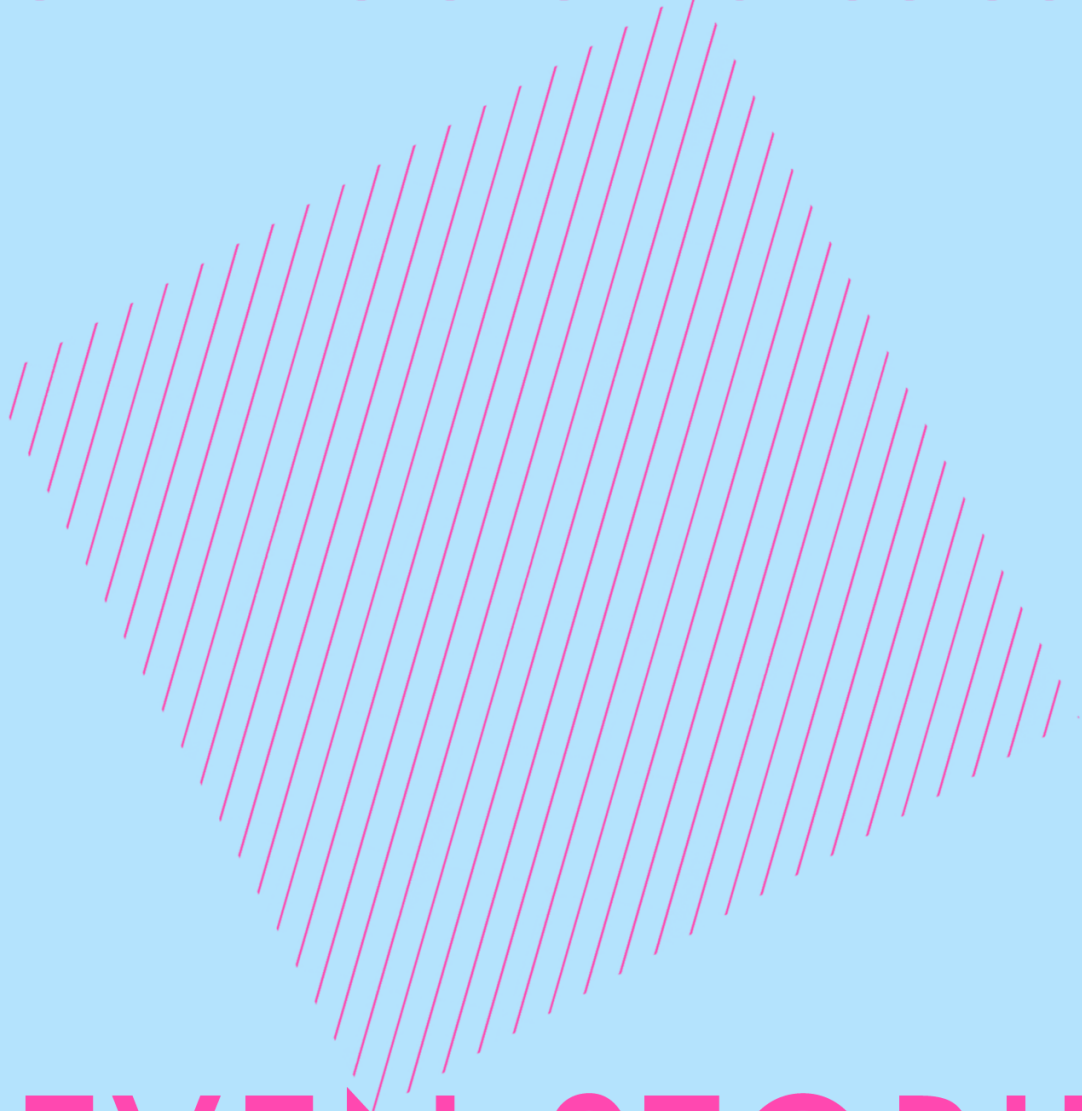


# ELEVEN STORIES

The Desperate Literature Short  
Fiction Prize Shortlist Selection



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## 2019

## JUDGES

Claire-Louise Bennett's short fiction and essays have been published in several publications including *The Moth* and *The Irish Times*. She received the inaugural *White Review Short Story Prize* in 2013. Her first book, *Pond*, was published in 2016.

Eley Williams' *Attrib. and other stories* (Influx Press, 2017) was awarded the Republic of Consciousness Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize 2018. With stories anthologised in *The Penguin Book of the Contemporary British Short Story* (Penguin Classics, 2018) and *Liberating the Canon* (Dostoevsky Wannabe, 2018), she is a Fellow of the MacDowell Colony and the Royal Society of Literature.

Sam Riviere is the author of the poetry books *81 Austerities* (Faber, 2012) and *Kim Kardashian's Marriage* (2015). *Safe Mode*, an ambient novel, was published by Test Centre in 2017. He lives in Edinburgh and runs the micropublisher If a Leaf Falls Press.

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# ELEVEN STORIES 2019

## The Desperate Literature Short Fiction Prize Shortlist Selection

Desperate Literature  
Madrid 2019

# LOST IN PARK HYATT TOKYO

## Joshua Riedel

*Josh Riedel worked at tech startups in Silicon Valley before moving to Tucson to pursue his MFA in Fiction at the University of Arizona. The winner of the 2018 Wabash Prize in Fiction, his work is forthcoming from Sycamore Review and was shortlisted in BOMB's biennial contest. He is currently at work on a novel about technology, art, work, and being in your twenties in early-2010s San Francisco. He lives in California with his wife and bound dog. Visit him at [joshriedel.com](http://joshriedel.com).*

In the opening scene of *Lost in Translation*, Scarlett Johansson lies in bed, on her side, in sheer pink underwear. The camera is behind her and shows only her midsection; it stays there for thirty seconds as distant traffic sounds – car engines, a siren – filter in. Only when Johansson, or her character, Charlotte, moves her legs slightly does the movie title appear, accompanied by Death in Vegas's electro-pop song 'Girls.' This opening scene used to be among the first images that popped into my head when someone mentioned the film, or whenever I was reminded of it, the way I was then, staying in the hotel where it was filmed, on my first visit to Japan.

My coworker David was somewhere else in the Park Hyatt, I wasn't sure where. We were supposed to meet up early tomorrow morning for another call with our boss, who was still in California. I wasn't sure if we were to meet up in person or if we would each video call from our respective hotel rooms.

Jetlag compelled me to google the *Lost in Translation* opening scene. I watched the clip on YouTube. Years ago, when the movie was released, that would have been enough. The difference between then and now is, I want to know the details of how the artificial is constructed. How carefully and intentionally crafted had that scene been, to stay in my memory this long?

The opening shot is inspired by the work of John Kacere, whose paintings nearly all depict the midsection of the female body. Some film critics argue the shot was inspired by the opening of the 1963 movie *Contempt*, but after Sophia Coppola, in an interview with *The Daily Beast* on the ten-year anniversary of the film, stated that Kacere's work was in fact her inspiration, most dropped the *Contempt* parallel. There are still people out there who think they know better than Coppola, however. Of course there are. In fact, the most ardent Coppola fans seem to derive extreme pleasure from correcting her, or insisting she doesn't know what she really wants. Most of these fans, unsurprisingly, are men.

I'd never heard of Kacere before reading the interview with Coppola. Kacere is considered one of the first photorealists, although he rejected the term. People often mistake photorealist paintings for actual photographs, and I guess that's part of the charm: what looks like one thing is actually another. The viewer is on unsteady ground.

I don't know why Kacere rejected the term. I like to think it was less about what the term means, and more that he could give a fuck about categories.

It was 3am, and I'd already spent the past two hours chasing after Coppola facts. Even though I knew I'd regret it when I dialed into my meeting in the morning, I left the comfort of maybe-Scarlett-Johansson's/maybe-Bill-Murray's bed to wander the halls of the Park Hyatt.

It took some convincing on Coppola's part to film at the Park Hyatt. When the hotel finally acquiesced, Coppola agreed to shoot in the middle of the night, from 1–5am, in hallways and communal areas, so as not to disturb the hotel's guests. The hotel is better late at night anyway. As I wandered the halls, a pod of Japanese businessmen in suits emerged, immersed in a cloud of cigarette smoke. An American couple walked by, in nice-ish clothes. Or maybe the clothes were in fact nice, not nice-ish. To be honest, I think I may have judged their clothes as less nice based on the fact that they did not appear to be guests at the Park Hyatt. This realization caused me to self-evaluate my own wardrobe: suede Allen Edmonds shoes, wrinkled Steven Alan khakis, a white Hanes V-neck. Jetlag business casual, not sharp but not awful either.

At the tea lounge, near the main bank of elevators, I sat in a plush green chair that faced the tall windows. I was the only one in the lounge. Where earlier in the day I had seen Mount Fuji, a wide expanse of blinking lights now greeted me. Coppola had stayed in this hotel several times in her twenties, when she owned a small clothing business and traveled to Tokyo frequently. She knew early on she wanted to film the movie here. I admire her for setting that constraint. She didn't, as far as I can tell, film scenes at other hotels and collage them together into her own 'Park Hyatt,' the way Stanley Kubrick did for *The Shining*. Although I guess you could argue that even though all the hotel scenes were indeed filmed at the Tokyo Park Hyatt, they are still inevitably a fictionalized Park Hyatt, Coppola's own version, stitched together for the screen.

Upon reflection, I think what compelled my research that night was a subconscious urge to find out whether I could enter Coppola's Park Hyatt, or whether I would remain forever locked in

my own world.

The lights on the skyscrapers blinked in patterns indecipherable to me.

Coppola admits Charlotte's relationship with her husband, a busybody filmmaker, is based on her own relationship with her then new-husband Spike Jonze. (They divorced the year the film was released.) I wondered if she had ever stayed at the Park Hyatt with her husband, or if her fascination with the hotel was wrapped up in nostalgia for a time pre-husband. I wondered whether she had ever considered calling Charlotte and her husband 'Sophia' and 'Spike,' a direct acknowledgement that the film borrows from real life.

I decided to get a nightcap, up at the New York Bar, thinking the whiskey would help me sleep. I walked to the bank of elevators across from me, but there was only a button for the ground-level lobby. I didn't want to leave this lobby for that one. I needed to go up, higher, to the top of the building, to the New York Bar, where I hoped to find the after-images of Charlotte and Bob reflected in the floor-to-ceiling windows.

I walked towards the check-in desk to ask how to access the bar but took a wrong turn and found myself in a sushi restaurant, which appeared closed even though its doors were open. It was an unfamiliar sight, this sushi restaurant. I don't think it makes an appearance in the movie. I retraced my steps, and walked in the other direction, towards what I thought was the check-in desk, but ended up instead in the tea lounge again. I retraced my steps once more, and this time did not make the wrong turn into the sushi restaurant but continued straight. I knew I was heading in the wrong direction, I could feel it. But I wasn't: this time I did indeed end up at the check-in desk.

'New York Bar?' I asked the woman at the desk.

'Elevators are to your right, sir.'

The elevator only had buttons with floor numbers, none that said *New York Bar*, so I pressed the highest one. The elevator took me to a floor that looked exactly like mine, only the carpet seemed to hold a century's worth of cigarette smoke. I returned to the elevator, hit the button for the lobby, and when I exited asked the same woman from the check-in desk, 'New York Bar?'

She said, 'Yes, here, here,' and led me around the corner to a different elevator. She stepped inside and pressed the *New York Bar* button, then stepped back out of the elevator, and bowed goodbye. I bowed back, sort of: in the elevator mirrors I witnessed myself bobbing my head and hunching my shoulders, a poor imitation.

A ding and then the doors opened to a sparkling view of the city.

The view, here, seemed even better than the view in the tea lounge or in my room, though it was essentially the same, only a few stories higher. I walked around the corner to a podium where I assumed the host would be. I waited, and no one showed. Peering past the podium, around the corner, it was clear the bar was closed. 'Hello?' I called out, before noticing a sign which verified the bar had in fact closed at midnight. It was half past three.

Why had the hotel employee helped me come here? Why hadn't she just told me the bar was closed? I thought about the bar in *Lost in Translation*, and immediately recalled the scene in which Bill Murray, jetlagged and sleepless, finds himself there. That's when Charlotte sits next to him for the first time. That scene seems to take place way past midnight, in that blurry time of day that is both tonight and tomorrow. Does the bar simply stay open later in the movie, revealing a discrepancy between the real New York Bar and Coppola's? Or, as a viewer, has my sense of time been warped by Coppola, inducing me into a kind of jetlagged state parallel to that of Bill Murray? I'm beginning to fear I'm not even remembering this movie right, even though I've seen it countless times. Maybe it's all my imagination, my own fictional version of the Park Hyatt layered on top of Coppola's.

I reflected on the facts I'd learned earlier, in my room. If all the hotel scenes were filmed between 1-5am, then it's likely that the New York Bar in the movie is either open later, and is therefore not the same as the one I stood outside of that night, or that time in the movie is off: they pretend it's 11pm in the *Lost in Translation* Park Hyatt, when it was actually somewhere between 1-5am in the real-life Park Hyatt. Either scenario worked, it didn't really matter, and why was I thinking so much about this anyway? What about the call with New Boss in the morning? Why was I so easily distracted?

I gave up on my experiment. I conceded to the fact that I would have to wake up early, find David, and dial into this stupid meeting.

Back in my room, I opened a tiny bottle of Hibiki 17 from the mini-bar and swished the whiskey around in my mouth while I pulled up another famous scene from the movie.

As Bob Harris films a Suntory whiskey commercial, a Japanese director delivers a long, impassioned speech, in Japanese, to Harris. The director's words are presumably intended to serve as motivation.

*What'd he say?* Bob Harris asks his translator.

She responds with what is clearly a super condensed translation of the director's speech. *Look at the camera, with intensity.*

*That's it?* Bob asks.

*Yes.*

The scene is based on Coppola's personal experience with her own translator, when she toured Japan for *The Virgin Suicides*. For *Lost in Translation*, Coppola wrote the director's lines in English before having them translated, but she never let Bill Murray know what the director was saying; therefore, Bob Harris's confusion, as portrayed by Bill Murray, is real, and probably mirrors Coppola's own, or at least what she had remembered of her confusion.

I finished the Hibiki 17 and fell asleep with my laptop still open, so that when I woke up at sunrise (I forgot to close the blinds) and touched my trackpad to check the time, Bill Murray was still there, beside me.