



# From Glasgow to Saturn



**Issue 31**

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Artwork by Kiera Gray

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## A Word from the Editors

Hello and welcome to *From Glasgow to Saturn* Issue 31, our fourth and final issue as editors. Hard to believe it's already been a year, but the time has now come for us to hand over responsibilities to a new dynamic group of editors, and usher in the next exciting developments of this constantly evolving publication.

When we took over the editorial role last year we had two main objectives: to make our own distinct impression on the magazine and to showcase prose, poetry and lyrical essays that truly stood out, that demanded to be read and re-read, and that exemplified the rich variety of the University of Glasgow's Creative Writing talent. We're proud to say that these objectives were achieved, thanks to each and every writer who submitted their work (sometimes perilously close to deadline) and provided us with such a wide range of style and subject matter from which we were able to construct our four issues. We'd also like to pay tribute to our fantastic contributing artists: Megan Taylor, Natasha Russell, Ruth Foulis and Kiera Gray, for making our covers really stand out.

Now, on to Issue 31. For our final issue we're thrilled to include an exclusive extract from the 2013 Sceptre Prize-winning *Keeper of Secrets* by Pauline Lynch, alongside tales of travel, thwarted love and a refreshingly large selection of poetry. All of this and so much more.

On a final note, we would like to say that the continued support of our readers has enabled *From Glasgow to Saturn* to endure and expand over these 31 issues, and now we will join you in looking forward to the new editors' debut issue later in the year. But for now, so long, and thanks for reading.

Shaunagh Jones | Calum Maclean | Kevin Scott

Editors

## **Keeper of Secrets (a novel extract)**

Pauline Lynch

She said the world is divided. She said there are tribes in the world, and countries, and countries at war, and factions within factions within these countries and basically there's a whole load of fucked up shit going on. But the biggest difference, she said, the biggest basic difference was between people. That's what she said.

She said, basically, not all people are people. That is to say, not all people are human. They walk human, they talk human and in every conceivable way, to the untrained eye, they are human, but that don't mean shit.

I didn't believe this.

She said you basically got human people and you got sub people. And we were part of that category labeled sub.

We were sitting in the bedroom and I asked her why it was we were sub. She said it was time I knew and went downstairs. When she came back she brought company. I was a woman now, she said, and we kept it in the family, had done for years. She said it.

What goes on inside four walls stays behind four walls, and sometimes what goes on behind four walls isn't even talked about there. There was three of them but only two did it. I never liked it none.

You knew it was coming. It would start on a Wednesday when Pop came home early for supper. He knew how to fill a room, did Pop. We'd all three of us be in the kitchen, Jojo working, me reading. Pop would lean back in his chair at the head of the table and stretch his arms out over the wood, stroking it with his big old knobbled hands. You were born on that table, he told me, conceived on it too, and he'd start to laugh. Same every week. I couldn't figure what was so funny. Sometimes he pointed to a stain deep in the wood and told me it was my blood. No laughing then. I'd stare

at that big dirty patch for hours on end, trying to figure what it really was. Jojo was in the kitchen all the while, moving between cupboards, getting it all together for him. No matter how prepared she was, he always managed to surprise her and the food was never just ready to go.

Day after that was Thursday, and instead of taking sandwiches out, Cy would come in from the fields for lunch. Somehow he'd always manage to get in Jojo's way while she sliced his bread. I used to worry where that breadknife would land when she was trying to dodge him.

For years it was as if Cy had never even noticed me but it got to the point where he would ruffle my hair and pinch my cheeks. Jojo would bang the knife off the countertop and tell him off but he just laughed and said it didn't hurt me none. It did hurt a little but I was just real happy to have him smile at me.

On Thursday nights, both men came in for supper. Used to be I'd get excited to see them because they were always real chipper then. Before it started on me I never noticed the little things. When Jojo put his plate in front of him, Pop would give her hair a little tug. If she dropped something, he'd smack her backside but he'd be laughing the whole time and winking at me. I'd practiced real hard just so I could wink back. For years, I didn't see it as anything other than fun. Don't remember Jojo complaining much about it. They left her alone once they started on me.

It was always on a Friday. Pop went first. He didn't take too long but Cy was rough and took longer. Pop would laugh and his laughter seemed to make Cy go rougher. Ash never did it. They'd tried to make him once but now they just made him stay in the room. Once Pop and Cy were finished and gone, he'd hand me a handkerchief to clean myself with and then leave, not looking at me, not saying nothing about it. I asked Jojo about him and she just shrugged and said: 'I guess he's different,' and that was the end of that.

That was my people. Pop, Cy, Ash, Jojo.

They called me Aggie.

# **From Here to Maternity**

Ciara MacLavery

Once you told me  
when you brought me  
home from the hospital  
snowdrops were out in the garden  
and every January when I see  
their fragile, cotton-bud heads  
I think, there is my flower, our flower.

Likewise, bonfire night,  
when rockets crack the sky open  
will always be the long night my son was born  
and I can't remember what flowers  
you brought to the ward the next morning,  
only your face, full of concern,  
as you came through a gap in the curtain  
and I cried, a baby in your arms.

# Curtains

Ciara MacLaverty

In our house  
I am the opener of curtains  
and the raiser of blinds.

You do not seem to mind,  
and when left alone,  
you can keep hall and bedrooms  
dark 'til noon.

This urge to be the one  
who lets in the day  
is my secret  
for I am like a child  
who already senses limit.

Let me be the one who  
clatters back hoops  
on ornamental wooden poles;  
and yanks up plastic Venetians.

In our bedroom,  
quail's egg flecks  
of condensation mould  
on the silver grey roller blind  
call fragile things to mind.  
All the more reason  
to hoist it high  
coiling it in on itself  
until it almost disappears.



# Thermal Shock

Caroline Robertson

The rough grain of wood embosses my naked flesh as I shoulder the bathroom door into its frame and haul the bolt across. I hover for a second, crouched, listening, then draw up my towel and re-knot it over my banging chest. I crane over the big enamel bath, jam in the plug and throw on the hot tap, which splutters and clanks, but eventually yields a gush of scalding water.

The bath fills. I lean on the sink and gawp into the big mirror. It's not easy to make out my reflection, what with the steam, and the fact that my eyes are nearly closed. Eyes, shiny purple, pregnant, ready to burst, and the nose, now, of a luckless prize-fighter. The mingling flavours of metal, salt and bile flood my mouth. I lick my lips (unfamiliar, but mine, right enough) and they are numb. About my pulped face, my hair is a matted straw wig, pulled and twisted and caked with sticky blood. Just before the glass mists over completely, I see my neck, mottled and bruised, and I lurch backwards to perch on the bath's edge. Filling up all the while. I reach to add some cold, but the crushing pain around my ribs forces me to wait a minute. Get my breath. I hang my head, stupefied, as fat globules of scarlet mingle with the clear bathwater.

And it is now, of all times, that I hark back to one long ago day on the beach. Exams over, results pocketed. Ready to blast out of the blocks.

Just beyond my quotidian crowd stands Alan. Beyond me in every way. A study in reserve and restraint, and too clever, too beautiful for our motley ranks. Nevertheless, persistently I buzz around, talking, asking, pleasing, smiling, and today, for whatever reason, he finally rests his spectacular gaze on me.

I'm a great one for planning. In the normal way of things, there's not much in life that can't be accomplished by purposeful strategy and lateral thinking. That's

been my experience. But tonight, as Alan gently kisses my blissful, sunburnt face, I enjoy the luxury of deferring to a higher design. Leaping before looking.

Back to the here and now.

The evening starts out fine. I am ready in plenty of time, wearing a dress that he likes (or ought to – he chose it), and his clothes are laid out on the bed ready for him just to get home, shower and change. No soaking in a bath for him. Too self-indulgent. I think he means I am (though please God don't ever let my smart mouth blurt that out).

It turns out he's booked a table at an extortionate seafood restaurant down on the waterfront. It's exactly his kind of place. The food is complicated and fussy, and the portions miniscule – okay if you're wanting to frame the bloody stuff, but perish the thought it'd fill you up.

The only really substantial offering is lobster, which of course he must have. With the dazzled little maître d' in his wake, he struts over to the huge display tank at the front of the dining room. Unerringly, he selects his prey, then settles back like a tricoteuse as the slowly flailing victim is borne towards the hereafter of the kitchen.

Shortly afterwards, as the glinting cloche is looped up and away, I watch him scanning the room to see if anyone has noticed that he is about to eat the most expensive thing on the menu. To his obvious chagrin, and to my mild satisfaction, no-one seems to give a toss.

Maladroitly, he starts to dissect the lobster. It's an uneven struggle, not necessarily weighted against the crustacean. Butter dribbles down his chin and a stray bit of pulverised shell rests defiantly on his cheek and before I can stop myself, I laugh. I can't help it; he looks ridiculous, and it isn't some big guffaw, just a smile really. Really.

I lean over and dight his face with the end of the heavy linen napkin that is swathed around his neck like a big baby's bib. Silence. It doesn't seem so funny suddenly.

Blessedly, the waiter swoops in to clear the plates, and asks me why I didn't go for the lobster myself. Such a special occasion! Our anniversary, is it not?

No way I'm eating lobster, I tell him. The poor wee bugger being boiled alive, that seems kind of unnecessary. And a bit cruel.

A barely perceptible flare of nostrils from across the table alerts me to the fact that I may have just opened my mouth to change feet.

My waiter friend is most indignant. 'We cook our lobsters the kind way, this I promise you!' I smile skeptically. He elaborates. 'Lobsters plunged straight into the boiling water scream horribly, you see.'

'That must be very upsetting for you,' I sympathise.

'Oh yes,' he agrees, 'and of course also very bad for the taste of the lobster.'

This guy's not running with my particular ball.

'How we do it,' he continues, 'is we put the lobsters into a pan of cold water, then heat it up slowly, slowly. They are sleepy when the end comes and do not feel anything.'

'Prolonging the inevitable,' I insist, the moral high-ground swaying, like my logic, beneath me (never give me the floor after I've polished off the best part of a bottle of wine). 'Probably wish they'd just had their brains dashed out on the side of a fishing smack...they're still dinner.'

'No. Surely it's nicer to slip away?' opines the waiter.

It briefly crosses my mind that this guy might be attempting to flirt with me, in a jokey, unthreatening way, perhaps just trying to make me feel 'special' (and certainly preferable to having a phallic pepper grinder thrust in my face accompanied by much smirking innuendo, as is sometimes the way in these situations).

‘Oh, for God’s sake, just fire them in the pot and get it over with!’ I laugh. ‘At least they’d be under no illusions.’

The waiter winks at me theatrically, wishes us *Buon Anniversario* and scuttles off.

I turn back to the table, smiling. Just being happy for fuck’s sake.

Our romantic dinner ends abruptly and I am huckled outside, into a cab, and we ride home in silence.

I’m stiff and sore, and there’s no easy way to get into this bath. I heave myself in off the edge. I never did put in any cold water.

Another thought crosses my mind. Residual memory from my student days. When I still used my brain. Thermal shock: a fluctuation in temperature, causing stress, often resulting in fracture, especially brittle materials such as ceramics...

... or arms, or ribs, or hearts.

It’s too late; no illusions any more. I decide to scream.

# How We Drown

Sophie Sexon

I insisted that I'd never again curl into Someone  
who did not love poetry.

Do you remember  
when we stayed up till dawn  
reading lines of Prufrock  
and Frank O'Hara  
like I'd heard them for the first time: slatternly?

For some people poetry is a hell,  
A stain on the day  
like the bruises on my legs  
from cycling drunk to get home to you

But I suppose that in blank verse  
All the pain of life is rehearsed  
or reversed  
A thousand times read, spoken  
to show how words make peace with the dead.

You told me you'd read something beautiful about a hangover.  
In the dawn chorus I heard;  
but poetry couldn't mend  
my sore head and bruised legs.  
It could only stop the morning from rushing in uninvited  
with its vice grip on my head  
and a kick in the chest

Full of words  
The dawn chorus was so full of words  
Then human voices woke us

## Cold Case

Colette O'Connor

Girl, eleven, buck teeth, elbows  
and cowslick. Blue eyes captured by something  
too far distant for comfortable focus.  
Magazine smile, plagiarised  
(Out of print: see archive).

Still  
missing, presumed dead

And the dark shapes of things  
growing power like mildew  
under sheets in the attic of my mind  
gather dust a little longer,  
though it's been ten years –

I can say  
only  
*presumed.*

I dredged the lake,  
slipped fingers beneath unwilling stones  
and groped in the silken silt for the touch of  
colder hands threaded with the roots  
of streaming weeds –  
and, finding nothing,  
stopped all white vans  
going too slowly for innocence,  
threw my torch beam like a knife  
into the eyes of the bystanders  
and screamed *who what how why*  
until my tongue turned to sulphur  
and crumbled between my lips  
like a secret or  
a forgotten song.

She is left caught in the  
foggy amber  
of the unknown *presumed*,  
waiting  
for someone to call off the search,  
let a tear fall like  
a warm pebble punctuating still water  
and offer at last  
a little unsullied quiet.

And then

one day in a shop window pane  
I see her face peering from  
the outline of my body

and I realise there was no crime.

She'll walk away in my shoes  
with no one to mourn her.

# On The Campaign Trail

Simon Ward

I will wear my smartest starched suits with a tie of white or blue  
avoid red less any radical gets the wrong idea  
feel the worn grooves on the hands of the nameless faces I meet  
pry into the lives of others and see what childish mistakes they made  
in their childhood  
grin in the face of mothers and children  
bow somberly to the blue collars of America  
attend philanthropic functions and bid silently in their open auctions  
practice my smile into every morning's mirror  
hide my true self at all costs  
find the biggest bus with the loudest horn  
employ an artist to announce my name in a palette of red, white, and  
blue  
locate the largest flag and picture myself in front of its rippling  
message  
point fingers at my rivals like gun-toting kids at play  
make a soap opera out of existence  
pander to CBS, CNN, FOX and PBS, and force my face to millions  
have someone write my beliefs on cue cards  
travel to the far corners of America to deplore green-house gasses  
imagine myself the American dream incarnate  
confuse the political spectrum  
be left of the far right  
live life like a carnival, dancing to the rhythmic beat of bombs  
be a puppet freed from my strings  
leave the straggling vagrants behind  
deny my past statements  
I will fill the most balloons to bursting with my hot air



## Duck (Verloren Vertaling)

Mark Fraser

‘S’a fair breeze the day, innit Archie?’

‘S’no hauf, Tam.’

‘Enjoyin the weather but. Nice wee holiday fae the Glesga rain.’

‘Aye, aye. It’s guid. It’s almost goat a different texture than it does back hame.

Don’t hink ah’ll be stickin aroond lang wae that wind, mind you.’

Tam and Archie sat side by side in the Prinsengracht, somewhere in Amsterdam’s labyrinthine canal system, dodging cruise boats and bobbing for leaves whenever the mood struck them. It was a particularly dull, rainy and therefore standard Autumnal day in the Dutch capital, and the breeze meant that they’d be moving south earlier than normal this year.

‘Spoke tae a penguin wance who said that the weather changin is tae dae wae whit the humans caw ‘global warming’. Every penguin ah’ve ever met is an environmentalist,’ Tam said.

‘Aye well, ye heard whit happened tae Danny din’t ye?’

‘Danny? Lizzy’s wee boy?’

‘Aye.’

‘Naw. Whit?’

‘Wis involved in a territorial dispute wae Frank an his missus last month. Shat himself an went tae run away, ended up gettin himself tangled in wan eh they roon plastic net hings that they monkeys pull cans oot eh. Drooned tae death. Puir sod.’

‘That’s tragic.’

‘Ah know man. Lizzy wis gutted...haud oan, ye speak penguin?’

‘Ach, aye man. Picked it up when ah wis floatin aboot in Edinbra a few years ago.’

A strong gust of wind snuck over the seventeenth century houses and struck the two coots on their left hand side, ruffling their feathers. Archie started kneading his left wing back into its smooth frame. Behind them, a human appeared on the terrace of an orange house boat in his underpants and flicked a cigarette into the canal. It hit the water with a fizz.

‘Ach yer arse,’ he said, once he’d rearranged his down.

On the roads around the canal cyclists rang their bells at foreigners confused by the bike lanes, and trams trundled along the streets with the occasional loud electrical pop crackling off the overhead wires.

‘Here, check this prick out.’

A duck, all grey feathers, green head and dog collar, swept in and landed in the water next to them. Archie and Tam were dwarfed by the duck’s size and eyed the newcomer with suspicion.

‘Whit dae ye hink he wants?’ Tam said,

‘Here...ah recognise him. Hink his name’s Pat. Wan eh Frank’s enforcers.’

‘D’ye hink he followed us?’

‘Doubt it.’

Archie paddled over to the duck and nudged him. The duck jumped, as if he somehow hadn’t noticed the two coots, and turned with a startled look to face Archie.

‘Quack, quack quack?’ he said.

‘Whit?’

‘Quack?’

‘Eh?’

‘Whit’s he sayin Archie?’ Tam shouted from behind them.

‘Ah dunno man. Ah don’t speak duck,’ Archie said, assuming that no coot alive could ever speak duck.

Tam swam over to investigate. Archie, noting the cigarette butt floating beside him, ducked into the water to eat it and spat it out unimpressed with the flavour.

‘Whit dae ye mean, ye don’t speak duck?’ Tam said to him.

‘Whit dae you mean? Should ah speak duck? Nae cunt ever taught me—’

‘Quack?’ said the Duck, cocking his head to one side in confusion.

‘Ah speak Duck,’ said Tam.

‘Dae ye hell. Ye speak penguin and duck?’

‘Aye. Multilingual, man. That’s me. Ah’ll tell ye whit he’s sayin.’

As Tam began to address the duck, Archie turned the other way, embarrassed by what was bound to follow, but couldn’t help turning back to watch.

Tam looked the duck in the eye. ‘Whit ye sayin?’

‘Quack? Quaaaaaaaack? Quack quack. Quack, quack quik quack, quaacckkk. Quack?’

‘Aye, aye. Ah see whit yer sayin.’ Tam nodded in understanding.

Archie shook his head, unconvinced by Tam’s bilingual abilities.

‘Whit’s he sayin then?’ he asked.

‘Askin me whit ah hink eh the weather.’

‘Is that so?’

‘Ah’m tellin ye—’

‘Quack? Quack? Quack, quack quackquack! Quack!’ With a look of fright, the duck flapped his wings furiously, almost as if he was pointing up the canal. He offered one final ‘QUACK!’ and took to the sky.

‘Aw look, ye offended him,’ Archie said, laughing.

‘Fuck. Hink he’s in a hurry? He said that he hud something tae attend tae.’

‘Aw well.’

Nonplussed by the duck’s abrupt and rather rude exit, the lads progressed down the canal, negotiating tourists in pedal boats, and dodging the blown out umbrellas that the wind had carried into the Dutch water. After travelling fifty meters Tam came across a large green leaf wedged under a discarded plastic bottle.

‘Mate, check the size eh this! Ye don’t see them that big this time eh the year!’

‘Aye, yer right there Tam.’

‘Gies a haun, eh?’

Tam sidled around and started pecking at the bottle while Archie dived underneath to try and pull the frond free from below.

After a few moments of furious hammering, Archie emerged and said: ‘Ah hink it’s inside this hing.’

‘Ah’f nearlfth thur,’ Tam said with a mouthful of plastic.

A second later the brown water around them started to bubble and then parted. Looking round, Archie spotted a white canal cruise boat approaching them at tremendous speed. Tam, facing the opposite direction, failed to notice the vessel. Archie jumped out of the water, taking flight the second he saw the ship approach, shouting: ‘Tam look-’ but it was too late, and the boat clipped Tam’s tail, dragging him under in its wake.

Archie started to frantically circle the canal, waiting for the boat to pass below him, hoping that it had not decapitated his friend. Once the craft had passed it took a few seconds before Tam’s body, legs first and limp, rose to the surface.

‘Aw naw. Naw.’ Archie landed in the water again next to the body and as he did so, Tam righted himself and brought his head above the water.

‘Jesus. Whit the fuck?’ he said, coughing and spluttering. ‘Ah mean, ye’d woulda thought some cunt coulda warned us!’

# Orpheus & Eurydice Head for Govan

Sheila Millar

Och, Orphy, can ye no look at me when ah'm talking ti ye? Ah need a wee rest.

Naw, Hen! Ah've tellt ye a hunner times, ah cannae look it ye or ye'll be stuck doon here forever.

Aye, so ye said but ah don't get it. When yer deid, yer deid. Is that no right? An the last time ah looked, ah wis deid.

Aye, ah know. That's right fer maist folk but no you – no me – no us. Sure ah told ye ah came aw the way doon here tae get ye. An ah don't mind tellin ye, that Serryberruss is a big, sleverin bastart, so it is. It nearly kilt me an aw, carryin they chops. It wisny easy chuckin them at aw they heids and keeping them aw champin and chowin till ah goat by. Ah nearly broke ma harp in the process. An ma harp's the maist important thing; Ah needed it tae impress the Big Man so's he wid let ye go. But it was aw worth it, Hen. Haydees wis that tak'n oan wi ma music – an ah hud tae play for about a fortnight - that he said ah could get ye back.

Whit dae ye mean – get me back? Ah'm no yours tae get back!

Aw c'mon hen – ye know whit ah mean. We'd only bin mairrit five minutes. Ah mean, yer maw wis still greetin; yer faither wisny even feenished shakin ma haun. Well, ye know that as well as ah do. That bloody snake scuppered the whole day, din't it? We'd tae cancel the reception an evryhin.

Oh, ah'm sorry! Excuse me fur stepping oan a snake an fallin doon deid. Ah didny hink about aw they disappintit folk!

Och c'mon hen! Yer takin it aw the wrang way. Ye know ah didny mean that. Ah luv ye. Ah came aw the way doon here tae get ye, din't ah? But that Haydees is a tricky wan, an he's just waitin fur me tae make a mistake so he kin get ye back. Noo,

c'mon, keep climbin an' we'll be awright. We can start aw ower again. Mibbe rearrange the reception efter a while?

Tae Hell wi you an yur reception. Ah'm knackered, an this hill's very near perpundiculur. This harp o yours is heavy an ah need a brek. Ah'm stoppin for a minute.

Aw, come on, Yoorideetchy, we canny stop the noo. We're gettin further away fae the flames aw the time. Jist in case ye've forgotten, we ur in Hell an ah'm daein ma best tae get us ootay it. Ah'm knackered an aw but that Haydees is jist waitin fur me tae stop an look back at ye, an if ah dae that, ah've tellt yi, he'll take ye back an this time he'll no let ye oot again. We're no stoppin. Ah'm no lookin back. We're just gettin oan wi it. Noo stop moanin an climb.

Charmin. Ah canny wait tae start oor lives ower wi aw this patience an understandin. Haud me back. This harp weighs a ton, ye know.

Aye, aye, but ah'm carryin the light to see oor way oot. Ah canny dae both an you canny go in front cause that's the rules. Lets just get oan wi it, eh?

Ah dae appreciate ye comin back fur me, ye know?

Aye, Hen, ah know.

An ah luv you too.

Aye, Hen, ah know.

It wis a pity aboot that snake. Typical wint it? Jist as the ceremony feenished and we were aboot to start the reception, trust me to step oan a snake.

Och, it was awfi, Hen. Ah couldny believe it! Honest, ah wis hert broken. But noo we've goat anither chance – it's no far noo. Ah kin see a wee bit o light away up ahead, so ah can. Whenever we reach that, we'll be oot an we can forget the hale thing. Awright?

Aye but, Orphy, could we no jist huv a wee rest? Honestly, ah'm knackered, pure knackered.

Fur Gawd's sake, naw. Ah've tell't ye, nae rest. We're nearly there'n then ye can rest aw ye want, but no till we're ootay here.

Aw but this harp's really heavy. Go on, jist a wee rest.

Naw! How many times? It's no safe till we're ootay here. Noo c'mon!

Awright, awright, keep the heid. Ah wis only askin. Aw naw! Ah've drapped yir harp. Ha! Ha! Made yi loo

ooo

ooo

ook.

# The Only Burns Supper I Ever Attended

Ciara MacLaverty

In Halls of Residence we had to celebrate it all:  
Halloween, Thanksgiving, rugby or the Super Bowl.  
Our parties left Christmas trees toppled,  
carpet tiles stained, and plastic cups  
stomped into Perspex hooves.

On Burns night, it took only  
a few sips of cider to see,  
that this time might end  
less than kindly  
when *the Keith guy*, the Scottish Keith guy  
(American football shirts but never a player)  
launched his Toast to the Lassies.

Too raw was his panic,  
beyond the reach of life-belt heckles  
from posh boys in kilts.  
Too long he hung on  
until the drunken yells  
of, *sit down, man!*  
drove him out the hall  
to vomit or cry or do whatever he had to,  
and me to the Ladies  
to check myself in the mirror.

Weeks later, cleaners were in,  
and I saw his room: posters plastered  
with the oiled torsos and bullet belts of  
*Rambo* and *Rocky*.  
When he swung on his chair  
and told me he'd seen  
all of the films several times  
I said, *had* to say,



*God, I hate Rambo,*  
blind from seeing myself  
as he might see me:  
just another lassie, years away  
from any random cup o' kindness yet.

# Islay

Laura Bissell

A bleak sky.

A greyer sea.

Like my thoughts have finally  
burst their banks and filled up  
all the waters that surround  
these islands.

Next to you,

I stand alone.

Watching your tall  
waterproof figure  
at the end of the pier.

Waiting, as I always do,

but this time,

less solitary, I feel,

with the waves

crashing.

Later, we sit close,

warm and whiskyed,

hot breath on each other's faces,

whispering conspiratorially.

We have forgotten earlier.

The sea and sky are one now,

and continue like we don't exist,

devouring shoreline and

dragging the shingle,

into the blackness.

# Madrid

Laura Bissell

We arrive at night,  
on a wet runway,  
and drive through dark streets.  
Anonymous city  
until the next day  
when the sun weakly illuminates  
The City.

Redundant summer clothes  
lie tucked-in in my suitcase,  
we leave them napping,  
and explore in the rain.

Even with the skies open,  
the city radiates its vibrancy and light  
in the middle of a square,  
a man sits with glasses of water and,  
with his fingertips, magics up the  
most beautiful notes.

The bars are filled with smoke  
and animated chatter.  
I don't understand it  
but I like it.

Hundreds of people  
dance all night in a disused summerhouse,  
there is a graffitied tiger  
that becomes clearer every minute,  
and we ride shopping trolleys as go-carts  
across the concrete jungle.

When I remember Madrid  
I think of laughing,  
apart from a pair of lost sunglasses  
that remind me of rain.

# Veilsdorf

Laura Bissell

Driving  
we slow,  
something nestled amongst the grass,  
pointing.  
Excited pointing. Here?  
I ask. It was here?  
Nodding.  
She touches her head,  
talking animatedly,  
and incomprehensively,  
then draws her finger across her throat.  
Dead.

A wing mirror nestled among the grass,  
What age? I ask.  
They confer.  
How old? I try.  
Hieroglyphic whispers then,  
A flickering of fingers.  
Svaiy dry.  
Twenty three  
my schooltime dabblings tell me.

I watch the greenery flash by.

# May Morning

Gillian Prew

A labyrinth of rain. Grey  
to the ground the view from here.

Up,

among the furious gloom,  
pulled-by-the-sky magpie –  
the closeness of its wing to winter.

Just this coffee to my lip  
the warmth of weeping.

The way the cattle low on stone floors –  
the way they kneel, their eyes blisters.

I might catch the grief, and  
if only it would bloom –  
a luminous rose for a sun.

If compassion could be a colour –  
a fuchsia bulb that lit and lit.

# Spring Aubade

Gillian Prew

Spring, a blooming sleeper, a swallowed smell,  
where are your flowers? The daffodils are beaten.  
The wind has hammered their bells raw. Yellow  
has bled the air sweet - another bloom exists,  
such a fist it is.

Silver bombs, the gulls shriek to the sea.  
I admire them, I dig my memory up.

The light is sticking to the sun,  
the morning calloused from the shade.

Will summer ever come?                      for my bones,  
my inner birds.

# Untitled in Mourning

Gillian Prew

Speaks, ever-winter I cannot un-see  
what lies there like a whelp,

bare blood for a coat. Eyes, loud  
yellow. Cut up, a buttercup for sun.

Fly, your howl heart, your wound –  
unfurl our failure, make the moon a bed.



## **Red Road Flats of Handa**

*(Handa Island, Sutherland)*

Rachel Tennant

Sandstone walls, rise, fall  
on tilt and turn of earth's plane.

Red ramparts pocked, picked  
and foul with Handa's inhabitants.

Communal high rise stacked on  
sea stacks spattered and stained .

A seabird cacophony of curse,  
wail, lament and rail.

Kittiwakes scream their name  
to shame the Skua's squabbles.

Razorbills shuffle, jostle and elbow  
puffins that squat in cliff top rubble.

Fulmers spit oil and vitriol  
on the Guillemots toe holds.

Overhead the Gannets blades  
slice and turn on earths plane.

# Storm of '76

Rachel Tennant

It was one of those summers when  
time slows to the clocks'  
doze, the buzz of flies suspended,  
the school lawn shaved lemon  
and the sky a cruel blue line.  
Heads in the classroom bowed by heat pressed  
between leaves of exam papers dried  
and sun swallowed.

Some say it was a Borasco squall that had been building  
others a tsunami from subterranean eruptions  
or even the sun ignited by heat had finally exploded,

but in that summer of '76  
Mr Jefferies (head of maths) and Paul Seagull ( ne'er do well)  
met head to head in the corridor of Form 5  
creating their own storm  
and when their rage had receded  
the air was clear, Paul had flown  
and Mr Jeffreys lay  
as jetsom in its wake.

***Borasco*** *A thunderstorm or violent squall*

# Glance of Spring

Rachel Tennant

It catches me out always,

stops

my hibernating heart in an out

beat.

A momentary hint, impossible to hold,

freeze framed

between winters bitter

brass

and summer mellow

strings.

Its first warmth thaws cold skin

cobwebbed

with frosted veins, then

gone.

As transient as a breath of blossom in tatters of spring rain.

## **Author Biographies**

### **Laura Bissell**

Laura Bissell studied English Literature and Theatre Studies at the University of Glasgow between 2001 and 2005 and received a first class Honours degree. She then completed a MPhil by Research in Theatre Studies and completed her PhD in 2010. Laura taught in the Theatre Studies department between 2005 and 2012 and is now a lecturer in Contemporary Performance Practice at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

### **Mark Fraser**

Mark Fraser is a Glasgow native who worked in IT for four long years before deciding to embark upon university. He currently owns and runs the website [www.dailydischord.com](http://www.dailydischord.com), where he has been putting his journalistic pen to work for around four years now. At the age of 26, he has just started his third year in Scottish Literature at the university, a course which helped him rediscover his passion for writing. He has a bunny rabbit called Leo that was once called Lily until it was established that she was in fact a he.

### **Pauline Lynch**

Glasgow born Pauline Lynch trained as an actor and worked in theatre, film, television & radio. Always a writer, she concentrated more fully on this after having children. In 2008, her stage play *King of the Gypsies* played at the Edinburgh fringe before touring the UK. She also wrote *Roar for Poorboy*

Theatre Company in conjunction with the National Museum of Scotland. She has been published in *From Glasgow to Saturn*, *Ironstone* and *The Guardian*. In 2013, Pauline was awarded the Sceptre prize for fiction.

### **Ciara MacLavery**

Ciara MacLavery was born in Belfast in 1968 and studied Arts at Glasgow University in the early 90's. She is currently returning to writing after breaks for a) chronic illness and b) recovery to full-time motherhood. Previous poems and short stories have appeared in *New Writing Scotland*, *Northwards Now* and *The Irish Times*.

### **Sheila Millar**

Sheila Millar graduated in 2011 from Glasgow University's MLitt in Creative Writing. She holds an Honours degree from the Faculty of Arts (1991). She has had a short story published in *From Glasgow to Saturn* and is completing a final edit of her first novel. She is currently being inspired and supported by G2 Writers.

### **Colette O'Conner**

Colette O'Connor is a literature undergraduate from Kent. She has previously been published in a collection of short fiction by Honno women's press. She hopes for a long and successful writing career so that no one will notice her inability to deal with real life.

### **Gillian Prew**

Gillian Prew lives in Scotland and is the author of two chapbooks, *DISCONNECTIONS* (erbacce-press, 2011) and *In the Broken Things* (Virgogray Press, 2011). A further book, *THROATS FULL OF GRAVES*, is newly released from *Lapwing Publications*. Her poems have been published widely online and in print, including *Vayavya*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *The Glasgow Review*, *The Recusant* and *Ink Sweat & Tears*. She has twice been short-listed for the erbacce-prize. You can find her online at <http://gillianprew.com/>

### **Caroline Robertson**

Caroline Robertson was born and educated in Glasgow, before training as an actor in London and working in the Performing Arts for 15 years. After the birth of her daughter, Caroline took an extended break from the theatre, but returned to university as a mature student to gain a BA Hons (First Class) in Musical Theatre, and now aims to further her studies at Glasgow University. Caroline has written and is currently developing a full-length musical play.

### **Sophie Sexon**

Sophie Sexon is a current student on the MLitt in Modernities at the University of Glasgow. Her poetry has been published in *Tip Tap Flat* and a zine for the Glasgow Women's Library entitled *Hens Tae Watch Oot Fur*. She hopes to spend the next year reading all the Russian authors she wishes she had more time for and perhaps she'll find some more poetry there. She is

currently writing about the plays of B. S. Johnson for her MLitt dissertation and she strongly urges you to read his works.

### **Rachel Tennant**

Rachel Tennant is a landscape architect and photographer with an award winning design practice based in the UK and Hong Kong. Rachel's writing aims to distil a physical and emotional response to a location that captures and renders the '*spirit of a place*' Her work has been included in the Glasgow Anthology *Tip Tap Flat* (Freight Books 2012) and *Prole Magazine*.

### **Simon Ward**

Simon Ward received an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow in 2012. He was founder and editor of the Glasgow-based literary anthology ClockWorks. He recently attended the semester-long Jenny McKean Moore Community Workshop at George Washington University. He writes short fiction and poetry, and has recently settled in the US with his wife.