

From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



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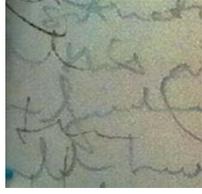
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Artwork by Tim Sandys <http://www.timsandys.com>
Find more of Tim's work in [100 Artists of the Male Figure: A Contemporary Anthology](#)
of Painting, Drawing, and Sculpture



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A Word from the Editors

As editors, we have the difficult task of selecting work from the many submissions we receive. It is not easy and we don't always agree (*shhh*) but writing that gets our attention is always that which takes the reader right into the heart of the text and doesn't try to leave him/her behind.

The writer George Orwell expresses this much better, saying that: 'good prose is like a windowpane'. Writing should be clear and transparent, reflecting images back into the mind of the reader. There should be no obstacles to the reader understanding the text, no 'decorative adjectives', 'purple passages' and 'humbug' in general (Orwell, *Why I Write*).

It is exactly the same for poetry. Jen Hadfield, T.S Eliot prizewinner and this issue's *Quick View* interviewee, believes that poetry should seek to include rather than confuse the reader. In our interview she remarks that if you create 'too coded a poem... you'll wall your reader out.' Now we editors don't claim to be the most intelligent people in the world (far from it!), but there were some poems we received that we didn't really get. The writing was obscure and the meaning, unclear. We definitely felt walled out, unable to break in.

Having selected work with the reader in mind, we are therefore confident that you will enjoy it and find something that you love. As with all our previous editions of *From Glasgow to Saturn*, this is a varied issue with lots of different genres and styles covered. So in these pages you will find (amongst other things) a Christmas nativity story (of sorts), a poem on the horrors of the Arab Spring, a guidance teacher who can't spell and some disturbing origami.

So pour yourself a cup of tea, pull up a comfortable chair and have a read. Please remember to let us know what you think.

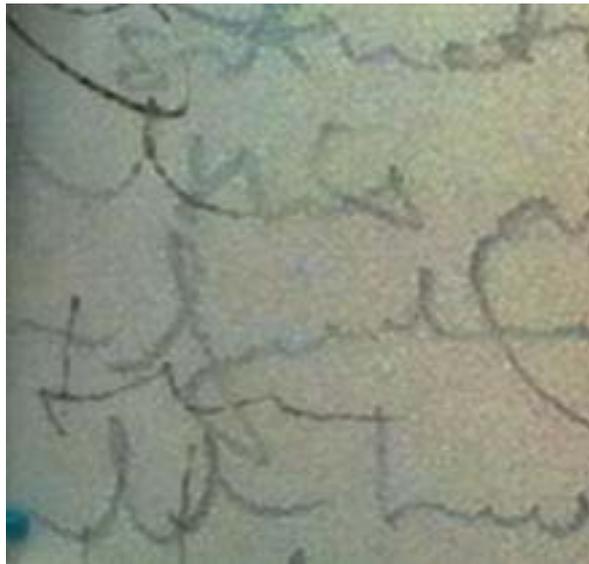
Megan Primrose | Siobhan Staples | Paul Deaton



Medium

by JoAnne McKay

Books are thought
preserved in amber.
Slaughter the kine,
scrape your skin,
make good ink from an oak gall.
Then, Codex Sinaiticus;
come a thousand years
and yours shall be
the very word of god.



Some Urban Hazards

by David Greaves

While I was travelling I met a man who could fold cities into octahedrons small enough to carry in his pockets. He called himself the remembrancer. He kept the cities hidden, in case anyone was watching maybe, and when he was sure it was safe he teased them out into sprawl, hands like smoke, and then walked the streets with a smartphone and an earpiece, taking notes as he spoke. He always folded them back up before too long.

I had some time to kill so I decided to stick around for a couple of days and see what he did. I didn't say anything to him initially, but a couple of days later, when he was done, we got talking and decided to go to a bar. On the way, I told him about what I was doing, where I was going, and asked about him. He gave me a couple of tips on his work. He said to start small, if possible at one corner of the city in question. If I wasn't sure where the corners were, well, he said, that's what research is for. People like to start in the centre because of the symmetry and it's flashy but they never think about how they're going to get out until they're about three-quarters done and every street leading off from theirs has been wrapped four times around a concertinaed skyscraper. Corners, he said. Although I had seen him folding from the centre but I suppose he had a lot of practice.

Grid systems, he said, were certainly simpler but he found them unsatisfying. He never bothered with, say, San Diego, because it just wasn't that much of a challenge. Nothing could beat taking a patchwork like London and tucking and aligning the frayed edges like a mosaic into a perfect equilateral and balancing it on your palm. I did wonder about things like sewers, subways, water, power, but he waved his hand in between typing on his phone and said as long as you remembered to keep track of the ends and didn't get mixed up between systems they really weren't a problem.

The main problem he'd found, he said, was parks. Sometimes gardens as well. The reason being the grass, which tended to tickle his fingers at the most crucial moments. He was used to it by now but if you weren't careful, he said, if you were distracted for some reason, it could really sneak up on you and the whole thing could just spill right out of your hands. I asked if he'd ever tried wearing gloves, he laughed

although I don't think he actually found my question funny exactly as in he wasn't really smiling definitely not with his eyes and he said no, he needed the sensation in the tips of his fingers to do his job in the first place, and in any case he had his pride. He put his phone away, took out a few of the cities and some thin dark cord, and started to string them together. I didn't ask why, I assumed he had his reasons and he certainly seemed to know what he was doing.

One thing that I couldn't help but wonder about was the people in the city, as I hadn't seen any. He shrugged. I pressed the issue. He said he felt the whole thing was trite but since I kept asking then okay he'd explain that while the folding process doesn't actually damage living organisms it can be discomfiting, even upsetting, for those who experience it; so while the city is folded, the population is first reflected in the nearest mirrored surface; the reflections, along with the surfaces, are then folded as well, until the people of the city are glints, occasionally visible at certain angles from outside. After being unfolded, he said, the people didn't remember anything of the experience and went on their way, occasionally glancing at windows like they'd forgotten something or at blank screens like they weren't convinced or like they expected something other than what was there. Then he shrugged again and strung another city onto the cord.

I drank some water because late July is a malicious bastard in George Town and offered some to him. He shook his head without looking at me and took a flask out of an inside pocket. After he took a sip I asked about him again, how he got started in the whole thing. He closed his eyes for a moment, then palmed the string of cities and said the first thing you should know is that the only person who can teach you is the remembrancer, and he probably won't want to, so be sure to be polite when you talk to him and not to ask him too many stupid questions in case he gets pissed off with your stupidity and decides to break your stupid fucking legs and your stupid fucking arms and half your stupid ribs and as you're lying on the floor in stupid agony wrap a cord around your stupid fucking neck and choke you, choke you to death, you stupid, stupid fuck. And by that point my eyes were starting to cloud over and the cord was cutting my larynx shut and there was nothing I could say to get him to stop.



Arab Spring

by Aya Musbahi

Blood of forefathers and descendents
Mixed on the hot pavement
Seeped into a gutter
Where it nourished a forgotten apple seed
Trickled into cement cracks to water
A solitary flower
Clouds wept blood
So that flowers could bloom blood
And in the autumn the trees could shed blood
And the wadi would flow with much blood.
The sun's rays shone red, green and black today
Hospitals, havoc, surgery, scrubs amidst
A woman wailing for a long lost lover,
The glint of a rose on an AK47,
Red like the blood,
Green like the spring,
Black like the shadows
Fighters are shrouded in.
May the flowers blossom and the nightingales sing
To the bleating Apaches of an Arab spring.

The First Time

by Laura Brown

He had really small hands. That was the first thing I noticed about him. And he moved them all the time, fidgeting Mum would say. Those stubby hands had written me poetry and sent me letters. Not real ones of course, emails, but it sounded more romantic to say letters.

We were meeting up at the train station. He was taking me into Glasgow to an art gallery. I'd only ever been in Glasgow with Mum shopping for my school uniform. Mum hated the crowds but she said you got a better bargain in Watt Brothers than in the local shops. Mum kept her head high and looked straight ahead making people move out the way for her while I sidestepped everyone saying sorry, sorry.

I lay awake most of the night shivering with excitement and worrying about what to wear and what I would say and should I take some pieces with me in case I got hungry.

I slept in. I woke up twenty minutes before the train was due, threw on the first clothes I found, brushed my teeth and washed my face and ran out the door, sweating buckets by the time I got to the station. Out of breath, unbrushed hair and probably stinking of BO, I gibbered something resembling a hello and he laughed at me. I knew him from his pictures but he looked older in real life.

'We could of got the next train,' he said.

'I didn't want you to think I'd stood you up.'

'I would of waited,' he said, taking my hand. I wondered if we were a couple then, if I was his girlfriend because he held my hand. I couldn't stop smiling, I'd never held a man's hand before. Except at school at Christmas when we had to do the social dancing but that was different. All the boys' hands were sweaty and you didn't want to hold them. I was never picked first but I wasn't last either. The boys threw you about mad, it was fun. Not like this. This was like a dream. This was a man, not a boy.

He let me have the window seat on the train, his leg pressed against mine. The journey was only half an hour; I wished it was longer. He talked about the places we were going to visit, the gallery and the museum, and told me about his life, how he

was a sailor and went to sea for months at a time.

‘So what do you do when you’re not at sea?’ I asked.

‘I climb mountains.’

‘Really?’

‘Aye, well, kinda. I go hillwalking.’

‘Up north?’

‘Aye, I’ve done one hundred and seventy-two Munros.’

I hadn’t a clue what he meant. ‘Wow,’ I said.

‘I just get as far away from the sea as I can,’ he said.

I was awestruck. Mountains were mystical things I only saw in pictures. He looked past me, out the window, his eyes flicking back and forth with the speed of the train. I watched his mouth forming the names of the mountains, there was a brown line down one of his front teeth, Beinn Alligin, An Teallach, Stac Pollaidh, they were the most beautiful words I’d ever heard.

He had a deep line between his eyebrows so it looked like he was thinking all the time. I reached out and touched it with my finger. He smiled and looked at me, I smiled back.

In the art gallery I was conscious of where I was and who I was with so I didn’t really take anything in. He talked about the paintings, telling me what he saw in them, but I just frowned and smiled in turn, not able to say anything about them. I was more interested in the people about me. There was a shabby looking man with a scraggy ginger beard talking about how expensive his glasses were to a frumpy American woman wearing a massive ugly skirt. I tried to see the magic in the paintings but it just wasn’t there. I felt like a failure.

‘I’m hungry’, I said, wishing I’d brought some pieces after all, but then thinking I wouldn’t have had the courage to take them out my bag in a place like this.

‘Let’s go,’ he said, ‘it’s too nice a day to be stuck indoors.’ I followed him.

We got another train, this time going out of the city rather than in, but not back the way - further away from home. He took the window seat. He was very quiet, his head turned away from me but occasionally squeezing my hand. It felt nice.

The things we saw out the window got less and less ugly. The world got greener. I worried about the time. Eventually the train stopped and we got off; I

hadn't a clue where we were. And I had on my patent red ballerinas, they gave me blisters.

'Loch Awe, the Jewel of Argyll,' he said. 'The train goes much further but ye really have to see this place, it's beautiful.' I smiled - it was - but I wanted to go home.

'Thought you didn't like the water?'

'Yeah the sea. But this place is serene. Close your eyes.' I closed my eyes. All I could hear was birds chirping and the water lapping on the stony shore. He unzipped his backpack, and took out a blue blanket, lying it down on a small sandy patch near the edge of the water.

'Are you hungry?' I nodded. 'I brought us a picnic,' he said. I thought it was a bit late for a picnic. I really wanted a big plate of Mum's hotpot and a mug of tea. But it was nice of him to bring some food. I hadn't eaten all day but didn't want to say. I was getting a headache and felt a little dizzy. He offered me his flask, it was coffee. I hated coffee but I took a few sips. It was bitter. The cheese sandwiches had Branston Pickle on them.

'Are you ok?' he said. I shrugged my shoulders and smiled. 'You're not. I'm sorry. I just thought you'd love it here as much as I do. I wanted to surprise you.'

'Aye it's lovely,' I said, 'I've just never been this far away from home.'

He stood up and walked to the water's edge.

'So peaceful,' he said, bending to pick up a stone. 'Watch this.' He threw the stone and it bounced along the water five or six times before plopping in.

'Wow,' I said, getting up. 'How did you do that?'

'The key is in the stone. It's got to be flat, see.' He picked up another stone and showed me it. 'You have to hold it such a way that it stays flat after you chuck it. And you aim it along the water.' He threw it and it bounced just like the first one.

'Skiffers,' he said.

'Skiffers,' I said, picking up a flat stone of my own. He took my hand and showed me how to hold the stone, and how to flick the wrist just before letting go. I tried it and it bounced once, twice and plopped into the water.

'Look I did it!'

'Well done! Try again.'

We played for a while but I never managed any more than three or four

bounces; I was in awe of his six.

‘Years of practice,’ he said.

I didn’t have a watch but the sun was lower in the sky so it must have been getting late. Mum would be fizzing when I got back, I hadn’t told her I would be away all day and she didn’t know where I was going.

‘I really have to head home,’ I said. He frowned.

‘Don’t you want to see the stars come out?’

‘Another time maybe?’

‘C’mere a minute.’ He beckoned me closer and put his arm around me. ‘I’ve had a lovely day with you,’ he said, ‘I don’t want it to end.’ I smiled and cooed my face into his armpit. I couldn’t look at him because I thought he was going to kiss me. He tilted my face up and kissed me. His face was rough with stubble but his lips were soft.

He put his hand on my leg and stroked it, reaching further and further up. I couldn’t move a muscle except my lips. He put his tongue in my mouth and it was cold.

We lay down on the blanket. His hand was up my top then pulling my jeans down. I didn’t know what to do with my hands.

It was sore but I liked the weight of him, and the closeness.

I sat up and fixed my clothes. He had walked off to the water’s edge. He had a cigarette in his mouth. I didn’t know he smoked. I watched him, waiting for him to say something but he kept his back to me. I thought I’d done something wrong.

Eventually he threw the stub in the loch and came back over.

‘Let’s go yeah?’ I nodded, relieved. We packed up our things and walked in silence to the train station. I took his hand but it was limp.

We talked a bit on the way back but he seemed distracted. I did most of the talking but I was conscious of boring him with my silly schoolgirl chat. Eventually I gave up, forlorn, and just watched him looking out the window. I wish I knew what he was thinking then.

When it was time to say goodbye I realised I knew nothing about him. I’d told him everything about me; where I stayed, my family, my dreams but all I knew about him was that he was a sailor who hated the sea. I felt like a complete idiot.

‘See you later yeah?’ he said. I didn’t believe I’d see him again at all. And I couldn’t kiss him goodbye, my mouth was raw.



The Lecturer

by Colin Boyd

His was the work of planing off preconceptions
The morning his scaffold and his pivot.
He stood upon its time
hearing the doppler-effect, dragon’s snore
of the stray traffic
harnessing his students to the yoke of the tide
burnishing a hundred pairs of glassy eyes
with words like toner
which grazed the paper black.

Extract from the novel 'One Man Down'

by Gill Davies

'One Man Down' is a black-humoured look at a dysfunctional family living in the Glasgow suburbs and focuses on how traditional roles in society are changing. The protagonist, Crawford Down, cares for his teenage son and his bedridden mother-in-law, who is gambling away her savings playing online poker. While Crawford is stuck at home, his advertising executive wife is gallivanting round the country blowing her wages on clothes, cocaine and a layabout toyboy.

It was good drying day. A wind had got up. While he was hanging out the sheets, Crawford could hear his next door gibbering. She was a right lazy besom, that one. Sitting on her B&Q furniture, drinking cups of tea with her cronies, yak-yak-yakking all day long. Crawford hadn't said two words to her since he put that bucket of water over their barbecue. He was sure they'd waited until he'd put his washing out before they lit the damn thing. Ridiculous. What a mouth she had on her. Him standing behind her too, nodding like a wee dug in the back of a car.

Crawford had just finished pegging the last sheet when the dog started bark-bark-barking. Come here you, he said, but the dog blanked him and made a bee-line for the kitchen door. He followed it inside. There was the boy standing peering into the fridge.

Why is there never anything to eat in this house?

What are you doing here at this time of day?

Been sent home.

How? Are you not well?

Suspended.

What for?

Nothing.

What do you mean nothing?

I didn't do anything.

You must have bloody well done something.

It was that English teacher. He's a wanker.

What have I told you about your language?

Well, he is.

The boy had been in detention twice already this term. He'd been warned – any

more trouble and you'll be getting suspended.

That's no way to talk about a teacher.

He's an asshole.

What did I just say?

The prick went mental cos I called him a paedo.

You called him *what*?

Well ... he told me to take my t-shirt off.

Her next door was peering over the fence. Crawford booted the kitchen door shut.

A teacher told you to take your t-shirt off?

Yeah.

Are you sure?

Of course I'm bloody sure.

Was it just you and him in the classroom?

No ... fuck sake. In front of the whole class.

What was it? Biology?

You never listen to a bloody word I say, do you? English. E-N-G-LISH.

What the hell's an English teacher doing telling you to take your t-shirt off?

He's a paedo.

He can't be a paedo, for chrissake. He wouldn't be working in a school.

Yeah, right.

I'm warning you, son. I want a straight answer this time. Why did he tell you to take your t-shirt off?

The twat said it was offensive.

Where is it?

In my bag.

Let me see it.

The boy went into his school bag, pulled out a black t-shirt and threw it at Crawford. Crawford held the t-shirt up in front of him. Emblazoned across the front in bright red letters were the words 'BAW BAGS.'

Where did you get this?

Off the internet.

What the hell were you doing wearing it to school?

It's the same colours as the uniform, isn't it?

That's not the point. You shouldn't have been wearing it to school.

Trust you to take his side. It's not bloody fair.

Life isn't fair, son. And you're going to find out the hard way.

I could report him. In fact, I'm gonna report the bastard. See how he likes that.

The boy marched out of the kitchen, into the living room. He threw himself on the settee, put his feet up on the coffee table and flicked through the channels on the television.

Put that bloody thing off, Crawford said, grabbing the remote from the boy's hand. I'm not finished with you, yet. How long have they suspended you for?

The boy folded his arms on his chest and shrugged his shoulders.

I asked you a question.

Gimme a break.

I'll give you a good kick in the arse!

There was a thump on the ceiling. Keep the noise down, the mother-in-law shouted, can't get a minute's peace in this place.

Crawford took a deep breath. How long have they suspended you for?

I don't fucking know. There's a letter in my bag. Read that.

Go and get it.

You get it.

Get your backside off that couch and bring me the letter!

The boy stood up and kicked the coffee table. He came back with the bag and threw it at Crawford. Crawford rifled through it and found the letter crumpled at the bottom of the bag, covered in ink leaked from a burst pen.

Dear Parent/Guardian

It is with regret that I have to inform you that we have suspended Atholl Down from school. I would like to discuss the matter with you before he is allowed back in school. He will definitely not be allowed in class until I have spoken to you in person. Could you please report to my office with Atholl Down at 10am tomorrow morning.

Yours faithfully

B Black

What the hell's this? An English teacher who can't spell 'definitely'? That's a bloody disgrace.

It's not from the English teacher. It's from the Guidance teacher.

Guidance is it? He's the one in need of guidance by the looks of things.

It's a woman and she's a fucking bitch.

Enough! Get upstairs to your room this minute. And you can stay there until I take you back to school tomorrow morning.

Crawford's head twitched as the boy slammed the living room door shut and fucking arseholed his way up the stairs. It didn't matter how many times Crawford pulled him up about his behaviour, the boy never paid a blind bit of notice. Hellbent on doing what he bloody well liked.



You Won't Know the One with the Gun

by JoAnne McKay

Murder victims make good reading between
the lines: strangled (lovely girl) (easy lay);
beaten to death (life and soul) (closet gay);
shot in the head (some businessman) (unclean).

We get the pictures, family ferried
to scene, moving tears, cellophaned flowers
dissolving in twenty-four news hours
to brown sludge memory, council buried.

Make a list of murdered people, then write
your list of murderers. Salutary
neglect of who do you suffer with too?

Next noon, go stand beneath the harshest light
look at your hands, limbs, torso, head and see
each lost body, sole exact, same as you.

Point Me at the Sky

by Kevin Scott

The room they've locked me in has only one wall. The wall is metallic and circles the room, making me feel as though I'm in a tin can. Dents in the metal distort the reflection from the dim lights overhead, turning the wall into a succession of seamless carnival mirrors. A door provides the only indication that the wall has a beginning and an end. I sit on a chair at a desk in the middle of the room, opposite a grey man who has squeezed himself into a grey suit. He looks like he could be made of stone, nothing more than a relic. A Grelic. I'm patient only because he is testing my patience.

'Are you listening to me, Luke? You better start taking this seriously.' His face is angrier than his tone.

'Don't criticise what you don't understand,' I say, quoting Bob Dylan. Grelic stands up, kicking his chair backwards onto the floor. I don't flinch.

'You think quoting folk lyrics is going to get you out of this?' He answers his own question by shaking his head. He reminds me of a dog that used to live in the village. It was put down last year for biting a kid in my class. When he places his palms on the desk I notice how huge and hairy his hands are.

'Now, you are going to tell me how you do it,' he says, deliberating over every word as if it's some sort of mind trick. He slams his fist on the table and my plastic cup of water jumps. I sniff, and run a stained thumb around the rim of the cup to steady it. He swipes it off the desk and we both watch it rebound off the tin wall. The light reflecting the water as it runs down the wall reminds me of the aurora borealis.

He grabs my hands and studies the mess of colour that decorates my thumbs, while I study his grey suit, wondering what he really thinks of me; whether he's afraid or enthralled by what he thinks I can do. He bends my thumbs back and I cry out.

'Tell me,' he says leaning in as coffee breath rushes out between his yellow teeth. I tell him nothing.

He lets go of my thumbs. They disappear into the protection of my quickly folded arms. He disappears almost as quick, the door clicking gently into place behind him. At first I'm thankful for the silence, but as time passes and my throat becomes

dry I grow bored. I circle the room, running my hand along the cold metal wall, first clockwise, then in reverse. I count 20 revolutions of the room then sit back down, aware that I'll have to tell him, but determined to do so on my terms.

When he returns with two cups of water, I am ready.

'Take a seat,' I say, opening a hand like a welcoming host.

The corners of his mouth suggest a smile before he manufactures a frown. While I wait for him, I drum my injured thumbs on the table. He eyes them like a hungry dog as he sits down. I take a long slow sip of water then begin to tell him how I am able to paint clouds.

When I was younger I would stare at the clouds for hours, amazed by their existence as they swept across the sky. I lay in the garden, tiny, my exposed skin tickled by the grass, watching them like movies as their stories unfolded at the mercy of the wind.

My dad bought me my first cloud atlas when I was twelve, presumably in the hope that it would answer my incessant questions on the subject. That's how I learned about the three families of clouds, the twenty-seven species and sub-species and what they can tell you about the weather.

I would bore friends and become distracted from the games we played as my eyes drifted skyward. Interest became obsession on my fourteenth birthday when my parents bought me a trampoline. Soon its coiled springs were blasting me closer to the clouds, just a foot or two at first, then three, four, five; until one day it all changed. The sky was brimming with nimbostratus, those clouds that look like a ruffled duvet stretching out in every direction. When I jumped my body felt lighter, as if I was falling, but in the wrong direction. As I kicked down I rose higher and was soon level with the weather-beaten slates on the roof. Then shock surged through me and I sank. When my feet hit the ground I felt as though the whole village could hear my heart pounding. It was two hours before curiosity coaxed me back onto the trampoline.

Soon I could jump beyond the chimney, purely because I believed I could. The trampoline was discarded like bicycle stabilisers and in addition to these huge leaps I learned to move diagonally and horizontal. I called it 'air swimming'. Within a year I had freedom of movement and could even hover. I wouldn't say that I'd learned to fly; it was just that I'd taken on gravity and won.

That's not to say it was easy. Most people watch Superman and think flying is effortless soaring. I wish. It's like running through syrup. Falling isn't any easier.

That's like sprinting downhill. Believe me, I'm no superman. If I was, I wouldn't get so cold up there.

The view was worth every ache. Far above us, on the verge of space, random weaves of thin and wispy cirrus formations cascade across the sky until the setting sun glowing behind them makes it difficult to argue against the existence of God. Far below this, thick rippled stratocumulus commandeer the sky with little threat. These are the clouds that a plane tears through on its descent, suddenly making its passengers aware of how fast they're moving as the soapy suds flash by them. Yet from the ground, when gaps emerge and allow rays of sun to shine like spotlights, they appear to give a glimpse of the heavens. Then there are those flat, miserable rain clouds, from the morning haze of the altostratus that the sun toils to burn through, to the lower, heavier nimbostratus that loom featureless across the horizon, drenching the world beneath them; and the stratus that loiter so low they're practically fog.

I immersed myself in them all, but cumulus clouds – those vast puffs of white cotton that drift across blue skies, changing shape as they do so – are the clouds I prayed for. It was a cumulus blushed by the halo of the rising sun that first gave me the idea to paint them.

I stole a can of red spray-paint from the car repair shop and absconded into the sky. Soon a small puffy white ball that had drifted from the pack was turned into something resembling candyfloss. After I'd landed and lay on the grass watching it drift into extinction, I knew my purpose.

Every day I awoke I would run to the window, and if cumulus clouds adorned the sky I would waste no time in filling my backpack with cans, wrapping up warm and soaring towards the vast armies of cotton wool that shifted and slid with the wind. I would twist and weave my body through the air, spraying them until they were transformed into treetops and tennis balls, pensioner's perms and golden nuggets.

I only returned when exhaustion overtook elation, and as my pulse steadied I would look up in wonder at the rainbow drops I'd created, like a sand sculptor watching the incoming tide, while the wind took my work with it, forming new shapes and colours as clouds merged, then evaporated or grew large enough to swallow up anything I'd thrown at them.

Over the months crowds began to gather and gawp, their gossip drawing in others from surrounding villages. They stood with their cameras pointed at the sky, capturing moments that had never been made to last.

I didn't want the attention so had to land further from home and plot untraceable trails from the woods to my back door. I would stumble home with heavy limbs, doubled over and barely able to walk in a straight line, but I always made it back to my room. Until yesterday, that is.

Silence follows my confession. I look at Grelic's warped reflection in the tin wall and wait for him to speak. He leans back and rests his left elbow on the chair.

'You have a very rare gift Luke and it's being wasted on party tricks,' he says. It's like I've sedated him when he should be at the pinnacle of his outrage. 'It's time you became aware of a few things.'

He stands up, even smiles at me, and takes six broad strides to the door. It opens from the outside then thuds closed. I turn to my reflection for a response. It looks like a silver puddle. What does he mean, wasting it? Gifts should be harnessed by the beholder, not suppressed by the observer. By the time he comes back my cup is empty.

'I'm thirsty. Could I have some water?' I say, but he sits down, placing an inch-thick paper folder between us. His tie has been straightened.

He looks me in the eye and clasps his hand together.

'You've got two options Luke – you can be taken to a holding cell where you can spend the day reading this.' He taps a little tune on the folder. 'Inside here are details of our recruits; everything you need to know about people like you, who they are and what they do.'

People like me? He's bluffing. If there was someone else like me I'd have seen his work. There can't be.

'What's my other option?'

He draws in breath through the gap in his yellow front teeth. 'You can be taken to the same cell and you can sit and stare at the folder, allowing romantic notions to fog your thinking. Either way, tomorrow morning you'll be asked to make a decision. You'll be better placed to make it if you know why you're being asked to.'

He stands again, this time beckoning me to come with him.

Outside the room is a corridor shaped like a long hexagonal tube. There are identical doors cut into it every ten yards or so, and it continues until it disappears into a point. The corridor is bright, lit naturally by a glass ceiling ten feet above me that runs its entire length. I want that folder.

Grelic walks briskly and I struggle to keep up. He stops at the fifteenth door on the right and offers me the folder.

‘We’re putting our trust in you Luke.’

I grab the folder and the opportunity it provides me with. I smile then squat, tensing my hamstrings and calves. There’s just time to see the realisation fall over Grelic’s face before I jump. I lift the folder above my head for protection but pain still shoots through my arms as the glass ceiling smashes, raining fragments down on my former captor. I grip the folder tightly and quickly climb against a cutting morning wind. The sky is gloomy, compliantly coated in nimbostratus that contain enough rain to drown the village. They’ll be coming for me, but I’ll be home before they’ve got their engines started.

I open the back door and head for the kitchen where Mum is abandoning a cup of tea.

‘What have you done?’ she says, glaring at me with bloodshot eyes and slapping me around the back of the head as if I’ve been caught stealing sweets. ‘They wouldn’t let me see you.’

‘It’s fine Mum, honest.’ I try to hug her but she pushes me back.

‘Why did they let you go? What did they say?’

The half-eaten dinner from the previous night is lying on the kitchen table exactly as it was when the doorbell rang and Grelic and his pals took me away.

‘Where’s Dad?’ I say.

‘He had to go to work,’ she says. ‘You’ve not brought this village to a standstill just yet.’

‘I have to go back out.’

‘Now why would you say such a thing? The sky’s thunderous. There’s nothing there for you to paint.’

‘I think my cloud phase has finished, Mum.’

‘Don’t you understand Luke. It’s over. Sit down, tell me what they said, why they let you go.’

‘They didn’t, okay. Which is why I have to go back out.’

‘Oh Luke, what have you done.’

‘I’m sorry Mum, but this is how it has to be now. It’s their fault.’

‘It’s always someone’s fault.’

She leaves her words hanging, disappointment dripping from every syllable. I

seize the silence and run from the room.

In my bedroom I lift the floorboard at the foot of my bed, and sigh with relief when I see my untouched stash. I empty it of spray-paint cans and place the folder Grelic gave me inside, then replace the board. I cram both my backpacks with cans then strap them to my back and chest. Gripping the last two cans I run down the stairs two at a time and out into the back garden. Through the kitchen window I glimpse my mum's head. She's leaning against the sink, looking anywhere but out here. I blow her a kiss and jump.

The air is quiet as I climb, and I can sense thunder lurking above in a cumulonimbus that cuts through the lower nimbostratus. The cumulonimbus towers up to 60,000ft tall; intense, foreboding and channelling more energy than the bomb that fell on Hiroshima. I rise towards it, feeling the fog of the nimbostratus cloak me, the rattle of the cans breaking the silence as I shake them and ready my bruised thumbs.

Colour rains down in freak storm

A FREAK storm yesterday saw multi-coloured rain soak shocked villagers in Stonebridge.

Initial fears that the village had fallen victim to an acid rain shower have been rejected. A local teenage boy linked to the incident has been reported missing.

The phenomenon has puzzled weather boffins, who have been studying video footage of the storm since it appeared on the internet last night.

Police were inundated by calls from concerned locals who believed acid rain to be falling, however early tests indicate that paint may have been used to dye the rain.

Missing

The missing boy, 16 year-old Luke Benson, recently emerged as a suspect in the spate of cloud painting incidents that have made Stonebridge an unlikely tourist attraction. Police refused to comment on his alleged links to the rainbow-coloured rainstorm, but said they were working with scientists to

discover if crime or nature was responsible for the storm.

Stunned locals began a clean up operation this morning after homes, gardens and streets were left in swathes of colours.

Local businessman Joseph Sinclair said: "I've never seen anything like it. There was a crack of thunder and seconds later multi-coloured raindrops were falling. It was incredible."

Child's Painting

Local MP Matthew Gray said: "When coloured clouds began to appear a few years ago it really put Stonebridge on the map, but this is too much. This rain may have looked spectacular, but it's caused thousands of pounds worth of damage. The streets look like a child's painting. God knows how they did it. I just hope it was a one off."

Meanwhile the search for Benson continued this morning. His parents have asked for privacy but urged their son to return home.

What Magic Is

by Colin Boyd

Magic is when you break an egg on the edge of the pan and fry it with a single dip and flick of your wrist.

It's when you cut the ribbon with garden shears in front of your guests

because you forgot the scissors.

Magic is breathing with that part of yourself that lives in a messy bedroom full of the wreckage of ambition

so that now and again you just-somehow-just-about manage to do something that took no effort

yet leaves nothing undone.

It is remembering yourself in time to convince her you are not a love struck fool

and leave her looking out for you

wondering if you are.

Nativity

by Jo Lennie

Edith was day-dreaming about chips when she first saw the pram.

It had stopped snowing. Small miracles, thought Edith, wishing she'd worn Ray's old wellies and a woolly hat. According to Kirsty whatshername on the radio that morning, there was only one shopping day left. Which meant that at four o'clock on Christmas Eve, Edith was rapidly running out of time to buy Ray his bottle of whisky. Merry bloody Christmas, indeed. Thankfully the office had closed early after the annual Festive mince-pie-and-only-one-glass-of-wine ordeal. At least they hadn't tried the mistletoe game again. She'd had a few bruises after that last year.

The town centre was a shuffling, noisy mass of last-minute shoppers and after-work drinkers, huddled round cigarettes. She didn't want to miss the shops but the icy layer of snow on the Main Street was slowing her down. She'd already had a fall, just a small one mind, and her knee was smarting. There was probably a hole in her tights and she hoped her knee wasn't bleeding, but she couldn't bend down to check. Hadn't looked at her knees in years. She was trying to forget about yet another shift spent processing benefit claims for folk who, Edith knew fine well, had no intention of ever finding a job. Especially at Christmas, for God's sake. Lazy sods. That's what Ray called them. Still they kept *her* in a job, so she shouldn't really complain.

A discordant wailing of carols, from a group of school children outside the concrete monstrosity attempting to pass itself off as a church, reminded Edith she still needed to buy the turkey roll. Dammit. She'd pop into the wee Asian shop beside the flats. It stayed open all night, even at Christmas. Get the turkey and the whisky for Ray. She wondered if she should ask Santa for a pair of those special snow shoes. The ones with the attachable grips she'd seen advertised in her TV magazine. They'd stop all this sliding.

Edith was starving. She was hungry most of the time but tonight she could eat a horse. Not literally of course, that would be revolting although they did eat horse in some countries. Just not in Scotland. She fantasised about oven chips, a fried egg followed by a steam pudding. Or a baked potato? That would be the healthy option, aye she knew that much, but she was damned if she was going to spend Christmas Eve in front of the television with a baked potato. And Ray wouldn't touch any food

that had a skin. Oven chips it was then, she thought. And a brandy, or two.

Her shoe slid through a mound of something soft. 'Oh for the love of God,' she muttered, peering at the brown mess. 'Filthy bloody dogs.' Her good shoes as well, the ones with the leather uppers. 'Shit.'

And then she saw it. In the charity shop. She wasn't really sure why she'd looked. She had no desire to rummage through other people's discarded slacks and tea-stained books, but the waving Santa and the Nativity baby Jesus in the window seemed to be pointing at her. The biggest pram she had ever seen was revolving unsteadily, on a tinsel-covered podium at the back of the window display. It rotated alongside a tired looking golf bag and a faceless, limbless mannequin. Round and round it went. Blue and white, majestic like an ocean liner with an elegant hood, shiny wheels and a shopping rack. A shopping rack, fancy that. Edith forgot about her shoe and pressed her face against the shop window, peering through grimy fingerprints smeared on the glass. She inhaled, scrunching her face up like a gargoyle. She could almost smell baby lotion on newborn skin; almost touch the nautical-themed upholstery, plastic covered mattress and the matching nappy bag. She had time to pop in, if she dared. Just for a look.

'Just browsing thank you very much.'

And Ray would never need to know.

An elderly female assistant in a Santa hat was bent double pushing a vacuum cleaner across the shop floor, which prompted Edith to rub her offending shoe on the WELCOME doormat.

'Closing in ten minutes, dear. Feel free to have a look around.' The old lady gasped, as though taking her final breath, and retreated behind the counter, perching on the stool like a tiny, geriatric Christmas budgie. Edith navigated between display racks of ladies' separates and gents' suits until she found the podium. The pram turned slowly, creaking and wobbling to the piped strains of 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen', like an abandoned fairground ride. She felt quite dizzy. She didn't think she'd ever seen such a massive pram. This was the Rolls Royce of baby carriers. A professional pram for a real mother. A mother, immaculately turned out, who smiled as she pushed her golden-haired cherubs around the park. A mother who pureed parsnips before breakfast, baked her own bread and kept a spotless house. A house. She would definitely live in a house. With a garden. Edith let out an involuntary moan

of appreciation, reaching up to caress the chassis as it passed her by on its infinite passage.

‘It’s a beauty isn’t it?’ The aged assistant was applying make-up at the till, scrutinizing her wrinkled, rouged reflection in a child’s Barbie doll mirror. ‘Just came in yesterday. From one of they big houses on the estate. Silver Cross, you know. Is it a Christmas gift you’re after? For a new grandchild perhaps?’

She pouted her thin, glossed lips at the mirror.

‘No,’ said Edith, fumbling in her nylon tote carrier. ‘It’s for me.’

‘Jesus Christ!’ The lipstick bounced onto the till and fell to the floor. ‘A wee miracle baby? You should have said. How lovely, dear.’

‘Aye. A bloody miracle,’ said Edith. ‘How much?’

‘Fifty pounds, dear. A Christmas bargain, just for you.’ Chewing vigorously, the assistant revealed her dentures momentarily before sucking them back into her ruminating rouged mouth. ‘Well dear, are you taking it? We’re closing now, you know.’

Edith tried to focus on the coins and notes in her purse. Her hands shook as she counted them. This was her Christmas money, money for Ray’s whisky and the turkey roll. Every year. The same. Whisky and turkey roll. Maybe a trifle. Ray didn’t bother getting up until lunchtime on Christmas Day. Every year.

‘No point’ he’d say. ‘Fuck all to do Edith. Bring me a whisky and a sausage roll, if you’ve got one. Call me when the Queen’s Speech is on.’ Every year she did a wee spread just in case a neighbour popped by. Sausage rolls, Scotch eggs and meat paste sandwiches. But no one ever came. She’d open the present from her sister’s family, usually a scarf and a box of Ferrero Rocher. She’d eat the chocolates and then go for a walk around the town. Maybe go to church. Say a prayer. There was little chance of a gift from Ray. A silky baby doll or a bottle of Elizabeth Arden. She’d given hints, even written him a list once. 1999 that was. Just before the millennium.

Little chance of a gift from Ray, little chance of a cup of tea.

‘I’ll take it.’

Together they pulled the pram off the podium. It was heavier than it looked. The assistant wheezed.

‘Smashing suspension, dear. You’ll have no bother pushing it up they steep hills. That’ll be fifty pounds.’

Edith handed over the money, to hell with the turkey roll, and she grasped the

pram's handle, running her fingers over the moulded plastic. It felt warm, comfortable. As if her hands were meant to be there. Like a nanny, she thought.

'Was it a surprise dear? The baby? When's it due?'

Edith smiled and stroked the pram hood, her heart racing. She tucked her handbag under the gingham quilt and steered past displays of books and Christmas cards, out into the street, letting the shop door slam behind her.

The snow had started again, soft white flakes falling like handfuls of candy floss. She guided the pram down the hill towards the bright lights of the precinct. She couldn't push or the pram would gather speed, dragging her along with it. She took tiny steps, like her mother with the zimmer, trying not to slip. Her hands gripped the handle so tightly she could feel her good gold solitaire piercing her palm.

'D'you need a hand wi' that, hen?' An inflatable reindeer came lurching towards her accompanied by a man in a stained suit, tinsel round his neck, wearing a disintegrating paper hat. She smiled and shook her head. 'Well - watch that wean doesn'y fly out. There'll be one hell of a mess at the bottom of the hill if you slip.'

Her feet were wet through, her tights stuck to her legs and she had lumps of snow on her shoulders. A small snow drift was gathering on the pram. She stopped and removed her shoes, throwing them into the luggage rack. Her feet were cold, painfully cold but at least she wasn't sliding. She started to run, slowly at first but then gaining speed. She could hear the gentle hum of the wheels, feel the undulation of the iced pavement beneath her feet and the cold air slapping her face. If only Ray could see her. Running down the Main Street in her stocking feet with a pram. Oh, what would the neighbours say?

As she steered the pram up the path she could see lights on in the flat, the outline of the TV in the window. The ground floor was Ray's idea. He said it would be handy when they got older. In case they couldn't make the stairs. Morbid, that's what it was. Living your life from an armchair, just waiting for the end. The close smelt of wet dog. Bloody dogs. Woman up the stairs had a big black one. She had no idea what it was but it looked like it would eat you for breakfast.

'I'm home.' She pushed the pram into the warmth of the hallway, taking off her cagoule and sodden tights and warming her feet on the radiator. She couldn't feel her toes. God, what if she had frostbite? Or hypothermia? She heard the creak of the

couch in the front room.

‘Bout time too, Edith. Where have you been? I was getting worr... What the hell is that?’ Ray tucked his black Status Quo T-shirt into his track suit bottoms as he inspected the pram.

‘It’s a pram, Ray. A Silver Cross. Isn’t it lovely?’

‘Aye, very good, very good - but who’s it for, Edith? We can’t keep it here. I can’t even get to the front door.’ Ray stood against the wall and breathed in to demonstrate.

‘It’s for me Ray. For us. My Christmas present.’

‘Wha...is there something I’m missing here? Oh yes – a baby. We don’t have one, Edith. Oh come on. No. Don’t tell me some bloke at work’s got you in the family way.’ Ray snorted. ‘That would be a laugh wouldn’t it!’

‘Would it, Ray. Would it be a bloody laugh?’

‘Well you’re a bit old aren’t you? I mean you, in that benefits office, having it away with a YTS trainee. That would be funny.’

‘They don’t do YTS anymore, Ray. And why would it be so funny?’

‘Oh God’ said Ray, heading for the kitchen. ‘Bloody hell, Edith. Why do we need a pram?’ He opened a can of beer, froth gathering on his grey stubble as he gulped it down in one.

‘It’s never too late, Ray. We could try. I know I’m getting on, but it would still be possible. Wouldn’t it? There are lots of older parents these days. It’s not that strange any more. You read about it all the time in the papers.’

Ray was staring at her, shaking his head.

‘You have got to be kidding, Edith. Surely this is some kind of joke. Where’s the hidden camera? You’ll be drawing your pension before you get maternity pay. We could be grandparents. We should be grandparents.’ He crushed the can in his hand and threw it into the sink. ‘We had our chance, Edith. Years ago. For God’s sake woman, leave it alone.’

‘But don’t you see Ray, this is what we need. Another chance at having a life. Look at us - living for the next day. Living for the turkey roll, cans of beer, the daily newspaper and a walk around town.’

‘Well what else is there, Edith? That’s what life’s all about.’

‘But other folk have done it. There are clinics, and test tubes and IVF...women having babies well into their fifties, or we could adopt. Fostering...’

‘Stop it, woman.’ Ray banged the table with his fist. ‘Enough. This has gone too far.’

Edith went back out to the hall. The pram’s quilt and nappy bag were wet through. She removed the covers and hung them over the radiator. She’d polish the bodywork and oil the wheels in the morning and maybe give the inside the once-over with the vacuum.

‘We live in a one bedroom flat, Edith,’ Ray was shouting now. ‘Where the bloody hell would a child sleep?’

‘In the pram, Ray. That’s why I bought the pram.’

Ray’s face was red, redder than she’d seen it in a long time.

‘Babies grow up, Edith. We don’t have room, we don’t have the money. We had our chance twenty years ago and we lost it. Dead, Edith. The baby died.’

Ray grabbed his leather coat from the stand, pushing past Edith to get to the front door. He muttered something she couldn’t quite hear and slammed the door behind him. One of her Pierrot prints fell off the wall.

The dog was barking in the flat upstairs. Edith stood for a moment, staring at the door, waiting for it to open. Waiting for Ray to come back and tell her that everything was going to be okay. She could hear the Eastenders theme tune through the wall. Must be seven. The bedroom was cold and dimly lit, they didn’t have a heater in that room, didn’t seem worth it. All we do is sleep in here, Ray said. She knelt at the wardrobe. The bottom drawer was jammed, stiff with years of neglect, and she had to tug the brass handle with two hands before the drawer shot out, toppling her backwards, like a skittle.

They were still there. In the darkness. Nestled in a Bayne and Duckett shoebox, wrapped in crumpled tissue paper. A pair of tiny white mittens, pressed together in eternal prayer. Beside the mittens lay a white crocheted baby bonnet with silky ribbons tied in a bow and a brown teddy bear, staring out at her with black button eyes. She picked up the mittens and held them against her cheek, breathing in soft wool, a faint odour of dust and mothballs. A sob came from somewhere, a guttural, primal cry. Warm tears were running down her face and she was moaning. She closed her eyes. Dear God, help me she thought. She remembered. Remembered Ray’s face as the nurse told them. Remembered her mother telling her that it was God’s way. Remembered.

‘These things happen,’ Ray had said over and over again. It was her fault. She knew it was. She was responsible. It must have been something she’d done. Too much coffee, or tea or cake or chips or not enough exercise or watching too much television. Or maybe she didn’t want it enough. They hadn’t planned it. It just sort of happened. All these years, all those wretched, unspoken memories stuffed into the shoebox. She sat on the bed, gathering the teddy bear into her hands, cradling its limp, furry body as she pulled back the floral duvet and curled herself up like a newborn.

‘D’you fancy a chip?’

She woke, instinctively pulling the duvet high around her neck. Edith wasn’t sure how long she’d been sleeping. She squinted in the gloom.

‘Who’s there? Is that you, Ray?’ She could make out the shape of a bobble hat and what looked like a long robe. This must be a dream. She thought she could see Santa sitting at the end of the bed eating a bag of chips. She reached out, like a small child in a grotto, and grabbed at his hand to see if it was real, closing her fingers over his. The hand was cold and greasy from the chips, but she could feel the reassuring squeeze of his fingers.

‘I’m sorry, Ray. I just got carried away, just wanted...’

‘I know. It’s okay. I’m sorry too. I didn’t realise.’

He stroked the tiny teddy bear’s shiny fur.

‘I’ve forgotten the turkey roll, though, Ray. What will we do? We always...’

‘I thought we could go out for our Christmas dinner, Edith. Maybe a Chinese? Might be nice for a change and they do a smashing chicken chow mein. My treat. How’s about it?’

‘And chips, Ray. Chinese chips with curry sauce?’

‘Aye, Edith. Why not. Chips it is.’

The Quick View

with Jen Hadfield



Why do you write?

To remember. To make myself at home in the present tense. To build a bivouac of words.

What are you working on at the moment?

Private stuff ;) A sense of privacy is pretty crucial to my writing. But I'm also working with the Shetland Library as one of Creative Scotland's Readers in Residence at the moment which is exactly the reverse: it's all about other people and the role reading plays in their lives: I'm loving it. And I'm slowly producing an installation of 100+ porcelain limpets for the Pier Store at the Shetland Museum, working title 'The Colony' or 'The Dominant Species' ... something like that.

What is your writing routine (if you have one)?

On writing days I try to avoid entering a social state. I write in pyjamas, and drink tea until my teeth chatter. I start with reading, and chat to myself (and whoever I'm reading) on sheets of scrap paper as I go. I work like that until I get too hungry. I try not to get waylaid with admin or housework on those days, and I try not to speak to anyone until I'm done.

Who is your favourite writer?

I'm fickle. No 'favourite'. Instead, a writer will become intensely important to me for a spell of time. At the moment it's Anne Carson.

What book do you wish you'd written?

That would be like wishing I was somebody else. No point in articulating someone else's reality.

What book / books are next to your bed?

I don't read in bed much. It's hard for me to separate reading and work, so it's often

kid's stuff: recently Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*.

Best piece of writerly advice you care to share?

Tom Leonard 'all livin language is sacred' (from *Ghostie Men*). Related to that, I ask myself if the writing is living language. I read the poems out loud. Listen for the bits that embarrass me or are just too hard to pronounce. Notice if I'm running out of breath. For me a poem has to work as spoken language (including concrete poems to some extent). I think of a poem as a conversation in which sense is made in collaboration with the reader. Lecture in a poem, and there's nothing to draw the reader in. Write too coded a poem, and you'll wall your reader out.

Thank you Jen.

*If there's a writer you would like to see featured in a future 'Quick View' then send us your suggestion at fromglasgowtosaturn@glasgow.ac.uk (just remember that writers featured in *The Quick View* must have an association of some kind with Glasgow University).*

Author Biographies

Colin Boyd is currently studying computer science and electronics at the University of Glasgow. He likes reading classics, cycling, cooking and cats, and writes poems for catharsis and exploration, which hopefully have some literary merit.

Laura Brown graduated from Glasgow in 2005 with an M.A.(Hons) in English Literature and has also been studying Creative Writing on the Cert HE through DACE (Glasgow University's Department of Adult and Continuing Education) in recent years. Laura studies Poetry on the new MLitt in Creative Writing at Stirling Uni but spends most days finger painting and doing jigsaws with her three year old daughter. When she is not writing stuff to go in books Laura makes handmade notebooks that she sells online and at craft fairs. Every room in Laura's house is pink.

Gill Davies is a freelance multimedia producer. She has written for BBC Radio 4, the BBC website, The Herald newspaper and blogs for travel site www.spottedbylocals.com. She received a Certificate in Creative Writing from Glasgow University's Department of Adult and Continuing Education and is currently studying Russian.

David Greaves is a 21-year-old student on the Creative Writing MLitt at the University of Glasgow. He has had work published alongside Luke Kennard and George Ttoouli in the *New Victoria* collection, and in the *Verge 2011* fiction anthology. His prose-poetry pamphlet, *Hinged*, was released by the New Fire Tree Press in 2011. He is originally from the North but his accent needs work.

Jen Hadfield is a Creative Writing MLitt of University of Glasgow, where she studied under Tom Leonard. A recipient of an Eric Gregory award in 2003, Jen has two full collections with Bloodaxe Books, *Almanacs* (2005) and *Nigh-No-Place* (2008). The latter won the 2008 TS Eliot prize and made Jen the youngest ever recipient of this prestigious award. She lives in Shetland where she is currently working as one of Creative Scotland's Readers in Residence. She tutors widely, most recently for the Arvon Foundation.

Jo Lennie is a freelance arts publicist who lives with her family in South Lanarkshire. Originally from Edinburgh, she arrived in Glasgow to study English Literature and Theatre Studies and never left. She was a performer for several years and wrote comedy material and lyrics for a stand-up comedy act. She has recently started to write again, late at night or when she should be working.

JoAnne McKay JoAnne McKay was born to a slaughtering family in Romford, Essex and subsequently joined the police. She now lives in a small Dumfriesshire village where she combines motherhood, work and a Masters degree with mixed success. Her second pamphlet, *Venti*, was runner-up in the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award 2011.

Aya Musbahi is a twenty-two year old final year medical student at University of Glasgow. She has previously published several of her poems and enjoys writing on the themes of identity, truth, hate, human nature and justice. Her influences include Arabic poetry such as Darwish, Al-Bayati and modern poets such as Selima Hill.

Kevin Scott is a journalist trying not to let the fiction of his imagination get confused with the facts required in his day job. He is currently studying an MLitt in Creative Writing at University of Glasgow.

Thank you for reading