

MT20 • ISSUE NO. 8

THE TURL

dreamwalking

ART

The Universal Nightmare

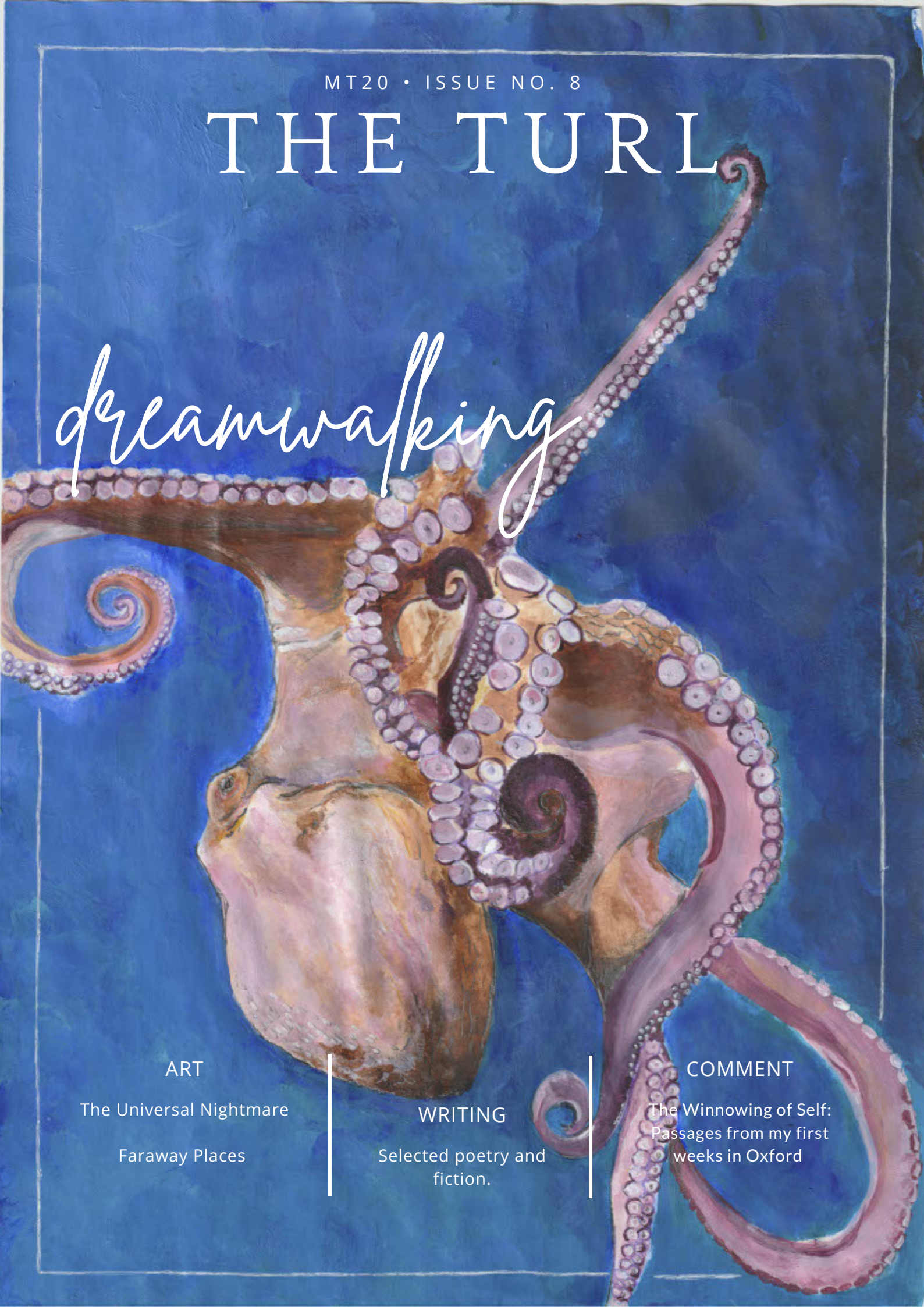
Faraway Places

WRITING

Selected poetry and
fiction.

COMMENT

The Winnowing of Self:
Passages from my first
weeks in Oxford



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note from the editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the MT20 edition of THE TURL MAGAZINE! If you're not already aware, The Turl is an arts magazine collaboration between Jesus, Lincoln, and Exeter Colleges. We accept submissions every term and back in pre-COVID times, we went to print. Now we go to PDF. You can find back issues of the magazine on our snazzy website <https://turlmagazineoxford.wixsite.com/online>

This issue's theme is DREAMWALKING. When we were coming up with the theme during the lockdown summer, we knew we wanted to avoid explicitly discussing COVID, and to instead create an escapist experience to fascinate, inspire, and maybe even disturb our readers (see Nana Simas's 'The Universal Nightmare' on p19). Yet when reports of strange, vivid dreams are on the rise due to lockdown, this theme felt relevant and intriguing. In this issue, you can plunge into the dreams of our contributors, from Lucas Troadec's surreal, Wes Anderson-esque series of photos 'Lillie and Tillie' (p9), to Emilie Clowry's melancholic poem 'Coffee Stains' (p8) and Chelsea Wallis's lyric essay on arriving in Oxford (p5).

This is also our last term as Editors of The Turl, and we're incredibly proud of all the wonderful work that has graced the magazine's (now sadly digital) pages in our three runs. We're looking forward to seeing who the new editorial team will be and what they'll come up with! But for now, we hope you enjoy the MT20 edition and have a lovely, relaxing vacation.

Cover Art by Shathuki Perera

To fit this term's theme of 'dream walking' I have painted an octopus using acrylics. I was inspired to portray this fascinating organism following the story of an octopus named Heidi kept by Professor David Scheel from Alaska. One day, Scheel captured a video of Heidi changing colours in her sleep as if she was dreaming. She turns from a ghostly white to yellow, deep red and then turns to a mottled green colour. Scheel speculated that she was imagining catching and eating a crab, using camouflaging techniques that octopuses would usually use in the wild. The limited amount of research around this area makes it an exciting concept of Biology and I felt moved to share its ethereal beauty.

With socially distanced love,
*Helena Aeberli and
Jenson Davenport*

Lincolnshire blues

Big skies make different colours. There is no such thing as grey there – yellow does not exist, either. In the morning, the sun used to shine through those Dunelm blinds in rose-coloured lines, turned the walls of my borrowed bedroom the lightest blue. Peach, too – that thick, warm wallpaper, soft to the touch. I remember pressing it down with the pads of my fingers, feel the resounding spring. Even in winter – the snow was softer there, though they say the northern showers are the coldest (and god forbid you try to tell them that it's not really the North). I bit down on that bitter gale with such joy, it tasted like someone had frozen the sun as a lollipop, fizzing sharp against my teeth.

I used to think it was the flattest land in the world, you couldn't see a hill for miles. We never had anywhere to sledge, my mother would say as we looked across the fields. One scarf is never enough – you'd need at least three. Freezing hands balled into the sleeves of my too-big winter coat, we trudged along the marshes, silver tipped grass crunching with each step - I shiver at each and every breeze, but the women in my family can handle the cold. Spring, 1944, the Haven brimming its banks, but she wades straight in, step after step, until the grey mud falls away from her bare feet. Choking mouthfuls of that heavy, rust-coloured water, cast about like wet leaf in its currents, before breaking gasping through the surface. Water-blinded eyes dazzled by the sunlight and a rising cheer torn from her throat. So, now you can swim.

The stories used to spill themselves, swilling over like wine. Kicking her legs against the counter, my mother sits up on the sink, not five years old, mouth full of salt and bubbling laughter. She ate the yew berries, Barry! I've pictured it so many times – a seed-flecked grin, that self-satisfied smile of a toddler who has gotten what she wants. Any poison never touched her.

Big skies, yes, big enough to put to bed these Lincolnshire blues, purples, orange-reds. Strap on your roller-skates and try to make it to the end of the road. We were so small, matchstick people sketched across the kitchen table with a borrowed crayon, wobbling our way home as the evening stars spiralled down from above. The Plough followed us with her stern eyes, gentle, waiting, stitched into the right-hand corner of the night.

See you soon, I remember saying, like a promise, or a prayer, but god was never lenient with us. The carpet was beige, the walls white. I could never read the Roman numerals on the clock. A year ago, after both funerals had been and gone, I dreamt that me and my sister visited whoever lives there now. They had kept the kitchen the same, but had a far uglier array of mugs. Last week, just before I woke, she came around the corner in that same old coat. When I asked her why she was here, of all places, she smiled and held me by the shoulders. Just wanted to see how you were doing, duck.

They say all sorts about it now – you can scarcely mention the name before a clunking trail of ugly words drags heavily behind. Most segregated town in England, murder capital of the country... hotbed of deprivation - get out, get out, quick, while you still can. A scaffold town, crammed with breathing skeletons. Dead leaves blow down its empty streets, and nothing else. But I'd go back now, even though it's not the same. Try and find a fistful of colour in all that churned out, smoke-tasting paint. Turn left down the road and you'll see the blue lampposts, waiting. There will be a girl stumbling after her granddad, their laughter ringing out in the November air as he turns, ties her shoelaces for the fourth time.

You know, she learnt to swim in the river, my mother said, our backs to the churchyard as we turned away from the docks and stared across the grey water. Waiting, perhaps, for the familiar sight of head bobbing through the ripples, making her way home.

Anna Cooper, Jesus

THE WORLD OF TERESE AT NIGHT (NANA SIMAS)



THIS PAINTING ATTEMPTS TO CREATE A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE IMMERSSED IN A DREAM. IT DEPICTS A YOUNG GIRL FLOATING IN A WORLD OF BRIGHT LIGHTS AND VIBRANT COLOUR THAT EXISTS ONLY AROUND HER AND THEN FADES INTO DARKNESS AND NOTHINGNESS.

The Winnowing of Self

PASSAGES FROM MY FIRST WEEKS
IN OXFORD

July: A Caution and Counsel

You will soon be submerged in a pond in which privilege can be scraped off in slabs, the air so saturated with it that you can taste the fetidness, breathing quietly but insistently that you mustn't presume to belong in such an ancient place; a fabled demesne in which those of your ilk have walked for less than a century, and even then only shrouded in a fog of opprobrium. It is the obfuscation of this privilege, the invisibility of intellectual habitus, that reeks most pungent. Yet you are the product of generations of indomitable women who confronted these same fortifications on even steeper footing of inequality. Let the knowledge of these intrepid forebearers hang not as a grindstone but instead nourish you with solidarity. Though you have never before encountered the trappings of grotesque wealth to such degree, walk in the knowledge that worthy values need no gilded patina. Seek these same in others: the kind, the impassioned, the searching and perceptive souls amidst the throng. For pangs of loneliness sharpen the palate for the delight of kin. Do good and try to take root even in alien and inhospitable terrain.

'I am made bold
here.'

6th October

An inaugural pilgrimage to Blackwell's procured me this journal. I sit now by my open attic window and count seventeen chimneys, as the sun washes the stones gold and the clouds paint them grey in turn. I hope this little book may stand a record of who I am and who I may perhaps become while I am here. I feel already in some small way as though in being here I no longer need pretend to the part of academic – it is almost as though the having 'a room of one's own' in this town presupposes the fact. I went to the bookshop as the bells were chiming five o'clock and my feet squelched in sodden, spent shoes. But I became so absorbed in the spines around me that my frozen toes were of little consequence. I sought my kindred folk amongst the tomes, wondering who of these had felt as I was now feeling; adrift in a strange land with much yet to prove. I returned with Plath, Sayers, Wollstonecraft, Woolf, Dickinson, Montgomery and C Brontë in tow. It is odd that I should feel myself incumbent to continue their legacy – that of women who obstinately insisted on thinking and demanded that they be heard. Odder still that I consider them my peers here as much as any others I have met.

7th October

While lingering in St Mary's Passage it occurred to me that this town is rather like Narnia itself, enabling its temporary denizens to fashion themselves as something nobler or grander than they were before. But I wonder if the effects are equally fleeting. Shall each of us return from the wardrobe much the same as our former self, to a world that refuses to recognise that we are changed creatures?

8th October

I woke inadvertently early and had not experienced until now how beautiful the town is while still asleep, assenting to me gazing my reverent fill on the glory that is sunrise and the grandeur that is the myriad spires reaching to the horizon. It is a blessing to be closeted away here, the madwoman in the attic as I always envisioned. The chimneys are just now billowing apricot as the smoke is caught in bands of sunlight. Lonely little birds alight contentedly among the stacks. It would be altogether too easy to spend full days in idle reverie, never actually writing the poems that are conjured in the air each passing moment.

9th October

I find I am made bold here, enlivened to the myriad of possibility encased in the days, having yearned so long for this very existence. But there is a stasis to finality – it is far easier to plan than to realise. And how was I to know three years ago that the life I had then realised was to prove so transitory? It is a discomfiting prospect to me to contemplate that the same may be true of this new selfhood. The only sense in which I now know my own mind better is that of my propensity to alter.

10th October

How tired I am. I feel more and more keenly the need to be prudent in spending the precious coins of time. Surrounded by so many tides of people, I must seek out those that awaken the better versions of my fragmented self – those around whom I feel kinder, more patient and more awake to the vastness of opportunity that hides beyond the reach of my own foresight. But I do wish I were not so metallic, flashing hot or cold from the stimulus of company around me. Deep joys tend to herald melancholy in their wake.

11th October

I am unused to the abundant beauties of a true Autumn, which reflects loveliness and decay in such close camaraderie. Oxford on a sunny day is quite acutely painful, for somehow the sublimity echoes with attendant loss. The University Church bells are striking, and the choral evensong drifts up to my window from across the way. These stones are haunted by divinity.

12th October

I prowled along Dead Man's Walk, Merton Grove and Magpie Lane this afternoon, pausing often to marvel at the play of light and dark against the vivid lawn, slate skies and bursts of delicious sunshine. I meandered back through Radcliffe Square and noticed two girls sitting sketching the Camera with sure strokes. There are some people who seem to have the gift of certitude, forging a clear path through life and feeling no compulsion to deviate. Further along a girl in a golden skirt with bright blue lipstick was kicking up the orange leaves as she walked up Brasenose Lane. The symphony of colour struck me deeply; that particular moment was potent with life. I reached my room, my very own ivory tower, feeling utterly dissociated, gazing down at the stained-glass Chapel windows glowing in the dimness of dusk. I think I must consciously abjure some moments of beauty if I am ever to attain tranquillity.

13th October

It is strange to be so busy after such an extended period of relative idleness. I wonder sometimes whether my quiet nature is suited to so much bustle, so much uncertainty and change. It disturbs my thoughts, leaving me uncharacteristically absentminded. I have kept to my room today, enjoying how the sun fills it from high above all the surrounding rooftops. It is quite lovely to have no onlookers – my own private haven, lonely though it may be.

14th October

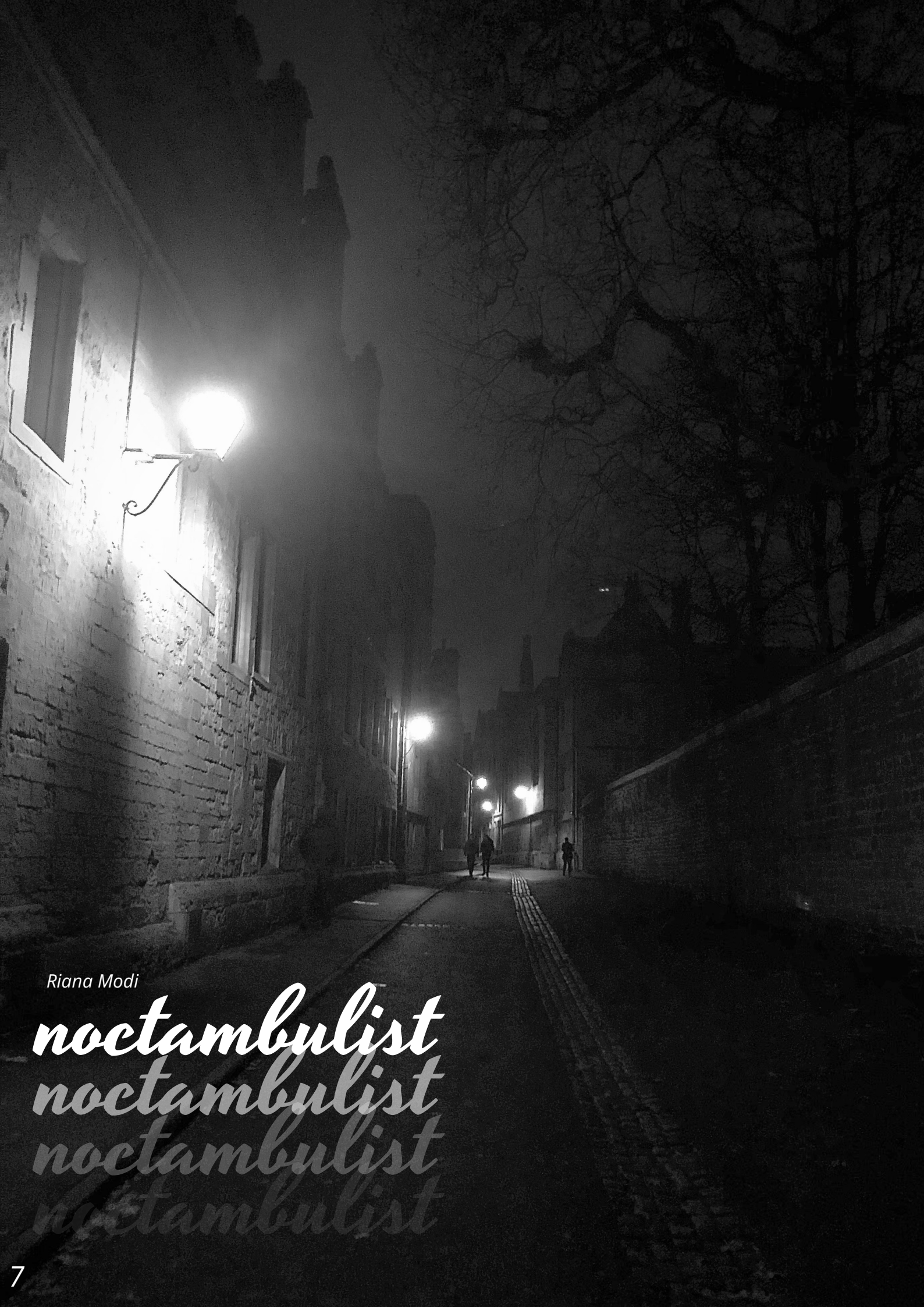
Today marked the centenary of women formally matriculating and graduating at the university. The morning was spent at the Rad Cam, aptly commemorating the first day on which we poor females were first allowed inside its hallowed halls. And yet still the shelves upon shelves of history volumes inside it are barely tenanted by millennia of anonymous women, all of Shakespeare's lost sisters as Woolf conjectured. I felt the weight that bears heavily on all those who feel the duty to justify a legacy of oppressed ancestors, whether they be of a marginalised race, gender or otherwise maligned identity.

It is not enough to simply access the same elite spaces when the burden of past generations' inequality remains so fresh a reminder and a disturbance. Certainly I would not wish away my awareness of the struggles endured so that I may indeed gain such opportunities. There is no easy answer; but I think it is only by properly exhuming these ghosts and acknowledging the intensity of embedded disadvantage that genuine progress is conceivable.

There are so many brilliant people here inquiring deeply into questions that matter; questions that can help to build a greater world. The line between inspiration and intimidation is dim. But I begin to understand how flourishing consists of a peculiar alchemy of place, people and purpose. I cannot take for granted this rare and precious juncture.

CHELSEA WALLIS





Riana Modi

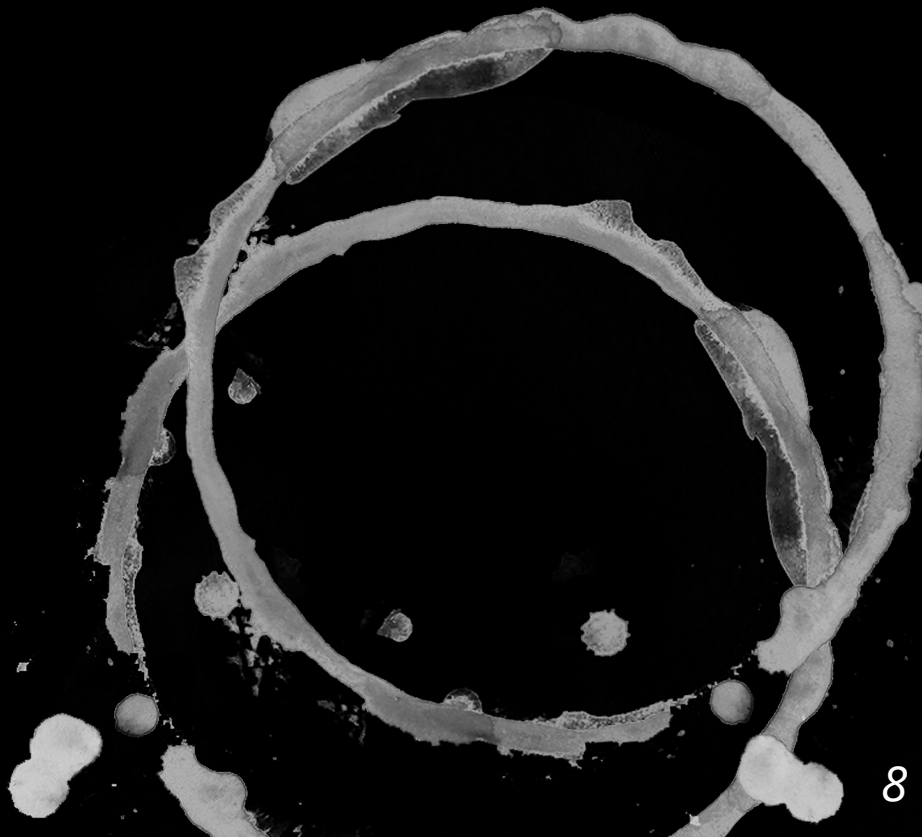
noctambulist
noctambulist
noctambulist
noctambulist



Emilie Clowry

COFFEE STAINS

The coffee stains inside the mug
just below the blue chipped rim,
a faint smile of steady years
you could meet with your eyes half-closed
each morning.
You didn't care about washing it clean,
a quick rinse every now
and then to clear the worst away
,watching as the dregs built up,
sediment-like,
inscribing, ingraining the patterns
of a life long-lived
,of a life lived long in the steady unerring pace
of the day-to-day. Normal patterns
,reliable, regular
,like a beating heart
in a blue-chipped mug
that only now I wipe clean.



A promotional image for the series 'Lillie & Tillie'. Two women are shown from the chest up, standing side-by-side. The woman on the left has a vibrant green bob wig and is wearing a pink pinstriped suit jacket over a white top. The woman on the right has a pink bob wig and is wearing a tan pinstriped suit jacket over a white top. Both are holding large milkshakes with whipped cream and straws. The background is a warm, reddish-orange color. The title 'Lillie & Tillie' is written in a large, yellow, serif font across the center of the image.

Lillie & Tillie

murder on high st
Lucas Troadec, full series available on
instagram @troadec-lucas





I DESIRED ALWAYS TO

stretch the night

AND FILL IT

fuller and fuller

WITH

dreams

VIRGINIA WOOLF



Rosa Chalfen

HYMN FOR THE MAD PEOPLE OF PARIS

o, mad people of paris!

with your lank waves of hair,
like grubby ocean swathes:

with your burning eyes in which
apocalyptic fires dwell:

with your wasted limbs, your shoulder blades like
the sharp vertices of an angel:

with your dark skin that shines like
the moon under dead shadows of night:

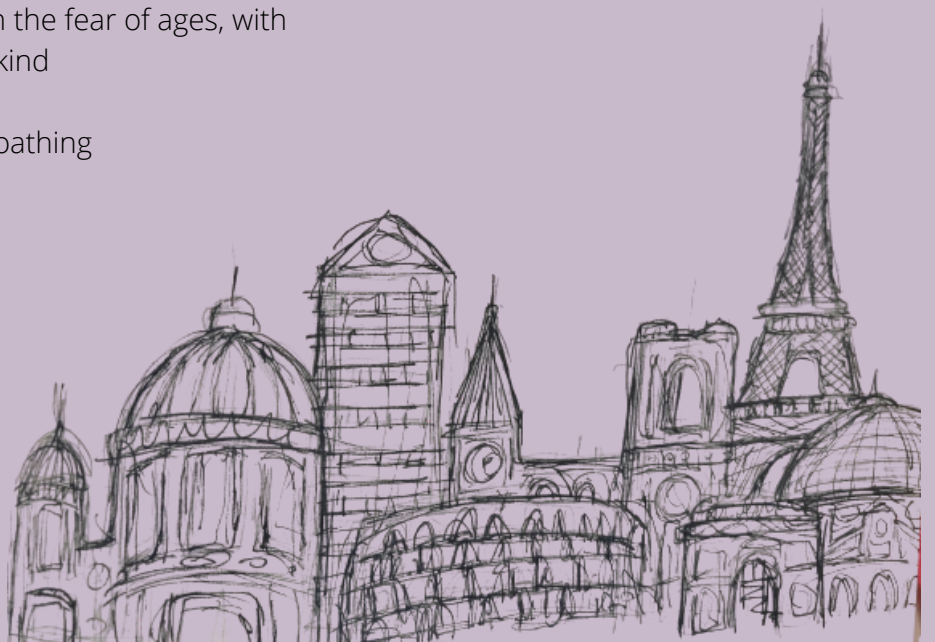
with the torn arpeggios of your laugh
that rip polite boulevards in two:

with your chants and spells,
the words that spill from your mouth like smoke,
like the guttural characters of some wild land:

i love you! i may look at you with the fear of ages, with
the disgusted fascination of my kind

but do not mistake my love for loathing
(they are so easily entwined)

i love you, mad people of paris!
i have been mad, like you.

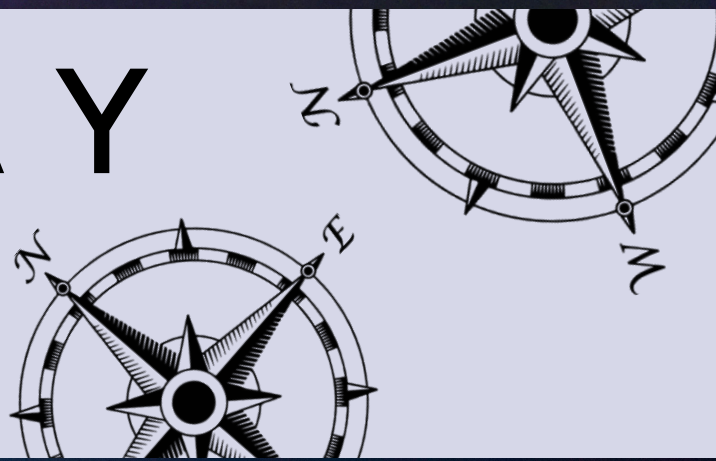


Art by Anna Cooper



FARAWAY PLACES

REEF RONEL





Unsurprisingly, to anyone who has ever spoken to me for more than 5 minutes, these photos are exclusively from travelling. Beyond dream-walking, which I hope you get a sense of from the photos, these are about liberation, adrenaline and finding meaning in the face of the overwhelming.

I've tried to draw a contrast between two main perspectives: the master of the birds-eye view, surveying its scenery as if it were the owner, and being enveloped from within the surrounding to the point of being part of it, to the point of insignificance. The two photographs that really capture (haha pun) this dichotomy for me are the lightning and the cave. The brilliance of the lightning bolt and the dim inconsistency of the light from my head torch: looking at something from a distance in one, and from within in the other.

When I took the picture of the lightning I was in the sea, drinking a beer and being pelted with rain; a rainbow and the city smog to my right in the distance, and the lightning storm (photographed) to my left. The photo of the cave was a month later. In the cave itself, I was almost in utter darkness for an hour as we sailed through. I only glimpsed the smallest part of the overarching architecture from that dimly-shining light around my head.

There's a clear narrative as you go through the pictures. As you look through them, your eyes walk along a tightrope of nightmarish frailty and triumphant, powerful daydream. Seeing them in the four walls of your room, in the midst of a time when adventuring seems scarcely possible, you can see a hyper-augmented reality. I hope it gives you a hope of things yet to be seen that, one day, vaccine permitting, you will.



Charlie West

TRADUCCIÓN 10

El amor duerme en el pecho del poeta:

Tú nunca entenderás lo que te quiero
porque duermes en mí y estás dormido.
Yo te oculto llorando, perseguido
por una voz de penetrante acero.

Norma que agita igual carne y lucero
traspasa ya mi pecho dolorido
y las turbias palabras han mordido
las alas de tu espíritu severo.

Grupo de gente salta en los jardines
esperando tu cuerpo y mi agonía
en caballos de luz y verdes crines.

Pero sigue durmiendo, vida mía.
¡Oye mi sangre rota en los violines!
¡Mira que nos acechan todavía!

The Love Sleeps on the Poet's Chest:

You can't know how much love I have for you
Because, lying on my chest, you're asleep.
Voices of penetrating iron pursue
me, so I shield you while I weep. (4)
Rules which make both stars and flesh have a fit
now wound further my aching heart, and the
Cloudy, murky words surrounding us bit
the wings of your severe, harsh character. (8)
Groups of people prance around the estate
awaiting both your body and my strife
on horses of light whose green manes alate. (11)
But carry on sleeping, love of my life.
Hear my broken blood in the violins!
Look how they wait for us with javelins! (14)



Jennifer Crompton

BATHSHEBA

Only a silhouette of charcoal dust
and chalk, smudged by deft hands against the night,
she stands. Waters drip on the rust
rubbed from the roof tiles, running with the bright
red, running down her legs. Voyeur, I see,
even from the background, I see a star
dropped in her eye. Is she aware? Is she
aware of the painted star, near and far?

She turns on me now, a celestial frame
for an unyielding gaze, to meet my stare.
Undone, unmade, uncovered but by shame,
I wait for her contempt. Still, bare, wet hair,
she turns back to her waiting skies anew.

A pair of aesthetes, we enjoy the view.

THE *hauntingly beautiful* REALITY OF FICTION

Thien's *Do not say we have nothing* is an utterly heart-wrenching book, as delicate as it is beautiful. I have not been so moved by book in a long time, if at all. One cannot help but compare it to *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* for its treatment of the Cultural Revolution and communist China. Love, family, friendship, and history weave together a complex narrative as lives are ripped apart. The book is hauntingly beautiful—in its writing, in its story, in its message.

Li-ling—Marie—introduces us to Vancouver where she lives with her mother; her father disappeared and died by suicide in Hong Kong when she was 10. That same year Ai Ming, a student fleeing the brutal scenes of Tiananmen Square, arrives on their doorstep. Slowly but surely Ai Ming, warmer and brighter, transports us back in time all the way to China. A patchwork story of different places and generations is slowly uncovered, starring the epic characters Old West, Wen the Dreamer, Big Mother Knife, and Swirl, who sang in teahouses before being sent to labour camps, trekking across vast swathes of China for all-too-short reunions.

Ai Ming's tale is fantastical, so mythical and allegorical one can only assume it to be fiction. But breaking it up is Marie's tale, down to earth and brutally heart-breaking. And yet, slowly but surely, they spiral together like the musical notes of Goldbach's Variations, an organising theme that echoes throughout the book. Ai Ming—fragile and freezing—shows up at Marie's doorstep, thrusting them together. The reader is submerged in this collision of worlds as the Marie and Ai Ming story is contrasted with that of Wen the Dreamer, Big Mother Knife, and Swirl—two worlds which, it is revealed, collide into one. Big Mother Knife, it turns out, is Marie's grandmother, Swirl her great aunt. We are introduced to Swirl and Wen's daughter, Zhuli, a talented violinist, and to Sparrow, their son. Marie's father, Jiang Kai, was a concert pianist, both friend and lover to Sparrow and Zhuli. And Ai Ming, it is revealed, is Sparrow's daughter. Their worlds become one, historically as well as locationally. The distance between fiction and reality is not so great after all, and these stories skirt the boundary, liminally exploring the relationship between the two.

If the seemingly fictional world of Wen the Dreamer can unite with the seemingly autobiographical world of Marie, why shouldn't Thien's ultimately fictional world spill over into our actual one? Because, yes, Marie, Ai Ming, and Vancouver are all fictional. I, however, mistook the book for a semi-autobiographical treatment of the intertwined life of the author and her long-lost family, failing to realise that Marie and the story were nominally fictional. Yet, my reading of the book cannot be separated from my then-assumption that it was a real story.

I'm glad I read it like that, though. Because if there's one message that flows throughout—and indeed beyond—the book, it's that both history and stories are not so far from reality. Life is cyclical, the future is already written, we are but repetitions of those before us, fiction is not so far from truth... Marie and the story, as I say, are nominally fictional. But the book tells us that Zhuli is passed down to Sparrow and his brother, Ling, and reborn in Ai-Ming—and then again, I think, in Marie. Perhaps all these manifestations of the same person are mirrored in 'real' people; maybe even the author herself.

life is cyclical

Ai Ming's lack of English hinders her ability to tell Marie their story. Hence, the tale is woven through the Book of Records, a fragmented set of notebooks copied and recopied by Wen, Sparrow and the other characters from Marie's past. This conveys everything we need to know about the relation between the past and the future, fiction and reality. As Ai Ming tells Marie their story, Marie tells the reader that "the Book of Records was not, after all, a recapitulation of those thirty-one notebooks, but about a life much closer to my own. A story that contained my history and would contain my future." The Book of Records may be fictional, but its story and characters spill over into the world of Ai Ming and Marie. A world I took to be real but was in fact fictional. But just as the Book of Records leaches into their world, why shouldn't Ai Ming and Marie's reality spill into ours?

Intriguingly, we hear so little of this further story, the Book of Records—another story without a clear threshold. Because Wen the Dreamer's life merges with the Book of Records as he continues writing the unfinished story, making it his own. And yet, the Book of Records also makes Wen's story its own, coming to define his whole life from his marriage to Swirl to his isolation in the desert. Upon revisiting the book, I had forgotten enough to think that Wen the Dreamer, Big Mother Knife and Swirl were characters from the Book of Records rather than the characters whose lives revolve around it. Now I'm not so sure just how distinct they are. And for Marie, the Book of Records contains her history and will contain her future. Do not say we have nothing is thus three stories in one, all of which merge and flow into one another. I can't help but feel it flows into our reality too. So it's not really disappointing at all to learn that it is fictional, nor any less heart-aching. Not just because it is couched in the real history of China, but also because we know this story is true for too many people and will be true for too many to come.

For the fact it seems so much more real, it is Marie's story—which I took as autobiographical—which is so moving, especially when Ai Ming left. Focusing on the events of Tiananmen Square, the second half tears worlds apart. Ai Ming, for so long a light in their lives, is torn away from Marie just as she awakes something in them. More brutal still when Ai Ming's departure is interspersed with the story of Swirl, Wen and Zhuli—a family savagely ripped apart by the revolution; still further when we learn about Ai Ming's own tragic backstory in the Tiananmen Square protests. What makes it so emotional, then, is not just that two friends, with all their shared connections, are ripped apart, but that the gulf represents the millions of people torn from their loved ones. Because the book tells us that this will happen again, and this will become of us. Stories are torn away from one another, friends from friends, lovers from lovers, humans from the world, and, ultimately, fiction from reality. We are left wondering if Marie ever finds Ai Ming, and it matters just as much even if Marie and Ai Ming aren't real. In fact it was looking up whether Marie and Ai Ming ever found one another that brought the realisation that the story is fictional. We will never know: silence.

But ultimately, this silence expresses hope. Infinity can come of nothing, Marie tells us, while Zhuli calls silence the greatest music—particularly poignant given her suicide. Sparrow, meanwhile, insists that the fourth movement to his magisterial but lost Symphony No. 3 is silent.



For me, these are the mathematical and musical correlates of the idea that no matter how much history is re-written, humanity is broken, minds are indoctrinated, society is oppressed, something will always survive. Even in the smallest of nothings, even in silence, there is something. The Book of Records somehow persists, capturing many different lifetimes, stories, and secret-codes. Sparrow comes alive again and rewrites his music into another form which—in spite of its destruction by officers and Ai Ming—makes it into Marie's hands and is performed and then plastered all over the internet. Zhuli still questions the doctrine force-fed to her all her life, resisting all attempts to quash her love of music and artistic 'bourgeoisie'. As Thien writes, "the only life that matters is in your mind. The only truth is the one that lives invisibly, that waits even after you close the book. Silence, too, is a kind of music. Silence will last." Humans will not be crushed. And if it's true in the book, why not in reality too? After all, it's encapsulated best of all in the very real title, Do not say we have nothing.

MADELINE THIEN'S

do not say we have nothing

A REVIEW, BY JAMIE SLAGEL





the
universal nightmare
nana simas

This series of photographs is inspired by the vanitas movement, which aims to remind humans of their mortality. The elements in the photographs are common symbols of the passing of time and the end of life which create a composition that is meant to illustrate the greatest human nightmare - death.

Jenson Davenport

REALISING THE DREAM

So, they walked alone beside each other
Against sullen skies of indifference
Acknowledging the lie of the lover
Now, unmasking the veil of ignorance

The Illusion plagued in reality
Stillborn, those brumal leaves collectible
They wandered on, below a willow tree
Holding a mirage on a pedestal.

book recs mt20

Helena Aeberli

