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ST JOHN'S
SCHOOL
LEATHERHEAD

THE ENGLISH MAGAZINE

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Welcome to the first edition of *The English Magazine*, and a chance to sample some of the terrific writing to emerge from the English Department in the Autumn Term.

From the Fourth Form we feature three especially strong creative writing pieces stimulated by reading projects that encouraged pupils to devise imaginative responses to a variety of novels. Angus King gives us the late-in-life reflections of Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*, brilliantly capturing the jaundiced outlook and prose style of this famously disaffected narrator, and in doing so creates a haunting elegy for the character's creator, J.D. Salinger. Angus writes of his piece: "My story is based around the idea that the anti-establishment ideas of Holden, which seemed so original and challenging in 1951, have now become so commonplace, they are now the norm. Holden is horrified by the fact that he has become a spokesman for either the establishment or mad gunmen like Mark Chapman." Abby Dwan's piece, told from the point of view of a carrier pigeon in World War One, was inspired by Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse*, and gives a quirky and original perspective on the conflict. Sophie Evans' *Jackdaw Winter* is a beautifully crafted tale in its own right, full of enchanting descriptive writing ("The moon was a piece of chalk smothered on a black canvas..."). The power of words on a page to kindle our imaginations is one of the most accessible and dependable sources of pleasure we have – something these budding authors display in abundance.

For the Lower Fifth, currently doing battle with GCSE Controlled Assessments, storytelling has been serious business this term, perhaps accounting for the darker themes and plot lines that appear in their featured writing. James Barr's grimly compelling account of a man counting down to execution draws much of its power from sophisticated structural effects. Matthew Chalmers serves up a delicious twist in his tale of the famished survivor of some unspecified calamity: teachers are warned to beware the glint in Matthew's eye as the lunch bell approaches... while Paige Garrett's tense and gripping story reminds us all never to ignore a fire alarm.

Cecile Gillies continues the dark theme with a chilling narrative inspired by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, one of many fine pieces of 're-creative' writing produced by the Lower Sixth in preparation for AS level coursework. From the same year group we have three reviews of Arthur Miller's complex and challenging play *Broken Glass*, which we saw at the Vaudeville Theatre in November. Nathalie Kelk closes the issue with a reflective piece on the half term visit to the Battlefields of the Somme and Ypres; always a moving occasion, and one that has inspired some outstanding coursework on the literature of the Great War from our Upper Sixth pupils. Accompanying it are some of the wonderfully evocative photographs taken by Dominic Higgitt during the trip.

My thanks to all the contributors.

Nick Johnston-Jones

Head of English

January 2012

THE LAST TESTAMENT OF HOLDEN CAULFIELD (27 JANUARY 2010)

Angus King – Fourth Form

If you really want to hear about it again, the first thing you'll want to know is what has happened to me since I wrote that book, and what my lousy life has been like since then, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap.

To tell you the truth, I wish I'd never written all that stuff. God knows why, but now everyone claims to feel like I did then. I hate it when people go along with that crowd; they're all phonies. Everyone feels like they don't belong anymore: pop stars, goths, disaffected youths and even politicians for God's sake! They all think they're against the system, but it's all lies. Even a wacko murderer like Mark Chapman claims to get his inspiration (ha!) from me. He apparently later said that the killing of John Lennon had been carried out to "promote" my book; who's the crazy one now?

To tell you the truth (again), I'd give up all my fame and glory just to live one moment of my life again. And it isn't what you think either.

It was in about 1962, around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, when everybody was suddenly starting to notice what I'd been seeing for years. It was a pellucid fall day, and I had ended up at the fair at Coney Island; this was weird in itself, because I had always refused to go there and had always enjoyed calling it *Phoney* Island. That killed me. How I had ended up there I did not know, but as I gazed up through the bright lights and vibrant colors, I suddenly decided to try my luck on the big Ferris wheel that dominated the skyline of the whole park.

As the wheel began to turn upwards, I remembered the old story of the wheel of fortune that Mr Spencer used to bore us with, and I felt a part of life as I saw the magnificent panoramic view of New York as I ascended into the heavens. I could taste the bitter autumnal air and smell the faint aroma of fresh popcorn from the vendors far below. I felt on top of the world and a part of it, but at the same time I knew that this feeling couldn't last, and that soon the wheel could only go down.

As my seat reached the apogee, my heart began to sink towards the squalor below. Suddenly, the wheel ground to a halt, and I heard a piercing cry from just above me. As I looked out I glimpsed the horrifying silhouette of a young girl, hanging perilously from the car above. She was on her own and there was no one to save her. I stood up, rocking from side to side in the unsteady car, trying to reach out to her. Suddenly, I realised that I felt just like my sister Phoebe had felt that day on the carousel, when she had reached out for that gold ring, but found it always just out of her reach, like Tantalus in the bowels of hell. And as I realised it, the girl fell and it was too late.

As I gazed down on her lifeless body, it not only brought back memories of the time when James Castle threw himself out of the window, but I also realised that I had destroyed Phoebe with my book. She could never reach the golden ring simply because she was the sister of Holden Caulfield. ■

PIGEONS AT WAR

Abby Dwan – Fourth Form



A siren howled. I knew what was going to happen; I was on my way thinking that I would never see the light of day again. I got into the crate and I was off, on my way. I knew that war wanted me, but I wasn't sure if I wanted war...

I arrived. Off in a crate I went being carried through 'no man's land' on a soldier's back who was really putting all in for his country; he may have had a family to feed and care for

but was pushed out. I only came from a flock however. Some of the public passing by like to call us "the flying rats" just because they leave a piece of bread in their hand or mouth and we go for it... ridiculous.

They got me fitted for my little pack on my back with my capsule attached with the all-important message. I was brought over to part of the trench witnessing the horrors of the front line: men all over the floor, not a spare piece of ground to lay a foot without touching blood or a hero. I came across a young looking man. I had a sudden feel for him – little did his family or loved ones know that he had passed away. That's when it hit me, if I could do this job really well I could save all those still out here now, hoping for survival. I will be the fantastic "War Pigeon!"

I took to the misty skies carrying that all-important message with me. I had never flown with such pride before. I was flying over Belgium when suddenly I was hit. My wing was struck through by what looked like a gunshot. I plummeted to the ground spiralling like the red arrows do in their performances, although in my case, it was not out of pleasure.

I landed in a van, open backed and full of injured English men all crying out in pain. I felt overpowered through their presence. We arrived at the infirmary. Of course I knew that all the men would go first as they were sent here from far away. Up came this one man who took great pride and joy in me and picked me up carefully in his dirt coated hands. His name was John. He cared for me and he looked after me making sure I got some nutrients even during the important times of the rations. I could tell time was going on and I needed to get that message to the headquarters in London as soon as possible.

He would speak to me and I would understand. We would communicate in a way that not many others would be able to accept. Some of his colleagues must have thought that he was some crazy man, but he wasn't. He was a true friend.

Soon I became well enough to fly and I knew it was time for me to move on and deliver the message. I flew off but my heart ached for John and I was lonely up in the sky; I

wanted to see him again. However, I kept flying. Through my travels there were many ups and downs. I hit many storms and it was a tough and torturous flight but I knew it would all pay off when I arrived.

Only three miles away from the headquarters, I saw Big Ben and the Houses Of Parliament. However, the atmosphere was completely different. The town looked damaged, a dangerous place. You could tell where all the bombs had hit; there was little life around them, nor buildings.

I arrived with the message and all went well. The message was one of the most crucial and it got to them. I was so pleased as were the headquarters. I was rewarded with a badge and the words came out of his mouth that I was dying to hear... "That is what I call a fantastic War Pigeon!" ■

JACKDAW WINTER

Sophie Evans – Fourth Form

I could see my breath in the air. The pavement was like a sheet of glass, and I struggled to grip the ice as I urged forwards to get back home. All I could see was white, except for the black wrought iron gates over the road, and the old-fashioned street lamps that lined my path. Yet there was something in the middle of the road. Something that stood out against the perfect, untouched snow. It looked like a crow, but even from a slight distance I could tell that it was a smaller bird. It was a jackdaw.

As I neared the last shop on the street, a man pressed his face against the window. His raven coloured eyes stared down at me as he flipped the 'open' sign over to become 'closed'. No one ever went in there. Not many people even knew what he sold, for there was never anything in the display window. Suddenly I heard tyre noises as a Land Rover accelerated round the corner. It was out of control on the ice, and it showed no sign of slowing down as it approached the jackdaw. I looked away as the car's headlights blinded me. I turned around and faced the road again as the fierce sound of the engine faded into the distance.

I expected feathers to be scattered around the scene, and the odd patch of reddened snow here and there. However, to my surprise, the jackdaw was still there. It was in precisely the same place – it had not moved a single millimetre. I gazed at it, bewildered by the event. Strangely it stared back at me, and it jerked its head towards the gates. It was as if it wanted me to follow it into the woods. Perplexed by its actions, I crossed the road and started to unravel the thick, corroded chains. It did not take very long as there were no knots or locks, and before I knew it I was walking through the dark estate.

The moon was a piece of chalk smothered on a black canvas, and it was my only source of light as I walked down the winding path. A mixture of mud and snow crunched under my feet as I continued to follow the jackdaw, and I started to doubt whether I was right in doing so as there was not a single thing in sight. Nevertheless, a minute passed and an ancient building came into view. It would have been a remarkable place to live some

decades ago. However, it was a decaying brick house now, with singed, dirty, white siding. The roof had tiles missing and you could even see its wooden joists. I assumed that a fire had destroyed the home, and possibly the people inside it. The jackdaw was still there, perched on the doorstep, and the charred front door was wide open. To satisfy myself, I gathered all of my emotions together, and I stepped into the hallway.

I can't quite remember what happened that night. In fact, I can't remember a thing at all. The only thing I recall was walking home, startled to find a police car on the drive. I reached into my pocket with trembling fingers to get my house key. I opened the door and threw my rucksack onto the floor, and I was greeted by my parents who ran over and threw their arms round me. My mum clutched the back of my head and she spoke into my ear. "Where have you been? We didn't get a single minute's sleep last night. We were so worried. We thought you had been abdu..... We thought you'd never come b....." I could see that she was struggling to get the words out as tears streamed down her face. "It's OK," I exclaimed. "I'm fine. Really I am." There were two young policemen sitting on the sofa. PC Malcolm was a medium height officer with black hair and PC Island was tall with dark brown hair. They both stood up proudly and put on their hats. "If there's anything you need, let us know," they stated before leaving the house.

I was sitting on the bench in the school playground the next morning, deep in thought about the recent incidents. Why had I never returned home? What was really in that house? I asked myself these questions as the sound of bells and children playing encircled me, and navy uniforms sped past. I could hardly focus in lessons, as the only thing I could watch was the clock. All I wanted was for the hand to reach four, because I was desperate to go back to the house and discover the truth. School finally ended after what felt like years, and I pedalled past the shops and through the woods faster than I had ever done before in my life. When I arrived I threw my bike to the ground and sprinted towards the doorstep.

I cautiously wandered the hallway, scrutinising everything to check that it was safe to be in the building. There was a wide staircase in the middle of the hall which had blackened, wooden rails. There was a large, shattered window at the top of it, and the glass shards on the carpet were like diamonds as they sparkled in the sunlight. Scorched family portraits lined the walls and embers covered every inch of the floorboards. All of a sudden I started to hear something moving behind me. I spun around to see a small Shetland sheepdog at the bottom of the stairs. It slowly paced towards me and it started sniffing me. It was clearly seeking food, which wasn't surprising as it was quite bony and looked as if it hadn't eaten in days. It had a collar, but instead of having any contact details on it there was a message. It was engraved on a golden circle and it said, "Please look after him rite – this is a doggo of god." Next to him there was a lead and a jam jar filled with a few notes and coins.

I took the puppy back home so that I could telephone the local animal shelter. Mum was at work all day, but I could tell that dad was home because I could hear the printer whirring upstairs. He's a writer you see. He came downstairs to quickly grab a cup of tea, but he ended up taking out a pencil to scribble down the events on his notepad when he saw the puppy by my feet. The people came around within fifteen minutes to collect him and check that he was fine to travel. It was rather hard saying goodbye so soon, but they

gave me their address so that I could visit whenever I wanted. They placed him in a dog cage and put him in the back of the boot. I watched as they drove away, and he looked out of the back window at me with adorable eyes.

Mum came home and was extremely disappointed that she hadn't seen the little Sheltie. She absolutely loves animals, and she insisted that I should take her to see him as soon as possible. We therefore drove to the address at the weekend. It was a modern building with a glass conservatory as a reception at the front. We walked in and the place was immaculate. There were people wearing the shelter's light blue polo shirts, and there were notice boards with recent news and profiles of all of the animals in their care. We went over to the receptionist. She was typing vigorously on her keyboard, and she was wearing an earpiece so that she could receive calls. Five minutes passed and mum had to fake a cough to get her attention. "Sorry," she said in a superior and friendly voice, "how can I help you?"

"We've come to visit one of the animals in your care," Mum replied. "A Shetland sheepdog. He was brought in a few days ago."

"Oh yes. He's not here anymore though. He was placed with a family overnight. That's the thing about these puppies. Everyone wants a dog whilst they're young and sweet!"

"Oh. Oh OK. Is he there permanently or temporarily whilst you can find him a full-time home?"

"He'll only be there for the time being. I can arrange for you to meet the family if you would like. Were you interested in adopting the dog by chance?"

"No, I'm the one who found him," I intervened.

"Excellent. Here's their phone number and their street. They only live a few miles away."

We jumped into the car, saddened that the dog had been accommodated so quickly. Nevertheless, we drove to the house and knocked on the bright red door. A lady with long curly hair appeared. She shook our hands and introduced herself as Sam (Samantha) and she called her husband Sam (Samuel) from the kitchen to greet us. It was PC Island. The dog came rushing to the door. It turned out that he had been named Teddy by the shelter, which coincidentally was the name I had always wanted to call any pet of my own – something I had craved for since the untimely death of my younger brother three years before. Two seven year old boys raced down the stairs and presented themselves as Harry and Tommy. They were twins, impossible to tell apart, and they strangely spoke at exactly the same time. The family insisted that we should come in and have a drink with them.

The boys showed me to their bedrooms. There were football posters all over the eaves, and trophies and medals glistened on their desks. Teddy came up the stairs and leaped onto my lap. I stroked him, remembering the day that I found him in the ancient house. The boys rubbed his ears gently. They told me that they had looked after many dogs in the past, but none of them were anything like Teddy. "Teddy is a canine like no other," they declared. "He never barks too loudly. He's never unfriendly. He's always attentive and he obeys every command. He's every man's best friend."

After meeting Teddy, mum went home and pleaded with my dad to adopt him. “He would be a wonderful addition to the family!” she begged. He argued and made up excuses, but eventually he gave in with great reluctance, and within a week Teddy was roaming our house happily. I watched him go to sleep by the cosy fire, and as I patted him on the back I asked myself out loud “Where did you come from? You randomly appeared in a demolished building where I went missing for a night. I was guided to you by a tamed jackdaw, and everyone who knows you says you are a dog like no other. Your collar said that I should look after you as you are a ‘dog of God’, and that is what you are Teddy. I vow that I will keep you safe forever.” ■

HERO

James Barr – Lower Fifth

Who would have thought that such a bland, boring, grimy corridor could be the stairway to heaven? For me, this would be one of the last things I would see in my life. Gone were the times of fresh, crisp air in emerald green pastures; replaced by rough concrete walls, covered with a layer of flaking navy blue paint. The floor is ice cold against my grubby, bare feet. Cobwebs litter the ceiling like stars. It is covered in stains from the men before me, the men who have been sentenced to death.

The corridor is roughly fifty metres long, but it feels like the longest mile. It seems to stretch for an eternity. A solitary door stands at the end, welcoming the traveller to death.

I am in **Death Row**, being escorted by two sullen faced guards; they do not speak, just walk with me as if the silence says all that needs to be said. “You’re about to die...”

They do not know me, and I do not know them. They are unnamed guards A and B. They don’t know my name, my age, my history. They do not know what I have done, or what I have not. These are the last two people I will ever see; **they do not know me, I do not know them.**

40 metres

That is what is cruel about **Death Row**: not the sullen guards, not the conditions, not even the ever present presence of **The Chair**; but the solitude.

I will be alone in my final hour, no loved ones to support me through, nobody to lay flowers at my grave, nobody to miss me when I depart this world...

30 metres

Why am I here?

A mistake.

Pure and simple.

I was at the extreme of the expression, “At the wrong place, at the wrong time.” But that is history, an event that has happened and will always have happened. An event that cannot be changed, but affects the present more than anything else.

20 metres

There is no point in appeal; the prosecution’s case is as hard and unbreakable as the concrete corridor that entombs me. No defence lawyer would take me, I am an animal being led to the slaughter house. Hopeless. Defenceless. A fate set in stone.

A bead of sweat rolls down my face like a teardrop, creating a channel in the grime that has built up over the years in the maximum security prison.

15 metres

The maximum security prison has hardened me to emotion, but despite the defences I place in front of my mind, I can feel *it*.

A cacophony of voices and feelings are ripping down the barriers, determined to enter my mind and fill it with their presence. Despite the raging battle in my mind, my cool demeanour still prevails. Guards A and B remain as sullen and cold as ever.

What am I to them?

Nothing.

A method of receiving cash in the pocket and food in the mouth.

10 metres

A fly buzzes angrily around my head; I don’t swat. I savour it. I must value this moment as it will be one of the last I ever experience.

5 metres

We are getting close now, the door seems to lure me, smirking as it receives another prize for its collection. Our paces seem to be slowing, whereas my breath increases in pace and depth. I breathe heavily, savouring the taste of the musty air.

4 metres

Beads of perspiration moisten my forehead, the only visible signs of my internal conflict.

3 metres

A small trickle of urine runs down the inside of my leg. In any other circumstance this would appear unnatural, disgusting. But here and now it is as normal as placing one foot before the other.

2 metres

My ears are ringing, our echoing footsteps sounding like gunshots in the empty silence.

1 metre

My head is held high, I am calm, I am dignified. I am a **Hero**. Not the typical Superman figure who arrives at the last minute to save the day; but a hero nonetheless. I am admirable, staring Death in the face without quaking in my boots. Welcoming him as if he was an old friend.

We arrive at the Gates of Heaven.

*They have always been pictured as majestic wrought iron gates that tower among the clouds. In reality, they are a cold, steel door. As unwelcoming and featureless as the guards who escort me and **The Chair** that awaits me.*

The door swings open with a piercing creak, revealing a dark, concrete room. There is no point in describing this room as there is nothing to describe. What description and emotion is needed for is... **The Chair**.

The Chair sits in the middle of the room, a dark oak-ish colour and a well worn seat, from people that have met their fate like I, in this room; a chair that you may find anywhere in the world. But interwoven among the very fibres of the chair is **black**. Not the colour black, but the emotion black. Fear, pain, despair. **The Chair** is made from pure evil, as if The Devil himself crafted it with his own wicked, gnarled hands.

I am bound to it with leather straps, tightly.

One on my left arm

One on my right arm

One on my left leg

One on my right leg

The guards retreat. Without passing, prayer, farewell.

Heartless.

Do they feel lucky to be the last people to see me alive?

No. They think I am a heartless murderer. When in fact the tables have been turned and they are the ones sentencing me, an innocent man, to death.

My eyes scan the room, taking in its 'beauty'.

From left

To right

After a few minutes of contemplation, a man appears at the door. Dressed in a white lab coat. His eyes are feverish, avoiding mine at all costs. Though my eyes aren't on the man, they are on the syringe clasped in his right hand. A few drops of a clear liquid, made up of pure, undiluted death.

Everybody believes death to be painful, but in reality it is just a sharp prick of a needle. My limbs feel tired momentarily and my vision is blurred. Then I pass to the other side. The only sound justifying my existence is the thump of head upon shoulder. ■

HERO

Matthew Chalmers – Lower Fifth

I lie so quiet, so rigid, so still, that I may as well be dead. I went to sleep in the dark. I now rise in the dark.

I had a watch once, but it was broken a long time ago, so the time right now is unknown. I take a few steps forward and I stumble out of the crumbling doorway of an old, decaying house. I beat some flaky dirt from my wiry and tangled beard.

The sky is a fusion of black and grey and the sun cannot be seen; only the countless rows of deserted and crumbling buildings are visible.

I hobble through a mound of broken glass and stone. *Might as well start the day.*

I begin turning over rocks, my bruised and brown hands darting amongst the cracks. *Surely there is something to eat here?*

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I haven't eaten anything in days. My ribs are rubbing against my leathery skin. Smog in the sky has made my eyes red. Yet still no food. *I have to try harder.*

I glide silently amongst the dead buildings, looking for any trouble; however, the silence tells me there is none.

I had seen other people in my journeys. Oh yes. Some of them were small and helpless, as I am. Some were crazy and deranged. In this chaos, however, there was some order. Brutal gangs, religions, though they were no better, and all sorts of strange, gas mask clad soldiers patrolled the streets. Though this is a big city and I feel I am safe right now.

Then I hear it.

The crunch of hard soil under footsteps. I scurry into a corner of the house I am patrolling

and my eyes press against the cracked glass of a window.

There is a man strolling down the street. A well dressed man. My belly rumbles.

I have considered it. It would mean a hell of a lot more food. Yet I decided against it, as of now. I have done bad things but cannibalism is something a little too far.

Yet I am hungry. So damned hungry. Desperation. *I need food!*

He must have *something*. It is decided. He is wearing a blue suit for Christ's sake! His hair is slick, his smile obnoxious: going back ten years I would've taken him as a banker!

I sidle down the stairs, avoiding making any noise at all. He strolls along carefree, as if the world *hasn't* ended.

My heart is pounding. He does have a knife strapped to his belt. *Interesting*. However, I didn't dwell on who this man could be, I just knew that this was prey. Armed or not I needed to act. If I didn't it would not be long till I die. Last chance.

I hear a noise at the other side of the road. A scuttle like a mouse, yet it's too loud to be that. *Others!?*

The man stops and turns to look. He slowly draws his knife and walks toward the other side of the lane.

It's a trap! This I'm sure of. Someone else is going to rob this man. Someone else is going to live.

The man's back is now turned to me. Sweat pours down my face, washing off the mud. I creep out onto the street, stalking the man as a wolf does. I pick up a large jagged rock. The man is still walking, weapon out, to where the noise had come from. I am not going to let whatever trap is waiting for him work.

I attack.

I cleave open the man's head and continuously hammer it with the sharp edges of my weapon till dark, saturated blood floods down over his suit. He is definitely dead, but I keep attacking. Must be my emotions.

Killing didn't feel bad.

This was the first time I had killed in a while.

I begin to unbutton the man's blazer and I scoop up his knife, sliding it into my belt. If my suspicions were right, someone was watching. *I can feel someone watching!*

I put his blazer over my sticky coat and madly begin to search his pockets. Pressure was

building. I rip out a small bag. I can't believe it.

Some tinned sardines. *Ha-ha! Tinned sardines!*

I rip open the cap and begin to guzzle them like a pig, no time to even think of rationing. Oil trickles down my beard as I chomp away on the soft, fishy wonder.

I hear a squeal.

My knife is drawn. I stand alert and bare my teeth in anger. A figure steps forth.

It is a young girl, maybe in her mid teens, and she looks terrified and dirty. A tear runs down her cheek as she steps forward. I meet her and my knife presses up against her throat.

"Please! Please don't hurt me!" she wails. I stare on at her through bloodshot eyes. She doesn't look like she has food. Maybe I shan't kill her.

"You, you saved me from that thug!" she exclaims through emotion. "He was trying to kill me you are... you're a hero!" she breaks down entirely and collapses in tears.

I look at her in confusion. *I saved her?*

"He was going to kill me!" she sobs.

I don't say anything. I am astounded. I killed a man for some food and clothes and now I have saved a young girl's life? *Brilliant!*

I couldn't help but question the morals of life as the poor girl descended into emotion and slumped into the black mud, clasping my legs. Was it fate that I had saved this girl? Was it pure chance? Did someone guide me to kill that man?

Much needed to be answered.

Yet through all the bitterness and mistrust, all the thankfulness and confusion, all the violence and sorrow I still hold my knife. I bring it up. It's sharp point presses up against the girl's neck. Her eyes burst into fiery panic. She wants to run. My eyes are red like the most twisted monster or ghoul.

"Do you have any food?" I growl. ■

HERO

Paige Garrett – Lower Fifth

The piercing scream of the siren tore through the house, ringing in my ears. I couldn't hear myself think. I was crouched on the floor gazing up at the door. I took a last

massive gulp of air, filling my lungs until I thought they would burst, and shoved open the door.

Black smoke poured down on me, covering my face like a curtain and engulfing me in its long, outstretched fingers. I shivered under its grasp, wary not to open my mouth.

I crawled forwards.

2 seconds.

I made my way through the thick billowing smoke that now clung to the walls of my house, taking over. My hair was sticking to my head as the heat of the nearby flames warmed my face. It was like sitting by a bonfire, but much worse.

9 seconds.

The smoke was now finding its way into my system, through my nose, in through the sides of my mouth. It tickled my throat, making me splutter and cough. It made my insides feel like they were made of black gunk, sticky and oozing all over.

14 seconds.

I reached the stairs and started to make my way up them on my knees, like a pilgrim at Canterbury. My legs ached and were burning from rubbing against the carpet. I looked down at my hands which now looked like my sister had coloured them in with black felt tip on one of her arty crafty days.

My sister. That's where I was going. Painfully hauling myself up the stairs with my charcoal covered hands, I reached the landing.

20 seconds.

"Where's her room?", I thought to myself, my own home feeling like a distant memory. I glanced around.

Left

Right

Left

Right

Then I remembered.

Straight ahead

I advanced towards her room, dragging myself with all my might.

30 seconds.

I suddenly needed to breathe. My head felt light and dizzy.

I pressed my spinning head against the hard floor, where the smoke was thinner, and gasped in air.

Ebony smoke poured down my throat, causing me to cough and shake uncontrollably. I brought my shirt up, to cover my mouth and nose, which absorbed my ashen tears that were miserably dribbling down my face from my stinging eyes.

I painfully dragged my aching body towards the broad, heavy oak door that lay in front of me. The last obstacle that stood between me and my sister.

I pushed with all my might against the door but it didn't budge. I tried again but nothing happened. I was growing impatient, my mind buzzing.

WHAT DO I DO!!!!

I was going light headed again, still coughing. It felt as though someone had a tight grip around my throat. With one last almighty push, I shoved open the door with my shoulders and fell backwards into the small room of my sister. The walls were covered in pink. Hot pink cushions, pale pink ballerinas, fluorescent pink dolls.

It made me sick to even look at it. I turned towards her bed...

There was nothing there.

No blankets. No Rachel. Nothing.

I felt a cool breeze ruffle my hair playfully. I turned to where the window was. Open. Blankets, tied together were draped over the side of her small balcony. Her escape.

I collapsed, numb. I felt weak. I had no more energy left.

The room was starting to fill with smoke, its hands slowly tightening around me. I no longer tried to escape. There was no one to save. I could hear sirens and voices, breaking the silence. I wanted to scream out, "I'm here! Please come and get me! Please!", but I could barely even utter a whisper.

I thought I was a hero, that I could save the day and once, just once, my father might see me as a son to be proud of.

But I had failed.

I was a nobody.

Game over. ■



A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO MARGARET ATWOOD'S 'THE HANDMAID'S TALE'

Cecile Gillies – Lower Sixth

A canopy of glass lies barely beneath the dark, threatening sky. The concrete jungle extends up over the smothering smog cloud which grasps the city. Skyscrapers stab into the remaining light, attempting to escape.

My toes creep over the edge, and I look down into the epitome of darkness.

I want to escape.

The streets are the undergrowth of the city, crawling with leaking sewage, built up garbage and remains of poisoned corpses. The sewage adds to the stench of gasoline fumes within the smog and stains the floor with the memory of a dirty society. The garbage is endless, creating the city floor as a permanent dump. Flies don't even scavenge the food; life doesn't exist anymore on the ground. The bodies cry out in their deathly silence. Rotting away like the rest of the world.

The darkness is thick and heavy creating a torture chamber, suffocating anyone who ventures outside of their scraper with its polluted weapons. No cars drive, no restaurant feeds, no shop sells. No human can live.

Scraper 1218, 45th floor, room 37 is where my mom, my brother and I live. We used to live on 86th but after dad died we had to move. It is a lot darker on 45th; we don't get Mr. Sun anymore. But mom says that later I can go play with Flora and she lives on 130th. They have Mr. Sun and she has lots of toys to play with. We don't have many toys. They started to smell of funny strong smells so mom had to throw them out. Mom starts crying when things smell funny now, she gets scared and tries to put towels round the window.

The smog rises a bit more every day, claiming more floors of the scrapers. No one lives long at the bottom. There is still hope however, at the top; the rich can live in the sunlight in their well-furnished, fully functioning apartments. A monorail silver tram system links the buildings together, passing over a 560 metre drop. The rattling tram is the only visible movement anyone can see from their window.

I got that tram just hours earlier. I went to see Emma.

She was my girlfriend...

These towers can get claustrophobic. The heat can become intense, pushing off the tight walls in the building and people panic. Fear is prominent in today's society.

Flora's apartment is colder than ours but in a nice cold way. I don't feel sticky anymore. Her mom says it is air conditioning. I don't think we have that. I look out of

the tall glass windows in the living room. The sky is pink and Mr. Sun smiles at me. I look down towards our window but I can't see. I just see black. I don't like the black.

That was funny... the floor just felt all shaky.

The nightmare had to arrive eventually.

An earthquake hadn't happened in over fifty years...

Waterfalls of glass erupted around the city, as skyscrapers cascaded into the mouth of the gaping smog. The black was joined by explosions of red as fires licked up the walls of remaining buildings. Smoke billowed into the remaining sunlight in the atmosphere, blinding the city.

The tram had pulled back into my scraper when I felt it. I jumped out of the tram onto the platform just before her scraper fell... it ripped the tram line out of my building with it, there was an explosion and everything burned in pain. I had hands dragging me away from the edge, but I just screamed.

I saw her being swallowed up by death...

People frantically ran through the remaining standing buildings. Families were separated. Some were so desperate they ran outside to look in the rubble of other buildings... lungs got poisoned by the air and their lives were taken too.

Flora and her mom were hugging each other and crying. I didn't understand. Where was my mom? And why were all the buildings crashing down... was I going to crash down...

It was only a matter of time... everyone buried themselves under anything, clinging onto their family and friends trying to hide from the finale of this hell. The gasoline polluted smog which surrounded the city erupted into flames.

Then everything was silent.

But Skyscraper 1218 still stood.

I am now up here on 137th, it is a safe balcony from the smog, but I do not feel safe in this barren, destroyed city.

Time for me to go...

Flames still curled around the bottom of the building but they were weak. Only one tower left in the wasteland which was Los Angeles.

Mom is crying. I know why now.

I have no toys or brother to play with me... ■

REVIEW OF 'BROKEN GLASS' BY ARTHUR MILLER

Thomas Hedger – *Lower Sixth*



The lone cellist plucked her last note, the spotlight snapped off and – bang! – snapped back on before anyone could blink. *Broken Glass* had commenced. One of the last plays written by Arthur Miller, in 1994, it first premiered at the Royal National Theatre on 4th August shortly before Miller's death in 2005.

Set in New York, America in 1938, the world was on the

brink of another world war as Germany was being put through its paces by Nazi dictator, Adolf Hitler and his anti-Semitic policies. However, on the other side of the Atlantic, away from any harm, a woman named Sylvia has been bedridden, not due to any physical illness but due to the psychological effect of Kristallenacht on the streets of Berlin, where Jews had been stripped of all human rights, and were made to crawl on their hands and knees to clean the streets with toothbrushes.



Phillip Gellburg, (Antony Sher) stepped out onto the stage immediately bringing his character into life. He imitated the American-Jewish qualities perfectly, coming across as a man who was indeed proud of his namesake: very business-like and to the point. He fulfilled the picture that I had in my imagination perfectly, dressed in black which automatically gave him a professional air that he carried well throughout the production. Margaret Hyman, played by Caroline Lonco, fulfilled the qualities of a Jewish New Yorker outstandingly as well: she came across as the bubbly, energy-filled housewife that was common in the time. Her laughter was obviously very carefully practised yet natural enough to make her come to life as a character that the audience could engage with. Throughout the play Sylvia Gellburg (Tara Fitzgerald) and Dr. Harry Hyman (Stanley Townsend) showed their intimate relationship to a T; however, I feel that Townsend didn't particularly fit the part of the wise Dr. Hyman. In my mind I believed that Hyman would be a lot thinner, younger and more handsome as he is a key character in this love affair between Hyman and Sylvia.

Then we had Sylvia, played by Tara Fitzgerald who managed to play the role of a semi-paralysed individual so convincingly that I believed she would never rise to full recovery. Her accent, like all the other Jewish characters, was well practised and convincing, and the use of her top half of her body made up for the fact that she was paralysed. The only flaw in her performance was at the pinnacle of the play where she was left standing for a few seconds: her miraculous recovery could have been exploited further. Brian Protheroe also played the part of Stanton Case well, truly representing the White American and also the American Dream as he was at the top of his profession. A three out of five stars award from me for this performance. ■

REVIEW OF 'BROKEN GLASS' BY ARTHUR MILLER

Ben Brooks – Lower Sixth

All credit must go to the cast of *Broken Glass*. Only a skilled actor can bring to life a performance and engage with an audience that well when given what was a very limited script. But, indeed, all seven – yes, only seven – cast members of *Broken Glass* managed to engage with the (very small) audience. In my opinion, though, I think the small cast, small theatre and consequently small audience, came together to create a more personal atmosphere and experience. It is not often that an audience member will feel for a cast member but I think we all did. The three rounds of applause played testament to this. Phillip Gellburg, for instance, was played extremely well by Anthony Sher. The vast range of emotions and tones of voice supplied by the actor were some of the best – along with Sylvia Gellburg, played by Tara Fitzgerald, they made a brilliant couple with some great 'sparring' of emotions in their scenes.

In fact, the only thing that did possibly hinder the performance was the script itself, which, if it were not taken up by such a brave and talented group, would have flopped flat. *Tuchas offen tisch*, Mr Miller. ■

REVIEW OF 'BROKEN GLASS' BY ARTHUR MILLER

Oliver Rumbold – Lower Sixth

As I was sitting down in the historic Vaudeville theatre I was pondering over my expectations of the play. I was expecting a simple yet cleverly crafted set with powerful and fairly intense sounds coming from the cellist. To my dissatisfaction, and I'm sure to my fellow theatre goers I was let down and disenchanted by the rhythm of the play. In commiseration with the cast having such a difficult task I was always intrigued by how this very lacklustre yet classic Miller play could develop into interesting viewing. For us to empathise with Sylvia, played by the very attractive Tara Fitzgerald, would take acting of the highest Olivier-esque calibre to succeed in playing a bedridden, disabled character, and whilst she coped adequately with the role, coping is not good enough for a West End theatre audience. I also found her fluctuating American accent an infuriating nuisance. More positively, I thought Stanley Townsend, playing Hyman, gave a first-rate performance, showing real expression throughout the play. ■

A LEVEL BATTLEFIELDS TRIP

Nathalie Kelk – Upper Sixth, pictures by Dominic Higgitt – Upper Sixth

The First World War: an event so deeply in the realms of the past that it has slipped out of living memory.

So how has it managed to maintain its presence in modern life? One thing that has immortalised the events of the First World War is the literature: the harrowing words of the likes of Sassoon and Owen, revealing the truth behind the war; the daily confrontations between life and death, the hopeless conditions of the trenches and the bitter existence on the battlefields of northern France, all serving to reinforce the necessity to remember these men who gave their lives for a cause. The power of the language, conveying the horrors of war cannot fail but to move and it was on that basis that the Upper Sixth English group set off for France, to see for themselves where these brave men lived and died and to bring to life the reality of what is so powerfully portrayed by those writing in the years 1914-18.

Leaving at 7.30am from the PAC on a dark and cold October morning, twenty one reluctant Upper Sixth English pupils left on a four day trip to the battlefields on the Western Front, accompanied by NJJ, Mr King and Athé. And our equally loveable coach driver – Dell.

Unknown to us, before we left for France Mr Collier picked out one of our Old Johnians who died in service of our country – Charles Fouracres Greenlees. After searching the cemetery at Auchonvilliers for his grave, we found it and laid a wreath at its foot. At this point we took a few minutes to really think about what they had done for us, and how it would feel to perform such a sacrifice for unknown people.

In Belgium we visited ‘Talbot House’ also known as ‘Tolc C’ which was established as a club for soldiers and officers of the British Army. This club was to be different from others as all ranks could meet and relax whilst also being entertained. To emphasise this the message ‘All rank abandon, ye who enter here’ was hung by the front door. This house has become famous due to the number of men who wrote about it in their diaries or who wrote home about it. Soldiers came back after the war to visit it, however, during the Second World War the Germans took it over as their headquarters, so the locals emptied it of anything to do with the British – though it has now all been restored.

At the spectacular Menin Gate in Ypres we were lucky enough to represent not only our school but our country among the locals who have commemorated every evening since the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 11th November 1918 (apart from a period during the Second World War when the ceremony could not be performed). Four pupils – Sam Bunyan, Forest Skerman-Stevenson, Chessie Stephenson and Kate Henley – further represented St John’s by laying down a wreath at the Gate. This moving ceremony will continue to be carried out daily until all the dead listed on the Menin Gate monument have been individually commemorated.

Ultimately, the point of our trip was to enlighten our understanding of the conditions

the war poets had to endure and to obtain a perspective we could not get though sitting in a classroom. This was achieved by visiting the massed cemeteries of the Allied forces, but also visiting the similarly cramped German cemeteries. We were able to detect an eeriness in the dark grey tombed cemeteries which was unlike the cleared space and bright tomb stones found in the Allied cemeteries. All were well maintained and respected, but in each, we were able to find a new presence, equally as striking and equally as profound – a recurring shock that never seemed to strike for the last time. The sheer number of gravestones or memorials with names after names of lost or dead men was breathtaking and reminded us of the ultimate sacrifice which each performed. It was a hugely humbling experience and walking among the dead made us wonder not only why or how did this happen, but was it worth it? Are we, several generations on, worth the loss of those men?

We will remember them. ■







ST JOHN'S
SCHOOL
LEATHERHEAD