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WORDSWORTH 250th
(1770-1850) Anniversary

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Beggars

by William Wordsworth

*She had a tall man's height or more;
Her face from summer's noontide heat
No bonnet shaded, but she wore
A mantle, to her very feet
Descending with a graceful flow,
And on her head a cap as white as new-fallen snow.*

*Her skin was of Egyptian brown:
Haughty, as if her eye had seen
Its own light to a distance thrown,
She towered, fit person for a Queen
To lead those ancient Amazonian files;
Or ruling Bandit's wife among the Grecian isles.*

*Advancing, forth she stretched her hand
And begged an alms with doleful plea
That ceased not; on our English land
Such woes, I knew, could never be;
And yet a boon I gave her, for the creature
Was beautiful to see a weed of glorious feature.*

*I left her, and pursued my way;
And soon before me did espy
A pair of little Boys at play,
Chasing a crimson butterfly;
The taller followed with his hat in hand,
With yellow flowers the gayest of the land.*

*The other wore a rimless crown
With leaves of laurel stuck about;
And, while both followed up and down,
Each whooping with a merry shout,
In their fraternal features I could trace
Unquestionable lines of that wild Suppliant's face.*

*Yet 'they', so blithe of heart, seemed fit
For finest tasks of earth or air:
Wings let them have, and they might flit
Precursors to Aurora's car,
Scattering fresh flowers; though happier far, I ween,
To hunt their fluttering game o'er rock and level green.*

*They dart across my path but lo,
Each ready with a plaintive whine!
Said I, "not half an hour ago
Your Mother has had alms of mine."*

*"That cannot be," one answered "she is dead:"
I looked reproof they saw but neither hung his head.*

*"She has been dead, Sir, many a day."
"Hush, boys! you're telling me a lie;
It was your Mother, as I say!"
And, in the twinkling of an eye,
"Come! Come!" cried one, and without more ado,
Off to some other play the joyous Vagrants flew! ♦*

A Koldusok keletkezéstörténete

Tárnok Attila

William Wordsworth, az angol romantikus költészet idősebb nemzedékének, Coleridge mellett, legkiemelkedőbb egyénisége. Gyermekkorát meghatározta, hogy korán árvaságra jutott; édesanyja a költő 8 éves korában, 1778-ban, édesapja, a költő 13 éves korában, 1783-ban hunyt el. Ekkor William évek óta bentlakásos gimnazistaként már nem élt otthon, de szülei elvesztése után, testvéreitől még a szünidők idejére is elszakadt: fivéreit és húgát más-más oldalági családtagok gyámságára bízták. Az örökség sem biztosított számukra jómódot, mert apjuk mintegy nyolcezer fontnyi kintlevőségét nem sikerült megkapniuk, így a gyerekek amolyan megtűrt, szegényházi rokonnak számítottak.

A testvérek közül William és Dorothy kivételével mindenki gyakorlatias pályára lépett – a legfiatalabb fivér pap lett, a középső tengerész kapitány, a legidősebb pedig jogász –, William és Dorothy azonban valószínűleg különcöknek tűnhettek a tágabb család szemében. Ugyan Dorothy időről időre kisebb nevelőnői

munkát elvállalt, William pedig közepszerű eredménnyel elvégezte a cambridge-i egyetemet, de tanulás helyett inkább mulatott, Európában barangolt, majd a francia forradalom éveiben Párizsban szerelmeskedett. Ez utóbbi kiruccanásából, 1792-ben, Wordsworth 22 éves korában, egy házasságon kívüli lánya is született, akiről a későbbiekben nem gondoskodott. Dorothy és William tehát a gyakorlati élet valóságát a család szemében nem szerencsésen élte meg, lelkük a természet imádata és a költészet felé terelte őket, gyakran kerültk a nagyobb társasági életet, remeteségre vágytak, és nem véletlen, hogy amikor 1795-ben egy fiatalom elhunyt barátja révén Wordsworth némi örökséghez, 900 fonthoz jutott, Dorothyval egy közös vidéki ház tervével kezdtek foglalkozni. Dorsetben, egy barátjuk tengerparthoz közeli, magányosan és üresen álló házában, Racedown Lodge-ban rendezkedtek be. Itt robbant be az életükbe 1797-ben a Willamnél két évvel fiatalabb Samuel Taylor Coleridge.¹

Coleridge, Wordsworth-höz hasonlóan, megszállott volt, ő is a költészetnek élt. A Wordsworth-testvérek a kertben dolgoztak, Coleridge, a sövényt átugorva, valósággal rohant feléjük. Így találkoztak. Barátságuk

¹ Némely szerző megjegyzi, hogy a két költő híres dorseti találkozását megelőzően már esetleg Bristolban összefuthatott, de ha így történt is, alig vettek tudomást egymásról.

csupán tizenöt éven át tartott, és haragban váltak el, de találkozásuk kultúrtörténeti jelentőségű.² Az irodalomtörténet az angol romantika kezdő dátumának Coleridge és Wordsworth közös verseskötetének kiadási évét, 1798-at tekinti. A kötet címe *Lyrical Ballads* (Lírai balladák), a nyitóvers Coleridge *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Rege a vén tengerésről) című misztikus látomása, a kötet utolsó darabja pedig Wordsworth *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* (Sorok a Tinterni Apátság fölött) című híres verse.

1797-ben, mindössze hat hónappal a költőtárrsal történt dorseti találkozás és két évvel az égből pottyant örökség után, Dorothy és William úgy határoznak, hogy közelebb költöznek Coleridge-hoz; a nyugat-angliai Alfoxden nevű villát veszik bérbe igen kedvező áron. 1798 mozgalmas év. Dorothy január és május között naplót ír. Ha vezetett is naplót korábban, esetleg Dorsetben, annak kézírata nem maradt fenn. Azonban 1798 májusában az alfoxdeni napló epilógus vagy zárszó nélkül hirtelen félbeszakad. A május 22-i, utolsó bejegyzés csupán ennyi: „Gyalog Cheddarba. Szállás Crossban.” Ugyanezen év szeptemberében a Wordsworth-testvérpár és Coleridge egy nagyobb németországi útra szánja el magát, majd október 4-én

² Ezt a tizenöt éves barátságot, majd az azt követő összekülönböződést elemzi Adam Sisman (*The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge*).

megjelenik Coleridge és Wordsworth közös verseskötetének első kiadása.

Dorothy és William Wordsworth dorseti tartózkodásukat követően gyakorlatilag William haláláig, 1850-ig együtt élnek. Bár William később házasságot köt, és gyakran fivérük, John, a tengerész is velük lakik, de a biztos pontot egymásban találják meg. Kettejük kapcsolatának alakulása lélektani elemzések tárgya. Frances Wilson (*The Ballad of Dorothy Wordsworth*) Dorothy szellemiségét és igényes műveltségét emeli ki – egy költő veszett el benne – , míg Kenneth Johnston (*The Hidden Wordsworth*) a testvérpár között esetleg fennállt incesztust véli a fő mozgató rugónak. Akárhogy is, Dorothy és William, talán közeli életkoruk okán már eleve, elkülönülnek a többi testvértől, családtagtól, és életük végéig tartó kapcsolatban, közös háztartásban, úgymond, életvitelszerűen együtt élnek. (Az incesztusra vonatkozóan Johnston egyébként semmiféle bizonyítékkal nem rendelkezik.)

Kapcsolatuk mélységét jelzi, hogy 1800-ban, immár a születésük óta imádott angol tóvidéken, ahonnan William és a tengerész fivér, John, Yorkshire-ba indul, Dorothy, mintegy megörökítendő az eseményeket, melyeket William távollétében átél, újabb naplót indít, hogy majd a fiúk visszatérte után a napló segítségével számolhasson be nekik mindenről. A *Grasmere-i napló* címen híressé vált írás ekképp kezdődik: „1800. május

14, szerda. Wm. és John, zsebükben hideg sertéssülttel, ebéd után, fél háromkor elindultak Yorkshire-ba. A Lowwood-öböl beszögellésében hagytak magamra, a fák alatt. Olyan nehéz volt a szívem, hogy szinte szólni sem tudtam, amikor W-mel búcsúcsókot váltottunk. A tó partján egy kövön ültem sokáig, és ömlött a könnyem. Lassan, nehezen erőt vettem magamon. A tavat, nem tudom, miért, szomorúnak és melankolikusnak láttam, a hullámok ólomsúllyal csapódtak a partra.” Az ok, amiért a természet ilyen színben tűnik fel, nyilvánvalóan William távozása.³ Dorothy szándéka, hogy érzéseit, élményeit rögzítse, amíg William távol van, teljesül. Ilyen módon két héttel később, amikor bátyja visszatér, Dorothy a naplóírással akár fel is hagyhatna, ám a napló két és fél éven át folytatódik. 1803. január 16-án a grasmere-i napló, az alfoxdenihez hasonlóan, kurtán szakad félbe. Találghatunk, mi készítette Dorothyt William hazatértét követően a

³ Nem mellékes körülmény, hogy a Wordsworth-fivérek yorkshire-i látogatásának célja a Hutchinson-lányok, köztük Mary Hutchinson felkeresése. Ám ekkor még valószínűleg fel sem merült, hogy Mary Hutchinson esetleg később William felesége lehet. Sőt, John, a tengerész fivér sokkal alkalmasabbnak mutatkozhatott a lánykérésre: megbecsült, polgári foglalkozással bírt, Williammel ellentétben, és egy esetleges jövőbeni házasság tervével, szándékával írt leveleket ekkortájt Marynek. Mindazonáltal az mégiscsak elgondolkodtató, miért nem tartott Dorothy is fivéreivel, ahogy a korábbi hosszú, többhetes látogatás alkalmával.

napló folytatására. Wordsworth *Koldusok* című versének keletkezéstörténete, azt hiszem, részben rávilágít a talányra.

William és John, a Dorothy naplóírásra ösztönző yorkshire-i útról, két hét elteltével tér haza. 1800. június 7-e, a viszontlátás napja, szombat. Dorothy a következő rögzíti naplójában: „Nagyon meleg, borús reggel. Esővel fenyeget. Elsétáltam Mr. Simpson házáig, egy kis köszmétét akartam szedni. Derűs délután. A kis Tommy elkísért, teát ittunk és készítettem neki egy kis felfújtat. A dombtetőn gyepfüvet és zöldnövényeket tépkedtünk, lenn a tóparton pedig kosbort és egyebeket. A kertben gyomláltam és öntöztem. Nem mentem el otthonról, dolgoztam, mert már számítani lehetett Wm-re és Johnra. Tizenegy után lépéseket hallottam a ház előtt, megfordultam és kitártam az ajtót. William állt előttem! Az első örömteli percek után leültünk teázni. Hajnali négyig fent voltunk, mindenről be akartam számolni Williamnek, ami a távollétében történt. A madarak vígan daloltak, minden üdének tetszett, bár nem feltétlenül jókedvűnek.” Hogy miért tűnik minden üdének, ismét nyilvánvaló: a látásmód Dorothy boldog lelkéből fakad. Az sem véletlen, hogy John alig érdemel említést; a kedvenc: William.

Dorothy naplója Grasmere-ben éppúgy, mint Alfoxdenben, az időjárási változások, a növények virágzása, az állatok mozgása, a természet alakulása

körül forog. Szinte mindennap feljegyezi, merre sétált, kivel találkozott. A feljegyzések, valószínűleg este, a munka végeztével, visszatekintő módon, gyakran tömondatokban vagy hiányos mondatokban fogalmazódnak meg. 1800. június 10-én azonban, tehát három nappal a fivérek megérkezete után, különös bejegyzést találunk. A napló, sőt mindkét napló, módszerétől eltérően az egyébként pontosan adatolt június 10-i időképhez Dorothy hozzáfűz egy hosszú jelenetet, ami május 27-én, William távollétében történt. Hogy miért itt, arra nézve a magyarázat egyszerű: technikai jellegű okok miatt. Dorothy természetesen nem magukban álló írólapokat használ, hanem egy fűzött-kötött füzetet, amelynek lapjai eddig a pontig feltöltődtek, a margókon sem maradt elég hely, és pótlap beszúrása sem lett volna biztonságos: könnyen kieshet, nyoma veszhet. Ezért fogalmazódik meg a május 27-i, látszólag jelentéktelen jelenet a június 10-i bejegyzést követően, jöllehet az esemény az egészében szigorú kronológiát követő napló időrendjéből, egyedülálló módon, kilóg. Ám hogy miért fogalmazódik meg egyáltalán, arra már nehezebb magyarázatot találni. Az esemény önmagában nem igazán említésre méltó: egy kolduló asszony alamizsnáért esedezik. Mindennapos esemény ez; elhagyott, megözvegyült, gyerekes anyák, veterán tengerészek, megélhetésüket veszített vándorkoldusok, hajléktalan csavargók, sebesült katonák kopogtatnak

nap mint nap Dove Cottage ajtaján vagy szólítják meg a vidéket járó Wordsworth-testvéreket. Véleményem szerint Dorothy rögtön William megérkezése után, az örömteli, hajnalig tartó beszélgetés során feleleveníthette a magas koldus asszony alakját. Az egyébként szintén magas, vékony testalkatú Williamnek ez a mozzanat valamiért megtetszhetett, valószínűleg rákérdezett részletekre, és esetleg a hosszú éjszakai beszélgetés adta vissza a május 27-i apró esemény jelentőségét, illetve ruházta fel az eseményt addig fel sem ismert jelentőséggel. William érdeklődése ösztönözhetette Dorothyt, hogy, késleltetve ugyan, de naplójában is rögzítse, mi történt.

„Egy nagyon magas asszony, magasabb, mint akit általában magasnak tartunk, kopogtatott az ajtón. Hosszú, barna kabátot és hófehér kalapot viselt, főkötő nélkül. Az arcszíne sötétbarna, bár egykor nyilvánvalóan fehér bőrű lehetett. Kézen fogva vezetett egy kétéves forma, mezítlábas fiúcskát, és azt mondta, a férje, aki egyébiránt üstfoldozó, előtte jár a többi gyerekekkel. Adtam nekik egy darab kenyeret. Később, útban Ambleside felé, a rydale-i hídnál láttam a férjét is. Az útszélen ült, két számarra mellette legelt, és a két említett gyerek a fűben játszott. A férfi nem kért alamizsnát. Otthagytam őket, aztán

körülbelül egy negyedmértöldnyire két másik fiút pillantottam meg, egyikük tíz, a másik talán nyolcéves lehetett, pillangót kergettek. Vadócok voltak, bár nem éppen kopott ruhájuk miatt, csakhogy nem volt rajtuk se cipő, se harisnya. Az idősebb kalapjának karimáján sárga virágfüzér, a fiatalabbét pedig, karima nélkül, mint egy koronát, babérkoszorú övezte. Míg így játszottak, egészen a közelükbe értem. A szokásos nyafogó koldus-sírámokkal fordultak felém, de megmondtam nekik, hogy reggel már adtam egy darab kenyeret az anyjuknak. A fiúk annyira hasonlítottak az anyjukra, hogy semmi kétségem nem támadt kilétüket illetően. Ő, szólt az idősebb, nem adhatott kenyeret anyáknak, hisz ő már régen meghalt, atyánk pedig a szomszéd városban él, fazekas. Ám kitartottam álláspontom mellett, nem adtam nekik semmit. Gyerünk innen, mondta az idősebb, és mint a villám eltűntek a szemeim elől. Eltekeregtek az útról, így előttük értem Ambleside-ba, és láttam, amint az idősebb fiú vállán a koldustarisznyával betérnek Matthew Harrison házába, sántikálva, ahogy a koldusok néha megjátsszák magukat. Amikor már hazafelé indultam Ambleside-ból, az

utcán találkoztam az anyjkkal, a szamarakat hajtotta, egyiknek a két oldalsó málhás kosarában gubbasztott a két kicsi gyerek. Az anya a szamarak ösztökélésére használt bottal korholta és fenyegette a két gyereket, míg azok hancúrozva csüngtek a kosár szélén. Reggel ez az asszony azt állította, hogy Skóciából származnak, a kiejtése is ezt igazolta, ám az utóbbi időben, azt hiszem, így mondta, Wigtonban élnek, csak hogy nem képesek a házat fenntartani, ezért vándorolnak.”

A rövid incidens, még így sem, utólag elbeszélve sem, tűnik kimondottan fontos eseménynek, de ha hozzávesszük, hogy a naplóbejegyzések többsége nyúlfarknyi helyzetjelentés csupán, akkor ez a viszonylag hosszas részletezés, nemcsak az időrendi kimozdítottság okán szembeötlő és váratlan fordulat a naplót egészében és folyamatában követő olvasó számára. Még különösebb az, hogy a mozzanatnak, látszólag, itt semmiféle következménye vagy eredménye nincs. Azért csak látszólag, mert míg a többi egyéb, megszámlálhatatlan, apró, elvarratlan történet szálnak általában nyoma vész, ez a jelenet visszatér és újabb jelentőségre tesz szert, sokkal később.

Majdnem két év telik el, amikor William verset farag a magas koldus asszony alakjából. Dorothy a tényt a következőképpen rögzíti naplójában:

„1802. március 13, szombat reggel. Egész télen nem volt olyan hideg, mint ma reggel. Kemény fagy. Pitét, kenyeret és magos süteményt sütöttem Mr. Simpson számára. William befejezte Alice Fell című versét, aztán írt egy másikat, *The Beggar Woman* címmel,⁴ egy asszonyról, akivel én találkoztam csaknem két évvel ezelőtt, májusban, míg John és ő Gallow Hillben jártak. Kisebb megszakításokkal egész délelőtt mellette ültem, leírtam a versszakokat, egyebek. Ebéd után elsétáltunk Rydale-ba a leveleinkért, szörnyű hideg volt, útközben elkapott két-három jégzápor, a jég darabkái tisztán, csinosan csillantak a száraz, tiszta úton. A kis Peggy Simpson az ajtóban állt, és tenyerével igyekezett elkapdosni a jég darabjait. Egyre inkább az anyjára üt. Tizenhat éves korára a nagymama szemében épp olyan lesz, mint az anyja, ahogy minden rózsa a kertben épp olyan, mint a rózsák, amelyek évekkal ezelőtt nyíltak. Rydale-ban nem várt bennünket

⁴ A vers későbbi címváltozatai: *The Beggar Boys*; *The Beggar*; és *Beggars*.

levél. Amint hazaértünk, teáztunk. Tea után felolvastam Williamnek a jelenetet, amikor a magas asszonyhoz tartozó kisfiúkkal találkoztam, de ez balul ütött ki, mert nem bírta a szavaimat kiverni a fejéből, így nem tudta befejezni a verset. Befejezetlenül hagyta és fáradtan feküdt le. Pedig útközben, Rydale-ből hazafelé, megbarátkozott a témával, és félig-meddig meg is fogalmazta a verset.

Március 14, vasárnap reggel. William rosszul aludt. Kilenckor kelt fel, de mielőtt kikelt volna az ágyból, lejegyezte a Beggar Boys című verset, és amíg reggeliztünk, azaz én reggeliztem, mert ő csak ült az asztalnál, a tál leves és a kistányéron lévő vajjas kenyér előtte érintetlenül, megírta a Poem to a Butterfly című verset. Egy morzsányit sem evett. Még a harisnyáját sem húzta fel, az ingét, mellényét se gombolta be, míg dolgozott. A vers gondolata akkor ötlött fel benne először, amikor arról beszélgettünk, micsoda öröm mindkettőnk számára a pillangók látványa. Elmeséltem neki, hogyan szoktam üldözni őket, de félttem megfogni bármelyiket is, nehogy a hímport ledörzsöljem a szárnyukról. Ő meg azt

mesélte, hogy az iskolában a fehéreket meg szokták ölni, mert azok a franciák.”

A leírásból kitűnik, hogy Wordsworth munkamódszere erősen függ Dorothy jelenlététől, némelyik vers szinte kettejük közös erőfeszítése árán születik meg. Látható továbbá, hogy a koldusasszonyt megörökítő vers inkább Dorothynak fontos, aki kezdetben nem is ismerte fel a jelenetben rejlő költőiséget. Ám William érdeklődése nyomán visszatér rá a naplóban, és az azóta eltelt két év alatt érett meg benne, vagy Williamben vagy kettejükben közösen a gondolat, hogy az a jelentéktelen májusi közbjáték, amit William nem is élt át személyesen, lassanként verssé csiszolható. Ám William számára e vers megírása mégiscsak közbjáték maradt. Azon a napon, amikor a Beggars című vers megírásába kezdett, fejezett be egy számára sokkal fontosabb, hosszabb verset, és másnap reggel is, amikor a Beggars utolsó sorait leírta, ez csak melléktevékenység volt csupán, mert egy sikerültebb verset, a Butterfly címűt is papírra vetette. Míg a Butterfly című vers magyar fordítása, Szabó Lőrinc munkája, megjelent nyomtatásban, a Beggars fordításáról nincs tudomásom. Talán ez is jelzi, hogy a három vers közül a Beggars talán a legkevésbé sikerült?⁵

⁵ A verset nyersfordításban közlöm.

*Magasabb volt, mint egy férfiember.
Hosszú pelerinje kecsesen
A lábfejeig hullt, s arcát nem védte
Főkött a nyári nap hevétől,
Csak egy fehér kalapja volt,
Mint a frissen hullott hó.*

*Napbarnított, s gőgös, mint egy
Etióp, ahogy pillantása
A távolba dobta fényét,
Kőszájként, akár egy királynő,
Amazon seregei élén, vagy a görög
szigeteken portyázó bandita-feleség.*

*Jártában a kezét előretartva
Alamizsnáért esdekelt panasszal,
Végeérhetetlenül. Angol földön
Ily esengés, tudom, méltánytalan,
Néhány garasom mégis bánta,
Hisz gyönyörű lényre elbűvölt.*

*Utam folytatva magára hagytam,
De hamarost két kicsi fiúba
Botlottam, kik egy karmazsin
Pillangó üzésébe fogtak.
A magasabb, boldog mezőn szedett
Virág koszorúzta kalappal kezében,*

*Másikuk, fején karima nélküli kalap,
Babérlevelekkel tűzdelt korona,
És még örömujjongással a mezőn
Széltében-hosszában kiáltottak,
Testvércukon ismerőssé váltak,
Semmi kétség, ama esdeklő nő vonásai.*

*Ám e vidám szívű fiúk többre
Hivatottak szabadban, réten.
Ha szárnyuk nőne, Auróra diadalszekerét*

Dorothynek része van az alkotási folyamatban. Dorothy egyfajta múzsa, titkár, másoló, gondnok, menedzser, ügynök, impresszárió, mindenese: igazi alkotótárs, úgy, hogy eközben egyik szerep sem a sajátja igazán.⁶ Olyan kitartó, állandó ÉLET-TÁRS,

*Repítenék, és virágát hintenék,
Bár örömtelibb, jól tudom, a röpdőső
Pillét úzni sziklán és széles réten át.*

*Az ösvényen élémbe tértek és lám!
Rögtön esdeklő panaszra nyílt ajkuk.
– Fél órája sincs, hogy anyátokat
Megszántam – intettem őket.
– Az nem lehet – szólt egyikük.
Korholva néztem, de ők egyet se bántak.*

*– Uram, anyánk már rég halott.
– Csitt, fiú, ne hazudjatok,
Anyátokat láttam, ha mondom.
– Gyerünk innen! – kiáltották,
És a vidám csavargók egy
Szempillantás alatt új játékba fogtak.*

⁶ Dorothy alkalmanként egyenesen társszerző. Naplójában ilyen megjegyzéseket tesz: „Kihúztunk néhány sort a versből.” A többes szám határozottan közös munkára utal. A napló gyakran csupán egy-két soros időjárás-jelentés, azonban azokon a napokon, amikor William verset ír, Dorothy a végletekbe menő részletességgel rögzíti a vers megírását ösztönző körülményeket. Egy ízben például megszámlolja, hogy a réten, ahol a testvérpár egy délután ücsörög és ahol William írásra szánja el magát, negyvenkét tehén legel. Ez a már-már abszurd precizitás azt a célt szolgálja, hogy

amilyenek William fiatalkori szerelme, a francia Anette Vallon, de még akár későbbi felesége sem bizonyulhatott. Dorothy talán épp azért több e másik kettőnél, mert nem hordoz testi jelleget. E téren Kenneth Johnston érvelésével nem érthetek egyet. Dorothy a szellemi társ, az örökös segítő, aki, talán mondhatjuk, feláldozta magát bátyja tehetségének, bár odaadása nyilvánvaló szeretetből fakadt és nem áldozatként élte éveit. William számára Dorothy jelenti az alkotói közeg lételemét. Nélküle vagy távollétében csupán középszerű zsánerköltő válhatott volna belőle, ahogy Dorothy William távollétében szintúgy, partra vetett halként, levegőért kapkodott, és csak akkor nyugodott meg, amikor újra együtt lehettek. Kapcsolatuk nem szerelem, 'csupán' testvéri szeretet. Közös, alkotói magány, az együtt teremtés örömeivel átítatott alkotói munkaközösség. Egymás kiegészítői ők, ketten egyetlen komplementer színné válnak, mert egymás nélkül mindketten eltűntek volna az irodalomtörténet süllyesztőjében. Csak együtt, a másik segítségével által léphettek a halhatatlanok társaságába. ♦

a későbbiekben, ha William az aznap délután rögtönzött versen még javítani akar, minél több és pontosabb részlet álljon a rendelkezésére.

Till September Petronella

by Jean Rhys

There was a barrel organ playing at the corner of Torrington Square. It played 'Destiny' and 'La Paloma' and 'Le Rêve Passe', all tunes I liked, and the wind was warm and kind not spiteful, which doesn't often happen in London. I packed the striped dress that Estelle had helped me to choose, and the cheap white one that fitted well, and my best underclothes, feeling very happy while I was packing. A bit of a change, for that had not been one of my lucky summers.

I would tell myself it was the colour of the carpet or something about my room which was depressing me, but it wasn't that. And it wasn't anything to do with money either. I was making nearly five pounds a week – very good for me, and different from when I first started, when I was walking round trying to get work. *No hawkers, No Models*, some of them put up, and you stand there, your hands cold and clammy, afraid to ring the bell. But I had got past that stage; this depression had nothing to do with money.

I often wished I was like Estelle, this French girl

who lived in the big room on the ground floor. She had everything so cut-and-dried, she walked the tightrope so beautifully, not even knowing she was walking it. I'd think about the talks we had, and her clothes and her scent and the way she did her hair, and that when I went into her room it didn't seem like a Bloomsbury bed-sitting room – and when it comes to Bloomsbury bed-sitting rooms I know what I'm talking about. No, it was like a room out of one of those long, romantic novels, six hundred and fifty pages of small print, translated from French or German or Hungarian or something – because few of the English ones have the exact feeling I mean. And you read one page of it or even one phrase of it, and then you gobble up all the rest and go about in a dream for weeks afterwards, for month afterwards – perhaps all your life, who knows? – surrounded by those six hundred and fifty pages, the houses, the streets, the snow, the river, the roses, the girls, the sun, the ladies' dresses and the gentlemen's voices, the old, wicked, hard-hearted women and the old, sad women, the waltz music, everything. What is not there you put in afterwards, for it is alive, this book, and it grows in your head. 'The house I was living in when I read that book,' you think, or 'This colour reminds me of that book.'

It was after Estelle left, telling me she was going to Paris and wasn't sure whether she was coming back, that I struck a bad patch. Several of the people I was

sitting to left London in June, but, instead of arranging for more work, I took long walks, zig-zag, always the same way – Euston Road, Hampstead Road, Camden Town – though I hated those streets, which were like a grey nightmare in the sun. You saw so many old women, or women who seemed old, peering at the vegetables in the Camden Town market, looking at you with hatred, or blankly, as though they had forgotten your language, and talked another one. 'My God,' I would think, 'I hope I never live to be old. Anyway however old I get, I'll never let my hair go grey. I'll die it black, red, any colour you like, but I'll never let it go grey. I hate grey too much.' Coming back from one of these walks the thought came to me suddenly, like a revelation, that I could kill myself any time I liked and so end it. After that I put a better face on things.

When Marston wrote and I told the landlord I was going away for a fortnight, he said 'So there's a good time coming for the ladies, is there? – a good time coming for the girls? About time too.'

Marston said 'You seem very perky, my dear. I hardly recognized you.'

I looked along the platform, but Julian had not come to meet me. There was only Marston, his long, white face and his pale-blue eyes, smiling.

'What a gigantic suitcase,' he said. 'I have my motorbike here, but I suppose I'd better leave it. We'll take a cab.'

It was getting dark when we reached the cottage, which stood by itself on rising ground. There were two elm trees in a field near the verandah, but the country looked bare, with low, grassy hills.

As we walked up the path through the garden I could hear Julian laughing and a girl talking, her voice very high and excited, though she put on a calm, haughty expression as we came into the room. Her dress was red, and she wore several coloured glass bangles which tinkled when she moved.

Marston said 'This is Frankie. You've met the great Julian, of course.'

Well, I knew Frankie Morell by sight, but as she didn't say anything about it I didn't either. We smiled at each other cautiously, falsely.

The table was laid for four people. The room looked comfortable but there were no flowers. I had expected that they would have it full of flowers. However, there were some sprays of honeysuckle in a green jug in my bedroom and Marston, standing in the doorway, said 'I walked miles to get you that honeysuckle this morning. I thought about you all the time I was picking it.'

'Don't be long,' he said. 'We're all very hungry.'

We ate ham and salad and drank perry. It went to my head a bit. Julian talked about his job which he seemed to dislike. He was the music critic of one of the daily papers. 'It's a scandal. One's forced to down the right people and praise the wrong people.'

'Forced?' said Marston.

'Well, they drop very strong hints.'

'I'll take the plates away,' Frankie told me. 'You can start tomorrow. Not one of the local women will do a thing for us. We've only been here a fortnight, but they've got up a hate you wouldn't believe. Julian says he almost faints when he thinks of it. I say, why think of it?'

When she came back she turned the lamp out. Down there it was very still. The two trees outside did not move, or the moon.

Julian lay on the sofa and I was looking at his face and his hair when Marston put his arms round me and kissed me. But I watched Julian and listened to him whistling – stopping, laughing, beginning again.

'What was that music?' I said, and Frankie answered in a patronizing voice '“Tristan”, second act duet.'

'I've never been to that opera.'

I had never been to any opera. All the same, I could imagine it. I could imagine myself in a box, wearing a moonlight-blue dress and silver shoes, and when the lights went up everybody asking 'Who's that lovely girl in that box?' But it must happen quickly or it will be too late.

Marston squeezed my hand. 'Very fine performance, Julian,' he said, 'very fine. Now forgive me, my dears, I must leave you. All this emotion –'

Julian lighted the lamp, took a book from the shelf

and began to read.

Frankie blew on the nails of one hand and polished them on the edge of the other. Her nails were nice – of course, you could get a manicure for a bob then – but her hands were large and too white for her face. ‘I’ve seen you at the Apple Tree, surely.’ The Apple Tree was a night club in Greek Street.

‘Oh yes, often.’

‘But you’ve cut your hair. I wanted to cut mine, but Julian asked me not to. He begged me not to. Didn’t you, Julian?’

Julian did not answer.

‘He said he’d lose his strength if I cut my hair.’

Julian turned over a page and went on reading.

‘This isn’t a bad spot, is it?’ Frankie said. ‘Not one of those places where the ceiling’s on top of your head and you’ve got to walk four miles in the dark to the lavatory. There are two other bedrooms besides the one Marston gave you. Come and have a look at them. You can change over if you want to. We’ll never tear Julian away from his book. It’s about the biological inferiority of women. That’s what you told me, Julian, isn’t it?’

‘Oh, go away,’ Julian said.

We ended up in her room, where she produced some head and figure studies, photographs.

‘Do you like these? Do you know this man? He says I’m the best model he’s ever had. He says I’m far and away the best model in London.’

‘Beautiful. Lovely photographs.’

But Frankie, sitting on the big bed, said, ‘Aren’t people swine? Julian says I never think. He’s wrong, sometimes I think quite a lot. The other day I spent a long time trying to decide which were worse – men or women.’

‘I wonder.’

‘Women are worse.’

She had long, calm black hair, drawn away from her face and hanging smoothly almost to her waist, and a calm, clear little voice and a calm, haughty expression.

‘They’ll kick your face to bits if you let them. And shriek with laughter at the damage. But I’m not going to let them – oh no... Marston’s always talking about you,’ she said. ‘He’s very fond of you, poor old Marston. Do you know that picture as you go into his studio – in the entrance place? What’s he say it is?’

‘The Apotheosis of Lust.’

‘yes, the Apotheosis of Lust. I have to laugh when I think of that for some reason. Poor old Andy Marston. But I don’t know why I should say “Poor old Andy Marston”. He’ll always have one penny to tinkle against another. His family’s very wealthy, you know.’

‘He makes me go cold.’

I thought ‘Why did I say that?’ Because I like Marston.

‘So that’s how you feel about him, is it?’ She seemed pleased, as if she had heard something she wanted to

hear, had been waiting to hear.

‘Are you tired?’ Marston said.

I was looking out of the bedroom window at some sheep feeding in the field where the elm trees grew.

‘A bit,’ I said. ‘A bit very.’

His mouth drooped, disappointed.

‘Oh, Marston, thank you for asking me down here. It’s so lovely to get away from London; it’s like a dream.’

‘A dream, my God! However, when it comes to dreams, why shouldn’t they be pleasant?’

He sat down on the windowsill.

‘The great Julian’s not so bad, is he?’

‘Why do you call him the great Julian? As if you were gibing at him.’

‘Gibing at him? Good Lord, far be it from me to gibe at him. He is the great Julian. He’s going to be very important, so far as an English musician can be important. He’s horribly conceited, though. Not about his music, of course – he’s conceited about his personal charm. I can’t think why. He’s a very ordinary type really. You see that nose and mouth and hear that voice all over the place. You rather dislike him, don’t you?’

‘Do I?’

‘Of course you do. Have you forgotten how annoyed you were when I told you that he’d have to see a female before he could consent to live at close quarters with her for two weeks? You were quite spirited about it, I thought. Don’t say that was only a flash in the pan, you

poor devil of a female, female, female, in a country where females are only tolerated at best! What’s going to become of you, Miss Petronella Gray, living in a bed-sitting room in Torrington Square, with no money, no background and no nous? . . . Is Petronella your real name?’

‘Yes.’

‘You worry me, whatever your name is. I bet it isn’t Gray.’

I thought ‘What does it matter? If you knew how bloody my home was you wouldn’t be surprised that I wanted to change my name and forget all about it.’

I said, not looking at him, ‘I was called after my grandmother – Julia Petronella.’

‘Oh, you’ve got a grandmother, have you? Fancy that! Now, for Heaven’s sake don’t put on that expression. Take my advice and grow another skin or two and sharpen your claws before it’s too late. Before it’s too late, mark those words. If you don’t, you’re going to have a hell of a time.’

‘So that I long for death?’

He looked startled. ‘Why do you say that?’

‘It was only the first thing that came into my head from nowhere. I was joking.’

When he did not answer, ‘Well, good night,’ I said. ‘Sleep tight.’

‘I shan’t sleep,’ he said. ‘I shall probably have to listen to those two for quite a time yet. When they’re

amorous they're noisy and when they fight it's worse. She goes for him with a pen-knife. Mind you, she only does that because he likes it, but her good nature is a pretense. She's a bitch really. Shut your door and you won't hear anything. Will you be sad tomorrow?

'Of course not.'

'Don't look as if you'd lost a shilling and found sixpence then,' he said, and went out.

That's the way they always talk. 'You look as if you'd lost a shilling and found sixpence,' they say; 'You look very perky, I hardly recognized you,' they say; 'Look gay,' they say. 'My dear Petronella, I have an entirely new idea of you. I'm going to paint you out in the opulent square. So can you wear something gay tomorrow afternoon? Not one of those drab affairs you usually clothe yourself in. Gay – do you know the meaning of the word? Think about it, it's very important.'

The things you remember...

Once, left alone in a very ornate studio, I went up to a plaster cast – the head of a man, one of those Greek heads – and kissed it, because it was so beautiful. Its mouth felt warm, not cold. It was smiling. When I kissed it the room went dead silent and I was frightened. I told Estelle about this one day. 'Does that sound mad?' She didn't laugh. She said 'Who hasn't kissed a picture or a photograph and suddenly been frightened?'

The music Julian had been whistling was tormenting me. That, and the blind eyes of the plaster cast, and the way the sun shone on the black iron bedstead in my room in Torrington Square on fine days. The bars of the bedstead grin at me. Sometimes I count the knobs on the chest of drawers three times over. 'One of those drab affairs! ...'

I began to talk to Julian in my head. Was it to Julian? 'I'm not like that. I'm not at all like that. They're trying to make me like that, but I'm not like that.'

After a while I took a pencil and paper and wrote 'I love Julian. Julian, I kissed you once, but you didn't know.'

I folded the paper several times and hid it under some clothes in my suitcase. Then I went to bed and slept at once.

Where our path joined the main road there were some cottages. As Marston and I came back from our walk next morning we passed two women in their gardens, which were full of lupins and poppies. They looked at us sullenly, as though they disliked us. When Marston said 'Good morning,' they did not answer.

'Surly, priggish brutes,' he muttered, 'but that's how they are.' The grass round our cottage was long and trampled in places. There were no flowers.

'They're back,' Marston said. 'There's the motorbike.'

They came out on to the verandah, very spruce;

Frankie in her red frock with her hair tied up in a red and blue handkerchief, Julian wearing a brown coat over a blue shirt and shabby grey trousers like Marston's. Very gay, I thought. (*Gay – do you know the meaning of the word?*)

'What's the matter with you, Marston?' Julian said. 'You look frightful.'

'You do seem a bit upset,' Frankie said. 'What happened? Do tell.'

'Don't tell her anything,' said Marston. 'I'm going to dress up too. Why should I be the only one in this resplendent assembly with a torn shirt and stained bags? Wait till you see what I've got – and I don't mean what you mean.'

'Let's get the food ready,' Frankie said to me.

The kitchen table was covered with things they had brought from Cheltenham, and there were several bottles of white wine cooling in a bucket of water in the corner.

'What have you done to Marston?'

'Nothing. What on earth do you mean?'

Nothing had happened. We were sitting under a tree, looking at a field of corn, and Marston put his head in my lap and then a man came along and yelled at us. I said 'What do you think we're doing to your corn? Can't we even look at your corn?' But Marston only mumbled 'I'm fearfully sorry. I'm dreadfully sorry,' and so on. And then we went walking along the main road in the

sun, not talking much because I was hating him.

'Nothing happened,' I said.

'Oh well, it's a pity, because Julian's in a bad mood today. However, don't take any notice of him. Don't start a row whatever you do; just smooth it over.'

'Look at the lovely bit of steak I got,' she said. 'Marston says he can't touch any meat except cold ham, I ask you, and he does the cooking. Cold ham and risotto, risotto and cold ham. And curried eggs. That's what we've been living on ever since we came down here.'

When we went in with the food they had finished a bottle of wine. Julian said 'Here's luck to the ruddy citizens I saw this morning. May they be flourishing and producing offspring exactly like themselves, but far, far worse, long after we are all in our dishonoured graves.'

Marston was now wearing black silk pyjamas with a pattern of red and green dragons. His long, thin neck and sad face looked extraordinary above this get-up. Frankie and I glanced at each other and giggled. Julian scowled at me.

Marston went over to the mirror. 'Never mind,' he said softly to his reflection, 'never mind, never mind.'

'It's ham and salad again,' Frankie said. 'But I've got some prunes.'

The table was near the window. A hot, white glare shone in our eyes. We tried pulling the blinds down, but

one got stuck and we went on eating in the glare.

Then Frankie talked about the steak again. 'You must have your first bite tonight, Marston.'

'It won't be my first bite,' Marston said. 'I've been persuaded to taste beef before.'

'Oh, you never told me that. No likee?'

'I thought it would taste like sweat,' Marston said, 'and it did.'

Frankie looked annoyed. 'The trouble with you people is that you try to put other people off just because you don't fancy a thing. If you'd just not like it and leave it at that, but you don't rest till you've put everybody else off.'

'Oh God, let's get tight,' Julian said. 'There are bottles and bottles of wine in the kitchen. Cooling, I hope.'

'We'll get them,' Frankie said, 'we'll get them.'

Frankie sat on the kitchen table. 'I think Julian's spoiling for a fight. Let him calm down a bit . . . You're staving Marston off, aren't you? And he doesn't like it; he's very disconsolate. You've got to be careful of these people, they can be as hard as nails.'

Far away a dog barked, a cock crew, somebody was sawing wood. I hardly noticed what she had said because again it came, that feeling of happiness, the fish-in-water feeling, so that I couldn't even remember having been unhappy.

Frankie started on a long story about a man called

Petersen who had written a play about Northern gods and goddesses and Yggdrasil.

'I thought Yggdrasil was a girl, but it seems it's a tree.'

Marston and Julian and all that lot had taken Petersen up, she said. They used to ask him out and make him drunk. Then he would take his clothes off and dance about and if he did not do it somebody would be sure to say 'What's the matter? Why don't you perform?' But as soon as he got really sordid they had dropped him like a hot brick. He simply disappeared.

'I met an old boy who knew him and asked what had happened. The old boy said "A gigantic maw has swallowed Petersen . . ." Maw, what a word! It reminds me of Julian's mother – she's a maw if you like. Well, I'd better take these bottles along now.'

So we took the four bottles out of the bucket and went back into the sitting room. It was still hot and glaring, but not quite so bad as it had been.

'Now it's my turn to make a speech,' said Marston. 'But you must drink, pretty creatures, drink.' He filled our glasses and I drank mine quickly. He filled it up again.

'My speech,' he said, 'my speech . . . Let's drink to afternoon, the best of all times. Cruel morning is past, fearful, unpredictable, lonely night is yet to come. Here's to heart-rending afternoon . . . I will now recite a poem. It's hackneyed and pawed about, like so many

other things, but beautiful. “C’est bien la pire peine de ne savoir pourquoi – .” ‘

He stopped and began to cry. We all looked at him. Nobody laughed; nobody knew what to say. I felt shut in by the glare.

Marston blew his nose, wiped his eyes and gabbled on: “Pourquoi, sans amour et sans haine, Mon coeur a tant de peine.....

“Sans amour” is right,’ Julian said, staring at me. I looked back into his eyes.

“But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet,” ‘ Marston went on, “Though we prayed you, Paid you, brayed you In a mortar – for you could not, Sweet.” ‘

‘The motorbike was altogether a bit of luck,’ Frankie said. ‘Julian had a fight with a man on the bus going in. I thought he’d have a fit.’ ‘Fight?’ Julian said. ‘I never fight. I’m frightened.’

He was still staring at me.

‘Well then, you were very rude.’

‘I’m never rude, either,’ Julian said. ‘I’m far too frightened ever to be rude. I suffer in silence.’

‘I shouldn’t do that if I were you,’ I said. The wine was making me giddy. So was the glare, and the way he was looking at me.

‘What’s this young creature up to?’ he said. ‘I can’t quite make her out.’

‘Ruddy respectable citizens never can.’

‘Ha-hah,’ Frankie said. ‘One in the eye for you,

Julian. You’re always going on about respectable people, but you know you are respectable, whatever you say and whatever you do, and you’ll be respectable till you die, however you die, and that way you miss something, believe it or not.’

‘You keep out of this, Phoenician,’ Julian said. ‘You’ve got nothing to say. Retire under the table, because that’s where I like you best.’

Frankie crawled under the table. She darted her head out now and again, pretending to bite his legs, and every time she did that he would shiver and scream.

‘Oh, come on out,’ he said at last. ‘It’s too hot for these antics.’

Frankie crawled out again, very pleased with herself, went to the mirror and arranged the handkerchief round her hair. ‘Am I really like a Phoenician?’

‘Of course you are. A Phoenician from Cornwall, England. Direct descent, I should say.’

‘And what’s she?’ Frankie said. Her eyes looked quite different, like snake’s eyes. We all looked quite different – it’s funny what drink does.

‘That’s very obvious too,’ Julian said.

‘All right, why don’t you come straight out with it?’ I said. ‘Or are you frightened?’

‘Sometimes words fail.’

Marston waved his arms about. ‘Julian, you stop this. I won’t have it.’

'You fool,' Julian said, 'you fool. Can't you see she's fifth-rate. Can't you see?'

'You ghastly cross between a barmaid and a chorus-girl,' he said; 'You female spider,' he said; 'You've been laughing at him for weeks,' he said, 'jeering at him, sniggering at him. Stopping him from working – the best painter in this damnable island, the only one in my opinion. And then when I try to get him away from you of course you follow him down here.'

'That's not it at all,' Marston said. 'You're not being fair to the girl. You don't understand her a bit.'

'She doesn't care,' Julian said. Look at her – she's giggling her stupid head off.'

Well, what are you to do when you come up against a mutual admiration society?' I said.

'You're letting your jealousy run away with you,' said Marston.

'Jealousy?' Julian said. 'Jealousy!' He was unrecognizable. His beautiful eyes were little, mean pits and you looked down them into nothingness.

'Jealous of what?' he shrieked. 'Why, do you know that she told Frankie last night that she can't bear you and that the only reason she has anything to do with you is because she wants money. What do you think of that? Does that open your eyes?'

'Now, *Julian!*' Frankie's voice was as loud and high as his. 'You'd no right to repeat that. You promised you wouldn't and anyway you've exaggerated it. It's all very

well for you to talk about how inferior women are, but you get more like your horrible mother every moment.'

'You do,' Marston said, quite calm now. 'Julian, you really do.'

'Do you know what all this is about?' Frankie said, nodding at Julian. 'It's because he doesn't want me to go back to London with him. He wants me to go and be patronized and educated by his detestable mother in her dreary house in the dreary country, who will then say that the case is hopeless. Wasn't she a good sort and a saint to try? But the girl is quite impossible. Do you think I don't know that trick? It's as old as the hills.'

'You're mean,' she said to Julian, 'and you hate girls really. Don't imagine I don't see through you. You're trying to get me down. But you won't do it. If you think you're the only man in the world who's fond of me or that I'm a goddamned fool, you're making the hell of a big mistake, you and your mother.'

She plucked a hairpin from her hair, bent it into the shape of pince-nez and went on in a mincing voice 'Do Ay understand you tew say thet may sonn – ' she placed the pince-nez on her nose and looked over it sourly ' – with one connection–'

'Damn you,' said Julian, 'damn you, damn you.'

'Now they're off,' Marston said placidly. 'Drinking on a hot afternoon is a mistake. The pen-knife will be out in a minute ... Don't go. Stay and watch the fun. My

money on Frankie every time.’

But I went into the bedroom and shut the door. I could hear them wrangling and Marston, very calm and superior, putting in a word now and again. Then nothing. They had gone on to the verandah.

I got the letter I had written and tore it very carefully into four pieces. I spat on each piece. I opened the door – there was not a sign of them. I took the pieces of paper to the lavatory, emptied them in and pulled the plug. As soon as I heard the water gushing I felt better.

The door of the kitchen was open and I saw that there was another path leading to the main road.

And there I was, walking along, not thinking of anything, my eyes fixed on the ground. I walked a long way like that, not looking up, though I passed several people. At last I came to a sign-post. I was the Cirencester road. Something about the word ‘miles’ written made me feel very tired.

A little farther on the wall on one side of the road was low. It was the same wall on which Marston and I had sat that morning, and he had said ‘Do you think we could rest here or will the very stones rise up against us?’ I looked round and there was nobody in sight, so I stepped over it and sat down in the shade. It was pretty country, but bare. The white, glaring look was still in the sky.

Close by there was a dove cooing. ‘Coo away, dove,’ I

thought. ‘It’s no use, no use, still coo away, coo away.’

Alter a while the dazed feeling, as if somebody had hit me on the head, began to go. I thought ‘Cirencester – and then a train to London. It’s as easy as that.’

Then I realized that I had left my handbag and money, as well as everything else, in the bedroom at the cottage, but imagining walking back there made me feel so tired that I could hardly put one foot in front of the other.

I got over the wall. A car that was coming along slowed down and stopped and the man driving it said ‘Want a lift?’

I went up to the car.

‘Where do you want to go?’

‘I want to go to London.’

‘To London? Well, I can’t take you as far as that, but I can get you into Cirencester to catch a train if you like.’

I said anxiously ‘Yes – but I must go back first to the place where I’ve been staying. It’s not far.’

‘Haven’t time for that. I’ve got an appointment. I’m late already and I mustn’t miss it. Tell you what – come along with me. If you’ll wait till I’ve done I can take you to fetch your things.’

I got into the car. As soon as I touched him I felt comforted. Some men are like that.

‘Well, you look as if you’d lost a shilling and found sixpence.’

Again I had to laugh.

That's better. Never does any good to be down in the mouth.' nearly in Cirencester now,' he said after a while. 'I've got to see a lot of people. This is market day and I'm a farmer. I'll take you to a nice quiet place where you can have a cup of tea while you're waiting.'

He drove to a pub in a narrow street. 'This way in.' I followed him into the bar.

'Good afternoon, Mrs Strickland. Lovely day, isn't it? Will you give my friend a cup of tea while I'm away, and make her comfortable? She's very tired.'

'I will, certainly,' Mrs Strickland said, with a swift glance up and down. 'I expect the young lady would like a nice wash too, wouldn't she?' She was dark and nicely got up, but her voice had a tinny sound.

'Oh, I would.'

I looked down at my crumpled white dress. I touched my face for I knew there must be a red mark where I had lain with it pressed against the ground.

'See you later,' the farmer said.

There were brightly polished taps in the ladies' room and a very clean red and black tiled floor. I washed my hands, tried to smooth my dress, and powdered my face – Poudre Nilde basanee – but I did it without looking in the glass.

Tea and cakes were laid in a small, dark, stuffy room. There were three pictures of Lady Hamilton, Johnny Walker advertisements, china bulldogs wearing

sailor caps and two calendars. One said January 9th, but the other was right – July 28th, 1914 . . .

'Well, here I am.' He sat heavily down beside me. Did Mrs Strickland look after you all right?'

'Very well.'

'Oh, she's a good sort, she's a nice woman. She's known me a long time. Of course, you haven't, have you? But everything's got to have a start.'

Then he said he hadn't done so badly that afternoon and stretched out his legs, looking pleased, looking happy as the day is long.

'What were you thinking about when I came in? You nearly jumped out of your skin.'

'I was thinking about the time.'

'About the time? Oh, don't worry about that. There's plenty of time.'

He produced a large silver case, took out a cigar and lighted it, long and slow. 'Plenty of time,' he said. 'Dark in here, isn't it? So you live in London, do you?'

'Yes.'

'I've often thought I'd like to know a nice girl up in London.'

His eyes were fixed on Lady Hamilton and I knew he was imagining, a really lovely girl – all curves, curls, heart and hidden claws. He swallowed, then put his hand over mine.

'I'd like to feel that when I go up to Town there's a friend I could see and have a good time with. You know.'

And I could give her a good time too. By God, I could. I know what women are like.'

'You do?'

'Yes, I do. They like a bit of loving, that's what they like, isn't it? A bit of loving. All women like that. They like it dressed up sometimes – and sometimes not, it all depends. You have to know, and I know. I just know.'

'You've nothing more to learn, have you?'

'Not in that way I haven't. And they like pretty dresses and bottles of scent, and bracelets with blue stones in them. I know. Well, what about it?' he said, but as if he were joking.

I looked away from him at the calendar and did not answer, making my face blank.

'What about it?' he repeated.

'It's nice of you to say you want to see me again – very polite.'

He laughed. 'You think I'm being polite, do you? Well, perhaps – perhaps not. No harm in asking, was there? No offence meant – or taken, I hope. It's all right. I'll take you to get your things and catch your train – and we'll have a bottle of something good before we start off. It won't hurt you. It's bad stuff hurts you, not good stuff. You haven't found that out yet, but you will. Mrs Strickland has some good stuff, I can tell you – good enough for me, and I want the best.'

So we had a bottle of Clicquot in the bar.

He said 'It puts some life into you, doesn't it?'

It did too. I wasn't feeling tired when we left the pub, nor even sad.

'Well,' he said as we got into the car, 'you've got to tell me where to drive to. And you don't happen to know a little song, do you?'

'That was very pretty,' he said when I stopped. 'You've got a very pretty voice indeed. Give us some more.'

But we were getting near the cottage and I didn't finish the next song because I was nervous and worried that I wouldn't be able to tell him the right turning.

At the foot of the path I thought 'The champagne worked all right.'

He got out of the car and came with me. When we reached the gate leading into the garden he stood by my side without speaking.

They were on the verandah. We could hear their voices clearly.

'Listen, fool,' Julian was saying, 'listen, half-wit. What I said yesterday has nothing to do with what I say today or what I shall say tomorrow. Why should it?'

'That's what you think,' Frankie said obstinately. 'I don't agree with you. It might have something to do with it whether you like it or not.'

'Oh, stop arguing, you two,' Marston said. 'It's all very well for, you, Julian, but I'm worried about that girl. I'm responsible. She looked so damned miserable. Supposing she's gone and made away with herself. I

shall feel awful. Besides, probably I shall be held up to every kind of scorn and obloquy – as usual. And though it's all your fault you'll escape scot-free – also as usual.'

Are those your friends?' the farmer asked.

'Well, they're my friends in a way . . . I have to go in to get my things. It won't take me long.'

Julian said 'I think, I rather think, Marston, that I hear a female pipe down there. You can lay your fears away. She's not the sort to kill herself. I told you that.'

'Who's that?' the farmer said.

'That's Mr Oakes, one of my hosts.'

'Oh, is it? I don't like the sound of him. I don't like the sound of any of them. Shall I come with you?'

'No, don't. I won't be long.'

I went round by the kitchen into my room, walking very softly. I changed into my dark dress and then began to throw my things into the suitcase. I did all this as quickly as I could, but before I had finished Marston came in, still wearing his black pyjamas crawling with dragons.

'Who were you talking to outside?'

'Oh, that's a man I met. He's going to drive me to Cirencester to catch the London train.'

'You're not offended, are you?'

'Not a bit. Why should I be?'

'Of course, the great Julian can be so difficult,' he murmured. 'But don't think I didn't stick up for you, because I did. I said to him "It's all very well for you to

be rude to a girl I bring down, but what about your loathly Frankie, whom you inflict upon me day after day and week after week and I never say a word? I'm never even sharp to her – " What are you smiling at?'

The idea of your being sharp to Frankie.'

The horrid little creature!' Marston said excitedly, 'the unspeakable bitch! But the day will come when Julian will find her out and he'll run to me for sympathy. I'll not give it him. Not after this ... Cheer up,' he said. 'The world is big. There's hope.'

'Of course.' But suddenly I saw the women's long, scowling faces over their lupins and their poppies and my room in Torrington Square and the iron bars of my bedstead, and I thought 'Not for me.'

'It may all be necessary,' he said, as if he were talking to himself. 'One has to get an entirely different set of values to be any good.'

I said 'Do you think I could go out through the window? I don't want to meet them.'

'I'll come to the car with you. What's this man like?'

'Well, he's a bit like the man this morning, and he says he doesn't care for the sound of you.'

'Then I think I won't come. Go through the window and I'll hand your suitcase to you.'

He leaned out and said 'See you in September, Petronella. I'll be back in September.'

I looked up at him. 'All right. Same old address.'

The farmer said 'I was coming in after you. You're

well rid of that lot – never did like that sort. Too many of them about.’

‘They’re all right.’

‘Well, tune up,’ he said, and I sang ‘Mr Brown, Mr Brown, Had a violin, Went around, went around, With his violin.’ I sang all the way to Cirencester.

At the station he gave me my ticket and a box of chocolates. ‘I bought these for you this afternoon, but I forgot them. Better hurry – there’s not much time.’

‘Fare you well,’ he said. ‘That’s what they say in Norfolk, where I come from.’

‘Goodbye.’

‘No, say fare you well.’

‘Fare you well.’

The train started.

‘This is very nice,’ I thought, ‘my first-class carriage,’ and had a long look at myself in the glass for the first time since it had happened. ‘Never mind,’ I said, and remembered Marston saying ‘Never mind, never mind.’

‘Don’t look so down in the mouth, my girl,’ I said to myself. ‘*Look gay.*’

‘Cheer up,’ I said, and kissed myself in the cool glass. I stood with my forehead against it and watched my face clouding gradually, then turned because I felt as if someone was staring at me, but it was only the girl on the cover of the chocolate-box. She had slanting green eyes, but they were too close together, and she had a white, square, smug face that didn’t go with her

slanting eyes. ‘I bet you could be a rotten, respectable, sneering bitch too, with a face like that, if you had the chance,’ I told her.

The train got into Paddington just before ten. As soon as I was on the platform I remembered the chocolates, but I didn’t go back for them. ‘Somebody will find you, somebody will look after you, you rotten, sneering, stupid, tight-mouthed bitch,’ I thought.

London always smells the same. ‘Frowsty,’ you think, ‘but I’m glad to be back.’ And just for a while it bears you up. ‘Anything’s round the corner,’ you think. But long before you get round the corner it lets you drop.

I decided that I’d walk for a bit with the suitcase and get tired and then perhaps I’d sleep. But at the corner of Marylebone Road and Edgware Road my arm was stiff and I put down the suitcase and waved at a taxi standing by the kerb.

‘Sorry, miss,’ the driver said, ‘this gentleman was first.’

The young man smiled. ‘It’s all right. You have it.’

‘*You have it,*’ he said. *The other one said ‘Want a lift?’*

‘I can get the next one. I’m not in any hurry.’

‘Nor am I.’

The taxi-driver moved impatiently.

‘Well, don’t let’s hesitate any longer,’ the young man said, ‘or we’ll lose our taximeter-cab. Get in – I can easily drop you wherever you’re going.’

‘Go along Edgware Road,’ he said to the driver. ‘I’ll

tell you where in a minute.'

The taxi started.

'Where to?'

'Torrington Square.'

The house would be waiting for me. 'When I pass Estelle's door,' I thought, 'There'll be no smell of scent now.' Then I was back in my small room on the top floor, listening to the church clock chiming every quarter-hour. 'There's a good time coming for the ladies. There's a good time coming for the girls . . . '

I said 'Wait a minute. I don't want to go to Torrington Square.' 'Oh, you don't want to go to Torrington Square?' He seemed amused and wary, but more wary than amused.

'It's such a lovely night, so warm. I don't want to go home just yet. I think I'll go and sit in Hyde Park.'

'Not Torrington Square,' he shouted through the window. The taxi drew up.

'Damn his eyes, what's he done that for.'

The driver got down and opened the door.

'Here, where am I going to? This is the third time you've changed your mind since you 'ailed me.'

'You'll go where you're damn well told.'

'Well where am I damn well told?'

'Go to the Marble Arch.'

'Yde Park,' the driver said, looking us up and down and grinning broadly. Then he got back into his seat.

'I can't bear some of these chaps can you?' the young

man said.

When the taxi stopped at the end of Park Lane we both got out without a word. The driver looked us up and down again scornfully before he started away.

'What do you want to do in Hyde Park? Look at the trees?' He took my suitcase and walked along by my side.

'Yes, I want to look at the trees and not go back to the place where I live. Never go back.'

'I've never lived in a place I like,' I thought, 'never.'

'That does sound desperate. Well, let's see if we can find a secluded spot.'

'That chair over there will do,' I said. It was away from people under a tree. Not that people mattered much, for now it was night and they are never so frightening then.

I shut my eyes so that I could hear and smell the trees better. I imagined I could smell water too. The Serpentine – I didn't know we had walked so far.

He said 'I can't leave you so disconsolate on this lovely night – this night of love and night of stars.' He gave a loud hiccup, and then another. 'That always happens when I've eaten quails.'

'It happens to me when I'm tight.'

'Does it?' He pulled another chair forward and sat down by my side. 'I can't leave you now until I know where you're going with that large suitcase and that desperate expression.'

I told him that I had just come back after a stay in the country, and he told me that he did not live in London, that his name was Melville and that he was at a loose end that evening.

‘Did somebody let you down?’

‘Oh, that’s not important – not half so important as the desperate expression. I noticed that as soon as I saw you.’

‘That’s not despair, it’s hunger,’ I said, dropping into the back-chat ‘Don’t you know hunger when you see it?’

‘Well, let’s go and have something to eat, then. But where?’ He looked at me uncertainly. ‘Where?’

‘We could go to the Apple Tree. Of course, it’s a bit early, but we might be able to get kippers or eggs and bacon or sausages and mash.’

‘The Apple Tree? I’ve heard of it. Could we go there?’ he said, still eyeing me.

‘We could indeed. You could come as my guest. I’m a member. I was one of the first members,’ I boasted.

I had touched the right spring – even the feeling of his hand on my arm had changed. *Always the same spring to touch before the sneering expression will go out of their eyes and the sneering sound out of their voices. Think about it – it’s very important.*

‘Lots of pretty girls at the Apple Tree, aren’t there?’ he said.

‘I can’t promise anything. It’s a bad time of year for the Apple Tree, the singing and the gold.’

‘Now what are you talking about?’

‘Somebody I know calls it that.’

‘But you’ll be there.’ He pulled his chair closer and looked round cautiously before he kissed me. ‘And you’re an awfully pretty girl, aren’t you? ... The Apple Tree, the singing and the gold. I like that.’

‘Better than “Night of love and night of stars”?’

‘Oh, they’re not in the same street.’

I thought ‘How do you know what’s in what street? How do they know who’s fifth-rate, who’s first-rate and where the devouring spider lives?’

‘You don’t really mind where we go, do you?’ he said.

‘I don’t mind at all.’

He took his arm away. ‘It was odd our meeting like that, wasn’t it?’

‘I don’t think so. I don’t think it was odd at all.’

After a silence, ‘I haven’t been very swift in the uptake, have I?’ he said.

‘No, you haven’t. Now, let’s be off to the Apple Tree, the singing and the gold.’

‘Oh, damn the Apple Tree. I know a better place than that.’

‘I’ve been persuaded to taste it before,’ Marston said. ‘It tasted exactly as I thought it would.’

And everything was exactly as I had expected. The knowing waiters, the touch of the ice-cold wine-glass, the red plush chairs, the food you don’t notice, the gold-framed mirror, the bed in the room beyond that always

looks as if its ostentatious whiteness hides dinginess...

But Marston should have said 'It tastes of nothing, my dear, it tastes of nothing...'

When we got out into Leicester Square again I had forgotten Marston and only thought about how, when we had nothing better to do, Estelle and I would go to the Corner House or to some cheap restaurant in Soho and have dinner. She was so earnest when it came to food. 'You must have one good meal a day,' she would say, 'it is necessary.' Escalope de veau and fried potatoes and brussels sprouts, we usually had, and then crème caramel or compote de fruits. And she seemed to be walking along by my side, wearing her blue suit and her white blouse, her high heels tapping. But as we turned the corner by the Hippodrome she vanished. I thought 'I shall never see her again – I know it.'

In the taxi he said 'I don't forget addresses, do I?'

'No, you don't.'

To keep myself awake I began to sing 'Mr Brown, Mr Brown, Had a violin . . . '

'Are you on the stage?'

'I was. I started my brilliant and successful career like so many others, in the chorus. But I wasn't a success.'

'What a shame! Why?'

'Because I couldn't say "epigrammatic".'

He laughed – really laughed that time.

'The stage manager had the dotty idea of pulling me out of my obscurity and giving me a line to say. The line was "Oh, Lottie, Lottie, don't be epigrammatic". I rehearsed it and rehearsed it, but when it came to the night it was just a blank.'

At the top of Charing Cross Road the taxi was held up. We were both laughing so much that people turned round and stared at us.

'It was one of the most dreadful moments of my life, and I shan't ever forget it. There was the stage manager, mouthing at me from the wings – he was the prompter too and he also played a small part, the family lawyer – and there he was all dressed up in grey-striped trousers and a black tail-coat and top hat and silver side-whiskers, and there I was, in a yellow dress and a large straw hat and a green sunshade and a lovely background of an English castle and garden – half-ruined and half not, you know – and a chorus of footmen and maids, and my mind a complete blank.'

The taxi started again. 'Well, what happened?'

'Nothing. After one second the other actors went smoothly on. I remember the next line. It was "Going to Ascot? Well, if you don't get into the Royal Enclosure when you are there I'm no judge of character".'

'But what about the audience?'

Oh, the audience weren't surprised because, you see, they had never expected me to speak at all. Well, here we are.'

I gave him my latchkey and he opened the door.

‘A formidable key! It’s like the key of a prison,’ he said. Everyone had gone to bed and there wasn’t even a ghost of Estelle’s scent in the hall.

‘We must see each other again,’ he said. ‘Please. Couldn’t you write to me at – ’ He stopped. ‘No, I’ll write to you. If you’re ever – I’ll write to you anyway.’

I said ‘Do you know what I want? I want a gold bracelet with blue stones in it. Not too blue – the darker blue I prefer.’

‘Oh, well.’ He was wary again. ‘I’ll do my best, but I’m not one of these plutocrats, you know.’

‘Don’t you dare to come back without it. But I’m going away for a few weeks. I’ll be here again in September.’

‘All right, I’ll see you in September, Petronella,’ he said chirpily, anxious to be off. ‘And you’ve been so sweet to me.’

‘The pleasure was all mine.’

He shook his head. ‘Now, Lottie, Lottie, don’t be epigrammatic.’

I thought ‘I daresay he would be nice if one got to know him. I daresay, perhaps...’ listening to him tapping goodbye on the other side of the door. I tapped back twice and then started up the stairs. Past the door of Estelle’s room, not feeling a thing as I passed it, because she had gone and I knew she would not ever come back.

In my room I stood looking out of the window, remembering my yellow dress, the blurred mass of the audience and the face of one man in the front row seen quite clearly, and how I thought, as quick as lightning. ‘Help me, tell me what I have forgotten.’ But though he had looked, as it seemed, straight into my eyes, and though I was sure he knew exactly what I was thinking, he had not helped me. He had only smiled. He had left me in that moment that seemed like years standing there until through the dreadful blankness of my mind I had heard a high, shrill, cockney voice saying ‘Going to Ascot?’ and seen the stage manager frown and shake his head at me.

‘My God, I must have looked a fool,’ I thought, laughing and feeling the tears running down my face.

‘What a waste of good tears!’ the other girls had told me when I cried in the dressing-room that night. And I heard myself saying out loud in an affected voice ‘Oh, the waste, the waste, the waste!’

But that did not last long.

‘What’s the time?’ I thought, and because I wasn’t sleepy any longer I sat down in the chair by the window, waiting for the clock outside to strike. ♦

Fatsnakes Under London

by *Mike Michael*

In September 2017 a snake of fat or how it generally came to be called a fatberg weighing around 130 tonnes with a length of over 250 metres was discovered in a Whitechapel sewer. A first reading of media reports would suggest that people reacted to this London fatberg with horror and disgust. The fatberg brought to people's attention a variety of excreta and effluvia, of human wastes and weaknesses. But, on closer reading, the fatberg eventually also invited shame, pride, admiration, and even pleasure.

London's sewer infrastructure is routinely portrayed as a system on the verge of collapse. Joseph William Bazalgette's brilliant nineteenth-century design, originally supposed to serve a population of 2.5 million people, now serves around 9 million, and Londoners are at risk from all sorts of unpleasant flows and backflows of sewage. In this context, the fatberg points to dangers posed by an infrastructure that faces unforeseen challenges, not least those posed by the incongruous combination of fat and wet wipes.

Fatbergs are masses of fat that have collected and solidified in sewers, mainly in cities in the developed world. They can potentially lead to backflows of sewage through toilets, baths, and sinks. The first London fatberg was identified in 2013 in Kingston-upon-Thames, and the now-famous Whitechapel fatberg was discovered four years later. The latter was the subject of the Fatberg! exhibition at the Museum of London. Another fatberg, three times the size of Whitechapel's, was located in 2018 under the South Bank. This last one provided the material for Channel 4's TV program Fatberg Autopsy. Inevitably, there is a fatberg musical in the pipeline. I became fascinated by these presentations, and the public feelings that they evoke. And the more I looked at the feelings, the more they seemed to me to be providing broad, though perhaps shallow, support of the sewer infrastructure itself.

Fatbergs accumulate and grow because fat can attach to something. That something, it turns out, is primarily the wet wipe. Because these tend not to break down in the water flow of the sewers, wet wipes serve as surfaces to which fat can stick, accumulate, and attach to other objects (including condoms and tampons) which serve as further surfaces to which more fat can attach. However, the fat loses its usual consistency (oily and semi-solid) because it combines with calcium in the water to become soap. But this soap has no connotations of cleanliness, because of its

association and combination with the most intimate of artifacts and its blockage of the free flow of human waste. And thus the fatberg provokes shame, the shame of lazily disposing of oil and fat down the sink, the shame of having bodies that produce so many different kinds of waste and effluvia.

The Fatberg Autopsy TV program follows biological investigations of the South Bank Fatberg. These reveal a range of microbes that include *E. coli*, *Listeria*, *Campylobacter*, and antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The program begins with the initial tropes of epidemics, plagues, and monsters, and completes this narrative arc with the presenters' expressions of horror at the antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and the scientists' dire warnings that these germs could kill us all. Fatbergs, then, look like a source of possible infections, with potentially catastrophic effects.

In this version of the fatberg, it would appear as if it has somehow "gathered" and "concentrated" the microbes and the risk. Indeed, the fatberg is made to reflect a breach in the sewer infrastructure, allowing dangerous microbes to amass. In this respect, the bacterial threat and the associated anxiety rest on a tacit version of infrastructure under attack by an unruly nature. It would be a surprise, though, if there weren't dangerous bacteria in sewage systems; the microbes presumably pre-existed the fatberg and have merely exploited its presence. And fat is, after all, a

food, and it would be a surprise if there weren't bacteria and other organisms growing and feeding on it.

Again and again-in articles, in the Fatberg! museum display, the Fatberg Autopsy TV program-the massiveness of the fatberg gets emphasized. Indeed, the connotations of unhealthiness that attach to fat are echoed in the refrain over the massiveness of the fatbergs. The fatberg's fat suggests too much grease in the diet: Londoners are eating badly and irresponsibly.

By the same token, there is a sense that if London is going to display its unhealthiness through its fatbergs, that should be a peculiarly Londonesque unhealthiness. This is captured in an article in the UK broadsheet the Guardian: "The units in which it was routinely measured gave away its birthplace. This being a London phenomenon it was invariably described in local currency: at 820 feet, the fatberg was 'longer than Tower Bridge' or 'twice as long as Wembley Stadium' and 'the weight of 11 double-decker buses!'"

London can be ironic about the iconicity of London (and its fatbergs) by using peculiar indigenous units to chart its own decline. This irony is underlined by a cartoon in London's local newspaper the Evening Standard — which concludes with a trendy Londoner saying: "It's a bit like the Northern Lights, only smellier." It is like an elusive natural phenomenon worthy of touristic pursuit. Pride is enacted as the

underside of ridicule.

Londoners take ownership of their fatbergs. London pride is expressed in the almost unseemly speed with which the fatberg went from sewer problem to star exhibit at the Museum of London. There, the fatberg became a mass that entangles and reveals London's present history. As one of the information panels puts it: "As the Museum of London, it's important that we collect things that reflect the highs and lows of living in the city, today as well as in the past. We can tell a lot about a society by studying its waste. Many historic items in our collections were found in cesspits, or were never considered worth keeping."

Fatbergs are disgusting, fascinating things which mark a particular moment in London's history. They are modern monsters, created by people and businesses who discard rubbish and fat which London's Victorian sewer system was never designed to cope with. London is built on invisible, often ageing infrastructures that many of us take for granted and rarely think about. But the size and foulness of fatbergs make them impossible to ignore and remind us of our failings.

It is not simply foul waste but a lens through which to derive insights into the life of contemporary London.

Fatberg Autopsy reveals the immense challenge of identifying, accessing, breaking up, and removing the fatberg from the sewer. When the program's host Rick Edwards enters the sewer, he can't help retching from

the sheer stench. The most obvious smells may be less dangerous than other gases; the "Rushers" — the employees tasked with ensuring smooth sewage flows — carry warning devices that are triggered when the concentrations of carbon monoxide and hydrogen sulphide become too high. Workers also have to deal with the discomfort of heavy-duty protective clothing and breathing equipment in cramped and difficult physical conditions. Especially challenging for the flushers is the physical resistance put up by the fat-laden sewage they wade through. Finally, there is the sheer physical exertion required to break up the fatbergs. While flushers can use high-pressure hoses to break up some of the fatberg, sometimes they need to attack it with shovels and picks. As one of the information panels at the Fatberg! exhibition states: "Fatbergs are rock-solid and removing them from London's sewers is back-breaking work in cramped, filthy and dangerous conditions. High-powered jet hoses are needed to break them up, so they can be sucked out of the sewer by tankers. Some parts of the Whitechapel fatberg had to be hacked from the sewer walls with nothing but brute force and shovels. The fatberg took nine weeks to remove, with eight waste engineers working nine hours a day, seven days a week."

The sense of courage and exertion is redoubled by the fatberg's characterization as a monster, a beast or

creature that needs to be defeated.

It's a total monster ... it's like trying to break up concrete. (Matt Rimmer, Thames Water's head of Waste Networks)

Nailing the fatberg was like battling a giant Harry Potter movie creature beneath the streets of London. (Andy Brierley, director of a maintenance partner for Thames Water)

Our work is finished, and the beast is finally defeated. (Alex Saunders, sewer network manager, Thames Water)

The program asks the audience to revel in, be grateful for, and have admiration for the bravery of the sewage professionals.

In *Fatberg Autopsy*, the blame is placed squarely on the wet wipe. The program did an experiment, filling flasks with water and different kinds of "wipes," and then agitating them to mimic the flow of water in a sewage system. While toilet paper disintegrates readily, and some brands of "flushable" (as advertised on the packaging) wet wipes break up reasonably well, other "flushable" wipes fail to break up at all.

Fatberg Autopsy then urges people to stop flushing wet wipes: "you're responsible for the fatberg," the host tells the audience. But the main suggestion is to alter the labelling on wet wipe packets so that "flushable" means that wet wipes are "sewer friendly," rather than simply capable of getting around a toilet's U-bend. For

those wet wipes that do not break up, their packets should prominently sport a "do not flush" logo. As the voice-over notes, at that point in time there was no regulation to force compliance on the part of manufacturers.

This view of the wet wipe has been reinforced in a Guardian article entitled: "From babies' bums to fatbergs: How we fell out of love with wet wipes." Rae Steward, Water UK's director of corporate affairs, complains: "Water companies spend billions of pounds every year improving water and sewerage services in this country, but our sewers are just not designed to handle these new wipes which clog up the system. Sewer blockages end up costing the country about 100m [pounds sterling] every year so it's clear that something needs to change."

In all this, the fatberg is tied not only to shame, but also to guilt and responsibility, which need to be addressed through various changes in behaviour at both personal and corporate levels.

Both the Museum of London display and *Fatberg Autopsy* deploy techniques to evoke cinematic horror. In both, for example, lighting is arranged to echo the darkness of the sewers. In the exhibit, pools of light illuminate quotes placed on the walls, cabinets of equipment, and the fatberg fragments in their own glass display cases. The curators are tacitly referencing the horror movie genre, with its calculated patterning

of fragmented and partial visibilities.

In *Fatberg Autopsy*, the space in which the autopsy takes place is housed in an old Victorian sewage processing building. The lighting is arranged to optimize an atmosphere of unease. The light is at its strongest around the science section, where chemical and microbial analyses of the fatberg take place. The illumination provided by science immediately produces scientists' evident horrified relish as they describe the danger-laden components of the fatberg. This can be contrasted with the deadpan responses of the flushers who, in breaking up the fatberg at their separate table, treat the removal of syringes, condoms, and so on as a practical and mundane matter. Where the scientists show danger and horror, the flushers reveal everyday life.

Of course, horror is to be enjoyed. For all the various terrors, dangers, and dreads associated with the fatbergs, these are safely contained through the markers and pleasurable familiarity of the horror film. The fatbergs are simultaneously mysterious and uncontrolled, and known and domesticated. In sum, the horror of the fatberg is to be taken seriously but not too seriously.

Let us not ignore a very different form of lighting, though, at the Museum of London exhibit. The illumination is brightest in the gift shop. There, under harsh lighting, is a display of fatberg-related products

that one can buy: "Don't Feed the Fatberg" T-shirts and bags, depicting a white ghost-like fatberg with empty eyes and a gaping mouth climbing over a wall or out of a sewer, packets of "Fatberg Sludge" fudge, and copies of the book *London's Sewers*, to mention the most obvious. Wound around the table on which these products are arranged is black and yellow striped hazard tape. The direct and intense lighting allows visitors to take pleasure in the artifacts and the humour they provide.

The multiple versions of London's fatbergs bring on multiple feelings. To what extent are these peculiar to London, and if so, why might this be the case? Is the London-ness of the fatbergs another version of the retrenchment of Britishness seen in debates around Brexit? Would there be similar reactions to a fatberg problem in New York or Amsterdam? Further, if parallel problems arose in other forms of infrastructure, say in transport or power systems, would similar feelings arise?

The fatberg was "in" the sewerage infrastructure, but I followed it as it circulated through media. Are versions of the fatberg, as portrayed through various media outlets, also part of the public functioning of London's sewage system? Does the "soft" infrastructure of cleanliness and hygiene reconfigure the sewage infrastructure? Are Londoners' feelings ultimately part of the sewer system infrastructure itself?

Finally, throughout these various representations of the fatberg, the sewerage infrastructure has been portrayed primarily as a system, a thing, a noun. In contrast, many contemporary analysts regard infrastructures in terms of processes and practices: in this respect, the verb "infrastructuring" is particularly useful. This is because it serves to highlight the heterogeneous efforts that go into sustaining an infrastructure. Maintaining, modifying, repairing, upgrading, expanding, repurposing, etc. — all these (and more) are intrinsic to infrastructures such as London's sewerage system. Crucially, this conceptualization also alerts us to some broader implications : instead of being under attack by the fatberg "monsters," infrastructuring should be seen as central to their manifestation. What practices and processes (or absence thereof) enabled the fatbergs to rear their ugly heads? It is not difficult to ask this very question in relation to another "monster" — the "silent enemy" that is COVID-19. ♦



Side by...

London

by *William Blake*

*I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.*

*In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.*

*How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.*

*But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse. ♦*

...by side

London

Radnóti Miklós fordítása

*Sikátor mélyén lépdelek
A Temze partjához közel,
És minden arcon jel remeg,
Bűn és bánat marta jel.*

*Gyerekhangból, ha fél, eseng,
S ha jaj sikolt a férfiből,
Panaszból, átokból, ha zeng,
Az értelem bilincse szól.*

*Kéményseprő hangja száll,
S templomot rémitve kél,
Omlik paloták falán
Zsoldos hangja, mint a vér.*

*És hallom, amint éjfél tájt
Ifju szajha csecsemőt
Átkoz és dögvészt kiált
Megposhadt hitvesek előtt. ♦*



London

Gergely Ágnes fordítása

*A parton járok szerteszét
Megannyi ódon házsoron,
S az arcokon kín, gyengeség
Redőivel találkozom.*

*Ha Férfi átka feldörög,
Ha Gyermekek sír, hogy álma nincs,
A szóban, jajban ott csörög
Az ész csinálta rabbilincs.*

*Kéményseprők sóhaja
Leng a rémült Templomon,
Szegény Katonák jaja
Vért csordít a Várfalon.*

*Míg újszülöttjét elveri,
Dögvészt sikolt az utcalány,
S az éj átkokkal van teli
A Házasság ravatalán. ♦*

Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

by *William Wordsworth*

*Earth has not anything to show more fair .
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;
This City now doth, like a garment, wear*

*The beauty of the morning; silent, bare.
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.*

*Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendor, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!*

*The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still! ♦*

A Westminster-hidon

Radnóti Miklós fordítása

*Nincs ennél szebb e földi téreken:
ily méltóság s ily megható, szelíd
látvány; a lélek szépséggel telik:
mert fénybe öltözött e reggelen*

*a város s mégis csöndes, meztelen;
nézd a hajók, a tornyok ezreit,
templom, színház lélegzik égre itt
s járkal a tiszta égbolt fénye lenn.*

*Soha még szebben fel nem kelt a nap,
aranyban ázik völgy, domb, s épp olyan
arany a béke bennem s hallgatag!*

*Jókedve van, hát gördül a folyam:
ó, Istenem! a házak alszanak;
nagy szív a város. Nyugszik boldogan! ♦*

A Westminster hídon

Szabó Lőrinc fordítása

*Földi látvány nincs még ily isteni:
nyomorult lélek, ki varázserőt
nem érez e fenséges kép előtt;
a Város most mint ruhát viseli*

*a tündér reggelt; dómok tornyai
ragyognak némán; partok és mezők;
még minden üres, az ég a tetők;
a füsttelen táj szikrákkal teli.*

*Szebb hegyeket, völgyeket, dombokat
kelő fény még nem locsolt sohasem;
csend sohse volt mélyebb, nyugalmasabb!*

*A folyam fut, békén, kényelmesen;
Úristen! a házak is alszanak;
s ez az egész hatalmas szív pihen! ♦*

A Westminster Hídról írtam

(Israel Efraim fordítása)

*Szebb látványt nem láttat a föld,
Lenyűgözőbbet nem talál a szem,
Ki meg nem állna itt, érzéktelen:
A város, mint ruhát, magára ölt*

*Hajnali szépséget; csöndes, fennkölt
Dómok, színházak, hajók a vizen
A tájra tárva, égre odafenn;
Vibrálás járja át a levegőt.*

*Sosem kelhetett szebben fel a nap
Pompájában sziklán vagy dombokon;
Sosem volt nyugalmam nyugalmasabb!*

*Halad útján a folyó szabadon:
Ó, Uram! Városod még álmatag;
E nagy szíven Te legyél oltalom. ♦*