

North from Laguna Beach

by Neil McCarthy

1.

It feels a lot longer in kilometres; the metric system making everything seem a lot faster, further away, more expensive.

And here we are again: making a mockery of geography, wishing our recent air miles could be ascribed to one company.

Driving north from Laguna Beach, the Pacific struggles to sleep in the glare of the marauding metropolis around the corner:

It is Halicarnassus during a siege, abraded sketches of victors and the dead; the colour of Antelope Valley in April; your

Lithuanian skin where the sun screen missed, or my cheeks ablaze with guilt the first time we kissed in Vienna.

I was Orson Welles skulking in the shadows and you Alida Valli; our time measured like footsteps advancing on Gethsemane.

2.

I have been drawing a window sill of basil, rosemary and chive, painting over the *blu-tack* marks on the bedroom wall, watching

you time and time again, learning your habits, your sleep patterns,

imagining your stomach extend by its nine monthly chapters.

I have been nailing Hollywood signs to buildings we wish to claim, masquerading as a local on streets where angry men lash out at

invisible foes to the amusement of children and the horror of mothers.

You are there every time, safe in my hand, holding on to me as

I hold on to you, my arm across the divide driving north from Laguna

Beach. Outside, the tableau of images read like a contents page

to a book written with every metric mile; and the burning sky above

Los Angeles just gets brighter and brighter and brighter.

