

Response 6

Spring 2023

Introduction

Caves are as unexplored as oceans: the vast darkness below pulls.

In this magazine, be guided on a journey through the labyrinth that lies beneath your feet. Explore the horrors and psyche of our hollow Earth through a collection of images and texts inspired by all that caves are and represent. Prepare to shine a light into the darkness and uncover the unexpected: caverns and chambers, tunnels and tricks, danger and doom.

On your journey, learn about what it is to be lost in the dark and see the potential of underground worlds. Use the key and read with caution. Can you know what is truly down there? Notice hidden markings within the pages; these ancient and mysterious messages are yet to be decoded.

We twenty were once strangers, brought together in the darkness of winter. Together we have carved your path, so walk with us now. Cross this threshold to know the unknown, to see in the dark. It's a Hollow Earth, anything could happen, tread carefully and be sure to remember the way out.

From the Response 6 team, we wish you luck and a safe journey.

Diary Entry 1

Emily Laurence

24th May 2019

Dear Diary,

I feel my need for solitude is fulfilled in this cave. Finally, I have a chance to be alone with the beauty of nature. Its emptiness is magnetic, begging to be explored. Perhaps here I'll find the peace I've been looking for. I am a child in the womb, safe from the outside world that's so hostile and far-removed from what it feels like to truly be alive.

Why am I unable to find peace in the world beyond the cave? I feel like I've been living in a society that is slowly killing the very thing that keeps it alive. It's a world that always wants more but can't see what it already has. This beautiful, hollow earth.

The darkness has welcomed me with open arms. I sit on a cold, damp rock as I write, surrounded by different passages and structures towering above me. Mother Nature is the greatest architect. How is it that she created something so beautiful, to be kept so secret? I like to think she constructed this cave for me. I am meant to be here. This is my cave.

The Tanner

Rachel Laurence

Mother Cave was yielding

From her yellow flesh we carved

Vats and wells in which

To slake the skins.

She gave us a secret place to prosper
Our odious industry,
Creating silken leather
From sow's ears.

In those hidden places
We worked our hides
Until they came up gleaming
In the day-lit streets,
Gracing the ankles of ladies and louts
From Park Row to Barker Gate.

Cave Fact

The word "cave" is derived from the Latin cavea, meaning hollow place, which comes from cavus meaning hollow.

The Howl

Rosie Etheridge

He brought the lantern up to his eyes as he moved deeper, deeper into the cave. Fingers splayed against the side guiding him along, his steps sounded against the walls. The sound became echoing as he immersed into a bulbous opening.

Sprawled over the arching walls, floor to ceiling, were carvings most intricate in design. It was an underground gallery. Horses, men, healers, and beasts covered the walls, as many as there are shells strewn on the beach or stars punctuating the void. Delving into his pocket, he produced paper and a pencil.

Against the wall he held the paper, as he scrubbed with the pencil to form the shapes. Harder, he had to press harder for the details. The most trouble came when tracing some sort of beast, a large dog shaped figure. Harshly, he went over the carving again and again, but no lines would come. He turned with a sigh to place his drawings in his thick leather notebook.

A howl churned through the shifting dusk. He looked to the cavernous mouth of the tunnel, darkness pooling like treacle. He checked his watch. An over enthusiastic wolf he supposed, not unusual for these wintry nights where the sun slumbered so early. He stepped back, it seemed he had lost the carving of the dog. Shaking his head, he traced his fingers over the wall. He was most certain of its position and yet it was there no longer. Instead, it seemed to have been replaced by a towering human with long flowing hair.

Again, he tried to trace the new carving. It wouldn't take. The howl. This time he stopped and listened. It could have only been a wolf. And yet he could feel his hairs all over begin to prickle. He gathered his coat around himself and began to collect his equipment.

Kneeling down to collect the measuring equipment from earlier, he found his fingers grasping something else. Bringing it to the light of the lantern, he recoiled. It was a bone. There were many piled under the figure he had been unable to trace. Some were half buried and others were stacked atop each other like a haystack. He reached in to examine one. The pile collapsed scattering death onto the floor.

As the bones stilled, there began a rumbling. A deep guttural stirring like the earth was a cracking egg. Rocks began to rain down from all around him as the earth shook. Hurriedly, he began covering the carvings with a linen sheet in case anyone should stumble upon them. As he drove the nails into the soft rock, lumps flaked like skin into his hands. The carvings began to fall away crumbling at his feet. He held himself flush to the wall, a barrier between his riches and the ruins. It was no use and soon the whole wall had come away.

Well, almost the whole wall. All that remained was the figure that changed. It was still in the shape of a human. Somewhere in the passage the sound of padding footsteps could be heard echoing. The man, having nowhere to go, held the hammer in his hand as the footsteps grew louder. No. It wasn't that they were growing louder. It was that there were more. They were rhythmic and bounding. Before the man's very eyes, the carving morphed into the dog-like figure of before. The smell of dank earth filled the cave as the man began to sink further back into the shadows.

The bones littered on the floor began to shake as two glaring red lights appeared deep within the passage. The man fell to his knees and prayed aloud. The lantern light extinguished itself and the darkness went uninterrupted once again. The man stood, back against the carving, hammer aloft. His breathing was heavy, echoing off the walls, but it was now the only noise. He sighed and muttered a grateful prayer.

His amen was stopped by the lengthy hissing of breath upon his neck. The expelled air seemed to coil around him, twining ribbon. Under pressure, the bones were crunched on the ground. He cried out. But nobody would have heard him over the howl.

What the Caves Stole: Interview with Glenn Hart

Sam Young

Retired caving expert Glenn Hart is best known for his daring explorations of the world's largest caverns, but this interview explores a dark and harrowing event in his past: Glenn led the Greenvale rescue mission back in 1964, when six young men found themselves in perilous circumstances in Britain's deepest cave system. It's been over 50 years, but Glenn sheds light on those events and reflects on more recent rumours.

Question: So, to begin with, how were you informed that night, and how did you react to the call to action?

Answer: I was in bed when the phone rang. I knew something must have been off - it was about eleven o'clock. I answered and heard what sounded like a riot. My old caving friend Sasha was on the other end saying the authorities needed us for a rescue attempt down the caves that had begun to flood due to the storms.

Question: Were you shocked by that call, had you ever had to deal with something like that before?

Answer: No, never. I'd led a few expeditions to retrieve old gear, but never a rescue. I was quite shaken. It's been a long time, but that night still haunts me.

Question: Can you recall the scene when you arrived? It's known that the whole community came together that night, even putting up tents and taking shifts through the night.

Answer: That's right, it was a make-shift town along the riverside; everyone pulling their weight. Folk, on hands and knees, clawed the earth to divert the river. They'd built a dam so me and my team could

get in. I knew it could burst at any moment, just metal sheets and fence posts ripped from the fields around us. It was desperate but goes to show how strong the community was.

Question: Do you ever wonder why they decided to go down the caves?

Answer: I think they wanted to make history you know; to have their legacies tied to something so monumental. Even if it was just to get their names in the Guinness Book of Records. These are some of the deepest and most unexplored caves in Britain.

Question: How far down did they get before they ran into trouble?

Answer: It's hard to say - the tunnels will have flooded fast with that storm. It's caving 101, you have to tell people where you're going in case something happens and unfortunately, this was one of those bad outcomes.

Question: So, thinking back to the rescue, you went down into the caves for almost eight hours, and came back with five bodies. Were you prepared for that outcome?

Answer: Nothing prepares you for that. I think everybody there knew we weren't going to find survivors. It was the darkest moment of my career. We had squeezed through the Jaws of Death into one of the lower cavern spaces where we found them. They were bobbing in the water. These poor young men, the oldest only twenty-seven. So young and such a horrible way to go.

Question: We know there were only five bodies retrieved, had you heard the rumours that perhaps Tyreese Porter, the sixth boy, had survived somehow or maybe even got out? Do you believe it was even possible?

Answer: Yes, I heard the rumours. People clung to any shred of hope back then. But I'm quite sad these rumours are being brought up again, especially from people outside our small community. I didn't and still don't see any way he could have survived, and even if there was a chance in hell he did, the caves were blocked by the government after the trials of '65.

Question: Finally, it's being discussed because of the recent discovery of Porter's wedding ring and right shoe. It's not known how they resurfaced, but there are calls for an excavation. What are your thoughts on that?

Answer: As much as I would find solace in knowing that Tyreese had survived, I don't think there's much truth in the rumours. If an excavation were to take place, it's more likely we would simply find his remains. When those tunnels were closed, they became a tomb which shouldn't be reopened out of respect for the dead.

In The Drink

Joe Fyfe Hardy

Before mum went back to heaven, she used to take us out when dad was In the Drink. We'd go on long walks, and she'd tell us stuff about the places we went, like that big pond was actually a giant's footprint full of rain.

The story that got me, though, was about this cave near our house. Mum said that even though the cave was right in the middle of our city, a tiny dragon lived there, deep inside, further than anyone could get to, but if you took it a piece of treasure it would grant you a wish. I was only eight when mum died – I'm nine now – but when the

doctor told us she was gone, I wasn't sad. You know why? Cos mum was smart, and I knew she'd told me that cave story for a reason.

At Mum's funeral, Sajid's mum (Sajid is my best friend) asked me how I was doing, and I told her that I was doing ok thank you because I was working on a plan to bring Mum back. I don't think she believed me, cos she just got sadder, and later I heard her yelling at my dad.

That night I went to stay at Sajid's house. I told him about my plan, and he told me that after the weekend, builders were going to fill the dragon cave with cement and build flats on top of it, and he knows about that stuff cos his mum works for the council making all their new buildings. I knew if I didn't go before then, it would be too late.

On Sunday night I put my torch and my favourite teddy that mum got me (treasure for the dragon) in the pockets of my big coat, waited until dad was In The Drink, and then walked to the cave.

The entrance was easy to find cos it was big and wide open. I was worried there would be someone there, but I got lucky – Sajid's mum had put a fence up, and some big lights too. I had to take my coat off for a minute to squeeze through two fence panels, but my breath was making little clouds in the night air, so I put it back on as soon as I was in.

I felt like my tummy was full of grasshoppers. I knew, though, that I was the only one who could bring mum back because no one else was small enough to squeeze along the tunnels to find the dragon. So, I got my torch out, and I was brave – just like Mum said I would have to be, the last time we saw her at the hospital.

It was easy at first. I walked for a bit, until I had to bend over. Then it got narrower, and I had to crawl. I felt like a rabbit, swallowed by a snake, and I was glad I had my big coat on.

When the tunnel got so tight that I had to take Teddy and the other stuff out of my pockets, I thought that was probably where everyone else turned back. Not me though. I lay on my tummy and wriggled. Now I was the snake, on my way to do a deal with the dragon.

It didn't take long for me to realise that I couldn't wriggle backwards. I panicked then, and cuddled Teddy, and cried for Mum to come and get me, until I remembered again that Mum had told me that I had to be brave. I wriggled and wriggled and wriggled, I used all my energy and all my strength and all my brave and kept on going, until the cave held me tight and wouldn't let me go. Not onwards or backwards. I never found the dragon.

In the morning, when Sajid's Mum filled the tunnels with cement, I cried for Mum to help me, and I cried for Dad to come out of The Drink, and as I cried, the cement filled the tunnel around me until it spilled over my lips and flowed into my mouth and I breathed it into my lungs and now I'm part of the cave forever.

The Gold - Manchester Orchestra, Phoebe Bridgers, 2017

Niamh Cutler

I relate this song to caves and the mental health effects of journeys taken through dark places. To me, the song is about going through something, and it then being possible to become a completely different person. In Deeper Still, my narrator finds peace once they become used to the cave; it gives them a different perspective on life. This seems like a common experience for those who have journeyed through caves. Bridgers uses a cave metaphor in this song: "Our cave's collapsing / I don't want to be me anymore". Can people who

have not experienced what it is like to be in a cave, understand how transformative the experience is?

Cave fact

Luray Caverns in Virginia, USA, features the world's only Stalacpipe Organ that plays music with rubber-tipped mallets on stone formations to create the sounds.

Losing My Religion, R.E.M., 1991

Niamh Cutler

This song inspired me to write Deeper Still about the feeling of hopelessness that may be felt when entering a cave. To me, it represents anxieties felt when senses are heightened... "I thought that I heard you laughing / I thought that I heard you sing..." Every sound heard in caves feels louder than it would outside. The lines, "That's me in the corner / That's me in the spotlight", also inspired me to write about hiding away as the only thing to protect them within the cave. The feeling of hopelessly searching for something that feels bigger than ourselves is portrayed in both this song and the Hollow Earth exhibition. The area of the exhibition exploring 'The Dark', especially simulates the terror and adventure that comes with losing your way in cave darkness.

Deeper Still

Niamh Cutler

My breath is shaking. Tears are rolling down my face. The darkness of the cave is all-consuming, physically and mentally.

Not even two hours ago, I entered the cave filled with excitement and hope for where this journey would take me. Now though, I wish I could go back and scream at myself to not enter this dark abyss. I wish I could turn back, but every turn I take seems to look the same or lead me back to the same point I started at, or deeper still

A sense of panic runs through my veins, but the strangest thing happens; I start to laugh. It may be a distraction, or it may be how underprepared I feel for what lies ahead. I can't be sure, but right now, this laughter is the only thing that reminds me I am human: the darkness has not yet taken that from me.

I pick myself up from the crevice I had been hiding in - if I can't find my way out the way I came in, then surely there is a way out the other side, right?... and so I start walking towards the direction I have been fearing: further into the darkness.

My headtorch is the only thing illuminating my path. I am aware of every movement I make, every sound I can hear, and everything I can feel and smell. Once I have passed something, it becomes less terrifying as there is nothing unexpected that can jump out at me.

Being alone with nothing but my thoughts is beginning to feel like catharsis for me. There is nothing I can think of other than darkness, and in some odd way, I find that comforting. All my other issues are gone and I only have to focus on this one.

The more I walk, the less frightening the darkness seems. I can hear droplets of water coming up ahead, I can touch the sides of the cave when I get to an especially narrow bit, I can smell Earth. All this

combined makes me feel like there was nothing to be afraid of in the first place: I feel at peace.

After walking for what feels like hours, eventually I am able to see sunlight flooding in. Strangely, a feeling of disappointment overcomes me, and I am reluctant to leave: the peace I found here doesn't match anything I have felt before and I am worried I will never be able to replicate that.

Maybe the unknown in darkness can provide insight that nothing else can.

Guided Meditation

Megan Sprou

Try this five-minute guided meditation.

Sit comfortably in low-lit room.

Memorise this breathing pattern:

Breath in for three seconds through your nose.

Breath out for five seconds through your mouth.

As you inhale, think of a vast, empty space and place yourself there.

As you exhale, gently breathe your thoughts out into that void.

With each breath in, expand that cavernous space.

With each breath out, release more of yourself into it.

To finish, breath in and pull the edges of the space closer.

You are grounded back where you are sitting.

Κορη μεμαγμένη (Enchanted Daughter)

Jessie Hamilton

I.

My grandmother, Annette, (like St. Ann or Ananke), once took me to visit the caves in Warsaw, Ontario, next to the Otonabee River. My grandmother, the daughter of a plasterer, (a man who followed the gypsum route across from Glasgow), is the one who honours our history. She accepts its layers as concrete fact, like the sedimentary rock which leads us deeper into subterranean caves of promise, meaning, and personal power. I was eight or nine when we visited the caves, and wiry enough still to scramble through the underground on my stomach. The weather was lovely and bright, and I remember feeling that I was being watched by someone outside of myself while adventuring that day.

My grandmother has three daughters and no sons. All of the primordial figures in my life have been women and borne from necessity. Like the three Fates or Charities, Ananke's daughters are called Dawn, Leah, and Wendy, in that order... We have the 'dawn of time', the present: 'bitter', and the future, 'eternally young' through the magic of Peter. And I am the weaver on the loom. Second of my name, and thus inextricably linked to that Great Being that was my grandmother's mother, the first of my name.

Our family history is like sand, silt, and shale; like limestone, we disintegrate with too much exposure to water... Yet the exegesis I perform in order to make sense of our family mythos is nothing so great as to be feigned; we are but the inheritors of a plasterer's fortune. My mother taught me about 'Goddess' instead of about

'God'. She taught me about roots and dirt and compost, about the cycles of nature, and about how best to honour the walking miracle we are as women... We as women are each a sacred cave made incarnate; charged with a womb which embodies a deeper truth regarding the vital nature of entropy. Ours is a series of circles within circles. For example, I am the eldest daughter, of the eldest daughter, of the eldest daughter, and I have inherited the most precious gem of that which I am as a result of its gestation within the caverns of my mother's mother's flesh.

II.

O' Dawn, the eternal goddess – blonde mother with wide arms, wide hips, wide breasts – carries with her also an unfathomable depth to the warmth which glows from within the reservoirs of her Bluest Eyes. I have loved her more than I have ever loved myself.

Like Demeter, I miss her every winter when my darkness takes me underground. Where my mother is bright and simple, like sunshine and sparrow song and springtime, I am complex and chthonic and dwell more naturally in the unconscious realms, the underworld, the dark.

My mother again, this time drowsy and near Delphic following her hysterectomy tells me my future. She is afraid of me, my influence on my friends, and warns me against my own power. She is intensely human. Her immense breadth is an attempt to compensate for the frailty of her mind, her heart, and of her sense of deservingness in life. Lying there in her room, vulnerable, you'd think she would ask me for help, but no, her venomous tongue like the python in the cave at Delphi lashes out at me in an attempt to chew my whiskers.

III.

I travelled for a long time after that. Perhaps it was her animalistic attempts to dissuade me which led me to do so. Whenever I travelled, I would make a point of affixing a small bit of paper above my doorway with 'γνώθι σεαυτόν' printed on it. Every doorway of every flat I ever lived in became my cave, my temple, and my seat of power. Each man that visited me became a seeker of prophecy, and I, the voice of the aethers. But I don't travel anymore.

Now I am here in Nottingham, with its limestone and lace. Can I yet lay claim to who I feel myself to be – both Proserpina and Kore – Gaia as Pandora? For I have suckled at the breast of the eldest Dawn and I have studied the omphalós in my sleep. It's in my blood.

As the greatest circle borne of great circles, I exist not to fulfil an oracular function for men, nor to act solely as a voice lent to the aethers... I am more than the divine madness, more than the snake, and more than the bee... I am the cave. Welcome.

Cave fact

Exploring caves for recreation is called caving, potholing, or spelunking.

The Listening Cave

Rachel Laurence

Beneath the city's streets

An inner ear of stone,

800 chambers deep

Absorbing vibrations
Of past and present lives;
Of Tanners, Maltsters and ne'er do wells
Of people trying to sleep
Beneath the barrage of bombs.
Then silence, turns into rumblings,
The screech and tear of traffic
On the roads above
The footfall of a burgeoning population,
Pounding the streets in search of
Bargains, debauchery and promise
In this city of lights.

I Also Have Eyes, from Emily Alone by Florist, 2019: Exploring the Caves of the Mind

Emily Laurence

Florist's lead singer, Emily Anne Sprague delves into themes of mortality and the meaning of existence. What is the point in it all? Why are we here? How are we connected to the universe? Feelings of isolation and existentialism are portrayed in a melody that feels uncertain yet optimistic. Sprague's vocals are delicate and thoughtful, along with chords softly strummed on an acoustic guitar that seem to mimic tidal movement. She brings the listener on a journey into their

own being, often with new meanings presenting themselves over time.

The song begins with the question “how did I get into this place?”. This leads to a spiral of questions as Sprague becomes self-aware. In these moments, time feels surreal, leading to feelings of dissociation. Mundane statements such as “it’s cold and late”, sit alongside existential questions such as “do I even exist?”. This speaks to the difficulties of being on a journey of healing whilst going through daily motions. Life waits for no one.

Sprague describes people as, “hungry dogs running towards the horizon”. The horizon represents the threshold between the known and the unknown, and the difficulty in accepting there are questions we can’t answer. We are hungry to know why we exist, why things happen to us, why we are who we are. Rather than accepting not knowing, we find ourselves hunting for answers. But a horizon will always exist; there will always be things we can’t fully know about ourselves and the world.

In the lyrics “say hello to someone, look at their eyes”, Sprague connects body parts to the self, suggesting we connect through eye contact. This interaction can induce feelings of vulnerability, and echoes the well-known phrase, ‘the eyes are the window to the soul’.

Sprague then seems to realise a connection she shares with others – comprising of body parts. How are people just body parts, while behind eyes are thoughts, feelings and memories? Bodies are mere shells for unseeable and perhaps mythological souls. Behind eyes, beyond horizons, we long to reach, as if a skull were an unexplored cave, a way into the mind.

These thoughts continue with Sprague's journey into a "beautiful void", as if exploring a cave. She is enticed and becomes lost in a spiral of questions. However, she realises she must eventually come to terms with the cave and being repeatedly lost. In doing so, she accepts she won't always find answers to her question nor be able to control the events in her life. Sprague realises she is not alone and finds herself at one with the earth, where everything is connected.

Major chords are predominantly used throughout, but the song ends on a minor chord. The listener is left feeling uncertain, perhaps melancholy. The ending feels like a pause, an unfinished journey, hinting that Sprague may revisit the void and discover new passages. Although her journey is not linear or comfortable, becoming re-lost could be a gift.

Cave Facts

The largest cave crystals are 12m high.

Geologists estimate some undiscovered caves are large enough to fit entire cities in.

Creswell Crags in Nottinghamshire has Britain's only known Ice Age rock dating back over 13,000 years, and the largest known collection of 'witches marks', carved into the cave walls to ward off evil spirits.

Held

Pauline Leitch

She stood on the threshold, a place of half-light, of half-life, held between two extremes, neither one thing nor the other: able to feel

the sun on her face, yet within reach of the draught from the cavernous hollow at her back: simultaneously within earshot of the sounds of joy and the dark voices from within. Unable to step too far in either direction for fear that shadows would engulf the sun, or her. Rooted in the misguided belief that somehow, she fell short of the mark. The voices that perpetuated this notion billowing around behind her, self-doubt falling from the roof, a constant drip, drip, drip feeding her thoughts and starving her soul.

She'd had forays into the sun, sojourned there long enough to catch glimpses of her radiance and frolic with friends and lovers, to know the warmth, the delight, the wonder. Momentarily free, but always aware that she was on the run and that the feelings of unworthiness were faster and would inevitably catch and return her to her place of waiting, where she could watch but no longer partake.

Relentlessly she played this game of out and back, her lack of ability to win known before she began, like a moth burning itself against a light bulb, over and over again, bzzz, bzzzz, bzzzzz.

Bzzz.

Bzzzz.

Bzzzzz.

Turning off the alarm she awoke to find herself shrouded by the blinding light of realisation which, as she turned, in turn, illuminated her way.

Summoning all her courage she stepped into the mouth and found herself standing in an echo chamber, wet from the saliva of tongues, the cacophony of critical voices from her past reverberating around her - a dizzying, deafening sound of defeat - threatening her resolve and desperate for her attention. Ignoring them, and with her eyes

adjusting to the light she noticed what she should have seen all along, that they emanated from single sources. Lone voices, that if she'd brought into the open, would have been drowned out long ago.

Curious to what else she may have missed, she began walking inward, and contrary to all her previously held beliefs found that the further she went the safer she felt, the shadows regaining their rightful perspective close-up. The darker it became the more she had to use her inner fire to light the way, the stronger it burned the more at peace she sensed: grounded; secure; held in the womb of the earth.

This inner sanctum required further adjustment to her vision, which took concentration and focus, but once mastered revealed the outlines of chalk drawings on the walls, whispers left in her childhood mingling with the marks of her ancestors, telling the stories of her soul, from which there was no shortcoming. Fragments of clues to who she was, who she was yet to become, and who she had always been. A treasure trove of resource, an abundance of riches deep within her, the jewels of her crown - her sovereign power beckoning to her, willing her to try it on for size, to find out it was the perfect fit, but not without weight.

Responsibility. The ability to respond. The active choice of holding oneself accountable. Of learning who she was and living an authentic life: The highs, the lows; the twists, the turns; the good, the bad; the joy, the grief; the ecstasy and the despair. All there for the taking. By no longer fearing the dark, she could live in the sun.

Deep within this place of stillness, with the voices no longer vying for her attention, with a growing awareness of the fire that burned within, with the energy of possibility spiralling around her limbs, and with the winds of change feeding the flames, she heard a new cry, one of longing and lament, calling her home. Thus, with a shake of her

shoulders and a sway of her spine, she placed the diadem upon her head and I danced my way into the flames.

With Tired Eyes, Tired Minds, Tired Souls, We Slept

Elle Jacobson

I wake from slumber deep in the hollow earth
a place where souls sojourn to rest evermore.

Deep in the heart of the mountain
rain patters and footsteps echo.

A channel of light flickers through
the eternal labyrinth where
lost secrets, mysteries and folklore lie.

I wander in the abyss,
hidden from grief and suffering
that haunts my mind, body and soul
whose presence I feel following every step I take
the deeper I enter, the cave's abyss cocoons me,
whispering sweet murmurs and soothing sighs.

Shall I stay in this place, seek sanctuary and
as though my eyes have met Medusa's,
I become obsidian.

Frozen in time,

left forgotten
in tranquillity.

The Silence

Megan Sprou

The world was a great cacophony of sound. It would bounce and ricochet in their mind. It was all consuming. Everything seemed smooth, bland, and odourless as the noise screamed into the recesses of their being. They walked aimlessly through their world, sound the only thing that guided them. They would clasp their hands to their ears to dull the great echoes and reverberations.

When they were younger, it had been a harmonious hum in the back of their consciousness. They would create lyrics to the melody. But after time, the melody became harsher, sharper. It cut into their thoughts and bled dissonance into their mind. They could no longer remember the songs they had sung to themselves, the noise no longer bared resemblance to their childhood imaginings.

Now they would lay in bed, cocooning their head in their pillow to drown it out. But it persisted. It always persisted. They found themselves wandering their world, looking for a way to escape. They stumbled upon a forest with trees that scraped the skies. The wind rushed through the wood like waves crashing against rocks, the great bowed branches colliding together like the crack of thunder. Their thoughts drowned in the crashing sea of noise.

Then something changed. The noise seemed to reach its peak, a great crescendo of vibrations that made their teeth chatter and their body tremble.

It started to fade.

Had the noise not been so intense, so screaming, it might have been an indiscernible change. The fog lifted from their vision enough to see that they were stood at the verge of a cave with an opening not much taller than they were. A cool breeze drifted from the entrance, caressing their cheeks. They gazed into the darkness and the noise made notes like murmurs of apprehension.

They stepped across the threshold and a gust of wind rushed through them. They lifted their hands to cover their face. The blast was strong enough to reduce them to their knees, but they persisted. Each step they took, the noise diminished. It screamed and hollered, each note digging into their consciousness like a grappling hook. They gritted their teeth, the wind ripping the noise from their mind. There was one last cracked, anguished note before their world fell silent. There wasn't even a ringing.

Their skin prickled from the chilled atmosphere of the small chamber they stood in. Eyes adjusting to the darkness, they gazed upon the small cavern around them. The walls were short, only just taller than the entrance. There was a crevice in the back wall, just large enough to slip through. They stepped closer to it and a small current of air flowed past them. They gazed into the darkness of the crevice and the darkness gazed back. They wondered how deep the cave went, how far into the silence they could go. They knelt before it, the dampness of the earth soaking into their jeans. They pressed their hand against the jagged wall where the crevice began. They smiled at the roughness of the stone on their skin. When they pulled their hand away, small shards of rock came with it. They clenched their fist, savouring the feeling as the fragments were pressed into their palm. They dug their hands into the soft ground, revelling at the mud

beneath their fingernails. They grabbed handfuls of it, pushing it to their face, breathing in the musty odour of the earth.

They basked in the freedom of their silence.

It was hard to determine how long they sat there. They stared at the entrance, the cut out of light against the dark. The noise waited just beyond the reach of the cave. Behind them, the crevice seemed more and more curious. It beckoned them, promising a lasting silence away from the noise. They couldn't go. Not now. The noise was too much a part of them. Too much of who they were.

They had expected the noise to come back in full force, for it to be angry and harsh. The melody that returned was softer, more cushioned within their mind. The noise was loud, as it had been before, but the notes had more harmony.

Overtime, they would return to that cave in the woods. They would sit in the silence. They would stare into that small crevice, contemplating an eternal silence. Then they would stand, brush themselves off, and leave. They went back to the noise each time, the world a little quieter.

Race to the Bottom, Rise to the Top

Izzi Meynell

Depression is like an inescapable cave. I tumbled to the bottom years ago. The rope that connected me to the surface fraying as I tried to reach its mouth. I hurtled into the depths, screamed, and called for help. The rope, frayed to breaking point, lashed across my face and burned.

Nobody could hear me down there. My echo and I, all alone, the darkness a suffocating blanket. Rough, rocky walls that cut at my skin, fingers wore down to the bone as I clawed at this natural prison, a death sentence should I stay put. And so, at the bottom of that cave, I lay down on my back. I looked to the ceiling, but any crack of light was long gone, chased away by its emptiness. Chased away by the cruel predator that robbed me of my personhood, I wondered: who am I?

On the worst of days, I wanted to die down there. On the best, I forced myself upright and called weakly to the surface, ready to cling to their ropes and climb back up alone. After so long down there, my grip was weak – people would leave a rope and then leave me. Escape so close, torment. They expected me to help myself alone and anchor the rope underground when I could hardly stand. They gave me instructions but never the tools to finish the job. My fingers stopped bleeding after a while; my echo no longer responded to me. My body withered away into the void's empty, inky black.

They want me to heal without their help. Was it even possible to heal in the first place?

There did come a day, however, when a voice called out to me. They were there to help me, they say. They were there to get me out. They dropped the rope, and then they joined me. Another joined them, and there was light and noise before long. The cave seemed less like a tomb and more like a steppingstone. Comforting words, gentle touches, a harness, and a hand offered.

I did not trust them. I shied away from their hands and their kind words; I was like a scared animal shrinking away into my den. But that did not offend them; no, they stayed back. Their voices replaced my echo, and sometimes I grew angry. Sometimes I yelled at them that I

wanted to be a person worth saving, worth supporting. They never screamed back at me, no matter how hard I tried to push them away.

After a while, I wondered if anybody needed to change themselves until they were worth saving. Was that not why I lay a broken body at the bottom of a cave.

Leaving the cave was more complicated than falling into its depths. The walls sometimes crumbled, my feet slipped, and I braced myself for a drop that never came. Those around me held tight, met me where I was, comforted me, and celebrated each perilous obstacle I overcame. And, one day, I saw little light.

I scrambled to the surface, stood on my wobbly legs, and wept. My journey was only just beginning, but that was okay.

I would be okay.

Later in my life, I explored the cave again. I had stronger ropes and people who supported me. I had strength. The walls, worn down over the centuries, had long forgotten the bloody marks I left on them. Torchlight brought brightness to my darkest place; it did not remove that history; it showed me how far I had come.

I know that my depression will forever be a part of me. But I also know that caves will forever be a part of the earth. I could pretend neither of them is there, I could fill them both in and get rid of all the signs, but I refuse. The cave is not a sign of this world being broken, so why is my depression considered a representation of my fragility?

I appreciate the distance I have travelled since falling into the cave and how far I have grown. I am stronger for it, and there is beauty in such growth. Maybe I will fall there again, but I know the way out.

Perhaps my struggle will end in me offering a hand to another, stranded at the bottom of the world.

Diary Entry 2

Emily Laurence

Date: ?

Dear Diary,

I am blind to time. I don't know if it's been days or weeks since I entered my cave. The longer I have journeyed into its darkness, the further I have travelled into the corners of my mind. At first, I felt all-consumed - flooded with thoughts of my past, regrets, things I longed for and things I feared I may never have. Memories flash in my mind like fireworks, vivid but silent in the blackness. The way my mother smiled with her eyes. The last words I spoke to a lover. The taste of ripe plums from the tree at my childhood home.

I realise my time in this void is coming to an end. No longer do I know where the darkness ends, and I begin. Will it consume me if I stay? The cave has served its purpose. But now I long for the golden sun to kiss my pale, damp skin. I can almost hear the murmur of human voices. I am watching the geese glide across the reservoir. I am reaching out to cradle life in my arms.

Conclusion

The Response Issue 6 editorial team consisted of students from across years, degrees and courses, studying at Nottingham Trent University. During winter 2022 we learnt about the Hollow Earth exhibition at

Nottingham Contemporary and about the process of creating a publication. It has been a unique and insightful experience to develop ideas together and learn more about creative publishing processes.

This publication was made possible with guidance and support from Katy Culbard and other staff at Nottingham Contemporary, and we would like to thank our guest contributors for submitting fascinating interpretations.

Learning about a new topic and meeting people has been wonderful. We have shared our different experiences and perspectives and hope you enjoy the resulting designs, texts, images and communications. Response Issue 6 reflects both our shared and individual voices. Thank you for reading.

Spring 2023

Guest Contributors

Rosie Etheridge

Rosie is a Creative Writing student based in Nottingham and Norwich. She offers immersive new worlds inspired by Italo Calvino and John Le Carrè. Rosie experiments with different forms of writing including poetry and gig reviews. When not writing, Rosie reads Calvino's *Cosmicomics* or *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi.

Joe Fyfe Hardy

Joe is a Nottingham based writer, father, and a third-year student on Nottingham Trent University's Creative Writing BA. Joe's work is published on Steam as a Video Game Narrative Designer and is pursuing this field as a career while writing more personal pieces for pleasure.

Jessie Hamilton

Jessie has been interested in creative writing since adolescence and her work as a playwright and poet is acknowledged. In her writing, Jessie embraces themes of femininity, eternity and trauma. She explores transformational journeys of the soul within psychoanalytic and shamanic schools of thought.

Elle Jacobson

Elle is a third-year Creative Writing student at Nottingham Trent University. With a nomad spirit, she has a love of travel and seeing the world. As a writer and poet, she has been published in Seaglass Lit, Antagonizine and, Firefly Archives. Find Elle on Instagram @woolgatherer_writer

Rachel Laurence

Rachel is a poet and author who lives in Huddersfield. Her first collection of poems, *The Living Room*, was published in 1998. Much of Rachel's work explores the theme of landscape as a metaphor for the human body.

Pauline Leitch

Pauline is an emerging artist, writer and arts facilitator, She is beginning to trust her intuitive voice and is interested in what unfolds when she says 'yes!'. During 2022 Pauline exhibited her textile work and her writing was published. Find Pauline at www.100secondstomidnight.blogspot.com and on Instagram @createbypauline

Izzi Meynell

Izzi is a first-year Creative Writing student at Nottingham Trent University. Izzi writes about the imperfect thoughts and feelings experienced during mental health recovery and whilst facing trauma.

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