



# THE POOR PRINT



## Slow Travel: The End of the World That Was

Tobias Thornes

I could not know, as I scrambled through the suburbs and savannah of Kenya and Ethiopia while May slipped into June of 2019, that my long Slow Travel – over a year by then in duration – was so soon, so hurriedly, to come to a close. Since that sunny spring day when I had set out from Britain to see for myself the sorry state of a changed and battered world, and its ills social and environmental, I had criss-crossed Europe, Asia, North America and Africa. The beautiful continents of South America and Australasia and the white wilderness of Antarctica, of which I can only dream, it was my fate never to see. Now, fifty years hence, there is likely little left there worth seeing.

Back then, we still had hope. The forests were depleted but not destroyed beyond hope of recovery; the deserts had begun expanding but not without hope of arrest. So much of the coal and the oil that had brought us into this mess was still in the ground; we thought that this would be enough. But we hadn't reckoned on the fateful power of two dangerous adversities: the unquenchable reality of human greed, and the unstoppable force of nature's reaction once unleashed. Both these hard truths were about to sweep over us. It would take years for us to come to terms with it, but the fact remained: very soon, there would be no way back.

In those days, Kenya seemed exotic, with its humid tropical climate and its cooler, tranquil savanna hosting all the 'big five' game animals that thoughtless trophy-hunters liked to kill for sport or cash – lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino. The Serengeti migration of the blue wildebeest, a fantastic sight to behold for one fortunate enough to arrive at the right time, was said to be one of the seven 'Natural Wonders of Africa'. Much effort was being spent preserving all these glori-

ous species, each individual a splendid spectacle of nature's fine design, and all endangered under the corrupt stewardship of mankind.

The influence of China, which I saw all around me from the new railway line sporting swish Chinese trains to the Chinese-funded buildings springing up like warts upon the city skylines, hadn't helped. It was China that had the biggest appetite for 'medicinal' animal body parts, and drove the blind machine of the capitalist marketplace towards the illegal destruction of elephant and rhino to meet demand. Nor did it help that the mostly agrarian populations of both Kenya and Ethiopia – where four fifths of the workforce were agricultural workers – required more and more land, farmed in less traditional and less nature-friendly ways than before, and were putting increasing pressure on areas not explicitly protected as habitat. On the other hand, it might have been supposed that a growing tourist industry would be a means of saving all that beauty that I myself was captivated by, if only for foreigners to gape at and photograph.

But in truth it was not the Chinese medicine-hunters or the Kenyan and Ethiopian locals that tolled the death knell for those wild wonders of Africa's ancient heart, but the tourists

– with their kerosene-guzzling aeroplanes, their meaty diets and their swanky hotels. Kenyans and Ethiopians had been living here since the dawn of humanity itself, in a many millennia long coexistence with the big mammals. Within the space of a generation they would all be gone, not because of hunting but because of climatic change that the locals, whose meagre supplies of electricity were almost met by geothermal and hydroelectric carbon-free means, had nothing to do with.

A dusty bus brought me from the beautiful lakes of northern Kenya high into the heart of Ethiopia, and up into the scorching lands where heavily-logged forest retreated into desert. How pil-

grims managed to walk to the Holy City of Axum in such heat I know not, but braving such inclement heat was worth it for what I was there to see. This ancient site of human habitation was home – so it was rumoured – to the oldest relic of the Abrahamic religions, the original Ark of the Covenant described in the Old Testament.

Whether the story of one of Solomon's sons carrying the Ark here three millennia ago was true, and the small chapel beside the great Ethiopian Church cathedral really did hold the Ark, it was difficult to tell. Nobody was allowed inside to see – not even the patriarch of the Ethiopian church – except for a wizened old monk. But this holy site of worship, the centrepiece of a country supposedly the second ever to adopt Christianity officially, in 333 AD, was nonetheless breath-taking to behold. The Ethiopian Church is distinct from any other, and certainly seemed to hold the Old Testament particularly close to its heart, with its Jewish dietary customs and 2590 days per year of fasting from meat and dairy products – perhaps not accidentally also the best thing that any climate-conscious individual could have done to avert the doom that was coming upon the world.

But the world, by and large, did not worship the God of the Old Testament or the New, and was not much concerned with fasting. It worshiped three gods: greed, growth and money, and when in its distress it came to cry to them for help it received no response. It was on my way from Axum, crossing the straggling saplings that made up the eastern side of Africa's version of the 'Great Green Wall' intended to stymie the Sahara, that I heard the news. My Slow Travel through Sudan would have to be cut short; I now needed desperately to return home.

Khartoum to Cairo by ferry and train isn't quick, nor the boat back to Europe from the mouth of the Nile, that great long river that I'd followed all

the way from the heart of Africa. Many more splendid sights I saw pass by, but had little time to stop. The days now seemed a burden to me; the hours that had slipped so easily by now dragged like heavy weights. I longed to see my home again – that precious isle of rolling hills and winding lanes and sunlight-sprinkled woods – before it was gone, for ever. For the permafrost was melting now; methane belching into the sky. A hidden line had been crossed, the dam was broken and there was no hope of halting the flood. And sackcloth, fasting and repentance were not, it seemed, going to be part of the world's response. Heightening tensions had at last spilled over, panic was ensuing: for that same day, war had been declared.

And that was that: the end of my journey of discovery; the end of the world that was. You don't need me to tell you about the wreckage that now remains.■



## Worship Yourself

Sophy Oliver

I enter on a whim  
So quiet and so still  
Deafening with judgement  
To be accepted by Him

Here I sit and I wait  
In this unknown called peace  
Yet still feeling a fraud  
To be accepted by Him

I do not know how long  
Minutes, hours or days  
One has to sit and wait  
To be accepted by Him

But it is much longer  
For me to realise  
My true purpose here is  
To be accepted by Me



By Fanxi Liu

## Hallowed Be Thy Name

Amanda Higgin

As I come into the chapel, I click open the hidden panel in the woodwork above the hymnals and flip on the lights. In this weather it's more of a habit than a need; the summer sun already illuminates the checkerboard floor tiles, the familiar wooden pews and the soaring space above. I'm supposed to be in the chaplain's room in seven minutes for a meeting, but I'm early so I've come into the chapel to loiter.

In the new, summer light the stained-glass window above the altar is the most striking thing in the chapel, illuminating the elegantly monochrome space with bright blue, green, pink and yellow. In the centre panel a traditionally blue-clad Mary holds up the baby Jesus, the pair flanked on either side by a trio of figures: wise men, shepherds and a couple who, I presume, represent Simeon and Anna. It is a picture of adoration, admiration, veneration, of reverence, of respect: a picture of worship. Men in crowns kneel down to a naked baby, held by his mother. He can't yet speak, and Jesus already has more paparazzi than I predict I'll ever get. And to this day groups of fans convene regularly some two millennia after his execution.

I've grabbed a hymnal on the way in for the sake of something to do with my hands, so I flip through it. I don't know many of the hymns; the New English Hymnal doesn't tend to keep up with the latest releases on the Christian music scene, although there are a few good classics.

In ancient polytheism, the point of worship was to placate your gods in the hope that they would either bless you or just not destroy you. People sacrificed to the god of travellers before setting off on a journey in hope of safe passage, to the god of war before battle to ask for victory, to the god of plague on particular days to try and stave off their wrath.

Christianity isn't so much about earning favour anymore, though, which can make it hard to see why we bother telling Jesus that he's amazing. After all, I'm sure he's already aware.

So, if worship is neither flattery in hope of recompense nor informing God of an unknown magnificence, what's the point? It is, I think, supposed to be a natural expression of reverence. The whole point of God is that he's amazing beyond anything else, which compels you to say so in the same way that you might say 'That's beautiful' about a sunset that can't hear you.

There's also a sense in which we worship because we want to want to, because we recognise that God is something we don't yet understand but which is worth worshipping. It's like expressing the beauty of a sunset while wearing sunglasses. If you say the sunset is beautiful, if you're gathered in a group of people also saying how beautiful the sunset is, then some day you might take the sunglasses off and see for certain.

All of which is to explain what's going on when you hear choral music echoing around first quad (as an aside, the chapel choir is also just inarguably very good). It's a recognition of what is seen and an aspiration to what is unseen. Additionally, Jesus isn't the only thing in this world which people worship (as I'm sure other articles in this issue will make clear). We may not sing songs in praise of our degrees, but we talk to our friends about them at length, examining the minutiae of the specifications, the past papers and the reading lists as if they are sacred scripture. We give our time and thought to college sport, to our relationships, to our society ambitions.

Take a moment, perhaps, to consider what it is you worship. Because, someday, you may take the sunglasses off and see that it's not as beautiful as you always thought.■

# The New Epicurean

Tom Saer

Breathing binary air loss  
In a separate dream about top surgery  
I guess rhetoric wins in the end

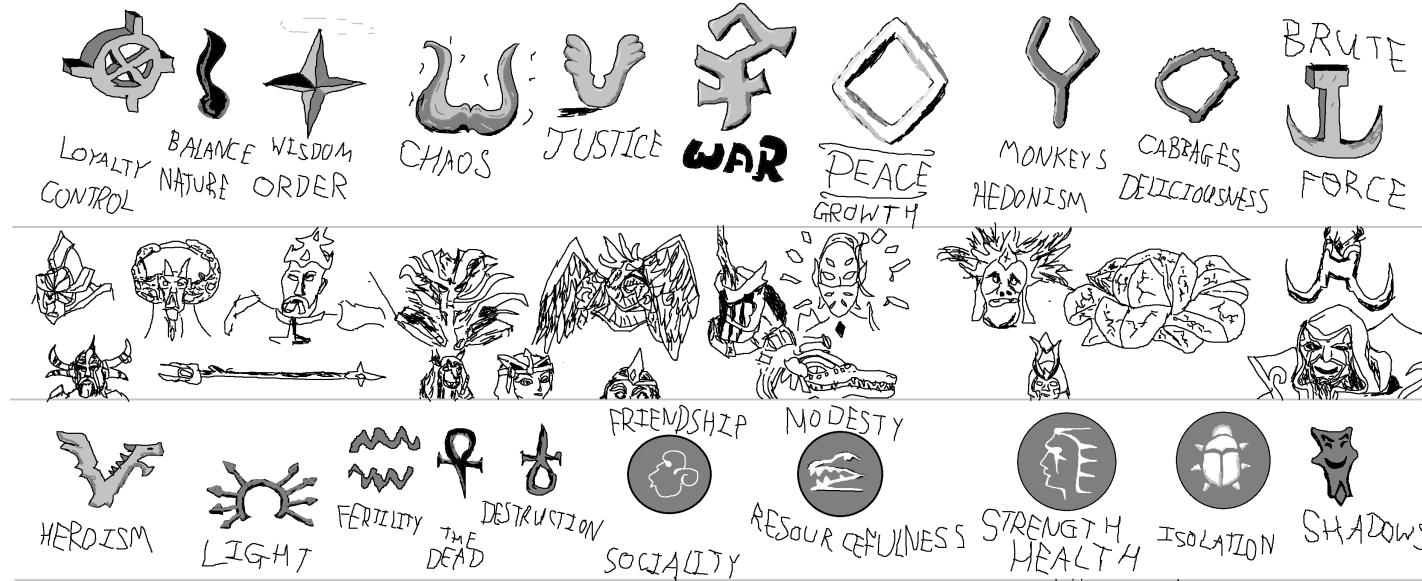
Maybe the water's taking a bank holiday  
And your side is pierced  
With one collective neck and my hands around it  
Or maybe that was the other guy

Rhythmic tarmac accompanied by the band's trademark twin guitar attack  
Shuddering occasionally to the odd pothole or change in technique  
Now that's something I can really think about next time  
I'm between the hammer and the anvil

Perhaps I should do my part in the Apostolic construction site  
Since being worried makes me worthier  
This Friday'd better be good

Where the fuck did the Hecatoncheires go?  
I guess they lost  
That's right – rhetoric wins in the end

## ICONS OF WORSHIP



by Joe Gardiner

# The Worth of Values

Michael Angerer

In recent political discourse, it has become commonplace to emphasise shared values whenever the more difficult questions regarding national identity and social cohesion are raised; for example, in continental Europe, the phrase 'Christian values' is almost bound to fall in the context of immigration from Islamic countries. Broadly speaking, there tend to be two different positions: one, frequently embraced by the political right, sets religion up as a defining feature of social systems; the other, usually associated with the political left, tends to maintain that social values may also be addressed quite independently of religion. The question is, of course, not to be resolved so easily: a glance at contemporary society reveals that who we worship and which

social conventions we follow are issues that are linked in complex ways.

A brief note on the origins of the word 'worship' may be in order: as the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows, it is originally derived from 'worth', and indeed meant nothing more than that something or someone was held in high esteem. Its modern use in a religious sense indicates exactly that: to worship a higher being is to accord it a special value in our life, to recognise its extraordinary worth. But religion does not have a monopoly on the distribution of worth. For many ardent fans, the secular sense of the word has not died out: they can still worship celebrities, venerating idols that supposedly embody the values they support. Within the framework of social values, religion is only one way of allocating worth.

In fact, the worship of the Christian God and the worship of celebrities –

with all the merchandising opportunities inherent in the situation – seem to be particularly closely linked in the United States of America, home of innumerable successful televangelists. Only last week, Justin Bieber (bear with me, please) surprised visitors at a religious event during the Coachella Festival in California by performing Christian songs and inviting people to worship. This week, Beyoncé is due to appear at San Francisco's Nob Hill Cathedral for a special 'Beyoncé Mass'; the San Francisco Examiner proudly announced to its readers: 'Come let us adore Beyoncé'. The boundaries between religion and celebrity-worship are blurring, and maybe it is now tempting to dismiss both as tools of capitalism, the system in which everything must be worth something.

But when dealing with human beings, values are never purely monetary. After all, social values are about a subjective feeling of community; to have the impression that a group shares values and concepts of worth may well be

more important than what these values actually are. If we briefly turn away from questions of worship, we may see this illustrated quite well with Donald Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminium imports: the new measures are not very likely to prove beneficial to the American economy; the *New York Times* even reported that it was the news of their implementation that drove Trump's chief economic advisor Gary D. Cohn to resign in March. But Trump's tariffs have a high ideological value to many in the country; a country united by God, popular music and steel and aluminium.

Religious worship is then one factor, interacting with many others, that determines a group's values; and it can be targeted for political reasons almost as easily: in an effort to promote traditional values while keeping others at bay, the Chinese government has recently banned the online sale of Bibles. Christianity's colonial history makes it rather unwelcome, and while the number of Chinese people who officially follow a religion has doubled over the

last 20 years, the government has taken steps to keep Christianity and Islam in check. Their mistrust of these religions is probably not purely theological: it is the cultural values often associated with them that are kept at bay – but for how long remains to be seen.

After all, worshipping God does not automatically make you a Believer, just as conservative gender roles occur in the fundamental branches of most religions. It cannot be denied that religion often has an important role to play in the establishment of social values and communities, although perhaps less so now than a hundred years ago; but in the complicated world of values and worth, there are only supporting roles and no lead actors. Society is complex enough to comprise both religious and secular worship without being defined by either; we must not underestimate the social value of worship, but nor should it be overestimated.■

# The Second Coming

Aidan Chivers

A 2017 survey found that less than one in ten 18- to 24-year-olds describe themselves as Christian. JC, for centuries such an important figure in Western culture and thought, is going seriously out of fashion. But all that tradition is out of date, anyway. The youth has found its modern version: let's call him JC 2.0. He's the newer, fresher model, who can rally the secular youth with rather pithier and trendier words of wisdom.

The 21st-century parables are on their way. And JC 2.0 has chosen more effective preaching spots to have his words picked up by Momentum's echo chambers. There are more 'likes' to be had at Glasto than on some godforsaken Mount. And the new JC's got the right number of syllables in his name for a chant that can drown out the complaints of anti-Semitism, Momentum's relentless bullying of more moderate MPs, or the sound of 17,000 members slipping quietly out of the party this year.

The original JC might have despised profiteering capitalists, too, and turned over the tables of the money lenders, but the updated version's a little craftier: he'll just take control of the whole Temple. And nowadays it's only the Tories who are happy feeding an elitist gathering of 5000. That sounds suspiciously like the Few, and JC 2.0 is here for the Many. ■

Just listen to the leader, and he'll give us God's truth. After all, Hamas and Hezbollah are really only Lost Sheep, in need of a little love. We've just got to build our national house on the rock of Marx rather than all that sandy capitalism. And JC 2.0's worked out his predecessor's biggest mistake, too: we shouldn't be praising that Good Samaritan who helped the beaten-up Jew, when the victim's nation state is just an extension of Western neo-imperialist aspirations.

And the miracles would have come along, too, if only a few more had given him their vote. Have you seen the one where a man with two Es at A-level becomes prime minister? Or where we disband NATO, and Russia just decides to leave the Balkan states alone? Or where a 'jobs Brexit' takes on meaning and starts describing specific policy?

JC 2.0's made one significant improvement, too – he's got rid of all the embarrassing God chatter which we don't need any more. Thankfully, though, he doesn't need to promise eternal salvation, when he can just abolish tuition fees to guarantee loyalty. We can have Heaven down here on Earth anyway, as long as we don't mind cranking up the national debt a little further. And who needs the old, clunky Hebrew Bible when there's the much-improved pocket-size version, published in a more attractive red? ■

# Language Acquisition

1 Corinthians 13

Joel Fraser

These couplets clang as cymbals  
These gongs resound their rhythms  
We crash in tearful frustration  
For all of our creation  
Amounts to no more than this:  
A lip-locked struggle for air  
And words.  
Must we choose?

Tongues of men and angels, we can master  
But I know that they are jars of alabaster  
Half-cut, empty, pencil sketches  
Signs pointing nowhere but inwards.  
Teach us to let them fall, crack, and pour out their emptiness

For as my void bellows  
Wrenches its heaving, metal weight  
Through closed windpipes and clenched jaws  
The wordless whisper that is ripped from me  
Is translated, as I love

A tiny blot of paint appears  
And a word flitters musically,  
Threatens to harmonise with the melody  
That I can now imagine hearing  
And I realise  
The beyond of the reflection  
That this framed mirror of life lets me see

I am still mute mostly  
But You speak and I hear the sounds,  
The flung phonemes, tones and inflections  
And from all these imperfect reflections  
You are teaching me the art  
Of picturing the whole from its part.



## Issue #32 – Lines

Submission deadline: 20/05  
'And the countryside not caring:  
The place-names all hazed over  
With flowering grasses, and fields  
Shadowing Domesday lines'  
– Phillip Larkin

## Issue #33 – Passage

Submission deadline: 03/06  
'Cast a cold eye on life, on death, horseman, pass by.'  
– W. B. Yeats  
'Look on every exit as being an entrance somewhere else.'  
– Tom Stoppard

### Issue #31 – Fragment

Submission deadline: 06/05

'To great writers, finished works weigh lighter than those fragments on which they work throughout their lives.'

– Walter Benjamin