



WORDSMITHS

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Last year when preparing for the inaugural edition of this journal, carried by the excitement of a new endeavour, I had the foresight to collect pieces as the year went by so that when Summer arrived I already had a folder of excellent work from which to select the best of the best.

Now, in this second year, such foresight was quite forgotten, I had prepared no such folder, and come June I was suddenly faced with the daunting task of perusing almost a hundred pieces of work. Whilst not ideal in this busy month, it turned out to be a rather joyous journey.

I recalled those dark October months writing poetry with Class 9, visited Class 10's explorations of Ancient Greek literature, found myself in the 13th century seeking the Grail with Class 11, followed them then into the Sublime of Romanticism, and finally settled happily into those many afternoons spent reading and humbly editing Class 12's creative writing.

It has been a rich year, and what is here presented in this journal is only a fraction of what has been produced.

It was not hard to select the nineteen pieces contained herein—much more difficult was the leaving out of the almost eighty others, for regardless of how imperfectly they might be crafted, how ungrammatical, or even, occasionally, factually questionable, they are each a portrait of their authors, a history of progress and development capturing a moment in time, and together forming an invaluable treasure trove for their teachers.

But the intention of this journal is to highlight the most interesting, most beautifully phrased and most perfectly formed writing of the year gone by. I have looked for pieces which do not only contain brilliance, but which are carefully constructed and rich with knowledge but, equally, leave out what is unnecessary.

When I enter a classroom I have an idea of how capable is each age group. I set the bar high (just within reach) and I endeavour to support my students to clear it.

But the individuals whose work is here presented all surpassed my expectations, flying high above that bar, and it is my pleasure and privilege to share their inspirations and insights with you.

— Stella Ottewill

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Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival is, at its core, a Grail legend. Its story is simply that of a young knight, divinely chosen to release a land from heartache and pain—and yet the entire story is shrouded in mystery, allusion and ancient wisdom. In Class 11 students are perfectly placed to contend with the complex emotional and narrative journey of this text, and at the end of their study are invited to look more closely at its themes. This year I present two essays which are perfectly paired: the first, a consideration of the role grief plays in love, and the second, a consideration of the role love plays in grief.

Love in *Parzival*

Barnaby Michael (Cl. 11)

A main theme of *Parzival* is love. We are shown how love can bring immense joy and healing but also despair and destruction. This is illustrated when looking at Sigune's love for Schionatulander—a love so deep it ends up tearing her apart;—and contrasting it with the other side of love, the complex relationship between Gawain and Orgeluse.

Parzival encounters Sigune three times, and each time she is there to guide him on his quest. The first time they meet, she is cradling the body of a slain knight.

Below a spur of rock a lady was lamenting from heartfelt grief. Mistress Sigune was sitting there tearing out her long brown tresses in despair! [...] he saw in her lap a slain knight. (p. 16)

The use of the words 'lament', 'heartfelt' and 'despair' evoke in the reader the sense of passion and intensity in her grief. The grief she feels is heartfelt making it clear that it's for the love of the knight. The word 'lamenting' has a long almost dragging pronunciation. It feels that the word, 'lamenting,' could be used to show the longing she has for the knight's life, and the sudden slowing of her own as she grieves. She is described as tearing out her hair. The word tearing evokes an image of destruction, a grief so deep she seeks to destroy herself, seeking to feel a physical pain that can match her emotional pain. The tearing out of her tresses could symbolise the tearing apart of her life.

When we next encounter Sigune her Prince has been embalmed preserving him in death as he was in life but she herself has further deteriorated.

[S]eated in a linden, was a maiden, the wretched victim of her own fidelity. In her arms reclined a dead knight whose body had been embalmed. [...] whilst Sigune had been worn away by grief, her long hair gone and her features wan. (p. 24).

The word 'wan' can be used to describe her appearance as pale and ill-looking but can also give the imagery of a pale fading light as if the light that symbolises life and vibrancy is fading and weakening in Sigune. In this second encounter, her hair is gone. This is a visual representation of the deterioration within her. 'Wretched victim of her own fidelity' describes a grief borne out of a love so

intense that Sigune cannot live without it. Her wretchedness comes from not being able to live in a world where the prince is not. She has become, in a sense, too loyal to let go. The word 'wretched' conjures up ideas of being powerless and helpless in the face of her grief but also evokes the thought of 'wrecked', again touching on the destruction and inner deterioration of Sigune.

The next time Parzival hears of Sigune, we are given the description of a cell. 'The cell was empty of joy, bare of all light heartedness. Great sorrow was all he found there.' (p. 38) The description of the cell is a metaphor for Sigune now. She herself, is just a shell, devoid of all joy, filled solely with feelings of grief and sorrow. 'I shall give him love through the joyless days that remain to me.' (p. 38) It almost seems that along with Sigune's deterioration, she is in fact giving what is left of her being to him. Loving him as she waits to cross into the afterlife. 'Hearing this, Parzival realised this was Sigune and was deeply affected by her sorrow.' (p. 38) When Parzival realises it is Sigune he is immediately affected by her sorrow. As Sigune deteriorates, some of her grief and sorrow transfers to Parzival. This shows how after death you don't just disappear as part of you is left with the people who remain. Death can be harder for those left behind. It leaves a vacuum and it can take time for that void to be filled, and a new way of living to begin. This is often how people view funerals: they are a full stop, and once that celebration of a person's life has occurred and goodbyes have been said, it is then time to move forward without them.

'Late that evening they came to the cell. There they found Sigune dead on her knees in prayer.' (p. 72) Sigune's death has been prolonged in order to serve Parzival's quest and finally in this passage she has been freed from her sorrow and joins Schionatulander in death.

They carried her into the cell and raised the stone slab at the tomb, revealing Schionatulander, still beautiful as the day he had died. (p. 72)

Sigune's demise on Earth is powerfully highlighted by the juxtaposition of her deterioration in life and Schionatulander's preservation in death. Whilst Schionatulander appears untouched by death we see how Sigune decays on Earth like a living corpse and the comparison in this language makes it all the more stark. Whilst we would expect Schionatulander's body to decay, in reality it is the living and breathing Sigune who has deteriorated, destroyed by her grief and unable to live without him.

In Book X we begin the complicated love story between Gawain and Orgeluse. Orgeluse is a great beauty and Gawain falls in love with her at first sight. Bruised and damaged by love, Orgeluse has put up defences in order to protect herself from ever being hurt again. This reaction is a response true in many humans. In putting up defences after being hurt by love, you protect those wounds for fear that they may re-open and further damage be done. Only when you feel those wounds have healed are you able to

trust again. She cruelly toys with Gawan's affections, mistreating and mocking him. She only realises her true feelings for him when his life is in jeopardy. She feels ashamed for the way she has treated him and the tables now turn. For Gawan realises, as he almost dies, that she has played with him and pushed him too far: 'I would not take her love on such terms; I know where to draw the line.' (narrator, p. 54). Orgeluse gives Gawan her love:

Imperious Love and the fair Duchess caused Gawan's happiness to be quite consumed until daybreak. In her arms Gawan was healed, as though her love was a healing balm.' (p. 59)

This quotation shows the healing power of love, describing it as a 'healing balm'. It refers to Gawan's physical wounds but also his wounded heart. Finally he has won the heart of Orgeluse who was described as a 'balm to his eyes yet a thorn to his heart' (p. 54) and in giving him her love she repairs all the hurt and pain that she has previously caused him.

The book resonates with me because it shows that love can bring great joy and great sadness when it is lost, and although grieving is a very important process to go through it is crucial not to become stuck in it like Sigune, but to move forward and find happiness again. My way to articulate my feelings about losing my grandfather was to think about a tree having a branch ripped away: it hurts and causes damage to the tree and there will always be a gap where once that branch had been but the wound in the tree will heal over and new branches will grow bringing with them new life and possibilities. The rituals we observe in modern times, for those who have passed, are essential to help us through our grief; to come together to mourn with others allows us to share the burden of our grief and feel supported and able to move forward.

Parzival explores the different aspects of love. Love can bring such happiness, such pain, such longing, such anger but inevitably if the pain can be endured then love is the ultimate prize.

"The extremity of grief, so much do I love him." — *Parzival*

Hannah Edsell (Cl. 11)

Grief is a feeling that surpasses sadness. It can be described as agony, or an intense sorrow, and often arises from the death of someone for whom you feel love. In some ways, you cannot have one without the other: grief and love, joy and sorrow, happiness and despair. In the story of *Parzival* there are many situations where these themes appear hand in hand, and there are specific characters that must endure the pain. Herzeloide, mother of Parzival and wife of Gahmuret, Sigune, daughter of Schoysiane and cousin of Parzival, and Anfortas, Grail King and uncle to Parzival, are all prime examples of people with grief-stricken storylines, which I will explore

in this essay. *Parzival*, however, is not unique in this idea of love and grief. Many stories follow this path, but the difference is the extent and variety in which this theme is explored here. *Parzival* captures different perspectives and experience, bringing you deep into the feeling of it.

Grief in *Parzival* is portrayed as a part of life, which in some ways is true, but personally, I do not believe that I have felt true grief before, so I cannot fully relate to it on a personal level. However, even now, a fear emerges with the thought of it. The anticipation that it will inevitably happen at some point in my lifetime. I have experienced enough to understand that grief can often be caused by death, and not uncommonly, end in death too, which is the outcome more than once in this narrative.

Parzival grows up alone in the forest with his mother Herzeloide, trusting her, learning everything from her, so when it comes to it, letting him go is too much for her to bear. After setting Parzival off into the world, Herzeloide is so overcome by grief that it consumes her. Life as she knows it is over and she is desperate.

[W]hen she could no longer see her son, the loyal lady fell to the ground, where sorrow gave her such a cut that Death did not hold off. (p. 15)

—her parting sentence.

In my mind, grief would come in waves, moments of ominous stillness and pangs of rippling pain through one's body. Specific words in this quotation feed that feeling of rippling agony, for example, the 'f' and 'l' sounds in "fell to the ground" are swift and smooth, falling. Ground, too, sounds earthy and deep, like being hit, with a thud. The phrase falls and lands, and is flooded by sorrow; my picture of grief. The watery wave of the 'w' and the growling 'r' in 'sorrow' capture the image of tears, rolling in your mouth, over your tongue, just as surely as it rolls down Herzeloide's face; a physical reaction to such pain. The calm sentence is then pierced by the sharpness of the following phrase, 'such a cut', like a stab of grief, a pang of pain that flows back into the never-ending, thick sound of death.

Herzeloide's name, reflects her storyline as it means 'heart pain', and the name of her son (Parzival), means 'pierced through the heart', following the theme. I think these both represent what my idea of true grief would feel like. They are very descriptive names, giving the indication that you can feel their misery, as though they were destined to suffer—but then, isn't everyone at some point?

Parzival's cousin, Sigune is perhaps the most tormented by grief through this text. Every time we meet her she is found in the company of a dead knight, by the name of Schionatulander, her one true love, dead before they could be married. In my opinion, this is possibly the purest form of grief we will find, not only in *Parzival* but in life. The following passages show the gradual decline of her life and of her hope. When we first encounter her, this is what is said:

[A] lady was lamenting from heartfelt grief. Mistress Sigune was sitting there tearing out her long brown

tresses in despair! [...] in her lap a slain knight.' (p. 16).

Unlike many of the female characters in this text, it is not her beauty or her position that tells us who she is, but more her situation. The second encounter: 'Sigune had been worn away by grief, her long hair gone and her features wan.' (p. 24). A few years later and still holding his corpse, she is withering away.

This is how Sigune describes her pain:

"I am a virgin and unwed: yet before God he is my husband. There are two of us here. Schionatulander is one, I am the other." (p. 38).

She is ready to embrace death, to join her beloved and end her suffering. Her grief is so strong that she will not deny its course any further. Grief broke her, grief played with her, and finally, grief killed her. 'There they found Sigune dead on her knees in prayer. [...] Close to his side they now laid her in' (p. 72). Parted in life and united in death. Parted in love and united through grief.

There are of course many other ways to look at this theme, but my final example will be of the great Grail King, brother of Herzeloide and uncle to Parzival, Anfortas. Although a more minor representation of grief, his curse dooms him to eternal suffering, heavy with pain and grief. When accusing Parzival of failing his unknown task of asking 'the question' ("what ails thee?"), Cundrie la Surziere calls Anfortas "the Sorrowful Angler" and goes on to describe him as "sitting there, joyless and despondent". I think the inclusion of "joy" in this phrase, reflects the feeling that there is possibly still some hope for Anfortas' future, that he is not yet *forever* doomed. Although it is accompanied with a negative, there is an indication of hope. Cundrie la Surziere then turns on Parzival, saying "you failed to free him from his sighs!", then stating "He made the load of grief he bore apparent to your eyes." (p. 29) As clearly as she is capable, she is indicating that Anfortas is suffering in silence, just like the silent 'gh' in 'sighs', changing the way the word is pronounced but having no impact on the sounds that comes out of your mouth. Anfortas' curse changes the course of Parzival's life, but he has no say in the situation, no way of telling Parzival that he is the only one that holds power to free him.

Parzival has a mythical, sort of magical air about it, emphasising that it is merely a story, but it uses emotions, such as grief, to the point where people can relate to them so deeply, even when written on a page. This is such a clever way to really capture humanity. There are many ways that grief can be expressed, "Such is the way of the world: joy today and grief tomorrow" (p. 12)

As Parzival is to Class 11, so is Homer's Odyssey to Class 10. As teachers we always ask ourselves what will best serve the needs and interests of our students, and year after year this text proves effective and affecting. The students look at the tale of Odysseus as a picture of humanity, and having heard the story are invited to discuss and then write about the themes therein. This year Eleni Karakonstanti taught this block, and I am pleased to share with you two exemplary essays.

Destiny and the Evolution of Consciousness within *The Odyssey*

Walter Kelly (Cl. 10)

The Odyssey is a foundational work within the Western canon of literature. Considered one of the greatest pieces of literature ever produced, *The Odyssey* presents a basis of understanding of what it means to be human. Similar to the philosophy of Plato, *The Odyssey* has never quite lost touch with any historical state of Western thought. The concepts set forth by Homer hold relevance no matter the specific time-period. From the nature of destiny and the evolution of consciousness to ancient Greek customs of hospitality, *The Odyssey* educates from the macro to the micro.

The Odyssey is the quintessential example of the hero's journey. The narrative follows Odysseus on his voyage home from the Trojan war. Odysseus' journey is famously long-winded and fraught with difficulty. The adventures are so prolific they have found a way into common language and popular-culture.

The Odyssey begins 'en medias res,' starting from the middle and then recounting previous events back to the 'current moment,' then proceeding to the end.



This map recounts the supposed journey of Odysseus. His goal always lies in returning to his wife and son in Ithaca. Odysseus' family have lived nineteen years apart from him at the start of the epic. Through trials and tribulations, Odysseus manages to outwit the competition and return home to Ithaca. Once home, Odysseus massacres the band of suitors that abused his wealth in his absence.

Fate plays an integral role in the narrative of *The Odyssey*. The destiny of an individual is inviolable. No attempt to distract, bargain with or avoid fate can overcome its certainty.

Odysseus suffers from the 'curse' of his own fate.
 Kyklops, if ever mortal man inquire
 how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him
 Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye.
 (Book IX, ll. 548-552)

Odysseus declares his name after escaping from and blinding the cyclops, getting himself cursed in the process. The above quotation has a sense of obscure free will. Odysseus makes himself a target of fate by claiming his individuality.

Grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never
 see his home: [...]
 should destiny intend that he shall see his roof again [...]
 far be that day, and dark the years between.
 (Book IX, ll. 578-583)

Once cursed by the cyclops, Odysseus can do nothing to escape his fate. If Odysseus had remained a nobody, he may have returned home earlier. Homer does not paint the sacrifice of anonymity for cursed fate as a mistake; on the contrary, Odysseus is a hero, one who looks his destiny right in the face and stoically accepts it.

The gods can make fate easier if you regularly appease them with sacrifices and true faith. Athena aids Odysseus only at the start and end of his journey. During his hardships at sea Athena remains absently observing, knowing she cannot tinker with fate.

The Odyssey beginning 'en medias res' is important to note when discussing the evolution of consciousness. Beginning in the middle mirrors the specific change of human consciousness occurring in ancient Greece.

But come, now, put it for me clearly, tell me
 the sea ways that you wandered, and the shores
 you touched; the cities, and the men therein
 (Book VIII, ll. 612-614)

The act of 'looking back' was a significant shift from the linear view of time the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians shared. In respect to Plato's cave, perhaps the Greeks saw themselves half emerged already, not ignorant prisoners like the ancient Egyptians. The Greeks were becoming self-aware, emerging from the group consciousness with their avant-garde notion of the 'I am'.

Consciousness is certainly important to note when referring to the protagonist of a story. Often times the main character goes through a process, coming out on the other end as a changed being. Odysseus undergoes this same transformation on an extremely large scale. The path of Odysseus reflects that of the human life. Odysseus begins as a child (in the spiritual sense) after his release from Troy, and ends as a man on his return home. Each island, each challenge is an allegory for the human experience. For example, the Lotus Eaters who are blind to their ignorance yet remain happily mindless:

Who showed no will to do us harm, only
 offering the sweet Lotos to our friends—
 but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotos,
 never cared to report, nor to return.
 (Book IX, ll. 99-102)

Each man is thrust toward this same predicament—to lead or to happily follow. In this way Odysseus represents not just a hero or a Greek citizen—he is every man. Similar to Osiris, Odysseus is the cast-iron mould of human life; the world of forms' archetype of a man.

The Odyssey relates to its historical background in many ways. As great art often does, *The Odyssey* mirrors the society which bore it. The aspect of mortality forces a civilisation to present a value system for their culture. The Greek outlook on life after death is portrayed within *The Odyssey*.

In book XI of *The Odyssey* a situation arises which encompasses the Greek's view on mortality. Odysseus makes contact with souls from the underworld, other heroes and men who have passed away. Dialogues in book XI introduce the Greek concept of death being a loss. The physical body was so important to the ancient Greeks that death was less of a passing over, and more of a deprivation from the physical world.

Better, I say, to break sod as a farm hand
 for some poor country man, on iron rations,
 than lord it over all the exhausted dead.
 (Book XI, ll. 579-581)

The above quotation is taken from a dialogue between Achilles and Odysseus. The dead Greek hero is jealous of Odysseus' ability to live. The dialogue shows us how the ancient Greeks were in love with the physical world, the beauty of the body and the earth.

The Greek view of mortality is almost an inverse of the ancient Egyptian view.

The Egyptians, being the less individual of the two, running with the crowd and relying on a higher power to lead them, believed death was a good thing. The Egyptian pyramids are a representation of this almost reverence towards death.

In conclusion, Odysseus is the epitome of all heroes on their journey. While being one to whom we look up, Odysseus is also one to whom we relate, as he is the 'I am' in all of us. In this way, not only is Odysseus significant in the context of ancient Greek culture, he is significant in the grander scheme of human- historical culture.

Time and the Evolution of Consciousness in *The Odyssey*

Maxine Tsonev (Cl. 10)

The Odyssey begins with the strong, intelligent protagonist Odysseus, stranded on the island of a smitten goddess who will not permit him to leave her. The gods confer on his fate, and he is conveyed to the island of a king, who offers hospitality. Here Odysseus recounts the story of how he was blown out to sea, when returning from the Trojan War with his companions, by the Gods whose wrath is incurred by the murders committed in the war, and how he endured twenty years of hardship away

from home, battling with strange creatures and guileful goddesses.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to him, his palace back at home has been inhabited by a hundred suitors vying for his wife Penelope's hand, while his son is helpless to prevent them. However, he finally returns to his beloved homeland, kills all the suitors, and reclaims his wife and domain.

One theme which *The Odyssey* underlines is Time, displaying ideas of the past, present, and future both in content and in form, which shows that the people of Ancient Greece, having a more complex understanding of time, had also a more complex understanding of life, and therefore a heightened consciousness in comparison to previous literature.

Not only is the story told in medias res, beginning in the middle of the plot, and revealing the first half of the events in Odysseus' flashbacks (such as in Book VII at the palace of King Alcinous), it also has a great many references to the past and future. For example, with Odysseus' illustrated homesickness and longing for home, as demonstrated in Book IV when we encounter a strong sense of nostalgia, which is firmly based in the past.

I long for home, long for the sight of home.

If any god has marked me out again for shipwreck, my tough heart can undergo it

(Book IV, ll. 230-231)

When the blind seer Teiresias tells Odysseus of his future, as seen in Book XI, again we have a sense of future, and of time.

A sweet smooth journey home, renowned Odysseus,
that is what you seek

but a god will make it hard for you—I know—

you will never escape the one who shakes the earth,

(Book XI, ll. 111-116)

This can also be compared to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which predates *The Odyssey* by 1500 years, and whose plot is absolutely linear, showing a great deal of development between the two.

As a second theme, we also see strong indications of the evolution of human consciousness within *The Odyssey's* pages. First of all, to once again compare it to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: as another historical milestone in literature, we can see a difference in values that reflects the mental orientation of the people of both time periods. For example, while in *Gilgamesh* the protagonist's superiority comes purely from his physical strength and physical conquests, with much praise lavished to that effect, Odysseus is much praised in *The Odyssey* for his intelligence and mental prowess.

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,

(Book I, ll. 1-2)

I am Laertes' son Odysseus.

Men hold me formidable for guile in peace and war:

this fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim,

(Book IX, ll. 7-9)

This shows that in the time of *Gilgamesh*, bodily strength and the physical world were very much ingrained in people's mental frame, while in *The Odyssey* consciousness has progressed from the body to the mind, and in their mentality, thought was more important. The contrast between the two also demonstrates their views on death, and how it evolved between them. While Gilgamesh is petrified by death and strives to acquire immortality, Odysseus, although constantly battling for his life throughout *The Odyssey*, does not share the same mortal fear of death, as can be seen when he refuses Calypso's offer of eternal life in Book IV. Additionally, when faced with the mortal threat of Poseidon's storm in Book V, he laments that he should have died as a hero in Troy rather than drowning in the sea, which would indicate that he cares more about the *way* he dies rather than death itself.

I wish I had met my fate like them,

and died on that day when the Trojan host

hurled their bronze-tipped spears at me

while we fought for the corpse of Achilles, son of Peleus.

(Book V, ll. 309-310)

The difference between them is that while the Greeks believed in the underworld, Gilgamesh's fear of death stems from his ignorance of the afterlife, of the unknown. The development over time must have been due to the Greeks' love of thinking and philosophy.

In relation to evolution in Greece, there is also the appearance of democracy, seen in the frequent conferences and cooperative decision-making that appear within the story, as demonstrated in Book I when the Gods gather to decide Odysseus' fate, and also in Book II when Telemachus gathers an assembly to discuss his opposition of the suitors; these are perhaps a shadow of what was occurring in Greece at the time (7th century BCE) with the beginning of democracy, as opposed to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, whose portrayal of an absolute monarchy may be an indication of how things were then.

Additionally, hospitality is a theme demonstrated over and over in *The Odyssey*, which relates to its social context. For example when Telemachus immediately welcomes the disguised Athena into the palace in Book I, or when King Alcinous unreservedly spoils a total stranger, Odysseus, with luxury in Book VIII, referring to the Ancient Greek custom of Philoxenia (etymologically derived from "love for strangers") that was abided by without fail by everyone in Greece at the time. All were expected to offer hospitality to anyone, for they believed that every stranger was under Zeus' protection.

The Odyssey is now renowned as one of the greatest milestones of literary history, for its quintessential template of the Hero's Journey, and embodiment of so many elements that compose a truly sublime piece of art. It contains many of the themes that govern our lives: love, trials, fate, endurance, and homecoming, and its subtle demonstrations of the values most prominent in Greece at the time paint a picture to which any reader can relate.

In addition to study of Homer's Odyssey, Class 10 also delved into Ancient Greek Drama, again taught by Eleni Karakonstanti. In this block students learned how Thespiis stepped out of the chorus, becoming the first actor, and how this led, as thinking developed, to theatre as we understand it today. To demonstrate this students read work by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, lingering for some time with Sophocles' Antigone. The character of Antigone perfectly meets the students at this age: a young woman who begins to question and rebel against the authority imposed upon her. Despite enjoying the freedom of this unassessed block, the students nevertheless produced thoughtful pieces of work, two of which we here share with you.

Money and Morality in *Antigone*

Walter Kelly (Cl. 10)

Antigone by Sophocles is among the most poignant of ancient Greek tragedies. The fallible aspect of man is wholly portrayed within Creon's corrupted lack of human faith and Antigone's unerring determination. The play engages a plethora of themes, each one underlining and verifying the others through dialogue. In this essay I will explore two of these topics as well as their interrelation: money and morality, two concepts which distinctly govern one's value system. Upon expansion, these topics encapsulate the altercations between divine faith and the effects of organised society.

The narrative of *Antigone* is on a core level the wisening of a man. The ruler of Thebes, King Creon, stands as the overarching villain of the play. The cold-hearted authority of his rule is ugly compared to Antigone's devoted love for her brother. Moreover, we end up despising Creon for all that he has done to his brother's house. However, through the narrative, Creon softens into a man of regret; he undergoes a transformation into one 'burdened' with empathy.

Creon uses the currency of money as both his defence and offence. Swearing by the tempting nature of money, he finds himself helplessly accusing those who challenge him of succumbing to bribery, saying:

Their bribery has suborned my soldiers,
And paid for this demonstration against my authority!
Money, gentlemen, money!
The virus that infects mankind with
Every sickness we have a name for,
No greater scourge than that!

Creon takes shelter behind the so called '*virus*' of money. His confused thinking is however—rather unrefined. Creon himself is semi-infected by the dictatorial thrills of state, power and money. The hypocrisy displayed only supports our belief in Creon's lack of sound judgement. His ears, eyes and mind are distorted like a toddler, unable to accept criticism.

Creon displays a glaring moral blindness throughout *Antigone*. Running with the ideals of blissful ignorance, he seems unable to accept guidance from any intelligent

other. Creon seems to self-deceive, flipping the 'ignorance is bliss' model on its head—he believes he is a wise man yet seems to understand nothing:

But, let me tell you this, Teiresias,
A man can fall: he can fall like a stone,
Especially if he pretends to give good advice,
And wraps it up in a profound cloak
Of religiosity, when all the time
Naked self-interest, and the greed for profit
Are the only motives that matter to him!

Here Creon speaks to Teiresias, the all knowing seer of Thebes. His impertinence displays the contempt dictatorial societies have for wisdom. Creon, like many before and after him, sees his power as absolute—unquestionable. Advice or critique from family, friend or intellectual other is therefore a direct attack upon Creon's rule. This stance was directly hostile to the emerging democratic tradition of ancient Greece. Dialogue was valued extremely highly in Greek culture; Creon's position stood in direct opposition to this tenet.

Beneath Creon's authoritarianism there lies a deeper subconscious shift of belief. He seems to lack divine faith, replacing this Greek ideal by putting all of his eggs in one monetary, power-mad basket of the state. By constantly mentioning the purity of the state, he seems to be reassuring himself of the merit he believes it to possess. In reality however, as displayed by the narrative, the infallible iron-fist inevitably leads to an impure exploitation. We encounter the ambivalence of Creon's religious faith as he exclaims:

If she is allowed to flout the law
In this way, all authority in the
State will collapse. I will not have that!
There will be no exchanging of roles here,
Me playing the woman while she plays the King!
She is my niece, my sister's child. But I am the law.

By proclaiming himself as 'the law,' Creon denies the possibility of a governing higher power. Creon's passages are riddled with hubris, along with his reference to the 'I', that individuality with which he is so infatuated. By reasserting his own self-worth, Creon withholds the ability to disregard the judgement of others, dismissing their criticism as a by-product of capital.

In conclusion, King Creon is a victim of the same sickness he arrogantly condemns. However, I empathise with Creon; he embodies that predictable predicament of digging oneself too deeply into defending the indefensible. With no chance of correction, Creon enacts the most natural human response of all—he breaks down. I would argue, contrary to popular opinion, that Creon is the most human of all the characters within *Antigone*. After ensnaring himself into a knot of moral conflict—Creon cries, he weeps, thus the connection we feel towards him arouses true empathy.

Blindness and Sight in *Antigone*

Maxine Tsonev (Cl. 10)

Renowned for its emotional depth, Sophocles' masterpiece *Antigone* encompasses within its beautiful prose an amalgamation of themes, woven together to produce tragedy rivalled by few. Of these themes, blindness plays a great part, both metaphorically and literally, highlighted by elements of pride and fate.

Creon, the tyrannical king of Thebes, is one of the most prominent symbols of blindness and pride in the play, his stubborn belief in only his opinion is the eternal truth veiling his vision in a manner that blinds him to the knowledge of his own wrongdoing, even as it is clear to all those who surround him. He even disregards the laws of the gods, refusing to bury a mortal after death, in his conviction that duty to the state is above all else. Pride greatly constitutes his blindness, as when Antigone defies him, it is his pride, wounded by a woman's resistance to his 'all powerful' laws, that obscures his vision to her perspective and to familial love. After he condemns her, person after person, including the chorus, his son, the messenger and most importantly the seer, Tereisias, attempt to convince him that his actions are irrational but his pride and refusal to retract his judgement, lest he be emasculated, set a wall before him, built from the bricks and mortar of his own obstinate truth,, until the death of his dearest son bring it tumbling down.

The State, the Fatherland, is everything

To us, the ship we all sail in

If she sinks, we all drown.

Contemptible is the man who puts the interests of his friends,

Or his relations, before his country

Oedipus, father of Antigone and of her story, shares Creon's blindness, as both discover only at the very end the terrible consequences of their actions; but while Creon could, with less hubris and more compassion, have seen his errors, Oedipus is powerless, guided only by a pre-written fate. It could be said that Oedipus had a blindfold tied tightly about his eyes, while Creon merely kept his eyes closed. When that metaphorical blindfold is finally removed from Oedipus and he sees the truth, he gouges out his own eyes, as though the weight of both metaphorical and physical sight is too heavy.

In this context pride can also be found in Antigone herself: her utter confidence and hubris in the fact the her actions are correct and justified is comparable with Creon's assurance in his actions. However, compared with both Oedipus and Creon, it is possible to see that blindness is not a characteristic easily associated with Antigone. Although it may be argued that her commitment to her plan blinds her to the thought of death, and even her sister's pleas, it is evident that contrary to Creon and Oedipus, she sees life clearly: when her options are laid before her she chooses her path in full acceptance of the

consequences.

I intend to bury my brother,

And if I die in the attempt, I shall die,

For a loving sister to embrace a loving brother

Even in the grave: and to be condemned

For the criminal act of seeing him at peace!

Tereisias is the only character who is blind in a physical sense, and not in a metaphorical one. However, his inner eye is clearer than perhaps all the characters in *Antigone*, his powers as a seer making him aware not only prematurely aware of the consequences of their actions, but also how they could be rectified.

Throughout the Theban plays, and highlighted particularly in *Antigone*, it can be seen that the themes of blindness and sight combine with those of fate and free will, and the characters separately express all four. Oedipus, perhaps blindest of all, is bound by fate with no free will at all; Creon, who although lacking the burden of a pre-written fate, is too blinded by his own hubris to his foresee his approaching demise; Antigone, however, possesses free will and her tragic death is the end to a journey that is guided all the way by her own, clear determination.

In studying this theme of blindness I can relate it to our fast paced, modern-day life. Often, and increasingly so in times of social media and cancel culture, we fail to take into account two, or even more sides of an argument, blinded by what we think or know to be the real truth. I also sympathise with both Creon and Oedipus in their final understanding of the truth, having felt, as I am sure many have, the feeling of regret and humiliation when, *unknowingly*, my actions harm others or myself. This play is a perfect representation, in my opinion, of human beings and their fallibility, showing that flaws and mistakes merely comprise the ups and downs of life.

Literature studied in Class 11 spans a huge amount of time, beginning with medieval Romance, moving through Shakespeare, and finally coming to rest in 19th Century with a block on the Romantics. This year students studied Romantic art, music and literature over the course of four weeks, allowing these varied disciplines to inform one another and thereby building a full picture of the movement as a whole. In literature we looked at the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, before finally coming to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. The students were then invited to write commentaries on poems of their choosing, thereby demonstrating their understanding of both the literature itself and how these works reflect the time in which they were written. This year I am pleased present to no fewer than four pieces, including the poems to which they refer and the paintings the students chose to illustrate these works.

'Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte' — Lord Byron Esmée Lynch-Morrison (Cl. 11)

'TIS done—but yesterday a King!
And arm'd with Kings to strive—
And now thou art a nameless thing:
So abject—yet alive!
Is this the man of thousand thrones,
Who strew'd our earth with hostile bones,
And can he thus survive?
Since he, miscalled the Morning Star,
Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far.

Ill-minded man! why scourge thy kind
Who bow'd so low the knee?
By gazing on thyself grown blind,
Thou taught'st the rest to see.
With might unquestion'd,—power to save,—
Thine only gift hath been the grave,
To those that worshipp'd thee;
Nor till thy fall could mortals guess
Ambition's less than littleness!

Thanks for that lesson—it will teach
To after-warriors more
Than high Philosophy can preach,
And vainly preach'd before.
That spell upon the minds of men
Breaks never to unite again,
That led them to adore
Those Pagod things of sabre sway
With fronts of brass, and feet of clay.

The triumph and the vanity,
The rapture of the strife—
The earthquake voice of Victory,
To thee the breath of life;

The sword, the sceptre, and that sway
Which man seem'd made but to obey,
Wherewith renown was rife—
All quell'd—Dark spirit! what must be
The madness of thy memory!

The Desolator desolate!
The Victor overthrown!
The Arbiter of others' fate
A Suppliant for his own!
Is it some yet imperial hope
That with such change can calmly cope?
Or dread of death alone?
To die a prince—or live a slave—
Thy choice is most ignobly brave!

He who of old would rend the oak,
Dream'd not of the rebound:
Chain'd by the trunk he vainly broke—
Alone—how look'd he round?
Thou, in the sternness of thy strength,
An equal deed hast done at length,
And darker fate hast found:
He fell, the forest prowlers' prey;
But thou must eat thy heart away!

The Roman, when his burning heart
Was slaked with blood of Rome,
Threw down the dagger—dared depart,
In savage grandeur, home—
He dared depart in utter scorn
Of men that such a yoke had borne,
Yet left him such a doom!
His only glory was that hour
Of self-upheld abandon'd power.

The Spaniard, when the lust of sway
Had lost its quickening spell,
Cast crowns for rosaries away,
An empire for a cell;
A strict accountant of his beads,
A subtle disputant on creeds,
His dotage trifled well:
Yet better had he neither known
A bigot's shrine, nor despot's throne.

But thou—from thy reluctant hand
The thunderbolt is wrung—
Too late thou leav'st the high command
To which thy weakness clung;
All Evil Spirit as thou art,
It is enough to grieve the heart
To see thine own unstrung;
To think that God's fair world hath been
The footstool of a thing so mean;

And Earth hath spilt her blood for him,
Who thus can hoard his own!

And Monarchs bow'd the trembling limb,
 And thank'd him for a throne!
 Fair Freedom! we may hold thee dear,
 When thus thy mightiest foes their fear
 In humblest guise have shown.
 Oh, ne'er may tyrant leave behind
 A brighter name to lure mankind!

Thine evil deeds are writ in gore,
 Nor written thus in vain—
 Thy triumphs tell of fame no more,
 Or deepen every stain:
 If thou hadst died as honour dies,
 Some new Napoleon might arise,
 To shame the world again—
 But who would soar the solar height,
 To set in such a starless night?

Weigh'd in the balance, hero dust
 Is vile as vulgar clay;
 Thy scales, Mortality! are just
 To all that pass away;
 But yet methought the living great
 Some higher sparks should animate,
 To dazzle and dismay:
 Nor deem'd Contempt could thus make mirth
 Of these, the Conquerors of the earth.

And she, proud Austria's mournful flower,
 Thy still imperial bride;
 How bears her breast the torturing hour?
 Still clings she to thy side?
 Must she too bend, must she too share
 Thy late repentance, long despair,
 Thou throneless Homicide?
 If still she loves thee, hoard that gem,—
 'Tis worth thy vanish'd diadem

Then haste thee to thy sullen Isle,
 And gaze upon the sea;
 That element may meet thy smile—
 It ne'er was ruled by thee!
 Or trace with thine all idle hand
 In loitering mood upon the sand,
 That Earth is now as free!
 That Corinth's pedagogue hath now
 Transferr'd his by-word to thy brow.

Thou Timour! in his captive's cage
 What thoughts will there be thine,
 While brooding in thy prison'd rage?
 But one—"The world *was* mine!"
 Unless, like he of Babylon,
 All sense is with thy sceptre gone,
 Life will not long confine
 That spirit pour'd so widely forth—
 So long obey'd—so little worth!

Or, like the thief of fire from heaven,
 Wilt thou withstand the shock?
 And share with him, the unforgiven,
 His vulture and his rock!
 Foredoom'd by God—by man accurst,
 And that last act, though not thy worst,
 The very Fiend's arch mock;
 He in his fall preserved his pride
 And, if a mortal, had as proudly died!

There was a day—there was an hour,
 While earth was Gaul's—Gaul thine—
 When that immeasurable power
 Unsated to resign,
 Had been an act of purer fame
 Than gathers round Marengo's name,
 And gilded thy decline
 Through the long twilight of all time,
 Despite some passing clouds of crime.

But thou forsooth must be a king,
 And don the purple vest,
 As if that foolish robe could wring
 Remembrance from thy breast.
 Where is that faded garment? where
 The gewgaws thou wert fond to wear,
 The star—the string—the crest?
 Vain froward child of empire! say,
 Are all thy playthings snatched away?

Where may the wearied eye repose
 When gazing on the Great;
 Where neither guilty glory glows,
 Nor despicable state?
 Yes—one—the first—the last—the best—
 The Cincinnatus of the West,
 Whom envy dared not hate,
 Bequeath'd the name of Washington,
 To make man blush there was but one!

In 'Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte' 1814, poet Lord Byron illustrates his opinions on the characteristics of the popular French political (and military) leader Napoleon (1769-1821). At the time of Napoleon's appointment, France was encountering the radical political shift that was the French revolution (1789-99), during which time the French monarchy collapsed and King Louis XVI was forced to abdicate. As a result of this major shift, the country was vulnerable, forming an ideal opportunity for the already well-established Napoleon to be inaugurated.

This Ode makes it abundantly clear that Byron was not an admirer of Napoleon, by exposing a distinctly pessimistic view of the French leader in the form of a lampoon. What is unusual about the way the writer achieves this, is his choice of mood and form. Byron's selection of an ode for his purpose is interesting, considering that odes are typically used in a celebratory context. Yet through teasing, taunting and criticising



'The Charging Chasseur' (Théodore Géricault, 1812)

Napoleon, Byron reveals the apparent purpose of this ode which is not only to shame Napoleon but to deride and humiliate him, portraying a lively, impish derision of the character, whereby he is presented as idiotic, incompetent and immoral. Being of English heritage Byron was perfectly within his right to undertake such action, as, in addition to the fact that Napoleon was despised by the English, Byron would likely face little to no consequence for publishing such a piece of work; unfortunately the same could not be said for similar creatives in France. (Although, having said that, this ode holds many of the same, condemning values as 'The Charging Chasseur' painted in 1812 by French artist Théodore Géricault.)

In nineteen stanzas Byron presents his ode as a burlesque of Napoleon, in which he discusses many characteristics seen within this man that one would not wish to associate with a leader. To enhance the presence of the character (as a military commander) Byron structures his ode tightly. Within each 9-lined stanza is a strict rhyme scheme of ababccbdd. (This includes 2 alternate rhyming couplets (abab), followed by a rhyming couplet (cc), a 'b' line and a second rhyming couplet (dd)). Byron retains this military structure, whilst embellishing the tone through his choice of metre: 434344344—four lines of common metre, two lines of iambic tetrameter, a singular line of iambic trimeter, and finally two more lines of iambic tetrameter. The military connotations of the ode's structure contribute a certain balance to the poem, which in turn allows further emphasis to be placed on the disastrous

situation created by Napoleon's poor leadership. The ode's composition appears to fit with that of an epitaph, as Byron, rather scathingly, depicts Napoleon.

In this ode, Byron largely neglects imagery. Perhaps this is because his audience would have recognised Napoleon as a character of the time. However, the imagery that is captured is presented through snippets of language, primarily within the seventh stanza. Here the imagery portrayed is sanguinary with words such as 'heart', 'blood' and 'dagger' being used. Such language presents the reader with a picture of Napoleon as guilty or responsible, and following phrases such as 'left him to such doom!' and 'abandon'd', in addition to the use of alliteration 'the dagger-dared depart' emphasise the violent connotations associated with this narrative.

Byron uses techniques such as metaphors and similes to depict the character of Napoleon by comparing him to the quintessential image of a leader. For example, the metaphor 'Thou taught'st the rest to see', acts simultaneously as an example of sarcasm, as Byron opposes the view that Napoleon enlightened the people of France to any capacity. Furthermore, Byron uses the simile 'Like the thief of fire from heaven' to express a clear connection between Prometheus and Napoleon's wicked intentions. The following line—'And that last act, though not thy worst'—intensely emphasises this message.

Additionally, Byron's use of alliteration ('change can calmly cope', 'guilty, glory, glows'), and hyperbole ('thine only gift hath been the grave') emphasise an engaging military structure, exaggerated picture, and harsh sounds to maintain a compelling argument, simultaneously mirroring his strong criticisms.

Two major themes that Byron displays in his ode are the incompetence and destructive nature of the character of Napoleon. 'Thy triumphs tell of fame no more'. This quotation is ambiguous. Firstly Byron potentially displays the now defective nature of Napoleon's strategies, following their inability to conceal his ineptitude. However, there is a secondary reference to Napoleon's military days, as Byron seemingly conveys Napoleon's fall from fame as he transitions from military command to political leader where he is neither heroic nor successful. An interesting comparison on this theme is 'An empire for a cell;'. This implies that Napoleon deserves to be sentenced, as well as alluding to the fact that France is now imprisoned as opposed to a highly functioning Empire. To further convey the destruction created by Napoleon, references such as 'Strewed our earth with hostile bones' are used. This embodies a sense of selfishness within Napoleon's judgement as it implies he alone was responsible for the bloodshed and devastation of countries outside France. For me these themes evoke feelings of anger and disappointment at the aforementioned careless actions of Napoleon.

A final theme presented by Byron throughout his ode is immorality. Through an array of quotations, Byron highlights the ill intent of Napoleon: 'Ill minded man!', and the effects that this had on France: 'To think that

God's fair world hath been / The footstool of a thing so mean'. The use of this quotation in particular portrays God and his human creations as a 'footstool' which, in the eyes of the church, is a very troubled analogy of this divine being. Presumably Byron intended to shock his audience and remind them of the divine rights that Napoleon lacked. Monumentally, through this theme Byron affirms that the whole world (including God) is at the mercy of Napoleon, evoking concern over his foul intent.

'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' – William Wordsworth Barnaby Michael (Cl. 11)

Earth has not any thing to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

The poem opens with 'Earth has not any thing to show more fair:' This is it. This is everything earth has to show. As a reader I am preparing myself for the experience that lies ahead.

The first 8 lines of the poem describe the beauty of the city in all its calmness. The following 6 consist of Wordsworth describing how he feels looking out onto this 'Sight so touching in its majesty'. He also describes how the city itself is asleep, and how the only thing awake is the river 'That glideth at his own sweet will'. Even the flowing river seems to evoke calmness in Wordsworth. He seems a virgin to the sight and experience; 'Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep! [...] Never did sun more beautiful steep'. He really describes his experience of a sight never seen to him before.

This poem reminds me of experiences travelling into central London in the early mornings. When taking a moment in what's seen commonly as a grimy, busy, polluted place, I found I could really extract and experience the beauty and serenity hidden within. In taking a moment to stop and calm down, the calm of the city comes to you. Wordsworth's words really bring back to life the memories I created. 'All bright and glittering in the smokeless air'; I can almost breathe the frosty morning air in London and feel my lungs be chilled. By using the words 'silent', 'calm so deep', 'glideth' and 'asleep', it puts the reader at ease and calms them when reading.

The opening line 'Earth has not any thing to show more fair:' describes the sublime, a major theme of Romanticism. The sublime is the idea that nature can be overwhelming and overpowering in an awe inspiring way. Hirschfeld describes the sublime as 'physical grandeur transformed into spiritual grandeur'; Wordsworth describes what he sees as 'A sight so touching in its majesty;' this is Wordsworth's experience of the sublime. He even goes so far as to say the sight has touched him. 'Open unto the fields, and to the sky;', in using the words 'Open unto', Wordsworth gives us a sense of vastness and scale. In a lot of Romantic art the sky is the subject and its emphasised with scale in the paintings. This is also to highlight man's inferiority to nature. Wordsworth is describing this scale of the sky to us in his words. In the previous line he states all that he can see; 'Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie'; the fact that he describes everything he can see, which consists of these grand, magnificent structures and how they all lie under the canopy of the sky, really gives us this sense of scale. 'Dull would he be of soul who could pass by / A sight so touching in its majesty'. He says that to pass by this sight would make you dull of soul and be almost inhuman. This really illuminates Wordsworth's appreciation of the sublime. 'The beauty of the morning; silent, bare, [...] never felt, a calm so deep!' Wordsworth feels a sense of calm when looking out from Westminster Bridge, and almost knows that the calm he feels and what is around him won't last forever.

Wordsworth, throughout the poem, talks of the beauty of dawn and uses the imagery of a sleeping London not yet woken up from its slumber, to emphasise the birth of a new day. He uses the words calm and silent to show the peace in that moment and the word 'bare' like a newborn. London is fresh and beginning anew, the air smokeless before the factories begin belching out their fumes. 'The river glideth at his own sweet will', not bustling with the boat traffic that would have been a constant sight at the time, 'And all the mighty heart is lying still' suggests that London is a mighty beast, so peaceful when asleep, yet so fearsome when woken. With the sky polluted by fumes from factories, a product of the Industrial Revolution, it must have seemed surreal to Wordsworth to see this glittering, clear view. With the sky being a prime example of the sublime, this occurrence of it being covered up by these man produced fumes would have been like man covering up the sublime. This can show that as a transition into the Industrial Revolution was made, the appreciation for nature and the sublime became much less.

Wordsworth talks a lot about the new day, describing it as 'bare'. He also talks about the awakening of London along with some very surreal sights like being able to see the sky along with 'Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples' that would have been visible for miles due to the clear, unpolluted air, and most likely wouldn't once the day began.

The poem is a tightly structured Petrarchan sonnet. There are no irregularities. This really brings the poem

back down to earth from the surreal sights described within it, giving the poem a sense of security and regularity. Although Wordsworth is touched by the 'majesty' of his sight from Westminster Bridge, and is calmed by the gliding river, and beautiful sun, this day in Westminster will carry on like any other. The sky will be filled with the plumes of pollution from factories, the river, disturbed by the boats to come, the streets filled by the awakening workers, and ultimately, the calm, the serenity, the peace, and the beauty of a Westminster morning... destroyed.



'Monk by the Sea' (Casper David Friedrich, 1810)

from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* — Lord Byron
Daisy Meaker (Cl. 11)

CLXXVIII.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
 There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
 There is society where none intrudes,
 By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
 I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
 From these our interviews, in which I steal
 From all I may be, or have been before,
 To mingle with the Universe, and feel
 What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

CLXXIX.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
 Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
 When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
 Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.

CLXXX.

His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields
 Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise
 And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
 For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
 Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
 And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray
 And howling, to his gods, where haply lies
 His petty hope in some near port or bay,
 And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage by the English romantic poet Lord Byron is a narrative poem divided into four 'cantos'. The poem was written between 1812–1818 and is comprised of 486 spenserian stanzas. Possibly autobiographical, the poem follows the indulgent travels and cynical thoughts of the Byronic hero 'Childe Harold'.

Stanzas 178–180 (in 'Canto IV'), begin with the character of Childe Harold expressing his adoration for nature, and the peace and rapture he experiences in it. The second line reminds me of the painting 'Monk by the Sea' by Caspar David Friedrich. In line 5 he clarifies that he is not a misandrist, just preferring nature to human company. He then goes on: 'To mingle with the universe, and feel / What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal' perfectly encapsulating the experience of the sublime—the acceptance of the unknown while simultaneously feeling as if one is experiencing entirely everything and nothing at once. This poem evokes echoes of the sublime, almost as if one was standing on the lonely shore beside Childe Harold.

Not only does Byron describe the sounds of the ocean ('music in its roar' and 'bubbling groan'), his use of alliterative and assonant sounds—such as s, des/dos, th, p, f, and un—is distinctly oceanic sounding, building on the imagery. The steady rhythm, dynamics and spenserian form mimic the swelling of the ocean.

Byron's commentary on the playful violence of the ocean is spoken with reverence. He personifies it and yet does not look upon its violence as malicious. He is in a



'Rough Sea with Wreckage' (JMW Turner, 1845)

love affair with nature: this excerpt could almost be a love poem. I, too, love the ocean. I am fascinated by its mysteries and power; ironically, I am terrified of the deep. Naturally, this poem called out to me. Byron paints a picture that is very Turner-esque. It reminds me of the painting 'Rough Sea with Wreckage'. The crashing, playful yet violent waves, along with the shipwreck are very much in the mood of this poem.

The ocean is a force to which humans must submit, and one of the few things we have not been able to categorise and control—this is possibly why the romantics were so enamoured by it: they were rebelling against the enlightenment, a movement driven by the need for control, understanding, and categorisation. None of this can be implemented on the ocean. One is completely at the mercy of the deep, and this surrender of control is very anti-enlightenment and freeing. I wonder if this surrender is the feeling of the sublime—to cede oneself to the universe and accept the macrocosm. Humanity appears to find this a very challenging and scary idea to accept.

The line break between the third and fourth lines in stanza 179 highlights the finality of the loss of control, demanding a pause between 'control' and 'stops'.

When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelt, uncoffined, and unknown.

This passage has vibrant visual and auditory imagery—it begins with a quiet pause, crescendos into the third line and ends quiet, small, on the word 'unknown'. These dynamics reflect the narrative. This is a striking passage which confronts not only mortality but the fear of being unremarkable and forgotten. Despite the troubling content, it is calm and without fear.

Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray
And howling, to his gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay.

The loud, playful and violent tone of the poem completely changes after the colon from one of chaos to a sudden disturbing calm. All of the sounds, images, shipwrecks and sublime feelings are halted as we are confronted with the image of mankind's corpse—our corpse. The description is a painful one to read—our hopes and prayers are useless against the might of the sea. There is nothing one can do, which is terrifying and also kind of comforting.

from 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798' — William Wordsworth Hannah Edsell (Cl. 11)

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.—And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise

In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

This poem by William Wordsworth was written in the late 18th century, a product of romanticism in England. Romanticism was all about challenging convention. It was about finding ways to express your own personal feeling, through art, through language, to allow other people to relate, even across the world. Nowadays this is very common but the romantic period was perhaps the first time people attempted this. This poem indeed challenges convention. Although it is in the beautiful form of iambic pentameter, every line perfect, unwavering, always absolute, it is without a rhyme scheme or structure to the stanzas, so it doesn't feel like it. This is not by any means the first poem to explore this, many poets at this time were looking for any and all ways to innovate their art, however it is interesting to look at why.

In my eyes, this poem, or at least the section I am considering, is about nature, the sublime, and the past. Wordsworth starts off by saying how he has changed since last he came to these hills. He demonstrates an urge to return, not only in the title, ('Revisiting'), but by the thoughts he expresses in the text, showing a great passion for the land, or perhaps, as he says later on, he is 'more like a man / Flying from something that he dreads, than one / Who sought the thing he loved.'

Wordsworth uses the phrase, 'there is life and food / For future years.' By seeing this beautiful sight once again, his mind is fuelled. 'Food / For future' specifically — isn't that the entire point of poetry? And art in general? It may well be to inspire the present, but the present is only momentary, the future is forever. The aim of romantic poetry is to evoke emotion in the reader, to make us empathise with the time, and I think Wordsworth uses language to paint emotions as images, delightfully, just like the great painters of the time: Turner, Cole or Blake. The alliteration of the f sounds gives the feeling of fluidity in my mind, illustrating the flow of time, of life.

I love the beautiful and perfectly chosen language that Wordsworth uses to elegantly depict exactly what he is feeling, how the poem is utterly and completely in a perfect form but it is hidden, as if it is not important at all. Perhaps Wordsworth is hiding something, running away from something; this poem has many complex layers, even though it may seem simple. Everything fits together like a jigsaw puzzle, every word flows into the next, into the next, each feeding the next sentence, the next feeling. The sublime in this poem is very obvious to me, as he talks about it literally in the moment, *and*, (even though changed by time), how it drew him back to this specific place 'a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey by the Banks of the Wye'. This passage has a breath of fresh air in the midst of his current thoughts, between the semicolon and the colon, when he is remembering his past. Wordsworth wrote this poem while on a tour of England, which, in



'Tintern Abbey' (William Havell, 1804)

itself, is a breath away from normal life and stress. He allowed himself to travel 'Wherever nature led.'

I feel the sublime most strongly when Wordsworth finds the clearest way to express it, as 'A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts'. The odd feeling of pleasure and fear but without the sense of being scared. Wordsworth uses earth's biggest wonders, the sun, the sky, the sea, all constant and ever changing, which makes what he is feeling relatable to anyone who has experienced them. Next he says 'in the mind of man'. How are we, as humans—so small compared to this world — supposed to comprehend the overpowering 'motion and [...] spirit' of nature that 'rolls through all things'? This is a very romantic idea of man's inferiority to nature; almost helplessness. This is seen a lot in Germany as a result of the Napoleonic wars, however England was far more separated from that (until the battle of Waterloo), possibly suggesting a more personal reason as to why Wordsworth felt this way.

Themes of memory and imagination weave themselves through the images of nature, many of the past but of his hope for the future too. He says that when he last came, he was consumed by, what he calls 'An appetite; a feeling and a love' for the place. Later, in the next stanza, he talks about his dear sister, comparing her to the land, its awe and, I believe, *this* feeling. Interestingly this passage is used in the Romantic novel, *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley), and a theme that greatly exists in both texts is this all consuming love for one's sister, perhaps even more relatable than that of the sublime.

Creative Response

As teachers we are constantly looking for ways to innovate and enliven our work. This year part of that striving came in the form of Themed Intensives. These were two week blocks in which we focused on a single theme, and the students were allowed to choose which lessons they would attend, mixing with peers of all ages.

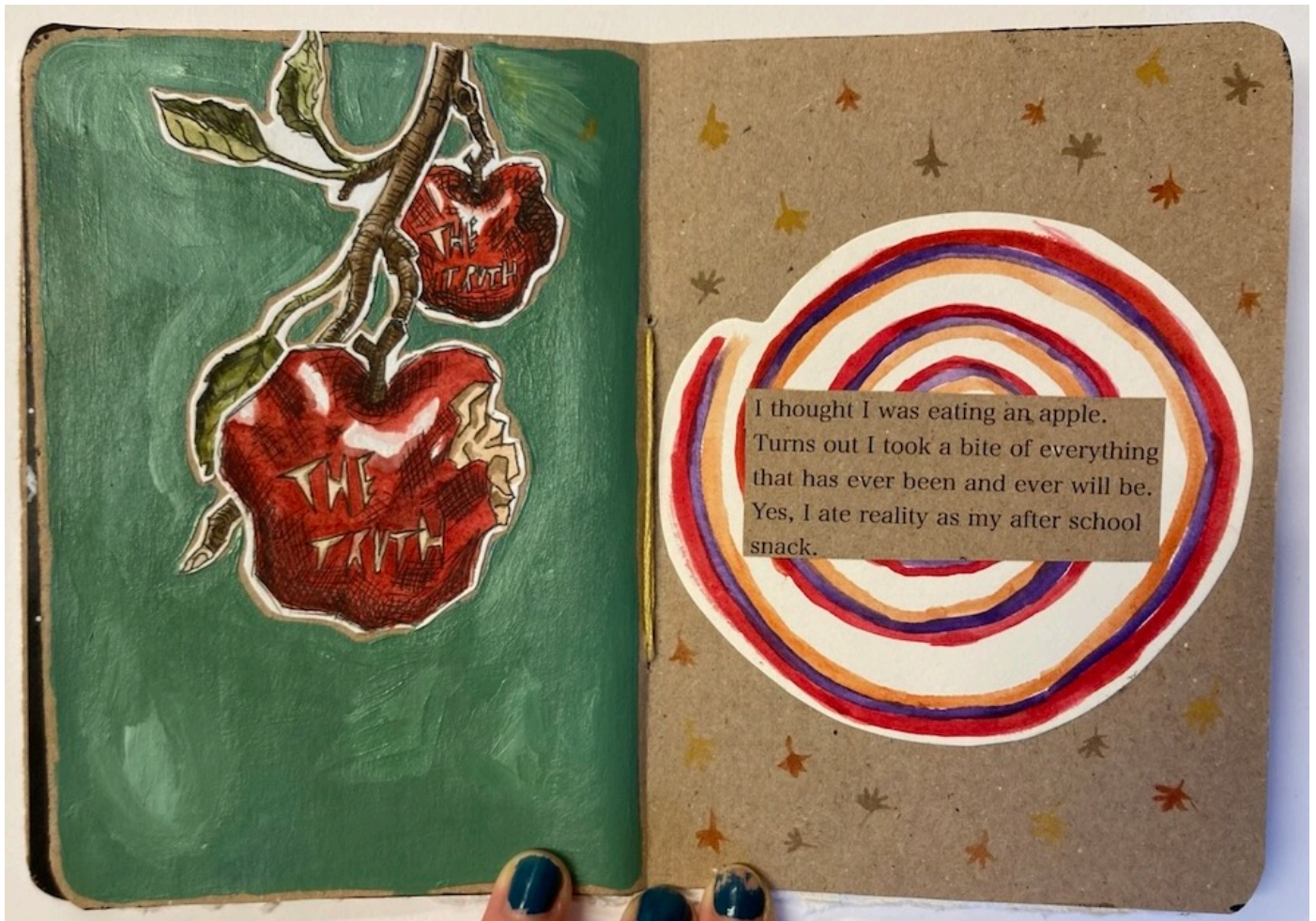
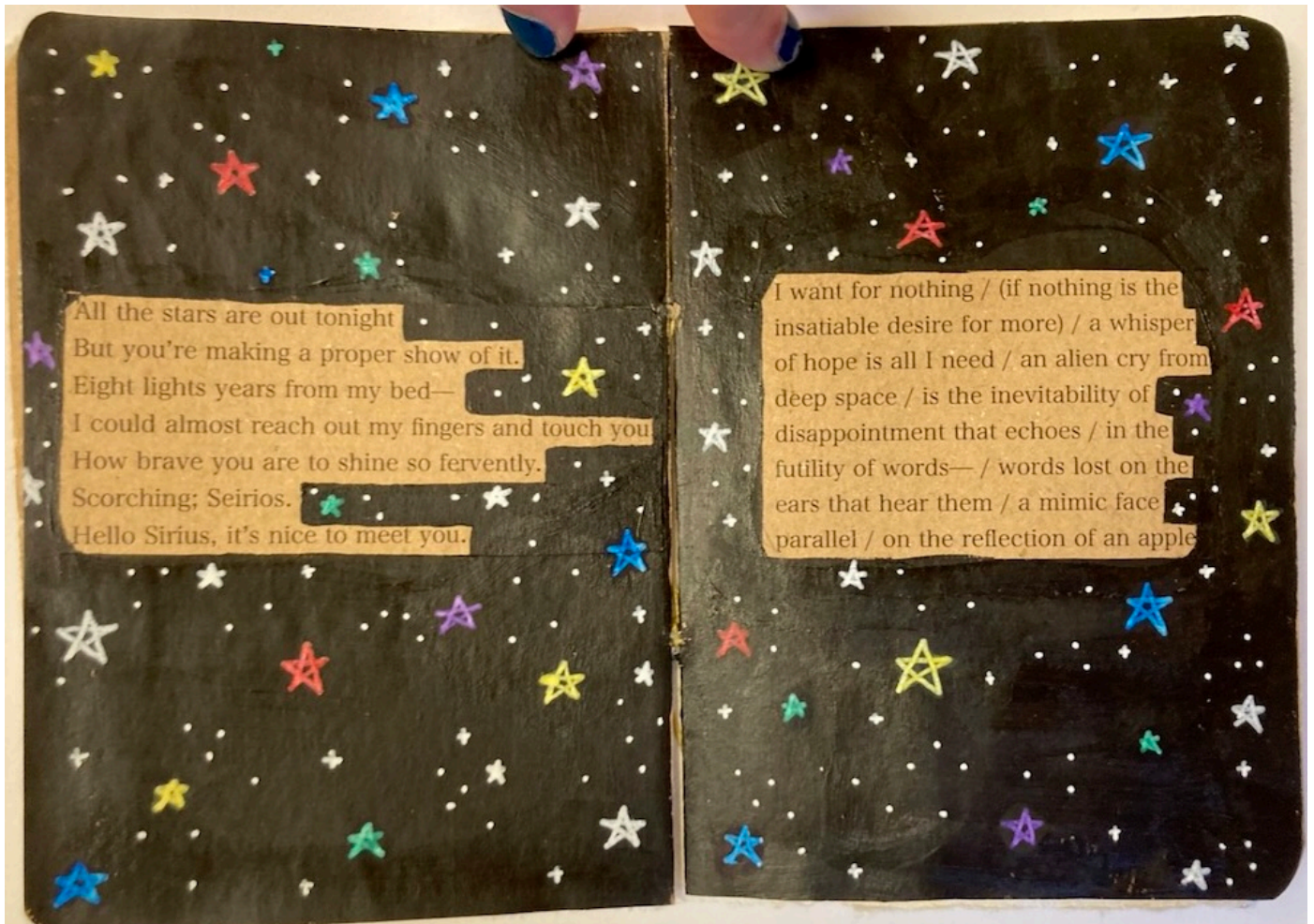
Our first theme was 'The Apple'. This idea was followed through subjects such as art history, science, craft, movement and creative writing.

As students gain skill and confidence in their own writing, an aspect which we often discuss is the physical presence of literature: simply put, the importance of the position in which the words are literally placed on the page. This year, in response to the Apple theme, Class 11 student Daisy Meaker ran with this idea producing not only a small collection of poems, but illustrating them to create this beautiful little book.











Ballads

In Class 9 students begin to develop their creative writing. Typically this starts with the writing of ballads, which are narrative poems. The word 'ballad' comes from the French term 'chanson balladée' which is a danced song. The strong dance beat can be felt in the regular rhythm of ballads. This year Class 9 worked in pairs to create humorous ballads with a dark edge. Because this block was very early in the year most of the work showed an encouraging development of skills—but one came forth (almost) perfectly and humorously formed.

The Tooth Fairy

Lila Hastings & Ibrahim Velmi (Cl. 9)

Crushing and grinding the tooth into dust,
To be able to fly, the fairies, they must.
Tucked into bed was a certain young lad
Who'd just lost a tooth: his name was Chad.
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, where is my cash?
Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, add to my stash?"

Deep in the woods, there was a big tree,
And that tree belonged to the Tooth Fairy.
Checking her phone, there was an alarm,
A boy'd lost his tooth on Jersey Farm!
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, a kid's lost his tooth!
And get it soon or it'll go with a poof!"

She got to the house and was a bit scared.
Chad opened the window to let in the air.
In through the window the Tooth Fairy went,
A way to get in that she did invent.
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, get us that dust!
Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, that is a must!"

Louder and louder Chad started snoring,
His books and his pictures were all very boring.
Under the pillow and into the darkness,
There was a small tooth and it looked marvellous.
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, bring us that molar!
Grind it and pound it and make us much stronger."

Chad woke up in the midst of the night,
The noise from the fairy did give him a fright.
His dad heard the sounds and went to Chad's room,
And on his way there, he picked up a broom.
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, where do you lie?
Come out from your hiding or I'll poke out your eye."

Father walked round with the broom in his hand,
After ten minutes he got really mad.
He shouted and kicked and screamed and hit:
After a time, a candle was lit.
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, come out of your hole,
Come out or I'll put you in fiery coals."

The Tooth Fairy flew in fear and in fright,
The shadow of Chad's dad blocked out the light.
He brought up the broom so 'twas over his head,
And whacked down the broom until she was dead.
"Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, we're making a pie.
Tooth Fairy, Tooth Fairy, say your goodbyes."

The next night as Chad's dad was cooking the food,
Chad came downstairs in a very foul mood.
He stomped and he grumped as he went round the house,
Until his dad told him to simply get out.
"But Father, But Father, the Tooth Fairy's gone!
Where is the money, dad? Mine is all gone!"

His dad glanced guiltily towards the pot,
Honestly, Chad was a massive clot.
He sprinkled the fairy dust into the pan,
Then brushed off his hands and turned on the fan.
"My Darling, My Darling, the Tooth Fairy's here!
Now come have some food and all will come clear..."

Romantic Ballads

Unlike their more traditional counterparts, Romantic Ballads do not necessarily emphasise a particular rhythm or rhyme scheme—but if you read closely you will discover that they do, indeed, adhere to a very strict structure. Upon reading Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' (see p. 14), Class 11 student, and accomplished poet, Hannah Edsell became enchanted by the idea of writing a poem which hides its form in layers of imagery and emotion—albeit appropriately broken by a melancholy refrain. The result is the following exceptional piece of work.

By Nature's Hand

Hannah Edsell (Cl. 11)

My flesh, coated in sweet and dirty salt,
Is glistening beneath the rays of damp
And honeyed heat. Like sheets of sweat that drop
From yellow clouds and greener skies of dust.
My burning skin grows crystal spikes of salt
That break and drip the contents of the seas.
—Drowning, still, flooded soul.
Aching, screaming, swallowed whole—
On mountain rock where clings the softened moss,
I rest the flesh which stretches under skin
And drags the earth that, endlessly changing,
Holds fewer signs of former human life.
The wind is gently roaring and the trees
Are loud, the butterflies are harsh and cruel
As beauty is disguise for smarter life.
The charging world is rude and flings aside
Any and all who do not sure abide
To warnings given when it changes course.
But bliss holds tight onto my pulsing heart,
Allowing not a beat to beat unfelt.
And nature is sublime and wondrous—still
The awe-filled sight to which our bodies crave.

The mud gives way beneath my foot of Eve
 When step I forth to reach the tallest point —
 My last desire, to see the world at length!
 But earth has power still unknown to man
 That swallows flesh and blood without a thought
 To what event will pull on other hearts,
 And cut the seeing part of watery eyes
 Allowing not to see, but hear the pain.
 — Drowning, still, flooded soul.
 Aching, screaming, swallowed whole —
 Along the path and through the dappled wood
 Limbs aching, smarting cuts to call a wound,
 Are rubbed raw, shining like the angry sun.
 The shade is home for creatures who, like me,
 Can live in symbiotic ignorance
 Of nature's war that nature does befall.
 I want to die in tragic accident,
 By nature's hand, by only nature's hand,
 To feel the unforgiving gift of life
 That sight of death can only thus obtain.
 But these are thoughts which flit between my ears
 And stay no longer than a dragonfly
 That skates the pond. I start to move my limbs
 That creek in motion, climbing rocky cliffs,
 Floating my body up above the clouds
 As earthly quilt unfolds beneath my eyes.
 Then fall, do I, down to the bottom skies.
 Fast, down, below the mountain passes high.
 — Drowning, still, flooded soul.
 Aching, screaming, swallowed whole —
 But now that I have seen the sight sublime
 My aching mind is now at last in peace
 And so may I rest in eternal sleep.

Creative Writing in Class 12

In the last year of school Creative Writing is an optional and independent pursuit. Students are invited to work in any form and to send me their work at any time over the course of the year. I am therefore afforded the great privilege of acting the role of editor; helping these young writers to hone and develop their skills — usually through many, many drafts.

This year Class 12 student, Alice Clifford, took up this challenge and I am delighted to share some of her work with you.

Four Haiku

by Alice Clifford (Cl. 12)

Autumn's Inferno

The forest burns red,
 Blazing leaves fall to the ground.
 Autumn's fire returns.

Pick Your Poison

Poison their sad hearts.
 Hemlock or Belladonna?
 Who knows? They'll still die.

The Tempest

Wild wind whistles o'er,
 Dark clouds turn the day to night;
 A storm is coming.

The Tributary of Treasure

The brook bubbles by,
 Flashing fish and glinting gold.
 A hoard hid in silts.

Sonnet

by Alice Clifford (Cl. 12)

The sun's light fades, the sky grows dark with night,
 The road that leads through the city is still.
 Streetlights flicker; house windows fill with light,
 Mists muffle sounds; the suburbs are tranquil,
 The asphalt glistens, like stars, from the rain.
 Voices and cars are heard the street over
 But they do not disturb the eerie lane;
 Quiet is rare here, a four-leaf clover.
 I like the cold, the hush, air hung with frost,
 The way my breath clouds in the calm night air.
 The ever-bright city; icy and lost.
 My heart is numb and sorrow is my fare.
 Loneliness is better in pretty scenes,
 The sublime is private, filled with half dreams.

The Bus Stop

by Alice Clifford (Cl. 12)

I open my eyes. My surroundings slowly come into focus, darkness and gnarled trees rising from the ground; the smell of earth and decomposing leaves permeating my nose from where I lie. I don't remember coming to a forest. Sitting up, I peer through the blackness of the trees, listening: the faint rustling of leaves and whistling of the wind fill my ears, otherwise — silence. The noises normally expected from the woods at night are absent. No owls hooting or badgers snuffling or pheasants squawking. It is eerily quiet.

Cold air brushes my skin, and my breath clouds before me. I have the feeling I am not alone; something else is in the wood, something unnatural that has scared the night-time creatures away. Phantom fingers ghost down my back making me shudder. Ragged gasping sounds through the trees becoming louder and louder; leaves crunch.

I need to go.

I can see a path through the trees towards a light. The breath is louder, coming closer, sounding over my shoulder. Panic is setting in; I tell myself that if I just get to

the light, I will be ok, I have nothing to worry about. I stand, swaying on my feet, my body shaking; I run. I'm being silly, I think, the forest is probably empty. Down the dirt path, jumping over fallen logs, towards the light. It is an old Victorian lamppost, just visible through the trees. A moth flaps around the light throwing itself against the glass but as I draw closer it flutters away. The glass is cracked and rust peeks out beneath the black paint. Beyond the lamp post is the glittering tarmac of a rain-damp road. I run faster. I just need to reach the light —

I trip.

I fall.



I open my eyes. It is dark. Gnarled trees rise from the ground, and all is silent. I am in a forest. Why? I don't remember coming here. The air is bitterly cold and my breath clouds before me. I get the feeling that I am not alone; something else is in the wood, something unnatural. Ragged gasping sounds through the trees, leaves crunching underfoot, coming closer and closer.

I need to go. I can see a dirt path through the trees toward a light. If I can just get to the light, I will be okay. I pull myself to my feet, my legs are scraped and bruised; mud streaked across the scratches—I wonder how I cut myself. My body is shaking with fear and I can hardly stand. The sawing breath sounds over my shoulder; brushes against my cheek. I can't breathe. I can't move. Claws scrape my skin.

I run.

Down the path, towards the light that glows through the trees. Footsteps thud behind me. I am wading through syrup; my legs cannot move fast enough. Rasping breath in my ear. I turn my head; look away from the path. My foot catches on a stone and I fall, the ground rushing up to meet me —



I open my eyes. It is silent, dark; there is no moon. Curled in a ball, I lie on the floor of a forest. The trees sway, rustling their leaves. Something tells me, 'Be afraid.'

Ragged breathing; just out of sight. Leaves crunch underfoot. I turn. I run. Through the trees, branches scraping me, tripping down the hill. The footsteps behind me quicken. I pass a forest clearing, the dirt path scuffed as though it has been recently disturbed. I see a light up ahead, an old streetlight. I run faster; it is almost upon me. I run straight past the light, not daring to stop. Through the trees, I see a dark snaking road; its black asphalt shining from the rain. I run down the road and follow the white, iridescent road markings. The sounds of my pursuer begin to fade and up ahead I see a solitary bus stop, with a streetlight. A beacon. A little pool of safety. I jog to the edge of the road desperate to reach the bus stop, aware that the *thing* from the forest isn't far behind. If I can just reach the bus stop, I will be okay. A car whizzes past on the road. Its glowing lights swing past me. I cry out. I wave my arms but it does not stop.

I run to the bus stop and as the puddle of light surrounds me, I allow myself a moment to breathe. I see my reflection in the plastic noticeboard. My terrified eyes, my sweat-soaked hair, the cut down my neck, oozing blood. Behind me a shadow approaches. It walks towards my pool of light. My limbs freeze up. I cannot move; I cannot turn.

It walks forward the light creeping upon its features. Its mouth is a bloody, gaping maw, cut wide into its cheeks, tinged black. Its eyes are empty sockets; blood runs down its face like tears. It lifts its hand to point at my reflection. Black claws, sharp as needles on each finger; red with my blood.

My strength leaves me. I take a step to turn around. My legs give out. I fall.



I open my eyes to silence, darkness. I can see the sky through the branches of trees where the stars twinkle in the moonless night. The trees sway, rustling. I lie curled in a ball on the forest floor. My legs ache, scratches cover my limbs and sharp pain radiates from a cut on my neck. Blood dribbles onto my top and I reach up with my sleeve to wipe it away. A strange calm settles over me. I should be scared: I am alone in the middle of the wood at night with no clue as to how I got there but the gentle, comforting hoot of an owl echoes through the forest. I sit up and brush the dirt and leaves from my knees preparing to stand.

The air in the forest ripples. A wave of silence passes through me and the comforting sounds of the nocturnal creatures vanish. A rasping gasp sounds through the silence followed by the crunch of leaves underfoot. Something tells me, 'Be afraid.'

I leap to my feet, the momentary calm replaced by rushing panic as I stumble through the undergrowth. I run through the trees, branches scraping me, tripping down the hill. The footfalls behind me quicken. I pass a forest clearing, the dirt path scuffed as though someone has sprinted through. I see a light up ahead, an old streetlight. I want to stop, to shelter in the light but I know it won't save me. I must get out of the woods. There is a road in front of me. I run faster; it is almost upon me. I reach the road and turn down the middle trying to put as much distance between myself and the forest. There is a solitary bus stop, with a streetlight. A beacon. A little pool of safety. If I can just reach the bus stop, I will be okay. I push myself faster, my breath sawing in and out, clutching the stitch in my side. I stumble over into the light and cling to the post to catch my breath. The puddle of light surrounds me and I squint out into the darkness trying to catch a glimpse of my pursuer. I see only trees and shadows. The plastic noticeboard reads **First bus: 5:32**. I just need to wait until then, my bus will come, and everything will be okay.

I see my reflection in the plastic noticeboard. My terrified eyes, my sweat-soaked hair, the cut down my neck, oozing blood. Behind me a shadow. I watch its distorted shape approach in the scratched panel. My limbs

freeze up with fear. I cannot move; I cannot turn. It walks forward towards my circle of light; its face illuminated.

Its mouth is a bloody, gaping maw, cut wide into its cheeks, teeth sharp as a fish's. Its eyes are empty sockets; blood runs down its face like tears. It lifts its hand to point at my reflection. Black claws on its fingers; red with my blood.

It steps into the light. I begin to shake. It's not supposed to do that. It should fear the light— I should be safe. Its claws gently brush my neck as though trying to comfort me, before it digs them under my collarbone. More blood rushes down, the stain on my top blooming across my chest. I can't move. It strokes a knuckle down my cheek.

I stare into its eye sockets in the reflection, realising I can never escape. I am trapped; the next bus is not for hours. It doesn't fear the light as so many monsters do; it is just playing with its food before it feeds.

Wrapping its arms around me, its hand in front of my face, it presses its claws against my lips, pulling them outwards, ripping skin; a permanent smile on my face. I try to cry out through the pain, but I only gurgle, like a baby. Hot wet blood coats my chin, my chest, my stomach. It drips onto the pavement and runs into the road, down the drain. The monster's claws trail up my face, hovering over my eyes. I look up, staring at its mangled eyes in the reflection. Its mouth, grinning at me, twin to my twisted smile.

It plunges its claws into my eyes.

The last thing I remember is the warped reflection of our twisted, bloody faces and the sounds of our ragged breath.



I open my eyes.
