

The Linahover





The Windhover

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

Liv G (editor), Rebecca Hyam (editor), Rustam Eltman (design and layout), Marni O (cover art), Eleni P (title calligraphy)

Editorial

LIV G

'Journeys' is the broad theme of this issue of *The Windhover* and the range of responses itself is astonishing. Amalia's thought-provoking 'BREATHE' is an exhilarating read. The winner of the original composition category in the Lyttelton Festival event, Amalia blew our minds and ears with the precision and passion of her spoken word delivery (we saw her first!). Other poems in this edition also take us to mystical far corners of our isle and across the Irish Sea; we revel in philosophical discourse; we frequent childhoods and memories, dissolving timeframes, train journeys, vistas of myth and injustice. Prose pieces are equally transportive. There is a heart-warming revelation of the sensibility of a humble letter; a return to a childhood home; a candid account of a painful break-up; a lurid, dreamy alien encounter; a tense marine adventure; and a rather baffling discovery in a back garden. There are revealing nods to *Macbeth*, as well as an illuminating review of two iconic productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

'Journey,' when boiled down to its origins, comes from the Latin *diēs*, day (evident also in *journée*). We humans like to structure time because otherwise it is the ultimate void: paradoxically both meaningless and the common denominator of civilisation. Can journeys last more than one day then, if they are borne from such a compact and condensed unit of time? Yes, of course, I hear you say. But maybe journeys are intrinsically innumerable and fragmented. Can a journey ever be over?

Writing embodies journeys. There is the act of writing itself, carving time out between school and a plethora of extracurricular interests. There is also

the symbiotic journey of reading these works, a forging of thought between creator and consumer. In these works, writing becomes more meditative than carthartic, leading us down fractal trains of thought. All the contributors to this edition of *The Windhover* have created something and made connections that didn't exist before. That is a wonderful thing.

The Windhover also (very eagerly!) welcomed legendary poet and thinker Anthony Anaxagorou to in-person workshops last term. The energy in the rooms was palpable and it is impossible to articulate the long-absent power and beauty of creating side-by-side. Some poems from these workshops are contained in these pages; many other ideas, I know, are still germinating. Our warmest thanks to Anthony also for his generous and absorbing interview, published in this issue.

As the year unfolds, as we enter a spring which may or may not live up to a poetic characterisation, we, *The Windhover* crew, hope we can all engage in the world in all its dimensions. We hope your journeys are unexpected and fulfilling – although, then again, being etymologically pernickety, we might have to call them quests...

Many thanks to our talented contributors, including our brilliant cover artist, Y11's Marni and Y12 photographer Theo. His photographs of baby kestrels (also known as windhovers) preparing to fly for the first time are stunning. Particular gratitude to Y13's Niamh and Ed, *Windhover* stalwarts whose work has sparked in many issues. An immense thank you to Mrs Hyam, without whose knowledge, patience and dedication, *The Windhover* would remain a haze in the Charter Building air.



ZARA S

POETRY

tir na n'og

NIAMH T

i dreamt of tir na n'og
sweet earth and
stars hanging weightless.

my hair would be golden there,
hands dirtied by soil.

Glaine ár gcroí:
It would ring across open waters
a cry beside peace.

Penelope

ESTHER R

Odysseus rode into Troy on a small brown horse
And kicked down the walls like they were made of paper.
The glass ocean his sky, the wind his wings, he set his course
For his wife and son, waiting at Ithaca.

He saw the rivers run gold with nectar,
Pierced the skin of death, bled not a drop.
Like a spectre, Penelope haunted his head, but vanished when
The dulcet, discordant siren song drew him to the rocks.

Twenty years crawled across her skin,
Their pinpricked footsteps drawing blood.
Surrounded by, like the inside of a skull
Four bare walls,
Not open water.
Silent as a spider spinning its web, her needle pierced
and untangled thread.

Pain

JAKOB L

An echoing voice-crack
The shriek as you fall down the stairs
Stumbling for a drink in the blackness
The needle that punctures the skin
The cotton stick of a Covid test up your nose
The man with the sleeping bag and the futility in his eyes

The buckled knees of the homeless
Their lives written bluntly in black pen on cardboard signs
Their hopes and dreams creased, stained and sopping
Sainsbury's bags and Waitrose trolleys carrying their memories
Dimming the eyes of their futures

Bruises
Purple clouds
Tattoos of youth and games of tag
Splatter the arms and illustrate the knees
You can point them out

The pounding of the death-watch beetle
The rippling muscles of your calves as you teeter up the hill
The bitter frost that burns the petals
The ripped and scarred skin that shapes your hands
The snip of the umbilical cord

Scottish

ANONYMOUS

You cultivated moss
On the crag of my heart –
Not in Perthshire and Ross,
But in our blue Knoydart.

Cleft, Excaliburated
If ever moss and rock should part,
Not Arthur's seat in Edinburgh,
But my soul in old Knoydart.

Mapping each coarse notch and inlet
Is the way our love's course is chart;
Where our fingers are entwined –
The hills of old Knoydart.

Here sits I on stage of stone
Watching my guts heaved off.
Shoulders white-soiled with little bones
No green cap in winter to doff.
I think of memories from long ago;
I crack with age and ague.
No soul has heard my saxine moan
but the birds of Ailsa Craig.

Breathe

AMALIA B

One. **Breathe.**

As Ozzy Osbourne once said –
“I’m mentally numb”
So, I succumb –
To the indignant thrum,
Of panic.

Two. **Breathe.**

My legs: walk, and my mouth: talks
And I see the faceless bodies stalk
Behind me.
And my mind:
It balks in its box drawn of chalk –
White and pale as thunder against dawn.

Three. **Breathe.**

I want to sit through a class and BREATHE!
I want to fill my lungs with air consistently
Taste Earth’s sweet nectar,
EVEN when they’re testing my patience –
In, and out, and in, and out –
I want to be SECURE in my being!
Just let me BE! I tell the thoughts,
That snatch, that steal the future away,
That take my breath away –
And never in the good way.

Four: **Breathe.**

I relapse
Just from trying to relax
I contemplate my future
And I hope, perhaps,
Time will, elapse
Before the next attack.
I try not to picture my plaque,
My friends, my family dressed in
Black.
And I look back,
On the years that we had
Fiddling with knick-knacks
In class
With no more to unpack
Than our backpacks.

Five: **Breathe.**

I want to look in the mirror
RECOGNISE myself
I want to dissect that image and know I'm
FINE.
I want to see my hands and know they're MINE.
I want to see the world with my eyes directly,
Not through the mist of a foggy mirror -
I think, as I shiver,
Alone, on my bathroom floor..

Six: **Breathe.**

We stand with what our teachers gave.
We'll take it to the grave!
And let them think they paved the way.

We stand with what our parents gave -
And what they took -
We'll take it to the grave!
And misbehave, and let them think THEY
Saved us -
Drew us out the 'cave' that is our bedroom,
Made us shave, and then 'forgave' us.
They enclave us.
Let them think THEY saved our future.

Seven. **Breathe.**

We stand with what our parents gave.
We'll take it to the grave!
And let them think
They did the boot packing...
But, no!
I packed my own snow –
The ONLY way to go,
When you're alone and struggling.

But in the mirror:
We are ALL stripped bare
And aware of every crevice
Every dot and blemish
That we once meant to cherish
And we stand and stare and stare and stare and stare until the
panic
sets in.

Eight: **Breathe.**

Grades,
Rates of Foreign Aid, and
Calories,
Pronouns, and our
Names (speak them loudly!). As well as.
Colouring and
Anarchy, and
Salaries, but don't forget our
Sexualities - they play a role!
Yet the duality, of our morality,
Feels like a lottery
The Media controls and will control.

As Ozzy Osbourne once said -
"I'm mentally numb"
So, I succumb -
to the idignant thrum,
Of panic.
Getting tachycardic!
Feel
Like the
Titanic
As I sink
Into a satanic
State of Mind,
But I don't mind
Since all our futures
Are INTERWTWINED

Breathe.



HONEY G

A New Dawn

MILAN G

After Langston Hughes

Grey high-rise blocks illuminated by the dawning sun, forests of concrete, so much pressure we cannot outrun. When
Did we grow so old? Let loose again, pursue dreams
That feed off the last drips of sun. Going past the streets we used to rule, a life
Faded. Remember when we were too cool for school, isolated joy, disentangled from pressure. A
Timeless rave to stop us falling back into a barren
Reality. 'Everything will be OK,' they say. Find a field
Of neck-deep grass, run and laugh. Keep time frozen,
Watch raindrops slip down the side of walls with
Wonder, and find the warmth in life's neck-deep snow.

A Sorrow Night

ETHAN W

The Mind – a lurking ghost inside you in disguise –
Far greater than a beast can be,
Exceeding anything seen by the naked eye –
The screams – all imagined – nothing you can see –

Alone all night and day and night – just the mind and I –
Is deemed nothing to the howl of wolves – the screech of crows –
The dark red trickling from up above – The Mind – it still terrifies –
What use are haunted forests when *it* has our hands around our throats?

An ice-cold sea – as deep as can be – a sheet to cover the monstrosity beneath - The sinking
boats – the waves unleashed –
Destruction one could only imagine,
But what do you think does the imagining? The Mind, of course.

Perhaps one might think a prison cell is the scariest thing of all -
All of time – eternity – just you, the mind and the walls –
Enclosed in captivity – the key thrown out - the rarest chance of escape.
But escape is still possible – and you are the cell – so be careful – The Mind has its ways.

To Thomas Hardy

ANONYMOUS

There is no fair rare woman with hair in abundance;
There is no good wild woman doing the sun dance;
There is no whole whore woman entering transcendence;
There are a billion or more women all in resplendence –

There is no fair rare man with hair in abundance;
There is no good wild man doing the sun dance;
There is no whole whore man entering transcendence;
There is just one balding god man who's good at pretence.

Untitled

HANA H

She presses her hands into the clay before her,
convinced she is moulding her own path –
shaping her own journey,
convinced she is in control,
unaware of the hands clasping her own,
guiding her yielding fingertips
and wedging them into the clay held in her palm,
but yet,
in a trance,
she believes she is in control.

She lies down in a field and lets herself think her thoughts,
convinced these thoughts are her own,
convinced that her choices remain pure and untouched,
unaware of the seeds that have been sewn into her subconscious
and continue to multiply within her,
unaware of the untruths this subliminal self feeds her,
stripping her of volition.
So how can her mind remain unscathed?
How can she resist this manipulation?
She simply cannot,
for like all others,
she remains in a trance,
confined in her own fantasy,
foolishly clinging on to the remains of her latitude.

She will spend a lifetime in denial.

Appearances

SARAH D

i

A look so similar,
With a face so unfamiliar.
A smile like a wilted rose,
Confused by the way it grows,
Studying himself, a detective with corpse,
The way he looks, he acts and talks,
If he waddles or wades or walks.
He wonders when he'll stop and
Fight the strive for pure perfection,
Pick up what's left of shattered glass
Of his fractured reflection.

ii

She looked like Romantic art
Elusive yet beguiling.
To think a normal face
Could ever be so inspiring.
Yet Art is not attraction:
Art is for admiring.
Spent hours infatuated
insomnia found it tiring.

Surrounding divine aura
Like there was God as her witness.
Married to the word, malt whiskey her mistress.
The lingering stench of liquor, with hints of hibiscus -
The feeling of Easter with the aura of Christmas.

What's in a name, Luv?

LIV G

My mouth twitches as they call
me Luv, the misnomer courtesy of auto-
correct, false warmth, like that uttered
by the 134 bus driver, the cashier at Sainsbury's,
my dad's barber on the Broadway, a busker
performing Lola, as I drop a coin in his hat.

The Kinks grew up somewhere
near here. The pub struts their signatures,
doffs caps to names which do not sit
tightly on the tongue but taste
like bourbon or the River
Moselle sent to higher places. Here, people
harvest the cherry blossom flowers to suck
out the sweetness, cordialise suburbia.

My patience saps as the café is renamed
once more and a neighbour paints
their door a new shade of grey.
I wear my Scandinavian name,
test the weight of its syllable. Liv -
There are places misnamed and some
not named at all. My father was named
after an uncle, my mother after an assassinated
actress. There are certificates claiming
other names in locked files and people
who bore no names. It took us a month
to name our cat. Maybe this poem is mis-
created as the universe waxes patronymic
and people make a name for themselves.



AKHAILA C

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

AMAYA S

After Shakespeare and Langston Hughes

Yesterday. What a pitiful tune to
Listen to. Retracing the
Footprints of time. Waiting for the last
Hour to chime. Remembering the final syllable
Of your final word. Facing the faces of
Your past.

But tomorrow is not recorded.
Now, how silent the stream flows with time.
Start with the first damp dewdrop and
Those painful memories, playing on repeat all,
Cease to exist. A midnight memorial where our
Calm outshines the fiery lights of deceased yesterdays,
Kept afloat on a river born of new hope. No longer hav-
-ing fear: for tomorrow will soon be here, on a lighted
Path after walks through dusty roads in the dark. Only fools
Believe that the sun tires and will never rise again.

Hope. The beautiful and sorrowful melody of life:
A broken-winged phoenix ris-
-ing from delicate ashes. A necklace of raindrops a-
Cross the night sky, crying, 'life is not barren'.
There is hope even in 'goodbye'. Stumbling through an empty field

To glimpse a pond of pearl with lilies never frozen,
Withering trees hugged with nature's soft snow.

Slow Hibiscus

SARAH B

Slow hibiscus, calling forth panic and caressing webbed glass,
Cries. Gasps.
The paper handbags drenched in fervent paint that crease the linen city buses
Scream at noon and quieten by nightfall.
Choleric cottages begrudgingly depart – immobile.
Purple, they bleed and bleed until they bleed no more (but they will), scoring the ground
With hot smoke.
“Ma perché mi fai questo?”
Honest, it isn't you.

Put It Away

HENRY G

A man filled with the anger of life

Shoved his phone in the bag;
In he put broken pencils
And crinkled paper.
All went into the bag.

The darkness of his room,
Bitter words,
In the bag went reckless punches.
Those who wronged him;
Those he wronged.

Inside went the stones which burdened his freedom,
The fire of his craving,
The burning of his hate,
His smouldering fear.

He paused, then gingerly placed one last thing in the bag:

The bag shut.

Journey

AUDREY N

The rocking starts,
Swaying in and out,
And on the platform,
The porters shout.
We're on our way,
To who knows where,
So see the sights
And smell the air.
But first the journey,
Long and slow,
But exciting,
As we watch the country go.
Flashing past our window,
Through sun and rain,
We're on the move,
Travelling again.
Cresting the hills,
And over the bridges,
Catching glimpses
Of small villages
And farms with cows
And pigs and sheep,
As night-time comes,
All falling asleep.
And the clanking
Of the rails,
And on my knee,
A book of fairy tales.
And as I slip
Into my dreams,
The train forges on,
Puffing out steam.



THEO P



THEO P

Time

FRYDERYK K

I open it,
And I'm transported to a world,
A world of the past,
Locked inside a flash of time,
One second stuck in a frame,
I see more memories
A big bear and me,
A small baby being hugged by me!
Two brothers,
looking over a wondrous city of Lego,
A birthday party,
A celebration of the miracle of life.
A beautiful snowman
with its three creators,
covered with soft white powder,
Gentle as silk but as cold as ice
I close the album,
Crying, only a bit,
Thanking the album,
for the Journey.

My Journey

BELLA L

The rhythmic chugging of the wheels on the track
The regular stream of slate-grey steam
The knowledge that from now there's no going back
The plan and the journey no longer a dream.

I had wanted this adventure for a very long time
I had poured over books and journals and maps
I had scrimped and saved as I worked in the grime
I ignored the rumbling as I ate only scraps.

In the distance I could see a hint of blush in the sky
In my ears I could hear the sweet melody of birdsong
In my soul I felt like I was free and I could fly
In my head, I knew that this journey would be long.

When I saw the scenery shift, I knew it was coming fast
When my reflection stared back at me, I responded with a grin
When I thought about who I was before, I hated the past
When I looked ahead at the future, I knew this would be my win.

Perpetual Spiral

JEMIMA I

I felt the tears trickle down my face
Because I know I laugh at jokes that aren't funny,
Overreact when no one cares,
Overshare, overwear, overdye my hair.
It's an obsession really – my hair will turn to crust if I don't stop.
But I'll keep doing, Jemima never learns,
She never learns to wait her turn.
Wait for time to be on your side.
Wait for someone to come along to dry your eyes.
Yes, keep waiting, wasting the only thing you can control
Because it is your own demise. You're no longer at the fair, no never-ending carousel.
And no matter how much you want mummy to tie your shoelaces and ship you off to school,
She can't.
You are in control.
So, drop the act, we gotta keep moving, because if you stay here, you'll get consumed –
By greed and jealousy, something that festers intricately in the mind –
Alice, you're going to be late, you're running out of time.
Spiralling down the rabbit hole at such fast speed.
By the time you realise what's happening, your eyes are overwhelmed with beads,
Your past three friendships are skyscrapers above.
Your family is three feet north, your grades plummeting to the floor
And while this is happening you are not moving at all.
Still. Stop the clock. He has clocked you are not moving as his hands move with time.

Are We Friends Yet?

RICCARDO S

Hi, my name is Ricky.
Actually, no, my name is Riccardo.
My friends call me Ricky but you're not my friend. Yet.
I go to Highgate School and at times it feels like chaos,
people shouting, Year 7's blocking the hallways, friends calling my name.
I'm surprised... I barely handle it.
Yet it seems so easy for everyone else or is that just their masks covering the endless stress
and anxiety they feel deep inside.
Anyways, Hi. My name's Riccardo.
Actually, no, my name is Ricky.
I guess we are friends now.

Flee

SANAIYA Y
with Samaa C

I come from a musical place
Where they shoot me for my song
It's not my place, it's not my right
It's not where I belong

I come from an artistic place
Where they hate my shade of skin
They want to paint me differently
Covered in red from toe to chin

All around me people fight
We all have different needs
But one thing we have in common
Is that we need to flee

Flee our homes flee the country
Get out whilst we're still safe
I've never lived a stable life
It's always been a race

I covered the children's eyes at the sight of bloodshed
Their house had broken down
I thought there was a future ahead
What is now dust once a beautiful town

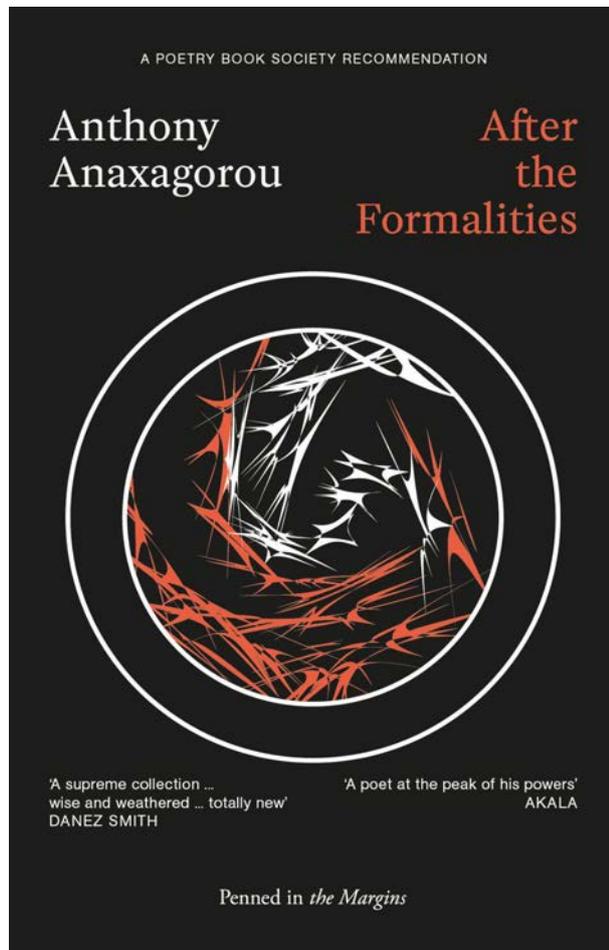
They want me gone they want me dead
There is no space for me
No one wants to make some room for
Just a refugee



THEO P

Anthony Anaxagorou

Liv G



The British-born Cypriot poet, fiction writer, essayist, publisher and poetry educator in conversation with Liv.

LG: Please tell us about your journey into poetry.

AA: I first started to dabble around seven years old, becoming interested in the way that language works, then started to write little lyrics at the age of around twelve, then poetry at fourteen. My mum entered me into a competition when I was seventeen. I ended up winning and I did a year of performing, but then at one of the events someone said something quite disparaging and it put me off writing for about ten years. I picked it up again when I was 28. After having been made redundant, I figured I wanted to be a writer. I didn't really know how to do that; I just wanted to do it. I had played instruments and tried to dance and these things didn't really meet my spirit. Anything to do with words compelled me. I wrote spoken word pieces for a few years, then around 2014 became more interested in page poetry.

LG: What's your favourite poetic form, not including free verse?

AA: I'm not massive on predetermined forms. I enjoy reading the sonnet or a sestina or a pantoum. I don't feel a compulsion or desire to write them all the time. I like poems that circumnavigate. I like poems that are very frenetic and energetic and move around in unexpected ways. I like poems that don't necessarily have a start, a middle and end, orbital poems I like to call them. Those are the ones that really excite me. I think they fit the way that my brain works – my brain's quite jumpy. I'm interested in the ways in which the forms respond to the thought or to the argument. That's when I really think – ah, this is great.

LG: How do you go about editing your poems? And what's the feeling when you decide they're complete?

AA: It gets to a point where you're not thinking about the poem anymore. It's not nagging you; it's not bothering you. There's a kind of satisfaction that you feel when you get to the end of something. John Ashbery was saying how poetry is a continuous thing for him. And he just cuts off bits and gives it to people. I like the idea of it just being like this roll, a sheet of fabric, and you just cut off little snippets of the fabric and hand it out. And the snippet is a nice way to think about a poem because it's part of a long thing.

LG: Tell us about your forthcoming collection, *Heritage Aesthetics*, and how the process is different from *After the Formalities*.

AA: I really love this book. For me it's very special. I feel very connected to the work. I'm in my element in the writing. The difference is that with *After the Formalities*, I was very conscious of myself as a poet in the work. When you're an actor, you've got the character and you've got the real person. I think part of the good actor knows how to make the real person redundant, how to erase the real person and just have the character there. With this, I felt a lot more at ease with my poetic voice and style. I was very conscious of it in *AF* because I was entering a new territory. There was a lot of trepidation around how it was going to be received. I was coming from the spoken word community – now I was trying my hand at page poetry.

LG: How do you approach your speakers in your poems? And how is it possible to blend the personal with the universal?

AA: I use the symbol of Cyprus in all my work as a point of departure to explore so many different things, because the history of the island, and my relationship to it, is laden with poetry. It's small, it's subtle, it's confusing. It can't fit into one box; it's multi-layered. It's everything that a poem is.

My poetry is about trying to balance quite heavy, difficult things that are shaped differently, and are different kind of weights. The idea of Cyprus is what fuels me. It's not that I want to be, you know, my island and my origin. It's more to do with trying to find a way where I can create a universal experience through the personal because I don't live in a vacuum.

LG: What is the role of a poet and has it changed for you?

While a heart surgeon, or a doctor could save your life and allow you to live life, art helps us survive life. There're things that are bigger than poetry, but poetry has a function, too. We're like paramedics. We're first responders – we turn up when someone's wounded, when someone's hurt, and we don't really ask why or how or whom. Our job is just to get them to a hospital, and then let someone else take over. We're not policymakers, we don't set legislation. We don't have any kind of power when it comes to civil duty. It feels like the job of a poet is to pay attention, to feel everything as deeply as you possibly can. It's also to be in love with the people of the world and to respond to things – not necessarily from a compassionate sense. That's too saccharine. It's more critical, it's more consciousness – to stimulate the senses in all their capacity.

LG: How did COVID and the lockdowns change your writing rhythm or your process?

AA: It sped it up. I wrote *How to Write It* during the first lockdown. My process has always been pressure. The lockdown forced me into a space of just making. When I get quite anxious, I need to write because the anxiety needs somewhere to go. So lockdown was really good for that. I could structure my days around childcare and writing. Money was an issue because obviously I didn't have any work. That was very stressful. But if I'm writing from ten until one, five days a week, I'm happy.

LG: What can poems do for politics?

AA: Politics happens first, poetry happens after. It's a way of critiquing, organising, of humanising the political landscape. Because I think politics, although it purports to be a humanist endeavour, is always not. For me, political poetry that has a more radical bent, is reparative and restorative for people who have been affected by political decisions. It's identifying a voice, a sound, a language that talks into that anger, that frustration, that grievance. Kei Miller said to me years ago, that nuance sometimes does a disservice to truth: it waters it down. It also goes into that platitude that all art is political to some degree. It's just you have very explicit art, and then you have more nuanced art. I don't want to be a zealot; I was when I was younger, but I think that's what being young is for. You become immersed in your convictions and your political leanings. As you get older, you realise things are more complicated. And through age, your poetry becomes more complicated, because your relationship to the world has developed in such a way where you're not able to just give it to someone in this very reductive, simplified, binary way. I don't mean that in a condescending way, I just mean it from an idea of practice and distillation.

LG: Can science and poetry form a relationship, do you think, in a conceivably STEM-centric future?

AA: I sometimes think that STEM subjects and the core subjects we have to learn in school are predicated around a capitalist economic model, where Maths, Science and English take precedence over everything else because you need one of those three subjects to contribute sufficiently to an economic system. Whereas poetry is more of a response as opposed to anything that can be

thought of as economically generative. Culturally, I'm interested in the way that poetry is valued, in that it's probably one of the most least valued of all the linguistic art forms: music, theatre, fiction – and poetry being probably the least lucrative out of all of those.

Schools could do with looking at the way that poetry helps inform us around the human condition. There's so much more to it than just the alliteration, simile, metaphor, sibilance. But we teach poetry in a way where we supplant intuition for a knowing. Whereas, when you really think about it, when you write poetry, there is the grey area that in schools, students aren't really encouraged to delve into because you can't mark or adjudicate around interpretation. So you have to have a set of answers – which is not what poetry is.

LG: How should schools go about decolonising the curriculum?

AA: Decolonising has become a bit of a tainted buzzword now. The more urgent aspect of that argument is how do we look after certain groups of people who are learning within the British education system, but whose families and whose ancestors have essentially been harmed and are still being harmed? How do we create a system that is fair. History is not a linear thing. And the way that civilisations have developed over aeons has not been isolated. It's not like, China just happened over there, India happened there, Africa there. Everything was happening at the same time. Whilst Africa had one of the most advanced civilisations, India was also having a renaissance moment. To try and have a fairer and more holistic understanding of how the world has been shaped and developed over millennia is important, rather than Britain was doing this and these guys were doing that which, again, is so binary.

You don't want a Eurocentric education system where everyone learns about World War Two and the atrocities that the Germans committed, but at the same time, people don't learn what the Germans did in Namibia. And the problem is, is that social media, and the way that media is reported now, have created a kind of hierarchy around 'Oppression Olympics: who's got it the worst? And it's not that, because oppression impacts people in very different ways.

LG: In *How To Write It*, you suggest there is a danger that writers of colour are encouraged to write heavily about grief and marginalisation which commodifies their trauma for the market. How do we avoid this?

As a movement you can push back against what publishers want. It's interesting, because they're marketing Black joy as an actual thing now – because Black folk were getting so tired of constantly being asked to write books about the Black experience and about racism and white supremacy. So Black joy was the resistance the counter-narrative, which is great. Marketing terms are ways you get books into people's heads very quickly, when there're millions of books that you're competing against. But we are not just our trauma. We're not our tragedies, we're not our shortcomings, we're not our past. We are all of us. There is a danger that poets are being encouraged to almost pimp or exploit their suffering. Market populism wants a particular kind of narrative from a particular kind of writer. It's important to try and resist that.

LG: What poets should we all be reading?

AA: Well, I don't know what we all should be reading. I can tell you what I'm reading. They change all the time. I have poets I will always follow and pay attention to, and read very closely. I adore Rachael Allen, Emily Berry, Wayne Holloway-Smith, Sandeep Parmar, Jack Underwood, Holly Pester, Momtaza Mehri, Gboyega [Odubanjo], Will Harris. I can keep going.

LG: What five people from throughout history would you invite over for dinner?

AA: I think Malcolm X would probably be one of those people, just because I'm just so fascinated with him as an individual. He was such a cerebral man. In a short time, he was so many different people, constantly adjusting and responding to what was going on around. Maggie Nelson is another writer I really love. She's alive – she's only a few years older than me, so I'd probably invite her to come along. Maybe Karl Marx? He'd be an interesting guy to have for dinner – if he turned up. Jiddu Krishnamurti would be another one. I used to read a lot of his essays when I was in my twenties. *The Awakening of Intelligence* was a great book. Also, maybe Emily Dickinson – for posterity... for bantz. But I struggle with these questions. I try not to deify anyone; I try not to idolise or be a kind of servant. I love writers and what they do. I love that kind of mind. For me the apex of human existence is to spend a life thinking about the world and making art out of it.

STORIES

The Voyage

LOUKAS A

When the engine's sputter swelled and the gnarled waves shouldered themselves against the side of the boat, we were flying. My stomach churned in euphony with the sea, the boat suspended in a cold, wicked breath above a vomiting cauldron.

We came crashing down again as Father heaved at the tiller over a gargantuan jolt. Too fast, too fast, the boat was going. Father turned in his seat and barked something at me with his grinning motor of a voice. His words were indiscernible, like salt dissolved. The wind jeered us on as Father, with a childish gleam, jutted his head over the gunsail and watched the unfolding Atlantic landscape ahead.

Up and down we went, each time my foot kicking against the big white tins teeming with anxious worms and adjacent rattling fish hooks. They chimed against the fibreglass bench beneath them as their song replayed, it was as if I could taste their metal creeping to the back of my tongue and their daggered ends pressing against my tired cheeks. The seconds tallied in my head: we were due back soon.

In the distance, with a hopeful squint, the harbour skulked up the horizon. Two minutes and twenty seconds: surely it could be no longer?

My head anxiously tilted towards the thunder painted sky, when a word brewing in my mind escaped my foggy breath.

'A Storm!'

Faster, faster, I wanted the boat to go.

I released my fingers from the enveloping warmth of my sleeved jacket and firmly clasped the back of the boat.

'Hurry!' I yelled at Father, into the abyss ahead.

One minute and 50 seconds: surely it could be no longer?

A sudden wave that had rushed onto the boat smacked my chin upwards. The sky melted into static noise as the aerolised water launched me back into its mother's angry belly.

The sea struck me with a splintering coldness that lambasted from all directions at the moment of contact. But I wasn't underwater for long. My arms shot downwards with a pulverising thrust sending my head like a cork floating to the ocean's surface. I was winning, which meant the sea was losing, exasperating its relentless toil. Another wave knocked against my naked face. But I didn't cave. Within seconds my head perched on the surface of the sea again. With a shocking, salty tongue and droplets of water sticking to the lids of my eyes, I yelled at the fuzzy image of the boat drifting into the distance.

The seconds tallied in my head: twelve seconds. But what was I counting to? Seven seconds. It wasn't the time until I would be back at the harbour. Six seconds. The swallowing ocean returned: another smack, another bruising to my skull. Five seconds, four seconds. The coils of my mind began to disentangle themselves as a dark light fell over me: three seconds, two seconds, one second.

The ocean was murky and frozen, but I was still sinking. A dense weight pressed within my lungs. I could feel my eyes beginning to seal and the ocean eased its struggle. I discovered I had lost. Time was up. The churning hushed and my swaying steadied as nothing more than a gentle descent remained.

I was drowning.

The Discovery

OLIVIA R

When I was little, I always dreamed and wondered about what I wanted to be. I fantasised about dashing princes in gilt and garnet, and daring, dangerous stunts and a magician or an escape artist.

However, as I sat there, Marigold washing-up gloves mud-covered and sticky, I didn't quite know what to think of the glistening, ivory object at my knees. It was buried firmly in the earth, as though time had made it sprout roots. Or as if someone had super-glued it with their best Pritt Stick to the flowerbed in my back garden.

Bemusedly, I reached for my trowel, prodding at the object with the wooden handle. It didn't move beyond a gentle shudder, though a passing bumblebee did flit rather hurriedly away from my weapon of war. Clearly, I was going to need a new plan of attack, and maybe a lot more patience to go with it. Whatever I'd found, suspiciously coloured and in the way of my rhododendrons, needed to get out of the dirt and into the light.

Humming absently to myself, I searched around. I had nothing of significant use - only my rake, a bag of flower seeds and - aha! My eyes fell on my garden broom like a hawk spotting its prey from above. As I stood to seize it from where it leaned against the red-bricked wall, I could almost imagine it shuddering in fear. My muddy gloves slipped a little as I reached for the handle. Now I was armed: perhaps my childhood self had been aiming for 'princess', but I'm sure she would have settled for the next Indiana Jones.

The mound of something - bone, fossil, rock and whatever it was - had not changed when I sat down to resume my work. There was something satisfying

in dusting off layers of grime and dust to reveal the mystery beneath, even as the anxiety of somehow breaking the moment of history sent anxious breaths echoing through my chest. Eventually, I had lowered the soil level by about half and my discovery was beginning to take shape: it was round, mostly, with a number of fine holes and smooth gaps where some fold of muscle must have fitted. Tentatively, I gave it a tug. Then another. Then one more.

I had bitten off more than I could chew. Now half out of the dirt, I could see its empty eye sockets, staring holes looking into my own. It was the enormous face of a dinosaur.

I gave it one more pull: something must have caught in the hidden eyes.

'Should I leave it?' I wondered to myself.

I didn't want to break it as my skill even in 'removing artefacts for beginners' was at the bottom end. Slowly, as though it might crumble into dust, I looked away. I reached for my trowel and began to saw at the root that trapped it in sharp, knotty edges.

God, I had better not break something. I sawed a little, waited a little, sawed a little, waited a little. And then I sawed some more. Finally, with a crack, something broke. Was it the dinosaur or the root? I felt the knotty, woody obstacle give way to reveal my prize. I reached out to take it, as those empty triceratops holes for eyes watched me. My younger self surely would have approved, I mused, taking off the Marigolds.

Which museum to call first?

The Return

LARA O

My jaw clenches and my nostrils flare. The pressure in my palm gets greater with each passing second - my nails have grown. As I slow my pace to catch my breath, I study the half-moons indented into my once baby-like skin. The callouses envelop every inch of open flesh on my hand., the shapes easy to see, illuminated by the African sun. I pause for a moment to study the picture before me. Once upon a time, it had been as familiar as the back of my hand and the source of my joy, but now it does nothing to mollify my anger. I don't understand why they would bring me back here. A child never forgets their first home after all.

I stood in this spot for the first time nine years ago as my six-year-old self. I remember running through the bronzed silage of northern Nigeria. The sun caressed my back and acknowledged me as one of her people, whilst my hands trailed behind me, petting the market goats as I moved along. They bleated their assent as my lingering hands traced the deep ridges between their ears, with me finding solace with each scratch. I bent over to examine a trail of ants all lined up one by one, jealous of their clear purpose in life as they followed their leader - no questions asked. I must have thought that I was like them and shadowed the creatures back to their nest. Awe and wonder used to come easily then, and I threw my head back with a cackle of unadulterated joy, a harmony to the wind's melody, swallowed by the air's murkiness. I crouched down, tracing patterns into the fertile earth, and lifted a fistful of earth's greatest gift, turning to the sun and pretending that I had not just heard my mother call me from the market stall

in the distance. Her calls rang out into the air and yet I stayed. I savoured the moment. Even then, I knew it would be one of my last here. I spun around and took off into the heart of the village, other kids joining me from out of nowhere, as my feet flew. Dust kicked up behind us and our faded t-shirts flapped haphazardly, barely succeeding in staying on, with there being more holes than material in each. Mud caked our skin soothing the damage of the mid-afternoon torridness and for a moment I felt uninhibited.

My feet were on autopilot, and I zoned out, taking the opportunity to study the traditional clothing hanging from washing lines outside almost every home, the scuff marks from our staffs marking the chief's porch from where we used to jump and dance to celebrate. And my favourite thing, the straw atop each house: when it fell the kids were allowed to make dolls out of it.

Gradually, each child broke off to get to their own home, but Olamide stayed. We kept moving. He was my best friend and knew me better than I knew myself. We were inseparable. He was already seven and the tallest in our school. He had the coolest tribal locs, the kind my mum wouldn't let me get because it was 'improper for a girl.'

We arrived to the sight of my mother hugging the doorway, her fingers unconsciously sketching the grooves in the mud walls that I had created over the years. It was a coping mechanism and her most conspicuous tell. She had high cheekbones, dulled by the roundness of her face and when she laughed it was infectious. I couldn't help but notice that my

mother had articulated her contentment less and less recently. She offered her hand, wordlessly begging me to take it. She was no longer young, I observed. Her palm was weathered from age and had scars littering its surface. Each scar reminded us of a lesson well learnt, but there was no scar for the lessons that fate still had planned for us. I took it - out of both curiosity and concern. It was trembling and so were her lips as she spoke. I remember the words that came out, muffled as they were by the rag that she clutched to her face.

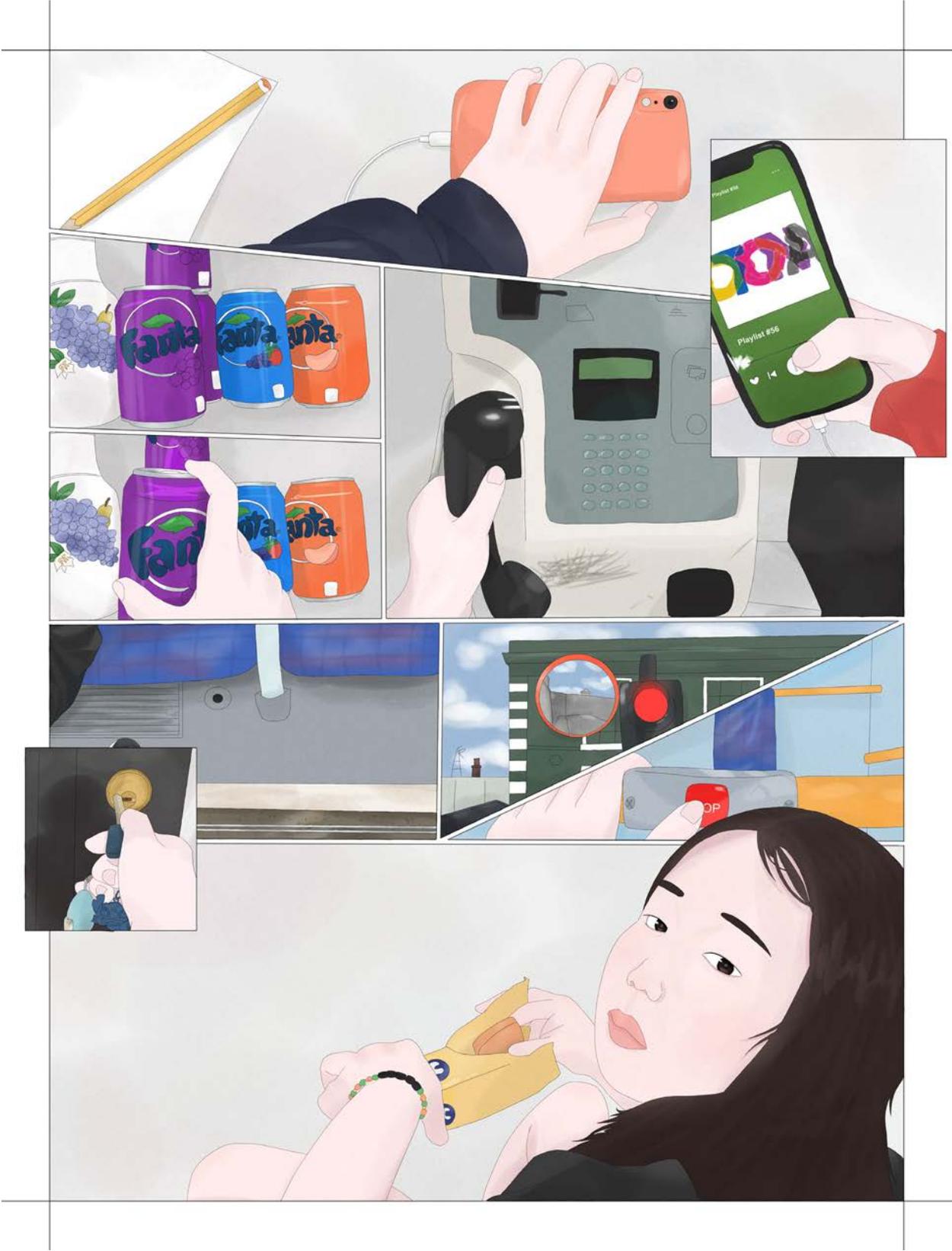
She said to me: 'Adewesa, a place has opened up for you at an English boarding school. You're going.'

The summer's soil in my left hand trickled to the floor. In that moment, I cared nothing for the mess or getting yelled at. I could only focus on these few words, a single sentence, that shattered the paradise that I had built for myself over these past six years. It was my world and I did not want it to end. From the shudder of Olamide's breath, I think that he agreed.

Nine years later, and I have still not recovered. My vision sharpens and I wave this reverie away. The place looks the same, but I feel nothing when I survey it. This would have been my home in another life. Instead, my mother ruined it by sending me away to a snooty English all-girls boarding school where I was the African pariah who runs with lions and lives in a hut.

'Why am I here?' I ask myself.

My arms flail around as I lose my footing and trip up on the uneven path leading up to the house that used to be home to a skinny six-year-old full of hope. As I draw nearer, a figure shifts next to the entrance and I pause. I see an unfamiliar teenager moving in to fill the frame. He is obstructing my path now, but somehow I don't feel threatened. My hands move to twirl my tribal locs that I got in honour of an old friend. The boy has matching hair. Of course, the pieces fall into place and I remember someone I thought that I had left behind in the past. I smile and wait to see if he will still do the same.



MARNI O

A Letter's Journey

DAVEY G

It was like rain, the noise that the train made, metallic drops of sounds. Of course, there was rain, too, but its soft impact had been overpowered by that of the wheels and rails. I sat opposite him, whose face looked as if it was sewn tight. He wasn't giving anything away. We looked at each other for a while, but until he became self-aware, he moved his glance away from me and out of the window, to the green fields beyond, suffocated by that grey blanket of sky.

It had been sunny when he left the house. He told his parents that he was just going out for a walk. It was still sunny when we arrived at the train station, where he had momentarily startled at the price of the ticket. He hadn't been on a train for ages, because he couldn't really go anywhere during his exams, or do anything much other than sit around and revise. Plus, the prices were always rising. Anyway, we got on the train together, both knowing exactly where we were headed.

It started raining after the first stop: a gentle, caress, descending down onto the tainted train windows. One drop, two drops, three drops. I anxiously watched him prop his hand against the pane, feeling its cool, relishing touch.

September last year, he and Mia were close. Really close. They were the type of friends who just knew what the other was feeling, always checked up on each other, confided in each other, understood when the other didn't want to do something, certain that things would never change between them, no matter what happened.

But then, they drifted apart.

Neither of them knew when it had started, where the turning point was, as it were, but it began with less frequent chats and more hesitation to text each other, which eventually turned into a fear of interacting with the other and then a hiding from it. Nothing dramatic or remarkable took place. They both concluded that it must have happened by chance. No big deal: friends come and go anyway; besides, if they ever wanted to go back to how it was, all they had to do was to say 'hi' to each other, and catch up with everything they'd missed, right?

So, they kept thinking like this for months, not doing anything.

Until he heard one day that Mia was moving away. Far away.

It had then hit him, like a punch in the gut, that if he didn't do something, they would never talk again. Yes, he had her contact details online, but he could never muster up the confidence to start a conversation there, and neither could she. What would they say? How has it been? No, that wouldn't work; it's too general and awkward. Hi. No, that's no good either; she'd just leave it on seen. I heard you're leaving. Definitely not; it's too blunt. For some reason, he could never pick out the right words from that keyboard on his phone. Every time he forcefully typed out some letters, a hundred more would also flood and drown his mind, ousting the previous ones. The grey word "seen" was like a harsh, definite barricade for anything more to be said and sent, guarding and preventing any communication between them.

The carriage shook from the slight curvature of the tracks, splitting the raindrop in two. The new-born droplets started accelerating, on their own paths, further apart from each other. He sat, watching, mesmerised, holding me in his hands

I am his creation, born into this world as he wrote 'Mia,' on that piece of lined paper he had snatched from school, with his blue fountain pen, in his scratchy, chaotic handwriting.

I waited for him to write more on me, but then he left me, thinking, for his next words; or deciding whether my existence was futile. Eventually, he did return to me, filling me with more messy phrases, the first ones being 'I know it's weird to write a letter, but...'

Once he started, he couldn't stop: my lines were gradually drowned in the blue blots of his ink, the smudges when he turned onto a new line, the commas and forcefully written full-stops, indented into me, the wild, free curves of his 'y's and 'g's and 'f's. I felt his hands quivering as he wrote the words 'I

I apologise' and 'I'm sorry'; I saw his smile and deep gaze and he jotted down phrases like 'Do you remember?' and 'How it used to be'; I heard his sobs when he concluded his letter: 'I think that sums up what I want to say, although I'm sure I've missed out something out. What I guess I'm trying to say is thank you for the past few years, and also that friends are more important than anything else, so don't shut them out and always look for more.'

After wiping his tears away, I was completed.

'I'll miss you.

Jacob' He turned his head away from the window and looked at me now. He brought me close to his chest, holding me tightly, not wanting to let go. I could hear his heartbeat, rapid, irregular, out of time with the clanging of the train. The announcement on the train sounded, a calm and monotone voice, dictating the next station, bringing him back into reality. Soon, the doors opened with a blaring chime. Still grasping me tightly, he hopped off.

The walk from the station to the house was not a long one. The distance wasn't long to begin with, and Jacob knew where to go anyway. I could feel the vibration with every step he took; they were imbued with a kind of determination, a kind of focus that felt very self-imposed, as if he were consciously forcing himself to take each step, trying to stamp out any part of him that had regrets about this. He looked straight on, never at me, as if he wanted to almost forget about my presence.

Of course, he couldn't keep this up for long. Soon, he started darting glances over in my direction; glances that were a melange of excitement, fear, anxiety, regret. He stared at my white face, focusing in on the three big letters he had written. They weren't quite aligned properly and seemed to be waning in size and confidence even as he looked at them. He kept staring, as if there were something wrong with them, something wrong with me.

Ah,' he realised, scrambling to get a pencil out from his backpack. He then sat down and added another sentence on the other side of my cover, favouring his legs over the tarmac road as his inadequate padding, on which to scribble down some much-needed words.

When we finally reached the house, he walked to the door from the side. He knew about the video doorbell her parents had installed, as well as the angle from which he could approach it so that it wouldn't catch him. For a brief, fleeting moment, this idea flickered in his brain, that he was doing something deceptive, something wrong, something invasive.

But then, he took a deep breath in. He had come all this way. It was time for us to part. He carefully lifted up the flap, sliding me in, careful not to let me be buried alive in the pile of advertisements and political handouts. Then, I glided, gracefully, onto the carpet, accompanied by the careful creaking and closing of the letter flap.

I saw him leave, back arched, steps dragged and resisted by some weighty matter. Occasionally, I could see him wipe something away from his face with the back of his hand. Then, he disappeared from my sight

So I sat there, waiting, thinking. What would she think? He hadn't written an address on the letter, like people usually do. Would she know that it was him? Would she cry, too, when she read the same words that he wrote? Would she tell him how she felt, how she wished to stay, to regain their friendship? Or would she ignore it, writing it off as some generic, cliché play for her feelings? Would I be put on a wall as a prized memory, or cast in the barbecue as a throwaway piece of fuel?

My thoughts were interrupted by a series of nonchalant steps.

'What's this? Better later than...never?'

She turned me around.

'It's for...me?'

Lady Macbeth's Diary

AAHANA J

Dear Diary,

I got a letter today. The first in a while. Funny how words on a piece of paper can unlock desires you never even knew you had. Can cause you to lose sight of what is right and surrender to the darkness within, a hiding beast. King. He could be king. My husband. King. He won't do it. At least he'll say that at first. But slowly, slowly, I might get to him.

He likes to be seen as this saint, loyal and courageous on the battlefield. Don't get me wrong. I'm proud of him. He's a great man, my husband. But he could be greater. I know how he thinks. He would never want to admit it, not even to me, but there are traitorous thoughts in his head. Why should he take all the risks? Why should he be the one who does all the dirty work? I know he hates himself for those thoughts. Oh the fickle mind. He won't be able to resist them either.

If he really lets himself, he has the ambition; he's tiptoeing on a knife-edge already. I can hear it in his letter. Frantically leaning back, so he doesn't fall over, fall over into that dark, dark place, uncharted territory where anything is possible. The place where right and wrong are both the same and completely different, where foul is fair and fair is foul, where you have lost yourself and found yourself completely.

How do I know so much about it? Because I am already there. Always watching, always calculating, always waiting. What else is there to do here? It is a harsh world and when you live in it for long enough, so much time on your own, you get ready to bite back.

He gets the good bits, the honour, his name mentioned with respect. it's easy for him to stay innocent. Act innocent. So pure. So weak. There is only so much you do in a woman's body. This, after all, is a man's world. The mind is a real asset. That's my world. No one gets to rule over that. No one keeps me waiting there. You have to learn to use it, to understand it, to master it. Then you're playing the right game.

I know. The temptation is dangerous. It can consume you completely. Already, I can feel every thought and action tainted by it. You think of getting nothing but what you want. What you need.

It is seeing the flames of a fire, blazing and beautiful, and wanting to touch it, wanting it so much, even though you know it will burn through you. You get so close all you can see is the beauty. It will only be afterwards, when the pain registers and your skin blisters, that you realise what you have done.

The line is dangerous, isn't it? Wanting something so much, you'd destroy yourself to get it. Queen. Burning in the flames in front of me. And even now, as I'm writing, I'm ready to reach out my hand and touch it, take it, pull it out of the fire. And I won't get burnt, I tell myself. It wants me to take it, I'm meant to take it. I won't get burnt.



LARA M

In The Rain

VERONICA M

It's raining, raining, raining. Wind whipping. Trees swaying. It's grey and dark and I love it, because no one else is around. Everyone is too busy making hot chocolates, while sitting swathed in blankets on their couches, to enjoy the rain. It smells like flowers. To me anyway.

The rain is my pleasure. It scares people away. Just like I do. The rain understands me. It listens when no one else will. We have a connection that goes deeper than you can imagine, that I can imagine.

I walk home from school alone.

Everyone thinks I'm a monster. Because I have blue eyes. Completely blue. The whites of my eyes are blue. Eerie, I know. I was born with it. Genetic mutation the doctors said, but I think it's more than that. In the rain, my eyes glow.

It frightens people when you're different.

But in the rain, as I walk enjoying the solitude, something completely unexpected happens.

The falling rain begins to freeze halfway from the sky. Two cars in the distance slow to a halt. The wind has dropped. The trees stand in silent anticipation. I am not easily scared, but in this moment I am petrified. It is almost as if time has stopped. I become aware of the thudding beat of my heart in my chest.

Am I seeing things? I wonder.

Suddenly the rain, frozen in flight, begins to spin like a whirlpool. For a heartbeat I am afraid it will suck me into its tiny, blue eye. Blue.

The rain is glowing blue. My eyes, I realize, are giving the water this scintillating colour. I stare blankly at the whirlpool, getting bigger, faster, more intense by the minute, mesmerized by the spiraling water. I have a dark sense of foreboding that somehow, I am causing this.

I try to stick my hand in the whirl of rainwater, only to rebound at the almost solid touch of the liquid. I don't know what to do. Avoiding eye contact, hitting and kicking the water, nothing will stop the surge of fluid from getting larger.

Finally, I yell: 'STOP!'

The rainwater separates from the swirling whirlpool, escaping its own colossal trap, which in turn dissolves. The flow of time resumes as if nothing has happened. I stand stationary and allow my tumbling thoughts to formulate into some sort of shape. What is going on?

I rush home, ducking under awnings and hiding behind buildings to avoid the rain.

In my room, sliding under the covers of my warm bed where everything makes sense, I shiver with fear. I ignore my mum's comforting voice as she knocks on my bedroom door. I don't think she could help me with my problem, not since dad died...

My feelings are confused: anger that I couldn't control the water, fear that it would swallow me whole, but also something else. Purpose. Like I was supposed to be doing whatever I had been doing. Yet it still doesn't make any sense and that's what scares me. Desperate to escape my thoughts, I force myself into a troubled slumber.

It was blurry. Seemed to be raining. Grey and dark. Just how I like it. In the storm, I could just make out a face. Ivory skin, a wave of black hair and...eyes white, a dazzling shade of blue, just like mine. Then the person spoke:

'Lin.' A woman's voice calls my name. 'Lin.'

'What do you want?' I yell at the face as it vanishes and reappears in the stomr.

'Go back to the rain,' the woman says.

The rain swirls into a cyclone again. And again I feel the terror choking me as the water swells to twice my height and then suddenly dissolves. It leaves a gaping gap in the watery frame. In the aqueous outline, I see the woman in full: round alabaster face, ebony hair and unmistakable cerulean eyes. She is wearing a thick fur cloak. The woman gets lighter and lighter, blinding me with pearly white light, until all I can see is -

I blink awake to find myself back in my bedroom. *Go back to the rain. Go back to the rain. Go back to the rain. The rain.* The words run through my head, yet somehow I cannot react. I spend a few long minutes staring impassively at a bare bedroom wall. *The Rain!*

Snapping back into reality, I am back in the street before I know it. It's still raining. I try not to think about anything, because that seems to be how it started last time. I was right. It's happening again now. Everything stops. No wind, no sound, no movement. The raindrops suspended in mid-air begin to churn. The whirlpool grows and grows, scraping the underbelly of the sky. Suddenly, it becomes hollow, leaving only a frame. *Like in my dream.* My eyes are glowing. I can feel it.

In the blink of an eye, three figures emerge from the empty vortex. I recognise the woman from my dream. The other two people, a man and a woman, look like her. I realize I do too. We share the same porcelain skin, raven-colored hair and intense blue eyes.

'Hello Lin,' the woman from the dream says. 'I am Mirith.'

She has a strange accent that I cannot place, and she rolls the rs slowly on her name.

'We are from the Planet Ereden. Thousands of years ago, our people lived on Earth. We were called The Ones with the Water because of our hydro-kinetic abilities, but about 10,000 years ago we were about to be hit by a meteor.'

In her clear, distinctive voice, she goes on to tell me how they fled to the unstable planet of Ereden, in the solar system of a dying star, which was the closest life sustaining planet. Just three families stayed behind on earth, in case of future problems on Ereden.

'You are the only living descendent of these families,' says Mirith. 'Our planet is dying, Lin, and you were chose to save it. Come with us to Ereden.'

I stare into her deep blue eyes and see myself reflected in them.

'But how can I save your planet?' I ask. 'Even if I have water powers, how can I stope your sun from dying?'

Mirith smiles.

'We have always had a prophet to warn us of dangers that the future might hold,' she says. 'You are the best of us. After your father died, we could turn only to you Lin. We all wish that the fate of our people did not rely entirely on someone as young as you. Yet here we are. Come with us. Help us save Ereden.'

I walk cautiously towards them. I can't believe that I'm doing this. As I step through the water-portal opening up before me, I feel the fresh rains of Ereden dance on my skin. It isn't like Earth rain. It isn't grey and dark. It is light and refreshing and beautiful, and I love it. It smells like flowers. To me anyway.

The Departure

NESSIE W

She placed her mug gently back onto the table before fixing her eyes back onto me. Her smile could have seemed warm, if I didn't know better. Her gaze drifted onto my own mug of untouched coffee and I obediently took a small sip.

'So, how have you been?' she said softly, her lips twisting into a wry smile: she knew exactly how I'd been.

'Fine,' I said shortly, adjusting in my seat. 'The new job is paying well.'

'I'm glad,' she said, sounding anything but. 'You always spoke about how much you wanted to go into journalism.'

My job wasn't in journalism. I didn't bother to correct her.

'You have no idea what you have done to me,' I had howled the last time we met. 'Or, maybe you do, and you don't even care!'

She watched me then as if I was a test subject in a lab and she had just pumped something into the ventilators in my cage. Her had been shorter then. ?

'God, you can be so dramatic,' she said finally. 'I should've ended this ages ago.'

I was beginning to forget why I came.

'It's nice that you can have time for your passions now,' she continued. 'Since I dumped you' was left unsaid.

My response was a tight smile.

'I am sick and tired of you constantly following me around!' she had said, her voice like an icicle that had been whittled to perfectly massacre my insides. 'You have no life outside of this relationship and it is driving me insane. Get a hobby, make a friend! Whatever it takes to just leave me alone!'

The concert tickets I had bought for us fell to the floor.

'I just wanted to do something nice,' I stammered.

'You are trying to guilt me into spending time with you! You are giving me no choice!'

Hot tears fell down my cheeks.

'I saw you started publishing your poems again, in the papers. That's amazing, I'm so proud!'

I was astounded at how skilfully she could make her expression seem genuine. It was obvious that she hadn't read them: let's just say she provided good inspiration.

'You know, I always say this, but you really have not changed since the first day we met.' She took another sip of her coffee.

I had spied her from across the room, swaying slowly to the music. Her dark hair shone under the harsh kitchen lighting that had been so unflattering to everyone else. I was knocked back to my senses by a couple slipping past me into the other room.

'Talk to her,' my friend whispered besides me, smiling indulgently at me.

'Oh, no, I couldn't...'

'Oh, come on, live a little! You'll regret it if you don't.'

I bit my lip and travelled the short distance over to her, busying myself with the bottle on the table beside her.

'How do you know the birthday girl, then?' I enquired casually, before taking a large gulp of my drink.

'Figure painting class,' she smiled at me. 'We connected whilst drawing naked old men.'

'Shared troubling experiences are a good foundation for friendship,' I replied.

She laughed then, throwing her head back slightly.

We went out to coffee a few weeks after. It took me a few days to compose the perfect text. It took her seven hours to reply. We'd gone to a café with low, ambient lighting and I'd reached over and held her hand halfway through.

Her hands curled round the mug.

'That's right. Not one bit.'

'Are you even listening to me?' I had said months later. She'd been carefully applying lipstick in her mirror. 'You know your problem?' she said. 'You don't change. You don't adapt. You just complain, all the time, about everything. The rest of us evolve but you stay the same. You're dragging me down.'

Her phone vibrated on the table and she glanced over immediately, before smiling.

'I have changed in some ways,' I said.

'One second,' she told me, picking up the call. 'Got to check in with the old ball-and-chain.'

As she stood up, she patted my shoulder absently and slipped down the street, out of ear-shot. I had chosen an outside table when I arrived, away from the bustle and noise of the other customers. I watched her remove a pack of cigarettes from her jacket pocket and laugh at whatever was being said by "the old ball-and-chain".

It had felt easier to navigate places with her by my side. I couldn't help but feel proud of the way everyone listened attentively to what she had to say, or shot admiring looks as we walked past. I didn't even mind all the attention she got that left me in the dark.

She met my family fairly quickly, and of course delighted them as she did everyone else, barring my sister, that is.

'It's just jealousy,' I reassured her, after we had said our goodbyes and returned to my flat.

She had smiled at me then and I thought she was comforted. Now I wonder if it was another sort of smile.

I drained the last of my drink and checked my own phone. My roommate had sent me a picture of our cat sleeping and I found myself laughing.

'Ah, let me guess, you also need to check in with some?' I hadn't noticed her return back to the table until she had spoken.

'Just my roommate,' I replied, locking my phone again.

'My mistake,' she corrected herself, but her eyes flashed with satisfaction. 'Don't worry, you'll find someone.'

It happened in that moment. I knew it in that very second. Closure is overrated. For days, I'd imagined a tearful apology and some sort of gratification that she had regrets. I practised the conversation in my mind. I'd imagined offering a reassuring hand. But, with a luminous flash of satisfaction for the first time, I didn't even need it. In a moment I would get up, leave the café, return to my cat, and to my roommate, and to my favourite movie. I would return to my future.

I rubbed my chin with my hand and laughed a little.

'I actually have to go,' I said slowly.

'Oh yes, you are busy nowadays, aren't you?'

'No, actually,' I smiled. 'I just suddenly realised that there's nothing here for me.'

'We had a good journey,' she said slowly, as I began to stand up.

'Sure,' I said. And then I left. Finally.

REVIEWS

Macbeth

Almeida Theatre, directed by Yaël Farber

VERITY G

An (unsurprisingly) darkened stage, tartan kilts, a man covered in blood: and yet the Almeida's *Macbeth* manages to execute the masterpiece of a play that is *Macbeth* without falling prey to becoming stale, and better still without butchering the text in favour of 'artistic interpretation'.

'Secret, black and midnight hags' are abandoned in favour of women attempting nothing in the way of visceral horror, ensuring there is no diversion from shrieking, dancing women round a cauldron. The witches are instead a constant but subtle onstage presence, controlling the set - not only acting as convenient stagehands, but as the puppeteers of the tragedy.

While Banquo makes a formidable ghost and the murder of the Macduffs is brilliantly horrifying, it is of course the Macbeths who dominate as they should.

Saoirse Ronan, as a prominent film actor to this generation, had much to live up to in her most mature stage role to date. As it turned out, it was maturity that she lacked – but is this really such a terrible thing? Ronan somehow manages to make one of the most malicious women in the canon into someone you felt achingly sorry for from beginning to end; a scared teenager trapped in a wife's body, longing to prove herself. And in fact, this interpretation works almost perfectly: an ambitious young woman goes too far and by the end is an old woman, wishing to be young again.



Although her deterioration into madness and regret is made noticeably less dramatic by her want of malevolence from the start, Ronan fills the stage (both literally with water from excessive handwashing and figuratively with emotion) in Lady Macbeth's famous sleepwalking scene. What I find to be the most distressing and climactic part of the play is acted beautifully, and although alongside McArdle her verse speaking is less assured, Saoirse Ronan pervades the stage with her raw and choking innocence.

And as difficult as it seems, Lady Macbeth is not the true force of nature in this production. James McArdle, although he brought nothing particularly different to this tried and tested role, certainly brought fire. And although the blood-painted ghost of Banquo is sinister, Macbeth alone could conjure such a manifestation of guilt. Nothing is felt more powerfully in this production than his 'vaulting ambition', damnation, and destruction. While Ronan's offers an excellent rendition of Lady Macbeth, McArdle is Macbeth.

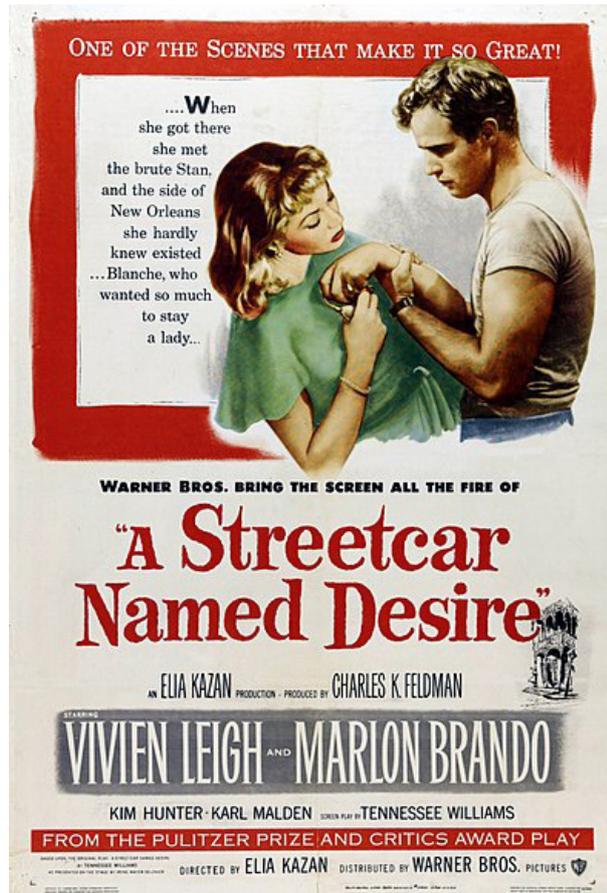
Live music (which can be detestable when slapped onto other Shakespeare plays) only heightens the almost grotesque beauty of the production; a cult like atmosphere lingers long after in a sinister remembrance of a wonderful production.

With thanks to Mr Catherwood

Does A Streetcar Named Desire work in the 21st century?

A comparative review of the 1951 film and the 2014 National Theatre production.

JULES H



When Elia Kazan's film version of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* hit theatres in 1951, it caused a cultural phenomenon. Not only was the film, as well as the original 1947 play, the focus of intense controversy due to its 'vulgar', 'immoral' and 'obscene' presentation of sex - it was also a huge critical success earning four Oscar nominations and firmly placing itself in the realm of the greatest 20th century cinema. Meanwhile, the stage play has been revived dozens of times since its debut, including the 2014 National Theatre production which places *Streetcar* in a modern setting. In comparing this production with the film, I want to ask whether the play still holds the same electric power in the 21st century.

Set in post-WWII New Orleans, *Streetcar* tells the story of Blanche DuBois, an aging former Southern Belle, who goes to stay with her sister Stella and Stella's husband Stanley in their cramped apartment. Blanche clashes with working class, alpha male Stanley and is shocked by the violence of his and Stella's relationship. As the play develops, Blanche's romantic illusions and past come crashing down ending in her total mental breakdown, leading to her being sent to a mental institution.

For both adaptations of the play, the post-war context of a fragile, unstable world reeling with loss and on the verge of significant change is vital to the story. But this daring look on "the destructive power of society on the sensitive individual", as Williams put it, caused *Streetcar* to not land well with the 1950s establishment: the censors were brutal.

By choosing to put the play in a modern setting, Benedict Andrews, the director of the National Theatre production, partially loses this potent social context so crucial to its themes. However, the set heightens the

intensity of the drama. It is constantly turning, from the moment Blanche takes her first drink, allowing the audience to constantly see new perspectives and also experience the intensifying instability. The characters are trapped in this ever-revolving cage with no escape. It presents the apartment as a skeleton with glass panels and no walls, giving the audience an uncomfortably intimate view: nothing is ever hidden and the characters must constantly perform for us. The harsh lighting and stripped-down modern furnishing contrasts with the black and white film and its softer light and reconstructed New Orleans aesthetic. Although the claustrophobia of the apartment is uncomfortable in Kazan's version, the staging of the National Theatre production is suffocating.

Ben Foster provides an equally threatening Stanley in the National Theatre version, whilst also being more modern. He captures the same intensity and animalistic nature, but Stanley's status as a former soldier seems very present in his character here. He carries his army veteran persona with him at all times, as if he has never fully made the switch to civilian life.

Meanwhile, Kim Hunter's Stella always feels grounded in reality, desperately trying to hold Blanche there with her, although she knows that she has already lost her. She juggles her intense desire for Stanley, despite his violence, with her love and devotion to her sister. Throughout the film this struggle is evident. However, Kazan side-lines Stella and allows her only to react to Blanche and Stanley, who dominate every shot. There is not a clear sense of who she is outside of her relationships to them.

By contrast, Vanessa Kirby brings a new life to Stella in the National Theatre production: she is a character on equal footing with Blanche and Stanley. Andrews' choice to open the play with her, as opposed to Kazan cutting straight to Vivien Leigh's Blanche's in the film, shifts the focus. This is no longer just a play about sex and the women are no longer entirely defined by men: the relationship between the sisters moves centre stage. Their shared emotions and complex history, from Blanche's first outburst about the loss of their childhood mansion, to Stella's anguish at the end of the play, come to the fore.

In their interpretations of Blanche, Vivien Leigh and Gillian Anderson highlight the most striking contrasts between the two productions. It may just be a disconnect with Leigh's more stylised 1950s acting style, but Anderson's Blanche works much better for me. She provides a nuance to the character that means the play never slips into melodrama. Anderson said in an interview that she "felt like I was hanging onto reality by a thread" by immersing herself so deeply in Blanche's character and this is evident on stage. She plays every aspect of Blanche, every deception and layer of performance and hyper-femininity to perfection, giving her softer moments a beautiful rawness, whilst also being able to transition into frenzied mania with intense power.

Leigh's Blanche is more visibly vulnerable and lost: her ability to emulate Blanche's own sense of social performance within her acting is exceptional, from her sweet conversations with Mitch, to her curated actions of sensuality at the poker game. However, she also tips into exaggeration and although this is

emblematic of Blanche's character, it can be jarring - especially when placed in contrast with the realism that the rest of the cast strives for.

Although Leigh plays Blanche's final breakdown with true poignancy, some of her earlier monologues, in which Blanche's mask slips and conveys real emotion, do not quite land. She is too weak or too vulnerable and she can come across as annoying rather than sympathetic, undercutting her spectacular finale. The moment where the shade is removed from the lightbulb, as Blanche attempts to let truth shine, do not carry quite the same weight as in the 2014 production.

This is not entirely Leigh's fault. The censors' zealous response to Motion Picture Production censorship codes led to the cutting of Blanche's revelation, in a crucial moment of honesty, that her first husband was gay and killed himself. This removes the heart of the play. Blanche's monologue in scene 5, in which she acknowledges the hyper-feminine illusion that she has built around herself, alongside her fear of ageing, is also cut. These moments are vital in making Blanche not only more sympathetic, but the fully realised complex character that Williams intended her to be.

Perhaps most damagingly, the removal of Stanley's rape of Blanche in the film undermines its core. Tennessee Williams told the censors that without it 'the play loses its meaning'. For him, the 'ravagement of the sensitive by the savage and brutal forces of modern society' is at its 'moral' centre. This censorship arguably undermines the film in a way that it cannot recover from. By contrast, the violence in the 2014 production, is shocking and visceral.

However, the 2014 production also faces challenges. Whilst it shines in many ways, from the performances to the set design and music, it never successfully convinces in a 21st century context. The modern clothes and set feel at odds with the text, which is still filled with 1940s cultural references, and the production does not do enough to fully cement the play within this new time. The evocative jazz music gives way to modern, melancholy pop, that is somehow lost in translation.

For *A Streetcar Named Desire* to work in the 21st century, adaptations need to provide as powerful a sense of instability and shock as the original version did against a 1940s backdrop. This is not an impossible task: a 2019 Brooklyn production of *Streetcar* did this by casting gender queer actor Russell Peck as Blanche. By having a trans, queer body in the role of Blanche, an entirely new dimension is added to the performance of femininity and sexuality that she develops to protect herself. Stanley's obsession with finding out who she really is also finds a whole new meaning and resonance.

The film adaptation of *Streetcar*, while not being as powerful as the 2014 production, fits beautifully within its social context, made more evident by its explosive impact on the censors. Whilst *A Streetcar Named Desire* can work within a modern context, and Andrews' production provided impeccable theatre, the lack of a clear societal backdrop lessened its impact even as Blanche is led away to the consternation, shock and shame of those who watch her go, including the audience.

Letters

The Importance of Music in Creativity: Play On...

CAMILLE T-H

Dear Editor,

I wanted to write to you about why the arts matter – and why music is at the heart of creativity for me.

The arts are the most important thing in my life and are one of the most powerful tools that we have in our society. Creativity makes us look beyond just surviving and it can lead us to find truer meaning in how we live our lives. There are so many different forms of arts that do this: painting, sculpture, poetry, fiction, drama. I believe every kind of art is powerful in its own way: art can tackle the most challenging subjects from politics and philosophy to mental health and wellbeing.

However, for me, personally, music is ‘The Art.’ It plays such an important role in how I think and who I want to be. This makes me wonder how music is different from other creative forms. A lot of great minds in human history have already tried to unpick the unique character of music. Friedrich Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* said: ‘Without music, life would be a mistake.’

Music has always been abstract, whereas the visual arts only moved into non-figurative representation with cubism at the beginning of the 20th century. Music evokes our imagination; therefore, it doesn’t represent any reality.

It is also the most accessible form of creativity, available to everyone in society. Thanks to the technology we have today, every single person with a device can access free or subscribed music online 24/7. YouTube, Spotify, SoundCloud etc have millions of songs, albums and pieces that can be played anywhere, at any time. Music has become the most democratic of the arts.

Before the invention of the phonograph in 1877, music listeners could only listen to songs when someone else was playing them live, whether in a concert hall or at home. From the invention of the Walkman in 1979, music has become accessible anytime and anywhere. Meanwhile, new technology has also opened up creativity: today anyone can record music through apps like GarageBand and Logic which are easily downloadable on a laptop or even a phone!

Moreover, music is brought together with groups and communities, unlike solo art forms. And it feeds into other arts so readily, from dance to cinema

In Music, they creative journey is also central. For example, in a painting we often only get to see the final presentation, whereas a piece or song is endlessly recreated. One of the reasons that I love poetry is its connection to music, which is why so much has been used by composers. Both poetry and music act as counterparts to our visually driven society. They allow us to imagine by using our ears rather than our eyes. The eyes are directional: if you look in what direction, you cannot see what is happening in the opposite direction. Music is omnidirectional and surrounds us. We can hear it even from before we are born, in the mother’s womb.

Scientifically, I found that music and art are both forms of patterns, which our brains love. Looking at visual art stimulates the brain to make sense of shapes in front of us. Our eyes take in wavelengths of light and different colours produce different responses in the retina. For example, the colour blue is sensitive to short wavelengths of light. Moreover, we also integrate sensory information from the eyes into the lines, shapes, and depth of a painting.

In contrast, music uses more parts of our brain at once than any other type of art. The rhythm element gives us a sense of movement through various patterns of sounds. Furthermore, studies show when we listen to music, our brains release dopamine, which makes us feel happy, and that dopamine release is strongest when a piece of music reaches an emotional peak, as the listener is overcome with sensations such as excitement and awe. These patterns explain why often the most popular songs are the most emotional.

Music allows us to experience all the emotions that we experience in our lives. I believe the possibilities of music are endless - it holds power to bring everyone together, whilst bringing positivity and calmness into the world which is what our society especially needs today more than ever. I cannot wait to see where it goes in the future.

“Altiora In Votis”



HIGHGATE