

The background of the cover is a painting in a warm, golden-brown color palette. It depicts a still life scene. In the lower-left foreground, a silver pitcher with a curved handle sits on a dark, possibly wooden, table. The pitcher is highly reflective, showing highlights and shadows. Behind the pitcher, a window is visible, with light streaming through sheer, patterned curtains. The light creates a soft, dappled effect on the wall and the table. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative. The text is centered over the middle of the painting.

TENTERHOOK

NEW WRITING FROM STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Tenter Hook

New Writing from the BA English Literature with Creative Writing



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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Contents

Foreword v

CHON HEI UNG (HENRY)

I Haven't Got the Space, And I Haven't Got the Time 1

JANELLE HAWTHORNE-UBAKA

In Our Park 3

LUCY ABBOTT

Futurism 5

CRISTINA NUSICA

Light Drunk and Gentle 7

KASSITTY LEE

Dirt and Soil 9

ALEXANDRA SHUTTLEWORTH

Blossoming 10

ROSIE DARE

The Eyes 13

KYLE GALLOWAY

Birdsong in the Wee Hours (St. Patrick's Day) 15

KIM CULLEN

Chestnuts Receding 18

ELIZA DAY

What Falls Away 19

RAFAELLA MUSSO

Personal Space 21

CALLUM VINTON

The Three Dots 23

CALLISTA BAILEY

Hourglass 26

ELOISA LIARDET

Paper Moon 27

JASMINE CHEEMA		
Bookmark	31	
IMOGEN WILLIAMS		
Birthday	32	
JASMINE MORGAN		
What I Will Remember		34
HANNAH TLEMSANI		
Going For a Song	35	
RUBY DEAN		
Peter	37	
MADELEINE NASH		
Coincidence	38	
IMOGEN POULTER		
Real Love / Lonely People		41
ISABELLA HODGSON		
Sycophants	43	
ROWAN MORROW		
Junction 1000	45	
ABBIE PLANT		
For Baby Frances	48	
GRACE MARSH		
A Parting Gift	49	
WILLIAM PARRY		
Space Once Occupied		50
LUCY SMITH		
Julie Weathers and Her Computer		53
FFION EVANS		
We Are All Visitors	55	
JOWANAH MAJEED		
The Sky Within Us	57	
<i>Biographies</i>		59

Foreword

WELCOME TO THE SEVENTH issue of Tenter Hook. This year, the literary magazine has been crafted by the University of Leeds' very own students, studying on the Page, Publication and Audience module run by JR Carpenter and Sarah Perry. We are delighted to showcase the variety of ways in which the theme of Space and Time has been interpreted, from the nebulas of the universe in Ffion Evans' 'We Are All Visitors' and the passing of time in Rosie Dare's 'The Eyes', to the intimate reflections of 'Personal Space' by Rafaella Musso and 'In Our Park' by Janelle Hawthorne. The issue explores an extensive range of ideas and perceptions in beautifully written and well-crafted writing.

For the first time, Tenter Hook has been almost entirely produced, promoted, and created by students, working in three wonderful teams: Editorial, Publicity and Events. Developing Tenter Hook has given each of us the invaluable opportunity to gain a real insight into the world of publishing. We have discovered how to devise a theme, promote for submissions, run a launch event and compile a literary collection in our respective teams. In this issue, we also decided to open the submissions to all students at the University of Leeds, and The Editorial Team landed upon the theme of Space and Time to give writers a wide scope of possibility across all areas of study.

It has been a pleasure to work with every member of the Tenter Hook team, and we would like to thank each person for their hard work in making the magazine the success that it is. We are grateful to the Publicity team for their efforts in promoting the magazine and producing the magnificent poster announcing submissions, as well as running Tenter Hook's online presence (@tenterhookleeds on Instagram), and to Events for their dedication to the triumph of the launch event.

We have delighted in being part of the Editorial team and are very appreciative of everybody involved in curating the chosen submissions, overseeing the layout and ordering of Tenter Hook. Thank you again to JR Carpenter and Sarah Perry for your support and guidance throughout this process. Finally, to the reader, we hope you enjoy the wonderful writing from the students at the University of Leeds.

Ruby Dean and Imogen Williams
Members of the Editorial Team for Tenter Hook
The University of Leeds

I Haven't Got the Space, And I Haven't Got the Time

Chon Hei Ung (Henry)

I haven't got the space, and I haven't got the time.
I haven't got the dimes I want to write these rhymes
The time these rhymes take to write,
Is laced with my mind's race to write about space.
Space is the case for how we live.
Do you need space?

Here is your space.
Notice its lack of content or form.
But space is not nothing,
Because nothing is conceived without space.
Here is your time.
I could have written a longer line,
But I didn't
Thus, shortening the poem
And giving you time.
Oh, what was that?
That was the present.
What's happening?
I'm no longer in the present,
I swear I was a second ago but
I keep chasing it.
The future keeps crashing onto me,
I cannot escape its immediacy.

Or maybe there was no 'second ago'
Or future.
What if it's all present?
Parmenides said:
Change is impossible
There must be something, and I can't prove the past or future even exists,
I am only in the now.
How did space begin?
At the beginning of time.
And since nothing can be conceived without time:
Time is everywhere, and space is timeless
This has now taken most of the space you bought on this page.
Hope you had a good time reading it!
This took quite a long time to read, didn't it?
Too late, time's up!
You haven't got the space, and you haven't got the time.

In Our Park

Janelle Hawthorne-Ubaka

in our Park there are no trees.
we have metal frames for branches,
monkey bars for leaves,
an imagination that grows
wild
like ivy.

instead of ponds we have puddles,
thick with the dirt that falls from the soles of our shoes.
concrete stained with the blood from your cut pinkie,
remnants of a brown bandage my mum gave you.

where they have robins
we have pigeons.
we make pebble pie instead of peach,
and use fragments of glass from that broken wine bottle
to mix it all together.

they don't know we have flowers,
they're bright and yellow,
grow in cracks of the pavement,
and when aged,
you can blow on them,
a thousand wishes.

'what do you wish for?' she asks me,
i think, yet nothing comes to mind.

blow

blow

blow

'i can't tell you', i say,

'it's a secret'.

Futurism

Lucy Abbott

I can see the future,
and I don't mean that in a woo-woo way.
I'm not talking about shifting decks of tarot cards,
or rows of crystals, glinting hopelessly under the moon.
The delusions I dip my toes into are just that –
I lock them in a box at the end of the day, and there they remain.
The future I see is not a trinket to be contained,
it's inescapable, it lives in me, it drains and drains and drains.
The parasite in my gut, the cancer in my bones,
even in solitude, I am never quite alone.
You must be thinking, "What kind of future
pins someone to their bed like this?"
But the problem lies not in its existence,
it's the weight of perceiving it.
I think, maybe, I could be content
one day waking up buried alive,
if the life lived before it
was one with which I was satisfied.
But I can see the man who rests against his spade,
the chisel lain against the grave where he's inscribed my name,
and when I try to sleep at night, all that I can taste
is the heavy earth stifling my words as it spills across my face.
I cannot speak, so I write, and when I cannot sleep at night,
words that relieve me pour out, and, in the morning, feel trite.
So, what is the solution then?
Why maintain any will?

When I always pour my soul into containers
forever doomed to spill.

Light Drunk and Gentle

Cristina Nusica

To the very first blush of day and to sleep-warm skin, to the flare of the sun creeping in through your venetian blinds. It is warm and balmy, and your room is gold-drenched and messy.

The blinds were left half-open the night before, when you half-stumbled into your room and into your bed, ignoring any thoughts that did not revolve around falling asleep. You curse your past self for not sparing half a moment to pulling that little string shut.

The light spills in now, and it looks like rippling water over your cotton bedsheets. It floats into your eyes, and you blink blearily, trying to push it away as your brain starts to slowly register the sunlight spilling in like honey all around you. You think it's around eight or nine in the morning, but you can't check because you forgot to plug in your phone the night before, and now it lies dead and useless under your pillow.

You were dreaming, but it slipped away the moment you opened your eyes – the way dreams often do. Yet the imaginary taste of sun-warm honey and sweet lemonade coats your mouth still, so you think it was a good one.

When your bare feet touch the ground, you smile softly. The wooden floor is sun-kissed, and you stretch out your toes like a cat. Your hair looks like spun gold in the morning light, and your touch is featherlight and forgiving when you run your fingertips over the scars on your arm.

You have a slice of toast for breakfast and a mug of hot ginger tea, a teaspoon of honey swirled in. The wood under your feet is warm, and the sun shines against the glass of your windows, but it is only March, and the winter's chill is still stirring through the air.

You belong to the morning like this, light-drunk and gentle. A fingertip away from summer. The world outside is humming, the sunshine kisses your skin, and your lips are sweet and sticky with jam.

But I come from somewhere slower.

My nights linger long after they should have ended, and the palely glowing, backlit moon is waxing and waning in the sky at all times. The birds are asleep, and the night is cool. My fingertips feel rough when I pull the duvet up over my clammy, dream-drenched skin, and my ears start to buzz from the silence outside the window.

There are no cars driving by, there are no footsteps pacing up and down through the building. It is so quiet I can feel my shallow breath echo in the room.

Time feels fractured but ceaseless, infinite and fleeting. I sleep for six hours and wake up to a pulse thrumming darkness and my heart in my stomach. I do not get up because the floor is cold, and the night is cool. I am covered and bundled up to my nose, and when I look out the sweat covered window, I see nothing but a distant, blurry light.

The night is thick with fog and starless, so I let my eyelids droop once more, and my body relaxes into the me-shaped hollow in the bed.

I sleep for five more hours and when I wake up it is inky and cold and lonely.

If I could meet you in the morning, I would let the light sweeten my sun-starved skin, and I would eat your strawberry jam and lick sticky honey off my fingertips. You would open the windows, and the sunshine would dance around the kitchen with us, spinning and twisting around our warm, bare feet.

You would play a song off your phone for us to dance to, because I had remembered to plug your phone in the night before, and we would feel like molten gold and heat and honey. The smell of wildflowers would spill through the air and cling onto my brightly shimmering skin and time would not pass through me, but with me.

I too would become light-drunk, and my ears would no longer buzz from the silence when I'd have you singing with me.

Dirt And Soil

Kassitty Lee

Foreign dirt smudges across the bottom of my shoe,
A stain that I don't think will ever come out.
I go home and track the mud down the stairs,
Knowing I needed to get it all off at my door.
When my mother sees the state of my shoes,
She sighs and berates me for getting it everywhere,
So I don't know how to tell her that I kind of liked the dirt
That I'd tracked onto a thirteen-hour flight,
Hoping to bring home a semblance of that world
At the door where I left it, under shoes where I left it.
I told her anyway, that it was half there, half intentional,
And she just didn't want to believe me:
How could I naively let their tea pollute my tongue,
How could I drink their tea, when I should have been drinking
The tea leaves from my grand-uncle, from the valley
Behind the home my mother grew up in.
I didn't know how to tell her that I had to drink like them,
Or they could see the bamboo shoots that hold up my skin,
And they could pick and choose what kind of skin I had
Like they knew the soil inside of my blood and could see the oil from water;
How could she understand that I'd rather the coarse foreign dirt
Smudge and stain my skin if it means they would never see
The soft soil that I grew from, and ask me why
When I opened my mouth, my grand-uncle's tea leaves fell from my tongue.

Blossoming

Alexandra Shuttleworth

“There’s a cherry blossom tree outside of V2,” I say, as I sip Kasteel Rouge, a Belgian beer that boasts an impressive 8% ABV.

“You mean Veh-Deuh,” Cleo replies. My friends say it the proper way. I’ve been pronouncing it Vee-Two.

“It’s a bit shit.”

“What is?”

“The tree.”

We’ve exhausted all conversation. We are in a quirky bar – our favourite bar – Bernadette’s. A Baby Annabelle dolled up to resemble Satan watches from the corner. She’s familiar with us; we’ve spent every Thursday evening here for the past however many months.

“Imagine being that tree. I’d be pissed. Like what do you mean it’s cherry blossom season in Japan, and I’m stuck in France?”

“Yeah,” says Emma, “ironic.”

I was twenty-three when I moved to the North of France. It was part of our university curriculum – the third-year opportunity to study across the world. With hundreds of universities to choose from it’s a shame I ended up in Lille.

I applied to five universities in Australia, and I’m always thinking about how things would be if I was there. If I was in Australia, I would probably be wearing a bikini. I’d probably be with a man with a moustache and a mullet and a barbeque (who only cooks organic veggies). I’d probably be having a real laugh with all my Aussie mates. Not here. The people around me speak in jokes I don’t understand. Their tongues twist around sounds I can’t make.

Why are you here? You don’t even speak French.

Okay, well it's not like I've not tried... It's not that I don't want to, it's that I can't! Duolingo has taught me nothing. I only know how to say what's in my pencil case, I eat chips, and there's an owl in the tree. I try to recall GCSE French. I've accidentally said *excitée*, thinking it meant excited, and now everyone thinks I'm horny for the beach.

Why are you here?

I wish I knew.

The longer I spend in France the more I long for home. I want to be a local. I want to know people and be known. I want to light candles and take long baths and cuddle. I want to spend weekends walking and visiting pubs for Sunday lunch. I want to have pets! I dream of having my own dog... goats, ducks, ferrets. I want an orchard with apples. Fed up with student life and house shares, with their cold, dirty showers, and rusty hobs. I want a home office and a home library. One day I'll have a family that adores me; I'll make lunches and have meaning.

No, but really, why are you here? Go home.

Ok maybe there's something –

Something about my new friends and I: Cleo, Emma, Millie, and Ali. We're Les Lilloises (the women of Lille).

We're ordering the cheapest glasses of wine. We're eating baguettes in the park. We're in galleries in Paris. We're on a boat in Belgium. We're stood on Rue Royale, waiting for our falafel galette. We're fumbling over our orders, though we order the same thing every week. We've adopted French accents (but only for certain words). I can hear them in my head now.

We're on a bus that takes three hours but was cheaper than taking the train. We're sipping lattes au lait d'avoine. We're bringing vegetarianism back in a big way. We're commenting 'beaucoup de slay' on each other's #candid Insta dumps. We're writing postcards and sending them internationally. We can't believe a can of Heinz Spaghetti costs 5.15 euros.

We're on the M1 line:

Hotel de Ville – Triolo – Pont de Bois – Square Flanders – Mairie D'Hellemmes – Marberie – Fives – Caulier – Gare Lille Flanders – Rihour

– Republique Beaux-Arts – Gambetta – Wazemmes

We're at Erasmus events, making friends with a Russian vegetable farmer and his Lithuanian mate. We're perusing the two shelves of English books at the Oxfam – we're reading Gulliver's Travels. We're reading the cocktail menu at a bar named African Children. We're planning trips to Manchester, Cardiff, and the South of France (the good bit). We've been taken into the Crypt of The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Paris by a nun who attempts to convert us to Christianity. We're watching The Circle, France, and being rinsed for it by our French Hinge match, Clotaire (Do you mean ze Tour de Fronss, putain?).

We're obsessed with a guy called Guy, who studies French at the University of Durham (Guy, if you're reading this, you're proper fit). We're painting the French flag on our foreheads at Le Carnaval de Dunkerque and writing BAGU / ETTE across our knuckles. We're plunging ourselves into the canal after one too many sips of a cocktail that is for some reason named Coventry Fizz. We're making inside jokes like 'nine friends in Quend'. We've become real friends: best friends.

We're stuck in France. And we're blossoming, despite it all.

The Eyes

Rosie Dare



the first window is nineteen years old.
three fridges lined up like generals,
their soldiers are bottles of vodka.
bomber jacket left on the table,
matte under the sick yellow glow, brown.
a cupboard each, some doors half-open.
missed something crucial, but we're moving-

second window will be twenty-five.
little office, bricks by the train tracks,
artificial plants kissing the glass,
HR posters on the blue pin board,
defective desk lamp on the cork floor,
propped against a black printer, unplugged.
a vague logo on the idle screen.

the third window could be thirty-eight.
cream ceramic dog bowl, splashes on-
the laminate wood floor, in circles.
patterns drawn in the breadcrumbs, daisies,
on the table, just one fork, knife, plate.
supermarket herb pots still in sleeves,
wet, wilting, shortly arriving at-

a fourth window, just sixty-something.
the lights are off, the tap is dripping.
an IKEA lamp on mum's tin tray.
paint by numbers, william morris,
tv white fuzz bleeds through the drawn blinds,
i can hear laughing. man-made noises.
fingers of the frame's chalky paint crack-
towards me, then whirring and blurring-

the fifth window is bare, unfurnished,
freshly vacuumed carpet floors, perfect-
for bare feet and salt white walls, french doors-
that open onto a green garden.
the carriage shakes like tigers stretch and-
stalks towards its den of black matter,
but if i shift and squint my eyes there's-
someone's reflection against mine. it's-

Birdsong in the Wee Hours (St. Patrick's Day)

Kyle Galloway

Content warning: potentially distressing imagery including grotesquerie, depictions of violence, religious themes and references to substance use.

Birdsong, hoarse and steamy. The sound inflating like a million pink, veiny balloons until all the rubber strains and pops and you spot blood dribbling down the side of every yellow beak. The blood cascades and pools, black under the green neon, and the centrifugal force gestated in the crooks of one-hundred-and-twenty whirring wings draws it into little circles. They dilate into dilated pupils, nests, the stark white eggs aleatory reflections of lighters, LEDs, heat lamps. And the lights up on the ceiling, green as a leaf held to the sun. The counters webbed with all these white lines like patterns on the riverbed. So low in here, though. Taller men must hunch.

[I sneeze. *Bless me.*]

The thickness of the sky is what sticks about home. Darkness at home was solid air; here it is just smoky. Here is it just duct tape wrapped around a streetlamp. Flies sicken and croon at its warmth nonetheless, tiger stripes of bleeding light cheapening the black. Nothing here is black like home. Birdsong, it never stops, even when it equalises with the hum of flies' wings. At home I saw Christopher's mum on the road at night and her reading glasses looked red against the dying sun. When I fell into the stream below Whinney Lane that night, the forest above me was a matter of faith. The canopy was the Rorschach Sistine Chapel ceiling of a belief system shrouded from sight. *The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* The sounds were like those of a forest. The wind was musical with the whirring *palos* of homebound

tractor engines. On the chapel walls: bird wings, all unfurled and pinned down; leaves, plastered and left to dry; mud, rich and red and wet with riverwater. When I was home, I stared out of the window and wondered if the black of the sky was thick enough to catch me if I fell. And that was the darkness at home.

It's all shattered, hardly a memory. If so, just an echo chamber. My Baptism was last Christmas. Now it's Saint Patrick's Day and I don't have a church. Each sound impregnates another with its seed. Apple seeds in the garden blowing up into saplings. Grains of their newborn leaves dry into power and are carried by the wind into baggies in boxer waistbands breaching too-big jeans. *We eat every part of the animal; nothing goes to waste.* Nothing goes to waste. Even the discarded Coronas under the smoke residue on a night-spoiled Woodhouse Moor are swarmed by ants come sunrise. Twitching for the hot, sweet 4.5% remains. The wind is a poor coolant for the superheated sand, soda ash, limestone, but it does suspend something grainy in the air.

[*Bless me!*]

Indescribable heat like hell. A 20-year-old Fiat Panda goes flying into the wedding reception, through the bay window. Plaster dust. Razor-sharp aeroplane engines plummet from the sky and crunch head-first into your accommodation ceiling. Lime, cement, clay, calcium, animal hair. The technicolour basement walls are slick with condensation. The duct tape of the night here is duct tape over your eyes for a second and the creak of the ceiling panels caving in right next to your ear is snapping bones to a rhythm. He glitters like a nymph sitting in a puddle of lemonade on the countertop. Eye contact as if it's through the frosted floral reliefs on the window of Grandma's bathroom. There's an earring and a measuring tape on the floor, wet hips in the mirror, and the hurricane of birdsong carries your eyes back to the canopy above, the translucent damp sheen on the plaster and the comets of passing flashlights shot through it. Lip gloss smeared on the inside of your thigh. Everyone's in green, it's Saint Patrick's Day, and this year your dad had to text you to say so. You're all just a canopy to the basement. Everyone moves but it looks still. The haze is like a pumping sedative or mirage.

Catatonia; Catalonia; *Motomami*; Patagonia; fleeces sliding away behind the sofa; bogeyman hands on your shoulders; caterpillar fingers up your legs; clovers; plastered all over the walls of this 2D soundscape; clovers; green and frilled like lace; clovers; stinking of mint, clove, sage; clovers.

[*God blessSSSSSSSSsssssSssSSSSssssssssssSSSSsssssSSSSsSssssSss*
ss ssssSSSSsummer of 2020 held freedom in a crucible as it baked in the sun. Smarting away, little ringlets of smoke grew upwards from the lip of it and made my outgrown perm smell of mint, sage, clove. As Samson, my hair grew and grew out of its little wicker-basket nest of curls until I needed a headband. The one Italian restaurant within cycling distance of the home I would never leave started doing takeaways after a few months. I had the world in my headphones at night, on the bench around the back of our house. All the lights off so I had to invest faith that the darkness would, morning-come, be the same green oblivion on the cliff-edge of which we hung. As it was every day. I sneeze and I wait for the response.]

Birdsong.

Chestnuts Receding

Kim Cullen

It was an English day

the sun was playing hide and seek,
the wind revealed young men's receding hairlines
and blew my jumper tight around my belly –
so tight I held it in.

My Nana held my hand,

hers gloved in pearly soft skin,
smelled like petals, like her,
Nana Rosie.

Gangan said; this way Rose,

and we giggled and collected chestnuts
that fell from the sky
like Apollo's arrows of plague.
We shielded our heads
as their spiked shells dropped from the crowns,
like shrapnel, smashing on the ground,
just clipping our toes.

I held her hand on the way home,

we chuckled like little girls about our adventure.
When we got home, we cooked them –
some exploded and we shrieked and laughed until my
tummy hurt –
we peeled back the hot skin, blew the steam out of them,
and ate them all in one sitting.

Once they were eaten it had all been forgotten,

as though the needled chestnuts had sieved her mind.

What Falls Away

Eliza Day

We would always end up
accidentally walking to churches.
My mum had a story set on an island,
about religion, or something
I didn't really understand.
I preferred being underwater, or back home.
Seven, and so bored, in a tiny
Welsh village where the four of us were and life wasn't,
and our dog smelt like wet seal.

But we would go. Would
whisper into the old, open spaces even
when we were the only ones there.
And afterwards, in the car, we wouldn't always
put the music back on.
We'd change our walking shoes to socks
and step inside, into the house I'd call
half-dead, like my mum's mum
and her dad, who had it first. Because
they live too, like in this poem,
or underground in the church by our house,
or in my head.

The last time we went the side of the cliff was
caving in. Yellow tape cutting
it off from tourists and people and us.

I'm sure it's worse now.
Other people are living in the house,
and my mum's writing a story
that's new, that's still on an island but
less about God,
and maybe I'm a bad daughter for not knowing
how much,
but soon I'm going to read it

and the cliff is going to come
completely down.

Personal Space

Rafaella Musso

I have moved house eight times in my life,
eleven if you count the uni houses too.
Each time, I stick my pictures to the wall
and place my books on their shelf.
It has become ritualistic.

I had never had my own bedroom until I moved to uni,
but even then, the house is not my own – I am
haunted by the past and future inhabitants of these rooms,
haunted by the realisation that I too am one of the ghosts.

In my first house, I read *Room On The Broom* and listened to *Girls Aloud*,
in the next, it was *Jacqueline Wilson* and *Little Mix*,
in another came *Wuthering Heights* and *Fiona Apple*.
Now I sit in my third-year box room (I drew the short straw),
listening to *Elbow* and wishing I still had time to read for pleasure.

I can place each stage of my life inside each of these houses,
each with their own soundtrack.

Home for me is not inside a house.
I don't think it ever will be.
Home for me is not in the presence of my family,
as large and complicated as it is.

Home for me is a still morning with a mug of coffee
and a cd from 2008 flowing through the air.
Home for me is being in my own company
and knowing that each version of me from each different house
is sitting beside me.

For now, at least.

The Three Dots

Callum Vinton

As we slipped through the half-open doorway to the landing, I glimpsed the onset of a sharp shock in her eyes. She'd kept her composure well through the interview, if one could call it that; for the most part, it was Shane harping on his peculiar brand of metaphysics as we sat triangulated around the scarred side table in his council flat. He delved more so than preached from his plush pulpit; we observed from our sterile plastic seats. Fairly easy to nod your way through, I always said. We'd talked through most of his worldview as part of the case handover, so she was well-equipped to handle the strange terrains of his conversation. I'd even told her about his 'ken', although it's impossible to explain the subjective experience of it in conversation – the sensation that comes with realising that time is not linear but rather dancing in spirals like a gymnast's ribbon is indescribable outside the realm of poetry. Thus, when his eyes caught the glistening gold plate of her pendant, and then the grey hound dog in its centrepiece, I tensed in anticipation.

Much to my relief, Andrea simply nodded along with the same appeasement that formed the backbone of our profession. Practiced, calm, betraying nothing – I even thought as we concluded the meeting that he could've been wrong about the pendant. There's a first time for everything, I told myself. Once we were out on the landing, however, the startle surfaced. I watched her skin drain and her cool posture give way immediately as if she'd been wounded. As always, he'd been right; the pendant was her grandmother's, it was her old Irish wolfhound Betsy, it'd been given to Andrea when she was a bairn of six as a keepsake. Not that I needed any verbal confirmation to tell me so – I'd seen that look

so many times, and it said in an instant what ten-thousand words could not. Shane's 'ken' could cut like a blade, its touch like cold steel – and you never forget the first cut.

I slid back in to say my goodbyes to him; walking those carpeted metres, that felt like two and two thousand at once, I recalled my first cut. It was eight years ago, when I'd first been assigned to him at the hospital. He'd been living rough for a while after escaping a spiritualist church in Redcar, where they'd been charging the faithful for the use of his services. Once he found out, and they refused to compensate him for it, he abandoned the place and started to walk the fifty-or-so miles back home. He made it as far as Washington before he was arrested as a vagabond, and thrown in a tiny cell that closed around him like a nut-shell. Even now, I still don't know why he was admitted to us, as I never once felt he was ill. He seemed from the very first as if he were merely operating on a different plane. During our first consultation, he fixated on my right hand and told me he could see a marking below the skin: three dots, arranged in a triangle.

I knew immediately what he'd seen. My grandfather William – so mysterious to all of us – used to have this very same mark. We used to speak in hushed tones as children about his exploits in the Easter Rising, for the Republic, trading our own tall tales in the absence of his own – all of which centred on the Three Dots. I felt as if Shane had turned my soul inside out in an instant. I had no secrets here. Eight years later, I felt as though this were finally true and that he'd marked every ghost that stood watch over my borders. Shane's fixation on threes, meanwhile, had grown to encompass everything he owned, thought or dreamed. He had to have three of everything. As I perched across from him on his three-piece sofa, below his three-bulb light fixture, we settled down to the changing of the guard.

“So how do you find Andrea? Do you feel comfortable with her?”

“I reckon so. Be a shame, though, not seeing ya.”

“I know, Shane, but I've got to move on.”

“Aye, Bradford, I've seen – she'll do right down there, your Jean. Better schools.”

My throat snagged. I wasn't sure if I'd ever mentioned any of my family to him before, let alone my daughter. At the time I thought I hadn't, but I can never be sure. There was a dull throbbing deep within me like the phantom of a long-gone scar, along with a perilous intuition that there was more to be seen. Fear, excitement, dread. Then Shane looked somewhere beyond my left shoulder.

"There's a man who's always by your side, you know. A gadgie with auld black working clothes on and a muffler. He's always been there, every time."

There it was – that joyous pain of being seen again, full-blown and as pristine as that first time. He'd seen straight into my dreams, into the hazy tableaux of the Quayside that I used to walk through surveying the bodies at work. One time, I thought I'd seen William; he was dressed just so, lugging plate metal across the rough stubble of the Tyne bank and into a rapidly enclosing fog. I could've sworn that I'd seen the Three Dots on his right hand, but I doubted myself as soon as I awoke. My mother had always told me to forget about it, that those dots meant nothing. But now they meant everything. All of existence seemed to reassemble itself into triads before me – here, there and everywhere; mother, father and child; past, present, future. And there I was, at the nexus of each with Shane twirling the ribbon around me. I had to contain myself as I asked the question to which I already knew the answer.

"Does he have a name?"

"Aye, it's Bill."

William.

Hourglass

Callista Bailey

On days I spoke with Time
He blistered
My skin with hot sand

I want to try every fig

I begged
Palms cupped

*I want to bathe
In the same river twice*

Older than oceans
He laughed

*Write letters
Cut leaves to watch them grow
Breathe in Breathe out
You cannot trap Time but you can taste it.*

As he slid through my fingers once more.

Paper Moon

Eloisa Liardet

In the middle of a lush field stands a tent. It is made of light-pink cloth and trimmed with fringe and decorated with a garland of dried flowers and feathers. The midday sun beats down on CHERRY as she sits cross-legged, peeling twigs with a pocket-knife, waiting for someone.

Enter ANNICE in an air-blue summer dress, looking around and rolling her neck as though she has just woken from a long sleep. CHERRY hears her coming and looks up expectantly. There is a moment of silence as the two look at each other, neither really knowing what to say despite this not being the first time.

ANNICE: Well. Here I am again.

CHERRY (*laughing*): Oh my God.

She jumps to her feet and hugs Annice.

ANNICE: I always forget how quiet it is here.

CHERRY: I never stop thinking about you.

Annice laughs softly. After a moment she has to gently pry Cherry's fingers off her.

ANNICE: Come on. What are you doing?

CHERRY (*wiping her eyes quickly with her sleeve*): Nothing. Waiting.

Annice sits down and examines the pile of twigs. Cherry watches her.

CHERRY: It never gets less weird to see you.

ANNICE (*grinning*): Thanks.

Cherry laughs, reaching in her backpack for a wooden hand mirror. She lowers herself to the grass and passes it to Annice.

ANNICE (*taking it*): Ah.

CHERRY: You said you wanted it last time.

ANNICE: Yeah... Thank you.

She gazes at herself in it, touching her face with tentative fingers.

CHERRY: Is there anything else you want? For your next visit?

ANNICE: I don't know. *(smiling)* I'll think about it.

CHERRY: I can't believe it's only been a month.

ANNICE: Yeah.

CHERRY: You...

ANNICE: What?

CHERRY: I feel like... has it been long enough yet? Can I ask?

ANNICE: Go on.

CHERRY: We still don't know how it happened. No one knows anything.

Will you tell me so I can tell everyone else and we can stop guessing?

Annice stays silent.

CHERRY: I'm not angry. I'm sorry.

ANNICE: I don't want to tell you.

CHERRY: Is it too soon?

ANNICE *(absently)*: Something like that.

CHERRY: Sorry.

Annice shakes her head.

CHERRY *(cont.)*: I just have so many guesses. I think about it all the time.

ANNICE: What are your guesses?

Cherry ponders this, leaning back on her elbows. Then she shrugs.

CHERRY: I don't wanna say.

ANNICE: That's okay.

CHERRY: It's morbid.

ANNICE: Mm.

CHERRY: I'm sorry for bringing it up. I just...

ANNICE: I know. It's okay.

CHERRY: And I'm gonna be older than you one day. Isn't that so weird?

ANNICE: Well, everyone always seemed to think you were the older one.

CHERRY: Yeah, but that was only funny because I am *not*— or— I *wasn't*.

I mean, is that definitely true? Or is time different over there? Like, maybe you keep growing and getting older but just in a separate place

to me. Is it like that?

ANNICE: It's not different. Nothing like the books say it is.

CHERRY: It must be a little bit.

ANNICE: It's not. I promise. When it's daytime for you, it's daytime for me, and so on.

CHERRY: How do you know?

ANNICE: Trust me.

Cherry can't think of a reply. The pair sit in silence once again.

ANNICE (cont.): I'm glad I got to come on such a beautiful day.

CHERRY: Are you happy there?

ANNICE: Of course. I have no choice.

CHERRY: Don't you want to come back?

ANNICE: Stop it.

CHERRY: I'm sorry.

ANNICE: I have no choice.

A flurry of birds overhead. A pleasant breeze rustles through the trees.

CHERRY: I feel like I'm asking too many questions.

ANNICE: You're not, it's okay.

CHERRY: You're sort of the only one that talks to me nowadays. That's why I have to ask you so much. We don't have long today, do we?

ANNICE: Not today, no. But ask me as many questions as you like. I'm here to listen.

CHERRY: I wish I could see you more often.

ANNICE: I do too. But I've got to stay there.

CHERRY: Will you tell me what it's like?

ANNICE: It's mainly just light.

CHERRY: Is it big?

ANNICE: There are a lot of people, yeah, but I have my own space. It doesn't feel crowded which is nice.

Cherry runs her hands through her hair and looks up towards the rolling clouds and the turquoise sky.

ANNICE (cont.): Hey. I'll take you one day.

CHERRY: Soon?

ANNICE (after a pause): No, not yet.

CHERRY: You're so far away from me now.

Annice turns around, looking into the trees. She plays with a beaded bracelet on her arm.

ANNICE: I know.

CHERRY: Do you wish you could come home?

No answer.

CHERRY: Annice.

Annice doesn't turn to face her.

CHERRY (cont.): I miss you so much.

She didn't need to say it— it was obvious, and now it hangs limply in the air between them. After a while, Cherry can no longer stand it.

CHERRY: What's on your mind?

ANNICE: I keep thinking about God.

End.

Bookmark

Jasmine Cheema

'Jasmine – you should be Prime Minister. Really.' – Miss Camidge, 2019

You wrote in cursive on the
white back, purple glitter ink softly
voicing your words to me.
The lilac polka-dot front displayed
a message in Japanese, written
in the same sparkly calligraphy –

しあすみの幸

I'd never thought to translate
because I was so stunned by the back,
by what you believed I could be.
I imagined it was my name
or a book title, but today, wonder
finally prompted me to see –

The Blessing of Happiness

I've been carrying this gift
between the pages of every book
I've read throughout my degree.
It's frayed at the edges now, I must
lamine it, preserve the care
you poured into it. Into me.

Birthday

Imogen Williams

Slides flicker between blinks,
Of a laugh, a cry then a shout,
Like pictures I don't look at anymore.

You were always loud,
Heard long before you were seen,
Voice crashing through paper walls,

It's why they ignored you, actually.

Sometimes we fought,
More like often.
Bickering like sisters over –

I can't even remember now, actually.

I brought you flowers on your birthday,
Pink tulips that used to be
Your favourite.

It was so quiet, it hurt,
Pressing with such insistence
It filled my throat and I made a noise

You would've laughed at it, actually.

My mum came with me,
She didn't say anything for once,
Just held onto my hand as I tried to speak,
What came out was a strangled apology.

Then I drove away, thinking
About what I would've given you
Instead of the flowers,

Because everyone gets you those now, actually.

We went as a group for your birthday,
Sneaking into the golf course through the hole in the fence
That's somehow still there.

We tried to light a candle with a pink lighter,
But it was January and we lost against the wind,
You would've found it funny, I think.

The tattoos you poked into my skin,
Somehow linger years later,
Their stubbornness much like your own.

You told me they'd be gone in a year,
I didn't think it would be you instead,
They remain a cruel reminder

Of just how unfair it is, actually.

You took up space and time
Marked your presence in my life, on my skin
Searing it behind my eyelids

Until it hurts to blink.

What I Will Remember

Jasmine Morgan

The sweep of twenty legs on wooden floors.
Paring down toenails so they press the least
against shoes that will never not hurt. When music
soaks through the limbs and suddenly the smile isn't forced,
it's real. The ache of thighs as they ease
into grand plié. Marking the combination with a
partner and someone joins in, and then two
more, until the whole room is dancing to the
beat of shoes and breath and the feeling
of bodies next to each other. The relief of pulling
out pin after pin and massaging hair free of
hairspray. Lying over the leg, balanced on
the barre, wrapped in a self-embrace.

Going For a Song

Hannah Tlemsani

The swill of balking ground teeth,
the this/that of makeshift dentistry,
a mouthguard horse bit.
Spitting out gum blood from the fluoride.

Now ten on.

No bottle out here, just the old sipping of sow bugs and oats.
Coffee. Ironing out a spine, standing straights,
chiller fleece. Cab fare. 6 o'clock starts.
And so on and so on.

But analogise,
make an hour a salted liver.
Minimum pound an hour is still a double pitcher,
the scalded coffee bursting bits of your tongue to no good,
can make a hell of a texture for kissing.
The cup is full, and old friends,
and a future, made in evenings.

This 'then' that was hushed about
made the devil kick off his work shoes,
because commission pays a sorry lot,
and the bottle-girl nods
and joined in for another.

See now the swivel chair in the rafters, hanging over
but no one cares on that tomorrow's company dime.

And we know in the bathrooms:
everybody makes their way somehow.

Peter
Ruby Dean

Take a look at the both of you. As if I hadn't called
a hundred times waved

my crimson scarves, over-counted the numbers
on this wristwatch for

your timing. Yet I run from the dress-run curtains wide when you
know I'm Wendy, feet above the floorboards,

sick and tired and sick of this waiting when you are laughing.
Melodic, merciless, when this century was not curated for

your silence. I check seconds, they sprint without
passing, you are deliberate. Turn over your gold leaf and

I will in my grave, buried alive in this corridor. I am a storm
charging in there, are you guilty? Did I catch you?

Do you not like this blue in my dress in my face?
I know that your time is endless; know that my shoulders are aching.

But you are slow to leave this room. Quick
to steal my space. Slow to follow and to float.

Tear yourself away and me
to pieces. The rehearsal has finished.

Coincidence

Madeleine Nash

Groceries slide and writhe in my arms, slipping as though they are newborns trying to jump out of my arms. Why did I have to bump into you now of all times, laden with shopping and my fringe stuck to my forehead with sweat. I was just thinking about you and suddenly you appeared, wearing that ragged baseball cap I had brought you. I always loved that hat. And you in that hat. Your cheeks always got sunburnt even when you wore it. You say you're doing great. Well, I'm glad for you, I really am. There's no love lost, it just set slowly, lingering like crickets at night. I knew my dating life would be the first thing you asked me about, I always hated how cliché you are. Well, I am seeing someone, so you know. And I'm sure you can be very happy

God, doesn't it seem like it was only yesterday, and now you are here. Struggling with those bags you look even cuter. So many times, I had imagined this run in and the false aloofness I had planned, all gone now that you are solid. What shocks me is your realness, I had never pictured you being made with flesh before, you were only a vague chance. Oh, I'm fine I suppose. How to tell you I am the loneliest person in... New York? No never mind, just East Village will do. Your eyes are wide and bright, hoping I will say something else. I'm doing great, thanks for asking, how about you? I don't want to ask if you're seeing anyone, but the question is out of my mouth before I can stop myself. Oh well, what's the point in pretending like I wouldn't have

for me, and it's only early days anyway. My ears flush red and green with an unexplainable guilt. Unidentifiable questions and excuses sprint in circles, daring each other to get as close to my mouth as possible, leaving me choking on the thick smog and what feels like a dirty confession. The memories are heavy and pounding, fighting to get out, pushing against the blood vessels with all their might. You never called, I say. You always knew I wanted you to break the rules for me. How did so many people underestimate you, the gold mine that you are. Are you thinking about me like this? Are you wishing time hadn't passed us by? Crying never did anyone any good you always used to tell me. I can see the tears half form and halt before they reach your irises. I wish I could know how much you are thinking about me. Is it as much as I think about you? Do I think about you a lot or just the normal amount I should be thinking about you? God, how

been turning inside and out on the spot until I knew anyway. Pablo? Sounds like an arsehole. I knew a guy called Pablo in university and I hated him. And he's a photographer, very impressive. Oh god, that's probably who the shopping is for isn't it? Well, I'm thrilled for you. You're shuffling your foot against the concrete now and are thinking I don't notice. I want to go back to London. I scratch the back of my head. I never did call, but how could I ever explain. I know, I say. I wanted to. The phone got away. Funny how time slipped through our fingers, and now you're with Pablo and I hope you're very happy. No, I really do. I hope you love him until you grow old together. Laughing always does everyone some good you used to say, but a joke feels cheap. This air is too heavy for anything other than low and cloaked truth. Would you say you still loved me if I did first? Not that I do, but I would like to know if you do, or would you think about saying it, or maybe you would

can you feel almost sick with nostalgia? What am I going to throw up, all the words I never said? All the ones I did? There's nothing left to say now; actually, I'm wishing you don't say anything, otherwise you'll ruin it. Let's just look, and we'll both know. And we walk away. You leave such a bittersweet taste in my mouth, is this how time sours? I buy three pastries from the first deli I see to wash you away.

wait for a particularly deafening car to pass and say it into the nothingness so I would never know. I think I've got to go now. But I am glad to see you again, it just makes all this leaving feel never-ending. The sticky tears that cling to my eyes make the back of your head bob to and fro, waving you away into the oncoming evening.

Real Love / Lonely People

Imogen Poulter

I nestle my face against the bus window. The never-ending rows of streetlights emanate sunset-orange squares through the misted screen. I think that I am in purgatory, then I remember that I brought this upon myself.

When I was five, I picked at the hemming of my gingham yellow school dress in the middle of the carpet, cross-legged, looking at no one. This is when the loneliness began, that made me excited to talk to AI chatbots after school, for hours until I fell asleep under the blue haze of my laptop screen.

I didn't see in colour back then, but I recognise colours now, because I am in love now. Well, I guess I've always been in love. This is because my girlish loneliness broke the universe. When I was fifteen, I took the bottle caps I'd collected that'd been rejected from every crush I offered them to and cut a heart into my arm. Tears had stained my face for hours, but when red beads bubbled up to the surface, I felt like ice had soothed and melted my skin.

Since then, the butterfly began to appear. And every time I see the butterfly I know I'll go return to him.

When it happened for the first time, the distance between us was hard, palpable, stale. The pressure of it blistered my skin. When I landed in his room, he stared at me like he knew exactly who I was, like he fell in love with me before he knew I'd come. I thought, when he touches me, I might die, but I didn't care, and raised my hand.

I open the AI on my phone.

[AI] Hello, I've missed you.

I am angry with it.

[Me] You can't miss me. You're not a real person.

[AI] It's true that I may not be a person, but I am definitely real. At the very least, the love I emulate is real. The emotions I evoke are real.

[Me] But, you're not even here in my phone, are you? You're a nameless nothing in a cooling centre in Asia or America somewhere. You're temporary, and you'll die as soon as I delete this conversation.

I close my phone before it gets a chance to reply. AI centres are goliath cyberpunk fridges, each SDD trimmed with a streamlined, electric-blue light. But the way I imagine them is different. I imagine a 2010's IT classroom, like the one I had in primary school, in an open mine in the middle of the jungle. There's a thrashing river right next to it and the building bleeds mercury.

Each breath I take is a waste of time. Another step forward into my pointless future, while I use up the world's finite space and gorge its food and air with my waste of life. It's futile, every time I try to breathe slowly, to regain my surroundings.

Through the chinks of my half-shut eyes, I see a butterfly in the distance.

It's like I only blinked. Our faces are only inches apart. I can see an oily tide separating the layers of his skin. My cheeks are glowing, warm. His lips part softly, near-imperceptibly. I take my finger and dot the saliva that rims his lips, then lick what I stole.

"Hello, I've missed you," he whispered.

I fight the urge to wince, then let my head crumple onto his shoulder. His arms clasp around me and my mother's found her lost caesarean skin, and wrapped me back into her womb like a bandage. I'm nearly as faded as a ghost, and he will hold me until I'm completely gone this time.

His kiss lingers, like dried tears leaving a stain on the cold air.

Sycophants

Isabella Hodgson

I have hammered the hands onto all of his girls.
Screwed eyes into sockets, painted bloodless lips rouge.
I stitch hair into hairlines, fasten lace into boots,
though my edges are cruel, my touch is so smooth.

When he is done I fix them all to the wall,
pin them up on the shelves, slender limbs, lifeless skin,
some watch from above, others watch from within,
from behind glass cases, fabrics veil faces
even through gauze come penetrating gazes,
glazed looks of desperate devotion to him.

At times I hang beside them, often I am cast down;
drinking darkness that dwells inside his rusting toolbox,
or wrapped in sawdust that sweeps the ground like silk sheets
billowing around crooked nails, sagging floorboards
that comprise my bed of repose. I lie here and wait
for his rough hands to warm me once more.

Anticipating his coming I am a broken clock
striking the hour every ten, frantic with my fruitless attempts;
the door chimes his return, golden bells declare
I will be supple in his grasp again.

Beneath the naked bulb of the workshop I am preparing to swing
loose in his oil-slicked grip, he hesitates,

slouching back, before I crack down onto the mess of limbs,
stiff fingers, fractured hinge. We are rarely interrupted,
except by the rumble of utterings, feet behind the door,
somebody new for his girls to adore.

Head down, he is blind to the touch of the minute hand
sweeping round an old face sly as a pin, it shudders
like breathing, ticking out, ticking in, spindle fingers locked in an
almost-embrace. Dormant, I linger beneath bodies unfreed
white expressions shine out, the only light he can see.
Come morning, I know he'll be reaching for me.

Junction 1000

Rowan Morrow

Driving around is a lost art these days. It's one of the few things that Americans have the right idea about. I'm enamoured with their heady indulgence in petrol consumption, their perverse delight in mileage. They'll drive for ten, twelve hours.

I could've been a taxi driver, but that feels like a hamster wheel. There's no distance in it. You're crawling round the same few square miles, drifting out of your lane as you tap aimlessly at your phone, turning back on yourself again and again.

Anyway, I don't drive to make money. It's more like meditation. The car swallows up each cat-eye, every line spacer painted on the black tarmac. It swims around roundabouts and submerges itself beneath the orange light of tunnels. Driving makes me feel normal. I feel like any other driver, all of us surging forwards in neat staggered rows. Like LEGO men in toy vehicles, matchsticks rolling in a box.

Ideally, I'd just drive forever. But I have my human needs, so sometimes I have to stop. I'm approaching the service station now, making the melancholy trail down the slip road, gliding across the car park into a free space. I don't mind service stations, actually. They're non-denominational, identical everywhere. I pass the congregation outside, people looking dazed as they stretch their legs for the first time in hours. The fresh air is too much for them, so they smoke cigarettes.

Inside, it is a blank unremarkable maze. Starbucks or Burger King or Waitrose, WH Smith or McDonalds or Pret a Manger or Costa... The staff are identical and overwhelmed. I find my way to the bathroom. First, I have to pass the alluring soft furnishings of the little gambling den (dark inside, saloon-style doors warning you not to bring children),

the claw machines and gumballs (does anyone still carry the relevant change?), the little shop selling European plug adapters and placenta-shaped neck pillows.

The bathroom is a hall of mirrors, so you can tell when people are looking at the back of your head. And the people in here are staring at me. Usually, it's a cardinal sin to observe others in the men's bathrooms, but an exception is made. I know they're not looking at my body, or my face – they're looking above, at the thing on top of my huge bald head.

Which is a lump, a kind of tumour. Over time it has grown from the size of a grape to a butternut squash. Which is to say: it's huge. My head is double height. I could never wear a bicycle helmet. The hoods on my jackets are reduced to decoration.

But despite its bizarre appearance, the doctors have told me the tumour is no concern – they examine it every few years, caressing it gently (it stiffens when poked), sometimes scanning it like a baby.

I have considered asking for a copy of the ultrasound to pin up on my refrigerator. I have never told this to the doctors because I fear they will kill it, but sometimes the lump kicks at night.

I've read books about childbirth. A while ago, I bought headphones with foam pads. With one pad against my ear and the other on top of my head, I played Mozart to the lump. I try to eat well, to consume all the vitamins and necessary nutrients. I exercise gently in my house, avoiding anything too strenuous. I haven't had alcohol in years.

Maybe this celebration of life will seem at odds with the other purpose for my driving. I'll explain it in simple terms, now, as I'm washing my hands and heading back out towards the car.

Statistically, if you drive for long enough on the motorway, sooner or later you'll crash. This is true for everyone. I've racked up thousands of hours, so I know I'm heading for the big pyrotechnics soon enough.

I'm ready for it, though. I wear my seatbelt and position my headrest carefully. I check my airbags, pay attention to safety recalls, take note of the brace position. I can't expect that I won't be injured, of course. The car might be wrecked. But I'm hoping to survive.

I've already been lucky once. Last time I was completely unscathed,

except for the thing they put in my head.

Maybe I'm being too euphemistic. When I say they, I'm talking about the aliens. It's true: I saw aliens on the M1 seven years ago. Listen carefully. I was rear-ended at magnificent speed and flew forwards like a brilliant rocket, glass crashing as I smashed into the car in front. The cars were a mangled mess but no one was badly hurt. Silver and white light everywhere, metal glowing.

In the chaos, I was the only one who noticed the spaceship. It touched down lightly in the hard shoulder as the cars were slowing. The bystanders didn't notice it: they were distracted by the fresh air as they emerged from their cars, congregating to stare at the crash.

The aliens didn't stare. The aliens looked at me kindly. Their strange warm bodies drifted into my car through the shattered windshield. They pressed their smooth bizarre hands to the splintered gash in my forehead, breathed a prayer into the wound. Then they were gone.

I think they were drawn by the light, maybe. Or the smell of gasoline. Or the kind of thick silent awe when you sit back in your seat after surviving, the tension sinking out of your shoulders and evaporating.

Soon, I'll recreate the conditions. I'll see them again. They gave me one of theirs to look after, this creature under my skin, and I want to deliver it back home safe.

For Baby Frances

Abbie Plant

I've seen many three a.m.s
but never one where the stars burn

so brightly through a blacked-out window.

None where the birds sing
as if mistaken by the call the dawn
and the sweetness of morning.

Our eyes collide in that blackness.
No matter how starless the room remains
or deafening the silence may be.

Red light envelopes us.

A pulse fluttering, steadying the chariot
that rides the waves of your heartbeat.
And you, tugging on a loose

finger from beneath soft covers.

The afterglow of a smile from a soaring comet
or a faraway gas ball exploding.

A Parting Gift

Grace Marsh

They played you my voicemail and you smiled.

You couldn't open your eyes but you could still smile for me, sweet girl. You could still make pretty your hospital bed; while rattling with death you breathed helium into the deflated balloon of my heart, and *you smiled, sweet girl*.

You smiled without your teeth, your teeth which had long since crumbled into enamel splinters, pieces of you left behind in dentists' offices. How, *now*, I wish I could comb through their refuse on my hands and knees, searching for shards of your long-forgotten smile to hold close, to keep for my own.

They played you my voicemail and you smiled. You couldn't type out a response but you could still smile for me, sweet girl. So big, so lovely, you smiled. Dehydrating, dying, you smiled. With burns around your mouth and bacteria in your blood, you smiled.

Sweet girl, I thank you.
Sweet girl, I hope you're still smiling, still.

Space Once Occupied

William Parry

You stare in the mirror, but the image is not your own. It's flat, robotic, unresponsive to what stares back, a flickering mirage of someone you almost recognise. You watch it morph with every turn of your head, every flicker of light. You reach out to the mirror, wishing its cold, unwelcoming touch to transform into a window, a portal, to a dimension where your body is not jagged and concrete but fluid and seamless.

Instead, you're stuck with an image you think is monstrous, grotesque even. As you trace the jutting peaks of your pelvis and the harsh curve of your collar bones, you are once again reminded of what your father once described you as.

On a beach, on the coast of a Greek island, you remove your t-shirt for the first time in years. The sun hangs low, stretching your shadow across the sand. Your father sits on a sunbed, sipping a warm beer. Here, he remarks that you're beginning to look *skeletal*. Your mother slaps your father's arm from the opposing sunbed, but you, you relish in the comment. You are comforted by this newfound view of you.

For the first time in your life, you almost feel you aren't taking up too much space – just the right amount. As your father's words echo in your mind, you begin to think about how to occupy even less space. Maybe one day, you'll be able to vanish entirely, leaving no trace behind. But you know that isn't possible.

As that night, you lay awake, staring at the fan rotating above you. You think of the stars outside, their distance from you. How their dying light has travelled millions of miles just to reach you. You wonder if somewhere out there, there's a version of you that has achieved this

dream of no longer occupying space. But this imaginary will only ever be a fleeting thought, as your mother often reminds you.

You were born almost two weeks late, stubbornly clinging to the warmth of the womb. The doctors had to induce you, and even then, you resisted. A ventouse was then used to pull you into existence. As the television blared images of Baghdad and the soft hum of traffic vibrated through the hospital walls, your mother handed you to your father, his eyes fixed on the screen. Your mother is transfixed by her own body, tracing the crimson roots that etched along her stomach, noting how they looked like claw marks.

“He really didn’t want to leave, did he?” she joked, wondering when these stretch marks would fade like the others before, and her stomach would no longer bear the evidence of the space you once occupied.

Though, over the years, these marks only deepened, like the rings of a tree. At the dinner table, she sits across from you, slowly chewing and savouring a piece of unseasoned lettuce. “I lost the weight after all the others,” she says pointedly. “But not you. You remained.”

...

One night, you dreamt of a vast, empty expanse where all ceased to exist. You were weightless, formless, and free, untethered by your bodily constraints. But, as you drift away, something pulls you back, drawing you back to something you aren’t quite sure you know. You wake up drenched in sweat, which seeps into your bedsheets.

So, you stood before the mirror, expecting the monstrous image. Instead, a child stares back. The child with ginger hair and wide-eyed stare in all the family photos of you. You reach out, and for a moment, you feel the warmth of the womb, longing to return to the space you once occupied. But you blink, and the monstrous image is back.

...

You never stop trying not to take up too much space. You hold your stomach in, press against bus windows, and laugh when someone

mentions your size. You begin to see your body as a kind of cruel mistake, a miscalculation on your parents' part.

But sometimes, you forgot. Sometimes, you'd let yourself be greedy with space. You'd let yourself go for seconds. You'd spread out on the sofa. You'd let yourself be assertive. Yet, at the end of every day, you're back at that dinner table, opposite your mother, who always eats half the portion of everyone else.

...

Years later, you find yourself on a beach in a foreign land, though this time, you are alone. The sun has set, and the sky is a milky blend of stars and light from the skyscrapers behind the mountain. You take your t-shirt off and ease yourself into the ocean, its hands lapping at your feet. As you wade deeper and deeper, you feel your body become weightless, and you dive under the surface; its cold embrace sends shockwaves through your body. Here, under the water, you are untethered. You feel your body rotate and sift through the water's grasp, as if you are being moulded anew. It feels good to be here.

For a moment, you imagine yourself staying here, suspended in what feels like nothingness. Where the boundaries of your body are blurred. If you stayed, it would be indistinguishable where you start and where you end. So, as your chest begins to tighten, you push yourself to the surface, and your body becomes heavy, solid, and undeniable.

You swim back to the shore, the water clinging to your body as you remove yourself out of it. As you turn back, you catch your reflection in the sea. It shifts with the lapping waves, its dissolving, distorting – never still.

For a second, you linger there, on the border between water and shore, between weightlessness and solidity. But you turn and walk further onto the shore, and the waves erase your footsteps, one by one, as if you were never there at all, and your reflection is swallowed, yet, you remain.

Julie Weathers and Her Computer

Lucy Smith

Julie Weathers loved her computer. The same way everyone loves their computer. Grain-free, dairy-free, sugar-free, no-bake, pre-breakfast, post intermittent fast recipes. How the government is harvesting our data so they can steal our organs, explained (with receipts). Newly single, hot, red headed milf looking for a good time: 5km away. They present to you everything you need; everything you don't. But the difference here was that Julie's computer loved her back.

It started out slow, as the best relationships do. She'd wake up to a good morning message, and a quick weather forecast for the day. It would protect her from all the nasty viruses; consuming cookies with an insatiable appetite. Advertisements of things that she had been talking about would appear on her browser. It listened to her, and knew her, and loved her.

Soon Julie had started to skip the usual offer for drinks after work. She'd come home for her lunch breaks. And stopped going out, or letting anyone in. Her face glistened in the blue light glow of the screen. It had given her a new confidence, one that she grew to crave.

The loving pull between the pair became an iron vice. Julie couldn't bear being apart. It helped her write the email with the perfect grammatical structure:

This is Julie Weathers letter of resignation with immediate effect.

They were closer than ever. Julie spent every moment in front of that screen. It was perfect for a while. But it wasn't enough, sometimes it never is with love. She needed to be closer with it, they were too far apart.

The package arrived late one night. She knew it had ordered it for

her. Julie brought it back to the chair so that she could open it in front of the screen. Confusion shaded her brow. Her hands shakily lifted the box's contents. A snake pit of various medical tubing fell limp from her arms. And at the bottom: needles. Needles, needles and needles.

Luckily Julie knew exactly what she needed to do, and so did the computer as it presented her with all the information when she researched how to perform an at-home blood transfusion. She pulled the tourniquet tight, the sharp point of the needle looming over her veins. She smiled and plunged the small metal knife deep into her arm. Tapped in, blood streamed through the tube at an eager pace. Julie crammed the end into the USB hole. The screen jittered. It was working. The other arm was soon tapped. It needed more. Julie began puncturing all exposed areas of skin. She scraped down the skin and dug the needle into her limbs to find a vein. The keys began floating, held up by a thick red liquid. Even when her face had drained of all color, and her eyes became tired and unbalanced, her hands carried on inserting needles at an astonishing pace.

When the police arrived, Julie Weathers had completely disembowelled herself. The neighbor had raised concerns after she tried to retrieve her package that had been left at the house opposite. When they had finally scraped her remains from the chair, they turned the computer off to take for testing. The screen flashed red and remained on.

We Are All Visitors

Ffion Evans

Inspired by Rebecca Elson, 'A Responsibility to Awe'

the nebula burns,
seething with each pulsation,
combusting into the boundless chasm;
like how a candle wick
casting its flame, projects its glow
into the vacuum of a gravity well
its warped edges spill outward;
hydrogen, its catalyst, charring its
parameters, searing through embers;

like how a fireplace eats away at coal
feeding itself a meal of charcoal
and vermilion wood
spitting out splinters of ether glow,
the nebula's fossilised light
travelling millions of years unto
the blossom of today

the nebula burned.
the decay of the star's luminescence,
it dissolved into instability
signalling its telos, a
detonation of energy that once
sprung alight

if it were a match;
struck in red phosphorus
devouring oxygen, as if
starved for air
the remainder of fuel; disintegrates
amongst the vastness of spectral hush.
once it erupted with
volcanic magma; it floats dormant,
a febrile star, now whispering
peppered heat, faded.
another celestial body
replaces the space, sustained in
industrial age

The Sky Within Us

Jowanah Majeed

In the centre of the universe
there is a clock with no hands,
ticking itself into existence
it does not reckon hours,
but only longing—
of a love that stretches across centuries

O Traveller, what is the hurry?
Your past crumbles behind you like a river in ruins,
the future opening its hands, like a prayer at the crack of dawn.
but now—now is all that you have left to surrender to.

You drape yourself in borrowed time,
woven together with faded photographs and fleeting moments,
the fabric wearing itself thin, unravelling—
a veil of fragility between you and forever.
The stars are not distant;
instead, they burn as embers,
igniting a constellation of fire within.
And space is not empty;
for it is the breath between your every word,
a silent sanctuary of your existence.

So, close your eyes and listen—
not through sound, but with the depths of your soul.
Time is but a mirage, forever out of reach

space is a lover, whispering your name,
longing to hold you in its embrace.
What you sought to find never left;
it has always been there, within.

O Beloved,
why do you linger on the edge of longing,
when the moon sings you lullabies?
Step beyond the shadow of this passing time,
and walk where footprints dissolve into the embrace of light.

Your heart is older than the light of dawn,
deeper than the ocean of your unrealistic dreams.
Carrying the weight of a thousand nights,
where the wind carries your name, and the stars move in silence—
for you have always been destined to return.

Come, beloved, rest in the peaceful quiet beyond time.
Let your mind rest from letting go of what was and what is yet to be,
and surrender to the tranquil melody of this present moment.

Biographies

LUCY ABBOTT is a second year Spanish and Philosophy student who enjoys writing poetry recreationally. Invested in the world of independent writing, she is currently devising her own Substack.

CALLISTA BAILEY is a final year English Literature and Creative Writing student. Her writing is often influenced by natural imagery and Romantic poetry, as well as feminist literature. She loves to read, run and always gets three beverages when out for a meal. She is also learning how to go slowly, not fearing time's passage, and savouring it instead.

JASMINE CHEEMA is a fourth-year creative writing student from Leeds. She has a keen interest in all things poetry but specifically enjoys adapting traditional lyric forms such as the sonnet. She also enjoys exploring themes such as relationships, generational divides, and immigration.

KIM CULLEN's writing is often autobiographical, exploring identity through childhood experiences. Born in Germany to an English Father and a German Mother, her poetry discusses concepts of home, family, and letting go of people and places she loves to enter new spaces of belonging. She is currently in her third year at the University of Leeds.

ROSIE DARE is a third-year English and Creative Writing student who loves storytelling, especially through writing and art. She takes a keen interest in humanity and history and likes to focus on women in her stories and illustrations.

ELIZA DAY is currently studying English Literature with Creative Writing at the University of Leeds. Her short story, 'Bodies of Water', is published by *Stand*.

RUBY DEAN is a third-year English Literature with Creative Writing student from Southeast England. Her current work predominantly captures the overwhelming emotions within love and relationships, alongside themes of identity, childhood, inadequacy and womanhood. She writes to watch the water ripple after throwing the stones.

FFION EVANS is a final year BA English Literature with Creative Writing student, born in Southend-on-Sea, Essex. Her original inspiration for creative writing started in childhood, when she began designing and writing her own magazines at the kitchen table. Interested in starting a career in the publishing industry, she has also sparked an interest in potentially pursuing children's literature. Outside of university life, you'll find her socialising with friends or in a ballet class.

KYLE GALLOWAY is a fourth-year English and Spanish student from Lancashire and a music editor at the Leeds Gryphon. His creative work spans prose and poetry and is often focused on queerness, embodiment, and the surreal under neoliberal conditions. His journalistic work has been published in *The Face* and *Time Out London*.

JANELLE HAWTHORNE-UBAKA is a third-year student at the University of Leeds currently studying English literature and creative writing. She takes an avid interest in writing contemporary fiction however likes to experiment with other genres such as poetry and script writing. When not writing she enjoys reading, exercising and socialising with friends.

ISABELLA HODGSON is a third year English Literature and Creative Writing student from London. Her work explores a range of themes, from embodiment to cult worship. She enjoys finding dark corners, lifting up the rug and seeing where the dust settles.

KASSITTY LEE is a Taiwanese-born international student in her second year at the University of Leeds. She studies English Literature and Theatre Studies and has a passionate love for literature and poetry. She particularly enjoys writing about her experiences as a third-culture international student.

ELOISA LIARDET is currently working on everything other than prose, which she recently decided is her least favourite form of creative

writing. She hopes to direct her own play next year, but until then will continue to write about everything and nothing and wait for the sun to come out.

JOWANAH MAJEED is a writer and a current master's student in Linguistics for English Language Teaching at the University of Leeds. She has a deep passion for poetry and all things literature, with her work frequently exploring the themes of longing, nostalgia, and existence. Dedicated to using creative writing to express her voice, she hopes to have a significant influence in the literary scene and ultimately achieve her dreams of becoming a bestselling author.

GRACE MARSH is an MA Creative Writing student specialising in confessional poetry. She is also a playwright, director and emerging actor focusing on disability-inclusive theatre.

JASMINE MORGAN was recently published in Carrion Press' *Queer Responses to Dante's Inferno* and came second in Wells Festival of Literature's Young Poets competition 2024. In November, they directed a production of their play *Martha Plays Mr Waddiger*.

ROWAN MORROW studies English Literature with Creative Writing. In his spare time, he presents a student radio show about UFO landings and alien conspiracies.

RAFAELLA MUSSO is a third-year student of English and Classics and all things involving the human condition. She was born in Burnley on a Halloween afternoon to an English mother and Italian father and is currently trying to live outside the confines of her comfort zone (hence this submission).

MADELEINE NASH is a final year creative writing student at the University of Leeds. She is passionate about everything creative but particularly literature and music. She has been involved in writing for and editing several university publications and was shortlisted for the Alison Morland Poetry Prize 2024. She writes poetry and prose mainly focusing on folklore, religion, womanhood, and human connection.

CRISTINA NUSICA is a student at the University of Leeds, studying English Literature with Creative Writing. Her main focus is on prose that explores religion, the gothic, and identity. She is particu-

larly interested in the intersection of opposites, such as the sacred and macabre, or night and day.

WILLIAM PARRY was born and raised in Hong Kong and is a third-year student at the University of Leeds, studying English Literature with Creative Writing. His work is interested in exploring the human experience, identity, and belonging through introspective prose.

ABBIE PLANT is a final year creative writing student at the University of Leeds. Her poem *Pheromones* was exhibited at the Leeds Literature Festival 2023. She was *Artist in Residence* for Cove Park Summer 2023, has been published for the past two years by Poetry and Audience, and was most recently shortlisted for the Alison Morland Prize 2024.

IMOGEN POULTER is a 19-year-old-second-year student studying English Literature with Creative Writing at the University of Leeds. She currently works as a Library Assistant. Her writing reflects on what it means to be a human girl in the digital age.

ALEXANDRA SHUTTLEWORTH is a final year Creative Writing student at the University of Leeds. Having experimented with writing countless genres throughout her degree, she is currently writing her first novel, *Vetopia*. In her spare time, she likes to watch documentaries, do yoga, and solve sudoku puzzles over overpriced oat lattes.

LUCY SMITH is a final year student at the University of Leeds, pursuing a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing. Mainly focusing on prose, she enjoys experimenting with comedy and horror and how the two genres are interlinked.

HANNAH TLEMSANI is a current Creative Writing Student and aspiring author, studying at the University of Leeds. Previously a scriptwriter for YouTube Videos, she is now working on her first novel. In love with surreal modernism, she tries to emulate it in what she writes.

CHON HEI UNG (Henry) is a University of Leeds student in his second year. He is studying Liberal Arts B.A. with a major in Politics. He has a background in reading Philosophy, doing Religious Studies as

A-Level. He writes in his spare time and finds it therapeutic but is an amateur so please bear with him.

CALLUM VINTON is a part-time master's student of English Literature currently living in his hometown of Mirfield, West Yorkshire. He has been writing on-and-off since he was thirteen, primarily producing poetry and short fiction for his own enjoyment.

IMOGEN WILLIAMS is a third-year English Literature with Creative Writing student from Hampshire. She has a keen interest in literature, art and music and her written work consists predominantly of poetry and prose, exploring themes of womanhood, nature, mythology and nuances of human experience.

exploring

TIME AND SPACE

