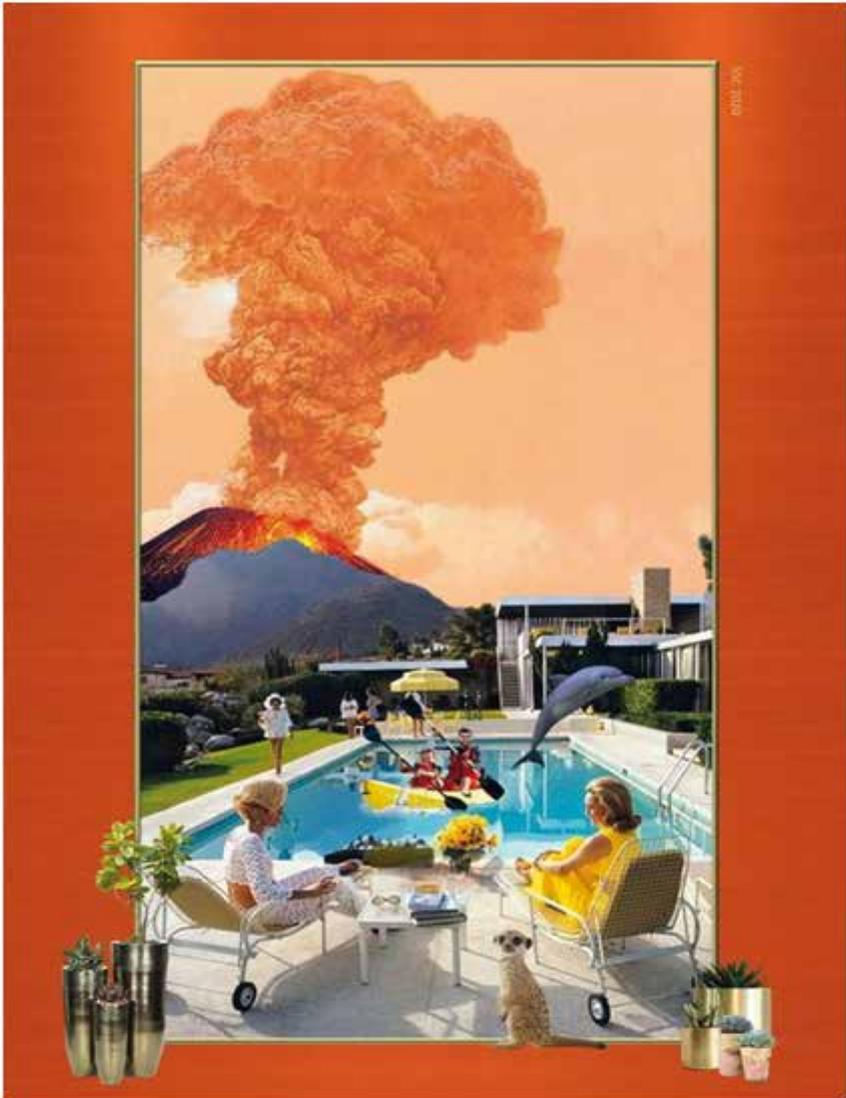


Climate Matters



Poems and Prose about the
Climate Crisis and Capitalism



Climate Matters

**A collection of poems, stories,
life writing, images and
science writing about
the climate crisis and capitalism**

**Edited and introduced by
Virginia Baily, Sally Flint
and Mike Quille**

Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations.

—Karl Marx



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We take this as an occasion to further celebrate our accolade as Exeter UNESCO City of Literature (<https://www.exetercityofliterature.com>).



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Introduction

In 2019 we challenged writers and artists to address the burning topic of the climate crisis and question its relationship with capitalism. In 2020 Covid-19 erupted and spread across the world.

The whole of this anthology has been assembled under the on-going but ever-changing restrictions imposed by this pandemic, which has necessarily coloured the content in ways that we could not have foreseen when we put out the call for submissions.

Amongst other effects, the Covid lockdown made our world pause; it let the Earth breathe—albeit for a short time. It made us search for words that imagined a brighter, cleaner, greener future. At the same time it let climate concerns slip down the agenda, and in our sudden need for PPEs and facemasks made us forget our unkept promises about single use plastic. Ultimately though, its advent and its non-respect for borders, remind us of how we are all interconnected. The Coronavirus also inspired writers to show how health and wellbeing relate to eco-systems and the climate crisis. It was a logical step to link *Climate Matters* with the ‘Waking up to the planetary health emergency’ conference at the University of Exeter and to have the publication of the anthology coincide with the start of this.

If the descent to extinction is ‘not a slippery slope, but a series of cliff edges, hitting different places at different times,’ as Alex Pigot of University College London, said in his study into the loss of biodiversity, (*Nature*, April 2020), then the pieces in this rich and varied collection can be said to fall into four main categories: the edge of the cliff; over the edge; the ledge on the cliff-face; stepping back from the edge.

The majority of the pieces fit into the first category. They constitute an attempt to articulate the status quo, to do that difficult thing of lifting the blinkers from our eyes and staring clear-sightedly at what is revealed about the state of our planet and its causes. They seek to counter the massive, wilful blind spot so arrestingly conjured in Bob Beagrie’s ‘Last Supper’ where the demented god in whose image we constantly re-fashion ourselves has ‘plucked out his own eyes so he shall not see our plight.’

This is the first hurdle, and it is difficult to surmount both because what clear vision affords us is terrifying and because we are in and of the system, the children of global capitalism, and not geared to viewing dispassionately the thing to which we belong.

Some writers shared a vision of going over the edge and explored various dystopian and/or post-apocalyptic futures in the brief last outbreath of humanity but, along the way there, breaking the fall, we came across a sort of ledge—the third category—where a seeming solution to some aspect of the crisis might give temporary respite and a sense that things might not really be as bad as we thought. For example, that technology will step in and save the day.

Few of the contributions in the collection come into the ‘stepping back from the edge’ category and no author claims to have the solution (unfortunately). Instead they offer a tentative hope that humankind will dare to change. As poet and Met Office scientist Natalie Garrett puts it: ‘We have got/ just one shot/ Together we raise the bow/ And hold our breath.’

The collection makes for sobering reading, but it is also beautiful, insightful, occasionally uplifting and leavened with humour, mainly of the gallows kind. And it is also necessary, because the first step to action is to seek the truth, not to flinch or seek token responses, not to close our eyes and turn away, not to shrug or be side-lined by despair or eco-terror, or the magnitude of the vested interests, including our own, at stake.

Greta Thunberg was right to excoriate the rich and powerful gathered at Davos earlier this year, for having done ‘basically nothing’ about the issue. But as we have seen throughout the pandemic, an economy geared to the maximisation of profits, and a state shaped to facilitate that goal, means that our society is poorly equipped to plan for an emergency at all, whether that be a health emergency or a climate emergency. Climate change and the Coronavirus are hitting the poorest hardest, and capitalism is making things worse.

Climate Matters is a powerful expression of the inextricable connections between capitalism, Covid-19 and the climate crisis, and the need for a new, democratic and socialist vision of how we see our world and our place in it—a new definition of what constitutes a good life.

Through words, metaphors, images and scientific argument, this collection brings to life the nature of the cliff edge on which we teeter. It is the clamour of clear, resounding voices calling from that cliff top, saying that we need to act now and act fast, because our survival depends on it.

Dr Virginia Baily, Editor, Riptide Journal

Dr Sally Flint, Editor, Riptide Journal

Mike Quille, Chief Editor, Culture Matters

Worst Case Scenario

'It wiz fry or jump. So we jumped.'

—Andy Mochan, Piper Alpha survivor, BBC News 7th July 1988

The brief but brilliant atmospheric transit of the asteroid will not be seen.
Nothing will hurt or disappoint.

The shockwave when the magma chamber bursts will not be felt.
Nothing will be funny and nothing will be sad.

The rumble of the tsunami will not be heard.
Nothing will be loved or laughed about.

The ash and sulphur in the air will not be tasted.
Nothing will be holy. Nothing will be true.

The stench of corruption will not be smelled.
Nothing will be mysterious or awesome. Nothing will be known.

Until it is again. Nothing.

Now jump!

John Bolland

Antarctica: As Seen On TV

A seal pup encrusted with starfish
in the clearest of water,

he is clearly eaten,
clearly being dead

but *dead* in such clear water
seems like uber-death

death in 3D
death in close-up;

the ice shelf above
with its mountainous dark

and all that warm blood that sails beneath
leaving its scratches

as if dangled hooks.
And I always wonder why

the sea is so turquoise, gathered that way:
the swimming pools of icebergs

with their cool opaque clarity
like no colour anywhere else

in nature;
more California than California.

Wes Lee

[This poem originally appeared in print in *Driftfish*, Zoomorphic Journal, December 2016, Brighton, UK].

Torch Song

The cathedral's burning while a wren
sings *my house is on fire my children
are gone*. No—it's a ladybird singing.
She falls on her back, legs kicking—
a polar bear's ribs poke like broken
umbrellas. Twelve minutes from my
house I walk the hill where I hear
a wren babble like water, watch it
(the size of a leaf) flick between
branches. They're in danger
(this hill, that wren, those branches).
The bluebell's blackening. An ice floe
shrinks till my boots soak in a petrol
puddle. The spire wavers, topples,
but the golden cockerel's saved
—surely that counts for something
when we kneel and sing on stones,
roll helpless on our backs
air scorching our O-gaped mouths.

Robert Hamberger

The Last Supper

How many of us remember the kiss of rain?
We scan the heavens through the cracks in walls
through peeping bullet holes in bolted doors
at mirages of another life we thought we led
in malls, parks, chatting at tables in ghost cafes.
Was that us? Our lives are played by extras.
Breathe. Survive. Move through gaps between
one sky tantrum and the dry earth's reply,
crawl through the lenses of insatiable cameras.
Devour the offering. Our lives are played by extras.
Many fled across a sea of life jackets, clambered
over fenced mountains into other people's faces;
we stayed to sip at dust, dream the hum of drones
nibble corners of a prayer learned in childhood
for a god, you'd think, was drooling in dementia,
who's plucked out his own eyes so he shall not see
our plight, but you may feast upon this spectacle,
note how nightly we recraft ourselves in his image.

Bob Beagrie

Going Viral

When you were a child 'Corona' was delivered to doorsteps. Narrow necked bottles were ringing bells, and the pop man, breathless like he needed a drink, would debate deposits on dimpled glass returns. 'Every bubble,' he said, 'has passed its fizzical.' It was what your sister asked for, aged fourteen, put in isolation, as she gasped her last consumptive breaths.

Last summer we thirstily drank the flagship of the brand with a citrus twist, transported half-way around the world. Now sales slump as a virus named the same spreads. Computers report a global danger of 'multiple threats'. Blue-lipped, we can only wait. When any creature's endangered or contained we imagine germs can still

breed in crevices of deep-cleaned walls. Who knows if it was a sneeze, a close conversation, touch, holding a handrail, a hug. Hidden in a body, cells vie for position, droplets rise to the tops of lungs and travel down the roadway of a trachea, the tunnel of tonsils and, spit between teeth they hopefully, lose energy, die.

On the screen a politician washes his hands. I try to sip water. A nurse whose eyes flicker behind a visor says: 'I must keep hydrated and segregated.' She coughs as we play another game of lost meanings: *Corona*: it's the glow surrounding the darkened disc of the moon, a daffodil's cupped centre, the crown of a baby's head.

Sally Flint

In the Midst of the Sixth Great Extinction

All of John Clare's birds—Fern-Owl and Starnel,
Chiffchaff, Corncrake, Pettichap, Pewit,

Bumbarrel, Snipe, Quail—all of them,
overnight, in moonshadow, while elsewhere

we lay dreaming, upped, just upped, took wing
from his poems, leaving not an echo

or a fallen feather on their page, leaving
redacted lines like a stripped winter hedge

holed with black spaces, with windswept nests
where nothing now glabbered or chelped.

Chris Waters

Vanishing

Of the coiled easy form
of the slow-worm sleeping

in the dark heat of the compost
beneath its old cover

there is now neither
trace nor memento—

a perfect vanishing act
except for that shimmer

and indentation still there
back of the retina.

Chris Waters

Inheritance

This will be the raven's share:
the long silence of the wind-felled oaks
in the winter wood.

Chris Waters

Letters to Dad

I write to you, Dad, who will not read my letters,
who memorised *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
and knew by heart the one-eyed yellow idol,
was never idle but for the hours mined
in front of the hearth with the tv casting shadows
on your big chin. Your chin, I have inherited. In age,
I have yet to surpass the numbers of your birthday
the last time we shared cake, a tell-tale crease
curves from cheek to cheek regardless, shapes
an image of myself in your face
when you moved to land your fist.
Did you feel like you were punching yourself?
One letter away from dead,
does guilt hang weighty like an albatross,
like me aged kid with my arms around your neck,
asking you, Dad, please will you read to me?
You told me two-dimensional stories out your head,
had imagination and could build sheds from scrap,
but sat on my homework because it remained flat for you,
who, when I choked, held me upside-down,
like the book you couldn't read,
until rind fell from my mouth like pressed flowers.

Rachel Fenton

Civilisation

I dream that I wake up.
You take me by the hand
along streets impossible to cross,
past the Steam Factory,
across the Dead River,
through car parks and theme parks,
around palaces and prisons,
under concrete flyovers
and the scaffold of cranes,
out to a patch of waste land
surrounded by skyscrapers,
monuments to nothing,
and pointing there, you show me,
on this, the final morning,
nature's tombstone.

Mark Kirkbride

[Originally published as 'Apocalypse for Breakfast' in *The Strand Book of International Poets*, 2010]

Sinn Féin

Ciara, in a tantrum, bombards us
with a whiteness less fluffy than it looks.
Ice pellets and frozen drizzle gather in corners,
warp the greenhouse door unlocked.

Too much wetness, lakes in the camber.
In the old glasshouse the rumbled threat
of a copper pipe reverbs darkly, until your arrival
converts its mumble to music.

An unstrange newness to how we lie together
here in this abandoned ivy-strewn ruin.
A coiled fern's fragile power, two etiolated lives
scarred, yet no longer scared to connect.

We live out uncertain seasons. Fire-storms in Sydney
or California chase ice storms in Europe.
Our own microclimate reduced to the sticky heat
of these borders, this bed. Now.

Lane Shipsey (Glasnevin 9 February, 2020)

the straw of hope

I had no interest in the big disasters.
Shrugged my shoulders, turned away, ignored
droughts, bleached reefs, and disappearing glaciers
islands sinking under rising seas,
all someone else's problem. Sticking plasters

had always been enough
just buy a larger carpet, bigger brush
find sixty different channels of distraction
and deal with it tomorrow.
What's the rush?

We had hotter, drier summers in our futures
no need to go to Spain for better tans
already counting up the cash we'd save
on heating. We were masters of our universe,
and masters never need to change their plans.

Soon we learned how small things grind you down:
mosquitos in their millions moving north,
cloudbursts that savaged treasured gardens,
streams that burst their banks,
roads washed away, rivers changing course,

unseasonal gales that blew slates
from their moorings,
roofs that leaked, allotments baked to stone.
The absence of frogs.
The dawn chorus now a blackbird on its own.

The loss of what you thought would never leave you.
Whoever thought I'd miss the polar bear?
Or bluebells? Or icy frosty mornings

where I saw my breath before me
as crystal clouds across the frozen air?

They say this year the harvest will be good,
the wheatfields up in Greenland doing well.
I pray they're right.
Perhaps we've turned a corner.
Time will tell.

Steve Pottinger

**'I actually wanted to be a singer/writer/actor/painter/journalist,
but I thought it was too insecure' or: Fears First**

All this talk about Security

Being secure: belonging somewhere in the middle,
being mainstream-alternative, being naturally against

climate change; not to an extent it actually means
cutting down meat or diesel, or cancelling the surfing trip to
California, or not joining in with the popular bashing of veganism

doesn't change anything, and 'anyway *I* only eat a little meat once a month on Sun
days from the butcher next door, and I *do* know where my
doner comes from, and what's next then, you want me to feel bad about
dairy, chicken, pigs, plastic, clothes, women—and what about children in Africa?
Do you help them, too? Well, can't help everyone. I have no reason to feel
bad. Darwin already said—

every time I go shopping, I give money to the Accordion Guy. I'm not
saying things shouldn't be more
equal, I'm not—but nowadays you can't say anything out loud without
being called racist,
egomaniac, or anti-feminist by those linksversiffen Gutmenschen
protesting at every corner for
ecological justice, equal payment, earth day, what have you. I always
separate my rubbish. There are
even companies that don't have enough men now, did you know?
All I'm saying is—not
everyone can live here, that's simply impossible. What about us,
what about our lives?
Excuse me for wanting a secure job *and* children, a house *and* health
insurance. A nice and
easy tax declaration form at the end—that's not too much to ask,
considering my CV and everything.'

Fighting for ideals is really out; better be
flexible and not too vocal; pick a proper job from the careers' guide, always
brush your teeth with
fluoride, remember to carry two euros with you, one for the trolley
one for the homeless, stay away
from lists other than the Einwohnerinnenmelderegister and the vaccination
record and the
flight check-in list, don't forget to have an opinion on the latest fake news,
follow the FB algorithm. Individually. In times like these,
you need to look after your own
fence before helping others. Brother/Sisterhood. Life is not easy
between Monday and
Friday, between low-fat flat white in the morning and Merlot
in the afternoon, between A
FDP and CDU, or whatever mask Big B wears in your country to feint with
freedom! free choice! Freie Fahrt für freie Bürger! Dig! Out! Archetypical! Fears
First! Tell us gender inclusivity disrupts the status quo and doesn't change
anything; there is no
fashion without Heidi, no taste without steak, no fun without flags, no Net
flix without coal, no cars without global warming. Heimat! Werte!
Rinderbraten!
Security, the new sexy.

Katharina Maria Kalinowski

Vegas Heat

The air is a solid block of blue; no silver sliver of cloud.
A woman collecting cans hangs a water cooler on the side
of her cart to spray her face and moisturises permanently
cracked lips. Unserved banquets go to food banks.
Homeless huddle in storm drains avoiding sidewalks
and the risk of burns from heat-retaining asphalt.
For ninety-six days a year the temperature climbs
over 38° Celsius in the battle born state.
The Clark County coroner stands outside in forty-six degrees.
Inside is a corpse caught by malfunctioning air con mid-way
between pay days. A deck of cards had fallen face down.

Emma Lee

Tick Tock

Tick tock it's one o'clock
we come down from the trees
tick tock it's two o'clock
we rise up off our knees
tick tock it's three o'clock
we journey far and near
tick tock it's four o'clock
we eliminate all we fear
tick tock it's five o'clock
the prize—a vast resource
tick tock it's six o'clock
we set the world on course
tick tock it's seven o'clock
we harness fire and light
tick tock it's eight o'clock
we put machines in flight
tick tock it's nine o'clock
a man is on the moon
tick tock it's ten o'clock
January comes in June
tick tock it's eleven o'clock
what is that noise, we cry,
tick tock it's twelve o'clock
we're all going to...

Moya Roddy

Red Flag

Poppies have made inroads
seeding themselves on disturbed soil
a final stand against steel and glass
against concrete—
parading their true colour
tossing outraged heads
as if to say look at might have been—
look!

Moya Roddy

Rewilding Red Hill

This hanging hill, the view beneath its sway,
in my child's eye, a tapestry enhanced;
take in the pub, red tractor turning hay,
elm avenues, rook pie, a living map
before my gaze; proud-steepling wedding bells,
blind cuckoo's cry, transcending larks, until,
one marbling watery glaze, horizon place,
infinity's blue haze where earth meets sky.

Red Hill's a sterile unmade grave these days,
a breviary to time and tide, cheap kiss-
me-quick failed business plan, where lapwings used
to beat their bounds each spring, claim squatting rights,
insipid, charmless as a barren stave.
Ten fields farms houses deep below. No old
man with his scythe come harvest home; I hear
the silage monster on his way to mow.

A peewit dances air above my head;
free-styling, screams, careens so artfully
across the startled sky. Not bred here since
I was a kid, this wraith, its role to kiss
the sward past my mind's eye and drag one wing,
a mangled fist, to flag distress with dole-
ful cry, cajole from chicks as still as death,
like primal statues Nature's swallowed whole.

The cuckoo's risen, turtle dove, swift too,
the lark high seraphim, all Adam Smiths
and Eves rubbed out with Mother's help, grace notes
invoked through holy water eyes, the quires
no longer silent grieving hosts. The grave-
yard's grown, church soulless, roached beyond repair,
house lawns tree'd over, ivy next of kin,
glass AWOL, frames decayed, thatch whisper-thin.

Peter Branson

Only on the Page

I've told you, Doctor, a thousand times: I do not love my abusers.
They haunt my room when I close my eyes, but that's neither here nor there.
You seem to wish to spin a tale of wicked fathers, pretty wives,
Then search for Grecian heroes when I talk of dreamt housefires.
I dare you, Doctor, unpeel what's there: I'm no poem; I am a girl.
A girl locked in dreams, in shadow-struck rooms, in empty cemeteries.
A girl in crowded railway stations, carrying herself in a jewellery box.
A girl you define by whether she wants a married man.
I tell you, Doctor, I'm right on this one: I know my own brain.
At eighteen I am a textbook hysteric, but only on the page.
From ink-stained papers I fly up—a troubled, normal woman.
For I too have my normalities, and the normal their insanities.
I leave you, Doctor, this New Year: truth is, I do not need you.
I'll laugh with barefoot girls, maybe fall in unwritten love.
He'll see more to me than mythic locks, keys, and virginities;
In me he'll see what I now see: my mother's smile and symphonies.

Sylvie Lewis

An Apology to a Snake

Thank you kind snake for taking pity on me when I stopped
to investigate the mysterious hissing in the grass.
The freakish piping hot sun, the mating dance of butterflies
leading the way between the humming hedgerows,
the unfamiliar birds and shaky arrows of geese gathering,
the daylight moon about to slip its buttonhole;
somehow all this lulled me into a false sense of my place.
The glittering horizons of time left to us.
It was my wife who woke you from your slumber.
She had just compared the pheasant's call we'd heard
(sorry to bring up one of your few predators)
to that of a squeaky toy, and I had slowed down
to make a furtive note on my iPod. That was why I mistook
your admonishing hiss for white noise at first.
Then a burst water pipe. I meant no disrespect.
Yet if she hadn't already surged ahead with the unfair advantage
of her longer legs I might have further tested your patience,
searching for evidence of that leak.
And although I was born in the Year of the Snake,
and like you have poor eyesight (not helped, it turns out,
by prescription sunglasses), I realise this gives me
no special dispensation. This was your basking hour.
A dry bite would have been no less than I deserved.
In defence of my forgetfulness something was bothering me,
and I ask you to take into consideration
the small boy still peeking behind his sister's dressing mirror
looking for the boy staring back at him.
Then again if I was worrying about anything it was the creak
of my new £130 Renegade walking shoes.
So thank you kind and beautiful snake for making allowances
for my mental confusion—ironically, one of the symptoms of your kiss.
'You'd hardly notice then,' my wife said as we sat on the seawall
admiring the shepherd's crook of your strike pose

in the photo I'd had the temerity to take.
That was the last straw and had I still been just a shoelace away
you'd have made good your promise.
But thank you for letting me hurry on unharmed
along this vertiginous footpath at the edge of the world
to end up paddling in the September warm,
untrammelled, healing waters of Portwrinkle.

Mark Czanik

Swimming Pool

Lou Siday

It is already 2020. I have a *National Geographic* from fifty years ago with a warning on the front cover. The warning is a photograph of a duck in a river or the sea surrounded by rubbish. *The National Geographic* tells us about our ecological crisis. Pollution is a threat to man's only home. We abuse the world. We must stop this. My ancient copies of the *National Geographic* come from a great great uncle. My family is one that gives me nothing but junk and houses to clear out. I never go back to my hometown for long.

We need to save the world. I am willing but unable. How can I save the world? I am guessing everyone feels this way and therefore if we come together we might be able to save the world.

The smallest shark in the world is the lantern shark. It glows and can fit in your hand.

At night I light candles and sit in my ground floor flat listening to footsteps and arguments in the lives above me and try not to think about the animals burning to death in the fires of Australia.

Where I work the people look well rested and well fed and at some sort of peace and I want to shout at them and ask how?

WHY AREN'T YOU FILLED WITH THIS FEELING?

LOOK AT MY DARK EYES. I CANNOT SLEEP.

Where I work is a hotel for rich people. There is a swimming pool, a spa, a library, and me to take their bags to their rooms.

There are many theories as to why aliens have not contacted us. The one I believe is the one that says that there are different planes of existence. When we look at Mars we see an empty, uninhabited planet. When Martians look at Earth they see an empty, uninhabited planet.

Sometimes I am allowed to use the swimming pool at work. It is only fair, all the baggage I have to carry. I gulp in the chlorine and wonder if I might die if I consume too much of it. I once planned to put fish in the swimming pool but then I thought the fish would die from the chlorine so I didn't. I wonder where I could put the fish that are in those tiny tanks at the pet shop? I could fill my bathtub, but where would I bathe? Plus, my bathtub is still too small for all the fish.

When I am swimming I like to pretend I am deep in the ocean. I imagine the deep trenches at the bottom, but I am too warm to ever really believe I am there. And the water tastes of chemicals. But, maybe the water in the ocean tastes like chemicals now too. There are cotton buds sticking out of the ears and eyes of sea turtles. Plastic bottles stuck in whales' blowholes.

Don't think about it don't think about it.

It is already 2020 and this winter is balmy. I leave work at night sometimes and I do not need to put my hat or gloves on. At work I say, 'don't you think it's really warm? I hate how warm it is,' and people look at me weirdly because it is cold. Yes, it is still cold, but not as cold as it should be.

Sometimes when the guests have gone to the bar and I take their suitcases up to their room, I open them up on the bed and look inside. There are no security cameras in the hotel rooms. I can do what I want.

I often find strange things in the suitcases. Things like a folded origami crane made from a decades old receipt from a bar in Texas. Or things like one tiny baby shoe. I find illegal things more often than you would think. A lot of guns. Bags of white powder. I will always try a sample. It is mostly cocaine, but sometimes I black out for days, or finish my shift watching dragons crawl up the hotel walls.

Apart from the odd bump of chemicals, I never take from the suitcases. What would be the point? The joy is peeking into this person's existence for a bit. What books they read and what pills they need to be able to sleep at night. Sometimes there is money. Rolls of it. Suitcases full. I never pocket a penny.

Moray eels have a set of teeth in their throats that can shoot out and grab prey. This means they have two jaws. The jaws in their throats are called pharyngeal jaws.

I am thinking about these jaws while I start my Friday night shift. I think about the eels and the swimming pool and the painted toes of the swimmers doing lengths before they go for their dinner. In the lift I open my mouth and stare at it in the mirror. I stare at my teeth, the yellowing molars.

I am carrying bags up to the fourth floor. Ding. Floor two. Someone gets in. A girl who works here who I recognise but I can't remember her name.

'Hello.'

'Hi.'

She presses 5.

I think she is a waitress but I am not sure.

Ding. Floor four. I push the luggage trolley out and down the hall to the rooms. I have to go to room 415. I take my time.

Moray eels remind me of goblin sharks. Goblin sharks are the weirdest looking shark we have discovered, even weirder than hammerhead sharks. They have jaws that come out of their head to catch prey. They live in the deep sea and never see light. They look like skeletons.

I unlock the door of 415 and take the suitcases in. I close and lock the door behind me. This is my time. There are only two suitcases.

The largest giant squid ever recorded was a female. She was thirteen metres long and weighed nearly a tonne. Most of what we know about giant squids is from the dead bodies washed up on shores. Sometimes their eyes, giant and icy blue, are found by families and dog walkers on beaches around the

world. They think of aliens, of nightmares, of the unknown, and start running.

I unzip the suitcase, it is brown leather. I unpack the clothes onto the bed. Shirts, trousers, matching socks. A chain of keys. A Ziploc of loose pills. Not all the same.

I hear the water from the sea rush and scream past me. We need to save the world. I am willing but unable. How can I save the world? I am guessing everyone feels this way and therefore if we come together we might be able to save the world.

I take the Ziploc bag, leave the room. Clothes still unpacked. I get into the lift, click B2. Someone gets in. I stuff the bag up my shirt.

'Hello.'

'Hi.'

He presses 0. I think he's one of me. A luggage boy. I should know his name.

The doors close.

'Balmy isn't it today,' I say, and he ignores me.

Ding. Floor 0. He gets out. The doors close.

Ding B2.

The floor is empty. The swimming pool filtration system is at the end of the corridor. I take my time. There is no rush. I unlock the room with the master key I bought from a maintenance guy a few months back. I can smell the chlorine, hear the groans and gushes of the system. I unscrew the top of the main filter, leaning over to see inside. Jewellery, tampons, plasters all caught in the system. I get out the Ziploc bag. I open up each pill one by one, pouring the contents into the water. I don't take any, I don't need any. Then I sit in the damp basement, listening to the gurgles and creaks. I wait. For hours. Until the screaming starts.

Morning swimmers are choking to death on their own vomit.

Chunks of sick float around the dead bodies. I can smell it coming through the filtration system.

Screaming from poolside staff. The managers try to calm the lifeguards.

'Isn't this what you are trained to deal with?'

'I can stop people drowning in a swimming pool, but not from their own sick!'

Why does it smell so bad? What is in the water?!

Soon the early risers who swam before everyone else are throwing up over the breakfast buffet. They collapse into the croissants. The waitress whose name I forgot tries to give a man CPR until she starts throwing up on him. And then the sirens start and then the questions start.

And I answer them all.

All the places that I do not know

Alice Jolly

In those days red dust thickened the air. The sky was swollen and stained and the carrots grew as long as your arm but tasted of ash. And by then we had stopped waiting for news and lived in each day blankly, moving through the rooms of the house from one dusty window to the next. The landscape around us was stripped bare and the road which had once come to the house was broken into pieces—but still he came.

Arriving at the door, blown by a hot breeze, he brought with him a smell which I imagined to be city and rat and smoke, although I knew little of any of those things. I saw him coming from far off. At first he was nothing more than a spiral of red dust, whipped by the wind. But then he became the spiked form of a tall man accompanied by a dog. I had not seen a dog in a long time, so many of them being dead or eaten.

I was under strict instructions to let no-one into the house but he banged at the door, banged and banged, and the sound went through the brittle house like a cough through an old man's chest. So that finally I went down to him and opened the door a crack. I thought that he might bring something, anything, even if it was only disease.

He was thin as a piece of wire and his eyes contained the images of flaming buildings and a last piece of bread, to be shared among six. His flesh was scarred with wounds like burns, some of which had healed with brown scabs but some of which still bled or wept. He had only four fingers on one hand and a piece of rag was tied over his knotted hair. The whites of his eyes were yellow and his teeth brown and shrunken. A brindled dog with orange eyes stood in close to his leg.

Through the crack in the door, his eyes moved over me, taking in the pattern of twisting blue flowers on my skirt, and clinging to the brightness of my blouse. I knew that he stared so at my blouse because it has remained almost white. I saw him calculate what I might know, what I might remember. I wanted to tell him that I was too young to remember anything—but I didn't do so.

How could I refuse to let him in? We had food and he did not. And the others were all away at the house by the river in the next valley and I knew that they would not be back until the next day. And so I opened the door and his boots moved forward, then settled on the cool of the stone floor. And from somewhere outside we heard a rush of wings, as though a flock of birds had suddenly taken flight.

Without speaking, he followed me upstairs and laid himself down on one of the beds which had not been taken for firewood. The brindled dog

settled itself on the bare floor beside him. I went down to the kitchen to find bread and I took a bowl of water from the stream and boiled it for him. He ate the bread with extreme slowness, breaking it up into small pieces and chewing each piece again and again. Then he drank the water and fell into a deep sleep.

I sat on a blanket on the floor, with my back against the wall, and watched him as he slept for I had nothing else to do. I may have dozed. I do not know. The heat dried my lips and made my breath dusky. Around me the house yawned and settled into itself. Upstairs a shutter rattled while the red of the day gradually drained from the sky. And then night suddenly swept in, as it does nowadays, with a blue so deep that you could have dived into it and swum forever.

And it was then that the man woke with a sudden leap, his body twisting as though avoiding grasping hands. But then he opened his eyes and became still. Gradually he began to look around the hungry room and his eyes finally settled on me. He stretched out his hand to the dog, which licked at the place where his missing finger should have been. I took a blanket from a cupboard and wrapped myself in it, then passed one to him as well, for the night had become cold.

'You are here alone?' he said. His voice was quiet but I felt that the echoes of it would surely spread for many miles. It was a voice that could tell tales of all the places that I didn't know. All that lay beyond the river and the next valley, all the places of scabs, burning buildings, fingers cut from hands.

'No', I said. 'I am not alone.' As I said that word, I felt the meaning of it twist and turn, blossom into something new. That's what his voice did. It showed me what the word 'alone' must mean by supplying me with its opposite.

'They will come back tomorrow', I told him. 'And so you must go by then.'

He nodded his head and sat up on the bed. I went to find bread and apples and I drew more water from the stream and boiled it for us. When I came back he had opened his bag and had produced from it a musical instrument. I knew that this instrument was a pipe as I had seen pictures in a book. I went to fetch the book for him and opened it out on the floor.

He wanted to know if we had more books and so I showed him all that there were, carrying them up the stairs to him. And then I lit a candle and together we turned the pages of the books. I knew every word of those books, and every picture they contained was printed into my mind. It was only when a drop of water broke on a dusty page I realised that he was crying.

But soon he wiped his eyes and said that he would play the pipe for me. First he dusted it carefully and showed me the line of holes which ran down the front and the tiny metal covers which, with a flick of the finger,

could be used to close some of those holes. Then he drank some water and placed the instrument to his lips.

He held the instrument awkwardly because of his missing finger but this didn't seem to trouble him. The dog stood beside him, licking its lips. Then the sound came and it was like the running and rustling of rats, as they hurried through the timbers of the room and tickled the stones of the house. Then it grew louder and spread, just as his voice had done, and it seemed to gather together all the lost parts of our lives and make them whole again.

'You should dance', he said.

But I had no idea how to dance and I was embarrassed to try.

'Of course you can', he said. 'If you can breathe, you can dance.'

And so he made me stand up and he told me to listen to the music and to move in time with it. But I could only stand with my hands knotted together, smiling stupidly. He continued to play, his eyes closing as he withdrew into those sounds, into their promise of safety. And then as I listened, I began to sway gently to and fro. I did that only because the sound insisted but, when he opened his eyes, he smiled at me.

After he had finished playing we went to the window together and I pulled both of the shutters right back. Then he put out his hand to the broken frame and started to pull. I told him that he must not do that. The windows were all nailed shut and they must be left like that. But he took no notice and pulled again at the frame until the nails gave and the window opened. The air outside was knife-cold but I enjoyed the cut of it on my face.

'So where are we here?' he said.

'I don't know.'

'I am heading north,' he said.

'And why are you going there?'

'I don't know.'

I wondered where he had come from, and what he had seen, but I didn't ask. I knew this house and the barns, the valley beyond, the riverbank, the exact outline of the hills all around. I had watched the sky change colour, the ground crack, the leaves wither, the red dust twist and twirl. I knew the sun and its path across the sky but that was all that I knew.

'Will it be better in the north?' I said.

'I don't know', he said. 'Probably not'.

We both stared out at the depths of the night. Below I could see the road running away from the house, and the vast cracks which split through it. To either side there were trees with a scattering of leaves, still and silent in the windless night. I pointed out to him the place where there had once been a school and the hunks of metal, now thickly overgrown, which had once been used to farm the fields. He didn't say anything but watched the landscape intently, as though searching it for some echoing answer.

'The people who live here—they are your family?' he asked.
Again the word 'family' acquired a new meaning on his lips.
'No, they are not.'

I took his hand then. I don't know why but I did. And I felt for the place where his finger should have been and laid my thumb across it. Then I squeezed my hand tight, pressing against that place, and I waited for him to wince in pain. But although the pressure of my hand hurt him, he didn't cry out. Instead he laughed. A sudden bubbling laugh. And so I pressed his hand again and he laughed more until I started to laugh as well. The sound was like the falling of rain on dried earth so that you could almost hear the barren boards of the house sucking it in.

'Take me with you', I said. 'When you go tomorrow, take me with you.'
'No,' he said. 'No.'

Then he turned away from me and said that he must sleep and lay down on the bed. I went back to the blanket and watched him as he closed his eyes. The books we had looked at still lay on the floor and the pictures from those books danced through my mind—women in long dresses with their hair curled and piled on their heads. Pictures of machines and instruments, diagrams of the moon and stars, and maps of many place which I had never seen, which may not exist any more, which may never have existed.

From outside I could hear the rustle of red dust and the creaking of dry trees. And I thought of the others sleeping at the farm beside the river. Occasionally the man turned and twisted in his sleep and the dog shuddered beside him. It was a long, long night, the longest that I have ever known. I do not know if I slept, for waking and sleeping had become the same.

When a gleam of red light appeared at the window, he woke and sat up. Once again I went to find bread and apples and water. He ate in silence as the rose-coloured stain of the dawn crept in through the broken window and spread across the bare boards of the room. Then he stood up and packed his pipe away into his bag. His eyes strayed across the books still lying on the floor.

'You want to come with me?' he asked.

'I don't know,' I said.

That question had been in my head all night but still I had no answer.

'We are alive here,' I said.

'Are you?'

I shivered as he spoke and pulled my blanket more tightly around me. And I felt again the fear which has always been a part of this house, which is built into the mortar and timber of the place, dissolved into my blood. This was my home. How could I leave it behind? How could I walk away from known fear into the red dust?

'You would show me places?' I said. 'Like in the maps?'

He looked at me with icy, shallow eyes.

'If you come with me, we will probably die,' he said. 'You know that.'

I knew it but I longed for him to tell me that it might be otherwise. I longed for him to play the pipe again so that I could hear it whisper through my bones, shake them into movement, bring back his smile. I longed to press my hand against that wound again and hear him laugh. I didn't know what lay beyond.

'You must decide now,' he said. 'Before the others return.'

I stared around the room, imagined all the spaces of the house, the bare corridors, the dusty windows, nailed shut, the bowl of the valley around us, the stream where I went for water. I had always believed this place to be enough. I had sometimes heard whispers of what came before but, even as I listened to them, they always dissolved into silence. What more was there to know? What else might I find?

For a moment I touched his pipe, where it lay on the bed, my fingers pressing one of those silver keys. Then turned and went to the room I usually slept in and took a skirt from a shelf, then a blouse, a blanket and underwear. I put these things into a bag. Then together we went down to the kitchen and found a bottle for water and wrapped dried fruit and potatoes into a cloth. I wanted to take the books with me but he said I could only take one, and so I chose, and then put the others carefully away.

By now the sun was struggling up into the sky and the red dust was rising. I knew that we must go, as we would not be able to walk in the heat of the day. As I left, I looked back at the house which had always been my home and imagined the others returning to find that I was gone. My heart tore at that thought but still I walked on. I had no idea where I was going but I followed him towards the horizon, towards the lip of the valley, walking towards a world of flaming buildings and a last piece of bread, to be shared among six.

I Protest

Emily Way

It was a Monday morning in July 2019 and Bristol was in the midst of a heatwave. As I stepped off the bus I could hear the beating of samba drums echoing down the street. My heart, in response, was thumping wildly in my chest. With my baby strapped to my front, I headed towards the music, focusing solely on putting one foot in front of the other.

I was on my way to join a climate strike over rising sea levels. A cause which will affect us all, but one especially poignant for parents of the next generation. Like my own mother, who had gone to Greenham Common whilst eight months pregnant with me, I wanted to share this with my daughter.

However, the reality of my current state was one of exhaustion. My baby was now six months old and since the beginning of my pregnancy I had experienced a relentless depression. Antenatal, into postnatal: each day it continued I was further immersed into darkness, and I was losing sight of a way out. The guilt this produced in me was unbearable. There was so much expectation: to be a good mum, a happy mum, an attentive mum. My protest wasn't just about rising sea levels. This was a way to channel my 'mum guilt' into something positive.

Bristol Bridge was teeming with activity, the atmosphere joyfully harmonious. It was a festival of colour and sound, a sensory experience no baby class could compete with. I ambled around at first, not knowing what to do with myself. Then as we watched the samba band, I found myself enjoying the rhythm, my body remembering the moves. I held my baby's hands in mine, and swayed, feeling the warmth of the sun on my face. Lost in the crowd, surrounded by people, I felt freedom: freedom of speech, mind and body. There were no expectations of me, no judgement, just the knowledge that we were all there for the same reason, the same ethical morals, the same message. I felt thrilled for the first time in months.

It had only lasted minutes, but this experience had been a glimmer of light in the darkness—and it'd felt like a beacon of hope.

My daughter turned one recently and I am beginning to feel like myself again. The light is finding its way in more freely now, and I find myself noticing life, finding joy in the warmth it brings. There are still dark corners, but if I think back to that day, it gives me the strength to protest. I forgive myself and remember there is always a way out, I just have to find it. And the truth is, parenting can be like scrabbling around in the dark a lot of the time—so maybe carry a torch with you for a while, just in case.

[This piece previously appeared in the Mothership Writers anthology *Dispatches from New Motherhood*.]

The End of Money

Gavin Boyter

When the end of money came, it happened on both a microscopic and macroscopic scale. The Covid-19 crisis of 2020 and subsequent pandemics decimated world economies, reduced international monetary markets to chaos and caused stock prices to plummet for everything that wasn't tech-based. Hyper-inflation, previously seen in Germany before World War II, became the norm, with world governments having to convene regularly to agree the strategic devaluation (or re-valuation as it was euphemistically termed) of their respective currencies. Banknotes began to appear with mathematical formulae in place of lines of zeros. A loaf of bread would cost ten to the power of 8 dollars. Financial markets, struggling to function at all, would start bandying about the kinds of terms once used by overexcited children—one quintillion, five point eight sesquettillion. A Googleplex of pointless pennies.

Various desperate strategies were adopted. The world's first global currency was trialled—the Omnidollar. It bore nobody's face, because nobody could agree who to put on it. Instead, it had a honeybee on one side (a symbol of industriousness) and a dove on the reverse (a symbol of hope). Issued in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50 and 100, it lasted eight months before succumbing to hyperinflation too. Soon it became infinitely cheaper to wipe your bottom with banknotes than actually buy toilet paper.

There was a brief plan to return to the gold standard in the 2030s, lauded, of course, by those economies who still boasted gigantic gold reserves. A group of anonymous techno-terrorists put an end to that, sending a vast swarm of nanobots to devour the US federal gold reserve. These miniscule machines crawled through ventilation ducts and keyholes, eating almost 5000 metric tonnes of gold, carried away in tiny particulates over the course of one holiday weekend and scattered to the wind. You could find gold dust on the beaches of California, blowing across the Nevada desert and silting up the swamps of Alabama. Diamonds were mooted as a replacement, but the power shift this would entail towards some fairly unpleasant African dictatorships put paid to that one.

A radical solution was proposed—simply to abolish money altogether and return to a barter system. Obviously the seriously wealthy opposed this most vigorously, since they had very little the general populace wanted, except access to their outrageous lifestyles. Farmers and food producers were the most vocally in support of such a system, for obvious reasons. The general populace, when it wasn't starving in its billions, marching upon parliaments, deposing despots, forcibly crossing borders and rioting, simply wanted stability, enough food to eat, and a dry place to sleep. Was that really too challenging a list of

demands?

By 2044, Earth's citizens were submitting to 'chipping', being fitted from birth with a device which measured and tallied their consumption and linked this directly to ability and readiness to work. Of course, there were widespread protests, by those libertarians who still believed freedom was the ultimate human right, even superseding the right to equality and perhaps even the right to life.

You were born, chipped and thereafter allocated a weekly supply of food and spendable credit, which could be enhanced only within rigid parameters, based on conspicuous hard work. All work was declared equal, from sewage engineers to architects to musicians to doctors to hairdressers. Jobs that nobody wanted were performed by all on an AI-controlled rota system, which had always worked well for jury duty and national military service. You worked in a particular allocated role in six month stints every five years, unless you were permitted a medical exemption. In 2044 everybody worked as a sewage engineer, a refuse collector or a member of parliament. Jobs that could only be done by certain individuals—scientists, writers, sprinters, world leaders—were designated as protected and had to be applied for, but these were not rewarded with any additional life credits. You could be the president of the United States of America and you would still be entitled to only one loaf of bread per week.

Violations of these codes were dealt with severely—reduction of goods allocation or incarceration seemed to work reasonably well as incentives to good behaviour. Black market bartering was swiftly curtailed. Royalty was abolished, and its excesses redistributed. Buckingham Palace became a hotel, its rooms costing the same as all hotel rooms everywhere—one away-from-home sleep credit. Booking was available by lottery only. A popular YouTube video showed a Syrian child refugee, now in her forties, reclining in a palatial tub once occupied by the King of England. King William the Fifth was photographed sweeping up autumn leaves in Windsor Park, holding both thumbs aloft to the camera, doing his statutory work rotation.

It is true that totemic displays of human achievement diminished considerably during this time—giant dams, bridges and palaces were no longer built. But it was felt the world had plenty of those. A movement to celebrate the rejuvenation of the earth's biodiversity gained ground instead, as climate change diminished and the world returned to a kind of observant stasis. Animals not seen in significant numbers for decades began to proliferate—herds of white rhino thundered across the African veldt once more.

After the initial decades of catastrophe and conflict, wars diminished—after all, what was the point in fighting another group of people whose wealth was identical to yours, and from whom you could take literally nothing that you could keep? And if you couldn't benefit personally from subjugating another, why go to all the effort? Even a sociopath could see that it simply

wasn't a worthwhile use of one's time.

Dissidents called this phase in human history 'the systematic self-destruction of the human race'. Idealists called it 'a new golden age'.

The author called it 'unpublishable', crumpled up the piece of paper upon which she'd written the above fantasy scenario, and returned to her novel about Russian oligarchs having one another's families executed.

[This piece was first published by *The Abstract Elephant Magazine*, <https://abstractelephant.com/>, October 1.]

Round Black Grains

Kevin Doyle

At his wake, we talked about the time Justin nearly died, in the Glen trying to save the sand martins. Really, what was he thinking? The colony of birds had been living in the urban wilderness for as long as anyone could remember, their nests long tunnels burrowed into the sandy deposits left behind when the glaciers receded. A consortium, Skellig Developments, planned to build houses beside this ancient abode only to discover that the birds enjoyed protection under some obscure bylaw. They proposed a solution, a compromise it was called, to build the sand martins a new home, a short distance from where they had always lived. These units, concrete towers bristling with hollow plastic pipes, were superior to sand dunes apparently—studies had showed. They didn't suffer from the damp, they were durable and they could even be painted so as to appear as if they were a part of the surrounding terrain.

The city council was thrilled. Finding itself mired in an ethical dilemma of stupendous proportions—could progress run roughshod over these ancient dwellers?—they finally saw a way out. Voting to lift the injunction they accepted the generous offer from Skellig and a few days later the new towers were hauled into position.

That night a strange contraption also appeared, blocking access to the site. It had three spindly legs intersecting four meters above the ground. Hanging from the apex of the structure was a tiny capsule not unlike a chair-of-plane seat. Sitting in this was Justin.

A Garda explained. He had seen the structure before, a tripod it was called, at an anti-Shell Oil protest in Mayo. It was designed to interdict the movement of ground vehicles along narrow lanes and roadways. It couldn't easily be moved, in fact assistance would have to be summoned.

This arrived shortly. From a van that said 'Garda Specialist Unit', three police officers dressed in black alighted and filmed the scene. Their peaked baseball caps read G.S.U. and they had with them a dune buggy that they went around in for awhile, mostly up and down the narrow track obstructed by the tripod. They examined the obstacle, took pictures with telescopic lens and rattled its spindly legs. They ascertained through a combination of measurements and stress tests that Justin's abode was structurally sound. A cherry picker was sent for and duly arrived—rented, it later emerged, from a subsidiary of Skellig's called Skellig Equipment. We jeered and sang songs, held away as we were at a distance from the stand-off by a robust chain link fence.

The strange thing though was the sand martins. We could see them in the distance. In the beginning they had scattered about in squalls—there

was quite a population of them—but as the day progressed, as the crowd of onlookers grew in size, the entire colony of birds took up a stationary position on the sandy cliff face, to watch.

The Garda unit were serious men. Two went into the cherry picker cabin while a third videoed proceedings. The picker rose like a serpent's head and drew level with the capsule. Some time was spent talking to Justin, reasoning with him, but apparently—we read this later in the newspaper, the one that described us as rent-a-mob—that he couldn't be reasoned with. So eventually battle was joined and pepper spray was used. It was a sight: seeing the tripod rock from side to side, Justin swinging wildly in the capsule.

Finally, he was extracted and brought down, escorted to a position near the builder's huts. He was offered tea and informed that he wouldn't be arrested. Apparently Skellig Developments had endured enough adverse publicity.

Divested of its human inhabitant, a bulldozer moved forward and smashed the tripod into the ground. Earth movers followed on then quickly, trundling up the narrow road toward the dunes. We saw a JCB's claw rise into the air and swipe wildly at the tallest of these. The sand martins flew away, scattering into the air as a tall wedge of sand separated from the cliff face and toppled down. In the hiatus that followed, knowing that his cause was lost, Justin broke free once again. Dodging Gardaí and a variety of Skellig goons, he ran forward and dived into a collapsing heap of sand. It seemed to take forever before it was understood what had happened. Gardaí and Skellig employees ran to help.

Anger followed panic. Shouts of madman and who does he think he is, could be heard. The JCB driver was livid and the first to claw at the mound. There were fears of another collapse but that stopped nobody. Within a few minutes Justin's head of black hair was located. A vent space to his mouth was cleared next and after that his shoulders were released. It was only a matter of time then. They excavated quickly, uncovering a figure contorted around his own cupped hands. As he was finally pulled free, he shouted, spluttering his words, 'Gentle please, gentle. Mind the birds.'

There's a photo of the moment. It's on *Indymedia* apparently. A collection of men in orange hi-vis vests and white helmets are gathered around. Nestled in Justin's lap is a collection of sand martin chicks. The fledglings have withdrawn their heads deep into their bodies. Their necks have vanished. Their eyes are round black grains.

River

Corinna Wagner

*The fountains mingle with the river...
Nothing in the world is single*

—P B Shelley, 'Love's Philosophy'

At arm's length: The couple spend a hot day in the tangle of narrow passages that end at the Ganges. Squeezed onto a street-side stool they spoon sweet lassi from a clay pot. A river of bodies flows by at nose-level: scorched haunches of cows and rivuleted midriffs of saried wives. Then, a corpse on a bamboo frame on its way to fire and water. Her throat narrows. He is happy with his doubled rations.



Varanasi, 2017-20, cyanotype on Hähnemuhle Platinum paper, toned with Ganges dirt

Twenty steps down: Their haveli, which once served as a residence for the aged, is reachable only by boat or on foot. After a dinner of vegetable thalis and smuggled wine, he looks at maps while she lies flat in the tub, and guiltily, lets the shower run over her. As the sounds of boat traffic come in through the window she wonders at the river's mysterious course to her bath. She thinks about the nearness, the intimacy, of it all.

She is awed by Mother Ganga's family tree:

the crouching boys who brush their teeth, spitting into her bosom,
the oleaginous women of unwavering faith who fill their
plastic bottles
with her coffee-coloured and clotted liquid,

the dogs and goats scavenging at the Burning Ghats,
before the smouldering bones are swept into the
bowels of Ganga Mata.

Spitting distance: Every evening, the couple watches an impossibly thin man perform his routine at the river's edge. With an emaciated grace, he soaps himself vigilantly. His head white with lather, he scrubs and dips,

scrubs and dips.

His backbone, like those of the water buffalo, dominates his body's topography.



Ganges Bather, 2017-20, cyanotype on Hähnemuhle Platinum paper

Beneath: She cannot help but wonder: What did feet and hooves touch in the sedimental entrails of Ma Ganga? What bones? What memories? What dreams? Where the flesh-eating turtles?

Religion christened the river a goddess.
The law decreed her a living entity, a rightful person.
Motherhood made her sick.



Ganges Floater, 2017-20, cyanotype on Japanese mulberry paper

6,895 miles away: The couple is silent on the boat that ferries them away on their last day beside the Ganges. They watch a meditating pilgrim float by, his body a diya.

She recalls the far-away river of her youth. Crowded with freshwater clams and clogged by beaver-felled trees. That spinal river cut through the prairies as it had a childhood scrubbed clean by elbow grease and Sunday sermons. Security came, then, in the careful apportioning of clean and dirty, human and animal, godly and worldly.

That prairie river, like this gluttonous Ganges, had overflowed its bounds more than once to consume swathes of terra firma. In the receding, it disgorged the bones of buildings, of bodies, and of cautious ambitions. This, the persistent lesson of the river: partitions will not hold.

Time Please

Ecocide and the Death of Capitalist Realism

Matt Osmond

In March 2020 Falmouth University's annual Illustration Forum took *Home* as the theme for a day of talks focussed on creative responses to the Climate & Ecological Emergency. The headline presentation was from Extinction Rebellion Art Working Group, who asked that the gravity of the ecological crisis be addressed within one of the previous talks if they were to concentrate on their own practice-based response to it, as requested. What follows is a lightly edited version of my attempt to meet that challenge in the forum's introduction.

Before beginning I played Greta Thunberg's November 2019 COP25 address. I then proposed that a quick scan of the many hostile comments accruing on social media posts relating to Greta's recent visit to Bristol suggested that most of her online hecklers default to three commonly-held positions:

1. *Climate change isn't caused by humans, so shut up.*
2. *Climate change is unstoppable whether we like it or not, so shut up.*
3. *You're a hypocrite anyway, so shut up.*

I said I'd be ignoring the first, speaking to the third, but concentrating on the second of these heckles here. It's this increasingly dominant criticism of climate activism—that human civilisation can at this point do nothing to put back in the bottle the devastating processes of change which it's now set loose—that seems to me the most significant of the three, voicing as it does a perception quietly shared by many of the most dedicated 'climate activists'.

It's an issue, I believe, that we'll all need to get better at speaking to in the years ahead. This talk is one attempt at that.

The Question

Here's a story I'm trying to tell. It's about ecological loss. It's got burning forests or vanishing animals, or maybe it's got dying oceans. But what I can't work out is, how do I end it? If the forests and the animals aren't coming back, if the oceans are still choking whatever I find to say about them, what can my story do except kick its reader in the stomach?

Welcome to the Home Forum. While we've been preparing today's gathering a number of students have helped us to bring its agenda into focus. What they've done is to present different versions of the same basic question. None of them have put that question exactly as I've framed it here, but this is the basic thrust of what they've been asking in relation to their own creative dilemmas.

Clearly this question takes on a particular delicacy when addressing a young reader, but I'd suggest it voices a far more fundamental and widespread quandary than that. It feels like a good place from which to start our forum, if only because it's not a question that any of us here came up with, but one that a great many of us now find ourselves confronted by, in one form or another. So one of the things we're hoping that today's forum might help us with is seeing better what sort of a question this is, and what beginning to answer it might look like.

Thick Speech

In his most recent book *Underland*, the writer Robert Macfarlane tells of how, during the weeks he spent on the thinning ice-sheets of Greenland, he struggled to keep language from sticking in his throat. 'The black-inked words in my note-books seemed sluggish, tar-slow. Writing lost its point, clotted into purposelessness, there in an ice-world that was unhomely and untimely.'

Trying to get his head round what it was that weighed on his tongue before that great vanishing, Macfarlane turns to the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai, who suggests that 'when shocked or grieving, we find ourselves able to speak of the experience only in "thick speech". When speaking thickly, Ngai says, we are challenged in our usual ability to 'interpret or respond'. A drastic slowdown and recursion of language occurs, a rhetorical enactment of fatigue and confusion ... We speak an eddying speech, cloyed to the point of congealing.' (1)

Pause

Last week some of us here today met to discuss an online talk by the Nigerian climate psychologist Bayo Akómáláfé: 'The times are urgent; let us slow down.' (2) Before going into what this traditional Yoruba saying might offer us in the face of ecological collapse, Akómáláfé sets a pause on any too-hasty rush towards clarity—as if sheer eloquence and criticality might equip us to conquer this challenge, too, once we've named it for what it is. Before going any further, then, Akómáláfé invites into the room all of those aspects of our

shared predicament which resist being spoken of in human terms. Things unwilling to ‘show up’, or to be illumined by human thought.

Given that some of today’s presentations will be speaking quite directly to the ecological catastrophe that is our present and unchosen system of living, maybe now’s a good time for that kind of pause.

For eighteen years we’ve gathered for this annual forum and spoken in one way or another of the act of illumination which our practice offers us—shedding its peculiar light on whatever subject we happen to be engaged with. And I doubt it’s news to anyone here that while we’ve been absorbed in these excellent conversations, processes of change have been gathering pace around us. Changes that are now becoming ever-harder to leave out of the room, whatever topic happens to be on the table.

Here’s another place, then, from where we might start today’s discussions: during the eighteen years we’ve gathered here, 81% of insect life has vanished from Northern Europe (3). I’m neither an ecologist nor a mathematician, but having a rough idea of the foundational role that insects play within ecological communities, and doing the sums on my fingers, I’d suggest that this situation is not one whose significance we’ll still be debating eighteen years from now.

Akómáláfé promises his audience that in relation to ecological collapse, they’ll leave his talk neither more eloquent, nor more woke. He admits that he’d actually prefer that those who roll up to this conversation with a spring in their step, confident in their ability to articulate the challenges it presents us with, might walk away with a limp—or with a newfound lisp, thickening and slowing their speech. So here’s one way we might come at this question of what sort of meaning-restoring resolution we’re supposed to offer our reader in this context. That to find ourselves struggling to supply any such thing, our tongues thickened by a lack of obvious answers, may simply be a sign that we’re paying attention. So maybe we’d do better to pause, and to consider—to feel—where not being able to answer this question leaves us.

One More Round

This winter the mass media’s binged on images of an Anglosphere nation engulfed in wildfires larger, in some cases, than European countries. And as each new wave of apocalypse porn pours across our screens, something’s gradually beginning to catch on, maybe: for all the suffering entailed,

these fires, these floods, these cities of running out of drinking water are in themselves no measure of what climate change amounts to. If we're to be taken in by such wild-eyed extremists as the academic reviewers of the IPCC (4), or the EU's own advisors on climate (5), these early symptoms of change are more like the whining of metal rails as we stand on a station platform—the first faint rumour of an oncoming train. And what none of us can see, for all the self-appointed experts shouting their online opinions on the matter, is exactly what that train's arrival will mean for us, nor quite how soon it will mean it. So we wait.

Ever since the surreal unravelling of the COP25 climate negotiations in Madrid I've had a story stuck in my head about this weird sense of collective waiting—a sort of broken mutation of 'The Emperor's New Clothes'; let's call it 'The Schoolgirl and the Drunk':

Girl confronts addled sot, imploring him with reasoned argument and occasional, carefully deployed flashes of temper to kick the habit that's about to cause all of our deaths. Slurring old drunk, who's become weepy and contrite at this point, as old drunks will, almost means it as once again he promises to get sober. Then pours another and a bigger round. And the rest of us watch this curious game unfolding, where all of us know that the drunk has absolutely no intention of stopping—or, at least, of stopping today, which comes to the same thing. And we all agree to leave this knowing outside the room for a little longer—twelve years, say—because allowing it in would surely bring an end to the game, and none of us are quite sure where things would go from there.

So there's my not very helpful story, and as you can see, I'm stuck as to how it ends. But I do know it's not a story about a teenage Swedish climate activist, any more than it's about one malignant glove-puppet of a politician. What it's about is the rest of us.

Walking Away

Bayo Akómáláfé turns to a better story than that to help us to peer around the blind corner we find ourselves standing at: Ursula Le Guin's classic 1973 thought experiment, *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*. What would you do, Le Guin asks us, if you found yourself living in your ideal culture—a place where whatever manner of communal living you most long to see has been fully realised—and then at some point you discovered that the whole thing depended for its existence on a single child being kept locked in a basement, deprived of any manner of kindness, left alone and naked in their

own shit, year after year, in order that the wonders of the time and the place you've been born into may continue to exist?

I think Akómáláfé chose the perfect storyteller to help us fathom the ecological crisis. As ever, Le Guin's voice offers a quiet sanity, one which promises no quick or easy solutions. To speak of this most intersectional of crises is to speak of the invisibilised suffering that empires always depended on. But in global heating, today's growth economy has found the perfect hiding place for the obscenities required to prop it up for a little longer: that most secret of locked basements, the future, where no Double Down hack is in danger of finding them: a time and a place where every child's home, to borrow an image from the poet Warsan Shire, has become the inescapable *mouth of a shark*. (6)

So how do we craft images by which we might help each other to turn and meet this situation? And faced with the scale of the changes unfolding around us, what does responding to ecological crisis as citizens even mean? Le Guin leaves us with an image that offers us a place to start, at least: that there are always some in *Omelas* who never do become well-adjusted enough to ignore the toxic bargain required to sustain its wonders; nor do they find some magical solution by which *Omelas* might continue to function without the need for any such bargain. What they do is to get up one day, and walk away. We hear nothing of where they go, or what happens next.

Change the World

Akómáláfé frames such a walking away as a matter of decolonisation. If we can't fully disentangle our lives from the structural violence of the ecocidal growth economy, what we can do is learn not to fear the contradictions this saddles us with, nor to be silenced by them. As Timothy Morton puts it, we can learn to 'deepen to our own hypocrisy'. Decolonising begins at home, we might say, in attending to the occupied territories of our own lived experience. Of getting acquainted with the ground from which our ambition to change the world proceeds—including the assumption that climate change amounts to one more challenge for human ingenuity to conquer. Caught as we would seem to be in an inescapable bind, one that includes our own well-learned determination to defeat it, we might do well to get better at being ourselves defeated. Not in order to do less or care less about the emergency upon us—far from it—but to attune to more sustainable and unconditional reservoirs of courage than poor beleaguered hope.

'Post-activism' is what Akómáláfé calls this regenerative work of attention. Whatever name you give it, the sort of lingering curiosity he proposes is surely one of the things that we can and we do bring to this crisis as artists and storytellers. If we'd speak truth to power, or offer something of consolation and encouragement to our grief-stricken reader, such noble aims may thrive best when grounded in the no less radical undertaking of changing the world we live in through paying attention to what it has to say to us. Of learning, if you like, to shut-up for a minute and listen.

I've tried to keep statistics out of this, but here's one more research finding that for me has everything to do with decolonisation, and with what's at stake as we allow an unsought encounter with ecological grief to redraw our lives. Perhaps counter-intuitively, a recent survey revealed a significant drop in the take-up of psychiatric medicines among School Strikers (7). Eleven years ago Mark Fisher spoke of the UK's youth being so heavily medicated that to be a teenager now amounts to a mental health diagnosis. His brilliant 2008 examination of the contemporary mindset of Capitalist Realism (8) tracks the pervasive condition of 'reflexive passivity' which now colonises our variously medicated lives, pre-emptively co-opting and feeding on our every attempt to challenge the system we're born into, and trapping us in a media-glutted state of subdued, ironic detachment. Occupied territories indeed.

Fisher doesn't pull his punches concerning the grip that this corrosive, disenchanting 'realism' holds over our shared lives, but he does nod towards a paradoxical sort of hope, one that Le Guin herself well understood: that in the onset of ecological crisis we meet an unstoppable force before which capitalism on its final fossil-fuelled binge is about as immovable an object as a spider's web in a hurricane. Strangely, then, in the very predicament that grieves and frightens us, as well it might, we also meet an agent of change so utterly non-negotiable as to be the one player capable of overturning all that we presently take as 'the way things are', and of initiating a collective walking away of a sort that seemed impossible yesterday. The kind of root and branch social transformation that might only take hold once enough of us realise that we quite literally have nothing to lose here. For me, anyway, none of this requires knowing for certain that we can still stop, or even slow climate change. It's much simpler than that. It's about uncoupling our communities from a drugged acquiescence in ecocide, and finding that work to be its own abundant reward, irrespective of whatever comes next.

Mat Osmond 6.3.20, edited for secondary use 6.6.20

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Detail of My Emotional Landscape by Catherine Cartwright

This image shows a tiny detail from a large-scale artwork made with abstracted woodland drypoint prints and hand-stitching. It reflects on the richness of our emotional landscape, and our visceral need for immersion in the natural environment.

Applewood Alley

Michael Bonnet

Tom admires Nate's clothes the same way he admires convertible cars or tribal tattoos: he appreciates their intrinsic beauty from afar, but knows he'll never shed sufficient layers of self-consciousness to try them out himself. In any case there's no way work would let him get away with anything as casual. It is curious, though. Things that definitely weren't cool when he was younger, now all of a sudden are. Bumbags, too-short trousers, chunky trainers—these are no longer invitations to public humiliation, but apparently apparel to be flaunted. When exactly had the consensus changed, Tom wonders, and why was he so late being informed?

Nate walks towards him from the other side of the alleyway. He saunters, really, hips swaying, a slight bounce in each step propelling a definite swagger in his shoulders. Tom is suddenly aware of his own gait. Does he always stand this upright? Do his legs only move this rigidly? His leather shoes clack on the concrete, overselling his arrival. Nate, silently, effortlessly, glides towards him.

'Evening.'

'Easy fella.'

They slip inside their respective back gates towards their neighbouring flats. Tom wonders whether it's Nate's skate shoes that make him walk like that. Which could mean that it's his brogues that make him walk like this. He unties his laces and walks across the decking to the back door barefoot, attempting to liberate his stride from its formal convention.

'What on earth are you doing?' Hettie asks.

'Just trying out a different walk.'

She hands him Milo, who as ever is sucking the ears of Cuddly Bunny to within an inch of their life.

'How did it look?' Tom asks.

'How did what look?'

'My walk.'

Hettie is already whirl-winding through the living room, cleaning up the day's destruction so far. 'Honestly, Tom, it looked ridiculous.'

Tom nods to himself. He suspected as much. People's walks aren't determined by their shoes; their walks are already predetermined and then they buy the footwear that suits them best. Tom carefully places his brogues down by the door for tomorrow. Milo has graduated from chewing Bunny's ear to gnawing his own foot. Tom considers what kind of walk he wants his son to have when he's older, one like his, or one like Nate's?

On the other side of the partition wall Nate flings himself down onto the settee without taking his shoes off.

‘Had some heavy ideas for the podcast today Kay. Real cutting-edge stuff.’

He examines his bald patch in the mirror on the wall opposite. Barely visible. If only his reflection in the Kurosawa poster didn’t tell a different story. Kay doesn’t come through from the study, which suggests she’s in the middle of one of her intense periods of concentration.

‘Yo Kay’, shouts Nate, ‘you in the zone or something?’

Kay doesn’t reply.

Nate goes to the study. Kay is hunched over the desk, headphones on, face impossibly close to the paper adding shading to a picture of an overweight cat diving unsuccessfully at a bird. She’s been working on the illustrations for this book every day for the last two months.

‘That cat still at it?’

‘He is babe.’

‘He’s insatiable.’

‘That he is.’

‘Think I might go for a spliff to unwind. Busy day, you know.’

‘You do that babe.’

‘Lots of ideas for the podcast.’

‘I’m sure babe.’

Collecting the scooter from beside the door, Nate heads back out into the alley. He cranks up the volume on his headphones and blasts Roy Orbison’s ‘Running Scared’ as he sweeps down towards Tesco at top speed (15 miles per hour). As he careers towards the automatic door he imagines the song soundtracking an epic chase scene. Sunglasses on, besuited, gun tucked into his waistband, the distant sound of sirens closing in and \$10 million in unmarked bills in his backpack. Out of shot, Quentin crouches Zen-like behind the camera, watching his protégé at work. He’s just a few feet from the doors now and the security guard looks nervous. He’s shouting ‘Slow down!’ and readying himself for a dive into the fabric softener display if it comes to it. At the last second Nate diverts left and into the car park. A wide-angle shot captures him weaving in and out of the bollards at pace. As the song reaches its crescendo and the timpani drums pound in that distinctive dum-dum-dum-dum rhythm, we notice that our hero is banging along to the beat on the handle of the scooter, which leads us to question whether what we’re seeing is in fact the protagonist’s fantasy, or if the director is once again playing with the conventions of the fourth wall.

The song finishes before the daydream has run its course, so Nate selects something else from his Spotify as he whirs back in the opposite

direction. 'Out of Space' by The Prodigy pulses in his ears. To reconcile the change in aural tone, he imagines a bust-up between Quentin and the studio which almost led to the picture being canned entirely, until Guy Ritchie stepped in at the eleventh hour, but only on the proviso that he was allowed to rub as much grit into the Hollywood gloss as he desired. So, as is Ritchie's want, the Steadicam is ditched for the reverse journey and from our star's perspective we now see every shudder and skid required to keep the scooter on course. Low-hanging branches crowd the path and empty metal laughing-gas canisters crumple beneath the wheels. Nate does his own stunts of course, insisted as much during negotiations.

We pull to a stop by the picnic benches in the patch of grass that backs onto the alleyway which backs onto Nate's garden. From his pocket he retrieves a silver cigarette case he'd bought from a literal car boot sale where he keeps his stash. As he skins up he imagines the speech he'll give if the police were to try and arrest him. It would take inspiration from the one Johnny Depp's character gives in court in *Blow*. Measured, but defiant. *Officer, if we were in Canada, or in Uruguay, or Mexico, or South Africa, or indeed in any of eleven US states, well, we wouldn't even be having this conversation. If I could be so bold Officer, I think you're going to end up on the wrong side of history on this one. This naturally occurring substance has been legalised in 5 countries (?) in the last two years (?) alone.* He'd probably get away with that, you'd be unlucky to get a policeman who'd done his homework. Of course, the cop wouldn't budge. Probably take off his sunglasses and say something like *Son, that may well be, but last time I checked it's still a crime here, which is bad news for you.* Nate wouldn't try to run, or scoot, away. Instead he'd stand up, cross his wrists in preparation for the cuffs, and say, *Man, tell me about it.*

Man? Mate? No, man. Definitely man.

'Oh my days, mate, do you live at this bench or something?'

Nate doesn't look up, he knows it's the kid with the really good shirts, who'll be with the girl he suspects is a lesbian, the tall kid Kit, who everyone seems to accept is the coolest, the pretty girl Annalise who he has to limit the amount of time he stares at, and the other kid who seems to bring nothing to the table and who he thinks the rest of the gang should cut adrift.

He waves as if he's been briefly distracted out of profound thought. They sit on the next bench over. The kid with the good shirts has really excelled himself today with a baggy Aztec print number. Nate refocuses his attention on his Kindle, or at least pretends to. He's never been much of a reader, but he'd like to be, thinks it would add a layer of seriousness to his public persona. As he approaches the last third of the joint, he pretends to finish his chapter, making a show of putting the Kindle away. Kit and Annalise catch his eye and come over to share the remainder. That's one-way kids have changed. When he was in sixth-form everyone he knew spent their free time happily inhaling the

cheapest of solvents in the hope of extracting some kind of buzz; now it seems three out of five teenagers turn their nose up at free, high-grade Moroccan hash.

‘So, you caught up with the Bros documentary yet?’

They look at him blankly. ‘Nah, what’s that?’

‘Doesn’t matter. Watched anything good recently?’

Nate notices Kit is wearing his socks pulled up high with his shorts, whilst the kid with the cool shirts has his rolled low. For a moment he wonders if the hegemony of the high sock with shorts look is finally being challenged, until he sees Aztec print lean down to readjust his. What he gives these kids in terms of free weed, he tries to take back in the form of zeitgeist monitoring.

‘We watched *Homecoming* the other day at Zizi’s house. Man, Beyoncé is something else.’

‘Yeah? You don’t find her a bit, *manufactured*?’

Annalise finishes the zoot and flicks away the roach. ‘Are you mad? She came up with the concept for the whole show, choreographed it, danced it, performed all the songs, *that she wrote*, and you think that’s manufactured? You need to watch it.’

Nate makes a mental note to do just that at the earliest opportunity. ‘Hmm, maybe I will. What about at the cinema, anything you think I should cover on my podcast?’

Kit snorts. ‘The cinema? You joking? Who goes to the cinema?’

Annalise joins in laughing. ‘Have you even started making this podcast yet?’

‘I’m still in the planning phase’, he blusters. ‘Recording the thing is easy, it’s knowing what you want to cover that’s the hard part.’

Nate’s mind is already racing. Have *Front Row* or any of the other cunts already done something on young people’s desertion of the cinema? This could be good.

‘Later man,’ says Kit. As they walk away Nate notices him and Annalise are holding hands. He wonders if platonic hand-holding is a thing among Generation Z and if so whether his listeners would appreciate such observations interspersed amongst his refreshingly engaging approach to film analysis.

The neighbourhood where Nate and Tom live is the kind of place that has alleyways, just not one that gives them nicknames of ill repute—like slasher alley or perverts’ alley. Instead, the alleyways are civilised with whimsical, official names—like this one: Applewood Alley, so called because it once cut through a copse of apple trees, although now there’s nothing but sorry-for-themselves saplings growing among the nettles. Geographically the area sits at the mid-point between places which have colloquially-named alleys people take detours to avoid for fear of being inconvenienced by actual

crime, and places with no alleyways at all and therefore no *frisson* of urban excitement. It is the same with graffiti. There is lots of it locally, but it is mostly aesthetically pleasing, possibly local authority commissioned depictions of animals, rather than gang demarcations or revolutionary screed.

There are broadly two types of recent interloper to the area. There are the Nates: aging hipster-types who like the over representation of pubs that brew their own beer and live music venues, a legacy of an edgier and artier past. They enjoy the cultural credibility the postcode confers upon them, though in private they reluctantly acknowledged that this cachet is diminishing with time. Then there are the Tom and Hetties who have a slightly lower proclivity for vintage clothes, but slightly higher incomes. They come for the healthy number of not yet oversubscribed 'Outstanding' schools and the more reliable than you'd think transport links. For the most part these groups coexist harmoniously with the area's original inhabitants, who view the changing status of their parish with a mixture of disinterest and disdain—save for the odd smashed window when a new estate agent opens or longstanding premises changes hands.

One of the surprisingly few arenas where these three tribes converge is the park. Here, mums in designer gymwear pushing car-priced strollers compete for shade with pale, rollie-smokers, who sport haircuts that may or may not be ironic. Burly matriarchs, bored schoolkids and park bench drinkers watch on, united by knowledge of their indigeneity and thus superiority over the newcomers, which they communicate silently with eye rolls, cheek puffs and wry smiles. Tom and Hettie, of the £800 buggy brigade, take alternate goes flinging their son forward in the swing.

'Gentler, Tom, don't take it out on him.'

Tom's embarrassment at a work *faux-pas* had been the source of much amusement for his partner ever since he returned home the evening prior, kicked his shoes off in anger and asked, quite unexpectedly, 'Do you know what 'gash' means?'

Tom most definitely hadn't. He had ill-advisedly used the word to describe the current state of the market during a meeting with a visiting contingent from Tokyo, one of whom had paused proceedings, taken out a notebook and pen, and asked for an explanation of this hitherto unknown technical term.

'I thought it was an acronym, like 'fubar', or 'scuba' or something.'

'An acronym standing for what?'

'I don't know, something bad. The guy next door used it to describe the broadband reception in the area.'

'The guy next door? You're borrowing the vocabulary of Peter fucking Pan now?'

Hettie embarks on a lap of the park, but not before drawing Tom's attention to the skatepark across the way, where Nate, decked out in knee and elbow pads, is waiting among a group of mostly teenagers for his turn to tackle the half-pipe.

Tom continues to push the swing, but his attention fixes on Nate. He watches him bouncing on his toes in coiled anticipation at the same time that Milo is kicking his legs out on the swing's back-lift. He strains to hear the crack of the low-fives Nate shares with other skaters over his son's appreciative gurgles. So invested is he in the outcome of Nate's attempted kickflip, that he misses his cue to smile reassuringly during the half-glance backwards as the swing descends. A thought occurs to him: he has never set foot, let alone wheel, in a skate park. Never attempted even the most modest of ramps. All around him children are clambering over the play equipment: hurling themselves down slides, failing to balance on logs, nauseating themselves on roundabouts, becoming tangled in cargo nets. All the time they are learning. How to become more dextrous. How to problem-solve. How to overcome anxiety. And here he is, beginning to usher a child through this same rite of passage, with his own skills turned to rust some time ago. Not just out of practice, but quite possibly a hypocrite; retreating from each new obstacle placed in front of him.

At the skatepark Nate concentrates hard, though ensures he gives the impression of not concentrating at all. He knows enough about skating to know he isn't especially skilled at the technical aspects. But that's the beauty of the sport: so little of skating is actually skating. Although his ollies are clumsy and his coordination not good enough to grind, there can be no faulting how he wears his jeans low-slung off the hip, or the height of his turn-ups. He perches his £50 cap of a defunct Japanese skate brand at an angle that satisfies the 'just resting on your head' *de rigueur*, whilst also maintaining confidence that it won't become dislodged mid-powerslide and reveal his bald patch. Admittedly the elbow and knee-pads detract somewhat from the projected image, but his pride, coupled with his propensity to fall, knows some bounds (he draws the line at helmets however). Not that skating is all about looks. He's often mused that the skatepark is a complex social structure—a mesh of people of all abilities and ages who share the space harmoniously and wordlessly. Come to think of it, that would make a great podcast. Perhaps he could get Tony Hawks and Alain de Botton on?

Nate studies the spotty sixteen-year-old ahead of him as he drops-in. Nods with contained enthusiasm as the boy nonchalantly rides the rail, catching his board a couple of times, before meandering back out, switching his stance every few seconds, so that he skates left foot forward, then right, then left again; a look of disinterest never leaving his face. Then it's his turn. He's already spied Kit and Annalise chilling on the grass bank behind, he wonders if

they're watching him now. He drops-in confidently enough, but loses balance a second or two into his descent. He departs without recrimination, though silently congratulates himself when he flips his board up from the concrete into his hand in one smooth motion. That's the thing with skateboarding, you have to learn how to react when you do something well (like you don't care) and when you mess something up, (also like you don't care).

Finding themselves next to each other in the queue at the park café, it doesn't take Kay and Hettie long to do something their partners have never quite managed: have a proper conversation. They begin by apologising for not having taken the time to knock next door and introduce themselves properly. They touch on local life, rehash second-hand observations, before pleasantly surprising each other by segueing into meatier topics: new motherhood, work, gentrification. By the time they return to their other halves—'that's mine, pushing the swing without even looking', 'at least yours has a good excuse for using the children's play equipment'—they've agreed it's ridiculous to return to their siloed lives next door and have made plans to meet again.

Hettie retrieves Cuddly Bunny from his abandonment beneath the swing and clicks the fingers of her free hand in front of Tom's face.

'I think you can stop pushing now.'

A shell-shocked Milo comes to a standstill. She links her arm into Tom's and begins manoeuvring her husband and the buggy homewards.

'Hey, guess what? I saw the woman from next door just now. Did you know she's an illustrator? How cool is that. She's invited us over to their place. She seems lovely. Don't know what she sees in him though.'

As they reach the corner Tom glances back to the skatepark in time to see Kay collecting her other half.

'Babe, I met the neighbours, well one of them. She seems so nice. Like a proper grown-up, but dead friendly. We're having them over. You look a bit down babe, did you not have fun skating?'

Nate doesn't reply but instead tries to flip the skateboard up from the ground into his hand again, only this time just using his heel. Unbelievably, he succeeds. He smiles, squeezes Kay's hand and squints back into the sun scanning the grass for figures that could be Kit and Annalise or any of the others.

Tom spends more time than not worrying about the impending meeting of the neighbours. He feels transported back to the eve of his school trip to Barcelona, before which all the talk had been about Spain's apparently lax attitude to age verification when selling alcohol, and the rumoured rejection of discipline that happened as soon as teachers were taken out of the natural habitat of the classroom. Whereas his classmates counted down the days in a state of anticipatory excitement, Tom had been so paralysed by fears that he'd be the only one asked for ID, he hadn't slept at all.

They spend Sunday in their respective gardens, on countdown to next week's D-Day. As he helps Milo with his trains, Tom *Shazams* the songs he hears emanating from the other side of the fence. The same songs he hears the teenagers hanging out in the alleyway describe as 'dead', the colloquial meaning of which he looks up on *Urban Dictionary* and is surprised to learn isn't good. Hettie meanwhile, oblivious to the lurking music critics nearby, asks him to put 'Wheels on the Bus' on for Milo. Jesus, how 'dead' must 'Wheels on the Bus' be? He doesn't want to know and moves further into the garden to escape the inevitable review. At one point he hears Nate slide out of the back gate and ask the teenagers for a light. He smells the pungent aroma of cannabis and hears Nate say 'Kay thinks I smoke too much of this'. For the next five minutes it's as if Nate is giving an impromptu presentation about the relative merits of something called 'indica' and 'sativa' strains. He speaks without reply or reaction, then Tom hears the gate snap back shut and a millisecond after that a burst of vicious laughter.

From his leaning spot against his fence, Nate sees the crew at their usual picnic bench. He sees Tom and his entourage walking towards him from the other side of the alley. He sees the crew see them and appraises Tom through their eyes. Catalogue clothes, Martin Freeman haircut, I watch *The One Show* expression. Wife and baby flanking him in beige, obviously. This was unfair on him, to tarnish his reputation like this. *Steve Wright in the Afternoon* in human form, socialising in his house, in his garden, in full view of everyone. What had he done to deserve this? At the picnic bench something funny has been said. But what, and by whom? Surely not the boy who contributes nothing? Now? At his expense?

Kay practically slobbers on them as they walk through the gate. Delighted to have guests who bring over £12 bottles of pale rose wine and not train ticket wraps of ketamine. The infant marks his arrival by throwing his building blocks right across the limited-edition Joy Division pulsar blanket. Kay takes Hattie or Betty off for a tour of their adjoining and presumably identical flat, which leaves Tom and Nate nothing to do but sup their grapefruit IPAs and small talk.

'Oh, a podcaster, cool! In any particular area or, you know, just current affairs?'

Current affairs? This guy's worse than he thought. 'Film mainly. Though we also explore the cultural impact and influences of cinema.'

'Right. Cool. Like Mark Kermode.' Tom laughs.

Nate concedes the atmosphere may have turned a little frosty by the time the touring party return. He's part way through his 'there's room for more than one exponent of each craft' speech.

'I mean, is Picasso anything like Gauguin?'

'Well, no, I guess.'

‘Exactly. Not that I’m saying I’m anything like either of them you understand?’

‘Of course,’ Tom agrees, perhaps a little too readily.

Kay emerges with a tray of snacks in time to defuse the situation. Tom gingerly takes a crostini, Nate scoops up three of the sausage rolls at once. There’s an awkward silence which Tom and Hettie fill with favourable comments about the food. Then, from the limited-edition Joy Division garden throw, there’s an explosion of blocks and a wail of frustration. Before Hettie has a chance to offload her carrot sticks and wearily wheel-away, Kay reacts and takes on the role of consoler-and-rebuilder-in-chief. Hettie follows out of a sense of obligation, but is quite happy to hang back and listen to Kay’s soothing tone.

Alone again, but now feeling the pacifying-effect of canapés, Nate tries to start over.

‘So, er, Tom, what’s your take on *Homecoming*?’

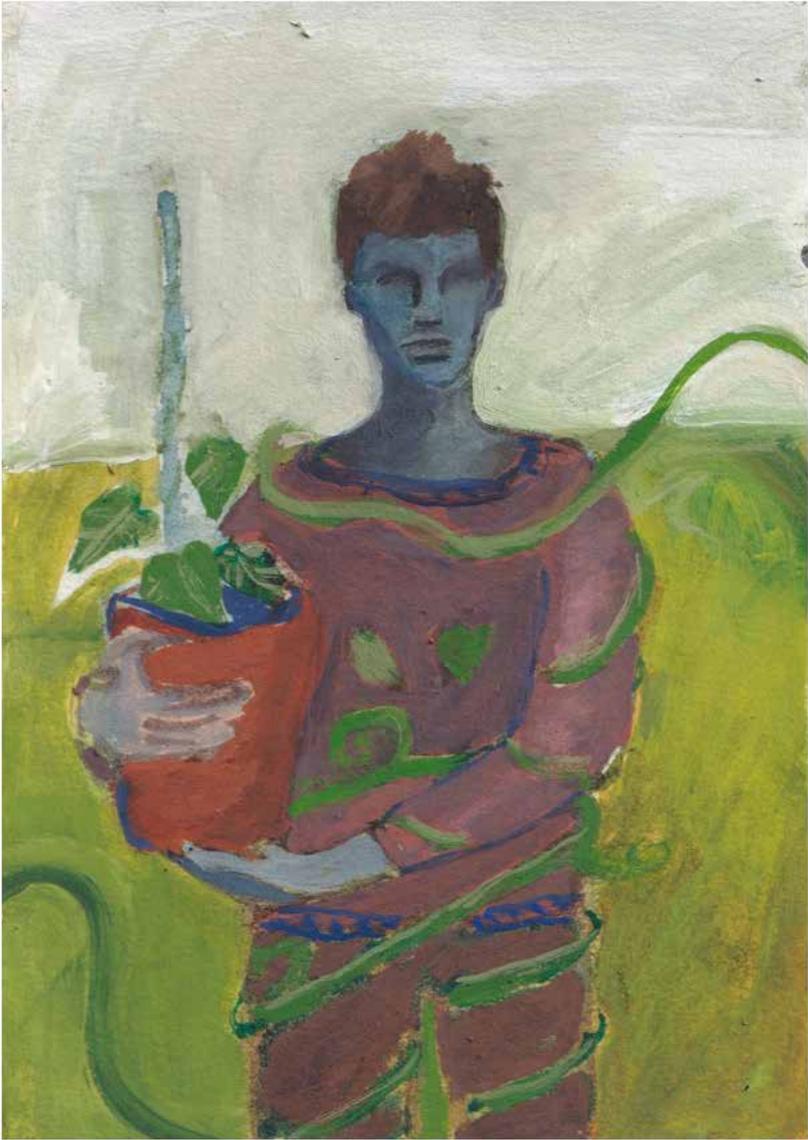
Tom continues to stare blankly.

‘The Beyoncé film,’ Nate clarifies.

‘Oh, I’ve not seen it,’ but sensing more is needed to fully grasp the olive branch he tentatively adds, ‘I imagine it would be a bit *mainstream*?’

Nate nods to himself, takes a long swig of his beer, exhales and commences. ‘Mainstream wouldn’t be the word I’d use, Tom. Sure, we’re talking about one of the most commercially successful artists of all time, but we’re also talking about a cultural phenomenon. The foremost symbol of both female *and* black empowerment working today..’

Over the fence, from the alleyway, chatter and birdsong drift in on the breeze, vying for attention.



'Properties of Plants' by Ella Squirrell

The Flying Dutchmen

Martin Sorrell

Legend has it that in 1641 the captain of *The Flying Dutchman*, a merchant ship returning to Amsterdam laden with valuable goods from the East, defied a terrible storm that suddenly erupted off the Cape of Good Hope. Defying Mother Nature, the captain pressed on; time was money. When some of the crew rebelled, he quashed the mutiny and threw its leader overboard. As punishment for the captain's hubris, he and *The Flying Dutchman* were condemned to sail the oceans for eternity, never able to make port. Sailors still occasionally report sighting a ghost ship wandering the oceans, crewed by dead men.

Evrybody ran who could full flite
Hither athither up ground serching the highyes point
But I too slo like others too slo and couldnt
Birds sang in the middle of the night a sure sign

Then Lantic Oshn incum another Soon Army
The hevens again opend there jaws
Deep earth workd itself into a fury
And upsputd from the underground
The akwakwake turnd the low kuntry to sheetwash waterplains

Afoot I hav stood the hole day and nite threw
Strandid aroof clucht to the chimney stak
Sameso other peepel like me who hav our dwelhouses highyer upground
Random spared lukky
Lap of the dogs

A new day now has dawn at larst
A far off I see rowmen boating a way wo men chilefoke forseeking
drygroun
Downstairs my dwelhouse is no mor
The furnicher has saild off tabels singelsitpods multisitpods litepods

cook unit jim kwipment sin mar vue kwipment evry winder blone
My nexdoor naiber shoutd nonstop from his chimney stak all nite
My doggy my doggy my paw little doggy
His blovd pridenjoy fansybreed howld a wile then stopt kwyet as the
grave and bloatid floatid a way upsidedown legs up strait asky
It lookd like faimus dome in daze befor Lndon dispeerd
A fargon sentry ago when the Thames Oshn was but a plezant stream
Befor kent went

The legs of my por naiber dog remind me of candels on a birthday cake
My birthday cake
Forty last week
Thirteen years outlivd longer than my babys gon larst Soon Army
Four candels for my evry ten years
Happy birthday to you happy birthday to you happy birthday dear Aimy
Giggeldrunk were us galsnboys gallens gon to legless
Follode by toppelsex with who ever
And next day head

But now a helichop sound I hear approaching humchatter
Us aroof wave wild our arms bak forth bak forth one hand grip titehard of
chimny the other frantic
The goggle helmit man at the portal spots us no problm
He slides out danggerling on his rope ladder
Swirls down then gripgrabs me
Clipclix me into his cradel
And up assens me
Til a spacesoot figger arm outwood reaches hauls me onto bord into
Then the helichop turns a way and climes into the clouds
To rarnday voo with a Flying Dutshman
As evrybody calls them
One of the great heliships
Sevn hundridnfifty rotars spinning each
Great sittys in the air

In side its abussel of doct or nurses
Lookalike robots all soots boots gluvs
They look no setsex not hes not shes
Armsnlegs like corydoors
No faces just tubes and germ mask app ratus
A mask voice says I must be chekd for high pothermia and other possibil
itis
Trollys me mediatly a long passijways up down elvaters
Parst compouns parst gaytid comunitis parst foodpods soshulpods
On anon for seeming oursnours
Evenshly we arive at the hospitl wing
Rosenrose of moansngrones

Out cums an eedel harf a rod long
Tap tap
Role my sleeve
Peerce skwirt deep in and stedly hold
I let scream highfly and shiverkik out my legs thrash my arms bash my
brains
A robot me pins me down firmlok
Waits till I gro slowncarm
Are you feeling better now the robot arsx
Hunky dooryet
Shshsh I tell it shshsh
All round all sooth all still as snow
Just listen to the rotars flutterflutter
As tho paper wings

Next a long side me cums my naiber delirium tremendus
Tears running downface
Pulling at his hair a wander of his going mind
Crying out in his illirium
Crak your cheex you catarax you hurrrycanose
Then fists scrood into eyes
Starts wailing O my doggie my doggie

I sleep the sleep of the just
For an iternity my head blakblank an inside of no dreams no nite mares
When I wake theres a bloke too beds a way yakayak
In farnorthern axent the noo the noo
Says he was pikt up from harf way up a highlan
Says hav we heard the roomers
No
Well roomer mill is going full tilt
Evrywhere parently othermor biblicfluds hav swept sittys towns villijs a
way
Swept scrapeskys viaduk bridjis into canyons
Carsels humbel dwellings alike no distinkshun
Swept power stayshuns
Drownd captal sitty
Guvermint house
Ships submreens fishboats jyant frayters
Hav washd up mountensides
Forists hav gon
Trees broken as pensilsnap
Millyn bodys and mor swept out to wartree grave

Parently kingnkween plus sum royls hav been brort aboard full secret
Sconsed at the far end of the Flying Dutshman in sweet luxree
Strictly out of bouns
Gardid by aileet offsirs shoot to kill
Roomer says that the pryminster and the war cabnit are lokt in pryvit
parts
Gardid by mor killermen
Farnorthernman the noo the noo snearjeers
Whats that to me
Its your guvermint
Your pryminster
Your kingnkween

The public nounsment sistm cums crakkell live

Atenshun Atenshun

Evrybody must be reddy at six oklok

There majstees will adress there subjix

At the pointd klok peepel wark or take trollytrams to the nearest vue
stashun

Those of us abed look at the skreen overhead

The jakflag app ears on the screen wile nashnul anthm plays

Then they app ear all longface demeener

Compatryots

In this gravest of cryseas

We stand a long side you

Carmnrezlute

We are resolvd

As we no you are resolvd

To pre zerv with our way of life

To go on as befor living by our cherishd values

Our nashuns bedrok down the sentrys

Wherever we stablish ourselvs

We will rebild our great kuntry

Not only will we servive but we will flurrish

We will prosper and suceed

As never befor make no mistake

We are determind as we no you are

*Our brave armdforsis will keep evry man wo man chile of you Safe and
out of harmsway*

With our greement the pryminster and the armdforsis cheef of starf

Hav sent our vangard ship

The Churchill

To serch out newlans for us to habit in

A thousan Flying Dutshmen all fewld up for as long as it takes

Follo in formashun

So rest ashored

We will reech a newfindlan

*We will bild a new Jeruslam
Rezume our lives
Which nothing no power no hostile nashun
Not even Muther Nachure herself at her angryest
Can ever distroy
For down the ages
Down the sentrys way bak to 2000
Our nashun has wetherd whatever's been throne at us
And always carm always rezlute
We hav cum threw
So let us not luse hart
Let us stiffn the sinyews sum up the blud
And plase our trussd in our good sens
And in Almitey God
And let us keep faith with our destiny
Together we will be strong as never befor
Our bless sings apon you all*

Then god save the kingnkween and the jakflag again

The thousand Flying Dutshmen fly on northwoods
Then bak south and eastnwest
Ever serching serching some plase to lan
But theres nowhere to settel
No new Sarara Dezut no new Arktik Platto
The few kuntrys still abuv water hav becum waystlans
Sept one which sens up rokits to frit us a way

So we go on anon
Like a flotiller of butterflys
Those luvly scraps of cullerd paper in the wind
We used to see pichers of
Vagabons of the air

In Late Rainy Season

Like good boys and girls we attended church regularly, where we learned that God was for us, not against us. It was unseasonably wet, causing sneezes and coughs to ripple along the pews like the germ of an idea that had not yet been tested in the fire of open discussion. God was for us, not against us, except for those He targeted with His anger. Luckily we were not among them, so skipped towards home without looking back, only pausing to marvel at His creation, which sang, rejoicing, at marvels to which we were blind.

Anthony Wilson

The Rewilding of Stonelands Farm

See this:

a red flatbed marooned in slurry.

A perished tyre up on top
of a dead Peugeot raised on blocks.

A green trailer laden with sodden logs.

Last night's storm has passed
and everything steams
as if the world is being poached.

A squirrel shuffles hazels,
clanging the galvanised tin
of a purposeless shed.

At the island end
of a waterlogged paddock
five black heifers wait
for nothing they can name.

Mystery machinery
corrodes against stone,
caught by surprise
when the iron plague came.

On a yellow skip throne
a one horned quad bike
rules this junk and rubble kingdom.

Behind a high fence,
something happened
the Planners wouldn't like.

A snapped sign says:

Private Kee

Nothing moves. I wait
and nothing moves again.

The Earth is readying itself
to accept a death, the slow
disassembly of molecules.

See this: empty pubs, silent schools.

Marc Woodward

All Decent And Fair-Minded People

Chiatulah Ameke

Dear TV and Radio Editors,

I would like to thank you on behalf of all right-thinking people for the fantastic work you are doing ensuring that your presenters shut down intelligent and articulate black people who want a serious discussion on race that challenges whites to change. We do not want to be challenged, we do not want to change, and we certainly do not want to make amends for so-called historical or present-day injustices.

Far too often these intelligent blacks (IBS for short!) want us to look at our slave-holding history from the viewpoint of so-called victims. The hundreds of heroes we honour that built and grew rich off the slave trade deserve every ounce of credit for laying the foundations of our prosperity. We do not require any 'fuller picture' from these troublesome blacks and their tiresome facts. Thankfully your presenters do magnificent work interrupting, diverting, belittling and ignoring them with wonderfully patronising and condescending statements and questions. They often completely derail IBS points with beautifully evasive tactics involving irrelevancies, whitewashed history and ridiculous parallels that are a delight to behold.

I'm particularly impressed with how your presenters often use a succession of quick-fire questions designed to distract and inflame the IBS so he or she forgets the original point and engages the presenter on false ground—a wonderfully Machiavellian manoeuvre. I also enjoy the use of mock outrage from your presenters that the listener, viewer or black stooge we control is invited to join in. The interview then becomes a media lynching that has me in raptures. It serves as an excellent reminder of how we must never miss an opportunity to let viewers and listeners know that at all times and in all cases we whites are the victims of their rabid political correctness. We must always send the message to all listeners and viewers that these blacks are not to be respected or trusted, that they are the enemy within who would destroy all we hold dear.

Just imagine if we allowed them to talk freely? I know you all share my horror at how the floodgates would open and the general public would hear in unnecessary detail of the failure of universities to even admit to, never mind tackle, racism, of how football, far from being a beacon of progress, is going backwards, of the frenzied rise of racism since Brexit, of how gun culture in America is intimately entwined with whiteness and white privilege, of the endless coups and assassinations instigated by the West to ensure control

of Africa's resources, leaving millions in poverty, of how for decades we have disproportionately excluded black schoolchildren, of how the criminal justice system exhibits racism at every stage from police to courts, probation and prison, of how the West has waged secret biological warfare against blacks, of how we stole, destroyed, denied and whitewashed their legacy in Ancient Egypt, of how the Windrush betrayal is part of a bigger betrayal that keeps their countries in never-ending debt, of how we ensure so many of their children end up in prison, of how we maintain burning injustices in jobs, housing, health, politics and of course the media itself. There's no end to what they allege and where it might lead, so keeping them quiet is absolutely paramount.

As we are all acutely aware the IBS demand we take responsibility for our actions and our so-called ill-gotten gains when all we want to do is to live a quiet life. Their arguments must be shut down, they are the thin end of the wedge. Allowing them to be listened to would lead to all manner of new demands that could eventually lead to a drop in our living standards that would be completely intolerable—this is the true injustice we are all trying to prevent.

In the final analysis we all understand we must maintain the current order and hold onto our wealth, privileges and advantages at all costs, no matter how they were gained. The excellent way you use your power ensures we can go about our daily business, untroubled by their spurious notions of justice. For this I cannot commend you all highly enough and you have the eternal gratitude of all decent, fair-minded people.

The Ghost of Wangari Maathai

This is how your ghost appears.

Today's update: Women walk miles for water.

Air pollution in the urbans. Massive

soil erosion in the rurals.

You haunt the dirt; weeping for plastic souls,

shouting to be heard. Wailing. Wailing.

Mind my green cry. Plant trees! Save streams!

*Where is the general to command the fallen band? Mobilize
the deluged troops deceived by the suits.*

You weep; as twigs turn to towers, as sharks come for parks.

But we will give you rest.

But we will give you rest.

You'll laugh: as towers turn to twigs, as parks come for sharks.

The rousing troops ravaging the suits

Here is the general to command the rising band, mobilizing

We mind your green cry: Plant trees! Save streams!

Fighting for we've heard. Marching. Marching.

You'll dance the dirt; hailing the earthen souls

Soil accretion in the rurals

Clean air in the urbans. Massive

Today's update: Women win war on water.

This is how your ghost departs.

Edith Knight Magak

**Wangari Maathai was an environmental activist and the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. She died in 2011.*

Orangutan

A coconut-knuckled lope
of shoulder blades and bone
tumbleweeds its rust-wire load
along a log-clotted artery of road.
An ailing pace it takes
with vine-long arms
thinly pressed, almost weightless,
into the exsanguinated gash of it.

The 'it'
that splits
the alopecia flats,
from receding canopy choirs,
scrummed pennilessly silent:

The 'it'
that cleaves
a snow-ash path
through alien plains
blister-cracked with exhumed roots
and stubbled with the splinted limbs
of crucifix palms
and a kerosene tree scrivenering S.O.S.
on tallow-smoked cerements of sky:

\$.O.\$ it reads
to colonies of trespassers
who've chainsaw-made
their paper bouquets
of dollars, titles and deeds.

With evaporated rivers

fossil-mapped
on the soles of his feet,
Old Man of the Forest limps
into the steaming swill—
a solitary blood vessel
clung to the colossal thinness of the wind;
Sadly. Onerously. Slowly intent
on finding something
he might recognise.

Katina Laoutaris



Starbucks in the Gutter

Down with the dandelions,
legs sprawled across dirt, he's down
on his uppers with sod all
but a hold-all, a drizzle of old coppers,
in a cracked coffee cup.

Ground down, down at heel, worn down
to the last bare leather
stitches of his sole. Horizons glimpsed
through sticky plastic
lids, the envy of a warm sip of latte,

coughs of muttered *please*,
ravenous for any small change,
a cup of tea. This is what he is—
flat, tight, a Costa cup on his knees,
a sloshed dosser in need

of a top-up, for a shot of sympathy.
Chucked in the gutter,
his stars are buckled and fucked up,
while we cradle the stain
of a disposable cup in our hands.

Julian Bishop

[This poem was runner up in the 2020 Aryamati Poetry Prize.]

The Lazarus Taxa

morning beholds me the border, white and scathed
in your replica sunrise. *ingenieur*, i watch and wait,
on the edge of your twice-tall wonderland. i wonder
where to land, or how to fly, caught in clockwork
congeries, spokes and spikes inscribed against
the sky, blighting my bony adherence to air. it will
take time: time to gather, time to wheel, and bank,
and plan. my people are poets. yours, the brittle
tacticians who talked the forests into chalk; who
tread the fleshy grape to rot. our name was Vagrant
Needlegrass, was Living Sceptre of the Meadow.
you made our name a Rake of Ash, a Dynasty
of Haunted Costumes, Effigies and Masks. it will
take time, but we are patient. waited and watched
from the remnant hedgeland, learned to live on
whispers in the ozone of our eking. you have been
large in the Land, conniving encroachment, daily.
you classify and map. your larcenous cartography
has cut the green unknown to networks, sectioned
into territories, precise as measured meat: loin
to hock to chuck to shank, from canopy to tundra.
we were Augers, Prophets of Velocity. until you
came, inventing obsolescence. our name for you
was Doom. Evangelists of Asphalt, you built
cages for your manias. cities walking upright,
exulting in imprisonment. our name for you
was Sickness. your names for us were lanoline
and carmine, cordwain, rawhide, gelatine; were
shellac, tallow, civetone, ambergris and isinglass.
you called us shearling, eiderdown; fertilizes,
fixatives. you called us rennet, cochineal; you
sterilized and rendered us to fibres, waxes,
feather meal. yet we are patient, *ingenieur*,

have learnt to live beneath your notice, barely breathing, biding time. morning beholds me the border. call us Savants of Escape. call us the Dizzy Shining Charge. call us the Sudden Coming Storm. call us the Weight of Reckoning.

Fran Lock

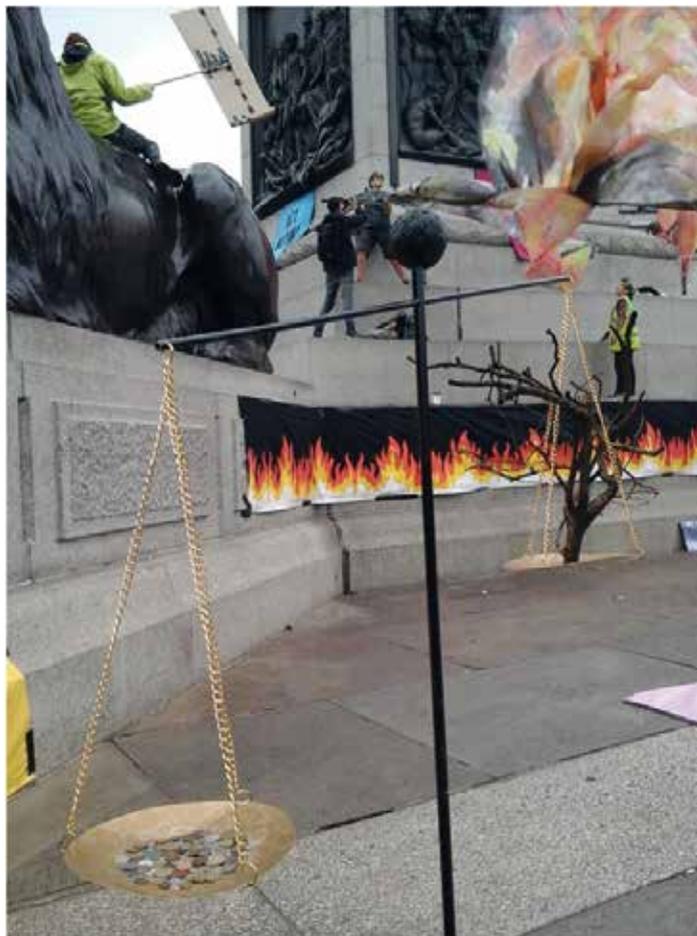


Image by Fran Lock

Journal of the Covid Year 2020

January 29th 2020. *Hic incipit pestis.*

We took Lawrence to the hospital
for a scheduled CT scan.
He will be ninety-nine this year.
All was normal, except
the building rattled hollowly
like a drum with something loose inside.

Outside the home we said goodbye
—no visits now—and the dimness
of the hallway took him in.
'When' and 'if' stood sentinel,
unvoiced, still as the shut door.

*

The Prime Minister, drunk
on bubbling Brexit,
is now hung-over, not noticing
the amber lights just up the road
as they turn to red.

*

At the start of the third week—
sun in a greening garden,
fridge reasonably stocked,
international exchanges
with friends on social media
—you have to say that things
could be a great deal worse...

...except for the leaping lists
of the dead for whom
better and worse no longer signify,
and the rippling circles of the grieving.

*

The daily papers feature photographs
of empty streets. No cars; no people.
Mountain goats invade Llandudno
and stroll the town as new-come owners,
chew on anything that's chewable,
bed down in the local cemetery.

In the garden, birds sing insistently
where Spring swells, and the air smells sweet.

Hospital workers locally
speak of empty wards and corridors
as when on a walk through a bluebelled wood,
you sense the clouds draw over, a shadow falls,
and all the woodland birds grow silent.

*

Those who die in this time of plague,
us rushing down a dark, long tunnel,
just step aside, are gone, no more.
There is no last goodbye,
memorial, nor rite of parting
to greet the human ordinariness of loss.

When at last we come out—those who do—
blinking at an unaccustomed world,
we'll feel them everywhere, weighing down
our shopping bags, sitting beside us
on the train on a trip to the sea.

*

The Minister says we are following the science:
data. That's numbers, locations, speed.
We have collected no data.
We are voyaging a virus ocean

and the run of the tide eludes us.

*

'Andrá tutto bene' they say in Italy
and all manner of thing shall be well
for opportunists and profiteers.

*

Chowdhury and Shousha;
Haider, Saedu, Zaidi;
Adeji, Ayache;
Sebastianpillai;
El Hawrani and El Tayar:
NHS doctors, dead.

'We never forget...,' the Minister says.
Let's wait and see. There are
some unexpected corners of English fields
that will be forever the rest of the world.

*

How many are infected?
Pick a number; multiply by two point five
for week one from the end of January;
multiply that total and the total
for each successive week
by the same amount. Take away
the number of the dead:
they do not count. Double the total.
Take away the number you first thought of.
You know as much as the Government.
The world is full of numbers.

*

David rang to say that cousin Christopher has died,
failing heart, not Covid-19: 80 this year.
There will be no summons to the scattered family

for a funeral coming-together: a lonely dying
and a sparse farewell, though neighbours
lined the street as the coffin passed. A memorial,
perhaps, another time, when things are normal.
Things will be normal: not the normal we recall.

When the flocks of black crows settle
they will roost upon different trees.

*

'Have hospitals the PPE they need?'
the minister is asked.
'We have ordered tens of thousands,'
the minister replies.
'Have hospitals the PPE they need?'
the minister is asked.
'People are working round the clock,'
the minister replies.
Why doesn't he tell a proper lie?
Is he too honest? Or just embarrassed?

*

*Those who control the present control the past
and those who control the past control the future...*
Negligence is preparation; failure is success;
and now we know that what we knew
we also know we do not know, and never knew.
Big Boris will fix it, and we shall love him.

*

Celandines covered the lawn,
a Creamy-Yellow Way of stars
across the grass. They fade,
and apple trees burst into blossom.
Delicate pink centres, white outers,
glow like lamps in the midnight moonlight,
as they always have.

*

After nightshift in Lodi
the doctors and nurses
stop off at a café
for croissants and coffee
before they go home.

They sit in a corner and cry.

*

Barry Tempest

In Fashion

Remember the season we were all mad
for the skins of nightingales? How we gaddied
in full-skirts hung with a hundred beaks—
never gave a thought

to the nightworkers,
to the smothering, gutting and stitching,
or to our forests—songless—
hung with tiny swaying traps?

Anna Kisby

[Written in response to early 21st-century concerns about 'fast fashion'. In Edwardian Britain hundreds of millions of birds were slaughtered annually to provide hat feathers. This poem was first published in *Campaign in Poetry: anthology of political poems* (The Emma Press, 2015).]

The President

Chiatulah Ameke

President Wesley Jackson, the second black president in US history, had two guns pointed at either side of his head, by two different people with opposing demands.

In front of him was an open briefcase with a red button that was the trigger for nuclear war. It could only be activated by fingerprint identification from the president himself.

Both gunmen were four-star generals at the top of the US administration, but had opposing views as to the threat Russia posed.

General Goldberg believed intelligence clearly showed Russia was about to make a nuclear strike that would annihilate the West. He urged a pre-emptive strike that would save the country and the Western world.

General Warren believed the intelligence was seriously flawed and came from unreliable sources. He was adamant a pre-emptive strike would trigger a response that would utterly destroy both sides.

The generals were brothers—twins. Brought up since birth by two different families they had nonetheless embarked upon the same vocation, each believing they had been marked for high destiny. After discovering each other late in life they had sworn to never be separated again, and to defend each other's life to the last. But, independent of each other, they had made odd simultaneous decisions to use their security clearances to enable them to smuggle in weaponry, and place the President in an impossible dilemma.

The president had an internal dilemma neither general was aware of. His biography omitted to mention several lost years in his youth where he had undergone a secret rite of passage deep in the heart of Africa. He had volunteered to undertake a mission to destroy all white men, at whatever cost to himself. The rituals involved in his initiation had empowered him with tremendous abilities, only a small fraction of which he had needed to call upon to enable him to become US president. But his commitment to that mission had been compromised by the fact he had fallen in love with and married a white woman, who bore him three children who meant more to him than he could ever have imagined.

All three men were drenched in sweat.

'Sir, I'm going to have to insist you press that button NOW!' said Goldberg.

'Sir! If you move an inch I will have no choice but to shoot you, sir,' said Warren.

In such moments time warps and slows.

The president's thoughts switched to the years he spent in Africa

before the initiation—of the total humiliation of grinding poverty that had forced him and so many others to literally eat dirt. He remembered the strange diseases that had wiped out entire communities, causing sufferers to die in unspeakable agony. The old men who had initiated him blamed the white man for many of their ills. And they were right. He had been so proud to be chosen. The old men saw a rare determination and selflessness in him, and had dared to whisper to him their most secret and ancient prophecies. The president's thoughts switched again to his lifetime in the West. For the majority of his life he had seen how his African-American brethren possessed combined wealth now unimaginable to those back home, but who had done so little to alleviate the suffering of their brothers and sisters in the motherland. Their lack of unity and spiritual grounding had rendered them almost worthless, unworthy of redemption, along with the whites.

'Sir!' shouted Goldberg, who now took the safety off his gun and cocked the hammer.

'No, sir, do not move sir!' said Warren who did the same.

In these last seconds the president thought of his children, his wife, his mission, the cost of it all, the necessity of it all, life for all, death for all, secrets and whispers ... His head, which had been so still, now suddenly tipped forward, the generals who had been taut and tense to beyond breaking point simultaneously fired, killing each other. He felt them fall to the ground—and pressed the button.

As thousands of nuclear warheads from both superpowers burst into the sky seeking cities and continents to destroy, the president smiled as he remembered the solemn whispers of the old men:

*'Our kin in the land of the Pales will fail and die in sin,
Our son from the land we hail midwives our Light within.
Though death from skies will fall, and earth removes her stain,
The blacks whose Light shines tall shall rise again and again.'*

Gauging the Distance

I thought that after so many days adrift, I would
become accustomed to my anxious way of life,
to the sea of washing and sluicing, cooking from scratch,
doors closed, windows open, gauging the distance
from my mouth to her mouth, or his mouth to mine.

I garden every day, grateful for the blackbird
that comes to feed in my wake. Each night
I curl into myself, basking
in the blue light of the news:

the numbered dead,
evidence, theories, studies, statistics.
I imagine myself hooked up to machines,
what place will I retreat to?

Imagine myself
walking out in the open,
imagine the unseen:
they say it can live on particles of pollution,
ride on the skin of bacteria, hang
in a cloud of breath for hours.

I long
for shipwreck, to be thrown
out into the waves, to fight or drown.

I have taped up my letterbox,
left a basket outside for mail,
cardboard boxes for groceries.

They say we can go out now,
work, meet friends. But
I have become accustomed
to my anxious way of life.

Kim Squirrell

The Gardens at Minterne Magna, 2018

A rhododendron dies for want of iron
in the chalk. A cinnabarinum cross
remains botanically unnamed. Cyclamen
crowd at the foot of a purple beech.
Amelanchier. Prunus. A grove
of flaming acer. They matter, the names.

I need to grow poetry from them
on a soft October afternoon between the referendum
and the leaving,
as the last of four years of war centenaries approach
and yesterday's UN report states that the planet will cross the critical
threshold
in a dozen years.

In this garden I feel placed in my ageing,
happy among magnolias thirty-five years in the flowering.
I am happy to outlive the cherry, not to survive the beech,
but when science is talked out of its meaning
and rituals of remembrance require forgetting,
what is to come?

How can I be happy with the low sunlight gyring
on the backs of circling flies?
How can I feel belonging amongst trees that ask me nothing,
ask nothing of me,
that free me from the lowdown heartbreak of old hostas,
to help me breathe, re-plant, go on?

Gill Barr

Overshoot

Mother is in the garden
She doesn't see the dragon
Between us

We released it long ago
We didn't know
It could destroy our world

We have got
just
one
shot

Together we raise the bow
And hold our breath

Natalie Garrett



Rise Up by Natalie Garrett

The Village of Dung

Habib Mohana

The small sleepy village perched on the hill overlooking the purling creek that fed vineyards, wheat farms, and vegetable plots. The residents of the village ate the wheat of their farms and drank the milk of their buffaloes. They spent the broiling summer days under the shady trees, chit-chatting and singing songs. During winter nights the families sat around fires, snacked on roasted peanuts and avidly listened to the stories told by the elders.

Once, a maniacally adventurous explorer suddenly stumbled upon the village. The long journey and the punishing sun had given him a deep tan complexion. 'The sun was on the verge of sinking when I discovered the village, and it took my breath away at first sight!', he gleefully jotted down in his dusty diary. The villagers accommodated him in the community centre and brought him food. He stayed in the village for several weeks and made entries in his diary first about the flora and fauna of the village and then about the language, religion and ethnicity of the villagers. At night the villagers collected in the community centre and he regaled them with stories about the life of the city dwellers.

One night he said to them, 'You've tons of milk, why don't you take it to the city and sell it?'

'You must be joking, the city people buy milk?' one farmer asked.

'No I'm not joking, the city people buy and sell milk,' the explorer replied.

'Our ancestors strictly forbade us to sell milk. In our language we've the same word for light, eyesight and milk. To sell milk is a sacrilege in our culture,' the village chief said.

One midmorning while he was doing his packing he repeated, 'Milk sells in the city.'

The villagers stared at him in disbelief but he said that someone should accompany him to the city and see for himself. The villagers held a long meeting and at last an intrepid man was readied to strap a small milk churn to his back and accompany the explorer to the city.

Some days later the man returned to the village and men, women and children poured out of the houses to welcome him back. 'Milk sells in the city,' he showed the villagers a palmful of shiny coins.

On the second trip to the city the intrepid man was accompanied by his cousin. On the third trip they were three milk sellers, and then in a short while their number grew to seven. Not long before the entire village was selling milk. Now, during winter nights, the villagers sat around the fires and talked

about the city, the money, the dearness and insecticides.

After some years the city people ran a small freight train to the village for transferring milk to the city, but on the way it was often raided by the savage tribes. The city people laid an underground pipeline to carry milk from the village to the city, and to keep the troublemakers from the milk pipeline a big chunk of the village men were enlisted in the freshly-minted Elite Milk Militia. After some time the city people suspected the villagers of mixing water in milk. The experts came and they permanently hooked the udders of the buffaloes to the milking machines and the machines kept sucking milk all the time. Now the villagers could not touch milk let alone use it.

‘Our babies don’t have milk to drink?’ the villagers complained.

‘We’ll send you a truck full of white powder; mix it with water and give it to your children. This powder-mix is far refreshing and nourishing than the milk that comes from your dark ugly beasts,’ the city people sent a message.

The next day a truck full of bags of white powder trundled into the village. The villagers tore open the bags of white powder, emptied them in the pond on the outskirts of the village. They rolled up their trouser legs and waded in the pond to stir the water with feet, spades and sticks. In a short while a white chalky mixture was ready and the mothers brought their children to the pond to drink it. At night tomcats, jackals and foxes gathered at the pond to lap the white chalky mixture. The villagers hired a watchman to keep the wild animals away from the milk pond. But the watchman’s rifle was useless against the fishes, frogs and crabs that swam and lived in the milk pond.

Time kept speeding.

‘Feed pistachios to the buffaloes, give them rose water to drink, don’t let them walk, with walking the buffaloes’ milk dries up,’ A written order came from the city. The next morning a truck brought a load of massive, custom-made padlocks to the village and the villagers secured the legs of the buffaloes with the padlocks.

After some time the city people issued another notification ordering the villagers to replace the old names of the buffaloes with the modern ones. The city veterinarians believed that the modern names would exert a pleasant effect on the brains of the buffaloes, which would produce a pleasant effect on their stomachs which in turn would relax their mammary glands thus raise the buffaloes’ milk producing capacity to 65.73%.

One morning a gang of painters descended upon the village and painted the buffaloes white, red and green. The next day a courier delivered to the villagers a mechanical buffalo stud of improved variety for breeding purposes. The buffalo stud had the appearance of a grey langur while its outside was covered with crimson velvet. Around its neck was a booklet,

dangling on a length of silk string. The booklet said that with the new stud a new breed of buffaloes would come in green, purple, pink and beige colours, and the new breed would have rose bouquets instead of black curly horns, and they would have golden silk tassels for tails.

The new stud could not differentiate between a buffalo in estrous and a non-estrous one. It was only fond of mounting. After mounting a cow buffalo it would doze off and remain in that position for days on end and when a buffalo was not available it mounted a donkey, a tree, a wall or a heap of manure.

One day the city people saw from the long-range surveillance cameras that the village was sinking into animal excrement, and bacteria from the excrement posed a grave threat to milk. They hoisted all the buffaloes high in the air over the village with the crawler cranes that were brought into the village on a short notice. The buffaloes blocked the sun from reaching the village and when the wind blew they swung back and forth like inflated balloons and sometimes they would become entangled. When the quadrupeds defecated the village was blitzed by poo bombs and the villagers would push their children under the beds or tables. In a few months the buffaloes had turned into skeletons and they were so low on energy that they could not even moo. But sometimes they managed to turn their bleary eyes to the verdant pastures where once upon a time they leisurely cropped the wild grasses while the birds chirped and scampered in the nearby trees.

Time kept speeding.

The villagers and buffaloes started shrinking. The buffaloes produced more shit and less milk and the village was sinking into the animal shit. After some time the buffaloes stopped producing milk. The milking machines started sucking their blood. When the blood reached the city, the food experts mixed a wonder chemical with the blood and turned it into pure refreshing milk.

One day the buffaloes stopped yielding blood and the city people forgot about the village.

A century later, a selfless adventurer was in the midst of a great journey of exploration. He was taking a leak on a tree when he heard low voices emanating from the nearby dunghill. First he poked his walking stick in the dunghill and then squeezed into it through the narrow pathway. The sight enthralled him: he saw bean-sized buffaloes grazing on minuscule mushrooms, ant-sized men and women chatting and doing their chores and rye-sized children playing marbles made from dung. The adventurer scribbled down the time and date of the discovery of the village in his soiled diary. He gave the news of the newly discovered village to the newspapers, radio and TV channels.

The archaeologists, economists, philosophers, poets, anthropologists,

and scientists hightailed to the newly discovered village. For hours they gazed at the tiny shrunken creatures that were crawling around in the dunghill, and the visitors' skulls were at the brink of bursting with the ideas about the books and theses they were to write about what they were witnessing. They made their research, published bulky books and theses on how the humans and buffaloes of the newly discovered villages could have shrunk.

Soon the newly discovered village gained the highest status among the prominent heritage sites

The international media started a hue and cry that the elements and thieves were wreaking havoc with the newly discovered village. The world leaders lashed out at the rulers of the country where the village with shrunken creatures was situated. 'You, daft idiots, you aren't doing enough to save the marvel of nature from harsh climate. If you're strapped for cash we'll give money, if you lack expertise we'll provide you the expertise.'

A white palatial building with lofty domes was erected in the heart of the city and the newly discovered village was shifted to the newly built building with the help of machines. The façade of the building carried a bold caption *The Village of Dung*.

Tourists from every nook and cranny of the globe came in enormous numbers to see *The Village of Dung*. They gawked at their beloved sight and held talkathons regarding its beauty, silence and pureness. 'You people are so lucky that you're the inheritors of those geniuses who built *The Village of Dung*. Take wealth, science, and skyscrapers from us and in return give us this architectural wonder.' The tourists often said to the inheritors of *The Village of Dung*.

'No, we'll not exchange it with all the treasures of the universe,' the inheritors of *The Village of Dung* would reply.

'Sorry, time is up, we're closing now.' The attendants of *The Village of Dung* announced.

'But we've to see the curator of ...' the tourists argued.

'He's gone abroad. He'll return after a week. Sorry, time is up,' the attendants shepherded the tourists out of the building.

The white palatial building was lit with thousands of lights, its white marble floor was shining as if it were made of diamonds, the curator of *The Village of Dung*—a portly little man dressed in a blue safari outfit—scurried into the building, he was tailgated by a swarm of tourists, students and researchers. He delivered a short fascinating lecture on the history of *The Village of Dung*. Then he turned the key in the lock and opened the glass door.

'Today the weather is friendly so we can open the door of *The Village of Dung*. It is awfully fragile, you know.' The curator spoke over his half-moon spectacles and the visitors held their breath. Very gingerly he inserted his right index finger into the pile of animal waste, a great number of men, women,

children and buffaloes bunched up on his finger. He slipped the finger out of the glass case and held it before the gawking visitors.

‘Wow, incredible, this is called creation! This is a true marvel of the universe. Can any other civilization show us something like it? Unbelievable!’ He kissed the tiny creatures that crawled on it. ‘All my research is on them. I’ve dedicated my entire life to them. They’re my children or rather I’m their child. Amazing!’ He kissed them again, tears filling up his puffy, piggy eyes. ‘I love them more than my children. I give them more time than I give to my family. Wow, unbelievable! This is called creation. This should not be called *The Village of Dung*, rather it should be called *The Village of Gold*.

A civilisation hell-bent on destroying itself

James Dyke

The coffee tasted bad. Acrid and with a sweet, sickly smell. The sort of coffee that results from overfilling the filter machine and then leaving the brew to stew on the hot plate for several hours. The sort of coffee I would drink continually during the day to keep whatever gears left in my head turning.

Odours are powerfully connected to memories. And so it's the smell of that bad coffee which has become entwined with the memory of my sudden realisation that we are facing utter ruin.

It was the spring of 2011, and I had managed to corner a very senior member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) during a coffee break at a workshop. The IPCC was established in 1988 as a response to increasing concern that the observed changes in the Earth's climate are being largely caused by humans.

The IPCC reviews the vast amounts of science being generated around climate change and produces assessment reports every four years. Given the impact the IPCC's findings can have on policy and industry, great care is made to carefully present and communicate its scientific findings. So I wasn't expecting much when I straight out asked him how much warming he thought we were going to achieve before we manage to make the required cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.

'Oh, I think we're heading towards 3°C at least,' he said.

'Ah, yes, but *heading towards*,' I countered: 'We won't get to 3°C, will we?' (Because whatever you think of the 2°C threshold that separates 'safe' from 'dangerous' climate change, 3°C is well beyond what much of the world could bear.)

'Not so,' he replied.

That wasn't his hedge, but his best assessment of where, after all the political, economic, and social wrangling we will end up.

'But what about the many millions of people directly threatened,' I went on. 'Those living in low-lying nations, the farmers affected by abrupt changes in weather, kids exposed to new diseases?'

He gave a sigh, paused for a few seconds, and a sad, resigned smile crept over his face. He then simply said: ‘They will die.’

That episode marked a clear boundary between two stages of my academic career. At the time, I was a new lecturer in the area of complex systems and Earth system science. Previously, I had worked as a research scientist on an international astrobiology project based in Germany.

In many ways, that had been my dream job. As a young boy, I had lain on the grass on clear summer evenings and looked up at one of the dots in the night sky and wondered if around that star a planet orbited with beings that could look up from the surface of their world and similarly wonder about the chances of life being found within the unremarkable solar system we call home in the universe. Years later, my research involves thinking about how surface life can affect the atmosphere, oceans and even rocks of the planet it lives on.

That’s certainly the case with life on Earth. At a global scale, the air we all breathe contains oxygen largely as a result of photosynthetic life, while an important part of the UK’s national identity for some—the white cliffs of Dover—are comprised of countless numbers of tiny marine organisms that lived more than 70m years ago.

So it wasn’t a very large step from thinking about how life has radically altered the Earth over billions of years to my new research that considers how a particular species has wrought major changes within the most recent few centuries. Whatever other attributes Homo sapiens may have—and much is made of our opposable thumbs, upright walking and big brains—our capacity to impact the environment far and wide is perhaps unprecedented in all of life’s history. If nothing else, we humans can make an almighty mess.

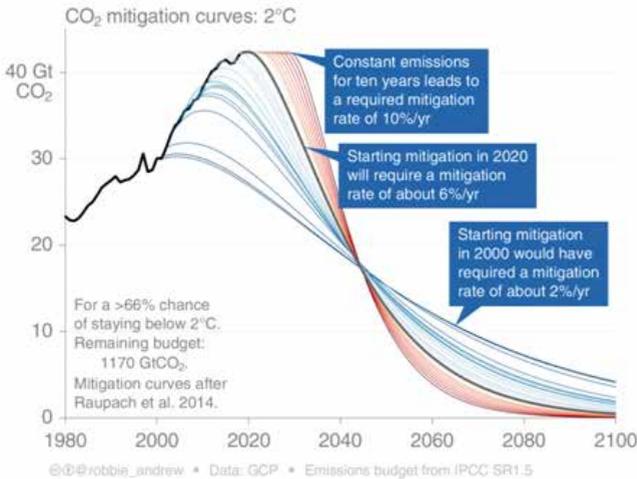
Change within a lifetime

I was born in the early 1970s. This means in my lifetime the number of people on Earth has doubled, while the size of wild animal populations has been reduced by 60%. Humanity has swung a wrecking ball through the biosphere. We have chopped down over half of the world’s rainforests and by the middle of this century there may not be much more than a quarter left. This has been accompanied by a massive loss in biodiversity, such that the biosphere may be entering one of the great mass extinction events in the history of life on Earth.

What makes this even more disturbing, is that these impacts are as yet largely unaffected by climate change. Climate change is the ghost of impacts’ future.

It has the potential to ratchet up whatever humans have done to even higher levels. Credible assessments conclude that one in six species are threatened with extinction if climate change continues.

The scientific community has been sounding the alarm over climate change for decades. The political and economic response has been at best sluggish. We know that in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we need to rapidly reduce emissions now.



Required emissions reductions to limit warming to 2°C. Robbie Andrew

The sudden increase in media coverage of climate change as a result of the actions of Extinction Rebellion and school strike for climate pioneer Greta Thunberg, demonstrates that wider society is waking up to the need for urgent action. Why has it taken the occupation of Parliament Square in London or children across the world walking out of school to get this message heard?

There is another way of looking at how we have been responding to climate change and other environmental challenges. It's both exhilarating and terrifying. Exhilarating because it offers a new perspective that could cut through inaction. Terrifying as it could, if we are not careful, lead to resignation and paralysis.

Because one explanation for our collective failure on climate change is that such collective action is perhaps impossible. It's not that we don't want to change, but that we can't. We are locked into a planetary-scale system that while built by humans, is largely beyond our control. This system is called the technosphere.

The technosphere

Coined by US geoscientist Peter Haff in 2014, the technosphere is the system that consists of individual humans, human societies—and stuff. In terms of stuff, humans have produced an extraordinary 30 trillion metric tons of things. From skyscrapers to CDs, fountains to fondue sets. A good deal of this is infrastructure, such as roads and railways, which links humanity together.

Along with the physical transport of humans and the goods they consume is the transfer of information between humans and their machines. First through the spoken word, then parchment and paper-based documents, then radio waves converted to sound and pictures, and subsequently digital information sent via the internet. These networks facilitate human communities. From roving bands of hunter-gatherers and small farming tribes, right up to the inhabitants of a megacity that teems with over 10m inhabitants, *Homo sapiens* is a fundamentally social species.

Just as important, but much less tangible, is society and culture. The realm of ideas and beliefs, of habits and norms. Humans do a great many different things because in important ways they see the world in different ways. These differences are often held to be the root cause of our inability to take effective global action. There is no global government, for a start.

But as different as we all are, the vast majority of humanity is now behaving in fundamentally similar ways. Yes, there are still some nomads who roam tropical rainforests, still some roving sea gypsies. But more than half of the global population now lives in urban environments and nearly all are in some way connected to industrialised activities. Most of humanity is tightly enmeshed into a globalised, industrialised complex system—that of the technosphere.

Importantly, the size, scale and power of the technosphere has dramatically grown since World War II. This tremendous increase in the number of humans, their energy and material consumption, food production and environmental impact has been dubbed the Great Acceleration.

The tyranny of growth

It seems sensible to assume that the reason products and services are made is so that they can be bought and sold and so the makers can turn a profit. So the drive for innovation—for faster, smaller phones, for example—is driven by being able to make more money by selling more phones. In line with this, the environmental writer George Monbiot argued that the root cause of climate change and other environmental calamities is capitalism and consequently any attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will ultimately fail if we allow capitalism to continue.

But zooming out from the toil of individual manufacturers, and even humanity, allows us to take a fundamentally different perspective, one that transcends critiques of capitalism and other forms of government.

Humans consume. In the first instance, we must eat and drink in order to maintain our metabolism, to stay alive. Beyond that, we need shelter and protection from physical elements.

There are also the things we need to perform our different jobs and activities and to travel to and from our jobs and activities. And beyond that is more discretionary consumption: TVs, games consoles, jewellery, fashion.

The purpose of humans in this context is to consume products and services. The more we consume, the more materials will be extracted from the Earth, and the more energy resources consumed, the more factories and infrastructure built. And ultimately, the more the technosphere will grow.

The emergence and development of capitalism obviously lead to the growth of the technosphere: the application of markets and legal systems allows increased consumption and so growth. But other political systems may serve the same purpose, with varying degrees of success. Recall the industrial output and environmental pollution of the former Soviet Union. In the modern world, all that matters is growth.

The idea that growth is ultimately behind our unsustainable civilisation is not a new concept. Thomas Malthus famously argued there were limits to human population growth, while the Club of Rome's 1972 book, *Limits to Growth*, presented simulation results that pointed to a collapse in global civilisation.

Today, alternative narratives to the growth agenda are, perhaps, getting political traction with an All Party Parliamentary Group convening meetings

and activities that seriously consider de-growth policies. And curbing growth within environmental limits is central to the idea of a Green New Deal, which is now being discussed seriously in the US, UK, and other nations.

If growth is the problem, then we just have to work at that, right? This won't be easy, as growth is baked into every aspect of politics and economics. But we can at least imagine what a de-growth economy would look like.

My fear, however, is that we will not be able to slow down the growth of the technosphere even if we tried—because we are not actually in control.

Limits to freedom

It may seem nonsense that humans are unable to make important changes to the system they have built. But just how free are we? Rather than being masters of our own destiny, we may be very constrained in how we can act.

Like individual blood cells coursing through capillaries, humans are part of a global-scale system that provides for all their needs and so has led them to rely on it entirely.

If you jump in your car to get to a particular destination, you can't travel in a straight line 'as the crow flies'. You will use roads that in some instances are older than your car, you, or even your nation. A significant fraction of human effort and endeavour is devoted to maintaining this fabric of the technosphere: fixing roads, railways, and buildings, for example.

In that respect, any change must be incremental because it must use what current and previous generations have built. The channelling of people via road networks seems a trivial way to demonstrate that what happened far in the past can constrain the present, but humanity's path to decarbonisation isn't going to be direct. It has to start from here and at least in the beginning use existing routes of development.

This isn't meant to excuse policymakers for their failure of ambition, or lack of bravery. But it indicates that there may be deeper reasons why carbon emissions are not decreasing even when there appears to be increasingly good news about alternatives to fossil fuels.

Think about it: at the global scale, we have witnessed a phenomenal rate of deployment of solar, wind, and other sources of renewable energy generation. But global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. This is because

renewables promote growth—they simply represent another method of extracting energy, rather than replacing an existing one.

The relationship between the size of the global economy and carbon emissions is so robust that US physicist Tim Garrett has proposed a very simple formula that links the two with startling accuracy. Using this method, an atmospheric scientist can predict the size of the global economy for the past 60 years with tremendous precision.

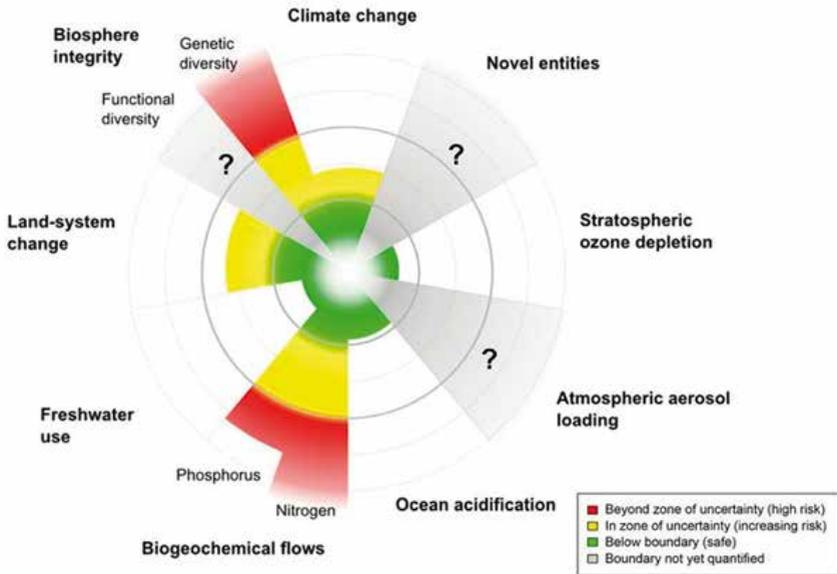
But correlation does not necessarily mean causation. That there has been a tight link between economic growth and carbon emissions does not mean that has to continue indefinitely. The tantalisingly simple explanation for this link is that the technosphere can be viewed like an engine: one that works to make cars, roads, clothes, and stuff—even people—using available energy.

The technosphere still has access to abundant supplies of high energy density fossil fuels. And so the absolute decoupling of global carbon emissions from economic growth will not happen until they either run out or the technosphere eventually transitions to alternative energy generation. That may be well beyond the danger zone for humans.

A repugnant conclusion

We have just come to appreciate that our impacts on the Earth system are so large that we have possibly ushered in a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. The Earth's rocks will bear witness to humans' impacts long after we disappear. The technosphere can be seen as the engine of the Anthropocene. But that does not mean we are driving it. We may have created this system, but it is not built for our communal benefit. This runs completely counter to how we view our relationship with the Earth system.

Take the planetary boundaries concept, which has generated much interest scientifically, economically, and politically. This idea frames human development as impacting on nine planetary boundaries, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and ocean acidification. If we push past these boundaries, then the Earth system will change in ways that will make human civilisation very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. The value of, say, the biosphere here is that it provides goods and services to us. This represents what we can literally get from the system.



(from globaia.org)

This very human-centric approach should lead to more sustainable development. It should constrain growth. But the technological world system we have built is clever at getting around such constraints. It uses the ingenuity of humans to build new technologies—such as geoengineering—to reduce surface temperatures. That would not halt ocean acidification and so would lead to the potential collapse of ocean ecosystems. No matter. The climate constraint would have been avoided and the technosphere could then get to work overcoming any side effects of biodiversity loss. Fish stocks collapse? Shift to farmed fish or intensively grown algae.

As defined so far, there appears nothing to stop the technosphere liquidating most of the Earth's biosphere to satisfy its growth. Just as long as goods and services are consumed, the technosphere can continue to grow.

And so those who fear the collapse of civilisation or those who have enduring faith in human innovation being able to solve all sustainability challenges may both be wrong.

After all, a much smaller and much richer population of the order of hundreds of millions could consume more than the current population of 7.6 billion or the projected population of nine billion by the middle of this century. While

there would be widespread disruption, the technosphere may be able to weather climate change beyond 3°C. It does not care, cannot care, that billions of people would have died.

And at some point in the future, the technosphere could even function without humans. We worry about robots taking over humans' jobs. Perhaps we should be more concerned with them taking over our role as apex consumers.

Escape plan

The situation, then, may all seem rather hopeless. Whether or not my argument is an accurate representation of our civilisation, there is the risk it produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because if we believe we can't slow down the growth of the technosphere, then why bother?

This goes beyond the question of 'what difference could I make?' to 'what difference can anyone make?' While flying less, cutting down on eating meat and dairy and cycling to work are all commendable steps to take, they do not constitute living outside the technosphere.

It's not just that we give tacit consent to the technosphere by using its roads, computers, or intensively farmed food. It's that by being a productive member of society, by earning and spending, above all by consuming, we further the technosphere's growth.

Perhaps the way out from fatalism and disaster is an acceptance that humans may not actually be in control of our planet. This would be the vital first step that could lead to a broader outlook that encompasses more than humans.

For example, the mainstream economic attitude about trees, frogs, mountains, and lakes is that these things only have value if they provide something to us. This mindset sets them up as nothing more than resources to exploit and sinks for waste.

What if we thought of them as components or even our companions in the complex Earth system? Questions about sustainable development then become questions about how growth in the technosphere can be accommodated with their concerns, interests, and welfare as well as ours.

This may produce questions that seem absurd. What are the concerns or interests of a mountain? Of a flea? But if we continue to frame the situation in terms of 'us against them', of human well-being trumping everything else

in the Earth system, then we may be effectively hacking away the best form of protection against a dangerously rampant technosphere.

And so the most effective guard against climate breakdown may not be technological solutions, but a more fundamental reimagining of what constitutes a good life on this particular planet. We may be critically constrained in our abilities to change and rework the technosphere, but we should be free to envisage alternative futures. So far our response to the challenge of climate change exposes a fundamental failure of our collective imagination.

To understand you are in a prison, you must first be able to see the bars. That this prison was created by humans over many generations doesn't change the conclusion that we are currently tightly bound up within a system that could, if we do not act, lead to the impoverishment, and even death of billions of people.

Eight years ago, I woke up to the real possibility that humanity is facing disaster. I can still smell that bad coffee, I can still recall the memory of scrabbling to make sense of the words I was hearing. Embracing the reality of the technosphere doesn't mean giving up, meekly returning to our cells. It means grabbing a vital new piece of the map and planning our escape.



Surrender: Welcomb Mouth beach near Hartland, Devon. K.W. Ashleigh

ALIVE THROUGH TIME.

TODAY I TIED MY SHOE LACES. ACTIVE.
READY FOR MY WALK. HOLES IN SHOES. PADDED
I PAW DIRECTIONAL LINES. WET AND MULCHED.
THINKING AS I GO OF THE PLANET. CHAOTIC.
STOPPING EVERY NOW AND THEN. SHOCK STILL.
TO FEEL EVERY ROTATION THROUGH TIME. ETERNAL.
KNOWING THE ONLY THING TO HANG A COAT ON CERTAIN.
IS I'M HERE. STILL AND ACTIVE. BEING UNDEAD.
ALIVE TO THE SEASON. ALIVE TO THE MOVEMENT. ACTIVE
ALIVE TO DAMPENED CARDBOARD. WETTING. WALKING
ALIVE TO SPITE THE SPARE PENNY. POCKETED.
ALIVE TO THE NORTH LANDS CALLING. HISTORIC.
ALIVE TO RIVERS FLOWING TO OUR HOMES. FLOODING.
ALIVE TO THE PANIC RAIN + SUN. CLIMATIC.
ALIVE ALIVE HO TO TUNE I SING. REPEATING.
ALIVE TO THE ONE + ONLY DEED I DO.
ALIVE TO BEING HERE. STILL AND ACTIVE. ALIVE

BY RICH DOWNES



POEM BY RICH DOWNES
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The Island

Ian Inglis

This part of the island had stuck doggedly to the ancient traditions of its agricultural past and, although its inhabitants were often derided for an unwillingness to move with the times, or a reluctance to embrace new opportunities, or an inability to confront unfamiliar practices, or any number of additional perceived deficiencies, the spectacular beauty of the land and the evident contentment of the people who lived there were powerful rejoinders to those who sought to introduce or encourage change.

The climate helped. In fact, it was impossible to separate the island from its climate. Westerly winds brought plentiful rain which helped to keep the land green and fertile. Through the long, hot summers—punctuated by fearsome storms, particularly in the sparsely inhabited mountainous tracts of the south—and warm winters, the crops grew and the livestock flourished and the fish in the seas multiplied and the people had enough, more than enough, to eat. There seemed to be no good reason to consider any alternatives to a way of life that had survived for generations.

And the character of the people also helped. Practical and resilient in their own circumstances, and largely uninterested in involving themselves in the affairs of their neighbour islands, they maintained a robust and confident independence that occasionally led to accusations of indifference. Some travellers from the mainland reported that they were shunned by the local inhabitants and that their requests for information or attempts at conversation went unanswered. Few visitors stayed long, for the simple reason that there was nowhere to stay. Now and again, a barn or outhouse might be called into use as overnight accommodation for those stranded there when their boats were unable to make the return crossing, and when this happened, those that stayed had nothing but praise for the spontaneous generosity of the people they encountered.

It was said that nobody born on the island had ever left and, although this could not be verified, there was no reason to disbelieve it. The population was not large—a few hundred perhaps, a thousand at most—and had remained at around the same density for as long as anyone could remember. Requests from the mainland to record and note such details were ignored, as indeed were any notions of political representation or government. What authority there was had always been vested in a small council of elders—men and women—whose advice and discussions carried no legal weight, but which filtered down throughout the islanders and were quietly adopted as working practices. Crime was unknown: material possessions were shared, and the idea that one person should wish to harm or steal from or disadvantage another

was seen as absurd. Education was the responsibility of each family, and took as its guiding principle the importance of preparing the young so that they could continue to contribute to the successful and efficient maintenance of the community. Boys and girls were treated identically, and subject to the same obligations and expectations.

While there was no evidence of organised religion, there was a strong emphasis on what could best be described as a form of geographical spirituality, based around the land, the people, and the relationship between them. Marriage was seen as unnecessary and in its place was a loose hierarchy of semi-permanent partnerships that endured only as long as both partners wished them to: such partnerships might be entered into at any age from fourteen upwards. The familiar distinctions between infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age had no meaning. The islanders were islanders, and their roles, duties and occupations were determined by their own physical abilities and by the needs of the community. Attempts to monitor the health of the islanders were confounded by the discovery that illnesses and complaints commonplace on the mainland were entirely unknown. Personal disagreements were rare, and were quickly resolved by immediate kin or, where this was not possible, by the council of elders. Violence or any form of physical aggression was regarded as abhorrent. Sporadic outbursts of unrest and conflict that might have threatened to spill over from nearby islands were resolutely ignored.

Whether this independence—or isolation—was the legacy of some calamitous event or series of events in the past, or a pragmatic reflection of current conditions was impossible to discover, as any substantive details of the island's past were hidden. The people's outlook was in the present, of the present, and for the present. The absence of any historical records was matched by the absence of any historical artefacts. The island—while undoubtedly very old—possessed no discernible history. There were no tales of previous generations, no monuments to inspirational characters, no distinctive literary or artistic traditions. There were no architectural styles or archaeological formations, and few anthropological patterns that might supply clues to the island's past: houses were repaired and rebuilt as and when circumstances required it, and with whatever materials were to hand at the time. And yet all this had not resulted in a mean, barren culture devoid of self-knowledge, but in a vibrant and stable community.

When I look back now through the pages of my diaries recording those early days I spent on the island, I am struck by a phrase I wrote during my first visit: 'this place possesses a strange, haunting equilibrium.' It is a description I find it hard to better, even now. I have heard it said that to perceive infinity one need only gaze into the eyes of children or out at the waves of the sea. To these two, I would add the island's boundless and unyielding landscape:

contemplation of its topography led inexorably to a profound understanding of the balance between the tininess of an insect and the vastness of the universe.

On that first visit, I found lodgings in the house of a woman whose male companion had drowned at sea. In return for whatever manual labour I was able to provide and for my assistance in caring for her three young children, I slept at the back of the house in a small room whose doorway opened directly into the stables. It was an arrangement that suited us both. I ate with the family and, like the rest of the islanders, my days began with the sunrise and ended with the sunset. I encountered none of the suspicion that would surely have accompanied such an arrangement on the mainland, and was largely left to my own devices. Few of the people I met questioned my presence; there seemed to be a common understanding that one man had died and that it was therefore necessary for another man to take his place. On the one or two occasions when I was asked to account for myself, my neighbour would listen without interruption to my explanation and nod in agreement, before wishing me well.

Kajsa's children were five, six and eight years old. The proximity of their ages reflected the customary practice (which I noticed in almost all the island's families) of having children as close together as possible, in order to minimise the disruption to working life that might be caused by a series of pregnancies and births spread over several years. I guessed—although I was never told—that they had been born when she was in her early twenties. She came into my bedroom for the first time during my second stay on the island. She said nothing, but pulled back the blanket and lowered herself on to me. When I tried to kiss her she initially resisted, but, as if realising that some demonstration of affection would be appropriate, calmly allowed me to do so. She fell asleep in my bed, her arms and legs wrapped loosely around my body. In the early morning, she made love to me again and then returned to her own room. Once established, this pattern was repeated irregularly, perhaps once or twice a week, sometimes less, and without prior announcement. Occasionally, she would ask me to adopt a certain position or to touch her in unfamiliar ways, but it seemed to me that for the most part she was less interested in giving or receiving sexual pleasure than she was in satisfying some longstanding obligation. During the day, she never spoke of our night-time meetings and her behaviour to me remained as matter-of-fact and unemotional as it always had been.

When her eldest child Roth—named after his father—failed to return home one afternoon from the nearby forest where he had been felling trees, I was somewhat taken aback to see none of the urgency that would have ensued had such an incident taken place on the mainland. It was not that the islanders were indifferent to his fate; instead, their composure reflected

the community's belief that no harm would or could come to the young boy. As dusk fell, the islanders quietly assembled, lit their torches, and walked systematically through the woodland until they found him beneath a clump of bushes, nursing a sprained ankle. Roth cheerfully allowed himself to be carried home where his two sisters Rona and Aud prepared an ointment to rub on to the swollen area. By the next morning, the swelling had all but disappeared and within two days, his ankle seemed as strong as ever. That night, when Kajsa came into my bed, she made no mention of the incident and the only indication of any relief she might have felt at her son's safe return was in the exuberance of her lovemaking which, for the first time, expressed an awareness of both our desires.

As my visits were confined to the summers, I enjoyed the benefits of long, open days, separated by brief periods of darkness. The Festivals of Rodull and Ljos, which were celebrated on successive days, corresponded to our own Midsummer ceremonies, and were the only holidays marked on the island. On those two days, the islanders were discouraged from doing any sort of work; instead, there were feasts and dancing, music and plays, to which all were expected to contribute. Kajsa suggested that the five of us should perform a short entertainment—I could not in all honesty call it a play—which told the tale of a young girl wandering in the mountains who loses track of time and becomes lost. She encounters an unknown but kindly creature who escorts her back to her village. My role was as the creature, Kvikindi. Aud and Rona fashioned a rough costume for me of wool and animal skins, dyed in deepening shades of yellow and brown. To lead the young girl home, I devised a loping half-walk, half-dance, which brought so much amusement to those watching that I was asked to repeat it again and again. Over the next few weeks, I watched in astonishment as my bizarre gait was incorporated by the island's children into their own games. Thereafter, I became conscious of a definite increase in my status on the island: I was congratulated repeatedly on my strange invention, and invited to demonstrate it to those who had the misfortune to miss its original performance. At the end of that first summer when I departed for the mainland, there were tears in Kajsa's eyes as we took our farewells. It was the first time she had shown any obvious signs of emotion in my presence, and I was both puzzled and grateful to see the extent to which I was treated in much the same way as any other islander.

When I returned to the island several months later, Kajsa, Roth, Aud and Rona were waiting on the narrow beach for my boat to appear. Kajsa held in her arms a child—my child—who had been born during my absence, and whom she had named Arvid. My son was a strong and handsome baby, with the same contented expression as his brothers and sisters. My surprise quickly gave way to great joy. Fatherhood was something I had never contemplated, and my initial fears soon vanished as I succumbed to the unique combination

of pride, apprehension and dedication that afflicts all new parents. When we reached the house, I found that the room in which I had previously slept was now a storeroom and pantry, and that I was to sleep with Kajsa in her bedroom.

Thus I began to think of myself as an islander. Whenever the time came for me to leave, I found myself increasingly reluctant to go. Although there was plenty to occupy me on the mainland, and my life there was for the most part pleasant and comfortable, my thoughts remained on the island—not just with Arvid and my adopted family, but with the unhurried pace of life, the lack of pretension, and the unsullied innocence that were so different to anything I had known elsewhere. When I eventually came to my decision, it seemed so obvious that I was amazed I had not reached it before. The next time I returned to the island, I would remain there. I prepared accordingly. I took my leave of those close to me. I gave away many of my possessions, which I now realised were superfluous and would benefit others far more than they ever would me. I visited some of the special places that held happy memories for me. As I did these things, I suspected that much of my life had been—I hesitate to use the word wasted—but purposeless. I cannot pretend that I was among the few who claimed to recognise early signs of the catastrophe that would shortly engulf the mainland and devastate much of what I had known. My motive in leaving was purely personal: the island had given me a sense of direction and I was determined to follow it to the end.

The reactions of Kajsa and the children to my news contained none of the unbridled delight that my vanity might have expected. Instead, they merely evinced a quiet satisfaction, as if I had finally understood something they had known for a considerable time. I remember that summer as a glorious time. The crops were unusually plentiful, the sun shone high and bright, and among the children there was an excitement and energy that I had never seen before and which seemed to come from the land itself. If there had been any traces of doubt or uncertainty about the correctness of my decision, they vanished completely.

Towards the close of the summer, word came from a nearby fishing village that a young woman was nearing the end of a difficult and painful pregnancy. Her immediate neighbours, none of whom had experienced childbirth themselves, had asked for help. Kajsa and two of her closest friends, Sanna and Marit, offered to make the short trip and, rather than follow the unnecessarily circuitous inland route, they sailed directly northwards across the wide curve of the bay. The child was delivered safely and the three women set out on the return journey in early evening. The storm was as unexpected as it was violent. As the sky darkened and the waves grew, the westerly gale flung their small boat this way and that, before hurling it against the foot of the cliffs overlooking our village. When we scrambled over the rocks and reached the

site, we found the remains of the boat strewn across the small beach. Barely conscious, Marit was clinging to part of the hull. The bodies of Sanna and Kajsa were not recovered until the next morning when the tide brought them in to the shore.

News of the accident was received with a grim resignation by the islanders. Sudden deaths were not unknown. Sanna's partner had been killed the previous winter when an avalanche in the southern mountains had caught him unawares, and Kajsa had lost Roth when his boat had capsized out at sea. Now their women had followed them—not to the fictitious afterlife promised by the purveyors of organised religion, but into a secret place that existed only in memory. When I told the children of their mother's death, they wept, as did I. We did not sleep that night, but sat in a circle, telling tales of Kajsa as if to preserve her unique self, and reassure ourselves of her permanent presence in our lives. The following day, the bodies were burned and the ashes scattered on the fields, as was the custom. All islanders—those that had died and those that were living—thus reasserted their spiritual connection to the land, and to the essential nature of Kajsa and Sanna.

When Marit was fully recovered, she began to spend much of her time with us. I wondered if she felt a kind of guilt that she—who had no man or children—should have survived while Kajsa, the mother of four, had not. But her company was not melancholy and she took great pleasure in playing with the children, especially with Arvid. One night, I dreamed that I was with Kajsa again. We talked of things we had done and things we had not, we drifted through the house watching the children as they slept, and as we kissed, embraced and said goodbye I felt that a portion of my life had irretrievably ended. When I awoke, Marit lay beside me, her arms around my chest, drawing me in, claiming me as her own.

I left her sleeping and stepped outside, as I often did, to watch the sun rise. For several minutes I stood motionless, transfixed by the glorious palette of pinks, reds, oranges spreading across the whole of the eastern sky. As I turned to go back into the house, I happened to glance across the northern seas towards the mainland, and noticed for the first time faint columns of smoke spiralling into a dense carpet of purple-black cloud suspended above the land I had known.

This Is Not An Exit

George Aitch

The café is cold and blanketed masses huddle over steaming cups of weak tea. The bomb blast took out the windows, even in this hamlet miles from the target. Those of us who still have our sight read old newspapers and our bitterness grows. I while away my hours here now. You'll find me at the back, the man with rough hands and heavy-lidded eyes on a pock-marked face. Not that I'd stand out from the rest with that description. One way or another, the fallout has marked all of us.

My sentry post is at the back tables, watching those who come and go. I never sit facing away from the door. It's advice I've picked up lately, reading Malcolm X. He always took his seat where he could see the exit, just in case. The idea has taken hold within me.

I rub the toe on my boot into the damp bark coating the floor and its pine scent mingles with the smoke in the air. Soon it will be sunrise and I can use the weak daylight to guide my way up into the hills beyond our ghost town. It's a lonely hike—my work sets me apart from the rest. It doesn't pay well. Not in financial dividends anyway.

But I eke just enough from scattered handyman jobs to hold my roost in the formerly snug coffee corner. There's nowhere else to go during the still hours. I've been locked out of every house since rumours started flying around about my excursions into the tree-line. They're happy to call on Handyman only when they need something. To be needed and not wanted is lonely. Folk are reading too much into my distrust. Though they're deaf to my pleas, this is all part of the shunning. I've learnt independence through adversity.

The first light glimmers on the lingering shards of shattered windowpane. It's time for me to get moving. My tools jangle in their greasy holdall as I cross the floor and ignore the dirty looks I get from the patrons, waiting out until the safety of morning. Animals have become bolder lately, they can tell that their former apex predator has been toppled, hoisted on its own petard. Roaming packs of dogs have spread to fill the gap. Where you find humans, you'll find them in groups and you'll find them with guns. So it's not just the evil eyes staring me down as I leave my perch. I have to face the cold glare of gun barrels as well. There may come a time soon where I am the victim of some frontier justice. I'll have moved on before then. I've a knack for sensing which way the wind is blowing.

This morning is sweeping in from the south, washing radioactive particles from long dead branches and bleached building slats. I don my thick gloves and muffler and unfold a stained map I've torn from the rubble

of a library. There are several ringed points, copied over from an advertising brochure whose filmy pages I'd had to peel apart. This damp magazine is my bible: Handyman's purpose and word of God. On the way out of town, I lean into a thick shrub and draw out a thick gym bag filled with building materials. There are several of these stashes lodged around the town. I've cannibalised unused buildings for planks of wood and sturdy timbers. Gardening and hardware stores have provided me with the rest. Having slung these over my shoulder, I am ready to make the trip into no-man's land.

In the woods, it is quiet. There are no birds any more. The tallest trees are the dead ones. Their smaller kin grow stunted and diseased. The poison got into the water table even this far out in the sticks. While all of us had our noses pressed to screens showing international tensions coming to a head, national park land was being flogged off behind our backs. For those who could afford it, a remote point was an ideal place to wait for all of this to blow over and hunker down in case it didn't. In the cities, polluted air strangled the protests. Meanwhile, in the unspoilt countryside, trucks, diggers and other earth-moving machines were chartered and sent into the wilderness. I've become adept at chasing the tracks they left behind.

Out here, I don't feel as hunted. My pace slows and I have time to enjoy the anaemic sunlight. On the brow of a hill, I pause to cough and am forced over, retching. The drops of blood on my handkerchief are the only sparks of vitality in this cold locale. I tie the handkerchief back across my face and heave my load once more. I didn't used to have a cough. I'm not sure how much longer I've got to do this. All the more important that I finish my task here, then.

From this vantage point, it's easy to see where the land has been carved out by hydraulic machinery. Trees felled months ago have given way to concrete doorways and rusting vents. The billionaires sheltered here have made a private heaven to weather the storm and have locked the rest of us out. These bunkers were sunk deep underground and sold at exorbitant prices. The figures in my magazines are astonishing. Those that could pay cling on to life in their safe caverns, waiting for a time when their descendants can emerge. Even from here I can see warm steam seeping from the filtered vents. Not all of them though.

My boots clump through a thick carpet of leaves. Autumn hasn't come and the trees have shed their load. After checking my map, I alter my path and arrive at a flattened glade, shrouded in mist. Ahead of me is a doorway fashioned from rock and concrete. Fresh moss creeps across the weathered grey surface. Either side of it are reinforced portholes of thickened glass. Beyond I see nothing but darkness. There's no-one checking the weather today.

It's too late for me to beg for shelter. Many tried. As the first alarms

sounded, swarms of people ascended looking for sanctuary. Weeks later their skeletons had been picked clean by scavengers. Those doors are sealed, there's no way in or out until the various internal spectrometers and computer systems decide that the air is safe once more. If I want to make my presence felt to those inside, I need to try a different tack.

To provide an isolated bunker space beneath the earth, a steady supply of filtered air is needed. And so, upon completion of each shelter, drills bored thick channels through the bedrock to enable the inhabitants below to access life-giving clean air. These channels were rigged with complex dynamic systems capable of removing toxins from the atmosphere. In complexity, there is room for error.

I drop my gear to the ground in a heap and open a can of beans which I've kept for the occasion. Sitting on a dislodged boulder, I eat them cold while I think up a plan for an attack. This time wouldn't be different from any of the others. The empty can clangs off the door. I hope that down in the ground, they will hear it and fear.

Like most of us, I lost everything in the blasts. My life that I'd built up for years vanished in a flash. My house, my family, everything. Once I hadn't been Handyman; I had a name. I hadn't dirtied the water. I hadn't declared war over dwindling resources. I had paid my taxes and kept my eyes front. That said, I'm not the type to whine over a problem without trying to do something about it. I've always been a practical man. If we were feeling the consequences of the decisions made by those who now bedded peacefully underground, then why not redistribute things a little.

This little snuffing operation is payback. Those wealthy men and women who now are sealed off, away from the disasters that they've caused, need a reminder that we're still here on the topsoil. They might feel invincible down there, but as long as there is breath in my body, I will be extinguishing their air supply.

If there's no hope for us, there will be no hope for them either.

I unscrew the first vent. When the hood comes off I am bathed in warm air. The whirr of machinery echoes up the pipeline. I take a shovel and begin to heave dirt down the pipe. The work is hard on my back, but bitterness powers me through pain.

I'm not always able to block off the air supplies with earth. Sometimes I have barricaded the opening with caulking and wood. When it has been a possibility, I have torn the filter and the pipe hood apart, walking away happy in the knowledge that below my feet an unseen family are choking on a slow trickle of fallout dust. Sometimes I have found mining equipment left behind and have put the explosives to use burying the reinforced doorways.

After an hour of slinging dirt into the hole in the ground, the clicks and stutters coming the other way fall dead. Suffocation might be days away

for anyone on the other side of that door, but it is certain. I nail a pallet of wood together and roll a boulder over the top for good measure. From my pocket I pull my map and scribble over one of the circled points. The next one on the map is only over the other side of that ridge. I can be there by nightfall.

She Sings the Mist Away

David Cook

Emerald had lived in Golden Valley for as long as anyone could remember, her tumbledown home squatting right on the edge of the small town that nestled there. During sunny spells, her existence would be forgotten as people went about their lives. But on misty days, of which there were many in this overlooked part of the world, the townsfolk would wait expectantly until, as always, Emerald would open her door, shuffle outside, and open her mouth to sing. They would watch as the mist was herded away, magically shepherded up the slopes by Emerald's rich tones. But they were too ungrateful, nervous, or both, to ever say thank you.

Then the factory was built, slap bang at the bottom of the valley. Soon, its stinging, choking smoke overwhelmed the village, but the Mayor, in the pay of the factory owners, did nothing. The residents simply waited. Emerald would save them. And yes, soon she emerged from her home and began to croon. But nothing happened. The acrid fumes remained, clogging lungs and choking crops. What had gone wrong? People slowly gathered in ones and twos around her. 'Sing again!' they shouted. 'Sing again!'

Emerald, gnarled hands clutching a wooden cane, glared at the crowd. 'I can sing away the mist,' she said, 'for the mist, like my voice, is a wonder of nature. But it seems I can do nothing about this. This is man-made evil and I am powerless to combat it.'

At this, the Mayor strode forward, his lackey, Marlow, skulking behind him. The Mayor told the people how their lives had improved since the factory had been built. They had more work. They had more money. What could be better? The factory was not evil, he said, the factory was progress. An enemy of the factory was an enemy of the future. And the people looked at the Mayor, at Emerald, and shook their heads. The Mayor was wrong, but Emerald could do naught about it and neither could they. They went back to work. Soon, another factory was built. The fog became ever more suffocating. Nobody thought about Emerald. What use was she now?

Then one day neighbours were awoken at dawn by Emerald's voice. They pulled their curtains aside and saw her, on her step, singing at the top of her lungs, louder and fiercer than ever before, and they swore the smog shifted, just a couple of inches, before oozing back into place. This continued for the next few days and each time she succeeded in pushing the fumes further and further back. The villagers began to chatter excitedly. Emerald was winning! Emerald was going to save them! But again, nobody approached her with words of thanks or encouragement.

A few days passed and it seemed as if Emerald was indeed on the verge

of victory over the smog. But then, one morning, as Emerald was singing her most beautiful song yet, a masked man emerged from the shadows behind her home. He smashed her in the head with a club and she crumpled to the ground. The doctor was summoned and he declared her dead. Her closest neighbours swore the attacker, who was never caught, was built just like Marlow, but nothing could be proved. The Mayor decried Emerald as a witch and a heathen who had got what she deserved and, as before, nobody challenged him.

They buried Emerald alone, on the hills overlooking Golden Valley, in part a belated acknowledgement that she had always watched over them, but also to ensure that she was as far away as possible. Then they left, back to town, to the factories, to become prisoners of the smoke. They never visit the hills. And so they never notice that, although the smog often billows to the top of the peaks, no matter how dense it becomes the sun always dagggers through it and illuminates Emerald's unmarked plot like a spotlight.

But sometimes people in the valley imagine they hear faint strains of song and look up towards Emerald's burial place, although it isn't visible through the black fog. Then they shake their heads to dislodge the thought and carry on about their business, trapped beneath the dark, dirty clouds of progress.

Climate Stories

Pierrette Thomet and Peter Stott

** Climate Stories, an innovative year-long National Environmental Research Council funded project, created by Pierrette Thomet and Peter Stott, gave space to scientists and artists to explore ways of communicating Climate Science facts with the public: www.climatestories.org.uk*

People are singing

ONE giving individuals a voice. Anyone who takes part, anyone touched by it. There is no political agenda, no ideological allegiance required. But allowing individuals their own distinctive voice feels like

writing

TWO a political act. With our inventive project team, our cohort of climate scientists and people of all ages and walks of life who accepted our invitation to join in, we created Climate Stories. At its heart are climate scientists who go into the world to share what they know and learn from others. In our encounters—at Exeter’s marvellous museum of curiosities, RAMM, at the peaceful Farms for City Children site near Dartmoor, at the vibrant Exeter Phoenix, and at other creative venues around Devon—we brought artists, scientists and members of our local community together to think about our changing climate through the prism of story-telling. Our means were creative writing, printmaking, theatre-making and song-writing. In making stories we discovered how everyone is equal, nobody is talking down to anyone, all of us have knowledge to share,

painting

THREE a fresh picture of climate action. We learnt over the course of our year-long experiment with twenty climate scientists and many more from the wider Devon community why we all need Climate Stories. Our participants found it life-changing. Any researcher wanting to present at a scientific conference, needing to talk to civil servants or politicians, longing to engage with the wider world, has to learn how to tell a good tale,

composing

FOUR an act of optimism and imagining. Without the power of human imagination we will never solve the wicked problem of climate change. With that power we are

acting

FIVE to create a better future. Art science collaboration is old hat if artists are just used to interpret science. If the enlightenment separated the arts from the sciences, post-enlightenment thinking conceives the researcher-artist, the artist-researcher. Art comes out of scientists' heads, science comes out of artists' fingers, collaboration

dancing

SIX to new rules. An artist and a scientist cook up a plan to take a cohort of climate scientists through a process of personal transformation. They dream up a structure that involves a residential programme of activities and a series of public workshops. Thanks to funding from the Natural Environment Research Council under their Engaging Environments Programme and under the guidance of four arts practitioners, the scientists practice creative writing, printmaking, song writing and theatre making. They discover if they are avid actors, canny composers, plucky printers, wily wordsmiths. They learn that they can talk about their scientific work in non-scientific terms. They take their new knowledge into workshops involving children and grown-ups, people in cities or in remote communities. Together they write poems, make pictures, sing songs, perform their work in public. Together they produce a book that is freely available to download from the project website *climatestories.org.uk*. The geographer analysts collect new data from diaries and interviews on what it means to be a researcher-artist, artist-researcher. Being transformed, the *Climate Stories* graduates are equipped to transform others,

printing

SEVEN a new template for emotional engagement through a solid grounding in scientific research. Emotional engagement drives action. But emotional engagement without a basis in reality when tackling the greatest problem of our age can lead to futile gestures and harmful responses. Every picture, every poem, every dance, every song underpinned by scientific understanding, is a uniquely individual expression of one person's engagement in climate

stories

The Big Pause

Elena Kozlova

Perhaps in this year, 2020, a number associated with perfect eyesight, we will at last see the error of our ways, as a primitive form of life, a virus, exposes humanity's vulnerability, turning our lives upside down. The changes forced upon us as a result of our disrespect for the environment have achieved what neither the climate scientists nor activists could have ever dreamt of—THE BIG PAUSE.

Nature has stopped us in our tracks and given us a unique clue (or more like a push!) about the causes of our own predicament . Now the question is: Will society use this opportunity to unite and forge a way of life based on a very different sets of values?

Right now, we treat our planet and every living creature that inhabits it in much the same way we treat each other: with distrust, greed, possession and intolerance of diversity or deviation from the 'ideal norm'. Society resembles a bunch of naughty children, pointing fingers at each other while passing the blame for any mischief or wrongdoing. And what do all children have to go through to mature? Growth. However, 'growth' has become a word often associated with negative connotations of unrestricted and unsustainable economic expansion. But that's not really what growth is about—unless we consider growth of fear and insecurity as the true driver behind it. Our heads and hearts are constricted; we are guarded towards each other, and wait till another (person or nation) makes the first move .

So, how can we make and maintain sustainable yet tangible changes towards a greener more positive future as the spread of Covid-19 continues, alongside solving other global challenges? Climate scientists have put together a remarkable body of evidence showing that in a few decades our lack of action, our immaturity and irresponsibility as a species will have life threatening repercussions. Just as nobody is left unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic, including the richest people on the planet, the same holds true, but to a much higher degree, when it comes to climate change. Surely, it's time to challenge our fears around change? The sooner we start making logical, sensible, insightful choices, the fewer sacrifices our children and grandchildren will have to face.

Despite the vast knowledge and research provided by climate science, the progress we've made so far towards a greener future is minimal. Some

countries have been more responsible than others; however, it seems that the interests of the planet and those of our children directly clash with those of capitalism. The desire and drive to gain more possessions comes from an internal disassociation between our emotions, minds and bodies, which lead to estrangement from our environment. And when we feel separated from someone or something, what are the chances of wanting to sacrifice our habitual comforts to help them?

There exist two motivations to achieve lasting change: a *genuine desire* for change—or *fear* of the consequences of not making it. The fear of climate change and change in general, exists in all of us, but when a threat doesn't appear to be imminent 'green progress' gets stalled. The former, and ultimately preferable, route towards change has to be motivated by a desirable set of values and beliefs and achievable aims. Wouldn't it be easier if we all simply wanted to protect our environment, live healthier lives, eat healthier food as well as being more open and tolerant towards each other? The answer is a resounding 'yes' on all counts, but in a consumer society it sounds unrealistic to activate these sentiments. What's required for this to become reality is a shift in the collective consciousness, which starts on the level of each and every one's individual consciousness. The fact that you are reading this special issue, *Climate Matters*, suggests that the collective consciousness has started to shift, and this is being hastened significantly by the latest pandemic. Most of us agree that the world will never go back to the old 'normal'. However, is this enough to fuel the challenging task of rescuing ourselves from the revenge of Gaia?

Climate change is the collective karma of our society; it's the result of our actions and those of our ancestors. It's already happening and cannot be completely avoided, only mitigated and adapted to. I argue that it would be wise not to leave anything to chance when it comes to such a time-sensitive response especially as there are proven and accessible techniques leading to the attainment of the higher states of consciousness, initially on the level of an individual and subsequently, society as a whole .

In 1957, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a physicist by education, introduced to the West a technique of expansion of one's conscious mind which he called 'Transcendental Meditation' (TM). Despite what its name might suggest, this is a nonsectarian practice that doesn't place itself in contradiction to any religion, faith, or the lack thereof. In fact, TM meets the criteria allowing it to be considered a scientific approach to the development of the higher states of consciousness: it's systematic, open to all methods of scientific research, universal by nature and application, and most importantly, the results

are consistent; can be replicated by any individual, independently of their race, gender, age as well as religious beliefs and emotional and intellectual intelligence. It has been the subject of numerous scientific studies carried out at some prominent universities around the world including Harvard Medical School and Stanford University.

The philosophy behind the technique lies in the recognition, (widely accepted by the science of psychology), that the conscious mind accounts for only a small percentage of our thinking potential, with the subconscious mind being the root cause of most of our thoughts and actions. If both the individual and collective subconscious are dominated by fear and lack of safety and security, all of which being the natural results of our turbulent past, it's no wonder that our society is predominantly driven by insatiable consumption, giving rise to unsustainable capitalism and hence, the overzealous exploitation of the natural environment. TM expands our conscious minds and brings awareness to the driving forces of our actions in the similar way a lit candle gently illuminates the room, making any movements within it much more effortless, purposeful and safe. As a result, the individual creativity is expanded allowing each and every one of us to think and act with an enlarged awareness and compassion.

It seems natural and would be beneficial if such a technique were part of the daily life of our decision makers, politicians, and leaders in economy, finance, agriculture, education, health, culture and defense. Only when people in power, people we elect during the legislative process, raise the level of their consciousness and start making decisions from the level of the higher awareness fueled by the genuine desire to serve others—then we can expect dramatic changes in the way our society operates, and the way we treat and relate to our environment. Our leaders should be women and men of wisdom, experience and equanimity leading others with their insight from the higher realms of consciousness, rather than predominantly white privileged male alumni of a handful of institutions whose main purpose is to look after each other's base interests. If a practice such as TM became part of the standard school curriculum all over the world it would allow us to raise a consciously aware new generation of people. It could become a part of the higher education system too, with Maharishi International University leading the way by being the first of such consciousness-based universities where both professors and students practice TM together in a large assembly hall twice a day. Surely, such an inclusive, peaceful and consciousness enhancing practice could find its place in many of the modern institutions and establishments.

The climate challenge, which seems a better way of describing the collective

process we have just entered, will not be solved or mitigated to an acceptable level compatible with the existence of modern civilisation, by the current limited way of thinking and awareness of the past. Albert Einstein warned of the danger of human intellectual achievement (in the context of the invention of the atomic bomb) without development of human consciousness, and neglect of the roles of emotions and intuition. He postulated that we cannot expect to resolve our problems on the same level of thinking and consciousness that we were in when we created them.

To tackle the climate challenge effectively, we will all have to go through many personal and collective changes to our lifestyles relating to the material and natural world. For those changes to be voluntary and permanent, will require increased creativity, productivity, higher levels of intelligence and cooperation along with maintaining and supporting good health, harmonious relationships and personal fulfillment. All of the above could be attained by the regular TM practice which is a simple way of improving every individual through the expansion of their conscious mind with all other important changes (e.g. in health and well-being) as mere side effects. This would allow for the collective shift in the societal consciousness which, in turn, would facilitate and integrate the worldwide efforts in restoring the health of the Earth for ourselves and future generations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that we are not separate from our environment. The human mind is the pinnacle of the evolutionary process, with its superior intellectual capacity and potential for the attainment of the higher states of consciousness. As no other species on Earth is capable of tackling the climate challenge, it's up to each and every one of us to expand our own individual consciousness and contribute towards the collective survival. By embracing our hearts, intuition and humanity, along with our intellectual abilities, we can overcome the next biggest challenge ever in our history, and create a better, happier and all-inclusive society.

Turning a Wrench for Raindrops in this Miraculous World

In my fist I hold a razor-sharp 6-fluted cutter that can carve a block of steel down
into hub of wheelchair wheel that will roll an old man toward the last kiss
of his great grandson
door handle
letting children step into a planetarium full of galaxies
scalpel
to cut a piece of vein that will let a heart keep pumping
why can't we keep the sea from swallowing New York
the lion from taking its last step across the African veldt
the hammer I hold in my hand
drove the spike holding the rail the train rolled down carrying Lincoln
toward his Gettysburg Address drove the chisel
in Michelangelo's fist through the marble he carved into the face
of the dead Christ
why can't we keep the raindrops falling
save the trees from burning
Beethoven wrote a symphony when he was stone deaf
Stephen Hawking rolled his wheelchair through 30 years they said
he'd never live
Robert Stroud saved the lives of 10 thousand birds with a microscope
in Alcatraz
we'd hardly left the cave when Armstrong set his foot upon the moon
can't we find our place
on this earth with the hummingbird and the redwood tree and the ice
under a polar bear's paw
can't we find our place
under the stars with the curling waves and the windmills and the glowing eyes of
sea otters
why does a trumpet blow jazz
a screwdriver
turn a screw a steel worker tie the laces of his steel-toed boots
a kangaroo hop a hammer tap a golden honeysuckle attract a bee Billie Holliday
take a drink of clear clean water

and sing why
do the pendulums swing and the comets return and the roses open
if we cannot find our place
beside purple grapes and singing whales and the stairway and the falling stars
why did I ever pick up a wrench
tighten a nut squirt oil onto a smoking cutting tool
if we cannot begin to save
this miraculous world?

Fred Voss

Contributors

George Aitch is a writer from Blackheath, London. His short stories and essays have appeared both online and in print with *Litro*, *Storgy* and *The Crazy Oik*, among others.

Chiatulah Ameke was a probation officer until 1999, working with some of the most serious offenders in London. He left to establish a successful business, training Criminal Justice organisations on Race Equality. Chiatulah lives in South London with his German wife who tells him that their marriage was arranged by their family in the spirit world. Events have led him to agree. His short story collection *Black Lives Rising*, published by April Gloaming, will be his first book.

K.W. Ashleigh: The person who ‘hides’ behind this pen name works at Exeter University as a scientist in molecular biology and as clinician at the local NHS hospital. With her artwork she captures the human condition and the bond of the human soul with nature. The coming and going of tides are a metaphor for hopes and testing times as they rise and ebb. She publishes photography in combination with poems. See also: kwashleigh-poetry-and-art.blogspot.com

Virginia Baily, *Riptide* co-editor, is the author of three novels: *Africa Junction*, which won the Society of Authors’ McKitterick Prize in 2012, *Early One Morning*, a Waterstones and Goldsboro’s Book of the Month and a *Sunday Times* Bestseller which was dramatised on BBC Radio 4 and, most recently, *The Fourth Shore*.

Gill Barr was raised in Derry/Londonderry and now lives in Dorset where she is a poet and teacher. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from Queen’s University, Belfast. She performed at the Exeter Literary Festival in 2019 with Greta Stoddart, Elaine Beckett and Helen Evans, and at the Bridport Literary Festival in 2018 with Annie Freud. She is working towards her first collection.

Bob Beagrie is a poet, playwright and a senior lecturer in creative writing at Teesside University. He has published six chapbooks and ten full collections and his work has been translated into several languages. He is a founder member of Project Lono—a collective of poets and musicians producing experimental soundscapes. He lives in Middlesbrough.

Julian Bishop is a former television journalist living in North London who is a member of the collective group *Poets For The Planet*. A former runner-up in the Ginkgo Prize for Eco Poetry, he’s also been shortlisted for the Bridport

Poetry Prize and is one of four poets featured in a 2020 pamphlet called *Poems For The Planet*. He's recently had poems in the *Morning Star*, *Finished Creatures* and *Irisi*.

John Bolland's writing in Scots and English is widely published in magazines and anthologies including *The Interpreters House*, *Northwords Now*, *The London Magazine* and *Pushing Out the Boat*. His first collection—*Fallen Stock*—was published by Red Squirrel Press in 2019. His new collection—*Pilbroch*—explores parallels between the climate emergency & the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988. www.aviewfromthelonggrass.com

Mike Bonnet is a short story writer, living in London and published by the likes of *Structo*, Dead Ink Press and *Halfway Down the Stairs* magazine. Other published work: <https://halfwaydownthestairs.net/2020/06/01/olive-and-jasmine-by-mike-bonnet/>
<https://pleasesee.me.com/issue-4/fiction/wendys-eighty-eighth-mike-bonnet/>
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Gavin Boyter is a Scottish writer and filmmaker living in London. He has published two travel memoirs about running ludicrously long distances, *Downhill from Here and Running the Orient*. The latter, published in August 2020, charts his 2300 mile run from Paris to Istanbul, following the 1883 route of the Orient Express.

Peter Branson, published (incl) *Acumen*, *Agenda*, *Ambit*, *Envoi*, *London Magazine*, *North*, *Prole*, *Warwick Review*, *Iota*, *Frogmore Papers*, *Interpreter's House*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Butcher's Dog*, *SOUTH*, *Crannog*, *SHOp*, *Causeway*, *Ogham Stone*, *High Window*, *Curlew*, *London Grip*, *Sarasvati*, *Fenland Reed*, *Anima*, *Chaffin Journal*, *Bread and Roses Anthology*, *Measure*, *Columbia Review*, *Huston Poetry Review* and *Other Poetry*. Latest collections: *Red Hill* and *Hawk Rising*.

Sasha Saben Callaghan is a writer and digital artist, living on the east coast of Scotland. She was a winner of the 2016 'A Public Space' Emerging Writer Fellowship and the 2019 Pen to Paper Awards. Her illustrations have featured in a wide range of exhibitions, journals and magazines. Sasha's lived experience of disability is a major influence on her work. Twitter: @SabenCallaghan Instagram: Sasha Saben

Catherine Cartwright has an MA in Multidisciplinary Printmaking, and is currently a doctoral student at the University of Exeter (AHRC funded).

Recent residencies and exhibitions include the National Memorial Arboretum (2018) and New York's International Print Center (New Prints 2018). Catherine is a director with Double Elephant Print Workshop.

David Cook writes mainly flash fiction. His stories have been published in a number of online publications, as well as print anthologies such as the *National Flash Fiction Anthology* and *Stories For Homes*. He lives in Bridgend, Wales, with his wife and daughter. You can say hello on Twitter @davidcook100 or visit his blog at www.davewritesfiction.wordpress.com.

Mark Czanik was born and brought up in the sweet borderlands of Herefordshire, and now lives in Bath. His poems, stories, and artwork have appeared in *Cyphers*, *3AM*, *Southword*, *MIR*, *Wasafiri*, *The Frogmore Papers*. When not writing he enjoys finding new paths to walk with his wife, and swimming with his daughter.

Richard Downes is a socially engaged activist poet who always wanted to write before getting waylaid by personal experience of disability and making corresponding challenges to systems of oppression / discrimination through activism, advocacy and engagement via participation in the Disabled People's Movement. Much of his work still focuses in on these areas and is further underpinned by commitment to the Social Model of Disability.

Kevin Doyle is a writer and activist from Cork, Ireland. He is the author of two political crime thrillers, *To Keep A Bird Singing* (2018) and *A River of Bodies* (2019)—both published by Blackstaff Press. He also co-wrote with Spark Deeley the award-winning children's picture book, *The Worms that Saved the World*. More at www.kevindoyle.ie

James Dyke is Assistant Director of the Global Systems Institute and Programme Director of the MSc Global Sustainability Solutions at the University of Exeter. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a member of the European Geophysical Union, and serves on the editorial board of the journal *Earth System Dynamics*. He writes a weekly environmental column for UK newspaper *i*, and is a contributor to *The Ecologist*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and the science-based news website *The Conversation*.

Rachel J Fenton is a working-class writer from South Yorkshire. Her poems have appeared in *The Rialto*, *Landfall*, *Magma*, and *English*. Her chapbook *Beerstorming with Charlotte Brontë* in New York is forthcoming from *The Ethel Zine* and Micro Press in 2021 and a pamphlet of nature inspired poetry is currently shortlisted for publication with The Emma Press.

Dr Sally Flint's poetry has been widely published, anthologised and won awards. She lectures in creative writing and co-edits *Riptide Journal* alongside being an associate editor with **Culture Matters**. After working with Met Office Scientists she has a keen interest in socially committed eco-writing that challenges, exposes and reflects on the truth about climate change and politics.

Dr Natalie Garrett is a scientist working as Private Secretary to the Met Office's Chief Scientist. In this role, she hones her communication skills in the area of tension between policy making and scientific analysis. Motivated by work that helps the world, she uses photography and poetry as a way of expressing the complex emotions that are provoked by working in the field of Climate Science.

Robert Hamberger has been shortlisted and highly commended for Forward prizes, appearing in the Forward Book of Poetry 2020. His poetry has been broadcast on Radio 4, featured on *The Guardian* Poem of the Week website and appeared in British, American and Japanese anthologies as well as magazines including *The Observer*, *Poetry London* and *The Poetry Review*. His fourth collection *Blue Wallpaper* was published by Waterloo Press in 2019, and his prose memoir with poems about John Clare *A Length of Road* by John Murray.

Ian Inglis was born in Stoke-on-Trent and now lives in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. As Reader in Sociology and Visiting Fellow at Northumbria University, he has published several books and numerous articles around topics within popular culture. He is also a writer of fiction and his short stories have appeared in numerous anthologies and literary magazines.

Alice Jolly's most recent novel *Mary Ann Sate, Imbecile* was runner up for the Rathbones Folio Prize and was on the longlist for the Ondaatje Prize. Alice has also won the Pen Ackerley Prize and the V.S. Pritchett Memorial Prize. She teaches creative writing at Oxford University.

Katharina Maria Kalinowski is a bilingual poet and Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the Universities of Cologne and Kent. Her creative-critical PhD project focuses on ecopoetics, the Anthropocene, and expanded forms of translation. Her publications include *Magma*, *Epizootics*, *JBIIP*, and *Litmus* (forthcoming).

Mark Kirkbride lives in Shepperton. He is the author of *The Plot Against Heaven*, *Game Changers of the Apocalypse* and *Satan's Fan Club*, all published

by Omnium Gatherum. *Game Changers of the Apocalypse* was a semi-finalist in the Kindle Book Awards 2019. His short stories can be found in *Under the Bed*, *Sci Phi Journal*, *Disclaimer Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Magazine* and *So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library*. His poetry has appeared in the *Big Issue*, the *Morning Star*, the *Daily Mirror*, *Sein und Werden* and Horror Writers Association chapbooks.

Anna Kisby is a Devon-based poet, archivist and author of the pamphlet *All the Naked Daughters* (Against the Grain Press, 2017). In 2019 she collaborated on the project *Creative Histories of Witchcraft* and is now working on a collection exploring historical magical practitioners.

Elena Kozlova is a climate researcher at the College of Life and Environmental Sciences (University of Exeter), specialising in measurements of the atmosphere at remote locations. Her research focus is making the high-precision atmospheric concentrations of oxygen and the greenhouse gasses contributing to climate change, and creating long-term records of such measurements for the use of the research community.

Katina Laoutaris is a professional violinist. As a teacher and performer she has worked with refugees in Palestine, Serbia and Calais, and, most recently completed a circus tour in France and at the Edinburgh festival. Four years ago she achieved a first class honours degree in Arabic and English Literature. With five children and a granddaughter, she feels passionately about the world we live in and the legacy left them of this beautiful planet.

Emma Lee's publications include *The Significance of a Dress* (Arachne, 2020) and *Ghosts in the Desert* (IDP, 2015). She co-edited *Over Land, Over Sea* (Five Leaves, 2015), is Poetry Reviews Editor for *The Blue Nib*, reviews for magazines and blogs at <http://emmalee1.wordpress.com>.

Wes Lee lives in New Zealand. Her latest collection *By the Lapels* was launched in Wellington (Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2019). Her work has appeared in *Best New Zealand Poems*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Poetry London*, *The London Magazine*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Banshee*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, among others. Most recently she was awarded the Poetry New Zealand Prize 2019 by Massey University Press.

Sylvie Lewis is an undergraduate English student at the University of Exeter. Her poetry has appeared in *The Village Magazine* and *Exeter Enigma Journal*, while her journalism on literature, theatre and film has been published by *RAZZ Magazine* and *Exeposé*. Her poem 'Fragments of Villette' was shortlisted

for the 2020 Bridport Poetry Prize.

Dr. Fran Lock is the author of seven poetry collections, most recently *Raptures and Captures* (Culture Matters, 2019) in collaboration with collage artist Steve Burgess. She is an Associate Editor at Culture Matters. Her poetry is concerned with exposing the half-hidden histories of working-class lives.

Edith Knight Magak is a writer and currently a creative nonfiction literary interviewer at Africa in Dialogue. Prior publication credits include *Brittle Paper*, *Critical Read*, *Voices & Verse* poetry magazine, *Jellyfish Review* among others. She lives in Nairobi, Kenya.

Habib Mohana from Pakistan is an assistant professor of English and a prize-winning writer of fiction in English, Urdu and Saraiki, his mother tongue. His short stories have appeared in literary journals throughout the world and his Saraiki books won the Khawaja Ghulam Farid Award from the Pakistan Academy of Letters. He is currently seeking a publisher for his novel *The Village Café*.

Mat Osmond is a writer and artist who lectures on Falmouth University's MA Authorial Illustration programme. He's a co-director of the Art.Earth research collective based at Dartington, and convener for their November 2021 summit on ecological grief, the arts and death culture: Borrowed Time: on death, dying & change. (CFP deadline 13.12.20.) <https://borrowed-time.info/>

Steve Pottinger is a poet, author, and workshop facilitator, and a founding member of Wolverhampton arts collective Poets, Prattlers, and Pandemonialists. He's an engaging and accomplished performer who has performed the length and breadth of the country. His sixth volume of poems, *thirty-one small acts of love and resistance* published by Ignite Books, is out now.

Moya Roddy's debut collection of poetry *Out of the Ordinary* was shortlisted for the Strong/Shine Award. She's also been shortlisted for the Hennessy Award. Her novel, *The Long Way Home* was described in the *Irish Times* as 'simply brilliant'. *Other People*, a collection of short stories was nominated for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award.

Lane Shipsey writes stories and poems, which have been published in various places in print and online. A recovering travel addict, she has only used her passport once since 2018.

Lou Siday is a young writer from the North East of England, interested in the supernatural, magic, folklore and all things weird. She completed her MA in Creative Writing at Newcastle University last year, receiving a distinction for her work. Her dissertation piece was a memoir project using magical realism to tell her story.

Martin Sorrell taught French at Exeter University, including the MA in Literary Translation. He has translated the poetry of Verlaine, Rimbaud, Apollinaire and Lorca for OUP World's Classics, and has written radio features and plays, including the award-winning *Glass Man*. His most recent book is *Paulette*, a memoir centred on his French mother's colourful life.

Ella Squirrel is a multidisciplinary artist working with paint, film, photography and performance. Her primary focus is painting, informed by the complexity of gender and mixed ethnic identity. In her semi-fictional portraits she plays with fact and fiction in an attempt to understand her own sense of 'being'.

Kim Squirrel (O'Loughlin) is a writer and artist. Her poetry has appeared in: *Poetry Review*, *Riptide*, *Stand*, the *Out of Bounds* poetry anthology and the British Library exhibition *Windrush: Songs in a Strange Land*. Her stories are included in the Dinesh Allirajah prize anthology and the Comma Press short story anthology *Resist*.

Peter Stott is Professor of Detection and Attribution, Department of Mathematical Sciences, University of Exeter, and a Science Fellow at The Met Office Hadley Centre. He has a distinguished research record in the science of climate change and extensive experience in communicating climate science through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, public engagement events and appearances on radio and TV.

Barry Tempest was born in Bradford, brought up in a small mining town outside Barnsley, studied at Sussex University, and taught until retirement in Yorkshire and Dorset, where he has lived for over forty years. He has written poems for several decades, and recently had published his first full collection.

Pierrette Thomet is a classical singer, artist and founder director of the award-winning WAM—Weather Art and Music project. She created *Climate Stories* in collaboration with Peter Stott.

Fred Voss has been a machinist for over 40 years and has written about it for 35 years (thousands of poems and one novel set in a machine shop). His

Bloodaxe collection, *Hammers and Hearts of the Gods*, was chosen as 2009 book of the year by the *Morning Star*, and his latest is *Robots Have No Bones* from Culture Matters.

Corinna Wagner is Associate Professor in Literature and Art History, the University of Exeter. She publishes on the body, photography, the gothic, water and the environment, and ruins and architecture. Among her recent books are *Blueprints: A Lockdown Diary* (a forthcoming memoir and photobook), *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism* (2020) and *A Body of Work: An Anthology of Poetry and Medicine* (with Andy Brown, 2015).

Chris Waters is a London-born poet / musician, Devon-based since 2001. Several prizes—including Bridport, Plough, Wivenhoe. Collections from Mudlark: *Arisaig* (2010); *Through a Glass Lately* (2014); *Dancing Satyr* (2018). Performer with spoken-word groups Visible Ink (Totnes) and Que Pasa? (Brewhouse Theatre and Somerset Villages). Inspired widely, but not reliably, by Basho, Tu Fu, the Anglo-Saxons, Edward Thomas and Seamus Heaney et al.

Emily Way is a mother and arts administrator by day and an amateur writer by night. She grew up in Devon and now lives in Bristol with her husband and two children. During maternity leave with her second child she took up writing classes with Mothership Writers, and wrote this piece for their anthology. She continues to keep writing, in as many available moments of solitude as possible. @wayemilywrites.

Anthony Wilson is a poet, writing tutor and lecturer. His most recent books are *The Afterlife* (Worple Press, 2019) and *Deck Shoes*, a collection of essays (Impress Books, 2019). His *Lifesaving Poems* blog can be found at www.anthonypowellpoetry.com.

Marc Woodward is a Devon-based poet and musician has been widely published and awarded several prizes. His recent collections include *Hide Songs* (Green Bottle Press, 2018) and *The Tin Lodes*—co-written with Andy Brown (Indigo Dreams Press, 2020).

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