

one
minute



thirty of the best

monologues

INTRODUCTION

As always we are grateful to Tom Flemons of Atticus Books for originally giving so many writers the opportunity to take part in this writing competition. Many of these writers are local but every year we attract people from across the nation and around the world to join us online and in spirit.

This year people were just as keen to enter, even though we had to ask for a £1 entrance fee. Lack of any other funding means there are no printed booklets and the judges volunteered their services for free.

We are putting this collection online and videos of readings can be seen on YouTube and the Atticus website

<https://www.atticusbooks.co.uk> and on our face book site

<https://www.facebook.com/atticus1min>

Five independent judges chose Harriet Bagnell's 'Tea and TV' as the best written monologue. Well done Harriett.

The live event will be in Lancaster Library on November 19th, where the winner of the best spoken monologue will be chosen by the audience.

Thank you to this year's judges and to all supporters of the Lancaster One Minute Monologue competition.

The OMM organising group

Wendy Haslam, Maureen Cronin & Vivien Mautner

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Tea and TV

Harriet Bagnall

My middle-aged daughter Jane lets herself in. It takes me ages to get to the door, so I stay in this chair. It is our usual Friday games night. She bounces into the room wearing those gold trainers and throws herself on the sofa. We play Rummikub and I win both games.

she says, 'Mum, I don't know if you have guessed but Eliana is not just a friend. We are a couple.'

'Oh, I see.' I reply.

'We are thinking of getting married.'

'Oh, I see.'

She should have married Jonathon. Sex with a woman seems pointless and silly.

We play another game with *A Touch of Frost* on in the background. She wins.

'So, what do you think mum?' she asks.

'I have nothing against gays' I reply, putting the game away.

She tells me Eliana's dad does not approve. The family is foreign, Greek orthodox or similar. They are very prejudiced people.

Jane leans forward for her third biscuit, and I noticed she has shaved the back of her head and covered it up with curls. She used to be a pretty girl. She jumps up to go,

'I might not be able to come next week'. She says, 'I'll let you know.'

BLIND EYES

Pavlos Pavli

We chatted at the refugee centre.

His English good after he spent seven years in Germany.

I asked him why did he come to England, isn't Germany a safe place?

He sucked and tutted, waved and told me about the bad men.

He said that "Everywhere there were bad men.

Everywhere. They control. They take. Like the Sudan. They tell us to sell drugs. They will hurt my wife and children and they know where they are. The girls had to do everything. We go to the Police. Nothing. They do nothing."

They turned a blind eye I said.

"Yes we also say he looks with no eyes. But here in England they say the Police are good. Is it true? You live here. Tell me. Can we be free? "

Someone bought some tea and home made fruit cake.

He took some, laughed as I said that I didn't eat cake , telling me that It's was bad to say no to things that are good.

He sat closer. Once again he asked me. Is it true. Will he get protection in England? He needed to know. Is this a safe place he can bring up his children?

There was only one thing I could say.

Childhood Fantasy

Afaf Sanders

Our fathers were fishermen, Riko and I used to listen to their tales about mermaids.

One day before dawn, we sneaked out to the beach hoping to see the mermaid before she submerged. Instead, the prow of a boat emerged from the surf, and masked divers rushed out wading ashore. We stood motionless, but they moved in the opposite direction. Riko followed them, I ran after him, "Come back." But he wouldn't stop. I called again and again until I couldn't see him.

Standing on the bridge of the ship I command, I focus my binoculars on that very beach as we sail past. I see children splashing each other, and imagine Riko amongst them. In my eyes, he remains the little friend who never left me.

Truth Or Lie?

Gill Wistowsky

We'd arranged to meet outside the venue and go in together. This would be the first time we'd seen most of these people in years but Carole and I had remained friends and met up regularly. Which is why I was so shocked when I saw what she was wearing. She noticed my raised eyebrows as I took in her bizarre appearance.

'What do you think? Not too much, is it? I thought I'd pay tribute to the Japanese heritage of our old company...'

She explained how she'd found the kimono in a vintage shop and thought it would be ideal for the occasion. It was quite charming and suited her beautifully, but the addition of the stark white face paint and elaborate wig covering her blonde hair, brought the phrase 'cultural appropriation' to mind.

What to say? There was no time for her to change. I felt the lie forming on my lips.

'You look perfect Carole. Shall we go in?'

VISCERAL

Leila Biggs

Okay, but if I answer honestly you can't laugh, alright?

I feel guilty reading teen romance books because I feel like I should be reading 'Girl, woman, other', because I'm nineteen and I should be consuming intellectual, ground-breaking and mature content.

But, truth be told, I find that content fucking boring. Every time I turn the page I think about how much more I'd rather be reading about enemies to lovers.

I feel stupid because I put on music when I'm doing work even though I know it's distracting me, but I can't let my brain focus on one thing because that never ends well.

So instead I go into an over-stimulating spiral of tiktoks and instagram reels so that the thoughts drown out and all I have in my head is 'About damn time'.

I don't feel confident using 'visceral' in a sentence because I don't think I fully understand what it means. At my big age I still can't do column multiplication and I constantly feel like I'm coming last in a race that I don't know the finish point for. And I also don't know why I'm running. I feel wrong for turning down a night out and, on that, I'm so fucking bored of my parents telling me that I should go out and that these are the golden years, when really they feel pretty fucking black. And they're not full of laughter with my mates, they're full of white noise. And, of course, 'About damn time'. But now I fear I'm being self-indulgent. Get some perspective. I have a roof over my head and a family that loves me. So I should be happy... right? Right?

The Moon Our Witness

Siân Phillips

You've never seen the moon, love, born after that explosion which tore up the sky, outshone the sun. You know day by the eerie, diffuse haze backlighting the smog – what used to be sunshine. Night once shimmered with stars... now its unyielding darkness smothers, presses heavy on our eyes - but tonight there's a pearlescent glow in the sky. Full moon!

A flame of hope catches my throat; that pale illumination is redemption. It's like getting lost as a child, spinning into panic that you've been abandoned, and seeing your parents coming back for you – the moon's come back for us!

All night we'll gaze as we were born to – to wonder, love, taste the vivid exultation of all the world and our one wild chance to be alive. I hold you close as I step delicately over the rubble. Round this corner, we'll see the moon!

We see a floodlight hoisted on a pole above the factory. My moon fell to earth, and got impaled.
I hold your face to mine, murmur my sorry to the stars in your eyes.

Our Chloë

Elizabeth Dixon

Me mam was mortified the day our Chloë turned up with Trevor, and a ring on her finger. 'She hadn't even bothered to warn me!' she wailed. Hadn't had the *nerve*, more like.

Good on him for sticking around though, 'specially after that first incident. Where I saw a silver fox with twinkly eyes, Mam saw grey hair, crow's-feet and a total embarrassment to the family. In a panic she shut the curtains! I'm not lying.

She's been boasting about our Chloë ever since she won a poetry prize in Year 8 and then, when she got a teaching job in a posh school in Surrey, Mam could hardly contain herself. Suddenly she was nipping to the Co-op six times a day hoping to bump into people she hadn't already bragged to. A nice young man with a good job would have been the icing on the cake but when our Chloë brought Trev home that day I thought, good on ya, girl, 'bout time you rebelled!

Looking at them now though, with a Little Trev running round and all three of them slotting together like they were made for each other, I don't think she rebelled at all. Good on ya, girl.

IN THE BEGINNING

Norbert Hirschhorn

was a certain bird, and the bird had an inaudible chirp, and God saw it was good. But the bird pleaded for recognition, identity, a sound other birds would recognize and respect. All songs had been given out, none left, but God took pity on this one last, tiny thing, and made its wings beat so fast they made a hum.

Time Flies

Aaron Aquilina

One day my grandmother sat down on her bed and never got up again. My many aunts carried out her errands, my many uncles brought her milk and money, and my mother – who lived with her – tended to all her other needs. She surveyed her domain from the comfort of her bed, a matriarch.

We little ones, scared of her, watched her from behind heavy satin curtains. Sometimes, she remained completely still. Flies brought out by the afternoon sun alighted on her bare, white shins, almost enticed. She would slowly raise her hand, as a queen waving, calculating the fly's exact movements. And then – slap! A dead fly. Flicking it off the edge of her bed, she would chuckle to herself, then once more lie still, in waiting.

If nothing else, our grandma taught us about having fun when you time flies.

After School

Lucia Kenny

We rushed home and left our educated minds behind,
gulped down some bovine juice
and headed to the world outside,

swinging from railings
we saw the world upside down,

carelessly ran over stepping stones
across a fast flowing river,
the weakest with wet feet was laughed at.

We three siblings climbed lofty heights,
there we rested our eyes on the ocean,
glimpsed across the sea to Burn's country,

with the wind as our sail
we ran down hills,
breathlessly sauntered home
in a line with the cows,

picked daisies and buttercups,
placed them in a jar
on our home-made altar,

with heavy eyes and contentment
we knelt to say our prayers.

We Are Green

Julian Edge

We are green in a brown land. No dust-devils rushing across our fields, walls of flame leaping from disposable barbecue trays to devour the woodlands, no medieval bridges arising ghostly and improbably sturdy from the depths of dried-out reservoirs. Look at those tv images now and remember how many nights we sat and watched Helen or Liam telling us how tomorrow, *'will see lots of sunshine with a gentle breeze in the south,'* whereas, *'the north-west will be unseasonably cold with persistent showers, many of them heavy.'* Well, having taken back control of meanness of spirit as a central cultural value, we can't help wondering if a regional tax-cut might help with levelling-up if we are to see our water being sent off south to their hosepipes. For we are green in a brown land.

TREADING WATER

MH RAVENHALL

At my junior school, there was a ten-metre swimming pool.

There we'd take tests—front crawl, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly—all measured in widths and lengths.

Only one test was timed. Ten minutes treading water while our teacher paced the pool's edge.

'Keep your heads UP', she'd call out as we danced furiously in the water, 'and remember to BREATHE. No cheating now. One day you could be on a SINKING SHIP, and you'll have to do this FOR REAL.'

We cheated, of course.

There was one point—as she strode confidently round the pool—and we knew we'd be in her blind spot.

Then each of us would touch the pool's bottom with an outstretched toe.

Just for a moment.

Just to check it was still there.

Because treading water only seems possible when you know there's a floor.

Promise

Aaron Aquilina

I made him promise not to die. He and his hospital bed had already become inseparable in the minds of his sisters, his friends, the nurses. Not to me. I could still see the fire burning beneath his closed, shaded lids; feel the warmth rushing through him as I held his hand, though the doctor told me pumping blood was not the same as living life.

So I knelt down, whispered in his unhearing ear, ordered him not to die. But die he did.

Or so it seemed to his sisters, his friends, the hospital staff. Not to me. Every flower reminds me of his lectures on botany (I was the sole audience); every tree twists and turns just as his thoughts did; every breeze rustling through the leaves his gentle snoring.

I mean, all it takes is a little bit of an open mind to see that we are as close to trees as Darwin said we are to apes.

ODINI

Pavlos Pavli

I never saw him in a fight. But nobody messed with him. Nobody called him out. He had a way of standing and moving. Or just looking, his two gold teeth glittering against the black of his face. And when he sold me his old fish tailed parka, the hand sewn studs on the back spelling out North London, I could wrap his protection round me when I walked into assembly.

I had a scooter sure, a beat up Vespa, his though was top, all purple, tuned, a straight through exhaust and Colonel Boogie air horns. He'd left school early to work in the post, his mum needed the money, but he wanted to read some of the books I studied in English, especially Brave New World and 1984. We laughed at the same things, and he didn't take the piss when I played football.

Then in his damp shed, fixing my oiled up spark plug, the carburettor in bits on the petrol stained floor, he kissed me.

A Doll for Christmas

Hilary Walker

She arrived in the night as I gently slumbered
half-listening to whispered murmurs,
'go back to sleep, he's not been yet'

On Christmas morning I discovered her
peeking out from inside the pillowcase
blond curls twirling
baby blue eyes smiling at me
complete with chubby cheeks and dimples
softly crying for her 'mama' when I rocked her

My mother had knitted tirelessly
a wardrobe full of lemon drop booties
matinee coats and
a sugar-pink pinafore dress
to match the ribbons in her hair

My sister coo'd and oow'd
'oh she's so pretty,
you should call her Daisy or Gracie'

She was a cherub,
a perfect doll for Christmas

It was such a shame because all I really wanted,
all I ever asked for through all the Christmas's of my childhood
was a bike!

Merry Christmas

Change

Dorothy Yeates

I was able bodied
Skipping along (well, plodding round Park Run with gusto!)
A reluctant, but able walker and champion retail browser
Not a second thought for rushing in and out the door
Reactive and proactive
Then the trip
The odd behaviour
The diagnosis
Secondary progressive multiple sclerosis
The blue badge
The stick
The walker
But also
The swimming
The resilience
The appreciation
Now I am disabled (so the form says)
Staggering along - having to plan always and now more prone
to stop, think and hesitate
Always an advocate for change
Now I am living it.

Leaving Thornfield Hall

Vivien Foulkes-James

Quiet now, just the
easterly wind whistling through the casements
and the scratching of my pen on this notepaper.
Soon the disturbances from upstairs will start.
Until the commotion subsides, sleep will be impossible.

Glancing round this room, my sanctuary,
can this really be my last night here?
I was flattered you sought me out,
I thought it was a meeting of minds,
now I see you wanted so much more.
You are twice my age, my employer,
you hold all the cards, this is not a union of equals.

This house holds its secrets,
questions hang unanswered in the corridors,
whispers echo from room to room and
the treads of the backstairs keep their terrible truths.

Sir, I could never marry.
I had only one true love and she was cruelly taken from me.

Jane

Missing You

Jean Lindsay

I stand at my bedroom window and look down at the busy street. I can see the new level crossing that mum campaigned so hard for.

I go downstairs to the kitchen in the Saturday morning quiet. Mum and dad are not down yet. The dog smiles up at me and I blow in her ear, she loves that.

The kitchen door opens and mum comes in, blotchy faced and bleary eyed. She sits down at the table and puts her head in her hands.

‘I miss you so much Mum,’ I whisper’.

She drags herself up and fills the kettle. Then I feel a slight spasm as she shuffles through me to get the milk out of the fridge. I sigh and she looks startled. Maybe she heard me. I’ll work on it.

Only Custard Will Do

Trisha Broomfield

Nan makes it with milk, bright yellow egg yolks, then sugar stirred in like sand. The steaming jug thuds on the scrubbed table. Aiden goes first, smirking at us girls, he lifts his arm, pours a yellow stream onto his plate. He passes to Martha, who marvels at steam still rising, finger licks the drip then passes to Mary. I watch and pray. Then Cecelia. Praying hard now. Nan rescues the jug, pulls out a desolate expression just for me, 'All gone,' she says, then, 'pass your plate Katie-Kate.' A smile swells from my boots. Rapt, I watch a thick blob of yellow cream plop onto my apple pie.

Sectioned

Helen Edwards

I wake up with the thin blue hospital blanket crumpled around me. Light spills into the room through tiny hexagonal holes in the metal screen covering the window. There's black felt tip pen writing on the cork-board next to the dulled, distorted mirror and above the desk in front of me. I try to read it but it makes no sense. I recognise the writing as my own and have a vague memory that I did this. I get a feeling similar to when I slept walked as a child and peeled wallpaper off my bedroom wall, a flash of the act but not enough insight to own up to it. Getting out of bed I go to my airplane sized bathroom and freshen up before leaving the room. The nurse sat outside is the one I don't like. It's nothing personal I just feel like she's not equipped to be providing support. Her demeanour emanates anxiety and she has greasy hair and an unkempt look. I walk to the place where medicine is dished out. I'm asked to sit and willingly take a handful of drugs to ease my illness, an illness of my mind.

Blood Ties

Siân Phillips

Sorry, I wasn't listening. I was looking at my hands. No, not ignoring you, I got distracted... I mean... look. The veins in my wrist. The skin translucent over the little channels, tiny blue rivers. The purple intersections, the blood branching just below the surface. It makes me feel a bit giddy, you know? How vulnerable we are. How beautiful it is that humans love each other, because there's so much trust in that... we're so resilient in this fragility, to let people love us, to love other people, to open ourselves. How when you hold someone's hand, you hold the bones of them.

Do Not Mistake

Shuhui Ren

“Do not mistake my pacifism for passivity. I am not afraid of conflict. I am not afraid to stand up for what is right. But if you think that shooting at your counterpart in the enemy’s infantry will spare the suffering of those interred in the camps then you are woefully mistaken, and you will end up dead.

War is almost never about right and wrong, about freedom or rights or defending the vulnerable. It is almost always about the egos of men and their desire to rule – the defendant as well as the aggressor; for how do you think the former came to have land and resources to defend in the first place?

If you cannot see war for what it is – indiscriminate killing to assuage the egos of men who know not what they are without power – if you are enamoured with the idea of noble battles and dying a hero, then gladly go. Be consumed by the war machine. The state nor rulers have any love for you. You are exactly the kind of youth propaganda adores.

How’s that for rhetoric? Perhaps you will understand it thus, seeing as it is the only kind of language you seem to understand.”

The Horse's Bottom

Wendy Breckon

I drove home once and saw a horse's bottom sticking out of the public bar door. It really happened. *Honestly*. We lived in a pub in North London on the Great North Road, next to a tatty garage and the Odeon Cinema. A new boyfriend was coming back to meet my parents. *It was so embarrassing. You didn't know where to look.*

Every summer it was Barnet Horse Fair. To use the word 'mayhem' would be an understatement. There were men arguing over wads of money, spilt beer on the floor and little kids skittering around the car park.

"Don't go in there love," my Mum said, "it's a right royal racket."

Her face was red and perspiration was dripping down the new blue dress.

"Only two days left... thank goodness."

My Dad was rubbing his hands in glee. The ten pound notes were flying over the counter. Mum was hatching a plan to release the horse. The new boyfriend was so fascinated... he kept on seeing me.

Nothing to worry about after all.

On the Edge

Siân Phillips

That first summer home after university, my best friend convinced himself he wasn't real. We contemplated it together, if perception could be illusion, walking cliffs and watching the swifts skim the horizon, watching gannets fold themselves into arrows and drop beneath the waves. The land here falls away to the sea, there is an eternal awareness of the edge. It isn't insecurity, it's honesty. To make a life here is to make peace with the shrinking margin. The outline shifts, the cliffs surrender to the sea. Year after year, the light changes as it falls on the same ground. There is a mythology drowned beneath the waves, and we know that our own will follow.

ONE MINUTE FROM HOME

MH RAVENHALL

Not far now, just through the village and out the other side.

I suppose you remember though it's been a long time.

Remember? Sorry – suppose not.

And Jean's waiting. I know you two didn't always get on.

But that's water under the bridge... and time's great healer,
so they say.

Twenty-years!

Jean would've come with me, but she knows you like to sit
up front—and Jean gets carsick too. Well, not sick exactly,
just queasy.

There's the old Post Office—closed of course—and The
Crown where Dad used to drink. It's something called a
gastropub now. I don't know what Dad would make of that.

Make of anything—these days.

But that's water under the bridge.

I guess everything is when you think about it.

The Past.

There's the Rec' we used to play in—you the Big Sis.

And, here's The Close.

We're at the end on the left—perhaps you recall? — and
there's Jean waiting.

To welcome us home.

Futile

Helen Bridgett

I've just bought this bamboo toothbrush.

Trying to do my bit for the environment, you know. Not using plastic and all that.

The only problem is, I have no idea what to do with the old one.

I mean, I can't just leave it lying around the house and I don't need to keep any more for scrubbing round the bottom of the taps. I have to get rid of it somehow.

But this hard sort of plastic can't be recycled and I just know that after I put it in the bin, I'm going to be watching national treasure David on TV - that's Sir Attenborough to the likes of us – and there'll be a whale dying on the beach because something's lodged in it's throat. They'll do one of them camera close ups they always win awards for and there it'll be – my old toothbrush looming larger than life on the 55 inch flat-screen.

Then David will give a lecture on how we all need to use less plastic and move to bamboo so the whole bloody country will be chucking out their old toothbrushes.

And where will that leave the whales?

Result

Jean Lindsay

The postman's here. I squat on the icy chessboard of the hall way and pick up the letters, shuffling them like a pack of Tarot cards...My stomach swoops and I hold the manila envelope carefully, as if it's a bomb.

My hands shake, I'm cold but sweating. Coffee! I boil the kettle and spoon instant. Strong and black it scalds my throat.

I pick up a knife and slide it into the envelope. My heart thumps, I can't open it.

I run upstairs, shower, dry, moisturize, deoderise. The cat wows, I run down and feed her. I knock over the stool with the wonky leg. I grab the envelope, rip it open and pull out the single sheet. I can't focus, then I start to laugh quietly, and I'm sobbing, choking, thanking, thanking, who I couldn't say. I stopped believing years ago.

THE DISPOSSESSED

Jane Roberts

I had read that perhaps the stone graves had been used more than once. But nothing had prepared me for that moment when I stood on the headland.

While the lights along the shore defined the bay, there came a pause in the breaking of the waves. Then the sound of an oar, pulling against the tide, and then the soft knock of a wooden bow upon the rocks.

I watched as thin fingers reached to steady the hull.... as arms arched out towards the ground and faint prints began to marked the shale.

Scaling the cliffs, and crossing the bracken ferns they came - sea-borne wraiths of time moving through the shadows towards the graves....

Was this the return of the dispossessed reclaiming their place in the coffins of cold stone?

All Life Is Sacred

Gill Wistowsky

I'm not a good Buddhist. I swatted a fly today, a large and angry bluebottle. I didn't want to kill it, tried to ignore it, then opened the windows wide and attempted to waft it outside to freedom and the open air. But the thing wasn't having any of it and just got to buzzing louder, disturbing my meditation with its frantic antics. I focussed my mind on the mantra, my breathing...but the buzzing got louder and angrier...then suddenly...stopped.

I sighed with relief and ... that's when it started up again... got under my skin... became an itch I had to scratch. All life IS sacred I know. And flies have amazing eyes, so large and bulbous they actually meet on top of the head! I never expected to catch it unawares. But there it lies. Dead. I'll probably come back as one next time.

We Interrupt This Dream

Vivien Foulkes-James

I woke early and put the radio on. Farming Today, that should bore me back to sleep. In that hallucinogenic state that blurs waking and dreaming I hear mention of another cull. Badgers, squirrels, birds, what now I thought?

A cull of farmers. I admit I was a little shocked. But, on hearing the argument it all began to make sense.

They said that in certain parts of the country, Wales and the Lake District they were becoming endemic. Also, post Brexit the subsidy paid to farmers was now unsustainable. It would be carried out as humanely as possible by professional marksmen. They would attempt to take them out with a single shot.

I came to and just caught the end of the programme. They were discussing an alternative to culling, using hazelnut spread spiked with contraceptives.

Radical stuff!



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