

**Poetry Section: The New World**

**The Edge**

Since Ancient Greece,  
Pythagoras, Aristotle,  
The world has been round:  
A sphere circling an orb of fire,  
Not a flattened disc  
Encased by sky,  
Or carried upon the back  
Of some great beast;  
But today, I found  
The Edge.

I did not sail over a vast  
Waterfall,  
On the crest of a wave  
Into the endless depths of space,  
Or tumble from a grand  
Precipice,  
Into a haze of golden light.  
There was no expanse of clouds  
Drifting through forever;  
It was just  
An Edge.

There was no word of warning:  
'Mind the gap between  
The world and  
Infinity',  
No sign to say  
'Here be dragons'.

So I stepped  
Over  
The Edge.

## Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

### **Quicksilver**

By the light of the  
Gibbous moon rising  
In the eastern sky,  
The water, waist deep,  
Makes quicksilver streets,  
Spilling from gutters  
Full to the brim, lapping  
At doorways closed  
In the night, sealed with  
Silicon against the tide,  
Haemorrhaging  
From the veins  
Of the countryside.

### **Insanity Laughs**

Inside countless padded cells,  
The cold cacophony  
As inmates shriek and howl  
Begins to fade: white noise and  
Nothing more.  
It's a lullaby to trigger  
Walking dreams  
To skip and writhe  
Across the white-washed floor.

Whispered voices hiss  
In eager ears  
As plastic hands restrain  
The broken blade  
That paints a bloody smile.  
The grinning  
Crimson clown  
Looks back,  
To sit and laugh a while.

### **Winter Smith**

## Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

The fires of the forge blaze summer's heat  
But far below, the smith begins to beat  
Upon the metals of the earth to blades  
Of ice, that pierce through dying autumn's haze.

The gushing rivers freeze to sheets of glass  
Blown through a mould of stone, a mountain pass  
To sculpt the life that's caught in winter's grip;  
A fist of steel that holds the north wind's whip.

Here flakes of silver smelted from the skies  
Now plate the barren ground with frozen sighs  
That settle down to rest on coal-black streets  
To bury flames and make the furnace sleep.

### **East of the Wall**

I once climbed up to  
The highest branch of  
The old Ash tree,  
To look over the  
Wall around the world  
Where it cuts the street.

The concrete curtain veils  
A mythical land;  
My parents saw it once and  
See it again with misty eyes.

But all I've seen is the wall.

### **The Kingdom of the Blind**

I saw them once: those empty eyes  
So glazed with honeyed lies.  
They looked beyond the turmoil  
Off to distant, cloudless skies.

### **Poppy Scars**

The Earth yet shakes

## Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

With pounding thunder;  
Hooves, and guns, and  
Cannon fire; still  
The drum beat sounds  
Above nameless pits  
And crosses, crooked  
Beneath a carpet,  
Red,  
From weeping hearts.

### **Gravity**

There is no force to keep  
The apple, red and bright  
Upon the branch  
From falling

Down to

Earth



### **To Know the Night**

I have walked out  
Beneath a restless night  
Across streets deserted  
Under hollow, yellow light.

On slated roofs  
Shades and vultures wait  
Upon idle dreams, rising  
From chimneys to flee their fate.

I heard the sound  
Of something screaming at the light  
Of the sun appearing, then  
I came to know the night.

### **Faerie Dust**

The sky is bright in new eyes,

## Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

Seeing magic between the leaves,  
Of long dead trees.  
Hiding under hedgerows with the faeries,  
Tick-tock goes the Croc, fighting Hook  
With sword beside the mermaids in the pond,  
Feathers in ebony locks around campfires  
Dancing, straight on till morning  
Through drenching rainbows, arrows and  
Cannon fire. Time to go.  
Never.  
Now,  
Out the darkened window glazed with rain,  
A little dust and laughter,  
And fly away.

### **Skyscraper**

Upon the back of the wind  
She glides, above the glass  
And concrete trunks, the iron,  
Russet leaves and smog, rising  
On an errant breeze  
From tarmac rivers, black,  
And swept aside  
With the twitch of a feather  
And a tilted wing,  
Soaring up with talons  
Outstretched  
To touch the sky.

Word count: 656

**Prose section:**

The Devil's Day Job

Behind a grand solid oak desk, spinning morosely on his office chair, sat The Devil. He didn't look quite how one might imagine the Prince of Darkness, Lord of Hell: no fire, no tail, not even a pair of horns to his name. Even his skin was not the traditional blood red, unless you counted the angry sun burn scorched across his shoulders, still visible despite the best efforts of a slim black suit.

Of course, he could look however he pleased, but recent years had taught him that the old clichés just didn't get the same reaction anymore. No-one walking into the cramped office in Croydon would have even considered that the recently elected young Tory MP in front of them might be His Satanic Majesty, Father of all Lies. Well, probably.

The polished plaque that hung precariously from the edge of the table read on one side his alias, 'Nicholas Hellton'. The other side stated his full title, printed in 4 pitch (about the same size as the text on page 45 of the Terms and Conditions that pledges your soul to the Devil – you know, the one you ticked without so much as a glance) and unreadable to humans. The documents that crowded the desk were sorted into two main piles: constituency matters and paperwork from Hell. There was a rapidly growing third stack that covered both. Satan sighed and massaged his temples in an effort to dispel a growing headache, muttering under his breath.

"I love my job, I love my job –" though once true, his words were hollow. The problem was that there was not much to do in his line of work anymore. Humans had become remarkably efficient at orchestrating their own destruction with as little help from below as some well-placed sticky notes. In the beginning he had worked in the field, but time passed and the paperwork stacked up. It had been a long time since he had done something big. However, making that call concerning PPI had been a real brainwave – it was up there with Health and Safety and the French.

The Devil was torn from his reverie as the phone rang, the sheaf of papers on which it rested spontaneously bursting into flames, a habit it had recently acquired. He snapped his fingers impatiently; extinguishing the fire before the smoke could set off the sprinkler system. Making a mental note to have one of the lesser demons take a look at it, he answered the call.

"Yes?"

"Your Satanic Majesty, Commander of the underworld, Lord of –"

"Yes, yes, you can skip that bit. What do you want?" The demon on the other end of line paused for a moment, not sure how to continue. He had only been in the job a week – a recent promotion from torture pit cleaner – and he was off script in uncharted territory.

"Well, um, there's a s-slight problem, my Lord." He hesitated, an edge of fear in his voice, and then continued in one breath. "There has been another sudden influx of inmates and we're stretched to capacity; all the waiting pits are overflowing and we don't have the staff to cope." The line fell silent and Satan groaned inwardly, shaking his head.

For centuries, Hell had functioned perfectly and hordes of his finest demons spread corruption like a disease throughout civilization. The lure of promotions and bonuses had led to fierce competition between orders of demons, and the disease had become a pandemic which they could no longer control. Humanity had taken to sin like imps to boiling oil, and was orchestrating its own destruction. Much like British prisons, Hell was overcrowded.

More of the damned poured in every second and there wasn't enough eternal punishment to go round. With the workload increasing, many of his subjects had gone on strike for better pay and conditions,

#### Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

refusing to take no for an answer even after some public incinerations. The climate of the economy on Earth impacted heavily down below and money was tight – Satan feared that if the state of things did not improve, his cosy office would lose its under floor heating. Realising that he had left the demon on the other end hanging, the Devil collected his thoughts.

“Tell Astaroth I’ll be there soon,” he said resignedly, then placed the old Victorian-style hand piece calmly back on the hook. For a moment he sat, breathing deeply, his fists clenched, then with a cry of frustration, he spun to face the bookcase and took his anger out on it, cremating a full three rows.

A tendril of smoke curled up to the ceiling. Water poured from the sprinkler system.

The Last Jump

*Fifteen, fourteen...* James counted the seconds; his timing here was vital. A millisecond out and he would be nothing but a smear on the landscape. Clouds were definitely not as light and fluffy as they looked from the ground when you were falling through them. Little more than droplets of water suspended high in the atmosphere, they were wet and cold, and unfortunately the one through which he was passing was not at all lonely. The damp shroud obscured his vision, and James felt panic beginning to rise, but forced himself to keep counting.

*Twelve, eleven...* Once through the cloud layer, the ground rose quickly; the vast tapestry of moonlit fields and the silver tracery of rivers accelerated towards him. *Ten, nine, the mission, focus...* From so high it was easy to overlook the craters and jagged scars torn into the earth, softened by the distance and the night. *Eight, seven...* His fingers itched to move as the world rushed upwards at an alarming rate, but he held back. *Not yet – if I go now they'll see. Six, five...* He had been told the first jump was the worst; more than half of all new recruits never got the chance to jump again. *Four, three...* His target was visible, the warm glow of a single oil lamp revealing the camp. *Two...* His sweaty palms gripped the cord.

*One, Now.* He yanked hard and felt a wrenching as the hand-stitched yards of dyed silk were released, billowing above him to catch the wind. His descent slowed rapidly, but the ground was already upon him. There was no time to think, so with his instructor's voice ringing inside his skull, James moved as he had been taught. Contact, bend knees, tuck, arms in, roll right, kneel, pack off, collect in, and run. Everything by the book, they said, and he would live. The jump was the hardest part, the rest would be easy.

His eyes fixed on the light, the soldier stepped forwards. Beneath his foot a quiet click shattered the silence. He glanced down, eyes wide as his momentum carried him forwards.

The clouds above his head ripped apart.

*Time's up.*

Dead Marshes

A low haze hung over the marshes, tendrils of fog rising from stagnant pools to lurk in hollows. Clumps of tough grasses and reeds sprouted from the mire in islands, their roots submerged in the dark waters. The tumult of life that filled the air in summer had retreated in the face of the oncoming winter, the water-dwelling creatures burying themselves deep into the sludge, leaving the water still and quiet.

Through the mists, a shadow emerged, pushing aside the coarse vegetation heedless of the blades that scratched at his skin. The leaves were soft. Plumes of hot breath billowed into the sky, thickening the damp shroud which obscured the landscape. The figure surged on, the treacherous ground shifting beneath his bare feet. Glancing over his shoulder, he stared wide eyed across the fen, gaze barely penetrating the cloud. The plastic band around his wrist caught on a low branch, scoring a crimson line across his skin before it snapped.

Slipping, the man fell into the icy waters, the splash resounding across the barren marshland. Ripples warped the surface of the pool, spreading from their source to lap against the reeds. He lay motionless, only his head above the surface, ears straining for any sound as he waited. The frigid water pierced the rough weave of his clothes, saturating the fabric. Play dead; he had done it before.

Yellow lights were refracted through the fog, their harsh glow accompanied by low voices. The marsh-water roiled as careless feet surged through the shallows, leaving a trail of sediment churning in their wake. As the floating beacons drew closer the man filled his lungs and slid beneath the surface, recoiling from the beam of the searchlights.

Immersed within the cool water, all sounds were muted: the suck and squelch of mud; the muffled splashes of his pursuers; the betraying thud of his own heartbeat. Sharp pain lanced through his fingers, each tremor that shook him digging hot needles into his extremities. He was used to their touch.

The distorted murmurs from above seemed to fade, the little light that filtered through the water dimming as its source moved on. Fearing a trap, the figure remained frozen, his hands wound around the coiled stems that hung in the mere to hold himself down. His head pounded, starved of oxygen and his body convulsed. Choking as his lungs were filled with water, the man struggled to reach the surface, the glutinous mud reluctantly releasing him.

As his head broke the water, a bright flame flared into life, searing his eyes with its glare. Gloved hands seized him, forcing him back under. The water writhed as the man fought to free himself, thrashing against his restraints.

It did not take long for the spasms to subside.

Oil on Canvas

The Long Gallery was full to capacity, crowds of well dressed members of the art community giving their expert opinion on the piece of work that hung before them. Women in fine dresses, fascinators adorning their hair, lounged in groups with champagne glasses in hand. Men sporting tailor-made suits (that weren't-rented-honest), commented on technique, and money flowed with the bubbly.

On prime real-estate at the far end of the hall, behind a small section of violet rope, hung the painting. It had been described as many things: 'thought provoking', 'an emotional journey' and even 'A rival to the greatest painters of all time'. Blu-Tacked onto the plaster beside it was a single sheet of A4 paper that read 'SOLD'. Beneath this word was a number with an unpronounceable number of zeroes.

Two suits stood, trays of empty glasses expertly balanced upon gloved fingertips, in front of the end wall. Slight frowns creased their brows. One opened his mouth as if to speak, then closed it again. The other glanced across at his companion and took pity.

"Well, I suppose it's rather... interesting," he suggested, tugging thoughtfully at one side of a drooping moustache.

"Oh yes, it is undoubtedly, definitely, very interesting. And the use of colour is superb."

"Extremely fine brushwork – meticulous."

They waited in an uneasy silence for a while, unsure of what else they could say. Everything mentioned thus far was true; the vivid pigments daubed upon the canvas arched in cerulean swirls like waves, crested with vermillion foam. Each line was a work of absolute precision, minute details exquisitely preserved in the medium of paint.

One of the men leaned forwards, eyes squinting behind half-moon spectacles as he struggled to read the small plaque below the painting.

"Oil on Canvas." He turned to his partner.

"What do you suppose it's meant to be?"

The one with the moustache peered closely at the piece, stepped back and attempted to frame the picture with a free hand, one eye closed. *Pre-gothic, gothic, Renaissance? No... Perhaps Baroque, Rococo, Naturalism, Pre-Raphaelites? Modernism, maybe pop art?* He straightened,

"I haven't the foggiest."

### Beachcombing

The creature was barely recognisable as it emerged from the sea, dragging its enormous bulk across the sand to escape the waves. Out of the water, the usually sleek form was cumbersome, and the weight of its own body would compress the delicate lungs, slowly suffocating the beast. When I first saw it, I could hardly tell that it was a whale; a viscous oil, black and foul smelling coated its skin and dripped to form a glutinous pool on the shore. Thick drops spun through the air as powerful fins struggled to remove the tar. As I got closer, bare feet leaving a trail behind me that was gradually submerged, I saw why the whale had hauled itself from the ocean. Each breaker that crashed upon the beach stained the sand, and rainbows danced on the surface when sea met sky.

That characteristic domed forehead, huge and grey, loomed above me. I remembered something from a school trip: that dome contained the largest brain of any creature to have ever lived on Earth. His eye, round and as deep as his home peered out of the giant skull and rolled unseeing in its socket. Reaching out, I placed a hand on the damp skin, wiping away a patch of oil. It was warm. I turned and ran for home.

Though it was still early morning, it did not take long for the cameras to arrive. Figures scurried around the prone form, like the Lilliputians around Gulliver. They ran a hosepipe from the sea and tried to wash away the cloying substance, while lenses and reporters blinked and looked on. I sat on the rocks a little way away to watch. I'd wanted to help; the red plastic bucket that had made a hundred castles stood beside me, ready to carry water to the whale. If his skin dried out it would crack. They laid wet blankets across him to protect from the sun. There wasn't much else to do to help a 40,000kg whale.

By the time the sky began to darken, the beach was deserted once more. The crowds that had gathered in a noble quest to save the sperm whale had given up, retreating to their warm beds. My red bucket sloshed as I ran back and forth between the whale and the waves. It wasn't as far now; the tide was coming in and salty tongues licked higher, caressing the tip of the creature's tail. Deep crevices scarred his back as a sea breeze stripped the moisture from the blubbered hide. Crimson seeped from the wounds and flowed in rivulets to join the water. They looked almost black in the growing night. It was almost dawn when he died.

I placed the tooth, nearly seventeen centimetres long, in the centre of my windowsill between shards of green beach glass, facing out to sea.

Word count: 2443

### Reflective Commentary

The starting point for many of my pieces was as little as a line from a film or a well-known phrase. For example, 'The Devil's Day Job' was inspired by the saying, 'Speak of The Devil'. I then developed this idea, drawing on sources such as the writing of Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman in *Good Omens* and the 1967 film *Bedazzled*. This led me to develop ideas on how well-known characters (such as the Devil) are portrayed, and how they can be defamiliarised. I also took this approach with the rather cliché image of the edge of the world, to present a new take on a familiar setting.

With 'The Devil's Day Job', I wanted to create a voice with which the reader would not yet be acquainted. The Devil as the protagonist is an unusual concept as he would normally take the opposite role, but works such as *The Book Thief*, written from the point of view of Death, encouraged me to explore this avenue. One of the most challenging aspects was to convey the emotion of The Devil and allow the reader to connect with him. The asperity in his speech comes across quite clearly, "“Your Satanic Majesty, Commander of the underworld, Lord of –” “Yes, yes, you can skip that bit, what do you want?””

The opening description of The Devil is designed to immediately alter any preconceptions the reader might have, 'He didn't look quite how one might imagine the Prince of Darkness, Lord of Hell: no fire, no tail, not even a pair of horns to his name.' I have utilised the technique of free indirect speech, where the thoughts of the main character are written from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person ('However, making that call concerning PPI had been a real brainwave – it was up there with Health and Safety and the French') allowing the reader to connect with Satan. The tone of the piece reflects The Devil's sarcastic mood; it is droll.

Through the use of very short lines, I've inserted comedy into the piece, an emotion that would not normally go hand-in-hand with the subject matter. My use of phrases such as, 'Humanity had taken to sin like imps to boiling oil', reinforces the way in which clichés are used in demotic thought and speech. The typical simile would read 'like a fish to water,' but even hell has its own expressions.

The inspiration behind 'Beachcombing' was as simple as a tale told by my art teacher about being asked to pull a tooth from a dead porpoise by his young son. My aim during this piece was to express emotion effectively, and to this end, I made use of the object correlative. In the words of T.S Eliot, 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.'<sup>1</sup> In my piece, I made use of this technique in the form of the red bucket and the tooth.

The red bucket acts as a motif, and shows the child-like hope of the character 'the red plastic bucket that had made a hundred castles', believing that she can save the whale. This object holds memories and seems powerful to the autodiegetic narrator. When all of the adults have left, knowing that their work is futile, it is the red bucket that carries her hope. The final line of the story contains another objective correlative, around which the poignancy of the tale hangs. The tooth of the whale conveys both the sadness of its loss, and the wish of the girl to preserve its memory in any way she can. Beachcombing also uses the device of paradoxical paralipsis, as an older, more sophisticated narrator recaptures the voice of an earlier, childish version of herself.

Showing the passing of time in a short story can often be a clumsy affair. I attempted to address this issue in 'The Last Jump' by utilizing the internal thoughts of my character. In earlier drafts of this piece, James counted up from zero; however, after discussion in class workshops in which it was decided I could create more tension, I decided to make him count down. This gives the piece a sense of direction and anticipation, 'Four, three... His target was visible', 'Two... His sweaty palms gripped the cord.' This method of

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<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Hamlet and His Problems' in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932)

## Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

displaying the passing of time, combined with short sentences, builds the tension that James is feeling and perhaps shows that he is unconsciously aware of the approaching deadline.

The importance of the closing line of a piece of flash fiction is evident in 'A True Short Story' by Ali Smith. The final line of this piece, 'When the echo of it answers back',<sup>2</sup> refers to previous images created in the piece, but leaves the conclusion open to interpretation. I also like the climatic surprise pioneered in the short stories of O. Henry. The final line of each of my pieces holds significance, be it the tooth acting as objective correlative in 'Beach Combing', the death implied in both 'Dead Marshes' and 'The Last Jump', or the bathos produced in 'Oil on Canvas'.

My poem, 'Gravity' was heavily influenced by William Carlos Williams, in its brevity and the use of line breaks. I found this technique to be effective in conveying meaning and emotion; a simple word choice allows the reader to focus on clear imagery and meaning. In 'The Red Wheelbarrow', the line breaks and especially the breaks between lines have a strong impact. I used this technique to show the movement within my poem as the apple falls:

From falling

Down to

Earth

The line breaks here are mimetic. This technique can also be seen in the final stanza of 'The Edge', where very short lines enhance the imagery of stepping off the edge of the world. This piece was largely influenced by *The Redemption of Althalus* by David and Leigh Eddings, as a main plot point revolves around what is thought to be the edge of the world. The archaic, grandiose tone of the poem is set in the opening line, 'Since Ancient Greece, /Pythagoras, Aristotle,' and is then enforced by phrases such as 'orb of fire'. This language displays the serious mythology surrounding the theme, which is then abruptly brought back down to earth with the derisive, 'Here be Dragons' that mocks the previous stanzas. Repeating 'The edge' after each stanza reinforces the finality of such a concept, whilst the final line does not answer the question posed by the rest of the poem; the reader is instead left hanging.

The subject of war is a common theme for poetry, and works such as Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'In Flanders Fields', John McCrae were a strong influence in the writing of 'Poppy Scars' and 'East of the Wall.'

The latter was originally designed to be a prose piece, exploring the life of a child living in Berlin in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. This subject matter was inspired by a documentary on the Berlin Wall, and by a piece explored in class, 'Flight'. I wanted to see if I could vary from my usual heterodiegetic voice as in Dead Marshes, into the first person. After some research, I decided that my character could be best captured in poetry, as this allows me to show a child's understanding of the events, and the snapshot way in which we remember things.

The speaker is clearly a child – 'My parents saw it once' – who does not quite understand the war that has invaded her life. The use of short lines shows the disjointedness of memory and child-like thoughts, and the effect of the Wall on the speaker is apparent: 'The concrete curtain veils/ A mythical land;' she is separated from her dreams.

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<sup>2</sup> Ali Smith, 'True Short Story' in *The First Person and Other Stores* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008), pp. 10-16

## Exemplar 4 - FULL MARKS

The process of developing my poetry is most apparent in 'Winter Smith'. Unlike many of my other poems, this piece uses a strict rhyme scheme and metre, with structured stanzas. I used this because it gives the poem a strong rhythm and pulse to follow, underlining the beating of the hammer 'But far below, the smith begins to beat', described in the poem itself. The iambic metre and rhyming couplets enforce the metaphor of man-made nature; order and structure. This was influenced by J.R.R Tolkien's 'Over the Misty Mountains Cold' in terms of the beat, 'While hammers fell like ringing bells'<sup>3</sup> and the theme of metal working.

After work-shopping this piece, I received feedback that led me to alter my diction to enhance the metaphor. For example, in earlier drafts the final stanza read, 'Flakes of silver smelted from a heavy sky', this changed to 'Here flakes of silver smelted from the skies', as the iambic pentameter allowed the poem to flow more naturally; the imagery of falling snow and molten metals is enhanced. Contemporary poet R.F. Langley said that, 'Where I feel something else is there or I must expand in some way, etymology is one of the major places to look,'<sup>4</sup> and I have found this to be true. I replaced 'Gild' with 'Plate', because the etymology of the word taught me that gilding only applies to gold.

Throughout my folder, I have attempted to show different types of emotion in both poetry and prose, and to challenge stereotypes associated with certain images. The use of poetry allowed me to show emotion in its simplest form, such as in 'East of the Wall' in the eyes of a child. This theme was then explored further in 'Beachcombing' – raw emotion of a child learning about the world. Motifs of the familiar becoming something strange and unexpected (water to mercury, sudden deaths) can be found throughout my pieces. In each I have explored a range of human emotion and nature.

Reflective commentary word count: 1648

Creative work total word count: 3099

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<sup>3</sup> J.R.R Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, (Fourth edition George Allen & Unwin (publishers) Ltd, 1978)

<sup>4</sup> R.F. Langley 'R.F. Langley interviewed by R.F. Walker' in *Don't Start Me Talking: Interviews with Contemporary Poets* ed. Tim Allen and Andrew Duncan (Cambridge: Salt, 2006), pp. 237-257

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