

RIGGWELTER #31

JANUARY 2024



POETRY

PROSE

VISUAL ART

EXPERIMENTAL



RIGGWELTER PRESS

RIGGWELTER 2024

ed. Jonathan Kinsman

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Foreword

Hello! It's been a while, hasn't it? Quite a lot has changed. I'm not going to give you the run down of the last four years, you very much lived it. What I will do is reassure you that, in most practicalities, Riggwelter remains the same. The key thing to make a note of is that our publishing day is now the last day of the month and not the first. Why has Riggwelter returned? Well, why not.

Moving swiftly onwards, this issue contains twenty-nine of the finest works of poetry, short fiction, visual art, experimental and mixed media that we could find. As all of our issues remain unthemed at the point of submission, it's up to me as an editor to structure and make sense of them as an issue rather than just as individual pieces. What I discovered throughout this process is that this issue is about warning signs, portents of doom and our failure to recognise or do anything about them. We are living in a time in which, daily, we are shown omens of coming tragedies that as a society we let go unheeded.

If you are looking for a sign to contact your representative about any number of issues: about public health; about the environment; about declining support for the most vulnerable; about the rising cost of living; about genocide unfolding in front of us on live television; this is that sign. Make some noise! Go to a protest! Boycott the corporations that finance our undoing! Rage! Rage! Let us not go quietly! Let us not allow evil to go unanswered!

May you and yours be happy and safe. We will see you in the next issue!

Jonathan Kinsman (Founding Editor)

A Police Diver Bows His Knees to Baal

Interregnum in a northern town,
October moon limning a last consummation of ghosts,
the light lies low, its spare shadows, deep tree-trunk hollows,
where the drowners tangle among feathers and bone.

This is the season of searchlights,
waiting for *eschaton* to descend on doleful concrete streets,
a truant girl nursing new bruises by shit-scrape of brown canal,
the void of a vacant hearse stopping up our mouths.

And here is the river's cold lum,
lost-doll eyes staring out from a clay bed, a darkness rising,
up out of the earth, a police diver deep in a crystal-meth coma,
by his deathbed a slow winnowing of Baal-black wings.

Paul atten Ash

Curriculum Vitae

Born bicuspid, lacking
the valve that keeps the black
flood checked, my blood

rushes in reverse, river
after a hurricane, dragging
debris, splintered trees: cuspis,

through arteries, capillaries,
venules, veins, vena cava—
my vessels hijacked.

Loose sack of bruise
on the verge
of bursting.

Such sharp darkness,
in the arch of my aorta,
trapped—

Laura Amsel



Your Need Grows Teeth

Ophelia Gilman

This is a feminist poem (hush)

After more than a year resolving to be obsessive, but not a stalker, I get drunk and look at his Instagram, there is no trace of me.

If tomorrow I die,
he won't know of it for months, when
he does, he'll hush a tear in the closet.
I drink pink lemonade and reek of mold and
shit, he
wears a black suit, her
hanging on his neck like
decoration, they
look beautiful, crystal, shiny,
easy to crack
generic, boring lies, or was the lie I,
the experience?

They hurt me like he hurt
my mother, I need to be quiet because
I saw her be loud, saw what happens
when you're
silly and
femme
and loud, I am
taken aback by the men and the mascs;
their privilege, how easy
it is to say "it's a shame," heads down, no one to blame,
unfuckable purple flesh, when my want to die is
collaged greatest adorations,
and **what they**
did to me -
not because they're monsters, most
are not, because they could,
intimidatingly beautiful and
a means to an end, I want to be
blindfolded, clothes ripped off, and
passed around like a joint and I
know
it's a trauma response, but it's
so easy to cum at the thought.

Emilija L. Ducks

The Needless Modesty of Magdalene in the Wilderness

I stood in the gallery in Florence in Italy and assessed Penitent Magdalene. She was unbeautiful: crane-leg thin, all cheekbones and sinewy arms and long tough feet. She'd lived in the desert for thirty years, fasting and atoning, and she'd been pared back to the merest scraps of humanity. Only her hair was abundant, straggling over shoulders and chest and legs.

Magdalene the former prostitute, who went into the desert to atone for a lifetime of sin, the guide told me, eyes and voice full of the story's romance. One of Donatello's greatest sculptures. The work of a master.

I was unmoved.

I'd hurried past the picture of St Ursula and the eleven thousand virgins and pointedly ignored the women getting fed to the lions by some sneering Romans (done in scarlet and gold oils). Two days in Florence and I was thoroughly sick of repentant, abject women. Mostly because contrition was demanded of me daily. Because I'd hurt my colleague's feelings, forgotten to get my brother's favourite cereal, been insufficiently grovelling towards a customer.

Say you're sorry! You never think of anyone but yourself! You're so selfish! You need to learn to talk to people! And so forth. Thus far, it hadn't prompted any contrition from me. Quite the opposite.

So, I stood there and regarded Magdalene with a jaundiced eye.

Why is it, I wondered, that all the world's most revered women were created by men?

I stared at Magdalene staring at me. She was hairy as an old English sheepdog, but there was no canine docility in her gaze. She looked wearied, impatient,

exasperated. The guide had said, reverence whittling her voice to a whisper, that when Magdalene's clothes were worn to scraps, her hair grew miraculously to protect her modesty.

Weird, I mused. *If she lived in the desert, with no-one to see her, why the need for modesty?*

Magdalene stared at me staring at her and listened to my thoughts.

"Because God was watching me," she answered. "God is everywhere, at all times. He hears our every word, our every notion. He knows our every feeling. I was naked before God and my hair grew to spare the shame mankind learned in the Garden of Eden."

Bullshit, I thought, literally biting my tongue to keep from uttering blasphemy. The God my mother and brother petitioned regularly would never spare anyone's shame.

Magdalene regarded me sardonically. Her eyes were blunt and heavy and drove my gaze down to the floor. Like a sulky child, I began muttering justifications.

"That's not the reason," I said, my voice flat and uninflected. "If God is everywhere, at all times, then He'd seen you naked before. It wouldn't matter to Him."

"It didn't," answered Magdalene, so promptly that I managed to wrench my head up to stare at her. Her expression had transmuted slightly, to one of perpetual fed-upness.

"It's freezing in the desert at night," she continued. "My hair kept me warm."

"Then why all the fuss about your modesty?" I asked, bewildered. Magdalene shrugged.

"It makes a much better story," she said and lapsed back into muteness.

I waited for a long time, but she said nothing else. Eventually, my tour guide returned for me, and finding me – as she thought – in abstract reverie before Penitent Magdalene, she immediately began rhapsodizing about the servile, remorseful woman.

“All those years, atoning for her sins,” she sighed.

“Perhaps it wasn't atonement,” I interrupted, made impish by Magdalene's words. “Perhaps she just wanted some peace from everyone who told her she ought to repent. Perhaps she went to be happy and free.”

And then I spun round and left the guide gaping in horror and Magdalene forever fixed in her jadedness and went to seek a little freedom of my own.

Carys Crossen

I have loved girls

fed a diet of sweet orange juice
diluted to tap water,

whose voices purr
like the rev of a chainsaw,

girls who swing from streetlights
because there are no trees,

and nick hunger
from one another's empty fridges,

girls who bless bus seats
with their name in marker pen,

who stab metal through a top lip
without grimacing,

girls who slip small fingers
into the large loop of gold sovereigns

and use school jumpers
to mark their own goal posts

so they're the ones
forever scoring, scoring, scoring...

Debbie Hudson

Haunted

What haunted me was that I had been in the same house as a ghost
who did not visit me.
Spare room in a shared house in an Oxford terrace with Edwardian tiles
and a dial telephone,
and the emptiness of after-university: my best friend visiting his girlfriend
and me tagging along
with the bottle of *Clan Dew* I bought from a Batley off-licence, drank,
then threw back up.
And I guessed that was the reason I didn't see her, though the two of them
woke frozen,
staring at the whiteness that was and was not there: was and was not
a human shape
or the space a human shape might have filled. And I thought about when
I was eight or nine,
reading history books that couldn't fill the sadness I was too young
to understand;
the sadness I took to an attic room in a Morecambe boarding house;
the sadness
that lifted when a girl my age knocked, came in, talked for an hour about –
I can't remember what;
the sadness did not return next morning, when I found no girl her age
was staying there.

Mike Farren



The Crows

(Cover Image)

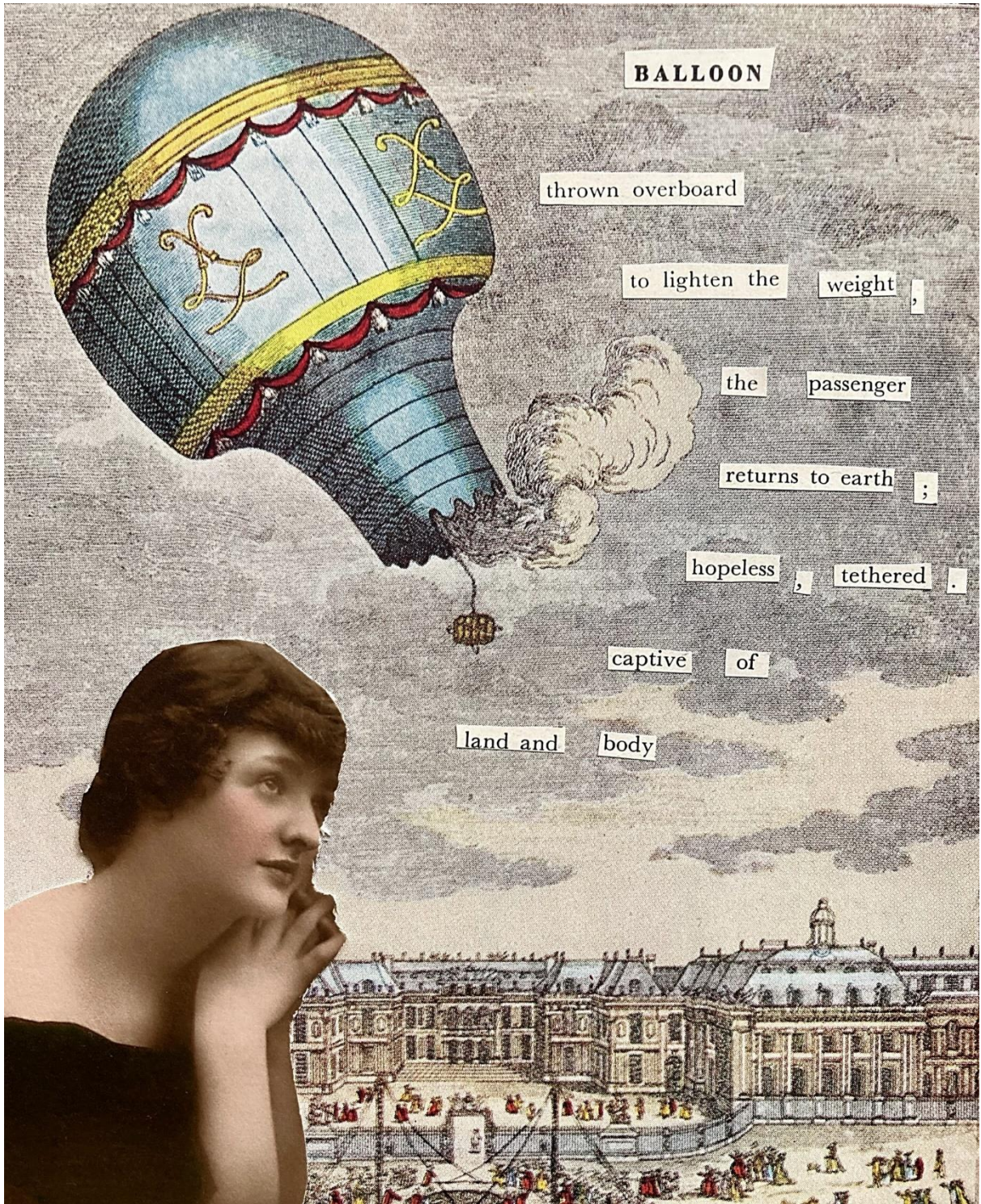
Abby Morrice

Drifting Rig

Two persons making a balloon ascension in a promotional stunt died Wednesday when the rig drifted into high power lines and they were thrown to the ground. ... After the accident, the balloon floated on for three miles before coming to earth in a vacant lot. — The Philadelphia Inquirer, September 20, 1968

Consider the serenity
the stiff wicker basket held
as it continued without them. Consider
how quickly silence came to travel
with it. No pilot sparking
fuel to roar into the empty
nylon moon. No wind stealing
away the silence as it cut
around the ropes and through
the wicker. It moved
with the wind, not through it.
There was no breath turned
into yearning words lost across
the open sky. No heart's
red drumming.

Lee Potts



BALLOON

thrown overboard

to lighten the weight,

the passenger

returns to earth;

hopeless, tethered.

captive of

land and body

Balloon

Julia Biggs

The Woodlouse is my Dad

Bobby announces this to the cross-legged class on the carpet. It's show and tell, and he's produced a woodlouse the size of a domestic cat from his backpack. He holds a piece of string attached to one of the woodlouse's antennae like a dog lead.

"Where did you get this?" I ask. I lean away from the smell of piss and woodchips.

Bobby looks at me like I'm the one who brought a giant bug to school.

"Home, of course. Where we live."

Bobby waits for me to prompt him for more information, but I'm already envisaging quitting teaching to take this creature on tour; twenty quid for a look (maybe I could teach it tricks), thirty-five for a photo with it. It's ugly as sin, but you'd want a photo of you cradling it for your keychain. Or I could sell it to science. They could deal with the awful stench. I think I read somewhere that woodlice secrete their urine through their exoskeleton. God, help me!

Something brown falls out from beneath its armadillo armour, and it inhales it like a vacuum. The class screech in delight and horror, and the woodlouse folds into a ball, the lead whipping from Bobby's hand. It looks like an insect yoyo.

"Dad does that sometimes," says Bobby. "Especially when I play my drum."

Bobby once brought his drum to show and tell; a biscuit tin and a splintered spoon. He performed We Will Rock You, the memory making me also want to curl up.

"How did..." Your Dad? Some of these kids know the truth about Santa. If I play into Bobby's story, I could be throwing him to the playground wolves. "How did your woodlouse get so big?"

"I feed him lots. He didn't want his favourite cereal anymore, but he eats the black stuff on my windowsill." I remember Bobby's father from parents evening, a few dark stumps in his mouth. A skittish man with no interest in Bobby; a flight risk.

The woodlouse unravels, and Bobby picks up the lead. It stays by his side.

"Where did you actually get this?" I ask, unsure anymore whether it's even a woodlouse. Perhaps it's an escaped zoo creature; something exotic but too hideous for Attenborough to document.

Bobby sighs, his tone patient. "My dad was sat at the table saying he wished he was someone else. The next day he was gone, and on the chair was this woodlouse. His wish must've come true." Bobby smiles and pets the creature. It doesn't flinch or tug at the lead.

"Maybe he's big because of how much you care about him. Isn't Bobby's dad lucky to have him?" The class nods, and I know Bobby will be safe. "Why don't you all take Bobby's dad into the playground to play?" The class cheer, squabbling over who can hold the lead first.

Rebecca Klassen

CODEC // SECRETARY OF DEFENSE JIM HOUSEMAN (Top of Metal Gear REX)

*After Metal Gear Solid by Hideo Kojima & Tomokazu Fukushima
& I will put Chaos into fourteen lines by Edna St. Vincent Millay.*

I am the one: the man who contains chaos, traps him within fourteen
walls. Has your thumb ever left prints on the pristine paint of the button,
the one that drops the bomb? (It's smaller than you think, liquorice black,
no poppy red). Few have the power to wield God's eraser, to tumble tower
blocks, scrape cityscapes from our planet's sorry crust. Your mission
is complete, soldier, now mine begins. Tomorrow's fish-&-chip
wrappers will spill the story: a dad's army terrorist cell
fumbled a nuclear device in the chill Alaskan wasteland.
There was no virus, no hostage, no hero to flog
America's dirty secrets. Try twisting to fire,
flood, demon; escape will strain
to nothing in the strict
confines of my sweet
order.

Laurie Eaves

Portrait of a Funeral, Sept. 2023

In moments like these
the animal is so close
I can taste the primordial musk
like thick honey on my tongue

meat
we are become meat
we are become dust
dust and ash and meat

my father sounds his barbaric yawp
like a beastly, drunken Jackson Pollock
clutching at the urn
he howls like a wounded thing
my hand against his shoulder bony and pale
in the wake of so much frailty

ashes to ashes
dust to dust
et cetera, et cetera
the Reverend, some cousin fished in from Ohio
drones on about resurrection and peace
while my father is screaming
his loss to the empty heavens
his features distorting like a Francis Bacon painting
pained, desperate tears melting
down his twisted face
watery acrylic on a canvas of mourning

meat
we are meat
and death is that relentless butcher
lining us up to taste the thunderous blow
two legged cows tottering on the long march to slaughter
grief hovering
grief heavy
grief lingering
and my father,
my father, flushed red, shoulders heaving like a great bull
still screaming

Jay Orlando

2 sonnets from Zionism is Us

i.

At work I walk away from the sound of
BBC news and stand near the tumble
dryer until I can't hear genocide.
Everyone has had enough. The earth says
this loudly. We apologise before
we say this. *I think about what Jimmy
Baldwin's mother said: 'the good people have
been born,' and think: 'the good ideas
have too.'* Freedom was thought of before,
in sincerer minds. It stays a crushing
promise, because it's only that. The word
was not needed in Atikamekw*, that
was a European abstraction for
those who'd no idea what it looked like.

ii.

I walk back to the TV, you vaguely
say something anti U.S. I worry
of police spies there is no evidence
for. I tell you the weapons that cause the
explosions were made in our city. Why
does U.K. citizenship make this fact
vanish. We know it. The explosions stop.
We don't. I say there were one mill whites in
Algeria before armed struggle. So
Palestine will be free. You're African,
here on a work visa, near every part
of this sentence is at threat. You think of
the example and say *free? How naive
to think that when you leave the room you do.*

Silas Curtis

* *an Indigenous language and nation occupied
by Canada*

Limbo

Saints in the thirteenth century didn't have to try too hard. All a lot of them did was live lives of piety in a convent, and that was enough. I copied the word "canonised" carefully under my drawing of Saint Marie of Oignies looking holy. Did you choose your nun's name? I asked Sister Agatha, and she said she didn't. She was one of the nice nuns; young, you imagined she had a life before joining the Convent. What was your name before? I asked and she said, I'm not supposed to say. I asked her why Saint Agatha wasn't in the saints' book I was copying the pictures from, and she smiled and said there were so many saints there wasn't room.

Next door the rest of the class, being of the age of reason, were preparing for their first Holy Communion. Reverend Mother was talking about getting ready for first confession, which you had at the same time. She asked them what were the four essential aspects of the sacrament. No one knew them all, and I whispered Repentance, Confession, Penance and Absolution as I bent over my colouring-in.

I was also of the age of reason. I used to think that I was a Non-Catholic, that that was an actual religion, until my mum corrected me and told me ours was a Protestant house. Protestants didn't have nuns or convents. I went to St Dominics because mum thought the local primary school was too rough and would be bad for my asthma.

Reverend Mother had said that unbaptised babies went to Limbo if they died. There was another Limbo as well, for the Patriarchs who had lived godly lives but couldn't go to Heaven because they had the very bad luck to be born before Jesus saved mankind. What about the matriarchs? I had wondered but did not ask. Reverend

Mother didn't like it if you asked too many questions. Or the wrong sort of questions. She said that the babies in Limbo were perfectly happy because they didn't know any better, but it was sad for their parents knowing they would not see them in Heaven.

I had been christened but it wasn't as good as being baptised. I still had my original sin, a dark stain on my soul, along with the newer, lighter stains that had got there since I reached the age of reason. I worried about dying in the night. Sometimes I tried to stop myself falling asleep in case I didn't wake up. I begged my mum to let me go to Mass on Sunday, but she wouldn't. This is a Protestant house, she said. I was eight years old. Would God understand that I couldn't go to Mass by myself? If I died, would I go to Limbo?

I asked Sister Agatha, but she couldn't or wouldn't say.

En Ransome



Cryptic

Sarah Leavesley

Notes from an Online Workshop

One thing I'll take away is ...

my doodles
developed
fourteen
My go-tos

have not
since I was

are spirals

colonies
of snail shells
KEY POINTS
clustering around

on Box
on Box
on Box

Screwed
up
angles
and

self-taught perspective

light
Pyramids
cast with
and
from conflicting

shade
directions
Faces of
(*imaginary*) friends -
their eyes!!

high
too in their foreheads

their teeth!!
tiny and too many
s i
and m i a l g n
ed

Love hearts
speared with
hope

two

dimensional

like the

nothing
real

thing

Yes, I would recommend to a friend.

Helen Anderson

None of The Above

Format adapted from the SAT Reading and English exams. The SAT is a standardized test administered to secondary school students to measure college and career readiness.

Each passage below is followed by a number of questions. After reading each passage, choose the best answer to each question based on what is stated or implied in the passage and in any accompanying graphics.

Passage 1

The Elusive Mr. Huang- adapted from former accounts of employees

Mr. James Huang of Starfire Enterprises was a brisk man with a sharp disposition.

Every day, at work, he would straighten out his tie and his fingers as his assistants rushed to bring him coffee, memos, and good news. He was known for his perfectly loopy signature, his placidly thin smile, and his spotlessly polished lapel pin, borne in the shape of a feather.

When asked about his lapel pin, he would often shy away, unanswering. Only his closest friends and family knew the origin of the pin- a fine, golden thing with thinly veiled ridges, sitting at the cusp of his collar. The pin belonged to his daughter, who had received it in recognition of getting the highest honors at her school. "Straight As, Dad," his daughter had told him, pressing the pin into his palm.

For all Mr. Huang seemed to revere his daughter, he rarely spoke of her at all. The staff only knew of her existence due to a single account from his secretary, where she had knocked on his office door to deliver some documents that needed signing. Through the door, his voice was evident, starching. "No, Amara, come straight home from school. You don't have time. Remember, one day, Starfire will be yours. Do you know

what would happen to our publicity if the next CEO was not only a woman, but an uneducated one?"

The secretary had backed away from the door, deciding that those documents could wait. She made a mental note to hug her own daughter when she returned home from work that day.

1. Based on the events of the passage, which of the following is an accurate assumption regarding Mr. Huang's daughter, Amara?
 - A) Amara is ungrateful and does not appreciate all the prosperous opportunities her responsible father is offering her.
 - B) Amara is too distracted and frivolous to recognize that her academics are the most important aspect of her life as a high school student.
 - C) Amara is too irresponsible to take over the company because she has no sense of respect towards her father or her academics.
 - D) Amara has no purpose or defined goal in her life because she wishes to go elsewhere after school, rather than study and work towards her future.

2. Based on the last sentence of the passage, which of the following statements is true regarding Mr. Huang's secretary?
 - A) She coddles her child rather than correctly disciplining her or setting behavioral standards.
 - B) She assumes the worst of Mr. Huang because she does not understand the importance of setting goals for one's children.
 - C) She disapproves of Mr. Huang's parenting style because she is emotionally fragile, hence her belief that children should be adapted to rather than disciplined.
 - D) She does not care about her daughter's future, and chooses to give her unearned affirmation as a result of her own weakness as a parent.

Passage 2

The Bluejay Review – "Do Grades Really Mean Everything?"- written by student reporter Sam Tyrone

The debate over current systems of academia has escalated over the recent century. Historically, statistics such as grades, standardized test scores, and AP scores have been used by employers, recruiters, and most universities to measure a student's intellectual viability and career potential.

However, studies have shown that test-taking is not always reflective of a student's academic or social abilities, but rather of the socioeconomic conditions that a student faces throughout their course of education. Meanwhile, students who are able to keep up with [3] extremely demanding (yet necessary) course rigors often do so at the cost of their mental and physical well-being.

"It's exhausting," Bluejay High School junior, Amara Huang, reports. "I get maybe three hours of sleep per night. The thought that a single bad grade could drop my GPA keeps me awake- but I do it anyway. I've always had good grades, since I was really little, so I'm not sure what I would do with myself if I didn't."

Despite her troubles, Huang is resolute to continue her academic pursuits. She confirms, "I think it's worth it, though. It really is."

Huang has a 4.0 GPA, is taking 5 AP classes, serves as Bluejay High's student body president, and plays two varsity sports. She partially attributes her academic drive to her heritage. To this, Huang remarks, "One of my big inspirations at school and at home is my dad. He immigrated from Asia and works really hard to build a great life for us. I feel like if I even had a fraction of his work ethic, I'll be able to build that same bright future for myself."

1. Based on the given passage, which statement should the author agree with?
 - A) Schools must maintain strict grading policies and deadlines because academic success is the most important factor in every student's life.

- B) Academic grades and test scores are the only viable reflection of one's intellectual ability.
- C) A rigorous academic culture may be unhealthy, but it is necessary in order to prepare students for the harsh realities of the real world.
- D) If a student cannot keep up with advanced coursework, they will have no success in future endeavors.

2. Based on the passage, which of the following can the reader learn about Amara?

- A) Amara is ungrateful, because Asian Americans are naturally smarter and get better grades than average, so she should not be complaining.
- B) Amara is overdramatic, because many other students face the same academic struggles that she does, and are just fine.
- C) Amara is hypocritical, because she is criticizing the system of academia that she voluntarily chooses to follow.
- D) Amara is irresponsible, as she recognizes that her academic practices are unhealthy yet does not change them.

3. Which word best fits in the underlined portion? (See [3].)

- A) NO CHANGE
- B) very beneficial
- C) undeniably necessary
- D) genuinely useful

Passage 3

Excerpts from the Diary of Amara Huang

January 9th, 2024

Hey. It's me, Amara. I haven't written in this thing in ages, but I felt like it today, maybe because I don't feel like doing anything else. It's strange. I was really on top of things a few weeks ago, but all I want to do now is lie in bed and stare blankly into space. So now, I'm here.

I guess I've changed a lot since I last wrote in this. But I'm exactly who I thought I'd be when I was younger. I'm a good daughter, I think. I work really hard in school and people like me and that's all I've ever wanted. In the past few weeks, though, it's been getting harder. I've started imagining running, sleeping, lying somewhere and not thinking about anything at all. It sounds like a nice life.

But I think I have a bit too much going on to be daydreaming about what could be. I think Dad would throw a fit if he even knew I'd been considering any of this. And rightfully so. He'd do anything for me. He deserves a daughter who's got her head on straight.

For now, I just have to keep up. And get out of bed, at some point. And focus. I need to focus. I need to.

February 20th, 2024

Something happened today for the first time. I didn't like it at all. I didn't. I got a B on a test. When I saw my score, I ran to the school bathroom and sat down on the floor and cried. Then I did something bad. I started writing a note. It had a bunch of goodbyes on it. To Mom, Dad, my friends. I felt like I wanted to disappear. I bit my lip and it hurt. It was a good hurt. I didn't even think that was possible.

Maybe I'll do better next time. I can't let Dad find out. He's worked so hard for me, for his life, for his future, and I can't even pass my exams. I need to try harder. I need to be like him. I need to be him. If I can't be like him, what good is being in the first place?

March 18th, 2024

It happened again. I couldn't see the paper in front of me because my eyes were blurring. I've failed three quizzes in the last week. My grades aren't going to be As anymore, not after this.

I wonder where I went wrong. What was the point of everything? I can't let Dad know; he'll be so disappointed. Sometimes, when I think about him, I can't breathe.

I still have the goodbye note I wrote a week ago. It has everything I need to say. I read about this thing, in a book, when I was younger. It was about a girl who hadn't met her goals, so she disappeared forever. No one had to know that she had failed, except her.

It doesn't sound too bad.

April 3rd, 2024

I got my report card back today. It was what I thought. It wasn't what I wanted.

[1]I guess this is the end of it all.

I can't even pull myself out of bed anymore. It's like climbing a mountain, where there are ropes on my feet pulling me back every time I try to move or think at all. I had so much more going for me, and now it's all ruined. If I didn't have to care so much, if I could breathe on the weekends and sleep a little longer at night, would things have been different?

I know this is what I was made for. And I've failed.

I'm going to go somewhere where I'll be allowed to breathe again. I'm going to disappear.

1. Given the context of the passage, which of the following phrases provides the most reasonable outlook that Amara should have of her situation? (see [1])

A) NO CHANGE

- B) "I need to stop complaining and work."
- C) "I think that I have been lazy over the past few weeks."
- D) "I must work harder and strive for a better future."

2. Which of the following best describes Amara's mentality at the end of the passage?

- A) She is too weak to handle the academic and familial pressure she faces.
- B) She victimizes herself rather than tackling her obstacles head-on.
- C) She is too immature to make rational decisions about her future.
- D) She does not recognize that her problems are insignificant, given that she is still a high school student and has many outward responsibilities taken care of for her.

Passage 4

The Southland Gazette News: Bluejay High School Student Passes Away

The community of Southland County is grieving the death of Bluejay High School junior Amara Huang, who was found in her home on the evening of April 4th, 2024, at the age of 16. Tragically, Amara appears to have taken her own life.

Amara was an incredibly bright and responsible student who was known for her [2] remarkable leadership, serving as Bluejay High's student body president this past school year. An anonymous peer reports, "She was always excited about being at school. She worked really hard, and she wanted to make us all proud. Nobody ever told her that we would all be proud no matter what. Maybe she never knew."

Her father, James Huang, remarks to the press, "This is a saddening and confusing time for us. Amara was a perfect student, an inspiration to her peers, and had a very bright future. We appreciate your thoughts as we take time to grieve, but also recognize Amara's life and achievements."

1. In the article provided, what was the author's intention of highlighting Amara's academic and extracurricular accomplishments?
 - A) To express confusion as to why Amara took her life, as her achievements are all qualities that should contribute to one's fulfillment and happiness.
 - B) To express disappointment that Amara's academic and extracurricular potential was wasted due to her untimely death.
 - C) To accentuate Amara's most defining characteristics and her values, in order to remind readers about what is truly important in life.
 - D) To encourage other high-achieving students like Amara to keep working hard, so they may one day be as highly regarded as Amara is.

2. Given the tone and the circumstances surrounding this passage, which description of Amara is most appropriate? (See [2].)
 - A) NO CHANGE
 - B) work ethic and intelligence
 - C) service to the school
 - D) academic success

3. Contextualize the perspectives of the previous passages, as well as the answer choices that have been provided. Given these circumstances, in regard to current academia culture, which of the following is the most likely outcome of the developments described in the text?
 - A) NO CHANGE
 - B) NO CHANGE
 - C) NO CHANGE
 - D) NO CHANGE

Caroline Zhang



Dream Series 1

Ophelia Gilman

The Simplification of Chinese Characters Reviewed

1.

Is it a linguistic coincidence or an undeclared prophesy?

But 60 years after Mao Zedong approved

The scheme for simplifying Chinese characters

We are now living in an open & reformed age, where

愛 /ai/ [love] has become feeling without heart : 爱

親 /qin/ [kinship] someone who is not to be seen: 亲

兒 /er/ [son] a person without a brain : 儿

鄉 /xiang/ [village] a place where there are no men: 乡

廠 /chang/ [factory] a building with nothing inside: 厂

產 /chan/ [manufacture] a process without production: 产

雲 /yun/ [cloud] a nimbus offering no rainfall : 云

開 /kai/ [open] an action to break something doorless: 开

導 /dao/ [lead] a guidance without the Way: 导

2.

More than half a century long after

The simplification of classic Chinese characters

And almost [XS8] half a century well after

China opened its doors & began its reforms

To shake off its deformities and archaisms:

魔 /mo/ remains the same as 魔 [evil], so does

鬼 /gui/ as 鬼 [ghost], so does

偷 /tou/ as 偷 [steal], so does

黑 /hei/ as 黑 [darkness], so does

貪 /tan/ as 贪 [greed], so does

賭 /du/ as 赌 [gamble], so does

毒 /du/ as 毒 [poison], so does

賊 /zhei/ as 贼 [thief], so does

騙 /pian/ exactly as 骗 [cheat,], which remains

As unchangeable as Chinese per se, or does it not?

Yuan Changming

Untitled

I. 2022.

it is boring to write a poem in which
our enemies are vast impersonal machines

+ free will is saying fuck you to empire &
then not getting paid very well

this may or may not
be good for your mental health.

a large portion of us are
permanently bought off

i disappear into doing
nothing rhythmically +

wage-moses
sweeps sea
aisle.

enough-food broken off
the titan accrual

dispensary
peep-hole.

does my peroxide hair
gentrify in-and-of-itself?

oh how un-materialist!

II. 1938.

me and my bothy and my cullen skink
@ bellahouston park's empire expo.

today's
order of dust

claims yesterday's
finished

to scream thru
our bodies.

the snapped charcoal of
prayer-hands
flare

tossed thru
city-night
smog.

& finding our bones
won't stop our production
into them

as if the rounds
are just shells

& not live propulsions
into flesh.

Silas Curtis

We Broke a Songbird

The man in the mirror steers the razor through the foam on his cheeks. Suds fall into the handbasin filled with water, flecked with stubble and blood where the razor has nicked him. An old-fashioned safety razor, like the one his father had used. *Su padre*, his father, standing at the bathroom mirror back in 1973, shaving before putting on his uniform for work. The belt, the boots, the peaked cap, the pistol he kept in a safe and took out each morning, checking the clip then tucking it into the holster on his hip.

The man in the mirror pauses to squeeze a zit that has formed overnight at the side of his nose. He wipes it away, a fleck of blood against white tissue. He shaves his moustache, then does a final check with his hand, feeling for bits he's missed. A few flicks of the razor and he's done. Checking his eyebrows. Checking his chest hair where it rises from his shirt. Unscrewing the metal head that holds the blade and rinsing it.

It's a German razor, a Merkur, built to last. Maybe forever. You could still get the blades from eBay. He'd bought a good supply, when he had the chance. Maybe one day they'd run out. The way things do. One thing superseding another. He'd tried those modern triple-bladed affairs, but they cost a fortune and didn't get into the little ravines that had formed in his face. Sometimes the old ways were best. Before that, cut-throat razors. You couldn't help shuddering at the thought.

He dries his face on the hand towel, dabbing at the blood. The cut is just below his cheek bone. His father used a styptic pencil that stung like hell. The man in the mirror still has a white scar under his chin from learning to shave. That was long after they took the flight from Santiago. His father had been posted there in the chaos after

Allende. He'd risen fast until that wheel turned and they had to leave the country. They were like lice, his father said, the communists. And they'd be looking for him. For doing his duty. To Chile, to Pinochet. Though he didn't know what a communist was, of course. The man in the mirror had been a child then.

There was an ice cream van that parked outside their apartment block in Santiago and his father sometimes brought him a cone of vanilla ice-cream with raspberry sauce after work. He liked to tease him before handing it over. Holding the cone behind his back and reciting every possible type of ice cream the vendor sold. *Napolitano, ron con pasos, choco menta*. But it was always his favourite, vanilla with a splash of *frambuesa*. Until his father thought they were watching him, the ice-cream vendor and his wife. He'd walked out to talk to them in his uniform and they never came back.

The man in the mirror puts the razor away in the little silver case. He rinses the shaving brush and stands it in the cupboard on top of the tub of shaving cream. Sandalwood. The bottom section of the bathroom window is frosted, so their neighbours can't see in, but the top half is clear. There's the snow, falling across Minnesota in big flakes. Across the lakes, across Canada, like a dream settling upon reality. But today is Monday and he has to go to work at the power station where he's worked for fifteen years. Checking the computers. Burning coal from Wyoming and Montana. Feeding the turbines with steam. A technocrat, like his father.

Downstairs he can hear his children squabbling over a TV channel, Adrienne just stirring in the bedroom next door. He'll go down to make their breakfast, now. John and Michael. Good Catholic names, but anglicised, of course. *Juan, Miguel*. He was seven when his father took him aside to tell him how the family needed to fit in

here. How they had a new family name now, a new language, a new beginning in a new country. They put a little stars and stripes flag in the corner of a downstairs window, his father's hand on his shoulder like dread he couldn't shake off.

It had been hard at first, a game in which you had to be careful to tell the same story. His father was working shifts as a janitor in an apartment block. On a day like this he'd have been stoking the heating system with coke, outlined against the glow of the open boiler door. He had a few friends from the old country. Men who knocked softly on the door at night and who he took into the back parlour, closing the door with a click like the magazine seating itself in the pistol grip.

The man in the mirror closes the door of the bathroom cabinet, then opens it again, remembering the cologne he needs to splash his face with. He'd get half an hour with the boys before Adrienne emerged, sleepy eyed, pulling her nightgown over her breasts before she poured coffee and lit that first cigarette. The cologne stings his face as he dabs it with the towel.

He goes downstairs, pausing in the stairwell to look out through the long window. The snow is settling now. On the tiny lawn and in the larch trees. The roads could be bad. He'd check with the app on his phone. A few starlings are padding across the lawn, leaving their traces. Migrants too, he remembered. Brought from Europe. He'd learned that in school. Eugene Schieffelin (the name was a splinter lodged in his mind) introducing all the birds mentioned by Shakespeare in his plays. They'd spread across the country, the starlings, swarming like an idea taking hold. That was one way to think of them. Insurgents. Maybe that was something to do with their multitudes.

It's one way of going home, to die. His father had said that on the cancer ward, though he was delirious at the end. Talking about some artist, a singer he had to take

care of. His mother resting her white hair against his chest. It made no sense, and he kept getting his words mixed up. Speaking in Spanish again, *el capitán*. He got close to saying things and then fell into silence, his eyes blurred by morphine, the monitor above the bed still showing his vital signs, the hospital sheets tight as a snowdrift. He kept saying it, *un hombre que cantaba en el estadio*. Then a thin, rictus smile, *nosotros rompimos un pájaro cantor*. Then nothing.

The man who was formerly in the mirror is downstairs, laying the table for breakfast. The TV programme finishes, and he calls to the kids. *Breakfast guys! It's happening*. Of course it is. Setting out bowls, Putting a spoon beside each one. Fetching milk from the fridge. Bringing cups and spooning beans into the coffee maker. Kissing Adrienne once on the cheek as she arrives, looking for her cigarettes.

He calls the boys again with just a hint of annoyance and they spill into the room, dark-headed, asking him if there are pancakes. Asking him if he really has to go to work in the snow? *Your dad has to work, kids*. Then, gangster style, *Godda bring home da bacon, huh?* His father would have liked that. Kissing his mother before walking to work. Straightening his overalls, brushing dust from his shoulder, a piece of tissue stuck to his chin where he'd cut himself shaving.

Graham Mort

Your life need not make sense

Origin story

We are foam on the surface
of the boil of evolution, and you are fitted,
crudely, in a survival-of-the-fittest-shaped hole
and although so many armchair Fascists suggest
this means your only valid role
is to beat, subdue and rape
this is not the case.
You need not be the wolf
(who are not like that anyway.)

Fittest never meant *most buff*
or *supreme conqueror*,
Darwin and consequent theorists
have always meant *most suited to the day*
and when the afternoon is spent
building box forts for grandchildren, then...
why Grandma, what strong genes you have...

Making a life

So you build a society
upon the froth and initially all you want
is edible roots and grains enough
for through the winter's bleak

but in a society people speak
or snub one another
and people start to own things
inherit
acquire that younger lover
on the side

and people hide
or worse take pride
in their tiny peccadillos
and before long
the heap is sorted
every person in their place
every foot
firmly in the face
of someone underneath

and you smile and say you are happy
with the boots
all pressing down.

Making a buck
I will trade these beaver pelts
for a new iPhone, I have I think
a ton of them
encrypted
with a blockchain and stored
in an envelope which I keep
beneath the mattress
and I earn them, of course,
on the gig economy
where nothing is forever
or even for the day
and why would you want a pension plan
why would you believe that you
or your nation
would ever last that long?

Coherence is not required
...as we stroll along the shore
salt sea-spray in our hair
and the five star hotel is still burning
over there
the currency we bought when we arrived
might now get us shot on sight
and who knows whether the street kitchen
we used for food tonight
will still exist tomorrow
or take my walking boots in payment
but this is a great holiday
axiom zero still holds:
we exist
and what more do you want?

Ian Badcoe



Heart Tree

Ophelia Gilman

Art angel

These next few years will be spent doing [all] my dream body mods – Grimes

The arms are the biggest sacrifice – the hands – losing the sense of touch – the ability to lift – to caress – to hold – to write – to feel – but mammal shoulders can only take one set of limbs – support them – interpret the signals from the brain – turn them into movement. After the hours on the surgeon’s table – the professional miracles of graft and transfusion – the intricate connections of prosthesis to bone and cartilage – the fledging of hollow metal wing-bone tubes – synthetic keratin feathers – it still takes all of my efforts at first to twitch them an inch or two – to stir the air – unfold and fold them back on themselves without misaligning fragile parts. I know the rest of my frame will never be aerodynamic – my shoulders not broad – my chest not deep and muscular enough to take the strain of the kind of flexion that would lift my body up onto the thermals – over mountains – over oceans – my brain unable to tune into magnetic fields of the earth – it isn’t the point – the point is being at last what I have always known myself to be.

Mike Farren

Binbag Mary and Virgin Paul

Mary and Paul are bickering in the living room again, and I can hear them from the space just off the hallway, next to the stairs, where I'm digging through the bag of old Scalextric. I search for usable pieces, track that isn't warped or rusted and have intact connectors, stacking them to one side. Sections I can't immediately use but that I can fix I place in a separate pile. I know I can't make the circuit a perfect figure 8, but if I gently twist the pieces without buckling the metal slots, I can make some sort of eternal shape. I'm happy with my birthday present, happier that I have something to repair and re-make, but I'm not happy with the bickering of Mary and Paul in the living room, because I'll have to stop playing and intervene even though I know I'll get in trouble.

Mary and Paul are framed pictures of Pope Paul the something and Virgin Mary Mother of God. I sometimes wish we had a picture of Jesus so he could shut them up, but I suspect they wouldn't listen to him anyway. Jesus is a step too far for Dad. Me too. They've argued since Father Childwell fed me the body of Jesus for my First Holy Communion. Jesus stuck to the roof of my mouth and Mum hissed at me for picking at him with my finger.

At our house, birthday presents arrive in bags. Brown paper binbags of Lego without instructions. A bag of injured toy soldiers, a tangle of Macedonian legs and Nazi arms and twisted Hussars. I don't know if I'm supposed to heal them or make them fight. Once, I got a Tesco's bag of Meccano, bent metal plates, buckled yellow and silver strips, pre-drilled shapes, half-assembled structures held loosely together with tiny black grommets and mismatched screws, and no tools. I used a dinner knife as a

screwdriver. Mum told me off as she pressed the tea towel to my finger to cut off the flow of blood.

This year, my present is a binbag of Scalextric racetrack. And two cars, a Mini Cooper and a Lotus Formula 1 race car. My cousin Philip, whose toys I inherit, has left the controllers attached to the transformer terminals and the bare copper has oxidized black and needs to be rewired. At the bottom of the bag is the screwdriver from last year's Meccano. I use it to lift the track connectors so that I don't have dead zones that make the cars stop.

There is also an old rotary phone in the bag. Sometimes my presents contain surprises. I've already taken the phone apart to harvest wire to replace the burned nubs of conductive bushes on the race cars.

Philip is too old for toys, says Auntie Chris. Philip needs to focus on his career, she says. Philip is 15, four years older than me, and plays football for the city and junior cricket for Lancashire. He also sings a solo hymn at the church every Christmas. Last year, Chris told my Mum that Philip was going to be a race car driver. The year before, an architect. This year he is going to be a surgeon. Each birthday I'm given the toys that no longer match her ambitions for him. Next year I'll probably get a corpse. In a bin bag. Auntie Chris always says the same thing. She blows smoke down her nose and hands over the binbag, pinches my cheek with the lip-sticked cigarette popping dangerously close to my ear, "Oh, it's just some of Phillip's old things that you might make use of." She doesn't know that Philip smokes cigarettes in school, behind the bike sheds, holding the butt between forefinger and thumb, keeping it at arms-length between grimaced inhalations.

I can make anything out of mismatched Lego. I can build towers and bridges from old Meccano. I can bring world peace by putting limbless GIs and decapitated Nazis in the same army, the unarmed and the beheaded. And I've just discovered, I can wire the telephone to the Scalextric transformer and make the bell ring when I press on the controller. I just need to figure out what makes the transformer smoke. And I can do this without electrocuting myself because I know that when Mary and Paul are too busy arguing they can't make me dead and send me to hell. But sometimes, like now, I can't concentrate because their arguing gets too loud.

His Holiness has just called Mary a slut, and Our Lady (that's what Mum calls her) has just called the Pope a kiddie-fiddler, and though I'm not really sure what any of that means—they're words I hear at school—I know that if I repeat them just one more time, Father Childwell, who gives a speech every morning at school assembly, will tell me I'm going to hell and he'll give me more than the 10 Our Fathers and 10 Hail Marys he gave me last time. And my Mum will tell my dad who will still be laughing when he punishes me. Unless he's drunk, when he'll close the door and punish Mum instead. But Mary and Paul are shouting so loud that I can't figure out why the telephone rings, but the cars won't move.

I'll have to go and turn them to face the wall, even though I got in trouble last time because it means I don't love God.

My Mum arranged Mary and Paul so that they face slightly toward each other at either end of the wooden mantelpiece, above the three-bar electric fire that never gets turned on even when it's cold. Auntie Chris gave us that too, bundled it from her living room into our car the same day I convinced Philip that when the bars glowed white it meant they were cold. He tells people the scars on his fingertips are from

putting out a fire. He's not entirely lying. Dad suggested that next time I convince Phillip their brand-new electric stove is cold.

Mary and Paul are arguing about God. They do that a lot. Mary says God loves her more because he gave her a baby, and Paul says that at least God still talks to him. Paul calls her Binbag Mary because she arrived in a binbag, like the Lego and the Meccano. Mary calls him Virgin Paul, but he shouts over her, calling her a slut for letting God do it on the first date.

Auntie Chris and Mum are still talking in the kitchen. Chris is always loud. My Mum tells my dad she is "larger than life." "A character." Chris announces that Philip is at a football tournament in Holland. He's probably smoking cigarettes and doing it with girls. He once told me he was no longer "pure" like Pope Paul, who jeers when I turn Mary to face the wall but shuts up when I turn him around too.

Before Auntie Chris leaves, she'll come to find me and pinch my cheek again and almost burn my face with her cigarette. Then Mum will sit in the living room and smoke three cigarettes in a row until she stops crying and then she'll wipe her eyes and say "that cow, that sodding cow" under her breath. And then she'll notice that I've turned the pictures again and she'll start crying again and threaten to call Father Childwell to talk to me. But Father Childwell has just showed up at the house and Mum and Auntie Chris are using their posh voices.

I'm smart for my age, everyone says so, so I know that as long as I turn Paul and Mary back around before Chris leaves, I won't get in trouble. Chris is laughing about how well our wallpaper has lasted, and Mum is laughing in that way that she does only with Chris, and in between the laughter the glass ashtray scrapes across the kitchen table collecting their ashes. Father Childwell asks if Mum can bake something

for the church fete and Mum is laughing as she resists while Auntie Chris teasingly insists. "She burned a rice pudding to a crisp last week," says Auntie Chris. Dad winked at me when he said he only nailed it to the gatepost, "as a joke." Father Childwell will win, he always does, but I have some time until Mum's resistance breaks. It always does.

I turn Paul and Mary back around and hush them before the glares turn bickering. I have to unplug the Scalextric and work out what is burning.

Tony Cartlidge



After Rain Blues

Katie Hughbanks

Halfdan Was Here

There's something in the fact that AI art can't get the hands right
And some of the oldest art we have is handprints on a wall
That some of those handprints were too small to be anything but children's
But high up, like they were held, or balanced on the shoulders of their mothers
Hands outstretched
Making a mark
There's something in the fact that I could sit at a desk at school, ready to do my exams
And trace my fingers over graffiti written there decades before I was even thought of
Initials twined in hearts, strangers wishing people luck from the past
And that you can do the same in museums, and dig sites, dig your fingers into carvings
at Pompeii that say Gaius and Aulus were friends
That a man thought his girlfriend was proof of Aphrodite's existence
And my personal favourite
"Theophilus, don't perform oral sex on girls against the city wall like a dog"
Reasonable advice for any city, methinks
There's something in the fact that dinosaurs all died out millions of years
before any of us were born
And we found their bones and footprints
Made sketches of what they might have looked like
And turned those sketches into toys
Made them small and soft so that we could love them
That kids for thousands of years have clung to things soft and warm for comfort
Tiny facsimiles of themselves in grass and wood, in porcelain and cotton
And found some great meaning there
There's something in the fact that humans
No matter the strife, the pain, the hardship
Have made art, have told stories, have sung
And that even in the dark
The endless cold
You can hear the song between the strings.

Demi Smith

Moon Enough to See By

for Rebecca Cooney

It feels like it should be a saying; something
an ancestor somewhere in rural Ireland
making their way up the coast one night
right after the last drink might hear

from a stranger coming the other way,
after they raise their hand, look up
to see everything suddenly silver and say,
"quite a moon tonight!", or similar.

In any event, it's a good thing to wish:
that the night road under you has its edges
lit, if not transfigured; that your breath
is a star-cloud in the cold

letting you know you have warmth in you
to step, then step again; that home
is a waiting brightness; that the night
is not so dark; that there's moon enough.

Tim Kiely

Contributors

Laura Isabela Amsel lives in Madison, Mississippi. She holds an MA in Spanish from Middlebury College. Her poems appear in recent issues of *Terrain*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Cloudbank*, *wildness*, *Nimrod International Journal*, and *Atlanta Review*. Her poem "Father" won the 2022 Monica Taylor Poetry Prize, and her poem "Cain" won the 2022 *Mikrokosmos* Poetry Prize, judged by A.E. Stallings. Her first book manuscript, *A Brief Campaign of Sting and Sweet*, won the Brick Road Poetry Prize and is forthcoming from Brick Road Poetry Press in April 2024.

Helen Anderson writes poetry and prose near Redcar, in the North East of England. Her poetry chapbook *Way Out* was published by Black Light Engine Room Press in 2017 and her debut pamphlet *Sagrada Familia* came out with Nine Pens Press in 2022. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Teesside University and her work has appeared in literary magazines such as *Confingo*, *The Storms Journal*, and *Boats Against The Current*.

Paul atten Ash is the pen name of Bristol-based Paul Nash. He has been published by *Bent Key*, *Broken Sleep*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Full House*, *Magma*, among others. Prize shortlistings include: Alpine Fellowship (2023) and Ginkgo (2022, 2021). *Searchlight Seasons*, his debut pamphlet, will be published by Atomic Bohemian in 2024.

Ian Badcoe is a nonbinary person living in Sheffield, during the day he develops computer games and in his spare time he writes poetry and attends some of the many excellent local open mics.

Julia Biggs is a poet, writer and freelance art historian. She lives in Cambridge, UK. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Annie Journal*, *Sídhe Press*, *Streetcake Magazine* and elsewhere. Find her via her website: juliabiggs1.wixsite.com

Born and raised in Liverpool, England, Tony Cartlidge is currently being held against his will in Illinois. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *trampset*, *Pithead Chapel*, and elsewhere. He has an MFA from Indiana University but thinks the dogs may have eaten it.

Carys Crossen is a writer of short fiction, non-fiction and academic articles from Manchester UK. She has a husband, a daughter and a cat with very high standards (for writing and everything else).

Silas Curtis is a support worker and poet based in Glasgow. He has published with *Prolit*, *Wet Grain*, *Overground/Underground*, *Prole*, and *Propel Magazine*. In 2020, he script-edited a short film critiquing the UK immigration system - *A Dream in a Mirage*.

And in 2023, he facilitated a children's workshop on poetry and social justice with ReMode, Paisley. He is currently studying an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

Emilija L. Ducks (they/them) is a Macedonian musician and writer, active in both fields since adolescence. Self-taught in poetry, and musically educated, they have been published in Macedonia, Serbia and England, and have four musical releases available on Spotify and all listening platforms. Currently based in Manchester, and probably doing chainmail or something.

Laurie Eaves' debut collection, *Biceps*, is out on Burning Eye Books. His work has been published by *Bad Betty Press*, *Fawn Press*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Dear Reader*, *Atrium Poetry*, *Poetry Rivals*, *The Primer* and *Allographic Press* amongst others. He co-hosts the Dead Darlings podcast and hosts/produces both Genesis Poetry Slam and the Vagon Slam.

Mike Farren's poems have appeared in journals such as *Stand*, *14 Magazine* and *The Interpreter's House*. He has won several competitions, including Poem of the North (2018 – 'canto' winner), the Ilkley Literature Festival Poetry Competition (2020) and the Red Shed Competition (2023). His pamphlets are *Pierrot and his Mother* (Templar), *All of the Moons* (Yaffle) and *Smithereens* (4Word). He is part of Yaffle Publishing team and one of the hosts of Shipley's Rhubarb open mic.

Ophelia Gilman is a mixed media painter based in Philadelphia, PA. Their work explores tension within dichotomies- life and death, autonomy and oppression, the beautiful and the grotesque. They graduated from Lehigh Carbon Community College with an A.A. in Fine Arts and are currently studying painting at Temple University.

Debbie Hudson is a working-class writer from West Yorkshire whose work focuses on the working-class northern experience, typically with a queer slant. She has been previously published in *Isele Magazine* and *Bandit Fiction*.

Katie Highbanks' photography has been recognized internationally, including two honors from the London Photo Festival. Her photos appear in various publications, including in *Peatsmoke Journal*, *In Parentheses*, *L'Esprit Literary Review*, *New Feathers Anthology*, *Glassworks Magazine*, and *Black Fork Review*. She teaches English and Creative Writing in Louisville, Kentucky.

Tim Kiely is a criminal barrister and poet based in East London. He is the author of three pamphlets of poetry: *Hymn to the Smoke* (Indigo Dreams); *Plaque for the Unknown Socialist* (Back Room Poetry); and *No Other Life* (VOLE Books). His work has also appeared in *South Bank Poetry*, *Under the Radar*, *Magma* and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*.

Rebecca Klassen is co-editor of *The Phare*. Her work has been featured in publications that include *Mslexia Best Short Fiction*, *Popshot*, *Burningword*, *Barren*, *The Wild Word*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, and *Ellipsis Zine*. She has won the London Independent Story Prize and was shortlisted for the Oxford Flash Prize and the Laurie Lee Prize. Rebecca has performed her work at Cheltenham Literature Festival and Stroud Book Festival.

Sarah Leavesley is a prize-winning poet, fiction writer, journalist and photographer, whose visual art has featured in a wide range of publications. As well as designing covers for *V. Press* poetry and flash fiction books, she was The High Window Resident Artist 2019. Her website is sarah-james.co.uk.

Abby Morrice is a freelance illustrator based in UK, her practice is heavily influenced by nature, portraiture, fashion and everything in between. Her work is not restricted to these parameters as she enjoys fluctuating between them all. Spending years working with commercial brands, illuminating their products has not only given her great experience but has given her a sense of direction.

Graham Mort lives in North Yorkshire, UK. He writes poetry and short fiction. He was winner of the Bridport short story prize in 2007. His short story collection, *Touch* (Seren, 2010) won the Edge Hill prize in 2011. His collections, *Terroir* (Seren, 2015) and *Like Fado* (Salt, 2021) were both longlisted for the Edge Hill Prize. A new poetry collection, *Rivers Joining*, and a new short fiction collection, *Emigrés*, are in preparation.

Jay Orlando is a proud queer, Appalachian poet living in rural Pennsylvania. He collects yo-yos and comic books and has a spouse and four cats. You can follow his poetry and adventures on Instagram @jaybird.orlando

Lee Potts is founder and editor-in-chief of *Stone Circle Review*. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, his work has appeared in *The Night Heron Barks*, *Rust + Moth*, *Whale Road Review*, *UCity Review*, *Firmament*, *Moist Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. In 2021, his chapbook, *And Drought Will Follow*, was published by Frosted Fire Press. He lives just outside of Philadelphia with his wife and daughter.

En Ransome is an ace, non-binary writer based in England. They have been writing for a number of years and enjoy the freedom that comes with creating shorter form fiction.

Demi Smith frequently introduces themselves as a bisexual, non-binary, bipolar, bilingual Libra who has never made a decision in their life and isn't planning to start now. They are a poet and sometimes author based out of Cambridge and can be found performing at various open mic nights in the city. When not inflicting their poetry on others they can be found with their nose in a book or making notes of weird things they overhear strangers saying as inspiration for more poems.

Yuan Changming edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan in Vancouver. Credits include twelve Pushcart Prize nominations for poetry and two for fiction, besides appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17), *BestNewPoemsOnline* 2019 and other literary outlets worldwide. A poetry judge at Canada's 2021 National Magazine Awards, Yuan began writing and publishing fiction in 2022.

Caroline Zhang is a writer from Minnesota. She is a two-time Gold Medalist in the National Scholastic Art and Writing awards and has been recognized by *the New York Times* and the *Bluefire Editorial*. Her work is published or forthcoming in the *Peauxdunque Review*, *Eunoia Review*, and the *Center for Fiction*, among others. In her free time, she heads her school's literary magazine.



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