

# JOURNEYS



## POEMS BY

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Daphne Milne  
Grant van Wingerden

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## Journeys, an ebook

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James Bell

## increasingly on pilgrimage

---

you walk into a landscape  
that is always full  
where quartz in stone shines  
mica in granite flashes

every foot forward  
with its small offerings  
along your way as milestones

a woven circle of wheat  
a posy of purple heather  
a bracelet of snail shells

waymarks to the presence of those  
who have gone ahead  
to seek the possibilities of the path

for the way is narrow  
even if it exists  
remade by your own feet

night calls for a shieling  
where outside dark glows  
then morning water from a clear pool –  
the well at the world's end

James Bell

## strange meetings

---

as I journey and dawn rises  
bleak for what becomes a dull day  
there is no sign of animals or birds  
the coach travels too fast along  
deep routes man has etched  
carved and sectioned - land shared  
with other creatures who have names  
given by man - they do not acknowledge  
the gift and do not buy or sell land - live  
where temperature and food are congenial  
no wildlife or domestic life - then suddenly  
lapwings in one large field and nothing else  
their hooked plumes rise out of mist -  
the land soon gone by - traverse concrete  
bridges and ramps then flat land with  
straight roads - through towns never heard of  
and forget as I travel into the afternoon  
see only an unearthly geometry -squares  
and oblongs with occasional smaller ones  
walled with a gate and white crosses inside -  
*'where they fell'* it is said -symbols a century  
old and counting - I cannot say if these  
are sites of advances or retreats with intervals  
of rest and sleep in a pitted land  
now disappeared not to be met again -  
soon I will reach Arras - see the signs  
begin to appear with kilometres to go -  
I know that name - once reached after  
weeks or months - now in a couple of hours -  
still time to see before it gets dark

**James Bell**

## places I've never been

---

I've never been to Manhattan - never will -  
except with songs and poems  
have seen the photographs and movies so I could go back

then travel to the Arctic again to see  
its frozen wastes before  
a complete ice melt as it wouldn't be the same

toss a coin to decide what small town in the Mid-West  
I could go back to again -  
No Hope, Virginia - and arrive into the next Lee Child novel

will return to the furthest point of each continent  
where I have never been  
to contemplate each unchanged view of an ocean

it's so good to go back to places never visited before  
such activities are inexpensive -  
will travel back out to St Kilda again early next week

James Bell

# how the good news was brought from Porlock to Nether Stowey

---

laden with mud on shoes  
cape and hat  
a wish not to forget  
the news on a  
not so good day  
while  
I wear unsuitable town  
shoes just clean forgot  
a need for country boots  
on foot  
the horse fit only  
for the knackers now  
barely greet others  
en route to Stowey  
a comet  
or shooting star  
in the sky easily  
ignored on the visit to  
dear Sam  
this most lovely  
and most difficult of men  
especially when at work  
on a poem or somesuch –  
  
well the servant girl let's me into  
the cottage and disappears into the  
kitchen I go to the study  
and enter to hear

(cont)

*For he on honey-dew hath fed  
And drunk the milk of Paradise*

he sigh's then pauses  
does not continue I swear

and now anonymously content  
I remain the person from Porlock  
who never drunk of the milk of Paradise  
or anything like that though poets  
poor souls forever speak about it

James Bell

## Hodogaya - 5th Station of the Tokaido

---

three trees dominate the scene where  
people appear like insects  
at this stop among the hills

the slow gestures of trees can easily  
be ignored in a busy world concerned  
with faster movement and not noticed at all

as part of this movement - partly to a stasis  
caused by the lives inside - the nutrition gained  
beside the stall that serves food it has

a philosophy that hurry is unproductive  
just uses up more energy and to say  
hills roll is pure nonsense

a point of view for they stay exactly where  
they are like the trees - like the tableau  
the picture makes only its stillness

yet nobody here will hurry - pilgrims  
like trees have the same attitude inside  
their mix of concerns

both contemplate what passes  
as they stay or depart this station -  
all will go in the end

**James Bell**

## on leaving

---

a different kind of dangerous  
where all is fire under the blossom  
on the apple tree  
look out to sea where sky meets water  
seamlessly  
nature pushes from underground  
the timing unlike that of a clock  
responds to water and season  
an incidence of light  
all external yet part of you  
whose thoughts have no beginning  
yet will come to an end  
in the usual way  
sometime in the future

James Bell

## on the flight to Nairobi

---

the land disappears like a pianola roll  
under the white wing of the plane  
to an engine thrum and familiar lines  
from Casablanca in my earphones  
while the large cabin screen charts  
a crude flight path down the coast  
of Italy over the Mediterranean –  
a fictional Morocco in black and white  
and Charles de Gaulle airport are  
equally distant here while a taste  
of Africa is offered in Tusker beer –  
Italy drifts by in strong sunlight  
where mountain ranges pass like  
a cardiograph measuring heartbeat -  
strain to see maybe Naples  
Vesuvius or Pompeii and Herculaneum  
quickly gone and now only sea below  
as we stay in the air for there is no wax  
or feather in our defiance of gravity –  
next there will be more sea than sand  
as a first sight of another continent  
before that last goodbye in fog  
before that other flight takes off  
amidst the sound of propellers  
fades into another night while ours  
has that certainty of daily colour  
although we will arrive in darkness

James Bell

## the great journey

---

today the bramblings arrived again  
after most of the rain had stopped  
and high winds off the Atlantic gone

only a him and her this time  
his plumage brighter while she is cloaked  
from view against granite

paler in all shades though still distinct  
amongst a flock of green finches - tomorrow  
they may be gone like other visitors come and go

though these have not been here  
for three years now - then in snow -  
and who can say if him and her were among them

in the trip from Scandinavia -  
would there be any point in them returning right now

James Bell

## Paris Metro - December 2017

---

I give change to musicians  
who perform in moving trains - it's difficult  
to stand and play and sing  
with a guitar or an accordion  
while moving at speed amongst po faces  
who might or might not have internalised  
their pure enjoyment  
of a repertoire designed to be played  
between stops -  
appear to and from Montparnasse  
on the different journeys we make

change is rarely given to those with testaments -  
it's difficult to follow the general assessment -  
recited as they stand alone at one end of a carriage  
head tilted slightly forward  
hands held loosely before them -  
hard luck has a certain dramatic tone  
the content too is formulaic  
spoken clearly above train noise  
hard luck can only be desperate  
has to convince between stops

Lesley Burt

## The Paris coach party

---

Scene I: Southampton

*Betty:* Looks like he's had a good night out.

*Laughter from people in nearby seats. Betty pinches the crisp crease in her lemon trousers while the man shambles across the park.*

*Ted:* You said we drive through Normandy?

*Leans over the driver's shoulder:*

Been there, done that, got the T-shirt.

*Driver (using microphone):*

One day I'm keeping an eye on my coach while they all go in the Services, see a woman wandering around, looks a bit strange, disappears ...

*Janice:* We saw one just now by the bus shelter.

Only had one sock and one shoe on.

Amazin' aren't they. *Adjusts her hairband.*

*Driver (using microphone):*

Well I know she must be in the coach.

I get in. No sign. I walk through, look under seats, open the toilet door.

*Ted:* *Settles back, addresses nearby seats.*

You want to know anything

about the Western Front: ask me.

*Driver (using microphone):*

There she sits, knickers round ankles talking to herself. I tell her to bugger off my coach.

*Laughter around the coach.*

Scene 2: Calais

*Pete:* Look, look. See 'em? Illegals behind the bushes?

*Chunters along with the radio.*

Chantilly lace, doo doo doo.

*Ted:* A bloke hung onto the petrol tank under our truck with one arm for two hours. Didn't realise we were actually going back to Belgium.

*Pete:* Hilarious. Over there, look, More of 'em. washing their smalls in the river. *Laughter.*

Perdy face, doo-doo-doo. Anyway, who was Big Bopper? Little Richard?

Bob Cooper

# On Finding A Train-Ticket Bookmark Near The End Of Your Copy Of Middlemarch

---

I've no need to stand on the platform again,  
looking at the dull digital display as it changes,  
stare along the track, see the train's distant light,

but I remember it now. How the train rumbled,  
lit carriages slowing as the brakes screeched,  
overcoats darkening many door's window-glass.

A pause. Bodies on the platform. Me looking,  
knowing you were looking, too,  
my cold hand waiting for warmth.

**Bob Cooper**

# Abdulatif, Now The Family Head, Says What Matters

---

These are the last minutes of our journey,  
two years from Syria, so much money,  
and now driven in a mini-bus to a flat  
in Wallasey, The Wirral, England.

We've been promised windows with curtains,  
beds, cupboards, a tv and fridge.  
I have explained to my mother  
English seems not always to say  
what it means, so saucepans  
are for vegetables not just sauces,  
and tea-bags don't mean a bag of tea.  
In a while we'll get used to British bread.

May my father – who became part of the sea  
when we all saw Europe as lights  
beyond the high waves as the boat sank -  
bless us now and help me.  
My young brother is now 8, is still quiet  
yet patient and clever with his hands.  
He will be an engineer to honour our father.  
I will learn good English and Latin,  
be a doctor like my dead uncle.  
My sister, a year older than me,  
must now wear a dress, a burka,  
I don't like how men look at her.  
Soon we will have more documents.  
I will find schools.

Now we stop. I wake us all.  
We see light beyond an opened door  
as three women step forward to greet us.  
We look beyond them, walk slowly  
what we hope are our final steps.

Annest Gwilym

# At night her bed became a pea-green boat . . .

---

that sailed to the dazzle of distant lands:

over many miles to Babylon,  
nimble and light, by candlelight;

on magic carpets, soft and silky  
as the warm Oud-perfumed air,  
where a muezzin in a minaret  
called to prayer;

through magic doors in fairy mounds  
where fair folk danced on mother-of-pearl,  
gossamer gowns shushing silver flutes;

to a girl made of flowers that became an owl,  
that flew deep into pine-scented forests  
on liquid currents. White butterflies hung  
in honeyed light that rose to a violet sky  
where larks tunnelled upwards towards the sun.

Dreams burnished by words from the book beside her,  
where Sheherazade still whispered her silver.

Jan Harris

## While still, we journey far

---

Our plans deflated by a nail in a tyre,  
we must wait by the big cream phone  
in our holiday lodge, while Cranecleugh Burn  
rushes past the veranda on its journey  
from moor to Kielder Water.

Our mobiles silently reproach this remoteness,  
but the grey heron wings low along the river  
with news of fish, and a robin  
romances the rowan with song.  
We pace, sit, sigh, while morning slides

into afternoon. The landline brings news  
of delays, our rescuers diverted to emergencies.  
Here, the only urgency is the swallows'  
insect-hunt, their mechanical whirr.  
With each new call we fall down the list

into tomorrow, patience ebbing  
with the late-summer light, until we dine  
al fresco, pass bowls of broth from hand to hand,  
dip warm bread, sticky with butter  
that pools on the soup's surface, like words

that linger on our lips, before we speak them  
into the cool evening air where buzzards circle  
higher and higher – *do you remember...*  
with an inflection that lifts like wings,  
*of course, and did I ever tell you...*

and while the dark sky darkens  
and is pricked by stars, we wonder  
which ones are now just memories, light  
carried through time and offered to us now,  
like an unexpected gift.

Jan Harris

# If we travel towards each other, you and I,

---

we will meet at a point neither of us has reached before,  
where a welcome bench is neither rickety nor new  
and the view is not of silent, scented pinewoods  
rolling down to sea, or city skylines drawn with steel  
and glass, where traffic travels endlessly to somewhere else,  
but something in between,  
and there may be a small café  
with food that doesn't zing with chilli on our lips  
and isn't bland as rice without a hint of spice or seasoning,  
and we will sit awhile, careful  
not to close the gap too soon for fear  
of something strangely undefined but real, until you say  
a quiet *namaste*, *shalom*, or maybe the *salaam*,  
and I will offer you my hand,  
and you will hold it, warm in yours,  
with your hand warm in mine.

Martha Landman

## Stopping at Mars on The Way to Venus

---

And then we see it all —  
NASA's space station, Russian  
camps, other countries' claims  
the sudden change in skyscape vistas  
sharp drop in the UV index  
as we move closer to the dim light.

We marvel when we step out  
toward the Gothic houses  
of the Martians, four feet tall  
click-consonants  
of Khoisan in their speech.

There are Karoo shrubs, palm trees  
tall grass like sugar cane  
but not a single gumtree, not a bank  
no gas stations, no bottle shops.

In broad brimmed hats  
Fellahin locals carry on their business:  
slip, slop, slap as if we aren't here.

Their women's eyes are emerald green,  
they sip indigo-coloured cocktails,  
read in the scant shade of paw-paw trees.  
I check their titles —  
*A Beautiful Anarchy,*  
*Slow Pilgrim,*  
*The Second Coming,*  
*Endless Life.*

Martha Landman

# the road will take its toll

---

there's a certain intimacy  
in us being  
on this road —  
the miscues, detours  
thoroughfares  
*cul-de-sacs*

dedicated cycle lanes run  
along bridges and tunnels  
but our toes in the gravel  
at crossings and junctions  
defy intimacy as does  
reading a map

Martha Landman

## east of Africa

---

dew on your tattered shoes  
you walk far into the early morning  
along dusty boulders  
the sun nuzzles the earth

from the lookout a breeze  
ripples through cane fields  
the horizon holds you eternally  
in an illusion of stillness

a wedge-tailed eagle soaring on the wind  
swoops down  
feasts on last night's roadkill —  
a western brown snake  
a kangaroo, joey in her pouch

harvesting machines' distant rumble  
makes you yearn for the Indian ocean's roar  
for African savannahs  
for mopane trees  
for the smell of elephant dung

you disappear with that silver 787  
on its westward trek through the clouds

the sun is warmer on the long walk home  
memories meander on the river path  
between gumtrees and paperbarks  
your thoughts are roots and soil

Martha Landman

# All Along the Mekong

---

Saffron-robed monks and rice paper makers  
trade goods between boats,  
they laugh and chat in the floating markets.

Beyond the riverbanks are rice paddies,  
women in colourful garb and conical hats  
up to their knees in water.

On their stroll to the candy workshop  
in the temple village, an elderly couple smile.  
Sellers charm the crowd.

From our floating airconditioned bar  
we watch and sip snake wine,  
they say it makes men strong in bed.

The Royal Palace quietly slips by.  
There's hushed talk of Cambodians murdered  
by the Khmer Rouge in the twilight hour.

Now a display of traditional dances,  
antiques scattered through silk weaving villages,  
silkworms chomping away at mulberries.

At Ouknhatey Village, pass stilt shack homes  
we take refuge from the heat. White Brahman cattle  
pull painted wooden carts on dusty roads.

We wave at the kids who run and laugh in humidity,  
play hide-and seek among palm trees,  
their dark eyes intense with mischief.

We yell "xin chao" to a napkin folding lady  
before she too passes out of sight —  
no one wishes to remember what once were killing fields.

Daphne Milne

# We could Pedalo all the way to San Francisco

---

and I would still love you  
even when the Atlantic  
swooshes up through  
the floorboards and we have  
to keep on paddling  
feet going faster and faster  
to escape the rising waves

and I would still love you  
if we drove from London  
across the channel  
on a sea-sick making  
ferry boat full of English  
football fans drunk  
on loss or victory

and I will still love you  
even though it is raining  
when we reach Paris  
too late for a meal  
at La Cotriade because  
Paris is Paris and a city  
for lovers of any age.

Daphne Milne

## CEDRIC TRAVELS BY TRAIN

---

Cedric says there is a grand piano in a field just outside St. Erth. You have to be quick to catch it for it has no innards and is only good for chopsticks. Cedric says he saw a covey of nuns on the jetty outside Dawlish. They stood in a row, like starlings on a telegraph wire, and passed a bottle from hand to hand, up and down the line, glugging. Cedric says he doesn't know how they got there as the jetty is only accessible by sea or by climbing over the fences and the railway line. This was in the sixties and he has no idea of what was in the bottle, but he remembers it well. Cedric says there is a two foot high penguin all alone in the middle of a field between Reading and Exeter St. Davids. Cedric says the white horses of Wiltshire fluff out their manes and gallop away with the chalkdown maidens, but only after dark while the chalkdown men stay silent and grumpy to guard the chalk downs from travellers and unicorns. Cedric says he sat in a train just outside Stockport and waved to a young lady sitting in a train going in the opposite direction whom he had met at a party the previous night and never expected to see again. Cedric says.

Daphne Milne

# Here be Dragons

---

It is cold when memory begins.  
All the pretty colours of the past  
faded like the photographs  
like the clothes we wore.

He's barely there.  
The invisible presence  
that held the camera  
unblinking eye of the recording angel  
capturing our dreams or fears.

All the places we went to and some we never did  
Switzerland and Barcelona  
Italy and France but never Wales.  
Great Grandmother came from Wales.

A gaunt, thrawn woman dressed in black  
a wielder of lashes  
with a bitter tongue and haunted lips.  
She owned  
the hardest hands in Christendom.

No. We never went to Wales.

Grant van Wingerden

# Stopped

---

I refrain from a strain to explain  
why I have no motive to shun in train  
no trip in ship or like to hike  
buck on the back of the bike  
My ventures don't involve  
the rest of my resolve  
The steps I take  
are mine to make

Shrinking circles  
distant squares  
wit will wilt  
where no one cares  
Try angles that dangle  
on the end  
of a long line

Descending driveway  
the only way I'm inclined