

Issue 11

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2018

# The Edge

poerty / art / interviews / stories



Northumbria University's Creative Magazine

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# EDITORIAL

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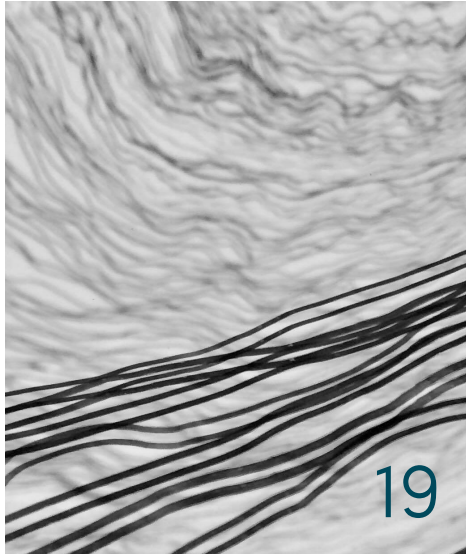
Hello everyone! I'm immensely proud to be presenting 2018 Spring/ Summer issue of The Edge! This is my first – and last – issue as editor-in-chief of the magazine, as I will be graduating from my BA in English Literature and Creative Writing. I got involved with the magazine in my first year when my lecturer Kaye Kossick approached me, saying she was looking for a literature editor. I have since seen The Edge be overseen by Daisy Hildyard and Fiona Shaw in my respective second and third years, and I'm very grateful to Northumbria University for providing me with a chance to develop my creative and editorial skills under such excellent guidance from lecturers.

It has been an absolute privilege reading everyone's submissions and seeing the range of artistic talent Northumbria University has to offer. The Edge is a fantastic opportunity for students to share their work. Our submissions range from centenary-appropriate wartime stories to the exploration of masculinity in art, and it's just an unusual coincidence that so many of our submissions feature death! I suppose, in the words of Khaled Hosseini, 'sad stories make the best stories'. The standard of the submissions this year has really blown me, and the rest of the team, away.

The team are a group of creative students studying several different courses at Northumbria University. We offer our free time and services, and we're incredibly proud of our production. However, a lot of us are in our final year, so rather than a call for submissions for our next issue, we are asking for any student who has a passion for writing, reading, editing or design to join the team next year. If you are interested in the role, please email [fiona.shaw@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.shaw@northumbria.ac.uk) for information on how you can become involved.

Thank you,

Lucy Twist  
& The Edge Magazine Team



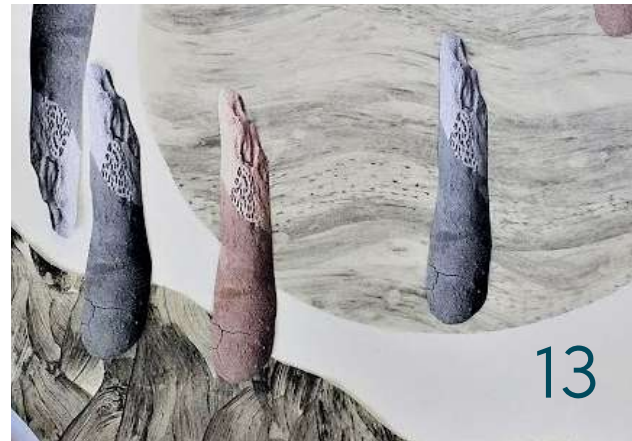
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# ALMA SCRATCHES AN ITCH

*Story opening by Barry Marshall*

The train rattled around the curve and pulled into the station. Alma Garcia opened the door and stepped into the carriage. The heat buffeted her and she smiled widely, the fine lines around her eyes puffing out powder. She felt, for a fleeting moment, at home. It was the height of summer but that meant little in this grey, cold alien country. There had been a chill in the air since Alma had landed at Heathrow; this was the first time since she had stepped off the plane that her hands felt free of the curl of arthritis.

Alma had bought a seat in standard class for the trip to Edinburgh, but she had little interest in sitting. She instead stood in the corridor, where she could remain out of view behind the door to the carriage. Alma disliked spending money on frivolity and loathed feeling conspicuous; here she could stand alone and watch the cavalcade of travelers. So many drunken young men and loud, excitable children for the festival! The hot tin can behind her thrummed with life and Alma cast her eye backwards, safe in the knowledge that anybody walking out of the door would pass her by unnoticed. Her small fingers curled and uncurled mechanically. A young couple walked past her, their arms wrapped around each other's waists. Alma's eyes were drawn to their bulging pockets for a split second, no more than that, she promised herself.

The bustle, the heat and the freedom she felt in her fingers threatened to combine into an intoxicating compound. Alma closed her eyes and let her mind wander back across the Atlantic to the marketplaces in Pachuca, where she spent many a happy hour wandering alone amongst the crowds. Every weekend, new sights and sounds, new faces passing by her, new opportunities.

As the warm air nuzzled her cheeks and neck, she began to feel that familiar, maddening itch deep within her soul. Alma told herself to think of her granddaughter, the very reason she was here in the first place. Such a precious pearl, her dark eyes so like those of Alma's late husband. Even over the poor Skype connection, the resemblance was startling. Alma's granddaughter was almost a month old now and this trip was about her, nothing else. Alma told herself to think of her own daughter, stuck with a newborn and otherwise alone in a strange land. She needed her mother; she always had. Alma told herself all of this, already knowing that she would scratch that itch.

# EVERY DAY

Every day I walk the same route,  
Back and forth, back and forth,  
Every day he's there.  
Not against the wall,  
Not on a bench,  
He stands in the middle of the path.

I try and keep my head towards the floor  
I try not to think about it,  
But I do.

I look at all the faces I pass,  
I think about that thing we don't discuss.  
It could be anyone,  
Any one of these faces could be you.

I will never know.

I keep walking,  
I get to the track, I step on  
I put my head down,  
I don't want to look at the faces.

You don't know it,  
You don't discuss it,  
It makes you uncomfortable.

My hands clench.



I get off and walk up the track,  
11:34

He's stood there again.

He smiles at me and my flatmate is looking at me,

I tell him that he does this every day.  
"He must like you"

The man at work keeps coming in,

The first day he said,

"I know you from somewhere"

I search his face,

It could be him.

My hands clench

He leaves after a while

But he comes back.

"If you were in my phone, you'd be the only Robyn"

I clench my fist.

"I'll figure out where I know you from"

I clench my fist.

I stopped walking home.

Words and images by Robyn Benham



# studio visit

## Interview **Becky Norrington**

*Chloe Randall is currently studying Fine Art at Northumbria University, and has recently been accepted onto a Master's degree in Museum Studies at Newcastle University. Her practice has evolved over her time at Northumbria, expanding from painting to mixed media sculpture and installation.*

*Follow Chloe on Instagram:  
@chlorandart*

Above: *Music Lessons*  
Opposite: 45

### **Could you tell us a bit about your current practice and what's happening in your studio?**

Of course! Over the past year I've become really intrigued by the idea of the abstract self-portrait. I think this interest came about through my research and through history lectures last year. In my studio I've been working with the idea of making portraiture that depicts me through things other than my physical appearance – so I've been making work that explores things like memory, childhood and experience. It's all become quite abstract.

### **Can that still be classed as a self-portrait do you think?**

I think so yes! It's off putting to some people as they consider self-portraiture to be a very loaded term, one that's already a set title for a particular thing, but art is all about exploring the new and reinventing the old, and that's exactly what my practice is about, exploring how something can be something else. In my current work I am looking at how a person can be depicted through the visualisation of a memory, experience or aspect of personality. This is usually quite abstract. For example, I recently created a work that was made





of hundreds of tiny Blutack bunnies; that was based on a childhood memory from when I was about six – I remember always taking a tiny blob of the stuff in music class, and making and remaking this little form over and over to entertain myself as we sang hymns. While the work obviously looks nothing like me and can be interpreted in many ways by different people, it's fundamentally about a part of my childhood, a personal memory and made through this repetitive action I mimicked

from then – so to me this makes it a self-portrait, as it is work about the artist created by the artist.

**It's an unusual material to be working with, can you talk about the media you use in your practice?**

Yeah, an expensive one too! I thought about using something else for this piece, I even experimented on these bunny shape casts, exploring different media and methods, but it just seemed right using the Blutack, it's a link between that experience and now. I love that Blutack keeps the shape of your finger prints too, that's like a little Easter egg into the work, I feel like I'm present in the piece so subtly through that little genetic signature, that tiny piece of the physical me.

**I can see from your studio you do a lot of experimenting and working with lots of varied media.**

Yes definitely, colour is really important to me too, and nearly always a big presence in my work. I've done a lot of experimenting with media over the years, wool and hard dried paint are a couple of my favourite things to work with. Last year I experimented with material a lot, particularly in creating this work 45 (2017),



that was made of forty-five tiny canvases all made with a different media and displayed together on the corner of a wall. I really enjoyed that work.

**I notice there is less variety of material in your studio at the moment than usual in previous works?**

Yeah I hadn't noticed that until recently, but that will be changing soon – I realise now that that media is just as important to my practice as the subject matter, and I always enjoyed playing around with different materials so much, I'm excited to do that again. My practice is all very hands on and "crafty" I suppose, I work a lot in my studio and things take a long time to make, like the Blutack sculpture or my wool pieces. They're worth it though, I thoroughly enjoy the experience of making each one.

**So what are your plans at the moment, any current projects?**

I'm still really excited about what I'm studying; identity, memory and my body.



I'm really interested in also using the literal body to make work, so I have been experimenting with body prints, drawings and casting. I am also exploring that idea more literally – the body as a medium in itself, so I've been saving hair from myself and my family for months now, I am hoping to do something really cool with that. I've experimented with saliva paintings too, but I think that's as far as I'll go with the body fluids for the moment whilst sharing a busy studio! The use of the physical body within the work is something I'm really intrigued by as a way of creating a portrait – something that doesn't visually resemble you in any way but is entirely you as it's made with examples of your DNA. Marc Quinn has been a huge influence on that. His DNA portraits and body casts I think are fantastic examples of the modern and contemporary self-portrait. They depict him through not only physical resemblance in his casts, but in the use of his bodily fluids and DNA as media, and in the hidden subject matter of some of the works, like his battle with alcoholism. His works are so entirely him and have so many layers and depth into creating a self-portrait. I find that really inspiring. I am trying to make work at the moment that explores those ideas and themes, as well as get back to engaging with exciting and varied media.

**Work which I'm sure you'll be exhibiting in the upcoming Northumbria Degree show!**

Yes definitely! I'm really excited about that, I hopefully will be showing some really interesting pieces!

*Chloe will be a part of Northumbria's Fine Art Degree Show which runs from 15th June – 30th June 2018. Northumbria Main Campus.*

# TEA AND BISCUITS

*Short story by Amber Unsworth*

The kettle sang and Tom took it briskly off the hob to set aside onto a cooler part of the stove.

"You drink too much of that, you do," Carol said as she rolled up the morning's Herald and hit him squarely on the back of the head with it.

He laughed. "What do you mean? This is only my third cup today."

"Maybe so, Thomas Burn, but it's as though we have tea pouring out of our pantry, bursting at the hinges."

Shaking his head slowly, Tom smiled as he fixed two cups of warm, sweet tea. He had to scrape the little clumps of sugar off the bottom of the barrel to do it, but he'd be damned if he couldn't have a cup of English bleedin' tea before bed. "I know, Love. I know. It's hard times, and I shouldn't waste...I'll give up butter, my salt, even my bacon, but not my tea." He sucked the spoon and smiled at her with it sticking out of his mouth. "Even if it don't taste like normal."

Tom took their cups to the living room, placed them onto the small wooden table between the arms of two green, fraying chairs he swore still smelled like his mother, and sat down in his.

"Did you hear? They got hit down south again", Carol said, carrying in a small plate of biscuits she'd usually save for special occasions.

Tom nodded. He'd heard. Jimmy round the block had been telling him this morning as they shared a smoke behind the factory. That way he could return home with smoke laced clothes and Carol wouldn't know any better. Just another commodity he was wasting.

"Aye, them Jerrys won't stop till we're all gone," he sneered and took a drink. "Wouldn't be surprised if this was the last cup of tea of my life."

"Tom! Don't go saying things like that!" Carol scowled at him, and he took in her sad eyes and crinkle-cornered lips. Sighing, he leant forward and put a hand on her knee, his thumb idly tracing the seam of her stockings, thankful she still had a pair, else that'd be something else she'd worry for.

"I didn't mean no harm, Love. You and me, we're going to be just fine. If we can manage fifty years of marriage we can survive just about anything. Besides...I wouldn't wanna be the Fritz, Hans or Hermann coming face to face with you, poor sod would be sorry." He rubbed her knee again and she relaxed, laughing. He always did know how to win her over.

"Doris thinks she might be able to get her hands on some nice sausages for dinner tomorrow, says she might even be able to make a gravy," Carol crooned, and Tom could already taste it, salty and rich, and he hummed at the thought.

"Bah, I could do with a good dinner," he said, as he swallowed another mouthful of the tea he was nursing. The two sat in silence for a moment. Tom looked thoughtful, with a furrowed brow and pursed lips.

"Did I ever tell you about that day in the trenches with Corporal Stone? He was a funny bugger, that Stone. Used to carry boiled eggs around in his helmet like it were a basket." Tom chuckled and scratched his chin, eyeing the photograph on top of the mantelpiece that showed him alongside Jacky Stone, George Kipper, Titch, and Spoons. Spoons. He couldn't quite remember why they'd called him that. Carol said nothing, her silence a cue for Tom to continue.

"Well, we'd woken up one morning around three am by Stone thinking he'd heard shellfire. Turns out it was Spoons dropping a sack full of tinned bully beef onto the pans and cutlery next to him. That was it. How he'd gotten his name. Silly really. Poor man screamed like a girl." Tom laughed again, one of those deep, true belly chuckles. "So Stone pulled off his boot and threw it at Spoons. It started raining again after that, by five we were two feet deep in water. Smelled awful, it did. Then..." Tom paused and frowned, his body tensed and his knuckles bled white where his fingers gripped the handle.

Carol remembered this particular story now; how the snipers had started, how a stray bullet tore through the corner of a sandbag and how Spoons had taken it fatally to the head. It was her turn to comfort Tom now, so she curled her fingers gently around his wrist and hooked her thumb onto his.

"Should we head up to bed, Tommy?" Carol leant closer till she could rest her head on his shoulder. Tom turned his and nuzzled her soft, fragrant hair in kind, taking her hand more comfortably.

"You go on up and get the sheets warm. I'll put these dishes away." Tom stood up and took the cups to the kitchen. He waited until he could hear Carol's footsteps on the stairs and then the landing before retrieving a bottle of brandy from the cupboard under the sink. It was one he'd bought two Christmases ago, when they weren't so hard to come by. He poured a glass and swirled it carefully. The bottle was still half full. A little tippie before bed had always put Tom in a good mood and sent him easily to sleep.

"Are you coming?"

Tom heard Carol shout from upstairs. It was as though she somehow knew what he was doing, so he quickly took it back without wasting a single drop. As he put away the bottle, Tom thought about how he would finish the whole thing come V-day, and one or two more just like it. He and his wife would dance in the streets listening to Vera Lynn and eating sponge cake.

"Coming," Tom called, and climbed the stairs slowly, appearing in the doorframe of their bedroom. "You know, Love. I was thinking how grateful I am now that we never did have any kids. Else we'd be up all night worrying ourselves sick, thinkin' all sorts of awful things."

"Oh I know, like those two down the road there, they lost their boy last week." Carol smacked and fluffed the pillows on the bed hard. "Blinded by shrapnel he was, then taken to one of them military hospitals. Poor lad got an infection. God bless his soul."

Tom started to undress, peeling away his jumper and trousers, though he left on his vest and stepped into his striped pyjama bottoms. "Terrible deed, that. It's bad enough out on the front line, now our boys are coming home to die." He shook his head and disappeared into the bathroom. Carol followed.

They brushed their teeth side by side, sharing comfortable glances in the mirror, then Tom watched as Carol brushed her hair and she watched as he set out his razor and cream for the morning, before the two finally got into bed. Carol scooted as close to Tom as she could get as the dying coals from the bed warmer hadn't quite done their job. She leant up to kiss him, and he rubbed his hand along her side.

"Oh, Tommy! You've been at that bottle again, haven't you?"

Tom felt a brief pang of guilt, knowing she must've tasted the brandy even after he'd brushed his teeth, then he laughed and kissed her again.

"Might be my last," he joked, then closed his eyes as his fingers toyed with Carol's hair and the back of her neck.

"Love you, Tommy."

"I love you."

Tom fell asleep to thoughts of him and Carol when they were young, how they'd eaten chocolates on the pier in Brighton. How they'd tried for children, never quite succeeding, but having great fun practicing.

Carol was his final thought. The tea was his last. The brandy, and her lips, were the last thing he'd ever taste.

At quarter past three, the bombs dropped.



## THE EMOTIONAL TREE

Standing still,  
Moving slightly,  
Moving gradually,  
Standing still.

As I stand staring,  
Others walk by aimlessly,  
It can be touched,  
It can be stroked,  
It can be harmed,  
But it can't be moved.

As the wind increases,  
The leaves disappear one by one,  
Brown, golden, green,  
Gone in an instant.

If I took one leaf,  
Brown,  
Golden,  
Or green,  
Saved it from the wind,  
I could hold

A thought,  
An idea,  
An emotion.

If I took another leaf,  
Brown,  
Golden,  
Or green,  
Saved it from the wind and the rain,  
I could grasp  
A thought,  
An idea,  
An emotion,  
And never let it go.

This leaf,  
Whilst nature lends it to me,  
Is all of my...  
Thoughts,  
Ideas,  
Emotions,  
I will let it go and give it you.

*Poem by Helen Searle*

*Photo by Sophie Skinner*

# Becky Norrington



Follow Becky on Instagram: [@beckynorringtonartist](https://www.instagram.com/beckynorringtonartist)  
or visit: [www.beckynorrington.co.uk](http://www.beckynorrington.co.uk)

# GUY MANKOWSKI

Interview *Lucy Twist*

Guy has a PhD in creative writing from Northumbria.

His latest novel is *An Honest Deceit* (Urbane, 2018). All of his books are available from Amazon. For more information visit:

[www.guymankowski.com](http://www.guymankowski.com)

Twitter: @Gmankow

## What is your writing process?

I write to immerse myself in a feeling I'm fascinated with, or a situation I'd like to live in; by writing about it it's my way of willing it to life, but that doesn't mean it is necessarily a pleasant feeling or situation. However, it does mean there's something about it that I want to explore and understand. Having fleshed the idea out on the page I then work in the story, and start to think about how I can make my obsession something the readers will get obsessed by. I also take a very long time researching each book; this one was six years!

## Could you tell us about the book you wrote for your PHD?

When I was at Northumbria I wrote *How I Left The National Grid* for my PhD. I was fascinated with the 80's Manchester music scene, thinking of it as an almost mystical place where all this music that resonated with me – from The Fall to Joy Division – came from. By writing the story of a fictional band in that setting I was trying to get under the skin of my

preoccupation with that music scene.

## Do you have any writers that have inspired you?

For *An Honest Deceit*, I was inspired by the stories of real-life whistleblower, in particular a banking whistleblower called Paul Moore who I worked with; I edited his biography. I was also inspired by whistleblowers in the NHS who got the stories out of what it's really like there.

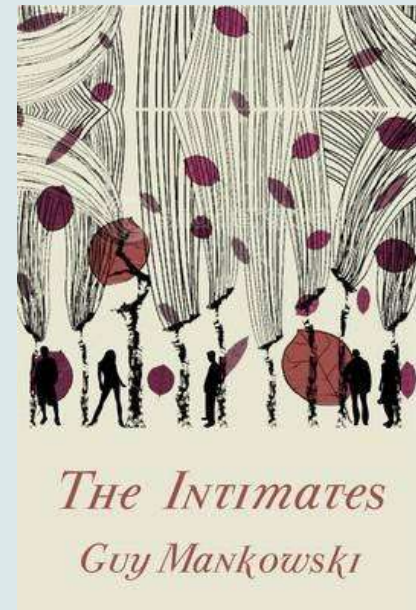
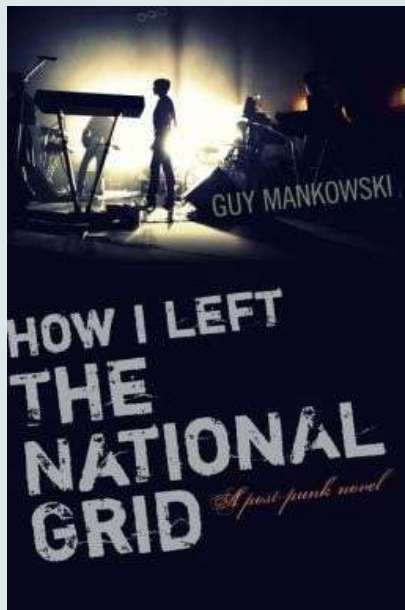
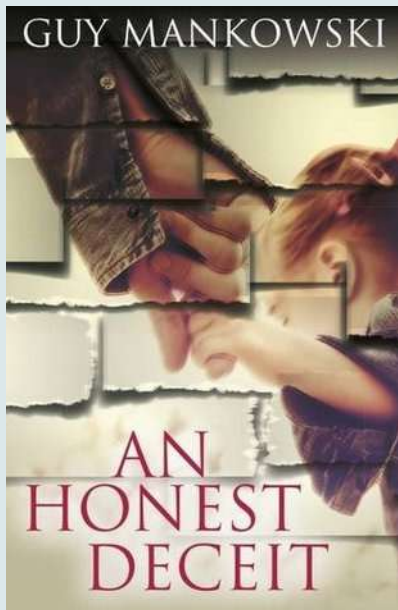
## Can you summarise the plot of your latest book in a sentence?

When a man tries to expose the truth about how his daughter died on a school trip, he comes up against all the devices the modern world uses to try and conceal it.

## What drew you towards this genre?

I didn't really realise I'd written a crime novel until people asked me "do you realise this is a crime novel?" I think just telling the story and being faithful to the story made it turn out the way it did. But I'm inspired by writers like Ruth Dugdall; I had the same publisher as her at Legend





Press and she's really good at setting a thriller in a world that people recognise. Mine's set in the world of teaching and she works in prisons. But when it comes to that motivation to do lots of research and make the books sound authentic, I think she inspired me.

**What have your previous books been about and how does this one differ?**

This one is very different. I wrote a book which was set in the Russian ballet and I received a grant and went to live in Russia for a while and research the whole setting there. And for the PhD at Northumbria it was set in 80s Manchester and the music scene. So this one is different in that I'm trying to make it very much about now. I suppose that's the big shift here; this novel's more current.

**Could you tell us about the competition that got you into writing?**

The writing competition was run by Legend Press, asking for submissions for their annual short story collection. That year the title

of the collection would be '8 Rooms', and I wrote a story about a man who's become convinced his house is an extension of his body. Although I'd missed the deadline I submitted to them and they included my story in that collection, which led to them commissioning my first book, *The Intimates*.

**If you could go back, what would you change about your writing career?**

I probably would have spent more time writing my first novel; I had a small advance to do it in six weeks and it was a lot of pressure. I would probably say to myself, "No, take as long as it will take." All of the books after that took at least years! So I probably would say to myself "take more time."

**What can you tell Northumbria students about the creative writing PhD?**

There are great supervisors who really know their field and it's a good way to not just create work that can get published but get you to meet authors and publishers and understand what it's really like trying to get your work out there. I would really recommend it.

# THE BATTLE OF THE SOMATIST

*Short story by Adam Adamson*

The shelling had eventually stopped at around four in the morning. Another sleepless night for Bill, whose duty had been fraught with artillery reports, spanning across the horizon, from the French in the east to the British way over to the west. Though summer was steadily marching on, the quagmire of the trenches soaked Bill's feet through his puttees and his thick cotton socks. All he wanted was a seat and to be able to dry his feet for five minutes, so as soon as the men had been stood down, Bill shuffled to the back of his dugout, looking for a comfortable spot. Sitting on the wooden slats with his back against the damp soil, he pulled his heavy trench coat high above his shoulders and slid into a fitful slumber.

Anne sprang into his thoughts even before his eyes had closed. Where was she? What was she doing? He fancied she had written on many occasions, but because of his company's movements of late, her letters just hadn't made it to him yet. His three children would be sitting around the writing desk, hampering her as she wrote. The twins; Judith and Hamnet, making suggestions as to what to say in the letters. His eldest daughter Susanna, wanting to add her own words of wisdom and wit. All of them smiling at the poetic way their mother spoke as she wrote. He missed them dearly, he missed them all, more dearly than he could have imagined at the beginning of this crusade.

He hadn't been asleep more than five minutes, he was sure of it, but the shrill whistles of the sergeants as they trawled the trenches looking for volunteers meant that whatever the actual time was, sleep was gone, done, never to return while the summer sun was in the skies. His bones creaked as he straightened his legs, no time to dry his feet. He yawned and stretched out his arms, knocking off his bunk mate's shaving mirror from its perch by the wooden ammunition locker. It hit the muddied floor of the 'cave' and managed to find the only stone there, smashing to pieces, and shaking him from his dreams of family life.

Bill looked down at the shards, and though he recognised the fragmented face that peered back at him, he struggled to accept the features engrained by months of bitter warfare. His once handsome features now ravaged by exhaustion and hopelessness, a hopelessness orchestrated by the generals and field marshals who would never experience the purgatory that they were putting their men through. His cracked lips, once the desire

of his woman, no longer able to smile for her memory. Who was this 'cuckoo' in his eyes? Even those once bright, soulful orbs now seemed to have witnessed far more than they could take.

Wearily, he raised his eyes to where his love was pinned to the wooden beam, keeping the trench roof from collapsing, the faded and cracked black and white image of Anne plunged him deeper into his reverie, as he gazed upon her photograph for the thousandth time. Her three-quarter pose showing the curvature of her body, along with the beauty of her face. Long dark hair cascading down her back, stretching out of shot, her bare neck draped in her finest pearls and silver necklace, a neck he had kissed and caressed many times. Her soulful eyes, as once were his, still held the light of innocence. She had never experienced the horrors of war, and he hoped she never would. Those eyes burned into his soul, and the flames they kindled would keep him warm for another day, it was at night that he relied on his thick, issued clothing, to do that particular job.

He closed his eyes and studied her face, her perfect face. Not a wrinkle, nor spot, no blemish could ever encroach on her alabaster skin. Where he had been transformed from a married, happy man to a jaded broken shell, she would always stay the same, an unchanging beacon of love in an ever-changing landscape. His heart wept. As he opened his eyes again, her lips seemed to turn upwards and smiled sweetly to her love, his eyes smiled for him. Gently, he put his wedding ring finger to his lips then placed it on hers. With a deep sigh, he turned and walked into the daylight.

As he stood in the trench with the cacophony around him, he tilted his head towards the bright blue sky. How dare the clouds disappear? How dare the sun shine down onto this battlefield of craters and scattered body parts? People rushed past him, barging by with the urgency of battle, sounds in his ears starting to dull and fade. He breathed out, a long drawn-out breath that loosened his shoulders, shrinking his whole demeanour into the background of the gully he called home. What was happening?

As he looked at his chest, he imagined he could see his heart beating. It was a strong beat, a beat that took him back to the comfort of Anne—that was where his heart was strongest, with his love, away from the sepia visage around him. Colourful and 'homely', a house touched by a woman who cared greatly for all who lived there. No colour here... except a crimson stain on his coat that shouldn't be there.

Red was the colour of his passion for Anne. Every time he looked at her photograph, he could see the scarlet of her dress and the deep cherry lips beckoning him home, and the flames she imbued in him roared the brightest vermillion, scorching every sinew of his body to the point of pain, a pain that made him feel alive. A pain that suddenly shocked him back to the here and now.

War was raging around him, smoke filled his lungs, and ejected clods of soil – spat into the air by exploding shells – rained down onto his prostrate body. Other men were gathering around him, a clamour of medical personnel, wrapping bandages, pushing

needles of morphine into his stiffening body, shouting to each other over the explosions. What was happening now?

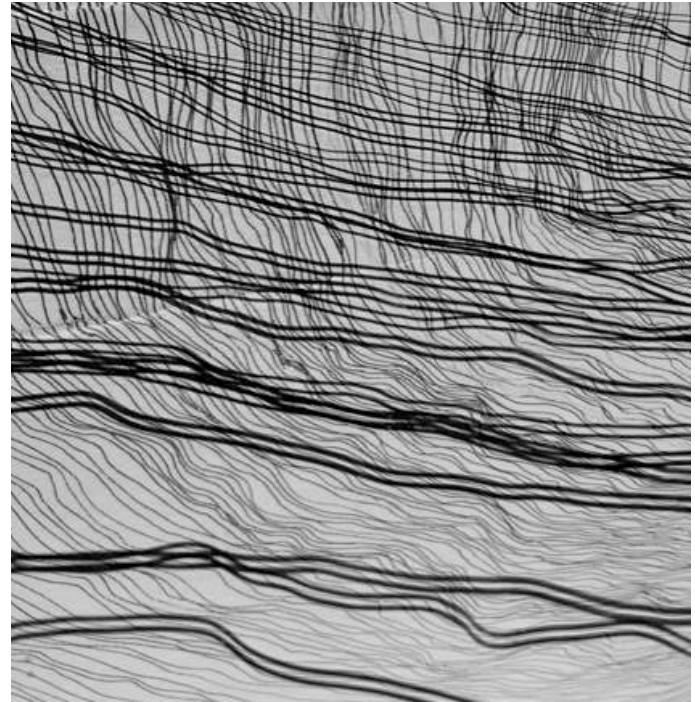
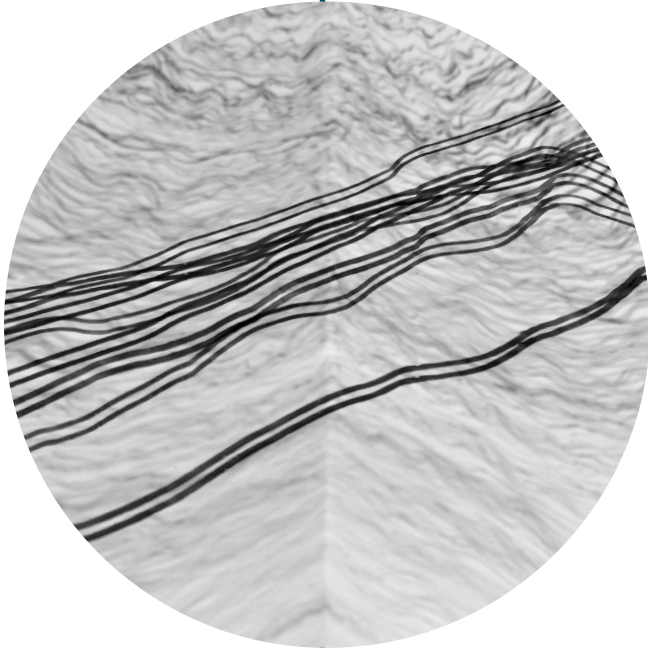
His eyes started to lose vision, then started to look inwards to the man he was, and the man he wanted to be again. A loving husband, a doting father, an avid writer. He shouldn't be here in the middle of all this. He should be entertaining people, making them laugh at his plays. He should be writing about tragedies, not living one. Of all his scribbling in the trenches, during lulls in battle, he hadn't made one single person laugh. There may have been little to laugh about anyway, except the absurdity of what was actually happening, but he missed the sound of happier times, and the times he was with his Anne were the happiest times he had ever lived.

He woke, blinking away the light that wasn't expected. The soft pillow beneath his head made him stiffen up with utter confusion, and a thick warm blanket lay across his chest. He felt the soft skin of Anne brush against him as she moved in her sleep. His confusion deepened, his mind raced with thoughts of... with thoughts of... he didn't know what thoughts were causing this, he couldn't understand any of it. Was he dreaming? Was he dead? The room looked exactly as he remembered, the wooden-framed bed that creaked every time one of them moved. The low-beamed ceilings held in place by ancient oak, cracked, pitted and ravaged with age, but still as strong as the day they were made. The highly polished oak floors that felt warm, no matter what time of year. It was all familiar, it was all... real.

As he stood outside the cottage amongst the hyacinths, gladioli and lilies, he looked over the thatched roof, off to the east, and closed his eyes when the sun broke its cloud cover. The warmth on his face made him breathe deeply, and the rays penetrated down to his very bones as he moved them with ease. No stiffness. No pain. No feeling? Was he cursed? His eyes still closed, he heard the door latch open. He didn't need to see, he knew his love was standing watching him. He could feel her loving gaze. He could sense her smile upon his heart.

Slowly, so as to savour the moment, Bill at last started to open his eyes. Which dress would she be wearing? How had she worn her hair today? Would she still be smiling?

# Megan Morrison



Follow Megan on Instagram: [@megan\\_banana](https://www.instagram.com/megan_banana)

# Tommy Keenan

Tommy is currently completing a Master's Degree in Fine Art at Northumbria. His practice is a response to the often repudiated connotations of masculinity. Having an invested interest in the notions of etiquette and appropriation within specific subcultures, the work performs as a retaliation against these subjected iconographies by questioning their implied social authority and sexuality. The sculptures rift between the sensations of awkwardness and undecidedness as an attempt to reflect the imbalance of gender binary and social doctrines.





Left: *Turn-Up*  
Above top: *Edna*  
Above bottom: *...Like?*

Follow Tommy on Instagram: @tommy.keenan

# REMEMBER, REMEMBER

*Short story by Eileen Wharton*

I wonder if you're aware of my presence, as you divide my life into so-called equal parts. You are shouting about wanting the dog.

-It's not fair Cherie. If you're getting Guy, why shouldn't I have Max?

-Because I've had him since he was that high.

She makes a space between her thumb and forefinger of about four inches.

-I nursed him when he cried at night. I cleaned the mess when he shat everywhere.

I'm not sure whether she's talking about the dog, or me.

I imagine you dividing me up; casting lots for my clothing.

-I'll have the blue dungarees with the red stripes.

-I'll have the jumper with the teddy bear on that my mother knit.

-You can have his teeth.

-I'll have his hair.

-No, I want his beautiful blonde curls.

-You can have his eyes. What big eyes he has.

All the better to cry a pond of tears.

-You can have his temper.

I go out and slam the door.

I'm in the garden. I can still hear the muffled sounds of arguing. It sounds like that party you had where Mam caught you kissing that blonde girl from next door.

The trees are blowing against the wind. The pile of sticks and rubbish I've collected over the weeks resemble a huge bird's nest. I imagine dinosaur eggs cracking open and a pterosaur carrying me into the mountains.

My scruffy old namesake sits at the top of the woodpile, keeping a lookout. He's wearing brown trousers with patches at the knee. His stocking feet are pushed into my worn out trainers. The tongue flaps like a thirsty dog's. His face wears a sneer that's supposed to be a smile. His hands are your old golfing gloves. The fingers are curled round as though gripping an iron.

I hold my arms up to the sky, my fingers outstretched. The sun lights up the space between the



branches of my hand. The edges of my fingers glow red.

-Guy what do you want for your dinner?

- Whatever.

I slump in front of the telly and switch on the cartoon network. Tom is chasing Jerry around the garden, holding a big broom.

-I'll have the broom. You've never used it.

Jerry runs into the dog kennel. He knows Tom won't follow him there.

Our dog bounds in, knocks me over and slobbers all over my face. Its tongue is everywhere like Mam's was with Mr Partridge that time.

-Get down Max.

-Don't shout at him like that. You're not fit to keep a dog.

-I've kept you for the past ten years.

-Kept me? You've never kept me at all. I've worked damn hard for my living. Not like you, in your poncey office with your arsey friends.

-You leave my friends out of this. At least they're not as common as muck.

I play in the muck I've spilt out of the pot, which holds a big yucca plant.

-Guy don't do that you're making a mess.

You can talk.

-I can't spend another night under the same roof as you.

-Well you know what you can do then.

Mam picks up the phone and dials.

-Sue have you still got that flat...yeah tonight...I know it's short notice...Thanks a bunch...Yeah, I'll pick up the keys about six....Thanks a lot, bye.

Acrimon Removals, oh hello I was wondering if you could fit me in today...I know its short..... You can, great...Yes four would be fantastic.

She replaces the receiver and begins throwing things into boxes.

-Mam what about the fireworks and the bonfire?

She ignores me. Her eyes are alight. Hot liquid boils over and runs down the sides of her face. She picks up a photo of me on my first birthday. I'm blowing out the candle on my cake. You're both grinning broadly, my cheeks are puffed out and my lips are pursed, ready to extinguish the flame.

My second birthday photo's similar. My cheeks are less puffed. Your smiles are not so broad and the flames are wavering in the draught from my mouth.

In my third birthday photo Mam's glaring at you, my cheeks are deflated and three wisps of smoke curl up from the candles, on three separate paths towards the ceiling.

Mam is throwing things into boxes. The kettle, hair-curling tongs, the camcorder with the tapes from Paris, where you were caught on film changing my nappy (the one and only time, Mam said.) She doesn't take the scratched love-song CDs and the red, heart-shaped vase.

The van pulls up at tea-time and Mam lets the man in. She dictates what to put in the back and you argue about every item.

-I bought that washing machine and you can put that telly back as well.

You pour yourself another whisky and your voice gets louder. The neighbours watch 'the show' as the removal man carries things out to the van and you carry them back in.

-You're not right in the head you.

-I mustn't be, I married you.

-What kind of man stays in the family home and leaves his wife and child on the streets.

-Guy won't be on the streets, he's staying with me.

-No he is not, he's coming with me.

I pick up my 'Stretch-Armstrong' and throw him into one of the boxes. I know how he feels, being pulled in two different directions. My arms are so long they reach around the world.

-I cannot get anything else in luv. You'll 'ave te mak another trip.

-Tom, I'll come back for my great-grandmother's desk. Do you hear? I'll come back for the desk.

-Mam what about the bonfire and the fireworks?

-Not now Guy.

I'm mad with her. I've been guarding that bonfire for weeks and stuffing my guy with the old stockings you say she doesn't wear any more, not for you anyway.

As we drive away, red splashes fill the sky and screams can be heard all over the neighbourhood. Catherine wheels spin like my stomach. The driver smells of sweat. He coughs a ball of phlegm into his dirty palm, rolls it round and round and wipes it onto the sides of his faded jeans. We drive into a smart estate, where every drive boasts a Volvo or a BMW. Noses appear round curtains as Mam knocks at the door of a double-fronted house to pick up the key to our new flat.

The van struggles up the road to the tower blocks and we're greeted by a thousand grimy windows. Grey stained washing hangs from fraying rope like dying daffodils. Rain starts to fall. A dog with a banger tied to its tail runs, yelping into the road and our van screeches in terror. The road is now wet and mist clings to the air. Rainbows in puddles are washed down drains and a single bird hovers.

The lift to the flat smells of urine. There's a pizza box on the floor with a melted cheesy mess stuck to the lid and there're splashes of sick up the walls. Mam whistles, pretending to be cheerful. The ancient lift creaks and groans as it reaches its resting place. We step out onto the concrete stairwell. Graffiti lines the walls and a foisty damp smell reminds me of the London Underground. A man with wrinkled, brown-paper skin sits on a step puffing on a Woodbine. He coughs a great, hacking cough that seems to start at his toes. His frame shakes. He turns to me and smiles. His teeth are like gravestones.

The door of our flat is grey. The paint is peeling and red bubbles show through. Mam turns the key in the rusty lock and pushes open the door. Something scurries across the room and disappears into the woodwork. Sad woodchip wallpaper hangs from the ceiling and walls and there's a smell of cats and mould. The removal man drops the box containing my life at my feet. The clap echoes round the bare room. My feet sound like thunder on the cracked tiles.

-In no time at all it'll be just like new.

Mam uses that false voice she usually saves for the vicar or your mother.

She plugs in the kettle and gives me money to go to the corner shop for milk. I run till my legs are pipe-cleaners. Gunshots can be heard from every direction. Blue lights scream across the sky then plummet to certain death. I turn corner after corner and the darkness swallows me.

I wake in my nest. It's still dark and I hear your voice.

-If she wants it she can bloody well have it, only it'll be a black ash writing desk.

I hear the sound of an axe chopping wood and you curse as though you've cut yourself.

-Her great grandmother's desk. Antique. Bollocks. Good for firewood is what I've always said. Queen Anne my arse!

Twigs dig in my back and I try to move to a more comfortable position. An old chair leg digs in my thigh. I snuggle into the guy. I'm glad I used stockings instead of straw.

You're pouring liquid out of a square tin. It smells like the garage. My eyes burn.

-Remember, remember the fifth of November. She's gonna fucking remember it alright.

The branches look like bones in a heap. I can see them silhouetted against the moon.

You throw slices of furniture on top of the stack. Twigs come loose and fall onto my head. A car skids to a stop and I hear Mam's voice.

-Where is he? I know he's here. I know you're hiding him.

-What are you talking about woman?

-Guy. Where is he?

-He went with you.

-Don't play games with me. I know he's here.

-I'm telling you, I haven't seen him since you left.

-What are you doing? That's been in my family for centuries you vindictive bastard.

I hear a 'splack' and the smell of sulphur reaches me on the wind. With a whoosh the moon goes out and the sun comes down.

Your face is grey. Tears drop from your eyes like dew from a shaken spider's web. Flowerbeds dance in a winter breeze. Muffled sobs and sniffs punctuate quiet chanting.

-Ashes to ashes, dust to dust...

Smoke puffs out of the tall chimney. Two specks of black ash land on Mam's shoulder and you swipe them away. They tumble in the wind, unite and dance towards the sky.



## *INNOCENT LASS*

A rose bud  
grows  
to become  
a beautiful flower

But,  
that innocence  
was tampered with  
by a weed  
more than  
double her age.

Slowly,  
thorns grew  
around her.  
She's too scared  
of being touched  
by the leaves  
of strangers and those she knew.

Innocence is a millimetre of silk  
thread  
torn in a moment.

*Poem by Ferdousi Begum  
Photo by Sophie Skinner*

## ***BITTERSWEET***

For all the pain one can endure,  
The ideal thing is to stay soft.  
I'll never give someone the satisfaction  
of turning me hard.  
I'll stay kind,  
Stay gentle  
Just to spite.

## ***HOMESICK***

I have been hugging the shower head too much.  
Warm water replaces a beating heart.  
The sun shows up little here,  
And when it does, it is not motherly Georgia,  
But passive father.  
Creeping in once or twice,  
Always at a distance  
Before seeping back into the obscure English sky.

*Poems by Makeda Yasmin Phillips*

# CABIN

*Short story by Jimmy Ryan*

Dawn crept over the white spruce, which encircled and isolated the property from the dirt track and the world. It was only the fog of his breath that disturbed the perfect stillness as he looked across towards the Cabin, and then, without warning, a miniature avalanche cascaded from the roof, forming a neat pile outside the wooden porch, its dull thud the only sound he had heard for over an hour, apart from, that is, the last of the wolves and his own trudging steps.

When he woke, he was still in the armchair, and though the old Cabin was warmer now, he couldn't remember having lit the brass wood-burning stove that alone gave the cabin a sense of character. He closed his eyes again, only to be called back to consciousness by the popping of the wood.

The family photo album lay open on the table, and as he turned the pages his sense of isolation began to melt. His rifle slid along the edge of the table on which it rested, but he managed to snatch it before it fell to the floor, and he congratulated himself on the evident return of his reflexes. He focused on one of the photographs – a picture of a gravestone. With a slight squint he could determine the inscription –

*'Two brothers – both alike in dignity.'*

Alongside this photograph was another of both men in their prime working alongside each other in the old mine that had formed their characters. They had agreed to pose for the photograph only because Mr. Grant Jr., the son of the mine boss, insisted they do so, but their coal-blackened faces could not conceal their annoyance of having had their work interrupted. They were small, bony men, but wiry with it, and thus well suited to backbreaking work that the mine demanded. As they posed holding their picks, a close eye could determine that both men were missing some fingers. Michael, the older of the brothers, was two fingers short on his right hand, and Milo's little finger on his left hand was no more. Both men had been trapped underground when a beam collapsed in the bowels of Sherrigan's Seam. Neither man revealed exactly how they lost their fingers – perhaps because no one had asked.

In life, the brothers had lived together in their modest shack on a peppercorn rent, and both felt from a relatively early age that their lives were pretty much complete. Neither had ever married, indeed neither had ever known a woman, for they valued one thing above all else – silence.

Not that they were without passions, but they were the quiet passions for reading and the breeding of geese, which they kept just outside earshot on a small lake on the neighbouring McLaverty farm, which in turn was well out of earshot of the recently bereaved widow

McLavery's homestead. Her husband would sometimes tend the geese (when his work permitted it) and would often remark on the unique flying form that the geese would adopt in preparation for their annual migration.

For reasons known only to the geese themselves, the usual V shape formation associated with flocks of geese in flight, was replaced by either a W formation or alternatively a double V shape, in which the outer V was supported by an inner V of geese. When the brothers first witnessed this, they accepted it as a peculiarity of nature, and gave it little further thought except when inquisitive locals sought explanation, and one of them would give a brief and mostly tangential quote from whatever book he happened to be reading at the time, and which the enquirer would often mistake for wisdom.

Sherrigan's Seam claimed the lives of five men later that year. Three of the men were what the locals termed 'incomers'. They were employees of the Hedley Mine run by the Monterey family, whose own reputation for safety was impeccable, as there had not been a single work-related death in its 80 year history. They had been assured that the seam was entirely safe (a dubious boast for any mine boss) by Mr. Grant Sr., who detailed both Michael and Milo to act as guides so that the three mineralogists could examine the possibility of extending the cut-and-fill operation. This would entail the eventual blasting of the old rooms and their supports, to create a sloping plain to allow the release of fresh ore into a deeper reservoir. The mine had been evacuated just three weeks before, when Mr. Grant Jr. received reports of excessive groundwater in one of the sinkholes. After three days of heated discussion, the boss ordered the men back to work. It was discovered that the room behind the five men had collapsed and though they were able to communicate via the truck tracks for a while, they eventually perished from lack of oxygen. It took a further week to clear the collapsed room to allow the bodies to be brought to the surface.

The Mineralogist's bodies were swiftly transported by train back to Nova Scotia and it was agreed after much deliberation on Mr Grant Sr.'s part, that the Mine be closed out of respect for the brothers, at least until the men were buried the following week.

The preacher had waived his fee for the brother's funeral service, and this would have been a wholly respectful gesture had he not sought to make it so widely appreciated. The snows had all but melted, but the biting easterly wind made the mourners huddle close to each other around the open double grave. Mr. Grant Jr. checked his watch again, before looking towards the cemetery's entrance gate, in the hope of seeing his father's puffing late arrival. Widow McLavery held her prayer book so tightly that her hands showed tiny vibrations.

When the preacher had finished the service, which was as short as it was unimaginative, he asked the sizable gathering to step back to give room for the gravediggers to throw soil across the diminutive coffins. At this point some had to be physically supported in their grief as they sought to muffle their sobs in their loved ones' overcoats.

Once again Mr. Grant Jr. shot an eye across to the gate, and before he could check his watch again he was distracted by Widow McLavery's elevated gaze. Her trembling hands were now still and her body rigid, and Mr. Grant Jr. feared that she was about to faint, but then her right hand moved slowly outwards from her body to touch Mr. Doyle's arm. Mr. Doyle instinctively reached for his handkerchief to offer to the widow, then glanced down at her for a moment when he too was seduced by her expression. He followed her eye line skywards and both stood perfectly

motionless. Mr. Grant Jr. turned his head casually to see what heavenly apparition had struck the couple but he saw nothing but the vast grey expanse of cloud speared with light and a few birds. The sun was fighting for its rightful place, but otherwise the valley, the mountain, and the skies were exhibiting a sullen respectfulness entirely appropriate to the occasion. Even the wind had dropped to make the rhythmic pounding of soil against wood the only sound for miles around. When it too stopped, Mr. Grant Jr. turned his head back, only to see that the gravediggers were also staring upwards.

The stillness and absolute silence gave the scene the quality of a hanging painting, a moment poised between life and its capture by the artist's eye. The dark, huddled figures in the foreground contrasted against the growing light, as if heavy oils blended with the delicate touches of the water colourist's brush, and whose subtle tint hinted at an endless universe. Out of this pale canvas, gossamer thin lines of ink demanded focus. The oils were prompted to melt back into life by the minute downward movement of Widow McLaverty's lower lip, and a distant but singular sound seemed to bear witness to her doubting eyes. The birds' languorous wing beat suddenly propelled them almost vertically, and in double V formation they swooped down again, only to rise as they flew over the graveyard with deafening calamity and made their awkward way towards and over the mountain. No words were spoken. There was no need for words and no need for knowing looks.

The gravediggers returned to their work, the farm and miner folk returned to their lives. Mr. Grant Jr. escorted the widow in silence to her home, and the graveyard was deserted once again. Until, that is, Mr. Grant Sr. arrived in his resplendent black coach, whereupon he surveyed the area with haughty confusion, then left in anger.



*Art by Ed Lawrenson*



# Catherine Thompson

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Contact Catherine at: [catherine-thompson079@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:catherine-thompson079@hotmail.co.uk)

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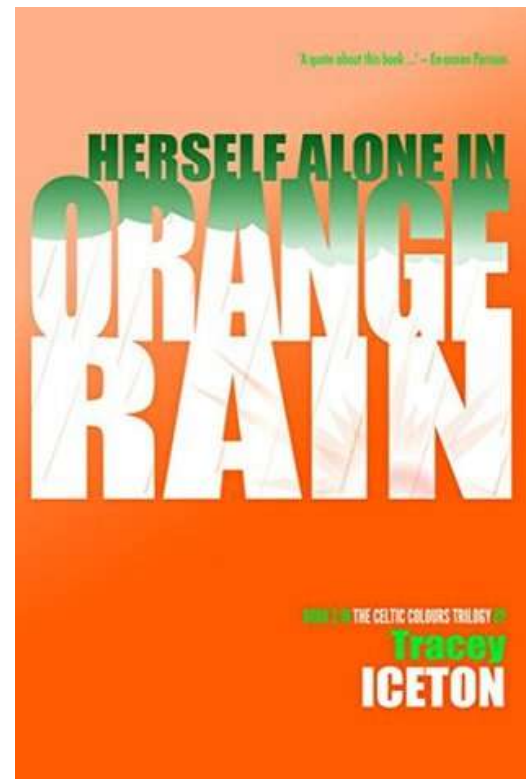
# TRACEY ICETON

*Tracey has a PhD in creative writing from Northumbria. Her two novels, Green Dawn at St Enda's and Herself Alone in Orange Rain are published by Cinnamon Press and available from Amazon.*

Interview *Lucy Twist*

## What is your writing process?

It depends on what I am writing. With short stories I need to have the whole thing worked out in my head before I can write anything down because I need to know what I'm heading towards. With novels, I feel happier to just start writing with a vague idea of where I'm heading, as there will be a lot of editing to be done anyway. In fact, with both parts 1 and 2 of my Celtic Colours trilogy I thought I knew how the book would end only to keep writing and find it was actually going to end differently. If a piece needs research, as much of my writing does, I will do what I think I need to get started then do further research as required. Lots of writers talk about how pieces often take you where you never expect to go and I have certainly found this to be true. I've learnt to roll with it, letting the story be what it needs to be. I also do a lot of thinking while I'm swimming, often coming out with full scenes in my head. I highly recommend doing something like that (walking is also good) to give you time to think about a piece. Writing for me happens in my head, not on my laptop – that's just where I type it all up!



## Who is your literary inspiration?

I suppose the person whose writing style I most admire is Canadian author Margaret Atwood. I've attempted to use my own version of some of her writing techniques on occasions – although I'd never dare compare myself to her. But in terms of who first inspired me to write I'd have to say Enid Blyton. I read my way through most of her novels when I was a child and still love them today. On cold winter days there's nothing better than curling up with one of them because, for me, they take me somewhere I could never go otherwise, and that's what I aspire to do for my readers.

## Could you summarise the plot of your book (or in this case, trilogy) in a sentence?

The Celtic Colours Trilogy (Green Dawn at St Enda's, Herself Alone in Orange Rain and White Leaves of Peace) tells the story of a hundred years of conflict in Ireland from the 1916 Easter Rising to the 21st century.

## What drew you towards writing about Irish history and the IRA in particular?

It was a holiday to Dublin in 2003 (before

I was even seriously writing) that started me off. We did the touristy tour around Kilmainham Gaol, now a museum. The tour guide takes you into the execution yard, stands you under the Irish flag and tells the story of what happened to the men who led the Easter Rising. It was a powerful moment, made more so for me because just prior to that I had been teaching Lloyd Goerge's 'Pinnacle of Sacrifice' speech, in which he calls for people to join the WW1 to help stand up for the independence of 'little nations'. The irony and hypocrisy of him saying that while putting fourteen men in front of a firing squad for doing the same thing – wanting their country to be independent – was overpowering for me. I bought a book in the gift shop and started reading about the Easter Rising, of which I knew nothing. In particular I was struck by Patrick Pearse, one of the leaders. He was a teacher and writer, like me. I became fascinated with the idea of what led him to do what he did, how he ended up facing that firing squad. He became a central figure for part one of the trilogy, *Green Dawn at St Enda's*. Immediately I knew there was so much material I wanted to cover in relation to recent Irish history that I would be writing a trilogy. Having told the Easter Rising story from the perspective of nationalist characters, the natural development was to continue with that point of view for books two and three, focusing on characters on the nationalist/republican side, many of which, especially for *Herself Alone* in *Orange Rain* (book 2) are members of the Provisional IRA. But having started from that angle I found it fascinating, developing the trilogy, researching what that organisation was like and the experiences of those who were part of it. In much other Troubles fiction, the IRA are the baddies, often caricatured and not resembling the reality so it became a challenge for me to 'rewrite' them in fiction, presenting something closer to what the group and their members seem to have been, from what I know of them from my research.

### **If you could go back, what would you change about your writing career?**

My only regret is not focusing full time on writing sooner. I let myself get sidetracked by things like earning a living (I was an English teacher for ten years). So if I have any advice for aspiring writers it's to dedicate yourself to it as soon as you can

### **What can you tell current Northumbria students about the creative writing PhD?**

The PhD is a fantastic opportunity for writers to develop a full length work; be that prose, poetry or script. One thing about writing is that it can be a lonely, isolated process, but the PhD gives regular access to the feedback and support of the supervision team, all of whom will be (certainly were in my case) extremely experienced writers who can really help to develop your work, pointing out things you just wouldn't see otherwise. They are also great for bouncing ideas off! And, naturally, they help you with the tricky critical writing that accompanies the creative work. The whole programme is really designed to help people get a foot on the ladder of academia, but I've also found that the confidence and life skills you get from doing the PhD, not to mention just how much it can help you grow as a writer, are a great grounding for any writing-related work. Since being awarded I've had two writer-in-residence posts and have run (am still running) some very popular and successful writing courses. Plus, I think the credibility a doctorate gives you is useful. It has certainly helped me to attract a few private clients who I now work with, mentoring them through the process of writing and editing their own full length works. I definitely recommend it to other writers.

*For more information about Tracey's work with writers or to contact her visit:*

[www.trywriting.co.uk](http://www.trywriting.co.uk)

# FRED

*Story opening by Lucy Twist*

Fred Cross met Roxanne Spencer at a club called Empire when they were in their early twenties. His eyes were first drawn to her because while her surrounding friends danced like no one was in the room, Roxanne danced for an audience, using her hips and hair to draw the men to her like flies around a carcass. She'd never bought a drink in her life, and she didn't ever intend to.

Whilst Fred never plucked up the courage to buy her a fruity drink, fate intervened when the club closed at three o'clock and both of them had to wait outside for a taxi. To the backdrop of threatening youths smoking and squaring up to each other, as well as girls staggering in heels too high, Fred built up the confidence to give Roxanne his phone number and ask her out on a date. He sealed the deal by offering her a piece of his doner kebab. He would never forget how radiant her smile looked under the fluorescent lamppost above them.

Their first date was at Pizza Express because Fred had the Tesco vouchers. He was a real gentleman, too; he pulled the chair out for her and told her she suited the navy blue of her dress. Fred thought she had a great time, even when he needed to pick the little flecks of tomato out from in between his thin teeth because the feeling of the food against his gums began to bother him. Roxanne just smiled.

Fred was pleased and flattered when Roxanne agreed to a second date. She didn't compare his lips to a wet Cornish pasty like his ex-girlfriend did, nor did she cringe at his prickly handlebar moustache. On the contrary, she seemed to like them, for when she got beard burn after a surprising heated kissing session behind Westlake Park, she didn't even complain. Fred, dizzy and giddy with glee, knew in that moment that he had found The One.

They went on more dates. The cinema was where they most often went, for Roxanne seemed to like sitting in the dark, not talking, just steadily going through a bucket of sugary popcorn.

"Oh, I didn't realise this film had Leonardo DiCaprio in it! He's really good!"

"I'm trying to listen."

She liked quietness, did Roxanne. Wasn't much of a talker. But that was alright with Fred. He was content to just sit with her. She was so beautiful. He could look at her until his eyes dried up and fell out and then keep looking. She never noticed. She

was keener on looking off into the distance. Fred admired her keenness to take in the world around her.

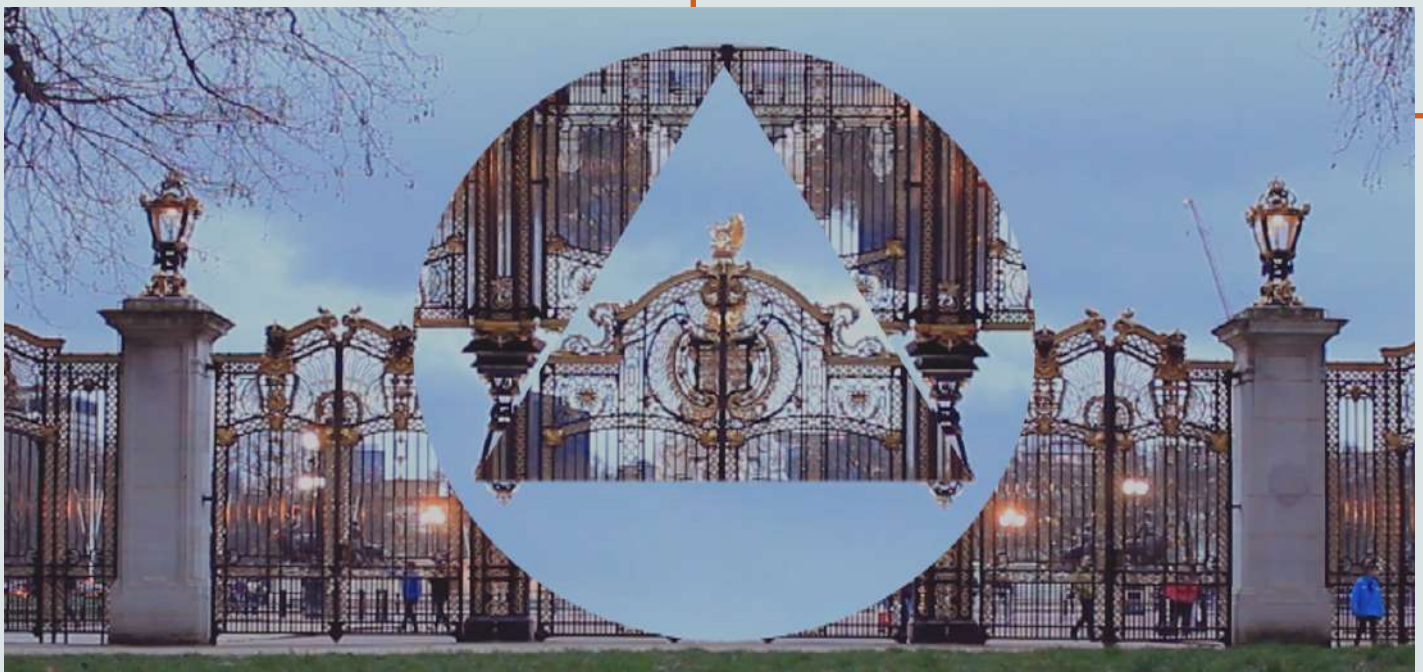
He threw an engagement party in the house he'd bought for them, thanks to his big promotion at work. Roxanne had looked so shocked to walk through the hallway of the house she would share with the man she'd been dating for four months. Fred was thrilled – as was his entire family, who were waiting in the living room to surprise the happy couple. Aunty Liv had made the vol-au-vents, and Fred's mother was noticeably eager to meet the woman who had made her son so happy – the woman who would give her the grandchildren she so desperately craved. When Fred got down on his good knee and produced his grandmother's engagement ring, Roxanne had faltered under the expectant gaze of Fred's family for an agonising minute before saying "Ok." O. K. The best two letters in the English language.

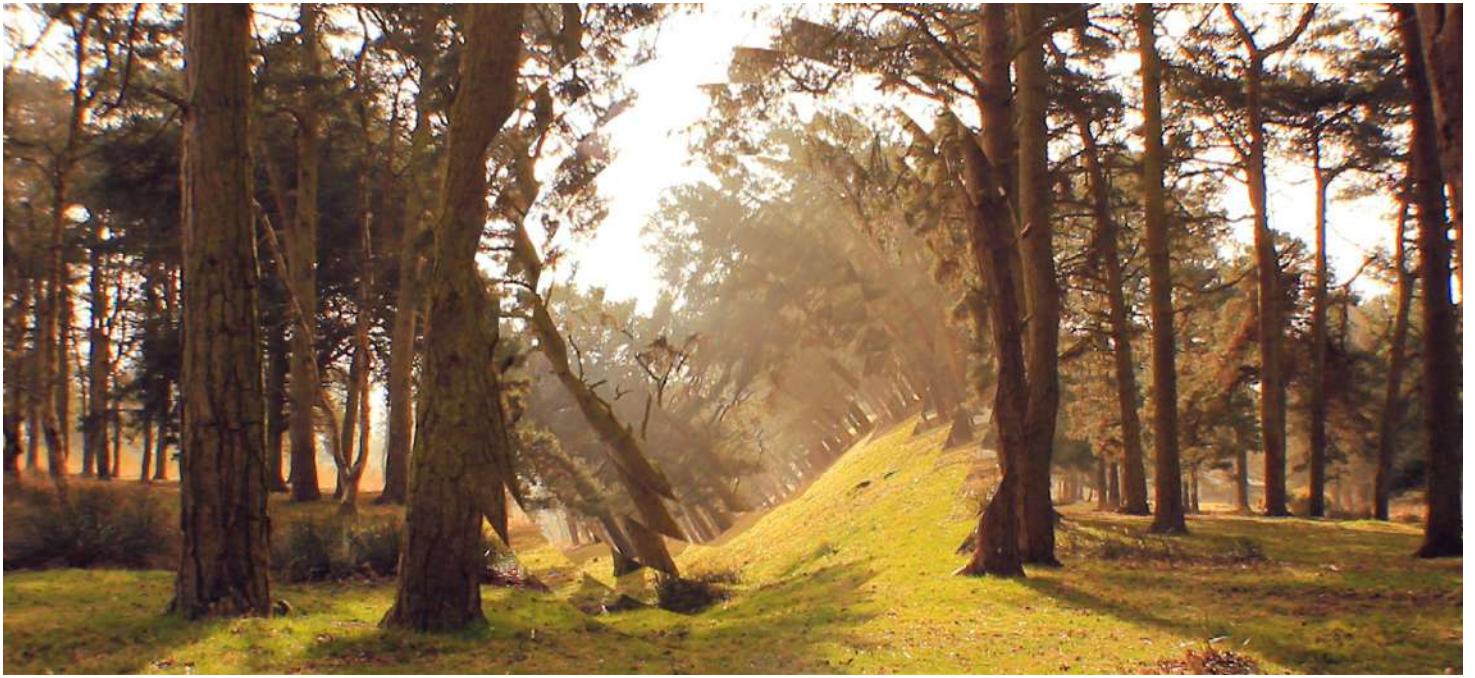
Fred didn't get a say in the wedding. 'Bride Knows Best' was what all of the women in his family harked at him, especially Roxanne. Fred's Sugar Pie wanted the best of the best; a big white princess dress to match the massive butter cream wedding cake, big flower arrangements on every table and, of course, an open bar. It was like being in a dream. Everything felt so right, so easy. Fred was more than happy to relinquish control, write Roxanne cheque after cheque to let her have the big day she had dreamed of, even if his mother clicked her tongue in disapproval; Fred really needed to watch his finances, even though Roxanne had agreed to sign the pre-nuptial agreement.

Fred didn't dare to ask what had happened at Roxanne's hen party. He received a voice mail from Lindsey Burton, Roxanne's best friend from school, who for some reason had always been opposed to her relationship with Fred. Lindsey was stinking drunk, giggling about how he should worry that Roxanne was enjoying her lap dance from the hunky policeman-themed stripper. Fred thought it was a bit hypocritical of a girl with a dad who used to do her fake tan to give him relationship advice, so he deleted the voicemail and pretended it didn't exist, even if it did leave him feeling like a maggot was gnawing its way through his brain. When Roxanne walked down the aisle the next day with a bruise above her collarbone and her Michael Kors sunglasses blocking her eyes, Fred kept his mouth shut.

He should have said something.

# Ed Lawrenson





*Follow Ed on Instagram: @edlawrenson*



# THE AFTERMATH

*Short story by Ryan Shanley*

*Dear James,*

*I miss your pretty kind of dirty face that I can't seem to recall. It's getting harder to picture it. I'm afraid one day it'll be a greyish blur, like the smoke of those cigarettes we shared. It's been too long. Too long since I last heard your voice. All those little quirks we found hilarious. I miss them. I wish I could say that to your face, but this letter will have to do.*

*I guess I'm trying to apologise for what I did, for what I caused. Most people would bury these memories into the deepest corners of their mind, but not me. Not after everything. Even now, despite the life we shared, in spite of all those days we screamed until our lungs burned, I don't want to forget it. I'd rather be heartbroken and have all the beautiful moments we had together in my head instead of wishing to never have met you.*

*I loved you so much. I just hope you know that. Perhaps a part of me will always love you.*

*Yours, Samantha*

*P.S. I hope the afterlife treats you well.*

\*\*\*

There wasn't a body, but he's gone. It's been a week since I left the letter on his grave, and two since they found his clothes over South Platte River. I take a final drag of my cigarette and stub it out into the snow before I continue along the street. It's getting colder. Everywhere I go, there's a chill I can't seem to shake. I miss his warmth as I walk through the streets. Boulder isn't the warmest of cities at this time of year, but James would always help.

Snow is pirouetting throughout this concrete jungle. It's beautiful, but it's making my skin burn as it hits my face. I slip the scarlet scarf around my face. I can feel it billowing behind me in the bitter cold. It's the scarf he wore on our first date; one of the only things left of him that I own.

It's not far from here.

Turning a corner, I see it at the end of the street. With an audible gulp, I bolster myself



and continue along the seemingly infinite lane. The trees are bare and barren, void of the emerald leaves they once held. I know that with every step it gets closer, but it seems so far without his hand in mine.

And it's there, standing in front of me. It seems hollow. There's no light but a flicker in the living room. The TV must be on.

With three knocks on the door, I hear a vague response from inside, and pull the handle. A deep breath. The steam evaporates in front of me, and I open it. With a slight smile, I step over the frame and into the warmth I knew well. She's on the couch, coffee in one hand and the remote in the other. A half-smile forms on her face as I shut the door behind me.

"Hi, Sharon..." I say.

"Hi, Samantha. You're looking as radiant as ever." She shifts her curled-up legs from the couch, tapping it lightly as my coat slips from my body. Her eyes catch the scarf around my neck and her expression lightens. "How are you feeling?"

I undo the scarf, placing it with care along the arms of the hat stand by the door. I step towards the couch, hugging Sharon lightly as I sit down. She's cold. I pull away and glance at the TV. It's muted, but I can tell it's some soap opera that Jamie used to watch with her.

"Honestly, frozen. As if rigor mortis has just—" I freeze, both figuratively and literally. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay..." She places the coffee down by the couch and pushes herself up, stepping quietly towards the fireplace. Her voice is quiet as she hands me a letter. "This came for you. I haven't read it, don't worry." I watch her glazed eyes trail to the stairs. "His room is still there..."

Standing up, I take the letter with a smile and hold her arm gently. There are tears in her eyes, but I know she won't cry. She didn't even cry at his funeral. I turn, and head up the stairs. His room is to the right. Sharing a short glance with Sharon, I nod gently and she flashes that half-smile before I continue up the stairway.

His bedroom door is bare and chipped slightly, and I pry it open with a creak. Part of me expects him to be there. The curtains are closed, but I can still make out the posters tacked onto the walls. Even the Polaroids of us with Ben and Michael are still above his bed.

Pulling the curtains open, I cough as dust floats through the room. It's too quiet without him sprawled across the bed. Instead, it's just the hoodie he wore the last time I saw him. He lived in that hoodie. He died in it too. I slump onto the sheets, letter in hand. My eyes catch the writing.

It's Jamie's.

My eyes narrow. Hundreds of questions race through my mind while my fingers try and tear the envelope open. The letter falls out and my eyes scan the first words.

*Dear Samantha,*

*Bet you didn't expect to hear from me, huh?*

I drop the letter. My fingers tremble as they brush my hair behind my ears. A sharp inhalation fills my lungs and I continue to read, as if I can hear his voice in my ear.

*Surprise, sweetheart. I thought, as everyone's feeling so Christmassy and sentimental, I thought I'd try something new. So, let it be one of those sentimental letters with loads of sweet words and heart-warming crap.*

*I wish I could be there to celebrate the baby Jesus with you. You always looked so good in the snow. Remember that Christmas we stole my mom's car with Ben and Michael? We didn't even plan anywhere to go. We just drove out to Lake Granby and watched the snow drift across that frozen lake. I wish we could go there again.*

*How's everyone holding up? I hope you're not too bored without me. Life is weird, but I know you'll cope. You always did. Through everything, you were my voice of reason, and now I want to be yours. Even if I'm not there physically, I'm going to be there for you. Always.*

*Don't worry about me, I'll be fine.*

*I guess, by the time you get this, the worst we planned for will have happened. I just want you to know it wasn't your fault. The argument, yes, because you've always been a stubborn bitch. But what I did, don't blame yourself. I just want to apologise for leaving you in the way that I have.*

*Anyway, I've got to go. We'll find each other again one day, maybe sooner than you think.*

*I love you, now and always.*

*Jamie.*

*P.S. The afterlife is treating me well. Thanks for wondering about that. You looked as good as always at my funeral.*

Folding the letter into my pocket, my feet move faster than I can process and I'm downstairs before I know it. I wrap the scarf around my neck and smile. With a short goodbye, Sharon throws a wave.

In the snow, I pull my phone from my pocket and dial both Ben and Michael. They both answer almost immediately. I'm sure they can hear the grin on my face as I speak.

*"I know where he is."*



*Preacher*

*Melody  
Sproates*



*Fass and Fass*

# BOOK REVIEW

## *You Could Do Something Amazing with your Life (You are Raoul Moat)*

by Andrew Hankinson

*Review by Shaun Wilson*

In the summer of 2010 Raoul Moat, an unstable former bouncer, got out of prison and shot his ex-girlfriend, shot and killed her new boyfriend, and shot and blinded a police officer, sparking a widely publicised manhunt which lasted six days and ended in his death. Andrew Hankinson, drawing from a range of exclusive material, has written an award-winning account of Moat's final days, told from the perspective of the killer's unravelling mind.

The second person narrative sucks you in like a drainage vortex of steroid-fuelled neurosis, at first prodding you accusingly on the forehead, before taking you hostage on a nightmarish descent into tragedy and chaos. Conspicuous at first, the use of second person soon begins to flow effortlessly, bridging the gap between subject and reader without the intrusion of a tangible writing style. Elmore Leonard would find little here to rewrite on the grounds that it 'sounds like writing'. It reads more like a vocalisation of Moat's conscience and inner conflicts, in his own words and coarse Northumbrian vernacular. Moat's self justifications are often followed by notes from the author, in parentheses, referring to facts that stop the reader from assimilating completely into a world of fantasy and delusion.

As Moat you will experience the hopes and failures of your past, such as Mr Trimmit, your feckless attempt at a lawn mowing business, your obsession with bodybuilding fuelled by a fear of bullies, and your doomed attempts to love and be loved. Many of your human experiences will sound familiar in their banality, but others, like your tendency to slap and kick your girlfriend in anger may well upset you.

What struck me was the humanity with which Moat's character was treated, removing him from the setting of media sensationalism and moral panic, and giving a balanced account of his life, revealing his vulnerabilities, his fears, and his often sickening inclinations towards violence, inviting the reader to confront their preconceptions and explore the nature of empathy.

As well as being a concept-driven masterclass in creative non-fiction (a CWA non-fiction dagger, and a Northern Writers' award winner), the book also serves as an exploration of modern morality and societal labels, especially those dispensed by mass media channels. It is a study of fragile masculinity, one rife with paradox: the hulking bouncer and tormented, tearful

wreck, the controlling alpha male who can't seem to control any aspect of his life, the stubborn man-child, struggling against the responsibilities of adulthood and failing to maintain relationships with his own children.

As the book is told wholly from Moat's perspective, many elements of the media circus are missing—he wasn't aware of Gazza's appearance, nor did he find out that Ray Mears had been drafted in to help track him down. Instead we see Moat striving to be understood in the face of imminent death, attempting to court the media with his version of events, writing sprawling letters of explanation around camp fires in the wilderness of Rothbury, dreaming up hare-brained schemes with his sidekicks, cooking burgers, and making rambling voice recordings of his life and times.

In the midst of bleak resignation there are curious moments of japery:

'There's a badger. It's been run over. You pick it up by its leg. It's mangled and bloody. You throw it on the windscreen and tell Sean to drive. You tell them it'll make a nice hat,' as well as a disorientating sense of surrealism:

'It all just feels like a weird video game now, a cross between Bourne Identity

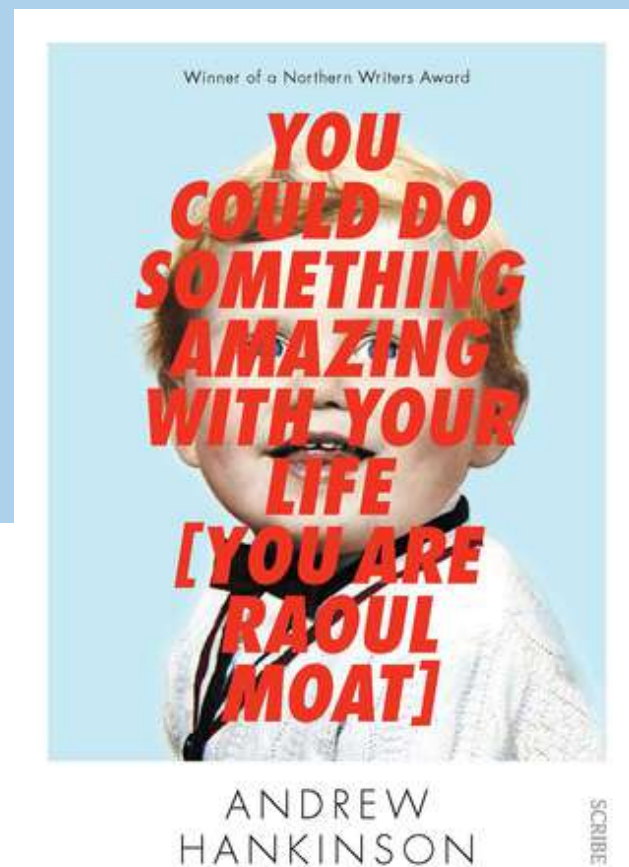


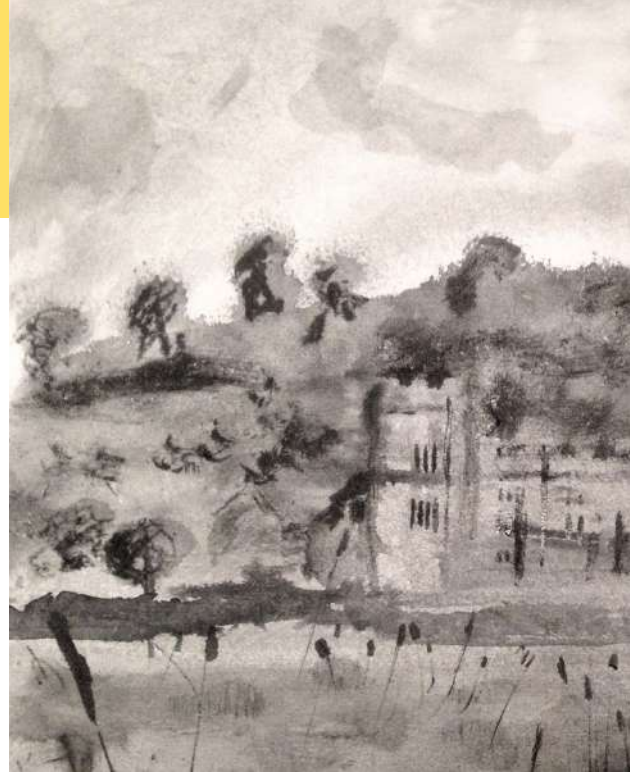
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and Grand Theft Auto, like you can do whatever you want, when you want, because people don't see what's really going on.'

The author has gained access to troves of previously unpublished material: recorded confessions, letters, interviews with family and friends, and the reports of police and social workers, enabling him to reveal more than the media frenzy that immortalised him as, among other things, a callous monster, a cowardly murderer, and a maniacal Rambo of the underclass. Perhaps what is most disturbing about this book, is not the violence you come to expect from its subject, but the fact you're not told how to feel about it.

I give this book 5 stars out of 5, and recommend it to anyone interested in Raoul Moat's life, criminal psychology or creative non-fiction.

See more of Shaun's writing here:  
[twitter@smw\\_writing](https://twitter.com/smw_writing)



Top left: *Sophie Skinner*  
Top right: *Ed Lawrenson*  
Bottom left: *Becky Norrington*  
Bottom right: *Chloe Randall*

# THANK YOU

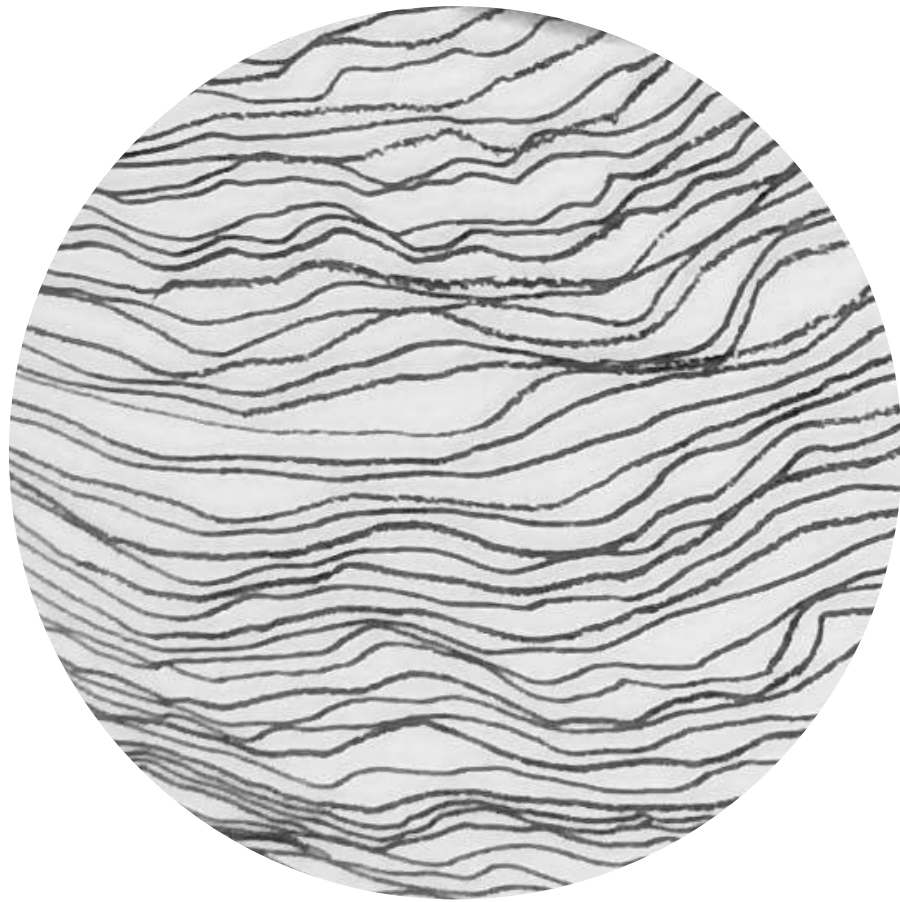
All of us at the editorial team would like to say a massive thank you to Fiona Shaw and Daisy Hildyard. The faith they have in us is incredibly motivating, and their assistance and guidance is invaluable.

Thank you so much to Guy Mankowski and Tracey Icton for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in interviews. Hearing first-hand from published novelists is a real privilege, and their novels are well worth a read!

We hope you enjoyed our magazine. Thank you once again for taking the time to look through it!

And lastly, thank you so much to everyone that submitted their incredible prose, poetry, artwork, photography and reviews. The Edge couldn't exist without you.

The Edge Magazine Team



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