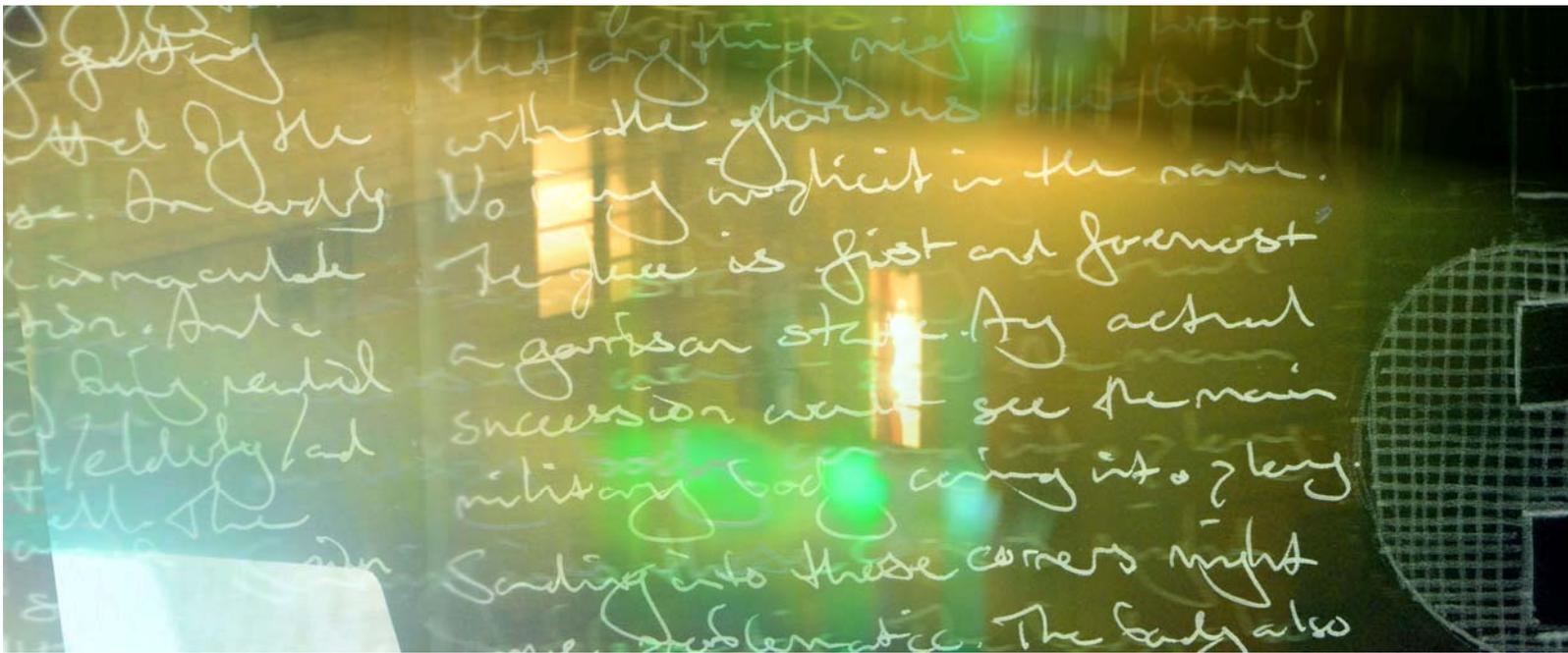


# From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



Issue 17

November 2010

<http://glasgowtosaturn.com>

Issue 17 of *From Glasgow to Saturn* was first published on November 5th, 2010. This edition published on November 10th, 2010.

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## A Word from the Editors

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to launch Issue 17 of *From Glasgow to Saturn*, the online literary journal of the University of Glasgow. It is particularly fitting that the re-launch of the magazine coincides with the anniversary celebrations of fifteen years of Creative Writing at Glasgow. The editors are all students, currently in our second year of an MLitt, and are honoured to be involved.

*From Glasgow to Saturn* is of course named after the collection of poetry by the late Edwin Morgan. We felt that in the year of his passing, it would be appropriate to revitalise the magazine and provide a platform for emerging writers to showcase their talents.

We have been delighted with the response to our request for submissions and are presenting the best of that work from Glasgow University students, past and present. There are novel extracts, short stories and poems which we hope you will find as challenging and involved as we do.

Look out for our next issue, which promises to be as wide-ranging and varied, and will be available on December 5th.

Happy reading from your editors,

Alan Gillespie, Nick Boreham and Sheila Millar

# Wasp in a Wine Glass

## by Alan Bissett

Yes, madam?

Glassay white wine, please.

Of course, madam.

That's £3.70.

Whoof. No shy are yese?

Ha ha, I don't set the prices.

Awright if I sit in yer beer gairden?

Nice n sunny, know.

Certainly, madam, that's what it's there for.

Even though I've got a glessay wine but?

What's that, madam?

I'm sayin.

I'm gon intay yer beer gairden.

But I've got a glessay wine.

No a beer.

Ha ha.

Good one, madam.

Snice oot here.

...just that we've been waitin  
that long for the sun, know...

Mm.

Oof. Naw. Aw naw.

Haw, scuse me, son.  
Can I get another wine?

So soon, madam?  
Someone needed a drink!

Naw, there's a wasp in ma wine.

Well, don't tell everyone, madam.  
They'll all want one!

Ha ha.

Naw, there is but.

Just flew in the noo.

Ooh. Ah.  
Look at it there, splashing about.  
Eech.

...their legs, you see...  
...don't like their legs...

Naebody dis, son.

Can I get a replacement glass, please?

Sure, no problem.

There you go.

Well...

Yes, madam?

You wantay pour some wine intay it?

Oh, I see. Of course.

There.

Thanks.

That'll be £3.70 please.

Aw. Aw I didnay mean...

Didn't mean what, madam?

I thought ye'd mibbe...

Maybe...?

Well. I thought ye'd mibbe give me a replacement wan on the house.

Oh. Ah.

Well, you see...

Well, you see, *no*. Madam.

It's not really the house's fault  
that a wasp flew into your drink, is it?

Didnay even get a sippay it, but.

Yes, and that's a shame.

Right.

So...uh...

That's £3.70 please?

Right.

Thing is.

Thing is, right.

I don't really see how I should be peyin for it, son.

I mean, I'm no bein funny or nothin right, I ken it's no your fot.

But like the, em, the *incident* happened on your premises.

Does that no make youse liable?

'Incident.' Hm. *Cough*.

Uh, not really, madam.

You see, we're not really responsible for the *insect* life, as such. You see?

Aye, but what's a wasp?

What's a wasp?

Okay, tell me.

What is a wasp?

It's a pest.

I mean, you wouldnay tolerate a *man* in yer beer gairden  
bein a pest, would yese?

Or a rose-seller.

I've seen yese chase them rose-sellers.

And they dinnay even sit in folk's drinks.

Ha ha, yes I see what you mean, madam.

Ha ha.

Not...

*quite*

the same though, is it...?

So if a rat had climbed ontay ma table oot there  
and shat in ma salad?

Would yese have refunded me that?

Yes.

Well.

Dae wasps no dae shits?

Madam, do you want the drink or not?

Aye, I want the drink.

Well, it'll be £3.70, please.

*She scoops the wasp out of her first glass  
and drops it in the second.*

*The she downs the contents of the first glass in one*

*and exits.*

*He tuts and watches her go,  
then puts his hand into the glass to pick out the wasp*

*and is stung.*

## Opening of a chapter entitled 'Pamela' from a new novel by Raymond Soltysek

Geoff trotted down the side of the gully, head down, watching for loose stones and jutting cobbles on the old mill track. He wasn't much of a runner – Pamela called his technique “joggling” – but it made him feel virtuous, and Morag his Well Man check up nurse had been quite strict about exercise: “You have to run faster to stand still in your forties, Mr Kaminski .”

Old Jack in the next cottage suggested the route: down the track, across the little stone bridge at the chimney, up the other side, follow the road downstream, cross back where the river goes underground, then ... he'd ended up not listening, relying on his old habit of following directions only partway and then winging it, because if you got that close you couldn't get lost, could you? Pamela hated that, pursing her lips and sulking out the windscreen when he got them hopelessly lost for three quarters of an hour five hundred yards from the dinner party they'd been invited to. But that wasn't an issue. Now.

The chimney was massively phallic, a tapering sixty footer, rising through and above the fuzz of the tree line. A veritable porn star of a lum. The rest of the mill – cotton? wool? – had disappeared to a height of eighteen inches of cannibalised stumps, its stone spread across the countryside, reconstituted as field boundaries and sheep pens and chartered accountants' second homes. Visiting places like this always made him think of the industry of people, the effort needed to build a stately home half way up a Scottish mountain or a medieval cathedral that peasants climbed to the clouds and died for. Christ, the sweat of it.

And the imagination. What obscure, fantastical part of the brain was involved in deciding to quarry stone a dozen miles away, bringing it here to construct a four storey building to house machines driven by a river at the bottom of a gorge that teased out the coats of some stupid shitty-arsed creatures that roamed the hillsides? It was brilliant, it was insane, it was absurd.

He dug in for the incline on the other side: if only he could truthfully tell himself he powered up it. It was gloomier here, the sun above the lip of the gully. The Neanderthal graveyard, Old Tom called it. The last outpost of a dying species. They settled on the sunny slopes, doing whatever it was they

did to pass the time of day, and buried their dead in the shadow of the facing slopes. Yorkshire: Land of the Caveman. And then they'd been displaced by toolmakers who knew how to adapt their environment and refused to adapt themselves, who imposed themselves on what they found. Displaced: another word for ethnically cleansed.

His father had been a builder, a maker. A welder. First man through the Clyde tunnel, first human hand to link Govan and Partick, though they'd wanted some good Scots lads for the photos in the newspapers. Then thirty years of building oil rigs in Nigg and nuclear power stations and the occasional hush hush job patching up Polaris submarines. His father was the only man Geoff knew who'd signed the Official Secrets Act.

They'd made a good choice there. A winner.

Forget all that building minds nonsense, teaching just didn't have that same manly feel. He wondered if his father ever understood what his son did for a living. He looked over his shoulder, down at the mill complex. There was something to show for a life. Even now, two hundred years later, things you could hold in your hand, things you could stand on, things you could lean against. An "I'll-miss-you" card was pinned to the cork board above the desk in his study, from an ex-pupil, the best compliment he'd ever had:

*Dear Mr. Kaminski*

*Thanks for everything.*

*Because of you, I still smell books before I buy them!*

Not much really. Pamela looked at him oddly when he brought it home, raised an eyebrow at this inordinate pride. But then, she delivered babies. No way to compete with that. He'd admitted, at relationship counselling, that her job always intimidated him. She came home, flushed with adrenalin, describing the success of a difficult delivery, her strong hands and arms and shoulders twisting, re-enacting, retelling the story. Hells' bells, the things she'd told him: the ripping and tearing from cunt to arse, the stitches, the sudden hot rush of unexpected blood, the twisted heads and limbs and strangling cords, the piss and shit, the fish supper women who had to have their rolls of fat heaved out of the way, the wanky husbands and dangerous consultants, the wasted druggies and their wasted druggie newborns. Christ, it sounded like an abattoir run by asylum inmates, and yet, by the end of their meal, by the end of the bottle of wine, her cupped hands

would once more cradle a perfect child and then she'd ask him how his day'd been. Wee Sandra sick in the corridor, a window broken in the Music Room over lunch, Douglas McKendrick downing three miniatures of Whyte and Mackays in the staff loo to get him through an afternoon of Spam Science with his Fourth Year class. Not much to compare. Pathetic, really.

"Why does that intimidate you?" the counsellor, Anne, asked.

"It's so... productive. Essential."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I dunno. Women are... I've always thought women were warriors. I mean... that pain. They *want* it, when they say "I want a baby" they're saying they *want* all that agony, all that blood and guts and gore. I'd be scared shitless, run a mile. And Pamela – she dives in up to her oxters and sorts it all out."

Anne tapped her green biro against her teeth. "It's not unusual for that to frighten men. It's natural. Women are just wired differently." She paused. "And if you and Pamela ever had a child, would you want to be in at the birth?"

He'd shrunk slightly in his seat. She'd wanted another child for some time, their child, it would bring them together. They'd stopped using contraception a year before with no result and he was sure she suspected he indoctrinated his sperm, trained them in the ways of the conscientious objector.

"I've no idea. I might not want to be, but I probably would."

Anne turned to Pamela. "How do you feel about that?"

"It would be up to Geoff. I wouldn't need him there."

She'd meant it kindly, meant it to take the pressure off him, as she always did, but he felt something expire in the middle of his chest. Perhaps that was part of the problem: there was no pressure to save it all, not until it was too late. He sounded the alarm bell when he'd run out of steam, when he already had nothing left to give, and she said, "Fine, let's not live together any more, let's give you space." He agreed as if it was what he really wanted and within three months they fell apart, their life dismantled with even less to show than a derelict mill.

He stopped for a rest: his calves were tightening, and he stretched them out. He felt cool doing that, hands thrust out against the tree, legs at odd stick-man angles, and it was the one thing, in exercise terms, he thought he could do right. Pamela was the fitness fanatic: spin, aerobics, running.



# Cold Meat

by Anneliese Mackintosh

*Rabbits' feet. Lambs' testicles. Calves' brains. Quails' tongues.*

I used to feed you in bed. Anything you asked for, as exotic as you liked. We'd lie between the sheets, whispering words with our mouths full; words like *kobe*, *caviar* and *fugu*. Because that's the way you liked it. Me, you and the meat.

You look delicious tonight by the way.

I take another swig of champagne, and wait for you do the same. In the past, you always drank champagne as if it was the first time you'd ever tasted it. I felt like the luckiest man alive as I watched you suck it between your teeth, swill it, caress it, then lick the droplets off your lips, one by one, and swallow.

So far tonight you've taken one solitary sip. You flick your long, blonde hair and begin to pout. 'Champagne has an aftertaste like spoons.' Then you put down your glass and insert a forkful of *foie gras* with a grimace. Was a time when you'd nibble goose liver off my bare chest.

This evening isn't going to be easy. We're at the most expensive restaurant in the city - five stars after its name and a celebrity chef: a star for every television series he's had. I've got us a table on the river terrace, because tonight's a special occasion: our two-year anniversary. Not a *real* anniversary, because even though we live together we're not married. And it's important I keep you in a good mood tonight, or we never will be.

'You'll love the main course,' I say, licking my lips. 'You haven't had fillet steak for weeks. I've asked for it blue.'

Last night for dinner we had beansprouts. I haven't said anything, but when the vegetables appeared the sex got worse. Legumes don't feed the libido. They make for one feeble, anaemic grope before lights-out and then wind until dawn.

Tonight I've ordered us lots of red meat. Just the way it used to be. You'll get that tingle from a lump of flesh, and remember what you're missing.

And then I'll ask you to marry me.

I look at my watch.

*Eighteen carat gold, snakeskin strap, hardened glass, water resistant, perpetual calendar and moon phases.*

Half past nine.

Suddenly you lean forwards. 'I need to tell you something.' It's the first time tonight you've actually addressed me. You're biting a manicured nail, which means you're about to say something important, and I don't think it's that you want to marry me. Instead, you're about to make an admission. But I already know all about it.

A nosy neighbour brought it to my attention. She stopped me on the way to work last week. Told me it wasn't fair that I was 'the only one in the street getting my bananas hand-delivered, every day,' and by 'such a charming, handsome young greengrocer at that.'

I never made it to work that day. I turned around and went straight back home. But I didn't go inside. Might not seem like the best way to have gone about things in retrospect, but I crouched behind a large foxglove bush in the front garden and spied on you.

Sure enough, mid-morning, the greengrocer arrived at our front door. Careful not to jump to conclusions, I took time off work and crouched there every day for a week. And, hiding behind the pungent foxgloves, I took careful mental notes on everything I saw.

*Monday – two large watermelons*

*Tuesday – six shiny cucumbers*

*Wednesday – a dozen red pomegranates*

*Thursday – one fleshy beetroot, bagged in its own juice*

The Friday was by far the worst. On the Friday, the greengrocer brought you the biggest, plumpest tomato I've ever seen. Made the lambs' testicles look like peanuts. He stood there, on the doorstep, offering it to you in both hands, as if it was his own beating heart. In horror, I watched you accept the tomato, cradle it, and usher the visitor inside. He stayed in there for a full hour. Some delivery.

Once he left, it took me ages to pluck up the courage to go into my own home. I let you take my coat without saying a word. Then I wiped the pollen off my shirt, and followed you to the kitchen. There, at the table, you dipped a

ladle into a giant tureen, and dished out enough tomato soup to last all week.

At first all I could think about was how good it would feel to rip the man to shreds. I had visions of serving you a human steak braised in truffle sauce. Sometimes, when I wasn't crouching in the garden, I lingered outside the grocer's shop, concocting plans. The most I managed to do, though, was buy a small bag of cherries - even got short-changed for that. Eventually I had a brainwave. I'd leave the greengrocer alone. Instead, I'd ask you to marry me.

As you know I'm one of the richest men in the city. That means I can buy you whatever you want, and lots of it. If it's not fancy meat you're after any more, I can get you fancy tomatoes. I've googled it: fancy tomatoes. Over 2,500 hits; 23 pages of results. I can buy you the tomatoes mentioned on every single page. I just need to get that ring on your finger first. And you're not to go spoiling it all by confessing.

But now you pull a finger away from your mouth, teeth glinting, matching the pearls around your neck.

*Cultured saltwater, double-stranded Akoya, 8 millimetres, pure white. Nice.*

'Something has happened to me lately,' you begin, looking wistfully out onto the water.

'Me too,' I say quickly. 'Now listen, I need to ask you something important.'

At that moment the waiter appears and puts two huge domes on the table. '*Madame...Monsieur.*' He pauses dramatically for a second. '*Et voilà!*' He hoists the silver domes. A nugget of fillet steak and two strands of saffron. '*Bon appétit!*' The waiter leaves.

'This person I've met,' you say before I get a chance to speak. 'He's changed the way I see the world.' You lift a hand to your ear, and for a moment I think it's because you're finally about to listen to me, but then I see you pull out an Akoya pearl earring and lay it on the table. 'He's shown me what really matters.' You take out the earring in the other ear. Pink holes are in your lobes where the studs have been. 'What matters,' you say, 'is *nature*. The fruits of the earth. None of this.' Now your fingers go to your throat. You twist off your necklace and place it on a napkin. 'He's shown me that money - and *riches* - don't matter at all.' Finally you take off your diamond-encrusted watch, and let it curl next to the pepper-grinder.

There's a loud belch under the terrace as a catfish plunges underwater, bubbling.

'I need to ask you something,' I say quietly. My hands suddenly feel very heavy. I try clasping them, but they're slightly more webbed than other people's and it makes me feel squeamish when the webbed parts touch. I unclasp them, and feel for the ring in my breast pocket. 'Do you - love me?'

Your big blue eyes gaze back at me, unblinking. 'Of course,' you say, and the Indian silk scarf falls from your shoulders. 'But what about you?' you ask, sitting there in a plain white dress. 'Do *you* love *me* without all this?' You gesture at the jewellery with your fork, laid out on the tablecloth like a street seller's display.

It's my turn to gaze back, unblinking. 'Of course,' I echo, as I think about how bare your neck looks. For the first time I notice two deep lines running around it. 'Of course...' I bite my lip. I'm really trying very hard to ask you to marry me. All I need to do is take the ring out of my pocket, get down on one knee and offer it up to you.

*Platinum band, one-carat princess-cut diamond, five by five by three millimetres.*

You won't accept it, of course, what with it being the diamond sort of carat, and not the vegetable one. But you'll say yes. Won't you.

There's blood oozing out of my steak, the colour of homemade tomato soup.

As if you've suddenly noticed the meat for the first time, you turn your attention from me to it and slowly cut into your steak. The knife drags across the plate with a screech. I sit in silence as you eat the whole lot. At last, you lick the droplets of red off your lips. The sparkle has gone from your eyes.

I suppose it has gone from mine too.

You pick up your champagne glass, fingertips going blue with cold, and drain the lot. On the final mouthful, you suck, swill and caress the fizz, and the glass clinks back on the table so loud I think it'll smash. Then you sniff, swallow, sigh, let your hands skim to your knees and grip the hem of your dress. You jerk your fingers back up your thigh, exposing bare, fleshy goosebumps, and with one more swift movement the dress is off, waving above your head like a white flag, and then fluttering to the ground.

This is the most expensive restaurant in the city, and, save for a thin

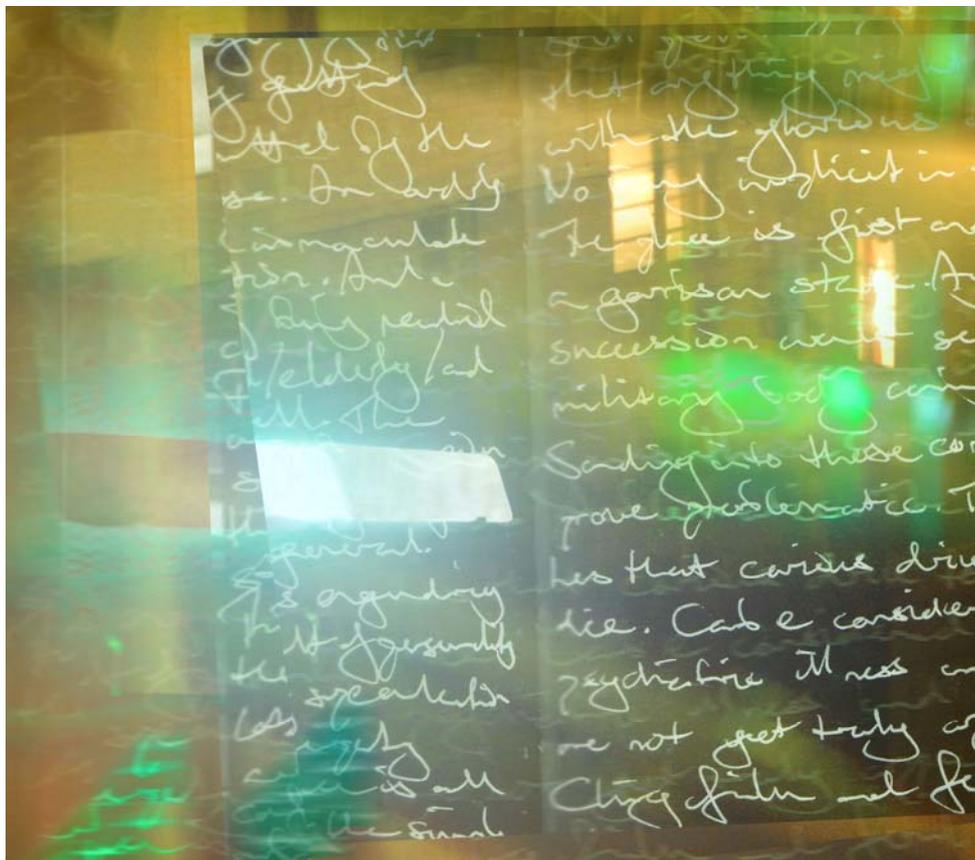
white thong, you are naked.

You slide back your chair, breasts hanging in full view, nipples puckered with cold. 'Goodbye,' you say. There are two brief taps under the table, which tell me the sapphire stilettos are off too. You walk to the edge of the terrace, buttocks glowing in the moonlight, then turn to me one last time with a cold smile, and jump into the river. For a moment, your long blonde hair spreads on the surface, and then all is submerged.

At that moment the waiter appears. He looks at me with serious black eyes. 'Thees eez the most expensive restaurant in the city,' he says, and coughs discreetly into a white, gloved hand. Then he collects the plates and asks if 'Monsieur would like anything for dessert?'

Strangely enough, something must be hard-wired within me, because I'm about to answer: *a selection of cold meats, please*. But then I stop myself.

I look out onto the water, and I think I can see you doing butterfly stroke into the distance. I look from water to waiter. 'I'll steer clear of the cold meats for now,' I tell him. 'I'll take the fresh fruit salad instead.'



## Extract from the novel **Bring Me the Head of Ryan Giggs** by **Rodge Glass**

*Summer 1991. July the 17<sup>th</sup>. The beginning.*

The Great Man was well early, so when the bell went I wasn't ready, and I swear to God I went fuckin *mental*. I started legging it round the house, not knowing where to go. I could have run right up the wall, onto the ceiling and back down again, I had that much energy. I could have taken a bite out of the couch, or my leg. I jumped over one of the chairs and jumped right back. I ran round it then round it the other way. Mum battered me with a tea towel and said, *Stop it, do you want him to think you're a hamster?* But even she was excited, it was obvious. She kept staring out the window at his car. (We were thinking: if he left it there too long, it'd probably get nicked.) Then Mum screamed, *Well get the door then! What are you waiting for?* So I opened it, smiled and said, *Hello Mr Ferguson, come on in!* As if that was a thing I said every day. His first words to me were, *Son, if ye can get up the wing as fast as ye get round your front room, ye'll do just fine. There's no question about that. No question about that at all.*

*Ooh, Hhhellooo*, said Mum, showing him into the lounge where she'd laid out a plate of biscuits. Then she asked, in this really fake voice, *How doo yoo like yaw tee?* Like he was a lord or something, and she was his maid, at his service. While he picked up and crunched a digestive I just stood there, thinking. Thinking that he looked pretty small compared to what I expected, and then thinking that he had this funny little red nose, how it didn't look that red on the telly interviews after the games, and then thinking that *fuckin hell Alex Ferguson was sitting on my Mum's couch, about to drink her tea!* As I stood there, not believing, trying to act the big man, the manager of Manchester United was chatting away about the weather, smiling and nodding, all polite, whenever Mum spoke. Then he said, *You must be very proud of your boy Mrs Cole*, and she laughed that bit too hard like this was the funniest thing she'd ever heard.

It was over quick. The whole visit must've only lasted twenty minutes, and Alex Ferguson hardly touched his drink. (I gave him the United mug, the one that said *European Cup Winners' Cup 1991* on it. He smiled when he saw that.) I reckoned he'd be round ours for half the day, maybe stay for tea,

perhaps watch a film with us or something. Thought he might come down the park for a bit of a kick about and a swig from a bottle of cider. Sit up all night talking by torchlight, under the duvet, about the great United teams of the past. Arguing about our favourite players. Making up Best Ever United XI's off the tops of our heads and plotting together how we were going to *knock Liverpool off their perch*.

But there was none of that. He just told Mum I had *a very promising career in the making, Mrs Cole, if he works hard, and I'll make sure he does, don't you worry about that*. Well, Mum couldn't stop herself. *Could you make him tidy his room as well Mr Ferguson? That'd be just smashing*. The Great Man didn't laugh. He just turned to me, face straight, like he was talking about something important and said, *Son, be good to your mother. She brought ye into the world and she can take ye back out just as easy*. (Was that a joke? Was he joking? Did Alex Ferguson make jokes?) Then he thanked Mum for the tea, got up, and smiled. At the door he said, *I don't do this often my boy. In fact, I've only done it once before*. He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together. Looked out of the window. Perhaps checking his car was still there. Then he said: *Have you seen Ryan Giggs play, Mark?* I was too numb to answer with words, so I just nodded, once, all tight. *Some talent, that boy*, said Alex Ferguson. *Some talent. You could do worse than learn from him. Be at The Cliff for nine on Monday and we'll see what we can do about making a player out of ye*. Then he touched me softly on the shoulder and left. Didn't ask if I had an agent. Never even mentioned City. Never asked me how much they'd offered. Didn't matter, did it?

After he went, I danced in the kitchen. No music, no need – just danced and danced like a spastic, arms and legs everywhere, till I'd forgotten why I started. Then I fell onto the couch *he* had sat on with *his* arse – the same one he sat on the dugout with! – and grinned so hard my cheek muscles ached. But Mum grabbed them, twisted the flesh with her fingers and said, *Don't you DARE fuck this up Mark Jonathan Cole. Promise me, okay? PROMISE!* Real fuckin hairdryer treatment, no question. Pointing right at me and shaking. Like I'd already done something wrong! Mum never usually got angry, and *never* talked about football. Usually it was all *Listen to your teachers and Revise for your exams* and *You'll never get anywhere in life if you don't do your Geography homework*. Then there she was, almost crying. Begging me to be a footballer. So I told her what she wanted to hear: *I'll be the BEST EVER*, I said. I gave her a big wet kiss on the cheek and told her: *Don't you worry about*

*NOTHING any more, Mum. You're gonna live like the QUEEN from now on! I would've said anything to get her to agree to me leaving school just before the exams I was gonna fail anyway, but when I said that – don't you worry about nothing Mum, I'm gonna look after you – I really meant it, you know?*

After he left, we didn't know what to do with ourselves. Mum cleaned the kitchen again, even though it wasn't dirty. Then she started dusting. Then the Hoover came out. I just sat for a bit, back on that couch of ours, staring at the TV, this zoned out half-grin on my face. Like I was hypnotised. I wasn't even watching what was on. I didn't know what was on. I just knew that somewhere in the corner of my vision there were colours moving, and people moving, in the screen. The hum of the Hoover stopped. Mum pointed towards the box and said: *So, you'll be on there soon then eh?* I smiled. *Yeah. Yeah. I suppose.* Then I said: *I wish Dad was here. He would have laughed his fuckin head off. Fergie! In our house like that! It's mad!* Mum gave me another clap across the head for swearing, but I knew I wasn't in trouble when she unplugged the Hoover, sat down next to me and said, with a relaxed smile, *It's okay, Marky. It's okay. We'll tell him all about it when he gets home.*



## Three poems

by Duncan Muir

Cerro la Mesa:  
on the death of José Luis Painecur,  
Lake Budi, Chile, 22 May 1960

'for great illnesses, great medicine is required'

*Machi Juana Namuncura*

### *Foresight*

What comes before is imperceptible  
but snakes feel it; a shiver down their length.

Ants identify a moment yet to be borne.  
Something flexing, rising, and a tension  
thick in the space between their ranks.

The machi dreams of horses. Foaming flanks  
frothing muzzles, she dreams of hooves  
thumping earth, stampeding, throwing up turf  
and upon their backs a dust cloud roiling.

### *The Calling*

The machi remembers '49  
her grandmother's house falling.  
The child interred into its earth  
could not save it.  
Bricks bound with bone  
and blood mixed into the mortar;  
but still it fell.

Memory is a warning:  
the sound of the potato plants rustling

in their rows on a wind-dead afternoon.  
Remember the shapes made by coca leaves  
thrown onto a plate, examine the clouds  
that form in urine, shake the jar, shake  
and let it settle, look again, study  
shape and colour. Read deep into a face  
be aware of the lines and the furrows  
be sure of the peaks. Which way will water  
then flow? Which way will earth?

The earth that rears

and rucks a person down onto their knees,  
that shakes a froth into the blood, a fear,  
a stack of stones upon the chest and face.

Take another, one that is smooth and pale  
and sits cold, low, and squat within the palm.  
Does it have the lightness of sun-baked clay?  
or the hollow weight of bone?

### *Aftershocks*

It took days for the earth to stop shaking.  
Quake after quake continued underground.  
Short. Insignificant, like a missed step,  
a fallen slate, or old crockery knocked  
from a table.

Others came low and long

like the wail of a man who has lost all  
or the moan of a woman digging down  
through debris, and finding there a child's shirt,  
a baby's shawl; recognising a clue  
to the way the body might have been swept,  
and where it may now lie.

## Three poems

by Julie Martis

*Eish!*

Eish! Serious? Ahh, I cannot believe it,  
no, I cannot believe the sun  
the sun it shines down on Sibasa  
it is like an eternal apple  
rolling down a friendship hill  
rolling away those hyena thoughts  
neh?

Eish! Serious? Ahh, I cannot believe it  
no, cannot believe the sound  
the sound of children playing  
it is like the purple harmony  
of church bells in my vuvuzela heart  
like a baobao tree at sunset  
neh?

Eish! Serious? Ahh, I cannot believe it  
it is like the songs of our childhood  
the songs of the grasslands  
they echo in our clouds  
and now that you are leaving  
it is now that I have the feelings  
neh?

Eish! Serious? Ahh, I cannot believe it  
the feelings they are like crushed fruit  
they are like a silent playground  
like a cut upon my daughter's cheek  
the broken tusk of an elephant  
a tokoloshe in my bathtub

neh?  
Eish! Serious? Ahh, I cannot believe it  
cannot believe I love you like a P.S.  
like a rainbow we must fade  
like a rainbow flag we must wave goodbye  
the broken tusk of an elephant  
a tokoloshe in my bathtub  
neh?

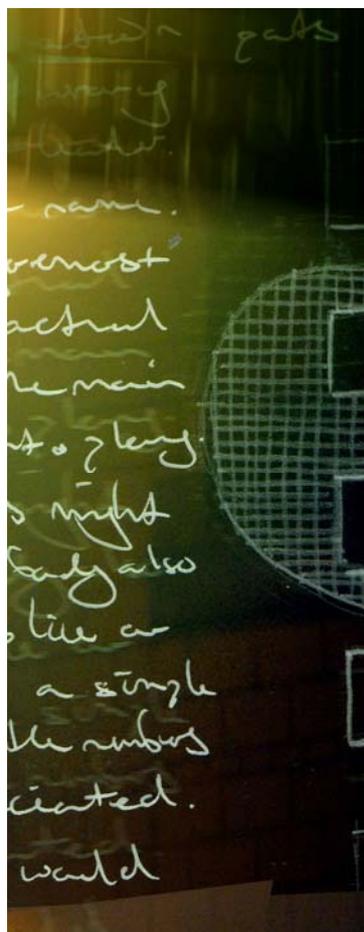
*Glasgow at night*

The midnight streets  
feel like a poodle underfoot  
I may have had too much wine  
but that is besides the point  
their conversation is terrible.

*Lego*

I think I didn't love you  
I hated the way your belt stabbed  
my stomach when we kissed  
I hated the way you were skinnier than me  
your hands were always cold  
and you never buttered the toast  
all the way to the corners.  
I think I didn't love you  
your computer was a fifth limb  
and you wouldn't part with money  
except in extreme need  
like a beagle with a bone

but now that we're on the other side  
I think I loved the way you silently sat  
with me when I needed you  
patient like a paralysed fountain  
the way the stars spelt out  
your name whichever way I turned  
and persuaded the grass to do the same  
the way we used to fit together  
like soulmates or lego  
the way each letter of your name  
was a secret song meant only for me  
it is just funny that I should forget  
the words this quickly.



## Three Poems

### by Mukul Dahal

#### *The Letter*

I carry your letter with me all the time.

Because I can see  
what sharp teeth it has.  
I can feel the frost in it.

Your letter reminds me of the injury  
I once had. On a grey day, I had fallen  
on the dusty road from the bullock cart.  
The wheel had run over my shin.

It reminds me of the evening  
when I was bitten by a snake.  
Papa tied my left leg with a rope,  
not to let the poison climb up my body.

I carry your letter to grow immune to it.

#### *Uncle Chose A Day*

Uncle did not outlive the daylight today.  
He peeled sun-ripe papaya  
sitting on the stool made of bamboo.  
He rested between peelings  
as if that was the only time  
he had for reflection.  
Or else he kept knitting  
seconds and minutes into a fabric  
of a day. He barely allowed  
his head round the news in the world.  
Mosquitoes, flies and mice near him  
were enough to keep him away from it.  
A stray dog came sniffing at the yard.  
He yelled: What the hell you want?  
Veins on his neck stood out.

Then he began to munch on the papaya  
Not even strapping the seeds off it.  
He stood up, eating fiercely in big morsels.  
He got choked when he pushed  
larger chunks of papaya down his throat.  
He waved at the sun as his sons came running.  
As he fell, I remembered him say:  
You need not go to bed to die  
and it need not be dark either.

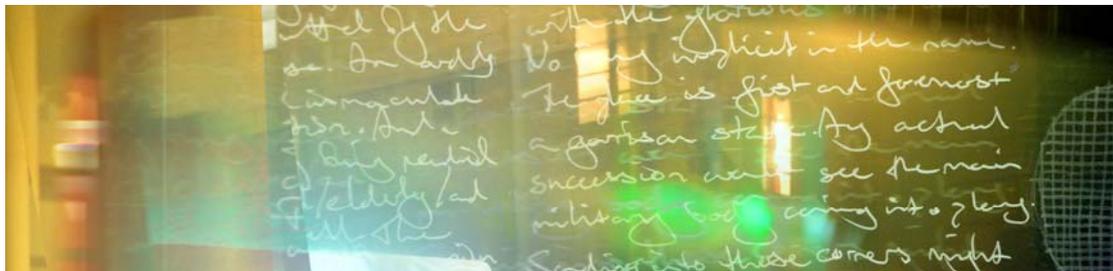
### *The Signboard*

He held in his hand a signboard that read: Love You.  
The letters on the board looked crooked  
like the legs of a cockroach.  
Each of them embraced a shadow.

I allowed him to rest his hand upon my shoulder.  
When he came too close to me,  
I grew aware of his breath.

As he whispered into my ear,  
the board fell down and hit my head.

*First published in Counter Example Poetics, May, 2009.*



## **Ballottement**

**by Paul Joseph Abbott**

broken by dew's weight

the strands of a spider web  
flirting with the sun

while the coffee heats  
steaming under the window  
storming at the pane.

## **Vince Vaughn**

**by Miles Beard**

I like to pretend I'm a guy's guy and that's why none of my friends are girls.

It makes me feel like

Vince Vaughn

to think I could never be platonic with curls.

It's my sense of humor they find alienating  
not my misogyny.

Sure, that was someone's sister, but he never  
ever

was me.

# **The Joys of Poetry**

## **by Patrick Holloway**

It's so easy to finish a poem,  
A few thoughts, lines,

Spaces.

Maybe a rhyme  
to set a beat to  
the beautiful  
faces  
that frown at me  
because of the music that  
leaks like love from  
my earphones.

I thought people at  
airports were happier.

I wanted to start  
a short story, but  
they are always longer  
than one expects.

Too many characters, too many individuals  
to create, and at the moment I can't even create  
a broken image of myself.

# Glasgow

by Amy Anderson

This place is accustomed to grief.  
Standing like a coffin bearer  
sandstone heavy,  
a deep tolling heart,  
in purple morning shadow.

His forehead is sheened  
in dreich, he is unflinching  
and nearly very handsome.  
He absorbs rain like thaw  
through the cracks in old skin  
waiting for the Rite to begin.

Relations arrive like  
crows from their branches  
gather in small knolls,  
male with males,  
female with females,  
bracing themselves  
on the wind of one last  
cigarette. The shock of loss  
becomes pungent again,  
like the sudden smell of brakes.

The eclipse begins indoors  
the heavens truly open,  
roar down on the just  
and unjust,  
spooling at the feet of mourners  
who yearn for the dry salt wake  
and first possibility of light  
and the next gasping smoke.  
The bearer hears them all,  
his broad shoulder  
under the cold weight  
of another withered son.

Accustomed to grief,  
the bearer stands unflinching  
absorbing the dead to his soil,  
his broad granite shoulder  
powdered with the dust of  
planed oak.

## Author Biographies

*Alan Bissett* was born and raised in Falkirk and now lives in Glasgow. He is the author of the novels *Boyracers*, *The Incredible Adam Spark* and *Death of a Ladies' Man*. He lectured in Creative Writing at the Universities of Leeds (2002-04) and Glasgow (2004-07), before becoming a full-time writer. He writes intermittent academic criticism, and a blog for The Guardian. In 2008 he was named Falkirk Personality of the Year, and the Daily Record voted him the 46th Hottest Man in Scotland, a title he takes very seriously indeed.

*Raymond Soltyssek's* short stories have appeared in many literary magazines and national anthologies and on BBC radio. His first collection, *Occasional Demons*, was shortlisted for the Saltire First Book award. The film of his first screenplay, *The Practicality of Magnolia*, won two BAFTA New Talent awards, including Best TV Drama, and was nominated in the Best Screenplay category. Born in Barrhead to his Polish father and English mother, he graduated with an Honours degree in English Literature and Philosophy from Glasgow University in 1981.

*Anneliese Mackintosh* has been published in various literary magazines and anthologies, as well as broadcast on BBC Radio 4. She regularly performs her work around Scotland and is currently finishing a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. She is Editor of Cargo Crate, a new eBook publishing venture, and co-runs the creative showcase Words Per Minute.

*Rodge Glass* was born in 1978 and is originally from Cheshire, though he has been in Scotland since 1997, and since then most of his family have scattered all over the globe. Rodge is the product of an Orthodox Jewish Primary School, an 11+ All Boys Grammar School, a Co-Ed Private School, a Monk-sponsored Catholic College, Hebrew University in Jerusalem,

Strathclyde University and finally Glasgow University where he was tutored by James Kelman, Janice Galloway and Alasdair Gray. His next novel, *Bring Me the Head of Ryan Giggs*, is exclusively previewed here and may not be released for some time.

*Duncan Muir* holds an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. He is from the north of Scotland.

*Julie Martis* is a postgraduate student at Glasgow University, studying Creative Writing. She graduated last year in English Literature. When not writing, she is generally to be found playing piano and ukulele, or watching Poirot and Inspector Morse with a cup of coffee.

*Mukul Dahal*, originally from Nepal, is a first year PhD creative writing poetry student at the University of Glasgow. He was Absolute Winner of the Nosside International Poetry Prize in 2009 and has appeared in world poetry anthologies, print and webjournals such as World Poetry Almanac 2009, Hudson View, and Autumn Sky Poetry.

*Paul Joseph Abbott* has lived in England, Australia, China and India. He is presently studying full time for his MLitt in Creative Writing.

*Miles Beard* was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a student of Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

*Patrick Holloway* is from Cork in Ireland and is currently studying at Glasgow University for an MLitt in Creative Writing.

*Amy Anderson* is 36 and has been writing poems since she moved to Glasgow three years ago. In her poetry she is particularly interested in rendering nature in the urban environment and exploring the concept of nationality and the self. She has been a student on number of creative writing courses run by the Glasgow University's Department of Continuing Education in the last three years, most recently Donny O' Rourke's definitive Poetry Class.

