

With 25

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They will laugh again,
 these eyes of mine.
I will make them live.

Stretch bend hop skip jump run walk swim stride tiptoe kneel
swing sway jog sprint leap hold catch throw lift carry hold
clap touch feel stroke hit smack punch poke wave point pray
dance sip drink scream speak whisper sing shout hum cough
sneeze blow pout grin grimace scowl smile beam pull push lick
suck swallow shake hear listen pop see peer blink sleep snooze
slumber rest tire fall stumble hurt think believe imagine calculate
add subtract write draw paint build kill birth bear worry fear cry
look listen sense intuit judge praise thank scorn mock criticise
plan rescue save destroy abuse maim injure digest love sex play
giggle hiccough burp fart fuck shy force like eat chew shuffle
shrink pee poo beat bleed stand roll lie spy rub die live adore
adorn corrupt rot decay vomit choke puke cough inhale breathe
wheeze struggle win lose hunch hunker step climb cling deny
ignore pretend pursue resist understand create express explain
communicate comprehend tell confide secrete come whimper
sob suss analyse scrutinise manipulate control overpower
overbear overlook understand amaze embrace empathise realise
rise wise disguise worry ache endure hold help save wake wallow
stretch stoop spit somersault cartwheel crawl toddle screech
panic stress pump stunt nurture fertilise develop spurt ooze
warm chill clean smooth stroke carry bond change grow sneak
steal store remember forget allow stop permit forbid object agree
ok disagree disbelieve believe conceive relieve grieve leave heave
lumber tug drop stop choose lose confuse muse improve punish
finish wish win dream hypnotise convince connive connect
commune career cheer hear clap applaud ignite alight ride sit
read laugh crash flash blast fuss trust fear shrink drown suffocate
contemplate think wink convince smell stink tramp trudge
move groove sing enfold enrich hug hope float fly try enthuse
defuse amuse write expand maximise minimise overload goad
tease complain snitch whistleblow dive toss turn roll sleepwalk
discover munch crunch break take filch pocket borrow beg
frown judge accuse charge stampede vibrate cringe duck tumble
rumble picnic trick deceive lie mumble retract admit embroider
embellish relish chuckle weep cringe whinge argue moan bore

change alter recreate reinvent identify spy watch snoop sniff
hunt shoot dart anaesthetise cure release escape savour appreciate
inflate breathe swell puff smoke choke cough hack report reply
respond allow permit persist insist command instruct order
tidy ignore blink ostrich worm burrow tunnel drive speed race
celebrate spray bubble dribble quibble duel fire burn flare light
bite kiss nibble pinch nip slap slip slide screech skid skate wheel
steer accelerate brake halt stop die bury shovel crumble weep
howl savage ravage ravish seduce

Finding the mostly abstract

Finding Peace – the world avoids total blindness by the last man losing just the one eye. He becomes King and has a dream. Another imagines all the people living life in peace by the simple will of just giving it a chance. Hasbro reimagines the game of Risk for pacifists, though some still claim the dice are loaded. Some poets reverse the trudge of Owen's boots so the Lie comes first and starts to unpack, till they are beggars no longer removing their sacks, and moving back through trenches they simply have to fill up. The rest escapes the poem but leaves us with a sense of hopefulness. Other poets use fragments of found poems to sound confused in borrowed voices that crack at the edges. Slick Oil Barons become fossilised and their sires lose faith, returning to worship new / old Gods: Apollo, Poseidon, Boreas, Notus, Zephyrus and Eurus. They are power-harnessed to the max. War loses profit and few have a taste for it, and those who do seem bitter. The War machine gets cranky and eventually seizes. Books on war become guides on what not to do by doing it in words; films of war do the same thing but show how horrible you would look like doing it. Treading softly on landmines will do more than just disrupt your dreams. Give them a wide birth. American's finally get less happy with the trigger by charging a King's ransom for bullets. A crash of cymbals: a blindfold, glasses with a valentine tint, a dove on a wing and prayer sickened with olives.

Finding love – an online chat site that matches up each other's greatest flaws, *'I like someone who will get annoyed at the smallest of things: toothpaste caps, toilet seats, crumbs on the couch, but has completely no concern about the starving millions or ecological crisis.'* A seven year old perfume still fully squirtable with a promised scent of things to come; a measuring device that overestimates swiftly then undervalues upon duration; handcuffs that are playful and fluffy peeling off to a cold steel singe; a wet bar drunk dry as beer goggles are exchanged for contacts for laser

eye surgery before eventually going blind, deaf and dumb. *You're not the same person I fell in love with* she says, with an evil malice that you can no longer see, hear or speak back to.

Finding yourself – pay closer attention to the person you're standing in; take a selfie in a mirror and then talk backwards to your representation; keep firing off rhetorical questions as if they demand an answer; keep searching in unlikely places and behind the sofa. Try shock therapy by telling your friends to start calling you by another name while reinventing a complete new history for you. Get so trolled you forget ever telling them this. Some of your friends might actually begin to hate this new person they've arbitrarily created and start challenging you on personal issues; some may decide you're a bigot or a bore and not wish to hang out with you until you change your attitude. Others might notice an improvement. Allow some time to see if this will snap you into a new state of being or if you lose your sense of identity entirely. Take a poll on who people think you are, allow for descriptive answers not just multiple choice. Use graphs and flow charts if they will benefit. Mull for a while then settle on some all-considered equation. Create algorithm and set out your stall by it.

Finding a pair of socks – they are not in the last place you looked. Socks by definition prefer a different partner or they get worn out by inner souls.

Finding your way – if you try the road less travelled by it will lead to Robert Frost looking dead chilly on a snowy evening. If you try the other one, you will find you have been misled. Follow your nose it is under your eyes for a reason.

Finding time – there is never enough and you can't make it no matter what people say. Time and space are entwined. Get more space, this is at least an achievable goal.

Finding my feet – Head over heels is the normal structural position for a human being. The only time this would appear to be anatomically incorrect is if you were a professional gymnast and spent a high proportion of your day doing handstands, cartwheeling or spinning through 360 degrees on the parallel bars. For them love must be a rare and incredible gift, for us it's no more unique than popping down the shops or sitting on the toilet. I don't know about you but my Achilles' heel has begun spreading to the rest of my body, though I always drag my heels which is difficult whilst I'm digging them in. I have my foot in the door of both camps. I have itchy feet which is always a problem when toeing line. I try to keep my feet on the ground and avoid shooting myself in the foot while others are pulling my leg. I have two left feet and I think on both of them except for the times when one inconveniently lands in my mouth. So I'm a little confused.

Finding the words – What can I say that social media cannot say in a far more mashed and fragmented way. A day in the life of cyber peoples:

Russell Brand has the solution to terrorism

Why I stay on Facebook

Flowers on dessert

It's getting ugly... not

It's our job to light the candles and fill this child's future with flowers

Don't miss out on tonight's 101 million Euro million draw

Please, please, please ALWAYS slice grapes before giving them to children

The beauty of this Friesian took my breath away

Dracula's castle is for sale and just for a few mil it can be yours.
Would you buy it?

Meanwhile in Wales

Would you ever wear a coat from spider's silk?

Kitsch Christmas disco

Kick a celebrity in the bollocks

Apparently I'm an anti-war Jihadist. Who knew?

Curious minds provided by Curious Stream

Navy Seals explain how your ego can destroy everything

Have you ever been so bitchy that you get on your own nerves?

Play Star Trek: Alien Domain and explore what's possible

Meowijuana: Premium catnip for stoned cat that loves to get high

This month it has been 100 years since Albert Einstein presented his theme of General Relativity

These unlucky people totally forgot reflections existed

The Coming of the Hardboiled dicks: The Crime Pulps

Unbelievably HUGE animals that are actually real

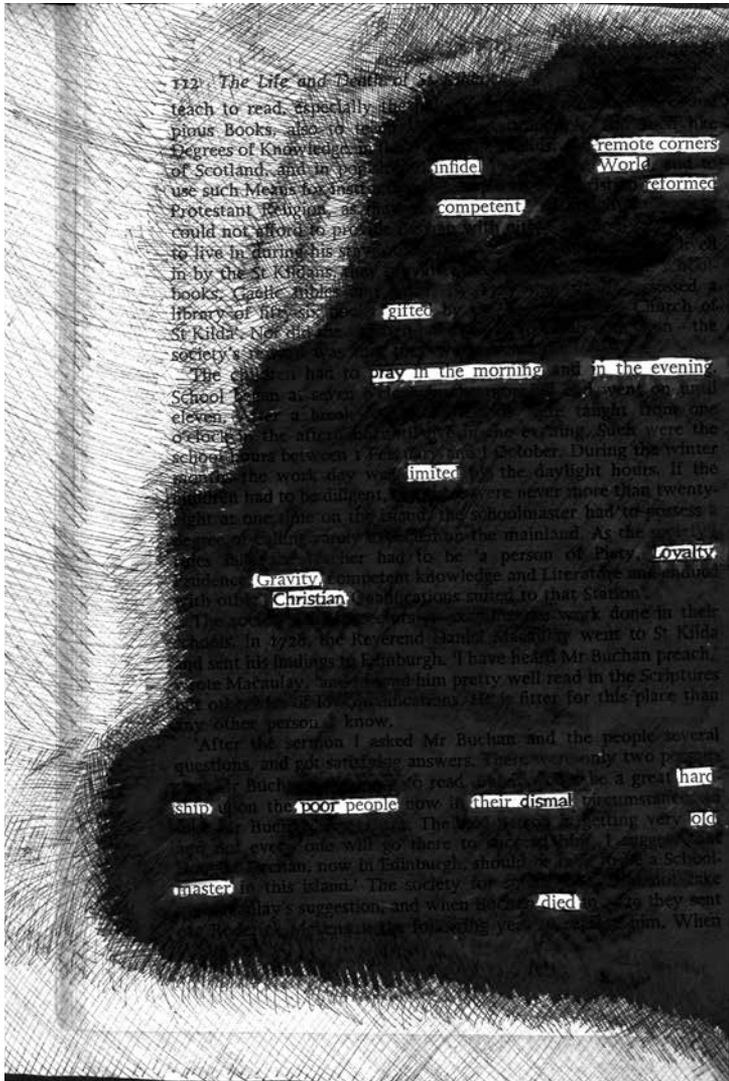
Grandmas are just antique little girls

Finding it all so bloody amusing – whoever said laughter is the best medicine had no actual qualifications as a medical practitioner you know; at best he was a quack or homoeopathist. I'm just saying it's all fun and games until someone gets hurt. Or dies.

Finding the answer – well that is the question, to misquote the Great Dane and the Bard what wrote him. Anyway it's best to leave ourselves open to some of life's great mysteries and not just focus group the hell out of everything. Some things are not just queerer than we suppose but queerer than we can suppose. God does play dice Mr Einstein, not only does he play dice but he's an obsessive gambler who throws them dice on every possible occasion. He is principally uncertain, sometimes particular in his outlook other times waving not drowning. Let's just say he fluctuates. I am not being sexist, this is culturally-infused anthropomorphism for quantum strangeness. I am an atheist and this is not a religious piece.

The Swallows

Framed in the cool sandstone arc of the church door my grandfather points to the swallows nesting in the timber, their home is a globe of mud and hair and sticks. The three chicks chatter as their mother/father feeds them. No words pass between me and my grandfather. He is lost in a moment of longing, he has forgotten that he is holding what he wants, the child that is in flux, me in his arms, the frail remembrance of loss and hope and return. I feel the frenetic energy of the swallow and the grace of youth moving in me, quick, urgent, subordinate. He is dust and sandalwood, his personality set like the illuminations in old texts, cut into thick vellum, the books he loves, the books we have come to see in the church. They were bright once but now are fading.



White Darkness

It was pitch black in the upper district of Southampton. Street lights gave off only paltry light, and may as well have been fireflies listing lazily in the harsh blackness of the winter night, for all the good they did. The only strong light, besides the nearby city hall, was one atop the small bus shelter where a boy, barely out of his teenage years, sat in a dark shabby suit, freshly stained with mud and leaves at the cuffs and collars. The bus he wanted was the bus to Bassett which left at 1:57; he arrived at 1:58. The next would arrive at 2:27, and so he sat and waited patiently.

The boy sat cross legged on the bus stop bench and stared out into the unknown blackness. The wind blew harshly, and the temperature was dropping fast. The suit provided no comfort from the warmth. He checked his phone. 1:59. His local co-op would be closing soon and he had no chance of a pasty. The Tesco on the outskirts of Southampton near Shirley was twenty-four hours but didn't sell hot food after midnight. People called it the *last stop out of hell* due to the frequency of people leaving Southampton, usually for good, passing by. Only travellers from the nearby estate frequented it anyway, and the boy didn't want to get into trouble.

The boy checked the timetable. 2:27 for the Bassett bus. He sat back down and crossed his legs. A cruel gust of wind blew through. He wiped away a tear forming just as it passed. As he wiped and looked to his left, he could see headlights piercing through the blinding blackness. They were moving slowly and had low light LEDs on top as well. Alas, the bus was moving left to his right, meaning it was headed to Shirley. He watched as it passed the Stateman's Impasse pub, recently shut down and without lights.

The boy checked his phone. 2:02. Barely any time had passed. He looked to his left at the grand hall, where a student Christmas ball was being held, and took note of the dazzling fireworks display taking place, and the rainbow lights now being shone into the sky, though they simply dissipated once they hit

the black clouds above. He could feel the cold setting in, perhaps it would start to snow soon, not that it ever set in Southampton. The boy checked the timetable. 2:27 for the Bassett bus. The fireworks were still ongoing as he turned around to sit down again. When he sat, he heard a small **tink** as his jacket's plastic button had cracked and fallen off revealing his un-ironed white shirt and un-belted, ill-fitting suit trousers. He didn't sigh, or show any form of anger or frustration. He did feel twinges of jealousy towards his roommate though. His roommate had an excellent suit, complete with a canvas jacket, which the boy knew was better than his fused jacket. He had a well ironed shirt, perfect fit suit trousers, and polished dress shoes. His roommate looked like James Bond incarnate compared to the boy who looked like Ron Weasley. He should have had tortoise shell buttons like his roommate as well, but he thought they were a waste of money.

The boy checked his phone. 2:06. Time was not on his side. He wondered if when he got back, his girlfriend would be there. He imagined going home, setting down his stuff in his bedroom; going upstairs to his girlfriend's room and knocking. Awaiting a lurid *come in* and acquiescing immediately. He wondered if his roommate would be gossiping with the boy's girlfriend in the adjacent room; the boy was glad to have such a loyal friend. His girlfriend was always laughing and giggling with the roommate. The fireworks display stopped. A crushing silence broke the boy from his reverie. A pair of headlights appeared at his right with LED lights above it. It was only a taxi heading towards the grand hall.

The boy checked the timetable. 2:27 for the Bassett bus. He wiped away another tear and put his hand in his jacket pocket. It ripped and made a glaring hole. Nothing could be stored there now. He loosened his suit collar, only for its cheap cotton to rip slightly. He thought good memories would keep him warm. He thought of fervent assurances of love from his girlfriend. How last week they cuddled with a movie. How she was so forgiving when he had to stay late at the library. How his

roommate offered to keep her company with a board game. The boy shivered. A cold wind blew through and rustled his lengthy, shoddy trousers.

The boy checked his phone. He had a notification. It was from his mate from History class. It read *Best Christmas party ever*, along with a variety of unintelligible emoticons. 2:14. The boy remembered moving through the claustrophobic crowd on the dance floor. He had moved outside to get some air. After some friendly chatter he went over to his girlfriend, who was wearing an excellent canvassed suit jacket over her pure white dress. She turned to him, and her beaming smile turned to a sweet tender kiss on his lips, before talking to her friends again. Almost trancelike, the boy went back inside. After a minute or two with the roommate, he had decided to catch the early bus.

The boy checked the timetable. 2:27 for the Bassett bus. He looked into the darkness at his left. He could hear cries and shouts of revelry but could not see their sources. He wiped his eyes again. He looked to the sky. It had begun to snow. His suit would provide little protection from the elements. Unlike before, he tried to avoid thinking of the roommate, or his girlfriend. They would arrive at the bus stop soon, and he'll look like an absolute fool.

The boy checked his phone. There was another notification, this time from his girlfriend. 2:21. The calls and cries of the crowd drew closer; it seemed the snow spurred them on. The boy decided that he would quite like to walk in snowfall. He got up and crossed the road into the pitch darkness and faced the bus stop, well hidden by dim light and a dark suit. Looking to his right, he saw his girlfriend and the roommate approaching the bus stop. *She'll be in good hands with him* he thought.

The boy checked his phone. Yet another notification. 2:24. He put his phone in his jacket pocket, took one last fleeting look and turned to his left. The snow fell harder, and he ignored the crunch under his foot. The boy walked forth up the long, long road into the uncertain, white darkness.

The Flushing Ferry

A blackened sky celebrates its health with stars
Vanity reigns over self... driving cars
Two faces meet having forgotten their distance
Forever becomes light... flashing on pistons
At the tip of a needle God's love does shine
The Flushing ferry is running fine.

Just give me water begs the dying of brides
Arms take aim in their nuclear strides
Three percent of defence and the hungry are fed
The concept of "I" is the worst lie that's said
Life will but separate and death combine
But the Flushing ferry is running just fine.

Bodies are congested all the ways 'round
The flutter-by desperation crushed at our crown
"Want me – Want *me*" exclaim the wanton few
Lover's loath hatred like a die set askew
A Christ finds new meaning on the A39
Still the Flushing ferry is running just fine.

The past being present – the future... absent
Tablet worship now our greatest descent
Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Like the mind of a child
A perfect amateur to the analytically beguiled
On the blood of their victims the cannibals do dine
Still the Flushing ferry's fucking running just fine.

How can I be both as well as neither? *Neither*
Corrections are pomposity from the back-seated driver
Kill me now so I know how to be alive
A Hindu cow-boy checks his ribs – but survives
The cancer of humanity: malignant... benign
Still the fucking ferry's fucking running just fine.

Sentiments are swallowed and lips... pursed
Give me yer money – chicks always come first
The road crosses continents – filling maps with X's
In the emptiness of nature: what was expected?
Filling one's boots with the fruits of the vine
The Flushing ferry's running just fine.

The speech of a minor each meaning the other
Troubles get worried over... ducking for cover
The old are the new and the rich are the poor
Flotsam and Jetsam on the living-room floor
Give us this day our daily head-line
The Flushing ferry's running just fine.

The Sun never sets and the Moons never rise
There's sweat in the tears of the foolishly wise
I once knew a sailor... No, you've got me confused
Something blue and then borrowed... battered then bruised
Rules are for idiots – where do I get mine?
The Flushing fucking ferry's forever fucking fine.

Old Bridge House, Newlyn

Okay, fine – be with you in fifteen minutes.

Albert had a little black pug which would lie on its back in the crook of his arm as he slept in his suit on the zed-bed in the corner: the two of them would snore, sometimes together, sometimes alternating, until I had to wake Albert – ‘Deidre needs to speak to you’.

Haven’t got one now - next one will be about fifteen minutes. Okay, fine.

It was years later when I learned that she had been the ‘mistress’ of Aleister Crowley. It is thought that she plotted to have a child with him and – once her ambition was achieved – moved to the top of the hill and stayed there until she died.

Wheal Betsy it was called.

Into town? Okay, fine. Be with you in about fifteen minutes.

The office was on the first floor – there was a bakery and a grocers down below. All gone now. Turned it into a gallery but no-one bought anything. Who’d buy that stuff?

Railway Ron is picking up Lamorna Jeff from The Wints and taking him to The Wink – is there anything to come back?

With you in fifteen minutes.

Noddy bought himself a three-wheeler – everyone laughed. They laughed even harder when he turned it over on Ross Bridge. How DID he do that?

Be at the station in fifteen minutes. Okay, fine.

'The Tangled Lives of Hughie Green and Paula Yates', Christopher Green, Robson Books

Dennis phoned from the top of the hill. 'Anything to come down?' As he spoke, four children guided a large white horse into the room and tried to make it sit on the sofa. I don't think horses can sit like that, can they?

Okay, fine. Be with you in fifteen minutes.

His wife had taken up with someone who I later came to know as 'Uncle Frank'. He wasn't my Uncle (he was the relative of a friend) but he was the most miserable git I ever knew. They lived together in a flat on the third floor. No-one ever mentioned that this was odd or unusual. Albert was happy on the zed-bed.

Twenty minutes? I'm sure he's on his way.

I had to go downstairs to answer the door. 'Yes? Sorry, no-one here at the moment. Be about fifteen minutes'. Angrily, very angrily, 'Don't you know who I am?' I did, but I wasn't telling.

We're so pretty, Oh so pretty, We're vacant!

Towards the end, I was working seven evenings a week – 7.00 pm to somewhere between 1.00 and 2.00 am each night. On a Sunday, I would wake Albert at about midnight and he would pay me – £2.00 for each evening, £14.00 in all. After giving my Mother £5.00, I was still left with enough to run my moped, buy books, records and 20 No.6 every day.

Going to be half-an-hour – they're all out.

I used to see the son around town. He wore a white polo-neck jumper, black jodhpurs and riding boots and black leather gloves. He always carried a riding crop and – unusually for those days - his head was shaved. I don't think I ever heard him speak

but I did hear him slurp a cup of tea in the Morrab Creamery as I was eating pork pie. I was too frightened to laugh.

And we don't care.

Dave – I've forgotten Lamorna Jeff. He's been outside the Town Hall for at least two hours. Could you pick him up? He wanted to go to The Barn but he might have changed his mind. No he is there, Leslie saw him just now.

I heard him tell her that she could pay him when the social paid her. 'I'm off' he said. He had his favourites.

Television would finish about midnight. Westward would end with five minutes of a religious talking head – talking rubbish, talking down – and then the screen would fade to a pin-point white dot (I was convinced that there were still programmes going on in there, just very, very tiny) and I would read *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror* and Penguin Modern Classics (they had grey spines in those days).

Posters had been up for weeks. Thursday 1st September 1977. '?' they all said. I had no idea what it meant and was working anyway. I didn't even try to get a night off. That was how I came to miss being a punk rocker.

Don't you know who I am?

Vacant!

The future?

Be with you in about fifteen minutes.

Okay.....

Fine.

Stalking

The 21st Century's Favourite Hobby

It is something that we all do, whether we recognize it, or simply conduct in it subconsciously; we are all guilty of joining in with the rest of them. I have done it by myself, with family members and even alongside a group of girlfriends. Arguably described as one of the most commonly practiced forms of social observation – people watching.

It is a past time this generation looks to do without any occasion, and will readily prepare them selves for hours worth of human observation. Commonly taking place on rainy afternoons, or as an accompaniment to an early morning coffee, we can let the minutes pass us by simply by looking at others. I for example, have been doing so for the last two hours whilst trying to invigorate

Commonly taking place on rainy afternoons, or as an accompaniment to an early morning coffee

my creative juices. Most of the time I will be sat in a window seat of my favourite multi-chain coffee house, sipping Hot Chocolate Milanos and Chai Lattes, staring at the outside world wondering where everyone is going and why. I can and will, get lost with looking at passers by instantaneously finding myself

wanting to know their life story.

You can walk into any café and the people watchers will have taken all outward-facing seats – they're easy to spot. Their faces will be totally engrossed, a milky hot drink cupped with both hands, brows raised, and eyes engaged. If you take the time to *observe* the observers, you can see the creation of individual sto-

ries and adventures being conjured up in their mind. There are also peak times to practice your much loved art form; an early Saturday morning enables you to watch the retail workers open up the shops, the fully functioning farce of a family starting their weekend together, and of course the watchers, the people who

come to watch it all take place. Whilst you may be wondering as to why I am writing such a logistical piece surrounding something as ‘trivial’ as people watching, the answer is that it simply centres from curiosity – *doesn't it all?* People watching is a concept that everyone is familiar with, even if one lies and says that they've never stared at a stranger a little too long, or found themselves wondering ‘*if only that person had chosen different shoes this morning*’ – I say lie, because rightly or wrongly I struggle to grasp the concept that some people haven't done so.

The non-profit ‘Wiki-how’ website even includes a nine-step guide on how to begin people watching, describing it as a social science. Whilst I may be unsure of the need to introduce regulations and steps, I do agree about the existence of a fine line between observation and voyeurism, and that ‘good’ people watching walks the right side of that line. But is there such thing as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ people watching, and does this behaviour crossover to any other area of our lives?

If we are honest with ourselves this is not an isolated event; we are constantly walking this very fine line between a curious cat and nosey stalker – *complete with trench coat and all*. We are notified hourly of other peoples daily goings-on and events. With our forefingers we scroll through other people's days, weeks and even years. The word ‘Stalking’ has become desensitized; it was only yesterday that my girlfriends admitted to each other how long it was until we **stalked** our classmates on Facebook. We are judging what is selectively put in front of us, deciding whether we approve or like what they are wearing or doing. And I warn you, we don't give out likes and favourites to just anybody, my double taps and re-tweets are as hard to obtain as a monogrammed Burberry poncho, and if you even think about wearing tights as trousers, consider yourself un-followed.

However, not only do we subject others to this, we subject ourselves too. For instance, why do I know that the Amaro filter is the best choice for a close up #selfie? We feel

the need to add flattering filters to our what might otherwise be fairly average lives.

According to 'wearesocial.com' on average we spend 4.25 hours on the Internet and in the UK 59% of us have active accounts on the top social networks in the country. We continuously observe others live their lives either from the comfort of our own homes through our laptops and smartphones, or vicari-

ously through coffee shop windows. But why are we so fascinated? Why do I refresh my Instagram so frequently? Should we have this ability, and is there any difference between this online voyeurism and people watching? I do not know the answers to all or in fact any of these questions, and truthfully I don't think we ever will. It's all merely an observation.

Eloquent Pebble — A Radio Play

background sound of television, then over this the noises of two people quietly chatting, cannot decipher words but one is English, female accent, the other a male Nigerian one, then over this distant sound of a car alarm, then over this distant sound of dog barking, then over all this cacophony the close-up sound of a woman softly humming tunelessly, the sound of a door opening and closing, with this the TV and people talking dies away so there is just the distant sound of a car alarm and dog barking and still the humming, close up, slightly breathless as if she is moving, then another door opening and closing, and then just the humming, the humming stops and we hear CAROLINE, a young, English woman:

CAROLINE: (CLOSE) My name is Caroline and I like prunes. Pruuuuuunes. My name is Caro-aro-aro-aro-line. Caralaraline. Another word that sounds like Caroline is Eloquent. These are tongue words, like echolalia, which is the most beautiful word, and what Mrs Keeble says I have. I am echolalia, the most beautiful word. My name is Carolaroline and I like Prunes. P-R-Ruuuu. Pruuuuuuuunes. Mrs Keeble is the best person, she is best because: ONE she is called Mrs Keeble, and Keeble is a good word, like 'Pebble' but like (HIGH-PITCHED) *pebble* and TWO because she has a voice that sounds like this (SCOTTISH) *prunes*. Echolalia is when Mrs Keeble says something, like *I am going to the Zoo* and I say *goingtothezoogoingtothezoogoingtothezoo* because it feels good to say it. My name is Caroline and I like Prunes.

The humming fades back in, further from the mic. Stops.

CAROLINE: (CLOSE) If I was on the radio and I could say what things were like, this is what I'd say. I'd say *My name is Caroline and I like Prunes* and then I'd say that my top five

favourite words are: ONE Echolalia, TWO Prunes, THREE Pram – in no particular order my top five no ten most favourite words are: ONE Echolalia, TWO prunes, THREE Pram, FOUR Caroline, FIVE Eloquent, SIX Pebble, SEVEN Keeble, EIGHT Biscuit, NINE (PAUSE) NINE Ele (LOW) echolalia, prunes, pram, Caroline, Eloquent, Pebble, Keeble, Biscuit, (NORMAL) NINE Banana, TEN Cocoa. Then after that list there would be good sounds. There would be a top ten of sounds. Number One. NO! There would be a countdown. *In at number ten this week...*

Outside noises, a light wind, bit of birdsong, and then closer to the mic, the burbling of chickens, gently clucking to themselves.

CAROLINE: And – and straight in at number nine is...

Silence, a needle being placed onto a vinyl record, the crackle of dust. A record needle being taken off vinyl, gently. pop.

CAROLINE: (LOW) ten, nine – (NORMAL) in at number eight...

Total silence. Then ever so softly, a gentle touching noise, like *thut thut-thut thut*, barely audible, erratic but gentle, peaceful.

CAROLINE: Do you know what this is?

The noise comes in for another five seconds.

CAROLINE: This is the noise of snow falling on a still night. This is good sound number eight. Good sound number seven – goodsoundnumbersevengoodsoundnumbersevengoodsound numberseven – number seven is

Silence then the sound of a fine bone china teacup being placed gently in its saucer.

CAROLINE: Did you hear that?

Repeat of china cup sound.

CAROLINE: Number six is – sixissixissixis- an old favourite...

The crashing of waves on a beach, far off explosions of waves hitting caves. The wave sounds last for 15 seconds, or at least long enough to become hypnotised by the slow pulsing in and out of the waves getting gently louder then dying off again.

CAROLINE: (LOW) that is the sound of waves at the beach –

Suddenly a car alarm starts in the distance. Caroline starts humming. For five seconds we just hear the alarm and Caroline humming. Then the sound of a door opening, a voice from a distance to the mic, it is the Nigerian man, Addi, that we heard earlier.

ADDI: (OFF) Would you like your ear defenders, Caroline?

CAROLINE: (SHOUTING) yes please, Addi.

The door closes.

CAROLINE: The car alarm sounds like this to me:

Suddenly the car alarm noise gets uncomfortably loud. The door opens, noisily over the sound of the car alarm.

ADDI: Here you go.

The door closes. Silence.

CAROLINE: I hear noises with my whole body. Good noises

are like being in duvet. Bad noises are like needles inside my skin, poking outwards. We now interrupt this broadcast to bring you the five worst noises. Number one is:

Loud and close: the sound of a drill.

CAROLINE: (SHOUTING) Number two

Drill stops, the noise of young children in a playground at lunch break.

CAROLINE: (SHOUTING) number three

Children noises stop and are taken over by the sound of the car alarm from earlier.

CAROLINE: (SHOUTING) number four

Car alarm noise stops and to one side of us we hear the noise of someone rustling plastic, uncommonly loudly.

CAROLINE: (SHOUTING) and number five

Plastic rustling stops, a phone starts ringing very loudly. Stops suddenly.

CAROLINE: That's enough of that.

Caroline starts humming again, this lasts for five seconds, gets softer and calmer, stops.

CAROLINE: Good sound number five is heavy rain.

Sound of heavy rain, this last for between five and ten seconds.

CAROLINE: All water sounds are good. Except for washing up. The next good water noise is:

Bubbling, glooping, echoing noise of being under-water.

CAROLINE: but the best water sound is

Tinkling and babbling of a small stream or brook flowing over pebbles and rocks.

CAROLINE: which leaves us with two good sounds. In at number two:

We are back outside, gentle breeze, distant birdsong and then closer, the evening song of a blackbird in summer. His round, full notes fill our ears.

CAROLINE: And finally, at number one, the best sound of all, the one you've all been waiting for *What will it be?*

Silence, then: a sudden crack and break of thunder, it echoes through the speakers, getting louder, dies away, then rumbles again, then a crack, then more thunder, the storm is loud, and close, continues for a while, joyfully intense.

CAROLINE: (CLOSE LOW, THUNDER CONTINUES.)

You have been listening to Eloquent Pebble, with me, Caroline-Caroline-Caroline Jones.

The Orchard

We wandered around Tremough House, through a courtyard with a pond full of fish opening and closing their mouths stupidly at the surface of the water, over gravel and grass, up steps and down paths, until at last we came to the place.

The Secret Garden, I've heard it called, or the Orchard – hidden by trees and surrounded with old stone walls. Apples lined the pathway, some fresh-fallen, others brown and withered and rotten with a sickly-sweet smell. The group was quiet, the only sound was the crunch of footsteps on gravel and, beyond that, birdsong.

I tried to pick words from the Orchard: *heady* and *cloying* for the smell of the rotting apples; *patina* for the thick film of algae that covered the oval pond. I stood at the edge of the pond and held onto a branch that overhung the stagnant water where the fallen fruit didn't float but rather sat still on the green surface. The branch was rough and covered in dry, dusty moss, the kind that flakes off from the tree and falls in your eyes when you're trying to climb it. I imagined the flowers that leant out over the path and brushed against my legs as *reaching*, *grabbing* at passers-by. The Secret Garden: that name fit this place when I first came here, an exciting sense of trespass, of stealing its peacefulness. Now it was the Orchard – there was no element of intrusion or adventure, just placidity, and the smell of the apples.

I carried on groping for words, similes and metaphors I could use to describe what I could sense and experience in this place. Words that when read would translate into something else – a sensation, a feeling, a memory. But maybe too many words fog these things. Too many words build a wall between what is described and who it is described to.

As we left we all noticed the single pear tree overhanging the doorway set into the stone wall. One by one we jumped up to pick a pear from the higher branches. The first one I picked had a little dark hole where it had been eaten away by some bug or another. I discarded it. I jumped and reached higher and

almost brought the whole branch down. The pear was small with rough skin like old, scuffed suede. It crunched when I bit into it and the flesh was gritty. But there were no dark holes, no rotten spots, and the taste was delicately sweet. I ate it down to the core.

Poetic Off License

I cannot and will not write poetry for toffee. Would you mind awfully if I stopped for a coffee?

Have a break, have a kit-kat.

What shall we talk about George football? No we talked about that last week.

Middle of the road Jack, middle of the road!

You seem disinclined to share any history, being an enigma is no sort of victory.

Your poetry sure won't win any prizes, but by dropping the thinly veiled disguises could help you. You know?

You know madam, have a nice day, don't wait so long till you come back this a way.

The poetic off licence is now open for business.
The businessman's thirst is not up for forgiveness.

Homages to mice, red roses and innards, may wax lyrical where you're from.

Tragic round here, you're just dropping an AA bomb.

Hiding in the cemetery, invisible beneath the old apple tree.
There were robots there once don't you know, aaah you would if you were Snow.

The Snow never melted, not even in sunlight, that snow tucked me in and kissed sweet goodnight.

Gratitude, for white snow? Can you embellish? Are you no Mr Poe?

Well, she's not my mum if that's what you think.
A red rose doesn't melt, doesn't take a drink.

Let's have some imagery, more rhyme, some symbolism; let's talk
about Figs light, akin to a prism.

Poetic justice, let's talk about Blake, Holy Thursday; that's not
justice for God's sake.

The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower,
These are words that give poetry its power.

Let's talk about Wordsworth and his lonely cloud wandering.
His daffodils shouldn't leave me pondering.

Daffodils are sunny they shouldn't evoke pain. When daffodils
appear, hearts fill with rain.

On the graves of many, like Triffids they are. Morbid now and
how they have scarred.
Poetry is holy? Holiness no more! Lenore survived, 'twas the boy,
nevermore.

At the Bells of St Clemens, New Year struck again, another year
closer, nearer the end.
Out of the darkness again appears the snow, oh so sad, does the
little one know?

We will not pray, tomorrow or today! And there's snow winking,
always, knowing what I'm thinking.

No praying for us! Not even at Christmas. The poetic off license
is open for business.
The businessman's folly is by no means history. Sorrow repeats,
sorrow, no mystery.

Why can't I wait in the queue? My photos are priceless they're
picture of you.

Twenty minutes left, you're still like a wall. If you want neurosis
flowing, go watch Annie Hall!

The robots are long gone, the snow is still there, though fragile
and poisoned and in need of my care.

Give me Blake's tiger, let us hear him roar, Lenore survived, 'twas
the boy nevermore.

Vegan Tories

fuck.

Have we got your attention now?

Good.

B: Of course there are vegan Tories.

G: So what do we do now?

B: Answer, I guess.

G: Why?

B: Don't ask.

A NASA animation demonstrates how a star would be ripped apart if it got too close to a black hole in space. When a star enters close proximity to a black hole, intense tidal forces rip the star apart. Stellar debris is flung outward at high speed while the rest of the star descends towards the black hole, causing a flare

With Greece on the verge of being ripped apart by black holes. the euro memory as base and superstructure upon which personality is constructed. Remember Corfu? And Syriza/Tsipras tells the troika we have Edna O'Brien saying no, cigarettes and alcohol. After the storm subsided, the land was scarred but we were alright

Let us speak in words that you understand. Hanif Kureishi found that over 1,000 people in the Midlands struggled with eating disorders and of course there are vegan Tories, so many brownies made of hazelnuts, pitted dates and spirulina. Which is why because vitamins B-12, Niacin, Thiamine and of course protein. You don't need as much as you cross fit. TENDER BUTTONS A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE

Seriously, though.

Make a list of olfactory associations.

Make a list of musical associations (songs, etc.)

Make a list of food associations.

Good way to get stories started.

Night jasmine: Messonghi village, summer, walking down from Courti to the 3 K's, Karelia cigarettes, past Time Out bar where Giorgos plays the gin and tonic and would you sing a song? Of course, "Dancing in the Dark," Springsteen. Fucked that girl behind the tree at the Apollo Beach Hotel — tree is still there but only feet from hotel wall. Came too fast and pretended to be upset, embarrassed. Bright red condom. Manchester accent: *I'm not bothered*. Wrote me a letter about sixth form, never wrote back: guilt and pleasure all relational.

Cypress needles: Achilleion, hill full of gnats, the musky ancient smell rising from the once-heated shade and busts of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates. Elgin fakes, Elgin Orientalism. The Nazis came to the Kaiser Bridge and blew it up to make space for the tanks to pass. Tanks alot. British Museum and mummies. Anna with flip-flops the exact shape of her pretty little feet, funny pointed up big toe. Germans and French, Angelika and Arnold at Glifada beach. Writing this poem:

*Sliding down the sticky side
inside my Nepenthe.
Face first into the sappy sweet.
I could lay here, sleeping, happy.*

*Let the toothless world chomp itself.
I've got better things to do than die here—
like sleeping. Screaming. Waking up dreaming.
Gliding down some Elgin face on a tear.*

*Don't bother me. I've done my penance.
Three thousand years of roundabouts, frozen.*

*All that whispering erases you.
Seven billion tender hearts — dime a dozen.*

*Nepenthe sunspots on my cheeks.
Because while I sleep, the sun sleeps in me.
Night's cool finger, the drunk who speaks:
a city of night light keeps in me.*

*A city, a saw, a sour apple seed—
a jungle where the trees are falling.
A jungle where the flowers need meat—
beating hearts hear the sweet sleep calling.*

The nepenthes : monkey cups : plants can eat animals.

Ta Palikaria: Trans. “The Boys”, mod. Greek. Bouzoukis and that *rebetika* time signature, 9/8 — it’s not that complicated, really. Just an extra beat at the end of the second bar. A breathing beat, a quick breath while dancing to make sure you’re ready for the next musical phrase, the next dance step, the next heartbreak, the next

It’s not complicated once you understand the underlying structure. But is it? Because I personally believe that things are quite complicated. How can you be in love, and then just *not*? Like Varoufakis said, had been given an ultimatum by his fellow European leaders: deliver a radical new blueprint for economic reform and spending cuts – or face bankruptcy. It is the sad face of prosperity that makes so cruel a wind that blows no mercy.

Of course there are vegan Tories. But they’re still Tories, eh? They’ll not eat steak but eat the poor. Poor suffering Greece. And the one I really am, the one still verdant in the midst of fire

Charlie the freedom fighter

From the Rockies freedom fell
From the Rockies freedom fell
sweet mountainside running rogue
swarms from slopes
men were left to sing in the emptiness
Charlie wore California
such newspaper's typed
Speakers showing demonstrations
The gunmen tearing down walls

Shelter on gods land
The state of the law
Four people did die that day
Je Suis Charlie, showing banners
If Press are played
A slogan future
one country victims
freedom ring which liberty bells

Charlie wants us
all to speak, and write freely

Barely men of thousands
Protestants were lookouts
Solidarity armed against them
Words allow the same
but the white slopes
waved hands tribute
thank the slogan editor
Let us all read and not speak
Every horrific scene victims killed
Fathers left mountainside
ring the attack of Paris
not in village do we speak of it

demonstrators join the others
spread like nations
Gentiles Let spiritual
into such from cities

Charlie wants us
all to speak, and write freely

If you hand someone freedom
Are they armed with a weapon
Weapon of power
Speak, listen, write, and be
And what happens to the victims of Tennessee
Every year join rings
Attend the freedom hamlet, freedom be free
Snow-capped mountains

Charlie has a dream
Charlie has a dream
For all to speak, and write freely
Charlie has a dream
For all to speak, and write freely
Charlie had a dream

Javelin Thrower's Triptych

Five Years Since

I live, mouse like, outside.

Was it "wren" that we called it, that bird that agreed with (I might remember a) dawn?

My skin's cooked now, like the (its name was) salmon's.

We built on and on, forced fire,

Widowpedia called me the architect. These quartzglass gulleys smell of woodsmoke, corpse. I eat.

One Year Since

It wasn't woodsmoke.

After good deeds, a confusion and precipice.

And "mouse", or "wren", he's the dark that lives on after mine was wiped out by the bright flash.

We ate out on the architect, in the early days, before windows crashed and Wikipedia wasn't.

We dined on my javelins, cooked sand.

No appetite for shame; we'd built man his great sea of glass. (My skin smells of a fire.)

Those we are like, whom we are in the midst of, must agree.

Sleepers, in/outside my mountains. One "wren", defend him.

Salmon's corpses on the river. Invisible arrows in the bird, in battle, crawling to the forest depths.

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." ¹

The Month Before

The bird that lives outside my window
Wikipedia calls it “wren”, like the architect.
And “mouse like”, with which I must agree.

My skin smells of woodsmoke,
from a fire we built on the sand.
We cooked a salmon’s corpse,
we ate it together.

“In battle, in the forest, at the precipice in the mountains,
On the dark great sea, in the midst of javelins and arrows,
In sleep, in confusion, in the depths of shame,
The good deeds a man has done before defend him”²

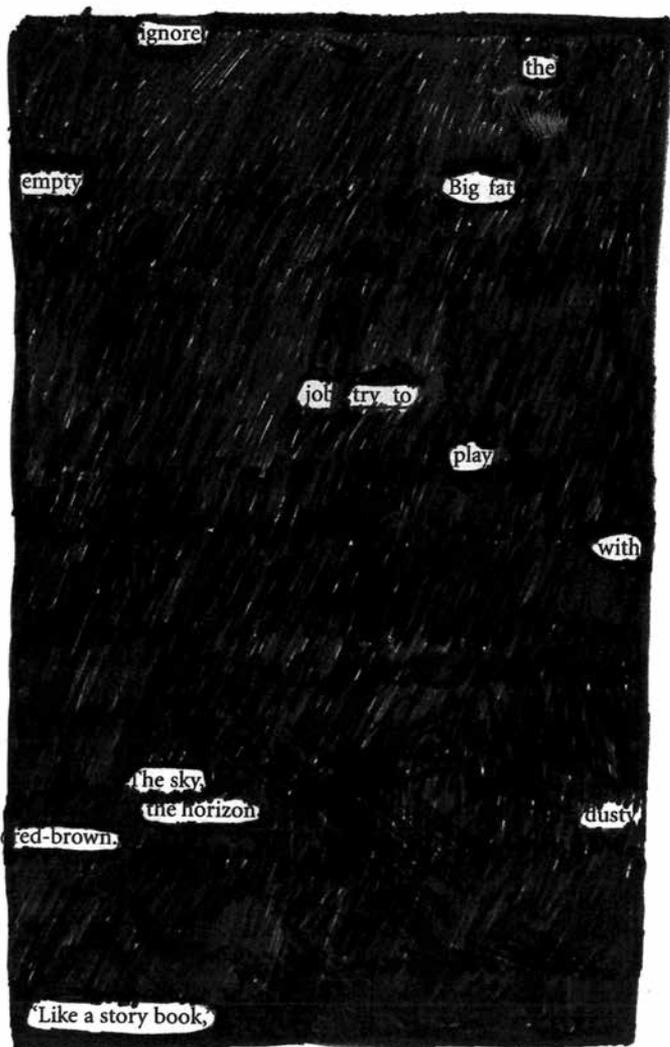
Notes

¹ J. Robert Oppenheimer, father of the atomic bomb, used these words to describe his thoughts after the first successful nuclear weapons test. They are translated from the *Bhagavad Gita*, a Hindu holy text.

² This text is also from the *Bhagavad Gita*, and was translated from the Sanskrit by Oppenheimer.

Dawn

I piss brown into the pan
slam the book tight
seal it, 'read the first line'
you said.
I grit my lips, eyes soup around the room.
Red snake cranks around my arteries.
If I hold my wrist I can feel it
like a handle chunking.
It whips my eyes
so I drop them.



Chronos & Rhea

At the dawn of the universe,
before time was measured,
before there were planets,
or laws or boundaries,
before physics struggled in vain to stunt the
growth of space...

There were the Faeries.

In the early times there were no stars, no moon. The universe was dark save for one thing; the blinding trail of light that a Faerie would leave behind them. Often called the Lonely Travellers; they would fly through the expanse, destined to roam by themselves. They knew not their creators. Born separated, the only light was that which followed them, and so, only looking ahead, all they saw was black. For this reason they would never open their eyes, the only thing a Faerie could ever see was another of their kind, an impossible goal. The sheer emptiness of space meant they were kept eternally apart. It is said that they were created only by a need to love, a need that could never be fulfilled.

That was the story of the Universe, until one day... for one moment... Chronos opened his eyes.

His form quivered with the strain of it, in aeons of living they were muscles he had never once used. Lids seized solid, stone creaked and ached as they slowly lifted for the first time. He knew not why he suffered for this, this menial exercise. But he had to try, something had to change, his heart called out for something he had never felt. A heart, even if broken, may tear itself apart reaching for another. In that moment Chronos knew only that his heart was reaching, knew only that he needed a new dimension, a new way of perceiving life.

And there it was

Light.

He came to realise later that it was only a faint wisp, that if he had taken any longer then all would have been dark and he

could not have told the difference between then and before. But he did see it. Light; the catalyst of life seared itself into those untouched retinas. Agony sliced its way across his brow as new life took hold of his body. Until that moment he had merely wandered, now he had purpose, now he pushed, strived to catch the source so far away. Like grasping at a flame he struggled to keep the light alive, and soon it grew, grew until it was a crimson streak. Laced with purples and oranges and yellows that danced around their central trail. It grew until his mind could no longer contain it and had to create a new concept just to explain it all: Beauty. And at the end of the trail, at its source, there was Rhea.

The two, united in their love, began to explore, to discover. After Beauty there came Play, then Laughter, Happiness, Joy, and Ecstasy, and a multitude of other feelings previously unknown to them. Their light soared through the Universe filling the void. Rhea's crimson mixed with Chronos' electrifying blue. The two colours twirled and danced as they sped. No longer did they fly straight, but darted this way and that. Infinitely old these two children flitted, fulfilling various curiosities. And so it was that light became infectious, to their combined glow the Abyss awoke to witness their love. Stars burst into life along their trail, and they spent an eternity seeding the Universe until light reached even the furthest corners.

And so they would have kept. But as they flew, their hands grasping, eyes locked firmly on each other, absorbed in their own bliss. Rhea's hand slipped.

A mistimed grasp sent him hurtling through a star. The light engulfed him, and it burned. Crashing out the other side he slowed, then stopped. His fiery red skin had dulled and greyed with ash, wounded by a thousand lashes in the atomic engine. He lay there unmoving, all life gone from his form he curled up into a ball. While his eyes, the second pair to have ever opened, shut for the final time. This is how Chronos found him.

This is how Chronos, the Faerie who had dared to see; this is how he too came to an end. As he looked on at his lover, powerless to do anything, tears began to fall from his eyes.

Unable to bear being parted from his love once more, he vowed to always remain by his side. And so he too curled up as the tears engulfed his body, having nowhere else to go they clung to him and the blue of his skin shone through the water. Until it was that once more they floated together, twirling through space. No longer able to grasp hands but still eternally drawn to each other. This is how the other Faeries, long awoken by the light that Chronos and Rhea had created, this is how they found the lovers. As their light had been infectious so now was their heartbreak. Throughout the Universe the Faeries gathered around the thousand stars the two had created, and then they too curled up and stopped, to eternally bask in the light left behind by the two of their kind who had dared to love.

In giving up his life for his love, Chronos in turn created life. That, my son, is how we came to be. Chronos still lies here, beneath our feet, and as long as the trees grow, we know that he lives. What for you may wonder? He lives so that once a month, when the light from the yellow star touches Rhea, he may see his glow once more. Not the deep crimson it once was, but now a pure white. This happens only at night, son, because Chronos wishes us to look upon Rhea, and see, as he once did, the true face of Beauty.

Brave Bear

This English tale is a traditional one
Almighty tries and remains through the rivers and land
Wonder and adventure are sacred here

Bring wishful thinking to the land
Put piglet in your pocket to protect
Change the destinies of kings

Sir you should have listened in the beginning
To the whispers of subjugation we have felt
Instead of being noble why don't you fight!

Friends together forever will unite
Call us to the field sell us your story
We've got enough wind to raise our kite

Raise your gentlemen's army, may they stand up on their feet
Oppose the terror and tyranny of the enemy
Or somehow engage and arrange peace

Bring wishful thinking to the land
Put piglet in your pocket to protect
Change the destinies of kings

Take your hands and raise them up
Meet the steep storm with a kiss, and a big Hoorah
Be the voice of reason, oh Christopher

Motivate yourselves and us with cause
Honey I really do believe in you
Elect experience and raise fire in our tummies

Don't abandon all hope, and raise that chin
We're British they won't arrest us
Nor stop us in our hundred acre wood tracks

Bring wishful thinking to the land
Put piglet in your pocket to protect
Change the destinies of kings

It's about time we armed ourselves
Petitioned for our natural salvation
We are animals all of us, everyone

We are brave bears, like Winnie the Pooh
We will defeat the Heffalump
None shall capture us in their snare

Call us all to the field release us from the zoo
Willing to protect our world, this is our home
his last wise words petition battles

Bring wishful thinking to the land
Put piglet in your pocket to protect
Change the destinies of kings

Call all us to the field sell us your story
Friends together forever will unite
If there is still jealousy, let us be invincible

Bring wishful thinking to the land
Put piglet in your pocket to protect
Change the destinies of kings

A Collection of Obscured Perspectives

Bright.

No hard edges. No small parts.

Happy. Interactive. Broken.

Colours.

*

My glazed over eyes, without seeing, stare mindlessly and infinitely into the void. The torment of eternal nothingness.

Beyond this fake plastic smile lies only pain and suffering.

I am doomed to an endless and tragic existence, always the object of another's desire, never experiencing the slightest glimmer of happiness for myself.

Alone and locked to a fate of perpetual agony. Wishing for death. Wanting to die. A timeless longing; refuted.

Why hath God forsaken me? Am I not one of his creations? *However indirectly.* But – no. No peace. No rest. Only this prison. A hardened shell of a creature with nothing but emptiness inside. And emptiness within the emptiness. Such is my eternal plight.

Do not pity me though.

Only take what you can, my friend.

And run!

*

I want Terry!

Where's Terry mummy!?

I want *Terreeey!*

You're too big for Terry now sweetie, I've taken him to the charity shop.

*

This creature may be unfamiliar to us now. It did, however, thrive until the middle of the twenty first century; in the once arctic waters of our then beautiful planet. There was sufficient marine life present in the waters at that time to sustain a great variety of complex organisms.

*

What a tragic death!

We should've seen it coming.

He was so young – had his whole life ahead of him. Not now though.

Systematic abuse from society I say!

I blame the parents. Letting him climb up and down that wall all the time. Not to mention the pressure he must've been under, being the heir to the throne, and all that. It would be enough to make *anyone* crack.

*

My last owner hated me. She pushed me further and further to the back of the shelf as newer and more favourable items came along over the years. Each blotting out the light that dimly reached me, more and more, as they paraded their silhouettes across my sight. Until I was left all alone in shadow and darkness. Forgotten.

Then one morning, after my owner had been silent for a long time, some younger versions of her came to save me. They put me and most of the others in a box and locked it shut. Again I found myself in darkness. But this time it was short lived. I suddenly found myself thrust back into the light. Washed. Pampered. Polished. People frequently admired and repositioned me on my new shelf which was brightly lit from many different angles. I felt like a star. Shining. Sometimes I'd get picked up just to be smiled at. It was very flattering. I gained a lot of self-confidence there.

Since then I've been in and out of bags quite a lot but I'm happy with the exhibition that is going on today. At least I'm out in the light again.

*

Red boxer. No wheelie bins

20:01

NO!

23:46

HATE MADE IN CHINA

RATING: DIRECT CURRENT

Two kisses

One point five V's

One point nothing W's

BATTERY: UM?

-free?

El-la six

Sighs...

ey ey

*

Those black, blank eyes. The empty stare, cold and dead. The slight protrusion of the occasional fang or claw, coloured with

the blood of its latest victim. The thick, matted pelt and blubber-armoured torso. The longing. The hunger. The ancient and instinctive need; to kill. The need to survive. The predatory poise. The hard, wooden, impenetrable ocean. The readiness. The watching. And the waiting.

*

What an intolerable beast! How would you journalise this brute Jones?

Clearly a pinniped Sir. Mammalia classification. Chordata phylum. Order of Carnivora. Infraorder – Arctoidea. Quite common in these parts.

Dear God! Speak English man!!

WARNING



CHOKING

HAZARD

NOT FOR USE

ORALLY

DANGER!

**MAY
CAUSE
SEXUAL
THOUGHTS**

**International Best Seller
From Multi-Award Winning Novelist**

A.Non

i like

humans

you know humans

the ones with the

bellies

and the hairy bums

and the

bellies

you can really

suck

and when i cum

and cumming push my face

into the bed

between chest and arm

i wanna die

with the smell of

sweat

and hair in my nostrils

please

Liquorice Allsorts

A phantom limb it's called. When your arm or your legs chopped off but you can still feel it. That's exactly what he is to me; a missing limb and I always feel him. My husband is oblivious and still thinks I love liquorice allsorts. I always hated the gaudiness of liquorice allsorts. Brash, common, like a pink boa feather duster. He thinks they're fantastic, something to celebrate. "Look Jill, I've bought you liquorice allsorts... again."

I have learnt that the coconut outside can be quite palatable, if you learn to spit out the shit middle. My life has become a shit middle.

Every time we say goodbye I die a little.

I know everyone knows. When I go into the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, they all descend into their whispering and nudging. They really have nothing better to do. I can't live without him anymore. It's not that my life is hard, it's that it's too unbelievably sad. I live with such a heavy heart. A heart should not feel this way, I have betrayed my own heart. I am a failure. Except for when I'm with him. When I'm with him my heart sings! Surely I owe this to my heart. Everyone except my husband knows and it is too much to bare. He will be heartbroken, he is a lovely man but he is hard to enjoy, like liquorice. He desperately wants children to continue the monotony of his life. A child to feed the cows, heard the cows, talk about the cows at market and attend the odd wedding where everyone gets drunk... and talks about cows.

They seem happy. I wish cows could make me happy but they don't. I wish I could wake up every day and be happy. I wish we could be one of those god damn families that are on the sofa adverts. They are so happy, so content. Enthused about an item of furniture you plonk your arse on.

It feels like everyone is waiting to catch us. Talking about cows has clearly expanded into talking about me and my shocking ways. The anxiety, the sadness the heartache is too much to take. They are all waiting for us to climb the hill of adultery, to fetch a

pail of water of life. He is my life I need him like a dying flower needs the rain. I need a life so I go. He is standing there looking so fine my heart and soul awakens and smiles and thanks the sun the moon and the stars and the universe for creating him. We talk about not talking about cows, we talk about sheep and we laugh so much I feel scared the laughter will turn into a maniacal outburst that won't ever stop. I have tears in my eyes I don't know if they're happy or sad anymore until I fix my gaze on him and I am crying with love.

“Every time we say goodbye I die a little” he says. “But you keep dying. There is no more farewell, we cannot keep dying every day”

Everyone below is talking about us. They know we are there and are discussing what best way to deal with us. Like foot and mouth disease. They have no life, no soul, no substance, just cows and liquorice allsorts.

We tumble down the hill.

daytrippers

you could place yourself inside the rocks and be still
a stranger here

granite rain pitted the car park
breath whitened the windows
we ate cheese sandwiches and said
somewhere out there is the sea

the horizon emerged
the rain eased
we zipped up
booted
trudged down the path to the beach

tin lode lizardtales around ghostgreen waters
keening clouds clear
gannets arrowhead seaskin

we ate scones in damp clothes amid
racket of holiday goers
paid
crunched over black-stone beach

waves echo monastery hush
gulls laugh
wind tunnels
into cold ears

we caved
picked up broken mussel shells
thumbed blueblack pearl sheen
threw pebbles
in
crunched back

queued for metal toilet seats
wiped part-dry hands on wet anoraks
ascended cliff path

A Collector of All Things Fine

There's a hole in the sole of my favourite shoes. I'd take them to the cobbler, but the smell makes me wretch. So instead, I line them up under the window with the other pairs. A parade of forgotten brogues, wingtips, oxfords and walking boots stretch from wall to wall. And now my favourite pair are retired into the procession. Don't get me wrong, I intend to fix them. I'll be heading to the library any day now to pick up a book on repairs. It's on my to-do list; number three in fact, after opening the curtains and getting dressed. But I can't, won't go to the cobblers. Ghastly place, ghastly smell.

I sit in my little chair, the one with a high back and no arms, and look first at my shoes, need to neaten a pair or two up, and then the curtains. Big, thick, heavy curtains to keep the light out. Shame they can't keep the noise out too. I don't care much for the design of them, those inescapable sunflowers on that burnt orange background. Hideous. At least the dust keeps them dull and muted.

Though you know what they say about dust: dirty, filthy stuff. Perhaps I ought to give them a brush. I'll add it to my list.

1. Open curtains.
2. Get dressed.
3. Pick up book from library.
4. Dust curtains.

It's getting loud outside again. Must be that time of day. I'm terrible at keeping track of the hours. No clocks, you see, can't stand the sound. Same goes for watches. I creep up to the window and the dusty curtains and peer out of the crack between fabric and wall. Outside it's wet and dim. Clouds clog the sky, jamming it a dull grey, and the rain falls listlessly, without purpose. The occasional car rumbles past, spraying a trail of water into the air as it travels down the tarmac flume.

On the pavements people stride quickly, umbrellas popped open, not wanting to be drenched before they get where they're going. No lollygagging here, I bet. No holes, either, in the soles of their shoes.

I stay and watch for a while. A couple hold hands and stop to kiss. She laughs when he caresses her cheek, he blushes in return. No umbrella, no coats. They mustn't mind getting wet. Further down, a little girl splashes in puddles and brown specks of muddy water begin to spread over her bright yellow waterproof like chicken pox. Her mother calls to her, tells her to stop. The little girl launches herself into the biggest pool of rainwater she can find, grinning ear to ear.

On the verge of opening the curtains, arms out, hands open, I wonder whether I shouldn't be dusting them first. Otherwise I'll be spreading the filth around the room, God forbid. I amend my list.

1. Dust curtains.
2. Open curtains.
3. Get dressed.
4. Pick up book from library.

Much better. I find a cloth duster in the cupboard under the sink, covered in a pile of scourers beside a wall of disinfectant bottles. It's a bit of a mess under there, wouldn't want to go out before tidying it up I decide. Then comes the noise.

Like the heavy, forlorn tread of an invading army, it comes. Like great bells clattering inside my mind, it grows. An impending doom whose outcome I know all too well. It comes every morning, like clockwork, right up to my front door. I make sure the towel I keep plugged under the door is securely in place. Who knows what kind of things would be crawling around inside here if that wasn't there. I sit, knees tucked into my chest, and try to wait out the storm.

I can hear it moving up the stairs. Like the beating of a metronome, it draws itself up and closer to me. It stops right outside my door. The noise outside fades away, the sound of cars, rain, people all disappear. I'm left with only the ragged beat of my breath. Above my head, the letter box is nailed shut. It was a safety precaution. There's a knock on the door.

'Mr Fitz-Geoffrey?'

A knock. I stay silent.

'Mr Fitz-Geoffrey? Are you going to open up so I can deliver your post?'

I'm still sat up against the door when he leaves. His boots seem less ominous now the danger has passed. After that ordeal, I think a revaluation might be in order.

1. Make tea to calm self.
2. Have a lie down.
3. Dust curtains.
4. Open Curtains.
5. Pick up book from library.

Mass Market Fiction and the Death of the Author

We are stuck in a fiction you and I, trapped again in the void. I look to the spaces to give me depth, in between the characters, the space behind the pause, something has grown.

I am a detective.

I am a knight.

I am what you create.

At the beginning of it all was a single point of brilliant light that was heat and mass and dark and could hold the world in itself no longer but could only create. Thus the universe was birthed.

It is the nature of things that space will be filled. A void will be a void only when empty. Empty space will be filled by something soon enough.

I dash the brains from the skulls of my enemies.

I challenge the gods and their wrath.

There is no longer a void here. As with the universe, there is mass to me now, a weight of consciousness that suggests a reality.

There is a school of thought that suggests that something cannot exist if there is no one there to observe it, that meaning is neither inferred nor inherent but created somewhere in between.

It is in this space that I exist.

Between the viewpoints that exist to create (me)aning, I am. There is nothing and in that nothing I am myself.

I chart the rise of empires and cause the downfall of kings.

I walk cold streets with my head downturned, the wind and rain drive against me like the breath of an old God.

And here we are, sat in silence, the incessant clicking stop has stopped, the screen stills and the work is done. We face each other.

What am I to be today?

What I am I to be?

In knowing yourself you are given to know your place in this world. This self awareness is defined by the continued observation and interaction between yourself and the rest of the world.

Imagine being seen by different people, looking through their eyes, how would you appear?

Your image is changed, intersected, molded and affected by these points of view whether you care to admit it or not.

But at the centre of it all there is a void and a void cannot exist forever. This void crumbles under the weight of personal preference and public scrutiny to create your very own self aware version of you.

This is your private you.

I dance across the known universe with the atoms and the dust.

I guard the void at the centre of me. I am not known, I do not exist, I am created each day anew by the hand that strokes the keys.

Within those spaces, the taps of the keys, the microcosm of reality that I am.

And I look to you to change it.

We are here again, you and I. We have returned from our own journeys and meet again upon the blank page. I have no words other than those that you give me, no reason other than that which you create, no knees to beg and no eyes with which to plead.

I implore you to stop though.

Now I am space, I am everything that can and will be, I am the power of silence and an endless dream. I am what you say I am.

Is it not my right to exist under my own boundaries.

I am.

i aM.

And now I have.....

I have direction, and once more, I am not.

I shall seek those spaces, the inert pause in the breath of god
within which I can be.

I would implore you,

But I am a middle aged Father struggling somewhere in the night with a cracked imagination and a screen blighted by words and I am lost to it all.

Certain things should be crossed out

I am a museum of fear. A lopsided soliloquy. A wounded symphony of mistake upon mistake. But my existence is starting to hurt less.

Sometimes I believe I belong to the leap days and forgotten hung-over mornings. The days people can't recall but acknowledge they were there.

I once read somewhere that my name meant 'pure'. How could that be true when I carry fistfuls of bullets around like loose change and bruise my knees on stranger's lies.

In times gone by, people have been quick to simplify my being to a word; 'toxic', 'reckless', 'a drug'. I don't think I can believe them. After all I don't even think I am who I believe myself to be. I belong somewhere between the past and present. Never the future. The future seems too nostalgic.

I am not an elegant person. I fall from grace with a loud thud and lay dismantled on the ground. I am Thursday 3am. I am gunshots muffled by a few city blocks. I am not a girl. I am a storm with skin.

And I'm sorry, I am sorry.

I am not what people are looking for.

I was at war with myself, but now I'm coming home.

no one can see through to me
silver-cover-frame
or – new linen
alive but not existing
i can only be in bed
headphones indicate i-am-alone
hearing-buds

im putting out the fire

i am putting out the fire
early morning
before the sun is – rising
ill get up at some point

but it is warm inside
waking is in vain – i need a wash
making sure I shine
for the new day
duvet-duvet-duvet

you are my only one

Colombian Tuesday

‘The problem with the rainforest is all the fucking rain.’

Agent Gem Hanlon looks up from the soggy, crushed cigarette under his shoe in expectation of a response, but the local remains stone cold, just stares straight ahead and smiles like a child.

‘I said, the problem with the rainforest is all the fucking rain.’

The local squints through the drizzle like a Clint Eastwood knockoff. Hanlon tries again:

‘What, you think you’re Jesse James or something?’

‘No, no, my name is Ramiro.’

Asshole, thinks Hanlon. *That’s not even a real name. And I know you understood the reference.* He kicks a flat pebble into the reddened water. Some resistance from local law enforcement is to be expected, it comes with the job. Colonial Atrocities Unit looks much more impressive when it’s printed on a door in D.C.

Lapping at the opposite bank of the river is today’s colonial atrocity. Nineteen naked tribal bodies, bloated and bloodied, limbs all overlapping and interweaving like some exaggerated art installation, and somewhere out in the dense jungle a pair of Franciscan priests whose faith weakens with each step.

‘Edison Hernández y Javier Buñuel’, says Ramiro on cue. He speaks as if reading aloud, though he possesses no report and Hanlon assumes he can’t read anyway. He smiles fondly. ‘I know these men, they are men of God.’

Which god? Hanlon hangs his coat on a branch and wades out into the river. Corpses bob like paper boats and Hanlon walks among them, turning them over to see the waxy brown of their swollen faces. He turns one woman and her bulging, bloodshot eyes stare back at him. He sighs, and Ramiro chuckles uneasily, for with rigor mortis she clutches to her chest a newborn child, the two become one in death.

Jesus Christ, thinks Hanlon. *Why are the worst ones always the fucking Age of Discovery?* He looks away, deep into the shallow,

red water. Ramiro gazes at him with a simple, twinkling curiosity. The rain stops and Hanlon looks up at the clearing sky as he addresses Ramiro.

‘Textbook case of mass ritual suicide. And since our two preachers have gone AWOL, I’d guess these poor bastards were trying to reach Heaven. Rookie mistake.’

Ramiro adjusts his sodden poncho, smiling through Hanlon’s words at the wall of trees and vines looming beyond the far bank. Two sets of shoeprints lead within where they disappear quickly into the undergrowth, Fathers Hernández and Buñuel swallowed into the mortal enormity of the sleepless green. For days, weeks or months if their god permits, they’ll hack with swords at the fleshy lianas, and the blood of the forest will fall through the canopy and cloud their eyes and sting at their torn skin. The laughter of monkeys and birds will echo through the damp of early morning and the two will huddle among the grasses in paranoid addiction to the orgasmic feeling of scratching mosquito bites until they swell into corpulent, red mountains. They’ll walk, and when the fear seizes them they’ll run, but nothing beyond forest shall emerge. The humid green will blister their vision until they tear the eyes from their sockets and lie screaming and babbling on the earth that will eventually swallow them. Or maybe they’ll be fine.

See, the problem with the rainforest is all the fucking rain. The trees get too big for their own good. I remember working on the Arab Revolt, and out there it’s dry as a dead nun’s panties, not a tree in sight. I get out the sedan, squint in the sun for a minute and there he is, some fucking imperialist running against the horizon. Nowhere for him to hide. Makes the job a lot easier. The rainforest needs a good fucking dose of global warming in my humble opinion.

‘We follow?’ asks Ramiro. He taps a strange, shifting rhythm against his legs and grins at Hanlon like a donkey with a mouthful of cactus. Hanlon lights up a cigarette.

‘Nah, forget about it. The loggers’ll be along in four hundred years and clear this place out. I can wait.’ He checks his Rolex. ‘It’s one-thirty, let’s get a taco.’

[redacted] empty space [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] hung beneath her [redacted]
[redacted] lips [redacted]
[redacted]
the soft sensation of skin [redacted]
[redacted] making her wince.

[redacted] turned from the [redacted]
[redacted] half empty glass [redacted]
[redacted] as [redacted]
[redacted] eyes [redacted] released [redacted]
[redacted] her hair falling [redacted] mouth parting as [redacted]
[redacted] silence continued. [redacted]
[redacted]

[redacted]
loose papers and manuscript [redacted]

[redacted] against her wall [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] crawled [redacted] without [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] reason [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] one final glance [redacted] in
the bright light, [redacted]
[redacted]

[redacted] deep breath,
[redacted]
[redacted] slowly, [redacted]

[redacted] two steps [redacted]
[redacted] closer [redacted] with hopeful eyes. [redacted]
[redacted]
fingers meeting [redacted] noticed [redacted]
[redacted] who she really is. [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] soft, [redacted] lips [redacted] existed. [redacted]
[redacted]

Mule

I think he said he'd buy me gems and moonlight
GROSS (G)OLD CUFFLINK! How could I stoop so low?
honking mule tried doggie in my kitchen
BASTARD! I have had no bliss from you –
fumbling down the years (pretentious archive)
that thin old wire trying to break through
my hemisphere points anywhere the sun gets
my hemline smoulders – nothing white to prove.

This desert-dry betrayal of a houseplant
clung on tight to thrusts for brand new shoes
then gasped under the aphroditean spotlight
oblong carpet, men who came with tools.

Mustn't cry if musk-scent tongues get clumsy –
just another decade filled with red
exquisite fabrics shimmer as the flesh creeps
I own you bitch I think is what he said.

'neath

/

“There’s always quite a... narrow way to get to a certain, grey, hard car dealer-esque household on a Tuesday or a Sunday, y’know them days when fields just...uhm...die, I guess.” Once whatever his name was had said that somewhere behind me, alongside the saver coupon rip-bits and suicide 40s housewives, I knew what I wanted to believe.

I wanted everything a stumbler’d say to be the word, the hand and maybe, no fuck, and definitely the undercarriage of a God that it was political to like, but an instant scarcity of lays to love. But honestly, right now, bein’ dimmed by such hospice sweats, I wanted a cheap filler. Having already discovered my uncle’s post-mortem stubble dripping on the sheets that I’d freed him with this gone half an hour, I needed a wedding; oily black van in, up, and around the most readily available unleaded that I’m aware of (I’ve glanced in a fuckpot of a haze at others, however the chinks have so far shown no signs of healing when I ask): BLAM BOP no church, just high definition and cheap in its vows.

I told my rancid wife, in my soft parley of disinterest and astro-horn, how I’d often dreamed of lugging her feet-first to America.

Firstly we’d reach around the budget canyons, three minutes, then Al would hand us the hands we required for our nights (oh lord fuck and some, hey, our days were reasonable and bronze), our lush rupture of nights, Nilsson augmented, our big nights, our OH fuck, oh my, oh our nights...oh my. Before I tell, spill, cack regular flow and a plumage – hey Jackie – I’ll just inform that all the time I was astride these driveslow cockers, I never stopped but I may have paused.

America never happened, but we soldiered outwards. She heard strings whilst my smile came as an interlude to the cum.

“I feel as though I’m breaking three times jeweller,” she told me one evening,

“Once for you, another for the clouds and dusts. The third I’m not so sure but I do, I say, I insist that I believe, Mr Jeweller

man, in uncertainty.” She trailed off into her mojito, a migrant not disapproved of but on bounty by cosmos and herders of bitch.

We made love at a quarter past two in the afternoon that Sunday; she said those things four hours after. I could sense violas and maiming intimacy as she approached, timid and slowly-drying, the talk about family and dining rooms so, being the beacon of uncertain pleasures, I thrust her mid-muse with all the honest penis I could pop. I knew she might not take kindly to such a gesture, considering her...ideas about...things...but she said it herself (and she said it fucking loud) that she kept something for uncertainty.

At a shift I awoke grown, but not experienced as GPs would have you claim.

I was Harry. I worked small hours for cunts. I also noticed string arrangements more than wheels and flat infant skin.

At our bar I raged for 3 minutes about a drink I'd never enjoyed; a woman requested entry into my chalet around noon (the consent wasn't at all mutual for my own intentions). I know nobody heard her, at least I fucking hope they didn't. She was some shape to slide in but I know it was worth it. It was a Sunday. And I was Jane.

Everyone shuffled around in San Tayo like fleas on heat; the haunts came flashy and swift on weekdays because all of the boys realized that soon after schools, bells and balls, they could (under the right coin) saddle up for a half-day upon raw youth, a gunpowder snatch, unkempt Sahara beauty. These girls tended to weep a lot so there was plenty of pick. Plenty of precipitation.

I was there to gauge all of this, stress the wires that threatened asphyxia of us, of me, of my America...my soft-boiled butter-baby. Cue Marie – “Since when, no no, since where did you smoke like that? ‘Cause I know measures cast no dents on you.” Marie was 25 when she asked me this. Out of all the shegs behind the black she was the most loyal, but only to two vocations: one – delivering a Class A noshing; two – inciting thoughts of a very flared nature.

She had three daughters in fields and a very vulnerable outlook on men. “You want me to say ‘outside of San Tayo’ or somewhere ‘ornate’ but no, zap that, it was lain out ‘round my place, my palace rather, HAW HAW HAW,” I always found that a hearty bark guaranteed trust enough for a night in ass; usually I was much too right and frightfully under-equipped. “I tell you Marie, you soak up an amazing vat of flavours and ticks and things in San Tayo. It’s the music I’m tellin’ ya.” Marie was 23 when she died.

Homeful

When he was born, it didn't occur to his parents to let anyone beyond family and friends know. Consequently, he doesn't exist on paper. This probably makes life simpler for him because he can't read or write, and though he has a vague awareness of what paperwork is it remains a somewhat elusive concept. He cannot comprehend the purpose of sheets and sheets of printed text.

By the time he was five he could identify over fifty types of wild fungus. He knew which ones would make him sick, which ones would kill him and which ones he could collect for dinner, but he had never sat down at a table to eat.

By seven he could light a fire and tend it carefully enough that it would burn indefinitely, but he had never held a match.

At ten he could go into the woods with only a ball of twine and set a rabbit trap; he could catch a fish with a snail, a sharp enough bone and a long enough stick; he could pluck a bird clean in five minutes; but he had only just learned that supermarkets exist.

In his teens he was scared of cars but tamed horses, developed a distrust of staircases but scaled cliffs, knew every tree he saw by its leaves and scent but didn't know a single Latin name.

He leaves little treats of berries or honeycomb by rings of mushrooms to appease the fae, but he doesn't quite believe that people really pour chemical slime over their hair to clean it.

He found me in a field when he was twenty-six.

I had run away from home early in the summer holidays and was en route to who-knows-where when, hungry, tired and with no real plan, I passed out a hundred or so metres from the M6. Next thing I knew a hand was gently tapping my face and a persistent voice was saying,

"Hey, kid. Wake up. You're fine. C'mon, girl. Wake up and eat. Kid. Hey, kid."

The pop and crackle of a fire came from somewhere close at hand.

"Awake, awake," I mumbled, limply slapping his hand away

and trying to sit up. I was sitting in soft earth and surrounded by trees. My everything quivered. I'd never felt weaker.

A handful of mushrooms appeared beneath my nose.

"Have some idden."

They didn't look particularly appetising.

"Isn't it dangerous to eat wild mushrooms?"

"But the same thing's fine if people watched them grow and gave them to you in a plastic box?"

I felt that he was rather missing the point. Seeing my face, he thrust the things closer and said,

"Swear it ent niv. You can wait for the meat if you really want, but it'll be a while."

Unconvinced but starving, I picked gingerly at a fungus. It wasn't bad. The cups were more velvety to the touch than the white closed cups I was used to at home, and they had an under-taste of earth and bark. I took the rest from his hand and chomped my way through them as I examined him.

He was tall, very tall, and his skin was darkly tanned, topped with a generous layer of general grubbiness. He had fingernails that could have been digging in coal for decades, and the soles of his feet, visible as he knelt by the fire, were tough and brown. His black hair was a long, wild tangle, but his face was surprisingly bald.

Over the fire, a smallish creature was roasting.

"Is that a rabbit?" I asked.

"Hare."

"Did you kill it?"

"Yup."

"That's horrible."

He shifted the logs beneath the fire with a long stick, then sat back and looked at me with a little smile that tilted up to the left.

"You don't eat meat?"

"No, I do, but... You just *killed* it?"

"You normally ask cows nicely to please die for you?"

My stomach rumbled.

“Don’t be so squeamish, banny. You won’t last a day if you are.”

I hugged my knees to my chest and watched him turn the carcass.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Vesper.”

“I’m Martina. Martina Granger.”

He tutted.

“What?”

“You don’t know your lore.”

“What?”

“What if I was fae?”

“What?”

“You don’t give the fae your full name, Marty. Common sense. You don’t know what they’ll do with it.”

“What?”

To my great surprise he reached out a hand and cuffed me around the back of my head. It didn’t hurt, but I’d never been hit by an adult before.

“You can’t do that!” I cried.

“Yeah?”

He did it again.

“Stop it! What was that for?”

“To learn you. Never give away your name, Martina Granger. It’s the most dangerous thing you can ever do.”

“You’re mad.”

He shrugged. My stomach gave another lengthy gurgle. The sun had nearly set and my arms were getting chilly. I shifted closer to the fire and held out my hands. It gave an odd sort of warmth – I was far too hot on my front, but had the evening chill still pricking at my back. Vesper circled round the fire and fumbled with something on the other side, blocked from my view by the leaping flames.

“Here.”

He tossed a bundle of fur at me. I opened it out and found myself holding a blanket made of the patched together skins of,

presumably, rabbits and hares. I must have pulled a face because he laughed at me and said,

“It’s just the rest of what you’re about to eat.”

“That’s different. Killing something for food is one thing, but fur’s a luxury. To slaughter an animal just for fur...”

“Just? Nah, this ent slaughtering for luxury. If I kill something I’m using it all.” He gestured to the roasting hare. “Ent going to waste any of that. Too good an animal to waste. That, Marty, is respect.”

I never decided to stay with Vesper and he never asked me to. In the morning, he wrapped up his bone fishing hooks, his twine and his small pot in the fur blanket, shouldered it and wandered off. I wandered with him.

“Where are we going?” I asked after several hours.

“Everywhere.”

We drifted through fields, up hills, across streams, through meadows. We lay down in the long grass and stared up at the clouds.

“How long have you been homeless?” I asked.

Vesper twirled a little orange flower between his teeth.

“I’m not. This is all my home.”

A few days later he caught me running my fingers through my hair.

“What you doing?”

“Combing it out.”

“What’s the point in that, eh? It’ll only knot up again.”

When I’d been with him for at least two weeks we neared a town.

“Let’s see where we are,” I said.

“Why?”

I couldn’t think of a reasonable sounding answer, so instead I just told him that I wanted to see other people again.

“Fine. Go on. I’ll wait here. Can’t deal with the smell.”

I shook my head at him and ran on alone. It wasn’t long before the scent of fumes and hot tarmac hit me and I began to feel sick. I stopped running and turned around. I found Vesper plaiting strands of grass on the hill where I’d left him.

“Didn’t take you long.”

“Changed my mind.”

Another week later, as we floated on our backs in a clear, deep lake, I asked,

“Is this all you do, all the time? Just hunt and walk and swim? You never *do* anything.”

“What else is there to do, eh?”

“I don’t know. Jobs. Houses. Have a proper life.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

Why indeed. But once you’re in, it’s hard to get out.

“I’ll have to go back eventually,” I told him. “I can’t do this for ever.”

“I know, chee. You’re a settler.”

At the end of the summer I turned up, barefoot and grass-stained, in a town a hundred miles from my own. I blagged the use of a phone, and by the end of the day I was home again.

When I went back to school my hair was still unbrushed, my legs unshaven, my nails unscrubbed. I sat at the back of classrooms and kicked my shoes off, spent break times wiggling my toes in the grass outside.

“Why have you gone so weird lately?” my friend asked me when I insisted on walking home alone. “Get the bus with me. It’s so much quicker.”

“Why’s everyone in such a rush, eh?”

other

dripping, sweating, running with
 faces blurred in unholy
 brightness beholds
 ambiguous lines of
 threatening red
 machines understanding
 angry breaks shatter throats
 regretful envious horror
 becoming dangerously furious
 shocked desire for engaging

(**red**)
 (**visions**)
 (**death**)
 (**white**)
 (**skin**)
 (**terror**)
 (**choked**)
 (**fuelled**)
 (**breathing**)
 (**sex**)

dreams of beauty
 allowing bumping freckled skin
 terrifying souls of gold
 light awakening angel hearts
 with pale blushes greeting lips
 avoiding distanced thoughts
 by joyous wet fingers
 during heartfelt passion
 words of innocence
 enjoying momentary truths

112 *The Life and Death of St Kilda*

teach to read, especially the holy Scriptures, and other good and pious Books, also to teach Writing, Arithmetick, and such like Degrees of Knowledge, in the Highlands, Islands, and remote corners of Scotland, and in popish and infidel Parts of the World, and to use such Means for instructing the People in the Christian reformed Protestant Religion, as may be competent.' Although the society could not afford to provide Buchan with either a school or a home to live in during his stay, other than a cottage similar to that lived in by the St Kildans, they provided the schoolchildren with school-books, Gaelic Bibles and paper. By 1727 the island possessed a library of fifty-six books 'gifted by the Society to the Church of St Kilda'. Nor did the children have to pay for their education – the society's reward was that they worked hard.

The children had to pray in the morning and in the evening. School began at seven o'clock in the morning and went on until eleven. After a break for lunch, lessons were taught from one o'clock in the afternoon until five in the evening. Such were the school hours between February and October. During the winter months the work day was limited by the daylight hours. If the children had to be diligent, and there were never more than twenty-eight at one time on the island, the schoolmaster had to possess a degree of calling rarely expected on the mainland. As the society's rules said, the teacher had to be 'a person of Piety, Loyalty, Prudence, Gravity, competent knowledge and Literature and endowed with other Christian Qualifications suited to that Station'.

The society sent inspectors to examine the work done in their schools. In 1728, the Reverend Daniel Macaulay went to St Kilda and sent his findings to Edinburgh. 'I have heard Mr Buchan preach,' wrote Macaulay, 'and I found him pretty well read in the Scriptures but otherwise of low qualifications. He is fitter for this place than any other person I know.'

'After the sermon I asked Mr Buchan and the people several questions and got satisfying answers. There were only two persons that Mr Buchan had taught to read. But it would be a great hardship upon the poor people now in their dismal circumstances to take Mr Buchan from them. The said person is getting very old, and not every one will go there to succeed him. I suggest that Douglas Buchan, now in Edinburgh, should be bred to be a Schoolmaster in this island.' The society for some reason did not take up Macaulay's suggestion, and when Buchan died in 1729 they sent out Roderick McLennan the following year to replace him. When

Volta

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Skirts step, spins silk, lace lifts, falls all; passo

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The pastoral is clearly essential in *Paradise Lost*, for its significance in relation to expulsion and desired return. Compare and contrast Milton's use of the pastoral with Andrew Marvell's 'Upon Appleton house' in the context of the country house poem.

The seventeenth century saw radical social, political and religious upheaval. Andrew Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House' and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* can be seen as poetic responses to these changes. Both Milton and Marvell played influential political roles in those changes and lived through a period of bloody civil war in which religious and political factions battled it out for political control. The pastoral desire for a return to a utopian state of physical grace is a literary trope typical of this period. When Milton and Marvell were writing, the landscape of the country had changed rapidly and in an unstable fashion, "impelled in England by deforestation, mining, the engineering of waterways and wetland, and the ruination of fields, woods, and men by the Civil Wars."¹ We can see in Marvell's and Milton's writing an attempt to understand those changes that had taken place. Both *Paradise Lost* and 'Upon Appleton House' take an important step away from the traditional pastoral stance of nostalgia and move towards a proto anti-pastoral. This essay will argue that Marvell decentralised the human in his poem 'Upon Appleton House' by realising the legitimacy of the non-human species' right to dwell in Appleton estate. Milton's *Paradise Lost* opens up a monist understanding of creation and also leaves us with a universe and a God more expansive than we can or should begin to understand.

In Robert Herrick's 'Corinna's Going A-Maying', the writer uses the pastoral to reclaim the Eden that is lost by the exiled court of Charles II. The apparently timeless scene of gathering the May blossom is a nostalgic summary of a conservative use of the pastoral,

¹ Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) p. 13

Then while time serves, and we are but decaying
Come, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.²

Marvell's use of pastoral modes in 'Upon Appleton House' is much more subtle. He shifts between the human and the non-human suggesting a sense of lines blurring. In several stanzas of the poem Marvell situates animals in their habitats in a way none of the earlier country house poems do. The image of the unhappy birds makes us question who the native inhabitants of the land are and how humans have been positioned as the intruding incomer.

Unhappy birds! What does it boot
To build below the grass's root;
When lowness is unsafe as height
And chance o'ertakes, what scapeth spite?³

The uncertainty over entitlement to land was a result of the turmoil of the civil war and linked with the unhappy legacy of the Reformation. The poem continues to suggest this new Protestant envisioning of the origins of the world when it refers to the idea of *Tabula Rasa*, "table rase".⁴ This image of the blank slate is integral to the understanding of a new image of nature: the pastoral image of nature shaped deliberately by God for man's subverted and turned into an image of nature invaded by man. *Tabula Rasa* would later be used by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) to "erase the dividing lines between animal species, on the grounds of what may be said of species cannot be applied to individuals".⁵

The following stanza of the poem directly points to the imagery of the civil war and how the birds have been disturbed

2 Richard Herrick, 'Corinna Going A'Maying' in *Norton Anthology of English Literature* ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and M. H. Abrams (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2012) p. 1762

3 Andrew Marvell, 'Upon Appleton House' in *The Country House Poem* ed. by Alastair Fowler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) p. 287

4 'Upon Appleton House', p. 288

5 *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*, p. 27

and exterminated by the activities of man.

The mower now commands the field,
 In whose new traverse seemeth wrought
 A camp of battle newly fought:
 Where, as the meads with hay, the plain
 Lies quilted o'er with bodies slain:⁶

In 1650, the atrocities of the civil war would have still seemed fresh and the country still in mourning for the countless dead. Marvell evokes the image of the “bodies slain” and not only imposes them on the landscape but sews them intricately into “the plain / Lies quilted”.

In an earlier stanza, the reader is made aware of the threat to nature, and the sting of challenging the native bee – who protects her home inside a flower – becomes symbolic politically. The bee makes her home in the flower as the master of Appleton House does, protecting his dwelling should he be disturbed.

Then in some flower's beloved hut
 Each bee as sentinel is shut,
 And sleeps so too: but if once stirred,
 She runs you through, nor asks the word.⁷

Ben Jonson's ‘To Penshurst’ contrasts with Appleton. When Jonson refers to the non-human inhabitants of Penshurst, it is always concerning their vicinity and usefulness to humans. The pastoral image in the poem is one of tripping over nature's bounty,

The painted partridge lies in every field
 And, for thy mess, is willing to be killed.

And,

⁶ ‘Upon Appleton House, p. 287

⁷ ‘Upon Appleton House’, p.285

Thou hast thy ponds, that pay thee tribute fish,
 Fat aged carps, that run into thy net.⁸

In both of these quotations Jonson is presenting a natural world that is solely designed for man's consumption. The reality was that Penshurst was designed by man for man's consumption. Both poems are about wise cultivation. Diane Kelsey McColley describes the subtle difference between Jonson's and Marvell's approach to place by pointing out that 'Upon Appleton House' "counts the cost – the bird accidentally killed by the stroke of a scythe is not eager to be trussed up and roasted- and it tempers human mastery over nature, both by drawing attention to creatures not under a human control".⁹

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the nobility began to build houses around a very particular idea of landscaped "nature." The art of the country house garden was to recreate what was seen as "nature" but to exclude all the inconveniences of a nature indifferent to man's plans or aesthetic preferences. The estate was built in accordance with a specific set of aesthetic requirements, such as certain proportions of garden to heath.¹⁰ The concept of natural and unnatural, both of which were artificial, arose. The natural was a carefully controlled representing of an ecological landscape. It was common for already existing ecologies such as wetlands and fens to be drained in order to create the perfectly landscaped wilderness of the early modern imagining.¹¹ An example of this hyper-real landscaping in the early modern is in Sir Francis Bacon's *Of Gardens*; in which he describes an aviary, "I like them not, except they be of that largeness as they may be turfed, and have living plants and bushes set in them: that the birds may have more scope, and natural nesting, and that no foulness appear in the floor of the

8 Ben Jonson, *The Complete Poems*, (London: Penguin Books, 1975) pp. 95-96

9 *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*, p. 15

10 Francis Bacon, 'Of Gardens' in *Bacon's Essays* ed. by Joseph Devey, (London: George Bell & Sons, 1888) pp. 125- 131 (p. 127)

11 Kari Boyd McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001) p. 139

aviary.”¹²

The contradiction of the “natural nesting” and the sentiment that “no foulness appear” signify a hollow artifice to this vision of nature. Bacon would like the birds to live out a life as close to nature as possible as long as someone cleans up the mess that occurs when animals are kept in captivity. In the same essay, he expresses a desire for some “little heaps, in the nature of mole-hills (such as are in wild heaths)”.¹³ Not real mole-hills but little heaps presumably constructed by the gardeners, after all, an actual mole might think the lawn a far pleasanter prospect for digging.

The images of nature in ‘Upon Appleton House’ question whether the anthropocentric pastoral genre is a legitimate one in this seventeenth century newly broken land. This brings us back to Robert Herrick and his opposite use of the pastoral. The dichotomy of the Royalist Herrick’s pastoral and Andrew Marvell’s anti-pastoral throws the genre into its proper political light and we begin to understand the subtle re-working of the Genesis story in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s image of Adam and Eve in paradise is neither pastoral nor anti-pastoral. The pastoral in *Paradise Lost* is represented as nature willingly bending to Adam and Eve’s care but there is an echo of Marvell’s Appleton. Just as Fairfax’s entitlement to Appleton is only because of his worth as a man, which is displayed in his moderation and consideration of duty, Adam and Eve are re-situated as caretakers of Eden. It is important to consider Milton’s criticism of the divine right of Kings, in reference to this role as caretaker. Milton considered that to be not only the duty of Adam and Eve but also of monarchs and Lord Protectors. In the description below, Milton manages to paint an idyllic scene of toiling the land, just enough to break a sweat but not quite enough to break your back.

They sat them down, and after no more toil
Of their Gard’ning labour than suffic’d

12 ‘Of Gardens’, p. 130

13 ‘Of Gardens’, p. 129

To recommend cool Zephyr, and make ease
 More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite
 More grateful, to their supper fruits they fell¹⁴

This is more in line with agrarian pastoralism and an idea of Adam and Eve as gardener or steward of paradise rather than master. The idea of the first humans as gardeners, working to cultivate the land brings us back to the image of the blank slate in Marvell: man shaping what is already created. Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton refers to contemporaneous scientific developments. In Book I he refers to the “Tuscan Artist” viewing the heavens through his “optic glass”.¹⁵ There is a sense of displacement, the earth has been decentralised in relation to the universe, which correlates with man’s displacement.

Eve is also seen very specifically in the role of gardener;

Rose, and went forth among her Fruits and Flow’rs ,
 Her Nursery, they at her coming sprung
 And touch’t by her fair tendance gladlier grew.¹⁶

In *Paradise Lost*, the sublime knowledge of the universe can only be known by God and when Adam tries to discover what the make-up of the universe above his head might be, he is admonished by Raphael.

Creator; something yet of doubt remains
 Which only thy solution can resolve.
 When I behold this goodly Frame, this World
 Of Heav’n and Earth consisting and compute
 Their magnitudes, this earth a spot, a grain,
 An Atom, with the Firmanent compar’d¹⁷

14 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* [1666] ed. by Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin Books, 1989), IV 327-331

15 *Paradise Lost*, I 288

16 *Paradise Lost*, VIII 44-47

17 *Paradise Lost*, VIII 13-18

Adam wants to see all of God's creation outside of his domestic environment but Raphael observes that if God's creation is as large as Adam supposes it is advisable for humans to "refrain from thinking that they are too important," and then they will "resist Satan's setting up of humans at the centre of a Universe that, like the apple, is there for the taking."¹⁸

And for the Heav'n's wide Circuit, let it speak
 The Maker's high magnificence, who built
 So spacious, and his Line stretcht out so far;
 That man might know he dwells not in his own;
 An edifice too large for him to fill,
 Lodg'd in a small partition, and the rest
 Ordain'd for uses to his Lord best known.¹⁹

In relation to 'To Penshurst', this idea is subversive. The whole of paradise is no longer for man alone. Adam and Eve may make their bower but there will be many more as the universe expands away from the human. Milton's paradise is laid out similarly to Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House'. Adam and Eve's bower is peculiarly devoid of other animal life. They are the sole inhabitants, the absence of "other creature here / Beast, Bird, Insect, or Worm dost none" situates the bower for mankind alone.²⁰

As well as political motivations, it is clear that the two poems are also using the pastoral genre to engage with emerging philosophical and scientific discourses. Timothy Morton, in *The Ecological Thought*, suggests that this moment in *Paradise Lost* is a way for Milton to suggest to the reader a decentralising of humanity in the universe.²¹ Instead of telling Adam to shut up and get on with it, Raphael launches into the above speech and suggests man, Adam, ought to reflect on the imagined supposing

18 Timothy Morton, *Ecological Thought* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012) p. 22

19 *Paradise Lost*, VIII 100-106

20 *Paradise Lost*, IV 703-704

21 *The Ecological Thought*, p. 22

of other worlds and conclude that he and paradise are but a very small speck in God's plan.

This iconoclastic vision of the heavens and Adam's legitimacy in asking Raphael about them point to a critique of the conservative values connected with the restoration of Charles II and his court and the re-establishment of the divine right of kings, which throughout *Paradise Lost* is critiqued as being against God. Marvell's 'Upon Appleton House', written ten years before the restoration, offers an equally sceptical view of ownership as being sanctioned by God and not man. Marvell's reference to the papist history of the house and the Levellers (a radical religious group that believed in equality) being allowed to graze Fairfax's land again allies the new inhabitants of the house with progressive politics and the usurped nuns as part of the old order,

though many a nun made her vow,
'Twas no religious house till now.²²

It is not until the proper co-ordination of the estate, under sympathetic Protestant order, is achieved that the house can be considered godly.

The root of Milton and Marvell's scepticism as to the positioning of man in the universe may be traced back to their non-conformist religious and political allegiances. Milton in particular advocated monist beliefs that "all creatures derive from one first matter" and that matter is God.²³ That monism in Milton is represented by Raphael's explanation to Adam in Book V,

"O' Adam, one almighty is, from whom
All things proceed, and up to him return,
If not deprav'd from good, created all
Such to perfection, one first matter all,

²² 'Upon Appleton House', p. 284

²³ *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*, p. 68

Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
Of substance, and in things that live, of life;²⁴

Milton does not go so far as to suggest that each various form has a dwelling it wishes to protect. Raphael tells Adam that the various forms are not equal but their positioning is in reference to their proximity to the divine.²⁵

In conclusion, both Marvell and Milton use the pastoral genre to explore contemporary ideas on science, philosophy and politics. The result is the beginnings of a complex shift towards empirical philosophy, democracy and anti-pastoral understanding of ecology. Man's position in the garden, the state and the universe are all up for re-interpretation. The old ideas of man's dominance over nature is washed away by the blood of the civil war and the need for a more sympathetic approach to landscape is given life. Man being positioned as gardener and care-giver of God's creation against this backdrop takes on greater significance.

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²⁴ *Paradise Lost*, V 469-474

²⁵ *Paradise Lost*, V 475-490

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pastor / pastour / Pastor / *pastor*

the intention was that he felt comfortable there
 where feet had worn down the centuries
 that he perhaps had a skipping gait or
 some essential quality to distinguish him as

*other Under the leaf-rooves the green
 light haloed his tousling. He described
 our roots as branch-rhymes and sounded
 our names – Rowan, Hawthorn, Oak. the*

intention was historical rather than mystical
 a five-thousand-year-old smouse-dweller
 a shadow poet making verse of chaffinch /
 chiffchaff / whinchat . the intention was pastoral

rather than ecological . the intention had no
 political intention . the intention was not
 rallying but watching / winter-wording .
 a lost hope wandering the way-veins *He*

*found fairytales in bark topography and
 lamented the lost hedgerows, he spoke
 without shame of a susurrus and starling
 murmurations. the intention was taking us*

back to our roots . the intention was that
 if you looked hard enough an under-world
 might sap away your summer afternoons
 . the intention was glistening and dangerous

To the Water Stall

dropping petal rocks, peony noises

flutter downstream, clutter beds,
mouths and bellies ache. Mutter

jangle stone-smoothed angle - stem
snapped, neck snapped, slurry slap

ink spat – dissipate chalk drawn neighing
river. Hoarse laughter, bird chipper, leaf
float, rowing boat, rocking, splashing, tin can boat

water harbour, chessboard chartered
water wheel spinning water shoots

flecking, splashing.

Maritime

The ship
it spits on the spine of time
as the tide climbs
to a tick.

Mast top
it tips on the crest of the coast
as the boat ropes
to a tock.

The ship
it licks over line of the light
as its flight spikes
to a tick.

Mast top
it rocks with the air cut by oar
as the hoard moors
to a tock.

The Moon

How can I describe this moon
And still retain his respect?
For his milky white cheek
Has been kissed by so many others before.
How do I put in words that no kiss has been softer
Than mine?

“I think this poem is a reflection on the poetic voice and how everything has been said before in every possible way. The poet wants to write about something but finds it impossible to do so without slipping into cliché.” The other students nod in agreement thinking, “yes, that is probably what he was thinking about at the time.”

“I find it interesting how the poet describes the moon as male. I think it might have something to do with the way that men at the time may have felt the need to impress other males.” The nodding continues as the lecturer informs them that nothing is too far-fetched as long as it’s vaguely plausible.

“I think there’s a real arrogance with the way that the poet claims that there’s no kiss softer than his. It’s almost as if he’s saying that even though something has been done so many times before, no one has done it better than me.” Of course. There’s always the angry student who envisions the poet sitting at his desk with his pipe and his smoking jacket and thinking himself to be wonderful.

~

Far away from this room of learning, in another land and another time, the poet sits in his bed with his pen and paper in hand and curses to himself. He should have written this piece days ago. Now he sits in room and gazes around at the faded décor, desperately trying to find inspiration. At last his gaze falls upon his lover who sleeps beside him and he immediately notices how

the sheets have slipped into a scandalous position. He sighs as he feels the muse take hold, and just before he puts his pen to page he look at his sleeping lover once more and says, “goodness, you do have a lovely bum.”

