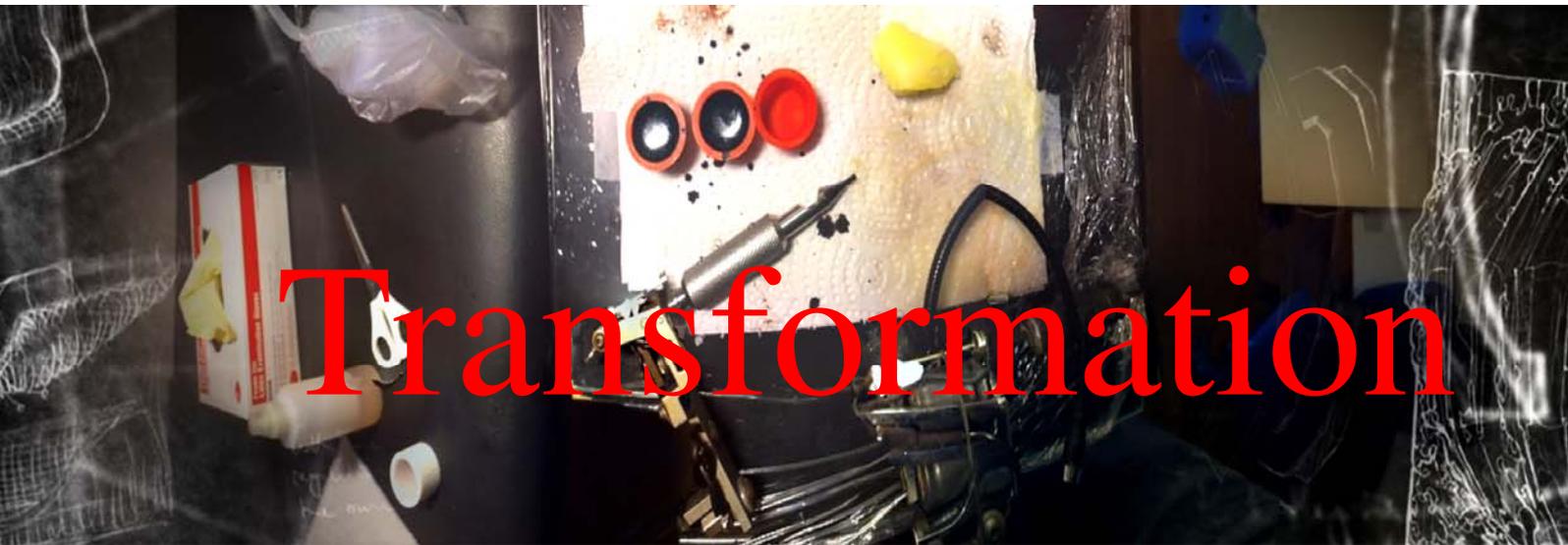


# From Glasgow to Saturn

The University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Showcase



Issue 26

April 2012

[www.glasgowtosaturn.com](http://www.glasgowtosaturn.com)

Issue 26 of From Glasgow to Saturn was published in April 2012.  
Arrangement and editorial material copyright © 2012 From Glasgow to Saturn.

Copyright for all works appearing in this issue remains with the authors.  
No material may be reproduced without prior written consent.

Please visit [www.glasgowtosaturn.com](http://www.glasgowtosaturn.com) for more information,  
including submission guidelines and full archives of previous issues.

Artwork by Tim Sandys [www.timsandys.com](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](#).



# C

## ontents

- 4 A Word from the Editors
- 5 *Apotheosis*, JL Williams
- 6 *Tattooed*, Sandra Webster
- 9 *Effigy*, George Craig
- 10 *Growing Love*, Gillean McDougall
- 12 *Skittle Alley, Greenwich*, Vivien Jones
- 13 *Twelve Hours Max*, Vivien Jones
- 14 *Benefaction*, Sarah Lowndes
- 16 *Poseidon and Caenis/Caeneus*, Hayley Rushing
- 17 *Baptism*, John O'Donnell
- 21 *Dementia*, John Horn
- 22 *Outside the Box*, James Carson
- 28 Quick View: Karen Campbell
- 30 Author Biographies

## A Word from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 26 of *From Glasgow to Saturn*, and the magazine's first ever themed issue.

Deciding to go with a theme was something of a leap of faith for us, and we'd be lying if we said we pursued the idea without a single reservation. Themes can be tricky. There's always a danger that a theme will hamper a writer's creativity, rather than inspire it: straightjacket the imagination by forcing it down a single, pre-determined route. So what if this was the case with our theme, and the work we received just wasn't up to scratch? Or what if no-one was inspired by our theme at all and we had nothing to publish? But then the word 'transformation' came our way (thanks to a plea at a Creative Writing Department event and a strategically placed ballot box). Here was an idea that offered a thousand different interpretations, a million possibilities. Surely we couldn't go wrong with this one? We took the leap.

What followed was a nail-biting few weeks as the *From Glasgow to Saturn* inbox went strangely quiet, and we began to think we'd made a huge mistake. The phrase 'contingency plan' might even have been mentioned, once or twice.

But eventually the work began to arrive, and we realised we had struck treasure.

The human condition is one of constant transformation – from baby to child, from child to adult, from lover to bereaved, from victim to victor – and here, in this issue, are some extraordinary tales of the human condition. A man takes an unusual package on a city break; a Holocaust survivor performs an artistic act of revenge; a green-fingered lover goes to tragic lengths to express his love, and a woman's mind slips away like sand. The words in these pages are narrated by children and old people and even a few gods; from characters you want to cheer to characters you want to pull aside for a sharp word. But whether you love them or hate them, we guarantee that you won't forget them. These are stories and poems that reward reading, that will stay with you long after you have put down the page or logged out of the computer. And that, to us, is what *From Glasgow to Saturn* is all about. Enjoy.

Siobhan Staples | Megan Primrose | Paul Deaton

# Apotheosis

by JL Williams

In darkness,  
beaten by moths,  
you realise you are the light.  
The body wrapped in cotton  
marked on the nipples and the pubis.  
All you are is this picture.  
Lay the body on wet sand;  
octopi slither its belly.  
The heart in the mouth of the owl.  
How many bulbs have you shattered  
making a death for yourself?  
No apology for transformation.  
In deep water,  
a voice vibrating sunk lines.  
Turned over, the body is still desirable.  
Where do hands go  
when there is no time?  
The eyes of this one have no bottom.  
As if the well pennies  
could save face,  
tapestry slowly becomes moth.  
In darkness,  
stared at by the starving,  
you realise you are fire.

This poem was originally published in 2011 as part of the JL Williams collection *Condition of Fire*. It is reproduced here by kind permission of [Shearsman Books](#).

# **Tattooed**

**by Sandra Webster**

Gunter Hollinger had many regrets in his life. He had never married nor had children, he had seen little of the world apart from his corner of it.

Now nearing the end of his life he also regretted the time in the camp. Every night when he closed his eyes his dreams were full of the faces of those he had encountered on their arrival at the camp. These were the lucky few who lived to die another day still in shock, half hoping that their mothers, wives and children had been taken to the Kinder camp.

That first day, after they had been shaved and deloused and stripped of their humanity, they would offer him their arm and he would record the number by which they would now be known. Gunter was proud he was one of the lowest numbers - 000047. The last one he tattooed was 865879. Between these numbers only 200 survived to tell of the atrocities.

Gunter, as one of the survivors, had been a witness at many trials where the guards and Kapos had been brought to justice for their crimes. There was never any doubt that Gunter was a victim too but he always felt responsible. He could have been more gentle, been kinder, not cooperated.

It only seemed fitting that after the war he would continue to tattoo. He opened a parlour in a local town. Some of his first clients were the ex camp inhabitants. They fell into two groups. Some, like Gunter, did not flinch from letting others see their tattoo as it served as an external mark of the collective guilt of a society. Others wanted to forget the past and Gunter gently covered the numbers with faces of loved ones, or flowers. He looked at each person and gently reflected their soul into the tattoo, trying his best to cover over his own guilt and that of the other tattooists.

Some people who did what he did called themselves 'tattoo artists' but to his clients and himself he was always 'the tattooist'.

Although Gunter never regarded himself as an artist, his reputation grew. Now in his fifties he was the owner of a very successful business. People came from all round the country for one of his special designs. He had a gift for looking into their minds and removing from it the perfect image that would suit only them. No matter how successful he became though, he could never forget the little room in Treblinka where he had first honed his work.

One day a man came into his shop. A decade older than himself perhaps. He looked at the drawing books while Gunter finished the tattoo of his last customer. Gunter thought he didn't look like one of the clients from the camps but he had the look of a survivor about him. He didn't seem to be comfortable in his own skin, as if like them he carried an invisible load on his shoulders. When Gunter was finished he asked the man to sit down.

'Please Sir, take a seat, can I get you a coffee?'

The man looked at Gunter and shook his head.

'No thank you, I have had so many cups of coffee today. I have been so nervous you know?'

Gunter smiled. 'Don't worry Sir. I have tattooed so many people.' He pointed to his head. 'And each of them is stored right in here. I have not had one complaint yet.'

'I like your work,' the man replied. 'But I have a special project for you.'

'All my work is special Sir. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back, and in thirty years I have never had to make a refund.'

The man shuffled uncomfortably in the chair.

'I have a secret,' he said. 'Something I regret in my youth. It was youthful high spirits – you know how the young are – but I want it covered over before I go to meet my Maker, which will be very soon.'

He rolled up his shirt sleeve and showed Gunter a very old Waffen SS blood group tattoo in Gothic script just above his right elbow. To show his blood group, in case he required a transfusion. Gunter sucked in his breath and tried not to react. Such Gothic blood tattoos were very rare and among the oldest of the Nazi tattoos he knew of. This meant the man was not just a recruit but a volunteer to the Waffen SS as early as 1937. Well before the rest of the country had jumped onto the Hitler bandwagon.

Gunter was aware of his less rare tattoo and was glad it was cold and he wore a long shirt and coat today.

'I have never seen one before Sir, how unusual. What would you like me to do?'

'I want it covered over,' the man replied. 'I do not want to go to my grave with this. Can you help me?'

Gunter worried if this was some sort of trap. Did others know about him, was he being threatened? He refused to be frightened of such an old man and took control of the situation.

'Of course Sir, but it will hurt, being where it is, and will take some time. Do you have a design in mind?'

'I'll leave that to you. Just do it quickly so I can leave it behind. I know you are the best

so please do this for me.'

Gunter prepared the needles, trying not to tremble. He had waited years for this opportunity to put right the past. This old man was his ticket to karma.

'My gift is to cover up Sir, never fear. That mark will be obliterated and covered with my art.'

The man was flustered. 'Yes, yes, I am in a hurry, just get on with it.'

In that instant Gunter knew exactly what he was going to do.

He sprayed the alcohol onto the man's arm. Felt him shiver with its cool touch. Then he poised with the needles above him. This was going to be his masterpiece.

Being directly on the bone, the needles caused the man severe pain. He held it in, as Gunter knew he would. Gunter enjoyed feeling his pain, causing it. He had not been gentle with his first tattooed ones and now he could inflict a little on the man. Usually he talked and chatted while he worked, but an almost supernatural force took over him and he had no desire to make small talk with a man such as this. Nothing in common but a brand on their skin they had both had to accept.

At last he was finished. He looked at his work and was proud of it. The man looked nervously down.

'You have finished at last, may I have a look?'

'Of course Sir, let me get a mirror.'

The man looked in the mirror at the image Gunter had created of his soul. A man in a Nazi uniform, wearing a pair of jackboots, stood on top of a pyramid of small crushed bleeding bodies.

'I have covered over your brand to your satisfaction?'

The man looked at Gunter and smiled.

'I have at most a week to live. I hope when I go to meet my Maker he will be satisfied with your work. How much do I owe you?'

'For this there is no charge Sir, for now we are equals.' Gunter smiled. 'Good Day to you Sir.'

He turned his back and when he looked round the man had left the shop.



# **Effigy**

**by George Craig**

Today I'll drive to Kirkmabreck,  
search for your essence in ancient  
slabs of rock. I'll drag your hulking  
core down slopes, onto my axles  
trundle home with you on my back.

The tools and I are ready, canny  
and sharp. We'll chip a way round stone, probe  
for a heart, until that granite shell  
bares your warming seam. The blades will bend  
across you, following honest grains.

I'll raise black drapes high to the ceiling  
while instruments chisel cairns as breasts  
for smoothing hands to curve. When I come  
to breathe upon your face, eyes to part  
lips to kiss, you'll almost come to life.

# Growing Love

by Gillean McDougall

They met in the winter when the grass was dusted with frost and nothing had grown for weeks. He loved her to distraction, visiting expensive florists to buy her flowers forced prematurely into season. But they had no scent; he waited for the time when he could give her that as well.

She loved him back. They found a little flat with a handkerchief sized garden, and he was quick to plant shrubs and trees for her. He wanted to possess her, limb by limb. He would take two stems of roses and twist them together, bind them in the way they bound themselves to each other, twining into a singular growing thing, always and for ever.

He played the violin, that was how he made his living. He wasn't very good, and she didn't like it when he played to her. She said it was too loud. When he should have been practising, he would work in the garden.

When he was making love to her, he liked to twist his legs and arms round her, knotting them together. Sometimes he would read poetry to her. His favourite poem described a love so intense that anything was possible, 'like making a finger break into blossom.' He read it over and over again.

'A finger, break into blossom?' she teased. 'How much do you love me? Can you do that?'

He worked on it at night while she slept. He bought rooting powder and malodorous chemicals for fertilizing. He burned scented candles to cover the smell, but sometimes in the morning her nostrils would twitch like a cat's.

It took. He hid it from her until it was established. Then one night, by candlelight, he revealed his most precious specimen. Cherry blossom sprouted from his fingers. It had its own scent, bitter-sweet, with a woody core.

She laughed, was charmed that he had tried so hard to amuse her. She felt around his fingers for the join, accused him of using glue. It was a trick. She stopped laughing. Her fingers probed a little longer, scratching at his skin. Eventually she admitted defeat. They spent the night staring at his trembling little tree. In the morning she packed her bags. The tears dried on her cheeks as she left.

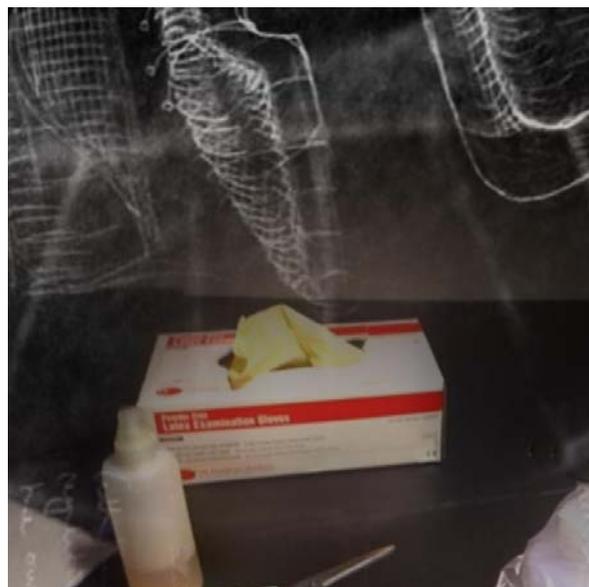
It grew quickly; he had to carry out almost daily maintenance. He bought specialist tools, tiny cutting blades. Sometimes in the street he would notice people looking at it twice.

He would jam his hand in his pocket, feeling the branches bending or breaking. It could be painful.

He played badly in the orchestra, worse than usual. He had deliberately cultivated his bowing hand, so he was still able to play the violin, as long as he kept the small branches from becoming tangled in the strings. His colleagues watched him curiously, wondered if she had left him. He took to wearing a glove.

She didn't return. He got a postcard from The Lost Gardens of Heligan. That made him happy, because she had chosen it specially knowing he would like the picture of lush greenery. 'Hope you are well,' it said.

In the daytime he continued to work on the garden, the tiny patch of green now crammed full of growth, one flowering shrub tumbling on top of another. His neighbours avoided him, whispering together when his back was turned. They peered at him through his windows in the evenings, the man with the cherry-tree hand. They watched him sitting in candlelight, examining the flowers, turning his hand this way and that. The petals were the colour of the blush on her skin. He tended his little tree and waited for her.



# Skittle Alley, Greenwich

by Vivien Jones

The photo freezes us,  
four strangers drawn  
to a vacant music room,  
blissful as the chord ends.  
Musicians all, lovers of  
renaissance music and viols,  
we arranged ourselves  
by personality; bass,  
tenor, alto and soprano  
people, equal to the task.

We do not know each other,  
like each other, share politics  
religion, newspapers or place.  
But when we play, since  
we have fine-tuned our guts,  
the bows catch the strings,  
fingers dance on the frets.  
Since the music is well within us,  
we are, momentarily,  
blessed, elevated, brilliant.

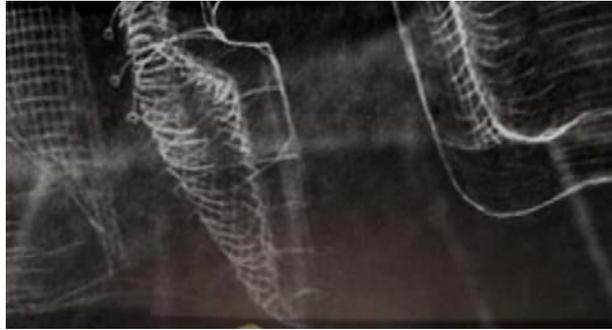
The photo freezes us,  
four friends now, having  
shared musical intimacy.  
We exchange names, postcodes,  
plan a holiday stopover,  
even though we doubt  
it will, or should, happen.  
Ecstasy can't be planned,  
instead, we confine to memory  
an unexpected moment unparalleled.

# Twelve Hours Max

by Vivien Jones

On this beach  
the dry half hosts  
the sand blast logs,  
the lone, undamaged  
left foot trainers,  
the twists of plastic rope  
in green and orange,  
the shattered tubs  
of mineral lick,  
shattered seabirds too.  
Coarse concrete lumps  
from a wrecked building,  
half-buried, outdone by the  
aesthetic of pebbles.  
This wet half exists  
only between tides,  
with ripple imprints  
in the mud, webprints  
and four toed tracks,  
perfect clues to species  
prodding the sheen  
for bubbling creatures.  
Samphire gleams greenly,  
its dry hours brief enough  
to ruffle its ferny foliage,  
cockles cackle in bubbles,  
low tide draws below  
flounders in mud cots.  
Each twelfth hour  
the moon-most wave wets

the last dry sand grains,  
stretching its damp reach.



## **Benefaction**

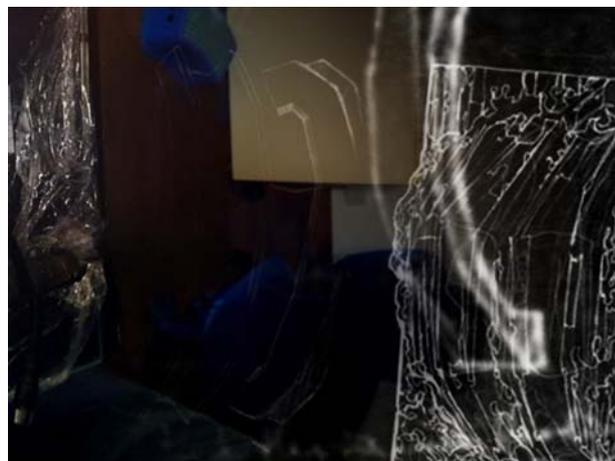
**by Sarah Lowndes**

Agata shivers as she waits on the pier. It isn't cold, but she is tired, having hardly slept during the siesta. She folds a corner of her mother's skirt in her small brown hand and looks once more out at the black waves, each one licked with an orange sheen from the quayside lights. The water's edge is crowded with all their friends and neighbours and also with unfamiliar people, tourists from other places here for the fiesta. She cranes her head again to try to see where her father is. He hadn't come home that afternoon and when they had walked past his fishing boat on their way to the pier the sails were furled around the mast, the door of the small hold padlocked shut. She had asked her mother over and over '¿Dónde está papá' but she would only tell her to hush. Now her mother bends down and points out a distant string of coloured lights on a boat approaching into the harbour.

Everyone else seems to see the boat at the same time and the excited chatter grows louder. Closer and closer the boat comes, the tip of the prow picking up the lights, then the impossible outline emerges of the cargo: three men on horseback, each a king. Agata feels dizzy as her eyes strain to separate the sight of the three kings from the darkness around them. Her mother lifts her up onto her hip and Agata instinctively grabs a length of her mother's long soft hair, so different in texture to her own. She winds her fingers in the hair

and stares, as the boat sails closer. All the children are pushing forward, especially the older ones who have more experience of catching the sweets that will soon rain down, a benefaction of foil-wrapped candies from Los Reyes Magos. The kings are in sight now, Melchior and Gaspar clad in long fur-trimmed cloaks smile and wave as they near the pier's edge. But it is Baltasar whose name all the children call. If they have been good it is he who will fill their shoes with gifts in the night.

Agata gazes upon Baltasar, illuminated in the Christmas lights, his dark skin and white teeth, his strong arm throwing a shower of bright sweets towards the out-stretched hands of the waiting children, with the same ease he throws out his fishing net. 'Papa!' Agata shouts suddenly. 'Papa!' Her voice is swallowed up in the roar of the crowd. Her mother laughs and smooths her hair, kisses her forehead, 'Si, lo hace verse como daddy.' Agata asks again, '¿Dónde está papá'. This time her mother smiles and says, 'Papá se casa más tarde - todo está bien.' As they start to weave their way through the crowds, her mother stopping every few steps to exchange words with friends, Agata looks back over her mother's shoulder, searching for another view of the king.



## **Poseidon and Caenis/Caeneus**

**by Hayley Rushing**

He bites His lip as He looks  
at her. He's feeling guilty, because she's  
still lying huddled on the shore, seeming  
not even to breathe, as if He'd  
drowned her instead of having done what  
He did. And she's crying now, salty  
tears, and she can still feel Him  
crashing and breaking inside her like waves,  
in and out like the tide, and  
she almost wishes that He'd drowned her,  
wishes – almost – for death. He speaks.  
He promises to grant her anything she  
wishes. She hates herself so much,  
she wishes to die, hates her  
weakness, her vulnerability. But she's too hurt  
to escape in death, too angry.

She wishes to never be hurt this  
way again. She wishes to be a man.  
Apologetically, divine will changes an X  
to a Y, and then she/he is invulnerable.  
But even with a changed body,  
a changed name, and a changed pronoun,  
his memories are still her own. True,  
she had changed, but what she really  
wanted was to be new again. She  
changed, again and again, but she would  
never again be new.

# Baptism

by John O'Donnell

Asian fish were something: as big as a weightlifter's arm. They jumped on the hooks and it got to be too easy. Then there were days so hot I didn't even bother taking a rod. There was a cove that called out for just sitting and looking at the waves and a sweet spot where the ultramarine sky met the sea. The occasional breeze would blow in, giving the semblance of coolness and hours, or lifetimes, would pass. I'd dip in and out of the water, do a bit of swimming, but mainly sitting was enough. There was a red marker buoy some way out. It wasn't out there for nothing: it's not that kind of place. It began to irritate me. I wondered if swimming out that far was possible.

My sandals and peaked cap with money belt lying beneath it like a turtle egg were left lying at the water's edge. The water was soothing, but then there was a slight chilling of temperature. It was by no means cold, but it was a warning that this was the deep end, and the water began to whip and chop, as if it was not playing any more. School-pool breaststrokes got me within sight of the buoy, before I skeddaddled back to the safety of the beach. The breath had been knocked out of me and I needed a fag, which got me musing, it was stupid turning back having reached half way. I sat on the same spot and looked out to where the sky met the sea. I'd even framed a word for it that I breathed in and out like a Buddhist mantra: 'skea'. But I couldn't focus. The red buoy taunted me and a dot appeared in the 'skea'.

The dot became a boat that became a white, rich man's toy, cutting up the sea and sky. The boat, one of those big-arsed cruisers, was tied to the buoy. The splashes of girls laughing as they jumped off the deck into the sea carried over the water. I had another fag. The taste of barbecued meat played on my tongue, and the clink of ice cold beer sounded like a gunshot, as party music started and brought the city to the sea. I didn't stay long.

The next day the magic had gone. I sat in my usual spot, but no matter how much I tried I could no longer see the 'skea'. Somehow I convinced myself that if I could swim out to the buoy things would be back to normal. I tried a few stretches before getting into the water. Nothing too energetic, a loose bending of knees and pulling them up in a lazy man's arc. One foot settled into the sand and my body took on the shadowed aspect of a pregnant one-legged stork ready to fall over. There was no taking flight; not right away. The shallow water lapped against my knees. When the waves got up to my chest my eyes fixated on the buoy, or at least they would have if an upsurge hadn't come over and swatted me under like a big hand. Sea

water filled my mouth and nose and coughing it out I swallowed even more in. My feet kicked out searching for sand or sediment, or any solid thing and, god knows how, I stumbled crab-footed back to the beach. There was no one around to see my disgrace and I had only made about one-quarter of the way to the buoy.

A few beers helped me sleep that night. I didn't smoke much, and came early to the cove the next day. It was cooler and I figured that would make it easier. Swimming goggles in my rucksack were my secret weapon. They'd cost about ten pence, but in baht that's a lot of money, and they looked fit for an Olympian. The thought of using flippers drifted through my mind, but I figured that would be cheating. There was no messing. No Siree. Straight into the sea and I started swimming the breast stroke towards the buoy, but water somehow got into one side of my cheap goggles. It was like having an optic measure pressed up against my eyeball and beating the lens egg-white stiff with salt water. The only sane thing to do was to take them off, or turn back. A killer wave pushed me back towards shore, but even with my remaining good eye little rainbow-coloured fish dotted the deep, and naturally my mind jumped to 'Jaws'.

Exhaustion and heat bullied me into lying on the sands and stones of the beach and resting my eyes. The midday sun treated me the same as any pasty-faced tourist off the plane. It tattooed eyelids to eyeballs and I was sure my nose was the same squashed colour as the red buoy. The shallow surf was a natural balm, the waves washing up and over my head. The sideways drift picked me up and drew me out, like a kiss, into deeper water. Instead of going back the way my body pulled further and further from the shore. A wave crested and flung me up and outwards and the red buoy popped into view. The small toes of my left foot began to curl and spasm. My feet beat against the surge, but made two yards and lost three. The shore remained further and further away. The cramp in my toes cut a diagonal across the instep, curving my foot like a bow, sending arrows of agony up my calf. My screams were muffled gargling. The tongue bite of drowning kept me afloat, moving the wrong way, toward the buoy.

My mind unshackled and picked over the debris of my life. The image of the white yuppie yacht, which had moored a few days earlier, grew so vivid, I could hear the engine beat, and feel its swell in my arms and legs. The city music blasted out its anthem and the girls were back in the water, swimming with easy strokes, up and around, as if they were sleek dolphins inspecting a fat seal pup.

'English,' I shouted as I blunderbussed through the waves. 'English.'

'Engleesh! One girl shrieked to the other.

‘Engleesh.’ A blonde swam underneath me, inspecting the state of my baggy shorts, and splashed up, ahead. ‘Very good, Engleesh’.

‘I need help.’ But seeing them gave me energy.

‘Anglaise?’ A tanned girl swimming ahead of me asked.

They swam together in a childish competition to see who would be first back to the boat, a race which only the beautiful could win. The boat’s engine throbbed with concealed torque whining to be let loose and churning up water, the displacement pushing me away and muffling my screams for help. Something splashed close to my head. My hands flailed and grabbed for a lifebelt, or a line from the hull, but the something clamped onto my face and pulled me under. The propellers whirled close-by, ready to chop limbs into uneven parcels. My head broke the surface and the boat had moved one or two feet away from the red buoy. The thing grabbed at my hair again, and little hands grasped in sheer terror.

‘Help. Help.’ I shouted clinging to the buoy. The child was about three or four and scrambled up and onto my head, bobbing up and down, threatening to pull both of us under.

The ship’s engine purred. A tanned young man, with white slacks, wearing the crease of a captain’s gold braid, looked over the water at us, and smiled with perfect white teeth.

‘Mad Anglaise.’ He laughed and one dimple appeared on his cheek, like a good natured duelling scar.

‘Help!’ I shouted.

The boy perched on my head shuddered, squirmed, clutched and dragged me under. The captain’s smile was there for us when we resurfaced. The boy gasped and spasms of fear rippled out from his stomach and thrashing legs. My left hand shot-putted him towards the marker float. He flung his naked legs underneath it, shivering in shock and terror, his dark eyes as big as caves. Rock music blared from somewhere in the lower deck. The captain shrugged his shoulders as if apologising.

I made a dash for the boat swimming as fast as I could, the child’s screams filling the air like a seagull’s cry. The captain looked over the hull at me with sad brown eyes as if I was an interesting fish, and with the brass of a boat hook pushed me away.

‘Help the kid,’ I pleaded.

He didn’t seem to understand. ‘Chinese – Noir.’ He pointed at the kid and mimicked shooting him with two fingers. The boy whimpered. ‘Noir. Like you. Mad Anglaise.’ His lips pursed and his forefinger wagged at me as if I’d been naughty.

The girls appeared on deck, their hair and swimming costumes dry, and all lipsticked up. The captain adopted a new tactic. The boat taxied away two feet from my flailing efforts

to get near. The girls drank different coloured cocktails out of long-stemmed glasses, looking over their sunglasses at me. The engine coughed and slowed and the captain leaned over. As I swam over he dinked me once, twice, on the head with the brass boating hook.

‘Olga,’ his teeth glinted in the sunlight, ‘has a little wager, that you, mad Anglaise, won’t make it to shore, because you’ll try and save the little monkey. I like Olga very much.’

The child whimpered and the captain smacked me on the head with the boat hook again, as if it was my fault.

‘Irina,’ the tallest of the group stepped forward, ‘Irina has a wager that you’ll simply swim for shore.’ Her bony hips brushed against his as she kissed him on the cheek. ‘Yulia says you’re weak and you’ll drown.’ He made a meowing noise and shrugged.

The boat hook caught me on the shoulder with a vicious smack.

‘That’s cheating!’ giggled Irina.

A great weariness grew in my shoulders, arms and legs. A garden of exotic perfumes lingered on the water and the clink of glasses kept stroke with the sound of a shouted, ‘Bravo’ and a more muted, ‘Told you so.’

# **Dementia**

**by John Horn**

Once your recollections  
were cut glass  
each facet refracting  
as you glittered among  
the moments and minutes  
of blue-green flashing  
kingfisher days.  
Sunbeam and moonbeam  
were partners in your eyes  
recording to perfection  
differing shadows  
as light and laughter  
led the waltz  
of easy friendships.  
Now  
you sit  
head awry  
eyes  
more than half  
in eternity  
grains of memory  
trickling out  
of a split hourglass  
that has no  
reversal.

# Outside the Box

by James Carson

To be fair, they couldn't have handled it better. The ambulance had arrived in minutes, the paramedics were attentive, everyone very concerned. But when he noticed Mark's hand slip from the stretcher, Liam knew it was over.

A year later, he was back in the same restaurant, the same seat. The décor was much the same too, except the reddish walls were now greenish, punctuated by North African street scenes. At the neighbouring table, a petite blonde was trying to engage her dining companion in conversation.

'So, Carl, I think we should go shopping again tomorrow. Berlin has some really cool stores, don't you think?'

Her partner shrugged, 'I guess.'

'I read that Friedrichstrasse is the toniest street,' she continued. 'And honey, we just gotta see the Galleries Lafayette.'

The man looked up sharply from his menu. 'Isn't that French?'

The woman shot him a warning look. 'Carl, do not start with me.'

Liam tuned out, his thoughts drifting back to that awful night. The Moroccan waiter had tried to comfort him.

*'Is okay, sir, he will be okay.'*

Liam had shaken his head. *'I was a bit harsh with him.'*

'I don't know what to start with. What do you think, Carl? Should I have the salad?'

Her companion snorted.

'No, but I think *he* should!'

Liam instantly knew the remark was aimed at him. Any other night, he would have ignored it, but not on this night. He began a slow, mocking handclap.

'Well done, mate, you spotted the fat man. Ten out of ten for observation.'

The American's sniggering reply was cut short by a blow to his shoulder.

'Carl! Apologise to the man! Now!'

Carl rubbed his shoulder.

'What? You're defending this guy? Come on, Lisa it was just a...hey!'

The woman had stood up and hit him again, harder this time, on the ear.

'Carl, I do not believe you!'

She spun round to face Liam, eyes on fire.

‘Sir, I am so sorry. My douchebag boyfriend obviously doesn’t know the meaning of the word respect!’

She spat the last word at Carl.

At the back of the restaurant, the waitress was looking worried, but Liam’s raised hand arrested her approach.

As Carl nursed his throbbing ear, his girlfriend began gathering up her jacket and bag.

‘Lisa, honey, come on, I was just – Lisa, cut that out! She’d thumped him again on the head. With a final ‘Asshole!’ she stormed from the restaurant.

Carl glared at Liam, who was now innocently perusing his menu. The man was clearly torn between chasing after his girlfriend and saving face. When the waitress approached his table, he testily ordered a coffee before stomping towards the rest room.

Liam ordered his meal, then watched as the waitress placed a cappuccino on the man’s table. He had to act quickly. After retrieving the freezer bag from his inside pocket, he stretched over to sprinkle some of its contents into the cup of coffee.

The incident had raised Liam’s spirits. Devouring his schnitzel, he looked up occasionally to offer the simmering Carl a cherubic smile. Liam noticed the man grimace and cough as he drained his cup, peering queasily into the muddy residue. Still swallowing uncomfortably, the man deposited a five euro note on the table.

‘Goodnight, Carl’, said Liam, sweetly.

‘Fuck you!’ said Carl, slamming the door behind him.

Liam felt no shame in his act of mischief. Instead, curiously, he felt Mark had been in on it. There’d been no voices, no presence, but Liam sensed Mark approval at his ashes playing their part in a mischievous act of revenge. It was what he would have wanted.

In truth, he didn’t know what Mark would have wanted. There was nothing about earthly remains in his will and they’d never talked about it. After seventeen years, they hardly talked about anything. Once, Liam had pondered how he might feel after Mark. He’d imagined he would cope well, handle it with dignity. No wailing over the coffin, no hurling himself into the grave.

In reality, after the difficult business of arranging for Mark’s body to be returned home, and the distraction of the funeral, it had come as a profound shock when Liam realised he felt truly bereft. All the songs about waking up alone and setting the table for one had turned out to be distressingly spot-on. Like an oil slick, grief coated every cranny of his life. His return to work, which Liam hoped would ease him back to normality, merely amplified his loss.

Whereas once he had seen himself as the lynchpin of Midlands Print Management Ltd, Liam now saw his job as utterly meaningless.

After leaving the restaurant, Liam boarded the U-bahn for Nollendorfplatz. The carriage was populated with a Saturday night mix of tourists and locals. At Potsdamerplatz, an elderly man with a violin entered the carriage and began sawing at his instrument in a valiant stab at Strauss. Liam sought refuge from the awful sound, turning to the video monitor above the connecting door. The screen was reprising Berlin's top news story: another mysterious arson attack on a parked car. This latest incident had taken place in Kreuzberg, but over the summer months cars had been set alight all over the city, with no clear motive. Liam watched as the image of a BMW in flames morphed into a preview of a new photographic show by an unpronounceable Hungarian.

He'd been lukewarm about returning to Berlin. But his line manager Kathy, a woman ten years his junior who acted ten years his senior, would not let the matter rest.

'Have you booked your flight yet?' she would begin again. 'You need to go back, Liam. Leave Mark there and get on with your life.'

Liam knew she was building up to the C word, the one she'd added to her vocabulary after hearing it on *Friends*.

'Liam, it will give you closure.'

He'd binned Kathy's bereavement books and donated the stress ball to next door's bearded collie. But after almost a year he finally conceded there was something in the idea, and he'd been giving a lot of thought to how he might dispose of Mark's ashes.

Even in death, Mark was larger than life. After the cremation, Liam had expected to receive something the size of a tea caddy, but when the funeral director arrived at the flat with what appeared to be a hobbit's coffin, Liam wondered how on earth he was going to dispose of so much Mark. But he was nothing if not resourceful. Once he'd arrived at the hotel, he began carefully transferring the ashes into seven freezer bags and embarked on Mark's farewell tour of his beloved Berlin.

Disposal proved easier in some locations than others. Finding a private spot in the Tiergarten was no problem: on the contrary, Liam was spoiled for choice in the sprawling urban park. He considered approaching the cruising ground, remembering Mark's fondness for anonymous rough, but at the last minute his nerve failed him. Eventually he chose a shaded corner, next to a preposterously ornate statue of Goethe.

Other locations were more problematic. Inside the food hall of the KaDeWe department store – one of Mark’s favourites – Liam had liberated the ashes into a pot plant just seconds before a security guard rounded the corner. And he’d had to abort the operation at the Brandenburg Gate when a police officer started taking an interest in Liam’s furtive movements so close to the American Embassy. But by the end of the week, Liam had come to realise that most people were too wrapped up in themselves to notice an oddball with a bag of dirt.

After leaving the metro station, Liam turned into Nollendorfstrasse, a quiet, residential street lined with lime trees. Passing the sex shop, with its scary toys in the window, he recalled Mark urging him to go in. His insistence that they were far too old for that sort of nonsense had generated an angry backlash from Mark.

*‘Fuck it, Liam, we’re not dead yet!’*

An hour later, he was.

Further up the street, Liam paused outside an apartment block, no different to its neighbours except for a small plaque on the exterior wall. The sign quietly recorded that Christopher Isherwood had written a book here which would one day become the musical *Cabaret*. Liam retrieved the bag from his pocket and released the last of Mark into the still night. Nearby, the bells of St Matthias sounded ten o’clock, and Liam began to cry.

‘Excuse me?’

The voice startled Liam, and he looked up to see a tall, fair-haired man observing him.

‘You okay, man?’

Liam nodded, wiping his eyes with his free hand while shoving the empty bag into his pocket.

‘Yes, I’m ok, I was just... Er, how do you know I speak English?’

‘I always know the English.’ The man spoke in a throaty Dutch accent, his eyes twinkling above his full beard. ‘They always look so, you know, super-English? You wanna beer?’

Liam surprised himself by agreeing to join the stranger. After a week of solitude, he felt grateful to have someone to talk to. Except Edwin didn’t seem to be much of a listener. The lanky young man was animated in explaining his work.

‘I come to Berlin because it is so much better for artists. I have to get in touch with the elements, like with the fire and the air. It’s like mashing up the multidimensional and the

super-abstract. You know what I'm saying, ja?

'Ja' said Liam. He had no idea what Edwin was talking about. 'Don't you miss Holland?'

'Are you kidding, man? I am coming from The Hague, which is small and super-boring. It's only got, like, embassies, and the fucking people have their noses stuck up in the sky. So, I come to Berlin, which is a super-crazy town. I never get homesick to the fucking Hague. I mean, NEVER!' Berlin is totally cool. You know how the mayor calls Berlin? He calls it poor, but sexy. I never go back to the fucking Hague. What were you doing with the bag?'

The question startled Liam. He began mumbling something about the night Mark died. But Edwin was off again, expounding on the artistic qualities of fire.

Suddenly Liam blurted, 'We were having problems!'

It was louder than he'd intended. But once Liam's emotions started pouring out there was no going back. He told Edwin about the terrible arguments, the ugly silences. The holiday in Berlin had been a chance to patch things up, but instead, the bad feeling had continued right up to the last night.

'Mark said he didn't want to go back to England, and I told him he was being stupid. He kept saying he wanted to stay here. I told him we couldn't just leave everything and start again, and he said *why the fuck not*. We argued all the way through dinner, and I ended up throwing a massive sulk. Then Mark started coughing. I thought it was just attention seeking, the usual drama queen stuff. Then his face went purple.'

Both Liam and the waiter had pounded Mark's back, but nothing would shift the bone lodged in his throat.

After Liam had finished explaining about the bags of ashes, he lifted his tear-stained face to look at Edwin.

'Man, what a cool project!' Edwin exclaimed. 'It was like the whole of Berlin is your canvas, and the ashes are, like, igneous and kinetic atoms.'

Liam slammed his glass down on to the table. 'It isn't a fucking art project!'

Edwin looked blankly at him, then said mildly, 'Still pretty cool, man.'

Liam relaxed and smiled. 'Yeah, super-crazy.'

Edwin looked at his watch and in an instant was on his feet.

'Shit! I gotta go!' He buried Liam in a bearhug. 'You take care and listen, call me, ok?'

And he was gone. Liam smiled to himself. He didn't have Edwin's number.

He stayed for another beer, then another. He watched the guys in the bar chatting amiably and listened to the primordial grunts drifting up from the darkroom. On one of the

video monitors, Rihanna was reprising her umbrella fixation; on the other a fire fighter was receiving a blow job in high definition.

Liam woke with a start. He was still in the bar, now populated only by a couple of Spanish bears and a bored barman. Shifting unsteadily to his feet, he began his wobbly progress back to the hotel. His flight home was due to take off in three hours. As he stumbled back through the deserted streets, he found himself envying Mark: in Berlin forever.

He smelled the little wisp of smoke before he saw it. When he recognised the small white brick smouldering beside the car tyre, a memory stirred in Liam's mind of his mother, sending him out for firelighters from the corner shop.

Suddenly, the car was ablaze. Mesmerised, Liam stared into the dancing flames.

A shout from the corner of Fuggerstrasse jolted him back to the present, and Liam saw that a uniformed figure was running towards him. Common sense should have told Liam to stay where he was. *All a misunderstanding, officer, ich bin ein tourist.* But common sense seemed to be burning up before his eyes. Liam began to run.

As the policeman gave chase, Liam realised the only thing in his favour was weight: incredibly, the officer was fatter than Liam. Even so, as sweat streamed down his back and his lungs began to burn, Liam knew he couldn't keep going for much longer.

Just as his legs were beginning to seize up, Liam felt himself being propelled into a darkened courtyard. One hand had his arm locked behind his back, the other covered his mouth. Terrified, Liam tried to scream. But as the policeman lumbered past, Liam saw his chance come and go, and he braced himself for the worst.

A hand patted him playfully on the backside and a throaty whisper reached his ear.

'Didn't I tell you Berlin was super-crazy?'



**What book do you wish you'd written?**

*Kieron Smith, Boy*. The mastery with which James Kelman shows the physical and emotional changes over the course of this wee boy's early life is pitch-perfect. Through sheer virtuosity with language, he pulls you deep inside Kieron's head, to the point where you utterly forget you're you. I think that's what every writer aims for – total, effortless immersion.

**What book / books are next to your bed?**

I've just finished *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan, and am about to start the very beautiful looking *Blue Book* by AL Kennedy.

**Best moment in your writing career (to date!)?**

Getting phoned at 10pm one February night towards the end of my two-year MLitt by a very posh, hugely enthusiastic lady saying how much she'd loved my novel. After many knock-backs from agents, to have someone so genuinely excited by my work was brilliant. That was my agent, Lisa, who's continued to keep faith in me.

**Best piece of writerly advice you care to share?**

'You write what you write'. This was said by Janice Galloway, in response to what I suspect was a pretty whiny 'naebody loves me' email I'd sent. Feedback I'd been getting from agents and publishers was: 'Like the writing – but what *is* it? We're not sure how we'd place it.' She was right. Don't try to fit a mould, or second-guess a market in order to get published. Never lose sight of your own voice, of what it is that fired your writing in the first place.

**Thank you Karen**

If there's a writer you would like to see featured in a future *Quick View* then contact us at [fromglasgowtosaturn@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto: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

**James Carson** is from Glasgow and works in the library and information sector. James has been writing on and off for many years and has enjoyed some success in writing competitions. He's a regular contributor to the Glasgow Writing Group and in September 2011 began an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

**Karen Campbell** graduated from the Creative Writing Masters in 2003, having been awarded an SAC New Writer's bursary in 2002. She's since published four novels with Hodder: *The Twilight Time* (2008), *After the Fire* (2009), *Shadowplay* (2010) and *Proof of Life* (2011). A new novel, *This Is Where I Am* will be out with Bloomsbury in 2013. She also writes short stories, and tutors in creative writing at Arvon. Before turning to writing, Karen was a police officer with Strathclyde Police, then a media officer at Glasgow City Council. You can find out more about Karen at [www.karencampbell.co.uk](http://www.karencampbell.co.uk).

**George Craig** is a recent graduate of Glasgow University's MLitt and a friend of *From Glasgow to Saturn*. In his former life, George graduated with an Honours Degree in Law from Glasgow University and a Masters Degree in Comparative Jurisprudence from New York University. In 2011 George's story *Shuttered Windows* was runner up in The Guardian Short Story Prize. He is currently working on his first novel.

**John Horn** is originally from Glasgow but have been living and teaching in Dumfries and Galloway since 1979. He is currently a member of the Crichton Writers and has had both poetry and prose works included in a number of publications including Scottish Arts Council sponsored *Both Sides of Hadrian's Wall*, the Dumfries and Galloway Arts publications, *Dragon Song* and *Southlight* (issues 7, 9 and 11), the Crichton Writers' 2011 anthology *A Banquet of Writing*, the Dumfries Writers' delightfully quirky pamphlet *The Fankle* and the Lockerbie Writers booklets *Network* and *Soul Songs*.

**Vivien Jones** has had her short stories 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. *About Time, Too* – her first poetry collection – was published by Indigo Dreams Publishing in September 2010.

**Dr. Sarah Lowndes** is a lecturer, curator and writer based in Glasgow. Lowndes lectures in the Forum for Critical Inquiry at Glasgow School of Art, where her research focuses on artist-led projects, interdisciplinary and performance-related practice and contemporary art. She has contributed to *Frieze*, *Artforum*, *Art on Paper*, *Untitled*, *MAP*, *2HB*, *Spike Art Quarterly* and *Afterall* and to catalogues for international institutions, writing on artists including Richard Wright (2009), Robert Rauschenberg (2011) and Dieter Roth (2012). A revised and expanded second edition of her book Social Sculpture: The Rise of the Glasgow Art Scene was published by The Luath Press in 2010. Her forthcoming curatorial projects include the sculpture park *Dialogue of Hands* (Supported Programme, Glasgow International, 2012) and *Studio 58: Women Artists in Glasgow Since WWII* (Mackintosh Museum, 2012).

**Gillean McDougall** is a musician and voice-over artist who spends her life talking to herself in studios with no windows. Incipient madness led to incipient writing, and she dreams of returning to full-time study when the talking stops. She is a member of Glasgow's Mirrorball poetry initiative, and currently taking creative writing courses at the University's Centre for Open Studies (formerly DACE).

**John O'Donnell** is a forty-nine year old Bannkie studying Creative Writing as a Distance Learner. He writes for fun and because he can. When not writing, he works as a gardener, window cleaner and carer. In a normal distribution curve which measures just about everything and nothing John hovers around the normal mark...just.

**Hayley Rushing**, an international student from the United States, is currently studying in the MLitt Playwriting & Dramaturgy programme. Next year, she plans to return to the U.S. to pursue a PhD in theatre studies. She received her undergraduate degree in English and theatre at the College of William & Mary in Virginia, where she was published in student literary journals. She primarily writes plays and poetry, and indulges in the occasional blog. She is a fan of naps and good cheese.

**Sandra Webster** is an undergraduate and a student of the DACE creative writing diploma course. She is grateful for all the support from all her fellow students and tutors. When not studying or thinking about it, she can be found listening into interesting conversations all in the name of research. She is also passionate about films, music, people and politics- both with a small and capital P. Her mission is to make the world a kinder, fairer place.

**JL Williams** was born in New Jersey and studied at Wellesley College and on the MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Her poetry has been published in journals including *Poetry Wales*, *The Wolf*, *Shearsman*, *Fulcrum* and *Stand*. She was awarded a grant from the Scottish Arts Council for the poetry collaboration *chiaroscuro pentimenti* with composer Martin Parker and artist Anna Chapman, and the Edwin Morgan Travel Bursary from the Scottish Arts Trust. In September 2009 she journeyed to the Aeolian Isles to write a collection inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is called *Condition of Fire* and is published by Shearsman Books. JL Williams is the Literary Officer at the Traverse Theatre. In May 2012 she will be taking on a new role as Programme Manager at the Scottish Poetry Library. You can find JL at [www.jlwilliamspoetry.co.uk](http://www.jlwilliamspoetry.co.uk).

Thank you for reading

[www.glasgowtosaturn.com](http://www.glasgowtosaturn.com)