

eco*



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notes in collaboration with Cambridge Zero Carbon
Society and Cambridge University Wildlife Society

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Our first themed issue of the year comprises works looking at green issues, wildlife and nature in creative ways. From Tanmay Dixit's haunting eulogy to a dying world to the sheer vibrance of Tessa Callendar's hummingbird image, this issue explores the relationship between humans and nature through a careful consideration of our actions within the world. We hope it appeals to a wide audience and inspires discussion and creation of future works. Much thanks to Cambridge Zero Carbon Society and Cambridge University Wildlife Society, who collaborated with us to make this issue.



Miles Edwards

Nature

Life splits like oak leaves in sharp winter rain.
Earth bleeds its sickness. The illness remains.
Clouds in the forest of mist and of shadow.
Future sleeps hidden in brown barren barrows.

Tea stains on desk tops and crumpled-up shirts.
Trainers and running shorts riddled with dirt.
Whirring of warmth and your fading grey breath.
Late autumn leaves the miraculous death.

Step up the hillside and see how it dies.
Feel wind's rebuke to the land as it lies.
Cattle have scattered. The branches grow twisted.
Ground digs out shallow. The buildings are listed.

Sullen grey mornings. Break of the day.
Clamorous car horns drive birdsong away.
Kids' spiky laughter has pierced through the air.
True life dead. Dormant in dark-guarded lairs.

Dinner for two. You laugh and I love you.
Let's stoutly ignore what this brave world has come to.
Outside the window, the whispers of wind.
Smoggy clouds shadow the sins we have sinned.

6 o'clock news. Stands a young politician.
Visiting nature reserves on a mission.
He claws back his hair, pads the earth with his feet.
Sees himself primate at 10 Downing Street.

Now the environment's come back in fashion,
He's prompt to provide us the pretence of passion.
In a wet, trampled field he lifts his voice and thus spake:
His way had been cleared clawing leaves with a rake.

Rachel Lewis

Father

In between hunts, when I lie in the grasses
And practise the stillness of death,
I have been thinking hard. And I believe,
Father, that what is gone is certitude.
We learnt the loss of you in between licks,
When we asked where our bull elephant,
Our antlered stag, our spring-spout was.
Mother said you were a wanderer, that all men are,
You were never going to be around for long.
I do my best without you. I rise
As I believe you rose, as I saw Mother
Surge, all dappled haunches, in the den.
Like her, only heavier. For I think you would stand
With all the thunder-strength of muscled cloud.
Now I am big as she said you were and I would be,
Eye-level with the lightning-riven tree.
But she was wrong as well, said you were wandering
Through forests longer than the sky is high,
Forests full of other fathers. I have looked for you.
I have walked the orange day and the black night.
But I could not even find the forests, could not
Even find the way to you. All I found was men
And the carcasses of lands they leave behind.
Father I am afraid for you, lost somewhere
I cannot help, somewhere I cannot even see.
But Father, I am still more afraid for me.

Cressida Peever

Unnatural Selection

In a tank in his greenhouse Grandpa bred
Cabbage White Butterflies – pearly-winged
With singed tips and on each a perfect black
Pupil shivered and stared back.
On hot days we'd uncover the tank
And they'd rest like sighs on my fingertips to drink
Droplets of sugar-water from my outstretched palm,
Smattering around in the glass-walled warmth.
Once I found a mass of brown caterpillars heaped
Just outside, desperate to get in and taste the heat.
Leave 'em be Grandpa said, *they're only moths*
And if you bring 'em in they'll gobble all the cabbage
And breed and swarm until my butterflies are overrun.
A day later the first frost fell and killed every one.





Alex Cussons

Storm

Strange feeling,
I have just realized that it is over.
What does this mean?
The storm is passed.
That great turmoil, when neither up nor down
Were distinguishable
And the lightning rivaled the sun
Confusing day and night.
It is so calm now.
Yet I am disconcerted,
Afloat here on this bland translucent feeling
Of terrible stillness.
From what seed of air
Was it born?
And where has it gone?
I had learnt to live in a perpetual condition of upheaval
And now,
Now this calmness frightens.
Can it be that storms
Are never to be had again?
And how shall I live?
Now that everything in my little ship is broken?
Shards, glued into fragile oneness
And nailed to the ground for safety
In anticipation of a storm
That will never come again?

Niamh Ryle

Saddleworth Moor through a window

Fog proceeds like a visitor:
Shouldering no identity, permeating
The peripheries of turf.
We cannot drive through it anymore.
It squats like a cyst, ripe for extraction,
And we tail around its industrial skin
As the lens eye feasts and saturates.
(And was it worth those ruptured lives
Pilfering the soggy earth?)
It catches my kisses in the soil,
Wrestles them into tumuli,
And we drive on with greedy hearts.
I am courting with that fog.

Tanmay Dixit

Nature's Eulogy

A brief glimpse,
A shape in the moonlight,
Swathed in the shadows, a shape from the past,
As the amorphous smoke rolls by, and the mournful cry of the
unseen plaintive
lonely night-bird in its hidden lair
rings out.

With the syncopated churning from the man-land distant,
The water glistens, ripples widen,
As the moon explodes.
Extinguished and forgotten.
Discordance prevails.
The natural melody of the night is
Cut short.

Plunged deep into the fog filled darkness,
Blindly kicking out,
With the gurgle of the murk and the turgid lumps,
Like headstones by a church.
The past lurks in fading memory,
And the current rushes by in a splurge –
Thoughtless and destructive.

The ancient sentinel trees groan in a clamour,
Their wounds renting the air,
As their resolve wavers,
And their guarded minds travel back
To when all was not so,

That shape in the hollows,
Telling its tale:
Of a strong chorus,
Blaring out nature's song,
When the starlings blocked the sun,
When they flew to roost,
When the air was clean,
When the land was green,
When the moon was pure,
When the waterfalls roared,
Yet calmness reigned,
as the world remained,
Full of Natural Calling.

Now, in a world of man's destruction,
The insects eerily silent,
The forest wilted, the sky darkens, sullied
with smoke. The shape of the past has gone,
Forced into the wisps of fuming gas.
Was it ever there?
Even the memory of those ancient, failed sentinels dwindles
quickly.
Blindly,
Stumbling,
Clumsy movements,
Lurching forwards,
In regression.
Natural unity separated.
The world brought to a halt.
The artificial lights in the man-land closer
penetrate the once-still air.
The night-bird's reluctant, painful utterance, brought to an
premature stop.
Hopelessly, confused, spinning ever smaller,
In Unnatural Silence.

Nell Whittaker

Five Dead Sperm Whales in Lincolnshire

Storms at sea.
Rain, then squally showers,
Moderate, becoming poor.

They knew the cold
And the dark heavy water
Like cartridge paper
Folded around them.
Then the shallow North Sea
Where the water came undone,
Collapsing into shingle and sand,
Tissued into not much at all.
They beached
Probably quietly.

The sun must have come up slowly
To show them,
Grey as slate – dewed, maybe –
Close to one another,
Much smaller looking.
Still punctuation
On a wind-hushed page.





“ I Just want to
Change the world ”

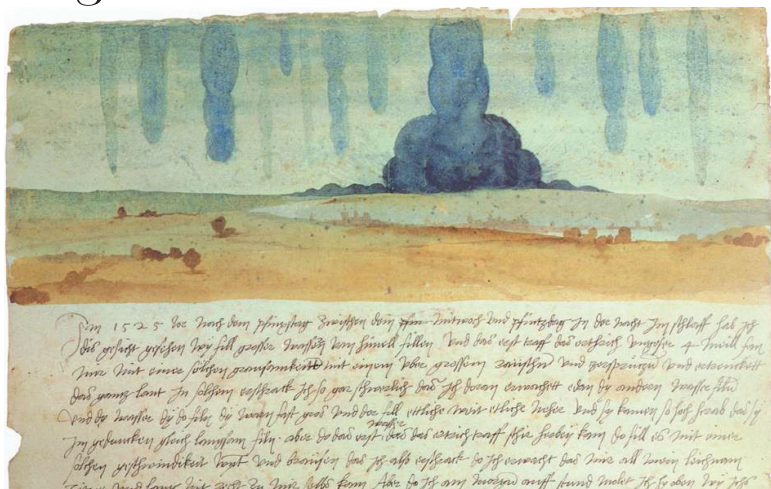




Apocalypse Season

this is the end
of life as we know it: by morning weeds will have eaten through the
wood
the chairs will be reduced to exoskeletons; the porcelain
will hang like pieces of a broken jaw, gaping, incapable
of understanding the fate of the world. Twinning
around the doorjamb a clump of hurried flowers – violets –
grown in bursts like earthy anxious sighs – but fragrant – strong
and resolute: flowers who will go on to tell
tales of the world ending, and still sway to say that they survived.
The heating: broken. Sun through all the cracks, dousing the ruins
shining with a passion, unaware of the reports of its coming death.
When it implodes,
then we will get showers of gold, dust returned to
dust. The bed turned over, sunken in the middle, heavy
with dead embers. Children scattered
begging – this is the end, but the end has passed
now they run with girlish screams and rattle the bowels
of this country and tan its skin with their wild stampede.
By the time
we let go, we breathe, we give way the river flow in
between us: that is when the termites go to work, that is when the
flood arrives
that is when the rains pour and the sun shuts off and around us as we
sleep
the sleep of the partially innocent. Everything around us crumbles
to pieces, better to be reborn. Can you call our love
a breath of spring? It is devastating and mythical
and it works slowly, like thunder, and it is
completely and utterly breathtaking.

Albrecht Durer's Environmental Nightmares



Environmental and ecological issues have long been a source of fascination and inspiration for artists. Today, Aviva Rahmani and Antti Laitinen, alongside many others, use their art to explore and protest against climate change and unsound environmental policies. Perhaps the archetypal environmental subject matter for post-Roman artists was the Biblical flood. Artists as diverse and Michelangelo Buonarroti and J.M.W. Turner famously explored this subject in their artworks. But Albrecht Durer's flood image is of an entirely more personal nature.

He painted this watercolour on having awoken from a terrible nightmare, one he describes at the bottom of the painting.

He notes that: *'In the night between Wednesday and Thursday after Whitsunday I saw the appearance in my sleep - how many great waters fell from heaven. The first struck the earth about 4 miles away from me with terrific force and tremendous noise, and it broke up and drowned the whole land. I was so sore afraid that I awoke from it. Then the other waters fell and as they fell they were very powerful and there were many of them, some further away, some nearer. And they came down from so great a height that they all seemed to fall with an equal slowness. But when the first water that touched the earth had very nearly reached it, it fell with such swiftness, with wind and roaring, and I was so sore afraid that when I awoke my whole body trembled and for a long while I could not recover myself. So when I arose in the morning I painted it above here as I saw it. God turns all things to the best.'*¹

Despite his cheerful note at the end, the dream clearly had a great impact on him, and was a terrifying experience. In his painting we see the floor waters advancing, approaching cities as others wait their turn for destruction. The work was created in 1525, a year when much of Northern Europe was caught up in fears that the end of the world, the Apocalypse, had already begun. Durer had published his famous woodcut series on the Apocalypse, taken from the Book of Revelation, in 1498, where he depicted the predicted events of the end of the world with startling and unsettling vividness. The specific fears of 1525 arose from the science of the day, which was dominated by astrology, the belief that the movements of the stars and planets impacted on events on Earth, and in people's daily lives. 1524 was the beginning of the conjunction of planets in the sign of Pisces, which was thought to lead to disastrous flooding.² The fact that the planets were also thought to influence dreams would have given Durer's dream an even more terrifying sense of reality. This also keyed into medieval ideas about the end of the world.

1 Jean Michel Massing, 'Durer's Dreams', Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Vol. 49 (1986), p. 241.

2 Massing, 'Durer's Dreams', p.241.



The popular ‘Fifteen Signs Before Doomsday’, included a prediction of horrific flooding, noting that:

*‘The first day the sea will rise in itself a height of sixty cubits higher than the highest mountain and will stand as if in itself a day, and every water likewise. The second day they will descend just as they will rise, as has been said before, until it is hard to see them’.*³

This description, almost like an inversion of a tsunami, reveals how pre-occupied the pre-modern mind was with the threat of flooding. Durer’s nightmare shows the modern audience how ubiquitous environmental fears have been throughout our history, although perhaps at no time in history have these fears been as justified as they are in our own day. His simple watercolour reveals the deep-seated concerns of his society, and perhaps we should now look to our own artists to play a similar role in highlighting the plight of the environment; it is said that seeing is believing, and Durer’s believed what he saw in his mind, and transferred it to paper for posterity, a warning of the fate he thought his world would soon meet.

³ William W. Heist, ‘Welsh Prose Versions of the Fifteen Signs before Doomsday’, *Speculum*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Oct., 1944), p.421.



Dawn Seabrook

Anthropocene

Perhaps it's time to learn
that the ambition to leave your mark,
can often lead to
scars

Landbound

I wonder
if the birds will still fly south,
when the world overheats.

Cuts

Aristotle

chose to ignore what did not fit

neatly

but



wood and root

rings of growth

cypress pine.

(extinct)

remain visible.

- still -

after

twenty million years :

a petrified forest

of

tree trunks

tree trunks

tree trunks

buried

by the seashore.

trunks lying underwater

Nol Swaddiwudhipong

Spring

The year completes
A new ring that encircles home.
The tree taps deeper into the land—
Grows into the well that now
Draws up a different wish.

Above, the leaves
Light like little flames
In the sun's rays.
The wind glides one
,comma-shaped,
Into the space between thought.
Here, the birds with their song
Lift your words into flight.
Their calls condense like dew—
The droplets holding the day together
In clear round eyes.



A boy goes into the woodland. The Scottish countryside, there is much of it. He is in a particular wood somewhere in Scotland and he is wearing a pair of khaki green wellies. They smell slightly, damp and fusty. He is wrapped up in woollens and waterproofs and his agility is stifled slightly because of this. He is seeking something. He wants to find something. Woods are places we wish to find things in. He treks over the moist ground, covered in October leaves of browns and reds. They are soft under foot, akin to walking through snow it slows your tread, which in turn slows your body and then your eyes. When your eyes are slowed down you can notice what is around you. The boy notices what is around him and he notices the moss on the trees and the trickles of rain-water, tepid on the surface of branches. He goes past these big trees and wants to see the river. The river is large and running fast. You can hear the river from here. The boy can hear it. The boy wonders if he will see any animals. He has seen a lot of animals but not so many wild ones, ones that hide from humans. As he walks further, he diverts his eyes from the trees to watch his feet. When he gets closer to the river he inspects the ground, and picks up twigs. And then he sees it. He sees the thing he came for even though he did not know what it was he came for before he saw it. He looks down and picks it up. A thick fat twig, slightly heavy in the palm because of the rain, and gnawed by a beaver. A pointed end like an iron-age tool. He smiles and wraps his fingers around it and he looks out at the river to see if he can spot a beaver damn. He can't see one. He looks for more beaver gnawed wood but he can't find any. After swinging off some low hanging tree branches he returns back to the house, happy with his treasure.



Cassia Price

Magpie

He saw the little piles of coins,
his own petty dragon-hoard,
and knew there were enough to fill him up
with chocolate power and pride,
He pecked
until the weepy little peaks unraveled.
After the twinkling meal, his tongue was going dry.

He turned from his turreted perch.
In the corner of his mind
he kept a bit of light.
He flew to it. A flash below
welcomed him and he looked down from his wings.
He saw himself reflected in this other trove,
though it was rushy, quick.
The sun was taking off its clothes
and shining gold and low. He dipped
and clasped at the treasures.
He tried to drink the golden, bouncing light.
The river paused and dabbed at his beak
which was sugared and hanging with foil.
The foil washed off. The chocolate too,

all but a smudge.

Then she turned, looked away from his grubby mouth.
She ran as she always had,
stretched out, stretched forward,
kept running.



