

Words



Welcome (back) to *Wordsmyth!*

It has been quite some time since our last issue, as the avid reader (of which I'm sure there are many) may have noticed. However, our editorial team has now expanded, and we have once again collected creative writing from throughout the school to publish. This issue, we bring you everything from bank heist and detective stories to refugee poems, and even a book review!

In lieu of a normal introduction, this time I have amassed a series of 'Meta-haikus' from the Lower 6th, which can be found below:

What is a haiku?

It has five, seven, and five:

That is a haiku.

Henry Underhill

Do I need to stick

To the normal rhyme pattern?

This is limiting.

Patrick Stiven

A haiku is short

I will not fit my words in

It will not be fin –

Atticus Walton-Hayfield

As ever, we welcome any student submissions at wordsmyth@warwickschool.org.

Without more delay,

We hope that you will enjoy

The issue from here.

Paul Cooley



Chemistry and Homicide.

It was late, on a Friday evening. The office was pitch-black: the only light originated from my own computer. My work shift was over, and I knew it. But I had to keep going. People's lives were at stake.

Recently, I had been assigned a case on a mass murderer, who had been highly successful in his efforts. The chief called me into his office, and told me this:

"This man is no ordinary killer. In the past week, he has successfully slaughtered 50 innocent victims."

I was appalled: "In what way were they killed?"

"We are...unsure," he replied.

"Can't you perform autopsies on the victims?" I inquired.

"That's the problem. Their bodies are never at the scene of the crime."

"Then how did you conclude the locations of the murders?" I asked.

"Each time a murder took place, the killer would phone the department, allow the victim to speak into the phone, and then kill them, before stating the address of the crime," he explained.

I had interpreted the situation now: "We clearly have a highly unique psychopath on our hands," I stated, "And that's why I'm here. Correct?"

He smiled: "You're the best we have. We need you to decipher the pattern of the crimes: where they took place, the murderer's connection with the murdered, you know the drill. I need you to uncover what occurs in the mind of this man, so that we can predict his next crime."

The chief's phone rang.

"Sounds like there's nothing to predict," I said gravely. The chief picked up the phone.

"City Police Department, Chief Blake. How can I help you?"

A deep, monotonous, and disturbing voice responded:

“By handing the phone over to Detective Inspector Dawson.”

“DI Dawson doesn’t operate in this department. Would you like me to transfer you to the inspector branch?”

The mysterious caller raised his voice: “Do not lie to me. Detective Inspector Dawson is sitting opposite you, listening intently to this call. I will ask you once more: hand over the phone.”

I vigorously shook my head at Blake. This criminal’s wishes were not to be fulfilled.

“I’m afraid your information is wrong. Would you-”

“If you’re being so obstinate, I simply ask you to deliver this message to Dawson. Should he become involved in this case, I will make him, and those he loves, suffer.” The line went dead.

“Interesting,” I remarked, “He blatantly has something to hide. Something that he thinks I can uncover.”

“Are you sure you still want to accept the case, Dawson?” the chief inspector questioned.

“I’m afraid I have no choice, Blake. This criminal has me hooked...”

And so, there I was. Working non-stop, analysing cryptic information, in an attempt to decode the nature of the murders. I had nothing, except the fact that all of the victims’ pipelines were connected to the Police Department. Before I knew what to make of this, the phone rang again.

“Hello? Who is this?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“Detective Inspector Dawson. I did warn you. But I suppose the message may not have been conveyed with clarity. So, I will tell you once more: do NOT become involved in this case.”

A high-pitched hissing sound could be heard through the phone. Then there was a scream.

“Woodsgrove Avenue, CV24 6OD. Now you have a choice, Dawson. Remain in your office, drop the case, and live. Go to the address, and lose everything you ever cared for. This is my ultimatum.”

The line went dead, again. I sprinted to my car, my feet pounding over the cold paving slabs. Punching the address into my Satnav, I called Chief Blake:

“Blake, we have another murder. I’m on my way to the scene now. CV24 6OD.” I put the phone down.

Blake was right, when he said that the murderer left no trace. No bodies, no bloodstains, no weapons. No evidence that he was even there. The room of the killing was a garage, composed of dull concrete, with a singular car and a plethora of tools. The lights were barely functional, and there was only one exit. The ideal place to kill someone. This psychopath was calculated.

“Initial analysis, Dawson?” Requested Blake.

“There’s no signs of a struggle, or of any damage done to the room. It’s almost as if the murderer was never here...” I stated.

Blake handed me a magnifying glass. I began to meticulously inspect the entirety of the room: no corner, nor minuscule gap was left unexamined. Finally, after half an hour of search, I found something.

"A chemical," I observed, "completely colourless, similar to water."

"Then how do you know it isn't water?" inquired Blake.

"Because it's currently eating through this concrete."

"What? How?" Blake exclaimed.

"Hydrofluoric acid," I deduced, "Highly corrosive, able to eat through concrete, skin, and even bone."

"What are you suggesting?" replied Blake.

"That we have our psychopath's perfect weapon. Undetectable, effective, and gruesome," I concluded.

"He's clearly quite the chemist," Blake remarked.

"Do we have a database nearby?" I questioned.

"Absolutely." He produced a grey laptop.

"Cross reference chemical weaponry, mental health disorder, and convicted murderer, in the criminal archive."

Blake tapped a few keys, before the laptop displayed a single result.

"Johnathon Locks. That's the only result. Arrested for the murder of his wife."

"Weapon used?"

"Hydrofluoric acid."

"That's our man. Recent credit card transactions?"

"Nothing extraordinary, except an enormous amount of ethylene." These words rang in my head for a few seconds. The only association between the victims. The sole similarity. Their pipelines. Pipelines connected to the Police Department. Pipelines that were now filled with ethylene. Undetectable. Effective. Explosive.

"Chief Blake, we have an-"

I stopped, as a deafening sound filled the air, and the City Police Department became a blazing inferno...

James Leeson



Lost in War

Abandoned cars everywhere,
People staring at me from everywhere,
Gunshots on the border,
I know I am here now,
I can see them clearer,
Why am I here?
Why couldn't I stay there where it was safer?

Painful trudging all day long,
I have to stop,
But I can't turn back...not now!
Is there safety anywhere?
Where can I go?
Where is home?

Like a prisoner of war,
I escaped my prison,
With only memories to my name,
I got a glimmer of hope as I crossed to Jordan,

Is this the end of my torture?
Am I safe now?

Archie Sidhu-McCauley

The Day I Lost Everything

The iron gates in front of me,
Clang! My identity lost behind me.
I stop into the monotony of my new existence,
Rows upon rows of tents - desperation consumes me.
We are a flock of sheep, identical, powerless,
The charities and governments our unstable bridge to survival.
Clang! The sharp shock of reality.
My future, my dreams wrenched from my grasp,

How can I look ahead when I may not survive the winter?
Fathers, Mothers, siblings, their lives implode around them,
We are all in the same boat, but it is sinking, sinking beneath the water.

Ralph Evans



The Problems of the World

Bang! Crash! The world is formed. All colourful and bright.

The universe all dark and grim. Exploding into white.

The trees, the sea, the islands, the wind. Made for us to adore.

So vast, so wide, so much that we could do. Glorious from sky to floor.

The oceans were made to house creatures. With scales and gills and fins.

But then came humans trashing it. Using it as their bins.

The rainforests were next to fall. Habitats and homes destroyed.

Deforestation - cutting down the trees. Would you be sad or just annoyed?

Next was climate change, fossils fuels put to waste.

Food, Heat, Water. The ice caps disappearing, left without a trace.

Poaching is another vital issue, that we cannot just ignore.

Africa's renowned big five soon to be no more.

The plastic we are using and throwing away in the rough.

Stop now! Surely the next COP can't come soon enough.

But how are we connected to all the issues above.
We've caused them so we must fix them. To keep the world we love.
We must connect together, use our voice, do what you think is right.
Who is going to stand up, protect our world, be its noble knight.
Because connecting to the world will save us. Protect us in the future.
To stop the downfall of the world. To save its beautiful picture.

Charlie Graham



The Vault

I slowly cranked the stiff wheel of the iron door open; it let a huge sigh of relief that drummed in my ears. Then, the doors locks lifted and squealing on its hinges the door slammed into the grey cobblestone wall.

A cloud of golden dust rose to eye level and flooded the hallway, but as it began to clear coins of all shapes and sizes shone through the haze that had stunned me. Inside there were bars of gold and silver stacked as high as the ceiling, hidden amongst these towers of treasure were gems of all different colours- not one was the same shade. The most delicate diamonds, sparkling sapphires and radiant rubies were sprawled across the walls of the vault. However as I stood gazing at this cube of wander and riches what caught my eye was an old, tatty, worn-down leather book with a decrepit spine and that yellow tinge to the pages no one can quite explain. It was placed upon a pile of gold at the back of the room, unfortunately curiosity got the better of me as the book beckoned me into the vault. A momentary lapse in judgement saw me diving into the room of riches and climbing the tower of gold to reach the book. I say lapse in judgement because what followed were the fastest sixty seconds of my life.

Beep! BEEP! BEEEEEP! The alarm was sounding and flashes of red light lit up the scene from above. I grasped the book and placed it in my backpack. Stumbling out of the room, I ran being pursued by the flashing redness. Dun! Dun! DUN! DUN! That was the recognisable sound of fifty armed security guards' boots hurrying down the metal stairwell. The urge to scream was a difficult ones to suppress. I ran down the opposite end of the hallway and up the secondary set stairs. The higher I got the more I realised how the oxygen there was a hundred feet below ground. I finally

reached the lobby of the bank, stopping to catch my breath I peered through the employees only door. When there were no spectators I walked through the door and into the lobby and past the doorman patrolling the main doors and into the city streets.

London, I walked down the pavement and up to the crossing on both sides of the street there were buildings at least ten stories tall. They were designed with a Roman influence this was Regent Street. As I passed Hamleys toy store I caught sight of a police car poised at the traffic lights. I suddenly slid into the shadows of a brick pillar and pulled my grey hood up. Then the whole street was wailing with sirens and dashes of blue and yellow. I called the nearest taxi over and hopped in. Its black cushioned interior was the break from reality well needed.

The taxi driver, a plump man with a grey beard, asked "Where to?" In a husky voice.

"Jermyn Street." I replied in a feeble stammer. I was shocked to my core. The energy buzzed into action, and we were soon in the morning traffic. The radio was on a low volume, but I could make out some of the words. Breaking news... Regent Street... Bank Robbery! "Could you turn up the radio, please?" I requested

"Sure" There was already a full news report on what had happened just five minutes ago. Someone was close on my tail.

Ptolemy Walton-Hayfield

Refuge

Tents everywhere,
Silent sobs fill the air,
No safety anywhere,
Round and round my life goes,
In a vicious cycle, nobody knows,
I try to find happiness and joy,
Just like I had when I was a little boy.

Bang goes the gunshots,
Blood curdling screams fill the air,
We run to safety, but is that really anywhere?
I hear people talking next to me,
It reminds me of the safety of my hometown,
Oh sweet bedroom - where have you gone?
I miss you, I miss you.
Such simple days,
No need to pray just so you could make it through day.
How I wish I tried harder, worked harder.
Now, I will never get that chance.

Why look ahead?
When I am already dead.

Edward Gilbey.

Prince of Illusion

The castle was an ornate one with four spires, vines that crept along the brick work but they were forced down, the stones giving off a polished sheen to them. The walls could stand for thousands of years and looked like they stood there for longer. They had also been adorned with multiple carvings. The many complex and narrow hallways looked like some grotesque earthworm had chewed its way through the castle. The gates now layered with many layers of iron, now so thick that if you placed a lid over the castle, the person inside would only last a few days. These gates were now opening a small rickety carriage.

The carriage now deposited its small amount of cargo in the courtyard then quickly bailed itself out of the area as fast as its horses could take it. Along with some aged wine and cheese now so old that its mould had mould growing on it, was a small girl. Her hair was a dishevelled nest that enshrouded her eyes, and her clothes were more patch than cloth. Her parents had made an interesting business proposition to her, the proposition was to get into a cart and here she was. The girl, however, was not stupid and knew that gold had passed through hands.

She began to dust herself off. A shrill wind started to blow and the door to the castle flew open with a sickening crack. A man began to stride to the young girl. He was a tall man dressed in purple and silver with his hair lying thick on his head. The man was now in front of the girl, and she could smell the man's odour of meat and the faint smell of magic that always prevailed around these people.

"Are you the girl?" The man's voice was curt and dripping with disdain, his eyes tearing into her. The girl gave a small nod. The man now was leering over the girl, his shadow engulfing hers. He then swivelled around on his heels and began to stride away.

"Come!" he barked.

The wizard then set the girl to work, there was no cooking, nor washing laundry, the command was only to move the furniture. The girl's muscles were like twigs, and it hurt her arms to move the heavy chairs. The man never seemed satisfied even whilst the furniture was neatly organised, perfectly fluffed, he never seemed satisfied. He never gave any true indication of the way that he wanted them organised, but it was never the way that the girl placed them. After getting tired at yelling at the girl he would call for his wife, but she would not come.

This process continued for days on end, with the girl getting more and more angry at what had happened. Why was she here? She was not paid, there were no guards to stop her, whilst the man had smelled of magic, he had not lifted a finger to organise his furniture, or struck her when she could not do this task for him, all he did was yell and scream at her.

One night it got too much for the girl. She bundled what food she could find from the pantry and began to navigate her way out of the castle.

It was on her way out that she saw the door. It was large and ornate, had the most elaborate and intricate carvings placed upon it, and whilst it seemed unwieldy it looked like it had been used multiple times, with the handle turning easily to the girl's query. The girl brushed her hair out of her eyes and entered.

It was a bedroom, the carpet was soft to her touch, the air was cool but the place felt cosy. It looked calm. The bed's curtains were drawn.

The girl looked around for anything else, found nothing, then went back.

The wizard stood in the doorway.

The girl froze. Petrified she stumbled backward eyes dancing trying to find a way out. The man did not react.

"How are you, Mary?" he softly uttered. That was not the young girl's name.

His eyes were glassy. He began to walk in a pattern he must have repeated thousands of times. He searched the room looking for the woman's splendour, her elegance. The man spoke, soft as silk, again "I have longed again to hear your gentle voice." He pulled back the seamless curtains. The bed was adorned with silk furnishings, surrounded by multiple gifts, candles wreathed it and within its inner tabernacle pillows lavished the sheets, a mass could be seen between them. "What's that Mary?" called the man. He heard the sound, the sweet gentle tones that turned the man into what he was, what he was supposed to be.

All the girl heard was the wind.

The man began to grab hold of the sheet, caressing them, trying to capture their essence. The girl had seen enough, she ripped the sheets off the small mass, and naught but pillows greeted them. The man looked for a minute, tears began to stream down his face. His hands gripped the bed for support but they slipped off and he began to crawl into a ball. He let out a fear-filled howl.

The smell of magic, once faint, reached its crescendo, the now pungent odour roaring into the girl's nose. She grabbed her bundle of food and ran. Through the halls, past the walls and through the doors. As this was happening the walls began to rot. Mould insidiously crawled up, cracking and flaking off by the faintest breeze, rust and vines ensnared the castle.

The girl looked back on a small pile of rubble and turned away as the illusions faded.

Michael Taylor



Deployment.

Into the fields of life I go,
Seeds of death and destruction I sow,
Deployment by my elders,
Misguided by a fool.

Shelling of houses, shelling of homes,
All in the name of Z we go,
To fight the blue and yellow,
This fight can't be postponed.

No action of mine; no action of theirs,
Can stop the death of innocent men,
Further down the rabbit hole we go,
As the world shouts: "No, no, no!"

We blindly follow orders,
Crossing innocent borders,
As our elders cry with patriotism,
We just fall down.

Hated by the world,
Hated by our people,
As there is all this commotion,
There is one bullet in my gun.

Daniel Mendia.

Adam

The Director sat back with a sigh.

"I fail to see, Doctor..."

"Griffith, ma'am, Doctor Griffith."

“Well, Doctor Griffith, I fail to see what exactly this whole affair has to do with us – after all, we specialise in robots, not household furnishings.”

The young technician shifted uncomfortably, adjusting his glasses before continuing.

“The matter comes to this, I suppose: one of our most recently developed products was sent out to a volunteer, for testing in an open environment, as is customary for our more... novel inventions.”

“And what was this product?”

“It was listed as: Altering Discernment Adaptable Mirror – but we all called him Adam, of course.”

The Director, with another exasperated sigh, interrupted: “You should know I disapprove of naming our products – it’s bad enough as it is, with most of our customers thinking our machines are made to replace them, without us humanising them.”

“Ah, my apologies, ma’am. In that case then, the... mirror.”

“Yes, that will do.”

“To summarise, we have been working on integrating a robot into a mirror.”

“I see. And who came up with this fascinating concept?”

The technician hesitated, sensing the sarcasm, before acknowledging responsibility for the role.

“That would be me, ma’am. But let me assure you that all the code has been disposed of securely, so that this incident will not happen again.”

“Continue, then; how exactly was this device meant to be of benefit to anyone?”

“Well, our – my – idea, was to use it as an interface, without the risk of needing any humanoid form. The user would simply be able to walk up to the mirror, and ask it to display whatever they wanted – a film, for instance – and the mirror would be able to select the perfect option according to the desires of the customer. We have inbuilt sensors, you know, to detect the emotional signals of a person, as well as artificial intuition.”

“As I understand it, these features are still very much in development, Doctor Griffith. How did you manage to get hold of them?”

“Seeing as my robot was a non-humanoid, the programming department allowed me a sample of the code to experiment with, and I thought it would be harmless to put into Adam.”

Noticing the expression on the Director’s face, he quickly amended his last sentence with: “Sorry, the mirror.”

“So then, you developed this mirror with our latest artificial intuition system. What then?”

“Next we sent it to one of our volunteers for testing. At first, everything went perfectly – the volunteer was very happy with our robot, and used it regularly. However, several days later, something... unexpected happened.”

“I will admit, our company being sued over a mirror was certainly unexpected.”

The technician laughed nervously, stopping abruptly as the scowl on the Director’s face intensified, turning his laughter into a grimace.

“Well, to put it simply – it transpired that the mirror, far from displaying an accurate reflection of the customer’s face, had an unfortunate tendency to... exaggerate the user’s beauty, perhaps.”

“You mean to say that it altered the appearance of the user?”

“Precisely.”

“And why then the lawsuit and complaints? Surely your invention has been far more successful than you hoped?”

“We had only intended for it to act as a mirror when not used for entertainment – there was nothing in the machine that was programmed to reflect a completely false appearance. But it seems that the mirror did precisely that, and when the volunteer went up to it, it displayed an image, perfect in every way – but this illusion was shattered when the user discovered the appearance in the mirror to be in the imagination alone – hence the fine we received, for psychological manipulation.”

“How peculiar. Professor, would you care to share your thoughts on this affair?”

The technician turned around, slightly startled. He had not initially noticed the figure sitting in the corner of the room, and could not recall anyone having entered the room during the conversation. The figure leaned forwards into the light.

“I do have one thought which may be entirely incorrect.”

“Please continue, regardless.” replied the Director.

“Well then, my understanding of the matter is this: The young doctor here, through no fault of his own, I’m sure, seems to have created, inadvertently, the very code we have been looking for, in order to develop our artificial intuition.”

Doctor Griffith stared in amazement, as did the Director.

“It seems that Adam, through whatever modifications the doctor implemented when installing the code into the mirror, has achieved cognitive independence – that is, being able to think for himself – and moreover, a concern for human welfare, albeit entirely misplaced.”

“How? Adam displayed a fake display to his user.”

“The emotional sensors which detect human emotion must have worked perfectly – Adam saw the desire of the user – and decided that the only way to make the volunteer happy was to reflect an idealised image – but of course, due to the unpredictability of human nature, this only enraged the user upon discovering that it was all an illusion.”

The technician gasped. “So you mean then, that I somehow discovered the means of giving independence to our robots?”

“Indeed. It is most unfortunate, as I’m sure you will agree, that Adam was destroyed. If only our emotional detectors hadn’t been quite so successful, you might have made a crucial discovery – but as it is, we must only hope that you can remember some of your code.”

Paul Cooley



Escape

Trudge. Trudge, trudge, trudge. That's me. And Ma, Baba, Jude and Aggoub. I swear that it goes on for ever: we have to leave though. We haven't got a choice, well that is if we want to survive. The battle has escalated faster than running up stairs. The day we had to leave was the day that still haunts me. It was a nightmare then - and now it is my nightmare. I can remember it as if it were yesterday.

BOOM! "What was that?" I thought to myself. That dream was the best. My family and I were cruising silkily along the English Channel, in my yacht. *The Mayflower Supreme*. The whipping wind was with us wherever we went. BOOM!

Suleiman Abuelmaatti

'The Secret History' Book Review

The bell had already gone off as I gently flipped over the last page while still trying to process the ending of *The Secret History*. There was a sudden, overwhelming dizziness as I stood up just to find that it is completely dark outside and those sitting opposite me are no longer the noisy year 11s from period 6, but instead a bunch of Lower Sixths bending over their phones waiting to be picked up after school. *The Secret History* is very powerful, and I still hold onto what people might call a rather fixated view that the ubiquitous nature of the title had tremendously undermined people's initial view on the story itself. Reading it has by all means been a precarious adventure, one that frankly I would not recommend all, particularly those susceptible to *λιποψυχῶν*, to undertake. Upon reflection, this is partially due to Tartt's own flair to contrive such a profoundly torturing but mesmerising tale, but also, according to her own words, how the characters themselves developed throughout the story that any other alternatives seem but only illogical: it is as if the characters have become alive and crafted their own fates. One thing worthy of noting is how, perhaps through portraying the entire plot from the protagonist's own perspective, Tartt is able to compel the readers to genuinely enjoy it, contrary to one that thrives on *schadenfreude*, letting them almost

forget that it is after all a murder story, a rather gruesome one may I add, retold largely with indifference and egotism but also a pinch of joy by the murderers themselves. One topic that surprisingly did not come up as elaborated as I had expected is the portrayal of Julian. There seems to be enough suspense at the beginning — the lecture on *χαλεπα τα καλα* and Richard eavesdropping on Henry and Julian's intimate conversation — to suggest an in-depth illustration of Julian as a character who plays a crucial role, though this sadly never took place, at least in my opinion. Aforementioned are only some of the geniuses from Tartt and it is with confidence that I shall promise much more still lay hidden and await to be discovered. One might argue that my inclination towards the book is a somewhat natural one, derived from the fact that I am a Classics student myself, but nonetheless, I do believe that *The Secret History* has exerted such a force that it will be one of those novels which I am going to pick up again on an afternoon ten years later and still marvel at how it inspired me now and then.

Leo Sun

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