

The Narrator

volume 2.1



The Narrator

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Volume 2.1 begins a new volume, along with which we have a new publication design. Critical articles include psycho-geography and film, and Jesus' biblical rhetoric, whilst creative pieces include a tale of magic and a Scottish tribe, unemployment, the seasons and their relation to people, and the state between wakefulness and sleep.

We are proud to announce a new partnership with a student-led publication entitled *The Durham Review of Books*, edited by Isaac Turner. *The Durham Review of Books* is a termly publication, launched independently by a group of students at the city's university. It aims to be an intelligent, challenging and irreverent short collection of essays, in roughly the same format as the London Review of Books. Its first issue was launched in the summer of 2014. It has also published Joshua Eaton's article; you can find it at <http://www.durhamreview.com/>. Please continue to check The Narrator's Facebook group for details of partnership submissions and events.

Dan Underwood's poem *The Old Man* follows *An Old Man*, published in the previous issue; additionally, he responds to this issue's poem *November* by Cherelle Johannes in a critical analysis. Andy Hooley's *Pater, The Family Ass* is a critical piece in dialogue with the poem *Another Father's Day* from Volume 1.2.

We are proud to have Melony Bethala as our postgraduate creative writer for Volume 2. We would like to thank other regular contributors for their continued support and new contributors for taking the time to submit. We extend special thanks to Adam Bristow-Smith for taking the time out of his Ph.D. and job to write for us.

Readers should also be aware of upcoming events and opportunities led by the Literature Society and read the newest issue of *Unknown* magazine which has just become available.

We hope you enjoy reading the new volume.

CREATIVE



WRITING



BRIJJ

Adam Bristow-Smith

A small river ran through the glen. The water wound and trickled its way round the many bends and curves at a leisurely pace. At one end it vanished into a densely packed forest of pines, dark and unwelcoming, but in opposite directions these petered out, making way for the barren yellow scrub and bare, craggy rocks that covered most of the valley. Above it all towered the Viaduct. It spanned the glen in five proud strides, dwarfing all around in its red-bricked majesty. The river seemed to cower in its shadow; the stunted bushes mocked in their struggle for a foothold by its firmly rooted columns. Those towering columns had no trouble standing tall even in this windswept wilderness.

Yewn stared up at the great construction in awe. He had sixteen winters under his belt, was a grown man, and he had travelled far in his time. In hunting he had gone as far North as the Stone Hills and as far South as the Farland Lochs. There were those in the clan who looked up to him as an intrepid wanderer. Yet in all his travels he had never seen anything quite like the Viaduct; nothing had ever come close. The finest wooden feasting halls paled in comparison to this red stoned titan.

There had always been a sense of mystery to the place. Few from the village ever came near it but Yewn was as fascinated as he was afraid. Though people hadn't always been so afraid, or so Yewn's Da' had told him. At nights by the fireside he'd told Yewn tales of how he used to play in its shadow as a bairn, scrambling up the rock sides of the valley where the great Viaduct jutted out from them, how the most adventurous would even run out onto it, up high and exposed where the wind could tug and pull at their furs, icy fingers threatening to drag them off at any moment. So he'd claimed. Yewn couldn't imagine being so careless, so unaware, in its presence. And it was too late to ask. His Da' was many years dead, lost to a fall and a cut leg that had turned feverish. The old man had been full of tales. He was the only reason Yewn even knew its name. Most of the clan didn't speak of it at all now, or only in hushed tones as "tha' thing."

Yewn tried to remember the words his Da' had taught him, that he'd learnt in turn from his Da', who'd got them from the memories-put-down. Yewn couldn't understand the memories-put-down. He'd seen some of them once but to him they'd just looked like tiny

black marks, not like memory at all. Maybe the Magick in them had run out. But he had his own memory, and that didn't need putting down. The words had gone something like...

“The auld men spoak of the greet yern wurryms tha' went across the way.

They belcht smoak and breetht fyr at fyrst. Til they closed theyr mowths,

An' grew kwyet.

Faster than nay man nor ku they carvt thru roak an' stoan,

On theyr greet yern feet til the Bad Tyms came,

Of the fyr, the bludd and the boan...”

Yewn didn't understand most of it. He'd asked his Da' once but he didn't seem to know either, at least not in a way he could tell. Apparently Yewn's Da's Da' had said you could follow the wurrym traks, and if you went far enough you'd find things even bigger than the Viaduct. Yewn wasn't sure he believed that either. But Yewn had heard about the “Bad Tyms”, the times of “Bludd an' Smoak an' Greet Fyr.” There were plenty of tales about that, about when the Magick had run out and the world had burnt, passed down from the grey to the young until they became grey themselves. They had meant something to people once. Everyone knew them, but no one really knew why, or what for. And people were beginning to forget. Yewn was sure it was all out there somewhere, along with the reason it was important to remember why the Magick ran out, somewhere in the memories-put-down, but now their Magick seemed to have run out too. In the end, everything's Magick did.

Still, Yewn stared up at the Viaduct, thoughts beginning to brew, piercing the fog of his awe. He began to try to understand what it was, piece together his knowledge. Ideas formed - but a cold wind began to blow. He did not have time to be still and think. A storm was brewing. There were things that needed to be done. Another time maybe... but there were always things that needed to be done. He drew his furs tighter around him. Grey clouds gathered overhead and the first droplets of rain began to fall. Off in the distance thunder rumbled. It would be getting dark soon; he would not want to be caught in the open when the downpour began in earnest... he'd heard the howls in last night's moonlight hours. Making sure the brace of rabbits he'd killed earlier was securely fastened to his belt, he gathered up his pouch of cutters, slung his spear over his shoulder and set off towards the tree-line, leaving the Viaduct, and his freshly formed thoughts, behind.

The campfires burned brighter this night. Even Yewn could see that much, though his eyes were old and failing. The flickering firelight seemed almost to lick at the clouds that hung low overhead, the reflected light casting an orange glow across the night sky. They'd stacked the fuel high this time. But, still, it wasn't enough to warm the cold he felt in his bones.

The times were changing, that much Yewn knew for sure. With over fifty winters behind him he was one of the oldest members of the clan, the oldest now perhaps, since Old Jock had died. He bore the scars of the many winters to prove it, proof that he'd seen both good times and bad. The gouge in his thigh he'd got from the "Greet Hoag"; it had gored him as he had gored it. But in the end spear had won over tusk. He'd taken away its tusks, and his limp, as a trophy. The smaller fingers of his left hand he'd lost to the cold. The blizzard had trapped them for ten days and nights in a cave far from the village. He was the only one of that hunting party who'd returned. Aye, he'd seen much. Life was difficult, that was its way. But it was more than that now. He saw the change; his long life had allowed him to see it, though there were few men left who remembered the times before. But it was getting colder, every winter more snow until finally the ice didn't bother to melt. The Howlers had pushed in from the north. There were more of them now, and they were bigger, less cautious... hungrier. And dark things lurked in the forests, now. The bravest hunter didn't dare tread where Yewn had played as scarcely more than a boy.

From time to time the young ones came to him for advice. They respected him, for he had seen much. He told them to prepare: for the dark times ahead, for the coming of the Others from the West, for what he had once thought of as their "Magick" running out even more. But they listened to him less and less, caught up in their own plans and thoughts. They fitted what he said to what they wanted to hear. They thought they knew their own path... They did not know the long view, past or future. One had come to him now, as he sat staring into the flames, the moths and mosquitoes no more than grey blurs flicking across his vision. "Auld Mann? Will ye kom?" the young one spoke.

There was a pause before Yewn spoke; his voice was as stiff and sore as his old joints. "Ach, away wi ye, wee'un. I've telt ye afore. I've nae tym foar magicks o' gods... Nor do enny of ye!"

"But ye telt us tae prepar for the tims tae kom!"

"Aye, ah did... ah did." Yewn nodded his head sadly. "An' have ye? No! There's nae wud in the stoar, nae fud foar the wunter."

“There’s moar tae lyf than fud and warrumth, Auld Man.” This one was kind, respectful, as they all were, but he still thought he could teach Yewn something.

“Aye, tha’s true. But there’s nae moar tae death than the lack o’ them!”

But the youngster was not to be deterred. “Kom, Auld Man. We’ve found an Auld God. It’ll help us!”

“Oh, aye? If the Auld yens were so greet how kom theyr all deed?” But he rose carefully, climbing onto his aching feet, nevertheless. They wouldn’t stop pestering him until he agreed to come. The village had become infected with their misguided enthusiasm. The campfires had been stacked high with fuel that would’ve best been saved for the winter. Streams of people wove between the huts and these great bonfires. Eventually they all joined the one long column that filed out past the stockades, out of the village and into the dark night. Everyone had been rounded up, enthusiastic or begrudging, by the torch-bearers that now took their places down the sides of the column. They were the escorts, the guides through the darkening night.

The march was long and hard. Even with his stick to support him Yewn’s legs ached. He didn’t like being this far out, this exposed. He didn’t have so much as a spear to protect him and he had long since come to terms with the fact that he was no young hunter anymore. It pained him to think that amongst the young’uns there were now few that would have done much better in a hunt than him, even as he was now. The torches made the dark more dangerous; it would draw attention and with unaccustomed eyes they would not be able to see what followed them in the night. And through his furs the cold still felt biting. But eventually a glow up ahead showed that their journey was drawing to a close.

Great pyres had been lit here too. Their flames licked at the sky while clan-men danced and leapt around them, chanting and howling into the night. And there, silhouetted by the fires, was their new God, the salvation they had come to see, their hope for the future, wreathed in smoke and flame and crossing the valley in five proud strides.

Tears rolled down Yewn’s cheeks, tracing the furrows in his hard-aged skin. He understood. It was too late. Too late to explain. Too late for change. His shoulder shook, tears falling faster, as the clan around began to chant Its name.

“Briij! Briij! Briij! Briij!

BRIIJ!”

CAPSULA MUNDI

Georgia Marshall

Roots envelope
caressing tired bones,
porous skin rips
wooded veins penetrate.

Reconnecting circulatory paths
the juices of life still flow,
comforted,
no longer in a lonely body.

Rising up, melting, standing strong,
cracking the shell of foetal confines,
smiling in the blossoms
shuddering in the frost.

Reaching limbs stretch,
tender shoots framed against blue sky,
loved ones weep
zesty tears nurse new beginnings.

Rippling leaves chatter,
friends surround,
creaking and swaying in response,
sacred forest infused with minds.

I see again
feel the breeze,
absorbed into a new soul with new eyes.

About Capsula Mundi:

The first Italian project created to promote the realisation of green cemeteries. Capsula Mundi is a container with an old perfect shape, just like an egg, made with modern material -starch plastic- in which the dead body is put in a foetal position. It is planted like a seed in the soil, and a tree is planted on top of it. The tree is chosen when the person is alive, relatives and friends look after it when death occurs. A cemetery will no longer be full of tombstones and will become a forest.

http://www.capsulamundi.it/progetto_eng.html

THE EMPLOYMENT MENTOR

James Fellows

The agency was in town, between a bookie's and a charity shop. I was sitting in the foyer, waiting for my appointment.

There was a lad sitting opposite me, wearing the interview combo: black leather shoes, black trousers, white shirt and a tie. He was resting his elbows on his spread-wide knees, and tapping his thumbs on his phone screen. There were faint blemishes on his cheeks, from where he'd picked and scratched at spots.

I could put his story together like a four-year-old's jigsaw. He'd been made redundant from a factory, the council, or maybe a warehouse. Definitely a place with high-vis vests, and steel-toe-cap boots.

Sacked, and unable to find work, he threw himself here like I did. I could tell he didn't want to be sitting here, with the useless and doomed, but there was no other option.

He's the type you see plastered on a Friday night, sweating aftershave and slumping down the high-street with his mates. Lads like that are alright. I'm not far from him myself, but I don't like the thought of drinking in the same sweaty bars all my life.

I want to get away from that. I need money first though. I need a job I can stick at.

Maybe when I sample a few places here I'll get inspired, and this time next year, I'll have a career.

The lad locked and pocketed his phone, then raised his head. I looked down at the table between us, and faked an interest in the month-old magazines, and leaflets with Interview Tips and Job Hunting advice.

I let my eyes wander around the foyer. Green carpet tiles were worn to the floor near the entrance. The walls were blank white, apart from a few felt notice-boards. It was dusty and dark. I could hear people walking around on the floor above.

A man who looked about forty was sitting on my left. Age had bitten two chunks from his hairline, leaving him with an M shape of hair on his brow. Maybe he's been coming to recruitment agencies since he was my age, I thought.

A door clanged on the floor above.

Footsteps moved across the ceiling toward the stairwell in the corner.

Another door clanged, and a man shot down the stairs into the foyer.

"Hello guys!" He boomed.

"Glad to see you made it!" He boomed again.

He had short, lightly gelled ginger hair, a fantastic white smile and blowtorch-blue eyes. He was the "Employment Mentor" that we'd agreed to see.

"Come straight up gentlemen," he turned and walked back to the stairs. "This way this way," he said, beckoning us over.

We followed the mentor down a corridor and into a small room, where there were a few plastic chairs facing a whiteboard.

"Come on in and take a seat fellas," he said.

I quivered in last like a timid tadpole and sat down. The mentor closed the fire door after me.

"Right," he said. "My name's Tony, pleased to meet you all, and I know exactly what you're thinking... Who's this good looking ginger kid eh? And why should I trust him with my future?"

I tried not to smirk.

"Well," he said, opening his arms. "First of all, I don't want to make you someone you're not. Because I know that ambition, dedication and hardworkability are already in you. It's what we are as homo-sapiens, and the human race didn't get where it is today without a bit of determination."

He paused, and inhaled deeply.

"Now you might have lost that drive, somewhere along the way. But I know it's there, and I'm going to pull it back today."

He paced across the whiteboard, switching eye-contact between the lad, the man, and me.

“First things first though,” he said. “I’m afraid I have to show you a few corporate vidz,” he mimed a yawn. “And then I’ll talk about the recruitment processes, in a bit more detail.”

He walked to the computer next to the whiteboard.

“OK, bear with me guys. I’m not too good with this space-age malarkey, but I’ll do my best.”

The projector that was hanging from the ceiling blinked awake, and a presentation appeared on the whiteboard.

“So this is what we do here guys,” he hit play on a video and a woman’s swaying voice said:

“Williams… Here for you… For your future… Putting you where you want to be.”

Happy workers faded through each other on the whiteboard. A construction worker became an office worker, a shop clerk became a delivery van driver, a teacher became a mechanic.

“Our three point employment programme is: Cooperation, Confidence and Capability,” the woman said.

As I watched the video, I thought about absolutely everything else.

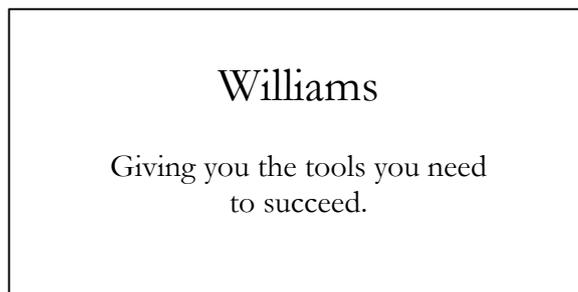
I thought about Tony’s suave shoes, his expensive watch and his sharp tie. I figured he must know he’s being seedy, but he doesn’t care. He just goes for it anyway.

I thought about the lad who was sitting opposite me in the foyer. He was watching the video and so was the older man. I thought about my mum and my dad.

I thought about Rachel.

The video ended and Tony clicked onto the next slide. He moved back in front of the whiteboard, and the presentation was projected onto him.

Words rippled and rolled over his body. His shirt read:



QUITTING

Six months earlier

I would like to leave my job as a “Happy and Helpful” customer advisor. My last day will be the 07/02/2014. Thank you for the opportunity and your support.

Yours Sincerely, Sean Walker.

I scrawled it out with a black biro on lined paper.

I hated that place. Stacking shelves under fluorescent lights. Eight-hour till shifts. “Excuse me, where’s the Milk?” I couldn’t do it anymore. Time to change I thought.

Rachel wasn’t pleased when I told her I wanted to leave. We’d had enough money troubles this year.

She was lying in bed next to me, and I was holding her tightly round the waist. She’d just gotten out of the shower, her damp hair smelled of lavender shampoo.

She reached over to turn the bedside lamp off.

“I don’t want to work there anymore,” I said.

She stopped, and turned back to me.

“I want to do something else,” I said, she was silent for a moment.

“What do you want to do?” She asked me.

“I don’t know. But I know I don’t want to work there. I’m tired of it.”

She must have known this was coming, I was always complaining about work.

“Have you thought about what’ll happen if you quit?” She said. “I hate seeing you upset, but I don’t think you realise the consequences. We have no savings and we’re fucking drowning in debt. It’s a bad job, and I know you hate it, but we can’t afford to go after what we really want.”

She went on.

“I don’t like where I work either you know. But I do it for us, so we can be together. Here.”

Why couldn't she be un-pragmatic? Just once.

"I'm so tired of it," I murmured.

"We have to make do Sean. Just stick with it. Please?"

I stared at my uniform, draped over the chair in the corner of the room. It looked like the melting clocks in that trippy painting. An ambulance shot past the bedroom window. It flashed a vein-blue light on the curtains, then fell out of earshot.

"Fine," I said to her.

"I love you," she said back.

She kissed me, rolled over, and flicked the lamp off.

I brought it up over and over, and we had some bad fights. She'd get sick of me and shrug me off by leaving the room. If we argued in bed, she'd go downstairs and sleep on the couch. I'd always apologise though, she wouldn't speak to me if I didn't.

She screamed "You're such a fucking underachiever!" at me once, then slammed the door in my face and drove to her mum's for the night.

I really had to apologise after that one. I felt awful. Like I was dragging something dark to the surface, so I didn't talk about quitting for a couple of weeks after that.

She never got that angry again, thank god. Instead she gave me quick, non-emotional responses. When I talked about how I felt, she cancelled out my "depressed," "vacant" and "exhausted," with "try," "strong" and "love."

We spoke at each another with hollow words. Words that flew past our faces like bubbles, fell down to the carpet, popped, and dried up.

Then, one day she just said "Fine. Do whatever you want."

I felt a release of tension between us. I went over to hug her, but she drew back.

"You have to find something else," she said, looking into my eyes.

"Don't take my house away from me, Sean. I don't know what'll happen if we have to move because of this."

I kissed her, and promised I'd find something else.

I handed my notice in the next day.

LAURA

Molly Bell

I have shared
your bed,
pressed
shivering spines
together;
fallen asleep,
my words
nestled
inside your
head.

always
boil enough
for two.
two mugs,
drop
a bag in each.

sigh

when the kettle's cry
does not draw you out.

towering
glass of
lemonade,
bubbling at the
brim.
one drop
of alcohol:
you spill,

pure tears
on sick-
stained
dance floors.

phantom flautist,
steal into
my bathroom,
haunt it always.

LEAVES

Emily Willis

Mist glistens on her eyelashes,
the last leaf quivers in the breeze,
the air bears a grudge.
But it is in the calm that the leaf dislodges itself,
peaceful, deliberate,
aware that time reclaims all things.
It falls
cuts through the air's floating conspiracy
slowly spinning,

spinning,

spinning,

and it did seem as if an age had passed between the fall
and the soft, soundless meeting with the floor.
They freeze together
and in it is the image of the boot which shatters it.
The shards of leaf scatter into the grass,
melt, die, rot and become nothing.
Or, at the base of the tree, they become a leaf again.

NEWTON

Nathaniel Tye

“You think I see not beauty?

Feel not passion nor sorrow nor joy?

Blinded by my observation,

Great sights obscured from view?

Logic, my craft,

Sculpts me a devil in your mind;

Reason, my art,

Paints me a heretic in your eyes.

The poetry of deduction,

The art of numbers,

Art not valid

In your mind?

The work of mine,

It's legacy to reveal,

Sights so sublime,

Unimaginable to your mind.

The pillars of creation,

Born in the eagle,

Itself within the snake,
Made clear by calculations,
Those which you decried,
Unveiled by crystalline logic,
Our existence now defined.”

NOVEMBER

Cherelle Johannes

Winter days have been approaching
But life is barely in my grasp!
The twinkle that begins receding—
I cry and grasp to make it last.
 (Don't take it away!)

Numb— too close— hard to think
What comes after sunrise?
Falling— memories—
 Autumn drifting in like a stranger uninvited
 Leaving before dinner is served.

Exeunt, and enter Winter!
A blocked gutter out of reach, gaut pulling the tether
The stony grip of Arthur, that bloody draught

Where are my slippers?
Where is my sister?
… A house falls into dereliction, disrepair
 I am cold, bring me

Sunny dreams of hands held warm
Hold me close, a child again, guard me
Against frostbitten fingers, cruel ice and bleak
Grey Winter's only blanket of chill and rain.

The scent of pie and pudding, mother.
I would make them for you
If only I could.

AN OLD MAN (SUBJECT)

Daniel Underwood

There he sits
The old man
My old man

Rigid in his chair:
So entirely stiff
Until the subtle
Touch
Of an inky nib
Scribbles him into action.

The moment's silence before the beginning,

Motionless.
Waiting for time
To resume its ticking;
Time which waits on me
Who holds the conductor's baton.

One, Two, Upbeat,

In.

The pawn in my
Whimsical game:
Moving in black and white
Until I, playing doctor,
Inject some well-needed
Colour.

Dolce please, more tenderly,

That's better.

Sometimes,
Often even,
I quite forget about him,
And there he goes out the window;
No crash of cymbals
To accompany him.
He fell out of existence
Temporarily
Until I saw fit to retrieve him.

Back he comes
Bad penny.

PAN(IC)

Leonora O'Hanlon

I feel the panic in me, I feel it crawling across my insides, I am trying to keep it in, I am trying to hide, that panic in me.
What do I do, where do I begin, how do I start my day when I have this panic in me.
I hate this fear, this constant stream of worry as it cackles with a crackle in the liquid spill of my thought.
I feel the panic in me, it rises like the wind creeping like a natural disaster beating my mind into the submission of an anxious life
This panic in me
What do I do
How do I begin
Counting Pennies, putting them in piles, security dripping from my fingertips
I have this panic in me that needs to be contained, I try to keep it in, I try to hide its angry ways
But it claws and it paws and it thaws my broken skin until I hear it,
Clear,
This stream of anxious thought
And I let the panic in me wash my body into its flood
Until I disappear in its waves, it is me, I am it, the panic in me
Is everywhere, it smothers my air, it becomes my sight, my breath, my every move
I try to soothe the rising beast
But the power of progressing panic piles onto my pining insides I cannot breathe I cannot do
I cannot see I cannot know, not when I have this panic in me
wait stop think
This panic is not you
It is the voice of the survivor, the animal mind seeking escape

You are not the panic in you
I have the panic in me
It is mine I am not it

I am the survivor of this anxious thought

SLEEP

Leonora O'Hanlon

Sing to me that lullaby of silence. I want to sleep tonight.

I lost myself again

So sing to me the silence and let me fall into the noise, let me fall into myself again.

I want to talk my mind out of my flesh I want to wake up

wake up wake up

but sing to me that lullaby of silence. I want to sleep tonight.

body makes me move, makes me feel a part of the space

but mind is me, makes me feel like a living...

nothing but a living...

with no label or name but a living of me

I am the living

please sing to me that lullaby of silence and let me fall into myself again

if I close my eyes you can not see me

if I close my eyes I am not real

you are there but you can not see me.

I have your face in my mind

trapped behind my lidded sockets

so sing to me that lullaby of silence,

tonight I want to sleep, so silence that lullaby of sing

I am falling.

SINGLE

Louise Essex

If I lie here long enough
I wonder
if my body might shrivel a bit,
toes curl up into themselves,
brows collapse, staring
at a sun dusty through my window

Sun doesn't look like sun,
I see a square of bright fluffy light
in streams, that hurt my pupils
makes me look down
down
to my body
This bed
single bed, with sheets in need
of passion
to stir the dust,
perhaps

Not a body
not in this haze or this age
with this white light
ageing through the window
shut tight
I can't remember the taste of air,
Or you

And my left side is left to dream of my right side

SURPRISE OK

Maddy Crammond

walk home from the pub orange circles
of light swimming in front of tipsy wide eyes
all of a sudden the urge to look at the night
comes over my dream-addled pint-softened mind
concrete path for my back and my spine
is locked to the ground and I'm stargazing

billions away hugeness of sky filled
with stars and stars and stars and stars and
lying in the darkness swept up in my smallness
it is such a thing of beauty silent and pulsing
heaving screaming night
you are quiet as a cup you are so quiet
you are weighted with your stars
after all I think each thing is just
an experience a yellow-roomed experience
we are terribly young still brutally painfully young
the stars and I hold each other in regard they seem wise
and mysterious

WINTER MORNING

Melony Bethala

Your coat is a
snowy morning,
the ground wilted
beneath layers,
your skin dewy,
pale and smooth.

We walked back
along the river,
returning to time
what it gave us
that winter.

A chilled room
in a corner flat
in a hollowed part
of town far from here.

I am the warm gloves
over your hands,
the pocket space
between you
and the snow outside.

Blazing wood
in the fireplace,
the tingling feeling,
your hands, my heart
your hands, my heart.

CRITICAL

WRITING

JESUS' RHETORIC

Stanislaw Braminski

When Biblical scholars write of the rhetoric of Jesus they largely consider it rhetoric of the writers of the New Testament. Everything conventionally known about Jesus is held to originate from an embellished account; much like everything Socratic is treated as Platonic by readers of the life of Socrates, so are the words of Jesus treated as being woven into a rhetorical fabric that has survived to persuade billions (Hayes; Holladay, 92). Others contend that it is not outrageous to consider the gospels' as historically reliable, such as those holding the Christian fundamentalist doctrines of scriptural inerrancy and inspirationⁱ. These views are unpopular in the secular sphere; Naomi Alderman for instance in *The Liars' Gospel* acquaints her readership with the pre-Latinized and pre-anglicised names of Gospel figures: Jesus becomes Yehoshuah; Alderman hopes Yeshoshua is more likely to be considered historically by her readership, and not in relation to Christian texts, art and literature (Abrams). This Jesus is stripped of the insidious glowing benignity and white skin stuck to him in the European consciousness. (Despite such efforts this is how you'll regardless encounter him on his Wikipedia page.) I hope to engineer the same effect, but contrarily to Alderman, propose in a brief commentary taking a reading of Jesus' actions as they appear in the gospels (within reason), while also considering the perspective of rhetorical scholars viewing the New Testament as rhetorical literature. There was a man Jesus behind the words of the Bible and perhaps viewing him as such is worthwhile.

The concept the word 'rhetoric' represents has been subject to as much change as exegesisⁱⁱ, and any investigation of New Testament rhetoric must first be a discussion of rhetoric itself. There are two senses in which I could apply the concept to Jesus' words in the Bible:

- (1) The art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.
- (2) Language designed to have a persuasive or impressive effect, but which is often regarded as lacking in sincerity or meaningful content.

(Oxford Dictionaries, "rhetoric")

Dr. Charles Mosley in his talk "The Figure of Satan" stresses the distinction between rhetoric, a linguistic tool, and its good or bad ends which have over time come to link up with the word and remove its neutrality. He elsewhere elaborates upon a definition following (1)

in *English Renaissance Drama*: “Theoreticians since antiquity recognised that different patterns of words had different effects, and recognised over 200 distinct figures or colours of rhetoric, each with a purpose to achieve a psychological effect on an audience ... out of persuasion through words grows power” (140).

This categorisation of language emanates from a Greco-Roman tradition venerated for centuries; for as long it was included in primary education, and can be seen anywhere in the ancient world, and the world following it, where “through words grows power”. Scholars debate the types of which rhetoric influenced New Testament texts. Some such as George Kennedy in *Classical Rhetoric* prefer to view Hebrew traditions of rhetoric in Jesus’ word, with a perceptible Greco-Roman influence immediately recognisable to the few educated and literate who might have received the writings of the gospels (144-146). He points out the rich imagery and extensive allegory of Jesus, “alien” to the Greco-Roman tradition, and covenant speechesⁱⁱⁱ (140-143). Others such as Ian Henderson in *Jesus, Rhetoric, and Law* insist on placing the rhetoric of the New Testament within a Greco-Roman rhetorical framework; the predominant of these is Greek gnome: structuring a writing and arguments around wisdom sayings (156), e.g. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself” (Mat. 6. 34). John Hayes and Carl Holloway favour a similar approach in *Beginner’s Handbook* and write of the episodic arrangement of the Gospels which mirrors the flow of Greek literature (98-99). Scholars have and can identify these rhetorical types within the New Testament.

Media in the UK is inclined to use “rhetoric” to denote the associations of (2). (Even popular media: Youtube videos of Boris Johnson’s thesauric excoriations or any televised Prime Minister’s cocky pith in the commons are a national phenomenon.) This is a meaning that can be bluntly seen everywhere; I find a *Daily Telegraph* article by Roger Carr in December 2013 particularly representative:

Political rhetoric and some media comments have inflamed consumer passion, fed suspicion, discouraged investment and damaged investor confidence. The reputation of the industry has been battered and morale bruised.

[...]

The Punch and Judy politics on energy must stop.

Carr’s article gives the impression of rhetoric being a politically agensised language with malicious ends; a medium for “Punch and Judy” undulations of debate, damaging to both political progress and credibility. This is an impression prolifically shared by the media: “Energy Bills: Call to end Punch and Judy politics” (*The Scotsman*), and indeed now after

Carr whenever an attack on politics seemed possible: “Stop the Punch and Judy Show, speaker tells Politicians” (*i-Independent*) “No Place for Punch and Judy Politics” (*Aberdeen Evening Express*).^{iv}

While applying this sense of rhetoric to Jesus may seem perverse, an investigation of scripture yields surprising results. Among the New Testament interpretations of Matthew Hurt in his 2014 one-man-play *The Man Jesus*, Hurt connected the rhetoric of the gospels with the widespread cynicism facing contemporary politics. While figures such as Pontius Pilate were more obviously at the end of the stick, the play was a cynical discussion of one man’s ability to conquer first an obscure Roman province, then the Roman Empire, and finally the world. Rhetorical scholars would balk at ascribing this impact to one man, and therefore side lining the rhetorical skill of the several learned writers of the New Testament. But before their rhetoric was the rhetoric of Jesus. Most agree some true details found their way into the Bible, for example the crucifixion, an ignominious form of execution: its presence in Christian tradition suggests absence of embellishment and historical veracity (878-879). In the same way any rhetoric (2) in Jesus’ words that can be found would have been non-conducive to a properly eloquent work of rhetorical fiction, and may be historical accounts.

Thus, there are two strains of the word “rhetoric” which I will to apply to the Bible. I’ll not spend much discussing rhetoric (1) as I cannot hold a candle, much less hold forth, to scholarship of New Testament rhetoric. Hayes and Holloway identify the three persuasive features of Ancient Greek rhetoric in the Gospels: ethos, pathos, and logos: ethos, the character of the speaker/writer whether inspiring, or compassionate; pathos, appeal to the emotions and reactions of an audience; and logos, the coherency of speech (Hayes; Holloway, 93). Viewing the Bible as literature, in an instance such as when a sinful woman washes Jesus’ feet (Luk. 37. 36-50) one can read pathos: the repentant woman is pitiful and washing Jesus’ feet with her tears; one can read ethos: Jesus is compassionate to the woman, juxtaposed, you could even say, with the callousness of the others he is with; and one can read logos: Jesus in his act of grace never loses the authority of his moralising and the writer crafts an argument on the woman’s behalf, making it clear to all around Jesus why he would act with kindness towards a prostitute^v:

⁴¹ “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

⁴³ Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

The greater debtor is the prostitute and loves Jesus, as he himself later says, more than anyone else in the company. (This is less egotistical once one recalls Mat. 25. 35: “For I was hungry and you gave me food”.) The writer’s craft, as opposed to the historian’s eye, is difficult to deny.

For rhetoric (2), and in sifting in New Testament texts for the man behind the words, it is perhaps most appropriate to look at the most polemical period of Jesus’ mission: the time he spent preaching in the Temple of Jerusalem. It is in this time Jesus uttered some of his most brazen attacks on the religious order of his times: rhetorical attacks, such as his response to the challenge put to him by the combined forces of the Pharisee (anti-Roman) and Herodians (pro-Roman):

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said,

[...]

¹⁷ “Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

(Mat. 22)

If in this situation Jesus had answered taxes should have been be paid to Caesar he would have opened himself to attack from the Pharisee and stood to lose a considerable part of his following (inhabitants of an occupied land). If he had answered taxes shouldn’t have been paid to Caesar he faced arrest by the Roman authorities.

¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

²¹ “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

(Mat. 22)

Emphasis is placed by theologians on Jesus’ implicit lambasting of the Pharisee, and how this response highlights their dishonest intent in trying to trick him (*NIV*, p. 2012). However, I contend Jesus’ priority was the people he was preaching to and hearing his every word, and not an abstract ideological battle. Kennedy suggests that some of Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisee hints at an authorial knowledge of Greek dialectic, evaluating

the truth of propositions by challenging them in a chain of counter-propositions (Kennedy, 145). However, in this case this interpretation would require the exchange to be one of propositions: Jesus doesn't answer the question, and comes off particularly well, contrarily to the Pharisee. (The question was what in fact everyone should “give back to Caesar”) This episode is a sly exchange of rhetorical point scoring. Jesus is challenged with similar stakes earlier in the gospel of Matthew (and of Mark and Luke); it is a challenge to his authority:

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

(Mat. 21)

The challenge has the same structure and resolution as the Pharisee's later challenge: Jesus is placed between losing his credibility or being arrested for outright blasphemy in claiming he has divine authority. His evasion of the question is more blatant, and this time trades a question for a question. Notice that Jesus traps the Pharisee in the exact same way in which he later criticises them for trying to trap him. It would seem a bad rhetorical choice of the writer of the “Gospel of Matthew” to locate it so close to Jesus' later victory over the Pharisee, which to me improves the likelihood of both dubious episodes being true retellings of Jesus' rhetoric.

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’” ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”^{vi}

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don't know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

(Mat. 21)

Of course, it cannot be overlooked that in both these situations Jesus had his back to a wall: he faced the disillusionment of his followers or arrest by the Romans. But perhaps it also shouldn't be overlooked at the most a few days before the incident Jesus had entered the

temple of Jerusalem and caused widespread property damage in his famous “Cleansing of the Temple” (Mat. 21. 12-13), and that the Pharisee were probably trying to expel a disturber of the peace; that this was a man, despite his indignation at the Pharisee’s challenges, who had come for war; a rhetorical war, conducted much like they are today: making a show for the people and not losing face to what Jesus considered iniquity.

As when of old some orator renowned
In Athens or free Rome, where eloquence
Flourished, since mute, to some great cause
addressed,
Stood in himself collected

[Satan before his final temptation of Eve]

(*Paradise Lost Books IX-X*, 85)

Milton felt it necessary to highlight that it was an act of rhetoric that caused the fall of humanity, yet in his magnum opus rhetoric is shared by devils, angels, and humans alike; the art is magnificently free of the particulars of its ends and glows as the backbone to the poet’s epic. I would like to conclude by suggesting this, Dr. Moseley’s neutral tool, is not at all how Jesus would have considered his rhetoric:

³⁴Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

(Mat. 10)

“Who’s who?” is the question here, “are you for me or against me? You can’t be both”. This sectarian ideology rebuffs all eloquence unless it is in the service of good. Everything in Jesus’s message was polarisation, to turn “daughter against her mother” (Mat. 10. 35) – to kick the bees’ nest in a society that he saw to be filled with insubstantial values. For this there is also a modern analogy: the Pussy Riot demonstration in 2012, irreverence to answer injustice, mirrors Jesus’ entrance onto a public and polemical platform in his “Cleansing of the Temple”. Like Pussy Riot, Jesus’ rhetoric (or rhetorical actions) was charged with his

uncompromising message—accepting the less attractive features of it is important if one is to realise the full scope of who he was, as precious little remains in the rhetoric of the Bible.

Notes

Inspiration: the doctrine that the words of the Bible were delivered to writers directly from God (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 201); commonly held as support for: inerrancy: the doctrine the Bible is an infallible account of history, ethics, cosmology, et al (Oxford, 650).

² Exegesis: interpretation and scholarship of the Bible (*Oxford*, 588).

³ Covenant: the idea of there being a contract between humanity and God (this in the Old Testament is exclusively a contract between him and his chosen people: the Hebrews) , e.g. If the people fulfil their part of the bargain, such as by avoiding sin, then God fulfils his, such as by providing eternal paradise (*Oxford*, 124 & 477).

⁴ Although criticisms such as Carr’s give the phrase currency, it was David Cameron who coined it in his 2005 victory speech at having won the Conservative leadership.

⁵ A progressive attitude in a time when a common Judaic prayer was: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who hast not made me a woman” (Taylor Banks, 21).

⁶ Omniscient third person narration: stylistic features of the Bible such as these make a good case for scholars interpreting the New Testament as a non-historical rhetorical text.

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PATER, THE FAMILY ASS

Andy Hooley

The most interesting thing about my Dad is that he's a coward.

In some ways we're alike. We usually can't help but talk about everything other than the topic of conversation.

Even now I'm worrying about how this sounds (trite, melodramatic, reductively pithy, vainly and “egregiously” self-aware – not that you need help working that out), which is to say, reads, which is to say, I'm trying to change/edit/redact (delete as appropriate) what it is I say, which is to say, write. Yuck. It's awful, and it's all so tired, so exhausted. And beside the point, of course.

I could just delete that paragraph but it's illustrative. However, I spouted a poem a few issues back which now I can't delete, only it doesn't really mean anything unless you're me (editor Emily even e-mailed an enquiry), and I assume that that makes the poem a semi-facile back-patting mystery machine, or just tacky. In the interests of being interesting/indulging in a frenzy of explicitation, let's get to work solving this mystery, gang.

(You might, if you read the prior poem, get the impression that my “muse” is my “dad”. Not so,)

So silence. It's not that Dad and I don't talk. We do talk, though sparsely. We never talk about what needs to be said, though (as above [illustrative]).

Ironically enough for someone who had little time for education, (whenever he found me reading he'd tell me to "do something constructive with my life", which I realise with retrospect is a strange thing to say to an approx. 6-11 year old) my Dad is a textbook baddad. I'll unfold elements of his character and some of the concrete mundayne-to-day facts of his particular existence before we go through our poem, to get you ready steady Freddie. At first glance he is an emotionally-distant over-drinking adulterer whose primary function in the family was to provide the fiscal frust.

He's very boring, for all that. These are just the roawrest facts and are big dramatic slaps but they don't come close to communicating anything (the boredom). The emotional distance could be assigned to his over-drinking father who died of a dickie liver at 54 while my Dad, the eldest of three brothers, was 11. The over-drinking (Dad's, but Dad's Dad's too no doubt) was "just how he was brought up" - wine with meals, beer in pubs after work with the other electricians - sometimes with his footy friends. The adultery seems to have coincided with his entering the managerial side of electricianship - more profit projections, no more pubbing with the lads (lads) - and being phased out of the physical side - mid-life crisis (predictable). (lads).

He was 45 when the affair began, I was 11. He's 54 now and he's just been treated for bladder cancer. 45 years ago, his dad didn't have Bupa. But, for my Dad, it's all cleared up, he's not dead yet - the cycle, it seems, is broken.

He's never said any of this to me or my brother. It's semi-sickening. It's just as though it's a coincidence we haven't seen him around each time we see him around. He's too much of a coward to ever acknowledge his actions (the adultery) and the resulting situation (My parents didn't get/haven't yet getted divorced. It wasn't just biologicobligation that had him seeing us, it was, like the best/worst/bworst/burst things in life, more complicated (like his bladder (burst - Bupa had to stick a little camera up through his penis, consider this an appropriate tunnelling metaphor for tunnelling metaphors), it was because we were, as it happened, (or rather, in spite of it having had happened, but not, but obviously had) still a family) - which is to say, the curious inter-situational situation where the result/effects of the actions had happened but the cause part of the equation was missing. It's probably important to look at these situations with sympathy.

Like, I and brother mine theoretically don't know he has adulterated, but, ignore it though we do, it malingers in our routine amicababbles (fifteen minutes on a Tuesday). Every Tuesday, he'd come "back home" (he moved out, bought a house with a big telly and a wine celly and a fast car (Mid-life crisis, see?)) and bring sweets - (We were chocolate children, he knew this) ironically - (emotionally distant, see?) and we'd joke about being such a dysfunctional family that we didn't even know what each other liked (Every Christmas, like clockwork, we get him a Chocolate Orange (He got them each year when he was child too) (he likes them) (actual presents are hard, because we don't know really know what he likes, and usually he's like "A Cuban Red and a South African White" . But what value hath a present that is usual? - he likes it), so we have to get any actual info about the man/myth second-

hand from Mum, to whom he would talk when he would drive her off to the pub for drinks (See?). The problem with the sympathy is that it's "just how he was brought up". He's only, until now, been following the cycle round and round, after all. Only now the cycle has been broken. He's in new ground, maybe with a firm hand at the tiller to plough new furrows through the brows of the waves of rye – or whatever Guinness is brewed from. He could change.

Mum often says I'm very like Dad, very stubborn. Not an alcoholic adulterer though. So not "very like" him, but Dad always says, when demonstrating the values of being constructive, that things should be literal and looks at everything through the pragmatism prism of is/is not. Just how have I been brought up? What if the cycle traps me until I'm 54? I need to find ways I am reproducing him and expurgate them so I'm not trapped. Isn't that solution founded on the belief that I can either be or be not? I don't plan on becoming an alcoholic adulterer, after all, but neither did he?

So I said, which is to say, wrote, "our poem" before, which is to say, just up there (^), because I realise now that my poetic encodificative mystification was in total alignment with my Dad's chosen technique of silence, obscuring important communications with white noise – which usually are the routine phrases of social conventions which can be used in almost any context which almost hide the fact you have nothing to say. So the poem was just as much my Dad's as it was mine. Maybe I should "doubt that the son had moved" (Hamlet pun). It was maybe, not consciously, just a little "cowardly" (even more contrived reverse-Hamlet pun).

Here's the poem:

Argie-bargie Arbitrary Title: *Another Father's Day*

(A subtitle for this piece could be *Another Father's Day II*)

My father has a black god in his chest.
The spirit sits, fermenting, his hospice,
Achilles' armour, Ajax's anger,
Casting bones, an uncomfortable auspice.

Like me, he makes light of situations.

Black god most literally refers to Guinness (but not literally). The blackish Irish beer my Dad has drunk since his admittedly-late-but-still-illegal teens (he likes it). He went to Ireland for the first time when he was redoubtably middle-aged. He doesn't keep Guinness a secret though, nor is he a pirate, so as to why he hoards it groggy in his chest I don't know (I do, as I said above it's a combination of just the way he was brought up and how times were and also everything that's happened in his life since he was brought up, but still, I can't think of a good reason why he can't stop being himself in order to do himself a favour), but barrelish of waist is he nevertheless/everthemore.

But that's not all, because Nietzsche says, which is to say, writes, one of the four "great" errors of humanity is the error of imaginary causes. The black god isn't really the Guinness, but the ginnels and widening gyres (how much can the centre hold?!) of Dad's internal geography which I can't be aware of partly by virtue of our being "unique" human beings but mainly because he hoards it groggy in his chest. I've had a textbook education in misplacing effects for causes, so the black god is the Guinness, but also simply the part of my father that my father allows to run round willy-nilly (tunnelling metaphors at the ready).

The second line can be construed as a continuation of the boozy/bibificatory theme, and after a whole line straight through pauseless slipping quickly foot to footly, I thought it best, or at least, better, to steady things down and chuck a coupl'a'commas in there. It hopefully malingers, just as how both Dad and I know of his adulteration altercations, but the acknowledgment of the changed relationship is not a conversation that has taken place, so the line is a reiteration of the above. The usual order of the day.

The line (especially the word spirit, which is both alcohol and my Dad's metaphysical ID or something) has quite a few i's in it, which are at least shape-wise kind of like bubbles rising in a glass. Maybe all the spitty esses will leave speckle-spots on the screen that'll make it slightly harder to read, as if you had drunk too much/gotten yourself accidentally ravaged by the whips and scorns of time. The two eyes in "spirit", which, as above, is, as well as alcohol, Dad, need glasses to see (he doesn't use them). He ignores problems (and exacerbates them). He makes his eyesight worse, he also fills his body with drink when he knows he shouldn't and makes it worse. So his hospice ferments and gets worse. Also, he sits.

In fact (his primary currency, or so he would have you believe) he's even managed to work out a way to continue his passive self-destruction by sitting in cars (his big-business atom bomb of a BMW with an engine that grawps with injection after injection) for so long

with his wallet in his back-left trouser pocket, that he's developed spinal problems that he compensates for by shifting his right shoulder a little lower than the other (the left). He even plays golf, which seems at odds with the rest of his high-pace thorough-bred (I assume if cars were horses that German engineering would be quality stock, although the whole national character vein of stereotypes is further up my Dad's street than my own) jockey/jock-eyed lifestyle, only of course golf is an almost perfect means of ensuring your joint damage is long lasting without being painful (coward), and the eighteenth hole leads on to the clubhouse where Guinness can be got. The line, just like the game of golf, ends in his hospice.

To follow through with the pantheistic nudging of the black god remark I had to go along and shove in some Grecian alliterative alphabeataroundthebush allusions. The letter A, what with it being at the start of our alphabet, was chosen to stand in as my own allegorical quest for the cause, rather than the effect.

This quest is, as of yet, unsuccessful.

Both allusions bespeak of actions hurting others, and then hurting themselves. The armour being the reason Patroclus is killed, which causes Achilles' subsequent slaying - (Dad's Dad's drink-related death, as causing Dad's drink problems).

(The two allusions, unfortunately, feed into each other, just as in my quest, I have to sublimate effect into cause. This is also representahensible of the oddness of sense of tense that Dad's silence happens to have brought about. Because the past hasn't proceeded in the way it should have, so that the conversation that ought to have happened like, 7 years ago when Dad came clean (dirty) to Mum could maybe happen in the future, and yet the conversation doesn't need to happen really. Like, I know about the adultery and the resultant fallout (obviously) so past and future have been pressed oddly together. (imperfect past, eh eh?))

- and the anger of Ajax not getting to wear Achilles' armour afterwards being the cause of Ajax's (Telamon/Tellingmum?) casual/causal killing of literature's first example of sheeple, and then himself. He hurts others, then himself. But what if I'm Ajax, vainly trying to get into Dadchilles' armour?

So too have my Dad's actions hurt everyone else before coming back and affecting him we're forced to watch him continue damaging himself (for us to have "The Conversation" would be worse - he'd be unable to handle it, he'd run off and then we'd lose even our chance

to have routine amicababbles) unable to do anything, but knowing we'll be able to once he has his tragic fall, which is quite the uncomfortable auspice – I mean, revenge is wrong bad and evil, but it also seems unavoidable at this point. We try to tell him “no Dad, drink's bad (<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/dec/23/single-educate-wealthy-men-alcohol-study-drinking-habits>), can't you see?” “What a plonker, pater” “Daddy, you're being a ninny” “The long-term effects may prove catastrophic!” we all say, but it does no good, he just keeps rolling down the changeless groove).

A is followed predictably by B and C as far as the alphabet goes, but my Dad didn't die the same way or at the same age as his dad, meaning that if his dad is A, then B, (who is Dad) can't go after all of those A's, so the prophecy pattern set when the bones are cast by the common-sense oracle is broken, thus the words of the next line go ACB rather than ABC. It's a little pun on cast too. Like in a hospital, when bones are cast, it's the setting right after a trauma, only in his case we aren't able to give him help because we don't “know” it has happened – the setting right would be occurring before the trauma, which is sort of like the future occurring before the past, which, as we all know, leads to uncomfortable sci-fi-style auspices where you kill your grandpa and so never get born etc.

Thus, his hospice and our auspice (that of the tragedy to come/ already happened) rhyme because they are one and the same.

As an electrician my dad brings light to dark places. As before, the black god in his chest, while it is Guinness, is also this lodged truth not yet brought into the light. So his not bringing this admission into the light is his way of making light (being levitous?) of the situation. He makes light of things both as a job, but and also in his approach to us, so we don't know the full picture. I mean, if Dad hasn't told us what we already know, which is to say, the adultery, what other things which we don't know has he not told us? Maybe the four earlier lines of the poem are nonsense not only because of my poetic rendering, but also because there may be even more in his chest?

I, in an accurately inaccurate rendering, also made light of things in my hazey-mazey manner of communicating my personal understanding of the incomplete picture available to me, so there's a double-bind. - I don't know the whole picture, so the poem must be considered incomplete on that count, and I make light of what I know, so you knew much less. However, since I am making light of what I know, and so is Dad, we must be alike – together in derivative disparity. A double-blind.

“Like me” is loaded with loads. As with many of the young or those with memories of youth, I can remember being berated by Dad for using the word “like”. It’s possible my feckless adulation of simile (see also, the arts) sprung very much from these conflicts. “Either it is something or it isn’t” he would say, in between mouthfuls or berating me for biting my fingernails. Fuck you and your bullet-headed Saxon literalism. If only I could believe that either I am like you or I’m not.

Hopefully I am less so now, though.

SUITING A HABITAT: NARRATING MY WALK, WALKING THROUGH A NARRATION

Joshua Eaton

As a Literature student and a village dweller, I am privy to the flaneur's peaceful sensation of drifting receptively through my surroundings, breaking from pacing with purpose to give attention to the buildings and the nature around me, making up the place I have found myself in. While surrealists and symbolists of previous eras may have been met by sceptics questioning the practical use of this disposition, the practice has developed into a popular modern study known as psycho-geography. Study into the influence that an environment and the mind have on one another has turned to literature to record the interactions, the sentiments and the social lives of the inanimate place. Jeffrey Shaw and Tjebbe van Tijen's article *Literary Psychogeography* appropriately states that forms of literature "relate the changes cities go through, revive what can no longer be lived". This implies a form of narrative reflected in the life of the place, yet the nature of psycho-geography valuing individual experience means that no one whole view will easily exist - rather, a place is made up of a series of views and images. It is said by Mark Gisbourne that "Today we increasingly build our picture of the world (habitat) from the part-narrative of purely sensory experiences such as these". This is said in relation to Niklas Goldbach's short film *Habitat C3B*, which I will use to explore urban representation in psycho-geographical literature.

This 2008 film is set in the Parisian district of "Front de Seine", an area designed to modernise the city/arrondissement, and presents the viewer with a silent, still, urban series of concrete buildings, arranged with strict linear patterns, through which a group of identical men dressed uniformly in black and white walk with a purposeful manner yet with no clear direction. The unvoiced narrative depicts one outlaw member breaking from the group and consequently being chased through the environment. The men mirror each other's patterns of movement and the viewer witnesses the chase in fractured moments and perspectives, sometimes hearing the approach of a runner before seeing him, sometimes seeing him through the reflection in the windows of the buildings. There is no resolve to the narrative as the film loops seamlessly to its beginning.

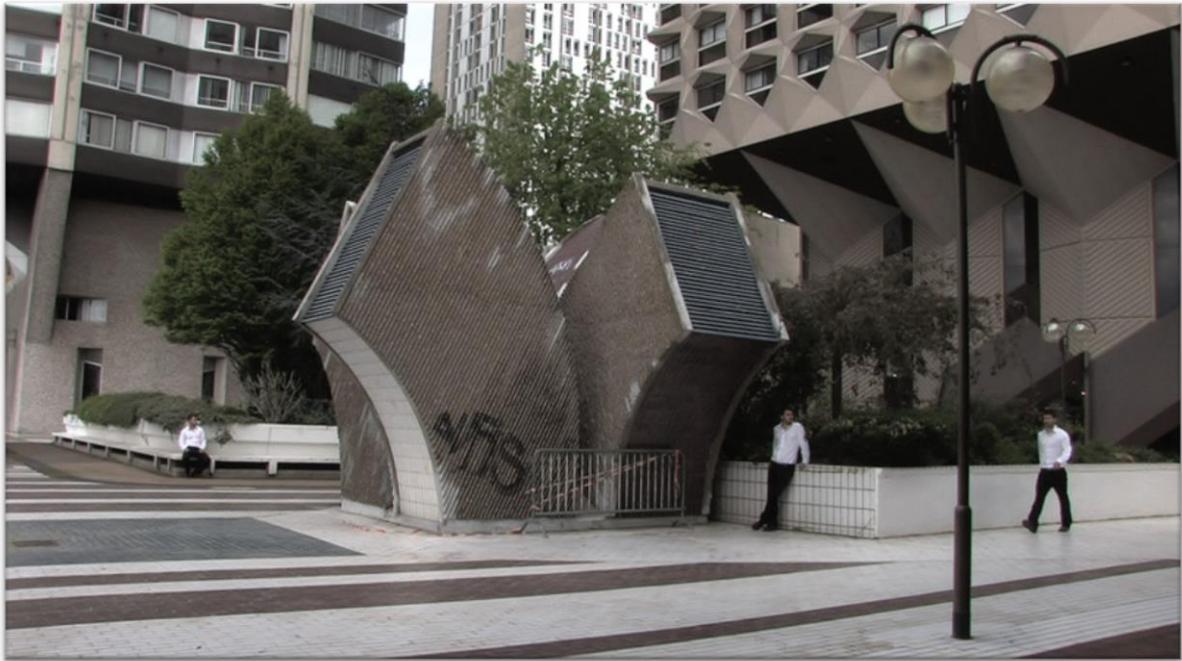
The film has science fiction and dystopian resonances, directing the viewer to watch with a question of control in mind. While the group of men patrol the landscape, they are unable to capture the outlaw, despite him seeming entrapped by the labyrinthine architecture. The setting has a strong presence and appears to motivate the direction of the chase, seeming to guide the men towards or away from each other; however, it is unclear whom exactly the environment is in support of. This obscurity of purpose is mirrored by the characters'/group's directionless movements before the chase. Their presented nonchalance reads as an act, particularly in one moment when three men are on the screen. One man sits on a bench to the left, stands and walks a step to the side, then sits once again, as if for the first time. To his right a man leans against a barrier with legs crossed, seemingly relaxed, yet looks in one direction with the keen eye of a look out. To his right another man marches across the screen, reminding the viewer of the patrol-like nature of their presence. This moment pushes a performative element to the forefront of the viewer's mind. When then viewing the shots of the chase in which the men run at equal pace, turning corners which lead them astray from each other or bring them back together, it appears subtly playful. The men and the environment are therefore attributed a wholly performative element.

The appearance of control, order and regimentation in the film is undermined by this performative aspect, which means that the viewer is not to be met with the sensation of danger expected in the genres that this film initially implies. Such unresolved expectations give the viewer the opportunity to pass their own judgement. The urban buildings represented in this short film imply regimentation and control, having a larger presence than that of the men. The actions of the different clones utilise these elements to impose onto the film a narrative which could not have existed without either the environment or the earlier evocation of such genres. In this light, the multiple bodies of the same man represent the existence of multiple views and existences, which culminate in a person's reflected view of their environment.

My own experiences of psycho-geographical awareness has been based upon living in rural communities, as well as historically rich Cantabrigian stone buildings, decorated Churches and Cathedrals and cobbled streets, all preserved and reconstructed to maintain the sense of their original aesthetic. When confronted with an urban environment I am meeting it with eyes unfamiliar to the dynamism of the surroundings. Yet, remembering that the purpose of the district of 'Front de Seine' was to modernise what was already there, it remains easy to witness the existence of a less overtly historical narrative than in my less urbanised environments. The urban environment is therefore one that I view as a playing

ground for narrative, with the environment and the people acting on one another to create an environment which accepts its constant role of development, without resolution.

Excerpt from *Habitat C3B*: <https://vimeo.com/3743118>





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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NOVEMBER BY CHERELLE JOHANNES

Daniel Underwood

The literary scene at the University of York is remarkable for its diversity and productivity – *The Narrator* is only one reflection of this larger community. However, there is surprisingly little by way of dialogue between the various publications despite the fact that many of the writers, editors, directors, and readers move within similar social circles. This hitherto unexploited area provides an excellent opportunity. The distinction between “creative” and “critical” pieces has always been boldly defined. Therefore, this initiative aims to cultivate a more introspective environment with regard to the relationship between critical and creative writing. With the permission of the author, the article will examine a piece taken from the “creative writing” section, offering comments relating to the composition and aesthetic. It is hoped that this initiative will become a staple feature of *The Narrator* in which the work of University students may be considered critically alongside articles concerned with writers of established fame and merit.

November by Cherelle Johannes

Before considering the poem *November* I would like to express my gratitude that Cherelle Johannes consented to my discussing her poem.

What we have before us is a thoroughly considered poem whose verse yields more layers with every reading. “November” is in many ways a sensuous poem, consistently preoccupied with that which is tangible. Throughout the poem, there is an anxiety caused by the inaccessibility of those things which are “out of reach” or beyond “grasp”. The poem’s speaker strains in a Tantalus-like effort, with arms outstretched for warmth and security, only to be denied.

Indeed, the interplay of the tangible and the inaccessible is threaded through the stanzas with a varied effect. The attention is particularly focussed on the physical. Aside

from the “grasp” and the “grip” there are the “slippers” and the “hands held warm”; the imperative “hold me close” and the bleak “frostbitten fingers”. To my mind, this is part of the poem’s success. It is consistent in its attention to the small details which, in this instance, are the extremities of the body – the feet and hands which are the most vulnerable to the cold. It may be a moment of pedantry on my part but I feel that the illustration of the “slippers” serves a dual purpose: while it captures the feeling of exposure one cannot help observing that, semantically, the “slip” of “slippers” perpetuates the sense of inconstancy that pervades the poem.

This inconstancy is equally embedded in the poem’s conception of time. The “twinkle that begins receding” and the “drifting” Autumn possess an expansive quality which contrasts sharply with the immediacy of the “blocked gutter out of reach” and the “stony grip of Arthur”. This contrast, though slight, implicitly invokes a sense of the poem’s irregular temporality. The poem in general is wonderfully disorientated – an effect produced by the frequent modulations in tone and voice. The poem oscillates between a distanced objectivity and an intimate vulnerability: the opening line “Winter days have been approaching” has a quiet, knowing wisdom about it, whereas “I cry and grasp to make it last” exposes the anxiety beneath. The assonance operative at a subliminal level in this line demonstrates the poem’s phonetic ability: the “cry”, “grasp” and “last” share an aspirate effect which highlights the strain of the poem’s speaker. In turn, this internal anxiety gives way to a succession of broken thoughts in which the syntax decomposes into a paratactic outburst: “Numb – too close – hard to think”.

This progression of “disrepair” continues through the poem and though there are moments of warmth which glimmer through chinks in winter’s grey façade, these are short lived. The poem’s concluding stanza (arguably the most evocative of the poem) is a prime example of this. The “scent of pie and pudding” provides a potent olfactory image which immediately conjures a corresponding feeling of warmth and love. However, the line is beset by the two terminal caesuras which prematurely cut across the syntax of the sentence and undermine the comfort of the imagery. The following line “I would make them for you” hangs with an ominous sense of incompleteness, only to be followed by the deflated realisation “If only I could”. This final line is the most powerful of the entire poem; the sense of inaccessibility which builds throughout the course of the poem culminates in this small admission of inability. There is not so much a sense of an ending, as a sense of extinguishment, which weighs the poem down with a heavy note of despondency.
