



# HYDRA

THE  
ARTS  
MAGAZINE  
OF  
MERCHISTON  
CASTLE SCHOOL

HYDRA



# Foreword

Edinburgh Napier University has owned the Craiglockhart Campus building and grounds since the mid-1980s. When the University purchased the building, we recognised the importance and significance of the building's history to medical, literary, and military history.

As a result of increasing interest in Craiglockhart's unique history, The War Poets Collection was established in 1988 to collect and preserve items relating to the campus, particularly the years between 1916-1919, when the building was requisitioned for use by the military as Craiglockhart War Hospital. The hospital became particularly well known due to the innovative therapies offered by Drs William Rivers and Arthur J Brock, who treated the poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen there during the summer of 1917.

It is my privilege to hold the post of Curator of the Collection which holds around 800 items. One of the most important and fascinating items is *The Hydra: The Magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital*. *The Hydra* was first published on 28th April 1917 and comprised: articles, poems and cartoons, submitted by the officers and staff of the hospital. Creative writing was regarded as beneficial for the men who had suffered such great psychological traumas and a magazine would be a beneficial communication tool between the officers, their families and the wider community.

*The Hydra* also recorded the activities of the many clubs, concerts and classes that were encouraged in the hospital. For example, the results of cricket matches played between local independent schools, such as Merchiston, Fettes, and George Watson's College versus the Craiglockhart War Hospital team. My own particular favourite amongst the activities is the Poultry Keeping Club, run by 2nd Lt. Bird.

*The Hydra's* original cover image was replaced from November 1917 by the iconic cover design created by Lt. Adrian Berrington, an officer-patient, who was a talented artist, delineator and architect. I am sure that he would have been delighted with Kit Nugent's excellent interpretation of his cover for your own magazine and the high standard of the literary, artistic and creative work by all the contributors.

Communication is particularly important during these troubled and anxious times, more than a century on from the Great War. Recording and sharing your feelings, thoughts, and events through *The Hydra: The Arts Magazine of Merchiston Castle School* is a most fitting tribute to the staff and patients of Craiglockhart War Hospital.

I wish you every success in your new publication.

**Catherine Walker MBE**

**Curator**

**The War Poets Collection**

[www.napier.ac.uk/warpoets](http://www.napier.ac.uk/warpoets)

# A Note from the Editor

Last year, I was fortunate to visit The War Poets Collection Exhibition at Edinburgh Napier University's Craiglockhart Campus with a group of junior school pupils as part of their education in First World War poetry.

During our visit, the Curator, Catherine Walker, spoke at length about the history of Craiglockhart War Hospital and in particular, two of its most famous patients, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

Whilst the War Poets Collection is comprised of some 800 items, one of the most striking pieces on display is undoubtedly a carefully preserved issue of *The Hydra*, New Series. *The Hydra* was the magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital and was produced by the patients who were treated there. The hospital doctors, in particular Arthur J. Brock, thought it essential for shell-shock victims to be as active as possible, so the magazine was run by and for the patients, with the main purpose of advertising events and activities. Its pages tell of the lectures, meetings, expeditions, hobbies and entertainments that went on. Patients could contribute topical jokes about the hospital, as well as verse, stories, drawings and cartoons.

Wilfred Owen was editor of the Magazine for six issues from 21 July 1917. He took the chance to publish (anonymously) the first two poems of his own ever to appear in print, *Song of Songs* and *The Next War*. A fragment of what later became *The Dead-Beat*, was also published as part of his Editorial for issue No 10. Two new poems by Siegfried Sassoon, *Dreamers* and *Wirers* were published in the September 1917 issues and several more appeared later, in *The Hydra*, New Series.

It was during this visit to the University's Craiglockhart Campus that the idea of recreating *The Hydra* first came into fruition. Whilst the original magazine was a means for soldiers to exercise their demons from the First World War, it is hugely significant that the first edition of *The Hydra: The Arts Magazine of Merchiston Castle School* is set to be published during an unprecedented global crisis following the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Whilst, unlike Sassoon and Owen, our boys may never know the horrors of war, a majority of the works published in this magazine reflect similar themes of grief and loss which we can all relate to during this seemingly never-ending period in lockdown. That said, where there is grief and loss, there is often hope, and it is my hope that you enjoy reading the works shared in this magazine as much as I have enjoyed collating and editing them.

I would like take this opportunity to thank Catherine Walker, the Curator of The War Poets Collection at Edinburgh Napier University, who kindly agreed to write the Foreword to our magazine and whose unparalleled enthusiasm for the war poets helped inspire its creation.

Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues in the English and Art departments, in particular Gail Cunningham and Jason Cordingley, who helped compile the material for the first edition, not least, the contributors whose works of art are an inspiration to us all.

Whilst Craiglockhart War Hospital was founded to help rehabilitate soldiers suffering from shell-shock, it is my hope that our magazine can help support those in our local community who are at most risk during these extraordinary times. If you have enjoyed reading this magazine and would like to help our community, please donate to The Salvation Army at Davidson House and other care homes and adult day centres across the United Kingdom via the following link: <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/donate>

Stay safe.

**Stephen Douglas**

**Teacher of English**

**Merchiston Castle School**

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# A Note from the Illustrator

For front cover of *The Hydra*, I wanted to stay true to the original by Adrian Berrington who created the first cover more than a hundred years ago. To achieve this authentic look, I have used plain colours and text, as well as copying the iconic explosion from the original.

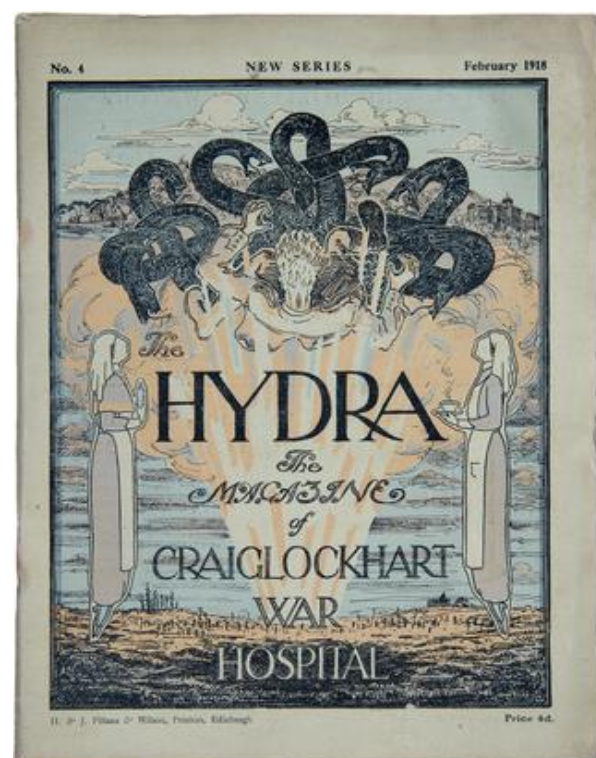
The printing press in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was very different in comparison to the modern technology artists have available to them today. Consequently, in redesigning the front cover of *The Hydra* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I am fortunate to have access to Adobe Photoshop and have been able to use contemporary techniques to give the cover an eye-catching overlay in the finished artwork.

With the Great War as its subject matter, the principal theme of my work depicts several soldiers walking wearily across a battlefield. I have purposely used simple silhouettes so that the men's identities and nationalities are unclear. Much like the original, there are two figures looking over the explosion. However, I have chosen to replace one of the original nurses with a scholar in an art nouveau style, to interweave *The Hydra*, Craiglockhart War Hospital and Merchiston Castle School together.

Finally, I have also chosen to sketch the School in the top left-hand corner facing an image of Craiglockhart War Hospital which is not only in keeping with the original, but also represents the close proximity and sense of community that exists between the former Hospital and Merchiston.

## Kit (IV Form)

The cover of *The Hydra, New Series* was designed by Adrian Berrington. It shows a patient in the grip of the Hydra, representing a shell-shock nightmare. But nurses are at hand, and in the distance the hospital stands secure under a summer sky. The title, a pun on 'Hydro', refers to the many-headed monster slain by Hercules.



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In loving memory of Joseph Tshepang Harry Stanley Yates  
23<sup>rd</sup> June 2009 – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020

# Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,  
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime. –  
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, –  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*

**Wilfred Owen**



# *For Prometheus*

I

Castaway to the Caucasus,  
An immortal fated to die  
A wretched death for all of time.

II

The swooping eagle screaming low –  
The gods' eternal reckoning  
For His sins self-sacrificing.

III

Hold fast gallant Prometheus!  
Your offering of fire burns bright  
In the spirit of man tonight!

IV

Bound by Hephaestus' clasp,  
Your suffering is not in vain,  
Legacy lives in every flame!

V

For mankind, the gods you defied –  
Gifted what we not could borrow,  
Salvaged hope from our sorrow.

VI

For you, noble Prometheus,  
O King Humanitarian,  
We live to serve our fellow man.

**S.J. Douglas**

# Lockdown

What is this silence? This absence of talking?  
Streets are littered with nothing but dead air.  
It slithers around houses; stalking –  
The silence stares at you with its harsh glare.  
A silence that allows you to think care free,  
No distractions.  
The environment breathes with the loss of travel.  
There is only your thoughts and your actions.  
The silence is heavy, thick like gravel;  
The silence is empty, hollow like a tin can.  
You wander in this strange world, scared of your surroundings –  
What is this silence? This absence of speaking?  
Or is it the silence that speaks to us?

**Kit (IV Form)**

# Alley



Oil on canvas by Yang (LVI)

# 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915

*Robert Blair was born in Macosquin, County Londonderry in 1883. The great-uncle of The Reverend Nicolas Blair, Chaplain at Merchiston, Robert's letters from the front give the reader a valuable insight into the life of a soldier during the Great War. The extract below is dated 13<sup>th</sup> May 1915, and is part of a series of letters written between January 1915 and May 1916.*

My Dear Bro,

...It is an awful affair about the Lusitania being torpedoed, it a serious loss of innocent lives but you may bet your boots they will pay heavily for it.

The gasses they use have a terrible effect, you can see a thick yellowish cloud drifting towards the trenches, and there is no man can stand against it. Of course, they can only use it when they have a favourable wind. I got a touch of it myself and I was pretty near choked for about an hour. I've seen fellows crawling out of the trenches into safety and dying in agony from the effects of the gas. You will see a full account of everything in the papers.

Well I got another parcel the other day from Kilrea, of oatcakes, butter, tobacco papers and writing papers. I think it must from be Mrs Stewart and I must say I enjoyed it very much along with a few of my chums...

I will now finish with best love to yourself and Sallie.

From your loving Bro, Bob.

**Robert Blair, 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Western Cavalry), Canadian Expeditionary Force**



# Letter from Lockdown

Dear Ismael,

Why am I writing to you – my future self? Well, I wanted to make sure that you remembered that interminable spring of 2020. After all, you said lots of things and made lots of promises back then: to never forget and to be better in the future. I would like to remind you of those promises now. I hope all your declarations of ‘never again’ and ‘I will always from now on...’ have lasted and I hope this letter will nudge the deepest parts of your memory and help you to appreciate what you have in the future.

Lockdown. Isolation. Quarantine. Social distancing. Do these words ring a nasty bell on the dance floor of your head? Is it all coming back to you? March 23, 2020. That was the day the most unusual time of your generation’s childhood began. Do you remember the excitement at school that morning? Everyone gathered in front of the TV, waiting for the final decision from the government. And when the news broke that we didn’t have to go to school for the rest of term, the cheers rose throughout the campus as if Scotland had just beaten the All-Blacks at Murrayfield. It makes me want to laugh and to cry when I think of how ludicrously thrilled we all were. Like we were all about to go on a holly jolly holiday – if only we had known what lockdown would be like.

After we went home, the first few days passed like a bank holiday weekend and you were happy you didn’t have to wear those tight white shirts with the choky collar squashing the skin under your chin. Instead, you put on your stretchy tracksuit bottoms and sports t-shirts and kept them on for weeks and then months, until they had started to fade in colour and become threadbare. Do you remember? You started to feel like you wouldn’t mind wearing those constraining white shirts again if it meant you could go back to school.

Do you remember experiencing a tedious time of loss and despair? How you felt like you were missing out on a lot of laughs with your mates strolling up and down the drive at school and how you felt lonely at home? Do you remember how you felt when you asked your parents when we’re all going back to school they didn’t answer straight away? It made you feel sick inside. They were supposed to know all the answers and you could see in their eyes that they didn’t. Do you remember how that made you feel as if you were sailing by yourself on a tiny boat in a huge ocean and there was no land in sight?

Do you remember the boredom? Everyone said that the way to get through lockdown was by staying entertained, but there was only so much entertainment Xbox and Netflix could provide before your eyes itched and felt like they were melting at the corners. You read a lot of books, coloured in until your knuckles needed cracking and baked a lot of banana bread

because there always seemed to be really brown, ripe bananas lying about the kitchen that smelt like washing up liquid. By the way, do you still eat banana bread? Because you ended up hating it in lockdown.

To make matters worse, the weather was lovely. Despite this you stayed inside for most of it: daydreaming about having a picnic; visiting your favourite cafes or going to the beach to feel the sand between your toes and hearing the water sloshing around your body. Oh boy, remember how you missed swimming so desperately? You regretted all those times you complained to your mother about going to swimming practice. Do you remember the feeling of regret? I hope you haven't forgotten the promise you made to yourself that you would never skip swimming again, no matter how icy cold it gets between the car park and the edge of the pool. Did you keep that promise?

Another promise you made during lockdown was to never take school for granted again. Let me remind you that in lockdown there were no fun lessons. It was all online and you were stuck sitting at a desk by yourself feeling overwhelmed with all the work. The amount of schoolwork felt like climbing to the top of a massive hill, only to realise it's a false summit and there's a lot more to go. And to make matters worse, you had no friends next to you to share your feelings with or whinge with.

Week after week it just felt more dreadful. Every day you woke up grumpier and more anxious than the last. Do you remember the crazy daily routine? Not seeing anyone but your sister, your mother, and sometimes your father when he was back home after working long hours at the hospital. You felt you were turning into a robot living inside the same beige walls. The air felt stuffy even when the windows were open.

You missed others so badly. The occasional awkward across-the-road chat, shouting with the neighbours wasn't really a good substitute for socialising. You promised that when this is all over and you got to go back to school again, you would never complain about having to wake up early and go to school in the dark and cold of winter. You declared you would never try to bunk off school by faking illness again because you wanted to have a lie-in. You swore you wouldn't moan about the lunch portions in the dining hall being too small or pretend to leave your black school shoes at home so you could wear your trainers all day. The list goes on and on. I hope you stopped doing all of those things like you said you would when you were in lockdown. Did you?

And finally, have you kept the biggest promise of all? When you got scared hearing about coronavirus and so much death and sickness you realised how important it is to be alive and be with other people. So, I hope you have been accepting invitations to go for a walk with Nana and Grandpa when they have asked you and not complained that it's going to be boring and you'd rather be playing on your phone. I hope you've remembered to say yes when your

mother asks you to go to Sainsbury's Local to get a pint of milk, because right now you're not allowed to. I hope you remembered not to bicker with your sister about who gets to sit in the front seat of the car because you're lucky that you can even go for a drive somewhere. Just make sure you're doing all those things because you promised you would, once you were free and safe to do them.

Don't forget.

From your 12-year-old self in lockdown.

**Ismael (II Form)**



Cherry Blossom at Merchiston by Jeffery (UVI)

# Compassion

Without compassion,  
What are we?  
Mere strangers in a raging sea,  
With no place to run or to be?

When we are called to action  
To help someone who is down and out,  
There is no doubt –  
That is compassion.

And when we are moved to tears,  
From all the sadness that we hear  
And we seek to quail our fears –  
That is compassion.

When we're feeling all alone  
Then someone comes along,  
And with a touch of kindness  
Fills our hearts with song –

That is compassion.  
When someone shows compassion to you,  
Don't keep it to yourself –  
Pass it to someone else.

If we can inspire compassion  
In all humanity,  
To live with compassion all of the time –  
Then our world would be just fine.

**Cliff (III Form)**



# Chapter One

1841

*Somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean*

This boat is my land. Immersed in water, it relentlessly rocks from side to side like a baby in loving arms. It cuts a path through the ocean, as the waves plead for mercy. In this playground of dolphins and sanctuary of whales, I feel the breaths of wind softly ruffle my dark hair. The waves breathe up and down with rhythmic ease. Under the scattered stars, the setting liquid moon lingers over the isolated clouds forming a silver path along the lifeless ocean. Memories rattle around in my mind like coins in an empty can. Fog slithers around the ragged wooden boat, piercing the ocean below. I suddenly catch an unexpected reflection of stars above perching next to the hull of the boat. My stomach barks with hunger as I touch it gingerly.

Looking down at the heart-shaped locket – the engraving, G & M, hit me like a red dot on a radar screen. Golden petals curled around the border, framing a black and white image of a woman. She wore a white wedding dress and a tartan scarf around her neck. Her small pearls were hidden by her long black hair and a long-forgotten smile touched her gleaming lips. On that day, I remembered the red flowers entwined between her fingers in her hand. As she entered the church, the light reflected from her crimson bouquet. I vividly remembered looking into her iridescent blue eyes, sculptured upon her creamy face like dazzling jewels as she whispered the words, “I do.”

“If only we knew then it was going to end this way.” I muttered to myself as I turned the locket over and glimpsed a tarnished mercury mirror casting its hidden poison. I noticed that my face was as pale as a ghost. Below my deathly black eyes, my lips were like cracked rock. My greasy hair masked a bleeding scar on my right cheek and blood was splattered across my damp clothes. I couldn’t do anything but sit cross-legged on the wooden deck and stare at the rising sun, raising its head over the distant horizon like a blossoming flower spreading its petals over the dark blue ocean. Red streaks cut away at the awakening sky. Beautiful smudges of lavender, fiery orange and twilight blue blended together into a symphony of light. Tangled in thoughts, I lay back to catch some of the sun’s emerging warmth. All was clam and still. I looked down. Crouching at my feet still, like an abandoned doll, lay the stark white body of a woman. Framed in a lurid lake of dried blood, the corpse stared back at me blankly.

I suddenly acknowledged her long beautiful black hair, hiding her eyes darkened with blood. Uncared for pearls lay scattered across the damp, wooden surface. The wounds under her

chest gaped in dark gashes and her greyish white skin was peeled back exposing arm musculature and the gleam of splintered bone. I placed the locket around her neck. “I’m sorry, my love,” I muttered to her as a wall of tears poured out of my eyes. “I will find who did this to you... I will have my revenge.”

Kit (IV Form)



Frida asked, “What are you looking at? Ready to hunt?” by Jeffery (UVI)

# Pegs



Acrylic on board Paul (V Form)

# Words of Unity

Unity. Lack of it in this world.  
Global warming, pollution, killing this pearl.  
Leaders spreading fake news.  
Plastic, killing us all –  
Fossil fuels. We need to stop.  
Step back and look at what we have done.  
Inventions of another age,  
We must leave behind –  
A new age has come.  
One where we must unite,  
Fix our mistakes:  
Electricity, hydro power –  
Find a new way forward.  
We must stand up for our planet,  
Our only home.  
We can make a difference,  
We can stand as one.  
A small difference can make a big change:  
Clean up the seas,  
Reduce carbon emissions,  
Reuse what can still be used,  
Stop wasting,  
There's no planet B.

Everyone can make a difference,  
If we unite.

**Richard (IV Form)**



# James 2:10

The bell rang as the door opened and a dark silhouette appeared in the mouth of the doorway. A young man stepped into the light. It was quarter to midnight and I was close to finishing my last shift of the week, normally I would've respectfully told whoever had entered to leave but I had a couple of my friends at the bar area who had been there since eleven and it seemed rude to turn the young man away when there were other customers here.

There was something almost incongruous about the man: his gruff demeanour presented quite the opposite of the men who usually came into the bar, ready to find a lover or to drink themselves to waste. He wore a dark suit and a trilby with the brim pulled down low. Before he sat down, I caught a glimpse of his eyes, they were tired and heavy. Something in my conscience told me that I knew this stranger. As I began to search my brain for an encounter that I may or may not have had, he began to speak.

"Whiskey" he demanded in an unmistakable American drawl.

Being too lost in my own thoughts, it took me a moment to acknowledge the request. "My apologies, sir," I replied. "What can I get you?"

"Whiskey" repeated the stranger, this time with a hint of irritation.

I gave him a half-smile and hurried over to the drinks cabinet where I proceeded to call over to the young man, "Hudson's Bay alright for you, sir?"

He looked up and grimaced, "If that's all you've got."

The man had guessed right. It was all I had got. The Depression had resulted in the closure of many of the factories which usually supplied me and the prices of international exports were just too high. I poured the final glass and carried it over to the man. He gave me a nod and took a swig.

I strolled over towards the jukebox and selected number three: 'Waiting for a Train' by Jamie Rodgers. As the music began to play quietly, I turned back to my friends Ralph and Mary.

"Alright Ralph, start finishing up. My shift ends soon and I wanna get home by quarter past," I said.

Ralph nodded and turned to the woman sitting beside him, she had fiery red hair and wore a blood red dress to match.

“Fancy one more drink, Mary?” he slurred.

Mary looked up at me with big eyes, “Please Arthur, just one more?”

“Fine, but you have to buy me a drink the next time we’re out together, okay?” I replied.

They both nodded and as I began pouring the drinks I reminisced about the days when it had just been Ralph and I. He had always been my greatest friend, more than that, he was like my brother. We were born on the same day and our mothers had been best friends, however, like so many, my father had died on the battlefield during the Somme. My mother couldn’t handle the grief and two years later she took her own life just one week before my eleventh birthday. It was Ralph’s idea to take me in and save me from the orphanage, and for that, I was eternally indebted to him. Ralph and I had played football together at Marlborough College and graduated arm-in-arm, ready to take the world together.

That was before Mary had come along and married him. I had absolutely nothing against Mary, she was a lovely girl but it just wasn’t the same anymore. Mary was the daughter of Darby Sabini and since they were married, Ralph had been spending more and more time with the Sabini gang and to tell the truth, I was very worried about him. The Sabini gang were notorious for their violent treatment of anyone who got on the wrong side of them and I didn’t want Ralph to end up like the Elephant Boys – crippled or dead.

“You know what Arthur?” Ralph slurred. “I wuz talking wit’ Mary and we were thinking, how about you come down to south London and have dinner wit’ Mary, Darby and I?”

I didn’t know what to say. I had managed to stay out of the gangs and their troubles so far and I intended to do so until my end. I laughed a half-laugh.

“Ralph... you can’t be serious. Darby Sabini? I mean no disrespect Mary, I know he’s your father, but he’s the most infamous gangster in London. I mean he’s got dealings with the bloody Sicilian Mafia!” I exclaimed.

“Well look ‘ere Arthur,” Ralph told me, “Jus’ go home tonight, sleep on it, and phone me tomorrow, a’right?”

“Look Ralph...” I began.

“Listen Arthur!” Ralph interrupted, “You’ll be fine, I promise you, I’m his son-in-law, you’re my best friend and Mary’s his daughter for Christ’s sake! Just think bout’ it okay? Dinner’s tomorrow at 7pm at the Mayfair Plaza. Tell you what, why don’t you bring a date, what about

that fine-lookin' honey who's a regular here – you know the one – she wuz 'ere the other day – the one with the blonde hair, brown eyes, an' she wuz wearing that green dress!"

I knew exactly who Ralph was talking about. Angela always came in for a drink with her friends in the afternoon and we had chatted many a time.

"If you don't wanna take a woman why not bring a mate – how about Billy, John or Robert?" Ralph continued.

I cut him off, "Okay, Ralph, I'll think about it." I assured him.

"Perfect! Make sure to call and let me know!" he replied.

Mary turned to me, "Alright Arthur, we'll be off now." she said.

I nodded and then proceeded to take the two half-empty tankards towards the sink. I turned around to see Mary helping a drunken Ralph onto the street and just as they waved goodbye and were swallowed by the darkness of the street the other man began to speak.

"Excuse me," he said, "Arthur, isn't it?"

"Yes sir, what can I do for you?" I replied, expecting the man to ask for the bill.

"I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with the gentleman and his lady," he told me.

I listened, curious to what the man was going to say. He reached into his pocket and withdrew a black leather wallet. He removed a small newspaper clipping which he proceeded to unfold and, in doing so, reveal the front cover of the Telegraph. That's when it struck me – I did recognise him, not personally, but I had seen this same front page just a week ago. The man sitting in front of me was Melvin Purves – an esteemed American federal agent whose capture of the infamous John Dillinger had been all the press could talk about for the last few weeks.

"My god!" I exclaimed. "You're Melvin Purves!"

I would not have been so excited if I had known what was to come next.

"I've flown over from the States to have a meeting with a Mr Ramsay MacDonald in which he informed me he's having a problem in London with a man named 'Charles Sabini' – better known as 'Darby'. I have been tasked with arresting this man, however, it turns out he's not so easy to find..."

My mind began to adjust to what I knew Purves was about to say.

“I believe you were just invited to dinner with your friends and Sabini,” he continued. “I want you to take me as your friend so I can meet with Mr Sabini. I’ll get him drunk, get him to admit his crimes and, in so doing, gather sufficient evidence to arrest this criminal,” he explained.

I was completely aghast, I had no idea what to do or say. In one instance it was the right thing to do – the Sabini gang had terrorised the streets of England; however, Ralph was my best friend and if I partook in an activity which resulted in the imprisonment, or more likely the hanging, of his father in law then neither he nor most of the people in London who looked to Sabini for financial and personal help would ever forgive me. Even though he was a gangster he would, for a price, prevent innocent people from suffering at the hands of the unjust economy.

I looked up at Melvin Purves, “I’m sorry sir, I can’t do this...” I said weakly.

He cut me off. “No listen to me cuz – I don’t think you understand, you ain’t getting a choice here. If you refuse to help me, I will arrest you for conspiring against the government and you won’t see a day outside prison for at least twenty years, d’ya you hear me?” he declared angrily.

There was nothing I could say. Purves reached inside his suit and removed a Colt revolver from his left breast pocket. He dropped it onto the table with a heavy metallic clunk.

“Just in case,” he attempted to reassure me.

He then looked me dead in the eyes, downed the rest of his whiskey and reaching into his wallet, he removed a coin and a slip of paper with a phone number on it. He placed them next to the gun and proceeded to explain to me what I had to do.

“Call your mate tomorrow. Tell him you’re taking your friend, ‘Robert Smith’ to dinner tomorrow, then at no later than 4 o’clock, call this number and explain the whereabouts and timings of the dinner to me. You got all that?”

I wanted to speak out, but the man did not wait for a reply, he just nodded his head in a dismissive goodbye and walked towards the door. My lips trembled, wanting more than anything, to open and protest to the man but I knew I could not. I felt so helpless and alone.



I slumped down into a barstool and buried my head in my hands. The clock struck midnight and a knot of guilt grew inside me. I felt helpless. I was going to have to betray Ralph, the man that had been my best friend for the last twenty-six years – he was the one who had saved me from a life of poverty. My body began to weaken with despair. I had no way out.

The bell rang harshly as Melvin Purves strolled out into the dark street and was consumed by the blinding darkness. I lifted my head from my hands and looked at what Melvin had left me. I reached out and found my hand closing around the action of the revolver lying on the table. It felt cold and heavy in my sweaty palms. I looked carefully at it, so small and yet it felt like a burden. A strange sense of calm began to come over me as I lifted the gun slowly, carefully, meaningfully. My fate was sealed.

I rasped barely loud enough for myself to hear. Pressing the barrel of the gun hard against my temple, I recalled words from last Sunday's sermon: 'For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.'

As tears streamed down my face, I closed my eyes tightly and prepared myself to face my father...

Torin (Shell)



'Rainbow Estate', Hong Kong by Jeffery (UVI)

# Nighthawks



Oil on canvas by Edward Hopper

It was hot, but Charles pulled his jacket on further, as though cowering from the bright light of the diner.

"I just don't understand why anyone would say that, whether they thought it or not?" Charles exclaimed.

Sophie replied tiredly, "But Charles, you're not a famous singer and you certainly aren't Clyde Cunningham, are you?" as if such acclamations were as relevant and repetitive as the elevator music playing in the background of the diner.

"Bloody glad I'm not!" Charles asserted. "Will anyone really miss him?"

Sophie sank further into her seat with a sigh, tired from the verbal onslaught of the day. The soda jerk, on the other hand, was prompted into action and began to bustle around.

"I'm certainly not sad to see him gone," Sophie assured Charles as the soda jerk bent over to wipe the counter. "But we ain't gonna see such a good singer for a while."

Charles grudgingly acknowledged that fact, signalling the end of yet another long debate on the question of Clyde Cunningham. The death of Clyde Cunningham, probably the most famous crooner ever to come out of New York was, for now, of great importance to the inhabitants of the city. The front covers of every newspaper and magazine were plastered with photos of him. It seemed like every radio station was playing his hits. Such a loved, yet disliked man, Charles had never known. Charles likened him to Marmite, people loved his romantic, caring and peaceful music but they were in stark disagreement with the man's opinions and his possible links with organised crime.

Charles hated the juxtaposition between Clyde's gracious lyrics, smooth delivery and the arrogance of his manner. Although he couldn't help but admire the reputation Clyde had built through his music, Charles hated the people fooled by it. Such people, blind like the young bobby-soxers who worshipped Clyde, also seemed to find themselves in the media far more often than those who sought to expose Clyde for what he truly was – heartless and cruel. It was odd, Charles thought, that death could render a whole population senseless to what just yesterday they had sought to wreck. Fame is a fickle food upon a shifting plate, Charles reflected.

Charles took a long drag of his cigarette and cast an eye over the bright diner. The soda jerk still buzzed around, tidying up for the night. The three patrons sat around the curved cherry wood counter. Outside was mostly gloom: the dark abyss of the New York suburbs. Inside the light grew brighter towards the centre of the diner and was reflected in silvery tones from the two chrome soda fountains. Sophie and Charles leant forwards with their heads upright allowing the light to strike their faces; across from them another figure sat hunched, head shying away from the light like a vampire.

The soda jerk shook off his cloth and rested an arm on the marginally cleaner counter. "Eventful day then folks?" he asked in a voice that seemed to strike a well-known note within Sophie's and Charles's ears.

"Eventful enough to land me here at this time of night."

It wasn't Sophie or Charles who replied but rather the third patron of the small suburban establishment, who had lifted his head to be visible in the light. The soda jerk was not dissuaded by the third patron's icy tones and turned to him. He seemed to know the unidentified man well.

"Kit, I get why you are so agitated – people just don't understand or care, do they?"

Charles and Sophie sat smoking, politely feigning indifference, but really their brains were revolving, attempting to conjecture the cause of Kit's dismay. As Kit grunted his indifference the soda jerk turned to Sophie and Charles and swept an arm in Kit's direction.

"Yes, yes... of course, Kit Cunningham, brother to the glamorous and, as you so kindly pointed out, controversial, Clyde Cunningham."

Fixated as Sophie and Charles had been on Clyde Cunningham, neither could have known that his brother, Kit Cunningham was the man sitting no more than six feet away from them. They had only glanced casually at what had seemed a quiet gentleman, wasting his night in a cheap diner. As the extent of Sophie and Charles's naivety dawned on them, Charles opened his mouth to apologize for the harsh words he had said regarding Kit's brother. However, it was again Kit who spoke first.

"Please... Charles is it?"

Charles could only nod in horror as his conscience ate away at him for the imagined suffering he must have inflicted upon Kit: criticizing his brother, while Kit was in mourning.

"I understand your opinion of my brother. Sometimes I hate him too. But I do... did, love my brother..."

As Kit trailed off, the soda jerk melted into the back of the diner and left Charles and Sophie to wonder at whether Kit was offended by their rash words or secretly agreed. Sophie again sought to offer an apology, just as Charles had done.

"Kit..." she began.

However, Kit again cut her off, "I loved him as a brother and hated him as a man. Today I am just tired of hearing his name; the revolting media mix of praise and denunciation."

He took a breath and laughed coldly, "I suppose you are better than most I have spoken to today. So many only think about his music and good looks. They forget to think of him as a human, whether or not they like his human side," Kit pronounced carefully, as though his brother was present and able to learn from past mistakes.

Sophie eventually found her tongue, "We certainly did not seek to cause offence." She continued, with a glance at Charles for support, "I merely feel the same as you, as though the whole world is missing some crucial fact regarding him."



As Kit reached into his inner blazer pocket for a cigarette, the soda jerk returned from the back of the diner and removed his chef's cap with a sigh. Placing it on the counter, he released his golden hair to shimmer in the light, most of his work for the night done.

"If I were in a more jovial mood, I would suggest you look like Clyde yourself," Charles exclaimed seriously while casting his eye for the first time over the 'soda jerk'. If Charles or Sophie noticed Kit's look of horror before he had hidden it behind his cigarette, they did not show it, they seemed intent on focusing on the soda jerk.

Clyde reflected on his latest media stunt, how marvellous it had seemed only a day ago, who wouldn't want to hear their own obituary? Glen, the usual soda jerk, had been more than willing to take the week off work with some gentle persuasion from Clyde. Kit obviously had to know, but why the fool had come to the diner he had no idea. As the story of his life flashed past his eyes in magazines and on the radio, people voiced their opinions about him and Clyde began to contemplate the idea of permanent death. Should he return to life as planned or melt away forever? 'Who wouldn't want to hear their own obituary?' he had asked himself, but how he wished he could forget it.

Standing in silence, he reflected on the truth of Burns' words: "O wad some Power the giftie gie us, To see oursels as ithers see us!"

**Teddy (LVI)**



Mount Aso, Japan by Jeffery (UVI)

# L'amour malheur

C'est un désir irrationnel,  
Pourtant des plus ardents,  
Je serais beaucoup plus cruel,  
Dans un monde plus répugnant,

C'est une pensée partagée,  
Pourtant de la même source,  
Créée pour être divorcée,  
Une pensée mise à la course,

Ce sera du côté vainqueur,  
Que l'amour malheur mènera,  
Un chemin d'amour ou malheur?  
Un oiseau blanc ou noir viendra.

Est-ce possible d'en finir,  
Ou bien même de l'arrêter,  
Ça reste à en définir,  
Si on croît être possédé.

**Firman (UVI)**



# Misfortunate Love

It is an irrational desire,  
Yet most ardent;  
I would be so much crueller  
In a repugnant world.

It is a shared thought,  
From the same source;  
Created to be divorced,  
A thought running its course.

It will be on the winning side,  
Only one will be the guide –  
A path of love or misfortune?  
A dove or raven will arrive.

Is it possible to finish,  
Or even to stop it?  
It remains to define,  
If you, like me, are possessed.

**Firman**

*Translation by S.J. Douglas*

# Chapel



Oil on canvas by Struan (UVI)

# The Bull's Vengeance

Once upon a time there lived a poor family on the Western isles called the MacUalraigs, Papa MacUalraig, Mama MacUalraig and their child, Cailean MacUalraig. Together they lived in a very small black house. All the rich families on the islands made fun of them but despite this cruelty, the MacUalraig family were always kind. The MacUalraigs looked after their few cows, helped the other families nearby (even if they didn't return their kindness), and always had a smile on their faces.

Unfortunately, there was one family that even the MacUalraigs avoided – the Mac a' Phearsains. The three Phearsains, Mama, Papa, and Eachainn Mac a' Phearsain were all as evil as each other.

One day Cailean was out tending to the cows, when he heard a voice come booming down from the clouds above: "Cailean, because of your family's enduring kindness, you have been blessed by my divine power and I shall give you three gifts: a protective moat that only lets the true of heart pass, a field of the tastiest carrots ever to exist and a Golden Bull of Glory which will bring luck to you and your household!"

Cailean was stunned. He ran to tell his parents what had happened when he found his mum staring at a patch of tasty looking carrots and his dad standing by a great moat! He told them what had happened and when Cailean had finished speaking, they heard a loud "MOO" – it was the Golden Bull!

Soon the whole island had received word of the family's fortune and of course the Mac a' Phearsains were very jealous. They thought of a devious plan to steal the Bull because their family had been cursed – any livestock they brought onto their farm always shrivelled up and died so they could never get any juicy meat.

Eventually they came up with a plan. In the dead of night, they bridged the moat and stole the Golden Bull from its pen. Little did they know the other cows and bulls had been watching and as soon as the Phearsains touched the Golden Bull they sprang into action! The cows sent blasts of milk at the thieves, blinding them, and the bulls tackled them to the ground. Unfortunately, the brave animals didn't notice the sneaky Eachainn hoisting the unconscious Golden Bull away and by the time they noticed it was too late – the Phearsains had got away!

The next morning Cailean went to tend to the cows but when he got there they looked distraught! One of the bulls said weakly, "The Phearsains came... they stole the Golden Bull..." and then promptly fell unconscious. Cailean knowing his parents would not let him go, decided to confront the Phearsains alone. A bridge of water rose beneath his feet as he crossed the moat in pursuit of the Phearsains.

When Cailean got to the Phearsains farm, he found a huge bubbling cauldron of broth with a horn rising out of it. Curious as ever, he blew into it, and to his surprise the horn began to sing!

*O poor me! O poor me!  
Help me with my plight!  
O poor child!  
I have been sliced and slashed,  
Into boots, and a belt,  
And for these evil people's dinner!  
Blow hard into me,  
And watch the chaos unfold  
As I take my vengeance!*

At first Cailean was shocked but he decided to blow into the horn again and watch the chaos unfold on in Mac a' Phearsain's farmhouse.

The belt which Papa and Mama Mac a' Phearsain were fighting over, suddenly burst into flames! Startled, the Phearsains dropped it, only to see Eachainn's boots melt on his feet! "AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!" screamed Eachainn. Cailean watched in amazement as the meat in the cauldron started expanding and expanding and expanding until it exploded, breaking a hole in the side of the cauldron.

Cailean ran for his life and when he turned to look back, the Phearsain's house had collapsed around them and they were crushed by their own house.

When Cailean told his parents what had happened, they didn't know what to say. The scourges of their Island were gone! That evening, they served celebratory drinks from the Golden Horn of the Golden Bull and stayed up late into the night dancing and singing with joy!

**Anonymous (III Form)**

# Compassion

Compassion is so important in this world,  
It doesn't matter if your hair is straight or curled.  
I like to think we all have it, if we didn't we would feel sad,  
Or even worse – make others feel bad.

I sometimes wonder when people do bad things,  
If they're really mean or are they just struggling?  
If you choose to be kind, you'll often find  
Life is easier. But if you choose to be mean  
Then I think you need to see  
The good in life.

They say, 'Oh, I didn't mean it,' but it can be hard to see it,  
When so much is going on –  
Sometimes it feels like people have let off a bomb.

I like to think that people will become kinder over time,  
And that everyone will be seen right –  
I walk along the streets so bright,  
Feeling like I'm doing right;  
Helping others is being kind,  
It isn't hard –  
It's just being nice.

Every day can be great  
When you know you're doing good,  
Though you may be feeling down,  
Pick yourself up from the ground.

**Finlay (IV Form)**

# Everyone Sang

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,  
Winging wildly across the white  
Orchards and dark-green fields; on – on – and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;  
And beauty came like the setting sun:  
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror  
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone  
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

**Siegfried Sassoon**



Marshmallows in the Sky by Jeffery (UVI)





**MERCHISTON**  
EDINBURGH