

Issue 2 | Spring 2026

# Oscail



Home of neurodiverse and  
queer writing in Ireland

# Oscail

Magazine

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## Editor's Note

Our second issue and first of 2026 is kindly supported by the Munster Literature Centre as well as support from the editors of other lit mags in Ireland, such as The Stinging Fly and Banshee. The overall encouragement from writers of all backgrounds regarding our inaugural issue was quite overwhelming, and I want to thank everyone again for their continued support of Oscail and the community behind it.

With the rise in second-rate creative writing generated by AI (otherwise known as 'AI slop'), it is increasingly refreshing to read work written by profoundly talented humans. This issue includes the work of human writers with unique lived experiences and perspectives that are seldom explored and represented on the page.

In this issue, we interviewed two Irish writers whose writing and identities align with the ethos of Oscail: Chloe Michelle Howarth and Sam Fowley. They share thoughts on their work, their process and experience within the industry. It was an honour to interview them for this issue and an honour to publish more work from queer and neurodivergent writers, both from Ireland and abroad.

Finally, I would like to highlight a new resource from Ireland's LGBTQIA+ charity ShoutOut for neuroqueer people. It offers support and advice on how to navigate the world with the aim of empowering neuroqueer people across all backgrounds, validating and ensuring our community receives the support it deserves. Thank you to them and anyone else who has taken the initiative to promote the lives and work of our neuroqueers everywhere. This work is vital and deeply appreciated.

Le meas,

Emmet

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'at the end of the dark river I released my mother'

By Aepril Schaile

she lived in my hips

a circling horse

home after work

ice pack to swollen lumbar disks VHS stories on tape

leave the door

decapitated moon

floating there

biting the air

from my spinal fluid I pull her out of my neck

my back

a pearl string of mother-lines

millions

of silken eggs

I am wobbly soft boned

black water running past

gurgling

like a girl

newly hatched and

hungry

dropping

leaden

tailored shoulders

she cracks open

like competency

a clanking

groaning

iron maiden

a cage inside a cage inside a cage inside

mothers inside mothers inside mothers inside

apartments inside heartaches inside

long dark nights of childhood

still shrieking

her face

#1 blue ribbons unfurling from her mouth

her head

leaping horses

the moon

wrenched out of the sky

slapping backward from the driver's seat

we twist

to dodge her     soaring

down the Bronx River Parkway

warning us we'd thank her

someday

someday

someday

echoes across the night under the

moon moon

moon

# 'Hangman'

By Aisling Walsh

Seventeen white dashes stretched across the blackboard. Below stood a platform, constructed from two connecting lines, where a noose swung waiting for its victim. I turned to the class with the chalk pressed between my fingers and hand poised to write, waiting for the eager executioners to begin shouting out letters.

Before they had a chance to throw an A or an R at me, Miss Brennan was at my side. She leaned towards me and whispered in my ear.

'Um... what's the word exactly?'

T R A N S U B S T A N T I A T I O N,' I replied, in a conspiratorial whisper.

The smile was not returned. 'Don't you think that's a little difficult?'

'But we learned it last week when we were reading Joyce.'

She frowned and glanced at the class. 'I think you'd better pick something else.'

'It was in the text book!' I protested.

'I know, but it's too hard.'

Heat rose to my cheeks as the class looked on. I caught the smirks and eyerolls exchanged across desks. Their lips made the shape of those all too familiar words: Swot. Nerd. Weirdo. Eyebrows arched as if to say 'why can't she just be normal?'

I was normal.

At least I was trying to be.

Or rather, I wanted desperately to be just another one of the girls.

But it wasn't easy. My stubborn brain was always conspiring against me. Two months of secondary school and I'd already singled myself out as the class freak. I thought I was being clever, choosing transubstantiation. The aim was to construct a full man, make him swing. It was *supposed* to be hard, that's how you won this game.

I turned my back on the class and stood, hand frozen in the air and palms sweating, trying to come up with a simpler word. Under scrutiny from the whole class, my mind turned as blank as the dashes I had drawn. Not for the first time I felt like I had missed some vital message about the rules of the game, not to mention the rules of a religion that wasn't even mine.

\*

'It's bad enough their father's upped and left, you don't have to raise wild heathens as well!' Granny sat on a kitchen chair, flicking cigarette ash out the back door. 'What will people think?'

'They can think what they like,' said Mum, setting plates on the table for tea.

'And what do you have to say about it?' She looked directly at me, smoke curling out of her nostrils. 'Wouldn't you like to have a pretty dress? And all the money you'll get!'

I stopped colouring and glanced at Mum who rolled her eyes. For once, I decided to take her side.

'I don't like dresses,' I said. 'You can't play soccer in them.'

It was a lie, but it was easier than trying to explain to Granny that I didn't care about any promise to a God I'd never believed in. I had, however, been fantasizing about the white frills, satin shoes and flower crowns for months. No one in school would be having a Communion, Protestants didn't seem to go in for that kind of thing, but my cousins already had their dresses and I wanted one too. My parents had flatly objected and I even I had to admit that faking a belief in God, even for the prettiest dress in the world, was crass.

'You won't be playing soccer on your Communion day,' Granny said, tut-tutting. 'But you will get to eat lots of cakes and I know you love cakes.'

She gnashed her dentures at me. I shrugged and focused on filling in a yellow sun over a blue sea.

'Leave the child alone,' said Mum. 'She's too young to decide for herself.'

Granny didn't leave me alone though. She followed me upstairs that evening and, instead of bedtime stories, she tried to teach me the Rosary. I repeated the words

to her prayers and promised I would try remember them. To her talk of glitz and glam, money and attention, I said nothing.

'Would you not tell your Mum just how much you'd love to make your Communion?'

I shrugged.

'Well, I'll be up tomorrow night to check you've learned your Hail Marys.'

'Yes Granny.' I said and kissed her goodnight.

The following evening I pretended to be asleep when she appeared at my door.

\*

The Communion never happened but Granny *did* get a shock, a year or two later, when, on one of their visits, I asked if I could join her and Granda for Mass.

'Of course you can darling.' She beamed at Mum, delighted to have triumphed in the battle over my everlasting soul.

I told neither her, nor Mum, that saving myself from eternal damnation was not the issue. My real interest was finally learning what Mass was all about. I was desperate to understand why our family's refusal to go seemed to get everyone else into such a tizzy.

That Sunday morning I put on my favourite dress, spit-shined my patent shoes and felt very proper and special holding Granny's hand as we walked into the church. They found a pew towards the middle and sat me down. I started asking questions about what would happen but was shushed as soon as the priest took the stage. I spent the rest of the hour imitating my fellow villagers as they stood, sat and kneeled on command, mumbled prayers and groaned hymns along to a thundering organ. I could keep up with their movements but not the words, so I made shapes with my mouth in time to what I thought they might be saying or singing.

When the whole church stood and began filing into the aisles, I made to follow. Granny pushed me back onto the pew, hissing: 'Not you. *You* stay here and wait until we get back.'

I fidgeted with the buttons of my coat, trying to appear younger than I actually was so that no one would guess that I'd been left behind because I was a heathen

whose soul was destined to burn in hell. They *did* let me shake hands with my fellow worshippers at the end of Mass and I wished a very peaceful day to anyone who caught my eye.

The next time Granny visited I made sure I was still in bed when they left for Mass.

\*

'This is a great responsibility girls.'

Brown Owl stood at the head of the room, hands on hips, staring down at us.

'You're not just representing our troop, but the Irish Girl Guides.'

'Yes Brown Owl,' we answered in unison.

She walked down the four straight lines of girls, checking the shine of our Brownie pins and the hemlines of our blue dresses for imperfections. Brown Owl marched to the door and nodded once before turning and leading us from the community centre. Among the oldest of the Brownies, almost ready to graduate to Guides, I'd only recently been promoted to Sixer and took my responsibilities to my littler Brownies very seriously. I hurried after her, herding my band of five little Forget-me-nots through the biting December air, across the main road and up the hill to the church. I ushered them into the pew behind Brown Owl and tried to act as if I knew exactly what I was doing. This was the first Christmas Mass I had been allowed to attend with the Brownies and I was determined to do Brown Owl proud. Though I had still failed to learn any prayers, I knew all the Christmas carols by heart and belted them out at the top of my voice.

As Mass wound to a close the people around me began to stand and stream towards the altar. Each Sixer shooed their charges into the aisle. I dawdled, unsure what to do. Five little faces stared up at me awaiting instruction. I was blocking the row and the other Sixers had begun to nudge each other and throw glances at Brown Owl. I knew I shouldn't but, before the gap grew any bigger, I stumbled along the row and into the aisle. I had a responsibility to those girls and didn't want to be left there alone, to fidget with my badges.

No one held me back, nor made me sit down. Brown Owl didn't even seem to notice the momentary bottleneck. I slipped seamlessly into the queue, a heathen among the lines of the devout. The crowd carried me forward with ease, but the closer I got to the altar the more terrified I became that I was breaking some sort of holy law. My once resolute lack of faith had become riddled with doubt and I wondered if God could see me, the little faker, standing in line to receive Communion? Did I have no shame? Would the wafer sizzle and burn on my tongue? Would I burst into flames?

Curiosity overcame any sense of shame or fear as I realised this might be my one and only chance to see what all the fuss was about.

By the time I reached the priest, I was sweating. My hand trembled as I held it out in front of him but he barely glanced at me when he laid the wafer in my palm. I put it straight into my mouth and retreated from the altar before anyone could object.

I made my way back to the pew chewing on the tasteless disc. I assumed it would be sweet at least, like ice cream wafers. It felt more like cardboard. I scanned my own body for some sign of spiritual awakening. Maybe a tingling on the tongue or some kind of glow as the wafer churned in my stomach. There was nothing. My remaining doubts about my lack of faith dissolved as quickly as the wafer.

\*

At the top of the class my cheeks blazed and sweat pooled under my arms as I dithered in choosing a new word. I cast my eyes around for inspiration and borrowed 'T H U N D E R' from the copy of our class text, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, that sat on Miss Brennan's desk. I rubbed the ten surplus lines off the board. Miss Brennan nodded her head in approval and the class began hurling letters.

The stick man was still missing vital limbs when someone shouted out the answer. I couldn't look the winner in the eye when he came to claim the chalk.

I shuffled back to my seat, shoulders hunched and head down, pretending not to notice the elbow nudges and mocking smiles as I passed along the rows of desks. I refused to call out letters or guess which infantile words my classmates had chosen for their hanging men. I'm not even Catholic, I fumed. I hadn't even known what transubstantiation was until the previous week when we read the extract from Joyce's

*Portrait of an Artist As a Young Man.* I had been shocked to discover that my classmates, all Catholics, actually believed the innocuous wafer, transformed into the living body of Christ during Communion. I had always thought it was simply a metaphor. The same classmates had mocked the 'cannibal savages' from far off lands that we had read about in history class. But, they were the ones who stuck out their hands and tongues every Sunday to absorb Christ's flesh into their own.

Stephen Dedalus would have understood. He was a kindred spirit, another unbeliever in a world saturated by religion. But Stephen was a fictional character created by an author long-since dead. I still had six years left with these people. How long before I learned to keep my thoughts and opinions and cleverness to myself?

# 'Autistic woman in an Irish bar'

By Duggan

A drink in the afternoon  
in a bar overlooking the harbour.  
Chittering locals and scraping chairs  
on foot-flogged stone.

Human voices  
(Wordsworth's still, sad music)  
tugging her from her lonely orbit,  
though in truth she is happier to circle unnoticed.

Her book coughs a polite rejoinder  
and she re-enters its pages  
content with soundtrack rather than script –

neither protagonist nor onlooker  
nor entirely absent from the narrative -  
apart and a part in the town's continuing story.

Grey skies and a rippling sea  
hint at rain to come

while within the pages  
night has already fallen on a faraway town

and a threatened reckoning is due.

# 'Code Blue Kinship'

By J'Nae

Like big brother, Pac,  
I have also felt trapped since birth,  
cautious because I'm cursed.

Not from the streets  
but from street mentalities  
spraying caustic words left to right in the air  
wild like wayward bullets into the 4th of July sky.  
The only pressure placed on my wounds,  
only way to slow the bleeding  
is silence. Acquiescence.  
I mastered both.

I climbed many mountains for many years  
hemorrhaging so badly  
that Chocolate Drop's rich chestnut tone  
turned a quietly pale azul.

Limbs numb, I forever feel unsteady.  
Breathing so short I take no breaths at all.  
Confusion incessant, poisoning the grey  
I can comprehend no worth within me.  
Chest rigid beyond mere tightness.  
Thunderclaps ring in constant applause.

Awake but unconscious.  
My scleras robbed of light  
I know nothing less than extreme fatigue.

The most championed placebo for cure,  
placed in my cold and weary hands,  
is to fix your face and pray on it.

Give it to god  
and walk it off.

All signs of life weaken.  
I have become the walking dead.  
I pray, only  
to have to walk no more.

Everyone knows the call sign for homicide,  
to mock and threaten  
with a 5150 attachment to your name.  
Tell me, Fam what is the call sign for misery?

# 'Disciplineship Of Life'

By Purbasha Roy

But once I had known the discipleship of life. We went to the slime-dam to see the famous sunrise-spot in the evening. The path around the slurry earth was silent in this odd-hour. Like a plodding rested awhile.

On its opposite side the bushes refused to ink what the bored wind whispered on its body.

They stay stagnant like there's a better task keeping them busy. Dusk was falling softly like prayers answered only when they have to. Other than the rustle of leaves and the infrequent crows passing the world seemed like a deserted planet by all of human civilization. Leaving behind no trace of apocalypse.

Suddenly you stopped. Season hushing the riddles of time.

Following your trajectory of sight I caught the fox-step marks on the semi-dry soil. They disappeared at a certain distance.

When we reached our destination, the fox-steps reappeared.

What mattered to me were not the marks or the relief to know there was no life-loss. But the slow hiding by the earth

of them centrifugally... Nothing shifts here as delightfully  
as the thought of being alive. Not all but a barely active  
consciousness of me went on feeling home. How we keep  
covering memories in the pivot of livingness. We stared at  
the east skyline pouring out the vocabulary of waiting.  
The truth sheltered in the layers of disappearing light but  
with a discipline of an emotion skipping the world to enter our bodies.

# 'Beyond'

## By Margaret Gillies

The heavy blue of the sky makes Arran's eyes ache, so he closes them. He feels the warmth on his lids. There is nothing, only sky.

His hands grow numb beneath the weight of his head. He squints. He can almost see the curvature of the earth, the way the blue gently slopes right before the darkness of outer space. Like he's in one of those glass globes you buy at gift shops.

Arran could stay. But it's too painful. He needs to get out.

The warmth is unpleasant but not uncomfortable. Arran is wearing a loose-fitting t-shirt and khaki shorts. When he peeks at the sky, he imagines himself floating. There's nothing else in his field of vision, so he could be. He stops noticing the dry prickle of the grass beneath his neck. But the firm ground reappears beneath him when he remembers where he is.

Arran winces and moves his head slightly to the right, the layer of burnt grass and hedges sliding into view.

He closes his eyes and feels the dead air on his skin.

A fly lands on his face. He resists the urge to brush it away.

He focuses on his breathing.

He counts to seven with each inhale. He exhales gently through his mouth while counting to ten. The fly's movements tickle his nose.

'Your sister is dead,' says the fly.

'Stop,' says Arran.

'No,' says the fly. 'Why don't you stop?'

Arran opens his eyes. The blue fills his vision again. A faint black border pulsates gently around the image. Little strings of translucent floaters glide by. The blue stares down at him, waiting for him to fall. The blue is a monster. He can sense life within the colour, this looming, omniscient thing. This life ready and waiting to swallow everything below. A world turned upside-down. Arran falling out of it. He remembers being on the swing as a child, swinging so high the frame rattled. If he swung high enough, he could cut through the sky and vanish. He loved the thrill of almost being swallowed by the blue. Custard-yellow fluorescent lights in a classroom. Moss-green carpet. The crackle and swoop of posters that kept falling from the wall. The smell of smoke behind the school shed. The way the egg yolk bled into the beans in the morning. Walking through the streets after dark. Streetlights flickering. Unlocked, unlocked, unlocked.

'Your sister is dead,' says the fly. But Arran is no longer aware of the fly. He can feel gravity's pull. A tightening sensation in the air around him. But gravity is losing control. It's beginning to twinge just enough to almost hurt. It's a comfortable tightness, like stretching at the gym. Arran remains absolutely still. He glides through memories. Unlocked, unlocked, unlocked. The air is getting thinner. The temperature rises. It's about 35 degrees where Arran is. They're not used to this heat. He can feel his surroundings spin, his stomach swaying lightly inside him. The air is getting sharper, stinging his Eustachian tubes. His ears hurt, heat radiating from the lobes. Arran is nauseous. The fly stays on his nose.

'Your sister is dead,' says the fly. It crawls down his face and under his shirt.

Arran's breathing becomes shallow. He allows himself to be suspended in the sky for a moment, just before he reaches outer space. Then he begins to fall.

# 'Hazard Lights'

By Neethu Krishnan

The tulle skirt is a sky lilac. Or a blush of coral. Anything gentle, unthreatening, or pastel works. It has a smattering of fine silver specks, much as the sky that twinkles likewise, given a little while. The babyest pink of roses uncurl like fists on the crown. At the window, eyes heavenward, dreamlike in the flutter of the parallel universe, I am. Or she is.

My act of observation collapses the bridge between realms. We do not coexist. I am, now, only the corporeal, omniscient narrator, who in the sweep of artificial white light finds the dissociated girl pale into a silly, wannabe flower child. After all, reality is but a play of light and stories; switch a shade, and the delicate is now garish, now ordinary, now a flight of naïve fantasy.

Escapist though she might be, she still is me. And I let her be.

We have cycled through the disgust-obsession-indifference-gratitude seasons and compromised at this reality. The stories, if in minutiae they be told, or even attempted at, are no full truths or lies, and none hers to claim entirely. Nevertheless, they are not without form when hissed into air.

Forked tongues of fiery light twist and coil, mutual damnation spewing from what seems the geyser of cumulative misery, hatred, and anger of her ancestors; radiations and hues that never fail to scald and petrify. Because she is only the fatality, light becomes her story, with reds sharp as from carotid slits, violets dull as of clots under papery skin.

She cannot turn off the serrating beams, which since her first recollection of light have only been known to burn and burn and burn, because they are her creators' weapons, because she is unwelcome in their battlefield. Not only does she end up an unavoidable, unaccounted-for casualty, but the way the strikes sever past her flesh and bones at every utterance makes me question how much of her, if any, is the good light. After all, these shape-shifting, ugly streams have always borne the signature of hatred, in magnitudes beyond what should be permissible in two small human bodies.

She wonders if the excess is what fills her insides, for she is more than the sum of their parts.

It has cemented into a fact, a label, no longer a question; the neon sign, sinister and ever urgent in its flashing as she grows up—the only answer she needs. She vows never to partner, de facto eliminating the risk of mutating into the serpent itself, the one she has feared and despised all her life. She would rather be collateral damage than be the cause of more.

She decides to end its life in your pyre, not allowing it to infect any more than it already has. (Or at least, that is her tentative plan.)

There was once a waiting upon an almighty superhero to swoop in and save the child because clearly, there was an error in its allotment—the warm, fuzzy nest of safety was somewhere in a far-off land. When none shows up, the scheme is presumed too juvenile; superheroes can't just do a fly-by pickup and be discreet. Maybe a kidnapper with benevolent eyes and a kind smile would toss you into the dark, no questions asked? The brief indiscretion of gravely misplaced hope is scrapped as soon as it is conjured, for it tips heavily the scales to all shades of wrong, even to the little scheming mind.

Into girlhood rides the idea of the One—with no darkness or extremes of light, who by mere proximity learns everything about you, present and history, and by a curious magic tailors you the perfect gradation of tolerable light. In this all-understanding

companionship, she is liberated, finally free. But again, in a world where brokenness spares none, she discerns the probability of encountering the One skirts on impossible.

So, she starts out with the power posing, but the unwieldy armour crushes her ribs and blisters her chest and spine. Progress to ditch the metal and keep just the cape, and yet, it feels like a big farce. When she thinks of the worse-off, her fight seems like histrionics or an awful satire, as if she wants it to be larger than life, wants all the spotlights on her, the victor. But she then remembers the fact of their invisibility—the lights, her trauma, her coping—and she laughs a little laugh because she keeps forgetting her mind is a devious liar.

You do not become immune to light. In its dimness, there is a getting used to, the adjustment of eyes, enough to trace and map contours in the dark, but in its brightness—it burns and blinds. This is why you love the softs, the barely-theres, the transition from light to dusk that can't hurt if they tried. So, you settle for the reverie, piece together the You, or her vague approximation, were you unscathed, whole, without lightning scars in your essence. The pastels and soft glitter and pale roses seem ideal. Well, at least until she sprouts wings and soars off the window ledge she stands gazing by.

# People Move Mountains So I Can Live In This World

By Rachel Geough

Guillermo A group of women  
tuck their suffrage flyers into their knickers  
— beside the incendiary devices —  
and together, they carry off a snow-rimed sleeper.  
The decision of where to leave it will be put to a vote.  
James Connolly hefts a mountain range, then backhands it.  
It lands — bang — in a bloom of dust.  
Careful, the women tease, don't put your back out.  
Connolly can concede,  
they are heavier than they look.  
Then some citizens of the Choctaw Nation  
— and they were just passing through —  
perceive the insurmountable  
and crush it underfoot.  
They sweep away the rubble to reveal a children's playground.  
Then my mother stands. There is a mountain on her back.  
She inhales, exhales, finds her balance and asks:  
Who put these mountains here anyway?



# 'a red setter at the queer gathering'

By Elizabeth Gibson

the top floor of the mill.            dog dog dog dog            rafters done up nice with fairy lights  
I put they on my label            dog dog dog dog dog            consider my new name but write liz  
a green circle sticker            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            means please talk to me  
I just... can't talk            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            then I feel this presence  
joining our corner            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            the hugeness just gets me  
arms and legs            dog dog dog            dog dog dog dog            gangly cannot keep track of them  
folded-bended-in            dog dog            dog dog dog dog            like an awkward spider or a dragon  
every inch is rust            dog            dog dog dog dog dog            unsentimental sunset on the city  
lush and thick as blood            dog dog dog dog dog            ears a wavy bob with no gender  
mouth hanging open            dog dog dog dog dog dog            constant heartbeat of tongue  
I tell everyone around me            dog dog dog dog dog dog            this has been my dream dog  
ever since I was little but            dog dog dog dog dog            it is hard for people to hear me  
I just rub head and nose            dog dog dog dog dog dog            make the kiss-kiss noises I make  
when I see an animal            dog dog dog dog dog dog            that are magic because my mind  
goes quiet while I kiss-            dog dog dog dog dog dog            -kiss and it is just me and a dog  
and as time goes on            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            people do talk to me in bursts  
we eat red stew and rice            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            I take so many plantain chips  
then trifle with red jelly            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            I am instantly sent back years  
I realise there has been            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            no barking this whole time  
just panting and sighing            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            tucked on a sofa absorbing  
all the red-gold light            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            half here and half asleep  
my friend comes over            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            mentions my new name  
and thinks it is cool            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            we walk back together  
blessed blue night            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            I stretch out my limbs  
and consider howling            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog            I think  
I am happy that I came            dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog

# 'Radio Static at 3AM'

By Rajendra Prasad Gupta

There is a frequency in the house that only insomnia hears —  
a thin blue wire behind the refrigerator, humming like a throat.

I tune the dial with trembling hands; the room gathers its skirts,  
pulls its darkness closer, makes room for the small longings.

A voice reads me the weather of people I never met:

two lovers arguing about a borrowed spoon, rainfall in a city I visited once in a  
fever dream.

Outside, a dog times its breaths to the click of a clock.

Inside, my heart rehearses its exits.

The radio offers a poem and then apologizes,  
its static the punctuation of a sentence falling apart.

I press my ear to the speaker and store its broken grammar,  
as if there is meaning in interruption.

At 3 a.m. the kitchen becomes a cathedral of small appliances:  
a kettle prays, the microwave makes the sign of the slow.

I make coffee like an offering and drink it without ceremony.

Some nights, the static becomes a map; other nights, the map becomes static.

There is a place where signals stop being lonely —  
it is not on any dial but in the way we remember our names.  
Listen: someone across the city hums the same lullaby,  
and for a moment, the world is less a machine than a hand.

# Straight Man Learns to Sew from Butch Lesbian

By Edward Myers

His sweater needed mending, and he needed a mentor.  
So tonight, he reaches out to someone he's only recently called a friend.  
Under the light of the dining room table  
he sits, legs crossed and back hunched, to focus on his practice subject:  
an old red polo cut crudely into a muscle tank.

His mentor, dressed in patch pants and a checkered hoodie,  
acts out the whipstitch, wrist twisting slowly.  
She hunches over the table as his needle hits the fabric.  
But when his wrist twists like hers, she relaxes, and stands straight  
with her hands on her hips—watching proudly,  
like a dad teaching his son how to change a flat tire.  
His blisters will come from a needle, not a wrench.  
Maybe after this, the two of them will go out back and play catch.

How often do such separate worlds collide?  
if they can converge in one room,  
around one person?  
All threaded together—a patchwork.

He finishes the seam that joins shoulder and sleeve.  
The fabric bunches, threads poke out like stray hairs—

still, he smooths out the other shoulder, holds his needle with growing precision, and begins to thread again.

# Chloe Michelle Howarth

## *Oscail* interview, Spring 2026

You've spoken about seeing very little queer representation growing up and writing *Sunburn* partly to fill that gap. How did the social landscape of 1990s rural Cork shape your sense of what queerness and queer desire could or couldn't look like on the page?

Truthfully, my personal experiences of growing up in rural Cork didn't give me much of an idea that queerness or queer desire could look like at all. The odd bits queer media I came across weren't representative of where I was living, it was something that only existed in cities, not so much in small towns like mine. Luckily, I grew up in a household where queerness wasn't taboo or negative, but I think the culture at the time was that it wasn't taken seriously or treated with much dignity, possibly because it didn't seem like reality. So, when writing, I want to give some dignity back to rural, Irish, queer experiences.

In interviews you've talked about steering away from writing queer longing as something tidy. What kinds of queer stories do you still feel are missing from Irish bookshelves, and how consciously are you writing toward those absences?

Mainly, I think we need a higher volume of queer Irish stories in general. The more of them there are, the more diversity there will be. I want to see a lot more trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming protagonists in Irish stories, specifically in rural spaces. My own aim has been to queer the Irish countryside through my writing by

placing characters there who are explicitly, undeniably gay there. Although I am writing to help fill an absence, I would certainly continue to write queer stories even in a saturated market. There isn't a quota of representation to be reached, I will always want to see more.

Sunburn and Heap Earth Upon It both circle young women who are negotiating desire and secrecy in close knit communities, but in very different eras and tones. What feels most different to you about how each book imagines community for a queer protagonist?

In Sunburn, the protagonist, Lucy, imagines community as something that she cannot penetrate. To her, it always feels like a far away and inaccessible thing, which she is forever trying to figure out and become a part of. She is othered by her internalised homophobia to the point where she doesn't believe she will ever fit in, until she finds herself among other queer people. While in Heap Earth Upon It, I think that community is something that Anna has become disinterested in. She has been through a lot of rejection, and so rather than finding a network of supporters, she is desperate to find one close connection that she can sustain. Neither character is in a position to be actively seeking out a queer community, and in ways, I think they have both become resentful of their local communities because they feel so isolated from them.

Your second novel leans much more into gothic than Sunburn. Do you feel you gravitate more towards the gothic mode as a queer writer and what does it do for you?

I've certainly always been drawn to the gothic. However, I feel I gravitate more towards it as an Irish writer than as a queer one. There are so many fantastic examples of the

Irish gothic that I have absorbed throughout my life. As a teenager I was obsessed with Harry Clarke, an illustrator and stained-glass artist. Writers like John B Keane, Marina Carr, and Martin McDonagh capture the Irish gothic so beautifully. Growing up in West Cork, I saw their settings and characters reflected in the world around me. For me, the gothic is the perfect way to express Ireland in the winter. Of course, there are so many elements of queerness that bleed into this, but I believe in this case, Irishness comes first.

In your essay on queer storytelling, you talk about wanting queer characters who are allowed to be morally messy, not just victims or role models. How does that belief show up in your choices of voice and POV when you're drafting?

I think the clearest example of that in my work is unlikable, frustrating, and unreliable main characters. When drafting, it's really liberating for me not to force any character into the role of hero or villain. I feel it allows me to get to know them on a deeper level and see the nuances of who they are. As people, we are morally messy, not entirely good or entirely bad. I want to try to recreate those layers in my characters. That might show up as me writing a character as an antagonist in some drafts and as a hero in others, then blurring the two, or it might just be allowing them to make annoying decisions. It's freeing to write like that, even when I'm sure I know how characters will be perceived, I like to find the duality in them.

On a practical level, what does your writing process currently look like? Are there routines, environments, or tools that help you protect the headspace needed to sustain writing such emotionally charged material?

I don't have any particular rituals or routines, although it might be helpful if I did! I try to write every morning, but if it isn't coming naturally, I leave it and try again in the afternoon. If it's the right time, then the words and ideas flow easy enough, but I've learned not to force it. Sometimes I open the laptop and just hope for the best. Consistently reading fiction helps keep my mind going, and if I don't read for a few weeks then things are definitely slower to get going.

Oscail was set up partly out of frustration with how elitist and exclusionary literary spaces can be, especially for queer and/or working-class writers. Have you come up against particular forms of gatekeeping whether in education, industry, or media coverage that felt specific to writing queer Irish stories?

I'm often positioned as a queer Irish writer, and I would imagine the Irish element is because I'm currently living out of Ireland. I never really speak about my books without being asked about queerness in some form. That is fine with me, because I live a very queer life, and I'm surrounded by queer people, it's something I'm really happy to talk about. However, I'm sure that straight/cisgender authors don't spend much time talking about the heteronormativity of their work. I wouldn't say I've been kept out of any spaces, but I've probably been firmly kept in others. Luckily, I'm very happy with the space I'm in.

When you're writing, do you picture a particular reader, your younger self, someone else entirely or do you resist that idea? How does thinking about who might find your work in a small town or school library change what you're willing to put on the page?

I really try not to picture a reader at all when I'm writing, as I find the awareness of somebody reading my writing has me editing myself before I've even gotten any words down. It's quite a private thing for me, I typically don't share it with anybody outside of my agent/editors until it's published. I try not to consider anybody's reaction to what I've written, positive or negative, because ultimately, the reason that I write is for creative fulfillment and enjoyment. I think that considering external reactions would take away from the fact that this is a hobby for me, and is meant to mainly just be something fun. That allows me to not hold back on anything, which I suppose creates a level of honesty in the stories that I think readers in small towns and school libraries may enjoy.

9. Your work has been talked about as queer coming-of-age, Irish gothic, commercial, literary and sometimes all at once. How do those labels sit with you? Is there any use in considering them or are they ultimately limiting?

As a writer, there isn't any use in considering labels like that. My first book was a coming-of-age story, and while that worked really well for that book, I don't know if I'll ever write a coming-of-age novel again. If I had felt married to that label, I wouldn't have written *Heap Earth Upon It*. Words like that normally come from other people when the writing is finished, so I don't tend to think that much about them. By the time people are labelling what I've written, I've usually moved onto something new. I know my writing will always be queer and Irish, because that's who I am. Besides that I'm very happy to welcome all labels.

10. Many of our contributors are queer and/or neurodivergent writers who feel shut out of more traditional routes. Is there anything you wish someone had told you earlier about building a writing life from the margins of the literary culture?

People have told me from very early on to be proud of my writing, and to be less modest or bashful about it. I would tell other writers to take that advice! The more you are proud of what you're writing, and the more willing you are to share it with readers, the better. In regards to being on the margins of a literary culture, it's true that as a queer/neurodivergent writer you will be on the margins of mainstream literary culture, but you will be at the centre of other cultures. Surely it's more important to find people who will enjoy and celebrate what you're writing rather than trying to impress the people who continue to allow you to be on the edges.

# Sam Fowley

## *Oscail* Interview, Spring 2026

*Eyes Guts Throat Bones* has been described as a collection of “queer, horny, gory, fantastical stories” about bodies and the end of the world. What drew you to putting queer, often female bodies at the centre of apocalyptic and body horror scenarios? Does realism struggle to accurately capture the reality of queer life?

I wrote most of *Eyes Guts Throat Bones* in the spring of 2020. I was supposed to be working on a YA novel, but from the early days of the pandemic I found that I couldn't write about anything except bodies and the end of the world.

I've always been interested in embodied approaches to writing — writing the body, writing *from* the body — so after I wrote what would become the first story in the collection, I set out to write a series of experiments in body horror: writing the (queer, female) body as transformative and terrible and gory and full of hunger.

Outside of that intention — and the idea of having each story come from or be about either eyes, guts, throat, or bones — I didn't plan any of the stories, just let my body write them for me. My queer, non-binary body (although I identified as female at the time) clearly has no interest in writing cishet male stories.

It isn't so much that realism can't accurately capture the reality of queer life — although I like the idea of queer life being too queer for reality — it's that realism doesn't particularly occupy a large space in my consciousness. I don't write from the real world; I'm barely in it to begin with. When I write, I'm out the window and in the depths of the story. I'm in the characters' bone marrow and hair follicles, I'm in the cement between the bricks of their houses, I'm under their lovers' tongues. The real world has no business here.

Reviews focus on the visceral horror in the collection and how the stories ultimately feel consoling. If you're consciously writing into violence, disgust, or fear, how do you decide how much to lean into horror and how much to offer the reader a sense of survival or comfort?

The balance of horror and hope, for me, comes from the body. Because that's how bodies are: horrible and fearful, disgusting and violent, but sharply focused on survival. Ultimately, I find that comforting.

There is comfort, too, in the idea of queerness and/as survival. That at the end of the world, disengaging from or rejecting the rules of the capitalist cishet patriarchy can

leave so much more room for hope. Which is what centring queer bodies and queer stories does. In all the horror of *Eyes Guts Throat Bones*, I intentionally wrote the interval to be the only truly bleak story of the collection. Written as a playscript, it originally had another name, but my editor loved the tagline I'd been calling it by so much we made that its title: *Sad Straight Sex at the End of the World*.

So many of your stories are interested in bodies as sites of both desire and harm, especially queer and non conforming bodies. Do you think about the politics of representation while drafting, or does that come in later during revision?

The intention behind my work is always to write from a place of truth — even if it is not a truth that will be immediately recognisable by everybody. When I'm drafting, there is nothing but the story. Before and after that, there is the young reader I once was, constantly searching for stories that reflected life or characters that experienced love in the same ways I did. I like to think of my books as voices in a chorus of queer feminist writers of marginalised genders. The more voices we have, the louder the chorus.

A story can be a window or it can be a mirror. Either way, when I consider the politics of representation in my work, my focus is often on the visibility of multifaceted authenticity. Allowing queer women to be monstrous on page. To be seen bad, and brutal, and messy, and dangerous, without being pathologised. In *Eyes Guts Throat Bones*, women cut open each other's faces and summon disembowelling demons and survive transformative forests only to want to eat children. They fight when they want to fuck and fuck like they're fighting, and it isn't because they are the villains of the story: they are neither and both at the same time.

*All the Bad Apples* takes on intergenerational trauma, Magdalen laundries, and the buried histories of "bad" Irish women. You've spoken about it as shaped by rage around the Eighth Amendment and Irish church state violence. How did you find balancing the weight of that history with the needs of a YA novel and a queer coming of age story?

Queer coming of age stories are often about finding/fighting for our place in a society in which we're believed outsiders: as queer people, we come of age in a society that doesn't understand us. Internally, for the young person coming of age, it's a story about authenticity. Externally, it's a story about control: who controls the expectations of who we are, who we are allowed to be, who we have to be.

That external story is easily mapped to the politics of control, to colonialism, to reproductive rights, to organised religion, to who is branded wrong or bad in society. Coming of age narratives often centre shared stories and spoken truths. The same is the case for breaking those politics of control and creating change.

My first three novels were primarily concerned with intergenerational trauma, the past repeating itself, and the work of breaking those patterns. In *All the Bad Apples* in particular, it's the spoken and shared stories — the links and connections between people, between women — that break them. I didn't really have to find the balance between the weight of that history and the coming of age YA novel: that balance already existed.

You've said that the book carries both rage and hope. When you look at your work as a whole now, do you feel more driven by anger at what's been done to queer/female bodies in Ireland, or by a desire to imagine something better for them?

*All the Bad Apples*, like *Eyes Guts Throat Bones*, was written at a specific point in time, and imbued with that time's energy. The rage I wrote *All the Bad Apples* with was the energy of Repeal: that grassroots protest-based coming together for a better future. That kind of rage is the suit of wands in tarot, where anger is creation is desire is fire is action. Anger had us organising, anger had us mobilising, anger made change.

It was also the energy and power of community and shared stories — people speaking openly about their abortions, older people talking for the first time about their experiences in the laundries — of true stories and truth changing minds, in person, one at a time, on the street and door to door.

Already, that point in time feels like half a society ago. These days, our society seems so broken it's impossible to imagine true change without the entire system collapsing. Hence, I suppose, the appeal of apocalyptic fiction. Part of the draw of end of the world stories is the bone-deep knowledge that the world as we know it needs to end in order for there to be real hope. Tells us how bad things are, when the apocalypse is more optimistic.

You took part in Neuro Pride Ireland's neurodivergent author panel, speaking about representation and neurodivergent creativity. How does your own neurodivergence shape the way you write characters, structure stories, or think about attention and sensory detail?

My neurodivergence is why I have always anchored myself in story. Inside the meat of my writing, it's why I come back to the same things, untangling the same knots with my stories until I've figured something out about the world and my place in it — the things about the world I know and the things I will possibly never understand. Writing to and against the rules, the expectations, of reality.

Makes sense, in that case, to come back to writing the body and the end of the world.

At Oscail, we think a lot about access, how writers' bodies and brains actually manage to get through a project. What does it look like, in practical terms, for you to make your writing process accessible to yourself? Are there particular routines, environments, or boundaries that protect your capacity to write this kind of emotionally and sensorially intense work?

In a lot of ways, the environment and context in which I wrote *Eyes Guts Throat Bones* was ideal for my neurodivergent writing process. I'd shelved a novel to write a collection of short stories I had no idea would ever sell, but because of timing, and family, and with the support of the Arts Council, I could afford to take a chance. I had a degree of freedom to explore, to play, that I didn't have before, and haven't had since.

After that, my next book took — is taking — years, as well as a huge toll on my body and mental health. The way we, as neurodivergent people, work doesn't fit into capitalist structures, which don't take into account the importance of flexibility, of fallow periods, of rest and of timing. The ideal schedule is inaccessible to many. I make certain sacrifices for mine, firstly because for me it's worth it (just about), but mostly because it is impossible for me not to write, and I have learnt, after years of cycles of burnout, to trust my process.

Do you have a particular reader in mind when you write, or do you like to keep that vague? How does imagining those readers change the story or feel of what you're writing?

Writing from the body, writing from a space slightly left of reality, writing to make sense of the world and myself, I don't really write for a reader, but I know it wouldn't change the story if I did. I have and will always be interested in connections and similarities, in archetypes and shared stories. That's what reading does, after all, doesn't it: it offers a mirror, it offers a window, doesn't matter the reader.

Many of Oscail's contributors are queer and/or neurodivergent writers who feel shut out of traditional routes into publishing. Is there anything you wish someone had told you earlier about sustaining a writing life from the margins creatively, practically, or emotionally?

I've been thinking a lot about failure lately. Traditional narratives around failure suggest that failure only exists to teach us to do better, to build our resilience, so we can learn how to get back on our feet. I'm more interested in Jack Halberstam's reframing of the queer art of failure, and with engaging with failure as part of my creative practice. To reframe failure is to reframe success.

Emotionally, I've learnt that part of sustaining a writing life from the margins is asking yourself what success as a writer looks like to you, and whose framing of success you're holding. How much of your beliefs about success are tangled up in neurotypical cis het capitalist dogma? If you untangle your sense of creative self-worth from productivity and traditional markers of success, what does success look like to you? Is it about self-expression, is it about adding to visibility, is it about connecting and inspiring readers, is it about making a living from your art? When your parameters of failure and success are true to your own self and your process, they become easier to work within and towards.

Practically, I've learnt that part of sustaining a writing life while neurodivergent is in being true to and realistic with my priorities. Existing as neurodivergent in a capitalist society means often having to whittle things down to the top three priorities, and sometimes simply surviving takes up those top three. Engaging with the failure of productivity means accepting fallow periods, allowing for adjusted timelines, and working with my own flow.

Creatively, it also allows for a less rigid framework. For the importance of play, of experimentation, of gathering. In a life centred around and prioritising authenticity and creativity, everything is important, everything is creative fuel, everything will be used. It all comes back to hope, back to connection, back to bodies, back to trust in our (queer/neurodivergent) structures, back to dispatches from the end of the world.

## Contributors

**Edward Myers** is a queer poet from New York State. He graduated from Skidmore College with a BA in English, with his capstone portfolio “Through My Eyes” winning departmental honors. He is also published in Skidmore’s Lunchbox Magazine. He is currently a student of UCC’s MA in Creative Writing.

**Margaret Gillies** completed the Creative Writing MA at UCC in 2021. Her writing has featured in *The Stinging Fly*, *Sparks*, *SWERVE* and elsewhere.

**DUGGAN** is an Irish poet, who happens to be autistic. DUGGAN chooses to identify as an autistic poet because so many misconceptions exist about those with autism, and so few autistic voices are represented in the arts. You can read more of DUGGAN’s published work at [www.DUGGANpoet.org/poems](http://www.DUGGANpoet.org/poems)

**Rachel Gough** is a writer and academic from Cork. Her work has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4 and published in *The Waxed Lemon*, *Bealtaine*, *The National Flash Fiction Anthology*, *Best Small Fictions* and *Quarryman*. In 2026 she was awarded the Irish Writer’s Centre Notre Dame Kylemore Residency.

**Neethu Krishnan** is a Mumbai-based, Pushcart- and Best of the Net-nominated writer with works curated in 50+ international publications, including *The Spectacle*, *Prairie Fire*, *Southword*, and more. You can find her @neethu.krishnan\_ on Instagram and her works at <https://neethukrishnan.carrd.co/>.

**Rajendra Prasad Gupta** is a writer and teacher from Ara, India whose work explores memory, marginalised belonging, and the small violences and consolations of everyday life. His poems combine intimate domestic detail with speculative image, drawing on experience across languages and places. He is interested in hybrid forms that bend lyric and short narrative, and in work that centers voices too often left at the margins.

**Aisling Walsh** (she/her) is a queer and neurodivergent writer based in Co. Clare. Her work has been published in *New Irish Writing*, *Channel Magazine*, *New Island's 'Wired Our Own Way'* anthology, the 2024 'From the Well' anthology, *Púca*, *The Guardian*, *Al Jazeera*, *The Irish Times*, *Literary Hub* and others.

**Elizabeth Gibson** is a poet and performer of Irish parentage living in Manchester, published in *Abridged*, *Banshee*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Channel*, *Crannóg*, *Dust*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Howl*, *Magma*, *Under the Radar*, and *He, She, They, Us* from Macmillan. Elizabeth's debut collection is *A love the weight of an animal* (Confinco, 2025). <https://elizabeth-gibson.com> Instagram: @Grizonne

**Purbasha Roy** is a writer from Jharkhand, India. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Denver Quarterly Review*, *SAND*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The Margins* as of late. Attained 2nd Position in 8th Singapore Poetry Contest. Best of the Net Nominee.

**Aepril Schaile** is a neurodivergent poet, dancer, and performance artist raised in New York and living in Co. Sligo. Her work moves between myth and body, landscape and the fragmented psyche, drawing on the archetypal and the celestial to explore descent as a transformative and regenerative force. Aepril holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art.

**Chloe Michelle Howarth** is an Irish writer. She grew up in the West Cork countryside, and the landscapes, culture, and people of rural Ireland have served as an inspiration for her writing. Chloe's first novel, *Sunburn*, was shortlisted for the inaugural Nero Book Awards in the Debut Fiction category; shortlisted at the British Book Awards in the Discover category, and shortlisted for the Polari First Book Prize.

**Sam Fowley** is an author, artist and tarot reader who lives in Dublin with their two children and a lovable but dim-witted gremlin disguised as a large black cat. Their first book for adults, *Eyes Guts Throat Bones*, a collection of short stories about (queer, female) bodies and the end of the world, was published by W&N/Orion in 2023. One of the collection's stories, *Such a Pretty Face*, won the 2023 An Post Irish Book Award for short story of the year.

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