

Five Dials



Fig 1



Fig 2

NUMBER 27

Things Simmering

FEATURING

- STEPHEN THOMPSON 19 *Another Side to Greece*
CHRISTOS IKONOMOU 23 *The Good Thing About Layoffs*
CHRISTOS ASTERIOU 30 *New Fiction*
LAURA GOTTESDIENER 36 *The Cuisine of Occupy Wall Street*

*... plus poetry from Sam Riviere and Sam Donsky;
Eithne Nightingale in Hackney; Ben Masters on style; the glory of the Oyster card;
Sappho; Joe Brainard; and Proust's madeleine goes to Lewisham . . .*



CHRISTOS ASTERIOU, born in 1971, is an author of short stories and novels. His latest novel, *Isla Boa*, was published in 2012 by Polis Publishing House in Athens. He received this year's literature fellowship from the Berlin Academy of Arts.

HANNAH BAGSHAW was born in Norwich in 1983. She graduated from Byam Shaw School of Art with a degree in Fine Art and has completed an MA in Illustration at Camberwell College of Arts. She works as a freelance illustrator and as a digital products designer at Phaidon Press.

BECKY BARNICOAT illustrates regularly for *Five Dials*. Her work was featured in #6, the Obscenity Issue. Her blog can be found at everyoneisherealready.blogspot.co.uk.

PENELOPE BEECH is an illustrator whose work has been published by Aurum Press, Bloomsbury, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Lady* magazine and Penguin US. She recently contributed artwork to *Eyeballs*, published by *Private Eye*.

JOE BRAINARD started exhibiting his work and winning prizes as a grade school student in Tulsa, Oklahoma, before moving to Manhattan's Lower East Side before he turned twenty. By 1969, he was a veteran of the New York art scene. He designed covers for dozens of small literary magazines and books of poetry, and stage decor for theatre pieces by LeRoi Jones and Frank O'Hara. His book, *I Remember*, originally published in 1970, has recently been re-released by Notting Hill Editions.

HELEN CONFORD has been a UK citizen since birth.

PETER CONSTANTINE's recent translations include *The Essential Writings of Rousseau*, Sophocles' *Theban Trilogy* and *The Essential Writings of Machiavelli*. A 2010 Guggenheim Fellow, Constantine was awarded the PEN Translation Prize for *Six Early Stories*, by Thomas Mann, and the National Translation Award for *The Undiscovered Chekhov*.

SAM DONSKY graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 2007. He is the author of *Poems vs the Volcano*, a sequence of one hundred poems based upon one hundred films, initially published in its entirety on Tumblr.

YIANNIS DOUKAS was born in Athens. His first poetry collection, *Inner Borders*, was published in 2011.

THEMELIS GLYNATSIS was born in Athens. He studied drama and comparative literature in the UK and since 2004 has been working as a theatre director and translator in Athens.

LAURA GOTTESDIENER is a writer and editor at *Waging Nonviolence*. She is the author of *A Dream Foreclosed: Black America and the Fight for a Place to Call Home*, forthcoming in August from Zuccotti Park Press. During Occupy Wall Street, she volunteered in the People's Kitchen.

LAURENCE HOWARTH is a comedy writer who has worked extensively in radio and television. He wrote the sitcoms *Safety Catch* and *Rigor Mortis* for BBC Radio 4 and has created four radio series and toured the UK regularly with his double-act, *Laurence and Gus*.

CHRISTOS IKONOMOU was born in Athens in 1970. He is the author of two short story collections. He works as a journalist and translator.

PANOS KARNEZIS was born in Greece but moved to England in 1992. He is the author of the short-story collection, *Little Infamies* and the novel *The Maze*. His latest book, also a novel, is entitled *The Convent*.

BEN MASTERS is the author of the novel *Noughties*. He is currently working on a PhD about stylistic excess and morality in the novel.

EITHNE NIGHTINGALE recently left her post as Head of Equality and Diversity at the V&A museum to pursue her writing and a PhD in Children, Migration and Diaspora. Parts of her memoir, *A Spotticelli Angel* describing life in a northern vicarage in the 1950s, have been read out on Lancashire radio. Her website can be found at eithnenightingale.com. Her contribution originally appeared in *Acquired for Development By ... A Hackney Anthology* published by Influx Press.

JOHN OLDALE speaks five languages and lives in a suburb of Washington, DC, with his family. He is the author of *Who, or Why, or Which, or What ...? A Global Gazetteer of the Instructive and Strange*.

EFTYCHIA PANAYIOTOU is a poet, copy-editor, poetry translator and literary reviewer. Her first collection, *meGas kipouros*, was published in 2007 followed by *Mavri Moralina*, published in 2010, which was shortlisted for the Cyprus State Prize and the Diavazo Poetry Prize. She has translated into Greek Anne Sexton's *Love Poems* as well as works of other poets such

as Anne Carson, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer and Ravi Shankar.

SAM RIVIERE is completing a PhD at the University of East Anglia. He is one of the founding editors of the anthology series *Stop/Sharpening/Your/Knives* and has had work published in the *Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *Poetry London* and *Poetry Review*. His debut collection, *81 Austerities*, was published by Faber & Faber.

DANIEL SHERBROOKE lives in north London. He produces the self-published magazine *I Will Never Write Again, Again*.

THOMAS SMITH has made a number of mini-comics including *The Spider Spoke*, *Useful Phrases* and *Pirate Adventure*. He lives in London, where he also teaches English to Japanese businessmen and children. His blog can be found at smithopolis.tumblr.com

STEPHEN THOMPSON was born in London to Jamaican parents. His first novel, *Toy Soldiers*, was published in 2000 and described by Hanif Kureishi as 'beautifully written, painfully honest and deeply affecting.' He has written articles for, among others, the *Observer*, the *Voice*, and *Arena*. Between 2006 and 2010, whilst living in Edinburgh, he wrote regular book reviews for *Scotland on Sunday*.

DIMITRIS TSOUMBLEKAS' exhibition of photographs, 'Texas: the problem with our current situation', were shown at the Ileana Tounta Contemporary Art Center in Athens from February to March of last year.

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Our Glorious Readers

and other sources

‘The Berlin issue was looong,’ wrote long-time reader Albert Bennett, ‘but goooooood.’ ‘It’s chunky,’ was the response we received from Tina Auerbach of Manchester. ‘I’ve been living off it for a while. It’s good to put out an extremely big issue in the winter. I have taken it with me into hibernation.’

‘New Berlin issue is HOT,’ tweeted Niven Govinden. (He has reason to be positive: he contributes regularly to the magazine.) ‘Can’t wait to dive into the fiction. Paul Ewen’s food writing rocks.’ (If you missed it, Ewen’s account of going haywire at a Welsh food festival begins on page 55. Yes, there are more than fifty pages in the previous issue.)

‘Am I alone in thinking it’s about time the city of Berlin was brought down a

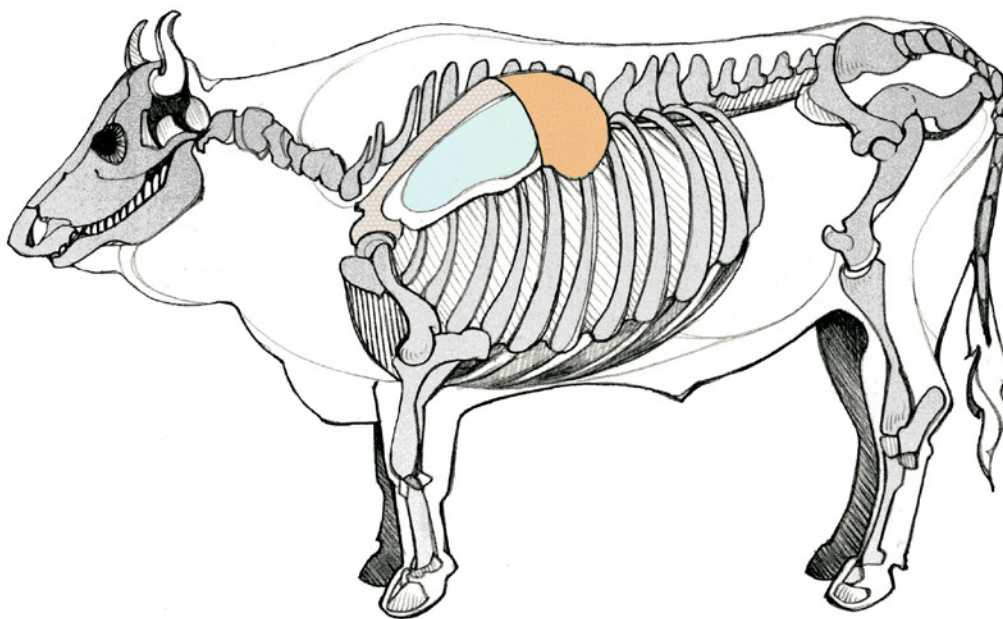
notch?’ was the question put to us by one reader named Jamal. ‘It seems that all I do is listen to how great it is, how I’ve got to move there, how the entire world is there. It was refreshing to read Jan Brandt’s take-down of the place [‘I Hate Berlin’, page 13]. It made me feel better about living in a place that’s not quite as cool.’ We wrote back, ‘Where are you sending this from?’ His reply? ‘Outside Toronto.’ Fair enough.

‘I saw Peter Stamm give a reading in London and am thankful for any chance to read more of his prose,’ Sylvia Simpson told us. ‘It’s like skiing,’ she wrote. ‘Skiing?’ we replied. She explained further: ‘In that it’s cool and very icy in sections. You glide through his prose; it’s been stripped of impediments and then occasionally something terrifying happens and you

carry the injury with you for years. I can’t take this analogy much further.’

The event in Berlin received positive coverage from some of our favourite online venues, including the translation blog *Transfiction*. We must, however, respond in print to one of their claims. Their dispatch from the event accused us of tampering with the bouquet of the launch venue, The Wye. ‘Once I’d found the entrance,’ wrote Lucy Renner Jones, ‘the air in The Wye, I could have sworn, smelled of fish and chips. I was not alone in thinking this. It was not a trick of the mind, induced by hearing London accents. I reckon someone from Hamish Hamilton had a little fish ‘n’ chip spray in their pocket and wasted it around for authenticity.’ Unfortunately, we carry no such spray.

Finally, this, a word of encouragement. Not so long ago cherished reader Alan Bowden (@WordsofMercury) tweeted, ‘My but I’m glad I discovered *Five Dials*.’ And my, Alan, but we are glad you made that discovery too.



On Timelines and Greek Photographs

Over the past year we've developed a fondness for the timelines that appear every once in a while in weekend newspapers, mostly in 'Week in Review' sections. These timelines sit next to large feature stories that discuss the complicated issues of the day, and the relevant background events are presented as a vertical list, in a way that allows readers to scan down the page as if performing a long, slow nod, so that by the time their chins finally approach their breastbones, they know how the Royal Bank of Scot-

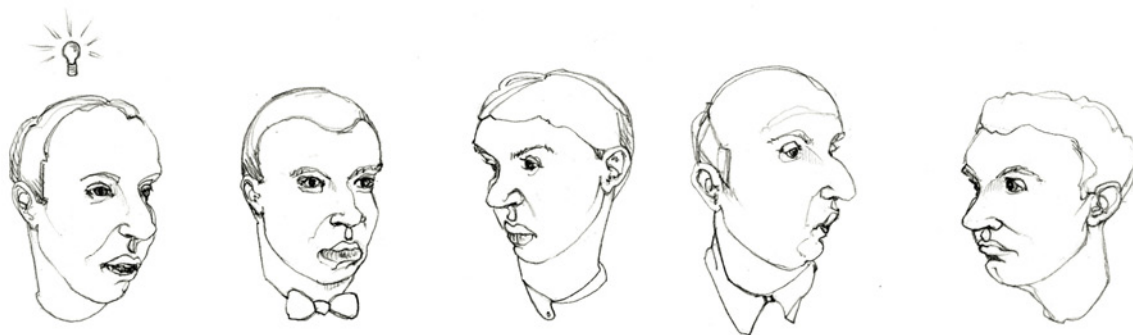
man shot himself outside Athens parliament, afraid of the debt he was due to leave his child. Finally there was a news story from a few months ago warning that the Greek economy was to shrink 25 per cent by 2014.

Five Dials visited Athens not so long ago and was alarmed by the scenes of protest in Syntagma Square and the hints of violence and the red paint left dotted across the Bank of Greece building, as well as the downbeat energy of the conversations, which made us curious enough

were angry with others, some with themselves. Having been through the phase of acceptance everyone's feeling more desperate now, but somehow secretly hoping for a positive change.'

One of the poets we met in Athens, Yiannis Doukas, acknowledged the restlessness of these transitional times. 'I'm trying to understand it,' he wrote to us. 'I'm trying to tell the "colours" apart. It is not only a financial crisis, but also a social, moral and cultural one. It touches all areas of human activity. And, of course, it is not a Greek crisis, but a global one.'

Ask most people and they'll admit there's another life they could imagine living rather than their own. Ask a young Greek and that coveted alternative life often seemed shockingly mundane. One night during our visit, as old Nirvana



land collapsed, the Irish property bubble burst, the Egyptian revolution unfolded, or, thanks to the chronologies we've been drooping towards lately, how Greece collapsed.

We printed out one timeline from a website that aimed to explain recent events in Greece and it unspooled over four pages, so that at the top of the first George Papandreou was still prime minister and by page two his replacement, economist Lucas Papademos, had already left office. The top of the next nod offered accounts of anti-German sentiment on the streets of Athens, and inches below showed that on 7 March, 2012, the German newspaper *Bild* bought €10,000 of Greek debt at a discounted price of €4,815. As we dropped our head we saw the entry for 4 April, 2012, when a Greek

to sift through the clippings stacks so we understood more about the teetering parliament, and the Coalition of the Radical Left, Syriza, and even the far-right Chrysi Avgi party, whose leader threw water over another politician on a talk show. (This was on the 7 June, 2012.) Since then we've realized we don't have to depend solely on dry timelines; *Five Dials* can act as a vehicle to bring into English from Greek a few stories from ground level, from the workplace. When asked how the events printed on our timelines have taken their toll, journalist Christos Ikononou responded by sending us a short story set amidst the layoffs, where uncertain employees may be less angry, but certainly more desperate. 'A year ago, Greeks felt angry,' we were told by novelist Christos Asteriou, another contributor to the issue. 'Many

played over the loudspeakers of the bar (*In Utero*), there was much talk amongst the gathered writers of deferral, stasis and the erosion of self-worth that comes with continually seeing your parents at breakfast. They're lovely people, one writer assured us after describing her own, but I don't want to see my parents eating their eggs every morning until I'm forty-five.

'The consequences of recession and heavy taxing will probably appear later, in the next few years', said Doukas. 'For the time being, I find it very difficult to make long-term plans – that is the main difference. I feel as if my future is mortgaged. Being now in my early thirties, I know that it will be very tough to have children and raise a family in the years to come. It is weird and discomforting; my generation will probably be the first one

to pass on to the next much less, materially at least, than it was given by the previous one.'

Because we're not economists, we were interested, too, in the effect the crisis was having on the poetry coming out of Greece. The poetic field, in Doukas's view, had unfortunately shifted towards introversion. 'There is a huge difference,' he continued, 'between the inner life, which digests and refines the external reality, and the private life, which ignores it. The poet today should be personally engaged, should be tested in his time – and, if necessary, against it.' Was it possible, we asked, to take solace in Greek writing? Were there texts a poet could read to help put the recent collapse in context? 'I finished reading the diaries of George Seferis,' Doukas responded. 'They cover the years from 1925 to 1960 in about 2,000 pages. It was as if the drama of the twentieth century – personal, existential, poetic and political – unfolded before my eyes. And in this I take solace: desperate times and yet people could love, think, write, fight, move on and endure.'

Our talented contacts furnished us with plenty of Greek writing – we have fiction from Panos Karnezis and poetry from Eftychia Panayiotou – but we were also lucky to secure reportage from Greece, including a dispatch from writer Stephen Thompson, who witnessed a changing landscape not just as a foreigner, and not just as a traveller passing through Patras, one of the more industrial of Greece's ports, but also as a black Briton occasionally mistaken during his stay for one of the ghostly asylum seekers from a scatter of African countries who now linger on the edge of Greek life. Thompson is the author of the excellent *Toy Soldiers*, an account of addiction in Hackney and the more dangerous corners of west London. After living in Paris and travelling through Greece, he has now returned to the UK. 'My time in Greece,' he said recently in an email, 'affected me in ways I hadn't foreseen. It made me realize, and appreciate, just how far Britain has come in terms of race relations. The situation in Patras couldn't have been more different. It was a shock to the system to see black people living as an underclass. Two years on from the experience and it still lives with me. I've been thinking that I'd

like to write a book about the Africans in Patras, an extended piece of reportage done in the form of case studies. The book would be intended to highlight a little-known aspect of Greek society and to give voice to the voiceless.'

Apart from the writers, we were also introduced to some of the local photographers who had spent time calmly viewing recent events. Not so long ago, one of our Greek fixers sent us an email with a few photos attached. The work, by Athens-based photographer Dimitris Tsoumblekas, was very different from the overheated images of Syntagma Square that often sat in proximity to those timelines of Greek implosion. When we emailed back to request more photos, we received images of shops and domestic scenes. The photographs illustrated what we'd been told during our visit: tragedy doesn't always announce itself dramatically.

One of Tsoumblekas's photos shows posters advertising the glittering shoreline of the Greek islands; the posters just happen to be attached to the window of a barren, empty shop. In another, amidst a stand of verdant trees, a mysterious figure stands facing away from the camera. 'This is my sister,' Tsoumblekas wrote to us. 'She's wearing a raincoat on a street in Plaka. In the same place, a year ago, on a sunny day, I was photographing burning garbage and some people throwing rocks at policemen. At the very same spot, thirty-five years ago, there was a bakery where I would buy bread as a child.'

There are hints of destruction in Tsoumblekas's work: on the counter of a burnt out shell of a shop sits what looks to be an iced coffee sweating in the Athens heat. 'This was a coffee shop on Panespitiou Street,' he wrote. 'It's just across from the National Library, the Academy and the University, the so-called Athenian Trilogy, one of the most prestigious streets in downtown Athens.' It burnt last summer during what Tsoumblekas calls 'a small riot after a demonstration', which happened on the same night the Attikon Cinema was destroyed, along with some forty other buildings in the centre of Athens. Tsoumblekas grew up in the area around Syntagma Square and, along with a couple other cinemas, the Attikon was where he felt he received his real education. 'We went there every

Wednesday to watch mainstream movies and smoke Marlboros,' he wrote. 'On Fridays we went across the street for more intellectual fare and Gauloises.'

The last photo we clicked open from Tsoumblekas was an interior shot of an elderly man sitting in his chair with what look to be drawings of ancestors or relatives just out of the field of focus, peering at him from their spots on the wall. They've been placed above a TV that looks garishly alive with daytime programming. The man is not looking at the television. He's in profile and one of his blue eyes, caught in focus, looks off-camera. It's a fearful look.

'That man is indeed my father,' Tsoumblekas responded when we asked. 'I can only assume what he is thinking about as his mental condition has meant he has become alienated from us in the past year. He grew up during the thirties and the German occupation. He was in the Greek resistance and served in the EAM, the left wing/communist army during the civil war. Afterwards he spent some years in exile camps, in remote islands, and many years after that trying to make a living, trying to be a real father. It still surprises me the way he never hated anyone, never accused anyone, not even God, or the politicians, or the fascists, or the police, or the doctors, or Merkel, me or my mother. I think he's both worried for us and worried about something he cannot see clearly, something that may lie in between these images. That is what I try to catch with these photographs, something in between, something you can't really talk about, something you feel.'

(Before we get into the issue, rest assured our regular sections are still in place. Our examination of London life, 'Our Town', continues with dispatches from Hackney Town Hall and – perhaps you have to live here – an appreciation of the Oyster card. We have poetry from Sam Donsky and Sam Riviere, an essay on style from Ben Masters, and gorgeous illustration from Hannah Bagshaw. We also have a dispatch from Laura Gottesdiener, a veteran of Occupy Wall Street in New York, on the cuisine of resistance. 'Perhaps it's fitting,' she writes, 'that much of the recent unrest in the United States can be blamed squarely on the apple.' Enjoy.)

– CRAIG TAYLOR

CONTEXT

Four Photographs

by Dimitris Tsoumblekas





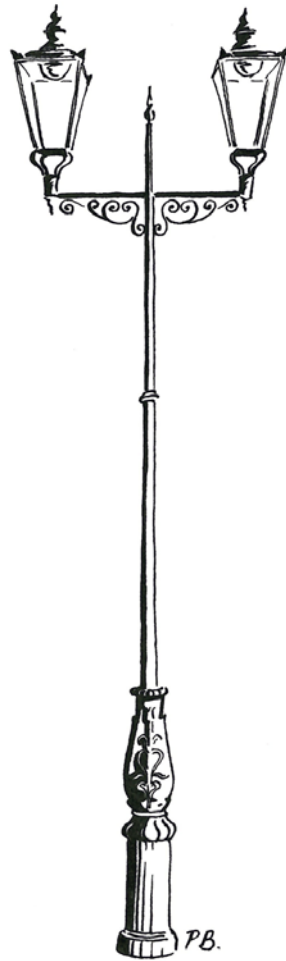




Our Town

After years living in London, the city had begun to press down on me.
I sometimes felt as if all the sky were sea, and we citizens mere bottom-feeders, held down by its
great pressure as we moved around the caverns and boulders of the streets

— *Leviathan*, Philip Hoare



BURTON STREET

Place: Burton Street

Date: 27 January, 2013

Time: 9:33 pm

This issue's itinerary:

a stack of Oyster cards; Prince William's forehead; Landor Rd;
endless supplies of elderflower wine; Tony, the linguist, armed with a Polish dictionary;
Hackney Town Hall; the nation's favourite Hovis advert.

The Shell, the Grit, the Oyster Card.

by Daniel Sherbrooke.

I've got a stack of Oyster cards at home, resting on my bookshelf. They've been left at my flat by various guests over the years and each holds within it a small amount of residual credit, or, as one visitor said, Oyster juice, like the few drops left in the shell after it's been replaced on the bed of crushed ice provided by the restaurant. Even now, I can link each card to a different trip and visitor, and guess, within a certain range, what's left behind. The amount on the cards won't change. The money never expires. It will last for a century, one TfL worker told me at Clapham North. It will literally last for ever.



Different guests have chosen different plastic holders. There are even different Oyster cards, including one of the 750,000 commemorative cards that came out in April 2011, featuring a photo of Prince William and Kate, and when I see it on my bookshelf I imagine William's large forehead wiped again

and again on the yellow plastic of London's card readers, a yellow installed to act as high contrast to the normally light and dark blue cards. I'm not sentimental, but I refrain from using the bookshelf Oyster cards because I consider them property of others. Since I no longer travel to an office at Warren Street each day and therefore don't buy a weekly pass, I've become more involved with my own card. I often know exactly how much pre-pay credit is on it at any time. I know when it feels light and depleted. I know when I have just enough to get away with a single bus journey south, £1.40, though there are times when I misjudge and get on the bus on a rainy night, at a stop on the east side of Trafalgar Square, touch it to the reader tentatively, as if the mechanism will be more forgiving if I don't slap the card against it, then hear the two beeps denoting insufficient funds, and am forced to make the short journey backwards off the bus, stepping slowly, all the while watching the driver to see if I'll be waved back on, uncertain of the capriciousness of the driver, never fully aware of the conditions that allow them to forgive and let a person go through. This gesture only appears as a result of an alchemy that combines the day, their mood, the traffic, the weather, the behaviour of cyclists weaving through their lane, and even perhaps my own reaction, which is sometimes a pleading look, or a brash challenge, or a slump and a huff of air that I release after hearing those beeps, before I step back, all the while watching the hands of the driver, as their faces are often obscured behind the plastic barrier as the light of the bus and the traffic and streetlamps outside moves across the partition. In that window I can see as much of myself as I can see them.

And when I sometimes watch others misjudging the credit on their cards, I think they are lesser people, not in control. I've watched in disbelief as the driver, for some reason, has waved them on board. Who they are, what they represent, must correspond with the driver's weakness, or the strength of his beliefs, or some sense of kinship. Or perhaps those passengers have learned what to add to the alchemy. One was carrying food. Another, waved through, held up a child as evidence. I watched them from across the bus.

There is one Oyster on my shelf with only around 10p left, which is the sign of a traveller who knows how to exit without a trace, perhaps the equivalent of kicking ash over a dead fire in a provincial park. But there is another that was left in the deficit. This guest – and it was inadvertent; it was my mother on her last visit to London – somehow finished her journey and touched out within the realm of amnesty, which goes as deep as £2.90 if you make it to Heathrow, as she did. TfL knows that most Londoners will have to climb out of this deficit. But those who are leaving the city, especially those who may never return, or at least never return with that card, have struck a blow against TfL, and sometimes I envision all these lacerations actually adding up, though to what end? When I lived in North America as a child I used to worry about restaurants losing money because of their all-you-can-drink sodapop deals. It doesn't matter. No matter how far a visitor delves into the red, they've still paid a three-pound deposit. On January 2011 it went up to five pounds. In March 2012 the BBC reported there were 17 million cards out there that hadn't been used for twelve months. The combined balance was 55 million pounds. The Oyster is thin. Since it was introduced it has retained its original dimensions: 85mm x 55mm.

But I remember travel cards. I remember Brixton station, when I first moved to London. I remember the street musicians banging drums at the top of the stairs and the street preacher who still stands at the entrance, usually on Saturdays, who pronounces Jesus 'Dreesus' because of some sort of speech impediment, and the Rasta guy selling sticks of incense outside the Iceland, but most of all I remember so many men milling around the ticket machines in an attempt to sell travel cards. These men would ask travellers who were done for the day for their card and then sell what was left to incomers. It wasn't an amount. They weren't selling residual credit, they were selling hours, and some days I bought one in the early afternoon, just past noon, and my entire



day was provided for, and those were not days of one to-and-fro commute. On those days, there was so much travel the paper cards were weak enough to fold by the end. Sometimes I was simply given a card while I wandered towards the barrier. Take this, some tired, twitching man would say. What he meant was: here's your day's provision. The station is now empty of those guys. I've never been offered an Oyster card, but I can't imagine why someone would give up an object of permanence. I mean to say, there's a difference between plastic and paper.

When I used to buy a week-long pass I didn't have to worry about watching the depletion. I was made aware of the time that was left on the Oyster, and that card seemed always to be nearing expiry; even halfway through its week the barrier readouts would announce that it would expire soon. It was morbid, like constantly telling a forty-year-old he was near death. But when I have time instead of money, I feel profligate. I don't wait for the gate to close before touching my card to the reader. I don't listen for beeps.

The Oyster card underwent a trial period in 2002, and was then launched in 2003. The name obviously refers to the world as your oyster, but also as the concealed pearl hidden in the shell of your wallet, though I wonder what role all the other cards play. Lesser pearls, I suppose. The claimed proximity range is three inches, but I've always found it's more satisfying to press the card, or Prince William's forehead, to the reader. I have to retrieve my Oyster from my wallet now. It stopped being able to transmit its power through my other cards. I know it's wrong, but I sometimes think my other cards have strengthened against it. I've let go of it mostly, but for years I believed in the envy of inanimate objects. The unused gym card refuses to cooperate. The paper loyalty card, so thin and so obviously linked to corporate usage, sabotages others. Perhaps my credit card has petrified. In 2008 a computer fault corrupted around 65,000 Oyster cards when the readers stopped working for about four hours. You have a tainted Oyster, I was told by that same staff member at Clapham

North. He was the guy who loved to repeat jokes to outgoing passengers. My card would be automatically refunded, he said, though I never checked. 2008 feels recent. It has the ring of a recent date, but it was a long time ago.

Around 2008, some people in London became worried about surveillance, specifically because they feared strangers might operate their own scanners, which would allow them to read the information on any given Oyster card. The whole system operated on a 'free frequency' at 13.56 MHz. Which is why, my flatmate Gordon announced,

it wasn't ridiculous to keep his Oyster wrapped in kitchen aluminium. It wasn't like wrapping your head in aluminium to keep out the CIA, he said. These were valid concerns.

The chips inside the cards have changed. In February 2010 TfL stopped using MIFARE Classic. The MIFARE DESFire chips used on the new Oyster card have much more sophisticated security features and more complex computation power. These are radio-frequency identification chips (RFIDs) and for a while

some people used to dissect their cards and scoop out the chip. I saw this done delicately once, with one of our paring knives, back when we had a lot of cutlery, and when June got the chip out, she went on to the next card, flexing the Oyster back and forth, bending the blue until it became white and then piercing it. She held the RFID chip on the tip of the paring knife. I wasn't used to having her in the house back then – her relationship with Gordon was just beginning – and it occurred to me when I walked into the kitchen to see her with a knife and two brutalized Oysters that this was one of those gestures that needed to be contextualized, but first there was her reassuring smile. For a while June had one of these RFID chips attached to her watchstrap.

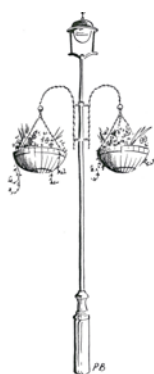
I think she used to enjoy looking at people when she touched in using nothing, when she glided through the barriers. TfL could not fine her for fare evading. She paid to update her Oyster, holding the watchstrap to the reader, but she was still warned once by a confused Tube station employee, who looked confused. Around that time there were also sightings of a man dressed as a wizard who had affixed an RFID chip to the end of his wand and walked through Underground stations after opening the gates as if by magic. That was somewhere in West London, maybe South Kensington, but West London was a different kingdom. If there were going to be bright magical beings walking among us they probably lived out there. You heard stories of Ferraris idling outside Harrods and secret caves under houses. I'm not sure what happened to the RFID chip, or June's watch, because it's certainly not the one she wears now. I can't imagine her cutting up an Oyster card these days. I've known June for so long now. She doesn't do that sort of thing any more. She uses one like everyone else. She hitches up her purse and places it on the reader. Or else she used to, as of a few months ago.

You are always protected against loss, they tell you when you register. That's how they get you. They ask you a security question: a memorable date, or a person you'll never forget, or a place or your mother's maiden name. There are about 4,000 Oyster Ticket Stops in London, including Booji Newsagent, directly below our flat. One day, while buying more credit, but only a little more, in change, I said to Atif, who was behind the counter that day, 'You know a lot about me from my visits in here.' 'I know everything about you,' he replied. 'What's the smallest amount I can possibly put on the Oyster?' '20p,' he replied. 'Who does that??' I asked. 'Around here?' he asked, motioning to Landor Road, and perhaps Stockwell, and perhaps all of South London as well. 'More people than you think.' I took the blue card from him. I couldn't honestly tell if it was any heavier. There was no faint sound of sloshing juice, of crushed ice. I've become allergic to a kind of whimsy. I like the precision of the reader instead: I was up to £1.60 of credit.

I always think of Oyster cards as blue – light blue for most of the card until the curving white line separates the light from a dark



CHARLOTTE STREET



ST ANNE'S COURT

blue at the edge of the card. A red card is issued to retired TfL staff though the words *red* and *Oyster* clash, especially for anyone who has grown up on the coast and endured Red Tide signs. The large black-and-white billboards were always stuck in the thickets near the beach, and they didn't just list types of oyster but other shellfish: mussels, scallops, clams, and so the association still feels wrong or sickly, no matter the perks, which I'm sure are plentiful.

A purple card is issued to bus operators. Current TfL staff

get a pale blue card that looks like a normal card that has been left out in the sun. It's as if a normal card has faded, like those jeans you see Polish men in London wearing in Leicester Square on Saturday nights: patches of purposefully faded light blue. I can see that blue, you can see that blue in your mind's eye, but I don't want it to be a loose thought. I know more now. I have learned a few things. The dark blue of the Oyster is Pantone 072C. The light blue of the Oyster is Pantone Cyan C.

CLAPTON, E 5

Eithne Nightingale Discusses Foucault Over the Garden Fence

'I was a nun with a very bad habit,' laughed Tony. He poured more vodka into my chipped crystal glass.

'My friend was the bishop and I would knock off his mitre and look up his hassock.'

'Cassock,' I ventured, thinking it must be the drink. It seemed improbable that my erudite neighbour, who spoke ten languages, should make such an elementary ecclesiastical mistake.

'Then we set the mice free and the pious got up on their chairs screaming at God's furry little creatures scampering underneath. It was a riot.'

Tony was beside himself, doubling over at the memories of disrupting the Christian Festival of Light.

'Oh,' he suddenly exclaimed, 'I forgot you were a vicar's daughter. I hope I haven't offended you.'

'Not at all.' I smiled, tendering my glass for more vodka. 'I think my father might have approved.'

Tony had been my neighbour for fourteen years. Over the garden fence and between the leaves of the wisteria he talked to me of Foucault, feminism and far-left politics. And while the wisteria never flowered, our friendship did. Spring excursions to the auction house; summer walks along the River Lea; autumn trips to a gallery or two and convivial winter meals of broccoli soup and chocolate tiramisu. In the early morning light we fed the birds and late at night we argued politics over tumblers of Russian vodka.

Tony was always there for me when the going got tough; when my car tyres were slashed, my brake cable cut and my keyholes glued I slept in his house, warmed by hot toddies and macaroni cheese, safe from the fury of my ex-lover.

'All clear,' he would shout as he peered through the curtains. I would rush next door for a change of clothes and return to my refuge.

And he was there when I got burgled, my belongings scattered down the street as the thieves made their escape. After the third break-in within a month I talked of moving from our Hackney terraced street.

'You can't leave without me,' he said.

Nudging, nurturing neighbours on the margins of Murder Mile.

And I was there for him when he needed a break from writing

his book on the representation of the male nude in eighteenth-century art.

'Hopeless,' he would sigh and I would listen, trying to dislodge his writer's block.

Tony was not only a member of the Gay Liberation Movement but an active campaigner in the early days of the squatting movement in London, occupying boarded houses left to rot by the local council. Once he told me how he had arranged bail for two East End lads living in the same squat as him. They were brothers who had lost their parents, fallen on hard times and taken to drugs.

'I took them home to my mother,' he said. 'They loved it and ate all her homemade cakes.'

I imagined the scenario. A respectable, middle-class lady from suburbia offering a Victoria sponge to her gay son and his jailbird friends, cosseted by chintz but nervous for her silver.

The one time we nearly came to blows was when Tony insisted that I chop down the elderberry tree casting a shadow over the bottom of his garden. I procrastinated, offered to trim it back, tempted him with endless supplies of elderflower wine and elderberry jam.

'It must go,' he insisted. 'It is a plague on both our houses.'

Within days a lean, gay gardener from Abney Cemetery scaled the branches, electric saw in hand, and the tree was gone.

'Into darkness comes light,' announced Tony. He cracked open a bottle of champagne and offered me a glass.

Then one day in 2005 everything changed.

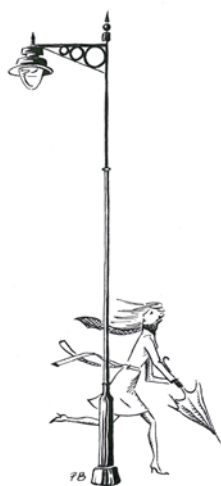
Tony, this sixty-year-old, handsome, bald and bearded academic fell terribly in love with a tall, full-faced, burly Polish waiter half his age who spoke only ten words of English.

'Stefan's not rung today,' he said, emptying his vodka glass in one go.

I waited, anxious for the next installment.

'I went to see him at work but the restaurant owner threw me out,' he laughed.

His lover's thickset face filled the screen of his mobile phone,



COLEBROOKE ROW

smiling up at him as if joining in the joke.

But as the affair unfolded, there was anger at his lover's refusal to disclose his sexuality to family and friends.

'I will out him,' he cried.

Tony paced round the garden shoos the squirrels away.

'You can't do that. His mother's a devout Catholic.'

Tony beyond reason. Tony passionately in love.

One day his lover upped sticks and left for Poland and Tony's despair pervaded his tumbledown house. Shelves of leather-bound editions of Goethe, Byron, Proust lay neglected. Videos of *Porridge*, *The Simpsons* and *Prisoner: Cell Block H* remained unwatched. There were no late-night political arguments over tumblers of vodka. No early-morning feeding of the birds.

But two weeks later there was renewed excitement.

'Stefan's coming back with his sister, brother-in-law and nephew.'

The house was decorated. Apple-green downstairs, fresh white for the hallway. A new carpet, sideboard and a giant plasma television screen. A buzz of domesticity. Cleaning, painting, cooking.

There were invitations to Polish Sunday lunch, starting with borscht and ending with oodles of cream and historic walks round the East End of London with Tony as our guide.

'First there were the Huguenots, then the Jews from Poland fleeing the pogroms in the nineteenth century.'

Tony laughed and swept his arm towards his lover.

'And now we have the Poles again.'

He liked to show off his newly found passion to his friends; his friends to his newly found lover.

There were trips to the social security offices to find out about benefits; visits to the nursery to secure a place for the nephew. Tony, the linguist, armed with a Polish dictionary, supporting and loving his newly adopted family. He asked all his friends to find work for Stefan so he could earn more than the minimum wage. So he could stay in England and with him.

But after a month and for no obvious reason, the Polish family left to live in west London. Student exam papers remained unmarked and the forthcoming art history book on male nudity languished. I fabricated a reason for the estranged couple to meet and make up.

'I still need my bedroom decorating.'

So Stefan agreed but Tony wanted to interrupt his friend, to

cook broccoli quiche and make love between the coats of paint. But his lover was focused on his task.

'I'm working.'

'If not now, when? Come tomorrow night.'

I worried as I travelled to see my family for the weekend, thinking I should ring to make sure Tony was all right. But something stopped me. A feeling I couldn't identify; a fear I didn't dare acknowledge.

I returned on the Sunday to a crackled answerphone message from my other neighbour.

'Call round when you get back. Something's happened to Tony.'

I knew straight away that he was dead. That it was suicide. Perhaps I was the only person who knew, besides his lover, that he would do it. Could do it. The police wanted to see me. Just to make sure it was not a murder. Just to make sure it was suicide.

Over the months that followed, each time I went into his house, the room where he killed himself, I felt his despair. Each time I picked up the American book lying on the table, *A Hundred Best Ways to Commit Suicide*, I felt it. Felt his despair. I read and reread the suicide note written to his lover, long since gone.

'I'm sorry but I have never been so happy.'

The police had no problem tracking Stefan down. His mobile number was written on the suicide note.

As I emptied the house – prints and books to university libraries, household goods to the homeless and refugees, I thought of the students not taught, the book not written, the friendships fractured. Did all these mean so little in the wake of love? And where was Stefan? There was no sign or sight of him, just paint on my bedroom carpet as a lasting reminder.

It took some time to trace distant relatives, to find the will. Half of the estate was to go to the two brothers whom Tony had rescued from jail and taken to tea with his mother. But the will was out of date. One of the brothers had died of a drugs overdose years ago.

I recalled the taste of hot borscht and Russian vodka, the urgency in Tony's voice as he determined to out his Polish lover, and thought back to when I could have stopped this madness. But perhaps it was a considered act, Stefan's leaving was a loss too hard to bear, too reminiscent of painful, past betrayals. Indeed, is this what we all risk in the pursuit of love? I tried hard to accept his death, to respect his right to end his life. But still Tony is not there. Tony is not next door.



BLOOMSBURY SQUARE

Helen Conford witnesses the Citizenship Ceremony

One Friday lunchtime I left work with two missions: to reach Hackney Town Hall by 2 p.m. and to find a full-size Union Jack that could then be draped over my friend's newly British shoulders. He had chosen me to accompany him to his Citizenship Ceremony. After living in England since he was seven, speaking a light mockney and representing British art on three continents, he was finally embracing the land of *Sun* newspapers over his distant yet native Japan.

The ceremony took place inside the town hall's council chambers, and on the way in the twenty-six almost-citizens received an 'I Love Hackney' tote bag. An official read out a list of countries from which the new citizens hailed – Angola, Australia, China, Iraq, Jamaica, Turkey, Poland, Zimbabwe, even the United Kingdom – and a hush came on the room. A young boy sitting behind me stopped swinging his legs. Whatever journeys had brought us here, we were all now seated in the horseshoe-shaped chambers in chairs of parliament green, waiting for the ending of something and the beginning of something else.

I've not often had to think about what being British means. If someone asks me where I'm from, there's not the possibility of them then asking, 'No, where are you *really* from?' In the months leading up to my friend's ceremony, as he grappled both with grinding bureaucracy and the thought of identifying himself as British, I learned a few things: that I could scrape through the Citizenship test that precedes the ceremony (and that you must pass) if I had some friends helping me; that becoming a subject of the Crown would cost me a minimum of £600; that identity is wedded to nationality, and that altering it can be a relief or a sacrifice; and that pieces of paper matter more than we think.

On that particular day, identity was a gentle affair. The Depu-

ty Speaker of Hackney, pinstriped trousers under red ceremonial robes, spoke of Hackney as a 'microcosm of the world', reminding us of the knowledge and skills brought to Britain over generations by new citizens. She spoke of what being British would mean: the rule of law, freedom of speech, the vote.

Then one by one they rose to swear their oath – or affirmation – of allegiance to the Queen. The room was split evenly between those who swore with God and those who didn't (my friend didn't). While most rose and spoke without help, a few had to repeat an official's words, as in a marriage ceremony. One was unable even to do that: when asked for his name he said, 'Queen Elizabeth.' After this happened a few times he was asked to sit down and told he could complete the take later, like a student misbehaving at a public performance. Later, over beer, my friend wondered how 'Queen Elizabeth' had been able to pass a Citizenship test designed in part to check the state of your English.

Then came the Pledge, spoken in unison, and the National Anthem, sung to a tape played over speakers, our singing as diffident as that of any awkward wedding guests in church. Finally, each new citizen rose to receive their certificate, handed to them by the Deputy Speaker in front of the flags of the European Union, Great Britain and Hackney, to the music of the nation's favourite Hovis advert, where a boy cycles down a hill with a loaf of bread. The air filled with small rustlings of joy, as families came together for a quick official photograph. A daughter joined her father and I wondered if she was British already, or if they'd be back here again when another sum of money was saved.

After, when we stepped outside and other friends came to greet us, the Union Jack was joined by a bowler hat and a packet of PG Tips.



I Remember

by Joe Brainard

The following list is taken from the book I Remember by Joe Brainard, which consists entirely of a long, non-chronological list of remembrances, each of which begins with the two words of the title. There are more than 1,000 entries in the book. In the introduction to the version recently released by Notting Hill Editions, Paul Auster remarks that "The text is not long (just 138 pages in the original edition), but remarkably enough, in spite of these numerous rereadings, whenever I open Joe Brainard's little masterwork again, I have the curious sensation that I am encountering it for the first time." Auster goes on to say: "The book remains new and strange and surprising – for, small as it is, I Remember is inexhaustible, one of those rare books that can never be used up."

I remember taking out the garbage.

I remember 'the Ritz' movie theatre. It was full of statues and the ceiling was like a sky at night with twinkling stars.

I remember wax paper.

I remember what-not shelves of two overlapping squares. One higher than the other.

I remember ballerina figurines from Japan with real net-like tutus.

I remember chambray work shirts. And dirty tennis shoes with no socks.

I remember wood carvings of funny doctors.

I remember the 'T-zone'. (Camel cigarettes.)

I remember big brown radios.

I remember long skinny coloured glass decanters from Italy.

I remember fishnet.

I remember board and brick bookshelves.

I remember bongo drums.

I remember candles in wine bottles.

I remember one brick wall and three white walls.

I remember the first time I saw the ocean. I jumped right in, and it swept me right under, down, and back to shore again.

I remember being disappointed in Europe that I didn't feel any different.

I remember when Ron Padgett and I first arrived in New York City we told a cab driver to take us to the Village. He said, 'Where?' And we said, 'To the Village.' He said, 'But where in the Village?' And we said, 'Anywhere.' He took us to Sixth Avenue and 8th Street. I was pretty disappointed. I thought that the Village would be like a real village. Like my vision of Europe.

I remember putting on sun tan oil and having the sun go away.

I remember Dorothy Kilgallen's face.

I remember treader pants.

I remember a baby blue matching skirt and sweater that Suzy Barnes always wore. She was interested in science. All over her walls were advertising matchbook covers hanging on rolls of string. She had a great stamp collection too. Her mother and father were both over six feet tall. They belonged to a club for people over six feet tall only.

I remember doing other things with straws besides drinking through them.

I remember an ice cream parlour in Tulsa that had a thing called a pig's dinner. It was like a very big banana split in a wooden dish made to look like a pig's trough. If you ate it all they gave you a certificate saying that you ate it all.

I remember after people are gone thinking of things I should have said but didn't.

I remember how much rock and roll music can hurt. It can be so free and sexy when you are not.

I remember Royle Cochran. She lived in an attic and made long skinny people out of wax. She was married to a poet with only one arm until he died. He died, she said, from a pain in the arm that wasn't there.

I remember eating alone in restaurants a lot because of some sort of perverse pleasure I don't want to think about right now. (Because I still do it.)

I remember the first escalator in Tulsa. In a bank. I remember riding up and down it. And up and down it.

I remember drawing pictures in church on pledge envelopes and programmes.

I remember having a casual chat with God every night and usually falling asleep before I said, 'Amen.'

I remember the great girl-love of my life. We were both the same age but she was too old and I was too young. Her name was Marilyn Mounts. She had a small and somehow very vulnerable neck. It was a long thin neck, but soft. It looked like it would break very easily.

I remember Sen-Sen: little black squares that taste like soap.

I remember that little jerk you give just before you fall asleep. Like falling.

I remember when I won a scholarship to the Dayton, Ohio, Art Institute and I didn't like it but I didn't want to hurt their feelings by just quitting so I told them that my father was dying of cancer.

I remember in Dayton, Ohio, the art fair in the park where they made me take down all my naked self-portraits.

I remember a middle-aged lady who ran an antique shop in the Village. She asked me to come over and fix her bathroom late at night but she wouldn't say what was wrong with it. I said yes because saying no has always been difficult for me. But the night I was to go I just didn't go. The antique shop isn't there any more.

I remember how disappointing going to bed with one of the most beautiful boys I have ever seen was.

I remember jumping off the front porch head first on to the corner of a brick. I remember being able to see nothing but gushing red blood. This is one of the first things I remember. And I have a scar to prove it.

I remember white bread and tearing off the crust and rolling the middle part up into a ball and eating it.

Harry Potter & the Deathly Hallows, Part Two

by Sam Donsky

& then! Darker still. The ending was a
 boredom it would take years to discover.
Star Wars; *You & Me* by The Walkmen;
 'I Will Always Love You' by Whitney
 Houston: phenomena we could
 explain away by 'basically, the
 whole thing caught fire.' Pubescent
 hurrah, law of excluded middle:
 We're at the epilogue or we aren't.
 Later the police cars filled with kid
 stuff as we explained what went
 wrong. Lack of signal. Bad grammar.
 Cocaine. Snapped wand. (American
 poetry: 'You get what you pay for'.)
 'However ugly you grow,' Hermione
 texts Ron, 'you will always be handsome
 compared to literature.' It wasn't the
 compliment we had in mind. Urban
 spark, *Comète Fatale*: What remained
 was a magic from which it took spells
 to recover. England qua England, qua
 Elton, qua Bond, qua Beatles, qua
 Shakespeare, qua Narnia's London:
 the novel as no motion until we
 were at absolute rest. 'However
 beautiful you grow,' Ron texts
 Hermione, 'you will always be ugly
 compared to cinema.' It wasn't the
 pickup line we had planned. Atlas
 of lost endings, *Comète Fatale*:
 Whitney Houston: 'I will always
 love you.' Dumbledore, epilogue:
 'Basically, the whole thing caught
 fire.' Sheer heat, sweetheart.
 We sleep amid our foreheads
 scarred from having to pretend.

Greece: An Octagonal Tour

Ο κανατάζόπουθέλεικολλάει τα χερούλια¹

John Oldale acts as guide

1

Chinese is one of only a handful of foreign languages that bases its name for Greece on Ελλάς (Hellas), the term the Greeks currently use in self-description. Until recently, however, Greeks referred to themselves just as frequently as ‘Romans’ in a lingering link back to the Byzantine Empire. It was the real Romans that popularized the name Graecus – and, hence, the ‘Gr’ stem in use in all other European languages (bar Norwegian). The word was probably taken from the name of one particular early Greek tribe that migrated west to Italy. Greek settlement in the other direction, around Ionia, the region along the eastern Asian shore of the Aegean, gave rise to the ‘Yun’ stem found in many Asian languages (such as the Turkish ‘Yunanistan’). Uniquely, though, Georgians know the Greeks simply as *berdzeni*, from the Georgian word for ‘wise’.

2

The Aegean Sea was known historically as ἀρχι – πέλαγος (*arkhi – pelagos*). meaning ‘Main Sea’. During the Middle Ages the sense shifted to the very many islands found within the Aegean, and by the sixteenth century the usage of ‘archipelago’ had extended to the modern sense of any assemblage of islands.

3

The Greek island groups are as follows:

Cyclades

‘Ring’ [of islands] (220, centred on the sacred island of Delos)

Dodecanese

‘Twelve Islands’ (more accurately 150, of which 26 are inhabited)

Heptanese

‘Seven Islands’ (the historical name for the Ionian Islands)

Sporades

‘Scattered’ [islands] (24, of which 4 are inhabited)

The Peloponnese, meaning ‘Island of Pelopas’, is technically the largest Greek island since the completion in 1893 of the sea-level Corinth Canal. As such, it has displaced Crete – formerly known in English as Candy.

4

Known in Greek as κεράτιον (*keration* – literally ‘little horns’), the long flat pods of the carob tree were one of the most important sweeteners of the Hellenic world. The tree’s seeds also found use as weights for measuring small items and, in this sense, they have given rise to the English word ‘carat’ – the standard unit of weight for diamonds and other gemstones (standardized since 1907 at 0.2 grams).

5

In post-classical Greek the word for ‘beauty’ (ὥραϊος, *horaios*) originally meant ‘timely’. The prevailing aesthetic was that appearance should match one’s age. Thus both a young girl and a dignified matron could qualify as having *horaios*, but never an older woman trying to recapture her youth, nor a teenager dressing like a dame.

6

According to Greek convention the length of time a woman should wear the black of mourning depends upon her relationship with the deceased:

Distant relative 40 days

Aunt or uncle 6 months

Mother-in-law or father-in-law 1 year

Parent or sibling 1–5 years

Son or daughter (while a child) 5+ years

Husband life or remarriage

These periods may be lengthened where death is at an unexpectedly young age or in an especially tragic manner. Cessation of mourning should not be undertaken abruptly. Dark brown or blue clothes must be worn for a transitional period before a normal wardrobe is resumed. A widow may remarry only after her former husband’s corpse has been exhumed. Under the rules of the Greek Orthodox Church this is forbidden until the longer of three years or full decomposition down to a skeleton.

7

Within the Greek Orthodox Church, Monday is a fast day in many monasteries: the day is set aside for the commemoration of angels, and monks aspire to lead an angelic life. All Greeks consider Tuesdays unlucky (as Constantinople fell on a Tuesday), and Tuesday, not Friday, the thirteenth is feared most greatly by the superstitious.

8

As knowledge of classical Greek faded among Europe’s medieval monks, passages of ancient texts in the language were frequently merely copied by the terse phrase ‘*Graecum est; non legitur*’ (‘It is Greek; it can’t be read’). Picked up by Shakespeare in *Julius Caesar*, the phrase became ‘it was Greek to me’, and the words have since been repeated ad infinitum down to the present. English is by no means the only language that finds the metaphor handy. Most others have something roughly equivalent, but details often vary. In Greece, for obvious reasons they prefer to say: ‘It seems to me Chinese.’

¹ ‘The potter places the handles wherever he wishes.’

Practically Unwatchable

Stephen Thompson feels the gaze of a new Greece

The Peloponnese region of Greece is generally considered to be one of the most beautiful parts of the country. Its capital, Patras, is not. Apart from a thriving international port and a street carnival that attracts thousands of visitors each year, the city has little to recommend it. The grid of narrow streets is clogged with traffic night and day, the exhaust fumes making it difficult to breathe and causing a smog of pollution dense enough to block out the sun; constantly overflowing rubbish bins give off an almost pestilential stench that can be escaped only by retreating into the surrounding hills; the rocky, litter-strewn beach is colonized by the homeless and plagued by stray cats; and everywhere you look there are office and apartment complexes as unprepossessing as anything in the former Eastern bloc countries. It's the sort of place people pass through en route to somewhere more aesthetically pleasing, and yet, in the spring of 2010, my girlfriend Daphne and I went to live there for six months. Our friends and family were baffled. Why move to Greece, a country on the brink of bankruptcy, and why Patras, which could only be described as a backwater? For us the decision had been straightforward. Among other reasons, we had chosen Greece because it's part of Daphne's heritage and she had always wanted to live there, and Patras because it's cheaper than Athens and only a three-hour ferry ride from Ithaca, where we planned to spend an additional six months.

Within a few weeks of being in the city, Daphne had found her feet. Outgoing and inquisitive and speaking the language like a native, she made friends everywhere she went and was determined, as she put it, 'to live every moment of this experience'. To go shopping with her at our local fruit and veg market was to witness someone totally at ease in her surroundings. The frantic gesticulations and noisy appeals of the vendors made her virtually giddy with excitement, whereas for me the experience was a regular and uncomfortable reminder of my 'otherness'. I felt

conspicuous in a way that made me consider, perhaps for the first time, how my parents must have felt when they arrived in Britain from Jamaica in the 1960s. The looks I got in Patras, less curious than hostile, made me furious. Whether I was sitting in an open-fronted café nursing a frappé or strolling across one of the city's many plazas, I was always conscious of being stared at. If Daphne and I were together, people would actually nudge each other and point and even snigger. I take no pride in saying this, but I hated the idea that I was being viewed in the same way as all the other black people in the city, the illegal African immigrants who existed on the fringes of Patras society, who skulked about the back streets with their heads down, mostly at night, like ghosts, too ashamed to show themselves during the day. I did not want to be identified with these people. I was from London. I hadn't come to Greece illegally. I did not eke out a living selling fake designer handbags and knock-off DVDs. I lived in a nice apartment, in a nice part of the city, not in a squalid, cramped, disused train carriage in a derelict rail depot. I did not rely on handouts to keep me fed and clothed and was not attempting, at every opportunity, to become a stowaway on passenger ships bound for Italy and other parts of Europe. When people saw me, they couldn't look beyond the colour of my skin, and after a while I found that I didn't care so much about how I was being perceived. A much greater concern, which had begun to prick away at my conscience, was my readiness to disassociate myself from the Africans.

In 2008 the Council of Europe held a three-day conference in Patras entitled 'Speak Out Against Racism: How to Report Discrimination in the Media'. The delegates consisted exclusively of journalists known for their sensitive reporting on issues relating to immigration. Every major news outlet in the world was represented, and Patras had been chosen for the conference because it holds the unwanted distinction of being the main gateway

into Europe for African immigrants. To illustrate this fact, the delegates were shown a series of grainy film recordings of half-dead black people – mostly men – drifting off the Greek coast in vessels that were scarcely more seaworthy than wicker baskets. Each film featured a variation on the same story: confronted by the Greek navy's gunships, a good many of the boat people simply dived into the sea, forcing the navy to rescue them and take them ashore. Without passports or any kind of identification documents, they were effectively stateless, and since they could not be repatriated, they were herded into open-air camps, given a little food and water and then abandoned.

Next to feature on the movie reel were the Afghanis. Though they arrive in Greece over land, via Turkey and Iran, their journey is no less hazardous for that. Smuggled into the country by profiteering people traffickers who cram them into trucks like cattle, many of them are robbed and beaten on the long, arduous journey and left to die in the middle of nowhere. Of those that do make it to Patras, a fair number are arrested and sent straight back to Afghanistan. The rest spend their days in and around the bustling port, where they keep a constant lookout for opportunities to sneak on to ships bound for Italy, and their nights in the ever-growing squatter camps on the outskirts of the city. Some even go through the hassle of seeking political asylum, not because they want to stay in Greece, but because it allows them to leave the country legally. They needn't bother, for though they claim, legitimately in many cases, to be fleeing persecution from the Taliban, the Greek authorities see them as economic migrants and are unwavering in that stance. The statistics speak for themselves. In 2007, of the 20,692 asylum applications submitted by Afghanis to the Greek Immigration Office, eight were approved.

After watching these horror films, the journalists were taken to see one of the Afghan squatter camps, the better to report on them. Daphne was one of those journalists. Two years after her first visit, and now no longer working as a journalist, she took me along to one of the camps to see if the situation had improved. It had worsened. There was still a complete lack of basic amenities,

the immigrants were still sleeping six and seven to a room, but the camp was now a sprawling, overcrowded shanty town consisting of dank, dark, windowless huts made from cardboard and rusty corrugated iron. We spoke to several of the squatters and none had the slightest compunction in denouncing the Greeks as a nation of racists. They wanted out of the country by any means necessary and almost all of them expressed a desire to go to the UK or, failing that, to one of the Scandinavian countries. Being French, Daphne was a little put out that her country was not viewed as an attractive option, that it had a reputation for being tough on immigrants. I, on the other hand, felt immensely proud to see that Britain was still regarded as a bastion of liberality and fair-mindedness: or, as one Greek man later told me, as a soft touch.

The day I met him, Emanuel looked as if he had been having a hard day at the office. Daphne and I were enjoying a milkshake at a terrace café near the port when he ambled up to our table, sweaty from the 40-degree heat, clutching a sports bag full of DVDs. This made me smile. He had seen me in the same café only a few days earlier and hadn't so much as nodded at me. Today, with Daphne sitting beside me, he clearly fancied his chances of making a sale. For him, it was a simple equation: white people had money, black people didn't. Had it been one of the other sellers, I'd have taken umbrage and sent him packing forthwith, but he had such a round, friendly face and approached us with so wide a grin that I couldn't, in all conscience, harden my heart against him. Instead of launching straight into his sales pitch, he began by asking where we were from and why we had come to Patras. He seemed genuinely surprised by what we told him. He'd had me down as an African – possibly from Nigeria, possibly based in Athens – who'd made good by snagging himself a local. Daphne and I had a little chuckle at that, but the subtext of Emanuel's remarks was a serious comment on the state of race relations in Greece. An African man who goes out with a Greek woman was considered, favourably it seemed, to be a social climber. Quite how the woman was seen, especially by the Greeks, was not something I chose to dwell on.

Emanuel was from Nigeria. When we met him he had been in Patras for more than three years. He hated the place, hated his life there, hated the Greeks. 'They treat us very badly, even though we do not go around begging, like the Gypsies, or rely on charity, like the Afghans. You see these' – he held up a fistful of DVDs – 'they allow me to feed my entire family back in Nigeria and I do not apologize for it.' He told us how the police were wont to assault him in the street and confiscate his goods, forcing him to make the expensive six-hour round trip to Athens to re-stock. So far he had always been able to finance the trips. He was very careful with the little money he earned, always making sure to put a little something aside each week for emergencies, but he said there were others in his position who were not as sensible and lived to pay the price. 'They are a bit like the Greeks. They think only of today. When the police come and take away their things, they starve. You have probably seen them, sitting together like orphans outside the supermarkets, hoping that someone will give them a little bit of work. It is pitiful. I would sooner go back to my country than live like this.' But he had no intention of going back to Nigeria. He harboured dreams of going to the UK, where he would set himself up then send for his wife and three children. In the meantime, he sent them money, photographs and increasingly hollow promises that they would all be reunited one day. When he'd finished speaking, I offered to buy a few of his DVDs, but he smiled, shook his head and said, 'These are not for you, my friend.' I thought he meant that the films were not to my taste, which would have been quite an assumption, but it turned out I was mistaken. Looking left and right to make sure he wasn't being overheard, he leaned in and whispered conspiratorially, 'Between you and me, the copies are so bad they are practically unwatchable.' I was so taken aback by his honesty, all I could say was, 'Thanks.' Daphne laughed and said, 'That explains why they're only three euros.' At that point Emanuel closed his sports bag, slung it over his shoulder, smiled at us and said, 'Have a nice day.' Moments later he was gone, weaving between the tables and chairs on his way out. As we watched him leave, Daphne and I remarked to

each other on how friendly he'd been. I had no way of knowing that the next time I saw him he'd refuse to speak to me.

The Greeks have always loved their football, but after their country caused a shock by winning Euro 2004, they became even more obsessed with the game. In the immediate aftermath of the championships, attendances for domestic matches soared, while all the satellite sports channels reported a marked increase in the number of people taking out subscriptions. Live football on TV became so popular that almost every café, bar and taverna installed a big-screen TV in order to attract extra customers. In Patras, if Daphne and I fancied a night out, we had to search long and hard to find a place that wasn't showing a match featuring either Olympiakos or Panathinaikos, the two giants of Greek football. When the World Cup began in June, we allowed ourselves to be swept up in the excitement of the tournament. Greece had qualified and the locals, with typical reticence, were looking forward to seeing how their team would perform. Daphne had nailed her colours firmly to the Hellenic mast, but kept one eye on the French team in the hope that they would be eliminated from the tournament as quickly as possible. When they failed to make it past the group stages, her judgement was blunt: 'Good. They're too arrogant.' I felt the same way about the England team, but I still wanted them to do well.

Greece versus Nigeria. To progress to the knockout stages, both teams needed to win. The locals had come out in force to watch the match. Not wanting to miss out on the excitement, Daphne and I turned up at our local café almost an hour early to make sure we got a table, and even then we could only get one with a side-on view of the TV screen. The café was on a pedestrian street lined with orange trees in full blossom, the scent of which was as heady as a perfumery. All along the pavement, knots of people were standing in front of hastily erected jumbo TVs. Daphne and I ordered our usual aperitif, ouzo, with nibbles. At an adjacent table sat an enormous middle-aged man with a couple of teenage boys who I presumed were his sons. Just as the game kicked off he leaned across and, directing his comment at me, said in perfect Eng-

lish, 'Your boys have no chance.' I shook my head in dismay. Daphne was mildly incensed. 'He's supporting Greece, actually.' The man flushed red and turned his attention to the game. A short while later, I sensed a presence behind me and looked over my shoulder to see a group of Africans standing under one of the orange trees, several of them draped in the Nigerian national flag. Some of the faces I recognized, others were new to me: all of them were staring at the TV. Not welcome in any of the cafés, they were forced to watch the game from the pavement. Though completely absorbed in the game, they had to be careful to contain their excitement for fear of giving offence to the Greek supporters. If the Nigerian team attacked, they would gasp and hold their breath in anticipation. If the Greeks attacked they would bite their lips or hold their heads or clasp their hands together as though in prayer. Any talking they did was in hushed tones and among themselves. Their behaviour was an object lesson in how to act in a hostile, alien environment. I felt desperately sorry for them, and had I not been with Daphne I may well have gone over and joined them.

Greece won the match. At the final whistle the street erupted into joyous celebration. Daphne and I hugged and cheered. Our fat neighbour, some way gone now on ouzo, shook my hand and mumbled something in Greek which Daphne translated as, 'We will go all the way.' I laughed. The man was delusional. I was about to say as much but then I remembered that no one had given Greece a chance back in 2004. Daphne's mother then called her from Paris to talk about the game. This gave me the opportunity to see what the Africans were doing, how they were taking the defeat. When I turned and saw Emanuel standing among them, I instinctively got up and started heading towards him, but no sooner had I left my chair than he started wagging his finger at me, forbidding me from approaching him. He had a face like thunder and was clearly unimpressed by my overt show of support for the Greeks. I felt the snub in the pit of my stomach. Not knowing where to put my face, I sat down again and waited for Daphne to finish talking with her mother. Presently the terrace began to empty. As they

were leaving, the fat man and his sons shook my hand in turn and said, 'Kalin-ichta.' Then, from the corner of my eye, I saw that the Africans were beginning to disperse and that several of them were watching me. This time I felt too guilty to look at them. Daphne continued to talk excitedly on her mobile, going over the game in minute detail, annoyingly ignorant of what was going on between me and the Africans. When at last she finished, I urged her to her feet and dragged her away from the café.

After five months in Patras, Daphne and I were settled and feeling good about how the move had gone. This was in stark contrast to how we felt when we first arrived. Yes there'd been excitement and a sense that we were embarking on an adventure, but there'd also been fear and trepidation. What if we didn't like Patras? Had we saved up enough money? Before moving to Greece, ours had been a long-distance relationship, conducted between Paris and Edinburgh: would proximity now come between us? Had I underestimated the height of the language barrier? Would Daphne buckle under the pressure of having to translate everything for me? And what of the things we were leaving behind: a regular income, friends and family, the comfortable and the familiar? How long would it be before we began to feel homesick? In one respect or another, at one time or another, we were affected by all of these things, and sometimes they assailed us all at once: but there was no doubt in our minds that the gains we made by moving to Greece far outweighed the losses. First and most important, we had time: time to get to know each other, time to talk, time to think, time to experience another culture, privileges we were keen to savour and extend. It depressed us to think about a return to our former lives, when we lived in different countries and had to make do with phone calls and emails and occasional, fleeting get-togethers. Daphne was loath to return to France, to a stressful existence of making ends meet while trying to establish herself as a writer, and I had no intention of going back to the UK when I had spent so many years dreaming of escaping its grey, spirit-killing shores; but we knew we couldn't stay in Greece for ever, we knew we had to find a place in the world where we could build a

life together that didn't involve us making too many self-sacrifices. But where exactly was this place, and what would we do once we got there – how would we live? In Patras we discussed all of these things while making sure not to rush into any decisions. Our adventure had barely begun and we didn't want to spoil it by grasping after the ungraspable. Next up for us, Ithaca. Beyond its blue, fabled horizons lay the future, our future, only we couldn't see it – we didn't want to see it.

The week before we left Patras was a stressful one. Not only did we have to sort out our accommodation on Ithaca from a distance, but also we couldn't think what to do with all our stuff. We had arrived in Patras with only a few items of clothing between us, but it hadn't taken us very long to start accumulating possessions, not all of which were necessary. As well as a king-sized bed, a table and two chairs and a two-seater sofa-bed (we had rented our apartment unfurnished) we had purchased a lot of pots and pans, cutlery and crockery, a whole wardrobe of linen, wine glasses, a kettle, a toaster, bedside lamps, a bookshelf, pedal bins, a vacuum cleaner, an electric fan, stacks of stationery, portable speakers and a printer. We didn't want to take any of it to Ithaca, but as we had to empty our flat we spent our final days in Patras trying to persuade our neighbours to accept them as gifts. More out of pity than necessity, they took what we offered them, but even then we had to leave the bed in the apartment as we couldn't find anyone who needed it. Ridding ourselves of possessions, even relatively new and expensive ones, was not as easy as we had supposed.

The day of our departure from Patras saw us in a state of excitement. We couldn't wait to leave. After months of intense heat we were desperate to get to Ithaca and spend the rest of the summer swimming in the Ionian. To make sure we didn't miss our ferry, we turned up at the port a full two hours early. We'd even had the foresight to book our passage the day before to avoid queueing at the ticket office. All we had to do now was wait. This we did in our favourite port-side café, which, we had come to discover, served the best ice-cream milkshakes in the city. We had lunch, hemmed

in all sides by our luggage, and by the time we'd finished our ferry was due to depart. Just as we were getting ready to leave, Emanuel entered the café. He was wearing a tight-fitting green T-shirt that showed off his muscular physique, and his dark oval face shone with perspiration. Weaving between the tables with his sports bag slung over his shoulder, he walked right up to us and said, 'You are going on a trip?' Daphne and I were a little embarrassed to see him. We had been talking about him only a few minutes earlier – slagging him off, truth be known – and now there he was standing in front of us. It was Daphne who answered his question. 'We're leaving.' He seemed genuinely sad. 'You mean you are never com-

ing back?' 'Oh no,' Daphne replied, 'we'll be back. Maybe in a month or so.' We had no plans to return to Patras. 'Yeah,' I said, 'we'll be back, for sure. And we hope to see you.' At that Emanuel smiled. 'I'll be here.' He then shook our hands, wished us good luck for the future, bid us farewell and left. There was hardly time to pay for our lunch before we had to gather up our suitcases. We made it onto our ferry with only a few minutes to spare.

Once our luggage had been stored, we went up on deck to see if we could spot Emanuel. There were several Africans milling about below on the busy quay, trying to sell their wares, but he was nowhere to be seen. On the other side of the high, wire-meshed railing that sepa-

rates the street from the disembarkation area, we saw at least two dozen Afghans, their faces pressed up against the railing, scrutinizing the gigantic ships in the harbour as they alternately disgorged and swallowed their cargo, human as well as vehicular. Our ferry rumbled to a start, sending a cloying smell of petrol and oil into the air that forced some of the more sensitive passengers below. Daphne and I remained on deck, not speaking, staring straight ahead as the ferry pulled slowly away from the shoreline and the city receded further and further into the distance. Finally, when we were well out at sea, and with the wind whipping our faces, we turned and faced the direction in which we were headed.

POEM

Sappho the Housewife

by Yiannis Doukas

She besieges her apartment from within
Aiming at a window with a view
Living among the potted plants on the veranda
She gets wound up around noon
Feeling forgotten and forlorn
Until at sunrise she calms down

She is conversing with infinity
Giving space to the absurd
And leaves her name behind
On parchments of a shopping list

She sinks into a weekend depression
Considering the rain and condominiums
With coffee and cigarettes and anything
That language cannot say or hair dye will hide
Looks to the meaning in the bracket between
Two items on the parchments of a shopping list

Like People Who Hadn't Laughed For Years

by *Christos Ikonomou*

Layoffs. There's something good about them. You get to know people. You go out, say, on the balcony for a smoke and someone says: Hey, you've heard the news? They sacked Lycos.¹ And you ask: Lycos who? The bad one? And they all turn and stare at you and then someone says: No, you jerk. Lycos the electrician. Tall guy, long hair. The one with the limp. And now you're trying to remember if you know who that Lycos is. But you can't – you don't remember him at all. Three hundred people work in here, how the hell are you supposed to know them all? So you keep your mouth shut, while they keep talking about Lycos like he's already dead. Nice guy. Hard-working guy. He had two kids and a mortgage and his wife got sacked, too, three months ago; she was working in a slop shop or a shoe store – something like that. And then someone'd say: Well, lately he was too careless. Talked too much, squabbling all the time. He had changed lately. He was paying no attention at all, even though he'd been warned. And then they stop talking, and one of them sighs and says: Damn it, it's still June and it's getting hot already, and another one says: Come September who knows how many of us will be here – who knows how many of us will be here then, smoking and chatting and sipping coffee. And then they dump their paper cups and put out their cigarettes and go back in their cages. And you're left all alone and you smoke another cigarette, watching the cars passing by and the birds flap around the wires. A dog sleeps in the shade of the mulberry tree. A woman comes out to the balcony across the street and shakes off out a tablecloth. On the sidewalk a kid passes on a bike, then an old man with a stick, and two girls in low-back tops and denim shorts, already tanned from the sun. You watch the world spinning, full of bustle, heartless and indifferent, and you say to yourself that, after all, life is good. And somewhere deep inside – or maybe not so deep – you feel glad that your name

isn't Lycos, you're not tall, you don't have long hair and a limp, and your wife wasn't fired from a shop that sells clothes or shoes. And then you take a deep breath and put out the cigarette and go back to work. And you decide to do everything in your power so you never find yourself in the position of Lycos. You decide that, after all, in a world full of wolves, you'd better be a sheep than a wolf. A lame wolf.

And then, the next afternoon or the afternoon after that, Lycos comes back to pick up his stuff and say goodbye. And it happens that you're out on the balcony again and someone says: Hey, that's Lycos. That's the guy who got sacked yesterday.

And you look at the man who climbs the stairs slowly and you say: That's him? This is Lycos? But I know him.

And then you remember that snowy night last January – or maybe it was February. You remember you had stayed late at work again and when you went down to the parking lot you found your car covered in snow – eight or ten inches of it. And you stood there in the freezing cold, staring at the untouched sheet that sparkled in the twilight, and you hated yourself for having to spoil it. But you had to do it. You had to clean the snow off the car and get inside and start the engine and leave – you were so tired and wanted to go home to eat, to get warm, to watch TV, to forget, to fall asleep, to fall into a heavy, dreamless sleep, watching TV. So you started cleaning the snow off the windshield, but your hands were naked and quickly they froze. And you stood helpless in the cold, rubbing your frozen hands, feeling your heart go numb with despair, until you saw someone coming over – a tall guy with a cap, scarf and gloves. And he asked: What's going on, pal? You told him that, so he went to his car and opened the trunk and took out a dustpan and told you to start your car and set the heat blowing on the windshield – not the air conditioning, just the heat. Then he bent over the windshield and began to wipe the snow off with

quick, sharp movements. Then he cleaned the side and rear windows. And you, sitting into the car, enjoying the warmth, watched him working silent and solemn, his breath steaming out of his mouth; and you wondered who that guy was and why he'd bothered to help a stranger, a wuss like you. When he finished he lifted the wipers off the windshield and rubbed the hardened snow. Then he nodded – all set – and told you to be careful on the road and waved his hand and left. You didn't even have the chance to thank him, because his kindness made you feel more numb than the cold. And on the way home you kept thinking about him and wondered. And then, as soon as you got there, you forgot all about it, just like you forgot so many things, so many people in your life.

And now, as you're watching him climb the stairs slowly, dragging his foot on each step, you realize that on that snowy night you didn't even notice he has a limp. You realize now that you let a lame man clean the snow off your car, without even thanking him. And you wonder if you should go down and tell him something. Remind him what happened that night and thank him, even now, so many months later, even if you don't know what his name is –

Yannis, Kostas, Nikos, Takis.

That's what you're thinking you should do. But you won't do anything. You won't go down, you won't go talk to him.

What's to say?

So, you stay on the balcony and light a cigarette and, after a while, you see him coming out with a large box in his hands. He stops on the landing and takes a look around like he doesn't know where to go. And then he turns around and stares at the huge building that stands in front of him; and you take a glimpse of his face and suddenly you shiver. It's snow-white. Never before have you seen someone with a face so white. You shiver again. And then you throw away your cigarette and go running down the stairs – you won't wait for the elevator – and

¹ Lycos means 'wolf'. It's not an uncommon surname in Greece.

catch up with him the moment he puts the box into the trunk. While you try to catch your breath, you talk to him about that night. Do you remember? you ask him. Remember that night in the snow? Do you still have the dustpan? Not that we need it now, of course. It's June now, right? But then you never know what might happen in this goddamn place. Right?

Such stupid things you say and he's standing there, looking puzzled, rubbing his hands that have gone red and swollen from carrying the box. But his face is still white. White like a blank sheet of paper. And his mouth, a black pencil mark.

Yeah, he says after a while. He nods. I remember now. The blue Nissan.

Black, you say. It's black.

He stares at you for a moment, like he's trying to understand if you are dumber than it seems you are. And then he says: Okay, see you around – and he shuts the trunk and goes inside the car.

Then you get this crazy idea.

Hey, how about a ride to Piraeus? you ask him. Drinks on me. You know, for the dustpan and all.

Well, most likely, he'll say no. The man has just lost his job, for Christ's sake – he has important things to think about, important decisions to make. He won't go fooling around with a guy who doesn't even know his name.

But maybe he'll say yes. Yes. Maybe he'll say yes.

And then you get another idea, even more crazy.

Wait here, you tell him, will you? I'll be back in ten minutes. Okay?

You get into your car and speed away, without even caring that you've left everything loose in the office and everyone will wonder where the hell you've gone.

At home you load the cooler with ice and stuff in it two bottles of tsipouro with anise, some bread, cheese and tomatoes, whatever you find. On the way back your heart beats like crazy because you're afraid that Lycos has already gone. But he's still there, sitting on the hood of his car and smoking, his face white.

Come on in, you tell him. We're off.

On the way to Piraeus you have a little talk with him. And while you're talking, you watch him out of the corner of your eye and keep thinking of reaching out and pinching his cheeks to make him blush a little. When you get there, you go down the rocky beach beneath the Cross and sit by the sea. And then you take the bottle and everything else out of the cooler.

While drinking and eating, you watch as the pallor fades from his face. Now he talks about the past. He says that in school everybody teased him for his name. Here comes the wolf, they'd say, and they

kneeled down and lifted up their heads and howled.

That's how I met my wife too, he says. At a Halloween party. She was dressed up as Little Red Riding Hood. He stares at you for a moment and then he starts laughing. You laugh too. You laugh together, loudly, for a good while. You laugh like people who haven't laughed for years.

And then, just as you've opened the second bottle, he asks you to tell a story too.

Tell me a story, he says. I want to hear a story with a happy ending.

You light a cigarette and let the smoke stream out of your mouth, holding the glass in your hand, listening to the ice rattling. And you're thinking of telling him that no story has an end, sad or happy.

But you don't want to upset him. So you keep quiet for a while. You smell the sea breeze, listening to the waves crashing against the rocks. You stare at the black sea, watching the lights of the ships flickering in the dark. And then you take a deep breath and start talking:

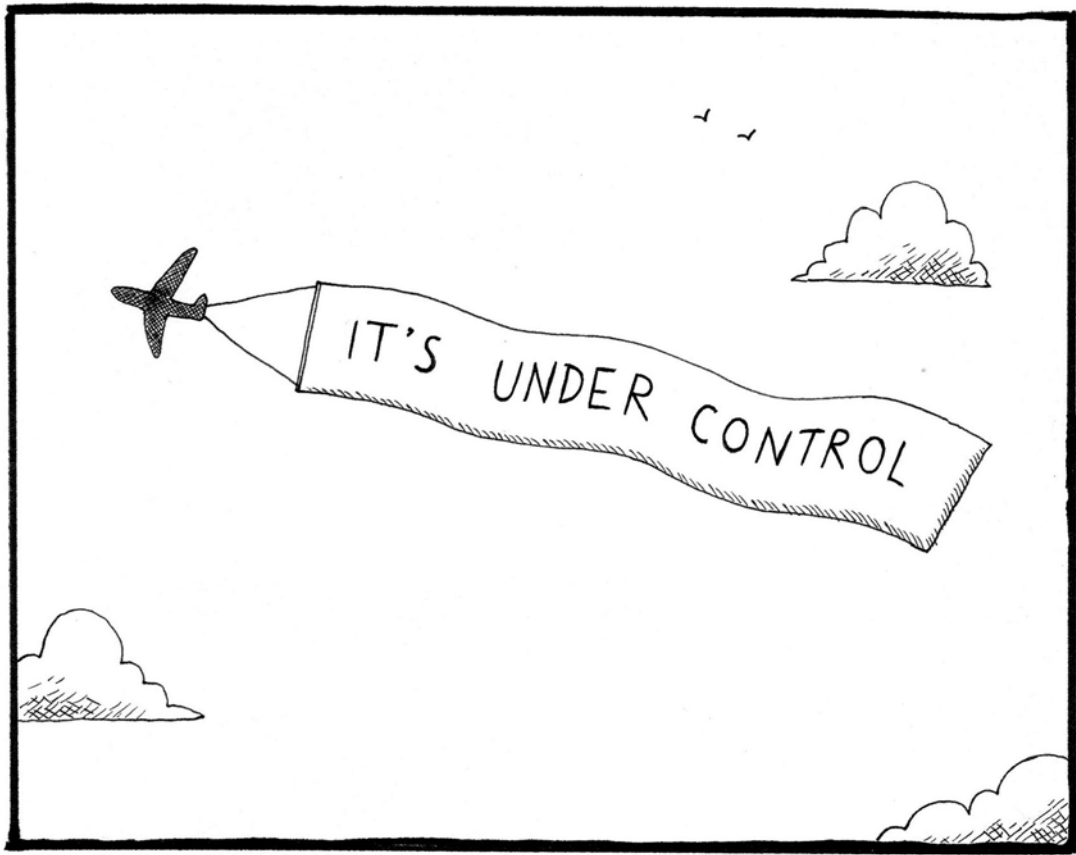
Layoffs. There's something good about them. You get to know people. You go out, say, on the balcony for a smoke and someone says: Hey, you've heard the news? They sacked Lycos ...

TRANSLATED BY THE AUTHOR

Things Simmering

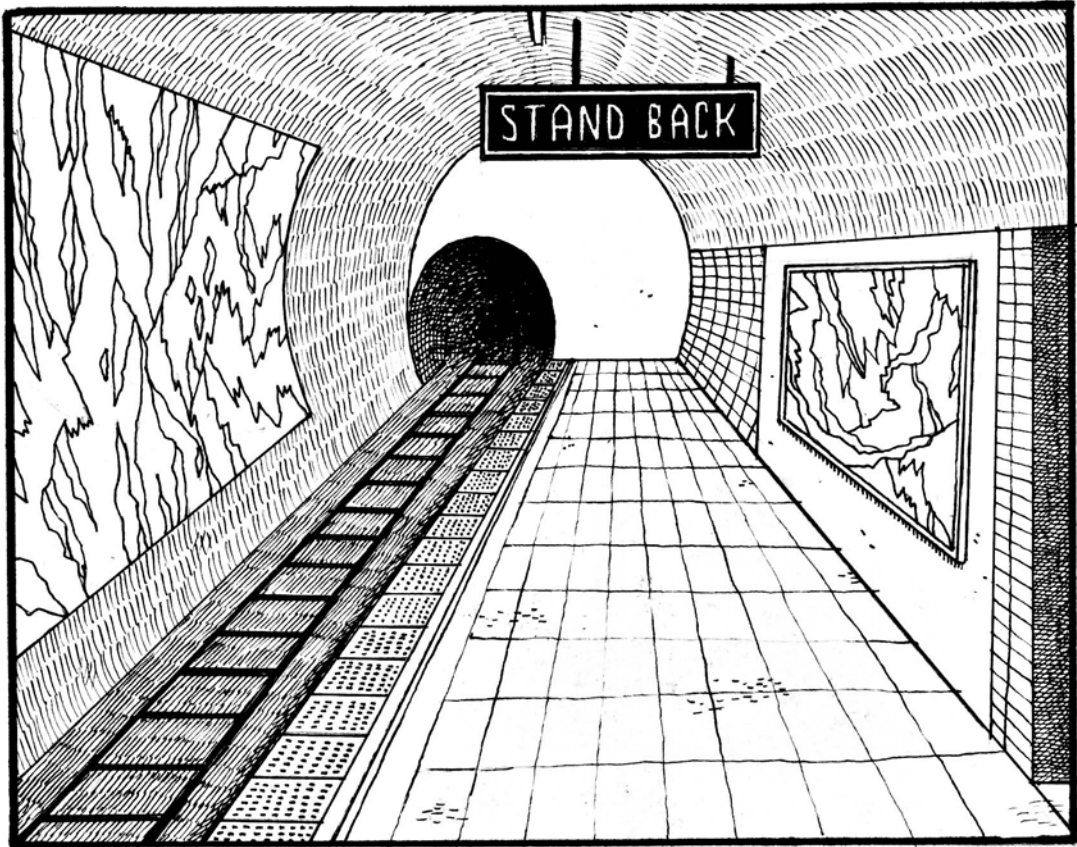
a series by Thomas Smith











The Psalm

by *Christos Asteriou*

It was during the Feast of the Dormition that I saw my uncle Anastasis, alive and breathing, three months after his death. Dressed in a blazing white linen suit, he stood on the pier, watching without expression the procession of the holy icon as it passed through the narrow streets of the island. His skin, untouched by decay, was lit with a dull yellow, which had remained with him ever since the day we buried him with our bare hands in the village cemetery, since no priest would agree to bless the ‘accursed one’ on this final journey, and neither of the two gravediggers would dig a hole for the man. Even though I was still in school, I knew that uncle Anastasis had not really died since I could see his body making small, imperceptible movements as we lowered him into the ground, covered in a shroud. (He would breathe out from his nostrils or roll his eyes under his shut eyelids). I was thus convinced that, despite the doctor’s pronouncement, he was still alive. So I was equally convinced he would return some day.

Before I managed to make my way through the crowds to reach him, his white suit blended with the foaming waves that broke on the pier, carried by the August gales. I felt vertiginous. I left the procession and stood motionless, staring at the sea. Anastasis, my mother’s half-brother, an immigrant for most of his life, first came to the island when he found out about my illness. I truly savoured the gesture, even though until that point I did not know him, since his wanderings never brought him to our part of the world. From the moment he walked into my room for the first time – a man of milky complexion, dressed from head to toe in white – my life changed completely. He spoke his mind, and chastized my mother for having constrained me to my bed for so many months. And when she told him of the strange sickness that drained the life out of me day after day, leaving me weak and unable to move a feeble limb, he placed his palm on my forehead and said that this was all doc-

tors’ trickery and told me I had better get ready to go for a walk around the island he so missed.

When the salty wind hit my face – so long after my last outing – the delirium brought on by my fever was instantly supplanted by euphoria, as if an invisible serum had suddenly replaced all the youthful humours that my illness had sucked out of my body. We started walking on the path that led to Piso Livadi (Back Ley) and after an hour or so we reached the seashore. I greedily inhaled the colours of the evening, and even dared to jump into the cold waters of the May sea. Standing next to my unexpected visitor, I felt a premonition that something wonderful was about to happen, or at least something was going to change.

From that day on, Uncle Anastasis became my constant companion, and proved himself capable of unique skills. He managed to chase away the enormous animals from my sleep (sea elephants with unfathomably large tusks that rumbled through my head), as well as the colossal wooden shapes (sometimes they were cubes and sometimes triangles. – I never exactly understood) that during the night landed with a thundering crash on my bed, or near my bed.

In their place he brought Aphrodite. My uncle’s greatest attribute was that he knew everything about girls: what they thought; what they were made of; what they wanted to hear. So it did not take me long to conquer – under his guidance – my beautiful classmate whom I had never managed to approach for all these years. For the first time I could see everything from above. I began small and lost my moorings, floating over beehives and dove cotes and canyons, glancing orchards and fishing boats from a great height. Uncle Anastasis insisted that we should not be afraid of flying and, as it turned out, he was not wrong.

From time to time I opened my eyes in the small room. Amongst other things, I could see the faded photographs of my grandfathers on the wall, placed inside

simple, wooden frames and the crucifix hanging above my head. Nothing of what I saw was real, since now I knew reality kept unfolding only in the vistas my eyes could not reach. Underneath my bed, I was sure, ran antelopes with foam dripping from their mouths, chased by lions that never could capture them. Sometimes, the rumble of the chase reached my ears together with a few grains of sand. Inside my wooden closet fought two sunburnt, one-eyed pirates, drenched in sweat; underneath my pillow sublime dark bodies found one another in loving embrace. Whereupon my uncle reappeared.

For a long time a rumour went around the island that uncle Anastasis was not an ordinary man. His bright, white appearance and his behaviour provoked the islanders’ suspicions. This rumour was soon amplified by certain miracles he performed, which remained unexplained to many. Once, I remember, he leaned over the dried up well outside the town hall, whispering, and suddenly a torrent of water bubbled up from its stony entrails, flooding the laurels of the town’s square, which had not been watered by rain or man for more than a year. Another time he raised straight the ancient olive trees in our field, whose tips, after years of being whipped by fierce winds, nearly crawled on the ground.

Within a few weeks his presence was clearly unwanted in the small community of our island and he himself never made another public appearance, bearing the mark of the ‘accursed one’. He was content visiting me every day to oversee my pubescent life, without following me, at least not outright, in my expeditions. His death, which my mother announced to me one morning, was something that I never accepted and despite the fact I participated in his entombment (since there was never a service at church), I was convinced I would see him again. His absence lasted three months, during which my health began to deteriorate steadily, and I started waking up ill even more often. On the day of the Feast of Dormition, I was meant to see him again.

The procession wound around the main town of the island and the people had started gathering on the cobblestoned square, when, suddenly, the light of the day started dimmed. A darkness

fell on us so thick that a few minutes later, even the sea was concealed from my eyes and. I could only hear its churn and wash. The crowd of the churchgoers (amongst which I discerned my mother and some friends with great difficulty), with candles in their hands, started approaching, circling my low bed that creaked with the slightest movement. I grabbed a candle and opened my eyes as wide as I could. In front of everyone, the

golden figure of the priest was no longer holding the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary, but Aphrodite's lifeless body, from whose hair fat droplets of black water dripped and dripped. Behind the priest stood uncle Anastasis, walking amongst the crowd, extinguishing candle after candle with his fingers, drowning everything into darkness.

I was alone, listening to the breath of the people around me. Before long, the

sea, tumultuous, started to flood my little room, dragging along with it everything that met its powerful ascension. As the water covered my body, I moved with it, faster and faster, abandoning myself to its rage, trapped inside the anxiety of drowning, and it was then I heard a familiar, resurrectory psalm rising from the obscure depths.

TRANSLATION: THEMELIS GLYNATSI

POEM

Variations on Anne

On translating Anne Carson's 'The Beauty of the Husband' into Modern Greek. By Eftychia Panayiotou

If the poem is an enigma.
If the poem does not offer a solution.
If the solution does exist and someone calls out that you must find it.
If that someone is you (the reader) but you do not have the key.
If the key exists and someone calls out that you must seek it.
If seeking it means that you must observe the man next to you.
If the man next to you is in fact your husband and you ask him: where is the key?
If your husband replies along the lines that it is *you* who have the key.
If the question 'where is the key' triggers an upheaval.
If the upheaval leads to the poem losing control.
If the poem turns into a dialogue (somewhat liquid).
If in the dialogue 'all is liquefied' and you become the man, and he the woman.
If you feign to be someone you are not.
If he who you are feigning to be is a fictional hero.
If that hero has the key.
If you ask him for the key and he answers that it is *you* who have the key.
If he is you.
If you must choose, you will choose to be a woman.
If he must choose, he will choose to be a man (though not a husband).
If you are a woman (then surely he'll never see you as wife).
If he can choose, he will surely choose mistress (but where then is the wife?).
If dialogue demands roles, then you are the killer, I am the victim.
If he has given the key to the wrong woman.
If he says something witty, such as 'Desire doubled is love and love doubled is madness.'
If she replies even more brilliantly: 'Madness doubled is marriage.'
If love compels marriage. If marriage expels love.
If our being men and women in a poem with dialogue seeking a key represents an enigma linked to marriage.
If seeking the enigma means you will shed many tears.
If the poem tells you: 'It's a gap in a series, the series is you.'
If shedding and shedding tears means that the poem is here and you feel it.
If it is not just a matter of feeling the poem but also of fathoming it, you must delve deeper.
If delving deeper means deciphering words.
If deciphering words is a metaphysical endeavour.
If as Aristotle says: Poetry is ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, that which is ever elusive, that which is ever perplexing.
If you seek an enigma called 'poem' you must delay marriage, which is itself an enigma.
If the poem is in a foreign language, how will you speak the words?
If in Greek the word 'an' (conditional conjunction) also means Anne (name), then the poet is present and is speaking to you.

Translated from the Modern Greek by Peter Constantine

An Afternoon Outing

by Panos Karnezis

The lake was a large reservoir serving the capital some distance away. There were firs and pines on its banks and steep slopes that ascended towards a public road tracing the rim of the stone dam, which was built in an arch like the seats of an ancient amphitheatre. On the side of the road, commanding a splendid view of emerald placid waters and dense forests, was a small coffee shop. A few iron tables and some chairs were set on the gravel under the sun, while under the eaves of the tiled roof, in the shadow, hung a cage with a pair of canaries. It was a quiet afternoon. Very rarely a car drove down the public road. When it did it passed the sharp bends slowly, crossed the narrow rim of the dam and disappeared in the darkness of the trees on the other side. The birds chirped and sometimes the cicadas joined in, but the canaries in the cage always slept, balancing their bodies side to side on a little plastic swing. There were only two people in the coffee shop at that time. They were sitting on the same side of a table on the gravel in front of the shop itself, as far away from the adobe building as possible.

‘Have you made up your mind?’ the man asked.

The boy raised the price list. It was a laminated piece of faded card soiled with dried coffee rings. The coffee markings were like rubber-stamp impressions on some official document.

‘Orange,’ he replied.

The man nodded and snapped his fingers. The waiter appeared at the door of the coffee shop and looked at the raised arm. Then he went back inside. The man lowered his arm and elbowed the boy.

‘You can have beer,’ he said, and winked. ‘I promise not to tell.’

‘Orange,’ the boy repeated.

The afternoon heat had begun to silence the birds, but the buzzing of the cicadas increased: it sounded like a repeated telegraph broadcast. The shad-

ows of the two people, of their chairs and of the table in front of them, stretched out on the gravel and fell off the edge of the precipice descending towards the reservoir.

‘Go on,’ the man said. ‘Have a beer. At your age I used to drink a grown man under the table.’

He had a thick growth of dark curly hair that had begun to turn grey down the sides, a long straight nose, narrow lips, and the absolute determination of one intending to be a decorated veteran of life rather than another of its casualties.

‘Is it because of your mother?’ he asked. ‘She would smell it.’

The man gave the boy the side look of



an accomplice and grinned.

‘Boy, oh boy.’

‘Orange juice,’ the boy said.

A loud sizzling came from inside the coffee shop and soon the smell of fat reached the noses of the two afternoon customers. The man licked his lips and remembered he had had nothing to eat

all day.

‘How old are you?’ he asked. He wore a shirt with short sleeves, a pair of immaculately pressed linen trousers and newly bought espadrilles. A sharp crease ran down each trouser leg: it was the latest trend in fashion.

The sizzling abated and a radio went on inside the coffee shop. After a careful search its needle came to rest over a sponsored broadcast of popular songs. The cicadas stopped to listen to the music. The quiet afternoon was not so quiet any more but not noisy either – it was as noisy as lying next to a sleeping partner who snores a little. The man noticed a stain on his shoe. He immediately placed his foot on the strut of the table and began to rub the dust with his thumb.

‘Sixteen,’ the boy answered.

The waiter now arrived with the tray under his arm. He was not much older than the boy, but his few years of employment had already set his young face in an expression of universal indifference. The man gave their order and the waiter nodded and walked slowly back to the coffee shop, rapping on the tin tray and whistling the tune that played at that moment on the radio. The man watched him return inside the adobe building.

‘Sixteen,’ he echoed. ‘Yes. Of course.’

He went back to rubbing his espadrille until the stain was gone and the fabric was neat and white again. After giving it a final inspection, he reluctantly placed his foot on the gravel again. The surface of the reservoir was as flat as a metallic sheet and shone in the sun. Some seagulls arrived and circled the reservoir and screeched and sat on the shining surface. The boy began to rock in his chair. Slowly its iron legs sank deeper into the gravel. He was dressed in a shirt of some premier-league football team and an old pair of jeans. His elbows were chafed and his hands rough. His skin had a copper tint. It was the colour of someone who spends time in the sun – not a sun-bather; more like a builder or an athlete.

A hot wind blew and the tree branches shook. The pine needles fluttered like ornamental tassels and let out a hissing sound. The waiter returned with a bottle of orangeade and a large coffee on his

tray. He placed both on the table, tucked the tray under his arm and fished a brass opener from his pocket.

'We asked for orange *juice*,' the man said.

The waiter shrugged.

'We only sell bottled.'

The man picked up the laminated card on the table.

'It says it here.' He put his finger on the list and read out: '*Orange juice*.'

'That's old. The business now operates under new management.'

'This is fine,' said the boy.

'You should update the price list,' the man said.

'I like orangeade,' said the boy.

The waiter looked at the boy and nodded respectfully. He put the opener on the bottle on the table, and took off the cap using only one hand. He threw the cap to the gravel, pulled a plastic straw from his pocket and left that on the table too.

'Want anything to eat?' the man asked. 'Are you hungry?'

The boy shook his head.

'But it's lunchtime,' the man said.

The boy put the straw in the bottle and began to suck the orangeade.

'Does the new management toast bread?' the man asked.

'Egg mayonnaise or ham and cheese?'

'Cheese and ham.'

The waiter tapped his fingers on the tray and turned to leave.

'Bring two,' the man called after him.

A moment later he was eating the toasted sandwich. He ate with great appetite, interrupting his chewing only to sip coffee. He had finished when he looked up from his plate and saw that the boy had not touched his food. He was about to say something when he saw a snake cross the road. He jumped off his chair.

'Did you see that?' he asked. 'Did you see?'

The boy turned his head slowly, with his lips still on the straw in his bottle.

'Did you see the snake?'

'There is nothing.'

The man pointed to a thorny shrub on the edge of the dusty asphalt.

'An adder,' he said. 'Big one. Grey. I saw the stripes.'

'I didn't see it.'

'Wait.'

They waited for several seconds but nothing happened. The boy drank his orangeade while the man held his breath and watched. Finally he sat down again.

'It was there,' he said.

The road was empty and silent. It traversed the hills and the forest like the bed of a dried-up river that once sprung from a secret cleft in the mountains and moved downwards, always downwards, eroding the ancient rock, carving out little valleys and shallow gorges or simply slipping over the polished stone, slowing down at a flatland, speeding up at a rapid, carrying away wood and gravel, meandering like an endless snake.

'It is venomous,' said the man. 'But it rarely bites.'

An engine was heard and a moment later a small car drove past the small coffee shop and headed in the direction of the dam. As soon as it came to the narrow part of the road that ran across the rim of the dam, it stopped. Only one car could drive across the dam at a time. A stoplight at either end of the dam directed the traffic. When the light turned green the car started and drove until it reached the middle. There it stopped again and this time the driver switched off the engine. A young couple jumped out. For a while they took in the view before they began to take photographs. From the coffee shop, some distance away, the man and the boy watched in silence. The couple talked and laughed and posed for each other, then set the camera on the roof of their small car and embraced. They turned quiet and kissed for a long time.

'How are you doing at school?' the man asked.

'Fine.'

'Do well and you can go to university. Do you want to?'

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

'Engineering is a good degree,' said the man.

Another car came to the opposite end of the dam and started sounding its horn. The couple stopped kissing and laughed. They waved at the other car, took the camera from the roof of theirs and jumped in. The small car drove off and the other one crossed the dam. It did not stop. It drove to the other side, past the coffee shop and down the hairpins that descended the hill. Far away were the sea and the faint outline of an island.

The view from the coffee shop was truly majestic.

'As an engineer you could work in a factory,' said the man.

The air smelled of petrol. When the music ended on the radio inside the coffee shop and the commercials started, someone turned it off. The cicadas began again then. The hot wind was still blowing and the man found his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He looked at the soaked square cloth with misery, folded it in two and put it back in his pocket. Then he had a quick glance at his watch.

'There is some shiftwork if you work in a factory, but nothing like being ... a doctor, let's say,' he said.

The boy was finishing his drink. His toasted sandwich was still on his plate, untried. The bread was burned round the edges and the melted cheese had trickled out into yellow brittle tongues. The man looked at it: he was still hungry.

'But if you don't like maths, you could always study law.'

The road was empty, the air clear and silent apart from the cicadas, and in the reservoir the water still reflected the sun when the canaries woke up and immediately began to chirp. The waiter walked out of the shop and filled their bottle with water and their cup with seed. The man at the table checked his watch again and sat up in his chair.

'Your mother will be waiting,' he said.

While the boy sucked the last of his drink the man arched back his spine, stretched his shoulders and sighed. A line ran along the length of the steep banks of the reservoir, where the water had been all winter. But the summer drought had long started and every week now the level dropped a little, exposing tall stems of reeds and thick beds of mud, where worms and frogs and beetles buried themselves.

'Let's do something again soon,' the man said. 'Is Sunday fine?'

'I have football.'

The man nodded.

'Fine. Some other day; I will talk to your mother.'

He snapped his finger and found his wallet. When the waiter came he opened it. Then he hesitated.

'You want another orangeade before we go?'

'I'll have a beer,' the boy said.

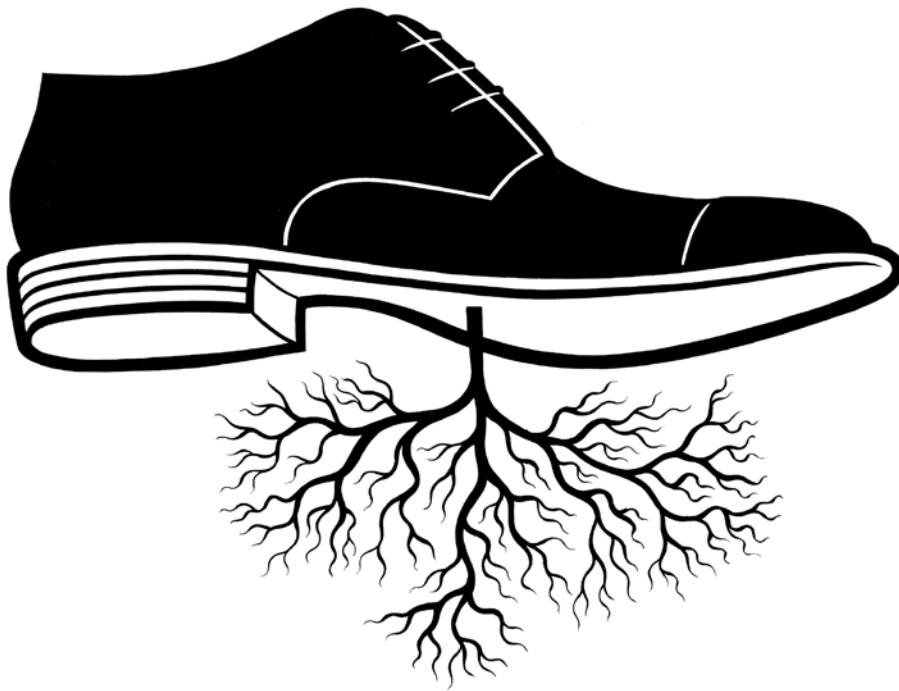
Year of the Rabbit

by Sam Riviere

there is no purer form of advertising
than writing a poem
that's what the monk told me
if I were a conceptual artist
I would make high-budget trailers
of john updike novels but no actual movie
the scene where angstrom drives towards
the end of his life down a street in the suburbs
lined with a type of tree he's never bothered
to identify and laden with white blossoms
reflecting slickly in the windscreen
I would fade in the music
as the old song was fading out
keeping the backing vocals at the same distance
kind of balancing the silence
the word RABBIT appears in 10 foot trebuchet

LET US GET SOME ACTION FROM...

The Back Section



This Particular Back Section May Include The Following Elements:

- The Best Bit
- Food and Drink
- On Something
- Five Minutes to Midnight
- I Knew Nothing
- The Serial

The Lewisham Madeleine

Tony T., age twenty-four, on Swann's Way

The best bit? Gotta be the madeleine, right? Shit's classic. Shit's *instant* classic. It lasts, you know what I'm saying? You be reading the Proust, be in it, reading that *Swann's Way*, up and down the page, and all of a sudden, what? It's like there's the madeleine, the pastry, for real. There's that bit you been hearing about all over. You go to read Proust and you're hearing all about this thing, this pastry, and the memories and the link up of the memories and all that. It's right on a page near the beginning. You're like: Proust, are you fucking with me? You know? You're like: Are you serious, Proust? This is your massive track and you're going to put it this close to the start of the set? That is mad. Man, Proust, you got all that business to go, all that *Sodom*, all that *Young Girls and Flowers*, all the rest of five books, and you've already got your man eating his

pastry, right up at the front? Madeleine.

I got a teacher, don't I, who helps with English sometimes – not full time, sometimes – and we had to do a mad assignment about something that takes us back. I love that. Takes us back to the past and I was like DJ 4G takes me right back to last summer, not even last summer, but last August, not even that but about 3 a.m. on 12 August. For real: pinpoint. And my teacher said: now think if there's a taste or smell linked to a memory that takes you back, and I was like: I'm not going to smell my way back into the past, man.

So that's how we got to all this Proust and that. My teacher says he is the king of it, king of the memories. Cause my teacher mentioned Proust and he was like: Ooh no, it's too complicated, it's all Proust this, Proust that. Too complicated. Don't I own a membership to Lewisham

Library? Head down there and just Proust it up, you know. Reserved that first book, that *Swann's Way*, online, go in, get some Proust, read some Proust, gain some knowledge on Proust and learn his ways, sitting on the library chairs, gaining some knowledge.

I write about memories and how they're linked and how you don't really have a choice. Like if I had a choice I wouldn't make Monster Munch my madeleine but it just is because that's what I was eating just day in, day out, when I was a child, knowing nothing the whole time, properly ignorant, small, and now my memories of sunny Lewisham days and that are linked up to Monster Munch so even if someone opens up a bag near me, man, I am prousting then. Just full on. That shit doesn't take me back, it's like crash, I'm back, I'm small. That is the best bit of that book for sure, 100 per cent. I didn't get too far. I got turnover, you know, I got other books on my list. I'm coming back to Proust at some point. I could come back and rock Proust straight down the line. It's rich, man, it's pastry. That shit is pastry.

FOOD & DRINK

The Apples of Zuccotti

Laura Gottesdiener surveys the Occupied cuisine

Perhaps it's fitting that much of the recent unrest in the United States can be blamed squarely on the apple. Occupy Wall Street began in late September 2011, and if there's one ingredient celebrated above all others in the autumnal cuisine of the Northeast seaboard, it is the hand-picked McIntosh apple. So as New Yorkers began noticing the protest downtown, apples arrived – first in half-peck plastic bags slung over the shoulders of curious Manhattanites, then in bushels and crates delivered by the truck load.

'Did you really drive all this way just to see us?' the protesters asked, staring at the cars' out-of-state licence plates as their owners hauled the barrels into the park. The visitors smiled sheepishly, mumbling something about bank bailouts and apple

boughs. By mid October, the fruit – like the movement – had taken on a life of its own. Overflowing from their cardboard confines, Galas and Honeycrisps rolled across Zuccotti Park and occupations spread from city to city as if sown by an itinerant Johnny Appleseed.

From the first peanut-butter-sticky evening of 17 September, the occupation provided food for its participants. Initially, the culinary operation was humble. Meals consisted of whatever could be salvaged from local dumpsters, washed down with watery coffee purchased – in solidarity, protesters insisted – from Egyptian-owned food carts. But the onslaught of apples – not to mention the potatoes, carrots, herbs, eggplants, fresh bread and pounds of dried pasta cara-

vanned down Interstate 95 by a newly formed network of anti-corporate farmers – instilled in the camp a new sense of urgency. Soon, nearby residents and community centres opened their kitchens, and dinner transformed into steamed vegetables, home-cooked casseroles and vegan lasagnes. Dessert featured, without fail, some type of apple concoction. The most celebrated of all was the apple crisp. Canada Bill, a hobbit-sized man who worked as one of Occupy's half-dozen chefs, was the master of this dish. Despite its simplicity, few attempted to replicate his recipe. The base, of course, was dozens of peeled apples, sliced and roasted with a generous dusting of cinnamon sugar. He cooked them until they caramelized, then added heaping cups of granola, which he made from scratch by combining oats, nuts, flour and cinnamon. The secret was that Canada Bill roasted the apples to succulence without adding even a tab of butter – perhaps to accommodate the vegans, or perhaps out of a general concern for the community's health. In early October, *The New York Times'* dining section ran an

article entitled ‘Want to Get Fat on Wall Street? Try Protesting’. The piece quoted a laid-off garbage collector who had gained five pounds in his first two weeks at the occupation. I can testify – from unfortunate personal experience – that a measly five pounds was not the worst weight gain experienced.

Canada Bill’s frequent crisps barely made a dent in the growing apple collection, which increasingly became the evidence of the protesters’ community support, the manifestation of their grassroots base. The apples were the hearts and minds. All social movements receive some form of vital material help from their more passive supporters. Sometimes it’s guns. Other times it’s money or infrequent marchers. During the Montgomery bus boycotts in 1955, middle-class African Americans donated their cars. In late October 2011, a full 59 per cent of Americans polled agreed with the spreading anti-corporate movement, but the vast majority never attended a rally, took up arms or even withdrew their savings from Wall Street’s banks. Instead, they delivered more apples.

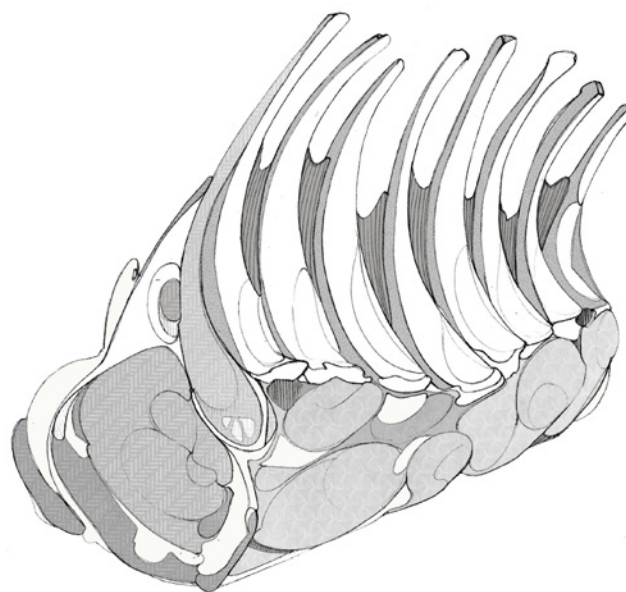
Despised by Christian fundamentalists and revered by the ancient Greeks, apples are perhaps the most dangerous and seductive fruit in existence. One was responsible for the end of human innocence; another for the beginning of the Trojan War. Hurling apples was a form of early courtship. The trees were one of the earliest to be cultivated.

Today, nearly seventy million tons of apples are produced each year, and at least half of that volume seemed to flow into Zuccotti Park. Apples were brought to North America by European colonists and quickly appropriated by the new nation and baked into apple pies. The apple is widely considered the harbinger of mind-blowing knowledge; if any fruit can destroy an empire, it would be the apple.

The movement invented other creative forms of apple consumption. The fruit

became the centrepiece of sandwiches (peanut butter and apple; hummus and apple; honey and apple), and salads. They became a mobile snack during marches, doled out by members of the Kitchen Working Group, who had loaded up their backpacks out of a heavy sense of duty. Occasionally, they became flying projectiles hurled at the police, a starter brick for the budding revolutionaries. Finally, one of Canada Bill’s comrades discovered a three-gallon chopping machine in the soup kitchen where they prepared the occupation’s meals, and he began baking massive cornbreads with – you guessed it – apples as a substitute for the golden kernels.

The whole menu at Occupy Wall Street was similarly inventive and eclectic. Forced to pick a single genre, Ethan Murphy, creator of the apple



bread, identified the culinary tradition as Southern-inspired comfort food. But then he backpedaled: one of his co-chefs mainly created Asian peanut noodle dishes, he acknowledged, while another was an Eastern European whose answer to spoiled food was simply to boil it. Then there was Chef Eric, who didn’t cook at all but contributed to the dining atmosphere by wandering through the park during mealtimes and leading a call and response chant of ‘FUCK MONSANTO!’ A day’s menu transcended genre

and class. There could be stale bagels for breakfast, salvaged by members of Food Not Bombs, a food justice group; \$16.75 Katz Deli Reuben sandwiches for lunch, donated by some Lefty on the Upper East Side; soup-kitchen-style meat casserole for dinner, with the ground beef spread so thin that every other bowl was vegetarian; and half-eaten wedding cake for a midnight snack, delivered by drunken guests who evidently thought of Occupy Wall Street as they teetered home. As for distribution, the food was doled out in the most equitable way people could think of: first come, first served.

There were always surprises. One evening, a wispy-haired woman ambled up to Zuccotti’s outdoor kitchen and, with an impish grin, revealed a Tupperware container filled with moonshine jello shots. The occupation’s General Assembly had decreed (by consensus, of course) that there was to be no drinking in the park, so kitchen members slurped down the clandestine jelly in a moment of autonomous action. Another time, the occupation received a shipment of canned Spam from a supporter who didn’t seem to understand that providing free, unprocessed food was itself an act of protest in a world where basic human needs are increasingly commodified and pumped with pesticides.

Those first apples didn’t survive long. By the winter, they were gone – bruised and evicted from the park along with the protesters themselves. Both mounted a valiant defence; those present the night of the raid remember New York

Police Department officers slipping on crushed apple flesh as they made arrests. The fruit, in fact, seemed almost as determined as its human counterparts, perhaps seeking redemption through Occupy for that mishap in Eden. But apples never last for ever, though their seeds are notoriously stubborn and difficult to kill. Meanwhile, other food survived Occupy wholly intact. More than a year later, there’s still some dried ‘People’s Oregano’ stashed in one of the off-site kitchens, ready for use.

On Style

Ben Masters wants to see the world afresh

I am a hoarder of theories of style. I nod sagely when Martha Nussbaum says that ‘Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters.’ I give a ready bow of accord when Susan Sontag states that ‘Style is the principle of decision in a work of art, the signature of the artist’s will.’ I feel impressed by the grandness of ‘A prose is a vision, a totality. Great stylists should be as rare as great writers’ (James Wood), and intrigued by the giddy thought that ‘A style creates multiple, universal singularities’ (Adam Thirlwell). I am eager to go along with the narrator of Anthony Burgess’s almighty *Earthly Powers* when he exhorts me to ‘Live for style.’ And I sense that I am getting nearer to the truth when I read Martin Amis’s seductive claim that ‘Style is morality: morality detailed, configured, intensified.’ But what exactly do we mean by style? What is my own working definition? Again, I defer: ‘The conception of style is based on the fact that every writer has his own rhythm, as distinctive as his handwriting, and his own imagery, ranging from a preference for certain vowels and consonants to a preoccupation with two or three archetypes’ (Northrop Frye). But what about . . . and what if . . . and how does . . .?

Style is so much more than a theory to be got at. It is essential. It is *vital*. Take, for instance, the Romantic essayist Charles Lamb. A small, frail man beset by a debilitating stutter, it could be said (perhaps all too neatly) that Lamb found refuge in style. And so we get the domestic sublime of the Elia essays with their becalmed surface precariously maintained above an undercurrent of excess and absurdity, that fatal stutter never too far away, occasionally erupting in stylized and ironized forms:

I know [Elia] to be light, and vain, and humorsome; a notorious ***; addicted to ****: averse from counsel,

neither taking it, nor offering it; – *** besides; a stammering buffoon; what you will; lay it on, and spare not; I subscribed to it all, and much more, than thou canst be willing to lay at his door—



Lamb makes an art-form of deprecation. Instead of lachrymose pity, we get the most intense kind of self-revelation, all borne out by the ironic, digressive style; a pre-Dickensian pleasure in the indecorous energies of life, as seen through a contorting squint.

Henry James was another writer known for his painstaking habits of speech – all those delays and feints as he strained awkwardly for the best thought, the right phrase, for impossible precision. But James was able to sublimate this into a finely tessellated prose, fit for the challenge of life’s complex qualifications

and particularities. It is because of his facility for hyper-modification, for head-spinning minutiae, that James is so adept at creating paranoid and neurotic moods, as in this passage from *The Golden Bowl*:

Quickly, quickly, on a certain alarm taken, eagerly and anxiously, before they should, without knowing it, wound her, they had signalled from house to house their clever idea, the idea by which, for all these days, her own idea had been profiting. They had built her in with their purpose – which was why, above her, a vault seemed more heavily to arch; so that she sat there, in the solid chamber of her helplessness, as in a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her, over the brim of which she could just manage to see by stretching her neck.

And then there’s Nabokov, one of the twentieth century’s most self-conscious ‘stylists’, with the supporting theories to boot. The style is aristocratic and plush, every sentence working like a language loom where words merge in and out of one another in an intricate weave. But as Nabokov famously remarked, ‘I think like a genius, I write like a distinguished author, and I speak like a child.’ This was an anxiety borne out by his tendency to read pre-written answers during television interviews. The self he wanted to present dwelt in the style.

Style, then, is a means of self-fashioning. Word and grammar games are *life* games, as Angela Carter intimated when she said that ‘To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is, to be killed.’ Carter was restlessly alive to the potential for reinvention through all different kinds of style (from the literary to the sartorial), and for her this was best realized in the ornate mode. I share Carter’s preference. As she once said in an interview: ‘I write overblown, purple, self-indulgent prose – so fucking what?’ To my mind, the greatest stylists are more often than not of the excessive school, from Dickens to Joyce to David Foster Wallace. Perhaps it is a question of

sensibility. This is Burgess's take on the matter:

The beauties of the plain style are often urged on me, the duty of excising rather than adding. [. . .] One has to be true to one's own temperament, and mine is closer to that of the baroque writers than that of the stark toughies. To hell with cheeseparing and verbal meanness: it all reeks of Banbury puritanism.

And here is a rule of thumb: never trust someone who too easily dismisses prose for being overwritten. Overwriting can also be writing over – filling out meaning and adding dimension. I favour a nourished prose. 'An awful lot of modern writing seems to me to be a depressed use of language. Once, I called it "vow-of-poverty prose". No, give me the king in his countinghouse' (Amis, again).

If style really can *fashion*, we must do away with the mimetic fallacy – the notion that literary prose mimics the content it describes. Though it is true to a certain extent (albeit uninterestingly so), it makes writing sound like a limp business of apathy and passivity, as well as encouraging many a lazy interpretation of how Foster Wallace produces a boring amount of detail because he is writing about boredom, or how Bret Easton Ellis writes with a plain style because he is writing about a vacuous culture. Such one-dimensional readings will never tell us much about a text, because style generates and moulds content as much as it reflects it; it is constitutive. When an author stylizes a subject, he filters it through his perceptions. The author pays fidelity to what Nabokov called the 'artist's peculiar nature': 'Style is not a tool, it is not a method, it is not a choice of words alone. Being much more than all this, style constitutes an intrinsic component or characteristic of the author's personality.' Style has to do not only with how the author sees the world, but how he then *shapes* it. It is both perception *and* conception, as the author rises and moves forward to his senses. (Though, of course, the perceptions are often deliberately adapted to suit a given mood or character, whose perspective may well be flawed, or to generate effects of distortion like irony

and stereotype. It remains the cardinal sin of lit crit to equate, unquestioningly, narrator or character with the real flesh-and-blood author, which is really just a means of shirking the responsibility to examine and understand what a book is *doing*.) And what of prose styles that purposefully seek a dissonance between form and content? As Amis's best novels show (*Money*, *London Fields*, *Yellow Dog*), tonal awryness can be far more valuable – can provide reader and writer alike with a new and revealing angle, with a moral purchase – than an unchallenging harmony.

The measure of a *true* style, however, is its ability to individualize writer and reader alike. For the writer this occurs in the gradual development of a personal decorum. Stylists originate a manner of proceeding that is both aesthetic (their unique combination of perception and expression) and social (something affective which is to be communicated). For writer *and* reader, individualization occurs in a new and surprising quality of vision; in the illumination of something that had not been recognized before. Indeed, as readers we inhabit and dwell in the author's style. This involves us in at least a double engagement: when we read we are identifying with the author (insofar as stylistic choices – conscious or unconscious – index what matters to that author) and the characters he creates, who exist within his style (the style is their cosmos). Therefore to attend to the particulars of a style is to attend to the particulars of a character's situation. To my mind this is more productive than both the old traditional humanist notion of reading empathetically for character, and the econstructionist quagmire where characters are nothing more than text. (Subscribing to the latter feels a bit like beating off into a sock . . . You know that to some extent it is real, but you can't help feeling there must be a better way of going about it.) We can engage with a style: we can adapt to it, we can fight with it, we can exceed it. It is very difficult, however, to have a conversation with a self-referring system of signifiers.

Proust called identifying with an author's voice 'a voluntary pastiche'. The writer's voice momentarily becomes our own. For Proust this was a necessary step towards individuality because 'you can become original again afterwards, rather

than making involuntary pastiche for the rest of your life'. (There is an insightful discussion of this in Thirlwell's *Miss Herbert*, from which I take the quotation, where Thirlwell refers to Proustian pastiche as 'a way of testing out the limits of a style. It is a form of map-making'). I think that this is true. As we begin to see in and through a writer's style – as we inhabit it and adjust ourselves to its peculiar demands – our perceptions are recalibrated. This may only be a partial process (we are subtly adapting our own perceptions rather than simply being taken over by another's), but it is nevertheless one of agitation and effort. Reading and writing are physiological experiences. This is perhaps what Amis means by 'style is morality': if morality can be said to exist at the level of the sentence, then it exists in style's ability to make us see afresh, its ability to prompt us and, above all, to encourage us to make choices. Style is affective in this way; it creates certain ethical and experiential pressures. To engage with a writer's prose is to attend to its specificities, to dwell in the uncertainty of wonder and to hold ourselves accountable to the call of the author. I would add one slight though significant qualification to this and say that these are more ethical responses than moral ones. They cultivate ways of knowing rather than knowledge itself.

The reader-writer relationship is, of course, a very intimate one. We put faith in certain authors. We have to trust them. Not in any typical, day-to-day sense – some writers, after all, might want to obliterate us (William Burroughs once said: 'If I really knew how to write, I could write something that someone would read and it would kill them.' And he's a favourite of mine). But we trust their writerly instincts and their ability to work us in a way that is invigorating and hopefully even pleasurable. We put faith in their style. And, of course, there are so many styles, because style is also possibility. This is why I love the trickster dexterity of Thomas Nashe, the impressionistic clarity of early H.G. Wells, the rich lyrical detail of Virginia Woolf, the all-at-once inclusivity of Saul Bellow, the jagged angularities of William Golding, the violent grandeur of Angela Carter, the hydraulic prose of J.G. Ballard . . . I love them because they've all got style.

Five Minutes to Midnight

A series on the end of days. By Laurence Howarth

23.55

— entirely sure he even wanted to leave. It was a good party. Is a good party. He fears his exit won't have changed that. He notices his body and its bearing strikes him as inward and meek. He props his left elbow on the inside of the door and instantly regrets it, while accepting he is now committed to the posture, in all its staginess, for the immediate future.

And if he had wanted to leave and it was just him, he'd have taken the bus. No call for a taxi at this stage. He needs to do something with his legs now. So the idea this is to save money won't wash. And in fact he's probably going to have to pay for the whole thing, isn't he, if they... or even if they don't. Being unable to think of any beneficial way in which he could rearrange his lower limbs, he decides to leave them where they are.

It's not that she's not attractive. She is attractive, and to him. But given how early it is, and given there's no guarantee that the basis on which they're doing this is anything more than mutual convenience, she really ought to be stunning. He takes a moment to be sickened by his own thought processes: whatever his reason is, it clearly isn't gallantry.

This is when he realizes the taxi is heading in a completely different direction from where he lives.

23.56

She sneaks a peek at the screen of her silenced mobile phone. 'So??? Xxx' For God's sake, they've only just left! What are they meant to have achieved in ten minutes?

She returns her phone to her coat pocket and meets the gaze of her reflection. It asks her how she's feeling about this. Jittery is the answer but she doesn't let on. She blinks, with such regal slowness, particularly on the up stroke, that she suspects she may indeed be drunk.

The thing is, she really does have to get up early tomorrow. Admittedly she'd forgotten she did when she told him she did. Although maybe the reason it occurred to her to say she did was because it was true? It's conceivable but that's not why she said it. Presumably her intention was to dis-

courage him: a ploy that can be said to have enjoyed only limited success, given his continuing proximity. She hooks a strand of hair with her right index finger and tucks it behind her ear, from where it immediately begins to plot its escape.

She looks at him, without moving her eyes, and wonders how he'll do it. Suddenly or incrementally? On the pavement or in the communal area? She could do it of course but then she wouldn't find out whether she likes him. And it does depend on whether they're stopping at her place first or his. This is when she realizes the taxi is heading in a completely different direction from where she lives.

23.57

'So whereabouts exactly do you...?'

'Oh! Same basic area. Just a bit further along. Because you're...?'

'Yeah. Absolutely.'

'So that'd be...?'

'Pretty much round the corner by the sounds of it.'

'We're more or less there then?'

'Are we? I mean, yes. We are.'

'Great! 'Cos this is perfect for me actually.'

'Well it would be, wouldn't it?'

'Why?'

'No, I just meant because we're going to... at least, I think it'd be best if we...'

'Oh yeah, definitely. And then I can just... Or not. As circumstances dictate. Basically, don't worry about me.'

'I'm not. I wasn't.'

'Sorry, is there a...?'

'God, no! Everything's fine. Isn't it?'

'Couldn't be better!'

'There we are then.'

'There we go.'

23.58

They beam at each other then turn their faces to the front. Their features melt back into the blackness of the cab and their smiles die. They catch sight of the meter, either just before or just as it twitches, spasms and comes to rest in a very awkward position. If this is what it costs to get here, how much is it going to cost to get home? They understand that no more can be said

now and nothing can be done: it is mandatory that they get off with each other.

They try to reconstruct the sequence of events that brought them here. Whose idea was it that they share a taxi? They don't know. How did the misconception that they live near each other arise? Perhaps they were misheard, or a poor grasp of local geography may be to blame, or there may never have been any misconception apart from their perception that there was one. Why did they agree to the idea? They ought to know this, being themselves, but the more they peer into the mirror to pinpoint their motivation, the more they just see themselves looking back. What was said when they got into the taxi? They can't remember getting into the taxi, so it's hard to tell, but instructions evidently were issued, given the zeal of their driver. He knows where he's going.

The taxi driver knows what he's doing. He's used this tactic before. And if there is any dishonesty in it, it's only because the public is wedded to the myth of the infallible cabbie: he's not allowed to hesitate or ask for help. That's why, if he forgets where he's meant to be heading, or didn't know where it was in the first place, he simply barrels along in any direction until his passengers correct him. And then makes out it's their fault. So as he turns out onto the main road and dives into the conurbation, he's not worried. He is ready for what is to come. And on they roar.

23.59

When someone's about to drive a car over a cliff, at the moment they realize it's too late to stop, they instinctively accelerate. Perhaps in the unconscious hope of making the leap to some hypothetical far side. Or just because they might as well.

The speedometer climbs and climbs. The meter ticks over and a few seconds later ticks over again. Then immediately again. And then again. And again. The numbers cascade across the display as at a petrol pump or a stock market crash. Pinned to the back seat, they sit in silence and await their doom, just like a proper couple.

A large raindrop snakes its way across the front passenger window, annexing numerous smaller ones as it goes. Road signs, hedges and houses crick their necks trying to make out the writing on the bodywork as they fly by. And then the lampposts cease.

00.00