

GCSE (9–1)

Teacher Guide

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

J351

For first teaching in 2015

**‘Unseen’ 20th and
21st century literary texts**

Version 2



GCSE (9–1) ENGLISH LANGUAGE

'Unseen' 20th and 21st century literary texts

This collection of texts has been designed to support the teaching and delivery of the OCR GCSE (9–1) in English Language J351. These texts have been selected to fit the context of Component 2, Exploring effects and impact. There are 12 pairings of thematically linked texts from the 20th and 21st centuries, including prose fiction and literary non-fiction. They range from 300 to 600 words in length, comparable to the length of the unseen texts that students could encounter in the exam.

This anthology can be used to develop students' reading and language analysis skills and can be adapted to suit particular groups of students, learning styles or teaching approaches. References have been given at the end of each text should you wish to look at a longer or an alternative extract as part of differentiated classroom activities.

The texts cover a variety of themes and could be used as alternative learner resources for the suggested activities outlined in the 'Approaching unseen 20th and 21st century literary texts' delivery guide, available on the OCR website. This anthology could also be used for exam preparation.

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Theme: Home

The Paying Guests

– Sarah Waters (prose fiction, 2014)

London, 1922. Frances's father and her two brothers, Noel and John Arthur, have been killed during the First World War. Frances and her mother have decided to take in lodgers as they are short of money. The lodgers, Mr and Mrs Barber, have just arrived at their house and are currently unpacking upstairs.

As Frances reached to the lamp there were more footsteps in the room above; and then her hazel eyes returned to the ceiling.

'It might be Noel or John Arthur up there,' she murmured, as the light went down.

And, yes, thought Frances a moment later, lingering in the shadowy hall, it might be; for she could smell tobacco smoke now, and hear some sort of masculine muttering up on the landing, along with the tap of a slippered male foot... And just like that, like a knee or an elbow receiving a blow on the wrong spot, her heart was jangling. How grief could catch one out, still! She had to stand at the foot of the stairs while the fit of sorrow ran through her. But if only, she thought, as she began to climb — she hadn't thought it in ages — if only, if only she might turn the stair and find one of her brothers at the top — John Arthur, say, looking lean, looking bookish, looking like a whimsical monk in his brown Jaeger dressing-gown and Garden City sandals.

There was no one save Mr Barber, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, his jacket off, his cuffs rolled back; he was fiddling with a nasty thing he had evidently just hung on the landing wall, a combination barometer-and-clothes-brush set with a lurid orangey varnish. But lurid touches were everywhere, she saw with dismay. It was as if a giant mouth had sucked a bag of boiled sweets and then given the house a lick. The faded carpet in her mother's old bedroom was lost beneath pseudo-Persian rugs. The lovely pier-glass had been draped slant-wise with a fringed Indian shawl. A print on one of the walls appeared to be a Classical nude in the Lord Leighton manner. The wicker birdcage twirled slowly on a ribbon from a hook that had been screwed into the ceiling; inside it was a silk-and-feather parrot on a papier-mâché perch.

The landing light was turned up high, hissing away as if furious. Frances wondered if the couple had remembered that she and her mother were paying for that. Catching Mr Barber's eye, she said, in a voice to match the dreadful brightness all around them, 'Got everything straight, have you?'

whimsical: unusual, playful and unpredictable

barometer: an instrument used to forecast the weather

Waters, S, *The Paying Guests*, (2014), Virago Press, London, pp.16-18.

The Songlines

– Bruce Chatwin (literary non-fiction, 1987)

Here, Chatwin remembers how he first became fascinated with Australia (a place he would later travel to) and his early life during World War II.

I also knew, from my great-aunt Ruth, that Australia was the country of the Upside-downers. A hole, bored straight through the earth from England, would burst out under their feet.

‘Why don’t they fall off?’ I asked.

‘Gravity,’ she whispered.

She had in her library a book about the continent, and I would gaze in wonder at pictures of the koala and kookaburra, the platypus and Tasmanian bush-devil, Old Man Kangaroo and Yellow Dog Dingo, and Sydney Harbour Bridge.

But the picture I liked best showed an Aboriginal family on the move. They were lean, angular people and they went about naked. Their skin was very black, not the glitterblack of negroes but matt black, as if the sun had sucked away all possibility of reflection. The man had a long forked beard and carried a spear or two, and a spear-thrower. The woman carried a dilly-bag and a baby at her breast. A small boy strolled beside her — I identified myself with him.

I remember the fantastic homelessness of my first five years. My father was in the Navy, at sea. My mother and I would shuttle back and forth, on the railways of wartime England, on visits to family and friends.

All the frenzied agitation of the times communicated itself to me: the hiss of steam on a fogbound station; the double clu-unk of carriage doors closing; the drone of aircraft, the searchlights, the sirens; the sound of a mouth-organ along a platform of sleeping soldiers.

Home, if we had one, was a solid black suitcase called the Rev-Robe, in which there was a corner for my clothes and my Mickey Mouse gas-mask. I knew that, once the bombs began to fall, I could curl up inside the Rev-Robe, and be safe.

Tasmanian bush-devil: a wild carnivore that lives on the Australian island of Tasmania

Old Man Kangaroo: a fully grown male kangaroo

Yellow Dog Dingo: a wild dog with a sandy coloured coat

Aboriginal: native of Australia

dilly-bag: a traditional Aboriginal bag used to collect food

Chatwin. B, *The Songlines*, (1987), Vintage, Random House, London, pp.5-6.

Theme: Difference

About a Boy

– Nick Hornby (prose fiction, 1998)

12-year-old Marcus's mother and father separated four years ago. Marcus has recently moved from Cambridge to London with his mother. It is his second day at his new school and he has arrived early and gone to the form room to try and avoid some students that have been giving him a hard time.

There were a couple of girls in the room, but they ignored him, unless the snort of laughter he heard while he was getting his reading book out had anything to do with him.

What was there to laugh at? Not much, really, unless you were the kind of person who was on permanent lookout for something to laugh at. Unfortunately, that was exactly the kind of person most kids were, in his experience. They patrolled up and down school corridors like sharks, except that what they were on the lookout for wasn't flesh but the wrong trousers, or the wrong haircut, or the wrong shoes, any or all of which sent them wild with excitement. As he was usually wearing the wrong shoes or the wrong trousers, and his haircut was wrong all the time, every day of the week, he didn't have to do very much to send them all demented.

Marcus knew he was weird, and he knew that part of the reason he was weird was because his mum was weird. She just didn't get this, any of it. She was always telling him that only shallow people made judgements on the basis of clothes or hair; she didn't want him to watch rubbish television, or listen to rubbish music, or play rubbish computer games (she thought they were all rubbish), which meant that if he wanted to do anything that any of the other kids spent their time doing he had to argue with her for hours. He usually lost, and she was so good at arguing that he felt good about losing. She could explain why listening to Joni Mitchell and Bob Marley (who happened to be her two favourite singers) was much better for him than listening to Snoop Doggy Dogg, and why it was more important to read books than to play on the Gameboy his dad had given him. But he couldn't pass any of this on to the kids at school. If he tried to tell Lee Hartley - the biggest and loudest and nastiest of the kids he'd met yesterday - that he didn't approve of Snoop Doggy Dogg because Snoop Doggy Dogg had a bad attitude to women, Lee Hartley would thump him, or call him something that he didn't want to be called. It wasn't so bad in Cambridge, because there were loads of kids who weren't right for school, and loads of mums who had made them that way, but in London it was different.

Hornby, N, *About a Boy*, (1998; this edition: 2014), Penguin Books, London, pp.13-14.

The Quarry

– Iain Banks (prose fiction, 2013)

The narrator, Kit, is an autistic teenager. In this extract, Kit's friend Hol gives him some advice.

Most people are insecure, and with good reason. Not me.

This is probably because I've had to think about who I am and who I'm not, which is something your average person generally doesn't have to do. Your average person has a pair of parents, or at least a mother, or at least knows roughly where they fit into all that family business in a way that I, for better or worse, don't. Usually I think it's for the better, though sometimes not.

Also, it helps that I am very clever, if challenged in other ways. Challenged in this context means that I am weird, strange, odd, socially disabled, forever looking at things from an unusual angle, or however you want to put it.

Most things, I've come to understand, fit into some sort of spectrum. The descriptions of myself fit into a spectrum that stretches from 'highly gifted' at one end to 'nutter' at the other, both of which I am comfortable with. One comes from understanding and respect, while the other comes from ignorance and fear. Mrs Willoughby explained the thinking behind both terms. Well, she explained the thinking behind the latter term, the offensive, deliberately hurtful term; the thinking behind the former, respectful judgement seemed perfectly clear and valid to me. (She got that wincing expression on her face when I mentioned this, but didn't say anything. Hol was more direct.)

'But I am clever.'

'I know. It's not the being clever that's the problem, Kit. It's the telling people.'

'So I ought to lie?'

'You ought to be less . . . determined to tell people how clever you are. How much cleverer you are than they are.'

'Even if it's true?'

'Especially then.'

'But—'

'Plus, you're missing something.'

I felt myself rock back in my seat. 'Really?'

'Yes. There are different types of cleverness.'

'Hmm,' I said, which is what I've learned to say rather than the things I used to say, like, No there aren't, or, Are you sure? – in what was, apparently, a sarcastic tone.

'If nothing else,' Hol said, 'other people think that there are different types of cleverness, and that's what matters, in this context.'

'Are you sure, Hol?' I asked, patiently.

'There you go.'

'There I go what?'

'There you go, sounding sarcastic and patronising.'

'But I wasn't being either. I was trying to sound patient.'

'Again, what you meant isn't what matters, Kit. What matters is how you appear, what other people think you meant.'

Banks, I, *The Quarry*, (2013), Abacus, Little Brown Book Group, London, pp.1-3.

Theme: Memory

Home: The story of everyone who ever lived in our house

– Julie Myerson (literary non-fiction, 2004)

The narrator, Julie Myerson, has discovered that in 1881 a writer and journalist called Henry Hayward lived in her house with his wife Charlotte and their three children. In this extract Myerson, her husband Jonathan and their three children, Jake, Raphael and Chloe, are stripping the wallpaper from the walls of the house.

And the layers of paper curled and rolled off and dropped onto the floor – and, quite perfectly preserved, half a dozen different patterns were revealed: imitation wood grain (the sixties?), brown zigzags (the fifties?) – then a bold Art Deco style in cobalt and scarlet (the twenties?). Under that, large Morris-style chocolate ferns and flowers, and beneath that a solid layer of thick custard-coloured paint. Each layer – imperfectly glued, faded, merged — revealed another.

‘What smells so horrible?’ said Jake, wrinkling his nose.

‘The glue, I think,’ Jonathan said. ‘Probably made from bones.’

‘Wicked!’ said Raphael and then, frowning, ‘But would vegetarians have used it?’

‘Weren’t really any vegetarians then.’

‘Just think,’ I said, as another William Morris-style lily showed us its black, almost funereally rimmed edges, ‘how long since anyone saw these patterns. I wonder when each one was covered up.’

‘Which one was the Haywards’ wallpaper?’ asked Chloë.

‘I imagine that’s something we’ll never know.’

But even a little information is seductive. Once you know names, you start to see things. It’s impossible not to – impossible to resist. I know almost nothing real of Henry Hayward but my imagination has already begun to whisper. And I admit it. I’ve begun to listen.

He’s tall, whiskery, gingery-haired (Hayward is definitely a gingery name). And maybe a bit of a punter, inclined to slope off to the races at Epsom or Goodwood, though he never loses too much – he has it in check. His wife Charlotte is much shorter, plumper and more self-effacing – a terrible worrier, especially about what other people say. Sometimes she thinks she only sees herself through other people’s eyes. Take away that critical, slightly warped perspective and she’s really not quite sure who she is – not that she’d ever think of expressing such a flighty idea to anyone.

. . .

But these are just a writer’s irresistible imaginings, not facts. What do I know?

And it might all have been quite the other way round.

Charlotte might have been a quite different woman – shrill, sharp-tongued, wealthier by birth than her husband who, she never ceases to remind him, may be an author but is hardly a successful one. He’s yet to earn more than a few shillings from it. It’s pathetic, at his age – all very well to dub himself ‘author and journalist’ when the census man calls round, but when’s he going to get more than the odd article published in the South London Press? If it wasn’t for the money left her by her mother, they’d still be living out in the falling-down cottage in Deptford and would never have afforded somewhere so swanky and clean and new.

cobalt: a deep, strong blue colour

funereally: having a mournful character, suitable for a funeral

self-effacing: not drawing attention to oneself; modest

Myerson, J, *Home: The story of everyone who ever lived in our house*, (2005), Harper Perrenial, London, pp.9-12

The Ocean at the End of the Lane

– Neil Gaiman (prose fiction, 2013)

In this extract, the unnamed narrator is returning to his childhood hometown for a funeral.

I had been driving towards a house that had not existed for decades.

I thought of turning around, then, as I drove down a wide street that had once been a flint lane beside a barley field, of turning back and leaving the past undisturbed. But I was curious.

The old house, the one I had lived in for seven years, from when I was five until I was twelve, that house had been knocked down and was lost for good. The new house, the one my parents had built at the bottom of the garden, between the azalea bushes and the green circle in the grass we called the fairy ring, that had been sold thirty years ago.

I slowed the car as I saw the new house. It would always be the new house in my head. I pulled up into the driveway, observing the way they had built out on the mid-seventies architecture. I had forgotten that the bricks of the house were chocolate brown. The new people had made my mother's tiny balcony into a two-storey sunroom. I stared at the house, remembering less than I had expected about my teenage years: no good times, no bad times. I'd lived in that place, for a while, as a teenager. It didn't seem to be any part of who I was now.

I backed the car out of their driveway.

...

The little country lane of my childhood had become a black tarmac road that swerved as a buffer between two sprawling housing estates. I drove further down it, away from the town, which was not the way I should have been travelling, and it felt good.

The slick black road became narrower, windier, became the single-lane track I remembered from my childhood, became packed earth and knobbly, bone-like flints.

Soon I was driving slowly, bumpily, down a narrow lane with brambles and briar roses on each side, wherever the edge was not a stand of hazels or a wild hedgerow. It felt like I had driven back in time.

I remembered it before I turned the corner and saw it, in all its dilapidated red-brick glory: the Hempstocks' farmhouse.

It took me by surprise, although that was where the lane had always ended. I could have gone no further. I parked the car at the side of the farmyard. I had no plan. I wondered whether, after all these years, there was anyone still living there, or, more precisely, if the Hempstocks were still living there. It seemed unlikely, but then, from what little I remembered, they had been unlikely people.

The stench of cow muck struck me as I got out of the car, and I walked gingerly across the small yard to the front door. I looked for a doorbell, in vain, and then I knocked. The door had not been latched properly, and it swung gently open as I rapped it with my knuckles.

I had been here, hadn't I, a long time ago? I was sure I had. Childhood memories are sometimes covered and obscured beneath the things that come later, like childhood toys forgotten at the bottom of a crammed adult closet, but they are never lost for good.

azalea: brightly coloured flower

dilapidated: in a state of ruin as a result of age or neglect

gingerly: in a careful or cautious manner

obscured: hidden

Gaiman, N, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, (2014), Headline Publishing Group, London, pp.4-8.

Theme: Parenthood

The Children of Men

– P.D. James (prose fiction, 1992)

Set in 2021, no human being has been able to give birth for 25 years and scientists still do not understand why. Here, Theo meets a woman as he walks through Oxford towards Magdalen College.

It happened on the fourth Wednesday in January. Walking to Magdalen as was his custom, he had turned from St. John Street into Beaumont Street and was nearing the entrance to the Ashmolean Museum when a woman approached him wheeling a pram. The thin drizzle had stopped and as she drew alongside him she paused to fold back the mackintosh cover and push down the pram hood. The doll was revealed, propped upright against the cushions, the two arms, hands mittened, resting on the quilted coverlet, a parody of childhood, at once pathetic and sinister. Shocked and repelled, Theo found that he couldn't keep his eyes off it. The glossy irises, unnaturally large, bluer than those of any human eye, a gleaming azure, seemed to fix on him their unseeing stare which yet horribly suggested a dormant intelligence, alien and monstrous. The eyelashes, dark brown, lay like spiders on the delicately tinted porcelain cheeks and an adult abundance of yellow crimped hair sprung from beneath the close-fitting lace-trimmed bonnet.

It had been years since he had last seen a doll thus paraded, but they had been common twenty years ago, had indeed become something of a craze. Doll-making was the only section of the toy industry which, with the production of prams, had for a decade flourished; it had produced dolls for the whole range of frustrated maternal desire, some cheap and tawdry but some of remarkable craftsmanship and beauty.

A middle-aged woman in well-fitting tweeds, hair carefully groomed, came up to the pram, smiled at the doll's owner and began a congratulatory patter. The first woman, simpering with pleasure, leaned forward, smoothed the satin quilted pram cover, adjusted the bonnet, tucked in a stray lock of hair. The second tickled the doll beneath its chin as she might a cat, still murmuring her baby talk.

Theo, more depressed and disgusted by the charade than surely such harmless play-acting justified, was turning away when it happened. The second woman suddenly seized the doll, tore it from the coverings and, without a word, swung it twice round her head by the legs and dashed it against the stone wall with tremendous force. The face shattered and shards

of porcelain fell tinkling to the pavement. The owner was for two seconds absolutely silent. And then she screamed. The sound was horrible, the scream of the tortured, the bereaved, a terrified, high-pitched squealing, inhuman yet all too human, unstoppable. She stood there, hat askew, head thrown back to the heavens, her mouth stretched into a gape from which poured her agony, her grief, her anger. She seemed at first unaware that the attacker still stood there, watching her with silent contempt. Then the woman turned and walked briskly through the open gates, across the courtyard and into the Ashmolean. Suddenly aware that the attacker had escaped, the doll-owner galumphed after her, still screaming, then, apparently realising the hopelessness of it, returned to the pram. She had grown quieter now and, sinking to her knees, began gathering up the broken pieces, sobbing and moaning gently, trying to match them as she might a jigsaw puzzle. Two gleaming eyes, horribly real, joined by a spring, rolled towards Theo. He had a second's impulse to pick them up, to help, to speak at least a few words of comfort. He could have pointed out that she could buy another child.

tawdry: showy, but cheap and of poor quality

galumphed: moved in a clumsy, noisy manner

James, P.D., *The Children of Men*, (1992; this edition: 2010), Faber and Faber, London, chapter 6, beg. paragraph 2.

Man and Boy

– Tony Parsons (prose fiction, 1999)

In this extract, a young man witnesses the birth of his first child.

It's a boy, it's a boy!

It's a little boy.

I look at this baby — as bald, wrinkled and scrunched up as an old man — and something chemical happens inside me.

It — I mean he — looks like the most beautiful baby in the history of the world. Is it — he — really the most beautiful baby in the history of the world? Or is that just my biological programming kicking in? Does everyone feel this way? Even people with plain babies? Is our baby really so beautiful?

I honestly can't tell.

The baby is sleeping in the arms of the woman I love. I sit on the edge of the bed and stare at the pair of them, feeling like I belong in this room with this woman and this baby in a way that I have never belonged anywhere.

Later my parents are there. When she is done with the hugs and kisses, my mother counts the baby's fingers and toes, checking for webbed feet. But he is fine, the baby is fine.

'He's a little smasher,' my mum says. 'A little smasher!'

My father looks at the baby and something inside him seems to melt.

There are many good things about my father, but he is not a soft man, he is not a sentimental man. He doesn't gurgle and coo over babies in the street. My father is a good man, but the things he has gone through in his life mean that he is also a hard man. Today some ice deep inside him begins to crack and I can tell he feels it too.

This is the most beautiful baby in the world.

I give my father a bottle I bought months ago. It is bourbon. My father only drinks beer and whisky, but he takes the bottle with a big grin on his face. The label on the bottle says 'Old

Granddad'. That's him. That's my father.

And I know today that I have become more like him. Today I am a father too. All the supposed landmarks of manhood — losing my virginity, getting my driving licence, voting for the first time — were all just the outer suburbs of my youth. I went through all those things and came out the other side fundamentally unchanged, still a boy.

But now I have helped to bring another human being into the world.

Today I became what my father has been forever.

Today I became a man.

I am twenty-five years old.

bourbon: a well-known type of American whisky

Parsons, T, *Man and Boy*, (1999; this edition: 2010), Harper Collins Publishers, London, pp.1-2

Theme: Rituals

Me Cheeta: The Autobiography

– Tony Parsons (prose fiction, 1999)

Before Cheeta found global fame starring alongside Tarzan in the movies, he lived a life like any other chimpanzee. Here, in his autobiography, he recalls his early life.

You've never seen a rain dance, have you? They were us at our best. For hours beforehand you'd feel the electricity building in the air. You'd climb up into the lower canopy to escape the humidity, and it would slither up the trunk behind you. So you'd climb higher, until finally you'd be perched in the topmost branches, high over the rest of the forest, panting and sticky with moisture, too tired even to reach for one of those fizzing yellowy-green fruits whose name, dammit, escapes me.

From across the forest you'd hear the low coughs given out by other tree-climbers. No birds. No insects. Only our low, muffled coughs, echoless in the wet air. Then the first pant-hoots: the long low hoots, the shorter higher breaths. Mama and the others in our tree would respond with their own hoots, counting themselves in, and then the pants would climb higher, flowering into screams, and the screams would link into a continuous long chorus, and as the rain began to leak a few drops Mama would start pounding on the trunk, shaking the branches, like she was trying to wake the tree up too, and you could hear us all through the forest, drumming up the storm. And over it all, our alpha, Kirk, summoning us to gather for the dance.

We'd climb down from our tree and follow his call through the forest. In my memory it's always dusk as we sight Kirk, walking upright at the apex of a long-grassed ridge and howling in the strengthening rain, looking terrifying up close, twenty times my own size. He seems to be coaxing the thunder towards us, reeling it in. The other grown-ups, like Cary and Archie, are quieter but also in a trance and visibly shaking. The thunder swings through the upper canopy, approaching in huge, looping leaps until finally it's upon us, above us, all over us, and the air suddenly turns into rain.

The mothers clear themselves and us children away into the sloe trees to watch. We're absolutely rapt. Kirk, illuminated by lightning, charges down the ridge at an astonishing speed. Then Cary, who's clever, discovers rocks can be made to bounce up and smack satisfyingly into the foliage. Cary can always do certain things Kirk can't. Archie is smaller than the others and finds a branch to whack against a tree-trunk, leaving a series of white scars. They are our heroes, and Victoria and I are too enthralled by it all to eat our sloes.

apex: the top or highest part of something

sloe: a small blue-black fruit

Lever, J, *Me Cheeta: The Autobiography*, (2009), Fourth Estate, Harper Collins Publishers, London, pp.11-13.

A Rose for Winter

– Laurie Lee (literary non-fiction, 1955)

English writer Laurie Lee travelled through Andalusia in southern Spain in 1955. This extract, which takes place at a bullfight in Seville, comes from the memoir he wrote about his journey.

A superb, straight-limbed young man now stepped forward into the ring and a cheer went up, for he had already earned some reputation. He was dressed, not in the heavy gold-embroidered garments of the professional matador, but in Andalusian riding clothes – a broad black hat, short waistcoat, tight-fitting trousers and high-heeled boots. With cape folded, hat held to his breast, he faced the President's box, bowed, raised his head, and in ringing tones dedicated the next bull to one of the virgins, whose name was Gloria. Her companions congratulated her rather noisily upon the honour, while she, huge-eyed and delicate as a doll, waved a small hand, and then went pale as death.

The President leaned forward and gave the signal, the trumpet sounded, and the doors opened for the fourth bull. He came in like thunder, snorting and kicking up the dust, his black coat shining like a seal's, his horned head lowered for immediate attack. Two assistants, trailing long capes, ran out and played him first, a formal prologue designed to discover the unknown temper of the bull. Slowly, their job done, they were beaten back towards the barriers, and the bull stood alone. Then Gloria's champion walked out across the sand. He took up his stand, the pale sun gilding his rigid face, gave a loud clear shout to the bull, and from that moment we witnessed an almost faultless combat. Elegant, firm-footed as a dancer, but with cold courage and movements of continual beauty, the boy entirely dominated the bull. He seemed to turn the fury of the beast into a creative force which he alone controlled, a thrusting weight of flesh and bone with which he drew ritual patterns across the sand. The bull charged and charged again, loud-nostrilled, sweating for death, and the boy turned and teased him at will, reducing him at last to a kind of enchanted helplessness, so that the bull stood hypnotized, unable to move, while the young man kissed his horns, alone in the ring, unarmed with the armed beast, he had proved himself the stronger. He never ran, he scarcely moved his feet, but he turned his cape like liquid fire, and the bull, snorting with mysterious amazement, seemed to adore him against his will, brushing the cape as a bee does a poppy.

The moment for the kill arrived; and this was accomplished with almost tragic simplicity and grace.

The crowd rose to its feet with one loud cry. Hats, caps, cushions, even raincoats, were thrown into the ring. The young man stood amongst these tributes and smiled palely at the crowd. Then he came, sword in hand, and bowed low to the president and to Gloria. Colour and intoxication had returned to the girl's cheeks; she stood up and clapped him wildly and threw him a box of cigars. His triumph was hers; it was the least she could do.

embroidered: decorated with needlework

matador: a bullfighter

prologue: an introductory section, usually in a piece of literature, drama or music

Lee, L, *A Rose for Winter*, (1955; this edition: 2003), Vintage, Random House, London, pp.46-47.

Theme: Leaving home

The Bone Clocks

– David Mitchell (prose fiction, 2014)

15-year-old Holly has just had a blazing argument with her mother. Her mother lost her temper, slapped Holly and told her that she cannot see her boyfriend, Vinny, anymore. After crying in her room, Holly decides that she is going to move in with Vinny.

Do I dare?

I dare. Pack, then. Pack what? Whatever'll fit into my big duffel bag. Underwear, bras, T-shirts, my bomber jacket; make-up case and the Oxo tin with my bracelets and necklaces in. Toothbrush and a handful of tampons — my period's a bit late so it should start, like, any hour now. Money. I count up £13.85 saved in notes and coins. I've £80 more in my TSB bank book. It's not like Vinny'll charge me rent, and I'll look for a job next week. Babysitting, working in the market, waitressing: there's loads of ways to earn a few quid. What about my LPs? I can't lug the whole collection over to Peacock Street now, and Mam's quite capable of dumping them at the Oxfam shop out of spite, so I just take Fear of Music, wrapping it carefully in my bomber jacket and putting it into my bag so it won't get bent. I hide the others under the loose floorboard, just for now, but as I'm putting the carpet back, I get the fright of my life: Jacko's watching me from the doorway. He's still in his Thunderbirds pyjamas and slippers.

I tell him, 'Mister, you just gave me a heart-attack.'

'You're going.' Jacko's got this not-quite-here voice.

'Just between us, yes, I am. But not far, don't worry.'

'I've made you a souvenir, to remember me by.' Jacko hands me a circle of cardboard - a flattened Dairylea cheese box with a maze drawn on. He's mad about mazes, is Jacko: it's all these *Dungeons & Dragons* books him and Sharon read. 'Take it,' he tells me. 'It's diabolical.'

'It doesn't look all that bad to me.'

'"Diabolical" means "satanic", sis.'

Christ, I don't half have a freaky little brother. 'Right. Well, thanks, Jacko. Look, I've got a few things to—'

Jacko holds my wrist. 'Learn this labyrinth, Holly. Indulge your freaky little brother. Please.'

That jolts me a bit. 'Mister, you're acting all weird.'

'Promise me you'll memorise the path through it, so if you ever needed to, you could navigate it in the darkness. Please.'

My friends' little brothers are all into Scalextric or BMX or Top Trumps — why do I get one who does this and says words like 'navigate' and 'diabolical'? Christ only knows how he'll survive in Gravesend if he's gay. I muss his hair. 'Okay, I promise to learn your maze off by heart.' Then Jacko hugs me, which is weird 'cause Jacko's not a huggy kid. 'Hey, I'm not going far . . . You'll understand when you're older, and—'

'You're moving in with your boyfriend.'

By now I shouldn't be surprised. 'Yeah.'

'Take care of yourself, Holly.'

'Vinny's nice. Once Mam's got used to the idea, we'll see each other — I mean, we still saw Brendan after he married Ruth, yeah?'

But Jacko just puts the cardboard lid with his maze on deep into my duffel bag, gives me one last look, and disappears.

labyrinth: a complicated maze

Mitchell, D, *The Bone Clocks*, (2014), Sceptre, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, London, pp.6-8.

Starter for Ten

– David Nicholls (prose fiction, 2003)

It's 1985 and 18-year-old Brian is living with his mother in Southend, Essex. His father has died recently. Today, he is leaving home to go to university. He has just packed his father's jacket to take with him.

Mum comes in, then knocks, and I close the case quickly. She looks teary enough as it is, without Dad's jacket starting her off again. She has, after all, taken the morning off work especially so that she can cry.

'Nearly done then?'

'Nearly.'

'D'you want to take a chip pan with you?'

'No, I'll be fine without, Mum.'

'But what are you going to eat?'

'I do eat things other than chips, you know!'

'No, you don't.'

'Well, maybe I'll start. Anyway, there's always oven-chips.' I look around to see that she's almost smiling.

'You'd better get going, hadn't you?' The train's not for ages yet, but Mum thinks catching a train is a bit like international air travel, and that you should check in four hours before departure. Not that we've been on a plane or anything, but still, it's a wonder that she hasn't made me go and get jabs.

'I'll go in half an hour,' I say, and there's a silence. Mum says something but can't quite get the words out, which means it's probably along the lines of Dad being proud or something, but she decides to save it for later, and turns and goes. I sit on the suitcase to close it, and then lie on my bed and look round my room for the last time — the kind of moment where, if I smoked, I'd smoke.

I can't believe it's actually happening. This is independent adulthood, this is what it feels like. Shouldn't there be some sort of ritual? In certain remote African tribes there'd be some incredible four-day rites of passage ceremony, and village elders smearing my body with

monkey blood, but here, rites of passage is all about three new pairs of pants and stuffing your duvet in a bin-liner.

Finally it's time. I'm very insistent that Mum doesn't walk me to the train station because it somehow feels more potent and symbolic this way. I stand on the doorstep while she goes to get her purse, and solemnly presses a ten-quid note, folded very small, into my hand, like a ruby.

'Mum . . .'

'Go on, take it.'

'I'll be all right, really . . .'

'Go on. You take care of yourself. . . '

'I will. . . '

'Try and eat a piece of fresh fruit every now and then . . .'

'I'll try . . .'

'And . . .' here it comes. She gulps and says ' . . . you do know Dad would have been proud of you, don't you?' and I kiss her quickly on her dry, pursed lips, and run, in short bursts, as best as I can, to the train station.

rite of passage: the transition from childhood to adulthood

Nicholls, D, *Starter for Ten*, (2003; this edition: 2007), Hodder and Stoughton, London, pp.21-24.

Theme: Guilt

No Night is Too Long

– Barbara Vine (Ruth Rendell)
(fictional memoir, 1994)

The narrator has received an anonymous letter through the post which subtly suggests that whoever sent it knows about a crime he has committed.

When a crime one has committed becomes known to someone else, when one is aware that it's no longer a secret, it becomes concrete, it becomes real. It can't have been imagined, it can't be the product of a disturbed mind. There is no longer a chance that a mistake has been made.

I knew what I'd done as soon as I'd done it. I needed no confirmation from others. But now that confirmation had come in this strange, oblique way, I didn't so much confront my act as have my act confront me. Like his ghost it stood before me, but, unlike him, it was solid, not insubstantial, not shadowy and half-hidden. It was real, it had really taken place, I had done it, and I knew this as absolute truth because someone else also knew it.

Writing this down won't stop the letters — there have been three more since the one from San Francisco — but it may help to lay his ghost. The dreams, after all, come only by night, when I'm in bed asleep. His ghost appears to me everywhere and at any time. He, it, whatever it is, a figment of my brain, the creature of my guilt, he never shows himself to me directly but always in the corner of my eye, on the edge of my vision, or very distantly as it might be along the beach by a breakwater or across the High Street, reflected obliquely in a shop window.

This isn't to say that I believe something supernatural is going on. I don't believe in ghosts, I still don't. He is the product of my troubled mind. Remorse has made him out of memories and old photographs and mind-imprints. Much of the time I see nothing, only sense him standing behind me or feel the chilly draught as he opens a door or hear his footstep in a creak of the stair. Strange, because he was never in this house. In my mother's time I was hardly ever here myself and all it ever knew of him was his voice on the phone, his clear resonant voice that sometimes carried from the earpiece into farther reaches of the room. His

ghost shows itself to me wherever I am and I know he would come to me wherever I was, his evanescent appearances have to do with me and not with a place in which he and I were together.

He lives inside me and if I died would die with me. By writing about him, do I mean to kill him a second time?

obliquely: unclearly

evanescent: not lasting very long

Vine, B, *No Night is Too Long*, (1994; this edition: 2012), Penguin Books, London, chapter 1, beg. paragraph 23.

A Judgement in Stone

– Ruth Rendell (prose fiction, 1977)

Eunice is the Coverdale family's housekeeper. Eunice, together with her friend Joan, has killed the entire family, Jacqueline, George and their two children.

Left alone, Eunice, who had wanted to “see to things,” at first saw to nothing at all. She sat on the stairs. She had a curious feeling that if she did nothing but just went off in the morning with her cases, to the bus stop she had long ago located, to the station, and got to London, it would all be all right. They might not find the Coverdales for weeks, and when they did they wouldn't know where she was, would they?

A cup of tea would be nice, for she had never had that earlier one, Joan having poured the contents of the pot all over Jacqueline's bed. She made the tea, walking back and forth past George's body. The watch on his dead wrist told her it was twenty to ten. Now to pack. She had added very little to her personal property during those nine months apart from what were truly consumer goods—sweets, chocolate, cake—and these she had consumed. Only a few hand-knitted garments swelled her stock of clothes. Everything was packed into Mrs. Samson's cases in much the same order as it had originally gone in.

Up here, in her room, it felt as if nothing had happened. Pity she had to go tomorrow really, for now there was no one to make her go, and she liked it here, she had always liked it. And it would be even better now that there was no one to interfere with her life.

It was rather early to go to bed, and she didn't think she would be able to sleep. This was exceptional for Eunice, who knew she could always sleep as soon as her head touched the pillow. On the other hand, the circumstances were exceptional too, never had she done anything like this before, and she understood this. She understood that all the excitement was bound to keep her awake, so she sat looking round the room, looking at her cases, not feeling in the mood for television and rather wishing she hadn't packed her knitting at the bottom of the big case.

Rendell, R, *A Judgement in Stone*, (1977; this edition: 2000), Vintage Books, Random House, London, pp.160-161.

Theme: Class and status

Bad Blood – Lorna Sage (literary non-fiction, 2000)

Lorna Sage grew up in a village in Shropshire, on the border of England and Wales, in the 1950s. In this extract, she talks of some of her childhood memories.

None of us spoke Welsh, but we had broader Shropshire accents than Whitchurch people, marking us out. Then there were our own social strata: the bus served three schools, the secondary modern (mixed), the boys' grammar school and the girls' high school, and it had an elaborate unspoken seating plan.

The back seats were reserved for big girls of fourteen and fifteen who went to the secondary modern, but only just. They had perms, boyfriends and jobs lined up, and they wore their school uniforms in a sketchy, customised way, with extra bits and bits missing, and nylons whose ladders they fixed showily with nail varnish. They had a lot to talk about and laugh over in private. They painted their nails on the way home and picked off the varnish the next morning, although sometimes they passed around a bottle of remover that smelled headily of pear-drops. They didn't have homework, but kept changes of clothes in the shopping bags they used for satchels; school was for them a last concession to other people's picture of childhood, for in the country girls were grown up at fifteen.

The secondary modern boys were younger for their age and scuffed about in the middle seats, playing at being wild, priding themselves on the filthiness of their ties and wearing spare cigarettes behind their ears. Although they sometimes looked up girls' skirts and told dirty jokes, they were second-class passengers, the bus was girl territory, the real tearaways among the boys didn't stoop to catch the bus, but biked to school on the days when they weren't truanting.

And the grammar school boys and high school girls, a conspicuous and shifty minority, distributed themselves around the first seats as they boarded. Grammar school boys stood out sacrificially in bright purple blazers and caps. At least the high school's navy blue matched the majority – although only at a distance, there was no getting around the stigma.

The very first time I caught the bus I committed the terrible solecism of sitting next to a big girl who was saving a seat for her friend in the next-to-back row. She very soon – with a kind of matronly contempt – let me know my mistake. Those first few months I ended up more often than not next to a real pariah, Gilbert, a pale and soft spoken grammar school boy whose mother had once complained to the bus driver when a rude boy stole his cap.

strata: levels of classes that people belong to based on their social status

concession: the action of admitting defeat/ giving in to something after some resistance

conspicuous: clearly visible

solecism: going against the normal or accepted order/ breaking the rules of etiquette

pariah: an outcast

Sage, L, *Bad Blood*, (2013), Fourth Estate, Harper Collins Publishers, London, pp.146-147.

Goodbye to All That – Robert Graves (literary non-fiction, 1929)

The poet and novelist Robert Graves was born into a middle-class family in London in 1895. Here, he recalls some early childhood memories.

At the age of four and a half I caught scarlet fever; my younger brother had just been born, and I could not be nursed at home, so my parents sent me off to a public fever hospital. The ward contained twenty little proletarians, and only one bourgeois child besides myself. I did not notice particularly that the nurses and my fellow-patients had a different attitude towards me; I accepted the kindness and spoiling easily, being accustomed to it. But the respect and even reverence given to this other little boy, a clergyman's child, astonished me. 'Oh,' the nurses would cry after he had gone, 'oh, he did look a little gentleman in his pretty white pelisse when they took him away!' 'That young Matthew was a fair toff,' echoed the little proletarians. On my return from two months in hospital, my accent was deplored, and I learned that the boys in the ward had been very vulgar. I did not know what 'vulgar' meant; it had to be explained to me. About a year later I met Arthur, a boy of nine, who had been in the ward and taught me how to play cricket when we were convalescent together. He turned out to be a ragged errand-boy. In hospital, we had all worn the same institutional night-gowns, and I did not know that we came off such different shelves. But I suddenly realized with my first shudder of gentility that two sorts of Christians existed — ourselves, and the lower classes. The servants were trained to call us children, even when we were tiny, 'Master Robert', 'Miss Rosaleen', and 'Miss Clarissa', but I had not recognized these as titles of respect. I had thought of 'Master' and 'Miss' merely as vocative prefixes used for addressing other people's children; but now I found that the servants were the lower classes, and that we were 'ourselves'.

I remember the servants' bedrooms. They were on the top landing, at the dullest side of the house, and by a convention of the times, the only rooms without carpets or linoleum. Those gaunt, unfriendly-looking beds and the hanging-cupboards with faded cotton curtains, instead of wardrobes with glass doors as in the other rooms. All this uncouthness made me think of the servants as somehow not quite human. Besides, the servants who came to us were distinctly below the average standard; only those with no particularly good references would apply for a situation in a family of ten. And because we had such a large house, and hardly a single person in the household kept his or her room tidy, they were constantly giving notice. Too much work, they said.

scarlet fever: an infectious disease which causes a bright red rash

proletarians: working-class people

bourgeois: middle-class

reverence: deep awe and respect for someone or something

pelisse: a long cloak often lined with fur

toff: slang for a rich or upper-class person, meant to be insulting

convalescent: recovering from an illness

Graves, B, *Goodbye to All That*, (1929; this edition: 2000), Penguin Books; 2000, London, pp.19-20.

Theme: Youth and age

Somewhere Towards the End – Diana Athill (literary non-fiction, 2008)

This extract is taken from Athill's most recent memoir, published when she was 90 years old. Here, she reflects on her experiences of getting older.

All through my sixties I felt I was still within hailing distance of middle age, not safe on its shores, perhaps, but navigating its coastal waters. My seventieth birthday failed to change this because I managed scarcely to notice it, but my seventy-first did change it. Being 'over seventy' is being old: suddenly I was aground on that fact and saw that the time had come to size it up.

I have lived long enough to have witnessed great changes in being old as far as women are concerned - smaller ones for men, but for them less was needed. In my grandmothers' day a woman over seventy adopted what almost amounted to a uniform. If she was a widow she wore black and grey clothes that disregarded fashion, and even if she still had a husband her garments went a bit drab and shapeless making it clear that this person no longer attempted to be attractive.

Nowadays an old woman would obviously be daft if she dressed like a teenager, but I have a freedom of choice undreamt of by my grandmothers. There have been days when I went shopping in my local Morrisons wearing something a bit eccentric and wondered whether I would see any raised eyebrows, only to conclude that I would probably have to wear a bikini before anyone so much as blinked.

Even more than clothes, cosmetics have made age look, and feel less old. Until quite recently they could be a danger, because women who had always worn a lot of make-up tended to continue to do so, blind to the unfortunate effect it could have on their skin. One of my dearest old friends could never get it into her head that if, when doing herself up for a party, she slapped on a lot of scarlet lipstick, it would soon come off on her teeth and begin to run into the little wrinkles round the edge of her lips, making her look like a vampire bat disturbed in mid-dinner. Luckily today's cosmetics are much better made and more subtle in effect, so that an ancient face that would look absurd if visibly painted can be gently coaxed into looking quite naturally better than it really is.

Appearance is important to old women, not because we suppose that it will impress other people, but because of what we ourselves see when we look in the mirror. It is unlikely that anyone else will notice that the nose on an old face is red and shiny, but its owner certainly will, and will equally certainly feel a lift in her spirits when this depressing sight is remedied. I know for sure that I both feel and behave younger than my grandmothers did when they were old.

eccentric: unusual and slightly strange

absurd: silly; stupid

coaxed: persuaded gradually or gently

Athill, D, *Somewhere Towards the End*, (2008, this edition: 2009), Granta Books, London, pp. 11-13

Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time – Penelope Lively (literary non-fiction, 2013)

Penelope Lively is a British writer. In this extract from her memoir, she talks of different attitudes towards old age.

The extent of the challenge depends on when and where you experience old age. Social context is crucial. You don't want to be old when circumstances mean that anyone who doesn't contribute but requires support is a drag, and there is therefore a grim logic in failing to sustain them. Nomadic groups existing at subsistence level did better without the encumbrance of anyone who couldn't keep up. The district nurse in Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield* talks of the Suffolk cottages in the last century where a decaying grandparent was stacked away somewhere and nudged towards the grave. The anthropologist Colin Turnbull has given a horrific account in *The Mountain People of the Ik*, a Ugandan tribe whose flexible way of life was curtailed, forcing them to live in one area with insufficient resources, at starvation level. The effect was the erosion of any care or concern for others, with the old forced to starve first, and children also (further stark logic: keep the breeding group alive, you can always make more children if things improve). But the old, in this corner of Uganda in the mid-twentieth century, were around forty; 'old' is never a fixed feast.

There is evidence from elsewhere that in a hunter-gatherer society the old are valued simply for experience — they have a bank of hunter-gatherer knowledge. That again makes sense; you may not be all that fond of Granny, but she knows where to find those roots you need. Elephant groups also depend on the matriarch, it seems, to know where to head for water and for food; I like this elemental link with animal behaviour.

Things aren't quite like this in a world powered by technology; just as well that increased affluence means that nobody disposes of the aged just because they can't cope with a computer or a mobile phone. Rather the contrary; at the time of writing there is a heated debate about the quality of care for the elderly in hospital, and a scandal about conditions in a failing group of residential homes for old people. Things can go wrong, but it is beyond question that society assumes a responsibility towards the old; you don't leave them by the wayside, you don't push them into a cupboard and forget to feed them.

nomadic groups: groups of people that have no fixed home and move from place to place in search of food, water and grazing land

subsistence: the minimum (food, shelter etc.) needed to live

encumbrance: burden

anthropologist: someone who studies human society and culture

curtailed: restricted; deprived

matriarch: a female who is head of a family or group

Lively, P, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish: A Life in Time*, (2013, this edition: 2014), Penguin Books, London, pp.10-14.

Theme: Aftermath

A Lovely Way to Burn – Louise Welsh (prose fiction, 2014)

A deadly flu-like virus has swept through London. In this extract, Stevie drives through the city in the aftermath of the epidemic.

People spilled into her path as if, now that they had flung off the division between night and day, the boundary between road and pavement no longer existed. There was a holiday recklessness to the crowds, a sense of ragged revelry. She wondered if this was how it had been in the old days, when families packed a picnic and treated themselves to an outing to Newgate to watch the hangings.

A flock of youths on undersized bikes tore across the Mini's path, bandit-quick, hoods up, mouths and noses hidden behind scarves and surgical masks. They vanished up a side street, fast as smash-and-grab men. A bag slid from one of the boys' handlebars as he rounded the corner. A bottle shattered, tins bounced and dented against the tarmac, and Stevie realised that their booty wasn't from electrical stores, sportswear outlets or computer shops, but a supermarket. She turned a corner and saw the supermarket, squat and shining, its car park jammed worse than any Christmas Eve. Men and women struggled to their cars, pushing ill-balanced trolleys heavy with supplies. Stevie paused to watch. The shoppers had an anxious edge, but assistants were still tidying away abandoned trolleys and it was clear that the customers were hoarders and not looters. A car tooted impatiently behind her and Stevie moved on.

She was used to driving home in the early hours. The night-time city was a world beyond her windscreen, the preserve of drunks and police, of prostitutes, insomniacs, kerb crawlers and shift workers. She was used to stumblers and head-down walkers. But Stevie knew that London was unpredictable, a city that could explode into pitched battles, Molotov cocktails, burning cars and blazing buildings.

She drove cautiously, keeping to the rules of the road, until three buzz-cut-bald men approached her car at a red light, put their weight against its roof and started to rock it from side to side. They were chanting something, a football song she didn't recognise. Stevie put a hand on the horn and her foot to the floor. Her right tyre skidded against the tarmac and she thought the Mini might roll, but the combination of horn and spinning wheels startled the men and they let go. After that she no longer bothered with traffic signals.

Busy streets held their terrors, but sliding back into the black, travelling the unfamiliar roads with only the glow of her headlamps to guide her, was even more unsettling. The unlit pavements looked deserted, but once her eyes became accustomed to the gloom, she caught glimpses of people moving in the darkness, and was glad of the knife in her bag.

revelry: lively, noisy or unrestrained partying

Welsh, L, *A Lovely Way to Burn*, (2014), John Murray Publishers, London, pp.166-167.

Empire of the Sun – J.G. Ballard (prose fiction, 1984)

After the attack on Pearl Harbour Japanese troops invade Shanghai and in the chaos Jim, a British schoolboy living in the city, is separated from his mother and father. He returns to his home and waits for his parents to return.

Trying to keep up his spirits, Jim decided to visit the homes of his closest friends, Patrick Maxted and the Raymond twins. After washing himself in soda water he went into the garden to fetch his bicycle. During the night the swimming-pool had drained itself. Jim had never seen the tank empty, and he gazed with interest at the inclined floor. The once mysterious world of wavering blue lines, glimpsed through a cascade of bubbles, now lay exposed to the morning light. The tiles were slippery with leaves and dirt, and the chromium ladder at the deep end, which had once vanished into a watery abyss, ended abruptly beside a pair of scummy rubber slippers.

Jim jumped on to the floor at the shallow end. He slipped on the damp surface, and his bruised knee left a smear of blood on the tiles. A fly settled on it instantly. Watching his feet, Jim walked down the sloping floor. Around the brass vent at the deep end lay a small museum of past summers – a pair of his mother's sun-glasses, Vera's hair clip, a wine glass, and an English half-crown which his father had tossed into the pool for him. Jim had often spotted the silver coin, gleaming like an oyster, but had never been able to reach it.

Jim pocketed the coin and peered up at the damp walls. There was something sinister about a drained swimming-pool, and he tried to imagine what purpose it could have if it were not filled with water. It reminded him of the concrete bunkers in Tsingtao, and the bloody handprint of the maddened German gunners on the caisson walls. Perhaps murder was about to be committed in all the swimming-pools of Shanghai, and their walls were tiled so that the blood could be washed away?

Leaving the garden, Jim wheeled his bicycle through the verandah door. Then he did something he had always longed to do, mounted his cycle and rode through the formal, empty rooms. Delighted to think how shocked Vera and the servants would have been, he expertly circled his father's study, intrigued by the patterns which the tyres cut in the thick carpet. He collided with the desk, and knocked over a table lamp as he swerved through the

door into the drawing-room. Standing on the pedals, he zigzagged among the armchairs and tables, lost his balance and fell on to a sofa, remounted without touching the floor, crash-landed into the double doors that led into the dining-room, pulled them back and began a wild circuit of the long polished table. The war had brought him at least one small bonus.

chromium: a hard grey metal

abyss: an endless pit

half-crown: a British coin that was used as currency until 1967

caisson: a large watertight chamber in which construction work may be carried out underwater

verandah: a raised, covered platform that runs along the outside of a house

Ballard, J.G., *Empire of the Sun*, (1984, this edition: 2012), Fourth Estate, Harper Collins Publishers, London, pp.66-67.

Theme: Parent-child relationships

We Had it So Good – Linda Grant (prose fiction, 2012)

When he was a child, Stephen's father took him to the warehouse where American film stars such as Marilyn Monroe had their fur coats stored. Years later, Stephen tells his children about the memory.

Stephen ran down the racks of furs which hung like heavy headless bodies in the darkness. Doubling back, he came to a rail of stoles that had just arrived for treatment and storage. His father was on the other side of the room smoking the stump of a cigar, his knee raised, his foot resting on a wooden crate, a small, skinny man – with the endurance, his wife said, of an ox – who arrived in America all by himself aged twelve and who barely grew afterwards, as if the soil of home in Europe had given him all the nutrients he needed. She was a head taller than him in her nylons, and her hair rose even higher, blue-black and held up with a butterfly comb.

The garment that lay draped around the hanger was slipping off, and before it reached the floor Stephen raised his arms to catch it. The fur body fell, weirdly, he thought, both heavy and light, and with a fragrance of hot pearls. The hairs brushed his face and tickled him. 'I had to try that thing on,' he told his children. 'I don't know what came over me, but you know all kids love fancy dress and maybe it was just Halloween come early.'

The weight of the pale mink bore down on his thin arms. He came walking out towards a mirror so he could see what kind of being he had been transformed into.

His father turned and saw his only son draped and twirling on his toes in Marilyn Monroe's champagne-mink stole. Stephen thought he was taking the opportunity to try out transformation. He was exercising his birthright, the American capacity to be reborn.

A hard whack came from behind and he heard his father utter imprecations in his native language, in which there were few vowels and many syllables that seemed to get stuck in the speaker's throat, choking him.

...

At home, he was a momma's boy. In the kitchen Stephen failed to develop an interest in baking, as his father had feared. Instead, baking had ignited a curiosity about the inner mysteries of the ingredients themselves, their hidden lives. One night Stephen's father brought home a child's chemistry set for him. Working late in his bedroom (the only member of his family not to have to share a room, the privileged little prince), he completed every experiment by two a.m., and awoke the next morning parched for more knowledge. At school he learned about chemical compounds and molecules. The very air you breathed consisted of oxygen, and when you combined it with a couple of measures of hydrogen, it was water. Things changed their forms because of events invisible to the naked eye, as if God was in the kitchen, with his crazy wooden spoon. The universe was spinning and expanding; great gaseous clouds were worlds. Years later he would be moved to sudden tears, sitting in the college library, by the beauty of physics, which was not even his major.

Observing his son propel his way through high school, like one of the rockets that the space programme was shooting up in the direction of the moon, with the best grades in chemistry, biology, physics and math, his father wondered from which side of the family the brains had come. He had had a grandfather back home who, by all accounts, had been a learned man, a bearded wonder, but he only remembered his herring breath. His wife was singular for her beauty, not her thoughts. Where did this amazing mind come from?

stole: a scarf or shawl worn over the shoulders

Grant, L, *We Had it So Good*, (2012), Virago Press, Little Brown Book Group, London, pp.3-5.

Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal? – Jeanette Winterson (literary non-fiction, 2012)

Jeanette Winterson wrote a semi-autobiographical novel called *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Here, in her autobiography, Winterson recalls the argument she had with her mother about the book she wrote.

For most of my life I've been a bare-knuckle fighter. The one who wins is the one who hits the hardest. I was beaten as a child and I learned early never to cry. If I was locked out overnight I sat on the doorstep till the milkman came, drank both pints, left the empty bottles to enrage my mother, and walked to school.

We always walked. We had no car and no bus money. For me, the average was five miles a day: two miles for the round trip to school; three miles for the round trip to church.

Church was every night except Thursdays.

I wrote about some of these things in *Oranges*, and when it was published, my mother sent me a furious note in her immaculate copperplate handwriting demanding a phone call.

We hadn't seen each other for several years. I had left Oxford, was scraping together a life, and had written *Oranges* young — I was twenty-five when it was published.

I went to a phone box — I had no phone. She went to a phone box — she had no phone.

I dialled the Accrington code and number as instructed, and there she was — who needs Skype? I could see her through her voice, her form solidifying in front of me as she talked.

She was a big woman, tallish and weighing around twenty stone. Surgical stockings, flat sandals, a Crimplene dress and a nylon headscarf. She would have done her face powder (keep yourself nice), but not lipstick (fast and loose).

She filled the phone box. She was out of scale, larger than life. She was like a fairy story where size is approximate and unstable. She loomed up. She expanded. Only later, much later, too late, did I understand how small she was to herself. The baby nobody picked up.

But that day she was borne up on the shoulders of her own outrage. She said. 'It's the first time I've had to order a book in a false name.'

I tried to explain what I had hoped to do. I am an ambitious writer.

Mrs Winterson was having none of it. She knew full well that writers were sex-crazed bohemians who broke the rules and didn't go out to work. Books had been forbidden in our house and so for me to have written one, and had it published, and had it win a prize ...

The pips — more money in the slot — and I'm thinking, as her voice goes in and out like the sea, 'Why aren't you proud of me?'

Crimplene: crease-resistant fabric

bohemian: a person with artistic or literary interests who disregards normal standards of behaviour

Winterson, J, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, (2012), Vintage, Random House, London, pp.2-4.

Theme: Nostalgia

The Ministry of Fear – Graham Greene (prose fiction, 1943)

This novel is set in London during the Blitz. In this extract, Arthur Rowe goes to a village fête and is reminded of his childhood.

Arthur Rowe looked wistfully over the railings — there were still railings. The fête called him like innocence: it was entangled in childhood, with vicarage gardens and girls in white summer frocks and the smell of herbaceous borders and security.

Arthur Rowe came along the railings, hesitantly, like an intruder, or an exile who has returned home after many years and is uncertain of his welcome.

He was a tall stooping lean man with black hair going grey and a sharp narrow face, nose a little twisted out of the straight and a too sensitive mouth. His clothes were good but gave the impression of being uncared for; you would have said a bachelor if it had not been for an indefinable married look . . .

‘The charge,’ said the middle-aged lady at the gate, ‘is a shilling, but that doesn’t seem quite fair. If you wait another five minutes you can come in at the reduced rate. I always feel it’s only right to warn people when it gets as late as this.’

‘It’s very thoughtful of you.’

‘We don’t want people to feel cheated — even in a good cause, do we?’

‘I don’t think I’ll wait, all the same. I’ll come straight in. What exactly is the cause?’

‘Comforts for free mothers — I mean mothers of the free nations.’

Arthur Rowe stepped joyfully back into adolescence, into childhood

. . .

He came to these fêtes every year with an odd feeling of excitement — as if anything might happen, as if the familiar pattern of life that afternoon might be altered for ever. The band beat in the warm late sunlight, the brass quivered like haze, and the faces of strange young women would get mixed up with Mrs Troup, who kept the general store and post office, Miss Savage the Sunday School teacher, the publicans’ and the clergy’s wives. When he was a child he would follow his mother round the stalls — the baby clothes, the pink woollies,

the art pottery, and always last and best the white elephants. It was always as though there might be discovered on the white elephant stall some magic ring which would give three wishes or the heart’s desire, but the odd thing was that when he went home that night with only a second-hand copy of *The Little Duke*, by Charlotte M. Yonge, or an out-of-date atlas advertising Mazawattee tea, he felt no disappointment: he carried with him the sound of brass, the sense of glory, of a future that would be braver than today.

wistfully: feeling or showing a sad longing especially for something in the past

herbaceous: relating to herbs; leafy

shilling: old British currency

Mazawattee: one of the most important and well known tea firms of the late 19th century

Greene, G., *The Ministry of Fear*, (1943, this edition: 2001), Vintage, Random House, London, pp.11-13.

Bad Blood – Lorna Sage (literary non-fiction, 2000)

Lorna Sage remembers the school dance she attended in the 1950s.

Boys sidled across the hall, their temples glistening with sweat and Brylcreem, nudging and shoving each other, and suddenly here was one, saying ‘May I ...’ Well, yes, the relief was enormous and this was easy, a waltz. Once my first pang of gratitude had subsided, I noticed that my partner was preoccupied too. He seemed to be having trouble remembering the steps, for he was pumping my arm and counting under his breath (one, two, three), and his breath smelled like the open maws of the pub cellars that gaped on Whitchurch pavements on delivery day. Beer. He’d been drinking and, although in theory this was glamorous because forbidden (and he was anyway certainly under age), in fact he was distracted, disjointed and clammy. He stepped on my feet (one, two . . .) and groaned as if his pain was greater than mine, and then it was over and I was back in my corner, my white shoes a bit scuffed, still waiting for the evening’s true, occult ritual to start.

Now one of the scatter of sixth-formers wearing dinner jackets would surely pick me out, someone older whose casual touch would unlock the mysteries of the quickstep and A-level physics. But my next two partners seemed just as inept and nervous as me. I wasn’t getting anywhere and, as if to rub it in, my first partner was back, more dishevelled than before, his collar unbuttoned, mopping his brow. This time, instead of counting, he talked as we jogged round the floor, into my ear, in a whispered shout over the music: his mother had broken her arm falling from a stepladder in the shop where she worked, where she wouldn’t have to work if her sons and her husband looked after her properly, which they didn’t, his own bad behaviour was adding to her troubles. He snickered sarcastically and seemed about to burst into tears. This was awful. Each dance with him took me further from my imagined cavalier, he was leaving his messy mark on me — this time it wasn’t just the bruised toes and the dirty shoes, there was definitely a damp patch on my dress in the small of my back where his hand had been and my hair felt sticky where he’d leaned on me to tell me his story. Who was he? How could I get rid of him?

Brylcreem: a cream used on men’s hair to give it a smooth, shiny appearance

maw: the mouth or jaws of an animal

dishevelled: messy, disordered

cavalier: a man acting as a woman’s dance partner, also a knight or courtly gentleman

Sage, L, *Bad Blood*, (2013), Fourth Estate, Harper Collins Publishers, London, pp.212-215.



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