

Contents

First – David Trame

Disjointed – Cheryl Whittaker

Satan – Jessica Edelman

Review – Dropping Ecstasy with the Angels by Dee Rimbaud

Odds + Ends – Michael Pepper

Going Home – Lazar Dzamic

sister/outsider – Belden Sezen

Dark Matter – Vincent Heselwood

The Shattered Mirror – Rebecca Stonehill

Music Hall & Dirty Pop Music – an interview with Penny Broadhurst – Rebecca Toennessen

Judas Lives – John Hall

Jelly Park - Aliya Whiteley

Peaches - Liliana V Blum (translated by Toshiya A. Kamei)

Cover art and page 15 - SpookyAndrea
(SpookyAndreaHM@hotmail.com)

Riot Angel #4



July 2005—£3—ISSN 1743-5633

MEET THE EDITORIAL BOARD



Colin Jones: was born and bred in Wigan. Most of his early background was in education. Since then he has moved into proofreading and editing. His interests include reading and writing.

Jacinta Nandi-Pietschmann: was born in Ilford, Essex and now lives in Berlin with her baby boy Rico. She's had work published in Riot Angel, QWF and Mslexia and has an article appearing in the near future on the f-word. The most famous person she ever met was either Richard from Right Said Fred or T-Shirt from Teabags. The thought of a stodgy, greasy English breakfast, washed down with piping hot tea makes her homesicker than ever.

Steph Little: Born and bred in Newcastle. I graduated with a degree in English, specialising in Contemporary Literature. Currently working for an independent publishing house as publicity manager. I also dabble in freelance writing, editing and review new titles for many leading publications (my 'field of expertise' is travel writing and biography). An obsessive reader/writer, you can find me searching the charity shops of the south coast for first editions, or working on my latest writing project.

First – David Trame

Early spring, first warm sun, you look at the sea
with a mixed itch of dread and desire,
you know it's still very cold.
You wait, fidget with a shell, a pebble
and scan the lulling glare of the horizon.
Then step in and walk on
slowly, teeth chattering, heart hammering, water
at your ankles, calves, thighs, almost up to your breast,
your arms still raised in the air –go, you tell yourself,
go, each instant is a leap
and no way to know for sure you will resist,
go, it's what the bottomless now of your breath
asks first.

David Trame is an Italian teacher of English living in Venice-Italy. He has been published in magazines in Ireland the U.K. and U.S. including "Event", "White Wall Review", "Nthposition", "Orbis," and "Stand".

Disjointed – Cheryl Whittaker

I was in the news today
- did you miss it?
Well, I made the Horror Headlines.
They found my body,
in the river,
in pieces.
My arms
my legs
my hands
my feet
my fingers
my toes
...had all come apart.
I had no teeth
nor eyes in my head,
they said.
I had the letter ten
burnt into my back.
They couldn't figure that one out
and are currently investigating the matter further.
My coal-silk hair
in a plastic bag
brushed and shiny.
My fingernails, little almond slices,
in a harmonica case.
It's the only time
I've ever been on TV.
I wish you'd seen me in the news.

***Cheryl Whittaker is a Literature graduate currently working
in the most un-degree-related of disciplines: e-commerce.
She hopes very soon to be living
and writing in Europe.***



Satan – Jessica Edelman

Satan was getting a bit tired of being diabolically evil and was thinking of going into Journalism instead.

He'd have to get a postgraduate diploma. Perhaps he'd study part time so that he could, at the same time, continue earning his regular salary for committing evil deeds and corrupting people's souls.

This had, he had to admit now, been a rather risky career path to chose, but what else could he have done, having failed his TEE and taken an immediate dislike to TAFE?

He had, of course, had that job at McDonalds, but after having the incredibly loud argument with the manager over the abysmal presentation of a cheeseburger, he had left in a huff.

It was over the Internet that he'd found out about the career prospects of 'evil'. He'd been sent a forward, which was one of those; 'which profession are you best suited to' multiple choice tests, and as there were ten minutes left until the start of Dawson's Creek, he decided to give it a go.

Fortunately enough, there were only ten questions. He had always detested long examination papers. As he began, he was a bit nervous that they might suggest his ideal profession was a cleaner, or a garbage collector, or something along those lines. But, no. At the end of the test, a box with small print appeared in the centre of the screen.

You are not gifted academically, and prefer to avoid physical tasks. You interact reasonably well with people, and have a

rather good dress sense. Given you like your job, you are committed to working long hours and are not bothered by the prospect of travel. It appears that you are best suited to work in the sector of 'evil'. For more information visit www.evil_work_opportunities.org

As there were still three minutes remaining before the start of Dawson's Creek; which happened to be the season finale, he clicked on the link.

To his annoyance, the site took rather a long time to load, and he wondered whether or not he should have signed up for broadband after all. Eventually, fifty seconds before the start of Dawson's Creek, the red background of the site emerged, and then, the bold type.

He had never liked reading very much, so he scanned quickly through most of the details, until he saw 'Position for Satan – now vacant. To apply, send résumés to assistantmanagerandcoordinator@hell.com'

By now, he could hear the music of Dawson's Creek already playing, so he left the screen and went to watch the show; and decided he'd go back to the computer as soon as it finished, providing nobody called or no other programs of interest came on.

One hour later, he began to prepare his résumé. Having no qualifications whatsoever, he scanned old school reports and decided they would have to do. You never know, he thought; some of the comments about disrupting class, not handing in assignments and playing soccer out of bounds might even work in his favour...

It was actually only a matter of ten minutes after pressing send that he received a call from the Assistant Manager and Coordinator of Hell telling him that he had received the placement.

"The position has been vacant for years," he said, "We've had several applications, but none have appealed to the board. We were, however, quite impressed with your many d's and f's. We have decided to give you a six month contract."

He was over the moon.

Well, then at least. It only took a few weeks of working as Satan to realize that the career had, over the last few centuries, changed a lot. Technology had replaced most of the need for human controlled evil deeds, so Satan's role was mainly secretarial work, answering phone calls, neatening papers and making cups of coffee for the other staff.

He would have quit, however the pay was surprisingly good and he got paid double time for working on all the saints days, of which there were many; and the manager insisted on buying all the staff free drinks at the pub every Friday night.

So he'd kept his position, for quite a while, in the department of evil, and had even been given long service leave ten years back.

But now, Satan was having what most people might call, a midlife crisis. He wasn't sure if being a devil was what he really wanted to do for the rest of his working years. Besides, the long hours meant it would be difficult if he, for

instance, wanted to settle down one day, get married and have kids. And he was having some problems with a few of his new co-workers, who liked to have everything their own way and refused to take any constructive criticism. Not to mention the excessive heat was drying out his skin, which had always been ultra-sensitive.

So one day, he entered the Hell Administration Block and tried, as politely as possible, to explain his situation to the manager.

Luckily, he was very understanding.

"Satan, I respect your decision. It is probably time for you to move on. You've served us well over your years here – we're all very grateful for your service."

He then wrote out some references and shook Satan's hand in a final farewell.

"Good luck," he said, "And keep in touch!"

Satan waved as he left the Hell Administration Block, and the Department of Hell, for the very last time.

He had to admit, in the weeks to follow, he felt a pang of nostalgia whenever he ate with a fork, but he soon came around.

His mother had begun pressuring him to start searching for a new occupation, as she didn't want him to become lazy. She recommended he try real estate, claiming she had a friend with just the right connections, and he didn't think it was such a bad idea.

Satan studied hard at TAFE, despite his previous struggles at the place, and received his diploma, with surprisingly little effort.

In no time at all, he'd joined a company and was earning nearly as much as before, and found that although the management weren't as friendly, he enjoyed having the extra few hours to sleep in on weekdays.

He did, of course, have to work extra hard to reverse his habits of committing cardinal sins and corrupting people's minds at every opportunity. He behaved, as it so happened, remarkably well, given the circumstances. About the worst sin he committed was stealing a few chocolates from glass bowls on display on coffee tables. As far as corrupting people's minds, well, pretending the odd dishwasher or alarm system actually worked was hardly devastating to the client's life. Nor were the little white lies about land value.

And no one ever asked about his previous working history. Or his insistence on always lighting the fireplace in every house where there was one. If they had given the matter a moment's thought, they would probably have assumed it was just to attract more buyers, with its warm, friendly, welcoming glow...

Jessica Edelman is 17 years old and doing a Bachelor of Arts majoring in French and English at the University of Western Australia. She has been writing since she was able to pick up a pen.

Review: Dropping Ecstasy With The Angels by Dee Rimbaud – reviewed by Jacinta Nandi-Pietschmann

You know, when I first started reading Dropping Ecstasy With The Angels I thought Dee Rimbaud was a woman. I really did. Maybe even a feminist: a bitter one, with short, dyed red hair and pale skin. Maybe even a lesbian...

The poem that gave him away was The Morning After. No woman could have written this poem. There's too much shame, too much dirt. I mean, do you actually feel dirty and shameful when going to get the morning after pill? Don't you just pop along to Boots, a little red-faced and a little embarrassed? Has any woman ever felt:

*I deserve this oh I deserve this
The metal clamps, the indifference,
The six wee pills
And the twenty-four hours
Of nausea, ugliness
And self-inflicted violence.*

I don't know, it's probably me, I'm probably just not old enough, not Catholic enough to get it. But for me, the poem betrays a melodramatic approach to emergency contraception that most women just can't afford to have. I mean, violence? What violence? And Dee? That woman at the desk with her pristine coat on? Pristine? Are you sure now? When was the last time you saw anything pristine in the NHS?

The thing is, Dee Rimbaud desperately, desperately, DESPERATELY wants to understand women. It's quite flattering, really - I'm not sure there's actually that much to

understand, you know. But in Mother of God he complains of a statue of Mary:

*This Mary, before me and above me,
With her inscrutable plaster face
Not exactly smiling down on me
Could only have been carved by a man*

She's too dry, you see, not enough blood, milk, sweat, tears. Not enough pain. But in his desperate desire to understand what it is, what it means, to be a woman, Dee Rimbaud has got a bit obsessed with the whole secretion thing. I mean, I know we are a leaky bunch, us women, don't get me wrong. We leak milk and secrete menstrual fluid like nobody's business, ok, ok, I know. But that's not all we do. We're not always on our periods! And we're not always lactating. That old dusty statue of the mother of Christ may have been too dry, but Dee's women are, well, a bit too wet, to be honest.

The thing is, and shoot me for saying this if you like, but men will never be much cop at understanding women, they really won't. Why should they? We don't understand them and they don't understand us. The power in Dee's poetry is to be found not in his attempts to understand women but in the poems which explore his desire for women. These poems are honest, erotic and sensual, allowing him to paint with words, and the paintings he produces are powerful - bright, vivid pictures full of colour and blood.

But some of the paintings aren't as bright and vivid as they obviously could be. You know what it's like when you've swallowed a few pills - suddenly you know every adjective in the Oxford English dictionary. And some of this work has obviously been written after (or perhaps even during) a night out on the tiles. The trouble is, sometimes the power in his

bold imagery is weakened, or diluted even, by drug-induced vocabulary: ugly, precise vocabulary, words like 'gesticulating' or 'fabrication', 'pharmaceutical' or 'concentric.' And the beauty in Dee's work lies in its sensual simplicity:

*And yet, still I ache
I ache in my animal soul*

These poems aren't ugly or soulless. They don't need these boring, unromantic words - words that belong in a double-glazing catalogue. They're words which, when up there with the angels, tumble effortlessly out of your mouth. Only the thing is, reading them sober, in the cold light of day, they are stumbling blocks - you trip over them in your head.

There was only the one poem I really hated - The Apple of My Eye, written 'for Rebecca.' It's a half-hearted lament about having missed out on his daughter's upbringing. I just know her reaction: "All those parents' evenings and sports days he missed and all I get is this lousy poem!" Read it and you'll see what I mean.

And you definitely should read this book. It's a work that explores so much - it's new-age, it's Catholic, it's erotic, and God, it's full of drugs. It's hard to write well about being on drugs but Dee Rimbaud manages it. It's a book that's worth reading for the prose poetry alone, especially It's Friday And They Don't Send Flowers Anymore. I loved, too, the warm humour in many of the poems - a warm, forgiving, humane humour appropriate for this very humane book. Check out ViRtuAL ViRuS, Sartre's Eyes and A Neo-Post-Modern Love Poem.

To order this book, which comes with a gorgeous cover (sorry to be shallow), click onto Dee Rimbaud's website: www.thunderburst.co.uk

Here, as well as ordering his work, you can read samples of his work, win signed copies of all his books, and plus read his opinions on vegetarianism and people who sail around the world on his blog. Like Dropping Ecstasy with the Angels, it's more than an interesting read: it's an attack on all your senses.

Going Home – Lazar Dzamic

Email to Bob, Washington, 05/12/04

Hiya Bob,

Greetings from Stiffupperliptown. Things are ticking fine over here, I hope it's the same on your side. Thanks for asking – I know we had an anniversary - but after nearly four years of breathing London's air, memories of my asylum-seeking past are now like a reflection off a polished marble wall in the toilet of one of those ostentatiously dignified investment banks in Moorgate: seemingly dazzling, but actually lacking detail. I don't think about it much these days, it is more fun to keep cataloguing – as you already know – idiosyncrasies and comparisons between old Blighty and Serbia. So, here's another one for your collection. It struck me the other day that every nation has a particularly quirky superstition and the biggest in Serbia is the one about the draught. It could be, without exaggerating, called the Serbian enemy number one. From ordinary people in the street to the fiercest of paramilitary warriors and the most psychopathic of mafia executioners, everybody descends into a state of utter panic if subjected to even a mild movement of the air through the room. It is almost magical thinking: as some indigenous people don't want their photos taken from fear of losing their souls, so the Serbs avoid even the slightest draught from fear of contracting all sorts of horrible illnesses. Serbian mothers and grand-mothers swaddle children from the early days in thick woollen shawls to bar access to 'cold', which is over there usually confused with any fresh air. All the windows in the house have to be shut all year, the only exception being the highest of summer, when it is allowed to open only one; opening two would produce a dreaded draught and therefore is avoided. Although it may look silly

to the English (and, I guess, the Americans), this Serbian myth is to be taken quite seriously, particularly on the public transport and especially on buses. You've been there, you know how it is: every bus journey in Serbia during the summer resembles extreme preparations of the American Marines for a war in tropical countries. The temperature inside is simmering fifty degrees (Celsius), air conditioning is non-existent and the buses are decrepit, smelly, dusty and crammed. Despite all of that, there is no excuse to open a window or a ventilation hatch. Any attempt to do it is considered a personal attack on the inflicted by the stream of (hot) air and guaranteed to cause outrage. They will scuttle to close any source of draught, while simultaneously painting possible risks in the grimmest of terms. I guess you have witnessed at least one skirmish due to ventilation and draught disagreements. The superstition of the Serbs regarding this has a vicious circle of self-confirmation: it makes them tolerant of being dirty and drenched with sweat, which then reassures them of the need to keep the windows closed - after all, having the draught blowing to one's wet shirt is a sure way of catching serious cold. Other potential dangers, elevated to a status of urban myths known to all, are a stiff neck, facial paralysis, sinusitis and pneumonia.

This whole idiotarium of paganism could not be in starker contrast with the love of the English for the draught and their general lack of response to cold. Even during the chilliest days, windows on trains are open and it is indescribably impolite to refuse one's kind request to do that. The custom of British girls to go out and about in the middle of the winter wearing just slippers, sleeveless tops and no stockings – as well as the non-existence of the inflammation of ovaries as a frequent female condition, so widespread in Serbia – is a source of utter bewilderment for any Serb who is aware of this fact.

Walking down Turnmill Street inevitably conjures up images from Dickens, although the street has been - for a long time now - completely sanitised, broadened and utterly dumbed-down. Nothing but concrete offices on one side and the tube lines behind the wall on another. No whores, snotty orphans, murderers or pickpockets any more, just a bland broadness of one road leading to another. The British darkness around me is mellow, a sort of a civilised version of the absence of light. It is as if that peculiar combination of the warm Gulf stream, order, urbanisation and the predominant English proclivity for all things solid and perpetual generates an additional glow during the night. It is very different from the crude, wild and dangerous darkness of southern Serbian provinces, or the sweaty, sleazy, sticky night of Singapore where the light pushes through blackness with a visible effort. It is the light of well-oiled, well-trained and well-behaved photons, a Teflon-coated light of reassurance and prosperity, blossoming in a mild climate.

The entrance of Farringdon station was basking in its usual promising glow. A Big Issue seller was parked nearby, holding a magazine in his trembling hands and watching a stream of tired, but still self-aware, business executives pouring in and clashing before the ticket barriers in a chaotic buzz, like molecules of hot gas farted out of the bowels of a sated commercial god.

Getting on the train is a game I'm very good at, even when the platforms are very crowded. There is a secret in this, something that I don't mind sharing. British train drivers are a disciplined lot, respectful of the special marks with which to align the train while at the station; that makes all the doors on the train open at the same spots along the platform. The art of squirting oneself into a carriage like a vaselined cucumber lies in knowing those exact places at the very

beginning and the very end of the platform. However, there is another even more critical, trick. Ever more people are aware of the positioning game, therefore avoiding the crowding in front of the train doors is not always possible. In that case, I use my "funnel" strategy. If I happen to find myself at the back of an embarking group, unlikely to get on by the natural flow, I try to stay somewhere in the middle, positioning myself on the imaginary line that is dividing the group into two equal halves. What is happening when the train stops and people start getting off is a natural split of the group into two wings to make room for alighting passengers; each wing, reluctantly, pans hard left and hard right, leaving some space in between for a smart person to jump a couple of places ahead. When the entrance is clear and the groups start pouring in, the centre has the quickest flow and everyone situated there just squirts in. To avoid being slowed down, one needs to avoid being thrown to the edges. A bit like in life.

This time, there is ample space. The carriage is warm and well lit. I leaned on the glass seat barrier and pulled the book out of my bag, the Consolations of Philosophy, my faithful companion for over a month. The train was doing its usual jerky dance along dilapidated rail lines, rushing towards Barbican, then Moorgate, then all the way to Liverpool Street. During the stop at Barbican, I noticed something interesting, a weird coincidence: two girls, standing at opposite ends of the coach, in identical dresses. Something modern, pink, plastic and ridiculous. They were not aware of each other, both staring through the window with expressions of boredom, or mild disinterest. Two identical dresses in a society of endless variety? How odd. I wondered what would they make of it; would there be - once each of them acknowledged the disappointing presence of the other - embarrassment over the fact that both were so slavish to

the latest fashion trends, so predictable in their taste, so mass market? Would there be a realisation of their own narrow-mindedness, a bad taste in the mouth from swallowing too many toffee lies? Or, would it be just the infinitesimally simpler reaction of making as big a distance from each other as quickly as possible, hoping they would never meet again? At least not while wearing the same dress? Just a simple running away, without any big thoughts on the nature of individuality, back into the ululating security of the chick-mags and the-next-big-thing-which-will-make-them-unique.

I could not read, I lacked the concentration the book demanded, scanning faces of the fellow passengers instead and trying to read their life stories; none of them brought any memorable moments. Just a regular, hard working, quiet British folk. So easy to love, so easy to ridicule.

From Moorgate, it is the usual descent into the even deeper pits of the underground system, finding a good spot along the platform, getting on, and finally getting off again at London Bridge. I let the flow of the rat race carry me on, always careful, always considerate, always standing on the right, always saying my "sorries" in the unfortunate event of running into somebody. I have a consummate fear of disturbing other people, intruding into their private space, making myself a nuisance. It was always like that, as far as I can remember, and that was what made me so odd in my native country where an apology is the equivalent of a personal humiliation. Being considerate was my revolt against the mentality that I hated for its small-mindedness, its intrusiveness and its contemptuous dismissal of individuality. My contempt escalated it to obsession, a micro-situational reflex of looking all around all the time while in the crowd, monitoring the arrival of people behind me or

those coming from the sides, calculating their trajectories and adjusting my pace accordingly. I give way, I stop to avoid the formation of choke points, I step aside while going around the corners to avoid a collision with someone less skilled coming from the other end. It is my art of spatial anticipation – the physical way of being polite. It allows me to drift through the crowd like a breeze through the forest.

At London Bridge, I am climbing up from the Tube to the train platforms, through narrow tunnels with vanilla-coloured walls. Although very long, the platforms are always full of commuters, waiting for trains to take them to their leafy suburbs – and Deptford. I try to be punctual and to catch specific trains at specific times. I repeat my positioning game yet again, watching Londoners perform that fascinating skill of tense crowding around the train doors without actually touching one another even for a moment. One could be forgiven for thinking that they have all been accidentally charged with the same polarity of the all-pervasive social force, generating a rejection field and making them unable to contact. And yet, as a group with the shared purpose of getting on the train as quickly as possible, they are surprisingly efficient.

Email to Bob, Washington, 09/12/04

Hi Bob,

A great insight from a few evenings before: the Serbs and the English share a long and interesting history of waiting in queues. However, there is a significant and telling difference in the manner of how they are handled in Serbia and in England. First of all, queues are still very much an everyday part of life in both countries. Serbian queues, though, are more likely to be caused by scarcity of certain goods – like a cheap bread or cooking oil from the government reserves,

which is more affordable – or by an unusually good opportunity, like taking a washing machine on credit. English queues, unless in front of the train ticket counter or some similar service-connected occasion, are likely to be a manifestation of spending power, with traditional Christmas shopping and its accompanying hoo-ha as the best example. Serbian queues are notoriously disorderly, with everyone trying to jump the queue all the time, causing both outrage and, very often, bag fights. During the times of Milosevic, queues at post offices were occasionally a place to witness the unchallenged power of gangsters or local thugs, who would brazenly go straight to the top of the queue, dismissing all of the initial complaints by the unwise by pulling a gun or simply knocking out the complainant. An Englishman would rather drop dead than be caught jumping the queue. English queues are silent; Serbian queues are fuming with clamour. English queues are faintly romantic, invoking the days of the Blitz and the now vaporous spirit of togetherness; Serbian queues are harsh and undignified, a Darwinian affair. English queues are like a string of amber beads, all in one line but with each bead a separate universe – a protected individual – closed for eternity around its small fossil; Serbian queues are live, entwined, ferocious organisms barking and biting left, right and centre, both at its tail and its head at the same time. Serbian queues are also utterly political: discussion forums on political parties, corruption, the incompetent government, easy solutions promised by national populists, the West – basically, spontaneous street rallies against everyone and everything, mostly life itself; English queues, on the other hand, are not only apolitical, but asocial. Serbian queues are quantum equations, uncertainty rules: the store can be shut unexpectedly if the store manager feels like it, the goods can run out too soon; English queues are plain algebra: X stands in the line + spends a little time waiting = a need satisfied.

English queues are utilitarian and focused, a symbol of nothing else apart from the momentary slowing-down in the dispensation of inessential resources. And, thanks to the ingrained efficiency of the market-based economy, they are mercifully quick.

Although close to Christmas, the night is mild. The train is on time, sneaking along the platform, humming, not very busy. I took a seat – all three of them, actually – in one of those spacious three-seat rows facing each other, sometimes called “the builders’ shoulder” because builders who go to work early in the morning use them to top up on sleep for that day. These three-sealers provide enough legroom for one to feel luxurious, especially if nobody is sitting opposite.

I like watching London at night from this particular train line. It has a good view of some of the most extraordinary London landmarks, the very essence of Englishness in a way, at least as inferred by numerous postcards. Curiously, all of the sights are on the left side, by the Thames, while the right side of the route is drab and boring, predominantly dark, with the exception of Deptford (its exception being the light, not the interest of the place). It is the other England, the one of musty brown bricks, badly maintained warehouses, old iron flyovers, trading estates and council blocks. On the left, particularly in the beginning – the left side has its own spots of grimness – things are bright and shiny. First, there is Tower Bridge, imposing in its mechanical glory, so obviously forcing anyone who is crossing it to feel specially rewarded, as if granted access to times bigger and better than their own; its sister, the Tower, glows from the other side of the river, more ominous. On the left from it, protruding from behind the jagged barrier of rooftops near the train line is the “Erotic Gherkin,” London’s newest landmark. Black, Gargantuan glass dildo garnished with light spots, it oozes

the power of money, the obelisk of uncrowned kings and the true rulers of the world. Finally, as the train wriggles farther along the Thames, London's Manhattan – Canary Wharf – lands suddenly on the retina, piercing in its brightness. It is my personal yard-stick for the passing of time and the speed with which one needs to attend to one's life: when my wife and I arrived in Britain, Canary Wharf was just one, the first, the original skyscraper, the most un-English apparition and the tallest structure they have ever built. Now, only a few years later, it is an island of skyscrapers, a massive bush of steel and glass that beckons souls during the day and keeps wake over London at night.

I tried to read the Consolations of Philosophy again, Nietzsche's part, soothing and calming. It is miraculous what Nietzsche can do for the ambitious, but miserable. If it were up to me, every asylum seeker entering Britain would get a copy of his collected works as a morale booster and as the first step in building a new life. There are no more Nietzschean creatures in the world than refugees and asylum seekers. To lazy Western eyes, they are just human shells devoid of all dense content, standing at the bottom of a dark, cold mountain, facing up the steep wall. What wonderful Nietzschean larvae all of them are! From vilification and rejection, from anonymity and obscurity, through pain and effort, to stars and chilly, clear air of icebergs up near the top. But one must make up his mind first.

My reading was interrupted by a sudden recognition of a face I knew but hadn't spotted initially, in the same carriage. She uses the same morning station as I do for going into town, always immersed in mobile-phone chatter, cooing in Danish to a colleague or a friend. To say that she was pretty would be an understatement: her cropped blonde hair mixed with

green, almond-shaped eyes, sweet, sumptuous lips and a body that could bring the dead back to life just by casually brushing against them all assembled a powerful collection of stereotypes about a dream girl. I stared at her, unblinking, aware that I was being rude, but still unable to turn my head away. She was oblivious to the world, deep in a book of her own, one of the current bestsellers – or, more precisely, one of those conceived as the "best-to-sell" as defined by Umberto Eco; another member of the over-appreciated family of the Western stencil-art literature: all plot, and pace, and setting, and dialogue – rules, rules, rules – all products of the "ten points of successful characterisation." God, have mercy.

Why was I looking at her? I don't know. She was pretty, but somehow distant, with an aura of carefully concealed arrogance that would not make us a nice couple (providing I am not married, of course), or at least not a workable one. I imagined her going well next to an ostentatious, hair-oiled broker from the City or – it occurred to me – as a perfect companion for an owner of a hip restaurant or a successful car dealership. The natural coupling of people who never think they can be wrong.

The train was gently rocking and the heat in the carriage made me sleepy. With drowsiness came the pictures: me, my wife and the Danish girl, all mixed in a blur of faces and bodies, the hot tide rising in my veins and making my heart beat faster. Something has gone wrong, the switches are confused. I feel a sudden urge to impress the girl, to make her go crazy about me in a second, to put that book down, to look at me with wet eyes and never to forget me. To feel like I saved her life. It is an avalanche of thoughts, dragging me more and more into a fantasy: an uninhabited tropical island, just me and the Vikingess, survivors of a ship (or a

plane) crash. I'm in charge here, a model alpha-male, on whom her weak life skills now depend. I'm the one who organises everything quickly, looking her straight in the eyes and explaining, calmly but firmly, what we need to do. Collecting as much of the useful debris swept away on the shore is a priority, of course; there, we will find (I know) some matches, a machete, rope, blankets and enough canned food to keep us going for months; also, maybe a small idiosyncrasy such as a pack of table candles, which I will use in due course to pull off a romantic surprise for the girl. Then we get all busy building shelter, me cutting the branches and banana palm leaves, building the frame for the hut, while she clumsily tries to assist me. And then it is all over, we are sitting by the roast fire, sheltered, in the tropical night, listening to the ocean, glancing from time to time at twelve bed sheets fifty yards away, (merchandising samples with the Simpsons motifs on them, that somebody has sent to a business partner or ordered for his or her store); they are spread into a huge rectangle and pegged to the beach with wooden spikes – our SOS symbol for rescue planes that might be flying over us. The girl is tired and scared, and keeps on looking at me with those green eyes, full of hope. We dine on tinned ham and fresh bananas harvested from the jungle behind us. There are cans of Coke Light as well. I make our beds from palm leaves and blankets we salvaged from the sea. We finally crash, I bid her good night, calm and in control. She sighs and tries to sleep, but can't, and rolls restlessly in her bed. I'm lying still, waiting, and finally the moment comes and she is looking at me, coyly, and asks if I would mind if she tucks in over there because she is feeling cold. I just nod, make space, make a tiny distance between our bodies signalling that I'm interested only in having a rest after a hard day of saving our urban asses. Her back is flat, her butt is warm. She

shudders, then turns around and looks at me. I return the gaze. We kiss. We make love.

I felt a sudden jolt to my shoulder, a hard, inhuman push that catapulted me back to reality. The train was swaying wildly, crossing the complicated set of rails before reaching Deptford and I was sorely taken out of the illusion. It was difficult not to feel embarrassed: if you happen to think of yourself as a responsible, civilised guy, you shouldn't be sharing infantile sexist excursions into the ridiculous with obsessive users of pornography, serial killers and neo-Nazis (which, in a way, all adds up to the same). The dreams of domination, oh yes! – what a drug, and it is free.

It took me some time to recover from daydreaming. As a relief, my station was next. I live in a leafy suburb of south-east London, in a quiet residential area that some may consider as too middle class. It is its quietness, exactly its profound lack of personality and its unperturbed blandness that make me feel good. No distractions, no demanding Serbian neighbours, no uninvited and annoying drop-ins for a cup of coffee and wasting time. So, I can finally think properly.

Having a place in London that we can call our own is more than a nice thing in life for my wife and me. It is as if we own a time and space capsule, a self-contained pod that, from the very moment of shutting the door from the inside, transports us to a place where nothing else matters except the two of us. Quite the opposite from the inability to afford even an illusion of a decent life we had to endure in Serbia. Having a flat in London is a sign of victory, a symbol that the umbilical cord is severed, that all the bridges behind us are burned down, a big thumb on a nose to a place that spits at everything different. Our flat is our revenge. Our home. The

payoff for working hard, sticking together and believing in transformational powers of will. And the power of love.

As the door shut, I left the day behind me. The evening unfolded as a regular calming mix of chatting out the day at each other's office, mildly anthropological comments on people's behaviour, some time planning for the following couple of weeks and reading. I tried toying with writing an article for a well-respected magazine on how soap operas can kill you, found myself ceaselessly repeating the same thought, until my brain started grinding to a halt and it was time for bed.

I cannot go to sleep (I love this wonderful English phrase, "go to sleep," as if sleep is a mother waiting for us in the distance with biscuits and hot milk) without the ritual of reading; anything: books, magazines, manuals for things we have bought, even a grammar book. I just cannot simply lie down and sink immediately into unconsciousness. My mind needs taming, cajoling to climb down from the observation post, to take a deep breath before indulging in a well-deserved peace. It takes a certain kind of insensitivity, I think, a lesser mind of a sort, to be able to just switch off, as if shutting the door on an empty cupboard. I could not resist reading from the Consolations of Philosophy a bit more. My last conscious sentence, the very last line I could remember, was this Schopenhauer thought: "After his fortieth year, any man of merit ... will hardly be free from a certain touch of misanthropy."

I put the book down and turned the light off. My wife was asleep, warm, firm and lovely. I buried my face between her shoulder blades. Sleep came to me powerful, soft and quick like a Chunnel train wrapped up in cotton wool.

Lazar Dzamic was born in Serbia, came to London in 1999, ten days before the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. Claimed asylum, then got a work permit. I'm a journalist, writer and digital marketing consultant. Published 5 books in Yugoslavia, one in the UK (No-Copy Advertising, RotoVision, 2001). Regularly publish articles for various UK and USA magazines. Working on my first British novel.



photo by Rebecca Toennesen

sister/outsider – Beldan Sezen

Speak to me
and tell me
what kind of outsider you want to be.
don't be shy
choose if you can.
black, fat or lesbian.
poor or
a woman without a man.
there is plenty,
choose !
for you must know
without you
sister/outsider
I can't be
can't be as white, male and beautiful
as i want to be.
I don't know
sister/outsider
what is taking you so long?
don't you know?
I got you all long.
don't you remember
my dear little sweet child
the times
when I have raped you
beaten you,
abused you, misused you
used you, used you, used you
for that you can serve me right?
so go
be the poor little thing
who can't deal with life.
go!

take the place
I offered you.
emotions don't count,
cut off yourself
and try to do your best
to be part of my world.

but let me be honest with you
sister/outsider
I mean
you know it already,
never can you be
as strong, as beautiful as me.
never can you be
as normal as me.

huh ?
what are you saying
sister/outsider,
what ?
thanks but no thanks
you don't want to be
as normal as me ?
to precious to serve me
you take care of your own life ?
and can see the beauty of yourself ?
what ?
and you are strong enough
to survive me ?

sister/outsider
just because I messed with you
don't you mess with me.
lots have tried before,
too big is the wish for harmony.

too big the wants for cosines,
the need
 of a 'little happy family'.
and if this is not enough
the love-thing will get you.
oh yes, you know
if you can't love yourself, you can't love anybody.
you
are going to hate yourself
mistrust yourself, guilt-trip yourself, fight yourself
not me.
so, to make it clear
the road of isolation and loneliness
you are going to walk
sister/outsider
by trying to survive me.
once again:
give up, hand your life over to me.
relax, go to sleep!
there is nothing wrong with living in dreams.
I take care of everything,
you won't feel no more.
trust me
like you did before.

what ?
you think
I am stupid
because
I still don't get you,
still don't understand
what I am offering
is not worth the breath I take.
that you do not give a damn
if you are fat, black, tall or small.

you are proud of all
you can be.
and you have enough self-respect
to kick my ass.
by giving up control,
the fear of letting yourself be
and let go, let go
the false and empty dreams
I try to make you swallow.

by choosing for yourself
you won't be lonely
too long
I fucked with your mind, body and soul
that after all
there is no choice but ...

well,
sister/outsider
your will to
cross my heart
is what I fear.

Belden Sezen is Turkish born and raised in Germany. He has written poetry since the early 90s in German, English and Turkish. Currently he works as a freelance artist in Amsterdam.

Dark Matter – Vincent Heselwood.

In the candle's yellow half-light, he looked up at the ceiling and smiled. How different it had all been just a few months before. Then, his Job search had been going nowhere, his romantic dry-spell had been fast approaching drought status and his home life had become a marathon to be run on eggshells. The weight of the world it seemed was pressing upon his shoulders. Now six months later laying on his back in his girlfriend's bed the only weights he felt were the pleasant pressure of her head against his chest and the pleasing weight of a good meal within his stomach. Drowsy and contented he lets out a sigh of soul washing satisfaction. The only impingement upon this moment of absolute bliss, being a nagging ache in his bladder and an overwhelming desire to piss. He tuts to himself and prepares his reluctant body for the quick dash to the bathroom. With a cat burglar's care he adjusts his weight and slides her head back to the bed, a midway roll and muted whimper the only damage caused. This done he levers himself, naked save for a pair of white flannel boxer shorts, out of the bed and into the chill night air. Creeping across the bedroom he pauses momentarily at the door and in a split second absorbs the image of her, submerged from the waist down in a tangle of blankets, the top half of her body a pale golden colour in the milky light, once again he feels the now familiar swell of warmth within his breast and he steps gingerly into the hall closing the door behind him another smile spreads across his face.

The darkness in the hall is total, and his fumbling for a light switch fruitless. Through a combination of touch and memory he cautiously finds his way towards the two steps that lead into the lounge. He blindly shuffles his feet along the floor so as to feel the edges of each step. Having negotiated

this, the greatest obstacle on his journey, he puts his trust in his bearings to lead him to the bathroom opposite. As it happens the lounge window permits a small amount of light to penetrate the darkness, allowing him, through determination of greys from blacks to catch the outlines of some of the larger items of furniture. It was then, a few steps from the bathroom door that he sees something move...

And how could she forgive him, some would say? The crime seemed almost obvious. It was this thought that took prominence in the tempest of her mind. Face down on there bed her once smiling features buried in the tear soaked pillow, she cursed him to heaven whilst she agonised in hell. It had taken the police only a matter of minutes to draw there conclusions. A simple story of unlucky love, the missing villain and the jilted lover. He had saved his blushes by leaving in the night and despite her tearful protests, the heroine would live. And yet, within the flabby mass of anger and betrayal, her mind had placed a splinter of doubt. A splinter which throbbed and stung the more it was touched. Why would he just leave? It didn't make sense. And what about his clothes? He wouldn't just leave in his underwear, it didn't add up. Her eyes stung and her head pounded as she wept, and as her sobs carried into the night the thing that lived in the shadows licked its lips and smiled.

Vincent Heselwood is twenty two and lives in Glossop. He is part of a movement called Backroom noise and has recently finished his degree.

The Shattered Mirror – Rebecca Stonehill

Weak autumnal sunshine filters in through a gap in the curtains. A hazy glow is cast on to the face of Ahmed who is sitting in front of a mirror, meticulously applying fuchsia pink lipstick to his cracked lips. A child throws a ball against the wall in the next door flat, again and again. The relentless barrage of traffic and blaring horns seep through the open window. Somebody twangs chords out of an electric guitar, jabbing aggressively at the strings. But none of these sounds reach Ahmed. All he can hear is the comforting whir of the vinyl from the corner of the room and the gentle crooning of Frank Sinatra '...flyin' too high with some gal in the sky is my idea of nothin' to do, but I get a kick out of you...'

Ahmed hums tunelessly along, studying himself solemnly in the mirror. He has missed a spot. Picking up the silver encased lipstick holder, he runs his finger reflexively over the engraved letters: 'Mina'. He squints and draws his breath in as he fills in the corner of his lower lip. Satisfied, he sits back and stares at his reflection, this feminine touch transforming it almost out of recognition. Dark eyes. Unbrushed tousled black hair that has gone neglected for so long it almost reaches his shoulders. A faint scar which is all but invisible to everyone except himself runs across the bridge of his nose, embedded deep into his skin like an un-dotted question mark. And bright pink fuchsia lipstick. Mina's lipstick.

If he stares at his lips for long enough he can almost conjure her up: the arch of her eyebrows; the darkness of her long lashes; the walnut colour of her skin; the gracefulness of her neck; the golden drops that always hung delicately from her earlobes. But if he tries to put the features together the clarity blurs. He looks away, glancing at the goldfish swimming round its bowl in the mirror's reflection before

standing and picking up the dress that is draped neatly over the chair.

Gently, he holds it against himself, noticing details in the garment that he has never paid attention to before: the top button which is ever so slightly off centre; the deepness of its shade of blue. He has never spent so much time staring at it before and as he does so, holding it defiantly against his body which has started to quiver like a solitary leaf on an autumn tree, her delicate form is involuntarily assumed from behind its gentle folds.

They are at a wedding. He is walking behind her, the sapphire pleats of her full skirt rustling softly against the ground as her dark hair sways against her back. She is glimpsing over her shoulder and smiling at him before she reaches her hand out and squeezes his arm familiarly. They are eating honey glazed roasted lamb and sultana rice infused with saffron, seated in small circles around plates of food. She is carefully shaping a mound of rice into a ball with her right hand in the precise way she always has done and is scooping it gracefully into her fuchsia pink mouth. As she does so, a grain of rice works itself free from her hand and falls upon the collar of her blue dress, staining it slightly with a pale, oily sheen.

She is craning her neck this way and that to see the arrival of the bride who enters the crowd regally, seated sideways with gold coins lining her headdress as she trots in on a horse and coyly smiles at all the guests, her white teeth gleaming luminously beneath the lanterns. Men are chanting all around them; the traditional wedding chants that have been sung for generations in their land, rising and falling like the gentle swell of waves. She is ululating; that cry of joy as the men begin their folk dance and she is throwing her head

back and laughing in the balmy night air spiced with the scent of cinnamon and jasmine. They are walking away from the gathering through the heady warmth of the night and she is slipping her hand through the crook of his arm and sighing, a deep sigh that comes from the depths of her body.

"I'd like to get married soon."

"Would you?"

"Why do you sound so surprised?" And she is laughing, a small delicate sound that flows through the warm, rippled air. Ahmed is stroking her hand gently and peering at her sideways, trying not to react to her comment in the way that he'd like to.

"I don't know," he is saying quietly. "I don't know..."

She is nearly there, so nearly but still she remains elusive. He cannot remember her in the defined detail that he would like. He has become a perfectionist. Conjuring up the hollow of her neck or the glow of her cheek is no longer enough – he longs to recall the precise timbre of her voice and the sheen of her hair and which foot she usually put before the other when she began her graceful gait. Ahmed clenches his fists in frustration as he slumps back down into the chair and glances back in the mirror. In the corner of his vision, hidden away at the back of the room behind the bed is a Palestinian flag. His thoughts are dragged away from Mina to everything that the flag symbolises, or should symbolise. A homeland. Pride. The struggle. Claiming what rightfully belongs to you.

"Don't go son. Stay for us. For Palestine."

Ahmed closes his eyes and is transported to Old Jaffa, that

beautiful walled city on the coast. The city which was once in a country called Palestine. Can a country really cease to exist? Not if it lives on in his memory, for behind his closed eyelids it continues to be as vivid and vibrant as it ever was. Ahmed sees himself as an eight-year-old child, running barefoot through the market with a bag of freshly baked bread slung over his shoulder. His twin is running several steps behind, calling out to him to slow down. He laughs, dodging the spice vendors and escaped chickens and trays of sweetmeats piled mountain-high.

Opening his eyes, he feels delirious trying to connect these two such alien worlds. How did this happen? How can it be that he is suddenly so far from everyone and everything he knows and feels comfortable with? But the truth is, it's not sudden. It's been three years. Three long years of moving from one shabby bedsit to another. Of scouring charity shops for warm clothes to get him through the freezing winter nights. Of forcing himself to stop listening to the music he knows will only bring back painful memories of his home. He'd never even listened to Frank Sinatra before, but it was the first record he picked up in the shop. Now he listens to nothing else.

He closes his eyes once again. They are walking along the seafront towards Tel Aviv. It is one of those beautiful spring days when the waves of the sea flirt with every onlooker, luring them into its tantalising coolness. Wispy white clouds streak the sky and men wheel along barrows of watermelons that people flag down. They stop to buy two slices and Ahmed laughs as thick, pink juice dribbles down her chin. He gives her his handkerchief and she wipes it away and smiles as she hands it back. What ever became of that handkerchief?

It is a day on which they can almost pretend that people live in peace here it feels so unscarred; so simple. As they finish their watermelon they gaze out across Old Jaffa: the minarets and the markets and the familiar pulse and throb of life as they have always known it. Yet the further out of Old Jaffa they walk, they need only to turn their heads 180 degrees to note the unmistakable changes. Everything becomes whiter, more edgy and coarse and the faces become paler and the fashion more brazen. For they are approaching the seventy-year-old city built out of the ashes of a Jewish dream: Tel Aviv. The heart of the new Israel: a symbol that speaks as much of hope as it does hell and as much of adventure as it does anguish. And it is all there, rolled into a burgeoning melting pot of a metropolis, luring people from Old Jaffa with employment. The wages are meagre, but it is work.

They reach Dizengoff Street. Ahmed has to sort out some paperwork so he arranges to meet Mina in half an hour. He leaves her sitting on a bench on the seafront outside a café. She flashes him a smile. That is the last time he ever sees her alive.

As Ahmed opens his eyes, trying desperately to pull himself out of his reverie back to the present, the first thing he sees is the crumpled Palestinian flag. Catching sight of his reflection in the mirror, he is jolted back to reality. He looks like a monster with all this hideous lipstick smeared on his mouth and Mina's blue dress held up against his body. An overwhelming surge of anger builds up from the pit of his stomach, escaping in a strangled scream. He rushes to the window and with all his might, hurls the dress out as he watches it fluttering disconsolately to the ground like a broken-winged bird and lightly thudding to the ground. A child is kicking a football around and bewildered, he gazes up

at Ahmed, shading his eyes against the glare of the sunlight before resuming his solitary game as the ball starts to thud against the wall once more.

Dragging himself away from the image of Mina's splayed-out blue dress, Ahmed pushed himself away from the window ledge and furiously retraces his steps. Before he is able to control himself he is smashing his fist into the mirror and it shatters, sending broken images of fuchsia pink lips flying. She is lying face down in the rubble. Ambulance sirens mingling with wailing. Police. A severed limb here. A bloodied corpse there. The call of 'suicide bomb' echoing around the smoking ruins of the burnt out café. Ahmed is screaming as he turns her over, praying that it won't be her. It can't be her. Suicide bombers aren't meant to kill their own kind. Another man is wildly flailing his arms around as he tries to pull a buried child out from under the rubble and as he does so a piece of flying glass hits Ahmed on his nose and he can taste blood in his mouth. At this same moment, he knows it's Mina. His beloved twin. The girl who entered this world two minutes after him and he loved with a strength that left him speechless.

"Don't go son, don't leave us. It'll be like losing two children. You must stay. You must stay for us and for Mina's sake. You must stay for Palestine. Please don't go son."

He gets to his feet and with a roar throws the mirror behind him.

Silence.

The goldfish pathetically flaps its gills as it lies dying amongst pieces of its broken bowl on the floor. And as

Ahmed's body is racked with sobs, Frank Sinatra continues to sing of love and of longing.

Rebecca Stonehill is a 27-year-old English language teacher with a passion for creative writing, travelling and trying new things. She presently lives in the Bedfordshire countryside.

Odds + Ends – Michael Pepper

Just a wink of white from a woman's leg
and I was gone, way back,
to when we was kids.
But we weren't kids, of course, not then:
we were all grown up, moved on,
with our heads in the clouds, our hearts on our sleeves,
and our faces all shiny and new.

I remembered you:
a pitch black nightclub at 4 a.m.
dotted with the orange nibs of cigarettes
and dark whispers in perfect white lavatories
on the night it pissed it down in Paddington
and we ate a pie for breakfast.

I wonder who's got that house we lived in?
The tacky kitchen floor,
the crazy kid next door, all grown up now too;
the wispy sonnets you tippexed on the bathroom mirror;
your fragrant touch on the air
in the spare room where the window wouldn't open.

But the real question is: did you make it?
Or are you still like me:
moving on from promise to promise,
purchasing new baggage in every town
and stashing memories away like
boxes of toys, or half shrouded paintings,
cluttering up
the bulging attic of the brain.

Michael Pepper was born in Leicester nearly twenty-five years ago. This is the first time he has been published.

Music Hall & Dirty Pop Music – an interview with Penny Broadhurst – Rebecca Toennessen

1. When did you first start writing?

I know it sounds really lame, like all those popstars who claim to have been singing before they could walk, but I don't ever remember not writing. I've been reading since I was two years old and would read a marmalade label or cereal box and then, when I had run out, write stories, poems, songs, ridiculously intense letters - all the time. In maths lessons, sitting at the top of a hill in a field full of dopey young bullocks, typing bits into my phone, scrap pieces of paper litter my desk at work. I found it too easy at primary school to be top of the class at creative writing, and towards the end I was given writing homework instead of spelling homework as they figured out that I didn't need to revise the word "conspicuous" and that I played up when I had nothing to do. Then a teacher who was a poet took me on at secondary school. I've always been lucky like that - though I've always pushed my stuff onto people, they'll only encourage and support you if you put the effort in first. People ask "How did you get to do that?" or whatever - it's a case of asking, often, and then pushing. Graft counts as much as talent.

2. Who has been the biggest influence on you?

Billy Bragg, without a question. As a bloke - he's brilliant and inspiring and kind - and his music. The tunes are great, the lyrics are greater. Both the rousing political stuff and the quiet, sad stories.

"Call up the craftsmen/Bring me the draftsmen/Build me a path from cradle to grave/And I'll give my consent/To any government/That does not deny a man a living wage"

"One dark night, he came home from the sea/And put a hole in her body where no hole should be/It hurt her more to see him walking out the door/And though they stitched her back together, they left her heart in pieces on the floor"

"If you want to talk about it, well you know where the phone is/Don't come round reminding me again how brittle bone is/God didn't make you an angel, the Devil made you a man/That brutality and economy are related, now I understand"

I write in a musical way, I suppose, the timbre and rhythm and voice often come first, and Billy's lyrics work like that, they never jar or fail to scan like Richey Manic or something and the melody and the lyric fit the rhythms of both natural speech and good pop music and they're clever without trying to be. He breaks my heart and makes it burst with joy. I've never found a literary writer that can consistently engage me fully in that way.

3. What are you reading now, and do you have any recommendations of writers we should check out?

'Joyce Grenfell Requests The Pleasure' - her autobiography. She's one of the main points of reference people have used when describing my "other" sorts of performance - mainly comic monologue and character parts in musicals and dramas. 'Er and Victoria Wood, Julie Walters and Maureen Lipman. All legends. Courtney Love, John Cooper Clarke and Kathleen Hanna might mean a lot to some, but they mean naff all to me. I come from a root of character comedienness, music hall and dirty pop music.

I read an awful lot of non-fiction, mainly biographies and autobiographies. Why not? My work is about life and people, so I go to source - buses, shopping centres, diaries, blogs, biographies, magazines, radio phone-ins, talk shows – rather than pick out the fictionalised version. I do enjoy the odd bit of literary fiction, often long after the author has fallen out of fashion - Bernard MacLaverty and Patrick Gale are sometime favourites - and chill out with teen fiction devoured as a child and now revisited for twenty minute formulaic lifts in the style of Hollyoaks or other undemanding soap operas.

My reading habits were formed by my two main sources of books - the mobile library bus, whose only regular change of stock seemed to be your Sweet Valley Highs etc section and the Miss Read books my mum liked, and a very cheap second hand paperback shop in Pickering which is still going. I grew up in the countryside and read what I got my hands on - I'm one of the few people who reads every section of the weekend papers when I have the time. Yes, even the money and business bits.

I do read a bit of poetry, but like most people prefer pop music. I'm in the wrong game, really.

4. Do you have any special preparations before going onstage?

About five wees and a big gulp of drink. No hippy crap, and I don't drink/smoke/take drugs, so none of that either.

5. Do you consider 'performance poetry' a separate and unique genre?

Unfortunately, yes. That's why I try to use the term "spoken word" where possible, it sounds less special and wanky,

although it's still a bit wrong-sounding and too broad. I just want to be a popstar, not a poet. Performance poetry is lumped in with performance art, which I hate, or makes people think of slam and open mic, which I'm also less keen on. It encompasses people even beyond open mic stage who are reading bits out rather than treating it as a performance (I have a prompt book so that I'm not stuck with one learned set, but I do rehearse and perform) and are often reading stuff that needs to be read alone, in a quiet place, rather than taken in from someone on stage, and it also takes in people who leap about in capes, folks with beards and a beat complex, dudes with bongos and bongs and people who shout a lot about words and poetry and vibes and being an activist but say and do nothing. Everyone claps at poetry, unlike music where they dance or go to the bar or comedy where they laugh or heckle, it's hard to gauge a reaction unless you do mixed discipline stuff - which I generally prefer.

Good performance poetry should make the most of the live aspect, like theatre and comedy and music, but also be able to stand up when written down and not be some lame dog carried by the voice and personality of the performer.

6. Do you write particular 'performance' poems and 'book' poems?

I write some that I know work better on the page, particularly the "quieter" ones, so they get performed less often, but I hear everything I write as voices in my head (Nurse! The straitjacket!), I don't just stab out letters onto a page because they look right or fit the meaning in a dry way, I hear it as I write in a real voice with real and not forced paper rhythm and tone and so forth, so they're all

performable. I guess you could separate them into radioorcdandbookpoems and stageortvandbook poems, really, because they're all intended to be heard AND read, it just depends on which context would suit them best.

Read more about Penny's albums, zine, and upcoming gigs at her website: www.pennybroadhurst.com

Judas Lives - John Hall

Informer on myself
I counted my thirty
Caesar's heads,

sipped my wine
under sinless trees
and let history hang,

moved to Babylon
and opened a brothel
called the son of man,

he'd have liked that.

John Hall is editor of Citizen32, Poetry, Arts & Current Affairs magazine. He writes plays, short stories and poetry, He was a political activist 1979-90, Member of the South Manchester Poetry Group during the 70's and regular reader at 'The Why Not Pub'-Liverpool during the 80's. He attended Lancaster University, Reading Social History, in the 90's. Poetic influences include William Blake and Robert Creeley.

Jelly Park - Aliya Whiteley

I must have fallen asleep on the bus.

It was the late night that did it, playing Portishead records with a bottle of Jack D and a packet of black Sobranies for company. By twelve o'clock I was singing, 'Nobody loves me...' in a hoarse growl. By two I was attempting to play solo Twister to prove that friends are just not necessary in life. By three thirty I had stolen the pot plant from outside flat six and chucked it out of my top floor window. I've had enough of decorative frippery for one lifetime.

I don't remember going to bed, but that's because apparently I didn't. I'm still not sure how I made it to the bus stop, but I must have, because I definitely woke up on the top deck of a double decker and the view from the window was definitely of a run down depot. My watch read 10.30am and the voice on the answering service of my mobile said, 'You are so bloody fired, you bitch.'

That was my ex-boyfriend, and now, my ex-boss speaking. From the smug tone, he meant it. He had been looking for a way to get rid of me, and I wasn't sorry I had finally given it to him.

So I was no longer a legal secretary.

What was I?

'You're in the wrong place, lovely,' I heard, and it took me a second or two to spot the speaker. He was half-hidden behind the rail leading to the spiral staircase: only his head

and hands were visible. He was Welsh and grizzled and wearing a blue hat at a rakish angle.

'Sorry.'

'This here is the end of the line, so to speak,' he said. 'At least, for passengers it is.'

'Yeah. I can see that.' I slid my mobile phone back into my bag.

'Passengers shouldn't really go any further than this, see?', the Welshman, who must have been the bus driver, said. 'Company employees only beyond this point.'

'Beyond -? But this is the depot.'

'Ohhhh yes. This is the depot. It's the depot alright.' He sniffed, and rubbed the skin under his large nose with one finger. I noticed he had very long fingernails. 'But there's more to life than the depot. At least, for us drivers, there is.'

'Like what?'

He winked. 'Got you curious, have I? Well, it just so happens that we're looking for new recruits right at this moment. Would you happen to be looking for a job?'

'Um...' I thought about the phone message. I thought about my ex-boyfriend and ex-boss, and the ex-friends who had sided with him after the break up. What was I? 'I suppose I could be a bus driver,' I said.

'Great!' He took off his hat and threw it to me. 'Put this on, lovely, and wait here.'

He disappeared back down the spiral staircase.
I looked at the hat. It had a shiny black peak and a silver badge had been sewn on to the soft felt material on the crown. The badge read, 'Next stop: Jelly Park.'

I had never bothered to read the badges on bus drivers' hats before, but I'm fairly sure I had never suspected they said that.

At that point the piped music started. It was a bouncy little tune, a brass band I think: I looked around and spotted the orange and yellow striped speakers situated in each corner of the bus, just below the roof. It's funny how unobservant people are on their daily commutes.

Then I heard the singing. It started very softly, and as I strained to hear, it got louder and louder, until a sudden burst of volume hurt my ears. A stream of bus drivers in their blue caps and uniforms poured out of the depot building in a crocodile line, two by two, holding hands and singing with their chins tilted up to the sky.

They marched to the bus, and I heard the collective earthquake of their feet tramping up the spiral staircase. Before I could consider hiding or jumping out of the window, they were on me, filling the seats around me, jamming themselves into every crack. They came in all shapes and sizes. There were only two things they had in common: their uniforms and their singing. They were all perfectly in tune with the piped music, and they all knew the words.

Keep your sponge cake,
Fling your flan,
Stick your doughnuts,
Cream and jam,

Leave your custard
In its can
And give us all some jelly!
Jelly is the bouncy treat,
Never runny, always sweet,
Squishy underneath your feet –
Give us all some jelly!

I have to admit it was catchy.

A young Asian woman with lustrous black hair took the seat next to me, and gave me a wave. 'Hello!'

'Hello,' I said.

'Not singing?' she said.

'I don't know the words.'

'But you can sing?' she asked, rather anxiously, I thought.

There was a tap on my shoulder. I swivelled in my seat, and looked into the beaming red face of a middle-aged man who had an enormous monobrow.

'Of course you can sing, love,' he said in a South London accent. 'I'd bet you sing those nasty nineties songs about nobody loving you and what have you, and you only sing when nobody else is about, right? But you can sing. Come on, let's have a peep out of you. Give it a go.'

He looked at me with expectation in his eyes. I cleared my throat and opened my mouth. As if of their own accord, words poured out of me, in perfect time with the music:

In a trifle,
From a mould,
Rabbit shaped or
Ice cream cold,
Nothing better
(So I'm told)
Than a lovely jelly.

Everyone joined in on the chorus:

Jelly is a bouncy treat,
Never runny, always sweet,
Squishy underneath your feet –
Give us all some jelly!

'And we're off!' cried the monobrow man. Sure enough, the bus starting moving slowly out of the depot and along the familiar streets of London.

It was a highly enjoyable journey. The singing never stopped, and it was fun to wave at all the annoyed looking pedestrians standing at bus stops as we cruised past them. Soon the city melted away into green fields and sunshine, and I actually began to feel like one of the gang.

But still the mystery remained – what was Jelly Park?

'You'll see,' the Asian woman said, and winked.

The green fields soon became studded with grey buildings once more, and the sunshine disappeared behind a big cloud. It started to drizzle.

We drove past a Mars Bar factory.

'This is Slough,' I said to my neighbour.

She gave me a mysterious smile. 'We're nearly there,' she said.

'But this is Slough. We just drove past the Mars Bar factory.'

'Here we are!' they all cried at once, and we made a sharp turn left, everyone leaning against each other and clutching the rails on top of the seat in front of them. We pulled up with a screech into a large, empty car park, and I looked through the window at a squat, dilapidated building with a large open gateway.

'This is a warehouse,' I said to my neighbour.

'Oooh, so close now,' she said. 'Get ready for a treat.' She grabbed my hand and pulled me to my feet. We joined the jostle to squeeze down the stairs and out of the bus. As we passed the cabin, the grizzled Welsh driver gave me an extra big smile.

We got into formation and crocodiled through the open gateway into the shadowed, musty interior. All around us, piled high, were hundreds of cardboard boxes.

The Asian woman let go of my hand and the other drivers scattered apart, all running to a box each, whooping and grinning. 'Jelly Park,' they breathed as a collective sigh. Then they opened the boxes and delved inside.

I stood just inside the gateway and watched them pull out multicoloured rectangular packets, no bigger than a fist.

'Catch!' the monobrow man called, and threw a packet straight at me. I caught it as an instinctive reaction, and turned it over in my hands.

The label read, 'The Jolly Jelly Company. Break cubes apart and add one pint of boiling water. Pour into mould and refrigerate to set.'

'It's jelly,' I said. Or, more precisely, jelly cubes. Packets of instant jelly cubes. Mine was lime flavoured.

The others were ripping their packets open, tearing the cubes apart, and popping them into their mouths with accompanying noises of intense delight.

'Is this it?' I said. 'Is this Jelly Park?'

'Good for your hair and nails,' the monobrow man called.

'Yes, but –'

The Welsh driver had come up behind me. 'Well, what were you expecting, lovely?'

'I don't know. Something else.'

'Like what?'

'I...I'm not sure I belong here.'

'Then where do you belong?'

The others stopped chewing and looked at me expectantly.

What am I?

Am I a whisky-drinking, cigarette-smoking, Portishead-listening and pot plant-throwing kind of woman?

Or am I a jolly bus driver: a singer, a laughter, and a regular at Jelly Park?

I ripped open the packet, tore off a cube, and popped it in my mouth. It tasted delicious.

So now I drive the number 67 with a smile on my face. Nobody looks at the badge on my hat and nobody notices the yellow and orange striped speakers above their heads. But if you were to fall asleep while riding my route, and found yourself waking up at the depot feeling a little lost and lonely, I might just invite you along to Jelly Park with me. Whether you come along is up to you.

Aliya Whiteley was born in North Devon but currently lives in Germany. Her first novel 'Mean Mode Median' is available through online bookshops. More details can be found on her website
<http://www.geocities.com/aliyawhiteley/index.html>

Peaches - Liliana V. Blum
Translated by Toshiya A. Kamei

Grandma Lulú's house is right in the center of the city. It is old, mysterious, and of stone, like grandparents' houses should be. The cool rooms have a view of the patio and the canaries overrun the atmosphere with their yellow chirps. In the afternoons the kitchen turns into the gathering place for daughters, aunts, and daughters-in-law who play cards with the grandma, eat cookies baked by the Carmelite nuns, and take coffee over gossip and events of the city.

"Did you know that Chiquis Campuzano's daughter is getting married?" asks Aunt Delfina, sipping her coffee. She takes a cookie, nibbles it slowly, and sweetens her words with morbid curiosity and cinnamon. "Because the girl has a bun in the oven, doesn't she?"

The other women shake their heads with greedy curiosity, encouraging Aunt Delfina to spill the beans, leave out no detail. Above all, they are dying to hear her caustic critiques and harsh judgements. In those moments, the grandma obeys her impulses to serve her fellow man. She breaks into the narrator's yarn at the beginning and offers the gathering of women "more coffee, more cookies, my girls. I also have quince jelly if you like." The aunts and daughters-in-law replenish their plates and cups while getting ready to spend an afternoon of destructive gossip, a delightful opportunity to escape from the boredom of housework and unbearable husbands for a few hours. All of sudden, one of the aunts asks rhetorically, "Where are the boys?" as if she felt obliged to worry. A calm silence arises among the women and no one answers because everyone knows where the boys are playing: they spend energy as if youth burned their cores and had to get rid of it as soon as possible. They run agilely

from the hall, pass through corridors and dark rooms of white walls until they arrive at the patio, the backyard, and finally the garden. They play with the ball and form rival teams with cousins and friends in the neighbourhood. They struggle in passionate games while each one pretends to be his favourite soccer star. They can be also torturing a dog or watching television for hours.

"And what are the girls doing?" asks again Aunt Rosalina.

"They're in the orchard," answers the grandma. Of course, it is always very important to know the girls' whereabouts. "They're cutting fruits; I told them I would show them how to make pies tomorrow."

A general and calm "ah," with a touch of feigned surprise, invades the kitchen. Aunt Delfina picks up the thread of her monologue, skilfully, as if she had never been interrupted. "...I told Chiquis Campuzano that girl was very wicked since she was little. Once while Chiquis and I were enjoying talking, the girl asked me if I knew what Kotex pads were for. Can you believe it? What a child!"

"Touch yourself," demands Susana, the eldest cousin.

The blonde girl with thick braids obeys with a sad look. Lifting her skirt, she reveals her pink panties.

The girls are hiding under the largest fig tree, the one at the back of the orchard, beyond peach and orange trees filling the middle. The mulberry tree, the quince tree, and the lemon trees guard the entrance with their ripe and gentle fruits.

"Put the peach inside you," Susana orders again. "We all did it already. You must do it too, so go on."

The girl stares at the fruit her cousin gives her and blinks from fear.

"What if it gets stuck inside forever?" she says, distressed.

"Nothing is going to happen to you, Delfinita," the others assure her. The girl inserts the small peach in her small vagina. Brushed by the soft fluff of the fruit and the glances of her cousins, she wets the fruit and pushes it out at once before the awakened interest of the other girls.

In that moment, the girls hear the dried leaves on the ground rustle and pretend to cut early figs from the fig trees. The footsteps halt and Grandma Lulú appears before them, smiling and with her hands on her hips.

"Did you already cut the fruit? I have chocolate bars for the girl who wants to listen to a story." The old lady hurries her granddaughters, urging them to return to the house. 'They shouldn't be by themselves where no one can see them,' she thinks to herself.

"A story of princesses, Grandma?"

"Yes, Delfinita, one about princesses, fairies, and toads."

Entering the kitchen, the girls follow Grandma Lulú like chicks following a hen. The aunts and daughters-in-law become hushed and smile at their respective daughters. Little Delfinita runs to her mother and throws her arms around her neck with a charming smile.

"Mami, we put peaches in our quesadillas!" she announces proudly, her brown eyes gleaming. Doña Delfina lets out a smothered cry, holding her hand to her throat instinctually. Her mouth stays open for a few seconds as she tries to take in what she has heard. The rest of the women look at each other discreetly, without knowing whether to celebrate the girl's witticism or to pretend to join in her mother's bitter surprise. A few seconds later, Delfina blushes pink and seizes the girl violently by the arm.

"We have to go. My husband will be home soon and he gets mad if I don't have dinner ready," she says. Throwing kisses in the air as a sign of good-bye, she forces herself to smile and leaves as fast as she can. Confused, the girl follows her mother closely, trying not to be dragged along. When they are on the street, Doña Delfina slaps her daughter, dry and hard.

"Naughty girl, look, you have embarrassed me in front of your aunts. You know what busybodies they are!"

Delfinita has grown up. Time had to pass. She got pregnant by a boy from a well-known family and has to marry, just as Chiquis Campuzano's daughter had to. Only this time, Aunt Delfina is not the one telling the story. She has stopped coming to the afternoon get-togethers in Grandma Lulú's kitchen.

In the orchard, the peaches have already dried.

Liliana V. Blum was born in Durango, Mexico, in 1974. She studied comparative literature at the University of Kansas and has a master's degree in education from the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey. Her stories

have appeared in various anthologies and literary journals. She has published the collection of stories La maldición de Eva (Voces de Barlovento, 2002).

Toshiya Kamei is an MFA student in translation at the University of Arkansas. Toshiya's translations of Mexican short prose have appeared or are forthcoming in Bonfire, Metamorphoses, Literal, SmokeLong Quarterly, and Words without Borders.