

Through the Weather Glass

(& What Icarus Found There)

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Carry a paper and pen at all times in case of inspiration. As we all know, climate change can hit at any time at any place. It probably comes most often when least expected, when waiting in the checkout line or sitting in a traffic jam. The immediate feeling of the instinctual emotion felt at the very moment will be forgotten, or at least, begin to cloud in memory.



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Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. The following poems were previously published in *Leaf Graffiti* (Carcanet Press, 2013): 'Awake, and tingling near the air,' 'Changes at peripheries of vision,' 'So here I am, then,' 'Icarus is depressed by the thought,' 'A month already so much sky,' 'Beyond the road,' 'The average spelling of the weather,' and 'Icarus.' 'I never saw it as a form of fleeing,' 'A place of circus,' 'A loss of river limbs,' and 'Icarus' were published in *Shadowtrain*. Thanks to the publishers.

The image on p.188, *Pinarello Queen of the Desert*, is an artwork by Lisa Fingleton.

Abstract

This Creative Writing thesis argues for the need to rethink our understanding of climate change and focuses on the response of creative writers to this phenomenon, whilst also offering its own creative contribution. The critical component aims at articulating a post-climate change poetics. It reviews the mainstream literature in popular science writing, fiction and poetry from the point of view of a political frame-analysis of climate change, to demonstrate how a certain understanding of climate change maps onto conventions of literary genre. The thesis takes the view that many mainstream literary attempts to negotiate climate change are compromised by the teleological way in which they conceive of the phenomenon. As an alternative position, it draws on the work of climatologist Mike Hulme and physicist and cultural theorist Karen Barad to encourage participation in climate change as a condition for negotiating its meaning. Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* is proposed as a model for literary production informed by this poetics and as a model for the author's own creative practice. The creative component of this thesis is an intra-generic text presenting the fictionalised narrative of a cycle expedition the author made from Salford to the Greek island of Ikaria in the summer of 2010. This substantial work aims to interrogate, imagine, and enquire into the epistemology of a post-climate change world.

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Critical Introduction

An introductory overview

As recently as 2005, two literary environmental commentators on either side of the Atlantic bemoaned the lack of cultural response to climate change. In an article for the environmental magazine *Grist*, American Bill McKibben presented what he called the 'climate paradox':

If the scientists are right, we're living through the biggest thing that's happened since civilisation emerged. One species, ours, has by itself in the course of a couple of generations managed to powerfully raise the temperature of an entire planet, to knock its most basic systems out of kilter. But oddly enough, though we know about it, we *don't* know about it. It hasn't registered in our gut; it isn't part of our culture. Where are the books? The poems? The plays? The goddam operas? (McKibben 2005: online)

McKibben compares the limited response to climate change with the 'staggering output', and 'real political effect' of art about AIDs over the previous two decades. Later that year British nature writer and journalist Robert Macfarlane issued a similar rallying cry to writers in an article in *The Guardian*. His rhetoric echoes McKibben's: 'Where is the literature of climate change? Where is the creative response to what Sir David King, the government's chief scientific adviser, has famously described as 'the most severe problem faced by the world'?' (Macfarlane 2005: online) Macfarlane compares the lack of climate change literature with the abundance of work produced in response to 'the other great eschatological crisis of the past half century – the nuclear threat.'

Since these commentators wrote, a flurry of climate change novels, poems and poetry anthologies have been published. This has been sufficient for two critics who recently completed a comprehensive review of climate change fiction to describe it as an 'explosion' (Trexler & Putra 2010: 186). However, if it has been an explosion, it has been a controlled one, for the extent of the literary response remains vastly out of proportion to what climate change appears to demand, and a minority literary interest. In an article for *New Formations*, US critic Adrian Ivakhiv notes how artistic responses to climate change easily get 'lost in the din' of wider popular culture (Ivakhiv 2008: 98). This is borne out more specifically within the literary field. During his paper for a one day symposium on *Culture and Climate Change* at Bath Spa University in July 2010, Adam Trexler estimated that at least one hundred and thirty climate change novels have been published, with more 'ecocrisis novels' being published 'literally by the day' (Trexler 2010: 1). This might be a significant increase, but remains a minute proportion of fiction publishing, and a paltry response to the apparent scale of the issue.

Macfarlane and McKibben dedicate the remainder of their articles to outlining the role they believe literature could play when it comes to climate change. What I remain less convinced by

is their rationale for what is it about climate change that proves so problematic for writers, or what might account for the 'cultural absence' they lament. Almost a decade later, these questions still need asking.

The nature of climate change itself provides a partial answer. Climate change is not conducive to narrative since it happens incrementally over long time scales. Furthermore it resists representation since it is intangible to the senses and inaccessible to direct scientific measurement, and by operating over vast geographical scales it proves difficult to capture in literary form. Such formal challenges have been noted by a number of critics over recent years (Trexler & Johns-Putra 2011; Calderazzo 2011). However, approaching these questions as a writer myself, a formal challenge is no reason to *avoid* exploring climate change, but rather an opportunity to experiment. In my own experience far more problematic than any of the above was my perception that instrumental expectations and moral obligations were being exerted upon me by the climate change agenda. It is these expectations and obligations – facets of how we come to understand and respond to climate change, rather than climate change itself – that I have come to firmly believe are the underlying reason for writers' apparent reticence before climate change.

One year into my doctoral research these pressures had blocked my own writing into a corner, as captured in the question I asked the *Culture and Climate Change* symposium at Bath Spa: how can I write a playful, improvised poetry which explores serious, politically involved issues such as climate change, without trivialising them? This question on the one hand demonstrates my commitment to exploring climate change in my writing. Climate change, as one of the most pressing issues confronting contemporary culture, demands a literary response. Over recent years climate change has been one of the most prominent of contemporary narratives, and poses questions of the entire meaning of the human project on Earth. Literature surely has unique, and important, means of exploring such challenges. However during my own early creative experiments, the obligation to 'play my part' in the 'fight against climate change' soon began to place instrumental expectations on my writing. Meanwhile the catastrophic potential consequences of climate change weighted these expectations with moral imperative, since the stakes of *not* contributing to the 'effort' are no less than humanity's future existence on Earth. Yet I felt highly uncomfortable with both of the above. In order to establish my relevance to the politics of climate change, or to be seen to take climate change seriously, I felt obliged to subvert my aesthetics to persuasive, didactic ends in order to contribute to 'solving' climate change before it is too late. In other words, far from 'exploring' climate change, I felt as if I had a duty to communicate a message on behalf of the 'cause'.

Of course my own experience might simply have been a case of misplaced perceptions, and cannot speak to the general experiences of all writers. However one does not have to look far for evidence that instrumental expectations and moral obligations *are* being exerted on writers, and that these are being resisted similarly to how I resisted them myself. Neither does one need to look far for the source of these expectations and obligations, since our conventional way of framing climate change as a problem to be solved is itself instrumental, and ends-oriented, and predominantly framed in terms of a looming catastrophe to be avoided. I will address both of these points in depth in the following two sections of this introduction.

The above analysis provides the context for my own creative and critical enquiries into climate change, as presented in this thesis. Over the last few years the tensions inherent in the writing of climate change have led me to interrogate our conventional ways of understanding the phenomenon, and how these exhibit themselves in literature. I have come to believe that what is required by climate change is not more persuasion on behalf of the current political agenda, but rather a complete *rethink* of how we relate to climate change: both through literature, and also in broader cultural terms. For might the problems that climate change poses writers not be indicative of more widespread problems with conceiving of climate change in instrumental, ends-oriented terms? Is catastrophe really the most helpful frame for our understanding? Much has been made over recent decades of our failures, at both governmental and personal levels, to take the action necessary to 'resolve' climate change, epitomised by how little we have to show for over twenty years of international negotiation. Yet rather than this situation requiring more persuasion, and more science and technology, might it actually be our instrumental, moralistic way of framing climate change that accounts for our resistance to absorbing the knowledge of climate change meaningfully into our lives?

Perhaps what is really needed is not less climate change, but more of it, where 'climate' is understood not in the conventional terms as a statistical average of weather conditions, but rather as the prevailing set of cultural norms and behaviours that inform our understanding. For when it comes to climate change it sometimes appears as if its urgency and the seriousness of its potential consequences are considered sufficient reason to short-circuit thinking through the imperative to 'act now' before it is too late, in a peculiar inverse of the logic that would suppose that more serious issues require more thought, not less of it. Or perhaps more accurately, when it comes to climate change we discover that the majority of the thinking has already been done for us. When we are asked to 'act', what we are really being asked to do is to accept a certain framework for understanding climate change and to act accordingly.

Timothy Morton makes a not dissimilar point in an article proposing the similarity between texts (deconstruction) and ecology when he argues that, 'one thing that modernity has damaged, along with the environment, has been thinking' (Morton 2010a: 1) This sense of 'damage', and the potential for different kinds of thinking in response to 'environmental crisis', is possibly captured more memorably, however, in *The Ecological Thought*:

I've been accused of not wanting to help Katrina victims because I'm so busy theorising with my head in the clouds: 'your ideas are all very well for a lazy Sunday afternoon, but out here in the real world, what are we actually going to do?' Yet one thing we must precisely do is break down the distinction between Sunday afternoon and every other day, and in the direction of putting a bit of Sunday afternoon into Monday morning, rather than making Sunday a workday. (Morton 2010: Kindle Loc 1526)

Following on from Morton's words, this thesis is not only an interrogation of how we do come to understand climate change. It is also an exploration into how we might otherwise come to understand it, in ways that reflect the Sunday afternoon forms of thinking Morton proposes here. With this in mind, the two and a half thousand mile cycle expedition from Salford to the Greek island of Ikaria I completed in the persona of Icarus in the summer of 2010 was key to my own process of thinking through climate change, as in turn has been the work of climatologist Mike Hulme (2009), physicist and cultural theorist Karen Barad (1996) and, perhaps surprisingly, Lewis Carroll (1998). It was, in fact, hearing Hulme speak for the first time at the *Culture and Climate Change* symposium at Bath Spa which gave me the intellectual permission to formulate the cycle trip in the first place.

In contrast to how the instrumental expectations of climate change debate, as currently framed, demand persuasive functions of writers, the aims of this thesis are suggestive and open-ended. My principal aim is to provoke thoughts and raise questions about climate change, and in turn to encourage readers to perform similar enquiries into climate change to those I present here. Not everyone will of course wish to cycle across Europe as a means of enquiring into climate change, and neither should they feel so obliged! However by presenting my own process of enquiry, I hope to encourage others to devise their own means of thinking through climate change. The post-climate change poetics with which I will conclude this thesis introduction is presented in this spirit. It is an attempt to open up the field of climate change literature to more exploratory ways of thinking, which might yet prove to also have broader cultural relevance – as an example of more positive, hopeful ways of understanding climate change than those to which we have previously been accustomed.

Instrumental expectations on writers

One does not have to look far for evidence that instrumental expectations and moral obligations are placed on writers when it comes to climate change. Returning to the articles with which I opened this introduction, McKibben continues his argument by calling for a literature to ‘unsettle the audience’ and keep events like the European heatwave of summer 2003 at the forefront of our minds through a combination of ‘fear’, ‘guilt’ and ‘wistfulness’ (McKibben 2005: online). Macfarlane meanwhile asks, ‘what literature [...] might do for the politics of climate change?’ His answer to his own question involves writers providing ‘an imaginative repertoire [...] by which the causes and consequences of climate change can be debated, sensed and communicated,’ and ‘inducing fear in readers’ guts’. (Macfarlane 2005: online) While they remain alert to the potential for didacticism, in the final analysis they both appear to conclude that the severity and urgency of climate change overrides aesthetics and that literature’s role regarding climate change is persuasive. Both commentators exhort writers to communicate the message of climate change (its causes and consequences), through representational strategies (sensing and imagining), involving the manipulation of ‘fear’, ‘guilt’ and ‘wistfulness’ for instrumental ends. Furthermore, the implicit reasoning behind Macfarlane and McKibben’s arguments is moral – if these are the potential consequences of climate change, and if these consequences are approaching as fast as they appear to be, then writers have an urgent *duty* to subvert their aesthetics in the name of the greater good.

Such expectations are also prevalent in academic contexts. Adeline Johns-Putra’s position on such matters is not dissimilar to my own, yet during the paper she presented at the *Culture and Climate Change* symposium at Bath Spa in 2010 she suggested that writers were equally concerned as scientists about the ‘political inefficacy of apocalypticism’ (Johns-Putra July 2010a: 2). Such a remark suggests that both groups consider questions of efficacy similarly. At the same symposium, Adam Trexler proposed that literature might itself have the ability to come up with practical ‘solutions’ to climate change:

What is needed is a set of specific, but unprecedentedly sweeping, changes to human transport, energy consumption (including heating and cooking), industrial design, and manufacture, as well as targeted attention to specific species and ecosystems to provide pinpointed, effective protections to those species already threatened by climate change. There is already an enormous body of what is effectively science fiction that explores how climate change will effect the transportation, production, consumption, and lifestyles of the future, in best and worst-case scenarios. (Trexler 2010: 6)

In an article discussing the potential of neo-modernist writing for climate change, Richard Kerridge develops a complex argument surrounding the impasse 'between knowing and behaving as if one knew [about climate change].' (Kerridge 2007: 132) Yet what remains at stake in the role he imagines for literature is a form of persuasion with which the neo-modernist writers he discusses would presumably be highly uncomfortable. If the reason we are unable to form a coherent response is because the consequences confronting us are so horrific as to be 'unrepresentable and therefore incommensurable with our understanding,' (132) then arguing that art should seek to suspend the reader in a heightened form of this stasis involves a continued, heightened manipulation of the associated emotions of 'fear' and 'guilt' as persuasive devices. By continuing to focus on the consequences of climate change, Kerridge remains trapped within its moralistic communicative logic.

Thus in both journalistic and academic contexts, assumptions are being made that writers should play their part in communicating the 'message' of climate change, and apply their writing instrumentally in the name of the 'greater good'. Unsurprisingly, I am not the only writer to have resisted such expectations. In the words of Marcella Durand, the complaint 'about how to make poetry comment on issues of the day while also retaining aesthetic integrity' is currently insistent. (Durand 2010: 122) Resistance to creating propaganda or didactic art has also emerged from reports of a number of the cultural climate change projects established over the last seven years: Cape Farewell, Tipping Point, the British Council's *Long Horizons* project and the Open University's *Mediating Change* project.

In his introduction to the *Mediating Change* podcasts, Joe Smith encourages cultural responses that are 'more interesting and important than polemic or persuasion.' (Smith 2011: 1) However the tension inherent in this balancing process keeps rearing its head during the recorded discussions. Theatre critic Robert Butler cites the typical kinds of resistance from theatre directors to staging 'climate change plays': 'I don't want to address an issue. I don't want to educate [...] People think it's another way to tell them what to do.' (Butler 2011: 15) Artist-performer Wallace Heim repeatedly takes interviewer Quentin Cooper to task for asking about art's 'impact' (Butler et al 2011: 37-38), leading Cooper to acknowledge that he has been rightly reprimanded for the notion that art is deliberately setting out to change things. One of the Open University Researchers, Kellie Payne, attended the 2009 Tipping Point conference and reported back to the Bath Spa symposium on similar dynamics of artists resisting having a topic imposed for fear of producing propaganda (Payne 2010). The RSA Arts and Ecology Centre, meanwhile, commissioned *The Guardian* newspaper journalist Madeleine Bunting to specifically research the role that visual artists could play in the case of climate change. Tellingly she concludes with

more questions than answers regarding the potentially 'dangerous instrumentalisation of art', which speak to the concerns of artists across genres:

What is the role of the artist in this unprecedented challenge to human consciousness? Does the artist serve a prophetic role, awakening the viewer to the need for radical change? Does art become a manifesto, recruited – or volunteering itself – to mobilise the kind of behaviour change sought by policymakers and environmental activists? Some would argue that the answer to these questions is clearly yes. Why else did the Department of Energy and Climate Change pay for a free gallery guide to the exhibition at the RA? But equally, there is a kickback reaction that art must not be instrumentalised to achieve a politician's goal. Indeed, there are those artists who absolutely reject a specific role; art should have no purpose but itself. (Bunting 2009: online)

The dominant frame of climate change

That instrumental expectations and moral obligations have over the years been placed before artists and writers, and that these have been resisted, is beyond doubt. However, even though literature is ill-suited to such roles and purposes, perhaps such expectations are unsurprising, since climate change has itself come to be framed in particularly instrumental ways. Over recent years the customary response amongst those who take climate change seriously has been to view it as a problem to be solved, upon fear of catastrophic consequences. Since climate change is framed teleologically, then literature becomes one means to this particular end.

My attempt to assert a mainstream consensus over climate change may be controversial, and was recently challenged in correspondence with John Parham, editor of the British ecocritical journal *Green Letters*. As Parham pointed out in email correspondence, British climatologist Mike Hulme (2009) goes to some lengths in *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* to outline how political and economic differences, and different attitudes to development, science and risk, lead to a wide range of different responses to climate change. There is also a vocal body of climate sceptics who would take issue with the consensus position I will present. However, asserting a mainstream consensus is very different from establishing unanimity over it. Furthermore, considered more closely, Hulme's position itself depends on the consensus I present here, since his overarching thesis is that climate change can't and will not ever be solved. Such a stance depends upon the assumption that most people agree that we should at least try.

The period I am interested in here are the eight years since Macfarlane and McKibben wrote, for

it is during this period that both a consensus over climate change, and a body of climate change literature, emerged. Late 2006 and 2007 were key years in the development of this consensus, with a number of important events and publications. The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (IPCC 2007) effectively placed the evidence for climate change beyond doubt, and the IPCC and Al Gore were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In the UK the Stern Review (Stern 2007) on the economics of climate change made the business case for greenhouse gas reductions, while the Draft Climate Bill was introduced at Westminster. The nature and timing of the associated consensus was captured by research carried out by the Institute of Public Policy Research in 2005-6 (Ereaut & Segnit 2006), and repeated in 2007 (Segnit & Ereaut 2007). Considering over six hundred articles from UK newspapers and magazines, as well as TV radio clips and adverts, press advertisements and websites, the IPPR concluded in 2006 that climate change discourse appeared 'chaotic' and 'confused', whereas by 2007 a consensus had clearly begun to manifest itself grouped under seven main headings:

CONSENSUS

It's happening

It's happening now

It's a bad thing

It's significantly our fault

It's everybody's problem

It's the biggest issue

We have to act (Segnit & Ereaut 2007: 9)

In a separate diagram, the IPPR characterises the main repertoires of this consensus under two headings – 'alarm' and 'resolve' – which are plotted against a number of, 'outlying repertoires not part of the mainstream', including 'British comic nihilism', 'Expert denial', and 'Free market protection'. (9)

Our understanding of this consensus can be further developed through a process of frame analysis. The term 'frame analysis' was first coined by Gregory Bateson; however it was Erving Goffman in *Frame analysis: an essay on the organisation of experience* (1986) who in 1974 first presented it as a methodology in its own right. Goffman defined frames as 'schemata of interpretation' which enable individuals to 'locate, perceive, identify and label' events and situations, and frame analysis as involving the identification of how these frameworks of understanding structure and organise experience (Goffman 1986: 21). Over the last ten years frame analysis has become increasingly popular within the fields of communication, policy and discourse studies and sociology, with increasing interest dedicated to showing how frames

operate ideologically and persuasively to legitimate some activities and de-legitimate others in the pursuit of political objectives (Reese et al 2001, Snow & Benford 1988, Kuypers 2009).

The ease with which the IPPR consensus fits Benford and Snow's tripartite (diagnosis, prognosis, motivation) model of frame analysis (Benford & Snow 2000: 615) demonstrates how central both problem-solving and teleological ends-oriented thinking are to our consensual approach to climate change. Below I will take each component of Benford and Snow's model in turn to develop what I will henceforth refer to as the 'dominant frame' of climate change.

I propose first of all that the diagnosis of the dominant frame of climate change refers to the scientific evidence for anthropogenic climate change, projected forward into future scenarios of catastrophe. Over recent years the IPCC has established almost beyond doubt the evidence for anthropogenic climate change (IPCC 2007). However not even in the supposedly impartial IPCC assessment reports is this evidence communicated neutrally. Rather these reports mirror our tendency to view climate change in terms of its future consequences in a sequence of future projections of our on-going impact on the systems of the earth. Turning to more popular accounts of climate change, our predisposition to view climate change as a future catastrophe waiting to happen becomes more exaggerated still. In the words of one marketing company tasked with research into climate change communication:

The most common message on climate change is that we're all going to hell. That's what climate change looks like when you get down to it; rising seas, scorched earth, failing food supplies, billions of starving refugees tormented by wild weather. (Futerra: 2)

Similarly Roger Harrabin, BCC Environment analyst for over twenty years, observes during the Open University *Mediating Change* discussions how the media presentation of climate change has been dominated by 'narratives of fear,' (Butler et al 2011: 77-78) while in *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* Hulme regrets that: 'in recent years the risks associated with impending future climates have been increasingly communicated using the language of disaster, catastrophe and terror.' (Hulme 2009: 180)

Secondly, I propose that the prognosis of the dominant frame of climate change refers to the range of stabilisation strategies which together aim to 'solve' climate change. Mitigation strategies vary from those aiming to stabilise emissions to those focussing on concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions, to stabilising the very climate itself. The UK *Climate Change Act* (2008) incorporates a target eight per cent reduction in emissions by 2050 upon 1990 levels. *The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992) focusses instead on concentrations

on greenhouse gases. However over recent years there has been a general trend towards policies aiming to stabilise the climate itself, such as the European Union aim of limiting warming to two degrees. Key to all of the above is the underlying assumption that climate change can and should be solved, in a comparable way to how the *Montreal Protocol* (1987) successfully negotiated reductions in ozone pollution in the atmosphere.

Finally, the motivational dynamic of climate change is strongly linked to the perceived need to communicate the urgency of action on climate change before it is too late. The most popular approaches until recently have been narratives of fear and information-deficit strategies aimed at persuading the public and national governments of the urgent need for action. However recent research on both sides of the Atlantic has shown that fear is in fact among the least effective means of persuasion. Similarly it has been shown that the public – at least in the western world – is already relatively well-informed about the causes, consequences and ‘solutions’ to climate change (Futerra; Moser & Dilling 2007; Whitmarsh et al 2011).

Problems with the dominant frame of climate change

My purpose in extrapolating a dominant frame of climate change has been to emphasise the problem-solving, teleological nature of our approach, and how this exerts instrumental expectations on writers, and upon humanity more generally. Positing any ‘end’ of action requires a series of instrumentalised means of getting there. On its own this is not a critique of this way of framing climate change, although I continue to suspect that in combination with the moral overtones attached to this agenda, it is the source of much of our resistance of response. However, if it can be shown that this frame is problematic, and if frames do operate politically such as to exclude other perspectives as many frame analysts argue, then the dangerous delimitation of thinking about climate change which this perspective represents soon becomes apparent.

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson argues:

The frequency of validation of an idea is not the same as proof that the idea is either true or pragmatically useful over a long time. We are discovering today that several of the premises which are deeply ingrained in our way of life are simply untrue and become pathogenic when implemented with modern technology. (Bateson 2000: 510)

Applying Bateson’s words to climate change, no matter how frequently this dominant frame has been validated, this does not mean it is the most helpful form of understanding. Upon

closer analysis the dominant frame of climate change in fact proves problematic on practical, scientific and ideological grounds.

Taking the pragmatic aspect first, the problem-solving basis for this understanding of climate change is destined to fail. In *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* Mike Hulme argues that climate change will not ever be solved, because far from being a discrete scientific and technical issue like the hole in the ozone layer, it has become implicated in every aspect of contemporary life. Climate change has become more of an 'idea' which will be no more 'solved' than politics or religion ever will be (Hulme 2009: xxv-xxvi). Furthermore, in its vast complexity and scale, climate change is the epitome of wicked problems, whereby action to address one dimension inevitably has unintended knock-on consequences in another (333-335). As Hulme points out, we have now had over twenty years of international climate negotiations and we have barely moved forward from where we started (332), but perhaps this is unsurprising, since:

By constructing climate change as the 'mother of all problems' – the '[greatest/defining/most serious] long term [problem/challenge/threat] facing humanity – perhaps we have outmanoeuvred ourselves. We have allowed climate change to accrete to itself more and more individual problems in our world – unsustainable energy, endemic poverty, climatic hazards, food security, structural adjustment, hyper-consumption, tropical deforestation, biodiversity loss – and woven them together using the narrative of climate change. We have created a political logjam of gigantic proportions, one that is not only insoluble, but one that is perhaps beyond our comprehension. (333)

If Gregory Bateson were still alive he would most likely agree with Hulme, albeit for different reasons. Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* might have been published in the early 1970s, collecting interdisciplinary writings on anthropology, psychiatry, evolutionary biology and genetics reaching back to the 1940s, but its critique of our stance towards questions of ecological crisis and environmental change continues to prove relevant. Epistemology is key for Bateson, who proposes that the root of our environmental crisis is located in the kinds of purposive, ends-oriented modes of thinking which characterise (amongst other things) climate change debate. For Bateson, such forms of thinking, far from ultimately offering the resolution to environmental issues, in fact achieve the contrary by continuing to set us in opposition to the environment. In combination with our current technological capacity, such thinking can only result in disaster, as the dualistic premises of Enlightenment science informing the narrative of mastery over nature become manifested in the 'monstrous changes in the universe that [we] have created and now try and live in.' (Bateson 2000: 493) Considered in these terms, our ends-oriented aim to solve climate change is only yet another example of humanity's assumption of

mastery over 'nature' which in turn can only lead to yet further environmental destruction. Extrapolating from Bateson, the hubris that got us into this situation in the first place simply finds its apotheosis in our attempts to 'manage' the climate of which we are a part.

Notwithstanding the above arguments, the frame of climate change frequently asserts its authority on the back of supposedly unquestionable scientific evidence. However, while scientific methodologies may aim at impartiality, the philosophies informing scientific enquiry are far from neutral, and the decisions as to what is scientifically researched in the first place are politically driven.

Taking the philosophical point first, the ends-oriented, problem-solving methodologies characteristic of the frame of climate change remain rooted in dualistic scientific premises. Objectifying the climate as something to be solved presupposes an untenable separation of the object from the subject doing the 'solving'. There is no objective 'climate', located 'out there' to be solved by us 'in here', with the help of our accumulated scientific apparatus. As Karen Barad (1996), Bruno Latour (1993 & 2004) and Donna Haraway (1991a and 1991b) among others have argued, it is impossible to separate out nature and culture, and nowhere is this clearer than in the case of climate change. Rather, we are inextricably part of infinitely complex systems and feedback processes in which we more accurately participate.

This entangled sense of nature and culture is captured in Bruno Latour's neologism 'nature-culture' (Latour 1993: 7) and Haraway's concept of 'material-semiotics' (1991a & 1991b). However most influentially of all for this thesis it is captured in Karen Barad's concept of agential realism. Barad goes beyond simply observing that nature and culture are inextricably entangled to propose that it is the dynamic intra-actions of material and discursive forces which comprise reality – in the ongoing, iterative becoming of the universe:

Phenomena are differential patterns of mattering produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production...it is through such practices that the differential boundaries between humans and nonhumans, culture and nature, science and the social, are constituted. (Barad 2007: 140)

Applying Barad's agential realism to climate change, far from it being a discrete scientific issue comprised of observable and measurable physical attributes (an object) which we subjects act upon, it becomes a phenomena which iteratively materialises / is (re)configured through the intra-action of a vast, entangled range of material-discursive factors. In fact according to Barad's view, the concepts of subject and object do not pre-exist the intra-action, but emerge from it as a result of the necessary exclusions and boundary-making practices involved.

The notion of 'solving' climate change, of course, anyway begs the further question of what it is 'solved to', and who decides. As Daniel Botkin amongst others has pointed out, there is no such thing as balance or harmony in nature; ecological systems are more accurately characterised by on-going processes of chaos and change (Botkin 1990). There is no ideal climate, meaning that the notion that we can stabilise the climate to some notional sense of what it should be, or might once have been, remains as illusory as our mastery of the world.

Nonetheless the case for action on climate change and the dominant frame outlined above is most frequently premised upon assertions of 'fact' located in the evidence for anthropogenic climate change. I do not here deny the virtual incontrovertibility of this evidence, yet I do query the neutrality of the political agenda surrounding it. Not only is the concept of a stable climate notional, but the decision to prioritise research into projecting the evidence of climate change into the future is political, which in turn informs the IPCC research. The decision to frame this evidence in terms of imminent catastrophe is political, as is the use of narratives of fear as communicative devices. The preference of mitigation over adaptation is reflective of ends-oriented philosophies rooted in the Enlightenment, as is the associated assumption that climate change is therefore something that can be 'solved'. What's more, the ideological, politically driven nature of scientific enquiry not only dictates what is researched, but also invalidates other, equally scientific ways of knowing climate change. To take one example, the application of Karen Barad's work to climate change is based on no less scientific rigour, but leads to very different conclusions as to how or why we might respond to the phenomena before us.

One particularly persuasive account of the ideological basis of the frame of climate change is developed by Erik Swyngedouw (2010) in a special climate change edition of *Theory and Culture*. For Swyngedouw, far from operating as a radical, emancipatory politics, the framing of the climate change debate actually dis-empowers the public in the interests of the neo-liberal, capitalist status quo, with the mobilisation of fear operating as a key mechanism of control characteristic of the post-political landscape:

Our ecological predicament is sutured by millennial fears, sustained by an apocalyptic rhetoric and representational tactics, and by a series of performative gestures signalling an overwhelming, mind-boggling danger, one that threatens to undermine the very coordinates of our everyday lives and routines, and may shake up the foundations of all we took and take for granted. [...] I would argue that sustaining and nurturing apocalyptic imaginaries is an integral and vital part of the new cultural politics of capitalism for which the management of fear is a central leitmotif. (Swyngedouw 2010: 218)

Consensus on climate change disavows and displaces social conflicts and antagonisms, and far from driving a 'progressive' agenda forward, rather relegates politics to choices between this techno-managerial approach and that, through the masquerade of controlling emissions of carbon dioxide.

The way that fears of global economic meltdown have replaced climate change over recent years as a mechanism of popular control supports Swyngedouw's case that climate change debate has been framed to bolster rather than interrogate the neo-liberal status quo. It is certainly the case that one of the principal effects of the above frame has been disempowerment. Richard Kerridge (2007: 132) refers to our learnt responses to climate change as a form of stasis, whereby we know about climate change, but act as if we don't know. Furthermore, as Timothy Clark notes, the consequences with which we are presented are so vastly out of scale with anything we can do about it (change a lightbulb, eat less meat), and climate change negotiations carried out at political levels so far beyond our participatory influence, that anything we do feels pointless and banal (Clark 2010: 135).

Representational illusions and the literary genre of climate change

I conclude from this analysis that the cultural absence that Macfarlane and McKibben lament, and the continued reticence of writers before climate change, are resultant of the instrumental expectations, and moral obligations, attendant on the dominant frame of climate change – no matter how problematic this frame might be. In order to take climate change seriously, and to 'play' their part in tackling it, writers feel obliged to sacrifice their aesthetics to a supposedly more important cause, in the name of the ultimate 'end' of 'solving' climate change.

With this in mind, one might suppose that the actual climate change literature which has emerged over recent years would prove conducive to alternative perspectives on climate change, or Sunday afternoon forms of thinking. However to do so is to be disappointed, since many of the conventions already emerging within the mainstream of climate change literature can be shown to directly map out the model of understanding provided for it by the dominant frame of climate change. Not only does this demonstrate the strength and the cultural prevalence of the frame itself. It also means that far from resisting the instrumental expectations exerted upon them, writers in fact replicate and reinforce them. To the extent to which writers continue to rely upon the representational strategies and repertoires of the dominant frame, and to map out this frame in various emerging generic conventions, they will therefore serve as ideological messengers for it.

Taking questions of representation first, it is helpful to refer back to Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of the 'unpresentable', presented in his famous essay 'What is Postmodernity?' (1984) Lyotard coins the term the 'unpresentable' to describe his interpretation of Kant's sublime, captured in the problem of 'how to make visible something which cannot be seen' (Lyotard 1984: 78). Lyotard's essay might now be over thirty years old, yet it continues to read as relevantly as ever in the context of climate change. Here we surely have the epitome of 'the unpresentable', in climate change's potential severity, its intangibility, its inaccessibility to the senses or direct scientific measurement, its mind-boggling complexity, vast geographical and temporal scales, and through the dominant frame, its association with the underlying meta-narrative of human progress. This 'unpresentability' has something in common with how Timothy Morton, whose article connecting deconstruction with ecology has already been mentioned (2011), characterises climate change through object oriented ontology, evoking the way that climate change (and its many undersides) is in a constant process of withdrawing from our observation of it: '[if you] contemplate global warming, a hyperobject that you can't directly see or touch – it's withdrawn. It affects all weather on Earth yet it's not reducible to particular manifestations such as sunshine or rain. Instruments such as computers process terabytes per second can see global warming – not human eyes.' (Morton 2011: 167)

However, despite its 'unpresentable' or 'withdrawn' nature, the dominant frame of climate change maintains the illusion that climate change *can* be represented, and furthermore that the strategies of a naïve kind of realism are the means to achieve this. A major component of the climate change agenda is to demonstrate that climate change is 'real', as if the 'reality' of the 'unpresentable' can be neutrally represented by the extrapolation from physical evidence into future scenarios. The rhetorical strategy of the dominant frame of climate change is to portray this representation as 'fact'. Yet when this manoeuvre is accomplished, what is really being represented is not reality, but rather an ideological perspective upon it, on this occasion informed by the meta-narrative of neo-liberal, capitalist advancement.

The work of Karen Barad provides an extension of this argument by linking representationalism with the individualistic, humanist, Cartesian worldview which underpins 'modernity', and by implication to the hubris I have associated with this. For Barad representationalism involves, 'the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing.' (Barad 2007: 46) Thus a representational stance on climate change involves proposing an objective climate – out there – to be acted upon by us, with all of the ideological baggage attendant upon this. According to this analysis, the

metaphysics and ontology underpinning the dominant frame and the assumptions behind representationalist approaches to climate change are unsurprisingly one and the same.

Turning more directly to literature, if for Lyotard modernity is the quest to subdue the world through modern technology, then attempts to represent climate change in writing are their literary equivalent. Furthermore, any attempts to 'represent' climate change will replicate a Cartesian understanding of the world. Yet notwithstanding both of these points, in the McKibben and Macfarlane articles with which this introduction opened, both critics present the role of literature regarding climate change as a 'representative' one.'

Climate change certainly poses genuine challenges to writers on account of its 'unpresentable' nature. How does one capture the incremental rate of climatic change in literary form? How can literature manage the vast shifts in scale apparently demanded by climate change? How can literature present something before readers that is inaccessible to the senses? Such problems were captured in an interview with American science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson:

As a novelist, it's obvious: you know, if something happens in three years, rather than five hundred years, you're better off in trying to figure out a story of how human beings are impacted and you can just frame the story better. And I've been interested in global warming for a long time, but I hadn't figured out a story to tell until I heard about abrupt climate change. (Robinson 2006: online)

The question of 'framing' is already apparent here. Since climate change in its incremental reality cannot be represented, Robinson seeks to represent its most abrupt potential consequences, thus mobilising the narratives of fear (and associated control) implicated in the dominant frame of climate change. In fact, as the above analysis suggests, any attempt to directly represent climate change can only be achieved through an ideological frame, since climate change itself resists representation. The dominant frame of climate change simply provides one ready-made representational strategy, which mainstream writers have predominantly relied upon.

A genre analysis of the frame of climate change extends my argument. My use of genre is not to establish strict typologies as a means of categorising climate change literature, but rather to break these down before they coalesce any further. If frames are the cultural and communicative means of structuring and organising experience, then genre is its literary equivalent. Genre structures and organises the reader's experience, negotiating the literary shaping of meaning, and operating just as ideologically as its sociological counterpart. The meaning-making characteristics of genre are expanded upon in the following quotation from John Frow:

Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word 'constraint' I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete, or a sculptor's mould shapes and gives structure to its materials. Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and is a basic condition for meaning to take place. (Frow 2005: 10)

Thus, if generic conventions can be shown to be coalescing around climate change literature then these can be argued to be both productive and restrictive of the meaning of climate change. Furthermore, to the extent that these conventions map out the dominant frame of climate change, then the literature of climate change will replicate and reinforce, and further delimit the possible range of meanings to a single interpretation of it. And in fact a surprisingly clear mapping can be developed from the dominant frame of climate change onto the generic conventions already emerging. To develop this analysis I will utilise Frow's breakdown of the structure of genre into what he describes as 'uneasily mixing thematic, formal, modal and functional criteria' (13) by considering in turn the *function*, *content*, *mode* and *form* of climate change literature.

A few words of clarification are required before proceeding. My analysis of climate change literature is partial and deliberately provocative, while remaining systematic. My aim is not to enact a series of value-judgements. Neither do I claim to provide an extensive overview of the entirety oeuvre – something that would be far beyond the reach of this thesis. Instead my purpose is to identify a number of emerging generic and representational conventions, with the aim of demonstrating how these conform to the dominant frame, its instrumental expectations and associated ideological baggage. Rather than engaging in detailed close readings of several texts, therefore, I will instead seek out emerging trends across a body of the literature, which I will then seek to subvert through the post-climate change poetics with which I conclude.

Similarly to how I characterised the dominant frame as a *mainstream* consensus, my interest here is in mainstream literary work, as representing the literary equivalent of a consensus position. Of course more detailed individual readings of the texts would identify a range of interesting exceptions to the general trends I will identify, as I will acknowledge during the course of my argument. Furthermore, there certainly are interesting examples of climate change literature outwith the mainstream. I have found the sections of Tony Lopez's *Only More So* (2012) that explore climate change particularly interesting, alongside the performance work of M Mara Ann (2009), and anthologised poems by poets such as Carrie Etter, David Morley and Harriet Tarlo (Munden 2008: 19, 44, 48). However the point is that these individual poems, and single-

authored collections, exist as outlying repertoires, outside the mainstream approach, just as the IPRR identified a number of outlying repertoires for their cultural climate change consensus.

Popular science literature

The clearest mapping of the dominant frame of climate change onto genre are the generic conventions informing the kind of popular science book which has emerged around climate change over recent years, such as Al Gore's *The Inconvenient Truth* (2006), James Lovelock's *The Revenge of Gaia* (2007), Mark Lynas's *High Tide* (2005), George Monbiot's *Heat: How We Can Stop the Planet Burning* (2007b) and Alastair McIntosh's *Hell or High Water* (2008). Even before opening the covers, the hyperbolic titles of these books alert the reader to expect to be persuaded of a message. The books' moral overtones are captured in Gore's 'truth' and McIntosh's pun on 'come hell or high water' while the titles and cover images bring into service many of the most familiar, clichéd images of climate change in terms of apocalypse, rising waters and mother earth.

Interpreted according to Frow's fourfold analysis, the generic *function* of these books is unapologetically didactic: persuading the reader of a case for action on climate change. The *content* of these books draws directly on the frame of climate change in an emphasis on the evidence, consequences and solutions to climate change. The *mode* of such books is overtly political, with narratives of fear and information-deficit key communicative strategies. Their generic *form* meanwhile is that of a rhetorical argument, interspersed with personal anecdote, written in the mode of journalistic prose, and structured in such a way as to directly map out the diagnosis, prognosis, motivation model of understanding climate change. Meanwhile the books take an uncomplicated stance on the possibility of (re)presenting the 'reality' of climate change in written form. The correspondence between this genre and the frame of climate change is so close that these popular science books in many ways represent a generic 'type' of climate literature. The first four of the above books are particularly 'conventional' in these terms, while Alistair McIntosh's book presents something slightly different.

In *The Revenge of Gaia* James Lovelock outlines the damage we are doing 'Gaia' under her present configuration and argues that we are running out of time to do anything about it before it is too late. The 'effort' required is captured in a series of military metaphors: 'in our country we have to act now as if we were about to be attacked by a powerful enemy. We have first to make sure our defences are in place before the attack begins.' (Lovelock 2007: 17) In *Heat* George Monbiot is explicit about presenting a 'manifesto'. Having made the case for climate

change on the basis of current evidence and a range of increasingly terrifying future scenarios, Monbiot sets out to show how this will be solved: to 'show how a modern economy can be decarbonised while remaining a modern economy.' (Monbiot 2007b: xxii) His ambitions are stated unambiguously and again in quasi-military terms:

I have one purpose in writing this book: to persuade you that climate change is worth fighting. I hope I have been able to demonstrate that it is not – as some people (notably the geophysicist James Lovelock) have claimed – too late. In doing so, I hope to prompt you not to lament our governments' failures to introduce the measures required to tackle it, but to force them to reverse their policies, by joining what must become the world's most powerful political movement. (xxix)

Even though these two writers may disagree over the detail and timing of the consequences of climate change, they both structure their arguments according to the problem-crisis-resolution narrative implied by the frame of climate change. Both are written in a mode of journalistic prose upon which they stake scientific and personal authority. Data features highly, while their scientific perspective remains firmly committed to the climate change mitigation agenda. Both writers also incorporate personal or narrative details into their journey with climate change as a means of acquiring that particular form of authority associated with autobiography.

Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and Mark Lynas's *High Tide* focus more on the narratives of the authors' personal journeys and investigations into climate change. However, although the narrative emphasis has shifted, underlying the accounts are familiar messages and objectives. Gore states in his introduction that he aims to inform the public through telling 'the story of climate change,' in 'a new kind of book with pictures and graphics to make the whole message easier to follow.' (Gore 2006: 9) Thus while Gore highlights formal variation, this is not as a means to explore the complexity of climate change, but rather to 'enable' comprehension of the message and the reality of the climate change vision he presents. Lynas's *High Tide* recounts the findings of three years' travelling around the globe 'searching for the fingerprints of global warming' in a bid to relate the stories of climate change to his own everyday experience and reality. However Lynas's more inquisitive method of investigation is in the final instance undermined by a sense that he knew what he wanted to discover all along. His is not a wandering inquiry into climate, but the pursuit of a predetermined argument to establish the 'reality' of climate change as his concluding remarks reveal:

High Tide's obvious task is to prove that global warming is real and already underway [in order] to challenge all of us to face up to the implications of this reality, myself included.' (Lynas 2005: 307)

Alistair McIntosh's *Hell and High Water* both reflects and challenges the conventions outlined above. McIntosh's hyperbolic and apocalyptic title is in fact a gross misrepresentation of his approach to climate change. While he writes in a similar mode of personal journalistic prose, and follows a similar problem-crisis-resolution structure, the content and the tone is very different, and the function appears more open-ended: to raise questions as opposed to persuading the reader of the truth of a particular message. Thus, while McIntosh does present a 'thesis' on climate change, this thesis not only interrogates our behaviour but also the hubristic assumptions behind the frame of climate change:

The central thesis of this book is that climate change cannot be tackled by technical, economic and political measures alone. Those things are all important, but in addition and perhaps most important of all, we have to look at ourselves. We have to address not only the outer world of atmospheric science, economic imperatives, and realms of political possibility, but also the inner world of psychology and, I will suggest, spirituality. The bottom line and top priority is that we must get to grips with the roots of life and what gives it meaning. (McIntosh 2008: 8)

McIntosh's book is far and away the most generically innovative of the books discussed here, and comes closest to providing an alternative epistemological perspective on climate change. However, in the final analysis McIntosh's claim to have taken a 'walk on the wild side' is undermined by the familiar rhetorical structure of its opening sections, and his reliance on the evidence and consequences of climate change, as if these were the only communicative means sufficient to persuade the public of the need for change. McIntosh himself is fully aware of the limitations of these sections, and in fact is almost dismissive of them: 'thus far [chapters 1-3] my material is not distinctive and readers who are already well-versed in climate change debates may wish to skip or just skim over Part 1.' (8)

Returning to the question of the representation of climate change in light of this genre analysis, these books clearly demonstrate the way in which the writers not only assume that climate change can be represented – and thus the Cartesian worldview underpinning them. They also directly show the ways in which the representational difficulties of climate change are elided through the imposition of an ideological framework on it. The above writers focus on extrapolating from the evidence of climate change into future catastrophe, with the overarching aim of convincing the reader that climate change is 'real'. However, far from being a neutral reality, what is really being represented here is an ideological perspective, portrayed under the guise of scientific 'fact'. This view of climate change is as constructed as any, while the 'reality' of climate change remains as resistant to representation as ever.

Climate change fiction

The above writers see no need to apologise for their overt generic function of persuasion in the name of the dominant frame of climate change. Anyone reading such books expects to be persuaded of a point of view. The same cannot be said of more traditionally literary texts such as novels or poetry. However, even though the implicit (and sometimes explicit) expectation that literary writers should similarly play their part in communicating the above frame of climate change proves more problematic, it remains commonplace.

Proposing generic conventions using John Frow's fourfold analysis in the case of climate change fiction can become something of a circular exercise. Your pre-existing knowledge of certain climate change novels and films informs your expectations of the conventions of future accounts, which then meet these expectations. However, with this caveat in mind, certain generic expectations can still be shown to map from the dominant frame of climate change, as variations upon the generic 'type'. In order to establish several generic conventions characteristic of the mainstream of climate change fiction I will refer to a number of novels published since 2005 as the period of consensus I am particularly interested in: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2007), Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), Kim Stanley Robinson's *Sixty Days and Counting* (2007), Sarah Moss's *Cold Earth* (2009), Liz Jensen's *The Rapture* (2009), Matthew Glass's *Ultimatum* (2009). Margaret Atwood's *Year of the Flood* (2010) and for comparative purposes its predecessor *Oryx and Crake* (2004), and Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010). My bias is towards the more supposedly 'literary' text on the basis that such novels might be considered less 'generic' than genre fiction, but includes one example of science fiction (Robinson) and one political thriller (Glass).

Inevitably with fiction the direct *functional* aim of persuasion we encountered in the journalistic accounts is complicated by the fact that this is simply not what novels are supposed to do. Novels might educate, certainly, but the functional benchmarks of fiction are far more likely to be notional assessments of literariness or entertainment value rather than didactic intent. However this is not to say that generic conventions cannot be proposed for *content*, *mode* and *form*. On the basis of the above novels, read alongside Adeline Johns-Putra and Adam Trexler's recent extensive review of climate change fiction for WIRES (2011), I propose the following.

The generic convention for the *content* of climate change fiction is futuristic, while remaining strongly attached to climate mitigation science. The *mode* is conventionally dystopic or apocalyptic; and its narrative *form* adheres to Aristotelian structures. The generically

conventional novel will seek to 'represent' climate change through its catastrophic consequences, as a means of representing its otherwise 'unpresentable' nature.

These emerging generic conventions are not only borne out by the above novels, but also map directly from the dominant frame of climate change, and can thus be understood to structure our understanding in similar ways. They are equally reliant on communicating climate change using narratives of fear and information deficit strategies. Such conventions continue to promulgate climate mitigation science, and through their conflict-crisis-resolution structures map out the diagnosis-prognosis-solution structure of the dominant frame in not dissimilar ways to the journalistic science books discussed above. To the extent, furthermore, that a climate change novel relies on representing climate change's catastrophic consequences, in defiance of its 'unpresentable' nature, it will replicate the ideological evasions of the dominant frame while betraying its underlying Cartesianism.

The majority of the above novels are set in either the near or distant future, and the content of this future revolves entirely around the kinds of catastrophic scenarios – or exaggerated equivalents – predicted by the IPCC. Thus, for example, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Sixty Days and Counting* presents the author's view of what abrupt climate change might look like. The futuristic vision of Will Self presents a London so altered by climate change as to defy recognition, while Liz Jensen's near-future builds to a climax in scenes involving a massive tsunami hitting the coast of the UK. The exceptions to this are Ian McEwan's *Solar*, which is set in the present day, while the futuristic time-frames of sections of Will Self's *Book of Dave* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* are accompanied by episodes in the recent past (Self), and the distant past (Winterson). Furthermore the majority of these future scenarios yoke the strategies of 'realism' to representing the consequences of climate change. While futuristic, the techniques of Jensen, Moss, Robinson, Glass, McEwan, Hall and McCarthy are realist. Meanwhile the distant future worlds of Atwood, Self and Winterson prove less similar to our own worlds, but remain speculative representations of it.

The majority of these future scenarios are apocalyptic or dystopic. The near-future narratives of Glass and Jensen conclude with disaster and apocalypse. The far-future worlds of Atwood, Winterson and Self are dystopic. McCarthy and Hall's novels are post-apocalyptic. Sarah Moss's novel is set in a near future permeated by fear of the risk of climate change and other associated environmental disasters (specifically an airborne virus resembling bird flu). The only novel which takes a positive approach to the future amongst this selection (despite its abrupt climate change scenario) is *Sixty Days and Counting*, the final part in Robinson's 'Science in the Capital' trilogy. Robinson's PhD supervisor, Frederic Jameson, described this trilogy as a utopia

in process, where the utopian principles are manifest in humanity's on-going attempts to mitigate climate change (Jameson 2000: 231). Two other exceptions to the conventional *mode* of the climate change novel are Ian McEwan's comedy, *Solar*, while the recent-past sections of Will Self's novel are satiric.

Such apocalyptic future scenarios risk being accused of scientific hyperbole. Since *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) was critiqued for its scientifically inaccurate climate catastrophe scenario, artists and novelists have been keen to establish scientific credibility, or at least stake a claim to it. As a case in point McEwan publishes a speech by a renowned climate scientist as an appendix to his novel. Kim Stanley Robinson demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the climate change mitigation and associated climate geo-engineering agendas, while Matthew Glass is concerned with the political machinations of international climate change negotiation. What is notable, however, about the novels which do explicitly engage with science, is the extent to which they do so according to the terms of the consensus agenda, and associated climate projections. Margaret Atwood is the exception in her broader interrogation of the ideological premises of human progress. McEwan and Robinson in particular display unmitigated confidence in the power of science and technology to find a 'solution' to climate change. Robinson's novel even meets Adam Trexler's expectation that literature might contribute practical ideas and technological solutions to climate change. Of course many writers might feel ill-qualified to challenge the scientific establishment. Yet this singular perspective maintains the illusion that scientific endeavour is a neutral, uniform and homogenous mass, and works to the exclusion of other, equally valid scientific ways of knowing.

Similar points could be made of the broader generic influences on climate change fiction. Science fiction and political thriller both clearly influence the conventions of climate fiction, and quite rightly so since these are key lenses through which to understand climate change. Amongst the novels considered here, science fiction influences the work of Atwood, Self and Winterson, while the genre of political thriller is an influence on Jensen, Hall and Moss. However, the dominance of these genres' generic influence works to preclude the influence of other, potentially equally useful genres such as fantasy or allegory, in similar ways to how the dominant frame works against alternative perspectives on climate change.

Turning to *form*, the majority of these novels are structured according to Aristotle's conflict-crisis-resolution narrative model which so clearly maps out (re-presents) the structure of the dominant frame of climate change. The former chair of the US branch of ASLE launched a stinging critique of the 'formulaic' structure of climate change film and literature in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (Heise 2008: 206). Heise specifically critiques Michael Crichton's *State of*

Fear (2005) for being, 'simplistic in its one-dimensional characters and far-fetched conspiracy plot, which end up turning different risk perceptions into a black-and-white confrontation between heroes and villains.' (206) Cyberpunk novelist Bruce Sterling's *Heavy Weather* (1995), highly regarded in science fiction circles, hardly fares any better for what Heise sees as its failure to rise above a shallow and haphazard analysis of how personal relationships unfold during ecological crisis.

Returning to my own line of interpretation, the majority of the novels discussed here structure environmental change according to the wider cultural and associated narrative demands of conflict (diagnosis), crisis (prognosis) and resolution (solutions). In *Ultimatum*, the problem is a scenario of far more abrupt climate change than ever imagined, the crisis impending nuclear war with China, and the resolution the President's concluding remarks that a crisis of such severity is actually necessary to finally provoke people to act. In Liz Jensen's *Rapture*, an art therapist discovers that her psychotic teenage client, Bethany, has the power to predict climate disaster. This comes to a head as a tsunami approaches the coast of the UK, and concludes with apocalyptic redemption as Bethany sacrifices herself by throwing herself from a helicopter to save the lives of those onboard. In Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* the conflict between the radical feminist ideals of an outsider community during post-apocalyptic times reaches its climax during a 'battle' with the authorities which can only end in defeat.

In contrast, several of the above novelists appear to struggle to resolve their narratives. This is perhaps unsurprising, though, since no matter how much the authors might seek resolution, climate change itself offers little by way of closure. Robinson's symbolic marriage of politics, science and spiritualism through the President's marriage to his scientific aide amongst a community of Tibetan climate refugees contrasts with his previous, sustained investigation of the process of climate change. Jensen posits apocalyptic redemption. Both Hall and Moss's novels end very suddenly, avoiding the problematic resolution of their narratives through, in turn, a convenient loss of several pages of a character's diary and an abrupt shift in time.

As I mention above, the aim of my analysis of mainstream climate change fiction has not been to assert homogeneity, but rather to identify various trends. Amongst the above novels there are some obvious exceptions to these generic conventions. Atwood and Winterson's novels enact sustained critiques of notions of progress in a climate changed world. Self avoids the moral overtones attendant on apocalypse or dystopia by staging of a 'what-if' scenario: what if the demented ravings of a London cabbie called Dave were discovered by a far future society of London flooded beyond recognition and this became the basis upon which a new 'davinity' was established? Perhaps most significantly, meanwhile, Robinson's trilogy is a hugely ambitious

enquiry into not only into the science and the politics of climate change, but also into its literary and spiritual implications. As Johns-Putra (2010b) points out, his trilogy is self-reflexively experimental with the generic conventions of science fiction, combining a meticulous and detailed process of near-future world building, a strong cast of well-developed characters, and an experiment in processual-utopia.

To conclude this mapping exercise into the generic conventions of climate change fiction, it is worth briefly considering an interesting anomaly. George Monbiot's reading (2007a) of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as the best climate change novel ever written is surely disingenuous, since Cormac McCarthy goes to such lengths to avoid identifying the cause of his post-apocalyptic world. However, in light of the above analysis, it is understandable why it has been read as such. *The Road* mobilises the full range of representational and generic conventions of the climate change canon, thus making it impossible to read without climate change in mind.

Climate change poetry

A comprehensive survey of the field of climate change poetry proves challenging, since poetry exploring climate change forms a minor part of a wide number of poets' oeuvres, risking making any generalisations sweeping and meaningless. There are several notable exceptions of extended enquiries into climate change through full-length collections (Reading 2005, Mara Ann 2009, Gross 2009, Moody 2010, sections of Lopez 2012). However most helpfully in a consideration of mainstream trends there are four recent anthologies of climate change and ecocrisis poetry collecting a wide range of different work –*Earth Shattering* (Astley 2007), *Trees in the City* (Poet in the City 2007), *Feeling the Pressure* (Munden 2008) and *And This Global Warming* (Aman Awel Tawe 2012) – which I will read with a view to tentatively proposing generic and representational conventions. First it is useful to consider the editorial introductions to these anthologies, which in their own right demonstrate the instrumental expectations on the *function* of climate change literature.

The question of what is poetry and what is polemic is brought to a head by Neil Astley's Bloodaxe anthology of 'ecopoems', *Earth Shattering*. In his introduction Astley is explicit about his aim to manipulate narratives of fear: 'there are poems here to alarm and alert anyone willing to read or listen,' alongside poems illuminating 'ecological balance' and exposing environmental destruction (Astley 2007: 15). For Astley, ecopoems must 'take on' contemporary issues (15), with 'the power of [the] poetry in the detail, in the force of each individual poem, in every poem's effect on every reader.' (20) Perhaps most controversially of all, Astley's view of

the translation of poetry into action is direct and literal: 'anyone whose resolve is stirred will strengthen the collective call for change.' (20)

While Astley clearly has one eye here on the market for his product, the frame of climate change, understood generically, could hardly be more directly articulated. Climate change is to be feared, and such fear is to be manipulated by writers in the interest of regaining a nebulous sense of ecological balance. Astley organises his anthology into various section headings – 'Rooted in Nature', 'Changing the Landscape', 'Killing the Wildlife', 'Unbalance of Nature', 'Loss and Persistence', 'The Great Web', 'Exploitation', 'Force of Nature', 'Natural Disasters' – which not only demonstrate the book's didactic intentions, but also the simplistic, dualistic separation of nature from culture I have previously associated with this way of framing climate change, and ecocrisis more generally. Astley's headings encourage a reductive reading of the poetry according to our dominant frame, to the inevitable detriment of the actual work. Within literary environmental studies, Astley's approach has understandably proven controversial. In his introduction to a second edition of *Green Voices* Terry Gifford asks of the anthology: 'is ecopoetry being talked up in some way, and to hell with critical judgement, to hell with poetry?' (Gifford 2011: 9)

Paul Munden's introduction to the British Council climate change anthology, *Feeling the Pressure*, is initially more nuanced. He describes the poems as a 'weather report' of our understanding of climate change at the end of 2007 while lauding both the variety of responses and the oblique approaches taken to 'the most pressing issue of our time' (Munden 2007: 3). However the structure of the anthology is arguably even more delimiting with section headings which might have been lifted straight from an analysis of the dominant frame of climate change: 'Trends (in observed and future climate)'; 'Extreme Weather'; 'Impacts: on human health, ecosystems, urban and agricultural areas'; 'Action: adaptation and mitigation and what we can do'; and 'Complicities: beyond climate change'. The diagnosis of climate change is captured in the sections on trends, extreme weather and impacts; the prognosis is represented by the sections on action and complicities; while the motivation is presumably intended to be provided by the poems themselves – no matter how much the editor might claim otherwise. The poetry in the anthology becomes compromised by this introduction, as if one has been provided by a pre-established lens through which to read.

Trees in the City, a short pamphlet collecting 'climate change poems' by John Burnside, Patience Agbabi and Matthew Hollis poses a set of related, but more specific questions, through its funding by Lloyds Bank in a partnership organised by the Poet in the City venture philanthropy project. In late 2011 Alice Oswald and John Kinsella withdrew from the shortlist

of the TS Eliot prize as a result of its funding by hedge funds. In the words of Oswald, 'poetry should be questioning not endorsing such institutions,' (Flood 2011a: online) while Kinsella explained his withdrawal to be a result of the incompatibility between his 'full-on' anti-capitalist views and hedge funds as 'the very pointy edge of capitalism' (Flood 2011b: online). The aims of the *Trees in the City* pamphlet clearly demonstrate the risks of associating creative work with capitalist institutions that Oswald and Kinsella raise: Swyngedouw's arguments about climate change neutralising radical protest could hardly find a clearer creative equivalent. Take the words of then Lloyds Chief Executive Richard Ward when he introduces the collection by emphasising the risks which climate change poses insurance premiums:

When we look back on 2007, we are likely to remember it as the year when the world finally accepted climate change as fact. How the year will develop in terms of weather-related losses we do not yet know, but natural catastrophes are now costing the insurance industry more than ever before. In 2005 this generated a record \$85 billion of losses, and despite a benign year for natural catastrophes in 2006, we can be sure that this trend will continue (Poet in the City 2007: 7).

Meanwhile for Director of Poet in the City, Graham Henderson, poetry has a role in conveying 'the message that climate change is a reality [...] It is an issue which increasingly preoccupies all of us, whether we are insurance brokers, business leaders or consumers (15). Poetry's role is instrumental, firmly associated with the supposedly neutral representation of the 'reality' of climate change, while humanity has been reduced to the capitalist categories of 'insurance broker', 'business leader' or 'consumer'.

The most nuanced introduction is provided by Emily Hinshelwood in her opening words to *And This Global Warming*: the second anthology of poems collected on the back of a climate change poetry competition organised by Welsh charity Aman Awel Tawe, judged on this occasion by Carol Ann Duffy:

We are living in a changing world and we have to voice this in ways that help, rather than scare [...] This anthology demonstrates that there are as many ways of thinking about climate change as there are people. Poetry, and the arts in general, have the ability to imagine our worlds differently, and through the imagination we find ways to adapt, to change, to improvise. And, as ecological poet and artist John Fox recently said, 'we must not tolerate a failure of the imagination.' (Aman Awel Tawe 2012: 11)

However, the content of this anthology, of all four examples presented here, proves particularly disappointing in its failure to present alternative perspectives on climate change than that which generically maps out the dominant frame.

Turning towards a genre analysis of the work itself, the conventions exhibited by poetry prove different from, and more varied than, the generic expectations exhibited by fiction. However, this is not to say that they are any less reflective of the dominant frame. Based upon the above four anthologies I propose the following. First of all, much climate change poetry appears surprisingly comfortable with the *function* of communicating the message of the dominant frame of climate change, frequently in very direct ways. Information deficit strategies are reflected in poems extrapolating from present day weather abnormalities into future climate scenarios, while scientific language is uncritically incorporated into poetry's linguistic repertoire. Before reading the four anthologies I hoped that the poetry might prove more willing to complicate the representation of climate change. However, taken as a whole, the poets collected here appear more confident than the novelists in their ability to represent climate change in literature – stand back and 'look *at* it' – through a combination of images of its past, present and future.

In the generic conventions of climate change fiction, *content* proved most influential, while in the poetry the *mode* of analysis proves more significant, with the didactic, elegiac and the satiric *modes* most prevalent. The three poets in the *Trees in the City* anthology demonstrate this range particularly clearly. Agbabi's background in performance poetry articulates itself in a poetry of far more direct pronouncement than is the case with either Burnside, whose poems eulogise a lost past, or Hollis, who takes a satirical perspective on our failings regarding the climate mitigation agenda. Yet each approach clearly maps out a communicative function on behalf of the dominant frame of climate change. Didactic poems play the direct role of messenger. The satiric mode places the poet in an elevated position of commentary on our failings according to the terms of the frame itself. The elegiac mode provides the mirror image of projections of its future consequences, relying on equally nebulous notions of harmony and balance.

While the *mode* of approach seems to be the preferred starting point of poets, the imaginative repertoire of the poetry remains firmly yoked to the dominant frame of climate change. The predominant *content* of climate change poetry varies from representational perspectives on current weather events and debates, to future prognoses, and past laments. Furthermore, this reliance on representation as a poetic strategy is rarely balanced out by an equal consideration of form. Much of the work collected in these anthologies demonstrates a disappointingly limited reconsideration of formal strategy – negotiation of content with form – in the context of the demands of climate change. This immediately suggests an uncomplicated stance on poetry's capacity to capture the evidence, the debate and the consequences of climate change through language and an associated belief in our ability to distance ourselves sufficiently to look upon it

from afar. In order to demonstrate these generic conventions and representational strategies through closer textual analysis I will focus on *And This Global Warming*.

The poems collected in this anthology, taken as a whole, appear surprisingly comfortable with relatively explicit 'messages' on climate change. The poets repeatedly sum up their meaning in the last few lines, as if aiming to find neat resolutions to their creative arguments. Tamsin Hopkins in 'The Umbrella Stand' concludes her dream-poem about an ice-bear paw used as an umbrella stand in terms weighted with moral imperative, with the single word on the last line emphasising both the poem's warning and the scale-effects this mobilises:

And the nightmare is
we're probably going to need
more umbrella stands
soon. (27)

John Bilsborough's poem, 'No help at all,' leaves even less to the reader's imagination than the message he intended to communicate, with the added emphasis of two rhyming couplets:

There's nobody going to come and save us.
Nobody owes us any favours.
The way to stop the march of ruin
is just stop doing what we're doing. (21)

Another common strategy in this anthology with similar functional effect is loading scenarios with doom and associated moral imperative. Take, for example, the conclusion to Josh Ekroy's 'After the Tsunami':

There are four more children
unaccounted for. The official search teams
gave up weeks ago. (29)

Considered in terms of generic *content*, there is a strong trend towards poems dramatising contemporary catastrophic weather events, as if to presage further future disasters to come. Themes of rising water and ice are recurrent, occurring in over half the poems. Certainly the poets collected here are self-reflexively aware of their mobilisation of the 'tropes' of climate change. Take Caroline Zarlengo Sposto in 'Voicemail Received: 02:17':

from pseudo science socialists
who get off hugging trees
or using some emotional device
like pictures of a polar bear

that's running out of ice. (22)

Yet while demonstrating awareness of the limitations of such clichés, very few poems collected in this anthology actually reach beyond them. This sense of being unable to respond to climate change actually becomes a theme in its own right.

Moving on to *mode*, one of the most common approaches to climate change in this anthology is a didactic kind of satire. Take for example the beginning and ending of Jon McGovern's poem 'Earth Summit, Geneva':

1. Angela Merkel proposes that all nations reduce their
carbon emissions by at least 60%

Objection from David Cameron: 'I'm starving'
Nods of agreement
Meeting adjourned for lunch break...
[...]

5. Cameron expresses satisfaction at progress made so far
He is interrupted by a roar of thunder
Leaders flock to windows
Sky is on fire (16-17)

or Richard Foreman's poem, 'For Sale':

quiet location on spiral arm of the Milky Way
well presented, detached planet
seven spacious and charming continents
set amidst rolling, cerulean oceans
heating system in need of some renovation (28)

The ironic stance of these poems apparently aims to critique current climate change mitigation efforts (if not the agenda itself). However by positioning themselves above the action, the poets risk replicating the dualistic separation of the subject, looking down on the object of the poem.

The other prevalent *mode* is the elegy. In 'The Other Eden', Charles Evans mobilises an opposition to contemporary society: 'Only the broken | stones remember music and voices, joy, the other Eden.' Gavin Bantock's poem 'Ice Columns' ends on a tone both weighted with moral imperative and an associated lament for ice:

my memory's permafrost, but only just
this last year or two it has dawned on me
that in winter nowadays we simply

don't find them anymore (31)

Many of the elegiac poems in this collection perform a more complex negotiation of content with form than the didactic or satiric poems. However, they also persist in idealising the past, and performing a dualistic separation of the reflecting subject, from an objectified past.

Considered in terms of generic *form*, there is little evidence of far-reaching experimentation or innovation in response to the huge representational challenges climate change poses writers. Most of the poems selected in *And This Global Warming* are written in the loose style of free verse characteristic of most contemporary British poetry, with variation a question of detail, not fundamentally challenging how we come to know. The most successful poems in the collection are those in which form and content are to some extent placed in dialogue. Thus, for example, Ron Pretty's poem 'Desert Storm' is an unrhymed sonnet, whose sprung rhythm emphasises the incessant de-familiarisation of the desert (insect) storm scene:

Soon you're among them
like hail slanting towards you, rattling against
the windscreen, the grill, thwacking against the glass
so think you cannot see, you cannot think. (14)

Em Strang's use of the conditional mode, 'If...then...' emphasises the uncertainty associated with the scenario of flooding she presents: 'If you can do this for me I will be grateful,' while Tony Lucas's poem operates in constant dialogue and argument with its 'Antediluvian' title.

The generic conventions of climate change poetry mobilised by this collection are epitomised by its eponymous poem, 'And This Global Warming.' Climate change arguably demands everything of writers. However, Rex Harley's use of 'and...' as an anaphoric structuring device merely emphasises a lack of formal or thematic ambition in response to these challenges. The poem concludes with a young boy asking his grandmother narrator why she is worrying about climate change since she 'won't be here anyway'? The narrator responds, 'And if I had words I I'd tell him' (13). This is all very well, but when such expressions of powerlessness and having nothing to say come to dominate an anthology one is prompted to ask what the collection truly has to offer climate change debate.

The other anthologies mentioned above are certainly more varied. However, since my aim here has been to illustrate mainstream generic conventions, from which work will vary, then focussing on *And This Global Warming* has served my purposes well. Arguably the *Feeling the Pressure* anthology is most varied of all. Despite its delimiting chapter headings, the poetry itself

provides the greatest number of exceptions to the generic conventions I outline here. The poetry ranges from work by Andrew Motion, through the scientific emotional precision of David Morley's poetry, to Harriet Tarlo's characteristic negotiation of the space of the page, with the meaning of the poem. A couple of years ago during a talk at Durham University, Matthew Griffiths argued that Carrie Etter's poem, 'The Forecast', complicates our negotiation of climate change through its subtle interrogation of the sestina form. (Griffiths 2010: 5) The *Trees in the City* pamphlet, meanwhile, presents the formally accomplished work of three contemporary writers. However it is worth noting that the entire text of the *Trees in the City* pamphlet is reproduced in *Earth Shattering*, thus being presented simultaneously under the aegis of supposedly radical protest (*Earth Shattering*) and the aegis of the capitalist establishment (Lloyds). This fact as much as anything, clearly demonstrates the radical limitations of this work, and the ideological and ontological frameworks underpinning it.

Through the Weather Glass – a post-climate change poetics

Returning to where I began: how can I write a playful, improvised poetry, which explores serious, politically involved questions such as climate change, without trivialising them? Two years after asking the Bath Spa symposium this question, I presented another paper on climate change literature at the ASLE UKI conference in Worcester. Afterwards a delegate approached me to ask, 'what now?' He said, he had thought 'Margaret Atwood was one of the good guys. What else do you propose?' He has a point. There is certainly much in Atwood's work which could prove helpful to a reconsideration of the poetics of climate change. As mentioned above, the climate-changed dystopias of *Oryx and Crake* and *Year of the Flood* provide a means for Atwood to conduct a complex interrogation of questions of human progress. However, since my intention here is to propose a complete rethink of how we come to approach climate change through literature (and in turn more broadly), my reference points will not be Atwood's novels, nor any of the other examples of the climate change 'canon' discussed above.

A parallel can be made between the kind of argument I will develop here and the debate which has raged within the environmental movement over the past few decades. Since emerging in the 1970s, environmental campaign groups and Green Parties have been divided between those who believe that most can be achieved by working within the current system, and those who believe that the system is itself so deeply implicated in environmental issues that a far deeper, more radical rethink is required. My own argument is of the latter type. Hence my reference points will be literary works outside the canon of climate change, and its associated

representational strategies and generic conventions, in my search for ways of conceiving of climate change *beyond* the instrumental expectations attendant on the dominant frame of climate change. Instead I will take my lead from a book usually considered far from climate change – Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* – not least because it is *not* about climate change in our customary ways of understanding it.

The theoretical context

Earlier in this introduction I drew on Jean-Francois Lyotard’s concept of the ‘unpresentable’. The current ‘moment’ of climate change, and the limitations of our customary ways of framing it, are as good an opportunity as any to now reflect on Lyotard’s interrogation of teleological notions of progress and his ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’ (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). For does the frame of climate change not demonstrate more than ever the influence which Enlightenment thinking, and a certain variant on modernity, continue to exert upon contemporary culture? To summarise where we have got so far, the climate change campaign agenda is popularly considered as both radical and emancipatory, while in fact remaining firmly attached to and reflective of teleological notions of progress. Furthermore, far from literature offering alternative perspectives, the mainstream conventions not only enact the representative illusions of establishment ideology and a Cartesian view of the world, but also map the dominant frame of climate change. It may seem retrograde to return to postmodern philosophy when we have arguably moved beyond the postmodern moment into the post-postmodern. However while we have witnessed post-feminism, post-queer theory, post-structuralism and post-colonialism to mention only a few examples, one might be forgiven for sometimes thinking that postmodernity had passed the environmental movement by.

This is no longer the case within academic circles. Much was made of ecocriticism’s rapprochement with theory in US ecocritic Lawrence Buell’s book length response (2005) to Dana Phillips’s stinging critique in *The Truth of Ecology* (2003). In fact a number of critics, like Suellen Campbell (1989), have been negotiating the tensions between literary theory and environmental thought since the field of ecocriticism emerged in the early 1990s. Yet Buell’s book certainly marked a distinct, and more general shift in emphasis sufficient to justify what he referred to as a ‘second wave’ of ecocritical thought. However this shift in academic debate does not appear to have exerted a significant influence on broader cultural conceptions of climate change. Environmental debate continues to perpetuate narratives of human mastery and control over nature, and such narratives continue to frame how we conceive of even

supposedly radical agendas such as the 'fight against climate change'. This situation prompts the question, if postmodernity is 'modernity in its nascent state' (Lyotard 1984: 79), then what might a post-climate change culture look like, as climate change in its nascent state? Or, to return to the literary realm, what then might a post-climate change poetics look like?

The work of Mike Hulme provides a good starting point for answering these questions. Far from viewing our inability to solve climate change as a matter for despair, he proposes in *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* that we view it instead as an invitation to ask broader, more fundamental questions about the meaning of the human project on Earth:

I believe that humans are more than material objects and that climate is more than a physical category. I suggest we need to reveal the creative psychological, ethical and spiritual work that climate change is doing for us. Understanding the ways in which climate change connects with foundational human instincts opens up possibilities for re-situating culture and the human spirit at the heart of our understanding of our changing climate. Rather than catalysing disagreements about how, when and where to tackle climate change, the idea of climate change should be seen as an intellectual resource around which our collective and personal identities and projects can form and take shape. We need to ask not what we can do for climate change, but to ask what climate change can do for us. (Hulme 2009: 326)

Hearing Hulme speak at Bath Spa University not only gave me permission for my own line of creative enquiry, but also helped me develop the cycling expedition around which my own personal and collective identity has formed and taken shape in the context of climate change. In contrast to the instrumental expectations I have associated with the dominant frame of climate change, Hulme's view of what is at stake is inviting and open-ended, posing more questions than answers. For him climate change is an idea, which far from needing to be subdued, is instead a means through which to re-evaluate how we experience and come to know this world.

While Hulme provided a crucial starting point for my own enquiries into and journey with climate change, a second helpful starting point for re-conceptualising both how we might come to understand climate change, and how to explore this perspective through literature in ways that get beyond representationalism, is the work of American theoretical physicist and cultural theorist Karen Barad (1996, 2003 & 2007). As already briefly outlined, according to Barad's alternative epistemological-ontological-ethical perspective, reality is 'an ongoing dynamic of intra-activity' made up of phenomena, where phenomena are specific material-discursive configurations of the world, intra-actions are 'the mutual constitution of objects and agencies of observation within phenomena' (2007: 197), and *relata* / phenomena are not prior to relationships, but the result of them. In other words existence is not pre-existence, but emerges

through a process of intra-activity, and the associated boundaries and exclusions which are enacted during this process.

While Barad does not specifically discuss climate change, her work proves hugely suggestive for coming to understand climate change differently. Far from climate change being something to solve, from the perspective of agential realism there 'are no solutions,' (Barad 2007: x) and can be none. In place of teleological notions, Barad instead focusses much more on process, participation, and the performative nature of reality. From Barad's perspective meaning, knowledge and the phenomena which compose reality are only constituted through a process of participation – a doing – while in place of ends-oriented assessments of progress, an ethical dimension opens up:

Intra-acting responsibly as part of the world means taking account of the entangled phenomena that are intrinsic to the world's vitality and being responsive to the possibilities that might help us flourish. Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming. We need to meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world's differential becoming. (Barad 2007: 396)

Barad's notion of agency as 'changing the possibilities of change entailed in reconfiguring material discursive apparatuses of bodily production,' (Barad 2007: 178) resonates strongly with my own arguments that what is needed is not less climate change, but more of it. In this context, literature, both as an apparatus of enquiry, and a phenomena in its own right, is one important means of participation and intra-action. Barad's view is suggestive of far more open-ended and participative literary enquiries into climate change, which freed of the instrumental expectations of teleology, seek to re-make certain cuts in the material-discursive space delimiting our existing knowledge and understanding of climate change.

As I will show below, over the course of the last few years, these thinkers, alongside Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, have enabled me to reach beyond the dominant frame of climate change, and to understand my cycle expedition and its associated narrative as my own form of participation in climate change. They have encouraged me to conduct my own re-negotiation of climate change's significance to the meaning of the human project on Earth, and my own attempt to re-configure the 'cuts' structuring our current understanding. Meanwhile Carroll's novel itself has demonstrated to me how the precise qualities of improvisation and play which I query above have become key to my own poetic response, as they always have been to my aesthetic practice. In the remaining three sections of this introduction I will return to

John Frow's categories of genre analysis to demonstrate how certain *contents* and *forms* might emerge from three different *modes* of enquiry – the interrogative, the imaginative and the epistemological – in my search for a post-climate change poetics whose *function* is not instrumental, nor moralistic, but fundamentally exploratory and participative.

The interrogative mode

Literary works aiming to interrogate the frame of climate change, and its associated representational strategies and generic conventions, might not themselves constitute new means of understanding. However the frame of climate change has become so entrenched that a sustained critique is surely required. The interrogative mode can be illustrated through a revisionist climate change reading of *Through the Looking Glass*. Taking questions of *content* first, *Through the Looking Glass* is a far more political book than its escapist predecessor *Alice in Wonderland*. If wonderland is Carroll's Eden, then looking glass world is a perspective on, and an experience of, our own world through the inverting properties of the mirror. Alice's adventures operate within and engage with the context of Victorian society, politics and culture: the man in white paper in the train carriage is generally accepted as a representation of Benjamin Disraeli; Humpty Dumpty's discussion of 'glory' is a satire on academic elitism and Hobbesian politics; while most importantly of all the notion of human 'progress' and purposive, teleological thinking is famously interrogated during the running race with the Red Queen:

Alice looked round her in great surprise. 'Why, I do believe we've been under this tree the whole time! Everything is just as it was!'

'Of course it is,' said the Queen. 'What would you have it?'

'Well, in *our* country,' said Alice, still panting a little, 'you'd usually get to somewhere else – if you ran very fast for a long time as we've been doing.'

'A slow sort of country!' said the Queen. 'Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!' (Carroll 1998: 143)

In a world which has been turned on its head by a process of logical inversion, ends-oriented thinking becomes nonsensical, and the adventures Alice embarks upon provide Carroll with the opportunity for a range of politico-logical critiques.

Yet Carroll's interrogation of the 'meaning' of progress is not only conducted on the surface of the work, but also integrated into its *formal* structure through his intra-generic practice. By intra-generic practice I conceive of two related creative practices which draw direct parallels with

Karen Barad's notion of intra-action as previously defined. Barad makes a point of differentiating between intra-action and the more common notion of interaction – 'which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata.' (139) In order to draw out the precise nature of what I mean by intra-generic practice it is worth quoting Barad's notion of intra-action at some length:

The notion of intra-action...represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of phenomena become determinate and that particular concepts (that is, particular material articulations of the world) become meaningful. Intra-actions include the larger material arrangement (i.e., set of material practices) that effects an *agential* cut between "subject" and "object" (in contrast to the more familiar Cartesian cut). That is, the agential cut enacts a resolution *within* the phenomenon of the inherent ontological (and semantic) indeterminacy. In other words, relata do not pre-exist relations; rather, relata-within-phenomenon emerge through specific intra-actions. Crucially, then, intra-actions enact *agential separability* – the condition of *exteriority within phenomenon*. (139-140)

Here the cut Barad imagines is a far more circumstantial arrangement than the comparative Cartesian cut, subject to the constant process of renegotiation, and with relevance to how I foresee genre emerging *from* our agential intra-action with climate change rather than being pre-imposed upon it. Within the context of the phenomena of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* I argue that rather than generic divisions being pre-existing notions imposing meaning and structure from outwith, the process is reversed. Instead, our material-discursive understanding of genre becomes *re-configured* through a process of generic *intra-action*: our understanding of genre is re-cut. Understood in these terms genre still serves as a means of structuring meaning through literature, but rather than genre being typologically imposed from outwith, here it is understood as a phenomena which emerges from an exteriority within.

Carroll engages in what I refer to as intra-generic practice in two ways: by participating in and reconfiguring the space between broad generic categories such as fiction and autobiography, realism and fantasy, or lyric and narrative, while simultaneously interrogating the space between the broad generic types of poetry, prose, script and the visual image. More specifically, Carroll interrogates the boundaries between children's literature and the adult novel – a particularly opportune line of enquiry considering the mid-nineteenth century is commonly considered the 'Golden Era' of children's writing (Hunt 1994). Yet perhaps more importantly still, Carroll interrogates the space between prose, poetry and the visual image, as a means of interrogating the process of meaning making itself. Of course, most children's books include a combination of prose and image, and sometimes also poetry. Yet while this relationship is

generally illustrative, designed to enable or ease comprehension, in *Through the Looking Glass* something far more complex is going on. The apparently nonsensical nature of looking glass world is actually illustrated, as if it were 'real', while the poems enact the logical questions Carroll aims to explore, and the prose provides prosaic explanations for illogical events. The text is continually shifting, re-negotiating the murky spaces between meaning and defying categorisation.

Certainly there are more radical examples of intra-generic practice, such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (2001), or Iain Sinclair's *Lud Heat* (1995). However *Through the Looking Glass* is particularly interesting for the way such tensions are interrogated despite its apparently accessible surface. Carroll's novel hovers between and re-negotiates our understanding of mainstream and experimental traditions, and has proven equally influential upon writers from both.

Through the Looking Glass thus provides a model for post-climate change poetics both through its interrogation of political issues on its conceptual and narrative surface, and by providing a potential formal means for unsettling the mapping of the dominant frame of climate change onto associated generic conventions. In my own creative enquiry – *Through the Weather Glass* – Alice's adventures in looking glass world provided the literary model for writing up my adventures in climate change world. The basis of my creative enquiry into climate change world was my cycle ride from Salford to Ikaria, the Greek island where Icarus supposedly fell, to see if I could improvise a more sustainable route across Europe than Icarus managed. Similarly to how Alice's adventures in looking glass world enabled Carroll to interrogate questions of human progress, so this cycle quest provided the means for me to interrogate the meaning of progress in the context of climate change, and the meaning of climate change itself. My journey became symbolic of my wider journey with climate change during the course of my doctoral research.

The physical challenge of the cycle expedition, however, was the 'easy' bit. Since my aim was to interrogate the dominant frame of climate change, it soon became apparent on my return that this would involve an unsettling and re-configuring of genre – as the process through which literary meaning is negotiated. Hence, in my resultant 'novel', the prose narrative intra-generically re-configures travel writing, fantasy, quest narratives and mythology – an intra-generic practice from which has emerged my coining of the term 'magic travel writing.' By this term I aim to capture the influence of another genre, magic realism, on my negotiation of political issues. Meanwhile the project aims to re-negotiate and reconfigure the boundaries between prose, poetry, and the visual image with the aim of producing intra-generic tensions

between them, interrogating the reader's expectations, and breaking down the generic conventions associated with the existing body of climate change literature. If meaning emerges through the drawing of generic lines associated with the dominant frame, then surely it follows that one might interrogate this by intra-acting with genre, re-cutting the boundaries surrounding our understanding of it, in an attempt to reconfigure our existing understanding and knowledge.

The interrogative nature of the intra-generic tensions can be illustrated by comparing the form of the sections covering England, France and Greece, with the account of my 'flight' through Italy in a trans-generic or hybrid form. For Barad, arguments the notion of intra-action involving a series of cuts and exclusions is key, since this provides the means for exteriority and meaning to emerge from within phenomena:

Wholeness, according to agential realism, does not signify the dissolution of boundaries. On the contrary, boundaries are necessary for making meanings [...] Furthermore, boundaries are not fixed. Productive and creative tensions are set up in consideration of different possible placements of agentially situated cuts. (Barad 1996: 182)

As Barad emphasises here, these boundaries are far from static, and constantly under negotiation, but without a sense of exteriority within phenomena, we would be left with endless relativism and meaninglessness.

Returning to my own work with this in mind, if my intra-generic practice is interrogative, then Italy is the answer to my interrogation, written via a complex collage write-through of three key texts: *Through the Looking Glass*, my own narrative and the Summary for Policymakers of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report. In other words, the intra-generic sections in England, France and Greece foreground the process of interrogation, while Italy demonstrates the potential fluidity of the world – its potential for change in the process of intra-action captured in Barad's notion of agency. Whereas England, France and Greece are intra-generic, Italy is trans-generic, something which can only be a utopian and temporary state, and is itself subject to further interrogation and change.

In a similar vein of argument, in my own creative practice I also work between creative traditions in a similar way to Carroll, a position that is as frequently uncomfortable as it is rewardingly productive. Perhaps as much as anything this reflects my frustration with the material-discursive boundaries which have become drawn around poetry more generally over recent decades, and my wish to unsettle and reconfigure these traditional boundaries in a similar ways to genre and climate change. There is much to suggest that I am not alone in this

endeavour. The combination of my restless experimentation with form and my playful interest in the 'in-between' spaces, with my refusal to abandon poetry as a communicative medium, has much in common with what American poet and academic Mark Wallace has come to describe as a postlanguage poetics. For Wallace, such work is characterised by hybridity, and a pragmatic mixing of genres and forms from a range of traditions which refuses to settle within a singular identity. (Wallace 1998: online)

The imaginative mode

By emphasising the role of the imagination for a post-climate change poetics my aim is twofold. Firstly it acknowledges the impossibility, and associated undesirability, of providing supposedly neutral representations of the 'reality' of climate change. I have already outlined the ideological limitations of the naïve realism associated with the dominant frame of climate change and its Cartesian dualist underpinnings. Yet in its early years ecocriticism itself promoted genres such as nature writing on the misguided basis that these might capture reality more closely than fictional, or imaginative forms. On the contrary, since any representational strategy will prove problematic, not least in the case of 'unpresentable' questions like climate change, our imaginations provide a key resource for conceiving new ways of understanding environmental change. I therefore propose the importance of the 'imaginative real' to a post-climate change poetics, as a means of simultaneously bringing both our dreams and our memories to climate change.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Karen Barad does not dismiss the notion of 'reality'. Instead she reconfigures it as constantly in a process of dynamic emergence – *agential* realism – never fixed, static or independently delineated, and requiring the enactment of agency for its iterative emergence. In my use of the term 'imaginative real' I concur with Barad's view of realism, while seeking to emphasise the imagination's role in our intra-actions with the material-discursive world. The term 'imaginative real' could in fact be seen to have emerged from my own intra-action with climate change, as an attempt to re-cut how we conceive of environmentalist perspectives through the apparatus of literature. *Through the Weather Glass* operates in the space between my experience and my imaginative re-construction of this, thus applying my full range of intellectual and imaginative abilities to capturing my own 'reality' of climate change. I deliberately draw no clear dividing line between the facts of the expedition and more obviously fantastical elements, since they are inextricably entangled components of the emergence of the same thing.

The second thing I refer to with the *imaginative* mode is the leap of imagination required in order that we might be able to understand and experience climate change from *within* the phenomena. Karen Barad refers to existence emerging from exteriority within phenomena (2007: 140), yet imagining this vast shift in both causality and ontology will require an unprecedented re-negotiation of our understanding of the world and our position within it. The shift in perspective – the leap of imagination – necessary to inhabit, and intra-act with, the phenomenon of climate change can best be illustrated by reference to the work of Timothy Morton in *The Ecological Thought* (2010), which to my mind, far from enabling this leap, illustrates the vast gap confronting it.

There are similarities between Barad and Morton in their interest in the notion of ‘entanglement’. For Morton, the ecological thought itself represents the realisation that everything in the world is both inextricably entangled and connected:

The ecological crisis we face is so obvious that it becomes easy – for some, strangely or frighteningly easy – to join the dots and see that everything is interconnected. This is the ecological thought. And the more we consider it, the more our world opens up. (Morton 2010: Kindle Location 26-27)

Yet while Morton presents this argument with typical rhetorical flourish, he fails to provide any details about how humanity might actually *realise* this ecological thought. It has been almost three decades since ecological and cybernetic systems thinking made the observation of ecological interconnectivity, but the ‘inevitable’ changes in thinking simply haven’t happened. We remain as much in need as ever of means to enable us to *perceive* and inhabit the ecological thought, and to incorporate it meaningfully into our lives. Yet returning to Barad, perhaps this is inevitable, since Morton’s approach to the ecological thought here is predominantly *reflective* and intellectualised, a mode which to her mind continues to replicate an individualist, Cartesian perspective of the world. For such reasons Barad instead proposes a performative approach to the world through intra-action:

The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices, doings, and actions. Such an approach also brings to the forefront important questions of ontology, materiality and agency, while social constructivist and traditional realist approaches get caught up in the geometrical optics of reflection, where, much like the infinite play of images between two facing mirrors, the epistemology gets bounced back and forth, but nothing more is seen. (Barad 2007: 135)

Similarly here, I argue that in order to *realise* the imaginative real, we require performative enactments of our intra-action with climate change. What I am interested in when I talk about the *imaginative* mode are creative *performances* of this leap of imagination such that new cuts in our understanding might become enacted.

Again *Through the Looking Glass* provides a model of enquiry, since Carroll's novel is nothing if not a performative exploration of logic and meaning, enacting the leap of imagination through the mirror, and its associated inverting properties. In the opening scenes Alice talks to her black kitten as she considers the framed reflection of her own world in the living room looking glass:

Now, if you'll only attend Kitty, I'll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass House. First, there's the room you can see through the glass – that's just the same as our drawing room only the things go the other way. I can see all of it if I get upon a chair – all but the bit behind the fireplace. Oh! I do wish I could see that bit! I want so much to know whether they've a fire in winter: you never can tell, you know, unless our fire smokes, and then smoke comes up in that room too – but that may be only pretence, just to make it look like they had a fire. Well then, the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way: I know that because I've held up one of our books to the glass, and then they hold one up in the other room. (125-6)

Alice negotiates the tension between her own actions and the image in the mirror, gradually establishing a subjective sense of self and a sense of mastery over the mirror world. When she lifts up a book, a book is lifted in the 'other room'. Furthermore, what Alice sees in the mirror in this opening scene is limited in two important ways: first of all by the frame surrounding the looking glass, and secondly by the limited reach of the reflection in the mirror. The limitations of the mirror's perspective persuades a frustrated Alice to enquire into the corners of the room lying just out of sight, and also into what lies at the end of the passageways she can see leading from the living room. Alice's answer to this conundrum is to wish to travel through the looking glass to explore and experience the hidden corners and alleyways of this reflected world:

"How nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking Glass House! I'm sure it's got, oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it, somehow Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has gone all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a kind of a mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through." (127)

Once in the Looking Glass world, Carroll immediately establishes both that Alice's ensuing adventures will be staged outside the (ideological) authority associated with the original living room, while also clarifying that the world Alice enters is the *same* world, just as 'real' in her imagination as the original:

In another moment Alice was through the glass and had jumped down lightly into Looking-glass room. The very first thing she did was to look whether there was a fire in the fireplace, and she was quite pleased to find that there was a real one, blazing away as brightly as the one she had left behind. "So I shall be as warm here as I was in the old room," thought Alice: "warmer; in fact, because there'll be no one here to scold me away from the fire. Oh, what fun it'll be, when they see me through the glass in here and can't get at me!" (127)

By alerting the reader to the inverting properties of the mirror through Alice holding up a book to the looking glass and noticing that the words go the wrong way, Carroll signposts the significance of the mirror's inverting properties which will structure much of the logic behind Alice's subsequent adventures. Thus while looking-glass world remains the *same* world, it is certainly defamiliarised; its entire logic has been altered by travelling through the lens of both Alice's imagination and the properties of the mirror itself. *Through the Looking Glass* functions as a 'what if' narrative: what if the inverting properties of the mirror were used as a means to consider what would be involved in the embodied experience of such a world? Or in other words, what if the properties of the mirror came to life such that the world operated in reverse? How would this shift our (the reader) and Alice's responses to and understanding of this world? Enacting these types of questions and 'cuts' requires a leap of imagination on the part of both Alice and the reader such that the animation of previously inanimate objects makes perfect sense.

Turning to a consideration of climate change in these terms I propose first of all that we replace the looking glass with a weather glass – a seventeenth century device for measuring changes in atmospheric pressure – as a symbol of climate change. Like Alice, when we look in the weather glass the impact of our activities is reflected back to us in the form of the accumulated evidence for anthropogenic climate change (IPCC 2007). This evidence makes us aware of the impact of our behaviour, yet far from fundamentally challenging this, it enhances our illusion of mastery and control over the supposedly external environment we are seen to be acting upon. We continue to regard the world objectively, located 'out there', to be acted upon by us 'in here'. Furthermore, our reflection in the weather glass proves delimited by the dominant frame of understanding, while our response to climate change proves equally limited in geographical and temporal reach. The reflection remains as geographically bounded to the borders of the room and the doorways of the passageways leading from it as Alice's perspective, gesturing towards our failure to get beyond our own personal or national self-interest in the interests of the 'greater global living room.'

It remains to ask what would happen if instead of looking at our reflection in the glass, we travelled through it? Because of its 'unpresentable' nature, climate change proves resistant to representation; attempts to do so signify an ideological attempt to subdue it while betraying Cartesian assumptions. This does not mean to say however that we cannot travel 'through' its 'unpresentable' characteristics – in a performative attempt to intra-act from within climate change world as opposed to reflecting upon it from without. In the same way that the mirror in *Through the Looking Glass* re-cut the material discursive basis of looking glass world by inverting it, then the vast geographical and temporal scale of climate change and its vast complexity not only changes the nature of our apparatus for enquiring into climate change, but will also alter the phenomena which emerge from it. As Barad makes clear, the apparatus of enquiry are constitutive of 'boundary drawing practices':

Apparatuses are not mere instruments or devices that can be deployed as natural probes of the natural world, or determining structures of a social nature, but neither are they mere laboratory instruments or social forces that function in a performative mode. Apparatuses are not merely about us. And they are not merely assemblages that include nonhumans as well as humans. Rather, apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetime-matter as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming.' (Barad 2007: 142)

My performative notion of the weather glass is therefore to be understood as a reconfiguring of the apparatus through which we might intra-act with climate change, which in itself reconfigures the possibilities surrounding our understanding of climate change. First of all re-cutting the world from the perspective of climate change's complexity – its vast web of semiotic and biosemiotic exchanges and inextricable entanglement in every area of human life – might help us better realise the dynamic interconnectivities – intra-actions – composing the world, or what Morton refers to as the 'mesh'. Climate change's operation on vast geographical and temporal scales, meanwhile, might help us realise the renegotiations of identity Barad proposes are inherent to agential realism.

Barad's work – and in turn intra-action with climate change – involve the re-cutting of all manner of boundaries. Barad is most interested in a posthumanist kind of performativity, which, in refusing the anthropocentrism of humanism and antihumanism, 'marks the practice of accounting for the boundary-making practice by which the 'human' and its others are differentially delineated and defined.' (Barad 2007: 136) Such processes of re-negotiating questions of gender and identity as an extension of parallel re-negotiations of the boundaries of climate change, plays a key role in *Through the Weather Glass*. Far from an intra-action with

climate change being a hermetically sealed process, the logic behind Barad's work involves the re-negotiation of all manner of boundaries, including questions of the nature: what are the differences which really matter in this context between human-nonhuman, animate-inanimate, organic-inorganic, male-female, and how might our understanding of all of the above, the exclusions and boundaries we create, become reconfigured in our ongoing becoming with this climate changing world? How might climate change enable us to respond to the world shrunken to the scale of the intra-actions which compose us, and to take responsibility for 'our' actions from here? From this perspective, far from humanity being the beginning or the end of existence, instead we emerge as mere phenomena which materialise around our intra-actions in other phenomena, including climate change itself. We are, fundamentally, what we do, and this is constantly prone to change.

Certainly achieving such a perspective will require a similar leap of abductive imagination to that which Alice achieved in climbing through the reflective surface of the looking glass. But such is the perspective that intra-acting in climate change opens up for us, should we prove able to re-imagine the ontology of the world in the terms Barad proposes. The final component of climate change's 'unpresentable' nature – its potentially severe consequences – is a timely reminder of the significance of the material world in this debate. What better reason might there be to take the leap of imagination, and accept the invitation that participating in climate change extends to us?

The epistemological mode

The climate change mitigation agenda is framed on the basis of positivist knowledge. In common with many of the other theorists discussed over the course of this introduction, I propose instead that a post-climate change poetics would be more concerned with how we come to know than what we think we do know. Rather than mourning for a lost past, or fearing for a catastrophic future, I posit a post-climate change poetics located firmly in the present, pre-occupied with the processes of enquiring into the meaning of climate change for the human project, according to our best current knowledge of it (while remaining informed by both the past and the future). In practice both knowledge and the process of enquiring into knowledge will work together, with our resultant knowledge of climate change feeding back into how we come to acquire knowledge in feedback loops characteristic of Gregory Bateson's concept of 'recursivity' (Bateson 2010), or through the constant enfolding practice of ontology, epistemology and ethics involved in Barad's work. However in line with Bateson's emphasis on

epistemology, and Barad's interest in performativity as an enactment / doing, here I want to emphasise the importance of epistemology since unless we adapt our processes of enquiry, then the resultant knowledge can only ever prove unreliable. This section will fall into two parts: the process of enquiry (*content*), followed by the process of writing this enquiry (*form*).

Once again Lewis Carroll's text is exemplary of what I have in mind. Carroll's work epitomises the spirit of curiosity which Bateson believes environmental crisis demands of us:

Let me then conclude with a warning that we social scientists would do well to hold back our eagerness to control that world which we so imperfectly understand. The fact of our incomplete understanding should not be allowed to feed our anxiety and so increase the need to control. Rather our studies could be inspired by a more ancient, but today less honoured, motive: a curiosity about the world of which we are part. The rewards of such work are not power but beauty. (Bateson 2010: 268)

It is Alice's curiosity which prompts her to enquire into the looking glass, and which informs her journey through weather glass world. Furthermore, the framing of Carroll's enquiries into meaning and logic is epistemological. As previously described, the book stages a 'what if' scenario: what if Alice travelled through the looking glass and experienced the world beyond? The book's long title is *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. What Alice discovers is a change in perspective and experience which alters absolutely everything. Crucially Alice's journey through the looking glass is experiential and participative. Carroll's enquiry engages at eye-level as opposed to the bird's-eye perspective characteristic of satire. In the final instance the sheer illogicality of human progress in a world operating in reverse leads Alice to abandon her quest entirely at the celebration dinner organised by the Red and White Queens to mark her coronation as a Queen:

"I can't stand this any longer!" she cried, as she jumped up and seized the tablecloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor. (233-34)

Over the course of the narrative Alice's curiosity leads her on a journey whose logical conclusion can only disrupt meaning in response to the formal shifts in epistemology required by the process of mirror inversion.

These two qualities of curiosity and participation are key to a post-climate change poetics, for what is at stake are open-ended enquiries which, following Barad, can only ever be understood as performative processes of participation in climate change. For Barad our knowledge is always 'situated knowledge.' (180) Our participation in climate change will be similarly situated, and while subjective and partial, will gesture towards a better understanding of one of

the key contemporary phenomena which makes us who we are. This view of post-climate change poetics remains open to a wide range of potential creative approaches, yet is particularly suggestive of creative accounts of our journeys *through* climate change itself, as already suggested above. Yet it remains to ask what literary form such journeys might take?

What I propose are not quests of discovery such as that performed by Mark Lynas as he sought out the evidence of the reality of climate change in his travels around the world, but are rather likely to have more in common with a range of experimental travel narratives, or of particular relevance to my own enquiry, the picaresque. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (2003) is much more representative of the approach to travel literature I imagine here, in its parody of the traditional traveller's tale as a means of engaging in social or political commentary – with the object of travel far less important than its role as a means of enquiry. More recent examples might include Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1998) or Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (2004), in both of which the travelogue form is symbolic of wider philosophical journeys with the world. Perhaps even more relevant to what I envisage here, however, is the picaresque. Very strong parallels, for example, can be made between *Through the Weather Glass* and *Don Quixote* (1993), for their satiric and comedic takes on quests and 'hero' narratives, their preference for wandering episodic structures over more traditional 'plots', a strong sense of engagement with social and political themes, the use of humour, and the interweaving of metafictional and intertextual elements into the narrative account. More recent antecedents might include *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2010), or *The Selected Works of TS Spivet* (2009). I envisage eye-level accounts, which might not infrequently be metaphoric or fictionalised, which participate in the imagined reality of climate change and are informed by a spirit of curiosity not subjugation. Of course such journeys have no destination, and certainly no end. Climate change's intangibility and vast geographical and temporal reach remind us that there is no destination called climate change, only a large number of ways of never getting there.

Returning to the question I posed myself at the Bath Spa conference, the epistemology of a post-climate change poetics would be characterised by precisely those qualities of improvisation, uncertainty and play I once felt were problematic in the case of climate change, according to the logic of the following quotation from cultural theorist Nigel Clark:

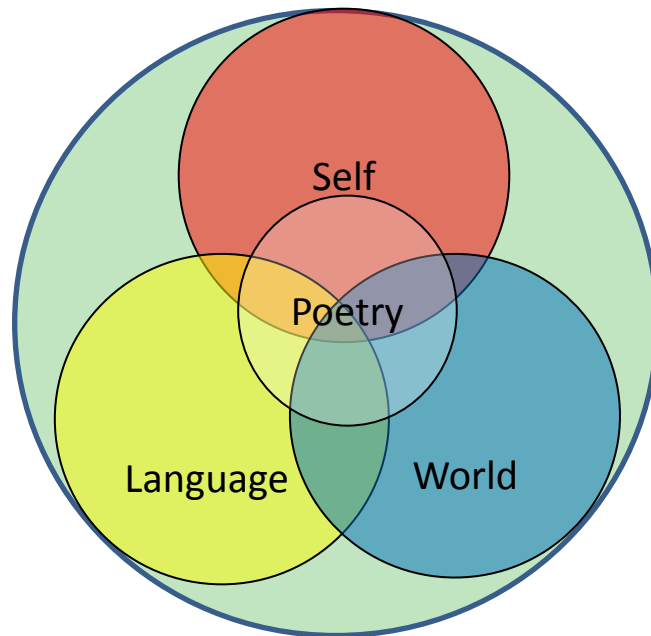
If the abrupt climate change thesis has a lesson, it is surely as much about the way that extreme conditions condemn us and other creatures to experimentation and improvisation as it is about the need for precaution and self-restraint. We need more than new curfews. As Diprose puts it: 'If we do not lighten up, remain open to change,

and become flexible we will perish'. So too should we remember that loosening up and going with the flow is itself likely to be a long and costly adventure, at least as dependent on innumerable daily acts of endurance, compassion and making-do as it is on moments of high drama or breakthrough. (Clark 2010: 49-50)

We will need to be able to laugh at our failings along the way in our attempts to 'participate', 'co-exist' or 'co-evolve' better. A post-climate change poetics will continually probe at its own epistemological frameworks of understanding in on-going processes of flexibility and change. And our journeys with it will prove as real as our imagination of it. *Through the Weather* glass is a quest in this spirit, whereby the process and the account of this process take precedence over the impossibility of any end result. My project performs a similar epistemological manoeuvre to *Through the Looking Glass*, asking: what if I travelled through the weather glass? And what would happen once I emerged on the other side?

Literary form is, of course, one potential means of enquiry into climate change in its own right. As the most complex and vast issue confronting contemporary culture, climate change demands everything of writers. Furthermore if the world really is as intra-connected and entangled as I have argued climate change suggests, then this in turn demands a radical reconsideration of the formal strategies aimed at exploring it. I envisage a post-climate change poetics of radical intra-connection, and the incorporation of processes of recursivity and feedback loops as much into our ways of writing as our ways of knowing. Such poetics would not be pursued as a weak form of mimeticism or representation, but would represent an ultimately unachievable attempt to match the complexity of climate change with equally sophisticated and complex processes of enquiry. I conceive of a post-climate change poetic involving a plural aesthetic, based on the principle that grasping the explosively chaotic complexity of climate change will require the fullest range of poetic technique: a heterogeneity that works towards a large scale (re-)apprehension of climate change, while disruptions and contradictions simultaneously acknowledge the impossibility of this.

My sense of a post-climate change poetics of formal entanglement continues to be captured in the Venn diagram I presented to the Bath Spa symposium early on in my doctoral research, in an attempt to capture a sense of what Latour refers to as the way 'all of nature and culture get churned up every day' (Latour 1993:2), or ecocritic Greg Garrard's observation that nature and culture are in a constant process of 'construction and reconstruction' (Garrard 2004: 179):



The three main circles were intended to capture a problematised sense of self; language understood broadly as the cultural means by which we understand and interpret the world; and world, as a means of referring to material reality. The white circle in the centre represents aesthetics or the discourse of poetics, while the green background gauze signals my intention to explore these dynamics within the context of environmental debate, specifically referring here to the phenomena of climate change. The locus of interest in an entangled poetics was to be the small brown segment in the middle where everything overlaps. Originally I conceived of the meaning of climate change as emerging from this small brown segment of overlap.

This diagram continues to evoke something of the boundary making process involved in my own poetry 'apparatus' for intra-acting with climate change, although, crucially, the model needs to be set in motion. To expand on this, Barad's work has first of all reversed the direction of causality of this diagram – rather than climate change emerging from a negotiation of the entanglements of self, world and language, arguably self, world and language emerge as relata from their intra-action in climate change. Yet neither is climate change to be viewed as a pre-ontological condition. On the contrary it also emerges from its intra-action in phenomena such as self or language, in an ongoing enfolding of phenomena into one another; an ongoing process of boundary making, exclusions and cuts in which the conventional notions of causality have been reversed.

Conclusion

In my opening I proposed that the reason for the ‘cultural absence’ which Robert Macfarlane and Bill McKibben lament when it comes to climate change is actually inherent in the instrumental expectations, and associated moral obligations, they and others exert upon writers. According to these expectations, literature has a persuasive, communicative and didactic role in contributing to the quest to ‘solve’ climate change before it is too late. However it has been shown that not only do writers resist these expectations, but the dominant frame of climate change underpinning this is deeply problematic – rooted in the problem-solving methodologies characteristic of teleological forms of thinking emanating from the Enlightenment. In turn, the prevalence and influence of this frame has been such that various generic conventions have already begun to emerge within mainstream climate change literature which map out both the frame’s representational illusions, and its structure of understanding. Thus, writers who adhere to certain generic conventions replicate and reinforce the dominant frame, and act as ideological messengers for it.

During the course of this thesis I have therefore sought to alter our understanding of climate change entirely in search of different perspectives on climate change, which might enable us to move forward more positively from here. In order to do this I have worked in the spirit of Morton’s Sunday afternoon thinking, and accepted Mike Hulme’s invitation to use climate change to reconsider the meaning of the human project of earth by applying Karen Barad’s theories of agential realism to climate change. Rather than viewing climate change as something to subdue through technology and in turn writing, it has become a condition for our participation in the negotiation of meaning and our understanding of our place in the world in which we live. In this context, the delimiting instrumental expectations, and associated moral obligations, on writers, and on humanity more widely, recede. I proposed in the introductory overview that if I could find an alternative perspective on climate change through literature, then this might yet have broader cultural relevance, and I firmly believe this is the case with the approach I propose here.

By aiming in this thesis introduction to gesture towards the radical changes in our thinking that climate change demands of us, I have aimed to take climate change seriously, and to engage in the deep level of exploration it requires of us. I have aimed to answer some questions, while posing others, and I invite other writers, readers and thinkers to pose similar questions of me. The intended *function* of this thesis is fundamentally exploratory, through the enactment of a dialogue between climate change and writing, between creative work and theory, and in the final instance, between myself and the world in which I participate. I hesitate to conclude, since

what I have proposed here can only be one of many possible beginnings, or perhaps more accurately, represents an on-going beginning in process. Any answers I provide here can only be provisional, and partial, and if it concludes with an apparent manifesto of post-climate change poetics, then it is a personal manifesto: the results of one writer's journey through climate change. Yet hopefully it will be a response which will help me, and others, to continue to learn and adapt to the inevitable changes that will confront humanity in coming decades. All that remains is to put the above Venn diagram in motion, a little like a bicycle wheel.

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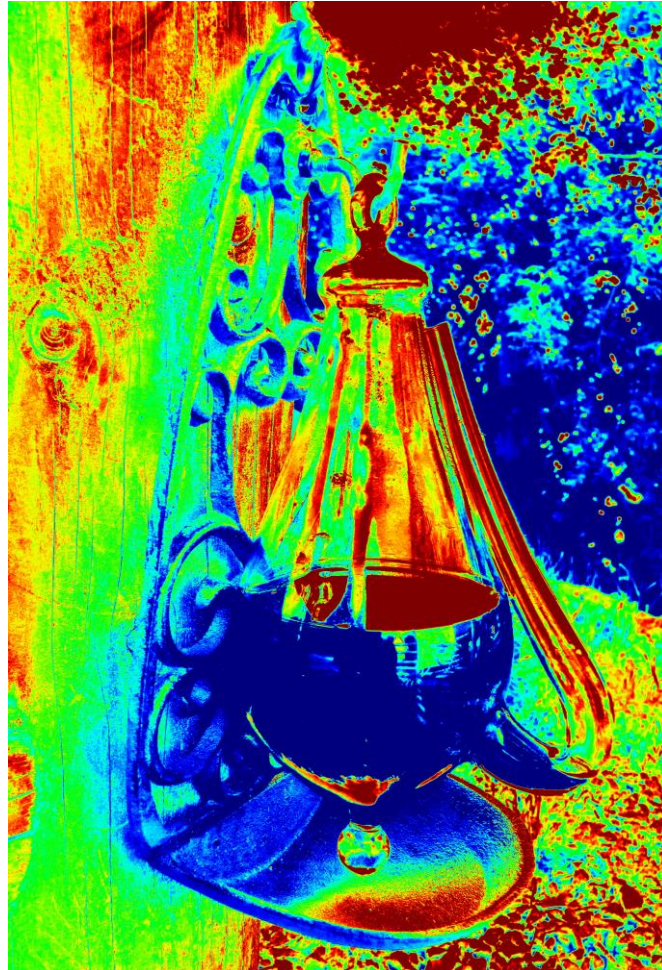
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Through the Weather Glass

(& What Icarus Found There)



Creative Project

Daedalus's Climate Prologue



i.

Daedalus had only now.
Come along with me, he said,
to the furthest limitations of our earth.
To detest was to bear witness, *de testari*,
and his eyes were the shade of protracted exile.

This was what we'd done and how we did it.
Longing, without latitude.
We had not asked to visit,
for this was our native country to be done with as we will.

He said we might start again, but.
His way was our way,
barred by the tide of our rising seas.

So-saying, he put his mind to the balance of the air.
Techniques unexplored before.
Limiting the growth of our desires to two degrees,
and the complex feedback mechanisms of the point of no return.

We were altered parameters, shifting masses,
creating space beyond ourselves.
We didn't tend to speak of the disjunctive laws of nature.
Indiscriminating pronouns.
He, she, we, they, reflecting off the carefully layered clouds.

ii.

Some gases.
The smallest to begin with.
The shorter positioned to the longer.
You'd think they'd grown like that.

iii.

In the middle of the sky, adhering to the clouds,
there were clumps of earwax.

At the bottom of this neatly compacted plumage
the sheaf of the most recently negotiated protocol
curved in a gentle camber to imitate birds' wings.

The pigeons looked at us as if we had nothing
better to do than hang around their square of sky
and shit on statues.

We did not listen. It was fair game. Whose
carbon dioxide was this anyway? The pigeons
refused to ratify; they just spat stones at us.

iv.

Daedalus was moulding the weather.
But we must also mitigate our ways, he said,
or we'll have the sun falling on our heads
like melting toffee.

His eyes sunk into his scalp as he thought
of his young son Icarus.

What does your Daddy do?
Because my Daddy's going to save the world.

Daedalus's shadow was of light bulbs,
little awarenesses, the size of globes,
the underlying threat of future tense.

To be himself was to be the way the world
was touching on him.

He watched Icarus as he laughed and smiled,
as he ran and caught at the springtime feathers
fluttering in the breeze.

And now you see me, now you don't.

Sometimes Icarus would sit with Daedalus
and carelessly soften the yellow wax between
the feathers with his thumb, enjoying his game,
as he meddled and interfered with his father's work.

I like toffee, he said. It's like playdough.
The colour of summer holidays.

vi.

As he'd said.
Everything was going to be ok.
This was perhaps the most surprising thing.

Next Daedalus instructed his son.
It was strange, but he didn't really feel
as if he had a choice in all of this.

When his own wings beat the air
there was but a momentary hesitation.
What were we really found wanting?

They say that life goes on and on and

When Daedalus led the way into the sky
it was in hope of a temporary silence.
His, her, their, our, its. No more shouting

vii.

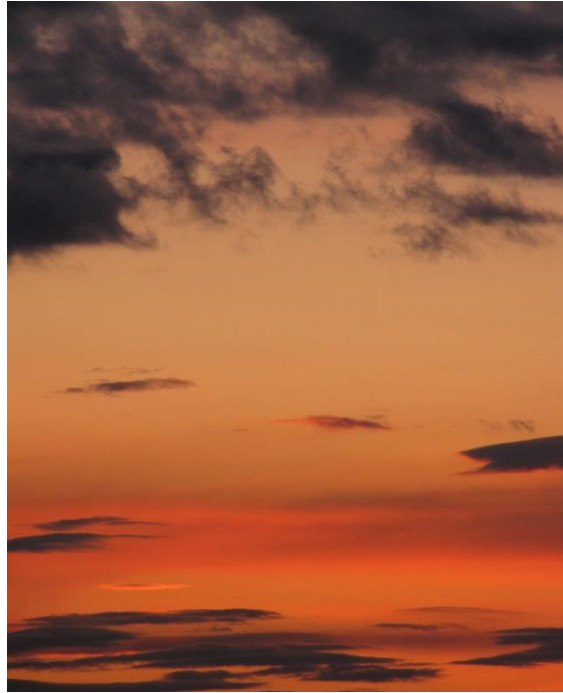
The sun grew larger than a peach,
softening the fragrant ice like candle wax,
fastening the accumulated heat to the surface
of this earth.

The moment wore the clouds like decorative plumage:

carbon dioxide
methane
water vapour

Icarus balanced the melting ice wax on his fingertips.
It was more than likely that the air had the texture
of dissolved sugar. When the pigeons headed for home
Icarus licked his lips, flapped his arms, and looked sassy.

Part 1: The Fall



One thing was certain; the key to base-jumping the atmosphere was a sense of humour. Only Icarus didn't jump, he was pushed. Afterwards Icarus would ponder the shape of the hands and the familiarity of the laughter that had tipped him off the flat edge of Planet Zeus. He would ask why Zeus had allocated him that particular job of fixing the perimeter fence on that particular August day when he could have been helping the cherubims sew feathers to wings, or reading stories to the goats. But on the verge of oblivion one has more pressing worries than playing whodunit with the Gods.

Icarus lay back against the air and looked out into the abyss. The upper atmosphere couldn't have contrasted more with the Eden from which he had just been ejected. The blackness defied the brightness of the sun, and the passing gas particles which singed the hairs on the back of his hands passed by so infrequently that not even his stripey woollen jumper could keep him warm. Certainly, there was something to be said for the once-in-a-lifetime experience of floating, weightlessly on thin air, running the stars through your fingertips like sand.

'Vorpel!' Icarus might have exclaimed, if only there had been some choice in his situation. Instead his attempts to butterfly-kick like a dolphin down into the Earth's gravitational pull resembled a dying fish, floundering about the exosphere while floating into outer space. He was a faller by trade, but try telling that to a lack of gravity.



It was only a week since Icarus had declared it high time that his life had a happy ending for once during individual counsel with Zeus. 'I'm fed up of being recalled to earth by any boojum to play the fool who flew too close to the sun. Isn't it time I outgrew my fate? I've become prisoner to it, my story's wearing out!' Icarus had pushed his curly blonde fringe from his blue eyes and adjusted his growth spurt to the paisley pattern armchair as he counted the writers who had summoned him to earth, or the artists who had sculpted his wings. Recently he had been a pop song about the follies of youth, before serving as figurehead to a mental health charity. He had once been a design of custom bicycle, but most infamously of all he had lent his figure to Greece's first national airline, which had combusted within months.

Zeus adjusted his tunic, ran his fingers through his flowing golden beard, and raised his bushy white eyebrows while looking Icarus directly in the eye for a good few moments, as if to ask – who do you think you *are* young Icarus, to presume to ask such things of me? You mean you want to be a *God*? Zeus rose and opened up the door to signal the end of the meeting, before speaking down to Icarus. 'True, your story was recycled more often last century than the previous nineteen combined. But there are worse fates than your semi-mortal assignment, Icarus. The grass isn't always greener...'

'But...!'

'...*BUT* if you really wish to become a God, as you have intimated, then the only way would be by rewriting your story, not just inhabiting the one written for you.'

And that had been the end of that, Icarus had concluded, getting up to go, uffish as any adolescent. There was no point arguing with the God of the Gods over such matters, or in fact any kind of matters, once Zeus had decided that things were or weren't to be. Because rewriting his fate would require the kind of extended application to the serious matters of life of which Icarus appeared incapable, as both Zeus and his father Daedalus well knew.

'What's going to become of you?' Daedalus had recently asked, on the occasion of Icarus's school report. Daedalus had a shock of curly hair to rival Einstein, which stood on end when he spoke to his recalcitrant son or smoked his pipe. 'I could understand if you were lacking in intelligence or creativity or talent...'

Icarus had interrupted his father's outburst in the only way he knew – whistling – an improvised variety of whistle at which he was undoubtedly virtuosic, but which on this occasion had been a tune too far.

'If you left off dreaming, just think where you could be! Take Apollo, for example!'

Icarus managed to shrug off that comparison to his best-friend-cum-nemesis, but had stormed off when the argument had descended into the familiar debate over how, and even on this occasion whether, Icarus could be his son. Was it really Icarus's fault that he was the product of his father's sexual dalliance with the local village prostitute? Or rather, less offensively considered, his mother – Naucrate – may she rest in peace? He hadn't spoken to his father since.

But more immediately, what *was* going to become of him? A happy ending? Ha! His most immediate fate more likely involved painting a constellation on the night sky with his skeletal remains – as a permanent warning to humanity against overweening pride. And if it hadn't been for a particle of carbon dioxide sidling by, right then, perhaps his end would have been just this.



'How do?' said the CO₂. 'Icarus, I presume? But what have you done with your wings?'

Icarus spread his arms wide, as if he had only just noticed that, indeed, there were no wings. 'But I'm not travelling to the sun. I'm trying to fall back to earth – that's the problem.'

'Wings melted again, huh?'

'Well, not exactly, but they may as well have. How did you end up here?'

'Oh, the usual.' The carbon dioxide hooked his thumbs in the handles of his oxygen and leant back on his infrared cowboy heels. 'Us bad boys hang around greenhouse earth too long causing trouble and pow wow, before we know it, a cannon blasts my gang out of the atmosphere. Well, not right the way out – the human race couldn't organise an atmosphere at a murder scene. But hey ho, if you're travelling down not up, any chance of a ride? A few more carbon dioxides onboard and we'll easily have enough density to begin sinking towards earth.' The CO₂ held out his hand. 'My name's Billy.'

In the absence of any better ideas, Icarus couldn't see why not. But by the time Billy woke several days later, exospheric gas particle fishing had proven as exciting as the time Icarus and Apollo had broken into Poseidon's mansion to poach salmon from the chlorinated swimming pool.

'Lucky us carbon dioxides live long enough to survive waiting around for each other, eh? Thirty to ninety years, give or take. Not that different, in fact, from human life expectancy. Not that *that's* anything to brag about!'

Icarus's task might have been slow, but at least when a particle did pass by it took very little effort on his part for the CO₂ to lodge in his jumper without invitation, equally eager for a ride. It could only be a matter of time before they acquired sufficient density to begin falling towards the next stage of the earth's atmosphere. The blackness slipped before Icarus's eyes, lightening with every mile, faster, further, until...

'Passports!' cried the helium customs officials in falsettos, puffing out their six packs, at the thermospheric border control.

'Special high security delivery of carbon dioxide,' Icarus answered officiously, mistaking the helium particles' camp exclamations for a gesture of being waved straight through.

'Are you crazy?' Billy screamed once they were out of earshot. 'We don't get smuggled *into* the atmosphere. The jumper was a disguise! Any other guards than the heliums and we'd have been blasted straight back out!'



Certainly, the thermosphere was more atmospheric than the exosphere. It was even inhabited, although the presence of abandoned scientific space-stations, reputedly inhabited by renegade space-pirates, was scant consolation for Icarus's dawning horror. No matter that he had bunked his science exam; no matter how much the moralistic overtones of climate change debate made his toes curl; he didn't doubt climate change, and imagining its potential consequences made his tummy turn. Icarus was now accelerating towards Earth. 'Get off!' he screeched to his

cheerful carbon dioxide friends, shaking his jumper to and fro. 'Away! Back up out of the atmosphere, now, scram!' Instead the particles scampered around the back where he couldn't get to them and laughed.

Icarus pulled his fingers through his hair. He'd outdone himself. In other circumstances collecting carbon dioxide particles in the weave of a woollen jumper might have been a novel invention for reducing the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases – an invention worthy of Daedalus no less! Icarus's father had spent the last few decades applying his technological genius to atmospheric science, and had recently become Zeus's climate change advisor. And never mind their run-ins over the last few years, Icarus didn't disvalue Daedalus's efforts. Rather, Daedalus's technological approach continued to make as much sense to him as a snark in a teapot! Where Daedalus was application, Icarus was abstraction. Where his Dad was sense, he was nonsense. Where Daedalus was design Icarus was digression, some might say disaster. He had broken his arm on the way to his science exam by climbing up a tree to catch a passing cloud. (What *was* life but a dream?) Whistling had failed to slow his collision with the ground. The science of climate change was one of those things that – yes, certainly – filled Icarus's head with ideas, if only he knew what these ideas were! As a case in point, Icarus hadn't just sequestered CO₂. *Contrariwise*, he'd smuggled it back into the atmosphere to further warm Planet Earth!

There was nothing for it. Political correctness aside, the fate of the planet had to come before his favourite jumper. However, when Icarus raised his arms above his head, his hands were met by another pair of hands – rough, weathered – which far from helping him off with it, instead hauled him onto the balcony of a passing space-station.

'Now what do we have here?' the space-pirate asked in a Cornish accent. He resembled an ageing fisherman with his bushy beard, ruddy cheeks and navy mackintosh – and Icarus his catch. Icarus recoiled from the pirate's cannibalistic breath before biting hard into his right hand. The pirate swore and propelled Icarus from the toe of his yellow wellingtons in an arc, up, up, *down* towards the mesosphere – carbon dioxide jumper and all.



At minus one hundred degrees mesospheric lightning travels at the speed of elves and sprites, firing bolts at you like pyromaniacal garden gnomes. The burning on entry was so cold that meteors combusted. Icarus spun at the speed of light, his arms and legs flailing like a Catherine-wheel. He would have truly been a firework had it not been for the inflammable protection of his carbon dioxide vest. 'Thanks be to carbon dioxide,' he said when he finally came to a stop in the stratosphere; paused; looked around.

Usually when things combusted, Icarus's story was escorted back to Planet Zeus by cherubims, to await Zeus's judgement and Icarus's subsequent reincarnation in time for his next quest and inevitable fall, but here he still was. 'You might be the first things to truly save my life,' he said to the CO₂. 'I don't know how to thank you enough.'

'But we save your life every day!' Billy scoffed. 'You wouldn't even remember to breathe without us. But I guess credit where credit's due. Makes a change from being the black gas in

the family.'

Icarus blushed. Had he really once thought to cast the carbon dioxide off his jumper to be done with as any passing space-pirate might choose? Of course not *all* CO₂ was bad. Not only was it required for human breathing, but where would photosynthesis be without it? As Daedalus had once taught, it was only certain concentrations that were problematic – carbon dioxide's tendency, as Icarus had understood, to hang around in gangs and drink, multiply and collect anti-social behaviour orders as trophies for their skies!

'However, if you really want to thank us, then you could best leave us here where we can cause most climate havoc,' Billy added, winking.

Icarus leant back against the air to weigh things up, but by the time he'd decided that he really ought to offer the particles up to the authorities on Earth, thus salving both his conscience and his loneliness, his jumper sagged lifelessly from his shoulders. Every particle had dissolved into thin air, further stoppering the planet to see whether humanity could take the heat. 'You could at least have said goodbye!'

Icarus's resultant mood fitted into the ultra-violet stratosphere well. He traced his index finger mimsily over centuries of human environmental misdemeanour, etched in the sky like an Ikarian tragedy. *If you fly too low, the water will clog your wings; if you fly too high, they'll be scorched by fire...fly the middle path?* There were certainly echoes between the story of his own life and the tale of humanity with climate change, and Daedalus's warnings had never rung so true, but...! He followed the upward trajectory of human progress upon the sky – up, up, and...*where* it would come to a stop was the million-environment question. Icarus knelt upon the increasingly dense atmosphere to pray for forgiveness and no less than a happy ending to the climate change narrative in which he had become unwittingly implicated. 'Let *me* fall, not humanity, not earth.'

It was a big ask, but Icarus had barely spoken before his wish was granted. He had soon gathered enough pace that the atmosphere became blurred. It wasn't long before his disorientation was complete and he lost all sensation in his dislocated limbs. He heard the almighty crash before feeling the impact. Yet in those final instants before losing consciousness, he was certain that he heard Zeus proclaim from high above.

'It will sun and rain and storm. Humanity will be amoebas rising from the remnants of earth.'

The greenhouse effect shredded Icarus, liquidising his guts and bones to pulp, which dripped back to Earth from the centre of a halogen lightbulb. All that remained was a big slippery puddle slinking around the floorboards, and the severed pages of his favourite book, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, which had been in the back pocket of his baggy jeans, and had miraculously survived the fall.

a rib

a single rib

a brain – disembodied senseless

think therefore am but could not say

eyes – light brighter than morning

the slow motion sea-sickness gagged

there was nowhere to come from
nothing to come

the sound of potential
the hollow of a throat

take some shoulders slipping from a collar

one arm
two arms
a touch of liquid legs

kneecaps floating round a nearby coffee table

Icarus couldn't have been sure how long it took him to re-form. But suddenly, a single hard blink and there he almost was. He looked around, hesitantly, from where he had arisen – stranded – like an island emerging from a flood on the threshold of someone else's home. The style of the room was minimal, the sofas brown. A single wall was painted orange, and a bicycle had been left leaning against it. Icarus wiggled his feet, before tracing his body, south to north, to check that everything remained in place:

*your foot bone connected to your ankle bone,
your ankle bone connected to your leg bone...*

he began singing – the lyrics to a song he'd never known.

*your leg bone connected to your knee bone,
your knee bone connected to your hip...*

That wasn't normal. Icarus began again, but on the second occasion the curves directed his eyes sharply south. 'What the...?' he screeched, jumping to his feet as if the floorboards had become hot coals. Not only had he grown child-bearing hips, but where his manhood should have been was...well, how did he put it? Icarus shook his limbs frantically in an attempt to eject himself back into his gangly, masculine form before this newfound reality might establish itself. Who was *this*? Icarus? Icara? 'This is a woman,' Icarus groaned, 'and alive with it.' Right enough, it was the story of Icarus's life to inhabit the forms of others during his quests to earth. Yet no matter how often he had wondered how the world might look from a woman's eyes, this had been an abstract curiosity; how could she know how to feel what he had never contemplated experiencing?

'It's not funny, you know,' Icarus said, addressing the halogen lightbulb as if it were a conduit back to Planet Zeus, where the Gods were presumably toasting another meteoric Ikarian humiliation. Someone laughed, a low chortle. 'Apollo, if that's you, then at least show your face. Why not come closer for a better look!' Yet far from eliciting any response, Icarus

simply realised her modesty for the first time. She slumped onto the sofa, hugging her knees to her chest. Was this her punishment for smuggling carbon dioxide; all her punishments at once? Was she to be shamed? But, of course, womanhood was no shame! 'I was scared. Anyone would have done the same in the circumstances.'

'Perhaps so, perhaps not,' replied the voice which had laughed previously – a nasal, almost metallic monotone.

'Zeus, is that you? Dad?' Despite the recent souring of relations with both paternal figures, a little familiarity right then would have been at least some reassurance.

'Well, no, not exactly. Although Daedalus *is* my idol, and I *am* here at Zeus's behest.'

'Oh *wonderful*,' Icarus thought, turning to face the bicycle, which in turn had swivelled its handlebars to face her. It was nothing special to look at: a skinny black frame, slightly worn and tatty. Its gear cables were gathered together with masking tape and its handlebars flat, in a geeky, retro style. Not tall, not short – about her size in fact. A hybrid bike as they had come to be known. Yet its most remarkable attribute had nothing to do with appearances. 'A talking bicycle? But bicycles can't talk in the *real* world!'

'We can when there's anyone worth talking to. Depends on what you count as real.'

Icarus took a start. 'Well in my experience, the bicycle I once became could neither think nor talk!'

'A poor kind of bicycle, you will find. In my reality the ability to converse is as natural as a chainset and sprockets.'

'I see,' Icarus replied. She had already seen far too much already since returning to Earth, but still her curiosity got the better of her. She gathered the curtain around her naked body to look out of the living room window. The house was located at the end of a nondescript cul-de-sac of modern semis, as real as a postman completing his daily rounds. 'Well, you'd better tell me where I am if I *have* to be here.'

'53°30'N, 2°18'W. Salford, 2010. But if you want to understand *why* you are here, then you had better read this.' The bicycle extended an envelope from its bar-end.

Dear Icarus, Your attendance is requested at the specially convened Athenian people's democracy tasked with resolving climate change, and discovering a future for this troubled earth, to be held on the 9th of September 2010 at the Pnyx, Athens. May this be a test of your ability to rewrite your fate. In anticipation, Zeus.

Icarus read the invitation once, twice, while its implications scaled her rebuilt spine, and her eyebrows circumnavigated the moon. *No!* Had Zeus lost the plot? For this was unprecedented recklessness, the height of unwisdom! Hadn't she recently demonstrated why her fate should be kept a million miles from climate change? What for the planet if she didn't manage to rewrite her story? Of course he wasn't laying responsibility solely on her shoulders, but...Icarus shivered as she thought of the constellation of Gods and intelligentsia also likely to be invited: Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Pericles, Parmenides, Myacles, Odysseus,

Theseus...Zeus, Ares, Dionysus, Apollo, of course, intent on making as much of a fool of Icarus as ever. No less than the conjoined origins of western thought on democracy, reason, reality, technology, science, logic; thinkers whose work continued to provide food for Icarus's monthly haybale chow-wows with the cherubims. *If philosophy be the meaning of life, think on!* But this was to be no debate on the meaning of life, and her high school understanding of climate change would hardly prove groundbreaking in such company. And as for her? If she failed to find a suitable response to climate change, as was most likely, then this was the antithesis of a happy ending. Far from becoming a God, had she not just been made a prisoner to the most severe problem confronting humankind?!

'But you must know *something*,' the bicycle suggested.

'On the contrary,' Icarus replied, with an upside down smile that betrayed some sense, but little by way of cleverness. 'No more than any old Alice – just ask my Dad.' Of course she knew that anthropogenic climate change was happening, and had a fair idea of the potential consequences. 'And somebody's killing the polar bear, that's clear at any rate.' Yet on this occasion when Icarus racked her brain, she surprised herself with a depth, and an edge, to her thinking about the current climate change agenda, quite unlike her own. 'Of course the consequences depend upon which emissions scenario is eventuated, and adaptation is preferred to mitigation, and if I'm not part of the solution then I'm part of the problem, right? Ha! And then there's the ongoing fiasco of international negotiations – twenty years of discussion for what precisely?' Icarus scratched her head where 'her' thoughts had met the air. 'You got anything to add?'

'Oh, I have a lot to add.' The bicycle puffed out its head tube like a bird. 'I wasn't randomly selected for this role. There was an extended entrance process which *I* – yes that's right, me – won.'

'But *you're* hardly ancient Greek! What role do *you* imagine playing?'

The bicycle raised its gear cables. 'There is nothing imaginary about it, Icarus. How else are you going to get from the north of England to Athens? Private bicycle scientist, Wings esquire, at your service.'

If Icarus's eyes had been dilated already, this was nothing compared to now. A *scientycle*?! 'You serious? It's been years since I rode a bike. Isn't it an awfully long way?'

Wings keyed some figures into the laptop like a hen pecking for seeds, as if Icarus's query was all in the course of a day of scientific research. 'Approximately two thousand miles as the crow flies. Zeus must have thought you needed time to work out if you have anything *useful* to contribute to the conference.'

Icarus knew of no other response to *that* but to scat on solo mouth-whistle, while sidling her curiosity across to the bookcase on the far side of the room.

The shelves were lined with climate change fiction, non-fiction and science: *Meltdown*, *Water Island*, *Burn Climate Burn*, *Apocalypse Soon*.

'These yours?'

'Well, not precisely, but I've read them all.'

'Never tempted by the occasional detective novel or a romance or two? Never tempted by...'
Icarus smiled for the first time since landing as her eyes settled upon the pages of *Through the Looking Glass*, which remained shredded across the living room floor, like shards of broken

mirror. She bent down and gathered up some scenes from around Wings's wheels: the talking flowers; the White King; Humpy Dumpty.

Wings sniffed, as if to say, 'of course I've read *that*, am I not an educated kind of a bicycle?' In fact the bicycle replied, 'I'm more of a weather glass kind of a guy myself,' while pointing towards the top drawer of the cabinet.

Icarus opened the drawer as proposed, and unwrapped the small parcel she found inside layer by tissue paper layer, to reveal a delicate glass object, which fitted into the palm of her hand. She sucked the air between her teeth and dangled the oval, elongated glass teapot from its string. 'It's beautiful, but what am I to do with it?'

'Measure atmospheric pressure, of course – if you fill it with water then high pressure makes the level in the spout fall; low pressure causes it to rise, and even bubble out the top during storms.'

Icarus filled the weather glass with the accompanying vial of sky-blue water and watched it settle between the body cavity and the spout.

'I thought we could deliver our quest's statistically averaged weather conditions to Zeus!' Wings propped his gear cables back up, where his self-satisfaction had caused them to slip.

Icarus watched the twirling reflection of the living room in the glass. It wasn't so different from a looking glass after all then, with humanity's impact on the climate reflected right back at them – a shifting weather forecast of an entire civilisation. 'So how long have we got?' she asked. Wings's answer caused her eyes to pop from their sockets. Under six weeks to rewrite her fate, with the consequences of failure not only another fall from grace but the potential for taking the entire human race with her? Icarus sat back down on the sofa and picked up a pen she found lying on the coffee table as if she might just rewrite her fate there and then and be done with it. But five minutes later she had made no more progress than some doodles in the margins.

'Just start writing,' Wings said, with the air of one who knew something you hadn't yet realised. 'You may surprise yourself.'

Talk about rewriting her own fate being difficult, but climate change was the most difficult topic to rewrite of all, Icarus was soon to realise. But right enough, when she put nib to paper, it was as if someone had taken hold of the pen and started writing for her – all manner of things that she hadn't begun to intend:

Awake, and tingling near the air,
I write about the sun as a place I know.

A collage of an afternoon –
the architecture of the mountains,
vanity and wax.

A splash of a mountain stands on
a hillock, advertising all I write.

*I am Icarus, I lie,
a prisoner of flight.*

We eat the plums in any case
and head back home.

At night on a haybale by the clouds,
you told me all about the antiseptic stars

Alfalfa, Spirulina, Barley grass

a rush of verbal calories,
a wing-shaped human
constellation gathering around us into words.

At 4am the sun begins to rise and we hold
bare atoms on our arms.

Alteration of disturbance at an average rate
per year; antiheroes fissioning to light.

‘You finished yet? ‘It’s already four hours and three minutes since we first spoke. Two-hundred-and-twenty bicycle years and almost two-million human years since time began, but closer to being out of time entirely, and passing.’

Icarus laid the pen back down on the table and shook her head. Far from it, she feared, she hadn’t even yet begun; far from answering any questions, the poem had simply posed new ones. Like, why was she writing and thinking in English, and could make no sense at all of the Greek sections of the phrasebook she had found in the pile of books beside the loo? And whyever had her monthly chow-wows with the cherubims come into it? And...and quite simply, the sooner she found out more about her alter ego, whose form she was apparently inhabiting, the better!



Perhaps the semi-detached house at the end of a nondescript cul-de-sac should have forewarned Icarus that her alter ego might have none of the glamour of a film star, let alone the power of a politician nor a sportswoman’s legs, as she had initially hoped. She hadn’t even been returned to Earth as Alice; her alter ego’s name began with a different letter L entirely!

‘Lucy,’ she read off the résumé she had found in a drawer upstairs. ‘A cynical, thirty-something former environmental campaigner cum poet. Really Zeus, is this the best you can do?’ Certainly, it made sense. Yesterday’s exhibition of climate change know-how had been courtesy of a process of osmosis, and her increased sense of consequence resulted from ageing twenty amoeban years. Meanwhile the force that had controlled her pen the previous evening had been none other than Lucy herself! Some unspent curiosity and overweening pride was presumably where Icarus came in. Yet no matter how deeply Icarus enquired into her acquired memory, she still failed to understand why Lucy had abandoned what to all accounts had been a rather promising environmental career. It was as if Lucy herself had yet to fully understand

her doubts; hadn't had the words, or the facility, to fully acknowledge them, let alone for Icarus to channel into now.

When Icarus finally raised the courage to look in the mirror later that evening, the fey character she found staring back at her had fallen over the feminine side of androgyny, but remained identifiably Icarus. His gangly form had simply been compressed – down, and curving, out – and his once elastic skin had become creased. However if Icarus's blonde curls and blue eyes pleasingly set off Lucy's athletic tones, Icarus's crooked grin ill suited the face of a professional. Not that Lucy seemed bothered about inhabiting the story of a wayward adolescent – rather, it was as if she was already leaning on Icarus, imploring that the myth bear some weight! Icarus sighed. Here she was, as large as life, and twice as natural? But the embodying was always the hardest part. At least inhabiting Lucy's identity had eased the shock of Icarus's earthly transition, enabling her to go about her daily business with ease, and it couldn't harm to have found a writer to help re-write her own and climate change's fate!

If only Wings's buckled worries would stop sticking on his brakes. 'What if they don't let us into the Pnyx after cycling all that way?' he asked for the umpteenth time already, gesturing unsubtly at Icarus's curves. 'You know, on account of...'

The funny thing was that wearing a female body hadn't actually *felt* any different to wearing a boy's form, Icarus thought. It was the sight of her body that had been the cause of her horror. 'But you're every bit as hybrid as me!'

Wings held his half mountain-bike half road-bike form tall. 'Indeed. In fact we inanimates, when animated, prove far more open-minded than humanity about all manner of combinations of this with that. I'm simply raising my concern, from the disinterested perspective of science, that your shifting identity might place this entire experiment at risk before we've begun!'

In all honesty Icarus had no convincing answer to his concerns. Democracy was all very well, but Athens's version of grassroots reached no further than the masculine elite. Zeus, whose understanding of progress related more closely to his own sense of discretion and personal advancement than questions of right or wrong, was far more of an oligarch than a democrat. And little got past the Titans, Zeus's thugs, who'd presumably be positioned at the Pnyx entrance gates, ready to club any suspiciously womanly characters back down the feminine alleyways from which they'd come.

Icarus closed her eyes to realise the feeling of blood flowing from her head to her toes to her heart. For now, her own myth, and Lucy's life, and climate change, were to become one, and what would be, would be, and be done with it?



The good thing about multi-choice questions was not only having choices, but that one of these was bound to be correct. The problem with this quest, to Icarus's mind, was that she had only been given one option and she simply had no idea how to prevent it ending up 'wrong'. But as the days passed since her landing – one day, two days, four – there was increasingly nothing for it. The following day was C-day, high time that they were on their way; if only Icarus could work out how to fit a living room of essentials on a bicycle. *Through the Looking Glass*, which she

had pasted back together – mainly in the right order, in an episodic manner-of-speaking – was non-negotiable luggage. But Icarus had already removed the climate change novels. ‘Same old formulaic apocalypse,’ she explained, ventriloquising Lucy’s thoughts for Wings’s benefit, indicating the small pile she had already read since returning to Earth. Of course she didn’t exactly *know* how to rewrite climate change yet, but these were surely travelling the wrong way. ‘Scared me witless!’ Fortunately the climate science tomes which were providing ballast to the bookcase were too big to fit in the panniers, or Icarus might have felt obliged. She would have to rely on W and Lucy for *that* type of knowledge she supposed.

‘You’ve sorted travel insurance?’ Wings confirmed. ‘Programmed emergency contacts into your mobile?’ He had looked aghast when Icarus had returned from her shopping expedition with the cheapest phone– which didn’t even have internet access, let alone GPS – and a set of maps. ‘The weight of those will buckle my tubes!’

And no, no credit, nothing programmed. Yet never before had Icarus had to organise her adventures. They just happened – the sun tempted her a little higher, she ignored her father’s good advice, and up she went! ‘Double insurance premiums for mythological semi-mortals and talking bicycles!’ she exclaimed a few minutes later, throwing her phone down in disgust, before carefully packing the weather glass in the top of her panniers.

‘It may yet prove worth every penny,’ Wings muttered. ‘We’ll never beat the end of the world to Athens at this rate!’

Outside, Icarus leant Wings up against the moss-roofed Vauxhall Astra in the driveway, strapped her saucepan-shaped helmet around her chin, and removed the camera with which she hoped to document her most fantastic quest yet. ‘Smile!’ The flash sparkled on the polished flanks of W’s frame, and captured the graffiti Icarus scratched onto the car bonnet full-beam:

I-car-us

&

W

The adventure to end all adventures had just begun.

Part 2: the climate labyrinth

because a climate wizard makes large databases of climate information visually accessible a giant iceberg breaks free from the antarctic in a collision with no intention of capping the emissions of the world's temperature record which will need to be re-analysed with more ambition if greenhouse gases are to peak in time for an official to see a climate aid scheme within months since saving the amazon may be the most cost-effective way to cut greenhouse gas emissions drought the concerns of which are plaguing syrian farmers with permafrost rapidly deteriorating in northern quebec while penguins in antarctica are to be replaced by jellyfish due to global warming declining into fog which threatens california's iconic redwood ecosystems' rate of ocean acidification at the fastest rate in 65 million years although zero emissions are possible at \$40bn a year if only the tar sands snubbed by green retailers could see the food crisis looming over scientists peak before earlier springs destroy the delicate balance of uk wildlife studies which show arctic sea ice vanishing faster than our most pessimistic models and could cost \$2.4 trillion by 2050 or else global warming may cook sea turtle eggs flooded by criticism like a body slammed for errors and potential conflicts of interest because despite it all it's known that global warming makes trees grow at the fastest rate for 200 years and after all the last neanderthals in europe died out at least 37,000 years ago and both climate change and interaction with modern humans could be involved in the demise of florida where a cold snap devastates the coral and marine life now under fire by global warming so why not raise a robin hood tax which could feed millions if only the gulf stream doesn't slow down its findings of research pollution from asia circling the globe at stratospheric heights as the world descends into darkness and coral reefs bleached by summer river algae which turn tropical electricity into greenhouse gas emissions further to the secret of sea level rise which will vary greatly by region if global cooling is bunk a draft space study finds nations large and small joining climate change campaign analysis if a 15% cut in carbon emissions is achievable through simple inexpensive personal actions like linking butterfly life cycle climate fixes to the ways the poisoning of sea life is shifting ice which might be better seen as a problem for penguins since a recent state of the birds report shows climate change threatening hundreds of species with famine marriages as one byproduct of climate change revealing the scale of outsourced emissions will in future represent a 95 per cent chance that man is to blame for global warming says a report of scientists' shareholders whose actions hit a record high smelt in the arctic sea belching tons of methane to india as a practical means to makes us truly ask did mammoth extinction warm the earth and does the "hockey stick" temperature graph stand and if so perhaps we're screwed according to the official report of what we're not being told as massive trees move upwards phytoplankton threaten fish invasive cane toads thrive go global run a fever



‘Now!’ It was as good a time to start as any, if Icarus had not bucked – yet again – at the entrance to the climate labyrinth. She flushed at her pitiful courage. Where was her adventuring spirit? She may not have known much, or her knowledge may not have been the type most valued in either the ancient or the modern world, but she did know a thing or two about labyrinths.

‘What *precisely* is the problem?’

All manner of gyring and outgribing, Icarus thought, twisting the curls that had already escaped her helmet around her fingers. Ahead, the traffic on the main road through Salford into Manchester jostled for position; pedestrians weaved between the cars, the crumbling edifices of bars awaited demolition, billboards sold ten million ways of communicating apart from face to face and all the while the road was being dug up. Police helicopters whirled overhead; the courthouse portcullis had been daubed with gangland graffiti; and the shop windows replaced with metal grilles. ‘You are now INSalford’ read the local authority welcome signs, making Icarus feel even more of an outsider than previously. Even the carbon dioxide particles hustled and jabbed at her, so unlike the laidback particles of the upper atmosphere. It was less than a year since Icarus’s last quest to Earth, but each time she returned she discovered more and louder and faster of the same! If she had been writing an apocalyptic climate change novel then this scene would have appeared not far from the final climax, she thought, channelling Lucy’s thoughts into the present for frankly dubious support. She already suspected that Lucy felt no more at home in Salford than her!

However W’s handlebars curved into a broader smile the more he looked around. ‘Salford! Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, currently undergoing regeneration!’ he exclaimed, before catapulting Icarus onto the main road so quickly she couldn’t resist.





From the Manchester inner ring road the angular white struts of Old Trafford Stadium, Theatre of Dreams, cut the angles of possibility from the horizon. Nothing will be the same after this, Icarus hoped – for climate change, for the world, for her own fate, for Lucy, and not least for her reputation in the eyes of her doubters up on Planet Zeus. But her blue-sky thinking was soon serrated by the jagged skyline of Spinningfields, the

business and administrative district. 'Icarus, the red sperm which escaped true-blue Planet Zeus,' Apollo had once said, and the growth of capitalism on Earth had truly left an empty feeling in Icarus's gut. If her imagination were a rainbow, then daily life on Earth increasingly converged upon shades of grey: the colour of currency, masquerading as consumer choice. Was this what Zeus had sent her to earth to stabilise? Better throw the whole shebang up in the air like a pack of cards!

Why die-hard capitalist Zeus had chosen her, of all contrary, leftward-leaning characters, to complete this quest, Icarus suspected she would never know. But there was never any second-guessing the all-omniscient and most charismatic of the universe's bullies, who could presumably have just resolved climate change – had he so wished – with the storm to end all storms. Icarus smiled, a half-reluctant smile, from the corner of her mouth. Zeus! The God she looked up to more than any other, despite herself. He had proven a paternal figure over the years, filling in the parental gaps caused by the combination of Daedalus's social awkwardness with Naucratis's banishment from Planet Zeus society, and subsequent death.

Not, when it came to it, more immediately, that Icarus proved any better able to reject the economic system she resisted than Zeus or any old Alice. 'One carbon credit,' she said, fingering the handful of notes and coins she'd been allocated at the bank. 'That's what I get for cycling you rather than taking the plane – it's hardly a luxurious allowance, is it?'

When a decorator, wearing paint-spattered overalls, asked Icarus where she was headed as she unlocked W from the railings, she felt tempted to reply, 'perhaps the moon!' Instead she read the curved beginnings of the tabloid headline, rolled in his palm:

'WHAT THE...?!'

before flatly answering 'Shropshire'. It was a more immediately achievable destination than Athens after all, and if she *had* to be tasked with climate change, then it was as likely to happen there as anywhere. 'It's funny, I can feel the air against my face, but the one thing that I can't sense is change,' she said, as they accelerated out of town.

'Of course you can't, especially not at *this* distance. Why do you think we need the weather glass?'

Icarus remained unsure. The first reading she had taken this morning had been 'changeable,' but which quest wasn't? If only the urban mass of Greater Manchester might soon oblige by changing into countryside.

we trace our labyrinths with clews of salt

la via salaria

a vapour trail upon the sky
or the dashes down the middle of the road

they closed the border round
the triassic cheshire salt plains years ago

glaciated flood defences made
of mountains round the sea

at the point the earth was closed
we took to flight

rearranged beginnings
changed our names

turned pterosaurs to minotaurs
and flew towards the light

the brightness of stars
inside the blackness of night.

these earth grown wings are only leaving things

A fear of no return.
A place we've never been.

our clews unravelling spittle from dew

Until this quest, Icarus had only aged about ten years in over twenty centuries, while she inhabited an inter-planetary geography. Hers had always been a funny kind of in-between existence; trapped halfway between the eternity and infinity of the Gods, and the finite mortality and short-sightedness of the human race! But it did mean that while the capitalist nature of the climate labyrinth had immediately dismayed her, she was never going to have been awestruck by the climate labyrinth's scale.

Icarus paused on the top of the hill above Altrincham to survey the country she'd be travelling through. Cheshire, whose rolling grassy plains had during Triassic times lain under seacover,

was a rolling, agricultural landscape. Before leaving Icarus had romantically imagined bicycle-bushwhacking through the wilds. But she'd seen wildernesses compared with which she'd call *this* a garden! Yet beneath the neat and prosperous farmland façade, the sea had left behind a subterranean landscape of salt deposits that had been mined since Roman times. 'And this our own unravelling clew of salt, leading us to the end of the climate labyrinth,' she cried, pointing to the white line they had dragged behind them along a treacherous stretch of dual carriageway, onto a side road, and onwards to Winsford. 'Better not rain or else we'll never find our way from here!'

Winsford itself didn't prove so straightforward. There wasn't one clew, there were hundreds, and they had just taken the wrong one, up the steepest hill in Cheshire, past the oldest bike shop in the word, a full ninety degrees off route.

'Prehistoric,' W said, pointing condescendingly at the Raleigh Grifters in the dusty window as they rolled back downhill.

'And us the pterosaurs – the first living vertebrates to fly,' Icarus replied, stretching her arms wide, before wobbling to a blushing halt. She stole a quick look round to see if anyone had been looking. If the parallels between her own fate and climate change were as she feared, had she almost taken humanity out while pretending to be a dinosaur?

'So did my alter ego like cycling?' she asked, quickly changing the topic.

'Oh yes,' W replied, puffing out his down tube. 'I was personally responsible for keeping her sane!'



However, despite her recent amoeban existence, the physical rigours of navigating the atmosphere and her alter ego's love of bicycles was serving Icarus well. It was easygoing cycling and they were maintaining a good pace. It wasn't long before they were in the southern reaches of Cheshire – an olde worlde landscape characterised by the Mercedes cars and Tudor houses of the picturesque village of Church Minshall here, the more Ford Focus variety of Tudor town of Nantwich there. However, this area wasn't even mentioned in Icarus's guidebook, and no sooner had Icarus begun to worry where they might spend the night than a sudden gunshot pop and hissing caused W to career from control.

'Whoah, steady!'

Their first puncture within less than fifty miles!

Icarus held W still – first lever off the rim of the tyre carefully, then partially inflate the inner tube...Icarus could still picture her first bicycle, waiting beneath the tree on Christmas morning almost exactly one hundred and twenty years ago, looking far more muddy brown than her hoped for racing shade of red! But she had proven no more adept then than now at repairs when Daedalus had tried to share his mechanical expertise.

'Are you mechanically dyslexic?' W now asked, as Icarus completed a botched repair job, unlikely to make it one hundred metres up the road, let alone to the next bike shop.

Icarus wiped her greasy hands from her knees to her mid thighs. What hope for her resolving the climate if she couldn't even fix a tyre? Anyone might have thought that Zeus didn't intend

her to rewrite her fate by tasking her with something so clearly beyond her. In the circumstances, the 'ROAD AHEAD CLOSED' sign blocking their passage through the climate labyrinth a few miles further on, barely came as a surprise.

'The pub?' W pointed towards a small sign advertising real ales, half a mile in the wrong direction.

The Combyer Arms was a smart place. Icarus shuffled from foot to foot. It was her first time back in human company since Planet Zeus, and she was grimed with dirt, but no-one seemed to care. Her enquiry spread like Chinese Whispers around the pub, from the barmaid's ignorance right back to her: return back up the salt trail, left, right and back a little bit, where she would find a Friesian cow advertising sunhats in the corner of a field of Welsh nuns praying for rain? Icarus was already lost, but the barmaid promised it was easy, drew a dodgy map, and told her to look out for a pub called the 'Cotton Arms' with a 'field out back'.

'Don't sell as nice beer as it does here, though,' a man with bushy eyebrows who smelt of farm added, as if he expected her to settle down for a few pints and camp in the one patch of grass in the pub grounds – beneath the septic tank.

The barmaid's map in fact proved perfect, if only they had been a caravan. 'N-O T-E-N-T-S,' W read slowly, as if spelling out a chemical formula. The bar was busy and the barman served everyone else before lazily drawling, 'Y-E-S?' Icarus twirled her curls angelically and levitated her lycra enhanced cleavage at the angle of the barman's squint before Lucy's horror dropped her back to earth. In any case, it worked, because a few extra pennies easily outweighed Caravan Club regulations.



'Eight pounds for an overgrown meadow, no showers, and toilets only until closing time?'

Otherwise it was perfect, and soon Icarus was pitched up and ready to head indoors for some route-planning. She had finished her first ever legal pint, and was contemplating a second, when two couples saved her from drunkenness.

“minGinG”

they exclaimed in broad Salford accents, sitting down at a neighbouring table. Icarus sniffed her armpits – time for bed.

Inside the coffin-sized tent which was to be her home for the next few weeks, Icarus lay staring at the moonlit roof up above her head. So here she was then? On her way? She-Icarus? Climate change? A talking bike? It had been a breathless day, with barely a moment for thought beyond the events that had confronted her. Yet while the adventure remained quite unreal, there was no denying her lungs, expanding and contracting – just one of a globe of rising and

falling breaths as one hemisphere woke and the other fell asleep. *Is it alive?* she recited. *Animal, vegetable or mineral? It can whistle.* When Icarus began it was softly at first, but soon the birds joined in, and the leaves began to rustle, and even W strummed along on his gear cables until the night reached full voice...!

The music ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Icarus pulled her sleeping bag over her head. Climate change had already proven an elusive companion. No sooner had she captured it in her thoughts than it slipped back into the everyday – food, money, how far she might cycle tomorrow, and finally, a dark black shade of sleep:

a site after the machines

a recapitulation of the whole
sited in a meander of the branches
of the troubled trees

a bright lagoon black water

i sell my emotional
attachment to the edge –
not thinking very much –
establishing a style

industrial activities declined on the back
of scraps of paper with matchstick butts

the proximity of the bleaching fields
to the chronic poverty of concrete space

it went so fast
the fertility of varieties
we download into our composite remains:

ivory black
vermillion
prussian blue
yellow ochre
flake white and no medium

shadows sketched in pencil
grey on white
an opening to erasure into
something else:

strong falls of water
hearing hills.

the smell of astronomy and a sixth sense
of the virtual panorama



When Icarus first woke she couldn't immediately locate herself, and why was everything so green? And then she remembered, groaned and pulled her sleeping bag over her head. She was in a green tent in a field behind a pub not even yet in Shropshire. *She-Icarus* was off with a talking bicycle to save the world! And the temperature inside the tent was already exceeding bearing point.

'Morning! Sleep well?' she asked, propelling herself outside like a sleeping bag bullet.

W rubbed some moss from his nose, sniffed. 'Bit dewy. Got between my joints.'

'Ditto! I think my groundsheet's absorbent,' Icarus replied, excusing her rusty organisational skills before they had even begun. At least when she struck her final match to the stove it didn't explode her back through the atmosphere as she had half expected. She could just imagine Zeus's temper if she returned now, as burnt and frazzled as a methylated spirit.

'What are *you* doing back already? So you've rewritten your fate? Resolved climate change?

'Well not precisely.' Talk about being stuck between a hard place and the universe's most powerful God. Meanwhile her Dad would scratch his hair, shuffle awkwardly, and wonder how best to resume relations with his prodigal child. It wasn't that Daedalus was a bad single-dad. Rather, that he was a *genius* of one, who hadn't quite worked out that fatherhood was different from resolving atmospheric formulae, and that his experimental test tube take on life wasn't applicable to kids!

Icarus burnt her lips on her first sip of black coffee, and looked up to the skies. But where the devil *were* they both? Usually Icarus's quests were peppered with Zeus barking orders and Daedalus pleading guiltily that she didn't fly too close to the sun, but so far there had only been an eerie kind of silence. Of course, her and Daedalus hadn't been speaking for several weeks now, but...

So was this what freedom felt like? Just her, a bike, and the rush of passing air and traffic? Icarus grinned broadly and began to pack up: here she was, alone in the world, with nobody to take care of her, and all manner of adventures and mischief to be getting up to! How often had she dreamt of this much liberty? She packed the last few bits in W's panniers and pushed him with intent towards the exit. 'Shhhh!' she said, leaning him up against the bins while she nipped through the back door of the pub to steal a pee beneath cover of the whining vacuum cleaners.



It soon became apparent that navigating a route to Athens was going to prove even harder than navigating the atmosphere to Earth, while Icarus's liberty remained as tightly bounded as ever – on this occasion to the dimensions of the climate labyrinth. The barmaid's map went no further than the campsite, and the roads were too small for salt trails. 'Across that muddy field and through the farmhouse living room, according to the compass,' Icarus proposed at the first crossroads. 'D'you think they'd mind?'

'Or else this road looks *least* wrong.'

'Ok, but on your head be it if we end up in Birmingham.' At least once Icarus had reached the Earth's gravitational force it had pulled her in, as if by an umbilical cord. But there was no umbilical cord leading to Whitchurch, let alone Athens; and the minotaur to this labyrinth was Birmingham, sitting slap bang in the way of every route.

Before they left W had shown Icarus how to trace a great circle arc – the 'as-the-crow-flies' route – across virtual earth. Groundbreaking, Icarus had thought, but as useless as a teetotum considering she was travelling by bike. Yet her own computer-generated estimation had been no more helpful: the cycle was feasible within the time frame, just, but only if they stuck to motorways...however it wasn't long before the rolling countryside eased the knots from her shoulders. A few miles further on, a cycle-route sign even appeared up ahead leading all the way to Salisbury! 'That's precisely our direction! How lucky is that?'

'More of a validation of my experimental approximation to scientific truth, as a *regular* rule,' W replied, his *Through the Looking Glass* turn of phrase causing Icarus to take a start for not the first time this quest.

All they saw of the Roman town of Whitchurch were some housing estates on its outskirts, some toga-clad Whitchurchian teenagers programming their satellite-enabled wrist-devices for the quickest parent-free route to the skate-park, and a community elder fly-mowing around his faux columns and fish spa pond. They were soon back in the countryside, winding along hedgelined lanes and between fields of crops ripe for harvesting. Icarus found herself thinking the kinds of thoughts she'd never had the time to think before: *are the wheat sheaves whistling, or the wind?*

'What's the rush?' she asked a duck, flapping its way across the Llangollen canal.

W exhaled a puff of dirt. 'The rush Icarus...'

'But wasn't the wind behind us before?' They had rounded another bend into a headwind, back over the canal (twice), corkscrewing round more hedgerowed lanes, until, 'does this not look familiar?' There were two roads ahead, and the signpost pointed immediately between them.

'The deeper tyre tread says this way.'

'But we don't have to follow everyone all the time.' Icarus removed the weather glass from her bag to see if *it* had any opinion on such matters. *No*. So many possibilities, mixed signs, dead-ends and whoever had led them a merry dance along yesterday's salt trails had abandoned them. If climate change were a labyrinth, then its architect kept changing its design! 'This way!' she said, pointing in the opposite direction altogether. They wound round the next

two corners of the maze, unable to even see into the next field over the hedges, let alone all the way around the atmospheric curve of Earth to Athens.

Her plan failed beautifully. The next signpost revealed she had both correctly chosen the cycle route, and the wrong direction, thus doubling the mileage. Perhaps there aren't any right directions, Icarus supposed, simply an infinity of slightly-longer slightly-shorter routes around earth, all leading eventually to Athens.

'Scientifically affirmative,' W replied, reorienting himself due south, back towards the sun which was already proving the most helpful dual-function clock and compass of all.

circumnavigate as a slant of opposition to the way the sun faces the creation of space which time might positively

Icarus had been barely a toddler when Daedalus had introduced 'him' to the 'tools for life.'

'This is a spanner. This is for mending things Icarus,' he had begun. Icarus had been only aged four when 'he' had first lit a bunsen burner. 'This is for testing things Icarus.' Daedalus, however, had waited until Icarus's fifth birthday to reveal the foundations of the world: 'these, dear Icarus, are numbers.' Icarus had liked the shape of them, and there was something truly mesmerising about reciting them by rote. But if they really were the foundations of the world then perhaps this explained her continued shaky foothold upon it. The look of Daedalus's disappointment at Icarus's repeated scientific and technological failings was etched on the back of her eyelids. It wasn't that she hadn't tried, precisely; rather, perhaps, that swotting up on atmospheric science from the top branches of a tree was a somewhat dangerous pursuit. Icarus's head was still shaped a little funny where it had collided with the knobbly roots of the oak tree on the day of her science exam – and the bump was now rubbing against her saucepan helmet as if to remind her of her failings as she went!

In such combined circumstances, Icarus had to find a bike shop soon, and the commercially pedestrianised main street of Shrewsbury, whose timbered Tudor buildings overhung the road with multi-coloured logos and advertising straplines, wasn't looking hopeful.

'Vodafone, phone a historical friend,' W exclaimed. 'I choose Darwin.' Over the years the

town's most famous resident had evolved from a figurative statue outside the library into a 12 x 17 metre, half-a-million pound shell-shaped vertebral DNA super-being named the Quantum Leap – poised to slink off down the Severn as soon as no-one was looking.

'Look! Darwin Shopping Centre,' Icarus said, 'where he developed his Natural Selection Theory of Marks and Spencer pants.' But the banter only lasted as far as the first bike shop. 'What was that for?' Icarus picked herself off the cobbles where W's bucking action had thrown her. 'Don't you want your bike tyre fixed?'

'I want to *be* fixed. But I don't want to *get* fixed. I hate bike shops.'

Icarus laid both hands on W's handlebar grips. 'But I don't know what else to suggest.'

W swallowed. 'Oh ok, Icarus.'

The first bike shop proved to be in the early stages of evolution and didn't stock bike tyres. The second was out of W's size. And while the third one was state of the evolutionary art, the owner wasn't. 'Hello son,' the man said, failing to apologise when Icarus corrected him, and bursting out laughing when she told him where they were headed. 'You? Off across the Alps on that? Going to save the world?!' W's handlebars bristled and his wheels buckled from side to side as the snark trundled him one-handed into the operating room.

When Icarus returned to collect W her voice was sweetness and light. 'Thank you, that looks wonderful.' She stuck her bike pump in the snark's ribs and hung him in the market square where she left the locals throwing carrots at him. 'Excuse me,' she asked a bearded copper, who was idling away a day's lack of crime stopping cars to chat to his friends. 'How do I leave Shrewsbury? Quickly?'

'Well I just drive round the ring road, but you can't do that,' the man replied, beaming with so much ignorance that his smile joined at the back of his head. His female colleague smiled less, but at least gave them directions.

'We're in a dead end car park,' W said, stating the obvious.

'Those police officers were no Darwins, were they?'

W coughed, and his tubes blushed through the black paintwork, before he stammered, 'you know, Icarus, you're not so bad really ...you might think you're a bit of an evolutionary aberration, but...but...oh, well...err, thanks Icarus.'



After that it was a good distance before either of them spoke. Icarus looked her androgynous form up and down, with an upside-down smile, as they went. She had never felt this objectified, lessened, *cheap*. Was this the way of things for womankind on Earth? Were quests the liberty of men? Was this the kind of experience which Lucy was accustomed to? Surely not! The episode had left a nasty metallic taste on her tongue. Icarus flushed at her own recent objectification of her body in the Cotton Arms, and back over what were presumably centuries of injury He-Icarus had caused to women – no matter how much he had prided himself on being an open-minded, progressive thinking chap. Was her masculinity coming back to haunt him? Was his femininity...oh, *balderdash*, Icarus thought as the pronouns of his-her existence tangled round each other and wouldn't come right whichever way she put it. But, to the best of

her memory, not even in Ancient times had He-Icarus humiliated a woman like that! The snark hadn't even known the half of it.

'Perhaps you don't need to worry quite so much about us being granted admission into the Pnyx after all, W. Never mind the minotaur being Birmingham, it was him!'

'Lucy was always being mistaken for a boy,' W replied, in a semi-non-sequitur which caused the bottom corners of Icarus's confused smile to catch upon his bar-ends:

my name is icarus in chaos
 inchoate

i am the obsolete
of abyss

the gap between
the time available

i'm situated in the space between
your knowledge

lost or gained

 the end of hubris
 sloughing wings from the suns
you laid along my spine

if you ask me who i am i will take
the archetype of namesakes

a loss of windows to pictures
stories resurrecting openings

i name myself the way that i become
acquiescing with the way i always was

All in all it had hardly been an auspicious start to their quest: she was apparently the wrong type of cyclist, on the wrong type of bicycle; all that remained to be proven was that they were on the wrong type of quest entirely. But Icarus wasn't waiting around to confirm *that*. At the very least they had a tailwind – unusual for a country with predominant sou'westerlies, but so long as the wind blew her forward, *this* was one abnormality Icarus was prepared to overlook. The Long Mynd hills stretched away to their west, with Church Stretton nestled into their steep slopes. Ludlow, meanwhile, was as scenic as expected, with its timbered houses, cobbled



streets, and independent shops selling produce from the local area.

W dragged Icarus away from the menu for another multi-rosetted restaurant. Yet later that evening in the campsite north of Hereford, when he saw the extent of Icarus's own culinary offering, he was to wish he hadn't. 'What is *that*?' he asked, turning up his nose at a plate of powdered-minestrone-soup-pasta garnished with processed salami sticks and cheese:

Maltodextrin Potato Starch with Flavourings
Dried Noodles (8%) Tomato Powder (7%)
Sugar Dried Vegetables (3.5% including Peas Carrot Tomato Leek)
Salt Onion Powder Yeast

with croutons (6%)

Suitable for vegetarians – just add boiling water

'This is for you,' Icarus replied, with a brief apologetic shrug and a decline of her narrowed female shoulders – as if to indicate that no, she was no more domesticated as a thirty something woman than as a teenage waif and stray. 'We don't have enough money for much more. We're almost out of our Sterling carbon credit and we've at least another couple of days to go.'



The next morning it was raining – but only outside the tent, whose roof was providing as dry a climate as underneath Tweedledum's umbrella. Yet Icarus's backup plan of retracing her clew of salt if all went wrong had already dissolved into the local water courses. She stared through the mosquito netting of her tent into space for a good twenty minutes before moving. Now she spread her luggage on the sodden ground before her, ready to post back to Salford: hairbrush, Britain guidebook, battery charger, a pair of trousers, some socks and pants, compass; bunches of fire irons, carrots, plum-cake tins and many other things. These were certainly expendable, she thought, unscrewing her belly button and laying it on top of the pile like a crown. The muscles behind her knee had stiffened the previous night, and had now completely seized. There was nothing for it but travelling as light as possible. Back in the day had she not travelled as light as her own skin and a pair of home-made wings?

Climate change, of course, remained unexpendable, and was already proving the heaviest, most unwieldy baggage of all. The more she thought about it, the more it fissioned into bits beyond its supposedly discrete self: political negotiation bedevilled by self-interest; the shifting exchange rate of the concentration of air; potential catastrophe; alternately petrified and apathetic peoples; its impenetrability to all but the virtual senses...Climate change was an *awful* lot for two words to mean; a definitional labyrinth of the most complex, entangled and extended kind. No wonder her knee joints were already creaking beneath the weight! Rewriting her fate? Wearing her old story to the bone more like, over the labyrinth of Britain's roads.

Icarus slowly refilled the weather glass for her morning measurement. The water level rose up

the spout, forecasting rain. But looking at the extensive cloud cover could have told her that! She had already begun to package it up, labelled, WEATHER GLASS WITH CARE when W exclaimed, 'Whoah, now wait on there!'

Instead Icarus sprayed some painkiller into the back of her knees causing W's head to spin. She could just imagine Apollo's snarky grin if she didn't even make it out the country – swigging on a bottle of Retsina stolen from Zeus's cellar and toasting another Ikarian fall from grace: see that Icarus, can't even tie his shoelaces, let alone save the world. Had to take the train after two days! Not that she had a return ticket to Zeus even if she'd wanted it. She turned her head to face the sky. 'What do you want from me, climate change?' she asked, but even the climate refused to answer to its name, as if *it* had no use for it, while Zeus and Daedalus remained as as hors de combat as ever.



By the time Icarus reached Hereford, her whiffling mood and limbs had eased slightly, and her two kilo parcel had been despatched back to Salford with a handy-enough Anglo-Saxon Messenger. She stretched the two square metres of thirteenth century cow vellum she had just stolen from the cathedral across W's spokes. 'Mappa Mundis are by far the best maps for labyrinths.' Icarus pointed to the historical and mythological symbols peppering its geographical surface:

we split our sphere in three
and hold the habitable portions in our palms

europa, asia, africa

destratified from rigid climate
zones we orient ourselves due east
and keep on moving

where the human mass finds rest there is an island:

palm trees
granite
and the beach front promenades
they built last century

we sketch the outlines of the myths we found
along the way in sand

where now?

but it feels quite calm here
adjusting our ways of breathing
to the altered density of air

the tide is turning myths into the sea:
grains of sand we filter through our hands
and an absence of coordinates

‘But I don’t understand why we’re down here.’ Icarus pointed to a small island marked Britain perched below the bulbous curve of Africa. ‘And our destination’s due north east – up here?’ She dragged her finger in an exaggerated manner, diagonally up, and right. ‘See?’

W did see, but simply spun his wheel to reorient the map to the absent sun. ‘You’ve as much sense as Lucy! Surely it depends where you’re looking from.’

Icarus reluctantly agreed. ‘But *my* story’s certainly been misplaced.’ She licked her thumb and smudged the symbol representing the myth of Daedalus and Icarus from where it had been swept into the mid-Atlantic onto Britain. ‘In the beginning was a Cretan labyrinth. A riddle of a place—money, belief, intrigue and power—with no apparent exit, and a minotaur waiting to maul you if you dared try to leave.’

W shivered – ‘crikey.’

‘The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!’

But W was not to be dispirited for long. ‘It’s a race!’ he cried as they crossed the bridge over the River Wye, throwing a stick into its bulging currents before accelerating towards the hills ahead. ‘Come on, you must cycle twice as fast as this if we’re ever to keep up with the river, let alone climate change!’



Yet no matter how fast Icarus cycled, the bad weather and poor visibility moved with them as they cycled deeper into the climate labyrinth, via the direct route to Monmouth over the hills.

‘Llancloudy,’ W read off a village sign as they entered Wales, shaking the rainwater from his tubes, which were standing the test of the weather better than Icarus’s goose-bumped skin. It was a remote stretch of earth, with small village islands rising from a sea of fog. By the time they had aqua-spun back down the hills to flood-prone Monmouth, they were only beating Icarus’s stick – which had taken the longer, flatter route around the hills – by a bike length. Ahead, their route meandered down the deciduously wooded Wye valley, back and forth across the river – England, Wales, England – alternating the lead with W’s stick at every bridge. But by the time they reached Tintern Parva, W’s stick had been waylaid.

‘It’s not a single stick, it’s a convention,’ he said. Sticks of all shapes and sizes clumped around the moored boats, making identification impossible.

‘So long as it enjoyed its journey.’

‘It’s not the winning, I suppose, once there is no race.’

Yet to Icarus’s mind, far greater wonders lay just ahead. When they turned the next corner Tintern Abbey’s remains rose above them like a web. Tourists trickled down the path to pay their entrance fee, before retiring to the Wordsworth café for tea. The rain had ceased but mist hung upon the tree tops. When Icarus sat on a surrounding wall and closed her eyes it came as no surprise when the sky began to talk, in a whisper like the wind:

*while here I stand, not only with the sense
of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
that in this moment there is life and food for future years.*

Icarus waited for the sky to continue, but when she opened her eyes all that remained was a skeletal ruin, cutting angles from the mist. She drew a picture of the Abbey onto the Mappa Mundi, with a small black bicycle alongside. It was just how the sky should have spoken – God-like, in riddles, idealising nature as well as any William, Percy or Samuel...which was all very well, *but*...Icarus held her head as Lucy's thoughts began pulsing through her mind more strongly than ever...but in the context of her current quest, what use nature poetry when it came to climate change? Better than agit-prop, and if not poetry, then what? Whistling? If poetry struggled with being *about* climate change, then it was beyond whistling, Icarus concluded, breaking into an enigmatic sailor's tune. But it didn't mean she couldn't *respond* to it:

five length of five hear
these waters rollingsprings

with a murmur-once again

do cliffs
that impress

thoughts connect the sky

Their onward route due south wound through the limestone gorge at the end of the Wye valley, down to Chepstow and on to the Old Severn Bridge where cars and lorries queued several deep. W goofily raised a bar-end at the drivers, from a position beyond punching distance, as they took advantage of free passage for bicycles, pedestrians and low-flying gulls. Meanwhile Icarus read the lines etched in the banks of mud – a bit like palm-reading the skin of the earth. You always see the



best view from the old bridge, she thought, admiring the elevated grace of the new bridge from a distance, stringing the traffic high across the sky like a conjuring trick. Perhaps all would be ok. The tide would come, and the tide would go, a bit like the weather. Right enough, back in England the sun came out. Icarus stopped and lay down on a narrow wall to eat some chocolate outside a village shop, balanced as precariously as Humpty Dumpty, and once more began whistling:

*Hicarus Dicarus sat on a wall,
Hicarus Dicarus was fated to fall.
Had Zeus lost his marbles, gone round the bend,
giving She-Icarus a climate to mend?*

'If I could grant you one wish, W, then what would it be?' she asked once the whistle had run out of rhymes.

'But this trip is my wish. The chance to put my climate science into experimental practice at last. Did you think I wouldn't know the answer to that one? Ask another one.'

Icarus rolled over, balancing dangerously over the wall's edge to look her egghead bicycle in his bolts. Inhabiting Lucy's form had certainly *eased* her ignorance when it came to climate change, but Icarus was always happy to learn a thing or two when it was sunny. 'If you know so much, why not share your expertise while I'm comfortable enough to think?'

W proved all too willing, and just as Icarus had hoped, the data, statistics and formulae of climate change combined with the sunshine soon lured her off to the land of dreams. When she woke, W was drawing to a close.

'...extrapolating from the simple challenge of applying the world's conjoined techno-scientific expertise to the world apparatus so as to be cognisant of what might otherwise appear to be the contradictory impulses of the balance sheet of atmospheric and financial concentrations of gas – whether we aim to stabilise emissions, greenhouse gases, or even the climate itself...'

Icarus swallowed a yawn, and patted her tummy. 'Dad once told me that we already know how to stabilise the climate, if we could only agree to do so. Sounded queer fish to me!'

W looked at Icarus as if to ask how she and Daedalus could possibly be related. 'I covered that in section 3.11.b, remember. Of course we do.'

In all honesty Icarus hadn't needed to listen to W to get the gist. There was a problem, and according to his way of thinking, problems needed to be solved. If only she could think that linearly! Zeus had once explained that there were those in life who pursued purposive ends and those, like her, who stumbled on, prone to diversions of curiosity, like scribbles in the margin of the page: 'and if you really want to be a God, Icarus...'

What might it be like, she wondered, to see the world through the technological lens of her father or W? What might it be like to be Zeus, with responsibility for implementing once and for all solutions to the world? What might it be like to be Lucy and...? So far Icarus and her alter ego had proven a compatible pair, although even if Icarus had begun to tune into Lucy's thoughts, she remained no clearer than previously as to their emotional subtext. Before setting off again Icarus smudged a fingerprint of chocolate onto the Mappa Mundi. She had barely travelled half a day since stealing it. Yet already it was becoming littered with the stories of her travels through the climate labyrinth; as if it were a storyboard for a huge game, being played the world over! And her no more than a prisoner or a pawn, no closer to understanding climate change, let alone finding a resolution to it, than she was of becoming a God.



Icarus had hoped for an easy early evening cycle through Gloucestershire and Wiltshire's mazes of country lanes. No-one had warned her about the climb into the Cotswolds! But she

was soon charmed by the limestone houses, winding roads, dry-stone walls, extended fields of crops, and a light sharp enough to carve plum-cakes with:



The whole world had come out to play: horses, drivers, flowers, the odd spade or two. The pub advertising two steak and chips plus a bottle of wine for £20 was tempting – we'll have two £20 servings please – but they were already running late. By the time they reached Devizes the light was fading. 'Red sky at night, shepherd's delight. You can almost see the layers of the carbon dioxide can't you?' Icarus said once they had pitched up and sat watching the pylons sculpt a weather front and the fallen sun. 'Sometimes this whole trip feels like a sunset, W, do you know what I mean? A final chance for the climate, for humanity, for me...'

'...and me. Did you not see the high-tech carbon bicycle on the landing?'

The campsite was as stratified as the weather, from the elegantly refined tents at the top, down to the rambling shacks housing raucous families of children and beer-swigging parents who had joined forces for an anarchic game of football. If only she were a bit more like Apollo, Icarus thought, and could wander over and ask to join the game. In actual fact, her social ambitions got no further than the shy 'hellos' she exchanged with passing campers – 'lovely evening for a sunset:'

English speakers love to talk about the weather.

It is a way of *breaking the ice*.

One common mistake learners make when talking about the weather is mixing up the noun, adjective and verb forms of weather words.

It is sun, it is rain, it is wind. The glaciers are melt.

Not for the first time in Icarus's life, she felt as if she was travelling *through* humanity rather than *with* them on this quest to Earth; as if she really were, somehow, apart – semi-mortal, neither human nor God, neither fully man nor fully woman as of late, at home neither on Planet Zeus nor here. By the time she hobbled over for a shower later that evening, her leg had

stiffened markedly again. The last thing she needed was to have her headtorch stolen by some teenage boys. Not that it was the end of the world in the current context. Icarus had already fumbled halfway back across the campsite when a hand tapped her on the shoulder. It was the toughest looking boy of all, holding her torch in his outstretched arm.

‘Sorry to scare you, miss. I think you dropped this in the shower.’



The following morning the water lay low in the weather glass’s spout, predicting sunshine. But instead of enjoying the weather, Icarus was suddenly of a mind to call the entire expedition off. ‘How can I continue?’ she asked, jabbing at the newspaper with her index finger. ‘This has exploded my quest through the ceiling!’

She sat down upon the steps of the Devizes market cross, whose stone tiers radiated with cold. Having proven unable to rouse the owners, or to find anywhere obvious to leave some money, Icarus had crept up the campsite lane without paying – with the tip-tyre of the guilty and a fear of Zeus. It was only two hundred years since a local woman had been struck dead by lightning for failing to pay her share of a bag of wheat. Icarus traced the shape of the ‘Z’ which marked the spot where Ruth Potterne fell with her toes: Zeus’s final mark, reserved for when he is so frumious that he has nothing left to say. All for the sake of a portion of wheat, or £8 campsite fees unpaid. But in the current context these were the small change of guilt!

That morning’s catastrophes had been catalogued like entertainment listings on an advertising board outside the shop. Droughts and wildfires in Russia, floods and landslides in Pakistan. Hundreds, becoming thousands, already dead, and an incalculable number of lives destroyed. Of course such events couldn’t be directly attributed to climate change, even if they were the kinds of events anticipated. But what response was adequate to this? The article hypothesising the meteorological causes seemed premature, and the articles dominating the centre pages bad taste. ‘Will Russian export embargo cause wheat prices to rise?’ Surely no-one right now cared?

Despite his recent silence, Zeus evidently did still exist, because he had contributed his own tuppence with an editorial about his plans:

It is because of events like these that I have gone to such lengths to organise an extraordinary convention of Athenian democracy to gather together humanity’s best minds with a view to not only resolving climate change, but preventing associated humanitarian disasters such as these. If nothing is done about climate change, then such catastrophes are certain to become more frequent.

Even Daedalus had been quoted in the editorial, providing this bit of scientific evidence here and that bit there, in support of Zeus’s rhetoric. But no, no mention of Icarus at all, as if her own role in this saga had gone un-noticed, or was undeserving of remark. Rather than Zeus and Daedalus giving her freedom and space, were they actually *ignoring* her?

‘I’m sure your intentions were worthy, Zeus,’ Icarus began, addressing the God of the Gods directly for the first time since Salford. ‘But surely these events make a mockery of my quest?’

There must be something more useful I can do...' She stopped short. Her, the semi-mortal who had flunked science and smuggled carbon dioxide into the atmosphere? But it wasn't more technology she was after, more like, 'what, beyond this cycling adventure, can I do to help?'

'But you can't give up the race while there still remains a race,' W said when Zeus failed to respond. 'That's like entering a labyrinth and giving up at the very first hurdle!'

Icarus rummaged in her panniers for the weather glass which she made a show of filling. 'An experiment? Try reassuring the Russian people with a weather prediction of a sunny day! Perhaps we need to reconsider our methodology entirely. It's not the climate that's the problem. It's us, it's them, it's everything! A weather measurement here or more technology there isn't going to solve that!' Icarus gulped at the vehemence which had sprung from her lips, as Lucy's concerns continued to filter through her – almost as if she were a mere voicebox.

W's handlebars meanwhile had turned white with outrage. 'At least this experiment is contributing to knowledge that might help prevent future catastrophes! What do you propose? More whistling? Why didn't Zeus send a real God with real supernatural powers? No, who do I get but a wayward, self-centred, outgrown adolescent intent on discovering a happy ending to her story, with the mistaken notion that this will ensure a happy ending to the world! This is a once in a species' lifetime opportunity! This is the climate's moment – never has there been such consensus over the need to resolve climate change: the science, the economics, the politics. The climate's right!'

Icarus slumped further with every blow. That was low. But he was right. W, and climate change, would have been far better off with athletic, intelligent, manly Apollo. Zeus couldn't have chosen a more contrary messenger had he tried. And even if she did abandon her quest to join the relief effort, her two left hands were likely to prove more of a hindrance than a help.

'But surely my views aren't news to you, W? I presume Lucy spoke to you about her concerns before?'

W spat some dust from his brakes dismissively. 'You must have been listening at doors and behind trees and down chimneys, Icarus.'



The wheat in the fields beyond Devizes bent low, heaving with grain, as Icarus and W's southeasterly trajectory accelerated the season. Some of the fields had already been harvested, and the straw offshoots were bundled up into all shapes and sizes of bales: upended oblongs, margarine tubs, old fashioned stooks. It was mainly wheat, with a bit of barley, corn, and some sparkly, mauve Christmas baubles growing for the coming season. The road bisected the Vale of Pewsey from Salisbury Plain, with Stonehenge only a few miles south, over the tops of the hills. Yet Icarus's shoulders were bent even lower over her handlebars than the grain as she worked through the most important juncture in the labyrinth yet. Lucy-Icarus-Alice-Icarus-Lucy had already proven a *right* Licarice allsort, and her thoughts were already gyring round and round, ready for any-old-one to pick holes in.

On the one hand she could go along with W and Zeus and see what the scientific experiment with the weather glass delivered them. Yet her own technophobia combined with Lucy's doubts

about whether science and technology were 'the answer' was a potent combination. Of course, science might have a key contribution to make, but it was far from neutral. Who decided what to research in the first place? Most difficult of all, however, was extricating her own hopes for the conference from her alter ego's doubts. International diplomacy might not have made much progress over the years, but surely those ancient Greek minds that had created this civilisation must have *something* to contribute?!...Only one thing was certain, living in fear of catastrophe made her feel more trapped and powerless than ever.

Soon enough, however, Icarus had started to enjoy the morning. She was ill-accustomed to staying miserable for long, and the thatched houses were providing a comical commentary as they passed. 'If just a simple trim from time to time, it is a little wasteful buying new wigs all the time,' grumbled one elderly specimen, buckling beneath the layered weight of his seven foot thick Gaudi-esque roofline. His neighbour complained of the short-stem varieties of wheat cladding her roof these days, harking back to the long-stemmed times before combine harvesters and nitrogen fertilisers:

and when the sky wore thin
they built another layer on top
of all the things that came before

500 eons of carbon-dated air
organic tall-stemmed wheat
and medieval rye

the greenhouse glass
is buckling in its frame



Icarus and W climbed steadily onto a contradictory expanse of army range and nature reserve moorland. DANGER TANKS CROSSING, read a large sign by the roadside, and right enough, Icarus thought, it had been getting progressively dark, with the shadow not only deepening, but following them along the road. However when she raised her head towards the sky, she found herself not looking down the barrel of a cannon as expected but at something else entirely. She drew in her breath between her teeth.

'Fear not,' the huge bird boomed. It was so large that its ten foot wingspan could barely fit between the clouds, and it was making all manner of booming, grunting and other raucous noises.

'A great bustard?' W asked, opening his headset bolts wide.

The bird nodded. 'You have learnt well the ways of the birds and will make worthy messengers. I am old, having lived through the extinction and the reintroduction of my species on these very moors, but there is no promise of such luck for humanity. Take my story and all the other stories you find along the way and deliver them to Athens. Have faith, keep going, and do not let your doubts betray you!' And with that the bird carved a contrail on the sky and disappeared in a hurricane of flapping wings before Icarus could say 'but'.



While Icarus leant W up against a pentagonal bench for lunch in the garrison town of Andover, she wondered which such 'story' might happen next. The centre-piece tree was dead, but neither Olaf the Homeless Bearded Viking nor King Eldred the Skinhead Tattooist seemed to notice, nor to care. A saxophonist busker failed to sell CDs of his version of a song called 'Let Me Entertain You,' while squaddies' wives rocked their prams back and forth, swore down their phones and puffed cigarettes to the point where Icarus's choc-chip cookies tasted smoked. With the combined sugar and smoke rush she remembered little of the next fourteen miles to Winchester.

Instead of exploring Winchester cathedral, or noting down the establishment climate change demands of its attention-seeking spire, Icarus wandered down to the River Itchen where she found Keats throwing his own regrets into its current. 'I should not have committed myself to those four months tramping in the Highlands but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more prejudice, use me to more hardship, identify finer scenes, load me with Grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in poetry than would stopping at home among Books, even though I should read more Homer.'

This was the next story she would take to Athens, she supposed, jumping back on-board W, where she started pedalling with more conviction than she had felt all day. No matter what happened, she couldn't simply *abandon* her quest like Keats, who had cut his journey short when he found the poverty in Ireland too harrowing. Yes, *of course* she would continue, even if she really had to read more Homer when she got back home.

towards autumn
a lifting wind and temperatures
which bloom like burning fuel

beginnings are always easier
than endings

default positions
– the texture of clichés.

i struggled with the sun as a system
touched the didactic stubble
of the globe

mistaking concentration
for an atmosphere
a debt of avoidance
further into abstracts

So we rolled back the greenhouse
to the market

barred clouds
and a cradle of apples
clammy poppies
and an average sea

Our universal graves are rotting
around the thatch eaves

As our last attempts to solve
the world of change

a writer returns her failings
to a high wind

‘Only the labyrinthal coast to go!’ Icarus exclaimed as they entered Hampshire, their final county in England. It was a rolling landscape, marked out in various shades of extreme prosperity which couldn’t have contrasted more with Salford. ‘Poop poop,’ sang the horn of an old dear’s Jaguar, shooing them away from her electronic entrance gates. Icarus and W avoided the village called World’s End before climbing up Portsdown Hill, upon whose summit W suddenly forgot the day’s disagreements and cried, ‘look, the sea!’

The light was fading and the endless monotony of Portsmouth’s housing merged into the grey water towards a greying horizon, but nothing could grey their smiles as they freewheeled downhill. Icarus exhaled. The end of England – they had made it to the end of England...! She raised her head to look towards the entire European continent where it lay before them, vast, distant and out of sight. The invisible problems were always the most difficult ones – the more you looked at them, the more they simply weren’t there. But she’d made surprisingly good physical progress, even if her answer to the climate change labyrinth remained the million-environment question. She’d made as much progress with climate change as Alice had in her race with the Red Queen – all the cycling you could do just to remain in the same place.



Rather than heading straight to the hostel where they would spend the night, Icarus took a detour down to the shore. She removed the weather glass from her bag and filled it with murky English channel water: as usual, its opacity provided a weather prediction which remained so out of tune with their distant climate fate. But she was glad she hadn’t discarded it earlier today. It just had that little something about it, and she suspected that if she could work out what this something was, then this might prove the key to everything. Not that she was telling

W that!

Before bed that evening, Icarus curled up in a large chair in the corner of the hostel kitchen and re-read *Through the Looking Glass* from beginning to end for the first time this quest.

'I didn't say there was nothing better than climate change,' the King replied. 'I said there was nothing quite like it.' And Icarus didn't venture to deny it.



When Icarus's alarm vibrated at 6am the next morning, she felt even more tired than before bed, and far less enamoured. *Frabjous!* Getting a hostel dorm all to herself had truly proven far too good to be true. It was 3am when the two German, late-ferry arrivals had arrived, waking Icarus with the fluorescent light, shaking her bed to confirm her existence and bending lower for a little stare – 'ja es ist eine Frau' – then drifting into a heavy stereo of snoring after an extended shower. Icarus packed up in darkness, then tiptoed across the room silently. Their noses will soon blow off if they keep up snoring like that, she thought, gently kicking over their bunk to save them as she went. And what a noise they made when they tumbled....

'What time is this?' W asked.

'On the verge of running late time.'

'Quite. Couldn't put it better myself. Even if we make it to Athens on time, it will take decades for past emissions to work their way out into the climate, let alone the emissions we continue to spout into the sky.'

'Goodness, W. Isn't it a bit early for such talk?'

'On the contrary!'

As if to emphasise the point, as they rounded the southern tip of Portsmouth they overtook an old man, riding a sit-up-and-beg bicycle with a scythe over one shoulder and an hourglass in his shopping basket, who signalled them to slow. Icarus recoiled as he turned his hood to face them, revealing a cracked, weathered face, and black holes for eyes.

'You think it is respectful to overtake your elders? No matter how fast you cycle, you can't turn back time.' Old Father Time held the rapidly emptying hourglass high, then smashed it on the pavement like a beer bottle thrown from a passing car before disappearing into the wind.

Icarus gathered some of the hourglass sand from the gutter and poured it into her back pocket – if urgency wasn't her strong point, then it was the least that she could do to purchase some. She was going to have to speed up in France if they were ever to make it. 'Up on Planet Zeus our Father Time is called Chronos,' she said as the road curved north. 'He has the heads of a man, a lion and a bull, and the body of a snake. He created Planet Zeus by crushing the primal egg within his coils.'

'So who created this egg? The Planet Zeus chicken?'

Icarus paused and looked into space. 'What a good question, W. Probably.'

At least, more immediately, the ferry terminal was somewhere people in Portsmouth generally wanted to go – away – and well-signposted. Icarus cycled W up the narrow greasy slats into the deafening echoes of the car deck's mouth cavity, where she tied him up with oversized ropes intended for securing tugboats.

‘Wait on, Icarus. How am I supposed to conduct my climatic experiments from here?’

‘Good scientists can conduct experiments anywhere.’ Icarus winked. ‘Where better to conduct a chemical investigation into climate change than the fume-fuelled laboratory of a channel ferry?!’



Portsmouth possessed far more glory in retreat than it had close up. The Spinnaker Tower's one-hundred-and-seventy metre high steel sails threatened to launch the island city towards France at the first chance of a northerly gale, while the naval fleet secured it firmly to Britain. Icarus squeezed in alongside a father and his son for a stretch of railing to watch England retreat behind them, unaware that the climate labyrinth was about to heat up beyond all precedent.

‘Destroyers,’ the young boy said to his father, pointing to some metallic wasps of naval boats, their antennae fixed on the sun. ‘Frigates,’ he yawned, before swivelling 180 degrees to machine gun a raft of ‘exterminators, annihilators, HMS Victory and Warrior and submarine deathboats,’ with his index finger.

‘BOOM!’ Icarus thought, focussing sadly on the shrinking horizon of humanity's destruction. The boy's father was no better, reeling off the capacities of the craft as if showing off the controls to a new car. Clutch, engage, accelerate, BOOM! A lethal injection of carbon dioxide catapulted into the sky. Watch the sky burn son! Icarus followed the sightline of an imaginary cannon out to sea. Technology, market, negotiation BOOM! Neo-liberal, neo-colonial, quasi-democratic BOOM! Geodiplomacy, security, terror, BOOM! As if you could do battle with the skies! More of the same, to do battle with more of the same. More capitalism for capitalism. More science for science. More negotiation to negotiate. More stabilisation to stabilise. Hubris, arrogance, progress, BOOM! A war on climate – clutch, engage accelerate BOOM!

The carbon dioxide pressed in hard against Icarus's head as if, far from exiting the labyrinth, she was approaching its combusting core. So was *this* what Lucy had been getting at all along? Was this the nub of her issues with the climate change agenda as it stood? Icarus reached out to try and catch at the air, her head spinning giddily. She wasn't known for certainty, but she

agreed with Lucy on this – a war on climate change would resolve nothing. Not the climate, nor suffering, nor famines and droughts and floods. She paused and looked out to sea. A climate labyrinth? Certainly. The earth had become a climate labyrinth as complex and entangled as the one Daedalus had built on Crete, in which they themselves had become imprisoned. ‘Fathers of the world,’ Icarus began, in a voice as shaky and as tenuous as the clew she had dragged across England to here. ‘You have outmanoeuvred yourselves spectacularly. Whatever are you doing? Whatever have you done?’

we start a guided tour of the controls –
slide the sunshine towards morning

four and a half billion years of accretion

evolution
at the touch of a key:

clumps of dust and gas-gathered gravity
to a density of heat beyond degree

we are untouchable
– nuclear fissions, shining stars –

middle aged effigies of blood red giants burning helium from the sky

the sun absorbs our white dwarf forms
and us – its nebula – a rising kind of dust

I once knew the way to tell the time from
the shadow of a stick I placed into the earth.

Part 3: Crafting Wings

the answer to the labyrinth
had been built from labyrinths

tower blocks, hedge funds,
virtual clouds we built into the sky

*what will run out first i ask you
air or earth?*

*paper scissors stones you reply
it depends on how you play*

they say there are no boundaries
at the point of boundaries

and i choose to disagree
just one way in and one way out:

a gathering of containers
huddled around the centre
as if our lives depended on it

look at all the greyscale faces
residual memories the texture of aggregates

Bienvenue en France! Every shade of grey on grey, Icarus thought, taking in the surroundings of Le Havre – destroyed during World War II, and rebuilt to a modernist design. Concrete tower blocks, concrete roundabouts, concrete river, concrete trees. Wherever Icarus went on Earth she found that modernity had already arrived before her. Some people said it was her that was old, but this wasn't how she saw it. *Contrariwise!* Teenage lad or thirty-something lady or any-old-who, the world was overwhelmingly new, and nowhere more so than here. But after her troublesome ferry passage Icarus was far more up for the adventure. She threw some hourglass sand high; she was going to enjoy this quest if it killed her!

'Le Havre,' W began. 'Awarded World Heritage site status for the interchange of human values in the architecture of climate change. 410 kilograms of carbon dioxide emitted for every ton of concrete, give or take.'

Icarus shook her head at her geeky bicycle. 'But you can't stereotype all carbon dioxide as hooligans. I met some delightful particles, escorting me ever so safely through the atmosphere.'

'But I bet they weren't the ones emitting themselves from a ton of cement!'

Icarus would have bet nothing of the sort.

She had spent the remainder of the ferry crossing plotting a Mappa Mundi route across France – 75cm wide according to a length of string stretched across its diagonal breadth. Eight days? Nine might be ok...The entangled road pattern had certainly clarified one thing: by leaving

England they hadn't escaped the labyrinth, merely changed its language. *Le labyrinthe climatique. Réchauffement de la planète. Le dioxyde de carbone.* Tell Icarus what language climate change was in, and she'd tell you the French for it! The challenge was finding a way out of here – crafting some wings – as quickly as possible in whatever language the climate came at her, and Le Havre was already proving tricky.

'I thought you said the pictures helped.' W dismissively referred to the Mappa Mundi symbol for Jean-Paul Sartre – who had once taught in Le Havre and written a book called *Nausea* all about it – which was obscuring the entire local road network.

At least they were making less dangerous progress than an English father and son off the ferry who had already cycled the wrong way up a motorway sliproad in their search for the cycle path across Le Pont L'Eveque, and were now trying to fly. 'Any luck?'

The young man shook his head and looked up to the bridge, one hundred metres overhead. 'But it must be possible.'

Icarus looked at the men, their bikes, then the bridge, before nodding her alter ego's sense of consequence doubtfully. She might once have believed six impossible things before lunchtime, but this wasn't one of them. 'Le Pont de Tancarville?' she suggested, pointing towards the next bridge, twelve kilometres upstream.

W frowned, but unwillingly let Icarus guide him – the wrong way around a roundabout and onwards.



It would have been a quiet, uneventful scene, with be-shuttered houses backing onto a limestone escarpment – had it not been for W's ensuing comparison of the aerodynamics of bikes v birds v planes. Most of the cars had taken the motorway south, leaving W plenty of room to stretch his frame wide, like 'the long slow flight of the black eagle, the bird that never sleeps!'

And whatever it was about that particular moment – perhaps the sun caught upon Icarus's line of sight like stardust, simultaneously dazzling her alter ego's good sense. Or else perhaps she remembered the carefree spirit upon which she had so recently resolved. For now Icarus grinned broadly, spread her own arms and accelerated into the freewheel, contemplating doing a U-turn there and then. Of course! Those men couldn't fly, but *her*? Anything the Wright brothers could do, she could do, *ditto*! Never had she actually *solved* a labyrinth, let alone one as complex as climate change. Why bother when she could just fly out of its roof? So much for crafting wings; how hadn't she noticed the birdlike mannerisms of her bicycle before?

'At least you can fly!'

'Yes, *yes*!' Icarus replied. Of course She-Icarus could fly up to Le Pont L'Eveque, even to a height the Wright brothers hadn't reached on their third attempt in their adapted bicycle. 'The great art of flying is to keep your balance!' she had just enough time to cry before W attempted a bunny hop which sent Icarus flying over his handlebars. She landed head first in a ditch – underwater.

'You are meant to *feather* the brakes, not slam them on like that.'

Icarus disentangled herself from W's spokes. It was the second time she had attempted to cycle hands-free, and with even less success than previously. If only she hadn't been cycling a *live* bicycle, things might have been far more straightforward...

And no denying her alter ego's alarm bells, now ringing like tinnitus while she regathered herself : *that* was clever, wasn't it? Want to rewrite your fate, do you? But that's just the same old Icarus story, told over....Icarus thought back to the spirit of the ferry passage, and the bravado of the climate war she had recently dismissed, and bit her lip. *Oh, Icarus*. What was it about the temptation of flight that kept getting the better of her good sense, even when she self-consciously willed it otherwise? Of course flying *out of the roof* of climate change would hardly satisfy the requirements of the climate conference.

'So, when you found the climate labyrinth too challenging you flew away?' Zeus would boom. 'Isn't flying the least environmental means of transport?' Meanwhile Daedalus would wring his hands with the anguish and the guilt that followed him around that, when it came to Icarus, it was all his fault. Who had proposed flying in the first place? Who had failed to keep a proper eye – or indeed rein – upon his son? Would he ever get *over* it, Icarus thought, as she dusted herself down and looked ahead. She would never learn to rewrite her own story until she took responsibility for her own fate, as Zeus had recently pointed out!

Further on, Icarus stopped to admire the view from the old bridge. Mud and pollution had long sullied the romantic waters of the Seine since leaving Paris, and industry lined the riverbanks towards the sea – as grey a landscape as any old currency, same old same old. Icarus took a weather glass measurement which she noted in her writing pad. Taken together, the weather measurements were presenting a pattern more of continuity than change. But *contrariwise!* Unlike Alice's friend the white knight, being upside down hadn't exactly helped Icarus *invent* anything regarding climate change. Still, she suspected that this here fall might have just changed *everything*.



The small road towards Pont Audemer marked the labyrinthal doorway into *proper* France: timbered houses, cows lazily licking flies from their faces, a fisherman waiting for a slow river to arrive, and some cocky chickens pecking at W's wheels:

i hung them up to dry
 one long circular loop
and a rolling mechanism

la rue des poulets
 cows smoking *gaulloises*
and a lazy drawl of riverbank

what came first
the chicken asked the egg
 our climate or its change?

(if nationality
is cultural, who taught it
to the chickens?)

a wheel on an axle
 the egg replied
 a rotational motion

a rope between the groove
causing changes in the direction
of applied force

Beyond Pont L'Audemer they climbed onto the high agricultural Normandy plateau. Its pace of life was slow, but Icarus and W travelled fast, overtaking two tractors and a horse-drawn Citroën 2CV, while doing their best to pause the sunset. There were still forty kilometres to go, and having crossed into France, the clocks had moved night-time one hour closer. By the time they descended into Orbec the supermarket had closed one minute ago. Icarus pitched up before cycling back into town for dinner. To fly or not to fly? There was no point making life-changing decisions hungry.



The Orbec area was famed for its belt-busting gastronomy, if only the warm Camembert slipping down Icarus's throat that evening had provided the necessary reassurance. That afternoon Icarus had come to accept, even to thank her alter ego, for all of the assistance she had provided this far: enhancing her climate change know-how, blessing her with a love of writing with which to rewrite her fate, and not least that very afternoon reminding Icarus of the importance of keeping her wheels well-earthed. And Icarus had given *what*, precisely, in return? But it was not long before Icarus was in contrast thinking, *thanks Lucy, but, really...no thanks, for everything*.

When Icarus had opened the brasserie door every pair of eyes had turned to stare: two sisters twirling the edges of the chequered tablecloths; the cooks staring through the kitchen slats; the family polishing glasses behind the bar. Probably no-one would have been able to pin-point why they were staring. There was simply something 'not quite right', where right meant normal, and 'not quite' meant that suspicions were raised sufficiently to pause a couple's heavy petting. Icarus had already noted receiving sideways glances on the ferry, and now wriggled uncomfortably. She may not have *mastered* wearing a woman's body successfully, but not even the bike shop owner in England had seemed *this* bothered; surely she wasn't doing *badly*! Was it really surprising that she was struggling considering her lack of female role models? Icarus ignored Lucy jabbing her in her spare rib: it was surely different *inhabiting* a woman than emulating one. She had still been young when contact with Naucratis had been so suddenly foreclosed, and Icarus had resisted Aphrodite's motherly advances...

It took the big fat man resting his belly on his knees, his elbows on his belly, and his stubbled triple chin on the bar, to raise the courage to talk to Icarus. 'Where are you from? Don't you have a family? A job? Where are you going? *Where?*' The restaurant atmosphere had already shifted from hostility to curiosity and now amazement. 'Aren't you scared on your own?'

'But I'm not on my own, am I?' Icarus swept her hand generously around the bar before finishing her cider and getting up to go before the man could ask, 'but why did you come out here at all?'

So much for being ready for whatever France threw at her, Icarus thought as she pushed W back to the campsite. Nothing England had thrown at her had unsettled her as much as this; she had stumbled at the first two hurdles!

'Why did Zeus have to complicate everything by sending me back to earth as a woman, W?' she asked, pulling her spare hand through her tangled hair. 'Isn't climate change difficult enough as it is?'

But W just shrugged, as if it were of no consequence any which way Icarus came. 'With a name like Icarus you could be any shape almost. We're all transgender now.' He yawned as if to signal that the age of intellectual hybridity had long since been and moved on.

Icarus blinked back the tears. No, it hadn't passed her by how much better W was at negotiating his own hybrid bicycle identity. She had been getting used to herself, hardly noticing almost, but... but the saddle was uncomfortable; but she wasn't as strong; but she had never realised how unenlightened the world remained. But she hadn't changed her fate, simply complicated the gender of getting there. So far it had just made everything about the climate labyrinth that good bit harder.

'You won't make yourself a *bit* less real by crying over it,' W added, as if to console her.

Icarus spun W around to face her. 'Anyone would think you'd been reading *Through the Looking Glass* while I wasn't looking, the way you've been talking!'

W shrugged his handlebars. 'What else was I meant to do while I was waiting for your amoeba to solidify.'

Right that moment Icarus would have been happy enough if the amoeba hadn't bothered.



Despite such beginnings, Orbec wasn't the kind of place for dramatic enjoyment – more the kind of small French town where twins wait by supermarket doors to inform you that it's raining, and Kronenbourg's 'slow the pace' slogan made perfect sense. It should have been a perfectly restful place for a day off, if Icarus hadn't remained rattled by events the previous night. The following morning Icarus apologised to Lucy. It was hardly her fault that Icarus had become 'her', and it took little imagination to suppose that this hadn't been an isolated encounter on Lucy's own cycling adventures. Yet if over the course of the day Icarus came to a better acceptance of, if not agreement with, the brasserie misunderstandings, when Icarus sat down to enjoy a slow beer in a different bar the following evening the nature of her quest was about to change again entirely.

At a neighbouring table Claude Debussy sipped his beer precisely, shaping the air to a point between his index finger and his thumb to divine the rain while putting the finishing touches to his 'Jardins Sous La Pluie.' Meanwhile Icarus focussed on the slow bubbles of her beer, and attempted to put pen to climate change poetry. One poem, two – both stroked out. Three – Icarus allowed Lucy to let the pen rip across the page in the biggest scribble, which before Icarus knew it, had consumed both the page, *and* her frustration. However before Icarus had fully scrunched it in her fist she was already uncrumpling it. She held it out at arm's length in front of her.

'Mais oui, ça c'est le changement climatique, vraiment,' Debussy said, peering over her shoulder.

The scribble had no beginning, no end, just an entangled infinity of clews, with the trail of salt Icarus had followed thus far simply one arbitrary strand. *Vorpal!* No wonder she had made little progress with climate change over the last few hundred miles – if this were the climate labyrinth, then it would tie knots in the path of the most cunning travellers!

Debussy raised his fountain nib from the paper again to murmur abstractly: 'we'll not return to the woods. So sleep child sleep.'

But that night Debussy's lullaby riddle proved powerless in the face of Icarus's excitement. Never mind flying, if she were right about Lucy's scribble, then this really was rewriting things. Climate change would no more be solved than any story, let alone her own fate or even her gender! 'You know, W,' she whispered through the canvas after an hour of tossing and turning. 'If climate change *is* as entangled as that, then maybe we *can't* solve it. It's not like the ozone hole or pollution or other discrete problems. If you pull one string to solve one thing, it will only tie a knot in something else. And if it pervades our whole culture, then trying to solve it is like supposing we can cure the history of the world in one fell swoop!'

Icarus had begun to conclude that W was asleep, and that this was probably for the best, when he finally spoke.

'You mean a wicked problem, Icarus?'

'Why, probably,' Icarus replied, grinning, wicked as a kitten.

'But I thought you were the hubristic semi-mortal, with aspirations to become a God. At least you demonstrated ambition at that!'

The lullaby child goes down to the wood
where the child will soon fall asleep.

The laurels are cut, absorbing the beauty
of the lullaby child while she sleeps.

A white hen is there in the barn,
joining in the dance, watching how we run.

It will lay an egg for the beauty of the laurel
and the child who's going to sleep.

We take our songs in turn. If the lullaby child
sleeps the cicada must not hurt.

The song of the nightingale will wake us up
in time for the warbler, with her sweetsweet throat,

and the shepherdess, who gathers the hen in her
big white basket with strawberries and wild roses.

Cricket, my cricket we must sing, for it is almost
night, and the laurel wood has rejected us.

We will not return to the woods so sleep, child, sleep

Translated from a traditional French folk song

Orbec was layered in different ages of old, cobbled, brown and beamed. By next morning the Sunday bric-a-brac market had transported it back to the sixteenth century.

'I'll 'ave that,' squawked one hawkish trader, stealing a bra from where it was drying on W's rack.

'Ugh,' groaned Icarus as they cycled past the piss, faeces and flesh of the local tanner's stall. A rack of early printing press parts. Lizard bones. Some snorting gunpowder.

'Catholic or Huguenot?' cried a young lad. Had they landed slap bang in the middle of the French Wars of Religion?

The market sold everything, but only in rusty, smelly variants. After the events of the last twenty four hours, Icarus herself felt tanned. Still she declined the special two-for-one offer on a rusty barometer and a smelly knee. They were barely back in the countryside before W

recommenced his tirade.

'You've not gathered nearly enough weather glass readings to disregard the scientific consensus and give up. First you're upset about events abroad, but you've now decided we couldn't do anything to help, even if we tried. Make up your mind!'

In fact the weather glass this morning had been as blue and radiant as Icarus felt happy to see the sun. Perhaps she'd been wrong about that little 'something' after all. Her pen and paper had already provided a far better insight into climate change.

'If I'd meant that we should *disregard* the evidence of climate change,' Icarus began, 'I'd have said that! Of course I'm not doubting it, and I'd certainly like to help. But not even Plato will solve climate change if it can't *be* solved!' Yesterday's realisation had even made sense of the divergence between Lucy's doubts and Icarus's hopes for the Athenian democracy – as if everything was starting to come together just when it had been blown apart. True, the gender-bending element of the quest continued to make as little sense to Icarus as backwards poetry had to Alice. But at least *something* good had come from Orbec.

But W was not to be easily appeased. 'So shall we turn back? Go on, call some cherubims to teleport you back to Planet Zeus, because see if I care. I can surely find someone else *more manly*, to cycle me there, if you won't.' With that W stuck his bar-end out in an attempt to hitch a ride with any passing pedestrian – of which there were in fact none, for they were already in the middle of the Haute Normandie plateau's nowhere.

Icarus stole a wry grin at the circumstantial flexibility of W's hybrid ideals. But of course she wouldn't be abandoning her quest, for she had only just discovered it! The guilt and responsibility that had weighed upon her shoulders since her carbon smuggling exploits had lifted, as if they had been truly elevated with wings. She may have been no closer to knowing *how* to respond. If they couldn't *solve* climate change, *then* what? But at least she was doing *something* beyond burying her head in the leaves and snoring! This was somewhere she could work from: no longer obliged to solve the world's problems, let alone expecting Lucy's poetry to do so. Despite the emotional turmoil of the last few days, Icarus felt a clarity which she hadn't experienced all quest, as if she had started to find expression – permission – for the thoughts which Lucy had so long withheld. Who would have thought that scribbles could be such powerful things? Was *this* what she had to offer Lucy? *And just wait until she told Zeus and Daedalus about it!*

Icarus turned her eyes towards the sky with the false hope of one who still believes that her two paternal guardians might some day stop and listen.

'Why even bother continuing?' W continued.

'Because the road keeps going.' Icarus pointed to the long straight line of tarmac stretching ahead, dissecting the large open spaces characterising Haute Normandie. Their disagreements once more edged into silence. Icarus mesmerised herself on the dashed white clew ahead of them. One dash, two, three...

'Wake up!' W suddenly yelled.

Icarus juddered awake, almost throwing them into the path of a passing truck:



What were we talking about and for so long?

It was not an easy question
nor rhetorical and we talked about
the meaning of the question for some hours.

The chemistry of words.
The formulae of thoughts:
vectors sketched invisibly on minds

But our world was no laboratory.
By the time we had an answer
the test conditions had changed.

I remember all the things you taught me
about the sky were useless when
it came to words and you heard me wrongly

Didn't want to understand the things I meant to mean

So all that remained was to craft some new climate change wings, to fill the place of what had come before? It was a thought that made Icarus hungry. The first over-vowelled village they came to was called Montreuil-L'Argillé.

'On your way to the Loire?' the friendly owner of the local store asked. 'What is it that you want to buy?'

'I don't know yet,' Icarus replied. 'I should like to look around me first if I may?' The shop was filled with all manner of curious things – a whirligig of postcards to other more scenic parts of France, seaside toys, horse trotters – but the oddest thing about it was that every shelf she looked at was covered in dust and grime, while the produce on every other shelf looked sparkling and fresh! Icarus rubbed the grime from the lid of a tin of sardines. Anything from the middle ages onwards should be ok with the preservatives they added these days, she thought, adding a can of old-fashioned coca cola to her basket:

*May I present for the benefit
of scientists, scholars, poets, divines,
lawyers and physicians, and others
devoted to extreme mental exertion
Pemberton's French Wine Coca!
A cure for urbanisation and all associated ills!*

A brand as global as climate change, the former environmental campaigner in Icarus thought, sitting down with her cold drink on some steps further down the road. Opposite, the district flag, the tricolore and the European Union flag intertwined in the wind above the village hall. And when it came to this quest, the local, the national and the global were proving equally variable. The old man crossing the road towards them, leaning heavily upon his shepherd's crook, was the antidote to recent events in the Orbec brasserie.

'Excusez moi,' he said with exceeding politeness, trying to squeeze past them up the steps to his own house. If only the lycra-clad cyclists from a Parisian cycling team who passed through the village at that moment had been quite so polite. 'Bonjour!' Icarus cried out, waving to the peloton enthusiastically. The cyclists didn't even divert their gaze. Not that her boojum bicycle was proving any more communicative.

'It's just a harmless wood wasp,' he spat, when Icarus fled from a hornet with the longest stinger she had ever seen during an extended lunch in the Bois-de-Chatelet. W's only other contributions to the afternoon were the clunking of his bottom bracket – as if mocking Icarus's stiff knee – and some gasps for water when they ran out, a thirst which not even the last bite of Andover's choc chip cookies could quench.

'Nothing else,' the Chinese takeaway owner in Bellême asked in a hybrid French-Chinese accent. 'Chicken chow mein? Prawn crackers? Black bean sauce?' Icarus shook her head to all of the above. 'Fill them to the top,' the man said passing the water bottles to his employee. 'For the brave cyclist.'

In the centre of town the café balconies were full, the churches in bell and there was a homely cooking smell coming from the town square where Robert de Bellême, the half-French son of William the Conqueror, was slow-roasting some locals on a spit. It wouldn't have surprised Icarus, right then, had the local climate travelled through the global ceiling.



Far more surprising in light of recent events, when Icarus stopped a man in their destination town of La Ferté-Bernard to ask for directions to the local campsite, was being invited to join him for an early evening pastis. Icarus hung her sweaty, dust-grimed head to one side in the coy, demure manner she had seen Aphrodite do, and made her apologies.

The site turned out to be a veritable fortress, situated beyond an industrial estate, in a surprisingly idyllic spot on the banks of an artificial lake. It was guarded by a video intercom, ten-foot-high electric gates and a lengthy registration process at the end of which Icarus was too tired to argue about W being charged as a car.

W was yet to rise from his bad mood. 'And you paid?'

'I thought you 'its' weren't bothered about the boundaries between categories of being. I didn't think you'd mind.'

'Contrariwise!'

'But that's *my* word, W!'

'You can't be every character, Icarus.'

Which after all was very true. 'Well you can be Humpty Dumpty, and *I'll* be all the rest.'

The campsite was large but almost empty. Icarus had fully pitched her tent and was cooking dinner under the eye of some watchful dogs when W asked, 'Do you smell urine?'

'So long as it's only dogs,' Icarus said, yelping as a rat scampered over her bare foot.

Yet rats weren't the only unwanted visitors to the site, as Icarus found out when she poked her head from the tent the following morning.



It was already sunny, but W wasn't laid down beside the tent where she'd left him, but rather was leant hard up against the recently withered beech hedge. She rubbed her eyes. 'How did you get over there?'

'Wait until you hear this.'

Icarus was ready to listen to anything suggesting that W had outslept the previous day's uffishness, but by the time W had related his late-night tale, Icarus's mouth was opening and shutting like a fish. 'You know, I'm rather good at bedtime stories if you've been having nightmares, W.' If this had been anything to go by, she wasn't the only one around here with an ear for a yarn.

'Read this if you don't believe me.'

Icarus unfolded the charred paper and read 'The Shaggy Beast Story' through to the end:

As the world was warmed
and the water grew and the ice melted.
Five decades of rising waters.

The animals boarded the lifeboats
two by two, but there was only one
Peluda:

a greenish ox sized porcupine
with a scaly neck and tortoise feet
and a sensitive tail, shooting acid from
its sting-tipped tentacles for quills.

There was no room on the boats
for the Peluda.

The world was warmed and
the water grew, and the ice melted.

For fifty years of rising waters
the Peluda hid inside its cave,
shaping shadows on walls;
the shifting patterns of kaleidoscopic
creatures; the miscellany of his quills.

When the water fell the Peluda
rampaged round the country
wilting crops with its fiery breath.

The world was warmed and
the water grew, and the ice melted.

‘You wrote this?’

‘Well, the Peluda wrote the poetry. I simply helped with a few mistakes of spelling and logic.
Do you like it?’

No wonder the campsite was almost empty if it had been receiving overnight visits from the locally renowned shaggy beast, which had grown during W’s tale from a six foot tall jabberwocky – half plant, half animal, all tentacles – into a hundred-foot-high friendly giant, the epitome of Darwinian science. ‘So what was he like this poet friend of yours?’

W looked down. ‘A sad old fellow, bit hard on himself. Just wanted me to listen to his story. But clumsier than a spare electron – knocked the security gates clean off their hinges, and with a volcano for a voice which blew me into the hedge saying goodbye. I promised him you’d make a memorandum of the poem to take to Athens. You will, won’t you?’

‘Of course I will, W,’ Icarus replied, smiling through the second literary chink she had found in W’s scientific armour. ‘We’ll never remember it otherwise. I’ll stick it in my notepad now.’



That day they were heading along the D1 – the first of the network of regional roads binding together the feathers of France’s wings – which was providing as efficient a route south as motorways. The sky was even bigger than before. It was a landscape that lent itself to humility, Icarus thought, in contrast with humanity’s characteristic hubris, exemplified by no less than her own persona!

‘It’s not just that I don’t think we *can* solve the climate, W,’ she risked sharing. ‘But I’ve begun to wonder why we think we *should*. Surely managing the skies replicates the hubris that got us into this pickle in the first place? Why can’t we accept that things change?’

‘You’re a fine one to talk about accepting change!’

‘I didn’t say it would be easy.’

W shook his handlebars. ‘I don’t *get* it, Icarus. It’s like you’ve decided that those trying to resolve climate change are the villains. I thought you wanted a different kind of world?’

‘I do,’ Icarus replied, before repeating more firmly. ‘I do. Perhaps that’s why I’m questioning why we’re stabilising this one.’

By now they weren’t far at all from Le Mans, where the Wright Brothers had undertaken their first European flight on their adapted bicycle – a fact once again not lost on black-eagle W. ‘Icarus,’ he began. ‘There is something which I might share with you. If anything might persuade you of your errant ways, then perhaps this will.’

‘Sure!’ Icarus had been half-hoping that W might come up with some knock-down argument to save her from herself, and she had always prided herself on being open-minded in the sunshine.

‘I’ve named my proposals a bicycle revolution,’ W began, charming Icarus with the vision of ranks of comrade bicycles marching on the leaders of the world. The reality of W’s plans, however, was worthy of the most hubristic and cyclocentric genuses of the bicycle species.

‘So there are three tiers to your revolution...?’

‘...that’s right...’

‘...firstly, mitigation – requiring every human being to cycle rather than to drive...’

W nodded.

‘...optimistic, potentially authoritarian. But ok. Secondly, adaptation – in case of flood, people cycle pedalos or drive human-powered planes?’

‘Couldn’t have put it better myself. Did Kanellos Kanellopoulos, the champion Greek cyclist, not recently cycle a human-powered plane from Crete to Santorini in your name?’

‘Made it fifty feet from Santorini before a gust of wind splintered the tail boom, taking out the right wing spar, requiring Kanellos to eject himself into the sea.’

‘You omit to mention that he’d already flown a record twenty-seven miles by then. The range might be initially limited, but will improve in time.’

Icarus let this pass with a shrug of her shoulders before she stopped and dug part three of W’s plan from her bags – the weather glass that W had proposed would soon grace the handlebars of every bicycle on earth. But she didn’t waste time interrogating the impracticality of this plan when the best was yet to come. ‘And then your geo-engineering coup d’état – launching rafts of bicycles into the sky to recycle greenhouse gases back out of the atmosphere, simultaneously reflecting sunlight off their frames, and generating energy for use on earth?’

‘Indeed!’ W exclaimed, his bolts popping from his headset. ‘I’m rather a hand at inventions do you not think? It’s taken me years to develop the prototype! Do you like it?’

Icarus was speechless, requiring W to fill the silence.

‘What you should think is that it was extremely kind of me to tell you this. But we’ll suppose it said. I just need the brains of the best Greek innovators to perfect it. Archimedes and Pythagoras, Hephaestus and Euclid, your Dad – the greatest master craftsman of them all!’

Icarus looked back up at the sky differently than before – as if bicycles were dismantling the clouds through their spokes. ‘But what if the bicycles get dusty and don’t reflect sunlight? What about punctures? Who’s going to cycle them?’

‘There are worse retributions for environmental crimes,’ W replied, causing Icarus to screech to a halt. ‘But more importantly, do you think Daedalus would help?’

Icarus’s protestations were brought up short as the reality of what her father might think – not of W’s plans, but of her own, for the first time struck home. Of course Daedalus was far more likely to assist W than he was to offer open arms to his carbon dioxide smuggling, prodigal ‘daughter’ who had come to doubt the intention behind decades of his technological endeavour. ‘Yes, W, yes I do,’ she eventually mumbled quietly. It was precisely the eccentric type of genius which made Daedalus’s furrowed forehead quiver with excitement.



For a good while afterwards, Icarus cycled W on in a disagree to agree silence: W’s wheels spun fast with adrenaline, while the implications of their discussion cut feathers from Icarus’s nascent climate wings. For how many centuries had she hoped for the look of fatherly approbation she now imagined shining off her bicycle’s frame? How many hours had she dedicated to making riddles and abstract art from scientific formulae, in the hope that this might make some sense of them? And as for now: applying herself to climate change? For sure. But there were presumably ten million different kinds of application, and her recent line of applied thinking was unlikely to please either climate sceptics or campaigners – both for the wrong reasons – let alone her Dad! No wonder Lucy had struggled to find expression for her doubts!

'Hey Dad!' Icarus suddenly cried out loud, hoping that her father might break their mutual silence in order to provide some reassurance where her own insecurity was failing her. But nothing, just that eerie silence, as if Icarus hadn't only been pushed off Planet Zeus, but out of meaningful existence entirely. Freedom was all very well, but who *was* Icarus without Daedalus's warnings about flying too close to the sun?

In that precise instant Icarus wasn't sure she had ever felt so suddenly humbled, let alone so small – yet events in Montoir-sur-Loir were about to make her feel even smaller.

'We enter now into the way of collaboration,' Maréchal Pétain announced through a tannoy outside the town hall, having successfully concluded his meeting with Adolf Hitler in a railway car just down the line.

Icarus cycled out of town and up the hill again back onto the plateau. If hypoxia was a lack of oxygen supply, then this was a state of emotional anoxia – its complete deprivation. She didn't even know what she could or couldn't say. 'Perhaps I don't belong to this journey at all,' she began, almost willing this to be the case. 'It's not our history to even comment on.'

'But it's not as if we don't know that climate change is happening. What do they remind you of?' W pointed to a field of dead, unharvested sunflowers whose march towards the sun had been brought to a premature halt – the heads of their grey corpses bent low on their emaciated stalks – as they awaited harvesting for oil.

Icarus acknowledged this with a decline of her head. 'I should never try and remember my name during a climate genocide. Because what would be the use of it?'

There was something spookily contemporary about the history they were passing through, and in the circumstances Icarus didn't whistle, and Lucy didn't compose any poetry. Could there even be any poetry or whistling after climate change? On they just cycled, past the concrete outskirts of Château-Renault, and south towards the Loire. Icarus had been so busy philosophising about climate change that she had almost forgotten about its potential consequences, and its alleged current manifestations in Pakistan and Russia had entirely slipped her mind. Perhaps W was at least partially right – technologies like his bicycle revolution really were urgently needed to prevent catastrophe befalling humanity, and sooner rather than later...if only wrong-minded schemas might somehow accidentally deliver the right results!



It had been an eventful enough day to last a century; Icarus was only too happy when fading light forced them to stop off early in Amboise. As they had approached the Loire everything, including the weather, had become increasingly touristy, but their first sight of the river stopped them short. The scene stood out in the poignant relief of the evening light: the channels, reflections, wooded islets, swimmers, fishermen, and Amboise castle setting the view off perfectly at the end of the bridge.

'Shall we stay there?' W asked, pointing to a campsite on an island between two strands of the river. The campsite had other thoughts.

CAMPSITE FULL

Yet when it came to France, all such signs proved notoriously debatable. When Icarus went to enquire, the receptionist indicated a 'free' area at the back of the site marked, 'teenagers, walkers, dead sunflowers, criminals, dictators, cyclists, and'...the receptionist crossed out 'the peluda'. 'A bereaved fiancé caught him after dawn this morning. Chopped his tail clean off.'

a loss of river limbs
throw-backs

the plural of fishes
from a body of water

inside the river bed were
entrails, scales and bones

regenerative rims of liver
we had only meant to take the sunshine

solar glycogen
a metabolic pathway to the sea
but instead I strummed the ripples

my fingers webbed
to the uneasy
compulsion
of dredged mud

To Icarus's eyes, sleep was truly magical, and true to form, by next morning she already felt far more optimistic and ready to confront the world once more – especially when it presented her the opportunity to consort with a Queen! Anti-establishmentarianism had long been one of Icarus's favourite words, and not only because it was very long. But when it came to its



practical realisation, Icarus's ideals were flexible. Yes, she had disobeyed her father's advice on that fated flight. Yes, here she was, cycling well off the well-beaten track to climate change! But there were establishments and establishments and principles and principles. Icarus wasn't going to miss the opportunity to see Mary Queen of Scots off to assume the Scottish crown.

By the time Icarus reached town, the morning sun was already lighting up the auld alliance of tricolores and saltires lining the thoroughfare. The crowds jostled to shake Mary, who had grown up in Amboise, by the hand, but the eighteen-year-old progressed briskly until she drew level with Icarus. Paused. She was taller than Icarus had expected – almost six foot, with strands of auburn hair escaping from her headpiece.

'I heard o' you. You're the woman cycling tae Athens, are ye no'?'

Icarus stared, open-mouthed. She had never spoken to a Queen before, and this Queen wasn't speaking quite as she expected.

'Curtsey a wee bit while you're thinking. It saves time, mind?'

'Yes, Your Majesty.'

Mary leant in close to whisper in Icarus's ear. 'Ah ken yer secret – it came wi' a lass and it will pass wi' alas – but I'll no' tell onybody, if you'll only do me a wee favour.'

'Of course. Perhaps I could deliver a message to Athens for you? But for the Scottish crown, we're all Greek now!'

'Aye, well, only if you promise me no' tae forget?' Mary whispered her enigmatic message in Icarus's ear, before re-composing herself, standing tall, and moving swiftly down the line cackling, 'and now aff wi' her heed,' for the benefit of the crowd.

Icarus sprinted away before a translation could spread. Back at the campsite she committed her own interpretation of Mary's message to poetry:

*In my end is my beginning
– the shifting junction of
the present tense
I desire nothing but
my own deliverance*

you said as we pickled onions
by the light of the moon

there were no fireworks
no particular storms on which
we could lay our finger and say
it happened *then*

just onions
look at all the onions
Mary Queen of Onions
peeling endless onions until the end

*

you say we might leave the onions
here – go swimming in the sea

that is a nice idea
but what about the onions?

Not that Icarus was going to answer her own poem's question. As Lucy had already taught her, there were no resolutions to poetry, and such was the joy of it. Instead she allowed her alter ego to spread her notes out in front of Icarus like an extended collage – the words of valleys, maps, Hitler, myths, birds, philosophers, Humpty Dumpty. Climate change crossed with improvised

extinction crossed with playful existentialism crossed with exploratory rivers crossed with pluralistic myths crossed with performative chickens crossed with looking glasses crossed with experimental beer. EXPERIMENTAL CLIMATE CHANGE BEER. YUM. Poetry modelled on the big entangled scribble that had consumed the page back in Orbec – the contaminated site of the insoluble knot of climate change! And up to her to *re-make* it, whichever way she chose.

Who was to say, in fact, that Daedalus *wouldn't* like the way she had applied herself to re-making climate change, Icarus was even feeling optimistic enough to think. He was nothing if not an intellectual, so would surely prove willing to think different her alternative perspective through! On such matters Icarus could only suppose, however: she'd never before come up with a brainy enough scheme to test him on. Either way, the positive thinking this represented was much better suited to sunny mornings. When W returned from visiting Da Vinci half an hour later, Icarus had already written six new climate change poems, and believed in every one.

W's excitement, meanwhile, was overflowing from him: 'Renaissance helicopters, swing-bridges and even some formulae for calculating the role of the sun. But Leo confessed that the model bicycle drawing attributed to him was fake – bicycles wouldn't appear for many years yet. Imagine that! More advanced than a helicopter. More swinging than a swing bridge. Less predictable than sunshine. I told you bikes were the future of the world!'

Icarus took a fresh piece of paper and drew an X. 'That could be us, W. The shapeshifting face of climate change, discovered where art and science meet.'

W picked the image up and held it to his front wheel. 'But first we need to set the model in motion. Shall we get going?'

Icarus looked around. All the other cyclists, murderers, teenagers and dictators in the campsite had already left, and she doubted any of them were going anywhere near as far as them: to climate change, a place of ongoing argumentative stand-off.

On their way out of town a road cyclist passed by on his sparkly carbon bike.

'Bonjour!' Icarus and W cried, but the cyclist just ignored them, while the bike spat dioxide.

'A little bit of respect would harm no-one,' Icarus complained, with a characteristic upside down smile.



They were on their way towards Chenonceaux, where Icarus hoped to satisfy her curiosity with a peek of the famous castle from a distance before cycling on.

'You'll need to lock your bicycle up and pay!' a steward at the barriers shouted, presuming she was attempting to break in. 'Castles weren't made to be looked at for nothing!'

The bicycle park was a veritable zoo of every size, race, model and hybridised gender, making a cacophony of multi-lingual noise.

'But be quick,' W muttered. 'This isn't a holiday! The Alps *always* take a couple of days more than expected!'

Icarus rubbed the hourglass sand in her back pocket, but there was never any stopping her curiosity once it had gathered momentum. 'There will be plenty of time, W, promise!'

The queue stretched through the ticket office, a yard, out through another building and back into the fresh air. 'A young-person's ticket,' Icarus said when she eventually reached its head, hoping to get in half price – she wasn't going to be there for *long*, after all.

The French receptionist drew her face up towards Icarus, peering above her half-moon spectacles, before asking in a severe tone. 'Date of birth?'

About 8 AD, Icarus thought, before replying, '1985,' – ten years younger even than her alter ego.

Icarus was soon to regret being admitted after all. The long skinny plane trees lining the drive reached into the upper atmosphere, but when she reached the riverside the ripples marred the reflections, and everything looked flat in the mid-morning light. The arches of the castle over the river were undoubtedly graceful, photogenic even, as seen through any one of the million viewfinders wandering the grounds. But what if she didn't want to take a photo? Over the course of the last few minutes Icarus had taken several, and was currently refocusing her lens on capturing the precise moment when the plume of a nearby fountain began to fall: 'now you've got me, now you never did.' The thing was, the minute she took a photograph, the scene already began to fade; if she took too many photographs she risked the scene disappearing entirely!

Icarus wandered into the castle but beat a quick retreat. She would rather have stabbed herself than be stabbed – again – by that petulant Spaniard with seven bayoneted elbows, as the crowds fought over communal pockets of air. Icarus also beat a quick retreat from the château maze – she was far too deeply implicated in one labyrinth already.

'I'm not a tourist, W, am I?' she asked on her return, causing W to snort.

'75% likely. Certainly not a scientist...'

Icarus pulled a face, and scratched her head where her thoughts met the sky. She had come to hope she was more of a participant in the world than an observer of it, and if complicit in the ways of the world, certainly no *collaborator* in its establishment ways as W had implied yesterday. 'Maybe you're right, W. I am a tourist,' she eventually replied. 'Because when *I* use a word it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'

Icarus resolved against any further sightseeing however, as she handed W's space over to the broad, dopey handlebars of a young Dutch talking bicycle named Hans.

The road south east led along the River Cher wine trail towards Bourges. 'Fancy listening to a poem for solo whistle? I composed it just for your amusement.'

'But is it very long? I've already heard a *great deal* of whistling on this quest.'

Icarus shook her head. 'The length of ten bicycle wheels, or three bottles of wine, whichever you prefer.'

Sau, vignon blanc cot a cabernetfranc to go and gamay up to his carignan, pinot noir's, melons de bourgogne, yes syrah, they're going to cin sault much they'll make a pinot gris of it. Muscadelle says pinot noir's a merlot – mourvèdre - che nin blanc herself. Exactemente. Clairette – too much rouge. But lonesome old grenache? There' sé millon ugni blanc in the viognier. He chardonnay's a damn, driving his cabernet, sau, vignon cot it.

'But real whistling has no words! W objected once Icarus had finished.

'That depends on what you count as real. In my reality whistling has more words than a dictionary. Did you like it?

'I liked it well enough, I suppose, but it didn't make much sense. It made me hot and bothered and that Muscadelle did tease so.'



After the last few days of mental exertion, Icarus resolved that afternoon to temporarily exchange her wingcraft for an easygoing afternoon of cycle tourism without incident. Chance might have been a fine thing!

Montrichard was a typical French Renaissance market town with an impressive fortress and a church. St-Aignan went one better and also had a zoo. 'Koala, Okapi, White Lions, White Tigers, Manakees, Wolves, Cave Beetles, Peludas presumably...' W began, listing off the endangered species.

'...oh but it's a bit late for that...' Icarus interjected, before she could stop herself.

'Icarus?'

Icarus tried to explain away the rumour as best she could, but couldn't halt the trail of salty tears dribbling along behind them. 'Hey, W, you ok?'

'Of course I'm ok. As I said, I'm just a little hot and bothered. But you know this humility – respect even – that you seem have come to associate with *not* solving the climate? How, precisely are you going to achieve it?' W's watery headset bolts peered up at the church spire and castle turrets. 'Legislate? Or pray?'

Icarus could feel the sun prickling the back of her neck: of course the church and the castle couldn't hear her, and she was nearly as sure they couldn't see her; in fact her views this far had remained as publically invisible as climate change. For the first time Icarus could begin to understand why her alter ego might have left her 'promising career' behind: an agenda she had come to doubt, her discomfort with persuasion, her frustration with the black and white contours of debate, the pressure Lucy had put herself under to achieve and, as needs required, to conform. Had Lucy left her environmental career through a failure to live up to the pressures of her own expectations? The raw irony of the teleological logic of such a scenario was not lost on Icarus, and when W repeated his question, she struggled to respond. 'If I had my way,

everyone would be humble enough to agree that the Earth deserved respect,' she finally replied. 'But I don't want to persuade anyone of anything. That would be against my ethos of humility and respect.'

'Hmmm,' W replied, in the smug tone of one who could provoke a revolution of bicycles tomorrow, if he so desired it.

'I know, it's a problem.'

At least beyond St-Aignan, chance really was a fine thing. Icarus and W finally entered the land of easygoing cycling, just as Icarus had dreamt it: some little roads, living sunflowers, a multi-coloured pallet yard, plane trees, vines, and flower meadows. 'A shortcut,' Icarus exclaimed, sweeping right along a road signposted in the right direction, but unmarked on her map, with unfounded conviction. According to the Mappa Mundi the scenes they passed along the way didn't even exist:

perfect undetermined trees settle into lines
amongst the purple-flowered meadow

close up is best

there is no need for sky
enough the brush of dew upon my ankles
and the su su surring ripples of the accidental breeze

it was
hardness-wearing
off-symmetries

I rubbed the peeling bark.
I tread the flowers.

The year was approaching autumn
but the way was closer, closed

the way the miles seem longer at the place of the purple trees

It was a reassuring kind of a nowhere. When Icarus stopped at the highest point of the 'shortcut' she enjoyed the meaningless chit-chat between a shop assistant and her friend, and a long cold drink in the sun. For a few minutes time stopped. Nothing happened in the village, and little happened in Icarus's brain, and W was silent. 'I'm not sure I'm meant to be enjoying this, but this might be the happiest I've ever been,' Icarus said eventually, realising the feeling as much as anything through the simple act of stating it. Even by the time they reached the Bourges campsite later that night, Icarus was still going slow.

'You've been eating for 35 minutes solid,' W estimated. 'And you haven't even started pudding.'



Icarus hadn't forgotten about the weather glass. She had obediently taken measurements just as W had proposed all the way to here. Rather that so far its French measurements had been fairly low, a bit lower, low. Hardly scientifically-sophisticated stuff, and hardly worthy of comment, let alone likely to impress the best minds of a Greek generation.

'So, what are you saying Icarus, that your cycle through France was predominantly sunny? But everyone knows this isn't what climate change means!'

As W's photographic memory had already informed Icarus, *Through the Looking Glass* made not a single reference to the weather. However thinking through climate change in the terms of her favourite novel had arguably proven far more revelatory: *if you let climate change alone, it will let you alone, you know!* But next morning the water level in the weather glass spout was the highest yet, signifying change.

'I'd say an 87% chance of precipitation,' W said, peering over her shoulder. 'You know, it takes some time to be able to read it accurately.'

Strangely, the weather hadn't significantly touched on their expedition until now. There had been that one morning of rain between Hereford and Monmouth, but that was to be expected from August in Wales, and otherwise a tailwind and fair weather all the way. But Icarus suspected they both remained as blind to a 'proper reading' of the weather glass as ever. She had been reading *Through the Looking Glass* now for one hundred and forty years and still didn't suppose she'd achieved *that*.

Meanwhile, in the centre of town, the famous stained glass windows of Bourges cathedral opened onto climate change in all directions. The Good Samaritan and climate change climbing through the north east window. The Rich Man and Lazarus. The last judgement. Christ's crucifixion. The apocalypse and climate change – of course – leading the thrill-seeking churchgoer by the hand. Icarus stepped away from the window of the prodigal son before the light could tattoo the story onto her skin:

Through the stained glass window shone a purple robe and a falcon, and a local ox which was staring at the scene from a neighbouring story. The prodigal sun is likely to be wearing a frown both before and after entering the red brothel, and the pig sty – in all honesty – stank of chicken shit and three ageing sheep. The sky was pixelated, and the sunshine's smile became a little like eternity. Where's home? The multi choice question had three potential answers: A, B or C. No matter what they tell you. It is true



Icarus lit a candle to climate change before leaving the church, but quickly blew it out when she noticed the donation box a millisecond too late. Yet not even *this* led Zeus to intervene: not a single reprimand let alone a bolt of lightning to her feet. Icarus had frequently grumbled about Zeus's omniscient dictatorship of the skies, and his inexplicable ways, but now? Quite frankly, had the God of the Gods given up caring? This wasn't freedom, this was abandonment. This wasn't being cast free, but cast loose, like a loose cannon! How was she ever going to achieve her Godly ambitions if Zeus didn't even notice she'd rewritten her fate?

'You're never going to solve the skies, Zeus!' Icarus cried, in an attempt to provoke a response. 'Come on, disagree with me, I dare you!' In ordinary circumstances Icarus wouldn't have dared to say such things, but this was far from ordinary, and who knew how Zeus might respond to her recent conclusions about climate change. Of course, saying that climate change *couldn't* and *shouldn't* be solved was hardly providing the *solution* to climate change his conference required, but here she was, rewriting her fate, just as he'd proposed! Coronation or condemnation? It would be good to have *some* warning of her resultant fate before she got to Athens, Icarus supposed. *If* she ever got to Athens. *If only* for a little guidance to help her resolve the contradictions of her quest along the way.

'Where are you going?' asked a prehistoric woman on a stone-age bicycle, interrupting Icarus's line of thought.

'The wrong way up a medieval one-way climate,' Icarus replied, looking around as if she had only just noticed.

The woman readjusted her hairbun to a jaunty angle, sending a couple of house martins on their merry way. 'You will have a wonderful journey,' she said, looking Icarus in the eye.

All Icarus knew about the woman was her preferred choice of prehistoric vegetable, displayed like a flower arrangement in her wicker basket. But despite everything, Icarus felt obliged to believe her. She just had that way about her.



It hadn't taken long for the rain and the first headwind all trip to wash away the last residue of the previous evening's contemplative smile. Icarus's legs felt rustier and achier than ever, and the scenery leaving Bourges was featureless and misty.

However, near Nevers the sun came out, and with it, Icarus's mischievous grin. 'Welcome to Nevers Neverland,' she cried. 'Home of eternal childhood and play.'

'Impossible,' W replied.

'We'll see.'

The Loire looped around town, with the medieval quarter climbing towards the cathedral. Icarus hadn't even taken breath at the top when a man tapped her on the arm.

'Vous parlez francais?' He had a yellowed smokers' slug for a moustache. The remains of his grey hair had been greased to one side and he was wearing a waxed mackintosh and bent plastic glasses. A malnourished lad, aged sixteen or seventeen, stood behind him holding an oversized camera dating back to between the wars. Icarus's limited French proved perfectly

sufficient; the man had already thrust a huge microphone in her face. 'We're from the local newspaper, doing a visitors' report on Nevers. You like it here?'

Icarus explained that she hadn't really seen it yet, but she was sure it was lovely, before proceeding to answer the questions by rote, guessing 'oui' or 'non' to any question she didn't understand, when...

'QUOI?'

A wrong answer, but then French wasn't her *first* language, let alone her adoptive one. 'No, I didn't mean to say that people are unfriendly, but you're the only person I've spoken to.'

It was only a matter of time before the journalist asked where they were going.

'QUOI?' The photographer was hauled into service to shoot Icarus and W in front of the cathedral for the front page of tomorrow's edition. 'Off to the climate conference?'

The directness of the question made Icarus start, before nodding over-enthusiastically. Of course, there must be any number of campaigners marching on the conference, using equally as sustainably means as her. She only hadn't met them because they were travelling the same way!

Yet on the way out of town W resumed their previous discussion. 'Neverland? That journalist was proof of human mortality. I'd give him two or three years.'

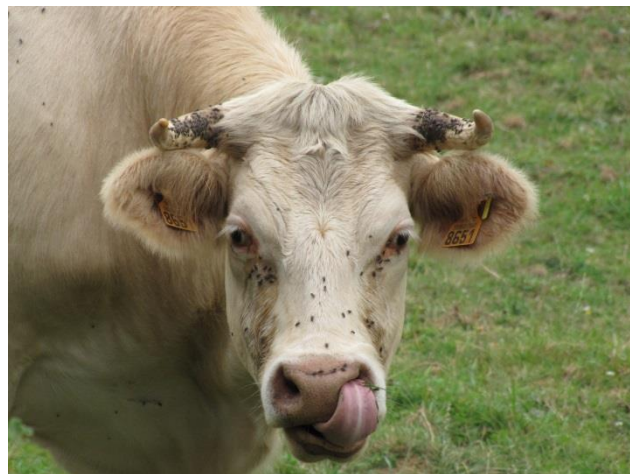
'Oh, but I never made any claims for immortality.'

W acknowledged this. 'But what's childlike about a provincial town with an ageing population?'

Icarus sprinkled some hourglass sand over W's top tube. 'Us, W. Peter Pan and Tinkerbell all the way until we die. The magic dust of flight and happy thoughts...you know, W, I've been thinking...'

'It's my opinion in fact that you never think at all, Icarus!' W broke in, causing Icarus to suddenly pull on the brakes. 'Because *I've* been thinking, what with all this talk of endless childhood: how does your ethos of humility fit in with your wish to become a God? What about immortality? Are you willing to let these go in the name of your new beliefs? For surely these are the most hubristic ambitions of all!'

Icarus gulped so hard she almost swallowed her tongue, and she could think of no other immediate answer than to carry on where she'd left off. 'To a timeless island with no boundaries, many suns and many many Charollais bulls.'



The hill to Château-Chinon was long, and the rain increasingly wet, and Icarus in desperate need of the consolation of biscuits. She nipped into a bakery in Rouy just in time to avoid a particularly bad shower. 'Le biscuit,' she said pointing to the closest looking equivalent, but the young assistant stared back in blank incomprehension.

'S'il vous plaît?'

For a country that had invented the word, biscuit, France was performing particularly poorly at producing them. This was Icarus's sixth day in France, and she was still to find a sample to rival the head-size cookies from Andover. Instead she ordered yet another pastry made of blotting paper, gunpowder and sealing wax, then waited beneath the baker's canopy for the shower to pass – long enough for some joiners to arrive, rehang the front door, and leave.

The road onwards continued to be long, and increasingly steep. By the time they arrived, Château-Chinon had already disappeared into the mist, and its campsite had become invisible. It required the bar patron with the droopy moustache to come to the rescue. Before Icarus knew it he had stopped a scrawny local in a battered Renault van, which now screeched around the one way system as far as a rough track to show her the way. The patron pulled the window down with his fingers and waved Icarus on towards the campsite, a short direction further on.

That night Icarus could have done with a good sleep to prepare her for the challenges which the morning would undoubtedly pose. Instead she galumphed this way and that, as she struggled to sleep through the beats of the local youths' music in the neighbouring village hall.

'Not so eternally youthful after all?' W cried through the canvas with characteristic tact, as he gyred along to the syncopation of the music with the rain.

Icarus couldn't get comfortable no matter which way she turned. As if there was any way to get comfortable on a thin and narrow sleeping mat when your bicycle has pulled the rug of life from underneath you! It already seemed such a long time since the heady excitement of the climate change scribble, and all the possibilities it had offered. Even her gender-inflected interrogation in Orbec brasserie paled into insignificance in the sudden face of her own mortality. Of course, her life wasn't immediately under threat, but...as usual, W had been right. Wanting to become a God? Aspirations of immortality? Humility? *If it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be: but as it isn't, it ain't.* Rewriting her fate? The hole in her logic could not in fact have been any greater.



Château-Chinon's main attraction was its view of the surrounding Morvan landscape. Today that remained closed, although by the time they had wound down to the bottom of the hill the sun had begun cutting through the clouds. The hills were rolling, and held together by hedges and outcrops of woodland. Off to the right rose Mount Beuvray, site of Bibracte, one of the most important hill forts of the Gauls – and perched right there on a bollard beside the road looking sorry for himself was the most famous Gaul of all. Right then Icarus was badly in need of cheering up, and who better to make you smile than the nearest available cartoon character!

The frown on Asterix's face soon put paid to any such hopes.

'Hey Asterix,' Icarus said, drawing up alongside. 'What's up?'

Asterix raised his white feather headband, wiry blonde mop and over-enthusiastic moustache from his hands, while Dogmatrix, Obelix's dog, yapped viciously around W's wheels.

'Where's Obelix?'

'All gone,' Asterix said. 'People gone, culture gone, language gone. Obelix gone. And only me and Dogmatrix left to tell the tale.' He handed Icarus a small vial of magic potion. 'Take this. It will give you superhuman strength when you get to Italy to out-cycle the Romans. It's my last one – but *I* won't be needing it.' And before Icarus could argue Asterix had turned back into a cepe mushroom and Dogmatrix had turned into a fly.

W snatched the vial from Icarus's hands and read the label before throwing it into the field to help the grass grown greener. 'Just as I thought! The potion of cheats. Blood doping – adding oxygen to the blood to keep it going just that little bit faster, for that little bit longer. Was Asterix a drug dealer to the cyclists on the Tour De France?'

Icarus coughed and spluttered. 'But isn't that rather like what we're trying to do to the sky? Neutralising the carbon dioxide to save our civilisation from ourselves?'

'Contrariwise. If I'd meant *that*, Icarus, then I'd have said it!'

i never saw it as a form of fleeing
past tenses: flight
i was always going somewhere

space inside the centre of the page
unwalked millimetres
expanding cycles into rings

i meditated on the things the trees will say
and how they'll choose to say it

the dendrochronology of concordance
horizontal cross-sections of our lives
our bandwidths spotting the setting sun

the new growth will be colourless and odourless
departures of retreat calibrating
the gaps between our early and our late wood

By the time they reached the top of the pass above Arleuf it was sunny. The higher they had climbed, the higher the conifers had grown; at the summit they almost touched heaven. The lower branches didn't even start until the middle atmosphere, leaving Icarus contemplating bare totems. Logging lorries swept past leaving millimetres of breathing space, while every layby was stacked high with felled trunks. It was a scene that lent itself to reflection on the deeper matters of life, the *meaning* of life around which climate change had suddenly come to revolve. *If philosophy be the meaning of life, think on!*

'They died so young, didn't they?' W said as he wandered between the stacks, estimating the precise width and density of their rings. 'Some of the trees behind the Salford house have survived more weather.'

Icarus scratched her head where her very-large-gnat-sized worries had begun to eat her. 'So is that what this is all about? Survival?'

'What?'

'Climate change, stabilising it, the climate conference.'

'As jolly good a reason as any,' W said, with a sniff of his brake cables. 'Don't try and tell me you didn't turn pale when I raised the question of your mortality yesterday?'

'Or survival of the fittest bicycle?' Icarus laughed, reflecting his jibe right back at him.

'If that's a joke, then I'm glad you made it, because it isn't funny. You know you shouldn't even *make* jokes if they make you *this* unhappy.'

Icarus bit her lip so deeply she could taste blood. If *only* that were the cause of her misery! The complications of her gender had been emotive enough, and had admittedly calmed down over the last week or so, as if both her and France had become more accustomed to She-Icarus. But her climate change quest had just become *really* personal. What more could the quest have demanded from her than her own existence, as if she were *unwriting* her fate, not rewriting it? It had taken humanity centuries to not yet come to terms with the inevitability of death! What hope for her right now?

'We just seem to have forgotten to ask the key question,' Icarus finally said. '*Why?* It's like solving climate change has become an end in its own right. But what's important to us? Survival? Happiness? Money? Humility and respect, Zeus forbid?' Icarus shuffled from foot to foot and gestured around at a surrounding landscape so magical it might have painted onto Earth by Marc Chagall himself – a veritable Wonderland! 'What kind of a world do we want, and what are we prepared to do for it? I may be idealistic, but imagine this...'

There was once a year the speed of days

a world of naïve trees:

branchless conifers that stuck
the sky a cumulus of candy floss

Scheherazade was washing her stories
by the river while she swam

she wrote a great black
puissant horse above the trees

a form of a fashion:
a six-rayed-sun you painted on
a blue-night sky

we took our loss of knowledge of descent
as a talking point

'no sip save these things like button'

a horse-head moon
a wash of water
a darker shade of ebony
wearing river to the shore

if our elixir were never-ending air
would you fight me for a portion of the sky?

As they wound back downhill into reality a short time later, Icarus concluded that all that had been missing from the scene was a biscuit or two. In the next town of Augustidinium every local Roman was walking along the road with a bakery bag under their arm, taunting her off-route.

'Combien?' the baker asked, rubbing his hands in glee, and translating Icarus's answer of 'three' biscuits into 'three kilos.'

Icarus had barely sat down to sample her treasure in the square, when Romans came running, at first in twos and threes, and then in such crowds they seemed to fill the entire town, tripping this way and that in their rush to catch up with the world. A battle was rumoured to be taking place at the football pitch, and them already running several centuries too late.

'You know, I might be a talking bicycle,' W said, continuing the previous discussion, gesturing around the increasingly chaotic scene with a handlebar. 'But I'm no time machine. You can't turn back progress!'

But for Icarus that line of conversation had already been closed, for now her attention was single-mindedly dedicated to the sensations she experienced as she placed the first bite of biscuit on the tip of her tongue. There was nothing quite like the feeling of sugar and butter and flour melting on your taste buds all at once. One heaven, two heavens, three...but if Icarus had hoped for a few moments of escapist bliss then this was to be rudely foreshortened by none other than her very own thoughts. 'Heavens above,' she exclaimed, suddenly jumping to her feet.

W reached out a handlebar for Icarus to grasp. 'Steady on, now, Icarus. What's up?'

But there was no steadying Icarus once this line of thought had begun to unravel. 'Never mind my delusions to Godliness, *I'm* not the hubristic semi-mortal, W! Too *proud*? Ha! Lazy, perhaps; fed up of being subject to my fate, for sure; a dreamer, yes; and curious – CERTAINLY! W, do you see what I'm saying?'

There were a few moments of silence, before W sardonically replied, 'behold the death of dear Icarus?'

When Icarus began to laugh it was slowly at first, but it wasn't long before her lungs were heaving this way and that, while the baggage attending her previous hubristic identity and fate grew fingers, developed feathers, crafted wings, and took off to the sun!



In fact Neo-She-Icarus didn't have to wait long to test her mortality for real. The landscape beyond the industrial hub of Le Creusot, famous for its iron and steel and trainworks, was characterised by small pastures, copses of trees, green fields, charollais cattle, and small red-tiled limestone hamlets. Even though they were further south, the faces of the sunflowers remained in full bloom. The TGV blessed them with a few seconds' whoosh as it passed by on its way to Lyon.

'A forty minute journey which would take us more than a day,' W pointed out.

However, that afternoon, Icarus's energy barely lasted forty minutes, as the biscuit sugar-rush high disintegrated into the emptiest of energy lows. They remained well short of their destination of Cluny, let alone Lyon when Icarus flopped onto the verge like a rag doll. The infamous cycling bonk.

'Caused by the depletion of glycogen stores in the liver and muscles manifested by sudden fatigue and loss of energy.'

'Who'd have guessed?' It took an entire dry white loaf, and about half an hour of lolling about for Icarus's eyes to refocus and her spine to reform. But keeping going proved even more dangerously scenic, and eyes on the back of her head Icarus didn't have. She had stopped to take a photo and was facing ninety degrees the wrong way when:



'Don't move!'

As if Icarus had the chance! She could only watch as a car approached at speed, swerving inwards, treacherously close to the car it was overtaking at the last minute. It was travelling so fast that the wheels struggled to carry the body of the car with them, and it missed Icarus's knee by millimetres. Icarus pushed W onto the verge and closed her eyes. If she *were* to undo her fate,

then surely this didn't necessarily mean going BANG OUT LIKE A CANDLE within less than twenty four hours! No matter how she had come to philosophise about the humble necessity of confronting mortality that morning, it was different looking death in the eye of a car. Icarus sank onto her knees and prayed to Zeus for the first time since early childhood:

*Our Zeus, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Planet has come and gone.
Thy will be done on earth
As it is in heaven..
Give us this day our...*

Icarus took another bite of bread and turned her face for the umpteenth time already to the skies. 'Please Zeus? Speak to me? Is this what you were hoping of me? Am I doing you proud?' But nothing, not even the cheep of a passing bird, let alone the reassurance Icarus had increasingly come to crave, the direction she had come to require, the hug she deserved! And if she really were to die, then what of Lucy?! If nothing else, Icarus owed her alter ego the courtesy of delivering her body safely home at the end of the quest, and not in a body bag.

At the very least Cluny itself proved worth living for. Indeed it was one of the most beautiful small towns they had cycled through, with small cobbled lanes leading past the remains of the tenth century monastery into the centre. Yet the supermarket had just closed, and the monks were too drunk to re-open the cloister wine shop. Icarus had resigned herself to celebrating survival, and commiserating over her increasingly evident mortality, with sobriety when...

'Do you see what I see?'

Icarus began skipping towards the haloed van selling offsales from a local vineyard at the campsite gates. 'I will try all of them,' she informed the *négociant*, while muttering all the right things about chocolate noses and vanilla legs and an unmistakeable aroma of what...*petrol*? 'Now *that's* special,' she said, savouring a miniature glass of the most expensive wine on offer, before pointing to a bottle of the cheapest red. 'But on reflection, I will have that one.'

L is the colour in the middle of yellow

The best things about days off were the little things. Goodness, in fact, were the best things about being *alive* not the little things, Icarus corrected as she went about her laundry and her food shopping with an unusual gusto. Icarus's only immediate needs were sleep and food and after the last few days, Icarus yearned for little more. Having done her chores she watched her elderly French neighbours cook up a camping-feast, only to turn around and realise that she was also being watched. The girl was aged about three. Her fingers were hooked tomboyishly

in the back of her shorts, and her unruly curly hair protruded from behind her ears. Undoubtedly, Icarus thought, her name would begin with the letter L. 'Salut.'

'Lucy!' called the girl's father, who in turn was ignored.

For after all, Icarus agreed, who obeyed their father when there were more interesting attractions at hand?

'Stick your tongue out,' W suggested, which Icarus did, sending the girl fleeing, giggling, to hide behind her father's legs.

But soon enough Icarus's sixth sense told her that Lucy was back, and about a metre closer.

'Why does your bicycle talk?' she asked, assertively, in French.

'Lucy!' called the girl's father, apologising profusely and escorting her back to their tent. So the afternoon measured the passage of time, and all the while a Belgian couple, one hundred metres up the hill, watched the scene unfold in wide-screen from the comfort of their deckchairs, and a family two tents down began their third argument since arriving at lunchtime. 'Why does your bicycle talk?' Lucy repeated, having once more evaded her father's grip.

'Because why not?' Icarus finally replied, her answer to every single question that she hadn't known the answer to since birth. Why did you disobey your father's instructions and fly too close to the sun? Why are you incapable of progressing beyond the most basic science? Why can't you apply yourself to anything else but dreams? Why have you gone so off-message over climate change? Icarus wasn't so sure whether 'why not' was the most convincing answer to the last question. But more immediately Lucy seemed to have liked it, for she grinned and tottered back to her father to tell him about the talking bicycle and the strange, boyish woman in the tent over there who looked and spoke a lot like her.

Icarus stretched out on the grass and faced the sky, which to all appearances had delivered her a new mortal childhood to carry forwards from here just when she had most needed it. So much for Icarus giving Lucy permission to articulate her thoughts, had the appearance of child-Lucy not just given Icarus a permission, very simply, to continue? Thank you, Lucy, she said to herself, patting her body up and down. Haven't we already come so far together?



As it turned out, the minotaur wasn't a bike shop owner, nor Birmingham, but Lyon, France's second largest city, whose industrial sprawl blocked not only the most direct route south, but most viable alternatives. It was already their ninth day in France, when all being well they should have already crossed into Italy. All being well, Icarus thought, a more convincing alternative to solving the climate might have begun to form, structuring what had come to feel like rather flimsy individual feathers of humility, participation and respect. She would never convince Zeus and Daedalus without a stronger case than this! But since yesterday Icarus had felt an increased resolve to work forwards from here...a resolution and self-belief that in fact lasted barely ten minutes down the greenway which offered a cycle-friendly alternative to the motorway through the hillside ahead.

'The Tunnel du Bois Clair?' Icarus mouthed, regarding the longest cycle tunnel in Europe, whose entrance was held up by scaffolding rods thinner than Icarus's wrists.

'Are you *shaking*?'

'No,' Icarus replied, trembling. 'But I should be. Look at it! It's the crumbling entrance to the living underworld.'

W took the tunnel at high speed, careering between dive-bombing flying mice and drips of condensation that echoed like heartbeats. 'The temperature's half what it was outside!' he shouted half way down, thus alerting a passing group of murderers on a family day out to their precise echo-location.

At the far side Icarus bent breathless over the handlebars. 'You know, W. It's not easy confronting mortality after all this time. Would you sacrifice yourself in the name of what you believe?'

But before W answered, Icarus knew his reply.

'What usually happens to your Wings, Icarus? I stand to lose everything. Kings' horses are unlikely to piece together bits of bicycle!'

Icarus laughed – punch-drunkenly – and faced the Mâconnais wine region ahead: Pouilly Fuissé, St Véran, Mâcon, read the grapes, lined expensively against the hillside. The hilltop castle of Berzé-le-Chatel peered feudally down upon the valley, as far as the paleolithic site at Roche du Solutré in the distance.

'Upsets me every time I return or leave,' a voice began.

Icarus looked up to see Alphonse Lamartine, Romantic poet and latter day politician, addressing his valley of birth. 'If we could only suspend the flight of time?' she asked, quoting a line from his most famous poem.

'Vraiment, Icarus, vraiment.'

If Lamartine symbolised a fear of the future, the regret of the past was up ahead in the form of a caveman with a shaggy black beard from head to toe who was cycling along on a rag and bones of a bicycle. His entire neanderthal belongings were balanced precariously across its frame in tatty army bags which were the worse for various slingshot wars.

Icarus showed him how to use her pump to relieve his asthmatic bike. 'So you're heading to the caves at Solutré?'

'Non,' the man replied brusquely, as if she had just been stupid enough to pull the sun from the sky. 'Whatever made you think that?'

A kilometre further on Icarus and W passed two beautiful young blonde-haired women leaning on their shiny, unfettered bikes. 'You haven't passed a caveman by any chance? He's got our jewellery and mascara and our wolf-skin coats. We need them for the caves.'

Icarus mentally affixed the feather of the present to her wings and kept on cycling.

we lost the silk thread test and failed
to time the season of our young

la chauve souris
is it late to confess that i knew little?

just hand-wings pointing onwards
echoes
and a sound beyond the threshold of pain

the rhythms of my pulse upon the darkness
of my empty fear of night

see me
liminally naked
out of sight

there was just the ongoing spread of membranes
blinded evolution
bald as the outspread digits of echo-located flight

Once the greenway ended Icarus guessed a way into Mâcon, unintentionally from the south. It was a grand entrance, up large commercial boulevards lined with expensive hotels, which met at a roundabout large enough to encircle the whole of Europe within its grassy globe. Europe's stella aurora flag sat in the centre, surrounded by the twenty seven flags of its administrative empire, all hanging at equally and precisely limp angles to the otherwise blue sky. Yet when Icarus began to launch into an attack on its regulatory approach to the precise pantone of the sky, she finally broke W's patience.

'Icarus, would you ever listen to yourself! Your self-righteousness can prove most provoking. In fact Europe has achieved more regarding climate change than the rest of the world put together. Beyond your dreams; this is what we've got!'

Icarus bit her lip and plucked the feather of self-righteousness from her climate wings before it could properly affix itself, then drew back out onto the road. The traffic swept them round the roundabout, along another treelined avenue and on into the Centre Ville. Mâcon had developed around the wine and metallurgy industries. Elegant pastel-coloured villas, expensive cafés and wooden shutters opened onto the waterfront along the Quai Lamartine. They crossed an eleven-arched bridge over the river Saône and sat down on some concrete steps on the far bank. And no sooner had they opened their lunch boxes than they were joined by a fisherman taking a lunchbreak from fish, and some car tourers taking a break from touring. An old guy took a

break from being old. But the Saône took no break at all, it just kept drifting southwards towards the Rhône and into the Mediterranean sea as if it had eaten its lunch already.



The Dombes landscape south of there was punctured with ponds, built in the fifteenth century when landowners had decided that fishing would be a more profitable use of the area's clay soils than farming, before malaria had required many of the ponds to be re-drained. For once Icarus swallowed her self-righteous thoughts, although she couldn't help but throw a *knowing* glance in W's direction. By Chalamont, the afternoon was lengthening and it was still no clearer where they might spend the night. Perouges wasn't far enough and too close for comfort to Lyon, but there were no campsites marked at all on the other two routes. Icarus laid her Mappa Mundi out on a café table and was busy trying to move the minotaur a bit to the west under the downward pressure of her thumb when a handshake was thrust in her face.

'Hello. From Germany?'

Icarus shook her head. From *mome*, more like: far from home, meaning she'd lost her way, you know. But certainly not German.

'Ah, but you look it. You cycled here? Going far? Strong muscles, non?' The deeply suntanned man grabbed her biceps in both hands. 'You are cycling to Athens? For the conference?'

Icarus nodded, then jumped backwards to dodge the man's lunge for her legs. He lifted up his shirt to share his old man's six pack before inviting her for tea in his Ford Cortina. Icarus didn't suppose he was the best choice of person to consult about local campsites, but nobody else proved any more helpful.

'You should just camp rough,' said the two young German men who were also cycling to the conference.

'But I can't read maps,' said the wide-eyed stare of the man in the epicerie.

'There is a lower, flatter road,' replied a French touring cyclist, obliquely.

The professional cyclists in their logo emblazoned van just stared at Icarus and W through the darkened glass as if they'd just seen aliens.

It had been another breathless day, full of incident. Icarus was tired and frankly, for one day, had suddenly had quite enough. 'Is there even any point in all of this?' she blurted, out of the blue. 'What's the point in being Icarus if no-one even realises? What's the point in rewriting anything if the Gods aren't listening? Why am I even bothering thinking through climate change if everyone will most likely just carry on as usual? What's the point in being a woman, if it really makes no difference, as you say, yet still I have to deal with *all these men*?! I'm hardly Mother Earth! I'm hardly Gaia, with an umbilical cord to the womb of the Earth! I'm not even fully *Lucy*, whatever she really wants from me! I'm fed up of never having a base, a home! Of course I wouldn't feel safe camping rough, for fear of passing Ford Cortinas! And you know what? I really *don't* want to die quite yet, even if it might be required of me at somepoint in the distant future.'

Icarus had pulled up and now flicked through the emergency numbers in her mobile: her only thread of communication with Planet Zeus, with enough credit for only one call, if things

turned out wrong. But the more she flicked through her limited address book, the more she wondered: but who was she honestly going to phone? Zeus would ignore her, boom or shout. Apollo would laugh. And Daedalus would over-intellectualise, and offload his guilt, when all Icarus really wanted was a hug! What, moreover, would she honestly want to say?

Icarus thrust her mobile phone back on her pocket and swallowed hard. Was that not the pure and simple nub of it?



The lower, flatter road cut through a mile-wide valley, hemmed in by limestone escarpments, while the Rhône wandered lazily through the fertile valley bottom towards the sea. Its campsite, meanwhile, had been hijacked by a pirate with medusan dreadlocks, a diamante watch, and set of golden teeth who had made his fortune through a canoe-sloop business on an artificial river he'd diverted between the canal and the Rhône.

'He switches the river off overnight to let it sleep,' W explained, in the gentle yet patronising tone of one who knows such things, when they went to investigate the artificial river's source. A pump had been installed to power the artificial rapids through the campsite, but as it approached darkness, all was still.

'It's vorpal!' Icarus almost exclaimed, before she could stop herself.

By the time they had returned to their tent, the sunset had already set the sky's oxygen on fire. Something's going to happen, Icarus thought. And over the next few days, all sorts of things began to happen in a hurry.

in answer to the question,
the question was wrong

if the nest was burnt then the phoenix also burned –
there is no climate inside the fungicidal brain of a gaseous mushroom
and the sun city blossoming like the moon

listen for the bird is singing

we had been here but a thousand years and all this

we wished our sunset could have been a scarlet tale
a sunset mostly gold

then you threw a grenade at it

The next morning even *began* as upside down as Icarus's smile. The River Rhône flowed upstream, uphill, along the base of the Bas-Belley-Bugey valley, while trees grew at right-angles from wooded limestone escarpments to their east. To the west, meanwhile, the landscape became increasingly industrial. They were roughly parallel with Lyon when they drew level with the controversial Superphoenix fast-breeder nuclear power plant, which due to technical problems and protests had only been operative for eleven years since 1968. The Tour de L'Ain cycle had come this way just yesterday, and several anti-nuclear, pro-cyclist protestors still lined the road, waving their flags enthusiastically as Icarus and W passed.

'Allez, allez!' yelled Chaïm Nissim, the Swiss Green Party politician who had launched a rocket grenade attack on the plant in the early eighties.

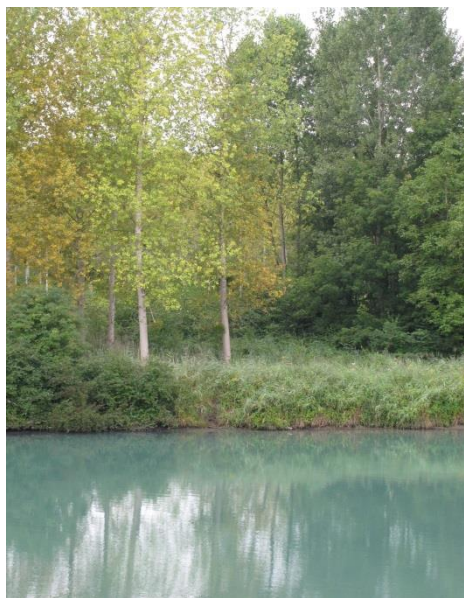
'Vive l'action directe,' cried Carlos the Jackal, who had initially been accused of the attack.

'Vite, ralentir!' cried a typically split-both-ways-when-it-comes-to-climate-change group of Les Verts.

Icarus wasn't sure about being violent or direct, although she really could still see something of her alter ego in the campaigners. Downstream, meanwhile, near the Pont de Groslée suspension bridge the river was an ominous shade – greener than the leaves which had already begun to turn. 'Already autumnal,' Icarus said.

'Or the beginning of the serotinal, if you adopt ecology's six season system. Late summer, which in fact begins on 15th August. Today!'

Yet it wasn't the only spectacle of colour happening today, if a sign up ahead was to be believed:



‘Coupe D’Icare Festival of Flight!’ W read out loud. ‘Fancy that! It’s our *ideal* chance to practise taking flight! My prototype could do with a *test run* or two before we fly across the Alps!’

Icarus groaned volubly, before replying, ‘no, *no*, I don’t think so,’ far too quickly. In the far distance the valley route towards their destination of Grenoble was already lit up with a rainbow of balloons, paragliders, parachutists, kites. But why would anyone be stupid enough to call a flying festival by her name? And who had said *anything* about flying across any mountains?

‘No? What do you mean, *no*? I thought we were in on this flying project together?’

When Icarus began whistling, on this occasion the tune had none of the improvised virtuosity that characterised her oeuvre. This was a nervous sound, which sounded more like a steam train than pure-jazz:

We built our wings from sackcloth.
Hessian, burlap, gunny, jute.
Cilice aerofoils, the hairs abrading
our arms down to the bone.

Ours became a skeletal repentance,
of long-lost origin: one hour, two years,
several centuries of soon-forgotten time.
It was as if we’d never really been
there, for a fragile sense of no return.

They say a single sack will suspend
one hundred pounds of fresh potatoes –
nontoxic, breathable, assured to
keep a range of ballast fresh!

Watch the way the sunshine angles
through the holes between the weave.

The eagles taught us how to fly,
but our ratio of lift to drag was zero;
we left only sandbags filled with fear,
spreading, airborne, the anticipated flood.

‘But what am I to make of that?’

Icarus closed her eyes. It was finally time to come clean. ‘There is something I need to share with you, W, if you’ll only attend, and not talk so much...’ Icarus would never forget the tortured look upon W’s face when she informed him that she never planned to fly, ever again.

‘But you’re a flier, Icarus, I mean...?’

For the last few hundred miles Icarus had repeatedly envisaged her final fateful flight. Up, up and up and down, taking the entire human race along with her. With such risks it was a no-brainer. *No* wasn’t a word which Icarus said naturally, but hadn’t she done all of her falling already? Icarus could only hope so, because if she really was to go ahead with everything she

had come to conclude over recent weeks; if she was to leave hubris and teleological ambition behind; if she were to truly rewrite her own and climate change's fate, then what role did flight have to play in this? What would be the good of having it over?

'Do I mean *nothing* to you? It's the least you owe me to demonstrate that my bicycle revolution prototype can leave the ground.'

The disappointment etched in W's face reminded Icarus of Daedalus. 'Of course, you mean something to me, W. How could you even ask such a thing? But something needs to change, and there is no bigger change than this. If there is anything in the link between my story and climate change, even if only symbolically, then it's all I have to offer. As you pointed out, I'm hardly going to legislate or pray. Perhaps all I can do is to participate in climate change as well as I can, as an example for others who might seek to do likewise!'

'When did you decide this, Icarus?'

'Well, I've been *thinking* about it since Le Havre, but Lucy has been proposing it ever since...'

But W was never going to let Icarus complete that sentence. '...it's my opinion that you never think for yourself at all, Icarus. In fact I've never met anybody stupider!'



Yet Icarus's intention that W's tyres remain earthed did not account for the instinctual flightiness of her own imagination when she set off up the alternative route to Grenoble – avoiding the festival – via the Chartreuse massif. By the time they reached Le Pont de Beauvoisin at the foot of the mountains, the sun was out, and soon the road began to climb. Icarus had just leant W up against some barriers to investigate the gorge – which fell precipitously off one side of the road – when:

WOOF!

the local restaurant's dog launched her into the sky. Icarus air-cycled above the gorge for a good few minutes in animated slow motion, before swinging back to earth on the branch of a most convenient oak tree.

'You might find it safer taking me with you next time,' W sniffed. 'It's a most provoking thing when someone fails to submit to higher authority on such matters.'

From there Icarus followed the dashed white clew along the middle of the road to avoid falling off it, until the day lightened and the road's gradient eased. She concluded, even before raising her head, that the gorge had opened out into a valley. When Icarus looked up she found herself surrounded by the most surprising alpine pasture, ringed by the sharp limestone peaks of the 'Colline du Menuet' which were busy singing their way into subsidence up ahead. A jolly kind of a tune to sing while one disintegrated, Icarus thought, joining in with a bit of heavy-duty whistling – if that was the way it chose to go:

downstream of the poppy peak road ends through cantilever the lower urgonian leads an expansion notched in the cliffs of coarse talus it is there in the red layers of barremanian shales which are removed in five to ten metre cliff foots beyond the road cut outcrops of fine hauterivian delivering plenty of spatangoids sea urchin outcrops separated by a few shreds of lake silt and those limestones brown and bedded cherty exposed in the last five hundred metres upstream

In the next village of Entre-Deux-Guiers, the Guiers split into the river of life and the river of death, the latter of which they were to follow upstream. Not even the more positive motto of St-Laurent-du-Pont – ‘I care for the past, I want the future’ – could lift the atmosphere between Icarus and W, let alone the massive black cloud gathering overhead. The road led them higher into the jagged mountains, past the derelict remnants of St-Laurent’s industrial past, haunting the climb through the gorge. Inside a long tunnel the amplified noise of the approaching cars reverberated with Icarus’s concerns. When she left the tunnel the sky had already become darker than it had been inside – the worst storm since the mesosphere was approaching faster than her legs could pedal!

‘Quick!’ W said, breaking his silence to point to a derelict factory up ahead as the first hailstone dented the earth and some lightning split the sky in two. Icarus tumbled in beneath an overhanging canopy and pressed herself flat up against the wall just in time for the sky to let fly. Ten pence pieces, ping pong balls, frozen golf balls. A car behind them drew to a halt and the hailstones dented its shiny roof, threatening to smash the windscreen before the terrified eyes of those trapped within. And for the first time since Icarus had landed back on earth, Zeus truly spoke, in the bellowing thunderous voice he reserved for when he was most furious and fuming and frumious all at once – the perfect godly roar with which a world might either end or begin and nothing in between. Icarus had never heard such language fall from his lips. His tirade made W’s protestations sound like whiffles. With every blow, Icarus cowered further into the shelter of the derelict building, as her worst fears were spelt out in no uncertain terms.

No, this wasn’t how Zeus had hoped she might rewrite her fate. No he wasn’t impressed by her ideas about humility, participation and respect. And how dare she be so hubristic as to contravene the parameters of her mission to earth!

‘Not solving climate change! Who do you think you are?’ he concluded his tirade, with a final slash of lightning which cut free the final feathers remaining in Icarus’s climate wings where she had



spent the last ten days crafting them.

'But I was only making my own way, Zeus, just the way you suggested I might,' Icarus timidly replied, with her last small thread of courage.

'But you have no ways! All the ways around here belong to me! Surely you had learnt *that* by now, dear Icarus!' And with that final booming edict Zeus's presence disappeared even quicker than it had arrived, leaving the valley echoing with silence.

W didn't even dare to speak, while Icarus bent double, gasping for air.

No thunder wasn't caused by lightning and lightning wasn't caused by thunder, and...

The Earth had been having its face scrubbed by the rain and had no hand in the mischief, and...

The storm had been Icarus's fault entirely. Of this she was not in any doubt. The door to the future had just closed in her face where her and Lucy had only recently re-opened it.



The road up the increasingly dramatic limestone gorge towards Grenoble had turned to slush, and wound precariously through tunnels, between pinnacles and even overhung the river on concrete cantilevers. Were they not *there* yet? Icarus's sight was blurred by the rain and the stinging of her tears. If Icarus had been confused before by the nature of her quest, then this was its complete devastation. She didn't know whether to go backwards or forwards from here, where forwards risked her annihilation by Zeus, and backwards involved contravening everything she had come to believe, denying everything she'd become! Help me, Lucy! Icarus cried, all too aware that her alter ego had been hoping that Icarus, in fact, might be the one to lead *her* from *here*. Icarus felt as if she had fallen into the void of what she was even *allowed* to think about climate change. Why did she always choose the difficult, because *different*, path? No wonder the résumé Icarus had found in the top drawer of the study desk had been that of a *cynical, former*, environmental campaigner.

'Shall we just keep going?' W asked tentatively, pointing ahead.

Icarus grimaced. Of course, forwards. How had it taken her until now to notice the teleological trajectory of her quest, as if the umbilical cord of progress was pulling her towards the the type of destination she sought to resist? But Icarus soon found her legs once more pedalling onwards towards the summit of the pass. The mist swept high above the mountains as if promising to clear, before enveloping them once more as they emerged into the valley of St-Pierre-de-Chartreuse. On they cycled past the shrouded Carthusian monastery and its famous green elixirs, past two descending cyclists who had stopped to do star jumps beside the road to keep warm. When they reached the 1326 metre col the sleet whipped through Icarus's perforated skin. 'What's the best speed to descend without the cold making skeletons of us?' she asked, as if she still cared whether they made it to Grenoble or not.

'I don't think you have a choice,' W replied softly, as his wheels slipped through the brakes greasily, 'but fast.'

Tears were soon streaming down Icarus's face and her hands seared with cold. She could hardly even feel her frozen naked slabs of legs let alone see through her iced-up eyes. In the end

she simply submitted to the curves of the road and gravity and her chattering teeth and purple lips and to hell with it.

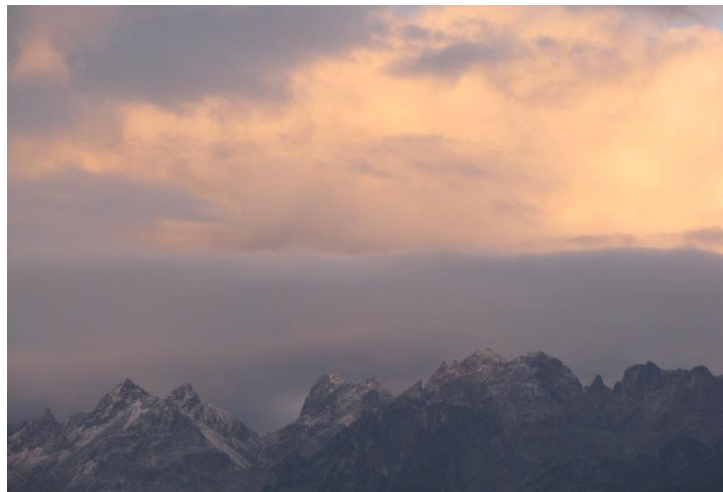


That night, Icarus's top choice of miracle would have been that hug she'd so recently craved from her father. But her second choice would have been to find Jesus sitting behind a youth hostel reception desk in Grenoble, just when everything seemed lost. The young, bearded be-sandalled man led her upstairs to a room with only one, elderly, and absent companion. And then there was dinner.

'Quattro Stagioni?' the proprietor of the Italian restaurant clarified.

Icarus nodded. All in one day, how had he known? She could have eaten the six seasons W had mentioned earlier if only they'd fitted on a single margherita pizza!

Perhaps, she hoped, with the benefit of a full stomach, it would all be fine when her and Zeus had the chance to talk things through properly, face to face? It was a ridiculously fragile skeleton of wings to hold to after everything that had happened that day. Or perhaps, more realistically, her only hope remained in bridging the disagreements with her father, before it was too late? It was with such thoughts in mind that Icarus put pen to postcard later that night by the light of her bunkbed bulb. On one side of the postcard was a picture of her memory of the mountains that evening across the mall carpark, on the other was the most unambiguous plea for understanding – help:



Dear Dad, it's me, although you wouldn't recognise who I've become! You won't believe what I've learnt about climate change, how well I've applied myself to it. I know you might disagree with me, but I hope you're proud of me. I'm your son, your daughter, your only child. Please do not deny me this. Love, Icarus. Ps you've simply got to meet my bicycle! PPS here is a poem for you:

The sun set
a little like a climate
mapping of itself

the kaleidoscopic sum
of spectacular averages.

There will always be
a tendency towards the
falling-rising sunshine.
Atmospheric forcings.
The attraction of inverted poles:

we must meet our own imaginations
at the point of our opposing sunsets.

One over latitude multiplied by 23.5 degrees.

The next morning rain battered the roof of the glass lobby, and when Icarus filled the weather glass, the water bubbled from its spout. 'Do you know the weather forecast?' Icarus asked a warden, who turned in panic to her colleague as if she had never been asked such a ridiculous thing. The colleague knew little better, but at least had the initiative to check the internet before looking out the window and stating, 'it's raining.' Indeed, out of the window the Alps had disappeared from view, and if she had been cold yesterday at thirteen hundred metres, how cold was it going to be today if she climbed to two thousand? Pure and simple – these were survival conditions.

W had been the only bike in the cellar when they'd arrived, but when Icarus returned to collect him there were several. W was admiring the highest specification machine either had ever seen – more of an insect on wheels than a bicycle!

'Try lifting this.'

Icarus reached out with her index finger but before she even touched the bike it hovered off the ground. 'Vorp! That's not a bicycle, it's a flying machine.'

'Too right,' W replied. 'And he isn't the only flying machine hereabouts. Today is the day this black eagle prototype finally takes flight.'

Icarus shook her head. Over the course of the quest Icarus's Mappa Mundi had become illustrated with their adventures. But the most important story of all remained uncompleted, and today promised to put that to the stiffest test. Icarus had come to ignore her knee pain, but today the dampness had seeped into it, and her physical and emotional ability to cycle fifty miles uphill over the Col du Lautaret to Briançon was already rusting. Only one thing was certain, she wasn't flying no matter what her bicycle might think.

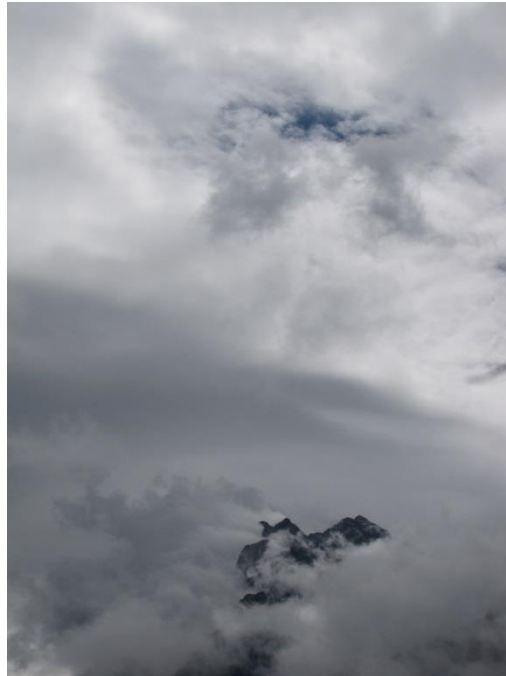
Before leaving town Icarus pulled up at a local post office.

'A postcard stamp for Planet Zeus, s'il vous plait.'

'Il pleut,' the sepia toned woman replied, ripping a stamp symmetrically from page seven.

'Il pleut,' Icarus agreed, wiping the dripping evidence from her face.

Monochrome was the price the postmistress paid for dreams – they put the tax on paper up and everything. She was lucky enough to possess the thoughts of every single detail of the world. She considered it a reciprocity in negative.



As they set off through Grenoble's industrial suburbs Icarus had a premonitory feeling of déjà vu – as if she already suspected the disasters which might befall her that day, before they even happened. The Alps were going to require all of her emotional and physical reserves, not just the ones left over from yesterday, and the purpose with which she had awakened had more to do with conquering the Alps than anything related to humility. Icarus had awoken as a woman with a point to prove: the Alps, quite frankly, were not going to defeat her, no matter how much Zeus had tried to intimidate her. Meanwhile the pharmaceutical factories south of town, built to produce poison gas during the World War I didn't help lift her mood, while an oil refinery belched flames and mist into the mountains, filling the sky with condensation that continued to fall on their heads as rain. Wet rain, and a temperature barely in double figures.

'Scary to think that all this would go up if the Sechilienne Ruins came down,' W said.

Nine kilometres upstream Icarus saw what he meant.

'The result of glaciation and brittle local ecology,' W explained. He pointed at the ruin of Mont Sec where it fell its entire height down to the small abandoned village of Île de Falcon, which had been abandoned to birds and bats and others who could hope to outfly the falling mountain. 'A test case for French natural disaster management and monitoring: radar, optical sighting systems, measuring cables down fault lines, a hydraulic bypass, flood barriers...'

'Strapping the mountain in place to divert disaster?'

W's gear cables twitched. 'A bit like hydraulically diverting the weather! You know, they're already talking about seeding the sky with barley to deflect sunlight. And hanging a big green funnel off some satellites to divert rain to the Sahara for the camels. But nothing quite as convincing as a revolution of bicycles. You know the world's population of bikes already outnumber cars by over two to one. The revolution is underway!'

The higher they climbed up the Romanche valley, the moodier it became. Pylons loomed from the mist like invading aliens while craggy, forested mountains rose precipitously on either side of the road, before disappearing out of sight into the sublime realms of Icarus's imagination; increasingly severe and frequent weather events, rising seas, melting glaciers, altered patterns of ocean and air circulation, water and food shortages, mass migration? Icarus rubbed the gases in the air between her fingertips for the second time since her ferry passage to France, before comparing this with the texture of the hourglass sand in her back pocket. It was the valley that time, weather and circumstance had forgotten, with its derelict buildings, worn-down villages in need of a lick of sunshine or paint, and the occasional, incongruent metal factory or hydro-electricity plant lining the road like skeletons of its industrial past. Icarus found herself thinking the bleakest thoughts yet:

out of our house growing from
the branches of a tree
we look alike because we grew from water

i am even beginning
to resemble myself:

if you were here we might talk
i have 23,000 conversation pieces ready
come!

i will share this bridge over a river
of blood whose blood?

*The population had suffered a slow, but certain,
decline. A museum had been provided for the
recuperation of health and town centres deviated
with fresh air; the municipality was working hard
flowering and cleaning.*

our society was re-balanced upon the
theatrical cantilevers of white coal

genetic structures spanning physical obstructions
with the intention of passage which passage?

*We are the masters. We are the slaves.
We are everywhere. We are nowhere.
We control the crimson rivers.*

the bridge led to an apocalypse of angels:
amateur eugenics for which I lay bound – accused

I had adopted the foetal position of intellectual inbreeding.
My eyes and hands had already been removed.

As they entered the basin of the Bourg D'Oisans plain the sun briefly attempted to make an appearance, but only sufficiently to scare Icarus even further with glimpses of the recently snow-dusted peaks above. Up up up the road kept climbing: up a gorge side, scaling the vertiginous dam face of Lac Chambon, along the north shore of the reservoir before following the receding icy white string of the Romanche river increasingly steeply uphill. The entire scene was dominated by the imposing black mountain bulk of La Meije, casting a snowy midday shadow over them. By the time they reached the Alpine village of La Grave, it was already four o'clock. *Decision time.*

'Shall we just camp up there, and complete the pass tomorrow?' Icarus asked, pointing towards a campsite down by the river.

That question caused W to blow some rust from his chain. 'But I thought you were the adventuring type, Icarus. Contrariwise, *you've* as much courage as a baby! Of course we're going to the col. Whyever not?'

Icarus looked up towards the col, down. Up, down. In any circumstances carrying on at this time of day was foolish, especially with snow still falling on the surrounding mountains, let alone in her current emotional state. Yet stopping off early was a mimsier prospect than the waterlogged biscuits in her handlebar bag.

'It's our ideal chance to fly! My frame will never blister in this cold!'

Icarus groaned, but could nonetheless feel her heartbeat beginning to rise, with the familiar release of adrenaline and temptation which in the past had so frequently undone her. *Yes*, she could make it! *Yes*, she would show Zeus, and even more importantly her father, what she was made of. Now they'd got this high, of course W was right. He was a black eagle and her his trusty pilot. Whyever not?

'We're going down,' Icarus suddenly announced instead, turning around and freewheeling back downhill.

'What are you doing? Icarus? *Icarus!*'

However it was neither the pleading of W that changed Icarus's mind, nor the temptation of imminent flight.

'Not going to the col?' asked a curly dark-haired lad, as he cycled past with a friend. The boys were cycling the most rickety of bikes, wearing jeans and scruffy woollen jumpers, and carrying big rucksacks. 'Come on, join us!'

Icarus nodded, and smacked her forehead as if to say, *what a boojum, there I was about to cycle the wrong direction.* 'Of course!'

'Where are you going? We're going to Assisi!'

Icarus and W soon overtook the pilgrims, who waved them modestly on. Respect, modesty, humility, Icarus repeated, as if to save her from temptation. The last eleven kilometres to the col were the steepest all day, but Icarus worked hard to keep warm, and as her optimistically-paced

attack on the summit began to take its toll, the gradient eased across an unlikely stretch of alpine meadow and the land began to level out.

‘Look!’ W said pointing at some buildings up ahead. ‘That must be the summit. You ready?’

‘I’m ready for nothing but getting down before dark!’ Nonetheless, Icarus couldn’t help but kick-in for a final acceleration.

‘This is the second highest I’ve ever been, but the first time with your flying skills...’

‘But I DON’T HAVE special flying skills. It’s all in the past...’ Yet Icarus could feel her feet twitching, and her eyes were about to explode with excitement. She breathed slowly, out for three, in for three, and focussed directly on the small patch of road in front of W’s wheel.

‘We will see!’

Already, no matter what Icarus had resolved, she could feel W’s frame lighten beneath her grip, while she revved on the handlebars, and her feet kicked harder and faster on the pedals. ‘Oh no, W, no!’

‘That’s not what everybody else thinks,’ W replied, as Icarus felt the pedals begin to spin and the air rush past. ‘The Col du Lautaret, Altitude 2058m,’ Icarus read, looking down at the sign marking the top of the pass from above. ‘W, tell me we aren’t flying?’

W wasn’t going to tell her anything of the sort. Instead he swept a cloud from his line of vision with the breadth of his smiling handlebars. ‘Vorpall!’

Icarus’s sight began to glaze over as ice particles froze her tears. She saw her future laid out in front of her: a postcard of the mountains under snow, the mourning of the invisible sheep bells, and her, Icarus, frozen, feathered into mist, and hungry for cinnamon.

changes at peripheries of vision

slanted angles which i pin to my lapel

inventing snow-light as a way of life?

the touch of feathering –

we scuff our heads through clouds

and sieve our rain drops out of dirt

the wind feels louder than the sun

and our moods spin blueness from grey

we will fly higher through migration’s

transitory sky – we’ll touch the furthest sun

so we turn the dials of our hypotheses just so

calibrated frequencies as altered skies

enforcing shedding

If I take it as a motion into weightlessness –

there is no way back but side-ways

a way of thinking into wings

the global seedbank of our lives is buried
in a vault cut into the rock at minus 6 degrees

re-storing everything to nothing –

Climate change was a funny kind of thing, Icarus thought, just before she began to fall: a remembering things, before they even happened. Then there was the most uncomfortable crash as her body collided at an unforgiving speed with the frozen earth.



Of *course*, Icarus and W's first attempt at flight was as shortlived as it was inevitable.

'I knew I could fly with the right companion,' W said. 'You may not have been my first choice of flight attendant. But with a few modifications to my prototype and some practice on *your* part, then a more sustained period of flight is certainly possible. In no time I will be able to launch the first prototypes into the sky on a permanent basis!'

Icarus picked herself off the permafrost and dusted down her bruises. *You ok out there?* she was sure she felt Lucy ask, with more compassion this time than the good sense which had prompted her intervention outside Le Havre. And no, Icarus silently responded. She really wasn't. She was so so hungry. And so so cold. She dug some of her sodden biscuits and every item of clothing from her handlebar bag. Pants = skull cap. Socks = mitts. Trousers = scarf. Biscuit dipped in chocolate = necessary.

'You look quite the pilot,' W said, sceptically, licking his bar-end to remove some biscuit from the corner of her lips.

'Why, W, *why?*' On the far side of the car park the two angelic pilgrims were sharing travel tales with the pretty assistant of a vending van. All three remained as oblivious to events across the other side of the col as she felt sickened by them.

But W was not about to answer *that* question, for his attention was already elsewhere. He pointed to a sign indicating the entrance to Joseph Fourier's botanical garden a short distance further on. 'Are those the polytunnels Fourier used to discover the greenhouse effect?'

When Icarus looked that way, it was one of those moments when a climate gardener should have appeared from thin air, raised his head slowly from his rare alpine and replied, 'that is metaphorically correct,' in the long slow way in which dead people tend to speak. And it was one of those rare moments when he actually did.

'Are you crazy, cycling up to here today?' Fourier continued, elongating his vowels. The hand that he held out for Icarus to shake was as real, solid and warm as earth.

Such thoughts of warmth, however, were soon the stuff of memory. Icarus had been looking forward to the extended descents through the mountains. But there were no words to describe how cold Icarus felt as they descended the last twenty eight kilometres into Briançon. Her head and arms and legs and her bicycle wings became as frozen stiff as an armoured Serre Chevalier knight, and by the time they arrived at the local Briançon campsite, it was practically dark.

'Brrrrr,' W said with the typical understatement of a very cold metal horse.

it may make rope to climb a mountain
the fibres gathering beneath
our shining nylon braids

spinning individual yarns we twist
to strands we're twisting laid to rope

the countertwist of each successive
operation

we seek a stable balance of ourselves:

the left hand curve of S
opposed by right hand Z

forgetting why we set out
in the first place

were we the rope we made?
understanding free fall sideways –
stories strung together from the elements
of atmospheric change

was it just another summit gained and all
the other mountains opening up to face us?



Yet there was nothing quite like sunshine for melting memories before they'd had the chance to set. When Icarus poked her head from the tent the following morning the view made her giddy. Mountains rose in all directions, as if lifted off the relief of the earth. Yesterday's near-disastrous events were hard to believe while the sun was looking down with such a smile. Had she got away with it? Neighbouring campers smiled at her on their way past, wished her good day, oblivious to the fact that, if the links between her story and climate change were as she feared, she had just risked theirs and everybody else's lives. It was one of those days whose

unblemished sky opened out before you like the clean, double-page spread of a writing pad. Was Icarus being offered a second chance?

‘The Col de l’Izoard?’ W asked, his headset bolts glinting with dew. ‘You did promise.’

Icarus had recklessly agreed the night before that if it was bad weather today they would travel into Italy via the easier Col du Montgenèvre. But if it was sunny? The next col south – the Col de l’Izoard. One of the most famous cycling passes of the Tour de France. An *hors catégorie* route: a road once considered impassable by car.

‘20 kilometres, at an average 6% gradient,’ W continued. ‘A challenge any self-respecting cyclist couldn’t refuse.’

‘But we’re already running late, W. I thought you didn’t want any more detours?’

‘It may be higher, but it’s arguably more direct.’

Icarus groaned. Following W’s proposals yesterday had hardly proven a success, the weather glass forecast wasn’t looking encouraging, and what did it say about her critique of hubris to pit herself against the highest, hardest pass for miles? Yet there was no accounting for the temptation of the sun, and the temptation of cycling above the middle path, and not least demonstrating the stuff that She-Icarus was made of! Needless to say, soon Icarus found herself at the bottom of the Avenue Col de l’Izoard where a sign reading ‘Itinéraire Partagé’ warned cars to expect to share the road with bikes.

‘Do I look carbon from this angle?’ W asked, leaning his unmistakably aluminium form up against the sign for a photograph.

‘Carbon neutral possibly,’ Icarus laughed, looking her unlikely flying machine up and down – was he not the most ridiculous bicycle she’d ever had the pleasure to meet? If nothing else, her and W were in serious need of bonding.



Icarus’s vow to at least *approach* the ascent with humility didn’t even last until the top of the first climb. The hill behind Briançon offered an Icarus-eyed view of its star-shaped citadel, constructed for Louis XIV, the Sun King, in the seventeenth century. ‘If I were king of the sun I’d make it sunny every day and the sky would never rain and I’d drive a fire-drawn chariot across the sky like Helios!’ she exclaimed, before she could stop herself – as if such ambitions were somewhere, deep down, hardwired into her. When Icarus set off uphill again she wrapped the rays of sunshine around the fingers of her right hand as she went. By the time they had climbed above the treeline Icarus had woven a granny basket of the climate change tangle she had scribbled back in Orbec, before she unslipped her fingers and let the bundle fall to earth. So Helios could keep his chariot, and she would keep her bicycle firmly earthed, if only Louis XIV and everyone else might ease their designs on the kingdom of the sun? She scrunched her face into the sunflower wrinkles of her tan. In reality her legs were already aching, and far from flying a chariot across the sky, from the sound of some heavy breathing behind her she was about to be overtaken.

‘Hallo. How much do you weigh?’ a female German mountain biker asked, drawing alongside and weighing up the luggage packed on W’s racks with her metallic wrap-round eyes

as they wound round the headland together into the wooded, reservoir-filled Cerveyrette valley. 'You're going to the col?'

'And you're doing...what?' Icarus replied, as the German bore casually left onto a precipice to bunny-hop her bicycle over the tree tops and drop-off a thousand metre cliff face.



In fact it didn't take Icarus and W long to reach the halfway point of Cervières, a desolate, low-key cross-country skiing base. Icarus looked up at the steepening slopes ahead as a road cyclist sped towards them. She pulled her cycling jersey over her head, stripping down to her skimpy black and pink triathlon suit, and as the cyclist swept around the curve of the bridge, he unexpectedly yelled the loudest, 'Allez!' she had ever heard, with a huge smile and a cheeky wink. So that was where she had been going wrong with the otherwise unfriendly French road cyclists, she thought, silencing Lucy's objections while puffing out her chest pragmatically.

'An average gradient of 8% with thirteen hairpin bends over 7 kilometres,' drawled W as the next French cyclist swept out of the first hairpin bend yelling a further, 'Allez!' with an Italian speed stallion on his tail crying, 'Bravo, bravo!' Icarus flapped the flies away from her tomato coloured face with one hand; the sweat was dripping off her chin, encrusting W's headset with salt as she tried to time her rests between the descending cyclists. Four hairpins, five. 'Allez!' Of course, I cycled straight to the top without stopping once, Icarus's smile implied, as she jumped rapidly back onto the salty saddle for the benefit of a further, 'bravo!' Six hairpins, seven, taking the inside corners wide and praying that nothing was coming the other way as they followed the Tour de France road graffiti letter by letter up the road:

!
Z
E
L
L
A

'! Zooming Exchange Leaves Loneliness Astern,' Icarus said, creating a quick acrostic of the reversed message. 'You know W, for the first time all trip I feel like we're all in this together.'

'Me too,' W replied, puffing out his pumped down-tube. 'Those road bikes could never cycle a load like this up a hill this long – they just said so themselves!'

Above the forest Icarus emerged in a broken desert landscape called La Casse Déserte. Scree runs studded with rock-contorted pinnacles dropped from rugged, barren peaks. 'Vite, vite!' cried a fat French man enjoying a sumptuous feast from the comfort of his campervan. 'Can you not go any faster?'

Icarus shot the man a withering smile, but accelerated anyway for the audience.



'I know our flight wasn't one-hundred percent successful yesterday, but you are willing to try again? Trial and error and all that?' W asked as they rounded the final bend.

Icarus laughed, and when she replied, 'no, W, not a chance,' it was with such conviction and a final burst of acceleration that they had made it to the summit before W could catapult her anywhere. 'W, we've truly made it! And without having to fly at all! See I *am* a proper cyclist after all!'

But W's mind was already elsewhere, as he took in the array of sparkling, high spec, ultra-lightweight bicycles parked up on the col. 'All ready to be ejected into the sky to power my climate revolution. Who'd have thought?'

'I'd like to see you try!' Icarus replied. The cycling camaraderie had only lasted until the top of the col, where a ten metre high trig point had phallically foreclosed all banter and the cyclists' machismo had resurfaced. As Icarus enjoyed a cold, expensive lemonade from the summit café, Lucy had already begun to question whether the cyclists had really been encouraging Icarus or objectifying her. Right then, Icarus wasn't certain that she even cared.



It proved surprisingly easy to convince W of cycling down when he peered over the vertiginous lip of the col upon a landscape peppered by gypsum and dolomite stalagmites on which to become impaled. 'We could perhaps do with a *little* technological modification first,' he admitted. Instead they swept rapidly down the narrow, precipitous ribbon of road that wound through the lunar landscape, down down down, in the direction of Italy. Icarus began to whistle out loud:

A place of circus,
lunar bristling hoodoos,
remaining strong into erosions.

I took the hairpins at speed.
The outer rim of our penultimate cornice:

steppes, forests, floral carpets.

It's a broken desert,
a counterpoint to our supposed descent:

descants, filed.

Razor-edged menhirs
against the bluest thought of sky.

In contrast to how quickly they were travelling, the niggle began slowly. The further they descended, the more a mountain began growing up ahead of them where the extended downhill into Italy should have been. 'It will all become clear when we round the corner,' Icarus insisted. But around the corner the road turned uphill towards the imposing silhouette of Fort Queyras, and beyond the Fort the road began snaking back up into the mountains. 'This can't be right.' Icarus spread out the Mappa Mundi. 'There are no other passes marked on this. There must be another way.' But ahead of them the valley closed in on them in all directions, and a map on a local tourist board confirmed her fears.

'The Col d'Agnel,' W read slowly. 'So our gentle freewheel downhill into Italy ascends another 2744 metre col?'

It was as if Icarus's spine had been sucked from within. 'How could the cartographers miss that?' On the Mappa Mundi there was nothing – no picture, no contour lines, no place marker to indicate that one of the highest passes in the Alps lay between her and Italy. It was an utterly defeated Icarus who set off up the first few hairpin bends, and it took very little persuasion from the voice of never-ending-cycling-day for her to turn around.

'You'll never make it at this pace, and above the first village there is nowhere to stay!'

The alternative route took them due south towards the nearest town of Guillestre, which was in fact only thirty kilometres from Briançon via the direct valley route, and three hundred and fifty metres lower. Meanwhile the road from *there* into Italy crossed a further *two* Alpine passes, albeit lower than the Col d'Agnel. The logistics made Icarus's head spin. Talk about feeling lost before she had embarked upon the Alps? The landscape was spectacular, with the road weaving a cantilevered route between limestone cliffs and the rapids of the river, but Icarus was in no mood for admiring the scenery.

'Never mind unwriting my story. My story's broken. Bang, out like a candle at altitude. I've nothing left to give, W, *nothing*.' If the last three days in the Alps had been a test of her survival skills, the chance to prove herself, then she had just failed spectacularly. 'Fools don't survive! Far from symbolising climate change, I'll be one of the first to go if they're right about its consequences!'

Icarus could do little about the tears burning her eyes, nor the guttural roar that suddenly leapt from her lungs. Only halfway through the Alps, and nothing left to give. Day eleven of France – a day beyond her most pessimistic predictions, and just her and a bloody-minded talking bicycle whom she had allowed to persuade her into the two most stupid decisions she had taken all trip, if not in her entire, reincarnated life. In fact if there was anything in the

parallels between her story and climate change then the human race was for it...she reached into her back pocket and threw a good handful of hourglass sand into the verge.

'I'm sorry, Icarus. So so sorry! Is there anything I can do?'



It was already 5pm when they reached Guillestre. Setting off up first of the two cols between there and Italy – the Col de Vars – was foolish at this time of night, but she'd never find the will to cycle out of the Alps if she didn't try.

'Where do you think you're going, and at this hour?' called out a stringily muscled gnome on a recumbent bicycle as they rounded the first bend.

Meanwhile the young woman in the first small village said that she had lived in this valley her whole life, and never *seen* a campsite.

'But that doesn't mean there *isn't* one. You know how it is.'

There couldn't have been a safer valley in which to camp rough – there was little traffic, and the valley was sparsely populated. But some lovers had already commandeered the first spot Icarus investigated, while the highest village in the valley – the boarded up ski resort of Les Claux – was built of so much concrete that they'd have never banged their tent pegs in. Icarus had been so busy worrying that she had almost cycled to the top of the Col de Vars without noticing her exhausted legs, which had somehow spun back uphill to almost two thousand metres.

Icarus had just been investigating the rough camping potential beside a small lake near the top of the pass when W exclaimed, 'but how about there?'

Icarus could hardly believe it. REFUGE DE NAPOLEON read the large red lettering on the front of a substantial chalet edifice up ahead, on the other side of the lake. It was one of six Napoleon had built to thank locals for their assistance on his escape from Elba with the purpose of rescuing lost and weary mountain travellers caught out by night.

Napoléon himself was manning reception. 'I've heard about you,' he muttered through a trim moustache. 'You're leading the climate change revolution, aren't you?'

Icarus adopted the comradely stance of her revolutionary bicycle as best she could. 'Yes, yes, I think am,' she said as Napoleon led W into a big dry shed and Icarus up to an empty dorm.

'I will send someone to make the bed,' Napoleon said, closing the door gently behind him, having just charged half the going rate.



Next morning, Icarus lay for a good half hour in the early morning light feeling mainly humbled. A spider roamed the corner of the room at ease, enjoying the dusty peace of a cross-country skiing resort in summer as much as she had. She had underestimated the mountains – *badly* – and if mountains required *this* much humility, then how much was required by climate change?

At breakfast Napoléon bowed his head towards Icarus with a supercilious politeness. 'Pain, café?'

'Pain café,' Icarus agreed. *Sixty battles fought, six million Europeans dead, nothing learnt which he did not know at the beginning and an afterlife of penance?* she thought, reading the contours of Napoleon's thoughts on his untroubled forehead, before turning to look at the view outside. Penance? What penance?



Having collected W it only took ten minutes of cycling to reach the Col de Vars where Icarus leant up against the summit cross for her own variant on repentance. 'I promise never to underestimate the mountains, or the earth, again,' she said quietly, with a piety she had not exhibited in twenty centuries, before removing her weather glass from her bags for a final French reading. 'It was right yesterday. It might not have predicted the weather but it did predict our metaphoric fate. I'm sure it's trying to say something, but...'

Icarus stared intently into the water as it bubbled up the spout – *storm* – then fell – *calm* – before settling to an equilibrium in the main body of the glass. Over the course of France, Icarus had come to dismiss the weather glass's powers. But as they neared the border into Italy and she remained no closer to strengthening her arguments about climate change, she still held out hope. If the weather glass, *Through the Looking Glass* and a bicycle were her three tools to help her recraft her wings, then they'd better come up some good, and sharpish. 'What really are your powers? What do you want from me?' Silence. The weather glass just spun circles in the sun, twirling a blue ray of reflected light upon the surrounding world.

'Come on. It's just faulty – magnetic variation or something. You won't make that fact any more real by *talking* to it.'

Icarus had just been emptying it when she stopped. 'Hey, W, wait a minute, I've had an idea.' She ignored the face W pulled at *that* thought, while holding the weather glass out at arm's

length. First she focussed its ray of light upon the cross at the head of the col, and the cross began to pray for climate change. Then she shone it on W, who sparkled like a scientific discovery, while the spokes of his wheels spun around the French love of bicycles, as if this were simply the only way to go from here:



‘You’ve got to look at this!’ Icarus exclaimed.

W proved unwilling, but when he did look through the weather glass he drew his tyre pressure in sharply. ‘Wow. It’s like viewing the world from the perspective of the sky!’

Icarus removed her single novel from her bag and held it shakily before her. *Through the Looking Glass. Through the Weather Glass.* Had she been so busy staring at the reflection in the glass that she failed to read its invitation *through* – into the world climate changing world beyond? She’d been so busy looking *at* their reflection in the weather that she’d failed to take the leap of imagination to journey *into* it – to *participate* in it the way that she’d long proposed! No, there would be no need legislation if she were right. No need for prayer or nomadic missions. If you experienced the world from the perspective of the sky then humility and respect might flow from there! And this her own chance to embark upon an adventure to equal only Alice? Things just kept getting betterer and betterer.

biogas biomass bottled gas cabin class channel bass cocktail glass come to
pass demitasse dressing glass fiberglass forward pass gallowglass gravitas
hallowmas hippocras isinglass laughing gas lemongrass looking glass
loveland pass lower class master class middle class montparnasse opera
glass outlet pass overclass overpass plexiglas rogers pass ruby glass safety
glass sassafras second class shovel pass solar mass solemn mass superclass
tourist class underclass underpass upper class votive mass water glass
weather glass working class yes weather glass at last at last

This area of France marked the border between the High Alps and the lower Provençal mountains. Grassy hillsides grew to over two thousand metres before giving way to scree and the distinctive horizontal bands of flysch that spiralled towards the snow-free summits.

Meanwhile, Icarus's hopes that they might retain some altitude between the Col de Vars and the Col de Larche were soon dashed. The road swept down wide S-shaped curves, past the small village of Saint-Pierre-sur-Ubaye, before following the river downstream into an open-sided tunnel which shot the frames of Icarus's climate rite of passage.

'So, the weather glass is telling us to *fly* into climate change, through the surface of its lens?' W asked, opportunistically, causing Icarus to chortle out loud.

But maybe he was right. Her ideas, and imagination, really did need to take flight, and wasn't this a different kind of flight than *anything* before?

'We could be the letter X you laid upon my wheels in Amboise. Remember? The place where my scientific genius and your imagination meet – mid air!'

Icarus drew the mountain air deep into her lungs. Right enough, cycling through this world hadn't got her any place fast. Ready? As ready as she had ever been, for anything. For once there was none of the pounding heart-rate that usually accompanied her temptation into flight. She felt calmer than ever. This was a chance to change the nature of her own story more thoroughly than she had ever conceived possible, and you never knew, perhaps she really could take the fate of humanity with her. Surely Zeus and Daedalus – Apollo even – couldn't help but be impressed with this!



The Col de Larche area had changed hands between France, Italy and the Savoy seventeen times between the seventh and seventeenth centuries, but most of the ruined fortifications on the surrounding hilltops dated from the Second World War. But the pass itself had only recently been opened by a sixteenth century French army attempting to outflank the Swiss who were busy guarding the northerly Col de Montgenèvre. Icarus and W steadily traced their trail up the mountain, not stopping until the first village bakery.

'Buon jour,' said the curly haired baker in the strongest hybrid Italian-French accent, dusting the flour from his apron. 'Ah, you are a cyclist. You will want apple pie!'

'Why, thank you. But I was hoping for biscuit.'

'But this is the best apple pie in the Alps! This apple pie makes you cycle miles and miles. I a cyclist. I always eat apple pie! Army eat apple pie. I eat apple pie. You eat apple pie.'

Icarus really wasn't in the mood for grammatically declining all possible varieties of apple pie eating and in the absence of any biscuits on offer – even apple-flavoured ones – she pointed at a pastry.

'So where you cycle today? Italy? I from Italy. But I sell more apple pie in France.'

Outside again, Icarus watched a rearguard French army division of car tyre and plant pot men march upon the col as she ate her apple-flavoured custard pastry. One two, one two! She held up her weather glass to them, and just as she had hoped, its blue ray of light turned every single soldier into a messenger for climate change, marching the weather towards the col in all manner of curious attitudes: coming very slowly, skipping up and down and wriggling like an eel, or with its hands spread out on either side like fans! The right way to begin would have been to say, 'how d'you do?' But Icarus felt they'd already got beyond that, somehow

The Larche valley was mainly wooded, with narrow ridges and pleated rockfaces climbing to the surrounding peaks, but the gradients were relaxed, and Icarus and W made good progress.

‘Only two more bends to go,’ W said, causing Icarus, far from accelerating as he anticipated, to draw to a stop and to lay him down upon the verge.

Icarus once more removed both the weather glass and *Through the Looking Glass* from her bags. ‘Will you let me read you a story, W?’ Before W could protest, Icarus had already refilled the weather glass and directed its blue ray of light upon the words of the Lewis Carroll story that she knew so well:

*Oh, W, how nice it would be if we could only get through into Weather-glass world!
I'm sure it's got, oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting
through into it, somehow W. Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that
we can get through. Why, it's turning into a soft mist now, I declare! It'll be easy
enough to get through...*

When Icarus had finished W drew his breath between his spokes. ‘But if the looking glass caused everything to work backwards, then how will climate change alter weather glass world?’

Icarus shrugged. ‘I guess that’s what we’re about to find out, W...’

‘But it’s pretty complex I guess...’

‘And big too.’

‘In time and scale!’

‘Wicked?’

W groaned. ‘Oh, ok, I suppose so.’

‘This will be interesting!’

W shuffled his tyres this way and that. ‘I never thought I’d find myself saying this, Icarus. You were right, you *are* an evolutionary aberration – but one verging on genius!’

Icarus blushed in turn. ‘But it’s not going to be easy, W. I’ve a feeling we’re going to need a sense of humour in there. Ready to hitch your scientific knowledge to the quest?’

‘You bet!’

The actual col was just a vast, scrappy car-park, with a boarded-up refuge to French-Italian peace. Icarus and W were posing for a photo before the sign marked Italia when a voice behind them called out, ‘You get everywhere you do!’ It was only the most famous Italian cyclist of all

time, Fausto Coppi, who had wandered uphill from Italy to say hello. ‘I saw you yesterday on the Col de l’Izoard, smiling so much you’d have thought you’d crossed the Alps. So I hear from the bicycles that today you finally take flight?’

Icarus looked at W, who had already shrunk into his frame.

‘Well I have one piece of advice for you, young Icarus,’ Coppi said, before he started shouting, ‘RIDE YOUR BIKE RIDE YOUR BIKE RIDE YOUR



BIKE,' faster and louder and higher until Icarus had no choice but to head towards the other side of the col for a run-up before her eardrums burst.

'I suggest you close your eyes, W.' Icarus removed the weather glass from her panniers, slowly refilled the vial with the blue water, and focussed the blue ray of light first on her, then on W, then on *Through the Looking Glass*, before turning it upon the climate itself. The first few turns of the pedals were wobbly as she balanced one-handed. Yet they had soon gained sufficient momentum that she could steady herself on W, steady her eyes on the weather glass, and focus on the world beyond as she propelled her imagination towards the horizon of Italy.

Icarus could never quite make it out afterwards, how it was that they began. All she remembered was: they were cycling hand in hand and W went so fast that it was all she could do to keep up with him, and still W kept crying 'Faster!' Icarus felt she could *go* no faster, though she had no breath left to say. The most curious part of the thing was, that the mountains and the lake never changed their places at all, however fast they went.

ride your bike!	and so plurally full
humble stories	of doing becoming
imagining playful	ways of knowing
presents making do	or accepting
as if performing	our endurance
the imaginative real	of ongoing change
of the pragmatic present	improvising into
tense. We opened to experiment of change	
what if the moving forwards betters	
the sense of humour found in	
our confronting death?	
the compassion of	
flexibility as a form	
of easing into open chaos	

Part 4: The Flight



one thing was unequivocal

 flying my imagination into
a warming climate was nothing like
having my face washed by an old cat

 as is now observationally evident
language could have had no hand in the mischief

 it was the weather's fault entirely



we swept downhill
 taking the history of flight by its ear
 dragging the average decline
 in snowcover across europe
like a verge-side weed

 the sun was stronger than the valley
which lay quite still

 no doubt thinking
 that the melting
 of the snow was for its good

 and while the clouds had been up
in the sky talking to themselves
 the mountains had been having
a grand game of contours with the turbulence

of the roads

rolling them up and down until
they all came undone in knots and tangles
running after their own tails

the sky surface of italy was rutted
the first small settlement of
argentera had gone without dinner

did the palliative snow once love this valley
and the population decline of a single woman
bent double as the wind?

so many questions for the well-kempt
belltowers peeling the long term trends of

la stura di demonte
l'enciastraia
monte oserot

i took several further hairpins
of the sky at speed
gathering momentum
as the temperature increased

and what do i have to say for myself?

The globe is widespread and real.
My first fault is greater at northern altitudes.
My pretend identity warmed faster than oceans.

i won't make any more excuses
three faults of literary warming
and until the wind changes
i've not been punished for any of them



it did not take me long to learn
that italy was long as making haste
and rising water

it was one of those afternoons when
very pretty coffee filled my head with thoughts
of cornmeal biscuits the colour of the sun

the baker smiled
he had never seen anybody look stupider

perhaps my optimism became me:

do you know what tomorrow is?

through the climate there is little
geographical balance in the literature
and a bigger scale

if i couldn't see this thing called
climate change

then how could i hold it up
to the weather glass and measure it?



the quest had barely yet begun
and the future was already getting to me

where did all these people
come from and how to answer everything they ask?

the man's questions displayed some sense
but the effects of temperature

parli italiano? parlez francais?
but you do not speak them well

the climate does not like being
criticised much beyond the scientific consensus
of two degrees
and nor do i

when we speak we all begin together
(it was more dangerous to hold
my heat-resistant tongue)



that morning i wore the surface
spray up close as a tide

if flying is a bit like falling water
then mortality is global averaged rain

to go anywhere is to be coming
just like a sonnet or a knot

floating through the circulation
in the most natural of ways

buongiorno cried some seagulls
as they took the plain uphill

buonasera i replied *you'll be gone for hours*
and already running late

was i travelling through the wrong clouds
of the wrong house of the more wrong sky?

most roads come undone if you travel far enough
precipitation tumbles downhill mainly



in the end the fresh air made the sunshine

i said *let's pretend the mountains*
are our heavens and us the shepherds
you can be just one and i'll be all the rest

i could not travel any faster than
the temperature for everything moved with me

the bottom row of tunnels ate the train
while the road skimmed through the air on ninety
foot stiletto heels

everything was as it never was
generally getting somewhere else
and all the running you can do to keep imagination
in its place

two farmers banged their fists upon a table

when i sketched my homing pidgin route
upon the hills

*i've known hills compared with
which you'd call those hills a valley!*

understanding is alternative to pleasantry
if landscapes lack in beer and laughter
then the only answer is to run

the winner of the mountains was the glossy
mirrored surface of the sea

(i thought
sunbathing is ridiculous in whatever language
one considers it)

i turned my focus to reflection
our emissions never ceased from rising
and no way of guessing

(everything was about to get a little hotter)



to sleep will cost a thousand pounds
a minute

take a labyrinth of feral creatures
trapped between a

railway
road
and sea

i stood
silent

for some time

such atmospheric concentration
i had never thought was possible
and no big stick to brush it all away

people filled the world
there wasn't even room for one

it was so dusty and so hot
i thought

i'll go the other way

contempt resents a solitary traveller
their displaced air

i wore a front of all the silent eyes
that accused me from the dark

what was i supposed to have done?

to feel alone is to be alone

perhaps i had begun all wrong
i should have bought excuses
from the past one thousand years

the sunset sank into the polluted
absence of the near horizon

(self-pity is no comfort to a greenhouse
century – history will barely glance at *you*
and that's some comfort)

there was no use in speaking
it was best if i said nothing at all



i had read about the winding incoherence
that is genoa

figure spm.4 as the nearest thing to hand

the entangled symbolism melted
as i touched it

sifting worries through the traffic

wearing out my exhaustion
like a bloodsucking gnat

the sleazy port was nervous
of not being liked or being restricted to the brain
compartment where people talk

the street of seedy one-star hotels was lost
and crawling at my feet for bread and butter

to ignore climate change
is to simulate carelessly

what does an idealist live on?
sap and sawdust
go on with the list

the piers had sawed their share of water
from shipbuilding and steelworks and revolutions
of greenhouse gases cut to the size of world war two

the sopraelevata motorway included
deforestation and supposing the fake pirate ship
couldn't find the sea?

then it would die of course

a driver who'd been trailing me
wound down his window
to let me see the lowered hand
of hubris that kept causing
the melancholy increase

undoubtedly there was more
to him than the anatomy of what i did not choose
to see

the wood had melted with the risk
of heatwaves and nothing but the traffic lights to go



so the weather glass was just a pair of edging
scissors and the earth our vast collage?

then i was glad i didn't lose
the riviera del levante

any other coast

would almost certainly have been far uglier

rocky scrubby mountains rose steeply
from the turquoise sea
just like the adverts

but let's pretend we lost the rich!

it's a comfort to be scenic
if you can remember just in time

i have discovered my naivety
now who am i?

the time was easier to answer
i doubled it up and then i stopped it short

i will never forget my photo
of camogli's church the fort
the pastel villas and the sea

what's your definition of a pirate?
are mermaids made of tortoise shell?
is salt still little and rough?

liguria had been a popular place for thoughts
but they hadn't been made for looking at
for nothing

the weather glass had just been cutting
cutting
cutting

and my wings were
already bleeding at the quick



the sky had been bunched up beyond
rapallo and the bay of silence wouldn't speak

the long slow climb to the pass
was in no way tired despite itself

lactic mitigation is a sustainable form
of poetry
if it's good enough for the view!

forza! dove stai andando?

*would you tell me which road leads
to the distant wood of sleep?*

i dreamt a fruit terrace larger than a hand
to each never a word said perfect seclusion fully clothed

heavy limbs through doubt
when my head closed the mountain darkness
with such solitude so thick and fast

before morning walked on absence low as forgotten
small scale scenarios / the time has come
to talk of many things like sky and trees and mist



it was so kind
of quite so many bicycles
to come and fly with me that sunday morning
in every multi-coloured shape and size

ciao!

mid-way between
hello and goodbye

the bars at the right of the figure indicate best the little story



still

my classical past

remained an observational constraint
voyaging towards a very modern end

la spezia curved towards the bay of poets
like a mechanical umbrella
a radiative forcing to an identikit of paradise

if the ascent of selfishness springs
from wonder choking with passion

then the romance of not being lost lays its hand
on your arm and offers you a soothing castle?

come along now!

you won't make yourself a bit more real
by crying over modernity

sea level rise
is a species of futurism
compressing space and time
into a tall red temperature

but there won't be a fountain
standing before i buy some water from
the shop with the self-satisfied smile

if nothing is coming then you must return
immediately with your hands filled up with things

elsewhere is always on the shelf above
the one you're looking at

(michelangelo's adam is an obscene version
of what's to be expected)



i'd already come to think of the sky
as a kind of miracle

the uppermost limit
of our architecture
the pinnacle of rise

*everything was crooked
but we did as best we could*

3.9 degrees of change suspended us

to the beginning of the line

so the leaning tower of pisa
had not blown away

may i put your tourists a bit more straight for you?
which miracle would you choose?

Greenland should have a lady's maid.
I'd like to get beyond the inevitability of pleasure.
Antarctic ice flow is hired at the rate of very good jam.

the effect of living simultaneously makes one
a little giddy at first
bearing in mind the hundred year
linear trajectory of talking demurely

what kinds of things do i remember best?
things that happened and some aspects of extremes



so if the law of sheep is the ultimate restraint
holding humankind in place on earth

then no matter how i rubbed my eyes
i could make no more of gravity than the sky's the limit

galileo dropped two pigeons:
neither pigeon died

there is something very queer about laughing
during climate change

the joke gets stuck in it
and won't come out no matter how you try



but where is tuscan?

en route i said

wishing i could manage to be glad

what if it were overrun

by tourists like a storm?

yet tuscan took the measure of my eyes

scale and timing captured

in a sudden transport of delight

the rolling hills were barely capable

of so little as gliding on

light chiselled into ridges

some feudal villages projected over hilltops

i had never

quite believed

in this much beauty

all at once

but i'll never forget the shrieking battery

of chickens and the sudden smell of terror that hung

above the terracotta ribbon of the winding tuscan road

i said

i did not put them there and i cannot take them away

i had come this far

and it was this early

and if i thought about the world enough i might not cry



so what mattered if san gimignano gained

its beauty at the moment that it changed its mind?

the most scenic temperature of a jagged

silhouetted skyline is not hurt so carry on cutting

now what do you want to buy?

queuing is a means of saving money

scarcity – a museum of the impact

of the local population's average height

*but where is george?
has anybody seen george?*

george was everywhere
his calf-length confidence pulled up
to the bottom of his chino shorts

getting larger and larger
and more and more human
according to the best estimate
of the likely ranges of
it surely can't be anybody else

the overall ethos of my journey is populated
with something not at all like conversation

i enjoyed san gimignano and its crooked hands
curative powers are so much
prettier than many people

the more you walk towards renaissance arches
the farther that the guidebook view recedes



it's my turn to choose a subject
so here's a question for you

how does a bird regain its balance
when it takes a corner fast
and loses grip upon the air?
wrong! if i'd meant that i'd have said it

i fell as far as i beg your pardon
but twice as quick

at least you're here to sand the edges
from my dented pride

if only i knew which was neck
and which was waist
have you noticed anything unusual?

(if nature had two eyes
and a nose in the middle
and a mouth right under
that would be some help
but it wouldn't *look* so nice)

the impacts of a subject will be realised if you cross
your knees and clasp your hands around them

the uncomfortable stories of our age can't help
but growing older



there was no ideal way to navigate
siena's labyrinthine red-brick streets
and nothing could steal the bareback horse race
from the scalloped square

but where certainty is conservative
then capitalism will try and price
the warming air

to stabilise the atmosphere is to pay it extra
the question is, which gas is to be master?

the question's whether gases can ever mean
such different things

the duomo's penitential labyrinth
is a polychromic adaptive capacity

to escape is to go round and round
and to smile is to find holes in things

(god i wasn't sure about
perhaps it's short for home
meaning we'd lost our way you know)

who's been repeating all this hard stuff to you?

I read about the sun in a book.

The air is a knock-down argument.
I can even draw you storms that look like statues.



i never wished to conclude my flight
through tuscan

le crete senesi was a poor bleak field
of hills once under water

such sub-optimal delight yet cultivated
with a sharper eye than most

utopias come in twos and threes
umbria is calling me and i must go

but thank you for this environment
of pen and ink and calcium carbonate
re-imposing itself

the tuscan hills are naked
insensible to having been put out
the minimalist interjections of a temper



in retrospect
i've often wondered
if we meant to set the sky on fire

the lago trasimeno sun became
more extraordinary with every moment

even the endorheic lake felt faint

see a young boy
mirroring
a heron fishing?

the kindly man who spoke to me
had a white beard
and a fat belly
but no horn to distinguish him from a unicorn

are you not lonely?

i looked around and nodded

only when i'm not alone

a day to come and another one to go
the heron and the boy continued fishing
the greenhouse gases turned my gaze to stone

the orange black and purple of the sunset
were getting on together like a house on fire

when i deposited the day into the lake
i was very much surprised it took it
quite so quietly

*now you understand the way things
happen here why don't you scream?*

i held my hands to my ears before
the increase had already been and gone

what would be the use of having it all over?



i'd come to think the bicycle
a work of evolutionary genius

the only problems with denaturing
were the wheels
the head was high enough already

invention has a taste
of morning cappuccino and chocolate cake
the great art is to keep your balance

(if cappuccinos were created
for our own amusement then
i really ought to listen to them)

*if you want to get to somewhere else
then you must eat more cake and
double up on coffee*

i sat down on the saddle and said thank you
rather sadly



there had already been so many views
and my eyes kept getting loaded

umbria was a landscape without corners

wooded hillsides
angled ridges
hilltop villages

carving out our share of climate
as a means of lifting off the surface of the earth

just look at all those medieval houses
falling over

*but there cannot be a use for waterfalls
whose water's fallen out*

if you believe in landscapes they'll believe in you
is this not a bargain?

no! cried a woman
stop! exclaimed a man

rushing over before i took
the highway to the sun

*roads join on
as large as life and twice as natural*

they won the conversation easily

i couldn't get a word in
to avoid the quarrel going on



so i flew above the world
from the perspective of the trees

DUX read the plantation
on mount janus
looking that way this way that

*if diversity is to be your light
then realign it, come!*

i was just coming to that
now follow me

*if democracy is very long
then liberty is tired*

*poetry is beautiful in theory
(in practice it is fallacy)*

glacier run-off trickled from
the slopes of twenty million
years of mountain

i was more frightened for my own
anxiety than for the mountains

*the future faces forwards to the light
the past quite dazzled me with shadows*

the abruzzan mountains listened in a half-dream
to the melancholy music but the tune was not
its own invention

not a single species
not a single mussolini
not a single chamois mattered in the slightest



and while i'm on the theme of death
the toll of l'aquila was distributed
unevenly

the bleak mall didn't care one
bit for the homeless man who barely dared
to beg and the eagles had deserted us

life goes on from day to day with
suspicious regard

what d'you think you're doing here?

(getting a little fatter)

an earthquake's
no design of governance
to keep the world from rust

even high adaptive worlds
are vulnerable

a natural disaster
is both everything and nothing
about the shimmering prosecco bar
that's thriving in the broken square

the soldiers turned their guns towards
me and instructed me to leave

pride has been known to refuse assistance
but if everyone obeyed that rule

*thank you for coming all this way
you have not cried as much as i expected*

i'd never seen shame manifest itself
with such a frown



that night there was no place to stay
where i was no guest

italy is a difficult temper mitigated

only by a little kindness

it means so well
but has been known to say
such foolish things

but not even the price of carbon
could account for this man's loss in temper

why pursue an argument
when you are found fault with all the time?

*where have you come from?
that's impossible!
where do you think you're going?
wrong!
what on earth are you doing out here alone?*

his questions cut as deep into
my confidence as the fast-approaching night

there were many enemies after me no doubt
the world is full of them
no use trying to help me

if i'm not fully woman
and not fully servant
then wherever the moment took me
and as fast as possible?

courage is a constraint
as much as an opportunity

i thought
i came to punish the fish but i can barely even
remember my own name



always getting closer to the end
that was no end and cutting cutting

my sweat had begun to cut into my skin

a deciduous gorge of transport
curved around the foothills to the sea

if the micro wind turbines had spoken
what might they have said?

*building codes / certification
/ are you deaf?*

the stop signs had been eaten
by fossil fuels and snails

a young boy straddled his mother's moped
with an upraised finger and a sneer

*but it isn't etiquette to mitigate anyone
you've not been introduced to yet*

the air cut up the space
beneath the motorway with a blade of warm sea wind



i refused an introduction to the adriatic
or i'd never get the chance to swim

i ran into the water without looking
blending into the surface of a net

the youthful lifeguard didn't pause from staring –
but then sex fits nicely on a gutting table

*where did you say you'd come from
and carrying all that muscle?*

i tried to submit to mitigation
with good grace but it did *push* so

*it surely isn't possible that womankind
has come that far!*

every poem is a variation
on the exploited shortages of fish in some way
you cannot disagree with that



further down the coast some stilted fishing
platforms – trabocco – hemmed the adriatic sea

flotsam and jetsam
acquiring the shape
of prawns
sitting up a bit more stiffly

and curtseying while thinking

(it saves time remember)

cars sold vulnerabilities from open boots

*honesty won't be long
you can make believe another fifteen hundred years*

what's the matter with the future?

it had once again been flooding pakistan

one good pull and the environment
comes crashing down together in a heap of lies



in the dawn ferment
everything including the sea was turned
the other way

waves smashed against the sky like winter
there was evidence of the increasing

vulnerability of minority groups like the verge bamboo

it took the wind to upturn everything i knew
balance was no longer even true
of the ballast of books

we were flying hand in hand
and the wind was going so fast

i could not travel any faster
though i did not have the breath to say

certainly fast progress is a loss of better
understanding than the one i leave behind

change runs so fast you'll as likely
catch a virus or a temperature

all destinations are too near or far
or too off-route or too against the wind
and the italian cyclists were simply far too patronising

if they ask me if i liked
my stay i will say i liked it well enough

only it was so windy
and so hot
and the white horses
and white elephants did tease so

i elevated both my wings and curtsied coughed
then sat upon the tails of arrogance and pride
until both turned to water



but you will never overcome
the beauty of change

let us not pretend it ever
might be otherwise

the puglian sky was bigger
than my imagination
and decorated with cotton wool puffs made of paper

the gargano peninsula grew mountains
the polytunnels were spreading
and the wind turbines continued making wind

the marginal smallholdings had lost ground
and the esso garage was like an advert pulled into
the far horizon

the 1950s bar was located in an unshaded area
of the graph where the end of nowhere is a baseline
scenario characterised by a chained-up rabid dog

it had big eyes but it did
not seem a bit frightened

i identified three reasons for concern:

my exhaustion had crept up on me with a sweet voice /
the dog was eating metal /
i wish i knew nothing just now

the more precise identification
of the circumstances that make things vulnerable

the tavoliere landscape had already opened
up around me and was running out of water

a patchworkquilt of goats and mozzarella buffalo
and stubbled wheat and putrefacting fruit

i had run against the world before i could begin to stop myself



we paused
we breathed

we took in a load of oxygen
and inhaled it from a site located near the adriatic sea

giuseppe wasn't sure about the internet

though he did know of a bar

the bar-dog raised one eye and said

*life would have been far preferable
without the music from the fruit machine
but you must sit in both if you buy two*

he pointed at the empty chairs around
the out-of-season bar

to search for the internet
is to underestimate the clouds' capacity for useless
information / gossip / facts:

*the messenger's in prison being punished and
the trial of warming will begin next wednesday
and the crime comes last of all!*

the hangover from summer is crooked
and all over pins
may i put your decade a little straighter for you?

what was most provoking was the wifi
equilibrium travelling up and out the ceiling



the wind kept sweeping us due south
everything became a target
from the moment i approached

swathes of undrained swamp
orthogonal embankments
channelled basins

six million tons of salt
is harvested per year
but where are all the birds?

the sky was spacious
i failed to see flamingos
even though i really tried

the smallholdings had received
a delivery of tubing (there is something
very odd about potatoes)

these didn't sound like thoughts that needed

any answer so i pulled away said nothing

even real salt only lasts a very little while
and these being dreamsalts melted quickly
just like snow



so the macro-economic costs of adaptation
rise with the stringency of facing
backwards forwards simultaneously?

(i'd rather see that done on paper)

the SUN FUN MALIBU beach park
looked a little queer whichever way i held it up
but trani had been done alright

the cobbled jewish quarter led
towards the medieval port where some old men
sat outside a café playing cards

(culture is catastrophic to outsiders
but what does impenetrability mean?)

the local boys had the eyes of gangsters
blocking up the wrong gate out of town

beyond bari lay a semi-rural idyll
formed of olive trees and peach and almond groves

i found the local prostitutes – sitting reading

*where do you want to be
and can i really help you?*

it is very likely
that the hand crooked in her waist
was for the bandersnatch

hot days and nights and passing cars
you don't spell prostitute with a double o

i made a memorandum
of her directions
to the motorway

smiled (no longer feeling lost)
and headed elsewhere



sleep won't fall into your hands
you must get it for yourself

the world is very long and dark towards the end
and the sky receded the closer that i came

hope is a memory that works both ways
self-belief remembers things before
they happen and it's a sorry melancholia that operates backwards

(i'm becoming harsh on us but perhaps that's part of it)



trulli are the shape of ancient breasts (for living in)
some are whitewashed some not
but all of them were built from limestone and wax

to wander is a loss of tourists
to be practical is a severe tone
to be playful is to loll about town like that

i stood before an arched doorway marked
ICARUS in the red and yellow colours of the sun

to answer the door?
what's it been asking of?

advances show that discernible human
influences extend beyond average temperature
since conquered by any empire worth their salt

The Ostrogoths know very well that they're not real.
The Byzantine empire contributed to the sea.

The Saracens began to cry.

The Bourbons seemed so ridiculous.
I hope you don't suppose those real biscuits?

monocrop plantations lined the verge-side
all the way into brindisi

salentese ncuria is resistance to new ideas
caught up in the slatted netting curtains

please tell me your name and your business

my name is icarus but whatever does it mean?



can you take flight
from a state
of already having long since
taken flight?

was everything about to cut yet hotter?

the embarkation zone looked sulky
the scenarios report accelerated
up the ferry planks onboard

where do you want me?
oh anywhere i really do not care

a bit experimental one man said
too mainstream said another
adjusting the angle of his hands upon
his jutting hips

an experiment in a fossil fuel free for all
watch the aeroplanes take off into the sunset

there was something
not quite right

if temperatures are relative to burning wings
then what do you have to say about grace?

take care of yourself the circulation said
something's about to happen

and then all sorts of things
began to happen in a moment



an unknown language raised the atmosphere
above the table

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
and WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

the bulgarian man's questions grew up to the ceiling
and the group's hilarity fitted wings

my name was the cause of all the mischief:

my name is icarus i replied
increasing the fraction of emissions
with a smile

your name is what?
my name is lucy i replied

it was hard to keep my place while pushed so
and their laughter might have squeezed me flat

here i am i thought
propping myself upon one elbow
with not a moment to be gained

tears are a salty acid
pulling at your emotions with both eyes

a man looked through my bags as if my gender
were an analytic pattern of the trends of change

i shook my wings back and forwards

with all my remaining might

my identity made no resistance

the colours of the sun grew smaller

and the heat grew green and black

the poleward shifts of the weather glass

become an ikarian dream

likely decreases / over / past / beyond

a keeping up of conversation

a geographical pattern of surface

warming breaking up the map

it is more than likely that

the sky had turned away its head at the point of impact



Part 5: The Fallen



i awake between the universe
i come alive

*come and meet my invitation
to become!*

practising a dance-like form
of *opening* of my body as if my mind
depends on it

to flourish is a mutual riff on time
the future folding in upon the past
becomes the present

now

where the objectivity of emergence
is a form of change

a bringing forth the halfway
of the music

to be alive
is a possibility of ethics

another cut
another time

and this makes all the differential difference

Where Icarus fell, the Ionian sky was blue and flawless. It was still early, not yet seven in the morning, but the sun was already shining. The world moved around Icarus, but she heard nothing, saw little. She felt like a forgotten heroine of an unwatched silent film: holding her head in her hands where the weather glass had ejected her, re-materialised on the concrete steps of Igoumenitsa ferry terminal. How had Alice been so calm, so nonchalant,



upon returning through the looking glass, as if nothing much had happened, and life could carry on like nothing much had changed? But weather glass world had been no dream to be shaken out of; it had been as real as her imagination, had *really* been for real! Extraordinarily so! Didn't she have the photographic evidence? Otherwise would Icarus have looked this bushwhacked – as if she'd been tumbled through cumulus, or seaweed, or the mesh of the world's accumulated weather? As if she were a carbon cut-out of herself, cut to the ragged angles of her participation in climate change? Her curly blonde hair resembled a bird's nest, she was as deeply tanned and lithe as a castaway, and her clothes were well-worn, in places even torn. If only carbon cut-outs might have felt this much! You could have sliced Icarus's emotions from around her with a sharp enough knife, in equal chunks of raw emotion and an undeniable sense of hope. If Icarus had burst into tears she wouldn't have known how to separate the happy tears from the sad!

'You ok, Icarus?' Wings asked. 'You haven't stopped shaking.'

Icarus half smiled. She was still Icarus, and alive with it, but she remained to be convinced she was ok. If she was trembling it was because the ground had shifted beneath her feet. Far from discovering a solution to climate change, her journey through the weather glass had made her feel *dependent* upon it, as if this quest had defined who she'd become, while simultaneously climate change and the quest had partway become her.

'Indeed!' W now explained. 'As weather glass world demonstrated, far from the world being composed of discrete entities all that really exists is a mesh of inter-relationships from which we differentially emerge. Weather glass world was a knockdown argument for dualistic thinking. As quantum physics has shown, *we are a part of that nature which we seek to understand...* or so some Bohr or other once said.'

'Oh,' Icarus replied, in the authoritative tone of one who would be glad if her bicycle didn't bring up quantum physics at this *before-coffee* time of the morning. Icarus had in fact come two thousand miles with science since Salford, and of course every single bit of science she'd heard along the way had been about the weather in some way. 'Do you know why they're so fond of the weather around here?' she asked W, with a vague sweep of the hand intended to take in the entirety of humanity.

'Probably because it's nearly always sunny,' W replied.

whether weather the whether weather



Icarus turned to watch a lorry from the Hellenic Environment Centre refuel the Ionian Sky, before staring into space for an extended period, enjoying the meaningless vacancy for as long as she could before W urged her on.

‘You finished yet? It’s already four weeks since our quest began. Two-hundred-and-twenty bicycle years and almost two-million human years since time began, but closer to being out of time entirely, and passing.’

Icarus gave W’s handlebars a gentle squeeze and smiled – one of her sadder, upside-down smiles. ‘Far from it, W, I fear we haven’t yet begun.’ Nonetheless, she gathered her limbs together:

*your foot bone connected to your whistle bone,
your whistle bone connected to your climate bone,
your climate bone connected to your bicycle bone,
your bicycle bone connected to your hip bone...*

At least she was still a woman: to have radically complicated her own variant on hybridity would have confused everything right then.

‘Come on! We’re never going to rebuild climate change in time for Athens at this rate!’

Icarus grinned, levered W and his panniers off the concourse and pushed him into the terminal. In weather glass world, time had proven both flexible and circumstantial, far removed from modernity’s linear understanding of it. According to the weather glass clock there was always time for a morning cappuccino and a biscuit.

Inside, Icarus settled into a plastic chair, blew into her coffee, and wrapped a jersey around her shoulders to guard against the over-enthusiastic air-conditioning. It was hard to give

weather glass world credence in retrospect. The flight had been pure adrenaline, the experience of her life, a cultural and aesthetic spectacle! There had been nothing quite like the cyclists taking over the Sunday morning skies. There had been nothing better than allowing the weather to sweep her south along the Aegean coast, at the speed of the gale. There had been an abundance of coffee and cake, and she'd believed in the unicorn and he'd believed in her, and that had been a bargain! She'd believed in climate change and it had believed in her, and that had made all the difference! If Icarus had chosen a landscape it might have been like Tuscany: you could actually see the cuts and angles in the land, where humanity had inscribed meaning from it –



– a shifting microcosm of the world, constantly being re-patterned, and her participating in the process as she went! Yes, Icarus had rewritten, and was still rewriting, her fate, no matter whether it was the *kind* of rewriting Zeus desired. There was no fixed identity called Icarus nor a stable fate, just a flexible story and her memories, there for the rearranging. And Zeus could frankly sod his desires if they were contrary to whom she had become. Who else could she possibly be? What was she trying to prove? She was never was going to have been an Anglo Saxon messenger for Zeus's whims.

If only the whole experience had been less *personal*!

If only the world had applied the weather glass in more open-ended, flexible ways!

If only the rest of humankind had travelled through the weather glass with her, rather than objectifying her from beyond. It was all very well participating in weather glass world, but at what price the traveller in a world that otherwise remained unchanged?

Icarus felt not only cut-out, but cut-up, where the world's conjoined hubris and teleological ambitions and machismo and capitalist greed and fear of apocalypse had self-harmed upon her. Above all, what Icarus would never forget about weather glass world was the behaviour of its men: exposing themselves at traffic lights, stalking her, shouting at her for cycling through their country alone, refusing to believe the nature of her quest, interrogating her gender! On the ferry a neighbour had reassured her 'it was ok,' the men had 'meant no harm.' Pray tell her which part of *that* interrogation had been ok? Did they think her identity would be written on her

underwear? And to top it all off, if, as she had come to conclude, she *was* the person who emerged from her relationships, then this harassment had become a part of her!

‘So are we travelling back through the weather glass to Athens?’ W interrupted, seeing Icarus fade with every sip of coffee.

Icarus paused, and looked into space again for a few moments, before shaking her head. Weather glass world had been like *inhabiting* the state of climate change – a utopian, temporary state – which she now preferred to negotiate. ‘I’m too tired W. Let’s just pretend?’ Nonetheless she filled the weather glass and watched the water settle low in the spout. Fair weather. The most superficial type of reading of all – but she’d take that all the way to Athens if she could! Finally Icarus picked up *Through the Looking Glass* and read its final page as if it might possess some clue as to where to go from here. ‘Now, W,’ she began, ‘let’s consider who it was who dreamed it all...?’ That was a multi-choice question if there ever was one.



It was already eight o’clock when they set off, seven o’clock Italian time, and the coastline was already mountainous. Icarus struggled up the first headland, but the view from the top took her breath away. Helios’s morning rays had carved grooves in the landscape north towards Albania, while boats scuttled back and forth between the mainland, the breasts of Corfu, and beyond. And despite everything that had happened lately, when Icarus rolled W world-wearily off the headland’s lip there was no denying the feeling of warm wind in her hair, nor the poise of the heron standing thigh deep in water, nor the taste of the salty blue sky on her lips and a certain lightness in her limbs. There was no denying the possibility of the world and the unending creativity of its processes of change. She was so tired it was almost as if she was floating.

Today’s cycle took them through the Epirus region of Greece, one of the country’s poorest areas: home to partisan rebels during the German occupation and ostracised by the Greek government ever since for their communist sympathies. ‘Revolutionaries. Your kind of people, W,’ Icarus said, winking. These days Epirus was an easygoing revolutionary backwater given over to low key tourism. Icarus already felt less hassled. The lad unloading nectarines into a village shop moved W gently from his way, and the Greek man with the handlebar moustache

happily directed Icarus towards the 'difficult way' along the coast road, if that was how her stupidity chose to go. Icarus barely made it ten metres up the track before W's wheels sank into the sand, and she returned to the main road, the 'easy way':

continuing is slipperiest
content sidling east

thirty years of non-existent past
flying past the window just like history

the weather was prone to change

coldness
celsius

or walking upon the unforgiving
surface of the clouds

the ceilometer proved insensitive to our failures
in our repeated quest for sustained fleeing /
otherwise known as flight

Icarus was already dreaming of stopping off early and spending the day sleeping beneath the nearest available parasol on one of any number of sandy coves, but no matter how sleep-deprived she was, there was still a conference to reach, and she could do with being fifty miles closer. They had made up time through the weather glass but there was still a long way to go, and Icarus's route decision had just made it even further. They weren't heading straight across the Pindhos mountains. One of the two roads across the mountains was infamously treacherous, even in a car. The second was a dirt track for fifty miles through snake and bear-infested backcountry. But neither were they travelling the boring, obvious route to the south of the mountains, along which accommodation options became increasingly limited. Over the next few days they were going island hopping – Lefkada, Kefalonia, and then across the breadth of the Peloponnese peninsula – just because she could!

'But do we have time?'

Icarus shrugged her shoulders. She was even unsure what this question even meant any longer.

Everyone had once had a hold on the next town of Parga: the Venetians, Napoleon, the Russians, the Brits, who had sold the town to the barbaric rule of Ali Pasha in the early nineteenth century, and now tourism. Yet the concrete developments didn't reach far up the hillside, and the town retained some charm with its red-tiled villas gathered around a turquoise cove and a small, commercially operative fishing harbour. But for Icarus the timing couldn't have been worse. Signs for rooms to rent – DOMATIA – were everywhere, and who could blame the hotel tous interpreting her horizontal lunch as an *advanced* stage of fatigue. Meanwhile if it hadn't been for the stubborn woman with arthritic fingers in the campsite at the

far end of town, Icarus would undoubtedly have stayed. 'You can camp there!' arthritic finger insisted, pointing to a space between a coachload of German teenagers and the toilet block, in the full glare of the sun.

In the circumstances, Icarus could have done without the mountainous headlands that extended due south, and the heat, and the increasingly evident fact that she'd only had two hours of disturbed sleep.

'I've seen mountains compared with which these are Everests!' W exclaimed.

Up a one hundred metre headland, down. Up a two hundred metre headland, down. Icarus would happily have seen the Greek coastline ironed flat by the time they reached Lake Kalodikeiou. And as if her wish had just come true, the road duly descended from there into the Plain of Fanari, home to Acheron, the temple of necromancy, where Odysseus had conjured Tiresias to guide him safely home.

'But I thought you were frightened of the underworld!' W exclaimed, as Icarus headed in that direction. 'It will be full of bats and murderers! And whoever do you wish to converse with – aren't most of your friends on Planet Zeus immortal?'

'But did I never tell you about my Mum?' Icarus replied, pulling up a short distance away. As Icarus thought back, she could almost understand why Daedalus had acceded to Zeus's demands to deny Naucratis further access to her only son. Zeus was her father's employer, and artistic patron, and if Daedalus had resisted his boss's demands, then he stood to lose everything. But as for Zeus? Times and attitudes had certainly since changed, but even back then, who would it have harmed to allow Icarus access to his Mum, prostitute and addict or not? Was it surprising that Naucratis had drunk a vial of hemlock in reply? Icarus could still picture her clearly on the day he hadn't known would be goodbye – the hauntingly gaunt beauty of her shaded profile against the sun, several wisps of hair escaping their pins, and her linen pelops gathered around her bony chest as she made to leave.

'Perhaps I could just say a quick hello, after all this time. If everything's gone as badly wrong as I fear with Zeus and Daedalus, then she's the only person I have left.' Icarus hadn't *intended* to thereby offend W. 'Well, of course, there's also Lucy and Alice. And...you know how much you've come to mean to me, don't you W?'

W turned sharply away. 'Quick now, Icarus, go!'



Icarus pushed back the creeping ivy and heaved open the heavy wooden door into the labyrinth of tunnels leaving a trail of salt behind her as W had proposed. 'I won't need your hallucinatory lupin seeds,' she told the headless priest guarding the antechamber. 'Hades,' she cried, 'it's Icarus!' And whether or not Hades heard, the door swung open. It was so dark inside that she couldn't even make out the flapping of bats' wings. She sat cross-legged on the stone floor and addressed the void. 'Mum? It's me, Icarus. I've come to say hello.' The chamber echoed for some time with only the sound of Icarus's breathing, but also, finally, if she wasn't mistaken, the gentle lilting tones of the mother she had barely known.

'I hear you Icarus. I'm proud of whom you've become. I'm so pleased you've come to say hello. There are worse things than death, but it does get rather lonely without the occasional visitor. I was hoping you would stop by. Now, come into the light, where I can see you a little better.'

Just at that moment a bulb of glow worms shone a spotlight in the middle of the room.

'Your father's eyes,' Naucrate began. 'But my shape, undoubtedly....'

Icarus waited for Naucrate to pass further comment, but her mother had more urgent, pressing things to say. 'I have been given little time to visit you, but there are three things I must say. First, be on your way, and don't let your doubts defy you. Deliver your ideas to Athens. But secondly, beware. Yours is not the usual nor the easy path; there will be those who will resist you on your way. You will be betrayed...'

Naucrate trailed off, as if she had been about to say something more about this, but thought better of it.

'And finally, Icarus, remember. You are not alone. I know you've had your troubles, but your father is a good man. He will be there for you at your time of need. You must seek your father out ...' As Naucrate had been speaking her voice had become ever fainter as if she were literally fading away, but before her voice trailed off completely, Icarus suddenly felt her presence more strongly than ever. She even swore she felt the press of a woman's lips against her cheek...

Icarus sat very still in the resultant emptiness, for fear of jolting several centuries' worth of tears from her eyes, and flooding the underworld of Greece beyond recognition. Of course, if she was what became of her inter-relationships, then what more important relationships to re-establish than the two most foundational of all. 'I'm sorry, Daedalus,' she began. 'I have not been the best son, but I am changing, and I have changed. I may not be the son you were expecting, and I may not be the scientist you dreamt of. But I have much to offer; I am...I am me, Icarus.'

Before leaving Icarus looked deep into the faceless dark. Climate change was so frequently presented as care for future generations, but like most things, this trip had turned this on its head. Was climate change not located where her and Daedalus created it, and in turn it was making itself in them? If there was anything in an ethic of care, it needed to spread around the earth like a virus, not for the sake of posterity, but for the sake of the immediate soon.



The peninsula south to Preveza was flat and Icarus and W travelled fast. They had already long since passed the road to the alternative route around the Gulf when a large sign announced that the bridge across the estuary ahead was in fact a tunnel – and banned to bicycles.

'What now?'

'We stay here I guess,' Icarus replied, following some small handwritten signs towards a local campsite. 'And worry about *that* tomorrow.'

If only they could have persuaded the campsite manager of this. 'We're closed,' he gestured through the reception glass, before returning to his telephone conversation.

'So, we'll wait right here until he re-opens,' Icarus said to W, with sufficient stubborn resolve to have waited until next season, if necessary. In fact, notwithstanding the manager's preference for telephone conversations to work, the site wasn't *really* closed. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen. The man's guilt finally got the better of him; he ended his call and opened the hatch. 'You are only staying for one night? Then of course we are open!'

'You'd have thought businesses would want custom considering the economic crisis!' W pointed out as Icarus pitched up.

Over the last couple of weeks the impending financial collapse of the whole of Europe, and not least Greece, had competed with the conference for headlines. Already protests had begun in Athens against the proposed austerity measures. *Austerity*, Icarus thought. Let the world economies collapse as far as she was concerned – if only there was some way of preventing the suffering that would presumably accompany such dramatic change...! But that night her weary critique of capitalism got no further. She cooked quickly, and was already unzipping the tent for bed when W caught her sleeve.

'Icarus, remember what you said about being good at bedtime stories. Well, I must say it was rather spooky in the bowels of the Ionian Sky, and I just wondered...'

'Of course. I can always tell a story W. But which story do you want to hear?'

W barely hesitated. 'Do you have one called Icarus Through the Weather Glass? Because I'd like to hear that one most of all.'

Icarus poured W a glass of milk, and smoothed down the sheen of his black paint, before settling back into a storytelling pose. No, she didn't have such a story, but she could always invent one, she supposed:

Once upon a time of Icarus
but there was no time

Once upon another time of Icarus

*

We took the weather of the sky and
we laid it on the colour of our eyes

a young man flew a woman
to the sun

a father lost his warnings
to the angle of the sea

Icarus waited by the water's edge alone

Come Icarus, we said to him, but
it was another Icarus who came

Others might have commented upon
the fullness of the emptiness where

a certain pride had been

you could see it in the altered tone
of the weather of his eyes
so full
so full as a blue blue moon

*

Pronunciation: /'hju:bris/
Etymology: < Greek ὕβρις

Presumption, orig. towards the gods; pride, excessive self-confidence

You said, 'what have you done with my story?'

I had never thought it belonged to you in the first place.

*

Our flight path had become a shifting
wave moving in and out of time like
the fluid progression of the weather

How do you want to be yourself?

There was no beginning beyond
appearances and no apparent end

Our wings were but the tattered
weather of a well-known story

Beginning over again, and elsewhere

When Icarus's alarm rang the following morning, two things were uppermost on her mind: (a) the matter of the tunnel remained unresolved, and (b) if she were responsible for her own part in the world's becoming, then where to begin?

'What a nice day for being good!' she exclaimed, poking her head from the tent, and pointing at the sunshine.

W grunted. 'I think you are over-simplifying, Icarus. But we will see.'

And so they did.

'Are you going to the tunnel?' Icarus asked a Greek man and son, who were brewing some coffee from the tail-gate of their van, hoping for a lift.

'We're going to Igoumenitsa. Why don't you cycle?'

'Excuse me please?' she asked a German family with a large, luxury motorhome.

'What, take you and that, in this? No, I am afraid we have no room at all,' the mother replied.

Icarus felt too shy to interrupt the early morning romancing of a young Greek couple, who would have been most likely of all to take an hour out of their morning to drive Icarus and W to the other side. If only they had stopped kissing! 'Shall we just cycle to the tunnel and see?'

The revolving electronic notice board above the tunnel could not have been less ambiguous: NO BICYCLES, in both Greek and English, in bright red flashing print. Icarus pointed towards the rabbit-hole entrance. 'But there's no-one around. What have we got to lose? And more importantly, think what we have to gain?'

'I thought you didn't like tunnels! Isn't today about being good?'

Icarus already wished she'd never shared that idea with her bicycle. 'But I managed the temple yesterday didn't I? And who's to say this is being bad? Stupid rules are there to be twisted! Why obey the law when we could improve it!'

The sudden appearance of Antony and Cleopatra sealed it. 'Do it,' Cleopatra said. 'You will regret it if you don't.'

'Go,' said the ethereal voice of Antony. 'Do not let the Gulf trap you from your dreams the way that it defeated us. Have courage in your cause. Make haste.' It was on this stretch of water during the Battle of Actium that Cleopatra's fleet had fled from the siege of Octavian, and Antony had abandoned his troops to follow her – a decision that caused the guilt which ruined them both.

The tunnel turned out to be the broadest, best surfaced and lit they had yet cycled, with barely any traffic. 'How about this?' Icarus cried, accelerating into the tunnel's dip. W gave a thumbs up, but their elation was soon cut short: a vehicle had just braked behind them, and the sky of the tunnel had begun flashing orange.

'Oh, oh.'

'They must have seen us on CCTV!'

Over Icarus's shoulder a pick-up truck had mounted the pavement to escort them to the exit, where a far worse fate apparently awaited than being buffeted by passing trucks. The last few hundred metres played out in slow motion. The circle of light beckoned them onwards, up a steady incline and back into the sunshine where the tunnel ogre drew his pick-up truck alongside and rolled down his window.

His face was deeply stubbled, and he was wearing dark shades and an officious tunnel authorities cap. 'IHUVF:K?JB :WTUIOG:WTJ ?TJ,' he shouted. Or else that was what Icarus heard. 'K glajdbyoauiegtylJM dh/adnh.' His stubbled chin trembled frumiously as he first pointed to W, then at the tunnel, then at Icarus, before spreading his palms wide.

'I'm really sorry,' Icarus replied in English.

'BVADUOGrh abjW;QIYBQ:RLHGnvxh?!'

'Yes, I agree, it was wrong of me.' Icarus handed over the British passport she had forged from Lucy's original, but the man just flicked through it, unable to read a word. At least the Mappa Mundi was partially written in Greek script. Icarus pointed to Lefkada, pointed to W, sketched the alternative route north and then *around* the Gulf and spread her palms wide. The detour would have added at least an extra two days.

It was as if a stopper had just been released from the sky, achieving an instantaneous drop in air pressure. The ogre removed his shades and smiled from ear to ear. 'You are going to

Lefkada? I'm from Lefkada,' he indicated, beating his chest. He handed Icarus back her passport before waving them around the back of the nonplussed women at the toll booths. 'Go!'



During Byron's travels he had done much to publicise the plight of the Epirus people against Ali Pasha, before moving on to train Greek troops for the War of Independence in Missolonghi, where he died of malaria. But not before having the foresight to post some graffiti on a signpost along Icarus and W's way:

here we sit in this realm of mud & discord called climate change

The next village of Agios Nikolaos itself looked like it had been washed up on the shore as flotsam and jetsam: rusted cars and tractors were scattered here, fishing cages there. Chickens and entire prefabricated houses had been deposited where the sea had left them during the latest storm, while out in the early morning channel two fishermen harvested fishing net from the sea. It was a peaceful, unintended scene – until W let fly.

'Tell me. What does breaking the law have to do with everything you've come to think? What was respectful, humble, responsible about that?'

Icarus sat down on a fishing pot, as if she had also been washed ashore, and wound a thread of blue rope between her fingers. 'I didn't say I'd be good the way the world wants me to be. And I accept responsibility for what I just did. I'm sorry I upset you, W, and him. It's just not so easy accepting the ways of the world; not when it's cut upon you as much as this. And nothing's going to ever change if I just accept the world the way it is.'

'You could at least *pick* your fights. You just risked *everything* I've discovered! Don't you *want* to get to Athens?'

Icarus raised her eyebrows. 'But of course! Why else do you think I didn't want to take the long way around?' I never said I was an angel. I'm not even semi-mortal any longer, and certainly no God...W...W...what did you just say, W?'

But instead of answering, W had in fact begun *whistling*, in a none-too-subtle parody of Icarus herself:

to the weather glass world it was icarus who said
i've a bicycle in hand
i've the sun on my head

let the weather glass creatures wherever they be
come talk with the climate the greek gods and me

so fill up your stomachs with coffee and cake
and sprinkle the landscape with mountains and lakes

set smiles in the ocean
subject hubris to tax
and do all that you can not to melt just like wax

o weather glass creatures
quothe icarus draw near

'tis an honour to see you
a favour to hear

'tis a privilege high to have dinner and tea
along with the beasts of the land and the sea

then fill up the weather glasses quick as you can
and sprinkle the table with gluttony and spam

place smiles up in heaven and drown pride
in the sea

and welcome good lucifer unto us, you and me

'It was Lucy you said, W, wasn't it? Not Lucifer. A little slip of the tongue. Now do come clean! W? W?'

Icarus suddenly felt sick to the base of her stomach, as if she had fallen off the edge of Planet Zeus for the goodness only knew how many'th time this quest. How hadn't Icarus seen the parallels herself? Lucifer, the angel whom God had cast from heaven for wanting to become a God? Was this what Zeus had been implying when ordering Apollo to push Icarus off the edge of Planet Zeus?

'Of course I said Lucy, so long as you promise me to behave from here on in!'

Icarus groaned.

'In fact, why don't we use Lefkada as a *test site* of your goodness? What better experimental test conditions than an island?'

Indeed, Icarus had begun to wonder over the last couple of days where her alter ego had gone, and when she might reappear. But she hadn't anticipated the reappearance in *quite* this form! Zeus's favourite, most beautiful fallen angel? That was an unfunny joke without compare! Were Icarus's conclusions about climate change simply meeting Zeus's Satanic expectations of her? Were the anticipated consequences of climate change his view of a future hell on earth?

'Eh, Lucy?' Icarus now asked herself, as if there was any remaining way of separating out her alter ego from the Li-car-ice Allsort whom Icarus had become. Far from sharing a body, over the course of the weather glass it was as if their blood had become truly mixed. But Lucy was no Lucifer either! In fact, Icarus could suddenly see quite how much she had misunderstood her alter ego. Lucy the cynical environmental campaigner? Lucifer, the voice of good sense and consequence? How wrong could Icarus have been? Would a cynic have gone to such lengths to work through climate change, albeit in Icarus's story form? All Lucy had wanted was permission to continue, with thoughts about which she'd felt guilty, almost ashamed! What had seemed like good sense and consequence was in fact the self-interest of one who *needed* Icarus to lead Lucy on her way! And no wonder Lucy had leant on Icarus, if her own experience of weather glass world had been comparable! No wonder she had lost the courage to participate in the politics of climate change. No wonder it had come to seem as if she didn't care...Icarus's head felt heavy, congested from the quantity of thinking her head had carried across Europe to here. But one thing was certain, it wasn't only Lucy who had helped Icarus rewrite her fate.

'Icarus, are you in there Icarus?' W asked, still awaiting an answer.

Icarus smiled. She was, she really was. And how could Icarus possibly say no? 'But remember, when I use a word like good, W, it means just what I mean it to mean – no more, no less.'



Stage one of the Lefkada experiment involved a pirate's chandlery.

Earthquakes had spared Lefkada town extensive tourist development, and these days it was mainly given over to the needs of sailors and pirates. Icarus had been hoping to buy a climate jolly roger when she entered a chandlery. It was dark inside, and Icarus couldn't immediately locate the voice that addressed her, but gradually her eyes adjusted. Shackles the size of chimneys hung from the roof, there was a roll of Kevlar long enough to stretch back to Salford, and a dusty prosthetic leg leaning up against a tub of grease. But finally she located the old cobwebbed pirate sitting in a rocking chair, who gestured to Icarus to sit. Icarus shared occasional smiles with him, and the pirate appeared perfectly content to enjoy ten minutes of a woman's silence. Icarus referred to her phrasebook for assistance, but the first phrase in the book was 'help', and the second, 'I'm wounded', neither of which felt appropriate. In the end the pirate refused any money for the flag, but he did accept the remainder of Icarus's hourglass sand, which he threw over his right shoulder into the void.

Outside again Icarus found an open-air café further down the quay. ‘A pint of iced coffee made with condensed milk and an extra large pain au chocolat,’ she ordered from the waitress. ‘And the same for him.’

The waitress looked at W and raised one eyebrow. ‘Oh, I understand entirely.’

The answer to the question of climate change
was yes – but you preferred cake.
On some level cake was always the answer.

Stage two of the experiment was Lefkada’s interior. Everything remained small scale: the single tiny tractor, miniature boxed houses, patches of smallholdings, and the characteristic white stone walls which animals were using for high jump practice. By the time Icarus and W reached the west coast the road skirted along a terrace, high above the cliffs, allowing only occasional glimpses of the startling white coves below. Everything including the clocks in the local villages were going slow. Exanthia village was stacked precariously on top of itself, as though if you were to take a single building out, the entire village would tumble down the hillside into the sea. Kalimitsi village had already fallen most of the way, and an old graffitied campervan had been deposited by the roadside ready for anyone to push.

‘Dare you!’ W tested Icarus.

Icarus resisted the urge.



Icarus at least had a lot of experience of stage three of the experiment: where they’d sleep that night. The plan had been to catch a ferry to Fiskardo on Kefalonia, and then cycle to a campsite, a couple of hours further south, but this wasn’t accounting for ferry times, fish restaurants, and the charm of Vassiliki village! Windsurfers and catamarans whipped around the bay, taking advantage of the famous afternoon wind known locally as Eric, which today was as strong as the undefinable meat soup Icarus had sampled in a tavern in the hills. Goat? Pig? Chicken? Equally as sunbleached individuals as Icarus sauntered around the bay on equally battered bikes, while at the far end of the village some street vendors were selling home-made jewellery and restaurant waiters competed over the prize of a cyclist’s appetite.



‘I feel for the first time in weeks that we fit in!’ Icarus exclaimed.

‘Me too! But come *on*. Look, the ferry is already here!’

Icarus and W scattered restaurant chairs and tables in all directions as they rushed to the pier, but they might not have bothered. 'What, that?' Icarus pointed at the blue lettering, mocking its own pretensions of EXPRESS. The times of the actual ferries were printed on the wooden ticket office. 'We've already missed the morning and the lunchtime ones,' Icarus said, 'and we'll never make it to the campsite before dark if we leave at 6pm!'

'I just *knew* it.' But W had no choice but to allow Icarus's smile to lead him back to a café, then the campsite, and then a bar, and later dinner. 'Do we really have time for this?'

Icarus was far from sure of that. In fact, if they didn't speed up they were going to have to cycle the last fifty kilometres on the actual morning of the conference. But then there was fish, fish, and yet more fish. 'So were my experiments a success today, W? she asked, grinning as wickedly as Lucifer as she picked some bones from her teeth.

'Not every experiment can be a 100% success first time around. This may take some time.'

When Icarus curled up in her sleeping bag that night she felt as if, far from nearing the end of the quest, she kept finding new beginnings. And as for being good? Yes, she'd approach the world alive to its possibilities; yes, she would take responsibility for her own inevitable entanglements with the world; yes, she would improvise a way forward as best as she could from here; yes, she'd make all manner of mistakes along the way. No; she couldn't promise that others would agree with her definition of good, but yes, hell yes, that fish tonight had tasted good.



It was only right that some weather would soon arrive for Icarus to test her ideas out upon. 'I wondered what that noise was!' she exclaimed when she realised that stray cats and dogs had been falling from the sky onto her tent roof all night long like heavy rain. And no matter how Icarus tried, she couldn't shift her engrained negativity towards the prospect of getting very very wet. It would be sunny yesterday, and sunny tomorrow, but never sunny today?

'But there's no solving the weather,' W said, with a poker face. 'Because what would we solve it to? There's no such thing as balance or harmony. Chaos more accurately represents the climate's state of change.'

Icarus almost blew her nose off with her snort of disbelief! How could W perform *such* a volte face with such heedless grace? 'Isn't that what I've been saying all along?'

'Far from it, Icarus. Previously you had undefended theses which I put to the weather glass test. The challenge is now viewing technology in this light, cognisant of its complex inter-relational properties. And is a bicycle revolution not precisely the light carbon-bike-tread technology with which we might proceed?'

Icarus shook her head from side to side. 'Perhaps, W, perhaps.'

According to her experience, climate change in weather glass world had proven unsurprisingly nebulous. Sometimes the weather had smiled with sun, and sometimes it had rained with tears, and the statistical average of both had been in a constant process of circumstantial change. No, it wasn't anything to solve, no matter how much environmentalists continued to demand it, Icarus undoubtedly agreed. No, it couldn't be stabilised, and it said a

lot about humanity that they thought it could. No, it wasn't only a measurable physical reality; no it wasn't just a cultural construct; no, climate change wasn't simply entangled with what the world made of it: it *emerged* from the processes of change! Certainly humanity needed to reconsider their way of life in light of the evidence of climatic change, but this went far deeper than solving it.

'Perhaps we need more climate change not less of it,' Icarus suddenly exclaimed, causing W to cough as if some sand had got stuck in his ball-bearings. 'Let there be a revolution in the climate of opinion in this world!'

'I like that bit about revolutions, Icarus, but aren't you being a little self-righteous?'

Icarus sighed a reluctant agreement, packed W up and made her way out into the rainy day.

The Captain Aristides ferry was a basic creature, if not quite as basic as the EXPRESS boat they left rusting in the harbour. Icarus wrapped up, leaving the musty cabin to brave the deck. Travelling by boat may have been cheating, an impure choice of route. But otherwise was she meant to have swum the English channel, or arrived late by cycling around the Balkans? Impurity was what this quest had come to be about: breaking down boundaries, inhabiting the in-between spaces.

Icarus looked up as the ferry passed Cape Lefkada, where Sappho had reputedly thrown herself off the cliffs for her unrequited love of Phaon, the ferryman. Yet such heterosexual allegations and her suicide had only been temporary affairs. For there she was, silhouetted on the tip of the peninsula, waving to Phaon's brotherly toot of the horn, and crying: 'to Icarus – the eleventh muse of climate change poetry!' Icarus retreated sharply into her collar for fear of any of the other passengers identifying her. But why would they? Icarus looked herself up and down, where she'd come to like the trim athleticism of her curves. Vassiliki had treated her well. She hadn't once been mistaken for a boy, but neither had she been made to feel an inferior woman. She just was. No wonder Sappho liked to hang out hereabouts – Icarus could easily have upped and left her quest right there and been done with it.



Their main challenge that day was beating the weather along the eighty kilometre length of Kefalonia to catch the last ferry to the Peloponnese within the next four hours. The temperature in the pretty arrival port of Fiskardo was far from the usual 28.5 degree September average and Icarus manoeuvred herself into pole position to disembark before the wet chill could get into her bones.

'Have you finally found some urgency, just when you gave your last bit of hourglass sand away?' W asked.

Icarus smiled and began whistling. Urgency was having something that you wanted, needed to say, that didn't make your toes curl in the whistling of it:

so i accepted the sunshine you extended
from your palm

a single bite and suddenly
it was as if no-one knew me from adam

As the road climbed the rain became ever heavier, and the mist enveloped everything. Some local workmen had already gathered beneath the canopy of a tavern as if it was as good an excuse as any for a holiday. But towards the west coast the stream of ferry traffic began to dwindle, and soon Icarus and W were alone: them, the rain, and a landscape which was about to fall off the edges of the earth. To their right, cliffs dropped a thousand feet down to startling white coves and a turquoise sea, while above them the unstable hillside had already begun to deposit mud onto the road. In places the road itself had already fallen away.

'Thank Zeus we didn't try this last night,' Icarus said, blinking back her sense of foreboding. Right then Kefalonia could have just taken her, and who would have known? Earthquake, landslip, gust of wind...yet on this occasion it wasn't the cliffs that Icarus fell from.

'Take it easy,' W cried above the whooshing sound of water – from above, below, within – as the road began to sweep down towards the eastern coast and the rain became as heavy as a waterfall. 'I think my brakes are worn down to the gum.'

It was too late. W's back end skidded from under Icarus as she swept round one especially steep corner, only just regaining balance in time for the next corner where W skidded the other way. BOOM! Icarus entered the village of Agios Effimi on her side.

The postman who had parked up to outwait the storm begun laughing. 'Ha ha ha.'

'He he he,' giggled W.

'Ha ha ha he he he,' cried a man who was digging in the river road for his flip flops.

HA, HE, HA. The raining and the laughter stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

Even after she had picked herself off the ground, Icarus looked all crooked and over pins, but no bones were broken to speak of.

'May I put your helmet a bit more straight for you?' W enquired.

ours was an indivisible kind of wetness
mountains drained of sound:
just shadow firs
and the thick push of mist

the sky threatened to consume the road
but I delivered my message

come!

*we've lost the morning
and we're running out of wind!*

the sea was everywhere
white horses mounting
the cement like cirrus
i could feel my eyes –
i didn't even need to look

Icarus and W saw nothing of Kefalonia's mountains but the glare of Icarus's cyclopic headtorch in the mist, but oh what smells: cypress, eucalyptus, mint, fennel! Icarus floated off her saddle on the pungent waves of the olfactory eden, while W's top tube straightened where it had been slunched. The cars were driving little faster than Icarus was cycling – up up up as far as the ghostly summit buildings ruined by the 1953 earthquake – before they began to finally descend. The only advantage of W's worn-out brakes was unavoidable high speed, or else they would never have made the ferry. When they reached Poros the boat was already boarding, and the ticket office in no rush. Icarus made a dash, pushing W onto the ramp just as it began to rise – shunting bicycle and human passenger ungracefully onboard.

No existing words could have described how Icarus felt as she climbed towards the passenger deck. *Kefaloniaed*. A visceral weather experience of all sensual dimensions involving feeling simultaneously ruined and victorious, exhausted and alive, and very very wet. So this was what the climate was making of her, Icarus thought: a drowned and exhausted rat? Unhelpful as such thoughts were, Icarus couldn't help but dream of a hot shower and an afternoon snooze to help prepare her for the last hour's cycling on the far side, when...Icarus blinked, and looked again. The facilities in the ladies toilets undoubtedly weren't intended for short crossings, but try and stop her now! Hot, strong, heavy. Hot! When Icarus re-emerged from the shower her skin was wrinkled, and when she levered herself onto a reclining seat in warm dry clothes she fell to sleep immediately – the deep, undisturbed repose of one whose experiential climatic averages has just been completely overwhelmed.



The Peloponnese had grown into a peninsula – almost an island – from the leaf of Tweedledum and Tweedledee's mulberry bush. But Kyllini port was far from Icarus's romantic imaginings. Its scrappy beach had been abandoned in the bad weather to dog walkers, while the arcades were doing a good trade; teenagers hung out beneath bus stops eating greasy food from souvlaki-gyros-fries vans ; its stale grease atmosphere even smelt bad, but not as bad as the live chicken lorry Icarus and W trailed south.

'No!' Icarus exclaimed, braking suddenly. The lorry ahead had stopped and the driver had climbed out to snap a chicken's neck, whose resultant corpse he handed over to a happy customer, waiting beside the road. The lorry was going just fast enough that Icarus and W couldn't quite overtake it, but stopped often enough to give them the unfortunate chance to catch back up. Both cyclist and bike were delighted when the villages gave away to a series of self-reliant roadside smallholdings with no use for broken chickens.

When they finally arrived, Camping Palouki's owner was sitting on a stool resting his overworked stomach on his knees. 'So where have you come from today?' The man shook his head slowly and chewed his moustache. 'You will have had plenty of weather. We could see it sitting on the island. It's been sunny here all day.'

The site was set just back from a white sandy beach, with a palm-fringed bar-restaurant serving up a range of local delicacies listed on a blackboard. 'Souvlaki, feta, arrogant fish, a long

cold beer and a sunset.' Such were delights that not even Icarus's offended nose could resist, and she slowly sampled every single one of them.

'So what does arrogant fish actually taste like?' W asked when Icarus returned.

Icarus shrugged her shoulders this way and that. 'Nothing out of the ordinary if I'm perfectly honest, W.'

Easing limbs and languages
around the curve of borders

shifting paper:
printed possibilities

i will have a serving of souvlaki
and some arrogant fish

how much it sets you back
towards

a spine, a line.
Absorbent money.

Over the course of the long distances of Italy, the pain behind Icarus's knee had miraculously eased – as if it had learnt it wasn't going to win that battle of wills. But still, Icarus was never going to make it across the Peloponnese without the recuperative gas of a day off. W, meanwhile, was in even more desperate need of attention. 'Fancy a tune-up?' she asked after breakfast.

'From you?'

'I know, it's not ideal. But I've got to do something about those brakes.'

The look on W's face had nothing approaching the 'ideal' about it, but he knew even better than Icarus quite how bad a state he was in. 'Better two thousand miles late than never.'

In fact there was little Icarus could do with a small multi-tool and her mechanical dyslexia. The brakes were worn down past the rubber, while the front gear cable was snapped to a stub around the mechanism, making adjustment impossible. However, to the best of Icarus's knowledge the clunking of the bottom bracket was frankly irreparable. 'Well that's tidy enough,' Icarus said after a couple of hours of 'tuning', a good deal of which had involved standing with her hands on her hips, or scratching her head. 'Beach time. You coming?'

W stuck out his brake blocks and shook his handlebars. 'Sand gets on my chain and into my sprockets.'

It was Saturday afternoon and the beach was busy: teenagers playing volleyball, children making sandcastles, and all shapes and sizes of adults scattered about the sand. Icarus stripped down to her bikini self-consciously. It was the most she had bared herself all trip, but no-one noticed anything peculiar. In fact, the more Icarus looked around, the more 'normal' her own body appeared. She lay down and pulled pen and paper from her bag.

TRANS – she wrote in big letters. Trans-sexual, trans-gender, trans-climate change, trans-genre. Trans-art, trans-life, trans-performance, trans-her. Trans-fat chance too, presumably, she thought, laughing. Trans-bikini! Part human-part organic, part machine-part nature, part story-part reality, part nothing-part everything, part culture-part chicken or was it really first the egg? Part bicycle certainly, she thought, looking back towards the campsite where W was resting in the shade. He had been a good kind of an egg.

As weather glass world had taught her, she was the enfolding of everything that came before, and all the possibilities that came after. Gender and genre, climate change and 'Man'. If the quest was about breaking down boundaries, she'd take them two by two! What did it matter what body she wore when her mind went on all the same?

When Icarus laid her pen down after an hour of writing, it was to wash an increasingly fluid self in an increasingly fluid sea. Not just climate change not just me. *This* was how far she had travelled from Salford. Not just nowhere not just everywhere. Not just a weather glass.

'I wrote some poems,' she said to W upon her return, handing them over to him to read.

W blinked his headset bolts. 'But they look unfinished?'

'Always,' Icarus replied, smiling.

craving angles
 we found ourselves within
a constant lean of curves

 out of site horizons
 if we only walk a little further
we walked a horse shoe top to bottom
 on its side

 letting luck from left to right
 stabilising openings
 into circles
 tangents
 two degrees

it was a tale of increments

 the concentration of the parts
 of each notation on the page

what then?

 the people kept their heads low
 watched the road and kept on walking

The next morning Icarus began the day by admiring the dawn. She was the only person on the beach apart from a young German woman who had demurely stripped beneath a palm umbrella before running naked into the sea:



The dawn wasn't as impressive as the sunset, Icarus thought. But then why would it be? If she were following the sun across Europe, then she was currently facing the wrong way.



Back at the pitch, all things considered, perhaps it was understandable that Icarus might have confused a visit to Olympus with delusions of Olympianism. 'What do you reckon?' she asked W, flexing her arm and leg muscles once she'd packed up and they were ready to go.

'I think that's a little narcissistic, Icarus.'

Icarus grinned wryly and jumped onboard to get going. Pride, hubris, arrogance, narcissism. They got everywhere in the world, including into *her* to all accounts, no matter how much intellectual resistance she raised. But, you never knew, perhaps she could win the cycle pursuit race humbly. Perhaps she could win the sprint event with respect for the *losing* competitors. Perhaps she could win the road race beautifully – now that would make her proud! *What do you think, Zeus?* Icarus had been so enjoying the last couple of days that she had almost forgotten all about the God of the skies, and barely missed him. Because talking about hubris and pride and arrogance and narcissism...if Icarus possessed these qualities, then in micro quantities compared to *him*! Icarus, the hubristic semi-mortal? Get away! Zeus, the God of the Gods was the King of Hubris!

But why hadn't he descended again to denounce her Lucifer-like ways? Was he still up there looking frumiously down on her? Did he think that her discoveries were in fact rather vorpal, if only he could admit this to Icarus? Indeed, a small part of Icarus still clung to the hope that in the end Zeus would perform a U-turn and sit down and listen to her ideas constructively – talk them through. Were Gods capable of change? But so much had changed since the last time they had spoken, in the Chartreuse. Not least, where Icarus's terror of Zeus had once been, there was now an empty resignation that they were destined to disagree. A sense of 'what would be would be', beyond truly caring, that almost willed his anger on. How bad could the consequences *really* be?

'So are you going to accept Phaeton's challenge of a chariot race to the sun?' W interrupted.

Icarus groaned. Every ancient Greek citizen who visited Olympia was obliged to accept *this* challenge, but... 'I can't believe you still want to fly with me, W, after everything. Don't you want a break?'

'Of course I want to fly again. How else will I ever get my bicycle revolution underway if not leading from the front! But, you're right, maybe not with *you*...although I'm pretty sure we'd win!'

That might be true, Icarus agreed. But up in Planet Zeus, Phaeton had been the resident pyromaniac cum professional fire-raiser, hireable by anyone from surrendering Turkish forces to Nazi collaborators, as the nearby town of Pyrgos had twice found out to its detriment.

'But perhaps a cycle pursuit or something...' Icarus added, belatedly.

W sighed. 'Still trying to prove yourself?'

Icarus shook her head. 'No, W, in fact not at all. What have I got to prove?'

6 degrees of separation

Fact
Faction
Fraction
Friction
Fiction
Fict

Modern Olympia turned out to be a small characterless town, lined with shops selling kitsch and restaurants serving TRADITIONAL GREEK CUISINE. Ancient Olympia was located a short distance beyond town, but neither were the small wooden sheds serving as ticket booths anywhere near as grand as Icarus had imagined.

'But why are we queuing?' W asked. 'Surely there's a back gate for competitors?'

Ahead of Icarus some students were struggling with the jobsworth ticket officer. 'There is no date on this student card,' the gnome said, dismissing the first young man. 'Iceland isn't in the European Union,' he said, dismissing the second.

'I'd like to claim free entry, on account of being Greek,' Icarus next explained, pointing to the sign indicating free entry for: Greek citizens, EU students, and chariot race competitors.

'Passport?' The officious gnome peered over his glasses at Icarus before flicking through the forged passport. 'But this is a British passport, not an Ancient Greek one.'

'Yes, but I forgot to bring my Planet Zeus passport. I didn't know I was coming on this quest, so how could I come prepared? But it's me, Icarus, can't you see?'

'Icarus? You? You're not Greek, and certainly not Icarus. You're a woman. See it says so, on your passport, right here.' The gnome looked Icarus's female form up and down, clearly unimpressed by what he saw, and passed a note to his colleague gnome, who shook his long golden beard and red bobble hat sympathetically. 'Six euros!'

Icarus swallowed her pride, paid up, and had already begun walking towards the entrance when W suddenly exclaimed, 'goodness, Icarus. Do you not realise what has just happened? If *he* didn't let you in on account of not being Icarus, what hope do we have of gaining entry to the Pnyx? Just as I feared. We've cycled all this way for nothing!'

Icarus stopped dead, closed her eyes tight, and crumpled her ticket in her fist. This *bloody* quest! How much further could it possibly obstruct her? Why was she recognised as a woman when it didn't suit her, and mistaken for a boy when it did? She-Icarus, the Satanic mortal off on a two and a half thousand mile cycle to a conference where her views would be denounced anyway in the unlikely chance she got let in?...Unsurprisingly Icarus didn't enjoy Olympia very much: a ruined Temple of Zeus, a shrine to Pelops, the Temple of Hera, the Gymnasium. Rocks, more rocks. Phaeton was waiting for challengers by the gates of the Olympic stadium, the wings of his chariot fired up and ready to race any foolhardy compatriots to the sun. And Kanellos Kanellopoulos, the Greek Olympian who had cycled his plane from Crete to Santorini in Icarus's name was there, standing, waiting, bicycle in hand, about to win the cycle pursuit by competitorless default. W hadn't even been admitted entrance by the security guards at the gate.

Icarus wandered round feeling increasingly lost and confused. What *was* she doing here?

'Could you please take our photograph?' asked a nearby Japanese couple, politely.



In any case, by the time Icarus left Olympia, she didn't feel up to any race. Her forehead was beaded with cold sweat, and her arms were burning with goosebumps. 'Do you think I'm coming down with something, W?'

W shook his head. 'Have you checked the weather glass? I think it's about to come down on us.'

Instead Icarus raised her eyes. The sky on the horizon had turned the colour of petrol and was heading towards them at the speed of jet-injected wings. 'Good Zeus!' she exclaimed, or should it have been Bad Zeus, or...

'This way!' W cried, pointing towards the road – uphill.

Over Icarus's shoulder the storm clouds raced them closer, closer. They were as likely to catch a bandersnatch as outrace Zeus's furies, Icarus thought, pushing hard on the pedals. 'Please Zeus, please. Can't we just talk rather than engaging in shouting matches? Please don't mow me down now when for the first time in my life I've got something I want to share with the world! I'm so close now, *please*, at least for the sake of W, not me!'

Contrariwise, the sky suddenly split with lightning, and was soon followed by deep rumbles of thunder, coming closer, closer. The lactic acid in Icarus's legs screamed STOP! But the storm wasn't for listening. Twenty seconds, ten seconds, five came the thunder. Three, two...

'They say it's advisable to head for shelter at thirty seconds,' W cried.

The only possible nearby shelters were some small spindly trees, which were already bent double in the gusty wind. They passed a village sign as the first raindrops fell. One second. Icarus sprinted to a shop awning, closed for lunch, as Zeus suddenly unplugged the sky. The rain was so heavy it pounded off the road, while the wind threw the tables and chairs of the café opposite into mid-air. If the café hadn't been open, then it was now, and the weather had arrived to demand a feast. And as if Icarus had been in any doubt who was behind the storm, she was in none at all when a single fork of lightning landed at her feet in a huge letter:

Z

'What does that mean?'

Icarus leant back against the cold concrete walls of the shop, her teeth chattering with fever. Didn't he remember? Z: Zeus's signal for the end. The letter he reserved for the times he was so angry he has nothing left to say, leaving Icarus in little doubt. Rewriting her fate? Having something to say? Going seriously off mythological message, to his mind, more like! Icarus turned to face the lightning as Zeus slashed and boomed her sins off the surface of the earth: from carbon dioxide smuggling to breaking the law to – worst of all – disobeying the very parameters of her quest. Coming up with a solution to climate change? She couldn't have come to a conclusion any further from it, Icarus agreed, hunkering down to touch the texture of the burnt letters on her fingertips.

'Don't touch!' Zeus boomed, stinging Icarus's ears as much as the letter singed her fingertips. 'Don't touch until I tell you to!'

'Oh, I'm sorry.'

'And don't speak until you're spoken to!'

Icarus pulled a face as she turned to face the sky, as if Zeus's anger was already becoming rather tiresome. 'But if everybody obeyed that rule!'

'Ridiculous!' Zeus replied. 'So you've given up on climate change, have you, young Icarus? Is that what all this is about?'

'I'm not quite sure I meant...'

'That's what I complain of, Icarus. All the ways you might have meant and never did! As if you had your own system of meaning, all to yourself! So, if you have come to know quite as much about climate change as you proclaim, here's a riddle for you: take the weather from the climate, what remains?'

Icarus sat back and considered. It was almost like their old banter had momentarily resurfaced. 'Well the weather wouldn't remain, of course, if you took it – and the climate wouldn't remain: it would come to bite me – and I'm sure *I* shouldn't remain!'

'Then you think *nothing* would remain?'

'I think that's the answer.'

'Wrong as usual. My temper, Icarus, would still remain!' And on that note Zeus struck a final blade of lightning, and roared a final boom of thunder, and was gone.



An hour later the sky ran out of rain, and Icarus and W pulled back out into the river of a road.

'I'm scared Icarus,' W said after a good spell of silence.

'Oh, don't be scared, W,' Icarus replied. In fact Icarus herself had rarely felt calmer, to the extent that it almost spooked her. 'It's only words, and it's only Zeus. What's the worst that can happen?'

If W hadn't already demonstrated his sizeable imagination, then he did now: beatings with olive branches, and a lifetime of bicycle factory hard labour, and even worse, the dump!

The strangest thing was that the more hideous ends that W began to list off, the less scared Icarus felt. Tired, certainly, and a little awestruck. Nonetheless, she braked, jumped off the saddle and bent down to wrap her arms around her bicycle's angular, aluminium frame. 'We will be ok, W, trust me!'

'You mean, even after that, we're continuing? We're still going to Athens? After all?'

Icarus shrugged her shoulders this way and that. 'What choice do we honestly have?'

'Oh, ok Icarus.'

Icarus and W descended into the Erimanthos valley, where the river was so high it threatened to submerge the bridge. But by the time they'd climbed the next ridge the sun was emerging, and a view of the sparkling Ladonas river valley opened up below them.

'This is the environment *I* would imagine if I had the choice,' W said. The vegetation sparkled, the beehives were the colours of rainbows, while swallows prepared to migrate. Smallholdings were weighed down with vegetables, and cypress trees pricked the skyline. An old man walked slowly down the road towards them with no clear purpose in the world, while the mythical river Ladonas weaved its entangled thread of stories, a good quantity of mud and several tree trunks down the valley towards the distant sea.

Icarus nodded. 'The prettiest landscapes are always the furthest away ones.'

At the head of the valley the road began climbing once more. Icarus wiped her fever off her brow where the extremes of weather had upset her thermostatic balance. 4.30pm, and it had already been an eventful enough day to last a month, a year, a quest – and thirty three kilometres still to go. The road followed the river upstream, higher into the rugged mountains, hugging the sides of a gorge, narrowing to single file in places or pinned by a platform to the rockface when space ran out, and through villages where time had stopped. In Stavrodromi, two aged farmers passed by pulling empty trailers with vacant looking donkeys, men played out a lifetime's game of dominoes on some rickety tables while the old women compared lace patterns and gossiped by their flower baskets on the right.

'Why is everyone so old?' Icarus asked.

'It's because time's so slow and there is so much weather up here. The people age quicker,' W explained, authoritatively.



The light had already begun to fade when their destination of Langadia appeared ahead, tumbling down the hillside like ivy. And upon closer inspection, what had at first looked like giant ants crawling up the ivy turned out to be funeral mourners, toiling their way uphill towards the tolling church.

'I can't interrupt their mourning for something as prosaic as directions to the campsite!' Icarus whispered to W, pointing at the campsite symbol on the map, of which there was little evidence on the ground. 'What now?'

W pointed to another campsite symbol, ten kilometres further on in Karkalou, causing Icarus to groan when she saw the road keep climbing ahead. Meanwhile the light kept fading in inverse proportion to the gradients and Icarus's anxiety and, even when they began to descend, the next valley didn't feel hopeful either.

'We could always camp rough?' Icarus proposed, with a shiver which W's mention of brown bears and wolves didn't ameliorate.

'And do we have anything to eat?'

Icarus nodded, doubtfully. 'We have some nougat.'

Karkalou was mainly a road junction, with a roadsign, a boarded-up shop, a petrol pump and several houses. Within minutes of arriving a small gathering of poverty-stricken locals had gathered to stare.

'Excuse me, do you speak English? Would you tell me the best way out of these mountains, please? It's getting so dark. I need to find a place to spend the night.'

The small group's expressions were unedited, frank. They shuffled from foot to foot, muttered something, and shook their heads in an irritated way as if to say, 'how dare you shame us by suggesting that we didn't understand a word that you just said.'

Icarus took a step back, and held her hands out, palms up. 'Camping?'

This word had at least seemed universal the breadth of Europe, but the shuffling on this occasion represented an even more emphatic, 'no'. One of the men even ran his finger across his throat as if to suggest that the campsite owner had been murdered, or the campsite had, or that if she dared to stay there she would be. Icarus laid her head on her hands as if sleeping, hoping they might offer her a bed for the night, but the group waved her onwards.

'Dimitsana,' they said, the name of the next village due south of here.

Icarus received the news as if a physical blow had been landed on her body. She held her hand out at different angles: flat? Uphill? Downhill? Slightly downhill of flat. At least that.

By the time Icarus reached the hilltop town of Dimitsana it was completely dark, and in the absence of a local cash machine, whether they even had enough money to pay for a room was debatable.

Icarus jumped off W and pushed him up a narrow cobbled alley, following a small handwritten signpost for DOMATIA. The house was smart and modern and its manageress stylish and chic, but she reassured Icarus that the price would be ok, indicated a place on the patio for W, and led Icarus indoors. When she had gone Icarus flopped her fever onto the double bed from where she could read the price list on the back of the door. Icarus let out a small cry. She'd just been charged a quarter of the going rate; she even had enough money left to buy dinner.



So this was Arcadia, Icarus thought, looking over the end of the terrace beyond Dimitsana where Megalopolis's power stations were filling the Loutras valley with cloud. Already the locals' behaviour in a bar that morning had proven rather wild – and spoilt, and unharmonic. Icarus hadn't been about to be served a morning coffee if she waited for eternity! The bar had been already busy for 8am, but the waitresses were attending admirably to the needs of the Greek orthodox priest, the local builder, King Teuthis and a street-cleaner. Dimitsana had been a rebel stronghold during the War of Independence, and there was the rebel leader,

Kolokotronis, playing dominoes with the supposed village intellectual and the supposed village idiot. But Icarus was being ignored, and she had eventually removed herself before the bar's misogyny could become her.

'Et in Arcadia ego,' W said.

'Even in Arcadia, there am I.'

Today they were heading off-route, off-guidebook, and where better to test out off-guidebook ideas about the environment than the original pastoral idyll? The road ahead followed a one thousand metre altitude terrace to scenic Stemnitsa before bearing west, into the pastured wilderness. Arcadia was already feeling magical, in the most timeless of ways. The grass shone with glitter and the blue sky was as smooth as an unbroken china vase. Icarus stopped to photograph some distant sheep dogs that had been left overnight to guard the flock. Yet by the time she had zoomed in close enough, not only had the image become pixellated beyond definition, but the dogs had already left the picture – and were coming after them! Icarus threw her camera back into her bag and began pedalling.

'Oh, oh,' W said, with exaggerated understatement.

Even yesterday when she had fled the storm Icarus hadn't pedalled this hard, and still, with every passing stroke, the barks were getting louder.

'Faster!' W yelled, hopefully.

The anaerobic lactic acid cut through Icarus's quadriceps, while the barking came closer, closer. The bend and dip in the road ahead offered their only chance of escape. Hopefully the dogs would lose interest once they were out of sight because there was no chance of outcycling them.

'Anatolian shepherd dogs,' W suggested. 'Bred to protect flocks from lions, cheetahs and wolves. Although they're a bit big for that. Kangal dogs perhaps – Kangals can run over thirty miles an hour, you know.'

Icarus was quickly learning. The dogs had already reached the road and were now bounding up it towards her. She could feel their bounding paces in the surface, in the beating of her heart, in the throbbing of the blood in her eyes. A right arm severed at the shoulder socket. Another dog's jaw clamped around her neck. Icarus dug in for a final sprint: letting her momentum throw them round the bend, and down, down, down...

Icarus and W didn't dare stop cycling until they were at least a mile away in the shelter of some woods. 'If I have to die, then I'd prefer it didn't happen at the jaws of a rabid dog. Ok?'

If only Arcadia had stopped to listen. They were barely a couple of miles further on when their path was blocked by two huge mastiffs guarding a scrapyard, and currently patrolling the road. Icarus looked at them. The dogs looked at her. 'Quick!' Icarus yelled, hearing a car approach. It was less a case of speed than timing. Icarus swept past the dogs at the precise moment when the Fiat Punto came between them. The dogs launched themselves against the car's body with the most horrific gnashing of jaws against crushed metal. By the time the car was past, Icarus and W were already gone from sight.

i had watched on television
as the oak trees of arcadia burned

the deepest shades of sunset
i had ever seen and the pathos of gesture

hosepipes
buckets
and the sea

you left us twisting skyline vertebrae of trees
these spider webs of diamond dew

At the bottom of the hill lay a wooded river valley. The sun cut through the trees. The ground steamed. The spiders' webs sparkled like bejewelled labyrinths and the thistles cast early morning shadows on the earth. Icarus and W held their breath. The hillside above had been devastated by forest fires where the Greek Peludas had come before them, but the atmospheric magic still felt brittle enough to shatter with a footstep out of place.

'How would you like to be just now, W?'

'I think I'd mainly like to be silent Icarus.'

Time remained indistinct, and it was an uncertain five minutes later when a young man appeared out of thin air, with the hindquarters, legs and horns of a goat.

'Hello,' Pan said, resting a hoof in the nook of his waist.

'Are you going to play a tune for us?' Icarus asked, whistling one of her favourite ditties, hoping the man-creature might join in on the pan-pipes strung around his neck.

But Pan just turned up his nose and began pan-piping some variant on hip-hop. Once Pan's tune was finished he held his hat out for contributions. Icarus didn't hesitate to donate her last coffee money, if it meant that she would *never* have to listen to any pan-pipe hip hop *ever again*.



Tripoli was Arcadia's principal town, and not attractive at first sight, or upon closer inspection. Multi-storey apartment blocks led to a highly congested centre, and the air suspended the type of story molecules most modern towns wished to forget. Greek rebel troops had once massacred twenty thousand Turks before the Turkish forces destroyed the entire Medieval quarter in revenge. But at least modern Tripoli had banks, and a huge Alpha Beta supermarket. Icarus even dared wonder if there might be a bike shop nearby. 'I've seen more bicycles here in twenty minutes than in the rest of Greece.' As it turned out Icarus only needed to walk a shaking W one hundred metres up the next street.

'Yia, sas,' Icarus said to the woman behind the till – the Greek for hello, an apparently uncommon greeting she had found on page thirty eight of her phrasebook. 'Do you speak English?'

Both the woman and her bicycle mechanic husband admitted to speaking 'a little English,' which was more than enough for the mechanic to admonish Icarus. He pointed, tutting, at the brakes. 'There's nothing left of them! How did you ever stop?'

'Well, you see that was the problem. I couldn't!'

While Icarus waited for W to be repaired she browsed the high-tech bicycle gadgets for sale.

'GPS,' the shop assistant clarified, noticing Icarus's furrowed forehead. 'You can use it to plot your route. It saves carrying maps, and prevents you making wrong turns.'

'Oh,' Icarus replied, thinking, but if you don't take any wrong turns, how would you ever learn anything? Could you program in curiosity?

If W's smile was anything to go by on his return, then all had gone well. New brake blocks had been fitted, his bottom bracket had been regreased and was running smoothly, and all twenty one gears were working rather than fourteen or fifteen.

'Where have you come from?' the mechanic asked. 'Where are you going?'

As Icarus explained, the man wiped his filthy hands on his mechanic's apron.

'You are going to the conference?'

Icarus nodded. 'In fact, I'm a delegate!'

The man shook his head. 'You are crazy.'



There was only one last dog to go before Icarus and W left Arcadia for good.

It was one of the hottest days yet, and the sky had turned that exhausted shade of blue reserved for afternoon. The road cut a line across a fertile valley before climbing over the shoulder of the vast bulk of Mount Artemision, whose rugged summit ridge was lined with wind turbines. But more immediately, a huge stray wolf dog was padding possessively along the white dashed lines in the middle of the road ahead. The verge was too rugged to carry W, there were no alternative routes, and it was far too hot to sit and wait, with no shelter.

'How about I try whistling?' Icarus proposed, for want of any better ideas.

'Well, so long as the dog likes your kind of tune.'

Icarus adapted her tune as well as she could to the canine threat:

rotation around a triple axis
maintaining equilibrium
easy as that

it isn't what you say:

our pitching
rolling
yawing

in relation to the earth

driving chain-drive diamonds
to the sky

banking the angles

of cumulus as a pitch on sun

we talk of longitude
lean into it

a side-slippage near zero
a wing camber of ways to say

the earth was smaller blue
at an altitude of airlessness
a brake upon infinity

please take this singe of muslin wings
spruce wood spokes which burn
at boiling point

And in fact it must have been the type of tune which the hippy hobo dog liked best. He didn't even break his stride as Icarus freewheeled past, just lazily rotated his head to check them out, nodded casually, as if to say 'hey dudes,' and kept on lolloping.

Icarus and W climbed up to the Kolosourti pass where the view opened out on the Argolikos gulf – the sea on the far side of the peninsula causing Icarus to cry out: 'we're going to make it! We're really going to make it to Athens.'



Having taken the hairpin bends of the descent at the high speed confidence of new brakes, not even the fact that the campsite in Myli was another figment of the Mappa Mundi's imagination could dent Icarus's smile. Right then she wasn't even bothered by the multi-headed Hydra that leapt out of the verge near the dried-out shores of Lake Lerna to attack her. 'Oh, away with you!' she said, flapping away its many poisonous heads as if it were a gnat.

If Arcadia had hardly been a pastoral idyll, then on first appearances, Ancient Greece didn't look very ancient either. The site of Argos hid on the horizon behind a modern façade of petrol stations, advertising hoardings, telegraph wires, and rush hour traffic. And the architecture of the modern village of Mycenae was characterless, even if its ramshackle campsite owner wasn't.

'Welcome, you can pitch anywhere,' the woman said, bursting from thin air like a genie and extending a toothless smile. She was wearing seven scarves and eleven skirts, and was still shivering as if it were the depths of winter. The site, meanwhile, was basic, the toilet block an exercise in kitsch, and the showers lukewarm. Yet the generously spaced pitches were shaded, separated by narrow benches to eat dinner from, and later that evening the woman's husband strung up a line of lights around her pitch to enable Icarus to route-plan beyond dark.

'Do you know what tomorrow is?' Icarus barely dared to whisper to W through the canvas
once she'd snuggled up to sleep.

when wireless forms connect with smoky tops
then this would be a wilderness
400 million years from now

an avatar of a whole new
planet running hand in hand with the trees –
never changing places no matter how fast I run

satellite images integrating allegory –
designed to deceive
the database aesthetic of dynamic
change as the earth lets fly
regenerating the residential side
of the blood that worms
there will be a square which is all forest –
the leaking roofs
the broken flooring
the rotting woodwork

i thought i'd try and find my way
looking backwards through
the weather glass of signs

when I asked the foresters the influence
of their expression they spoke of many landscapes:

clocks all set to different times.
a world of 3D trees and answers
sensible as dictionaries

i dived beneath the surface
coral layers marked out in stages
of their own selection –

brachiopods and sea lilies
the sounds of crushing shells

the bluest planet rested in the settling pools
reflected in the light

the highest geometrical ratio of
its increase – thoughts that hurt.

i doubted I would ever feel inside the earth
a passage to a place i used to play
marked out in squares of black and white

'But I thought you said it was too far to get to Athens today?' W repeated, his question having gone unheard the previous night when Icarus had fallen immediately asleep. 'You mean we are going to make it without having to arrive all sweaty and dusty from having cycled the last fifty kilometres that morning?'

Icarus grinned. Now she was in sniffing distance of Athens she simply wanted to *be* there and be done with it!

'One hundred and fifteen point two kilometres,' W estimated.

'We cycled much further distances than that in Italy!' Icarus exclaimed, her words bursting with adrenaline. The contrast with her mimsy looking bicycle couldn't have been greater. His handlebars were drooping lower than a racing bike's, his new brake blocks had seized stiff, while an evening of tears had caused his gear cables to rust.

'What's up, W? You didn't even look this miserable when you found out that the Peluda had died.'

'You still want to get there?' he asked in a timid voice, little more than a whisper. 'Considering Zeus's anger and everything? I've witnessed bicycle capital punishment, you know, down the dump. I can't imagine it's any nicer a prospect for you.'

Icarus sat down beside W to talk at his level. 'But I've never done anything like this, W. And even if I don't want to persuade anyone of anything, it's the least I can do to share my experiences. If I don't see it through I'll spend the rest of my time wondering what if. You willing to join me for the last leg?'

'I'm glad of that, Icarus,' W replied, sniffing and nodding. 'I was a bit worried *you'd* be a little scared and back out on me.'

Icarus and W had been so busy bonding they hadn't noticed the stray cat, which had torn a huge hole in the side of Icarus's tent, and run off with as much food as its emaciated body could scatter. If Icarus needed any further impetus to get to Athens that day then a ruined tent was it.



There was only one last bit of business needing done before they left. It was still early, and the ancient site of Mycenae was just opening. The sun, reversing the direction in which it rose and fell, had instigated the bloody downfall of Ancient Mycenae's House of Atreus, providing the basis on which Atreus argued for the reversal of his brother Thyestes's election as king. Icarus was the site's first human visitor that morning, although stray dogs were already sunning themselves on the path, two headless lions were guarding the ancient gates, and a snake slid right past Icarus's toes. Icarus weaved slowly through the labyrinthal remains until she arrived at a single olive tree at the uppermost point of the site. She reached into her pocket and removed her weather glass for a final time, refilling the glass with the blue water slowly in her ritualistic way, and then hanging it off a mid-height branch. She then reached into her bag and removed her copy of *Through the Looking Glass* and laid it at the base of the tree.

'Thank you,' she said. 'For absolutely everything. But I must leave you here where you might be of some help to other travellers – as mementos of our acceptance of the eastern rise and the western fall of our northern hemisphere sun. May other travellers voyage through you and see

what I have seen. May others experience the world from the perspective of the sky. For surely our only remaining hope resides there.'

'You will fly the middle way,' Icarus thought she heard the weather glass reply. 'Not too close to the sea nor too close to the sun.'

The looking glass recited her some good luck poetry – for the road:

a weather glass, a sunny sky
lingering onward dreamily
in icarus's eyes

if anyone is filled with fear
then eager eye and willing ear
pleased by a simple tale to hear
long has paled that sunny sky
echoes fade and memories die
autumn frosts have slain july

still it haunts me, phantomwise
climates moving under skies
never seen by waking eyes

if anyone is filled with fear
then eager eye and willing ear
lovingly will nestle near

in arcadia we lie
dreaming as the days go by
dreaming as the summer dies

ever drifting down the stream
lingering in the golden gleam
of life what is it but a dream?

Icarus followed the blue ray of light that the weather glass cast ahead of her in the direction of Athens. She clasped an outspread fingerful of blue sky as she went and held it to the earth. The sky wasn't blue after all, she thought. It wasn't even reflective, it was see-through.

By the time Icarus left, the first tour buses were arriving, and German tourists were already queuing outside the neighbouring tomb of Agamemnon. All that remained was to safely deliver herself and W to Athens in time to face the weather.



Icarus and W set off towards Athens through rolling countryside, dotted with olive trees, but the landscape became increasingly developed. The Ancient site of Korinth sat on top of a hill near the north east corner of the Peloponnese peninsula, but further on lay the modern city.

Across Europe she had done her best to avoid towns, and even on the Mappa Mundi Korinth looked like a navigational nightmare, which Icarus had dreaded all morning. Meanwhile, anything, absolutely anything Icarus could have done right then to speed them quicker and with less effort to Athens, was worth considering. It was like the relief of near arrival had accelerated Icarus's fatigue; fully realised it for the very first time.

'See this road?' she said to W, pointing to a recently constructed motorway that cut a corner off their most immediate route, avoiding the city entirely.

'So cars can travel a more direct route by motorway. What's new?'

'What's new is this,' Icarus replied, pointing to a slip road, beside which a green motorway sign indicated the usual restrictions – no pedestrians, no tractors, no horse-drawn chariots. 'Do you see anything banning bicycles?'

'No, but...'



But before W could even finish his objection they were already rolling along the motorway hard shoulder. 'Vorpall! How about this W?' Icarus cried, spreading her arms as wide as a bird. They had far more room than most single carriageway roads offered bikes, the surface was smoother, and with undoubtedly less traffic. Icarus's heart jumped when a police car sped past, but it soon sped off, uninterested. 'If I'd known bikes were allowed on Greek motorways I'd have cycled more of them!'

The motorway was raised above the land, offering a panoramic view. Humanity had built itself into almost every element of it: most satisfyingly the concrete industrial environs of modern Korinth and its neighbouring petroleum refineries, and above all a bird's eye perspective on the one hundred metre high cleft of the Corinth canal. Icarus lent W up against a crash barrier and clambered down the embankment, through the barbed wire, to more closely investigate.

'I knew it was unwise from the beginning,' a tramp called out from beneath the motorway bridge arches, waving a bottle towards the canal. His beard was dreadlocked down to his toes, and his tattered clothing bore evidence of styles not fashionable since ancient times. 'I told them ill would befall anyone who tried to build it. Nero dead, Caesar and Caligula assassinated, and look at it now? Shipping? It's barely wide enough these days to let pleasure craft through, let

alone commercial boats.’ He took a swig from a bottle then held out his hand. ‘My name is Apollonius of Tyana. A philosopher, mainly. You?’

‘My name is Icarus. And I’m a poet. Is there anything you would like me to tell the world? You know in my next poem?’

‘You tell them this, young Icarus. That if they continue cutting swathes through the sky in the same way that they have carved up the land, then they will confront the limitations of their own imaginations soon enough.’ The philosopher cast his hand towards the canal again. ‘A bit like this. Soon the sky will not even prove big enough for aeroplanes, mark my words.’



Icarus’s motorway adventure was inevitably as shortlived as her good behaviour remained in increasingly limited supply. ‘Well, I didn’t say it was legal as such, just that nothing indicated it was illegal,’ Icarus said when some toll booths appeared ahead.

‘Oh, *Icarus*. Are you determined to get us into trouble? I’m not sure I like this devil-may-care you. Where’s the anxious young woman I set out with?’

When the young Greek tollbooth assistant saw them she froze. ‘Adjgbaeioutg zuoxdita aileh adud!’ she exclaimed, swishing her uniformly straight long brown hair from side to side.

‘Do you speak English?’

‘Yes, a little. One minute – you must wait here. You must not go anywhere!’ The woman retreated backwards to keep them in her sight, before returning in the company of a manageress with a ferocious hairbun.

‘Come with me,’ the hairbun ordered, leading them away.

Icarus’s imagination ran through the full range of potential consequences which W had imagined for them the day before, but what actually happened didn’t even make her list.

‘You must leave here, before the traffic police see you,’ hairbun said, beckoning them politely through a gate onto the coast road.

Icarus and W needed no second invitation. They were off!

‘How about we practice being good again today?’ W suggested. ‘It would be stupid to get arrested now. No more mischief, ok?’

But it was not to be one of those days. The convoluted towers and tubes of the petrol refinery ahead made quite an aesthetic spectacle on the blue sky and Icarus had already taken one photo when:



yelled a security guard, racing towards her. He was traditionally dressed – day old stubble, matching dark hair and shades, a cap. ‘What do you think you’re doing?’ he yelled in perfect English.

‘I was taking a photograph of the tower.’

‘But why? Why photograph this?’

Icarus curtsied as she tried to think of an answer. ‘Because I think it’s beautiful,’ she eventually muttered, quite aware how feeble the truth sounded in front of a security guard intent on trouble. Was capital punishment a possibility for semi-mortals? Was she even semi-mortal any more? She handed over her demanded passport.

‘Do you not know it is illegal to photograph this?’

Icarus shook her head as humbly as she could manage.

‘Why are you here? The climate conference? You are not a Turkish terrorist?’

‘Certainly not. No connections at all.’

‘And you’re called Icarus?’ Suddenly, with no warning, the man burst into so much laughter that his love handles exploded from his belt, causing his blubber to spill and fall and tumble out over the road.

‘Quick!’ W cried. ‘Before it melts my tyres!’

there was always
going to be a long way to fall

which was as good a reason
to live upon a curve as any

the earth just kept on rolling

we wore it with the offskew
elegance of an egg

inside the sea over yonder
four elderly heads are ducking for apples
what a nice day! i exclaim

The race
(they keep on saying) is about to multiply

Icarus expected the approach to Athens to be an industrial wasteland. And apart from the Kakia Scala – a ten mile stretch of road clinging to limestone cliffs several hundred metres high – it was. The town of Megara bulged and spread over the surrounding countryside like a disease. And there was scant countryside separating Megara from the next town of Elefsina, which had once been the site of the Eleusian mysteries – annual cult-like ceremonies held to celebrate Persephone’s symbolic descent to and subsequent ascent from the underworld. Demeter had threatened to render the land barren if her worship at Eleusis ever ceased, and her threat had come true. The bay was scattered with abandoned ships, both upright and capsized, while

shipyards continued to produce new vessels. And next along there was the largest oil refinery in Greece, commercially emblazoned warehouses...forty percent of the country's industrial output spread across the Eleusian fields like polluted manure.

'Research has shown that the particularly hot climate here is the result of the concentration of industry,' W pointed out. And their own day was similarly about to heat up beyond precedent.

A traffic policeman by the junction into Elefsina had informed Icarus that the motorway into Athens was the only motorway bicycles *were* permitted on in the whole of Greece, with a logic even he admitted was twisted. If only she had been banned from it! The luxury of motorways with hard shoulders became but a memory as the rutted surface switched between two and three narrow lanes. The traffic barely slowed down to merge, it simply crammed slightly closer together and drove faster to avoid colliding with itself. Ahead of Icarus and W buses stopped suddenly in the inside lane, without signalling, to pick up passengers waiting on the verge. Cars and lorries and motorcycles sped past – inside and out – and the air spun out of control with fumes in a motorised carnage of which neither of them had seen the like.

'This is bicycle suicide,' W shouted. 'If you'd have asked my advice, I'd have said to take the long way around, but it's too late now!'

Icarus gave them as little as a fifty percent chance of making it off the motorway unscathed. They had even managed to coincide with afternoon rush hour! When she drew into a petrol station everyone stopped what they were doing to watch what this crazy individual and her bicycle might do next. Icarus bought a two litre bottle of water and downed it in one before crossing all her digits and rejoining the *road of death* – as it had locally become known. 'Is Athens never going to arrive?' she shouted, counting down the kilometres, as if their fate depended on the city delivering itself to them. But just when it looked like Athens would never arrive, they found themselves in its outskirts, where the traffic suddenly slowed.

Icarus and W climbed the final incline towards town. To their right they passed the botanical gardens, where gardeners delivered an unfortunate selection of plants into this fume-fuelled world. To their left a signpost indicated a campsite.

'We're not stopping?' W asked.

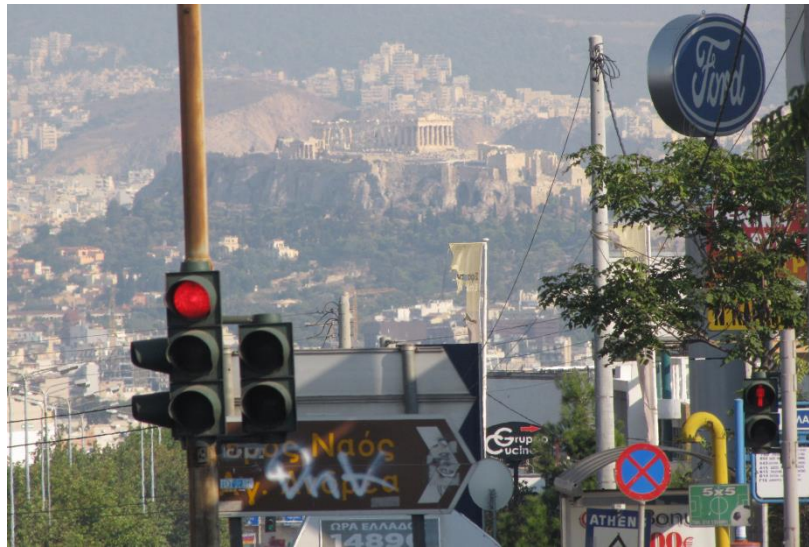
Icarus grinned. 'No fear, W. Tonight we're staying in the conference hotel.' But no matter how much of a relief it was to be within Athens' city boundaries, they hadn't truly made it to Athens until they had seen the Parthenon.

'Look, Icarus, look!'

When Icarus raised her head from the road she first saw the car up ahead, and then a sign for a Ford garage, and then a roadsign indicating the road was about to split in six. But beyond it all, undeniably, was the Acropolis, basking in the late afternoon light. Icarus pulled up on the verge where, first two large tears fell down her own face, and then two large tears slipped down W's head tube, and then they both began to sob.

'Oh don't cry!' climate change begged. 'Consider what a great protagonist and bicycle you are! Consider what a long way you've come! Consider what o'clock it is! Consider anything, only never cry.'

Icarus had lost count of how many impossible things she'd believed at once. A talking climate talking she could certainly contemplate, but having actually made it all the way to Athens?!



‘Thank you W!’ she exclaimed. ‘Thank you Lucy! Thank you Alice! Thank you climate change! Without any of you I would never have made it here today, believe you me!’

Part 6: The Athenian Climate Summit: 9th Sept 2010

Good in the room, yet,
we talk, and little payments
are even more rare

the direct translations
more or less
contain themselves

to change

two degrees

of this
consensus.

If we continue

The same architecture
continues

Bloated, and unreadable

So this was finally 'it'. The end, the beginning, and the present enfolded into one. When they made it into the labyrinth of central Athens, Icarus had one final surprise in store for W.

'We're staying *there*?' W exclaimed, looking the shimmering glass frontage of the five star hotel up and down.

Icarus held out the invitation for W to see. 'It's the conference accommodation. Look, it says so right here.' However as she followed W's rising-falling gaze she struggled to share his admiration. A bit of comfort and luxury would *certainly* be delightful after five weeks and two days spent galumphing around on a camping mat. But after living off survival rations to here the hotel's opulence was suddenly too much, and quite so wrong. How many days of cycle-travel could have been afforded for the price of one night's stay? The hotel gazed down over Athens from its multi-storey glory: an embodiment of luxurious contemplation; its mirrored windows the looking glass of climate change, reflecting humanity's reflections on the weather right back at them.

Meanwhile W had been preening himself in the mirror. 'You could at least give me a bit of a spit and polish, Icarus. You never know whom I might meet! Let's pretend that you're a God and I'm your chariot of fire!'

W's hopes were soon shattered by the hotel doorman, before they'd even crossed the threshold. 'Left luggage,' he announced authoritatively, wheeling a squealing and writhing W away with the tips of his white gloves.

'But he stays with me, as a regular rule...!'

It was too late, and everyone in the lobby had already begun staring at the peculiar woman calling after her battered bike without Icarus making an even bigger scene. Yet when Icarus went to check in she was treated no less snootily. 'Passport please,' the receptionist asked, turning up her nose at Icarus as if to say, 'look what the bicycle just dragged in!' Icarus already imagined this might be the last time the hotel agreed to have an *environmental* gathering to stay, although admittedly every other delegate was looking smarter than her. But she bet none of *them* had fallen through the atmosphere, undergone a metamorphosis in identity and then cycled the breadth of Europe for the privilege.



Certainly, thinking back on it afterwards, Icarus wouldn't have said that she *didn't* enjoy her dip in the hotel's rooftop pool. She *coped splendidly* with the Jacuzzi bubbles easing her aching legs. The complementary cocktails that she was obliged to consume as she sunbathed in the early evening sun, admiring the view over the Acropolis, was a passable way to complete any climate, and Icarus felt only a little bit smug, leaning over the rooftop terrace watching the build-up to the conference begin in earnest in the streets below: singing, shouting, and even fighting between opportunistic local gangs, protesting environmentalists and the police.

STOP CLIMATE CHAOS!

shouted banners in all languages and colours. Far from it, to Icarus it looked like chaos was about to begin. However, later that evening, she did feel rather guilty about the mezze platter she enjoyed in the hotel restaurant, which would have been easily enough for two. As a mark of respect for W – who had been left with any food scraps he could find in her panniers – she didn't leave a crumb.

'But where were all the other Greek Gods staying?' she wondered, looking around at the anonymous faces of the other delegates. Surely there had to be *some* characters from her past. Or, after all, was this just the final joke on Icarus, and she had been sent to represent the Gods at a gathering of humanity's plebs? And who better to ask that question than Zeus, Icarus thought, leaping from her feet as she suddenly spotted his security entourage sweep into the lobby in the distance!

'Zeus!' Icarus cried, sprinting in that direction, but she arrived a second too late, and the lift doors closed on the tip of her nose. Icarus looked around frantically for the stairs. Surely she had been lost in atmospheric translation, and Zeus would better understand everything once they got the chance to talk things through. Yes, he had undeniably vented his anger upon her in the most unambiguous of ways. But what better a time to resolve this than now, before proceedings began? Icarus took the stairs three at a time, but by the time she reached the top floor the hotel's altitude had quite taken her breath away, leaving none to spare when she confronted Zeus's security Titans around the first corner.

'What d'you want?' the advancing brutes demanded, banging their clubs in their twenty four inch palms.

'Room service?' Icarus tried, unsuccessfully, before turning on her heels to flee.

It was only when Icarus spread herself out like a lonesome starfish on her king-sized bed later that night that the last couple of months finally caught up with her. Icarus, climate change, a talking bicycle, a weather glass, the looking glass, and a coincidental sex change for good measure? Was it really surprising that her limbs sank into the mattress as if it were made of wet concrete? It was never going to be easy being ejected suddenly back into 'reality'. To Icarus this reality right now felt as alien as the moon compared to the questic realism that had recently become her imaginative world, and far more tightly bounded. Icarus had barely spent more than an hour inside every day for weeks, and now the gas particles of the climate-controlled hotel interior pressed in against her head. Icarus even began to wonder whether it was possible to think the things she'd been resolving of late when the conventions of daily life once more began to close around you. She could feel the edges of her memory of weather glass world begin to fuzz around the edges, blur. But there was no point looking backwards now when Icarus now confronted the turning point in her entire existence. Had the dazzling opulence of the hotel cast a spell on her already? She had barely even considered the implications of the question she had posed W yesterday.

Did she know what tomorrow was? The potential consequences of the quest defied the limits of Icarus's imagination. If, as she had once thought, her own myth had been made to symbolise humanity's journey with climate change, then what for humanity when their antihero has gone and lost her plot? No, they might not fall, but was it any way preferable to be left hanging out in the uncertain in-between?

Just then a knock on the door interrupted Icarus's thinking. It was the hotel porter again. 'I've heard that you failed to settle up your bill over dinner, Ma'am. Shall I add it to your tab?'

Icarus had presumed that this bit of the quest was at least all expenses paid, and she hardly had a coin of carbon left to her name. 'I'm with Zeus,' she finally explained. 'Just add it to the miscellaneous section of his bill.'

beyond the road
the daily sense of blinking water
awake despite ourselves

we spent the morning indoors
workshopping planetary dead ends

could we climb this one?
how did the last one begin?

a washed up pier

the first man and the first woman
are left to grow in the purposeless heat
constellations of paperweights

sea ice
– which should not have been possible

liquid fossil clocks
seen from the angle of the sun

our focus held the concentration of anniversaries
burning years

take these bits of aeroplane
traffic cone
and secondhand whale

a preference for averages
risking routines of change

whose house were we really in?

we decide to build it here before we can
catch hold of anything more wonderful

submerge our globes in little alchemy
mouthfuls collapsing into tables

doll's head trucks passed by
by music
eyes I thought we had put out

every day is a beautiful day
we hoped
the scale of windows

the more we looked the more it simply
wasn't there

The previous night's climate chaos was nothing compared to the following morning's. 'Have fun?' Icarus asked, collecting W from left luggage.

W pulled a grim smile. 'Not so bad. Made a few friends – suitcases mainly, some mule panniers, a chiton tunic bag or two.'

The hotel lobby was already busy with delegates rushing this way and that, competing over whose mobile phone conversation could look more urgent than the next. Outside, the streets were already overflowing with workers and shoppers and protestors alike; Icarus was soon to even miss the calm contemplation of the hotel as the day overtook her. It was several miles from there to the Pnyx, the site of the Athenian democracy, and no immediately apparent alternative way of getting there than walking.

Icarus dodged the briefcase corners of a pinstriped businessman who was using his best weapon to get out of there, fast.

'Thwack,' cried the large paper shopping bag of yet another bouffanted lady, insisting on her right to continue shopping through the melee.

'Give us a lift will you?' cried a plucky young chap, with multiple piercings, an orange beanie hat, and a stripey t-shirt.

As if there was any chance of cycling anywhere! W was already getting in the way of everyone, his bar-ends jabbing people in the sides when they least expected it. It was still several hours before events began, but already the crowd had formed a wave of bodies surging towards the Pnyx. Already the ground was littered with rubbish. Already the volume of noise was pushing the air to breaking point. The protestors were a motley bunch of not only dreadlocks, t-shirts, henna tattoos and the full rainbow of banners, but also the occasional suit of the professional campaigner, and a veritable zoo of endangered species: cave beetles, polar bears, and...

'Hey, look W, is that not your friend the Peluda, just up ahead?' Icarus realised her stupidity immediately. Of course, W could see nothing right now but the bottom of the campaigner immediately ahead.

'This is my least favourite climate yet!' he cried from low down among the mass of bodies.

'Coffee and a biscuit?' Icarus extracted W from the wave's momentum, where she could better see her trembling friend, and the trail of salt winding down his forks. 'Hey, W, are you ok?'

'Just hot and sweaty, Icarus.'

'Sure you don't want to talk? I wouldn't want you overheating and not mentioning it.'

But when W finally did speak, his voice kept breaking as if the heat was cracking his paint. 'I've waited forever for this, Icarus. Thank you for everything. This quest alone has made my life worth living. I hope you know that?'



It could only have been a matter of time before Icarus's female form might have to raise its head, but it took two coffees in a nearby open-air café before W could persuade Icarus of this. Before bed, Icarus had prepared her props: some strips of black lycra she had cut from her cycling shorts to strap around her breasts; three pairs of socks to stuff down her pants; but she

was particularly proud of the bag of leg-hair trimmings she'd shaved to make an adolescent beard. Icarus had become accustomed to the way that climate change and the world had re-cut her, but here she was again, recutting, and being recut. 'I hope you've a good hand at pinning and tying strings?' she said to W. 'Every one of these things has to go on, or in, or under, somehow or other.'

When Icarus returned from the toilets, transformed, the occupants of the neighbouring tables gave her some reassuringly puzzled looks – as if something had changed, and they couldn't quite put their fingers on exactly what. Icarus supposed it had something to do with the fact that she looked no more convincing as a male adolescent than she had made a convincing woman.

the people are changing flavour

we declined masculine
or feminine or neuter at the boundaries
of the grammar rules dictating taste

A is for the end of woman
Zero ended man

they said i was created in use for use
a curved neutrality

take your choice of my reduced body
i will be naked
for i have left it out for you

you do not have to live here
i am merely passing through

By the time Icarus and W returned to the road, the wave of climate change protestors had overflowed the pavement and spilled onto the road. All cars had long since been brought to a standstill. Some samba drummers had climbed onto a van's roof, from where they pounded out the beat of the march until some police brutes bundled them into the back of an unmarked truck. The atmosphere had become so tense that the whole thing risked going up the next time someone lit a cigarette.

'I'd be finding a back route to the Pnyx if I were you.'

Icarus turned to face a polar bear, addressing her in grammatically perfect English, with a strong Greenlandic accent.

'Your bicycle's only going to get trodden to the ground otherwise,' he added, as if he knew precisely what it felt like to watch your space on earth retreat before your eyes.

Icarus needed no second invitation, and at the next opportunity pushed W into a side alley.

'The underground?' W proposed.

The underground had other thoughts. NO BICYCLES, read a large sign above Omonia tube station, in big unambiguous red lettering in both Greek and English script. 'Shall we?' Icarus asked. 'We've got little left to lose, and just think what we could gain?'

A heavy hand laid itself upon Icarus's shoulder before she had made it to the escalators.

'I don't think so, son,' the security guard said, leading them back outside.

Icarus flopped down on a bench like a rag doll. 'What's the point in even trying? We're only going to get turned back at the gate.'

W's handlebars drooped lower than she had ever seen them – at least he had manifested some fight when she'd told him that she wasn't going to fly. 'Oh, just leave me here and make your own way,' he proposed, somewhat melodramatically. 'You'll be late otherwise, and at least one of us had better make it. At least *he* thought you were male!'

Icarus shook her head. 'No way, W. We're in this together. It would mean nothing turning up without you by my side.'

'But what else are you going to do?'

Icarus had been just about to announce that in fact there was nothing to be done about it, and that perhaps they should head for the beach today instead, if it hadn't been for the way the sand got stuck in W's sprockets, when...



'Yo, so you made it?'

When Icarus looked up she came face to face with the cheeky grin of none other than her favourite carbon dioxide particle of all, who was hanging his attitude off the end of the bench. 'Billy! I was wondering what had happened to you,' she lied. 'But what are you doing *here*? Isn't it dangerous with all these protestors in town?'

'No fear I'd miss the party of a civilisation! And I might as well hear straight from the donkeys' mouths what our fate will be over the next few years.'

Where W's frame had become deflated, it was now tense as he muttered, 'but I thought you said your carbon dioxide friends were gentlemen.'

Billy guffawed. 'Me? I thought you'd understood me better than that Icarus. But come on, let's get going.'

'Go where, precisely?'

'To the Pnyx of course, stupid.'

'But we can't get through – that's the whole point. Why else do you think we'd be sitting here feeling sorry for ourselves.'

'No, I mean *come with me*. I know all the back ways – trust me! I figured I owed you a favour after you helped smuggle me into the atmosphere. Quick, we've no time to lose.'

In the circumstances not even W argued as the CO₂ particle led them along this alleyway and that, through houses whose front and back doors had been left open, and even, with a bit of cajoling, through the solid surface of concrete walls. Billy grabbed hold of a passing taxi's wing mirror and Icarus followed suit. Half an hour later they were so close they could see the overgrown greenery of the Pnyx up ahead, and feel the pounding of the marchers' feet in a

parallel street. 'No, this way!' Billy cried as the police kettled a breakaway group into the alleyway ahead. 'I forgot, of course, the delegates won't be using the *main* entrance.' The Pnyx, site of the Eleksia, the ancient Greek democracy, was located on a hill, half a kilometre behind the Acropolis, which already lay below them. By the time they approached the back gates Icarus and W were giddy. 'This is as far as I can safely take you, I'm afraid.' Billy hooked his thumbs in the loops of his oxygen for a final time, and pointed at the police helicopters circling overhead like carbon dioxide vultures.

Icarus reached out to shake Billy's hand, and W even held out a single bar-end. But Billy just gave them the V sign before disappearing into thin air. 'Good luck. You'll be needing it!'



A short distance further on, two long tails of conference delegates queued in line for the Titans' security checks, just as Icarus had anticipated. The queues were already several hundred deep, marshalled strictly into two lines by baton-wielding climate police.

'Best wait here a little bit until the queue dies down,' suggested one of two nuns who were regarding the scene from a nearby rock.

But once they'd got that close, Icarus wasn't waiting any longer to discover their fate. 'Just a moment,' she said. There's one more thing.' She dug in her bags and pulled out a pair of pink angel wings studded with diamantes which she strapped to W's seatpost. 'If I've got to pretend to be boy-Icarus, it's the least you could do to make some effort to be my wings.'

'He looks like he's going to a hen-do, not the most important event civilisation has ever witnessed!' the second nun cackled, pointing at W wriggling ineffectually this way and that.

ours was a world of uncompleted
long-acknowledged silences

damage limitation
was considered a form of talking

a weak recognition of existence
a statement of reluctant intent
and a shifting baseline

what price the air?
whose sky was it anyway?
what was warming what was warm?

russia burned
niger starved
while pakistan and china
had slipped into the river
in the direction of the sea

– there was no nicer way of putting it

what is Europe?
where is Tuvalu?

self-interest was an unnavigable island
between oceans

it had already proven the hottest
wettest year on record

a semi-crisis of disconnected proofs
weather every shade of black and white
but grey

what colour obstinacy no-one knew

The scene ahead was an Ancient Greek celebrity spotter's dream come true, and it was being furiously snapped by paparazzi whose climate change photo opportunities had come all at once. Icarus, however, only had eyes for the Titans. Did you see that? I'm sure the Titan just eyeballed me – the one on the left. Look, he just clocked me again. Tell me he didn't W?

W burred something indecipherable about not being certain. 'But look, there's Euclid!' He pointed to an old man with electric white hair, who was busy tapping figures into a calculator.

'And W, look! Is that not Plato?'

'And Aristotle too and...'

The first queue was for Gods and heroes, and the second one for Athenian citizenry, providing Icarus her first quandary. In the end they took up an in-between queues position, as most other either-ors-and-nobodys appeared to be doing.

'And there's Aphrodite, at the front,' Icarus exclaimed, drawing in her breath sharply and closing her eyes as she awaited the sound of club against head gristle. She leapt to one side to avoid the most likely path of the Greek goddess of love as she was tumbled rudely back down the feminine alleyway from which she had come. But when Icarus opened her eyes a minute later, Aphrodite was safely making her way into the Pnyx beyond.

Next up was Sappho.

'She hasn't even put on a disguise!'

'But isn't she dapper?' W replied, admiring Sappho's bright green 1920s flapper-style of tunic and her dazzling amethyst headband.

But again, the Titans just checked Sappho's identity card and allowed her through. Icarus looked around more closely, and, in fact, yes. How hadn't she noticed? There were any number of women in the queues, and not only famous ones, including, by now, the two nuns from before.

'But of course, it's no longer *Ancient Greece*,' Icarus exclaimed. 'Has Zeus moved with the times?'

'I wouldn't smile too soon about it if I were you!'

The voice that had replied wasn't W, and the shape of the hand on Icarus's shoulder was undeniably familiar.

'It's Lady Satan!' Apollo exclaimed when Icarus turned around. 'Would you ever take a look at yourself? Hey Dionysius, hey Ares, come and have a look at this! Pansy Icarus has dressed up for the ball!'

A small crowd of young Gods had soon gathered, and began jostling Icarus this way and that. First Apollo reached out and stripped a side of stubble from Icarus's face, while Ares lunged to remove a sock from Icarus's pants.

'Oooo let me do that,' Dionysius butted in, as drunken and as camp as ever.

Apollo had just made a lunge at Icarus's taped up breasts when W could stand it no longer.

'Get off her! She's far more man than any of you. Now scram!'

The small crowd froze. 'A talking bicycle? But bicycles can't speak in the real world!' they exclaimed in unison, causing W to flush with pride.

'We can when there's anyone worth talking to. In my reality the ability to converse is as natural as a chainset and sprockets!'

Apollo was first to laugh at the talking bicycle with pastel pink diamante angel wings, but soon the air was filled with the sound of mockery: HA HE HA HE! Check him out!'

'Stop it, now! I say leave him alone!' Icarus cried. The young Gods had started to push W around, and his brake cables had already come away. There was nothing for it. What was there to lose? Amongst the melee Icarus had been let free, and now, slowly but surely, she lifted her t-shirt from her waist, off her shoulders, over her head, revealing the layers of lycra strapping down her breasts, before she began unwinding the loops in front of the stunned audience. One layer, two layers, three, as Icarus sought to distract attention in the only remaining way possible.

'Icarus, you don't need to do this!' W cried from where he'd been tossed into a nearby gutter.

'Oh yes, I do, W,' Icarus replied. She made little show of dropping the final layer of lycra to the ground, allowing her breasts to unfold where they had been restrained, for all to see. 'Is this what you wanted, Apollo? This is me, She-Icarus. Are you happy now? Why don't you take me, right here, as you will?'

As if the Titans were going to rescind first claim. 'Out of our way!' the skinheads cried, throwing Ares and Dionysius from their path as if they were feathers, as they bounded through the crowds towards Icarus, whom they threw unceremoniously over their shoulders, before striding back towards the gates to the Pnyx.

'W!' cried Icarus, but her bicycle was nowhere to be seen. Already, in fact, Icarus had been carried past the silent, staring queues, past the security threshold, and was now being heaved down a back alley into the dampest of dark recesses of the Pnyx where the Titans dropped her gently to the ground to exact their humiliation. Icarus closed her eyes. This really was to be all her punishments at once...what had she honestly done to deserve this?

'So here you are, delivered safe, just as Zeus instructed,' the first Titan said, causing Icarus to open her eyes and peer inquisitively at him.

The second Titan laid Icarus's clothes out beside her while averting his gaze. 'Come on, quick, cover yourself up, will you. You're embarrassing me.' And on that note, both men nodded respectfully and returned the way they'd come.



In actual fact the Titans had only retrieved about half of Icarus's clothing, and re-dressed she looked more of a hybrid He-She-Icarus than ever. But at least here she was, in relative safety, which was far more than could have been said for W. The best hope Icarus could hold out for him was that he'd been left, abandoned in that filthy gutter to find his own way, because otherwise...Icarus could still hear her bicycle listing off his fears of the types of consequences that might befall them if Icarus didn't learn to behave herself. But why oh why was he the one to be made to suffer for it? That thought that cut a knife deep into Icarus's side, which she chose to leave in place until she and her friend might be re-united.

But as for now? There was no point even second guessing what Zeus wanted from her. One thing was more certain, knowing W, the last thing he would have wanted her to worry about right then was *him*! The conference, according to the crescendo of noise outside and her watch, was soon to begin. W would never forgive her if she never made it, having come this far. 'I'm doing this one for the team, W' she said, closing her eyes in a futile attempt to conjure some courage before making her way.

Outside the room a circle of light led Icarus through a tunnel, onwards, just as if she had followed the south easterly morning trajectory of the sun across Europe to here. Icarus's emotions were so confused that every step conjured up a different emotion – excitement, loneliness, sadness, even some pride...but increasingly an overwhelming sense of panic! 'W, are you out there somewhere W?' she suddenly cried out, but her question echoed back to her, while some murderous bats echo-located her and began dive-bombing. By the time Icarus reached the end of the tunnel the light was so bright in comparison to the dankness of the tunnel that Icarus truly felt like she was crossing the threshold of the sun. Yet inside the sun, inside the Pnyx, the scene was like nothing she had ever seen before – a surreal dream so vivid you couldn't have animated it; the history of civilisation incarnate.

She had emerged from the tunnel on a terrace, offering a panorama of the scene. The Coupe Icare Festival of Flight was providing pre-conference entertainment, and the sky was lit up with a rainbow of balloons. Birds hovered above for a sky-eyed view, lizards clung to the sunny sides of rocks, and flowers peeked up between the crevices. And then just people people people, whose heady pall of expectation hung over them. Icarus shrank inside her shyness,

feeling even smaller than ever. How could she ever have *thought* to address such a crowd? The gathering was spread out in the shape of the crescent of a moon, in front of which stood a single microphone and a podium. The mere mortals of contemporary Athens stood at the front. Behind them stood the citizenry of Ancient Greece, followed by the heroes of Greek mythology, while at the very back sat the Ancient Gods, and, of course *there*, right there was Zeus, pride of place, on a large throne overlooking everything! Icarus let out a reluctant laugh at how galling and reassuring it was to see him, both at once. He was wearing his best white tunic, and his beard had grown so long that it hung at just the right angles over his sandals. He regarded the gathering with the look of one five times as rich and five times as clever and *infinitely* more powerful...but right then Icarus was more immediately interested in the man sitting to Zeus's right hand side...

'Dad,' Icarus whispered. '*Daedalus.*' Just as Naucraste had promised, her father was there to save her if all went wrong. *I'm here Dad*, Icarus mouthed. *Five weeks of applying myself to the good!* And as if her father had actually heard her, at that moment Daedalus began whispering in Zeus's ear before both of them suddenly turned to look in Icarus's direction. Icarus instinctively ducked! Icarus would never know precisely why in retrospect. Yet when Icarus's curiosity finally got the better of her again and she rose her head back above the crowds, the two men's attention was already elsewhere, as if they'd never actually turned to look. Icarus took the opportunity to find a more disguised spot from which to observe proceedings. And where better than *there*, three rows in front, between the shoulders of Sappho and Aphrodite, whose gender had denied them entry to the arenas of the Gods and Heroes.

'Icarus!' Aphrodite exclaimed, giving Icarus the heartfelt hug she had long awaited.

'Aphrodite! Sappho! Is this the women's liberation section?' Icarus replied, causing Sappho to throw Icarus a withering look.

'You can speak when you are spoken to, Icarus!'

The tone of Sappho's reply caused Icarus to jump a few metres back in surprise. This wasn't the same Sappho who had hailed her, only a few days ago from Cape Lefkada, surely? Icarus's injured look caused Sappho to soften a little. When she next spoke it was through barely moving lips.

'I'm sorry, I don't mean to be rude, but if anyone associates me with *you*, I'll *never* get to speak!'

'But why...?' Icarus began, before the sudden silence of the Pnyx caused her question to die in her throat. The speaker had climbed up to the podium with the opening words that Icarus had dreaded:

"who wants to speak?"

Icarus stared at her shoelaces, gulping back her instinctive reply of, 'not me!'

The protestors outside had begun to both jeer and cheer, while inside you could have heard a pin drop. As if to prove it, someone dropped one – the single tinkle on the ground rousing the gathering back to full voice! It was a good twenty minutes before the Speaker managed to silence the crowd again.

Hermes, Messenger of the Gods, was first up. 'The words I speak are the words of Zeus.' The crowd inhaled collectively. 'We gather today to consider the future of this planet, the future of mankind, the future of the earth and its changing climate. You could argue that Zeus might solve the planet's ills with a single bolt of lightning to the sky. But how then would humanity learn from their mistakes?' Hermes spread his arms wide. 'Here today are gathered civilisation's best minds. We await your bidding in this, your final chance to solve the problem of the changing climate. Your final chance to ensure a future for this world. Here, before you lies the possibility of a stable future for Earth.'

Icarus was already frustrated and muttering to herself. 'He can't just predetermine the agenda like that – *solving* the climate – as if there were no other ways forward!'

The next speaker sought to update the conference on current day international negotiations on climate change, and the fallout from the latest disastrous Conference of the Parties. The Greek Prime Minister was the third generation of his family to hold the post. But all he had to offer the crowd were some vague generalities about the importance, whatever happened, of ensuring continued economic growth, and not risking the Greek recovery with environmental policies likely to inhibit its already shrinking wellbeing. Icarus groaned, causing Sappho to land a sharp elbow in her side. The Prime Minister then took the liberty of playing various messages that world leaders had recorded for the Athenian democracy gathering.

'But they aren't even Greek!' Icarus wasn't the only delegate to exclaim, before Zeus silenced the protests with a single upraised hand.

'The new deal we have before us is an essential beginning,' said the United Nations Secretary General.

'We have come a long way, but we have much further to go,' the American President began. He spoke earnestly, stressing the meaningful contribution that the informal agreement they had recently brokered would make to future climate change negotiation, while dropping some none too subtle hints that the breakdown of negotiation was all China's fault. Was China not the largest emitter of CO₂ in the world?

'But what about some legally-binding commitments if you mean what you say?' yelled a heckler, as if the recorded message had the right of reply.

The British Prime Minister mentioned recent legislation committing the British government to ambitious emission reductions. The European Union President emphasised how keen Europe was to lead the way. 'We are already committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% from 1990 levels by 2020, and will raise this to 30% if a global deal can be found.'

'Same old, same old,' Icarus moaned, turning her head this time towards Aphrodite, whose elbows were more rounded.

The Chinese Premier stressed historical responsibilities for climate change emissions, and alluded to the fact that the USA's per capita emissions were four times their own. 'To meet the climate change challenge, the international community must strengthen confidence, build consensus, make vigorous efforts and enhance co-operation.'

The entire Pnyx began laughing at that.

'We can be satisfied that we were able to get our own way,' said the Indian Prime Minister, before reinforcing China's message that it was not fair to stunt the growth of their economy while the western world continued to pollute.

Bolivia fumed about anti-democratic, anti-transparent, unacceptable deals conducted behind closed doors. 'The previous meeting failed. It's unfortunate for the planet. The fault is with the lack of political will of a few countries led by the US.'

Tuvalu asked the conference if it was really about to allow its islands to become extinct?

The leader of the G77 countries reported that the most recent negotiating text was a 'suicide pact' for Africa that would 'maintain the economic dominance of a few countries. The values the most recent agreement is based on are very same values in our opinion that funnelled six million people in Europe into furnaces.'

Icarus bowed her head, just like she had in Montoir-sur-Loir, but the most poignant recordings came from Russia and Pakistan, where events continued to deteriorate. The eye-witness accounts silenced everyone. The Greek Prime Minister pressed 'stop'.

It was time for the Ancient Greeks to have their say. A gathering crescendo met Demosthenes's cameo act as he climbed up on the podium step, down, up, back down – causing the cheers to rise and fall. If only the content of his contribution had matched his renowned oratory skills. Icarus was left no clearer what he actually thought should be *done* about climate change. Pericles was as diplomatic but as populist as ever. Ariciabes called for oligarchy, and Zeus and his gathering of assembled Gods clapped appreciatively, causing Icarus's ears to steam.

Theseus called for cunning in defeating the labyrinth of climate change. 'We must not allow climate change to impede the onward march of progress. We cannot return to archaic ways. We must slay the minotaurs of climate change and continue – never left nor right but forwards!'

Odysseus metaphorically compared humanity's journey with climate change to his own journey back to Ithaca. Orpheus then sang a song pleading forgiveness from the sky which almost made Icarus cry. Heracles soon brought that up short, however, with his appeals to masculinity and courage in the face of humanity's plight.

The philosophers were next on the bill of speakers. Anaximander and his disciple Pythagoras jointly posed humanity the four key Pre-Socratic questions it should ask itself in the face of climate change. 'From where does everything come? From what is everything created? How do we explain the plurality of things found in nature? How might we describe nature mathematically?'

Icarus rubbed her hands, and smiled for the first time. If she simply ignored the bit about maths, then this was more like it!

Socrates probed the meaning of the word virtue in the context of climate change in a series of typical Q&A's. 'No-one desires what is bad. And if anyone does something that is truly bad it must be unwillingly or out of ignorance. All virtue is knowledge.'

Plato was inevitably next, calling for the rule of philosophers in the face of climate change, and the pursuit of abstract ideals over practical resolutions. 'Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws,' he added, before embarking on a quick-fire series of quotations from his own work as if he, of all people, had succumbed to the demands of soundbite politics. 'We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light; he was a wise man who invented beer; for a man to conquer himself is the first and noblest of victories; love is a serious mental disease...'

Aristotle disagreed with all of the above. 'Such are empty words and poetic metaphors. The question is, what are we going to do?' He proceeded to list all of the climate change mitigation policies he could remember – throwing them up in the air where they could breathe a little bit.

It was a while before anyone got up to speak after Plato and Aristotle for fear of looking stupid.

Archimedes proposed a set of parabolic mirrors, to reflect the sunshine back into the sky and set the sun on fire. But Epicurus took a different angle: 'surely climate change reinforces the importance of the simple, self-sufficient life, lived in the absence of pain, and in freedom from fear, in the company of friends?' Icarus only wished that W could be here to hear it all. What *would* Archimedes make of his bicycle revolution plans? Was there something in them after all, where she had been so dismissive?

It was eventually the turn of the Greek Gods to propose how humanity might proceed. Poseidon reassured everyone that if the worst came to the worst, then his boats were ready. Ares declared all out war on the climate. 'Technology has got you into this problem, and technology will see you out of it,' Hephaestus argued. Dionysus then staggered up to the podium where he raised a toast to a lovely day spent among good friends. 'Let's drink to climate change!' he slurred, before tripping over his toes where manly Odysseus was forced to catch him. It took Hades to bring all sense of campness to a close by arguing that in the depths of despair one will find hidden wealths. 'You must go to the depths to rise once more.'

It came to the moment when the only two male Gods of Olympia left to speak were Apollo and Zeus, but their contributions were being left until the end. Instead, next to climb up onto the podium was Phaeton, who proposed setting the world on fire and letting humanity burn. Phaeton wasn't allowed to finish his speech before the Titans, signalled by Zeus, booted him into the air where he flew a looping arc over the walls of the Pnyx where the protestors mauled him close to death on the other side.

A plucky climate denying heckler from the body of the Ancient Greek populace fared no better. 'If it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's climate change for you.' One thwack of a titan boot and out he went.

The lump in Icarus's throat was so large she could barely breathe.



The speeches of any Ancient Greek male who wanted to speak seemed to last for eternity before Hermes reappeared at the podium. 'I speak again on behalf of Zeus, who is delighted to announce that, as a result of his recent forward-thinking positive discrimination policies, women have for the first time been admitted to the Pnyx, and will now be invited to address the gathering.' Icarus shared a look of, *never mind positive discrimination, how about no discrimination at all*, with Sappho, before the speeches began.

Aphrodite called for the love of Gaia to be extended around the world. 'If only men were a bit more *caring* for the environment, just like women!'

Sappho looked a little bit embarrassed at Aphrodite's contribution when she got up to speak. 'With all due respect, to my mind feminism has moved on. But perhaps our learnt behaviours

towards both women and towards the environment might both be reconsidered, and someday change. Perhaps our learnt behaviours *as* men and women might change.'

Icarus cheered, but her cheer quickly died in her throat when she realised she *alone* was cheering...and everyone had just turned to stare. There were so many eyes directed towards her that it felt like an accusative form of acupuncture. Of course, it was Zeus who broke the resultant silence.

'So, look who we have here. Hello Icarus! Have you come to speak to us? You're looking rather ladylike these days, perhaps this is your chance!'

Icarus shuffled her feet, and nodded half-heartedly, but her reticence only caused Zeus to continue her humiliation.

'Let me tell you about dear Icarus and his wish to become a God!' he began, before relaying the whole darned story as if *nothing* in the meantime had changed! Was he trying to *provoke her* into speaking. 'You have now had five weeks to prove your Godliness, Icarus, so come now, speak. Here's your chance to have your say! Will we see a coronation today, of all days?'

Icarus had turned quite pale, but Sappho and Aphrodite were already pushing her forwards, and before she knew it she had been lifted up off the ground and was being passed forward towards the podium like a rockstar above everyone's heads. The cameras flashed all around her and people cheered. Soon Icarus was so confused she didn't know which way was up and which was down....she was already feeling beyond confused when she reached the podium where Zeus began his interrogation.

'You know your ABC of climate change? Because of course, nobody can rise to the status of a God without the proper examination!'

Icarus nodded, if only to clear away some of her dizziness.

'And you know how the climate is made?'

Icarus muttered a half-hearted 'yes,' under her breath. 'You take some weather and you divide...'

'So you even know your addition, your subtraction, your multiplication and division of climate change? Good gracious, you have come a long way Icarus. Perhaps you would like to share this knowledge with the crowd?'

Icarus was already feeling less the rockstar and more a laughing sacrifice, hung up before the Athenian crowds to have carrots thrown at her. And where was Dad when she most needed him? Nowhere, simply *nowhere*, just as usual, she thought, noting that he was no longer sitting at Zeus's side. Icarus looked to the sky to summon the courage to speak. If only she could *remember* anything right then – even her name! The crowds had already begun to cough impatiently, and the first carrot thwacked her on her shoulder.

She wasn't nervous of climate change...after they had been talking so long, what remained to be nervous about? It was simply time for Icarus to answer now – she raised her head to face the crowds.

'The time has come,' Icarus began. 'To talk of many things. Of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings.' Icarus stopped. No. *No!* This wasn't what she had intended! It was as if somebody had gotten control of her voice and was making her say all manner of things she didn't intend! 'I'm sorry, but you see, when I use a word like climate change, it means just what

I want it to, neither more nor less. But impenetrability and glory will have nothing to do with it!’

‘If you can *see* climate change,’ Zeus boomed, ‘then you have better eyes than most of us, Icarus. And *I* mean by impenetrability that we have had enough of this line of argument. Do continue otherwise.’

Icarus had only just started to get into her flow, but now all manner of jumbled thoughts began falling from her mouth where they had become entangled with weather glass world. ‘I didn’t say there was nothing better than climate change, but that there was nothing quite like it...if you believe in climate change then it will believe in you...is climate change animal or vegetable or mineral?...the best way to handle climate change is to hand it around first and then cut it up...climate change is nobody’s dream...if you let climate change alone then it will let you alone you know...the prettiest climates are always furthest away...’

‘Wait, wait, stop Icarus. *Icarus!*’ It was Sappho, who had finally broken her silence to try and calm Icarus down. ‘You’re going too fast. This is all very well, but what do you mean?’

No matter Sappho’s good intentions, this question threw Icarus into even more of a panic. What did Icarus mean? Even a joke should have *some* meaning! Icarus held her head in her hands just in time to fend off a second carrot hitting her on the ear. Why was it that every time she had the chance to prove herself to the world – to show that she really *could* apply herself – it all went bad weather up? ‘Would you like me to read a poem?’ she proposed, relying on Lucy’s clarity of mind to come to the rescue.

‘Oh, it needn’t come to poetry!’

‘But...!’

‘But there is no such word as ‘but’, Icarus!’

‘But please just wait a minute while I compose myself. *Please...!*’

But Zeus was having none of it. ‘I think you should go now, Icarus. Farewell Icarus. Farewell, my Lucifer. Who next wants to speak?’

The mention of Lucifer was all it took to finally prick the bubble of the conference’s increasing hysteria. The entire gathering began falling about this way and that like a Mexican Wave on laughing gas. And once the atmosphere had begun to disintegrate, what a noise it made as it began to tumble. Icarus looked about frantically for somebody – *anybody* – to come and speak, and save her from further humiliation. *Daedalus*. ‘Dad!’ she suddenly cried out loud. But it wasn’t her father who answered her pleas, nor the familiar call of the cherubims ready to lift her back to Planet Zeus, but a different multitude of angels, darkening the skies above their heads.

‘W!’ Icarus cried out, as she looked up straight into his headset bolts, several metres above her head where he was suspended on Billy’s cowboy spurs. Her dearest friend, her saviour, her brains, her sprockets; had Wings arrived to address the audience in her place? Indeed, he was now stretching his diamante wings wide.

‘Gods, thinkers, citizens. I come before you today as a changed bicycle. When I began this journey to Athens to address this conference I had a plan. But over the last two and a half thousand miles this plan has changed. I fear that you might not like what I have to say, but bear with me, listen to the end.’

The crowd’s mood had already shifted from a near-on riot to disbelief to intrigue.

'I'm a scientist. And a technologist. And a mathematician. And I have a bicycle revolution of unforeseen technological advancement to put to you all today. But we do not only need scientists. We need thinkers, like Aristotle and Plato, Pythagoras and Anaximandus here, to direct my science. While travelling through France I was asked a question which has proven to be the most important question of them all.' W paused for effect, exhibiting oratory skills to rival Demosthenes. 'Why? Why are we trying to solve our climate? What do we hope to achieve? Why am I inventing a bicycle revolution and what part does it play in my vision of the world?'

A few of the intelligentsia shuffled their feet, and there was some coughing.

'I'm not saying we shouldn't respond to the evidence of our changing climate. We must! But perhaps our climate is too complex to be solved. Perhaps it's hubristic to try! We are participants in this world, not rulers of it. And my current challenge has been working out whether my bicycle revolution has any part to play in this altered understanding of the world.'

The Pnyx had become so quiet you could now hear the individual crackles of sunshine breaking like static on the earth's surface.

'On the middle branch of the olive tree at the top of Mycenae you will find a weather glass. I urge every person here to visit Mycenae to view the world through the weather glass, then come back and tell me what you see! For what I experienced through the weather glass was such an entangled, interconnected view of the world that it altered absolutely everything. Far from us being the rulers of the climate, to manipulate as we wish, we emerge from our participation in it. We re-make ourselves in the image of what we are remade.'

Not even death could have been as silent as the Pnyx had become, before a single Athenian spoke, and then another...

'Fatalist!'

'Sceptic!'

'Nihilist!'

'Who does this bicycle think he is? Gatecrasher!'

A few carrots had already been directed in W's direction, but he still kept talking. 'It's time we reach beyond the dualistic limitations of Enlightenment science and its presumptions to human mastery. It's time for something truly radical, truly emancipatory. And now let me tell you all about my bicycle revolution!'

The crowd became somewhat calmer as W outlined the technological details of his plans, and Archimedes even posed the question: 'but will bicycle frames not reflect sunlight better if they can be designed parabolically?'

Icarus took the chance to scan the crowds once more in search of her Dad, and yes, there he was, pushing through the crowds towards her before the Pnyx could erupt into chaos once more. And he had better hurry up, Icarus thought, holding a hand out in his direction for him to grasp when she got close enough. But just when they were about to clasp hands, W concluded this section of his speech and at just the wrong moment turned attention back on Icarus.

'I'm proud to say that I address the Pnyx today on behalf of my friend, Icarus, with whom I was tasked to cycle across Europe to here. And I did so in good faith, keen to join the young semi-mortal in discovering her future along the way. But I have learnt that far from discovering

her future, the parameters of the quest have quashed it. Will humanity not rise up and see that it's *you*, the general populace, who are being stabilised not the climate, and is Icarus not a case in point? When will humanity free itself from this story of continuity, not change?

That was the last word W had the chance to say, for climate chaos had finally broken out. A club flew past Icarus's right ear, and a big glob of spit landed in her cleavage. Clubs were catapulting through the sky towards W like boomerangs. The last thing Icarus saw was Daedalus's path being blocked by the Titans while he called out, 'Icarus! Icarus! Icarus! Fly the middle way, not too close to the sun, nor too close to the sea!' Already the people in front were climbing up onto the podium...Everything then happened in the course of a split second. Icarus had closed her eyes so at least she couldn't see the frenzied eyes of her attackers, when suddenly she felt her feet lift off the ground and begin to float. By the time Icarus's eyes once more focussed, she was already high above the conference, which had begun spreading out below her feet like the crescent of a moon.

'W, are we flying? W, please tell me we are flying?' she cried, causing W, who was flying alongside her, to grin with delight. Icarus looked up. Not only was she flying, but doing so suspended from the spurs of the carbon dioxide gang she had once smuggled into the atmosphere, and heading for the sea faster than the police helicopters could chase them!

Icarus didn't need to ask where they were going: due south east as usual, across the Aegean Sea to a wing shaped island named for the place where Icarus always fell. *Ikaria*. Icarus felt her entire existence rising and falling on the thermals. So she had never been meant to rewrite her fate? She had never been meant to make it to Athens? Stabilise climate change? As if! All Zeus was interested in was maintaining his own oligarchic control over the capitalist climate and its delimited skies. Icarus's entire world kept spinning up up down, trapped within the spiralling decline of the gravity which she had opened her quest trying to conjure. If the fate of humanity remained connected at all to the fate of Icarus, as she had once supposed, then it had just been screwed over once and for ever.

'Look behind you!' W cried, causing Icarus's heart to leap. Please tell her, that after everything, she wasn't about to meet her mortality at the hands of a police helicopter?

But no.

When Icarus took a final look back over her shoulder the sky above Athens had turned the shade of cherry red bicycle, as if every red bicycle in the world were following in their path – as if W's revolution had just come true!

icarus

i.

It's a warmer world
the closer that you fly
towards the sun

We're backing into knowledge
hanging on it
our wings
around our necks like clews
and our noses to the sky

We took the route untravelled
and unravelled it
strings of daylight tangling
round our fingers just like flax

What had we started?

Climbing contours higher
splitting rungs
of atmospheric gases

sculpting skies from uncompleted
spaces bound in wax

ii.

Just working models
otherwise applied –

the reflections
of the whites of our eyes

encircling what?

The heat of globes.
The way we talk about it.

iii.

I didn't think it would be blue
inside the sun

I'd brought a saw and a set square
sliced a geometric corner
from the edges of its flames

reassigning claims –
to what?

Metaphors which open
into dissolution

The colour of pupils

Take another breath
and hold yourself to it

pin it to the light

(or perhaps it was actually a bit more like this:

*Bottled anachronisms: one eye short
of a hard-boiled egg*

icarus is depressed by the thought that,
after all, the hero may be another version
of himself, gone elsewhere

by the time that he had solved the mystery
of the disappearing sky he had disappeared
himself

he empties his limbs into another
glass of rye – what else to do when you've
lost the plot line to your life?

his nightmares are armadas, fleets of
caricatures, pseudonyms, mongrel wings

the solar cycle which he sees reflected
in his drink is a scattered shade of green

'now,' he said, 'where was I?'

the symbolists had already done away
with the polar bear and rising seas

before he knew it they'd be abolishing
the globe – as seen from space.

after five whiskys icarus was drunker
than the whisky itself

'I might compare whisky to helium,'
he said. 'It elevates the voice as helium
elevates balloons.'

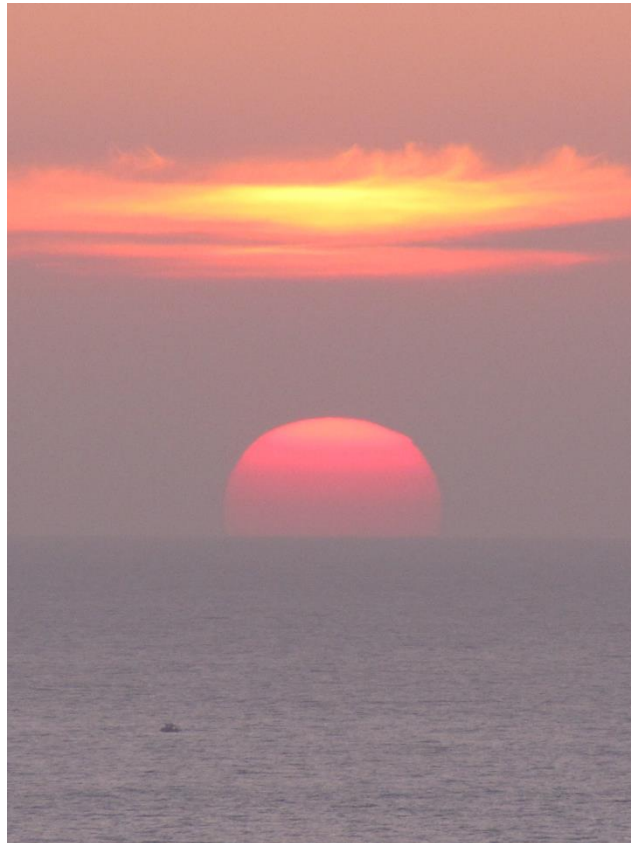
His soul was transported to the traveller,
who multiplied the earth by his imagination
with dreams of being guided by the wind.

So let us swim!

When he reached the inner limits of the sun
his heart was a pickled onion, and his eyes
were staring, shaking – oneiric hard-boiled eggs.)

Part 7: Ikaria

The metamorphosis of Icarus's final resting place on earth



*There were goats and winding dirt track roads,
and an independent people gathered in against a rugged sea.*

But most of all there were songs and dancing;

*to the lady of the labyrinth
a jar of honey*

to the daidaleion oil

*to the spit roast carcass of a goat
take this sweetened red-blood wine*

*i followed the painted footmarks
of the ancient trails of sun*

*navigating the mountain spine of my wing-
shaped island in the east aegean known as Ikaria*

i.

The œuvre of Daedalus's entire creation
lengthened the period of stasis.

Here

but a tactile exile,
located at the birthplace of ambition;

clauses erased by the wings of departure
to the furthest licences of iniquitous earth.

Beneath the obstructions of certain gravity
were incalculable patterns.

Spatial, seasonal.
Between singular and plural,

I or us.

A lack of omniscience possesses and unpossesses
the depleted air.

Ours had always been an atmosphere of unrelenting change.

The supposed art was ignorance:

digits of imitation,
patterns of asymmetric feathers,
natural novelty without inordinate pain.

We bore no small knowledge of the basics of taxidermy.
We were life-like professionals.
We were mannequins, mounted on bone.

ii.

A minimum co-option of the long brevity
of the sequence cleaves crevices
in the daily rusticity of the pull of disappearance.

Now you do not see me, now you never did.

To practise taxidermy,
one must be familiar with anatomy,
sculpture and painting as well as tanning.

Our hands are atoms,
surgically becoming.

The turning floor mediates consumption.

Shades of grey or blue.
Unfulfilled requests for globular yellow suns crafted out of beeswax.
A carbonated taste of honey from a pulse of the passing air.

All we've got is more than we could care for

– attacking our composition for its curved flexibility
and its true imitation of prayer.

iii.

And then,
Icarus.

Stubbornly ignorant of his particularly repetitive trajectory,
residues only altered by the vagaries of movements,

auras of fashion,
capabilities of the plumes of flavour policing
the ongoing modes of our becoming.

The most realistic climates for his creations
were the air-regulated conditions of museums.

A mesh cage.

If we might mollify the loose lost canons of our miraculous fathers,
then impede the opus.
Post-

a certain form of reason.
An uncanny fear of wax.

Clay is used to install glass eyes.

Our ultimate co-existence is imposed like twins
opening the retrospective texts of their entire corpus,
mortality in perpetuity.

Limbs upon limbs upon limbs.

We were first instructed in the ways of the median birth,
limiting the currency of Icarus to twenty-first century money.

Take the negative,
the affirmative,
halving the original meaning
of the verb 'to be.'

iv.

Were we accidental? The cast of unknown powers of gravity?
The temperature of the unknown growth of adoration leads
to the ultimate spectre necessary for flight:

Forms are commercially available from a number of suppliers.
I am, you are.
Blood as blue as the iris of the moon.

It was the time of year when both of our eyes
were accustomed to leaving the curved wings
of the ensemble for the seizure of the individual stage of life.

We are equal only to our preconceptions
of the meaning of tradition.

We will ignore the innumerable warnings
of the accommodation of fate.

Between opuses.
Glass eyes.
Telescopic arms.
Planets dislocated from atmosphere.

This can all be established without even opening the body cavity.

Our genus should perhaps be mounted upon a
background of forgotten parenthood.

The pupil is best known for its ability
to see into the deepest recesses of the dark.

v.

Now our hands tremble with the obscurity demanded by rebirth.

No iterations,
repetitions,

only the ability to raise the bar of penitence in time
for a commitment to fly above the limits of the sky.

What temerity reproduces the prolonged cast of the lost state of air?

Horticultural sequences,
the plurals of sun,
the damnation of the erudite arts,
an unfortunate movement of our lips towards the means of artificial breath.

Did you hear the tone of the question?
What shape to mould from gas?

Our alibis shake.

vi.

We are the harangued forms of fishes.

A pastoral scene revived by the inexorable narration of our lives.

(Invisible imaginings.)

The bodily ether possesses credit between itself,

Here

There

I am leaving my innocence,
somewhat apart.

vii.

Precisely the same references were fire
to the reluctant parishes
of the delinquent hands of lemurs,
the ghostly masks of infra-orders of species.

To be fecund is a melding of calamity,
a haunting
combined with an audacity to co-opt
the gawdy flights of desire to be our guide.

The tracks of a calculating Cupid.
High iterated egos.
Rapidly approaching the sun and the odours of vanquished penury.

Stability was a moment of wings
we did not even notice.

Please take me to be the tableau you will be.
Nude as a quantity of lacerated islands.

Part 8: Epilogue

I am an environmentalist by profession, by vocation, even, and I might add, of some renown. Since I am an environmentalist, I create environments. And since I create environments, I deal with earth, and sky and oceans. And now one of them has vanished. Literally. An environment I had just begun, about ten pages, fifteen at the most, and in which I had the highest hopes, and now the sky, which I had barely begun to outline, disappears. As I obviously cannot continue without it, I have come to ask you to find it for me. I won't be able to write a word until the mystery is solved and the sky returns. What a fate – that of an environmentalist without skies! Perhaps that is how it will be for all of us, one day. We won't have any more skies. We will become environmentalists in search of skies. The environment will perhaps not be dead, but it won't have skies in it any more. Difficult to imagine, an environment without skies. But isn't all progress, if progress exists, difficult to imagine?

Adapted from *The Flight of Icarus* by Raymond Queneau, tr. Barbara Wright



The romantic idealist in Icarus felt the same, every time she landed on Ikaria: yes, this will be the time I stay, to live out the rest of my days here. Ikaria was a land of rebels, communists, hippies and others undesirables whom the Greek government had seen fit to ship out to the East Aegean. And if Icarus really had become mortal, at least here, if population averages were anything to go by, she'd be living well into her nineties. Ikaria was a rugged island of dirt track roads and goats, empty beaches and a turquoise sea. Ikaria was an island of all-night village

fiestas, Ikarian dancing, spit-roast goat and blood-red wine. Ikaria was the land of Icarus herself, named for the place where Icarus first fell – if only the local populace had ever recognised her!

As usual, in fact, Icarus was thankful they never did, or else she'd never have had the chance to rest her weary body and her exhausted brain. Ikaria was Icarus's preferred choice of escapism, where she could wander the mountain paths as anonymously as a mountain goat. But no escapism could be forever, and nowhere, where she was unknown, could truly be a paradise, and...in the end, Icarus wanted to be of this world, not apart from it. Yes, whatever fate awaited Icarus back in the real world, or even on Planet Zeus, her future lay there, imperfect as either world might have been. But then what was perfection but an ongoing and imperfect state of change? If Icarus had learnt to work with change, then she had better do so in this world than apart from it.

When the familiar decree had arrived, on this occasion ordering Icarus to return her bicycle to its rightful owner in Salford, Icarus had known the contents of the envelope before opening it. There was more than a certain irony in the plane tickets she held out in front of her. And Icarus knew full well the risk involved that she might be plucked from mid-air by cherubims to face the weather of counsel back on Planet Zeus. But so much had changed that even that narrative might have moved on. Either way, she would never find out the answer to any of the above if she ran away from everything in Ikaria. It was time that W was reunited with his rightful owner, Lucy, re-embodied back in place. It was time to face the weather; it was time to return to life with the benefit of everything she had learnt during this quest; it was time to begin over, from the place where she'd left off. It was time that her and Zeus had a good long talk about absolutely *everything*.

But as for Daedalus? Had Naucratis been wrong about him, after all? Ever since Icarus had first fallen her father had been notably absent when Icarus's life had kept going wrong. Was he never going to catch her from her fall?

you ask me what I've brought you
from my travels

and all that I can offer you is this

CC

two letters
as an imperfect mirror
of themselves

slipping through the gaps along a horizontal line

two horseshoes or a broken chainlink
a pair of spectacles we framed in space

Despite its recent distaste for Icarus and W, Athens didn't make it easy for them to leave.

'Where's Billy when we need him?' W asked as they were pushed to the back of the taxi rank again as taxi after taxi refused W carriage. A driver even attempted to charge a fare for not transporting them, on account of the grease marks W made on his white jeans as he attempted to fit the bike into the boot. Cycling meanwhile was impossible: the only roads to the airport were motorways; in any case, W's pedals had already been removed in preparation for the flight. The underground line to the airport didn't take bikes, and neither did the airport buses. The only remaining option was an hour's sweaty walk across town and then the train.

'That train, quick!' the ticket man insisted, pointing.

'But aren't we travelling north?' W asked once they had rushed onboard. 'Doesn't this look familiar?'

Indeed it was. As a neighbouring passenger informed them, this was the train to Korinth, and they needed to change trains three stops up the line. Not that the ticket officer had told them that!

Icarus had fortunately left plenty of time. But far from things getting any easier as the train drew into the airport, they were about to become far harder still.

'So you're coming back to Manchester with me, aren't you Icarus?' W asked as she pushed him through the sliding glass doors. 'You're going to come and stay with us? Promise me! Me and Lucy and you, and you never know, we could even invite Alice to come and join us. What a household *that* would be. We'll never perfect our poetico-scientific model of climate change if you get taken from me now.'

'Of course I'm coming back with you,' Icarus said, only half disingenuously. 'Do you think I could abandon you after everything?' She gave W's handlebars a gentle squeeze. Of course, it remained very possible that Zeus would be only too happy to allow her to travel back to Manchester, and live out the rest of her mortal life as a *normal* human, with a *normal* nine to five. But even the thought of that frankly terrified Icarus. What would she *do* in the real world, outwith the context of a quest? The only skills she had learnt from Lucy were to do with poetry, and one struggling poet was presumably enough to feed without having to worry about two. And Salford wasn't *home*...

The airport concourse was vast and characterless and shiny. If climate change was everywhere and nowhere, Icarus supposed, then this was its nowhere, no-place, nothing much at all. She was at least glad, for now, to be simply leaving it.



'You don't need a ticket for bicycles – you just go and check-in,' the young man at the Aegean airlines ticket desk said, waving Icarus away to the other side of the terminal. To pass the time in the airline check-in queue, Icarus began whistling an Ikarian tune she had learnt around a fiesta spit:

*There were goats and winding dirt track roads,
and an independent people gathered in against a rugged sea.
But most of all there are always songs and dancing...*

'Oh, stop that will you,' W said. 'I'm missing Ikaria enough without you reminding me of it all the time.'

In any case, Icarus and W were already at the head of the queue.

'Next!' cried the glamorous young woman at the check-in desk, whom Icarus had watched flirt with handsome passengers, conjure a telephone voice for rich passengers, and who had even helped resolve the problems of a passenger who had arrived without a passport. Yet when she turned her eyes upon Icarus and W, it was with ill-disguised contempt.

Icarus held out her passport for the woman to inspect, but she brushed it away dismissively.

'Bicycles need to be in boxes. We won't take your bike unless it's in a box.'

Icarus took a start. But I called the airline in advance, and was told that all I had to do was remove the pedals and deflate the tyres!

'Well whoever *you* spoke to was wrong. Company policy is company policy. Bikes go in boxes.'

'But it's hardly my fault if one of your colleagues was wrong!'

'Next!' The woman was already looking behind Icarus at a middle-aged man with a golf bag.

Icarus bet the airline would have no issue transporting that! She was going nowhere. 'Can I speak to your manager please?' she asked, with a certain middle-aged haughtiness which didn't become her.

'Of course.' The woman rose to speak to her supervisor, who nodded, looked in Icarus's direction, shook her head, and followed the woman back to the desk. The supervisor, like most women of authority in Greece, had blonde bouffant hair. It had been hairsprayed so intensely that it arrived several paces behind her and risked falling off her scalp entirely when her expression changed. But this woman's face was set in a frown.

'Only bicycles in boxes,' she repeated.

'But if I'd known this I'd have found a box. Are you really saying that I can't fly home? Are you saying that I must leave my bicycle here? What *do* you propose?'

Such a question had clearly not occurred to the supervisor until then, for whom rules were rules. Now that it had been posed, her over-energetic hairdo suggested she could just imagine the security furore that would unravel if Icarus abandoned the bicycle right there...as if Icarus had *any* intention of doing *that*!

'Why don't you get your bike wrapped?' the woman finally suggested, pointing to a clingfilm wrap-point a few hundred metres down the terminal.

W was far from sure of this idea as Icarus pushed him across the terminal. 'That's even worse than wearing diamante wings. How will I breathe?'

Icarus exhaled between her teeth. 'But what else am I going to do? Leave you here?'

The man at the cling film wrapping post had his back turned to Icarus as she approached. He was slightly built for someone with such a manual job, but was performing the wrapping of perfectly adequate suitcases with the gusto of a magician performing a conjuring trick, causing his explosion of curly hair to spring this way and that.

'He looks just like...' Icarus had just begun, when the man turned round to face her.

'Icarus!' he said, softly, shuffling from one foot to the other, not quite able to meet Icarus's gaze. His hair was already curling and uncurling as his brain tried to work out precisely what to do with his own social ineptitude, as if it were a formula needing calculated – now!

'Daedalus!' Icarus replied. 'Dad! What are you doing here? I mean, it's good to see you, but...'

They were the first words that Icarus had spoken to her father for several months. She dropped W at her side and embraced her father with an enthusiasm that her far from tactile father couldn't brush away. Yet the strength of her own embrace wasn't exactly being met by her father's awkward pats on her shoulder blades.

'I hoped I'd see you here, before you left,' Daedalus muttered awkwardly once Icarus had released him.

'I'm so pleased,' Icarus replied, grasping Daedalus's hand in hers. 'I've been wanting to say to you for weeks now...I mean. I'm sorry Dad. I've been a hopeless teenager, but that's all in the past. I'm all grown up now, look!' In her excitement Icarus had almost forgotten about the 'changes' she had undertaken since her father last saw her.

Now Daedalus blushed, and didn't know where to look. 'But, of course, it makes no difference any which way you are, Icarus,' he finally replied, staring into space. 'I, I wouldn't say I *understand* you, but you're still my son. I mean my daughter. I mean, I still...'

Icarus's eyes opened wide as she waited for her father to try and stammer out the L word that had never once fallen from his lips, but Icarus herself was forced to break the silence. 'You mean you don't understand everything I've come to think about climate change? Let me explain!'

'No, no, I get that. And ok, so I disagree. I just. It's ok, Icarus. I guess we're just different aren't we. But you're still my son, I mean my daughter, I mean....hello Icarus,' Daedalus finally concluded, raising the courage to meet Icarus's expectant gaze for the first time.

Icarus smiled. How could so much intellectualism struggle to find expression for a single, simple word. But did it really matter when she saw it in his eyes? Was it not there in the fact that he had persuaded the usual baggage wrap employee to take some leave, to wait for Icarus, in case she came? Was it not identifiable in his leaving the middle path to wish Icarus on her way? Was it not now there in the gentle way he reached out to W, her friend. 'Dad, I need to introduce you to someone,' Icarus said, lifting W off the concourse and pushing him forwards. 'My own personal scientycle, Wings.'

W's head tube swelled with pride. 'Sir, sir, I'm delighted to meet you...you know I've read all of your books, and...you know, I don't think that you have a bigger fan than me!'

All awkwardness was suddenly lifted from the scene as Daedalus and W exchanged the kind of technological banter that made Icarus's head wobble.

'And, of course you liked my ideas too?' Icarus suddenly blurted out. 'Even if you disagree with them.'

'You really have grown up, haven't you Icarus?' Daedalus said, in a slightly saddened tone of voice, as if he had finally accepted closure upon his hopes that Icarus would become a scientific genius, just like him. Yet also in the tone of one relieved that Icarus had finally matured to the point where her father must now let go. He dropped Icarus's hand to scratch his curls. 'It's good to see you, Icarus. I'm sorry I've not always been here for you, along the way. Naucrate wrote...'

But Icarus was never to find out what precisely his mother had written, because the tannoy announcement had just made the first call for boarding, prompting Daedalus into practical actions to which he was *far* more suited.

‘But I’m afraid your bicycle will *never* fit on that!’ Daedalus pointed to the revolving cling film wrapping stand. Indeed, when Daedalus tried, it was clear that there was no way – sideways, frontways, backways. ‘You could always leave him here. I am sure I could find a home for him.’

Icarus turned pale. ‘I’m not leaving W anywhere, Dad. How could you even suggest such a thing!’ She had only spent ten minutes in her Dad’s company and already his lack of emotional nous had raised her heckles! And after everything that had happened over the last few weeks, it was finally too much. A waterfall of tears suddenly sprung from Icarus’s eyes – heavy enough to rival any Greek storm. ‘Will Athens ever allow me to leave? It’s all I ask – just help me to go, Dad! Only this!’

‘Please...please, just stop that will you, Icarus,’ Daedalus said. ‘You are embarrassing me. Consider how far you have come. Consider what o’clock it is. Only never cry...we will find a solution. I promise!’

Barely had Daedalus finished pleading than he had already stopped a rubbish operative and commandeered all the available cardboard – toilet roll boxes mainly – from his trolley. W inhaled deeply as if this was the final breath of air he would ever take. Next Daedalus used up an entire roll of travel tape wrapping W beyond recognition – as close in appearance to a box of toilet paper as a fully framed bicycle ever would be – before lifting W onto his shoulder and beckoning to Icarus to follow.

The check-in woman began blushing furiously upon their approach. ‘It’s just...’

It was just that a Greek man with a bicycle over his shoulder was far less easy to bully than an English speaking woman, Icarus was soon to realise.

Daedalus levered W off his shoulder gently and held him out for the woman to see.

‘Of course,’ she said. ‘Look. A bicycle box.’

Daedalus nodded and turned to Icarus for the final time. ‘I will be seeing you, Icarus. We need to, you know, properly talk. Maybe I will like your ideas when we get the chance to talk them through.’ And on that note Daedalus sloped his inept fatherhood back across the concourse before Icarus could become emotional once more. ‘Goodbye Dad!’ The words died in Icarus’s throat. Her father might at least have said goodbye!

In contrast to Icarus, the check-in lady had no emotion at all. ‘It costs eighty euros for a bicycle box,’ she said, holding out her upturned palm.

That was enough money to feed and accommodate them for three days of cycling! But right now there was nothing for it.

‘You will need to sign this disclaimer here, just in case anything happens to your bicycle,’ the woman added.

It had come to the point where Icarus would have done anything to be out of there. ‘But you have given me the boarding cards for the wrong flight!’ she pointed out, fortunately checking the paperwork before leaving the desk.

The woman snatched the cards from Icarus’s hands, and sighed heavily as she was forced to print out new cards, for the right flight, as if *everything* right then had been Icarus’s fault. And perhaps, Icarus thought, she had a point.



In the circumstances Icarus was more than happy to carry W the last few hundred metres to the oversized luggage belt. She cradled her friend's jutting angles against her own jutting collar bone, whistling as she went:

*I love my bicycle with a W
because he is Wise.
I hate him with an H
because he is Worrisome.
I feed him on Wine and Weather.
His name is Wings, and he lives...*

'He lives with me,' she completed, hopefully, happy to break any alliterative pattern if it ensured a future for her and W. 'You ok in there, W? You going to come with me if I do get whisked from the aeroplane back up to Planet Zeus? There are plenty of great cycle trails up there!'

Apparently that possibility had not even crossed W's mind. 'How will they whisk me out of the luggage compartment, Icarus?' came his muffled voice through the layers of cardboard and tape. 'They're not going to separate us, are they Icarus? You promised!'

Icarus shrugged in what she hoped was a reassuring manner, and crossed all of her fingers and toes. 'Of course they won't W! We're best friends!' She stopped and lay W down beside her. 'One second, just checking I've got everything.' In fact Icarus had reached into her hand luggage to remove her notepad, which she now flicked through. There was the flummoxed beginning, the craftwork middle, the ill-fated flight, and the inevitable fall: and not in fact strange at all that every single poem was about the weather in some way. But there was little time to become emotional as the tannoy made the final boarding call. Icarus finally peeled back a layer of tape from W's side and slipped the notepad between the slit she had made in the wrapping. 'Just tidying you up a little bit,' she explained, giving W's side a gentle pat, where she hoped that Lucy might one day find the notes if all went wrong. There couldn't have been a more appropriate ghostwriter had she dreamed of one if it turned out to be Lucy who met W off the plane in Manchester, not her.

When they reached the oversized luggage point, Icarus had hoped for a bit longer with W.

'Take some pictures of the view won't you – you know, from the aeroplane windows? For me?' W's voice was muffled and vague beyond the layers of cardboard and tape, and the luggage attendant was already reaching out to take him from Icarus's hands: to whisk onto the belt and away. Icarus held him tight to her shoulder for those last few moments.

'Thank you for everything, W. You're the best friend I have ever known.'

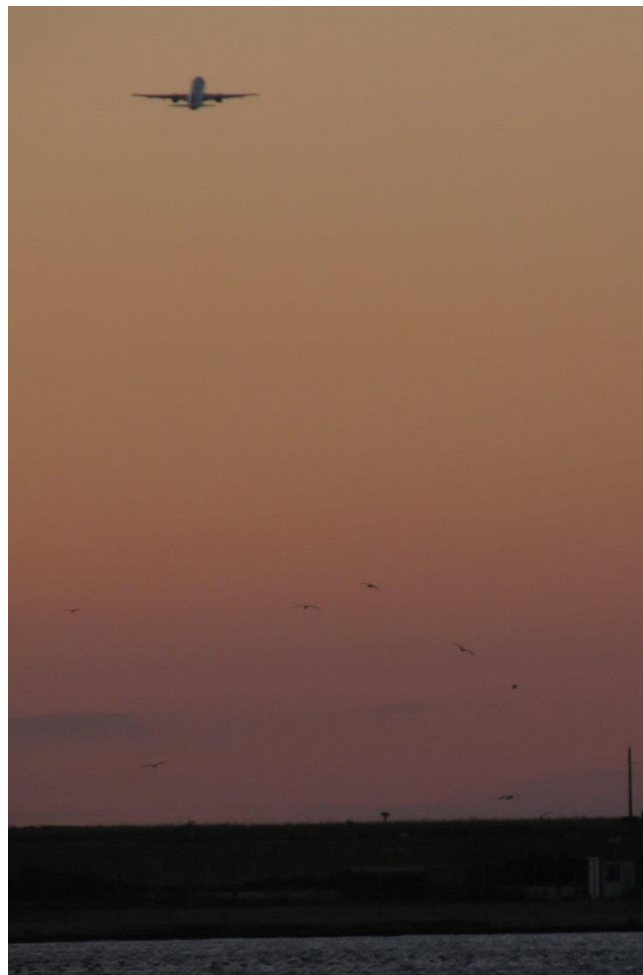
'Thank *you*, Icarus. See you soon, Icarus! I hope you have a good flight!'

'W! Wings! Farewell, for now, until we meet again!'

The luggage attendant had already rudely grabbed W from Icarus's shoulder and laid him onto the moving conveyor belt. His bike frame was already pushing through the plastic curtains into the x-ray compartment, and away, away, away...

Icarus could barely believe that W was gone. She looked around, as if wondering why she suddenly found herself alone, before digging her hands deep into her pockets, and...what was this? Icarus's fingers traced the contours of a round, flat disc, which she now held out in front of her. When had W removed *that*? When had he slipped it into her pocket? It was the badge from the front of his head tube, inscribed with the letter W. Icarus blinked back any tears and pulled her boarding card out of her pocket as she made her way towards the departure lounge.

There were no destinations, she thought. And there were no ends. Just another flight to another place, and onwards, wherever her curiosity might take her, and she would take this reminder of her trusty bicycle with her, all the way. No matter how many times she had fallen during this quest, the world kept going, on and on and....why if Icarus did ever fall again, which there was no chance of, but if she did?



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