ICARUS

MAGAZINE

VOLUME LXVI ISSUE III

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VOLUME LXVI, ISSUE III

Trinity College Dublin

EDITORIAL

"Not by growth
    But the
Paper, turned, contains
This entire volume" — George Oppen

It is a genuine mystery why people begin to create the works they do; people who don't have contracts or promised gallery spaces, many without professional ambition or any clear sense of *why*. But art is not a crime. It needs no motive. Still, somehow, in marking the world we trace a pattern, find contours in the mould from which each person forms a life.

We can never be sure how works might change a reader, reorient their attention, reconstruct their vigilance on the world. That uncertainty—that's the challenge and that's the worth. Affects tangle in ways that cannot be undone, but only thought anew.

We take this opportunity to welcome next year's editors, Leo Dunsker and Will Fleming, and alongside them, Éabha Jones and Gillian Murtagh. We would also like to thank Leo for providing us with our epigraph. As the magazine turns a new page, may the voices uncovered be the measure of the editors' work.

Our time with Icarus has been a joy. We thank all those who shared their art with us: its value is expressed in the simple fact that you, reader, are here, with others, attending.

— Dean McHugh *and* Michael Kemp

Icarus is proud to feature an interview with Thomas Morris in conversation with Philip Coleman, Fellow and Professor in the School of English.

The *Icarus* staff acknowledges Trinity Publications and the School of English as as well as Gemini International Limited for making this issue possible.

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Putting Down Roots

by CONOR CLEARY

I
Houses that look like they might've looked good in the 80s:
despite my parents' denials, I suspect this used to be

a wealthier place. There's something vaguely Mediterranean
about the monkey puzzle trees and faux colonnades in

the front of houses with names. *Aisling View*. *Ave Maria*. One,
ambitiously, *Melbourne*.

II
My parents look beautiful in photographs from
the 80s: coral rose bouquet in hand, in lapel, beside them

a tiny marble statue of a couple and beside that an ashtray.
Imagine the hairstyles, the smoking indoors, the clay

and gravel of the hotel driveway and the wedding car on it.
Tin cans at the back, flowers on the bonnet.

III
Sometimes Tralee looks petrifying to me.
I'm scared by its greyness, its smallness and I see

its roads as runways.

Knot

by REED VAN HOOK

Chiesa di Sant'Ignazio

by KELLY KONYA

was only a brief walk,
a cobblestone path to rapture.
When you enter, it hums "Welcome, all"
in its silence, a narcotic serenity,
as God is said to do. And then

you're alone. The ceiling
like Michaelangelo's, without a dome
too but you'll pretend anyway, you'll hope

as you sit, the bones in their reliquaries
lived good lives or tried, fixed behind
a crisscross golden cross, shrinking
at the enormity of prayers floating
to the apex—

ad majorem dei Gloriam
(for the greater glory of God).

But there—you shouldn't need to keep returning, should you?

*

Theories of God

1. Burning bush

2. stream from Lourdes to douse

3. Breach in the starlight,
dying to know you
then suddenly scared to death.

4. Angel without face,
Burnt into wheat, wheat made flesh

5. Is it hard to be everyone's number one?

6. Hopkins: The Best ideal is the true and other truth is none.
All glory be ascribed to the holy Three in One.

7. Peter formed castles,
Mary nearby but You decide.

*

It was the marble angels almost-smiling
(if almost-smiling implies eloquence)

arising from Bernini's students in devotion that bares soul;

the marble drifts beneath me
and I crave that bareness, to be marked
by consecration—knowing what's unknowable—

and each time the green door urges on
a soldier for
Christ,
doomed, miserably, to fall.

It Takes All Sorts

by RORY MCNAB

1 Albert
was still struggling to get to grips
with "the internet."
And he accidentally put himself
up for sale
on eBay.
He was bought by a Moldovan family
for 30 quid
(including postage).

Albert glumly picked at his cereal
after his first night
with the Birsanus.
"Wait 'til Gene hears what
I've gone and done now,"
he thought.
"She'll be furious."

2 Norm
did a wee
in a swimming pool,
hoping no one would notice.
But he did it off the top diving board,
so of course they noticed.
And the life-guard impounded his water-wings.

3 Gaz was determined
to be the bigger man.
So he sent Sheila a cake with
"No Hard Feelings"
piped on it in cream.
But he'd done the piping all shittily,
Out of spite—
and didn't cook it properly—
and put anthrax in it.
That'd show her.

4 Dave Winch
Was the world's first solar-powered
Arsehole.
Lovely chap
for the most part.
But when the sun comes out—
Oh!
What a cunt!

5 Tom was outraged
when he found Stephen Hawking
hiding in his bedroom closet
—Naked!
His wife denied that
she'd been having an affair with
The Professor,
that she'd nothing to do with it.
"Then how'd he
get up the fucking stairs!?"
screamed Tom.

6 Angela Merkel
did some weird
Dark Magic
(involving a harpoon
and some Jenga bricks)
to give herself
a longer abdomen.

It worked and all.

Now she was about
40 foot long!
And her middle about
like a slinky.
But by Christ would they listen to her now!

7 In a bid
to prolong her life
Sandra
filled a barrel
with vinegar,
clambered in
and tried to pickle herself.

8 Father McManus
really fancied Charlotte.
So when he was marrying her
—to Tom—
he crossed his fingers
behind his back
when he did all the official stuff.
Up yours Tom!

9 Trevor
absolutely covered himself
in stamps,
scribbled
"Bangkok"
on his forehead,
then clambered inside
a postbox.
And waited.
For the best damn holiday of his life!

10 Dean Swain
ate his neighbours
driveway.
Filmed it.
And put it on Youtube,
and waited for it to go viral,
while picking gravel
out of his teeth.

11 An albatross
swooped down
and carried off
Dale Winton
in its talons
to use him to build
a nest.

Dale comforted himself
by pretending it was all part
of a new reality tv show.
And he settled in for
a long
hatching season.

12 Enda Kenny
took all the TD's out
for a few pints and clay pigeon-shooting,
to bond.
Gerry Adams won by a mile.

13 The Hulk's
homosexual lover,
Timothy,
bought him vouchers
for anger management therapy
on his birthday
—as a joke—
But the Hulk didn't see the funny side.
And he shattered Timothy's pelvis
before doing a shit on his pillow.

14 Trevor
the fisherman
couldn't believe his luck!
He'd waited his whole life
for this.
He stared at his beautiful catch.
He'd actually caught one,
a real life mermaid!
"So will you suck me off?"
He asked, undoing his waders.
"No."
"Right, well forget it then!"
And he heaved her back into the sea.

15 Terry "Chopsticks" Harris
spent the whole morning
cleaning the shit out of
(and off of) his patio.
Then he put in a solid half hour on the internet,
before absolutely laying into a satsuma
for about 5 minutes.
And he probably only spent
about a third of this time,
thinking about his recently deceased wife;
Maureen.

'Take what's useful and dismiss the rest': An Interview with Thomas Morris

by PHILIP COLEMAN

Originally from Caerphilly, South Wales, Thomas Morris published his debut collection of short stories, *We Don't Know What We're Doing*, with Faber and Faber in 2015. He studied English Literature and Philosophy in Trinity and in 2009 he won an Undergraduate Award for an essay in Philosophy. Thomas Morris is currently editor of the Dublin-based literary magazine *The Stinging Fly*. The following interview was conducted by email with Dr Philip Coleman of the School of English in April 2016.

PC Thanks for agreeing to do this interview, Tom. Were you involved in editing or writing for *Icarus* when you were a student in Trinity? Did you find College a good place to be as a younger writer?

TM I actually ran the Literary Society in my final two years, and I edited *The Attic*—the rival (and quite superior) magazine as I saw it then. I was writing stories and keen to try and publish them somewhere, but I was weary of things appearing clique-ish, so I submitted my work to *Icarus* under pseudonym. I went by Harry Block—the name of Woody Allen's character in *Deconstructing Harry*. In that film, Harry is a novelist

and a callous thief of other people's lives for the purpose of his fiction; my stories were hugely autobiographical, so the name seemed to suit. Anyway, I published four Harry-Block-stories over two years, and they were mostly Frank O'Connor imitations. One of them, 'My First Relationship' (I did say it was a Frank O'Connor rip-off) was actually re-published in the 60-Year anthology that came out in 2010.

But yes, College was a good place to be a younger writer. I made friends with people who were trying to write, and the sense of competition between us was mostly healthy. I remember reading Sam Coll's debut piece in *Icarus* and thinking, who the hell is this guy? I'd heard rumours of this First Year student going around wearing a top hat and calling himself SJC. I thought he sounded awful. But it turned out the hat was just a bowler and Sam was actually lovely—and monstrously talented. Once a month we organized Open Readings in Chaplin's Pub and Sam came and read from his novel-in-progress. I think it was actually called *IKAROS* for a while. Each month Sam would read from the novel, and the next chapter would always be better than the previous one. Seeing people working hard on their fiction really made me raise my game.

With the Literary Society we also arranged for writers to visit and give readings and talks, and those evenings were both inspiring and heartening—I saw that these writers weren't super-humans with hugely superior intellects or bionic hands. They were people who had wanted to write and they had just sat down and done it. I should add, at this point, that I spent my first two years in college hating the idea of societies and student publications, and I hated the people who ran them, too. They seemed like pompous power-hungry idiots, obsessed with organized fun. Then one night I got drunk at a launch, put my hand up at the wrong moment, and I suddenly became one of the aforementioned.

Academics-wise, I studied TSM English Literature and Philosophy. The mandatory reading for Philosophy was very light (I think I read one slim book in its entirety over the three years) so I had a decent amount of time to pursue my own reading. I'd ensconce myself in the library and read Germans and Russians and Norwegians and whoever

the hell I could get my hands on. And once I discovered you could take DVDs out the library, I was all that over that, too. But yes, my experience of the English course was positive. After reading all those huge novels in First Year (and suffering reading fatigue), I gravitated towards the short story and I chose every short-story course on offer. I actually ended up doing Paul Delany's Irish Short Fiction course twice. I took a strictly formalist approach to my essays: I more or less got away with spending four years writing essays on narrative voice and narratological strategies. I think the interest stemmed from my wanting to understand how the text was made, but also from a conviction that a lot of Critical Theory failed to capture the pleasures of reading. It sounds naïve and anti-intellectual when I put it like that, but either way I suppose I just had no personal desire in becoming a "disinterested" critic. For me, the "affective fallacy" wasn't a fallacy: I admired writing for its ability to have an 'affect', to raise my skin, and I wanted to work out how the hell it had done it.

But that that all sounds very romantic, doesn't it? It also sounds very intentional; as if I was consciously making decisions towards this goal of 'becoming a writer'. But it never really felt like that. It was mostly a lot of time of doubt and confusion and insecurity—married with an unfounded arrogance that if I ever did take writing seriously, I'd be better than everyone else. Starting out, I think the problem for young writers is their tastes are far superior to their abilities. You read other people's published stuff and know it's shit, and you know you can do better, but you can't seem to break through this layer in you; this invisible wall that's holding everything back. I distinctly remember feeling I had a kind of dam inside me, and once I knocked it out of the way, the writing would just flow out. But, really, it was a matter of chipping away at the wall; eroding it word by word and story by story.

I do regret not having taken my writing more seriously in college, though a lot of that came down to my living situation. I was pretty skint so I had to share a bedroom the last three years in college, and that wasn't really conducive to the kind of writing I'd been doing in my first year, when I had that sought-after thing: a room of one's own.

PC Your debut short story collection was published to critical acclaim in 2015 by Faber and Faber. Can you tell me a little about how long it took to put the collection together and at what stage you felt you had enough stories to work between the covers of a book?

TM After finishing my A-Levels in 2004, I spent the next year working in a horrible office, doing data entry. I'd been accepted into Trinity, but coming from the UK meant I wasn't eligible for funding from anywhere, so I deferred college for a year in order to raise the necessary funds. The day after I finished my job—and the day before I moved to Dublin—I bought myself a laptop. It was the first time I had access to a computer that didn't belong to the family. I moved into Halls in Rathmines, and created a folder on the laptop called 'Writing'. I wrote and finished my first proper short story at the end of 1st year. Some ten years later—when I sent my final final draft to Faber in 2015—the 'Writing' folder contained 1146 files.

Granted, a lot of those files were just one line: *Story about a man who wakes up to find he's been transformed into a Beatle—not just any Beatle, but John Lennon.* But there were a lot of short stories; a lot of short, short, stories; and lots of snippets of things that never became anything. A good chunk of the folder was also dedicated to a novel I began writing after graduating in 2009. The novel was about a 17-year old boy and was set over one weekend in Caerphilly. It took me three years to write and it wasn't a particularly good book, but I learned an awful through putting the thing together. Without knowing why, the book was in first person, present tense. It was a huge limitation on the prose, so I had to find ways to encode the sentences with more information than they had a right to bare.

The biggest issue, however, was that I'd inherited this very stripped down style from my reading of the so-called dirty-realists such as Raymond Carver and Richard Ford. It limited my sense of what good writing was: clean sentences, no adjectives, no funny business. And the style had an unintended consequence: there was an air of depression and resignation to my prose that I hadn't really wanted. Everything was a little flat, and I found it hard to get characters *to do* anything. But

inspiration came from an unlikely source: in 2012, I got a terrible job writing newsletters for a members club in town. I was suddenly forced to use adjectives and hyperbole and all manner of things I avoided in my fiction. As I say, I hated the job, but writing those newsletter seemed to loosen my writing up. At the same time, I began to pay closer attention to the writers I loved and I realised that they all luxuriated in language.

Anyway, to cut a long story short: the novel got me onto the MA in Creative Writing at East Anglia, and I wrote most of *We Don't Know What We're Doing* during that year. We had to submit 5000 words each month for workshop, so I basically wrote a draft of a new story every four weeks. Once I had 6 or 7 stories, I saw how I could put them together for a collection. But when I finished the masters, I was in a lot of debt and I quickly needed to find a job. With a stroke of fortune, I was offered the editorship at *The Stinging Fly* (where I'd previously been an editorial assistant). It was a huge privilege to be asked and I couldn't say no, but it did mean I lost some momentum in my writing. (At the same time, I was also publishing a book I had devised and edited called *Dubliners 100*, but that's another story entirely.) Anyway, over the next year, I completely re-wrote some of the stories and I wrote a few more. The final story took two years in total to write. When I finished the final final draft, I was emotionally drained. I'm still not sure I've recovered yet.

In terms of it becoming a book, I actually became quite obsessed with the mechanics of shaping it as a collection; I kept a spreadsheet and noted for each story the word count, the point of view, the age and gender of the characters; the tone of each story, and how each story ended. I wanted the collection to be one that people read in sequence from start to finish. I don't know why—it's really not how I read story collections (I usually first read the shortest stories, or the ones with the best titles).

So there we go. I've probably omitted a lot of important milestones, but that's a rough timeline. And even though the stories were written over two years, I really do feel that the collection was ten years in the making.

PC You grew up in South Wales, in the town of Caerphilly, which features strongly in *We Don't Know What We're Doing*, and until the age of eighteen you were educated solely through the Welsh language. Do you write in Welsh also? Why do you think Caerphilly, in particular, exercises such a strong hold over your creative imagination?

TM In my teens, I wrote terrible Welsh language poetry, but thankfully (for me and the Welsh-speaking world) I've kicked the habit. Welsh language poetry is generally written in a very high literary register and is mostly concerned with God and the Welsh language. My own poems were imitations of these, and were absolutely crap.

But as for Caerphilly: Grace Paley said that in order to write fiction it's important to have to have two ears—one which is listening to literature and the other that's listening to people. My life in Dublin has been rich in terms of reading and being involved in publishing, but in terms of people, it's been comparatively impoverished. I lived in a very small bubble during College: I lived with my friends who were students, and then at College I'd hang out with more friends who were students. Everyone was around the same age, studying the same things, and on the whole, doing okay. In Caerphilly, my life—and the people I saw—was more diverse. I suppose there's a deeper texture to my experience of life at home, and my ear is better attuned to the daily trauma and absurdities. Things are more traditionally grounded at home in Wales: my friends are getting getting married, buying houses, having children, getting divorced. This obviously all happens in Dublin, too, but it somehow feels different; maybe it's because I haven't known my friends in Dublin for as long? There's certainly a dimension lacking in my understanding of it—whereas when I'm back in Wales, I seem to be able to see how everything has come together.

And to write stories, I need to feel like I know where the walls are. I tend to plunge into the unknown in my fiction—I don't know what's going to happen once I begin each one—so it's useful to have parameters; a constraint to work against. With my collection, 9 of the 10 stories are set in Caerphilly, so the the town itself is the constraint I've

imposed. It freed me to do whatever I liked in the stories because at a fundamental level I understood the setting and the characters—and I was likewise able to comprehend the limits of my not-knowing; I knew how to push at it.

'all the boys' is the outlier in the collection, a story not set in Caerphilly, but set in Dublin (it's about a group of Caerphilly lads on a stag weekend). I felt comfortable writing Dublin this way because both myself and the narrator knew more about the city than the characters did. It allowed me to play with knowingness, which itself is a theme of the story. I do want to write more fiction set in Dublin, but it's going to be a challenge to work out the point-of-view. I don't feel I have the authority—or enough understanding—to write from the perspective of an Irish character.

PC You live and work in Dublin at the moment, as editor for *The Stinging Fly*. Is this the 'day job' or do you see a stronger connection between your work as an editor and your writing?

TM Firstly, I have to acknowledge that it's a hugely privileged position. I probably read close to a thousand submissions a year, so the question of how to put a story together is one I'm considering every day. And in some cases that's had a very direct influence on my work. Reading the submissions grants you access to a kind of collective consciousness: you begin to see the same concerns and themes cropping up. For example, in every submissions pile I probably read 10 or 12 stories about 'coming home'. Stories titled 'Homecoming' or 'The Prodigal Son' and so on. Stories about people who have left a place, and then return, and suddenly realize how different things are, or how things haven't changed at all, or how things are the same, but the narrators themselves feel different, uncanny. Reading these kind of stories made me consider my own experiences of 'coming home'. I moved to Dublin when I was 19, and each time I came home it all felt quite unreal. And I mean that in the strict sense—as in 'not real'. Living between two places can be demanding on a person's psyche; it can almost cause a split in the personality,

and I wanted to find a way of expressing that feeling without relying on the common tropes that I saw in the submissions pile.

Domestic realism is the dominant mode in the submission we receive, and after reading hundreds of stories about families in kitchens, drinking tea and *not really talking*, I grew distrustful of the mode. The story 'Fugue' is my attempt at the homecoming trope, and by the end it basically morphs into a horror story. My fatigue with submissions has meant I've probably now become more interested in psychological and emotional realism than in the social or domestic. I want to capture how things feel, and if that means I have to trespass into unreal gardens, then so be it.

But to get back to the crux of your question: I've seen how stories can improve when the author is asked the right questions. As an editor, a lot of my work is about pushing the writers to go further, to own up to themselves about what their intention for the piece might be, and then to revisit the story and solidify the intention throughout. I'm not always great at following my own advice (who is?), but each time I come to edit a brilliant story by another writer, it forces me to consider my own processes anew. As I say, it's a hugely rewarding and privileged position.

PC Can you tell me a little about the significance of the Brautigan and Barthelme epigraphs to *We Don't Know What We're Doing?*

TM Well, to begin, I have to thank you. I first encountered Brautigan and Barthelme on your American short fiction course in my Third Year, and I immediately felt a connection with those writers—in a way I hadn't felt in any of my other course reading. Some writers just crack open your head, and give you permission to see reality—and write about it—the way you've always, deep down, seen it. And I encountered those things exactly in Brautigan's and Barthelme's humour—in their irony and willingness to embrace the absurd. There's something oddly humble and inviting about their work.

The Brautigan quote—'There must be talking. That's what people do, they talk'—comes from *You Can't Catch Death*, a memoir written by

his daughter Ianthe Brautigan. In it, there's a short chapter where she describes her father taking her to the ballet, to see Swan Lake, when she was very little. After about ten minutes, Brautigan turned to her and asked, 'When does the talking begin?' and when she told him there'd be no dialogue, he snuck out and went to the bar. On their way home, Brautigan delivered the There must be talking line.

For me, it was an important epigraph for a few reasons. Firstly, my characters talk a lot, so it's a kind-of aesthetic justification for what's to follow. But it's also an appeal, I think. The classic conception of the short story is that it's about what's not being said. In some ways, I think writers have taken this too far—I've read stories full of people not talking to the point that it's just ridiculous.

All that said, the older I've gotten, the more complicated the act of talking seems to be. And I'm beginning to wonder if it's possible to talk too much about something? Might it be best to just leave some things be? Funnily enough, I was recently been re-reading Ianthe Brautigan's memoir, and I see that ballet scene very differently now. My sympathies are with the little girl who was excited about her father taking her to the ballet and then getting left in the stalls on her own. She comes out at the end, and her father is drinking—and then he delivers that smart-ass line. Perhaps it's sometimes kinder to keep your mouth shut.

The Barthelme epigraph, meanwhile—'Any fool can cry wolf; to cry sheep is inspired'—comes from a short piece he wrote about the American sculptor Jim Love. Again, it can be understood a few ways—especially in the context that Barthelme is writing—but taken on its own, it initially made me think of the characters in my book. They spend so much time persuading themselves—and others—that they're okay, that there's nothing wrong, nothing wrong here at all.

Then, on further reflection, I understood the quote differently. I realised that it's the commonplace, the seemingly benign—our jobs, our relationships, our conversations with ourselves—that can pose the biggest dangers. Yes, the wolf in the field is threatening, but the routine of standing in the field, watching over sheep all day, comes with its own unique threats, too. When I worked that horrible data entry job, I'd

be on the 8AM train to Cardiff, and everyone would be pale-tired and yawning and looking utterly miserable, and I'd want to shout, WHAT THE HELL ARE WE DOING?!

PC A note at the start of the book states that 'These works are works of fiction' and yet that 'Any resemblance to real life is purely inevitable.' Do you believe that there is an 'inevitable' connection between literature and 'real life'? What kinds of challenge does this present to the writer?

TM Yes, I really do. And I think that when fiction fails it's often because it hasn't been rooted in life as the author has actually experienced it, independent from the way it's been represented in art and media (notwithstanding that art and media are inevitable prisms through which we comprehend our existence). Synge's early work, Yates said, was comprised not of 'real life', but of material that Synge only knew from his own reading. Yates compares it to two mirrors reflecting each other—mostly empty content, and showing us only the mirrors themselves. I think the challenge in fiction—for me at least—is to find the thing in-itself, while also showing the ways in which the thing-in-itself is obscured and complicated by all the surrounding noise.

On a practical level, there are the obvious challenges: the moral questions of truth and appropriation, and of writing something that won't leave you estranged from your loved ones. (There's a few stories in the collection that pissed my family off.) On a writing-level, I'm constantly trying to figure out how to use things I've seen and heard from 'real life', and then obscure them in such a way that particular people don't feel betrayed—whilst simultaneously not betraying the essential truth of the thing I'm trying to capture.

PC Do you have any advice for readers of Icarus who might be writing short stories and trying to get them published in Ireland or the UK today?

TM Find people whose opinions on writing you trust, then never let them go. Share work, and be open to feedback. If you're giving feedback, be

sure to dedicate serious time and consideration to it. It's good to be generous and you'll learn an awful lot about yourself and your own work from reading theirs. It's always easier to confront your own faults and weaknesses when they're presented in other people's work.

If you're sending a story to a magazine, be sure to know something of the magazine first. Each one inevitably has its own aesthetic bent, and you can save yourself a lot of hassle and heartache by picking the right venue. If you're a folk musician, you wouldn't send your demo to a rock label. It's also a good idea to read stories written by people who are still alive. Some living authors whose short stories I admire include: A.M. Homes, Kevin Barry, Joy Williams, Ali Smith, George Saunders, Dorthe Nors, and Lorrie Moore.

Read widely and critically. If you find an author you like, gorge on them, allow them into your bloodstream. If you read someone whose work you hate, go home and write against it. Use any energy you can find to make something new. And try to tell the truth as best as you can. This might require telling the most outrageous of lies and forging the oddest of new forms, but if you're not going to tell the truth, you may as well give up writing fiction and take a job in advertising.

And finally—you should feel utterly, utterly free to ignore any advice any writer ever gives. It's all based on the writer's own subjective tastes and experiences, and each argument is made in favour of themselves. Put simply: all writers are propagandists for their own work. You should take what's useful and just dismiss the rest.

—Untitled—

by ANNA D'ALTON

Yes, less than all that
underbelt of sound
yes, yes, stinging eyes
too full of pictures
eyes though
eyelids battened down
to the dust and against
their own seeing
kneeling, over eyes
my eyelids kneeling
to gods' imaginings
I am spending all my colours at once
I am spinning my hair for you
weaving my fingers
and pinning
I have none of my elastics left
if I were a child and I were lost
you would ask me
who do you belong to

An Interrogation of the Semicolon

by FÉILIM Ó BRÁDAIGH

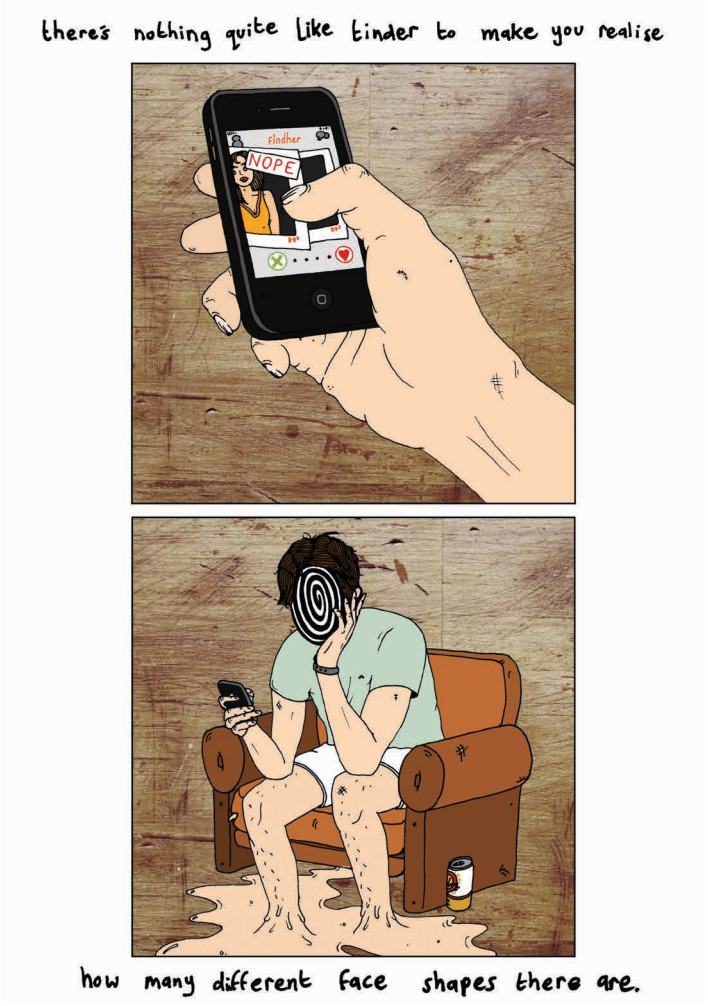
What the literal fuck do do you mean superfluous superfluous how does that word exist outside of its own description I know we had a recession but for a lot of people that meant less channels on TV I'm sounding like a Marxist I'm not I just need an outlet to let out this hyperventilation of the sunken soul superfluous superfluity went for a little walk along the road along the road that moocow once upon a time

When a woman loves a man
But won't
Yet

Is that where we put the semicolon?

Fishing

text by ED SALLEY, *image by* NATHANAËL ROMAN



Forgotten

by LAURA HEALY

Sex (after W.B.Y.)

by GEORDIE MILNE

We lie awake night after night
and never get the angles right.

The Man Who Realised He Was God

by FÉILIM Ó BRÁDAIGH

Smiled.

Some Strange Unsurprising Resemblances to Robinson Crusoe, Mariner

by GEORDIE MILNE

Granny is like Crusoe because she has learned to live life without other people.

Granny is like Crusoe because long ago she spurned loved ones in a way which led to this wreckage.

Somehow life goes on after the shipwreck.

Granny is like Crusoe because she hasn't seen another body naked in twenty years.

Granny reads about the cannibals in the morning papers, except now they are called refugees and she is very afraid they will come steal her land or worse. She should take precautionary measures, lay up provisions from the shop, fix that gate and such like.

She will not meet a refugee on Friday.

Granny is like Crusoe because she dresses in her own way. Goatskins and a homemade umbrella are not unacceptable when you're on your own.

Granny is like Crusoe because she's sick of the view.

Granny is like Crusoe because animals are a comfort. She throws dinner parties for them, with dog at her right hand, and two cats, sitting on either side of the table, so long as she keeps them there. They are almost like a little family, she thinks.

Granny is like Crusoe because she has wished her dog would speak.

She once considered teaching the birds on the feeder to talk at her like parrots. But that was crazy thinking.

None of them know her name. The chaffinch, coal tit, wren, woodpecker, she recites them like a poem.

Granny is like Crusoe but not the Crusoe who has the strength to build a canoe and escape.

A tree fell down in her garden. She won't hollow it out.

Things, as is

by LEONARD BUCKLEY

> "... Wir kennen den Kontur
> des Fühlens nicht: nur, was ihn formt von außen.
> Wer saß nicht bang vor seines Herzens Vorhang?
> Der schlug sich auf: die Szenerie war Abschied."
>
> ("... we never know
> the actual, vital contour of our own
> emotions—just what forms them from outside.
> Who has not sat, afraid, before his heart's
> curtain? It rose: the scenery of farewell.")
>
> —Rainer Maria Rilke

There are things I can't find homes for in the present
tense, as we presently are. Like the time you took
a shit in a bath we were close enough to share,
and we laughed at our novelty comedy gold
before an adult came in to fish it out with
my *Action Man* lunchbox, & we laughed at that still some more.

There are things like this where I wonder where you are
as far as my friendship is concerned, as I lie
here, in a double bed (and that small bit closer
than you think to the poop-scooping age), watching my
lightbulb post-lightswitch, dying and bloating inwards,

where it's too easy to sadden and worry over
it all, and how fine It All seems after sleep,
and whether that says more about your tendency
to panic irrationally before sleep, or
your indifferent apartness from everything
afterwards. It's a tough call, but there's little use
ignoring the synapse gaping from you

to me: how regularly I forget that we'd
once kissed, curious and fine with it; had drawing
competitions which I regularly won; wore
underwear like hats and hid inside wardrobes, not
ever thinking about why. And now I can walk

outside during a week that mom is away in
New Jersey, find you and Daniel on a mattress,
friends, totally zoned, and totally unable
to speak to me with words. And you're a much better
artist than I ever was now, but I worry
that you'll never make anything out of it. It

has become far too serious, like everything
else, and I am missing you, angry with you, scrambling
for a lunchbox big and figurative enough,
for the bathful of shit of things, as is; unsure
unfit for the task of getting this together.

Devil in the Detail

by DANIEL TATLOW-DEVALLY

It begins with the bishop. In some versions, that is, he is a bishop; in others, a knight-errant. There are still others in which he is an Arab returning from the raid of Constantinople. This last one in particular sits well with the fact that the character is often interested in where East lies yet many interpretations have been found to make the fact fit. At the least, it shows that many scholars found the story compelling, and that it set many lonely dreamers in many lonely places dreaming and hoping to fit its circumstances to themselves.

By and large, however, there is agreement that this person, this bishop, is journeying across a desert. It is the large, sandy desert that we find in every storybook; it is cold at night and hot by day. Dead shrubs, snakes, are rare; sometimes a barren edge of stone peeking out from the sand hints at a large plate rock beneath. At a distance this seems like a resistance or wrinkle in the smooth sculpting of the wind. The bishop is journeying across the desert with a charge, a somewhat sickly boy, and it is this aspect of the story that is strange on any iteration: the boy's left index finger is preternaturally long, long enough to rest in the crux of his elbow when he closes his hand. Some book versions of the story have an in-jacket design with the figures on their horses: the bishop shod in spurs and a long cloak, the boy emaciated and wearing a capuchin hat, the long finger draped across the neck of his horse. The bishop has been charged with taking the boy to Jerusalem: perhaps it is for healing, more likely it is to see what can be learned from studying him. Here the story mentions that the boy's finger is doubly unusual, being also strangely sensitive: the boy can run his finger over the top of a rock and become acquainted with every minutiae and crevasse in its surface; he can tell which ripple or crack was made by grass roots and which were worn by water. From the pulses and tremors in his horse's belly, he diagnoses worms. Some versions play the boy's feature as a magical gift, others insist (through his dialogue with the bishop) that the

finger's sense of touch is rich and sensitive. One night he scratches the ground idly and declares that they are on top of an old Assyrian city.

As they travel, the bishop talks often of God. But in some versions his actions are more those of a knight errant and it is while cleaning his armour that he falls into prayer and exhorts the boy to join him. But the boy is rarely interested and opts to spend their resting time cataloguing the strange minutiae that he is able to glean from the world with the sense of his finger. The finger reveals every fold rippling in a layer of rock: it can feel the lilt where one colour gives way to another in the vein of a piece of sandstone; where grass once grew, it can tease out even the faintest cracks and rivulets of moisture; and when the wind blows dust the boy confidently asserts that it was from a place that, a year ago, maybe two, people were burning fires to keep warm. Some versions of the story adapted for theatrics have the boy recount these details with the aid of a chorus against the bishop's pleas for him to close his eyes to the lurid details of the world and listen to the word of God. And still, the boy is unrepentantly interested in the many things that the world around him can reveal through his strange probing finger. On multiple occasions the boy is petulant, or sulks in the face of authority; some versions make it seem that this is incidental and instead he is earnestly engrossed in the information from his finger to the exclusion of an interest in anything else at all. Whatever cannot be found and traced under his preternaturally sensitive finger, teased out in can impertinent search for detail and texture, is as unreal to the boy as a passing dream. God, it seems, has not made an appearance at the level of the micro-tactile. Some versions give whole cantos to the interplay between the bishop and the boy on this matter: the bishop usually rebukes the boy for paying too great a reverence for what he can read from the world around him with the tip of his finger, and reminds him that such detail is as a dream to the God who made it. The boy's attitude to this is wilful and dismissive; at some points the interplay between boy and bishop plays out as it would in classic morality drama, or even in ancient dialogues, but the resemblance to these more austere, stylised forms is derailed by the intensity of passages in which the boy describes the detail of texture that the world reveals to his finger. A common etching found at the top of these chapters is of the two figures sitting by a fireside and arguing, the boy's strange finger extending far into the middle of

the image, the digit like one from a bat or a deep-dwelling frog. Their sleeping horses—themselves only rough scratches with a pen nib—frame the picture. In one stanza the boy points out that the bishop's smooth armour, below the level of the naked eye, is full of dents and rivulets, and makes a vulgar comparison between the armour and part of the human anatomy with which it shares that deeper texture. The bishop utters a stern rebuke and rides ahead of him for two days.

Each variation on the story's passages seems to offer new scope for debate on its origin and significance. The boy sometimes uses his strange sense to feel every silk strand in the many Fleur de Lis on the bishop's cloak; other times he meditates and finds dirt from the fingers of the weavers who sewed Persian egrets and songbirds onto the door of their tent. The boy will boast of his curved, deformed finger as being a scimitar that has no mercy when slicing open the truth; other times, it is a fish hook that latches onto the subtlest of facts. Arguments about plausible inspiration for the meters of these verses—the way that certain references to what could be the third or the failed fourth crusade may appear in the work and help date it—have fuelled academic dispute. But the last section, abrupt and rarely in the same format as the preceding narrative, is still more opaque. Riding now over the mountains of what may be Jordan, the bishop and the boy come to a valley: dry, below the snow line, and with stones arranged in semicircles or in tight piles against larger boulders. Here, the boy always dismounts and insists that he has sensed paths unavailable to the naked eye. In western versions of the story the bishop believes that the boy has found the last outpost of the empire of Prester John and attends eagerly to what the boy tells him. There follows a lengthy section in which the boy presses and winds himself along the rocks, speaking sometimes to the bishop and sometimes, it seems, in dialogue with himself or voices he tries to brush away. The passage becomes enervated and tense as the boy leads his guide in circles on the cold, misty path; the horse's shod hooves make little clear complaints on the rocks as they go. The bishop begins to chide the boy and says that bandits are known in the area, and that they will of course be drawn by the sound of horses going in circles and by strange, repetitive talk and chuckling, which is exactly what the boy is doing at the moment that the bishop says this. As their circles become closer and the boy's speech becomes

more feverish, the bishop utters a cry of warning—he himself knows not quite why—and hears rather than sees the flash of an arrow, and at this point a rhythmic refrain from earlier in the canto takes over, obscuring the action of the scene. When the story resumes, the bishop is desperately trying to hold the boy over the back of his saddle while dressing a wound that he has received himself, the two of them are now riding through the cold night and towards Ba'ir on the way to the Holy Land. The boy is subdued and chattering under his breath, and we learn that he is not talking in this passages because he is sucking the broken stump of the sensitive spindly finger that once came out of his hand. Escape from the bandits was, the bishop reminds him, a lucky affair. But the boy is not listening. The onomatopoeia of a language is often lost even in the space of a hundred years and an interesting suggestions is that the boy, in these last sections as he is draped on the back of a horse and sucks at his maimed hand, looking up at the stars, is making cooing noises like a nightjar. These *ûek*, *ûek* noises gradually meld into the last lines of the whole piece, and the final page of many versions—with a dense, inky or cross-hatched night, the moon grinning down with a very suggestive face over the little squiggle that represents the pair riding to Ba'ir—transliterates thus—

The land has closed its chattering mouth
I am the bird that knows not where to nest
What I have once seen I will hold in faithful memory
And count among my dearest, always.

The Farmer's Wife

by KATIE BLACK

—The soot turned my fingernails blue when I put that last briquette into the fire and after that when I scratched my nose the tip bloomed like a wave that's how the blue got onto my nose.

—Well throw your nose into the sink there and let the water pool and pull that soot down into drains and into lanes until it catches on some black cat's tail and makes it blacker.

—I'll do that so and I'll do it now but should I pick up that dead fish while I'm here in the sink so as to slice its head off—slice its head off so that the neck (if the neck is fishy or part of the fishery of the fishy thing itself) is torn and air gets at it with sad fingers and washes it with wine-blushed mould?

—Yes to that farmer. Now watch as I take this match which is in fact a bone of mine and light the newspaper you bought for me this morning and the footballers in the sports section run from the thin line of the earth which spreads and takes bites.

—Yes, and you toss that paper into the fire like you know you will, like I know you will, and you bend your face to it.

—And the fire grows and the bits of dirty images and the plastic tags that hold prices to clothes and shoes and cutlery sets they are sucked into the grate.

—Whoosh! Into the air! Light in the little pieces of air.

—You will stare at a wall.

—You will see the little pieces of air—they are moving.

—You know that I will.

—I know that you will.

—But all the time in the corner the television is screaming something that sounds like—

"And what do you know of the world now that you sit there so sure?"

—But I tell you farmer I know the answer—

What I know I know.

What I don't know I burn.

What I see in myself when I look at a blank wall I carry in moments alone.

Advanced Attack

by JAMES IRELAND

Calling All X-Men

by MAIREAD CASEY

There's a plastic vampire on the front porch swing singing, "I only make love in the midnight hour." I'm glad he's there. He doesn't scare the neighbours but I'm glad the swing is being used for something. After its first wet summer it became rotten and chipped. My sister Áine found a woodlouse in the cracks once and refused to sit on it again. Mam said that's just what we got for trying to imitate the Americans. This isn't Nashville, Tennessee, and airs won't make it like anything close to Nashville, Tennessee. I was glad to have the seat all to myself. I let the little rolly-polly fellas run around through my fingers and over again.

I used to sit on the swing there all day long with a book or an iPod until Jessica Morrison told me her sister said I looked like a mad old biddy that the family decided to keep outside. It's her thing to call me a biddy since one day she saw me wear a white slip under my pinafore at school. Bitch. She probably gets to wear whatever clothes she wants but my mam says it's only proper for a girl to wear a slip under a dress or skirt if it isn't lined. I bet Jessica will get more sweets than me trick-or-treating too and still call me fat after the mid-term. There's way more houses on her road and it's got all the new houses that my dad says is full of yuppies. "Yuppies" means you get proper lucky bags instead of fun-size Mars Bars and Milky Ways. At least the plastic, decorative vampire is above such scrutiny.

This year though is going to be great. With persistence, I got to inspect the bottoms of the stacks of sticks ready for the bonfires to make sure that no little hedgehogs were sleeping underneath. A nature man was on the television saying sometimes they're hiding in there thinking that this was some kind of new hedgerow and burn up while we're outside telling ghost stories and toasting marshmallows. It would have felt more worth the grief I got from the townie boys if I actually found a hedgehog. I've never seen one alive before. I'll keep looking.

Last year I was a vampire. I tied back my hair in a ponytail, gelled down the front part so my frizz stayed put, covered my face in Sudocrem and talcum powder so I'd stay white all night and used red lipstick for the blood trickling down my chin. I wore a fake tuxedo-print long-sleeved t-shirt. I liked how much I looked like the real thing. I have a natural widow's peak though mam doesn't like me to call it that. I was a bit disturbed though by how much I looked like a boy vampire.

This year I'm wearing the Scream costume. A long stretched mouth and black hole eyes hiding my face and my whole body is covered in the sewed-in shiny black sheet. There is a little button inside you press that pumps red blood down through the mask's long face. That wasn't in the movie but I think it's a pretty cool effect. I'm fairly sure that I have the best costume ever. My phone buzzed in the corner of the room. It's Natasha, sending the word out "BTW no costumes this Halloween. None of the 6th class kids are doing it and we're way too old as well."

I decide not to go to party at all but sulk around the house in my costume, sighing and pumping blood as I look in the mirror. Eventually I decide to watch The Simpsons *Treehouse of Horror* and *Poltergeist* and finally feel content that I missed nothing at Natasha's house. I went with my mam in the car to collect my older brother Dave from the pub in town. His friends were getting dressed up. He's a six foot tall parrot which seems kind of stupid since parrots aren't scary at any height. "It was the only onezie left in Penneys," he says by way of excuse. Outside waiting I see there are two Wonder Womans comparing tiaras at the door. I see Storm and Rogue from X-Men, authentically clad and chatting it up just like in the comics. I see Jubilee, Harley Quinn, Poison Ivy, Harry Potter, all four Ninja Turtles and Pikachu. I see Carrie, It, Jack and Sally. Most everyone else is dressed as Batman, the Joker, or zombie versions of every profession. My favourite is the zombie coroner. What's he supposed to do now? It was a treat to see them all stumbling around and laughing and hanging out in the same universe.

I made up a story while watching them from the car, of a world where the dead dug themselves out of their graves. Instead of being afraid, everyone is just really excited and glad to have them all back. The goal of immortality has been achieved and avenging dead loved one's is no longer a supervillian mo-

tivation and so they give up their lives of crime. The walking dead among has made mutants seem a paltry difference in a time full of possibility and Xavier's X-Men have no need to protect or fight, just fly to Bali beaches or toast bread with their laser eyes. Then the crimefighters get to have a break and they get to all just be friends and be happy. I always wanted Batman and the Joker to get together—they think about each other constantly—and now that they have no ideology between them, here they are kissing under a street lamp. It was sad when the car pulled away with our drunk, loud parrot regurgitating everything that went on in the night. But I looked forward to Halloweens yet to come when I would have boobs and could dress up as a Jean Grey or Scarlet Witch.

Stay

by KELLY KONYA

after Carl Phillips

When he speaks of mindfulness and writes it off—
prayer is better suited but for what?—
I can tell he believes it, fathoms it clearly.
Sometimes a thing can seem lovely when it's just
needing love, stripped of conviction and lying
somewhere in the cold, beyond tension.
Sometimes remembering that I'm doomed to fail—
that my body already contains the thing that will kill me—
keeps me almost steady, if steadiness is what flair
for a while brings—cigarettes (mine), silver bangle (his),
a timeline bookended by Septembers (ours)—
before it all rusts and fades like old fallow steel mills.
Before I had to defend myself, that I liked feeling in control,
before the beers and the silent disco, before envy
and a vile tattoo and the eventual that'll kill you, you know,
the coffee shop on the corner was a bank—before that,
a school for young Catholic boys, the only remains
of which is a cross above the door framed with the phrase
I AM WHO AM, as if that much, at least, still remains
for us to consider, or should. If it's true that transparency is
the honest-to-god truth, how come a made-up world
saves us from the rain? London, Cleveland—how delicate,
this holding of home in the mouth, the almost benign
trick of distancing for salvage the last signs of lust, lusting
like bees chasing honeycombs, frantic, eyeballs shaking . . .

La tour Eiffel

by LAURA HEALY

A Fable for a Puppet Theatre

by LEONARD BUCKLEY

> "A man and a woman exchange parts of themselves with each other
> —a hand, a leg, a heart. For a while this contents them.
> In the end they have rent each other pieces."
>
> —Kenneth Gross

I

In your pocket-lint days, the very
fat and many of them, there were things
that didn't get out; hands that were kept

out of reach from your teeth, your tongue,
the area of your mouth in general,
that prayed for wet animation: an

"I" for each body; confessions extremities
—boundaries reasonable and real.
Anything.

Say anything.

To help you in your age.

2

We scraped the sky for things of a like-
minded scale and availability
to the sky

which is big
and absent as far as our
little hands are concerned.

In the process they sagged themselves
in a dream and leapt from our bodies, until
the veins in our wrists made buildings of us

and love would answer with a sigh,
the sound of that forgetful sky
speaks about how our hands
—because I don't use them for hunting
or breaking things over my legs
or holding your hips and playing your palms
in the innermost ends of the labyrinth—

exist to insist upon limit; to stop people
from flowing into people entirely when
a banquet of little fires is going, and sounds

are pushed out between us that sound
like beams, from hip peak to ear drum,
like beams, from lighthouses or vapour trails

tocking out the time it takes
for our long hair to dry.
I'm lying at fox's distance, sick.

You're too much to catch
in one piece of laundry
and hurting my mains too much to work out.

3

This evening I miss you,
try not to think about it, and
wonder if you are in India yet,

unable to keep pounds
in my room any longer,
and wishing that any one thing

had the strength to stay the
same, nine months past our
sell-by—the time it takes

to bake and to
bin
a life. Funny.

I live like this now
with the constant thought
I have done this to you;

in my nakedness made you
my catatonic hero,
knowing that this

is deserving of memory;
that the sky
that not even the sky

is afforded such luxuries
as a blur between bodies.
It just isn't.

You have yours
I mine. It its.
And I'm sorry.

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Cf. *Icarus Magazine* LXVI (2):38–39.

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