a new kind of silver.

'Anger in a double string of pearls'

I forgive you, she said,
 harvesting another mouthful
 of beetroot risotto.
 He was having steak,
 they always liked opposites,
 it was fun once, but
 now it only worked in
 restaurants, and so the
 years wore on. I'm
 sorry, he said, his cutlery
 sentries now, awaiting
 reanimation. She made
 good promise of her rocket
 salad while his hand
 trembled the red wine,
 glassed high above the river.
 That was Chicago, this is
 Brisbane, she said. You
 were away. You shouldn't

go away. He had remembered
her when young, he had come in
the sarcophagus of her. He
wanted her back. Can you
still love me, he asked of his meat.
The young waitress, with
her undergraduate ambitions,
did not believe a word of
any story, she'd heard them all,
had accounts for all of them.
Eat, said the woman. I hate waste.

Marina had long legs and a mouth that said I'm sorry even when she was smiling. Marina said, *I'm sorry, but I think I love you. I love you and your macadamia everythings.*

Miss Piggy said Never eat more than you can lift and Mark Twain said Part of the secret of success in life is to eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside and Ronald Reagan said You can tell a lot about a fellow's character by his way of eating jellybeans but it was Albert Einstein who said Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances for survival of life on Earth as much as evolution to a vegetarian diet. But just when Mark had decided, along with history, that nothing mattered more than food and words, Marina said, *I don't like you working evenings, or leaving the house so early, or making other people's coffees. I like you being the landed gentry. Take me home to the farm.* And he did. *Read your poems if you want to,* Marina said, *and I'll read mine, but take me home to the hills.* So Mark phoned up his sister Edie in London, and said, *I need you please come home. Please bring me some Tetley tea bags and come home, and run my café for me.*

All this shit used to fit into their old house, Edie realised, looking at the unmitigated piles of rubbish surrounding her. Now that he was dead, there was plenty of time for the young widow to do all the things she should have done while her husband had been alive. Grief is like constipation. In the end, when it all becomes too much to bear, there are always drugs to do the work you can't manage yourself. And moving house is like a military evacuation, ask any old soldier who's ever faced their enemy up close: *you can't take everything with you.* One of the things that Edie liked to do most in her new flat was to iron her dead husband's shirts. The flat was on the second floor, opposite Stoke Newington Park. Someone had been almost killed there last week. A woman, jogging, her attacker's knife had slipped. Edie's husband had also known knives, as he died. North London is not what it used to be. Actually, ever since the mistress of some King had lived on the Green, and established the place as radical and alternative, the lies and the knives had never stopped. Mistresses just don't tend to live in the same part of town as wives.

What to do with all those shirts though? He used to have them laundered, a weekly batch, up on Church Street. Now they were all crisp sails without a boat, hanging

around the kitchen. Some still needed washing—to be outlived by a curry stain is ignoble. So, the tidal ironing, wearing of dead husband's shirts whilst jogging, washing, drying, then ironing said shirts just to sweat in them, suddenly seemed futile as a rationale for living life. He had loved her big time, larger than the love that even the Groucho club could contain on any given night. But he was dead, and she really didn't look so good in his old clothes, and her compassionate leave had run out. Plus, Mark had phoned instructing her to sell the travel agency and pleading with her to come home. First, she gave the shirts to Oxfam, in Drury Lane, so she'd never see anyone in N16 smelling of her old life. And then would the fun begin again? Her brother had told her about his Poetry Café. That sounded amusing. A place to hang out. A place to own. A place to feed and water people, and calm them down, take them away from anxiety and the grief of daily life. A place to call home. Yes.

Was there an age curfew on wearing bikinis in postcode 2478? It would be like heaven, she imagined, to feel the sun on so many places of your skin, all at the same time. Just like her freckled childhood. A diet. She had to go on a diet first, and then buy bikinis. Maybe there was space for innovation on the menu: dishes listing their Weight Watchers' points perhaps? *I want everyone to be thin and healthy and happy*, Edie thought. *I want them all to have someone to kiss, and someone to kiss them. I want to serve them coffee and food and watch them kiss, the ocean their soundtrack. I want this for everyone. I want it now.* Edie had been a nice girl, once, had once even known the true purpose of surf wax. Her very own long lost life echoed at her, as she packed her bags, and found her vegemite smeared passport beneath an empty bottle of Australian chardonnay from mysteriously related vineyards. Home. She was going home.

It is right, this expression of solace. Too right.

Epilogue: Just as well they invented the BLAT

In central west New South Wales, the cabbage farmers contracted to Chiko Rolls are about to relinquish their property. Bathurst sorely needs a truck bypass, it seems. Mr and Mrs Smith are the sole suppliers of this key ingredient to the national icon, providing about four tonnes a year of cabbage, but soon they will surrender, will sell out, will seachange to the far north coast, will have 2478 as the last word on the envelopes of their next Christmas mailout. They will never eat cabbage again. No. They've earned a sophisticated tofu scramble with their soy latte after their 6am yoga. Or, on days when they feel especially jaded, a Bacon Lettuce Avocado Tomato mega munch. Oddly, on certain mornings, just after dawn, they swear they can smell the fug of Chikos from the downstairs café snake-charming its way up through the floorboards of the surf club, full of prone hatha devotees, the steam snaring their feet and tying them to the past. *Lest we forget*, the smell says, *lest we forget that love is a cabbage*.

The end, the end. I am going to the greatest barbecue of them all. The end.

Research Statement

This short story is a creative outcome from research devoted to examining contemporary sea change Australia, within the area of cultural studies. While much energy has been directed at exploring the demographics of sea change, and its impact on community resources, there has been scant work dedicated to brokering understandings of human experience in the cultural and personal realms. The research question directing this story (and its companion stories in the book-length collection, *Shark Sonnets*) is ‘What constitutes happiness for Australians today?’ Part of a larger research project, ‘Arcadian Hells’, investigating notions of happiness and the failures of ‘paradise’ to deliver societal wellbeing, ‘I can still taste you’ explores the costs to human security that sea change migration generates, scrutinizing in particular love and relationships as commodities, and the commercial occupations (in this case the food industry) that fund lived lives. Taking food as its guiding metaphor, it allows an analysis of consumption and societal greed and need, as well as representing cultural change over time. A stylistic innovation—embracing the poetic form of the elegy as a structural device—has allowed a modulated investigation of cultural and societal anxieties, as the elegy insists on both lamentation and critical praise. ‘I can still taste you’ is based on a real place, exposing recognizable societal problems, and as such offers cultural observations of a sea change society experiencing critical change, acting as a ‘ficto-documentary’ of people and place in crisis.