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# OTOLITHS

A MAGAZINE OF MANY E-THINGS

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## FIVE BODIES

### I. CHALK OUTLINE DETAILING POSITION OF HEAD WITH KNIFE IN HAND, 1950

Watch:

any moment the chalk  
will summon its template

conjure up the core  
from sleeping dust

will pull – from where? – wind  
that disperses the finer grains

cleanses the lungs  
restores each corner  
with pulsing breeze

like flinging open doors and windows  
on a clear spring day.

He'll spit out ferrous-tasting  
blood as skin and bone re-fuse

he'll stand  
dress  
fold the blade back  
into its handle, slip it into his jacket

pocket  
then run his bruised right hand  
through his regrown hair  
and go looking

for a bus home.



*God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.*

— *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Foreman of the jury

Just like in the movies, or church, the clerk brings out three items of evidence in resealable bags tagged with capital letters. He passes them one by one to me. Reflecting dutifully, I pass them back to the clerk who, in turn, administers each piece in similar fashion to the other jurors as a priest would the host and cup.

Exhibit A: Close-up of the victim's left arm

The position of God's arm makes me think of the Sistine ceiling. Michelangelo had placed Adam naked and louche in Eden, used God's outstretched right arm (the left embracing a cherub for companionship or stability) to impart the spark of life, or point a finger of blame.

*It was God's fault, swears Adam, but I was only following orders.*

That arm impotent now, flung out lifeless. The other one too, shrugged off by the angel, no longer anchor or counterweight. God's fallen body flat against the floor, knife planted in his uncurled palm (*to make it look like suicide*, the prosecution allege) and God's arm and shirt sleeve painted with blood (burnt umber and cadmium red).

Exhibit B: Shoes

At least the Adam in front of me had the decency to take his shoes off. It was holy ground, after all, despite the absence of a burning bush.

Exhibit C: Knife

Odd choice of murder weapon: blade barely three inches long, intricate carving on the hilt, a series of curves to accommodate four fingers, a curled pommel to stop the stiletto sliding in use. Ornate, yes, but perfect to slip into a belt or tuck between a deity's ribs.

*Given half a chance any one of you would've done it*, claims Adam. I've a mind to agree. But Adam has taken the fall, admitted complicity.

A woman at the back of court stands up, smiles and leaves.

## V. TRIPTYCH OF IMAGES TELLS A STORY OF SUICIDE, 1950

### 1. Car parked in garage

Sooner or later someone will need to reverse  
the car back out. The upholstery requires  
scrubbing and the splatter above the door  
will need a dab of peroxide then saltwater.

### 2. Body on back seat of car

Up in the eaves the spiders had spun silk,  
too much of it. A waste. Holes blown  
through it catch only stale air  
and shadows. Nothing sacred here.

### 3. Detective

Framed in the rear window, the officer  
has hands on hips, head cocked to one side,  
cap and sunglasses on. A warm enough day  
to unbutton his jacket but not to take it off.

### Additional details

Notes of orange blossom, jasmine,  
and the scent of dust in the late-spring heat.

### A note on the poems:

In 2004, the Los Angeles Police Department released images from its archives of crime-scene photography. The titles of the poems in the Five Bodies sequence are taken from photographs from the LAPD archive. These images, and others, can be viewed online at <http://fototeka.com/lapd/gallery.html>, or in the book *Scene of the Crime: Photographs from the LAPD Archive* by Tim Wride (Harry N Adams, 2004).

**Ben Egerton** is a poet from Wellington, New Zealand. He likes to write using traditional forms as well as experimenting with new ways to put words on a page, often borrowing from the worlds of music and art. His words are readable in print and online in various New Zealand, Australian and British journals and newspapers.

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