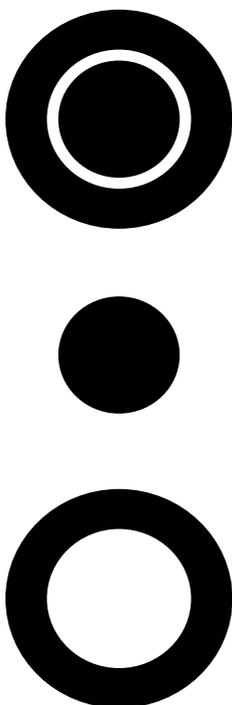


FROM GLASGOW TO SATURN



From Glasgow to Saturn

Issue number thirty three



Jemma Beedie | Lotte Mitchell Reford | Jordan Mulligan

The University
of
Glasgow's
**Creative
Writing
Showcase**

Note from the Editors

Welcome to issue 33 of From Glasgow to Saturn, our second as editorial team, and the first on paper.

We've all put in a lot of work over the last few weeks, but we would particularly like to thank David Rae, who created most of the art in this issue, as well as doing all the typesetting for us.

If we get to the printer's in time, you might be reading this at the new writing showcase we are holding with Octavius and Far Off Places. The showcase gave us the impetus to produce a print copy of From Glasgow to Saturn, and a date to get it published by, so we're very grateful to everyone involved for working with us.

We have some great writing in this issue, and once again we've managed to include a real variety of forms and styles. Prose ranges from Katie Hastie's flash fiction Last Touch, in which a funeral is described through a strange family ritual, to undergraduate English Literature student Innes McNicol's beautifully descriptive accounts of historical life on Lindisfarne, A Brief History of the Competing Dreams In and Around Holy Island, Lamlash Bay. We also have experimental imagist poetry from English Language PhD candidate Ross McLachlan. Ross compiles his poems from the first lines, titles indices of poetry anthologies – in the case of the first poem from his Imagist Suite we think this has been extremely effective.

Issue 33 also features an old lady daydreaming about flinging buns, a very visual subway journey, a trip to the firing range, cult ceremony, and some honks.

Overall, we're really proud of this issue. We hope that you enjoy reading it, and that you appreciate holding it in your hands.

EDITORS

Jemma Beedie | Lotte Mitchell Reford | Jordan Mulligan

FGG

TSS

CONTENTS

Last Touch , *by Katy Hastie*

Brief History , *by Innes McNicol*

Seven Years On , *by Siobhan Staples*

'I' from Imagist Suite , *by Ross McLachlan*

From Mike Tae His Hen , *by Corinna Cola*

Honk and The Shape of Sound but not the
sound itself by , *Ian Matheson*

Ruth's Tea Shop , *by Graeme Rae*

Alice, *by Rosie McCaffrey*

When Zombies Attack , *by Amy Sibley*

Inner Circle , *by John Duncan*

LAST TOUCH

Katy Hastie



Dad finds my palm and plants the end of a silk tassel rope in it, cut from the coffin like a baby cord. Everyone else is jostling to see the action replay of Uncle Joe's granddaughter being suspended by her tiny baby feet over the graveside. Her Dad secured proof of contact on his mobile phone. They announce her the winner.

We were all back in the function room gorging on wake cake even though my cousin Lucy's daughter had left her filled nappy under the food table. The priest, Cousin Francis, was still scowling about the indecorous mass line-up we had formed around the graveside, waiting for the starter's pistol: him.

It was gradual when it came. A clod of earth, a tap. In the name of the Father - and of the Son - and another rattle of soil - a palm touch. The proper ones queued up and pressed their fingertips to the polish like holy water, making way for the coffin to lower. Seeing it slide out of range, we advanced softly over the fresh mud, gathering at the edge. Someone's shoulder flinched, a hand darted, then we toppled like gulls to land small and big hands on its lacquered surface. As shiny as the new car she drove the day the game began many yellow summers ago, when she had tooted her horn and my uncles had waved from the boot, and we had raced after them all the way to the slip road, to be the last to touch the hot chrome bumper as she drove off.

A Brief History of Lamlash Bay and the Holy Isle

Innes McNiccol

The Saint's Boys, autumn 1263

Quiet. No spooked herons. The saint's boys try unendingly to comb out the wind, return to their bracken beds, dream about blood-red bracken and the possibility of a gloriously humane life, one moment to the next a chain of unfiltered beauty and goodwill. It's a small island, so the delicate little brown-green clearings the Christians have made and farm in honour of St. Molaise are determined and high-minded and represent their best, most devoted selves. It's there, on stumps and worn stone, in the feuding light of moon and Dragonboat lamp, which spasms and sucks like fire, that they agree: 1) their god is fatherly, not patrician, smiles into its cheeks, enters their dreams only as guide and reassurance, is in no way a provocateur; 2) the withery alien things the white man from the Dragonboats scribbled on the island's cave-wall yesterday were admissions of guilt and wrong-headedness: the warrior would logically strive to spread peace in the Dragonboat from now on; 3) they, the saint's boys, are the culmination of centuries of strife and human frustration and agony and, where possible, should use the knowledge thus garnered to their advantage. Look at our corn that draws in and out like the leaves of our own Genesis book! they say. They throw up their hands. Look at our lack of war. Periodically, such an agreement rises, rises then mounts and re-enters them until they all get down in hasty supplication because it has started to rain grey sleet inside them.

The White Men, autumn 1263. At Anchor.

Are you a soldier or a sissy? asked Karl

Let me check sir. Magnus checked his red sword.

Magnus had milk under his tongue, spilled it while checking his sword. Karl also had milk under his tongue, but never told anyone. He found plunder easy, and lived off of it guiltlessly and silently. He was afraid of the sissies finding out how easy it was, really, once you were warm and amongst the falling bodies and caught the queer scent of oblivion.

Karl couldn't remember a time free of pain in his head.

Magnus spent most of his time on the gold and red Dragonboat looking at the other Dragonboats and cleaning up the milk he was constantly leaking. The other Dragonboats represented a strange mystery to Magnus even though they were basically the same as his. He particularly envied two Dragonboats at the back of the fleet whose crew sang and coasted well and threw Northumbrian and Roman coins at each other, and who for the last two weeks since they'd left Ireland had done all these things lit by the afternoon sun. Compared to their sunshine lives, Magnus' existence was rotten, anxious and incomplete. Once he rediscovered this thought, which repeated with oar-stroke regularity, he sat down on his cold arse on the deck in the shelter of Molaise's island and thought his next thought, which was: at least I was terrifying on Bute. At least I was blindingly white and hadn't been a sissy. White like milk and terror.

Magnus, Skjallen and Jellyfish had fallen laughing sometimes in spite of themselves, laughing at how easy and warm the ground was when you fell and how easy and warm the Gaels were when they sliced them. Bute didn't hurt like Norway. It was harder to die a senseless death here. They insulted one another in the milkwort and the hot shiny bracken until it rained

Magnus asked a girl on Bute if she wasn't more foam-white than moon-white. He mimed the froth of the sea then got ashamed when she didn't understand. He spat at the dark fat pig-Gael to her left. He and Jellyfish played bones at their fire. Jellyfish asked the girl to sit down next to him. What's wrong? This is a fine place, said Jellyfish.

That night Magnus dreamt of a whole pack of pigs moving between his legs, sniffing his skins, sniffing and praying alternately, and Magnus getting mad because the pigs wouldn't look him in the eye: look down sniff, look up pray, look down sniff.

The next morning they rolled the barrels of milk along the shell beach at Ettrick and the foam-white girl followed Jellyfish with her mouth shut like the tight string seal of a game satchel. Jellyfish made her wade out until the water was past her knees before he allowed her on the landing craft. She looked so scared. Someone shouted that she looked like Alexander's milky whore. On the watertop her skirt puffed like an algal bloom.

The Bomb at Molaise's Foot, 1940

Hello, island here. I shall not be the voice of futility. Instead I shall invoke the honest weary spirit of my favourite ant, who resided in my belly-button for 100 years and after whom I am named.

Recently, they strapped the black iron supports onto the black dynamite just beyond the reach of my big toe, at the northern entrance

to the bay. I watched those uniformed ants accomplish this black fact in stages.

I don't have full-time ants anymore. They arrive in skittish little clusters in the summer and trip over each other on their way over my head.

In truth, I miss the wet, wooden and sad calls of the Dragonboats and of the ants who rowed them and the tiny suspicious eyes painted on their golden oars that sent waves to tickle me where they once carved their names on my belly. The regular drill bell of the Destroyers confuses the memory I have of those little ants, those ticklers.

The Ticklers would've welcomed dynamite that day they came back with half their ants drowned or stiff. They'd have lined up on deck and sung and summoned it to come tearing through their hull and send them home.

My scree-ing skin I put down to the black smoke I'm forced to stand here and draught pathetically. I scree ever more every day, and my terrified wild horses won't look up at me now as they once did for dodging my sloughing skin. They were once the best thing I had; now they chew at the small of my back. I suppose they'll either chew through my back until I feel their hot wet breath on my spine and I'll die that way or the bomb will do for everyone quickly and equally. I remember how the horses once ran across my palm.

The Saints' boys and The White Men Late Autumn 1263

I don't want this to be a critique of bigness per se, said the saint.

Alexander chops our balls off, and now this equivocating, said Karl.

We know you lost many men. The land barely produces enough to feed the monks. We cannot accommodate your fleet. We gave you two true and godly men in good faith, said the saint.

All they did was read and pray, cry and pray. They were blind and stupid, said Karl.

When we crawl up to each other's mouths we still can't hear devotion being expressed. And even if you stopped your hellish war-laments we'd still be anxious you were lurking in the birch with torches, said the saint.

On board the Dragonboat nobody spilled milk. They had only rotten stiffening milk. Their ceremonial smugness had been chased out of them as they fled south. Their gold panels were mud in the sun. They hated this bay and the dumb passive monks on Molaise and the way they had retreated back under the cover of the inscrutable mound of rock like scared children under their mother's breast. Karl's headache disappeared. On the near shore at Pennycroce they burned him in a small boat and waited till they could see the iron nails shining of their own heat before they moved up the coast.

Karl was a sissy, thought Magnus. Everything had to be perfect for Karl. He couldn't live with anything less than perfect triumph over fear. The Gael girl called Magnus a thief, and detested herself because Jellyfish, her real captor, had been hacked into glitter on the shore at Largs within minutes. His last words were as one star whispers to another: incoherently romantic.

At the 10th Anniversary of the Centre for World Peace and Health, 1999

Welcome to Holy Isle. I have many Bodhisattvas. They drape around my waist. I have green Tara and white Tara rock paintings. Please consider the flora and the saasen goat. They're native species and accustomed to Peace. Don't bring your dog either. I need to look after my skin. Also, don't trample on my History of Non-Violence. This island has a history of fighting the good fight. Try to find that spirit in yourself.

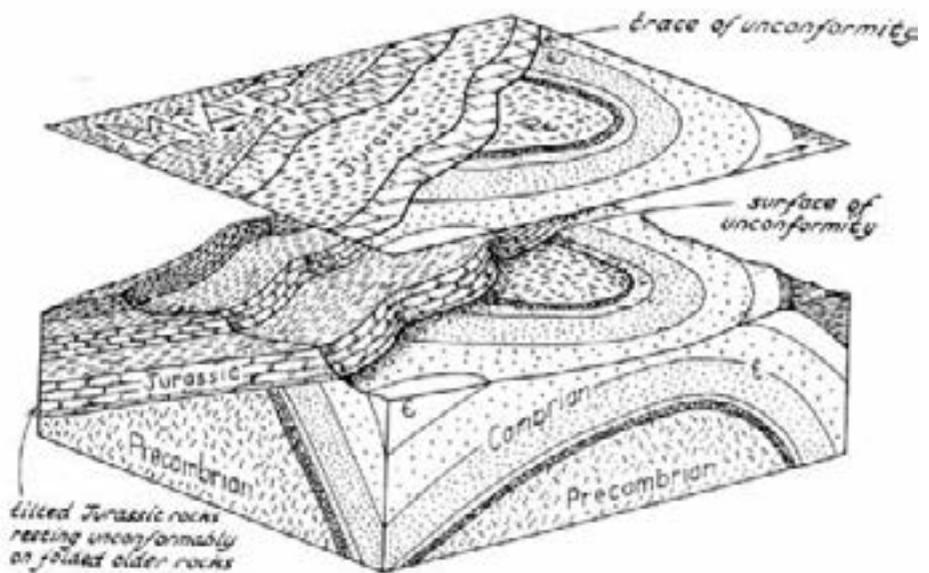
Summer residential courses are now available for booking.

You are also encouraged to reflect upon the area's rich military history.

People remark on my naturally Buddhist shape. Certainly I'm squat and low, with an inclination towards Enlightenment. And it's true ever since the new ants arrived and installed new gods I've had a quieter time of it and have rested well. My main occupation now is listening to the noise of the empty bay. The tide recedes to the same sound the Destroyer ants heard when they were shuffled out of service: the rocks applauding.

The only break in absolute Peace and Health I can remember with the new ants is when they started burrowing through my shin. The dogged way they reduced me reminded me of the horses chewing my spine when I was having trouble with the scree. These new ants made three lovely neat holes in my shin, one above the other, each the size of about ten ants. Then they rested for a period. My absolute Peace began to spoil. Were they trialling with a view to greater destruction? After a dark month they started to board and insulate the holes. Eventually, after a series of gatherings, one ant was installed in the bottom cave, another in the middle, and a final ant ascended to the top cave. Perhaps they imagine themselves inside the warm belly of their Creator. I haven't noticed the group ants dissent about this arrangement. It seems unkind that so few are isolated. However, I understand their installation to be sign of preferment. The group ants mostly play in the harbours between my toes until one of the cave ants is carried down to them dead and alone. The extant cave ants shuffle caves accordingly. Physically, I experience the resettlement of a group ant into the bottom cave as a very faint and distant description of ever narrowing circles followed by a deep silence.

SEVEN YEARS ON



Siobhan Staples

The 13:25 Glasgow flight is behind schedule. My eyes flit across the words of a magazine article as the engines begin their pre-flight growl, the last few passengers still tugging off coats and lifting bags into lockers. At the periphery of my vision I see a woman stretch to put something in the locker above my head and I glance up.

It's her. It's a while since I last saw her. The last time was in a supermarket in Ireland, her thick brown hair swinging from side to side as she pushed a trolley away from me towards the cereal aisle, moving past the stacks of Weetabix and Cocoa Pops as my mouth formed her name in a blood-rush of joy, before I remembered.

This time is my fault, I realise. Earlier today I mentioned her to her boy, carelessly, as if his history was a smooth-edged subject easily slipped into conversation without a second thought, forgetting the rough pock-marking of her absence.

This time is different too because it is not her then, but now: the lines around her eyes are deeper creases, as mine are, and her jaw-line has begun its soft sag. Her eyes are unchanged though, the same eyes the boy has: sharp blue beacons he turns on me from time to time to pick at my memory as he tries to place the disconnected pictures that are all he has.

She settles into the seat in front of me and now I can see her forearm in the gap between the seat backs, tanned and a little hirsute, so undeniably hers. I want to reach out to touch the soft hairs, the unlikely warmth of her skin.

Before, she has been walking away, or glimpsed only from the side, the obscurity of the image my safety net, exposing the trick of my mind almost in the same moment. But today I have been drawn further in. The pain is not blunted at all by the passing of time.

At least I can be grateful for the stomach-wrench of take-off when it comes, and the easy pretence that this is the cause of my bowed head, my concentrated silence.

'I' from Imagist Suite

Ross McLachlan

Excerpts from *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones, Penguin Books 1972

1. To paint the thing as I see it.
2. Beauty
3. Freedom from didacticism
4. It is only good manners if you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly. Utter originality is of course out of the question.

Ezra Pound, Letter to William Carlos Williams, 21/10/1908

I

A coryphée, covetous of applause
a flash –
a rose-yellow moon in a pale sky
A stand of people
a touch of cold in the Autumn night –
a yellow leaf from the darkness

A young man said to me,
above the dock
above the east horizon
above the quiet dock in midnight

after Ch'u Yuan
Alba
Albatre

All day I have watched the purple vine leaves
all the while they were talking the new morality

always

Amalfi
Antwerp

are you alive?

As a young beech-tree on the edge of a forest
as cool as the pale wet leaves
as I wandered through the eight hundred and eight
streets of the city
as the rain moistens
at the window
au vieux jardin



FROM MIKE TAE HIS HEN

Corinna Cola

Ah had a dream the other night, hen. It was one of those dreams where you dream ye've woken up in yer own bed. Those proper daft dreams that have nae point cause yeh dream ye've woken up. Yeh dream ye've woken up. Whit is the point in that, hen? Dreamin ye've woken up. Pointless.

Cept this dream but. . . This dream did have a point. It had a point cause you were here again. Your wee person was back wae me. Ah could hear you breathin pure soft an Ah turned round an you were there. Yer wee heid oan the pillow, yer eyes closed an yer skin, milk bottle as it wis wae yer brown hair fallen all over your forehead. Yeh looked so peaceful lyin there. So peaceful, like a proper angel. Not like that night, member, when we were at Darren's an we were aw so bloomin steamin. That cunt Ped was there an you telt me just tae leave it. It wisnae worth arguin wae him over somethin as stupid as a broken telly. 'Mike,' you shouted across the room, when yeh saw me wae him. Aw the lads turned round cause they felt ma pain, they knew whit was comin. 'Mike! Leave him alane! It's no worth it! Yeh always have tae make some fuckin mountain outta nae shit! Don't ruin a gid night.' An Ah said, quite bravely Ah might add, fir some poor cunt who wis gettin it aff the misses 'Debrah, fuck sake, he sold us fauwty goods! I'm nae havin it! None of yer shite!' Now, a must confess, the drink had gotten a hold of ma better senses. The room wis quiet. Then this wee tiny, brown heided thing flew across the room at me. You grabbed ma wrist an stood oan yer tiptoes and shouted right in ma face, 'Don't you fuckin dare swear at me, you drunken prick!' An then, Ah did somethin so stupid. Ah couldnae help masel, Ah couldnae help but laugh. . . Ah never got the chance to explain this tae yeh properly. . But Ah honestly laughed cause Ah loved you, so, so much. In that one moment, Ah loved you more than Ah had ever loved you. Yeh know, when yer younger an yeh pure fancy yer teacher? An every time she turns round in her dead, tight dress an looks at yeh, wae proper blazin eyes cause she's tryin tae teach an yer fuckin around wae some dick heid, makin a racket, yeh just buckle. Yeh laugh like yer stoned oot yer box cause you feel giddy, stupid an so unbelievably turned on, aw in wan big emotional wave, yer wee boner pushin against yer trousers. That's how Ah felt right then. But, Ah never wis the type to articulate ma inner most feelins. So, instead, Ah laughed, then a looked at yeh, like a proper twat. Ah looked at you, then Ah looked at that fuck nut, Ped. An then a punched the cunt right oan the keiker. You looked at him, then yeh looked at me, then you picked up the nearest glass an threw its contents right into ma stupid face. Ah have tae admit, it wis no yer most original move, hen, but it won the argument. You stormed aff wae yer

pals, aw geein me the stare as yeh marched aff. Ah tried tae phone you tae get you back tae the party but aw you said wis come hame soon an we'll talk. Ah said ad be hame in half an hour. But Ah wisnae. Ah got hame at five in the mornin. Ah took aw ma clathes aff an got intae bed wae you. Hopin tae get some lovin reassurance that yeh werenae gonnae chib me in ma sleep. But yeh were oot of it. Ah'd never seen someone sleep angrily until then. And you did it so well, hen. Ragin in yer sleep.

But in that dream, you werenae ragin. You were so peaceful. Ah reached out an Ah touched yer cheek. Ah swear, Ah actually felt yer skin. It wis exactly like it always was, dead soft. Ah'd actually forgotten whit it felt like until then, an Ah've forgotten since, but Ah definitely felt it then. An then you courried intae me, just like yeh used to. Yer freezin cold feet between ma legs, ya wee bastart, an yer heid under ma chin. Ah could feel yer heartbeat against the bottom of ma ribs an yer soft hair against ma neck. You breathed in really deeply then yeh let out this big sigh. It made the hairs on ma chest blow like dead leaves in the wind an yer own hair blew intae yer eyes. It gave yeh a wee fright an yer whole body twitched. You woke up an you pushed back from me a bit, yer eyes wide like wan a those Philippine Tarsiers, we saw at the zoo. Member? When we went tae the zoo an yeh kicked me in the shin fir laughin at that wee disabled boy who kept throwin raisins at folk in the canteen an he wis shoutin 'filthy fuck, filthy fuck'. Member? We saw this wee animal in a big, dirty enclosure. The sign said that they were nocturnal or somethin an that folk never really saw them durin the day but fir some reason he came out fir a chat. Ah swear, he sensed you. He came right close tae the fence an stood up as tall as he could fir a midget, an Ah said, that it looked like you. When you try tae pretend yer tall, an the strain of it makes you open yer already massive, green eyes so wide, that they take up yer whole foreheid.

Well, in the dream that wis how you looked at me. An then you realised you'd just got a wee fright an you smiled sleepily at me. You looked pure content. Normally, if we woke up in the night together like that, we'd have a good shag but Ah wis happy just holdin you, and you were happy just holdin me. Don't get me wrang, Ah did want it. Ah've not had any in a long time, you were ma last, of course. Ah don't even really get a chance fir a cheeky wank. That baby girl of ours is no longer a baby, Ah tell yeh. Between tryin tae stop her gettin pregnant an gettin called up tae the fuckin school every two seconds cause the boy's been beaten up again, Ah hardly get a second. Ah love them both with aw ma heart though, they look so much like you, the girl especially. Ah feel like Ah've been kicked hard in the nuts every time Ah see her. She misses you. Ah don't see much emotion from her but the other day, Ah walked in her room an she was cryin an laughin at the same time, lookin at photos from when we aw went tae May's 50th an it was the first time the kids had seen us drunk. You were sittin oan ma knee an a

fell backwards ontae the flair an every cunt wis rippin the piss. Then that awfa stripper came in an we goat a picture a your face when yeh saw May lick salt aff the guy's big arse. . . She wis lookin right at that photie. Ah love that wan Ah you. Yer cheeks aw red from embarrassment an alcohol, yer wee nose wrinkled. . . Well, the girl wis lookin at that, sittin laughin an cryin wae the picture in her hand. She looked up from the photies when she realised Ah wis staunin there an sounded exactly like you when she shouted 'why the fuck are you in ma fuckin bedroom?' an Ah said 'sorry hen'. . . an Ah went tae leave but then she said 'come back da, Ah'm sorry,' an Ah walked over tae her, trippin up on aw the shit that was oan her flair an we hugged fir ages. Like when she wis a wee lassie an we'd fall asleep oan the couch together, cept we were both cryin. Like brand new, wee babbies. . . The boy needs you. . . He really needs you, he's a fuckin idiot. Ah don't know whit tae do wae him, hen. He cannae concentrate in school, the other day he threw a Rolo at his biology teacher's heid. It sounds funny, but it wisnae. Ah'm actually embarrassed when Ah go up there cause aw those fuckin teachers wae their suits oan think it's ma fault. 'How are you coping, Mr McCafferty?' they say. Ah always say 'fine thanks.' While wantin tae scream at the top a ma lungs, 'fuckin interferIng cunts! How do you think Ah'm fuckin copin bastards?!' But Ah guess, that's just it, in't It? It wis always gonnae be hard. Yeh didnae leave unnoticed. It's funny that yer no here anymare an yet yer aw we think about. Cause ye've just gone an left us aw! Ah don't blame you, hen, Ah just get so fuckin' angry sometimes. So fuckin angry that Ah punch the bed headboard until ma knuckles bleed and then Ah roll intae a pathetic wee baw an a cuddle yer nightie, greetin ma eyes out.

Whit did I do? Whit did Ah do that meant Ah deserved tae have tae see ma stronger half fade away like the sun at fuckin twilight? Just another bit of fuckin dirt under the grass. Ah hope the worms fuckin appreciate you, Ah wish Ah wis lucky enough tae be a worm an Ah could crawl deep intae the cold earth an lie with you. Eternally eatin you an shittin yeh back out again. But Ah cannae be a worm right now, Ah have tae just stick wae the memories an the dream. The dream wis perfect cause none a the bad stuff had happened. You never got sick, you'd never got so thin yeh couldnae even walk tae the toilet on yer own an Ah had never had tae clean yer wee bum up. Not that Ah minded doin that, yeh were so cute when yeh were aw embarrassed as If Ah hadnae seen it before. Ah liked bein strong fir you fir a change, takin care a you. But Ah just wish Ah'd been strong enough. Strong enough tae make yeh better, but yeh married a fuckin weaklin, hen. An Ah'm so sorry fir that.

All Ah know Is Ah miss you so, so much, so, so much, hen. Ah hope tae the wee creator cunt in the sky, that wan day you'll be unlucky enough tae see me again. But until then, ma wee tarsier, Ah'll stick wae the dream.



The shape of a sound but not the sound itself

This is the sound of aubergines by moonlight
and this is the sound of a red handkerchief.

This is the sound of dandelions on fire
while this is the sound of a reluctant egg.

This is the sound of an armchair in danger
but this is the sound of colanders asleep.

This is the sound of strawberries at daybreak
and this, the sound of a penitent lightbulb.



Honk

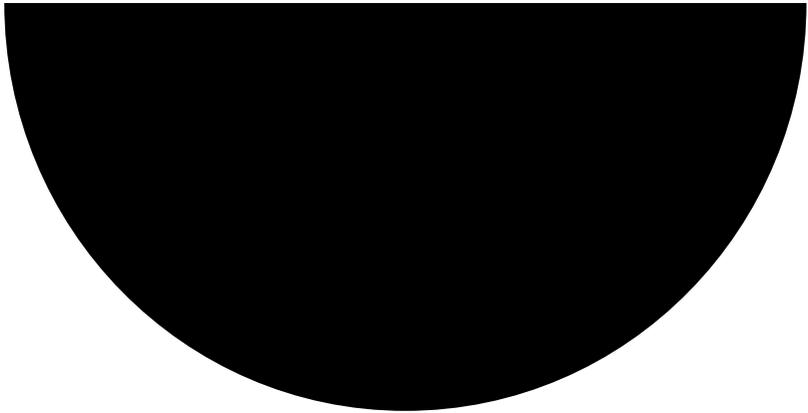
honk if you've ever been
or never been
to Frankfurt in spring

honk if you often keep
or never keep
old pieces of string

honk if you always think
or never think
fondly of honey

honk if you sometimes sing
or never sing
loudly to donkeys

*RUTH'S
TEASHOP*



Graeme Rae

Her rock bun is stale again. Too dry. Too hard. Perhaps today, she thinks, she shall lob it at the cake counter, confident it will shatter the glass showering nasty shards all over the lemon fancies and whatnot. But what a thought! How could she have such a thought? She notices some stray strands of white hair have fallen forward so she pulls them back over her ear. Something's just not sitting right with her today. She tries to pinpoint it while Agnes talks. It's sort of creeping into her chest and her bones from outside. But it could also be seeping or pressing out from inside her. A hollowness, maybe. It's all over her body but settling mostly around her throat. She would never lob her rock bun and ruin Ruth's counter like that anyway. Ruth would have her guts for garters even though they'd been regulars for over forty years. What would be the point of making trouble?

Agnes' dainty fork maintains a trembling hover over her usual Black Forest gateau, one tine wider than the others lending it a sort of knife-edge. Her hand is slender, like the rest of her. She still wears a lot of make-up, buys bright, fashionable new clothes which hug her figure rather than hide it, but something about the way she raises her pinky to hold basic cutlery is irritating. She's not touched her cake either but not because there's anything wrong with it – no, it looks moist, exotic – but because Agnes will do all the talking, take a last minute nibble or two, and then dash off home because her kids (and the grandkids) will be there any minute. It's always the same when they meet for their 'tete-a-tetes', as Agnes insists on calling them. She wonders, not for the first time, if this arrangement with the family deliberately coincides with their meetings.

The strangest things have been catching her eye today. Like the way Ruth has cut the floral lining paper on

the shelves with serrated scissors, not ordinary straight ones, and that the doilies are in fact all black not the white you'd expect. And the walls. Not that there's anything wrong with wood-chip wallpaper exactly but that paint-line half way up the wall and right around the room is in fact awfully squint: a bit like the Mendips. Then there is the colour of the ceiling. It can't have seen a lick of paint for twenty years or more. She tries to remember. No, the last time Ruth closed up shop was for her mother's funeral – and that must have been, oh, fifteen years ago – so yes, that would be right, before even then. She did get a grand send off ... Something though. A sound. Agnes hasn't heard it. She looks up and over her shoulder. A moth must be trapped in a lightshade somewhere. She cannot for the life of her work out where it's coming from.

“And I've never forgotten it!” Agnes bursts in.

“No, well you wouldn't would you?” A reflex. What was she talking about?

“But think about it! If that had hit her head and not the doorframe, well, I mean to say, she'd be dead!” Agnes' eyes bulge. “Oh, which reminds me – my new little baby arrives tomorrow! I thought Minka. That's what Queen Victoria named one of hers you know. “

Always skilled with people. Always knew what was really important to people, and their tender spots. If just any of their friends were still alive they'd already know all this gossip. Every one of the girls would have known about that near-death incident, or doorframe or new mutt before she did. If they'd still been alive, of course.

There was no question Agnes had been an amazing support to the girls in their difficult times, they always used to say how amazing she'd been. Cancelling things, chauffeuring here there and everywhere, staying over, freeing up her z-bed or dropping off meals she'd made. It was after Agnes' wedding when all that charity really began. Never charitable towards her though, now that she thought about

it. And no practical help either, over the years, because that would have meant getting close. Explaining herself. She'd never even tried to really talk with her, not that way she'd talked with the others, with warmth and sympathy and so fascinated by the tiniest detail. No, she got 'tete-a-tetes', and they were really all about Agnes. There was that tremor she always had, though.

"It must be because they've a share in the company they're so helpful, but I told her straight I said they didn't look like that through the cellophane. They've got a faint pattern on you can only see when you take them out. I was after plain white sheets! Young man was fine about it but ..." As she talks that little artery low on her neck in that dip beside the collar bone throbs away.

Back then everything about her was alert, cheeky and independent. Exciting. A Kathleen Byron looky-likey Jean, rest her soul, had said once and that was sort of right. Her looks were admired so. Imagine what it must have been like for him with Agnes. On fresh white cotton sheets in a romantically exotic city, Morocco maybe. Street-market hubbub drifts in through a window flung wide because of the sweltering heat and on a carved ebony bedside table aromatic, spiced tea infuses slowly in copper cups. Their clothes are draped about the room. Imagine him lingering over that tiny throbbing artery, lightly touching the skin with the pad of his forefinger, learning its contours, its intimate association with a full, beating heart, and there on the bed, him learning the body around it. Reclining. Open as the window. Alive. Her skin smooth as milk. Her curves and mounds and nooks and smells and taste and how it would feel to be surrounded by her, connected to her. And then she imagines what it must have been like for Agnes to have captured him like that. Did she study his expressions, his delight? Did she revel in her victory? Of course she did.

A stab of guilt and her face prickles. What is wrong

with her today? She has nothing to feel guilty about. Turning up dutifully like this every week, like a proper friend. Because that's what friends do. They're there for one another. They listen, they are strong, they roll with the punches however low, and they maintain. If you say a thing you do that thing because you've said so. Every week for all these years, watching Agnes' fork-knife thing and her finger all poised that way over a cake she doesn't really care about while she prattles on and her just sitting there in this out of date teashop, because that's what it is, after all, and with hands clasped in her lap just so and head nodding like that dog in the advert she can't stand. It was the crushed dignity. How you preserve what's left. Or if it's truly all gone how you ... obtain it again. She feels tears welling up and has to pretend to look in her bag and she can't understand any of it.

"Off to the loo. Tea's going straight through!" She forces a smile but she's too hot and her breathing is funny and that noise in her ear is louder. She wobbles a bit as she stands.

"More water in it next week, eh love?" Ruth shouts over then whispers something to the teenage assistant who brays with laughter from a mask of caked foundation and a mouth full of braces.

Once the door is closed behind her she splashes some water on her face and takes a few deep breaths. A small, creeping mold patch on the wall above the end cubicle, the verdigris coated plumbing, the missing tile in the false ceiling and the loose wiring lurking up there, a dark frame around the mirror's edge where silver paint has peeled from its back. Exactly the same time last week all this was here but it seems different today and full of meaning, of foreboding.

Leaning on the small corner sink she studies the old woman in the mirror. She detested growing old. It was

repulsive and nothing had prepared her for it. Nothing can. Maybe that's why the older people in her life when she was young were so reticent about it, to spare the young from such a bad, bad secret. Her mother must have felt just the same. And her mother. And her mother too and all mothers before her. But all the mothering stopped right here, with that old woman in the mirror. There had been no children, no tumultuous epiphany, no prize, no one in fact: apart from him. So very nearly him. But he'd been stolen from her and that was too long ago to feel anyway. Their friends are buried, turning to soil and silent. A finishing line, that once receded just as she advanced, now ceased to pull away from her and it feels like she could, with the gentlest effort, close her hand around it and never wake again and she knows then with utter certainty it will be tonight, or maybe the night after. Because she is truly ready and there it is. She nods slowly. In the black-framed mirror her mother's skull, wrapped in skin-like tracing paper, nods back. That moth again ricochets softly, unseen and barely there and for all the world like her own heart. Must have followed her in. Or it's another one. Or -- why yes, of course. It is her beating heart. Erratic, tiring and fearful.

Another splash of water on the face.

"You were ages, dear. Everything alright? ... So there I am – I mean can you imagine—"

"Stop that now, Agnes." Agnes recoils. There is a single, tiny wedge out of the gateau. The fork-knife lies beside it smeared with lipstick and cream like a stained weapon. She says, "I just had a thought. Maybe we could do something different today. Sit in the park down by the cypress or something ..." They'd never even been to Morocco. She knew for a fact it was Sidmouth.

Alice

Rosie McCaffrey

The purification takes place on the last night of the second full moon. We don't keep clocks or calendars here, except those provided by nature. At the end of your first month you are expected to be fully integrated and working alongside the rest of us. At that point it is time for you to become an official part of the family. Purification is the third and most important step.

When I first came here I tried to understand it through the lens affixed to me at birth—Catholicism. Each step was another sacramental vow, vows which supposedly brought you closer to God but nowadays are an excuse for fancy dresses and fancier parties. Rachel quickly corrected me. The word 'ritual' left a bad taste in her mouth.

'What we do here isn't faith,' she said, 'it is truth.'

The first step is renunciation. You have to let go of your past. That includes family and friends. It's easier than you think. You realise that the most important family is the one you choose to be a part of. We are defined by our choices, not our fate.

The second step is renaming. I used to be Alice, and I was exactly how it sounds: pretty and delicate like lace, but empty, purposeless, ineffectual. Now I'm Hannah. I picked it because it's the same backwards and forwards. It is straightforward and dependable. And now I have purpose. Aside from the duties we all share equally—working the farm, cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing—I have been given the privilege of being a mentor as well.

It's the first time I've made the mixture without Rachel's observation, but I'm confident in my abilities. I've always been good at cooking. I was good at chemistry too—the thought is a glance from a rock. Alice was good at chemistry.

I chop up the various roots and herbs, which I picked myself this morning, and boil them down until their colour has leached into the water. I sieve out the pulp and leave the liquid to cool. I take down an unlabelled container, pick out one white pill, and crush it with the flat of a knife. It's just a catalyst, nothing more than a mild sedative. I sprinkle the powder into the glass, stir, and watch it froth up like a milkshake. I place the glass on a tray with a thick corner of grainy bread. You're always hungry after the purification.

Before leaving the kitchen I open a drawer where we keep string, scissors and sewing needles, knock out the false back the way Rachel showed me, and shake a tiny white pellet out of a box. Jenna will need to take this immediately after the purification. I hold it in my palm for a few moments, watching it nestle into the creases that an old crone at a carnival once told me promised love, wealth, and premature death. I shake my head. She told Alice. And she was right. I drop the tiny tablet into my breast pocket and leave the kitchen.

The first step takes you from the desiccated vein of the highway into the woods that incubate the property for miles and miles around. I imagine it from above like a safe green blanket, like a length of emerald silk coiled around an uncut diamond in the centre. Walking through those woods in gumboots the same yellow as the aspen leaves, with Rachel carving our path in front, I realised I'd never really heard the rain before. I'd never really smelt the earth, or felt the cold cross-hatch a blush on my cheek with its tools of pins and needles. I'd never appreciated the trees before, bending close, cradling,

protective, strong.

Upstairs Jenna sits on a wooden chair that Max whittled last winter from a felled maple tree. She used to be Caitlin. She scratches at the cloth robe which is much too big for her spindly limbs. I remember the feeling against my own skin: jagged fronds of grass, not unpleasant, but goading.

‘Do I have to wear this?’

I sit beside her and smile. ‘I know it’s uncomfortable, but it’s only for a little while.’ The story of Jesus and the crown of thorns rises up behind my lips. ‘Besides, if you weren’t wearing it, you’d be naked.’

I laugh to show her it’s okay to laugh too. Her front tooth is slightly crooked. In the places beyond the trees she would be having braces fit by now. It would be a tragedy to straighten out that kink.

‘What do I have to do in there?’ She doesn’t glance up from her lap, but her words gesture towards the closed attic door behind her.

I reach out to put my hand on her shoulder

‘Nothing you don’t want to.’

‘I’m scared,’ she admits.

The only light on the landing comes from a candle in a bracket on the wall. The darkness exaggerates the size of her eyes until they look huge.

I put my arm around her concave shoulders and run a strand of her hair through my fingertips. ‘I know, that’s perfectly natural, but don’t be. We’re all your family here, and we love you very much. We won’t do anything to hurt you.’

She nods, chastising herself for doubting. ‘What’s that?’

‘Just a little tonic to ease your nerves.’

She wrinkles her freckle-scattered nose. ‘It looks like swamp water.’

I laugh. ‘Just think of it as a green milkshake.’

I pass her the glass and she takes a tentative sip. ‘Eurgh! How much do I have to drink?’

‘Just a couple more gulps until you start to feel more relaxed.’

She swallows half the glass before her lilac eyelids start to droop. I glance outside to check. The moon is a pearl suspended in the black, an egg about to break. It’s time. I guide Jenna to the door and push it aside, giving her a reassuring squeeze before pulling it closed again. I don’t tell her to lie down on the mattress; her body will do that of its own accord.

Thwack.

Thwack.

I peel back the thin curtain and peer down at Eli chopping wood by the yellow glow of a lantern mounted on the red barn wall. The axe cuts a silver arc through the air and splits the wood in two. Thwack. Thwack. He straightens to wipe his forehead on the sleeve of an ill-fitting red lumberjack jacket. One of many material goods we have alleviated from the rings of suburban hell beyond the trees. My favourite is a bronze figure of a meditating deity. I rub my thumb over its smooth knee now, thinking of a stain from a later trip. Usually we try to get in and out without you ever knowing we were there, but sometimes that isn’t possible. Sometimes we leave a mark.

Eli glances up at me, his blonde head surrounded by light. He nods. You are doing Right. I smile and nod back. I can’t imagine this place without them. It’s as though Eli and Max, Rachel and Isaiah have always been here. That they grew right out of the ground like the aspens swaying in the breeze.

The time of the purification is a spell, casting stillness and silence over the rest of us. We hear the noises, both familiar and unique, like a voice. And mutely we each send up thoughts of our own purifications as wolves serenade the night.

I remember sidling towards consciousness; I emerged from dense, heavy darkness into the welcoming glow of candles, arranged in a vigil along the low attic sills and in arcs around the floor. I was on my stomach. The robe was gone, its meagre warmth replaced by the sultry heat emanating like a halo from Isaiah's body. I'd had no sense of my own body until his enfolded mine. I smiled. With his mouth at my neck he began to move against me. It was painful, but that was good. The pain was a fire, incinerating everything bad and selfish inside me. All around the candles nodded their approval.

I am tingling with vicarious excitement all over again, knowing that like mine, Jenna's experience will be doubly significant. During her second week here Isaiah talked with us about the importance of sharing ourselves with others and not being selfish. The talk was for Jenna's benefit but we never tire of hearing those words from Isaiah. Any words. After dinner that night when the girls were clearing up, she confessed to me that she'd never shared herself with anyone before.

'Any - any man, I mean.'

She'd been afraid that if we knew, we'd think she was selfish and wouldn't want her anymore. She asked me if she had sinned. I told her we would never want her gone as long as she wanted to remain here and improve herself; that the only sin a person can commit is allowing fear to inhibit their choices.

I'm not sure what the boys' purification involves. I've never asked. It's private. Before she left, Janie told me it has

something to do with the old tool shed at the edge of the property.

That's how most of the girls find their way here: through Eli's blue irises or Max's dark slip of a mouth. Others squeeze through the puncture wounds left by needles or self-inflicted arterial leaks. That was me. That was Alice. It is exposure, incisions, voids, apertures of some kind that bring us all here. The gaping wound of pain and loss opens you up for sharing.

We share each other, but it is only right that Rachel is the one to bear Isaiah's sons. Isaiah only has boys and only with Rachel. That's part of the reason Janie left. She regrew selfishness.

I slip the small white pill from my pocket and place it on the table next to the deity's foot, ready for Jenna to swallow.

The moon has waned far to the west, peering out between the trees, when the door creaks open and Jenna emerges. Her fingers fumble dumbly to tie the robe and beneath it her legs move in jerks. I guide her to the chair, keeping my arm around her, my head bowed to hers.

'I know you must feel right now as though something terrible has happened.'

These are the words Rachel spoke to me after my purification. I know they will help Jenna now.

'But what happened in there was truly good.'

She doesn't speak, but I can see the logic, the comfort, the rightness of my words start to percolate. Her hand forgets about trying to cover the blood soaking through the front of the robe.

'You are part of the family now.' I hold her tighter. 'You are loved.'

When Zombies Attack

Amy Sibley

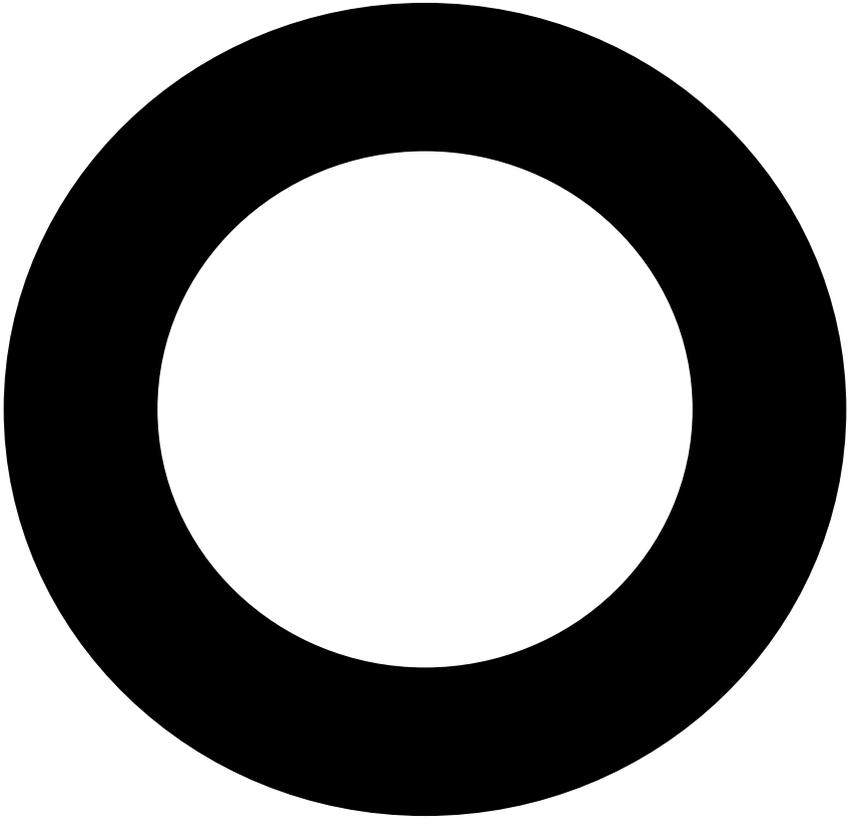
Take your right index finger and pull the trigger back; you'll feel the bullet shooting out of the barrel; you may at this moment realize the enormity of what you are holding in your hands. Yes, you're correct, it does feel like it weighs next to nothing, like a plastic toy; the one you're holding probably weighs about two to three pounds. While you were standing there still in awe over the immense sound and energy you felt coursing up your arms and through your chest, the bullet had already hit the target. See that? No, you're not a great shot just yet; but look there, you've hit the center of the target a few times now; aim for the chest, not the head – bigger target, easier to hit. Always aim in the safe direction; what's a safe direction? down range. As many times as you've seen people shooting at and getting shot on TV and films, and as much as you knew that bullet can kill you, you're now understanding just how true that is as you stand in this gun range and hear the loud 'booms' of the bullet being fired out with each pull of the trigger; wow, is that right? you've never held or been in the same room as a gun before today – April 5, 2012? So you signed up with your partner to take this gun safety and certification course - you've come along in spite of your reservations - but admit to yourself how you did look forward to shooting a gun; admit that it felt good; you could feel the power and control. If a cartridge flies back and falls down your shirt don't panic; your goateed instructor in his kha-ki cargo pants and tight black shirt will ask you to put the weapon down to fish the cartridge out from your bra, even if the gun is still pointed down range – thing is most people

put the weapon down to do that. And then you have to sit in a lecture for two hours on gun safety and gun laws; don't feel on edge when the instructor barks out the question of whether you'll all be applying for gun licenses and then purchasing them for your home; you don't intend to, but just dutifully nod your head in agreement alongside the shouts of 'hell yeah!' from your fellow classmates. You'll be fed a lot of information including what would happen here in Massachusetts if you shoot an intruder in your home; ¹ you may not change your mind about guns, you may not want one in your home any more than you did when you walked in, walk out of class with a healthier respect for the gun and a bigger fear of your neighbors, but don't let on; sign up for the email blasts; don't worry the school has its priorities straight and is on top of its marketing plans, you'll get an email in a few months about a new assault rifle they'll have for sale: the survival rifle.² This rifle is waterproof, floats, and it assembles in seconds; according to the school it is just what one needs when zombies attack.

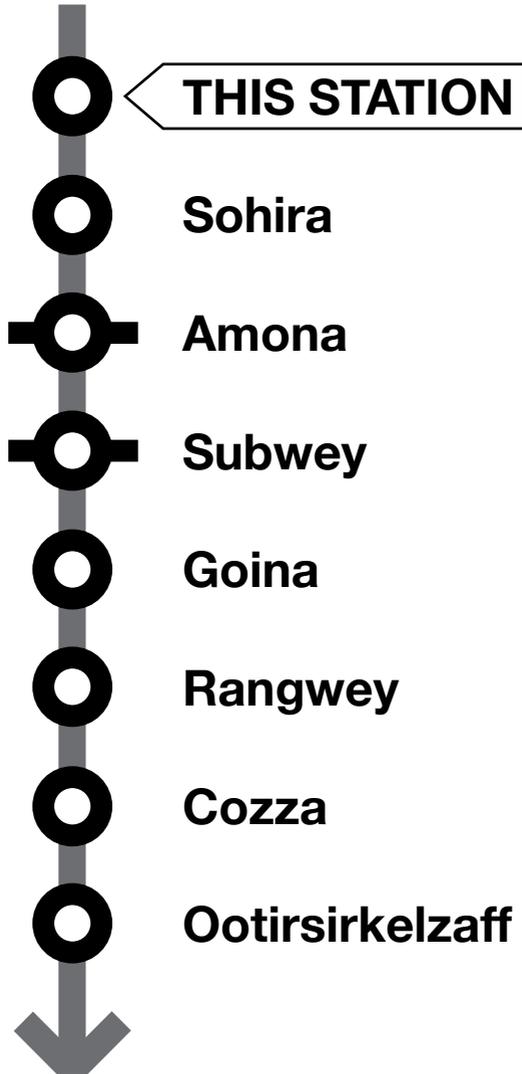
Endnotes:

1. 'It'll be the worst day of your life.' our instructor said. 'Massachusetts law isn't likely to protect you much if you shoot and kill an intruder in your home. The likelihood is you will get arrested. If you're lucky enough to get off on self-defense you're still likely to get sued by the intruder's family in a wrongful-death lawsuit. The states, in essence, if an intruder enters your home you must do everything to retreat. If you can't and you decide to fight back, be prepared to potentially suffer the consequences. And if you are going to shoot the guy, then don't shoot him in the knee. Why not? Well, if you had time to aim for something as small as a kneecap, then you had time to escape.'

2. This being the Henry Repeating U.S. Survival AR-7. It is a semi-automatic that holds eight rounds and weighs three and a half pounds and comes with a Teflon coated receiver and a coated steel barrel. It sells for the low price of \$280.00.



Inner Circle



Author Biographies

Katy Hastie has returned to Glasgow to study as part of the creative writing program.

Innes McNicol is an undergraduate literature student at Glasgow University.

Siobhan Staples has lived in seven different cities across the UK and a Scottish Borders town before finally settling (for the moment) in a village on the Ayrshire coast. She can't answer the question 'where are you from?' but is excellent at packing boxes. Siobhan is a graduate of Glasgow University's MLitt and a former editor of *From Glasgow to Saturn* (2011-12). Her work has appeared in a number of publications including *Tip Tap Flat*, *Spilling Ink*, *Octavius*, *From Glasgow to Saturn* and *New Writing Scotland*.

Ross Deans McLachlan is an MPhil candidate in English Language, focusing on cognitive linguistic approaches to discourse comprehension. His poetry is found in the indices of titles and first lines at the back of old poetry anthologies, a process that he openly concedes may be a lazy sham. He has been pretending to write a novel for 6 years.

Corrina Cola is an honours year Music student and part time musician. She has participated in the university's creative writing workshops and has been published in *Glasgow Gen*.

Iain Matheson was born in Plean, grew up in Glasgow and lives in Edinburgh. He is a musician by day and a poet by night. Sometimes at dusk he writes prose.

Graeme Rae is a year one, part-time student on the MLitt Creative Writing course.

Rosie McCaffrey is a fourth year English Lit student who dreams of being able to pay the bills by writing about her imaginary friends. She has written one deforestation-sized novel and is currently working on a much more disciplined prequel as part of her Creative Writing Dissertation. In the fleeting moments when she's not buried under a pile of books, Rosie enjoys watching Daria, cooking new vegetarian recipes, writing film reviews for an online magazine, and going for drives in stormy weather.

Amy Sibley is originally from California and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

John Duncan doesn't write as much as he should.

Issue 33 of From Glasgow to Saturn was first
published in March 2014.

Arrangement and editorial material copyright ©
2014 From Glasgow to Saturn.

Copyright for all work appearing in this issue
remains with the authors.

No material may be reproduced without prior written
consent.

Please visit www.glasgowtosaturn.com for more
information,
Including submission guidelines and full archives of
previous issues.

Graphic Design and Illustration

by

David Rae

davidraedesign.com

davidmacgregorrae@gmail.com