

welcome

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OWM is edited by James Quinton & Elizabeth Roberts.

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editorial

Welcome to issue 19 of Open Wide. This year marks our sixth anniversary. For six years, we have showcased promising new poets and writers, and elected to publish those traditionally ignored by the mainstream magazines.

Throughout this time we have remained independent, relying exclusively on sales, and not resorting to advertising or grants, which by their very nature encroach on artistic freedom. This fundamental principle allows us to consistently produce what we feel is a high-quality publication.

It's also been important to us to avoid the temptation to repeatedly publish friends, allies and anyone who submits work with a promise of buying a couple of issues in exchange for their name in print.

Sticking our necks out to produce an independent arts magazine, without pretension, may have alienated some, but thankfully many more have embraced us.

This issue does feature a few familiar faces. Danny Rhodes and Heidi James are back with brand new short stories. Both writers first featured in Open Wide in 2003 and their debut novels will be coming out soon. We spoke to them about this exciting development, and you can read their views in the mini interviews included after their contributions to this issue.

Our feature interview is with cult New York writer/poet/painter Arthur Nersesian, and as always, we have an electrifying selection of poetry and writing.

Now, as we like to say, sit back, relax open wide and come inside...

James Quinton

Devil's Work

Danny Rhodes, England

I was at the age where I was beginning to accept that everything living must one day expire, hanging out in drink-sodden places where journalists gathered like hogs at sundown, hoping to break into their world, not knowing the truth of it.

I was in a bar somewhere in Soho talking to a guy who said he was seeing a girl who worked as a waitress there. She knew somebody who knew somebody else or something like that. I was feeling a little heavy-headed and when I left him to make a foggy search for the toilets I met the devil in the corridor. He was just exiting as I arrived and when he saw me he gave me an ageless grin. His eyes were two dark pools and he stank of whisky. After he'd gone and long after I'd pissed and washed my hands, the smell of him still lingered around the urinals. I smelt it each time I went to pay a visit. After the third visit I followed the stink out into the corridor and around to a bar at the back where an oiled-up girl was gyrating against a pole and men were sat in shady corners, slumped over whisky and gin glasses. I looked for him in their faces but couldn't locate him anywhere. Heady bass music rebounded off the walls and a strobe light flickered angrily. I went back to locate my drinking-buddy but he'd disappeared too, so I found myself a seat in an alcove and ordered another Jack Daniels. It was 1:30 am on a Tuesday morning. I was twenty seven years old. It was a good age to start thinking seriously about a career and a good age to start thinking about death but I had no idea that the next hour of my life would almost be my last. That's the thing about death. It can announce its intentions long in advance or it can sneak up in a second. Either way the end result is the same. You wind up here, writing down your thoughts on the subject in a big black book and then they send you on your way through the little door behind me. At least that's the way it is for most. There's always an exception though, if you really look for it. There are always niches if you're creative enough and if you have the guts to force a gap when you find an opening. The old hacks call it 'going out and finding the story'. I found my niche and I've been here ever since.

"Okay then," he said. "Say what it is you have in mind."

"Thanks," I said "You won't regret it."

"I already am," he said. "You won't be the last today who wants to tell me their life story."

I'd downed at least two more Jack Daniels when the devil came and sat next to me. The girl at the pole had turned into two girls in red rubber and a guy in a leather thong. He had the sort of backside I like to see on a woman, smooth and toned. It worried me how much I found myself looking at it. I wasn't much in to what they were doing though so I was

welcoming of the company. There was just the stench to deal with and those terrible dark eyes. I chose not to look into them and to keep my glass up to my mouth. He knew what I was doing but he didn't seem to care. Every now and then, when the two girls and the guy changed position he'd laugh out loud and clap his hands together. The rest of the time he sat there watching as if he hadn't come for me at all and I was just a stranger who happened to be sitting next to the devil in a dingy Soho bar, but I knew he wasn't going to just let me get up and leave him and I knew I wasn't going to see another sunrise.

I can't say I was that bothered. There was a little tinge of regret I suppose, that I hadn't done this and that, but there was something else more powerful, an overriding sense of destiny rolling in my stomach, so we watched the girls and ordered Jack Daniels until he reached out and took my hand in his clammy grip and whispered,

“Okay, enough.”

He got up and headed for the gents and I followed, making eyes at the other men in the place to show them it wasn't what they imagined. When we entered the toilets there weren't any urinals anymore, just a spiral metal staircase leading down and down and round and round until we reached a tiny door at the bottom that was almost too small.

“To stop them getting out,” he laughed.

“Do they?” I asked.

“Sometimes,” he said.

He pushed the door open and leant inside. We were in the interview room. There was a second door that led to 'you know where', two chairs facing each other and a lounge table in between. On the table was a finely crafted ink pen, a number of crisp forms, each one numbered and dated, some hospitality magazines for busy times and the black book. He sat down and beckoned me to do the same. I said I was sorry for not wanting to look him in the eyes. I explained how I'd always struggled with eye contact but he waved away my apologies, said it didn't matter and that he wasn't much into eye contact either. I went through the motions of asking him if he was sure I was the right man and he said that I was and that we should be getting along and so the formalities were performed. Every now and then he drummed his long fingers on the table, like he was eager to be somewhere else.

I suppose the rest would have been routine if I hadn't noticed how tired he was looking. I asked him about it and his whole demeanour changed. He told me he was struggling to cope and that in a time when it should have been easy to take a few souls he was having trouble keeping up. Apparently there was too much competition. Too many

people were choosing their own paths through eternity. He sat up in his chair and this time I couldn't have looked away from him even if I'd wanted to, but I didn't want to, not anymore. Those two dark pools took my breath away. A person could fall into them and lose all sense of what they were. But what I saw was an opportunity. I twirled the ink pen in my fingers.

“Did you know I'm a writer?” I asked.

Take a look in a newspaper. If you've got one handy take a look in it now. Flick through the pages. Take a look at what's going on in the world then ask yourself how a young guy like me might write about it, what messages I might want to send out at the behest of my boss. Think about how a guy like me might need to write to keep himself in a job like this. Now that the post exists there's no shortage of people interested. They come through the little door at the bottom of the spiral staircase each and every day, they see me at my desk and their brains click into gear. Especially the journalists. The journalists are the worst. Old habits die hard I guess. I keep them at bay by setting the second door slightly ajar. They just have to go take a peek and when they do I slam it behind them.

I guess I'm lucky my boss has a strong sense of loyalty. After all, some of his employees have been with him forever. But it's more than that. He has a weakness when it comes to pride. He likes to make out the whole thing was his idea, but he's wrong. I've a knack for meeting my deadlines see, always have had. Editors read my copy and they know, they just know they've hit on a guy at the top of his profession. They run my stories on a hunch or with an unnerving sense of anxiety rippling through their nervous system, fearing someone else might get to print them first. And my editors are plentiful. They're spread across the globe. I write for the tabloids and the broadsheets, the financials and the topicals. I write for music magazines and celebrity gossips, for country living quarterlies and urban weeklies. You'll find my copy on the TV and the radio and lately I've been branching out on the internet. I recently got myself a mega publishing deal. Pretty soon I'll be on the bestseller list, both for adults and children! There's even talk of a movie, a toy and game franchise to follow. You'll see it for sure and when you do you'll know it's mine and you'll be impressed with it and it'll get you thinking about things in a whole new light. In fact, it'll get into your head. In such ways I'll continue to influence the world, satiate my boss and keep the devils from my door. And one day...one day there'll be an ending. I've actually got an idea for one. It's highly original. In fact, it's going to be like nothing you've seen.

Interview: Danny Rhodes
James Quinton, England

Well, congratulations Danny on getting Asboville published. I know you've been trying for a while. Just how difficult was it to get the novel seen and read?

I secured an agent on the back of the book in June 2005. It was a very exciting moment. The book was touted as 'Young Adult' but nothing happened with any publishers and the whole thing fizzled out in the end. There were suggestions that I write another book and try to satisfy certain 'market trends' so to speak. I tried writing something else using such a formula but the new project wasn't really happening so in frustration I submitted the book one last time as an adult novel to Maggie Hamand and Jane Havell at Maia Press. They got back to me and arranged a meeting.

I met Maggie at her house in Hackney. It's full of books and boxes of books and has great character. I'd like to think we clicked right away. Suddenly I was talking about the book and my writing to a publisher and the publisher was listening. Maggie told me that 'as luck would have it' they had a gap in their autumn list and now here we are...

You are getting a lot of praise for Asboville. Does it make you smile when you think about how hard it was to get published and now that you have, everyone seems to like it?

Well it obviously means I haven't been totally wasting my time all these years, but in truth I'm a bit of a pessimist when it comes to my writing. I think you have to be as a writer. If you always expect the worst you can handle the rejection slips easier. Rather than bask in the praise I'm preparing myself for the criticism.

Do you have any advice to up-and-coming debut novelists?

(Laughs) How many times have I read author responses to this question!!! Now I get to answer it. That feels pretty good.

First off you need to submit to magazines like Open Wide and get to know the whole business. That's why this magazine and others like it are so important. They give opportunities to people like me. I'm deeply grateful to all at Open Wide magazine for that. After that, when you have a few publications to your name and a novel to market, make sure your cover letter is business-like and meaningful.

Think about why the book should be published. Don't tell the publisher; just demonstrate that you've thought about it. Tell them why you wrote it too. Asboville is inspired by the young people I work with each and

every day. I felt I had a story to tell that only certain people who really know teenagers *could* tell. And be confident without being arrogant. My girlfriend taught me that. She used to say, "Why are you apologizing to them just for sending it?" (She took the photos for the cover). She was right. I was too meek. But don't be arrogant. I know I'm repeating that and it may seem obvious but if the publisher thinks you're arrogant they're not going to bother. Let's face it, who would?

What's next for you?

With a bit of luck Maia will help me through the next novel. I have a great idea (almost too great actually) - it scares me sometimes; I don't know if I can pull it off. Oh and I'll keep bugging magazines like Open Wide with short stories that come to me in dreams...

Asboville is out now through Maia Press, www.maiapress.com, priced £7.99. We have a signed copy of Danny's novel to give away. If you'd like it, send us an e-mail. A winner will be drawn at random.

Other Cities

Miriam Mabel Martínez, Mexico
Translated by Toshiya Kamei, America

Every day I wake up in a different city. I know it from the geometric shapes the light draws on my body--visual tricks that seduce Daniel. The first time I noticed my transformation, I was frightened. I saw my ever-widening hips and an unfamiliar mound in my belly. I was paralyzed until Daniel touched me. I told him what had happened. "You're crazy," he answered. But now he too notices my transformation. It's not that I don't recognize the room. The change doesn't happen to what's around me, but what's inside me. Since then I have dreamed that a city is built on the surface of my skin. I have felt it since Daniel looked at me through his camera. His look made me collapse, destroyed what I believed I was. Now I have to reconstruct myself, though I don't know how. The only thing I know is that I wake up in a strange place. I only realize it when he caresses me. The memory of his touch brings my mind and body back together.

Daniel thinks it's a game, and he likes this visual polyphony, as he calls it. He likes to wake up one day in a populated city, another day in the countryside, near the sea, in the middle of the desert, or in the mountains. He enjoys traveling over me, around me, visiting my sanctuaries. He thinks I'm a great lover capable of inventing scenarios. He says I'm a witch because I make him think he's never with the same woman. "All women live in you," he says, but I just want to be Mariana. I want to wake up one day certain that I live in my city. I don't want to be

a vagabond or in exile, I want to be Mariana living in the city I built for myself.

I'm losing my mind. I used to think the photos Daniel took of me were what caused this confusion. I had a feeling that he manipulated them in the dark room and those changes directly affected me. I thought he was satisfying his needs this way. I thought so because every time I said something about this, he told me, "You're my fantasies. You're what I want." Still, the last week I have noticed that's not the case; I fulfil the whims of someone who walks around in my dreams. This man draws on my skin a map of what will be a great city. Sometimes I wake up as a different figure than before.

At night, while Daniel sleeps, I listen to the footsteps of the man who constructs me. His presence excites me and little by little I recognize the rhythm of his gait, the intensity of his breathing. I start getting used to his smell. Recently I have resorted to touching myself. Daniel hears me moan. Thinking that I have come up with another game, he makes love to me. I don't know how to tell him I'm not interested in sex with him, I do it to excite the man who goes through my interior. I want the other guy. I don't know how to tell him my sexual appetite has increased. It's not enough when he kisses my pubis, bites my nipples, or penetrates me. I want more.

During the day my outlines disappear, maybe because of the inertia of my daily life. I stop being a city to be Mariana again, the model. My constructor's work has become evident. I'm not the same; Daniel also notices it, even though he denies it. Or even worse, he thinks it's because of him: "You look beautiful lately." He's so vain that he's convinced he has power over me. He hasn't noticed it's the other way around. He's just a medium. I had to meet Daniel to discover what my body could do, to be certain that my body is free.

At dawn my constructor leaves. I long for him. Then I embrace Daniel to not feel alone. I clasp him wishing he were the other man. With my fingertips I draw lines, imitating the other man. I want to design other streets, other buildings, ones other than those outside my window.

My construction becomes complex. I'm no longer just a construction. I have insisted on building a liveable city on Daniel's body--not to share my experience but to know that I too can be a constructor. While I'm awake, I caress his back and shoulders. I imagine traveling through his interior, changing his body into landscapes never before seen. I build another city on sensations and memories. Probably they are hallucinations or effects of exhaustion. Maybe I don't know if I'm asleep or awake, confusing reality with fantasy. It doesn't matter--I like to think I'm both a construction and a constructor.

My body changes, my movements become refined, and my senses are attuned to only what goes on inside. I'm the remains of my own history. During my construction, I have devoted myself to collecting memories. This way I help my inventor. My task consists of making the map of

what I have been. I have given him my memory so that he would understand me, so that the city he builds would be the result of the understanding of a body, its character, and personality.

In my memory half-remembered scenes, decisive situations in my body, gallop. In my mind these images--many blurred and incomprehensible--are arranged in alphabetical order. But all of a sudden I'm surprised to remember the future. I realize that a part of my past has been a fantasy. The present happens so fast that it's impossible to control it. For the first time, I have given myself to the present, to what my own construction means. Daniel is the chronicler of my transformation.

Our first meeting was visual. We didn't talk, it wasn't necessary. He had to photograph me. For me it was a day like any other. But since that first shot I felt invaded. Each time he photographed me, images of unfamiliar places crossed my mind. They revealed memories as if they were X-rays instead of photos. I felt naked, exposed--what he saw was not my exterior but my skeleton. I became trapped in those negatives. In those photos I look so different. I see a woman who looks like what I remember of me. Daniel's gaze has disturbed me ever since. We no longer work together--not bringing work into bed was a mutual decision. Anyway, he regularly takes a photo of me. It gets us both excited. In those images I see my transformation. He also notices it, but he chooses to be quiet. I'm his visual discovery. Daniel found the right angle, captured my face, and set my body free. He's in charge of chronicling the construction of my city. There they are, the Marianas I have been and the outlines by the man who constructs me.

Daniel's glance still disturbs me. For three years I have been holding off his sharp eyes. At first, I was captivated when I felt his pupils revealing his thoughts. Now I feel I betray my constructor. When Daniel looks at me, I imagine an army spying on my senses. I don't dare look at him. I'm afraid he would find out my infidelity, he would realize I live in an unfamiliar place where he'll never set foot. Sometimes Daniel forces me to meet his eyes, inquisitively fixed on my arms and legs. At that moment he takes possession of my will... though I win it back at night. When I met Daniel, I was attracted to his morbid curiosity that flowed behind the camera. Now this lewdness intimidates me. Or rather, I have started to lose my interest. Daniel's glare threatens me. I'm a hostage who escapes. Admittedly, sometimes there is the excitement of being imprisoned. I live through an internal war, as if all of a sudden my body, my city, started a coup d'état. Maybe that's why I wake up exhausted. Daniel suspects that I have a lover. He's not far wrong. Only my lover doesn't make love to me, he constructs me. I can't avoid Daniel's jealousy nor can I force him to stay or walk in me. Neither can I deny what is happening or stop this war. I fight against Daniel. It's a battle of souls. It's my spirit defending its purity... my body gaining its independence. It's my past, the construction of my name: Mariana. It's knowing a city where I have lived without being familiar with it. I have

lived in exile from myself, and Daniel paved the way for my first repatriation. He taught me how to enjoy my body, but he also unleashed an unknown violence.

I have stopped hearing my constructor's footsteps. I feel the steps of the soldiers and the weight of the dead. Maybe the cause of the fight goes back to the migration of cities far away like those of my parents. As if in spite of myself, I belonged to a vast geographic area, or were the result of emigrants, exiles, or aliens.

I dream that I'm Mariana and someone constructs me. The hope of living in my own city pushes me to stay in the battle. I sleep in Daniel's arms while waiting for the other man to finish his work. I cling to this presence. I don't want to be the object of someone's stare anymore. But now, the only thing that's certain is that I wake up in a different city every day.

Reclusive Irish Writer in Barcelona Edward Mc Whinny, Ireland

My tutor then in those halcyon days in the university of Barcelona was that lovely South American girl, Isabella from Ecuador, whose eyes, dark like dormant volcanoes, recognized that the reclusive lifestyle I had adopted in the misapprehension that it was a slick writerly way to go was in fact antithetical to my true Irishness and innate poetics of my native soil; land of small towns where pubs with thatched roofs tumble down one into the other under the shadow of the church steeple and cavalier drunks like marauding buccaneers from lustier climates navigate the short distances between such peaty-smoke dens in the rain without ever getting wet, every man jack of them a stand-up comedian and expert on rogue politicians, hurling and biology, especially the knack of lubricating a g-spot, every last man, a stand up comedian in his own right, nothing too sacred to be profaned. They tumbled out the door of one pubs and into the next with lusty cries to rouse the cool virgins frozen after confraternity, cute little noses stuffed by incense, heads resounding to the tunes played by the Redemptorist Missioners upon the altar, Oh Happy Day and Kumbaya, now in the pub by midnight become wild slappers, whose private parts are about as private as the front parlour of Ma Murphy's hairdressing salon or Bertie the Barber's, yes, the pious virgins of the confraternity had been transformed into unkempt, fierce and beautiful viragos by the vulgar sea shanties and rebel ballads of the boys until the dawning of a thousand and one inebriated frosty mornings see them wandering homewards arm in arm, the boys in shirtsleeves not feeling the cold, the girls all wrapped up in furry cardigans, freezing, Jesus, freezing, along past the Bingo Hall and the graveyard, a rook on a headstone cackling a gravelly

threat, over the bridge and up the lane to write a beautiful aisling or ribald timeless tale, or even both.

This astute girl, Isabella, traveller in world literature, recognised that not a word in anger, lust or love would ever be written by an Irish hermit, locked away in an attic, with only an empty bottle to prop up his chin and elevate his thoughts and so after two weeks of non-production I was taken aback by her one day when she seemed more agitated than usual. She kept moving seats, finally putting on her sunglasses, then in what was for her an extraordinary outburst, began to urge me to get out and see some life; she meant nightlife, why don't you go out for the night. By going out she meant waiting till well after dark when the lights of the city are at their most sensual, then being drawn into magically lit places and meeting new and wonderful people, having spectacular conversations, getting mildly drunk in candle-light here, under chandeliers there, finally dancing, dancing a waltz and dancing a tango and entering the hallucinogenic temples of mad dj's with the frenetic beat.

Maybe I'll go out tonight, I said. You must, she said, as though it were a matter of life and death. You must meet new people and have amazing conversations and see all the great buildings lit up and fly up and down the brilliant avenues in a car. There are extraordinary women to meet, not just beautiful but bristling with inspirational conversation under the aura of sudden spotlights; diamonds, emeralds, rave. Beautiful women with amazing figures, lightly clad, sparkling eyes and minds like Nietzsche. You have to go out. I would do it. I'd wait around until it was dark. I'd become a night prowler not sleeping until daylight. She had convinced me. Nothing was going to stop me now and next morning, by God, I'd make that keyboard dance. Unfortunately, the evening had other plans for me. I was sitting around pondering what I'd wear, the words of an old Smiths song occurring to me, when I heard the playing of a clarinet from a nearby, invisible room, pouring joyously out an invisible, nearby window, as if to choreograph the dance of the swifts as they swept around the spacious area over the quadrangle. That enchanting music filled me with temporary calm, surged something like absence into my soul. I sat back with my feet up on a chair and ignored the demanding teeth of the typewriter as well as the sultry call of the voluptuous city night. I was once again driving the lost highways of Tir na n-Og. And before I knew it, had drifted into that zone from which there is no return, upon a white steed, knowing that to dismount would mean only one thing. The clarinet played. The dark eased in. Oisín clung on firmly, arms entwined around the warm, heaving neck of his horse, many miles from home, forever alone.

poetry

That Valentino Dress

Bruno D'Arby, England

It's so scarlet it's almost edible –
tomato red, strawberry red.
It's so provocative
she should only wear it after dark –
Dracula red, vampire red.
That red dress is so vivid it's alive –
systolic red, diastolic red,
with the red that beats in her heart,
her stomach, her hips, and all the way down
to her high heel shoes
where it oozes out of her toes
like nail varnish.

Heavily Rocked

Bruno D'Arby, England

The tabloids say I look like an iron maiden
whose face went from cream to deep purple
in one Uriah heap. They say I can't focus
any Gary more, that I walk like a Saxon,
and I'm as deaf as a leopard.
I used to sing like a budgie and sting like a scorpion,
but now every day is a black Sabbath
of motor heads and king crimson antidepressants.
I feel heavier than a lead Zeppelin.
In the words of my late lamented thin Lizzy,
"An aero smith is blowing like a hawk wind".
How I wishbone ash I could get some ELP,
see some light at the end of the rainbow.
But it's either guns, or stones & roses.
Oh bury me in velvet underground,
I'm no longer grateful to be dead.

Custer's Last Stand on Poets

Bruno D'Arby, England

I don't care what they write,
the good, the bad, or the ugly,

who do they think they're Billy the Kidding?
Pushing back the frontiers of language?
Sitting bullshit!
I'd rather dance with wolves,
or ride to Texas on a man called horse,
than be seen reading sonnets
at high noon.
Give me true grit not true shit,
and I'll give you the real El Dorado of poetry –
Jack Daniels, whose voice is as clear as glass
and whose every poem is a bottled goldrush.
The rest - they're all unforgiven:
the Frisco Kid who writes like a whore,
the man who shot Liberty Valance,
and that posse of fancy-hatted poseurs,
The "Magnificent" Seven.
Their poems ain't worth chicken shit
let alone a fistful of dollars.

The Bargain James Babbs, America

the devil leaned against the table
stroking his beard with long fingers
sparks shooting from his whiskers
he said
I know what you want
and I can give it to you
I felt something tightening
in my belly but didn't say a word
the devil continued
for every great poem you write
you will forfeit one month of your life
and what about the bad ones
I asked
do I get a month back for each of them
the devil laughed

women are like bad poems
you can have all of them you want
but you'll get nothing in return
fair enough
I said
how about a drink to seal the deal
the devil laughed again

I finished the rest of my beer
reached for another cold one
felt the first stirrings of a poem
rising up inside me

Angry Man

James Babbs, America

he comes in every day after work
sits in the middle of the bar
drinks three or four beers and
never says much at all
he's not an angry man but
when a couple of the regulars
get bored with shooting pool and
decide to rile him up
asking him about his wife
he immediately starts in
with *her goddamn this* and
she can fuck that and
his voice grows louder as
he rises from the barstool
his face turning red
shaking his fist in the air
until they finally stifle
their laughter and
tell him it's okay and
we'll buy you another beer
just to try and
calm him down again

Good Guy

James Babbs, America

I guess he needed
somebody to talk to and
I was as good as
the next guy and
just happened to be
the only other customer in
the bar so he came down and
sat next to me with a
nod of his head and
after he had his beer

in front of him
he asked me if I
lived around there and
I told him yes
I'd lived there
my whole life and
that perked him up and
he started asking me
if I knew this person or
if I knew that person and
most of the names
he mentioned I either knew or
at least had heard of and
he bought me a beer but
wouldn't let me do
the same for him
later he said there
wasn't much going on tonight and
I said I know and
I better be getting home
but he told me he'd
buy me one more and
I said okay because
he seemed like a good guy

Man dog, dog man
Kay Pringle, Scotland

I watch you
writhing your back against the sand.
Now stretched, yawning,
toasting your balls in the sun.

I wonder if that half-moon curve
is really a smile, a grin,
a slack-jawed happiness.
Or if my mind has placed it there.

Licking me now,
your feisty, warm, wet affection fetched up
as selfless love. And I think,
is this your pink-fleshed, cunning survival?

Man dog, dog man.
Sometimes I wonder

Which you are.

The New Pornography Kay Pringle, Scotland

I am a gastro slut
Feasting lasciviously from culinary cunnilingus
Served up on Food TV.
An orgy fest of chefs
That lick and tease and masticate,
An all-consuming sex.

First up that young flesh Jamie
How I would suck his juicy joint
Infused by the elixir of mountain herbs,
While spiky, cocky Gary chains me to his hob
And brazenly opines his golden, glossy onions.
Then stops to shove a kumquat to my mouth;
Split my vanilla pod; grope my pawpaw; grind my cumin seed.
Along comes swell Nigella,
How we would make a saucy double act my dear
A hard-core food flick, *Dirty Kitchen Bitches*,
As we drizzle first-pressed oils, roll olives with our tongue
And rip the nipples from the carton milk.
Steaming in behind comes Ramsay,
The urgent, angry, purple-headed rake
As he parts the legs and stuffs
Yet another fucking bird.
Then rising up the Holy Mother Dominatrix,
Strictly whipping spank-fresh eggs
Until flayed by rules and regulations
I capitulate and cry, 'yes Delia, British meat is truly best!'
While pressed against Rick's rustic range
I whisper: 'Don't forget your little dog',
As he laps the cream spots from the flagstone floor
And we salivate the secret recipe
Of Ainsley's charred and salty, spicy skin.

And above it all the two fat ladies, fierce as brothel madams
Post-prandial fags in hand
Wave lacquered talons to this whorish epicurium.

Satis verborum (enough said)

Kay Pringle, Scotland

I am lava-blooded
By your censorship
As you sit in white-gloved Salem judgement,
Exorcising words and phrases.
Tomorrow I will be as Matthew tells me
Quietly shaking my feet
From the dust of you.
But today I rent venom spitting sation
From calling you
A coven full of cunts.

Blue House

Patrick Stanhope, America

Each night my love and I
consider the multiples of probability
and eternity's staggering mathematics
from this square of warm earth, a blue house with vanilla windows
Spanish frescos, silk handcuffs, Ming daggers in each room
Mimosa groves, Chinese elms, wild apple and plum trees,
vegetable and paper flower gardens, telescopes,
blueprints of outer space scattered about
the patio, each night I adjust tripods,
focus crystal lenses, continue searching the heavens
for my namesake, a star among a cluster

Each night my love moves like smoke
and apparitions past windows near the dining table
set with Transylvania china, Apache silver and fruit
she claims was grown in orchards
and hothouses of M-87

Silly girl, silly me these stellar aspirations,
each night the fruit consumed, novas and nebula locked
in their Godly orbits, Brahe and Kepler smiling, waving
from their ultraviolet deck chairs, my love enters the room
in a gown the color of air. Silk handcuffs in her hand, the light of Venus
upon us through a skylight, is this paradise or imagination?

She lies next to me. Copernicus turns in his heliocentric grave.
She kisses me. Wind chimes are speechless, mirrors collapse.
Each night is like this and each morning I wake,

eyes lost, hands staggering across the radiant
landscapes of her long brown thighs.

Peyote

Patrick Stanhope, America

It was
terribly hot
that morning when
we piled into the blazer,
drove southwest towards
the High Sierras
cotton-mouthed by noon
and beginning to sweat,
we stopped in Cuauhtèmoc,
bought two cases of beer
and drove on, drinking, anticipating
our sacred destination. Our mission
was spiritual in nature, at least
that's what we told ourselves
as we approached the old shaman
and cut a ritual deal. Show a little respect
for what I'm giving you the old Indian advised
as he handed over the goods, By midnight the sky
was jammed with multi colored stars
and a neon moon. The wind
seemed to cry as it blew
through our eyes. When cacti
began to glow and the bilingual Christo
emerged from the canyon, when his flaming halo
illuminated the darkness and he
offered us his ironic benediction
that's when I knew we
were gone man, really
fucking gone.

Scenes from the Underworld

Patrick Stanhope, America

What is it
that draws people
like us back to the grimy
blood-stained underworld
of every city in every country we've been

those urban sectors where prostitutes, rummies, transvestites,
pimps and small time hustlers feel at home,
where cantinas, bars, and dilapidated nightclubs
all smell of piss, sour booze, low rent perfume,
dangerous sex and self-destructing patrons,
where the taxicab drivers swap wild stories
of their last lunatic fare and the police tolerate just about everything
but blatant violent crime, where young streetwalkers learn the ropes
and runaway teenagers grow old overnight, where drug dealers,
thieves,
and loan sharks conduct the business
of survival in the underworld
where by pure chance we see
our ex-housekeeper's oldest daughter
standing under the neon glow
on the corner of Aldama
and Jaurez, where used up
middle-aged women stroll the narrow sidewalks
looking for Romeo and enough dinero to buy
the next round of drinks,
where the taco vendor looks
hopefully into the night
as beef smoke rises
from his makeshift grill,
where street bums dig
deeply into their pockets
for enough petos to buy
four tacos and a bottle
of cold Manzana,
where a toothless old wino
stumbles across a vacant lot
and falls into a heap of debris,
where we see the sad picture unfolding
without us and thank Gawd
we are just observers
of these scenes from
the underworld

Striptease

Rachel Chambers, England

I was there,
standing taut-legged on an old cane chair.
Then there was you,
squidgy as a sofa:

a soft jelly mass that I
stuck my stiletto heel deep inside,
pressing down firmly
and peeling back the grimy wallpaper.
Tearing long, scandalous,
mouthwatering swathes
– as though we were having it off for good,
not just replacing the greasy shimmer
with flesh tones,
fancy curtains
and a matching valance.

Culture Vulture

Rachel Chambers, England

When I saw the long, deep,
insouciant tear in the snow-white
canvas,

I thought of you naked.

You smiled at me,
finding it funny –

your lopsided red gash.

‘Well’, you grimaced, ‘that’s Fontana done:
Time for a lunchbreak’.
You sounded relieved.

We wandered out via
Francis Bacon.

Those bloodied, brutal, ripped-up triptychs;
Beauty grinning like someone else’s
lopped off, spread out, vandalised legs...

I prefer the Monet, you said.

Culture always makes me

Hungry

Jamestown
Rachel Chambers, England

Easy.
Easy to resist a man:
the musky morning duvet-spread,
insincere kisses,
prise-prod insistence
and stifled, optimistic whispers
...*Suck me.*

Fuck off.
Easier to fuck a man;
to just give in and suck a man.
I won't descend,
I am hard to understand.
He is just hard,
an opportunist.
Clambering kisses, hirsute seduction,
It's a sobering prospect
and not one to dwell on.

You can't dwell in me.
I am not a cave,
I have openings.
Widening out, falling away,
disclosing wide vistas,
cool clefted vales,
soft wooded hillocks and lush waterfalls.

You can't possess me,
so don't raise your flag,
your sad, veiny standard,
your proud, wilting prick –

America, my darling, is far away.

Featured Interview: Arthur Nersesian James Quinton, England

When did you first put pen to paper?

I remember at sixteen writing the short story that first made me to think, writing might be fun. I actually wrote a lot in my late teens, several novels, a play about Elvis when he was still alive, and a number of short stories - they were all pretty bad.

Which authors/poets inspired you?

Faulkner was my first inspiration, which is funny when I look back at it, since I write nothing like him. When I was sixteen I read *Light In August* and was truly blown away. I didn't mind what I now find long winded about him, his syntax and rhetoric seemed both mystifying and dazzling and though I haven't really found it in many of his other books, *Light In August* has a deeply affecting story at its center.

Which modern writers do you admire?

I admire all of those who've taken a shot at this awful profession. As far as any revelations about specific new writers, I don't really read a lot of fiction anymore. It's one of the casualties of being a writer. I feel like a porn actor who has to go home to make love to his wife at the end of the day. The last thing I want to do after writing all day is read another line of fiction.

What book have you read and thought, 'man, I wish I'd written that!'

Many, for different reasons. It doesn't take much. I can appreciate the high and low brow, the experimental and the conventional. When I was much younger, rough edged street books like *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and some of Bukowski's short stories were like sources of power, but I sort of outgrew them.

How does an idea for a novel come to you?

I usually consider a single large concept -- I'll write about a painter, writer, or an onanist -- and from that tree a million little ideas blossom.

The location and environment that you grew up in and where you now live are reflected in your novels - do they form the basis for your ideas?

Environment up until now has been the one fixed detail. Being a third generation New Yorker on my father's side, and Fifth generation on my mother's side, I feel a strange intimacy, even duty, toward this city. I've seen it go from one type of Dark Age to another.

Your novel 'The Fuck Up' broke you into the "mainstream" after being published by MTV books and given heavy advertising on the station. Did the critical acclaim that followed surprise you?

It was a real anti-climax. Roughly fifty agents and thirty editors rejected the Fuck Up in 1988 when I first wrote it. So in '91 I published it on my own. It got one or two reviews, and I do remember a swell of pride at seeing the very first review in a freebie throwaway newspaper called Downtown that no longer exists.

It kept selling, so I printed three more mini-printings and distributed it around New York. Akashic Books picked it up in '97. The Fuck Up was its first book. By then I had no real expectations, but it started getting a lot of little reviews in various 'zines. They printed three editions (the green, red then blue editions respectively), before an agent picked it up and sold it for a song to MTV, who ran some ads -- the only time in six published books when I actually got any serious publicity, and for that I am quite grateful. The book now is in its 17th printing!

After the success of 'The Fuck Up' did you feel obliged to carry on writing in that style?

I didn't want to just keep rewriting the same book, which a lot of authors seem to do.

With Manhattan Loverboy, which was my next book, I tried to write something more hyper and surreal. Suicide Casanova is composed of a series of small chapters, each one in a different narrative, sometimes third person, sometimes first person, seen from various characters' points of view – but not a single reviewer seemed to notice that. Dogrun, Chinese Takeout and Unlubricated are all first person. I wanted to make those three books into a connected trilogy about struggling artists, but I couldn't get my editor behind it.

You have a new novel 'The Swing Voter of Staten Island' coming out next year. Can you tell us a bit about it?

It's an alternate history of America with some magically surreal elements, written in third person. I've tried to keep it fast paced. It's set in New York, Nevada in 1981, just after a period when there have been a lot of domestic terrorists organizations. A low-tech dirty bomb has hit

Manhattan making it uninhabitable. The federal government has set up its first "Rescue City" designed to help house the homeless until the city gets back on its feet. Slowly this temporary asylum turns into a detention center that is essentially run by two gangs. I have to add that the book was conceived before the New Orleans tragedy.

What takes your interest when not writing?

Walking and yoga are my two physical activities. Beyond that, writing really is pretty full time. I do it during all parts of the day and without a family, it really does take over.

Can you tell us one thing our readers may not know about you?

I have two brothers, one older brother and an identical twin brother.

More information and up-to-date news can be found at
www.arthurnersesian.com.

Reviews

Books

The Group - Ravinder Chahal Loren Kleinman, America

Khaled's father has just arrived in Leicester from Punjab and has never been exposed to a lifestyle where mass production is the ultimate authority. However, the story begins to stray from "Khaled the immigrant" to "Khaled the narrator", who, to get out of this pendulum-like path, devises a scam to uncover how easily people are manipulated. However, he falls into the age-old cliché of waiting for something better to happen.

If anything, the narrative is didactic, and I'm not sure if readers can trust a narrator/character who is dishonest and manipulative. What should we believe? In all, the book is about escaping the journey ahead. Khaled has become tired of a job that doesn't offer him any recognition, so he's determined to get *everyone* back. Sound familiar or a cruel irony? Khaled is constantly vanishing, and is swept up in a pool of short sentences that ultimately culminate in a disappointing ending.

The Group is published by Reverb, www.readreverb.com, priced £7.99

**Redemption Song, The Definitive Biography of Joe Strummer
– Chris Salewicz
James Quinton, England**

Essential, essential, essential. That's how I'd describe this book to anyone with a soul. Salewicz (or 'Sandwich' as Strummer himself called the author) has constructed a near-perfect biography of the Clash frontman's life. An insightful journey that starts from Joe's funeral and leads us back to his childhood, through to his early musical adventures, on to the Clash, his movie career and his successful return as a solo artist with the Mescaleros. I couldn't put this book down and I have to admit that I had a tear in my eye as I finished. This truly is a definitive biography of a much, much missed musician and man.

'Redemption Song, The Definitive Biography of Joe Strummer' is published by Harper Collins, priced £20.

**Music
Orchestra Of Wolves – Gallows
James Quinton, England**

British punk may have found its savior in this five-piece band based in and around London. Here we have twelve slabs of inner city rage, brutal guitar thrash that will leave you breathless. It's been said that Gallows are the best new band since the Clash, but hasn't that been said about others before? Musically Gallows have more in common with third generation UK punk like Anti-Nowhere League, and maybe even Discharge, as well as US bands like Black Flag and the now sadly defunct At The Drive In. The strength of the band lies in vocalist Frank Carter, who screams every word like it may be his last. There's a big future ahead for these boys. Enjoy the ride.

Myspace page - www.myspace.co.uk/burnthegallows for sample tracks and tour information. You can also pick up 'Orchestra Of Wolves' for £8!

**Someone Hates You - Belinda Gillett
James Quinton, England**

'Someone Hates You' is the debut album from Belinda Gillett, a young British singer/songwriter based in Suffolk, England. I first met Belinda in 2006 after seeing her play at an 'open mic' night in Ipswich. The strength of her voice and the simplistic beauty of her music immediately captivated me. Soulful dark folk I'd call it.

So, it was with much anticipation that I slipped this CD in the player. I'm glad to say that the live sound has been perfectly captured on these ten tracks. The album starts with the vitriolic 'Bite Back'. The track begins gently before the tempo rises and pulls the listener in, while haunting background vocals swim beneath the acoustic rhythm. The second track 'Razor Blade' is clearly about self-harming. Whilst some may balk at this aspect, the lyrics convince that Belinda is singing with pure conviction; the song is a cathartic release. Indeed it's the brutal honesty of Belinda's words, matched with her evocative guitar-playing, that make this release stand above the current crop of young singer/songwriters.

The outstanding put-on-repeat-'cause-it's-so-good song is 'Getting Better'. A musically well crafted track with gorgeous vocals and heartfelt lyrics.

This album feels like you could be flicking through a photo album of Belinda's life. Buy it.

Sample tracks are available on Belinda's Myspace page
-www.myspace.com/belindagillett.

Interview: Belinda Gillett
James Quinton, England

Belinda, your album 'Someone Hates You' is amazing. How did the record come about and can you tell us a little about the process of putting an album together?

I was in the very lucky position of having a small record company approach me and after meeting Steve Mann, who runs the label, I knew I was on to a good thing. We clicked. I felt completely comfortable, which is so important when it comes to recording. Most of my songs are very personal and I needed to record with someone who I could talk to about that so we could achieve the feel that I wanted.

It was only meant to be a five song EP but we got a little carried away! I had such a backlog of songs I wanted to try out and they were all working really well... so we kept them all and ended up with the ten song album. It was recorded on analogue as I wanted a natural sound and we tried to do it as live as possible. More than anything, I wanted to capture the feelings behind the songs.

What musical or artistic influences did you have whilst making the album?

I tried very hard to not listen to too much music while I was recording because I am aware of how the music you are listening to can creep into the music you are writing. I wanted it to be without influence and as true to how I meant the lyrics as possible.

How would you describe your music?

I find this question so hard to answer, because I can't hear my music. I can only hear the stories and memories it came out of. I can feel it but can't hear it as others do. I used to think it was folk, but I think now that that word is sometimes just used to describe acoustic music when you can't think of anything else to call it. I would like to think that it is contemporary, dark, alternative, but according to others it is acoustic/folk. I don't really mind what it's called as long as I like it.

How do you go about writing a song? Music first or lyrics?

Usually when I write I start with a riff on the guitar that I have found. Something that rings out and sounds distinct. Then I have books and books full of words and stories that are waiting to be turned into songs. But other times if I am feeling raw about something the whole thing will just fall out, kind of. Then I just have to decide if I like it. Lots of songs that I write like that never get played because they aren't actually any good, they were just good therapy.

Your voice is what caught my attention when I saw you live, but the juxtaposition of your voice and your guitar playing seems to create something magical, something enchanting. How important is playing live to you?

Playing live is everything! I mean... like I said, just the process of writing music can be good therapy, but without sharing it with anyone it seems a little empty. Even if people hate it, the fact that you got up and said what you wanted to say is very fulfilling. I love to be there, in the song, feeling the emotions all over again and knowing I am sharing something with people I don't even know. I guess it's the same as how most people like to talk about themselves, very vain and self indulgent indeed. But we get away with it by calling it entertainment!

When did you start singing? When did you know you had a voice?

I was eight and we were staying in a caravan park. There was a talent show on every week and it was my brother who used to get up and sing (he has a great voice). I began to feel a little envious of the attention he used to get, me being a very shy, unconfident little girl. So my mother suggested I got up and sang too. She found me a tape of the song

'Where is love' from Oliver. She said I should practice. So, I remember standing in the caravan, looking out the window with shyness and singing this song. I gave it all I had and when I had finished I turned to my mother to see if I did ok and she was just sat there, crying. I was very confused about why but she just kept smiling and laughing, gave me two pounds and told me to go to the shop and buy myself what ever I wanted. So I figured I must be on to a good thing.

You had some early success when you were, what 13, 14? Can you tell me more about it? What effect did it have on your life and what experiences did you have?

Well, after I had got up and sung a few times and people loved it so much, I wanted more. I started going for auditions and I ended up doing plays, musicals and little bits of television. And then when I was 13 I auditioned for a record that Brian May was recording for a cancer charity [Belinda recorded a version of Queen's 'Who wants to live forever' with him - *Ed*]. And I got it. For two years it turned my life upside down. I went from having this quiet existence, getting on with school, to flying around in helicopters, driving in limos, singing on live television and radio and doing interviews. It was amazing, but far too much for me then. I was very glad to go back to my normal life and gave up on music all together for seven years. I had had enough. I didn't really know where I was going with it all and felt out of control.

It was only at twenty-one, listening to 'OK Computer' for the first time that I suddenly wanted to sing again. I think because I realised there was good music out there and it made me want to learn to play guitar, which in turn gave me the power to write my own songs. I could never see the joy in singing words that someone else had written.

The greatest thing that came out of my young experiences is my friendship with Brian. He is such a wonderful man. And hopefully we will be collaborating on a couple of tracks for my next album.

Who are your influences right now? What was the last CD you bought?

I think it's hard to find good music right now, there is so much meaningless 'light entertainment' that has seeped into the music world. But the good stuff that is out there is fantastic. I love Mew, a Danish band singing truly beautiful songs. I saw them play at V this year and I was blown away, every song was played perfectly and with feeling.

Music is obviously a big part of your life, but what do you to get away from it?

I am very rarely away from music nowadays. If I'm not writing, recording or gigging I am listening to it or better still, dancing to it. Doing yoga to Sigur Ros. Singing to myself as I drive or walk. Going to gigs, having jams with friends. My other passion in life is film but I seem to be drawn to films with a great soundtrack. I love film and music put together. I just can't get away from it... wouldn't want to.

What have you got planned for the future?

I really don't have any set out plans. I just want to keep gigging. Record a new album. Write better songs. Be successful I guess, but everyone's idea of success is different. If I am playing to a good standard and writing songs I like, I will be happy. But then if I have a number one album I will be fucking delighted, so I guess I'm hoping for the latter.

We have a signed copy of Belinda's CD to give away. If you'd like it, send us an e-mail. A winner will be drawn at random.

Proteus Cabinet
Heidi James, England

Driving has always made me nervous, the car being unknowable in its metallic intricacies, soft spots and braking power; I have never been able to trust in the expertise of others and really suspend my belief that at any moment the thing my feeble bones are cradled in will not disintegrate in the slow lane of the motorway. Not only that, but to trust in other drivers. To accept that they won't be struck blind or have a heart attack and smash into your careful path, killing both you and themselves, is just a step too far. But I have to do it. So I do it, carefully and with my right foot nervy on the accelerator, ready to hit the brake at any moment.

The car is loaded with jars of home made pickles, chutneys and jams. They sit on the back seat like specimen jars from an over-wrought laboratory. My mother, lonely in her divorcee dresses, divorcee hair and smaller house has taken up cultivation. Growing and cutting, scything the cucumbers and strawberries, damsons and cauliflower for the vinegar vats and sugared lubrications boiling up guilt on her lonely hob. The irrigation lines around her mouth feed her steady nourishment of bitter recriminations, pulling at her lips like a drawstring on a plimsoll bag so that it sits crouched above the muffled point of her chin. I leave her house with jars and jars of the stuff so she can be sure I will spread a thick layer of viscous guilt on my morning toast. She gives me so much because I leave it so long between visits, and of course, that's

another heart-break: she gave her whole life to my father and me and what have we done except abandon her, discard her like a Christmas puppy, large-eyed and thankless.

I travel from her, to my home. The two sites are tethered by the tarmacadam of this new road, shedding selves on the way, like a snake in the midst of an accelerated growth spurt; I stop being her child, take off the cardigan covering my tattoo - a ten year old tattoo, hidden like the family freak in the attic - light a cigarette and become his lover again. I go from her to him and at no point am I simply I. I drive steadily; the flinty English light is meagre and thin through the windscreen. His love is like a spool drawing me back to him, hands outstretched, feeling my way through distractions and faithless limbs, always back to him. Back to the me-shaped cavity left pressed into his male, hardened, body, the fibrous hairs chafing at my feminine-weak skin. Back to what is safe, his known moods, dark looks for forgotten items, angry at a lost sock, but still gentle and loving, and above all, just a man and one who loves me.

Six years of love, inconstant and variable, but still love and intimacy not known since infancy, and the interminable vigilance of a loving mother. Six years of knowing, of being together even through the smell of his shit in the morning bathroom, faeces squatted over like he was a plucked hen, my hand being held as I vomited sangria into his mother's tidy rosebushes one summer barbeque, unsteady on my sandaled feet, and sex, secret wants finally confessed to each other - thumbs in forbidden orifices and watching each other orgasm, vulnerable and naked. Our lumpy flesh aging together, comfortable dinners expanding our coupled waists; knowing his reaction to an item of news, or fumbled bill payment and in all that, knowing that we were staying here, together.

The radio hisses through the padding of the speakers. An old sports star lists his favourite music and tells the bored interviewer why he chose each piece, to underline his successes. This tired old country, filled with imperialist relics, stands knee deep in water; damp, cold and exhausted, it sags like depleted breasts beneath the clamour of its inhabitants. And old cricketers, whose only triumph was trouncing, yet again, a former colony still pistol-whipped and dusty from the twin vicissitudes of a tyrannical sun and a despotic invader, think the listening public will be interested in the stale saga of their lives. A fake pride, like gilding, coats the populace; golden it shines but has no weight. It doesn't bother me all that much, what you know won't hurt you. It is the unknown that unfolds a cascade of fear in my bowels, a long flag of lurid anxieties that knot and twist, cutting off essential supplies of filth to my extremities.

I stop at a garage and refuel. Walking across the forecourt I see the crook of my nose supporting the weight of my brow and low-lidded eyes in the glassy reflection. I am not a looker, never have been. Thick in the hips and low on tits, I have no use for short skirts, but God, I am great in bed, have an education, am well travelled and suck dick like I am sucking up life itself. So I guess I am still quite a catch. For his 30th birthday I treated my man to a threesome, I found a prostitute on the corner of Spitalfields who would join us for only a hundred and fifty quid. Her skinny hairless body rubbing against my mine, her fingers swallowed by the thick hair covering my vagina and thighs and both of us licking at his penis, sucking his egg-shaped balls into our mouths and laughing when he came in our hair, his eyes vast in surprise and gratitude. You see, I know my man and what makes him tick; tick, tock.

I pee hot into the cold toilet, the relief almost as pleasurable as an orgasm. Patient over my yellow stream and small tender farts. I wore good underwear for my arrival home; he always likes us to go straight to bed after a separation. I am lucky he is still so passionate about me, has been utterly faithful and keeps no secrets. He never makes me feel insecure by pointing out a beautiful woman on the street or on TV, never makes comparisons, has no porn collection, nothing. I pull my trousers up, flush, wash my hands and look in the mirror. Thirty this year, and still no lines as such; I redo my lipstick, pat my frizzy hair into shape, scrape at my teeth.

I tuck myself into the snug warmth of the car. As I get closer to home and further from my mother's place, the close-packed anxiety I carried there loosens and starts to flake from the smooth surface of my brain, it travels in drifts to the base of my spine, collecting in soft piles of angsty slush, and a sense of bliss and well-being expands through the tight veins of my limbs. The streets that belong to my life, that tend its occurrences, that we walk together and drive through on our way to work and tennis, dinners out and drinks with old friends, wrap me up and tuck me into its workings, its loving infrastructure.

Home, I pull into the drive. The street is quiet, gentled in the afternoon. I check myself in the mirror again, no lipstick on teeth, no stray hairs. The door, green and solid, is closed and firm - gentlemanly to my female hands. I take my bag from the boot and grab a few jars of my mother's preserves to show him; it's a running joke between us and I know he will laugh when he sees them, mollified as they are now out of her jurisdiction, and he will put them in the pantry till her next visit.

The door opens easily onto our clean, childfree space. He has tidied; bless him, hovered right through by the looks of things. I drop my bag

at the door and walk up the carpeted stairs, lined with photos of us in attitudes of happiness and success, smiling on skis and squinting prone from plastic recliners on blue-encapsulated beaches. The glassy preserves nestle against the padding of my bra, insinuating themselves into my closet affections like motherless kittens. The bathroom is empty, the door wide open, our rows of cleaning products neat along the side of the bath and on the straight shelves. The mirror is still steamy though; he must have just finished a bath, and will be in the bedroom getting dressed.

Six feet, six feet from bathroom to bedroom, he is six feet tall, six feet from here to there, from known to unknown, from this to that.

I push the door open. It opens onto our room, the bed made; all the ironing put away, the dusting done. Our room, where we sleep and fuck and do all the obvious and natural things a couple will do, where I paint my toenails and look in a disinterested mirror at the fat squatting on my thighs. Where he watches TV till he falls into sleep, where he does a few token sit ups, and throws his dirty underwear into the corner. Where we sleep and fuck and do all the obvious and *natural* things a couple will do.

He is on the floor, leaning back against the bed, his cock, MY cock - our cock - in his hand, watching himself in the mirror. Watching himself in the mirror, pulling on his cock in my underwear, in my best underwear, my silk expensive underwear that he bought, that he chose for me. For me. He has lipstick on his stubble-rimmed lips and kohl thumbed across his eyes. The camisole is taut over his chest, his balls sag from the loose hammock of the silky gusset of my knickers; and stockings that aren't mine, that he had to go out and buy for himself, that he had to plan for and specifically go out and get cling to his hairy legs. That this is not spontaneous is what breaks the bones in my legs. I stumble; he continues to pull at his thing, and he looks ugly, ridiculous, a fattening man dressed as a slut. He has disappeared inside my clothes, is no longer my man. My man has gone and left this thing, this silky, ugly thing, panting and open mouthed. He looks up at me, not stopping, not stopping or afraid. He looks at me and comes, he comes into my underwear, he comes like a man into women's underwear and is lost.

The jars smash where I drop them, puddles of guilt sticky on our floor, spreading slowly towards him where he lies, limp in the sediment of his ejaculation.

Interview: Heidi James
James Quinton, England

Hey H, tell us about your novel.

It is called Carbon, and is a cheeky tale about entropy, Cartesian duality, London submerged and a whole bunch of lies.

How long did it take to write Carbon? Did you have any set routine when writing it?

Took a year. No routine. Unfortunately I am too chaotic for that.

I know you took an MA in creative writing (and passed with flying colours). Obviously you learnt a lot about writing from the course, but what elements do you feel have made you a better writer?

The academic part was incredible (essentially, the exploration of theory, semiotics etc) but the rest only taught me how to edit. Actually, these courses foster a formulaic approach to writing, crushing playful wrestling with language. Beware displaying originality in a creative writing course.

How did you find the process of submitting your manuscript to publishers?

Relatively easy, the 3rd publisher I approached picked it up.

Do you have any advice for new authors looking for a publisher?

Get your short stories into mags, get as much experience as possible, learn to self edit... you are never as good as you (or your mother) think.

I believe you're starting your own press? Can you tell us more about that?

Social Disease is publishing work that defies the current publishers' marketing strategy... work that eludes categorization, work that has no 'market' (I mean, really!), work that has no target demographic - isn't that everything beautiful and interesting?? We are looking for novels, non-fiction, work that explores the world we live in today. No poetry unless it is extraordinary. Why is it so many people think they can write poetry, when all they are doing is being lazy?

Carbon is published by Wrecking Ball Press in March. We have a signed copy of Heidi's novel to give away. If you'd like it, send us an e-mail. A winner will be drawn at random.

poetry

Nearer Kings Cross

Rikki Weir, England

Bunching scummy cabmongers line-up
for the tackle, for the umpteenth time,
evaded, proudly, with experience and left,
back where they began, still plying their
trade in front of the masses, who don't care,
just want to evade the zapping rain and home.

Unattached from the cooked jelly of humans,
stuck together, in a morph, to be sucked out,
my choice, to leave and freefall back to bed.

Still high from the jelly, its greatness and magnitude,
its life and way of life, its scenic sounds, vibrating
sights and sexy insinuations, such a mischievous,
miscellaneous labyrinth, cornering us to coalescence.

I'm gregarious. They can see it, but I'll try and hide it
and maybe they won't notice and call me ambiguous
instead. But no one can touch me now, surely, still high
from the jelly, bolstered hormones and all, alert and alive.

I'm in a spacesuit. No supernova of strife will strike, surely
and if it does, it'll need to navigate my glass helmet. The
ground, junked-up with colourful go-clubbing paraphernalia
and these supposedly colourless sneakers, pointing at me
rudely, with all their dirty eyeballs and straggly hairs. The
old black man, with his atrocious afro, infernally towers
over me, as tall as the St. Pancras Chambers themselves.
Intravenously, my mood is swivelled by his lunatic berations,
tattooed with grief, he resonates unreason, does the deluded
male with the dilated eyes. His brain unendingly imploding
in front of me, for me to go on again, a positive test, not to
be derailed, here of all stations.

The vigorously bright road aids me in my direction, a
psychological boost, for me to go on again. Just follow the
sparse crowds, for me to gradually, eventually, find my
inlet, not up the hill, around that circus, by that pub, or
anywhere near and the sky won't show me either, light-
black and starless, dark and eyeless, like the slouching
hoods in the closed-shop doorways, some bleak portal for

an umbrageous soul, that I shuffle ever nearer, till I find my way.

The Night Bus

Rikki Weir, England

Once upon a time, the bus took ages to come and not one did know if it ever would, so we continued to wait, me and the boho and the hobo and the twitchy guy. And how we wished the girl next door was the girl next door and how convenient that would be and comforting and warm, breezing gusts, torpedoing off fly-by-night double-deckers, emitting a ripe banana to the hobo's face, as the boho girl's customary fluid-white skirt ripples brusquely.

Me, watching them, didn't even notice what number it was, like the boho, watching the hobo. Seemingly he's disinterested by it all, but we're both perturbed by the pert, funny eyes of the twitchy guy, with his fast but loitering glares at all but the road, evidently so.

Some of us stand, as it's not nice to stare, requesting a bus, coincidentally, stopping to my left shoulder, our heroine, but it's not free, like the new, bendy 73. Our hobo comrade, begrudgingly satisfied with his present accommodation, for the time being, saluting us as we depart. Just like the new kid in class, they all look up, as I look for a seat, I look at them and they look away, when wheels re-turn, the erroneous jibber-jabber of discussion, even more upstairs, a weird, nightshift calypso, when the Aztec, tomfool patterned furniture is revealed to me and a window view, shamed with sweat.

Vermilion tells me we've caught the one in front, through all these eavesdropped conversations, I feel wrong turns, through wrong streets, the horizontal g-forcing, more nerve-wracked each time, sliding nearer to naughty territories, when we break free from the contraflowing peloton, seamlessly crashing through bony, outreaching fingers of roadside canopies, the ham-fisted driver, constantly veering into trouble, missing by mere millimetres, from up here, he almost shatters my catachresis with his catcalling us out, as we're frogmarched to the kerb, in my lemming state, to wait, to follow time into night's distance and live happily ever after. The end.

Amewsd

Rikki Weir, England

Perfectly poshly poised. Pristined. Primed
for the poor, numbered for the needy, now
for the number-much, nice, neat dishevelments,
skid row skirts, ancillaries to the beaten track,
often off the A-Z, unprinted, urbane, still
there, rare, comfortably squashed, cul-de-sac land,
quite sheltered, here hidden, with
a cobbled censure to kinetica and cats.

Viewing jauntily-terraced assortments. Small,
burlesque niceties. Extrinsicly, quite uniform,
yet intricately different, decadent. Quite forcibly
eclectic, vogue, impressing old stablemates, few
else, none to see, indoor or away. Curtains flicker,
blinds flutter, plant pots stare, occasionally.

Old cars, occurring, back, anew. Newly
antiquated. Dead-end of pretty, reticent
contemplation. An empty treasure trove,
harbouring a happy end.

After the Beach

Tamara Fulcher, Scotland

I fell asleep
Thinking of the girl,
She, with the green bag,
And the toeballing dance
Off the kerb.

We were by the beach,
She, waiting,
Friends around with
Their green bags and
Jeans and useless belts,
Hips chiming,
Hair fighting.

Me on the sand
Watching,

My hands about
Myself
And the siren call
Of gulls
A bleaching
White, wind,
Music of the day;
We left. She,
By bus.
Me on my feet
And turning,
Tramping, hitching

My waist with my
Thumb,
Thinking of her,

She, my hand
A hole, mine,
Hers.

Dirty

Tamara Fulcher, Scotland

There is little grotesque
I haven't thought of,

Little rotten
I haven't tripped upon,

Little shame
I haven't shacked up with.

It all sleeps in caverns
And I like to roam caverns,

To touch their walls and lick
The rusty water from their back

Man

Tamara Fulcher, Scotland

You are behaving like a penis,
Quite literally:

Big-headed and insistent.

You think you know
Truth

All you really know is that you are

There
And you want to be
Here

Somewhere you can see through
One eye half closed.

Mistress of the Territories Ellen Marsh. England

The summer evening settles down and I come round from thinking I
ought to be
feeding the chickens,
The indefatigable grief, ripe, homely, sickening, that I shall never come
back here again, to find it more
Covetable than ever it was before. The heart yearns for
Places born of fondest memory and desire, transcending despair,
And, lost to him, I seek him everywhere.

Perhaps he longs for days he might have lived, guilty, human,
To me completely beautiful. I see him sometimes, half-questioning,
Then a mile to walk of lavender-scented land; entered a life, grieved it,
mourned,
Neglected the flowerbeds, turned the apple orchards sour, forgot for
Spring
to tend the front lawns.

Don't tell me this is my failing at every childish task,
To endure desperation's haste, for complicated, fragile, plans of escape.

It's being
Not just me here again, with my constant and untamed wrestling for
affection,
For him to replenish hope in my unsettling, sleepy belief in being loved.
The overgrowth is lovely, so dark, and so deep.

The falcon took flight from the falconer. But if anyone cares, I am not I; I
am that other, who strolls behind me, who I met,

This cannot be the territory for a young woman to venture out alone in yet.

Why you left me, at war with those I do not despise and frantic,
That no likely end to thickening desertion could bring me loss,
Or leave me in the state of love I was.

I remember each time he sighed for fatuity done and said, each time he says,

In vehement anger, it slashed his narrow days and I had so much not
quavering and collapsed ahead,
That he could not cope, was perhaps going mad.

Mentions of trespass, tired discontent, a hateful truth that
burning-ecstasies fall to terrified cries,
Just staring at him, half-wondering. What are the lies that hold him late,
What does he think of, dream of, await - when now, and always, alone.

I have become obsessed,
With these decisions that he cannot stand to be, as he was, with me,
In the one time in living, I knew where I was, that I was happy,
That to be no more myself, unless unwilling, to think of him.
And go on until the blanket covers fall for Christmas, to think of us and
little else.

Strokes of Time

Ellen Marsh, England

I am on the slow yellow bus back from the Sunday-shutting town,
clutching
tightly on to my one piece of paper,
Folded with blind talent to one neat square, faithful tourist guide
to the
free and safe drop-off and just a short walk to the front path that still
needs sweeping when I finally get back in,
Disturbing to have this information so positive beside me. I
want
out. I go
about,
Silently washing myself a tangerine under the kitchen tap. This can be
done
with tangerines for hours just so long as you never cut in. My hunch-
backed
neighbour's single tut, suppressed grumble - weeping the tears she left
me,
splashed him.

The yellow timetable too, ruined. I need to remember to throw it out when I arrive, from the place where all the stuff is taken away in neat little bundles.

The nurses had arranged her delicately upon the white bed linen for the closest relatives,
Her fine head of thick grey hair, tied up in a loose bun, means most of my Dad's Mum is just the same as always. But it's the bits that can't be seen, this time, that paralyse me. The drip-going-in is where the film-wrapped tuna-mayo sandwiches, help-yourself fresh fruit, has been. My terrified eyes are rimmed with the ordeals she has been mastered by.

I hate myself; bedroom cocoa secrets for so long being pleasure in this slow declaring onset of old age,
Just been thinking to myself, unashamedly, that I am faring much better under this new stage of the lighter regime.
My carrying her clumsily from room to room for months, saying 'oh dear' and all of us getting the giggles as we prise her into the low-slung cars,
Her memory slipping down so far and her developing the mild and broad-brushed feel for detail, perhaps erasing all the bad things I did as a child.

Train

Rachel Pierce, America

I was taking the train home from work. A girl, probably seventeen, gets on my otherwise empty car, and sits beside me, without hesitation.

She motioned to the window for my attention.
There was a homeless man sleeping under a bridge.
"Do you believe in god?"

she says.
"No, not really."

"See the homeless man under the bridge?"

I say nothing.

"It's not sad."

"What?"

"It's not sad. He's
probably hungry
and cold, but

I bet he has a lot of time to jack off."

I say nothing.

"You just never
think about homeless people
jacking off.
You know?"

The Hotel's Bar

Rachel Pierce, America

It was the day of
my brother's wedding.
It was at a
hall in the hotel.

I went into the
hotel's bar and
met an old English man
named William.
He referred to me
as a lady,
not a young lady.

William bought me a drink.
After the wedding,
I went home.
There I wondered why
William was at that hotel
buying me a drink,
calling me a lady.

The Truth

Rachel Pierce, America

life drags
the perpetual memory of
undeniable heat that overtook
them in all
their good intentions.
intentions quickly bent
by the heat
that came from each breath,
each glance.

one instant gone.
two wet backs rise and fall in exhausted breath.
time twists, without form,
toward a place
far away
from here.

and Reality.
Reality deliberately creeps quickly
towards the bodies
and steals away all the beauty,
leaving only the sin,
the wet.

mirror cracks

James Quinton. England

words riot
around my
head

akin to
wild horses
charging
across
open land
under a
thundering
sky

there is
madness
in them

they put

themselves in
my mouth
my head
urging me
to speak
them out
loud
and write
them down

they know
how
I think
how
I feel

and even
in
my sleep
they manifest
themselves
trying to
wake
me
 they need
an
outlet

the mirror
cracks
as my eyes
fall upon
it

the words
will soon
escape

shiver
James Quinton, England

dust settles
on dust
as insects
crawl up

my spine

in this
room
there are
gaps
between
the window pane
and frame
 the wind
outside
enters as
a draft

I shiver

Blue Apples
Mark Wagstaff, England

The wet tracks of her hair on the mirror. Steam swirling loose around the light, slipping out to die in the rain. Her trinity: shampoo, conditioner, bleach. Her aching head.

Her gum chewing walk, killed by frozen ankles, knees, hips. She sat in the bedroom a long time, smoke curling in her wet hair. Morning streaked the window, the puddles islands of rain in a concrete sea. She counted her smokes. She'd have to work.

Drying her hair at blood heat, her neck stiffened each time she bent down. At least she was alone. No friends, no lovers, this morning. Some days she had to wake up alone, when she crashed, when she felt she'd tumbled miles out the sky. In cold and painful exile from herself.

The kitchen looked out on the yard and the bins, the road. Behind the flecks driving her mad in her eyes, she missed nothing. Rain splashing back from the concrete; rubbish melting; lads in hoods coming down from the night; a kid in a green school jumper, blonde hair soaked and flat. Way too young, pretty. Pretty walk. She liked the pretty, the inspired, the tragic. She liked rapids. Always, from when she was young and pretty. Life was a ride. A shocking, heart-stoppingly beautiful ride. It took her strangely. She never got older, never looked a day older: under her make up, her skin was tight, unlined. She'd stayed the same, solid weight all her adult life. She *felt* young, but when she crashed, she never felt so shattered; limbs locked; muscles spiked; ready to chuck.

Powder: always the same. Powder all day, every day, taught lessons. She'd wake paralysed, take an hour for the toilet. She retched in the water, cramping. She didn't menstruate, but felt the pain of bleeding in those cramps. Sometimes, head on the floor, she could do nothing but wait. She never saw anyone those times: she was only sick alone.

She tried a few numbers, looking for work. She liked some jobs more than others. Fetching, carrying, watchful jobs, she liked them. Delivering, collecting: she was known as safe and careful. Dancing jobs, when her body sang, smooth as oiled canvas, for punters to make their dreams. Powder kept her fluid, full of tricks. But that morning was just flesh jobs: chilly, nightie pulled around herself at the kitchen table jobs. She said yes: she always worked. A day's flesh work was worth two dancing. Worth powder. Life stank without. She *could* go cold but it made her sick: once the cramps eased, and the pressure in her skull lifted, she felt strange, nauseated, unable to be herself. She *could* go cold when she went away because there she was somebody different. In the city she was always high; there was only dirt at ground level.

A couple of hours handy. She made more calls.

"Hi, it's *me*." Her body swam in and out of tight, vomity sweats. But she talked up, always up, forcing her voice to be happy. She never showed anyone she was sick. "Yeah, on the ear'ole, as *yooj*." She had her own words that made her. "Getting the spondies but need a favour, por favor." A tremor shook her up and down. The man on the phone never knew. Up, always up. "Need dabs on the card till later. Coupla grams, yeah? I'm counselling today. I stepped in for Mariah. Yeah, her that got sick." Her that aborted herself on meth and got infected. Silly girl. Punters drooled for fattened fanny. "*Wee-ll*, kinda nows, really. I'm working this morning. Nah, Bayswater. Gotta get ticket and all sorts. Hour, yeah? You are a *star*. What? Yeah, sure. Gotta pay deposit." She laughed her growly, sexy, infectious laugh, not letting one shred of her spasmic guts betray itself in the illusion. Yeah, she'd pay deposit. He'd want something worth two grams on the slate; at least she couldn't stay long.

She finished brushing her bleached hair, drawing the perfect parting in its black crown. Exactly two inches natural and the rest white as coke. She spent hours on her hair. But it was how she looked: it boxed her oddly featureless face, that smooth curtain.

She made up. White to cover everything; red lips today, black outlined to make them look full. Lilac shadow, taking the chill off her ice blue eyes. She had drops so they'd not be bloodshot. She had spray so her nose wouldn't drip. She pressed her septum: hard, still, nothing eaten

away. It would have started by now. Her addiction was mostly kind to her, kinder than some. But she'd been born addicted: it was natural, not put on.

She dressed for work. Her razor blade necklace, so beautiful and practical, been handy more than once. The silver torque her gorgeous friend made in her box-room studio: a leisurely fox, displaying through a ring of daggered moons. Her clattery bracelets. Her ankle chain with *Slave* in spiky letters. Her death's head belt: *Gothgirl* blazed on the skull. She had concealer for her arms; she hated it. There was nothing wrong with tracks. She hardly injected now. Sometimes, to put herself out for a bit, for holiday. Not often. Her best friend she'd shared works with had taken a ride. She almost stopped then, but didn't like to shrink her horizons. Her tracks were memories of a thousand and one gorgeous nights. Sometimes, in summer, she showed them, feeling the love of every pale young woman who passed. But flesh work meant being blank: an anonymised body. She ran the heavy make-up over her arms, frowning. It couldn't match her snowy tone, it looked like skin rot. "Eczematic." It was fraudy, but she had to work.

She folded her costumes in a bag. She always took her own. She didn't like the ones at the flat: sometimes, girls were careless, and the fit was never on. She liked to look good when she had to. Catching herself in the full-length, she thought every time how dappy she looked in suspenders. But she wanted the best she could do.

Rain fell. Just time for a cuppa, and see the man. She stared out the window, guts doing splits, a metallic taste in her mouth. She didn't want too much french: she had sores. When the glamour dimmed, and she came to on another wet, cold morning, with nothing but flesh work to shift her, she clung to the rainbow country. It would be four months, at least, till she could go south again; more, were she not saving. She wanted *teams* of punters, to get started on the fare, to feel she'd begun. Lights were flashing around her eyes, the rain fell sickly green. She didn't want any scenes today. Just grateful big spenders. She counted everything in grams: train fare to Chalons was a week's worth, then food and rent and living. She couldn't fly: she felt to spew just thinking about it. She couldn't stick the high speed trains of snotty suits and ski-ers. She took the slow ride from Paris, changing and changing, till she landed, a thousand miles deep, in the town by the Seille. There were real people on the long journey, and she loved their shock and pleasure when she shaped her butterfly lips to streams of quick, proper French. When they knew she was real. They saw her differently down there, and even when she was choking sick as the snowdrops left her veins, still it was in a whitewashed room, in linen sheets, in the hard, bright light of the unswept south, away from this pitiless rain. Green rain. She looked

at her hands. The fine, white skin was waxy yellow. Mostly, she saw colours right, or thought she did, with only her own eyes to look through. But when she got sick, way high sometimes, insomniac, something went in her eyes, her brain, to see colours wrong. The worst, when the mirror had her beautiful hair blood red or rapeseed gold. Her shiny flesh grey or sunset. Sometimes, when she was weak, she'd spew with the strangeness of colour, chucking up black, violet, khaki, in the slimy brown bowl. At worst, she'd be paralysed, gouged out by jarring colour. She never told anyone. She was Lady Cheerful.

She folded on the sofa, arms doubled over her stomach. The pain was bad but never killed her yet; she had to get going. Had to see the man and pay her dues, be grateful, so he'd be happy. When she opened her eyes the walls were pink. She'd live, it was okay. In the purple bowl on the sideboard, three bright blue apples for comfort. Toinette had a painting, in her flat by Rue Rochette: three blue apples in a dish, a ripe greengage, a bunch of golden grapes on a green-rimmed plate. She loved Toinette's flat, and that still-life caught something of the elfin girl, with her short, dark hair, sharp cheeks, quick smile; the delicious completeness, the *Frenchness* of her, from her little round glasses to her kitten heels, apricot jam for breakfast, grilled peppers for tea. The way she spoke her name like a question, early on Sundays, insisting, "Saki, nous devons aller à l'église." She'd searched for a print of the picture, even downloading a muddy, monochrome copy. She looked at her gone-blue apples; she had to go to work.

She got herself up and tried to be sick but couldn't retch. Seconds slipped by dangerously. She kicked herself into action, getting her scarf, her jacket; the umbrella ballooned with French swear words she'd got down Portobello. She missed being called Mademoiselle. A rare vanity, it made her feel *stylish*. Like taking Toinette to the Café de Nuit and knowing the menu inside out while the coach trips fretted with their guidebooks. Felt good. Maybe one day, she said, maybe one day she'd walk out the station and sell her return. "Qu'est à Londres?" Toinette would say. "Ce qui? Mauvaises choses seulement." She didn't know.

She smoked her last straight, chucked and felt better. Through shooting stars, the colours drained. Turquoise apples were green to the touch. She wouldn't eat them. They were charms: held, and thrown away. Her yellow skin was pale again; she'd be alright. She checked her pockets. Wallet, condoms, pepper spray; she'd rather be dancing. Dancing jobs didn't pay so well, but she loved the feeling of supple control, disciplining the punters with each flick of her eyes, shake of her hair, each glide around the pole. When she was flush, she danced for basic, filling in while girls did deals. Toinette didn't know what was in London.

She checked herself in the hall mirror. “Alexandra Eliza Prentice, you are a feckless individual who treats arrest and imprisonment as some great joke.” Still got a laugh, that judge’s speech, when she got her two years for possession. Longest hangover ever. Always, she’d known when the filth were coming, having it over the rooftops as they waded in to the party. That interview, with the WPC who fancied her rotten, who wrote off the dealing charges, thinking she’d get a bit back. The six months she actually did, in Holloway, with old mates. When she told Toinette, the pixie crossed her arms and said something rude enough to take to confession. Even that was good, though: sitting in the steep, cool church, waiting for Toinette to emerge, cleansed, from behind the screen. Far cleaner than leaving choky.

She’d run out of every last second to waste, and hustled the eight flights down. Her knees and ankles hollered but the pain did her good: it sharpened her, made her know she needed the money. She clattered out the security door, shooting the big umbrella. A curtain of water fell all around her, the cold ripping juice from her nose. Her spray without sniff made her woozy: she wiped her face on her sleeve. Down the block, a squall of alarm clocks dragged the young mums and students awake. When she couldn’t sleep, she’d stare into the comforting dark.

Under the bin chute cover, that blonde kid, wedged to a patch of dry, hand under her arm for warmth, phone sealed over her ear: “Do you think I’m a *fool*? Do you think I don’t *know* these things?”

Saki looked away. She’d been going to say, come in for a warm, a natter. She couldn’t. The girl was way young; there was work to do. She walked to the station; her usual swing nipped by cold, her fluidity damped by rain. There’d be no rainbows after, just more cloudy skies. She had to be earning, to believe in tomorrow. Up, always up, down in the tunnel, her hair, her body, a summer’s day in the dirty glass.

What is Brutalism? **Adelle Stripe, England**

Brutalism is a new literary movement. Think punk-rock, think beat generation.

It was founded in the summer of 2006 by three northern rock & roll outsiders: Tony O’Neill, Ben Myers and me, Adelle Stripe. We met via the internet, after showing mutual interest in each other’s work and realising we were getting published in all the same places.

Our subject matter encompasses common themes, and we draw our inspiration from similar writers: John Fante, Bukowski, Burroughs, Kerouac, Billy Childish, Cooper, Carroll...

We've put together a chapbook, *Brutal 1*, featuring poetry on the subject of our home towns, Blackburn, Tadcaster and Durham; the theme is northern desolation.

But it's more than an exercise in self-publishing - we figure there must be other people out there, writing in the same honest, *brutal* way that we do, producing what people really want to read about, reflecting honest experiences from real life. No dress-up, no bullshit, just raw writing from the gutter. We don't have a Brutal manifesto; we just want to encourage people to write, no matter what their background or education: you don't have to be a writer to be a writer.

Brutal 2 will feature prose from three Brutalist writers along with a special guest, and we intend to bring you further work by the best new writers from the Brutalist stable every few months.

Recent additions to our enterprise are Joseph Ridgwell, Mike Frankel and Ford Dagenham. They're all from Essex, from working class backgrounds, and are bound by the energy of their words, as well as their adventurous spirits. These boys have been around a bit. Taken risks. Got fucked up. Grown up. Got over it. And now they're writing about it - reflections of how the world really is: we all make mistakes, we all regret them; but writing these things down becomes an exorcism of some kind. When they put pen to paper, they almost absolve themselves of that experience. Their tone is slightly confessional, though not in a 'woe is me' way; more an acknowledgment that life is really a bitch. And we're all human, and all make massive cock-ups, whether we admit it or not.

Via the Brutalist movement, we hope to pull the closet writers out of the woodwork, and the internet has been the best way of finding each other so far. To find out more, check out the Brutalist myspace page at www.myspace.com/brutalists. We will be posting the new material there as soon as it's finished, along with the odd Brutalist bulletin.

I also edit *Straight From The Fridge*, a pretty obscure blog, which you'll find at www.upbondageupyours.blogspot.com, and where many of our new writers have found us. We get around 100 hits a day, from all over the world; it just goes to show that there *are* other people out there who are interested in what we do.

contributor biographies

Danny Rhodes teaches English in Kent High School and writes fiction for children and adults. His debut novel *Asboville* is out now through Maia Press, www.maiapress.com.

Miriam Mabel Martínez was born in Mexico City in 1971. She is the author of the story collection *Aquí y otros relatos* (Daga Editores, 2002).

Toshiya A. Kamei is an MFA student in translation at the University of Arkansas. Toshiya's translations of Mexican short prose have appeared in *Bonfire*, *Metamorphoses*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Literal*, *Eclectica*, *Mslexia*, and *Hobart* among others.

Edward Mc Whinney is from Cork in Ireland where he lives and writes.

Bruno D'Arcy lives in Lancashire. He is a poet and cartoonist, and has been published in numerous small press magazines as well as the occasional national.

James Babbs' recent poems have appeared in: *Abbey*, *Dream Fantasy International*, *Fight These Bastards*, *Hazmat Review*, *Naked Knuckle* among others. His poetry collection, *Dictionary of Chaos*, is available from www.xlibris.com.

Kay Pringle says of her collection, *It's My Party, But Not As I know It*, "it will neither be discovered wine-stained down the backs of ageing sofas in trendy liberal homes, nor in self-proclaimed 'good bookstores' across the country. But hey, that's just the way it is."

Patrick Stanhope is currently living in N. Mexico with his wife and daughter.

Rachel Chambers is 22 years old. She hails from the historic town of Derby but has successfully broached the north-south divide, completing her MA in Shakespeare and Literary Influence at the University of Bristol.

Loren Kleinman has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, *Resurgence*, as well as many other respected journals and anthologies.

Heidi James was born in Chatham, Kent. *Wrecking Ball Press* will publish her first novel, *Carbon*, in March 2007. She has set up *Social Disease*, an independent publishing company. She lives in London.

Rikki Weir was born in London, UK in mid-1986. He grew up in a rough area, went to one of the consensus "worst schools in the country" and somehow emerged relatively unscathed, to end up studying BA Geography at University College London.

Tamara Fulcher writes full-time and otherwise has no friends or interests, or interest in making friends. The first of Fulcher's many collections and novels awaits publication.

Ellen Marsh takes her work very seriously. She has had poems published previously in various anthologies.

Rachel Pierce is a student in northern Arkansas. She intends to further her education by majoring in English in the Fall. She enjoys reading, listening to music, writing, and making music.

James Quinton's debut novel and poetry collection forthcoming.

Mark Wagstaff lives in London. His new novel, *Claire*, a sharp and sugar-sweet ride through the pathology of love, is available now at £4.99 from PO Box 34702, London N7 8ZP. www.markwagstaff.com.

Adelle Stripe see page 48.