



Master of Studies in Creative Writing

Showcase Celebration Readings 2018

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Majella Kelly

Majella Kelly is from the West of Ireland. Her poetry and short fiction has been published in *The Irish Times*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Ambit*, *Southword*, *Best New British & Irish Poets 2017 (Eyewear)*, and *Aesthetica's Creative Writing Annual*, both 2017 & 2018. In 2016 she came third in the *Resurgence Poetry Prize*. In 2017 she was nominated by *Crannóg* for a *Pushcart Prize* and selected for the *Poetry Ireland Introductions Series*. In 2018 she came second in the *Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize* and was shortlisted by *The Irish Times* for a *Hennessy Literary Award*. For further information see www.majellakelly.com.

Genre: Poetry

Portrait Of The City With Mastectomy

PORTRAIT OF THE CITY WITH MASTECTOMY

The city is a woman and I almost can't look.
Someone has torn asunder her red and white dress
which was the gigantic For Sale sign, taken a scalpel
to her skin which was the façade of the Capitol Cinema
on Grand Parade, cleaved the flesh on the wall
of her chest which are red bricks and grey mortar,
clamped a rib-spreader on either shoulder
which are Tom Murphy's Dress Hire and a late night
pharmacy, in order to hold back organs and tissue
which are dumper trucks, piles of rubble and a team
of men in hard hats and high visibility vests.
Nobody should be able to see right through
the lungs of the city like that, as if through the gaping
backside of a surgical gown, as far as Patrick Street
whose buildings are a row of vertebrae that boats
once navigated and where pedestrians now bustle
as if nothing remarkable has happened.
Human eyes weren't meant to probe the dark
alveoli of abandoned rooms in the Oyster Tavern
from here, inspect the artery of Market Lane
or witness the scaffolding and steel girders holding up
the old Meat Market like surgical instruments.
Black plastic bandages flap in the wind amplifying
the persistent coughing of pneumatic drills
and all of a sudden there's Auntie Anne on a red
velour seat hovering in a ghostly confetti of ticket stubs.
Two shillings and sixpence she paid to sit up there
in the balcony. Now the yellow scoop of a digger
is my mother's hand manoeuvring a final Silk Cut
Purple to her lips, while the city holds the blue arm
of a crane across her breasts to hide her scars.

Gaston Tourn

Gastón Tourn is an Argentinian writer who has published two fiction books. In addition to writing, he currently works as CMO of Badoo and Bumble, two of the world's most popular dating apps. Previously, he spent more than five years in Marketing and Communications at Google, with an international career that spanned the UK, the US, Brazil and Argentina.

Genre: Screenplay/drama

I ♥ Iraq

I ♥ IRAQ

BY GASTÓN TOURN

I ♥ IRAQ is the real story of US Army interpreter Nayyef and Iraqi soldier Btoo – two men who fell in love at the height of the Iraq War.

It was the start of a dangerous 12-year struggle to live together as a couple.



SYNOPSIS

In 2003, Nayyef finds himself in the thick of the Iraq war, as a translator for the US Army. But a chance encounter with Btoo – a soldier in the Iraqi army – changes everything. They find love in the midst of war, but being gay in Iraq brings great danger. Despite the hostile environment they develop a secret relationship, until Nayyef's life is also threatened when he's targeted by militants for his work as a translator. Granted asylum by the US, he flees. But he has to leave Btoo behind, trapped in Iraq, and his attempts to get a visa for Btoo to join him are in vain. From that separation, they will begin one of the hardest battles of their lives – a battle against bureaucracies and immigration policies, prejudice and danger – in order to be reunited.

THINK

Suite Française meets *Brokeback Mountain*

FORMAT

- × 10 episodes @ 25-30 minutes each
- × Total content = 250+ minutes

GENRE

Drama

DIFFERENTIATORS

- × LGBT story set in an unexpected context (Iraq war)
- × Real story that has been little explored – only one documentary (*Out of Iraq*) but it does not focus on the emotional side of this drama

AUDIENCE

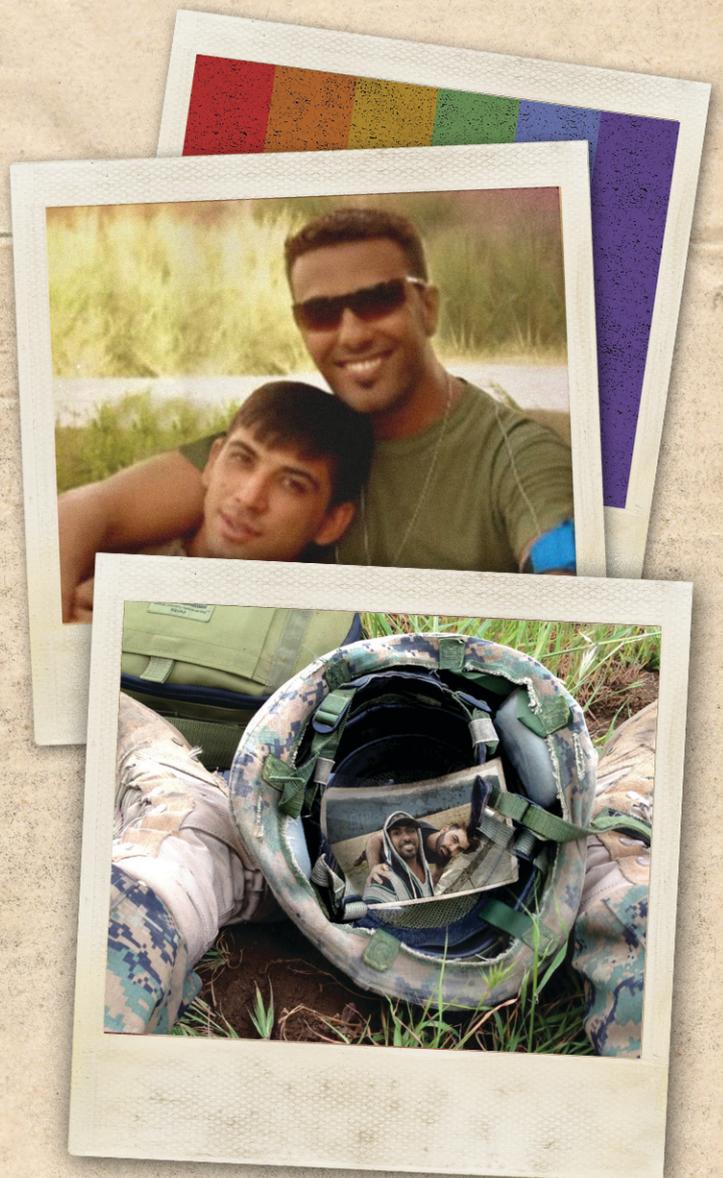
Millennials (18-35), LGBT

SCREENWRITER

- × Gastón Tourn is a published writer completing a Master's degree in Creative Writing at University of Oxford, with a focus in screenwriting.
- × In addition to being a writer, he currently works as CMO of Badoo and Bumble, two of the most popular dating apps in the world. He previously worked for more than 5 years in Marketing and Communications at Google, with an international career across the UK, the US, Brazil and Argentina.
- × He is working on this script with Jonathan Evans, an experienced screenwriter with more than a hundred commissioned scripts from short stop-motion animations to feature films, including many episodes of continuing dramas.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Contact gaston.tourn@gmail.com



I ♥ IRAQ

Episode 1 - "Roadside Bombs"

FADE IN:

EXT. BAGHDAD'S STREET MARKET - DAY

The sun hits hard on a busy street market in Baghdad.

A woman wearing a burka buys two oranges and chats pleasantly with the vendor.

Two boys chase a hen that managed to escape from a stall and play peacefully together.

NAYYEF HREBID, an art graduate from Baghdad University, slides into the market dressed in Western clothes.

NAYYEF (V.O.)
Baghdad smells...

Nayyef slips his fingers into a bag of coffee beans.

NAYYEF (V.O.) (cont'd)
Baghdad smells like coffee,
kebab... and melted plastic.

Nayyef withdraws his fingers abruptly from the coffee bag.

He crosses the market, dodging the sellers. When he is about to reach the corner, a convertible car stops in the middle of the avenue.

The car plays the song YA GMALK by Oras Sattar. The buffers rumble.

Three guys get out of the car and stop the traffic. They dance and laugh.

NAYYEF (V.O.) (cont'd)
It's the city where you can stop
the traffic... to dance.

Nayyef crosses the avenue without looking at the guys dancing.

AL-FAQMA, an ice-cream parlour, is across the avenue. He stops.

NAYYEF (V.O.) (cont'd)
Baghdad is the corner where I used
to have ice cream with grandma.

The music suddenly stops.

A car with tinted windows approaches at full speed. In the
distance, a couple of screams are heard.

NAYYEF (V.O.) (cont'd)
Baghdad's name was Madinat
al-Salaam... City of Peace.

The car speeds up and heads towards the sidewalk of the
ice-cream parlour. Cries of terror.

NAYYEF (V.O.) (cont'd)
Then what you've heard about
started.

People run away.

The car picks up speed and crashes into the parlour. An
explosion is heard all over the street.

Nayyef doesn't shudder.

NAYYEF (V.O.) (cont'd)
But this isn't a story about war.
This is a story about how I fell in
love with Iraq.

CUT TO:

OPENING TITLES: "I ♥ IRAQ"

Eric Czuleger

Eric Czuleger has spent the last seven years traveling, writing, and performing through over 30 countries. Most recently, he has returned from a year living exclusively in countries which are trying to achieve global recognition and statehood. This journey took him from working as a third grade teacher in Iraqi Kurdistan to becoming an ambassador for the world's newest country in Northern Somalia. Eric was trained as an intelligence analyst by George Friedman and he has published articles on everything from the geopolitical strategy of the Islamic State to why clowns are so creepy. Previously, Eric has published two novels of speculative fiction.

Genre: Travelogue

You Are Not Here: Travels Through Countries That Don't Exist

I am a third grade teacher in Iraqi Kurdistan. Here I am known as Mr. Eric, because my Hungarian last name is too difficult for Iraqi 8-year-olds to pronounce.

My students, *my kids* I call them. They fight. They form alliances, they make deals, they break truces, they stab each other in the back and save one another from ruin. Ibrahim wept every day because he was forced to sit next to his sworn enemy, Mahmoud. Soon, Ibrahim realized that Mahmoud could draw Dragon Ball Z characters really well. Mahmoud discovered that Ibrahim loved Minecraft as much as he did. A new alliance is formed from a common goal. Ignoring Mr. Eric. third grade is the United Nations without the suits and salaries.

Siva storms down the hall and I can see that he is red faced with rageful tears spilling out of his eyes. Mohammed runs up behind Siva to get in front of the lies that Siva is probably telling Mr. Eric. Mohammed is bruised and with tear streaked cheeks.

He stammers half in Arabic half in English. He's too angry to make sense. The boys begin yelling and crying, and cry\yelling at one another. I tell them that I just want to know what happened.

Mohammed allegedly told the class that Siva liked a girl. Siva reportedly said *fuck you* to Mohammed. Mohammed and Siva came to blows because their burgeoning egos were too damaged to discount words as just words. The allegation that Siva liked a girl and the *fuck you* in response were a rubicon crossed by both of the boys. Violence was the only logical conclusion.

Children know what adults claim to to have tamed in themselves: They know that violence is an antidote to fear. It is not a good antidote, but often it is the only antidote. And so, the boys swung fists and lunch boxes. They kicked and bloodied one another. They fought under the stairs while some students watched, some went to tell teachers, and others were too absorbed in the bright sunny day to care. This is how conflict works in the world. This is how conflict really works. Between these two boys honor had to be preserved and it had to be done through violence.

The boys, crying, scraped, and bleeding, have learned a lesson that nation states learn only to forget, time and time gain. Violence humiliates us all eventually. It is not a good option, but often it is the only option.

Martin Bremer

Martin Bremer was born in 1991 in São Paulo, Brazil. At twenty, he moved to Heidelberg, Germany for his BA in English Philology and Musicology. This is where he joined his first Creative Writing group. He also spent a year of this degree in Connecticut, USA on an exchange program. Currently, he resides in Oxford, UK. He really likes dogs.

Genre: Fiction (novel)

Eyelid Eclipse

It took her a few days but now the bed is made with a single pillow dead-centre with the headboard. Now that Gerry's gone Kasumi's been sleeping like a baby, and not only for the extra space: there's a newfound privacy coursing through the house like a fresh draught, as if she had been locked in a hermetic chamber from the time back when life got in the way. Not that work or Gerry were to blame for it, it's just the way things in life are stacked on top of one another — can't really move stuff around much for fear of the whole thing tumbling down. But with Gerry suddenly gone, looking through the ruins of what they built together, Kasumi is finding parts of it she wouldn't care to reconstruct.

As men — hell, as *people* — go, Gerry was, not for lack of a better word but for the unsurpassable fittingness of this one, human. He was sweet more often than cruel, always heedful — almost to a fault — of people's social positions, exceedingly patient and tolerant of the frustrations of one's day and/or traumas from one's background getting in the way of constructive dialogue. He did sound like a press release a lot of the time.

Out in the hallway now, Kasumi pulls on the cord of the hatch to the attic. The vertical triptych of her ascension now complete — from kitchen to bedroom to attic — she flicks the light switch to reveal several tins of paint, segments of carton evidently employed as mixing palettes, and the unfinished canvas framed in the midst of its creation.

She retrieves her brushes from a mason jar atop a storage-box-full of future nostalgia and regards her work — splats and hazes of green, blood red, ochre, violet over a coat of eggshell still showing across entire sections of the canvas. In this madwoman's attic of her own, there is — finally — space. Gerry, bless his soul, would probably have been more excited than herself by the idea of her taking up painting again. A typical gesture of his support would have been something like her arriving home to a knee-high stack of blank canvasses with a bow on top in the foyer. The intended effect being to enable her to freely experiment, take risks, make mistakes; the subtext reading, There are many more where these came from, hon, rest assured.

Kasumi only bought a single canvas. Because there is a freedom in holding something precious in your hands.

Susie Burge

Susie Burge is a Sydney-based freelance writer. She has a First Class Honours degree in English and Australian literature and began her career in book publishing as a fiction editor, before moving into arts and travel writing for various media outlets including *Harpers Bazaar*, *Grazia* and *The Guardian*. She writes poetry and literary fiction and is currently completing a road novel set on Australia's remote Nullarbor Plain.

We Are Made Out of Stars is Susie's first screenplay, inspired by the poetry and notebooks of Canadian, Cambridge-based astronomer Rebecca Elson (1960 – 1999).

Genre: Screenplay (feature film)

We Are Made Out of Stars

WE ARE MADE OUT OF STARS

Written by

SUSIE BURGE

Inspired by A RESPONSIBILITY TO AWE by Rebecca Elson

INT. REBECCA'S OFFICE, CAMBRIDGE OBSERVATORY - NIGHT.

The room is dim, the desk lamplit. On the computer screen: a shining image of a barred spiral galaxy bulging with new stars. Rebecca is leaning back in her chair, just within the circle of light. Ben, wearing his usual checked-shirt-over-Nirvana-T-Shirt-&-nerd-glasses, is sitting on the edge of her desk. It's late; the window behind them a dark square.

BEN

Doctor's orders - you should be following them.

REBECCA

What are you doing for Christmas?
(a beat) I never feel like going home, I can't begin to explain that to Angelo, though.

BEN

Jesus Becky.

REBECCA

I don't know how to do this - to be married and be sick, at the same time.

BEN

You'll be your old self again - zooming around on that old banger of a bicycle, climbing mountains, outstripping the rest of us - just give it time.

REBECCA

It helps to be here.

She makes a sweeping gesture that encompasses the room: the neatly stacked shelves of astronomy and poetry books, the images of star clusters, nebulas, supernovas pinned to the walls.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Do you think cosmology comforts the soul? Sometimes, I imagine I can eat the stars.

BEN

(taking her literally, curious)
What do they taste like?

REBECCA

Pepper hot. Sharp. Or I slide right back in time, to where -

(MORE)

REBECCA (CONT'D)

*The light of all the not-yet stars
Drifting like a bright mist
And all of us, and everything
Already there
But unconstrained by form.*

BEN

A new poem?

She leans forward. Her face is pale, surrounded by a halo of hair that catches the light. She nods.

BEN (CONT'D)

You're not going to die.

REBECCA

We're all going to die.

BEN

(firmly)

But not now. Not yet.

Note to Readers:

This extract is from the mid part of the screenplay (pages 40-41).

The lines in italics are from Rebecca Elson's poem "Antidotes to Fear of Death", p.61 *A Responsibility to Awe*, Carcanet Press, 2001.

I have been in touch with Carcanet and with Rebecca Elson's estate and they are aware of this project.

Rowena Cooper

Rowena Cooper graduated from the University of London with a Masters in Classics, and then pursued a career in business. She was leading a team of ten sales people, responsible for a target of over £3 million when, naturally, in 2016, she decided to become a writer. Since then, Rowena's poetry and flash fiction has been published in *Claudius Speaks* and *Panoplyzine*, and in 2017 she was Commended in the Winchester Poetry Prize for the poem, *Ultraviolet*. This month, her first play, *After Aulis*, will be performed in Stratford-Upon-Avon in a 4-night run. Currently, she's finishing development on a full-length poetry collection alongside writing a new play about motherhood, masculinity and fortune cookies.

Genre: Poetry

When the Octopuses Walked on Land

I left his plate of sliced tomatoes to pucker in their salt,
opened out the French windows, and walked under the night.

Suckered limbs frothed through the churn of the wash.

One, then dozens more, roiled out, and over the shingle.

Heavy in air, they dragged their mantles like spent dogs.

Crammed with ink, and crops, and poison; a simpler form

of heart. All made to be squeezed thin as a beak. One beam
from the lighthouse circled the beach, the flickering sea.

In each swoop of darkness the octopuses surged forwards.

In the light, they seeped. The closer I came, the more

they seemed like pilgrims. As if they had found a reason.

As though they had breached land, billowing their siphons,

to ask how it feels for me to breathe. To ask how hard

I needed to press my heart between my palms to slide

it under a bathroom door, and whether it could pump again

on the other side. Behind my bed, I'd left a pink clump of wool

to cast itself off a needle still tucked in one finger-length sleeve.

I'd left that boiler which, each evening, clickclickclicked out heat

to keep his shower running long after I'd given up to sleep.

When the octopuses walked on land, I walked beside them.

Steady as lungs. Their strange bodies dried out. One by one,

I scooped them up and threw them back.

Daniella Ritzau-Reid

Daniella is a British-Danish aid worker, writer and aspiring radio-maker. Most recently she spent four years in Myanmar, working on human rights issues with Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders, and previously worked in South Sudan and the occupied Palestinian Territories. She returned to the UK to explore new ways of bearing witness to crisis through the written word and audio storytelling. She is happiest outside in wild places.

Genre: Radio Drama

What We Know

Excerpt from:

WHAT WE KNOW

A Radio Play

By Daniella Ritzau-Reid

A RUSTLING SOUND, LIKE A PLASTIC BAG
BEING STOWED AWAY. THEN THE ZIIIPP OF
SOMEONE PULLING UP A ZIP. GULLS CRY.

SABINE:

(V.O.) It was a hot morning. Proper lazy summer's day on the French coast.

FOOTSTEPS CRUNCH AS PERSON WALKS
ACROSS THE SAND. WAVES IN THE DISTANCE,
GETTING LOUDER.

And it was Sunday so things were slower, shops opened late and most people were still sleeping.

FEET SPLASH AS PERSON ENTERS WATER. THEY
BEGIN TO WADE THROUGH.

But this morning a woman died. She slipped by unnoticed. Like a single pebble dropped in an ocean, her death barely registered more than a ripple. She was almost erased... almost.

SWIMMING, STRONG, RHYTHMIC STROKES.

This is what I know:

SOUND OF SWIMMING GRADUALLY FADES INTO
DISTANCE UNDERNEATH THE NARRATION,
UNTIL ALL YOU CAN HEAR IS THE QUIET SWELL
AND CRASH OF WAVES AND THE OCCASIONAL
GULL.

You took the dress Navira, the one from Paris. Put it in a plastic bag and tried to seal it.

The dress went into your rucksack, with the energy bars, the compass, the vaseline.

You didn't take your passport, your papers. Anything that could identify you.

You packed the wetsuit last.

On the coast the air smelled different, of salt from the wind off the sea, and hot sand.

There's a car park near the beach, which you avoided. You walked for a while up the scraggy dunes until you found a quiet spot where you couldn't see the tourists and they couldn't see you.

Maybe you stopped, sat for a while, looked out across the water. Or more likely you just threw your bag down and undressed.

You smeared vaseline on your legs, under your armpits.

You strung the compass around your neck and struggled into the wetsuit. Tucked the energy bars into the pocket at the back.

Finally, you took the dress from Paris and slipped it underneath the wetsuit against your stomach, the plastic wrapping scratching against your stomach. You tugged the zip up until the black neoprene reached tight around your throat, like a hand.

SOUND OF WAVES CRASHING BECOMES LOUDER

You walked towards the sea.

Nabihah Islam

Nabihah is a published poet. She had her debut reading hosted at the Bare Lit Festival, 2016.

Nabihah's involvement with the Council of Europe on gender equality and the #MeToo movement prompted her to re-write fairy-tales with a feminist twist. She has been invited to contribute to *In Her Own Way*, an Unbound publication, to inspire young girls.

Nabihah is a British Council Fellow and led their project, the *Hijabi Monologues* at the Bush Theatre, where she was an emerging writer. More recently her short play, *Home is Where the Heart Is*, was performed at Theatre Deli during refugee week.

Genre: Children's fiction

Bella the Brave

Because I was a frog, my skin oozed slime, especially when I was in water, so I hopped into the toilet and made myself extra gooey. (Hey, I couldn't exactly jump into the bath, I didn't have hands to open the tap, remember?). A thought crossed my mind that maybe I could go through the toilet pipes but that would make me smell even more of poo, not that it matters but I didn't want to leave a smelly trail behind. I managed to squeeze through the crack and jumped to Alexander's window. He had passed out and was tied down to the bed. Dad's goons had stupidly left a small gap in the window, so I squeezed through there, but there would be no way that Alexander would be able to escape.

I hopped onto the bed and moved closer to him. I planned to croak in his ear to wake him but even before that he was startled. He opened his eyes and looked as though he was going to vomit.

‘YUCK! What is that smell!’ he shouted.

‘Shhh, you’ll get us in to more trouble, Alexander.’ He turned to look at me and jumped a little, before shuffling over to the other side of the bed as far as he could.

‘Wh-wha-what are you?’ Alexander cried.

‘A talking frog, obviously!’ I was definitely not going to entertain this.

‘And that smell!’ Alexander’s face looked as though he had been sucking on a sour lemon.

‘Shhhhhh!’

‘Oh no, I must have pooped in my pants!’

‘No, Alexander, the smell’s coming from me, I needed to go to the toilet to-’

‘What did they hit me with! You’re a talking frog!’ Alexander was so confused.

‘Stop being dramatic Alexander, they didn’t hit you!’ but at that moment I would have if I could.

‘But you can talk! And you know my name!’

‘Shhhhh, you’ll wake everyone!’ I said, trying to keep calm and stop myself from shouting. ‘It’s Bella,’ I continued.

‘Huh?’ is all he managed. Understandably, nothing made sense to him.

‘Look, Alexander, my dad turned me in to a frog because I didn’t listen to him, if you don’t listen to me, you’ll end up like me, too.’

Gry Strømme

Gry Strømme is a screenwriter and a writer of fiction. For the last two years she has been the lead screenwriter on a TV-drama project for youth, currently in development with NRK, Norway's national broadcaster. Gry's first attempt at writing a short movie, called *One Second*, was produced in 2016 and ended up in 1st place in its category for the 7th *Cannes Corporate Media & TV Awards* the same year. She has also been writing fiction for several years and has previously worked with editors at Aschehoug, the country's largest publishing house. She was also invited to attend their writer-school. Exiting the master Gry will be focussing fully on finishing her first novel *The Also-Rans*.

Genre: Commercial Literary Fiction

The Also-Rans

The whole story started with the moustache.

Since I hadn't noticed it before it was like the dark hairs over my upper lip had appeared overnight. They were sending me messages, broadcasted by the thin, but clearly visible strands: Bam! Your hormones are changing! You're getting old – and manly. I was standing in front of the bathroom mirror. I slowly sank onto the cold tiles. On the ground I touched the moustache with my fingertips. When had this happened? I grabbed the phone and googled *suddenly discovered moustache woman*, and got thousands of hits from equally surprised women. One of them had clearly come to grips with her situation; she said that she had got hers for her thirty-ninth birthday. I shut my eyes. Moments earlier everything was

normal. I was sitting by the kitchen table working away, open books and cluttered sheets of paper everywhere, Rilke's *Duino Elegies* beside the laptop. Then in the next I was so much older. Older and manly looking. The next thought hit me in the forehead like a rock fall: Nobody will love a woman with a moustache. I quickly opened a new page on my phone and typed: *how to remove woman moustache*. The hits were useless. There wasn't a woman in the world who didn't know that shaving, waxing and laser only strengthens a hair's will to live. I put the phone down. Gazed up at the ceiling. After a few moments I got up. I snatched a small pair of scissors from the drawers. With shaky hands I cut the tiny, dark hairs as close to the skin as possible. Afterwards I sat down on the toilet seat and folded my hands across my lap. I wanted to curl up like a hedgehog in bed. I stirred by the thought of the animal's sharp spines and inspected my reflection in the mirror. I could still detect a shade. Would the hairs grow out again even darker because I had cut them, like the hairs on my legs? Would the moustache continue to grow? God, no.

Tui McLean

Tui Mclean is an award-winning BBC journalist and filmmaker who specialises in video features and short-form documentaries, mainly covering human-interest and culture.

Throughout her career she has written for a variety of international publications including *The Economist*, *Time Out*, *Evening Standard*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, and *World of Interiors*.

In 2010 she won Best Broadcaster at the AMTC awards and in 2015 was selected for the Cheltenham Writers Circle prize for Best Newcomer for her creative piece “Paris May Days”.

This year her first feature documentary 'Montana' has been awarded funding by F&F

Partners, and she was shortlisted for the BBC Communications Awards for outstanding content.

Genre: Fiction – Psychological Thriller

Off Grid

It’s been five years since any one has called me by my real name.

“Ava?”

I look up and see a man with pigeon-grey hair standing in the doorway to the cell. Behind him I can make out the corridor, and for a moment I picture myself running past him. He says his name is Detective Harris and when I don’t respond he repeats it as if he thinks I’m deaf.

Harris leads me down the corridor and steers me into a small room that smells of damp, with a mirrored wall on one side. I catch sight of myself, and my fingertips move to my neck, where there is still the flush of aubergine bruises.

“This is PC Yates, he’ll be sitting in during the interview.” Harris nods to a younger man, drops a thick folder on the table and fiddles with a tape player. “Before we start can I get you anything?”

“Water.”

Yates stands as his superior leaves, and I can feel him study me. With a burst of courage he asks, “What was it like... living off the grid?”

I look up at him into the bright wash of the lights. He can’t be more than early twenties. He must have read the headlines and followed the whole story.

“Don’t worry, this is off the record.” He takes a seat and keeps his eyes locked on me.

I anticipated some kind of judgement, but he stares at me with something closer to awe and waits for a response.

I don’t need to answer. Soon everyone would know the details of what happened when they found Nathan. And then the questions would never stop: *How did you survive? Why did you come back? What happened to the others?*

Sam Moore

Sam is a writer of prose, poetry, and drama. His poetry has been recently published by the *DASH Literary Journal*, and *Harts and Minds*, with publication forthcoming in the *Hawaii Review*. He has had three plays performed at the Burton Taylor Studio in Oxford; the most recent of them, *Like a Virgin*, was performed in May of 2018. His journalism has been published online by the *New Statesman*, *the I Paper*, and *Prospect*, and other websites.

Genre: Fiction

No Place, Like Home

Watching the waves, I think about the fact that they'll never stop rising, falling, and crashing. I think about Virginia Woolf. I think about Mum. I'll read *The Waves* again while we're here. Mum would like that; me reading *The Waves* somewhere I can hear them. Something about that makes the world seem smaller, and easier to deal with.

“Thank you,” I say to Andrew as we stand, looking out to sea. He doesn't say anything. He just squeezes my hand, lets his warmth move through me. It says more than my thanking him ever could. After all, he never had to come this far with me just because I asked him to. I'll never be able to thank him enough for that. For coming just because I called.

It sounds like the waves are trying to speak. That, somewhere in their rising and falling, is a whisper in a long dead language, being carried to us on the wind. Like the last will and testament of Atlantis. I close my eyes. I feel the warmth from Andrew's hand, the

cold from the winter wind, and the faint whisper of the water on the shore. My breathing falls into the rhythm of the waves; long, deep inhales and sudden, crashing exhales, sustained by the sea like it's some kind of life-support machine.

I can't help but think about the distance we've travelled, even in this short space of time. I think it would make Mum happy. And Dad too, I hope. He always thought people should explore the places that they came from. That's what travelling was all about for Dad; learning more about home, and more about yourself. If nothing else, I've done that. He might never know that I've done it, but I'm doing it right now. I hope I get to tell him that.

Slowly, I let go of Andrew's hand. I take off my shoes, and my socks. I step forward until I can feel the waves washing over my feet. I've stepped off the edge of the country.

Aisha Hassan

Aisha was shortlisted for the Poetry School / Nine Arches Press Primers competition 2017. Her play *Pickled Mangoes* was selected for the Tamasha comedy scratch night performance at Soho Theatre in June 2017. Aisha's work has appeared in *Under the Radar* and *Campus* magazines. She is currently working on a literary novel.

Genre: Fiction

The Other Son

The anniversary of Jugnu's death was overwhelming. Lalloo had managed to escape but his parents couldn't. They lived in the same hut, yards away from where his warm broken body had been left fourteen years ago.

Their hut was in the shadow of the chimney. Dusk had not yet fallen when Lalloo entered, though their windowless hut was as dark as ever. As his eyes adjusted, he caught a glimpse of something moving. He realised it was his mother. She sat in a corner, crouched down on her haunches, eyes unseeing, rocking her body back and forth. Each time she rocked, she hit her head against the mud wall of the hut, sometimes gently – at other times with considerable force. She seemed oblivious to any pain.

He sat on the floor beside her, 'Ma?' She didn't look at him. He pulled her towards him, cradling her body in his arms, as if she were a newborn bird, delicate and precious and liable to break. Half sitting in his lap, she continued to rock. He held her until she settled.

He found his father a few yards from the hut. Abu held a shovel in one hand and was crouching over a small object on the ground. As Lalloo approached, the loud speaker in a distant mosque crackled into life, and the muezzin started the Azaan. Abu stood up as if answering the call to prayer. But instead of raising his hands to his ears, Abu raised the shovel over his head. The muezzin continued to bear witness there was no god but Allah and Abu brought the shovel down with all his might on the packed earth, as if he were still working, preparing the clay to make bricks. Lalloo hurried over to see Abu lifting the shovel from the crushed body of a sparrow. Abu raised the shovel above his head again as the muezzin urged the faithful on.

‘Abu!’ he called out, staying his father’s hand.

Rebecca Slater

Rebecca Slater is a writer and publishing professional from Sydney. In 2017 she was one of two emerging writers selected for the Australia Council's prestigious Marten Bequest Scholarship in the category of prose writing. She has also previously won the Monash University Prize for Undergraduate Creative Writing, been Highly Commended for the Olga Masters Short Story Award and Gower Memorial Prize, and shortlisted for the Peter Carey Short Story Award and the Jane Martin Poetry Prize, among others. Her work has been published in *Award Winning Australian Writing*, *Meanjin*, *Overland Literary Journal*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Seizure*, *The Guardian* and other publications.

Genre: Fiction

The Swimmers

As a girl, almost everything I knew about the female body I learnt from the women's changerooms. Tucked away in that dark, brick block at the back of the pool, the changerooms were a damp, secretive space – a tiled underworld. The air thick with chlorine and ketchup and cheap shampoo. Musty towels draped from hooks. Dark webs of hair clogging up the sinks.

Standing in the corner after training, I snuck glances around the room. Back then I was convinced that everyone knew something about the female body that I didn't and I was always on the lookout for it. Ranking the bodies I saw, making notes of their shapes and sizes and smells. The way on some women, dark hair grew out from their private parts like

creeping vines, while on others it sat square and trimmed like Mrs. Jennings' hedges across the street. Left little black curls on the tiles. Question marks with clear, white tips. I saw breasts that flapped loose as women bent to dry their legs and others that barely moved at all. Bottoms that curdled and sagged, bellies bloated with unborn babies. I saw nipples, brown and wide, pink and pointy. Once, a breast with no nipple at all, just a hard, white scar running across the skin.

I saw different bodies and I saw the same bodies: the old woman who talcum powdered after her swim, the white dust collecting in her wrinkles and folds. The woman with the plastic leg, left like an unattended child while she swum her laps. The thin, Asian woman who kept losing her hair, getting thinner and balder, until eventually, she stopped coming altogether.

But of all the bodies I saw, it was Tracey's that fascinated me most. Those mornings after training, I studied her skinny legs and long, sun-streaked hair. Noticed the way her waist went in then out again. The way she peeled off her swimmers and kicked them with a pointed toe onto the tiles, like she didn't care at all. Like anyone could be watching. Like she wanted them to.

Sofija Zovko

Sofija Zovko is a writer from Zagreb, Croatia, currently living in the UK. She writes fiction, poetry and plays. Her work *On the Sea, an Island* follows a small island community in Croatia as their lives change after the war with the sudden rise of tourism.

Genre: Short Fiction

On the Sea, an Island

‘I’ll have a macchiato,’ said Luca sitting down. ‘So, ladies? What have you been up to?’

‘What have I been up to. Well. I’ve been grave shopping with my mother’ said Andi.

‘You’ve been doing what?’.

‘Grave shopping with my mother. Let me tell you, that woman is as crazy as a shotgun.’

‘But your mother is still alive,’ said Nives in shock.

‘Ae, and at some point, she won’t be.’ Andi shrugged. ‘You have to be prepared.’

‘But where did this come from?’

‘Some crazy fortune-teller got it into her head that she has until the end of the year before she kicks it.’

‘Is she sick?’

‘Ae that’s what I thought. So I took her to the clinic, had them run all the tests. The doctor said she’s healthy as dogwood. Do you think that convinced her?’

Andi leaned forward letting her sunglasses slide down her nose.

‘She’s started going to church,’ she whispered. ‘And confession. God knows what she’s telling those priests about me. All I need is some fat pervert knowing my private business.’

‘Eh by God, it makes me sick just to think what they know,’ said Luca shaking her head.

‘Anyway, this morning I took my mother over to Križna Luka to look at the new cemetery.’

‘I always forget there’s one out there.’

‘Yes well, my mother made sure to point that out. My lord. You should have heard her. *Do you want me to be in the middle of nowhere? Look at this. Everything’s concrete. The nearest café is a kilometre away. No one will come to visit me here.* I tried to tell her she would have a beautiful view of the sea. None of the ruckus from town. She’d even get her own space. No sharing a lot. No one’s buried on top of each other. *No, no.* She insisted. *I have to be buried in the town cemetery. It’s not for nothing everyone goes to town for coffee. It’s the place to be. Ae.*’ Andi pulled out a cigarette. ‘At five thousand a lot. She’d better be there. I swear if my mother outlives me.’

‘You and your mother,’ laughed Nives ‘carved from the same stone.’

‘It isn’t soft I’ll tell you that,’ said Andi lighting her cigarette.

Robin Ganderton

Robin Ganderton has won the Terry Hetherington Award for the best under-30 writer in Wales, and been shortlisted for the Wasafiri New Writing Prize and the PEN International New Voices Award, among others. In 2016 and 2017 he was selected as a Hay Festival 'Writer at Work'. Alongside his current novel, he is working on another set in Meiji-era Japan, and has just completed his first play.

Genre: Novel/Historical Fiction

A Spoken Word Is Not A Sparrow

We children were like a barometer. New gangs developed, new rivalries, as longstanding friendships dissolved like salt in the rain.

And then, one winter's day so cold your words froze in front of you and ice collected like broken glass on your eyelashes, the party officials came back to the village. They came on sleds pulled by large, muscled horses constantly re-emerging through clouds of their own snorted breath, came in long coats and black ushankas and once-polished boots stained in waves by the snow, and immediately, they began nailing up notices, pulling people aside to issue a quick bark into raw, red ears. That evening. A meeting. Every man. No exceptions.

After his black bread and beets, our father set off, taking Viktor, my eldest brother. Your uncle, *pchelka*. Just another you never met. Of course, we wanted to go too-- not be

packed off to bed at the usual time. We traded stories to stay awake, tales of Baba Yaga and Koschei the Deathless, til we finally succumbed, exhausted by a day of whispers and worry.

The next morning we woke into silence. Our mother would not turn from the sunk, and our father had left the cottage before breakfast. Viktor's face was washed pale as the kasha he stirred round and round with his spoon, until Nikolai asked in a whisper if he could eat what was left.

Then, the silence splintered. I ran to the window. The street outside was overrun with animals, cows and goats and pigs and sheep, scrabbling through the snow in a clamour of bleats and squeals. And as I watched, the men chasing them appeared, in long coats and stained boots, carrying short, hooked knives and burnished axes.

Natasha Parker

Natasha Parker is a writer from Zambia currently living in the UK. Her short story *The Godmother* won the Akoma Prize for Writing about Africa. Her short story collection, *How to Fall in Love with an Immigrant*, explores the stories of immigrants and emigrants between Africa and the UK.

Genre: Short Fiction

How to Fall in Love with an Immigrant

Nikki does remember. She was seven, and her father gone for a year. Her mother had never stopped believing he would come back.

‘They have no proof,’ her mother said, ‘missing is not the same as dead. He would swim the whole way back, if he had to. He will be back.’

And for a while, Nikki believed. She helped her mother once a month, when they washed and dried all of his clothes by hand so they would not smell of cupboard when he returned. They polished his shoes and lined them up against the wall in perfect pairs. His red rain jacket hung on the back of the front door. His chess set was dusted carefully, each piece lifted and then placed back where it was before, so that the game he and her mother had been playing before he left could be completed. They laid the table for three every day.

One Sunday Nikki refused to lay the third plate at the table. Her mother raised a

shaking hand but instead froze with a look on her face like falling asleep after running nonstop for weeks. Her lips drew up and she turned to the front door and opened it.

‘Oh, my heart!’ she shouted, and ran outside.

Nikki knew then that her father was home and that her mother would smile again now, so when her mother came back inside and said, ‘Your father is back, didn’t I tell you he would come back to us?’ Nikki had seen him beside her.

He looked nothing like himself. His eyes were red and raw, his beard wet and long. His boots were tracking water across the floor and he smelled of salt and seaweed. But when she burst into tears and hugged him, it felt like hugging him had always felt. He stroked her hair. She did not feel the sea, only his scratchy beard against her head. The next day she woke up in her bed where he had tucked her in, and she cried until each breath was a struggle, like drowning. She was never able to see him again. Her mother never stopped seeing him, or expecting everybody else to see him too.

Castille Landon

Castille Landon is a professional film director and writer, living in Los Angeles, CA. She graduated with her B.A. in English from Harvard University in 2016. Her previous films include Albion: The Enchanted Stallion (starring John Cleese and Debra Messing), which was purchased by Netflix, and Apple of My Eye (starring Burt Reynolds and Amy Smart), for Sony Worldwide. She is currently developing a series for a major television studio and working on several edgy, female-centered features.

Genre: Screenplay, Comedy

Alligator Alley

SCRIPT TITLE

Written by

Name of First Writer

Based on, If Any

Address
Phone Number

EXT. ORLANDO - DAY

A wave of heat hangs heavy in the air, suffocating. It's no wonder the state's full of nutbags.

Bumper-to-bumper traffic clogs I-4, snaking through downtown.

Inside a police cruiser, a sweaty COP-- ahem, STATE TROOPER-- stuffs a donut into his mouth. The creme/lard chemical combo filling pops out of the butt of the donut, landing on his collar. He pulls the collar up to his mouth, sucking it from his three-star pin.

Unsuspecting tourists try to combat the heat with globs of sunscreen and water mister fans, but the sun is a formidable opponent. Rosacea-faced fatties drop like flies.

Children's toys melt in overgrown backyards.

Greenish swimming pools in desperate need of cleaning bake in the sun. A hornet clings to life at the shallow end, buzzing furiously in an attempt to call for help. But alas, there is no lifeguard on duty in the wasteland that is CELEBRATION, FLORIDA.

INT. LEONARD'S APARTMENT - DAY

The wall-mounted air conditioner hums, struggling to pump air into the pathetic living room. Though it's a shit hole, it's remarkably clean and organized. A row of perfectly-polished shoes is near the front door.

A MAN IN PLASTIC COVERALLS AND GOGGLES scrubs the bathroom floor with a toothbrush.

A KNOCK at the door. The man's head darts up, but he waits, hoping the visitor will go away. They do. He continues scrubbing a section of the floor, which is already pristine.

He removes the goggles, finally revealing his face. This is LEONARD.

He approaches the horizontal blinds and peeks through, catching a glimpse of the back of a large man as he walks away from Leonard's door. Then, his gaze falls to a woman across the hallway, carrying her laundry. From his limited vantage point, he can only see parts of her: long legs, golden hair, cleavage up to her ears.

The woman looks towards Leonard's window and he backs away, fumbling with the blinds to still them.

But he can't help himself. He takes another peek, just as she pushes open her apartment door, two down from his, with her hip. A thong falls from the top of the basket.

Leonard's conflicted: return the panties and take the opportunity to speak to her, or...

He slides his gloved finger along the blind, wiping away a speck of dust.

He peeks through the blinds again. The underwear are gone. He sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Leonard peeks through the window of a confessional booth.

LEONARD

The truth is, F-F-Father, I guess I don't really have any sins to confess.

Behind the confessional window, FATHER JOHN C. REILLY rolls his eyes, makes a beating-off hand gesture.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY

Most people don't come to confession if they don't have something to confess. Something in your life that needs changing, perhaps?

LEONARD

Right. Right. Yeah. No. Things are pretty decent. I mean, I could use more m-m-money, but--

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY

I'm not a genie, Leonard.

LEONARD

N-N-No, I know.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY

You're telling me you don't have any sins to confess? No drunkenness or drug use?

Leonard shakes his head.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY (CONT'D)
I'm not Ms. Cleo either, speak up.

LEONARD
No, no d-drunkenness or d-drug use.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY
Anger?

LEONARD
Not really.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY
Prostitution?

LEONARD
Me, or-- n-n-no.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY
Homosexual actions?

LEONARD
Nuh uh.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY
Premarital sex?

Leonard sighs.

LEONARD
No, unfortunately.

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY
Bam! Impure thoughts. Five Hail
Mary's and five Our Fathers.

LEONARD
I-I-I'm sorry. I will, Father.
Thank you.

Leonard leaves the confessional. The wooden door clicks and he hears the Father mutter to himself:

FATHER JOHN C. REILLY
For Christ's sake, don't come back
til you've got some good shit to
share.

Leonard stops in his tracks in disbelief.

PRE-LAP: Sex noises.

CUT TO:

INT. TASH'S APARTMENT - DAY

This place is a toxic wasteland. Piles of clothes litter the floor, a massive stain on the carpet from either a murder or spilling entire box of wine. The trash can overflows with take out boxes from fancy restaurants.

The headboard bangs against the wall rhythmically as things come to a climax-- HIS real, HERS porn-y, fake.

HER BEDROOM

MISTER DADDY, sweaty, bearish, collapses in post-coital bliss, nearly crushing the young, matted-blond beneath him. She turns her head away from him as he tries to cover her in kisses. This is TASH.

Constantine Blintzios

Constantine Blintzios is bilingual and grew up in Athens, Greece where he played in bands and yelled into microphones. He is a graduate of English Literature, Music Composition and Contemporary Art and is interested in the cross-pollination of art forms. He writes fiction and poetry with a sharp focus on the lyric and its' transformative qualities in prose. He is Vice-President of the Oxford University Poetry Society, Publication Director of the Oxford Writers' House and has had both poetry and stories published on various online journals such as *Visual Verse*, *The Oxonian Revue*, *ASH magazine*, *Paris Lit Up* and the *OMEGA Poetry* group. His poem 'Where I am from' was shortlisted for the 2017 Martin Starkie awards.

Genre: Fiction

The Smoke is Me, Burning

"There are four legends concerning Prometheus...According to the second:

Hounded by the pain of beaks tearing his body,

He pressed himself deeper and deeper into the rock.

Until he became one with it." – (Anemoi - The four winds)

Maw had this nightmare whenever something went bad. She had it before every one of our dogs died. She had it before men left her and she had it before Jamie threw the stick into my left eye. It was the dream with Satan in the bathroom, sitting on the toilet. When the Lead-Belly records came out, so did this dream. Men came and went, throughout my childhood.

Their voices bounced off the walls and sunk into the gravel outside like rain - Maw's men.

Over time, I became one of Maw's men too.

It was the same routine. They all drank, but not like her – they didn't change like Maw did. Her eyes narrowed with liquor and her tongue became a serrated whip. She shouted things in the middle of the night that scared them. They'd find her walking up and down the wire fence outside in the yard, prowling and mumbling up at the trees. After a while the guy started feeling uneasy, there was more than one person living inside my mother. While she talked they were silent and smoked. She had a way of finding the weakness in a person, the pink vulnerable parts. She would press on those parts, pierce them with words and drag the embarrassment out into the room. I saw a lot of hard mountain men, proud whisky-barreled alligator men from all over Arkansas cave under the assault. I saw them leave in a line like our dead dogs with their tongues hanging out.

Maw lived out a fantasy with these people as if they were her manikins. She got under their fingernails like dirt. I heard her through the wall, scoffing at them as they undressed. She made loggers feel like they carried twigs, farmers like they were children chasing pigeons. All they could do was yell and bang the furniture – apelike, until she did a three-sixty and softened, submissively making them hers again – and I would slip my headphones on, open a book. In a town like Harmswood people get so bored of themselves, but Maw was nocturnal. Like my brother- like me, she wasn't the right kind of meat to be chewed up and swallowed. The three of us always got stuck in the town's teeth.

Millie Guille

Millie Guille is a twenty-four year old poet and short fiction writer based in Oxfordshire. She was longlisted for the 2017 National Poetry Competition, a runner-up in the 2017 Ambit Poetry Competition, and shortlisted for the 2017 and 2018 Martin Starkie Poetry Prizes, as well as the Plough Poetry Prize and the Christopher Tower poetry competition. Her poetry has been published in *The Kindling Journal* and *The Cadaverine Magazine*, and her fiction has appeared in *The Mays XXV* and *XXVI* anthologies.

Genre: Short Fiction

Waiting For Eve

She lies on her back, and her nipple is a torched flower. At the edge of the courtyard, an orderly sits on a white lawn-chair. Paws out, eyes closed, he is a lemur mid-prayer. Runs a lanyard through his fingers like a rosary. She rolls over to watch us pass and her pubes kiss the asphalt, white hair hot in the sun. To her left there is a crater where her breast should be. I catch Maria's eye.

“Cancer?”

“One hell of a tumour.”

“Did she suffer?”

“Most certainly, yes.”

Her smile makes me nervous. I track the veins circling her legs.

“How old is she?”

“Sixty-three.”

“Why’s she here?”

“Couldn’t say.”

She’s the same height as my abuela, and holds herself like child.

“Why are they naked?”

“Oh, it’s easier this way”.

Maria repositions the ID card on her chest and counts the ducados in their blue packet.

“One for each Saint.”

She winks and checks her phone. Eves watch us from screen doors, their faces fractured and loose. A woman sits on a patch of grass and tilts her head to the sky; she could be at a pool or a river-bank, a daisy-chain pressed to her cropped, wet hair. Belly scars stretch from her groin to her ribs, like the marks on a gaffed fish. Maria watches me watching.

“Botched caesarean.”

She lights up with a flick of her wrist, and her face is veiled by smoke.

“Try not to stare, you’ll upset her.”

“A knife would have done less damage!”

“Talk to the State if you want better surgeons. And that one was a kid— you should’ve seen the guy before. Where do you think her breast went?”

Dahmicca Wright

Dahmicca Wright studied at the University of Warwick before joining the University of Oxford's Creative Writing MSt. When she's not writing poetry, she works at an entertainment marketing agency in London, digital copywriting for shows such as *Game of Thrones*. She also does a bit of freelance travel writing to ensure her pen never stops.

Genre: Poetry

Two poems from the collection **The Empty House**

Wound

Sat around the fire we first saw it,
sweat and light pimpling his skin:

the scar he wore on his arm
like armour, raised at the edges
into a smile with cavities
puncturing its tips in pairs.

He told us he got it from a mad dog,
how lucky he was to still be sane.

The stories men invent for pride.

We knew he had fallen
flesh-first onto a garden rake
the day his wife went away.

Listening without question,
his steely words fell to ash at our feet.

Reading Trees

In our house we use trees to tell time:
the older the better, the wider the wiser.

Days shaved like sawdust, we are stuck
in the cushion of our self-made clock.

We axe trunks clean at the base, sand,
wipe the rims of our ritual ground.

We circle fingers around bark,
splinters smooth as light skims to dark.

Would you know what to do if time stood still,
not the stillness of death, but silence?

When the heart pounds drums to deafness
and touch is the only sense that grounds us.

Will Loxley

Will Loxley is a biographer from the Suffolk coast. From Wilde to Zadie Smith, and the Bright Young Things to the Young British Artists, his interests include 20th-century British art, politics and culture. *Writing in the Dark* explores life inside the wartime offices of *Horizon* magazine, as its editors and contributors attempted to find meaning and happiness in a London under relentless bombardment.

Genre: Non-fiction

Writing in the Dark: Bloomsbury, the Blackout, and Horizon Magazine

The rules of the blackout meant that by nightfall Bloomsbury was in total darkness, save for the crescents of blinkered car headlights, beams from the ARP wardens' torches and the odd bicycle light bobbing along its streets. It was so black that one bus-rider could not tell whether he had offered the conductor a penny or half a crown until he had felt the milled edge with his nail. One woman noted how it was 'like a fantastic game of blind man's bluff ... groping along with other shadowy figures, in a ghostly world'. 'At night its so verdurous and gloomy that one expects a badger or a fox to prowl along the pavement,' Virginia Woolf recorded in her diary. Faces appeared against torchlight and then vanished again.

In a small ground floor flat at 6 Lansdowne Terrace, in one of the neighbourhood's elegant squares, Cyril Connolly, Stephen Spender and Peter Watson met over drinks to make plans. From these rooms they would produce *Horizon* magazine, their way of preserving art

and beauty against the devastation of war. It became the most influential magazine of its day. Connolly would later state that Horizon came into its own in the blackout, when there was 'little to do but read, and people enjoyed it'.

And each issue would travel further afield, crossing enemy lines in the packs of soldiers. These men had been snatched from the universities or from their studios and desks, forced to abandon their pens and paintbrushes and books. The magazine was a bridge back to this lost world. One young fighter pilot, brought down in his plane in the Battle of Tunisia, was found to have in his possession a diary. Filling one of its pages and printed in large capitals were the words 'My story accepted by Horizon!' He had not lived to see it published.

Matthew Olson-Roy

Matthew Olson-Roy is a writer of children's and young adult fiction who lives with his husband and two children in Luxembourg. You'll find it hidden between Germany, France, and Belgium. If you trust your nose for directions, follow the smell of sausage and champagne. You can't miss it. A normal day might involve seeing a castle or two, eating an unpronounceable potato dish, or speaking any of nine languages. Then again, he might wonder what it would be like to find himself on another planet in nothing but his pajamas. That's the power of writing.

His middle grade comedy, *The Spy Who Grounded Me*, was recently named a winner in the 2018 SCBWI Undiscovered Voices competition.

Genre: Fiction (Young Adult)

The Rules of Loneliness

Thomas pulled a blanket around his mom's shoulders and laid her back into a corner of the couch. She was mumbling under her breath, not making any sense. Thomas called these fits of paranoia and slurring incomprehension her "episodes". They weren't supposed to happen, not now that she had started her new medication. With a pillow carefully tucked behind her head, he stepped out of the room to make her a cup of tea.

Sadly, when Thomas opened the refrigerator in search of milk, the only thing he saw was an enormous block of government cheese, a nearly gelatinous rectangle of off-brand Velveeta. In his mother's latest spiral into insanity, she believed that God appeared to her in a

grilled cheese sandwich. He had a hard time imagining why God would choose fake cheese as his communication medium. If he were going to speak through a dairy product, wouldn't he pick something with a bit more panache, like say Brie or Camembert? In any event, there would be no milk in her tea this time.

He placed her hands around the mug, ran his fingers through her hair, and lifted her chin to face him.

“Have you been taking your meds, mom?”

She looked into the tea before she answered. “God is the only medicine I need.”

Thomas dug his fingers into his thighs before forcing himself to relax. God was a problem, but he was only the latest in a long line of problems. Before God's word became comfort food incarnate, she believed that al-Qaeda was infiltrating Sullivan's Gulch. Once she asked Mr. Nguyen across the street how he was doing. When he answered, “I've been fighting a cold,” his mother responded, “You should fight al-Qaeda too.”

Before al-Qaeda, his mother was convinced that Big Pharma had set its sights on Sullivan's Gulch to test their experimental drugs. She screamed at the neighbors who watered their lawns that they were spreading tainted DNA, then she secretly punched holes in their garden hoses when they weren't home. Thomas wondered if that was still in the back of her mind every time she came home with a prescription from her doctor. Keeping her on her meds had proven to be a challenge.

Harriet David

Harriet David lives and works in Oxford.

Genre: Poetry

The Merchant's Wife

She put her tongue upon my
breast. Her gums were
awful red. I took my dresses
in. She was heroic, like
a ceiling, done in cream
with pink illuminating
elbows, dimpled knees.

All summer long I smelled
of sour cheese. How beautiful
your daughter is, they said.
I agreed. Your father sends
you silk, I said, wrapped
in patchouli leaves. A rattle
carved in fretwork ivory.

I closed my pearls around my neck.

She gnawed at me. See, I said,
ambergris. Jars of sweet ginger.

Silver beads. Rich things a
shipwreck might have left
under the big grey sea. She
held her mouth up, oyster-wide.

Her gums were awful, red.

I'll pack you up, sweet,
crystallised. You'll smell of flat
pink knees. Of ivory. A sea
is closing over me,
I said. She put her tongue
upon my breast. *Agreed.*

History (Anglesey, 5 May 1997)

Parked high up on the sand, we ate prawn sandwiches
and the afternoon curled up under us.

The sea expanded by slow grey degrees.

It rained. You left your crusts.

A hundred million years, brave knights, fat dinosaurs,
came stepping by across our rear-view mirror.

A soldier wiped his forehead, raised his sword.

Men marched out of the sea. A ship went under.

The view cleared with the rain. On the wet rocks
we saw one woman in a purple coat
stooping, considering. She stopped
and clambered on. She was already quite far out,
moving with open arms against the day.

We kissed, to give ourselves a chance to look away.

Darren Tan

Darren Tan is a lawyer based in London. He has produced a number of dramatic works in collaboration with acts at both the Edinburgh Fringe and Singapore Repertory Theatre.

Darren Tan was born in Singapore and now divides his time between London and Edinburgh.

The Seasons of Discontent is his first novel.

Genre: Literary Fiction

The Seasons of Discontent

Ten's in a killing mood. It's infectious and Wiley is already nodding along like a bloody blackshirt getting ready for a purge.

‘It's just a concussion-’ Caspian argues.

‘Oh, it's “just” a concussion, is it?’ Tenzin says, ‘And what shall it be when they come for you tomorrow? A knife in the gut? Perhaps accompanied by a soft serve of broken ribs on the side?’

‘I hate to compound the point, Cas,’ Arthur adds, he's chain smoking, on his third, a nervous habit, ‘but Ten's right. At least go to the police about this.’

‘And say what? I told you, I didn't clock them.’

‘We know who did it.’

It had been another typical boy’s night out. A couple too many beers at Art and Wiley’s, a gram of kush split four ways and then they were stumbling off to Forest to conclude the night. Cas is not exactly sure when he lost the others. That would probably be at some point between nicking those jaeger bombs and roving around the club to the tune of *This is America* that no one knows how to dance to. After that, he ran into Heston Scheiner-Best, who’s this likable fellow from young labour, they had a couple pints and the next thing he knows, he was all yawns and so bid Heston nighty night.

Outside, there was nary a cab in sight, unusual for the hour, but home’s a skip and a hop away and so he settled on trekking it.

It happened around Cuthbert’s street. Which is this pretty quiet curve beside a grassy embankment. Someone decked him from behind, causing him to stagger and fall. Drunk as he was, the first blow barely registered. Confused, he tried to get up. It was the second, sharp and heavy, shattering, against the back of his head, hard enough to drive him back into the dirt, has him realise, “Holy fuck I’ve been bottled.” He catches a boot to the throat, another in his mouth. And the rest – the rest is just blow after blow after blow until finally, a Texan voice descends beside his ear and says, ‘Get punked fag.’

Nika Cobbett

Nika graduated from Roehampton University, receiving the award for the highest graduating mark in class, with a degree in Creative Writing. During her time there Nika won the Hopkins Poetry Prize for a Welsh-English bilingual poem titled 'Cariad Cyw Iar (Esgyrn)' and was published twice in anthologies with Fincham Press, winning Editor's Choice for a short story called 'One of those.' She has worked as a concept writer for music videos, her highlight was a pitch for The Stone Roses, and she is currently working with Manchester's only literary agency to date, WGM Literary, as a Junior Agent.

Genre: Screenplay

If This Is It

Excerpt from:

WHAT WE KNOW

A Radio Play

By Daniella Ritzau-Reid

A RUSTLING SOUND, LIKE A PLASTIC BAG
BEING STOWED AWAY. THEN THE ZIIIPP OF
SOMEONE PULLING UP A ZIP. GULLS CRY.

SABINE: (V.O.) It was a hot morning. Proper lazy summer's day on the French coast.

FOOTSTEPS CRUNCH AS PERSON WALKS
ACROSS THE SAND. WAVES IN THE DISTANCE,
GETTING LOUDER.

And it was Sunday so things were slower, shops opened late and most people were still sleeping.

FEET SPLASH AS PERSON ENTERS WATER. THEY
BEGIN TO WADE THROUGH.

But this morning a woman died. She slipped by unnoticed. Like a single pebble dropped in an ocean, her death barely registered more than a ripple. She was almost erased... almost.

SWIMMING, STRONG, RHYTHMIC STROKES.

This is what I know:

SOUND OF SWIMMING GRADUALLY FADES INTO
DISTANCE UNDERNEATH THE NARRATION,
UNTIL ALL YOU CAN HEAR IS THE QUIET SWELL
AND CRASH OF WAVES AND THE OCCASIONAL
GULL.

You took the dress Navira, the one from Paris. Put it in a plastic bag and tried to seal it.

The dress went into your rucksack, with the energy bars, the compass, the vaseline.

You didn't take your passport, your papers. Anything that could identify you.

You packed the wetsuit last.

On the coast the air smelled different, of salt from the wind off the sea, and hot sand.

There's a car park near the beach, which you avoided. You walked for a while up the scraggy dunes until you found a quiet spot where you couldn't see the tourists and they couldn't see you.

Maybe you stopped, sat for a while, looked out across the water. Or more likely you just threw your bag down and undressed.

You smeared vaseline on your legs, under your armpits.

You strung the compass around your neck and struggled into the wetsuit. Tucked the energy bars into the pocket at the back.

Finally, you took the dress from Paris and slipped it underneath the wetsuit against your stomach, the plastic wrapping scratching against your stomach. You tugged the zip up until the black neoprene reached tight around your throat, like a hand.

SOUND OF WAVES CRASHING BECOMES LOUDER

You walked towards the sea.

Sophie Afdhal

Sophie Afdhal is a writer of fiction, film, and poetry. She was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, a city where waiting out the cold and being a Red Sox fan foster commitment. She studied psychology at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania and she completed an honors thesis examining hope and hopelessness in the face of illness. Sophie lived in D.C. after earning her B.A. and was a psychology researcher. Sophie felt the call to writing, spending the best part of her days writing poems in the evening. She maintains a strong interest in psychology and human behavior, considering it a driving force of her work. When she is not traveling, and responding to messages asking ‘what time zone are you in’, Sophie resides in Oxford.

Genre: Fiction

Shifting Histories

For all my past confusion, I had expected to look at my half-sister and find her the strangest yet. I’m wrong. She looks so ordinary from where I stand.

“Do you need anything right now? I could get you some juice?” I attempt.

“Why does everyone offer juice constantly while you’re in the hospital? Never in my adult life have I been offered such an excessive quantity of juice.”

I can't bridge the distance. There is no space to catch on. But this is what we do, push against each other until one of us gets tired.

Shea and I had fought over the music for Dad's funeral. It seemed like a throwaway argument at the time, something to bicker over instead of saying what we actually wanted to say. She insisted we would play the theme from an old cowboy movie as the other pallbearers and I carried him out. I thought it seemed wrong, insensitive, until we were there.

Our father believed he had been a cowboy in an old life. The music echoed through the drafty chamber as I held the coffin above my shoulder and I realized it was perfect. I didn't know who this big funeral had been for but I did know the song was for the three of us. I cried quiet tears I had been holding back.

When we placed him in the hearse and the music had grown distant, I turned around to see Shea. Her face was clouded with a shine like a sheet of glass and her eyes held an empty distance. Some pieces of her hair had fallen to frame her face. Though the light was catching it, changing the color, I was sure of her. I knew she felt what I was feeling and when I moved towards her to gather her in my arms, she let me.

She and I were the two smallest and grandest people in the world, reduced completely by our shared experience and elevated by the knowledge we were the only two in the world who might guess how the other could feel. I knew her, for once, on instinct and biology made me reach out to carry her as one ant does when it finds another, whether it be a fallen comrade or a stranger.

Now I don't know how long we sit in silence before the nurse comes over to suggest we take a walk through the garden. Shea and I agree. She leaves her puzzle book. I open the door and the cold sting of air hits my face. As we step outdoors, Shea clutches a cardigan tighter over her hospital gown

She sets off walking ahead of me. We sit on a bench she chooses. There is little to see in the garden other than the still frozen trees. The space gives the sense of beauty, waxing and waning, that it is biding time to come back to life.

"I miss Dad, too," I tell her.

"Don't lie to me," she replies.

We watch a pair of birds dance across the sky. They've perfected their steps. I wish to crack through a wall like ice to see inside my sister's mind. Instead we remain in our fixed polarity with a bond to each other's differences. This is a dance as well.

Farrah Scott

Farrah Scott is fiction writer and poet based in Bristol. She has previously written for opera and has recently had her first published poem in *The Lamp* journal. She studied Animation at undergraduate and has worked on several short films.

Genre: Fiction

Hypatia

KIARA 1990

It is late afternoon. She is standing on the edge of a creek watching the swell of the water. On the bank Tyrone's arm is just visible, beads of sweat running down his smooth black skin. The sun has passed its highest point for that day and the shadows are beginning to creep away from the trees, stretching languidly towards dusk. The birds' songs have changed since the morning.

Kiara rotates her ankles one at a time and takes a step towards the edge curling her toes for grip. She inhales, stretches her arms tilts her torso and with a small push releases her body to the familiar rush of air as she plunges towards the cool water. Her body slips in easily. he allows herself to hang - enjoy the sensation of weightlessness that comes with being submerged.

She looks around. *There is little of interest in the creek, a few schools of tiny fish weave purposefully amongst the reeds. She recites: plant, cryptogamia, thallophyta, algae. An old habit. She loves adding structure to chaos, looking at nature so wild, and being able to classify it, trace each plant and animal back to its origins - see its evolutionary journey. Kiara swims towards where she knows Tyrone is dozing.*

She pulls her body from the water. His head is tilted towards her; eyes, half-parted. He holds out his hand and she lets him draw her towards him. His skin is hot and sweet with sun. She relents.

REGINA 2112

It is midday and sweltering. Regina leans against a splintered fence watching clouds amass on the horizon. Judging by their dirty-orange glow, she has twenty minutes before she needs to be indoors. The air is already thick; the wind carrying the warning sirens from the city below.

She walks up the central garden-path lined with makeshift poly-tunnels; their bright contents sitting in stark contrast to the landscape.

Julian Heckmatt

Julián Heckmatt Navarrete is a bilingual Chilean-British writer. Writing poetry and some prose in Spanish, Julian employs English for his scripts, stage dramas and longer prose. After graduating with a First in English from King's College London, under poet Ruth Padel, he returned to Chile to teach, translate and self-publish a novella (*A Place in the Mind*). This year he co-wrote and performed in an original play with Pegasus Youth Theatre in Oxford. Currently he writes *A Good Indian* on the the colonisation of a Native American family in *Tierra del Fuego*, based on historical events usually omitted in English language drama. Next in development is a play on relationships and love-triangles, titled *Love is a Nasty Thing*.

Genre: Drama

A Good Indian

PROLOGUE.

TOURGUIDE (OREN) enters the stage: a large family tipi. The stage is divided in two: the interior of the tipi takes up the rear, while the front represents the outdoors outside of the tipi. The interior walls of the tipi are made from a network of trunks and sticks, from which hang the varied but few possessions of the family: tools, leather pouches, bows and arrows, hand-woven baskets, etcetera. The exterior of the tipi is covered in moss, leafy branches and thick throws of fur. A tree stands outside of the tipi, it's canopy rises above it. A TOURGUIDE shows his audience around the tipi.

TOURGUIDE: Hello and welcome everyone, I'm your tour guide. Welcome to a typical Hakan family tipi. Or at least our modern reconstruction of one. Rafters made from trunks and sticks, covered in moss and guanaco fur. A fire in the middle, could never go out. A family of about eight would've lived here. A family of Hakan so called "Indians" or Native Americans or simply Americans - here we can reclaim the term - at the southernmost tip of the New World: Tierra del Fuego.

Hakan means person or original people in the Hakan language. Luckily we filed a dictionary, though the Hakan language died with its speakers. Did you know, one language is lost everyday of the year. Everyday another language disappears, and a culture with it.

As for the Hakans, they were nomads. Hunter-gatherers. Never settling down like our overweight cousins: the agriculturalists. This tipi was made to move around, depending on the closest guanaco herd or time of year. They, just like their brothers, the plants and animals of the archipelago, belonged to Mother Earth. Our Mother Earth, just like the Father Sky, could belong to no one. But this line of thinking did not last, at least not more than a few ten thousand years.

Once the White Man invaded, they came across a "primitive" peoples. Members of "the Stone Age", stuck in the past. Truth is, one of the most ancient cultures on the continent perished in a matter of decades. Natural habitats and food sources dwindled. Plagues and epidemics. Killing raids in the name of science. Rape and theft of people for human zoos, some sold as slaves. Survivors sent to labour camps. The few left worked for those very ranchers who took their land away.

This is a tragic real life story. But every story has its hero. Our hero was a native who lived on both sides of the globe.

Caroline Middleton

Caroline Middleton is a Senior Bookseller at Waterstones and History graduate from the University of York.

Genre: Fiction

The Timekeeper's Apprentice

Cassia was in trouble.

Stupid. I'm so stupid!

She studied Jax, trying to figure out what to do, feeling her panic mount. His eyes were vibrant with scheming and he had the appearance of a boy sacrificed to the world. Stubble gathered on his jaw, his hair was loose and light, damp with the fog that lingered around these parts. Sand from the road stuck to his clothes.

“Time,” he persisted. “Tell me about it.”

Her fingers trembled. She'd only wanted to use him to steal a book, she hadn't meant to betray that word – Gods, that was the most important part of her training!

Inside, she calmed herself, trying to think of something to throw him off.

“Pass me the watch.”

He dug his fingers into his jeans and held it up.

She listened for the sound of the second-hand.

“One,” she said, hearing her voice shake. “Two.”

His eyebrow drew up.

“Three.”

“Why are you counting the beats? They’re continuous and they don’t change tune.”

“Four. Five.”

“You’re not making any sense.”

She stopped, held out her palm. He placed the watch into it.

“That is time. Like I said, you’re not clever enough to understand.”

“Then teach me about ‘time’,” Jax said.

She hadn’t expected *that*. “Excuse me?”

“Teach me. If I don’t understand what you’re saying, then I want to learn.”

“Why would *you* want to learn?”

“I don’t much like secrets. Plus, I’m curious,” he said.

She forced herself to relax, taking a deep breath.

“You stole from me. Why should I trust you?”

“I also saved you.”

She crossed her arms. “I saved myself.”