



Winter Songs

Poems

J.R. Carpenter James Caruth
Matthew Clegg Kelvin Corcoran
Angelina D’Roza Steve Ely Nancy Gaffield
Mark Goodwin Pete Green Rob Hindle
Chris Jones Fay Musselwhite Peter Riley

Photographs

Nikki Clayton

Longbarrow Press



Bradgate Park, Leicestershire, 31 December 2020. Photograph by Nikki Clayton.

*The winter comes, I walk alone,
I want no bird to sing...*
'The Winter's Spring', John Clare

Winter Songs is a digital supplement with a seasonal theme, drawing on poems published by Longbarrow Press between 2011 and 2024. The title alludes to two events that the press organised in its first decade. The first *Winter Songs* took place in December 2008, in the low-lit function room of The Red Deer, Sheffield, and was a showcase for new work by Matthew Clegg and Andrew Hirst. The second *Winter Songs* was a collective reading devised in collaboration with Matthew Clegg, Angelina D'Roza, Andrew Hirst, Chris Jones and Fay Musselwhite, in which their poems (and those of Emily Dickinson, W.S. Graham, and others) were presented in three movements (or 'winter journeys') at The Fat Cat, Sheffield, in January 2013. Somewhere between the second and third movements it started to snow.

This *Winter Songs* is a new selection for an old year, looking forward and back.

Brian Lewis
Sheffield, December 2023

Snow Has Come

Home-sickness for my little dwelling has come upon my mind

(Irish, 12th century: author unknown)

A quietness falling on my small house. And the fuchsia that keeps on well into winter. I wasn't there to cut it back, or to watch the settling of things. Snow delineates before it covers, so that nothing is absent, nothing ever settles, *the calves in the plain, the deer on the moor.*

Angelina D'Roza

From Angelina D'Roza's collection *The Blue Hour* (Longbarrow Press, 2023)

High Riggs

No, this is the cruellest month.
January, the old year passed on,
the sky over High Neb
emptied of light.

From off the valley a wind
edged with ice
stirs the couch grass,
the earth is pungent with the dead,

my head suddenly full of voices
and faces I can't put a name to.
I sit down by a grey-green wall
to watch a dog sniff a trail by the hedge,

both of us slipped the leash, searching
these borders for a scent of home.

James Caruth

From James Caruth's sequence *Tithes* in *The Footing* (Longbarrow Press, 2013)

Plum

Late November, Ulleskelf station,
early evening darkness. Fog rolling
up the river from the German Sea.
The hiss of gas, a flickering candle;
figures, indistinct: a man on a bench,
reading an opened newspaper; a boy
with a stick or fishing rod; liveried
official of the North-Eastern Railway,
hurrying down the platform. Empty
coal train on the up-Leeds line, waiting
for the signal. The up-Normanton
rail begins to sing. Shrill whistle,
earthquake rumble, thundering billow
of sulphur and steam. Diminuendo
down the track, a momentary robin:
*a bomb explodes, the coal-trucks
clatter, the screech of shearing metal—*

Lieutenant-Colonel Pelham George
von Donop, Inspector of Railways,
Board of Trade. Formerly of the Royal
Engineers. The York-to-Leeds express,
running nine minutes late, ran into
the back of a waiting coal train,
headed for Gascoigne Wood.
Statements taken: signalmen,
drivers, firemen, guards. Wilkinson,
the station master. Scrutiny of wreckage
and infrastructure—rolling stock,
signals, permanent way. Enquiries
at the North-Eastern, the characters

of the deceased; fireman Booth
and driver Dunham—teetotal,
exemplary—but who had nevertheless
driven through signals ‘on danger’,
presumably blinded, not by the fog,
which was not particularly dense,
but by the smoke and steam
of the Manchester express,
running parallel and just ahead.

F.A. Cup finals, 74 & 75, v.
Oxford and Old Etonians. Capped
twice for England, both times v.
the Scots. Wimbledon singles, 82.
91 not out v. Quins. Nile Expedition,
Bombay Gymkhana. Marriage
to Ethel reported in John Bull—
10th of May, 1890. Left the Sappers
for the Inspectorate, 1899. Promoted,
Chief Inspecting Officer, July 1913.
One hundred and eighty-two reports:
mettle, fatigue, systemic and human
error—how many dead fellahs
between Sarras and Akasha,
dead weavers in the plague-pits
of Girangaon? It wasn’t his fault.
Godfather, Jeeves and Wooster.

Steve Ely

From Steve Ely’s collection *Eely* (Longbarrow Press, 2024). The poem imagines the train crash that took place at Ulleskelf station on 24th November, 1906. Plum oversaw the building of the Sarras-to-Akasha railway in Sudan during the Gordon Relief Expedition, 1884-85, and was stationed in Bombay during the plague of the late 1890s. He was godfather to P. G. Wodehouse who was named after him.

Firewood

You need good boots,
a collar to the wind, and a shoulder
braced for the brunt of a cussed load;
gloves end up half pocket-stuffed, half lost
in the woods we gather to meet each winter
night head on. Alone or in pairs by dark we go,
every day or so, for armfuls that warm us
twice at least – as we handle it home,
cleave it apart for the hearth brought to light
by peeling back years of emulsion, paper, tin
and a squatting of soot,

then we rouse in it
a thing with breath to rage against dim,
to syncopate our undertones, rid the roomscape
of straight edge and flickered repeat.
A crucible for plots incendiary and tropical,
enthraling though hard to follow:
a vapour plume flags a site of pent intensity,
battleground or stadium, factory or town,
when its cover blows, licks and lashes
make light of a community exposed,
interspersed with snapshots in deep focus
of what may lie beneath the skin or ground,
and loud reports as a barricade falls,
spits its knots to hide unchecked in rugs,
socks and feline fur.

We burn what we can find
in streets colonised by stair shifters, roof raisers,
bay window chasers, home owners performing
their open house surgery, bedrooms waiting
in polythene wings. We raid their skips
for hundred year timber whose days are up,
try our luck at the hospital new-build outcrop
for pallet or plank, and it's never enough
for the beast that gapes at our chimney breast.
While we, between chokes, stoke it to its last
bright gasp, brasher for the creep of black
pooling coolly round embers' fade to ash,
the flare shares its shine in the beeswaxed flanks
of our borrowed cello, battered piano, trove
of guitars, without it crossing a mind
to feed those darkening chambers in
to the guttering flame.

Fay Musselwhite

From Fay Musselwhite's collection *Contraflow* (Longbarrow Press, 2016)

Pathos

Coughing up my ashy breath
I fight against the urge to shout
and stamp against the creaking cold.
I wince again, recall my sins.
Between the dark fields and the house,
custodian of deepening snow,
I linger on. Don't call me in,
I'm orphan now. Sleeves and knees
are stiffening with cakes of ice;
the old man's socks I used for gloves
are lost in tunnels that I've dug.
My streets are empty as the moon,
curtains closed as sealed-up hearths.
I stop the traffic and the world
and lay down on a snow-white road.

There was another snowed-out road;
traffic and the whole world stopped,
windows rouged like little hearths
and streets unprinted as the moon.
I was digging tunnels in the drifts –
a pair of football socks for gloves,
mint cake wads of snow gone stiff
on sleeves and knees. My mother
forgot to call me in, so I stayed
and pioneered a spit of snow
between the houses and dark fields,
forgetting all my chores. I stood alone,
up to my thighs in creaking cold
and worked my courage up to shout,
signing space with all my breath.

Matthew Clegg from *Cazique* (Longbarrow Press, 2018)

Grise Fiord | 76°25'05"N 82°53'36"W

Six hundred miles along the boundary between only water and ice. The hunger and cold percussing your bones were real. The fear of death as your engine dipped into three final litres of diesel was real. The eight-day loneliness was real. It was the border you crossed that was fiction. Seventy years ago officials hoodwinked Inuit families into relocating to a place where nothing was, driving them into this ground like human flags. It's a kind of conceptual alchemy, transmuting base substances – first they are ice and rock, then territory. You've voyaged halfway around the world and this ancient story of land and control stays the same. And none of the struggles relate to the needs of the people, Kate said: *all boys and toys and backyard bickering*. Canada claiming its sovereign rights in a region no-one ever wanted to call home. Negotiations, borders, imaginary lines, the fine lines between defining and dividing, at once shaping states and placing them at odds. Living here is straightforward and hard. You expect it to be cold and it is cold. The local people are sparing with words as if strongholding their hoard of ideas to insure against some future scarcity. The road is stone and dust, the roadside stone and dust. The kerb is improvised

from rusted oil drums weighted down with stone and dust. Opposite, the kerb is permafrost. Adjacent to the co-op store a tanker the size of a milk float loiters, engine idling, turning grey smoke out into white air. Its driver now becomes the latest villager to recognise your face from bulletins: *the boat guy*. She's tough to read. There is no smile and you scan for precursors of kindness as she looks you up and down, perhaps to weigh up your physique against the vast blank tract you reputedly traversed to make it here, against the unique featureless meniscus of Baffin Bay. In some other world your welcoming committee would have been a delegation from the RCMP, your tour sightseeing just courts and prison bars. This escapade allowed you to go viral, that implausible trip in a fibreglass boat to Ellesmere Island from west Greenland had your name trending on social media and Nunavut replaced immigration laws with handshakes. Your preparation for the trip did not overlook the name for Grise Fiord in Inuktitut but, as the driver of the tanker reminds you, it translates into English as *the place that never thaws*.

Pete Green

From Pete Green's short book *Hemisphere* (Longbarrow Press, 2021)

From *Words Through a Hole Where Once There Was
a Chimpanzee's Face*

If I were looking for the source of chill in my bones
perhaps it's in Kirkenes harbour on the Northern Cape;
the abandoned Russian trawlers, a crane, white walkways,
leave me here where nothing moves.

We see the assembled gear and hidden lives,
lit from far below, silent and ready to play;
the King of the Arctic has quit to find the start of it all,
vacating a snow-covered office chair on the dock.

And if I were looking for that cold cold answer,
in the last brilliant compartment of the sun,
the church bell would ring out its contours on the air
compressing the water to picture a polar sky.

Rolling out the sound condenses over ice,
sea smoke trails the boat, twists of light letter the air,
a language holding low around the edges of the world,
empty and endless for the mind to lodge at zero.

Kelvin Corcoran

From Kelvin Corcoran's pamphlet *Words Through a Hole Where Once There Was
a Chimpanzee's Face* (Longbarrow Press, 2011)

Particular Winter, Trossachs, January 2010

late light crumbles
across Coire Earb

Cruach Ardrain fades
and crisps and fades
and cr

isps as

snow-smoke surges
on gusts' tuning

spindrift-twisters hiss
grains of glint-sting
on my cheeks like

radio taking my skin
I am granular light like
this granular-lit-ground
could I & land be blown

away on wind
as frozen smoke

? drift-ridges & ice-clad
grasses scatter
light's fast passing
of pale gold powders

a sheet

of solid lochan holds
shine tight on ice as
gauze -spooks of snow

sheeesh its gloss
a moment

of mountain hare fast
as a statue disintegrates
to white speed's

furry smoke -light

Mark Goodwin

From Mark Goodwin's collection *Steps* (Longbarrow Press, 2014)

From *A Year at Sissinghurst*

Precious flowers of mid-winter. Chinese jasmine. Demands shelter. From frost. Twisted ribbons of Wych-hazel. Crinkle gold through the rime. Tassels of green-grey catkins. Thrive against a north wall. Against a high yew hedge. A pale garden. I am now planning. Under the first flakes of snow.

J.R. Carpenter

From J.R. Carpenter's collection *This is a Picture of Wind* (Longbarrow Press, 2020)

Year's End, Damflask

The sun is spinning air into copper
and scalding the reservoir.
People are out talking sense
back into their lives.
Dogs snuffle at cold trails.

Out on the bike I lead a caravan
of outsized cars over the dam.
A hill of geese hangs ahead
like a rug on a line, foreshortened
as fields with bright things are.

The road turns away, remembering:
an old lane dropping through trees
to a bridge, a mill, a few cottages,
long drowned and made strange
as a reef.

The year slopes to its end.
A fish flips, the geese move and stop;
the reservoir wrinkles and darkens.
Appearing from nowhere, the moon
freezes trees to the spot.

Rob Hindle

From Rob Hindle's collection *Sapo* (Longbarrow Press, 2022)

The Last Day of the Year

To last till midnight, sleep an hour
and lose this fogbound afternoon;
to draw in, braid the breath you share,
and slow a dusk-encumbered room.

Your kids doze close with coupled fists
as though they cradle loops of rope
that tether backs to knees to hips
like four bound sailors in a boat.

Press here: heel-kicks against your palm
flash life like starlight marking time:
you feel a universe of harm
imperceptibly realign.

Tonight's New Year. The weatherman
forecasts a bone-cold ten below,
but now you cling to heat and skin
to banish auguries of snow.

Chris Jones

From Chris Jones's collection *Skin* (Longbarrow Press, 2015)

From *Pennine Tales*

Upper Colden. Snow swirls at the doors
of stone farmhouses, thistle vibrating in the wind,
snow cloud approaching up the valley.
This is true north. Later the moon rises and people
behind rows of small windows take tablets,
set the clock, do what they usually do.

In sleep, in dream song,
the daylight ghosts are laid
and trouble us no more.
In silence nightlong
a life's debts are paid
at the open door.

Peter Riley

From Peter Riley's collection *Truth, Justice, and the Companionship of Owls*
(Longbarrow Press, 2019)



Cover photography: Nikki Clayton

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