THE gull no.1
Many, many thanks to Tansy Rees whose beautiful portraits of The Gull decorate this issue.

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Welcome to the greatest literary and cultural magazine ever to be edited by a seagull. Our first issue is packed full of delicious morsels, none of which is even slightly fishy - which did disappoint the Gull himself a little but I'm sure you'll love them.

We have the choicest selection of superlative literature available for your delectation: poetry, short stories, interviews, articles etc. and it's all gratis! A gift from The Gull and his esteemed colleagues to you by way of thanks for the chips you lent me that time.

T.G.
Spotlight

Three Swansea University Poets:

One:

Hugh Doyle

Hugh Doyle was born in Ireland in 1975 but has lived in Wales for many years, coming first in 1995 to attend Swansea University where he studied Philosophy and Anthropology. He returned to Swansea University in 2014 and is currently completing his MA in Creative Writing. He lives in Llangeinor with his partner Paula and son Finley.
**Untitled**

Now you had fallen in; I find you smashed against granite
wailing while smiling, floored in the kitchen.

Before you fell in; you would be upright weeks, fine
until overwhelmed you relented.
In deep gulps drank in your own drowning
swallowed in days at a time.

While you floundered
I watched you ebbing into habit
I saw you caught in returning tides
I saw you reaching with timorous hands
lost in a poisonous brine.

Flailing in failure, unravelling
treading currents that dragged,
pulled you under nightmare dark seas.

Submerged, often you would
sink further and further.

Adrift in crushing waters craving the very bones of you.
Signposts

Stop.
The only direction you cannot ignore.

I want to, really I should.  
But more forgetting is possible.

Opening the car door  
I feel your warm breath.

This paradox of remembered things  
absent but present.

The ignition ignites a song  
ready to be sung again.

Sliding anxiously into regret  
In my rear-view the whole world is quaking.

Yield.  
Prepare to give way to the right.

I wanted to yield, I could have yielded.  
Those last few days needed that.

Instead, tears waiting like so much traffic: flowed.  
Direction simply lacking, giving in going home.

I want to stop dead, right here, hiding  
under Galway skies white blue grey amalgam.

Blend into my darkness become  
once more a lapsed memory.
It is only when I stop at Joyce’s
For more wine

That I ask, was I mistaken?
Was it the world? Or is it me that’s shaking?
Exhausted

I will never forget
waiting, Fretting
upon a fractured doorstep
peering into an absence.

Repeating soon, it will be soon, fifty cars
less than fifty cars, alright then
one hundred cars.

Tedium becomes tension, begging the silence
be broken in that clattering
your cars cracked exhaust
the thing we all knew needed attention
how we never understood
even though you said you would
why you
neglected to fix it.
Conversing the Corrib

Below Tone’s Bridge at Corrib’s mouth
tongue tips are spitting
their fierce articulation
interrupted by estuary-sea
chattering in idioms
innate yet unknown
Imparting all each other knows
all they remember
a mumbling of voices
overflowing with whispers
seeping at the edges and shores of memories
the wind and I can only try to interpret
tongue-lashing tales
formed from wracked words
at crusted corners of its mouths
alluvial deposits living
on its shattered surface
constantly coursing conceals a motion
within this seething self
individual whims jostle

until the tongues slow

my mouth softly feeding on their drowned dialect

hearing that most immediate of sounds

speech

delivered in little rolls of whispers from small slips of tongue
SPOTLIGHT

THREE SWANSEA UNIVERSITY POETS:

TWO:

MARGARET HANNIGAN–POPP

Margaret Hannigan Popp is the author of ‘Hope & Other Animals’, a collection of poems published by Tuba Press, http://www.tubapress.eu/fr/, June 2015. She was born in Ireland in 1959 and has lived in Wales since 1988. She worked as a civil engineer for ten years on highways and structures and then, in the environmental sector, led the establishment of the Fedw Hir Eco Centre. Currently she is working on the Sùgán project, the Ballygar Community Arts project for Galway 2020, European City of Culture.
THE PHYSICS OF WRATH

under a gun-metal sky, people mill at the train station entrance
seagulls anxiously pecking at time
watching the car park

a different sound muscles above the chatter
it squats and grunts and hollers
then the man jumps on the bonnet
a piston enraged
he pounds up and down
a pile driver hammering the soft metal shell
goaded by the roaring abandonment of all form of self awareness
everyone stares

the girl crawls

the girl crawls
crawls
crawls away

under a grey veiled sky, the workers bolt up the shutters
ants trooping across the rigid frame of the reactor walls
eying the clock

a different design lowers the elevation
it sits on rock and saves on costs
then the plant starts generating
the atom fissions
half lives decay
an incandescent monk subservient in a concrete cell

confident in the overwhelming welter of data and terrifying genius
everyone assumes the heat builds builds builds a head.

under a bird flocked sky, sun worshippers ignore the sounds

time standing still in sand castles

trapped in paradise

a different pattern spells out seismic shift

rocks pool underwater

a violent heave wrenches the carpet sea

from the ocean floor

the waves rise up

an insurgent cavalry galloping towards the shore

protected by the evacuation platforms

everyone watches the water climbs climbs climbs up up

there is a red bruised and cloud bandaged sky

the angel swung his sickle into the earth

the butterfly stirred and flew from the garden

and peace comes dropping slow

the open fields

the open fields

stretch

far away
NO is no (maybe)

NEIN

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SPOTLIGHT

THREE SWANSEA UNIVERSITY POETS:

TWO:

JAMES AUST

James is currently studying for an MA IN English Literature at Swansea University, including creative writing modules in writing poetry specifically. Although originally from Bedfordshire he has resided in Swansea for over five years and finds the city to be at the heart of much of his poetic writings.
Dressing Men

The ward is weeping
and we cannot cope,
really, we all know this,
and they know it
or they must
feel it, I hope
they feel, my touch.

I hope they hear me,
and I hope
they cannot
feel anything, it would be best.
The air is thickening
like soup

in the mess hall,
their skin, plasmatic,
is slurped back, quickly now,
as another dozen come
mostly silent, I pick
at cloth subsumed in wounds.

The smell of mustard
turns our stomachs.

A sister holds a cool flannel
over a young boy’s eyes,
the water drips down
what is left of his cheeks,
it falls onto her arms,
turning them a sickly pink,

she goes pale. Her cheeks
are translucent, through
her tears she carries on with her work, like the others she does what she can to mollify every burn.

He reaches out blindly for her;

_Mother! Mother! Mother…_

The pained cries of undressing, faded to a silent interring.
This is Radio 5 Live:

First for news, and the best live sport,

and another accident to report
on another mundane Monday drive
from another work day survived,
pouring pounds away on extortionate
petrol who's neon prices bathe the forecourt,
buzzing smug by adverts for imported
fine wines whilst I idle over news of a five
car pile-up, past junction 36 at Bridgend.

A Seventeen year old, just passed,
Loses control of her dream car,
a Volkswagen Beetle, lime green
her epiphyseal plates, not fully fused,
shatter with the windscreen
as her face slumps down
to pale thumbs pressing send.
**A Beach at Night**

My hair,  
frostbitten at the fraying ends,  
wraps around my face  
and tangles in the wind,  
my ears  
gather the waves  
that wash over shells  
and replay the shore's orchestra,  
as I lose count  
of hours  
spent  
smiling  
through cold teeth.

My body  
pale  
against the night,  
is too cold to move  
as a dog barks  
somewhere  
along the indeterminate bay,  
serenaded
by the hissing rubber
of cars on tarmac,
passing
occasional colour
over
me, red
in tarrying tail lights.

In silence,
my eyes span the bay,
lost
on a horizon of flickering ships
framing
a figure passing at my feet,
oblivious
thick-soled boots
slog through wet sand

soaked in sea,

and blood
veining down the beach.
Late Stage Vascular Dementia

for Nana

I could see
something alive
in eyes,
enwreathed with deep wrinkles
and locked
on mine.

Underneath;
pale lips twitched,
trying to find the five letters.

I said hello,
and you replied–
Jo Mazelis is a writer and photographer. Author of 'Ritual, 1969', 'Significance', 'Diving Girls' and Circle Games'. Visit her website:

https://jomazelis.wordpress.com/
The Weather at the Dinner Table

‘We are almost like a world without a sun…’ her mother often said, using one of her infuriatingly overblown similes, then she would turn her gaze to her male child and add, ‘except that we have you Frank to keep the elements at bay.’

She’d said it the day their exam results arrived while the two envelopes sat unopened next to her dinner plate. It was a foregone conclusion that Frank would pass and go on to great things, while Eileen would naturally fail – her destiny unbruised by such unnecessary encumbrances as qualifications. Therefore it was Frank who’d been given extra coaching in arithmetic and English, there being not enough money for the both of them to see Mr. Gilbert on Wednesday and Thursday evenings after school.

Miss Withers, their lodger, who hardly ever said a word and had wanted to be a nun, was at the head of the table in the place where their father used to sit. The twins, Frank and Eileen sat opposite one another and their mother took up the helm nearest the door so that she could nip in and out to the kitchen.
To mark the occasion they were having something new for supper; spaghetti bolognaise. While it had been cooking it had smelled a lot like the mince and onions they had at school, but this was different, as they’d be eating it not with lumpy lukewarm mash but long impossible strings of pasta. Their mother dished up a portion for everyone, then from a small drum-like container, she shook out a dusting of a strange powdery cheese that smelled unmistakably like vomit.

Eileen was enchanted by this new development in their menu, by the idea that while everyone else they knew tucked into boring old sausage and mash, or ham with boiled potatoes and greenly glutinous parsley sauce, they were going continental.

When they were finished, their mother left the table and returned proudly bearing a cake stand on which sat an Arctic Roll. Frank and Eileen ‘Ooh-ed’ appreciatively at the sight of the Arctic Roll. They had seen the adverts for it on the television - where it looked a great deal larger. Their mother lifted a knife and was about to begin slicing when Frank, in an act of inspiration and suspiciously unusual thoughtfulness, said pleasantly, ‘You sit down and relax, Mum. I’ll do that.’

Their mother gushed with pleasure, ‘Oh, Frank, thank you, darling!’

Eileen knew what this kind deed of her brother’s meant - the smallest portion he could get away with for her, the largest for him. She therefore watched him carefully. He cut two equal-sized pieces
for Miss Withers and their mother and handed them out with a flourish. Then, while the two women picked up their spoons and began to investigate the dessert as if they were archaeologists uncovering some precious and fragile artefact, Frank cut the remaining sponge into two pieces - one almost three inches thick, the remainder barely an inch and put them on two plates.

Finally, knowing Eileen was watching, he grinned and licked his lips. He lifted a plate in each hand and began the movement that would deliver the small slice to Eileen, while he kept the biggest piece for himself.

‘Mu-um!’ Eileen said sharply, indignation giving her voice a grating high note. Their mother had been nibbling at her dessert, completely oblivious to the storm brewing. She dropped her spoon with surprise at Eileen’s voice.

‘Mary, mother of Jesus! Don’t do that, Eileen.’

‘Frank’s giving himself a huge piece and I’ve only got a tiny bit!’

Their mother looked at Frank. He froze, as if shocked by Eileen’s words, still holding one plate in each hand.

But cleverly, Frank had subtly switched the position of his hands. Now the plate bearing the generous portion of Arctic Roll was proffered to Eileen, while the miserly slice was nearer him.

‘Huh?’ said Frank.

‘Let me see,’ their mother said, standing up to get a good look at both of the plates. ‘Someone’s jumping to conclusions.’
Then in a judgment that was Old Testament in its swiftness, Mother took both plates from Frank and crossed her arms over so that Eileen now got the tiny piece, Frank the large one.

‘But, Mum,’ Eileen whined.

‘Be quiet, Eileen,’ Mother snapped.

Eileen should have recognized the dangerous note in her mother’s voice, but somehow she couldn’t shut up.

‘It’s not fair!’ she said. The injustice of it was intolerable. Eileen felt the small muscles in her chin begin to violently twitch and crumple, dragging the corners of her mouth down.

‘Not fair? Not fair! I’ll show you what’s not fair!’ said their mother in a fury, and she picked up Eileen’s plate, slid its contents onto Frank’s and returned it empty to Eileen. The plate bore sad witness to the lost dessert; a smear of ice cream and a couple of crumbs. ‘There,’ their mother said, brushing her hands together with grim satisfaction. ‘That’s not fair.’

Eileen looked at her empty plate, then folded her arms and glared across at Frank. He was pursing his lips and sucking his cheeks in, trying to hold back a laugh.

‘Oh, Mum,’ he said. ‘Poor Eileen hasn’t got any now!’

‘Serves her right!’

‘Here you are, Eileen,’ said Frank, brotherly love oozing like saccharine. He picked up the smallest slice of the cake with his spoon and leaned across the table ready to drop it onto Eileen’s plate.
She would not, could not eat it now. She raised her hand, meaning to signal no, but as soon as she did it, Frank’s hand jerked violently sideward and the cake sailed off the spoon. Eileen’s hand had not touched it, but somehow Frank had made it look just as if she had. The payload, once released from the gravity of the spoon’s silvery embrace sailed past Mother’s head and landed with a dainty splat on the head and shoulders of a china figurine called Top o’ the Hill which stood in pride of place on the sideboard.

They all watched.

Their mother’s mouth fell open. The china figure with her billowing scarlet crinoline and despoiled face rocked wildly and made a faint grinding noise. Miss Withers, who had always admired the ornament, thrust out her hands uselessly as though she might somehow stop its giddy dance from where she sat.

The momentum of its dangerous rocking kept the object upright for a few seconds as they watched. But when it slowed, as the laws of science decreed it must, it would either settle back in an upright position or fall. And fall it did, crashing onto the fireplace in an explosion of red shards.

No one doubted that Eileen had knocked Frank’s hand causing the whole tragedy.

Frank said, ‘I’m sorry, Mum. I just wanted Eileen to have some.’

At this their mother got up and fled the room.

Miss Withers began picking up bits of broken china and soggy, mangled sponge cake. She placed them carefully in the palm of her
cupped hand. As usual she said nothing. It wasn’t that Miss Withers couldn’t speak; it was just that most of the time she didn’t. Eileen watched her down on her hands and knees, her skirt hitched up, the tops of her stockings and her shiny white thighs showing.

Funny, she thought, coming back to the present and the task in hand, Miss Withers’ thighs had been the colour of a skinned squid.

Frank had resumed eating. He had an air of pious satisfaction about him. He was eating very slowly, licking his spoon in an exaggerated way, making ‘mm’ noises and watching Eileen all the time, wanting to catch her eye.

She remembered how she had often hoped that one day Miss Withers would notice all the bad things Frank did. That she was really an emissary from God who kept watch on them. Such work could fill and explain her silence.

Miss Withers’ hair was blue-black like their mother’s; there was always a packet of Sea Witch hair dye on the go in the bathroom. Eileen thought it was an oddly named product for such pious women as her mother and Miss Withers.

Miss Withers’ left hand was now full of smashed china; Eileen watched as she gazed at it in wonder, then sat back on her haunches and did a quick genuflection with her free hand. Her lips were moving, silently mouthing words that no one ever heard. Miss Withers read the bible every day. Miss Withers had never married. Miss Withers had moved in not very long after their father had moved out. She wasn’t much of a substitute; her presence was
ghost-like and ineffectual. She did her best, but couldn’t cook, couldn’t clean, couldn’t make beds, never smiled.

Even now she was making a calamity of picking up the broken ornament, slowly plucking bits of it from the carpet and dropping them into her open hand. Eileen thought she should help, should fetch the brush and dustpan from the kitchen, but was afraid of doing something wrong again.

Miss Withers seemed to be moving more and more slowly, gazing with narrow-eyed concentration at each bit that she added to her hand. Then just when Eileen thought she would get up and throw the bits in the kitchen bin, Miss Withers closed her fingers around the broken shards, her hand shaking as she increased the pressure, until at last a drop of scarlet blood was wrung from the scarlet china and fell to the carpet below into a pool of melted ice cream.

Miss Withers turned suddenly and met Eileen’s gaze. She nodded slowly, then smiled a slightly crooked Mona Lisa smile and Eileen suddenly understood; Miss Withers did see all and know all.

‘Well then,’ their mother said, bustling into the room and patting her hair into place. She wore a tight-lipped smile that almost seemed to vibrate so forced was it. ‘Let’s open these envelopes, shall we.’

She picked them up and held one in each hand, momentarily undecided which to open first.

‘Now,’ she paused, regaining herself. ‘Frank Brian Doyle,’ she read and dropped Eileen’s results back on the side plate. At this, quick as a dervish, Miss Withers leapt up and snatched the second
envelope. The crockery rattled alarmingly, but nothing was broken, not this time.

At opposite ends of the table, the two women, each moodily ignoring the other, opened their envelopes. Frank was slouched over, his face, a comic book rendition of boredom and smugness, was propped on his folded arms, his eyes lazy and rolling in his sugar sated head.

Their mother’s lips moved silently mouthing each word on the page.

Miss Withers was the first to make a sound. True to form, she did not speak, but emitted a queer high pitched, ‘Oh!’ Like an opera singer going through her scales, she varied and yodelled in louder and more elaborate sounds. As if this weren’t enough she began to flap the letter by way of accompaniment.

Eileen, both concerned and astonished, reached across and gently took the paper from Miss Withers’ convulsed and birdlike hand.

‘I’ve passed the exam,’ she said in a small voice that no one else seemed to hear.

Frank sat up a little straighter; his eyes on his mother as she silently refolded his letter and, standing up, slipped it into her apron pocket. She looked strangely lost and giddy as she made her way to the kitchen, lilting sideways as if she were on board a broken ship in a terrible storm.
Comedian, actor, activist and multiple-marathon-running-miracle-worker EDDIE IZZARD has been touring Britain broadcasting impassioned defences of the European Union and urging the citizens of the U.K. to vote REMAIN IN EUROPE in today's referendum. THE GULL couldn't pass up an opportunity to speak with such an inspired and inspiring man. So, if you're still undecided which way to vote, read this short interview CHRIS CORNWELL managed to secure with Eddie whilst he was visiting Swansea University.
CC: I’m from Cambridge originally, I remember, in 1996, you had an unpleasant incident in Cambridge; you were attacked because of what you were wearing.

EI: I took them to court and won so it was all OK.

But again it does link up with the human rights issues, & I wondered how far you think we’ve come as a society in terms of accepting transgenderism?

Well when I went to the F.A. cup, one guy screamed at me and 70,000 minus one didn’t. So I thought that was an improvement, I thought Ten years ago maybe ten people might have screamed at me and then forty or fifty years ago it would be the whole section of people would have screamed at me. I’m trying to be a positive role-model, for myself and anyone else who finds it useful, I ran marathons in painted nails, saying “yeah you’ve got to be transgender to do this! Well you don’t have to be but it helps!” So I’m battle hardened, and any LGBT people have to go through their own knight’s quest to come out. So that’s what I’ve done and I’ve tried to use it in a positive way. I like people see, so I want myself to do well & I want everyone to do well, as many people as possible. I consider myself radical moderate, do radical things with a moderate message, that’s why I’m passionate about Europe, it is the way forward. We are the first continent to ever do this; no-one ever seems to mention that, this is a really difficult thing. The American experience is different, this is the first one, two and a half thousand years of war and
people are saying ‘enough is enough.’ So it’s beautiful what we are trying to do. And the 333 gigs I am doing around the country, that’s fantastic because I thought I’d get about 22 people coming to the German gig, then I’d do the show in French and I’d get about 50 people and then we’d probably sell-out the English show. 150 in Bristol for the German show, 250 for the French show, I mean unbelievable. In Birmingham I did this amazing German gig, it’s been a couple of years since I’ve done German, and I was nailing the show, everyone was laughing like mad and I thought this is beautiful, it’s kind of bonkers, but it’s a beautiful thing.

A lot of people don’t realise you lived in Wales.

Yeah, well I tell everyone I can, I lived in Skwen, went to school in Uplands, Swansea, and in Porthcawl. They were boarding schools or private schools, that wasn’t my background but mum was dying of cancer so we had to do a very quick move. B.P. just said alright there’s a house to live in, there’s a school you can go to, it was all just sort of arranged. Dad worked for B.P. at Llandarcy. So I could have had a Welsh accent [in an excellent Welsh accent] I’d be speaking like this, I’d have been fine with that, it's nice.

It quite suits you I think. [Still in a fine Welsh accent] Well I’d have been okay with that, a welsh accent. People could say I was Jones the transvestite, “ahh there goes Jones the tranny, ahh yes he’s an endurance runner too, that’s just how he is you know. Don’t get in his way cause he just goes on and on.”

Do you think there is a discernible difference between the way Wales and England are approaching the referendum?

Yeah. I think Wales gets 245 mil and is a net receiver from Europe so any Welsh person who’s voting against it is going against his country as part of the U.K. It just doesn’t make sense. There’s 2.4 billion more to come and so much of the exports go into Europe. So logically Wales would be positive about Europe. And Scotland’s very positive. Of course not only does Brexit mean recession but also it would probably mean that Nicola Sturgeon would choose a time to push for another referendum, not necessarily immediately but then they’d peel off, so that’d be the end of the U.K. So these Brexit people obviously just want to break up the U.K.

CC.
John Lavin has a doctorate from the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, as well as an MA in Creative Writing from Cardiff University. He is the Editor of the literary journal, The Lonely Crowd and also the Fiction Editor of Wales Arts Review. He edited the short story anthology, *A Fiction Map of Wales* (H'mm Foundation). His short fiction has appeared in The Incubator, Spork Press, Dead Ink, The Lampeter Review and in the recent anthology *Secondary Character* (Second Chapter). His criticism has appeared in The Irish Times, Wales Arts Review and The Welsh Agenda amongst other places.
State Anxiety Pill Blues

She got abused on Facebook and twitter with such frequency and with such determined cruelty that she finally packed as many things as she could into her sister’s gap year rucksack. Ready to leave. Ready to be homeless if that was what it took to get away. She argued with her mother and slapped her fiercely across the face before she knew what she was doing. She ran out into the streetlamp-lit night and was sick outside their neighbour’s front gate. Later, back in her bedroom, the contents of the rucksack poured all over the floor, she almost cut herself again. Underneath her breasts would be a good place, she thought. One of the few areas of her body that her mother would be unlikely to subject to a spot-check.

But she didn’t want to go back down that route, no matter how small the risk of being found out. Not after the ten-month-ordeal-by-counselling-and-anti-depressant that had been the story of her recent life.
The deeply autistic, middle-aged man that she had met while staying in the ‘crisis bed’ of a residential care home had constantly referred to the anti-depressant that she had been prescribed as the ‘state anxiety pill.’ The man had been misdiagnosed with schizophrenia when he was a child and while that misdiagnosis had been widely acknowledged on the quiet within the residential care home, it was also widely acknowledged that there wouldn’t ever be enough money available to take him off the anti-psychotics that he had been wrongly prescribed for over twenty years. Not enough money, either, to then rehabilitate him and start him off on what would be deemed the correct course of medication.

He had said some extremely inappropriate things to her. Things like, ‘Darling, my cock is rotting off in this place!’ and ‘You’re nice… Playboy Bunny nice.’ So much so that she had been genuinely worried/ borderline-frightened by him at first. But then she had slowly begun to realise that his choice of words and his frames of reference were not particularly his own but rather the words and frames of reference of others, picked up over the years of a life spent in and out of different institutions. He often referred to himself, for instance, as PJ Tips, after the monkeys in the TV commercials that had been popular when he was a teenager in the 1980s. This was surely
something that he had been maliciously called in the past. She could vividly recall seeing him sitting in the chair next to the medication cupboard, waiting for a member of staff to hand him his cupful of largely, perhaps even entirely misdiagnosed drugs, while he chanted the words ‘PG Tips! PG Tips!’ over and over again.

And she had grown fond of him, she really had. Extremely fond because he really was a lovely misunderstood childlike man who had no one in the world except his fellow ‘service users’ and, understandably enough, they quite often grew exasperated with him because being misdiagnosed with schizophrenia also meant that he was in the wrong sort of care home for somebody with his requirements. There were the staff members too, of course, and while some of them clearly cared for him, it was also the case that the very nature of their job meant that they were not allowed to care for him too much, lest the lines between staff member and ‘service user’ became blurred.

But no, she didn’t want to go down that route again and so she let a middle-aged regular in the pub that she worked at put his hand up her skirt one night when the landlord and landlady had left early, leaving her to lock up on her own. She realised
later that the man reminded her a bit of the autistic man from the care home. Partly because he seemed lonely and sad but also because he looked a bit like him, with his short-ish, side-parted silver grey hair and his boyish face in its cloak of rumpled, shaving-cut-marked-skin. He was quite funny too, she thought at first, albeit in a misanthropic sort of way. He liked to tell self-deprecating stories about his lack of success with women. Maybe that was why she let him kiss her and put his hand up her top, and then - even though his Strongbow-and-Marlboro-Light-breath nearly made her gag - push his fingers inside her, breaking the fine mesh of her tights as he did so.

But mostly she let him do that last thing not because she felt sorry for him but because she knew that it wouldn’t feel nice. Because she knew that it would hurt.

And then when she asked him to stop, he had done. For a moment she had experienced a rare feeling of control over a situation. And a rare sense of control over another human being. Because she could tell that he really hadn't wanted to stop - that he had badly wanted to take things further - but she had asked him to, and he had let go of her at once, even
staying to help her tidy up the bar and asking her questions about her assignments at college.

She told herself that it was nothing to worry about, yet she knew deep down that that wasn't true. She knew deep down that when you do something as stupid and as lonely as this thing that she had done... something as matter-of-factly self-loathing... that there were bound to be consequences. And sure enough the man was in the pub the next evening watching her from over his Strongbow, a look of presupposed intimacy in his eyes that alarmed her and made her worry that he would say something in front of the landlord and landlady. Or say something to the regulars that lined the bar partly to look at her body and partly for the chance to talk to a young woman who was more or less required, as part of her job, to laugh at their jokes. They were all of a type, these regulars: all male and all either divorced or separated. All of them made bitter by drink and a lack of self-awareness and a lack of comprehension of their ex-wives and ex-partners. They enjoyed talking to young women like her because they thought they were unspoilt and not yet turned into the hard-faced hysterical and hateful bitches that they would almost certainly one day be.
The man was in amongst the opposite trees and their accompanying shadows when she left (the landlord and landlady staying behind for what always ended up being more than just one last vodka and tonic.)

‘Do you fancy going for a drink at Fahrenheit?’ he enquired. Fahrenheit being the small town’s only late night bar.

‘Ah thanks but I’ve got to be in college first thing tomorrow,’ she said, noticing at once that the man was more or less barring her path.

‘Oh well then, how about just a quick…’ he moved forward and put his arms around her waist. ‘Kiss again?’

He was smiling at her but how had she not noticed the emptiness in his eyes before? That empty-eyed look that seems to come into a lot of men’s eyes when they watch porn or go to a lap dancing club or when - especially when - they sleep with a prostitute. That vacant, glazed look, that suggests they are not looking at a woman but at an electronic product in a shopping centre. A look in some ways not unlike the look that they would have had playing with their new Christmas toys and
computer games when they were children. Only without the innocence, obviously. Without the rapt wonder, clearly.

She edged backwards, thinking that she would go into the pub and say that she had decided on that nightcap after all. But his arms around her waist tightened the way that a seatbelt does when a car turns a corner, his fingers digging deeply into her skin. He pulled her with him into the trees, the degree of his physical strength in comparison to her own coming as a sudden shock.

It hurt more this time when he thrust his fingers inside her and this time she felt it for what it was. Something ungentle and unwanted. Something that was painful plain and simple rather than something that distracted her from her loneliness and her body weight and from the upside down way that her medication made her feel.

And from her problems at college. The social media abuse. The twitter witch hunt. The Facebook witch trial. It had all stemmed from college. It was because of her anti-depressant medication and her stay in the residential care home, of course. Obvs. And it was because, at root, some girls that she had gone
to school with had never liked her vulnerability and disliked it all the more now that it was that much more pronounced. Quite what was so wrong with vulnerability she had never been able to fully ascertain. It was a quality that she personally found attractive in others but then, as one of the girls might have said, what would she know about being attractive? And in truth, the only men who seemed to find her attractive were the ones who frequented the pub where she worked. Men like the one that had his fingers inside her now. His tongue and his rank, sour-sweet breath filling her mouth, making it hard to breathe.

He took her hand and pressed it against his crotch, his penis feeling squat, pointy and grotesque through the coarse denim. Like a sharp, peculiarly flesh-like root that you find in the garden when weeding. That you might cut through with the sharp end of a spade. It was the first penis that she had ever touched.

She knew now by the way that he was holding her and covering her mouth first with his own mouth and now, frighteningly - dehumanisingly - with the flat palm of his hand, that asking him to stop wouldn’t work anymore. Her feeling of control over him on the previous night had simply been a
naïve and stupid illusion. It had been just another delusional attempt, in fact, at making herself feel as though she had a semblance - no matter how warped – of self-worth.

She felt so full of stupidity and ugliness and meaninglessness and fucking fear just then that when he did undo his fly and make to force himself inside her, a little bit of vomit leaked out of her mouth. She hadn’t really eaten anything all day and so it was nothing much more than prawn cocktail crisps and stomach acid. Unperturbed, the man dragged her tights down, his fingers digging hard into her flesh once again, the way a bird of prey might use its talons to safely secure its victim on the journey nestwards. She wrenched his hand away and into her mouth, biting it with all of the strength that she could summon. The sound of their twin, intertwining screams carried strongly through the trees to the pub where the landlord and landlady were listening to Gregory Porter and topping up their vodka and tonics from the optic. They didn’t think anything much of it, the small town they lived in being prone to drunken shouts and screams. To petty violence that it was best to stay well clear of if at all possible.
Gillian Clarke she is an award winning poet, translator and lecturer who has released over a dozen collections. Her work has been translated into ten languages. The president of Tŷ Newydd, the national writing centre of Wales, she live in Ceredigion on a smallholding. In May Gillian’s celebrated tenure as National Poet of Wales came to an end.
**Storwm Awst**

after Dylan Thomas

Especially when the blackbird on the lawn listens, head cocked, in August silence, tuned to the smallest syllable of the worm; when after golden heat the *storwm Awst* downpours steel phrases on the roof, the stones, and a windy sibilance sounds the vowels of trees;

when tractor wheels rhyme tracks across the land, scribing their couplets, and the homeless hare limps on the lawn's page like a gold initial; when red kites ride the wind, spelling forked phrases over land where big machines have had their say, killed hay\(^2\) and creatures lie in bloody lines;

when the weather is Atlantic, summer's mellowing, and trees wait weighted with assonance of rain, and wind blows flocks of birds in paragraphs, and pools italicise the broken sky, and the heart's iambic, a spell spelling itself to speed the blood, and rhyme the world.

\(^1\) *August storm*

\(^2\) ‘Iladdu gwair’, to kill the hay
This month marks exactly 20 years since Goodness Gracious Me first appeared as a radio show on BBC radio 4. An immediate hit, it appeared in its reincarnated television form in 1998 and completed a run of three highly popular series, making national treasures of its stars. One such star, Sanjeev Bhaskar, talked to Tommy Lumby about the seriousness of the absurd and the future of comedy in the age of individualism.

T.L.: I’ve always been drawn to comedy that goes close to the bone. It seems to enable people to confront tricky issues and examine them in a way that would be harder to do in a different context. In the first television series of Goodness Gracious Me especially, there were some sketches which dealt pretty head on with racism. I asked Mr. Bhaskar if it felt controversial for him and the other writers using this kind of material.

“On the one hand, it never felt controversial,” he explained, “as the content of many of the sketches were personal. On the other hand, we tried to be mindful of how what we were trying to say might be perceived. The point was never to simply offend someone. That would’ve been a) to miss the point of what we were trying to say, and b) to get mired in the notions of offence rather than the subject matter. We were careful in not tarring entire communities or groups with the same brush and tried to make the characters specific rather than generic. I believe we even treated our ‘targets’, whether Asian or not, with a degree of affection. We weren’t ashamed or embarrassed to be British or Asian and particularly both at the same time.”

Bhaskar’s last point struck me as significant. One characteristic of racism is its determinism, its habit of saying, ‘You’re this!’ based on a limited set of criteria. However, it also occurred to me that a certain kind of pigeon-holing can come from people with much better intentions. I thought of one of my favourite sketches: ‘Sarah the English wife’.

A group of young British Asians are
sitting round a table at a restaurant discussing their friend Ravi’s recent marriage to a ‘non-Asian’ woman. As the couple arrive, one of the group reminds the rest to ‘try and make her feel welcome’. Much to their shock, however, Sarah (played by Fiona Allen) arrives wearing a pink and gold salwar kameez and speaks to them in an unconvincing but pronounced Indian accent. Trying to maintain some semblance of normality, one of the friends asks them how they met.

‘My father had promised me to Ravi when I was nine years old. We were brought up together in the same village in Uttar Pradesh,’ says Sarah.

Dumbfounded, they all turn to Ravi.

“We met at a nightclub in Putney,” he replies.

For me, this sketch brilliantly sends up the archetypal liberal who exoticsises other people’s cultures. I wondered to what extent these sketches came from Bhaskar and the other writers’ personal experiences.

“Most came from personal experiences, others from observations and the really silly ones were just absurd flights of fancy. ‘Sarah the English wife’ came from us bumping into people who were professed Indophiles and embraced our Asian culture more than we did. We just took it to a ridiculous level, it being a comedy and all.”

Bhaskar has described the experience of making GGM as ‘cathartic’. For me, this strikes right at the heart of why comedy which deals with difficult subject matter is so important. I asked him exactly what he meant by that.

“A lot of the absurdities that come with any kind of clash, be it age difference, gender or culture (and in many cases in our sketches, all three at the same time) are ripe areas for comedy. A lot of these, we [the writers] thought we harboured in our own heads, thinking it was specific to only us. When we got together, we realised we were all carrying around the same strange thoughts and observations and then were able to put them down and share them. It did feel very cathartic. When it was then embraced as warmly by the audience, it felt more shared and common an experience than we had possibly imagined. And the fact that catharsis and sharing went across cultural lines was one of the biggest joys of doing the show.”

I was intrigued by his use of the word ‘absurd’. There is an absurd streak which runs through GGM, but some people associate the absurd with ‘light’ comedy. How important is the absurd, I wondered, in dealing with controversial subject matter?

“The absurd is essential in these matters. Taking any kind of conflict to its most extreme can
expose just quite how ridiculous the original argument can be or certainly what it can lead to.”

Some of the sketches that deal with religion are quite absurd. I asked if it would be harder now to do that kind of satire on such a mainstream platform.

“We never made fun of any religion, we did perhaps use practitioners of religions (or how they seem to have interpreted it) as a target for humour. I didn’t have a problem with anyone believing whatever they wanted as long as they didn’t then commandeer it and tailor it to their own weird view of the world. Religion itself wasn’t ever the target. It probably is harder to do that now. Sensitivities on the subject are such that people are far quicker to jump up in a personally affronted way without attempting to unearth the point being made.”

This notion of personal offence has come to prominence recently, especially in regard to universities. The adoption of ‘safe space’ policies by many student unions and the refusal of platform to controversial speakers has led many to accuse universities of placing the right ‘not to be offended’ over freedom of expression. Some blame identity politics for fostering this hypersensitive mentality. Bhaskar went to university in the 1980s, when identity politics was emerging as a major cultural force. Now the Chancellor of Sussex University, what difference does he see in how today’s generation of students approach identity politics?

“Gender identity seems to me to have made the largest strides. Women are far clearer about their value, achievements and potential than back in the 1980’s. The same, to a lesser extent can be said of the LGBT community. Cultural identity is the one area which seems more fraught. Various interest groups attempting to define it for everyone else seems more prevalent now than back then. I never had a problem with being a hybrid of cultures. I still don’t.”

In a recent interview, Bhaskar made a poignant remark about the loss of community in Britain, how what once were ‘our’ rights have become ‘my’ rights. Some view identity politics as symptomatic of (or even responsible for) this increasing individualism. In an increasingly individualistic society, are people becoming less empathetic?

“I’ve always believed the 80’s killed off a certain sense of community. The ‘us’ seemed a far more inclusive and broader term than it does now; the narrower the ‘us’, the broader the ‘them’. Ultimately, that meant a far more fractured society which helps no one. The smaller ‘us’ feels more isolated and with a bunch of smaller ‘us’s’ it
means people are less ready to be empathetic, as they feel their small ‘us’ has more to lose. ‘Better together’ has been used as a campaign slogan a few times but I think at a human and social level, it happens to be completely true. Sometimes I think that the only thing that could bring us all closer together is a movie style Aliens from outer space invasion.”

What does all this mean for comedy?

“For comedy, it means that people may end up looking to have their world view reinforced by more and more niche material, which can in turn just reinforce the notion of small ‘us’ness’.

T.L.
Gary Raymond is a novelist, short story writer, critic, and lecturer in English and Creative Writing. As well as a regular voice in Wales Arts Review, Gary has written for The Guardian, Rolling Stone Magazine, is a theatre critic for The Arts Desk, and is a regular commentator on arts and culture for BBC Wales. He has an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University, and a PGCE in higher education. In 2013, Gary published 3 Minute JRR Tolkien: A Visual Biography of Fantasy’s Most Revered Writer with Ivy Press, and his novel, For Those Who Come After, is available now from Parthian Books.
What I Learned At The Gallery

...And so as you can see from our next artist the progression to a more earthy, urbane, circumspect, diaphanous, kinetic drop to the canvass. This first painting, for example, uses far bolder, broader strokes, representing arguably a more fractured connection between artist and landscape, a relationship of much friction, one that is striving for understanding from a position of concerned concealment and brooding disapproval. Here, Jakeway’s ‘I Heard It At The Bus Stop’ seems to almost carve the two main figures out of the grey, damning concrete that forms the urban backdrop. The dark green of the hills, you can see, are little more than trim to the eye. How, you may ask, does the artist manage to draw so much colour from so drab a scene, such a monochrome pallet? It is a reasonable question. It has been suggested that the colour comes from the power of the two characters. They are the stuff of life. The old woman is built from the bottom up, and the young man is flapping in the wind. She is sturdy, weathered, an Easter Island monolith, whereas the boy is wide-eyed, addled with the greyscale of his environment, terrified not only of what the old
lady symbolises – the incoherence of the ignored which is the destiny of us all – but also terrified of the part he himself plays in that symbolisation. And he is also terrified of the fact he is consciously unaware of these unconscious impulses. What is she saying to him? Is he shocked that he agrees? Or that he finds sentiments in the old lady’s bile with which he disagrees? Is the boy repulsed and confused by his awakening to the fact old and young are but the same species spread thin? Are we to believe that Jakeway is placing in the mouth of the old lady the words of an atypical bigot? It wasn’t like this in my day. Or that she is subverting this stereotype? Jakeway, as we can see from his unpublished diaries that we also have here in the museum’s archive, did not wish to be the documenter of the humble peasant or the comforter of the uneasy consciences of those who bore everything with fortitude. As you can see from this painting, ‘Election Day in the Rhondda’ we are seeing Michelangelo, Poussin, Fragonard, Daumier, Degas, but we are seeing them as cynics. We are drawn to wonder – and perhaps even conclude – the voting intentions of these figures with their collars pulled up turret-like, as they queue before the boarded-up windows and the redbrick totems of a rose-tinted socially democratic past. I will complain no matter who gets in, this man seems to say, even if it is the person to whom I loaned my vote. These men on the end of the queue do not even proclaim to have had such glorious childhoods, but they know
their fathers and grandfathers were men’s men. These youths, not even in the queue, too young to vote, cannot even proclaim to understand that much. Jakeway had a remarkable gift for instilling history into the eyeball. We are meant to believe that these sorry folks in the impoverished Welsh Valleys town are ennobled by the mere notion of democracy, when in actuality the tonal suggestions and the bric-a-brac of the composition persuade us that this is a construct, as much a construct as any prison, and just as noble. Of course in this next painting, ‘How To Assemble a Picket Line’, we are again brought to the dinner plate of the idea of nobility as mask, as toy, and as weapon. Here the mounted police are Knights Templar, and the miners the grounded Saracen hordes. Two ideas of nobleness, indeed, but only one winner. What Jakeway is very clearly stating here is that the Welsh have a self-destructive notion of exaltation, as it is vehemently attached to their fondness for the underdog. See in the corner Jakeway has even painted a dog, as if to hammer home the point; and not just a dog, but a dog who doesn’t really seem to know which side he should be on. Is that a plaintive expression, or an expression of denial of plaintiveness? Jakeway asks us to decide the inevitable conclusion. A dog is not capable of betrayal of course, and Jakeway knew this, as demonstrated when he famously responded to his first wife’s divorce request that his bigamy had been little more than the act of a mutt. His
work indeed did become quite strongly informed by the traumatic turns of his personal life – trauma with which he always dealt with a shrug. You can indeed see something of the shrug in the way the streetlight falls down upon the flagstones of his mid-period masterpiece, which we are very lucky to have here at the gallery, ‘Why Don’t We Take This Outside’. There is a gentleness to the title, even; a gentleness that could be interpreted as mockery. Jakeway, we know, was no stranger to the drunken brawl. The two men who are fist fighting are not the centre of attention, even though they are at the centre of the frame. We can talk of them both for a moment, however. The ‘gentleman’ – for this is almost certainly how Jakeway would have referred to him at the time – to the left has tears to his jacket, but we are quite unsure as to whether they are a result of the fight or whether he was just accustomed to wearing torn garments. His opponent looks more determined, which we can interpret as less-experienced. We have here a generational confrontation, then. And not just father and son, but rather modernism versus post-modernism, which is why the old man in the torn blazer has skin turned blue by the moon, and the young man has a head of too many right angles. We are disgusted by this scene, but we are invested. Our future depends on who wins. The pub behind, from whence the pugilists and audience have just spilled, is to all intents and purposes the Welsh mountains, it is the banquet halls of the
gods, it is the history of Wales, it is the mouth of the pit. When blood has been spilled, for which that grate-grey pavement is glutinously waiting, they will go back inside, drink, forget why they fought in the first place, and it will be left to the power of time to change everything. And by the time of his late period, as you can see here from this final painting in the sequence that we have, Jakeway is obsessed with time as a notion. How many timepieces can you see? This gentleman leaning like a laggard on the line post, is wearing two watches, and seems to still be asking his companion what hour it is. We are being asked: is it only artists who deserve more time? This painting, entitled ‘The Decline of the Untitled Painting’, is perhaps the defining moment of Jakeway’s later period, and his last great work. Once again, the focus of the eye should be – and it is at first – the bishop here on the hilltop in the process of nailing Christ to the cross – a cross, it seems, of crocodile skin – but once that shock has settled, we see that the focus, for Jakeway, at least, is this man at the far left of the painting. Anybody…? Anybody…? That’s quite right; Jakeway painted himself into the scene, watching the Nazarene take away the sins of the Valleys, the sins of the chosen people. All he can do is watch. Yes. He is the only figure without a timepiece. Even Jesus is wearing a Seiko.
And if we now move into the next room we can see the marvellous fruit bowls of Gwenllian Pontcanna – not her real name of course…
Andrew Taylor’s debut collection, *Radio Mast Horizon* was published in 2013 by Shearsman Books. He has a compact disc of sound poetry forthcoming from ZimZalla and a pamphlet from Oystercatcher. Poems have been published in places such as *Poetry Wales, Stride, The Morning Star* and *Datableed*. He lives in Nottingham where he is a lecturer in Creative Writing and English at Nottingham Trent University.

www.andrewtaylorpoetry.com
Flow

Two geese leave
the vivid green field

The mower need to make
an appearance

_The local farmers produce some of_
_the finest coffee beans in the world_

Cereal du pain le petite marmite
the chocolate needs refrigeration

Reading Berrigan behind glass
while Evans plays the keys

Sheep are now in the field
lavender is planted

Pouring boiling water onto freeze
dried instant brings an aroma of its own

particular to the source
White Blossom

Pollinators shift yellow addition
refill the troughs

No library books may be taken to sea

Sear the ivy La Poste R.F.
late breakfast cloud cover

Cut a V in the prop
like in Melling fifty four years ago

No library books may be taken on leave
without the librarian’s permission

Green on the line check on the line
a coil of wire in the gravel

A franked stamp to be taken for charity

Mist rolls down top field ochre
barely registers against green
Food Ales Rooms

Trees triangular lit
open 7 days a week
so Abigail shows her face
angle of shop signs
this isn’t medieval
Yew Dell

Still warm enough to sit outside and drink coffee
allow for the rustle
of fallen leaves
Gleaning

As soon as the leaves start
voice sounds like home
It’s the joys that matter
the stories the love
dare to build things – go deep!
Hum of refrigeration ping of kettle
soup bowls on the sideboard
use the lamps to direct
it enhances the candlelight
Shared footwork delay
of baby grand it’s the melody!
Sarah Reynolds won first prize in the 2014 Rhys Davies short story competition. A freelance television producer, she relocated to Wales from London, became a fluent Welsh speaker, and has produced factual and entertainment programmes for S4C. Her first book in Welsh, a comedic novella about a group of Welsh-learners, will be published by Gomer Press, Christmas 2016. She is currently working on an English language novel. Sarah lives in Carmarthen with her husband and two children.
The Cleaner

I’m walking through Holland Park, into the dusk. My step is buoyed by the brief stroke of your hand, thudding in my memory. I’m full of you. Your morning lecture has been simmering in my brain all day, your voice ebullient in my belly, the sly dart of your eyes still smarting in my breast. I am fit to burst. And I want to do something, to show you. Something practical, useful, to prove to you I could fit into your world, make it better, the medicine you never knew you needed. My bag is heavy; my step is light. I know your house from Google Street View. I pat my pockets for mislaid keys - a pantomime for an unseen audience. I’m skinny; I slide in through the open window like a blade of sunshine.

Inside, the smell of you is the first thing that hits me – clean and musky, you make me think of freshly bound books. I pull my bag in after me and leave the sash window open, just in case. That’s when I see her: The Blob. Her well-scrubbed face looms out at me from the opposite wall. Even on her wedding day she looks like a butterball.

“I need to get a cleaner in first,” you said, “I can’t possibly let you see my hovel…”
And yet, an alleyway? The park? My musty bedsit with its mould map of Gibraltar? Really, how bad could the hovel be? It becomes a joke between us, your leaning tower of pizza boxes.

“I have to get back to Italy,” you say, kissing my dimple.

“I’ve never seen you eat pizza.”

“It’s my dirty little secret,” you say. A wink. A finger to your lips.

“I thought I was your dirty little secret.”

No comment. You suck the last embers from your cigar.

The silence is punctured by the shrieks of foxes, mating in the back alley. I block up my ears.

“Love is pain,” you smirk, stabbing at a discarded saucer with the stub of your cigar.

“Remember that as you work on the Bacri passage. Your bowing is coming on but the fingering needs work; your harmonic trills lack dexterity.”

I wanted to see it, your little Italy. But this is not the bachelor pad you described. Where are the towers of unmarked compositions? The takeaway containers? An invention. A half-truth perhaps, transposed from an earlier passage of your life.
Scatter cushions, lilac and lime. A bunch of long, curly twigs in a vase on the floor – very nineties. Everywhere is ‘spick and span’ as you English say. My bag is bulging with cleaning products – the good stuff – professional, stolen from my part-time job, cleaning at the college. How else could I afford this city? And now I am here, there is nothing to clean. I stare at your possessions. A pang of pity for you, trapped in this lie.

I turn detective. Who is this imposter, this you that is not you? He has five rooms in his ground floor flat – capacious, airy, high ceilinged. An entire living-room wall encrusted with books. A flute on the windowsill, a viola in the study, a baby grand cosied away in the practice room. A wall of achievements – his and hers. Shelves teeming with photographs, knick-knacks, nonsense. An imitation Degas leaps suicidally from the precipice of her shelf. I don’t blame her.

The kitchen: modern, marble-topped. Lists and reminders cling magnetically to the fridge door. ‘TP 29/6 8pm.’ Code for a secret existence. I venture inside. Lurid white light blinks at me. A wedge of dolcelatte. A straggle of prosciutto. Wine: white, Chablis. I help myself to the cheese, hack off a hunk of your bourgeois deli bread with one of your full-set fancy knives - the largest. The remainder of the bottle of Chablis
under my arm, I pad through to the lounge, imagine I am you, this version of you that I have never met before, sitting in the big comfy chair by the window, a Tom Clancy paperback on the arm. I lean back, feel the imprint of the back of your head beneath my own. Imagine the thoughts churning in your skull.

You eye me glassily from a gilt frame, posing with your OBE. I turn my head and you are conducting at Carnegie Hall, skiing in Aspen. All the familiar seams of your face taunt me from every wall. Your tiger-tooth smile snarls from every surface. I strike out at it and my scream goes on and on like a cadenza.

I sweep up the glass shards and dispose of each false smile in an industrial-strength rubbish bag. Then I lay on your bed. “You’re welcome,” I say.

I picture you laughing, naked, tumbling onto me, clamping your fingers around my neck, clutching my buttock in your palm, marvelling at the supple lines of my body. I bury my face in your pillow and I can smell you there – the sleepy scent of hair wax. I wrap myself around your pillow, real duck down, plush, expensive. I squeeze it between my thighs, imagining your face there, your carnivorous grin. I come so fast I barely catch the wave and my frustration tastes like anger.

I draw a bath. The bathroom cabinet is so banal I am tempted to down the packet of diazepam I find there. Her
name sounds like a brand of old ladies’ talc. I choose candles. Jo Malone bath salts. Water so hot it jellies my vision.

Light-headed, I tread wet steps through to your bedroom, envelop myself in your bathrobe as if it were a second skin. I sit before her mirror, fingerling her hairbrush. Milky strands thin as spider wisps are entwined in the bristles. I brush my hair, not bothering to remove the long black tendrils I leave there. Let her see.

A cello. I take it through to the lounge, sit down and play the Bacri piece we were working on, you and I. I am gliding through the liberation movement when I hear a key in the lock, slick as a knife. I freeze.

“Hello?”

She comes ballooning in through the door, billowing pastel-coloured linen and vanilla. A saccharine smile as she closes the door and hangs her coat up on one of the brass pegs on the wall.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t realise Henry was teaching today…”

I am silent. Her head tilts as she takes in the dressing gown. I put the bow down carefully on one of the lilac cushions, remove the cello from between my legs. She averts her eyes.

“Henry?” she says, “Henry, are you there?”
I stand up and she takes a step backwards towards the door. She reads something on my face - something I don’t even know myself.

“Take whatever you want,” she says and I say, “I think I will.” She makes a move for the door - not a dash. She’s not capable of that. Not bold enough to charge. I’m there before she can complete the thought.

“I don’t think you should do that,” I tell her.

I have cable ties in my bag. I was going to use them to tidy your office. Tame the medusa of your home computer but you don’t even have one. Why lie about that? I came to clean. I’m doing you a favour.

Once she is trussed tidily on the bathroom floor, I get dressed. I have plastic overalls for cleaning. No bleach splashes to spoil my jeans - I only have the one pair. I stand in the open space between the bathroom and the kitchen and while I’m changing, we chat.

“So you’re an opera singer…”

She seems surprised that I know this.

“Was…” she says vaguely.

“One of his students?”

She nods.
“And you? Are you one of his…”

Her voice trails off so pathetically it makes me smile. I widen my eyes at her.

“Did you know your husband likes cock?” I say.

She reddens; a blotch on her neck, big as a slap. She mumbles into the copious folds of her neck.

“Speak up!”

“Yes, I know.”

She can’t meet my eye.

The truth is, the old sow sews the seed herself. She’s not looking at me you see. She’s eyeing something behind me, something shiny on the kitchen table. I pick it up idly, finger the cool smooth lines and when I turn to look at her, her blancmange flesh is all of a quiver. I have to stifle a smile. I get right up close to her face.

“Boo!”

She pisses herself! Literally. Piss, foul and yellow, pools at her foot. I can’t stop laughing.

“What do you think I’m going to do?” I say.

She’s redder than ever - a boiled ham!

“I came here to clean. You’re not even – you’re not part of the plan. Why are you here anyway?” I ask her.
“I live here…” she whimpers.

“Confirmed bachelor, Henry said. Never married, he said. Never found the right one.”

She’s crying now, a sickly trickle of tears. You’d think a heifer like her would sob big fat boulders. And the way she looks at me is like she’s pleading with me to put her out of her misery. She’s relieved I’m forcing her to face the lie that is her life. You know what? She wanted me to do it – to set her free, set you both free. Now I think about it, she practically begs me.

“Make it quick,” she says, “Please.”

I’m gazing into her gibbous eyes and I confess, I don’t know what I’m doing. I came here to tidy. A nice surprise for you. And here I am, your great whale of a wife in my arms, begging me to end it all.

I’m thinking of the Bacri piece. I make a single, tender stroke – flautando – like you taught me. A gleaming ruby necklace springs up about her throat. Then she starts flailing and I have to be a little less decorous. I go at her with more gusto – short sharp scratch tones and this time I see chords and strings inside, trilling their last notes.

Lying on the bathroom floor, her skin pellucid under the spotlights, she looks relieved. I’m transfixed by the severed cables of her throat, the glug and rush of shiny blood. Now
there’s something to clean. I bundle her into the bath; the plughole guzzles and belches.

I have gloves, bleach, an assortment of cloths and abrasive sponges. I am meticulous. I mop. I scour. I use a toothbrush to scrub the grout. All that remains is The Blob in the bath. I sigh at the task ahead of me – the enormous, baleen bulk of it. Then I fetch the hacksaw from my bag.

When I’m done, I pile up the rubbish in thick black bin-liners on the kitchen floor. Twenty-four bags. The flat is pristine. My gift to you: a sparkling new life.

It’s dark when you swing through the front door, chortling into your mobile phone, hoisting up a swag bag from the Chinese as you fumble for the light switch.

“Ta da!” I say, twirling like an odalisque in your sparkling palace.

You terminate your phone call, a sour look on your face. The takeaway thuds to the floor as you stalk through to the lounge, the kitchen, the bedroom, calling out,

“Petunia?”

I slink after you, like an unfed cat.

“Aren’t you going to say hello?”

“You shouldn’t be here. You’re lucky she’s out. Kindly leave.”

“Lucky who’s out, Henry?”
“Don’t get smart. It doesn’t suit you.”

“Do you like me better dumb?”

You pause. Give me a thin-lipped smile.

“I’m a shit. You’re well within your rights to report me to the VC –”

“Look at those blinds. Not a speck of dust!”

“What?”

“You said you needed a cleaner. Your life is such a mess, you said. So I cleaned it for you.”

“Cleaned? Have you gone quite mad?”

“Oh come on, that’s all we Romanians are good for isn’t it? Cleaners and whores.”

“I think you should leave, Mihai.”

You eye the black bin-liners on the kitchen floor. A dark flower oozes from beneath one of the sacks, blossoming on the pale lino.

“I’ll take those to the trash on my way out,” I say.

“Just go!”

Outside in the warm summer air, I hover, moth-like, around the light from your window. Seven minutes pass. Then you scream, wild as the alley foxes.
My thoughts are heavy; my step is light as I weave through the sylvan shadows of Holland Park. I don’t pause for breath until I reach the bridge of the Japanese garden and for a moment I think I hear your voice, carried on ripples of night air. But it is only a peacock, calling mournfully to the moon.

“Love is pain,” you said.

I turn my back and slide into the night.
There has been much bark and howl to celebrate the quartercentenary of Shakespeare's quietus yet it strikes the Gull that far fewer hymns have been sung or bells rerung over the four-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of Nicholas Culpeper. The Gull is a great admirer of those people who devote their lives to healing, charity and writing. This is precisely what Mr Nicholas Culpeper did in the 17th century. Our next issue (issue 2) will have a few celebrations of Nic's life and work kicking off with some top-notch article writing action, the results of which will be published here. Also, in preparation we thought we would baptise our "Onomasticon" regular feature with a glossary of herbs, taken largely from Culpeper's Complete Herbal. If within this collection of terrifically peculiar botanical monikers you find fertile seed with which to grow a verse or two please send your fruit and flowers to the Gull for our Nicholas Culpeper special edition. T.G.

HERBS:

- Alkanet
- Calve's-snout
- Butter-bur
- Horned Rampion
- All-heal
- Gromel
- Toad-Flax
- Arssmart
- Yucca
- Dead Arssmart
- Great Glasswort
- Petty Spurge
- Duck's-Meat
- Greater Spurge
- Cubebs
- Madwort
- Dwarf Spurge
- Autumnla-water Star-Wort
- Baldmony
- English Serpentary
  AKA snakeweed
  Bistort, Dragon-Wort, Osteric, Passions.
- Barberry
- Dwale
- Lady's Mantle
- Lady's Smock
- Bastard Rhubarb
- Peagles
- Other Dodders
- Pellitory of Spain
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bastard Pellitory AKA Sneezewort</th>
<th>Saint Barnaby’s Thistle</th>
<th>Rough Shepherd’s Needle</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lady’s Bedstraw AKA Sneezewort</td>
<td>Prick Madam</td>
<td>Treacle Wormseed</td>
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<td>cheese rennet, because it performs the same office; as also gallon, pettimugget and maid’s hair.’</td>
<td>Kidney-Leaved-Sowerweed</td>
<td>Common-Shepherd’s Needle</td>
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<td>According to Nicholas.</td>
<td>Portland Spurge</td>
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<td>Dog’s Mercury</td>
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<td>Calamint</td>
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<td>Meadow Saxifrage</td>
<td>Ale Hoof,</td>
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<td>Olive Spurge</td>
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<td>Whortle</td>
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<td>Rue</td>
<td>Sea-Spurge</td>
<td>King’s Knob AKA Frog’s Foot, from the Greek name barrakion,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sauce-Alone,</td>
<td>Sun-Spurge</td>
<td>Crow-Foot, Gold-Knobs, Gold-Cups, Baffiners, Troll-Flowers, Polts, Locket-Goulions and Butter Flowers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clown’s-Woundwort</td>
<td>Nosebleed</td>
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<td>Berry Bearing Solanum</td>
<td>Middle Confound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brank-Ursine</td>
<td>Sweth</td>
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</tbody>
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Joseph Minden's poems have appeared in PN Review, The Manchester Review, The Junket and elsewhere. He was part of the team behind The Polar Muse, a project commissioning poems for The Polar Museum in Cambridge, and recently completed a residency at The Koppel Project, a gallery, bookshop and creative space at 93 Baker Street, London. He regularly collaborates with composer Laurence Osborn and artist Kat Addis.
Mine

You go forest
and you meet a man and
you feed him and offer him more
if he wants. Ping. Leaning on the mouth of a mine.
Take this small, artificial, plastic candle and get in this bucket
and go down

Candle in a
dim shaft, making figures
shine. You thought at first alone but
they are stood on nine feet of water. Boo! Tin men.
By this tin ear engines start in the underground and planes
awaken from deep flint

So go more down.
Then the light - pfff - the light
Up there, the man is ankle-deep in drove of hares.
You are in darkness like a raisin in cooked cake and the whole
cake is going down
What do you be
in such darkness, made block
of all things, and what do you finde
and how do you relate to shapes? Wet breath of mine.
False freond, you cannot find my way out, you have become
brother and my sister

And my sister,
what do you finde, how carve
shape from dark with the faithfulness
of my palm, my fingers, my interested thumb?
More down, curled in bucket in water of dark, ek myn emes lif
is in balaunce

In darkness, dust,
and my lungs, concrete paste,
which make contoured and resigned shapes
of wings; hollowed and palm-home cheeks of a flint head.
That hardening could be my sacrifice; my body, altar; my lung
offering
But to whom? Form.
You go down still but change comes, darkness rising to twilight,
twilight diminishing to a well shaft of light.
You are lowered into the sky from a cloud, swinging in the wind on a rope of light

I look down at you, delicate life of weight shifting in the bucket. He stiride in his modir wombe as he hadde dauncid.
There, below, is the remote landscape of toys, the mountains of slate rained from the mine

Of hevon Y yo beken. Two footprints of a giant and scree turning to droves of hares. The weight of the sky on the earth.
A man in a forest lowering something deep into mine on a golden thread
Saul is sat slumped at the end of a long
galaxy, glazed, dreaming,
without much thought for food. We moons hang, three
    facing three, the gleaming
meal spread out on the table, a strong
    effort from the chef. Saul
fumbles with unwieldy cutlery. We
    watch the knife almost fall.

Some guest. We expected a seer, but
got a decrepit, rude
man. As it is, we converse obliquely,
    our language bland, like chewed
vowels, and unknown to him. Coconut
    oil has roasted true
gems of the potatoes, tasting weakly
    but aptly of cashew.
Opposite our guest is a very bad
painting, hung to complete
the mise en scène, bought cheap. It shows some kind
 of summer house, a neat,
net-curtain, wooden place with soupy, sad
foams of flowers rising
in colours so random it’s like a blind
hand’s been improvising.

The cosmos looks good tonight, dark and cold
and immoderate and
everywhere, like walls but the opposite
around our dining band
of six heavenly bodies and this old
man. Candlelight expands
and shrinks. Saul’s stiff and marbled hands are lit
and fade. We have no hands.
In my face, a hot and nearly damp cloud
of odour coming off
fantastic buttered, shredded green cabbage
  flecked with cumin: Van Gogh
swirls, solar systemic. Saul makes a loud
  spluttering sound, throat
roping with coughs, shred of spat cabbage badge
  on his lapel. I float
a little backwards in disgust. We all
regret the meal and doubt
his credentials, can see how drunk he is,
  dull, accidental lout,
unconscious of this rare celestial
  regard, bent on rosé,
speaking to the six of us, like we’re his
  keen satellites, to say
rosé, as an order, then, after, sit
in his large mind, listing,
eating in a non-effective way such
good food, still insisting
on more and more wine. I get a new bit
of the beef wellington
into my mouth. It’s near perfect: the touch
of mustard, dimension
of flavour more pungent than chanterelle
and offal, than shallot,
pastry carapace and the muscular
silk of the beef, is spot
on and gels the whole dish really well.
Saul lifts his glass and sinks
the latest replenishment with a far
off look whetted by drinks.
I am looking down from a very great height as though at a lost world, aspen yellow and nuclear green with a sodium frost, a grand web of canyons across free plate, a rich, purple soil, the movement of stocky, brown rivers, sheen the plastic of oil,
time turning in the landscape like a child, the moons’ musical speech presiding, vague as distant telegraph wires, beyond the reach of terrestrial ears. Eating the wild turf’s hard. It tends to slide off my fork, stain my chin, leaving me half purple, undignified.
Why am I here, in the palace of space,
ignored by moons? I’m sure
they’re ignoring me and, when I pipe up,
    I seem to ask for more
wine and then go quiet. Where’s my old grace,
    old élan, the mischief
that kept me unawed and sober for cup
    after cup? The relief

of the full glass is intoxicating,
These unfriendly spheres stretch
off in their two rows, an inscrutable
    committee. Did they fetch
me? Have I disappointed them, waiting
    not at all between sips
and becoming increasingly unstable?
    Even so, they eclipse
all earth in stateliness, hint in abyss 
of huge architecture.

And distantly, beyond them, a summer
    house made of simple, pure,
small colours, nestled amongst clematis
    and rhododendrons. It’s
a painting or a memory. Dumber

    and dumber, all these bits

and mental pieces, a Picasso sick:
cubic, undigested
lumps – this thought, that fact, this smell – and then wine,
    the red base, ingested
too quickly and unanchoring things, slick
    and sour. It leaches
outwards, urging its lasso-like outline

    to my skull’s far reaches.
A memory! This piece of sick sticks, this
hologram playing ghost
across actual space — which side the eyes?

A house hung there, almost
cresting waves of star-stuck nothing, or kiss
of brain-fun, projected
inwardly as if it were light that flies

in through the protected

pupil, but not really? I remember,
either way: my parents’
favourite holiday destination

in the hills near Koblenz,
above the terraced vineyards. September

saw grapes as multiple
as fragile marbles of carbonation

in the Rhenish tipple
that turned them distant and involved with each other. I watched their heads
be close like boats at anchor on still seas
    seen from the harbour bed’s sands up through water, drifting out of reach
    then knocking together gently with the waves’ insistence, at ease
        in passionless weather.

I wondered about the urine-yellow liquid cones, balanced in smooth, provisional, perfect shapes on clenched stems, held close to the chin, spuming. I sat on the decking below my parents and red parts of flowers blew over from the hose-quenched bushes in fits and starts.

*
Saul’s chin is covered in purple juice spilt from his mouth as he tries to eat forkfuls of red cabbage. It, too, is an absolute prize dish: the vinegar has made the leaves wilt into succulence. I wince, tasting hidden apples, and chew.

Rich, magyar pungency.

We wanted to question him, hear the sweet song of a human voice, and the apogee of wisdom spoken.

We made the reasoned choice to bring him to dinner, so that we’d meet in a way he would find civilised, the link with home unbroken, nothing to make his lined
and venerable features furrow, go
dark with sad confusion.

No other person has eaten with us,
    nightlit by the fusion
in stars’ cores. Disappointed, we’ll be slow
to credit inflated
claims again. But the food’s a momentous
discovery. Sated

by stale solar wind for too long, we’ve found
a whole new sustenance,
the magic of human menus; the noise
    and beguiling fragrance
of onions frying. Really, it’s the round,
    moon-white onion that’s brought
tears to our dry faces, locked in the poise
    of austere, pocked rock wrought
by hot formation as splinters meshing
in orbit after big
impact between space bodies before time.

There is so much to dig
madly with the fork for, such brown oozing
into smooth mash-hollows,
soft meat’s striated blush and the sublime
aftertang that follows.

There’s none like him among all the people,
they said. One of the moons
gets up and leaves the room for some reason.

Another slowly spoons
in sweet squash gratin above the steeple
of a wine bottle clear
with emptiness and says she’d like to season
it. The rough salt is near
my plate but I resent the suggestion
that the dish lacks flavour.

None like Saul anywhere, the cleverest,
best, the most in favour –
and yet struggling with indigestion,
rambling internally
as if the gratin were an Everest
on the diurnally

oriented planet of his current
dish. I notice a flake
of pastry caught on my encrusted cheek
like a dry petal take
off into space and spiral away, sent
to meet the satellites
moving silently at high speeds a week
away between the lights.
Time travel is dreamlike but not a dream.
I am not dreaming, nor
have I gone back in time, but these unturning
moons show time small whose law
you can’t get outside, something you can seem
to be able to scale,
a tracked landscape, a curious yearning
for that house amongst pale
moons, and I’m floating as if gravity
has been removed and was
time itself all along. Time has plundered
my body; not because
of some vindictiveness, depravity
or any human-clone
rapacity horsepowering thundered
wheels, but because small bone
rattles in the same cave as entire
worlds, the forces it bears
no less tectonic, the shadow of time
in which it turns and wears
so dry it has to be hinged with wire
   no less pressed from what’s fresh
like extra virgin olive oil’s prime
   surge from the ruptured flesh.

And that boy I was was in the shadow
of turning to old man
even as I rolled up one trouser leg
to let the breezes fan
the still oiled joint of my knee with slow
   pulses, swinging my feet
on the verandah, clematis and beg-
onia and the neat
explosions of rhododendrons nosing
into the shade whilst, deep
in my form’s dark, matter inherited
from space, far from asleep
but idling like the points of the dosing
flowers, fierce with coded
decline, dreamt of infirmity ahead

and gently downloaded

my adolescence, adulthood and mere age. I am oracular
chromatin’s vision nearing its truant
gestures, spectacular
in the way of all life; no engineer’s
throwaway brilliance
set to unstick into constituent,
carbon resilience.

*
Saul jerks as though lightly touched with current.
The gone moon has returned
and begins to clear away all the plates.

   Evidently, Saul’s spurned
the whole menu, but the most aberrant
   treatment’s been given to
the beef, flayed like Saul personally hates
   it, or more like a zoo creature’s been tossed it and lost interest.
Still hungry, I follow
the other moons to the kitchen, knowing
   we each mean to swallow
one more mouthful rescued from the distressed
   meat – get at its rare core,
trim off the edges Saul’s ruined. Going
   through the connecting door,
I think how wonderful it is to watch
moons all dancing like whales
around a whirlpool in the kitchen air.

Beef-sated, one unveils
and starts to assemble dessert, a batch
of Rubenesque pears done
in red wine. A pear per bowl, cream per pear
pinking as juices run.

Accomplice of the dish is ganache prunes
stacked in a pyramid,
split, groaning with implanted chocolate:
violent and gelid,
brown, alien insertion. We moons
process back. Saul, hunched like
an avalanche of himself, goes straight
for prunes, looking to strike
the pile with arthritic precision.
The movement, so pacy
against his body sagging, is machine-grade articulacy
beats limp flesh run up the bone-pole. Vision
locks right; Saul picks the top
prune off with clinical success and clean
into him with a plop
it goes. We all kind of levitate, spaced.
Saul sucks as if toothless
the packed laxative. The gluttonous act’s
nothing if not ruthless,
unlike past effort. Abruptly, the paste
yields a line of black
spit from Saul’s mouth. For seconds this distracts
us. But a flash attack
in his gut – how could it come on so fast? –
fast aurally intrudes
on the spectacle. Saul lurches backwards,
grips his chair. Interludes
of terrible burbling; us aghast.

He points towards the loo.
The poor man’s pale as a moon, his innards
are a chaos of poo,

he pulls himself up painfully, staggers
along the table, out
of the room. We hear the toilet door creak
and then silence about
to burst, or that’s what we expect, daggers
of anxiety from
moon to moon. But the hush extends. A weak
sigh from the door. Dud bomb.
Sudden thud, after just too long, of meat
of a body and crack
of sharp angle of bone, hip or elbow,
    and the flop of a slack
shout, low, more in surprise than pain, complete
    helplessness even, air
just coming out the mouth in a rush. Slow,
    first fixed by it, we hare
back through to where he’s collapsed and find him
zigzagged out from the noose
of dropped trousers, arm under head, staring
    as if he could refuse
the event by staring, chickeny, slim
    lunar, shining, brittle
legs stacked up and the white shirt he’s wearing
    not blocking genital
exposure with its flimsy tongue. As if from a great height and through an uninterrupted atmosphere I watch as the human, who is unsupported by his thoughts and stiff bones, gives weight to other strength and is lifted up like a baby born too old, its mother

some six moons grown tolerant with pity. Us six reconstellate, having made the fallen Saul decent, and move back through to reinstate him in the dining room, certain that he has a fracture. But there he sleeps now, lingering deeply above the carcass of a pear.
Like sound so vast it’s not sound but presence;

a resonance; the boom

of glaciers calving unheard in ice;

    bomb in a distant room;

milky globes not quite throbbing with silence:

    body speaks to itself

through its own substance, vibrations in vice

    of space – plasma to shelf

of muscle, rippled to collagen bum,

    a shiver in the nerve –

so that one impact graved as a fracture

    shakes its shape from the swerve

of earthquaked bone, outward through the dim slum

    of matter to the live

fringe of skin, and vanishes into pure

    void like a rushed plosive.
Yet these are vibrations in vice of time,
too, rocking horse of part
to part over seconds, but also strange
talk across the wide chart
of years: child grown old, curled shrimp-like in slime
of birth or turned fossil
in drift of its past time, murmuring change
in cells once colossal

with youth, now newborn into dwindled age.
I am refreshed by pain
in my hip, rescued from indigestion,
and so am now again
the gentle, wholly methodical sage
who from his position
can abstract and set about a question
with firm definition.

Linear time. Time redeemed by return. Eternity. Embodied time. Disembodied, beamed repeated. Seasonal time, winter from autumn. Harvest, crop time, according to procedures of the seed.

Change, no change, as in rhyme.

Time in territorial states, defined by news, railways, wages, radios. The emerging middle class, family time, ages of man: childhood, adolescence, prime, lined features, death. Non-human time, the fossil record, eras and mass extinction, deep time, span
after span back, slow calendar of stone,
earth suddenly a stock
and complexity of gas, liquid, heat
cooling to rock, of rock
remodelling itself through heat, alone

in space with moons able
to recall its birth, like those come to eat
dinner at this table.

Talk no more so exceeding proudly, Saul:
time simply opening
and falling into itself until it

is nothing but one thing,
its passage a good trick like the duel

where light and dark traverse
the truth of a sphere as if the unit

had true borders or, worse,
were split, but is in fact a total point.

Because reason is like this.

There is no reason why there should not be

a discrete equality

where every part is both out of joint

and gluey amalgam.

Aka, say, the general baby

in digital honeycomb.
This year is the sixtieth anniversary of the first series of Hancock's Half Hour television series. Known as one of the first true sitcoms, it starred the comedian Tony Hancock playing the comedian Tony Hancock; it was a robust example of a metanarrative sitcom over 30 years before trendy comedy-fanatics' favourite Seinfeld hit the screen. As a prototype for the modern sitcom it really did set the standard. Hancock draws his fictional self as an inimitably lugubrious, self-aggrandising fantasist anti-hero, wracked with neurosis, constantly obsessing over his image and lamenting the disorder of a world which does not recognise his genius. He is in many ways the comedic holotype, a blueprint for sitcom characters from Alan Partridge to Garth Marenghi.

Backed by arguably the best comedy writers of the 50s and 60s, Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, and supported by a stellar cast of comedy and acting talent including not only the regular contributions of John Le Mesurier, Hattie Jacques, Kenneth Williams, Bill Kerr and Sid James but also appearances from Harry Secombe, Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan, Patricia Hayes, Warren Mitchell and Anne Reid, Hancock quickly became famous nationwide, attracting audiences of 20 million plus.

I have been a lifelong fan of Hancock but, unlike most, I have always preferred his radio work to the television episodes. The show, in fact, started out on the radio in 1954, two years before his television series began and ran a full six series until 1959, the last three being released between the television series. Despite the fact that the public's memory of Hancock largely comprises images from his seventh and last television series which included The Bedsitter, The Radio Ham, and his most famous, most remade and most often quoted episode ever: The Blood Donor it is, for me, the six radio series which contain the finest material and
performances. It is also the larger body of work; quite a few of the television episodes were recreations of the audio originals and many of the tapes are now lost. The T.V. version contained fewer episodes per series and all this means that now, of HHH's extant oeuvre of 122 separate episodes, 79 are radio editions.

Besides, radio is such a perfect format for a sitcom often dominated by the fanciful monologues of a day-dreaming fabulist; the show is able to leap between locations and back and forward in time without budget busting visual techniques. A simple change of ambient sound effects and an array of colourful settings is immediately unlocked. The radio was also still the dominant form of broadcast in the early 50's, only two thirds of homes had a telly and, until 1955, there was only one channel.

Perhaps it was the war which so ignited Britain's deep love for the radio not only as a means of broadcasting news and a method of dispensing vital wartime information but also as a comforting, friendly voice and a platform for poetry, drama and comedy, all of which boomed in the 50s. The grim backdrop of a country still trying to recover from rationing and bomb-damage was punctured by radio comedy. The Navy Lark, One Minute Please (the precursor to Just A Minute) HHH, The Goon Show and Much Binding In The Marsh are just a few of the audio comedies that first aired in the 50s.

Hearing these comic confections broadcast through the same medium which once transmitted distressing war reports, ominous news and warnings of bomb raids must have been a cathartic and therapeutic experience. The progressive nature of some of these shows chimed with forward thinking, newly socialistic Britain. Hancock himself along with others began illustrating the plight and frustrations of working class people, using slang and realistic accents; making jokes about the price of saveloys, music-hall, diddling rent books, offering the Vicar 'oily rags'.

Not only did he depict this culture, he also used its language. His comedy
acknowledged and addressed the blue-collar, pub-visiting, rent-paying classes. By making the fictional Hancock celebrate the pompous, snobbish aspiration toward abstractions and fetishism of the elite, Galton and Simpsons were able to ridicule it. Hancock the man created a character that pointed away from socially responsible natural realism in order better to articulate that very position. Hancock's evocation of a post-war Briton is an embodiment of post-war Britain at large; a country loudly proclaiming its own past-successes in an affected accent, clad in dusty and decayed felt coats and hats, trying to brush off the bomb-damage & warming its hands over the embers of freshly burnt ration books.

50s Britain at once still endured economic instability, low wages and austerity measures and yet enjoyed the emerging benefits of Nationalised industries, the radically upscaled government housing provisions and further regulation of working conditions, pay, pensions and living standards set up by the progressive Attlee government. By the mid-fifties it must have felt like the country was turning a corner.

This duality of nature, this lack of solid identity, meant the face of Britain had changed and now the scar tissue provided a somewhat blank canvas. The country was frighteningly disjunct from its younger self of fifty years before. The character of British society was being redefined and by a wider range of voices than had constructed the Empire. Hancock the character is a laughable fantasist who is lovable because his improvised, imprecise identity is wide and eclectic enough to embrace and represent both pre and post-war Britain.

HHH summarised the ludicrous character faults of the past but, rather than solely chiding, it sought conciliation of past and future through the creation of a comic character at once lovable and ridiculous. A character of polarity, caught in the dual social chattels of poverty and aspiration. Hancock is a creation which encouraged Britain to accept itself
and its new unfamiliar, mottled complexion, gifting it back the self-confidence to laugh at itself. Tony Hancock is 50s Britain.

The breadth of his significations demands an all-encompassing entity necessitated that Hancock was a versatile and ultimately inconsistent character. All the characters are. In fact the inessential nature of the characterisations are fascinating and challenging to a modern concept of character development. These are half stock-characters, half observational accretions. Hancock is variously parsimonious yet profligate, puritanical yet drunkard, would-be-bohemian yet philistine; Sidney James is scrupulous yet sensitive, witty yet unwitting, hideous yet sexy; Kerr is stupid yet worldly; Williams simply plays several characters with indeterminate boundaries and Hattie Jacques' Miss Pugh vacillates between the stock characters of 'Shrew' and 'Virago,' settling ultimately in neither camp.

These alternating characteristics jostle in different episode and each character takes turns to adapt their characteristics to suit the wider narrative and, sometimes, to individual jokes. This breadth of character potential and circulation of role-playing is not peculiar to HHH, but in HHH we find a conceit which is not just a device for convenience, nor a result of genuinely deep and honest characterisation, instead, I would argue the characters who reside in 23 Railway Cuttings intentionally have no essence, merely an existence, underpinned by the narrative meta-drama and as such their characteristics cannot be defined singularly. They should be thought of not as separate entities but rather fluid areas a collective psyche. This is healing comedy, comedy as curative, a socio-psychic unguent to the cicatrices of cognitive dissonance and self-alienation that Britain was then suffering and the characters themselves are polyvocal expressions of this dissonance. Theirs is the Britain which no longer has
an identity but rather has a mission statement, to move on to a world which remembers the lessons it learnt but never wishes to repeat them and, so, endeavours to understand how the past can underpin the very possibility of the future without ever holding it back.

T.G.
Here are The Gull's suggestions for essential HHH listening: Our top ten episodes of Hancock's Half Hour radio show, in no particular order:

1

SE: 06 EP: 14: THE IMPRESSIONIST

"Stop calling me Tone! When I'm doing the straight drama I'm Anthony. It's bad enough being called Tony, let's have a little respect for the principle. It isn't right for subsidiary members of the cast to address the principle with diminutives. Wilfrid Hyde-White doesn't allow his bit-players to go around calling him Chalky."

In the last ever radio episode a frustrated Hancock abandons comedy for the straight theatre but finds his reputation in tatters after he is impersonated in the voiceover of an advert for an inferior brand of cornflakes. It is interesting to note the shades of truth and fiction in this episode and also to note further that Hancock ends the last radio series reprising a Robert Newton impression which had formed the basis of his cabaret act before his fame.
"What's this funny looking thing with the letters on?"
"That's the typewriter"

The introduction of the funniest female character in HHH, Miss Griselda Pugh, played by comedy heroine Hattie Jacques. Before Miss Pugh the female characters, Moira Lister and André Melly, had been given precious few jokes and although they were both excellent radio actresses any character in a sitcom must have funny lines to be memorable. They essentially were demoted to second class characters providing plot devices and sensible voices against which the male characters could speak and act more outlandishly.

Miss Pugh is not an image of empowered womanhood either, she is often either an ugly nag, or a Sid James' object of desire but then 50's radio comedy was not quite ahead of its time enough to cope with funny women who maintained a self-possessive femininity. On the other hand Pugh is often represented as easily the most mentally competent and morally upstanding of the main cast without this impacting on her laugh hit-rate. Although Jacques herself did not want to be portrayed as a battle-axe there is no doubt she performs it to a T and certainly Matron or Gym-Mistress Short in the Carry On Franchise owe much to Miss Pugh.
"I didn't think you had it in ya Tub, I'm proud of ya boy! I thought you were the serious type, the stay-at-home, I thought you were only interested in tropical fish breeding."

"Well no, not all the time, I do have other outlets. I have been known to get quite worked up over cheese labels."

A classic story of Sidney James antagonising Hancock. Sid sets up a gossip magazine and publishes a mocked-up photo of Tony in a compromising position with a young woman in a nightclub. The theme of The Scandal Magazine overtly lampoons all the worst vicissitudes of fame which Hancock the real man found so difficult to cope with and which have become a major issue in contemporary culture.
"Ah, dear old Greystones, seven of the happiest years of my life. Started off as a fag and worked my way up to head cigar"

This very colourful and engaging episode sees Hancock concoct a fantasy of old-England prep school tutelage only to be besmirched when it is revealed his only time spent at 'Greystones' public school was during his tenure as a cleaner. It is sharply satirical of the political and cultural monopoly Oxbridge graduates enjoyed in middle century Britain. How different from today you might muse but, after the war, the fifties enjoyed the emergence of a serious vanguard of non-graduate entertainers. Many came through ENSA or similar entertainment cores of the army and they were all to one degree or another autodidacts, trained in the art via journeyperson experience. Sid, Bill, Hattie, Tony and Kenneth themselves were all intelligent and funny and none was Oxbridge educated.

"Stop pandering to him, give him a punch up the bracket!"

Bill Kerr's belief in Santa Claus is finally destroyed at the age of 412 months and Tony, Sid and Miss Pugh have to go to great lengths to comfort him. Strictly speaking a Christmas special, it's a heart-warming and touching episode and also one of the funniest.
Additionally it is the last time we see Jacques included in the line-up. Williams is not included, instead the great Warren Mitchel reprises his presence as the character man - Hancock had given Mitchel his break a few years earlier, anticipating the esteem he would win later in his career. Williams did return for a few of the early episode of series 6 but soon departed, largely it seems because of personal differences with Hancock himself.

"Champagne on cornflakes, I've never heard anything like it in my life. Brown ale yes but Champagne, who does he think he is?!

The New Radio Series sees an oft pompous and inflated Hancock once again in self-congratulatory mood embracing all the pretensions of a famous actor's life and systematically cutting out James, Jacques and Kerr from the success. The script is ominous of the problems and ructions which later beset Hancock's relationship with the cast members who had helped him to fame.

"Not a very nice afternoon is it? It's raining you know."

"Oh, so that's what's making the roads wet"
A brilliant set piece work which revolves around the chemistry of the classic line-up: Jacques, James, Kerr, Williams and Hancock. Series 5 is the best represented series on this list thanks in no small part to how well bedded-in the cast's rapport was by then.

8.

SE:02 EP:11 THE MARROW CONTEST

"This giant marrow I've entered for the vegetable competition, well I'll give you some idea of how big it is, here you are, here's a photograph I had taken standing next to it"

"OOOh Yes! Which one's you?"

Probably the funniest of the extant episodes of series two The Marrow Contest centres around a dispute between James and Hancock emanating from that most British of pastimes: vegetable shows. It features in this list not only on its own narrative and humorous merits but also as a representative of Series 2.

Series 2 was a tumultuous and dramatic chapter in the history of Tony Hancock the man and Hancock's Half Hour the series. Not only had Moira Lister been replaced with André Melly but Hancock himself was forced to abandon the show, overcome with nervous exhaustion. Harry Secombe stepped into the breech and played Hancock's part for the opening trio of the series. Sadly these episodes are lost. In fact hardly any of series 2 survives today. Another of the lost episodes was entitled 'A Trip To Swansea', now we can only imagine how brightly that thaliac gem sparkled.
"Sid, Sid, please No punch-ups, not yet, he doesn't mean anything, he's the most advanced member of our group. I mean he thinks Bertrand Russell is a bit of a Charlie you can't blame him for not reckoning you."

Hancock took swipes at high and low culture alike and never patronised its audience by presuming they had no thirst for or knowledge of the arts. In The East Cheam Drama Festival the crew warmly satirise the dramatic trends of the day. The inclusion of transparent lambasts of figures such as John Osborne point not to a philistine rejection of serious drama and socially critical art but rather an awareness of it and a willingness to acknowledge the nationwide consciousness of the issues these dramas raised.

The same goes for the Poetry Society only here the target is the obscurantism of modernist poetry. A must listen for fans of poetry.
"I say it's a map isn't it sir?"

"Yes! Do you mean to say you've studied Geography as well? Capital! A knowledge of where you are could prove invaluable"

This episode see another outing of a recurrent theme in HHH episodes: Hancock's suspect war-time anecdotes. The theme is an apt summary of the ability of comedy to give air to still tender issues, where there is discomfort replacing it with laughter.

This time we see him spinning a yarn to the Vicar, a character he similarly tries to impress in The Unexploded Bomb. Desertion was addressed earlier in the show's history also, in How Hancock Won The War Tony fabricates an impressive explanation for his 'war-wound' to his girlfriend, André Melly.
Rhys Trimble is a Bilingual poet / performer based in Bethesda, North Wales originally from Pontneddfechan. An experienced performer/improviser interested in medieval welsh language & bilingual poetry, music/poetry, collaborations, digital-art and avant garde writing practices. He is the editor of Ctrl+Alt+Del Ezine and studying for a ‘psychomythogeographical’ PhD in creative writing.
**Cut-Sonnet**

*in a café & after Raha*

bow heart other sins summertime by
with burden straight medina /
rich streaming no old thing
injury thing strategy monster/
ever fix’d sharks brain of flowers
breath the come
say not
purity /

hunca munca         withal thorny
dalliance     abroad/
                  oss gwail-loo-chun tha
weigh’d
                  a haunted ballroom

oil stoves strutted sandy waste /
    idea that man can control

gimcrack
birdcage
doll’s house
ccoal box
organ of hearing
appendages /

my dresses
white taffeta
branch that
the observance /
mother-of-pearl black-edged
mother of thousands /
rosencratz
& owen
sun of parts /
shall not choose but fall
plynymmon /

pluck such envy
vay-nt
ewe hin? /

from him
& propellers
a five pointed star /

quincunx

hexerisk

unworthiest siege

larded with many esgyn
Trafferth Mewn Tafarn – Dafydd ap Gwilym Cyngghanedd X-ray analysis

D th d th,
m h m h
C n dr cn dr
/Yd f/yd f/
ig ig /
in g /in a g/

ain fein /
n ty n(d) t/
wyr wyrain,
/yd m/yd m/
ost ost/
g dr g (n) dr/
ar (g)âr g
G l r f/ (dd)(n) g l r f/
H /st ng (b)(m) (r) h /st (d)
Dr yw h/ dr o h/
/ur s/ur s/
/od /fod /f
ai ei/
/u /u oe/.
/u, tru  tr/
b / (thr) (m) a b /
f/ yn hyfedr fedru
/l r f ; /l r f
/ais,  / nais  n
G  p d / (nd) (dd) g p d /
odi  dr / oni  dr
n dr /sg  yn dr/  sg
/ais,  /iais  i /
gr /m  g r / m
rth / stl r th / stl
/ ôl  /ffôl  ff/
D/ f  d/f
/ y, C  / y  c/
Tr/ w,  tr/ w
Ll  m rh/   ll  m rh /
/ wyll  /mwyll  m/
/ en  ben  b /
    awg rh awg  rh/
ll/ f  ll / f (dd)
    /wrdd  dr/wrdd  dr/
 dd /dr  dd/dr
    ad  ad/
m h/  fo‘i  mh/
G /dd  g /dd
r c/  r c/

/edd  m /oedd  m/
Dr/ s  dr/ s
tr/ff  tr/ph
/cin  /cin  Si/
S/g n  s/ g n
130

/r th dd dd/  rth dd/

ro, t  ro t/
n rh/  ’n rh/
/f  /f
/wch, / wch h/

/r  /r
/yd,  / yd
G/g  g/g
io  cio  c/  ;
/nn h  /n h /
n t/  n t/
Gw /dd,  gw/dd
D ng/  d ng /  ;
erth  g  erth g/
r/s  r /s
C lm/  c lm /,
âl,  wal h
D / ng s i, d / wng s
/Dd  / dd
Transliteration taken from Tony Conran’s translation of Gruffudd ap yr Ynad Goch’s Marwnad Llywelyn ap Gruffudd and the original

cold breast gold mint
joy foal destiny augur-handed

winter pledge saxons protest
silence weep true-eighteen
Aberffraw prostrate swordstroke

Bodfaeo, Cynllaith crimson
pool nor cool sad cantref

many many many
friable feathers
hurtling her

can you not see the tint & glower
can you not see tor in mourning seer
can you not see the beer impaneling?

throned scuds gaping prince

3 Welsh territory, 100th of a town
death breastplate lord minded

stumble!

eerie talon din phone

of thaw

thoracic ama veering
doe deer wind dorsal

Aberffraw.
Earlier this month delightfully lysergic comedian Paul Foot gave a well-received performance of his cockeyed brand of madcap hilarity @ Swansea’s Cinema & Co. Our reporter Nathan Llewellyn leapt upon the chance to grab this sharpshooting, short-lived but fast-paced interview with the lovely man himself:
Have you been to Swansea before?

I have been to Swansea before, I would like to say it’s my first time here and all is new but all is not new, it is not new at all, in fact it doesn’t look like it’s moved on much since the seventies. I’m sure it’s very nice, I’m sure that John Major or maybe James Callaghan would be impressed, yes, very nice, nice place. Thank you, thank you, that’s the end of the first question.

Do you have a favourite city to perform in?

I like all the places I go to. Often people say “Oh but isn’t it such a warm audience in such and such” but I like all the places; they’re all different, it sounds terribly trite but they are all different and they’re all great. The big cities are very cosmopolitan but then you get the little places in Devon and places like that where the reactions are sort of quieter and different and also beautiful so I love all the places but I would say my favourite place is probably Australia. Melbourne is a great place, it’s a bit cold, but it’s a nice place. It is still warmer than Britain. It’s nice weather and it’s a nice flight to Australia so you have many many time for wines, you’ve got 24 hours to drink wines {sic}

Do you have any favourite contemporary comedians?

My favourite comedian is Brian Gittins, he is a character actor and he’s my favourite comedian currently alive on the earth.

Why is Laughter important?

Well, laughter is important because it’s a release, everyone likes to have a laugh, everyone knows that, but why are comedians important? Sometimes you might think “well why do we need comedians?” because people laugh in their normal lives and no one laughs more than when someone’s walking out of the office and they slip slightly on something and fall over.

Schadenfreude is my favourite.

So why do we have comedians? We have comedians because there’s a different type of laughter (with comedy) people are laughing at ideas and thoughts and, I suppose, if comedy is
doing what it should do, it will be making people think about the world differently and seeing the world in a funnier light, in a different way. That sounds a bit pretentious and probably is but that is what it’s supposed to be.

We are doing an article on Tony Hancock and I was wondering what you think of him and if you have a favourite episode?

Well this is an interesting question actually because I am someone who is a comedian but is not a comedy fan. Now I am quite rare in that; there are comedians who have every type of DVD of every comedian there’s ever been on their shelves and then they think “Well I’ll just copy a bit of each of them.” Then you have comedians who don’t really know much about comedy and aren’t very good at it. You have comedians who have loads of knowledge and DVDs of different comedians and yet somehow manage to come up with something utterly original, very unusual, and then you have my type, which is also unusual, which is people who don’t have many comedy influences, never really watched it much, but just do their own thing. However, I am familiar with Tony Hancock that is something I have seen. A lot of stuff I haven’t seen. People will ask me about a lot of very famous comedians & I don’t really know.

I am not familiar with Tony Hancock enough to know much, the only thing I can think of is the Blood Donor that’s the one you always see. “A pint, that’s nearly an armful.” I’m not an aficionado but he’s obviously a great comedian. Although I sort of wonder about that word, I get very suspicious of people calling Tony Hancock and people like that ‘comedians,’ I always think he’s a comedy actor, which I think is a different thing. He’s not a stand-up comedian, he’s a comedy actor, like Rowan Atkinson isn’t a stand-up comedian, he’s a stand-up-comedy-actor, a brilliant stand-up-comedy-actor. I never quite like that word ‘comedian,’ it’s too general to me; it can mean someone who does acting and it can mean someone who appears on television and sort of says things in an amusing manner. Anyway, I am not trying to denigrate anyone but I always think ‘why not call him a comedy actor?’ That is the end of the answer to the question.

Are you continuing this tour for a while?

Yes I am continuing with the previews of my show and then I am taking it to Edinburgh Festival in the month of August and then I am taking it on the tours around Britain in the autumn after I have made a horror film.

N.L.
God’s Own Land: God, Colonialism and Endgame

God’s
Endgame as
‘Lack’

“A man is called infantile by a divinity as a child is by a man.” — Heraclitus

‘God is forever,’ the pious say. Always was and always will be. Thus, God is the forever. Beyond the temporal; beyond the sanctuary of genealogy. God is love and this love is forever. There are too many questions to be asked of a theology so I shall place my thoughts into one area:

I have said that the orgasm and death are the same (to a metaphysical limit), but what of the god that gives his son to the world (the world of the human being) via the ‘miraculous conception’ of the ‘Virgin Mary’. The ‘good god’ and the virgin woman are the sign of purity by which men wish to know themselves in totality qua the

The first break of consciousness and temporality comes with religion. Let us use Christianity for the simplicity of my own Western ‘cultural’ upbringing:
necessity of the purity of the objectified Other, the greater (God) and the lesser (women) between whom men reside. The powerful and the weak stand where men cannot heighten themselves and where men cannot debase themselves. Mary’s virginity is to be held onto lest she be as Desdemona to Othello’s naïve Bad Faith - impudent strumpet! – who stands guilty only in the nausea of the man who projects himself as god’s nearest reflection. God chose not to give Mary free will, thus he raped her; to give birth to his genealogy – hitherto non-existing; to give birth to himself: she was told this was her role. To give birth to the SON of god. The sins and the suffering imposed on the world of humanity is to be retracted by the son of god who is god in singular suffering caused by humanity to wash away humanity’s guilt and wickedness; a species of beings supervened by god who cannot allow his creation to be what He made it. God’s Bad Faith is revealed in the lack that constitutes his actions. God must be considered a Being-in-itself, an a priori of essence, for god is only consciousness and cannot transcend towards a Being-for-itself because he is pure immanence and exists as a meaningless idea of Being. God is his own sustaining force and his only emotion is desire: a desire that can never be completely satisfied. God exists as lack which is revealed in his creation of the world and of humanity as his desire to do so; having the desire to create human beings reveals that god’s existence is one of lack for He wanted more than He is. And to achieve the creation of homo-sapiens fulfilled that one want qua desire: but then there is god’s desire that humanity be good and moral; that humanity worship and fear him. All of these desires show that god is lack.
“The very clear indication that the being which possesses in itself the idea of perfection cannot be its own foundation, for if it were, it would have produced itself in conformance with that idea. In other words, a being which would be its own foundation could not suffer the slightest discrepancy between what it is and what it conceives, for it would produce itself in conformance with its comprehension of being and could conceive only of what it is.”

Further,

“But this apprehension of being as a lack of being in the face of being is first a comprehension on the part of the cogito of its own contingency. It think, therefore I am. What am I? A being which is not its own foundation, which qua being, could be other than it is to the extent that it does not account for its being.”

Therefore, humanity does not need god, it is, in fact, the inverse: god needs humanity. Jesus, Mary, Noah, Moses, et al: god needed them, they did not need god. And god forced himself upon them in different ways and means. God: the Onanist of hypocrisy and desire.

Even if god is ‘forever’, that forever is the purest negation of responsibility and meaning, for

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god’s forever is merely a solipsistic existence to satisfy his own desires in an attempt to negate his own lack. God is known as a neurotic hypochondriac.

“In a word, God, if he exists, is contingent.”

And so it is that the existence of the idea of god is a reflection of humanity’s lack revealed as nothing qua nothing.

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The Endgame of Empire

The coloniser is the ‘creator’ of something new; the colonial power is the destroyer of something contemporary with its own history. Colonialism attempts to implement the mother country’s history upon the land it colonises and make an empire that will belong to it forever. All empires attempt to exist beyond the boundaries of temporality and ethics. God is the tool of the forever-land. The native is bestial and the settler is god’s favoured race. The Manichean dualism is implemented from the outset and the dialectic of good and evil is fixed rigidly in the white versus the black. White = good; black = bad. Colour coded morality is literally and metaphorically black and white. And when the final colonist dies in a postcolonial malaise, the lies will be perpetuated through a subjectified history of a reified ruling race beyond class divisions, known under the gleeful eye of god. Only when the final human being dies will the currency of abuse and destruction end.

What remains of colonialism in the world today is the lack in which it was created in the desire for more, something unattainable from one’s own landmass, formulated in

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5 Ibid, p105
imagination and the neo-colonial psyche cries for the something it never had. The intentions were clearly set out and the end came in violence. Slurs of racial disparity remain; cultures have been destroyed that can never return; people tortured and murdered whose suffering can never be relieved. It is, however, the neo-colonial psyche that reveals the inauthenticity of the offspring of a colonising heritage: the Bad Faith of those who live in a lack that is the desire to take pride – and, more inauthentic still, solace – in the apparent shared history of being of a heritage of a past of empire, and the power implied in such rule – the polemic of ‘birth right’ negates the authenticity of praxis.

From desire to have an empire, to having an empire, to losing that empire: lack is the eternal return of the desire to be known as the ruler, the dictator of a shared indoctrination towards greatness which is the transcendental attempt to negate death. The Self is therefore negated as it is nihilated by the mother country’s ideological stance of *We* being better than *them*. Below being the Other as quintessentially the same as the Self (conscious and self-aware), the native is considered *an* other who is more object than a consciousness and therefore worthy of nothing but chattel slavery and derision. The native is given the status by the coloniser of being without history and therefore the only culture perceived as having a reality of *truth* is that of the imported mother country. As Fanon says:

“*The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an* *Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning.*”

Further,

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“The settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves.”

He – the settler – is the beginning of the attempted forever of empire. More important than the for-itself attempting to negate Bad Faith, he is a part of a sum total that is greater than his singularity. His consciousness limps along with the ideology, whilst his destructive being cuts down bodies, buildings and vegetation so that he can impose the dominance of the mother land in the name of the monarch who wills it. Group (i.e. race) consciousness thus supervenes class consciousness; the group nihilates the class.

“… the great show-down cannot be put off indefinitely.”

(p41)

The false-Forever of ideology will be destroyed by the actual Forever of the ending…

Fin.

G.C.A.O.

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7 Ibid, p40
Giles Rees is undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing at Swansea University. He’s been a newspaper reporter, a teacher and a black cab driver. For a while he lived in Russia where he taught English at a school in central Moscow. His short stories have been published by The Lonely Crowd, Heater, eFiction and Oddville Press.
The Honey Jar

When I stopped drinking I needed to find things other than bottles to occupy my hands. So I took to shoveling snow from the paths outside our block. I did this all winter, only finishing a shift when my spade scraped the tar and the slabs. Most of my neighbours passed without speaking, which wasn’t unreasonable given how they’d seen me do some crazy stuff over the years. Only the woman in 14 showed any interest, looking at me briefly when she opened and closed her curtains and blinds. One morning she came up to me and gave me a jar of honey. I thanked her and tried to think of something else to say. My lack of words didn’t matter because she said she had no time to stop. She walked on quickly in the direction of the Metro. I set the jar on the ledge of a window and went on with my shoveling till I was done. Then I took the jar up to my flat. I spooned some of the honey onto some bread. It was the best I’d ever had.

A week later I went to the market, carrying the empty jar. There must have been half a dozen stalls in the hall selling honey, and I had trouble recognising the woman. Apart from those moments in her windows I’d always seen her in a headscarf or hat. Only when I was about to pass her table, and hand the jar to someone else, did
her white-coated arm reach out. She smiled, turned and drew a fresh jarful from the churn on the bench behind her. The bronze honey was almost the same colour as her hair (which fell in a ponytail down her back). I offered money, but she refused. She said she was Kseniya. I’m not sure if I told her my name. At the exit, beside a stall where chickens hung from hooks, I stopped for a second, and thought I saw her looking.

All winter this went on: my shovel, the snow, the honey seeping into the jar, the woman’s – Kseniya’s – pale hands screwing the jar’s lid tight shut. Then spring came and the snowfalls stopped, and I no longer carried the jar to the market. Other glassware, the necks and shoulders of bottles mainly, took the jar’s place in my hands. Summer disappeared in a haze.

Come winter I re-claimed my shovel from the cupboard on the landing and re-started my thing of clearing the paths. Several times I went inside to throw up. I saw the honey jar on the shelf above my kitchen sink, and rinsed it with cold water. I took it to the woman’s stall in the market. As I neared her table I realised it was six months since I’d shown myself. She received the jar without a word, turned and drew the honey. It oozed from the tap like lava, just as before. Sunlight poured through the hall’s high windows and fell on her hair as she worked. It had strands that were no longer the bronze of the honey but grey, like the churn. I dug in my pocket for money, which she took.

Ends
Paige Smeaton is a 20 year old student of English Literature. She was born and grew up in Aberystwyth and returned there in March with the *Out of Bounds poetry Project* to help represent West Wales on their poetry map.
First the lungs like universes

If you take the scalpel and apply it gently to the surface of the skin, press to break the surface tension and slice downwards; the tent will unfurl from the chest – this is the desired effect.

First the lungs like universes unfold to make a person

If you take the scalpel – the knife – and apply it gently – firmly, surely, strongly – to the surface of the skin – the life, cut in – and press to break the surface tension like a dissection and slice downwards; the tent will unfurl from the chest – this is the desired effect.

Press to break the surface tension like a dissection and slice downwards; the tent will unfurl from the chest – this is the desired effect – like moths’ wings unfold them and pin them

First the lungs like universes unfold to make a person into infinities condensed

Press to break the surface tension like a dissection and slice downwards; the tent will unfurl from the chest – this is the desired effect – like moths’ wings unfold them and pin them out to dry in the rain while you practise your cabaret in the grey sea spray.

Open your circus on Saturday.
First the lungs like universes unfold to make a person into infinities condensed into breath

Hang up the sign on Friday:

WELCOME TO THE VAUDEVILLE THE GREAT STRIPTEASE WELCOME TO THE CABARET THE SEA, HUMANITY SPACE AND THE HUMAN RACE PAY WITH YOUR LUNGS YOUR HEART IN YOUR FIST PAY WITH YOUR FORTUNES: WELCOME TO THE HIERARCHY OF ORGANS
INTERVIEW

FFION JONES

Upcoming Welsh actor and playwright Ffion Jones' debut stage play, *Ugly Lovely*, begins an 18 day run at The Old Red Lion in London from June 28th and stars the playwright herself. 'Velvet Trumpet present work that is dark, bittersweet and above all funny.' Jess Thomas Caught up with Ffion @ Taliesin theatre to discuss the production.

JT: So Tell Me What’s your play about?

FJ: So it’s a bit of a tricky question when people ask that because it’s not about much, essentially it’s about a young woman called Shell who’s from Swansea and her mid-twenties crisis. She’s feels like she is stuck in Swansea; her Nan has recently passed away and that’s the trigger for her reassessing her life wanting to make a big change but not knowing what that change is. She reflects on where she is; she has a child that she doesn’t know how to look after, she has a difficult relationship with her mum and an even more difficult relationship with her boyfriend who keeps leaving her. Then there’s her best friend who she doesn’t know why she’s her best friend. It sounds very tragic but it’s actually a comedy believe it or not. It’s about young
people in Swansea or any industrial town feeling crippled by boredom and a lack of direction in their lives. There isn’t a tremendous story there but there is a story that the character goes through from beginning to end.

The relationships sound complex.

Yeah certainly between Shell and Tash. Shell is the main character and Tash is her best friend. The play is mostly a two hander but there is a male character who comes into it for a couple of scenes. It is important to have a male voice in there even though it is a very female heavy play about mainly female issues really.

What was your inspiration?

My inspiration was Swansea first and foremost. I first came up with the idea when I was in drama school. I was trying to write a piece that was suitable for me as an actress because it’s surprisingly quite hard to find interesting voices for young women from Wales for the stage anyway.

Was that something about being in London for you?

Probably yeah, throughout my training in Mountview I was amongst mostly English and Scottish people luckily there were two other girls from Wales on my course but Kerry was from North Wales and Beth was from Barry which is a little bit different to Swansea But none of us could quite find our voices at drama school, there weren’t many parts that were Welsh, we didn’t do any Welsh playwrights either so when it came to doing showcase I found it very hard to find something that was going to showcase me as an actress and I wanted something that was female-focused, funny and Welsh, something relevant and something now. That was my biggest impetus to write Ugly Lovely, to have a voice that is present, that is about women now and that is light. Even though I talk about tragic events in the play it needed to represent
the people around me in Wales who were just really funny and lovely.

Did you draw on your own character for Shell’s character?

I suppose I did. There are elements of me in Shell, I feel like she’s a bit of an alter-ego perhaps. I could have lived a life like Shell’s had I gone in a different direction or had different relationships with my family but fortunately I was able to channel my energy creatively whereas I think she’s got more of an emotional block which makes her very frustrated, she just can’t see the options open to her.

So actually most of her character is nothing to do with me and the play is not autobiographical at all.

You are the writer and also the star but what other parts of the dramatic process of bringing the play to stage have you been involved in?

Well fortunately my friends have a theatre company and I grew up with them so it’s been really, really lovely having them want to take it on board. I was on a train with the director Nicko one day and just said do you want to read my play? Most importantly he recognised the characters and issues inside it and felt, like I do, that the play is a representation of the Swansea that we know. So it’s just really fortunate that we are on the same level and we are able to use our skills and talent and make it happen. Velvet Trumpet have taken it on board and I have just let go of it. Interestingly they are all men. But I think it would have been different if they were all English men.

Especially if they were your Cambridge sort?

Yeah totally but we all went to the same school and know the same place and have the same sense of humour and I trust them. I trust them because they know me and also we have a lovely casual shorthand form of communicate-on. You could just say “remember this thing that happened when we were fourteen in the park, it’s like that” and they would get it.

But I’ve done my job as a writer now and they’ve taken it on and now I can just act in it.
Are the other actors Welsh?

Yes they are. That was something very important to me. It probably is because I am a Welsh actor and I want to make sure Welsh actors get work but mostly it was important for them to understand those people that I am talking about and understand the rhythms and the use of words. It’s a dialect that you need to know fluently without thinking about. I’ve experienced trying to train people in a South Wales accent before and 70 percent of the time they do really well but there’s always something where you feel oh no that doesn’t sound quite right or they wouldn’t say it like that and I didn’t want that to get in the way of anything.

Why stage and not radio?

That’s interesting because I was considering pitching it for radio at one point. I even went to a sound recordist to record some for me. It’s a very strong voice in the script.

Yeah. Because we’re not in rehearsal yet I can’t talk too much about what it looks like visually but you are right, the sound of it is really important and when we recorded it, it did work but it would miss something. There are bits in the play that you can only really experience visually.

I knew that I wanted the audience to be in the same room as the characters as well because I think there is a level of realism and also empathy you can experience from that.

J.T.

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The Gull will see you there!
Fin.
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