



# **ABDUCTED FROM NORMALITY**

*An Anthology of Prose and Poetry from Students and English Staff of  
Blatchington Mill School*

*May 2020*

Dear Year 11 Students,

The idea for this anthology came from conversations between the English staff on email and WhatsApp in the last week before the Easter holidays in 2020. We had set a task asking for creative responses to the lockdown, either through writing the opening of a short story, or a description of the view from the living room window. Some chose to write as a diary entry, or as a description of how the 'new normal' felt, before the phrase even existed. Very quickly, we were all talking about how well you had responded; then Ms Ewbank suggested the idea of a student/staff anthology.

So here it is. You will find poetry with surprising and ingenious extended metaphors to describe Covid -19, and with powerful rhyme and rhythm. You will come across writing with such diverse influences as Bob Dylan and The Streets. You will also discover detailed descriptions of the changes we were experiencing in mid April 2020, as well as the openings to several short stories I'd very much like to read more of.

Writing creatively in response to the lockdown has provided a space to voice the anxieties many of us felt at the time and are still feeling, and I hope that by ordering them on the page, it provides a degree of comfort and optimism for readers and writers alike. It is pleasing to see recognition of the role of NHS workers in several pieces, and the way the themes of nature, family and community are thoughtfully explored. I wonder how we will feel rereading this anthology in five, ten or twenty year's time.

Thank you very much indeed to all the contributors, and to the staff who sent them to me. The wonderful cover art is a piece by Viktoria Mihaly in Year 10.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

Andy Breckenridge

May 2020

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## THE FUTURE

Everyone's life has dramatically changed over the last few weeks. With the coronavirus spreading, the UK has been put on lockdown and there have been strict rules. For example:

- No gatherings or meeting up with people
- Only leaving the house if you're shopping for essentials
- You can only go outside for exercise (once a day)
- Keeping a 2 metre distance from everyone

Many people had different reactions when the rules were first announced. Some were annoyed, some thought it was a good thing and others were upset that they couldn't see friends and family. It's also a horrible time as there are many deaths each day, so many families are suffering from all the losses. Many people would've had weddings which had to be cancelled or even done online through a call. Also, people are struggling since workplaces have been closed, along with restaurants, cafes and shops like Primark.

However, schools have been facing a hard time too. Schools, colleges and universities were shut for the safety of students and teachers. This has led to exams being cancelled and online work being set for students. Furthermore, year 11 students have had a tough time because GCSE's were cancelled and many didn't get a proper last day of secondary school and saying goodbye to friends and teachers. Prom has also been cancelled. In addition, A levels were cancelled too along with university exams . This has put pressure on students because for a long time, no one knew what was going to happen.

NHS staff have been struggling a lot too. There are many patients who have the virus and they get overwhelmed because there is no cure yet. However, many people have managed to recover which is great news but there are still a lot of people who need recovering. To show our appreciation for their work, the UK did a clap for the NHS at 8pm on Friday. It was a beautiful way for everyone to show their care and love for the people who are out there helping every day to save lives.

Even though there are many negative things about the whole situation, there have also been some positives. For example:

- Venice canals clear up and wildlife returns. There have been fish and swans and the water is clearer than ever

- Dolphins appear in Italy's waterways
- China's sky clears and people were able to see the sky for the first time in forever

Now, all we can do is follow the rules and hope that it will all resolve soon.

*Leila Banjak*

## **DEAR DIARY**

Today is the 10th day of isolation. My current situation is very poor compared to last week. I no longer can go outside to meet my friends, I feel compressed and sad but every day I understand why we are doing this. To save lives.

But some positive things are that I can sleep in till 1pm and I can spend more time with my family. Also today, outside my window I can see people dancing and playing music on their balcony which is fun to watch.

I do feel worried for what's going to happen to the world and how the economy is going to come back from this - and if I will lose someone I care for.

*George Bull*

## **CORONA**

Emerging-  
With your lust for the throne,  
Started a futile duchess in a market city.  
Yet a small blip in genome,  
Crowned you with a thorned corona,  
December since.

From a long strain of descendents,  
Flowing with blue blood laced,  
All with disgusting desecration  
For all the human race.  
Unleashing torturous agony,  
To only luck is immune.

Armed with an ominous armada,  
Knolling on the horizon.  
A spectre on the orb of the globe,  
Lytic colonisation-  
You clasp onto our world with spite,  
An asphyxiating Atlas.

Your incessant ruthless reign  
Implodes our civilization,  
Demanding we shroud our faces  
In masks obscuring expression,  
Isolating us emotionally,  
Economically, socially, mentally, angrily....

Writing-  
I glance right, out my window  
The street is numbly vacant  
Hollow of all but sorrow.  
But before I serve my sentence-  
Your majesty,

Will you have mercy on me?

*Anon.*

## UNTITLED

Silent. This was the only way to describe it: the street was like a scene of an apocalypse movie - deserted and desolate with no sign of life to be seen except for the tiny glimpse of the flickering of the traffic lights from down the road outside my bedroom window. Ironic, since no one dared to go outside except for the occasional car rushing to get supplies.

As well as that the sky was cloudy and fog had started to rise over the hills behind the city. Around me, was my room that I had been so accustomed and familiarised with as it had been the only thing I had seen in the last three weeks of this scary and anxious time.

Life is meant to be treasured and looked after. Well, that's what my parents told me. But how are we meant to enjoy or even treasure life if there is nothing we can do? Since the outbreak much has changed not just in England but around the world. Even with this global problem people are still only caring about themselves. As that thought popped into my head I heard a loud shrieking from the street below.

I looked out. I could see two men around the age of 40 both wearing masks and with the same bald haircut, chasing a young woman into the entrance of the flats below. Thinking quickly I put on my mask and shoes and headed for the front door. But just as I opened it, both parties, the two men and the young woman, rushed past me and as they did one of the bald men shoved me to the floor shouting, "Stay out of this! It has nothing to do with you".

Still a bit dazed I swiftly got back to my feet and pursued the two men towards the set of stairs heading towards the roof. Like trained gymnasts the men hopped from floor to floor toward the woman who I now had a better view of. She was a small and frail looking with a distinctive eagle tattoo on the back of her neck. As she looked back the light caught her big amber coloured eyes that glistened like honey from the lights of the hallway.

As I reached the rooftop I could see the two men like lions slowly approaching their prey toward the edge of the 4 storey rooftop. One man snatched the bag out of the woman's clenched fists. I yelled "Stop!" but before I could intervene, the other man had restrained the woman while rummaging through her bag. Like an enraged rhino I charged at the two men knocking the one holding the woman onto the ground with a large thud. The other man started running toward the stairs with the contents of the bag spilling onto the floor but before he could get there the woman with the eagle tattoo snatched the bag from him and pushed him towards the edge of the building.



He flew across the roof; unbalanced like a newborn deer he tripped. I couldn't believe my eyes. I quickly rushed to the edge of the roof to see his motionless body lying 4 storeys down, on the hard granite pavement below. I turned slowly staring at the woman who was picking up her shopping from the floor. As I looked closely the contents that the two men were after were revealed to be a pack of toilet paper.

"Toilet paper?" I yelled at the mysterious woman. "You killed a man over toilet paper!" I was in complete and utter shock and disbelief. What had I just seen, more importantly what had I just done? I was an accomplice to a murder of a man I didn't even know. Before she could answer the distant sound of sirens rang through the air. She looked at me and said, "Come with me if you don't want to go to prison." She headed for the stairs. I followed quickly, leaving behind two men; one knocked-out on a roof and the other 4 storeys below. Dead.

*Michael Peters*

## **ABDUCTED FROM NORMALITY**

We're rooted in heavy houses, gazing fearfully out at the universe speeding away from us. We lie in broken desperation. Spreading acres of blank, empty space, racing outwards in a timeless rippling current expending the energy of that first cough, that first sneeze. Like the candle guttering, we are the smoke rising to dissipate into helpless nothingness. Heads riddled with unease, we lie in broken desolation. In cold beds with no regard to how this works. Abducted from normality, suppressed by my thoughts, my mind craves insanity. As lazy sun exudes through poisoned panes, injected with the film of listless time I exhale a gentle sigh without will. For the emptiness of a long forgotten mind.

*Daisy Huxley*

## **THE NEW NORMAL**

The virus is violent  
Everyone keeping clean  
All the streets are silent  
With no cars to be seen

GCSEs are over  
There's no more school for me  
No more revision either  
I've been waking up at three

People are volunteering  
There is some hope in sight  
Every Thursday we hear cheering  
For the workers saving lives

At home there are new hobbies  
To be learnt and mastered  
I am trying to stay positive  
And dream of what comes after

*Edie Evans*

## **LIFE IN LOCKDOWN**

Casting my mind back to two weeks ago, the noise of busy streets and bustling workers muffles the delicate chirping of the little blackbirds perched in the iridescent trees outside my window. Panicked, adults and children run for the last bus of the morning and greet the driver as they stumble on, fumbling around in their bags for spare change. Off to work and school they go, home by 6pm and soon up the next morning to do it all again.

But today, all I can hear is those little blackbirds. While the globe comes to a standstill, they continue to chirp and tweet. Like a living statue, the age-old tree outside my window stoically stands there, anchored and silently growing. The polar opposite to our world on this day; nature and its greenery blossoming, no longer gulping for breath at our feet.

The once crowded streets are now empty and still, like an abandoned film set, high streets like ghost towns. An eerie quiet fills the day, though if you listen close, you can just about hear the faint laughter of young children in their gardens, soaking up some sun. Around the country, there is an endless stream of video calls full of stilted conversations between friends and family who rarely communicated from month to month before this devastating, disastrous disease descended upon us.

In every home, the news is constantly playing, as people wait anxiously for the next snippet of information which may give hope that there is a light at the end of this long tunnel. Unprecedented, uncertain, indefinite; News readers refer to the ongoing crisis using these words that seem to describe a never-ending nightmare. But it will end. The time will come that this will be a distant memory for all of us, replayed only in low budget disaster films.

*Freya Boo Parker*

## ISLAND

I live on a desert island,  
Nothing around,  
    No places to go or people to be found.  
I think I am waiting,  
Though for what I don't know,  
    Do you know who I am or where I could go?

To escape this island,  
The endless silence,  
    The screaming of separation as I scream for guidance.  
To leave would be suicide,  
That I am promised,  
    But all I want is to leave to be honest.

Foaming at my feet  
The toxic waves beckon,  
    The temptation too great, the ocean a nuclear weapon.  
I'm soon to hit the button,  
To let it all go,  
    For the sake of some noise as I wade through the shallows...

Struck by an uproar,  
I'm sent stumbling back,  
    But this rarity of clamour, some kind of attack?  
I cannot see them,  
Yet I know they are there, ah!  
    They've heard my pleas, they've heard my prayers.

I cannot see them, I may never again,  
Yet I know they are there,  
Crying out that they care.  
    No longer does the silence deafen me so,  
My home is still my island  
But I, a little less frightened.

*Anon*

## QUARANTINE DAY 13

Dear diary,

I'm starting to get more into the swing of things. I woke up at 7:14 and snoozed my clock twice, I didn't go to bed late but I couldn't be bothered to get up.

Once I was out of bed, I went for a run round the block. It was tougher today, my legs weren't carrying me and my mind was elsewhere.

I hate this uncertainty, it's such a strange feeling, similar to swimming in the sea, not knowing what lies beneath the murky depths. I know there's nothing more to know I'm just frustrated and I do have it pretty easy. School work can be challenging but it's nothing compared to what key workers are going through: they're the real heroes.

I've been watching many series on Netflix and I've realised as of late I've been able to derive deeper meaning from choices the characters make. I'm beginning to see the deeper meaning behind directors' choices and how they want you to see the story. It's made me aware of my fascination for this stuff and how it would be such a good job but so difficult to get into. If I did it I'd want it to be big.

I started doing illustrations, as so much of my time has been freed up. Just my own versions of cartoon characters from shows I watched as a child. It's made me realise how much I want to go back and watch them, and I mean, I've got the time.

I'm not looking forward to the early morning tomorrow but I feel I need to get a better routine going.

*Jack Barden*

## **THE FUTURE (SHORT STORY OPENING)**

The eerie streets clenched by twisted vines and towering trees pierce the crumbling buildings. Slowly, the pathetic trace of mankind is being erased by mother nature as she claims back the planet. Cars are now home to foxes while the streets are littered by the wild ravaging dogs. Majestically, a beautiful flock of tropical birds dance across the clean blue sky singing a heavenly tune. Giraffes like skyscrapers oversee the land while mammoth like creatures stroll in the highlands. Earth has changed it into a safe haven for all animals; there is nothing or no one to threaten the extinction of these graceful creatures. The terrible plague of 2020 almost wiped out the whole of the human race except us. We are the future ...

*Joel Kusik*

## **TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED**

I can't wait for a time when I can take things for granted,  
The world, right now, is more than a little slanted.

Not just here, the whole world has been flipped on its side,  
Wondering daily if this is our demise.

I'm stuck inside,  
hoping someone can turn the tide.

An evil virus, no vaccine or cure,  
nothing's for certain, that's for sure.

The mad expectations from my school,  
I'm at the deep end, drowning in this pool.

White collars in the capital, Boris and his mates,  
Procrastinating, blindly, deciding all our fates.

Relying on the clever scientists to come up with the meds,  
Cheering on the NHS, hoping for more beds.

The world is taking a beating, my world is getting smaller,  
To save us, is a tall order so are we taller?

I make beats for myself, I make beats for my future,  
Hours on the process, trying to paint my picture.

I dream of simple things like meeting up with my boys,  
A time where going out again won't be a dangerous choice.

I dream of being 'normal', carefree and young again,  
but wonder if things will ever be the same.

Waiting for the time I can take things for granted  
Hoping the music will be like a seed I've planted.

*Noah Vogel*



## UNTITLED

I looked outside my window this morning, yawning and bleary eyed. The streets are empty, a single plastic bag tumbles down the street carried in the wind I can't feel. Who knows when we will next be able to? The birds fly freely, as if taunting us on the ground below, soaring in the open sky. The sun hides in the clouds, like us hidden away in our houses below, casting a blanket of grey over the street. Trees sway in the winds, skeletal dancers lining the empty pavements. On occasion a runner will pass through, keeping busy. It's not all bad though, the street is full of families who may not have been able to see much of each other now spending all day in each other's company.

*Anon.*

## SHORT STORY OPENING

The streets are desolate, where once they were filled with energy; the view in front of me is barren. There is nothing now. No vehicles out on the roads, no people walking the pavement. The world has come to a halt.

No commerce, no travel, no leisure. The only activity to be seen is the flight of a crisp packet in the wind. Forced into solitude and isolation, my life has been warped - the idea of "normal" no longer exists. My home, my shelter, has now become a prison, sealing me away from the outside world. They say it's for our own protection but it feels like a test or an experiment. What if, one day, everything stopped? If our electronic crutches are kicked out from under us, would we stumble helplessly or would we rebuild, independent from the devices and institutions that we put all of our faith in?

I would hope that we'd survive. I don't know anyone who wouldn't hope that. But all this questioning is obviously useless. My thoughts are nothing more than the result of mind-numbing boredom. Besides, the chances of an event like that are miniscule, so tiny that the idea is insane to imagine.

Suddenly, a loud crash shocks me.

I peer, cautiously, out of my window. Some kind of large metal structure has crashed into the road- chunks of displaced concrete lie everywhere. Wide eyed, my focus pans upwards, into the expanse of the sky, where my sight falls upon a fleet of these mysterious things. My thoughts race back to my previous daydream. No matter how small the chance, the chance is still always there. Now, my brain is screaming only one thing at me. Run.

*Anon.*

## DEAR DIARY

Today is the 16th day locked up at home but to me it feels more like prison. I feel like its been years since i've stepped outside and had the fresh air smoothly brush against my face and had my skin breath in wonders. The outside now had started to look unfamiliar every hour i would open my window curious about the life outdoors and what is going on but the only thing i would hear is the birds tweeting vicariously as if they were begging for us to accompany them but other than that was just deserted. The melancholic atmosphere has left us all feeling empty and unsure what to do with our lives. This pandemic has put our lives at a big pause.

As teenagers the people of our generation have now come to the realisation that we had taken for granted the outdoors life and having the freedom of going out when we wanted. Some people lose that opportunity because they were more addicted to social media and being on their phones that they wouldn't go out as much. I know i am feeling this regret and now i know the value of enjoying the outdoors because no one knows when one day we won't have this enjoyment and luxury of enjoying our life outside.

I'm not sure how long this is going to last but i hope every it is soon so we can all go back to our normal lives. The only thing getting me through is the expectation that there is a light at the end of this dark and long tunnel and that we will be able to enjoy our time for the rest of the holidays. I hope people learn lessons from this and stay at home otherwise this nightmare will be dragged on for much longer than needed.

Watching the news everyday and seeing the number of deaths increasing rapidly hurts as it is like a punishment for not seeing the signs of this earlier.

All I can do now is stay safe and be patient.

*Anon*

## UNTITLED

Hi. I'm one of you. What worries me right now is the high number of people who are testing positive to the virus and the number of deaths that happen. The thing that worries me the most is that if we can't get back to our life routines. My life - it has changed a lot in the past 10 days. For example, I used to go to sleep earlier when I had school, but now I'm going to sleep very late. One positive thing is that usually when I had school, I used to come back from school and revise. But, now that I have all day free, I have found some time to read books, which was something that I didn't really like to do but now that I've tried it, I really enjoy it.

What gives me hope is that one day we can get our lives back and all the people who have the virus can find a cure for it. But the thing that it worries me the most are the people that are not following the rules of the government because if they don't listen to them we will never get out of this situation.

*Anon.*

## **COVID-19 STAYING AT HOME**

COVID-19 is the phrase on everyone's lips,  
So let's start handing out some useful tips,

Make sure to wash your hands,  
Make sure to not rub your face,

Make sure to always have a plan,  
Don't walk away to distant space,

Society as we know it is under duress,  
So stay home and save lives in the process,

For those in medicine working tirelessly,  
We thank you for working bravely,

One final thing that I must say,  
Please stay at home don't go out to play,

COVID-19 is the phrase,  
Please stay at home for the coming days.

*Yan Fan*

## SHORT STORY

Day 1, I wake up to weeps of sorrow. Pain. I raise my hand to wipe the dried blood from my sore eyelids. Only to realize my hands can't reach leaving me seeing red as my stomach screams with emptiness. The stench of rotten flesh, salt and human faeces burns through the delicate skin of inside my nostrils. I am slowly swayed side to side with the sound of waves. I start panicking. Sounds of heavy metallic material fill the erratic atmosphere as they smash and erupt the wood I have awoken on shaking with instability and anger. Leaving sounds of horror and the impact to echo through the wooden planks right through my soul. As of this hostile shock, I become aware of my surroundings especially the impact on my body. At the strong and strangling grip, as powerful as an anaconda's ruthless and savouring squeeze around my too thin wrists and cut ankles. Flattening me to the floor with sheer weight against my weak and dehydrated body. A large hand as rough as a dried out river bed, wiped the so thick blood out of my eyes. I slowly emerge my eyes open, into something that will scare me forever.

Streams of golden light fill the room in rigid lines. Seeping through the planks above, to only highlights the gruesome horrors below. Naked bodies thrown on top of each other in what you would call a pathetic pile. All men. All chained. All starved. The same rough hand grabs my so bony shoulder. I turn defensively as there is no energy left in my body but what I see, brings me all the hope and happiness I've been missing these past years. My brother.

I found my long lost brother. I stare in amazement. In gratitude. That my dear brother, the one that grew up with me in the same little village of Dullstroom and the same village he ran away from, was right in front of me.

I scramble for words as the crying from other chained men over ride my thoughts. "Amren," I finally spit out of my dry mouth. "I mis-s-s-e", "BANG!" "BANG!" Our bodies fall to the floor in protection as our so wary eyes stare at the bottom of the stairs where the noise came from. Two men with coconut milk like skin circle the edges of the V shaped room we were in and hit the wood in which we are condensing together, with strips of bark. However smooth and polished (guns). They were wearing triangle shaped fabric on their heads and pointy things on their feet.

Unheard of in my village in Africa. They started dumping white, sick like textured slime around the ones near them with a shiny ornament that I had never seen before then left. It consisted of a small silver bowl at one end with an extended spine in the same metal shine that the man with the pointy shoes was holding in one hand. A knee strikes me round the back of my head leaving me face planting the wooden planks with such a vengeance my tooth knocks out. Leaving a river of blood seeping from my mouth. Then another man in chains clambers frantically over the top of me leaving me screaming in pure agony as a bone in my back cracks. However it wasn't my scream that filled my ears but the flattening of old and weak in the chaos that was beginning followed by the dismal and terrifying sound of claws cutting and teeth tearing to get to what I realise now was our only source of food. The white slime.

I grab some of the smaller men and throw with all my might behind me. Fights bloom. Blood paints the planks. I scramble for the puddle food. My stomach is now roaring in hunger. I manage to reach the slimy substance at the end of my fingertips before the gloopy puddle absorbs into the wood beneath it. My stomach is still not satisfied. I look round and find someone with it drooling out of their mouth along their chin and down their throat. I lunge towards them at the same time someone else does. Before I am able to identify the individual, a rock hard fist swings across my aching jaw twisting my head 180 and the sound on my neck cracking in different places fills my ears. A thud when I hit the floor and the next thing I see are the painted planks and him wiping the food off the man's chin.

Everyone's now asleep apart from me and a few in the corner, wide eyed not trusting anyone. I try silently to search for my brother I lost in the chaos but fail miserably with my chains screeching behind me. The ones who wake from the noise are the alive but the ones who don't are dead. Either from starvation or from the severed skin leaving them with too much blood loss during the brawl. The stench of their rotten flesh gets worse by the minute. Each inhalation burns deeper with absolute gruesome disgust through my nose. However everyone has now awoken by the laughter heard above us. Above the planks. I look up and through the narrow slits to see by small candles lit the owners of these laughs and see that it belongs to men who resemble the ones who gave us food. White.

Day 2, still in search of my brother we are forced to the higher deck, where the sun shines bright and is filled with golden rays powerful enough to blind us filled with the

aroma of damp wood and the whistles of the wind are so much stronger. There was a large bowl filled with thick brown water which was the only source provided to satisfy our hydration. I hear a voice being raised but not in my own language. Whitman language. I turned to find my brother I had been searching for. I couldn't understand and I knew my brother couldn't either. The short white man raises his milk coloured hand, covered with red rubies around his fingers which shine to their full potential in the sun's rays above deck. Suddenly he uses this hand to whack my brother round the face reverberating a shocking and dreadful sound across the whole of the deck stopping everyone in their tracks. My brother, taller than him, more muscular than him booms a strong clenched fist into the man's face leaving him falling to the planks and vibrating them with a harsh, callous thud. An angry river of red rushes down his chin and neck from his nose which now look out of place. A hundred sounds of gasps fill the shocking silent atmosphere where we stand. In a heartbeat 7 men enjoyingly pounce on my broad brother. Violently slamming fists into him. The white man with the disorientated nose watches with a smirk which spreads across his face one he notices the planks painted in my brother's blood. That evening he did not come to the lower deck with us.

Day 3 we were ordered to go to the upper deck again but this time I saw my brother with his head hung low and his extensive, bloodied, bare back facing us all. His hands were tied tightly in a white, thick rope stained in his blood. The short white man with the rubies held something which resembled a long, thin buffalo's tail but leather (whip). The man raised it above his head and down like a flash onto my brother's now sore, red back. Blood splattered on everyone's faces and clothes. Amren's deep screams shook through my bones and echoed through the ocean. I couldn't keep quiet any longer. I charged at him and pushed him over as I fell on top of the white man. One of the men that had fed us the previous day came running over and pushed some hard at the back of my head. The man I was on top of pushed me off of him and I saw two barrel chambers pointed directly at me. My brother's face now streaming with tears looked at me. I looked back at the man with the gun pointed at me and just simply laughed and ordered us to go back to the work they set us.

10 months later and coming to the top deck to clean the white men's clothes and polish their pointy shoes became a regular theme. However today we saw women and children come from the other side of the ship onto the deck. Some were



receiving the same treatment as Amren, some were pregnant and some had scars only one would imagine the punishment they injured. They had to carry large straw bags filled with bottles the same colour as blood (wine boxes), even the pregnant, the young children and the old and weak women. The smell of salt heavily overpowered the normally potent smell of sweat or blood. As we were all struggling and breaking bones with the work threatened at us, we could also see the white men laughing. I looked up to the deck filled with them and you could hear birds and them sniggering at the females and clinking glasses while watching us slave away.

The evenings are no more pleasant than the day. Sometimes even worse. They make us men fight to the death for pure entertainment. They give the winner a slice of bread. That's how much they starve us. They throw the ill, the dead, the weak and the smaller over us overboard with weights strapped to their ankles. To drown in the dark and unknown ocean. Only keeping the strong. They take women to their chambers when they've had too much to drink. They come out bruised and in tears, their clothes shredded. Some of us throw ourselves overboard because we just can't bear it and go become insane.

1 month later, the same cycle happens everyday. The fight for food every morning, the fights for their entertainment, the "whippings" they called them. More men, women and children have died. A pregnant woman gave birth and the next day threw herself and child overboard because she knew what the white men would do to her child once they found out. Once they found out she threw herself the white men couldn't care less. Mixed raced babies were born. If they were light enough the white men would keep them alive and healthy because it would then be the white father's property however if the baby's complexion was more black they would be treated like every other black person. They would normally die shortly after.

One night they forgot, to feed us. A lot of us died during the night leaving less than half the people we originally came with. This included Amren. The next day we could hear shouting above us. Between two of the white men. The man who was supposed to feed us and the short man. I looked up between the slits, which now was our only source to see if it was a day or night. The short man was always dressed the finest which left me to believe him as the captain. The moment the short man had enough he pulled a gun to the man's head and pulled the trigger. Ruby red sprayed from the

back of the man's head into the hungry ocean and the man followed. Booming the whole ship with sudden shock and ocean around us silent. Leaving everyone in fear.

Most of the children have died at this point. It's been months. Is there a point in life anymore? What did I do to deserve this? What happens next? These questions circle my mind all day, all night. Today we were ordered to the higher deck and made to scrub the floors when I walked to the side of the ship. Perch on the banister and I sit there and gaze upon all the others in pain. You can see it in their faces. In their eyes. I don't know how many others are gonna last before they become insane. I closed my eyes and listened to my unfamiliar surroundings. Birds chirping, the whistle of the wing, the waves crashing softly against the boat, the sun beaming on my dark skin, warming me. I take a deep breath and realize I am never going to be free again. As long as I am on this Earth. I think of my home, my childhood, my family. Most of all my dearest mother, Linette. Named after the bird in the Arthurian legend. She always used to tell me and my sibling about Mansa Musa, the emperor of the Mali Empire before we all went to bed. I lean backwards over the edge with the memories leaving a genuine smile plastered on my face. The only one I had for a while now. I close my eyes and take my last breath as the sharp coldness of the waves devour me.

*Kat Gilbert*

## **LUNAR ECLIPSE (OR TIME STANDS STILL)**

Peering out through the sky's dark  
curtains Pale and glowing Watchful and  
knowing, Obscured by city lights Weighed  
down by clouds of slate Its ghostly gleam  
does not falter.

Mostly it is waiting Omniscient,  
silent, Sometimes it is wondering Its  
twining thoughts are silver thread,  
Rarely it is weeping Its tears fall as  
lightest lead Upon the lands of  
smothering dread

And in the totality of a lunar  
eclipse All expression is siphoned  
away A blank void stares out in its  
place

Progress halted. Voices  
silenced. The thrum of life  
abruptly stayed.

You may gaze out at the apocalypse  
but reality will not fade For in the  
totality of a lunar eclipse The bare  
truth is laid.

*Tabitha Heaton*

## ENGLISH CHALLENGE

The creases of the white bed sheet looked like the ripples of a shallow sea in the gentle light of the afternoon. The clock read 14:00 hours as she finally rose from the bed with a heavy sigh. Rough, carpeted stairs gave way to cold wooden floorboards and then the tiles of the kitchen. Breakfast again, already.

She sat quietly in the garden, on the patio steps, as she ate; the sun was warm and untainted by even the slightest breeze, so that all the plants stood still and the only sound was intermittent birdsong. The same as it was yesterday, and the many days before. There was nothing to suggest that time was moving forward, nothing to suggest that this wasn't the same day she'd relived a dozen times before, nothing but the small clear date on her phone screen. At least if it would rain she would know it was real, that she was alive. The continuous, eutopic sunshine that was never broken or faltered only added to the stifling familiarity of each passing day.

She had to squint as she followed the sweeping flight of a single magpie. One for sorrow. Some reading today, she thought, in the garden, under the shade of the apple tree that never gave any fruit. It would be pleasant, tranquil, quiet and unfulfilling, just like yesterday. Still, she couldn't complain; she was safe, she had her health, enough food, a nice place to live. Anything she was feeling was trivial and unimportant; a fuss about nothing. She was embarrassed by the immovable entrenched privilege that countered her every complaint. Her arm had begun to burn in the incessant sunshine so, with breakfast finished, she rose to return just as quietly to the house. She had not made a single sound in days, she wondered if she ever would again. Her eyes skimmed the garden again, resplendent in the sunlight, and she turned to face another day in purgatory.

*Anon.*

## SUSANNAH

“Ain’t it just like the night to play tricks when you’re tryin’ to be so quiet?  
We sit here stranded, though we’re all doin’ our best to deny  
it”- *Bob Dylan*

From her perch above each of the terraced courtyards below Susannah sat and regarded the preparation for today’s performances. The wave of the ‘new’ had hit everyone like an invisible hand- groping and grasping at their routine -and yet they still worshipped the minutiae of it all. Susannah did not understand. The sky sighed slightly, unable to muster either the promising or the torrential- he too lacked any zeal, yet continued all the same. She found it funny how even the most disrupted of days could fall into the humdrum anyway.

Although no spectators and guests would come flooding under the marquee today the show continued at each household. Occasionally the chirp or chime of a screen would set forth the staging and one or two apparitions would condense on the other side of the glass. These encounters were brief- leaving the household at a social loss again. As of late the neighbour opposite to Susannah had formed an inseparable relation to the mid-morning news presenter - much to his wife’s chagrin. From 9 o’clock sharp to 10:30 at the latest the plump voyeur would lapse into catharsis while his wife would expostulate helplessly from the opposite settee.

Such sequences unfolded beneath Susannah’s watchful eyes each day. The neighbor to her left would venture into his garden six times a day for a smoke- his attire eldritch and usually scruffy- but never slovenly. His clothes hung loose- his body a tinder stick surrounded by the smoke. In moments that flickered Susannah believed that a glance sometimes met her own- but let these brief affections stay as illusions in her mind.

In the window furthest from Susannah’s she saw one person sitting where two should sit. Without so much notice he seemed fine- but upon further inspection his hands seemed clamped to the arms of his chair, as if he were fighting against being totally eclipsed by the rest of the living room. With time, all was revealed. Susannah sometimes saw her in the corner of his eye; cavorting across the carpet- frolicking and thriving where she should not- some days in a wedding dress and some days in

a dressing gown. Those glimpses contradicted the wrinkles that were etched upon his brow- a stern yet endearing face that seemed to politely ask you to move on. A face that spoke of grief (and understood it too) yet did not falter. A face that scratched through all the varnish and peered deep inside you- telling you to stop the tryst with denial. A face that recognised change of any size and greeted it with flowers- not bullet holes.

A face that told you to give up the ghost.

*Rudy Joy*

## **MARCH 2020**

I gaze outside my bedroom window,  
Waiting for an end,  
An end to the empty way I feel,  
having nowhere to attend.  
Nowhere to go and nowhere to be,  
No one's around to walk the streets.  
Everyone's hiding, hiding  
Inside,  
Scared of the danger that's  
lurking outside.

For what feels like months the rains  
not come, and for countless days there's been  
No sun  
Just an endless mist of smokey grey,  
Pale silver clouds that won't  
Go away.  
Now the hours are months, and the months  
are years, and all i can do is hold back the tears.  
I wonder just how long it will be,  
'til we see the city and see the sea.

But as I gaze out my window I see,  
The clouds disappear and the sun starts to beam.  
Maybe we'll learn from this time spent alone,  
To be grateful for what we had months ago.  
And when at last this nightmare is over,  
We will each go and find our own four leaf clover.  
We won't wait around wishing hours away,  
We'll travel outside and not waste a day.  
We'll swim in the sea and talk under the sun,  
We won't sit around, we'll dance and we'll run.

*Daisy Hook*

## **HOURGLASS**

6am

Grey. The tarmac still.  
That amber cat sashays past  
like a slow comet.

10am

The pram is heavy.  
My daughter leans to swipe a  
dandelion clock.

2pm

The upstairs neighbour  
has taken to Westerns - loud.  
Gallopings horses.

6pm

A toddler firing  
joyful consonants towards  
tonight's Zoom faces.

10pm

Three sets of warm breaths.  
Adrift.

2am

The washing machine -  
a mechanical ghost. I  
hear ventilators.

*Madeline Morrison-Price*



## **NIGHT DRIVE TO GLASGOW\***

The doors will close. Somewhere beyond Preston  
she becomes driver, he dozing and still,  
on his side in the back and the doors will  
close. Gone three, his lids are shut, eyes still on,

knees tucked in and near the heart, her coat for  
a pillow. Potholes thump, engine rumbles,  
Iggy's Passenger comes on near Kendal.  
Passing headlights flare inside the car,

catching her cheek, her left hand on the wheel.  
Tiredness can kill and doors close. Around  
two hours later his eyes open. Grey steel  
of near dawn. They get coffee, petrol  
and drive their son south to the bolthole  
called home, for the long haul, for the lockdown.

\*On the 23rd of March 2020 it was announced that the UK would go into lockdown to contain the spread of Covid 19

*Andy Breckenridge*

## COVID 19: WORD BANK

Winter. Hubei. Livestock. Rabbit. Chicken. Seafood. Bat.  
Province. Contact. Caution. Trading. Slaughter. Market. Wet.

Meeting. Whole staff. Lesson. Last-bell. Students. Exit. Lock.  
Chromebook. Google. Classroom. Marking. Feedback. Upload. Doc.

Parents. Carers. IT. Admin. Briefing. Teachers. Form.  
Online. Ofsted. Exams. Cancel. Future. Yearbook. Prom.

Coughing. Membrane. Hostile. Virus. Face-mask. Organs. Pain.  
Travel. Septic. Aircon. Tracking. Contact. Spreader. Blame.

Panic. Queuing. Social. Distance. Loo roll. Handwash. Tea.  
Shortage. Doctors. Nurses. Care-homes. Symptoms. Testing. Key.

Rumour. Fake news. Real news. Experts. Finance. Furlough. Debt.  
Theatres. Cafés. Hotels. Cruise-ship. Airports. Expats. Threat.

Healthcare. Vital. Welfare. Shielding. Balance. Patients. Breath.  
Frontline. Clinic. Staffing. Data. Shortfall. Closure. Death.

Homeless. Fatal. Figures. Safety. Lockdown. Wellbeing. Cage.  
Wild-life. Birdsong. Local. Global. Carbon. Fall-out. SAGE.

Captain. Hero. P.R. Media. Freeworld. Leader. Bleach.  
Dow Jones. City. Index. Mortgage. Base-rate. Freefall. Breach.

Neighbours. Windows. Kerbside. Rainbows. Doorways. Thursday. Clap.  
Ravers. Bookclub. Singsong. Cup-cakes. Workouts. Running. Snap.

WhatsApp. TikTok. YouTube. Hangouts. Netflix. Insta. Zoom.  
A-list. Film star. Football. Faux-pas. Backlash. Haircuts. Groom.

R-1. Pressure. Science. Time-scale. Research. Vaccine. Glove.  
Worldwide. Outbreak. Human. Crisis. Spirit. Courage. Love.

*Bee Mitchell-Turner*