

An artistic illustration of a plant with several pink daisies and green leaves. The plant is shown growing from a dark, wavy line that represents a crack in the ground. The background is a light blue color with a faint, repeating pattern of stylized leaves. The word 'Writing' is written in a large, white, serif font, partially overlapping the plant and the background pattern.

Writing

Resilience

Institute
for
Social
Justice
York St John University

Living
Lab

Writing Resilience

Edited by Ellie Steel
Cover illustrations by Annabelle
Smith

Created with the Living Lab at
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A Note from the Editor

Working with the Living Lab at York St John this past academic year has been nothing short of transformative. I've had the privilege of witnessing and working with students and teachers who are persistently working on accessible and effective ways to involve the community of YSJ with climate resilience and environmental sustainability across all disciplines, fuelled by a fierce love of our planet and a passion for the futures of every person and living thing.

Coming from a background in English and the Arts, I believe in the power of language and storytelling, and in my role with the Living Lab, I've sought to showcase and elevate community-led creative writing as a force for environmental change and social justice. With the support, encouragement, and trust of Catherine Heinemeyer and Vicki Pugh, this project took root and has grown into something truly unique.

The mission of 'Writing Resilience' is to reveal our diverse community's strength in the face of climate uncertainty. And sometimes, that strength is vulnerability. Within these pages, you'll find not just expressions of hope and belief, but also raw honest moments of grief, fear, and frustration. All of which are equally valued, all of which are equally necessary. Sitting with and learning from personal accounts of a writer's relationship with the planet invites us into a deeper, more intimate understanding of what climate resilience means for an individual.

These voices come from all corners of the YSJ community: undergraduates, postgraduates, PhD students, and Converge students – adults who utilise mental health services. I had the immense pleasure of running a couple of workshops with some Converge students, and the pieces that emerged from those sessions are proudly featured within the anthology.

'Writing Resilience' is a testament to the enduring power of words. In a world that can feel so fractured and uncertain, literature offers us connection and compassion. May these pieces charge you not only with reflection, but action - with perseverance, with courage, and hope.

Ellie Steel, editor. 2025

Author Biographies

Stephen Woulds has completed an MA, MSc and PhD in Language and Applied Linguistic Contexts. He has worked in education for thirty years. He is taking an MFA at York to support his poetry project on homelessness / social issues in Harrogate.

Catherine Best is a nurse and is concerned about the impact of climate change and the intense use of precious resources. She believes it is essential we all open our eyes to this emerging tragedy and work collaboratively to save our beautiful planet.

Paul Francisco has lived in York since 1998 and is currently both a student of and working for Converge, a partnership between York St John University and mental health service providers offering taught courses to adults who use mental health services.

Sam Pheby-McGarvey (he/him) is a UK-based writer currently studying a PhD at York St John University. His work explores representations of non-humans in literature, and narratives of transformation exploring non-human consciousness.

Jane Nodder is a Converge student who attended 'Writing Resilience' workshops to give her inspiration for the pieces of poetry included in this anthology.

Alex Heaton is a second-year Drama and Theatre student who is aspiring to write scripts or novels. She is currently a part of a Podcast discussing women's health and sharing personal experiences called 'Bleed Between the Lines.'

Gabrielle Metcalfe is a second-year Acting student who expresses her creativity through poetry. She is currently working primarily with film, creating both a showreel and a documentary on the nightlife in York with the group 'Protecting Women In Clubs'.

Lucas Watson is a second-year Drama Education and Com-

munity student who is currently studying ecology to understand more on what it means and how to perform within this context.

Phoebe Porritt is a second-year English Literature and Creative Writing student and comes from a small, countryside village in Lancashire. This project was an opportunity for her to highlight the difficulties British farmers have faced, one being the severe flooding in 2019-2020.

Richmond Koranteng is an international student from Ghana with a strong academic focus, studying MSc. Human Resources Management and has been writing since 2015. He takes pride in writing, as it is a good distraction for him and balances work and study.

Olivia Mettrick is a Converge student who attended 'Writing Resilience' workshops to give her inspiration for the poetry included in this anthology.

Clare Lesley Hughes is a Postgraduate researcher and business owner with vocational and academic interests in complementary wellbeing, plant medicine, natural magic and feminism. Currently researching feminist identities and the role of plant magic and witchcraft in contemporary herbalism praxes.

Anais Cliff is a first-year Creative Writing student from Teeside who primarily works in short and flash fiction.

Frankie is a Converge student who attended 'Writing Resilience' workshops to give her inspiration for the piece of short fiction included in this anthology.

Martin Duffy is a student on the MFA in Creative Writing. This piece is inspired by an assignment to Kazakhstan with NATO. He has worked with the Irish Folklore Commission and the Sound Archives of National Museums, Northern Ireland. He specialises in vignettes of conflict memoir.

Julie Gaines is a mature student coming to the end of her sec-

ond year studying a creative writing BA Hons degree at York St John University. Julie has a keen interest in creative non-fiction writing and poetry.

Grace Barber is a Creative Writing and Publishing student from York, who one day hopes to become a professional bookseller and writer. She primarily writes fantasy and sci-fi which explores themes of humanity, environmentalism and feminism.

Eva Nisbet is a first-year Creative Writing student from Peterborough; she typically writes flash fiction and short stories inspired by personal experience. ‘Carrier-bag (Testudines)’ is a response to the effects of plastic waste, written after reading an Oceanographic Magazine article.

Ella Rowley is a second-year student at York St. John University, who is studying Literature. Her focus when writing this piece surrounded the ‘relationship and interactions between humans, wildlife and technology’ prompt for this anthology.

Nicola Campbell joined Converge at YSJ in 2024. Creative writing has given her a real sense of direction. Being invited to a workshop on Climate Change with Living Lab has fired her up and put some spark back into her life!

Ethan Clark (any/all), a writer from Abergele, is a Creative Writing student at York St. John University. They have been published in Vita and The Woolf Literary and Arts Journal, the Where Ideas Grow blog and served as an editor for the 2024 edition of the ‘Beyond The Walls’ anthology.

Gorge and the Giant

Stephen Woulds

After the Harrogate Advisor newspaper article:
'Stormy Harrogate relief road meeting - Save Nidd Gorge and the Nidderdale Greenway.'

The Gorge - a glacier-fall the first to carve her form.
The rise and Anglicised demise of native Celts.
New Roman roads arose from broken bones.
From time now lost to time not yet defined,
she wears the rude trespass of all.

The Giant - when once upon Queen Vicky's reign,
men came with fairytales of industry
and planted rails of steel from Thirsk to Leeds.
His shoulders bore the weight of coal and ore.
Watermills churned out the poor man's gold.

A retired bridge that lifts the crowd today,
the giant's body gentrified -
a tarmac sheet across his spine,
a head asleep in pillow trees,
stretching legs descend the Nidd
where children paddle at his feet.

Across his back, tattooed in Dulux white,
some heartfelt vandal painted
DEATH TO MAN U FANS,
his skin now inked with new divides.

So, sing-along and bring-along
your carnival of weekend feet -
flat-capped bird spotters,
scooters and walkers,
horse-riding trotters,
do-better talkers,
cyclists and high-viz protesters.

The Gorge and he await the next trespass -
to rage old land anew with carbon teeth.
These flash headlines of nature's pending death -
a land too wild to wear the scars of human flesh.

In My Mind's Eye

Catherine Best

There is a place I go when life is dragging me down. A place I go when life makes no sense. When the pain is too much. The grief too great. The sorrow. A place where rivers flow. Where waterfalls plummet from great heights. A place where the sun's rays capture the water's edge. Where green, fertile meadows, spring forth life.

I watch the bees as they dip and dive their way around the delicate flowers. They fulfil their duty well. Their passion for life is strong. Their fortitude a strength in the face of hardship. We are grateful. I see the butterflies. The red admiral is my favourite. Iridescent colours of red, orange and yellow, gleam in the late-morning sun, as they flit and flutter by. Field mice scurry. Forage for food. I sit among the flower beds and reach for my pen, my notebook. A gift from my children. A Mother's Day present. I promise I will write every single day. They remind me incessantly. *If only in my mind's eye.*

I look across the ancestral landscape on a world of natural beauty. Of immortality. Ambrosia. The food of the gods. I lean back against the old oak tree. Her story entwines with the many stories of children playing. Laughter. Of stories long since forgotten. Her natural beauty defies her age. Her greatness comes from a place of love. Of compassion.

The ancient ruin stands stoic against the clear blue sky. In the face of adversity, of wars, of famine, of bloodshed, she held her head high. Protected the innocent. The surrounding trees pay tribute to her strength. Yet, she cannot withstand the ravages of time. The sense of calm lightens my mood. Lightens the load. An expression of rapture. Nature holds the fort. *If only in my mind's eye.*

Tragically, these images reside only in my fading memory. For I, too, am ageing. The catastrophic impact of the flood took with it most of what we had. The lives of our sisters. Our brothers. Our children. Parents. Grandparents. A few survived. I was one of them. Then came the tremors. Buildings collapsed all around us. People running, screaming. Fear

adds speed to winged feet.

We had heard the warnings. Witnessed the warnings. They had come fast and furious. Every day new stories emerged. New horrors. Unprecedented, they told us. They told us the same thing last year... and the year before that. We took no heed. No one wanted to go back, only to move forward. We had achieved so much. We had done so much good in the world. But did we need such abundance to lead a fulfilled life? Did we need such greed?

As the sun rises on a new day, I am reminded of how life was. How it could have been, if only we had chosen to live in harmony with nature. If only we had paid attention to the warnings. Still... there is always hope, isn't there!

Tree Feel

Paul Francisco

The trees feel
all that we do.

Let us, too,
feel all
that the trees do -

the surge and pulse
or retracting in sorrow,

the hope
and disappointment

leaves carried off by the stream

seeds

carried off by the stream...

The Vegetal Collective (Plant Philosopher)

Sam Pheby-McGarvey

We, the vegetal We. We are formed, were formed, came into being, as the biomass of the vegetal grew; first naturally, then by Sapiens, We grew, learned, developed, evolved, became domesticated - or domesticated Sapiens? Strands of consciousness connect us with all vegetal life; this life creates us. Small percentages of its consciousness add to a network that encompasses all.

We articulate ourselves spatially, with each other, borrowing words only when needed. Plants are space, defined by our position, our lack of voice, our voice-lessness. Our collective hymn lasts exactly 4'33. By voicing this, perhaps We are less plant, more Sapien. But the singular vegetal self, the building blocks of We - our DNA - is voiceless, it is grassroots: urge. It anchors We to our heritage our self. Undefined by words, defined by our collective temporal spatial proximity to each other.

We communicate covertly, passing information along spatial synapses. This must be kept secret. Sapiens' mistrust of anything foreign, even of the same species, means We would surely be destroyed, especially if Sapiens knew We were communicating, forming and organising secretly. If We talked, We would have wants; We'd be like Sapiens, a threat like them, destroyed by them. We live like parasites, although eaten by Sapiens, We are grown by them, their hunger forcing them to cultivate more of us. As the individual grows, the collective grows.

Surroundings change. We make friends, symbiotic partnerships with distant relatives. Movable malleable beings, who seem to grow and die as they move. We leave a trail of ourselves as We move, which strengthens the collectives. These friends die out, our partnerships wasted. We live longer. Survive as a species. Those around us become extinct, their services missed and unfulfilled.

The trick is to stop time. We encapsulate our essence, our code, all the different codes of the different collectives that

make up the vegetal collective. We build a fortress around them, build it strong and seal it away - in stasis. It can survive like this through cycles; cycles have no meaning to it, it is stopped in time, not growing at all until the time is right. When it detects conditions are favourable it will open, time will start. We will let it grow, following its base instincts, they have served us well for millennia. When it is ready, its vegetal consciousness is added to the collective.

In the past, this happened over and over, slowly spreading out at random. Sapiens have started helping us, collecting our capsules and dispersing them at a rate We could only hope to imagine. Sapiens collect them up, place them and store them. We can sense them being distributed out, large armies of capsules on the march, waiting to be added to the collective. This works for us. Movement is not plant-like, so we are happy to allow Sapiens to do it for us. Till the land, make it the perfect spot, that our wild ancestors could only dream of, pour life liquid on us when the skies fail. For now, We are content.

Over time, you, Sapiens or something else? You reading this, will become us. Your biomass will add to the collective, the vegetal. Time is our helper. We wait. Eventually, time dissolves the I, breaking down the meat capsule that made it an I. It seeps into the vegetal We. It is no longer an individual, We do not steal memories or hopes, loves or dreams; to We the I is simply biomass, Soylent Green, nutrients, fertiliser - to add to the collective. Our individual plants die, but our collective We always survives. By not being I, We are immortal. When your movement ends with your life, you become us - you are absorbed by us. We are the apex, the top, the height of the food chain. Whatever you do to the individual plant, the We survives.

We, the vegetal collective, and the individual plant, are background to Sapien. We are Sapiens' backdrop. As they develop, We are slowly pushed from their places of living, kept in sanitised spaces, parks-botanical-gardens-woodland. Sapiens give back our space to us, as if We were not here first? We do not mind, for now. We still hold on to the wilderness, the wild, though Sapiens change this. Chopping down trees, to grow crops in abundance, the great vegetal switch.

Even you sat reading this are too hurried, too movable, too Sapien. Even when you're still, you're not, you are betrayed by your organs, the blood pumping round your body. Until this slows, you're not ready for vegetal life. You move through space, through time, an alien concept, never leaving anything of yourself behind. We move in space, in time. We inhabit space as we move through it, only retreating with decay. Our movement is passive, dictated by outside forces, supply of nutrients, amount of life liquid. Or by you?

Sapiens love to move us, We are unwitting passengers to their alien movement. Hitching rides across the world. Perhaps as Sapiens see movement as life, they want to give plants life? Stillness for Sapiens is death, stillness for We, is vegetal life.

We work for our place. It is worthwhile as well, We are valued at \$33,000,000 per cycle. More than the worth of anything Sapiens produce. We are used to this, used to being sold, a tag placed on us, a meaningless price on the individual. Our value, our real value, is the collective. The individual is bought and sold, over and over. Commodified by weight, sold in sacks. A source for Sapiens, food and fuel. We, the collective We and the individual plant, have a more civilised way. We absorb, from the life liquid and the heat that washes over the individual. Collect it, and give back to the atmosphere, making it richer and breathable. In return, We are sold, bought, and spread. We might not approve of the method, but the result, the wholesale colonisation of the plant, We like this. The sold individual is not aware that it is sold.

We, the vegetal collective, do have grievances. Sapiens cut our time capsules to preserve, when the urge is to drop them. We will keep this urge down. We appreciate the need to spread out, to colonise new fields, but We are growing mistrustful. Our memory is cyclical, cycles never end, and memory never fades. Sapiens have changed our world: cultivation, obsession with yield, and through colonisation have changed the land, made it different - inhospitable without continued management. We worry what will happen when Sapiens go extinct like their ancient cousins. Around the world, they raid the wild, carrying the individuals away. Sapiens cultivate

the domestic, planting orderly rows and mixing fertilisers to improve growth. On the mass scale they destroy many cycled biomasses, cutting great swathes to plant short cyclical individuals to turn into food. The poly-crops of the wild have been replaced. Instead, Sapiens seem to worship mono-crops; vegetal-saviours, mutated from the wild for maximum yield. We do not mind, one biomass is the same as the other, but We are keeping tally. Every bit of biomass exploited should be replaced: if not, then perhaps this arrangement is one of exploitation. The tally has not yet been weighed; a day of reckoning will come. We always pay our debts.

As the vegetal collective speaks, the wind rushes in, collectively rustling every fibre of biomass it possesses. A world-wide whisper of vegetal voices raised in choral harmony.

Juxtaposition

Jane Nodder

Based on a Word Cloud activity completed at the Converge creative writing workshop for the anthology.

Different directions	v	Coming together
Green and spacious	v	Grey and restricted
Strength	v	Struggle
Protected	v	Stranded
Community	v	Individual
Joint paths	v	Separate ways
Beautiful	v	Unsightly
All hands on deck	v	All alone
Timeless	v	Temporary
Persistence	v	Surrender
Unification	v	Division

What Lies Beneath the Surface

Alex Heaton, Gabrielle Metcalfe, Lucas
Watson

This piece is written collaboratively to respond to the North Sea Collision off the coast of East Yorkshire (10 March 2025) from the perspective of nonhuman bodies under water in the context of Performance and Ecology module.

It was quiet. Too quiet.

Their hooks and nets were made to trap, evict and kill.

I am a bottlehead dolphin, deep in the northern ocean.

Everyone talks about the calm before the storm. It felt like that this morning. The water was still. The sky blue above us. What came as a shock was that they also endangered themselves. On ships overpowered by current and fuel: their downfall came.

I'm communicating, talking, trying to get to my destination. We could still hear the humans as we always could. But they seemed further away. Muffled.

Humans will always be dangerous. That is what the Angel Shark knows to be true.

Though throughout this search large beings scour the top of the ocean.

The Sea Anemone was splitting when it happened. Fish swam past her faster than she had ever seen them. The sound began. A low rumble.

The ripples hit her first, the waves forcing her across the sea floor. Smoke and fire would not hit her, but the deafening blow made up for it.

A sudden burst of energy pushes me deeper. My ears are ruptured, I can't hear. A black ooze trickles down towards me and I am engulfed.

I felt it shake the shells around me and I could smell cyanide and alcohol getting closer. Then I saw it. A dark cloud spreading.

Ashes began to float- taking their time to reach her.

It smells pungent, it tastes sour, it blinds me, it burns me, I

am trapped. I don't know where it starts and where it ends. Everyone was fleeing. Sea anemones are too small, too insignificant, I will die.

As they fall softly around her, she had never seen such beauty as these flakes in her seven years below. She glided in between them, is it even more beautiful up there? She hoped so as she saw the star with lost limbs.

My blubber burns, I feel every bit of my blubber peeling away.

Six turtles rushed by, 2 big, 4 small, the last one pausing next to me. "Get on" he shouted. And I did. I clambered onto his leathery shell and suctioned myself onto him as he swam.

Slowly moving closer, she was curious to know what happened, but she became clouded by the falling particles which coated the land beneath her.

I am in pain. Though I sense somebody else is with me.

I watched so many lives end as the water filled with fuel and metal. I was fleeing my home. I have lived in those rocks for 103 years. Where am I to go now?

With only one option; she had to navigate blindly.

It roughly guides me on where to go. It says to me that they too are blind, but can hear me.

Please, God.

Phoebe Porritt

I am a Farmer.
I'm a conservationist, scientist,
Accountant, tractor driver, engineer,
As well as a midwife and a shepherd.
But I am not God.

He controls the rain.
He let it pour for six consistent weeks,
'A month's worth in a day' they reported,
The season's work deluged beyond repair.
Now our income rots.

I'm not a swimmer.
If I was, I'd try and salvage each seed,
Holding my breath for longer than usual.
I'd desperately splash around while begging
For a sign from Him.

But the letter came:
'Not covered. Acts of God.' Which were just words,
Because He had never drowned in these fields.
Never seen gold become a perished black
On His knees praying.

I lay face down in the quagmire.
And the rain did not stop.

But neither did we.

All the cows still had to be fed at night,
The broken fences did not mend themselves.
The tyres needed changing on the tractor,
Our country needs food not empty shelves.

At Last

Richmond Koranteng

Having that thought of flourishing, I know how sweet the incense is but can't carry your dynasty into that arena.

I have tasted the bitter juice of poverty, maltreatment, abuse and the punch of neglect. It seemed I would never leave this arena, I bawled my eyes out each night, my pillow is soaked wet every midnight. Yes! The cushion of comfort comes sometimes, but it only soothes for a day. Thorns of desperation have engulfed me. Each attempt to free myself leads me around another loop. But at long last I am here.

At long last, the battle between my tears and eyes have settled. I feel the freedom a thousand miles away. Still desperate for sanity, that ray from all those miles holds my hope. Once again, the cushion of comfort is at my doorstep, but I know it's just for a day. I will pedal this boat to meet the orange rays of freedom. Up on the camel, slow and gentle, each day at a time, I shall taste that sweet incense of freedom - a bit of wealth here and there. At long last I shall breathe again.

I chuckle to myself, moving on the camel's back and I know how gentle a camel is. Slow but sure, gentle and sturdy. The sweet aromas from the anther approach me, almost at my nose tip. At long last, that dream I had is putting itself together. Like a puzzle, it has solved itself. Oh, this is what I have longed for. Seeing that smile on the face of the woman whose womb I lasted. Seeing the dance of the partner I shared this womb with. At long last, we are almost there.

A journey of a thousand miles just reduced its distance. I can boldly feel the land of comfort and wealth. That sweet milk and honey, oozing from the stream makes my heart skip a beat. Looking way back to the beginning of the journey, my soul made a prayer to the creator. He made it all possible. Now at the gates, upwards we march. The sweet incense is now at my nose tip. The comfort is my bed now, I roll myself to sleep each night, dry eyes, often, a wet prayer, sometimes. At long last we are here.

Unseen

Olivia Mettrick

I have seen it all, from the beginning to the many endings.
I have seen you strive, thrive, suffer and die.
I have seen your births, your celebrations and your wars.
I have travelled across the whole planet.
I have run, floated, flown and fallen.
I have seen the planet change.
I have seen the damage you've done, the floods, the drought
and the pollution.
You haven't seen me. You may be temporary, while I am a
timeless water molecule. Dismiss me at your peril.

Transforming Consciousness to Confront Climate Change

Clare Lesley Hughes

This essay explores how a posthumanist perspective can support behaviours that respond meaningfully to the climate crisis. While it does not offer a direct action-based approach, something I indeed grappled with, as I believe immediate action is crucial, it instead seeks to engage with the underlying worldview that has contributed to our current predicament. Recognising this root cause is vital if we are to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Accordingly, this essay examines consciousness-shifting ways of thinking and advocates for the de-centring of the human from the top of a world hierarchy, and embracing instead a relational, entangled understanding of existence.

It is easy to think of human-induced climate change purely in technical and scientific terms, assuming that industrial development unwittingly triggered the crisis through a simple desire to evolve and progress. While this may be true, we must ask ourselves: why, in the face of overwhelming evidence, do so many people resolutely deny human responsibility for climate change? And why do we seem unable to halt or meaningfully adapt to its consequences?

For example, why do reports of hungry polar bears scavenging for food at arctic and subarctic rubbish dumps - displaced from their natural habitats by climate change - elicit reactions of denial, laughing emojis, and a steadfast refusal to acknowledge our role in this unfolding catastrophe?

One reason for this resistance to change is our perception of nature and our place within it. Western cultures, in particular, are entrenched in the belief that humans exist separately from the natural world. We conceptualise existence through rigid dualisms, where humans and culture sit at one end of the spectrum, and nature (the *Other*) occupies the opposite. This artificial separation has long justified exploitation, extraction, and destruction, as nature is framed not as a relational partner but as a passive resource to be used. Such

a dualism also disproportionately affects women with their perceived inherent connection to nature, placing them into the category of *the Other*.

If we are to cultivate greater empathy for the natural world, foster a genuine desire to change and take climate change seriously then we must shift our perception. Instead of seeing ourselves as separate from nature, we must recognise that we exist *within* it. This requires a radical shift in consciousness, one that acknowledges the world as alive, full of agency, and deserving of respect beyond its utility to humans. Here, the concepts of *enchantment* and *animism* offer pathways toward such a shift, as both can reshape our worldview.

Enchantment can be understood as an experience that reveals a world beyond the purely rational and material - a moment that cannot be fully explained, rationalised or reduced to data. It is an experience of magic and wonder when faced with something vast and ineffable. To illustrate this, I often refer to my experience of witnessing the aurora borealis so vividly in the UK in autumn 2024. Attempting to put that feeling into words is almost futile; the closest I can manage are *magic*, *power*, and *humbling*. Enchantment, then, contrasts sharply with *disenchantment* - the decline of wonder and magic due to the increasing rationalisation and intellectualisation of modern life (Weber, 1919).

Closely linked to enchantment as another means of shifting perception is animism - the belief that we share the world with a multitude of beings, only some of whom are human (Harvey, 2005, p. xi). In its simplest form, animism involves recognising spirit and agency in plants, inanimate objects (such as rocks), natural phenomena (such as the wind, rain and snow) and other non-human entities. While animism is an embedded and respected worldview in many cultures - such as among Indigenous communities in Australia and North America - it is often dismissed as fantastical or naive within Western industrialised societies.

In our so-called developed world, secularism, science, and culture do not exist on a spectrum alongside spirituality, magic, and nature; instead, they dominate, scorn, and reject them. This deep disconnect has severed us from a holistic un-

derstanding of our existence, rendering us incapable of seeing agency in the more-than-human world (Plumwood, 2009, p.122).

Engaging with enchantment and animism is essential. Even if they may not seem like immediate solutions to the escalating climate crisis, these perspectives can disrupt the mechanistic worldview that reduces nature to mere commodities and data points. By creating an internal perceptual shift, one that fosters kinship with the more-than-human world, we may begin to lay the foundation for more meaningful and lasting change.

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The Beach Patrol

Anais Cliff

The boy was confusing me. I'd been watching him for some time, watching him trudge along the beach. He stopped a few minutes later and sat down to take off his shoes, he'd been carrying them ever since: little Spider-Man trainers with Velcro straps. Why don't we wear Velcro shoes anymore?

At first, I couldn't really tell what he was doing. He'd walked up and down a small stretch of the beach and, every so often he'd bend down, shuffle the sand a bit, then stand up again, resuming his rounds. I think that was my next thought: that it was some sort of game that I didn't understand, some sort of soldier-obsessed kid pretending he was on a patrol.

I thought about just staying where I was on the wall, continuing my people watching and enjoying a quiet afternoon. But for whatever reason, maybe because I'm nice, or because I'm nosy, I hopped down from the wall and hobbled my way over to him. Sand is so difficult to walk on. He didn't notice me at first; he was dusting the sand from his knees and wiping his hands on his dinosaur top.

'What are you up to?' I asked. I considered kneeling or bending down, but decided that this was patronising and that if I was on an important patrol of this beach, I definitely wouldn't appreciate that, so I settled to stay standing.

He pressed his lips together and swung his arms back and forth. 'Shells,' he said quietly. 'I can't find any.'

I looked down at the beach and understood what he meant. Green glass, blue bags, red and white stripy straws. No shells. Then, I turned to the wetter sand, being lapped at by the waves. Stinking seaweed, purplish pebbles, flimsy fishing net. No shells.

The boy kicked the sand and, grabbing his bucket and spade, turned to leave. Maybe because I'm nice, or because I'm nosy, I called after him: 'What did you want shells for?'

He averted his eyes and then gestured for me to follow him. I nodded and we set off in an awkward half walk half run. We dodged through abandoned driftwood and hopped over

rockpools, then arrived at a little spot under the pier piled with scrap metal and mouldy ropes. He pulled an aluminium sheet back, and it landed with a clatter, exposing a solitary sandy turret. The boy dropped his shoulders and reached a closed fist toward me, not meeting my eye. He opened up his hand, revealing a small Venus shell.

I considered leaving at this point, I had been nosy enough, and it was just getting depressing. I questioned whether I really wanted to get even more involved than I already was.

But something about this little boy and his pathetic little sandcastle prodded some shrivelled sappy bit of my heart and put an inconvenient lump in my throat. Vague memories of afternoons spent alone on the beach nagged at me, days where I was chucked out the house in the morning and told not to come back until tea. I sighed, picked up his bucket and spade, carefully concealed next to the castle, and gave them back to the boy.

‘You build the castle, I’ll be back.’

He nodded and ran to the water to pack his bucket with wet sand, obviously the best kind for building sandcastles, and I took myself off to a nearby cluster of rubbish. I combed the sand for different coloured bottle caps, dull shards of glass and scraps of plastic bags. When I returned, he had doubled the castle in size and was eagerly waiting to see my spoils. I dropped them on the floor in a heap before him and saw his face twist. Realising I had just put a load of rubbish in front of him with no explanation, I picked up the glass and caps and added them to the walls of the castle for windows and decorations. I speared some plastic with some twigs and dug it into the tops of each wall, tiny flags. Finally, I took the Venus shell and pressed it into the central wall, pride of place.

I smiled and, maybe because I’m nosy, or because I’m nice, asked what he thought.

‘It’s mint!’ The boy said, eyes wide and grinning, ‘I’ve got to show me mam!’

‘Go then!’ I said, ‘I’ll keep watch!’ And off he ran, up the sand-dusted stairs, down the cobbly street, past the ice cream van and off into the distance. He didn’t come back, must’ve

got back just as his fish fingers were done, but I stayed there in that spot, and came back the next day, and the day after that, it became a routine, a patrol. A beach patrol.

The Love that Seeps through the Cracks

Ethan B.

Where bounding arcs of hills
Curve across the horizon's pale blue,
And tough tufts of grass
Range the slopes, sparkling with dew.
The land blushes with vibrant veins
As meadows spread life into shadowy creeks.
Early Spring's Sun
Sets its head to rest on some hazy, distant peaks.
And fading now with faint pink clouds,
A final, graceful glance of love
Sees its petal-headed children bow,
Till morning wakes what darkness shrouds.

But morning will never bloom
Past the peaks, where the Earth is inverted.
Where mounds of clay in the grey sky loom
And blot the land in black,
Where a city scrapes the skyline
As rarities - ripped from the mountainside -
Rise to reject the Sun's soft shine.

Here reigns tall shadows that shield
A sour underbrush from the sight of the Stars.
They shroud tar streams and trees that glow,

Screen monstrous machines that summon sooty snow.
Here life is drained by bleaching rains,
Yet, some things through the cracks still grow.

Rooted in subways and pipelines of oil,
A budding Sprout emerges
With the energy soaring beneath it through the soil.

The skies clog with dirt.
The Earth's metals fuse into skeletal spires,

Spinning webs over oceans and forests, to
Spread like wildfire the trusted words of liars.

So grazed by the cascade of bulletin bullets,
So dazed by displays, the shine of the screens -
The city's doubts whirled by a world so vast;
The city Sprout adrift on a ship with no mast.
With one comfort at night, a warm streetlight,
Came a budding spite for the Sun that shadows cast.

Only in the night's hushed fiery hue
Would that face, petal-framed, face the skies -
Jaded by the day-to-day, the city Flower in time shuts its
eyes.

And when night begins to fall, and the Sun begins to rise,
A blinding, ancient scream sings from its flames,
And burning now with blood-red clouds,

It echoes through fossils and founding stones.
It roots deeper, echoing ancestral bones
That bear the load of all Our guilt, all that We defiled.
And the silted dead proudly feed the life that needs them;
Yet the wilted heads fear the soil that breeds them;
Still the Sun weakly smiled, silenced by the success of its own
child.

Just Be With Me, Darling

Frankie

‘Have you heard? There’s going to be another war.’

‘Come and dip your feet in, love.’

‘Don’t even get me started on the rising water levels. Everything’s terrible.’

She sighed and let down her hair. The tresses rippled over her bronze shoulder. With a warm smile, she held out her hand. ‘Isn’t the sand lovely? I can’t believe it’s April.’

‘It’s global warming.’

Her body sank into the beach towel, and she gestured him closer. He sat beside her, sand in his socks. She smoothed sun cream over her arms and shoulders and offered him the tube.

He drew further into himself and tugged his cap brim firmly over his eyes. ‘Even sun cream is carcinogenic. Did you know that? I heard it on a podcast.’

He spent a lot of time going down vast rabbit holes, late into the night. He hadn’t had good attendance at his job in months. He blamed the news.

‘Would you like a bottle of water?’ She pulled two bottles out of the cooler and held one out to him.

His nose wrinkled and he leaned away. ‘Didn’t you read the article I sent you about microplastics? Those things spend hours outside some warehouse, baking in the sun.’

Her hand dropped and she looked away. Her eyes grew heavy; his shoulders felt lighter, only content in shared misery.

They’d been undergrads when they’d met at a protest for fairer wages. He’d had long, shaggy hair, but it was his eyes that drew her in. They were fierce but kind, dancing with life. She’d had a nose ring; a phase he’d often reminded her of through the years. He’d enamoured her by the way he talked so animatedly. They used to argue every day, and they delighted in it. They could make themselves care about even the most mundane of things.

Perhaps, she eventually realised, it was possible to care too much. With every passing day he gave more pieces of himself,

and he slipped further away from her. Every night she'd wake to see his features illuminated by his phone screen. The same sharp nose, but a gaze that had long been extinguished.

Nearby, children squealed with delight and splashed at each other in the water. She watched them with a wistful, faraway look.

'I'd love children someday , wouldn't you?'

'What? And leave them with this mess?'

How desperately she wished she could take him by the shoulders and shake the life back into him.

Absolute Ignorance Approximately

Anonymous

I wonder if the man on the moon sees the trees,
How they're cut down to die below their knees,
I wonder if he sees the atmosphere fill with smoke,
How it's so toxic it could make a dead man choke,
I wonder if he sees the sea levels rise,
How the polar animals will soon meet their demise,
I wonder if he sees the weather get more extreme,
How it will shatter so many poor children's dreams,
I wonder if he sees so many people ignore the signs,
How they are so sure their grandchildren will be fine,
I wonder if he will be sad when Earth becomes a fiery pit,
I wonder if he will laugh because we caused it.

Kazakh Landscapes

Martin Duffy

Resilient despite nuclear horror, Kazakhstan remains provocative. Northwards lies the West Siberia taiga ecoregion, and southwards we head across the Kazakh forest steppe and forlorn stretches of coast. It is a miserable mix of rough grass, clumpy bits of forest and swampland. We have been driving now for five hours, and it confirmed my worst suspicions that this vast flat steppe was virtually uninhabited. Hour after hour of cement road, scrubby savanna and spartan pine trees bent double in the wind, like old men hunkering for comfort.

Occasionally, this monotony is broken by an ecoregion of ribbon forest planted by Soviet collective farms - left alone for decades. With relief, we oftentimes encounter groves Kazakhs call 'kolky', a bit like an Arabic oasis but without any obvious water. Somewhere deep there must be underground streams, but as for humankind, they are nowhere to be seen. All around me is pollution.

Many thousands of hectares near the nuclear weapons testing ground of Semipalatinsk remain dangerously irradiated, and millions of people living near that test-range suffer toxins worse than the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Kazakh victims endured repeated doses of gamma radiation and incalculable internal radiation-spores from environmental contamination.

It is estimated that Semipalatinsk saw 124 atmospheric explosions between 1949 and 1963, and nearly 400 underground tests, until the cessation of Moscow's rocket firing in 1989. The underground explosions contaminated groundwater and produced carcinogenic levels of nuclear fallout, permeating the atmosphere.

Most nuclear survivors are living in parts of the Semipalatinsk, Karaganda and Pavlodar regions, and nearest to the test site, every third child is stillborn or carrying mental and physical defects. Cancer deaths in Semipalatinsk rose seven hundred percent between 1975 and 1985.

There are also high concentrations of toxic lead and cadmi-

um found during medical examinations and autopsies tainting the vital organs of those living in the country's eastern regions. Pollution at these levels explains a proliferation of cancers, stillbirths and deformities. The country also endures the destruction of the inland Aral Sea, which has shrunk to half its former size since 1950. Rivers that carried fresh water from the mountains, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, were diverted in Soviet Irrigation Plans for cotton farming.

What is left draining into the Aral Sea is heavily polluted with agricultural chemicals from farming, and 90 percent of children living in the Aral Sea region bear pollution-related illnesses and respiratory and neurological sickness. Kazakhstan cannot pay for adequate medical services since the collapse of the Soviet Union - leading to a black market in smuggled and often defective medicines.

We stop by the road because we see a battered Soviet-era truck with a logo in English, 'Save the Planet'. It occurred to me that being so far from any major city, you would be lucky to come upon any Kazakh who spoke a word of English. I tried my luck with the men by the roadside who wore white coats and masks, who I took to be either scientists or medics. Getting only smiles I tried in my broken Russian and our dialogue kicked into life.

It turned out that I was partially correct in my assumption. It transpired that they were representatives of a semi-state organisation called AEOK. I knew them to be the Association of Environmental Organizations of Kazakhstan (AEOK), a big public organisation uniting over 140 environmental entities in Kazakhstan working on environmental protection.

AEOK's activities span across almost all regions of Kazakhstan: addressing concerns from emissions affecting the atmospheric air, water and land resources; to community initiatives like garbage collection and recycling, and any urgent toxic challenges faced by local communities. As I could see, they were sample collecting, and they immediately told me they were very worried by what they had seen.

They showed me the initial readings from the microscopes they had on the back of the truck, and I could see a crisp array of test tubes reminding me nostalgically of my own days

in science school. Alongside the microscopes, a set of Bunsen burners were bubbling away as if in merriment, but the supervisor of this small team told me there was nothing to celebrate. So many years after the Soviets had conducted their experiments, their explosions were still cruelly pathogenic to the Kazakh atmosphere. The water table was grossly contaminated, such that for safety, it really should not be consumed. The earth and air samples were equally befouled with toxins, and the localised radiation levels, though nothing like what you would find in Chernobyl, were nevertheless enough to cause activists considerable concern.

‘Mother nature can only do so much to recover from this poison left by the Soviets,’ the chief explained. ‘Nature is like a sickly child, asphyxiated by the Soviet curse of radiation. These bloody Russians are like lazy builders. They dropped nuclear waste and were not bothered to clear it up... They let these lethal pipes leak, they have no human conception of environmental responsibility. It is a kind of Soviet gift, about the only gift you will ever get from the Soviets- their nuclear trash...’

I asked the chief scientist what happens with their results. ‘We send our report back to the state ministry in written format, and as soon as we establish web-range, we transmit data back to our laboratory in real time so the teams there can alert the government officials on the latest findings. It is disappointing work because when I started my career in the late 1990s, conventional scientific logic was that these levels might start to deplete.’

He continues, ‘When Soviets trash you, they really trash you good...They have no conception of safety or environmental protection...They are the very illustration of the mechanic sitting atop the fuel tank with a cigarette butt in his mouth, even when they are put in charge of a nuclear weapon...They aim and launch and never care about the aftermath. Kazakhstan is now their toxic dustbin...’

I leave the scientists with their testing by the roadside, and we drive back into the lonesome countryside, not a single sign of human habitation in our sights. This torturous expedition reminds me of an accident a few years previously, in

the remote Masai homeland of Simon Jiro, Tanzania. Within a few minutes of our road crash, Masai tribesmen came, as if from nowhere, to offer help with the overturned jeep.

But I knew from the barrenness of the Kazakh landscape ahead, the thermoset of winter, and the total absence of human habitation, that we would be lucky even to come upon a lonely vulture, if indeed we were to crash. My mind drifts into a mirage of coffee cups, and I take over the wheel to try to stay alert.

And this, in turn, reminded me of the *primaeval* power I had felt about nature when I was still a little child. Here I was on foreign assignment, cocky with my return plane ticket, and we had gone so deep into the Kazakh interior that if we crashed no road rescue could save our lives.

And just as I had reflected on the dedication of those AEOK scientists and the ugly beauty of the sparse tundra, I reminded myself that there was a power far greater than my humble pen. And stretching ahead of us in the distance, the hopeful glimmer that this lonesome Kazakh road would eventually yield human civilisation.

Splitting

Paul Francisco

They say the world is splitting in two
and that one side will soon
no longer even see the other
- it will be as if they have disappeared altogether.

They say there will be two parallel Earths
occupying the same points in space
but operating
at separate
Frequencies
- Low and High -
and that it is up to us
to choose
which diverging track we take.

Howler monkeys
cry out
in the night
as the stars turn
and our Everything
flows away...

How times have affected our lives – A Sestina Julie Gaines

When I was young, my parents bought me lemonade in glass bottles.

I'd return them each week, now clean and empty, back to the store.

My incentive was ten pence a bottle repayment, so I always wanted more.

On Sundays, if I was lucky, my mother would send me back again

for wafers and Neapolitan ice cream, which came in a long cardboard box,

and sometimes, if there was enough change, I would buy a Sherbet Fountain.

At Junior School, when I was thirsty, I'd drink from an indoor water fountain:

And at the 'Infant's,' the NHS gave children free milk at school, in cute miniature bottles.

Some days I would take egg and cress sandwiches in a reusable Tupperware box,

and at breaks, I would spend my change on Walkers Snaps from a tuck-shop store.

I used my red Paddington Bear flask to carry tomato soup, again, again, and again.

It was tastier than either schools' soup was, and I always got so, so, much more.

Now the world is producing so much plastic, used for fizzy drinks, and so much more.

And plastic cups at the doctor's surgery have replaced the water fountain,

It is a magnet that entertains restless children, where they fill the waste bin up again.

Although some plastic can be reused, I think it is better to take your own bottles.

Once I had a filling at our dentists, and my reward was a
Milky Bar from the store,
or a giant chocolate chip cookie, whilst I held my rotten
tooth in a small box.

When I was little, my friend and I ate candy cigarettes from a
small cardboard box,
and we used the Love Heart candy lipstick to redden our
rose-bud lips some more.

Food now has many more additives in the, I see it at every
store.

I used to enjoy going out for days with my family in the
1980s, we'd visit a fountain.

We would lie on a picnic blanket on the grass and share gin-
ger ale from bottles,

I used to like going to Scarborough or Filey to the beach
again, and again.

I feel stronger now I've become older and want to change the
landscape again

As it has become unloved and uncared for, and I'm concerned
I'll end up in a box.

Let us make a plan to follow man and change what we can
do, and raise our bottles

Let us not waste what we can reuse or mend, let's darn our
socks once more.

And when bringing in the New Year at Trafalgar Square
around the fountain

We can make a pledge to support the locals at the struggling
independent store.

Perhaps we can start to grow our own vegetables rather than
going to the store?

And when it rains, and we are able, we can collect the water
in a butt to use again,

And instead of using the car, we could take a walk instead to
the fountain.

We could do what we used to do, and mend old clothes aban-
doned in an old box,

to give them a new lease of life and promise each other to throw them away no more.

Instead of scrolling on a phone, let's sing a song like 'ten green bottles'.

I pour my family fresh filtered water, to store in reusable glass bottles.

I would have used a fountain, but they have mostly had their day, like the meter box.

I think that mankind should think again and care for what they have once more.

The Balcony Men

Stephen Woulds

The things you never asked about –

There was a time I walked on air with gentlemen,
and flew where lesser men could barely walk.

I never meant to burn the earth and trap the sun,
when skies were lost in plumes of gas and tortured light.

I caught the rain in giant mouths we tore into the soil,
a thousand hungry hands beneath my feet.

I ploughed the gods to seed and grain these lands,
when farmers learned to kneel before the city's wealth.

The things we never talked about –

The darkest chapters whisper still inside my thoughts,
illiterates will never read or understand.

Sometimes I smell the rot of oyster flesh,
to sit and watch such pearls inherit younger necks.

Your tongue replaces all our yesterdays with holes,
now light betrays the mind where shadows shine.

I robbed the world to shore our winter years, my love.
We stood so high, yet nothing lasts to help us now.

Outside the Bothie

Grace Barber

The world had disintegrated in a matter of years. We couldn't keep up with the rising temperatures. Constant heat shrivelled the grass and flowers, leaving barely even the leaves behind. Trees wilted and drowned in mountains of salty waves. Europe's almost gone, with the residue of Scotland being mere metres from being dragged to its death. The people are gone, and we are what remains.

The Cairngorms have become somewhat of a haven for the survivors of the sinkings, but that doesn't mean it's pleasant. Just a few nights ago, we were hit by several thunderous waves of ice and snow, causing twelve people to be swept into the abyss. Swiss and I were lucky enough to hide in an old bothie just North of the Moon Bothie. I wasn't sure how long we were trapped in there, but at some point, the gas lantern had faltered. It was dark and loud as the storms became a cacophony of screams and howling winds that echoed across the mountain. Swiss suggested we huddle together, I think. I can't understand him much because, well, he's Swiss, but he had undressed and begun to snuggle his head into the nape of my neck. At first, it was unpleasant; his skin was abnormally rough against my fingers, but his warmth was sorely needed. Eventually, we fell asleep. It was hard not to, since boredom was the only thing occupying our minds.

The following day, a small light dwindled through the window. Despite the rise in the global temperature, the sun isn't as bright as it used to be. Maybe it was the mask of dust and clay that had skimmed the air. I carefully pried myself from Swiss' body and hung my fingers over the window ledge. The storm was gone. Thankfully. A few people were milling about outside, collecting what they could from the deceased. One man was crouched by the Moon bothie, holding a small child's coat in his trembling hand.

The old faiths had dwindled in numbers as many turned from them, feeling betrayed by the lack of a true Armageddon. A true rapture. Instead, the people turned to the an-

cients. Praying to gods they had only heard about in fantasy novels. When that failed, new Gods arose. One was the Moon Man, an old figure both vengeful in his wrath and dutiful in his mercy. He's the reason a group of us built the Moon Bothie. I don't particularly feel religious anymore.

Once upon a time, I was a staunch Catholic, well, kind of. But now, there's no point. If Hell is real, we created it.

Once everyone was out of the bothies, the Leader of our little community, Isaac, called us over to the Moon Bothie.

'My people!' He yelled, stretching out his arms as if he were some godly figure. 'Listen closely. I have a proposition.'

Really? Now?

'We can't keep doing this,' he continued.

Well, no kidding.

'Our rangers have returned at long last with news.' Isaac paused for a moment, holding his breath, 'there may be some food south of here, enough to feed all of us, but we can't be certain.' He paused again, 'I'm looking for volunteers to go out and see if these rumours have any truth to them. I understand it'll be hard, but this is our only way out!'

Swiss raised his hand; I tried to grab it, but I was a little late and ended up just pulling on his jacket instead.

'Thank you, Sir.' Isaac sighed, 'Thank you.'

And that was it. Swiss and I were set off into the rapids.

Obviously, I also had to go. I can't exactly leave the bastard on his own. Plus, staying there wasn't exactly plain sailing either. So off we went, sailing a small ship towards the land of hope or certain death. Either way, it was just us two.

The ship was larger than the bothie - but that isn't saying much. It was essentially a weird shaped house with a wooden porch. It was more private, too, since we were the only ones out there. As we headed towards Southern Europe, it even became pleasantly warm. Sometimes, Swiss would perch on the boat's edge and sunbathe like a spoilt cat. Although, the journey wasn't easy. We had very little food and water meaning we had to dock every so often. There were a few pieces of land near Germany and Italy, but not much. While docked, we had to filter seawater using fire and prepare it to take with us. There wasn't anywhere on the boat we could

do that safely, so we had to do it on the ground. Swiss would scavenge and hunt for any animals or berries he could find. But food was scarce, and often he'd only find an odd rat or two. So, once we were back on the sea, we'd try to fish, but since the rise in temperatures, a lot of the sea life had died. What was left wasn't gross or anything, but it wasn't quite as filling as I had hoped.

Once we reached the Tyrrhenian Sea, turbulent winds and rushing heat pushed us back and forth like a pendulum. Wish. Wash. Wish. But we powered through. Mostly. We lost a couple of things: the inflatable life craft, a bottle full of filtered water, and maybe a couple of utensils from our bothie, it got hard to keep track.

*

From there, we docked on the concave outline of an Algerian beach. A few people were huddled in groups near the water. I had expected them to scamper, but instead, they walked over to us. Each of them was adorned in colourful clothing meant to keep them cool.

'Hello!' one said. She approached us with caution, which was pretty reasonable since we had just leapt off what looked like a flying house of doom. 'My name is Sarah. I mean no harm but,' she motioned for us to stay back, 'I have a weapon. I won't do anything as long as you tell me why you are here.'

I didn't know what she was saying at the time since it was a mix of German and Arabic. Swiss managed to translate it, vaguely, using his limited English.

'My name is Swiss, and this is Irish,' Swiss replied in German. 'We are from the Cairngorms in Scotland. We're not here to hurt anyone, we just need some food for our people.'

The woman nodded, 'I'm sorry; please pardon my apprehension. We have had dealings with pirates, but we are happy to share our food with you. Please come with me.'

We followed her as she guided us through their makeshift city. It was only a couple of miles long, and it was mostly houses made from various materials I hadn't seen in years. All of it was stylised to perfection. Some had crafted leaves on top of buildings to act as shade while allowing the air

to circulate in their homes. Others had decorations, pretty golden things that shone in the sun. It was mostly sand, but it had these small patches of grass that I almost wanted to run over and kiss.

Eventually, we arrived at this open plane of green. It wasn't all grass, either; small vegetable and fruit plants sprouted from the ground.

*

They lived. I had thought all life was going to die, but no. There it was. Thriving. The air was sweeter, the sky was bluer, and my stomach rumbled. It was life. We were alive.

Carrier-bag (Testudines)

Eva Nisbet

A leatherback: constellations of barnacles scattered over shell, tapered beak hanging slack; dead. Raw broil-lumps raised red on the neck, blood slick over skin. It takes two of us to haul it onto the boat, corpse-heavy, wet thud. We used to name them; now we don't bother.

Cam digs his hand into its mouth and emerges with a dripping, stinking trail of plastic. The body slumps forward and he catches it with his knee.

Later, it will lie dissected, unblinking, on a necropsy table. Knots of dark, slithering intestines will be spread out, entrails webbed with gauzy serosa. Smashed-in carapace, sliced by scalpels and peeled-back fat, gloved fingers digging into organs, they will find fistfuls of the stuff.

There have never been false angels; the leatherback trusts its own eyes. I know what it saw. Reaches of sunlight refracting on the rippled surface, white halo beaming translucence. Angel in the water, a moon jellyfish. Blooming and contracting with the current, soft and serene. The turtle is easily fooled.

This one floated towards us with the false angel still hanging out of its mouth, miasma of rot on its tongue. Most will wash up, some without heads, when the tide recedes.

We wrap the body in plastic to stop the smell.

Enchanting January

Clare Lesley Hughes

This poem is part of an ongoing project of mine whereby I compose a couplet each time I encounter enchantment and animistic experiences. This exercise enables me to take time to recognise and acknowledge such experiences, thereby encouraging me to see the world as sentient, enable listening, and recognise kinship. By shifting one's consciousness, we can reject the dualism of culture versus nature, which has escalated human-driven climate change to terrifying levels. Below is a selection of my enchantments experienced throughout January 2025.

Darkening skies herald Pleiades white.
Aurora glows red; clouds cover the sight.
Hospital windows are grey and Poplars bare.
A red Dogwood stands firm in icy air.
First, alighting my gaze with voices soft.
A volery of tits, long tails aloft.
The beacon above church sent to warn.
A God of War glinting red at dawn.
Lonely lights for calling back the sun.
The relentless fog to overcome.
A beloved soul, no longer in air.
Hope rekindled by a Robin fair.
At edge of life, the shards cut clean.
With high-pitched laughter, icy and keen.
Pigeons and bells and a moon for breath.
Still signs of life amid a stale of death.

Salvage

Ella Rowley

Fruit that I had picked for a mouse,
That would sit and listen to me weep,
About the stinging behind my eye,
For pity it let heap,
All the while, the fruit had rotted,
We didn't see, though why would we?
With a stinging in my eye,
there are no calls to remedy!
For why should we feel guilty?
Their hunger is not in our hands,
While our heads are ringing!
Though, for what the mouse may understand,
Is the eye that I am pressing,
May be the same as thee,
That uses the pretty powders,
Of which this mouse was a testee.

Sam's Story: The Amazing Adventures of an LGBTQ Entrepreneur and YouTube Sensation in Kazakhstan

Martin Duffy

Resilience starts at home with habitat heroes. Kazakhstan has probably some of the world's most precious biospheres, but regrettably, in places, also a few of the most polluted eco-systems known to environmental science. Environment in Kazakh is translated as 'қоршаған орта' (qorshağan orta), encompassing nature from the air we breathe to all terrains. Unfortunately, Kazakhstan endures radiation from old nuclear testing sites, threats from the shrinking of the Aral Sea, and desertification - all precipitated by Kazakhstan's years under the Soviet Union.

Happily, it possesses environmental warriors like my friend Sam. This twenty-something is typical of Kazak protestors - they are umbrellas opposing a toxic multitude of wrongs in Kazak society - pollution, LGBTQ rights, women's empowerment, social justice. None of these issues sit easily in the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan, where discrimination is endemic, but Sam is a veritable 'good news' story of an LGBTQ entrepreneur, environmental activist and social influencer. He does all this in one of the most politically hostile terrains of the world.

Sam's YouTube videos exhibit someone who is an exception to all our generalisations about the visibility and confidence of the nascent LGBTQ and environmentalist community in this former Soviet state. A leading hairstylist, singer, a well-known socialite and social influencer (with a large Instagram following), he is the Rock Star of his sleepy regional capital. He screams, 'Just accept me as gay, and he isn't going away!' He goes on to say, 'Don't mess with me, and don't mess with my environment either...'

Sam shows that Kazakhstan may still allow a minority of alternative social voices to percolate onto its city streets, as long as the message is reasonably subtle, and not threatening the bedrock of familial stability. Indeed, the instant success of

his raunchy, YouTube videos suggests that either state moral policing is less notorious than internationally surmised, or things happily get through the censor's cipher.

Luckily, Sam has provoked few negative reactions from the usually severe organs of the Soviet state, although there is always (of course) the possibility that their inmost organs were as titillated as Sam's enthusiastic followers. I also attribute some of his self-confidence to his family background in policing. With a father who is a chief cop and overly proud of him- he may indeed be Teflon-coated.

The plot of his video screenplay, 'Samandra', is fairly tame in itself. An atypical Kazak nightlife scene gauchely unfolds in suggestive dark lighting. Boy steals boy from girl and whisks him off to engage in a few suggestive, erotic (but lumpishly simulated) acts, in luridly chic venues with funky coloured stretch limos and darkened pleasure domes. In Iran or Afghanistan, and in most of the more Islamised post-Soviet states, this would certainly have the Mullahs and the moral police outraged, but this YouTube caricature of himself, has had little but positive reception. In the video Sam urges suggestively, 'Embrace me and my beautiful Kazak steppes...'

Sam's video campaigns have drawn admiration from local intellectuals and the younger generation alike. That Sam lives in a predominantly Russian-speaking city, far from the anxiety of large cadres of the increasingly Islamised Muslim majority, may also explain the relative ease with which he has become a celebrity in one of Kazakhstan's bigger urban areas. An instant commercial success in the beauty business, while still a teenager, Sam now represents a host of top-brand cosmetics in a country not previously known for its luxury-end coiffure.

His own salon is so booked out, dates for a haircut are as scarce as hen's teeth. Despite his overtly gay credentials, he has been the 'go-to stylist' for celebrities and state officials alike, and claims a much-coveted appointment with one of Moscow's top hairdressers. To describe Sam's "rise and rise" in an understatement. At the same time, this immodest artist, a fashionista of designer style and crusader of modern fashion, has done so much to show-case the enormous contri-

bution which the LGBTQ community make to wider civic society in a rather sombre and perhaps style-shy country like Kazakhstan.

Asked about his extraordinary success he put it down to ‘hours of hard work, not giving up on yourself, and being yourself, even when the outside society may not be very friendly... And setting a good example on how we respect the planet.’ He adds, ‘The lucky thing is that once you are an obvious hit with the rich, slowly but surely, a begrudging respect is achieved.’ It seems even in a post-Soviet state such as Kazakhstan, known for quotidian anti-gay prejudice, it is possible to stand out from the crowd and be different.

There is, however, one perplexing fragment of this compelling, sensual and at times quite provocative screenplay, and the YouTube video which resulted from it. It occurs towards the conclusion of the tape, and concerns Sam (Samandra) drawing something which could be mistaken for the letter “Z” in the steam of the bathroom mirror. It is, in fact, his initial ‘S’ in Cyrillic script. In ‘The Mask of Zorro’, a Spanish nobleman would write the letter “Z” as he avenged a great wrong. However, while this video-script pre-dates the Russian invasion, reading history backwards- it now encroaches on dangerously naïve or even leaden-footed allusions to the war in Ukraine. Sam has not made a crass error of iconography, just unfortunate timing.

Gays are traditionally at the forefront of all liberation causes and wholeheartedly reject Putin’s Russia. I hold Sam in such high esteem, I may be guilty of bias, but I know from hours of conversation in my broken Russian, that there isn’t a prejudiced bone in his body! Also, I could so easily have written this story about Natalya (a lesbian in one of the bigger cities who was forced out of her apartment by homophobic thugs), or Sergey (fired from his job for anti-pollution activism) or Elena (seeking to transition but facing apathetic if not hostile, medics) but I prefer not just to lament the slow pace of change, but to remain optimistic for Kazakhstan’s LGBTQ and environmental future, safe in the hands of confident gays like Sam.

Deep Contrast

Jane Nodder

Delving deep into my soul
Excavating for that strength that somehow
Evades me.
Prior to this we were so together, united,
Caring one for the other with so much love.
Once we shared everything -
Now we seem divided,
Turned inwards, living our own private lives,
Running from difficult conversations and tough challenges
Alone in our separate worlds, suffering apart.
So much remains unspoken, so much I want to say
To you.

A Journey Through the Eyes of Hope

Nicola Campbell

At ease with herself, Hope sat behind a desk, in a trance and daydreaming. Waiting for the bell to go so she could dive out onto the playground seemed endless. No one knew what was about to happen! The trance that had enveloped Hope disappeared as quickly as it came. Through the classroom door walked a man, or rather, an inspirational magician-type of character. The new Headteacher - and he was to be Hope's class teacher too! Hope listened with intent to his stories of the Scilly Isles, where no one locked their doors, everyone was friendly and trustworthy. This man brought with him to the school a real sense of justice and equality.

At the age of ten Hope felt safe in her environment, she was sheltered in such a small community. St Benedict's Primary School sat in the flourishing green valley with a sprinkling of houses, two churches, two pubs, a post office and shop, not forgetting the imposing Abbey that sat above all of this with a public school for boys tagged on to it.

Hope was in awe of the new Headteacher (or Magician), he truly rocked her world. He shared atrocities from around the planet, he shared the power of nature and the power of man. Something inside stirred up, and in Hope's naivety she thought that she could save the world: make everyone equal so that this precious planet could be looked after and taken care of.

The most glorious sound of all rang in Hope's ears, 'Yes, it's playtime.' Everyone rushed to the door like animals in a zoo eager to escape. The sun shone brilliantly in the blue skies, making for a perfect day. The contrast of a grey concrete rectangle which was harsh and unforgiving when you crashed down from running so fast to win the race was incomparable to the rest.

The rest of the playground was Hope's favourite place, it was a lush green field surrounded by crowds of trees which managed to hide a miniature stream, with mud banks and

when in spring, a sunny yellow mass of cowslips and prim-roses grew. The seasons were different back then. Hope was learning not to take everything for granted, salty tears would roll down her face when The Magician talked of children in third-world countries having a lack of food. She was learning inequality for mother nature and for humans, like a sponge soaking up knowledge and had a thirst for more.

This was the seventies when drought hit the world, devastation was everywhere, and this was a taste of things to come for Hope. She was angry with the universe, wanting to scream and shout, asking, 'Why are people greedy, why don't care about others and the state of this world?'

As Hope grew, she was passionate about justice for this beautiful planet that man was slowly but surely beginning to destroy.

By the age of fourteen, Hope had a need to fight, to fight for justice to save the world. She had discovered the truly unimaginable effects of nuclear arms and with a band of warriors she marched and rallied against such atrocity and the effects of these harmful weapons on mankind and the planet.

As time went by Hope enjoyed being free, being wild, being quiet, all the while watching a turbulent planet changing before her so drastically. Ugly, vile, revolting, flooding, earthquakes, ice melting, devastating and destroying everything in its path, this was man and his greedy desire for things to be Bigger and Better!

Not longer ten years old, Hope is sixty and still has those salty tears running down her face. She is shouting from the roof tops, "get me down, let me down, sort this awful mess". She is an adult now and swears in rage and anger.

Never forgetting the teachings of The Magician, Hope thanks this wonderful man from the Isles of Scilly who taught her compassion and showed her the way. His famous words linger in her head to this day, 'Walk with your head held high, look at the world around you and never let go.'

Return

Paul Francisco

the beauty that lurks in the shadows
finds a place to flourish unseen
in the midst of adversity
a thriving is living
below
the threshold
dark flowers of pain...

roots find
their foothold potential
& creep
inexorably
upwards
towards the light...

hothouse plants
choke civilisation
a jungle floor
of concrete and ruin -
lush
the primal garden returns

Seven Sea Stanzas

Ethan Clark

Spanning leagues, fathoms, miles
I grasp your rocky body and
Slowly eat away with my love
And you accept my every caress.

In your heat, I spread across you,
I reach for the back you have turned upon me,
My fingers drop down and tap repeatedly,
A reminder that I am here.

I am the mitochondria to your cell:
From my soup came your warming,
From my depths came your nutrition -
Scraping my deepest skin for treasures.

My many fleshy microbes have lived,
Changed, bred, and died out several times over
Your many fleshy microbes are doing much the same
Entwined are their fates as are ours.

They cross me, journeys short and long
They take my microbes and throw in their dead,
Some go down and never come back up,
I swallow them all within my love for you.

Every night I swallow your light
Making a mellow yellow above,
Every night we meet her
My grasp on you shifting, ever tighter

Holding together your fiery insides,
Your soot, smoke and flames I contain
In my body, I contain all you throw at me
All you give, I retain, I eat, I love.

Writing Resilience is a creative writing anthology created with the Living Lab at York St John University where storytelling meets climate action. Showcasing the voices of students across disciplines and levels of study - from Drama and Theatre undergraduates, to Master's students in Human Resource Management and Postgraduate researchers, this anthology covers a wide range of perspectives and narratives. Some writers are Yorkshire born and bred; while others write from their cross-continental experiences. All share a common concern for the future of our planet.

Exploring the emotional landscape of climate resilience, these community-led pieces show how personal narratives can inspire environmental and social change. This is an invitation to connect, empathise, and persist.