FROM GLASGOW TO SATURN

ISSUE 46
FIG 46.

FROM GLASGOW TO SATURN
Letter From the Editors

Dear Reader,

When we, the editors of Issue 46, sat down to discuss the commonality between the works presented here, we noticed that an emergent theme was one of home. The past fourteen months have seen many of us separated from our loved ones, forced to negotiate the turmoil of a global pandemic in places that either we would not consider our home or, if we are fortunate enough, places which have become our adopted homes. In some pieces home is a sanctuary one yearns to return to in order to escape the vicissitudes of the world, elsewhere it represents the lure towards a community or a way of life that does not yet exist.

Taking the pieces as a whole we were surprised at how many of them were concerned with centrality or depicting home as a location at the centre of things. In one poem home is a place returned to in memory, solemnly recalled through the nature unique to its location. In others, the speaker must leave behind the home of their adolescence to reach the burgeoning centre of adulthood; in some pieces home is a place we make with another person. Some writers use this notion of centrality in excitingly subversive ways, in depictions of public spaces such as garden centres, offices, and call centres as dizzying or unsettling locations. Inversely, these self-assumed ‘centres’ have the ability to make us feel on life’s periphery, robbing us of our sense of self and mental well-being. In an era of self-isolation and social distancing, it is interesting that many writers chose to see public spaces as surreal and menacing.

But lest you think alienation is the dominant theme, we are delighted to present a host of gorgeous love poetry that takes place in domestic worlds threaded with tenderness and longing. The written pieces are
illuminated by the stunning visual contributions which focus in on the small details of everyday life and zoom out to the grand landscapes that surround us. All of these threads are encapsulated in Hannah Magee’s striking cover design, which also hearkens to the celestial connotations of the journal’s title.

We would like to thank all of the writers presented in Issue 46 who, at a time when human connection is a challenge, give us these intimate and candid works that feel all the more urgent.

Sincerely,

Grace Borland Sinclair | Hannah George | Niamh Gordon | Asta Kinch | Liam Welsh

c co-editors
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EC Lewis

Younger than the founding pantheon,
my acolytes announce my coming in temples of
waxed floors and dairy aisles,
with overheated radios in old station wagons,
hot plastic seats snapped shut
a stadium in reverence and ritual,
bound by the trio of brass instruments.
No one can be angry or upset
with my name on their lips,
queen of good times, empress of
the love shared between two
arms and hands outstretched,
of beer soaked bodies and
your body sweating in the shirt you bought
from the gift shop in order to fit in.
I unfurl my own, infinite
and ever expanding with each season
to hold them all in the warmth.
I am an immutable effigy of the
photograph, a girl with blue eyes
and a clean collar in the year
the moon was claimed.
Tomatoes

EC Lewis

Green tufts crowned
with self pollinating buttercream blooms

something to talk about other
than the weather,

I still have the red bucket the soil came in,
anaemic
and kissed by the late evening suns

consumed seemingly in one breath while
draped in warm basil leaves and olive oil,

the memory of summers when I could hold your hand
and the breeze kissed our outstretched limbs
Centre

Lesley McDermott
In the park, she passed yellow tulips so tall they reached her hip. A few people were wearing masks, most were not. A bee hovered and left.

She walked slowly and wondered who among them might be in hospital soon. She shouldn’t have been out, but she needed food and there was no way of getting it without going out.

She found a corner shop open. She bought milk and bread and two tins of beans. The man in the shop was wearing a blue surgical mask. He had bloodshot eyes.

She asked him if he had any apples or bananas.

Sorry, he replied, we only have mangoes left.

She hesitated before saying, I will take one. Alphonso mangoes, he said, they are the king of fruits! She paid for the groceries. You’re a life-saver, she said. He smiled but she could not see his smile.

Slowly, she walked home. Somewhere, a dog barked.

She put the groceries on the kitchen table. They looked like trophies. She wanted to tell someone about the mango, its smooth green skin and gold sticker. She liked the name Alphonso.

She wanted to tell someone about the tall tulips, and the shopkeeper posing as a doctor – a life-saver! – but there was no one to tell.

She had never eaten a mango before. She was not sure how to.

She held it in her hands.
Morning Visions

Hannah Magee

Sunlight bleeds through the thin skin of his ear
dying it red. I can see his pulse beat
under his neck. This is all I can see
lying here with the man I’m trying to forget.

Morning kisses aren’t so fresh but better
than none. All resolve was lost as our
crumpled clothes lay bathed in morning sun.
Blind half shut, I open my eyes, reposition myself,

but stop, when he sighs. Too much movement will
scare him off. I have to go, he lies.
Last night’s mask has begun to drop.
Fine, is my reply. I better be off.

One more time so the message is clear.
Never again, I tell myself. My lie this time, I fear.
Mildly, so as not to disturb a healing thing,
I watched from a nearby bench. She skipped, and lifted off,
on tickled-green knees.

Yesterday, she said that comparing sadness was futile and predictably I fled, my spinnaker bulging on devoted anger’s wind. (Seafarer!
I see you, tutting on the breeze)

Before leaving, she’d told me which window upstairs had the best view, it’s an old sash, gets stuck on the up but wedged in that way (with an angle) your eyes will soon meet the time-worn town, the watercress, a bird-soaked lake. Later

(out in the dip of the fort) I clenched grass and thought of the milk-white space between patience and its curfew. A gasping howl and a deed poll, the local lawyer’s kitchen. She makes damsons into jam. I wanted to make something happen
that was within the law. Erect a lamppost, bear a child, 
change the sign to sale agreed. At night I talk to you about this stuff, desperate 
for a clue. “She’s gone again” he says, “you surely knew?” but we’re interrupted by a foreboding 

ricochet, the jogger’s gait beating heavy at the window, air broad with headlong August. 
I’m sure she told me to keep one foot in the ocean, remaining fearful 
of the room below. These moments bend so freely and 

it’s not certain what is being said. Only 
that when she’s gone there is a lull, some mess, the fear of stopping completely - all cloaked 
behind the years of asking. You said you enjoyed knowing me, 

and I know you still, with no words to keep me up but shrug 
and love again, shrug, 
and love again.
There, Not There

Martina Genovese

In this series of monoprints, titled ‘There, Not There’, fallen leaves become a medium to visualise the concept of impression, both literally and metaphorically. Something that was once there, is not anymore—yet its absence shapes a void that is immersed in the moment, tangible, measurable. In an inextricable dichotomy, the negative space surrounding the object becomes the subject itself.
Waking Second Time Round Again As Fruit

Patrick Romero

Opening one eye barely stops the slow, slow back to how to be. Now close, ripe close, the thoughts grow, bowing heavy low. They are good nights. Buckshot. Sudden armadillo. Solder. So like slaters. Or cress when bitten into. But mostly they’re good mornings, gathering in the rind blush of one last dream as the other softly opens.
How the Snake Lost His Legs

Frederick Needle

This is a story about Scotland, and about the adder, our only venomous snake. It is a children’s story, a love letter to my home, and a creation myth – to be read aloud to an audience.

One day, when the world was still soft and green, and the trees grew as high as mountains, and the mountains glittered with thousands of precious stones, the big man Niall Mòr went walking in the early morning. His house was at the end of the glen, a small stone house with leaning walls to drain the rain and tied stones to hold the roof firm. The path went from his front door to the point of the river many miles hence, where it flowed into the sea, and turned filmy grey where the fresh met the salt.

Niall Mòr walked this path until his great feet were sore and his knees creaked like old timbers. He walked past mossy boulders and dry grass fields and the mighty tall trees standing with their backs to the mountainside. It seemed as though he had always been walking. Just as he felt he could go on no further, he came to the sea at last.

Standing at the water’s edge and looking out at the ocean, rippling with a blue that was not really blue at all but purple, and grey, and green, and deep deep black, the big man thought only about how much his feet were hurting him – blisters and corns and chafing from his long walk. He decided to take off his boots and step into the cool waters of the ocean, at the place where the fresh bubbling river met the cold salt sea.

As he turned from his boots and stepped into the water with a sigh, Niall Mòr did not notice the shape coiling through the long grass behind him. It was Moray, the long speckled snake, and a great maker of mischief.
“Aha!” said Moray to himself, “I see the big man has come down out of the mountains to look at the ocean and stand in the waves – but fie! He has left his boots unattended. What a shame it would be if some passing rogue were to take them for themselves.”

The scaly, speckled mischief-maker thought to himself a while, and then smiled suddenly, revealing his pointed fangs; “I shall take them myself – to look after them like – to keep them from any wicked fellows moving by. They do look like very fine boots in any case.”

Now at this time, when the land was still very young, Moray the serpent had legs of his own – four of them, that could carry the wily snake at some fair pace across the earth. Each leg, of course, had a foot at the end of it, and with two of these feet Moray stepped into the great boots of the big man and trotted quietly away.

After a while, once Niall Mòr felt that his aching feet had been sufficiently soothed by the cold salt seawater and by the flowing fresh river, he stepped out onto the brittle beach grass to find his boots and begin his long walk home – but his boots were nowhere to be found. He cast about for them, peered behind rocks, looked through the long grass, even waded back out into the water to see if the tide had stolen them away. He searched and searched until the sun began to set. But there was nothing – they had vanished.

The big man thought to himself, and stroked his black beard. He looked down at his aching feet, already blistered from the long walk – the journey home without his boots would wear away his feet to nothing. He bent down mournfully, to poke at a particularly painful corn on his big toe, and suddenly stopped.

He could smell something strange now that his face was closer to the ground – a cool, dry, frictionless kind of smell. It was the smell of Moray, the long speckled snake and maker of mischief, and he knew it very well. He found a set of tracks, a strange, half-legged trail. The front prints were
smooth and pointed, but the back were large and heavy, and held the outline of his lost boots. Niall Mòr frowned and cracked his knuckles, and started after them.

Moray heard the big man approach from miles away, and started to run, and quite the speed he could manage with those strong snake legs, so light and fast. But the big boots were too heavy for him, and a treacherous root in the long grass, that normally he would have sprung over, caught him squarely around the ankle. He tripped and fell, sprawling to the ground at the edge of a deep marsh where the moss grew thick and cushiony. Niall Mòr was on him in an instant. The big man grabbed the speckled serpent by the throat and rattled him, hard enough to make his eyeballs bulge in his head.

“Give me my boots, thieving villain!” he shouted. “Seeing as you want them so badly, I will make sure you never want for boots again!”

And he started to swing the long and speckled Moray around his head, like a hammer-thrower, faster and faster. The boots came off, one after the other, and landed some distance away. But the big man kept swinging, and even faster now, until nothing could be seen of Moray but a blur.

All of a sudden, there was an almighty cracking sound, and a spray of rich red blood fountained through the air. Moray shrieked aloud. The big man had spun him so fast that his legs had come clean off, all at once. They flew through the air to land with distant thumps in the mud and the long grass.

Niall Mòr dropped Moray the speckled serpent on the ground, pointed into his long face and spoke deep and gruff from behind his black beard.

“Never again will you take my boots, or anyone else’s, since now you have no feet to wear them,” he said. “I cannot cure you of your
mischievous nature, but I have made it harder for you to be quite so annoying.”

He paused, and sighed. “I will not say you deserve it, and I am a little sorry, but I feel quite sure you will recover. New things will come of this. The land is still very young.”

Then, the big man Niall Mòr strapped on his boots and turned away, to his long walk home, and a rest by his warm hearth.

As for Moray, that cunning, wily, speckled serpent, he lay in the dirt for quite some time, wailing quietly in pain and anguish for his lost limbs. Once the stumps had healed and his long body smoothed down into what we know today as a snake, he squirmed away embarrassed, keeping low to the ground so that no one would recognise him. Even today you can find him likely coiled up in the undergrowth, hiding away from the world and hoping that he will not be found and made fun of. He is still speckled and still cunning, but he never shows his teeth when he smiles, and bites not at all.

Moray’s legs also lived on, although not in shapes that he would recognise. His front left leg landed in the muddiest, deepest spot of the marsh, and, wet and dark, became the black slug. His back left leg landed in the bare dirt between the grass tussocks, and became the earthworm, shy and blind. His front right leg landed by the yellow ragwort flower and turned into the caterpillar or bratag we call the cinnabar, all barred with black and orange; and his back right leg landed on the bare rock of a boulder, stiffened and turned brittle in the open air, and became the earwig.

And around the edge of the marsh, where the moss grew the thickest and Moray’s rich red blood fell the heaviest, patches that were stained crimson became the moss we call sphagnum, or còinneach ruadh.
Cathedral (taken in Aysén, Chilean Patagonia)

*Tere Alliende*
Baba Dochia and the Dragon

Andreea Tint

This piece is the beginning of an urban fantasy novel inspired by my grandmother’s love of fairy tales. It is set in the Carpathian Mountains where two figures from Romanian mythology, Baba Dochia and the dragon, uncover a plot that threatens their entire magical society. First, however, they have a bet to settle.

“The girl is mine,” said Baba Dochia.

“What do you mean she’s yours? I saw her first,” said the dragon.

“I cursed her first.”

“No, you didn’t. You cursed her mother.”

“Actually,” Baba Dochia started, pulling a scroll from under her seventh coat. She opened it and it rolled and rolled and rolled until it stopped against one of the dragon’s pointy shoes. “Please refer to Section IV, paragraph 3, clause 1.6 of this standard issue curse contract.” Baba Dochia waited while the dragon read Section IV, paragraph 3, clause 1.6. They must have made for an interesting sight, her in her many heavy sheepskin coats and him in his tailored suit, standing in the waiting room of a small provincial hospital and arguing over a scroll.

“You did not curse the mother,” admitted the dragon.

Baba Dochia’s resulting smile was vicious. “I did not.”

The dragon huffed a smoky breath. “How do I know this contract is even real? You’re known for your tricks, Dochia.”

“It’s Baba Dochia to you. And this contract was written by the Tuesday Demon up in Bukovina. Do you doubt their word?”

It was with some reluctance that the dragon picked up the bottom of the scroll in one sharp-nailed hand and unfolded it fully. There was a
signature at the bottom, written in archaic Romanian but legible enough to prove Baba Dochia’s words.

Tuesday was indeed the author.

“I wish to buy the contract from you,” announced the dragon. “How much will it be?”

Baba Dochia started rolling the scroll back up. “I’m not interested in selling the girl.”

“I’ll give you nine sheepdogs to guard your flock.”

“I already have enough dogs.”

“I’ll give you twelve new lambskin coats.”

“I already have enough coats.”

“I’ll give you Saint Peter’s chain for two weeks.”

Baba Dochia paused with the scroll half inside one of the many pockets of the seventh coat she had on. “That’s a new one. Since when do you have it?”

“Let’s just say that the Bucharest black market has many interesting things if you know where to look.”

“And why offer it to me?”

“I know how much you enjoy bad weather. With it, you could make sure the humans get the harshest winter for decades to come.”

Baba Dochia seemed to consider the dragon’s offer. Then she put away the scroll in one of her pockets and dusted off the skirt of her coat.

“Funny thing, all my lambs this spring were white. So there’s enough bad weather coming. You can keep the chain.”

Frustrated, the dragon puffed grey smoke through his lips. “I really thought that would work. I even asked the fairies in the haunted forests for their input.”

“You trusted those harpies? You should know better by now,” said Baba Dochia with a sharp, high-pitched laugh.
“They’ve never been anything but polite to me,” the dragon pointed out. “And they hate you, so I figured they’d help.”

“They hate your kind more. You steal their precious babies.”

“Half the time they want to come with us to escape their various suitors. Really, this myth that dragons are the bad guys is an invention of that white fellow and his Red Emperor’s daughter.”

“Heroes do carry more clout than dragons,” Baba Dochia agreed, her eyes drifting to the maternity ward doors. “How much longer do you think it’ll take?”

“Probably a while. It’s her first birth.”

With their eyes on the maternity ward and their argument tabled for the moment, there wasn’t much for Baba Dochia and the dragon to discuss. At least, not much they were willing to say out loud in the hospital waiting room.

“I’m better with children than you are,” the dragon said after a while.

“Which one of us actually has a son?”

“I’ve raised more daughters than you’ve terrorised.”

Baba Dochia waved him off. “You tell one daughter-in-law to wash a piece of black wool until it turns white and no one lets you forget it.”

“To be fair, she is your only daughter-in-law.”

“And we get along just fine now. You’ve only ever dealt with girls in their late teens. You have no experience raising children,” she reminded him, narrowing her eyes. “Do you even know what a diaper is?”

“I’ve got the Yellow Pages for that. Besides, it’s not like I’m taking the girl. I’d only check in on her once or twice a month until she’s old enough to pick up a sword.”

“It’s not that simple,” Baba Dochia said with a shake of her head. “You don’t get to just choose when you walk into their lives once you’ve got them. You have to be there at three in the morning when they’re bawling their eyes out, and you have to be there to kiss every scrape and
bruise and paper-cut better. Anytime they call your name, you have to be there.”

“Sounds like a hassle. You sure this is all worth it?”

“They’re always worth it,” Baba Dochia sighed and the years melted off of her.

The dragon hummed in acknowledgement, his eyes travelling to the maternity ward again. “And I can’t convince you to exchange the contract? Not even for Saint Peter’s chain?”

“Oh no,” laughed Baba Dochia. “You’ll just have to do better next time and get them to sign a contract before I do. We both know the game’s over the second they sign.”

“And here I thought the game was just about to begin,” said the dragon, winking.

The entrance doors to the hospital burst open and a young man rushed through. He looked around, spotted them and strode over, fixing his winter coat as he went.

“Mother,” he said, grasping Baba Dochia’s elbows. “How many times have I told you to stop harassing mortal families? It’s not the fifteenth century anymore.”

“Dragomir, darling, there’s a contract. I’m not harassing anyone.”

“Let me guess, Tuesday wrote it?”

“Of course.”

“They indulge you too much. And you? What are you doing here?”

The dragon lifted both eyebrows. “Me?”

“Yes, you. Are you here for the same thing as my mother?”

“I am here for the girl, yes.”

“And what’s your claim to her?”

“I saw her first.”

Dragomir glared at the dragon. “You’re supposed to be a millennia old magical entity sustained by children’s fears. That’s your argument?”
“Darling, don’t be harsh. That used to hold up quite well in court.”

“Yes, back in the fifteenth century. It’s 2002. There are laws for these things now. You can’t just walk into a hospital and claim a child that hasn’t even been born yet!”

As if on cue, a loud wail reached them from the maternity ward. Baba Dochia and the dragon broke into matching grins.

“No.”

“Oh, come on, darling, I’ve always wanted a goddaughter.”

“And what makes you think you’d be any better as a godmother than a mother-in-law?”

The question hit too close to home. Baba Dochia’s gaze darkened and she glared at her son.

“That was uncalled for.”

“It’s true though. We both know how you treated my wife at first. No human child should go through that.”

“She managed just fine. I was only making sure she was good enough for you.”

“She’s too good for me, mother. And where are you going?”

The dragon stopped mid-step before righting himself. “This seems like a family conversation, and I have a situation to attend to. I’ll just be on my way.”

“Neither of you are going anywhere near that little girl.”

“Dragomir, sweetheart, it’s tradition.”

“So is gathering snow in February and only using that water to bathe for the rest of the year. You don’t see anyone doing that anymore though. You know why?”

“Global warming?” the dragon ventured.

“Because there are laws!” said Dragomir, throwing his hands in the air. “Did you even get the proper permits before issuing a curse contract?
And you, did you register your claim with the appropriate office before coming here? Of course you didn’t! You never do!”

“Might want to lower your voice there, youngling,” the dragon said, pointing at the nurses glaring at them from the other side of the hallway.

Dragomir deflated. “Why do we have to do this every ten years? I told you both the same thing in 1992. You can’t just fabricate a contract out of thin air. There must be witnesses, permits in place, and you have to inform the relevant authorities within a week of signing.”

“In my day, we only needed a bit of blood and ink.”

“In your day people also used to settle differences of opinion with fistfights.”

Baba Dochia and the dragon sized each other up at that, causing Dragomir to flail his arms between them to break their focus.

“No, no, we will not be doing that today. Or ever. Fighting to settle claims on humans has been outlawed since that mess in 1848.”

The dragon turned towards Baba Dochia with a long-suffering sigh. “How did the apple fall so far from the tree? Are you absolutely sure he’s your son?”

Baba Dochia smiled so wide her wrinkles got wrinkles. “He’s been a stickler for the rules since the day he was born, this one. It’s how he got his current job as Guardian of Love. He really impressed the people in charge.”

“Guardian of Love,” the dragon tutted, turning to Dragomir. “I still don’t know why you’re so against me. I’d only keep the girl until her one true love shows up. I’m practically a matchmaker.”

“It’s against free will,” Dragomir answered. “There are clear directives that say we must not intervene in the lives of mortals anymore. They get to make their own mistakes, and we’re not allowed to influence them in any way. That includes kidnapping them to teach them sword-fighting and Latin.”
A delicate snort escaped Baba Dochia. “Tell me again why people are afraid of you.”

The dragon grinned, exposing teeth that were too sharp. “I’ve been arming princesses with swords and knowledge since the dawn of time, Dochia, dear.”

“Yes, but you can’t do that anymore. And you especially can’t do it for an infant several hours old.”

The dragon rolled his eyes but the fight had gone out of him. “Fine. I will leave the girl alone.”

Dragomir turned to his mother. “Well?”

“The child still needs a godparent.”

“I’ll stop by the fairy department tomorrow morning and make sure she’s been assigned one. One who isn’t legally barred from acting as godparent to human children,” he reminded her.

“Very well, darling, you win,” Baba Dochia agreed, smoothing her many coats.

“Great! Let’s go. You two lingering in hospitals is never a good thing.”

Dragomir turned on his heel and started walking towards the hospital exit. Baba Dochia and the dragon followed, staying a few steps behind.

“Don’t you just miss the old times? Dragomir and his generation have so many rules. It makes life dreadfully boring.”

“It does seem like one can’t have any fun anymore. All these laws to keep the mortals from finding out we exist. At least your son never fails to amuse.”

The dragon reached into his coat and brought out a shiny gold coin. He considered it briefly, then handed it to Baba Dochia.

A smile spread over her face as she accepted the coin. She had already hidden it away in one of her many coats before her boy threw her a look over his shoulder to hurry up. She waved him off, much to his
exasperation. He rolled his eyes at them and disappeared through the entrance door.

“Same time next decade?” asked the dragon once they were outside, waiting for Dragomir to bring the car around.

“Of course. Shall we keep our bet going or are you willing to give up before your gold coffer run empty?”

The dragon huffed. “I’ll see you in 2012, Dochia. You better be ready to sell those contracts.”

“You’ve been trying for centuries, my friend. Another decade just means one more gold coin for my collection,” she answered, smiling.

He levelled her with a considering look before turning towards the hospital parking lot, his hands going to his pockets and his posture loosening.

“The humans say the world will end at the end of this decade. Did you know that?” he asked, sounding wistful.

It was Baba Dochia’s turn to snort inelegantly. “The humans have been saying the world is ending since they were first created. I wouldn’t put much stock in their prophecies.”

“Fair enough.” The dragon shook his head like a dog might after a long run in the rain. Then he turned to face her once more, his smile sharp but not unfriendly.

“Enjoy your family, Dochia. And maybe tell your son you’d like to see him more than once a decade.”

“And deny myself the chance to ruffle his feathers? What kind of mother would I be then?”

“A less antagonising one perhaps. Until we meet again,” the dragon said, tipping his head at her.

Baba Dochia returned the gesture and then she watched the dragon walk away, becoming steadily more incorporeal until he disappeared in a puff of grey smoke.
Dragomir pulled up then in his red car. More than a century ago, the strange contraption had started becoming all the rage among the humans. Baba Dochia had refused to set foot in one until 1916 and even then it had been under duress.

“What was that about?” Dragomir asked after she had settled in the passenger seat.

“Nothing to worry yourself over. Now, could your mother impose on you and your wife for dinner?”

“Sure. We haven’t had a family dinner since the last time I dragged you out of a hospital before you could bind a child to you with an illegal contract.”

Baba Dochia’s mouth curled in a soft smile as she reached over to pat Dragomir’s thigh. “Yes, well, you can’t begrudge an old woman her eccentricities.”

Dragomir shook his head, but there was fondness in the way he looked at Baba Dochia, before he pulled the car out of the parking lot and drove away.
Spacetime Continuum

Jeremy Hawkins

we are in the meeting
we are in the meeting right now
we are in it
no one remembers when it began
the minutes are being taken
sporadically
because we don’t know
how long it will last
things keep getting added
to the agenda
yes that’s my foot
under the table
don’t ask how
spacetime is curved
we should keep things moving
we should keep it going
we all have places to
do later things to be
I can’t see you
but I can hear you fine
I can hear you just fine
go ahead you
can go on
it feels close very
to something
new
Good Afternoon my name is Thomas Wallace I’m calling from Debt Force Limited can I please take your name and address please for security reasons I am on the phone. All day. They watch me. On the phone. They make sure I don’t log off. All day. They make sure I don’t disable the line. On the phone. All day. 9 ‘til 5. Talk to my colleagues seated beside me. In between calls. All day. Rob is sitting beside me. He studied Organic Chemistry. But got too involved in his own private practical experiments. Found himself. Dropping out. Landing Here. We try talk politics. Marx’s theory of alienation. In between calls. Interrupted. All day. We can’t sit in rest mode for more than one minute. They watch us. We talk of how too much debt caused the last financial crisis.

We can set up a payment plan at 40 pounds a month to come off your debit card automatically

We phone people. People who have taken out loans. Desperate people. Who have been screwed over by smallish print. By compound interest. Misery accumulation. Terms and conditions being applied. By huge corporations who have legions of lawyers to write into contracts the most intricate of traps. We phone on behalf of these devious entities. But never speak to Them. All day. I spoke to a woman this morning. Or was it yesterday? Days stretch on for hours. Off the clock. She told me I was scum of the earth. Who am I to disagree? I am alienated from the fruits of my labour. From my colleagues. From the person on the other line who has become a mere component in my job. A switch to be toggled. Just as I
am a mere talking robot to her. She was deaf in one ear. I had to practically shout:

**IT SAYS HERE THAT YOU TOOK OUT THE LOAN SIX YEARS AGO**

She didn’t remember. It could have been a lie. But I was contractually obliged to believe the big company over the little person. The logo over the flesh. All at a distance.

Good Afternoon my name is Thomas Wallace I’m calling from Debt Force Limited can I please take your name and address please for security reasons

How did I get here? I often ask myself. And Rob. I too dropped out. That’s what happened. No getting away from it. No matter how hard I drink. Shortly after mum died. I fell in love. She left. I hung on by a fine thread. Nights in a prison cell. I was on the dole. I was put on a training program. They taught me how to shake hands. To contort my body into an office shape. At the end of it this was the only job. Work or starve. What a choice. Glad to live in a free society. Should be grateful. Making enough to buy a few bottles of whisky at the weekend. Drown it out. Complete the separation. Rob buys acid. Organic Chemistry. To the other side is Sophie. She looks like she’s off one of those programmes about benefit scroungers. But she knows a strange amount about the Syrian Civil War. Books and covers. Judgements. Bombs falling. All day. Drones falling. A wedding in Yemen. Creates children who are scared of clouds. She believes in black magic. Mind is magic. Can conjure up things. Like a better life. Like a better world. Makes a mockery of being on the phone. All day. One thing I know – people surprise you.
Good Afternoon my name is Thomas Wallace I’m calling from Debt Force Limited can I please take your name and address please for security reasons

I wish I was dead. I practically am. I’m reading the script. On the phone. Over and over. All day. Mustn’t let my personality slip into view. I must remain rigid. Unmoving. Even when they are screaming at me. Mind wanders only to pleasant numbness. I need to acquire permission to urinate. Glad to live in the free world. Cannot wait ‘til Friday. Rob took a puff on his break. Organic Chemistry. Pleasant numbness. All day. Even when I am welling up inside with tears of rage. Trapped. Another prison. I must bat it away. And look at the screen and take a deep breath and feel the air rise and fall and flow through my body and open my eyes and calmly repeat:

I’m only giving you the information I have in front of me

A Man. On the phone. He owes 3,000. He says he doesn’t. He says he might. He says he didn’t know there would be so much to pay back. He says he lost his job. He says he took out the loan to pay for rent. He says he owes so much money to so many people that sometimes he sticks his head in a sink full of water and screams as loud as he can then takes his head out and looks in the mirror and looks at his face and wants to cancel that face and all that is associated with it. He says he’s going to kill himself. I try to talk him out of it. I say we can help. But we can’t help. We are not on his side. We are on Their side. All day.

Good Afternoon my name is Thomas Wallace I’m calling from Debt Force Limited can I please take your name and address please for security reasons
He finally comes down from atop the roof. I got no promise of payment from that call. I’m way behind target. The rotting fruits of my labour. I’ve been behind target the last three months. So has Rob. So has Sophie. We can’t all get fired surely. What will I do? To the job centre. That line of lifeless souls swaying in the aftermath of a hurricane powered by economic forces that none of us really understands. Derivatives. Many times removed. Alienation. Capital. Money begets money ‘til it invades the place where your soul should be. My soul withering. We are all waiting here. For the clock to tick down. Almost home-time. All day. On the phone. No way out. Staring at the screen. Promise of payment. How much do they owe? Can barely pay my rent now. I’m so behind target. Got to make them pay. If someone can’t pay they won’t pay. Debt Forgiveness. Happened in biblical times. Why has this country forsaken me? Look to the empty sky. I could ask for a raise. I pray.

Our Manager who art in the other room. Harold be his name. Thy will be done in the office as it is done in HQ. Give us this day our target bonus. All day. On the phone. Why not forgive them their debts? They forgive us for the amoral job we do. Some of them at least. Lead me not into temptation.

But I am tempted. Day after day. To punch a hole in the screen. To throw the computer to the ground. To see its insides. To walk outside and slash the tyres of the manager’s Mercedes Benz and to walk straight upstairs to the manager’s office whilst he’s smiling on the phone and stare into his eyes so far down that I can see the money where his soul should be and I say to him ‘I am going to do the flailing human spirit a big favour’ and then at that moment when his big stupid smile slips I take a knife and...
Good Afternoon my name is Thomas Wallace I’m calling from Debt Force Limited can I please take your name and address please for security reasons

It’s 5pm. This sapless space has now grown an exit door. There is life outside of this hollow house. The aliens are leaving the building. Until next time. All day. On the phone. Good Evening Rob. Good Evening Sophie. Good Evening Mr Manager. Oh it’s Friday. Drinks? Yes I did see the Football. No I haven’t caught up with that series. Yes I am glad our ancestors mustered up a tiny fraction of spinal fluid to fight for the weekend off. Yes. Can I tell you something? Yes. Sometimes I imagine I’m an alien. Isn’t that weird? Yes. Yes it is weird. Touch me please. No? Ok. Going home alone. I’ll see you all on Monday. Goodnight. See you all. Goodnight sweet aliens. Goodnight.

Run, Run, Run up the winding road into the mountains and reach the summit where the luminous lady dressed in lilting white will present you a book and you’ll read the first line and the black cloud will recede and the eyes will bring all into sharp focus and you will be returned to yourself and returned to others and the path back down will be straight and it will lead us to where we always knew we should have been and will be and

But you need the money, don’t you? We all need the money. Work or starve. Forgive me for I know not what to do. I’m here standing at the world’s edge, I feel tears swelling and my head tilts skywards and without urge or strain these words fall out of me:

I’m waiting for you.
Good night my name is Thomas Wallace. I am a human being. I am calling out to you for help. Please. I am begging. Don’t hang up.
there is no path out of the labyrinth

*Sean Patrick Campbell*

Digital print on recycled paper from 35mm film scan.

‘*The symbols of the divine show up in our world initially at the trash stratum. Or so I told myself.*’ Philip K. Dick, *VALIS*, 1981.
Drag Keats

or,

The Boys are in the Bushes

Jack Bigglestone

O verdure, O valentine, quiet & cavern me, salt lick and sound me deep, speak honey-sweet & sing swallow-high, O be my mischievous puck, goose the peach & gander the plum, in dew-tipped grass, under dapple-topped green, be fern fingered & adder tongued, on fireside, on furlined, O wood smoke & spiced wine, pun my thyme & plant in my thighs, under star sky or sun shade, O Heathcliff my home, truffle these ditches & scrump these boughs, in bloom, in blush, in blow, my rosebud.
i am in love with you, Harry Styles
and i care very much who knows it
i love your shiny curls, hidden under giant beanies
and the fact that you are six foot tall
i love how your public persona seems tailored just for me
and the way your management-curated jokes make me laugh until i cry
i watch you on my tiny screen, past midnight
ipod touch bundled under the pillow
at every creak on the landing
i wake up for school dusty-eyed and drooling
and act moody at the breakfast table
as my mother tries her best
to serve me eggs and ask me questions
she has no idea what I’m going through, but you do

when i dive deep into the shadowy depths
of onedirectionfanfiction.org
you love me back, hard
you love the way my long brown/blonde/auburn hair
cascades down my back
before i throw it into a perfect, messy bun.
you love looking into my amber/oceanic/emerald eyes
and saying things like
“Y/N, you are so beautiful
and i do not care that you are only 14/17 years old
because age is just a number”
one day i’ll live in a flat that has damp in the bathroom,
i’ll burn my tongue on my coffee every morning
and run to the train station late
sweating into my polyester shirt sleeves
but tonight, you have invited me to the Brit Awards!
and all the other girls are jealous of me
my swishy designer dress,
highlights cleavage i do not have
and makes me look sexy/hot/cool
but also, elegant/mature/demure
everything comes easily to me when i am with you,
my mouth acne fades away
and my chubby face hollows into supermodel cheekbones
the boys are here too, of course
they all seem to be harbouring quite obvious crushes on me
but it never becomes a problem
because my love for you is true and sharp,
it feels more real than failing History
and the disappointing boys who sit behind me
obsessed with GTA and sex positions
that i pretend to understand
in a few years i get more into Twilight
and cutting my hair short like Alice
a few years after that I get more into girls
and dying my hair pink like Ramona
i stop watching your concert movies on repeat
and the DVD covers get cracked in boxes in the garage
one day, somehow, i am 20
and Liam confides in me,
through the medium of a podcast
that you guys were never really that close,
that a lot of the stuff the audience saw, wasn’t real
and it makes me feel sad,
my fantasy life dims, so a real one can move into focus
and i stop modelling new personalities every birthday
i spent 18 years waiting for my life to start,
rubbing my mistakes out and pencilling in a better Me
now i pay rent and kiss people that know I exist
i see you on the side of a bus,
i wave
Love Tongue
Carys Bufford

i think i am going to snip the blue bit that connects my tongue to my mouth
- so i can leave it wet and thick on your bathroom counter
it might touch your forearm once
maybe, as you reach for your toothbrush.
i wonder if you’d recoil as the tip twitches?
or as it slips onto the floor by the skirting board and a hair band you once dropped -
would you mind if i hung it up on your jewellery stand?
I think i’d like it near the pretty chains which touch your neck,
let it lumber by your rings and the glasses you take on and off,
let us be blind together, let me lie,
maybe on your pillow, next to an eyelash, maybe -
i’d gladly rip it out of me if it means i get to repulse you.
Ha’penny Bridge, Dublin, 2016.

Sophie Barcan

Shot with a pinhole tin can taped to a lamppost.
me, god and an out of use phonebox

Heather Hilditch

sitting with God
in an out of use phone box

is a lot easier than
you might expect

as he perches on your shoulder
like some menacing fairytale raven

and asks

what are you?

and you can only reply
that you are

cross connected telephone wires
scrambled old vhs tapes
a bleeding nose in the middle of
the sea.

you are your mother’s magnolia oil
and her yellow paraffin wax

you are your father’s mouth, his nose,
and his eyes, you see? how the past recalls

itself with a biological footprint
hereditary/inherited

//

sitting with God
in an out of use phone box

is a lot harder than
you might expect

as he twists himself around the phone cord
like two eels entwining in space

and asks:

why are you?

and you can only reply
that

you’ve tried plenty of times not to
be but it keeps on not working
and the only way out is through,
like-

moses reaching the promised
land of milk and honey

but only after parting the
red sea first

in fact, sitting with God is a lot like
dialing up a modem, and hearing only static

you can almost make out the words
through the fuzz and distortion

//
last home

James McAleer

the trees and the track
  winding in column,
  a peel of
  sloughed birchskin
  against
moss, fir and umber.
dog heels you
  pitch-drop
  slow and constant

as
  if time is a
stitch to be walked off

stilled before the kitchen
  window
  you
negotiate your truce
with dusk,
  keeping
the switch off to
cultivate shapes of bent
  quitch and lambs-tongue
'til only headlights and
  embers remain
heard on
the radio this is
how they saw cave paintings,
hands absent in
pipistrelle flickers set
to rushlight, &
the conspiracy
of our voices calls

Jodie to her claws, bare
branches brushing a coastal train
Wipe-Clean

*Martha Nye*

On the sofa
which is leather and wipeable--

--and bought from a family with a cream lab

and now we live alone
the oven timer goes but we’re adults

choosing to ignore all the alarms
the signs that

those peaks of crispy mashed potatoes are done and need to come out

they’ll go honey; sunkissed; cinnamon; walnut chestnut; charcoal points

that add
flavour, texture etc

the alarm (small trills)
through the arms,

goes off as
your yolk bursts

and now I think about it

maybe
I made up the cream lab
Ice Cream Man

*Erin Gannon (in collaboration with Joe Salas and Nathaniel Walters)*

Originally conceived for Dostoyevsky Wannabe’s Cities Glasgow Anthology, ‘Ice Cream Man’, is part of a larger collection of concrete poems inspired by love, garbage, dookits, the Glaswegian sky, and life on the Clydebank during lockdown due out in the Spring.
Garden Centre Lunch

Sam

1.
You watch the wooden beams
waltzing
to lost songs
in the tannoy crackle

Can you hear their footsteps?

2.
I believe you when you say
you’ve been sad your entire life

If I am asleep
we can get out

The outro reverberates off the door
frame

3.
Sometimes
I am disappearing
and my eyes don’t adjust

They focus
refocus;
slim journals of poetry
morning clouds
smoke from vents

The afternoon
dissolves

Cold duvet peaks
knee cap mountains

4.
Outside
my dad walks on mossy grass

He talks to me
his eyes and mine

Take off my shoes
He sings
He sings

His childhood locked away

When does he get to stop?
A Scottish man
exhales only on the edge
of his bed

Noise forms elsewhere
5.  
Can I leave this body

Enter the garden centre canteen soup
of all conscious beings

I follow my breath;
its ribbed edges
fear of depth

In my room
sunlight fingers pry the corners
of my off white blinds.
I was once part of a body, part of a life. No more blood suffuses me, no more contractions, no more straining. Life is over, ended by a bolt through the neck, further up the spine near the head. Then I am separated from the whole with the surgical precision of industrial routine. My substance withers. The early stages of this process are classified as maturation, I become more expensive and toothsome by the hour. All the medicine they boosted through my veins and the food that fattened me up begins to pay off. I suffocate in a vacuum, foiled and chilled, but not frozen. Stacked up with more like me on shelves. My carefully regulated decomposition was a meticulous preparation for the final act. It begins with a non-stick coating that ensures none of me clings to the scorching vessel. My edges turn into charcoal dust, but my centre is warm again and still red, so they can pretend I never stopped breathing. Once the tenderness of my tissue reaches a satisfactory level, all of me goes on the porcelain plate. I land in an artful nest of green and get smeared with liquid, sauces drizzle, pepper is sprinkled, done. Dressed up in this colourful arrangement I am now resigned to rot in beauty. My decay has been monitored with care. I am just withered enough so as not to look too dead. I am not the material of a once-living being, I am a delicatessen. I am honoured. Bon appetit!
Shed With Red Baskets

*Frederick Needle*

Chalk pastel and acrylic.

On the farm where I live, there are a number of old and increasingly decrepit barns and buildings, all of them becoming surrounded and outmoded by modern giants of corrugated iron and concrete. One of these crumbling old stone-built structures was formerly a storehouse, for odds and ends to be brought out at potato pulling season – baskets, buckets, hoes, rags, and shovels, all to be used by volunteer families on their October holidays.

Today, only the baskets are left. It struck me, how brightly their red plastic still shone under years of dust and grime and pigeon droppings.
all the tired horses

Maria Howard

from somewhere, music:

All the tired horses in the sun
How am I supposed to get any riding done

the d is soft like the american t and if you unfocus your ears a little it could be writing.

///

he picks up a back copy of the desert oracle, a large black crow on the cover, and then discards it.

he leans like he has seen other men lean. he observes their movements and catches on to what is required. he leans with a practiced nonchalance, with the sprezzatura of the desert.

he moves with an awareness of the point on the compass that defines his genre, his movements slow and fluid, his outline focusing and unfocusing like a shadow formed by a cloud passing over the sun.
he looks out at the dunes and thinks he should know, by their colour, where he is but he finds the difference between marram grass and sage brush hard to distinguish right now. he is not long awake and the horizon is troubling him. the sun he knows but the rest is harder to pin down.

before the horizon, hills. a layer of land fading into the next. blue remembered hills, he thinks, but the thought is a glancing one, the memory of these words not quite there, they were only heard or read once and never rewritten.

///

the path is lost and the cairns made by the hands of others are nowhere to be seen. this place is just as empty as they promised and yet an absence is felt. not empty but cleared. he looks down the valley at the dust path and remembers something of that other place, of travelling through another pass and looking out at a lake above a lake.

he is aware of being in a different time here, though he still has not found his place in it. from pacific to mountain he is sure he lost an hour. and still the sun keeps rising.

red hope, blue hope, gold hope; layers of painted desert rise up like walls around the road and close in around him as the pass narrows.

a noise and he turns quickly, fingers outstretched in imitation of a man held in silk, his thumb turned upwards in aim.

a flash of memory, of milkweed, but here there is only brush.
and all this time he has been imagining himself on a horse while his hands hold not reins but a wheel, its stitched black leather now slippery with sweat. his gestures are anachronisms, affectations he could question if he took his eyes off the sun dogs and thought hard about where he found himself.

the road narrows, the trees close in and he could be anywhere. it feels like an inbetween place that leaves only a trace of its passing. it feels both strange and familiar, like a western set on the moon.

last night there had been a mist over the road, and he was aware of a dissonance taking place. after the heat of the day it was like being transported to another time, another season.

///

just when he’s got a hold on the plateau, a series of squares and circles rise up to meet him, concrete boxes designed to hold people but still the air is empty. the wind rustles through and then settles. someone told him this was a state with only two lakes.

and if this landscape were lunar after all? not just by comparison but by chance. to have woken up on the moon seems not impossible after all this desert. these slips between time and space are happening all too often these days.

///
it is tempting to look at the map and write a poetry of place names before you have even got there; a town called hope, horsethief basin, black canyon pass, you knew them from photographs first.

you move through impossible cities, built on deserts and faultlines with no thought for the paths taken by acts of god, and others. but the land was seen to be empty, and gas is cheap. these are utopias of sorts, places built on memory; a future that is yet to pass. a salt lake valley, a silver city, new harmony.

and all the while, in the desert, you remember other places. that grey day on the hills where the wind whistled through one of the holes in that man’s walking pole and it sounded like the noise made by cupping your hand around your mouth, an injun war cry if you believe the movies.

another time the wind ripped at your clothes but still you carried on, your ears muffled, eyes streaming until you were looking at the world through a lens of water.

neither of those places were here.

now you’re writing in the dark again, following straight roads, watching silhouetted shapes slip by, trying to match them to memories of places seen in the glow of a screen, absorbed and then forgotten until now, you’ve been here before.

///
the first day we woke up in a bed that kept us apart in its softness, looking up at the polystyrene beams of a mock tudor mansion. somewhere in the jet lag i had called it an architecture of exhaustion, low and wide.

and, well, how are things in deep time?

a horse named gus breaks the fourth wall as the actor grooms his coat, unknowing. another man claims these two species are in a state of coevolution but isn’t it called coercion when one leads another without consent? the third protagonist in this particular film, after the rider and his horse, is the sky. it dares you to say something about wide open spaces, to engage in cliche and reverie, while cutting the screen in thirds and halves, different each time.

in a book of essays a man writes about capturing tumbleweed and turning it into a christmas ornament. upon reading this you remember how you scrambled to get your camera out as one rushed past you in the parking lot of that restaurant, it never occurred to you to stop it in its tracks. to you it was just a trope and to remove it would have been to interfere with something.

the films tell of a whole cavalry sent out against a single crazy horse. men pull hard on reins, kicking up red dust in their phony war, and until you see the whites of their eyes, their heads jerking back, you had forgotten that horses can be extras too.

///

an interlude. a floodlit game of tennis. it turns out it’s a full moon on friday the 13th, an occurrence that won’t come round again for 500 years,
someone says. the temperature is perfect, the light is failing, it’s half seven and it’s dark already. you become aware that you have hit the ball the same way three times, the same shot played over and over and it feels like it will last forever until it falls. a backhand. the sky so blue then black, your tripled shadow lending you a grace you could never hope to achieve in the body.

you gather balls from all four corners of the court and stuff them in your pockets. each of you pulls one out and whoever is first to draw serves. it’s like a western he says. the mind skipping elsewhere as you return the ball with a spin, you don’t even know how you did it. the air so fresh the light so strange. voices call out from the paths of the park, cars rush, and from somewhere, music.

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. . . . . . . . . . . . .

(text art by twitter.com/infinite_deserts)
experimental gender bias
Katrina Williams

innards interlocking
spin spirals around
our coded love chroma
technicolour plexiglass experiment
wherein two become one, idealist romance
ambiguous body
soft like putty
in your hands
you mould me, display me, taxidermy, pick-n-mix person to
adorn with
curves
skin lines
stretch-marks
seep like caramel against your dainty bird bones, you are
creating me
in your image
binary
unfurled
so gentle when you touch me, slipping tender into my skin
clear honey
raspberry jam
stuffed
teddy-bear
we dream in stereo channels to wake with atrophic ecstasy
fantasy daze
angel-sap
summer hazed
this unstable chromosome commitment
and the success of our tied DNA
is decidedly subjective.
ultimate Gemini
our two halves to
love-womb resorption.

anatomy affair
flood yourself inside
snatching slowly
guts draped now
slithering
tired eyes
sieve into
rotting
nostalgia
becoming
so gruesome
fluid oozing
congealed scab
lab-grown
test subject
nightmare baby
swaddled in
medical gauze

63
Collemacchia

Lillian Salvatore

sugar cements in their teeth
ice cream thick in the cone
for years the sun
rolls down the mountains
they look up at now
drenched in light with the crumbling buildings
and fiats honking on single track roads
to warn oncoming tractors
the trees around them ache
with figs and walnuts
and somewhere in the distance
the cicadas click together
and join a symphony of stillness
that accompanies their feasting on
pasta in the sky.

it’s coming - behind the trees
yellow falls and the palest
of pinks slips over the mountain tops.
they are caught in a
golden light staring at the trees
and, mouths open tongues rolling,
long to be bathed in fuchsias
and violets before they must
descend the stairs back down
to the concrete world.
The End of Summer

Ciara Maguire

The sun beats down on her as she makes her way down the path, hot dust and grit kicking up into her sandals. Each step becomes a little more uncomfortable and she has to stop to shake the tiny stones out every few metres. Meg hates the heat, and the dirt and wishes she was back home, where it was cold but at least predictable, and everything (or really, everyone) she wanted was within reach. She arrives at the internet cafe, goes to her usual computer, inserts a few euros into the slot. The few minutes it takes to start running are agonisingly slow. She fiddles with the grubby friendship bracelet around her wrist, already fraying at the ends. Finally she can log on. She opens the chat screen but there’s nothing. She reads over her last messages to Chloe, spaced out over hours in an attempt to seem casual.

‘Hey’
‘hows it going’
‘so boring here, i miss you’
‘u ok?’

She waits a few moments, plays a game of solitaire. Still no new messages. She signs out and nods to the Spanish woman at the desk as she leaves.

Back at the pool her parents are dozing in the sun. Her brother is at the bar, taking advantage of the fact that the hotel has no qualms about serving alcohol to barely pubescent teenagers. Meg goes over to join him, resting her elbows on the bar between a cup of brightly coloured cocktail umbrellas and a sticky laminated menu.
“Where have you been?” he asks. “I’m just getting a beer, do you want one?”

“I’ll have a vodka orange,” she says, adding a, “please,” as she realises the bartender is waiting to hear her order.

She’d been drinking all summer, raiding her parents’ scant alcohol cupboard while they were at work. The days had been long and dull, the gap between her old life ending and new life starting stretching out with unbearable malaise. Meg was alone most of the time, her parents at work and James sleeping in ‘til late afternoon, only surfacing to bring a bowl of cereal back to his room. Since the incident during the last week of school she had been largely friendless and without distraction. Alcohol gave her a pleasant, warming buzz that helped pass the hours in her room more easily. Sometimes she decanted her DIY mixtures into a plastic bottle and took it to the park with a towel and sun-cream, the heat of the sun and the sting of the vodka letting her melt fuzzily into the ground, her brain softened and rounded so that it became hard for any thoughts to form at all.

They take their drinks back to the sun loungers. Meg puts in her earphones and picks up her book, lets her feet dangle over the edge of the plastic chair. James downs half his beer then lies back, eyes closed under his sunglasses. They sit together in uncomfortable silence.

As children they followed each other everywhere. James was like her little shadow, obsessed with mirroring his older sister. She didn’t find him annoying; instead she saw him as a built-in best friend, forcing him to copy the dance routines they saw on MTV, making up elaborate imaginary games, whispering to each other as they ripped up handfuls of grass in the garden for hours. It was hard to imagine that small, sweet boy now. Puberty had forced an awkward distance between them. They hid in
their separate rooms, consumed by the complicated entanglements of their adolescent lives. She looks at him now, sunbathing next to her, and sees a stranger.

She props open her book but lets her eyes drift from the page to follow the other holidaymakers dotted around the pool, her gaze hidden behind her sunglasses. A girl and her mother sit side by side, engrossed in their conversation, the mother idly playing with her daughter’s hair. The pool is a dazzling chlorine green, the terracotta tiles surrounding it marked with damp footprints and dropped leaves. When she gets home the summer will be nearly over and it’ll be time to move out, leaving her stale, sugary teenage bedroom behind for the clinical pine of student halls.

Meg is about to start reading when a girl walks out into the pool area. She’s dressed in black, her long hair falling like a curtain down her back. Something about the way she carries herself, and her unseasonable clothing, holds Meg’s attention. The girl unfolds a towel and lays it across an empty lounger, then digs in her bag for a book and sits down. She seems to feel Meg’s gaze and looks up to meet it. Meg shrinks behind her glasses, about to look away and pretend she hadn’t been staring when she realises the girl is tapping the cover of her book. Meg looks down at the book in her hands, then up again; twin covers of ‘Orange is Not the Only Fruit’ on opposite sides of the pool. The girl smiles, briefly, then begins to read.

The atmosphere at dinner that night is strained. James is tearing up the bread roll on his plate, as their parents bicker about which wine to order. Meg is tuned out, watching the orange sun sink into a lilac sky. She wonders about the sunset back home, if the sky in Scotland is also glowing amber. Their table is conspicuously quiet amongst the chatter of the people around them. Her dad and James end up talking stiffly about the
football match that’s on tomorrow and if they’ll be screening it at the hotel. Meg looks at her mum instinctively, to roll her eyes at the football chat, but her mother is looking down, her eyes fixed on the menu even though they’ve placed their orders. She cannot look Meg in the eye, hasn’t looked at her directly since the start of the summer. Meg takes a long sip of her wine, then stands.

“Excuse me,” she says, but there’s no need. No-one is paying attention to her.

She wanders down the steps from the restaurant onto the street. She needs to get away. Where once the practiced routines and rhythms of her family comforted her now she finds them suffocating. Recently, she has begun to see her family from the outside for the first time. She’s become keenly aware of how loud and boorish her dad is in public. She cringes when he speaks broken Spanish with the hotel staff, his obnoxious laugh when he gets it wrong. The smell of her mother’s perfume, once sweet and reassuring, has become sickly and overpowering, and makes her nauseous. Meg is a stranger to them, her place in the unit fractured. She doesn't know if it will ever be repaired.

She walks through the cobbled streets, past busy bars and happy tourists. In the distance, the sea becomes visible. It reflects the sunset, the waves a watercolour palette of blue and pink and orange. She feels her skin prickle at the cold breeze drifting inwards. Then she hears a voice behind her.

“Hey!” She looks round and the girl from the pool is standing next to her. “I thought I recognised you.” Meg stares, taken by surprise. “Same book, right?” the girl says.

Meg nods. “Yeah, I remember. You were at the pool.”

“Yeah. My brother works at the bar and sometimes he lets me hang out there. It’s a pretty sweet gig.”
Meg nods again. “That’s cool,” she says, feeling deeply uncool. The girl is still dressed in all black and now she’s up close, Meg can see a small tattoo of a lizard peeking out from her shoulder.

“Sorry, am I interrupting you? I can walk with you wherever you’re headed, if you like.”

“I’m not going anywhere. Or, I don’t know where I’m going. But you can walk with me.”

They walk together, down the narrow winding streets towards the coastline. They talk a little, swapping names. The girl is Marina: “Like where boats live. Are you here on holiday then? Your family look nice.”

Meg scoffs. “Ha. Yes, I’m on holiday. No, my family are not nice.” She feels bad once she’s said it, a small betrayal. But Marina is a stranger, and right now she needs to not think about her family; her mother’s silence, her father’s ignorance, her brother’s withdrawal.

Marina gives her a sympathetic look. “I understand. I love my brother but he drives me crazy. He thinks he’s such a player now he’s a bartender but he just looks like a dick.”

They pass a gelato stand and Meg realises she’s starving; she didn’t eat anything before leaving the restaurant. Marina catches her looking. “Are you hungry? I know somewhere we can go.”

They turn off the main street and Marina leads them down a narrow side street. There are apartments above them, Juliet balconies overflowing with pansies and lilacs. The whitewashed walls are punctuated with brightly-painted wooden doors. They arrive at a pink door, with a flashing neon sign above it declaring ‘SUGAR’. The gaudiness of the sign and the dance music Meg can hear from inside feel incongruous with the otherwise quiet Spanish street.

“Here we are!” Marina says, taking Meg’s hand and leading her inside.

The lights are low and cast a soft pink glow across the small room. A handsome man in short red shorts stands by a jukebox in the corner,
studying the list of songs. Meg recognises the music currently blaring as an old Kylie song. A group of older women stand at the bar, one wearing a leather jacket despite the stuffy heat of the room. A couple that look about Meg and Marina’s age are cooried in at a small table, taking sips from the same beer. Marina moves towards the bar and Meg realises they are still holding hands. Instinctively she lets go. Marina looks at her.

“Why don’t you find a seat? I’ll order for us.”

Meg sits at a booth tucked away on the far side of the bar and waits for Marina to return. She briefly wonders if her parents will be worried about her, how angry they’ll be at her disappearing act. But before she can linger on the thought too long, Marina sits down with a glass jug of bright red liquid and two glasses.

“Here,” she says, handing Meg a glass. “Everyone loves cosmos, right? They’re going to bring us some fries too.” Meg sips the sugary cocktail and feels the familiar sense of freedom and elation settle over her.

“Do you come here a lot? They seem to know you here.” Meg looks towards the bartender, a blonde with a lip ring who is smiling at Marina.

“Yeah, I guess I do. It’s the only gay bar for miles. And the karaoke is pretty good.” Marina laughs and pours Meg another glass. “What about you? What’s your deal, have you been to many gay bars where you’re from?”

“Glasgow. Not really. I tried once, with this girl I was seeing. But we didn’t get in.” Meg thinks back to her and Chloe standing in the rain, Chloe arguing furiously with the bouncer.

“Was?” said Marina, eyebrows raised. “What happened?”

Meg didn’t know how to answer. Before the last week of school, they had been seeing each other every day in secret. They mostly hung out at Chloe’s house, making out and watching movies. She liked Chloe, even if sometimes she was loud and quick to anger over silly things. And Chloe liked her, which mattered to Meg more. Then one day they didn’t wait to
get home to start kissing, and some idiots in the year below saw them. The word spread fast and one of the boy’s mums knew Meg’s mum. They only talked about it once, her mother grabbing her arm and hissing at her, *what are you playing at? You can’t be so bloody stupid.* Since then both her mother and Chloe had been silent, her messages to Chloe unanswered for weeks now.

“Oh, nothing really. It just didn’t work out.” Meg takes another swig of her drink and is about to change the subject when she is interrupted by the screech of microphone feedback, the lights dimming further as a drag queen ascends the tiny stage at the front of the bar. Marina swivels in her seat and whispers to Meg.

“Wait for this. She’s incredible.”

The drag queen takes a seat on a stool in the centre of the stage. The music is slow, her voice mournful. A spotlight shines down on her and Meg is mesmerised. She is beautiful, her hair shining bright red in the light, a trail of glitter across her cheekbones. Violet lipstick is swept across her lips and matches the sequinned thigh-length dress she is wearing. The bar is silent as her voice cuts through the dark. *I can’t survive, I can’t stay alive, without your love.* Meg looks at Marina who is also entranced, her chin resting on her hand as she smiles at the stage. *Don’t leave me this way,* the queen sings. Her voice is smooth, and Meg hears every word for the first time. Suddenly the music shifts, the beat kicking in as the queen jumps to her feet, her platform heels kicking the stool out of the way. The volume amps up and the lights begin to flash, Meg feels a shot of pure delight fly through her chest as the queen belts out, *baby! My heart is full of love and desire for you!*

“Come on!” Marina grabs Meg by the hand again, pulling her onto the tiny dancefloor in front of the stage. The shy couple from the table at the back join them, and the women at the bar abandon their beers and follow. They dance together, Meg and Marina and the rest of the room,
under the disco lights, and Meg throws her head back and laughs. She can’t believe the absurdity of the situation; separated from her parents, in a tiny gay bar with a girl she’s just met, singing along with a drag queen to a song she barely knows. She closes her eyes, the lights making shapes across the back of her eyelids. She is the furthest from home she has ever been, yet right now she feels like she’s found it.
About the Contributors

**Tere Alliende** is an author, editor, artist, teacher and cook who was born in Santiago de Chile in 1978. She has published a short story collection (*Cuentos Desde El Bosque*, 2009) and a cookbook (*Como en Casa*, 2015). She is a graduate of Law and MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Her literary work explores how everyday life is woven with human connections, quests for meaning and significant experiences. She is a skillful observer; her prose guides us into her world with evocative and poignant descriptions. She enjoys artisan bread baking and hiking with her family in southern Patagonia.

**Sophie Barcan** is an Electronics with Music student, musician, and sometimes writer who enjoys photographing cities and writing in French and English. She prefers short forms like sketches and poems and is currently editing a non-fiction book.

**Jack Bigglestone** is a writer and reader from rural Shropshire. He has been published in *We Were Always Here: A Queer Words Anthology*, *New Writing Scotland, A Queer Anthology of Healing*, and elsewhere. He is currently working on a piece for the *Bedtime Stories for the End of the World* poetry podcast. For wordish things follow him on twitter @JackBigglestone.

**Sam** is a postgraduate Law student who mainly listens to music and looks out of his window. He has never submitted, or shown, writing before, but has reams of half finished scribbles in the notes app of his phone. He hopes to one day be a lawyer like in *Legally Blonde*.

**Martin Breul** (he/him) loves coffee, and coffee loves him too. He currently indulges caffeine mostly in Glasgow, from where he pursues a MA in English at McGill University. His poems have appeared in *Half a Grapefruit Magazine, Wet Grain, The Wild Word, The Riverbed Review,*
The Honest Ulsterman, and others. He has also contributed essays and reviews to [X]position and The Common Breath. His first short story was included in the annual print anthology of Speculative Books in 2021. But he’s mainly drinking coffee, really.

Carys Bufford is a second-year Sculpture & Environmental Art student at GSA, morbidly fascinated with the body and materiality, maybe because she used to bite people as a child.

Sean Patrick Campbell is an artist and musician living and working in Glasgow. Graduating from Glasgow School of Art in 2019, his practise uses photography to enter into a dialogue between ecologies of landscape & mythology - personal, cultural, political. His work spills out into rituals of text, sculpture and moving image; these are the interlocking parts of his inquiry into the physical and psychic structures that build Worlds. He is always looking for ghosts - of hidden pasts, lost futures and the ever-haunted present. Recent exhibitions include 'TULPA', a collaborative show at Bloc Projects in Sheffield with artist Allan Gardner, and 'Imagining an Island', a group show at Taigh Chearsabhagh, North Uist. He is one of the selected artists in the Hospitalfield Graduate Programme 2021-22. (spcampbellart.cargo.site)

Madeline Docherty is a poet and writer living in Glasgow and writing about bodies, girlhood and dippy eggs. She is always growing out a haircut. Her twitter handle is @queenoofthevino and her instagram account is @madelinedoc_.

Stephen Durkan is a writer and spoken word performer from Saltcoats, Ayrshire. He has had stories and poems published in Structo, Ash and Paris Lit Up. He also contributes articles about the sorry state of things to Aspidistra Politics and occasionally writes about football for the Pure Fitbaw blog. Stephen is also a musician who will be releasing an experimental spoken word E.P (working title: Acid Communism) at some point in the near future.
Maggie Fores grew up in West Meon, Hampshire, and now lives nearby in the town of Alresford. She is currently studying for an MLitt in Creative Writing at The University of Glasgow, where her work has considered the relationship between language and landscape and the possible connections between boredom and forgiveness. In her poetry, Fores uses rural England as her backdrop while exploring the poetics of attention, loneliness, polyphonic voice, work and the trials of self-expression. She currently works as a gardener / fashion model / shop assistant and is also a singer in the alternative-folk band Organ Morgan.

Erin Gannon is a poet and performer whose practice explores the border skirmishes between verse, performance, and music. She holds an MA in Poetry from the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen’s University, Belfast, and is a doctoral candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. Her collaborators on this in-progress collection of visual poetry are: Joe Salas, a designer based in New York who is currently Production Manager for Newtown Literary Journal and Editor at Arbitrarium, and; Nathaniel Walters, a London-based graphic designer and filmmaker whose career spans across almost all genres from experimental, feature narrative, documentary, television, installation, interactive, adult, and, perhaps most embarrassingly, corporate. Presently, his time is primarily spent coordinating the UK’s XR video team.

Martina Genovese is an emerging artist and maker based in Glasgow. Her work revolves around illustration and bookbinding, but she is also passionate about photography. She can be found on socials as @craftyvarda, where her handmade books are currently available for purchase.

Jeremy Allan Hawkins is the author of A Clean Edge (BOAAT, 2017). His poetry has been featured in the Best New Poets anthology series and the extended program of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennial. He is
currently pursuing a DFA at the University of Glasgow on poetic practices and spatial design.

**Heather Hilditch** (she/her) is a butch lesbian poet and creative whose work focuses around themes of nature, connection, memory, time, mental health and how they all interlink. Her work has been featured in zines such as *From Glasgow to Saturn, Drawn Poorly, Queer Dot*, and *The Unicorn Zine*, and she has produced small, DIY zines of her own. Since graduating from Glasgow University in 2020 and going straight into a global pandemic she has spent a lot of her time at home working on her graphic design and illustration skills, as well as compiling her first poetry collection. You can follow her on Instagram @begonebehome to see more of her work.

**Maria Howard** is a writer and artist and a recent graduate of the Art Writing programme at the Glasgow School of Art. In 2019 she was shortlisted for the Fitzcarraldo Editions Essay Prize and received a Gillian Purvis Trust Award for New Writing. She is an associate editor for *Nothing Personal* magazine and also works as a freelance writer and translator (mariahoward.org).

**Nasim Marie Jafry** was born in the west of Scotland to a Scottish mother and Pakistani father. Her novel *The State of Me* – a fictionalisation of her life with the illness ME – was published by HarperCollins in 2008. She has had short stories in various literary magazines and has been shortlisted for the Asham Award (2001), the RLS Award (2005), the Bridport Short Story Prize (2011) and the Bridport Flash Fiction Prize (2012). She appeared in a BBC Alba documentary in 2012 in which she discussed her novel and her illness. She is working very slowly on a novella.

**EC Lewis** is a Glasgow based writer and poet. They are a reader for *the winnow* and their work has been published in *-algia, Fairy Piece Mag!*, and *Southchild Lit*. They can be found on Twitter at @banlocan.
Hannah Magee (she/her) is a Masters student at the University of Glasgow. She is currently undertaking a research masters in Scottish Literature, focusing on masculinity and violence in the contemporary literature of Scotland and Northern Ireland. An avid reader, crafter and painter who has written poetry for years but has always refused to share it with others (what if it’s awful??), this poem is her first (and hopefully not last) published piece.

Ciara Maguire is a writer living in Glasgow, Scotland. Her short story ‘The Middle of Everything’ was published in We Were Always Here: A Queer Words Anthology in 2019. She has written several short films with queer filmmaking collective ‘Lock Up Your Daughters’ and enjoys reading and writing about queerness, relationships, and loneliness.

James McAleer’s writing has appeared in Cluny, Paper, and Soft Spot’s Pilot exhibition, and will feature in an upcoming exhibition at Castlefield Gallery (MCR). He is based in Manchester and/or Glasgow.

Lesley McDermott is currently studying a Master of Letters in Fine Art Practice, Sculpture, at GSA, initially graduating from Gray’s School of Art specialising in Printed Textiles. Lesley exhibits widely with sculpture, digital and mixed media artworks, as well as teaching. Collaboration is at the heart of much of her work, developing projects with several Arts and Community agencies, including The Tolbooth, The Smith Art Gallery and The Engine Shed, Stirling, Generator Projects, Embassy, Transmission, PVAF and most recently GOSSIP Collective, where she is founder and Chairperson. Recently, as part of her current postgraduate studies in Socially Engaged Practice, Lesley initiated a series of discussions around Materials, Methodologies and Feminism, which culminated in an exhibition ‘After the Dinner Party’ at SaltSpace Gallery, Glasgow 26th – 30th April (gossipcollective.weebly.com).

Frederick Needle is pretending to be a writer, attempting to be an artist, and is otherwise a general instrument of sloth and disorder, in his first
year studying various Literatures at the University of Glasgow. He owes his outlook on life to a childhood spent in the baking wastes of South Australia, and to a current, barely-eked subsistence on the East Coast of Scotland. His inspiration comes from copious amounts of cheap instant coffee, and from things he thinks are cool. He dislikes COVID-19.

**Martha Nye** (she/her) is a writer, artist and cook from Perthshire, Scotland, studying on the Creative Writing MLitt at the University of Glasgow. She is interested in Southern Gothic literature, true crime podcasts, and small town gossip. You can commission her for a pet portrait on twitter @marthcnye.

**Patrick Romero** (he/him) is a Mexican-Scottish poet. His work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *Stand, Poetry Scotland, Gutter,* and *adjacent pineapple.* He edits *Wet Grain.*

**Lillian Salvatore** is a third-year Scottish and English Literature student at the University of Glasgow. She writes poetry and prose and loves all things strange and sinister. She'll talk to you about Mary, Queen of Scots until her head falls off, and is genuinely really happy to hear about that dream you had last night.

**Andreea Tint** is a first-year PhD student researching literary multilingualism. She also holds an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. When she's not working on her thesis, she writes short stories inspired by Romanian myths and fairy tales, with a focus on archetypal feminine figures, urban fantasy, and fairy tale retellings.

**Katrina Williams** is a third-year English Literature and Film & TV student, with interests in writing both poetry and prose. She finds the most excitement in exploring surrealist genres, taking inspiration from both indie text adventures and twitter micropoetry alike. When not writing, you can find her working as an editor for the *Glasgow Guardian,* illustrating, playing video games, and stressing over deadlines.
About the Editors

Grace Borland Sinclair (she/her) is a postgraduate research student working in the Scottish Literature department at the University of Glasgow. Her research specialises in feminist speculative fiction across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She is particularly passionate about the intersection of writing and activism, and the power of the feminist imagination. She enjoys punk rock and red wine.

Hannah George (she/her) is a third-year English Literature student at the University of Glasgow who likes to read and write poetry that explores the intersections between literature and geography. She is also part of the events team at Glasgow University Magazine and enjoys open water swimming, hillwalking, and making zines.

Niamh Gordon (she/her) is a writer and first-year PhD student on the DFA Creative Writing programme at the University of Glasgow. She has an MA in Prose Fiction from UEA, and her fiction has been published in Flash Fiction Magazine, Return Trip, and Still Point Journal. Her creative-critical research explores how grief impacts on narrative time, looking specifically at bereavement by suicide. She likes running, cooking, and pubs.

Asta Kinch (she/her) is a Danish poet. She has a joint Honours degree from UofG in English Literature and Theology & Religious Studies and is currently completing the MLitt in Creative Writing. She’s fascinated with the Bible and other fat texts and you can find her work in Disobedient Magazine, ZARF, and GUM, as well as in issue 45 of this journal and on the Instagram profile @fat_bible. She’d like to use this platform to remind you to wear sunscreen daily!

Liam Welsh (he/him) is a poet and MLitt student of Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. He is a long suffering observer of form in
poetry, interested in subjects such as ecology, landscape, religion, and matters of the heart. He is excited to be working on his own stuff again after an intense few months translating the work of Russian poet Sergei Esenin. In his spare time he enjoys watching football, bravely attempting to learn Russian, and listening to obnoxiously loud music.

**Hannah Magee (social media intern)** (she/her) is a postgraduate research student in the Scot Lit department at GU. Her research largely consists of comparing literary masculinities in the contemporary fictions of Scotland and Ireland. She enjoys reading, painting, crocheting, drinking copious amounts of iced coffee and spending too much money on espresso martinis. Her first ever published piece of work is in this issue of *From Glasgow to Saturn* and she couldn’t be more excited.
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Front and back cover designed by Hannah Magee;

The aim of my design for this issue was to create a parallel between the cosmic imagery associated with From Glasgow to Saturn and with images from the natural world, especially the ocean. Both outer space and the ocean depths constitute arenas that are vastly unexplored. This issue, due to the incredibly weird year we’ve experienced, has a large focus on home and domesticity. The space and ocean imagery represent the idea that there is, of course, much to be discovered in the wider universe; but there is equally as much to discover closer to home. Something we have all come to understand within the last 12 months or so.
FROM GLASGOW TO SATURN

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