

NEW WORD ORDER

Issue VII December 2023



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Dear reader

A very warm welcome to *New Word Order* Issue VII. This project has been a difficult yet so unbelievably fulfilling one. As a class of creative writing students, the opportunity to work with up-and-coming writers has been such a privilege. Our goal for this issue was diversity and we hope you'll join us in agreeing that we succeeded wholeheartedly with this.

We wanted to showcase themes, characters and stories that may have been overlooked in the past. We wanted to give all writers, regardless of their age or background, a chance to have their writing shine here, in *New Word Order*. Our editors carefully read through over two hundred and seventy submissions to make sure we achieved this goal of ours!

Even though creating a literary journal in such a short amount of time is not an easy task, this team made everything feel like a breeze and without their hard work and constant determination, this issue would not have been possible. I am eternally grateful for each and every one of them, for them putting their own individual mark on this issue and for making it stand out, for constantly working to make their deadlines and for putting so much care into each step of the process. It has been a pleasure to create Issue VII with them.

Marcus Hartigan, Jude- Emmanuel Nwosu, Holly Mulligan, Colm O'Shea, Hannah Fox and Raghed Sunni worked so powerfully as our fiction team. They read through so many fantastic submissions, taking care to choose the ones that fit with our vision of the journal. They then worked collaboratively alongside our exceptional authors to edit these pieces for the final draft of our wonderful journal.

Being a Poetry Editor is no easy feat but the brilliant minds of Dylan Nash, James Rutledge and Emily Reid made it look easy. They made it their mission to select eighteen poems out of the one hundred and fifty submissions we received, that promoted our goal of diversity and quality. They worked with the authors to make each piece shine and we cannot wait for you to read them all. A special thanks to Dylan who also did so much behind the scenes work for the team, managing the submissions e-mail and spreadsheet.

Rachel Shotunde and Teddy Pierce were the exceptional editors behind our non-fiction section of this issue. They worked tirelessly to not only read through and edit the submissions but also the interview portions of our journal to make sure you got the very best versions of these pieces for your reading pleasure.

The artistic geniuses behind our art and photography submissions, Aoife Conneally and Aoibhe Dunne, not only selected the amazing pieces for our journal and its cover but also did an unbelievable job on the design of PDF, our submissions poster and worked on designs for our social media. Their work, alongside the work of our wonderful marketing team, Chris Coleman and Róise Joyce, greatly increased the number of submissions we received which in turn attracted more writers to our journal and hence more diversity!

Chris and Róise also faithfully worked to create a fantastic launch for all our writers and editors to enjoy and to bask in this achievement of ours. The launch will also bring together the writers and editors of this issue for the first time! We are so grateful to have such a delightful evening and it's all thanks to the Marketing and Launch Team, thank you!

A huge thank you to our dependable Digital Editor Alti Toktarova. Alti created this PDF so that we have such a beautiful token of all of the hard work our writers and editors did to make this issue of *New Word Order* happen. Alti also managed to make this happen in such a short space of time, as is the nature with these types of projects.

The most gracious thank you to our terrific managing editor Niamh Richardson who was a silent hero throughout this process, doing an insane amount of behind the scenes work to make things run smoothly and keep our whole team on track. Without her this would not have been possible, and I am so unbelievably grateful for her guidance and assistance through every step of this process.

I also want to say a massive thank you to the wonderful Priscilla Morris who was there for us through the creation of this journal, from start to finish. Priscilla graciously gave so much of her time to this project to help us create the fabulous journal that we can proudly give to all of you to read and enjoy. It would not have been possible without her and we truly appreciate all of the time and effort she put into this and us.

To everyone who submitted to us at the *New Word Order* this year, I want you to know that you made our jobs very difficult. The talent we have seen in each and every one of our submissions were a pleasure to read and made the task of selecting extremely hard, thank you for sharing your work and please continue to do so. To our contributors, thank you for submitting such amazing pieces of work to our journal. we are so grateful to support such fantastic up-and-coming, writers, artists and photographers.

A final thank you to our readers, we hope you love this issue of *New Word Order* as much as we do and enjoy all the incredible work that we are bringing light to. While this wasn't an easy task, it was such a fulfilling one and we are so proud of what everyone involved has accomplished and this final product.

Happy reading,

Chloe Gahan
Editor-in-Chief



Feeling Sexy

written by *Stephanie Powell (she/her)*. *Stephanie is a poet based in Naarm/Melbourne. Her latest poetry collection is Gentle Creatures (Vagabond Press, 2023).*

Feeling sexy, but the garden needs weeding
and I am pulling up bastard clovers, thistle.

Feeling sexy in the bath too small for the both
of us and I can hear you making dinner,
talking to

the dog.

Feeling sexy? Bending over to scoop up my
knickers, rolls of stomach like cloud on
thighs,

nipples touching my knees one heel raised in
an awkward dance as you are watching by the

doorway anyway are we feeling

sexy?

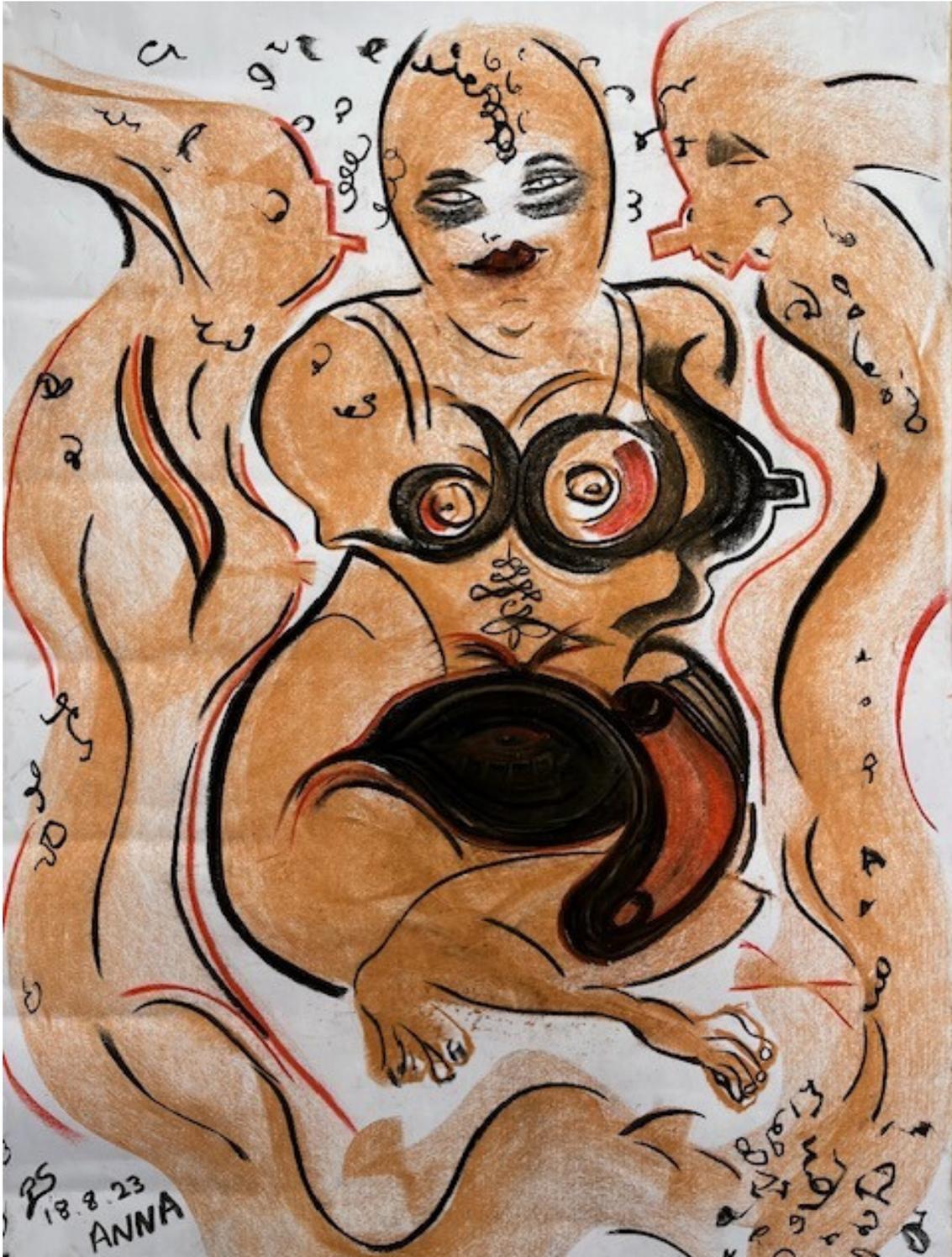


Image: Mignon by Penny Stuart

Penny (she/her) is passionate about good writing and creating art in a group setting. She loves to experiment with words and art in weekly lifedrawing workshops. Currently she is making her own book of fine art prints with James Joyce words from 'Dubliners' short story 'The Dead' as inspiration.

Worm

written by *Emily Linehan*. *Emily (she/her), a Tipperary native, has shown a great interest in all things literature from a young age. She has been published in anthologies such as The Quarryman and Cork Words 2, Motley Magazine, and thecurrent.ie.*

Hello? You're up? You haven't slept? Why not? Catching up on the match? Wales won; you don't need to bother. Why am I calling? You don't beat around the bush. No, I was being funny. I know I can call you whenever. I brought a worm back to my place. Yeah, I know, I'm some player! What are you, twelve? Yeah, we did 'do it'. Ew, gross! Google it, I'm not telling you. No, she's asleep. I'm calling because—I don't know why I'm calling I just felt like I had to. It was good, like really good, I just don't know. I feel weird. No, she wasn't drunk, she had literally a drop of cider. What's the issue then? I don't know man; we were walking back to my place, and she was tripping over herself. Some lad nearly stepped on her. Huh? I guess like three feet when she's bent over, probably a foot longer when she's all stretched out. Anyway, she was— Ah Jaysus what's the place called again? It's by the bridge. You know the bridge the one with the religious wan caterwauling some hymns? Something O'....O' Donoghue's I think.

Yeah, that one. You know it so. Yeah, it was packed, could barely get a drink. As I was saying, I got her back to my place and— oh he works there now? No, I didn't see him. I thought he was working at Vipers club? He got fired? What? Right tell me that story next time I see you. Okay, so by now she was on my couch, and I asked if she wanted some tea. By then it would have been midnight. What do you mean what was I thinking? It's only polite to offer tea, did your mammy teach you nothing? I have decaf lad!

Can I finish talking or what? So, she said sure but only if she could share mine. I was like okay I guess no harm so made the tea and all and brought out the biscuits. We were sipping the tea together. No lad, not like the lady and the tramp. We took turns like.

Anyway, I had a few biscuits, and she had a crumb or so from one of mine. I know she's small, but you have to fill your stomach with something. What? I thought they had stomachs? The more you know, I guess. So, then she asked me to give her a tour of the gaff. I was like there's not much to see but go on then. Yes, I know now it was a hint, would you shup? We get to the bedroom eventually and she kind of slithered on top of it. Sexy? It was actually. Anyway, we did the deed, and she was lying there beside me and—yes I am skipping that part. Because it's none of your business! I told you to Google it if you're so curious! She's lying there beside me and we're completely silent. I'm lost in the after-bliss and to be honest I'm about to go to sleep when she tells me that I could kill her so easily. Too easily she adds. I was freaked out too! I said sorry? And she just repeated herself, like it was nothing. And I said, I guess? And she was like do I actually realise it though? Like really think about it she said. I said no.

She said she wanted a better answer than that, so I thought about it. I told her then that she probably thinks about mites the same way I think about worms. She asked what I meant, and I told her that mites are smaller than worms so you're probably subconsciously gentler with them than with other creatures. I asked her if she got my point. She said she did and said that humans hated when she asked that. I could see why, I felt hugely uncomfortable, but I didn't tell her that. She then went on about how the whole world is predicated on the power dynamics between animals and stuff. And not only animals but plants as well. Hm? Yeah, it is pretty weird post-sex talk but what is standard post-sex talk, you know? Anyway, she said that all our behaviour depends on power dynamics, and power is just how much physical strength someone has over you. Every natural thing's prerogative is to avoid as much pain as possible. How could I disagree with that? It was weird but true. What was she trying to say about me? That I was a predator? Anyway, she then went on about sexual dynamics, how it once again involves around power but that it excites us. She described sex like



a friendly wrestling match where not only do we know the victor, but we also expect it, and like it. She then told me to look at her and I told her I was, but she was like look at me really closely. She slithered her body until the sheets fell down. I wasn't mad at the view, bro. I kinda wanted to go again but she seemed really serious about this conversation, so I thought it better not to. She then asked what labour could she possibly produce with her body? How could she survive in a system that doesn't need her? And isn't funny how capitalism created two genders through its division of responsibilities? I was like I've been out of college for a while now, I don't really wanna think about this stuff. Yeah, I know, right? But listen to this, she goes on about how she hates how much she depends on humans to not kill her. I was like what? She said that every day when she walks down the street, she hates the gratitude she has for all the humans in the world deciding not to kill her.

She said she's at their mercy basically and I was like maybe back in the cavemen times? But like, not anymore? And then she said that it doesn't matter how many laws there are in place for worms, humans will always have the advantage of more time to do everything, time to build companies and have sons and give the companies to the sons and they will always have more money and therefore more power and we can only hope to marry the sons who will take over the company. Luckily, by then, she was getting sleepy, so she didn't say much else after that. I mean, she said a few more things but she was yawning a lot, so I didn't catch most of it. I was kind of tuning her out at that point anyway. But she said one more thing before she fell asleep or maybe she was still asleep when she said this, I don't know. She asked me if I would still love her if she was a human. What did I say? Well, I told her no.



Image: Untitled 1 by Katie Foley

Katie Foley (any/all) is 19 year old poet and artist and is currently studying English, Drama and Film in UCD. Work of theirs has been published in the eighth issue of Hot Pot Magazine. They gravitate towards art that is sensitive and direct, which is what they try to emulate in their own work. You can find them on Instagram @katiethefoley.



From Mother to Daughter

written by *Audrey Moyer*. *Audrey (she/her) is a second-year Creative Writing student at UCD.*

I watch you
run to your father
sand tossed in your wake
So full of stardust and joy
so lucky are you
to run to a father
giggles harmonizing with the waves

I too had a childhood full
of shrieks and running
effortless sunshine
I too used to sing like a siren
luring in love without thought
for the consequences
It was later that the weather turned
lightning shattering my skull
and when I came to I found
a trident in my father's fist
commanding the storm

All this to say that
I hope your life remains
of salt air and smiles
the clap of thunder silenced
For how could it sound, with all
your beauty?
You are the ocean in all its entirety

Yet my mother felt the same about
me
but poetic musings are never
enough
The nature of weather and
the nature of man
are equally indestructible
and equally destructive



Image: Untitled 4 by Conor Bailey

Conor Bailey is a final year History and Politics student and they enjoy taking photos. They prefer to take clean minimalist photos with a few bright colours that show the texture of the spaces around us, but still enjoy scenes of nature and the shapes of urban buildings.



The Ranch

written by *Ciara Broderick*. *Ciara (She/Her) is a 24-year-old writer based in Dublin 8. Originally from a small village in east Co. Galway, she qualified in Social Care in Limerick, before relocating to Dublin to work in homeless services, where she began to pursue writing in her spare time.*

TW: Implied child sexual abuse, prostitution.

It was hot as hell, same as always down here in the summertime. The kind of heat that hums, clicks, and catches wetly in the back of your throat when you try and breathe it in. Ali sat in one of the camp chairs in the shade of the Magnolia tree, legs stretched out on the makeshift table in front of her. Sweat clung to the hair at the base of her skull and pooled against the skin beneath her breasts.

Ali hated the heat, always had, since she was a little girl. She'd grown up five miles from here, on a trailer park east of Abbeville, where summer heat was something you knew well, but she'd just never gotten used to how it weighed on you. Sometimes, as she tried to sleep at night, she imagined going further north, to some state where rain came down cold and the wind blew. She'd like the cold, she thought, because you could have some say in what it did to your body. If it got too much you could always wrap up, stay indoors, bring an umbrella. She knew better than to hold out hope of one day heading north, but it was still a nice idea. More than likely she'd live out the rest of her days in this heat she couldn't escape from, letting it do what it wanted with her.

The club she'd worked at before had at least run the AC during the day. They needed to, to appease the city men down from Lafayette on their bachelor parties or mid-life crisis hunting retreats.

Those clean, well-shaven men couldn't stand the heat either, apparently. The bunny ranch didn't have the luxury of an AC.

Hell, it didn't even have a sign. Just a grubby, sun-bleached brassiere strung up by a nail to a branch along the roadside. Ali'd heard when she first moved out here that the bra had outlived the girl who donated it by what must've been a couple of years now, but still it hung there. It did the job just fine. If anything, it was an accurate advertisement for what lay at the top of the dirt track, that being a ring of battered trailers leaking rust and sprouting moss, stained mattresses under cheap sheets, the smell of musty, dried sweat as yellow as the wilting posters on the walls. Girls that were only there because they'd run out of road and didn't much mind if you knew it.

The ranch didn't get any city men. It was all just local fare. Hillbilly guys that thought they were too good for truck-stop girls but were too stoney-broke to pay more than sixty dollars for a full service. You got cops showing up too, now and then. Asking questions about whatever girl had just jumped bail or been pulled out of a ditch somewhere. Some of the cops even stayed and paid, if they didn't have anywhere more important to be afterwards. Ali'd noticed that the older, fatter and sweatier they were, the less chance they'd have anywhere else to be.

She knew the two that just pulled in were cops because they drove a sedan that wasn't rusted. By the look of the ties they wore and the manila folders they carried, they were detectives. The girls who had been posing at the top of the driveway, advertising themselves, scattered into the trees beyond the trailers, but Ali stayed where she was. She was comfortable in the shade, or at least, as close to comfortable as she was going to get.

She watched the detectives cross the dry-mud-flattened grass, heading for Julann, who sat on a beat-up sofa in the centre of the ranch.

That wasn't what they were interested in today. Julann smoked her cigarette and re-crossed her legs, the sun-darkened skin of one thin thigh creasing against the other.

She was somewhere north of forty, and, after so many years on the wrong end of cop questions, Ali knew she always answered in the negative, as a matter of principle. True to form, she simply shook her head at their photographs and flicked ash at their shoes.

The detectives soon got bored with Julann. As they turned to leave, the taller one spotted Ali. He tapped his partner's arm and nodded in her direction. They approached. She saw them eye her exposed skin for tracks and scabs, the way she did with some of her rougher clientele. They wouldn't find anything.

The shorter one pointed to the seats in front of Ali and raised his eyebrows. She gestured for them to sit down.

"You got a name?" he asked.

"Yeah," she answered "Crystal." This was her work name.

"What, your Mama name you after her favourite hobby or something?"

"That's real funny sir," Ali leaned forward and shook her finger at him playfully, "They teach you them jokes down at the Academy, or is that the kind of thing you have to pick up on the job?"

He smiled. Then the taller one said, “Listen, uh, Crystal, we were asking your boss over there ‘bout a girl that might have been up this way.”

He opened the folder in his hands. “She says she knows nothing, but we were wondering if you’d mind taking a look too?”

Ali reached up to take the photos he offered her. She'd seen plenty of mugshots, but this was not one. It was a high school yearbook photo, blown up. The girl was the usual, blond-haired, blue-eyed, but not in the way Ali was used to seeing.

The girl’s eyes weren't bloodshot or red rimmed, her hair was natural and smooth, not fluffed and broken by peroxide. But, she was also familiar. The slant of her lips brought to mind the smell of shared cherry lip gloss and sticky, whispered secrets. The glint in her eyes, dimmer in this photo than in Ali’s memory, conjured the image of a grinning face turned towards hers as they ran, clammy hands entwined. Ali felt her chest compress. The girl in the photo was Mary.

After a few too many seconds, Ali looked up at the taller detective and shook her head.

“No, she never came round here before.”

“You sure?”

“Damn certain.”

The detective looked at her, steadily. His partner glanced between them.

“That’s strange ‘cause it sure looked like you recognized her just then.”

When they were six, Mary had invited Ali on a sleepover for the first time. They played dress-up and watched *Lady and the Tramp* on VCR. Ali had never been in a house with stairs before.

“I do recognize her. I know her face from way back. When we were kids, like.”

At eight they’d lain in the grass at recess and braided Chicory flowers in each other's hair, whispering to each other about which boys in their grade they planned to marry. Ali had made sure to take the flowers out before she got back to her trailer that night.

“That all? The look on your face I would’ve thought there was more to it than that.” The detective's expression didn’t change, but there was a new gleam in his eyes. A hunter’s excitement.

At ten the girls had entered the schools’ quiz league and won the State Championships. Mary's parents had taken lots of photographs. In each of them the girls posed with their arms wrapped tight around each other.

“I just didn’t realise she was running game is all.” Ali felt her pulse pound in her throat. She resisted the urge to raise a hand to it.

At twelve, on Mary’s birthday, her daddy took them to the coast. They stayed in a Super 8 and ate ice-cream that ran down their fingers and dried stiff and sticky on their hands.

“Well, we don’t know that for sure just yet. Would it surprise you that she was?”

At thirteen they’d stopped being friends. Neither of them ever talked about why. Ali hadn’t spoken to her since.

“A little bit, I guess,” Ali shrugged “but I ain’t seen her in a couple years so how the hell would I know anyway.”

She handed back the photograph, her fingers lingering for a second on the corner before letting go. The cops stood up and so did she. The taller one shook her hand and thanked her for her help. He had a nice firm handshake. The shorter one was staring at her, concern burrowing a crease between his brows.

“How old are you, anyway?” he asked.

“Eighteen, sir," she lied "I just got a baby face.”

“You ever think about getting a different job? Away from... this?”

"Why? Y'all hiring?" Ali grinned at him.

He sighed and shook his head, twisting his wedding ring round on his finger. Ali wondered what kind of father he was.

The taller one said, “Thanks again.”

“No problem.”

She watched them walk away; heads bent towards each other to say something out of earshot. They were almost in the car when she called after them. “Hey.”

They turned around. Ali never asked cops this question when they did their rounds. It was easier not to know, but she couldn't help herself. This was different. This was Mary.

“That girl in the photo, is she dead?”

The tall one adjusted his sunglasses, rested his arm on the car roof and said “Just missing for now. Gotta be hopeful.”

A pause, then; “Y’all talked to her daddy?”

The detectives looked at each other. The shorter one shifted, like he was about to say something. But his partner lifted his palm slightly, stopping him.

“Yeah, we talked to him.” the tall one answered, “But we can always go back and talk to him again.”

“You do that.”

The detectives tried to wait her out, but she didn't say any more. Eventually they looked at each other and nodded. They got in their car, waving at her as they drove away. Ali waved back.



Sitting back in her chair she watched as the dust cloud they left behind slowly settled and the sound of their engine faded. She reclined her legs and picked absently at the few wildflowers that grew high enough to be caught between her fingers. She threaded a couple of them through her hair.

Some of the girls re-emerged from their trailers, positioning themselves once again at the top of the driveway. They arched their backs and bent their knees, pulling tank tops lower to reveal more of their breasts, pale flesh swelling from push-up bras whose straps dug purple welts into their shoulders. Heat shimmered over the ground.

They all listened, waiting for the next man to turn up the dirt road by the nailed-up brassiere, his \$60 burning a hole in his pants pocket.

Image: Blue by Penny Stuart

Penny (she/her) is passionate about good writing and creating art in a group setting. She loves to experiment with words and art in weekly lifedrawing workshops. Currently she is making her own book of fine art prints with James Joyce words from 'Dubliners' short story 'The Dead' as inspiration.



A Wasp Jar

written by *Luke Breen*. *Luke (he/him) is a second year Classics, English & History student in UCD. As a bisexual man, he found himself often stuck between two worlds. The themes of antiquity he believe hold quite well to this feeling, the cusp between life and death, love and hatred, honour and dishonour.*

Are we everlasting?
Preserve me like the mead
Of sweet honey,
I am sour, in the wasp jar.

Each murky morn,
As a child.
Into the overdone hedgerow, I ran,
Jars in hand.

To land a wasp in one

When he was caught,
He buzzed and stung,
But the glass fought.
And kept as the wasp lunged,
Encased in a clear gaol

The judge held a thin stick
And the wasp stare, furious, thick.
Giggled delight, at our captive we won.
The wasp buzzed a bitter song.

The wasp struggled
Attempted to break from captivity.
Futile, but he never gave way.
Always kept up the charade.

What is the wasp's purpose?

Stuck in a jar.

He could die but never gave way,
Never lost face.

So I would free him
From his invisible gaol.
Free, he would not fight.
Simply fly, to the winding winds
above.

I was caught once,
A later time.
But she came,
She knocked my glass.

Shattered, free,
My judge stopped the games
Unlocked the weary wasp's gaol.
The wasp, and I, flew off

Do not put me back
Keep my honey mead
Sweet.



Image: Untitled 2 by Harsh Khatri

Being a single father of two, Harsh (he/him) explores his creative side through the form of photography. He takes great pride in this as he wishes to share his outlook on the world through a camera lens and to inspire young and old to take up photography.

The Eater

written by *Oscar Blair*. Oscar (he/him) is a first year undergraduate student in UCD studying English with creative writing. Oscar is American originally from France who has a passion for speculative fiction. He is a frequent short story writer and occasionally publishes them online.

Goats'll really eat everything you give 'em."

- Goat Experts

PART ONE

Pemberton Farm

"Geraldine! Come quick! The goat's gotten into the wrong watering trough again!" Exclaimed Wilby Pemberton.

This wasn't a common occurrence at Pemberton Farm, in fact, this was only the second instance in all of human history that a goat had drunk from a watering trough meant for another animal.

The first time had been earlier that week when the Pemberton's goat Petunia had jumped the electric fence surrounding the sheep field. She wasn't even thirsty, but hey, a drink's a drink.

Geraldine arrived almost instantaneously after hearing her partner's call of distress. She looked through the very same window that Wilby was spying through. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped. Her soul began evaporating from her body as she was confronted with a life-changing sight.

Petunia had gotten into the cow pen.

When Petunia drank from the sheep's watering trough, there were some unexpected effects.

In the minutes following the goat's partaking of sheep water, the surrounding grass changed in texture and turned white, as if mutating to become identical to the Saanen goat's pelt. Aside from this, Petunia experienced a wobbly, if not jiggly sensation, as if her very body was less solid, as though her skeleton was made of cartilage instead of bones.

These effects quickly wore off, after all, it had only been sheep's water. But Petunia was now about to drink from the cow's watering trough, and as every decent farmer knows: cow's water is infinitely more potent than sheep's water.

Geraldine and Wilby could only watch in horror as Petunia's head descended into the trough. Tongue out and eyes thirsty.

It happened instantly. It appeared as if Petunia had disappeared, she was nowhere to be seen. But the water inside the trough had turned white and fluffy. The inside of the trough itself did too.

Seconds passed. The farmers' heartbeats weren't necessarily fast, but they were hard. With every thump, they felt their world rumble. Seconds passed. The pair were still staring in shock, and then it happened. Something leaped out of the watering trough!

The creature that exited the trough was strange, it seemed a puddle moving around of its own volition. And it was strangely furry.

The fluffy water elongated, it now resembled a form not unlike that of a fuzzy anaconda. It slithered toward the farmhouse, leaving behind a trail of white and furry grass. And most off-putting to the farmers was the gray spot at the front of this being. As it approached closer to the building, the Pembertons could make out a face; it was Petunia's hircine visage, displaying the happiest expression the farmers had ever seen on Petunia.

At least they felt comforted by this in their last moments.

When Petunia finally collided with the building, it was instantly liquified and transformed into more Petunia, along with everything, and everyone, inside of it. This puddle quickly spread over the fields, transforming crops, grass, buildings, and animals alike into more Petunia.

The Pemberton farm had been erased from the Earth, being replaced with something far more valuable, and far more deserving of existence.

PART TWO

Earth

After absorbing the farm, the goat-like pond began slithering around. The towns she passed through fell to the same fate as the Pembertons. The trail she left behind quickly grew in width, as the woolly pond grew in size. Now she had reached the proportions of a lake, and the rate of growth didn't appear to be slowing down any time soon.

In fact, Petunia's growth rate did the opposite of slowing down when it came into contact with a river. Fluff began spreading over the river, flowing bidirectionally. This river carried Petunia to many lakes, and even more rivers, before finally arriving at the ocean. It only took slightly over a minute for all of the oceans, as well as any water attached to them, to be transformed into more Petunia. This would end up being devastating for the economy.

35% of the human population had already been transformed, while the other 65% fled inland to escape Petunia. They had no idea that touching the goat would instantly make them both happier, and simply better in general for the small price of one's individuality.

Getting the continents took longer than you would think. Petunia's face was lost somewhere on the ocean floor, simply roaming around in pure ecstasy, while human populations began their insurmountable challenge of endurance. Different groups had different methods of food rationing and distribution. There were even fights between groups, as well as plenty of infighting. But not a single one of them was prepared for the fur rain.

After the oceans had been consumed, the water cycle continued normally; evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. Except for the fact that the liquid wasn't water at all, it was Petunia, and it turned everything it touched into more Petunia.

After the land had been practically all turned into Petunia, it appeared as if the Earth had completed its transformation. But some say what really sealed the deal was goat rain over active volcanoes. The goat raindrops instantly absorbed the lava into the Petunia ocean, but more importantly, the Earth's liquid mantle had now been accessed. White fur rapidly spread to the Earth's core. Now, every last atom on what used to be Earth had been altered into a superior being.

PART THREE

The Universe

Millions of years of isolation passed for Petunia. She didn't mind it, she thought the world was better this way, and she was right. She had silence. She had peace. She had an almost complete absence of sensory input.

The same reaction that occurs when stars are Petuniafied happened again, only at a much larger scale. No longer a black hole, the furry supermassive white hole grew even supermassiver before exploding. Petunia particles were launched in every direction, slowly consuming every galaxy it touched, and then exploding and spreading even more.

A few billion years later, the universe is being Petuniafied quicker than it's expanding. A large majority of all matter is in fact, Petunia. Things were as they were meant to be. Everything was a goat. Everything was Petunia. And Petunia was happy. The Universe had finally achieved its goal.

PART FOUR

Beyond

Even though the universe had been wholly united under the ideal form of existence, not even a goat can escape the laws of entropy. Petunia had actually caused a large leap forward in the decay of the universe as she had spread the available energy within the universe in a more even way. There was little Petunia could do, time would create chaos, and chaos would create complete emptiness. Even though Petunia was used to waiting – she even enjoyed it, this time felt different.

She wasn't happy. That smile that had been displayed on her face for all that time faded. The perpetual bleat of joy grew silent.

The only things she could see were the nightly stars and the moon. She got to experience them in their full glory, as the absence of an atmosphere and human-made lights cleared the path of the light of the celestial objects. She wanted to experience them. To feel what it would be like to be near them.

When a big enough asteroid finally hit Petunia, fluffy chunks were accelerated to escape velocity; quickly enough to leave Petunia's gravitation. Saanen space dust was now abundant around Petunia, and plenty of the surrounding objects were transformed into more Petunia, notably the moon.

The growth appeared to slow down after reaching Venus, and Mercury, but it only took one molecule of Petunia to touch the surface of the sun for it to be completely Petunified. An explosion of gargantuan proportions ensued.

The exact explanation of why stars explode when they are converted into more Petunia isn't known, although it's theorized that the change in density when the hydrogen molecules of a star are Petuniafied forces them to accelerate nuclear fusion, therefore causing them to explode as the gravity of the star isn't enough to hold it.

The sun's explosion quickly spread Petunia over the entire solar system, then it continued slowly across the galaxy. It only took a few years before another star was hit, and the cycle continued.

Petunia was now spreading across the Milky Way at practically the speed of light. But the Milky Way would be easy, the real trick is intergalactic Petunification. But even that was proven to be possible when the waves of Petunia molecules reached the supermassive black hole at the center of the galaxy.

She knew she was going to end. But she didn't know when. She didn't even know if she would be able to tell. It's not like there would be one moment when she existed, and the next moment she didn't. She would slowly fade.



She felt the rate at which she was expanded slowed. This wasn't fair. Petunia was the greatest being possible. How come not even she was allowed to exist forever? She would not have this. This was not acceptable. Petunia would not be passive in her seemingly inescapable end.

She would do the same thing she had been doing for almost all of her existence. She would expand. All the matter in the universe was already Petunia, but it seemed the energy was separate. Why were they separate? After all, energy and matter are made out of the same stuff. It seemed the only thing separating the two things was Petunia not deciding to become one with energy. So she did.

She didn't stop there. There was more to become. As Petunia continued to realize how arbitrary the distinctions were between everything that existed, she grew more able to expand. Dark matter. She instantly grew. Spatial dimensions. She instantly was able to comprehend the manner in which she existed. Dark energy. She could now control the speed at which she expanded, as you can imagine, there was more and more Petunia with every moment that

What if she could become the very thing that threatened to destroy her? What if Petunia could become one with Entropy? One with the laws of the universe? If she could conceive of it, she could do it. Not only could Petunia now completely control herself, but she could control how she could control herself.

She rearranged the universe once again, turning everything into a form resembling her original goat body, instead of practically infinite interconnected fluffy spheres with a face. Her smile returned. The bleat ensued.



She wasn't finished. She had become everything in existence. She also decided to become anything she wanted in non-existence. She would connect any non-existent thing she wanted with herself. Omnipotence had been reached.

But now what? What was there left to do?

After existing for what felt like an instant stretching on forever, and an eternity condensed into a moment, Petunia knew it was time to settle down. She decided to create the place where she used to live all the time ago. She created grassy fields, sheep, and cows. She created the farmhouse where she used to spend her days. She created a planet around the farm, so it would have gravity. She created a solar system around the planet so it would have nights and days.

She created a galaxy around that solar system so that the nights would be filled with stars. And she created a universe around that galaxy to fill the imaginations of her creations.

She decided to erase her memories, and just be a goat in her home. She was done being omnipotent. She lived a prosperous farm life for some time. Although, she neglected to fix the watering trough problem.



Image: Butterfly by Tony Conneally
*Tony (he/him) took this picture in Parque de la Paloma in Benalmadena,
Spain.*

Jasmine Rice

written by *Natasha Huynh*.
*Natasha (she/her) is an emerging
writer originally from a charming
town in the south of Vermont,
United States. Since then, her
horizons have expanded to include
Ireland. Huynh's writing frequently
explores themes of identity, mental
health, and the immigrant
experience, inspired by her father's
journey as one of the Vietnamese
boat people.*

Jasmine steam
curls round almond eyes
on the face of my cousin.
She is slender like
the bean sprouts
that live and
die in Saigon,
a forgotten memory
of Vietnam.

The taste of
homemade phở
does not ease
the vagrant feeling
of shifting skins:
I am white-
too white
to speak the
tongue of my father;
And Asian-
too Asian
to light fires in
the July sky,
or dare think of
America as my home.

I am neither one thing nor the other;
I am the white grains of
jasmine in the fields,
but I too am the farmer
whose brown hands
burn alongside the earthen sun.



Image: Sanjongo, South Korea 2/7/3 by Sean McKervey

Seán McKervey (he/him), is a 3rd year college student studying Geography in UCD. One of his favourite hobbies he had recently gotten into is film photography. This summer, Sean had the chance to visit South Korea, in which he had many opportunities to take film photos.



The Confessional “I Can’t Swim”

written by *Selene Hoffstetter*. *Selene (she/her) attends the University of California of Riverside in the United States. She is a fourth-year college student studying creative writing, focusing on poetry. She is a tribal member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs located in Central Oregon.*

How can a person dive
into a blank, blinking eye
without assurance of life?

A lifeguard – is not your angel in red.
In a butt-tightening swimsuit
with three days of CPR training.

If you're looking to be romantically saved:

We no longer do direct mouth-to-mouth.
Your chest cracks under the pressure of our hands
as we force life into a body
it has not yet left.

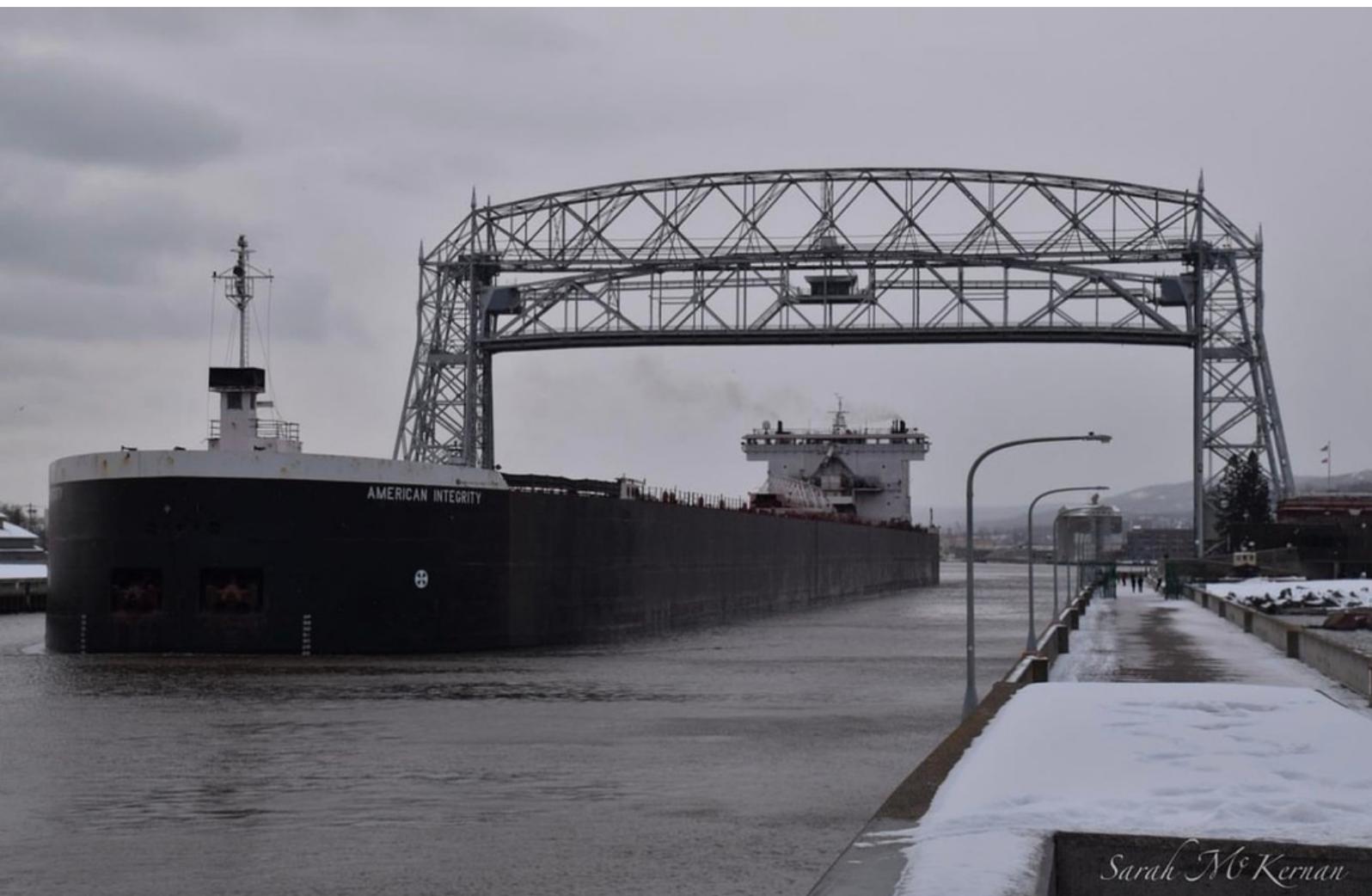
Do not look to us for leniency,
life is not guaranteed with swimming.
Death – drowning – takes you based on circumstance.

Not because an angel has decided
to check your name off a list
to decrease the human population
for the greenhouse gases.



Image: Untitled 3 by Sarah McKernan

Sarah (she/her) is a photographer and videographer from Stamford CT, US, and works in this field for U.S. Air Force and as a Public Relations Officer for Plus Brand Industries. She loves taking landscape photography as her photos are from locations all around the U.S..



Por Que Não Continuamos A Brincar?

escrito por Tiago Monni. Tiago (ele) é um estudante Erasmus de Direito vindo de Lisboa, Portugal. Ele também costumava escrever no jornal de sua universidade de origem, o "Jur nal".

Às vezes, em lapsos do meu cotidiano, recorro à nostalgia do despertar de uma criança, que não sabia o que era o mundo, e que tinha como dever explorá-lo e descobrir todos os seus labirintos e entranhas. Hoje em dia, por outro lado, sou um especialista no Mundo, pois provavelmente conseguiria desenhar um mapa que incluísse todos os seus caminhos e esconderijos, sendo tudo já previsível e esperado. Portanto a minha única arma para viver é a nostalgia: quem dera se alguém apagasse a minha memória e o passado tornasse presente...

Da mesma maneira que muitas crianças, eu costumava montar os meus próprios brinquedos, consternado, “vidrado” naquela ação. Poderia estar a acontecer um incêndio na cozinha, causado pelo meu irmão desastrado ou um anúncio de que a família fosse fazer uma grande viagem, que eu ainda estaria incessantemente à procura daquela maldita peça pendente para que eu pudesse completar a construção de uma das dez torres que tinha pelo caminho.

Passava horas nesta atividade, “movido” por qualquer coisa que eu não sabia identificar. Apesar da indicação do resultado do brinquedo, evidenciada na própria caixa, e da existência de um passo a passo pormenorizado que indubitavelmente me levasse a tal resultado, tomava como meu dever terminar a construção que eu próprio comecei, do meu próprio jeito.

Em reflexão, descobri que o que me movia era um verdadeiro Mistério, uma exigência de totalidade sobre qual, mesmo com a minha tenra idade, conseguia intuir ser infinitamente mais forte e mais potente do que o previsível manual de instruções que me apontava à construção da imagem pré-formatada presente na caixa.

Terminada a construção, corria diretamente ao quarto dos meus pais. Eles sorriam; e assim os meus olhos brilhavam, ao saber que fiz algo de importante. Naquele momento, através da realização da tarefa a qual me designei, me sentia pertencido, feliz. Reconhecia que nenhum manual de instrução, por mais detalhado que fosse, conseguia instruir-me até a beleza consubstanciada naquele momento.

Cinco minutos depois de ter saído do quarto deles, eu volto e peço por mais um brinquedo. Por mais bela que aquela aventura tenha sido, não me encontrava satisfeito. Eles coçam a carteira, fazem contas e decidem o dia da compra. Como o dia D nunca chegava, ficava eu na fila de espera louco para que fosse a vez da minha senha.

Atualmente, tenho vinte anos e cerca de trinta brinquedos na minha coleção. Eles ficam ali, hermetizados no armário, envoltos de poeira. Agora já não brinco, já não crio. Resta-me viver afundado em uma maré de obviedades, ditas e repetidas pelos meus colegas. Nós já jogamos todos os jogos, já brincamos até mais do que deveríamos. Tornamo-nos os criadores dos manuais de instruções. O Mistério que buscávamos nos brinquedos já foi desvendado, pois agora somos donos do nosso próprio destino. O que resta é a reputação de já ter feito de tudo e o alívio de finalmente não ter nada mais por fazer.

Qualquer imprevisto, surpresa, trabalho a ser resolvido ou convite inesperado é uma mosca a zumbir no nosso ouvido: matamos logo. São completamente artificiais, pois não teriam sido fruto da nossa infrutífera criação. Em cima do estandarte da nossa arrogante autossuficiência, escolhemos deliberadamente em censurar o novo em prol de um reconfortante bem-estar, em que tudo é óbvio. Agora, afinal, a novo não existe.

Passam-se meses e nem me apercebo do devir das coisas, pois tudo continua igual, “bem”, “tranquilo”, “normal”. De alguma forma, criamos a nossa própria linha do tempo. Até que chega o derradeiro ponto em que me sinto sozinho, mesmo quando rodeado por dezenas de amigos. Sinto-me fraco, pois parece que já não consigo possuir a realidade com as minhas próprias mãos. O ambiente de condescendência entre os meus amigos torna-se intimidante.

Passado alguns dias, constatei que este nosso “tudo” não era suficiente. Volta a insatisfação, aquela que sempre me deixava inquieto enquanto criança. Já não escolho violentamente anulá-la, mas entendê-la, refletir sobre ela. Noto que a nossa autossuficiência afinal tinha prazo de validade, pois não me basto sozinho e nem quando estou com os meus amigos.

Simultaneamente a esta insatisfação está uma nostalgia profunda, que procura distrair a minha memória em busca daquela época pueril, quando, para aprender a andar, eu não tinha medo de cair no chão; e mesmo assim chorava ao ralar o joelho. Chorava porque sentia na pele o impacto da vida. De uma vida “vivida”, não de uma suposta artificialidade fabricada.

Sinto saudade da criança que queria construir brinquedos cada vez maiores e que ainda ficaria insatisfeita mesmo após ter finalizado o maior que já lhe foi dado. Apercebi-me que, por mais poderoso que fosse, não conseguiria saciar a sede infinita do coração com as minhas próprias obras. É preciso de algo diferente que não dependa e que não consiga ser medido por mim, porque sei que se fosse tentar resumir a potência da vida em um manual de instruções, não haveria papel suficiente.

Necessito precisamente de recuperar aquele segundo antes de abrir a porta do quarto dos meus pais. Ali tudo era um imprevisto, tinha, inclusive, um pouco de medo de que eles ficassem indiferentes quanto aquilo que lhes iria apresentar. Não obstante, após uma certa hesitação, sempre decidia por, em um ato de coragem, abrir a porta e entregar-me a algo que não dependesse de mim, mas sim da obra de um outro. Assim, em uma curta reminiscência, descobri que a entrega é infinitamente mais bela do que a posse!

Hoje cheguei à casa após um intenso dia na faculdade, passado junto com os meus amigos. Decido abrir o compartimento mais recôndito do meu armário e acabo por despedaçar-me a chorar. Contudo, a meio deste mar de lágrimas consigo afirmar, com uma voz trêmula: aos vinte anos, recuso-me de já ter construído o meu último brinquedo.



Image: Untitled 3 by Harsh Khatri

Being a single father of two, Harsh (he/him) explores his creative side through the form of photography. He takes great pride in this as he wishes to share his outlook on the world through a camera lens and to inspire young and old to take up photography.

Why Don't We Carry On Playing?

written and translated by *Tiago Monni*. *Tiago (he/him) is an Erasmus Law Student coming from Lisbon, Portugal. He also used to write in his home university's newspaper, the "Journal".*

Sometimes, in my daily lapses, I remember the nostalgia of waking up as a child who didn't know what the world was and whose duty was to explore it and discover all its labyrinths and entrails. Nowadays, on the other hand, I'm an expert on the world because I could probably draw a map that included all its paths and hiding places, everything being predictable and expected. So, my only weapon for living is nostalgia: I wish someone could erase my memory and make the past present...

Like many children, I used to assemble my own toys, focused, "glued" to the action. There could be a fire in the kitchen caused by my clumsy brother, or an announcement that the family was going on a big trip, and I'd still be endlessly looking for that damn dangling piece so that I could complete the construction of one of the ten towers I had on the way.

I would spend hours on this activity, "driven" by something I couldn't identify. Even though the result of the toy was indicated on the box itself, and there was a detailed step-by-step process that would undoubtedly lead me to that result, I took it as my duty to finish the construction that I had started myself, in my own way. On reflection, I discovered that what moved me was a true Mystery, a demand for totality that, even at my tender age, I could sense infinitely stronger and more powerful than the predictable instruction manual that pointed me towards the construction of the pre-formatted image on the box.



Once the construction was finished, I ran straight to my parents' room. They smiled, and my eyes lit up, knowing I had done something important. At that moment, by carrying out the task I had set myself, I felt a sense of belonging and happiness. I recognised that no instruction manual, no matter how detailed, could instruct me in the beauty embodied in that moment.

Five minutes after leaving their room, I returned and asked for another toy. As beautiful as that adventure had been, I wasn't satisfied. They scratched their wallets, did the maths and decided on the day of the purchase. As D-Day never came, I stood in the queue, waiting for my ticket.

I'm now twenty years old and have around thirty toys in my collection. They stay there, hermetic in the cupboard, shrouded in dust. Now, I no longer play, I no longer create. I'm left to live sunk in a tide of obvious things, said and repeated by my friends. We've played all the games; we've even played more than we should. We've become the creators of instruction manuals. The Mystery we sought in toys has already been unravelled because we are now masters of our own destiny. What remains is the accomplishment of having done everything and the relief of finally having nothing left to do.

Any unforeseen event, surprise, job to be solved, or unexpected invitation is a fly buzzing in our ear: we kill it straight away. They're completely artificial, because they wouldn't have been the fruit of our fruitless creation. Under the banner of our arrogant self-sufficiency, we deliberately censor the new in favour of a comforting well-being in which everything is obvious.

Now, after all, the new doesn't exist. Months go by, and I don't even realise how things have changed because everything is still the same, "fine", "peaceful", "normal". Somehow, we create our own timeline. Until the final point when I feel alone, even when surrounded by dozens of friends. I feel weak because it seems I can no longer take reality into my own hands. The atmosphere of condescension among my friends becomes intimidating.

After a few days, I realised our "everything" wasn't enough. Dissatisfaction returned, the kind that always made me restless as a child. I no longer choose to annul it violently, but to understand it, to reflect on it. I realise that our self-sufficiency had an expiry date after all, because I'm not enough on my own, not even when I'm with my friends.

Simultaneously with this dissatisfaction is a deep nostalgia that tries to distract my memory in search of that childish time when, in order to learn to walk, I wasn't afraid of falling to the ground; and even then I cried when I hurt my knee. I cried because I felt the impact of life on my skin. A "lived" life, not a supposedly manufactured artificiality.

I miss the child who wanted to build bigger toys and would still be unsatisfied even after finishing the biggest one he had ever been given. I realised that, no matter how powerful I was, I couldn't quench my heart's infinite thirst with my own works. I need something different that doesn't depend on me and can't be measured by me because I know that if I tried to summarise the power of life in an instruction manual, there wouldn't be enough paper.

I need to recapture that second before opening my parents' bedroom door. Everything was unexpected there, and I was even a little afraid that they would be indifferent to what I was about to present to them. However, after a certain amount of hesitation, I would always decide, in an act of courage, to open the door and give myself over to something that didn't depend on me, but on the work of another. Thus, in a short reminiscence, I discovered that surrender is infinitely more beautiful than possession!

Today, I arrived home after an intense day at university with my friends. I decide to open the most recondite compartment of my wardrobe and end up bursting into tears. However, in the middle of this sea of tears, I manage to say in a trembling voice: at the age of twenty, I refuse to have built my last toy yet.



**Image: Untitled
2 by Charline
Chatelaine**

Charline (she/her) is drawn to several creative activities and hobbies like painting/drawing, making jewellery and photography, but with collage she particularly enjoys creating odd looking art by using different images and materials that wouldn't necessarily go together normally.



And Yet It Moves

written by *Tim Callanan*. *Tim (They/Them)* is a first year undergraduate student in UCD studying Physics, hoping to get a degree in Physics with Astronomy and Space Sciences. They loved reading, especially science fiction and fantasy, ever since they were a young child and their dad read *the Hobbit* to them.

TW: Transphobia.

It is said that, after being forced to recant his heretical views, Galileo Galilei stamped his foot on the ground and said “Eppur si muove” – “And yet it moves.” For he knew what we know, that no matter what he said or did, the Earth still moved around the Sun. Some things are facts, no matter how often they are denied.

On a clear night like this, thousands of stars could be seen through the window. They blurred together as the car drove along the motorway, hundreds of trails of light racing their way across the dark sky. The light had travelled years to reach there, over two and a half million years in the case of the Andromeda galaxy, all to shine indiscriminately across the planet. There was a beauty in that journey that Stella could appreciate.

The stars disappeared from view as the car entered a tunnel, replaced by the harsh lights that attempted to mimic the sky’s glory. Stella kept looking out the window anyway, knowing it was better than facing into the car and possibly inviting a conversation. Music was the only sound inside, a soft thrum of a generic old song her mother had always liked and Stella had never understood. Her mind was too far away to take it in at this time anyway. She doubted her mother was listening either.

The car emerged from the tunnel, the night sky reappearing, the stars right where Stella had left them. Trees started to spring up on either side of the road, partially obscuring the mighty sky high above, the city starting to fall away behind them. Stella was glad to leave it.

The further away it got, the closer she went to her home, to her room, to the safety of isolation. If she was lucky, the rest of the journey would continue as it was, in silence, and then she could hide away again.

If she was lucky, she wouldn't be in this position in the first place.

“Do we need to talk about tonight?” her mother asked.

Stella didn't answer, keeping her gaze locked out the window, trying to catch all the glimpses of stars that she could. She knew as well as her mother did that there was no answer she could give to stop the oncoming conversation.

“I've told you before that you can't act like that around your grandmother. It's not fair on her. You know she can't handle it.”

“She can't, or you can't?” Stella said before her brain could catch her tongue and lock it down. Responding never made things any better, and yet she always did it anyway.

Her mother sighed. “We've talked about this. You're my son, and-”

“I'm not,” Stella tried to interrupt, but her mother went on anyway.

“You are my son, and I love you, but you need help. I can't help you unless you let me. Will you let me?”

Stella stopped herself from responding, keeping her gaze out the window, letting her shaky breath out as quietly as she could. Her thumbs began tapping a rhythm against the tips of her fingers, a ritual she had performed hundreds of times before. She forced her mind to return to the view beyond the window and the near silence of the car.

The stars were clearer in the sky now, no longer fading together, as the car slowed down, rocky country roads replacing the smooth motorway.

Stella practised naming the stars in her head, begging it would bring her calmness as it had done so many times in the past. Polaris, shining in the north, at one end of Ursa Minor. Nearby, Dubhe and Merak, pointing to Polaris. Far below them, Arcturus, the brightest star in the northern celestial hemisphere. One by one, Stella named the stars she could see, hoping the silence in the car would last. Hope was all she had, but against her mother it was never enough.

“I talked to Father Davies,” her mother said. “He says there’s a place you can go, up north, where they can help you. He says he knows another family who had a similar...problem. Their daughter went up there for a month and when she came back she was cured.”

“I don’t need to be cured,” Stella said, but her mother ignored her.

“It’s not cheap, mind you, but Father Davies says it’ll be worth it. A few weeks, a month or two at most, and you will be back to normal. We can leave this...thing behind us.”

Stella turned to face her mother, her thumbs speeding up as they tapped on her fingers. “I don’t want to leave it behind.”

Her mother glanced at her. “I know you think that, honey, but you’re wrong. You’ll be happier once this phase is over.”

“I’ve told you, it’s not a phase.”

“It is. Father Davies says he has known other people who feel the way you do, and the ones who end up happiest are the ones who move on.”

Stella rolled her eyes. “What would Father Davies know?”

“Quite a lot, I think you’ll find. He is a very well-travelled man, which you would know if you paid attention to his sermons. Just last week, he was saying that-”

“I don’t care what Father Davies was saying!”

“Watch your tone, Arthur.”

The rhythm of her thumbs faltered. “My name is Stella.”

“No, your name is Arthur, after your grandfather. He was someone who knew how to accept the truth.”

“Didn’t he also drink his way to an early grave?”

“Do not talk about your family like that! Not in my car.”

“Then let me out of the car. I’d rather walk.”

Her mother scoffed. “Oh, I’m sure you would. Do you think I would just let my son walk home alone in the dark?”

“I’m not your son,” Stella said. Her mother sighed but did not reply. The rest of the journey passed in silence.



Finally, the car pulled up the driveway of their house. Lights shone in the windows, smoke curled up out of the chimney and plants laden with the last flowers of the season lined the path to the front door. To Stella, it was almost the perfect home. Almost.

Stella got out of the car as soon as it stopped, but she didn't walk towards the house, not yet. She took a deep breath, letting the cool air fill her lungs and ground her. She heard the car door close as her mother emerged, and saw out of the corner of her eyes more light spilling from the house as her younger sister came out. There was the crunching of stones beneath feet as her mother made her way to the house, but Stella didn't turn to face it.

"Come on," she heard her mother say to her sister. "Your brother needs some space to think." The light faded, and there was a click as the front door closed again.

Stella released the breath she had been holding, alone with nature once again. She turned her eyes to the sky, to the stars, where she always wanted to look. She allowed herself one sigh as she took in the distant lights, and let a single tear free from the prison within her heart.

"And yet it moves." The words hung in the air, the promise of a brighter future. She turned and made her way to the house.

Image: Untitled 5 by Sarah McKernan

Sarah (she/her) is a photographer and videographer from Stamford CT, US, and works in this field for U.S. Air Force and as a Public Relations Officer for Plus Brand Industries. She loves taking landscape photography as her photos are from locations all around the U.S..





These Words Are Queer

written by *Morgan Lyons*. *Morgan (she/her) has a passion for writing poems depicting body respect, intersectional feminism and queerness. Her writing and art has been published in Rainbow Library Cork Anthology which was launched at West Cork Literary Festival 2023, Good Day Cork Protest Poetry, and Motley Magazine.*

Queer joy

It starts in a lockdown

Locked in a bedroom

An avalanche of books

Queer romance, queer fantasy

Queer characters

Characters like... me?

At first you settle for anything, any
gay rep

Then you learn

So much more

More stories, more writers, more
characters

It starts with the words

Printed on pages

Written just for you

'Her girlfriend'

'Her wife'

'Her chosen family'

It starts with courage

To walk through the doors of your
local queer centre

To realise bravery isn't a show for
other people

But for yourself

Your identity

Your heart

Queer courage is in your hands
when you pick up a pen

In your mind when you stop filtering
the words

In your eyes when you read your
work, every stream of

consciousness, every thought

Every feeling you have mapped out
with letters and stanzas

Every poem you allow to breathe
outside your mind

Every character you allow to run
outside of your heart

Queer courage is in your voice, even
when it shakes, even when you

stumble over your poems, words

that feel unfamiliar spoken out loud,
words that fit around your lips like a

soothing balm



Queer takes its shape

On your mouth, in your fingers, in your notebook and in your artwork

Queer meets you where you are, comes to you in the paperbacks you hunted
for in your small town bookshops

Comes to you in fiction, comes to you in friends

Comes to you in small groups, in workshops, in parades you were petrified
to attend

Scared of not belonging

Queer is the word which keeps you company, the word which whispers
“yes”

Yes, you are enough

Queer joy is yours, individual and collective

Queer joy is sacred, magic, infinite

Queer joy is the reassurance of the

Little rainbow flag

Tucked in a bookshelf

All year round.



Image: Stair by Ethan Golding

Ethan Golding (he/him) is a Graduate of DCU's MA in Creative Writing. Embracing the space between the stage and the page, he has had work produced by DCU's drama society, has been featured in *The Chapter Catcher* is a staff writer for *The GOO Dublin*.

Dial Up

written by *Samantha Hodge*. *Samantha (she/her) is a Canadian exchange student from UBC studying in her fourth year of a very long Creative Writing and Computer Science degree. She enjoys writing almost as much as she loves reading (and cats).*

My mother loves her phones. She'll sit, twirling the spiralled cord, or splay out on her bed phone pressed to her ear. She's got one installed in every room of the house.

She keeps phone numbers in a little box of record cards, each one printed in neat ink. She carries it with her as she wanders the house and leaves it in odd places when she departs. When I arrive home and she's not there, it's a phantom of her presence.

Whenever she's bored, my mother will rifle through the cards and play a game of who is willing to pick up. The only card I've ever seen my mother get rid of was my dad's after she kicked him out of the house.

I watched her take a match to it in the sink from the stairwell. She cracked the window open to stave off the fire alarm and stayed there until the last wisp of smoke curled out to follow dad down the drive. Then she did the dishes, so I wasn't even able to save the ashes.

Her favourite victim is Aunt Caroline. When my mother starts dialing, I creep from my bedroom to the office and ease the phone from its cradle. Their conversations usually go something like this:

““Oh, dear Lina,”” my mother exclaims. ““You can't imagine the day I've had.””

““Lord save you, what is it now?””

““I’ll never leave this house again. I slipped coming back from the grocer’s and everything went flying! It absolutely ruined my hair—I’d just gotten it done Friday if you remember—and I cracked the eggs something horrible. Might you be able to run some over for me?””

““It’s a two-hour drive, get more yourself.””

My mother sighs delicately into the receiver.

““I’m simply too overwhelmed. Besides it’s not like Peter will miss you. That secretary is keeping his attention quite diverted. He’s bound to forget your anniversary again this year, so you might as well start spending the apology money now. How many times has it slipped his mind? I seem to have forgotten.””

I hold my breath in these thorned silences, terrified one of them might hear me. Aunt Caroline breaks first.

““Six,”” she snaps. ““Though you would certainly know more about spending. I heard you had to beg another mortgage payment off of father. How long until he also cuts you off?””

““Yes, well,”” my mother affects nonchalance. ““We all have our little vices. Buy yourself something nice but do drop the groceries at four. Ta.”” The line buzzes, disconnected. Then my mother dials again, a new target located.

““Darling mother, I hear you’ve been chit chatting with little Lina.”” And she’s off again.

My mother was the perfect picture of a woman with a charmed life. Beautiful and richly married, with a boy that shut up and smiled when prompted and the jealousy of all the women she’d shop with. That all imploded when dad left.

Technically she kicked him out, but he already had one foot out the door. He couldn't stand her towards the end, and he's the only person who's ever really done something about it. I admired that, even though it hurt.

He left me with only a number, and my mother burned that as well.

I asked her a couple years later for his phone number.

“I just want to call him,” I said as she was touching up her lipstick, getting ready to head out the door.

“I don't have time for this Charlie,” she said.

“You called him every day at work, you've got to remember at least part of it. It started with a two, didn't it?”

“Charlie.” A note of displeasure as she finally turned away from the mirror.

“He's my dad,” I pleaded.

Her eyes skated right past me and onto the scarf rack.

“I simply can't help you, Charlie, I've forgotten it. Now I don't want to hear about this again, okay? Okay.”

Then she patted me on the head and breezed out the door. Another thing about my mother: she is the one that taught me how to smile.

“Chin up, Charlie. Smile.” She always tapped my cheeks with her manicured nails. Whether I was crying or bunching up my forehead in a scowl, chin up, smile.

Smile for the other parents to coo at. Smile for the family photographer that's your birthday gift this year because I want some nice pictures for the mantle. Smile for me. Always for me.

Everyone in my family takes my mother's calls. Oh, they'll tsk at family gatherings for indulging her, but they can never resist being able to shove another barb in over the phone. As if words will ever make her bleed.

I've never understood them but then, even dad couldn't really hurt her. While she was gone for her hair appointment though, I did better.

I started with the phone in the front hall. A knife from the kitchen sliced through the phone cord, my heel crumbled the receiver. I took a candlestick to the plastic casing, beat in the little bells. The phone's innards were ripped out and scattered on the floor like a hundred rose petals for my mother to return to. Then, I started on the rest.

Like I said, she's never let the insults get to her but she felt this. Above anything else, my mother loves her phones.

Image: Untitled 1 by PIGSY

PIGSY, an Irish artist, creates genuine and unapologetic assured expressionist art that reflects his personal journey.





The Little White Rose

written by *Kaitlyn Gallo-Cover*. *Kaitlyn (she/her) is a fourth year Creative Writing major at University of California Riverside. She wrote her first poem when she was 12 and has enjoyed learning and growing as a poet ever since.*

The warming spring sun
melts winter memories
from the leaves of
the little white rose.

With a sigh and a stretch she awoke
stunned looking left and right
once fellow buds have now bloomed
bees and butterflies greet them
and her too.

Her fellow rose-mates
giggled as they were tickled
by aphids sucking away their sap
and their leaves greened when called
beautiful but
the little white rose frowned.

This is what she was supposed to
want
having her nectar and pollen taken,
her petals touched,
being smelled,
and being plucked
but she hoped for so much more
she wanted to fly with the birds,
travel into ant tunnels
and hold and hug a star.

Her fellow bloomed buds dismissed
her thoughts
they shouted that this is all they are,
“our nectar and pollen are for
nurturing others!
our sweet fragrance is meant only for
others’ noses!
we are meant to be picked and
admired by strangers and
we are just pleased to be!”
the little white rose wept

A dream was sucked out of her everyday by the bees
her hope weakened with each passerby's sniff
and each day prickles grew and petals fell
and she felt like she was no more.

When her little bud days became a distant memory,
she realized she had only one petal
“how did this happen?” she thought,
she didn't feel the the others fall off,
now this last one is aching to be let free
“but what am I supposed to be without any petals?”
the little white rose pondered.

The other roses snickered and turned from her
as she cried out her questions,
“what do I do when I have nothing left to give,”
will I still be called beautiful?”
they couldn't give her any answers;
but in her somber state
she looked and saw that no bees or butterflies were around her,
and no passerby dare set their eyes on her,
she reached with her browning leaves and tore off her last petal.
All of her nectar was gone,
pollen taken,
and petals all fallen
nobody wanted to smell, touch, pick, or take from her anymore
she looked up to the stars with open reaching leaves and
the little white rose smiled.



Image: Daisies by Ankita Nishant Khimesra

Ankita Khimesra (she/her) moved to Dublin from India in 2017 with her family. She is a qualified Chartered Accountant but because of her keen interest in Art she has decided to pursue a career in this field.

Dandelion

written by *Elle Tan Villa*. *Elle (she/her) was a proud member of Sutton Park School's Poetry After-school Club. Who was also given the chance to help write a speech for Irish Senator Sharon Keogan, commemorating International Women's Day 2021. She has worked as an intern with the following groups Supply Change, Split Banana and IntoGames in which she conducted/wrote interviews, informative papers and personal blogs.*

I make a wish and think
how awful it is
to be shredded by breath.
A thousand white hairs
without compass,
without regard,
I watch them drift,
Bearing the winds,
Bearing my breath,
In the depths of my self-
preservation,
I call a friend so that my body can
cling onto each syllable she speaks;
To hear a voice that wasn't my own.
She tells me about the villages in
Estonia,
The thousand-year spell

Of thatched roofs, wattle and daub,
Small decorations on every living
room wall,
Old women hanging clothes, telling
each other of daily happenings,
calling in their children to eat.
And there is nothing beyond this,
There are no hidden truths to
uncover,
Everything you need to know, in
plain sight,
The whole universe seen from a
bedroom window,
There are no Gods, only the stillness
after finishing morning cups of
coffee.
She tells me,
"This is who we do it for."
And I'm looking at strange pictures
Of people I'll never know
In even stranger times; separate to
mine,
And something beyond me stretches
To meet them,
For a moment I wish,
To bury myself in the soil beneath
their feet,
And bring them flowers.



Image: Untitled 2 by Conor Bailey

Conor Bailey is a final year History and Politics student and they enjoy taking photos. They prefer to take clean minimalist photos with a few bright colours that show the texture of the spaces around us, but still enjoy scenes of nature and the shapes of urban buildings.



A Red Eye For Details

written by *Asia Fontanarosa*. *Asia (she/her) is from Naples, Italy. She is a 21-year-old full-time student at UCD and has been studying English Literature and Drama for the past three years.*

I find it kind of ironic that a ladybug was going to be the last thing I'd look at before I died but I'm glad about it. I never cared much for insects but now for some reason, this little speckle of colour on a cold carpet of green kind of...calls to me. It might be the urgency of the situation, prompting me to look at the last beautiful thing I can lay eyes on before it's too late.

Now that I'm so close to it ...I must admit, they are quite fascinating. Satisfyingly round, an encouraging shade of red, and funny polka dots. I understand now the attraction my Mom had over these little silly creatures. Our garden is covered with funky fairy statues hovering around, and little ladybugs resting on plastic leaves.

I want to crawl closer to it and take in all the little pretty things that make it so. Unfortunately, both my legs are broken, crushed in ...disgusting little pieces, I think. I don't know. I don't care to look. But most importantly I would not want my last pointless whim for survival to scare the ladybug away. Who else can boast about being able to enjoy the view of symbolised luck on their deathbed? Because this is what ladybugs are known for right...? I'm not sure, as I said I never cared too much about insects. But my Mom always told me that they were lucky insects and if one of these little fellas were to decide to lay on you for whatever reason...BOOM!

Blessed by fortune. I didn't believe it, I'm not sure. But maybe she was right. I remember once, when I accidentally killed one.

I didn't do it on purpose, as I said, it was an accident. She always cared too much, over every stupid little thing. It was just a bug, in the end—another one just like it will exist. The look on her face though, made me think otherwise. I felt so bad, I got defensive. Was I going to be damned to misfortune now? I told her she was stupid for reacting that way. I did not care. It was kind of weird when I thought about the same accident years and years later. Years after my mom passed, months after my wife divorced me and took away the kids. I remember thinking...oh yeah, that's when my life went to shit. Then, at that point, I thought I believed in the ladybug's luck.

When the news announced that aliens were real, I was in my dark ensuite apartment with oily hair and a cheesy shirt. I did not care for it because I knew that anyone with a sane mind would know already that aliens were a thing. When the first malevolent aliens came in contact with us, and started to play around with humans and animals alike, I did not care as long as I was safe.

Not even once I thought about my wife and kids, I hadn't seen them in so long after all, I had kind of forgotten I even had ones to begin with! I did not get preoccupied over my friends of which I did not possess. And not even once did my mind go back to the moment I killed a ladybug.

I never once admitted to myself that maybe me killing the ladybug was not an accident after all and that maybe the look on my Mother's face was not for nothing. It was not stupid. That maybe if I had cared a little bit more, in my life, in that moment, everything would be different. Who knows, I might not have stepped on the ladybug. My wife might not have left me, my kids would be in my arms.

And you know what? I really care about this ladybug now, I hope it grows to have a nice and happy little ladybug life.



I just now realise that the look on my Mother's face was not because of some silly little ladybug who was stepped on, but out of fear her silly little son would not grow up to care, for anyone.

And as I crushed you little one, I am being crushed by a bigger, confusing alienated being. And maybe if they cared enough, if I did, if we did. If we cared.

“I see now, me and you are just the same. If I were to be a little red spot on the smooth green skin of our mother’s face, would it give me relief to know I am not alone, and we turned the Earth red?”



Image: Close to Nature by Ankita Nishant Khimesra

Ankita Khimesra (she/her) moved to Dublin from India in 2017 with her family. She is a qualified Chartered Accountant but because of her keen interest in Art she has decided to pursue a career in this field.



If I die before they do

written by *Tiffany Ching-Han Chang*. *Tiffany (per/pers) is currently a Stage and Screen Writing MA student. Per has an undergraduate degree in Biology and tries to incorporate insects into per writing.*

I could hear my mom screaming in the hall. The nurse was still at the door obstructing my view of her.

“But that’s my baby,” my mom wheezed, and she attempted to struggle past her. “You aren’t going to keep me from my baby.”

“She doesn’t want to see you right now,” the nurse said in an almost condescending tone. “Just give her some space.”

I heard the gentle but annoying beeping of the heart monitor and the teeth-grinding ticking of the clock. My bedside table was littered with gifts from friends and family. The drawings and letters I hadn’t finished. My eyes landed on a little LEGO minifigure that came with loads of toys given to me by family that I won’t even bother to play with. I was supposed to let her in, that’s what a good daughter would do. Then as if I inserted my AirPods, the beeping of the heart monitor becomes muffled, and the clock stopped.

Tall and dark, Death took a seat by my bed.

I smiled sheepishly. “You always come at the worst time, don’t you?”

He responded with comforting sarcasm. “No one ever says that.”

I always admired the way I saw him before, and I laughed. “It doesn’t matter. It’s been several years of me dying---my whole life actually, you know.”

I felt playful again and I waved my hands dramatically. “I can see it now. My picture surrounded by ‘Taken from Us Too Soon.’ While terrible pop music plays or whatever the funeral director plays when they don’t know anything about the deceased...”

His face wrinkled with concern. “Hey, you know I can tell her, your mom, what you want if you’d like.”

“She wouldn’t even listen to me, why would she listen to you? My parents were too busy crying. A piece of paper said they can do whatever they want with me regardless of what I said. That’s because I don’t have another piece of paper with big letters that say ‘DON’T.’ This society is stupid. And I am so sick of hearing them sobbing.”

“I can come back after we go, and then let her know what you want.”
“She won’t listen...” I shook my head. “Who would listen to a stranger at this time?”

A smile spread across his face, but it failed to get a foothold on mine.

“Well, then are you ready to go? Have anything you want to stick around for?”

I looked down at the tangle of wires by my side and the IV in my thin arm. “You know I never finished anything... or I have, but it didn’t gain traction... blow-up... anything...” I looked right into his eyes again. “Are you sure you want to talk to her?”

“I like challenges.” The clock returned to ticking, and my body flatlined. My Patron of Death guided me to where I needed to go. He let me gently down. I looked at myself in a small puddle of still water and I was no longer wearing that disgusting hospital gown. I took the edges of my new linen petticoat and twirled. I dug further into the sand with my feet, it was as if I was on the beach in the summer, warm.

Greenery surrounded me as I was in between a garden and steps to a colorfully painted bright white limestone temple.

“See you later,” he said and headed back.

Death donned a disguise and he saw my mom begging and crying beside my cold body. My dad stood by with his glasses off, face buried in tissue. Death bent down to talk to her. To her, it’s just another middle-aged nurse with a round face and the deepest, darkest of eyes. “It’s going to be okay.” He talked in a low captivating whisper. “I was just here, and your child told me what they wanted. With the unique biology of her heart, she was interested in preserving it forever by burying it or giving it to science.”

“She told you, but she wouldn’t tell... her own mom?!” She cried even louder.

Death snarled. “You would not listen when she told you what she wanted, but because it meant what you wanted was left out, you denied it.”

In the other world, I climbed some stairs and emerged in a hallway that seemed to stretch forever in one direction, and in the other direction was a lively and crowded throne room. It was bathed in torchlight, shadows, and song. But I didn’t feel like socializing. My mind was on the fact that I would possibly never see my friends and family again. So, I sat on one of the cool and fuzzy rugs I thought of the first time I met Death.

It was a Monday I thought about how much life sucked, how my parents were at work all day and I was at school. Then when they came home were too tired to address me other than asking about my day, which felt the same each time. I wondered why I had to spend all my time in the same place if I knew I only had so much life left. But that was what having no extra money after spending it on my medical care meant. On that day, as I walked home and crossed the bridge, I decided to stop in the middle.

I slid my backpack off my shoulder and placed it beside me against the railing. I had a vague recollection of feeling the vibration of cars while they zoomed past me. Suddenly I heard a confident voice, something that came from my subconscious.

“You aren’t going to do that.”

“Do what?” I asked back.

“Jump,” it answered. I turned and flinched. He was right beside me towering a few feet taller than me with a dark hood obscuring his head. Brown human-like hands with neatly manicured, but abnormally long nails were placed on the railing where I had mine. This surprised me and I blinked.

“I wasn’t thinking about it.”

“Yes you were, but then you were also wincing a little bit probably thinking about how hard drowning is and how upset---”

I held up my hand. “Stop.” I quickly put my hand away after realizing how disrespectful it was and gazed back out towards the edge again.

“It’s just really annoying to have parents who are waiting for you to die, you know? Why not just do it? I don’t know why I’m telling a stranger this.”

He bent down and tried to meet my eyes again and began slowly. “I’m far from a stranger. Well at the end of your short life last time, you begged to be a human. You may not remember.”

I turned to face his head flickering between a human with a cherub-like face and a furry black wolf head with a sleek snout. As if my mind tried to figure out what I wanted to see. “I do remember. When I was a baby, I had a dream, I was a baby animal torn away from its mother.”



“As you grew you read about me and fell in love with me, platonically... philia.”

He settled on the look of the black wolf head, yet with the rest of the human body, just like those many tomb paintings and steles depicting Anubis. I bent down to grab my backpack.

“That’s pretty antiquated,” I said. “It’s called ‘friendship’ now.” I tapped the area above my heart on my chest. “It’s going to give out soon, I can feel it...”

He followed me home in silence and I could feel him watching me and I assumed it was to see if I try another attempt on my life. But when I finally opened the front door and turned back, he was already gone.

Death came back to where I was standing, still in the hall, deciding which way to go.

“They cremated you,” he said in a monotone voice. “Put on that terrible pop music and said way too much about how much others pitied you.”

“Damn it,” I crossed my arms and stuck my nose up high. “Foiled by the system.”

“But I got this from the lab.” From his dark cloak, he pulled out my heart. It was in this plastic bag, and it looked like any other slab of meat you could get from the deli. Death sliced the wrapping open with one flick of his sharp nails.

“No freaking way,” I said.

Death lightly kissed the top of my head. He took me to a beautiful scale, that I swear was not there in the middle of the hall before. The base consisted of hand-carved wood with chains holding up two golden dishes. Then he placed my heart on one of the dishes. Oh heart, do not betray me.

This thought felt like a light breeze that gave me chills. Then from the glittering air, he pulled out a large ostrich feather and placed it on the other dish. Before the scale became still, he directed my attention away and he warmed my heart with his voice, “Welcome. Now let’s go see some folks who want to meet you.”

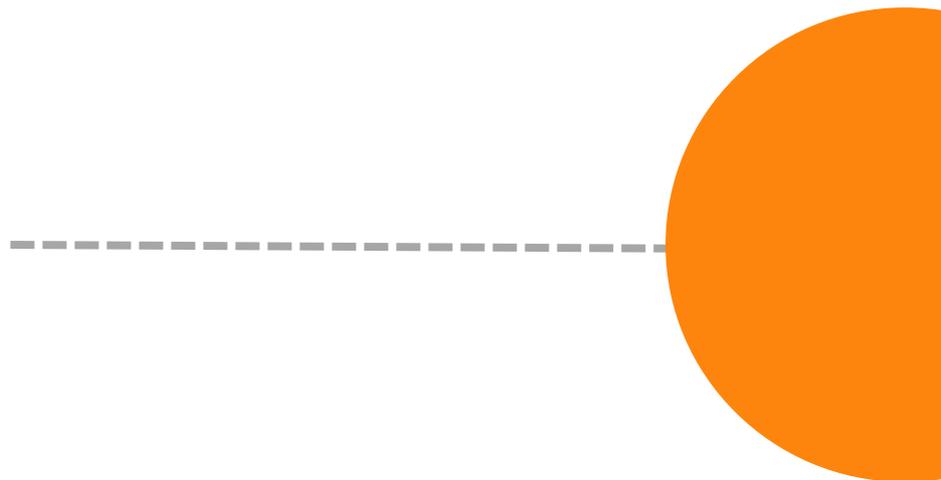




Image: Untitled 4 by Marco Acerbi

Marco (he/him) is an 18 year old psychology undergraduate at UCD. As an artist, he uses ink and colours to translate feelings that our words cannot reach. In his works, Marco loves combining philosophical and literary reflections with metaphors about identity.



An Ode to Water

written by *Molly Kehoe (she/her)*
*is a second-year English and
Creative Writing student in UCD.
Originally from Rathvilly, Co.
Carlow. A fun fact about Molly is
that she claims she is extremely
clumsy since she has very bad
eyesight and once knocked herself
out with a wing mirror of a car.
She also plays piano with a
speciality in funeral songs.*

I jump feet first into you
Your fingers gripping around my ankles
Dragging me into your depths.

You wash away my sins,
Giving me a new lease on life
One last chance to not drown.

I miss diving beneath the surface,
Searching for answers
That circle beneath my feet.

The darkness below no longer instils fear
But a sense of peace within me.
I know you're treading along beside me,
Salt sprouting up my nose and down my
throat
Reminding me how it feels to be alive.



Fall Storms

written by Louisa Klatt. *Louisa (she/her) is a 28-year-old PhD researcher at the University of Galway who is originally from the North of Germany and loves cinnamon rolls almost as much as writing. She is currently developing a research project that combines creative writing, constitutional law, and experimental jurisprudence.*"

how is the wind
in the shelves?
she asks the empty room
the wood cracks in response
autumn leaves rustle
the trees bend under pressure

a change in the weather

it's as if the house breathes
the walls parting lips as if
to say
something
and then changing their minds
a pause
seagulls screeching in the distance

how did the wind
crack the ceiling?
she asks the black lines
criss-crossing the height
they breathe in unison
now
her
and the room



Image: Untitled 5 by Clodagh Conneally

Clodagh (she/her) is a tourism and languages graduate. They enjoy visiting new places and see the beauty everywhere they go. They describe themselves as a bit of a memory hoarder so they love to take photographs to immortalise everywhere they go.

“Belonging at UCD”: Interview with Dr. Emma Farrell

On her career and recent success with the UCD and NCAD Belonging Project
by Colm O’Shea

Reader,

It's no surprise that as an education centre and a shiny blue, yellow and black beacon of Irish life, University College Dublin has been the stomping grounds for many types of people across the country and beyond.

It is a surprise however, that it took until February of 2023 to establish an arts project celebrating that fact.

This collective, affectionately called “The Belonging Project”, tasked the then current students and staff of the college with talking about a moment where they felt like they belonged at the university.

In August of that year, with forty written pieces, as well as forty students from the National College of Art and Design, the Belonging Project was launched in the Museum



Dr. Farrell herself, speaking at the launch of the Belonging Project (all images taken by Jason Clarke and provided to us by Dr. Emma Farrell, all rights reserved)

of Literature Ireland, a writing and art exhibition all about the theme of belonging.

With the recent move of the exhibition to the UCD Village upper floors, questions are now involved of who organised the exhibit, why, the work that was done between both colleges and what it has in connection with students who are struggling to find a place in the university.

To understand this, I sat down with Dr. Emma Farrell, the creator and chief curator of the Belonging Project to answer all of these questions. And to further gloat about me being featured in the exhibition as well.

Here's how our conversation went:

C.OS: So just to start things off Dr. Emma Farrell, please tell me a little bit about who you are and what you usually do at UCD.

Emma Farrell: My name is Emma Farrell. I'm a researcher in the School of Education. I think a lot of people don't know what a researcher does but I think it's perhaps one of the best jobs at the university.

I get to work full time with colleagues answering big questions in creative and interesting ways. Some of the questions I'm focused on answering at the moment relate to how we communicate people's lived experiences as evidence to inform policy and practice.

So for example I work on a European Commission funded study, the Sophia study, which is focused on obesity. And it's a huge international study, which UCD is one of the lead partners in. And it involves scientists and clinicians and people from all over the world trying to figure out how do we best understand and

respond to obesity. Which is an important and growing societal challenge.

And my job within that study was to make sure that, as we develop policy and guidelines for practice, that people living with obesity, their voices and experiences, are at the heart of the development of this policy and practice.

So that's what I do for a great deal of my time. I also work on other really interesting questions.

Like, one of the other projects I work [on] is called Thinkful. Where I work with my colleagues and friends in Philosophy, to understand how philosophy can help us understand that phenomenon of mental health. So my background is in mental health. I am a psychologist, I'm a founding member of Jigsaw, Ireland's national centre for youth mental health, and I'm really interested in understanding how we can think about [a] phenomenon like mental health in a very rich and diverse way.

And the other question, which of course as you know, that I'm really interested in at the moment is belonging. Particularly, how we lost that sense of connection and belonging during the pandemic and the impact that that has had on students and staff at the University.

But perhaps more importantly, how we can rekindle that sense of belonging on campus. And so that's where the Belonging Project came from.

C.OS: So where did the idea of the Belonging Project come from?

The idea for the Belonging Project came from a sense, if you can remember back to Spring 2022, that students and staff were really struggling to come back to campus. There was a lot in the media about students' mental health and that they were struggling to attend lectures and to socialise, but equally there was a narrative around staff reluctance to come back to campus. And I felt that, rather than focus on what was missing, you know the negative, let's consider what the opposite is. And that for me, the opposite to disconnection is belonging.

“We just really wanted to connect with that essence of belonging, where it is found, what does it feel like. And I think that's what we managed to do.”

So I really wanted to understand belonging and particularly belonging on campus. Where it's found, where it flourishes, where it flounders. And so, I connected with a group of colleagues and friends from across

the university. So those are Dr. Shane Bergin, Dr. Aíne Mahon who are also in the School of Education and Dr. Lisa Forin who is in the School of Philosophy. And we came together to think about how we could creatively understand belonging.

And we got some very small seed funding and we decided to invite students and staff from across UCD to tell us about a time that they felt they belonged on campus. And that's where you were involved, Colm, you were one of the many students who wrote.

We got poems, autobiographical reflections, stories, haikus, a whole variety of different accounts of belonging on campus.

We shortlisted forty of these then and passed these to our colleagues and friends in NCAD. And students there were tasked with creatively representing the essence of belonging in the written pieces.

So your piece is a great example and I really encourage you to talk about it if you feel comfortable doing that, about what you wrote and the artwork that came out as a result of it, I think it's a fantastic example.

But we just really wanted to connect with that essence of belonging, where it is found, what does it feel like. And I think that's what we

managed to do.

I was so struck [by] your story and how Belfield FM was the environment in which you found your tribe, or for other people it was the American Football Club or just the quiet corner in the library. Unfortunately we've heard a lot about how people often felt like they didn't belong in UCD and that their belonging came from the long bus journeys to and from campus.

We learned an awful lot about the people, the places, the conditions in which belonging is supported and nourished. And that's really what the project has been.

It culminated at the seminar and exhibition in MoLI, the Museum of Literature Ireland, on the 29th of August, so it gave us a chance to think about belonging in a scholarly way. It was a day of stories, and students and staff and scholars – all talking about belonging from different and diverse perspectives.

And then we had the wonderful evening exhibition where we got to share and connect around the stories of belonging and the artwork that arose from them.

C.OS: And I guess just on the subject of NCAD and MOLI, how did you organise working with them?

Well, this project started off very small.

Initially, we had just planned to invite the written submissions from UCD students and staff. And then I have a good friend called Rob Farley who is a tutor at NCAD. And he was the one who said “do you know this would [be] really excellent for Bureau + students.” He's a tutor there but he also runs his own design studio.

So he was the one who made the link and when we got in touch with our colleagues in NCAD, Claire Campion and John Slade, they were just thrilled to have good content to work with for their students.



A very flattering image of me, reading my short story “D’J Basket Case” at the Belonging Project launch in MoLI. Probably the only place where I can openly flex my interest in Green Day on two separate accounts without being called a boomer, to use modern day insults.

Bureau + is a year that really takes students kind of out of the classroom and more into real world settings. So they are given projects as if they were real world jobs. So our project turned out to be a perfect example of the type of work that they like to take on in that year. So it was our good relationships and a good fortune to make that connection.

They were absolutely a joy to work with. Some of our team from UCD went out to NCAD at different points throughout the year to meet the students to see how the work was progressing and then we just collectively worked together to make the whole exhibition work.

It was very much run on a shoestring, so we were begging, borrowing and stealing from different people across the college, and really the whole project was run on good relationships and good will.

And part of that is the MoLI piece. MoLI is one of the greatest assets that UCD has. I was very fortunate to launch my book in MoLI last year. And I got in touch with a colleague called Flora in MoLI and she was the one who really made it happen. She was the one who supported us to use the whole building, so the two houses for the whole day, set up the exhibition, ran the seminar and it was just such a joy to work with

them. And particularly considering it was all free of charge for us at UCD.

C.OS: I guess just the next question I have, for those unsure at UCD, like as a new student or an old student, what message would you have for them and are there any stories from the project that you'd probably recommend for them?

That's a really great question Colm. I think the thing that struck me and I think others from this project was, often when we feel disconnected or lonely, we think we're the only one.

I think we've all had that experience of looking around us on campus and wondering, how does everybody else know each other? Everyone seems to have friends and places to go and people to talk to. So when you feel disconnected or alone it can often feel like you're the only one.

But I think what came through all of the stories for me was that everybody felt like they were the only one. That a sense of belonging often starts from a place of loneliness.

And what's really interesting for me was to find how people found a place of belonging. There's no one formula to find your tribe or to find a sense of community or to feel like you are a part of something bigger.

“Often we feel like we're alone, we're the only one who doesn't fit in and I think the stories just demonstrate how that isn't the case.”

I think of one student who wrote about coming back to university in her sixties. And that all the students in her class were undergraduates within their twenties. And she talked about a project that they did together as a group that allowed her to connect with them, work with them and make some really great friends.

I think of another colleague actually, who also spoke at the launch, who described how she almost left UCD as an undergraduate but that it was somebody who said “give it time” and made the connection with her and just gave her a little bit of encouragement that meant that she stayed on to complete her degree and is in UCD all these years later as a professor.

So I think that what I found from the stories was that, often we feel like we're alone, we're the only one who doesn't fit in and I think the stories just demonstrate how that isn't the case. That so many people feel that they don't belong at times. But also that belonging can be found in the most diverse and unusual and remarkable places and ways.

C.OS: And just as my last question, any details you'd like to share, like, any other projects you've been working on if people would like to learn more about you?

Well I think we're currently doing some updates to the website Belonging.ie, which will hopefully be able to share soon if people are more interested in learning about the project.

There's also a website I run with Dr. Anya Mahon called Thinkful.ie which shares a lot of original work from scholars and students who are thinking about mental health and wellbeing in a kind of more philosophical way. Yeah I think those are probably two good places to start.



Rob McGrath, the artist behind my submission “Dy Basket Case”, which you can even see being displayed in the background.



C.OS: Thank you for your time Dr. Farrell. As mentioned, the Belonging Project is currently on display at the UCD Village centre but if you want to catch the story I wrote for the exhibit “DJ Basket Case”, check out my blog (cplisken.medium.com) for more information. And if you feel left out at UCD, remember that all students feel a similar way to you.

Whether you’re a new, veteran, or graduate student, remember that our college is open to all who wish to learn. And though it will take some time, you too will hopefully find your place within the campus. You just have to be willing to look for it.

Sincerely,
Colm.



Image of the lead organizers for the Belonging Project. From left to right, include: Claire Campion (NCAD), Professor Sarah Glennie, Director NCAD, Professor Oral Feely, President UCD, Dr Emma Farrell, Dr Lisa Foran UCD School of Philosophy, Professor Colin Scott UCD Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Dr Shane Bergin UCD School of Education. This initiative, like the theme of the Belonging Project itself, had a lot collective of hands and people involved, all of which contributed heavily to this successful and well presented exhibition. (Image taken by Jason Clarke and provided to us by Dr. Emma Farrell, all rights reserved.)

Colm O'Shea (he/him) is a writer from Dublin, Ireland. A Fourth Year English with Creative Writing student, he has had short stories published on two different occasions, alongside a Creative Writing Award for Adults with Learning Difficulties at the Listowel Writer's Week 2023. You can find more about him via his blog (cplisken.medium.com) or his Instagram (@cplisken).



Grandad, In Love

written by *Ashling O' Connor*. *Ashling (she/her) is a student in UCD. She writes when she's feeling stressed or pessimistic or trying to avoid college work. It's basically her equivalent of writing in a diary.*

he walked onto a stage already set
a tiny flat, complete with woman and
child, who objects both open and loud
and doesn't want to play

given every sign, and order, to leave
he stays. deserts a comfortable life
for move-out boxes and late dinners,
after shifts needed to pay for the family

which they become. a life he never planned,
but would have followed her anywhere.
he sees her beauty, but boasts of her brains
and recounts tales from their many years

holding hands through the south of france,
around the world, and now across
a hospital bed. his heart lays there with her,
each second apart is pained. and he waits

for her to come home.



Image: Untitled 1 by Jason Daly

Jason (he/him) has been doing visual art of some kind since the age of 2, and has recently in his life been interested in songwriting and poetry.



The First Wax Drip

written by *Charline Chatelain*. *Charline (she/her) is an English and Creative Writing student at UCD. She loves practicing various forms of art like painting, photography, collage, etc., and has been trying to expand on some of those hobbies as well as writing.*

All my love—I poured. Into the cracks and dents of the wooden floorboards,
Like burning hot red cinnamon wax
I poured it and it dripped and dripped
For hours at a time,
Without a second to spare
Holding my breath for what felt like years.
I loved you so deeply, so intensely, until all the love for myself was gone,
Vanished, vanquished
And consumed by you, only you.
Until you used it all up and there was nothing left for you
to seek, to love, to speak
And, so, you left too.
Why wouldn't you?

I had to search and explore and almost hunt.
To find this love, deep, deep within me.
This passion for myself that I was blind to and that only I could truly fulfill, I
had to learn to love myself all over again.

Discover, who *I* am without *you*, without *your* touch. The empty silence of
your absence
the bland of existence, when you're gone.
I search through screeching crowds of creatures
to find you, but I never do.
I never do.

My solitude begs for a way out, begs for another chance with you, But we are too far, too isolated and wounded to find our way back to each other.

We remain in this darkness,
separate and alone, surviving off scraps
of love from strange, dissociated
bodies, not feeling a thing inside.

I buried our words in soil,
The soil, where we lay our very feet.
The feet that we use to walk, to move,

to live our lives as separate entities, as
disconnected souls.

But we will never be truly disconnected,
impossible, we cannot *un-love* each other, we cannot
un-feel for each other..

The faint perfume of your immaturity stained my skin softly
like lavender-colored soap on dry skin

Your nicotine-induced kisses hooked me from the very start. The first hit
was fatal.

Our fingers tasted of sea salt and smelt of cigarette
overload from the night before – what became a habit.

The heavy white sheets, wrapped around your body, nearly
melted your caramel skin like the candle on my balcony

And sweat dripped, dripped, dripped down my chin
From the heat, from the habitual Athenian summer life we led
And the surprising boredom it dragged along with it.

What was once a distant vision, a sleepless dream,
became mundane to me, banal [as everything does with time].
A simple morning – a simple night – repeated again and again.



Every morning, I watched them from my
balcony, as I smoked a single stolen cigarette from
my mother's forgotten pack.
Uncomfortable chatter [around the schoolyard] between burnt-out mothers
And I watched you from my balcony, sitting on a rotten wooden bench,
waiting for what?

Barefoot on the cool marble floor, I tip-toed carefully across the living room
so I wouldn't shatter the ground I stood on,
And I opened the door with a
single pull.



Image: Amour Onirique by Elaïa Delon

Elaïa (she/her) is a French Erasmus student in Dublin. She is currently studying cinema and is extremely passionate about film and photography, especially portraits and wildlife photography.

Damp

written by *Cathal Brogan*. *Cathal (he/they) is a person from an island off the west coast of Ireland called Aughinish. It was a very rural and isolating experience so growing up writing has become a way for them to explore themselves and the world around them as well as escape from the more judgemental and hurtful people out there.*

‘Why the fuck is it raining so hard? It’s supposed to be July for Christ’s sake.’

‘Climate Change. They say the oceans are getting so warm that all the fish are dying.’

‘Probably something we should be doing about that.’

‘Well you could stop eating that processed shit you call breakfast for starters. Climate scientists say giving up meat is the number one thing people can do to reduce the impact of climate change.’

‘I’ll give up sausages when Taylor Swift gives up her private jet.’

‘That’s just an excuse.’

‘Shut up.’

I’m annoyed now. I thought I had her beat with that Taylor Swift jab, but she isn’t as rattled as I’d hoped she’d be. Worse still it looks like she’s lingering in the kitchen a while longer, waiting for her porridge to warm up.

I brace for the incoming barrage.

‘Why do guys always have to make it their whole personality to hate Taylor Swift?’

‘Why do girls have to make it their whole personality to love her?’

‘Nobody except freaks and weirdos actually do that, men just like to use the fangirl stereotype to make women feel shitty for liking things.’

‘It’s amazing how everything is men’s fault in your world, truly a fascinating fantasy you’ve created.’

She’s busy adding honey and almonds to her porridge, fingernails painted black contrast with the white porcelain bowl. I can tell she’s prepping her final insult before she’s out of the kitchen. I can’t let her get the last word, so I don’t.

‘Besides I don’t hate Taylor Swift because she’s girly, I hate her because she’s an extremely overrated, boring as shit pop-star hypocrite who writes shite songs.’

‘You don’t even know Taylor Swift, you just hate her because your ego can’t handle women being happy without men.’

‘Bullshit, Girl in Red is a proper musician, Taylor Swift is just audible wank.’

I can tell I’ve got her there. Girl in Red, my new favourite indie lesbian folk singer, is my ace in the hole.

‘You don’t know Girl in Red. She’s too indie for you.’

‘Course I know her, your music taste just isn’t as interesting as you think it is.’

‘Fuck off John.’

And with that final statement, her and her bowl of porridge are out the door. My victory is secured. Not that it feels like much of a victory, a real victory would be getting her to just shut the fuck up and learn not to bother me during breakfast anymore. But she always does.

I scroll on my phone with one hand and stab a fork into my plate of hash-browns and sausages with the other. The rain is fast and strong and loud, because of fucking course it is. Because why should I get to enjoy a warm, dry July like every other person in fucking history. I just know too that when I get to work tonight they'll have some retarded reason why they can't put me in the doorway and I'll have to spend the night out on the pavement catching my fucking death.

There's a horrid sound as I jab at a sausage with my fork unexpectedly hard and instead miss and scrape against my plate.

'Fucking come on', I mutter to myself.

'Swearing at the delph will hardly make it quieter.'

And here's my ever charming landlady. 81-year-old Debbie Powers; avid swimmer, bingo player and professional boring as shit old woman.

'Yeah sorry', is what I say to her, *shut up forever you old bint*, is what I think in my head.

Her loose floral dress rustles as she moves past me and, to my horror, turns on the kettle. I need to get into the habit of just eating meals in my room.

'Out working tonight are you?'

'Sure am.'

I start shovelling the food in a bit faster.

'Must be awfully busy on a Friday night like tonight.'

'Usually is.'

Two hash browns left. *Just bite, chew and swallow.*

‘Do you ever help out at the bar or is it just purely the bouncing you do?’

God woman take the hint, I don't want to talk to you.

‘Sometimes I help them move the kegs around.’

I'm moving my empty plate and dirty cutlery to the dishwasher just as the kettle audibly *clicks* with the sound of water done boiling.

‘Oh the dishwasher's full by the way.’

Of fucking course it is, I start assaulting the plate with a sudsy sponge in the kitchen sink. Debbie keeps talking at me.

‘They must be glad to have you, pro boxer and all.’

Go fuck yourself Debbie.

My entire career; a bullet point on my C.V.

‘I suppose you won't get much trouble tonight, not many people willing to play the hard man with a bouncer in that rain.’

My plates and cutlery are rinsed, dried and off into the cupboards and drawers.

‘You said it Debbie.’

Like that, I'm striding out the door and headed to freedom.

This house, the house Debbie allows Sarah and I to live in, is a fucking kip. It's one of those fancy Georgian types you can find south of the Liffey, all red-brown brick and white marzipan window sills.

Except of course the white paint is peeling off in shards and now flecks the overgrown front lawn like dandruff in someone's hair. The roof is missing several tiles as well, leading to a leak in the attic and the weekly chore of bringing up new buckets to hold the rain and emptying the old full ones out into the back garden. The interior isn't any better, she's got a lot of shit just strewn about the place either in cardboard boxes or just stacked on top of everything else. It makes it fucking frustrating for a 6,4 lad like myself to move around. I'm light on my feet but I'm always having to tense my whole body and stare at the floor just to walk around the rooms on the ground floor, the kitchen, the living room, the dining room. And there's never anywhere clear and stable to put something down.

Point is, even if the paint on the walls is chipped, the bed is creaky and my window doesn't open fully, my bedroom is still the nicest room in the house.

I'm good at this sort've thing, my Da passed on some tricks from his army days, they called it "admin". I know where my shit is and it's in good condition too, my clothes are folded, my bed freshly made and I've even got my work clothes hanging off the side of my crooked wardrobe. "Master the small things, then you can get started on the big things." That's what Coach always said.

Then I pull a chocolate bar out of the stash I keep in my bedside table. I eat half of it before I realise what I'm doing and lob the fucking thing across the room. It snaps into brown shards against my window. Fucking prick.

I change, slowly and silently, into my work clothes (black shirt tucked into black jeans, dark grey shoes) and get out of there.

After a brief return to get my poxy raincoat and a short-ish walk, I'm at the bus stop. Today my usual bus has decided not to be on time but instead make me wait an extra 15 minutes before it'll pick me up. I stare at my phone until the bus arrives. The weather app tells me it's going to be raining for the whole of next week.

The news app tells me there's a priest up north who's a paedophile and some government minister's wife has been illegally buying property for him. I don't go on my social media, deleted it all months ago when I realised that there's nobody I want to stay in touch with.

The bus arrives and I get on it.

Dublin City goes by in a whirl of streaking rain and shades of grey, everything is muted and restrained, it's not until the bus crosses the River Dodder that I start to feel back in my element. It's still grey, still wet, but there's noise now and movement and big tall buildings older than most families.

Now I'm jogging down the quays of the River Liffey, rushing around gormless tourists and deliberately ignoring the junkies begging for change from the shelter of untouched doorways.

No place like home, are my last thoughts before I reach my destination.

"Screwdriver" is a shitty nightclub that's been operating since the 90's. It's your typical overcrowded, €12 for a drink, cocaine residue in the toilets, type place with everything painted black and everything else lit by red and blue lights.

"McLoughlin's" meanwhile is a pub, and a pretty bog standard one at that. It's not the kind of pub that'll get put in any tourism ads. There's no knick-knacks or photos on the walls, no tvs blaring any matches and if you ask for food you'll get given a packet of crisps and a dirty look.

McLoughlin's and Screwdriver used to be two separate entities with a laundromat in between, but around the turn of the millennium that place went bust and so the owners of McLoughlin's and Screwdriver split the available space in half and each expanded their venues into the laundromat's old space. Then, even later on, the owner of Screwdriver bought McLoughlin's and tore down some of the walls separating them, to create a singularly owned bar and nightclub that was managed and staffed by different people despite being connected by a shared corridor.

I myself always work security for the nightclub part but I'm always on hand to rush in and drag someone out of McLoughlin's if anyone decides to make a tit of themselves.

Today, I come into the nightclub part and sign myself in, then I walk down the corridor and head on into McLoughlin's.

I don't like any of the people I work with. They're all too boring or stupid or bitchy to deal with so I prefer to just sit down in a booth and practice staring at the wall.

'Hey John!'

Unless she's in.

'Hey Adalina.'

Adalina is a short, slightly muscular girl with brown hair and a round face. She works behind the bar most nights while she studies part time to become a solicitor. She's the only Adalina I've ever met and the only one at work I really get along with.

'Did you know that the Irish for a jellyfish is "*smugairle róin*"? And that that directly translates to mean "seal snot"?'

This is what I like about her; no fake small-talk bullshit, just whatever random thing she wants to say.

'Of course I didn't know that, the only Irish I remember is "*cáca milis*."

'But that's another weird one, "*cáca milis*" directly translates into "sweet cake". But what kind've cake isn't sweet?'

'Coffee cake?'

‘You’re having shit coffee cake if it isn’t sweet.’

‘Fine, whatever. What about banana bread? That’s not very sweet.’

‘Yeah but it’s not cake it’s bread.’

‘It’s called that, but it’s really cake.’

‘No it isn’t.’

‘Would you make a ham and cheese sandwich with it?’

‘No.’

‘Then it’s cake.’

‘I didn’t realise you knew so much about cake.’

‘Well I’ve eaten enough.’

I cringe a little inside. Shite joke.

She doesn’t notice though, instead she snaps her fingers and points at me with sudden realisation.

‘Pancakes! Without any syrup or sugar on it, it’s not sweet at all!’

I ponder this for a second.

‘Yeah, I think you’ve got it dead-on there.’

She smiles and it takes up half her face. It makes me need to ask a question.
‘What’s the difference between a crêpe and a pancake?’

‘Rich people eat crêpes, poor people eat pancakes.’

I laugh, she smiles some more.

‘Hey Ada, we’ve got to re-stock the bar before our shift starts.’

Fucking Conor. He’s the deputy bar manager, so technically he has authority over Adalina.

‘Her names’ Adalina, Conor.’

Not over me though.

‘I know that, just a little nickname is all.’

‘I do prefer to go by Adalina though.’

He turns to her now and speaks with mock politeness.

‘Would you please come and re-stock the bar, Adalina?’

‘But of course!’ she responds in kind and then they’re both gone and I’m left there seething. I think about what a good right hook would do to Conor, how that smug prick would sound as I smashed his fucking head into the floor, Adalina would like it, even though she’d pretend she didn’t. I could tear that skinny, snide bastard apart with my bare hands and shit it’s time for my shift to start.

I run off and get to work.

* * *



My shift was standard. Wet people came out of the darkness and wet people returned to it. I just stood there and aged.

The bus back home was loud, and cramped with the various types of drunk arseholes I'd spent my whole shift trying to get rid of.

Now, I am tired. I'm always tired though, it's just that it's only before bed that I'm allowed to succumb to it. I move through my going-to-bed routine very slowly and very delicately, like I'm full of splints and IV bags.

Adalina always leaves work before me, so I didn't get to see her for the rest of my shift. I think about that while I brush my teeth.

When I return to my room I eat chocolate shards off the floor. I swallow and feel so much shame. I check my phone and see Dad is inviting me over to watch TV with him on Sunday. I tell him I have work that day and spend the next two hours browsing Instagram on my phone. I turn it off at 3am and try to go to sleep.

I curl up in the tightest foetal position I can make.

I don't deserve to be alive.

At some point in the night, I stop being awake.



Image: Untitled 1 by Ross Bradley

Born in Wexford town, Ross (he/him) has spent the recent years of his life, telling their story through the medium of graphite. They have chosen art as a way of life, mainly because it was a way to express themselves creatively, through secondary school, and college.



Losing Sight

written by *Sarah Roberts*. *Sarah*
(she/her) is a multidisciplinary,
internationally recognized artist
and published poet from
Waterford, Ireland.

Time moves quickly of late
And so does she.
Wondering if she can catch herself.
She questions if she should.

Alone and free of her performance
She lifts her face to the sun,
Allowing the warmth to bathe her skin.
Then grants herself permission to
breathe.

She holds her breath a lot these days.
So much so,
She fears taking air will kill her.
A dreamer.

Preserved in hope but lost in fate,
Weary,
She takes counsel from the wind
And prays for insanity to save her.



Image: Untitled 1
by Robin Mentel

Robin (he/him) has been doing photography for about 5 years now, and it has since been become a passionate of his. Robin tries to dip their toes into all kinds of photography, but became fond of portrait, abstract, and wildlife photography.





Dance of Death

written by *Katharina Laukner*. *Kat (she/her) is an avid reader, writer, and green-tea-drinker. She comes from Berlin, Germany, and has recently moved to Dublin to study English with Creative Writing at University College Dublin. Her favourite genre to both read and write is fantasy, particularly, but she enjoys experimenting wherever she can.*

The night I killed my mother was a beautiful midsummer's eve.

With the humid air sticky on my skin and the bite of gasoline in my hair, I watched as her body went up in flames in our backyard. My mother's blood coated my fingers like scarlet opera gloves, all the way up to my elbows. I didn't want to wipe it off.

As morning came and only ashes floated in the breeze, I turned around and strode over the freshly mowed lawn, back to the estate. Despite my stiff limbs, I felt happy- for her. If she knew why I'd killed her, my mother would have been proud of me.

"It's a new dawn," I hummed as I slid the patio door open and stepped inside. "It's a new day." I ripped the cord from the stereo, cutting the music short. With a sharp motion of my arm, the bloodied knife sunk into the doorframe. A trail of red oozed down the cracked white paint- the last trace of my mother. "And I'm feeling," I finished the lyrics, "good."

...

"I'm here to kill you."

I wave my glass of scotch in the air with a bored sigh. "What's new?"

"Aren't you going to ask who sent me?" The girl in the doorway to my office looks confused and a little disappointed. They always do. In one hand she is holding a sword I am not sure she knows how to use, in the other she grips a silver key. My key, I realize with annoyance.

Black curls are plastered to the arch of her warm bronze throat, which bobs as she swallows.

“You don’t seem scared,” the girl says quietly.

“That’s because I’m not,” I reply, taking another sip of my drink. “Please, take a seat.”

Her golden eyes muster me from over the broad maple desk as she sinks into a chair. Warily she takes in the splendor around her, the high arched walls, the dark wooden bookshelves, the candles flickering in their metal sconces.

“Would you care for a drink?”

The girl whips her head back towards me, blushing as if she were caught stealing- and quickly shakes her head. With a shrug, I pour more of the honey-colored liquid from the crystal decanter into my own glass and muster her with cool interest. She can’t be much older than I am, I realize with a frown. They get younger every year.

“What’s your name?” I ask finally.

“Odette.”

“Odette,” I repeat. She looks uncomfortable hearing her own name on my lips.

I click my tongue. “I believe an introduction on my part is unnecessary. I’m sure you already know everything about me.”

The girl sits up straighter. “Your name is Lilith Clay, you are twenty-two years old and five-foot-seven tall.”

“Impressive,” I sneer. That’s hardly more than common knowledge.

Her eagerness morphs into determination. “You’re a serial killer.” Her eyes harden. “There’s not much else I need to know.”

I lean forward, a grueling smile spreading on my lips. “Aren’t you worried I’ll kill you?” I purr, eyeing her bejeweled sword, now leaning against the side of my desk.

“No,” Odette says simply. “It wouldn’t be your style.” She folds her hands in her lap and looks at me critically. This resembles a business meeting in every way but one- we’re discussing which one of us will die first.

“I’ve been informed that you enjoy getting to know your victims before killing them.”

“Ah, so why don’t you tell me a little about yourself?” I croon.

“I’d love to.” Odette smirks, and for a second, I feel a twinge of something akin to emotion in the dark pit where my heart should be.

“Once you get to know me, you’ll be begging for death.”

“Do your worst, Lilith Clay.”

I only raise my glass in salute.

...

“You know we’re the good guys,” Odette says, before tearing into her waffle. The park is crowded at this time- no one is paying any attention to us. I chuck a piece of my own waffle to the malicious pigeon at my feet, rolling my eyes as it ruffles its wings in surprise, then clucks and pecks at my boot, demanding more. I bare my teeth, and the pigeon wisely saunters away, minding its own business.

“Who decided which side was good and which was evil?” I ask Odette.

She gives me an incredulous look. “Have you ever heard of morals?” she shoots back. “Unlike you, we actually stick to them.”

My chest tightens as images leap into my mind. “I’m sure you do,” I say, voice dangerously low. “Things like these are always a matter of perspective.”

Odette pretends not to hear. “We protect people,” she insists. “That’s more than you’ve ever even thought about.”

I don’t answer. She wouldn’t understand that protecting the ones I love has been the only thing on my mind since I was old enough to understand the politics of this horrid world.

Since I was old enough to take matters- or blades- into my own hands and send my friends and family to a better place. Only in the afterworld can they ever find peace.

“What I’m saying is that killing you would be the right thing to do.” Odette winks at me, then brushes the icing sugar off her frilly coat. She hasn’t bothered taking her sword today. “It would be a mercy.”

“Perhaps for me,” I answer, idly dissecting the remaining waffle with my pocket knife. “Never for you.”

Odette frowns. “For the entire world.” But a flicker of doubt sparks in her eyes.

...

“You brought mail.” I set down my book and cross the office, to where Odette is struggling with a large metal case. A glance down the hall shows me three more standing in the entryway.

Crows bicker outside the open window, heralding the twilight. Or are they cawing in warning?

“What big presents you have,” I mock. “Is it my birthday?”

“Don’t play dumb,” Odette grunts, heaving the shiny box further into my office. “You know exactly what these are.”

My smile widens, so much that it hurts. “I never liked this house anyways.”

I grab the crystal decanter from the table and saunter out the door, leaving Odette where she stands breathless on the rug.

“I was told separating you from this house would be much harder.”

“Don’t play dumb,” I echo. It’s not the belongings I care about- it’s the people.

On my way out, my gaze falls on the inscription on one of the boxes- a lightning bolt on a dark blue background. I glance up at the thunderclouds amassing over my doorstep.

“Nice try,” I whisper.

...

Rain pours through the blown-out skylight in the entrance hall. It’s the only part of the house that hasn’t entirely collapsed. I lay underneath the broken remains of the stairway, cradling the half-empty decanter to my chest as if it were a teddy bear.

The patter of water sounds like bullets in my ears. I grit my teeth, and with all my heart, curse the gods, wherever they sit on their gilded thrones. For the games they play.

For the things they make me do.

That is how Odette finds me in the middle of the night- a shivering mess, drenched to the bone.

“Hello, little swan,” I giggle. “What brings you to these cursed ruins?”

“Are you drunk?”

“No.” I offer her the decanter. As Odette takes the bottle, her fingers brush against mine. They feel like fire.

“You’re freezing,” she says and places the alcohol far outside my reach. I pout—or try to, past the shivers racking my body.

“Here.” She slips out of her jacket and carefully drapes it over my shoulders, making sure I’m at least half-warm.

“Why are you here, anyway?” Odette asks, casting a worried glance at the ceiling, as if she believes it will collapse right on top of us. Perhaps that would make things easier.

I shake my head, not willing to answer the question. I don’t want to admit that I have nowhere else to go. Not to her.

“It’s not too late to run away, you know.”

“I’ve got a job,” I slur, hating every word coming out of my mouth. “It’s very... important.”

“You mean killing?”

I wave her off. “Plus, I’ve got a lovely house and a great friend— enemy. Frenemy,” I correct. “What are you, really? ‘Cause I don’t have a clue.” I chuckle, reaching for the decanter before realizing it’s gone.

Odette doesn’t answer. After what feels like ages, she presses a hard piece of plastic into my hand and stands up.

“What’s this?”

“A keycard, idiot,” she says. “In case you feel like sleeping in a ‘lovelier house’ than this.”

Before I can respond, she disappears into the night.

...

The hotel bed is immaculate- I regret drenching it with blood. The towels too. And the floor.

But what’s done is done, and I don’t regret *that*. I sit in the dark for a long time, waiting for Odette to come home, and watch the crimson dripping from her sword.

As dawn breaks, the door opens, and a slim figure darts into the room. She moves like a shadow, yet it’s impossible to miss the wet gleam of tears sliding down her cheeks, illuminated briefly by the harsh hallway light. I know what happened. And I curse myself for not being able to stop it. Of having missed someone- again.

“Who?” I ask quietly.

Odette whirls around, slamming the light switch on so hard the lamps flicker in their sconces. “I didn’t realize you were here,” she stammers, wiping away the traces of her grief.

“You invited me.” An understatement. It was this, or freeze to death. “Who did they take?”

“My grandmother.” The words are flat. Defeated. *Grandmother*. I should have known.

“They won’t release her until I’ve finished the job.” Her throat bobs as she swallows.

“Kill me, then,” I say simply.

Something breaks within her at the words. Odette slides to the floor, balling her trembling hands into fists. “I can’t,” she forces out. “Believe me, I’ve tried but I just- *can’t*. It's not right.”

“Let me make this easier for you.” I toss her sword onto the carpet.

Odette freezes. Then her eyes widen as they dart from the blade to the bedsheets- and to my hands. The blood is like a red thread.

“Holy gods,” she breathes.

“They’re not as holy as you thought,” I note. “Here’s one more name you can add to their ledger.”

“*Liam?*” Fresh tears spill down her face. “Did you do this?”

I sit up straighter on the bed. “They would have found your brother eventually,” I say. “Freeing him from this world was a mercy.”

A light goes out in her eyes.

“Who do you think they would have gone to next, once you failed and they disposed of you? I’m only trying to help- to protect you-”

“You’re insane.” I can’t hide my smile. “In a world like this, can you blame me?”

“We’re a result of our choices, not our circumstances.” Odette rises to her feet, gripping the bloodied sword in her hands.

“Prove it, little swan,” I croon. “Prove you’re your own person- not a puppet in this game. Prove how good you really are.”



She stalks towards me, until we are less than a hairsbreadth apart, and her blade is angled at my heart. I laugh as she digs it into my chest.

“I wish I could have saved you.”

“I don’t need saving,” Odette spits. Hovering over me, she is a maelstrom of rage and fear, and fire. Despite everything, she’s beautiful.

My last thought is that it’s fine if she kills me. The room is bloodied already.

“I am the hero,” she whispers, as the blade meets its mark. “I am the hero.”

I cry as death’s kiss claims me.

Because I know she believes it.



Image: Tankardstown House, 27/7/23 by Sean McKervey

Seán McKervey (he/him), is a 3rd year college student studying Geography in UCD. One of his favourite hobbies he had recently gotten into is film photography. This summer, Sean had the chance to visit South Korea, in which he had many opportunities to take film photos.



Fixed Signs

Siobhán Mc Laughlin (she/her) is a poet and creative writing facilitator from Co. Donegal in Ireland, as well as an UCD Arts Alumni. Her poems have appeared previously in The Honest Ulsterman, The Ekphrastic Review, Drawn to the Light Press, The Waxed Lemon, Bealtaine Magazine, The Poetry Village and more. Twitter: @siobhan347

Scorpio mood like a black night
in November. And you, velvet demeanour,
spinning moons in your palms,
eyes grey and vague as smoke.

Intelligence stealthy and shining, sword
in a stone. Black ink tattooed on your future,
runes and ley lines and indecipherable script.
I wanted to save you, couldn't look away.

Before the prey is struck, it is mesmerised, held;
still waters, churning and purging of thoughts.
This is what I am, you said, bleeding black tears.
Dangerous, exotic, esoteric. Nothing stings

like inverted love, venom seeping into the heart.
Dulling, blackening, until there's no feeling
but pain, a charred memory,
the exoskeleton of a dream.



Image: Untitled 4 by Marco Acerbi

Marco (he/him) is an 18 year old psychology undergraduate at UCD. As an artist, he uses ink and colours to translate feelings that our words cannot reach. In his works, Marco loves combining philosophical and literary reflections with metaphors about identity.



Memories from a youth's anger

written by *Jom Thongprasong*. *Jom*, short for *Jomkhawun*, originally from Thailand but now in their 13th year of living in the UK.

If you gave me a stage to speak regarding the issue of racial discrimination against Asians, I'd be trembling as I speak. Too many memories gurgle in my blood, under my skin, in my mind – waiting to be pulled out of my throat to be presented bare, then dissected in a discussion like on a surgical table.

Memory one:

“Do you sell humans in here?”

No, but I wish humanity were sold the same way hate, ignorance, and fear are.

Even though the white man, shirtless, dishevelled, and lanky, asked this question years ago, the memory is still raw in my mind.

The sun is stabbing through windowpanes, slow cooking my mother, younger sister, and me in our Thai grocery shop in Hull. There is a Thai customer and her white husband. This husband is much bigger than the racist stranger. But he stands by, and watches. He even tries to say the man said something else.

He said nothing and watched on as the stranger spoke. But when the stranger left, he finally expressed frustration and anger with us then tried to excuse him. I didn't understand why.

If this man felt like the stranger had wronged us, why hadn't he defended us?

Furthermore, I didn't understand why my mother scolded me for trying to stand up to the stranger.

I can't remember what I said, but I remember my strong-willed mother, clearly scared for my safety as she shouted at me in Thai. Her words, full of worry, translated roughly to: why did you do that? You don't know what he could have done to us. Don't ever do that again. You could have gotten hurt. But I didn't care if I got hurt.

Because why would I when I'm staring racism in its gaping maws? Why would I when I'm being toyed with and intimidated like a little mouse caught between a cat's jaw and claws? Between the white noise in my mind and my trembling hands, I didn't understand why she wanted me to not express my indignation.

But now I'm older, and I understand.

Memory two:

“Confrontation is a privilege.”

A line my trans friend had said to another friend when asked why they didn't want to confront a group of people because of fear of being ostracised. Regardless of the resentment running rampant through our veins, we must mind our actions. Every word, every action, every twitch of a muscle – we need to watch them all. Because they are trans, and I am a queer Asian person.

It's easy to say, "don't let them walk all over you" or "you give the perpetrator the power," when you aren't in a place where your life doesn't run on the line. It's easy to say such things when you don't have to worry about hiding your identity or whether you'll run into someone who could harass you for simply existing the way you do.

Example:

COVID racism – the plight that still plagues many Asians – appeared in 2020. The outbreak of COVID-19 caused 64% of Asian Americans to feel that because China reported the first cases of COVID-19, it was a major reason for increased discrimination. Meanwhile, in the first week of the UK facing COVID-19, there was a 300% rise in Asian hate crimes reported to police in the first quarter of 2020. The discrimination became parasitic.

My mother would feel it as she managed our shop.

Memory three:

“Coronavirus shop!”

A few people would shout as they walked past, giving the shop a wide berth. Some even spat or coughed at us when they walked past. But that was tame compared to the targeted murders in America. It does make you wonder where the line is – because between the white noise in my mind and blaring headlines of Asian hate crimes, I feel like a sitting duck.

Between the white noise in my mind and the questioning screams locked away in my chest, I wish the younger me had been allowed to keep in touch with my Thai roots. All of that so that when I return to that street in Saimai District, Bangkok, the people who raised me don't see me as a Farang (ฝรั่ง, foreigner, specifically European foreigner).

I am proud to be Thai – to be Asian. No matter how much racism I face, I will refuse to succumb. If you gave me a stage to speak regarding the issues of racial discrimination against Asians, I'd be trembling, but I would speak.



Image: Untitled 5 by Ross Bradley

Born in Wexford town, Ross (he/him) has spent the recent years of his life, telling their story through the medium of graphite. They have chosen art as a way of life, mainly because it was a way to express themselves creatively, through secondary school, and college.





Bringing In the Hay

written by *Barbara Dunne*. *Barbara (she/her) is a widowed single parent, visual artist and emerging poet, based in Connemara. She holds a degree in Fine Art and has studied at Trinity College, Galway University and ATU. She has been published in Skylight 47, Crannóg, The Storms Journal, Hozel; New Irish Writing and other various journals. Her poetry appears in two anthologies, Shadows (2018) and Opening Up (2021).*

The fields, clean cut of all their long-haired grasses
are circled by crows, ladies' black fans at a funeral
dipping and twisting over the dead. The bales
are piled into neat rows of stocky soldiers
some standing to attention, some listing, all
casting long shadows in the evening glow
of late summer and pliantly waiting
to be dismantled. Soon to covered in black plastic
and redeployed as fodder to hungry cattle.

In this moment, time stands waiting
waiting for the swallows to retreat
and the routine return of school
while three generations soldier on
in a fleeting harmony of purpose.



Image: Untitled 5 by Robin Mentel

Robin (he/him) has been doing photography for about 5 years now, and it has since been become a passionate of his. Robin tries to dip their toes into all kinds of photography, but became fond of portrait, abstract, and wildlife photography.





Fading Echoes: The Puzzles Of My Mind

written by Luna Adasha. Luna is a novice writer, trying to explore this new writing world. They are surprised how no one near them has ever encouraged them to endeavor writing.

I find myself sitting in a lit room, occupying a chair; as I fix my gaze upon the wall. It has been some time since I could recall the identities of those who came to see me, or the names they utter when they address who I am. Everything seems to be slipping. Resembling a puzzle that is lacking crucial pieces. The tapestry of memories that once adorned my mind is now slowly unraveling, strand by strand.

I catch glimpses of those visions, like scenes from a distant movie. The sound of a child's laughter, a meal in the summertime, the sensation of holding a loved one's hand. They're all fragments from a past life, that has already slipped away from my grasp. My thoughts have transformed into a blurry painting, where colors mix, and shapes become indistinct.

Each and every day, I grapple with the fear and confusion that accompanies this constant fading. Trying desperately to hold on to my thoughts, I clutch them as if they were leaves about to be scattered to the wind. Who am I? Where am I? These questions swirl in my mind, lost in the intricate maze of my thoughts.

I want to express myself, to pass the message across to my family that I am still alive. Yet the words don't come out of my mouth. They pay me friendly visits and talk to me as gently as you can imagine. But their unrealistic talk escape me. My world is dying. Their love is a lifeline, a bridge between my fading plane and theirs.

The days have been turning into weeks, weeks have been into months, and I have become an observer of my own existence. I see myself in the photographs – a reflection of who I once was. The pictures appear to be the doors to ancestral times, and I catch my breath, trying to understand the unclear faces in the pictures that look back at me.

I know that time passes, the inexorable progression of Alzheimer's. It's like I am about to step onto the edge of a huge abyss, looking down into a deep and mysterious void. Fear of not being myself remains with me, but there are clear moments of understanding; when I regain the ability to separate thought from reality.

In those moments, I remember the love and the life I've lived. I recall the joy and the sorrow, the laughter, and the tears. It's as if the mist in my mind temporarily lifts, and I'm allowed a glimpse of the world I once knew.

Yet those moments are as brief as the shining stars of the night. My sickness is always elusive, pulling me down with its roots. I try to recover the shards of my life, that used to make sense before. I would like to share the unconditional love I still have, all the suppressed feelings hidden beneath the labyrinth in my head. I need to feel that I am being heard, seen, and understood.

As I sit in this chair now, in this softly lit room, I hold out hope that someone will bridge the gap between the fading world I now inhabit; and the reality I once knew. I hope for connection, love, and lingering memories even between the faces; of the indiscriminate embrace of my disease.

The burden of this situation is not only the loss of memories, but the decay of my core. I miss the moments that defined my life, the faces that brought me joy, and the stories that were once the fabric of my soul.

There are times when I get lost in a rough sea of ideas, with no lifelines to pick up. A lonely place, where I feel like a spectator of my own life, watching the shattered pieces of my past race by. In this time of despair, I crave the simple pleasures of life that I once took for granted. I miss the taste of home cooked meals, the feel of the sun on my skin and the sound of laughter filling my home.

But there are also times of grace. When the elusive nature of my mind allows me to see the world differently. I notice the play of sunlight on the walls, the patterns in the leaves outside my window, the gentleness of a familiar hand holding mine.

In those moments, I realize that while this sickness can steal my memories, it can't take away my ability to experience love and connection. The emotions that define me remain intact, even if the pieces of my mind are scattered.

And as I continue this journey, I cling to the hope that my family will walk beside me. That their love is a lifeline to bridge the gap between my crumbling world and their reality. A reminder that I'm not alone in this mysterious plane, and that I was still being raised even with confirmed Alzheimer's disease.

Image: Untitled 2 by Ross Bradley

Born in Wexford town, Ross (he/him) has spent the recent years of his life, telling their story through the medium of graphite. They have chosen art as a way of life, mainly because it was a way to express themselves creatively, through secondary school, and college.





She

written by Catherine Murray. Catherine (she/her) is 40 years old and lives in Stoneybatter. She's a single gay mum to a 7 year old son. She started writing when her mum died in 1996, she was 12. She has written poems for people who've lost people they love.

To hear the bird's sing ever more clear,
To dream her, to wish she was near,
To see star's glisten in the dark skies,
I felt something when I looked in her eyes,
To yearn for her, to long for only she,
To feel so alive within, now I can finally breathe.
To hear music as loud as never before,
To want only her, she is all I adore,
I believe it now, I believe what they say,
I feel it somehow, by chance in a day,
To crave her body, to see only she,
To wait in the darkness, for the light it is she,
Heart is pounding hard, jumping out of my chest,
Butterflies in my stomach, this feeling is the best,
To feel rich with love without a crown,
Her smile doth brighten, her beauty doth shine,
Her aura is glowing, her true beauty blue as the sea,
My river is fluid and flowing until it reaches she.



Image: Untitled 3 by
Clodagh Conneally

Clodagh (she/her) is a tourism and languages graduate. They enjoy visiting new places and see the beauty everywhere they go. They describe themselves as a bit of a memory hoarder so they love to take photographs to immortalise everywhere they go.

Jaśmina

written by *Maria Wojaczek*. *Maria (she/her) is a stage and screen writing student from Poland. She has always been an avid fantasy lover and her goal is to show, with her work, that this genre can also raise difficult topics and spark numerous discussions. In her free time from writing, she likes to discover new films and books and sometimes play the Sims for a little too long.*

Jaśmina was born on a gloomy November evening, when her Best Friend was reading a book about princesses in her ugly yellow child's room, dreaming about being one of them. That's probably why Jaśmina was born as a princess with beautiful sapphire hair, silver eyes, and a pair of rainbow wings so fanciful that only a bored 6-year-old could have imagined them.

Each princess in that book had only one dress, always the same in every picture, but Jaśmina was better than them. Every day her Best Friend gave her a new outfit. Sometimes it was a golden ball gown and sometimes a simple blue dress similar to the one her Best Friend got from her grandmother. Unfortunately, there were also days when the girl struggled with creating a new dress for Jaśmina. On such days she wore shapeless mist that kept changing colour as her Best Friend tried to shape the fog into anything that would look good at least.

Some kids very quickly forget about beings like Jaśmina, but her Best Friend didn't. After all, she was her Best Friend! Even though the days when they talked to each other every day, held tea parties, and took care of the invisible unicorns long passed, Jaśmina still stayed by her side.

She was there when her Best Friend fell in love for the very first time.
And then when she finished her school.
And when she got married.
And when she moved to a different country alongside her husband.

Jaśmina was there all this time, living comfortably deep in her Best Friend's memory, a bit dusty, like an old doll, but never forgotten. She was okay with this fate. It could have been worse. Not many of her kind lived this long, and she knew it. What she didn't know was what was coming next to her.

Jaśmina was given to her Best Friend's daughter. She didn't understand how this had happened. She just suddenly started living in someone else's mind and because of that, she changed. Her Best Friend's Daughter was a cheerful and lively girl, but she lacked her mother's imagination.

First, she lost her name as apparently, Jaśmina was too weird and hard to pronounce for someone who didn't speak their parents' native tongue. Then, she was called Jas. Just Jas. Then her wings, her beautiful beautiful rainbow wings fell off and her hair turned brown. She didn't look like a princess, but she wasn't one anymore. And who was she? Someone very boring, who played even more boring games every day and cried for her old life every night. Sometimes, when she saw her Best Friend, she tried to call her, and come back to her, but it was too late. Now she belonged to someone else in a way one couldn't even explain. But at least she was still there, right?

After some time Jas felt that she was tired. Every day she had to fight to keep her eyes open, knowing that her Best Friend's Daughter would not help her with this. Did she even know Jas was still here? Did she even remember how she took everything from her? Her wings, her pretty dresses, her joy, and now what? Was she going to let her fall asleep? Just like that? Yes. Yes, she was. Jas closed her eyes, not knowing if she would ever open them again.

Laughter.

It was laughter that woke her up.

Suddenly, still a little weary, she was standing next to two people. Her Best Friend's Daughter and a small girl who kept asking about...

Her.

The girl kept asking about her.

The girl kept asking about her!

One look into her eyes was enough for Jas to know she was hers now, so she smiled at her.

The girl didn't deserve to be called just "the girl" or Her Best Friend's granddaughter, so Jas chose to call her 'Her Friend' because she wasn't as perfect as her Best Friend, but she was still someone special to Jas. Her Friend's mind was like a beautiful but very chaotic place. She had so many ideas. Sometimes Jas was an astronaut in the morning, a fairy in the afternoon, and a singer in the evening. And her hair was beautiful again! This time she had long blue curls with golden highlights. She loved it!

There was also one surprise waiting for her. She wasn't alone. Soon Jas discovered that she was surrounded by others of her kind, born from Her Friend's ideas. Her brothers and sisters. Each of them was unique and interesting in their own way. It wasn't a problem for her. Not at all. She was happy that she wasn't the only one. Everything was fine again after so many terrible years.

Or was it?

Her Friend had many ideas. It was a good thing but as Jas discovered, it also had its downsides. By the time her Friend was fully grown up, her mind had already been quite crowded, and with each passing year, it was getting worse and worse.



Jas slowly felt that this chaos was too much for her. She was running through labyrinths full of ideas that were sometimes even hard to describe.

She tried not to drown in a sea made of her brothers and sisters she didn't even recognize anymore. She was lost. The imagination of her friend, which once woke her from sleep, became her villain.

And then...

And then she was something else. Her Friend somehow pulled her out of the idea bin and gently moved her to the book she wrote. It was a book about a princess with a pair of rainbow wings and magic powers. By doing this, Her Friend kept her to herself, but at the same shared her with the whole world. She was now in the minds of so many people.

They loved her. They hated her. But she had never been so alive before. A fictional character. That was who she was now.



Image: Untitled 3 by Clodagh Conneally

Clodagh (she/her) is a tourism and languages graduate. They enjoy visiting new places and see the beauty everywhere they go. They describe themselves as a bit of a memory hoarder so they love to take photographs to immortalise everywhere they go.



Adam's Atom

written by *Anna O'Flynn*. *Anna O'Flynn (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer from Cork, Ireland.*

If we have atoms, not souls,
And our atoms are other's,
Does that mean we are made
Of that same, fundamental cloth?
A biblical rib,
A poison apple.

If my skin is not my skin,
And my eyes are on loan
From the world that claims us back,
Dust to dust.
A cycle of decay and destruction,
To be born again

And what a joy to be born
With atoms not souls.
Who has time for souls?
Not I,
No sir, I have no time.
Give me atoms so you and I are one
and the same,

We are one and the same.
A startling thought I know.
I wonder how many of yours I have
taken?

Not enough, surely.
I wonder how many of mine I have
imparted?
Not enough, surely.

If my hands are, indeed, your hands,
And my breath, your breath,
Then I shall be content knowing I
carry you with me,
Forever grateful for what cannot be
created or destroyed.
How sickening that anyone should
want to destroy
Any blessed particle of you.

A Conversation With Sara Bennett from *Fighting Words*

I had the privilege of interning with the creative writing organization, Fighting Words Dublin through UCD last year. I gained a lot of great experience and friendships throughout my time there that I am very grateful for.

When given the opportunity to interview someone for the magazine, I immediately thought of Sara, she was an excellent mentor and I believe Fighting Words is doing amazing work for the young people of Ireland. So I wanted to shed a little bit more light on them.

Chloe Gahan: It's wonderful to sit down with you Sara and so great to see you again, I think its best if we start by having you give a little overview of yourself and your role as Operations Manager at Fighting Words.

Sara Bennett: My role has evolved over the years. I've always been responsible for the volunteer program. I joined Fighting Words when it started 15 years ago. We opened our doors in January 2009. So, I've always managed the volunteer program. But we started very small, just as our centre here in Dublin, and so it was managing the volunteers, managing the centre, the space. Liaising with parents for programs in the summertime. And as the organization has grown, my role has grown.

So, its much more about looking at things on a broader level with regards to policy development, garda vetting for all locations, so working with our partners to support them as they deliver programs and to support volunteers acrossst he country. And of course, the social media piece has only got bigger.

Managing the website used to take a couple of minutes here and there and now its very much a bigger part of the website. And social media takes up a big chunk of my week. But that's kind of the fun part.

So, it's fun.

C.G: Yeah. I've seen the Instagram lately. It looks fantastic. What is your favourite part of working with Fighting Words?

My favourite part of working with Fighting Words is always, always the people. I'm always delighted to welcome new people who want to volunteer with us, whether that's joining our regular cohort of people who deliver workshops to our internship program, to our transition year students who do work experience placements with us. We get people from all different backgrounds, all walks of life who come to volunteer with us because you don't need to have any specialist skills to donate your time and work with Fighting Words. All you really need is a desire to work with children, young people and adults with additional needs and older people in a creative environment to facilitate their creativity, to help them to tell the stories that they want to tell. So that means that pretty much everybody is qualified to do that, and all kinds of people come to us.

So, I always enjoy meeting new people, I try to remember their names, and I'm always interested in what motivates people to want to come and help us deliver our program.

I'm fiercely protective and love our volunteers. But also, I'm always motivated and inspired to work with the kids. The kids always do or say something that will make you think, make you laugh, and it's why we do what we do. So, the people, whether that's the participants or the volunteers who work with them.



Fighting Words base in Dublin

C.G: Excellent. I wanted to ask you about the Story Seeds program because I know that it's something you and everybody at Fighting Words has been passionate about. Is there anything new that you're working on or any new parts and places that are in progress?

Sure. Well, Story Seeds has been focused on a couple of different areas. The two main areas are our big cross border project with Fighting Words, Northern Ireland. So, since September, we have been delivering a large program managed by our Development and Outreach Officer Colm Quierny in Ireland, and then in Northern Ireland, Hannah Armstrong. And we've been delivering programs with Facilitators in Louth, in Monaghan and in Donegal, as well as in Belfast, in Armagh and we're working very closely with our sister organization in Northern Ireland and the outputs have just been fantastic.

We've also been working in Limerick, so we've just completed a series of workshops for secondary schools in the International Rugby Experience in Limerick City. And we're working on another primary school program in Limerick with our friends at Watchhouse Cross Community Library.



So those have been the primary areas. And we also did a lovely project with our team, in Fighting Words Offaly and working with all the schools there.

So, story seeds for people who aren't familiar with it. The focus is developing stories that are set in and around the communities where the participants live. Students are always inspired by their own community, their own localities, so it's encouraging them to set a story imagined in the place where they're where they live. And participants really, really enjoy that format.

C.G: I obviously had the honour of being a part of Fighting Words. It's something that I'm very glad to have done and opened a lot of doors for me, such as flying to Canada to work on creative writing in a summer camp. What would you say to people who would like to volunteer and how do they go about doing that?

Okay, well, becoming a volunteer with us is, we try to make it as easy and simple as possible.

If you go to the Fighting Words website, you'll see a section on the homepage that says Get Involved. Click on that, then click on Volunteer and you'll find all the information about what's involved in volunteering. And there is a short form you can complete that will come to us so we can contact you about next steps.

Once we have your form, we call that the Tell Me More form. Once we have that form, we'll contact you with the long form application form.

We'll arrange a chat to tell you a little bit more. We'll arrange for garda vetting. That's a legal requirement. We do check up with references and then you'll be invited to come to one of our training sessions. And we run training once a month.

Some of the training sessions take place here at the Fighting Words Centre in Dublin. Some of them take place online, and at training we do a sample workshop, so you get a sense of how workshops are run. We go through our child protection policy and our volunteer policy and answer any questions that people might have. The thing to know as well about volunteering, as you well know, is that it's totally up to you how often you come in. There's no minimum commitment when it comes to volunteering at Fighting Words. And certainly, for students and young people that have many different things going on in their lives, it means that you don't have to give a commitment to say, come in every week for six months or anything like that. We never want it to feel like an obligation or a chore.

We want people to be excited about coming in to volunteer with us. By giving you a username and a password to go on to our website calendar, you're in control of when you come in. And we think that makes it a really attractive volunteer opportunity as well. For people in Dublin. Our centre is here, just opposite Croke Park, but we also run programs three days a week at the Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray.

For anybody who is in South Dublin, if that's an easier location for you, that's there as well. But once you're registered with us, you can help out in any of our locations.

C.G: Why do you think that organizations like Fighting Words, places that really emphasize creative writing, are so important today for young people?

At Fighting Words, we know that not everybody who comes through our doors, and we work with students as young as first class right up through 6th year, so from eight to 17. But we also work with young people in youth groups and work with older people, and we work with adults with additional needs. We know that not everybody is going to go off and become a published author.

That's not why we're here. If they do, obviously wonderful. But the thing about Fighting Words is creating a space where people can tell their stories at their own pace and in their own language and everyone has a story to tell. And our facilitators and writing mentors are there to help people to tell their stories. And when somebody who comes to participate in one of our workshops, when you feel like somebody has taken the time to listen to what you have to say to value your story, that's what builds self-confidence.

That's what builds resilience. And you will take that to other areas of your life when you know that you matter, you're going to take that with you and do amazing things. It might be in writing and the creative arts; it might be in something else. But that's why we're here.

We're here to tell people that they matter, they count and they're amazing. And that's really it seems so simple, but it's given the demand for all of our programs, it's obviously we're meeting a need that's very much there.

C.G: I think that's a beautiful way to end our conversation, Sara. Thank you so much for taking this time to chat to me, it was so lovely to see you again.

If you're interested in finding out more about Fighting Words or how to volunteer, they have so much information to available on their website @www.fightingwords.ie.



Sara Bennett Operations Manager.

Photo taken from <https://www.fightingwords.ie/about/staff-members>, all rights reserved.



The Universe's True Masterpiece

written by Dearbhla Brady. Dearbhla (she/her) is in her final year studying English and History at UCD. She writes mainly poetry and short stories in her spare time, she does this as both a creative outlet and as a way of simply seeing what she can do with the ideas in her head.

I tried to be a true poet today
And be moved by the natural
masterpiece
Of our world,
It's Beauty.

This was when the pour of rain
started,
And I intended to meditate on the
melody of it's drops,
But all I could compare it to was your
tears.

I have never wanted our universe's
natural music to crumble.
How it's tones used to calm me.
Now, I am on my knees screaming at
the clouds to stop hurting you.
For it couldn't possibly just be rain,
It had to be part of you.

Then I simply got angry.
People could not have seen
the seven wonders of the world or
Any true beauty.
For they have not seen you.

How could the oceans be our
universe's painting?
The oceans are only perfected in
your eyes.
Similarly, how could the rain be our
universe's music?
When I have been held to your chest
and heard your heartbeat.

If my Father is right,
And God created our Earth in seven
days.
He couldn't have possibly rested on
the seventh.
For he would need all that time to
sculpt your perfection.
The universe's true masterpiece.



Image: Untitled 4 by Harsh Khatri

Being a single father of two, Harsh (he/him) explores his creative side through the form of photography. He takes great pride in this as he wishes to share his outlook on the world through a camera lens and to inspire young and old to take up photography.

Autumn Storms

written by *Hannah-Rose Lynham*. *Hannah (She/Her) is 21 years old and a third year English with creative writing student here at UCD. She loves to write fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry*

I cannot sleep. It is raining outside. Not the soft rain of spring with its damp mist and slick leaves. No. It is the rain of autumn. Where hot and cold meet in a delicious whirl of fallen leaves. Where lightning cracks across the sky and thunder rumbles in the clouds. And the rain. The rain is not gentle. It pours from the sky in silver shining drops, ricocheting off the roof to slide ghostly down the windowpanes.

Inside it is quiet. Everyone is asleep. I prefer it this way. All the noise and excess of the day has been transformed into the gentle breathing of deep slumber. I should join them. Put down the pen and stash the paper under my mattress. I know I will regret it in the morning if I don't, but I am not quite ready yet. Not ready to give up this daydream. For this fleeting period of time, I can imagine that all of the chaos truly is on the outside and inside it is quiet and peaceful.

But that is not reality.

Reality is long black gowns, swaying crosses, and lighting that crackles within four walls. It is chaos. It follows me wherever I go. It has followed me here, or perhaps it is what led me here. I can not tell the difference anymore. The only time that I am free from reality is now. When I can pretend.

That I am anywhere but here.

Sleep still evades me. There is an autumn storm outside my window and that is why I am writing you this love letter. I know you will understand me. That you will listen to me.

I do not think I am crazy, but the longer I stay here the more unsure I become. I see shadows twitch on the walls, and I wake up in a cold sweat. Dr Brown says I suffer with my nerves. Dr Brown says many things.

There is a room here that I visit once a week. It has a leather chair with straps that dangle from each armrest. They tie around the wrists and ankles. Dr Brown is in this room too. It feels like he is part of the furniture, always suspended between the same four grey walls. I hate this room. There is leather for the mouth too. It tastes like old cow.

Sometimes they forget it.

Cold metal on the temple and for a second you think, this is not too bad. Then they call the lighting down from the sky and they burn you with it. Searing pain and blinding light. Each nerve is cut open and laid out raw on the table.

I sometimes think they are trying to burn the devil out of me. Other times I wonder if it is the devil who is holding the metal, dressed in black and white. When it is over Dr Brown always stands beside me and says,

Good girl Cathy, you've done well today. See you again next week. And like a good, obedient, little girl, I peel myself away from the leather chair, my knees shaking as I walk out of the grey room. Into a grey corridor, where sister Margaret stands, waiting for me. She walks me back to my bedroom, the cross on her neck beating against her breast with each step. I sometimes wonder how it would feel to grab that cross and jam it into her neck.



To feel the hot rush of blood, pour down my hands and listen to her choke. I wonder if she would fall straight to her knees, like in prayer. Perhaps she would slide along the wall, turning it red. Finally, a bit of colour in this dreary place.

A shiver runs up my spine as I imagine the look on her face. When she realises what I have done.

Just when the light starts to fade from her eyes, and her breathing slows to a wet rasp, I think I will lie down beside her. From above I imagine we look like a pair of lovers. I will lean in closer, so my breath stirs the loose salt and pepper curls that have escaped her starched linen coif and into her ear, I will whisper, “What did you expect? Loneliness can do this to a person. Make them go crazy!”

I do understand that there is irony here, going insane in the place that is supposed to make you better. But that is reality. At least, it is my reality.

I ache from the cold. My hands cracked and chapped by the abrasive soaps, my knuckles red and raw from scrubbing the floors. Soon the moaning will start. The sounds of creaking bones shifting on straw mattresses. A hundred women pissing in porcelain chamber pots, wincing at the cold. Their piss steaming in curls that mock the mist outside. The bell will ring a loud clanging noise that will vibrate through the crumbling stone walls. We will dress, our skin damp, our scalps wafting a ripe odour of berries and roots, a fullness we cannot wash off. We will carry our chamber pots, our cheeks blazing each morning as the guards sneer.

Unclean, they call us. But they are as stiff as a board underneath. We all know it. Until they can corner us in moulding back rooms it is a game of obedience. Cat and mouse.

The rain has stopped, and if I were to stand on my tiptoes and press my hands against the sliver of a window above my bed, then I would see the sun starting to burn off the pearl-grey mist that has settled over the fields. But my eyes are starting to droop, my hand grows limp. I think I will finish here.

All my Love,
Cathy.



Image: Sanjongo, South Korea 2/7/3 by Sean McKervey

Seán McKervey (he/him), is a 3rd year college student studying Geography in UCD. One of his favourite hobbies he had recently gotten into is film photography. This summer, Sean had the chance to visit South Korea, in which he had many opportunities to take film photos.



Vitamin C

written by *Pluto Diamond*. *Pluto (she/her) is a 20 year old Mechanical Engineering student (currently taking a gap year). She has been writing poetry for a little over a year now and has been using it as a medium to put her very healthy orange obsession (amongst other things) into words.*

I do not wear my heart on my sleeve.

Rather, I present it with both hands in the form of an orange.

A clementine to be exact.

One half for you, one for me.

But as I watch you devour your portion, I am filled with regret.

Suddenly, I wish I had given you mine.

For every sweet section is but another piece of me,

I want you to have them all.



Image: Rows and Flows of Angel Hair by Penny Stuart

Penny (she/her) is passionate about good writing and creating art in a group setting. She loves to experiment with words and art in weekly lifedrawing workshops. Currently she is making her own book of fine art prints with James Joyce words from 'Dubliners' short story 'The Dead' as inspiration.





Meet the team

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Aoibhe Dunne - Art and Design

Aoife Conneally - Art and Design

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Chris Coleman - Marketing and Launch

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Róise Bevin Joyce - Marketing and Launch

Teddy Pierce - Creative Non-Fiction Editor



Image: Untitled 2 by Ross Bradley

Born in Wexford town, Ross (he/him) has spent the recent years of his life, telling their story through the medium of graphite. They have chosen art as a way of life, mainly because it was a way to express themselves creatively, through secondary school, and college.