

LIGHTHOUSE AND ANCHORAGE: JOURNAL ENTRIES

Introduction

As a virtual Writer in Residence for two UNESCO Cities of Literature Edinburgh and Norwich, I am thinking through 'lighthouse and anchorage'. The lighthouse on the coast near to me in north Edinburgh is the focal point for walks under lockdown in this time of plague. While Virginia Woolf rightly is renowned as the lighthouse writer *par excellence*, as an Edinburgh resident my thoughts turn to Robert Louis Stevenson, descendant of a family of engineers who designed lighthouses. His own thoughts returned to this, as he moved across the seas and would settle in Samoa. As for the Norwich connexion: my guide is Dame Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century visionary writer. She lived as an anchorite, in a spacious room opening off the south side of St Julian's church. Her stability of place guaranteed visitors the chance to be lit up by her conversation.

What is hopeful for me is the sense of return that such fixity makes possible. I am not attracted by fixity for its own sake. The still point needs the wanderer. Both are necessary. How else do sparks of love and memory bridge distance and dream encounter?

The words I shall note down from walking every day to the Edinburgh lighthouse, holding Julian's anchorage in thought, trace an energetic connexion from pier to cell, across our different waters. This is true, not only while our movements are restricted but also in the knowledge that even in 'normal' times, normality for most of us consists in such exercises of the heart: cherishing far-flung or otherwise inaccessible people; displacing ourselves physically for work and other, fiercer reasons.

Does the lighthouse have faith its coastal people will return, or does it have hope? Do visitors to the cell hope to meet wisdom, or do they have faith that wisdom is to be met there? It's impossible to distinguish, only possible to keep going. There is no guaranteed moment when our condition may or may not flip from static to dynamic, from expectancy to return.

These notes will vary, as days and walks do. Some will be prose jottings. Some will be poetry. Some may incorporate quotations or found text. They are the visible skittering or deposit of a largely invisible process. Perhaps readers will be inspired to make their own connexions, writing through the intimacy of the imagination tucked into their own distances and hours.

Feb. 1

Crushed ice, a spatter of deconstructed cocktails, at night looking identical to smashed glass, along the pavements. Just the middle. Winter's RSVP. Snail trail peril. The blaze on the forehead of an underground horse rising from beneath the multi-layered City of Edinburgh.

Melting.

People happen to be in the square. People do not meet, nowadays. People happen to be there, in the north-east corner.

The road has unfrozen. It makes no difference to the waders and swimmers. The wild sea remained accessible to them. December to January, the hinge of the

year, marks open to open. The parents are starbursts in black wetsuits. The children splash.

When I walk along the unwallied pier at twilight, away from land, tinnitus singing in the arches and porches of my skull, I frighten myself, as the lapping sound of the tide is less than the ringing sound in my head.

It feels as if all water connects with all other water.

There were two rivers I heard of. Perhaps I saw them. Someone described them as we walked about the loops of another river on the way to Ely. Those two rivers run parallel, side by side. The incoming sea forces itself up one channel. The other empties itself as expected, flowing towards the mouth of the sea. Did we also walk to those two rivers, then or at another time?

Love for some place, the desire to be in that place, could be those rivers. Where I am, stock still, counts as the land. Where you are, unfathomably moving, must be the sea. Desire rushes towards that place but love courses back, or is it the other way?

We are not supposed to travel. We tremble separately into coexistence.

This vision is general and not particular.

Feb. 2

The landing-place outside Dragon Hall in Norwich was pointed out to me on a day of almost agonizing sunshine, when the roses were out as if we were in a show about the Tudors, or in the presence of a short-lived saint. My friend conjured a smooth, speeded-up vision of numerous foreign arrivals to skilled and mercantile Norwich. That little interval is piled high with imaginary bales of woollens and ingenious phantoms, gangly men from the Low Countries making calculations of how to build.

These were my thoughts on a very cold blue Edinburgh evening as I walked to the breakwater quarried from Granton stone, the one that curves like a hook, is not much above the sea, and carries on for more than half a mile without formal boundaries. My leisure promenade resembles my long-time recurrent nightmare of hurrying down a rapidly filling causeway somehow seen from above even as I try to get to a vanishing circlet of land. However, this real-life sea-parting path is the relatively safe and stony conception of Robert Stevenson, grandfather to the adventurous author.

As I was about to cross to the place to step down and set off, a great, ugly biscuit-coloured hound barrelled towards me, lean as a cartoon wolf crossed with an heraldic lion. He yanked his owner in a crescent, at the end of the tensed lead.

The hound looked up at me, trying to be nice. His lovely expression sat badly on a dogface not built for tenderness. He bunted my hand again and again with a bony forehead. He used his tail to smile in lighthouse-arcs. The owner doubled up in silent, hysterical laughter, making no effort either way, rainproof, sharp, and silvery.

"Hi, dog," I said, my first utterance to a real-life being for some days. I passed on to the grassy place leading to Stevenson's walkway, telling myself: this is 'being out in nature'; this is peaceful.

The edge of water is a happening kind of place.

Feb. 3

Starbank Park, behind beautiful railings: enclosure. Wardie Bay, looking across to Fife: exposure.

Rupture narratives of our plague time, where 'we' are 'suddenly' at risk or in confinement, drown out another story. For some, life always has meant enclosure or exposure.

How many fishermen are guaranteed a return? How many submarines patrol the waters? How many ships does the sea hold? How many of our ancestors have been in a ship's hold? Perhaps 'we' have the chance to know we're in the same boat.

Great Michael Rise, a local streetname, commemorates the carrack ordered for King James IV of Scotland for his navy in 1505 and built here. War sends people out, but also hides them.

A gap in the sea wall looks as if it leads to a stairway. There is a sheer drop and a brilliant view across the Firth of Forth. The gap resembles a mouth.

What would the stone say?

I remember the stone curves echoing each other in Norwich Cathedral: how they invite, how they recede.

I want this (cold) stone mouth to whisper (warm) in that stone (cold) (warm) ear.

Feb. 4

wind, killer of umbrellas; ears, losers of lovewarmth
clear bag of aluminium; litterpickers in digital exultation
Hawthornvale to Victoria Park
border collie belly; mud in the bathtub
lights on in the dreadnought; only being at home allowed
songs about fish and punishment
songs about fornication and spring
Great Michael Rise to Starbank
breakwater covered by water
white horses have plans; broaching the wall, a shock of manes
night remembered, indigo bedroll scattered with white jasmine
night desired, half a glass of crimson wine in a sea-blue glass
night moving down the east coast in a shoal of names
my ears are too cold for notes, fingers too cold except for notes
body warm as a stone, body warm seven-times-opening stone

Feb. 5

Today I was in Edinburgh and in the south-east of England. Watching the Zoom screen, I felt exposed, as if hills had flattened around me. Mist came rolling in, taking the form of white ribbons of ectoplasm plastering out of the mouths of the learned. I 'spoke' by typing in the chat box, without landmarks.

Ectoplasmic fascia was trying to colonize my body. If only I could give over my brain and let my heart be ripped out, extra fascia would settle inside my ear. Absorbing my rogue blood, the extra fascia would blandify witness. *You could do with more softness, or you won't be heard.*

This Zoom life is real life. Disembodied, disembowelled, and reinhabited would be how I felt even if we were in touching distance of one another.

In the real life of memory, after such a discussion in the south-east I could board a train quickly and be in Norwich, eating a cheese scone in the Cathedral tea shop and hearing the peregrines skreek.

It's a mistake to confide your secrets to rushes growing near water. The wind will whisper them. You can confide your secrets to flint. Press a hand tiredly to a shiny, knapped surface. Neither stone nor flesh will acquire stigmata. You will transmit and receive, every wall a memory palace, which is to say a safe forgetting.

Feb. 6

Today I was in Edinburgh and in Delhi. Friends were discussing Gopal Honnalgere. How the migratory birds in a poem lose wight by the time they arrive. How the poem begins in one place and ends up in another place. Watching the Zoom screen, I see scarlet. Feathers bundle into my mind's eye. The poem's journey is a lightening.

Mike in Shillong, like me, is wearing knitwear. My cold blast ultimately emanates from Russia. His emanates from the Himalayas. Our winters are back-to-back.

The synthetic ice cube shapes clustered in my ceiling light are the centre of a multi-pronged star. If I say, "Put on the light," do I mean anything to do with the light fitting? The radiance and shadow cast by the fitting mask its edges. "Put on the light." Do I mean the illumination caused by the bulbs? Is the light primarily the star shape?

Starbank Park features an eight-pointed star cut into the slope facing the Firth of Forth. "A star to steer her by."

What is it like to have no electric light and to visit a recluse whose eyes shine back at yours by candlelight? You go in search of her and together you meet your reflections.

Feb. 7

The promised snow has not arrived, despite the amber warnings. Eider ducks have been coming close to the shore. I knew 'eider ducks' as a phrase, but where I met the birds themselves to know them as body and name together, they were called 'cuddy ducks', in Lindisfarne. St Cuthbert was protective of them. They look fat. Eider ducks, edible ducks; cuddy ducks, cuddle ducks.

My mother is unwell, and four thousand miles west, over the ocean. Not even postcard-sized but postage stamp size, our faces talk on handheld screens. It is impossible to fly to her island, under pandemic conditions and law. The last hug I gave her was a one-armed hug in her kitchen, before I hefted the single suitcase allowed on the tiny jet that would take me over the closed border, last September; last year. Everyone was angry or incredulous or unsure about my leaving. Couldn't I have stayed?

My friend in Norwich visits a rose window in the south wall of the Cathedral. Glass thickens light like liquid amber. The more you look at it, the more intensely the rose window seems to throb. It throbs like maternity. Stone is all around us. We swim.

Feb. 8

The promised snow has arrived. It is fluffy and thick. I am restraining myself from drawing on people's cars. I draw, just a little, on our boundary wall.

Weather sensitivity is common in the women of my mother's family. In Port of Spain, before the curtains are open in the morning, I know if there is a storm coming over the hills to the north. My bones will seem to have sunk lower in my flesh and a hangover-style cloud occupies my head. When the rain breaks, the feeling lifts.

So, too, with snow. On the weekend I felt heavy. Something like anxiety, but slower; something like expectancy, but impersonal. Now the snow has broken loose, I ring like a bell.

Feb. 9

When we were growing up on a tropical island, nobody told us about the texture of snow. My father spoke about feeling cold in winter. There are photos of him in a scarf. My mother spoke about feeling lively in winter. There are photos of her in a mini skirt. Both are smiling.

The first frost I experienced, in 1991, shocked me. Storybook frost would have traced patterns of ferns on windowpanes. Instead, Oxford frost turned grass into

desiccated coconut. The quadrangle was cake mix. Years later, packed snow was a safe floor for sledding in Perth, or for rolling down slopes on the North York Moors.

I want to write a note in the snow as if it were wet sand. I remember the time, on yet another tropical island, when my friend and I were tailed by two armed guards – not friendly – with death on their mind. They pretended to be walking with us by chance. We turned to them and asked them to hold our handbags. Suddenly young boys, they could not refuse. My friend and I took photos of our swim. What's the evidence? In a fuchsia tunic, I'm dancing in sprays of sunlit seawater. There's my curly writing, playfully curving along the shore. No guards feature; no guns. The camera is, and isn't, a liar. The sea, by its nature, washes away. I am much happier now, and want to take my finger like a stylus, write a melting message to Norwich in the Edinburgh snow...

...But the snow is too fluffy! I take off my gloves and pat it, watching it turn over and fall by handfuls, as if the low wall near the lighthouse has grown a white pelt.

It seems as if nobody else has been out. The village is hushed and printless. Plague makes us into a card blank of greetings.

Feb. 10

Further along the coast, towards Wardie Bay and Robert Stevenson's breakwater, the snow is hardened. It is easy to imagine the sea is salt when the snow at its edge resembles salt. The wind has had an action like hooves. The beach looks hard-ridden.

The complex hollows in the trunks of trees in Starbank Park show up whitely, since filled with snow. They look intimate, like gussets on over-washed tights or the seams on the heels of socks dragged out of school shoes and not quite lining up.

Back in my ice-cube-light room, I think of the intimacy of Julian writing about her sickbed visions. The vast flow of blood that surrounds and lifts her bed, linking the gush from the side of Christ crucified to Noah's flood, is menstrual and climatic. Her body opens her mind to envisage the kind of shifts that propel the naming of eras or renaming of continents. This generosity is the opposite of containing multitudes. It's channelling.

I light a rose petal pillar candle in my bedroom to be another lighthouse. I try to make a wormhole through to Norwich by arranging tarnished family bracelets into a tunnel for the candlelight. The photo fails: clear in its intention, confused in its execution. It fails just like yearning.

Feb. 11

Time is measured by place. For 'Feb.' I write 'Fen'.

Today is my mother's eighty-third birthday. Even in previous years, there was no point in timing visits. She and her classmates from St Joseph's Convent save up their birthdays, holding a collective celebration in any month that suits the biggest group. Once – was it the collective 75th? – the cake, with a candle for every year, caught fire.

Lighthouse and anchorage. Frost, frosting and candles. My mind skips across the Atlantic instead of skipping east and south down the British coast.

It's a rare day of seeing people: a visit to the lockdown-permitted food shop is due. On the way out, I see that passers-by have started doodling in the snow on my boundary wall, adding to my drawings. We've missed each other in person, but it's like a dialogue. They've added flowers, smileys, and the swoosh of an abstract bird. I draw a hug emoji. Now, if the snow had a paint chart name, it would have to be Warm White.

Valentine's Day is coming up. The lockdown-permitted food shop is offering discount red roses. They bloom as warm as a hearth against the north wall of the bedroom. I remember the rosebushes near the tomb of Edith Cavell in Norwich Cathedral. By a clever gardening choice, or a trick of sunned stone microclimate, they seem more often than not in bloom, intense and homely as a woman in war.

Feb. 12

The feeling of red, pink, gold and silver is ribboning and ballooning over this weekend. People with sweethearts ignore or despise the commercialism of Valentine's Day. I like any hint of silver, gold, red, and pink, and am free to do so. Birds collect for their parliament and most languages are not so impoverished as English in their words for love, their understanding of its shades.

During a Valentine's Day weekend many years ago, I had my socks on and was climbing in the bathroom to reach a high shelf in the ill-converted flat that occupied the whole, haunted first floor of a Victorian villa. My feet slipped from under me. I fell and cracked my tailbone on the tiles. A sound like radiators whooshing and clanging banged about in my ears. Instead of going to the doctor, I dosed up on painkillers. The next day, I headed out to the walk I'd organized with lexicographer and poet friends, some of whom had partners, others not, some of whom brought these friends or other halves, others not. We found ourselves in the Vale of the White Horse, looking at the godly outline of the galloping Bronze Age beast. The spread of snow appeared pale blue, printless except for the tracks of a hare. We flocked about those fields and ridges, happily. That was love. This year it is the unseen passers-by whose drawings flock on my boundary wall, also lovingly.

Dame Julian uses the word 'love' so often, that I am tempted to create a giant fabric scroll of her Revelations, erasing every word but LOVE and cutting the rest to lace. What did she mean by all this 'love', human and divine, though? What were its shades on each occasion?

An Icelandic friend of mine once spoke of different vocabularies and the question of translation. A friend of his was working on the Icelandic version of a novel that was exceptionally sensitive to atmosphere, with a raft of colour words for violet, amethyst, heather, hints, hazes... That would just have to be purple, a purple purple, a more or less purple purple, in Icelandic, said my friend. It is not that the distinctions are unseen. They just remain unspoken.

A lilac flower in my hair, I have WhatsApp dessert with a friend who seems to be triggered by my mention of Valentine's Day. He decries platonic love, and most other kinds. This friend then recites a poem, lovingly; for his voice loves the shapes of words.

Spring is fragile, a warm shock up the spine.

Feb. 13

Today I turned my back to the shore and walked to the park to see another friend and her infant, at a distance. She is tall and luminous. She lighthouses across the coconut frosted grass. She holds out a platonic Valentine's gift: a great satiny green bag. Inside are scarlet knitted booties. The last time we met, on New Year's Day, her little one smiled and extended a hand to people. Pandemic manners. Now she smiles and stares but will not reach out for a loving touch. Pandemic manners. Grown-ups may create social bubbles like multi-stick, multi-headed lollipops. Little ones learn to live in singular, invisible bubbles. The exception is dogs. A kind owner lets his pram-high silky pet have a good look and hello.

Looking at something doesn't mean you have to touch it. However, my memory of Norwich is textured, just as my experience of Edinburgh is textured. Tiredly walking up the old, narrow spiral stairs in the round tower that leads to my Scottish flat, I pressed my hand into the post for support. All the way to the top, I found little dents, resting-places where someone about my height must have nubbed their fingers into the post enough to wear it down. Taking a tour of Dragon Hall, I saw protective 'witchmarks' on the walls – some looking like lollipops on sticks. The height of the people who made these symbols, the size of their hands, the concentration with which they smeared or scratched, became palpable to the imagination. I could not 'see' what they would have looked like, but I felt their gestures through my own body, a way of relating to the building as material, not as space.

En route to the lighthouse, a curly-haired woman in red and pink, arms akimbo as if she is on a picket line or ready to dance, appears against an orange background. The local graffiti artist has brushed companionability into the walls. Bunches of roses have been fastened to the wire fence at the pier's end. I feel bodies stooping and hands working with care. Lovers' locks have been fastened there, too. Some of the permanent marker inscriptions are to living groups of friends, to dead

family members, and even to God. All kinds of love have been snapped into the salt wind, to shine in little ways.

Feb. 14

Carnival, which follows the Catholic liturgical calendar in Trinidad, has been called off. Normally, at this season, I would not be in this northern port. I would be dressed as a 'Fancy Sailor', dancing on the road into the night. My mother sends me video footage of a handful of masqueraders who have added PPE to their costumes. These few and distanced dancers, standing in for thousands, embody the spirit of a freedom-loving people. Unlike stripped-down Brazil, their costumes swirl with gold and purple cloth; turquoise and yellow ten-foot wings catch the wind. In the film, they are dancing in front of a mural which shows the town's colours to the town.

At night I walk to Wardie Bay, wearing spiked Swedish shoes. As in a fairy tale, I must go along a highway of glass. A child has abandoned a turquoise and yellow scooter against the sea wall.

It keeps freezing up. We keep on the move.

Feb. 15

Venturing from this north-east of Scotland to the north-east of England via Zoom, I still find myself in Norwich. At York, my colleague is planning a contemporary creative writing workshop, using early medieval poetry: 'Wulf and Eadwacer'. How many characters are in this brief poem (nineteen lines, in modern editions)? Who or what is signified by 'Wulf': a man's name, a wolf, a dog? A *vargr* – a Scandinavian outlaw? The irrecoverable, ancient speaker laments: Wulf is on one island, I on another. We are apart, disunited, disarticulated, unpledged, unmarried, not joined, not at one, in differing circumstances. Is an island even an island, or is it a mud bank, a peninsula, a floating and only sometimes fixed magical landing-spot, a tidal site only sometimes accessible? It is rainy weather. I loved and loathed a strong embrace... She grounds herself in distance, tells us about touch.

My Norwich friend can recite the whole thing in the original, from memory. Once, in a stony place, he did. For me, the poem has acquired a fenland overlay: firelight and that distinctive accent.

There are circles within circles in the landscape and story of 'Wulf and Eadwacer', and perilous crossings. A poem like this belongs to everybody and nobody. A lustrous bubble of past and possible voices holds us as we speak about how to give this text to the students, taking turns to recite it, each islanded within our experience of 'Wulf and Eadwacer', and reaching across...

Feb. 16

The mind stretches thinner and thinner. In this flat where no-one but myself has set foot for six months, I can hear my own circulation. I am thinking of heart's blood, Trinidad, and surgery. I switch the Zoom video option off and take up a sleep posture in order to forget my body and any other except the speakers presenting – ethereally present – on the screen. It's the best way to listen when attending a nearly six-hour conference like today's. I am thinking of England's medieval Jewish community. London? Not only in London. Meir ben Elijah, poet of Norwich around the time of the expulsion in 1290, would have words to offer. If only I had not left his book, given to me by a friend in the Fenlands, with another friend in the Fenlands. Cancel the phrase 'in nature'. There's no nature without ether. No human nature without citadel-building. *Gehyrest pu?* We are not at one.

Feb. 17

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / sailor and anchorite / the two homes / lighthouse and anchorage

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / mentor and worker / the two professions / short order home cook and creative industry

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / julian and stevenson / the two pets / dragon and seagull

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / herring girl and stonemason / the two poets / whitman and dickinson

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / snowflake and ice lolly / the two lifestyles / public engagement and mutual aid

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / transatlantic and outremer / the two weathers / breeze and breath

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / plushie toy and laser pointer / the two cats / lunar and solar

recurrence / places of recurrence / the two genders / zoom and landline / the two strangers / love and death

our host has ended this meeting for all

Feb. 18

Conscious twinning, garden to garden, Kingston (Jamaica) to Cambridge (England), and that poet whose Kingston gardens poem I read in a Cambridge garden is speaking today in Ireland, where I am not. Neither is he. Whatever light I'm seeing by is a brighter sun.

Conscious twinning, poem to poem, Leeds to Edinburgh, and those poets who have eaten similar biscuits in the same room though never all at the same time are sharing the poems today online. I join them and we all sit at the long table, where we are not. Whatever hot drink I'm drinking is Yorkshire tea.

Dame Julian, poor creature, finds her homeliest home in God, who finds His homeliest home in us. On the walk to the lighthouse this evening, I passed the ALIEN ROCK signs on the church. The inside has been renovated to provide indoor climbing walls for mountaineers and learners away from other types of high ground.

ALIEN, ALIEN is a red-letter word; an invitation to come in, transcend the body and conquer space. There is no way I'll do any of this. A little buzz of migraine would see me clutching to a rope too long in one easy position or falling off. Tinnitus, the sound of the sea, and the memory of bells are the ALIEN ROCK on which my body is built, a questionable church.

I cut through the alleys of the houses where nets used to be mended. An old window, missing glass, frames the bluest of evenings.

Friday 19

This morning the nurse takes four fine full vials of my blood for testing. Some days I am so tired that if I unload the laundry, I can't make dinner. The thickness of blood used to fascinate me when I was an ill child being checked up thoroughly: the ruby port colour was attractive, not liquid in appearance but semi-solid, with floating shapes that had been coursing about inside me and now escaped. It looks like sustaining stuff, and it's something to imagine we all share it. Dame Julian may have been more familiar with both blood and wine than I am. Her flooding visions might have been accompanied by consciousness of texture and of stimulant quality.

Slipperiness. I would have liked to carry over the sense of slipperiness into the conversation I'm having with Jeremy Noel-Tod in Norwich this morning, for this project. Some years ago, we had visited the museum in Dereham and seen astounding instruments and devices associated with the hunting of eels in Norfolk

waterways. The conversation is nourishing. It bakes itself nicely into a pie, but I would have upped the eel content. The weirdness of what sustains us. The moment has slipped by.

Feb. 20

Tonight is the launch of three Oystercatcher Press pamphlets: a strong Welsh presence. Lee Duggan, Zoë Skoulding, and I meet in the ether. Friends are naughty in the chatbox, like students passing notes in the back of class. My pamphlet, *The Dusty Angel*, is based on a year of walks in Port of Spain.

Knowing that the evening will bring back those routes drives me out for a long while in this winter. I walk past the lighthouse, to Stevenson's breakwater, onto the irregular stone surface and past the danger sign. The local graffiti artist has visited the sky-blue back of the signage: BI CHRIST IT'S CAULD.

The tide is low, though salt spray from high waves has left the walkway slippery. I look down to sea level and am entranced by expanses of warm gold lichen. My head is buzzy with over-Zooming and my steps unsteady, so I silently start reciting a poem which I learnt first in Latin and English, later in French and Italian. The Latin works best for keeping in step, though it's not a language I know except in so far as specific pieces of text have been explained to me. I want to walk to the end of the breakwater, where it hooks sharply and gives a different perspective on the Firth. Can I imagine the grand Victorian celebratory and commercial vessels that would have surrounded this path, making it feel *amidst* human goings-on, not exposed to the elements?

It's less than a mile to go, but the wind is picking up. Edinburgh blow-in, I'd not factored this in. Does it show in my posture that I'm rebalancing constantly inside? This is better than a Pilates class. Is anyone else walking towards the end of the hook, instead of towards the shore?

IT'S DANGEROUS! IT'S DANGEROUS! Two jubilant and coltish teenage girls skim past, shouting how DANGEROUS this is. The wind is blowing them into shapes. We make our way to the end. They tell each other to pose 'like heroes'. I offer to get out of the way; but they're not taking a selfie, they're attitudinizing for each other, and in the face of the – truth to say – not too wild weather.

Now you've done it once you don't have to do it again, but as soon as I heard about it, I knew you'd have to do it, my mother tells me.

I know I'll do it again, in a month or so, when the sun returns. Even without lockdown, this place would invite recurrence.

Feb. 21

"Sister, where is your spirit?" the poet Paul Collis, a Barkindji man, asked me, when I landed in Australia in 2017. He said it would take my spirit three days to catch up with my body. He was right.

Tonight's poetry Zoom is in Kendal, a place I've never been. Are there people who Zoom while remaining in their own bubble, slippers or bare feet snug on home ground? What happens to our inward sense of navigation if we keep sending our spirit out? Hannah Hodgson and Mark Waldron read. The shape of this day has an arc to it, *tendu* like a bow, like a branch, like a dancer's leg, not letting up even when the screen goes off, and night brushes in the window.

Feb. 22

some days are like paper patterns they make sense as cut-outs
three intense people one after another
novelist poet divine
fifty more people from Fife to Falkirk
zoom in zoom in
five writers imagining the city baked into a dangerous cake
lightened with bog butter toothsome to werewolves
tiered like a book hoard plated up like an anchor
a surveillance camera bursts out and smiles at five writers
nourished by our cities Ultima Thule Antipodean warmth

Feb. 23

The same diary entry recurs for a piece of writing (not this) I have meant to do since autumn, but it scatters, like pink confetti, like lemon pips and lemon pith into the recipe, there is too much to hold onto, my mind fails.

I cave and buy lilies. They are not stargazer lilies. Still they look up, like the fish nebbing out of a stargazy pie. You couldn't get further on these coasts than that southwest baked good, that here's-looking-at-you dish.

Feb. 24

So, how was your day? Three hours on the theology of trauma. Two hours on Auralities. One hour on...Starbank Park and Craighall Road in the dark. The slabs on the stone wall open like books of asemic writing, an Atlantis manual, the utterances anchorites make in their sleep and therefore never to a confessor, never to a human confessor.

Feb. 25

My little plant that is not a fern shows signs of cold. I wrap it in a pair of black wool socks. There is no longer any pretence that it is ornamental. I know I shall have to give it away to keep it alive. The socks swirl around plastic pot with similar patterns to an eye. I sift through old photos and find one of sky-blue patterns laid in a Norwich street, opposite the shop sign 'Oculus'.

Feb. 26

Thought connects us more speedily and surely than the Internet... Imagining our cities, some of us on this project 'met' online. We saw each other's image freeze, again and again, and the more we froze, the more we thought ourselves into each other's earthquakes and waterways, bringing our nights and tomorrows together...

Feb. 27

Dream. Dream as channel. Dream as connector. Dream of an indeterminate meadow, which could be in any of our time zones. Dream of the river to the left, a shining confusion of meadow to the front and to the right. Dream with a narrowed perspective. Dream herding you somewhere. The riverbanks are steep, exposed, and slippery. The grass is a long, thin type. Some of the blades are pale, as if bleached by no sun or too much sun, by cold or by heat.

In the dream I hurry forwards. I must cross the river to the left. The humpback ground in front suggests a natural bridge or the remains of an ancient one. It must be that the river, now appearing at the left, has a tributary under the meadow at this point, or used to be wider here.

Only now notice the crowd of people with darkened eyes and mostly long clothing, cream or brownish, walking ahead, towards the shine and confusion that is the further meadow. Some of them turn back. They show the anger of people who do

not believe themselves to be angry people. You are dismayed and unable to speak. How can you explain that you are not pushing ahead...that you want to cross the river to the left, not continue into the meadow? One of them – no, not one of them; someone with them – speaks in a clear, stern, androgynous voice. It is loud like the voice of someone who would not try to be loud. “She’s a child.”

No, no, I want to say. I am not a child. I feel my eyes going huge over the mask I realize I’m wearing in this crowded outdoors. It’s the mask that makes me look young; and I’m short, but I’m not... Yes. The voice was right. I am a child. These people are timelessly old, and who knows where they’ll end up as they pursue their route into the distant meadow? Compared to them, I am indeed a child.

Behind the mask, you smile, and turn eagerly to the left. The bridge is informal, made of ramshackle materials. Some of it may have dropped away, or it may have changed position when the muddy riverbank shifted, or perhaps it never quite reached the opposite bank of the river; but there’s a gap. For the last bit, you must reach behind you with one arm for the bridge’s support, and step forward, placing one foot against the wall-like roots of a huge, silvery-khaki tree, grown down into the riverbank. You must forget it might be slippery and step as if you’re sure.

It is excruciating, for a moment, as my unathletic body finds a groove in the air above the fast-running river. I let go with my hand and lean forward into the next step. Then I am up the bank. A little white path leads to a one-storey house, more like a cabin. I know I can stay there.

The main room has heaps of clothes that belong to you, or might fit you, though you’ve not been there before. You recognize items you wore ages ago and had forgotten. This living room is duskish. If there’s any lighting, you don’t think to look for the switch. To the right, in the opposite wall, there’s a door with light around it, suggesting a further room. You know it’s small and gives onto a courtyard.

I feel shy of the furniture: a low sofa, a large cube of an old-fashioned television set, probably broken or disconnected, some round, floor-level seating cushions. While I am standing just inside the door, someone knocks. I open.

You know him. You think it’s your friend, the very tall prophetic poet, the one who was filmed all streaming blue light walking down from the rain forest hills in Trinidad. You smile and hug him hard. The person smiles back. He’s not that friend. His face and hands are like charcoal with seams of silver. His tunic is the palest blue. You keep hugging him, confusedly, for a split second.

It’s his house, too. He comes in through the door and walks happily through the room. He opens the further door into the smaller, light-filled room. He tells me he’ll

be in there and I can come in when I've chosen something to wear. My sense of hurry and my sense of bewilderment vanish. I understand that this is some type of welcome or interview, before we recommence the walk.

Without switching on the room lights, you rummage in the half-light through the piled-up clothes that look as if they might have belonged to you. You pick out black sports trousers and a long-sleeved red running top, like the one you used to wear when you did martial arts and were in regular training.

I feel mildly alarmed. Why the red top? I've picked a level of walk by choosing that, but I'll put it on anyway. He's waiting. I mustn't take too long.

The dream ends.

You have recurrent dreams, sometimes. They begin with this kind of mood. They can come back over years. Perhaps a lifetime.

Feb. 28

Flood map predictions show that the sea may cover the main road within a few decades, possibly within my lifespan. I hardly ever walk along this road to the lighthouse. The main road is down a few steps from the cobbled street that leads directly from my front door. Those steps, with their sturdy metal balustrade, used to lead straight to the beach.

It's easy enough to find twentieth-century pictures of the sea covering the main road; or rather, showing the persisting line of the prehistoric beach met by mackerel-sleek water, no traffic dreamt of. The land for the high-rise flats, twenty-four-hour supermarket, and luxurious gym was reclaimed only recently. Even in less than four years, I've seen my favourite cut-throughs – rough patches of long-haired, salty grass with a high water table – fenced off or built over. Along the cobbled street, beneath the primary school on the north side, Bronze Age crouched burials were unearthed. I wonder about the undulating shape of the walk to the breakwater. Who sleeps in barrows, or what winds piled dunes that afterwards were tamed? Flood maps show that the sea may yawn and uncurl. That is all. Why are we still building on watery land? Will we have the sense, or the ability, to reconnect via water?

The sky-blue paint is flaking off the scarred walls of the spiral staircase. Fitting my fingers to the worn support-places, with Zoomy slowness I go up the thirty-one spiral stairs. Light tips in from the windows in the curved wall, splashing about. It takes a lighthouse, or an anchoress, to keep beaming patiently down the centuries.

You don't go back because you want to go back. You go back because it's what you do. You begin with desire, and graduate to love.

The glass is half full of water. You lift it to the light. In the cold, your hands shake. You tip the glass a little, by mistake. Then you shake the glass on purpose, watching the water tip, and the splashy sea-light coming in over the Firth of Forth and through your top-floor window enters the water in the glass. The glass is like a snow globe. Inside it, you're seeing the interior of Norwich Cathedral that Easter, when the many, multiply-rebuilt channels for light filled the building with brightness. Visitors and worshippers, breathing freely, were over the head in light like water. More light, as pale as this, splashed about in long arcs and streaks, higher than that. It continues pouring.