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# The Bottle Imp

**Issue 11, May 2012**

**New Publications: Fiction & Poetry**

## **A Summer of Drowning**

by John Burnside

*Jonathan Cape, 2011*

At a critical point in her career, painter Angelika Rossdal suddenly moves to Kvaloya, a small island deep in the Arctic Circle, to dedicate herself to the solitary pursuit of her craft. With her, she brings her young daughter, Liv, who grows up isolated and unable or unwilling to make friends her own age, spending much of her time alone, or with an elderly neighbour, Kyrre Jonsson, who beguiles her with old folk tales and stories about trolls, mermaids and - crucially for the events that unfold in the summer of her eighteenth year - about the huldra, a wild spirit who appears in the form of an irresistibly beautiful girl, to lure young men to their doom. Now twenty-eight, Liv looks back on her life and particularly to that summer when two boys drowned under mysterious circumstances in the still moonlit waters off the shores of Kvaloya. Were the deaths accidental, or were the boys, as Kyrre believes, lured to their deaths by a malevolent spirit? To begin with, Liv dismisses the old man's stories as fantasy, but as the summer continues and events take an even darker turn, she comes to believe that something supernatural is happening on the island. But is it? Or is Liv, a lonely girl who has spent her entire life in the shadow of her beautiful, gifted mother, slowly beginning to lose touch with reality? Set in the white nights of an Arctic summer, the novel has the heightened, hallucinogenic atmosphere of a dream, but culminates in a moment of profound horror. Intensely imagined and exquisitely written, *A Summer of Drowning* is a play of dark and light, of looking and seeing, that will hold and haunt every reader.

## **Skagboys**

by Irvine Welsh

*Jonathan Cape, 2012*

Mark Renton has it all: he's good-looking, young, with a pretty girlfriend and a place at university. But there's no room for him in the 1980s. Thatcher's government is destroying working-class communities across Britain, and the post-war certainties of full employment, educational opportunity and a welfare state are gone. When his family starts to fracture, Mark's life swings out of control and he succumbs to the defeatism which has taken hold in Edinburgh's grimmer areas. The way out is heroin. It's no better for his friends. Spud Murphy is paid off from his job, Tommy Lawrence feels himself being sucked into a life of petty crime and violence - the worlds of the thieving Matty Connell and psychotic Franco Begbie. Only Sick Boy, the supreme manipulator of the opposite sex, seems to ride the current, scamming and hustling his way through it all. *Skagboys* charts their journey from likely lads to young men addicted to the heroin which has flooded their disintegrating community. This is the 1980s: a time of drugs, poverty, AIDS, violence, political strife and hatred - but a lot of laughs, and maybe just a little love; a decade which changed Britain for ever. The prequel to the world-renowned *Trainspotting*, this is an exhilarating and moving book, full of the scabrous humour, salty vernacular and appalling behaviour that has made Irvine Welsh a household name.

## **The Bees**

by Carol Ann Duffy

*Picador, 2011*

Here's a mixer maxter of every kind of Duffy poem: angry, political, elegiac - elegiac about every endangered or disappearing thing in the natural world or the individual psyche - witty, nakedly honest, accessible, mysterious. Here are the willed, the skilled, the passionate ecological pleas and exhortations, the other voices - though less frequent than before - the lists and litanies, and, above all, the lovely lyrics of longing and loneliness and sorrow laced with ephemeral moments of almost-acceptance, lightness and grace. In this collection - from the poet who's always lived so defiantly in the real here-and-now world of "feedback, static, gibberish", of extraordinary rendition and David Beckham - are Achilles, Echo, Leda and ("give him strength") Atlas, as well as such old English folk archetypes as John Barleycorn and the white horses of Wiltshire.

[www.thebottleimp.org.uk](http://www.thebottleimp.org.uk)

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Indeed, Englishness is satisfyingly celebrated here, albeit elegiacally: the counties, the "masterpiece elms". There's an icy new take on Chaucer's "Parlement of Foules" wherein all the named birds of the air sing their songs of devastation.

### **Sightlines**

by Kathleen Jamie  
*Sort of Books, 2012*

Five years after *Findings* broke the mould of nature writing, Kathleen Jamie subtly shifts our focus on landscape and the living world, daring us to look again at the 'natural', the remote and the human-made. She offers us the closest of perspectives and the most distant, too: from vistas of cells beneath a hospital microscope, or the pores of a whale's jawbone under restoration, to satellites rising over a Scottish island, or the aurora borealis lighting up an iceberg-strewn sea. We encounter killer whales circling below cliffs, noisy colonies of breeding gannets, and paintings deep in caves. Written with precision, delicacy and personal recollection, *Sightlines* invites us to pause and look afresh at our surroundings.

### **Getting Higher: The Complete Mountain Poems**

by Andrew Greig  
*Polygon, 2011*

Alongside the mountain poems from *Men on Ice*, *Order of the Day* and *Western Swing*, *Getting Higher* features brand new material, facsimiles of previously unpublished material – including his first poem, written in 1972 – and illustrations and material from the National Library of Scotland archive. A beautiful collector's item full of illustrations, marginalia and notes.

### **The Steel Garden**

by Lorna J Waite  
*Word Power Books, 2011*

It is grittily urban, unashamedly academic, and quite possibly the most committed political and philosophical poetry in Scotland since MacDiarmid (whose work it vividly recalls) ... Lorna Waite records the devastation of post-industrial urban communities without portraying them as victims. The people of Kilbirnie are not statistics, social studies or puppets of a callous economic system, they are a vibrant creative community, expressing themselves through steel and sculpture, stories and music. These are poems about strength, not weakness; they are angry at defeat, not mourning

a loss ... If the feminist slogan was 'the personal is political', Lorna Waite demonstrates that the political is most profoundly personal, not to say passionate. She engages with social changes, clearances, migration and the class war through her friendships, family, archaeology and, in a profound and fascinating way, through her relationship with hill, burn, mountain and woodland, and with Gaelic.

### **Tales from the Mall**

by Ewan Morrison  
*Cargo Publishing, 2012*

From one of the UK's most acclaimed literary and film talents, *Tales From The Mall* is a mash-up of fact, fiction, essays, true stories and multi-format media that tells of the rise of one of the most defining and iconic symbols of the modern age – the shopping mall. Why would one woman threaten to kill another for a pair of shoes in the bargain bin? Why do shopping malls evict old ladies? Why are transvestites drawn to mall car parks? Why are malls dying in the USA? What do impulse buys have to do with rioting? And why are market research companies hiding the truth from us? If you want to work out how the modern world works, then ask Ewan Morrison. For the last three years he's been scouring the shopping malls of Britain uncovering the secrets of retail heaven and hell, to tell us how malls manipulate our emotions in twenty cleverly calculated ways; how some malls are 'vampiric' and other malls are 'pregnant', and how malls are an ideal space to meet a new lover or to kill yourself. From over a hundred interviews and confessions, Morrison re-tells the true-life tales of those who work, shop and sometimes even make love inside their walls. As shopping malls spread round the globe at the amazing speed of one new mall every seventy two hours, and everyone, in every country ends up wearing the same fashions, *Tales from the Mall* gives us a page-turning tour of the history of the mall and a vision of our coming future. Wry, humorous and fast-paced; packed full of terribly tweetable facts and gut wrenching, sometimes hilarious stories; it will change the way you think about your hair colour, your loyalty cards, the global economy and your boyfriend ... forever.

### **Stonemouth**

by Iain Banks  
*Little, Brown, 2012*

Pitched between *The Crow Road* and *The Wasp Factory*, *Stonemouth* is set in a small town north of Aberdeen and involves two warring

crime families. Our hero was run out of town five years ago and now he's back for a family funeral – and some closeted skeletons are about to appear.

### **Pack Men**

By Alan Bissett

*Hachette Scotland, 2011*

In 2008 Glasgow Rangers FC reached a major European final. It was held in Manchester, a short hop from Scotland into England. Cue a colossal invasion: the largest movement of Scots over the border in history and the first time in hundreds of years that an English city was taken over. Chaos reigned. *Pack Men* is the fictional story of three pals and one child trapped inside this powderkeg. In a city rocking with beer, brotherhood and the boys struggle to hold onto their friendship, as they turn on each other and the police turn on them. And somehow one of them has to disclose a secret which he knows the others won't want to hear... With this novel, one of Scotland's leading young writers has created a scuffed comedy about male un-bonding and Britain unravelling.

### **Wasted**

by Allan Wilson

*Cargo, 2011*

Love. If only there was an escape. Set against a backdrop of menial employment, escape into alcohol and an unflinching belief that life has the potential to offer so much more, *Wasted in Love* explores the tragedy and humour that exists in the everyday lives we lead. Whether they are starting out in life or having a cold moment of realisation, Allan Wilson's poignant vignettes are powerful, unflinching in their honesty and full of dark humour. We see the real world of love; couples fight, break-up, make-up and fall in and out of love. Lies, suspicion and betrayal haunt them. But when they come together in love, can they escape and rise above their problems? *Wasted in Love* explodes onto the page with vivid, heartbreaking stories and stunning prose. This much anticipated and praised collection is a brave exploration of the human condition from one of the UK's most exciting writers.

### **Island of Wings**

by Karin Altenberg

*Quercus Books, 2011*

On the ten-hour sailing west from the Hebrides to the islands of St Kilda, everything lies ahead for Lizzie and Neil MacKenzie. Neil is to become the minister to the small community

of islanders and Lizzie, his new wife, is pregnant with their first child. Neil's journey is evangelical: a testing and strengthening of his own faith against the old pagan ways of the St Kildans, but it is also a passage to atonement. For Lizzie – bright, beautiful and devoted – this is an adventure, a voyage into the unknown. She is sure only of her loyalty and love for her husband, but everything that happens from now on will challenge all her certainties. As the two adjust to life on an exposed archipelago on the edge of civilization, where the natives live in squalor and subsist on a diet of seabirds, and babies perish mysteriously in their first week, their marriage – and their sanity – is threatened. Is Lizzie a willful temptress drawing him away from his faith? Is Neil's zealous Christianity unhinging into madness? And who, or what, is haunting the moors and cliff-tops? Exquisitely written and profoundly moving, *Island of Wings* is more than just an account of a marriage in peril – it is also a richly imagined novel about two people struggling to keep their love, and their family, alive in a place of terrible hardship and tumultuous beauty.

### **Submergence**

by J. M. Ledgard

*Chatto & Windus, 2011*

In a room with no windows on the eastern coast of Africa, an Englishman, James More, is held captive by jihadist fighters. Posing as a water engineer to spy on al-Qaeda activity in the area, he now faces extreme privation, mock executions and forced marches through arid Somali badlands. Thousands of miles away on the Greenland Sea, Danielle Flinders, a biomathematician, prepares for a dive to the ocean floor to determine the extent and forms of life in the deep. Both are drawn back, in their thoughts, to the Christmas of the previous year, and to a French hotel on the Atlantic coast, where a chance encounter on the beach led to an intense and enduring romance, now stretching across continents. For James, a descendant of Thomas More, his mind escapes to utopias, and fragments of his life and learning before his incarceration, now haunting him. Danny is drawn back to mythical and scientific origins and to the ocean: immense and otherworldly, a comfort and a threat. *Submergence* is a love story, a meditation on mortality, and a vivid portrayal of man's place on Earth. With it, J. M. Ledgard proves himself a writer of large horizons and vast ambition.