



Issue VIII

NEW WORD ORDER



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Editors' Letter

Dear Reader,

We decided early on that the prompt of Issue VIII of New Word Order would be about the word Journey, and what it means to you. As Editors-in-Chief, we both agree that the process of creating this issue was definitely a journey in itself. Neither of us had assumed this type of role, however with the completion of this issue, we think it is safe to say it was a success. Reflecting back, despite our team having ups and downs, we are grateful for the opportunity to grow, improve, and create deeper connections within our team. The journey was definitely worth the end result!

We would like to thank our amazing team who worked together to create the VIII Issue of New Word Order. We first want to thank our professor, mentor, and role model Jonathan Creasy, who guided us when we would stray off our path. A big thank you to our Managing Editors, David and Chris, helped coordinate the project with grace. Our Section Editors worked tirelessly to make this issue a success, including reading, editing, and dedicating long hours to each piece. We want to thank each of our Editorial Teams for their hard work, including everyone who worked on the Fiction, Poetry, Non-fiction, Interviews, Art, and Audio sections: Carole, Laura, Anni, Lulu, Kate, Ella, Lara, Charline, Colm, and John. We also want to thank our Marketing and PR team, Lucy and Kate, for promoting the issue and creating a new look. Special thanks to Anni, who not only managed the numerous submissions we received and helped make our lives way easier, but also was in charge of our beautiful website.

We want to thank everyone who submitted to our journal, regardless of acceptance, as the quality of each piece was exceptionally high. We made some very hard decisions, and wanted to include way more than our limit. Please continue to write

and submit: The New Word Order would be nothing without all the writers, artists, and creators who contribute their work.

This issue is particularly special as we have included a new section for the journal, consisting of audio recordings of selected pieces from the issue. We wanted to add this to the journal to promote inclusivity, accessibility, and inspire the teams that will come after us to continue to improve The New Word Order.

We are so proud with everything that we have accomplished and are excited to see your response to our issue. This was an incredible experience, and we look forward to seeing the impact of our issue in the ones moving forward.

We hope you enjoy the issue and happy reading!

Gemma Bini & Olivia Barabanchuk

Editors-in-Chief



Chinese Pots by Charline Chatelain

Writing for yourself:

A conversation with UCD's 2024 Writer in Residence Colin Barrett



*Colin Barrett is University College Dublin's 2024 Writer in Residence. Having focused on short stories for the early part of his career, releasing collections *Young Skins* (2013) and *Homesickness* (2022), 2024 marks the year of his debut novel *Wild Houses*. Lucy Cleere, *New Word Order's* issue VIII marketing director, sat down with Barrett to discuss the move from short story to novel, the process of writing and inspiration behind it, and what a day in the life of a Writer in Residence looks like.*

Conducted by Lucy Cleere, edited by Ella Ruddle.

Lucy Cleere: Is there a typical day-to-day for you as a writer? Especially now being UCD's Writer in Residence and after just publishing a novel - do you get straight back to writing? At this point are you working with anything else?

Colin Barrett: Well, I did take a little break just because I think it's good to do that. I mean after just finishing a long project if you wake up the next day and happen to be burning with inspiration to write something else then go for it, but understandably you may be running on empty a bit creatively. So yeah I gave myself permission to take a break. Again, that's how the imagination works anyway, you give yourself permission to switch off and then that's when something comes along!

But actually, towards the end of drafting *Wild Houses*, I did have an idea for a second novel which is still very vague and obtuse. Nonetheless, I wrote a bit, like 6,000 words, a small section and some characters about 6 months before I'd finished and signed off *Wild Houses*. I spent a month or two finishing everything I had to do on *Wild Houses* - editing, proofreading, all that technical stuff. Then with the release of the book, there's generally not a huge amount to do. In these few weeks, I was doing a bit of promo for the book while writing pieces to really make the most of that stage of the release.

And the Writer in Residence, it's great, I love doing it and I really do enjoy the structure I have now. I have an office now! I've never had an office before, so I don't have to write on my kitchen table every day which is basically what I was doing before now so it's nice to have that. I'm doing a lot of one-on-one stuff and feedback sessions with people which has been quite popular. I am able to control what I want to do which has given me space to write as well.

Lucy Cleere: Any Spoilers on this new novel so far?

Colin Barrett: I mean it's just too vague, too vague to say. It's very early days but I mean yeah I have something there and I'm working away at it.

Lucy Cleere: In a 2023 issue of *Tolka* you were speaking to author Nicole Flattery about the process of writing *Wild Houses* and how it has differed from writing short stories; how there was an intensity to them that was 'easier' to manage than the novel. Having finished the process do you still feel the same? Any new revelations?

Colin Barrett: I can't remember what I said exactly haha - just complained probably about how hard it is to write a novel. Since that conversation the book has come out - it's been received and reviewed and all that, so you have people talking about it. I spent years just immersed in writing short stories, just thinking about that form so it was a definite switch to writing the novel. Any characters or ideas I came up with I was instinctively shaping them towards being a short story.

Lucy Cleere: So *Wild Houses* was originally meant to be a short story?

Colin Barrett: Well, this is the thing! It's hard to know, I had things set up with the characters - I had this idea of this guy who was incidentally/passively involved in a kidnapping. He's not the victim, he's not the direct perpetrator, he's not active in it but he's sort of in between and doesn't really have a choice, so that was an interesting position to put a character in. I just thought there was something there that I could expand on. So yes, I was always consciously thinking about a novel, and when I came across an idea it was just trial and error from there. It took years to work on it; I wrote a long first draft. There was a load of stuff in it, too much stuff, and so I had to narrow it down. The second draft was just restructuring and I

concentrated on getting what was there tighter and making sure it was readable and had momentum.

A long-winded way to answer your question - you just have to start thinking differently and have a different approach to characters. I've said this a few times, when a reader reads a short story generally they want to read it all in one go. You open it, it's 5/10 minutes, and you start and finish them in a singular experience. After a great short story, you're left with a lot to think about - a lot to digest but it's a singular experience you have and that's it. Whereas with a novel - while there are people who sit down and read a whole novel in an afternoon, you generally return to it episodically and so it's a place you go to for a little while. That's why I called it *Wild Houses*, books are houses that people go to for a couple of weeks, a few days while they are reading it so even when the material is dark it needs to welcome the reader back in some way. So yes, a short story is more intense in that way than a novel. With a novel you want your readers to develop a kind of affection for it throughout the reading period. You want them to keep coming back.

Lucy Cleere: A lot of what you have published so far has represented a very specific setting, style and genre - can you ever see yourself branching out to something completely different or do you think that as a writer you should only write what flows comfortably and naturally to you?

Colin Barrett: The latter part. I think of writing a lot as freeing myself from preconceptions. I write from the gut and I write very intuitively. I don't have big plans or ideas in my head before I start writing anything. I write about a particular region of Ireland and a place I'm familiar with because that is what comes to me, but all the same I wouldn't be afraid to give something else a go if it came to me. It is helpful to free yourself from preconceptions about your writing. I think people, especially starting, can end up laden with preconceptions about what you think you can write or should write. You start to wonder, have I written too much about this stuff already? This is incredibly understandable but you have to pull yourself up and even from story to story and book to book you can't worry about the similarities. More so, I find, the more you go back over certain subject matter and themes you generally find another way of telling the story. There is more material to extract. I just do that as a matter of faith but anyway, it's the way I write. It's about whatever

frees you up, whatever disinhibits you and allows you to write is the way to go. And to be honest you are largely writing for yourself. It takes a long time to write a book, it takes a long time to have it looked at and dissected by people who might not necessarily understand it so you have to. Writing about what you want to write about has always been my instinct.

Lucy Cleere: Your stories and novel represent a particular type of place, capturing the inertia of Western Irish life. Is there any significance behind switching from fictional to real places eg. Glanbeigh in *Young Skins* to Ballina in *Wild Houses*- if they represent the same thing?

Colin Barrett: Yeah, I know definitely with my first collection, with *Young Skins*, setting it in a fictional town served two purposes: the first one was just in terms of writing it because it gave it a cohesive theme, a unifying element to the collection. Certainly, when I was a young writer it helped me generate ideas. I was freed up to write the stories that ultimately formed *Young Skins*.

The second thing was more of a protective tactic, haha, I didn't feel comfortable setting it directly in where I'm from. I don't know why because it's transparently based on where I'm from so I'm not exactly kidding anybody. I guess when people aren't from there it can feel sort of representative. But again, going back to the second point, you can't worry about those things, you just have to write what you have to write. So setting it in a fictional town helped me finish those stories, and people from Mayo who read these stories at least have the sensibility to understand what you're doing. I didn't want people to think I was being condescending, romanticising or overly sentimental. While it talks of inertia and the frustrations of small-town life it's not a sociological study. Writing *Young Skins* I was barely older than the characters themselves but I had moved away from Mayo and writing about it felt like a way of holding onto it. That somehow I could preserve or bring those memories closer to me.

Lucy Cleere: A lot of your works leave many open ended questions, have you ever wondered if a character or story's resolution has been unfinished after publication?

Colin Barrett: There's nothing that I've published that I consciously think about changing. I put all my energy into every story and I'm totally in that world with the characters. I think a general reaction to anyone who reads a good short story is "Oh I'd love to read more of that." But, and I did this with the novel too, sometimes you hit gold with a great character and you're like I could write hundreds of pages about this person, but ultimately your highest loyalty is to the story, to try and get it as right as you can. So I put everything into it and then I leave it there. Definitely at the time, when I came close to the end of the story and was revising and revising it, sometimes it's natural to feel - "Is there something missing?" But at a certain point, you need to say you have done the best you can with it. You make decisions when you write a story. You have your characters and a nice premise or plot, but then the logic of the story takes over. So yeah the highest loyalty is always to the story.

Lucy Cleere: A lot of your characters eg. Sketch, Gabe, Dymphna, and Tug possess a type of enraged, violent streak, how do you encapsulate that in a character? Is it any personal experience or is it all observational?

Colin Barrett: Well yes, there are often criminal or violent characters in my stories. The way I think of them all is that I grew up knowing certain characters, they weren't necessarily drug dealers or anything, but they were people who lived in between. Probably still now, but certainly 20/30 years ago when I was a kid, there'd be young men who were semi-employed or sometimes on the dole that lived at home with not very much money but a lot of free time. They had the freedom to disrupt because they lived a fairly circumscribed life. They were probably not particularly well educated and might not have been able to advance to middle-class comfort or whatever one's aspirations are but they had a relationship with the world and most of them were happy - or at least seemed so to me in my naivety. So I've been able to write about those sorts of people who you know are - in between things.

As for the violence of it, I don't think you can or should go in wanting to write a violent book - I always go in wanting to keep the violence to a minimum. You want to set up dynamics between characters and know where it comes from. I have 4 younger brothers, but even as an adolescent in a small town, you end up hanging around in these slightly imbalanced age groups just because there are not that many

people around. I remember being like 13 or 14 and hanging around with mostly kids my age, but for some reason, there could be a random 19-year-old or even 20, and they'd be like "Oh let's get cans or something" and you're like "why are we hanging out with these guys?". You end up with these weird guys and that's when the younger people start acting older than they are and getting into trouble. That was what was on my mind as I was writing. I mean Dev is the same age as Cillian and Gabe but still, he's sort of unworldly because he left school, he's almost psychologically younger or something. Doll is almost more mature than him even though he's a kid as well, while Nicky under her circumstances has more sense than all of them.

It is about not having violence for the sake of having violence. I try to be more imaginative than that. I wanted this sense of violence and menace to permeate because of course Gabe and Sketch have kidnapped Doll but they're kinda pretending like it's not really a kidnapping. I wanted the reader to understand that they've already gone this far and if they wanted to they could maybe go further, so violence is always there in the air but I didn't want to overdo it. I remember being in situations when I was a kid where the threat of it was awful, it loomed worse than the actual violence. So that sort of sense of implicit violence, just hanging in the air permeating, that's what I was trying to get across, and those sort of slightly odd groups you would end up with as a kid.

Lucy Cleere: Is there any of that material that you would ever return to, say even stuff from ten years ago, would you save it and revisit?

Colin Barrett: I save everything in the hope that some piece of crap I wrote I might think "Ohh that's actually good I'll use that again." You may or may not but it's worth it, it's easy these days to save things and keep them in files, I do. I mean with the novel, I sheared off 40,000 words basically from the first draft to the second. And that's a lot of words! And they weren't all bad, some just weren't necessary, and you put all that away with the chance that you might come back to it. You don't always but it's worth it to keep.

Lucy Cleere: Is there anyone in the literary sphere right now that you see reflected in your work or similar, or that you would be inspired by?

Colin Barrett: I mean it's funny actually, when I wrote my first book there were a few obvious Irish inspirations like Kevin Barry who published a collection with *The Stinging Fly* that probably meant a lot to me at the time. Barry just has this flare and he wasn't afraid to go surreal. It was freeing really, knowing he did what he liked with it. I've definitely read more Irish writers since he started writing stories. I was reading a lot, well I was reading all over the place when I was younger, before my first book. American writers like Louis Johnson, and Joe Williams, mainly short story writers, actually would've been a big influence before *Young Skins*.

Since that book was published a lot of Irish writers emerged so I got to know them, I got to see their first works published in *The Stinging Fly* or *The Dublin Review*, and see them come through. To me, they were just young writers I happened to know, having a drink with in the pub after we're finished a reading or something, so that was nice, that was a really important thing to me to have this sense of community. People from other countries (England maybe - haha) don't have that as much. Irish writers are so nice! Generally, there are no insane rivalries -they're all nice to each other, well to an extent, but it's true. Most of my friendships I've made as an adult have been mainly through this club of writers so yeah it's really nice to have a community because writing is a very solitary profession once you're outside of a structure whether it is college or workshops or whatever. An unrivalled thing about being based in Dublin as an Irish writer is having access to those readings and festivals, like whatever stage you are in writing, if you're slogging away on a manuscript, being able to be with other writers and see other writers is invaluable. And it's the same thing here in UCD with the Writer in Residence, it's a great privilege to be able to think about writing seriously, and have conversations with people who are just as passionate.

The Gloaming

A poem by Eamonn Colfer

When the bell sounded
For curfew's end
I lost my way,
I lost my friends.

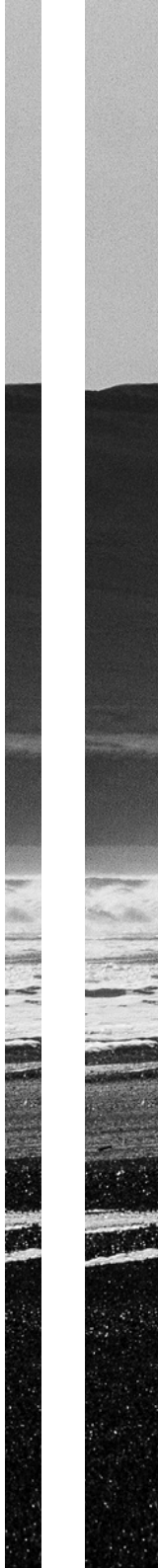
When trembling hands
Closed the gates,
Where the hooded guard
Sits and waits.

I followed the line
Of spooling thread,
Snow for a blanket,
A ditch for my bed.

A church of leaves,
The winnowing air,
The brides of sulphur,
With braided hair.

A hawthorn chalice,
A teeming mound
Where golden roots
Break the ground.

The laughing trees
And clouds of bone,
The marching ants
Carry me home.





Tag am Meer by Robin Mentel

Bucked Up

A short story by Jonny Voorheis

Like a thumb pushing into soft clay, the pain probed through Jessie's temple: dull, persistent, just out of reach. She tried to turn over but her eyes flashed open as her body threatened to pitch off the couch. She stuck out a hand and felt clammy stodge, her palm mashing into the mess of garlic cheese chips that had been tipped onto the carpet.

"Fuck," she groaned, wiping her hand on the couch's frayed upholstery. Muscles in her legs cringing, she swung her Docs to the floor, sending crumpled cans scuttling in all directions. A moan of protest came from the corner where a lad was sitting curled up in a ball, head wedged between his knees.

The light pooling through the greasy window was colourless and damp. Musty grey smells hung in the air. Jessie's jaw ached, her chest was tight, and her throat felt spent. She blinked and tried a few breaths.

"Mull," she rasped, after a while. "Dickhead."

Mull was sat on the settee opposite. His head hung and his mouth was open. A never-lit rollie was wedged between two fingers. Jessie hauled herself to her feet and straightened her glasses. She picked her way around the coffee table, which was littered with magazines and take-away menus, each a plinth for some line of blue powder or screw of clingfilm. "Mull," she whispered, giving his shoulder an exploratory shake.

"nah, t'fuck," he breathed.

"Mull?"

Eyes fluttered open, followed by a sharp guttural sound deep inside his chest. "Jesus," he gasped. "Jess? 'the fuck?"

"C'mon." She motioned with her head. "Let's go."

Mull leant over and bedded his head into his hands, massaging his crown. "Yeah, okay." He pulled himself to his feet and held onto Jessie's narrow shoulder for support. "Okay," he choked. As he turned, Jessie prodded him in the small of the back.

"What?"

Jessie raised her caterpillar eyebrows and flashed a look at the low table.

Mull nodded. The pair began stuffing their pockets with baggies and pouches and lighters.

“Here,” Mull whispered, putting a couple of loose halves into a bag. “Is that Yer One that you were talking to last night, at Conor and Anna’s?”

“Hmm?” Jessie followed Mull’s frown. She peered at the girl curled up on the couch. Bits of yellow sofa stuffing clung to the girl’s jacket. “Maybe?” She straightened up. “Shit. Yeah, might be?”

“What you reckon?” Mull massaged the baggie closed. “Probably wake her?”

“Can’t really just leave her here, can we?” Jessie stepped over to the couch. “Claire?” she intoned. “Claire?”

“Ciara, no?”

“What?”

“It was Ciara, no?”

“Fuck off,” Jessie hissed. She paused, hand hovering over the girl’s shoulder. “Ah fuck, was it?”

“Nah,” Mull shook his sandy curls. “Nah you’re right, it was Claire.”

“Ah ‘sake,” she scolded. She patted the girl’s shoulder. “Claire,” she said again, louder this time. The lad in the corner groaned once more.

The girl turned her head and her arm flopped off her face and onto the floor.

“Right.” Jessie turned around and made to go.

“What?” Mull looked incredulous. “Just gonna leave her?”

“Yeah mate.” Jessie pushed past him, clapping him on the shoulder. “Yer One definitely didn’t have a teardrop tattoo on her face.”

Out in the hallway the distorted sound of shite phone-speaker-techno was emanating from under the far doorway.

“Someone still going d’ya reckon?”

“Suppose. Thing is though.” Mull rubbed his stubbly chin. “I could really do with a bit of water.”

“Yeah, shout,” Jessie conceded. “Alright, let’s see what the craic is.”

Mull pushed open the door and they peered inside. A lad with his shirt off was sitting at the table, dirty blonde fringe hanging limp above a sweat-glistening forehead, eyes transfixed on the half-rolled joint cradled between his twitchy fingers. Behind him, at the sink, stood a bald man of around fifty. Jaw crooked from the chew, he looked up with eyes that were as deep and dark as two portals into the void. The lance of an erection tented his jeans underneath the belt buckle. Slowly, he smiled at them. Without a word, they closed the door, turned around, and made their way back along the hall.

“Here-” Jessie stooped to pick up a bottle of tonic from underneath the hall table. “This’ll have to do.”

They stepped into the damp, clinging cold. A row of houses crescented around a patch of dog-shitted grass. A girl stood on the kerb, smoking the end of a joint.

“Hey.” The girl took one last pull and flicked the roach into a bush.

“Story?” Mull took a swig of the tonic and grimaced. “What’s the craic?”

She shrugged.

“Might be a bit of a random one-” Jessie took the bottle, sloshing the contents around. “But you don’t know whose gaff this is, do you?”

“Nah.” Her expression brightened. “Yis want to come on the roll-over?”

“Ehm.” Jessie smiled wanly. “Probably not to be honest.”

The girl reached down the front of her top and rubbed underneath her tits. “You sure?” She withdrew her hand, sniffing it quickly before wiping it on her jeans. “Mates of mine are still going, up in a gaff in Sandyford.”

“Nah, you’re good I think.” Mull ruffled his hair and threw a look at Jessie who avoided his eye. “Sound though.”

“Grand.” She shrugged again. “Well, I’m gonna see if there’s still any yokes going.” With that she pushed past them, skittered around the spray of vomit that fanned across the path, and thrust open the front door.

“Ah.” Mull looked at Jessie. “Ehm?”

“What?”

Mull widened his eyes at her. “Yokes?”

“Ah shite.”

As one, Mull and Jessie bolted up out of the cul-de-sac, and around the corner.

“Well?” Jessie panted. They’d stopped at a junction, the frost-laden air biting at their needed lungs.

“Man.” Mull looked at the darkness of his phone screen. “Any battery?”

Jessie pulled out her phone and unlocked it. The screen flickered grey, the loading wheel appeared, and then it went black. “Yeah, nah.”

“Right.” Mull peered at a street sign. From underneath various elaborations of ‘loves cock’ could be made out the words ‘Beech Park’. “Ring any bells?”

“Nope.”

“Yeah me neither to be honest.” He kicked at a doubled-up can of Tyskie, sending it clacking against a skip. “Wait!” he clapped his hands together. “That says Kilgobin over there, does it?”

“Up above?” Jessie adjusted her round glasses and squinted. “Yeah. Where the fuck is Kilgobin?”

“Leopardstown basically.”

Jessie groaned.

Mull ignored her. “I reckon if we go that way, we’ll be able to get to the Goatstown Road.”

“Fine.” She lifted up her glasses and wiped at an eye. “Lead on, Columbus.”

They moved off, passing the tonic between them. The sparse calls of birds trilled amongst the tree tops, spilling down onto the lonely road. The morning was so still that the click could be heard as the traffic lights dutifully changed colour. An iridescent dew hung upon the grass, a dawning stillness.

Cars whooshed below as Jessie and Mull passed over the M50, the sounds of the individual vehicles calling to one another as they echoed all the way up to the fly-over.

“So Yer One that you were talking to last night?” Mull chewed his bottom lip.

“Yeah?” Jessie sniffed.

“So like, look I know it’s not my place.” He breathed out and looked up at the tinge of blue that was infecting the grey.

“Yeah?” Jessie narrowed her eyes at him.

“Forget it.” Mull scuffed at the cement with his foot. “forget I said anything.”

“Sorry.”

Mull drained the last of the tonic and grimaced.

The light was sharpening as they passed through Clonskeagh. Old Man Belfield was leaning against the railings of the bank. He nodded at them as he sucked at a fag end, and Mull stopped. Rooting around in his jacket, Mull pulled out a half-pack from an inside pocket which he handed to him. Jessie smiled and did the same. He grunted in thanks and looked through them, to the salmon-underbelly of the morning sky that stretched out above the tree tops.

The city comes to life unexpectedly, each nascent shift feeding on the next until a bustle emerges from between the drips. By the time they reach the Dodder, the dog walkers are out, all wheezing pure-breds and oversized keep-cups. Rathmines brings haggard parents shepherding side-stepping children in knee-length football jerseys. There are people in leggings eating scones, and auld wans peering at yet-to-be-creased copies of the Indo. Girls wearing over-sized hoodies walk down the main street hand in hand with boyfriends in jumpers and shorts, comparing eggs benedict to avocado toast, while two scagged heads in yesterday’s socks share a tin of Lucozade.

“It’s all a bit wholesome isn’t it?”

“Pricks,” Jessie spat.

The Black Church could be seen at the end of the road as they turned the corner. It’s stone implacably grey for the lack of rain. The tall houses, set back from the road, were bathed in the dappled light that shimmered through the high leafy branches of the beech trees.

“Yer One looked a bit like Yer One, I thought.”

Jessie let herself smile. “They always do.”

Mull laughed but it turned into a cough half way through. He beat against his chest with a fist. “Funny that, eh?” he wheezed.

Jessie nodded, more to herself than to Mull. “Yeah.” Her Docs beat out a step under her gaze. “You and Stephen, what’s happening?”

They reached the church and stopped by the railings.

Mull sighed, his shoulders deflating. “Ah.” He pulled at an ear. “He’s just. Look, I fucked up.” He raised his hands. “I’ll admit that, like, fuck man. I’m an idiot, won’t deny that, but like he needs to stand up to his dad as well right?”

“Easier said.”

“I know, I know,” Mull cut across her. “It’s just, I dunno, makes me feel like Stephen isn’t fully with me you know? Like he’s met my family, loads of times.”

“That’s different.”

“I know, but like.”

“No you don’t.” Jessie shook her head, bob-cut bouncing. “Stephen’s dad, I know you don’t want to hear this, but he really doesn’t want to know you.”

“He doesn’t give a shit about you though,” Mull protested. “You’re always around there.”

“First off, I’m not ‘always’ around there and second off, it’s different.”

“Yeah, that’s what Stephen always says.”

“I’m not riding his son.”

“Very little fucking riding going on last while,” Mull muttered.

Jessie smiled. “Look, Stephen loves you to bits. Christ, the fact that you’ve been such a dick about his dad and he’s still willing to consider talking to you is proof enough of that.” Jessie held up a hand. “And before you butt in, you have been a dick alright? You didn’t grow up with Stephen, I did. I saw how hard it was for him to come out, not everyone has Green Party parents like you, yeah?”

Mull leaned back against the church railings and looked up to the sky, jaw tight and hands stuffed in pockets.

“You’ve apologised a hundred times right?” Jessie leant back as well. “Apologise a hundred more, stop being at him about his dad, and give it time.”

Mull sighed. "I suppose I'll just have to trust him, I love him enough that I should."
"That's a very touching sentiment, Mull."

"Oh my god, actually fuck you dude."

"Here look, I dunno," Jessie grinned, dodging his swinging arm. "Just take it easy with him, he'll come back to you."

Mull nodded, stuffing his hands back into his pockets. "Reckon it's time?"

"Ah yeah," Jessie sighed. "C'mon."

They had a quick hug and parted ways. Mull stumped around the church and out of sight while Jessie picked her way down the little side-street, stopping to let a tabby dash across my path and ignoring Mr. Connolly's glare as he attempted to rub the marks of his middle age regret from his right wing mirror. The front door key fell to the scabbly path twice before the lock was successfully turned, the heavy door swinging inwards to the gloom.

The house still held the night's cold in its breath. As the city stretched itself awake, the interior of the house lagged behind, motionless but waiting.

In the living room Jessie emptied the ash tray into the damp grate. A general sweep of the table and the couch trawled up a couple more cigarette ends, and an earring which she placed up on the mantle. She couldn't find a spare screw cap amongst the mess of magazines and lighters, so she pulled a plastic cork out of the bin and worked it into the end of the Power's bottle.

In the kitchen Jessie paused, bottle hovering inside the top press. Sighing, she put it down on the counter, unwilling to be led so easily into the next fight. Her mother would just stand on a chair anyway, she did that to sweep her hand over the top of the cabinets in an emergency. She looked at the crockery sardined into the sink but couldn't face it, or the damp-gone-musty washing in the machine.

Jessie pulled a straight from her mam's packet, not arsed rolling. In the back yard, the lighter crunked under her thumb, coughing sparks until eventually, a nub of flame lapped against the end of the cigarette. She took a drag and leant against the down pipe, watching insects flitter amongst the vines and creepers that enveloped the high walls. The cigarette smouldered, next door's cat nosed about amongst the overgrown shrubs, and light spilled over the neighbour's roof, illuminating the tiny patch of anaemic grass.



Morning Light by Katelyn Markham-O'Halloran

Hollybush

A flash fiction piece by Weaver Melching

Today is a grim day. The birds have stopped singing, and the young blossoms have left their trees. I like to spend days like this in my bedroom. I used to have a window, but I covered it up and put glowing stars on the ceiling. They don't give off much light, and they grow dimmer every day, but it's better than looking outside.

There is one task in my room. An old pile of garbage I haven't sorted through that tumbles off the side of my bookcase. Mostly decaying books and old toys. I fidget with anything electronic to check if it works. Nothing does. The books don't seem to be readable either, but as I move one and it turns to dust, I find an old shoebox nestled in the pile, dented and a little stained, but oddly well preserved. Inside is mostly cobwebs and a bit of mould, but in the corner is a small skeleton with a few scraps of peeling skin left that I wouldn't recognise if I didn't remember burying Connor.

I found him in the back garden when I was very small. And by found him, I mean he scumbled out of the grass and bit my toe. I nearly screamed, thinking he was a snake, but when I noticed his four little legs, my fear turned into curiosity. The bite didn't even hurt, so I pulled him off of my toe and cupped him in my hands. We stared at each other, taking in our features. His eyes looked like honey and oranges, his scales indistinguishable from wet stones. I petted his head and he flinched, but then leaned into it, letting me feel the pleasant slipperiness of his scales. He opened his mouth. I smiled.

I don't know when I named him Connor. I just remember touring him around the garden, showing him our plants and flowers, telling him what was bad and letting him taste anything safe. He didn't like mint, but he did like the basil, which was next to the holly bushes, so I took extra pains to make sure he knew that bad things would happen if he ate them. He nodded along, so we kept walking around the garden and munching on basil until I heard Papa opening the gate.

Papa didn't like snakes. They were bottom feeding vermin on his crop, and even

though Connor wasn't a snake, I knew he wouldn't like him, so I tucked Connor into the basil bush and sat down to make believe like I was playing alone.

Papa quietly walked over to the bins and spat out his cigarette as he tossed in a black bag. I kept pulling grass. He looked over at me and said his words - hihowareyouimgood - without giving me time to answer. I made sure he kept looking at me and away from the basil, but he wasn't looking at either. Glancing back, though, I couldn't see Connor, which was good. Papa went inside without a word.

I waited until I heard him hit the couch, and I ran back to the vegetables. I couldn't see Connor immediately, so I dug into the basil, thinking he'd hidden himself well. Really, I couldn't find him, not even with those bright eyes of his, he was nowhere to be found.


Then I saw him lying in the holly bushes.

I got the box from the trash. I said some words as I put him in it, and I tried to dig a grave, but Papa caught me with the shovel and got mad. So, I buried the box under a pile of books and toys. And holding the box now, I decide to let it rest again.



Pneumopolis

A poem by Nick Badot



we learned
how to breathe
under asphalt,
our lungs
concrete-heavy,
strained
to heave up
the girders.
under the world
these bronchioles
are Atlas,
these breaths
Legion.
beneath milky-stained
carcinogenic freeways
bulldozers pass
on the surface,
surfing
on our breaths.



Study of a Man nr.1 by Laima Grasmanc

What broke you?

A poem by Wini Hannigan

“What broke you?” asked an empathetic face. My lips tighten together as I try to hold on desperately to *my* truth. Shame fills my lungs and keeps me in a chokehold. The shame that isn’t mine, yet it fills my body like second-hand smoke. It slips into my bloodstream, a slow, determined poison,
your secret; your shame.

Whispered reassurances threatened me into silence. A love that never felt safe, followed me relentlessly. The words that flowed so easily from your tongue still reside in a dark corner of my mind while you bask in what they call eternal rest.

I look in the mirror, and sometimes, to my horror, I see a glimpse of what you tried to create in me.
A girl you tried to force into womanhood. A woman who never had the chance to be a girl.

Through gritted teeth, I have fought with ferocious conviction to change a narrative centred around victimhood to one of survival. For the most fleeting of moments, I convince myself that the survivor I show you is the person I really am.

On crowded streets, I think I spy your cold eyes in a sea of
faceless bodies. In a queue, I feel someone
breathing heavily, standing a little too close to me, and panic rises
because it sounds like you. Still,
with a firm grip around my neck. Ruthlessly invading my mind.

The stories behind the story, the life behind the sentence, the
person behind the perpetrator, they
all live inside me. Screams fill the caverns of my mind, but even
they do not reach the places
where you so carefully sowed a piece of yourself inside of me.

“We live together now even though you are long gone. Most
days, I am winning, managing, living
despite you. Other days, I feel you inflate and rise within me,
demanding attention. There was a time when you and I had not
met yet. Now, you are a parasite, and I am your unwilling host
until the day I
find a way to rid myself of you.





Going Home by Delphine Arnault

A House

A non-fiction piece by Maria Harten

The house of my childhood is homely and run down. The four cramped downstairs rooms contain the memories of a faded person, a faded family. No photos are lining the walls, the stained yellow wallpaper peels away. The mould adorning the corners interestingly contrasts the plain old manilla.

Manilla, manilla, vanilla. My Father hated that colour 'It was the thief of joy', he would always say. He thought it was overused and boring and plain. Yet it brought my mother serenity, from the eclectic house of the working class.

The creaking groaning stairs, with the unstable handrail my father warned us not to lean on. The floorboards in my room that they had saved up for; still did not fit. The little gap of space caching all the dirt and grime made it annoying to brush my room. The floor in the living room with wax stains from spilt candles and water damage from my father's endless foot soaks. The kitchen with its mismatched cabinets and an awkward table.

The couch we got from my aunt in Cavan. The bed upstairs my uncle donated. The TV was a gift from our grandparents. Everything that we owned had a different life before us. Nothing was a new beginning, but each mismatched item found a use.

The discarded rocking chair that we picked out from someone's front garden. The upholstering ripped, and the stuffing spilt out. I would pick at it till my hand was slapped away. Stuff was everywhere and we were constantly told 'We can't throw that out, what if we have someone over.' The items from my mother's past, her Russian pots, woven baskets, the porcelain that she carefully carried from Petersburg.

When we were older, my mother felt less guilty to work. We were in school and could walk home unaccompanied. Despite her broken immigrant English, a restaurant in the shopping centre hired her. It hurt me to see her serve others. She was my mother. I told her I wanted her home and she should quit. Her hurt face

and my brother calling me an idiot.

I see now that her job gave her independence and a purpose. She was proud of her work and when she called back home and I eavesdropped through the door, I could hear the envious voice of my aunt. My mother was the lucky one. Being able to work and earn euros in this country was a privilege for her.

Gradually, I noticed changes in the house. The new gleaming kettle, gone was the encrusted limescale. The venik that my grandmother sent us was replaced with a shining Hoover hanging on the wall. We exchanged the gaping hole in the couch with a motorised one; with the press of a button, your feet are supported.

One day a van pulled into our driveway and the windows were changed. My brother painted the outside a warm auburn red.

My home was a constant project of improvement. Each item is proof of my parent's existence. The new objects that sit proudly are a testament to my mother's will. We got rid of our old broken Christmas decorations for new shiny glass ones; 'like back home,' she said beaming.

I wish to give my mother the kitchen she dreamed of, the extension into the garden. I wish to give my father the stove he longs for, and the outdoor shed he always talks about.

The house is a small testimony of their life, each object meticulously acquired. It may seem claustrophobic now, but once those walls contained the vastness of my imagination. I was lucky to avoid the polished, cold marble and sharp corners. I should be so lucky as to have a dilapidated, eclectic house of my own.



Dream by Delphine Arnault

The Train

A short story by Eimhin O'Loingsigh

By the time Brian reached the train station he felt ready to drop. It was a poor kind of day; first, he had missed his bus and had to run to work, only to then realise he left his folder at home, then, he got ate by his boss for not being prepared for his meeting. Finally, he got news he was being sent to Dublin. Thus, he had to walk all the way across the city in his dress shoes which looked wonderful, normally, but weren't well suited to long walks. Their normal look had been tarnished by a spray of dirty water from a speeding car. In fact, his clothes had also been dirtied when Brian had to dive out of the way of the maniac. So, blistered feet and wet denim were the state he found himself in when he finally got to sit down on the station's bench on platform two.

Those benches, hard and forever cold, might as well have been the most delicate ottoman covered in silk down. He checked his watch, a digital model, and saw that he had half an hour before the train arrived. Looking around he saw no one else in the station. He decided to set an alarm for twenty-five minutes, seeing as there was no one around to do anything untoward while he slept. Alarm set, he leaned back across the bench and shut his eyes, drifting off into an inviting world of vibrant visions of his fiancée Mateja's auburn hair. The strands were floating around the air like she was underwater, one errant strand cutting across her bottom lip which was delicately painted in a layer of lip gloss that smelled of elderflower and pear.

He began to feel himself floating upwards, as was she. She reached out her hand and the two floated together. Brian was rather unphased by this sudden buoyancy, focusing more on her amber-gem eyes. There was a warmth building deep in his abdomen as he gazed into her eyes. He never liked having to leave her for extended periods, and even more so now that they were engaged. When he rang her earlier in the day she acted as if it didn't bother her much, his going to Dublin, but she was a terrible actress. He would make it up to her. A nice, quiet meal (*a coq au vin*

accompanied by a red Burgundy for her and a glass or two of Redbreast for him) enjoyed by candlelight that would set her eyes in a fiery hue.

As was a common occurrence for Brian, his dreams shifted into a Romantic landscape complete with rolling hills veiled in golden cereal crops speckled with the little black figures of distant labourers. He leaned against a fence, beside him his childhood dog Conall gnawed on a postman's leg. The wind kissed his face with a kind of nostalgic warmth found only in memory. Soon his father would pull up the driveway in his Ford Fiesta and Brian would be off to the city. But for now, he drank in the view.

He awoke softly, gradually. The alarm hadn't gone off, or if it had, it failed to wake Brian. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and looked down at his watch. Half ten. He had surely missed the train. *Fuck sake. What am I going to do now?* He looked around the station without any real idea of what he expected to see. Perhaps someone would miraculously offer to drive him, a good Samaritan for the modern age. Instead, he found only a platform partially lit by orange streetlights and completely devoid of any other life. Not even a rat or bird wanted to be there. He just sat there, unsure of what to do. A strange melancholy had met him when he rejoined the world of the waking.

While he considered leaving his job—God only knows he had made many plans to before—he noticed a flicker in the corner of his vision. Looking down the track he saw the pin of light from a distant train. He looked at his watch again. Quarter to eleven. The trains usually stopped at ten. Brian looked at the light as it grew closer and closer, eventually being accompanied by the sound of carriages rolling on the track. It was definitely a train. Maybe they had chosen to run a late train, or—this seeming the more likely option to Brian—they were bringing it in for maintenance. Either way, it would do no harm to check when it pulled in.

The train, rather unremarkable and typical of an Iarnród Éireann intercity model, slowed to a stop just beyond the yellow lined edge of the platform. Only one door opened and out stepped a strange lad, dressed like one of the train attendants you'd

see in a Western film, complete with a navy blue hat. “Hello sir.” He said, looking at Brian.

“Hello”, he replied, “is this train running?”

“Isn’t it always?” the attendant said.

“It is? I never knew they ran a train this late.”

“Not many do.” This man was odd, to be sure. Yet Brian felt invited. His face was strong and adorned with a magnificently bushy moustache, completed with a decidedly imperfect smile of crooked teeth that was friendly. Brian had seen many men like him growing up. He felt right at home.

“Does it go to Dublin?”

The attendant didn’t say anything but waved Brian inside. Brian took out his wallet to pay for a ticket, but the attendant raised a hand dismissively. “No need, going to Dublin is costly enough.” *Too true*, Brian winced while stepping into the carriage.

Most of the seats were empty, all bar six of them. He slipped along the aisle and took a seat in one of the groups of four seats. To his left, across the aisle, he saw a familiar face. Mrs. Redmond was a lovely woman who lived only a kilometre from Brian’s family home growing up. He was often sent down to her house to help her and her husband with work or simply to deliver bread his mother had made. While many young lads might have bemoaned having to spend their free time cutting back briars or stacking turf, Brian loved it. Not only did it make him feel useful, but the few pound she would put in his jacket pocket for sweets was a boon. She looked exactly like he remembered her: rosy cheeks full of that kind of motherly love for all possessed by a select few; thick silver hair; and a little mark on the end of her nose. She had told him when he was young that she got it from a feather in her pillow, a story he now realised suddenly—and with a degree of shame at the length it took to realise—was a fabrication.

“Mrs. Redmond?” he asked.

“Oh, Brian, I hadn’t noticed you.” She turned in her seat to look at him. “Well,

didn't you grow into a fine young chap."

"How have you been?"

"I have been wonderful darling, thank you for asking," she said. "How are things back in Ballymurdoch these days?"

Ballymurdoch. It was like something out of a Joseph Kavanagh painting in Brian's memory. Perhaps it was rose-tinted glass, that was certainly the belief of the lads in work who thought it little more than somewhere you went through to avoid the motorway. Still, Brian would agonize over small details in his mind. The exact rust spots on Prendergast's gate, the positioning of the crows on the overhead wires in the morning, the divets in the road to Fossy. He could give you any directions from memory, using just the notable trees or who owned what field. *You head up there by Greene's field and when you get to Kearney's bottom you take a left.* He found himself smiling.

"I wouldn't know Mrs. Redmond. I'm living in the city now."

"Oh, that's lovely," she beamed. "How are you finding it?"

"It's grand, yeah. Still miss home, but sure you know yourself you have to follow the money."

"Of course, of course," she said with a coy smile.

He was just about to ask her if she had moved when he caught wind of a most peculiar sight. Dick Laffin was coming down the aisle.

"Dick?" Brian asked as he stood up without his realising.

"Jaysus, Brian, long time no see!" Dick Laffin was the same age as Brian plus one day. The two young men had grown up together. Or rather, caused harm together. They could be right little curs when they met up. Of course, that was mostly overshadowed by their reputation as the two best footballers to never play county. Stories were still told, last Brian heard, in Ballymurdoch about their escapades in the county final.

The story goes as such: sixty eighth minute and the scores are level 2-12 to 0-18. Moyanna had all but sealed the match in the first half with two quick goals and a flurry of points. All hope seemed lost and Ballymurdoch would have to wait another forty years for a county title. Then the two young men found a form which must have been granted by God and they slotted one after the other over the bar from any angle. Then at the death a quick handpass to Laffin followed by a boot like a lightning crack sent the ball right between the sticks from halfway. The two men had secured hero status and there was talk of a statue at one point.

Of course, the legend only grew after Laffin died in a slurry pit. “Dick, but... you’re dead?” Brian knew it to be true, he had been a pallbearer, and yet here was young Laffin.

“I know,” was all his friend replied.

“But if you’re dead, how are you here?”

“Because you’re dead too.”

Brian stood very still. There was surely no way he was dead. He told as much to Dick. “Dick, I can’t be dead. Sure, nothing happened that could’ve killed me?”

Dick put a hand to Brian’s shoulder. “Drunk drivers, they’re bastards.”

But I jumped out of the way.

“Did you?” Dick asked as he pointed to Brian’s leg. A perfectly preserved tyre mark appeared along it. Brian began to quake; his legs gave way and he fell into a seat. “I know, it’s a shock when you first hear it.”

“No no no, Dick I can’t be dead. Sure, aren’t I on a train? Last I heard heaven didn’t use Iarnród Éireann for transport.” That was it, Brian had proved his living. He felt calmer knowing this. Calmer, until Dick Laffin told him that a train was just how his journey was being conveyed to him. “It’s easier to use these kinds of sights. I saw a ferry when I died.” The weakness returned tenfold. Brian’s head began to spin violently as all manner of sights flashed in his mind’s eye. Mateja, his mother and father, sister and brother, Ballymurdoch. Every detail perfectly preserved. He

felt like vomiting, but Laffin held him up straight. “I know it’s hard to imagine,” he said in a low tone, “but it’s true.”

“But what about Mateja, and my family? I can’t just leave them. I have to get off this train and get back to my Mateja.” He was determined, stood with a straight back, certain that he was going to get off this carriage.

“You can’t, we’re moving.” Laffin pointed out the window. Sure enough, the train was beating down the track in great haste, flashing by perfectly framed scenes of the mystical coast drenched in moonlight.

“No, I can’t be dead. This is a bad dream, and I’ll wake up in bed with my fiancée and I’ll hug her.” The confidence of his last action melted into panic.

“Brian. We all have our time to go. It’s really not that bad. You’ll get to see lots of people.” Brian looked at Dick Laffin and felt the floodgates break. A torrential stream of tears burst forth and he slumped back into the seat he had risen from. He only looked up when he heard the patter of little nails on the floor of the aisle. Conall, the terrier came running over and leaped into his lap. Little Conall, black and tan with wiry hair, perfect as he ever was. He curled up into a ball on Brian’s lap and began to snore immediately.

Oh God, how will my mother feel when she hears about this? When will my funeral be, and how will she cope? And Mateja; how long will she wait before she finds someone else? Is it wrong that the thought sickens me- is it wrong to hope she never finds anyone else?

Laffin was sitting in the seat across the aisle and put a hand on Brian’s shoulder.

“Death really isn’t so bad. You get used to it quick enough.”



The Journey by Delphine Arnault

Killeshin Time

A poem by Barbara Dunne

Early morning. Wellies on. Unheeding
The wet. Through dew drenched fields
To get there in time for the milking.

The first, a poppy filled scalene triangle
With our house, cut in the same corner
As the ghost remains of a famine cottage.

The second, a rushy meadow where
Reluctant followers of a fungi fervent father.
We picked field mushrooms in November.

In Spring it floods and a lake lands.
The temporary home to a bevy of swans,
Drifting across its wind rippled body.

It's July, the field is a bog pasture
For milch cows, who raise their heads
From pulling grass to watch us passing through,

Uninterested in our headlong rush
They descend again. Over another gate
Into the drilled potato field, guarded

By Billy the long-haired black goat
With his crooked corkscrew horns
And a reputation that keeps us apart.

Then we turn up the haggard
With its door, high on the wall
Creaking. We pass the totem

Biscuit tin, framed in the pane
Of the fuel-filled shed window.
Around the pebbledash corner

We slow, to pick our way
Over the spattered cobbled
Path and slide under the arch

Of the cold stone milking parlour.
We are forced to stop by the
Heavy hum of fresh milk

And sour dung. The welcome
Of Mickey, caught in a shaft of straw
Laden light, sleeves rolled up,

Hands resting on the bony rump
Of a cow, while the swallows
Streak overhead. Origami in motion.



Fireworks Over New Brunswick

A short story by Weaver Melching

Thursday, 26 January.

I went out to visit Eunice today. I tried the car, but whatever makes it move had rusted and fallen to bits since the last time I used it. So yeah, I walked. I considered giving up and going back to sleep, but I had to get the letter to her. I'd been putting it off for four months and wanted it off my conscience.

The streets were in total disrepair. I guess I should have known they'd be, but it was worse than I imagined. Grass had begun to cover the asphalt where stray roots had pushed through and broken it. The three eyed birds and two-headed squirrels had built their nests in trees right in the middle of the road.

Fireworks were going off over New Brunswick. "Happy New Year," they said in blue and green lights. They'd been rumbling on and off for weeks. I don't know how. Someone must have fallen asleep on the job.

I missed the New Year celebrations entirely. Well, I guess that isn't true. Teren and I dropped the kids off at laser-tag day-care and watched the sky change from the private, open-roofed suite in the country club, but still, I couldn't help feeling a pang of guilt that I hadn't been here, hadn't seen the city lights when they'd started. Maybe next year I'll set an alarm, just to make sure I wake up at 11:55 and see what happens. Teren won't be happy, but he'll survive. I wonder what colours they'll be next year. They might be the same. I hope they're not.

Anyway, Eunice. I got to New Brunswick after about an hour. The streets were completely empty, aside from a single old, withered mailman walking along, adding to the giant piles of letters that spilled out of every mailbox. I waved at him. He smiled at me, but turned away when he saw the circles under my eyes. He didn't have any, he hadn't ever gone under. I was going to approach him, ask for directions, but I spotted an intact street sign and knew exactly where I was. I walked down three more blocks, climbing over two giant chunks of upturned cement and rubble from fallen buildings. The air was thicker in the city, and I wished I'd brought my ventilator, but I hadn't, so I just coughed through it.

Eventually, I came to the door of Eunice's building. I rang her doorbell ten times before giving up and kicking the door in. The elevator was broken, so I had to walk all the way up to the second floor. Her door was unlocked, and I went inside.

It was a mess. Like, somehow worse than my house. Trays and trays of takeaway and useless antiques were just stacked on top of each other, making her already narrow hallway even narrower. I remembered when she moved in. She was all excited about its "open plan," the way that there weren't really any walls or doors between rooms, just holes that let light and air move freely through the space. I don't think the apartment's open plan anymore. You'd be hard pressed to find any plan in there.

She was in her bedroom, asleep, the bottle of Nightshade still in her hands. I was four months late, but the fact that she hadn't waited for me still stung a little. I shook her for about five minutes before she finally gasped awake, panting and screaming at me to bring her water. Once I found and filled a glass that was anywhere near clean, I sat by her and she gulped it down in one go, taking almost a minute to breathe after she finished.

"So," she said, "why now?"

"What?"

"Why are you here *now*?"

I looked at my knees and checked my pocket to see if the letter was still there. It was.

"The fireworks are still going," I said. She laughed. "Though, you probably knew that already."

She grinned and pushed a strand of ash-grey hair behind her ear. My heart fluttered, and I let my grip on the letter loosen. Her eyes were glazed over from months of inactivity, but behind the clouds I could still see the brilliant, radiant emerald green they'd once been. Her skin was oily, and she'd had a few breakouts on her forehead and neck, but her nose still poked up, a bit like a mouse, and her ears were adorned with gorgeous blue jewellery.

"Yeah, I could hear them," she said, "they've been spilling into my dreams for

months now.”

“Ooh,” I said, wincing. “That go how I think it went?”

“Yeah, it started as a lot of warfare,” she said, sipping on her empty glass. “First, one of my best friends moved in, and that was pretty cool, only then my family was blown up, and when I thought it couldn’t get worse, *bang!*”

She made finger-guns at me.

“My house blew up. So, yeah, I started fighting back, was naturally promoted to top commander of the resistance, and I won. I took my goddamn revenge against the exploders, and we started setting off fireworks to celebrate. And we’ve been at that for a few days now.”

“God,” I said, sitting on the edge of the bed. “Your whole family? Eunice that’s *terrible.*”

“Not my real family, Natasha,” she said, rolling her head around her shoulders. “Dream-people. They’re nice but they aren’t alive.”

I scowled at her.

“What?”

“What the hell are you talking about?” I spat. “Like my husband and kids aren’t real? No, Eun. I know they’re real. They’re my everything. Just because they’re in my Dreams, doesn’t mean they aren’t *real.*”

“Nat, how—”

I pulled the pills out of her hand and held them up to her. “If these people aren’t real,” I said, “why the *fuck* are you giving them your whole life?”

She paused, put the glass down, and sighed, sitting up and dangling her feet off the bed next to me, the little bit of light poking through her blinds drawing a box around her sad eyes.

“Husband?”

Shit.

“Yeah,” I said, quietly. “His name’s Teren.”

I paused.

“We have two kids – Jaden and Cormac. They’re into sports and video games, like normal kids, you know. We live in a, uh, comfortable house on a big green hill

with a bunch of neighbours who like cheese and bruschetta and fine zinfandel wines. We make love every night, and he works at the local bank, and I start businesses on the side like, you know, better wine glasses, and ironic T-shirts and nice, artisan cutting boards I make myself and, you know, It's good. It's nice. It's good."

She said nothing, stared at nothing, no emotion on her face. Then, she smiled, chuckled, and blew her hair out of her face.

"Okay," she said.

My knuckles went white. "Well, what do you want me to say?" I shouted. She frowned and looked down.

"What is it, Eunice? What?"

"I'm married too, you know," she said, stone-faced. "In my Dream. Or, I was, at least. We lived in a little apartment in New Brunswick. Life was hard, but we were happy. She worked, I worked, we came home, we ate shitty takeout or whatever abomination she'd made in the kitchen while I was out because my shift was two hours longer than hers, and we'd fall asleep in each other's arms, each and every night."

The room was nearly silent, if not for the sound of settling dust.

"Eunice—"

"She was supposed to move to her parents' house," she said, starting to cry. "The world was turning into an irradiated shithole, so she'd gotten addicted to weird, mind-altering pills and she was gonna go away, just for a little while, to detox. I didn't think it would work, but I let it happen, and – and wouldn't you know it, she got better."

"No," I said, tears welling up in my eyes. "No, she didn't."

"She got better, she came back to me, and it was great," she said, choking on the words. "We kept by each other's sides even as the bombings started, started opening our loving doors to other people taking refuge from the explosions, and she was so amazing – so – so – she was a star. She was my everything. And she—"

I put my head on her shoulder. She leaned into me.

"She blew up."

The sunlight was fading. I could still hear the fireworks in the distance, thumping, thumping. Without thought or care, I turned my head and kissed her.

“I can’t stay here,” I said.

She nodded, wiping her eyes. “Nope.”

She reached for my hand, as if to hold it, but she took the bottle of Nightshade and poured three pills from it. “It was nice to see you again,” she said.

“You too.” I smiled.

She threw the pills into her mouth and swallowed. “Say hi to Teren for me.”

She fell asleep immediately. I checked her pulse: it was okay. I stood up, choked back my tears, and left the apartment.

The walk must have been long, but it felt like an instant. I sauntered up the lawn, snuck in quietly through a window for tradition’s sake, and crept past my parents’ bedroom and into my own. Now I’m here, writing, waiting for the Nightshade to kick in. It’s a low dose, but it should keep me under for a couple months.



Din by Tadhg McDonogh-Cunningham



Red Line by Edie Weinstein

cricket

A poem by Chloe King

damp and heaving swaddled
in duvet
the
nightmare
flickers
like burnt film
across
eyes.

forced to
make
a decision
alone.
in silence.
hide
under
the blanket

clammy and still until
the first
sliver
of light
appears
or
brave
the hallway
and face
deep sea creatures of
witching
hours.

impulse
half asleep
prance
on
balls
of feet
don't look
into depths
of other
rooms
those are things
you do not want to see.

dive
onto
shores
of your
mothers
bed
where
she
sleeps
alone.
her hair
a large nest
rotates
like an owls
to question
the disturbance.
“I had a nightmare.” sphinx
is satisfied,
sighs,
opens
the duvet.



waft of
hot air,
poof
of head
on pillow.

the clock ticks,
she snores softly,
rubs her feet
together
like a cricket.
harmless little thing creates a field
nightmares
can't
breach.
when she wakes,
she will ask
about your
dream,
call it silly.
she will
watch
siblings
hyenas
bicker
and observe
at a distance.

she will
look
at you,
roll her eyes.
in years

s p a c e

between

mother

child

will be

desolate.

nothing can grow.

nothing

nothing

nothing.

resentment.

warn the child,

hold their hand.

when they

have a

nightmare

there's

nowhere

to go.

they

stay

in


the

dark

with

the

rest



of
the
shadows.

the cricket,
ocean's away,

moving their
feet to sleep.



Study of a Man nr.2 by Laima Grasmanc

Evening in the Café

A flash fiction piece by Katie Farrell

I ride the bus in silence. Rain soaks the cobblestones, smooth and wet like black tongues. In Costa, I order a ham and cheese croissant and sit down. Mystery Achievement plays on the café's stereo. Beside me, two men converse quietly over murmuring voices. The air is warm and packed- the windows and doors shut tight. The men discuss something urgent. I pick at my croissant; white cheese bleeding over the side, the plate sweating.

The rain is relentless, pelting against the window. One of the men next to me shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

I open my book.

"I have these strange thoughts sometimes," he says.

I squint my eyes at the letters as they merge and blur.

"Ye just have to keep it going, keep it going. You're a wonderful, wonderful lad."

A woman in a dark green coat enters the café; a gulp of cold wind sweeps across my ankles; the book page flickers. The heat settles down again.

"I think about hurting animals," the man beside me says.

I cough but I don't mean to. Out of the corner of my eye, I see the man opposite slightly turning his head, a dark smudge against the well-lit room.

I press the book closer to my face, almost touching my nose. I can smell the musty paper.

"You're a bright lad, ye shouldn't be thinking these things, think positive, you're too young, far too young."

I pull up my jeans to scratch my leg, glancing at the men. The younger of the two is hunched over in his seat, eyes fixed on the floor, the older man sitting back against the brown velvet chair, legs crossed, chest rising and falling slowly.

"There's something wrong with me."

I swallow the last of the croissant, warm and thick as it travels down my throat. I close the book.

“You’re doin’ just fine.”

For a while there is silence. I stare at the book cover now sitting on the table; a sketch of Dorian Grey against a royal blue background, the empty plate beside it, a crumpled napkin, and an unused knife.

“I’m not being fully honest,” the younger man says.

The older man sits forward in his seat and rests his chin in his hands, his elbows on his thighs.

“About what, son?”

I slowly put on my jacket, closing each button gently.

“I think about hurting people too.”

The silence between them resumes. It seems as though everyone else has lowered their voice, too. I look around but all I see are regular customers talking or texting. They are unaware of these men and their conversation. Or perhaps they have chosen not to listen.

I stand up suddenly and steal one last look at the younger man. A tear sits quivering on his cheek.

I open the door and grit my teeth against the rain.

Previously published in *Flux: Issue 1*



Free Sweets Inside by Conor Bailey

Emerging Writer Profile: Katie Farrell - one to watch



UCD's own English with Creative Writing student, Katie Farrell is a writer to watch. Being published in OddBall Magazine and HG Wells Short Story Anthology in 2022 and UCD's Caveat Lector in all four years of college, she is only at the beginning of her writing Journey. A friend and New Word Order Fiction Editor Laura Kiehl sat down to chat with Katie about her journey so far and her approach to writing. While there is a lot to learn from established writers, talking to writers trying to break into the industry can be just as insightful.

Conducted by Laura Kiehl, edited by Ella Ruddle

What age were you when you first started writing?

I started writing when I was 11 years old. I had been dancing in a ballet school from the age of three and I was convinced that would be my career, but when my dad had to pull me out, I clung to writing to fill that creative void. My primary school teacher was also an amazing woman who saw some potential in me that I didn't see. I wrote for fun, I was only a kid at the time, but she urged me to submit a piece to the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre script competition. I was shocked when I placed in the top 100, and that was definitely the catalyst for my writing journey.

What do you draw the most inspiration from?

I draw a lot from my everyday life, which sounds boring I know, but I'm currently working on a short story based on my current workplace. It's a separate project from college, too, which is nice. I've been enjoying creating spaces for a reader to be in. I want them to feel as though they are there, not just that they're imagining, which is about the most difficult thing to do as a writer.

Your piece “An Evening in the Café” for *New Word Order* focuses a lot on space. How did you decide what way to construct it?

Again, it was inspired by an experience I had where I overheard an unsettling conversation, but it was, of course, altered and dramatized for the piece. I think I was reading Camus when I wrote it and I’m still at the stage in my writing journey where my style is somewhat malleable, so perhaps elements of his style seeped into mine, although I might sound a bit arrogant saying something like that. What I mean is that he focuses greatly on the atmosphere. The beach scene in *The Stranger* captures the atmosphere so fantastically, but his language is simple and his sentences are concise. I’ve been gravitating towards accessibility more and more, I would say. I finally gave up the idea that convoluted words necessitate good writing. That couldn’t be further from the truth.

In what ways do you think you capture the atmosphere in your piece?

I tried focusing on small squares of detail if that makes sense, almost like a slideshow. The cobblestones are mentioned, and then they are described, the same with the croissant. Different textures, smells, and sounds combined create the café atmosphere. I wanted to capture the stuffy indoors with the cold rain outside. It’s very Dublin.

When you write your pieces, who do you imagine your audience to be?

That’s a really interesting question. I think I imagine my audience to be similar to the characters that I write weirdly enough. For example, if I’m writing about an older woman I might imagine how an older woman would respond to that character, and whether or not she would deem the character believable. I would hate to misrepresent someone.

Is there a certain ritual or process you use before you begin your writing process?

I don't think so, not exactly. I mean I definitely have to play music, usually classical. I love the *Oppenheimer* soundtrack if I'm being honest. I think Ludwig Goransson is a genius. I really enjoy Joep Beving, too. His album *Solipsism* was hugely influential when I was working on my first book.

When you say book, have you completed a novel or was that just an experimentation with the form?

I haven't completed that book, no, and it haunts me every day. I have all of the characters following me around in my head and I can so clearly see the main location where the story unfolds, but I can't bring myself to sit down and work on it. Or perhaps I won't, it's like a silent protest. But the book made it to 20,000 words so it has a fair amount of potential. I started writing it when I was seventeen and it's very reflective of that period in my life.

What is the most valuable piece of knowledge you've gained since starting this course that you wouldn't have gained otherwise?

I would say that I've learnt to accept criticism. I found that extremely difficult in the first two years, as I was known as "the writer" in secondary school, so when I arrived in college and was surrounded by many writers I felt overwhelmed. I took criticism quite personally and I definitely beat myself up a lot if I didn't receive a shower of praise. Now, I want my work to be picked apart and it makes me anxious to receive a vague compliment or a generic response. What am I meant to do with 'very good' or 'well written?' That's not to say I hate compliments, I always appreciate when people enjoy my work, but it doesn't help me improve, which is what I'm aiming for.

Out of your work published since the start of your writing journey, what was your favourite and why?

I would say my short story *Discernment* which was published in the HG Wells anthology is my favourite, mainly because it was my first printed piece in an international publication. It's also a great example of how intensely your writing style and technique can transform in two years. I re-read *Discernment* a few days ago and I was initially appalled at how 'bad' it was. But the guys at the competition didn't think it was bad, so why be so hard on myself? Instead, I can use it as a marker of my progress, which is sweet.

We're going to wrap up with one final question. If you could take my place, and interview any writer in the world, who would it be and why?

Oh, wow. I would say Donna Tartt, simply because I struggle a lot with time pressure and feeling like I need to be churning out work constantly, and I'd love to ask her how she combats that pressure. She takes an entire decade to write one novel, and you can really tell. She's phenomenal.



Alpin Dip by Charline Chatelain



Paddle by Robin Mentel

Eurydice

A poem by Bea Basa

I often wonder how it feels
to be untouched,
 uncalloused
 unpoisoned by fear

as our footfalls echo
through the Stygian underground
so do my questions:
what will this make of us?
 (what will we become?)
will we see this through?
 (or will dread, too, strangle us in its wretched roots?)

like fingers interlaced
I am woven through life
and death
left liminal
with little more than a look

and in the spaces between
I find myself preparing
to either rejoice —

or to mourn.

for what is a journey
if not uncertain?



Marsh Tree by Charline Chatelain

9-inch Maneki-Neko

A short story by Conor Bailey

I met Des in the Liberty Belle. Hadn't seen him for a while. He was waiting for me at the bar with a half drank pint of Guinness and a crumpled up wrapper of bacon fries. I love bacon fries.

How's things Des?

He turned his head and gave me a cheerful upwards facing nod. Faking it.

Ah you know yourself.

Ah yea, I reply.

He was wearing a suit one size too big for him with a fading pink tie. I had seen him in it before, a Dunnes job probably. One of the few he had in rotation. He settled into it like a second layer of skin.

I catch the eye of the bartender. Pint of Guinness please Pat.

Des turned in his barstool to face me. Listen, I've something I need to tell you.

Jesus let me get a pint into me first.

Des dropped his head into his hands and exhaled. I hit someone, he said.

What's up? I took off my jacket and stuffed it at my feet. I scanned the surroundings. Few regular old fellas on the couches, a strange smell coming from them. Strange but familiar, comforting even. A couple of crusty students sat in the corner preparing their rollies.

Usual suspects this evening anyway wha, I said. I watched the bartender line the glass up against the tap. I felt thirsty.

You hit one of the lads at work, is it? What're you on about?

Des's head shot up, he stared into my eyes and I could see he looked exhausted.

No. Jesus Christ. He swallowed and then scrunched his face like he had a tooth ache. I hit someone with the fucking car.

He continued, I didn't mean to, genuinely. You know I wouldn't do that.

I watched my pint settle behind the bar, thick clouds of black and brown were swirling around each other behind the glass like a creamy tornado.

Oh fuck, I said and I let out a deep breath. This is no good Des. I mean this is no good at all, it's fucked up really.

Poor fucker. He probably didn't even feel anything, his neck was probably broken before he knew anything, you know?

Here you are now pal. Pat placed the fresh pint of Guinness in front of me, he tossed a beer mat seamlessly underneath it without taking his eyes off the match.

I took a sup and immediately put the pint down again. Lost my appetite. I took another sip anyway.

Jesus Des. I shook my head. Fuck's sake. Where is he now?

Des looked into his pint glass as if he was hoping to jump into it and drown in the sudsy leftovers. He necked the watery bottom from the glass and wiped his mouth. He dropped his head and stared at the bar.

In the boot.

The what?

The boot man, he's in the boot of the Corolla.

Oh fuck me. I gulped half my pint in one go and shifted my stool slightly away from Des. I stared at him. Someone scored a goal and the auld fellas cheered, a guttural phlegm filled cheer.

So, what will we do? Like, what do you want me to do?

Des looked at me like a kid expecting to get shouted at. We'll have to take care of it.

We looked at each other.

I mean, you know I'd bring him to the hospital, or the Gardaí or whatever you're supposed to do but Jesus man, I can't go to jail. I already have two points on my licence, they'll do me for this surely. Claire is threatening to leave me as things are, this will just make it worse.

I finished my pint and let him continue. Plus, that incident from last year with the ice cream van, I just can't get caught man, I just can't do it. We'll have to get rid of him.

He looked as if he was about to cry. Maybe he was crying before I got there.

Come on out, we'll have a look, I said.

Cheers Pat, I said also.

It felt like I was in a Tarantino movie when Des opened the boot and we looked at the lump of mud and blood and rain stained clothes.

Oh fuck, I said

I know, Des replied.

I closed the boot and we both got into the car, Des drove.

I continued my story from last week. So anyway, she fucked off and took his cats to Italy, can you believe that?

To Italy?

Yea, fuck's sake.

Yea, well they weren't really his cats but he loved them. Used to feed them chicken nuggets apparently.

Oh yea?

Yea, gave them mad dandruff. A couple of them had messed up faces too, only four eyes between three cats. We both laughed.

There was silence for a minute.

We'll have to dump him now anyway, while it's dark.

Yea, that's what I was thinking, I said. I wasn't really thinking that but I didn't want to make Des feel any worse.

Let's get away from town anyway, towards the canal.

Fuck him in the canal like? Des asked.

I turned to look at him. I didn't know what to say. Yes?

Alright yea fair enough I was thinking that too but I'm glad you agree. What the fuck, I thought.

We drove towards Harold's Cross down Clanbrassil Street and the car stopped outside Chop Chop.

I'd murder a three in one. I realised what I said straight away. Sorry Des, didn't mean to say that. Des looked like he was about to puke. I saw the shiny waving golden cat in the window of Chop Chop. About 9 inches tall. He was waving at us, wishing us good luck on our journey, or saying goodbye.

Here turn left here there's a Tesco, fucking starving I am.

You are messing, said Des.

I was not messing. I'm not messing, I said.

He parked outside the South Circular Road Tesco. I wanted a meal deal, couldn't be bothered waiting for a chippie. Cajun chicken wrap obviously, few hula hoops, but what drink? Ah Lucozade why not.

I went for a browse and passed the cleaning supplies. Black bags, disinfectant, rubber gloves. These items were now ruined for me.

I went to the self-checkout. Fuck, I'm on camera now. Oh well. Beep, beep, beep.

The man next to me said, do you want my Clubcard points pal?

Ah nah you're alright.

Are you sure?

Ah yea it's grand, thanks very much though.

We drove over Harold's Cross bridge; I saw Robert Emmet look at me as we passed by. He was judging us.

Pull over here I said, and Des did. It was dark and the dog walkers were inside, probably too cold.

Des pulled over and we both sat still. I turned on the radio.

Do you really want to do this. Kevin Street Garda station is down the road. They might go easy on if you own up.

Des said nothing.

I turned on the radio. Wonderful Christmastime. I love that song.

The mood is right.

Des was still silent. Then he wasn't. We already have him in the bleeding boot man, it's too late.

I suppose he was right, but I didn't like that he said 'we'.

We're here tonight.

The rear lights of the hatchback lit up the surroundings in a red glow. Cinematic. The veins in poor Des's temples were bulging.

We quickly unloaded the package from the boot and shuffled over near the canal. I looked into the dead man's eyes. There was no blood or bruise.

I then looked into Des's eyes; it was awkward. He took too long to look away.

This'll have to do, Des said.

I suppose so yea.

Okay let's slip him in the water. Des said he was sorry for asking me to do this.

It's okay, let's just do it.

His body sunk and not as many bubbles came up as I expected.

Des offered to drop me off at the quays so I could get my bus home.

I still wanted a three in one but the time wasn't right. The meal deal did not satiate me.

We drove under the arch at Christchurch and I hoped the thousand-year-old brickwork would collapse and end this whole ordeal. Not really though because that would cause hassle for other people.

Des was very quiet. Usually he's a bit quiet but this was uncomfortable.

I suppose he was still my mate.

He dropped me off outside the Smock Alley, the bus stop next to the Viking boat sinking into the pavement.

Ah eleven minutes, you may as well wait in the car.

Des rolled down the window and pulled out a smoke.

Gizza shot a that, I said.

I hate smoking, I took one drag and it made me feel sick but in films it's what people do after disposing of a body.

Are you working tomorrow?

Yea, fucking early start too.

Ah, it'll be alright.

We didn't speak for five minutes.

Do you think this'll be alright? Like nothing's gonna come of it do you think? He took another drag and threw it out the window.

I really don't know man, it's heavy stuff dyaknowwhatimean?

Yea.

A couple of bus drivers with their high vis jackets and little bags slung around their back were standing around the bus stop. How's the wife? Ah stop would you.

I mean, if nobody saw you hit the fella and nobody saw us chuck him in the canal we should be in the clear. Wait... did someone see you run him over.

Fuck's sake I didn't run him over. There was no bump.

Right yea, did someone see you hit him?

Nah, he didn't even have any lights on or anything.

He looked at me. Not even a helmet, like come on.

Yea.

I thought of the way the poor fella's hair clung to his forehead. I don't know if it was rain or sweat. I hope it was quick anyway, I said.

Ah it was yea, surely just a knock and out clear.

I hope he didn't have kids.

More silence.

Look, I said, everything's gonna be okay.

Ah yea. He fumbled and started to light another smoke. He gave up.

I grabbed his wrist and shook it slightly, for a few seconds too long.

I'll see you during the week anyway? We go for a pint?

Yea go on then.

Here, let me change the station.

Can you bear the calvary?



An Evening with Friends by Laima Grasmanc





Greek Lovers by Charline Chatelain

Diana

A poem by Orla Malin

Goddess of hunters, patron of nature, of
childbirth, protector of virgins
I sink my knees into the dirt at your feet,
under the shadows of the west tower.
The weathering of lead makes you look tired
and your hands are empty
Still, there is something I recognise
Your corporeal form is unraveling,
carnal desires that have carved you more than sculptor
You saw me last the day I entered here as a child
and left a woman,
unbecoming, my form unraveling,
and the taste of iron on my lips
and you,
in all your glory
watched my writhing
as one would watch a creature beached
Could you not curse him like you did Actaeon? Let him
stumble into the teeth of his own jaws?



I was defenseless,
naked as you were,
stripped not of cloth but something more
But I have forgiven you
Your divinity escaped you like it did me
and you and I were the same,
flesh and bones and blood,
scared children on their knees

Jazz Basement

A short story by Harry Smith

“Elliott.”

Elliott lifted his head to see the man from the cubicle over peering down at him. He introduced himself a few weeks ago, a friendly person who wanted to be on good terms with everyone in the office, but Elliott always had to think really hard to remember whether his name was Matthew or Michael. When he took his eyes off his computer screen, Matthew or Michael saw this as an indication to ask what he was planning to ask.

“Me and a few of the guys are going to O’Donoghue’s after work, are you free tonight?”

He didn’t have to think through his response for long.

“Yeah, I should be.”

“Won’t get in any trouble with the missus?”

“She has French lessons.”

“I didn’t know they do those so late.”

“They don’t.”

Matthew or Michael paused for a beat, processing what he was just told, clearly not expecting Elliott to be that blunt about it. He ultimately decided that wasn’t his business and continued with a chipper expression.

“Well, we’re all going to be there at around eight so come along if that time suits you. Let me give you my number in case you need directions or anything.”

Elliott didn’t need directions, he had been to O’Donoghue’s many times, but he still handed over his phone for his co-worker to put in his contact details. When he got it back, he saw the new number added under ‘Matthew (from work)’, which he would try his best to remember.

At the bar, Elliott and Michael huddled themselves around a lighter to light the only smoke they had left between them. He was fairly drunk by now, holding his

eighth pint in his left hand while he took a long drag with his right. It was cold out but he had loosened his tie, rolled his sleeves up above his elbows, and undone his top button while he was still inside. It was a warm, crowded bar that played music an octave to akin to nightclub volume which Elliott didn't like. His colleague went back inside leaving him alone where he lingered for a few moments longer under the smoking area's umbrella-like roof.

He noticed in his blurred vision a door to his right, away from the entrance to the bar, with steep stairs leading down into a basement that wasn't open when they had first arrived. Thinking nothing of it and having no one around to stop him, he stumbled down the steps. With each step the cold light of the street began to fade and the warm tones of the basement revealed themselves to him. His ears began to recognise soft notes: percussion and keyboard, a slow and smooth bass, one solitary trumpet separated from the ensemble. His steps matched up with the gentle click of a drumstick against the rim of the snare. He stepped onto the floor at the end of the staircase and was greeted by candlelight, a small crowd, and a quintet of young musicians.

The crowd could not have been more than fifteen in total, a few couples, and groups of three. They slowly sipped on pints and cocktails that looked more expensive than the drinks upstairs. They listened in total silence, showing intense appreciation for the music being played, with a few of their heads following the rhythm in a slow nod. He took a seat in the back, trying not to trip over his own feet on the way. As he sat down, a man in a black shirt and trousers appeared on his right with a drink menu, which he gestured towards, prompting the new customer to make a choice silently. He pointed at the only option he recognised, Guinness. The other options were IPA's and cocktails, and he was a man of simple taste. The waiter was gone as quickly as he had arrived.

Elliott looked around; the walls were dimly lit in a deep purple and each table had a candle right in the middle. There was no platform for the band to play on,

but the gold beams that shone down from the ceiling separated them from the rest of the room. The lights bounced off the metal and brass of the instruments, dancing as the musicians swayed to their own melodies. The trumpet player had his eyes closed as he poured all the air from his lungs into the brass, and in turn flooding the room with a piercing melody that resonated among the admiring listeners.

His drink arrived as he was looking around, he hadn't seen anyone bring it over, it had just been left neatly on a coaster in front of him. He pulled a note out of his wallet and looked around for someone to give it to in exchange, but when he couldn't find anyone, he left it on the table. He took a few big gulps before tuning in to the band, but being the drunkest there he felt as though he wasn't a part of the crowd. He was hearing the music but had lost the capacity for listening earlier in the night. The trumpet was all he could really focus on; the other instruments accompanied it like a shadow accompanies someone under a spotlight.

He took another gulp, reaching about halfway down the glass. When he set it back down on the table, he couldn't help but notice a dent in the trumpet that he was almost sure hadn't been there before. He squinted but he was sure of what he was seeing. He noticed how the rest of the listeners didn't seem at all phased by this so he concluded it must have been there the whole time. He continued to think this until he saw the trumpet change slightly in shape again, growing longer. The band didn't hesitate, they were in a trance and couldn't stop playing no matter what happened around them. The trumpet continued in its metamorphosis and the rest of the band became more distant. The shrill brass notes rang out louder and louder, gradually becoming the only sound left in the room. The nodding listeners, the accompanying musicians, the candles and purple lights, the bar, and its staff, all faded to black until it was only Elliott and the trumpeter left.

When he shifted his focus from the trumpeter, he saw on his lap a rusty, dented trombone. He looked up again and found himself in his childhood bedroom,

having just smashed the instrument into his desk in a fit of frustration. He wiped tears off his flushed cheek into his sleeve, trying to cry noiselessly, so as not to disturb his family any more than he already had. They didn't think much of his burst of rage, but he was more embarrassed by being sad than of being angry.

When he looked down a second time, the instrument was gone, leaving him with only the tears. He picked up the pint and finished the second half before the song's end. He held the glass over his mouth for a few moments after the last drops had fallen from it, hoping for a few more. The note had been taken off the table, again without Elliott noticing, and a few coins had been left in its place, but not enough for another drink. He put the coins clumsily into his pocket and began fidgeting with the coaster for his drink, tearing the circular cardboard apart. He was able to hear the whole band again. He didn't want to listen.

The crowd filtered out one group at a time, but a few seats remained filled, most likely, Elliott mused, friends of the band. He stared at the trumpet player, took notice of his clothes, how trendy they were and how expensive they must have been. The man was noticeably younger than him, but had darker and more luscious hair, with a thick moustache. As he played his instrument he looked as though he didn't need to think about it. Elliott loathed the trumpeter's presence, he hated the fact that he looked better, sounded better; better than he ever was or would be. He made a mess of the coaster pieces and slid them onto the carpet.

The band still playing, Elliott stood up with his pint glass in hand. The remaining crowd kept nodding along as he walked up the aisle between the seats. All eyes around him were closed, none of the ears noticed his steps over the sound of the music. He walked into the stage light, right in front of the trumpeter. The music only got louder, the musicians more focused, the crowd more enthralled. Elliott lifted his right arm, the glass in his hand was hit directly by the orange light. He sent it crashing down on the skull of the man in front of him in one swift motion.



Sunday Night Jazz by Charline Chatelain

Did You See the Flares?

A non-fiction piece by Helen Power

My journey started and ended in a car park at Sandymount Strand, overlooking the sea and the tall, brutal chimneys of Ringsend Power Station. That car park was my anchor, my copper rod to ground myself. I often pulled in for a few minutes on my drive to work - to remind myself of water, nature, and the real world before I was swallowed by offices, emails and meetings. The water flowed in and out - meekly lapping or furiously hurling itself at the path depending on the weather of the day.

This particular journey started in January 2013. I was going to say it was just a normal Monday morning, driving to work, but it wasn't normal. My whole world had turned upside down a few weeks earlier when my middle sister had died. My beautiful sister. Forty-nine years young - far too young to die. The cancer had finally got her - nibbling away at her for years, stealing her vibrancy, her beauty, until finally, there was nothing left. I had spent so much time travelling to be with her for her final months - away from my family, away from my job - that when she was finally gone, I ricocheted back to my normal life. Burying myself in busyness. Clamping shut the well of grief.

And then, on this 'normal' Monday morning, a song came on the radio - 'Flares' by The Script.

Did you find it hard to breathe?

Did you cry so much that you could barely see?

My heart stopped. My lungs stopped. My soul stopped.

My car kept moving.

I needed it to stop along with me.

I steered into the car park at Sandymount Strand and gazed sightlessly at the sea.

Did you see the sparks filled with hope?

You are not alone

'Cause someone's out there, sending out flares

The tears started flowing. Ugly, snotty sobs burst from me. I dabbed frantically at my eyes, trying to catch the tears before they ran down my face. Saving my makeup; saving my mascara and saving the face that I would have to show the world when I managed to pull myself together and continue to work. But not yet, not yet.

I hunched and rocked in the car.

The song finished.

I wasn't ready for it to stop. I turned off the radio and searched for the song on my phone. I found it, and I played it again. Again. And again.

And let the grief flow out. Through my eyes. My nose. My lungs. My pores.

That song became my valve.

I would play it - turn on the faucet of my grief, let it flow, and then turn it off firmly before stepping back into the real world.

My favourite place to play it was on long-haul flights as I travelled around the world with work. I would put on my headphones, pull on my sleep mask, and close my eyes as the music filled my ears. And I would cry and cry and cry - crying rivers of tears, drenching the sleep mask. Other passengers around me were absorbed in their films, or emails, or plastic food. They paid no attention to the sniffing woman cocooned in her own private world.

In the real world, in that first year, people bumbled and bungled around me. My close friends, my patient husband, saying words they meant as comfort. "She was an angel." "She was such a good person." But that wasn't her - she had been wicked, had a devilish sense of humour, a glint in her eye. Each wrong description was like a blunt hammer chipping at the edges of the sculpture of her memory that

I was desperately trying to keep intact, away from their clumsy, well-meaning words. I became sharp. Impatient with them. Changing the topic away from their sympathy, ignoring their grief. I was too busy protecting mine, tucking it deeper and deeper. Only releasing it with the music when it threatened to erupt within me.

The world continued to turn. The seasons flowed, one after the other.

Her husband sold their house. He didn't tell us. My oldest sister rang me and told me. I didn't blame him. He needed to move on. I would never have wanted him to change anything in that house, so I'd shrugged - better that he moved rather than alter it. I searched and found the ad on a property website and I scrolled through each of the rooms - reliving memories that lurked in each carefully chosen wall colour and each familiar piece of furniture. Remembering scraps of conversations, touches, laughter, and memories imprinted like photographs. That living room. That window. That bed.

He married again after a number of years. His new wife was lovely. I met her at one of the children's weddings. He'd invited me to meet her before then, but the timing had never worked. I'd dreaded meeting her somewhere so public, but she was lovely, and it was easy. I liked her. In another time, in another world, she might have been a friend. I think my sister would have liked her. My kids really liked her. That night, when we sprawled around our hotel room after the wedding, a little drunk, with feet sore from dancing, they raved about how much fun she was until finally I snapped and said, "Ok, ok, I'd prefer if you liked her just a little bit less." They laughed at me, and hugged me and told me that they'd never love her as much as my sister. She'd been the best - 'the bomb' - high praise from young adults.

As the years moved on, the grief was rubbed down, like a sharp stone that you keep in your pocket and rub and rub over the years, until the edges become softer—blurred.

And I listened to 'Flares' less frequently.

Less frequently, but never passively.

Whenever I listened to it, I stopped and really focused on it. Like I was pushing my tongue into a hole in my tooth to see if it still hurts, if it's still there.

And then today—a beautiful Spring day. I could see the beauty in the harsh brilliance of the sunshine and in the luminosity of the blue sky. I pulled into the car park, into my regular spot, at Sandymount Strand.

It felt fitting to put on 'Flares'. I realised that I hadn't listened to it for a long time.

As the familiar notes filled the car, I looked out over the strand. The tide was in, almost all the way. The sea looked beautiful, a gentle blue mirroring the sky - the light catching the movement on the water - soft and slow. It felt easy - like the world was breathing through the ripples of water and sunlight.

I saw three seagulls - just three - dive and dip and soar. Beautiful to watch. Magnetic.

And then one was left slightly behind. And the music played. And I breathed hard.

"Keep up," I willed the lagging seagull. "Keep up. Don't leave us. Please don't let the two of us go. There always has to be three of us."

And I felt my tears flow softly and gently.

And the song played on.



Wind On Down the Road by Edie Weinstein

Metamorphosis

A poem by Thomas O'Donovan


I knew I loved
You when we met
Because I was like
Ramplant flora
Geraniums
Sprouting all over,
Daffodils falling
From my ears.

A living ecosystem
I sustained,
A vegetation
Of flux, shifting
In me, day to day.

New species flourished
With each message
And every intimation
Of touch, obliterated
This ecosystem.

You grew on me,
Distorting my self.
My ecosystem
Grew, but its many
Helixes were skewered
Through with your initials,
Your radioactivity
Altering my chemistry.





Time passes, and the system
Is more stable now.
The shifting climate
Has stabilised and there is
New peace which brings new
Comfort. The flowers still grow
And some still spurt
Unexpectedly. I still cannot
Quantify their meanings
Or categorise their colours.
I do not know the nomenclature.

All I have is
A verdant garden,
Leaking colour
Into my life.



Midsummer by Laima Grasmanc

Tinder

A short story by Chloe King

TW: Abuse, Suicide, Violence

Let me just start off by asking if you've ever had Tinder. Yes? No? Well fair use to ye if ye haven't had it at this stage in life then you deserve some kind of medal. See, when you're bored off your rocker it's one of those things that *seem* like a good idea at the time. Whether you've had it or not you know full well it's a cesspool of weirdos and horny bastards, but you can't pretend to be above it all when you're swiping on and chatting them all up.

So, here's me, minding my own business, tippy-tapping on my phone. Oh look, I've matched with someone who doesn't look like a slapped arse. He wants the snap straight away? "Think about this for a minute" says your brain. "Ye haven't even garda vetted this young-one yet – don't give him anything." "But brain," I reply, "I'm going to Spoons later so I'll defo get some drink outta him."

So, there's me in Spoons with my friends. I'm havin' fun, laughing as some people tend to do. I take the picture of the table number and throw it on my story like the Tinder sugar baby I am. Here we are now, look there's two Kopparbergs for me from yer one and now I think I'm class. Was it the strawberry and lime ones? Unfortunately. Don't they taste like yoghurt? Unfortunately, but they're free.

Shite. Now he's looking to get a coffee with me tomorrow. I'll ask the table what I should do. "Ah for feck sake lads, will I actually say feck it and go? I may as well like? Okay grand I'll say yeah."

"Rise and shine you stupid bitch." Woke up with the fear and now there's this stinky coffee to get with this stinky young-one who I've decided is actually not my type. "It's only a coffee so it's no harm, and sure you can leave if it's weird anyways," I thought.

(Hello, future me here telling the story, I was violently, extraordinarily wrong.)

So here we are, it's 5pm. I'm at Stephen's Green and tippy-tapping on my phone, avoiding eye contact with everyone walking by in case it's him. He's late. I'm feeling nervous.

I get a text off him: "Are you in the leather jacket?"

I look up, and there he is across the road. He was about to cross when a Luas cut him off. I had to stand there and try not to look at him through the Luas windows. Ick. I gave him a huge hello and we're almost the same height. Scream. We crossed the road again, got a coffee and went into the park. We started chatting, but I was feeling mad awkward. I was trying to distract myself by constantly rolling and smoking rollies. Eventually, I calmed down and we were actually getting along really well. He was talking about his dogs when park rangers came up and said they were locking up.

He goes, "Do you want to get a pint?" and I say, "Sure, fuck it."

(You stupid, stupid idiot.)

So here we are, sitting outside Bruxelles. We started to run out of things to talk about so I asked if he wanted to play a drinking game.

He goes, "Sure what, you thinkin'?" and I say, "We can play never have I ever, and you drink if it's true."

So, we get into the game and we're having loads of fun asking questions like, "Never have I ever had a piercing" and "Never have I ever been to more than 5 countries" and we kept getting pints to keep playing the game.

Near the end of the night, the questions took like, a literal break your neck-whiplash- get a claim-and live cushy the rest of your life type of car crash direction.

He goes, "Has your dad ever hit you?" And I was like, "Ah man... what?" and then he says something along the lines of: "Yeah I hate my dad because we used to be millionaires because he had a patent to something but then he killed himself in front of me, but I don't really care that much because he was an abusive prick and

it's the anniversary of his death tomorrow.”

Like lads when I tell you I was just sitting there like literally on life support trying to figure out what was actually going on he turns around and goes, “Do you wanna get a hotel room with me?”

So I say like, “Here man I’m really sorry but I’m in college in the morning,” and he starts *SOBBING HYSTERICALLY* and hitting his head on the table being like: “*I ruin everything I can’t have one nice thing going for me I always fuck it up, I know you think I’m an absolute weirdo now but can we please start over I’m literally so suici—*”

And I was like, “Ah here man please calm down.” (*Like what in the love of god is going on here?*) and he got up and walked down the road and was hitting his head against the wall and shouting and crying and I hadn’t a clue what to do with him or myself.

So, after all that he goes, “Can you please get a hotel room with me and start over you’re such a nice person and I really don’t want this to get between us,” and I was like, “I will in my *shite*,” so he starts kicking off again and I facetedimed my sister being like, “What the hell do I do?” and she says, “I’m in college tomorrow and you’re after bleedin’ wakin’ me up like ... go home,” and hung up.

Ten minutes later, I’m on the bus home and he texts me and goes, “Can we get a coffee tomorrow so I can explain myself?” and I replied, “Please talk to a professional before going on another date,” and blocked him.

Now... you may be thinking ... you stayed off Tinder after that, right? Didn’t ya? You *do* have two brain cells to rub together in that thick head of yours, *right?* Here, you might have noticed that my tone implies sarcasm and you’d be dead right. Of *course*, I’ve never had a single good idea since I was shat out and I haven’t been planning on having one since, so giddy up ye good ting we’re back on the horse and rearin’ to go.

Ding goes the phone as it does when Tinder serves me up a new match. I

have a goo and it's another lad who goes to Trinity and thinks he's god's gift – joy.

I open the chat and see the following pickup line, “Hey, are you my laptop because you're hot and I'm getting nervous.”

I think to myself: “Hmm that was a little bit *too* good, let me see if he found that online,” and sure enough he did.

So, I turn around and go, “If you weren't using the laptop so much to find pickup lines maybe you wouldn't be having this problem,” and from there we did a little buzzin' off each other and then, he pops the question: drinks? I get a flashback of the last date and a shiver slithers down my spine.

I think you can guess my response to this question, and you've every right to call me a very silly sausage.

It's Friday night and lashing rain. I text him on the bus to tell him I'm on the way in, and we meet in Temple Bar. We walked to the quays and queued for a club that rhymes with jerkmans, and eventually got a table inside out of the elements. We chatted for a bit, but I kept getting a whiff and tried laughing it off saying, “Whoever's in here is on the Irish Olympic fart team.” Eventually after intermittent slugging he told me he had a stomach ulcer and the smell was his breath. Holy. Mother. Of God. I gave him a gum and said, “Sure look and sure listen we can't all be perfect like me.” We go out to the smoking area and I roll a rollie.

So, this young-one with long blonde hair and lip filler out the door comes over and starts chatting to yer man. He introduces me and I give her a smile. If looks could kill. I ask her how she's getting on and like a whippet yer man is gone back to the table. I excused myself, and thought, “That was a bit odd?” and followed suit. We chatted over another pint and then he said he was running to the toilet so I stayed put.

After ten minutes, I was bored off my hole and decided another rollie was

needed. I went out into the smoking area and asked someone for a light, and in the corner I see yer one and yer fellah gobbin' the face off each other ... I almost fell over.

Gobsmacked, I turned around to the lad that gave me the light and told him the story, and sure enough he invited me over to his table. A few minutes go by and I see yer man I was with zoomin' around absolutely gunnin' for me. I watched his eyes bounce over the tables until he saw me. He came over and asked why I'd moved and I just said I was bored. He told me to come back to the table and I said, no invite yer one over, and asked me what I was on about. I turned around, she's *still* giving me daggers and I go, "I saw yous eating the stinky breath off each other," and he calls me a *liar*. At this stage everyone at the table was like, "Man, we *saw* you." *SHE* comes over and is like, "Don't you dare talk to him like that," and I said, "Ah here, yous are both wreck the heads," and she starts demanding I give her an apology.

At this stage the whole table is ganging up on them and if there's any group you don't wanna mess with it's a table full of mullets and tattoos. The pair of them left without a shred of dignity between them and I enjoyed my night hanging out with my temporary mates.

Until...

I left the place at close and see the two stinky onion heads standing outside and locked eyes with the girl. I turned around to the bouncer and said, "Keep an eye on me cause they're about to kick off." She started pacing it towards me and another bouncer grabbed her by the arm and she went bananas. The lad goes to try calm her down while she's kicking and screaming trying to take a crack at me.

I'm on the bus home, I see a Tinder notification, and delete the app.



Morning Journey by Freya Rothwell



Journey's End by Freya Rothwell

Leaving Home

A poem by Barbara Dunne

Hands balled around sweets and coins
in the pockets of a faded blue apron.

You sit behind the kitchen door
on a wooden chair, rocking

by the kitsch kitchen cabinet
with the pull-down table. Blending

with the blank walls. Ankles swollen
and swathed in beige bandage. Ulcers

left your feet tapping out a steady rhythm
across the tiles— a tune only you could hear.

Your dove grey bun is loose above your face.
The spidery hand of time, distracted or amazed

by the crazy confetti pattern on the linoleum
had neglected to knit loose nets of wrinkles across.

When I bend to kiss your cheek goodbye
the soft shock of your silk skin, roots me to the floor.

Norah

A short story by Sharon Keating

Trigger Warning: This story contains themes of pregnancy loss, medical procedures, and intense emotional distress.

“You understand the risks?” The nurse flipped through screens on her pad before meeting Jennifer's gaze with her cold eyes.

Jennifer matched her stare, determined to convey certainty. “I understand,” she said, nodding, while rubbing a hand over the photo of her and Norah in her pocket – an old Polaroid she found in the shoebox under her mother's bed. That was two months ago, when she had finally felt up to clearing out her mother's house. That old shoebox under her mother's bed had set this whole thing into motion.

“We're achieving over a ninety-five-percent success rate with these re-implantations, but sometimes things come back a bit off.”

“That's okay. I want it back, even if it's upside down!” Jennifer's voice wavered slightly, thinking of the horror stories of people going mad after re-implantation. It seemed to particularly affect those who were reclaiming traumatic events. The loss of Norah had to have been traumatic but despite the risk, she was determined to do this.

“Hmm, I can see you had the extraction ten years ago.” The nurse paused and pursed her lips at the information on the pad. “That affects the success rate somewhat, for extractions from that time we are looking at closer to seventy-percent success.”

Jennifer nodded, not sure what to say or how to process this piece of information. She needed the memories back. She couldn't fathom why she had Norah removed in the first place. Even if the end of her short life was extremely painful, why erase her completely? It made no sense. Extractions were so new when she had it done, and she was always risk averse. Her stable, dull, but well-paying and demanding job as an actuary confirmed this. Her modest one-bedroom

apartment close to the office with no frills and her sizeable savings, now significantly reduced by this procedure, corroborated it. Sacrificing the joy of now for the comfort of a stable future had been her goal for as long as she could remember. Mitigating potential risks, securing modest comfort and reliable income. No surprises, no change, just peaceful stability – that was her life's aim.

In the weeks since the discovery under her mother's bed, these thoughts had consumed her. Why had she risked losing her mind on an experimental procedure? Was she really such a different person back then? Had the removal procedure changed her so much? They say removees often isolated themselves afterward, becoming alien to those around them who had the memories they had gotten rid of. Isolation was at an all-time high, blamed in part on the ease of the procedure and its widespread use. Conservative figures said at least half of Jennifer's cohort had dabbled in it. A modern epidural applied to every kind of emotional trauma, making for a happier society. Even if the effect was social isolation, they were proving to be more stable for employers, less traumatised, less sensitive, more productive.

Had Jennifer been different, more social before her extraction? Her current life contained no one she knew from ten years ago except a few co-workers. They were purely that, co-workers. Remote work meant that she had never even met any of them despite having worked with some of them for over twenty years now. They never shared personal details – she knew them by name and title only – and had no idea if they had families or where they lived.

Had her mother seen a change in Jennifer after the extraction? In all the years since, she had never alluded to Norah. They weren't close, so it would have been easy enough to avoid. Her mother had kept that shoebox though. A pair of pink knitted booties, a bamboo blanket with the word Norah stitched across it, and the Polaroid of Jennifer ten years younger holding a tiny newborn baby girl. Small round cheeks, a rosebud mouth, and beautiful grey-blue eyes.

"I'm going to need you to sign this." The nurse pushed the pad in front of Jennifer. A waiver absolving them of any consequences hovered inches from her nose. All Jennifer's instincts demanded she read it, query it, push back on those

areas she disagreed with, but she knew she couldn't. It was either sign it or give up those extracted memories of Norah. So, she connected her finger to the pad and heard the happy beep of confirmation. Perhaps she wasn't that different after all, risking her mind again to get back what she had extracted.

"Thank you." The nurse pulled the pad back before moving behind Jennifer and angling her chair backwards, reclined so she was staring up into the bright spotlights on the white ceiling.

Jennifer remembered wanting to be a mother, not an all-consuming desire that she had heard described, but she had wanted it at one point. That want had faded over the years, like so many other things do with age. And while she didn't pine for children, once she saw that picture of herself and the baby, she couldn't let it go. She needed to know what happened to the beautiful child in her arms. It was horrific, the not knowing, surely that not knowing was worse than any pain. She was older now, more able to deal with it given that time had passed. She would be able to process it better than a younger version of herself could have.

She watched as the nurse worked with her back turned to her. She listened to the noise of cabinet doors opening and shutting, the rip of plastic packages, the tap of metal on metal as a solution was prepared. The room filled with an acrid smell that stung Jennifer's eyes and throat. Cloying like children's Calpol, too sweet to be natural, trying and failing to mask something chemical underneath.

With an air of reverence, the nurse took a large syringe filled with a cloudy solution from the tray table and held it aloft as she approached Jennifer with measured steps. Jennifer's arm tensed beneath the nurse's cold fingers as she pinned her in place. In one quick motion the nurse administered the injection, causing Jennifer to wince as the cold liquid seeped into her veins.

Gradually it warmed to match her body's heat as it spread inside her. Her eyes watered as she tried to stay still desperately wanting those lost memories of Norah to return, even if they were just days, hours, minutes. She wanted to remember how it felt to hold her – and how she had come to lose her.

The nurse's voice echoed from somewhere behind her. "I'll be back to check on you in thirty minutes."

Jennifer noticed that straps had been places over her wrists and her ankles, securing her to the chair. When had the nurse done that? She must have moved fast. Jennifer thought of the sweet little face in the photo in her pocket, closed her eyes, and waited for the memories to flood back, hoping to see those little eyes come to life, sparkling in her memory the way she imagined they would.

A solid word – PREGNANT – printed on a white stick. Strong arms wrapping tight around her, lifting her high, sharing her excitement.

“We are going to be parents!” A hushed rush of words escaping her mouth. John’s blue-grey eyes shining with tears, putting a hand to her stomach with pride. Sharing their news; hugs from her mother, father; handshakes from John's dad. Sarah, Joan, and Deirdre's squeals of excitement for her over brunch. Softly singing “Hush Little Baby” every night to her growing bump.

The debilitating tiredness and sickness, wave after wave. The scans, the fear, the crippling uncertainty. Hand pressing on her belly, cold metal rods probing inside her. They just smiled down at her, not listening, not talking to her, not answering her worries.

Waters gushing out of her in their bed in the middle of the night, a little early but okay, she was thirty-eight weeks. An excited trip to the hospital smiling at John, holding his knee and her bump as he drove those dark streets. A look of contented bemusement on his face now that they were so close to their baby. Staff buzzing around them in the hospital, screams from other women, not knowing what to do. Pacing, waiting, waiting, and pacing. Then the pain, oh that pain, groaning screams from deep inside her.

Trying and failing to push the baby out, gripped with terror as her body was splitting open, pulled apart, shredded from the inside. John's eyes wide with fear as she was wheeled off surrounded by doctors, walls dripping away as she fell under, pulled down, lost, suspended in time. Then being yanked back into life with a void in her stomach where they tugged her child from her, ripped the tiny form from inside her failed body.

Norah was cold when they handed her to Jennifer. Her sweet baby Norah, named for her grandmother. Her longed-for beloved baby girl, cold and motionless. They hadn't closed her eyes; those eyes, the same blue-grey as John's stared blankly up at Jennifer in the hospital bed where she bled. She rocked her still form, singing "Hush Little Baby" for the one and only time without flesh separating them.

John looked on in terror at his partner, the mother of death. He balked when she asked him to get into a picture with them. A picture of the three of them together was what she wanted, a memento of their little family. John backed away, left the room, left them alone. It was a nurse on the bereavement team who had brought the Polaroid camera out, snapped the picture of Norah and Jennifer. She handed it to her, a sick consolation prize, as she tried to take the small cold body from her arms.

Jennifer pulled Norah back. "I need to close her eyes! She needs sleep!" she screamed at them all while reaching for Norah's face. Her nails made eerie, bloodless contact. Norah's eyes wouldn't close. Jennifer tugged down again and again at those little lids, desperate for them to close, as the midwives tried to pull the body away.

Then she saw that Norah's eyes were expanding, filling up that little face with deep blue-grey holes, swirling pools of cloudy mess replacing her dead eyes.

"She's alive!" Jennifer raged. "Look, her eyes are moving." Jennifer stared into the cloudy mess where her daughter's eyes were swirling, transfixed. Her small newborn mouth opening in a contorted suckling motion that wouldn't be satiated. A black mouth expanding outwards, sucking Jennifer in, swallowing her whole, dragging her into a dark, cavernous void of despair.

"So, how are we doing?" The nurse's voice brought Jennifer back.

She strained to open her eyes, trying to return to reality.

"Jennifer, how are you doing?"

Jennifer felt the nurse's cold hands around her wrist as she blinked, letting in a crack of light. A smell like bleach emanated from her. Jennifer's mouth felt like

cotton had been stuffed in it as she tried to say she was okay.

“Jennifer, how are you doing?” the nurse barked again.

As Jennifer looked up, her eyes adjusting, the room coming into focus, the nurse's dark eyes began to slide slowly down her face, opening into two massive holes that spread from her forehead to her dripping cheekbones. Inside those holes, a swirling mass of cloudy blue-grey liquid. All Jennifer could do was scream, her body tied down in the chair. The nurse's grotesque swirling eyes pulled her back down, deep into that terrible void within them.



What That Dog Doing by Conor Bailey




Uncensored

A poem by Wini Hannigan

I always declare that someone
Somewhere, should speak about
Something, sort of, maybe taboo
Like how when I was five
I believed my body wasn't mine
When I was seven, I was told
What a woman wants
At age fourteen I met him
The third person who came
And felled the trees of my fortress
I grew older and hated more
Furious at this vessel of mine
At age nineteen, I was asked
What I was wearing, by a solicitor
Sixty-year-old male, fourteen-year-old female
But let's focus on my outfit
Someone should really speak
Speak about how we suffer once
At their hands





Then again as our minds punish us
Berate us for allowing the man
The person, the perpetrator,
To mould us like clay.
I'd like to tell you about shame
It didn't belong to me
But boy did I claim it
I scrubbed my eight-year-old body
Until it bled beneath my vigour
I hid behind my books
Until I hid behind alcohol
Until I hid behind razors
While they walked, they walked free
Death claimed two of the devils
Even this did not liberate my mind
They break free from their slumber
To haunt my mind, my dreams
Dates on the calendar are reminders
Places carry the weight of your ghost
Someone should really talk about this,
Maybe someone just did.



The Other Side by Delphine Arnault

Did Jesus Give Me Salmonella?

A non-fiction piece by Chris Tiernan

It was during a week of illness that I contemplated my relationship with faith.

I never considered myself a man of faith. Perhaps I was once, but there are circumstances which can happen to a person in which it becomes incredibly easy to reject the virtues of divine conviction.

I have seen the decay of those closest to me. All that was left was a shell and the constant drip of saliva. I could not understand how an all-creator could create such a disorder.

I have experienced possibly the rawest, most debilitating form of betrayal. The kind of betrayal where consequences don't necessarily take effect. A person you thought completed you, turns out to be the person who incentivises a fall down a long, cold road of self-destruction. In moments like these, belief in people, belief in yourself, and your understanding of good and evil can become skewered.

Somewhere down the line, I subscribed to the beliefs of Camus and Beckett in which life was argued to be inherently meaningless. That existence is absurd. And apparently, it is our responsibility to try and find meaning, within the meaningless. Now that is the hard part.

The toxicity I felt as a boy in school appeared to intensify as a man about to enter his twenties. If, like me, you do not tread carefully, such toxicity, magnified by the era of social media, can take hold of you and direct you towards total surrender.

The kind of people I involved myself with; it would be untrue to call them my friends. The way it works is – “You have 50 – 100 euros cash on hand, and you're more than welcome to sit on this dingy couch, in this filthy apartment and destroy yourself with us.”

I witnessed people make life choices that perhaps, even to this day, they're still trying to run away from. Thankfully, I avoided succumbing to addictions hard

enough to truly cripple my chances of recovery. It was a frightening part of my life, to say the least, but this was complete desperation. We tend to give up in many different ways, and this aggressive bout with addiction and my ever-progressing trust issues carried on into my mid-twenties.

As a result, my first year at UCD had gone to waste. There were groups I tried to wedge into, but it didn't feel like I belonged. (Self-sabotage is a prick.), and there were events that I showed up for and ran away from.

In fact, the one event that recognised my efforts in creative writing – I ran from. Isolation rewires the brain. The will of the mind is stronger than we expect. Have you ever seen Pixar's *Ratatouille*? I too used to have a stupid little blue rat nestled in my hair.

What brought me out of this cavity? Possibly revisiting the depths of dear sweet Virginia Woolf. Possibly IDLES proving the guitar still has a purpose. Possibly *Poor Things* being the most inspiring film I have witnessed since *There Will Be Blood*.

Realistically, it was the scrupulous efforts of UCD's Health Centre. It isn't irrational to dismiss therapy and medication, as well as rehabilitation, but were it not for UCD's diligent mental health workers, I probably would have dropped out. Or worse.

During 'refresher's day' 2024, I was looking for the Mature Student Society but could not find it. I happened upon a member of UCD's Christian society for help. She said she didn't know but would help me find it. We strolled around the hall looking for it but to no avail. As we passed UCD's Philosophy Society for the third time, I settled on that table being my final sign-up.

She asked me if I was interested in the Christian society, and I said I didn't know anything about Christianity and The Gospel. Of course, I knew exactly where my feet were planted, but she took the time out of a busy hour to help me. So for that, I felt grateful and thought it only fair I accepted her invitation.

I agreed to attend her event that evening where Lewis Trilemma was being discussed. She asked me for my Instagram. I didn't have one. So, she insisted on

giving me her number. After collective praying and multiple sing-alongs, I felt like I had made a mistake. I knew this wasn't my environment, and yet the irony was it was the only place I felt welcomed thus far.

Every single person there was lovely. *Was it authentic?* Well, should it have mattered to me? In times of such despondency, beggars can't be choosers.

Nevertheless, it was the pastor who struck a chord with me. He gave us a three-part lecture on why Christ was more than just a messianic historical figure. He explained how the *Lewis Trilemma* was a concept introduced by C.S. Lewis in his apologetics for the Christian faith. Lewis proposed a logical analysis of Jesus Christ's identity based on his declarations about himself. He argued that Jesus, having claimed divine status, leaves us with only three possible conclusions: he was either lying, making him a lunatic; he was deluded, believing himself to be God when he was not, which also makes him a lunatic; or he was indeed who he claimed to be—Lord. This trilemma—Liar, Lunatic, or Lord—challenges sceptics by asserting that the only logical conclusion, if Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic, is to recognize him as Lord.

There was something intrinsically admirable about his efforts. Who was I to question him? Anyone there for that matter. After my obstacles, who was I to disrespect what brings one sanctuary? Despite this, I felt compelled to slip out before 'tea and coffee time.' I had listened carefully with a healthy sense of empathy, and I had a lot of things to consider, but alas, this was just another stroke in my tally of misfit realms.

Later that night, there was something unsettled in my stomach. It turned out to be salmonella. I could have sworn I cooked the chicken. I even sought the advice of my mother who has been cooking since she was seven, and she was confident it was done. And sometimes, to question the confidence of a mother is to question the solidity of water. And yet, for the next three days, I was bedridden and vomiting.

When you're this unwell, you have a lot of time to think for yourself. Screens and audio can be painful. I was quite literally doing nothing but tossing and turning and staring up at the ceiling. One of the first things I thought about was arguably the

most serious thing I have ever thought about – Was my life worth living as everyone seemed to tell me it was? I was still in recovery, and during Christmas and the New Year celebrations, I found myself in some pathetic situations. It was a real wake-up call.

The second night I reflected on my age, knowing by the time I got my degree, I would be entering my thirties. Now I was beginning to understand that things were a little more serious than I had initially thought. When you're young, there is a certain level of arrogance that leads you to believe things like addiction and self-harm will just magically work itself out. As if you can wave your hand and say to yourself "Ah. It will be grand. I'll think about that later. We'll deal with that when it's worth dealing with".

It's unfortunate to confess, perhaps even problematic, but my first year at UCD was extremely miserable. Yet, throughout these three days and nights of constant vomiting, cold sweats, and fever dreams – what dreams I could have due to sleep deprivation; I was beginning to ask myself if I was coming out of this a better man. A smarter man. A more empathetic and trustful man. Someone capable of loving themselves again.

And just as I started to feel better, I couldn't stop thinking about that night I attended the Christian Society event. Nowadays, more and more people like to think it's silly and surreal to pray, sing and feel genuine joy over something as dividing as God and Jesus Christ.

I'm not saying I have completely changed my perspective. I'm not saying that "*I have found Jesus. Oh lord, I have seen the light!*", but after reflecting on a lifetime of self-abuse, rage and despair, I can only surmise there is no harm in latching onto certain things that bring people together, in earnestness, and in the hopes one can extract even an inkling of meaning and purpose.

During my time at UCD, there were moments when I seriously considered checking myself into St. Vincents and showing them a letter the campus had provided me with in case it was necessary. For, all meaning and purpose seemed to be fleeting.

And on the third day of illness, I saw the light! because something as simple as taking time out of your schedule to help a stuttering idiot try and find a place where

he might finally belong; even something as small and simple as that can provide a gargantuan amount of solace.

There was still part of me, a rude, silly, cynical part of me which still existed, and it couldn't help itself— "*Did too much Jesus make me vomit?*"

More importantly, I reflected on climbing out of a hole and having a new attitude and appreciation for life. So this is why I could not help asking myself, *was* there some divine intervention? Was it just *really* just the Prozac? The therapy? UCD's Sports & Fitness Gym?

Therein lies another problem. Alcoholism has affected my memory, and I have to live with that, but what I can't forget is what people are capable of, what mere existence is capable of, and what *I* am capable of.

Did the hand of God provide me with some strength?

I am still debating this. Even right now as the cold drips of rain soak my notebook, and my hand quivers with ache.

Hemingway said, "*Writing is easy. All you have to do is sit at your typewriter and bleed for 300 Pages?*". Writing is the only way I can make sense of anything.

I used to believe that no matter the isolation and the loneliness, if I wrote with honesty and vulnerability, I would find acceptance in this world. I would belong.

But so far, this path has been fruitless. Writing is a lonely art. And yet, true loneliness doesn't always come from social alienation but from feeling like you are forbidden to communicate things that are important to you.

So please understand that I am bleeding. Profusely. Constantly.

However, the crossroads appear clearer than ever, and compared to my problems of the past, this feels like a luxury.

I can't stop thinking if my newfangled efforts to provide my life with some additional meaning have had some celestial assistance.

I just don't know. It seems like we are in a constant cycle of trading one pain for another, and right now, I feel okay about my current transaction. I can't remember the last time I felt something like this.



Dune by Robin Mentel

Seagull by Robin Mentel



Conor Pass

A poem by Edie Weinstein

Four girls and a speaker makes the time fly
houses punctuate trees, then sharpen

into stones

Now, the terrain untamable,
water oozes around icy bulbs on rock faces
and sprawls in sinister sheets

across the road
over which the car now picks its way
through the Conor Pass

Film flitting behind my lens
imprints itself with
verdant carpets swinging between ancient mountains,
mist shrouding their shoulders
as fast as my finger can click the shutter

Enameled sheep cast a cold eye
on life, on death
as we horsemen ride by

A seagull stares.
I stare back.
An interloper in his Kerry comedy.

Sunshine splices shadows across tiered
turns
Cascading seafoam rims the islands' edge,
cushioning sleeping giants

And beneath this walled drop,
reincarnated waves surge against rocks
before splitting to pirouette
into new crevasses

And our little car slices through it all
we turn up the volume
and
wind on down the road.





Horseman, Pass By by Edie Weinstein

From Switzerland

A short story by Chris Tiernan

I discover the first letter because of Ellen's purse. Although I wouldn't call it a purse, more like a large bag. Whenever she looks for something, she buries both hands into what looks like the void, rummaging through the innumerable items – pens; empty pouches of tobacco; plastic grinders; loose change; broken lighters; sticks of gum; damp paperbacks; and cosmetics.

After dinner and a movie at The Stella Theatre, we go back to her apartment. The doorman gives me a knowing smile. We sway in the elevator and stumble arm-in-arm towards her door. We are flushed from the meal, drinks, the walk back and a sense of romantic expectation.

She reaches into the bag to look for the key. After probing through the mess in her purse, she finally pulls out a key and inserts it into the lock, but it is the wrong key. After this, she drops the bag onto the floor and gets down on her knees. She smiles at me and reaches back into the bag. This is when she draws out a frayed white envelope with a doodle of a heart in blue biro.

“Oh yeah,” she says. “This is what I was telling you about. From my sister in San Francisco.” She suggests I read it while she looks for the key.

I take the envelope from her, and she swings back around to grab her purse with an almost adorable ferocity. She turns it upside down and empties everything onto the floor. Her disorganisation and her inability to find things drive me crazy. When we first met, I was amused by it, but now it has evolved into exasperation.

I have no intention of reading it, but when I take it out of the envelope, I realise she has given me the wrong letter. Instead of her sister, I have a letter from her former professor Dr Burroughs. Ellen has told me about this man before. She was his favourite student, and he was her favourite teacher.

She had told me that Dr Burroughs had moved to Zermatt, Switzerland to teach full-time, but now I learn he has retired. As I read on, something more interesting catches my attention.

‘Ell, I cannot forget about our last sauna together. The way you tied me up

and hit me with those gigantic willow branches has left an indelible impression on my memory. I know you think I'm too old for you, and I realise my paralysis is increasing rapidly – admittedly, I am dictating this letter to my valet, but I don't have long to live, and I can't bear the thought of living my last days without you. Ell, I want you to know that I'm prepared to leave you my house in Kerry. And more. Whether or not you come to me, I'll leave it all to you.'

I slowly fold up the letter, put it back into the envelope and return it to her without comment. She is still on all fours with the contents of her life scattered all around her.

That night we make love. In the morning, we only talk about what movie to see.

Ellen will lose many things in the space of a couple of weeks, flimsy corner shop umbrellas or cheap scarves she finds in charity shops. But if there is one thing that infuriates me the most, it's the gloves because they're not just any gloves. In contrast to all the other items, it is always an expensive pair made from sleek lambskin with a soft, red velvet internal lining.

So, the following night we decide on Villeneuve's DUNE. I book our seats in the middle row. We settle ourselves, – the trailers are already over, the film's about to begin, and everyone is quieting down but Ellen begins to squirm. First, she darts her head to the right, then to the left. She leans over to me and whispers, "I think I lost another glove."

"Well let's look for it after the movie," I whisper.

"I don't know where it is. I can't find it. I know I had it with me when we came in."

She stands up and looks down at where she's sitting. Then she asks me to stand up for a moment, gently pushing me forward so she can look at my seat. I hate this. I want to watch the movie and avoid making a spectacle of myself.

"Don't worry. I guarantee you it will be in the same place when the lights come up and the movie is over."

Shaking her head, she doesn't seem to understand me. It is like she has this

irrational fear that the longer the film goes on, this glove will get further away from her as if some unseen hand, from some unseen force, is separating her from this item with every passing minute.

She noisily searches through her purse, dropping some things onto the floor in the process. When that provides no results, she goes through her coat, and then she looks through my coat. She asks the people in the next row if they've seen her glove. I know everyone is bothered by us, but they try to be polite, and say, "No, we haven't, sorry." By this point the heat in my ears is excruciating.

"I'm just going to turn on my phone and use the flashlight," she says.

The nuisance of turning on a flashlight in the middle of a film is obvious, but I just say to her, "Your phone will play a loud start-up sound once you turn it on."

"Look, Mark, I don't want to lose another glove. I have lost too many already."

Even though it's dark, I can tell she is just as embarrassed about this whole situation as I am. She starts to clumsily brush past the people next to us. I watch her storm down the stairs, and my eyes continue to follow this tall, slender, black silhouette marching under and across the gigantic screen. Her heels aggressively echo throughout the theatre. I decide against chasing after her.

Further into the film, I reach under my chair and make a half-hearted attempt to find this damn glove. My fingers graze across scattered bits of popcorn before I finally feel smooth leather. There is something stuck to the glove – a folded-up piece of paper. It's another letter from Dr Burroughs.

I choose to read it during the desert scenes when the theatre is filled with light. What strikes me is, it is dated from only a few months ago. Again, he goes on about their nights of passion together.

'Ell, that night you brought a smile upon my face the likes I haven't worn for many years. Wheeling me around the driveway of the chalet after cocktails was a good laugh, but what solidified everything for me was your earnest spontaneity. Watching you burst out into the garden and dance naked in the snow whilst Chet

Baker sang to us about falling in love too easily...Ell, it was everything to me.’

I think I know the night Dr Burroughs is talking about. After what she told me was a weekend away to Switzerland for a literature festival, she spoke to me of her newfound obsession with Chet Baker and his ‘delicious’ voice.

I drop the glove down the side of my seat, and sit in the theatre, blindly staring at the screen.

It's the week of our anniversary. We have a date on the weekend, but tonight, friends of ours have booked us a table at a classy Italian restaurant called Rosa Madre. I arrive at Ellen's apartment one hour early. I bring a bottle of Woodford Reserve bourbon – our favourite, a bouquet of peonies and a vintage hardback of Anaïs Nin's *Delta of Venus*. I ring the doorbell, and Ellen greets me in a pair of pink tracksuit bottoms and the Velvet Underground t-shirt I gave to her. The place is a mess. Clothes are strewn all over, and her next-door neighbour Maria is there. Last year, after a string of nervous breakdowns, her husband left her in the middle of the night. She fears he may have killed himself.

Trying to be a good neighbour, Ellen listens to Maria's wrenching accounts of misery and loneliness. But finally, Maria leaves, and Ellen goes into the bathroom. She calls out to me: “There are some of those clear ice balls you like in the freezer. Go make yourself a drink.” She turns on the shower. I hear her singing to herself.

I gulp down some of the bourbon as I pace back and forth impatiently. Ellen takes inordinately long showers. I peruse her apartment, picking up old sweaters and folding them into a pile. I get tired of this, and I make another drink.

I start doing laps around her bedroom before I notice a dusty old book on her nightstand. I pick it up with bored curiosity. It is a copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. I can't say I have any genuine interest in it, but then I notice a folded-up piece of paper being used as a bookmark. Immediately, I recognise the postmark, and also the handwriting – *Love From Switzerland*.

Somewhat reluctantly, I am drawn to read this third letter. I toss the book

onto her bed and unfold it hurriedly. This time, there is a sketch of a crippled man and a younger woman entwined in a highly suggestive, complex embrace. Written underneath is the following:

'Death waits for me, but Switzerland waits for you. Counting down the days until your arrival. The excitement prevents me from sleeping. Despite the fibrillations and the spreading tumours, my doctor assures me I'm still functional.

I am ready for the long sleep. So kiss me goodnight.'

I slip the letter back into a random page. Then the landline rings. I pick it up, and it's Ellen's mother calling from Belfast. She's upset and in tears. Ellen's younger brother Matthew is in trouble again.

I say, "Okay, hold on Cheryl. I'll get her. One second."

"I'll be right out," Ellen says.

She turns off the water, puts on a robe and sits down on the bed to talk with her mother. Here's the problem with Matthew – he's a compulsive voyeur with a history of sex addiction, and now he has been arrested for sneaking into the ladies' room of the Clayton Hotel.

I am taken aback by this. I suddenly remember when Ellen and I started dating, she wanted me to tell her exactly when I'd be arriving at her building so she could stand in the window and undress slowly, letting me watch her from down in the alley. I admit, I found this kind of stuff profoundly arousing.

But now I wonder if Ellen encouraged this form of behaviour in her brother. I conclude that this thought isn't something I want to pursue, especially with a stomach full of whiskey. Besides, we're already late and I'm growing more and more agitated. I remind her we have a dinner party to get to, and eventually she hangs up.

Finally, after getting changed and putting on makeup, she puts on a silver earring, but she can't find the other one and starts looking for it all over the apartment.

"I'm going to call and warn them we'll be late," I say.

"Fine Mark. Go ahead." She says.

"Well, please hurry up," I say.

“What difference does it make,” she says. “They don’t serve dinner the minute everyone arrives.”

“Ellen, I’m just—”

“When they say 7:30, they don’t really mean 7:30.” She is still running around the apartment. She knocks over the piles of clothes I created. “Why are you being so uptight lately? And why do you have to be the first one at a party? You know you’ll have nobody to talk to.” She grabs her cigarette case from the nightstand and lights this thin cigarette, then she leans against her windowsill. “And anyway, it’s polite not to come too soon.”

And I say, “There is no way we can get there early, I’ll tell you that much.”

She gives up on the earrings and now she’s dressed and made up. We are stepping out into the corridor and closing the door when the phone starts to ring again.

“Forget it,” I say.

“It’ll just take a second.”

“For god’s sake Ellen, we’re forty-five minutes late. We’re going to miss dinner. Your answering machine will get it.”

“It’s been malfunctioning. I have to get it fixed. Look, you go on ahead then.”

I see no point in leaving alone for the party just to save two minutes. She goes back into the apartment, and I stand in the doorway because I’m afraid that if I don’t continue to make it clear we’re in a hurry, we’ll never get out.

I watch her pick up the phone. “Yes? Yes, it is.” She sits on the bed, putting her head in her hand, listening quietly.

“What happened?” I say.

“My old mentor. Dr Burroughs. He just died. His assistant asked me to attend the funeral.”

I lie to her and say, “I didn’t know you were that close.”

“Come in. Close the door.”

I sit down beside her. She brings over an ashtray and two cigarettes. I find that I am no longer worrying about the dinner party, about our anniversary. It doesn’t matter. There are a lot of things that don’t matter now.

“Talk to me,” I say.

“Well, we worked on a major research project in the Sahara. Richard, Dr Burroughs, I mean, we worked very closely, studying the impacts of climate change on the desert’s ecosystem. We would analyse pattern shifts in the dunes using satellite imagery and ground-based observations, things like that. About halfway through the project, I was bitten by a scorpion. I was delirious, but Richard never left my side. He was there to change my dressing and give me alcohol rubdowns. Mark, I don’t just owe him my intellectual development. I owe him my life.”

I know she’s leaving out one profound aspect of the story. “How did you stay in touch for so long?”

“We started writing to each other once he went back to London.”

“How often?”

“Why does that matter?”

“Sorry.”

“Oh, I don’t know Mark. Maybe every six months or so.”

She takes a long drag from her cigarette, blowing smoke out through her nostrils. “Listen, I have to go. I have to go to the funeral. But I need you with me.”

The situation fascinates me. I have been reading this man’s love letters for weeks now, and yet I still can’t believe it when I say, “Of course, I’ll come if you want me to.”



Mountain Road by Robin Mentel

Le chéile¹

A poem by Chloe King

The body bag may be used as the inner lining of the coffin.

Is féidir le roinnt daoine seassamb ar thaobh an bboithar,²

Ó tharla gurb ócaíd bhrónach atá i gceist.³

Doing this with you would bring me no joy.

Ach ní aon duine eile arbh fhearr liom é a dbéanamh leis.⁴

Inner guilt,

And to be ethical merely by accident.

Both sides suffer the same destruction

and have been ruined.

Split into a conscious and unconscious part

Omnipotent and righteous destiny

Has wrenched himself free

From the divine and human law,

The human point of view does not tolerate duality.

We must remember that by birth we shouldn't fight *leis an mbás*.⁵

I'm being compelled.

I will obey those in control

*chun caointeoirí a chosaint.*⁶

¹ Together

² Some people can stand on the side of the road

³ Since it is a sad occasion

⁴ But there's no one else I'd rather do it with

⁵ with death

⁶ to protect the mourners



Carpet Burn by Tadhg McDonogh-Cunningham

A Wing and a Prayer

A short story by Carole Wood

TW: violence, reference to sexual abuse

“You say you like animals but then you eat chicken.”

“Chicken isn’t an animal,” Gina replied, mouth full.

“Chicken is a bird.”

“It’s not a dog, though.”

“Yeah, Gina, ‘cause it’s a bird.” I squirmed around, trying in vain to get comfortable on the hard plastic seat of the cheapo diner we were eating at: Thelma’s Truckstop Tucker.

“Birds are stupid. They don’t feel the same way as dogs,” she replied.

“Are you saying animals have feelings based solely on their intelligence?”

Gina dropped the chicken wing she’d been gnawing on for the past five minutes.

“You’re eating an actual bird’s wing.”

She shrugged. “It tastes good.”

“You’re sick, you know that?”

“Takes one to know one, Cass.”

“At least I’m not a hypocrite.”

“Are you going to eat that?” she asked, pointing to my grilled cheese. I’d gotten through half the sorry excuse for a sandwich and given up. Looking at Gina chewing on animal parts hadn’t helped.

“Be my guest,” I said, pushing the plate towards her.

“You eat dairy.”

“They don’t murder animals for milk.”

“Yeah, but it’s still slavery. It’s not like they have a choice, right?”

I sighed. “Technically, no.”

“Then it’s almost as bad as eating meat.” She took a bite of the sandwich and chewed it smugly.

“It’s not great,” I conceded. “If I didn’t love cheese so much, I’d be vegan.”

“If I didn’t love meat so much, I’d be vegetarian.”

“Touché.” I took a sip of my coffee and picked at the cuticle on my left thumbnail. The dairy issue haunted me, but there was no vegan food available in our culinary wasteland of a hometown.

Gina swiped at her mouth with a paper napkin and flung it onto the plate. “No judgement here.”

“It just makes me unbelievably sad thinking of all those animals dying for nothing. Humans don’t even need meat to survive. And don’t get me started on Thanksgiving and Christmas . . . or fucking Easter. So much gets thrown away. Like lambs aren’t innocent babies with mothers same as us. Or turkeys don’t have emotions. Claim ignorance just so you can gobble down that flesh and then complain about being too full afterwards. Oh, but when someone hurts a dog it’s like Jesus has been crucified all over again—”

Gina’s eyes had gone wide. “You are one angry bastard, Cass. I mean, respect. But, did it work?”

“Huh?”

“Your whole spiel. Ask me if I’m converted.”

I didn’t like where this was going. Gina had a habit of verbally corralling me when I least expected it. “Well, are you?”

“No, and I’ll tell you why: people like me don’t care. We don’t wanna know ‘cause we’d rather just go on with our lives, doing whatever we feel like and not thinking about the consequences. Or the process for that matter. This is the world we live in, Cass. At least I can admit that.”

My eyes narrowed. “So, you’re saying you’ll never stop eating animals because you don’t care?”

She clicked her fingers and pointed at me in a rapid motion that resembled cocking a pistol. “Exactly.”

I finished my coffee and tucked five dollars under the salt shaker. “Looks like I need to reconsider my whole approach to vegetarianism.”

Gina threw down another five that landed in a spot of hot sauce. She left it there. “How so?”

“Well, if what you’re saying is true then there’s no point in trying to make people stop eating meat. That way lies madness, right?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“So, I’ll just do my own thing. Be the change I want to see in the world.” We both laughed a little too loudly at that. The waitress glanced our way, then went back to pouring coffee. I gave her a big smile as we left.

It was drizzling and gloomy out.

“I don’t get you sometimes. It’s not like you know these animals personally. And considering your stance on some other things I could mention—”

“I don’t need to know an animal personally to have compassion for them.”

“Hold up—”

“What?” I could hear another corralling coming.

“Do you feel the same way about people?”

“Some.”

“Ah,” she said, nodding. “Now, I get it. Animals being killed for meat doesn’t bother me because I’d probably eat humans too if they were on the menu.”

“You’re joking.”

“I’m not. What’s the difference?”

We reached Gina’s car, a hulking old Ford that was once shiny black. You wouldn’t look twice at it now. We clambered inside.

“Apart from the yuck factor, there is none,” I concluded. “It’s all meat, all murder. Morrissey had that right.”

“See, now we’re on the same page.”

“The same book maybe.”

“Let’s agree to disagree.”

She slipped some experimental jazz into the stereo and I groaned. “Only insane people can enjoy this music, Gina.”

“Maybe you could learn something from it. Y’know, go with the flow more.”

“Maybe.” I pulled up the hood of my black raincoat in an attempt to deaden some of the noise. When we arrived at the location it was dusk and the drizzle

had intensified to a downpour.

“How long?”

She checked the time on the dash. “About twenty minutes.”

Cars trickled by for a while and then the street was quiet. The rain beat a syncopated rhythm on the metal roof. Dusk gave way to night, illuminated in patches by the amber streetlights. Pools of water winked and rippled their reflections, except for the light above us. That one had been out for two days.

“Ready?” Gina asked, pulling up the hood of her own raincoat.

I nodded and we exited the car quietly. The house was around the corner, the last duplex in a small cul-de-sac. Curtains or shades were drawn in nine of the twelve houses, including Number 6, our destination. Gina and I kept to the shadows as much as possible anyway.

When we reached the house, we made sure to keep off the grass, using the walkway to get around back. At the French doors we paused to pull on our masks: rubbery nightmares with distended noses and bulging chins.

The lights were on in the dining room, a big wicker fan contraption over the table that revolved lazily but emitted a bright yellow glare.

I gave Gina a thumbs up and we put on our gloves. She produced lock picks from the pocket of her raincoat and set to work on the sliding door. I kept an eye out for anyone who might spoil our surprise. A series of clicks and she was in. I slid the door open a crack, just to test the noise level. A burst of canned laughter spilled through the gap, possibly from a T.V. No one stirred, so I slid it back far enough for us to slip through. Once inside, I locked the door and made a beeline for the light switch by the kitchen door. I flicked it off and turned to Gina, who was spookily illuminated by the dim glow filtering through the glass panels of the kitchen door, her eyes black holes.

Droplets of water from our raincoats made a soft, pattering sound as they dripped to the tile floor. Gina handed me a towel from a hook by the sink and I swiftly dried the soles of my sneakers. She did the same, then swiped the floor and threw the towel by the door to grab on the way out. Sneaking wasn't possible

in wet shoes.

I removed my Glock from the shoulder holster concealed beneath my coat and screwed the suppressor on; the click of metal on metal felt strangely satisfying. Gina attached one to her own; she used a Sig Sauer P320. She said the trigger was crisper than on the Glock 19 but I didn't see the difference.

When we were ready, she opened the kitchen door. It emitted a rather loud mouse-like squeak and we froze simultaneously. From the front room came a chuckle, coinciding with more canned laughter from what I was now positive was a television. Bluish light flickered through the partly open door. We advanced down the hallway in tandem. My gun was mostly for backup, in case something went wrong. It never had, but I always said preparation was the key to success.

When we reached the living room door, Gina raised her left hand indicating a count of three. My muscles tensed as my heart sped up, but the adrenaline felt necessary. On three, she kicked open the door and I went in first. That way I could make sure the target was alone.

A man in a worn, brown recliner sat facing the television. It was the type that swivels, and when he heard the intrusion, it spun around so fast he almost went three-sixty. He was about forty-five, with dark hair, some silver strands poking through, and a day or two's worth of stubble on his jowls. This. The face that sweet little girl saw as he loomed over her.

Dirty-blue, sunken eyes widened as they took in me and then Gina, who had stepped into the room behind me. She didn't even let him get out a whimper before she shot him three times: the first two in the chest and the third down low. The Sig emitted a muffled *phew-phew-phew* sound, the explosive gases of the gunshots tamed by the suppressor but not completely extinguished.

Joseph Garrett slammed into the backrest of the recliner which set it spinning madly. His expression was of a person who had jumped into freezing water, eyes like bloodshot O's circling. When the recliner's revolutions slowed, I grabbed the armrest and stepped around a puddle of his urine on the floor. Gina was reloading her gun, with real bullets this time.

I forced him to look directly into my eyes. “Listen to me you piece of shit. Next time it’s your *blood* all over the floor. If you ever hurt another child, or even look at one the wrong way we’re coming back to finish the job.”

Even with blanks, the pressurized gas being forced through the barrel could do real damage at close range. It was possible he’d lose a testicle, but that was just part of The Treatment.

I seized a fistful of his greasy hair and yanked. “Hey! Do you understand me?” My head was beginning to ache from the stink of the rubber mask. I wanted to go home and take a long bath. “Say ‘yes ma’am’ or she’s going to shoot you for real.”

Garrett glanced at Gina’s frightening disguise, swallowed loudly and warbled, “Yes ma’am.”

There was a thump overhead.

I glared at Gina, talking to her with my eyes. There wasn’t supposed to be anyone else here.

She shrugged. We’d done our homework: Garrett lived alone. I reloaded my own weapon and held it on the scumbucket in case he tried to make a run for it. But judging by his pained expression, he wouldn’t be running anywhere for awhile.

Gina held a finger to her lips and tiptoed out the door to investigate. I listened for her almost imperceptible footsteps as she climbed the stairs. I hated when plans had hitches. Stepping backwards into the hall with my gun still trained on Garrett, I chanced a peek up the darkened stairway. Gina was standing outside the room where the thump originated. I held my breath.

The sound of her laugh startled me. I was about to ask what was so amusing when a dark shape rushed down the stairs coming straight for me. I stumbled aside and it went streaking down the hallway and into the kitchen. I almost yelped, but recovered myself just in time.

It was only a cat. A large, long-haired cat.

Gina cackled again from the top of the stairs. “You should see your face!”

“I thought we were screwed.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I had us covered.”

“I was convinced he had his mother or something up there.”

“Or a kid . . .”

“Yeah, or that.” My heart was pounding. “Let’s get the fuck out of here, G.”

“With pleasure.”

I glanced back at Garrett hunched over in pain and then down the hallway.

“What about the cat?”

“What about it?”

“Can’t leave it here.”

“Why not?”

“This *man* doesn’t deserve a cat. And we’ll probably be back anyway. Guys like him don’t change. I’m bringing it with us.”

“You are not. I forbid it.”

“What are you – my mother?”

“What if it starts yowling on the way out?”

“It won’t. They trust me.”

“Fine. But if it starts making noise, you’re the one who has to kill it.”

“It won’t,” I repeated.

We instructed Garrett to stay in the living room. Sure, he could grab a weapon and come after us but I knew he was a coward as well as a creep. These guys were all the same.

In the kitchen, I flipped on the light-switch long enough to locate the cat huddled under the dining room table, huge green eyes pinned on me like lasers. It was a tabby, very striking. I called softly to it and made myself as unthreatening as possible.

“Throw me the towel, G.”

She flung the damp towel at me and in one fluid motion I dropped to my haunches and threw it over the bewildered cat, then pinned it with my knees and rolled it up like a burrito. “See?”—I grinned—“Nothing to it.”

She muttered something I couldn’t hear and wrenched open the door for me. It was still raining. We pulled our hoods up and made our way to the front of the

house. The street looked like an empty set. The cat made a low meowing sound in its chest but didn't try to escape and we reached the car without incident.

"If that thing pisses in here you're going to be sorry," Gina said.

"Yeah, yeah. Just go. The job's not over 'til we get home, remember?" I opened the towel and the cat sat there in my lap, peering up at me with terrified eyes. "It's okay, baby. I'll take care of you."

Gina drove ten miles under the speed limit the whole way back. She dropped me and the cat, who I'd decided to call Lucky, outside my apartment. Dawn was approaching and the rain was finally starting to clear.

I put down a cardboard box with a blanket inside it and Lucky hid there for most of the day. Later, I checked my bitcoin wallet for the second half of my payment. Lucky watched me settle into the couch and cautiously exited the box. I was pretty sure she was a female. After some gentle encouragement she crawled into my lap. As I gazed into her laser-green eyes, I realized I would have to renege on my vegetarian ethics to buy her food.



Stray Cats of Krabi by Charline Chatelain



Sunset by Robin Mentel

Currents

A poem by Bea Basa

I sit, sometimes, and think of the sea
and what awaits in its frightening deep;
fears, unspeakable fears
and the jaws of the uncertain.

but as I feel the warmth of your hand in mine
—clamminess and all—
I remember the beauty
that is just as undiscovered

among seaweed and seashells, debris, and detritus
we wander a shoreline
of vast unknown.
a journey of uncertain proportions—
unanchored and unrelenting.

yet as the waves lap gently at our feet
I cannot help but think:

I wonder how the tide feels?

I wonder if it knows your name?

I wonder if it knows how lovely it is— how lucky it must be to hear you laugh?

you tell me about the expanses
of unexplored ocean
and what marvels must lay beneath—

but, as if tangled in the whirlwind clutches of Charybdis,
I find myself enthralled only
by your presence.

like sea-water swallowing my frail frame
a sudden surge of courage
envelops my lungs

*(I may as well
have drowned.)*

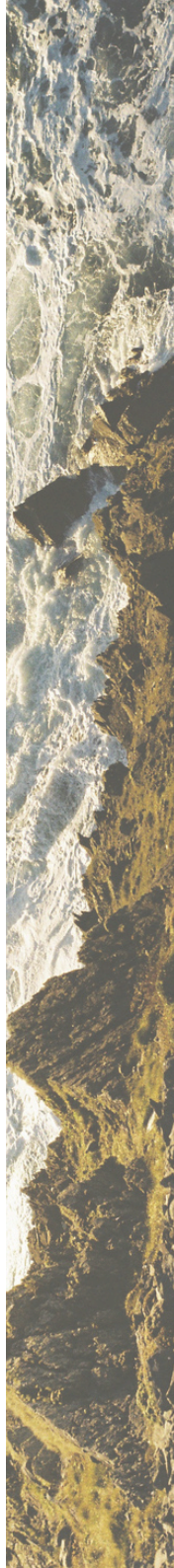
...

long gone are the unforgiving winds of before;
as I turn to you, I find
that only yours remain.

and as I am carried across your currents
a realisation rings
like a sweet, Siren song:
You are my truest love.

You are.

You *are*.





Photography by Edie Weinstein



Getting in touch and getting it done: An interview with Kiwi spoken word poet Ben Fagan

New Word Order draws on the unique strengths of its editorial team to create each issue anew. As an exchange student from New Zealand and Interview Editor for this issue, I tapped into my homeland's unique connections to have a conversation with spoken word poet and creative educator Ben Fagan.

This story from 'Down Under' gives you a glimpse into Fagan's journey to making a career in the creative industry. Fagan is a published poet and alongside his partner runs 'Motif Poetry' a company which organises poetry slams across New Zealand and writing workshops for young New Zealanders. When he isn't doing either of those things he is also the artistic director for the National Youth Drama School, which is a creative education program that I myself attended, and is where I first discovered Ben's work. I was delighted to sit down with one of my artistic inspirations to discover how he made it where he is today.

Ella Ruddle: Considering our *New Word Order* readership is largely Irish I thought it would be important to start by asking who are you? What is the elevator pitch for Ben Fagan?

Ben Fagan: Well as of right now I am sitting in an apartment in Auckland, I moved here one month ago with my partner and toddler after a fair amount of time in Wellington, NZ and London creating and performing spoken word poetry. I am from Hawke's Bay originally and I have just come off the back of a long time working in the arts as an artist myself but also working in arts education and facilitating poetry slams across New Zealand. I was appointed artistic director of National Youth Drama School and just got a new role in the media which is very interesting. A whole new world and a whole new bunch of learnings.

Ella Ruddle: We decided we would include a suggested prompt ‘Journey – what does journey mean to you’ in our call for submissions this year. I thought it would be equally interesting to track the journeys of our interviewees in this issue so looking back did you always know you wanted to end up as a writer and creative?

Ben Fagan: Depends on how young you're talking! I think I wanted to be a geologist when I was like 5, and then at 6 I probably wanted to be a bird or something but at some point I discovered performance. I found like-minded people in local community theatre, drama class and attending NYDS from when I was 14. I don't think I very had a clear plan or vision or direction of what I wanted to end up doing I just wanted to keep having interesting and fun experiences. It's only now that I draw a direct line from where I was to where I am. The discovery of poetry and writing was a massive unexpected left turn for me. I mean I was interested in English in high school but not writing my poetry. It wasn't until I went to a spoken word event, a poetry slam, that the world of performed poetry took me on its journey which I think I'm still on.

Ella Ruddle: So did this discovery of poetry coincide with your time at uni? What did you end up studying?

Ben Fagan: I started in a theatre degree but I found it too academic and theoretical so I jumped into a degree in philosophy and media and kind of stepped out of the arts for a couple of years. I think it was near the end of my 3-year degree and a friend of mine from high school texted me wondering if I would come along and support them in a poetry open mic. Naturally, I said I would and went along. What blew me away, other than a lot of great talent on stage, was the concept of spoken word poetry. You get to write your own story but you didn't have to be funny it was like a bonus if you were funny, you could be super serious or sad or happy or introspective whatever it was you could communicate a whole range of emotions which I enjoyed. Wellington was having a bit of a cultural moment I think, there had been a few spoken word artists who had grown a following through slams and whenever that happens it always drags some of the art form along with it.

Ella Ruddle: Not to linger on your 20s but as this is a university-run literary magazine and students are likely to read it, I guess one of our fears right now is what on earth do we do next. When you graduated did you feel a sense of ‘what on earth am I going to do?’

Ben Fagan: Oh definitely! So I became interested in spoken word in my last year of uni but when I got out I was unemployed. I got a data-entry grad role at the government which I bashed away at in real life but in the evenings I kept heading on to poetry nights and kept showing up. This was my first kind of introduction to actively writing all the time and I found a community that was writing heaps and going down to a cafe or a bar and trying stuff out on each other.

But, yes, obviously a career in poetry is not particularly well laid out, so I just kept kind of doing it and getting better and more confident. The kinds of gigs I was being booked for grew in variety and diversity and I started getting paid and travelling a little bit. I think it must have been 2 years of just showing up before I was invited to take a poetry show at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

My friend Jamie Sharp, who I was a NYDS student and teacher with in our early 20s and had planned, or knew at some point he wanted to run a venue at the festival in Edinburgh and said ‘hey if I was ever to do this would you want to bring a show over?’ I said yes and then in 2015 when his idea became a reality I wrote a 1 hour poetry show and took it over.

Ella Ruddle: So after doing Edinburgh you eventually moved to London, how did moving out of New Zealand change your writing?

Ben Fagan: I think what people took from my early spoken word stuff was the ‘pakeha-ness’ [New Zealander of European Descent] or ‘New Zealand-ness’ of it, just from how my stage persona was crafted and some of the nostalgic New Zealand references I used. So then moving away it made really clear the differences of New Zealand, right. You are suddenly keenly aware of this place and what makes you different, whether that is your cultural perspective cultural references the way you talk or just even your more abstract sense of the world or your sense of work or play.

Moving to the UK is one thing, there is the UK and then there is London. Two

quite different places at times. I had extreme culture shock and while it's very similar to NZ in lots of ways there were key differences and so what I continued writing about was New Zealand even more explicitly. I published a book of poems *Some Traveller* while I was over there which was about being a New Zealander in London and that became my point of difference. So I kept writing about the same stuff but instead of being a Kiwi in NZ, I was a Kiwi in London and my work developed because of that.

Ella Ruddle: You are obviously settled in New Zealand now with your family, did you feel a pull to come back?

Ben Fagan: I was living in a particularly rough part of London at the time and there was an edge to the big city as well which wasn't sitting with me. I got super involved in the spoken word scene when I was there, I was going to shows every night and performing every night and running slams. It was funny because that same cultural moment, or renaissance around spoken word that I described was happening in Wellington earlier was coming from London and LA. People writing for a local community stage could end up with a record deal or best-selling book and if we were kind of feeling the effects of that in Wellington the community in London was desperately aware of that fact.

It was amazing to step into that community and feel the edge. It wasn't like your Wellington bar where everyone was finding each other and finding this art form – while there was a lot of this as well – there was a little edge of 'If I win this slam it will lead to bigger and better things and maybe I'll be rich and famous...?' This did happen to maybe 5 people across the 10 years, but there were a lot more than 5 people in that community so that competition and those kinds of attitudes were wearing on me a little bit.

Ella Ruddle: You founded with your Partner Sara Hirsch, Motif Poetry, which hosts slam competitions across New Zealand. You talk of this 'edge' that London had, how did you navigate not falling into this trap with your competitions?



Ben Fagan: I guess New Zealand lends itself to that anyway just by the manner of population size and the communities we were in. I worked for Apples and Snakes in London, which is the UK's spoken word poetry premier production company and was paying attention and soaking it all in, knowing it would be wonderful to start something like this in New Zealand. So that's what we did! It was an evolving thing because slams are a very particular beast. They started in Boston in the eighties and the format differs across the world. It's a competition which means there are winners and losers but the judges are five random audience members holding Olympic-style scorecards. Our understanding of the initial kaupapa [principle/foundation] of poetry slams in Boston was that having random judges undercuts judging art with numbers.

We have tried as much as we can to stick to the kaupapa that it is bonkers to judge art with numbers to the decimal place, but what it does do is engage people who wouldn't otherwise be interested in poetry. The audience critically engages with the writing more than they realise.

Ella Ruddle: You have so much going on with Motif, NYDS, and media work – do you still keep up with creative writing and your creative pursuits in your spare time?

Ben Fagan: Yeah so in 2020 I put out this series of poems about pakehatanga [pakeha culture] which was the bookend or the culmination of all the years of writing and what I was exploring in *Some Traveller*. I wanted to explicitly lean into what I was subconsciously trying to figure out: which was what is my place in Aotearoa? What is the pakeha place here? How did my family get here? Why do they talk the way they do? It was a good artistic challenge to get one poem out each month for ten months with video and animation. At the end of it, I came out of it with more questions than I did when I went in. At that point, I put a pin in actively chasing spoken word and moved into the realm of non-fiction. I started writing a collection of essays that kept asking these questions and I'm still working on that. It is all the things that poetry wasn't. All the things that attracted me to poetry, nonfiction writing and book writing is the opposite. There is no quick feedback loop and no one claps at any point Ella which is devastating.

Ella Ruddle: A tough gig for a theatre kid!

Ben Fagan: Yes, having come to writing as a performer and writing for the stage with non-fiction you have to be in it for the long game and prepare for it to be less immediately gratifying which is probably a good thing for me. The process of writing has been intense and extraordinary by doing it properly I am wandering into fraught territory as the content becomes more relevant year by year. The people that I have wound up speaking to have been wonderful.

Ella Ruddle: Do you think the heaviness or the seriousness of this topic lent itself to a longer form than poetry?

Ben Fagan: They serve different purposes. Spoken word even if it is filmed is a lot more urgent. You hear it and it's gone. I guess I wanted a challenge and I wanted more space to explore this stuff. I was determined for it to be non-fiction because I just really wanted to point out a bunch of things about being a white New Zealander. I am constantly amazed in the process of writing over how people are just there ready to be messaged. I often joke that my only tangible skill is “getting in touch.” If you can think of people who you can draw connections with who weren't there before it is amazing. The book has been invaluable because any weird quirk of New Zealand history or culture I come across chances are you either have a friend in common or you can find the Facebook of a person or an email and then you can get a coffee with them and your life will always feel richer for it. That, too, is the benefit of writing.

Ella Ruddle: So is this your holy grail of advice – or do you have some other pearls of wisdom you would want to give to aspiring writers or performers?

Ben Fagan: Just keep doing it and figuring it out. I learned this the most through NYDS, it's a place that comes together through a wing and a prayer. I have seen so many friends doing projects that get so bogged down with the details that it never really happens. It's better to make a decision and get it wrong or do an average job –than making no decision at all. It's better to just not know nothing about poetry and write a poem anyway and perform it onstage when you are 20 and then do it again to get a little bit better. I do have a lot of privilege that backs this up, I mean people do have some very meaningful barriers that stop them from making these choices which is why when you are on this journey you can always afford to help others out. But please just give it a go, doing is your best friend because things lead to more things!



Study of a Man nr.3
by Laima Grasmane



Study of a Man nr.4
by Laima Grasmane

Author & Artist Biographies

Delphine Arnault

Delphine is an artist from France but based in Ireland since 2003. After studying Art in College in France, Delphine has had exhibitions in Cork, worked as an illustrator for Cork City Council, and has also worked with publishers in Ireland. Delphine is currently planning a solo show exhibiting all her new work in the near future.

Nick Badot

Nicolas is an Irish-Belgian writer of fiction and poetry currently living in the Balkans. His poetry has appeared in *The Provenance Journal* and *Rabble Review*, and his short fiction has appeared or is upcoming in *7th Circle Pyrite* and the *SciPhi Journal*. He has a penchant for all things speculative, macabre and fantastical. He is currently drafting a novel about endless towers and the ruins of cities in the desert.

Conor Bailey

Conor (he/him) is a final year history and politics student in UCD. He likes to feature elements of Dublin and its characters in his creative writing and photography.

Bea Basa

Bea (they/she) is a third-year Classics, English and History major at UCD. A Filipino-born native of North Dublin, she adores art in all its forms, though is partial, particularly to the visual and written. They like to write during the little free time they have, and—like many—use it as an outlet for emotion. She enjoys and encourages liberal use of the em dash. When not engaging with their discipline, you will often find them over-analysing video game narratives."

Charline Chatelain

Charline is a third year student in english and creative writing at UCD and a multidisciplinary artist, who particularly enjoys writing poetry and creating mixed forms of art.

Eamonn Colfer

Eamonn is a playwright from Wexford, Ireland. He has been artistic director of Aisling Theatre since 2015, during which time he has staged his work at such venues as Wexford Arts Centre, Smock Alley Theatre and the National Opera House. He's published a book of plays as well as short stories. He also wrote the lyrics to album *Local Dignitary*, released earlier this year.

Barbara Dunne

Barbara is a writer, artist and facilitator living in the Connemara Gaelteacht. She is a widowed parent. Her poetry has been most recently published in *Drawn to the Light Press*, *New Word Order*, *orangepeel*, *HOWL 23*; *New Irish Writing* and the *Storms Journal*. She is currently working on her debut poetry collection.

Katie Farrell

Katie is a fourth-year English with Creative Writing student and has been writing since the age of eleven. She aspires to continue her writing journey post graduation.

Laima Grasmann

Laima is a passionate textile artist who loves to express herself with bright colors, not only through fiber art but also through painting. She is inspired by Latvian culture and mentality, music and magic. In art, she pays attention to qualities such as joy of life and wit. Her main love is for tapestry, but she likes to create all sorts of textile art, like tufting, embroidery and knitting.

Wini Hannigan

Wini is an emerging poet from Tipperary with a passion for social justice, mental health and mental growth. She does her best to reflect these themes in her work. Her ambition is to write a trauma informed poetry book. A book of raw and honest poetry. At present, she shares most of her work through open mic nights and local writing projects.

Maria Harten

Maria (she/her) is a second-year student studying English and Sociology at UCD. She loves reading, writing and travelling and wants to write to elicit emotions and feelings from people and to create an understanding that transcends in-person interactions.

Sharon Keating

Sharon (she/her) works for one of Ireland's foremost mental health charities. Originally from Dublin, she now calls Wexford her home, having relocated with her young family during the pandemic. She loves writing short stories and poetry and is delighted to have works featured in the Wexford Bohemian and Wexford Women Writing Undercover.

Chloe King

Chloe (she/her) is in her final year studying English with Creative Writing at UCD. She enjoys sunny beer gardens, rollies, and having a yap. Her short stories and poetry are inspired by her experiences in Dublin, and her love of strangers.

Orla Malin

Orla has been writing poetry since she was a kid and it has always been a source of comfort for her throughout her life. Her favourite poem is 'Antarctica' by Derek Mahon who she would say is her biggest poetry inspiration, alongside her wonderful mum Mary, who has always encouraged me in everything she does.

Katelyn Markham

Katelyn is a cinematographer and artist from Dublin. Having recently graduated with a major in cinematography from the National Film School, her visual language attempts to explore narrative truths by leaning into a voyeuristic style of shooting. With the viewer in mind she is inherently aware that the lens can capture the most intimate and absurd.

Tadhg McDonogh-Cunnigham

Tadhg is a writer and director based in Dublin. He graduated from the National Film School at IADT in 2023 where he majored in directing and minored in television production. He also enjoys photography and writing poetry.

Weaver Melching

Weaver Melching (they/them) is a writer and student from Los Angeles, California. They primarily write speculative fiction with a humorous edge, and though they would deny any accusations of being a poet, they do routinely write poetry. They have previously had work published in *Gluepot* magazine and by *Invader Comics*. When they are not writing, they can often be found in the kitchen pretending they are much better at cooking than they are.

Robin Mentel

Robin is a passionate photographer with a special fondness for wildlife, abstract, and portrait photography but loves to try out all the different flavours of the field. The camera sees the world very differently than how we perceive the world; Robin tries to reach beyond that and show the world in alien ways that we are not used to.

Thomas O'Donovan

Thomas (he/him) is a writer/musician from Castletownbere, Co. Cork. He has been previously published in Paper Lanterns and has had an article published on the Irish Writers Centre website.

Eimhin O'Loingsigh

Éimhin (He/Him) is a fourth year English and History student in St. Patrick's College Carlow from Portlaoise, Co. Laois. He has had a passion for storytelling from a young age but didn't endeavour to write any stories himself until his second year of college where he entered and won first place with his story Lady of Winter. Since then, he has written many stories and started yet more, all varying in quality.

Helen Power

As a young girl, one of Helen's (she/her) favourite hobbies was writing "comic book love stories"; as a teenager, she was one of the few girls in class who celebrated when she was given an essay for homework. Fast forward through a husband, four children and a career, Helen rediscovered the joy of writing in a Creative Writing class during the pandemic. It is one of her true pleasures in life.

Freya Rothwell

Freya is an English, Drama and Film student from County Wicklow, and has always loved documenting her journeys through photographs - be it on her way to college or a hike in her local forests. Her main muses are sunrises, sunsets, woodlands, and the sea.

Harry Smith

Harry studies BA Humanities English Literature. He is from Lusk North Co. Dublin. His likes include jazz and rock music, playing guitar, literature, and a beer in the sun.

Chris Tiernan

Chris (he/him) grew up in Shankill and is Irish-Filipino. After attending Creative Writing at Inchicore College, he is in his second year of English with Creative Writing at UCD. Inspired by Raymond Carver, his short stories explore themes of emotional distance and communication failure, while in his non-fiction he delves into addiction and alienation. He has a passion for collecting typewriters.

Jonny Voorheis

Jonny Voorheis (he/him) was born and raised in Dublin and currently lives in Glasgow where he is studying for a master's in creative writing. A decent, if unremarkable, undergraduate career was supplemented by extensive, detailed, and immersive research into the pubs, after-sessions and Mad-Ones of his native city. It is this latter project that has come to inform much of his work. He is currently working on a short story collection that uses overlapping, interweaving, and contradicting pieces to study friends grappling with themselves, each other, and the transition from student to adult life.

Eddie Weinstein

Eddie Weinstein is currently working towards completing a Joint Honours degree in English and Linguistics at UCD. She is the author of *Grandpa and Lucy: A Story about Love and Dementia* and is a proud advocate of dementia education. A native of Saint Paul, Minnesota, she moved to Dublin in 2021 and has since fallen in love with the city (although sometimes she misses her dog, Scout). When Eddie isn't studying, she can be found reading in cafés, playing her trumpet, perusing art galleries, exploring Dublin with her film camera, or sea swimming at the Forty Foot.

Carole Wood

Carole Wood is a writer and musician from Co. Wexford. She writes fiction and poetry, and is in her final year of a BA (Hons.) in English with Creative Writing at University College Dublin. She was awarded a 1916 Bursary in 2020, and was shortlisted for the Maeve Binchy Travel Award in 2023. Her work has been published in *Caveat Lector* and *Envelope* magazine, and adapted for audio drama by the *NoSleep* and *Chilling Tales for Dark Nights* podcasts.



Suitcase Man by Conor Bailey