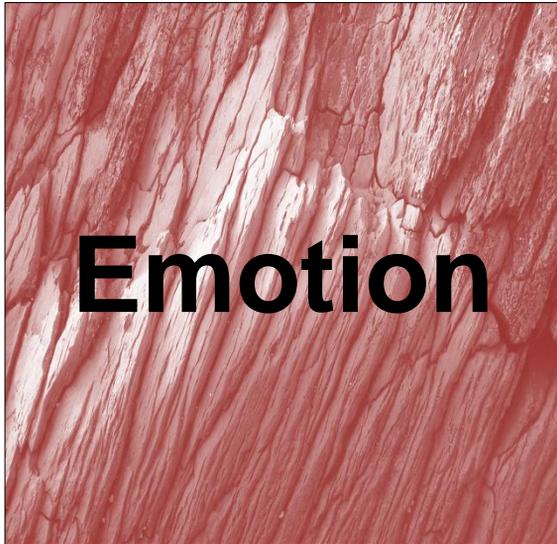
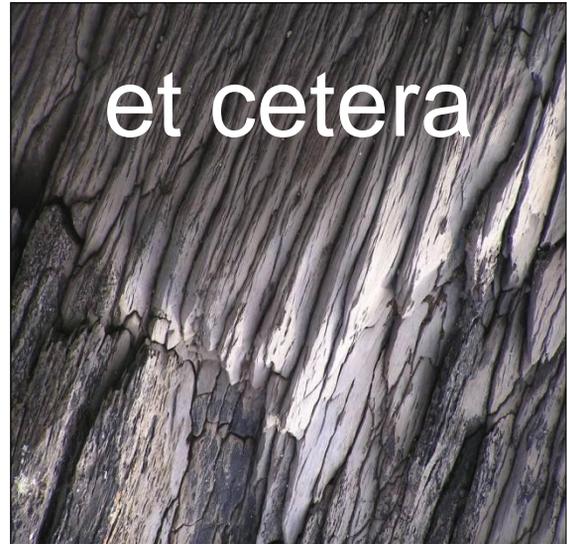




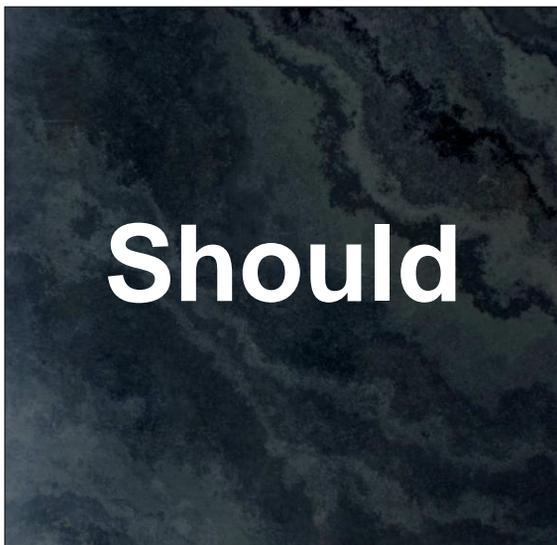
across ten
thousand
years of
ice



Emotion



et cetera



Should

Virgin Slate

Issue 8

April 2012

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Editor's Note

Dear Readers and Writers,

At the end of January VirginSlate decided to take a short break. This was due to holiday commitments, work pressures and life in general being a little more difficult than anybody would like. Our fortnightly meetings were put on hold and our most recent issue, *Issue 7 - Useful Madness*, wasn't published. Although planned for January, *Useful Madness* was only released in April.

It has taken us longer than we expected to get back on track. We're not entirely sure where the track is and we have no idea where it is going, so getting back on it is something of an achievement. We'll probably fall off again.

Our fortnightly meetings began again in early March, albeit with fewer attendees than before. Our numbers are slowly increasing again, and creative writing is coming in both from the founding members, new recruits and a few unexpected sources.

With that in mind, we're happy to present *Issue 8 - et cetera*, which includes all of the writing since *Useful Madness: Should, Emotion, across ten thousand years of ice* and a few other pieces which don't fit anywhere else, but belong in VirginSlate.

"*across ten thousand years of ice*", is an extract from a poem by Irish poet, Maya Cannon, which is also included here.

Happy Reading and Happy Writing,
Ed.
April 2012

Should

IKM

Nate decided to build a boat. After all, he had been thinking about it since forever. The great escape; Janet hated sailing so he could foresee wife-free weekends stretching out deliciously.

His friend John's vacant warehouse made a good workshop. Slowly, he began to acquire the necessary timbers and tools, nuts 'n bolts, screws 'n spanners. Anticipation and excitement filled his days as he chiselled, hammered and sang to the rhythm of his work. Every spare minute was spent on his creation and it was beginning to resemble the finished product. The pungent aroma of new wood tickled his nostrils; the anticipated smell of the sea filled his senses.

He finished dinner, kissed his wife and headed for the car; a few more weeks and he would set sail.

The padlock on the warehouse gate resisted his efforts to open it but his persistence paid off. He didn't like the feel of the wind and rain but he would be indoors shortly. Taking some minutes to admire his handiwork; he thought he might name her 'Piston Happy' and he laughed loudly.

He drove the nails home with metallic clanging and put on earmuffs to protect his ears from the screaming electric saw. The wood melted into shape with each stroke and blood spurted from his hand like a geyser! Searing pain emanated from where his thumb had been!
J-e-s-u-s !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

His mind switched swiftly into survival mode; his cloth handkerchief became a tourniquet. Scrambling on hands and knees, he frantically searched for his severed thumb and its adjacent fingertip. Blood-soaked sawdust, wood shavings, assorted tools and other hardware were strewn about the floor making the search more difficult. He felt strangely calm as he foraged about, eventually locating the thumb but no trace of the fingertip. Wrapping it in cloth, he carefully put it under his armpit to keep warm. 999 got him through to the ambulance. 'What's your address Sir?' He realised he didn't have any idea, that he knew the area but not the address. After some brief discussion, the ambulance driver agreed to meet him at a bus stop nearby. Locking the building, he made his way in the blinding rain, keeping his thumb safely underarm and his gartered hand protected from the elements. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the absurdity of having a rendezvous at a bus-stop with an ambulance. The welcome sound of the siren heralded the approach of his lift to the hospital. He hated to admit to himself that his wife was right after all, his eyesight wasn't as good as he thought....he admonished himself:

Dammit to hell, why didn't I listen to her?? 'I SHOULD have gone to Specsavers'!!

Should

DM

I should stop biting my nails. I should drink less, eat less and run more. I should relax more, work smarter not harder, get out of the office earlier and get things done in a more timely manner. I should make sure my team understand and buy into the vision of the organisation. I should encourage them and back them up and I should rotate them out if they don't perform. I should perform. I should define performance. I should document my definitions. I should define my documentation.

I should learn to calm down and not take things personally; when people take things personally they get rotated, or fired. I should learn to switch off. I should have mobile email access, which should not be switched off. I should delegate more. I should learn to say no. When my team say no to my delegation, I should learn to say no to their no. When my manager delegates, I should not say no. When my matrix manager delegates, I should also not say no. I should support my manager in discussions with my matrix manager. I should support my matrix manager in discussions with my manager. I should not point out when my matrix manager and my manager disagree. I should not point out when my matrix manager and my manager do not talk; they do talk, they talk about me pointing out that they don't talk.

I should not make other people feel bad. I should be nice to people. I should be more sensitive to people's feelings and should not suggest that they should act like adults. I should answer emails more quickly and in a nicer manner. I should answer the second reminder email in an especially nice manner. I should not complain about damage to my property. I should not point out that somebody burned a hole in my table; that does not achieve anything. I should not expect people to take responsibility for their actions, their finances, their accommodation or their lives; they have more important things to worry about like meeting their BFFs for drinks and playing their DS Lite.

I should decide what I want to do. I should decide what I want to be. I should decide where I want to be. I should be more ambitious. I should have a 5 year plan. I should strive for better work/life balance. I should read more. I should read better. I should write more. I should write better. I should complete my stories. I should revisit and edit my stories.

I should buy a better car. I should buy a newer car. I should buy a piano. I should buy a house. I should buy a dog. I should buy some nice clothes, stylish ones that fit better. I should throw out my old clothes. I should probably give them to charity. I should do my laundry more often. I should keep my apartment tidier. I should keep my apartment cleaner. I should visit my parents more often. I should travel more often. I should keep my travel expenses down. I should take all my holidays; '*no, not now!*'.

I should stop.

Happiness

MTB

*"Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence."
Aristotle*

I put it to you that Aristotle is wrong!

All too often happiness is mistaken for a destination. We refer to it, as if it can somehow be a permanent! That question of "Are you happy?" is extremely ambiguous! Is the person referring to that exact moment in time? If so, that's rather strange but is a valid question! Or do they mean are you happy in general, is happiness your most common emotion? Unfortunately it is the latter which society would consider more normal! As if a person's life is defined by a single emotion. To answer the question properly would take years of researching yourself. Jotting down every single emotion one feels in a day, working out percentages and ratios!

The question is asked of us as if, happiness is a destination, a constant. In reality this is completely impossible. Happiness, like sorrow, or joy, or pain is a moment, it is an element of life but not a constant. Happiness is a mood, an emotion, a perfect fleeting moment in time. The world would probably be a much "happier" place if we didn't try measuring our emotions or attempt to transform them into some sort of a destination! Our lives are composed of a string of fleeting moments, fleeting emotions. No single one should ever be thought to define or defy us!

Happiness is not something to aim for, but something to enjoy in that moment! Asking that question "will I ever be truly happy" is poisonous to one's soul. To ask this inexplicable question taints those genuine moments and they may pass you by, because you're too obsessed with this elusive place of happiness. Why strive for something at the end of the road, something that is there all along!

I would side with Buddha

"There is no way to happiness. Happiness is the way." Buddha

Emotion

MB

If life was conditioned by, or dependent on, our daily feelings or emotions, it would to me, be very haphazard and dysfunctional.

In any given day, no, any given hour, the human mind can go through so many diverse emotions: joy, sadness, regret, envy, all alternating.

Is real life what we see happening on the outside or what is happening in the inside “in the quiet waters of our soul”?

Sometimes I think we can confuse the emotion of “joy”, with that of “happiness”. To me “joy” can be a passing transitory feeling while “happiness” can be a permanent state of mind. If one is really peaceful and content within one’s own life, we should be able to overcome a lot of life’s disappointments and setbacks.

Theme: Across ten thousand years of ice

What is hidden in a midden!

MTB

Five shells stacked into each other, this is all it was. Five individual limpets becoming a solid stack! But to me those shells suddenly brought the past to life! That simple human action was all it took to transport me back over five thousand years.

Why is it, that this almost trivial, insignificant reflection of the human past, made me feel such a connection! With all the magnificent testaments to the past, why should such a little action mean so much? The skill involved in the construction of the pyramids of Egypt, the ingenuity and wonder of Newgrange, nor the intricate beauty of the Tara brooch, ever had such an effect on me, as these five shells.

Sitting on that remote inlet on the west coast of county Clare I was mesmerized! As I repeated the action, I could have been that person from the Mesolithic or they could have been me. With each shell I stacked, a thousand years rewound. It occurred to me right there and then, that the only thing that separated us was about five thousand years of sand.

Across ten thousand years of ice

DM

“No lack of men, or sacrifice”, he whispered.

She still thought of him. Many years later, many boyfriends later, many journeys later, she still thought of him and his sad smile. She knew it was her inexperience and nerves that had made that one night seem so important. More important than it really was, she knew now, but that didn't stop her thinking about it and how it had gone wrong.

Oh, lack of yen, she sacrificed

They sat at opposite ends of the room with seven friends between them, all squatting and lounging on beanbags and cushions. Some shared bottles they'd stolen from their parents. Some smoked cigarettes or joints. She had just stared at him, savouring their connection. The other girls thought she was stupid, that he was out of her league. They mocked her out of meanness and out of jealousy, but that night she didn't care.

Lacquers entrails ratified

It was a game someone remembered “from when we were kids”. She saw now that they had still been kids that night, but kids playing at being adults, rather than kids playing at being kids. Except him. He was the same age, but he was an adult playing at being a kid. He shared the drinks and the smokes, but they didn't excite him. He enjoyed the escape, but not the thrill of disobedience. Their games, their rule-breaking and their romances meant nothing to him after what he had seen. She understood that now. She had thought she understood it then, certainly more than the rest of them. She had had a connection.

Lacrosse Zen that dares survive

The other girls found him exotic and mature compared to most guys in they knew. They liked his foreign accent and they liked his apparent confidence. He never hesitated, never flinched, never lost his temper. He did what he was told, but calmly and slowly, never arguing, like nothing in school would ever be important enough to worry him. A few years later, in college, she came across a history of his country; the war he had survived and the stories of those who hadn't; the story of his town, the longest siege of the war and the atrocities when the town fell.

A cross pen thou tears suffice

They had connected earlier in the night, on a bench in the garden. He was smoking a joint and she sat beside him, afraid to talk, blushing in the dark. She let her silence play on her nerves as her nerves forced her silence. He just stared at the sky. When he spoke, he did so as if speaking to himself, “five years ago today since the walls have fallen; and the weather is same as tonight”. He talked and she listened, concentrating more on not sounding stupid than on what he was saying. He talked about the defence of his town and the small role he had played, helping where he could. She asked him questions to show that she was listening. She tested the questions three times in her head before asking, so for a short while before each question, her attention was internal, rather than on him. He didn't seem to mind and answered each question calmly and slowly and sadly, until the last.

A cross, ten cows and tears of mice

“Why did you lose? Did you not have enough soldiers?”

Suddenly he was glaring at her. His eyebrows bunched in the middle and his lips pulled back from his teeth in a snarl. She cowered, her eyes wide, and made to leave, but as she did so his face mellowed.

He smiled his sad smile and repeated “not enough soldiers” to himself, as if he was considering it. Then he looked back at the sky. Before he could answer her, they were disturbed by giggles at the door and a shout from inside. They were to stop their canoodling and come inside for a game.

Across ten sows and ears of rice

The other seven were already seated in a semi-circle when she followed him into the room. As they were last, they could only take opposite ends of the line. As he was the guest of honour, once the rules were explained to him, he got to start the game. He looked into her eyes from across the room as he thought of how to begin. His smile was gone, but the sadness remained. His brown eyes glistened, but continued to hold hers as he turned to whisper in his neighbour’s ear.

After the confused whispering, she received his message. She raised her head and brushed the hair back from her eyes to find him staring at her. She smiled back at him and then corrected her smile, forcing sadness into it to mirror his sadness. She stared into his eyes and pushed down her pride to fill her voice with caring and understanding. Across the room, she declared to him “across ten thousand years of ice”.

He looked away.

Across ten thousand years of ice

MG

Across ten thousand years of Ice
Through Blood and sacrifice
It lingers frozen but alive
Demanding to survive

It walks the earth no longer
But in the internal world is stronger
Waiting for the night to light it's presence

Sleep child so that I can pounce
Let all dreams bounce
There's angels to be found
Villains to be drowned
Sleep so that I can flounce

I have wisdom and innocence
Nonsense and sense
They are yours to play with
I only ask you stay with
Me...

Visits will do
Until you come anew
Across ten thousand years of Ice
To stay...

Across ten thousand years of Ice

MB

Diana stood there transfixed, motionless expressionless, akin to her goddess namesake. No salty tears streamed down her chiselled ashen face; nothing dampened her perfectly groomed blonde curls, hanging like drapes around her heart shaped face; she could have been a Bernini sculptor, adorning Piazza Navona.

Suddenly one last resilient force struggled within: HE would NOT be the victor! After all she had given him, and all he had taken, he would not take her last remaining strength – hope. She was so emotionally bruised and battered that it took all her inner reserve to prevent her dark, self-destructive, thoughts taking over her very existence.

Out of this despondent, despairing depth, a small feeble voice came to her from a time passed, the voice of her Granny. “Go! Take a walk in the mountains, majestic guardians of nature. They can take you outside of yourself. This is an important need in all of us, particularly in these times of much introspection, psychologising and self-analysis. When we behold the beauty and magnificence of a mountain, we can feel small and not so stuck in our own perception: a transforming and healing experience”, so her beloved Granny intoned with a faraway look.

With very mixed feelings and one last attempt at positivity, she headed along the narrow winding pathway leading to the mountain. If they could speak, what would their constructive advice be to her, she thought? Would they argue the futility of stress, anxiety, regret, past failures, missed opportunities, or else?

Now the “Mountain God” spoke slowly and clearly. “Step closer”, he said, “touch me, feel me. I am of this earth, as you are. Live, live, live! Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy! We are all part of this vast universe, each with its own part to play. I know mine, have done for nigh on 10,000 years now. You have only to look at the flora and fauna encompassed within my loving embrace. You, too, are part of us, yet with unique human and divine qualities, having a personal, significant role in this life.

“If you, as a richly endowed, special, and unique human, renege on your divine responsibilities, the whole of creation is much the poorer. Just as no two blades of grass are identical, no two snowflakes, so it is with you. There never was, or never will be, an individual predestined to be, or do, what you are. Go now with a heightened awareness live, love, enjoy!”

Diana tried, without success to lift her right hand to her head. Now slowly, painfully, she moved her left hand. As she lifted it to her half-opened eyes, the sight of fresh red blood dripping from her finger tips caused her to relapse back into unconsciousness!

Across ten thousand years of ice

LH

Martiin breakfasted on seal blubber. His wife Anouk was already at work grading and selecting his catch from the day before. She wanted to make the most of the daylight hours and so she was at her task early. Local radio from their small community in north Alaska kept them both company. Their children now lived in Juneau, Alaska's capital city. And who could blame them for choosing the shelters of city life? They knew their parents were a dying breed. The Inuit Eskimos still hunting for their food and trading their catch. It was said their ancestors came from Asia and crossed the Arctic ten thousand years ago. Across ten thousand years of ice. Modern life for the Inuit was happening too fast, Martiin thought. Ten thousand years can't be forgotten about so easily.

His mind drifted back to his day ahead. He finished his breakfast hastily and made his way outside to his excited pack of huskies. Ecstatic at his arrival and the prospect of their hunting trip, they barked excitedly. He harnessed them up to the sleigh and left them again to back to the kitchen to tell Anouk he was leaving for the hunt. He loved her dearly. They were together 40 years and they were both approaching 60 now. They were as happy together now as when they first met.

The huskies set off. He loved this: the wind in his face as they sailed along; the anticipation of the hunting trip; the huskies equally as excited as him. He wouldn't trade this life for anything. The wind in his hair and the blood tingling in his veins. He felt alive. He felt he had no right to be so happy. Not at his age. He felt a wondrous gratitude for his life and his health.

Martiin got to his hunting ground and he unharnessed the dogs. They frolicked with delight in the snow while he made his way to the spot where he would sit and wait for a seal to burst through a hole in the ice suddenly and explosively. He would wait first patiently, quietly. Sometimes for hours. Never long enough for his blood to run cold. His experience taught him when food and warmth would become essential and so he would then pack up, even if the day had not yielded a catch. There were days when his sleigh would pack itself easily with seal, walrus and caribou and there were days when there would be none. That would be the first life lesson in life for the Inuit hunter. Be joyful with your bounty as you don't know when you will have it again.

From his perch Martinn heard a snap and a low growling sound...

Mirror Lake

AC

“We are all rocked by waters at our beginnings”. It’s such a simple sentence, but it pulls me up and has me reaching for my pad and writing this. It’s by a woman called Mary Lawson and it’s in Crow Lake, the book I’m reading. And it has me thinking that this might be the reason I read: for those moments, for those moments of resonance that reach beyond the mere words to some kind of connection, to some kind of recognition that it is the same mirror we all look into, the same waters from whence we came. The same elements have made us and though we fracture and break in a thousand different ways and though our lives stutter and stall there is a space, somewhere within, where those elements still exist.

On my wall is a picture, a photograph of a place called Mirror Lake in California taken by Ansell Adams in 1935. It is a photograph of mountains, trees and a lake, and it feeds me. We are all rocked by waters at our beginnings. Those same elements that have made us make the trees and the mountains and the waters. We were once of them and will be again. Though I sit alone, I am not alone. Though you feel alone, you are not alone. We are all rocked by waters at our beginnings, and will be again.

And yet is that not the sadness of it all, that I should be alone and seek consolation in distant words and in even more distant mountains? Life is lived between the ears they say, but loneliness emanates from somewhere else, from some other unidentified place.

And if we are to talk of mirrors, if I am to talk of mirrors, should I not have the honesty to hold one up to myself? And lest there be any doubt the mirror, any mirror, is an instrument of judgement. To be reflected is to be judged. To be judged is to be found wanting. To be found wanting is to seek the solace of distant words and distant waters, to be rocked and to seek again the beginnings. We are all rocked by waters at our beginnings.

And so it occurs to me that I read now for solace, for comfort, for forgiveness. And I say now be cause it was not always so. For some time, between the beginnings and the now, there was no need for forgiveness. And if I am ever to write, now, it must surely be for forgiveness. And so, I realize that, I will not write, that whatever else I may give I will not for/give.

Vogelherd Horse, 30,000 B.C.

*Art, it would seem, is born like a foal
that can walk straight away.*
John Berger

*The horse is half the length
of my little finger-
cut from mammoth ivory
its legs have been snapped off,
three at the haunch,
the fourth above the knee
but its neck, arched as a Lipizzaner's,
its flared nostrils,
are taut with life.*

*The artist or shaman who carved it
as totem, ornament or toy
could hardly have envisioned
that horses would grow tall
would be bridled, saddled,
that of all the herds of mammoths,
lords of the blonde steppes,
not one animal would survive,
that the steppes would dwindle,
that, in the stacked mountains to the south,
rivers would alter course*

*but that this horse would gallop on
across ten thousand years of ice,
would see the deaths, the mutations of species
would observe the burgeoning of one species,
homo faber, the maker,
who had made him,
or, who, using a stone or bone knife,
had sprung him from the mammoth's tusk,
had buffed him with sand,
taking time with the full cheeks, the fine chin,
and had set him down on the uneven floor
of the Hohle Fels cave
to ride time out.*

Moya Cannon

Moya Cannon is an Irish author.

Cannon was born in 1956 in Dunfanaghy, County Donegal. She studied History and Politics at University College Dublin, and at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

She has taught in the Gaelscoil in Inchicore, in a school for adolescent travellers in Galway, and at the National University of Ireland in Galway. She served as editor of *Poetry Ireland* in 1995. Her work has appeared in a number of international anthologies and she has held writer-in-residence posts for Kerry County Council and Trent University Ontario (1994–95).

Cannon became a member of Aosdána, the affiliation of creative artists in Ireland, in 2004.

Her first book, *Oar*, (Salmon 1990, revised edition Gallery Press 2000) won the 1991 Brendan Behan Memorial Prize. It was followed by *The Parchment Boat* in 1997. *Carrying the Songs: New and Selected Poems* was published by Carcanet Press in 2007.

About VirginSlate

VirginSlate is a group of amateur creative writers based in Cork, Ireland.

Our inaugural session happened in the Slate Bar in Cork on Tuesday, 11th October 2011. We can blame the teacher of our creative writing class for cancelling that night, so we had nothing better to do than go to the pub and get creative.

Each of our fortnightly issues will begin with a theme (a word or a phrase). We then have two weeks to submit a piece of writing on that theme. The writing can use any form and take the theme in any direction the author wishes.

Every two weeks the group meets (in a pub) to discuss the various submissions and decides upon a theme for the following fortnight. The authors then have a chance to make any edits they like before the submissions are published online.

New members are welcome to either join us in the pub or to submit entries by email or post.

Email us at: virginslate@gmail.com

Or follow us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/VirginSlate>