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## Goodbye paper Anglophile! Hello digital Anglophile!

**This is the final *Anglophile* to drop on your doormat. You will have to live without that tremendous feeling of joy you get when you spot the envelope, when you fumble with faintly shivering fingers to open it as quickly as possible to find a freshly printed magazine. The paper *Anglophile* is no more. It has ceased to be. It has gone to meet its maker. It ... you know the drill.**

But how will you keep in touch with your fellow alumni? What will you read now that you have to do without all those lovely stories brought to you since the first issue of 1998? The bad news is that this is not a joke: we are really cancelling the *Anglophile* on paper. The good news is that we are going to present you with a brand new digital edition of the *Anglophile*. This summer we (board and editors) will create a completely new magazine which you will receive in your mailbox. Its arrival by email will soon sound as familiar to you as a magazine dropping on your doormat.

A new format needs fresh ideas. Who would like to join our league of correspondents? No need to go to editorial meetings or what not. You can just get in touch with us, offering your ideas or stories. Drop us a line through our horribly long mail address:

alumniclubengelsingroningen@gmail.com.  
Of course, you are also welcome to join our editorial board.

Speaking of which: we are also taking leave of our esteemed editor-in-chief Geart van der Meer, who decided it is time to finally retire. We would like to thank him very much for all his work, his stories and of course for the firm, but friendly way he made sure all of you got your *Anglophiles* in time and in good shape. Without your persistence, Geart, there would have been a lot less *Anglophiles*! So, thank you and hopefully we can still look forward to an occasional contribution to the new *Anglophile*. Perhaps about your next Frisian translation?

Since from now on *Anglophiles* will arrive by digital highway instead of by postal services, we need all of your email addresses. So, if you are used to getting all our invoices and invitations by post, please let us know your mail address. You can drop us a line by using the above impossible mail address.

**Finally, on page 3 you will find an announcement from the Board about a group visit to Diever, where this year Shakespeare's KING LEAR will be performed. Read on!**

## Murder Mystery Event postponed!

### New date: Saturday 10th of November 2018

As you will have noticed, we had to cancel our get-together on 26th of May due to a lack of participants. Since we still like the idea of a meeting involving a gruesome murder mystery, we decided to pick a new date. Obviously, Spring is not a good time for planning events. Hopefully, more of you will have time to visit Groningen when it is cold and dark outside and there are no garden parties, family weekends, BBQ feasts or other summerlike events keeping you from getting together with your fellow alumni.

So please jot down this new date in your diary, smartphone or on your kitchen calendar: we will see you on Saturday 10th of November 2018, around two o'clock. We will send you a proper invitation in autumn with all the details.

Hope to see you then!

On behalf of the board:  
Monique, Marjan, Reinou, Aurora and Nienke

# Good day to you, dear reader!

Elke Maasbommel



My name is Elke Maasbommel, I am twenty-six years old, live in Groningen, and will be writing for the *Anglophile* from now on. I studied English in Groningen, like all of you, and I got both my Bachelor's and my Master's degree there. After I had finished my Master's degree in English Literature, I decided I wanted to become a teacher, so I started doing the teacher training too. Now, three years later, I am still a teacher at a secondary school in Groningen, and enjoying it

immensely. Apart from teaching, I have also had the pleasure of giving a couple of lectures on literature. There is no better feeling than being able to share your true passion with a group of people who want to know more about that particular topic. My plan for the future is combining my teaching job with giving lectures in the evening, and making a living out of it.

And now for some more personal things: I was born in Kollum, Friesland, where I lived until I started studying. I knew I wanted to study English when I was about fifteen years old, after I had attended the Open Day at the University of Groningen. As I had always loved

reading, studying literature sounded like some kind of heaven to me. You might say I was a product of my generation: a fan of Harry Potter and all things British, from the country itself to their music and comedy. Thankfully I eventually grew up and acquired a personal taste.

I'm fond of sports, especially tennis and volleyball, which I've played for almost as long as I can remember. I enjoy music, sixties and seventies in particular, and some contemporary bands. Some of my friends are now earless, due to me talking them off regarding music, so I'll try to go easy on that topic in my writing. I also love food; love cooking it with friends and loved ones, and love talking about it. And reading, of course. My students at school always stare in awe when I tell them I read over a book a week, regardless of the genre or number of pages. My special interest lies in children's literature, as I feel there's always so much more to find in it than one thinks on a first read. I might tell you some more about that in a later article.

Why I am writing for the *Anglophile* all of a sudden, you wonder? I heard about there being a vacancy, and since I had written quite a few things in the past, I decided to give it a go again. I had wanted to write for quite some time again, but never found the time – or made the time for it, really. Let's hope you will enjoy the things I have to say, as much as I enjoy writing them!

## This is not a thriller

Frans Hempen

So I wrote this book. *Woudbloem* started out as an idea for a screenplay, back in the early nineties. A short news article about the potential correlation between natural gas extraction and earth tremors in Groningen sparked an image in my mind: a farmer rushing home to a collapsed farmhouse. Some twenty years later the Huizinge earthquake of 3.6 on the Richter scale made it crystal clear that the people of Groningen are sitting on a time bomb. *What if it went off.*

The stick that ultimately prodded me into action was a book that I would recommend to any aspiring writer. It is simply called *Story*, by American Robert McKee, grumpy old man of the Hollywood screenwriting trade. In May 2015 I attended his three-day workshop in Amsterdam. I was in awe of Mr. McKee's passion for movies, his insight into storytelling and his unapologetic use of colorful language. His opening statement to the 200+ audience was: 'If any of you are allergic to cursing, there's the fucking door.'

*Woudbloem* is a story about a father who suffers the greatest loss: the death of a child. His thirteen-year-old daughter does

not survive the strongest earthquake to date in the gas fields east of Groningen city. This event sets him on a fast-paced flight from grief disguised as a quest for justice. The big question – I am inclined to say – is whether there is redemption at the end of the road. Can balance be restored; can anything good come out of this terrible incident?

By the time of the McKee workshop I had completed my story outline and decided that the screenplay would become a novel. As the odds of getting any original screenplay produced are terrible, I figured I'd be better off giving the story the shape of a novel or thriller. This took me about three and a half years. I like to call it my slow marathon with hurdles, those hurdles being my day job, family life, vacation time, recovering from lumbar decompression surgery, etc. Don't get me wrong, I consider them all major blessings in my life. Even the back recovery (one word: yoga...). But they do get in the way of writing speed.

The biggest hurdle was my lack of a voice as a novelist/thriller writer. I decided that I would serve the story best by writing from

the outside in. I would use as simple a language as I could restrain myself to produce. I would express the actors' desire and fear in showing them in action. That would leave room for the reader to project their emotions onto the screen of their imagination. I would write the story like a movie.

I spent a lot of time on the 'production design'. Last year, my accountant asked me how an invoice for a tour of the FC Groningen football stadium could pass for a business expense. Not to mention the ticket for climbing the Martini tower. Well, I was able to say quite truthfully that both were purchased for research purposes. One of the many perks of writing this story was that it took me back to the city where I spent eight formative years. Prinsentuin, Noorderplantsoen, the train station are all fond locations in *Woudbloem*. Even our former Alpha Gebouw is featured, in a memory flashback of the protagonist. Call it a little indulgence on the writer's part.

Have you seen the Academy Award winning documentary *Man on a Wire*, or the feature film *The Walk*, about the Frenchman who walked a tight rope between the Twin



Towers? Well, that's how I felt as I was heading to the climactic scenes of the story. I was out there on the wire, without endless years of practice and French brass balls. On June 30th 2017, I gave the finished manuscript to Joanna, my wife, as a birthday gift. Eleven days later, on my own birthday, I presented it to a select group of 'prereaders' after visiting the Martin Scorsese exhibition at the EYE Filmmuseum. Movies, Catholicism, power and corruption, betrayal and guilt, obsessions that I humbly share with the formidable Mr. Scorsese. The prereaders turned out to be my solid safety net. They offered generous encouragement and frank criticism during the homestretch of the writing process. It took another six months to fix the flaws in my telling of the story. That would be my second piece of advice: gather a bunch of reliable, smart people to save your story from yourself.

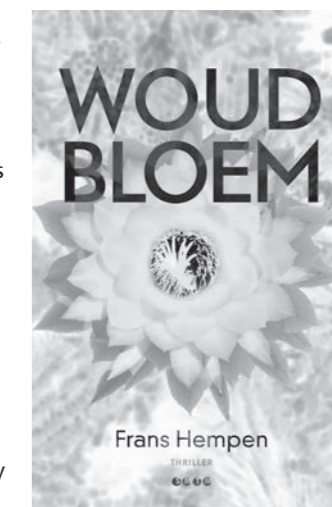
There is a point in the creative writing process where you feel in complete control. You know every sentence, what its purpose is, what lies underneath, what metaphor it serves. But this is a fleeting moment. And anyway, as soon as the printed books arrive, the idea of control becomes fiction. From that moment on you're just another reader. It's the readers' response that brings the story to life. *Woudbloem* has elicited many thrilled responses from different corners. Most readers seem to agree that the book is indeed a thriller and hard to put down. Many note that the protagonist does at least one or two things that they find hard to stomach. That's excellent news, I think. Who cares about a character without any flaws? One woman wrote to me that she had wanted to bring the book to the hospital where she had to undergo cancer treatment. But she couldn't wait and had already finished it. The story had connected her

back to her roots in Loppersum, in the heartland of this slow-motion disaster. That kind of response is a gift far beyond what I had expected.

*Woudbloem* has the word thriller on the cover. That is partly promise, partly disguise. As a reader you may expect to be hooked by this story. My first job was to lead you on a path to an emotionally and intellectually satisfying end. But, as is the case with many of the characters and incidents in the story, there may be more to *Woudbloem* than meets the eye. I kindly invite you to take a closer look.

*Woudbloem can be ordered at your local bookstore for a fair price: € 24.95 (paperback, 369 pp.) or € 9.95 (e-pub with watermark). You can read a 15-page sneak preview at woudbloemboek.nl.*

*If you care about my kids' education, you will order your copy directly from my website. We will donate one euro per copy sold to a cause supporting the fight for justice for Groningen, yet to be announced.*



## Learning from Lear

Since King Lear is a play with some important life lessons, our field trip can be considered an actual educational experience! Lear encounters flattery, honesty, rejection, politics, love and trickery, while his mental health borders on insanity as he needs to settle his inheritance.

In Diever on the 1st of September, the members of the alumni association will observe Lear's learning process, while enjoying some drinks and snacks in a group of approximately 25 people (evening show).

Want to join us? We have a last minute cancellation and no replacement yet.

Mail us at [alumniclubengelsingroningen@gmail.com](mailto:alumniclubengelsingroningen@gmail.com) if you would like to join the group.

KING LEAR (in 3 Panels)



## The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, by Muriel Spark

Muriel Spark was born in Edinburgh in 1918. She wrote novels, short stories, poems and essays. Her first novel, *The Comforters*, was published in 1957 when Spark was thirty-nine years old. She also wrote her own autobiography entitled *Curriculum Vitae*, although she later commissioned Professor Martin Stannard to write up her biography.

Spark was notoriously difficult to deal with and alienated almost everyone in her life, including her son. She lived in Italy for more than thirty years and shared a Tuscan farmhouse there with her secretary Penelope Jardine. They were rumoured to be involved in a lesbian relationship but Spark always denied this. Muriel Spark died in 2006 at the age of eighty-eight, leaving her estate to Jardine. Sparks's son Robin, an artist, died in 2016.

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is considered Spark's most successful novel. Its protagonist, schoolmistress Jean Brodie, was modelled on Christina Kay, one of Spark's teachers when she attended James Gillespie's High School for Girls.

Jean Brodie, who teaches at Marcia Blaine School for Girls, is one of Scotland's best loved fictional characters although I am not sure why that is. She's a complex character: loyal and charismatic, but also scheming, obsessive and self-centred, and she has fascist sympathies. I feel that this darker side certainly makes Brodie a memorable character, but loveable? Not really.

Brodie has selected five girls from one of her classes who become known as the Brodie set. Brodie lavishes these girls with special, but inappropriate attention, the least harmful being dinner invitations and extra tuition at her home; the more questionable being her intention to have one of the girls (Rose) enter into a sexual relationship with a married colleague she's in love with herself, and sending another girl to Spain to fight for Franco.

Interestingly, throughout the novel, we are never inside Brodie's head. We know what she says but we don't know what she's thinking and we only get to know her through the experience the Brodie set has of her.

The Brodie set consists of Sandy Stranger, Monica Douglas, Rose Stanley, Jenny Gray and Mary Macgregor. All girls are assigned a specific quality. For example, Monica 'was

famous' for mathematics but also for her anger and Rose 'was famous' for sex. In their turn, the girls are intrigued by Brodie. They take an interest in her personal life, especially where it concerns her love-affairs. Brodie shares a kiss with art teacher Teddy Lloyd, unaware that one of the girls catches them in the act. Lloyd is the love of Brodie's life but because he is married she breaks off their affair and starts another one with music teacher Gordon Lowther. He is a bachelor, which is more convenient, but Lowther ends up marrying Miss Lockhart, the science teacher.

Aware of Brodie's involvement with two of her colleagues, the Brodie set is mesmerized by the idea of sexual activity between them and the girls watch Brodie's tummy like hawks for signs of pregnancy. Sandy Stranger takes an interest in Brodie's bosom and wonders why it appears flat one day and huge on another. It is evident that this is a novel about the female experience: females at different stages of their lives.

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* is a story told in hindsight and largely revolves around Brodie's obsession with finding out who betrayed her. In a proleptic scene (a scene that flashes forward in time) we are told early in the novel that this person is in fact Sandy, ironically, the person Brodie trusts and confides in the most. Initially, I wondered if the use of prolepsis wasn't spoiling the novel as certain questions are answered rather quickly. I then realised however that this wasn't the case as we only find out at the end what the betrayal was about. Besides, seeing the girls as adults through the use of prolepsis makes them rounder characters.

When Brodie creepily states, 'Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life' (p. 9) it becomes clear that there is a thin line between being an inspira-



Muriel Spark

tional teacher and being downright smothering. Yet, through Spark's use of prolepsis we discover that Brodie was speaking the truth when she said this. The girls keep in touch with her until the day she dies (from a growth) at the age of fifty-six. Even after Brodie's death, the remaining members of the Brodie set (Mary died in a hotel fire) meet every summer at the nunnery where Sandy resides and where she is known as Sister Helena of the Transfiguration.

It is only when Brodie learns that Sandy has become a nun that it occurs to her that it may have been Sandy who betrayed her and she wonders if Sandy joined a nunnery to annoy her. Although Brodie wanted Rose to have an affair with art teacher Teddy Lloyd it was Sandy who had a five-week affair with him when she came to his house (like Rose) to pose for paintings. Brodie is not pleased about it and asks Sandy what possessed her (p. 123).

At one point in the novel there is a sixth girl, Joyce Emily, who is keen to join the Brodie set. This girl, indirectly, becomes Brodie's downfall.

### SPOILER ALERT!

When Brodie urges Joyce to fight in the Spanish Civil War, she sets off for Spain but dies in a train crash. Brodie, oblivious to Sandy's dislike of her, truthfully answers Sandy's probing questions about Joyce's fate. That is when Sandy decides that enough is enough. When she next meets with headmistress Miss Mackay, a meeting in which we learn that Brodie has selected a new set of girls, she says that the only thing she is interested in is 'putting a stop to Miss Brodie' (p.125). Sandy even advises the headmistress on which approach to take: 'You won't be able to pin her down on sex,' Sandy tells her, 'but have you thought of politics?' (p. 124). After years of unsuccessful attempts at having Brodie removed from her position for inappropriate conduct and unorthodox teaching methods that deviate from the standard curriculum, Miss Mackay can have her sacked at last. On the grounds of Fascism.

Throughout the novel, Brodie frequently refers to being in her prime. She tells the girls that it is important to know when one is in their prime. However, half way through the novel, there is another proleptic scene in which Brodie has lunch with Sandy.



Brodie is seriously ill and made redundant from her job. She admits that she is now past her prime (p. 56). At the end of the novel Sandy and Eunice discuss Miss Brodie and decide that she was fun 'when she was in her prime' (p. 127).

In the foreword, author Candida McWilliam calls the novel 'technically beyond praise' (xiii) and I agree. Spark constantly jumps through time, even mixing proleptic scenes (not to be confused with foreshadowing although Spark applies that too) with analeptic scenes (flashbacks), without ever being unclear or confusing. She accomplishes this by meticulously reinforcing time and place and by repeating keywords to

guide her readers. It is therefore Spark's craftsmanship that makes this novel an unforgettable book for me.

## Ducal jocularity

Henk Dragstra

**Given a choice between *The Royal House of Windsor* and *The Crown*, now both on Netflix, I'd definitely go for the former. It's a revealing documentary about the British royal family (pronounced *royl famly*), with sensational historical footage. But *The Crown* makes a good fictional counterpart. Its fictional elements are obvious: Elizabeth is depicted as a kind of saint throughout, counterbalanced in the plot by an arch-villain. Edward, Duke of Windsor is the latter's name; he was King Edward VIII for a few months before he abdicated in 1936.**

The reason for this king's drastic step was that British custom forbade him to marry the woman of his choice, being a divorcee. This meant passing the burden of kingship to his younger brother 'Bertie', who was considered unfit for it. *The House of Windsor* duly recounts this, as well as showing how Bertie coped; in *The Crown*, much is made of the elder brother's shirking of his royal duty. Later on both series divulge, with documentary proof, that Edward, or David as his original name was, made overtures to Hitler before war with Britain was declared. In *The Crown* this is understood to mean that he conspired with the Nazis against his own country. After this act of high treason viewers of *The Crown* cannot but feel utter contempt for the erstwhile Prince Charming.

Alex Jennings portrays His Dukeship as a despicable character indeed, self-indulgent, self-pitying, self-romanticizing, yet mercilessly sharp-tongued where others are concerned. What with all the sympathy that the series lavishes on Elizabeth, viewers cannot help but be horrified to hear the man nickname his little niece 'Shirley Temple'. What a demeaning name to call the young Princess!

Shirley Temple, to refresh the readers' memory, was a Hollywood child star of the 1930s, who acted, sang and danced and became fabulously popular. In retrospect her acting seems a matter of automatic obedience to the director's instructions rather than talent: with her golden ringlets and short skirts she resembles a mechanical doll rather than a real child. But then, similar objections could be made to many grown-up actresses and actors of her time.

As *The Crown* presents young Elizabeth to us, any comparison to the Hollywood child star would seem grossly unfair. Where Shirley was showy and sassy, shaking her little hips at every snap of the director's fingers, Elizabeth is demure, docile and dutifully reserved.

No mop of blonde curls for her: like her sister Margaret, she is a brunette, and her hair only slightly wavy. It took a nasty character like the Duke of Windsor to even imagine any resemblance between the two.

Or did it? Young Elizabeth and Shirley Temple did have a few things in common. There were only two years between them: Elizabeth was born 21 April 1926, Shirley 28 April 1928. They shared a fate that condemned them to a childhood of playing a scripted part before audiences numbering millions. Both were from an early age groomed for public appearances, faking obligatory feelings and suppressing their genuine emotions.

In fact the similarity between the two girls was driven home to the American cinema public when in 1935 20th Century Fox built Little Miss Temple a luxury bungalow featuring a big mural depicting her as a fairy-tale princess wearing a gold star on her head. In 1939 it produced the Technicolor feature film *The Little Princess*, which became a huge box-office success. It includes a



*The Little Princess and her court jester* (1939; picture from Wikipedia)

famous dream sequence (you can check it on YouTube) in which the young protagonist sits crowned and enthroned in an Old King Cole style court. Wallis Simpson, David's American wife, may well have seen the film and drawn her husband's attention to it.

Shirley, in short, was marketed as America's crown princess, in the lavish and thumping style that was Hollywood's trademark. But what is less well known is that British royal propaganda did a rather similar job on Elizabeth. At the time of her birth her uncle David was yet a bachelor, and as long as he did not produce offspring little Elizabeth would have to do for Heir Presumptive. To make the British public ready for her was a task undertaken by the British media, and by one lady author in particular.

Her name was Anne Ring, 'formerly attached to H.R.H. the Duchess of York's Household', and the book she wrote was entitled *The Story of Princess Elizabeth, told with the Sanction of her Parents*. Published in 1930, it was 'Illustrated with many Photogravures', and what sweet pictures they were.

But let's first see what Miss Ring has to tell us about 'the World's best-known Baby, another precious Princess Elizabeth, whose future holds possibilities as richly romantic as those of the first of her name'. Her Mother, it goes without saying, was 'all glorious within', and 'her beauty lay not merely in the charm of her face, but had its source in the tender and understanding qualities of her heart'. The baby's cot was 'neither ostentatious nor elaborate, but soft as down and white as a snowdrift', and its wardrobe 'a quantity of almost fairy garments so delicately wrought were they'.

Part of her early months were spent at the Scottish castle of Glamis: 'Imagine a garden walled about with close-clipt hedges, a formal dark-green frame for grey stone terraces, mossy banks and intimate benches, and a delicate jewel of a fountain, where Cupid from a pedestal pours water into a shallow pool, a pool filled with mosaic work of the brightest turquoise blue. And on either side of the fountain stretches an herbaceous border, which day after day, unfolds a new miracle of beauty, paid court to by a multitude of bees. To this magic place, then, Princess Elizabeth would be wheeled each morning...'. A charming vision indeed; though one wonders how much of it the royal three-months-old was able to take in.

Soon the delightful infant revealed her royal and celestial nature: 'She was sitting up by herself in the middle of the huge Chesterfield, like a white fluff of thistledown, with her dainty Columbine skirts arranged around her — a queen upon her throne.' When it was time to retire 'the Duchess threw around her daughter's head, to protect her from draughty passages, a filmy veil of gossamer, from which she looked down out of her nurse's arms smiling angelically at her Mother, like a cherub out of a cloud'. All done with a few yards of silk and gauze.

Later, near another royal mansion, she 'took brief walks with her Mother, and under the amazing green of the beeches, called up by thoughts of her own childhood, the Duchess would see troops of memories dancing fairy-like through the wood. But Princess Elizabeth didn't see them; she saw only a mist of bluebells and the starry faces of wood anemones, and opening her small arms wide, she imagined with the lovely faith of youthfulness that she was holding all the beauty within them'. And back to Glamis, where at a garden party she moved among the guests 'like some small sun-fairy, quite without self-consciousness and intent on her own concerns, with her curls brushed into a pale fluff and her tiny figure arrayed in a frock composed of primrose frills.' This is truly inspired writing, prompted perhaps by Cicely Mary Barker's *Flower Fairy* books, which were bestsellers in the 'twenties.



*The elves and I and lilies tall*  
*Rejoicing in life's Festival (H.R.H. The Duke of York)*

Oh yes, dear readers, little Elizabeth was a delight to all, from the wise old King her Grandpapa down to her own dear doting Nanny. From castle to palace she went, from strength to strength, and from one touching incident to another, culminating by the date of the book's publication in a four-year-old of immaculate charm and dignity. Who could wish her anything but the brightest future? Says Miss Ring: 'Soon she will be running eagerly towards the beckoning beauty of Childhood's enchanted wood, and in its magic Princess Elizabeth will meet knights, heroes, and dragons, witches, elves and fairies, robbers and red Indians — there will be governesses in the woods and lesson-books, rewards and punishments and playtime, ponies to learn to ride and pets to feed and fondle — and she will learn in the wood a thousand thousand things that are never printed in black and white between the prim covers of lesson-books.' Thus, with a faint echo of Edmund Spenser's glorification of Elizabeth I as the Faerie Queene, Anne Ring extolled that queen's latter-day namesake as a Fairy Princess.

Interspersed between the narrative we find the title-page's promise of 'many Photogravures' amply fulfilled. Only two of them can be reproduced here, showing us the Princess in all the fairy-tale splendour that her biographer described so gushingly. Surely even the most hard-hearted subject could not but feel love and pride at the sight of such a promising future Queen.

The differences with the promoting of Shirley Temple are evident enough. Where the latter was unremittingly coached to please film viewers with acting, song, and dance, the royal heir in her early infancy merely had to let herself be coddled, while a whole court provided the required glamour, and a biographer the romantic touches. But the marketing of the two young ladies does share the



*Shirley Temple*



*Princess Elizabeth*

saccharine presentation and the association of royalty with fairy-tales. Moreover, as the pictures show, they were both groomed for cuteness so as to make them look remarkably alike: wide frilly skirts; obliging doll-like smiles; and topping all, lavish golden curls.

Like the Emperor's new clothes in reverse, the resemblance between the two juvenile icons was there all the time; but it would have been bad form, bordering on lese majesty, for British subjects to remark upon it. That 'David' broke the taboo may have been

more a matter of himself being royalty than of a spiteful and jealous disposition. More than anyone else he must have been aware of the constricting pressure of the royal propaganda machine, and of what the public wanted to see. As 'Prince Charming' he had been a public icon himself, and experienced the fickleness of popular favour.

Where *The Crown* shows us only Uncle David's sarcasm, there was certainly more than a grain of true insight in the historical Duke of Windsor's gibe. And perhaps even a crumb of commiseration.

## A new harvest of short stories

Until the beginning of this century, creative writing was not considered to be the business of academic staff or students; but times have changed. Our department embarked on a more businesslike course when it introduced the graduate course in Writing, Editing and Mediation, or WEM for short. Anglophile featured an article on this new departure in the February 2016 issue. The course includes creative writing assignments; we present some of its best recent results here.

### The other side

Rhea Holleman

An unreal, almost vibrating sense of excitement ruled the studio that day. Unable to account for these high expectations, Jeremy dreaded the next section of the show, which would be in the hands of James May, most boring man alive.

'And now over to Captain Slow, who is taking the new Bugatti Veyron out for a spin on the track as we speak', he says as the screen flickers to life.

Meanwhile, James May, sick of his nickname, had decided to use a small amount of LSD, hoping the drugs might stimulate impulsive behaviour and improve his reputation of being an insufferable bore.

He is speeding over the racetrack, waiting for the drugs to kick in, as an enormous door suddenly appears in the middle of the road. James desperately tries to avoid a collision as he yanks on the steering wheel, but he is driving too fast. He closes his eyes but the expected impact never takes place. He hears the adrenaline roaring through his body as he opens his eyes.

All his sensations kick in on the other side as the road smells like green rubber and his attention is drawn to a pedestrian crossing where Jim Morrison, or is it a chicken?, starts to cross the road. He is distracted by the weird sound of a red sun in his left ear. James feels time itself slowing down, but unfortunately, the car is not. He sees a loud bang as he hits Jim at full speed.

Feeling strangely confident, James steps on the gas pedal and activates the windshield wipers. The chicken becomes stuck however, and is wiped left to right to left over James' window. Looking melancholy, the chicken opens his mouth and starts to sing: 'this is the end, my only friend, the end', as the car crosses the finish line. 'Back to the studio, you blithering idiot' James shouts expectantly.

Jeremy keeps watching for some time while the screen goes black, wondering how James managed to become even slower than usual. Looking at the crowd of disappointed faces in the studio, he monotonously utters his catchphrase:

'And on that bombshell, it is time to end the show.'

### The other side

Manou Jonink

Each year, on Hallows' Eve, when their parents are distracted by the goblins and ghouls dancing through the blackened streets, children sneak away to run up the hill. This year, it is little Tom, going to meet his friend Peter. Tom saw Peter just before the headless horsemen and pumpkin demons start to come out of their homes to join the ghouls. Peter was standing on the other side of the corn field. He gestured at Tom to come over to the other side of the field, too. But Tom knows that his mother does not allow him to go there, as the hill which serves as the home of the black house starts at that edge of that corn field. So, Tom waited patiently for his mother to disappear in the crowd, and snuck off. Tom wants to run up the hill, as is tradition for children who sneak away from the parade, but Peter doesn't run. As the street down below in the valley is covered in flickering yellow lights and children's laughter, the house is covered in shadows and a veil of black dust. When little Tom and Peter arrive at the top of the hill, they too are sheeted in black shadow.

The house is abandoned. No live human has been seen inside for years. Maybe even a century, who knows? Everything about the house is dark. Not only the wood used to build it, but the windows have accumulated a thick layer of black dust. Where any other type of dust is white or grey, the dust on this house is black. Like a veil, it covers the glass and disallows people from peeking inside. It has been a tradition in Sawston Falls to hold a parade through the streets on Hallows' Eve. With all the commotion, the abandoned black house on the hill shies away from the streets by turning even blacker and darker. The black door is heavy and rusty, but it moves just enough to let little Tom, who has always been a little chubby, through.

Each year, on Hallows' Eve, when their parents are distracted by the goblins and ghouls dancing through the blackened streets, children are murdered up on the hill. This year, it was little Tom. When the authorities look around the house, they find no trace of the skinny little boy who was seen at the other side of the corn field, at the foot of the hill, right before Tom snuck off. The house is abandoned. No live human has been seen inside for years. Maybe even a century, who knows? Everything about the house is dark. Not only the wood used to build it, but the interior has accumulated a thick layer of black dust. Like a veil, it covers all the paintings on the wall and disallows the pale white face of the skinny boy on the painting to be visible at all.

The fat, lazy cat yawned. The woman gave him a stroke as he ambled out the door again. The sun wasn't up yet. He was always the first to get to the house, which meant he was the first to get food, and the first to get out. He sniffed at one of the artificial bushes, its bright green leaves a stark contrast against the sleek grey streets. He peed on it, though none of the other cats would be impressed. They didn't care for the artificial bushes, or the sun. They cared for the wall, and what lay behind it.

The fat, lazy cat stood still, tail atwilt. The sun was close to rising, and he had to be somewhere. The wall stood higher than a human could reach, its smooth, gleaming grey surface only marred by the scratches the other cats made in their efforts to reach the top.

The fat, lazy cat lay down in exactly the right spot at the bottom of the wall and yawned. He could see some other cats flocking to the woman's door. He contemplated getting up to get some more food, but he needed to take a nap before the sun came up.

The fat, lazy cat woke up from the sound of window-shutters closing. Good. It meant the sun was about to scale the rooftops of the high buildings that made up this side of town. He saw the line of sunlight creeping closer to him across the hard plastic of the street. He blinked as the sun hit his eyes, then yawned as the blinding rays enveloped him in blissful heat. He didn't understand the humans for shutting out the sun, or carrying protective sheets above their heads. The sun was perfect for sleeping in. He contemplated rolling on his back to give his belly some sun. He sighed. He blinked. He rolled over.

The fat, lazy cat flattened his ears as a young, black cat fell down from halfway the wall, half on top of him. The other cat didn't pay him any attention, but stared at the top of the wall in full concentration. It needed, needed, to get to the other side of the wall. All the other cats did it, except one. It was better on the other side of the wall. The bushes were real, apparently, and there were even trees. And soft ground. And wilderness. Apparently. A sleek, black-and-white tomcat streaked passed and scaled the wall in smooth jumps that seemed to defy gravity. It didn't pause when it was on top, but immediately jumped down, eyes already roving over whatever it was that made the other side of the wall so delectable. The black cat decided to take a running start.

The fat, lazy cat watched as his black companion made it to the top. It chittered in excitement and disappeared from view. He twitched his tail. Maybe the other side was worth exploring. The sun was reaching its highest point, and the heat was making him sleepy. He watched as two more cats scaled the wall, scrambling in their haste to get to the other side.

The fat, lazy cat got up and stared at the top of the wall. He blinked. He jumped. His nails scratched the wall. He was on top. He saw the wilderness on the other side.

The fat, lazy cat blinked and yawned. The sun was good here. The morning light would reach him earlier. He looked down at the other side of the wall. He curled up on top of the wall, and took a nap.

It must have been four decades. Things had changed. He had moved to the countryside with Edith. Now, Louise and George were all grown up. He was going to be a grandpa in July. He had not been back in this neighbourhood for years. It still looked the same, but the cars were newer and he saw a few charging poles for those modern cars. He sighed, adjusted his scarf and started walking.

He had taken a train here, even though he generally disliked public transport. Edith had wanted him to. 'You going back to this place, I mean, I wouldn't want you to drive, you know'. It was cold outside, even for December. Suits the occasion, he thought. He quickened his pace, ignoring the dull ache in his left knee.

His feet knew the way, even though it was already getting dark. It left his mind to wander. The first time he had entered this place seemed ages ago. He got caught up in a hail storm that had reached the front papers, and had found shelter in an obscure pub. Five heads had turned when he nearly tripped over the doorstep. 'Afternoon' he mumbled as he sat down at the bar. He would later tell his kids that this clumsy entrance was the start of a new era in his life.

He turned a corner. The corner. There were no fancy, flickering neon lights advertising a new kind of artisanal beer. No big 'LIVE FOOTBALL EVERY SATURDAY' posters. There was a small wooden signboard, illuminated by the Christmas lights that decorated the streets: 'The Other Side'. He stopped walking at once. Only now he realised how high his heart rate was. His throat was dry. He was nervously fumbling with a pack of cigarettes in the left pocket of his coat. It was still in plastic. He had not smoked in thirty years.

That very first night, Don Shields, the big guy behind the bar introduced him to 'the regular lads'. There was Jimmy, Robert, William, and Gary. And after that night, John was slowly becoming a part of their little 'band of brothers' too. There were five of them on one side of the bar, and Don Shields on the other side. It had been a natural division, John thought. Don was different, he was something special.

The smell was still the same. Stale beer, spilt on the floor and tables from countless glasses that were held in countless hands, night after night. It smelled bittersweet, just like forty odd years ago. The place was crowded, John's eyes scanned the room in search of a familiar face. Everyone looked old, a familiar song played in the background.

'Johnny boy, good to see you.' A firm hand on his shoulder. Robert Freeman's eyes had turned yellowish, the way old people's eyes do. He turned around and saw the rest of the group. Everyone was there. Gary handed him a pint, and spilled a bit on John's hands in the process. He nodded, they raised their glasses. 'For old time's sake, for the Other Side' Gary solemnly said. It was barely audible, but his voice cracked.

The men stood together in silence for a while, focusing on their beers. They were less tall than they had been once. John felt uncomfortable and at home all at the same time. 'Now,' he said, 'where's Don.' The men moved, creating a path from where John stood towards the bar. He hesitated, swallowed and blinked, and walked over there.

Slowly, he put his hand on the coffin. 'Hi Don'.