

# LUDD GANG



Now October blows big  
furls from the beech tree  
hanks of twiddling leaves  
dyed yellow and green  
almost Canadian money

you can ride a bike  
or crash your truck right  
into the bower, autumn hauls  
its smoky spindles  
spore okay orange light

all perfect for picking up  
smoking again, apple  
juice flavours the earth  
under my denim  
barely a goose pimple  
the clocks haven't even  
gone back yet

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# LUDD GANG

11

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# VICKY SPARROW

## essential work

there's no heartbeat to it, no  
pattern we run all over each  
other's lives hot tea in the morning  
revives us but where do we  
go next? The wards are busy  
again  
the batteries aren't working  
again and we don't know what to  
do as they leak their salty  
gravel we tried lining up  
along the corridor to clap  
you out but no luck so we  
returned to our posts  
bewildered. What symptoms  
could do this to a person  
no one could say for  
certain that we'd reached the end  
of it stripping off on the  
threshold by the coat rack  
the spiny doormat beneath  
the feet what plastic we  
endure  
hot shower revives us  
but where do we go from  
there? the indentations  
of our faces, the crying  
nurse? what do we make of this

next life that is sadder and  
more callous than we ever  
knew! that beneath the paper  
all is soft and wrinkled and  
much, much more difficult  
my  
hands are moist all the time  
and all the time my heart is  
spilling for the empty bed  
both full and feared. Time  
moves a galaxy out of  
us how will I return how will I  
replenish these stores, reaching  
out as I darken the paper towels with  
my touch I'm watching a dribble  
pool on the gritty  
glittering lino I'm gripping the  
barrier of the bed, its blue  
waffle blanket. This is what we  
endure for each other and  
what do we so inflict? I leave  
my rubber shoes at the threshold  
trying to take something of you  
in  
in this heartbeat.

# MARK NOWAK

## Six Poems

Not another anthem but an another anathema. Another anesthesiologist. Not another anthem but another annexation, another settler occupation, more white anthropologists and their white-paged anthologies all dusty and unread in the library annex. Not another anthem but another white manthem, another Klu Klux Klanthem. Not another anthem but another rant at 'em, another gun-toting Karenthem, another Mitch McCanthem, another Steve Bannonthem. Another year older, another year whiter. Wiser? Pfizer. Another year weaponized. Another anthem, another tantrum

Black masks of the black masque. Anti-Baroque architecture (Family Dollar, Dollar Store, Dollar General, et al). Music? Atrocity Exhibition. The dumbshow begins at the top: bigly, very bigly, most bigly. Hear me? Tableau, Twitter, drive-thru Covid vaccination in an airport hangar in Plattsburgh or a college gymnasium in Utica. Black cloth mask, black surgical mask, black KN-95 mask: a materialist history. Bring out the mourners' singers, the necromancer in Milton's *Comus*, bring death magic to death's door. It is not the end that scares us so much as the beginning of the end. Cain or Abel? Genesis or Job? You choose (ha, it's chosen for you). Driving the country roads looking for this country is an unenviable beginning to the final act. Already the flags are out. Trump flags, Confederate flags, Don't Tread on Me flags rip through the wind like sleet does, like bullets would. So adorn yourself with a black surgical mask, black KN-95 mask, strap it behind your ears, breathe in, step inside, step inside.



Protests happen and nothing happens. A cop's neck is still a cop's neck. For a minute maybe and then it's back to what the news calls "breaking," worse than breaking, broke, the new neo-normal. The sun somehow unviolently rises, cracks through the darkness without a gun. Maybe the wages rise a little bit, too, but most of the businesses will eventually go out of business. It's America after all. And a cop's neck, check this out, remains a cop's neck. Emphasis on remains. I said it. Protests happen and happen. Sunrises are occasionally beautiful even if they come, like whiteness, with an expiring tendency, a best by date. Buy, grow old, mold. Breaking bread while watching Breaking Bad. Bring roses and rosé. Except, of course, for you; for you, pig's feet, chicken feet, gizzards, necks.

Ghost-drivers of the ghost-SUVs. Black & blue American flags on their back windows. The Dollar General is lined with them again. Came for fresh but all I could find was pork rinds, Orange Crush. Trump across the topography. Gethsemane, goth music of the mid-1980s (say, the choir in the opening bars of "This Corrosion"), GFUEL Energy Formula Ragin' Gummy Fish 16oz. cans ("Ships to U.S. Only"). Need I say more about u.s.? Auto body shops and excavating businesses gather up these mountain roads. LOL this phosphorescence. LOL this magenta mountainside, this disparaging into dawn at the gateways, driveways, drive thrus, drive bys. Instead just get me Oreos, Cheerios, Spaghetti O's. Land of the free ghost-drivers, home of their ghost-driven SUVs. Land of parades, charades, grenades. Rhyme over treason. Getaway vs. get away. Trump over the geography. WTF is Gunga Din. The sound of gunfire, WTF. "Amphetamine Logic." Gyro or Gyro? Just give me Newport box, white cotton tube sock, 24 oz. can of Genesee (but not the Cream Ale, please, that stuff is nasty). The small boats are already beneath their blue and green plastic tarps for what could be a very long winter (ghost-drivers snow tires at the ready). Late autumn's leaf piles lenient in an almost winter wind. These are only the excuses of this everyday working poor working pale pasted and duct-taped together life. Life he called it. LOL. Give up the ghost.

Hashtag America. Emoji American flag. What once used to be Friendly's Ice Cream on Route 20, not the one where my mom worked on Union Road in Buffalo but this one here east of Albany, boarded up wrapped up in cop tape. Hashtag Hancock Shaker Village, Housatonic River (laced with PCBs from the old GM factory). Hashtag the Homestead of Ezra Gates. New York State Trooper lights flashing behind a black Kia Forte that just hit a deer. Welcome to another New York, not the Big Apple but the bruises visible just beneath the Empire apple's skin, rotting seeds, these sectors of the state, not the lights in Times Square but the stack of unpaid electric bills stuffed inside 38.4 oz. container of Folgers Classic Roast. Hardees, Arby's, Wendy's, all the endings sound the same. Hashtag hawk, hashtag hemorrhage, hashtag about to hurl. Wanted to say the stars on the Emoji flag are tears, the stripes prison bars. Wanted to say the hashtags were a distinct type of hate. Wanted to but didn't, though I guess I just did. There, there now.

Pretend the Clorox wipes are the bridal veils of the dead brides. Pretend freezer trucks behind the hospitals are catering trucks for wedding suppers set to begin after the vows have been exchanged. Pretend hydroxychloroquine is champagne. Toast the brides and the grooms who sought to walk among us. Pretend surgical masks, hospital blue ones and three-layer black ones, are garter belts and tuxedo ties for the weddings unheld. Brides and grooms, grooms and grooms, brides and brides, lovers and their lovers, unbetrothed but buried beside each other. Pretend the ventilators are paper party horns and blow, exhale. Pretend the ivermectin is actually for the horses who will draw horse-drawn carriages away from marriage churches and city halls and down cobblestone streets to the ferry docked at the river of the dead. Pretend the KN-95 masks are the walkie-talkies of the ferry captain, son of Erebus and Nyx. Pretend that when all the brides and all the grooms copulate on the wedding beds, their skeletons leave no stains. Place your coins in the mouths of their corpses, our dear brides and dear grooms these oh so dearest lovers. Pretend for them, pretend for us. For fuck's sake just pretend.

# KANDACE SIOBHAN WALKER

## Saint Kandace II

The baby speaks like a yellow-naped  
amazon, parroting full sentences.  
Anxiety faster than a skyscraper's elevator  
reproduces, quetiapine-by-quetiapine,  
stereotyped fingers like steeples. Grown actress  
prefers repetition in her environment, ambient  
circus bulbs over supermarket aisles.  
Playing musical knuckles clears electric  
noise the way confetti streamers pattern her  
hypersensitivity to existing in this world.  
Hoist ropes in her sober speech scare the  
party guests into impenetrability, until  
complimentary box wine—social  
loaves and fishes keep everybody slapping.

Her nearly-typical mask shrinks into a pumpkin at  
midnight but she's already stumbling back to the  
elevator attendant, presenting this evening's last  
smile, the glass car filling with down and green  
feathers.

# ANDREW MCMILLAN

## no man's land

each Sunday morning the row of cars  
someone mournfully unlocking the gates  
another shouldering the bows and once  
they're all in place each arrow let fly  
towards the try-line of the rugby pitch  
where the targets sit shoulder-width apart

I used to read a boy's adventure book  
about survival with diagrams of how to make  
a slingshot out of string and old socks  
and how to use it to stun then kill  
a bird to cook and eat if food was scarce  
I crept about the garden until mum found me  
said *you wouldn't really do that would you*  
fixed me with her stare that was her answer

across the chain-link fence of the rugby club  
there are cardboard signs with Kitchener's finger  
pointing out towards the road across the road to me  
*Your Club needs you come and play* and perhaps I would  
but I'm running late to watch a friend drag himself  
through mud climb rope get himself electrocuted  
for a tshirt and a plastic medal  
sorry Kitchener! yes! yes sir! I promise  
that I'm ready for that war I know that men  
like me will never have to fight

# CHARLOTTE SHEVCHENKO KNIGHT

sisterhood

in theory disasters unfold  
in pairs

it is as though we lived  
on either side  
of a distorted mirror

she'd shake her leg  
& i'd cry uncontrollably  
my cursive frown  
mistaken for laughter

i do not go to church  
worry the building will collapse  
in on itself as i enter

my sister does not mind the falling  
she is often on her knees  
nursing some small animal

like prayers dropped dead  
from the sky

# JOSEPH MINDEN

## *from Paddock Calls*

Where the place? A heath, Paddock at the edge with her note. A drowsy bank, intricate with flowers. A fen, stretched out in the wordlessness of memory. A school.

A school fringed round with oxlips, violets, wild thyme and honeysuckle. A school built in an old field on the edge of a new town, dressed in ribbons like Mollie the carthorse. In the meadow at the end of the fen. A bespoke facility. A public-private partnership.

A neat grid, marked out in assured white paint. A punctilious grid, the mesh of the fence surrounding the tennis courts. An austere grid, the wide glass windows of the school. An undistinguishable grid, lines trembling in pixels.

Every morning, I come to a stop before the fence and stare at the chemical blue of the tennis court. They arrive.

Hail. Old friends, doubled. Faces ghoulish in the northern aspect, blushing in the southern. From gorse and fibrous



sinews of roots to the wild uncertain  
rose, light-tongued sweet brier, apple-  
like, shouldering fragrances. Hail. Hail.  
Hail.

Hail, old faces, pageant of translucent  
petals, strains from dual climates. All hail  
my sisters, dressed in tatters of  
executive wind. All hail my Cobweb, my  
Blossom, my Moth, hazy, half-  
recognised, resurgent. And hail my  
familiar equivalent. Paddock. There at  
the edge of the fen.

And wakes it now to look so green and  
pale? Learning is something that has to  
be sustained. Can it be sustained under  
such pressure? Paddock distant and  
unperturbed, waiting like a rock in the  
middle of a sound.

Finally, in the beginning of spring.  
Ditchling Beacon, from where you drive  
down into the sky, coming to every  
morning levitating on a carpet. From  
where you drive down onto the multi-  
coloured pile of mid-Sussex, where  
golden knights strafe the trees.  
Thameslink. Tranquility of stupefaction.

But it is only interstitial morning. One of  
the many trick mornings of the night,  
niches in the castle wall. And yet I would  
not sleep, sitting in my car at the tennis

court. Suddenly, the grid in the fence.  
Harmless there. Almost dissolved by sky.

So into the Resources Room. All hail,  
colleagues. Moth: the lid of their  
tupperware. A salad of lettuce and sliced  
frankfurters. Popping the little pink discs  
happily into their mouth. Killing swine.

Cobweb swings one leg over another  
and tucks into their couscous. The  
graphic novel Black Hole. This virus in  
the background, just a kind of buzz.  
Mustardseed coughs into their mask.  
The bell goes and suddenly the room is  
empty, folded up and slid into the soul.

## §

half a thought to  
interview, Colman  
blimp inflatable  
mustard dummy  
over three lakes  
hairpin rollicking lawn  
no end of dream pageant coming out  
haunting the blades and daisies  
with theatrics  
silly tenacities  
the Teach First scum tree  
dreg squadron  
small-time Mussolini club

cudgelling your book  
into distant damnation  
here come the students  
of Pimlico  
of Petchey  
Academy, bursting  
the wire knives  
of their entrainment  
Red Cross knight stuck  
on his true tears  
congregate at the entrance  
playing fields chained shut  
talk to your friends  
the principal discovers himself  
an iron thimble  
mushroom foreplanted, glade care  
Securicor edge  
and good thoughts of a coffee shop  
too much wig, say, in the face to think  
is *this* thought, to that  
sandstone faun  
blended off pantheon  
drones on pudding parade  
yolk slopes  
conciliatory facades as  
whole air vents, grid events  
a thousand white electric miniatures  
marching over the drawbridge  
depression  
into the castle  
old slow moon  
waned, quickly dreams

away the time  
weak sweat  
soaked into cotton  
washed off and  
vanished down the plughole

§

I have just sat with Mustardseed in the midst of low babble discussing the beautiful violence of fire. Out of the window, dressed in the witching hour's holographic fabric, the tree has thin fingers shaking. Yellow buds. Intermittent sleeves of yellow lichen. Corridors ankle deep in water, everybody wading through the needs of a pupil.

If Friday could be cut open and bleed into permanent stupor; Saturday afternoon in bed with Kat, the real estate agent Knock and Nosferatu. And Cobweb, found driving their keys into their forearms. Crying in lessons. And when you ask why, the grid steps out of your mouth wearing your voice, owle, shrieking his balefull note, violent silhouette in which a rusty knife fast fixed stood, falls dead in the face of their need.

We go down to the sea. Caterwauling weather. Rain is as spray of ghost waves and out there is the moonshine of windmills. Dread's shadow passing, twelve to twelve. All the rivers that sink east out of the island. Monday morning, like an eye opening into a cave.

There is a new pupil in the school today: Count Orlok. Soft waves of panic. Almost like Blossom in the Resources Room looking at red peppers. Numerous times, adults turn right or left through doorways and just keep on falling.

Deposit this howl in me, Sir Palomides.  
O, my armour is heavy and the bough of  
this yew tree cushiony hard.

## §

try out my teeth on  
get sorry  
factory pastry, that bitter  
conveyor-drawn carriage  
intricate, post-ball  
flake comedown  
vista that conceals in levels  
burns rushing  
out of the clients' ears  
such their gianthood  
single-growth courthouses

aptitude and ermine trim  
the central civic highway  
students on exam benefits  
assessments on life support  
the Duke of Edinburgh  
tossing in the furrowed sheets  
out of the dark-bright dark  
fore-white  
green castle  
mossy oak shifting its limb  
with some tower of sword  
pearlness on the paintwork  
where the maid who  
un-ate the chicken's balance lives  
in discord with her master  
ever sharpening the knife  
like the bed is the sea  
I keep massing up  
breaking apart  
tempest-tossed  
saturated later on  
brainsickly  
all because the word is the same  
when I can't do this  
you heath-hags, serrated sisters  
night a rag from off your backs

# JIMMY CUMMINS

I might just leave poetry to those who give a fuck

the air can't breathe  
stuck skin and sweat to the sheets  
every day i hope to write  
in the absence of life  
i find the city sounds comforting  
revving, the final chat  
the first rests  
the second is oil slick  
the third and final act is tragic  
is every poem a carcass  
being dragged around and made to dance?  
we can dress up the dead but they are still dead  
sometimes the motion is caught midstream  
a singular vessel  
remade in different gear  
from soil or story or thread  
we risk nothing  
but find an empty glass  
the late distil  
somewhere i lost  
my treacle blood  
in fairness  
we gutter in the eaves  
silent flaying  
press send and repeat

look busy and repeat  
repent and repeat  
we flock to the dead horse  
open its mouth and look in  
hoping to find gifts  
glossy worked and workshopped to shit  
caught the line  
hoped it was a fish  
kick back back slap slap stick stick man man hole hole punch  
punch bag  
as the line swells and sails  
the city tries  
i can't finish a poem  
for the life left to lose  
in middle c  
run through the history with sorrow  
one time more  
three times four  
flip the gravelcade  
into touch  
a word to break up play  
there is excitement on the street  
verbal in infinite jest  
denying abstraction  
splice the leaf  
split the seam  
surrender the fall  
where the line splinters  
jockeying for slaps  
the night rolls in



## Eleven

i would mimic my obsession with yellow  
your gestured spanish rose  
memory and time rose and roared  
out of step full bodied voices  
trapped as a descriptor  
in magnetic tape too hot to sleep  
reinstate the shades i would like to  
pull from the ceiling along the way  
living on a hill avoiding the trials  
nothing is a surprise so i sit quietly  
the future rolls in watching burnt things burn

## Don't Look Now

it is not the inside or the capital gains that matters  
the idea alone of the singular focus  
beyond our ability to be

oh christ we ball around and play  
rick roll and crash the party  
to be left waning like the monday mornings of yore

when fathoms are measured and sunk  
bring forth the conjecture  
praise the glory of our special awareness

eyes lit by each passing burning shit pile  
rebuke upon the outer rim of some science fiction fantasy  
the day has come crushed full crush nothing in half measures

where there is force there is the silent  
strings of bells in the wind go a blowin'  
those soft upward facing lilts of fancy

# KAT SINCLAIR

Royston Smith MP

Misery loves cornering you in the Sainsbury's up the road  
to demand it, on-the-spot, real-time,  
no lag no catch-up no secretary no 'no debate' no 'no casework'  
no 'local lad made good worked in a bike shop has the  
lowest attendance rate of any Member' it would impress me if I weren't  
a potential investment zone incapable of feeling just, absolutely gridded.

Cornering you in the Sainsbury's up the road is of course  
absolutely fucking pointless but Misery has not been able to see a GP  
since Misery's second child was born and, it's worth a go--  
that's the joke. For a fuller dissection of the set-up and execution,  
do send me an email. I'll respond (that's the punchline) within five  
working days. Do you get it?

The Sainsbury's up the road has two exits, not ideal for cornering  
for conversation or for Misery coming up from below to take it back:  
Bitterne Road West reclaimed and dug-out, piles of concrete  
obstructing the bike lanes--sorry. I can't do this, electoralism  
mid-the-cereals, the least Romantic day of my whole 53 week tax year  
this, uninspiring slop: mass produced.

# LUKE ROBERTS

## Prolific Unfinished Work

Hug tight to the building  
on my ankle, weight  
did I mention  
the economic gentians  
different speeds  
I call it autumn  
unequal pulses to begin with  
but soon you are tangled in wire.  
No more antics  
gone chewed-up and tacky  
the statement, the feeling,  
all followed by a pause.  
You couldn't fail to serenade  
the landfill  
lullaby the sleeping  
pilots on the sea  
who cry out for more  
caressing the wall  
with water & air  
the premise of love  
sun & dust  
bone & muscle  
then I open my mouth

# ELENI POULOU

The sound was uncollected  
Personal  
The sound was uncollected  
Strong  
The sound was uncollected  
Two visible colours, two hidden from view

Smoothly gliding down the former airport street  
Nobody said a word on that bus  
The pattern of camouflage on the seats seemed to shift  
Say no to all barbecues  
But Wolfgang () s best friend is here  
He said  
Trying to induce FOMO  
I RESIST

It was now out I the open  
Open season of all the glimmering and the hope

It was  
Uncollected  
Strong

Uncollected

Leaning forward  
Small  
Leaning forward



## Vital, Essential, Singular Guardian Plug

**The Poets' Hardship Fund** is really low on donations. The 'cost of living crisis' obviously amounts to a sort of public flogging of the working class and unemployed. Business as usual but with the thumbscrew turned some more. Please send anything you can spare to the paypal poetshardshipfunduk@gmail.com for redistribution.

Check out the **Leeds Poetry Studio** for future readings and workshops, or to use its library of pamphlets and poetry books as a study space. It's 'a free resource for anyone interested in reading, studying or writing poetry, regardless of experience, past publications or institutional affiliation.' Shire Oak Studios, Leeds, LS6 2TN. See [www.leedspetrystudio.co.uk](http://www.leedspetrystudio.co.uk) for info on how to book it and get involved.

Tim Wolf's *Participation Medal* is now out from **Gong Farm**. Bonnie Hancell & Elle Lo's *Untitled, or, in the stupid stupid present where I was living* is also still on sale (both £6.50 in UK). Head to [gongfarm.cargo.site](http://gongfarm.cargo.site) for these and others.

Lily Greenham's reprinted *Tune in to Reality!* and Ali Graham's *Shade Song / Sea Dream* are available from **Distance No Object** (£8/£5 inc. P&P) at [distancenoobject.cargo.site](http://distancenoobject.cargo.site).

**Face Press** are selling limited editions of Timothy Thornton's *Nothing Worked* (including an original painting by Ian Heames) for £150 each, with all the money going to support the Poets' Hardship Fund. Contact them to arrange purchase. More info and books at [face-press.org](http://face-press.org).

Issue contributor **Joseph Minden** recently published the collaborative *Woodvale* (a fiver) and *Paddock Calls* (8 quid)- to buy, paypal the money and your address to [joe.jnm@gmail.com](mailto:joe.jnm@gmail.com) (all profits to the PHF).

*The Daily Telegraph* probably have some poetry collections to recommend, some really classic debuts, but we recommend you get a pile of them out of your nearest supermarket and take a piss. Have fun.

