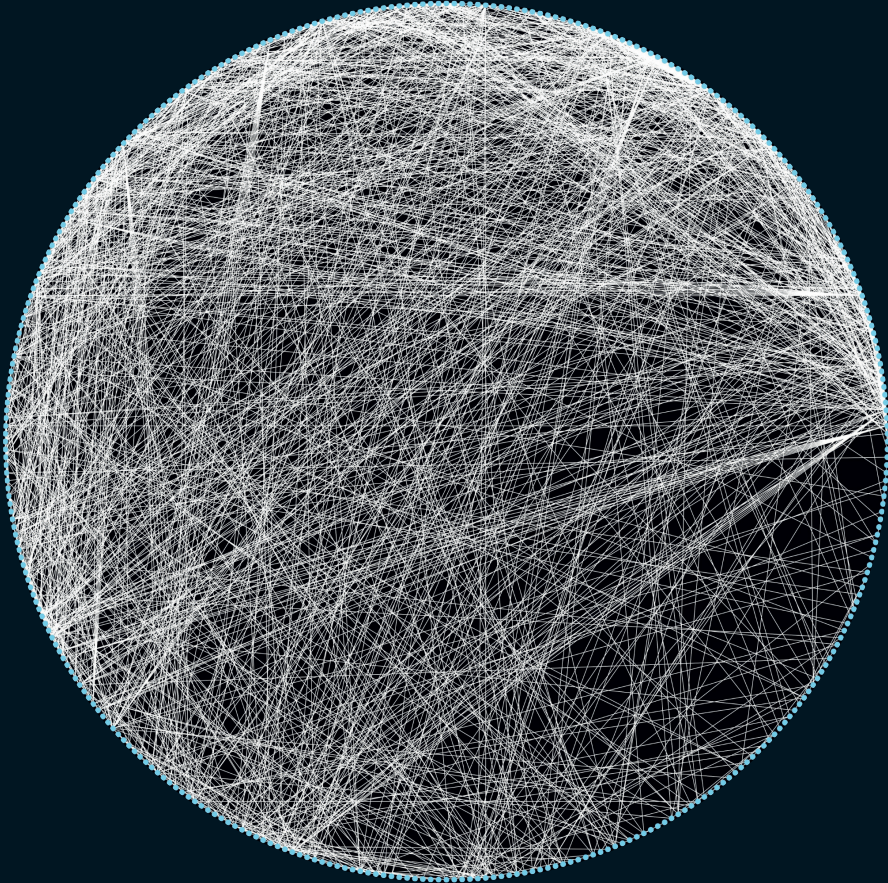


ISSUE TWO

THE LEAVES

THE LEAVES



DOWNING COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE CB2 1DQ

www.dow.cam.ac.uk

2024

2024

THE LEAVES

ISSUE TWO

THE LEAVES

2024

the leaves

A COLLECTION OF CREATIVE WORK PRODUCED AND EDITED
BY CURRENT DOWNING MEMBERS

EDITORS IN CHIEF
ASHA SYKES AND LIBBY HARRIS

PRODUCED THROUGH THE DOWNING COLLEGE ENGLISH SOCIETY

Cover image:
Curating Connections
By Edward Elson Kosasih
Winner of the 2023 Twining Egginton Prize

Contents

Artwork by Nathan Ng	2	Extract from <i>To walk with care</i>	27
		By Jenn Ashworth	
Blood test (walking to)	3	Artwork by Lucy Tansley	36 & 37
By Aoife Maddock			
The Glass Room	4	Colin Glen	38
By Libby Harris		By Jude Hughes	
Bird Song	6	Cliff Sides of Monodendri	39
By Ivan Ampiah		Eli Stone	
The Absence of Rain	7	Single Bed	40
By Sophie Davies		By Kezia Kurtz	
I think there is a shadow in this room	14	Loner's Oddity	41
By Asha Sykes		By Isaac Boyten	
Mess #4	15	Psychosoma	42
By Aoife Maddock		By Libby Harris	
Village Life	16	The Halloumi Sonnet	43
By Alice Roberts		By Louisa Graves	
Pilgrimage	18	Drupelets	44
By Siong Chen Meng		By Asha Sykes	
Photograph by Tomos Davies	20	Oread	47
		By Sarah Kennedy	
Breach	21	Hoarder's Honeymoon	48
By Libby Harris		By Elizabeth Reynolds	
Spiral	26	Artwork by Quentin Blake	49
By Joe Stell			

Empty Egyptian Sheets By Ivan Ampiah	50	Untitled By Aoife Maddock	73
mahler's symphony By Lauren Herd	51	Elon's Verse: Tokenised Reverie By LT Stockmann, with contribution from Jack Peck	76
Bruce Forsyth's Retirement Plan By Charlotte Payne	52	Songs of an Angst-Ridden Youth By Charlotte Payne	77
Extract from <i>Elegy of an Actor</i> By Jude Hughes	54	Artwork by Nathan Ng	78
Artwork by Nathan Ng	59	The Rose Garden By Emily Finston	79
Memoires By Esmé Goodson	60	Naked in Hendaye By Libby Harris	80
Photographs by Tomos Davies	64	Second Funeral By Aoife Maddock	83
early/late By Aoife Maddock	65	Photographs by Tomos Davies	85
The smaller wonder By Sarah Kennedy	66	Your offence is rank, it smells to heaven By Asha Sykes	86
The Last Sunday By Jude Hughes	67	Artwork by Nathan Ng	88
Sunday By Ryan Keys	68	The Death of Children By Richard Berengarten	89
Echidna By Chara Triantafyllidou	71	Contributors	90

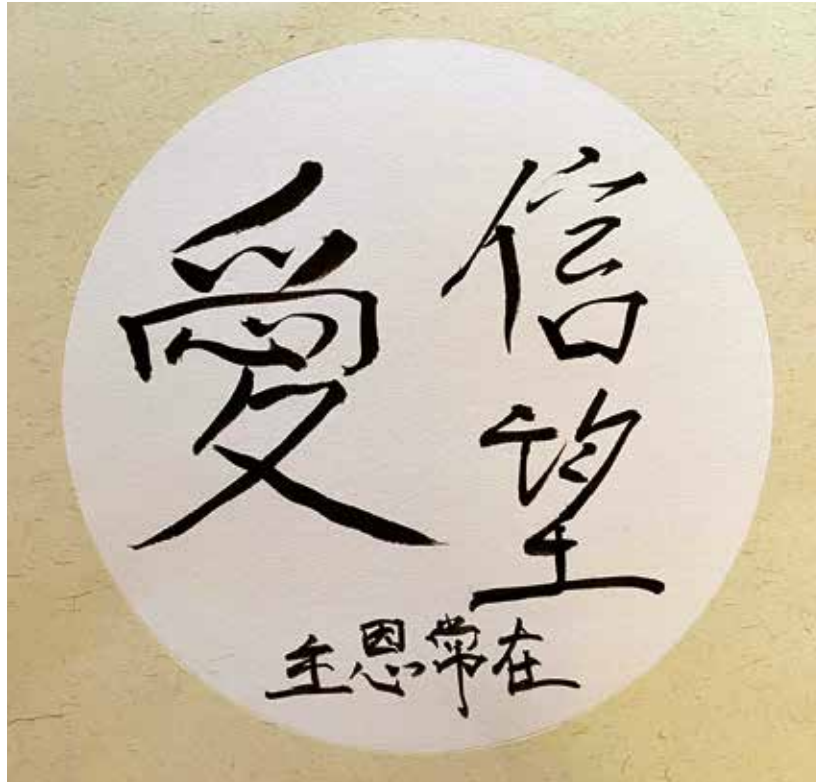
This is the second edition of *The Leaves*, Downing College's student-edited literary magazine. We have been delighted to continue the foundational work of Emily Finston and Tabitha Chopping in collating creative work from our College's members. We were happy to receive yet more submissions for this issue compared to our last, which we take as a sign of greater familiarity with the magazine amongst Downing members. *The Leaves* provides a generative space to encourage work that is playful, authentic, and of a charged and emotional texture. Downing is home to many talented creative minds, and we are proud to present their pieces alongside each other.

As first-time editors, we are grateful to Bonnie Lander Johnson for guiding us through the process and for the support of Becky Proctor. We were section editors for *The Leaves*' first issue, and, in editing all of the material ourselves this year, feel we have become both more open-minded and more judicious. We would like to thank Jenn Ashworth, Bye-Fellow in English, for introducing us to the principles of the creative writing workshop, some of which we have applied to our editing practice.

We are sincerely grateful to Robert Thorogood (History, 1991), whose patronage has enabled us to print our issue to such a high-quality. We are thankful to Andy Harvey for its graceful design.

The range of mediums, genres, and subject matter in this issue is truly remarkable. Striking portrait photography sits alongside experimental free-verse poetry; uncanny charcoal drawings accompany memoir. We hope you enjoy this glimpse into the preoccupations and fascinations of our College members.

Asha and Libby
April 2024



Artwork by Nathan Ng

Blood test (walking to)

By Aoife Maddock

I am quietly growing into a different sort of person.
 He's a boy, about five,
 And he's swathed in green but
 He'll swear to you his favourite colour is yellow,
 Spoken like a first word.
 He walks alongside a procession of buttercups
 And gets where he's going faster than they do.
 Memories emigrate, expatriates
 Leave me and circumnavigate.
 Sometimes our paths cross, but they've aged
 Into a mellower shape,
 Curved and golden like pears.
 Heavy and soft.
 If that boy was here now I would take it easy.
 I promise him I'm not going anywhere;
 I'll find something else to do with my hands.
 I'll make something comfortable of the stasis.
 Green becomes yellow sometimes (he tells me),
 When it sits out for a while.
 When it's old, or when it's lived in.
 I'm going to write a poem about me and my father and his father
 And I'll call it 'the next one after this one will be better, I promise'.
 He will draw a father on folded card and call it something else,
 Because he's still looking for the right word.

The Glass Room

By Libby Harris

The machine releases its battle-cry, a low note followed by a higher call, before the water begins to churn. It is 16:26 at The Bath Priory Hotel, and I am stationed in the glass-room. Not a glass-room of the conservatory variety, a suntrap full of palm trees, but a narrow, rectangular crevice beneath a stairwell where every single glass in this five-star hotel is washed, polished, and kept in serried rows on stainless-steel shelves. These are the golden hours in traditional English hospitality. Our afternoon-tea guests might still be cocooned in the drawing room, but every scone has been served. The first dinner booking is not until 18:00, and the service will not reach its crescendo until 21:00. For now, I can merely exist. With a green microfibre cloth in each hand, I pace two-step circles and hold every glass up to the searing fluorescent lights to check for any flaws. I am perennially thirsty, surrounded as I am by drinking paraphernalia. I glug chilled water into the most sizable goblets and drop my cloths to drink it all down. This kind of luxury is not found anywhere else in the hotel — for the staff, at least.

The glass-room is a social hub, which is peculiar when you consider the resentment with which the employees work there. If I am in the glass-room for over half an hour (which I always am) every single one of my colleagues will drop by — to chat, to rant, to gossip. The glass-room interrupts the sightlines of anybody moving through the ground floor of the hotel: eyebrows are raised, faces pulled, jokes communicated through slight hand gestures. Though the room is two paces long and a single pace wide, it can easily accommodate three or four people for a full conversation. We share gripes over the hotel's bureaucracy, our plans to escape from hospitality for good, silly stories from our weekends. The lights blare down and leave our skin red and shining. Glasses are polished all the while, of course.

The glass machine is broken and has been for a year or so. We use it, anyway. At the beginning of the day its function is adequate, but as the day passes it loses its will. Our manager (I hear this information second-hand) has been remarking on how the glass machine provides the staff with higher wages. Not that we are paid more, hourly, to compensate for inept machinery; rather, after the rest of the hotel has been cleaned and closed, we pile into the glass-room to polish for another hour. Four grown adults in a two-by-one pace room, in the early hours of the morning, handling hundreds of pounds' worth

of glassware. I am unsure if our manager was implying that the broken glass machine was a blessing, as it forced us to clock out later, or if this observation could be weaponised, presented as an incentive for the company to purchase a new machine. A new glass machine will cost £3000. The hotel is not performing well, financially. To make up for the shortfall, Chef decided to change the casual dining menu. We now serve 'small plates' at the same price as main meals.

After each wash, the machine sprays me with its steam as I open its door. I sneer: who does this machine think it is, panting with exertion, when it can barely do its job? I soak one microfibre cloth beneath the tap and twist my wrists around and inside of the glasses in practised circles. I cradle stemware at the base of the bowl, to reduce the likelihood of shattering a stem. My manager told us that once he snapped a wine glass stem such that it pierced a blood vessel in his wrist. He couldn't work for three months. I polish red wine glasses first — their large surface area is prone to staining. Unlike most of my colleagues, I can fit my entire hand inside a red wine glass. I take a slightly toxic level of pride in this. I like (and need) to think that my hand size makes my polishing more effective: there is nothing more humiliating than having spent the entire afternoon polishing glasses, only for the bartender to reject your work when he comes to restock his shelves.

Methodology appeals to me. Polishing is a ritual cleansing: first, the soaking-wet cloth, swirled around the inside and then the outside of the bowl, then the foot of the glass; then, the dry cloth, and my motions become shorter in an effort to buff, holding the glass up to the light so that I can apply pressure where it is needed. Without fail, I think of the only fragment I remember reading from the Gospel of Thomas, an extra-canonical sayings gospel. Jesus says: 'Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Do you not understand that the one who created the inside is also the one who created the outside?' The Gospel of Thomas was found in Egypt just after the end of the Second World War and is thought to have been composed in the century after Christ's death. Around 80% of its sayings have parallels in the canonical gospels; this hospitality-coded saying, for instance, can be heard in Matthew 23. Jesus says: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.' I cannot tell if these sayings are contradictory or concordant. Either way, my supervisor does not think Jesus goes far enough. I must polish every glass, equally, inside and out.

Bird Song

By Ivan Ampiah

Where I come from birds squeal cruel melodies
That fire up the winter sky like a stake,
Impaling a bundle of hopeful pleas,
Sending sirens up into the darkness
Which will be reborn as a mother's sob
As she retrieves a stained sleeve from peril.

Here, ravens whisper a limestone language,
The kind that bleeds crimson into street tar
Swirling in spools that a sister could sow
Into a funeral veil or a glove
To fast-forward the programme pages and
End another gratuitous gathering.

As they boldly unclasp their treacherous beaks
In order to screech their fatal cawing,
We disperse. Seeking comfort within cracks
Of alleyways and snatches of pavement,
Hoping that the noise passes us over.
Pitying us with yet one more inhale.

Ameliorating everyone's conflict
Becomes an artificial harmony,
For black feathers scratch out all the black eyes.
We forget the carnage the morning after
As no one rises to the crass challenge;
That is to blame it all on simple birds.

The Absence of Rain

By Sophie Davies

Most people don't realise there are three parts to a dry thunderstorm. There's the lightning, of course, that streak of electricity that splits the sky in half, cleaving a path through roiling clouds and stunning onlookers with the sheer power of its strike. Then comes the thunder, a mass of darkness and rippling noise that seems to envelop every piece of land it touches, drawing everyone around it into a threatening, enveloping embrace. But there's also silence. The absence of rain. A silence that you wouldn't notice unless the thunder had come before it. It's a stillness that settles lightly over people's shoulders, not invasive but not comforting either. A silence that reminds you there's more to come.

Abby has always been the lightning. Our father used to say she came out screaming, that she felt like the world had wronged her from the day she was born. Of course, no one saw the vindictive jealousy that ate away at her, every day of her life. All they saw were her blonde curls and those huge blue eyes that skyrocketed her into the waiting arms of millions when she was cast in her first blockbuster. They don't know her like I do.

Then there's Darcy, overcast since the day rain first hit her cheeks. People saw her as surly or glum — our relatives were always telling her to 'brighten up!' or 'look a little happier!'. They didn't see the moments when the clouds would part, when she'd stand up on the box that we kept our toys in and dramatically proclaim that she was going to be the next president of the USA. Abby and I would clap and laugh and for a minute Darcy would brighten, before the thunder would descend again and she'd disappear into her notebooks and her woodwork.

I wasn't the last child my parents had but I was the last one born alive. That might be why I've always felt like the breath before the next sentence begins. Except the next sentence never arrives. I'm told I was a very patient child, which is not something you often hear about children. To be honest, I can't quite see it in myself, but maybe my impatience has grown with age. I remember little about my childhood, and every memory I do have is tied to Abby and Darcy like a ribbon to a kite.

They are my anchors, just as I am theirs. Our storm tosses and turns, fighting through the rain, flattening houses and kicking up weeds, but it never breaks, it never bends, and it never falters. I can't escape Abby's lightning; I see her face on every billboard in New York. I'm reminded of Darcy every time I

read a book that makes me angry enough to snap it closed with that defiant sound that disrupts the tranquillity of the time I've carved out. In small ways, I think they're reminded of me too. I linger in the pauses in a conversation, in the crunching of leaves underfoot in the autumn, or in that sixth sense that pushes you into a room, forcing you to indulge in a small moment that might change your life. That's what happens when you know people so intimately that you could feel their presence with your eyes closed. They are a part of me and I of them. Even if I haven't seen them in twenty years.

I lean my head against the cold glass of the car window and try to tune out the crackling of the radio as the signal slowly dies. We passed Columbia Falls an hour ago and we're still driving, up into the mountains of Montana, to where my parents decided to retreat when Abby was born.

The imposing peaks tower either side of the tarmac and the edge of the road simply tapers off into the grass to our right. There hasn't been a hard shoulder for miles. A pile of debris skitters down a cliff as we speed past and I shade my eyes, looking up at the sheer rock face which is webbed with cracks. One day that'll come toppling down, just like everything else around here.

New canyons are constantly forcing themselves through the rock, carving deep rifts between the mountains and, occasionally, the road opens out onto a shimmering lake. There's one near my parents' house where my sisters and I were taught to swim. I let out a small huff of laughter and look down to check my phone. 'Taught' is a nice word for 'thrown in and told to keep ourselves afloat'.

My phone screen lights up with a message, just as the last bar of cell service disappears. I click on the notification but it's just the people from the funeral home, letting me know that they've left three shovels by the front door. They were very accommodating with our request to fill the grave ourselves.

The crackling of the radio is beginning to get to me. Leaning forwards, I tap on the glass and the driver's eyes flick to the rear-view mirror. I think his name is Tom.

'You won't get any signal from here,' I say. 'So, you might as well turn that off.'

His eyes turn back to the road, and he pushes a button, freeing the air from that horrendous static. I sit back and turn my attention to the window, trying to ignore the queasy feeling in my stomach as the car slips around a tight bend. I'm not sure whether it's my motion sickness returning or the thought of setting foot in that house again.

The car swings around one last bend as the road turns to gravel under the tyres and through the front window I can make out the cabin rising in the distance. Most Montana cabins are built out of wood, but my dad always had a fear of the dry thunderstorms that summer would bring. He used to say that if the flames were licking at his doorstep, he'd rather suffocate in an oven than be burned alive in a fireplace, so he built the entire house from grey stone. Darcy inherited his love for gallows humour — I could never stomach it.

The tyres grind to a halt, and I look down at my hands, clasped in my lap, as though putting off the inevitable for a few more seconds will grant me the relief I crave. There's a small piece of lint sitting on the knee of my dark slacks, and I reach forwards to brush it off, watching it flutter to the floor.

In the end, a tapping on the cab window is what causes me to look up at the house at last. The grey stone building is mostly obscured by a mass of blonde curls, the window filled with Abby's grinning face. She taps the window again and yanks on the door handle, pulling a face when she can't get it open.

With a sigh, I push open the door and barely manage to get to my feet before she pulls me into a bone-crushing hug with a squeal. After a few seconds, she draws back to hold me at arm's length as her eyes scan me up and down. Her mouth drops open, and she squeals again.

'Oh my god, I love your pants! Where are they from?'

The edge to her voice catches me off guard and I turn around to pay the cab driver to give myself a second to acclimate to her particular brand of compliment.

'I bought them from a store a couple of blocks away from me,' I say. 'Michael Andrews.'

Abby's eyes light up, 'Oh yeah, I buy from them all the time!'

I raise an eyebrow and nod, hoping my smile comes across as genuine. I reach out a hand and feel the fabric of her ill-fitting black dress, the rayon crinkling beneath my touch.

'I like this.'

'Thanks,' Abby grinned. 'It's Valentino.' Her head tilts to the left and I fake a smile. That's her tell. She's a good liar but she's never been able to lie to me. The grey stone house looms in the background of our conversation and I can't rip my focus away from it. It looms just as large as it did for the eighteen years I lived there.

From the arched wooden doorway — the only wood dad allowed during construction — another figure appears and I turn, glad to have something to distract from Abby's sharp, claustrophobic presence. Darcy descends the steps of our house (because it is our house now) and nods.

'Good to see you, sis. Shame about the circumstances.'

Abby scoffs, 'Not really.' She tosses her curtain of hair over her shoulder and shrugs. 'I mean, did she call either of you once in the last twenty years?'

Silence falls and an uncomfortable feeling twists its way up through my stomach, tightening around my heart.

'She called me,' I say. In truth, I wish she hadn't. I had nothing to say to her and truly, she had nothing to say to me.

'Oh yeah?' Darcy's head tilts. 'When?'

I feel my lips tighten and I admit, 'The day I made Forbes.'

Darcy lets out a hollow laugh and sighs. 'Money, money, money.'

Abby twists her fingers in her dress. 'She called me when my first movie came out. She wanted to come to the premiere.'

'I hope you told her where she could put that request,' Darcy scoffs.

'I hung up.' A small smile breaks across my lips and for once, we are united, just as we were in childhood. Against our mother. I look to Darcy and my brow furrows. 'She didn't call you once?'

Darcy shrugs, 'I'm not rich or famous. Why in God's name would she call me?'

The worst part is, I'm not even surprised. A trickle of sweat drips down my back and I gesture to the house. 'I suppose we have to brave the mausoleum at some point.'

Abby fans herself with her hand and brushes her hair back for the fifth time. 'At least there's air conditioning in there.'

'I'd take the fiery pits of hell over this house,' Darcy mutters as we start up the steps.

I'm inclined to agree with her as we step across the threshold. For a second, I expect our mother to walk out from the sitting room, that characteristic sneer plastered across her face, but while every muscle in my body locks at the thought, the vision doesn't come true. The house is empty. The house is ours. Darcy pushes the front door shut behind us and sticks her hands in her pockets once again. Abby looks behind her as if to check no one's there.

I smooth down the lapel of my blazer and ask Abby, 'Did you get it?' Darcy's head whips towards her as Abby produces a small silver key from her pocket.

'The funeral place just handed it to me. Said it was around her neck.'

Darcy almost snatches it out of her hand, but Abby yanks it back before she can take it. Darcy's gaze darkens. 'Just let me hold it. That's been hanging over our heads for twenty years.'

Abby shakes her head, and for a second I think Darcy might try to wrestle it from her grip, but something stops her. Abby pockets it again, and I look towards the front door.

'So, when do the mourners arrive?'

'Half an hour,' Abby says. 'We set it up in the garden.'

I clasp my hands together and nod. 'Alright. Let's get it over with.'

The funeral is a small affair and not very well attended for a variety of reasons, the largest being that she wasn't liked. It turns out, we shared that sentiment with the vast majority of the mountain community. Those who do come are appropriately sympathetic and subdued, bowing their head at the appropriate moments in the service and even letting a few tears fall when the casket is lowered into the ground. My cheeks stay dry. So do Abby and Darcy's. I manage not to laugh when one of her friends gets up to speak about her generous spirit, and the three of us stumble through our unrehearsed poem with enough mistakes to make it seem like we're too emotionally fraught to get the words out properly.

The wake is a parade of sympathetic gestures and touches that make my skin crawl. Most seem to be there for the buffet and a gossip. A few even ask Abby for an autograph — which she can't resist, even if she's currently supposed to be playing the part of the grieving daughter. Of course, that doesn't mean she can't conjure up a smile when one of the men asks to take a selfie with her. Darcy won't speak to any of the guests, she just stares out of the French doors at the back of the cabin and doesn't say a word. It's left to me to make conversation, but I've never been one for small talk, and I can tell that most of the attendees mentally check out about ten seconds after I introduce myself.

Eventually, the last buffet-hungry mourner disappears out of the wooden door. We're alone at last. The three shovels that the funeral home let us borrow are sitting by the front door. One by one, we pick them up and, without a word, we head for the garden.

The sun is setting, but there's an electrical charge in the air that lets me know a thunderstorm is on its way. The chairs Abby and Darcy laid out earlier

are still sitting in perfect rows on the lawn, facing the gaping hole in the earth that swallowed our mother's coffin two hours prior.

We arrive at the edge of the grave in silence. Darcy sticks the toe of her boot into the pile of soil and shifts some into the grave. We watch it splatter across the surface of the coffin and slip down the sides, mingling with the rest of the dirt. Abby produces the key from a pocket in her dress and holds it over the grave.

Her expression is determined as she says, 'She doesn't control us anymore.' I place my hand over hers and, after a second, Darcy does the same. I feel the other two take a breath at the same time as me and, when we let it go, the key falls into the grave at our feet. It bounces off the wood of the coffin and then, just like the dirt, slips down the side where it settles into the earth.

I'm the first one to pick up a shovel of dirt and toss it onto the coffin. Darcy follows, then Abby, in a ritualistic pattern that we repeat until the dirt at the side is gone and the coffin is buried underneath massive clods of earth.

By the end, I'm breathing hard and sweat is dripping down my forehead, soaking into the collar of my shirt. I ditched the jacket half an hour ago — it's draped over one of the soulless white chairs behind me — but I overestimated how breathable a silk shirt would be.

Setting my shovel to one side, I step back and take a look at the grave, the headstone sticking out from the back. Abby follows my gaze and scoffs.

'Loving mother. What a joke.'

A thought suddenly occurs to me, and I raise an eyebrow. 'Remind me what killed her?'

Abby shrugs. 'Maybe she shrivelled up and died because there was nothing left in her soul. Maybe Darcy whacked her with one of those axes.'

Darcy shrugs. 'Maybe Nic paid someone to do it.'

I laugh. 'Maybe Abby talked someone into doing it.'

'Because I couldn't possibly have paid someone?' Abby crosses her arms and huffs, tilting her head to the left. 'Besides, I don't think any of us would go that far.'

Darcy rolls her eyes towards the sky. 'Come on Abby, don't read into a joke.' She shrugs. 'Besides, we all know you spent the last of the money Dad left you on that lampshade you boasted about in Cosmo. Just because the world doesn't know you're a fraud doesn't mean you can lie to us.'

Abby lets out an incredulous choking sound and I brace myself as she turns on Darcy. 'I'm the fraud? Our own mother's been calling you a failure since the day you were born!'

I hold up a hand, cutting in before Abby can go lower. 'Let's just agree that whatever happened to her, we're grateful she's gone.'

I can see the rage simmering beneath the skin of both of the others, but they nod and set down the shovels just as the sky breaks open over the mountains and a lightning strike shatters the sky, followed by a roiling wave of thunder.

'Right on time,' Darcy comments, turning back towards the house. 'Let's finish what we started.'

The three of us head back inside, and Darcy fetches the pole from her car. It's one of those metal tent pegs that extends further than you'd have ever thought possible, and it takes all three of us to fit it together. Gently, we feed it up the chimney as the sound of thunder creeps closer, rattling the glass panes around us. Darcy sets the end of the tent pole in between the fireplace cinders and lays a collection of logs around it, tracking a path from the fireplace down onto the carpet covering the wooden floor. She steps back and dusts off her hands. Together, the three of us walk through the front door, down the steps and climb into Darcy's truck.

As we pull away, I cast a quick glance behind me to see that metal pole sticking out of the chimney, waving gently in the breeze as the lightning strikes creep ever closer. Eventually, one will hit it.

The stone won't burn, but the rest of it will, and the ghosts will burn with it because the rain is nowhere to be seen.

The End

I think ~~there is a shadow~~ in this room

By Asha Sykes

I think ~~there is a shadow~~ in this room
When I am writing I long for the sea,
And, though it stings, I sip its speech.

The pages under my hand become damp,
Their ink marks melt into jellyfish globes,

Into a sheaf of dark water glittering on my desk,
The radiator roaring blue, salt licks my skin —
I am the ~~wraith whose eyes you can see~~ through.

Piquing, waves scrape the ceiling (swelling proof)
Shaking sprays of plaster from their hair they kneel

Breaking fast and peeling smooth
Left (of course) babbling into the carpet

Words spraying out,
I can't keep myself down
I am the ~~wraith who can see right~~ through you.

My eyes foam,
November frays

Soon, its string of days will unwind.
I look ahead, dreaming out of bed and onto the wall,
(seeing it all as if a projector lives inside my head)
To when we meet again:
Submerging ourselves in blue
And duck-diving through liquid glass
Surfacing just in time
To catch the last wave of the sunset.

Surflines happiness
Forecasted at home with you — *it must be true.*

The wall's paint flakes its sunburnt skin.
I am the ~~wraith who can see you~~ right through.

Mess #4

By Aoife Maddock

In an attempt to blow glass without reflection,
I shift my piece from one featureless room to the next —
Leaving snail trail fingerprints, pleading to cover them with more of the same.
I'm all oil to the touch and skin peeling, transparent rind,
Flesh white and cobwebbed and fluffy beneath.
Peekaboo blue veins trailing to a yolky centre
That ought to be prised from a cracked shell
But it hurts too bad. So it stays right where it is.
I don't give too much of myself for auction; it scares me when the price is right
Because I want to offer something that isn't so antiquated.
Gazing up at the sky becomes an exercise in bitterness;
I'm jealous of the room. I'm jealous of everything that contains me
But is not me. Skin, unpeeled, untouched,
Clings tight round my neck. A held hand.
I just need a little space.
I just need a second.
I'd like to make something and then forget about it.
I'm tired by all these pieces, filling up the rooms in my house.
There's no more space on the walls.
I've given it all to mud, I've given it all to mess.

Village Life

By Alice Roberts

If I sit in my car and turn on the ignition and put on my Joni Mitchell and do my reversing and get out of the drive-way without scratching Gill like I did that one time at Annie's house and then I turn left and go to the roundabout which I was so scared of in my driving lessons and then I take a right (not a left because that's where she still lives and not straight over cause that's where Max's house is and to be honest I can probably cut him out of my little village life — actually, no, because there's no avoiding your first kiss when you both live in the same village as that kiss and as each other) and carry on past the fields that we walked through before we had licences and then past the tennis court where Sophie's dad plays in the tournament and past the pub where a lot (a lot!) has happened like not-quite sex in the loos and not-quite sex in the car park (that wasn't me) and quizzes with the grandparents of the weird boy in the year below me with his engine that really revs when he drives up the hill of the school car park, and like avoiding Maddie's old French teacher because she talks a lot and the bar staff who commit daylight robbery as you try and buy a glass of white wine because we can play at being adults in our village and anyway if I turn right at the pub (and not go straight on because that's where the house is where I spent most of my pubescent years and that was the friend break up that really broke my fourteen-year-old heart and anyway she's really fallen out of favour now in the village because of what she did to Sasha and sort of to Lily) and drive down the winding, winding road I will get to my best friend's house and her gate is new because she crashed into it and basically wrote off her dad's car but it's a very nice new gate and I will see her mum's studio where she makes the signs that they sell in the coffee shop where Imo works and where Mummy and I get brunch all the time and I will walk up her garden path and the stable door might be open but if it isn't then I'll knock and her face will come to the window pane and we'll smile so widely at each other and start talking through the closed door because we have to start chatting straight away and then I'll walk in and take off my shoes and put them in the same place I've been putting them for six years (next to the bin) and I'll hug Chris and Clara too and put my keys on the table like I'm home from a long day at work because really coming to Imo's house is just like coming home and we will probably sit at the table in our normal seats and have a cup of tea or maybe a lemonade (I only really ever have a lemonade at Imo's or at my grandparents') and talk and talk and then when I have to go I

will get back into my car and text my mum 'leaving now xxx' and then reverse onto the road and turn right and go up to the cross roads and drive past my first and only boyfriend's house with the swimming pool that I never went into cause I never really liked him and wouldn't have wanted to be in a bikini with him without his top on and I keep driving and go into fifth gear because it's just a long enough road to do that on and go past the primary school that I didn't go to (because my parents didn't like it as much as the one I went to) but Imo and Kitty and the twins went to and past the lane with the house that I house sat for with the in-built drinks fridge under which the mouse died and then I have to go into third gear to go round the bend because it's a sharper turn than people think and then past the pond that I've only just realised is there and past the boarding houses and past the old bakery and past the car park that never has any spaces and past the new tattoo parlour that we really, really don't have any business for and past my school, my lovely wonderful bad school where I was head girl, and past my uncle's house and his terrible car with the roof box and maybe he or my auntie or my cousins will be there to stop and chat with and then up the hill that I never walked up when I was at school because Mummy would pick us up because she's perfect and then past the ugly houses and then if I turn left I can see our house with its weatherboarding and the front garden that Nick has spent a long, long time making so pretty and then I'll turn onto the road and into the drive way and listen to the end of Joni and think about my lovely life. And now you know me because you know my village.

Pilgrimage

By Siong Chen Meng

I enter your home, my footsteps
reverberating on the white marble
tracing a now-familiar path till
our eyes meet once more.

You smile, glad to see me.
I come up to your brown wooden niche,
caressing you gently, tracing my fingers
over the ravines and valleys etching out
your name in gold. You return my touch

it's cold.

I start to speak. Remember that girl?
Yes, the one with the flowing black hair,
round glasses, doing chemistry.
Yeah, it didn't work out. I know you warned me.
We laugh — My laughter echoes all over your room.

I'm doing well. Doing my undergraduate
overseas. I can't believe I actually got out.
I'm doing the science I've always wanted to.
Your smile is almost glowing now. I lean in

you're almost here.

So close. Like how our fingers would
brush against each other on the spines
of books — Dickens, Shakespeare, Rupi Kaur.
They were cold, from the air conditioning, but
they warmed me like a fire in a winter's night.

Sometimes, they were oily, having filled
your stomach with fries and fried chicken.
Our face beamed as you spoke of
the latest prank your classmate pulled on
your teacher. How mad she got.
Even as inside you, you were withering.

It was so fast. You disappeared.
You told me you were going to be fine.
Please be okay...

...

I'm not. You're not
here, it's just your...
you stare impassively at me.
Your unflinching frozen expression
responds to the tears in my eyes.
Encased in granite, you can only echo
what once was. I always have known,
haven't I?

You nod. But you beckon me
to continue speaking,
to continue living.
I breathe in, shaky and stuttering,
but find the words to go on.



Photograph by Tomos Davies

Breach

By Libby Harris

Treherne Prize Winner

i.

Shearing sun. Merced Lake
 Sways, satin loosened from its
 Sewing circle as we tread the rim.
 Clouds aged and tender, further
 From a Los Angeles smile
 Than the ants which sheath
 The tree where I sit
 To write.
 It lives in an abnegation
 Which trees can accept,
 Cracking their cores and
 Craning their chins into their
 Chests and
 Greening their leaves, anyway.

ii.

Seven thousand feet
 Above sea level. Ice-
 Fed, June-swollen river.
 I had marked myself the route,
 Felt-tip on printer
 Paper, orange sweep from
 Half Dome to Merced
 Lake for one morning's hike.

iii.

A British man arched
 His hand delicately to
 Visualise his warning —
 Snakes are rearing
 In the Merced Basin.

His accent made
 Cartoon of his caution,
 Even to me, accustomed as I was to
 Vowels stretched under the sun
 And Labrador stresses.
 Scorched forest. Inescapable
 Heat, one trail, without fork
 Or loop. Neville (so I named
 Him, in the absence of knowing
 Him, knowing I would narrativise
 Him) laid it on thick, his hand
 Rearing more than once, his
 Khaki dark with low-land sweat.

iv.

Cheval-de-frise, cracked
 Pencil leads. Nausea —
 Young spindles balancing
 Disks of interior green between
 Remnants, fire-swollen.
 Horizon snaps the morning.
 White spirits of predawn
 Dew back to Earth. Sun
 Gives voice to the river,
 Concurrent.
 A black bear slides
 the horizon-cliff.
 We traipse and switch-
 Back.

v.

Underwear-tinsel
 On lakeside pines.
 Castile fumes.
 Roofs pitched like Boy Scouts, tree
 Stumps still in bonfire rings by
 Long-locked cabins, with

Too many steps in between.
 Soundless, our bodies breach
 Merced Lake.

vi.

Four dark heads, profile,
 Avert their path, cut
 Away from the shore.
 I look to J with
 My mind in my stomach
 But he is already angled
 Away from them
 At the hip.
 The four of us, the four of them.
 I hope they would sooner
 Absorb my body
 (curved, conspicuous, Titian?)
 Than interpret his form.
 We dress, retreat, return
 To the shore.

vii.

I cross the beach like
 I am walking through a ball-pit,
 Stones rolling ankles rolling
 Hips.
 Four men, four pale chests to
 Burn beneath crosses and chains.
 I am chipper, passing
 Their eyes, on the water.
 Liquor in their packs.

viii.

Weight behind my heels
 I crouch to the Merced,
 A nudge, a wind, away

From the newborn numbness
 Of my hands around my bottle
 Rendering the rest of my body.
 I feel the way I do in an over-full
 Room. The beach holds
 Their four and my three.
 The swash slights me.

ix.

Did I mention hunger?
 Vegetarianism, I swallow.
 The Jet-Boil wheezes over
 Three half-cups of dehydrated powder
 Which go immediately to our heads.
 We are shaking, babbling, subdued.
 In pairs we wind to the water,
 Decide the night is our limit,
 Our guts loud enough.

x.

Between our four and their four
 Pitch two men, burning
 Sage, playing bluegrass.
 It is four hours darker behind the treeline;
 The far is far too near.
 The four's fire smokes into a pillar
 Around which their voices crackle.
 Their camp is rock-ridged and
 Obscured.

xi.

We wear the layers that would
 Cushion our heads.
 I regret my shiny self-possession
 Of the early afternoon. I am
 Sure I see the scene through

The weave of the tent.
 They saw my body, and now
 They are here.
 Z lies so still she must
 Be sleeping; she is stronger
 Than me, pocketknife in her fist.
 Polyester flushed with firelight,
 Tracking-shot shadows.
 Flickering sense of scale: a child
 Dashing a magnifying glass between
 An insect and their face.
 Footsteps swinging torches
 Instead of voices.

xii.

Leaden bodies in a lithium dawn.
 A new family brewing coffee
 In the clearing where we ate
 Last night.

Spiral

By Joe Stell

I left
and made my way back
to the kingdoms in the sky

the fresh wound is a sorrow
battled
by an old familiar feeling

time beneath the kingdom's floors
heals all ailments
but wounds scar

an itching
irritating
scar

this incurable psychotic itch
of a person greyscaled
leaves nothing unturned

with enough time
the scar aches
and the kingdom burns

burning those who dare not to fall
to clutch hands
and spiral as the eagles do

Extract from *To walk with care*

By Jenn Ashworth

The morning I set off, Clive and I drank coffee in the café at Lancaster Castle. I wondered at the propriety of carb-loading Bakewell tarts in the place where they'd tried the Pendle witches. More recently, the castle had been a working prison and at some points in its history used as a hospital to contain (if not care for) the distressed, disruptive, and inconvenient. The building only returned to the Duchy of Lancaster in 2012 and they built the café after that: the history of suffering lost behind expensive flat whites and child-friendly school tours. The café itself became a regular haunt for students and writers because its big windows are good for people watching and it has brilliant free Wi-Fi. It was a nice place to take some setting-off photographs and Clive came with presents. First, my own compass — he'd gone back out to the Forest of Bowland and retrieved it. Second, a metal object that looked like a big pair of tweezers but was actually an instrument for removing ticks. I liked the practicality of the tick remover and marvelled at the effort he'd taken in retracing our steps through the long grass at Littledale to find a compass it would have been easy enough to replace, but which I'd become superstitious about.

Clive was going to write me letters, he said, and had planned one to arrive at each place I'd booked to stay, all the way along. He was a bit nervous about this: perhaps the letters might not arrive in time for me to pick them up before I moved on early each morning, or maybe the owners of the B&B would find passing them on to me an imposition, or that I, off seeking solitude in the great outdoors, would find the receiving and carrying them with me a burden — both emotional and physical. And maybe the nerves were about something more than that. It is scary, writing into the dark and sending off your words into the world.

'Write what you like,' I'd said, wondering what the distance might allow him to get off his chest. I remained evasive about what he might expect to get back from me.

The trainline hugs the west coast through North Lancashire and into Cumbria and for the first hour I sat in near euphoria, enjoying familiar glimpses of Silverdale's and Grange-over-Sands' genteel seaside charms and getting fidgety as the track curled around the Barrow peninsula and northwards, through Cumbria proper. This is where the place names get old fashioned or

portentous: Ravenglass, Drigg, Seascale, Sellafield. It was a bright day and I'd scored a window seat, so the sea was glittering away to my left for most of the journey. In the seats opposite, two cyclists returning home to St Bees from a trip to the Isle of Man told me how to find my way to my B&B from the station and, as we arrived and I shouldered my bag, laughed at how much stuff I was carrying.

'What's in there?' they asked.

'Books,' I said.

'You won't want to lug them the whole way across.'

They knew what I was doing without asking: the only reason anyone turns up to St Bees with a rucksack and walking poles is to start the Wainwright walk. But still, having my lack of originality demonstrated to me and being offered unwanted advice was annoying. One of the things I was dreading the most was men appearing from behind hedges to give me advice and directions every single time I opened my map. I'd actually arranged for my bag to be shipped between stopping places by a packhorse company but didn't feel like advertising that fact to these two guys.

'I will,' I said. I hoped I sounded rude and not tentative. A bookworm, yes, but a toughened and heroic one. Any effect was lost when I headed the wrong way out of the station and got a little lost trying to find my way to the B&B (which was more or less next door to it).

St Bees is a tiny village named after its priory and school, which are named for St Bega, a British saint who lived at the same time as the better-known St Hilda of Whitby. Other than the priory (an unmistakable building made of the local red sandstone) the beach itself, and a caravan park, there's not really a lot here. My plan was to grab something to eat, take a little walk around the village and hang out at the beach for a while, watching the sea and choosing which pebbles I would take with me. Tradition — if a ritual invented by Wainwright in the early 1970s can be called tradition — dictates that the coast to coaster gets her boots wet in the Irish Sea at St Bees and picks up a pebble or two which travel across the country with her, tucked into a pocket. Once the walker makes her triumphant arrival at Robin Hood's Bay, the pebbles are returned to the sea.

It's fair to say it was despite my best efforts and not because of them that I found the B&B in St Bees. I hang out in libraries, not the great outdoors. I struggle with left and right, despite avid, nearly compulsive study of *Collins*

Ultimate Navigation Manual ('all the techniques you need to become an expert navigator'). The man who I live with has a running joke that involves pretending he's going to 'set me free' back 'into the wild' whenever we're a couple of miles away from home in the car — his fairly reasonable assumption being I'm too gormless to be able to find my way back.

I'm not an outdoorsy type. I know the names of most of the trees and I can tell a rabbit from a hare but I've no idea what I'm looking at when it comes to bird life, didn't know there were different kinds of deer until someone asked me what type were commonest in Lancashire and I've only ever seen one fox in my life. (I was on a night bus going through Camberwell and it was dragging something out of a bin bag.) While I'm coming clean, I'll add that I'm scared of heights, really scared of cows and I have one leg longer than the other which has given me fairly persistent pain in my left hip and knee since my early teens. Because of that (and laziness) I don't run, haven't played a team sport since I was last forced to, and my fondest memories of PE involve sneaking off-route into the woods that the cross-country track cut through in order to sit on a log and smoke a cigarette bought for 20p from the ice cream van. More than heights, more than cows, I am really, really afraid of getting lost.

All the same, I unloaded my too-heavy bag then went out to pick my pebbles and find the priory — a late-nineteenth-century reconstruction of the twelfth-century Benedictine church that itself occupied the site of St Bega's even earlier building. It was pretty and empty and smelled like dust and hoovered carpets and I wandered the aisles for a while, rattling my pebbles in my pocket and drinking pineapple juice out of a carton. On a table at the back were a number of books and leaflets on display for the visitor, including *St Bega: Cult Fact and Legend* by the historian and theologian John Todd. Bega was — apparently — an Irish woman — a princess, no less, who arrived on the west coast of Cumbria in a curricule having run away from her father, who'd decided she was going to marry a Viking. Just outside the train station on the road down to the beach there's a sculpture depicting her standing next to her homemade boat, her arms held aloft as she either prayed for a sea wind or offered thanks for the one she got.

According to one old hymn, Bega escaped her father through a set of locked doors — a miracle worthy of Houdini. An angel protected her during her flit, guided her across the water and gave her a bracelet, the ownership of which can be traced through church and parish records through the

centuries. The excitement I was feeling started to grow: St Bees felt like an even more auspicious place to begin because this was a village that had a proven track record in both offering hospitality to the stranger and knowing when to leave a woman alone. And, best of all, Bega's most well-known miracle features a walk.

Once ensconced in the village as an anchoress she set up the priory which was endowed with lands by a local baron. It became the tradition for this priory — as was common for many villages and parishes during the medieval period — to perform an annual 'perambulation' known as the 'beating of the bounds' which involved all the monks ceremonially walking around the perimeter of the priory's land. The ritual was religious and solemn, setting apart dedicated land and concentrating it for the use of the religious community that lived and worked it. The walk drew the community together and attached its life to a particular place, but it also had a practical element: these walks reminded everyone about who owned what and an annual check of the edges of your land prevented neighbours making sneaky encroachments. At the time of one of these perambulations, the monks of St Bega's were embroiled in a land dispute and feared a miscarriage of justice. According to legend the dispute was solved, not by the monks' persistence with the walking, but by an act of God: a sudden snowfall marked out the edges of the land and was a miracle ascribed to the runaway Irish princess.

St Bega may have performed a miracle that saved her monks from one more iteration of the circular walk that I had come myself to dread, but these days her priory marks the start of St Bega's way, a thirty-six mile walk (there's a longer, circular version, the second half of which is called, charmingly, St Bega's Way Back) that follows the coast-to-coast route from the Priory, though West Cumbria and over Dent Hill, down to Ennerdale, along Ennerdale Water and then, departing from Wainwright's route, along the River Derwent and towards Bassenthwaite Lake, where the second church dedicated to her (and incidentally, the church where Melvyn Bragg got married) is. You can do the whole thing in four or five days, and people do — generally bookending their efforts with services of dedication and thanksgiving at both churches. There's another Melvyn connection too: his 2006 campaign to raise money for the upkeep of the Norman church at Bassenthwaite (the Credo appeal) inspired Rosalinde Downing to devise the route, write a guide for it and test her directions with several groups of walkers taking 'celebratory' walks along the way she'd devised. She sold the book to raise money for Bragg's appeal and,

though these days the money for the church's new facilities has long since been raised and spent, the walk has been adopted as an official pilgrimage route and is featured on the British Pilgrimage Trust website. Though Rosalinde Downing doesn't get a credit.

I set off properly early the next morning, a grey windy day, the sea so whipped up that the soft and sparkling turquoise of the evening before had turned the colour of cardboard. The village was quiet and there was nobody to wave goodbye to because I'd set off much earlier than needed. I dreaded falling into step with someone who wanted to do small talk for the entire seventeen miles I'd be walking that day and having to waste this bit of solitude on pretending to be friends with someone I'd never see again.

The first mile or so is a steepish climb past the caravan park. Without ceremony, I got on with it. The route is one long trek east so this start, following the edge of St Bees head north for a few miles past an old lighthouse and along a path that hugs the crumbling edge of the red sandstone cliff, feels counterintuitive. Still — hardly anyone misses it out. The views out to sea — the Isle of Man hiding out there somewhere behind a fuzz of grey and blue — were worth it. The wind was really something: it pushed the long grass backwards and forwards, forced overgrown brambles against my legs, and tossed the black and white seabirds nesting on the cliff edges either side of Fleswick Bay — a deep gash between the north and south heads — around in the air like they were bits of newspaper.

Before too long, Whitehaven came into view: the coal and shipbuilding industries are gone but the port-town's money made from the coal-pits around St Bees and Cumbria's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is evident in the grand buildings. I could only see pale outlines from where I stood, getting blown to bits on the headland. I still hadn't bumped into anyone at all and the euphoria of this and the fact I was actually doing it sent me hurrying eastwards along the edge of a disused quarry and away from the view of Whitehaven. I took a good look at the sea, wished it goodbye, and from there I hiked quickly through some unlovely parts of West Cumbria.

This is the part of the county excluded from the money that accrues in the Lake District National Park. The dull weather that day didn't help, but even Wainwright remarks that the residents here are too busy earning their own livings to worry about making a special welcome for the walking tourist. I'll get to the expensive, flashier Cumbria of William and Dorothy Wordsworth

later in the week, but for now there was the distant view of the Whitehaven Chemical Works and, after a while, the tiny, terraced houses — all peeling front doors and grubby net curtains, exactly like the type of house I grew up in — of Moor Row that you pass by on the way to Cleator. I tramped down cracked pavements in a bit of drizzle and headed down the side of a cricket pitch then a sewage treatment plant.

St Leonard's church in Cleator promises a welcome to walkers and, this being the last settlement before the climb up Dent Hill, I decided to inspect it. I'll see plenty of churches along the way over the next two and a bit weeks, and, in keeping with the sense that this walk acknowledges the idea of pilgrimage, if not exactly being one, decided I would stop in and have a look at as many as I could. Almost the moment I decided this, I discovered that the church doors were bolted shut and there was nothing to see but a pair of plastic crates and a dry metal dog bowl in the porch. I cracked on.

The shop on the main road is famous for its baked goods — according to some the meat and potato pies create early morning queues and have inspired fist fights in the street (my guidebook advised the walker to ring the night before to place their order) but all I wanted was a can of Coke.

'You're making good time, love,' the woman behind the counter said. 'Are you off up Dent now?'

I nodded, and she smiled warmly — managing to show some genuine interest in a piece of small talk she must offer to strangers hundreds of times over the summer, most of them hurrying their way through her much-derided hometown to get to the grander spectacle of the National Park. She didn't tell me to enjoy every moment or embrace the view or to stay safe. She didn't ask me who or what I was doing the walk for. She only sniffed, handed me my change, and said, with what I hoped was not the characteristic understatement of the North, 'it's not *that* bad.'

To take a pilgrimage — either on a well-worn route or a newly invented one — is to give a walk already characterised by the walker's ambition for its endpoint another objective: no pilgrimage is an aimless wander, even if they're done as slowly as shuffling along stony ground on hands and knees would suggest. The British Pilgrimage Trust defines the contemporary pilgrimage as one that involves 'journeying with purpose on foot to holy places' and historically that purpose was often — though not always — to do with health, healing and the recovery from illness. Along the way, the pilgrim would be relying on a

network of monastic 'hospitals', demonstrating the deep connection between healing and hospitality: our holiest places are those that offer refuge for those ailing in body and spirit.

These days, the pilgrimage's old association with healing — both spiritual and physical — has evolved into money-raising ventures for cash-strapped charities. Next year, Cancer Research UK are running a 'Lake District Challenge' around Windermere, and Macmillan Cancer Research are already urging its supporters to sign up for the sponsored 'Mighty Hike' on the Ullswater Way. The local hospice in Lancaster runs regular 'moonlit walks' where you can walk all night from the hospice gardens in Lancaster to the sea's edge at Morecambe, watching the sun come up from the old stone jetty. The last time I did the famous Cross Bay Walk, crossing the flats of Morecambe Bay safely conveyed by Cedric, the Queen's guide — I didn't just do it, I put a post on my Facebook page and asked people to donate money to the local theatre's schools' programme.

Before Dent, the first ascent of the walk and the 'gateway' to the Lake District National Park, there was Black How Farm, the last farmhouse before the fells. The fell road curls around the back of the sixteenth-century farmhouse, all low roofs and little windows, and took me past some ornate iron gates (rusted shut) and a skip filled with rolls of barbed wire and the skeletons of some old motorbikes. From there, it was a steady and fairly boring trek up a gravelly plantation path through the pine woods. It was still early afternoon, but the densely planted pine trees cut out most of the light and the ground beneath them was dark with dropped needles and huge shiny black slugs.

I hadn't got lost yet, even though the signage was patchy and unofficial: it wasn't unusual to see arrows spray painted on trees or on the plastic lids of feed buckets nailed to fences. The route up Dent Hill is obvious and the woman in the Cleator shop was right: it wasn't that bad. I didn't see a single human being the whole way up and, when I got tired, I simply stopped and lay on my back in the wet grass eating my sandwiches and drinking my can of Coke and letting the rain hit me in the face.

Up on the top of Dent the ground was boggy and because the weather had come in, the view back to the sea I'd just left and eastwards to the Lakeland fells I'd be crossing over the next two or three days was indistinct. Sellafield's chimneys were just about visible. This was disappointing: I'd had my phone in the pocket of my leggings all day wanting to capture that last sighting of

the sea. Never mind. I didn't wait long, and managed to avoid the worst of the bogs though the descent was steep and, once the ground hardened up, I made parts of it on my backside, bumping down through the muddy grass and arriving, eventually, at Nannycatch Beck, which is a tiny chattering brook famous only because it marks the coast to coaster's entry into the Lake District National Park. The word 'nannycatch' means — among other things — a mischievous sprite or fairy, but I saw nothing but a few chewing sheep and a profusion of wildflowers as I strolled on tired legs through a pretty valley on the final easy stretch into Ennerdale Bridge.

Inside St Bee's Priory, there was a space to the left of the main arch and altar and in that space a table with a prayer tree on it. Alongside was a tray full of little pens (like the type you used to get in Argos, before they went digital) and scraps of paper. The idea was you'd write up your prayer and push it onto one of the branches. Had other walkers used the start of their walk to ask for miracles or to dedicate their efforts to the memory of St Bega? Most people were asking for peace in Ukraine and my own wishes seemed petty in comparison.

I'd thought about Clive. The medieval pilgrim might be walking for the good of his master's soul as well as his own: it was possible to pay a proxy pilgrim to take the journey and dedicate the merit of their efforts to their sponsor. But Clive is too sane to want me to ask for a miracle for him and if prayer worked like that nobody would ever die of anything, would they? Clive is well loved: decades with a partner, children, a lifetime full of friends and colleagues — not a man who is short of people who'd want to pray for him, if that was his thing. All the same, the proxiness of the walk felt important. I'd taken photographs of the sculptures of sleeping children Josefina de Vasconcellos had donated to the priory to create a garden of remembrance for babies who died before or shortly after birth because I imagined it was the kind of thing he might have wanted to see if he'd have been hanging about in St Bees instead of me. I'd tried to film the patterns the wild wind blew through the long grass, making it look like a green ocean during a storm, and I found some signal up on Dent and texted the pictures and film to him.

When I started planning this walk, lots of people asked me not *what* I was doing it for, but *who*, expecting to be presented with a sponsorship form, as if every moment of solitude needed an alibi to justify it. I had to say, 'no, I'm not doing it for anyone,' and got quite good at riding out the

confusion that often resulted. No, I was not walking for bowel nor breast nor testicle nor blood: I walked for no good cause at all. Back in St Bees, I'd written Clive's name on a scrap of paper and pushed it onto one of the tree branches, feeling embarrassed and ridiculous and refusing to ask for a miracle cure or a remission of his suffering or for anything else. Rebecca Solnit said that whatever else a pilgrimage was for — earning the blessing you ask for yourself or someone else — its real purpose is a 'walk in search of something intangible'¹ so perhaps a certain amount of purposelessness was all right after all, no matter how much it might have displeased Wainwright.

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* p. 45



Artwork by Lucy Tansley



Artwork by Lucy Tansley

Colin Glen

By Jude Hughes

Liquid gold bleeds through the heavens
 Ichor of sleeping giants in their lush slumber
 Turning in their sleep, churning ether like butter.

Drifting in their dreaming, their noble limbs
 Carved open by the edges of mountain tops.
 Even their blood luxurious.

Opulent streams of molten sunlight
 Pour through the great ocean-sky, flowing
 In abundant lakes of air and angel breath.

December drinks down the liquid sun
 Sloshing on melted ice and honey
 Syrup spilling across slushy cloud

Indulgent Winter engorges on the lavish foam,
 Gulping down sugary richness of light.

Cliff Sides of Monodendri

By Eli Stone

I roll over to kiss you,
 You've fallen off — I miss you
 I hold the blanket close and the pillow closer to try and
 Replace your warmth with my own

Single Bed

By Kezia Kurtz

I didn't sleep last night, your body
 Splayed out across my bed. You slept
 Just fine, apparently. Dreaming of
 Other worlds, your snores kept me quite
 Firmly rooted to Earth. With no wriggle room,
 An ache moves up my body from my toes to
 My face. I tried to move my knee a tad
 Up and bump! I can't for lack of fucking space.
 In the morning this'll be it! Over!
 Done! Tomorrow night I'll starfish, and
 Stretch, and hear the hum of my own breath.
 But what if, without you, when I fall
 Fast asleep, what if — then —
 Without you, I have nothing left to dream?

Loner's Oddity

By Isaac Boyten

Cyclists of Cambridge beware my wrath,
 For I am Isaac, son of Lee (a tease).
 Orgasm Bridge down, you fiends ride the path,
 Winged wheeled sons of Peddleus (the breeze).
 If only for a gold banana skin,
 Yours would be a most Carthaginian plight,
 But alas! Those Cretans would cry in the din:
 'Rage, Rage against the dying of the shite!'
 But what is this punter's pole I see here?
 (I may be a nobody but have half mind...)
 'This beam in your Polyphemian wheel behind!'
 At your fall, Achy-Anns let up great cheer!
 So no longer I yearn for that gilt rind,
 For spoke have I, and you have not, foul hind.

Psychosoma

By Libby Harris

‘Not to write about love is to write with your hands
 Behind your back,’ a poet told me once —
 But can you write with other parts — with strands
 Of hair which loosen with the reverence
 Of shoulder against shoulder, in the aisles
 Of the supermarket where we try
 To find and satisfy — piles upon piles
 Of apples set to tumble — how poems lie
 With their sense beyond our palms, which,
 Pinned to the small of my back, my stomach expose —
 I want to finish writing this sonnet, I itch
 To supermarket shop for chopped tomatoes
 And spinach — I am hungry, can’t quite follow through —
 I am twenty years old, what else can I do?

The Halloumi Sonnet

By Louisa Graves

Yesterday I burnt halloumi again,
 charcoaled and flecked black and grey and oh so raw.
 As an afterthought: hob on, heat up, olive oil in.
 Smoke specks rise from the pan — ashened, blackened,
 it is feisty and soon and it craves less/more,
 I stand, soup coldened, company gone dry,
 and pan still spitting — I listened to the leaves outside, wide and deep oak tree
 who doesn’t ask why: rustles, softens, passes by.
 Here, I am 6 again, walking to school, leaving
 twenty minutes early to stare at weeds embedded in pavements.
 I simmer alongside this halloumi: gentle and slow.
 Ochre-resounding sun-swelling
 crisped edges
 we sit, and talk, and marinate: soul-singing.

Drupelets

By Asha Sykes

As the wind grew louder, shards of rain began to pelt themselves against the window — every drop fell downwards, paused in mid-air, and then flew sideways to compose a blotched symphony of grey and glass. The wind bucked: a wild horse trying to shake its rider, thrashing its head and snapping the trees caught in its mane. Gently, a note of thunder was struck in the distance to signal the end of dinner. We rose from our chairs and sleepwalked to bed. Behind the gauze of clouds, a little moonlight bled cautiously and tinted the sky purple.

The air has been thinned like a beautiful woman's hair wisped with scissors, exposing the blackberry juice hiding underneath a sticky fringe — the result of chasing the dying afternoon sun a little too quickly through autumn fields... But now we are dreaming.

~

Above the windowsill, the music of the storm steals my attention. The thunder is soft, it rolls onto its side and rests. Orange light from inside the room merges slowly with the mottled glass, watercolours spreading across a damp page. Your eyes are also wet — but they have no colour left. Your voice is trying to form words that I can't hear, at least not willingly. Your hair splays across the pillow and takes up too much space, I can feel it trapped under my elbow — the itchy resentment. You are underwater: muffled lines, verbal shapes sinking; my eyelids close for a moment to breathe.

She realises and the final trails of Azalea pink, the flowers he picked for her last year, are extinguished from her heart. Fizzing, a haze of champagne splashes onto the floor and forms a seething, frothy sea. He used to care what she said, she used to care if he cared. The bottle is an anchor, it weighs her down so she throws it to the ground for good measure. It shatters beautifully like a wave breaking cleanly on the shore. He finally opens his eyes, but she is deaf to his disgust. She slips the moorings of their sheets, gliding out of the room and into the blue-bruised night.

The Man was crying under my favourite tree. Why was this my favourite tree? It had everything. The leaves were just beginning to show their autumn colours:

bonfire hues of orange and yellow unfurled delicately from the centre of each leaf like Monarch butterflies emerging from their chrysalides. In the overhanging branches two squirrels chased each other round and round in Fibonacci spirals, while a sparrow looked on disapprovingly. A stubborn blackberry bush had somehow rooted itself inside the hollow of the tree trunk and its vines danced all over the bark, stretching up to reach the sky. It seemed to me that the plant was weaving a kind of poetry, I could always see letters in its lines and sometimes scratching words that pricked when I touched them. I walked up to this tree every morning at around 8am, it was the highlight of my commute to school as a student, and once I became a teacher the daily ritual persevered into adult life. I liked to read the tree with a flask of tea, and, most of all, I loved to sit under it with you. But today I arrived at our tree and (too late) realised I wasn't alone. The Man was leaning on the other side of its thinking trunk, except he wasn't occupied with feathery musing like I was — no — he had something trampling on his mind.

'She left me last night,' he said, while keeping his gaze fixed to a point on the horizon, 'I couldn't look at her.' His limbs folded in on themselves as he slid down against the tree to collapse at its base, fit to rot. I sat down on the moss beside him. Why was he unpicking his heart in the place I pick blackberries?

'She left yesterday — the crazy bitch chucked a bottle on the floor and stole my car. She takes everything, always did.'

He finally looks at me, the tears have been wiped away, but their traces remain like slug trails glistening on his cheeks. I can see he wants me to speak: 'I'm sorry.' Is all I can dredge up, the words are sticky in my mouth and glue my teeth together — it takes a concentrated effort to pull them apart. He hears the apology (bared along with my teeth) and his face changes. He suddenly looks malignant in his misery. It is nearly time for school to start: if I stay I will be late. The tree at my back stirs at this thought and beseeches me with its branches. The leaves are ribbons, boldly brandishing their colour to catch the morning light. The blackberries tremble with my hands. I am lost in the place where I normally feel so found — this tree can see me, but that man can't. He doesn't see anything. He's a man underwater who thought he loved a woman until she learned to swim. Now he's alone, descending like the inky shadow of an oil spill seeping into the ocean. He will spread to the horizon, stroking the waves with his greasy fingers and tainting the beach for years to come. That suffocating

murk solidifies in my lungs and I am all tar. Not even his tears can dissolve me. I feel him flaring. He doesn't know for certain, but he suspects me. He had been waiting for me. Stammering something about school soon, I get up and leave.

Natalie seems flustered as she abruptly ends our conversation. As my wife's best friend, she'd had to tolerate me, but she never liked me. She treated me like an inside joke and always called me 'The Man'. I stand up and push off from the tree trunk. Natalie tried to hide it, but I always knew. I saw the jealousy in her eyes: this woman wanted my wife. Giddily, I start follow her and, just as expected, she continues straight past the school gates. *Liar*.

The cobblestones seem to swell under her shoes, bulging like turgid plant cells and my head throbs in time with every footstep, she needs to hurry. He makes sure not to get too close: she won't spot him if she looks behind her, but I see him. He watches her arrive at our doorstep and fumble with her keys — a sure sign of guilt. Before she can select the right one, I open the door from the inside. His heart bites him from inside his chest.

My wife, she beams for Natalie.

Oread

By Sarah Kennedy

Fingers webbed with love, we stumbled up the slope,
turned foot in a foxhole, and from a moment's pain
went forth as crawling things that flick their tongues
to taste the air, rising after rain.

Pine dust. The sudden shock as shadows wing across
our slow-congealing bark. Stretching ligneous limbs,
whose forms have long since gnarled and woven, yet I breathe
myself in you, through this resinous dark.

Tremulous, groaning, we break to new meaning;
the pale light tracks dendritic patterns on our skin.
Minds dulled by sap, whose mouths once drank from mossy
beds whose bodies cannot leap, must leap within
when lightning strikes and sends us shuddering
in splinters down the mountain's streaming flank.

The First Story Festival is hosted by Downing College and the First Story Charity. The Festival Writing Competition is open to participating school children aged 12–16. This year's winning entry was written in response to Quentin Blake's drawing. With warm thanks to QB!

Hoarder's Honeymoon

By Elizabeth Reynolds

Scarlet and Charlie on their honeymoon,
With Purple Rock driver called Mr Doom,
They see with money, and are very snooty,
They're well known hoarders, with no beauty,

They own dragon eyeglasses and golden robot bells,
Cotton candy skyscrapers and owl chess shells,
Fudge book beds and octopus pen leads,
In bags of crushed spices,
That attract all types of mices,
They don't care about the prices,

But not even a toothbrush ... from down at the shop,
Nor trousers a skirt or even a top,
No drinks, no snacks,
They'd rather pack an Indian mop,
"Make sure you put in my gown with electrocuting threads."
"No room."
"Chuck the soap."
They're out of their heads,

"No soap." Mr Doom laughs,
How will you cope,
On purple rock mountain do you at least have a plan?
They both shout nope!



Artwork by Quentin Blake

Empty Egyptian Sheets

By Ivan Ampiah

Even at your worst, when you couldn't remember
 The frames of our faces, the cadences of our laughs
 How to form the wide vowel shapes of our names,
 We remembered you at your best.
 Your hands wizened with aeons of experiences;
 The shrill yet warm timbre of your voice, that bounced off of walls
 And would ring like a comforting ear worm
 For many days afterwards.
 In afternoons spent with you
 Discreetly hidden in little pockets were bouquets of love.
 Each of us had bundles of stories of you.
 Tales so many that each time
 We attempt to recount them, they stifle and choke our tears
 Like heavy vineyards.
 Our queen mother,
 Matriarch majestic who commanded this family fleet
 To divide and conquer,
 Watering and nourishing us till we yielded success.
 Looking now at these empty Egyptian sheets in your room,
 One can't help but notice how the fabric must have been pulled
 Taut
 When they lifted your cold form
 And how it exhaled afterwards:
 Free and fulfilled.
 The ivory bias remembers your perfume, still,
 And in these moments as it passes through my hands,
 Smooth and pale, I once again think of you.
 Resting on your Egyptian sheets,
 Hoping that somewhere from within this
 Emotional soreness, a spring of serenity will someday germinate.
 Within this seemingly endless sea of grief
 A bloom of fondness may peak its little head.

mahler's symphony

By Lauren Herd

for one aching moment
 we are infinite.
 our eyes closed in solemn prayer,
 our hands clasped in benedictions.
 no one dared to move, breathe, think.
 music swells, and we are who we were before.
 we drink when thirsty, we eat when hunger pangs our stomachs,
 we are our ancestors, our lovers, our family.
 a patchwork quilt of what once was, a constellation of who made us.
 deft fingers clutch the bows,
 and hands clap in rapture at the bows.
 hearts stop, then beat ever more fervently than before.

Bruce Forsyth's Retirement Plan

By Charlotte Payne

Bruce Forsyth retired from TV to become a warmonger.
He dreamt of joining the greats:
Napoleon, Churchill, some other warmongers...
It was difficult to start with.

He tried to declare war on Poland
But they weren't interested.
He tried to declare war on Sweden
But they said they were too busy.
And so Mrs Forsyth suggested he started a bit smaller.

So he declared war on Cornwall.
And at first, they were up for it,
But they then decided war wasn't for them
(It was August by then and they were all on holiday).

Bruce was down in the dumps, to tell you the truth,
He grew nasty and bitter and started kicking over bins.
But, sipping his (rather weak) tea and looking out of the window
He had an idea.

He crept outside and wrangled a squirrel.
He shot a pigeon with a crossbow,
And trampled the neighbour's cat, Smudge.
War had been declared —
And it looked like old Brucey was winning.

'Twas a long war — and at times it did concern Mrs Forsyth.
But Field Marshall Bruce was convicted with warmongering determination.
And so she let him be; and got back to her international espionage.

But Bruce's personal hygiene was poor,
And he never washed his hands after a long day's warring.
So he caught a tapeworm from a badger and died.

And so, dear children of Fleet Public Library,
The lesson of this tale is:
'Always wash your hands.
Especially if you're a warmonger.'

Extract from *Elegy of an Actor*

By Jude Hughes

Streetlights, dim and orange, are the only life on the empty main street.

ROGER and ANNA are outside the bar now. It's deserted. It's just them.

ANNA takes in the scene. As always, she is smoking.

ANNA: Hasn't changed a day.

ROGER: Neither have you.

ANNA: Oh, I wish that were true.

ROGER: I don't even remember... All those years ago. Why we ever said goodbye.

ANNA takes a sharp drag, as if that's an answer in itself.

ANNA: And I *really* wish that were true.

ROGER stiffens.

ROGER: It's been forty years, darlin'. It happened to different people, not us.

ANNA: Feels like us.

ROGER: I feel bad for your husband. Having to live up to you and me.
(Wry) What we were...

ANNA: You're arrogant. You knew me before. That doesn't mean you know me better.

ROGER: And you're naive if you think I'll believe that.

ANNA: I've had three husbands. I'm not twenty anymore.

ROGER: We've lived lives. It's what people do. Apparently... But I think of you. Between seconds.

ANNA: Now, what does that even mean?

ROGER: I miss you. Sometimes, I miss you so much I can barely think. And I can't remember who I was before I knew you. I don't think he was worth remembering anyway.

ANNA looks out across the main street, refusing to meet his eyes.

ANNA: God, it's almost scary how similar it all is. Like I never left. Forty years turned to seconds.

ROGER: You would think. But the life we lived doesn't exist anymore and yet I can see it all around. Like I'm always stepping in shards of broken bits of memories.

ANNA moves towards ROGER, brushes her hand against his hair.

ANNA: Maybe it's time we made some new memories.

ANNA waves her lighter at him.

ANNA: You want another one?

ROGER: Looking after my health.

ANNA: Little late for that.

ROGER chuckles, and stares at her for a moment. But his smile shifts.
Memory gets in the way.

ROGER: I can't stop thinking of us. I should have kissed you longer. Should have held you longer.

ANNA smiles. A sad smile.

ANNA: We're like living ghosts. Haunting each other with what can never be.

ROGER threads his fingers through ANNA's hands.

ANNA: I wish I could meet you again for the first time. Do everything right...

ROGER: Isn't that what this is?

ANNA: I used to be with you every day. I know everything about you, and nothing. How are we strangers?

ROGER: You could never be a stranger to me.

ANNA rests her head on his shoulder with the familiarity only an old lover can have.

ANNA: I saw you kiss your wife and thought, when are you gonna tell her that we did that first? The way you danced and thought, we did it too. When will she find out all your favourite films are mine, that all your music you listened to with me, that you cut your hair that way because of me? Will she ever know?

ROGER pushes his ring up and down his finger. Unwilling to listen yet unable to stop himself.

ANNA: I bet you called her my name. Sometimes, late at night, you'd slip up. I know it.

ROGER: I didn't leave you. What I did was for you as much as for me.

ANNA: Oh, how many more times are you gonna repeat that lie?

ROGER: Until I believe it myself.

Dawn is breaking in the distance. The two pause for a moment, hand in hand, staring across the empty street.

ROGER: You're right. I wish I could meet you again. For the first time.

ANNA: Strangers. Eighteen again.

ROGER: When it all seemed so easy, when the world was just waiting for us to put it in order.

ANNA: Invincible again.

ROGER: Thinking we would be different from our parents.

ANNA looks at ROGER, considers all he has been to her.

ANNA: I wanted my children to look like you.

ROGER looks at ANNA. Now they are facing each other. Hands still linked.

ROGER: Maybe if I hadn't gone to college.

ANNA: Maybe if we had been older...

ROGER: Maybe in another life...

ANNA: When are you gonna stop breaking my heart?

ROGER: When are you gonna stop loving me?

ANNA: I could never stop loving you. I think of you all day, and in my dreams, I see your face.

ROGER stands in silence, contemplating that.

ANNA: All I seem to do is remember you.

ROGER: I wish I didn't remember. It would be easier. Kinder. My mind has no mercy.

ANNA: You don't understand. I loved you. I *loved* you...

ROGER: And I loved you... But so what?

ANNA removes her hand from ROGER's.

ANNA: So that's it? To you?

ROGER: I loved you once. I loved you enough for my whole life. But I loved a different you. A you that died a hundred times since.

ANNA: I don't think you ever loved me. Not like I loved you — love you.

ROGER: I wish I didn't. More than anything. I can't believe I still love you, even after it all. That's what scares me the most.

ROGER tries again, to lace his hands with ANNA's.

ANNA: I could have loved you better than anyone...

ANNA kisses his hand, and then lets go of him.

ANNA: But you don't want to be with me, Roger. You just don't want to be alone with yourself.

ROGER backs away.

ROGER: I'll see you tomorrow.

ANNA: Don't be a stranger.

ROGER and ANNA walk off their separate ways.



Artwork by Nathan Ng

Memoires

By *Esmé Goodson*

We're back in this hospital together... The heart monitor sings its jarred lament as I gaze over at you. Your skin is creased like old toffee papers, and your lips are drawn into an empty frown. Your eyes lie closed like flowers curling up for the evening, although we both know that this evening will be your last. The nurse departs for the empty reception area. As she leaves, she glances back, a tear smeared across her cheek. Shakily, I float over to your side and take my place. You look so peaceful, so solemn... My chest swirls with a tornado of emotions. I loved you more than anybody in the world, but now your life is fading... Standing sentinel beside you, I notice a petite wicker basket. Arranged within is a delicate bouquet of photographs with corners curled from recalling the years gone by. The memories flutter before my eyes, a kaleidoscope of butterflies...

Oscillations of sound reverberated around the room. Fairy lights sparkled as we watched our family and friends jive to the celebratory tunes. Do you remember our (surprise) eighteenth birthday party? I only remember how stressful, noisy and crowded it was. I knew you felt the same. It was a bombardment of the senses. As soon as we could, we slipped out of the house and into the garden. We called it a 'garden,' but it was really just a square cut from needles of grass. Do you remember how we looked up at the velvet black of the night sky? Oh, how we traced the sparkling gems encrusted into the cloth. Like a spider spinning the slender threads of her web, we conjured the images that those long before us had uncovered in that same dark cloth. The celestial forms seemed to dance under the glowing wisdom of the silver moon. There was the small dog, the heroic hunter scouting through the sky, and, of course, the twinkling twins gazing back down at the two of us.

It wasn't always peaceful like this. We were side by side whenever things got rough and tough. Primary school: how long ago that feels now. Although, there is still nothing more dangerous than a pack of ravenous children unafraid to tear into anyone. Back then, we always kept to ourselves. Due to our quiet demeanour, we were always prime targets for the residing playground assassins. Do you recall how those imps would throw toys, pull hair, spit out repulsive names? It was as if they absorbed their energy from our suffering and took great delight in doing so.

Ah, a happier photo, Graduation. Once victims, we had climbed the ladder of life and become victors. Graduating from University was a magnificent

feeling. Technically, you were 'the first' in our family. Do you recall the grand amber hall? How it was packed with the other, tense graduates-to-be. In those long three years, these people had been our friends, enemies and comrades in the same academic struggle. As soon as the names started to rise into the air, the sound of ringing hands and shuffling feet followed. Your name was finally called; my heart soared with delight. Trembling behind the curtains of your gown, you strode up to collect your certificate. I was certain that, as you walked, the sculptures on the frieze above were glancing down at you with smiles of approval. Even they were in awe of your extraordinary achievements... I watched as you made your way back down to the crowd, scroll in hand and a grin of infectious elation etched across your face. Never had I been more proud to have you as my twin.

Twins, always together, sharing an unbreakable bond. We were inseparable. Do you recall our adventure in the woods. Were we lost? I remember following you as you ran through the village of trees. The birds sang their chorus of treetop serenades as they welcomed us to their secret domain. The earth was littered with leaf confetti, and the trees waved us on as we passed. With our small limbs, it was mere minutes before we had to slow our pace. Yet before long, the glory of nature snatched our attention, like a Venus flytrap does to her prey. We had found ourselves mesmerised by the mycelium-umbrellas that congregated in the trees' shadows. In the winding ribbons of mossy streams, we were hypnotised by the translucent shimmering forms of fish as they would swim to and fro. However, nothing would compare to the gruesome fascination I found in the frogspawn. Do you remember that groggy little pond where we found them? I stared, engrossed, as you dipped your arm into the clusters of slimy spherical eyes that would clutch to your fingers, like the goosegrass that clung to your back. I had never felt so alive. Slowly, they oozed down your fingertips and plopped back into the festering pond they called home. By the time we had been discovered by our parents, we were tired out, ready to plop back home too.

Ah, wedding photos... It was the happiest day of your life, despite the many mishaps. We were walking up to the marquee when the light breeze blew into a hurricane. Rain began to streak from the sky in heavy opals that burst into plumes of droplets. Gathered into a herd, everyone sprinted for the cover of the swaying marquee, now painted with pearls of precipitation. Once inside, everyone was soaked through to the bone and laughing. Your clothes had stuck to your skin and your hair was badly plastered to your face like the paper mâché we often played with in our youth. Shivering, we all took our seats

while listening to the sky rumble and the rain pattering down above us. As the ceremony began, the wind whistled along to the tune of 'Pachabel's Canon in D.' It was only when it was finally time to present the rings that we realised one was missing. If I had been your best man, I wouldn't have lost the ring. But of course, that wouldn't have been possible! In desperation, little cousin Amy's snack bag was raided for a 'Hoola Hoop' substitute. You both blushed like tomatoes and stumbled over your words in failed attempts to mask your laughter and giggles. As soon as the vows were over, everyone stood up to clap and raise a glass to your future together. All the while the banks of my soul had burst with joy. Even though I felt like I was losing my twin, I knew that you had found someone to accompany you through life, more than I could ever do for you. You had found true love. Or was that Floppy?

Don't tell me you've forgotten Floppy? He was the most amazing, cute little dog in the whole wide world. You had chosen the name – after his ears of course. We had discovered him curled up in a cardboard box outside in the numbing cold on Boxing Day morning. We were accompanying Dad back home after collecting some milk from the corner shop. Mum wanted us out of the house. Our street had been transformed into a winter wonderland. The blanket of snow upon the ground had not yet slunk into slush, and new snowflakes still danced delightfully in the icy draught. As soon as we spotted the tatty box, we were immediately entranced. We gingerly unfurled the flaps to find ourselves staring down at the trembling honey-coloured mass of fur. He had been so delicate and fragile; he was too weak to even lift his head in response to the shrieks and shouts of delight. Remember how much begging it took for Dad to let us keep him? After many bouts of 'please' and promises to take him for walks, Dad finally relented. Once Floppy had recovered, we spent all our time with him. Do you remember how we would frolic in the 'garden', how we would cuddle on the rug and bounce off the walls like a set of rubber bouncy balls?

A lifetime of photographs and memories... but I know, no matter how much I talk, you won't hear me. It seems not so long ago now that we were here together. The same pale morning sun had streamed through the curtains, draping our frail bodies with a fresh light. Our skin, pink, new and rosy, tingled with the cool warmth. We lay in a pair of transparent cribs beside one another, comforted by the certainty of each other's existence. We each had a mosaic of tubes weaving in and out of our bodies. I opened my eyes to a blur of endless white swallowing my sight. I had not the strength to prevent my eyes from

tumbling shut once more, forcing the images around me to permanently drift from my mind. We'd been together an hour before, but this life was never meant for the both of us. It had not taken long for my body to succumb to the sweet songs of slumber. I was whisked away; the doctors couldn't save me. But thank you, my dear twin, for sharing life with me. As I sit here listening to the heart monitor's familiar final notes, I know we will soon be together again.



Photographs by Tomos Davies

early/late

By Aoife Maddock

Treherne Prize Winner

i am enamoured with the girl who sleeps:
 we consistently pass each other by,
 waxing and waning as it all slips from my hands.
 our rhythm is awry; she eats into my day
 so that i am left hungry. we won't mix metaphors
 nor blur the edges of sin so i do not
 eat at night. i supplement meals with sleep.
 i am full with it, trapped in an indulgent lethargy
 that keeps me insatiable. tired. bone tired.
 these bones are hollow, avian, filled with treacle
 or something else that sticks. they whistle in the breeze
 and bone tried to be something with weight, like rock. stone
 rhymes but it didn't fit. too soft, i think.
 she waits for me on a street i can't name.

The smaller wonder

By Sarah Kennedy

Give me the smaller wonder
 The littleness of miracle I can grasp.
 The fragmentary light, the tree's curve,
 The assured sweep of the rook's wing
 Traversing the ripened field.
 The milk sky of a March afternoon
 Presaging absent snow.
 The vectored sweetness of sun and breath.
 Let the wound be gentle that marks the memory,
 The grasses soft and vernal, on the ways that call us home.

The Last Sunday

By Jude Hughes

The morning sun reaches out
 Long-armed, cradling Earth again
 It has been too long.

Brilliant shards of dawn
 Their shadows long and lusting
 In their regret, their longing.

Diluted streams of light
 Frayed at the seams
 This is the last sunrise.

Naked winter sun
 Serene in stagnant sky
 Unsympathetic, unkind, unforgiving.

Howling through frail trees
 The wind is indifferent
 It will breeze whether I am here or not.

Blue light seeps in
 Cloaks us in drowsy misstep
 All of life faded to memory.

Potent ink of evening
 Indigo clouds tumid with the unsaid
 All I get is closer, not wiser.

Hearty dusk of autumn forecloses in
 Somber gloom, aware of all failings
 That was the Sunday I packed up my life.

Sunday

By Ryan Keys

I'm nine years old and Bloody Sunday is a song on the radio. It's playing through the speakers of my mum's car as she drives me home from school, but I'm telling her what we did in class that day, so I don't hear the words. The chorus is catchy though, and it will be half term soon.

I'm eleven years old, and Bloody Sunday is a phrase glimpsed as I pretend not to listen while the grown-ups are talking. It has something to do with my uncle and where he lives, which is where my dad used to live too. The conversation seems quite serious. I think they notice me listening, so I go back to my Nintendo DS and make a face like I'm really concentrating, but I don't think this works because I don't hear the words again. I'll have to wait until next time. I don't mind this though — it's Christmas tomorrow and that's much more exciting.

I'm thirteen years old, and Bloody Sunday is a film that my uncle was involved in. I had no idea my uncle was in a film — let alone a film with Christopher Eccleston, my second favourite Doctor Who. I'm very excited because I'm finally old enough to watch it, but I try to act nonchalant so my parents don't change their minds. My uncle explains the plot to me: "In the early 70s there was a civil rights march back home in the Bogside, down the road from where your Dad and I grew up. The people were protesting political injustice against Catholics in Northern Ireland. The government sent the paras in to control the protest, but the soldiers ending up shooting at people with live rounds. A lot of people were injured, and fourteen were killed. A few of the lads who were killed weren't much older than yourself." He asks if I have any questions and I tell him that I don't and that it all makes sense. This is mostly true: I'd learnt about civil rights in school — they were invented by Martin Luther King in America, and I know that Catholics are the good guys and Protestants are the bad guys, so 'paras' must be another word for Protestants.

I'm a bit more than thirteen years old now, and Bloody Sunday is the film on the big TV that has just finished. The room is very quiet, and I know I'm about to be asked what I thought so I try and figure that out. It turns out that the 'paras' aren't the same as Protestants. It's actually another name for English soldiers — the same soldiers that I honoured every year with a poppy and a minute's silence. But they're not saving the day here. They're killing innocent people, including my uncle who is shot in the back as he tries to crawl to safety.

This wasn't like the violence I sought out in the films my parents said I was too young to watch, the violence that was thrilling but also righteous, because the good guys always won. This was real violence, carried out by real people in the real world, where the good guys did not always win.

I'm fifteen years old, and Bloody Sunday is a truant who never turns up to history lessons. The British Empire is as good as ancient history now, and America was much worse anyway. I try to talk to my friends about it, but no one knows what it is when I bring it up. I guess their parents are waiting until they're a bit older to have the 'talk'. I try to fill in the gaps myself, but I soon realise that I'm vastly underqualified to answer the inevitable follow-up questions: why would the soldiers do that? What happened next? My first port of call is, of course, Wikipedia, and I learn that Bloody Sunday was a key event in something called 'the Troubles' — an 'ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland that lasted for about 30 years from the late 1960s to 1998'. Finally, I had a name for the thing that made the grown-ups look serious and sad, talking in hushed tones as the night came to a close. A name for that unsettling presence glimpsed in the periphery of happy childhood tales. A name that would always seem too feeble to bear the weight it was made to carry.

I'm seventeen years old, and Bloody Sunday is that thing that happened in the place where *Derry Girls* is set. Finally, people offer a response other than, "where's that?" when I tell them that my Dad is from Derry. People seem to really love the show too, and I tell them with pride that my Dad walked down those very streets when he was a teenager. It's a very funny show, they all tell me, and I have to agree with them when I watch it too. Like them, I laugh in all the right places, and stay quiet in the right ones too. Still, I can't help but wonder whether those silences sound the same in their living rooms as they do in mine.

I'm nineteen years old, and Bloody Sunday is a footnote in my undergraduate thesis. I've started studying Northern Irish literature at university, stuffing the gaps in my heritage with drama and poetry and anything else I can lay my hands on. Finally, I have found an arena to talk about Ireland outside of my own home, and never before have I found myself to know so little. Every new detail begets a new web of inquiry, a new crash-course in political history delivered by the soft glow of my laptop screen. I am not reading but consuming, devouring each text in the hope that it will give me the right words to say what I need to say in the right way. I skim through pages that should silence an auditorium, harvesting soundbites that can end a paragraph with a punch. Eventually, the deadline comes around, and my words are immortalised by the automated

email confirming my submission. I close my laptop with a sigh of relief and take my stack of books back to the library.

I'm twenty-one now, and Bloody Sunday still stifles the air of Derry's Bogside. After a long time, I have finally returned to Derry, and my uncle takes me on the tour he has been giving for decades. The layers of distance and abstraction between me and that day in 1972 collapse in on themselves as I look at the back wall of the Museum of Free Derry, where there is what looks like a picture frame protruding from the red brickwork. Behind a shield of steel and reinforced glass sits a fragment of the original wall, rescued from the passage of time, which crumbles bricks into dust and memories into myth. There are two gouges in the wall, where it looks like someone has tried to break their way in with a hammer and chisel.

But this was not the handiwork of some rogue labourer. These were cavities punched into the wall's surface by 7.62mm rifle rounds fired at high velocity. Far from the familiar polka-dots of the Hollywood studio, they are crude and uneven, and in my head I replace the brickwork with flesh, summoning images that I try in vain to blink away. My uncle knows every detail of that day, right down to the singular fresh brick in a row of terraces, which marks the absence of another ballistic scar. As he narrates the death of each victim, I am silenced by the recognition that I am now older than many of them got to be. I take on the bereavement of an older brother, and the guilt — not of a survivor — but of an ignorant observer.

Echidna

By Chara Triantafyllidou

i

Her eyes devoured the darkness of the Earth,
Skin glistening under a sharp dent
A drop of life brings a flood of death.

A viper's love could never be in dearth;
Typhon knows time with her is always well spent,
Her eyes devoured the darkness of the Earth.

A cavern once filled with hollows of birth
Is now rotting in the echoes of lament —
A drop of life brings a flood of death.

She imagined frail human hands around a lion's girth,
A beast once feared now wilting under Moira's intent,
Her eyes devoured the darkness of the Earth.

How dare a mere demigod disturb her kin's mirth!
Such a brazen killing would cause any mother to dement;
A drop of life brings a flood of death.

In Typhon's serpent arms, once, she found her berth,
Yet now she is wailing, in her cave forever pent.
Her eyes devoured the darkness of the Earth.
A drop of life brings a flood of death.

ii

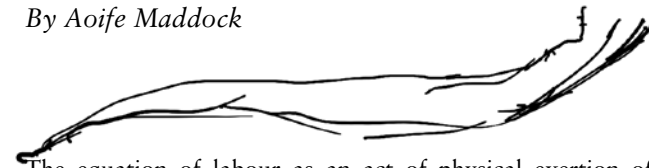
Humans could never stop battling their greed
— neither did gods when they started a fight —
Heracles has stained his sword for a deed
And so Echidna has fates to unwrite.

For when Orthros fell after her lion,
 Their blood filled her soul with the sharpest of aches.
 While mourning in darkness, the one of her scion,
 An omen appeared in the form of a quake.

Her most precious daughter bathed in her blood —
 eyes that once sparked in joy now all shut —
 a bare wound threatened by a flame's rud,
 blocked by a dragon in her proudest strut.

Moirā's intents have hence been undone;
 Hydra, now salvaged, is reigning in rut
 and Hercules by the King has been shunned.

By Aoife Maddock



The equation of labour as an act of physical exertion often performed by workers in exchange for wages, and labour as the last stages of pregnancy and the act of giving birth is something that is key to my analysis of the creation and animation of Frankenstein's creature. Mary Shelley is sure to make us aware of the tangible toll Frankenstein's work takes on his body, 'after days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life', and yet also, the incredible fulfilment he receives from it, 'after so much time spent in painful labour, to arrive at once at the summit of my desires, was the most gratifying consummation of my toils' (71). There is something approaching the realm of sexuality in Shelley's choice of lexis, 'summit' and 'consummation' create this implication of a climax of Frankenstein's mental and physical labour; his satisfaction is worded as almost orgasmic. This initial romanticism and sexualisation of Frankenstein's work contrasts the horror that follows, and conflates once again these two concepts of labour.

There is a reading here for Frankenstein's creature not only as his creation, but as his product. The lack of appeal to the Creature renders him, in an industrial world, functionally useless. Frankenstein has laboured over a product he will be unable to sell; he will not be acclaimed for his creation, and so Frankenstein has no use for him. I make mention of this analysis primarily to show the inextricable connection between procreation, and creation for consumption, and how Shelley's convergence of these themes speak prominently to a reader in the modern age — one who is concerned with the coalescing of personal identity and industry.

There is further exploration of this within the text of *Frankenstein*, specifically within Frankenstein's anxiety concerning the Creature's own reproduction, 'a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth', yet it is his elaboration on this point that lends a density to this analysis, '[they] might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?' (232). For we have several lenses by which to examine this statement, this question, begged by Frankenstein. He characterises procreation on the behalf of his creature as devilish, by extension confirming his own act of procreation as unholy. However, it is placing this hypothetical brood against the next generations of humanity that

clarifies the Creature's role not only as the anxiety of birth and sexuality¹, but the cause of those anxieties. We can see that through her conflation of the two concepts of labour, Shelley represents the incitement of our downfall, and the ultimate victims of it. Yet, layered on top of this are further anxieties concerning tradition and family. The unique and insidious relationship between Frankenstein and his creature can be read as breakdown of the traditional family unit in the early industrial revolution; fathers would spend more time away from their wives and children, and so there was a seismic shift in the nature of families and their purpose. The twisted ambiguity of Frankenstein and the Creature's relationship to and fixation upon each other demonstrates this.

Yet I am more interested, still². I remain interested. Transposed and interested. 'Over time', 'change over time'³, lain over time like pastry, like fabric — something else made with hands. Kneaded, folded, needed and held. Frankenstein speaks of 'the cause of generation and life', and his 'fatigue', and I remain so statuesque in my interest in whether this fatigue was an invention of Shelley's. When I write of my fatigue, is it different than diluting that fatigue through an invention? Or is the very fatigue itself changed by its form, its presence on the page; now it's away from me. Picture a flock of birds on the wind, paper wings and me, a singular, faceless, grounded figure trying to hold them all to my chest.

I forget; I apologise.

Mary Shelley's work remains a physical, unmoving body through the time that passes by it. And the more I am faced with the reality of creation, the more unnerved I become. Time is liquid as my hands move to write, but this, here, remains. Once it is written, we are separate. I can unwrite it, and then it is gone. I can leave something halfw

But even the absence of a conclusion is a reference to one, and I find myself painted into a corner, unwilling to give up this gestating being inside me. The continual, rhythmic, writhing, angry movement of pen on paper; they are tendrils, the cursor on the screen feels eldritch and unknown, a hand outstretched

¹ London, Bette. "Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, and the Spectacle of Masculinity." PMLA, vol. 108, no. 2, 1993, 253–67. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/462596>. Accessed 24 Feb. 2023.

² Still, I feel something beginning to shift.

³ Read: reference to a line that no longer exists.

for a toll I cannot pay. I am disgusted by what comes out of me, vile and black and seeping into the carved outlines of the page, but if I stop⁴.

This text lives on where I do not. I am repulsed by it, envious of it. It feels not like me, but close, as though we are related in water but not blood. It is from me, and yet it doesn't need me. Not once it is finished. Where do I go once this is finished. Will I be swallowed by it? Is it a whole different beast entirely? I write as though I know who I'm addressing. The version of myself on the other end of the elliptical? How is it, I wonder, to read me back to myself. Do we have anything in common, still?

Picture: a wide maw, protruding from the whispers at the bottom of the page — the second, interjectory voice. A creature with empty eye sockets who eats the white spaces between these words. Without what I am not, how can I know what I am. Exercising in self reference is exhausting and I am feeling the call of something not quite death but close. Related. Maybe I am almost done. Maybe it takes a new form, and I keep moving. Here, it stays still.

I take the resources available to me and build myself somewhere to lay. I'm tired.

It is hard for me to remember where we began. It's something of a closed loop.



The equation of labour as an act of physical exertion often performed by workers in exchange for wages, and labour as the last stages of pregnancy and the act of giving birth is something that is key to my analysis of the creation and animation of Frankenstein's creature.



⁴ Where am I.

Elon's Verse: Tokenised Reverie

By LT Stockmann, with contribution from Jack Peck

The Earth, costs decreasing rapidly,
 Crazy number of launches this year,
 Pretty much, blimps rock, going to the moon,
 A monkey is literally playing,
 Telepathically, using a brain chip,
 A tidal wave of vaccine is being produced,
 The Earth is not flat, it's a hollow globe

The words are based on recent tweets by Elon Musk and we used prompt engineering to get gpt-3.5 to curate and arrange the quotes in a meaningful form.

Songs of an Angst-Ridden Youth

By Charlotte Payne

Fuck Fuck Fuck, Fuck
 Provocative
 Vulgarities
 Etcetera.

Sprinkle in a touch of self-hatred
 A dash of dysmorphia
 And just a pinch of obsession to taste —
 Oh rise, Angst-Ridden Teen.

O unfortunate sight:
 The pages of unedited nonsense,
 Wasted eloquence...
 Replaced with the 'fucks,' 'shits' and 'cunts' of youth.

Pathetic, with a façade of pretension,
 Quiet pride misplaced on dross
 And, as such, these songs may continue, slightly
 Self-aware (but still a bit shite).

Fuck Fuck Fuck, Fuck
 Etcetera.



Artwork by Nathan Ng

The Rose Garden

By *Emily Finston*

Treherne Prize Winner

Do you remember the rose garden, now?
 You walked there on my arm a while ago
 And we walked slowly through the flowers,
 Looking for the hours yet to lose,
 Between our footsteps and the paths.
 The sky peeled blue —
 It laughed as only a living mouth can do
 And then dusk pursed its purple lips
 And we went slipping on, like light,
 Till rosebeds rose to meet us.
 It slips,
 Too light a thing, the mind,
 Blown like light among the rose heads
 Where seconds steady in the dew.
 The moment was to us our own,
 So clearly in the brightness,
 Delighting in our likeness;
 It seemed to never pick a rose picked all.
 Then never hardened and became an absolute,
 Took root amid the garden and overtook
 The roses where we stood.

Come stand — It rains —
 Come tangle in the rosebeds and let rain
 Wash out our eyes, dissolve our images;
 Let rain wash the mind
 Of lingering afflictions;
 There is a cleanliness otherwise known as peace.

Naked in Hendaye

By Libby Harris

Treherne Prize Winner

Last night I watched the heatwave become swallowed by the Atlantic from the nudist section of Hendaye's beach. The sun was pale and high at 5 o'clock and the sky was somehow paler. It was evaporating the ocean as if collecting its cobwebs, water rising in fine tendrils and spinning into the glare. The nudists were backlit: hazelnut phantoms against an ocean cross-hatched by westerlies. I presumed that they kept their pubic hair so shaven, for the most part, to better display their anatomy; that there is, to nudism, a dedication to disclosure. Willa countered with practicality: perhaps they want to keep their regions sand-free, for hygiene and comfort? I had visions of bearded men sporting breadcrumbs and dribbles of tea, the crumbs fanning into seaweed and the tea drying into a saltwater crust. I decided to leave my presumptions there. Willa and I had spent the last six weeks au-pairing for two little girls on what is surely the most isolated farm in France. Adult psychology was a novelty.

Many streets in Hendaye are named after trees (Rue des Pins, des Citronniers, des Magnolias) and felt, last night, as leading and clear as orchard paths. A few residents clustered in city-shrunk supermarkets and sloped parks. There was the distinct feeling, as we climbed into the town from the low-lying train station, that local prudence sealed Hendaye's population into their whitewashed apartment complexes and scarlet-timbered cottages. Just Anglo-Americans on the beach in these conditions, we reasoned, as we traipsed shoreward weighted with water reserves. Confronted by the kaleidoscope of parasols and ranks of sweltering, swim-suited bodies on Hendaye's beach, our assumption became laughable. We decided after a few paces to go the whole distance, to pick our way along the curve of the shore to where the population grows sparser and the laminated flush of the bluff swells to a pine-crust height and recedes, fragmented, into the waves. Nudism is effortful and geographically located beyond the comfort zone of other people.

We call it 'anthropology' every time we give more than a passing glance to the humans around us, as children of the humanities with Gen Z's irony, but I think a nudist location merits the term more than most. The demographic skewed toward the white over-fifties, toward men with greying temples and thinning ankles. They patrolled slowly, stomachs distended like aged cats, or else sat squinting such that the direction of their gaze was obscured. If they had wives, they lay on their stomachs as the women caressed their backs; if they were

overheated after participating in hopeful nudism for too long, they propped themselves sideways in the ocean and let the swash knock them over. For that was how it seemed by the end, their nudism 'hopeful', merely a concession for that of others'. I had given them the benefit of the doubt at first, assured Willa and myself that nudists had conventions of privacy and respect, but my naïveté soon surfaced. What were these men offering to the beach? I would not ask if they were not so blatantly taking, peering over their stubbled chests.

Willa and I wore bikinis for our first bathe, dashing without a sideways glance, and found the Atlantic as swamp-like and salty as our spines. My childhood summers were spent in Normandy, always more able than my father and brother to pull the chilled teal of the Atlantic up and over my hips. I had not expected even our unsalvageable climate to cause such a difference between the north and south of France. You would not leave a bath of its temperature if you ignored the fibrils of seaweed and muddied opacity.

The bathwater grew cold, at least to our minds, and we repaired to our towel, its yellow clarified against the coarse sand. Bikini tops left out to dry, we ate our baguette and Carrefour aperitifs whilst performing our own version of the anthropological sun-squint. Willa told me her chest had never seen the sun, meaning, it had not seen the sun since it became more than a chest. Heads turned on wizened necks, our bodies conspicuously pale, particularly shaped. Before long, practicality moved us to the ocean: if we left our bikini bottoms behind while swimming, we reasoned, they would dry in the white July of Basque country, and we would avoid soaking seawater into the train's seats on our return to Bayonne. It was all, of course, just a practicality.

The Atlantic greeted us like a puppy, bounding from all angles with more strength than it intended. The vapour layer was dense enough to obscure the high-rises on the staid side of the bay. Floating, we tipped our faces to the sky to feel the current act on our hair follicles, tug at our scalps, soothe where the sun had lodged and clawed. A man, the youngest nude besides the two of us, waded unnoticed into our proximity. Our voices, buoyant and unselfconscious, must have struck him. Surely, not our bodies. Whilst he asked us which language we were speaking, Willa let some waves prop her out of the conversation. I remained facing the visitor, our bodies perhaps six feet apart. I was not concerned by this, however, but sunk my attention into translating his French.

'Français? Espagnol?'

'Anglais.'

‘And where do you come from?’

‘Well, England.’

‘Oh, oh, really?’

As I puzzled over his semblance of shock, strawberry-blonde and pale as I am, the man mumbled something in English about my face resembling a friend of his, and vanished without my noticing how or in what direction. A man so conventionally attractive that he was not, in fact, attractive at all, I doubt he would approach me now on this Bayonne quayside, shivering and scribbling in linen trousers. In that slice of Hendaye we spoke eye to eye, our bodies all that there was to us, and thus almost nothing at all.

Second Funeral

By Aoife Maddock

Treherne Prize Winner

I sit in the third row of four pews and think about carpentry. Two inches from my left foot is the joint of the pew in front of me. The only specific, named joint I know is a dovetail, of which I initially had a vague aesthetic idea, that has now been confirmed by an online search. DIY websites are telling me, using clipart arrows, ‘they should look like this’. I agree. Based on my extremely limited knowledge of joints, I think dovetails are my favourite, and all joints should look like them.

The joint to the left of my left shoe is not dovetail. It reminds me of coloured building blocks coated in dried milk solution. It reminds me of a deconstructed crucifix, but that’s likely my Catholic-adjacent upbringing filling the concerted spiritual-not-religious blank space of the walls, the blocks of plain wood, with something a little iconographic. There is only one nail visible to me, driven through the head of the block that reminds me of a sphinx. Though, any shape with a notable decline/incline reminds me of a sphinx. The sphinx emerges from a wall of plain wood, the support plank upon which the seat of the pew rests, and sprouted beneath it are two arms and a single leg. A toilet man, his bulbous round head flattened beneath the leg of the pew.

My brother’s knee blocks the twin, parallel joint from my view, so I have no point of comparison. This is distressing, primarily due to the fact that the sphinx is not aligned to the man nor the leg, a needle pointing just slightly north-east. The nail, an empty eye socket, has driven the sphinx into a perpetual misalignment. Blind and disorientated, it points away from its brother whom, I would hazard to guess, is pointing directly at it. I cannot confirm this; a knee is in my line of sight.

I think of apartment complexes, architecture, infrastructure, rooftops, railings, legs until I circle back around to carpentry. I wonder what happens to make a pew joint so slightly crooked. Someone else’s left foot was stronger and closer and slightly more aggressive than mine; the sphinx was rotated around its eye and left to stare from a slightly altered perspective. Or maybe this is how it has always been. Maybe the carpenter was tired of making joints for pew legs and his tiredness manifested a slippery hand which in turn led to a crooked, one-eyed, compass point.

They play Frank Sinatra's 'Swinging on a Star' as we leave, siphoned out by a man whose name I have forgotten, but remember being incredibly suited to his profession. The first time I raise my downcast eyes from my feet and their neighbours, I am standing, and I can see rows of the same joints, the ankles and feet of the companioning pews, pews one, two and three. These joints do not have a sphinx, or rather, their sphinx is not so easily removed from their man who is not so easily removed from the leg. They are just a joint. Well aligned and load-bearing. People have sat, and now they stand. My knees ache a little, as we walk into the garden.



Photographs by Tomos Davies

Your offence is rank, it smells to heaven

By Asha Sykes

I am thy salted spirit,
Blessed every morning to walk this frail path,
And seek the surf hidden behind the dunes
Till, climbing the last crest of sand, the sea
Unfolds itself to me.

The sight makes me turn
To my bones,
The sea's blue is scarred by a dark stinking stain:
Sewage seeping and spreading until all is grained. The rain
Sighs to a stop.

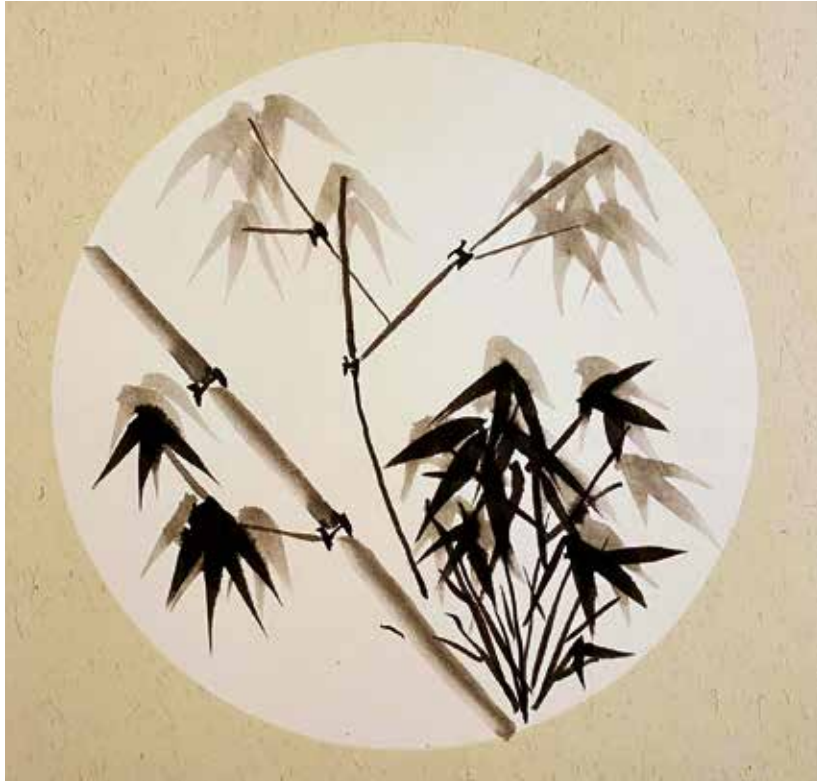
(We sink into nauseous pause)

Rocks wading past the shore's edge are stuck up
To their waist in a foaming brown scum the tide
Lurches inwards pulling the poison with it as every
Breath of exhaled water splays further up the beach and
In again rolling writhing wheezing trying to choke to cough
Up the phlegm lining limed lungs —

The sunrise is no help, the light is an excellent liar,
It rushes down to the billowing sludge, where blue's flesh
Is flaking brown, and dresses the festering sore
With a fine cloth of orange, disguising the unusual mesh
Of glassed water and eddying spores

The Lighthouse:
Beneath its watch,
The wind tangles my hair
(Listen to the whisperings it plants in my mildewed ear)
Virginia's tears run down the cliff's sunken cheeks
Wriggling their way through a crevice
And onto the sand
To form a river
Wound-weeping
Into the sea.

I can't pace the path anymore
I trace my steps
With waterlogged words:
Child-like and unsteady
Still learning to walk, teetering
Staggering —
Heavy with damp weight.
Blotted.



Artwork by Nathan Ng

The Death of Children

By Richard Berengarten

It is the death of children most offends
nature and justice. No use asking why.
What justice is, nobody comprehends.

What punishment can ever make amends?
There's no pretext, excuse or alibi.
It is the death of children most offends.

Whoever offers arguments pretends
to read fate's lines. Although we must swear by
what justice is, nobody comprehends

how destiny or chance weaves. Who defends
their motives with fair reasons tells a lie.
It is the death of children most offends.

Death can't deserve to reap such dividends
from these, who scarcely lived, their parents cry.
What justice is, nobody comprehends.

Bring comfort then, and courage. Strangers, friends,
are we not all parents when children die?
What justice is, nobody comprehends.
It is the death of children most offends.

Contributors

Aoife Maddock is a second-year English student from Swansea, Wales. Aoife's interest in film and screenwriting generates a style of prose and poetry that focuses on visuals, as well as mixed-media pieces. Inspired by surrealist and Dada movements in visual culture, Aoife likes to write on and encapsulate the strange and off-putting.

Among other things, **Libby Harris** has been: a pale British student at a liberal arts college in (near-ish) Los Angeles; an au-pair for a vegan, French family; a full-time, closing-shift, back-of-house worker in a swanky hotel; and a second-year undergraduate in the English Tripos. She journals often, loves to cook, and feels most herself when she is walking. Inspirations (/recommendations) include Teju Cole, Ada Limón, and Mary Jean Chan.

Ivan Ampiah is a first-year studying HSPS and an occasional hobby-poet. His philosophy for writing poetry is the opportunity to make the mundane lyrical, especially as a therapeutic creative output. Literary influences for him include Nella Larsen, Theresa Lola, Simon Armitage and Philip Larkin. When he is not scribbling down a few lines, he can reliably be found tinkering about with a script or having a debate about Shakespeare's best love story (spoiler: it's not Romeo & Juliet!).

Sophie Davies is a first-year Law student who has been writing since she was six years old (although she can't promise any of that was any good). She predominantly writes YA fantasy novels but occasionally branches out into short stories from time to time. Her favourite authors include VE Schwab, Sarah J Maas and Olivie Blake, and she uses a mad system of post-it-notes to keep her book plotting in order.

Asha Sykes is a second-year undergraduate studying the English Tripos. She is a surfer (maddeningly landlocked in Cambridge during term time) and her creative work dreams of and for the sea. Her work takes inspiration from the gentleness of dappled sunlight, the damp language of moss, and the shapes of waves bending to greet the shore.

Alice Roberts is a second-year Engling who spends the majority of her time at university feeling at least slightly homesick. As a result, she finds herself often thinking, dreaming and writing about her hometown, a small countryside town in Kent. The piece she has submitted is the most recent iteration in a long string of writing on village life, which includes her co-written play 'VEGAS' that is heading to the Edinburgh Fringe this August.

Siong Chen Meng is currently an MPhil student studying biophysics, however his undergraduate degree in chemistry means he does not quite understand either biology or physics. Inspired by modern poets like Larkin and Plath, and contemporary ones such as Ocean Vuong and Boey Kim Cheng, he writes to capture the visceral rawness that comes with life and to put into words feelings and stories that otherwise would not be captured.

Raised in Nottingham, **Tomos Davies** began his photographic journey in earnest during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. With his grandad's old pointand- shoot, he quickly developed an appreciation for the technical and artistic aspects of photography. Entirely self-taught, he draws inspiration from online creators as well as established industry heavyweights. Having built a diverse portfolio capturing friends and family, he now works with models across the University community and beyond.

Joe Stell is a second-year Chemical Engineer, with an occasional interest in creative writing but more often found rowing or underground, caving or mine-exploring. His experience in creative writing is limited, with it mostly being an emotional outlet, and so his writing is guided entirely by introspection and instinct, without knowledge of what makes interesting and intelligent poetry.

Jenn Ashworth was born in Preston and studied at Cambridge and Manchester. Her novels include *A Kind of Intimacy*, *The Friday Gospels* and *Fell*. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2018. In 2019 she published *Notes Made While Falling*, a memoir told in a series of essays. Her latest novel is *Ghosted: A Love Story*. She is a Professor of Writing at Lancaster University.

Lucy Tansley is a second-year Philosophy student. She draws with a 0.5mm HB mechanical pencil, and occasionally paints in watercolour. Her graphite works take inspiration from the grotesque; she studies that which decays and

that which unsettles. She also likes to draw cute fluffy hamsters but figured that they'd throw off the cool emo vibe if she submitted them alongside Hungry Hungry Horsey and Weird Pigeon (pages 36 and 37).

Jude Hughes is a first-year undergraduate studying English.

Eli Stone: 28 - New York, New York - MBA '24.

A passion for adventure and exploration of culture, music and food has taken Eli to 28 countries across six continents. He thinks of life as a series of one-year lives and, through photography, Google Maps layers and journaling, Eli records his experiences for personal reflection. He believes it's important to build and analyze the archives of our younger selves for ongoing insight, inspiration and investment toward future personal reward.

Kezia Kurtz is a finalist reading English.

Isaac Boyten is a fascinating and brilliant man. A delicate blend of casanova-like charisma, poetical magnificence, and intense misanthropic rage, he does not often write, claiming there to be a fine line between his brilliance and stupidity. Rather, he scorns fellow 'Englings' for their incessant writing; he chooses instead to unleash his Achillean rage on inanimate objects at the gym before consuming copious quantities of Pringles and pizza in a quasi-ritualistic wallowing of self-pity.

Louisa Graves is a second-year undergraduate studying English.

Sarah Kennedy is a UK-based writer and critic. Her work is grounded in the deep magics of ecological process, in myth, metaphor, and metamorphosis. Her poetry and fiction is immersed in the landscapes of her native Australia, Dartmoor, and the North Downs in Kent. She teaches at Downing College, Cambridge.

Elizabeth Reynolds is a thirteen-year-old student from Trinity High School in Manchester. She won the 2023 First Story Festival Writing Award with her response to Quentin Blake's image.

Lauren Herd is a second-year lawyer at Downing College; her simplistic style pulling from personal experiences is inspired by the work of Walt Whitman and

Phoebe Bridgers. Engaging most prominently in free verse, Lauren writes poetry to put her profound feelings onto the page. She is inspired by Alan Menken's idea that, in a musical, a character should not be singing unless they feel greatly enough to do so — this philosophy follows her into poetry.

Charlotte Payne is a first-year studying English. She's doing her best.

Nathan Ng is a second-year undergraduate student studying Biological Natural Sciences. Chinese painting has been one of his main hobbies from a young age, and it is still something he really enjoys. He has painted for over 10 years and has had the chance to participate in several art exhibitions in Hong Kong, where he is from. Chinese painting and science may not sound very compatible with one another; still, both require good observation skills and meticulous attention to detail, and painting various plants and animals has allowed him to gain a better understanding of their characteristics and traits, which will prove valuable to his future career!

Esmé Goodson is a four-year Classics student in her third year from Southport. She enjoys writing prose fiction when she can find the time and is interested in writing children's fantasy, occasionally dabbling in short stories. She is also interested in the prospect of reimagining ancient works. When she is not writing, Esmé can be found reading or playing music.

Ryan Keys is currently reading for an MPhil in English Studies. After completing his undergraduate degree in English at Downing, he is developing his studies this year with a particular focus on Northern Irish literature and political history, as expressed through theatre and film. Alongside his studies, Ryan is a keen member of the Cambridge theatre scene, and has been involved in a variety of productions from Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart* at the ADC to Romeo and Juliet at Trinity College Chapel.

Chara Triantafyllidou is a third-year PhD Student in Linguistics. She grew up in the Greek countryside and her writing draws inspiration from Ancient Greek she-monsters. Her first published poem was about the Lernaean Hydra and it was featured in the University of Edinburgh Journal. A more introspective piece was published in last year's issue of *The Leaves*. She writes to get at peace with her state of being, and to reincarnate herself in heroines living in her notebook.

LT Stockmann is a second-year undergraduate studying Computer Science.

Emily Finston is currently reading for an MPhil in English Studies.

Richard Berengarten is a poet who lives and works in Cambridge. His poem, 'The death of children', was written in former Yugoslavia in the late 1980's and is included in his book *The Blue Butterfly* (Shearsman Books, 2011). His recording of it can be heard here: poetryarchive.org/poet/richard-berengarten/. A Downing Bye-Fellow, teaching study skills, he has just turned 80 (shearsman.com/richard-berengarten-at-80).