

**Edinburgh International Festival**

**Royal High School, Edinburgh**

**Writer in Residence Programme 2010**

**S5 TRIANGLE PROJECT**

**Unless otherwise stated, the copyright for all poems remains with the authors. The authors have asserted their rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act, 1988, to be identified as authors for this work.  
© 2010**

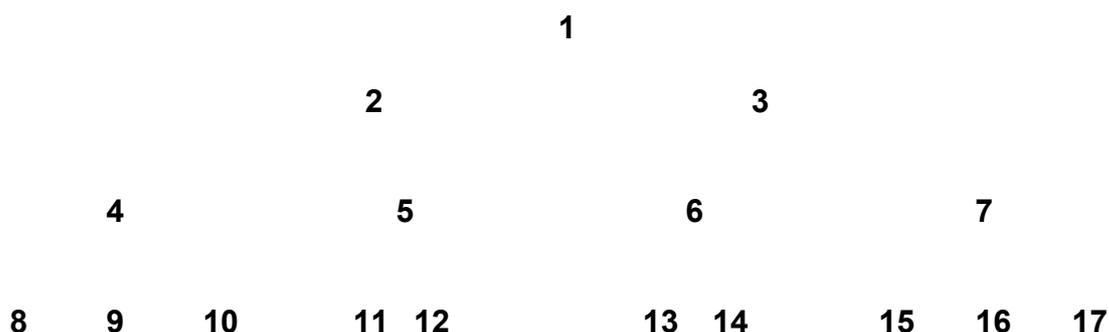
**Published by the Edinburgh International Festival**

**With support of the Scottish Arts Council and City of Edinburgh Council**

## EDITORS NOTE

This project is the result of a 7 week programme of creative writing – Indigenous Voices, Lost Narratives, New Worlds - undertaken by fifth year students at the Royal High School, Edinburgh and inspired by the themes, ideas and artists of the 2010 Edinburgh International Festival.

In this Triangle, sixteen authors collaborated to produce one work of sixteen linked pieces. Visually the structure of the work is as below:



The first piece of work was a quote by Lorenzo King, Choreographer and Artistic Director of Lines Ballet, a contemporary dance company performing in Edinburgh as part of the Edinburgh International Festival in August 2010.

His quote was sent to two writers, each of whom wrote a piece inspired by it. Their two pieces were then sent to two groups of two writers each and, in turn, their pieces were sent to two more groups each, one of three writers and one of two. All works were passed on anonymously and although the writers were responding only to the pieces immediately before them, echoes from the first piece can be found throughout.

Once completed the whole work was passed to visual artist and EIF Programme Development Associate Alex Hetherington to recreate in a new way.

In this manner the final project provided an opportunity for each individual student to create their own distinct piece of art, while also participating in the creation of other pieces of art that are coherent and new in their own right. Thus the project mirrors the process that happens during colonisation – a key theme of the 2010 Edinburgh International Festival – where one culture becomes involved with another, leading to new cultures (and expressions of that culture) which retain echoes of the past.

For more information about the Edinburgh International Festival please visit [www.eif.org.uk](http://www.eif.org.uk).

**Mary Paulson-Ellis**  
**Writer in Residence, 2010**

## **CONTENTS**

### **Editorial**

#### **1. Alonzo King quote**

##### **1 Alonzo King inspired:**

2 Harmandeep Shetra

3 William Mackey

##### **2 Harmandeep Shetra inspired:**

4 Cameron Kennedy

5 Rebecca Bailey

##### **3 William Mackey inspired:**

6 Eileen Dempsey

7 Lindsay Thomson

##### **4 Cameron Kennedy inspired:**

8 Rachel Geddes

9 Seona Halbert

10 Eilish McBurnie

##### **5 Rebecca Bailey inspired:**

11 Edward Cadden

12 Catriona Morton

##### **6 Eileen Dempsey inspired:**

13 James Andrew Cunningham

14 Katie Ghaemi

##### **7 Lindsay Thomson inspired:**

15 Laura Rennie

16 Calum Bolland

17 Eilidh Barron

### **Thanks**

# No. 1

There are places in the world that have certain vibrations. When you go to those places you get a feeling. There are places where war has taken place and you feel it. There are places where there was kindness and you feel it. There are places where agrarian cultures really tilled the earth and you feel it. There are places that are ancient grounds of worship, where people practised rites and rituals. You feel that.

# No. 2

## *Vibrations*

The ground shook below me as I clambered to the edge  
of the road that led me in two directions.  
One was kindness  
like never before and the other was...

## *Vibrations*

I stood then, facing emptiness so vast that all of the worlds light  
could have hidden in one corner  
and a coldness surrounded my body as if it was sent to target me in a war  
and I was the enemy...

## *Vibrations*

But this was the place I had always loved,  
worshipped even,  
when I was young.  
Running along this road towards her as she waited for me at that bus stop every day  
and in summer we would walk this road and plan a future where we would  
be together.  
Promising it would happen.  
Us and no...

## *Vibrations*

I felt that.

## No. 3

But you did not feel this place. An expansive ocean of grey, cresting with flashing red lights to warn off aircraft. Concrete scraped at the air, reaching tall and blanketing the murmuring depths below in a dark shroud. So dense was this forest, not a single life was to be seen. Only taxis and tunnels, billboards and banks, and faces trapped in suits and suitcases. A rumbling echo wanders through this place on unmoving roads and leaks out into the surrounding Eden. You did not feel this place. But you knew it's dull, growing corruption.

# No. 4

*It was with a heavy heart that I began to follow the winding path which led into the black of the forest. The path snaked left, then right, then left again, and before long I felt utterly consumed by the forest. I looked back and thought about everything I was leaving behind. The tiny glimpse of light afforded to me through the trees was the last thing I saw. The last remnant of my old life. I followed the path further, and the light was extinguished.*

*All around was darkness.*

# No. 5

*I stand here looking down into the emptiness that reflects my life.*

This is all I amount to. There is nothing to show, no one to remember me, nothing at all. I wonder what people will say when I am gone – will they even notice, probably not.

*One by one they have all left me, everyone that matters, and everyone I thought cared. They don't care though, that is the problem.*

Thrown out at seventeen and forced to be homeless, it wasn't long before my friends grew sick of me crashing at theirs. My mother refused to take me back but it was fine I would never go back to that, not to the arguments and endless beatings, the never knowing what would happen or what bruises you would have to hide. Not just physical but mental as well, I suppose that's what made me like this. Of course you'd have expected my father to help but he was useless, he left me to deal with everything myself. He didn't care; he left me just like everyone else did. I suppose by then I should have been used to disappointments.

The bruises manifested, the loneliness took hold and I slowly began to lose control. The drinking helped, so did the drugs and the cutting but only for awhile and then darkness would come back and envelop me, leaving me worse off than I was before. Searching for something that I didn't know I was looking for.

*I wanted, well to be wanted, and for awhile I thought I was.*

But then he got rid of me, tossed me aside after he'd gotten bored. I suppose it was my fault. I pushed him away. I lost control. He's not to blame, I am. I became a monster, I broke both of our hearts and now I don't have him.

It's hard to put on a brave face and laugh and smile like nothings wrong. You try it, I dare you. It'll tear you apart, bit by bit until it's too much and nothing helps anymore. Not the drugs or the drinking or the cutting. There's nothing else to do, nobody listens. Well that's not exactly true, nobody asks and I'm not one to burden others.

*I live in a world of windows but everyone else is on a different side of the pane to me and I'm an outsider, a monster looking in.*

I wonder what you all would think if you knew the truth. Would you shun me? Or would help me and tell me everything would be okay? The thing is I can't take that risk, so I must forever remain on the other side of the glass.

*Forever different. Forever alone.*

But why then am I telling you this? Maybe because I shall never meet you, never have to watch you judge me and maybe I just don't care. For when I'm gone who will care?

And so looking down into the emptiness that reflects my life, I throw myself head first, savouring my final thrill.

*Now I'm gone, who will care?*

## No. 6

I'd like to see a face trapped in a suit, or indeed a suitcase. Not in a serial killer way; I was thinking more of a natty pattern, or perhaps a few stickers. However it is unlikely that anyone would ever particularly want to sport such a fashion-forward statement. I also wonder how someone can feel a place: perhaps they feel the temperature, or the atmosphere, or perhaps they've walked around feeling everything so that they can reach a definitive state of feeling that particular place; or maybe they are so distracted by their suit decorated with faces that they pay little attention to their surroundings.

# No. 7

Barren. A concrete landscape: forests, hills, valleys, seas even. All grey. All cold.

Earth, our Eden, abused and broken, groans and writhes beneath her bonds.

All this, our fault. Only humanity could have acted so in humanely.

Under the clay and steel, Gaia is captive, waiting. She longs to be free.

Too much. We did this because we had far too much. And because we craved more.

You understand. We have tortured and imprisoned the most beautiful creature alive.

Islands vanish under rising seas. Still, we ignore the damage we have done.

Still, we deny that we need the care of our mutual mother, giver of life.

Destruction reigns. We did not consider the consequences. Greed overthrew sense.

Every day, reminders of our greed, our rape, our sin.

Avalanches, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes. Too little, too late.

Do not underestimate the power of our captive. We cannot control everything.

## No. 8

Forests are only pitch black at night. Unfortunately, that is generally also the time when you test your torch to see if it works – and then find that it doesn't. Utter nightmare, that. Worse than the one with the yellow gummy bears and robot dinosaurs, worse than the one where you're turned into a seagull by a maniacal sorcerer AND oh gods, AND the one with the tuna sandwich, plate of meatballs and...ahem. Yeah. You get the idea. In the dark, your mind starts coming out with all these surprisingly vivid pictures and you have to stop yourself from screaming out loud when a branch pokes you in the eye and you think it's a bear.

Here's my advice: if you do, inexplicably, ever find yourself in this situation, scream and get it over with, then keep screaming until someone rushes up to you with a working torch. Or just avoid the deep, dark forest in the first place. Seriously though, I hope that you never find yourself in the depths of a wood with no light, as there aren't many things more terrifying than being lost, with no visible way out.

# No. 9

She lay there slumped slightly to one side, propped up by the chipped oak headboard passed down through the generations. Her glassy eyes staring out, glistening with unshed tears in the solitary beam of light. The ray filtered through the particles of dust and she wondered how long it would be before she joined the dust.

Would it be before the light crept round to the glass ornaments on the dresser and filled the room with rainbows? She had heard a story once about a girl who lived in a room filled with rainbows and light - not burning bright, but soft glow - and how when she was confined to bed, unable to move, everyone came to visit her.

No one had come to see her, the door had never creaked. Lonely and abandoned in isolation. Even the wind afraid to whistle lest the cottage crumble around her. How it had ever held bustling active men she would never know.

She had once done her fair share of activity. Used to pride herself on her cleanliness and her work with animals. She did a spot of dancing and cooking too. All helped to keep her young and radiant.

Now look at her.

Lips as pale as arsenic. Skin as grey as a ghost. Eyes as dull as dirt.

Her beloved mother would have cried at the thought, but neither of them could cry anymore. Not even her hair was presentable, fanned out in greasy, tangled strands across the threadworn pillow. She wasn't able to do housework anymore, let alone keep up her personal hygiene.

Her nose itched with a sneeze that would never come (she had never been ill in her life before.) Her parched, cracked lips craved something she had never experienced, but most of all she wanted freedom.

She wanted out of her body prison. To feel the grass between her toes, to feel the gentle breeze caress her cheek one last time.

The sun had moved in the sky, the light now off her face. When she had been happy and lively she could look around and think the cottage quaint.

Now she was stuck with reality.

The rotting shutters, blocked drains and leaky, flammable roof set premature lines on her face. She had no mirror to look at, but she knew the response would no longer be her.

The light cast rainbows over the room, reminding her of lands and skies unknown.

And next to her a beautiful rosy apple with one bite mark taunted her with its vibrancy while she faded away.

# No. 10

Kiran

Susan had never been in such excruciating pain. Every inch of her body was bathed in a cold sweat yet she burned with heat. She was too young for this. She wasn't ready. Not yet. People buzzed around her but they did not care that she was screaming in pain. They were more bothered about him; the man who was demolishing all of her aspirations and the rest of her life in one foul swoop. A life that her parents had worked so hard to fill with every opportunity and desire that had flickered through Susan's fickle mind. Susan thought back to how her parents had looked when she told them what she had done. Their reactions were perfectly ordinary but in reverse; her mother yelled and her father wept in pity for what his daughter had become. As she thought of her parents waiting on her outside she began to forget what they looked and sounded like such was her pain. The pain was so strong she couldn't see. She was blinded by the darkness and the room began to swim as suddenly people began to tell her to do something. Why had she let this happen to her?

Just as Susan felt so lost she couldn't remember who she was before this pain, the darkness was obliterated by a blinding light. The light was so bright it dazzled her and so she squinted and if she screwed up her eyes tight enough and tilted her head to avoid the light, she could just make him out. Her baby boy. Kiran. The pain stopped. She was blinded by the light and the room began to swim as suddenly she knew she was at peace with her decision. For the first time in nine months she allowed herself to cry. Not tears like her fathers, tears of disappointment but tears of pure joy. A feeling indescribable to anyone who had never looked into the eyes of their own baby for the first time. Not just his eyes but Susan's eyes too. Susan had never been good at English in school. She took after her father and was a scientist. She didn't see the hidden meanings and she found it preposterous to believe that Shakespeare was attempting to convey all those connotations Mrs. Williams had nattered on about. But as she looked down at her beautiful, glittering baby boy she finally understood the quote from Jean Giraudoux that she had studied last year in school: "Sadness flies on the wings of the morning and out of the heart of darkness comes the light."

# No. 11

*I'd better get some milk before I get home*

*Typical, damn bus is always late*

*Hmmm, wonder what game is on tonight?*

*I stand here looking down into the emptiness that reflects my life.*

Landon's eyes slowly flitted open; the words engulfing his mind like locusts.

The noise, that is what he called it.

It was the never ceasing barrage of thoughts, lies, truths, desires, heartaches, worries, dreams, fears and hopes that relentlessly assaulted his conscious everyday without fail.

Yet, something was different. Amongst the swirling tornado that was the public's thoughts something had changed, something new had materialised in the foggy realms of his mind.

*I stand here looking down into the emptiness that reflects my life.*

Landon pursued it – his mind scattering people's anxieties and selfish needs that blocked his path. A glimmer of white teased him as he traversed through the mist, its glinting flash encouraging Landon to double his efforts. He sidestepped hopes and hurdled fears until eventually with a mental thrust he snared the new thread.

*One by one they have all left me, everyone that matters, and everyone I thought cared. They don't care though, that is the problem.*

'The voice' Landon reasoned, 'It's a girl'

The thread, shimmering like melted silver wriggled from his grasp – a quick jaunt and jibe between some lies allowing Landon to recapture in his mind's grip. The voice sounded again.

*I wanted, well to be wanted, and for awhile I thought I was.*

'Who are you?' Landon muttered into the noise, a complex mosaic of lines arranging themselves along the squirming shaft of the thread.

*I live in a world of windows but everyone else is on a different side of the pane to me and I'm an outsider, a monster looking in.*

Landon gasped. From within he felt a resonance, the first strands of a connection. A bond.

*A monster looking in.*

'She feels like me' whispered Landon to himself, his mental hold on the thread wavering as he spoke. The mosaic, now unscrambled and regimented, revealed a young face- pain and sorrow etched into her hollow eye sockets like tattoos. With the face established Landon began to search for the body, his mental grip on the thread again wavering as he released the feelers from his mind. His first attempt found a couple of businessmen talking outside, his second an elderly vagrant and then as he implored the rest of the tower block he found her. As Landon latched on, realization flooded his conscious.

*Forever different. Forever alone.*

Within the confines of his mind Landon released the thread, its eel like form leaving a silvery trail in its wake. He breathed deeply and with a splutter of coughs withdrew himself from the noise, his eyes snapping open to reveal the grimy murk that was the physical world. With a series of desperate gasps Landon scrambled to his feet and with one shoulder bashed open the flat door. The ascent of the stairs followed, his feet pounding on the concrete steps in rhythm with his thudding heart. The face of the girl was fixed in his mind, the image of her face lingering like a ghost. With a grunt he reached the top and with both arms outstretched rampaged through the door to the roof; the usually overwhelming noise in his head now reduced to one solitary voice.

*Now I'm gone, who will care?*

"NOOOOOOOOOOO!" roared Landon, his eyes frozen in horror as they watched the girl raise her left foot...

And spiral off the edge.

# No. 12

You should try it. It's FANTASTIC.

This morning I was on my way to the bus stop. I was walking along as usual, when all of a sudden I was INSPIRED to try something different. So I straightened up and I went for a bit of a skip. THAT IS RIGHT. I skipped along the pavement, obviously avoiding the cracks (you want to be careful of them darn crack monsters). When I got off my bus, I beamed at the driver, shook his hand and told him how glorious my ride had been. YOU SHOULD TRY IT!

However, I think I must have taken the wrong bus, quite by accident, because instead of finding myself in the centre of Townsville, I was in this crazy magic land. WEIRD HUH?! Yes, that is the first thought that came into MY mind. Well, what the hell, I thought. I decided to go for a wander. Well, the first thing that struck me about this crazy land was that the trees were glittering, and instead of dandelions, there were lollipops growing out of the ground! I plucked one. It was lemon, my second favourite flavour. How marvellous! YOU SHOULD TRY IT!

Well, I thought to myself, not being in the habit of speaking out loud to myself, what now? But I needn't have worried, for the very next thing to pass my way was a small elephant with a man on its back. The man was wearing a flamboyantly cut suit of claret velvet, and to my wonder, he had an elephant trunk instead of a nose. Excuse me, I said politely to him, but is there anywhere around here where I might find ice cream? (It just seemed like that kind of place.) Why of course! the elephant (who had a nose instead of a trunk) replied. You must come with us, for we are headed to the palace! Well, I said, how can I refuse such an offer? And so I got on the man's back and we rode away. But not before the man squirted some champagne out of his trunk. How delightful! YOU SHOULD TRY IT!

And my, how marvellous the palace was! It was made entirely of sugar candy and rested upon ivory stilts, and there were balloons coming out of the chimneys! Well, I said to myself, what luck! There must surely be a wonderful king living within this beautiful palace. How right you are, said the elephant, who had been most rudely listening in to my conversation with myself. His name is King Elfred. He has a beard so long no ruler can measure it, and his hobbies include raptor-watching, unicorn-surfing and rainbow-chasing. So, I bade goodbye to the man and the elephant, and made my way into the palace, where I was met by King Elfred. Good evening! he ejaculated, shaking me by the hand. He was indeed a most peculiar man. He was wearing a tremendously expensive hat, encrusted with diamonds and sapphires and rubies and a jewel I could not identify, before I realised it was actually a piece of chewing gum, presumably stuck there when Elfred sat down on his head on the throne, which was stuck to the ceiling. I also noted that his beard was a mere 13 inches long. Then again, I have never owned a ruler longer than 12 inches. I say, I said, Elfred, I do so adore your kingdom. I think the lollipops are a rather nice touch. Why thank you, Elfred said, scratching himself behind the ear with his foot. I grew them myself from mere saplings. BUT ENOUGH CHITCHAT! Let us dance the UNTERVELDENWERTENSCHTAM, the traditional dance of my people! You may wish to sharpen your feet before you begin. And so we did that for the next few hours or so, fuelled by the sherbet that kept coming out of my pockets. YOU SHOULD TRY IT!

What a wonderful evening! I told Elfred as I jived through the courtyard. We must do it again sometime. I would, but the hogwashed child has got a gun and a piece of talcum powder and I wouldn't want to interfere with the masquerade, he replied. WHUT? I barked at him.

It was at this point that I woke up face-down under the coffee table with my hand in last night's 4am peanut butter sandwich. A little too much late-night cherryade and cream of broccoli soup, I think. That combination tends to trigger the most unusual dreams.

YOU SHOULD TRY IT! It's fuckin' awesome.

# No. 13

What a waste. A complete and utter waste. What to do? I can only laugh, the alternative isn't pretty. This way is much more indulgent. Self-pity. Self-love, more like. Still, all those years, wasted.

I know it wasn't all my fault. I hope. There are people who wanted me to be like this, weren't there? Unenlightened third parties who would rather I sit up straight, shirt buttoned and laces tied than actually have an opinion. In my own twisted way, I probably enjoyed it. A criticism of constriction.

The usual questions. Typical answers. Who am I and where am I going? Rigidity and conformity. The clinking of gilded shackles. I am who they want me to be, and I do exactly what they want me to do. Not really, though, says Id. I am me, I am destined for eternity.

# No. 14

These thoughts ran through my head as I glared into Dixon's eyes. I could not interpret what he was thinking; whether this look of calmness was a genuine feeling or if it was merely an act. Dixon had secretive eyes; dark brown eyes which could swallow any intruders who attempted to invade his thoughts. If faces were as simple as these which I imagined sewn onto clothes and trapped in suits so that I could have complete control over their emotions and thoughts, my mother's life would not be at stake.

I examined Dixon's movements; his relaxed facial expressions and still hands as he held the playing cards away from me. I stared intently at the similar rear pattern on his cards, hoping that if I concentrated hard enough I would be able to see through them. I followed this same concept as my eyes drifted up towards Dixon's face, again focussing on his eyes.

I spoke the words, 'I'll match', as I placed another £500 in the middle of the table. My heart began pounding and I felt a constant drumming through my body. 'Show your cards', he spoke. This would be the moment I would find out the fate of my mother, and whether I'd be able to pay for her treatment. I told myself I was not too late to 'fold', however before I knew it, my clammy hands began slowly revealing what was behind the cards.

'Royal flush beats straight sets', Dixon spoke.

# No. 15

We as a race are a secret destroyer. As we climb to the top we crumble the rungs beneath our feet. We are the mighty consumer, oblivious to the once mighty feat of Mother Earth. One day we will face consequences. Our world will collapse. Beneath our feet it will finally crumble and we will plummet into obscurity. As we once sentenced our world to the same obscurity, shadowed beneath our modern society. It has become a prisoner of our success, our drive and our free market. We conquer the land beneath our feet and overcome obstacles for our future generations. We are proud as a race, moving forward. A constant moving mass, an organic society enveloping our minds and our consciences. Yet we do not think of the living mass far below; the most complex invention, business and life form of all time. Our planet and we are destroying it every day with our misuse. We believe the consequences never will surface and we plough forward. Forward, advancing, enveloping, invading and destroying. The human race has become its future enemy.

# No. 16

Her head rises  
Water flowing from the smooth, flawless skull  
Serenity, gliding through the water  
Her presence undetected till the song - the beautiful song  
Resonating through the bones  
And then silence.  
Magnificent tail her guide through the murky dark  
A great leviathan - siren of the deep  
Graceful and precise  
Powerful and vast

Maimed.  
Tortured.  
Killed for sport by the ignorant and cruel  
The unworthy.

# No. 17

I wonder if there's any martians out there? Or are we totally alone on planet Earth; a tiny grain of life engulfed by space? Space is big and boundless and beautiful. I wish I could explore its frictionless wonder. Float freely away from our green, complicated world and into the undiscovered. I wish I could leave the Milky Way. Leave behind the galaxy we have tarnished. Maybe there is much left for man to see. Of course, this is impossible. Science explains how death would quickly occur. Unless I was an astronaut, but that wouldn't be the same; all venture would be controlled and regulated. And I would have to wear a big space suit.

## **THANKS**

Editor and Writer in Residence Mary Paulson-Ellis would like to thank:

The fifth year students from the English Department at the Royal High School, Edinburgh who took part in the creative writing sessions with such enthusiasm and contributed to this final project with such commitment.

Ms Mollie Skehal, English Teacher and Mr Tom Bacciarelli, PT English of the Royal High School, Edinburgh for their huge interest, commitment and involvement in this project from the very start.

The Edinburgh International Festival for making the project possible, in particular Sally Hobson, Head of Programme Development and Lisa Barrett, Programme Development Officer.

Alex Hetherington, Programme Development Associate for his visual re-creation of the work contained herein.

Audrey Grant, Programme Development Associate for her support with the development of ideas and lesson planning.