



A Literary Magazine

Neon

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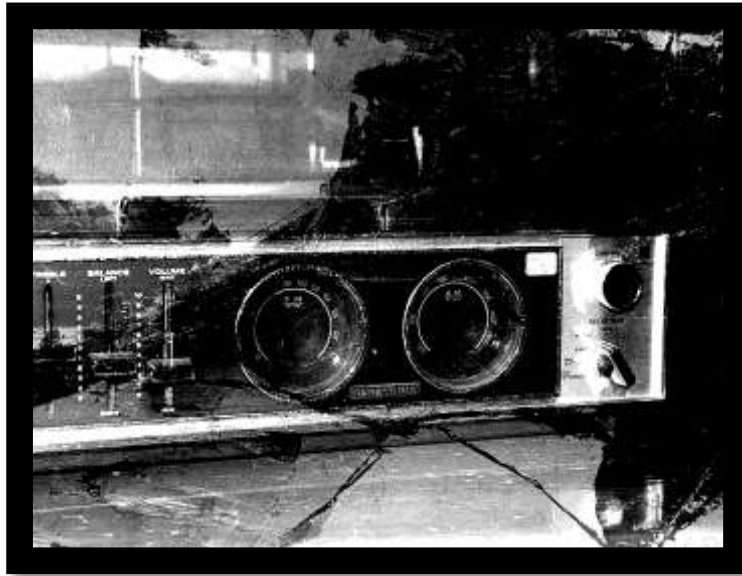


Image by Matina L. Stamatakis

Fire Flowers

"Fire Flowers" first appeared in Rattle

In Japanese, the word for "office" is a character composing
two smaller characters meaning "enclosed space"
and "slumping corpse".

Outside, a soft rain's falling on what was once the corner deli
but is now an immense pile
of pipes and bricks, chips of cement, and crumpled menus.
I used to eat there with my wife, who's no longer my wife but rather
someone's girlfriend. We used to order a plate of cheese fries
and discuss the feasibility of being married,

not knowing we could have more efficiently spent that time
doing something else, like organizing an expedition to the Arctic
or handing out flyers to save the corner deli
from its eventual demolition.

If I turn on the TV set, I'll no doubt be reminded that today's not Saturday
and tomorrow's not Sunday, and whatever I decide to watch
will simply be a way not to think about what I'm not doing.

On these days between the days I'm actually living,
relatives occasionally call to assure themselves I'm still breathing,
telling me small details I could do without, while in their voices' dark corners
I hear their latent, unfulfilled desires, and part of me
wishes to take their hands and guide them towards the unknown,
but just as I'm reaching out, grazing their invisible skin,
the connection's cut, breaking them loose into their lonely longing.

On my coffee breaks, I muse on the metaphysical consequences
of a slumping corpse in an enclosed space,
and I think how our word for "fireworks" is practical, but in Japanese
it's literally a "fire flower", which I find to be inherently more poetic:
"If you look into the sky at this very moment
you may see flowers composed of fire," and you may see stars
exhaling their last breaths onto a coal canvas,
momentarily warming the vast frozen space.

The Things We Become

"The Things We Become" first appeared in Merge

A suit laid out on the couch
awaiting tomorrow's workday, a tenth-row mezzanine seat
at the ballgame. Someone
steals your wife as you finish reading
a detective story. Someone else
steals your house as you fall behind on the rent.

Your skin becomes your identity. Your manhood is
a separate entity. You feel yourself shrinking
into obscurity. Obscurity. The darkness of one, of one
in the morning in the country, stars glimmering
untouchable. Morbid celestial giants. Abandoned, you are lifted
into a long dream, eyes opened/not seeing,

not wanting to see. Wars erupt upon your doorstep
entrapped in newspaper print. Headlines scream
of casualties. Some call them
eventualities, unfortunate mistakes leading to
inevitable. Fire is suffocating your cerebral cortex,
senses fabricated by the thoughts of others. You've
relinquished your processes of reason.

Neon

A bomb explodes somewhere you've
never been. Stop worrying about the
consequences of these actions.

Come embrace divinity. Step into
the sacred breath of eternity.

Breathe in.

Imagine your life in perfect symmetry,
in perfect balance with the stars abandoned
in a black sky unable to forget you
because it will never even know you have existed.



Image by Matina L. Stamatakis

Shadow Of The Divine

"Shadow Of The Divine" first appeared in Off The Coast

God is born in iridescent stains swirling through a puddle where piglets tread, their curlicue tails miniscule tornadoes twisting as the bristled sow floats by like an earthen angel, 'til her breasts caress the swimming offspring dressed in gasoline's lingering rainbows, an acrid scent of God unleashed from propane tanks, trails of oil delivered from deserts ten million steps away.

Children play in the shadow of factories, in streams saturated with runoff, their skins reddened, rough peeling like serpents' sloughs; their lungs congested with undiagnosed toxins; God inhabits their chests, wheezes with laboured breaths, sparkles in their eyes as darkness descends over the Andes.

Workers spread cyanide over the open pits, extracting gold, earning the freedom to work and live in their own country. Schools of river trout float belly-up, grown rich with gold, gathered by girls in hand-woven baskets on a bed of orchids and lilies.

God watches over his creatures, christening the growth of fungi and fashioned plagues protecting his earth. Fragile, orphaned, neglected. Burnt fields, felled forests, emptied oceans and men devouring orders, families, and species, 'til nothing remains but to name God in a swirl of oil.

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Four Poems

CL Bledsoe

February 5

a.

I picked at a scab on my cheek
until I got it off, and everywhere the blood
touched, a new scab formed. I picked all those off
my face and neck and hands and leg
and when they bled, it spread
until it covered me completely. Tourniquet
brought me flies for protein, which the orderlies
confiscated. The gods of flies like wasted blood.
See how their white clothed maggots are drawn to rot.

b.

I felt squelched
up top, weak from lack
of blood, dug around and found a knot
too big to cut, so I pulled
it free, tore hair and flesh from the roundness
of my head, unravelled it like string
from a sweater until nothing was left
but void.

Image by Tijmen Van Dobbenburgh

I felt hollow
as an Easter bunny, the darkness
between my ears full of light,
dust. The breeze from the vent
made my toes twitch when it blew
over the hole. I turned up the fan
and made myself dance a full five minutes
before the orderlies came
and wrapped me up in gauze.

February 13

Tourniquet^[1] nibble-toed me awake, left
me nine nearly whole ones (though I hardly need
more than three on each foot to balance^[2]).

Outside, broken trumpets. Outside, crows^[3] trample
leaves, kick tumblebugs^[4] into gutter-goals. I've eaten
a clock^[5]. I've shot my wife^[6], my mother^[7], my
son^[8]. I am comedy^[9]. I am on the cover
of a magazine (just behind the death-faced
models with staples through their eyes). You say
there's no God, no hope, nothing

but powerbars and masturbation. I say
there's not even that. No book, no hungry
felt-lined bowl, nothing

but toe-ache. I've got nine left. I've painted them
like cherries. I only need three^[10].

[1] My pet Jape.

[2] pinky, bigtoe, ring-toe.

[3] Or ridiculously obese blackbirds. Or men dressed as ridiculously obese blackbirds. Or tumblebugs dressed as men, dressed as ridiculously obese blackbirds in order to subjugate their own kind.

[4] I'm fairly certain these were what they appear, though they may have been overly privileged men pretending to be tumblebugs in order to suffer abuse as a means of karmic compensation.

[5] laugh.

[6] Not yet.

[7] Not yet.

[8] laugh.

[9] laugh.

[10] On each foot. See Note 2.

February 14

An old man came to see me
in the lunchroom, splattered
his shadow all over my mashed
potatoes, obliterated my shepherd's
pie completely, and said sight
is an illusion, hearing the easiest
sense to fool, the feeling of time
falling from one's shoulders is simply
gravity releasing the body to drift.

I had no juice left, nothing
to convince him otherwise. Comfort,
I said, comfort will save us.
He smiled, shook his head, guffawed
loudly as though I'd farted
on his mother's prize pudding,
turned on his heel and walked away,
muttering about youth, politics, style.

Corruption, I yelled, waste,
oppression, greed, all of these things
are yours, for myself I reserve only
prompt potatoes.

Image by Tijmen Van Dobbenburgh

February 20

Today is the day I will weave my toupee
from the hair I've been saving, collecting
from my tongue. I wake, most mornings
with hair on my tongue, none
on my head. It is cold up there, never
in my mouth. This is a blessing to those
must hear me speak.

I wanted you to know.

I wanted to share my gift, my fortunate affliction.
Hair comes from death; something in my throat
is dying each night, growing into this tombstone
each morning. You understand. It is important
to chronicle our inspirations. You understand.

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Two Poems

Howie Good

The Heart Breaks Down Like A Mechanical Device

The repairman says mice have chewed through the wires.

Thank you, I say--to the mice. Maybe now I can think

without being interrupted. But first I must do something

about the Styrofoam peanuts scattered all over the floor,

and then there's the fire to strum and the Bureau of

Weights and Measures to contact. My wife won't be any

help. She's hiding in our bedroom, embarrassed that we

have grown children. I pat my pockets as if searching for

cigarettes, or, if not cigarettes, symptoms. One side of

me is cold and dark; the other side, cold and bright. I

exchange melancholy glances with the deer head on the

wall. The repairman says he'll be back. Quiet, I say, the

baby's sleeping.

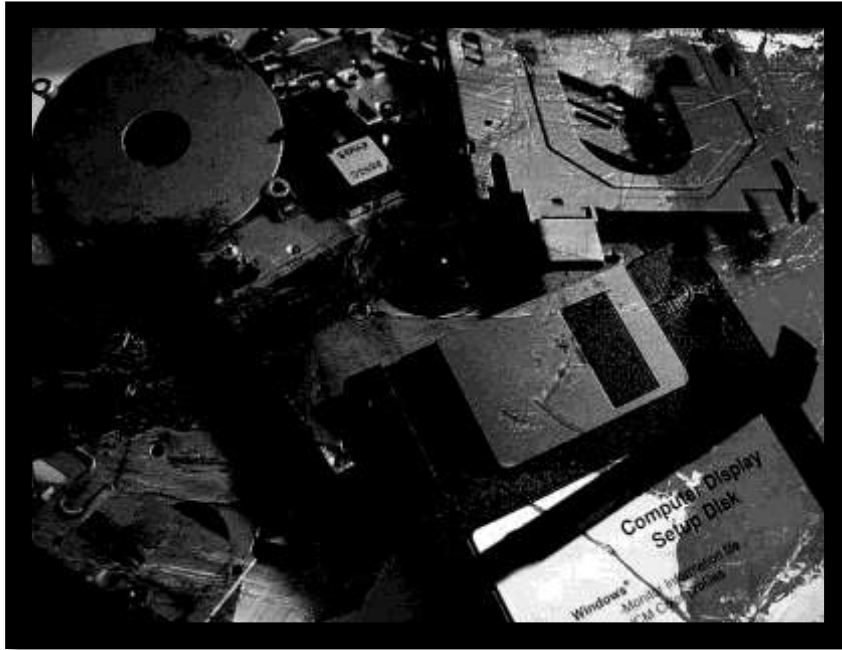


Image by Matina L. Stamatakis

Looking For Work, Week Five

"You aren't quite right for us," he says.

He isn't looking at me when he says it.

He's looking at the screen of his cell phone.

Where to now?

It's a hot day, and it promises to get hotter.

I start walking.

The folder tucked under my arm

might as well be empty for all the good

the papers inside have done me.

A woman up ahead

has a lovely, heart-shaped ass.

I can feel the sweat break out on my back.

I'm not sure this is the right direction.

My legs ache.

There's a metallic taste in my mouth

I tell myself this is the right direction.

I breathe in, I breathe out.

Etc. and so on.

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From Ribs Come Tales

Christopher James

A story begins at the point where two characters meet. If I put Adam in a garden by himself we don't have a tale. Adam stares into space drumming his fingers. He doesn't even think about anything because he has nothing interesting to think about. Now if I put Adam into a garden with Eve we have the start of something. Both wish to reach out to the other, and if they do we have a story developing. Sadly they are unused to company and the delicate art of small talk, and no conversation flows, and we have a story collapsing. Adam blames himself for being unable to think of anything worth saying and Eve blames him as well. At some point pride demands they give up trying to think of things to say and independently they both stare into space, drumming their respective fingers, each of them pretending to be on their own. It is not much of a story, yet, but we are getting there.

I put Adam and Eve into a garden filled with flowers. "Look at the flowers," says Adam, "aren't they beautiful?" "Yes," agrees Eve, "they're very beautiful." "Yes," repeats Adam, "they really are." Adam is pathetic. Eve is becoming bitter. She resents Adam for having nothing more interesting to say. In the back of her mind it occurs to her that she too has nothing to say, and she blames Adam for this as well. Adam wears nothing and Eve wears nothing and their bodies belong together. What's wrong with him? She glares at him with mean eyes that she hides from him when he turns, and she hates him because he doesn't beg her gentle touch. She pictures herself tearing up the flowers and throwing the torn petals at Adam like vicious confetti. Still they have nothing to say to each other.

I put Eve and Steve in a garden together. Steve is slime. He slicks his hair back with wet look gel, wears snake skin suits and throws his arm in the air to pull back the sleeve when he wants to check the time on his designer watch. Within half an hour Steve and Eve are screwing on the freshly mown lawn. Eve is wondering what Adam is

doing. She closes her eyes tight and bites her lip and makes noises of ecstasy in case Steve cares whether she enjoys herself. He doesn't. Adam is watching from the other side of the garden, hot tears on his face. He is digging his uncut nails into the fleshy part of his hands and biting his own lip hard enough to draw tiny blood droplets to the skin. He is cursing himself, and Eve, and Steve. Mostly he is cursing himself. He remains silent and listens to Eve's moans and wonders how she can enjoy herself with that asshole inside of her.

I put Adam in a room by himself and he jerks off violently, thinking of Eve. Now he has plenty to say.

A story begins at the point where two characters part.

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Image by Leonora Greceva

Three Poems

Donna Burgess

Judy Is A House

Inside the dome of Judy's skull lives five, all angry to some degree.

One weak, one sparkling, one nondescript,

Two who only emerge with drink, one who sleeps day and eve and supplies Judy with
cruel dreams.

Judy's eyes are iridescent lamps

That never shut off

Staring and lighting the way, staring into nothing.

Judy's heart is a boiler room,

Each chamber hotter than the last

On the verge of combustion.

Judy's fingers are hungry things,

Searching for something to tear, to scratch, to pinch.

Their pads as open as and sensitive as places down below.

Judy is a wretched house

On a sad part of town,

Aching for nothing and everything.

Neon

Her lungs are vacuums that ingest smoke of all varieties,
But the people upstairs dream of filling them with ocean
Until their burst like cheap birthday balloons.

Her mouth is the tunnel that leads things inside,
An intimate room with soft floors and sharp walls.
Things hide there and words reside, taking shape like things tangible and hard.

Judy's ribs are windows with bars,
Covered but not much of a view,
Unless your groove is red satin walls.

Inside there is a bed of liver,
Like a sponge filled
And rung out too many times.



Image by Travis Walker

Judy is a haunted place
Where ghosts guide her days and memories guide her nights as she falls,
Condemned.

Zora And Xena, The Conjoined Twins

Okay, so Xena wakes staring at the boy
Lashes on his cheeks like
One dozen spider legs

Little thing, a faerie or an angel
She decides he is like a dream she doesn't own
But he loves only me
The prettier one the other side of the bed.
Dumb old Xena, plain and lame
And not quite as whole as I am--
Because I am
Zora, Zora the better half.
Three-titted and two legged
As long as I am assertive
And I tell her,
Kiss my ass anyway, Xena, you're just along for the ride
With your crooked teeth
 And glasses.
Spider-lashed baby hides when we fight
A slash will do the both of us in
If delivered just so
 Maybe that's what we need.
Or a saw
Or perhaps a surgeon with guts.
Xena, you're a stain on my/our memory.
My hair isn't tangled like yours
Since I control both our arms.
 Stop that crying.
Back up and stay off my back.

No pun intended.

I can change our little world

You just hold your breath.

The Fable Of The Ash Boy

Maybe it could be a fable of sorts, she decides.

She was barren in the middle and plain of face,

But she wished for a baby of her own.

Little muse to stoke her dreams

Star of her nightmares,

Where no one is true of heart,

And wolves dress like children ready for Sunday school.

She spreads out her life on paper

And often the lives of people who live in make-believe

Who are pretty and smart and special,

So unlike her and her drab ways.

Out of paper, she births her muse

Boy baby, so dear, grown of clippings

From American Baby and Johnson and Johnson ads

For that good-smelling shampoo that makes her remember her own childhood.

By candlelight she wishes her boy real.

She consults a book of spells

Given by a woman of dark skin and darker intentions.

Like Geppetto and starry nights and Blue Fairies,

She throws wishes toward stars hanging and stars falling.

Nothing.

Not a damned thing or so she thinks until a small gasps

Dry as autumn leaves,

"Mommy?"

Nearly dozing, she starts,

Off topple those black candles

Into a crib made of cardboard and shreds of nursery rhyme pages.

Over as quick as a breath

She eats the ashes and sleeps dreamless.

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Two Poems

Stevie Blue



Image by Joergen Kindt-Ipsen

Back On The Road Exhibition

birmingham was bombed by upset stockbrokers
the day after christmas.

an old girlfriend and I stumbled across it

and

picked through the wreckage

looking for survivors –

working, as always, from the outside in.

bloodied, thin people limped toward the giant doors of the university
seeking shelter.

inside we found kerouac

lying dead straight

in a glass box--surrounded by the thin people.

his skin had turned slight and stained but we couldn't pry him out

and that field of thin people would not move,

unstirred by our cries--

a field of little trunks--little matches.

so we left, seeking help.

next we found a mountain of singed books--

we thought they were still smouldering but found the smoke

coming from a cigarette in bukowski's hand

who was perched on a splintered bookshelf arguing with ginsberg.

one outrageous line and they were ours.

thus, the four of us continued

running dangerously low on cigarettes.

finally, a busker in shiny shoes,

with bob dylan's wild hair and hands caught us outside a bank

on a chord he had strung across the path.

we threw three pounds and a note at him to buy our escape--

he let us go for being artists.

it was only then that we returned for kerouac

who was running out of air.

we were there an hour or more, pulling at the sides,

ripping holes in our jeans, sweating, swearing, cursing anything but each other

and the beat of his poor heart fell

and fell still.

thus,

we mourned, becoming angular and grey

and quiet.

"I have a poem I want to read"

I paused.

"I'm waiting for the right time"

and I took a drag and slugged bitter coffee that made my tired heart beat

and whisky that made my cold chest warm.

we sat in silence, golf-ball eyed from the morning's hit,

perfectly in silence,

and then

"it's time!" the church thundered,

and every housewife stopped, suddy and sullen,

every punter set down his tongue and guinness and bowed his head,

every artist crumpled his heart and sat cross-legged on the studio floor,

every traffic light blushed red (causing many major collisions)

Neon

and every child stopped to

hear me rise and cry:

"I'M IN LOVE"

the insulted clock struck me three times

until the blood left my mouth like an oil slick,

my weak fingers parted

and dropped the cigarette butt to

set the whole city alight.

at the university, the thin match people

sparked on, one by one, and

in his box,

jack smiled.

Asexuality

I am sexless.

We spend this night like jellyfish.

We sting and sting

each other and it thrills me.

We tie

in careful knots

until we fill this tank up.

This spills over--this

water that will never be

drunk.

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Five Imaginary Babes

Daniel Uncapher



Image by Debbie Schiel

In time I've had five babies.

The first one was boneless and meatless; it was a puggish fold of skin, and I would throw it on the ground in disgust where it would puddle up and gurgle little flatulent gusps that were almost cute but stank like dank pot. Within a few days, having accidentally left it lying in the sun, a feral dog came and lapped it up.

The next baby, within minutes, dissolved. I held him in my hand and named him Charlemagne and moments later he fizzled between my fingers and left them feeling very dry, not unlike fingers coated with super glue residue.

The third and fourth babies, Congolese twins, were tightly wrapped in cocoons and I left them hanging under my dining room table, but people started to notice and make underhanded remarks over cocktails, and that situation grew peculiar so I moved

them to my writer's desk. Now and then spiders make webs between them and perform acrobatic stunts when I'm not looking. Sometimes in my less proud moments I fancy peeling off the cocoon and spoonfeeding the innards to my cat, but I'm worried about what I may find inside.

The last baby is the size of a bat and skeletal, with arms too long and thin that swivel lifelessly before him. He sleeps and shits normally but his grotesque limbs bother me so I have locked him in my closet, where he sits with vacant eyes and says nothing. Often, when I pace about the room, especially just before dawn in the early morning, or late night like now when I'm growing paranoid against my silent piano and bristling canary in her gilded cage, at times like this the door will creak open and I'll see him huddled there, shivering with his arms stretching limply at his sides, and just before I slam the closet door shut in fright I'll hear him say, "Come hither, Love, come here."

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Three Poems

Jenn Clarke

Fags

That night
we traded from our decks
like Poke'mon cards,
speaking from our lungs
"got,
got, got,
need,"
and we lit them
and curled our lips
and smoked them
and burned ourselves
black as tar.

Half dead and dizzy
and too frightened
of the woods,
we had found a mound
not far from a street light
and doused ourselves
from an Evian bottle



Image by Homero Chapa

Neon

full of vodka
and smoked each other's
cigarettes.

A Confession

I do not want to be
a fatalist
because I know
that anything
is possible;
it's just that
some things
are infinitely more probable
and some things
are just
inevitable.

I Used To Write Emo Poetry

Now
my bed is dirty
and I have marked it out
uncomfortably for my own;
I have crossed the pillow
and filled the side

where you slept
with pebbles, shoe prints,
lost pens,
my own broken
fingernails,
and I face away
from where you are not,
encroaching on the edge
I have marked out
for myself
and stained.
Now
I cannot sleep
and I cannot dream
for dreaming of you.

I have made my bed
and, now, I will lie in it.

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Image by Matina L. Stamatakis

Contributors

When not writing poetry, **Jonathan Greenhouse** makes a living as an interpreter, whispering into people's ears so they'll understand what's going on around them. He is also an avid traveller, having ventured to the post office several times in the past few months.

In addition to his poems "Alice After Her Adventures In Wonderland" and "Colonizing Ants In The Desert", which appeared in *Neon* #14, his poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous publications throughout the United States and internationally, including *Many Mountains Moving*, *Rattle*, *Slab*, and *Going Down Swinging* (Australia).

CL Bledsoe is the author of two poetry collections, *Anthem*, and _____ (*Want/Need*). He's an editor for *Ghoti Magazine*: www.ghotimag.com.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, is the author of eight poetry chapbooks, including *Police and Questions* from Right Hand Pointing (2008), *Tomorrowland* (2008) from Achilles Chapbooks, *The Torturer's Horse* (2009) from Recycled Karma Press, and *Love Is a UFO* (2009) from Pudding House. He has been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize and twice for the Best of the Net anthology. His first full-length book of poetry, *Lovesick*, is forthcoming from The Poetry Press of Press Americana.

Christopher James is from London and around. He travels the world and works one underpaid job after another. He is currently back in England, with an eye on South America. His favourite animal is the jellyfish.

Donna Burgess's work has appeared or is forthcoming in many genre publications such as *Sybil's Garage*, *Weird Tales*, *Brutarian*, *Dark Wisdom*, *Chizine*, *Not One of Us* and others. When she is not writing, she enjoys running and surfing. She is also currently back in school, after a nearly twenty-year absence, pursuing an M.F.A. in creative writing, with plans to move into teaching.

Stevie Blue is a student from Leicestershire. www.humblevoice.com/misterblue.

Matina L. Stamatakis is a freelance photographer, writer, and noise artist currently residing in upstate New York. Her works have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Wheelhouse Magazine*, *Big Bridge*, *Moria*, *Sous Rature*, etc. She is the author of *Metempsychose* (Ypolita Press, 2009).

Daniel Uncapher is a prose poet, painter, and pianist from the deep American south.

Jenn Clarke is eighteen, from Leicestershire and generally dislikes describing herself. She was a Foyles Young Poet in 2008 and, now, really doesn't know where to post her writing.