







# ROPES

Review of Postgraduate  
English Studies

*SPARKS*

26<sup>TH</sup> Edition, 2018





ROPES 2018  
SPARKS

Published by  
ROPES 2018 Team  
MA in Literature & Publishing

English Department  
National University of Ireland, Galway

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# Foreword

When work began on *ROPES* 2018, we had a vague vision of what we wanted to accomplish. We wanted good, varied content – as every publication does – we wanted to be part of a rewarding and worthwhile learning experience – as every student does – and we wanted each of the pieces in our book to say something – as every reader does.

While we realised that these three things are yielded by hours of hard work, as well as a thorough commitment to that initial vague vision, I don't think we all understood just how many hours it would take, or just how thorough a commitment was required. The past seven months have proved challenging for each team member, but they have also been hugely satisfying as we have watched our three wishes for *ROPES* 2018 travel from our heads into a solid object composed of short stories, poetry, and visual art pieces.

Each decision in our production process was informed by these three wants. We chose *Sparks* as our theme because of our desire to have content that covered a wide range of possibilities and passions. We opted to publish in aid of Jigsaw Galway, who we see doing the essential work of providing counselling to young people in need of support. And we decided to always consider, but never marry ourselves to the conventions established by previous *ROPES* teams.





These decisions, as well as the countless others that have been taken to get this book into your hands, are all actions that we the *ROPES* 2018 team are proud of. And it is this team that I, as the Managing Editor, am most proud of. Never before have I worked with such a conscientious and enthusiastic group of people, and never before have I been so satisfied with the end result of a project.

I hope the long hours and commitment that we've put into this book translate to your reading experience, and I hope that you will continue to support *ROPES* for all the years that are to come.

Brendan Garrett  
Managing Editor





# Jigsaw

Jigsaw Galway is a free and confidential service supporting the mental health and well-being of people aged 15–25 in Galway City and County. Jigsaw's aim is to support young people in Galway who are struggling, to ensure they get the support they need, when and where they need it.

Jigsaw Galway is part of a national network of services provided by Jigsaw – The National Centre for Youth Mental Health. Our vision in Jigsaw is an Ireland where every young person's mental health is valued and supported.

Get in touch with us in Galway!

Text: 087 772 52 32

Email: [galway@jigsaw.ie](mailto:galway@jigsaw.ie)

Log-on: [www.jigsaw.ie/galway](http://www.jigsaw.ie/galway)

Phone: 091 549 252

Call-in: Fairgreen Road, Galway City

**JIGSAW  
GALWAY**  
Young people's  
health in mind





# Acknowledgements

The phrase ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ rings true when publishing a book. Over the previous seven months a tremendous effort has been put into this publication by the *ROPES* team, but we would not have made the book that you are reading now without the help of a much larger community. As such, we’d like to dedicate this journal and express our gratitude to the following:

Rob Smyth, for teaching us the ins-and-outs of the design process. Dr Rebecca Anne Barr, for providing guidance and support amid crises big and small. Toner Quinn, for offering his knowledge of the publishing industry. And the entire NUI Galway English Department, for its support of *ROPES* over the last twenty-six years.

Additionally, we would like to thank the *ROPES* 2017 team, who have helped prepare us for the challenges associated with publishing a book, and the Cúirt International Festival of Literature, for continuing to provide *ROPES* with a platform. As well as this, we are grateful to each person who visited us as part of the Publishers on Publishing speaker series, whose insight and advice will prove useful throughout our careers.

We also want to thank our advertisers, who enabled us to make the *ROPES* we envisioned: the MA in Digital Cultures, MA in English, MA in French Studies, MA in Culture and Colonialism, MA in







Environment, Society and Development, MA in Journalism, MA in Writing, MA sa Leann Teanga, MA in Literature and Publishing, MA in Global Women's Studies, Holfeld Tool and Die, Bank of Ireland, Careers Development Centre, Ardscoilanna Gaeilge do Mhúinteoirí, Charlie Byrne's, Town Hall Theatre, GoBus, and the Aisling Family Bookshop.

Lastly, we would like to thank Jigsaw Galway for their continuous support and each of our contributors who made the 2018 edition of *ROPES* possible.





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# the cuttlefish

Ali Glasscott

obscured

by my own cloud  
of black ink

of my own  
making

I sink  
into invisibility—

somewhere  
deep out of sight

bright lights still  
occasionally spark

in the dark





# Pale Blue Dot

Alice Kinsella

*It is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist  
in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring.*

—Carl Sagan

In Hindu legend a little boy held the whole universe inside him.  
His mother found all the stars, moons, and worlds in his telescope  
mouth.

(But mothers do that, don't they?)

In the photograph taken by Voyager 1  
we are a blue star trapped in sunrays.

A pinprick of light in the dark,  
like the spark of an early ultrasound,  
when that dot marks the screen  
to show life – where the heart will soon be.





In the right light we are blue fire,  
could be mistaken for any one  
of a billion gaseous suns  
instead of this wet miracle.

With enough distance we are small.  
Krishna could pop earths like Smarties.  
With enough distance

we can see nothing  
is what it seems.

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# An Ocean for the Old

Mary Deely

Women and men,  
*old* women and men  
march into  
December sea  
dressed in togs,  
swimming hats  
and *nothing else*.  
Step by step,  
they submerge  
peacefully  
into early morning.

My cries  
compete with the seagulls'  
as I stand there  
frozen, knee-deep.



Winter sea  
separates the  
hardy from the weak,  
whilst skies of blue and white  
blend into Galway grey.

Inch by inch  
I wade out further,  
count to five and then  
I'm down in their sea  
of creaks and cricks,  
arthritic backs and bones,  
replacement hips.  
Paying no heed to me,  
they swim out to the buoy  
and I hesitate to join  
the army of the old.

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# Fix

E. R. Murray

Conflict was like coffee to Sandra; she needed a good strong dose of it every morning to get the day going. Now that she lived alone, getting her hit was proving problematic. So discovering an Mk II hand grenade stashed in the attic amongst her ex's stuff was like a dog finding a secret tunnel into its food cupboard.

9:14AM. Hodgson & Son Glass Engraving Ltd.

Sandra types out her to-do list:

- unnecessary emails
- minutes from bullshit meetings
- manipulated sales figures for crack-pot boss

Intermittently, Sandra stops, reaches into her handbag, and cups the pineapple-shaped body of the grenade in her hand. As she scans the room for a potential hit, her fingers trace from base plug to safety lever, nails catching the strip of mysterious tape running the length of the grenade.

"What have you got in that bag that's so interesting?" asks Lindsay.

Sandra's supervisor. A specialist in dithering, brown-nosing, and generally pissing Sandra off.





“Excuse me,” says Sandra. She quickly types a sentence on-screen, rises from her chair with bag shoulder-slung, and pats her stomach. “Too much vino last night.”

Swaggering out of the room she knows that Lindsay leans over to her desk, checks her computer screen, and shakes her head before stomping to the crack-pot’s office.

Sandra had left a simple message: NO ONE LIKES A SNOOPER.

Settling on the black plastic toilet lid, jeans round her ankles in case anyone comes in and checks under the door, Sandra traces the yellow stripe around the grenade’s neck with her nose. Peeking under the safety cap, she fights the urge to shake it, hear the detonator rattle.

Unable to resist slipping the pull ring onto her finger, she imagines what it would have been like if she’d gone ahead and married Mike:

- interrogations
- complaints
- stinking jocks
- cricket

In other words, hell.

Like Mike said; when they bonded, they’d used the wrong glue. They were destined to come unstuck. But would things have been different if he’d shared the grenade? One flash of that little khaki body and she’d be putty. The sex would have been mighty...

Clumsily, Sandra peels back the tape. Scowls. No explosions, just instructions.

Warning: Killing radius of the M67 grenade is 5 metres; casualty-producing radius is 15 metres; fragmentation can disperse as far as 230 metres.

Someone thumps on the cubicle door.

“Are you okay in there?”

Lindsay. Also skilled in fakery and smelling like coffee grinds.



“Yep. I’ll be out soon. Dodgy stomach. I’d get outta here fast if I was you.” Focusing on the instructions, fist tightening around the grenade, Sandra smiles. “Did you get my message?”

“Very funny. Despite your little joke, I’m covering for you. Hodgson’s going loopy out there; says the report is way behind schedule. He’s spitting lava. Talking redundancies. Shall I tell him you’re not well?”

Lindsay hovers in the doorway, awaiting confirmation. Sandra returns the pull ring to her wedding finger, strokes the safety lever.

“Sure, you do that.”

E. R. MURRAY

//

FIX





# To be Read in the Voice of Addison DeWitt

Kevin Higgins

*after Elizabeth Barrett Browning.*

How do I understand you? Let me list your qualities:  
you have one song which you sing slightly differently  
each time, with enough authenticity, to fool  
the very young and the elderly; your motives are pure  
as an un-filleted sea trout that's spent the summer festering  
under a newly installed kitchen counter; your pragmatism  
is the type that would happily have the homeless woman  
who you make sure to be seen giving money to  
processed and sold as horse meat, if doing so purchased you  
an invitation to party with someone who has Meryl Streep's email.  
In flattering shadow you're a vision descended,  
the sort who gives little men false hope.  
But we both know you caught the elevator  
up here from the place of fire.





# And Some Were Caught in the Fires of California

Rob Childers

“Niagara Falls” he reveals  
to his anxious-looking wife,  
“Sixty years, Love, and finally  
that honeymoon we never got.”

She shifts her distant gaze to him  
eyes flickering  
with a near forgotten light,  
he draws her closer  
on the park bench.

Waves out at the dancing spectacle  
as if a showman presenting a prize,  
exclaims over the roar of the torrent  
amazement



for how such simple coloured lights  
could turn air-borne droplets  
into a magical maelstrom of sparks.

She smiles at that  
which causes him to wince  
at this first lie he's ever told her.  
The price of calm.

Her smile grows and so  
heads together they lean back  
and gawk  
at that untamed natural wonder.  
Two honeymooners aglow.

Until the smoke wraps around them  
and the rapids rush in.

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# Song of the Revolution

Abigail Stevens

We are the reason forests need fire towers,  
with flint teeth and steel for tongues.  
Let me show you wildfire  
in a pocketful of pages torn  
from my favourite novel and the click and shutter  
of a digital camera.  
History's famous artists find little remembrance  
until their bones crumble  
and we mass reproduce their finest works  
for cheap office decor.  
The difference between being a writer and a hero?  
Heroes have tragic pasts,  
while creatives make suffering a ground-note  
and meet untimely ends.  
I ache to know these verses  
will turn to ash with me,  
but find solace in the street artist  
muttering about social injustice,





and have hope for the novelist, living  
for words scribbled secretly by night.  
Some of us must bear the torch,  
stumbling through mountains and over seas,  
and toil on just long enough  
to set the world on fire.

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# Thicko

Mia Döring

I start the car, drag the steering wheel round, churning us over gravel and taking us out into the half-light. We turn east towards the Midlands. I don't know where we are going. It feels safe here in the Micra. *Polly*, I called it. Proud the day I bought it. Dad grinning and taking photos of me standing in front of it or sitting in the driver's seat thumbs-upping out the window. Everything works as it should in Polly, everything does what I tell it to do – indicators, clutch, breaks, gear stick, lights. I firm my shaking hands on the steering wheel and try to slow my breath, shuddering it in and shuddering it out. I inhale to the count of four and exhale for five – a mindfulness technique that I learnt on an app that doesn't work and I gasp for air. The pain at my left side feels like a lung has been pierced and I hold my hand gently to my ribs. I feel small and loose, jagged, my right foot pushing up and down on the accelerator, jolting us forward.

Dusk is settling all around, the lowering sun appearing over hedges and barn roofs, strong as a laser beam, blinding. Cows' breath hangs in the air as the animals observe us barrelling down the black tarmac of the bending country road, as though it's nothing unusual.

Jamie is loud in his car seat in the back and I stretch my mouth into a wide, manic smile, before turning to comfort him. The lower half of his face is covered in snot and spit and tears and blue dye





from his lollipop, his mouth an open wail. His screams fill the tiny car and push the air out of it.

“It’s okay,” I mutter, eyes back on the road, immune – nearly – to his ratchety sobs. My phone is flashing on the passenger seat. We’re only ten-fifteen minutes gone at best. Calls, WhatsApps, I ignore them, check the battery – low at 25%. I should’ve thought of that. Not ideal for the drive ahead. The drive to where? Johnny’s kind face. At least an hour away in Donegal. Would he take me in? My heart surges. I cannot bring this to his door. I cannot bring this to anyone’s door. We have no plan. “We have no plan,” I say sternly to Jamie in the rear view mirror and my ribs sting. My mother’s kitchen flashes in my mind. No point. He’d go straight there. He’s probably already been onto her after finding out that Siobhán has no idea what he’s talking about. Fuck, I should’ve called her straight away. What is wrong with me? My mind is ragged, picking things and dropping them, then racing on. I pick up my phone with my left hand, jab *S I O* into it and up she pops, her smiling face from a kids’ thing we were at last Easter. I think I even took the photo. “Text Siobhán” I tell my phone. *If Jay gets a hold of you tell him I’m in the loo. Tks.* I throw the phone down again, raging. Raging that I feel embarrassed to text my best friend. Raging that she is probably sighing and rolling her eyes and swiping my message away before she even finishes reading it. No she isn’t. Well, she might be. She’s probably sick of me. She’s definitely sick of me; the calls, the texts, the surprise sheepish arrivals at her door with Jamie in my arms and the broken look on my face of *I know*. The constant lying on my behalf and on her own behalf and on my mother’s behalf. The constant advice I never take. I’m probably too late anyway. She has probably already told him she hasn’t seen me in six weeks. She is so honest and he hates it. They hate each other and it’s rubbing off on me and her. It’s been rubbing off since the very beginning. I’m supposed to be on Jay’s team, amn’t I? Being his partner and all. The mother of his child. We’re supposed to be a ‘united front’, he says. I’m supposed to be loyal. He is loyal, but in a way that feels wrong.



I can never seem to explain why. He doesn't give me the space to explain. He watches me with eyebrows raised, mocking the length of time it takes me to articulate myself. Mocking my effort. My confusion. My words get stuck and slow and I feel thick and stop trying. And he is so *good* at explaining, taking me on a journey from my point of view to his. How did he get so good at this? He is so good at telling me why I am wrong or got it wrong or just need to rethink or relearn or understand. It is wrong. I know it is wrong. I was right all along. *I was never crazy, I was never thick. I was right.* Anger builds, deflates, knots itself into the pit of my stomach. Tears prick my eyes and I swallow them down. Now is not the time for tears. Now is the time to be brave and be strong and go somewhere, anywhere. A hotel, maybe. One off the main roads in some tiny town he'd never think of going to.

Jamie has stopped screaming and is looking out the window into the darkness, only snuffing now, tears wet on his face. He trusts me and his trust is terrifying. My heart is bursting with love for him. With anger for him. With defence of him. I have to be very careful I don't take any of this out on him. I have to be very careful not to blame him. I've done it before and I was ugly – an ugly woman, an ugly mother – dragging him out of the café by the sleeve, everyone staring (*the shame, the shame*), Jay holding his head in his hands, ever the victim of a hysterical wife and out-of-control child. He's only four. *He's only four.* I flash him a smile again. But kids can read tone. They feel atmosphere. They absorb their mother's tension unconscious in the womb for God's sake. Jamie has felt things, physical and emotional things, in my womb he will never be able to articulate. They take it all into their little bodies and the trauma of it sits in the marrow of their bones until they reach adulthood and realise and get help and then get bitter and then eventually get better. And it takes ages. It's going to take him ages. He might end up hating me. And I will have created this by giving birth to him, by growing him alongside all my stagnant stuff, repressed stuff, avoided stuff. And he has stopped speaking. He says yes or no and





tells me when he needs to use the bathroom, but other than that, very little. Even when he is in the playground, distracted, me on the sidelines trying to be normal and talk about whatever crap with the other mothers, gurning with enthusiasm for him. It's unsurprising. If I were him I wouldn't speak either. He knows that this started the day he was born. Escalated the day he was born. No, the day I became pregnant. No, the day I moved in. There are too many days to count. Too many days when something which seemed like it would help actually made things much worse. All my fault. Moving in. Agreeing to marry him. Making him a special dinner the night he got his promotion. Giving in to sex, and a certain type of sex, certain types of sex acts, so many times when he knew, *he knew*, I didn't want to. And God, the way he treated my father. He made me late for his funeral. *For his funeral*. Jamie was only one when he died. Dad always knew what was going on underneath the toothy smiles and carefully chosen conversations. We never spoke about Jay. Jay who left minutes after arriving at the wake in my mother's house because of 'work' and arrived back late to pick us up. My whole family awkwardly, politely, sympathetically not asking why my husband saw it fit to do this to us. To me and Jamie. My eyes fill with tears again and rage fills my chest and throat and I swallow, swallow, swallow. Jamie needs me to not crash the car, to not break down, to not lose my mind, to not give in. He needs me to get us to somewhere.

We continue along the blackening roads. I have to make a plan. Where will we even find a hotel far enough out of the way? My petrol is going to run out. I have no plan. Previous plans have never worked. Staying with my mother last spring for a week didn't work. He showed up every day crying and screaming and threatened to call the police, accused me of kidnapping Jamie, saying he'd been onto his social worker pal about me. My mother aged a decade. She ignored me, or was sharp with me, and stayed in her room. One night I heard her praying for Jamie. The next day she asked us to leave and we left, went back home. I apologised to Jay for



taking Jamie. I meant it. With a tremble in my voice, I told him that his behaviour was unacceptable, that I would not stand for it. That night he paid for a Chinese takeaway for us all and bought a bottle of wine and we cuddled on the couch watching *First Dates* and *Gogglebox* and we didn't talk about anything hard. He held my hand and apologised for scaring me and Mam. He cried and I held him. *He's learnt his lesson*, I thought. *This is where things change, and I did it, this is because of me. Everything is going to be okay.* I couldn't stop smiling. We had sex and I didn't hate it and he didn't try anything. I texted my mother, I texted Siobhán: *Jay and I are back on track. He apologised and I forgave him. He promised to go to counselling. Thank you for all your support in recent weeks Xxx.*

The next morning he took the back of my head with one hand and shoved my face into the leftover curry chips in their tinfoil container because I hadn't cleaned up the night before. We had gone, at his insistence, directly from the couch to the bed – there had been no time to clean up. Still in my nightdress, I sobbed down the kitchen press to the floor, curry sauce – disgusting, gluey – in my hair and on my face and down my neck and he left for work. I cleaned up the mess. Myself and Jamie got on with the day. I told no one. There was no one to tell. I couldn't go back now after everything I'd said the night before. How thick am I? *Thicko*, like Jay used to jokingly say, even in front of people. The mortification. The shame of it gutted me.

It will never end. He will keep finding us. Unless I'm dead or he's dead or me and Jamie move to Spain and get new identities. My stomach shrinks with the realisation. The realisation I've always had – since his first lie, his first infidelity, the first abandonment, the first rage, the first grab, the first slap.

I know where I have to go and my chest tightens.

We turn off onto the main road and drive for another twenty-five minutes, stopping in a lonely petrol station to put a fiver in and to grab a nearly totally black banana for Jamie, who is in okay form.



Even I am feeling better in a way, now that I have finally made a decision. I am resigned. This is it.

About a year ago I called a helpline and the lady said it takes on average thirty acts of violence before a woman tries to get help. She said that what he does is against the law. It is against the law. They have to believe me. Especially now with this #MeToo thing going around the internet. It's different when you're in a relationship with someone though. People see it differently. They make presumptions. I shove these thoughts away and firm my hands on the steering wheel. I insert a tape of Elmo's kids songs into the radio. Jamie sings along, making me laugh out loud with the joy of it, despite the jolt of pain in my ribs. They will believe me. They have to. They will see the bruises on my neck. They will see the bruises all up my left side.

I drive along the familiar road. The car knows the bends to this place. A stillness has come over me, like a balm. Like when I was at dad's funeral holding Jamie's hand in one hand and Mam's in the other. Calm, resigned. Jamie asks me where we are going and I tell him I just have to pop in to visit someone quick. I grab my phone and it is lit up with thirty-seven new texts and twenty-eight missed calls. All from him. Every single one. As I drive I scroll past the messages; the ones with one word, the ones in all caps. The pleading ones. The threatening ones. I don't read them. I know what they say.

Nearly there. I look back at Jamie and he's looking back at me and my heart bloats with love for him. I am doing the right thing by me and Jamie.

Just as I put my indicator on to turn down the road I have been down so many times before, a Garda car swings out ahead of me and stops at the yield sign. I jump and brake and grip the steering wheel. This is the first car we've seen all night. As we creep past I peer into the car's window and one of the younger Guards is looking back at me. Barry, I think? He rolls down his window and I roll down mine and give him a half-hearted smile. My heart is ramming into my breastplate and I try to slow down my breathing.



“Hiya Miriam,” he says cheerily. “Lookin’ for the boss man?” His smile is easy, friendly, carefree.

“Hiya!” I say, the words spilling out too fast. “Yeah, just thought I’d swing by on our way home. See what he wants for dinner.” I grin.

“He’s not in tonight I’m afraid. He got off this afternoon.” Barry looks pleasantly at me.

This was a terrible idea. An untenable idea.

“Oh yeah, right, yeah. I should’ve known that. So hard to keep track of... shifts and... you know.” I continue to grin.

Barry looks around, the way Guards do, into the back of the car, sees Jamie, nods at him, looks back at me. Doesn’t take his eyes off me. He’s not smiling anymore. I’m gripping the wheel. Grinning.

“You alright there Miriam?” he says.

*‘You alright?’ he says.*



# Merging Grey

Sacha Hutchinson

A wet Saturday for the bike ride,  
Flat, heavy and disappointed,  
We will go anyway.

Peddle on,  
Through Connemara's merging grey,  
Sea, hills, horizon,  
It's soft lines and muted shapes.

A fractured blue patch above,  
A sparkle of light,  
Three men in a boat fishing.  
Three bright white cottages.  
Three brown cows turn orange.

Another twist ahead,  
Then down, fast and free,  
Away into returning grey.





# Immigrant

K. T. Slattery

Immigrant. Refugee. Expatriate. Stranger.  
Keep them all out. They all denote danger.  
No turbans. No Allah. No Shiva. No heathens.  
Keep them away for they all pray to demons.  
My reasoning is perfect. Why yes it's quite sound.  
They come to destroy us – to knock us all down.  
When they come to get us, we must be prepared.  
So arm your young children – with hate unimpaired.  
Get out your Uzis and Magnums and Glocks.  
They are coming to kill us, but there it won't stop.  
They treat their women like vermin, like swine,  
Virtueless cowards, not like Trump, or Weinstein.  
Those upstanding pillars to whom we concede,  
Not like them at all... they are different you see.  
They're freaks. They're terrorists. Some worship the sun.  
Garments stitched to hide weapons and guns.  
If you won't listen to reason then examine the facts,  
Of the average death toll from terror attacks





Only five less than toddlers pumped full of lead...  
So close that 'golden door' before our rivers run red.  
Make sure they're not welcome! Make sure they don't get in,  
For the Good Lord says 'Same is virtue and different a sin.'  
No more huddled masses. Please keep your weary and poor.  
The plaque shall be changed now to, 'Vacancies – no more.'

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# Shia LaBeouf Came to Me in a Dream\*

Mikayla Kelly

I've done it again,  
Same shit, different day.  
And I'll do it all again  
In the morrow.  
For I know no better  
And refuse to know no better.  
There's work, the tills  
Beep beep motherfucking beep.  
Then training and running and  
Ice baths galore.  
There's no nine to five. The job  
Never ends. You do it  
Again and again the shifts' never over until  
You're dead.  
We go and keep going.  
We do, we did, we will do

\* 40







Because that's how we survive  
In this world for the few.  
I've done it again,  
The same day over and over.  
Same stress, same work, same fight.  
Because I can,  
Because one day I will.  
Because in some sad way,  
I wouldn't change it for a thing.

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\*Shia LaBeouf is famously known for a motivational speech called  
'Just do it.'





# Line

Jessamine O Connor

*Along this particular stretch of line  
no express had ever passed.*

—Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow

We have blocked the line  
with caravans, a Mercedes bus  
with the door come off  
and a trailer draped in blankets  
with a child's rainbow-coloured  
tunnel inside it;  
a pink plastic house  
sits on the track  
and a rotting pile of wood  
long left to slime;  
a car parks there  
on and off  
and further along we sit



around the firepit made of a tractor wheel  
and on nights like the solstice  
look up at the stars  
and the rocketing sparks  
feeling the ghost of a train  
roaring right through us.

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# Neuronal Beach

Daniel Senna

The sky is of a neon purple, the hologram palms next to us oscillate slightly, being projected from nowhere. They stand still – like Ana and me – on this beach, in a state of half-life that will last an eternity; billions of years of slowly degrading atoms.

Ana and I sit on the glowing sand, bright to the point of being opaque, a vast wasteland of yellow neon amidst the purple night. Ana is pregnant; our children were born yesterday. Lying in that old bed, in our wooden shack looking out to the sea she put them in this world. They are somewhere else now. Her belly bulges.

Our friend – who we call, at his request, Hannah – is in a remote corner of the beach, nailing himself to a car. It is an old Volkswagen Beetle, but in good condition, painted dark turquoise. A few minutes ago, Hannah walked by us, casually announcing he would nail himself to the Beetle, holding a toolbox by its handle and smiling with spiritual calm. Surely the Holy Ghost or some Zen emptiness invaded him during these moments of car communion; we have seen how, with his back to the rear window, one hand nails the other to the car roof. Crucified, but I never remember how he nails the last hand. Memory simply disappears. But it does him very well.

Or her: here comes Hannah, nailed to the back of the car, driven now by a translucent ghost, a woman, a feminine version of him.





Hannah always wanted to be a woman – and in a certain way now he is. The ghost parks the dark turquoise car beside us, phases through the car door, leaving no footprints on the glaring sand – we do not either – as it walks over to the back of the car and frees Hannah with a hammer.

Every day this happens. Now Hannah comes toward us, with his original, more nitid body being surrounded by the gelatinous film of the ghost woman's silhouette. Hannah's androgynous voice says the night is beautiful, and so is the sea. Soon we will have to go home, however, as it grows too late and he has let enough of the weight go away; through the holes in his hands, through a car ride. His voice is a uniform sonic mass, indescribable by these words I project on the backs of my eyes.

Hannah sits beside us and we contemplate the enormous moon above the sea. Like the sand, it shines absurdly, but we are not blinded by its gleam anymore; white, opaque, like smoke. Certainly someone up there waves out to us, but we will never know.

Returning home, we walk through a sand trail uphill, with pixelated beach grass surrounding the bare ground. The car stayed back there on the beach, waiting for the next day – for us. I go in front, holding Ana's hand, with Hannah following. I know Hannah envies Ana: her body is quite dense. We never truly touch each other but I can feel, through the almost-contact of our atoms, the strong charge of her body. I have known Ana since we were small, before the bombs, the radiation, the drugs in the air. Which we breathe and do not hurt us anymore. There is a slight smell of nitrous oxide in the air tonight.

Hannah envies Ana: not so much due to her density, I think, as to the fact that Hannah loves me. I had him once, dressed as a woman – Hannah knows I like women, but I also like him – the women's clothes, similar to Ana's, helped me love him beyond our common limits. I think I saw my father and my mother as I kissed Hannah,



feeling the straps of his brassiere over the thin, hard flesh. They were blurry, but rigid, ghosts, hovering under the bedroom roof.

But Hannah and Ana coexist peacefully. I also love Ana. I have always wanted her, even though the other men never let me. But now, with everything over, I am her husband. Yesterday, when she lay on our old bed, in the wooden shack atop the hill, the smell of the cannabinoids spread on oxygen mingled with the inhaled solvent as she started glowing between her legs; and, when there finally was an intense, white enough glow in there, an angel descended from Heaven, passed through our roof, and took our children, serenely smiling. We could only observe, smiling too, as everyday's angel, with his white garment, wings, and an aureole, drowning his hands within Ana's glow, produced three babies.

The angel took them outside and beside us, on the same hilltop, built another wooden shack with a view to the sea leaving the babies there, alone. Then it flew and returned to Heaven. The three of us watched from our porch as the night ended, the day began – a high-definition sun climbing over the horizon, scorching the mildly flickering palms – and, within a short hour, the three babies grew, becoming adults, with our forms and names. A great white glow then erased us, and today we are somewhere else.

Ana's belly bulges: our children will be born today. Then they will be erased again, with the overwhelming glow of the bombs, of the drugs that made me believe I grew duller every day – though there is only one day I know – of everything that exploded my brain and leaked my head outward. We were on the beach when it happened. The end; no more prying hands and eyes, no white rooms. But now the day begins again, and I, my wife, and my friend are safe, beginning another happy day on the beach, in a different place, but the same. Here we are united, and there is no one else to break us up. I miss nobody.

We descend again: the day began. We walk, but we glide, with unseen wheels beneath us, being borne under the sweet ether wind



toward the blurry lights, rushing waves. I fear the days might end up living themselves, repeating endlessly but with me as a dead shell, my body motioning, nothing behind my eyes. I hang onto a comfortable thought, to ease the journey a little. Even if I go, there will always be a picture – of an unforgettable summer – in a dustless corner of the shack. It shows the three of us in front of the car, the sea behind us.

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# Stardust

Reiltin Tynan

“On a soft bed of ashes  
Where once your dreams burned bright –  
Find strength in your darkest moments  
And the truth up late at night.”  
He held the dying embers  
And blew them gently into life  
And as the flame grew in his hands  
He said, despite my strife,  
That someday I’d grow big and strong  
Someday I’d believe  
In those around me – big and small –  
And love and live and learn to grieve.  
He told me with a gentle smile;  
“Fear not old age nor tender youth  
– For both have bitter fruits –  
But fear the day you fail to trust  
Within you lies a spark.”





You can chase each dream away  
Or fight to leave your mark,  
So lose yourself in wonders  
In riches, sonnets, peeling bark.  
We are all born of stardust,” he smiled  
“that’s enough to light the dark!”

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# Festival Fireworks

J. A. Sutherland

*for 'The Soprano'.*

The floodlights of Meadowbank Stadium are still  
in the rain-sodden sky, like stuck fireworks.  
The weather worse than dreich,  
I venture out in the soggy streets

to Sainsbury's for toilet roll and gin –  
life's essentials – and imagine the spectators  
at the Castle Tattoo; the din of pipes and drums,  
as the best of Scottish beats down on both.

If Meadowbank – once host to others games,  
given its stay of execution – had  
presented this military pomp,  
would equal crowds have flocked,



or Hogmanay's display  
fallen for a gust of Dunedin's wind?  
History and tradition keep folk  
afloat, even in this Diluvian Festival.

Sometimes we long for fireworks.  
Now, all I crave as water soaks my shoes,  
is a warm sofa, Bombay Sapphire, and a kiss,  
a breath, a touch of your soft, soft face.

Or better, the ecstasy of your voice  
igniting the wet, black sky.

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# Dunmore East

Sally McHugh

Sparkling Sunday July  
early sun circling my lined face.  
A pink Bellini for company  
peachy Prosecco  
good health to you Giovanni  
wherever you are.

Water appears cold below  
yet you children bathe  
laugh, play, splash  
shouts of “Mammy, look at me.”  
Your smiles and joy  
infectious  
gently warming my tipsy heart.

Musing on Bellini  
my Giovanni in hand  
light captures



rich tints and detailed shadings  
reflecting me.  
My living portrait.  
Bubbles rise, bubbles go  
and so too shall I.

O happy the handstands  
of young agile limbs  
carefree and alive.  
That your joy could last forever  
no speedy incoming tides to turn  
laughter to salty tears  
no bodily tsunamis  
shifting and swirling grains  
of gritty sand.

Clouds will gather around the setting sun  
tides will ebb and flow  
too soon you will arrive at this very spot.  
No more will I sit in tiresome watch  
as laughter echoes  
and the sea rise sprays.

I will run free  
along the shore  
splashing, laughing, sparkling.

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# Lovers to Fill the Silence

Abigail Stevens

I met a summer man whose arms felt like spring,  
all warmth and rain-smile and dancing with wildflowers.  
He taught me to drown in the gentlest way  
and sang me to sleep on the sea-bed,  
water rushing over our broken bodies  
the way blood explores veins.  
I never meant for this to happen:  
for the involuntary act of leaning in to him  
to become a prayer.  
Perhaps I loved  
ideas better than the flesh standing behind them.  
Can you blame me?  
He could take an overcast night  
and paint stars over the clouds,  
Virgo kissing the horizon like she feared letting go.





We thought the world,  
and moon too,  
of ourselves. As if lust paved the road to our godhood;  
and immortality, our birthright.  
In the wake of silence after our fifth date,  
or maybe our third or seventh, concluding with  
the confession of how I despaired emptiness: vacant stares, that  
hollow-chest feeling.  
Cocooning myself in the crumpled sheets,  
of a bed too vast for my slender diaphragm,  
I found courage.  
Or whatever infernal thing slammed him to the wall,  
heat steaming from my skin  
I remember smiling against his biting teeth,  
because goddamn,  
there's nothing sexier than an educated man at a loss for words.

The way I tell the story doesn't sound like love –  
pretty words and an ambush of lips.  
Sometimes,  
we empty people think that if we  
squeeze something tight enough we can absorb it.  
It never works.  
My lost pieces were missing  
when he toppled in to my bed, and the morning he walked out,  
the same gaps yawned in my jigsaw bones.  
The bed sheets,  
and my hair, were just a little messier.



# Exodus

Louise Lamb

It does not matter that we walked for so long. It only matters that the distance before us became the distance behind us. Now we are here.

There is a word for the march. It is an old word. People with bags and horses. People with a god. We were none of those things. We huddled together for too long under the craft of our faith.

We had no luggage, no cars, or photographs to abandon on the way. When we left, we anticipated how we would become. Perhaps if we had carried things, if we had left them behind, that would have changed what happened.

What we did instead, when the time came for a letting go, was a different thing entirely.

Our shoes wore away to thin, scraped rubber. We replaced them. Abandoned malls and unburied dead. Whatever was left. A column in dress shoes, clogs, and flip flops.

There were setbacks. Problems. Challenges. We found that we became thin, and we could not become fat again. There were fires, smoking black from the plastic, to see one another at night. Our bodies, breathing and speaking in softened voices, comforted in their closeness. The highways burnt and safe with emptiness.







We know that we did not need to do what we did. The leaving behind.

It happened a day and a night after the accident. We did not know it would be the bang of flint on steel. A day full of rain when we did not find blood on the road. One of our number was hurt. We felt her as a broken forearm. She did not slow our walking, but we were mad with her pain. It never left us. A raw, screaming wound that we were carrying and carrying, hoping it would heal.

We curved downhill, moving no faster. The days came warmer and we sweated beneath the coats we would not peel from our thinning skin.

With a forearm there is a sling. There is a splint. There is swelling that will fade away. A part of a human body. To remove. To cauterise. To strip away the injured flesh. This is worse. We did not think we were as a human body.

We gathered in small groups. We whispered. The embers were catching. We tried to ignore that feeling of pain. Our right arm. An imperative part of us that we could not replace. How quickly we forgot. It became a savage appendage. Unused and unusable, it swung at our side. It worsened. It betrayed us. We were horrified by it.

We are not a human body. There was no need for the bone saw and the wooden spoon between the teeth. We looked at the forearm first. We looked further. We saw the sprained wrist, the bloodied finger, the broken toe, the infected ears, and the vulnerable squelch of the appendix.

The fire seized us and we cut. We delved and sought and dismantled. We began to remove.

We gathered them, those burnt parts, and we left them on the road. Not with us. Not near us. No longer threatening. No longer a cause for concern.



Now that we are here we have realised. We are a human body, and we have altered ourselves beyond the reasonable and beyond the understood. We have been rended. We are a hobbled, bloodied thing.

The ears, the nose, one of the eyes, the unnecessary organs and the furthest limbs. Six of the toes. One of the fingers. An entire forearm and the meat of a shoulder. All of the lower ribs.

The pieces that we cut out. The people with wrinkles, withered legs, or simple speech. With coughs and bloodied soles. Those still small with youth. The ones we left behind. We wait without them, in our own charred creation, for growth that may not come.



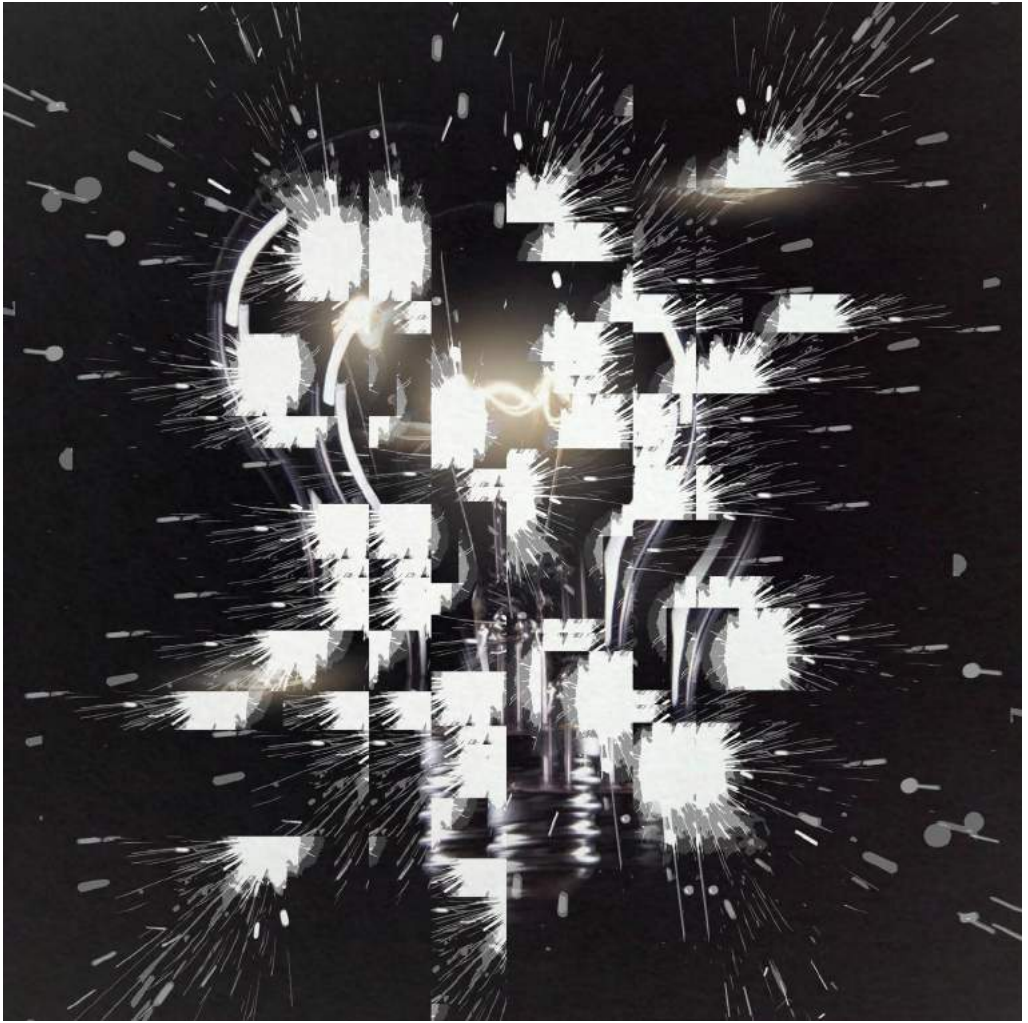


# World in Me

Kelsey Mader

59 \*





# lightconstructed debulb

Slim Jesper Varblane

\* 60





# Burnout

Réiltín Tynan

61 \*







# Let Go and Trust

Eimear Brennan

\* 62





# And All I Loved, I Loved Alone

Jessica Coakley

63 \*





# Twinkling Gaze

Jeff Annunziata

\* 64







# Beauty Within

Olivia Brandow

65 \*





# Prime Real Estate

Craig Screech

\* 66





# Spectres in Delirium

Christiane Vieira de Farias

On the roof she emitted sinister whispers,  
And in the pallor of the windstorm  
she was doing terrible dances.

Sometimes, in her black dress,  
the monstrous poem of the night says:

“Drops of scorn in sparks of dead stars.”

On the other side of the abyss,  
in the emerging sonata of the Devil,  
an apparition scratches the house.

She blows frenzied flies  
and, between wasps spewing scarlet,  
sucks the spirit, dances by the mist of the assassins,  
and she walks in the direction of the spectres in delirium.





# On reaching 45 the poet realises she is still only 23

Audrey Molloy

It happened quite by mistake, snipping a loose thread from the hem of my corset, the blade nicked my thigh and the tiny wound ran round my leg tin-opener fashion. Not a drop of blood spilt, but my flesh rippled to the ground like a silk stocking freed from its garter on a close afternoon. Revealed beneath, a taut and muscular thigh, covered in a gleaming coat of black hair. I was less shocked than you might imagine, thrilled, in fact, to make this discovery and I set about freeing the rest of the leg. The ankle was a real sticking point and I had to sit on the floor, prising flesh away with a cheese knife at first, and later a box cutter for the tendons, tougher than steel, until there, on the parquet, lay a coal-black neat and polished hoof. I was quicker with the second leg, applying lessons from the first. Already I could feel a surge of life through my veins. The gloves of my tired arms peeled away to new limbs of satin brown with buttery hands and fingernails like miniature clamshells. The torso was painful to flay, but how proud I was of my high round breasts, my belly rippling where it met the pelt reaching up to my waist. *You sexy fuck*, I whispered to the reflection in my ensuite mirror, then grabbed each ear and pulled upwards. A lake of hair fell over





my shoulder and reached to my navel. My eyes were ringed with black paint, my mouth, cleft as a hare. This was no dream, I tell you; this was just the beginning. In my zeal I tread on my tail three times before draping it over my arm and, grabbing my best bag and throwing in the knives, I was off to where the wild young things go to dance among the Baobab trees.

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# Communion

Aoife Reilly

Elation is the taste of amber.  
How you undo me  
has no right or wrong  
no before or after  
the spine melts in to bark  
bare bodies lithe  
in the northern sun  
hands sink in to roots  
that caress flesh  
the labia of this earth  
in the zing of orange  
I sink in your skin.

You are the birch  
I am the sap  
sipping your sweat  
from root to branch





we are ignited  
by the lime of night  
green to gold to bones  
we overtake, are overtaken  
gather ourselves up  
to the hum of light  
'til I am the river  
you are the tide.

We could be hares in April grass  
where I inhale clay, water, your fur  
under a moon of milky dreaming.  
We could be sacred and unholy  
casting out songs that follow  
the slow stairs of pleasure  
the length of your pulse travelling  
through forests and streams in my body  
all the way to the coffee, next to the sugar  
on the kitchen counter.

And this is the portal  
where I want you,  
yes, you,  
to meet me in your mouth  
soaked down to the juice,  
to the crevice between lime and stone  
where I end and you begin

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beyond body of man, of woman  
beyond knowing, not knowing  
in to our world  
without end

amen.

AOIFE REILLY

//

COMMUNION





# Snow Globe

Agnieszka Filipek

a roe deer stands alone  
nibbling moss  
it has only a piece of the forest

around it eternal winter  
snow falling  
covering its tiny world

snowflakes never melting  
a moment  
shimmering with glitter





# Light in the Darkness

Nav Logan

The click of a lighter. A flare in the dark as a cigarette is lit.

The sound of someone inhaling deeply, like this is their final request.

The orange glow moves, flares up and dies off for a few seconds, and my eyes watch it all, hypnotised like a rabbit in the high beams.

In slow motion, I watch, transfixed, as the glow draws nearer.

I feel its warmth against my forearm, and then the hiss of burning flesh as it is pressed deep.

Searing pain engulfs my brain, momentarily blinding me with white-hot light.

I whimper, bite down on my lip to stifle back the scream that bubbles forth from my throat.

I suppress the torment, bottling it up as I do with all my pain, trying to hide it from the world.

Tears fill my eyes as the throbbing in my arm pulses with waves of anguish.

“Ahh look! The wee boy is crying!” a motherly voice coos in the dimness.





Angrily, I wipe my face with the back of my hand, streaking tears down each cheek.

“Big boys don’t cry. Big boys don’t cry...” the silent mantra slips from my lips like a lifeline.

“Quit snivelling, ya wee shite! Grow a pair!” growls another daemon from the cavernous vault inside my skull.

Sometimes, one branding is not enough to silence all the voices and allow me to sleep.

My mind still boils over like a stormy sea. Tonight is going to be one of those nights.

With shaking hands, I spark up another cigarette, and select the next spot to hide my deepest secret.

By morning, I will have shaken off the melancholy. It has driven away the daemons that haunt my nights.

The class jester can be resurrected.

None will be the wiser.

The only evidence of my turmoil will be safely concealed beneath the sleeves of my hoodie.

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# Mother Mine, Mothers Ours

Julia McConway

All of us beautiful generations;  
I sometimes forget we take shelter  
under the same umbrella  
squeezing in like sardines to stay safe from rain.

Not wanting to poison our minds  
and hoping things would be  
different for us, our mothers  
told us the stories we needed to hear  
far too late in life and I made  
the mistake of thinking we were  
different species with different ideals.

I sat and listened,  
awestruck –  
at such strength never expected,  
wondered how many untold stories



have been handled by invisible  
muscles.

And how, looking back,  
they can laugh it away?

This system, it hurt them too  
and I think now of how I live,  
thankful to my mother and  
her mother and her mother who  
spent days since time began  
tunnelling up from underground.

And we haven't reached the surface yet,  
we could be breathing fresher air.  
But see the light not too far off and  
these most wonderful matriarchs  
before us saw so few sparks  
of promise, yet, they persevered  
in ways we can't begin to trace –  
this is the smallest tribute I can make  
but I will strive to make you mothers proud,  
strengthened, knowing:  
we are all sisters, still treading through twilight.

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# Frisson

Audrey Molloy

In the false darkness of a bar at noon,  
your eyes: a clearing in the woods,  
where something catastrophic has struck

to let the light in like that. I fear  
you think I'm making things up,  
all those tiny coincidences

like the photo of Al Pacino we notice  
just after we talk of the movie, unaware  
of the struck match so close to our fuse.

I tell you that Sting is even older than you  
but the coin sticks and the jukebox  
doesn't play and I know



this story may never unfold, only  
in unspoken thoughts that become moths,  
phantoms glittering in the imagination.

But you, Van Winkle, woken from torpor;  
what made you grab this life  
as she tried to slip from the room?

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# Lullaby

Katy O'Dowd

I hate the night. There, I've said it. Anything nocturnal really gets to me. Would get on my tits if I had any.

I have no discernible health problems. A good, if somewhat tedious job. A sweet partner. Plans. A cute tortoiseshell cat named Doris.

But an awful, lingering hate I own weighs me down. It follows me everywhere I go. It never leaves my mind. It colours my judgement. My perceptions.

Did you know that the average human being sleeps away a third of their life? Did you also know that people in the South of England sleep better than those in Wales? Or that nearly half of the UK population gets fewer than five hours of sleep a night? The recommended amount is a full eight hours.

How I envy those under-slept fools their five hours. Sleep and I have not been bedfellows – if you will excuse the expression – for so long that I can't even remember when my head last nestled into my pillow and I drifted off peacefully towards dreams.

Instead, I am haunted.

My dearly departed mother told me many times that I was never a good sleeper. While other babies and toddlers would snooze off in







their buggies, bouncy chairs, cots, over their mushed-up food, in the car, or even at bath time, I was always alert.

I ran the poor woman ragged, so she said, until I was six and had learned how to while away the night-time hours by reading to myself, instead of dragging her out of her warm, sleep-soaked bed. One slipped foot slowly in front of the other. And repeat.

I performed badly at school, I could never concentrate. Lack of sleep, you understand.

Meanwhile, my brain was full of its own gleeful self-importance at the thought of being filled with all sorts of interesting bits of trivia. How I deprived it.

As a boy, I imagined it as my pet in the cage of my skull, waiting to be fed so it would do well and thrive. But it never received even the tiniest scrap from my small fingers, and I could imagine it going off into a corner to sulk with pleading, limpid eyes downcast.

I just scraped my way into college, to study business, and the hours kept by students really suited me. Parties, narcotic-fuelled raves, Sunday morning-in-to-afternoon sessions at pubs, from the grotty to the sublimely ridiculous. I took it all in my stride of course, and never experienced come-downs or got burnt-out.

So, what's the problem? I hear you ask.

Quite apart from my current appearance? I answer.

Or the fact that I only realised that I had been watching, staring at the TV for a full twenty-four hours when I saw that the early morning show presenters were wearing different clothes?

Or, and here's the crux of the problem, the startling realisation that I think I have just sold my soul to the Devil in return for a smidge of sleep?

You don't believe me, I can tell.

I've been to the doctor so many times that she joked about putting a restraining order on me. "Hello Tim, here about the chronic insomnia again?" she'd joke. Very funny.



I know all about the 'sleep routine'. Cut down on caffeine, cut out alcohol. Exercise. Only go to bed when you're really tired. Keep your bedroom well-ventilated. Have a hot bath two hours before bed. Keep your bedding clean. Use lavender. Have a hot, milky drink. Write everything that's on your mind down on to a 'To-do' list. No large meals after eight PM. And so on.

I've tried it all, right down to exercise of the traditional and more intimate kind.

The doctor put me on sleeping tablets. Valium, Tamazepam, Diazepam, chalky yellow tickets to the Land of Nod.

I popped them like sweets and still I lingered in the Land of the Undeniably Awake.

She sent me to a sleep clinic. After all kinds of tests involving beds, wires, graphs, and machines, they couldn't find out what was wrong and sent me home.

You know that Shakespeare line that goes "to sleep, perchance to dream"? I wonder if he was an insomniac too.

Marilyn Monroe, Vincent Van Gogh, Winston Churchill, and Napoleon Bonaparte, amongst countless others, couldn't reach the point of exhaustion where the body and brain join together in the slow, sensuous dance of alpha, theta, delta waves and REM.

Lack of sleep and dreams can drive you mad.

I got so obsessed with the thought of running down the street naked, ranting, drooling, that my long-suffering doctor referred me to a psychologist.

After he determined that my only problem was the lack of sleep, he asked me to leave, calling to my retreating back that the majority of his patients should be so lucky to have so small an affliction.

48% of British adults sleep for five hours or under a night. I assume they are the ones with small children or elderly parents or major money problems.

I hate them.



I hate the remaining 52% even more, with their shiny countenances showing clearly that they have obtained the required eight hours. Like topping up a mobile phone. Clean, sparkling, happy.

How I hate them.

I hate those ads for mattresses and pillows.

Especially the really irritating one with the large and small creatures settling down companionably for a good night's kip.

I hate the annoying jingle that goes with that ad.

It races around my brain when I'm lying in my darkened room desperately trying to reach the coveted prize that is Eight Hours. It's always that jingle, or the one from the early 1980s for the carpet cleaner with the inanely grinning, chirpy housewife.

I can sense your boredom now.

Since I mentioned His Imperial Dark Majesty, Eater of Souls, Feeder of Large Fiery Chasms, you have lost interest in me and my tale of woe.

I tried the Good One, Shepherd of Souls, Perfection Personified first, you know. I cried out to Him in the night to deliver me from my torment. But I guess He's busy with all the angels and cherubs, up in their placid, feathery Heaven.

I got down on my knees and prayed, promised all sorts. I'd be a better, kinder person, I'd get involved with charities and do good for all men. And women. And the starving babies in Africa and the street children in India. Even the animals.

But He didn't answer me. Maybe He was too busy teaching the New Arrivals how to polish their halos.

Fuck you, I thought, fuck the whole lot of you. Sideways.

So, I sat up in my bed, dashed my tears away, and well, kind of invoked His Evilness.

Kind of? Kind of! I hear you shriek.



Ok, so I cut my finger and let the blood pool at the bottom of a cup. I looked up a summoning spell on the internet. I'm not going to bore you with the details, suffice to say that my blood and black candles were involved. Then my vision dimmed in great swathes of dark velvet and I heard a voice in my head. A big gravelly one.

Just lack of sleep?

I suppose that if I were alive in ancient times, was a Celt for example, a hole would have been bored into my skull to let the badness out. They were great, the Celts. Bloodthirsty, full of the joys of being.

I wonder how they slept. I did look, but couldn't find any data.

Anyway, I couldn't find the part of my head I should drill into. Remember the being bad at school bit for starters, and then the bravery element. Of which I don't exactly have in large doses.

I did try, actually, but the drill bit skidded off my skin and I now have a rather fetching plaster over a drying, crusty scar. Maybe I should have used a proper drill rather than the battery-operated one I currently own.

The rest of my appearance would come as a shock to you if you had ever met me.

My clothes hang off my gaunt frame. At over six-foot, I weigh no more than nine stone. My face looks lined with the worries of a man much older. My eyes are dull and doggy-paddle in their sockets.

My lips are too tight and I look like I'm permanently grimacing. Like that Wildenstein woman who had way too much plastic surgery. My teeth are still white, but I'm sure they'll start falling out soon.

My once shiny, full head of hair is coming out in soft clumps of black glossiness.

I tremble. I shake. St. Vitus' Dance.

I bump into things all the time, my body is covered in a grid of bruises that span the colour spectrum from midnight black to deep purple, lilac, sky blue and greenly yellow.



My favourite night-times ever are those that approach the summer solstice.

I often wished that I too could gambol over the hills like the little spring-born lambs, rejoicing happily in the time of year, where the day never really ceases. Daylight bleeds on and the birds are confused, twittering well past the midnight hour.

Mine is a lonely affliction.

While the rest of the world can sleep, I cannot. While the rest of the world sleeps the sleep of the just, I cannot. While the rest of the world has dreams, even nightmares, I cannot.

And so back to Asmodai the Antichrist, Iblis the Indecent, Kroni, Beelzebub, Mephistopheles, The Defecator of Demons.

The morning following the invocation, a leaflet was slipped through my letterbox. From the Zee Corporation, promising a night's sleep fit for a king or queen. All they wanted was a small donation.

I phoned up the number stated. They took my credit card details and address, and promised that help would be with me within two weeks. The charge was £66.60.

Are alarm bells ringing with you, or is it my somewhat fevered imagination?

The spiral of fear and deep loathing took over on a Tuesday morning, about ten days after my phone call to the Zee Corporation.

A large brick smashed through my window, raining shards of glass all over the sitting room carpet and easy chair.

I picked it up. It was smooth, heavy, and a pinky-terracotta colour, with ridges along the sides and holes through the top and bottom.

Now, I live in London, and crime can be rife. But in my tree-lined neck of the woods, such a thing is practically unheard of. I craned my head out of the broken window to get a better look, but saw no hooded boys running away.



KATY O'DOWD

//

LULLABY

The brick is quite obviously meant for me to bash my head with,  
hard, so I can fall unconscious, sleep.

The work of the Zee Corporation or that of the Regent of  
Exquisite Torment?

All that I can say is now I am terrified of sleeping.

I cannot sleep.

Will not sleep.

My body grows increasingly weak and weary, but I cannot  
afford to shut my eyes, cannot afford to let them rest for even one  
nanosecond.

You see, I quite like my soul.

But it will be lost if I do indeed reach the Eight Hour target, or  
relax into a long-overdue slumber.

I sing a lullaby to my brick. Croon, cuddling it.

Well, what else can I do?



# Rural Electrification

## November 5th 1946

Anne Donnellan

What they do not know is:

That the power pole will parse their passage.

That the beam switch will swipe their spirit space.

That the socket on the wall will suck in the outside.

That the element will move molecules to make bubbles and broth.

That the sound box will fill their filters with babble.

That the tube in the frame will stunt their organic orchestrations.

That the fuse board will be the cranial circuit conductor.

That the record button will prescribe their mutual manifestations.

That the dam for the turbine will topple the earth scale.

That the energy on the grid will fabricate friction.

That ultra-connectivity will hone human constriction.

That the illumination of the nation will banish the dark.

That in time they will mourn the hearthside conversation spark.





# Grasp

Kevin Higgins

*in memoriam poet of page & stage Eiléan Ní Faltíos.*

grasp at roses growing happily  
red in other people's gardens  
snip off every last fucking one of them  
with the hedge clippers  
you use to clear a path through the forest  
on your lover's back

drive laughing through the streets  
texting minor celebrities  
whose phones all allegedly died  
in Adam Clayton's former bidet

grasp the golf stick  
and learn to beat in  
heads no longer of use to you







wake the opportunists  
who'd re-Tweet anything  
jaysus do  
some say *let them stew*  
*in piss pots of their own making*  
each of them a cross between  
a chimpanzee and a yeast infection  
but they're your chimpanzees

grasp the corpse of Eva Gore Booth  
and go about the place in a people carrier  
owning it      dump your agent  
your auctioneer  
            your orthodontist  
they are not worthy

grasp that microphone and shout out  
how one night  
you tore the big wet lips off her  
and made them your own

tell them grasp the pipe and blow  
white smoke up all the right holes

given the chance  
to do the necessary  
grasp it      both hands  
and talk so fast no one notices they're dead

ROPES 2018



# Twig

Jordan Mant

My one true wish is, when you look back at me,  
You see what I see, strange unassuming beauty,  
For when I look upon thee, I see vestiges of your story,  
The lines of time never dim your brilliant shining body,

But this vision of yours is slanted, your worth compressed  
I'm concerned by the skeleton breaking through your chest,  
Slim, healthy, thin, those words conceal the truth,  
The sickness entrenched from crown to sole, disorder has taken  
root,

Helpless am I, to fight this invisible cur,  
Could I, would I step in and banish this insidious curse,  
Such a silken stealthy monster, feeding on doubt and perception,  
You will never, ever be good enough, you will never achieve  
perfection





And as you strive for brilliance, I watch it strip meat from bone  
Till none else remains but arid skin, wrapped around brittle  
stone,

I can see your beating heart, fantastic but so insecure,  
I weep for the day it gives in, can't maintain it anymore

Your beautiful little soul, let me hold it in my hands,  
I will try and save you, kiss this fragile little branch,  
Because you are human, you are alive, you're my everything  
I cannot lose you to this fiend, my precious broken twig.

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# Chocolate Teapots

Louise G. Cole

A well-dressed girl squats down beside Dan in the doorway. He tucks his sleeping stuff further beneath his legs. She doesn't look like the sort to nick his gear, but you never can tell.

The young fella who'd almost kicked him to death in the small hours two weeks ago didn't look like the type either. Neither did that fresh-faced yob who'd tried to pee on him the day before yesterday. "Take no notice, mate, he's just pissed," the lad's friend had said, handing over a guilty fiver when they'd finished relieving themselves in the gutter a few feet away.

Dan shifts uneasily next to the girl. His ribs still hurt if he twists. A sideways glance registers gorgeous red hair, long wisps escaping from a knitted hat. Trendy, expensive coat, shiny black boots with the straight-out-of-the-shop sheen still on them.

He wonders what she's up to as she begins to talk about the weather, traffic, queues in the supermarket, the bank. "I know, it's diabolical, isn't it?" he says, but she doesn't flinch.

Instead, she lights two cigarettes and is surprised when he refuses, stubs them out straight away, sparks spraying too close for comfort as she grinds them to a pulp underfoot. He thinks of the waste, should have had them for swaps for later in the day. Must be the cold weather slowing his thoughts in to molten treacle.





Ignoring the bruised ribs, he twists for a better look. There is something familiar about her. A celebrity, perhaps? He is a bit out of touch, but glances around for cameras, just in case. He shakes his head as if to dislodge something stuck inside, and wishes he hadn't. These days, that early morning headache and bad taste in the mouth seem to last all day.

"Do you mind?" she asks, taking a notebook from her pocket. The cover has a design of glittery cartoon cats. "You'll find it helps," she says, taking the top off a biro as if she is about to take notes.

It is only later he thinks how odd it is that a journalist on assignment doesn't write anything down or ask questions.

But she is right about it helping. Passers-by clearly think she is an investigative reporter, or a celebrity under cover, as they head over to make a show of pushing generous bank notes in to his paper cup. They must be hopeful of hidden cameras recording their good will. She crouches beside him smiling, nodding thanks on his behalf.

Just as the shops are closing, crowds dispersing, she gets up and walks off in to the darkness. He finds himself staring at the black spot in to which she's disappeared, but in no time, she returns with two packs of cheese salad sandwiches and a take-out coffee.

"I didn't know if you prefer brown or white so I got both," she says. "And I presume you take milk and sugar?" Dan tries to think of some witty reply that sounds grateful but not too sycophantic, but he used up all his thanks when the St. Vincent de Paul woman at the hospital gave him dry clothes and a clean blanket.

The girl comes back next afternoon, and then the day after. Each time, she stays for a couple of hours, rattling on about nothing in particular. When she fails to ask any questions, he finds himself volunteering information.

"They call me Doorstep Dan," he says, trying to recall who 'they' might be. Other down-and-outs, locals, bus drivers, shop assistants on their way in to work, guards on patrol, the man in the donkey



jacket selling papers on the corner, the black guy in the fluorescent jacket who empties bins.

“No-one knows I have a degree in anthropology.” He tries not to sound bitter. What was it his father said? “Anthropology is as useful in this world as a chocolate teapot,” which had made him all the more determined to finish the course.

“I have a degree in medieval history,” she volunteers. “Can’t say it’s ever got me a job either.”

“Human behaviour,” she says on the fourth evening. “It’s fascinating, isn’t it?” but she doesn’t elaborate. He feels it should be him, someone with a degree in anthropology, making such an observation.

He wants to tell her about the life he used to have, before they got repossessed and had to move in with Kathleen’s witch of a mother. Before, when he’d still got the job in the warehouse. Before, before. He can’t find any words that don’t make him sound whiney and pathetic.

When she’s gone, he realises he doesn’t know her name. In a plastic carrier, she’s left the open packet of cigarettes and lighter from the first day. There’s a thick woollen hat and a pair of man-sized mittens, alongside two packs of egg sandwiches and a naggin of vodka. He stares at the little bottle. He should have told her vodka gives him a headache, he prefers rum to soften life’s edges. Perhaps he’ll tell her tomorrow. He sits for a few minutes sparking the lighter on and off, watching the little flame flicker in the darkness.

That night, he dreams he is a student again, back when he befriended a stray cat, taking weeks to win its trust with saucers of milk, cheap tins of tuna. Eventually, the cat took to sleeping at the end of his bed. He struggles to remember the name of the girlfriend who’d also shared his bed that winter. In his dream, she is a long-legged redhead just like his new doorway friend. He wakes wondering what became of the cat when he moved away? He’d really loved that scraggy little ginger moggy.



“No lady friend today then Dan?” the news-seller from the end of the street comes over. He sometimes brings a free paper, sometimes coffee. If they are both sober enough, they might talk about the weather, or the day’s headlines.

Dan shrugs. “She’ll be here later,” he says.

But they both know she won’t.

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# Struck

Sophia Cordeiro

I.

*When struck against steel, a flint edge produces  
sparks.*

In serenity, in the English countryside, stands a  
dark church – the church of St. Thomas, which rests  
in stony silence.

She exudes only contented apathy.

And yet her sturdy walls are composed entirely of  
flint.

And Mt. Vesuvius herself would tremble with  
jealousy at such undiscovered potential for  
destruction.







II.

*You're only given a little spark of madness... You  
mustn't lose it.\**

There is a woman who comes to the theatre  
looking for answers when she has forgotten to take  
her meds.

She tells me that her apartment blows up every  
time she steps over the threshold.

She tells me that her body is charred and bloody,  
that her face is swollen and her flesh is singed  
away.

She says she tries to shower and change her clothes,  
but she can never wash away the carnage.

She tells me that when she goes in to her  
apartment, it is on fire.

I look out at her unblemished skin from behind the  
green glass of my ticket window and try to remember  
what it is like to burn.

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\* Robin Williams.





# Sea Swimming

Sacha Hutchinson

I used to watch the women  
Come for morning coffee,  
Even in the winter,  
Hair wet, animated,  
A shared experience,  
A tribe of sea swimmers.  
Too young then  
Still busy with children,  
Now it's time to try.

A winter's morning,  
The sky soft blue with milky edges,  
The sea deceptively inviting,  
Clothes peeled off quick,  
Swimsuit on even quicker,  
Feet hurt on cold concrete,  
Tentative steps  
Through puddles and slime.





Down the metal ladder  
Chipped and rusty,  
Flat reflective blue ahead,  
A curious seagull twists and angles,  
Pain and numbness  
From dipping toe  
Through submerging body,  
I breathe seaweed and salt,  
The sea surrounds,  
Subsumed by blue,  
A primitive belonging,  
Three strokes and out.

“Eight degrees” he tells me,  
A warm afterglow,  
A spark of inner clarity  
The brain like ice crystals

I will do this again tomorrow.

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# Pearl

Nuala O'Connor

Like oysters to the walrus, the sea draws me; I go there for succour when all is not well. Today I stop above the strand and let the saline-and-seaweed stench fill my nostrils. Inhale, exhale, the air is a slow-working balm. My eyelids are stiff from crying; I blink over and over to loosen them. I take the steps down to the beach.

You said that I was a beautiful disaster. This after ten years of love. I couldn't decide how to react, what to lay claim to. But there was no time for anything from me.

'I'm leaving,' you said.

And I knew by the taut, strange pull of your mouth when you spoke that it was true and that nothing I could do would stop you.

I keep to the high tide line and scan the banks of stones and sea-drift, searching for the familiar shale-and-ripple of the shell I want. There are piddocked stones and mussels, tresses of bladderwrack. At last I spot what I am looking for and I dip low and lift it, snap it open. The meat is gone and there is no jewel, but the inner walls of the shell sparkle like hope. And I want to tell you that I am the grit and you are the nacre. That I burrow and you cloak, that those are our fates. I carry the shell to the shore-line, hold it aloft like an offering, and toss it as far in to the water as I am able.





“Without the grain of sand, you cannot have the pearl,” I say in  
to the wind.

I say it to you though you are not here. I say it to the sea and the  
horizon. I say it as solace to myself, as prayer.

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# Reaching

Alice Kinsella

The sky delivers God to us.  
The moon, the stars, black clouds backlit,  
gliding against each other, silent as cats.

Lying on the dew damp lawn,  
watching our breaths rise like smoke.  
Our fingers loop tentatively like blades of grass.  
Above, amongst the bright spots,  
a flare, sudden  
like the glare of a match,  
moving faster than the earth can spin.

*A shooting star!*  
*Make a wish!*

*Do you know*  
*that's an angel*  
*flying to earth?*



*No, wait, look how it flickers, falters,  
it's a satellite, the space station maybe.*

The disappointment of humanity  
interrupting.

No wishes, no angels.

But then the tightening  
of fingers.  
The reminder.

A reminder  
of how far we can go.

ROPES 2018





# A Chat with Cat

by Jordan Ryder

**Catherine Doyle is a graduate of the MA in Literature and Publishing (MALP) program. Cat was first published in the ROPES 2012 issue. Her first series, the trilogy *Blood for Blood* titled *Vendetta*, *Inferno*, and *Mafiosa*, was published by Chicken House, UK. Her forthcoming novel *Storm Keeper's Island* is set to be published by Bloomsbury, in August 2018.**

Jo: Cat, your first series *Blood for Blood* was published in 2015, 2016, and 2017. You said it took eighteen months from when you found out to when *Vendetta* was actually on the shelf, what was the behind-the-scenes timeline like for you?

Cat: Yeah, so I wrote the first book, *Vendetta*, when I was working on my thesis in the MALP. I was doing a thesis on YA and marketing, and author brands and stuff like that. And I really wanted to write something YA, so I did the first draft in tandem with my thesis.

By the end of the summer I had a first draft. I had written it in under thirty days and it was... I mean to say, it was a terrible, terrible, *terrible* piece of work. But I didn't *know* at the time that it was really bad! And so I started haphazardly sending it out to agents. I had







absolutely no idea what I was doing. I was sending it out and then editing it and then sending it out to some more. [But] I got my agent... it must have been early 2013 [by then], and then she very quickly went out [with it]. I agreed my deal with Chicken House in July 2013, and I was like, okay, now I'm going to be published and this is great! And [then] they sent back a release date of January 2015, and I was like, *what?* That's eighteen months, that's crazy. Little did I know that that is a very, *very* typical time frame in publishing. Like [with] *Storm Keeper*, my newest book, it will be a year turn around which is *insane* and nearly killed me with deadlines.

But [my first draft of *Vendetta*] was really terrible and genuinely really bad. I would *die* if anyone read it.

Jo: Do you still have it?

Cat: I don't know. But I don't know if I would even want to read it, I think I'd just be so overcome with embarrassment. It's too soon. I've written four books now and the first draft of everything is never really accepted. Like, it's good but it's 10% of where it needs to be, the real magic of writing [is in] the finessing, it comes in the editing. What I learned in that eighteen months' time was that we did about three or four really intense edits. So we went through it structurally, and we really brought it up to scratch, and then you move onto line edits [...] and then you go to copy edits and then you go to proofs. And *then* the proofs go out in the world, and *then* you go to final copy.

I think this is a fallacy that people have they think 'oh I've written a first draft and I don't think it's very good and I'm not gonna make it.' The truth is – nobody – and I know a ton of authors, I know bestsellers and people who are award winners and not one of them would *ever, ever* send their first draft to anyone in the [industry] because they're always terrible.





Jo: That's heartwarming to hear!

Cat: There's a lot of ego in writing, you have to just be like, 'I'm a good writer but my first drafts just aren't good.'

Jo: Do you remember where you were when you had the idea for *Vendetta* or where it came from?

Cat: I remember my mind was turning around all this YA stuff anyways 'cause I had been researching it for my thesis. And I love film, and so I was really into *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*. I just thought... all this danger and intrigue and secret societies that live and breathe under modern society. I remember thinking gosh there's nothing in YA that even deals with this really successful topic.

I was falling asleep one night, and I just remember I had this image of this old, crumbling mansion in my head, and there were these five, kind of shadowy boys standing in front of it. And there was just something so compelling about it. And I realised I was looking at them from across the street and, you know I was a sixteen-year-old girl, and it was just this really powerful image. And I was like, oh, that's it. These are my characters, and this is the setting.

So I just got up and I wrote the first scene really quickly... and that was the spark. And for me if I get the spark then I can run, I can just run the whole way. So that for me was the moment when I knew, I've got something here. I just had to figure out what it is and how I was going to finish it.

Jo: That's interesting that you see the scene and then the idea builds from it. And you said earlier that you write to finish it, you don't really know where it's going necessarily?





Cat: Yeah which honestly, I wouldn't recommend. That's just the way I work. I've got friends who'll methodically plan out chapter by chapter. They'll plan the climax to happen here and they do it really formulaically. And it really works for them. It's so different from person to person. What I would recommend is that you need to finish the draft when you start it, and that you push through the boring moments or moments of self-doubt.

[But] when I start writing I'll have about half the plot worked out and then when I begin writing my brain's like, oh we're writing this? Okay! And then it will generate the other half of the plot. But it can make very convoluted or messy first drafts.

But what I'm really trying to improve upon is a more comprehensive structure. So if that's twenty-five chapters, it's chapter one, *this*. Chapter two, *this*. Like one line, not necessarily extremely detailed but just so I don't end tying myself up in loops and knots.

Jo: Are you finding with *Storm Keeper's Island* that there's added pressure, starting a new series, though it's for a different audience?

Cat: Yeah, this is definitely a different kind of pressure. It sold for a big deal and it was a publisher's auction which is, you know, five publishers vying for it which made headlines in the publishing industry. It's your dream as an author that you get this kind of interest and this excitement, and to have Bloomsbury, you know the *Harry Potter* publisher. But at the same time, it's a different kind of pressure now because people are gonna hold you to a standard.

I'm [also] conscious of the fact that it's the first book that I've written set in Ireland. And it's set on this tiny island where my grandparents are from. It's got real life ship rescues in it that my great-grandfather was a part of, so there's so much in it that's personal, and so much that's in it that I just want it to be incredible. So in that sense I found it extraordinarily difficult to write.





Jo: I know you call it ‘the book of my heart’ and because it’s set on Arranmore I can imagine – particularly when you haven’t written in Ireland yet, you set *Blood for Blood* in Chicago – I can only imagine there’s a different kind of pressure, as an Irish person and especially with your family’s history.

Cat: Yeah, and there’s so much of my real family in it. And you know it deals with a relationship between a grandson and his grandfather, and it touches on memory loss and dementia – not specifically, I don’t use that in any kind of scientific terms, I do it in a very magical way, but it touches on some hard, personal themes that I gleaned from my life. I thought, you know, I don’t see this in enough books for young people and I would like to bring... you know I want to do something important and worthwhile with the book apart from just magic and myth.

Jo: In that vein, this year’s *ROPES* is being published in aid of Jigsaw Galway – an organization that helps youth aged fifteen to twenty-five who are going through challenging or distressing times. Mental health is a pretty apparent issue in *Blood for Blood* – specifically with your portrayal of PTSD and anxiety, and the effects of trauma. What do you think of how mental health is being portrayed in literature today, and how important is it that it’s accurately represented?

Cat: You know that’s actually a really good question because I think in recent years, particularly in the last year or two, mental health has really taken central stage in a lot of YA. And I think it’s done sensitively and really accurately, and I think part of this shift that is happening, even mainstream media in the last few years, is that people are really coming out and saying this is really more common than you think. Especially instances of anxiety or depression, a lot of the stigma around it is falling away because people are stepping up and saying, ‘I suffer from anxiety’ or ‘I suffer from depression,’ and it’s





not unusual. And I think with YA, I don't want to say breaking down barriers, but there are certainly a lot of authors who are stepping up and tackling this subject matter and I think that a lot of authors pull on their own experience. I know a lot of authors who suffer from anxiety and a lot of them suffer from depression. And rather than hiding away like it's an illness that they don't want to speak about, I think they're finally starting to bring it into the light and I think that's helping to normalise it and makes it something that is easier [to] discuss and be open about. And to expose it and seek help and find a way to manage. So I actually think the YA industry is doing incredible work with mental health and I think that there's a real sense of responsibility to get it right if you're gonna do it. I will say the mental health in my books, like PTSD, and I have a degree in Psychology, so I was very, very, very intent on getting it as accurate as possible and as sensitive as possible and I think that authors have responsibility to do that. But most of them are doing that in a good way. Yeah, I think it's moving in the right direction. And I think the more visibility and the less stigma we can achieve with mental health the better, for everyone.





# A Chat with Charlie Byrne's Vinnie Browne

by Brendan Garrett & Victoire Lemaire

As we enter through the door of Galway's beloved bookshop, *Charlie Byrne's*, Vinnie Browne is chatting with a local woman and asking after her son: *how is your lad doing?* A familiar scene at *Charlie Byrne's*. Here, the visitor is not just a customer, he is a fellow book lover; that much was clear when we sat down for an interview with Mr. Browne, manager of a bookshop which has become a 'Galway institution' and a bucket list item for world-wide visitors. When asked about this label Browne chuckles: "Um, yeah that's good, we're happy with that designation." A modest reply, but one that also reveals a sense of pride in a business that has done brilliantly for almost three decades within the tumultuous industry of bookselling. Faced with the competition of powerful chains – such as Waterstones and Easons, not to mention the omnipotent threat of online retailing – Browne reckons that the shop's success has much to do with Galway's active cultural, touristic, and academic community.

This bookshop is one of a kind. The fact that over a hundred thousand titles are stored here – floor to ceiling, new, second-hand,





and antiquarian – without any computerised record (only the staff's impressive knowledge) tells a lot about the magic, treasure-hunt-like experience that is a visit to *Charlie Byrne's*. Attentive customer care, thoughtful selection, and personalisation simply can't be replicated online. Maybe that is why Browne seems carefully hopeful in the face of the digital age storming the book world: the "e-book revolution as they were describing it some years ago never materialised really [...]" The book has been around for a couple of thousand years. It's kind of hard-wired into the human communicative system, you know."

It's the personal touch then, going the extra mile for a customer though it's not particularly in the business' favour – such as storing copies of Pullman's *La Belle Sauvage* without the bulk-buying discounts allowed to larger booksellers, for instance – that is the key to independent bookselling... and much more. To Browne, a bookshop isn't only a business. Referring to the launch of Margaret Ward's biography of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington taking place the very same week, Browne highlights the importance of a bookshop as a cultural hub: "It should be on par [with a] theatre space, an art center, or a gallery [...] it's a space where people can go without spending any money, where people can gather, and where you can have interesting artistic events of one kind or another."

*Charlie Byrne's* manager rejoices over the current Irish publishing industry (its inclusion in the Man Booker Prize, and the incredible success of *The Atlas of Irish Revolution* by Cork University Press, which sold 24,000 copies nationwide) but is also quick to emphasise the importance of supporting local businesses, especially in a time of exponential demand for online retail – which is where the big threat lies according to Browne. What matters to him is for people to read, connect, and buy – as with their vegetables – 'local.' "So many people come to Ireland and they walk around places like Galway and they go, 'oh this is great, you've got so much going on here.' [...] Keeping that alive is a big, big challenge [...] the retail world has changed so much in the past thirty years it's going to be changed hugely in the next twenty years [...] it's down to people recognising that they do





have a responsibility to support the shops in their neighbourhoods otherwise they won't be there." While there is no certainty about the future, especially when it comes to publishing and bookselling, we are willing to bet that if *Charlie Byrne's* stays the kind of treasure trove it is today, it will still be where it is, doing what it does best, in thirty years.







# Our Contributors

## **Jeff Annunziata**

Jeff Annunziata graduated Cum Laude from Mercyhurst University in 2017 with a BA in Graphic Design. In 2016 he was awarded first place in the Mercyhurst University Juried Art Show for his photography. Since then, he has been working as a freelance graphic designer and photographer. Follow him on Instagram @jeff\_annunziata to view more of his work.

## **Olivia Brandow**

Olivia Brandow is from Romulus, NY, and graduated with a degree in Integrated Marketing and Graphic Design from Mercyhurst University in December 2017. She now works full-time as the social media manager and graphic designer for Montezuma Winery in the Finger Lakes region of New York State.

## **Eimear Brennan**

Eimear Brennan is an Irish artist living in Dublin. She works from her imagination creating her drawings outdoors in nature. She drew the featured piece *Let Go and Trust* while sitting under an oak tree and a beech tree over two days in Autumn. Eimear's pen and ink drawings can be found at [www.eimearbrennan.com](http://www.eimearbrennan.com) and [www.instagram.com/EimearBrennanArt](https://www.instagram.com/EimearBrennanArt)





### **Rob Childers**

Rob Childers winters in Connemara and spends summers in a remote Alaskan cabin. A member of Galway's Over the Edge writer's workshop since 2012, he publishes frequently in *Skylight 47*, and was a featured reader at the Galway Library. His work has won awards in both Ireland and the U.S.

### **Jessica Coakley**

Clonakilty artist Jessica Coakley uses watercolours and mixed media to create loose, colourful landscapes. Hailing from scenic West Cork, she takes her inspiration from nature and transforms it into surreal, serene images heavily featuring celestial bodies. To see more of her work follow @jesscoakley on Instagram.

### **Louise G. Cole**

Louise G. Cole writes fiction and poetry. She has been published in *Crannóg Magazine*, *Skylight 47*, *ROPES 2016*, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent*, and several anthologies. She was nominated for a Hennessy Award in 2015. She blogs at <https://louisegcolewriter.wordpress.com/>, explaining how the 'G' in her moniker avoids unnecessary confusion with an underwear model.

### **Sophia Cordeiro**

Sophia is a writer and choreographer/dancer based out of Pittsfield, MA, USA. She is currently working with Berkshire Theatre Group and feels passionately about combining movement with both written and spoken word. She can be contacted at [scordeiro2295@gmail.com](mailto:scordeiro2295@gmail.com).





### **Mary Deely**

Mary Deely is currently doing the MA Writing in NUI Galway. She has previously done some screenwriting, including the film *Stalking Colin Farrell*, which aired on RTÉ.

### **Anne Donnellan**

Anne Donnellan lives in Galway. She is engaged with human rights advocacy works in Age Action. Anne attends the Kevin Higgins poetry workshops at the Galway Arts Centre. She was longlisted in the 2016 Over The Edge New Writer of the Year Competition. Anne has been published in the Galway City Tribune.

### **Mia Döring**

Mia's writing has been published in *The Bohemysth*, *Litro Magazine*, *Headstuff*, *The Journal*, and *Huffington Post UK*. Her poetry has been published in *Cabinet of Heed* and *Vias Poetry Journal*. She is writing her first novel, which was longlisted for the 2017 Mercier publication competition.

### **Agnieszka Filipek**

Agnieszka Filipek lives in Galway. Recently her work appeared in *Crannóg*, *The Blue Nib*, *Qutub Minar Review*, *Three Line Poetry* and *Windows Publications Authors and Artists Introduction Series Anthology*. She was awarded a distinction in the poetry competition Połowy and took part in the three day Educational Poetry Workshops during the Station Literature 21 Festival in Poland.

### **Ali Glasscott**

Ali Glasscott lives in Connemara and draws great inspiration from the wildlife and unique landscape around her. She has worked as a





Creative Writing teacher in Galway and elsewhere. Her poetry has appeared in a wide variety of poetry journals and publications.

### **Kevin Higgins**

Kevin Higgins's *Song of Songs 2.0: New & Selected Poems* was published in 2017 by Salmon. *The Stinging Fly* magazine has described Kevin as "likely the most read living poet in Ireland". His poems have been quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times UK*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Mirror*, and on *Tonight With Vincent Browne*.

### **Sacha Hutchinson**

Sacha Hutchinson is an eye doctor working in Galway from Dublin, she has a BA in fine art. She paints and illustrates. She recently started writing poetry, attends Kevin Higgins Friday poetry class and has read at the *Over The Edge* open reading. She sometime combines the visual image with words or words with the visual image.

### **Mikayla Kelly**

Mikayla Kelly is a second year creative writing student in NUIG, doing her best to balance college, work, sport, and life, while indulging in the few luxuries of adulthood. Those indulgences include doing the washing, topping up the electricity, and remembering to bring the moldy mug down from the windowsill.

### **Alice Kinsella**

Alice Kinsella was born in Dublin and raised in Mayo. She is currently a student on NUIG's MA in Writing programme. She has poetry forthcoming in *Best New British and Irish Poets 2018* and *Poetry Ireland Review*. Her first collection, *Flower Press* (Onslaught, 2018), was published in February 2018.





### **Louise Lamb**

Louise Lamb was born in England but moved to America when she was eleven. She has lived in Dublin since 2011, and is currently taking a year out of the rat race to pursue the MA in Prose Fiction at the University of East Anglia. Her writing explores isolation and madness through strange, unsettling stories.

### **Nav Logan**

Nav Logan is an Irish author, who spent some time living as a horse-drawn traveller. This has given him a rich tapestry of experience from which to draw from. His published works include an Epic Fantasy series called *The Storm-bringer Saga*. He also writes poems, drabbles, and short stories.

### **Kelsey Mader**

Kelsey Mader graduated from Mercyhurst University with a BA in Graphic Design in 2017. She is currently working as a graphic designer for the *Olean Times Herald* in Olean, NY, USA, as well as doing freelance design and photography on the side.

### **Jordan Mant**

Jordan Mant is a budding writer with an addiction for fiction. When not reading or writing novels or waxing lyrical about poetry, he can be found studying at DkIT. Along with his lifelong infatuation with books, he loves working with exciting people, swimming, and football.

### **Julia McConway**

Julia has always been passionate about words and books, and started writing poetry seriously about a year ago. She is working towards putting a first collection together, but still isn't sure when that will be. Julia is currently living and working in editing in Berlin.





### **Sally McHugh**

Sally McHugh is a PhD student in the School of Education at NUI Galway. She is always looking for excuses to write poetry or make art, and remain distracted from reality. The poem *Dunmore East* was written in 2017 while visiting the south-eastern village with her family.

### **Audrey Molloy**

Audrey Molloy was born in Dublin and grew up in County Wexford. She now lives in Sydney, where she works as an optometrist and medical writer. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Crannog*, *Meanjin*, *Cordite*, *Headstuff*, and *The Ofi Press*. Audrey is one of Eyewear Publishing's Best New British and Irish Poets 2018.

### **E. R. Murray**

E. R. Murray writes novels for children/young adults and short fiction. Her award-winning books include the *Nine Lives Trilogy* (*The Book of Learning*, *The Book of Shadows*, *The Book of Revenge*) and *Caramel Hearts*. Recent anthology publications include *The Elysian: Creative Responses* (New Binary Press) and *Reading the Future* (Arlen House).

### **Jessamine O Connor**

Jessamine O Connor moved from Dublin to an old train station on the Sligo Roscommon border almost twenty years ago, where she facilitates The Wrong Side of the Tracks Writers group, and The Hermit Collective arts ensemble. Her latest poetry book *Pact* is available from Kenny's, and direct from her dot com.

### **Nuala O'Connor**

Nuala O'Connor lives in Galway. Her fifth short story collection *Joyride to Jupiter* was published by New Island in 2017; her story





*Consolata* from that collection was shortlisted for Short Story of the Year at the 2017 Irish Book Awards. Nuala's fourth novel, *Becoming Belle*, will be published in 2018. [www.nualaoconnor.com](http://www.nualaoconnor.com)

### **Katy O'Dowd**

Katy is a fiction and non-fiction writer who has worked for *Time Out*, *Associated Newspapers* and *Comic Relief*. Her articles have appeared in *The Times* (London), *Metro* (London) and many other arts and entertainment publications. She is the author of *The Lady Astronomer*, *Memento Mori* and co-author of *The Scarlet Ribbon series*.

### **Aoife Reilly**

Aoife Reilly lives in Galway and has published in magazines including *The Lake*, *Antiphon*, *Poethead*, *Crannóg*, *Boyne Berries*, *North West Words*, *Skylight 47*, *ROPES*, *The Ogham Stone*, *The Galway Review*, *A New Ulster*, *Spontaneity.org* and *Tales from the Forest*. She recently published a first collection, *Lilac and Gooseberries*, with Lapwing Press.

### **Craig Screech**

Craig studied Visual Communications in CIT and has recently moved to Galway. He frequently changes his illustrative style to learn new techniques, with his main focus varying between vector and dotwork. Also, he's 35% Daffodil.

### **Daniel Senna**

From Porto Alegre, Brazil, Daniel Senna Irgang is a completely non-drug-addled ball of purple glowing love that's been fighting its home town's amazingly boring literature. Will he someday succeed? He hopes so, despite all the silly words and obvious palindromes. He studies Portuguese and English at UFRGS.





### **K. T. Slattery**

K. T. Slattery was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. She attended Spring Hill College, in Mobile, Alabama where she studied English Literature and Philosophy and now lives in Clonbur, County Galway with her husband and many rescue pets.

### **Abigail Stevens**

Abigail Stevens is currently a full-time student from the United States. She is working toward a BA in English at Mercyhurst University. When not writing, she is also an editor for the Mercyhurst annual fine arts publication, *Lumen*.

### **J. A. Sutherland**

J. A. Sutherland is a writer and performer based in Edinburgh, UK, widely published in pamphlets and online, and produces work in a variety of forms such as art-books, exhibitions, spoken-word performance, and on a blog, [throughtheturretwindow@blogspot.com](mailto:throughtheturretwindow@blogspot.com). Besides poetry, Sutherland writes drama, short stories, historical memoir, and reviews.

### **Reiltin Tynan**

Reiltin Tynan is a third-year medical student. She has spent time travelling in the Middle East, spends most evenings sketching and has a fondness for screech owls. On a clear night she likes stargazing.

### **Siim Jesper Varblane**

Siim Jesper Varblane. is 22 years old and lives in Estonia. He's a third year BA student at the Estonian Academy of Arts and studies product design. Art and creativity have always been important to him, whichever form it takes.







### **Cristiane Vieira de Farias**

Cristiane Vieira de Farias was born in 1987. Brazilian writer. Graduated in Production of Electronic Music. First place in a competition of Japanese Haiku and third place in the Flibo Prize. Her texts have been published in anthologies, magazines and collections. Her book of poetry *Distorções* was released in 2015.





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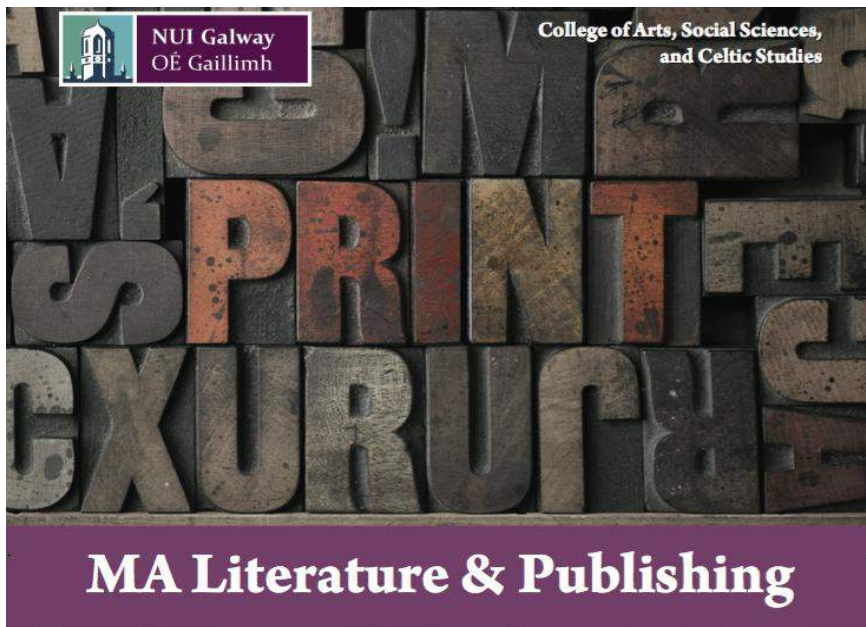
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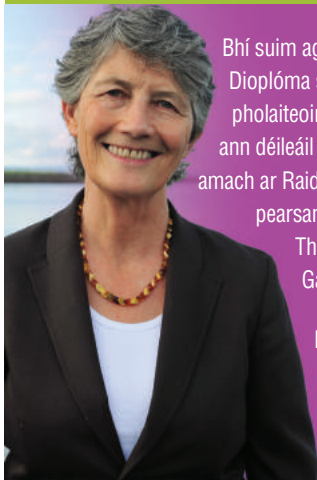
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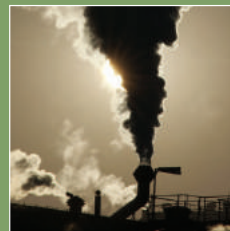
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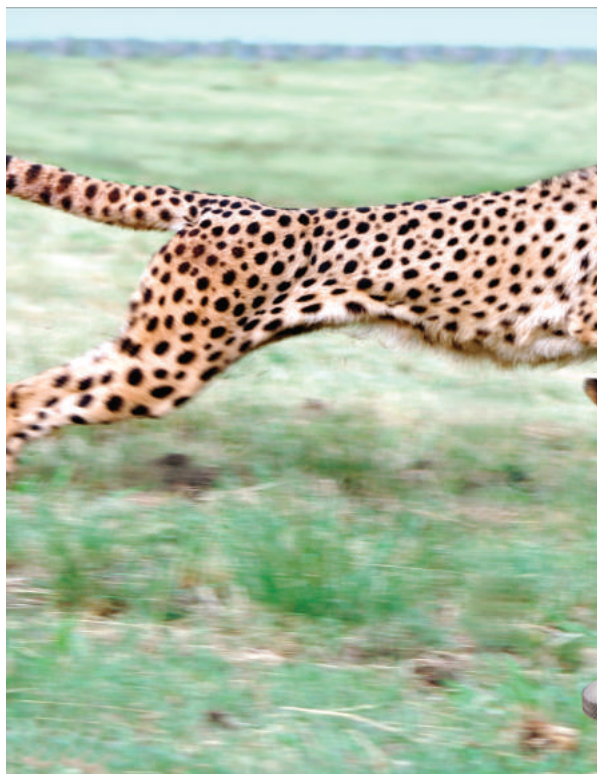
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