

the Creative Writing Society

Compendium



Spring 2021

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Our gratitude goes out to all of our wonderful and talented society members
whose submissions made this compendium possible.

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Editor's Welcome

Hello and welcome to the second Creative Writing Society Compendium! Everything you're about to read has been written, edited and produced by members of the Creative Writing Society, and has been discussed and developed in our weekly meetings. This is our digital, termly publication where we showcase the work of our talented, wonderful group of writers, in a collection of prose and poetry with a variety of genres and styles.

We're incredibly proud to have this ~~in your hands~~ on your screen. Following the enthusiastic response to our first publication, we've been delighted with the level of involvement within the society. Everyone involved has worked incredibly hard to make this happen and we'd like to thank everyone for their passion and dedication.

If you're a writer or just enjoy hearing others' writing, we'd love to see you at one of our meetings! The details are all on the next page, and if you'd be interested in getting involved with our next issue, get in touch!

President's Welcome

The Aberdeen University Creative Writing Society (AUCWS) was founded during the 1980s to offer students a platform to share, develop, read, and listen to creative pieces. Its goal is to create a welcoming place where writers can improve their work through encouragement and feedback. The society meets once a week to read out and listen to pieces of writing, followed by a post-meeting "social hour." Now, throw away any assumptions you may have had about the AUCWS being a "stuffy poets' society"—we are a community of diverse, mischief-loving and passionate people that celebrate all kinds of writing and all kinds of writers.

This year, as we all know, has been complicated by the unfortunate circumstances of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the society has persevered, and I cannot fully express my pride and gratitude for all the extraordinary writing our devoted members have submitted over this period of time.

Welcome to students and non-students, writers and readers alike, the society has its (Zoom) doors open to all. We hope you'll join us!

How to find us

If you enjoy anything we put in this Compendium, then you might be interested in checking us out on our various platforms!

Please send any inquiries or submissions you might have to our email address at creativewriting.aberdeen@gmail.com

Under non-apocalyptic circumstances, we would meet in person, in the upper floor of **O'Neill's** Pub (9-10 Back Wynd, Aberdeen, AB10 1JN) at 7PM every Thursday. Alas, world events deny us our usual meetings—but worry not! We have a digital version in place. As of right now, we meet over **Zoom**, at **7PM every Thursday**. The link for each session is given out on our Facebook group a little while before the event starts.

Speaking of, do join our **Facebook** group: The AU Creative Writing Society Page. It's the easiest way not to miss any updates. We also have a society-wide group chat—if you want in all you have to do is ask!

We also have an **Instagram account**.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/68588022409>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/au_creativewriting/

E-mail: creativewriting.aberdeen@gmail.com

We sincerely hope you enjoy this publication, especially if you decide to join us because of it!

Happy Reading!

Aidan Armstrong

Sometimes a Chest (feat. Ask Vestergaard)

Content Warning: Mild body horror

A small, cluttered, square porch. The walls are mostly covered by tall shelves filled with shoes and boots. Coats hang down over the shelves from above. On the bottom shelf, behind a trio of leather boots, is a small hole gnawed through the back wall. The camera pans towards the wall as the narrator begins to speak.

“A common porch. An unassuming sight to most, but this particular, often ignored transitional space is home to a rare subspecies of one of the deadliest predators in the material plane.”

A quiet squeak emanates from the hole as a mouse crawls its way out. It hesitates as it climbs over the third of the leather boots. It sniffs, and quickly begins to retreat. It is too late. The mouse is unable to lift its feet from the leather. Suddenly, the laces of the boot untie themselves and catch the mouse by its tail. The gusset falls forward revealing a fleshy tongue and the collar folds back to reveal rows upon rows of needle-like teeth. The mouse squeals in terror as it is slowly pulled towards the tongue. As the mouse is fastened, the tongue flies up, and the tooth-lined collar closes around it, silencing its squeals.

“The Mimic.”

The boot releases a ghastly belch. Jaunty documentary muzak begins to play. The shot switches to a dusty looking diagram of a treasure chest with teeth.

“Commonly feared by wary thief and adventurer alike, the Mimic is near perfectly adapted to its environment. Its ecology is truly unique. Most often, the Mimic is found in dungeons, where food is scarce. This is no problem for the Mimic, as they are able to subsist on as little as a single meal for weeks at a time. Contrary to popular belief, Mimics are omnivorous, able to survive for years without ever encountering larger prey.”

Cut to a barrel sitting underneath a hanging vine. The barrel cracks open slowly, and a dexterous tongue emerges. The tongue crawls gradually upwards until it wraps itself around the vine and rips it from its place. The lid quickly seals itself back onto the rim.

“While ferns and moss are enough to keep them alive, the Mimic prefers a heartier meal. Its natural camouflage is unparalleled; and, in the hunt, the namesake of the Mimic proves vital.”

Cut to a burly, armoured adventurer moving over a tattered rug to open a chest. He draws a longsword and jams it into the space between the box and the lid. He then raises one foot up to the hilt of the blade, preparing to bring it down and force the chest open. His foot never contacts the hilt, as the rug beneath him springs to life, quickly constraining the now unarmed

man and swallowing him whole. The rug returns to its unassuming, stationary form, leaving only an unopened chest, and a shiny new sword jutting from its lid.

“Beyond simply the recolouring of their bodies, the Mimic is capable of changing both the consistency and the texture of its skin. This transformation is achieved via a pigmented fluid originating in the internal muscular organs of the creature. This fluid is pumped from the body, up through the surface capillary vessels, allowing the imitation of almost any basic material. While the fluid can achieve the colour of wood, stone or even metal, the capillary vessels themselves serve to easily emulate the texture of the chosen material.”

As the narrator speaks, a short animation plays. The animation portrays the transferal of the mimic’s internal fluids to the surface of its skin. As the animation ends, the camera cuts to a recording of a stationary wooden chest, then to swinging chandelier, and finally, to a tall stone statue of a naked man wielding a knife and fork. The camera zooms in upon the eyes of the statue, which seem to stare hungrily back at the viewer.

“As if the colour and texture were not enough, the Mimic is able to change its very shape. How this transformation is achieved, however, is unknown. Unlike the gelatinous cube or the various other aggressive oozes, the Mimic is significantly sturdier in consistency. Dungeonologists and sages commonly agree that it must have a natural form, though what that form may be remains a mystery.”

The camera cuts to a white panelled room with no windows. It has one door, a light, and a speaker. The door opens and two men in white coats enter. They are carrying a glass case which contains a comfortable looking armchair. They set down the case and leave the room. After some time, a piercing, high pitched ringing begins to play through the speaker, shattering the glass case, and releasing the comfy chair.

“This specimen has been removed from its natural environment and placed into a bare setting in the hopes that it will show us its true form.”

Initially, the chair sits still. A moment passes, and it begins vibrating violently. Its legs spring into action as it quickly swivels towards the camera. The arm rests morph into a pair of long, waving pseudopods, and fly towards the camera, blocking its view. After some time, the pseudopods are pulled away, only to reveal that the white panelled room is now carpeted.

“Unfortunately, this creature was too shy, and too clever, to be caught out. You may have begun to wonder how such a creature is able to adapt to its surroundings. It has no eyes to speak of. It does not attack unless it comes into physical contact with its prey. Yet it is somehow able to observe its surroundings regardless of the form it has chosen.”

The camera continues to monitor the white room. It remains focussed on the carpet, but slowly begins to pan up.

“This is thanks to the composition of the Mimic’s skin. They are covered, ‘head to toe’, with tiny, light-sensitive sensors, imperceptible to the naked eye. These sensors allow the Mimic to see up to 90 feet in any given direction. They do however, come at a devastating cost.”

The camera concludes its ascent, coming to rest upon the image of the light hanging from the ceiling.

“The sensors are incredibly sensitive, and the Mimic is physically incapable of covering them. With nothing more than a bright flash...”

Cut to an image of the room in its entirety. The light flashes, obscuring the camera for a fraction of a second. The carpet rips itself from the floor and begins writhing in pain.

“...The Mimic is blinded.”

The carpet soon settles down. It once again begins vibrating. It starts to stretch and inflate. The growth continues further and further, until the carpet fills the entire room.

“In response to danger, this specimen has been sent into a state of panic. It is quickly searching for any means of survival. What it will do, is something truly extraordinary.”

A shatter of glass is heard, though the camera is still blocked. After a few minutes more, the pseudopods are removed from the camera, only this time there is no carpeting on the floor.

“The Mimic has found a new disguise.”

The camera scrolls through multiple shots of the room, now shrouded in darkness, but none seem to show anything out of the ordinary.

“This of course brings us to the true danger posed by the Mimic. While its sturdy skin, hardy constitution, and namesake mimicry all serve to make it a formidable creature, there is one more element to these ravenous receptacles.”

Cut to a small, stone brick room with two doors and a dilapidated chest of drawers. The door to the right opens and a short woman in leather armour enters, she approaches the chest of drawers, before hesitating. She thinks for a moment, before continuing towards the door on the left, ignoring the chest.

“The deadliest weapon in the Mimic’s arsenal is its mind.”

The woman places a leather-gloved hand onto the handle of the door. She pulls, only to hear a low rumble, and to find her hand stuck to the handle. The centre of the door bursts open into a fanged maw as the handle attempts to pull her in. She cries out, quickly slips her hand from the glove, and dashes back through the door on the right.

“As this lucky explorer has just learned the hard way, the Mimic acts not only as the trap, but also the bait. The proverbial hook, line, and sinker.”

Cut to a handheld camera facing an open door. The door leads into a familiar white room. Though it is still dark. The camera enters slowly, finding nothing but a speaker, a shattered glass case, and a darkened bulb hanging just above, the camera moves to the glass on the ground, clearly displaying the remains of a broken light bulb. A low growl is heard from above, as a brown, pigmented fluid drips down onto the floor. The camera pans back up to find a fleshy maw hanging from the socket. A scream rings out. The footage cuts to black.

“There are many wonderful creatures in world, dear viewer. The caring flumph, the gentle dragon, the surprisingly jovial tentacle goose, but not all that is beautiful is benign. The salivating slod, the nefarious knucklavee, the insidious seagull. The Mimic is among those all too familiar creatures, that should not exist, yet by some dreadful malfeasance of the will of the gods, continues to do so. I beseech you, dear viewers, you must never let your guard down. Sometimes a chest may be a chest, but sometimes... just sometimes... it isn't.”

Tape

My whole life is held together by tape now.
The wire on my headphones,
the fraying of laces,
the lenses of glasses,
held in their places by thin, plastic sheets.

It's simple, fragile, but works for a time.
Repairing, preserving
old, weathered book binding.
An easy solution
but now I'm finding that it cannot last.

I can't deny that it got out of hand.
Adhesive ill-fixer.
Binding wounds, sealing cuts.
Applied to all tears and
holding them shut. Until they open
again.

The Slope

Content Warning: Strong language

“So, what does she like?”

The question catches me off guard. I’m preoccupied with the crunch of light grey snow underfoot.

“Huh, what?” I look up and turn to Abby. She stares back expectantly.

“Sam. You know... from maths?” She tilts her head forward, peering up at me from over her glasses. They’re slightly too small for her eyes.

“I should have kept my mouth shut.” I sigh.

Abby raises her hands, palms open. “Woah, I just want to help.” She laughs. Her hood falls back as she moves. She quickly pulls it up around her face.

“Yeah, well I don’t need help.” I turn back to the road.

Abby gives a snort. “People who don’t need help don’t get so defensive.” She’s still looking at me as I try to hold back a smile. Abby always had a way of getting a reaction out of me.

“You wanna talk about being defensive?” I turn back to her with a grin. “It’s been a while since you’ve talked about that guy you were messaging. What was his name again? Darren? Danny? Da-”

“Fuck off.” Abby pulls her hood forward and marches ahead.

“Hey, what are you-” I move to follow her down the slope, slightly too fast. I feel the soles of my shoes slip away beneath me before I find myself falling. My chin crashes against the ice and closes my jaw painfully. “Gah! Phuck thake!” I roll onto my side and bring my hands to my mouth. I push my tongue against my teeth. It seems to help in the moment. A snort and a giggle ring out from nearby. I look up, and there she is. An outstretched, purple mittened hand is hanging in front of my face. Behind it, Abby with a smug smile and a scrunched-up nose. I think it’s the first time I’ve been the one looking up at her.

“Serves you right, asshole.” She pulls me back to my feet as I take her hand. I brush specks of dirt and snow from my clothes and move to hold my aching jaw. “You didn’t answer my question.” She attacks while I’m vulnerable.

“What?” It takes a second before I remember. “...Oh.” I didn’t expect it to come up again.

Abby lights up. “Come ooon. What does she like?” She attacks again with that expectant look. I try to avoid eye contact.

“I... I don’t really know to be honest.” I clear my throat.

“You... don’t know?” Abby cracks a smile. She tilts her head. “How can you not know?” Part of me knows the answer, but I won’t give her the satisfaction.

“I just don’t know her that well yet, ok?” I’ve started walking. Slower now.

“You’re getting defensive agaaaain.” She sings. I don’t respond. She sighs. “Ok, let’s try something easier. What *IS* she like?”

I think for a minute before answering. “She’s... quiet.” I place my hands in my pockets. Abby raises her eyebrows.

“Quiet? Quiet.” She looks to the road for a moment before turning back to face me again. “Quiet? Anything else?”

“Like I said, I don’t know her that well yet.” I check my phone. There are no notifications.

Abby puffs up her cheeks and blows out an exaggerated sigh. “Ok fine. This one’s *very* easy. What do *you* like about her?”

What’s easy about that?

“I... Well...” *What DO I like about her?* “...She’s nice.”

Abby stops walking.

So do I. “She’s... nice.”

Her jaw drops slightly, along with her eyebrows.

I shrug and shake my head. “What do you want from me?” I try not to look at her, but I can still feel her stare.

“Have you ever actually spoken to her?” She’s still staring. I break and meet her gaze.

“Not... at length.” I lower my head.

Abby cracks another smile. “You’re actually, genuinely hopeless.” She starts walking again. I follow.

“Yeah. I know.”

We walk in silence for a little longer. After some time, Abby chirps up again.

“Hey, remember when I first visited your house?” Halloween 2014. I had told her on the bus that it was my favourite holiday, and I planned to spend the night watching horror flicks. She asked if she could join.

“Yeah.” I smile. “What about it?” I turn to her.

She smirks and narrows her eyes. “How I told you that I would be the only girl to ever see your bedroom?” She’s waiting for a reaction. I don’t have the restraint to deprive her.

“Fuck. Off.” I walk on as she bursts with laughter.

“Hey...” I keep walking. “Hey wait!” She catches up, and I feel her grasp my arm. I stop and turn. She releases her grip.

“What are you doing?”

“We’re coming up to a steep slope.” She tilts her head back so that she’s not looking over her glasses. “It’s safer if we keep hold of each other.” I grin and tilt my head to look down at her over my own glasses. Her expression turns. “Don’t make it weird.”

“Scared of slipping?” I chuckle.

Abby offers her hand. “Some of us just learn from your mistakes.” She smiles as I take her hand, and we start to creep down the slope. I try to focus on the road.

“So... what’s your plan?” Abby looks down as she speaks. Each step is on eggshells.

“What are you talking about now?” I don’t look up.

“You know, for Sam?” She turns. I don’t.

“Are we still on this?” I’m only half paying attention. I look forward. We’re coming up to an icy patch. I don’t think Abby sees it. I smile.

“It’s just... if you aren’t talking to her... and you don’t have any kind of plan to...” She trails off. “How do you think people get together?” I turn back to her. We’re almost at the patch.

“No idea.” I smile at her. “But I doubt dramatic plans have anything to do with it.”

“You won’t get anywhere by just thinking about her.” She turns looks down. We’re almost at the bottom of the slope. Almost.

The ice cracks under my foot. The shattering eggshell. I step forward and pull Abby by the hand. She slips, but I hold on. A sharp squeal escapes from her mouth as I swing her around to my front and place an arm behind her back. As she falls, I catch her. I can see her breath as it leaves her lips with a sigh.

“Are you ok?” I can’t hold back my grin. Abby stares up at me, wide eyed. A moment passes in silence before she responds.

“If you’re that smooth with Sam...” She breathes heavily. “...you have nothing to worry about.” My smile falls away as she laughs. I pull her back to her feet. We keep walking on to the crossroads. I should turn here, but I don’t. Abby stays with me. We’re both terrible at goodbyes. I check the time on my phone. Midnight.

“I should head ba—” Something cold touches my cheek. I turn to Abby. She lowers herself from the tips of her toes. “What... what was that?” I stutter. She smiles.

“Don’t make it weird.” She squeezes my hand slightly before letting go.

“Oh, so it’s normal to kiss your friends on the cheek?” I raise my eyebrows.

“Completely.” She beams back.

“Oh, so I’m not special?” I try to save face.

“You’re very special.” Abby gets back onto the tips of her toes and pats my head condescendingly. Her face passes mine on the way up. I take my chance. She falls back.

“Did you just...” Her smug aura evaporates as she starts to blush.

“Don’t make it weird.” I smile. She looks away. We stand silently for a moment.

“It’s already weird.” She says coldly. The steam from her breath fades as quickly as it escapes. My heart sinks.

Oh god, what have I done? I’m such a fucking idiot. What do I say?

“But... it’s fine when you do it?” I grasp at straws. Abby pulls her hood forward around her face.

“Well, yeah...” Her hood springs back as she lets go, and her red cheeks are revealed. The ice melts away as she smiles.

Thank god.

I push my luck. I lean forward, moving to kiss her other cheek.

She turns. *Shit!* I don’t react in time. We’ve already made contact by the time I pull back. She stares back at me, wide eyed.

“Was...” My jaw falls. “Did I just... Did we just—” Her lips close mine, and before I can finish asking, my question is answered.

The Walk Home

Content Warning: Suicidal thoughts

The sound of the river fades out behind me as I move further and further from my destination. The torch on my phone shines a cone of light ahead, leading me forward to a place I thought I had left behind. My steps feel slower on the way back. Heavier. I'm crawling back into a trap I thought that I had escaped, and my body knows it better than my mind. I can't turn back. At least not tonight. In silence, I follow the light back up the only path I have with the only the tap of my footsteps and the rush of the water to keep me company.

BZZZT

A new noise interrupts the silence. Light shines on my face as the screen of my phone flickers to life. A message. In the light I read the last name I want to hear. Anna.

I stop walking. *Don't read it.* The light of the screen fades away. *Don't read it.* I take another step. Rubber fingers fumble for light as I open my phone and make my way to the messages.

Hey. You're probably asleep. Listen, when you get this can you call? We should talk. I don't like how we left things the other day. Ok, sleep well.

I feel my chest tighten. So does my grip. What am I doing? What was I...? I glance back at the pier. I almost... What would she have thought? It's not that I hadn't thought about it. I thought about it all the way from my bedroom. Not just Anna, but everybody. I thought about how they would react. Where they would hear the news. I wondered what they would do. I pictured it, and I didn't care. In the final hours of the night that I had chosen as my last, when I thought of the people I would leave behind, I didn't care.

So why do I now?

I don't think as I unlock my phone. I don't think as I open up my contacts and tap on her name. Moments feel as minutes while the ringtone echoes in my ear.

Until she picks up.

"H—Hey—"

"I'm sorry!" I don't think as the words escape my mouth. Oh god, what am I doing? "I just... I wasn't thinking, I didn't—"

"Hey, hey, hey, it's fine. Don't worry about it." Her voice is paralysing. I haven't heard her since the fight. I haven't heard her like this since the moments before. "I'm the one that should be apologising." What? What does she mean? Why should she...?

"I..." A word is all I can manage. She's accepted the wrong apology. An apology for an act she doesn't understand. An act she never needs to know. How could telling her lead to anything but a burden? "I..." Hot tears roll down my cheeks.

“Euan... are you ok?” She knows something’s wrong. I can’t answer. My mouth shudders open and a whimper escapes. She tries again. “Are you... are you crying?”

“I’m...” What can I say? Why did I call? “I’m so sorry.” My knees buckle as I fold into a ball by the side of the road. I catch my head in my hand. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” I can’t stop. The dim glow of headlights creep around the corner ahead of me. I won’t be alone for much longer.

“Hey, hey... what’s wrong? What’s happening?” Anna tries to calm me. How could I possibly explain? “You can talk to me.” The words are a knife through my eye. I remember when I first told her how I felt. My bedroom. My parents weren’t home. I felt safe. She cried. She cried and made me promise. No more secrets. If it gets bad, I go to her. How could I possibly explain?

The glow of the headlights is getting brighter. I push myself back to my feet and wipe a wet hand across my face.

“I just...” *Don’t do it, don’t do it, don’t do it.* “I just... miss you.” I turn away as the car rounds the corner. For a moment before she responds, I’m bathed in light.

“...Aw... Euan...” She believes me. Of course she does. I made a promise. The car passes and leaves me in the night. “...Listen. My dad’s getting takeout tomorrow. I’m sure it’d be fine if I invite you. Maybe we can talk then?” Tomorrow. I take a deep breath.

“I uh... I can’t tomorrow. I’m meeting Calum in the morning. We’re heading to Jack’s for the night.”

“Oh... alright.” Something in her voice makes me hate myself.

“My house is free on Friday though... if you want to talk...” Something in my voice makes me hate myself more.

“Oh! Sure! Just straight after school?” Her energy is back. I don’t deserve her.

She never needs to know.

“Sure. Sounds perfect.” I force a smile even though she can’t see it.

“See you Friday then!” She pauses for a moment. “I love you.” I feel the breath leave my body.

“Love you too.”

*

I sit by the side of the road. The path home feels longer than the road to the sea. I’m still not sure which way I’d rather walk. Still, for now I have plans and the waves have an easy schedule.

Emma Bristow

The Witch Isott

Content Warnings: Death, homophobia

There was nothing Isott could do to stop her fate now, she thought, as her ropes tightened around her, pinching her forever onto the wooden stake.

She wished she would be able to take her punishment in dignity and grace, as someone of her good line should be able to, but she knew that once they'd finished piling up the wood, and set aflame, she would be unable. She may have been sly, but she did not know if she would ever describe herself as brave, no matter what Aline had ever said to her.

She closed her eyes and tried to drown out the crowd's excited and blood thirsty cries of "Witch!"

The crowds grew silent for a minute, and the magistrate read out her crimes. The Witch Isott, who committed treason and attempted to drag the Good Princess Aline down with her.

Perhaps she could savour the sweet memories of the past years- although they turned bitter at the edges from where they ended- before she would be able to no more.

Isott turned her thoughts back to Aline.

Aline, who she was a lady in waiting to, staying as neither of them were married off through several years. The King could not find anyone worth giving his only daughter off to.

She'd stayed, her family down on its luck, trying desperately to claw their status back up to where it had been before. She would do more for her family here.

Aline's pale regal face, that would break into incredible emotion at times, but only when she chose to let it through, crowned around by golden curls, filled her mind, and Isott focused on the memory of her smile for a moment.

Isott had never expected it, but she was pleased when Aline returned her affection- initiating it even. And they'd been happy for a while.

Until a servant boy saw something he shouldn't have.

The first thing Aline did say when she knew that they'd learnt the truth was to leave her; accuse her of witchcraft; of seducing her away from the truth – and she'd been unable to defend herself.

Despite the betrayal, she would never wish a punishment such as this on Aline, so she would have to take it for both of them.

Opening her eyes again, she saw the crowd watching with bated breath, and at a balcony, she could see Aline, and King Otto. He wasn't looking her way, instead seeming more focused on the wine he was holding.

Aline did not meet her eye, but she seemed somewhat upset all the same, and that was all Isott could hope for at this point.

The flames crawled up the bonfire, and as they reached Isott, all rational thoughts left her, and she began to scream.

Eleanor Campbell

Betty Haunt Lane

Won't you tell me the story of Betty Haunt Lane?
A young woman murdered for smuggler's gain,
Where we stole away from eyes set to pry,
I knew nothing but you and the ground and the sky.

When I was on Leave: scarred, broken and beat;
The darkness engulfing but no spirits seen,
You witnessed my scars by the moon's silver sheen
And took them as nothing when we two did meet.

Won't you tell me the story of Betty Haunt Lane?
A young woman rests there whose love was her bane,
But we cared not for past grievance, or what might go by;
We knew nothing but closeness, that night, you and I.

War Poet Haikus

Sassoon

Lover of men and
Peace, angry and riled: Mad
Jack, with gun and pen.

Owen

Writer of anthem
Of pity and woe, left Keats
For the hell and mud.

Her Hand

And as I took that hand I realised
How shaped it was by life;
Palm rough and worn from trail and strife
But fingers soft from all things beautiful that gave her joy.

And such joy indeed was in those eyes,
They twinkled with all the mischief of the world
And told me that although she was old she was as
Youthful as I'd ever be.

Leveret

Fawny-furred and tawny-eyed,
As soft as heather is your silky hide.
And such a precious little thing are you
And delicate in the same way as glass
I am afraid the world in which you bide

Will harm you hideously, for nature's cruel,
And creatures far greater than your prowess rule.
Yet, in their circle, *you* remain a jewel,
Your beauty shows of you a treasure true,
A shining topaz in the garnet grass.

Oranges and Lemons: A nursery rhyme of war

Oranges and lemons,
Say the bells of St. Clements,
War you fled your part in,
Say the bells of St. Martins.
No more singing gaily,
Say the bells of Old Bailey.
I warned against mitch,*
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
You can't get off free,
Say the bells of Stepney.
Believe us, we know,
Says the great bell at Bow.
Here comes a candle to light you to bed
And here comes the squad set to fill you with lead.

*mitch: to truant

Blair Center

Gallery

In the gallery, a hundred faces loom;
sitting, standing, staring, on both sides
of the canvas. We funnel through, we
gawkers, walkers, spectators, lovers, haters
whisper-to-your-companion commentators.
From the balcony above, we are splodges
resting on the wooden floorboard palette.

In the gallery, the paintings are in motion,
the viewers and subjects in tandem.
Past and present's proximity peels
the figures off the wall, animates them.
They move from the craquelure into the crowds.
My eyes watch the mingling images
of faces stern, smiling, serene,
of figures poetic, regal, and godly
in their own right.

In the gallery, a hundred faces stare
at the painted portals, lost in reflections.
A pensive man with anxious mouth agape,
wide as his eyes, looks out from the frame.
I move along, bringing him with me.
as I see myself in the glass. Despite the rumoured
joys in the next room, I leave.

Outside the gallery, on the steps,
there are plump, purring pigeons.
Disturbed by the red buses whirring past the square,
they take off, rushing wings flapping like paper
as they struggle for height, before gliding at speed
above the skyline.

Washing in

Clothes flap like flags and bedsheets billow
on the washing line which spins this way and that,
pushed by the wind. Colourful plastic clothes pegs grip
like dizzy tropical birds on a telephone wire roundabout.

The fence shakes, rocking back and forth as punching gusts grab
and wobble the planks like baby teeth. The daffodils shake;
their plosive bells, hanging from stars, ring the panicked alarm
of a disrupted spring as the snow washes in, relentless in April.

Egg

The freckled egg rotates in the boiling bubbles
like a speckled stone tossed by waves.

To a chime, it rises, decapitated.
A wobbling volcano, (tectonic) plated.

The soldiers gather at the base in awe.
One by one, they leap into the rich magma yoke.

In orange construction hats, they are lifted out,
the builders of this balanced breakfast.

Kingfisher

Rising, soaring, diving, with wide wings spread,
while the sharp beak points like a missile ahead,
guiding flight,
the kingfisher moves gracefully like a breeze
in feathers shaded like a dawn sky alight.

Like oxidizing copper, turning, from bronze and blue
to gold and lapis lazuli in the scorching sun,
this alchemist cruising on the wing sees
the distorted, rippling water straight through,
conjuring fish from where others see none.

Spider

Muse of eight legs, spin me a yarn.
Weave me a tale that will stick
on the walls of my mind, span the corners,
the brain-beams, the eaves of my thoughts.

Show off like your ancestor Arachne,
play with fine threads to weave a godly tapestry
capturing my two eyes like your enwrapped flies.
Walk the sticky-high wire: I'm in the ring-side seats.

Show me swift deeds of hubris, feats of wit and daring;
show me great battles of nature in my own room.
Show me that execution, show me that determination
that beguiled exiled Bruce in that gloomy Rathlin cave.

Weave a sail to blow inspiration through this storm
of despair, guide creativity to anchor in my mind.
But don't lean too close to the water, Narcissus,
or be cursed with the fate of your washed-out
folk hero remembered in rhyme: Itsy Bitsy.

Martina Ferretti

Dragon of the sea

Plunge into the sea, taste the cold and breathe in the salt.

Reach out, swim up—

You can't.

You're going down

deeper

and darker

and colder.

You're pulled to the side.

Bound, but you're swimming

faster

and stronger

and warmer.

The keel is a dragon's belly, encrusted with gems:

find the weak spot not to kill but to survive.

You don't.

This sea is both a cradle and a coffin.

Eloia

Eloia is dark, mostly. The inhabitants can almost never see each other, because they each live inside of their own personal bubble of light, which follows them around as they go about their day. The city is populated by indistinct shadows melting into the background, but as soon as two of them get too near each other, they finally become visible for just those few moments of contact, before going back to the shadows.

Strangers bump into each other in the streets and gracefully tip their hats at each other before moving on. Sometimes, they'll strike up pleasant conversation—never about the weather, thank goodness! You see, Eloia is carved deep into a cavern. Even if it got weather, the citizens wouldn't be able to see it anyway. I was quite relieved not to have to talk about the weather.

Mothers help their children get dressed in the dark, mismatching clothes and shoes—no one is going to see them anyway, so it doesn't bother them. Once, I saw a little girl dressed in blue from head to toe, and I had to wonder if anyone else even knew of that extraordinary achievement. Almost everyone in Eloia is colour-blind, and the longer my stay extended the harder it became to wear matching socks in the morning.

Lovers only find out what the other looks like as they embrace for the first time—before, they have to make do with the sound of their voice, the rhythm of their footsteps and the feel of their hands. When I first arrived I shared a train car with a young man—trains are the only safe mode of transport, of course—who spent the entire time talking about his sweetheart, whom he was going to visit. When I asked him what he looked like, he turned very shy and confessed that they were taking it slow, and hadn't seen each other yet. I found this very charming.

The city itself is illuminated by the dim light coming off of the material it's built from, which comes from the cavern, so that people can see where they're going at least. But their faces are never visible aside from the brief moments where they're close enough that there's nowhere else to look.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the people of Eloia rely more on senses other than sight. They don't care much about art, which I think is quite sad. However, they make for excellent musicians—though obviously there are no orchestras since they wouldn't be able to see the conductor.

Washed away

Content Warning: Death

Every time I remember it, something is different.

I'm on a cliff on the sea—I think this has always been true. I've never been here, I don't know where *here* is. It's night-time, although I think it used to be golden hour—or is it the other way around? A small church stands behind me, sometimes, as I walk towards the edge of the cliff.

I should be scared, but I'm not. I'm not sure I'm feeling anything; if I ever was, those emotions have been washed away bit by bit every time I come back to the scene.

The cross at the top of the cliff is thin and grey. Last time it was a tombstone, I think. I sit down in front of it and stay there.

The wind howls around me, but the water is still. I don't cry.

One day later, I've all but forgotten about it.

One week later, Dad tells me Grandpa has passed away, and I can't quite find it in me to be surprised.

Over ten years later, it's more like a memory of a memory of a dream. I wonder if I ever dreamt it in the first place.

Nothing Matters but the Music

Content Warnings: Death, war

She starts early, too early to remember. Only two years old, and the girl is singing and dancing.

Her father plays the piano, and she dances—a toddler wobbling back and forth to the slow tune. Her mother sings lullabies, and she joins her, babbling off-key nonsense before they both start laughing.

She's not *good* by any stretch of the imagination, but it makes her happy and her parents smile.

"She's got music in her veins," they say, and they're right. Her mother always says her blood is that of merfolk and forest nymphs, and her heart beats to the rhythm of melodies forgotten in the blur of history.

The school does performances at the end of the year—a few songs in high-pitched children's voices and some clumsy choreography vaguely on time. But she takes centre stage, begs the music teacher to let her have solo verses, pleads to let her dance.

The other children are stage-shy and have to be pushed and prodded, but not her. She grips the mic with chubby fingers and sings; she steps in front of her classmates and dances. They may be born to fly, or fight, or rule, but she was born for music. She doesn't know if she's any good—all that matters is that she loves to do it.

Her mother signs her up for classes and it's the best birthday present a little girl could receive.

She sings and dances with everyone she meets. Their voices are different, but they weave together to form never-before-heard tapestries of melody. Their bodies are mismatched but they create hypnotic patterns of movement that captivate their audience. Some are hesitant, some go all in from the start, but they all end up in the same whirlwind of rhythm and melody, intoxicating and freeing.

"She's weird," they say, and she doesn't see it. The music is in her and all around, but some people don't hear it the same way she does.

She's the star of the show when she's older. The spotlight is bright, but her eyes even more so. She's alone on stage when she begins, then her friends pour in from the wings and add to the chorus and to the dance one by one.

The girl doesn't see or hear anyone else, though, nothing but the music. She swims through it and sings like she's alone on the top of a mountain.

Nothing matters but the music, until it stops and the applause begins. It's another kind of rhythm, irregular and frantic, but her heart matches it as she takes the stage once more and bows.

“She’s good,” they say, and she shines more brightly. If all she does in her life is bring a smile to people’s faces, she’s happy.

She turns to her friends around her and beams—they hear the same music she does, and they understand. Some don’t believe her when she says there’s music in everything. Footsteps, wind, laughter—she’s been singing and dancing along all her life, and the people here with her, on stage, understand.

It goes on. The girl dances through life and sings through relationships, never once stopping or losing her voice. The stage is all around her and her audience is as captivated in a theatre as it is in the streets.

The music is everywhere—overwhelming or barely audible, but she’s always listening.

Nothing matters but the music, until it stops and the explosions begin.

From silence to sound: it’s the simple principle of a beat, but it sounds wrong.

The curtain falls, and falls apart all around her. There’s no audience, no orchestra, no spotlight—replaced by rows of wounded, marching armies and searchlights.

The beat is chaotic, the melody dissonant and off-key, but she keeps dancing and she keeps singing.

Those who were born to fly man airplanes; those who were born to fight line up on the battlefields; those who were born to rule lead all of them into uncertainty. She was born for music—where does that leave her?

Some were born to die. Her songs are mournful and solemn, slow hymns to say good-bye, but they’re for the living as much as for the dead. Then, she glides from one hospital bed to the other, trying to drown the sorrow and stillness with joyous movement.

They don’t understand how she does it. Can’t she see there are more important things? Can’t she see there is a war happening? Can’t she see people are dying? How does she stomach herself?

“She’s insane,” they say, and she’s starting to believe it.

There’s music in the crying, in the screaming, in the missiles whistling through the air.

There’s rhythm in the bodies falling to the ground, in the gunfire, in the bombs.

She can’t help but hear it—and she can’t stop.

The body moves without her knowledge, the voice flows without her permission. Her blood is that of merfolk and forest nymphs, and it’s stronger than her.

The girl stares at old pictures of her friends, who now lay still and silent, and sheds bitter tears for each one. She hears the rhythm of their muffled splashes, and hates it. It’s cruel—mocking the people who can’t sing or dance along anymore.

She tries to stop, she really does. The eyes of everyone around are on her, judging and confused. For the first time in her life, she's ashamed of the music. People are dying, and she's trapped by the sound.

Until, one day, she feels a small hand tugging at the back of her dress as she passes through the recovery halls that are much more crowded than any theatre in her memories.

"I want to dance like you when I grow up," says the little boy. "You make my mum smile."

The time signature changes, and everything suddenly looks different.

The judging stares are still there, but now she sees the relieved smiles as well, the heads bobbing along to the beat, the way people's faces light up when she comes into the room humming a tune from her childhood. Some start singing along and some join the dance, if they can. She feels less alone.

They haven't forgotten about the war, or the danger, or the dead. But if all they're looking forward to is a world of regret and sorrow, where's the joy in surviving? She remembers herself. If all she does in her life is bring a smile to people's faces, she's happy. The fighting goes on, but the girl keeps the music going as well.

People die, and she dances.

She sings, and people die.

Nobody knows who she does it for—the dead, the living, or herself.

She does it for the past and for the future. For people to remember what life used to be like, and for them to believe that what has yet to come could still bring joy. She sings the dead to sleep and welcomes new-borns into the world with soft lullabies. She dances in the graveyards and in wedding halls. It's not easy—it's never easy—but she does it.

She dances, and people die.

People die, and she sings.

But the living are the ones bearing witness and joining in. Letting the music flow through all of them and hoping for a brighter future, for more songs to bloom. The stage is in shambles, but they can pick up the pieces and build something new.

Eventually, the fighting will stop. But the music won't, and neither will the girl.

Jenna Fults

Dust to dust

Content Warning: Death

Riverbanks dripping
stalactites of ice,
butterflies like kites
skimming across water
fast and high.

We break out decks
on dewy shores,
throwing cards,
dealing laughter nevermore,
trading memories of September –

– I remember

when we ate the wrappers
of those rice-paper candies;
they were plastic (they lied).
Do you remember, auntie?
We laughed til we cried.

We played double solitaire
my four to your three,
two pairs each of five,
Do you remember, auntie?
Mad dash to the pile

and you let me dive.

But now you're slipping
down the river path,
swirling between
eddying green, into
fast spring blue,

mixing in a cosmos of
sun-touched constellations,
to roll the dice another day –
ash to ash, dust to dust;
but I never believed,

anyway.

The Backward Man

Though the backward man lived in Tomorrow, more often than not, he stayed in Yesterday. Of course, he had little choice in the matter—for his eyes were set backward in his skull, and his feet were rather peculiarly attached backward to the legs. He walked in reverse; his clothes he wore inside out; when he opened his mouth to speak, the words stumbled out with t's dotted and i's crossed, letters tripping over themselves. Mirrors looked the other way when they saw him.

Each Yesterday was the same: on the long, straight Street of Everlasting, he walked past forward people walking with their forward feet, their forward eyes glancing briefly over his backward clothes before hastily flicking away. Try as he might, he could never walk the same way—it seemed that even when he turned around, he found himself quite opposite where he meant to be.

Indeed, each Yesterday in Tomorrow was exactly the same, until the backward man stumbles unaware into the intersection of Today, when the eyes in the back of his skull see a young girl with bonny gold locks, sitting with rosy knees crossed in the centre of the road. The girl watches him. She is barefoot, though she has shoes in her hands; she is twiddling the laces of one sneaker with her thumb, her head cocked to the side as she watches. He looks this way, he looks that way. She watches. He walks this way, he walks that way—she watches.

“Young girl,” says the backward man at last, speaking in his garbled nonsense. “Can I help you?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she replies, understanding him perfectly. “Only, well. It’s really quite embarrassing—I seem to have lost myself.”

“Lost?”

“Lost.”

“Well.” The man scratches his head. “Which way do you mean to be going?”

“Why, whichever way is right.”

“I suppose,” he says at last, watching the forward people go by, “The right way is whichever way they’re going.”

“And which way is that?”

“It’s the forward way, of course.”

“So, if I go forward, I’ll find myself?”

“I assume that’s how it works, yes.”

“Then that’s the way I should go?”

And here the backward man hesitates again. "I guess that depends on which way you want to go."

"Now that," says the young girl, "Is some forward thinking."

Then, she puts her forward feet in her forward shoes, ties them bottom to top and walks into Yesterday.

Alastair Fyfe

The Chariot (feat. Ask Vestergaard)

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THE CHARIOT

2 obols

SCANDAL ROCKS UNDERWORLD INC. (AND NO IT'S NOT SISYPHUS!)

The CEO of Underworld Inc. has denied the allegations of abduction concerning his wife, stating that the arrangement was consensual and that Underworld customers needed to stop taking his kindness for pomegranted. His wife was unavailable for comment, though the *Chariot* was able to reach her mother for an exclusive interview. Speaking from her mountaintop home, she stated that: "She would never run away with that man. Their Kore values just don't line up at all! Besides, it's a soulless business he deals in, you know? She's always been so fond of nature, and growing as a person, and he's so wrapped up in his work. It's a deathly affair, I'll tell you that much."

As for whether she will forgive the rumoured abduction? The jury is still drought. "I know my daughter, and she wouldn't do that to me. There's something going on here, and I will get the President involved if I have to! I just hope she's brushing her teeth properly. Otherwise she'll get Tartarus."

The story comes following the recent spate of allegations made against the President himself. While the President refused to speak to the *Chariot*, an Olympus spokesman mused that, "She clearly Leda him on. It's a Sparta life. Aetolia, the President has never and will never lay his hands upon anyone in that manner. It's just not who he is." Some observers have asked whether the Underworld CEO is attempting to swan-up his more successful older brother.

Following the scandal, shares in Underworld Inc. have plummeted and rumours swirl of a hostile takeover from an Italian company called 'Pluto Industries'. When asked for comment, the Underworld Inc. CEO would only say this: "Not on this planet, mate."

Chariot correspondent Askes Vestergardeus managed to secure a brief interview with the CEO, writing that, "Responding to allegations that he engaged in an adulterous relationship with a nymph called Minthe, the CEO of Underworld Inc. has insisted that his relationship with the nymph was 'entirely plutonic.'" The correspondent also managed to get hold of leaked documents exposing Underworld's nefarious dealings. Vestergardeus writes as follows: "Scandal! Underworld Inc.'s Amazon ratings have plummeted due to a barrage of negative reviews of their newly released SatNav systems. For some reason, the only location these new machines ever provide directions to is the high security mega-prison Tartarus—more

specifically, it only ever points to one cell: the one in which Saturn is imprisoned. Hippolyta, CEO of Amazon, is very much displeased at this gross abuse of her platform.”

In seemingly unrelated news, Underworld Inc. has ramped up advertising for the Fields of Elysium, in anticipation of rolling out its new premium service, the top-tier Isles of the Blest. The service has been criticised by many as a gambling mechanic designed to cut costs for Elysium, though Underworld insists that the service will have a significant positive impact in recurring heroism.

ALSO IN TODAY’S PAPER!

ON PAGE THREE: CALLISTO BEARS ALL!

HOMER: GENIUS OR HACK?

Experts suggest that Homer DID NOT write the bestselling flicks *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and that he STOLE the scripts from local bards! Star Odysseus LASHES OUT at the accusations, calling them “completely baseless” and saying that he wished people “wood just stop horsing around.”

EURYDICING WITH DEATH! ORPHEUS PREPARES LAWSUIT AGAINST UNDERWORLD,
DISMISSED AS A THRACE MATTER!

KEEP CALM AND CHARY-ON! EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH UNDERWORLD RECEPTIONIST!

AND A SNEAK PEEK AT THE BRAND-NEW BOOK “ILL-EAGLE DEALINGS ON THE ZEUS CANAL”
FROM BLAIRIS CENTAUR!

Vineyard

Row upon row in the sweet warm sun,
neatly trimmed vines in a gentle breeze.

Men and women carry wicker baskets,
warm drops dripping into the dry earth.

Atop the hill sits the villa, yellow and brown,
its windows glittering in the setting sun.

A homely glow lights the evening,
orange on green in summer's end.

Pristine

I weigh it in my hands, testing
the feel, the balance of it,
slight differences so prominent,
overriding sense with their starkness.

See, she says, it's exactly the same.
Is that so? Then why does it feel so
strange, so unfamiliar beneath my
fingers, which reluctantly pluck out
a single note, then stop in confusion?

As I place it in the old worn case,
its pristine skin shines, cold and perfect.

The Forge

Down in the dark, the blacksmith hammers away.
The ring of metal upon metal echoes up
through the deep in a steady rhythm,
an iron pulse from a lonely forge.

For whom does he work,
down in the dark alone by the fire?
They told me no one has ever gone down there,
nor climbed the crumbling steps.

What is his name?
Nobody knows.
Perhaps he never had one at all.
It was all so very long ago now.

Has it ever stopped? I ask.
Never. Night and day,
alone by the ancient fire,
down in the dark, the blacksmith hammers away.

Freya Juul Jensen

Late-night questions

The faint sound of music from the boarding school's dining room could still be heard in the hallway, all the way up the staircase. Most students had already gone off to bed, mostly to their own. Two girls could be found walking up the last flight of stairs.

Olive was leading the way.

"Okay, tell me what you're gonna write as an intern."

"Something they can print." Agnes was smiling up at the other girl, like she'd done for most of the evening. She had secured a summer internship at the local newspaper, but her thoughts were somewhere else entirely. "Kidding. I'd like to interview someone."

"Okay," Olive said, stretching out the last syllable. "Historians? Athletes? Fortune-tellers?"

"Definitely not fortune-tellers!" Agnes couldn't help but laugh at the idea. "Have you ever met one?"

"Yep. She told me something bad was going to happen to me in a couple of weeks, so I told her she was full of it." Olive wrinkled her nose, her features scrunching up in that way Agnes had come to enjoy. "Have you met one?"

Agnes stopped a couple of steps below Olive, wanting to drag out the walk up to bed as much as possible. She didn't quite want to admit that she found it difficult to do anything else while looking at Olive. "I did yoga with one, once. She told me to listen to the universe."

Olive laughed, leaning against the railing. "So? Did the universe tell you anything?"

"If it did, I don't think we speak the same language." Agnes rolled her eyes at the thought. "Do you even believe in fate and all that?"

"I don't think so." Olive was quiet for a moment. "I don't like the idea of a future I can't control."

Agnes couldn't help but worry. The conversation had taken a turn she did not expect, and judging by the sound of Olive's voice, she did not want to explore that idea any further. "Okay, here's an idea," she quickly said, trying to steer the conversation in another direction. "If you could control everything – and I mean everything – what would your future look like?"

Olive's fingers played with the railing, deep in thought. "Future as in... the next couple of months or my entire life?"

Agnes eyed Olive's fingers, not sure her attempt was successful. She looked away, tipping her head from side to side. "Let's say the next couple of months. Your entire life seems like a lot."

“I’m not sure I’d have an answer anyway. At least not a good one.” Agnes made a mental note of that, but Olive didn’t seem to dwell on it for long. “I’d go to France and convince my grandma that her snobbery is stupid so she could be friends with my mum again.”

Agnes was about to say something, but Olive wasn’t done yet.

“And I’d ace my exams. Even chemistry. *Especially* chemistry, actually. And then I’d...” Agnes caught the red tint in Olive’s cheeks before she turned away. “No, I don’t know...”

Agnes took a step further up the stairs, closer to the other girl, and caught her hand. “What would you do?” It seemed important, and she had an inkling it might have something to do with herself.

“It doesn’t matter!”

“Come on, you know that’s not fair!”

Suddenly, Olive turned towards Agnes again, cheeks still red and a mysterious smile on her lips. She locked eyes with Agnes. “Take a guess.”

Agnes had to remind herself to breathe.

And then to talk.

“I have a question first. What’s your last name?”

“Stokes. Olive Stokes.” She looked slightly confused. If Agnes wasn’t so aware of her own heartbeat, she might have noticed how still Olive was standing, as if a single movement would scare the other girl away.

Agnes’ next words were barely a whisper but rang crystal clear in Olive’s ears.

“Olive Stokes, can I kiss you?”

Harrison Stuart

My Journal: Entry One

We can't. No. Not at all. It's not possible. There's no way. We're already here. Here at this point in history. All of the technologies were available to us and we thought we could do it. Why did we think we could do it? We didn't know we could do it, but we thought we could. And we've done it. We're here. It's going to take over a hundred years to get there with current technology. 100 years is a long time. But that's ok. It was me who took part in it.

I might not actually get there, but that doesn't really bother me. Even if I do get there, I'd be one hundred and thirty years old. Life expectancy goes up as the years go on. So, if I keep up with a healthy lifestyle, then I might be the one of the first who lives up to that age. That would be pretty cool. I like the idea that I could tell my children, and their children, and their children about my home before this. My life. How I lived. What I did. What the salty sea-scented breeze smelled like as I breathed it in on a beach walk. How the wind would blow over the fields, towards the town, and into my home every day. I liked it when the sun shone down on me during the happiest moments of my life with my friends, my family, my people, mein Volk, mes peuples, mi gente, ma fowk. At such a young age, they'd all love to hear some good stories to make them feel good. When they'll get older, they'd love to hear about some of my struggles. The bad things that happened in my life. My reasons for taking part in this. The bad. It was bad.

Everything that has ever happened before my taking part in this was just a pretext. It was my origin story. When I pass my stories on to the next generations, and then when they pass those stories on to the next generations, and when they pass their stories on to those next generations. Eventually it'll turn into some kind of fairy tale. That's how fairy tales come about, don't they? Is it not the case that people just believe in something for so long, and then, what they believe in, eventually turns into fact? Into culture? Something of pure and ultimate cultural significance? That applies to every story.

In one thousand years, when someone's going to have to write an essay on me during their school exam, they won't believe in me. They'll only think that I'm just some kind of twisted and romanticised version of an obsessed, lonely scholar's idea of me. My stories (which will get recorded and written down at some point, I'm sure) will be bountiful and ripe for harvesting. For dissection. To obsess and overcomplicate what I went through as I took part in this. There really isn't anything more to it. This is it. I live here. I live as a human being. I'll eventually spawn another generation, and they'll live like a human being and they'll spawn another generation that will be obsessed with me. They all will be. To them, I'll be something like Alexander the Great or Plato. Socrates, Shakespeare, Obi-wan Kenobi or the great gods of the greater empirical grand realm of America, who are known formerly as Mickey and Minnie Mouse. I'll be something grand and powerful and classical to look up to.

I wish I was able to tell them that it's just not the case. I'm human like all the rest of them. I eat food, sleep for eight hours, drink water, dream of breathing fresh air. I know a couple of languages too. I'm not entirely fluent or anything. I think I'm far from it. But I know that I can at least have fun and make jokes in them. Something like this is going to make those future humans drool all over the idea of me. It's annoying.

I'm like everybody else who has ever existed in history. I'm human, but most importantly, I'm me. I exist at this time. It's not someone else who lived a thousand years before me. I never lived back in a time when humans were so primitive and they all gathered around kings and formed empires and tried to proclaim how powerful they all were by beating their chests and waving their swords around. They're nothing compared to what I'm taking part in. All of that old is meant to stay in the past. It's all over. That's done. But what I'm doing is new. What I'm a part of is a critical point in human history. This project isn't even built for war. Or for inflicting damage for that matter. It's here to spawn new life, not to take it away.

If we travel at safe speeds, it's going to take us over 100 years to reach the Trappist system. It was confirmed long ago that this system contains three habitable worlds. The habitable world closest to the star is the hottest, the one in the middle is similar in climate to earth, and the furthest habitable planet will be the coldest. Pockets of vegetation exist on each world. I'd love to study how similar they are to each other. That's exactly what we're going to do. We're going to study these new worlds and colonise them. It's a science mission, in one sense. Our main objective is to sow the seed of humanity across the stars. We can't cheat. There's no such thing as faster than light travel or unlimited fuel. Everything in the universe is bound together by the laws of physics. Maybe, perhaps someday, somebody will find the right elements, the right materials. Heat it up (or cool it down) at the right temperature. Add a couple of exotic ingredients. Design it in the right way. And flick the switch to bend the reality of our universe.

Advancements in science take a long time.

People who lived a thousand years ago couldn't have dreamt of a ten mile long colony ship, shaped like a drum, that spins on the inside to create gravity. With huge engines so powerful that they could incinerate anything from over one hundred miles away. I doubt that those people back then even had the concept of space. Today's humans spent those thousand years building off of someone's previous ideas and works in order to achieve this grand project and pull it off. I do wonder to myself, if heaps of things were impossible for people a thousand years ago, but possible to us now - what do we think is impossible to achieve now, that will be possible for us to achieve in a thousand years?

Meet the Committee!

Jenna Fults (President)

I'm a fourth-year student studying English and *gasp* Creative Writing. I joined this society in the hopes that I would find some like-minded individuals and perhaps share a piece or two of prose (my preferred writing medium). What I found was so much more—a place to foster my passion, the confidence to finally share my writing, and some of the most amazing friends in all my time at university. As this is my third year in AUCWS, I've watched the society go through several periods of change, evolving and adapting to the circumstances of the world. It's been a joy to step into the role of President for this year and watch the society regroup after a period of hardship and even thrive through tough times. It's only fortified my opinion that this group is more than just a university society—we are a community of talented writers and wonderful friends supporting each other through life and the university experience.

Alastair Fyfe (Vice President)

I've been a member of the Creative Writing Society for three years now, and I'm currently studying for a Master's in English Literature. The society has helped improve my writing so much, and I've made some great friends over the last few years, even if it hurts to admit that to them. I mostly write poetry or scripts, and the advice I've been given by this beautiful bunch of people (and Jenna) has helped me in so many ways – I don't know how I'd have got through my dissertation without them. I will argue for hours over anything, the more ridiculous the better (just ask Martina) and half of what I write is borderline incomprehensible. I am widely regarded as the most beloved member of the society, and a recent poll voted me the most important member of the committee*.

*Evidence cannot be provided, as this poll was conducted privately and may or may not have actually happened.

Alice Durand Degranges (Secretary)

I'm a Masters student (for the second time around!). After indulging in my passion and doing Creative Writing last year, I'm now doing a Master's in Ecology and Conservation. If I had technically joined the society back in spring 2019 (before actually doing my MLitt), during the Masters degree I thought it was a bit silly of me to be at both and... didn't go! So depending on how you see it I've been part of the society a couple months or over a year and a half!

But there's just something about the people here and the atmosphere... so when I heard AUCWS needed people to fill committee roles, I was more than happy to be part of that new adventure. And even though I don't submit much, I love hearing all of your stories and I'm very proud of what we've been building so far, especially in these difficult times!

Aidan Armstrong (Treasurer)

I first joined the society in Freshers' week of first year. After two years of promising to submit next week and never doing so, I've somehow found myself as the committee's current treasurer. Now, in my third year studying English with Creative Writing, I'm determined to make up for lost time in submitting as much work as I can. I tell people that I write fantasy, though I've yet to offer any evidence other than late night discussions over worldbuilding and tropes. I also insist that poetry isn't my thing despite having long given into Alastair's submission habits. Over my time at the society I've been welcomed (or at least tolerated) by a warm and relaxed atmosphere, and made more than a few warm and relaxed friends (God that was sappy). Now, I've finally come out of my shell and find myself constantly looking forward to the Thursday nights, when I offer tales of dead birds or poems of self-pity.

Martina Ferretti (Social Secretary)

I'm a third-year English with Creative Writing student, who finally said "no" to the safe career choice of staying in STEM and decided to pursue her dream of being a novelist who doesn't just dabble in, well, *transformative works*. So far, the Society is what has helped me the most with honing my skills. Every time I submit a piece (mostly prose, but I've been corrupted too, alas, and I have written exactly one poem which will taint me forever), I always leave the meeting having received praise, constructive criticism and feedback from people from all walks of life, and the society is an incredible source of inspiration for me as well. In three years of being part of the AUCWS, I have gone from a scared introvert hiding in the corner at meetings and submitting anonymously to a less scared introvert who is still, admittedly, not extraordinarily prolific, but who is much more confident about her work and skills. And I'm the Social Secretary too! How weird is that? All this, thanks to the amazing community I found here.

I am so excited to close out our Compendium and hope you had a wonderful time! We'd be delighted to see you at any of our meetings (info up above, on page 6), and make sure to tune in for the next edition of the Creative Writing Society Compendium!

