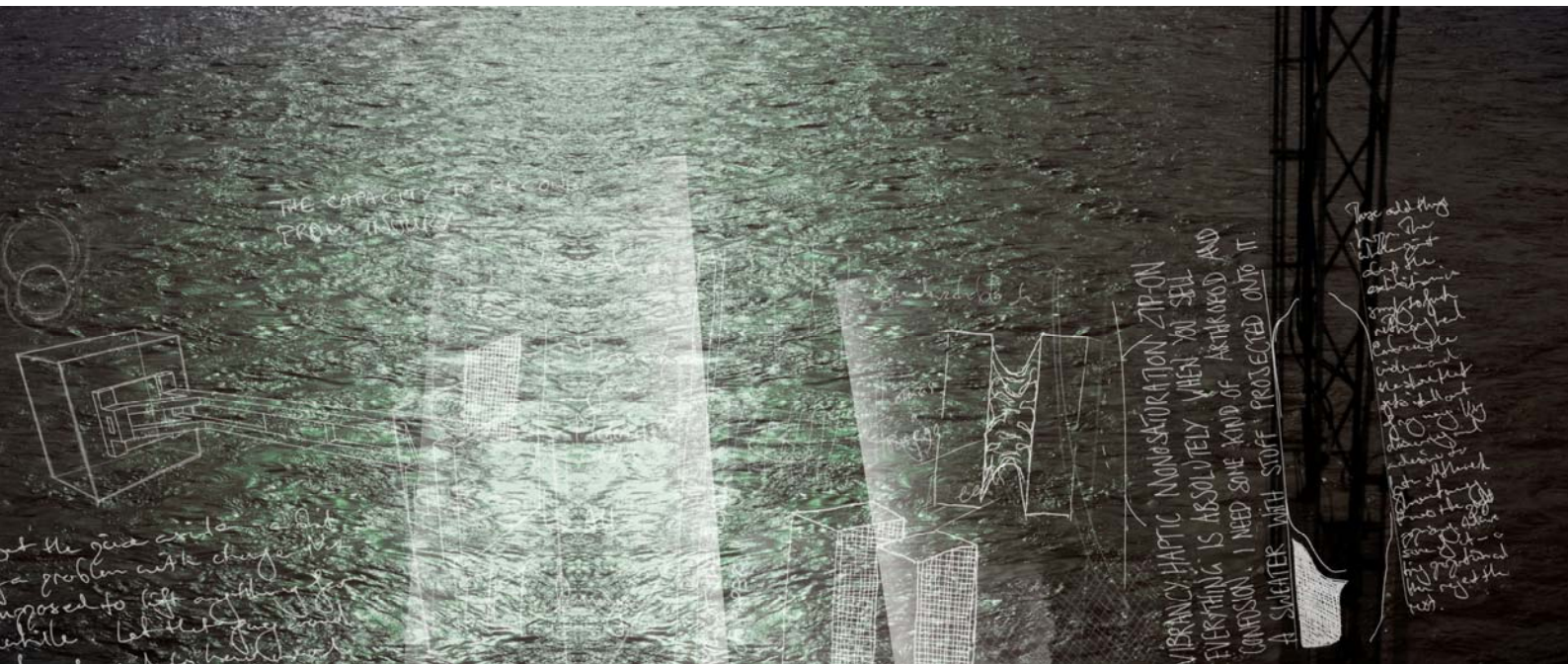


From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



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A Word from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Before applying to study creative writing at Glasgow, many students have rummaged through the archives of *From Glasgow to Saturn*, to acquaint themselves with the style and standard of work by those in the department. It was therefore disappointing, for both prospective and current students, when the title was abandoned in the summer of 2009. This has motivated us to resurrect the magazine, as a collaborative editorial project, in the hope that its presence can play an important part in the progress of emerging writers, as well as inspiring others.

Since reviving the magazine, we've published nineteen poems, thirteen in Issue 17 and the remainder here. There's a lot of diversity in style. Some of the poems are intensely personal. In these, the identity of the speaker is projected forcefully, and something of significance is confided to the reader. Other poems are just as strongly impersonal. The impact comes from the topic and (of course) from the language. There's also a lot of variation in language. Most of the poems are written in a conversational idiom, using Standard English. A small amount of the poetry is in Scots. Elsewhere, the syntax has been torn away from grammatical norms, creating powerful effects.

We've also been delighted with the variety of prose submissions. When you read the following issue, you'll be struck by the differences in style and genre; we have seaside settings, island retreats, humour, pathos, drama and mystery. We anticipate that you will enjoy the range and hope that you continue to support us by downloading, reading, recommending and, most importantly, submitting your work for our delectation.

On the website you can read the full archives of *From Glasgow to Saturn*, watch video clips of contributors talking about the craft of writing, and find local writing circles and publications. We see thousands of hits every month, which means that the writers we feature are exposed to a wide and receptive audience. We're delighted with the work that we have received, and look forward to another batch of literary goodies in 2011.

With many thanks,

Alan Gillespie, Nick Boreham and Sheila Millar

The End of the Day

by Kathrine Sowerby

Marion and I sit half way up the dune while the boys run in different directions below. The tide is as far out as it will go. In the distance white horses tip and glisten on the water under the crisp line of Raasay and we watch the last families pack up and leave the beach. One has a sledge to pull all the shoes, the wet towels, changes of clothes across the sand. A couple walks ahead of their crying daughter while her protests are carried downwind. Another family peel off their matching wetsuits, deflate their dinghy, and walk inland in order of size. Our older boys have clambered out of sight past the headland. The youngest is near the water burying his truck, digging it up, burying it again. Let's round them up, I say to Marion then run in deep strides down the dune. The turn-ups of my jeans, full of sand, are weights bumping against my ankles.

The wind falls away as we reach the grassy curve of the bay and we brush away the pinpricks of biting midges. We take the path that cuts through the ferns and I tell the boys to mind out for dog shit at the side of the path, to remember and check for ticks later on. There's a ditch where the path meets the road that leads down to the military base, up to the car park, and the older boys and Marion scramble up, laden with bags and boots. I'm dawdling at the pace of my youngest. He treads carefully on the gravel, his little feet angry at the transition from sand to stones. A woman is coming down the road.

She has grey, cropped hair and a beige skirt, in her sixties, early seventies I guess, and carrying a metal detector. I prepare a greeting in my head. You'll have the place to yourself, I'll say. Happy hunting. But she doesn't meet my gaze. Her jacket is open and I think for a second she's wearing a superman T-shirt but as she walks past, head down, I recognise the Lonsdale logo. I remember a flatmate at university and his brother who came to visit without warning. His head was shaved, his maroon DM's laced to the knee. He wore the same T-shirt. I turn and walk backwards watching her. On her back is a Converse rucksack. It dips above and below the line of the ferns. My son takes my hand and pulls me back round.

Marion and the older boys are leaning against our car parked on the grassy verge. The only car left in the car park is an old Ford Fiesta. Haven't seen one of those in a while, I think. You've got the keys, I say to Marion. I

gave them to you, she says. I pat my pockets, pull my cagoule from the bag and shake it. A lighter, a dud biro and a train ticket fall to the ground. Marion is looking at me, arms crossed. Check again, she says. I stick my hand deep into one pocket after the other and find nothing. Fuck.

The truth is I'm calm. We've had a great day and I'll wander down to the beach, retrace our movements. I'm confident. I'll be as quick as I can, I say. Marion is taking the Tupperware box from the bag, rooting through the crusts and sucked flat juice cartons.

I glance up at the dune scraped out of the hillside where a single red welly is lying at the foot of its slope and I head for the cluster of rocks that was our base for the day. The woman from the road is on the hard sand near the water swinging the metal detector in slow arcs in front of her. As she walks steadily forward water pools in her footprints.

Excuse me, I shout. She doesn't hear me. I walk closer. Excuse me, I shout again and she turns, a startled look on her face. I was wondering, I say, I've lost my keys. We were sitting over there. I point to the rocks, black now in the flat, end of day, light. The woman is staring at me and I think for a second maybe she doesn't speak English. There was a German man and his young daughter on the beach earlier. They lay on their towels, then walked into the sea, thigh high, and splashed water up their lean torsos. My keys, I say again, have you seen them? She shakes her head.

I look back at the sand dune, to the other side of the bay, out to sea and back at the woman. She is standing with her hand in her pocket and I want to ask her to show me what she has in there. I imagine her fingers curled round old coins, bottle tops. They have a bottle opener as a key ring, I say, a silver one. I haven't seen them, she says.

I walk inland searching for a glint of metal. The wet sand turns to powder with ridges of shattered shells. The millions of tiny fragments fill my vision and make my eyes ache. I walk back to the shore. The woman is a silhouette against the water. I lift my hand to shield my eyes, bring her into focus. Can I borrow it? She looks at me blankly. Your metal detector. Oh, she says, I don't think so. She clutches it to her as if it were her child. They could be anywhere, I say. I notice she's wearing canvas shoes. The water has crept over the soles and sodden the material. Will you be out here long, I ask. Can you help me, perhaps. My family...

I don't really like anyone else using it, she says. Her voice is soft but firm. Surely, I say and step towards her. She steps back. You could walk

alongside me. I take another step towards her and I've got my hand on the aluminium rod of the detector. You're being a bit unreasonable, I say giving it a tug. She has both hands on it now, pulling away from me. We stay like this for a while, pulling backwards and forwards then I let go. She staggers. Her mouth opens but no sound comes out. She's falling and I lunge to catch her but instead I land on her with my full weight.

Something is pressing into the skin on my forehead and when I open my eyes I see the teeth of her zip and the letters, N, S, D, rumped across her chest. I watch the cotton for its rise and fall, but it's still. My head is on her and all I can hear is the muffled breaking of waves. Eventually I lever myself to one side. Her head is tilted forward at too sharp an angle, propped up by a rock. Her eyes are open, looking past me. I get up and walk quickly without looking back. There's no one around. The sky is clouding over.

I step from the sand to the grass and there, lying in the middle of the path, are the keys. I'd forgotten. They're not hidden, not tucked under anything, obscured from view, just sitting there, like someone has simply put them down. I pick them up and clench my fist around them, pressing the blade into the fat of my palm.

Voices echo round the hills, sliced through for the coastal road to pass. I follow the curve in the path and see my eldest sons sheltering under an overhang, hands cupped at their mouths. Marion is sitting on a rock in the car park. The rock is dotted with shells cast in resin and information plaques about the geology of the area. The shells look ridiculous. I think of a climbing wall we took the boys to once and the plastic footholds carefully arranged to give the best climb. I made it to the top but had to be guided down by an instructor. By the time I reached the ground my hands were shaking uncontrollably.

I've got them. I hold the keys in the air. He's got them, Marion shouts up to the older boys. She climbs off the rock and helps our youngest to get down. Where were they? Marion asks. Her hair is pressed in damp curls to her forehead. It's starting to rain, I say, let's get going.

Kitty McGreal's, Kiltimagh **by Vivien Jones**

Middle aged, middle class,
two pale non-drinking English women
tacked onto a group of Irish writers,
male, Guinness loving, charming
– scratchy evening ahead ?

Was it Kitty McGreal's idea
to make her pub so cosy that
one tall man's arms
could finger-tip both walls
over the heads of drinkers ?

Did she plan to have too few seats
too close together,
strangers nestling from necessity,
ceasing to apologise
for something so unavoidable ?

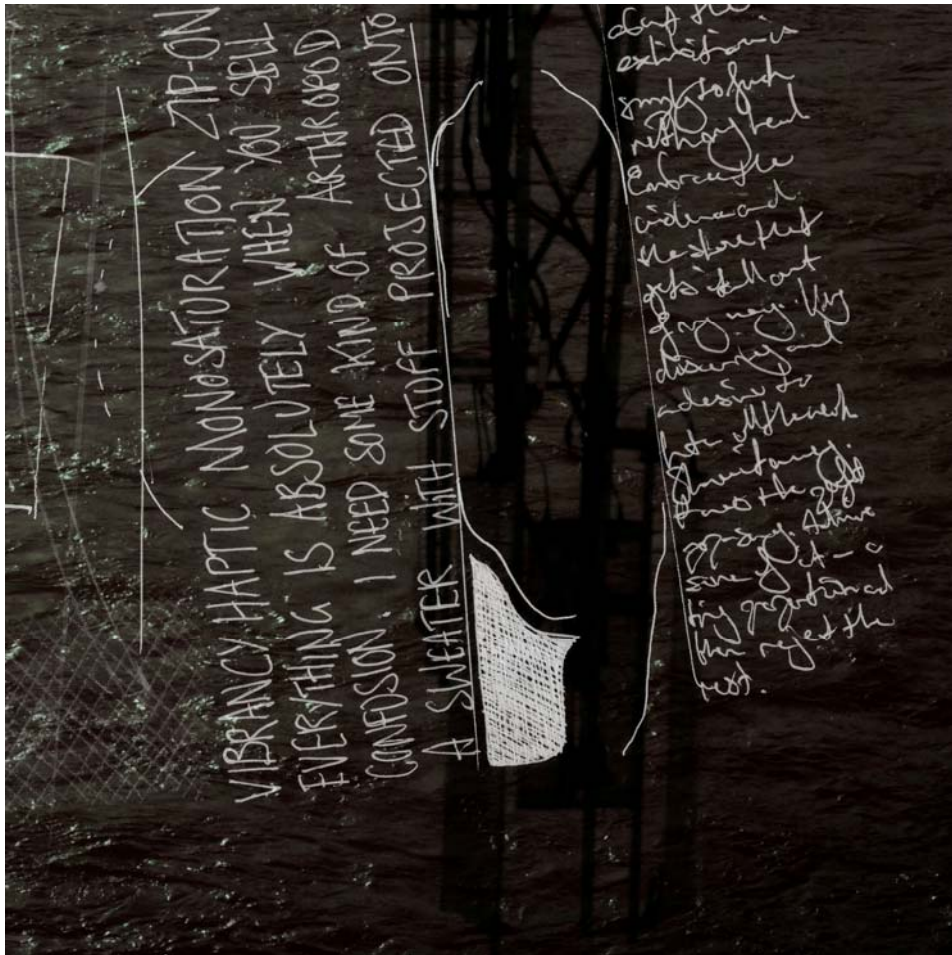
So touching without apology
makes us friends, we smile
and begin to talk with strangers
whose breath tickles our necks,
a live fire reddening our legs.

Since everyone bought the guest a Guinness,
he's reeling; he's Scottish, proud to sink
drink for drink with Irishmen,
he'll fall in the hedge on the way home.

Was Kitty McGreal insomniac enough
to wait them out ?
The English women slip away,

warmed, ready for love,
but husbands far away.

The small hours, washing the glasses,
wiping down the bar
start the closing down,
the slow draining of the tiny room
onto streets wet with mist.



Where Do Voices Come From?

by Philip Murnin

Julia was scared of Gran. She hardly let go of my hand that first day at the Crannag. She was scared of Gran's height and the deep crags of her face and her big nose. Gran moved everywhere at speed and with an unnecessary racket. The cupboards banged and she stomp, stomp, stomped from room to room as if she were always doing the most important thing in the world. Mostly she was just making a cup of tea or something. I could see how she did Mum's head in. She didn't speak softly like the other people on Barra. She spoke very loud and very fast and we couldn't understand her.

Gran gasped when she realised that me and Julia didn't have a word of Gaelic. If Gaelic had any swear words, she unleashed them on us when she found out. When she finished she asked again, 'Not a single word?'

I repeated a phrase that someone had once told me at school. 'Pok mo hon,' I said to Gran and she hit me round the back of the head and told me not to be dirty. Gran had a cuff that left your ears ringing. Mum had never hit me.

'Here's me on the Feis committee and my own grandchildren don't have a word of the language! You know your mother's done this to spite me. Oh, I could mangle her!' She shook her head at us.

I'd only met Gran once before. Julia had never met her at all because Mum hated her. When I was very young, she'd come for Christmas once and they argued from Christmas Eve until Boxing Day and Gran had got the first ferry back to Barra.

'You'll learn soon enough,' Gran told us.

'No we won't,' I said. 'We'll be going back to Barrhead as soon as mum is better.'

'That won't be anytime soon, James *a vooor*,' Gran said. 'Your mother's illness runs in the family. My sister was taken away with it and you've two cousins with it. Your mother has always had the taint. Always. It's in the blood.'

I didn't reply. I was glad that Julia was holding my hand.

The Crannag was painted white and had a red roof. It nestled amongst the rocks and nettles on what was nearly its own island were it not for the thin

white road that joined it to the rest of Barra. The road was made up of tiny broken cockle shells that came from the strand that stretched out around the house. Light blue-green water lapped around the rocks at high tide but at low tide the sands stretched for miles and you could walk to other islands. The strand was called Tray Vore but it was written Traigh Mhor on the signpost. That was Gaelic for you.

At the Crannag, there was endless sea and sky and each day was endless as well. There were just sheep and stinging nettles and me and Julia. I once jumped in a patch of nettles just for something to do. We looked forward to low tide every day, when a small plane called the Sea Otter would buzz right over the roof of the house and land on the far side of the Traigh Mhor. Me and Julia would wave at it and chase it across the beach.

We had only each other to talk to. I told Julia that there was a wee girl that lived on the other side of the bay with the same name as her. She didn't believe me so I told her to shout 'hallo Julia' as loudly as possible and the girl would shout back.

She shouted, 'HALLO JULIA!'

The bay echoed back, 'HALLO JULIA! Hallo Julia. hallo...'

Julia looked impressed. 'See, I told you so,' I said. And we spent a while shouting to the wee girl across the bay, filling the air with choruses of our echoing voices. We only stopped when Gran came out and told us to stop making such a din.

I also told Julia about the fearsome Barrasaurus – the amphibious dinosaur that lived in Barra's waters. I told her it ran out of the ocean and devoured fishermen whole except for their clothes and maybe a bone or two which it spat out. I proved my story by spending time tracing huge dinosaur footprints in the sand on the Traigh Mhor. I watched from behind a rock as Julia followed a trail of claw prints to some grass. She found a torn jumper there, an ancient welly boot and the jawbone of a sheep. I saw her gulp and run off to the safety of the Crannag. It earned me one of Gran's slaps.

I hated the night time in Barra: the sheer blackness of it that sucked at your mind and made it impossible to sleep. I had never known such un-human silence. I missed the comforting noises of home – the orange glow of streetlights behind curtains, passing cars and the electric hum of the town that you didn't know was there until it was gone.

My mind would fill the gap and I remembered how we would hide from Mum's monsters. She said that I protected her from them. Sometimes she wanted me around and I'd miss school and she'd sit on the couch with her leg shaking until the floor shook with it. She'd smoke and smoke and stare and stare. But we were alright, me, mum and Julia – as long as everyone left us alone. Except that one day, that one day when I had gone to school and wasn't there to protect her from her whispering voices.

I had a voice of my own that had been my friend before Julia was old enough. He was from a song that Mum had sung to me when I was wee – *The Song of Wandering Angus*. Wandering Angus had come out of the song and spoken to me. When my mind was full of evil things, he would appear. When I was afraid, he was there. But I wouldn't speak to him anymore. It wasn't good to speak to voices in your head. Voices were in the family.

After a week Gran told us our Gaelic names.

'The name shapes the person,' Gran said. 'The first step in making you Gaels is to use your Gaelic names.'

'We don't need teuchter names, Gran. We're from Barrhead,' I told her.

She ignored my comment and continued. 'The Gaelic for James is Seamus,' she said, 'and the Gaelic for Julia is Sileas.'

Me and Julia grinned at each other. 'Sheelus!' I laughed at her. 'Shaymus!' she giggled at me.

I said, 'Are you having a laugh, Gran?'

But she wasn't.

'What's the Gaelic for this is stupid?'

Smack! I got cuffed again and I lost it with Gran. 'Stop hitting me! We don't want to learn fucking Gaelic! Mum didn't teach us it for a reason!'

'Your mother didn't have a sound mind, young man.'

I ran from Gran. She could go to Hell with her Gaelic. A real Gran would have moved to Barrhead to look after her daughter and her grandchildren instead of separating us. A real Gran would be kind and nice to her grandkids. I ran to the Traigh Mhor and from there I ran towards the other island that could be reached at low tide. The sand sucked at my feet and the wind howled in my ears. It was behind me and pushed me across the Traigh Mhor. It pushed and pushed me away from the Crannag and away from Gran. When I looked back, I could see the white house with its red roof

and Gran and Julia standing on the rocks. They were holding hands and calling my name.

'JAMES!'

'SEAMUS!'

'JAMES MACNEIL, *HEEK A MACH!*'

And their calls echoed round the bay. But Gran could get to fuck.

I ran and ran until I reached the other island's empty shore. It would be a real island again when the tide came in and there would be water between me and Gran. I hoped she'd think I was drowned. There was a ruined croft house – roofless and broken and a tree that grew next to it in the shelter it provided from the wind.

I sat under the gnarled tree. One of the only ones I'd seen since I'd come to Barra where the wind swept them away before they could grow. This one was stunted and twisted like a Bonsai.

I sat amongst its mossy exposed roots and looked across the strand to the Crannag and wondered what Gran and Julia were doing. They hadn't come after me. Wandering Angus appeared beside me. He wondered aloud to me what the name of the island was and what had happened to the people who had once lived there. I wanted to tell him that they'd either been swept away by the wind or had gone mad from loneliness but I didn't answer him. I didn't tell him to go away though and so we sat in silence.

The sun was turning red. It lit the sky in shades of orange and purple and the clouds grew pink. I felt the huge emptiness of the sky and I felt it take my mind up, up, up until there was nothing, nothing at all and I felt as tiny as a grain of sand.

The tide was turning. It would soon make this island a real island. Wandering Angus asked me what I would do when I couldn't get back to the Crannag? He asked me what I would do when I was alone here and it was dark. He knew I didn't like the dark. And it would be cold. And there was nothing and no one on this island. He told me I might die out here. He asked, and what of Julia? What of Julia? She would have no one but your Gran.

'Shut up!' I shouted. 'Shut up! I know these things. I know. Just go away!'

And Wandering Angus disappeared. And it was just me on the island and the advancing water. Other voices began to fill my head.

Gran's voice said the illness was in the family, it's in the blood. The words echoed round my skull. They were joined by kids at school shouting schizo, schizo in a sneering chorus. And Julia called my name, and mum. Mum was begging me not to leave her. But I had left her. I'd left her to the doctors and the monsters in her head.

I couldn't be alone on this island. I ran. The tide had already pincerd the island, cutting me off from Barra but I splashed straight though the deepening water. But it was too late. I could either drown or turn back.

Shivering, shaking I sat beneath the tree. The sun had glowed red and sunk behind the island. The sky had turned purple and then black. The moon was a sideways smirk in the sky. I couldn't look behind me at the solid black mass of the land although I felt it there as if it was creeping up on me. I focused on the few lights of Barra – the electric light of the Crannag where Julia and Gran were. I drew my knees close and hugged them.

Wandering Angus came back and chanted the words of his song. His strange song about the fire in his head, about the silver trout that became the glimmering girl. He ended with the part about the silver apple of the moon. He repeated the words again and again to protect me from the growing Blackness around me and the spreading Blackness in my head. I rocked to keep warm and shook my legs.

The wind was gone and without it, there was utter silence. Even the water was still. Out of the Blackness came a voice. I thought it was from my head. A familiar voice calling my name. Searching. Julia.

Julia's voice floated across the water from the Crannag. Gran's voice joined hers. They were searching for me. 'JAMES!'

'JAMES!'

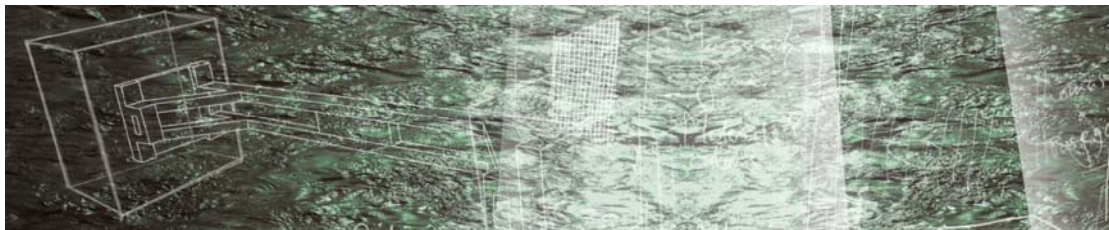
I leapt to my feet and shouted and shouted to them, 'JULIA! GRAN! I'M ON THE OTHER ISLAND!'

My words repeated around the bay. I heard Gran shout 'BOAT' and it echoed round and the words 'KEEP SHOUTING'. I watched for minutes the blackness of the far shore as a light made its way from the beach out on to the water.

I filled the bay with shouts to show them where I was. I shouted my name. I shouted Gran. I shouted Julia and Seamus and Sileas. I shouted Mum's name and Wandering Angus. I sang his song. I sang the song of Wandering Angus loudly and filled the blackness. It sounded as if I was on

the far side of the water and behind me at the same time. I was before me and to each side. It was as if there were ten of me standing out on the water – disembodied voices in the dark.

I sang the Song of Wandering Angus to guide Gran and Julia to me. The light on the water grew closer and so did the singing of Gran and Julia. They sang the words in unison with my voices. That night there was only the blackness, the slither of the moon above and all around us, from every direction, our voices, voices, voices.



I think Scottish Crows Speak Gaelic

by Mairi McCloud

There is rough music
in the deep, throaty song
of the crow.
Even in the rain
he sits regarding me
blinking the water
out of his black eyes.
The wind drives the rain in small waves
across my window
the orange leaves dance and spin,
and the crow sings his joy
in it all.

Three Shorts

by E. K. Reeder

september in the 'zoo

About an hour out of the city the train passes a pretty little town with houses built low to the ground, close together but with discreet backyards separated by short chainlinked fences; thick spider webs hold tree branches together and on the way to the junkyard just outside the town there's a dead raccoon on the side of the road and a skunk letting off steam when a truck hits it and the oddest farmhouse in town is the last one with a backyard which becomes a field; it'll be bought by incomers or will be the last in the town to get torn down. The bing bing bing of the crossing arms as we pass by and I'm in a dwam of crisis and worry, nearly tripping twice on the way to the station, out of it, exhausted and not quite myself, going to the men's room on the train by mistake, going to Michigan to look after my sister's kids while she goes to DC to look after her husband who collapsed yesterday with a heart attack or blood clots, they're not sure which. And all these dead trees on one side of the train, alive on the other. The lakes and houses and how they look normal, a bit sad, and then how the power plant comes into view and looks so nuclear.

Alfalfa, soy, monsanto crops. The signs I saw up in Wisconsin, roadside, at the edge of farmers' fields all those years ago that I thought were cool, weird, they've stuck in my head because they stuck out: fields dressed in white cotton like coverups.

A heron by a swamp pond. The swaying protective movement of the woman with the baby on the train. There's another hawk, and fields of corn. Dried stalks. Golden grain silos held up by tension wires. Silo clusters like carnival tent-tops.

There's a sound I only hear at night in the guestroom where I sleep with the door slightly open, the tablelamp on low so my nephew will know where to find me if he wakes up. It's a creaking, creeping sound. I only hear it in this room. On the first night I go downstairs and look around the rooms beneath it: in my brother-in-law's office and all the way down to the basement. For a cause. For a reason this sound appears at night. I find nothing.

Lying here in bed with the creaking in the air I think about *In Cold Blood*. Me alone in this big house, in Kalamazoo, looking after my sister's kids. Her smart, demanding kids. I wrestle and rough-house with my five-year-old nephew; read with my eight-year-old niece. Meals are unremittingly disappointing: meat-eating, thankless, opinionated. This emergency visit is not the time to teach them to say thank you.

After a week, their dad is out of hospital, their paternal grandparents have arrived to take over my watch. On my last day, I ask about the noise I hear at night and my nephew and I go on a hunt through the house (he dresses up as a cross-dressing detective) and we find nothing. When I ask my niece, she takes us outside and points up to the metal rooster mounted on the roof, the wind, even now, forcing small turns of the bird on its rusted perch.

chicago marathon morning

First frost and fifty thousand runners take to the streets. I walk east down Barry Ave until I hit Broadway and the elite runners at mile eight are running faster than I could run in the first fifty yards. People define themselves: charities' names printed on t-shirts, names of people lost to the world, 'in memory of' ribbons, people struggling to stay in this world, 'in honor of' ribbons, and some people wear their own names emblazoned across their chests:

Joe

Bill

Twin 1

Twin 2

And we call out:

Go Joe

Go Bill

Go Twins

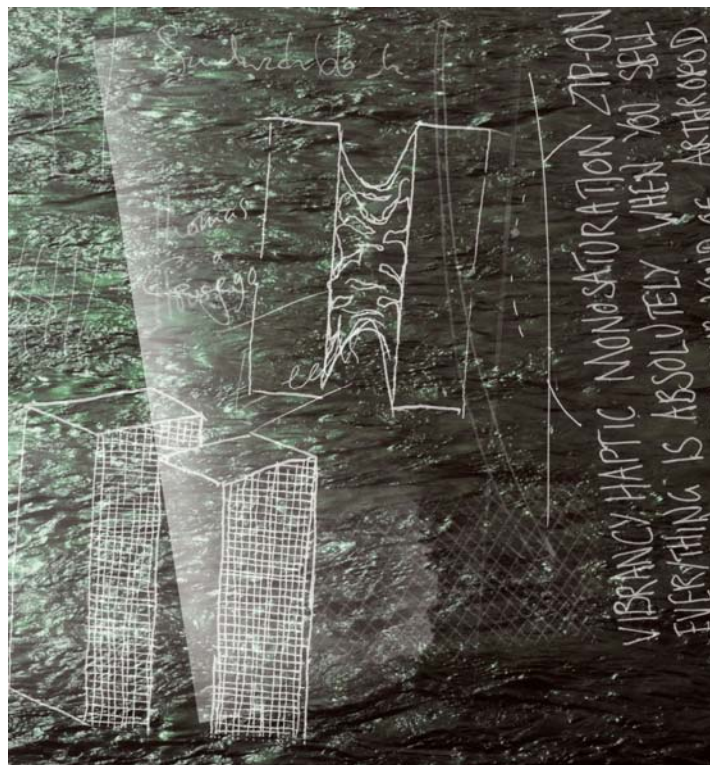
And I wonder if the twins will run the whole marathon together or if they will separate later on.

Rain slicks the plastic advertising strip which serves as the finish line and the first man over swings his arms up in victory and his legs slide forward and his body slams back, his head hits the concrete and that impact gives him a concussion which means he doesn't even remember winning the race.

The next year, because of predicted heat, they start the race an hour early. By nine am it's 87F and all the water tables at mile eight have been emptied and tipped. Near mile twelve a 35 year-old man, an off-duty cop, collapses and dies. The organizers cancel the marathon while it's underway. Only the elite runners and the truly tenacious finish the race. Some speak of a curse.

subterranean, northshore

The sand hot between our toes we walk and cool evening blows across the top layer of sand as a man with an alcoholic's nose runs one-way along the water's edge and swims home. From his porch an angry homeowner hits golf balls at us, as if he could own the harvest moon. We find them and chuck them into the water. We bury them deep.



Ode tae the Wee Manny at the Bus Stop

by Amy Rafferty

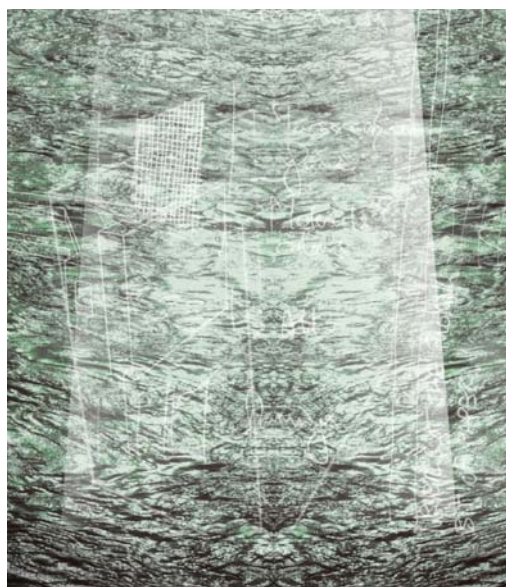
Bangin yir elbow
against the bendin glass'll no
bring yi the bus any quicker.

And neither will yir glarin
at the run-along-lights
make them any less wrang.

Yi stawn,
hawns deep in yir pokies,
an' swearin's aw that's keeping yi right.
Yir staggerin keeps me happy,
me, hawf fu', watchin and warm.

Wee manny,
I wish ye hame,
I wish yir teeth wirnae chitterin,
I wish yir hawn's wirnae raw,
I wish yir bus would come quicker.

But then yid be gone
and I'd be left watchin
a bus stop.



The Chair

by Lynsey Calderwood

'I'm sorry,' said the boy with the carefully lacquered hair and overpowering aftershave, *'I'm afraid you'll need to wait till the rest of the audience is in their seats before the chair can go in.'*

His eyes skimmed over Robert as he said it, flitting back and forth between the three remaining faces at the table.

There was no malice in his voice. No *'fuck off we don't want your kind here'* undertone. He was perfectly polite, and even smiled a watery toothpaste smile and apologised again, most profusely, for not being able to give them any further assistance at the time being; but still Robert didn't like his manner, didn't like the way he spoke.

Norma nodded, graciously: *'That's fine, son,'* she said, her mouth creasing up at the corners, stretching itself into a tired but reassuring smile. She was used to waiting, used to being the last in line for things. *'We'll just sit here till you come back and get us,'* she told him, slipping her cardigan off to reveal a pair of pock-marked bingo wings.

Robert grunted. He followed the boy with his eyes, lobbed heavy telepathic insults at the back of his shiny, black patent dome, as he turned away from them and marched double-time back towards the auditorium. He hoped that some cauliflower-shaped cancer would attack the boy's central nervous system without warning, or that some flesh eating insect would work its way into his body via his ear-hole, and then slowly and subsequently munch on every one of his few functioning brain cells...

'Robert, are you listening?'

Three pairs of eyes were blinking back at him.

'Jackie was asking you if you're looking forward to seeing Sharon doing her bit in the show,' said Norma. The tone in her voice was chastising, was more mother than it was wife of eighteen years. She sighed and turned to the young red-headed lassie in the blue and white checked blouse – one of Sharon's pals he'd never met before – and explained, *'He's away in his own wee world, hen.'*

Robert hunched forward in his wheelchair. He wasn't used to strangers starting conversations with him: usually if someone wanted to know how he was feeling these days or whether he took milk and sugar in his tea, they would direct the question towards his better half. His head lolled uncontrollably from side to side as he nodded an affirmative. Yes, he was

looking forward to the show. Yes, he was looking forward to seeing his youngest daughter doing her splits and her acrobatics and all her other joogly wilkies. And yes, as a matter of fact he was away in his own wee world, because it was better to be there than fucking sitting listening to some twenty-year old greasy-haired wanker referring to him as a piece of furniture. He opened his mouth to tell the others this but his tongue was heavy as a dead fish and the words became trapped behind his teeth.

The lassie shuddered, turned red in the face, and went back to reading the programme of events that she'd bought from one of the usherettes on the door. She was only about fourteen or fifteen and he'd probably just given her nightmares for life. Over her shoulder he could see a black and white picture of a boy in tights, lifting a lassie up by the waist.

He was glad that Sharon enjoyed the dancing; glad that she'd made nice wee pals (or so Norma said anyway); and glad that what she was doing wasn't sticking needles in her arms. He was glad even if it did cost a fortune for the fees and the various costumes and all the other things; even if it did eat into the money that was meant to pay for his physiotherapy.

Twenty years ago, when they first started courting, Robert used to take Norma dancing at the Flamingo Club in Linwood. They used to play all the old classics in there like Elvis and the Beatles and Showaddywaddy, and the two of them were always the first ones on the dance floor and the last ones to leave. He always had loads of energy back then. But, now he couldn't even lift his hand to wipe his own arse.

Norma's pal, Irene, kept glancing down at her watch: *'Do you think he's forgotten about us?'* she said. A mixture of anxiety and guilt flashed across the woman's face as Robert caught her line of vision. He knew what she was thinking: she had come to see her own lassie dancing and she didn't want to miss anything, and now she was wishing she'd just went herself, or persuaded her man to come along, because now she was stuck with them – stuck with the chair. He didn't really blame her for thinking like that, would probably feel the same if it was the other way about. But then on the other hand, she'd been quick enough to jump at the chance of a front row seat when she was offered.

'Och, don't worry,' said Norma. *'It's not on for another fifteen minutes. And these things never start on time.'*

Irene mumbled in agreement. She was quite a dour-faced woman, and Robert wondered as he watched her sitting silently stuffing herself with

chocolates without offering them round, what his wife actually saw in this ungrateful bitch.

Norma asked him if he wanted an Irn Bru while they were waiting. Yes, he did want an Irn Bru. He nodded his head, letting it flop forward onto his chest; the thin, loose layers of skin under his chin making contact with the soft white cotton of his T-shirt. He would have rather worn a dress shirt to the show – everyone else was dressed up to the nines except him – but it was easier for Norma to get him into loose clothing. Not that she'd bothered to ask him what his preference was. That was the way their marriage had always been though, her making decisions without consulting him first.

Robert decided that he didn't want an Irn Bru after all. No, he wanted a beer. The doctor said he could still have the odd beer if he wanted. He wasn't a complete invalid. There were still *some* parts of his brain that were working.

He started to tell Norma that he'd changed his mind, but before he got the chance she dismissed him with a pat on the shoulder and an *'aye, ok, I'm just going if you'll hold your horses'*. And then she was away to the bar and back again within minutes, and she was waving a can of Diet Irn Bru in front of his nose.

He didn't even like Diet juice. How many times did he have to tell her that?

Norma cracked the can open, plonked a stupid fluorescent straw into the hole, and then she lifted the drink up to his mouth.

Robert's head made an involuntary jerk. His chin and Norma's hand collided and some of the juice spilled down his neck and onto his white T-shirt, leaving a large and luminous unruly stain.

'Och Robert look what you've done now,' she scolded; as if it was his fault; as if he was some badly behaved child that wouldn't be told; as if he even wanted to drink the bloody stuff never mind wear it.

She was still wiping him down with a paper handkerchief when the boy with the greasy hair came back. He smiled a cheesy, patronising smile at Norma and his eyes wandered to the orange stain on Robert's T-shirt.

'Okay, here we go,' he said, gesturing toward the double doors, *'could you bring the chair this way.'*

Robert twitched. Irene lumbered past followed by a reluctant Jackie. Norma got behind him and set his wheels in motion.

She Says She's Fine **by Ellen Glasgow**

Some days, she says she's fine about you.
She says she's moved on,
And that you're a friend now.
But some days, ah, some days,
She really misses you.

Some days, she says,
She can hardly remember you
And the times you both had.
But some days, ah, some days,
It's pretty much all she can see.
Living in the past,
Standing so close to you she can see herself
In your eyes –

A sunny day in the park,
A nickname she'll never hear again,
The laughter...
Now hollow and sour.

However.
She's moved on,
And doesn't look back.
But some days, ah, some days,
She sees how your lives diverge,
 And how that just makes her so sad.

Mrs Jinniver's Compunction

by Michelle Waering

'Ma, why are you doing this?'

'Not now, Lance. I want to get these up before they do any damage.'

'Ma, there's nothing wrong with the goddamned hydrangeas.'

'The roots will get into your sewer pipes and block them,' intoned Todd.

'Yeah? Why this year? Why haven't they blocked it off before now?' retorted Lance.

Todd shrugged, 'I'm only telling you what could happen.'

Loppers in hand, Jane Jinniver stopped to look up at her son, Lance, and son-in-law, Todd. The front porch seemed a bit crowded. Her husband was there. What on earth could have dragged him outside on a Sunday? Her large, capable man who felt no compunction to embrace DIY or general gardening and maintenance. He nestled his corporate ass in his armchair with a book, a glass or two of port and a cigar, with which last item, she had to say, he was frugal. Yet here he was, ashtray in hand.

'For your war against pests.' He held the ashtray out to her over the railing. It was loaded with half a dozen cigar stubs – a week's worth. He gruffed and narrowed his eyes at the pile of branches on the lawn. 'Jane, what have you been doing? I thought you loved that hydrangea.'

'I suggested it was too close to the house,' said Todd. 'Wouldn't want your toilet backing up, would you?'

She didn't like the way her husband was looking at Todd, eyeing the sleeveless, dull orange T-shirt and grey shorts. Slack, he had called it this morning.

Melissa will be hiding upstairs, thought Mrs Jinniver. Her daughter and Todd had arrived unexpectedly a week before. Wasn't it nice, Melissa had said, for Todd to have wangled some time off work and scheduled a visit with them? They had spent the days with a lot of wine and chatter and advice about the house and garden. Even before Todd, Melissa didn't come home that often. Lance was here every Sunday but he never really helped out much and today he was agitated. Jealousy maybe.

The three men went back inside. Mrs Jinniver worked her way around the porch to the side of the house, lopping as she went. When she got to the end of the shrub just at the side wall, she stuck in the fork.

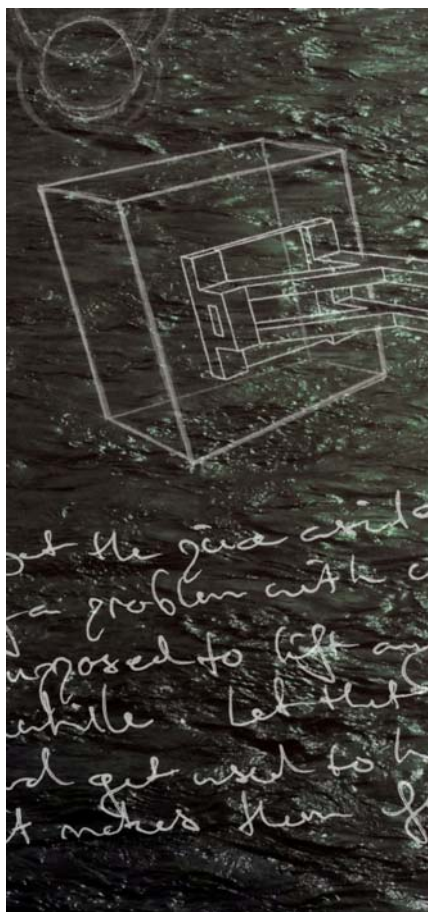
After an hour, that part of the hydrangea capitulated; a mound of green leaves, blue bracts and flowers, its roots wrenched out, exposed to the late summer air.

Mrs Jinniver stopped, took off her gardening gloves and sat down on a folding stool. She felt ill, shook up like the earth beneath the stubborn shrub. God knew how long the roots were – she hadn't. She stared at her work. What had she been thinking of, pulling the thing out? No, this was all a mistake. Put it back, Jane, she thought. It might just forgive you. Come on. Before the evening chill sets in.

Her shoulders protested down to the bones. Her jaw ached as if she had held her mouth clamped shut for days.

Through the screen door, she could hear Melissa's high pitch over the men's arguing. 'Todd knows what he's talking about! Oh darling, I knew we shouldn't have come here.'

Mrs Jinniver couldn't open her mouth. She slipped off the stool onto the ravaged ground. Earthworms, severed into halves and quarters, writhed. My God, such agony. She leaned her head against the cool, still-living roots and wondered who would come for her.



Two Ways of Eating a Seagull

by Paul Joseph Abbott

after Wallace Stevens

1.

The seagull is more human
when cornered
and I less so,
all-fouled and braying.

It flinches and shakes
that smooth head
and cries something like
'Fuck off! Please?'
As I widen my arms to gird it.

It leaps,
flutters to fly,
stutters, disturbs the dust-settled floor.
It tries again and flapslaps my mouth.

I bite into it.
It takes some time to die.
I am lucky, walled-in here,
it forgot to resist old habits.

2.

Rheumy feathers stick to the scree and
black night has curled around the day.
Legion shadows cloak me safely
and the frothy shivers
barely change the shape of the gull as they
stroke it, one way then
the other - smoothing pebbles more
slowly than seems possible.

The moon shows me everything, and
with my blade I reflect. I hew
the wings and head, pull the feathers
in greasy handfuls and feast; tucked
in a mountain pucker, dampened
by a runnel, illuminated by moss
and wait for fighting light.

The Intercessor

by JoAnne Ruby McKay

Look carefully, look closely, men
at the mothers of children under ten
this celebrated time of year.
We are the hollow-eyed women of Christmas.
No time or space for us at the manger-side
busy with shepherds and kings,
for we must shop, and wrap, and decorate
and write the cards and post the cards,
and shop and cook and shop and wrap some more.
It was Mary who had to travel
whilst nine months pregnant;
it was Mary who had to deliver
Christ in a stable,
the Incarnation, the miracle.
But it was a miracle
Mary herself survived.
Holy Mary, mother of God,
Pray, for I do not think that I
Hollow-eyed, can survive another Christmas.

Author Biographies

Kathrine Sowerby recently completed her first novel *The Spit, the Sound and the Nest* while studying on Glasgow University's MLitt in Creative Writing. Her stories and poems have been published in journals and anthologies such as 2HB, Fractured West and Sushirexia. She has a background in Visual Art and has taught English in Slovakia, Lithuania and Glasgow where she now lives with her partner and three children.

Vivien Jones lives on the north Solway shore in Scotland. She is a semi-professional early musician along with her husband, Richard. Her short stories and poetry have been widely published and broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and Radio Scotland – her first themed collection of short stories, *Perfect 10*, was published in September 2009 by Pewter Rose Press. Her first poetry collection – *About Time, Too* – was published in August 2010 by Indigo Dreams Publishing. In August 2010 she won the Poetry London Prize, her work chosen by Michael Longley. She has been awarded a Writer's Bursary from Creative Scotland for her next project on the theme of *women amongst warriors*.

Philip Murnin lives in the Pollokshields area of Glasgow, where he was born and has accidentally remained for the past 27 years. He graduated in English Literature (eventually) and has been teaching the subject in Williamwood High School for the past two years. Teaching has heavily influenced his work and a lot of his short stories are about children. He studies on the Creative Writing MLitt and has recently embarked upon a novel where the protagonist is a teenage girl and a delinquent one at that. He is looking forward to the challenge. Sort of.

Mairi McCloud is an undergraduate student from America. She is studying Archaeology, Gaelic and Celtic. She was raised with a strong sense of her Scottish heritage and is happy to be living in Glasgow.

Elizabeth Reeder, originally from Chicago, lives and works in Scotland. She writes fiction, long and short, and crossover pieces which are poetry, memoir and conjecture. The pieces featured here belong to a collection in progress called 'direction is the moment you choose.' She recently completed

her PhD in creative writing at the University of Glasgow and is now the convener of the distance learning MLitt. Visit <http://ekreeder.com> for more information.

Amy Rafferty is a post graduate student of creative writing at Glasgow University. She is also the baby in the graveyard scene of the original Wicker Man movie but she doesn't like to talk about it.

Lynsey Calderwood completed an MPhil in Creative Writing at Glasgow University in 2004. Her debut novel, *Cracked*, was published by Jessica Kingsley.

Ellen Glasgow graduated in 2007 in English Language and History at Glasgow University, and followed this by studying for an MLitt in History the next year. She presently remains at Glasgow University as a PhD student.

Michele Waering lives in Renfrewshire. She has recently completed her MLitt at the University of Glasgow. Which is nice. Now she can buy a garden shed and scribble.

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

JoAnne Ruby McKay grew up in a slaughterhouse in Romford. Her first career was as a police officer in Bristol, meeting her husband whilst helping the Scottish Crime Squad out with some fine art related crimes, and thus condemning herself to life in a very small Scottish village. JoAnne has published two poetry pamphlets, *The Fat Plant* and *Venti*. She is currently studying for the MLitt in Creative Writing.

