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open wide magazine

volume two issue one

poetry
reviews
fiction
interviews

FREE

welcome

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editorial

We've gone back to basics. Back to what we originally conceived the magazine to be, and we wanted it to be free.

We'd be the first to admit we 'lost it'. We were taking the magazine in a direction that didn't suit.

We were close to making it a glossy, advert laden monster, where we'd charge a fiver, or more if we could get away with it, and we'd sit back and pat ourselves on the back at how good it looked.

We were becoming the very thing we'd started out against.

With a newfound faith and passion came the revelation that the magazine had to go back to its roots. We had to strip it down, as we'd done with our lives, down to the words. The words are what matter.

So now with OWM, you're getting it raw. Raw with conviction. Just good writing; new talent, established voices and some old friends.

Enjoy.

Clouds Look Like Iceland - Emily McPhillips

I want you to name me one famous person from each of the countries in Europe. Dan thought that was a pretty easy challenge, until he tried to name all of the countries in Europe. He tried doing it by remembering beers he liked at first, but all the beers he liked seemed to come from the obvious countries in Europe, the big names, your likes of France and Spain, and for these countries he gave me Louis Braille and Pablo Picasso.

He took a pen and a beer mat, and over the gaudy symbol he began to write down his list. So far the list of countries and famous people looked like this:

France - Louis Braille
 Spain - Pablo Picasso
 Italy - Dante
 Ireland - Oscar Wilde

Then he decided it was time to go to the bar, and he ordered a pint of Carlsberg, and nodded back to where I was sat and told me to add Peter Schmeichel on the list for Denmark, and I sighed because I was bored shitless, but I also sighed because I knew who Peter Schmeichel was, and was angry at my brain, and the way it liked to remember the things I didn't need, or want to remember, like useless football trivia.

Anyway, when Dan came back to sit down, I took the beer mat and dunked it in his pint and told him the stupid game was over, and I didn't have a clue how many countries were in Europe anyway. He smeared the frothy beer foam on my nose and licked it off, making a big point of it so that everybody in the bar could see, but nobody cared because far worse things were sure to be happening in the toilets anyway, or at least that's what the writing on the cubicle walls liked to tell me.

We stayed out until closing; then Dan said that he'd walk me home, even though he was the one that probably needed looking after. I scooped my arm around his back and steadied him; his weight fell evenly on each side of him and this made me think of those ice-creams you can get, with a cone that is like an upside-down turret, and two-hanging baskets of different flavoured ice-cream. As I got to my gate I pushed him from me so that he stumbled into the yard. He was lying on the grass, looking at me stupidly, vacantly; looking at me as though he had something to say. Then he grabbed at my feet as I went on towards my front door, pulling me down to his level, and hauling his body on top of mine. 'I want to kiss you' he said, and I just laughed and said 'you should be so lucky' and pushed him off me. There we both stayed, lying there on the grass, it wasn't cold but I shivered anyway, and Dan blew warm air into his hands and rubbed up and down the arms of my jumper. Some threads had come loose and at each stroke they were pulled up and then down, depending on the direction of his hand.

Looking up at the night sky, the clouds started to arrange themselves into the shapes of countries. I could see the fifty pence shape of France, and Dan said that he could see Iceland, but I thought that lots of clouds could look like Iceland, it had that cloud shape to it, and he said 'no, not as much as this one' and then he remembered our game and called out, 'Bjork!'

book review: No One Belongs Here More Than You by Miranda July. Canongate, £9.99.

When you finish reading Miranda July's excellent collection of stories, you may find yourself wanting to wear the book. You might want to buy the Braille edition so you can feel the words touching your skin. And this will not feel wrong; you will not feel strange doing this because July has shown you a world where a person wearing a book instead of clothes is entirely normal. This is a world where a dying father passes onto his daughter the 12 finger moves he uses to bring a woman to orgasm; a world where a room full of women with napkins on their faces learn about the illusion of romance; a world where a woman believes her teenage lover, not a real boy, just a dark shape, has come back to her as one of her special needs students.

Yes, this is a highly inventive debut anthology from the actor, performance artist and award-winning filmmaker of indie hit *'Me and You and Everyone We Know'*. In fact this collection feels a lot like 16 new bite-size *'Me and You and Everyone We Know's'*. Like the film, her stories are concerned with longing; characters longing to be understood, longing for acceptance, longing to be loved. Lonely people inhabit this book, lonely people living in bizarre interior worlds, struggling to connect with others. In 'Majesty' a middle-aged woman from Sacramento obsessed with Prince William, dreams up odd ways to meet and have sex with him. 'The Sister' is an aging man's fantasy about the (non-existent) sister of a co-worker he's known for over twenty years. In 'The Swim Team' a young woman living alone in a tiny landlocked town that isn't a town, teaches three of its citizens to swim in her living room. Key to this offbeat and observant collection is July's ability to surprise. She is adept at handling contradiction. She introduces us to idiosyncratic characters and puts them in odd situations without the stories ever feeling unreal or fanciful. And it's this contradiction, this constantly being presented with the unexpected, that's the source of much of the humour in the book; a humour that saves us from being overwhelmed by the characters' sadness and disappointment.

These stories are about what it's like to be human; they are about you and me. What these characters are feeling, bizarre as the circumstances may be at times, are feelings with which we're all familiar or can empathise. July reminds us that people, our lives, are not so very different. No one is above sadness or suffering. And she understands this because July is fascinated by people. Yes these stories are whimsical and playful but, at the same time they are firmly rooted in the reality of human nature. July not only understands people but she cares about them too, which is why, in most cases, the stories have a sense of hope. Having laid all this pain and sadness before us, she leaves us with the hope that these characters, no matter how fucked-up, will be okay.

July gives us this hope because she cares about us too, or that's how it feels because her writing creates an intimacy with the reader. The engaging storytelling style makes the stories feel like the narrators are talking directly to us. Her writing too is focussed, spare and precise. She tells the tale then she's outta there, giving us just what we need to know to put us right in the moment with the characters. And July is a crafter of words, able to capture the essence of a moment, sometimes the whole story in a single sentence: *'I wondered if I would spend the rest of my life inventing complicated ways to depress myself'*. Or: *'I*

whispered it's not your fault. Perhaps this was really the only thing I had ever wanted to say to anyone, and be told'.

This book then, a winner incidentally of this year's prestigious Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, is a highly creative and compassionate collection from a writer with a strong, original voice. There is definitely much more to come from July the fiction writer. *'No One Belongs Here More Than You'* feels like a test-bed for something much more weighty and ingenious. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to go change and put on this book, preferably the Braille edition...

- Melissa Mann

music review: Kingdom of Comfort by Delirious? Furious? Records, £8.99

What began in 1992 as a trio of guys working together to play at a local event for youth has translated into the worldwide success of Delirious?. The band, comprised of Martin Smith (guitars/vocals), Tim Jupp (keys), Stew Smith (drums), Stu G (guitar), and Jon Thatcher (bass), has played for millions worldwide, released celebrated anthems sung in churches today ("History Maker", "I Could Sing of Your Love Forever"), and "Did You Feel the Mountains Tremble?"), and achieved success that is, well, history making.

Releasing their twelfth album, *Kingdom of Comfort* Delirious? crafts another album chock full of music that makes the soul flutter. The album is a return to rock, steering away from overproduced anthems in favor of the simplicity of piano, guitar, bass, and drums. The theme of the album-reaching out to those who have little hope-came from a Rob Bell sermon and inspired more than just the catchy track "King of Comfort".

The album's title track is gripping as it begs, "Save me from the kingdom of comfort where I am king/ From my unhealthy lust of material things". Pulsating through gut-wrenching verses that show the folly of materialism, the song finalizes with this, "Save me from the kingdom of comfort where I am king to this kingdom of comfort where You are King." "We Give You Praise", the album's first radio single, is a gritty reminder of how "we've been saved from ourselves" by God, who deserves all praise. Inspired by the movie *Whale Rider*, "Eagle Rider" shows a different vein in Delirious' song-writing, using a lot of flying imagery as a metaphor for freedom, faith, risk, discovery, and adventure. *Kingdom of Comfort* contains 13 amazing tracks including the guitar-driven "God Is Smiling" or the rocky "Stare the Monster Down" as well as softer tunes like "How Sweet the Name" and "All God's Children". Plus, you can listen to the whole album online and download two bonus tracks-"Hallelujah" and "Mothers of the Night"-by simply logging on to delirious.co.uk, and heading to the Living Room.

Besides encouraging Christians to wander outside their kingdoms to take a real look at the suffering of others, *Kingdom of Comfort* leads the charge in giving back. A portion of all profits from each album sale will benefit the Prem Kiran a humanitarian project in a red light district of India, which provides provides support for poverty-stricken children, whose mothers are enslaved by the sex industry. The band's efforts are not only noteworthy, but are also provide the meat in the delectable sandwich that is *Kingdom of Comfort*. It's an album that seeks to tear listeners down song by song, lyric by lyric, and note by

note so that listeners become contrite enough to tear down their comfortable kingdoms stone-by-stone in order to seek another Kingdom entirely.

- Amy Sondova

7th street porch view - Sarah Fouts

heavy spring showers' crescendo thunder
rumbles in long shadowed twilight.
the breaking of water on asphalt
in magnificent waves along the streets
lifts a mist to haze the curbside.
the gutters swell as pipe drains gush.
I am damp, am goose pimply,
am wholly awakened & withdrawn...
a spectator, a dirty huddle beneath an overhang
behind a curtain of waterfall rain.

I in mine - Sarah Fouts

my mind is a paper plane,
with its frailty & swerving destinations.
folded into shape
by hands that tremble
that *ache*
to create a certain form
for high, purposeful flight.

let there be *more*
than days spent walking to & from
& bags of dope to bridge those days.

let there be!
the dawn in peace
without scrambled egg brains for breakfast--
scrambling,
scheming,
contorted & commanded,
my brain *hates* a new day,
new trick,
new hustle to my end.

let there be a dawn
where the trees outline a young sky,
& I sit,
just sit.
maybe a cigarette smoldering,
"good morning"

Neon - Ben Barton

Yesterday I felt alive
Ten thousand sparklers went off in my head
from dawn to dusk and in my bed
White knuckles
I love you for that
and for making me feel

Fantastic to be beautiful again.

Yesterday all my tipsy dreams

Came alive and danced, venerated
in some mashed-up Mardis Gras.
Yes I was alive
I was neon.

Canidae - Ben Barton

He stares at us rolling up the carpet
Like it's the apocalypse –
the end of *his* world anyway
Wet eyes beaded
and tail on full jabber
with his paws he kneads the underlay
Bed moved, chewed
rat, smelly charity shop
blanket – all relocated to
the inner sanctum
of the utility room.
I know he's worried, but
he's untrusting like that
Always has been,
imbued with a cat's nerves
The furniture
Layout unfamiliar
he scurries underfoot
sniffing my ankles
and gazing up, dejected
I know he's thinking

what error or misdemeanour
has been let out today
To warrant these intrusions.

Snapshots - Claire Askew

Hiding under the lid of the shoebox, a girl stands
in a black dress, a typewriter in her arms.
She is in a hurry – one foot is blurred
as though in flight, and she looks at me like
I startled her. Her hair is yellow rope,
her cupid's-bow lips gleam like a cracked plate;
strange wordsmith, clasping her cumbersome child.

In her wake, captured in thumbbed sepia, some
frivolous ancestor of mine. In one hand
is a tambourine; she seems to flutter,
she is all ribbons. Her mouth is a pale smile,
singing, or laughing – I think I amuse her.

I know of her years-ago dances on table-tops,
and shudder, remembering she is a headstone now.

A great uncle next – cracked, black-and-white drunk,
in a baggy suit with knee patches – he slouches
beside a dirt road, an avenue of trees.
Five fingers are safely pocketed, the others tease
the neck of a bottle. Inside his half-open mouth
a stale tongue ferments, invents a tune to whistle,
remembers the taste of tobacco and dead summers.

Fast-forward, to a colour-shot clutch of girls,
 top-sided, chained together on a darkening street
 by their own skinny arms. High-heeled
 and braceleted, one wears a shabby fishnet glove
 that creeps up her wrist like the flesh of a snake.
 She is my sister; they are all sisters here –
 each one is a smiling lighthouse for the others.

A sun-filled seaside portrait follows. My lover
 immortalised – lips frozen in the shape of a word
 that could not wait, the shape of a kiss – face haloed
 by a smudge of let-in light. A crinkled sticker
 declares that this image is flawed, a failure. His palm,
 outstretched in a fluke of perfect focus, disagrees –
 it is curled softly at the edges, a small map, beckoning.

Finally, beside the countless hilltop vistas, and below
 the gilt-edged souvenir of my parents' wedding day,
 I find myself. My photograph-face does not match up
 with the one in the mirror – it is smooth, open, startling;
 a match-flare. This mouth has known so many songs
 since it was glimpsed here; words learned, used, forgotten.
 These hands have known so many other hands.

Where Was Satan? - Claire Askew

Where was Satan when I was six?
 When I was doing child things -
 scuffing my school-shoes
 on the chalk of a hopscotch frame,
 losing bouncy-balls forever
 into the greedy throat of the gutter -
 was he crouching close-by?

I don't remember Satan,
 not even from the many Sunday sermons
 I endured - squirming in a pew
 under dust-in-sunlight window-beams -
 though his name must have been mentioned.

No, Satan only came along at sixteen;
 swaggering top-hatted into view -
 the same grin, though never quite
 the same skin. It was Satan
 who cheered on the sidelines as I slapped
 the local schoolteacher's daughter;
 Satan who slipped me
 the heady high-school cocktails of sunshine
 and lust, and Satan who spirited away
 the last bastion of my innocence
 in a dusty garden summerhouse, taking
 notes no doubt, to pass behind God's back.

Nowadays, Satan sits quietly
 on my kitchen stools, or lurks behind
 the basement door, chilling my neck.
 He plants the stray thumb-tack
 in the bathroom rug, tornadoes
 through the plate-rack, inching crockery
 over the edge, reminding me I'm human.

Satan hums the fragmented tunes
 that set up home in my head, and refuse
 to leave. It makes me glad that God stops by
 sometimes, drops the occasional £5 note
 in the pocket I'd forgotten about.

The Blade - Phil Knight

Cutting the sky
 is a beam of pure
 white light which
 glimmers in the
 still winter air
 like a sword of
 polished silver,
 embedded in the
 earth like some
 great span of
 a bridge to the
 stars, but this
 is no trembling
 way. The origin
 of this vision
 is to be found
 in the belly of
 a police chopper
 hovering above
 the all but empty
 midnight streets.
 The beam searches
 the dead hours
 of a town asleep
 in it's glow the
 plastic waste bins
 shine like blocks
 of carved obsidian.
 For a moment the
 blade alights
 on an abandoned
 row of shops, the
 boarded up windows
 are covered by
 bright fly posters
 like the coins
 placed on the eyes
 of a dead Roman in
 late antiquity.
 When the beam
 cuts out the
 town is dark
 like an old
 scar.

Sci-Fi Nights - Phil Knight

The night was neon
 and wet like in some
 science fiction films.

I wore my trench coat

unbuttoned in the
best genre style.

The X5 I had to get
was no Atomic formula
or space rocket
but the last bus
out of town
on a Friday night.

My fellow travellers
still seemed alien
shift workers, drunks
and teenage girls
singing Kylie songs.

Through the clouded
windows I saw the lights
of the steel workers
and for a moment
it was beautiful.

Alley with Grand Opening (Longhu) - Elizabeth Kate Switaj

Stage rises & raises
from piled bricks for building or
mixed with banana peels
 & sweet potato plastic bags
 (striped yellow red)
bricks split open like carrots
 (tops there too)
Stage rises & raises

your traditional drums
your thunder drums
 & a throb instead of a beat
We think it should be faster
 than diurnal hands

but lights couldn't keep up
 for once slower than sound
relying on dull minerals
 & low-hanging wires

Civilian Dream - Elizabeth Kate Switaj

tried to escape but everywhere smell of garbage
so waited for you to irradiate me
 fill me with your light
 but all that came was fire

and only on my neighbors
with no food too late
to evacuate

 please send me your mushroom smoke
burn my fingers into claws
pattern my skin by my clothes
 or if your aim is true
turn me into shadow

without sense or death

everything is good - Sal Joyce

His presence
dulled,
suffocated
under the
dirty yellow
ceiling lighting

where the
weight
of work
and its
brain numbing
tasks

stifles all
spiritual and
creative
contemplation

the beautiful
aroma of
God
is drowned
out
by the bitter
odour
of
employment

but as
soon as
i step outside

into the
fresh air
and freedom

everything is
good,
everything is
good

out of tune - Sal Joyce

being
out
of
tune
with
God
is
like
having
an
out
of

tune
instrument

plucking
a
D
when
you
should
be
hitting
a
G.

Redundant - Elizabeth Rose Murray

As crows, they flock
to pick at and peck the order
the jobless

soon to be revealed.

Heavy carpets thin,
as feet shuffle through

sliding doors,

the reflections of sullen booted toes,
and cast them unnoticed,

aside

doors that steal

and out.

Brows
locked in worry
fight to float on muffled greetings,
to remain
indifferent

Pennies in the pocket sit heavier
thrust

deep

down to keep them

in their place
save face

should it be them that
go.

and many a lip
is bitten
and many a finger
is pointed

rapacious time

sobs and smirks
coarse as the spittle

in the yawn of yet another grayed complexion

that heads towards the office
amongst abridged sighs and peers

buoyant in the draft of echoing corridors

echoes made louder still

by proud backs leashed to chairs, and the
vehement clicks of departing footsteps.

House Clearance - Idris Caffrey

*Come back in about two hours mate,
he said, it's much better that way.*

Frost clings to shadows in the lane
as I loiter towards the town,
where a few people nod their recognition
but no words are heard from the clouds
of breath rising from their mouths.

I find myself drawn towards
those childhood places left behind
but the park has no swing anymore
and the sweet shop has drawn its blinds.
So to the chapel once again,
where pews crack to the cold
and I remember that long day
when autumn swirled
its red leaves against the glass.

The time is getting on,
the house will be empty now –
salvage from a life carried away
in a small removal van.
The great oak door slams shut
as I drop the heavy latch –
past echoes ripple through the grass
as I begin to pick my way back.

Walking the Line - Idris Caffrey

The trains have gone, the station closed -
tracks packed away like toys in a box.

We walk the line as the sky holds back Winter
and a tunnel beckons for us to pass through.

Leaving the day we enter darkness
without speaking, as if we know
this is our destiny and glancing back
the circle of light is squeezed to nought.

Time drips echoes from the walls
as we feel ahead, push ghosts away
until suddenly a small dance of light
swells to a flood and we run out
into a different World where snowflakes
have covered everything in white.

Love Poem At Shannon - Fred Johnston

: after the Irish and to the crew of N 368 CE :

My bright love

shapely sleek
as an unmarked Boeing 737
smoothing her skirts at Shannon,
as supple-formed
as a Gulfstream sipping
aviation fuel
as shut to me as her doors -

You are as distant
and desirable
as a stout Irish soldier
breaking down
the cabin door
of a secret 'plane -
my heart is your prisoner
chained to your heart's floor -

My scalding love,
your voice is young
and warm as the Duty Free
lounge, wrapped in war-clothes:
you kill me
a foreign voice at my hearth
you shame my people
with your sour battle-laugh.

Colman - Fred Johnston
: i.m. Paul Wilkins :

His first breath was in water -
out of the river like a caught fish
held up to the sun -
God's hook of spliced stone.

now in an iPod era
where nothing is sainted
they went up to Colman's cave
to spread your ashes
like seed on the bone-dry rocks.

We used to come up here
in other days
heady with philosophy, under
the high feral goat-watch,

after a brace of tunes
in a cottage thatched and kitchen-
hot, the music still in our fingers,
a wet breeze off the plain
like Colman sifting, sifting

And the road rising to ruins
like shattered bones:
we imagined a world beside
the world we breathed

salvation of a sort in books,
snug in omens of hedge
and scuttling hare -
Colman, harried saint, hid here

who'd been meant to drown.

At Esker Well - Fred Johnston

At Esker Well as night drenched down
and birds broke like shot
from blasted trees
a woman dipped a flask and showed us how
the holy water could be drawn
from stone and earth in the dark
and dripped over the roof of a car, could
protect the traveller
and it has a use for cattle too, and the sick -

by Esker Well in the Celtic Tiger dark
crawly with Four-by-Fours
on the gnarly backroads
behind the Ford of the King

we bless our cattle and our family cars
sip the turfy water for our sins
the blue air like light from a plasma TV -
part bird, part tree, part water,
part song, part poem, part prayer.

Samantha - Michael Cuglietta

I've never addressed anyone
by name
in a poem before
but Samantha
I'd like to
call out to you
in the 1st stanza
of this poem
and hopefully
it will be a sweet poem
a sweet poem for
a sweet girl

I remember you
on the day you were born
I remember
very clearly
you as a baby

I remember
waking up early
before mom and dad
this was back when
mom and dad
still slept in
the same bed
do you remember
when mom and dad
were still married to each other
I carried you
to the living room
changing your diaper
and laying you

on the carpet
next to me
so you could watch
while I played
Super Mario Brothers

it's weird how
we make memories
that stick with us
a lifetime
when we're not even
aware
we're making memories

it's weird how
I remember you
as a baby
but you seem
so much older
then me now

you figured out
on your own
how to pass into
adulthood
how to become
a proper woman

I am
far from a proper man
you have so much
to offer
can you tell me
how heavy is a heart
when it's filled with love

you have so much
to offer
can you tell me
how light are these days
when they're
filled with purpose

you have so much
to offer

the only thing I have
to offer is
piles and piles of money
that I feel guilty for making
that I devote my life to making
that I pass out
so liberally
so shamefully
to everyone around me

Samantha
will you help me
keep from
getting bored

Samantha
it's weird
to hear your name
inside this poem

is it weird for you
to hear your name
inside this poem
I'm guessing not
you have no shame
no sense of
self-loathing
you seem to find happiness
in almost anything

Samantha
will you help me
fall asleep
at a decent hour

will you teach me
how to
show up
fresh for work
in the morning

how to
pay my bills
on time

how to change my oil
every 3 months

how to be good at something
besides picking up
the check at dinner

how to devote myself
fully
to the things I love

Samantha
will you show me how
not to fall in love
with every girl
I speak to

how heavy is a heart
when it's filled
with love

how light are these days
when they're filled
with purpose

I've never before
mentioned anyone
by name
inside of a poem
Samantha

I'd like to use your name
in the last stanza
of this poem

Sunshine, Come Straight to Bed - Michael Cuglietta

the ocean is
big, blue and beautiful
the ocean is
where I go
to lay on a rented lounge chair
to eat trail mix
and drink fruit smoothies
to watch girls
in their bathing suits
to think on
the nature of things

the ocean is
big, blue and beautiful
with bright sunshine
reflecting off
the salty waves
as they break

I could call you sunshine
if you wanted me to
sunshine, come straight to bed
don't wash your face
or brush your teeth
don't waste another second, sunshine
sunshine, come straight to bed

interview: Frankie Boyle

Frankie, thanks for taking time out from your tour. How is it going?

Very well...certainly a lot more fun than when I used to tour around doing clubs years ago. I have a support act every night which kind of fills the indescribable void of loneliness often created simply by being in Sheffield on a Tuesday.

Your performances on various television panel type shows are refreshing, bold and original; reminiscent, if you don't mind me saying so, of the late Bill Hicks. How did you first get into comedy? And who were your influences?

Ta much, Bill Hicks is very much a hero of mine. I listened to every comedy record at my local library as a kid so I have a pretty broad knowledge of English comedy from the 1950s! Not that I was there just to get records...they had an assistant in a miniskirt who dominated my fantasies for a five year wankathon. Spike Milligan was a big favourite, but I also loved all the famous comedy videos, Eddie Murphy, Richard Pryor, Steve Martin, that I guess everybody from my generation of comics must have seen. I started going to see live comedy in Glasgow when I was about 16, and did some open spots then. I didn't go back to it till I was about 23.

How did your first gig go?

Brilliantly. I later found out that crowd had lied to me.

Where do you get your inspiration for the material in your comedy?

It tends to come out when I talk to people. I go through phases of going home and writing it all down, mixed with phases where I never take notes so I can be a normal human for a bit. I often think of a stupid phrase or image and then try to write a joke I can put it into, which is pretty much the opposite of the way a lot of people work.

Some of your material can be close to the edge, is everything fair game to you?

Yes. I think you either believe in freedom of speech or you don't. Most people do, so I don't feel I'm really taking as big a risk as it seems. While people might not like what you say I think they broadly support your right to say it. I find bland comedy the most offensive...and people just doing it for the money. All those people who are doing it to fund their new conservatory and so on are personally really miserable bastards. On the other hand, you can't go around trying to be challenging and complain when people are offended. I had a big group get really offended the other night...largely I think "fuck 'em", but then I am trying to shake them up a bit, so I can't really moan about it. I think a comic should think about the ideology of what they say and be prepared to stand by it.

Do you view your comedy as pure entertainment or is there a subtle message you like to get across to your audience?

I think there should be a point of view in every joke. Otherwise what's the point in saying it? Hopefully I'll be able to develop my ideas a bit more now that the audiences are getting used to me. Soon I can start in with my theories of Racial Purity and creating a new God from a cloud of living data.

What do you like to do when not performing and writing?

To be honest, I'm doing that pretty much all of the time. I'd really like to do a martial art, but I just can't get the time. I read a lot of comic books, which you probably guessed from the cloud of living data bit.

What music and books do you enjoy, anything you can recommend?

Lots! Gene Wolfe, read everything you can get by Gene Wolfe. Crime-wise I love James Ellroy. The P Smith books by PG Woodehouse are some of my favourites and you can't go wrong with A Confederacy of Dunces by Kennedy Toole. Currently I'm listening to Bonnie "Prince" Billy a lot.

What do you have planned for the future?

To die, just before the planet I'm clinging to does.

For tour dates and much more - frankieboyle.com.

"We are so new we are not in the book yet", the Danish guy had said pointing to my Lonely Planet guide. Dennis and I had just arrived in Hua Hin, walking down the street from the train station with our overloaded backpacks. I had marked out a few guest houses in the book, but with the sun shining on full blast, they didn't seem to be within walking distance.

The offer the Danish guy presented sounded too good to be missed, even if it was way over our daily budget. For 750 baht we would get a room with air-con, hot water and TV. On top of that there was free coffee, free drinking water and even more free water in form of a swimming pool. If Dennis had not been a de-hydrated stink bomb and had I not suffered from a Mekong hangover we would've felt suspicious about the word "free" in every other sentence. But at the time we were both relieved when a Tuk Tuk was flagged down to take us to the home of the Danish guy and his Thai family.

Three o'clock in the morning and the air-con had stopped working. The white box, which had previously blown out air, just sat on the wall looking stupid among all the Balinese paintings. Bare breasted women were mixed with images of ancient Gods and young fishermen. What a delight if the paintings had been the only things covering the walls! There were wooden carvings and film posters and framed jigsaw puzzles. Even if I didn't have an eye for design, this room wounded all my senses.

On the wall opposite a hand-woven mat was hung and underneath it stood a bright red sofa. I found it a tad odd having a mat on the wall, but then things surprised me every day in this country. Someone had just got a prison sentence for drawing a funny face on the king. Well not on the king himself, but on a picture of course.

There was hardly any floor space between the sofa and the bed, so we had stored our rucksacks in the wardrobe. On the top of the wardrobe was a tiny police motorcycle made out of plastic and on the table beside it a wooden duck had settled. How it was possible I don't know, but behind the duck a TV was crammed in. When Dennis finally had found the remote control the only thing we could tune into was a Thai comedy channel.

Above the bed was a massive fan with objects hanging from it like a mobile. Among other things there was a golf ball on a string that functioned as a light switch. It never seemed to get really dark in this room anyway. I could have a fair look at myself in the mirror taking up the wall space on my side. I wanted to wake Dennis up, but he was snoring on top of the blanket and had a peaceful look on his tanned face. His whole body was evenly tanned apart from a white strip covering his private parts. I wanted to touch him. But my need for the toilet was bigger.

I didn't exactly look forward to climbing down the stairs to the bathroom that we shared with the whole family. When we had taken a shower earlier, I had seen a packet of condoms in the pocket of a pair pink Mickey Mouse-shorts. Dennis said it was a good thing that the daughter was prepared. I couldn't imagine someone in such shorts having sex. But she had sneaked around-eyes wide open--when I changed into my bikini by the pool. I only had a quick dip as the pool reminded me of a puddle in the road after heavy rain. But the petite wife had said it wasn't for swimming, it was for cooling yourself down. I

let out a big sigh. I had to get away from the stink for a while. When the air-con broke down the smell of armpit and furniture polish had become stronger.

I tightened my sarong and climbed over Dennis onto the floor. I had another look at the body that had travelled with me for over a month. He was much more than a body. Perhaps I ought to cover him up in case the daughter peeped through the key hole ... Eh, how silly I was! I unlocked the door and sneaked out in the hallway.

Half-way down the staircase, where it turned, my heart stopped as abruptly as the train had earlier today. I had almost stepped on it; the little stump of a tail that was hanging out from the cage. The poodle seemed to be constricted to confined spaces. Earlier on I had seen it in the daughter's handbag. Being so submissive to a female I decided it had to be a boy. His fur smelled of murky water and his eyes were soppy. I had to stop myself from undoing the hatch. On the other hand he wouldn't have much to say to the street dogs cruising outside the girlie bars. I descended the last few steps and stopped in the lounge area with free internet. I would rather have paid for a fast connection and a clean keyboard away from the football on TV. It smelled of beer-breath and those chocolate pastries that the Danish guy stuffed himself with.

The light in here wasn't half as bright as the light in our bedroom. I could hardly make out the shape of the armchairs, the sofa, the TV and the computer. A big lump was lying in the middle of the floor and once again my heart behaved like a third class train. First I thought it was the poodle that had managed to escape, but the lump was much bigger. I kicked a cushion and found a brown arse bulging out under a mini skirt. Poor girl! She was more Westernized than I had thought. A handbag was flung over one of the armchairs. I didn't feel like investigating its content. The toilet door was only a walk through the kitchen away, but the journey had its complications. I remembered the noise my bare feet had made on the tiles earlier.

When I had convinced myself that it was better to pee and be heard than to wet yourself. I placed a cushion on the kitchen floor and took one long step to the bathroom. I opened the door as quiet as a ghost would have done and rushed to the toilet chair. It smelled of bleach. My wash bag had been moved from one shelf to another and revealed a tiny hole, like the ones you find in changing rooms. I put my eye to it. What a disappointment! All I could see was an unmown bit of lawn with a couple of rusty buckets.

On a hook, underneath a heap of towels were Dennis's cut-off jeans and T-shirt. He had forgotten to bring his clothes with him after the shower. But his pants were nowhere to be found. I did what I needed to do. If it wasn't for the circumstances I would've been pissed off about picking Dennis's stuff up on my way out.

The frogs in the garden were on my side. Their singing or whatever it was, covered up all other noise and I tiptoed back through the kitchen and the lounge. The daughter had disposed of the blanket all together and her small tits were falling out of a halter-neck top. I just hoped that she was older than she looked. I pressed Dennis's T-shirt to my chest. Drops of sweat travelled from my armpit, ran along my arm and landed on the thick carpet. It made me choke thinking that it mixed with sweat that I had seen dripping from a certain beer belly.

I wondered why the Danish guy had chosen this place as a home and why he let people stay in it. What came first; the house or his family? He could have been anywhere drinking beer, watching football and collecting odd objects. Perhaps it all came down to falling in love whilst on holiday. Although, if I had been his wife I would have married for one reason only: security. There were loads of things that could be sold if the finances started to go down. He hadn't even had the decency to put things away before he took on guests. Even in good times I would seriously consider to sell the statue of a full-grown St Bernard, which probably weighed more than mine and Dennis's backpacks together.

Holding my breath I started climbing the stairs and stopped by the cage. As well as the stumpy tail, the poodle now had his nose sticking through the bars of the cage. I let him lick my finger and cursed myself for not nicking something from the kitchen. When I thought this house couldn't get more bizarre I noticed that the wall leading up the staircase was decorated with Japanese-looking cats. They all had collars with long spikes and a lead attached to them. The lead was held by a Geisha. I paused. Why is it that you observe certain things and not others? Were there things in this house that Dennis had spotted, but I had missed and the other way round? Or even worse, things that we had both missed. I didn't feel like getting back to sleep.

While I had the house to myself I might as well make the most of it. Why not waking the daughter up and ask if she wanted a drink and a chat? No, that would be bad. If I were to wake her up, I'd better tell her to go to bed. Besides I should really check on Dennis. He suffered from very distressing nightmares. What if he had already woken up? Once he threw himself out of a bungalow window because he had a dream where I was unfaithful. Luckily he landed on the sand in the shade of a big palm tree. Please don't let him be out sleep-walking, I whispered to a little Buddha-figure who was resting on a hook next to one of the Japanese cats. I hurried up the stairs and went through the little hall and opened the door. The chill from the air-con was a shock. I dropped Dennis's clothes and let out a silent scream.

How I made my way back to the right bedroom is unclear. Dennis was asleep in the same position. Never mind the lack of air. I turned him over and dressed him in two sarongs and one blanket. The image I had seen made the paintings of the bare-breasted women appear as innocent as the pink Mickey Mouse-shorts. Last night's fried rice was making its way up my throat.

I walked over to the opposite wall and felt with my hand over the only surface that wasn't covered by something. Then I started to feel the hand-woven mat. And sure enough, there it was; a hole in the area that had the same colour as the night-sky. I didn't need to look; I knew what was on the other side.

The hostess had been asleep in the King-sized bed, her long black hair draped over the duvet. But the host had been on his knees facing the wall of the guest bedroom, his hand in his pants.

The sun found its way in through the mosquito net. I reached for the window above the mirror to let some air in, but it was too high up and just like the dog cage I don't think it was meant to be opened that often. I don't know if Dennis had transferred one of his nightmares to me, or if last night had been as real as the hand now cupping my breast. "We got to get out of here" I said. Dennis wiped his forehead

with my sarong. "You are right. I couldn't stand another hour in this sweat box. But don't forget the free breakfast." I don't think I could have managed anything, even if I was served fish and chips. Dennis opened the wardrobe and rummaged in his bag. "Where are my clothes, darling?" I shrugged. "You probably forgot them in the shower last night." I didn't know how to tell him. I just knew Dennis had to eat otherwise he would cut the balls off the Danish guy. There must be a better way of taking revenge.

As soon as we stepped out on the landing the poodle started to moan. Poor thing! I should've given him some water at least. I bent down to open the cage. But the dog didn't move. It just sat there, as solemn as the St Bernard statue. I whispered to Dennis, "Let's get out of here, quick". Before he had a chance to answer a singsong voice came from the kitchen. "Are you ready for breakfast?" Dennis wasn't late to agree. We trod through the lounge and were told to wait outside, by the poodle. It smelled of grease and sun-tan lotion. On a chair Dennis's shorts, T-shirt and pants were neatly folded together. I wondered where the master was. He had probably escaped after I had walked in on him last night.

The daughter, now dressed in a long flowery dress and her hair in a pony-tail, came out with two plates. Eggs and bacon. I spat out what had been stuck in my throat since last night. Splash! The orange lump had landed in the water. "Are you not feeling well?" the daughter said and put the plate down. "We don't eat pork," Dennis said. "But it's fine if you just put the bacon on another plate." It wasn't fine at all. The eggs tasted of bacon only. Dennis banged his fist on the table.

The daughter came back out again this time followed by her dad. He spoke in a very buttery voice. "Are my sweet hearts not happy? I could cook something else for you." I looked him straight in the eye. "No thanks." But Dennis was quick to order some extra toast with jam. He patted my leg. "You'd better eat, you know." I shook my sun and salt damaged hair. "You wouldn't eat either, if you knew that someone in this house just had a wank over you. I'll give you a clue; it wasn't me."

I didn't say it overly loud, but the daughter who was lurking about had heard. Swearing started in the kitchen. The Danish guy came out with the butter knife. "Get out of my house! How dare you tell my daughter such stories!" I asked Dennis to get both our rucksacks from the room. I had another spit in the pool. "How dare you let your daughter dress up as a whore and go out with condoms in her pocket!" The knife was dropped and I walked safely through the kitchen. The look I got from the daughter was as fierce as an electric storm appearing in a cloud.

The wife came down in her nightdress saying something in Thai. She looked as embarrassed as a mother telling her child how babies are made. Dennis followed shortly after, grabbing a handful of 1 baht coins from his wallet. "That's how much a night at Prince House is really worth."

We made our way to the front door. By now the Danish guy was burning the toast. "Don't you dare tell more lies" he shouted, picking the knife up. The wife was standing by the cage hugging her daughter who was hugging the poodle. I opened the door, waved at a Tuk Tuk driver, turned round and shouted. "Don't you worry. I'll write to the Lonely Planet." And that's what I did. In the new edition Prince House got listed as the homestay of a pervert.

Cadence - Sal Joyce

It comes down in sheets the warm southern rain. I stand on a dark wooden veranda, in front of a tobacconist's store, smoking a cigarette from a newly bought pack of Chesterfield Kings watching people rush about their business. New Orleans glistens beneath the shower in the humid late afternoon. During an unexpected break in traffic; mopeds and rusty cars, silence descends and somewhere above, "hm-a-hur-hm-ahur-hm-a-hur-hm-ahur" emanates from one of the overhanging apartments; a melody hummed in a deep feminine bluesy pitch.

The stench of tobacco drapes itself around the tavern. In the corner on an uneven stage, an old Pearl kit is set up. The bass drum must be as old as the building, its circumference wide, its pedal part wood and metal. I've found myself pushed back against many a brick wall in tiny pubs and clubs, no room to move, sweat pouring, stinging my eyes, my arms turning to jelly as I kept the beat going.

My first kit, bought for my fourteenth birthday, was a black Yamaha five piece and came from a second hand music store. It had scratches, dents and the cymbals chipped. But, like a first romance, the kit was my first love. I would polish it, happy when I could see my reflection in the black plastic trim on the toms and bass drum. But now, fifteen years later, I only have the high-hat stand left from that original kit.

I return to the hotel that I'm staying in. I go up to my room and drop my damp coat on the wooden floor and lie down on the bed. The wallpaper, a faded and stained dirty yellow, is peeling from the walls, pulling thin plaster away from brick. Lying back on the bed I watch flies dodge the blades of the ceiling fan. Rhythms enter my mind and I start humming a Skin Yard song. This leads me onto contemplating who is the best drummer to come out of the Seattle grunge scene of the nineteen nineties. I've been in town for two weeks now, but previous to that I'd fulfilled a teenage dream by visiting the Emerald City, a place I'd long been enamoured with having given me the soundtrack to my adolescent years; Malfunkshun, Green River, Mother Love Bone and then later transatlantic crossing bands such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Mudhoney and Tad.

Drummers though, my top candidates: Barrett Martin, Matt Cameron, Matt Chamberlain and Dave Grohl. Dave certainly had the power, Barrett good fills, done some great work with Screaming Trees. Chamberlain, maybe a bit light, but solid enough, Matt Cameron highly versatile, a real workhorse live, although maybe a bit busy a times. Despite that it's got to be him, he has after all done some of my favourite fills and rolls of all time.

The first band I was in, after two school covers bands, was heavily influenced by grunge with, it has to be said, an added touch of Metallica-esque heavy metal. We were a three piece, P on guitar/vocals, myself on drums but with a revolving door policy on bassists. We were collectively known as Grass, an asinine moniker, but we thought it was okay at the time. We saved what little money we earned in various post-school dead end jobs on improving on what little equipment we had. The band lasted around three years and we had some really good tunes, very punk, very heavy, we had quite a following. In that time I think we must have played every pub in East Anglia that would put a band on. We split when P, who couldn't get through his day without dropping several E's and smoking weed continually, stopped turning up for rehearsals and then gigs. We had

recorded a demo with The The frontman Matt Johnson producing. Roadrunner Records were interested but P was more attracted to staying up all night, getting stoned, whilst listening to techno and waiting for the sun to come up. So that was the finish of that.

After the disintegration of Grass I didn't play for a year. I got a job in a record shop, spent more time going out to bars and clubs, having fun, and enjoying life. But I always felt that something was missing, and bringing music back into my life was something I needed to do. But I knew I didn't just want to play generic rock music and I didn't just want to be another drummer. I wanted to be the best, or as pre-eminent as I could; I have sought to become skilled at as many styles as possible.

I had never had any lessons, well I had a dozen when I initially started; it was an unfulfilling experience. The tutor would leave me in tapping on the kit whilst he looked after his children in another room.

I learnt by putting on headphones and listening to tunes with the volume turned up high, just playing along. I would practice every spare moment of the day. I was fortunate enough that my parents didn't use their garage so I was able to sound proof it with empty egg boxes and thus make as much noise as I could. In summer it got so hot in there, perspiration would run from every pore. I also needed to build strength up in my arms so I had a punch bag hanging in the garage and would go ten rounds with it everyday.

The rain has stopped. The air that had been cooled by the precipitation now, once again, turns muggy. I get up from the bed, unbutton my shirt and throw it onto the bed, I turn on the radio and tune into the local station. I pick up my Vic Firth drumsticks and start tapping on the snare drum I have set up in the room. I'm looking forward to tonight. As soon as I got in town, two weeks ago, I immediately started looking for some guys to jam with. I found adverts and approached some buskers in the street. It wasn't long before I was working a second hand kit, borrowed from Max's Music, in a disused and damaged garage, left vacant after hurricane Katrina brought her devastation, the four of us, me the solitary white guy, making magic music in the heart of desolation, a mixture of jazz, blues, bluegrass and soul.

Samson Appended - Sarah Hilary

He's the first off the train at Paddington, blustering a path through his fellow passengers. I want to call him Samsonite, after his briefcase, Samson for short.

It's one of those wheeled affairs, no larger than his backside but bursting at the seams with laptop, clothes, papers, maybe a small animal of some kind, who really knows? He humps it behind him on four feet of stiff silver leash that's curved and hinged like the spine of a dinosaur.

Soon the whole station is dancing to his tune as we dodge and skip, hop and halt to make way for his absurd appendage, ball and chain of an existence.

It isn't happy around corners, the bag. It wobbles and refuses. Samson backs it up and tries again. One half of it lifts right off the ground, like a dog cocking its leg at the junction of two walls. Samson tugs at the leash, not looking back.

The bag is busy, it won't be budged.

A stream of yellow liquid is fluting from one corner of the cocked bag. A can of beer, I guess, shaken in transit and pissing now its contents merrily over clothes and laptop, work papers and wash-bag.

Will Samson applaud the wet ruin of his despised life? Or will he curse and kick the bag for its betrayal? I wish I could follow him and find out but the underground takes him away, leaving a dribbled trail that's quickly dried by the steady tramp of feet.

The Novel - Sai Joyce

I sit relaxed in a faux red leather armchair. I'm being whipped up by tales of a far off land; stimulated by the rhapsody of written lines that jump from the page and circle in my psyche. As I read I could almost be the protagonist, experiencing the life and seeing the sights he sees, after all we're only separated by distance and time.

It's the sort of book that when you put it down you still feel that you're in the novel, like when exiting the cinema and feeling that you're the person in the film; the hero.

I reluctantly turn my attention to the ringing phone that's cutting through my daydream, drawing me back and exposing the monotonous actuality of the life I lead.

*

We meet at The Smiling Mouse, our local. Inside the dark green walls are adorned with black and white pictures of the Rat Pack - Sinatra, Davis Jr, Martin and co. I presume that their epitome of preserved Hollywood cool is intended to rub off on the establishment that would otherwise be seen as a 'wrong end of town' drinker.

Mike is in buoyant mood and, as usual, conversation is dominated by him discussing, or rather telling me, about his writing.

The evening wears on with bottles of beer turning into pints and pints turning into shorts. We stumble out of the pub at midnight, eager for more.

Outside the stars guide us to Razzle's, a popular nightclub in the centre of town. The club is packed; wall-to-wall with people chatting, drinking and dancing as multi-coloured lightning sweeps the room and music pumps.

We make it through the throng around the bar and Mike gets a round of drinks in.

We're sipping our pints, leaning against a prefabricated wall.

*

I wake. My mouth is dry and my head is throbbing to a silent beat. I stink of cigarettes and can't remember getting home; I can't remember what happened after we got into the club.

I rise and make a cup of sweat, strong tea and shuffle, naked, over to the armchair and pick up the novel. I read through stinging eyes, which widen in bewilderment as the events that I couldn't remember from the previous night now come back to me. They are there before me in printed text between the covers of the book.

contributor biographies

Claire Askew is a twenty-one-year-old English Literature Masters student at the University of Edinburgh. She is a member of a small Edinburgh University-based writers group, The Blind Poets.

Ben Barton is a poet and journalist from Folkestone, Kent. His poems have featured in books and magazines worldwide. He has a website at: benbarton.co.uk.

Idris Caffrey has had poems published in The Rialto, Acumen, The North, Orbis, Smiths Knoll and Envoi. Selected Poems collection to be published by Original Plus Press.

Michael Cuglietta resides in Orlando, Florida. He has been published in various different magazines both on-line and in print.

Sarah Fouts is a twenty-year-old *completely* unpublished poet. Sarah devotes much of her time to reading loads of fiction, journaling & eating up movies from the public library.

Louise Halvardsson was born in Sweden. Her novel -'*Punkindustriell hårdrockare med attityd*'- about her teenage years is due for publication by an independent Swedish publishing house.

Sarah Hilary's work has appeared in Literary Fever, Every Day Fiction, Ranfurly Review and Zygote in my Coffee. Sarah blogs at sarah-crawl-space.blogspot.com

Sai Joyce is working on a book.

Fred Johnston was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1951. He is the founder of Galway's annual literature festival. He lives and works in Galway, on Ireland's West coast.

Phil Knight hails from Neath in South Wales. Poems widely published.

Melissa Mann is a writer, founder and managing editor of *Iltzine Beat the Dust*. Her work can also be read in a number of online and print literary publications.

Emily McPhillips was born in 1985. She lives in Manchester where she studies Journalism at Salford University. She has had her work published by 3am Magazine and Straight From The Fridge.

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“open wide the windows of our
spirits and fill us full of light; open
wide the door of our hearts, that
we may receive and entertain
Thee with all our powers of
adoration“

- Christina Rossetti