

THE NEW LUCIAD





edited by
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and **Robert Ward**

with acknowledgements to
the **Centre for New Writing**
and the **Society for Postgraduates**
in **English Literature and Language**
at the **University of Leicester**

The New Luciad 2014/15

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Cover art by
Rajowana Tuzh Islam

Introduction

Welcome to the third edition of *The New Luciad*, an annual publication that features creative work produced by students at The University of Leicester. *The Luciad*, which was first published in 1923 and ran intermittently to the 1980s, featured work by C.P. Snow and Malcolm Bradbury among others. The publication was revived by Robert Ward in 2013 and given a creative focus.

This year we have an exciting and eclectic mix of styles ranging from Guy Harrison's science fiction short story to the psychogeographical poetry of Kevan Manwaring and Rachel Evans' magic realism. Dip into the dark humour of Hannah Stevens' flash fiction, pause for the beautifully written poetry from Anna Lewis and Geraldine Bell and admire the well-executed photography from Rajowana Tuzh Islam and Sijia Wu. We hope you like all of the pieces included this year. Hannah, Richard, Robert and I were amazed at the number of contributions we received and although it was hard to choose what to include we hope we have picked an interesting, sonorous and well-executed range.

As always this publication was the work of many people and a huge vote of thanks is due to all the students who responded to the call for submissions. We would like to thank the G.S. Fraser and John Coleman Prize winners for letting us publish their pieces. And last but by no means least we would like to offer a big thank you to the University of Leicester's Centre for New Writing and SPELL; without their support *The New Luciad* would not have been possible.

- Suzi Shimwell



JOSH KELLY
BA English

A Poem For My Grandfathers and
A Poem For My Grandmothers

How long have their arms been wrapped in coiled ropes?
They trace their way from the wrists
To shoulder
And neck
And all the way back to the start of memory.
What palms they have,
Sanded down and cracked to the fingertip,
Hiding a thousand separate stories.
Some eyes have seen life laid bare
Like a broken globe;
Spilling its geography across their backs.
Countries are spread
Across my Grandfathers' skin,
With ancient streets running under their flesh
And bones that house their tempered nature.
They lived then
And they live still.
Their words are gospel.
Their actions are set in stone.
Their steps are felt by those they loved.
And every blink of theirs is an eclipse.
With every forward glance
They show the un-travelled boy in me
The value of youth, integrity,
And the smells and the sounds of the sea.

*

How will I remember them
Aside from being baptized
In the mouth of the Humber?
Or
Chiselled into form from Devon chalk
To stand against the wind?
Or Within the four safe walls
Of a kitchen with a linoleum face?
And will they still be there,
Holding hands with my Grandfathers,
When the cliffs retreat
To green hilt and soil?
When the water lies absent
On its sandy bed,
Cut by the bridge
Deep into the banks?
When the linoleum cracks
And the walls close in?
I am certain I will see them all
In the clock face
And in the distant call of its chime.
Calling;
'It is not time for you
To face the wind,
And the river,
And these different walls.
Face forward.
Don't turn homewards yet!'

Close Quarters

Their lives are led by dimension;
Six by Five feet, and clad
In the shadows of bodies.
They see where they had been...
...Their asses... Their backs... Their hands....
What sights this bed has seen!
They push the world down on its springs
And leave Pompeii ruins in memory foam.
These two are old enough
To wash their linings clean.
They can make it now:
A mattress hard with cheats and lies,
With the pillows bloated with cotton hate
And a frame uneven, shaky and cracked
In these dimensions love has lied
And in close quarters love has lacked.

Talking Heads

I made her in the image of Pinnochio,
I carved her and varnished her.
I drew tight her reins,
To hold her hanging by the nose.
My hand gives her the will to roam,
To come alive
From hair to chin.
It leaves her limbs dancing with my delight,
But left pendent when delight has passed.
The room remains, without light,
Allowing her heart to take new shapes.
In the dark she sings,
Fashioning teeth for her Marionette mouth
To bite against her strings.
Imagine her limping in her first steps,
Much like an amputee,
With truth left in her roots;
Passed down from bark and soil and rain
But singing against her pain
A verse I know,
And in her mask's geometry
I await her nose to grow.

HANNAH DRURY

MA Modern Literature and Creative Writing

Something for Something

Mr White is five foot six, or six foot five. Somewhere thereabouts. He wears an expensive black coat over a black suit and tie and a pair of black leather gloves that never leave his hands. He walks with purpose, one foot in front of the other, down the street with many houses, left right, left right until he comes to the house with the red door that opens directly onto the road. He grasps the knocker in one hand, swings it back towards him and then bangs it three times against the painted wood. A curtain twitches next door. He catches the whitened eyes of an old woman and nods his head. She nods also, a mutual exchange, before retreating back behind the netting as he returns his attention to the red door. It opens a tempting half-inch, held fast by a ball and chain, and a voice breathes into the gap.

‘Yes?’

‘I have a proposition, sir.’

‘I can’t buy anything.’

‘It’s a proposition sir, just that.’

The door closes and reopens onto a scruffy hallway. It is lit by a single bulb that hangs on a long wire from the ceiling and casts a sickly glow across the rectangular space. Mr White steps across a pile of red and white envelopes into the house, and as the man shuts the door behind him the vibrations cause the bulb to swing gentry back and forth. Its beam falls upon a series of pencil lines, each dated, that form a spine from skirting board to halfway up the peeling

wallpaper. There are also two pairs of shoes on the floor, one big and one small. There is nothing else.

‘I’m a busy man,’ says the man, in a manner that suggests he is anything but.

‘This won’t take long. Do you have anywhere we can sit?’

The man follows Mr White through a second door and into the kitchen. The cupboards here are old; their stained doors hang at forty-five degrees or more in a cubic masterpiece of hopelessness. On one is blu-tacked an ageing crayola scribble, the paper saturated with grease and the edges curling in on themselves. As they each take a seat at the folding table, the man and Mr White see each other seeing.

‘My son,’ says the man, ‘has an imagination like you wouldn’t believe. He’ll be an artist one day, I’m sure.’

‘He likes to draw?’

‘Oh yes.’

‘What does he draw?’

‘Everything. People and places and whatknot. Things he’ll never have. You name it, he’ll draw it. The other day, he drew a palace. A palace in the middle of a desert, with tall towers and lots of windows. He said, Dad, do you think I’ll ever get to live in a place like that? I told him, you don’t get palaces in the middle of deserts, not for all the money in the world. You just don’t.’

He takes a battered packet of tobacco out of his pocket and rolls himself a thin cigarette, pushing the filter into the end and licking the paper in one fluid motion. The smoke hangs in the air between them in waves of butane blue, and Mr White can taste the sudden, parching acidity.

‘Your proposition,’ says the man, ‘what is it?’

‘A deal. Something for something, that’s all.’

‘Some kind of time share, is that it? An insurance plan? Because you may as well know, I’ve not got anything to give and the bank says I can’t take on any more credit.’ ‘Oh no, sir, it’s nothing like that. Call it security. A future, if you will. For your son.’

Mr White hears the cogs begin to turn as the possibilities take shape. All the things that could have been, in a different set of circumstances, perhaps, are just now coming together, like the dusty pieces of an ancient jigsaw. Something like hope seems to uncrease the man’s tired face.

‘Give me a moment of your time, sir, and I’ll explain.’

‘I’m listening.’

An hour later, give or take, the old woman next door hears a single shot and drops her teacup, which shatters into tiny pieces at her slippered feet. It was a gunshot, she is sure, because she has seen them on the television and she has been waiting for something like this for a long time. She places an excited call to the local police station, explaining what has happened and when the officers arrive she tells them she has a spare key, if they want it, and some bourbon biscuits. They find the man slumped forward in his kitchen chair, his head resting against the tabletop and his brains spread across the linoleum like cooling butter. In his left hand, there is an empty revolver and clutched between the fingers of his right is a cheque made out to another name (his son, the woman says) in small, neat capitals. The same as all the others up and down the country and, like all the others, neither officer can conclude anything but suicide. Tomorrow, they know, the cheque will be traced to a Swiss bank account and the trail

will end there, in frustration and anonymity, until the next time. Outside in the hallway, the old woman is looking at a solitary pair of buckled shoes that reminds her of when her own children were small. Quite suddenly, she remembers the man in the black coat, but he is nowhere to be seen.

LAUREN FOSTER
Cert HE Creative Writing

The Wait

“Smooth as a pickpocket.” He
jokes but his hands shake like a
jakey's. I smile, nod and then
shudder as precognition
crawls, envelops as a shawl.

I take his hand; lean back on
vinyl seats that span the wall.
An old grey seal guards the far
corner. People enter, soaked,
cluster like lost children, then

disperse. It's just us again
and selkie in his oil-skin.
Once I had a living room
this same shade: institute green.
I was in a gloomy place.

No roundness inhabits this
space: NHS precision,
even the receptionist's
attitude. There is nothing
quite so angular as death.

On the digital screen the
doctor requests our presence.

Toast

He looked delectable
standing there

on the witness stand.
Scrubbed up very nicely indeed.

Words tumble
from my brain's tongue

like crumbs
that come out of a toaster

when it's turned upside down
and there's always

stubborn bits

that need a knife poked in
to prise them out

and out
 they fall
 in great
 stale

unappetising lumps.
Blimey he was laying it on.

Christ. Stop.

*I am
the toast with the most-est*

I'd thought that day
as I calmly scooped up the crumbs

whilst he screamed at me
and fumbled with his phone.

The dog wouldn't eat them
so I shook them into the bin.

ANNA LEWIS
PhD Archaeology

The Frame

A photograph shows them
on their wedding day:
her sober dress, his suit,
their faces still fatty and smooth;

his chin puffed out above his collar,
her plump, balustered calves.
She holds a small bouquet,
his fingers hook for the cigar

which, out of shot, a friend
holds lit. Tea, cake,
the front door's final click
and they are left alone,

the parlour over-run with cups
and plates. Now has the room
shrunk, have they grown?
– they fill it as they will

the poised, bare frame beside
his mother's bed, awaiting acts
of sun and shade, and dust
and dust's daily removal.

Stone

She was not really turned into stone:
no monk would have done such a thing.
He would have held out his hand,
drawn her up from the small of the cavern's back
to where the stream ran clear,
and sun dripped through leaves.

Look, he'd have said, the white vines
of her fingers folded into his palm:
Light, warmth, fresh water –
look at all that is good. She stood
with knees bowed, back bent, one arm
lifted away from her ribs as he spoke.

She could scarcely see him
behind the sun's rage,
and as soon as he let her go,
felt the way to her bed in the black of the cave:
dabbed dour water over her face,

her blistered skin. She woke
with a cry, each time she slept
and dreamt of him.

THOMAS WILLIAMS

BA English

The Sheriff's Son

"He was a good man, Joe. Good sheriff, too. But he don't know what I did, and you oughta, before the sun sets."

"Thirty years," Joe said, shaking his head. He hadn't visited his father's grave since the long, dry heat of the summer, and now that was over. In the fading light the small wooden cross looked like bones. "Thirty years, Sam, just to be thrown in a hole. I guess I got it comin too, one way or another."

"Hard times breed hard people, I s'pose. Ain't nothin personal."

"Horseshit. Drought of '87, you remember that?" Sam nodded, said that he did, said that even the young uns knew about '87.

"They was hard times. Dogs dyin in the street, dust so hot you could hardly breathe. I saw more boys die in that heat than in the war, and God knows how many we saw out there. Our grandfathers' grandfathers, they came out here expectin a better life, Sam. A new start. Look what they found." He gestured around at the graveyard, at the dusty ground and dead trees; at a whole lot of nothing.

"Still nothin personal 'bout it, Joe. Sheriff Silvers was a decent man. He don't need no fancy gravestone or --"

"But look at him, Sam! Thirty years, thirty god damn years he served the people of this town. And what's he got to show for it? A stick in the ground and a poor man's grave. Where's the justice in that? I been tryin for a long time to see

it, but all I see is rich cityboy stones all in rows, like they earned somethin better'n the rest of us. I just don't think that's right, Sam, I surely don't."

"Got nothin to do with right or wrong," Sam said, looking out at the headstones. "We ain't no rich man's sons, got no right to a fancy stone when we die. Hell, men like us, we damn near kill ourselves just puttin food on the table. But that's the way it is, Joe, way it's always been."

Joe grimaced and shook his head, standing up. Sam stood with him, grunting as his back creaked, a thin man with a shock of grey hair, hands stuffed into his pockets. Joe ran a hand down his coarse face and sighed.

"I'm just sayin it don't seem right, is all," he said. Sam clapped him on the back and smiled.

"I know, friend, I know. But there ain't nothin small town folk like us can do about it. We're just... just specks of dust, ridin the storm. Most we can hope for is a little rain from time to time. Besides," Sam said, "just cos we don't got no shiny automobiles, don't mean we ain't got our pride, Joe. Ain't no shame in bein a workin man, God knows it."

Joe looked out across the smooth marble tablets all stood in rows, all etched with names and dates and inscriptions no one in the town could read.

"Not much reward to it neither, Sam," he said. Sam shrugged and reached into his overcoat – an heirloom so old and patched up that nobody knew what it had once looked like – and pulled out a tin hipflask. For my son, Gregory, it read, though no one alive knew who Gregory was, or what fate had befallen him.

"I don't know bout that, Joe," Sam said. Joe grinned the way he did every time he saw that flask – like a twelve year old boy knowing he was doing something wrong, and

knowing it would taste all the sweeter for it – and Sam grinned back. He unscrewed the cap, took a long drink, swallowed, smacked his lips together.

“God damn that makes you feel like a man,” he said, handing the flask to Joe, who took a sip and coughed, wiped his watering eyes as Sam laughed.

“Christ, Joe, can’t you handle your liquor no more?”

Joe shook his head and returned the flask.

“Don’t go preachin to me, old man. I heard stories bout you.” “Plenty of em to tell,” Sam said. He looked down, tapped the flask with his ring finger. “But I got one you need to hear, Joe, one you ain’t gonna like so much. Been tryin to tell you this whole time, seems to me. Ain’t you s’posed to listen to folk, bein the sheriff an all?”

“I’m sorry, Sam, I didn’t -- ”

Sam waved him aside.

“I’m just teasin,” he said. “Your pa was the same way. No doubt your sons will be, someday. None of us gettin any younger, Joe.”

He took another long drink, and looked down at the cross of Joe’s father. When he eventually looked back up, Joe was watching him quietly.

“You know my pa got shot when I was ten years old, right Joe?” “Sure, Sam. He worked over at the gas pumps, out near Blackrock. Lotta shady fellas used to pass through Blackrock in those days. Wore a blue apron, if I recall. ”

Sam nodded, smiled. “Damn thing made him look like a woman, but he wouldn’t hear none of it. Said it does a man better to dress right than to dress well.” His smile faded. “Well there’s more to it than what I told you, Joe, and I don’t know if you’re gonna want to hear it, bein the sheriff an all.”

Joe took the flask and took another drink. Sam looked

at him, grimaced. Scratched the back of his head. "Spit it out, Sam," Joe said. "You know I ain't gonna judge. Been friends a long time, you and I."

"That we have, Joe. That we have."

It was a long time before either man spoke again. The dusk settled around them like a veil, and a breeze came in from the prairie, stirred the dust around their feet and whistled quietly through the church bell tower, as if God himself was listening.

Eventually Sam spoke, but his eyes remained fixed on Sheriff Silver's grave, and his rough hands, wrinkled but still strong, remained stuffed into his pockets.

"My pa," he said, "he worked out there at Blackrock for near on twenty-five years. Never missed a day. Never smoked a cigarette, never touched a drop o liquor. Never hit my mother or me, neither, and that's rare, that's a rare thing."

Joe agreed that that was a rare thing indeed.

"Used to say a man can be anythin he desires, on condition that he works hard and don't forget his family or his roots. Man grows from his roots, he'd say to me, and God knows that ain't no lie. But a man's roots keep him down, too, Joe. I was there when he died. Playin behind the counter. I remember seein this big old automobile pull up outside. Thought it was the greatest thing I ever did see, at the time. Til this rich kid gets out, starts orderin my pa around like he's some kinda servant. You think they have servants, up in those hills, in those big old houses o theirs?"

Joe shrugged and said maybe. It wouldn't surprise him, he said. Sam shrugged.

"Anyhow, my pa does his job, brings the kid inside to ring him up on that big old mean thing that used to scare the hell outta me (ain't never heard a sound like it, Joe), an

suddenly I hear this guy sayin ain't no country hick gonna make me pay for shit, or some such, and then he musta pulled a .45 on my old man because... I mean, that's a nice gun, Joe, it surely is. Six rounds, nickel-plated. I fired one once. An I hear six shots, six times he pulls that trigger, just bang bang bang, bang bang bang, til it clicks. Then he just walks right on outta there, Joe. Just walks away.'

"I'm sorry, Sam." Sam shook his head and wiped his face angrily, took another drink from the flask.

"Ain't no use apologisin now, Joe. But I just remember it goin round and round in my head, round and round and round like one of those god damn movin pictures. Why nobody stopped him. Why not even one god damn person tried to stop the sumbitch who killed my pa an had no bullets left? Well they can all rot in hell, the lowdown cowardly fucks." He turned away and spat on the ground.

"Did the law get him?"

Sam laughed coldly.

"Ain't no justice for folks like him, Joe. But Old Whiskers, you remember that crazy old bastard, right?"

Joe said that he did.

"Well two days ago, Old Whiskers tells me there's this rich-lookin guy, cityboy, been makin trouble at the Horse. So I go in, have myself a drink. Hear this guy sayin shit like no way I'm paying for this, shit I ain't heard in a long time. I see him reachin into his coat. Only, he don't know about the sawn-off Old Whiskers keeps behind the bar, so he puts his hands up an he leaves. Nothin unusual bout it. But I know I seen him before, Joe. So I followed him, an he gets in to this big old automobile, shiny as the day it was made, all chrome and silver. An I step up to the window, say 'scuse me mister?, an I reach into his coat, an guess what, Joe? Rich old cityboy

was bout to pull a .45 on Old Whiskers. Nickel-plated, six rounds. Heavy, like no gun I ever shot, not even in the war. So I put it to his head, but he don't seem to understand what's goin on. He's got this, this look in his eyes, like he thought he was made o iron or somethin. Like he was untouchable. An I say mister, you shot my father, and then I just kept pullin that trigger til it clicked an Jesus Christ I ain't never seen so much blood n brains in all my life. His whole damn head was gone, Joe, I mean, just gone. So I turned round an I walked away with his blood on my face an hands like some sorta god damn Indian chief, an I ain't spoken of it since, not to no one. Not til now, at least."

Joe said nothing. He looked across at the gravestones, all standing in neat rows, and then down at the small wooden cross that had been made for his father, sheriff for thirty years. Everyone said that his father had been a good man before the bottle took him. A good sheriff, too. But there was no telling what Sheriff Silvers would have said to Sam. Perhaps it didn't even matter. He sighed and looked at the old man, who had pulled his coat tighter around himself. He looked at Joe nervously, and there was a tightness to his skin, a darkness to the shadows under his eyes that made him look even older than he was. Tired. It had been a long time since they had been boys, shooting cans out past the Litton farm. "You ain't gonna say nothin, are you Joe? I ain't expectin to get away with it, I just--"

"Maybe it's time to be headin home, Sam," Joe said. "It's getting dark out."

Sam nodded. He looked down at the sheriff's grave one last time, and in the failing light the cross looked like bones.

"That it is, Joe," he said. "That it is."



SIJIA WU, MA FILM AND FILM CULTURES



SIJIA WU, MA FILM AND FILM CULTURES



SIJIA WU, MA FILM AND FILM CULTURES



SIJIA WU, MA FILM AND FILM CULTURES

HANNAH STEVENS

PhD Creative Writing

Bread

The lump of bread is lodged in his windpipe. He grips the table edge and tries to cough. No noise comes: there's not enough air in his chest. His face turns red, and then blue, and the woman from the next table stands and punches his back.

The room flips, and the floor is cold and hard beneath him. He feels the woman's breath on his face, then, her fingers in his throat.

The noise of the restaurant fades away and somebody holds his hand.

He hears the faint sound of a siren far away and then, he hears nothing.

Caterpillars

They're laughing. They think it's all a joke. The youngest one is collecting them from the low leaves of trees. She screams when they move in her hand. The older one holds them beneath the water in the bucket with a stick.

They are my children and they're drowning caterpillars. I wonder if they know that these crawling things would've become butterflies.

Soon, the childminder will be here. Maybe she will tell them. Maybe they will cry.

My bags are already in the car. I have written a note that I will leave by the kettle when I go.

Robin

It was a hot day and in the garden there was blossom and the sound of birdsong.

She'd found it on the grass: its wings fanned at its sides, its chest red fluff. Soon, she noticed the parts of it scattered across the floor. She knelt down and saw ropes of tiny, white intestines. It was the fourth this week that the cat had pulled apart just for fun. He lay in the flowerbeds and she called him over.

There was a spade in her hand and then a thud as the metal connected with the bones in his skull.

Shoes

She sees them from her car window. She parks: goes back to look at them.

The shoes are zebra print, except the white stripes are silver. The sun catches them, the silver sparkles.

She picks one up: size four: her size. She wonders why they're here on the ledge.

The car park is busy. It was level seven before she found a space. The noise of the city below echoes in the concrete. There's graffiti on the walls.

She steps towards the ledge, leans over the rail, picks up the other shoe. She looks down and then she sees her.

Wasps

It's already in your t-shirt but you don't know it yet. You'd leant forward to try to see where he was and the material had stuck to the car seat.

The wasp stings you. Startled, you lean back. You squash it and it stings you again.

You begin to cry but your dad doesn't hear you. He went into the chip shop to buy dinner and he hasn't come back yet. It's been forty minutes but nobody else seems to have noticed.

Your back really hurts now. You don't know what you should do.

GERALDINE BELL
PhD Creative Writing

Joyce Carol Vincent

In 2007 the decomposed skeleton of a 41 year-old woman was discovered in a North London flat. It was thought she had died around three years previously, of natural but unidentifiable causes.

That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once;
A song that made one think of stars.
That tongue once spoke with Stevie Wonder,
No less, ere it came to rest and rot
On a sofa, in a room.

Thirty-eight years ago,
Within a gelatinized globe,
A pink kidney bean grew eyes.
A teardrop of blood fell in a heart like a pinprick.
A warm bag of bones was delivered into this world;
A work of thirty-seven weeks.

That body of dust
Sat for three years in front of the TV
With only Christmas presents, half-wrapped
For company
And a trail of blowflies,
Flesh flies and maggots
That lined up at the open window
Hovering like neighbours around a calamity.

The neighbours themselves reported a funny smell.

But they mistook the slow transmutation of body to bloat
– Skin bursting like bubbling porridge,
Frothy organ-juice dripping from every orifice,
Maggots worming through her eye sockets-
For orange peel and yoghurt-pot film lids.

Once, these remains had a name; Joyce.
Worked for one of those big law firms
– Had dark Caribbean hair, all curly, and a lovely singing
voice.

Had a string of boyfriends, even
Wore an engagement ring for two years.
Once she fell in with big-wigs in the City,
And had a few close girl friends too.

Perhaps the Christmas gifts were for them,
Or her father, or her sisters – all still alive.
Presumably, they forgot to get her anything.

Proust's Pantoum

I'm writing to forget my present tense;
I can't put down my pen until it's tame-
My memories are my best form of defense.
My parents' faces flicker in the frame.

I can't put down my pen until it's tame,
It howls with reminiscence in the night.
My parents' faces flicker in the frame...
I sleep through weary hours of daylight

And howl with reminiscence in the night.
This cork lined room keeps out the song of birds;
I sleep through weary hours of daylight.
I'm stretching out their life within my words.

This cork lined room keeps out the song of birds,
I stoke the embers on the hour strike.
I'm stretching out their life within my words.
A smoky haze arises; pale, ghostlike,

I stoke the embers on the hour strike.
The ink is calling even from its well!
A smoky haze arises; pale, ghostlike,
I must write down as much as I can tell.

The ink is calling even from its well.
My memories are my best form of defense;
I must write down as much as I can tell.
I'm writing to forget my present tense.



GERALDINE BELL, PhD CREATIVE WRITING

ZOI TSIVILTIDOU

PhD Museum Studies

Worship

An anthology of paths crossing
Footsteps uncertain but sharp
Pinned on the certainty of the cement
Suits appearing in slow motion
Stupid revelations and unpleasant sympathies
It is not honesty that paid us a visit
It is not loyalty that made us wear black
Conformity and patterned formality
It is not how pain celebrates
Stiffness and the fabric is tense
Manly gestures that could confess
But have no interest in doing so
Handkerchiefs and the awful smell of cleanness
Exaggerations, flamboyant misconceptions
Mindreading and our sense of humour tickled
I can't help it but notice the buried
Confetti sprinkled on the shoes
Coated with Technicolor
I can't help it but notice the shoes, buried
And worshipping them is all I do

OLLIE PETTS

BA English

Leah

Get us some shots with those, I feel like a proper drink. I still don't know why we love this empty bar so much, but it sure feels like home. Old habits die hard, I guess. Lighter's fucked as well, pass me yours. Let me tell you, man, being with that girl was the best thing I had going for me in years. Well, you know me better than anyone. I've been a layabout as far back as I can remember. I always thought things'd be different at uni, that's what everybody always said, right? Best three years of your life. If I had a quid for every time someone gave me that bullshit line I'd have enough to pay off our tab. Everyone's story's pretty much the same. If you can't talk shop with the other guys then conversation's pitiful at best, none of it ever amounted to anything. Still, it wasn't all bad. Remember that party at Casey's place in second year? Y'know, the one where you got so hammered you ended up puking in his fridge? Can't stomach it like that anymore. Came out with a respectable 2:1 and thought I might actually make something of myself. What a fucking joke that turned out to be. The only reason I even became a teacher was because I'd been stuck in school for almost twenty years, being in a classroom's all I know how to do. Imagine that, an educator – the guiding light of the next generation – still living in that same, pokey little flat ordering the same pizza every Saturday. What? Oh yeah. Ready? Okay, three, two, one... Jesus Christ, what did you even buy? Sure as hell never drunk that before. But, yeah. So there I was, I found myself

stood in a white shirt and fancy shoes, looking into the faces of all these kids and thinking this isn't right, y'know, wasn't ten minutes ago I was slumped in one of those chairs staring out the window, but here I am teaching teenagers about things that don't even matter anymore. Could've been worse, I guess. After all, a couple of years on and I'm still there. All the lads are a pain in the arse, but at least I have something pretty to look at every day. I swear girls' skirts were never that short when we were in high school. I always had a thing for those outfits, and I bet I'm not the only one thinking it. Fifty quid says that over half the guys stood up in front of their class were thinking the same thing I was. What I wouldn't give for ten minutes alone with one of those. You should see it, man, you'd love it. Don't give me that look, I know you. Gave me a reason to get up in the morning. Strong coffee, that first fag and some eye candy. Yeah, there were some proper trolls, but the slender ones who'd read way too many celebrity magazines, coming in with skirts rolled up and their tits hanging out, showing themselves off to whatever poor, horny kid was walking past? I'm not gonna defy nature. Not that I was ever going to do anything. Shut up, I wasn't! I must've toked half my brain away in high school, but I'm not stupid, it's just a comforting thought on those lonelier of nights. That is, until this one girl. Leah, her name was. A bit of a weird kid, long sleeves in the sunshine type, but she was alright. Not shy so much as subdued. Kind of clumsy, too. She was always showing up with a new nick here or bruise there. Whenever I'd seen her around school she was always on her own, even in class. Spent her lunch breaks eating inside, playing video games, not talking to anybody. Someone said she lived with just her step-dad, so he probably

tries to shower her with gifts. Lucky kid. I know we're supposed to be objective with students, but I always tried to give her that little nudge when she was in class, just to give her a bit of confidence. A lot of the other teachers treated her like she wasn't their problem and the kids were always taking the piss out of her for one thing or another, so I'd talk with her when I saw her 'round, too. Trying it on never once crossed my mind, I promise you. Look, dude, you know when I'm not kidding. I just thought it was my job as her teacher to give her a bit of company, to be a friend to her rather than just another face. But then there was this one day, see, when she asks me if she could pay me a visit after school was over, 'cause she'd been having a bit of trouble with the class. I didn't see it, but I thought what the Hell, right? So there I was, helping this girl with her homework, when all of a sudden she starts coming on to me! Hey, shut up, man, I'm serious! She seemed kinda distracted, like she couldn't concentrate, but I thought she just had a rough night since there were these dark rings under her eyes. Next thing I know she starts rubbing her hand up my leg. I swear, I was gonna say something straight away, but she looked up at me with those big, adorable doe eyes and gave the old heartstrings a tug. Before I knew what the fuck, she's got her skinny little body pressed up against me with her tongue in my mouth and one hand down my pants! Now, here I had a choice, right. I could either resist this attractive young thing throwing herself at me and then trudge wearily back to my mopey shithole of a flat for some crap telly and a wank, or I could have it off with an actual woman for the first time in forever. See? I knew you'd get it! So, I end up banging this hot fifteen year old girl in school during the day - it's like every

teenager's wet dream! Well, near enough fifteen. What's a few months in the grand scheme of things? We've all got one of those dark fantasies that we think'd freak out everyone we ever met if word got around. Some people like to get beat up, some people like to do it outside dressed as Peter Rabbit's woodland entourage. All I'm saying is one tiny indulgence wasn't gonna hurt anyone. What? No, most of the other teachers go home pretty early, and my classroom's out of the way, anyway. But that's not all. A few days later she comes back and asks if I can "help her out" again! One minute I'm doing the same tedious shit day-in-day-out, and the next I literally have sex on tap with a girl who's never gonna badger me about why I didn't pick up her dry cleaning or whatever! And that was that. Nobody even came close to finding out about it and for weeks I was living an awesome life. I actually had a spring in my step for the first time in twenty-odd years. That is, until that little prick came and ruined it. Light again, please. Cheers. Basically, there was some form I needed to sign for all the kids one day so I did it when I was taking registration just to get it out the way. But this one kid, David, see, he always rocks up late, so I totally forgot to sign him off. You know the kind, thinks he's all that just because he hangs out with the popular kids and tries to talk tough, but get him on his own and he hasn't got enough nuts to satisfy even the smallest of squirrels. I've been at odds with that little shit since day one. He's a bit like, what's his name, that guy in high school... Yeah, that's him. He was a cock, and all. So anyway, come the end of the day, David goes on his merry way back home and I wait around in my classroom for some downtime, if you see what I mean. Cut to four-thirty, however, and the little bastard's remembered that he never

got my signature, so he comes back in to try and catch me. And catch me he does, with my cock half way down this girl's throat. I didn't even notice him, not the faintest idea he was there, but rather than turn around and mind his own business he decides he's gonna whip out his phone and snap some photos. The very next day, I'm getting my shit together for the afternoon classes, jolly as anything, when this fat fuck swaggers in. I'm thinking for Christ's sake, he's always causing me some kind of grief or another, but then he starts waving these pictures around and it suddenly hits me, I realised just how fucked I really am. Next thing, he tells me that unless I make it worth his while he's gonna show them off to all the other teachers, and if that happens I am truly in some serious shit. Now, this kid isn't exactly bright, but I'll be damned if he didn't make me think for a minute. Yeah, I was enjoying my slice of heaven right now, but one way or another my fun was gonna have to end sometime. One way or another I'm back to hating the alarm clock and just trying to make it through another goddamn day for the satisfaction, if you can call it that, of going back home to piss my life up the wall. But what can I do? I wanted to just knock him the fuck out and take his phone off him, but in the middle of the day that'd just make things a million times worse. So, long story short, I end up paying this kid his own body weight in cash – which, by the way, is quite a considerable sum – just to keep his mouth shut. Oh, don't you worry, I made sure he got rid of every last one. He's not smart enough to back that kind of stuff up. But it turns out I'm not paid enough to make this worthwhile, so once I realised that this arrangement I had going with Leah could get me deeply in the shit at any moment I had to sit her down and explain what was going on

the next time she tries it. Luckily for me there was no big song and dance about it, she just listened and left, not a word. Next couple of weeks she skips school more often than not, and when she did turn up she was looking pretty rough, then after a while she disappears altogether. And that was the last I heard of it. No repercussions, no nothing. Everything's just back to how it was. And now, by the looks of it, I'm back to sitting in a bar drinking my nights away with you again. So much for living the good life. Ah well, no drama, I s'pose. That's just the way it goes. Drink up, next round's on me.

Page 2 of 5

ROBIN STYLES

PhD English

A view from the gallery

Towering posts threw pointillist beams
Down ceaseless snowy streets

Stark bright night and patterned light
The curtain revealed
A collection of portraits, solid forms

We waited and were waited on
A red is a red is a redgreen is a yellow cool light on pale azure
sky
A corona of warmth on a swept summer day

Each artwork a funhouse mirror
Throwing the image back at them
Their inner parts distorted monstrously
Revealed furtively, glimpsed, and gone

We orbited each mobile frame
Aping their repeating variations
Until I brushed her skirt
And was swept back into the world
The calm within me ignited
Bristling to the tips of my fingers

We left satisfied, perplexed, exhilarated, sedate, filled up, and
empty,
And stepping towards the bridge and city,
Leaving shadows
In the lamplight
After

RICHARD FALLON

MA Victorian Studies

An Essay on Leicester New Walk Centre, **Anno MMXV**

You leant upon the thun'dring heart of town,
A mottled beast of grey and black and brown;
How un-Promethean a thief:
You stole all light from those who dwelt beneath!
Full pincer-shaped you pinched the arm of man
Proclaiming "Please, ignore me if you can";
But at that blasphemous Babylonian height,
Man's averted eye gave up the fight,
And turned to meet your horseshoe tower
Whose dullness kept him in your power.
A dark eclipse of stone and murky glass:
Who knows how your construction came to pass?
Hoary time speaks not to modern ways
(Ancients would have banned you in their days),
And so your plans remain by man forgot
And in some dusky cobwebbed cabinet rot;
Time now not to point the hand of law
But rather return life as t'was before.
The crater gapes where once you set your roots.
Your corpse is ash – the air it now pollutes
And paper phantoms waltz by in the dust
Around a bleeding wound in the earth's crust.
Are lessons learnt? Has Proserpine returned?
Dark tower: has your vampire been burned?
The bright city looks upon the sun

And prays the architectural battle's won,
But the damage of those decades will remain
Until the monster Brutalism's finally slain.

JOSH WYNN
BA English

The Stable Boy

Don Vasco de Vinaros was a drunk. Each week a cartload of wine would arrive at his country villa, sent by a Genoese merchant in Valencia. The driver would come each Sunday, early in the morning so that he would not have to experience any of Vinaros' rages. The Don would be in bed, hung-over from finishing the last of the Sangiovese wine the night before. The driver unloaded the cart, taking each barrel to the wine cellar with care and then left as soon as possible. Sometimes the stable boy would help him unload the cargo whilst all the other servants were asleep, and the driver would give the boy one of his oranges.

'Señor Matthias, what is your horse called?'

'I haven't named it, Tomás. It isn't mine.'

'Whose is it? Señor Vincenzo's?'

'The horse is his, this is his cart, and I am his man.'

They were silent for a while as they unloaded the rest of the cart. Some of the barrels were very heavy. The courtyard was cool at this time in the morning and the sun was blocked by the tall main building of Villa. In the middle of it there stood a marble statue of the Madonna, head tilted slightly down and to the right; her fingertips were lightly together in prayer for all the many sinful souls. Her face carried a slightly misshapen smile where the craftsman must have slipped. The Villa itself had been built from white stone, but was covered in dirt from years of neglect; there were not enough servants to maintain it all. Highest of all was the bell tower in which

the boy slept and watched eagerly for the cart each Sunday. Before Matthias left they spoke a final time:

‘Señor?’

‘Si?’

‘I do not think the horse is Señor Vincenzo’s.’

Matthias laughed. ‘Well I hope for the horse’s sake it is not Don Vinaros’ property?’

‘No, it is not Señor. It is God’s.’

‘Oh?’

‘Si, Señor. God made it, and it is His. God made me, and I am His. God made you, so you are His.’

‘God may have made us, but he does not pay us, boy. Don Vinaros feeds you, and Señor Vincenzo feeds me.’

‘But what about Hell?’ He said, looking toward the Madonna.

‘By the Saints I’d sooner make my case to God than tell Vasco de Vinaros what is and isn’t his.’

He gave the boy an orange and then drove the cart off back to Valencia.

The next week, the cart did not come.

Vinaros arose that Sunday well after midday, and even then he was still drunk from the night before. As usual he went down to the wine cellar to check that his drink had been delivered and when he found it empty, he lashed out in fury, his face as purple as the summer night. He rampaged through the villa, tearing through each room, looking to find a servant to beat and interrogate, but they had all left hours before. They knew what was to come. All except the stable boy, who stood shaking by one of the horses as the Don threw open the great wooden door of the stables.

‘Where are the others?’

‘I do not know, Señor.’ the boy quivered at the stench of the dirty old man.

‘*No me jodas*, where are they?’

‘I do not know, Señor.’

The Don struck him hard across the face and the boy fell backwards into a pile of shit.

‘Get me a horse!’

The Don returned to the villa for about ten minutes; when he came back he was wearing his light Conquistador armour from his time fighting under Cortez. He also wore a sheathed sword, a buckler, a pistol and carried a musket and a skin of wine. The stable boy brought the horse out into the sunlit courtyard. Vinaros pulled out his pistol and shot him in the middle of the chest, mounted the horse and rode out of the villa’s gates as the young boy lay gasping on the cobbles. His blood made little streams in the channels between the stone. The white Madonna looked down upon him, smiling still.

Serpentine

So here we are again-
Time to shed the Skin

When young,
It seemed like one a week
You know how it is
Part of growing, I suppose?

But you get older
And the Skin sticks around
Becomes part of you
But not forever--

A year, maybe two
Sometimes you think
'This time forever'
But you know the truth--

I'll strip you
You'll strip me
That's our way
That's the way.

One day we'll be one
The next I'll shake you off
Or you, me.

Maybe I'll eat the Skin
Out of necessity?
No,
Out of Spite.

TIMOTHY MARTIN

Cert HE Creative Writing

Multitudes

At 12.57pm, last Monday I missed seeing your face by the narrowest of narrow margins. At that moment I was distracted, looking straight up into the sky, by a plane going overhead. It was flying very low and it seemed to me too low as though there might be a problem. No doubt it was just on its approach to the relatively nearby airport.

Nonetheless, it caught my attention and in doing so meant that I missed you. I saw only your retreating back, a check shirt under a thin grey jumper, blue jeans and barely laced up shoes surely a couple of weeks from falling apart altogether. This was my only impression of you.

In another universe, these events happened in much the same way. Maybe the sun shone a little stronger, maybe I was stood a little further up the street and so got a longer glance at your retreat. Minor discrepancies and in this case the kind that made no difference.

In the next universe events have conspired to have a parade marching along the road. The noise and celebrations are such that neither I nor anyone else notice the plane flying overhead, even at its low altitude. We are distracted by the colours, the bright movement, the dancing and the singing. We are distracted and I am distracted. So that when I notice you, you're already lost in the crowd. Willingly pulled into

the party already much further down the street. A flash of check shirt amongst the flowers and song.

It becomes clear to me that, in several universes, I have died long before this event. As far as I can work out. Accidents mostly.

A tragic drowning as a small child when my head was clipped by passing row boat unobserved by me until it was too late.

A fall, too far up for me to have survived, given the angle at which I landed. Too high up, foolishly trying to prove myself.

A car crash as a teenager in a car that I got into despite knowing the driver was close to insensible with drink. Fortunately, I make this mistake in only one universe.

This knowledge is given to me in the form of a sudden, sharp memory. All the images, the pain and feelings experienced. The rush of air. The view of the beach so apparently far away. The blurred, incoherent but striking feeling that the car is out of control.

All of these come together like a glass-framed picture reassembling itself and lurch sickeningly into my conscious thought as of a film reel projecting behind my eyes. All these moments desperately bundled up and forced into my understanding.

It is this that forms the distraction and I'm only dimly aware of you walking past as I shake my head frantically, trying to dislodge the absolute certainty that I have died several times before. The feeling persists, however and as I fall to ground hyperventilating, eyes stinging with tears and the certainty grows. I am aware of dying many times over. On these few

occasions now being stabbed into my waking thought it's clear that I have died, as it were, before my time. That in all other lives, all other universes, I have simply continued to live my allotted span.

Though now the little things I have done with that time seem painfully insignificant. The families I have raised, people I have loved or tried to love are fading in the wake of a slowly disappearing check shirt. The title of my favourite film or book lost, even as I frantically try to hold onto them, because by now the memories and realisation have pushed me down to lie prostrate on the ground and the world just outside my eyes and ears is overwhelmed with the sound of footsteps and the sight of shoes, walking away, surely a couple of weeks from falling apart altogether.

This time the plane is too low. Far too low and, it seems, heading towards us on the ground at speed. Later on I will have the feeling that the tip of the plane was locked on to a point exactly halfway between you and I.

It is 12.57pm and I am distracted by a disaster falling out of the sky. I see you only briefly, shirt and jumper and jeans and shoes fleeing with many others to what I hope must be safety.

I am not running, despite my strongest instinct to do so. By now I'm aware of this moment recurring, indeed it seems to be the only consistent moment in each of our lives. Each of the universes or the same universe, I can't tell. I am staring up into the sky as it seems I have done so many times before. There are one or two voices shouting at anyone within earshot to run. I can hear them in the distance but it seems to be irrelevant. I have to stand here. I have to stand here and

stare into the sky or fall to ground or be long since buried underground but if I am here I have to be, always will be, distracted. I have to stand here and always narrowly miss seeing your face. I have to miss your face, which I have never seen. Which I will never see. There is a crescendo of engine noise at that point, a roar that's distant but narrowing the space between it and the ground and the buildings and me. The sound is overtaking the machine, overwhelming the streets and I feel as though it will crash first, destroying everything long before the passenger jet will have a chance.

Your hair. I realise now that I haven't mentioned your hair. It's long, almost to the middle of your back, and dark. It's dark almost, but not quite, to the point of being black. This does not, has not so far, varied. Sometimes it's tied up, sometimes down, occasionally it's draped over the back of the rucksack you're wearing. Though not often. Once, only once which is why I think it sticks in my mind, it was tied up in a knot very high on your head.

The moment fades in again, as it generally does, with my becoming aware of my own footsteps. The heavy boots I always seem to favour, making a dull thud on the pavement. I'm certain there was a life that occurred, a little over twenty years or so, before this but it seems unimportant now. There is the deep sound of an air plane overhead and despite this noise I'm at least aware of someone walking not far behind me. The sun is shining, though not fiercely.

It is 12.57pm, last Monday.



RUIZHE YAN, BA POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

JAMES HICKMAN

BA English

Compass

Signposts only suggest solutions. One more
Conundrum. He's late again; time for
Another fag. The lamp posts below are our new
Beacons... so who needs the stars? Breathe out
The subtle indecisions that had you stuck. Breathe
In the cold as it wraps you up. I suppose we've
Got time; the bell won't sound for
Another few hours yet. Though the coercive
Thirst for coal-dashed honey is swelling, the
Occasional thrum of cars distracts the tongue.
Another lungful of thought - The Great British Pastime.
The chippy is full again. A chat with Pete
While kebab meat is bought for the kids – although
The youths in the jitty will settle for a toke.
Someday soon I'll make him wait his turn
On this spangle-soaked bench
Which matches the carpet of frost.
Pull out the Zippo to shine a light on another revelation.
If signposts only suggest solutions, his
Should read "*punctuality*".

Weighted Chains

A chirpy witness to the most mundane
Of daily tasks, he rules his wooden throne
And keeps the pace of life up there alone,
Until he's charged to yell the count again.
It's then his vista hits him and it's plain
That deep within his shrill repeated tone
Exists a soul just waiting to be shown
What he has missed whilst he was wound in vain.
A flightless bird is all he thinks himself,
Unknown to him the worth of keeping time.
If only he could leave and join the flock!
An object to be kept up on the shelf,
A background noise, a simple hourly chime;
Confined in chains to always tick and tock.

JOSH WRIGHT
BA English and American Studies

*'The Amber Light' was the winner of the
2015 John Coleman Creative Writing Prize.*

The Amber Light

Sarah stood at the top of the hill and looked around. Everything she could see was grey, as if covered by a shroud: the naked trees, the deserted highway, the dilapidated gas station that lay about a mile distant from her location. She too was grey, a lifetime of itinerancy in the pallid wastes of that country having buffeted her with dust and ash, staining her clothes. Her cropped hair was filthy and her face waxen. She heard a scrabbling behind her and turned towards the source of the noise. A man swaddled in rags and the tattered military fatigues of a nation whose name was long forgotten greeted her with a nod and a grunt.

“Find anything, Dave?”

“Nah. Looks like it had been cleared out months ago. Judging by the amount of dust on the floor I don’t think anyone has been in there since.”

Dave came to stand alongside his travelling partner and from their vantage point they gazed out with weary eyes at the desolation that compassed them. An environment sapped almost entirely of life, save these two figures silhouetted against the pale sky. Sarah gestured at the gas station.

“What about that place?”

“Unlikely, but it’s worth a shot. I’m famished.”

“Alright then, let’s go.”

They descended the scree with care, half-crouching, holding their hands out to steady themselves, sending rocks cascading down towards the base of the hill as they went. When they reached level ground Dave began to trudge off. Sarah remained behind, wiping her eye.

“Hang on,” she said. Dave turned around.

“You need to put your goggles on. I’ve told you enough times.”

“You know I can’t see well out of them, they’re too blurry. They’re not as good as yours.”

Dave sighed. “Come on.”

The crunch of their footsteps and the whistle of the wind were the only sounds they heard on that short journey. As they got closer to the gas station, both travellers made a note of the boarded-up windows. It was unusual for a building to have maintained such defences, but not out of the question - perhaps there was a side entrance. Regardless, this was not a world in which it paid to be presumptuous, and both individuals removed their pistols from their side holsters and checked their ammo before continuing. Heart rates rose. Stomachs growled. The pair had been hiking for three days across barren terrain, subsisting on tins of beans scavenged from an overturned truck they had come across a week prior. Their supply of water purification tablets was exhausted, and yesterday Sarah had coughed up a gelatinous string of yellow bile. From Dave’s calculations, it was clear that they were covering less and less distance each day. Both knew that time was running out, though neither of them would admit it. When they started to come across discarded hosepipes and the decrepit monolith of the price board loomed in front of

them, Dave raised his right hand and came to a stop. Sarah followed suit. They listened.

"I can't hear anything," she said.

"That doesn't mean no-one's here."

Dave squatted and studied the building, but the only sign of movement was the torn and faded Coca-Cola sign above the door fluttering in the wind.

"Stay close."

They advanced across the forecourt holding their guns before them like priests wielding crucifixes. Their grips tightened as they approached the entrance and realised the planks of wood barricading the windows were a new addition. Sarah inspected the nails and found no sign of rust. She ran her hand along the grain of the wood to test if it had rotted.

"Fuck," she said.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. Just got a splinter. But either there's people in here, or there's people coming back here. Let's try and be quick."

They circled the gas station but found no other means of access, and returned to the front door. Dave sized it up. It had evidently been in place much longer than the boards and was far from impenetrable, despite being reinforced with scrap metal. He motioned for Sarah to move aside and then took a few steps back. With a running jump he launched himself at the door with enough force to send it crashing onto the floor inside. Sarah held her gun aloft and peered into the gloom, ignoring the moans of her grounded accomplice.

"See anything?" Dave asked, getting back to his feet.

"I think there's a jar next to the register that might have

something in it. No sign of anyone though.”

Dave followed her into the building and looked around to make sure. The shelves were bare and there was little of note other than the yellowing hallmarks of a prelapsarian age that were plastered over the walls. CHEESEBURGERS, 2 FOR \$5. THE BEST GAS PRICES THIS SIDE OF THE MISSISSIPPI. VISIT SCENIC LANCASTER FALLS. He read these words with puzzlement, then turned to Sarah.

“Okay. But stay alert.”

“Am I ever anything else?”

Dave rolled his eyes but this act of derision went unnoticed, concealed by the lenses of his goggles. Sarah, with a faint smirk on her face, began picking through piles of debris on the floor. Dave walked over to the cash register to inspect the jar. A thin ray of light pierced the room from a gap in one of the boards nailed over the windows and he held the object up to it so as to easier ascertain its contents. He could see, through a thin coating of dust on its exterior, that it was filled almost to the brim with a faintly luminous amber substance. He unscrewed the lid. In all of Dave’s thirty-four years eking out an existence on the godforsaken planet he was on, never had he experienced such an intoxicatingly sweet aroma as the one that entered his nostrils when he opened that jar. His eyes widened and he inhaled deeply.

“Sarah, come over here. Quick.”

Sarah cast aside the muffler she was weighing in her hand and walked over to Dave, who was standing with mouth agape and cradling the jar in his hands as if it contained ambrosia. She could smell it before she even reached him, and her pace quickened.

“What... what is it?” she asked.

“I think it’s food, y’know. But it doesn’t smell like any food I’ve ever eaten.”

“No, me neither. But I’m going in.”

Sarah swung her rucksack from her shoulders and started rummaging.

“What are you looking for?”

“A spoon, of course – it looks kind of goopy. I’m a classy gal, you know that. Ah, here we go.”

She retrieved the utensil and plunged it into the jar. When she withdrew it a long, glistening strand of the syrup adhered to the underside of the spoon, diminishing in thickness as Sarah raised it to her mouth before finally splitting and tumbling back into the receptacle, leaving a solitary globule dangling precariously as her lips closed around it. Dave watched this scene with trepidation but not a little envy.

“So? How is it?”

Dave’s question was answered for him as he saw Sarah’s eyes roll back in ecstasy. Without saying a word she handed him the spoon which he took up greedily.

“Fuck me,” Dave said, tasting the liquid. “That is fucking incredible. Fuck. Fuck! But what is it?”

“I don’t know Dave, and in a way I don’t want to know. I don’t care if it’s congealed human placenta; this is the best thing we’ve found since those morphine tablets. Maybe even better. It’s certainly tastier.”

Sarah waited for Dave to give some assent but it never came. He was staring past her and the smile that the still unidentified nectar had put on his face was gone.

“Oh come on Dave, lighten up. It doesn’t really matter if

we don't know what's in it – at this stage we should be taking all that we can get. And also --“

“Shut up. Turn around.”

She did so and then realised why Dave had fallen silent. His eyes were trained on a trapdoor behind the counter that the cash register rested on. It was open.

They looked at each other. No sound had come from the trapdoor to suggest that there was any living thing within the depths to which it led, but Dave still raised his finger to his lips. Sarah nodded, and the two sighted their weapons. They followed a trail of amber breadcrumbs formed by specks of the liquid that had dripped onto the floor, and upon reaching the hatch they saw that its handle was daubed in the stuff. Dave touched it: cold, dry, but fairly fresh. He swallowed hard. Sarah kept glancing behind her and was visibly agitated.

“I think we should leave,” she whispered.

“No,” was Dave's blunt response. “If there's more of this stuff down here then it could keep us going for who knows how long. We have to try. For you especially. You look like shit, Sarah. You need to get your strength back.”

Sarah bristled but she knew that he was right. Nevertheless, this time she could not hide her fear. She had never had to kill anyone before – she'd shot people, yes, but only in self-defence – and the prospect of ending the life of another human being just so she could continue hers was immoral as well as frightening, in her eyes. Dave knew this. And Dave had killed before. That was one of the reasons she stuck with him, but it wasn't the main reason. Not anymore.

“Okay. Let's fucking do this,” she said.

Dave managed a wry smile at this admirable attempt at machismo. Sarah wasn't the bravest partner he'd ever had on his travels, nor the strongest. She got on his nerves. She could be a bitch at times. But somehow she had lasted longer with him than all the others. They were all dead, and though she may have looked a tad cadaverous, she wasn't dead yet. That fact was one of the few things Dave was thankful for in such a grim world.

"Yeah. Let's fucking do this," he replied.

The pair attached their archaic wind-up flashlights to the barrels of their pistols and started descending the ladder. Darkness began to envelop them after a few rungs and before long the only light was of their own making, except for a dim glow from the gas station above. Dave had gone ahead of Sarah and it was he who first picked up the scent of their quarry. Heartened by the knowledge that their search would not be in vain (but also eager to get themselves back to the surface), they moved faster and faster, the smell becoming stronger and stronger the further down they went. When they reached the bottom they found themselves at the end of a dank tunnel, the floor moist underfoot. They pushed on. All they could hear was the sound of their own heavy breathing and the drip, drip, drip of water from the ceiling. Eventually they turned a corner and saw a light emanating from an aperture about forty yards distant. It was the same colour as the liquid, except diffused about the tunnel so that it illuminated the brickwork, making it seem as if the route to Dave and Sarah's salvation was paved with gold. They halted briefly and strained their ears, but heard nothing untoward. They continued onward.

Sarah had to cover her mouth to muffle the gasp she emitted when she entered that room. Dave was equally incredulous. Before them was an immense chamber hewn out of the bedrock, a host of candles flickering in iron braziers and countless jars of the amber liquid all about, the light refracted through them, bathing the space in a pale orange glow. Despite this hoard their eyes were immediately drawn to the centre of the hall and a great statue of some grotesque alien creature that towered above them, black as the darkness through which they had just journeyed, its six limbs splayed as if about to pounce upon the intruders who had come to desecrate its shrine, gigantic wings erupting from its back, antennae rigid as basalt columns, compound eyes horrifically exotic, and most terrifying of all, a hideously engorged stinger thrust out from its lower section with its point aimed directly at the entrance in which Dave and Sarah stood petrified.

“Oh my God,” they said in unison. Neither could move. They were utterly transfixed.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here, Dave. Please.”

Dave was aghast but somehow managed to compose himself.

“We’re taking some of these jars with us. Move.”

The temple seemed summoned up out of a nightmare, but they steeled themselves enough to move into it and busy themselves with filling their rucksacks, glancing back at the abhorrent icon as they did so. When they did manage to avert their eyes they saw that the floor was strewn with paper. Sarah took a piece up in her hand and furrowed her brow at the thick black lettering, which read: BEES DECLARED EXTINCT –

WORLD ECOSYSTEM DESTROYED SAY SCIENTISTS – WAR FOR RESOURCES WAGES ON. Below this was a picture of a creature that looked startlingly similar to the one erected on the plinth.

“Dave, what’s a bee?”

“A bee? It’s a letter, what are you on about?”

“No, B-E-E. I think it’s an animal. Or at least it used to be. Take a look at one of these papers.”

Dave bent down and studied the same headline. He stared at the picture and then looked up at the statue that dominated the room. The cogs in his brain whirled and clanked.

“Jesus. This is how we got to where we are, Sarah. This is why the Earth is the way it is. You hear all kinds of shit about what it was like before the wars, and apparently, at some point, we had bees. Animals. Life, Sarah. Whoever built this place must be worshipping them.”

Sarah let a jar fall to the floor as she attempted to process this information. The smash echoed around the sanctum, then all was silent - until a single unholy screech pierced the air. Preoccupied with the jars and the papers and the effigy of the bee, they had failed to notice a small opening at the back of the hall from which the sound originated. The devotees had arrived.

From out of this opening in the rock came forth a procession of emaciated humanoid figures, scuttling across the floor on their hands and feet. They were completely naked, their skin ghostly white and stretched so taut that the bones seemed to protrude from their bodies. Their faces were contorted with blind rage, and they were screaming. Suddenly an ear-splitting trumpet call out of the fissure from whence they

came announced the arrival of the queen, her cortege bearing her upon a crude palanquin. She was not like the others, and she was not like the statue; she was something else entire. If the drones could be identified as having once been human, the same could not be said for the figurehead of this subterranean cult. She lay immobile, her body disfigured and completely hairless, the stomach horrendously bloated and distended, two atrophied limbs grafted onto her sides to bring her form closer to her insectoid god, and her eyeballs long since gouged out to give the impression of the vacant, emotionless organs of the bee.

“Run!” shouted Dave.

Sarah did as she was told this time, firing into the crowd of feral assailants as she did so. Dave did the same, picking off three that had almost set upon his partner. They sprinted out of the temple and down the tunnel, Dave stopping to reload and fell another two of the creatures, brain matter and viscera splattering the walls. When they were in sight of the ladder he felt a claw rake down his back and he dropped down onto his stomach, his pistol skidding away from him.

“Get out Sarah, get out!” he cried while reaching around and snapping the drone’s arm like a piece of balsa wood, but another soon lurched upon him with its sickening simian gait and tore into his stomach. Dave unsheathed a knife from his leg and plunged it into the beast’s neck, but not before having his entrails ripped out of his abdomen. Sarah swivelled and returned to his side.

“Oh fuck, oh fuck, don’t fucking die on me Dave, please, please don’t die you beautiful bastard.”

Blood was oozing from his wound. “I’m done Sarah,” he

told her. "Get out right now. Save yourself. You'll be alright."

Tears welled up in her eyes and she kissed the man she loved for the first and last time, but there was no time for an embrace. She could hear the shrieks of the drones and the patter of their bare feet getting ever closer to her. She turned away from Dave and ascended the ladder two rungs at a time. From behind her she could hear shots, and then she heard no more. She emerged into the light of the gas station and flung the trapdoor shut, twisting the handle tight and sliding a nearby shelf on top. She darted through the aisles and out into the sun, running as fast as she could, legs pumping like pistons, her face damp, her voice hoarse. When she reached the hilltop from which her and Dave had espied the building mere hours earlier she collapsed and began to sob uncontrollably.

She sat in the same position until sundown and then wiped one final tear from her eye and stood up. Staring down at the site that was now Dave's resting place, she thought of him entombed there and of how unassuming its façade for the horror that it held. She turned aside, checked her ammunition, and walked back into the wasteland, making sure to put her goggles on.

SUZI SHIMWELL
PhD Creative Writing

Phil

Phil's girlfriend is in Bahrain,
so we drink coffee in the Arts,
stroll past the Fitz
and stop outside St Peter's to look at the books.

After the Mill Pond we hug
and he climbs into his mother's run-around.

'See you at the party' we call to each other
and then he stops,
rolls down the window
and asks,
'will there be hot girls there?
Cool chicks.'
Tongue is out now.
'Hot chicks.'
It waggles a little dance of delight.
'After all', he says 'I'm geographically single'.

Tomorrow

Tomorrow I will be good;
I will not smoke or drink
but instead floss regularly
in-between yoga sessions.

I will not enjoy procrastination.
Eschewing all cake
and trash TV,
I will eat carrot sticks
and quinoa
after I have blitzed the house
and annihilated my to-do list.

I will sleep at ten
and rise at six.
I will jog three miles
before having fruit for breakfast.
I won't need breakfast,
I will be a machine.

I will concentrate on succeeding;
working harder, smarter, longer.

Tomorrow I will be good;
the rest of today therefore
does not count.

KEVAN MANWARING

PhD Creative Writing

Sycamore Gap

An incursion of the wild into this regimented place,
where the wall of prose leaps into living poetry.

Stately crown of a sycamore
held in the hollow of the crag's cleft.
On the Pictish side a paroxysm of hawthorn,
a banshee frozen in mid-flight.

This is a fairy place – I can feel it in the stone's spine
the breathing wood, the twisting wind,
each with its interlocking fingerprint of contours.

I praise the day, pray for a dry spell,
as perhaps the Brigantes would have done
in their native burr, claggy as the Northumberland heath,
or even the sandaled sentry in his rain-lashed turret
gazing over the untamed north,
cursing the Hyperborean weather,
and thinking of the warmer hills of home
in Tuscany, Asia Minor, North Africa,
calling him like a lover to bed.

Auxillary, centurion, officer,
each praying to his personal icon –
Jove, Fortuna, Mithras, Mars-Nodentis,
or the smugly weather-proof Cucullati,

wise to the ways of this blear place.

Here I can imagine the Old Ones breaking through.
Here, there was a transgression from the Otherworld.
A chink in the steel of Imperial Rome,
a gap in the phalanx. Spiritus ex machina.

You cannot keep the other out forever.

They drew a straight line across the land.
Divided, to rule.
But the wild will always find a way in –
the boundaries vole, hare, kestrel, eagle ignore.
A doe bounds over a gate, a stoat steals through the night.

Immutable badger runs of the ancient Britons.
A native wife, allowing herself to be conquered to win in the
end.

Roman seed mingling with British blood, a child taught
the Old Ways from her mother's knee –
a phrase, a secret name, a custom.
So the ghost of a lost kingdom lingers.
And, at the gap, the wall seems to smile.

Eildon Tree

Words, vibrant as rowan berries,
hang poised for the plucking
from the quickening air.
Here, at the Rhymer's Stone,
worlds meet
and poetry is born.

The sun shines its benedictions down,
a fey breeze stirs the hedgerows.
A nameless bird sings a namless song,
is replied to.

Stillness after the city.
Meeting a muse for a coffee,
hoarse from the Fringe,
heart sore from love's disappointments.
She points me the way on the battered atlas –
three roads to choose from:
cairn or kirk or loch.

Roots snake deep into the peat,
draw up the sap of inspiration
conjured from the alchemy of
sunlight, rain, wind and night.

I lay like Thomas of Ercildoune on Huntlie Bank,
and the Queen of Elfland rides into view –
a woman cyclist in her lycra and helmet,
exchanging a bit of banter with two old characters

about the secrets of the gates
known only to them.

Beneath the Eildons' three peaks –
split it is said by a demon that
that old wizard Michael Scot confounded,
still to this day failing to make rope
from the sands of the Tweed –
the magical and the mundane rub shoulders.
The upper and lower get acquainted.

Climb up behind the Queen,
let her guide you to her hidden kingdom.
The jingle of her rein sends you into a trance.
Long hair coiling, blood lips enticing,
the tendrils of her song
piercing your heart.

Follow her siren call
to the end of all that you know.

Be prepared to not be
the same upon your return.

Fortingall

Ancient yew, walled off now
to protect it from relic hunters.
The pastoral is shattered
by the smash of broken glass,
empties from the hotel.
The trash is taken away,
leaving peace to settle like needles.

Five thousand years you have stood here,
half a millenia young by the time
the pharaohs got their act together
and raised their pyramids on slave-sweat.

You have seen the megalith builders flicker past,
the crannog dwellers, the Pictish kings,
the petty feuds between clans, between nations.

Grown an inch while the Normansen
castled the serfs, while waves of invaders
broke on our damp coasts.

Put out a few limbs as pretenders and heroes,
inventors and authors, archers shot past.

You stopped counting by the time
the souvenir collectors came along,
the arsonist children, funeral processions,
Victorian antiquarians, New Age seekers.

And now me. Meeting a colourful potter
from Derbyshire – bright pink fleece,
blue hair, climbing over the wall
to fetch me a twig like some nest-building bird,
before I knew her intent.
Yet, the relic's as dead as a saint.

A bird's ring-tone high in a branch
announces the moment's news,
but I feel as old as the yew now,
weary from climbing a mountain.
I must went my way south, wielding
my branch of Io. May it guide me through
the underworld of this dark Earth.



HELEN GERRARD, BA HISTORY OF ART WITH ENGLISH



HELEN GERRARD, BA HISTORY OF ART WITH ENGLISH

SAM STENARD

Erasmus Student

*'Mountain Lake (1938)' was the joint winner
of the 2015 G S Fraser Poetry Prize.*

Mountain Lake (1938)

The second floor of London's museum
For modern art has guided me through rooms
Colorless and strange-- watched by Picasso's
Refracted women gazing from ying-yang faces,
And the tired ribs of Pigeon-Chested Agosta--

To the shadow of a mountain lake
Whose scaled-surface offered solace
To the unborn Dali's mother and father
As they sought to replace their firstborn son
Carried away by night in fever's arms:
He too named Salvador.

How strange to be the young Dali,
Led past sunlit graves with flowers
In your mother's hand, to a stone
Cut with your own perfect name.
How heavy the burden of replacing--

And how dim the gloom of that mountain lake
Whose quiet tide soundtracked your conception,
Made to fill the bed and clothes of a small boy
You never met, yet whose hollow steps
You've been tasked to make your own.

Yet the soundless voice of this eternal
Child deafens your existence;
For how can you know, when your mother's voice
Beckons you, it is not he she calls,
Imagining that first tragedy undone?

And how can you know, as your footsteps
Hurry to her, it is not he she hears--
That mountain lake a still spectre
Haunting only a dream--
And a small and ghostly voice saying:
Here I am?

R. L. EVANS

MA English

Clock Heart

Once upon a time there was a Horologist.

The Horologist liked nothing more than to examine intricate clock-workings and fix them. Which was why he chose to be a horologist, he thought. Oh he dabbled here and there, with wind-up toys and the like, but he always returned to clocks, in the end.

Little pocket-watches were his favourite. He liked the gold ones the most, but he never objected if it was *not* gold. He liked it when they hung, elegantly, out of waistcoats, time and body linked by one fluid chain. His was nestled in his breast pocket, ticking away against his heart. His grandfather had given it to him when he was just a kit. *It's been in our family for generations*, he told him, his whiskers twitching with pride. The Horologist patted it in a sub-conscious act of respect; his grandfather had died at the ripe old age of fourteen, from kidney failure. *It happens to us all*, his mother said, her ears drooping in misery; *it never gets easier though*.

One day a girl came into his shop. She said, 'I have a problem', and then tugged at the door handle which protruded from her chest. The Horologist's eyes widened as her rib-cage swung open. She remained indifferent as her lungs expanded and contracted in perfect respiratory order, oblivious to their violent exposure. But once he was over the initial shock, he observed that instead of a normal human heart, she possessed an antique, brass-faced clock. It was immediately clear why she had come to him; the tiny clock-

hands were stationary, the mechanism flailing back and forth, chugging away but getting nowhere.

He twitched his nose in quiet contemplation. *It is a... tricky case*, he admitted. He hadn't seen a clock-heart in – how long was it now – three years. His grandfather had dealt with it as it was just too advanced for him at the time.

'But can you do something?' Asked the broken clock-hearted girl.

He would certainly do his best, he assured her, closing her ribcage with a gentle push. He licked his paws clean and bounded from his examination stool. Despite his confident words, his cottontail twitched with worry. His mind raced with technicalities, tool requirements and, naturally, the probable consequences of failure. This was not a 'normal' clock, although it looked innocuous enough. He prided himself on his success-rate with 'hopeless' cases; he was even admired for it by his colleagues at the Institute. But this was not something he had dealt with before. He scratched his neck with his back foot in distraction. What did his grandfather do?

'Sorry, but what next?' The girl had sat down next to him, her face pressing close to his nose. He blinked his clear blue eyes at her, hypnotised by her kind soul. In a way, she reminded him of his mother; she was also beautifully sad.

You will have to come back tomorrow, he instructed, *I need to do some research*.

She nodded, her face unreadable. Then, after rummaging around in her backpack, she pulled out a fat, purple carrot. The Horologist automatically licked his muzzle but regained his self-control just as she placed it at his feet. Instead, he bowed his head in appreciation; *the purple ones are*

my favourite... but would you not prefer to pay afterwards?

She smiled a small, indulgent smile. 'Consider it an advance.'

The Horologist gave his face a wash with his quick, clever paws; he had been sat at his workbench for hours, scouring his grandfather's journals for information regarding the clock-heart patient of three years ago. He remembered that boy, solemn and noble, with the same sad beauty that the girl possessed. At that time he had only just graduated to Under-Horologist, which meant he could repair the more commonplace timepieces. So when the boy had approached him, supra-calm, and opened his ribcage, he was too shocked to do anything but stare.

At that moment his grandfather stepped forward. His fur was grey and wiry with age but his ears still stood proud, like members of the Queen's Guard. The then Under-Horologist admired his grandfather's professionalism, which enabled him to appear taller than his hunched body actually was. But he also admired his capacity for empathy and for what was known as 'humanity', despite the fact that it was a quality that humans rarely possessed. His own ears twitched upwards as his rabbit-heart became swollen with love and pride; but as he was a Lop they would never reach those Netherland heights.

This is a very special case, his grandfather had said to the boy, his muzzle working over his teeth. *You will have to come back tomorrow*. With those words, the Horologist never saw the boy again; at his grandfather's insistence he hadn't worked the following day, but it was never mentioned again.

A months after the boy's visit, he watched as his

grandfather's health declined. He became less and less agile; his eyesight deteriorated; his teeth overgrew; his kidneys failed him.

But the Horologist didn't like to think of that painful time. He preferred to remember his grandfather when he was at his best, always reading a Russian novel and drinking tea from his favourite porcelain cup. He used to tell wonderful tales about animals and humans. He remembered, as a young rabbit, sitting on the edge of his haunches while he listened to his grandfather talk. He thought that he would be there forever; book in one paw, cup in the other, telling him to avoid young human girls in red cloaks or – even worse – blue dresses. *They will only bring you trouble*, he said.

He was right about that; this girl with the clock-heart was a definite headache. He absent-mindedly turned the pages of yet another journal, lost in thought. So far he had found nothing on how to fix her. He stomped his back foot in frustration.

Don't use your head, use your heart. His grandfather used to say this to him during his apprenticeship when there was an obvious solution to a problem. He was often guilty of overcomplicating things; in horology the simplest solutions were the most effective, and the most beautiful.

Just then, his eyes flicked across a sentence which caused him pause. On second inspection he felt his heart skip a beat. He checked again; yes, it was definitely what he was looking for. It was a quotation, copied out meticulously in his grandfather's precise hand, probably from one of his many books on lore. The Horologist straightened up in his seat, determined to understand everything.

Humans are delicate creatures, with delicate hearts, (even more so than the hearts of rabbits.) If the wrong thing is said or done at the wrong time, a human heart can suffer immeasurable damage and freeze at that moment, replaying the hurt over and over again. Sometimes, if the misdeed is particularly traumatic, the gears of the heart stop completely, and they die.

- Anatomy of the Human Heart, O.W. Lowry, p. 187.

The Horologist blinked, his ears flat with worry; he hadn't realised that the case was this serious. He worked to master his fear, and continued reading. His grandfather would have surely written about the 'treatment' – he was too precise a rabbit not to have done. And there it was, in the bottom corner of the page: *The only way to repair a broken clock-heart is to love the patient as only a rabbit can love a human.*

When the Horologist read these words, his fur and whiskers stood on end. Suddenly his grandfather's illness made complete sense. He shrank down and covered his eyes with his paws; if it was biologically possible, he would have sobbed. To love a human was to devote your entire self to them. They didn't mean to be selfish, he was sure, but a human heart was very rarely satisfied with what it had. A rabbit had to give and give and give until he had nothing left for himself. Then, utterly exhausted by it all, their bodies began to shut down. Then they died.

The next day, the Horologist and the girl stood face-to-face, avoiding each other's gaze.

All around them the Horologist's collection of clocks tick-tocked away the seconds, then minutes of silence. *Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock...*

The girl cleared her throat. ‘So... what now?’ The Horologist’s muzzle worked over his teeth in agitated response. He just didn’t know where to start. Oh, he knew the theory well enough by now, having spent the entirety of last night raiding his grandfather’s library. For example, he knew that he would have to forget that he ever was a horologist. What was it that he had read? *The rabbit must remove everything from his old life, which is represented by his clothing. He must go to the human, naked, in order for them to forge a new identity for him. He must be whatever the human wishes for and needs; he must forget everything he ever was.* The Horologist inwardly sighed; he would have to leave his waistcoat behind, but even worse than that...he would have to part with his grandfather’s heirloom pocket-watch.

At first it would be ok, or at least that was what the books had told him. The human would love the rabbit just as much, if not more than the rabbit loved the human. This wouldn’t last, of course, as humans were fickle, shallow creatures. As soon as their clock-hearts had been repaired by the rabbit’s affection, they would go off in search of more interesting and engaging things, leaving the rabbit with nothing. Rabbit hearts are just as easily broken as human hearts. The abandonment would make the rabbit sick with grief. The inevitable conclusion of such a union was death.

Tick-tock-tick-tock-tick...

But never mind all that. His main problem was starting; his grandfather had been decidedly silent on how the procedure was done.

‘Sorry to bother you...’ She looked awkward, as if it was uncomfortable for her to be in her own skin. Pulled from his reverie, he cocked his head to the side, inviting her to go on.

‘I... I wanted to give you this...’ she held up a beautiful waistcoat made of pale blue calico. It was edged with cream silk braiding and had a row of shiny brass buttons down the front. And there, on the right-hand side, was a perfectly pocket-watch sized pocket.

Speechless, he looked at the lovely garment. ‘You don’t have to accept it!’ She appeared to be suffering from an acute case of wanting the ground to swallow her. ‘I just... well... I just felt so bad.’ She pointedly looked at the wall behind his head, her eyes following the *tak-tak-tak* of a pendulum. The Horologist took the waistcoat in his paws; he could see that it was hand-sewn from the slight irregularity in the stitches. He knew fine craftsmanship when he saw it, and this was it. He looked from the waistcoat to the squirming girl sat next to him. He asked her what it was that she felt bad about.

‘Well...’ She gazed down at her clasped hands. ‘I felt bad for dropping my troubles on your doorstep. So I wanted to make it up to you.’ Her head snapped up and she looked him straight in the eye. ‘I’m sorry for the trouble I’ve caused you. I hope you aren’t too annoyed at me.’

The Horologist didn’t know what to say; it was unprecedented that a human could care so much for anyone else’s feelings outside of their own. His lack of reaction must have been too much for her nerves. She rushed towards him, panic-stricken. ‘I’m so sorry!’ She blurted, ‘I hope you aren’t offended!’ Had he been a Wild Rabbit, and not a Horologist, he would have darted down the nearest burrow. As it was, his fur quivered but he remained seated. He assured her that he was not offended.

‘Do you promise?’ She asked, revealing herself to be the child she actually was.

He promised. In fact, he confided that he was the exact opposite of offended.

‘Really?’ Her solemn eyes wavered, not daring to hope.

The Horologist once more looked at the beautiful waistcoat. His nose twitched once, twice, three times, all under the desperate gaze of the girl with the broken clock-heart. In a flash, he knew how to do it, to love her like only he, a rabbit, could. It came to him as naturally as breathing; he wriggled out of his own, decidedly shabby horologist’s attire and put on his new clothes. He secured the chain of his grandfather’s watch to the inside of the perfectly-sized breast pocket. Satisfied, he moved closer to her and nudged at her tightly closed hands with his nose. She didn’t seem to know what to do at first; she watched, with a furrow in her brow, as he continually nudged at her hands. The only thing he could do was this. She would get it, eventually.

Slowly, her face changed. Her brow smoothed over and the corners of her mouth twitched upwards. Her hands wandered, naturally, to the crown of his fluffy head and began to stroke him.

They sat there for some time, the rabbit and the girl. ‘What’s your name?’ She murmured.

His ears twitched. *I think it’s customary for you to give me a name.* He raised himself on his haunches and stretched his face to meet hers.

She looked at him in earnest, ‘but if you already have a name, then you should keep it.’ He didn’t see any flaw with this logic, so he told her.

‘Alfred’, she smiled, ‘it suits you.’

Alfred-the-horologist had to agree. *It was my grandfather’s name before me.*

‘I see.’ She nodded, her decision made. ‘Then you shall stay Alfred.’

He knew then that she was not like the boy that his grandfather had fixed all that time ago, for she had given him a waistcoat and a space in his heart to keep for himself. His eyes half-closed in contentment, as she continued to stroke his head.

Just as he was on the brink of sleep, she leaned down and whispered, ‘I’m so glad to have met you, Alfred. My name is Sophie.’

CLARISSA MCKENZIE
BA English and American Studies

Curfew

I grew with the shame.
I tried to behave.
Father found out and now makes me
gargle salt water every night,
and then makes me eat honey and ginger.
Mother feeds me spices.
When I leave the house I
cover myself with heavy perfume-
it is akin to putting on a new body.
Maybe you won't believe me but once
I had one of them come and beg on his knees
to have me.
I force myself to forget the bad things:
the times where it was not just one
who whistled
not one or two or three who came
but a crowd of them
a small swarm.
I come home just before my curfew.
I know the routine,
I head straight for the shower,
hope they can't smell the scent on me.
I dry myself off.
Rub almond oil where I am hurt.
Eat the honey with my hands,
then the ginger, tonight

suck the rind of a lemon for good measure.
Let mother place spices on my tongue.
In bed I put perfume on my skin before I sleep.
The spices catch at the back of my throat.

ANNA LANTAFF
BA History & Archaeology

On Watch

Raw night between the limbs
Of a frost-gripped forest,
Your back tucked close to mine
Below blankets –
And pine needles beneath
Our heads.

There beyond the crescent of your breath,
The embers of our fire stir restless,
And melt like little spatters in the snow
Winter's teardrops,

And out of the hollow where we lie dormant
The creaking boughs rub
And score the darkness overhead
With ghostly talons.

I do not think this night will ever end.

In a few hours we will rise
And shaking numb inaction from our bones
Turn south like migrant birds,
And gathering our feathers, flit as sooty shadows through the
pines, homeward,

And years hence, somewhere north of here
You will smile, a little wry beneath the hoar-frost in your
 beard,
To ask if I remember,

And hunched in this hollow between
Earth and sky
Will be the memory of two men-children with frozen hands
And the thrum of life deep in their breasts,

And the soft rise-fall of your living chest,

And the snow.

KELSI DELANEY

MA Modern Literature and Creative Writing

*'Like Rain' was the joint winner of
the 2015 G S Fraser Poetry Prize*

You Always Looked So Good in Blue and Red

You always looked so good in blue and red,
That's why our teachers chose you for the play.
I wished that they had gone for me instead.

I tried to follow everywhere you led
our loyal friend, I'd be the first to say
you always looked so good. In blue and red

I dressed...your shadow, waiting to be fed
and always hungry, you were in the way.
I wished that they had gone for me instead.

Dressing up for halloween. It went unsaid
that you would be the star again today,
you always looked so good. In blue and red

...a wonder woman, circlet round your head
and queues of men all held within your sway.
I wished that they had gone for me instead

The clinic called at 5am. You bled
for hours. Your face was bruised. You slipped away.
You always looked so good in blue and red
...I wish I wished they'd gone for me instead.

Like Rain

Sometimes I am a slap in the face,
you, the back unbending. We are cold,
unending. Children fending
for themselves. But at night,
when we crawl into bed
there is a space at the nape of my neck,
slightly wet from your breath.
Those words that we said
and unsaid. A leap in the dark
into arms that you hope are outstretched.
There are faces inside you I still haven't met,
Places between us. But we can just
take it slow, kiss like rain,
running free,
down the window.



HARVINDER (BOBBY) SINGH, BA ENGLISH

GUY O'HARRISON

CertHE Creative Writing

Orbit

Kepler Research Station. Lagrange 1, Kepler438b(KOI-3284.01)
Crew:1

2165-02-09 T11:37Z Log Entry

I have analysed the spectroscopy results from the moon's surface. It appears the increase in sodium levels are due to the seismic activity caused by the recent comet impact. The remaining debris from the tail is being tracked by Kepler and no immediate danger is predicted. Further investigation of the impact site has been added to the work log. The atmospheric probe has been prepped and will be released for analysis of the Polar Regions in forty eight hours.

I have a slight tear in my left Fibular Collateral Ligament. Kepler has increased my pain medication to compensate for the required change in work load and has provided an exercise plan to improve motility.

The increased stress response caused by the recent minor debris impact on the Kepler shields has been reduced by an anti-cortisol release from my implant. I granted permission for Kepler to control the optimum levels of hormone release.

I listened to my weekly personal greeting from Adam. It included a picture of his new haircut. It suits him. He sounds happy in his current job and is making new friends. I sent my greeting in return.

2165-02-10 T14:28Z Log Entry

Today I recalibrated the main electro-magnetic Sensor studying the surface of Kepler438b. The comet debris strike on the station has caused minor damage to the shielding and thrown it out of focus. The image stabiliser couldn't compensate for the distortion so Kepler authorised a space walk to correct the problem. The image is now restored to acceptable resolution and surface readings are now continuing as normal.

The space walk included a visual inspection of Kepler's tubular hull. It has some very minor impact marks, cosmetic damage only, nothing that requires attention.

2165-02-10 T22:04Z Audio Recording

"What the fuck was that? Kepler what's that alarm for? I'm still half asleep, Kepler what is that? I think we've been hit. I can't focus, something feels weird. Kepler are you there?"

2165-02-10 T22:58Z Log Entry

So it looks like Kepler's radar missed something. The station has suffered another, larger impact by the remaining comet debris and has caused some minor electronic issues on the station. No hull breach. I'll know more when the full status report is complete.

2165-02-12 T11:33Z Log Entry

Slept for twenty four hours. I have never done that before. Yesterday the green and orange sparks from the moons surface were unusually bright. I don't know what it means. I vaguely remember green indicates the presence of

copper but the impact caused a power surge in the comms room and it has killed my cerebral connection to the ship. Most of my knowledge and memory is inaccessible. Kepler isn't speaking but my retinal display is still working and the life support readouts are all green. Green means good, I know that much. I can't think straight because my logic chip is offline, my hormone controls are dead and all I can smell is burning, probably from the fried graphene circuitry in my head. I feel like I want to cry for the first time in seven years.

I'm a stupid, emotional meatbag in an orbiting tin can, my knee is fucking killing me and I don't know why. I may as well be a rat in a cage.

2165-02-13 T14:49Z Log Entry

I know I'm meant to keep a log and I can access my previous entries, but most of it doesn't mean much without my augmentation. My twelve-month rotation observing this moon will be over in two weeks and the ship coming to collect me is already on its way. I'm the last human on this cycle of the project. It will be automated observation only after me and there are no other vessels closer, so I'm just going to have to wait. God knows what I did to fill the time before the impact but I'm as bored as shit. The log suggests a lot of analysis and maintenance, some exercise and writing reports for fun. I'm surrounded by equipment but I have no idea what it does or how it works. Most of the data collection is automated leaving me to do the analysis but now I have no idea what any of it means. Occasionally one of the telescopes or sensors will send a report to my HUD but I swat it directly into the main ship's log without reading it.

My main goal is to regain communication with the

comms satellites orbiting the planet so Control can tell me how to reconnect with the ship. Kepler can talk to me though my HUD but she isn't taking into account my plummeting IQ and amnesia because she hasn't simplified her language to compensate. I know I used to know things. It's like I can feel the answers on the tip of my tongue but can't quite get them. I wonder if this is what Alzheimer's feels like?

2165-02-14 T07:03Z Audio Log Entry

"I didn't sleep. My guess is my body is trying to regulate itself now the hormonal controls are dead but it hasn't quite got the hang of it yet. I don't want to get out of bed, I'm sweating, I feel sad and the glands around my neck are swollen and painful. I know from the log I was stressed out and I was being medicated for it. All the medication stopped when the connection was lost. With everything not working I'm trying to remember my Mindfulness training to control the pain myself."

2165-02-15 T09:11Z Log Entry

I Feel much better today. Euphoric even. I'm making sure I keep using the exercise machines to keep my health and mood up and it seems to be working. We have just passed the dark side of the planet with its sun in eclipse. The starlight was so intense; the milky way spread like a river of crystal dust across the sky. I stared at it for the whole hour of transit.

I feel incredibly alone out here. Floating between the dead planet and the violent moon during the eclipse created an intense darkness illuminated only by the milky way. Knowing that an entire galaxy lies between me and home, me

and Adam, makes me want to cry and scream at the same time.

2165-02-15 T11:11Z Audio Transmission (cached due to signal loss)

"Hi Adam. I know it's not our weekly contact but I just needed to speak to you. Something's happened. I'm safe, don't worry, but my implants are offline. I miss you. It has been so long. You were so happy for me, getting this job. I know you said you didn't mind the time I'd spend away, that your implants would help deal with it, but I'm not sure it was the right thing to do. I don't know. I hope you are dealing with it well. I couldn't stand to think that you were feeling like this too. It won't be long now, I'll see you soon. I love you."

2165-02-16 T09:39Z Log Entry

I Woke up with the most incredibly hard erection I think I've ever had. I feel constantly horny and primal and raw. I understand why sexual appetite is inhibited on long space missions but Jesus, I miss this feeling. Had to take care of it, obviously.

2165-02-17 T17:04Z Log Entry

Kepler managed two minutes of external communication before the connection was lost. The system updated, scientific data uploaded but no voice or text comms for me to ask questions. Kepler is a selfish bitch and thinks her data is more important than my needs. True in the scientific and commercial sense I suppose, but that doesn't make it easy to accept I'm expendable. Just call me Laika.

The condensation on the inside of the ship is increasing.

Kepler should be compensating for any increase in atmospheric moisture. I guess my more erratic, emotional breathing is all new to her, used, as she was, to dealing with some kind of predictable, emotionally retarded, human cyborg.

I've been reading the system update. It's hard going and I can only make out fifty percent of it, but the personnel section was clear enough. Control knows about the loss of comms with my prehistoric, animal brain and they don't seem to give a shit about me any more. The relief ship has stopped accelerating to save on fuel costs, severely delaying my pickup. It seems that,

"An asset without the commensurate technological enhancements has drastically reduced capabilities and value. Furthermore, due to the primacy of the human witness protocol, there is an additional risk that the communication failure could render all scientific data collected on this mission void, creating a significant loss, blah blah blah."

2165-02-18 T10:05Z Log Entry

Fuck them.

2165-02-20 T17:13Z Log Entry

I Felt better today. I Managed to do some exercise and decided to try and clean up the place. The condensation is still a problem. Some of the monitoring equipment has shut itself down to protect itself from the increased moisture. I wish I could remember how to fix it. All I'm doing is mopping up the excess with a towel and bagging it up in the hope that helps.

I keep hearing things. There is an obvious background

soundtrack in this tin can. The life support, solar array movements, cooling system, plumbing and toilet all have their own specific hisses and clicks and are so regular they provide comfort that things are running smoothly, like a mother's heartbeat. When I close my eyes I can almost be in a jungle somewhere and I can make out the sounds of all the animals lurking there, even my stomach growls add to the comforting background noise. But there is something else now. Something new and I don't know what it is. The noise is almost a whisper. At first I thought it might be my new, emotional heartbeat or the blood rushing through my eardrums but it doesn't seem regular enough. Whispers and gurgles and sighs. Something new.

Kepler is being very stubborn, she is only speaking through text in my HUD and not taking into account my newly found stupidity. She knows my brain is offline, Control confirmed it. I asked her about the noise but she says she hears nothing. I know she can hear it, she records everything, why would she lie?

2165-02-21 T19:01Z Log Entry

Another sporadic connection to Control. Four days after the first. In the same part of orbit. That could be the start of a pattern. Still no bandwidth for me, only system downloads. I need to figure out how to disable Kepler so I can use the comms link for myself the next time we connect. If there is a next time, I may be looking for a pattern that doesn't exist. I heard the noise again. It sounds like the wind and rain and quiet laughter. It reminds me of staying off school when I was a kid and a violent storm passed through our town. It ripped the roof off the church and I hid under the covers all day and

listened to it howl and whistle and scratch at the windows like an animal trying to get in. I watched TV and drank hot chocolate and felt safe and happy floating in my duvet above the green and brown swirls of the carpet.

2165-02-22 T22:10Z Log Entry

I figured out if I ask Kepler very specific questions over and over again for hours, I can pinpoint her answers down to a level I can understand. I finally managed to get the diagnostic readouts for my personal comm unit and translated it into stupid. It seems there is no hardware damage in my comm or the Kepler unit; they just don't want to speak to each other because the timing units are out of sync. My first question is why the fuck doesn't Kepler pick up something that simple? It's like she is doing this on purpose.

I spent the rest of today questioning her on how to get the timing synchronised so I can re-connect.

2165-02-23 T19:19Z Log Entry

I Finally fixed the timing issue after hours of tedious questioning. I swear she's being obtuse on purpose. Two hours of intermittent crackling and finally a connection is up and holding. I am in union with the ship but that is it. No Memory chip, Logic or emotional controls available. Kepler is blocking them, I know it. She is scared of losing control. She's keeping things from me. I have access to her logs now and there is no mention of the noises but there are gaps in them, restricted areas I can't read. That must be the reports of the noise. Why would she be hiding it? I run checks on the cooling system, air and water recycling, CO2 scrubbing, check for emergency venting but all is ok. Kepler is not

making the noise.

2165-02-24 T16:59Z Log Entry

I spent the day preparing for the next potential connection to Control, orbital synchronisation will be achieved in 14 hours and I intend to use the link to speak to a person, it's about time I got some answers and Kepler needs to know who is in charge here. I managed to override the automatic updates, which should leave some space for me to try and contact Control in quick bursts. Hopefully the message will be picked up and I get a live feed straight away. Everything is set.

2165-02-25 T23:09Z Log Entry

I cannot believe what happened. The connection to Control was made and my transmission was all set when Kepler sent an override signal and jammed me. I had a five minute window to get my message out and now It's lost for another four days. I punched the wall and think I've broken the middle finger of my right hand. Kepler is sabotaging this mission I swear. I'm going to have to stop her. I'm so pissed off, I can't write anything else.

2165-02-26 T09:37Z Audio Log Entry

"I woke up to another alarm. Kepler ordered me into the life support pod and I'm sitting here sealed in. It hasn't launched yet so I'm guessing I'm waiting for the all clear if it isn't life threatening. If it is a real alarm. Maybe she just wants me out of the main ship. My hand has swollen up and is going purple, but I can move my fingers so I don't think I've broken any bones. Kepler has ignored my requests for

medical attention and I'm sitting here in this cramped space, waiting."

2165-02-26 T13:13Z Audio Log Entry

"I decided to read some of Kepler's logs to try and figure out what's going on. Most of them are hardware reports but there is a little narrative that can give me some clues. I thought it would take my mind off the fact I can barely move in this space.

"I found the override order Kepler used. It contained interplanetary legislation to justify its use. Apparently my loss of augmentation means I'm not sufficiently authorised to use interstellar transmissions. I'm probably supposed to know that already. I feel like an idiot now."

2165-02-27 T08:11Z Log Entry

I'm still in this damn pod. Kepler says the atmospheric controls in the station can't correct the humidity problem and the condensation has stopped some life critical functions. She is trying to fix it by isolating me in here so oxygen levels can be tested without risking my life. I don't know whether to believe her.

I miss Adam. I miss his touch, his smell, my fingers running through his hair. I haven't seen him in over a year. Being stuck in here is unbearable. I don't think I can take this anymore.

The green and orange swirling storms on the surface of the moon below me are hypnotically beautiful. I can hear the noise again. It sounds like crying.

2165-02-28 T23:59Z Log Entry

I have requested Kepler put me in stasis.

2165-04-7 T19:12Z Log Entry

I woke up on the relief ship yesterday. They arrived two days ago and rescued me from the pod. It had been ejected and kept close to the Kepler station as a precautionary measure due to the uncontrollable oxygen levels within the main station. All logic, memory and hormonal controls have been re-instated. The left Fibular Collateral Ligament in my knee has healed and my damaged hand has been repaired.

I have been reviewing my experience during the disconnection and have requested everything from the point of the comet strike be wiped from my biological memory. Kepler has confirmed the request but has made clear her own internal recordings and analysis of the incident are corporate property and will remain part of the archive for further study. I have also requested the unscheduled audio transmission to Adam be deleted from the cache without being sent.

Control has confirmed that after full analysis, the scientific data collected during the mission has not been totally compromised by my disconnection and the mission has been deemed a success, which means I am eligible for a place on the next rotation. I have sent Adam a message to confirm my acceptance of the mission.

I have increased my sensitivity to Oxytocin to reduce the manifestation of any separation anxiety caused by this decision.

End.

