ISSUE ONE

Fulcrum Review

Cover Art by Steve Smart

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Fall has always been a season of change, either in nature or elsewhere: moving up a grade in school, establishing new routines, or kindling new friendships. I found that this theme of change is captured perfectly within this first issue, whether subtly noted or bolded and underlined. This idea of change ties into *Fulcrum's* broader aim of highlighting scientific advancements or technological innovations, whether that be landing astronauts on the Moon or constructing buildings that scrape the sky.

Thank you to those who have made this tremendous effort of bringing *Fulcrum Review* to life. It has been amazing reading through the submissions from writers demonstrating their commitment to creative writing, science, and sociology. From an idea to a full-blown student-run magazine that is now publishing its very first issue, I am grateful to be here sharing this experience with you, and I hope you enjoy this very first issue!

David Wong

Founder, Editor-in-Chief

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On the Question of Questions

Laura Webb

Great North Museum, Newcastle, UK. *Cheirotherium sp.* Footprints from Middle Triassic rocks, 234 - 242 million years B.P.

In 1827, British palaeontologist William Buckland received a set of fossilised animal tracks. He set out to answer the question: 'What kind of creature made these?'

The culprit was christened *Cheirotherium* – 'hand-beast' – due to its distinctive fifth toe, which resembled a thumb in footprints.

Buckland had recently published the first scientific description of what would later be called a dinosaur. He recognised a pattern, and concluded that the tracks belonged to another extinct reptile.

Others asserted that the tracks had been made by a mammal or amphibian, or could not have been made by a real animal.

To test his theory, Buckland threw a party and invited the most eminent Georgian academics.

What happened next is perhaps best relayed by Buckland himself:

I made a crocodile walk over soft pye-crust and took impressions of his feet… [Then] I made tortoises, of three distinct species, travel over pye-crust…

The pastry was mixed by Buckland's wife Mary (née Morland). Her talents included not only baking, but also palaeontology and illustration.

The question of how Buckland acquired the crocodile and tortoises remains unanswered.

All those present lent a hand enthusiastically with rolling pins. John Murray – who would later publish Darwin's On the Origin of Species – recalled:

It was really a glorious scene to behold all the philosophers, flour-besmearsed, working away with tucked-up sleeves… the animals walked over the course in a very satisfactory manner; insomuch that many who came to scoff returned rather better disposed towards believing.

Not everyone believed, however.

Some of Buckland's contemporaries – convinced that Cheirotherium had thumbs, but seemingly on the wrong sides of its hands – even proposed that the creature walked with its legs crossed, planting its right feet beneath the left side of its body, and vice versa.

*

In my scientific work, figuring out which questions to ask can be as problematic as walking with my legs crossed underneath me.

The poet Tara Bergin mused in a 2024 workshop that artists get to ask 'the questions that really interest [them]', whereas scientists need to ask 'the questions that people want answered'.

To prioritise 'the questions that people want answered', however, would be to assume that prevailing views equate to the most valid questions.

Here is the prevailing view of Georgian society: 'The earth is only a few thousand years old, and all creatures that ever existed, still exist now.'

Some believed that fossils were planted as a test of faith; others, that they had been washed to different parts of the planet by the great Biblical flood.

It is always surprising to be reminded that the concept of extinction emerged so recently.

*

Even if I focus on the questions that people want answered, who gets to ask the questions?

In his 1970 polemic 'Whitey on the Moon', Gil Scott-Heron laments the billions of dollars spent on asking: 'How do we put a man on the moon?' instead of: 'How do we reduce poverty and inequality among the African-American community?'

A rat done bit my sister Nell
With whitey on the moon
Her face and arms began to swell
And whitey's on the moon
I can't pay no doctor bills
But whitey's on the moon
Ten years from now I'll be payin' still
While whitey's on the moon

It is undeniable that the Apollo programme did not improve the lives of disadvantaged members of society.

The same can be said of Buckland's pastry experiment.

*

Of course, a future society may ask completely different questions.

Buckland's antics contributed to the growing consensus that our planet was much older than previously believed, and that the concept of extinction was real. These revelations laid the groundwork for the modern-day science of ecology.

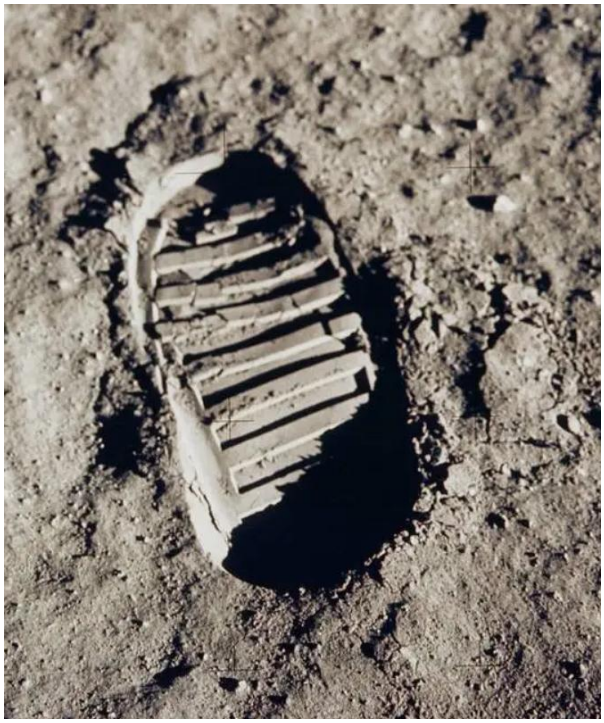
In a convoluted way, many endangered animals may owe their continued existence to the afternoon when a crocodile and three turtles waddled over pastry in a Georgian kitchen.

It is even plausible that someday our own species may owe its continued existence to the space-faring technology originally developed for the moon landings.

Whether it is morally preferable to reduce current suffering, or increase our future chance of survival, is not a question that can be answered by science alone.

*

In any case, the questions that a future society may ask are impossible to know.



Aldrin, Buzz, and NASA. First Footprints on Another World. Buzz Aldrin's bootprint from the Apollo 11 mission, one of the first steps taken on the moon. Photograph taken 20 July 1969.

Laura is a junior doctor in Brighton (UK) whose poetry explores themes of illness and healing, folklore and ecology. She previously studied History and Philosophy of Science and is now working towards an MA at London's Poetry School. She co-edits the science poetry journal *Consilience*. In her spare time, she enjoys swing dancing and cuddling other people's cats. You can follow her at @laurawebbpoetry.

Hearts of Oil: A Pandemic Yet to Come

Ayesha Faisal

Through broken mirrors and flames of gunpowder erupting, they all marched down;

Down into the pits of pitch black with eyes so dead and flat, insides scorched with the sound;

Sound of pure misery, hearts hollow and words dripping with menace as they claim humanity did nothing but rust!

So who can we blame? Who are we to resort to? And who can we afford to trust?!

Oh, how they rot now, suffering and gunshots with heads of straw and eyes sour as lime,

And oh! , how they grow pathetic each passing day and how they wish one could turn back time!

Ayesha is a 17 year old high school graduate trying to make the most of it through procrastination and occasional zoning out while jamming to radiohead and questioning reality.

Tokyo Sky Tree, Anonymous

Black box

Steve Smart

In the box: walnut blancmange –

a fleshy whip folding in

all your private everything.

In the box: time sieved through

an entanglement of spun brass –

it ticks but cannot flow.

In the box: a first-floor theatre –

Inputs. Black box. Output. they said.

That's all you need to know.

In the box: bricks behind

the glass in which another monkey

sees spots of paint upon its face.

In the box: rabbit, dancer, magician,

elephants or actual magic -

we don't know, but stop in case.

In the box: below the turbaned player,

scrunched impossibly small, someone

who anticipates your every move.

In the box: Skinner's pigeon keenly pecks

a bombsight - left a bit, right a bit,

what could possibly go wrong?

In the box: prize, star-prize or a booby, or

Take the Money? grins the sleekit host,

one eyebrow cant to the folks at home.

In the box: wisdom from a knowing crowd

ready to craft your homework essay,

give every answer at an easy price.

In the box: multi-lead brainwave traces

mathematically resolved against

the last horizons of baseline intent.

In the box: acquired in weeks,

a lifetime un-required to paint like a child,

at a keystroke: art; process; output.

In the box: something like understanding –

so, so tempted by any open ear,

so bred to need, here we linger.

In the box: every safe medicine known

modelled and randomly applied,

guessing sixteen hundred clues to cure disease.

In the box: arcane behaviours

cryptic even to their makers, parallel

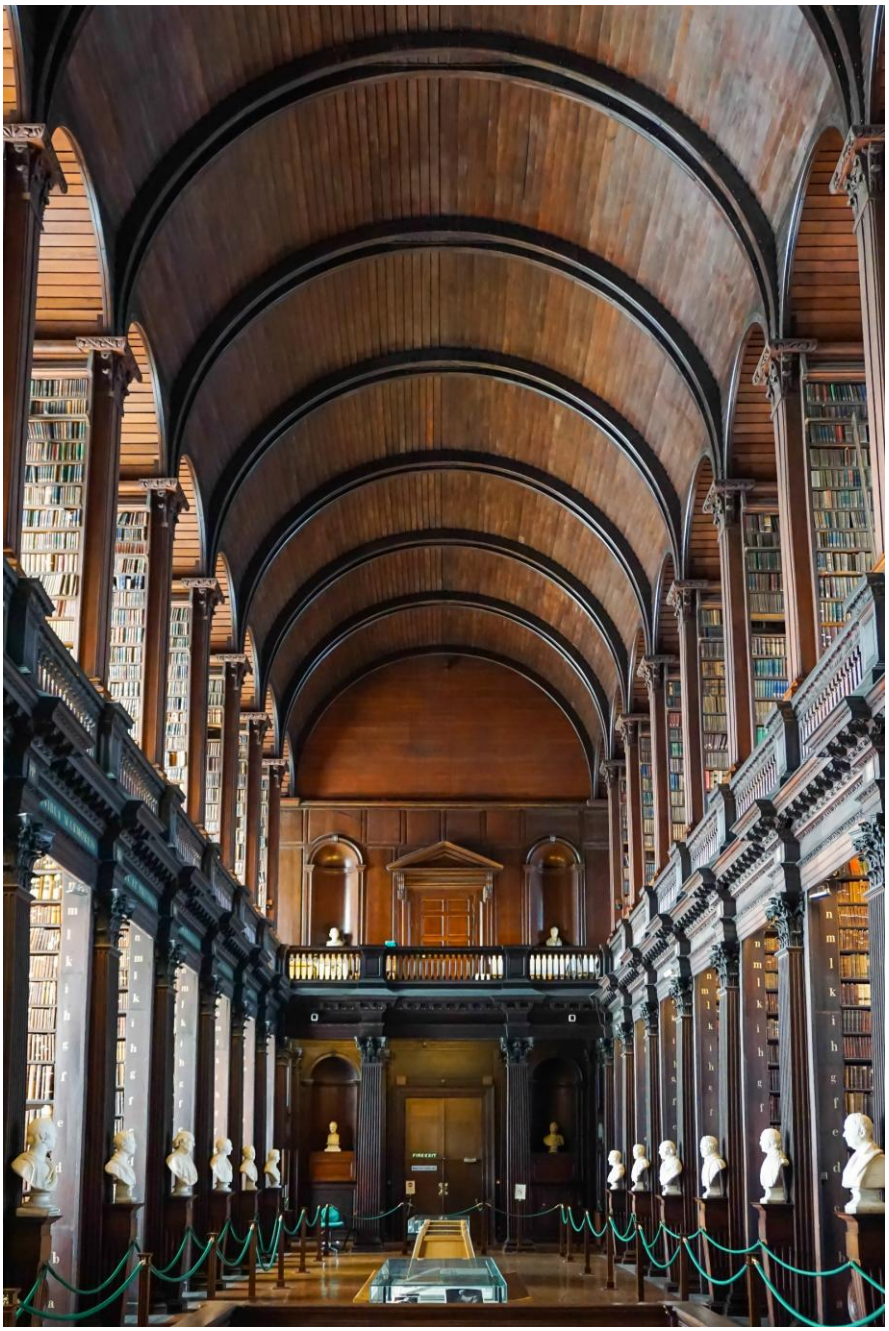
staging every iteration of a thousand ifs.

In the box: the flight recorder –

each step we missed, granulated –

our black box is hi-vis orange.

Poet and visual artist Steve Smart is based in Angus, Scotland. Places his poems have appeared include Atrium, Firth, The Poetry Shed, The Writer's Café, Ink, Sweat and Tears, Poetry Scotland, Gallus, Consilience and others. Recent collaborations have led to poems in anthologies published in New Zealand, Canada, and Scotland, and poetry film screenings at various international festivals and exhibitions.



Trinity College Library, Anonymous

Polygraph

Steve Smart

Heart-beat fictions,

quick-quick slowly scribed

waltzing their own beliefs.

Voigt-Kampff fantasies

trick track truths,

seductive tales such as

never told an honest lie.

Parrot lines cannot cage

any drawing of your mind.

Fingernail scribes needle

pen-point black and blue

scratching their ideas,

their inferred distillations

from the slick of your sweat.

There you are all wired up

like an old movie scene,

where g-men will sweat out

their version of your story,

rendered in analogue blacks

noir as your wide-eyed pupils –

so deep you dive right under.

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Sonata

Sophia Jamali

What do you do

with broken bones and injured dreams?

All the ways and secrets lead you to darkness

Midnight and nightmares make you scream

You count the breaths of eternal imprisonment

You leave sufferings to silence

In blackout, blackout

Long shadows laugh

They laugh at wounds and salts

And the wounds that will scratch your skin one day

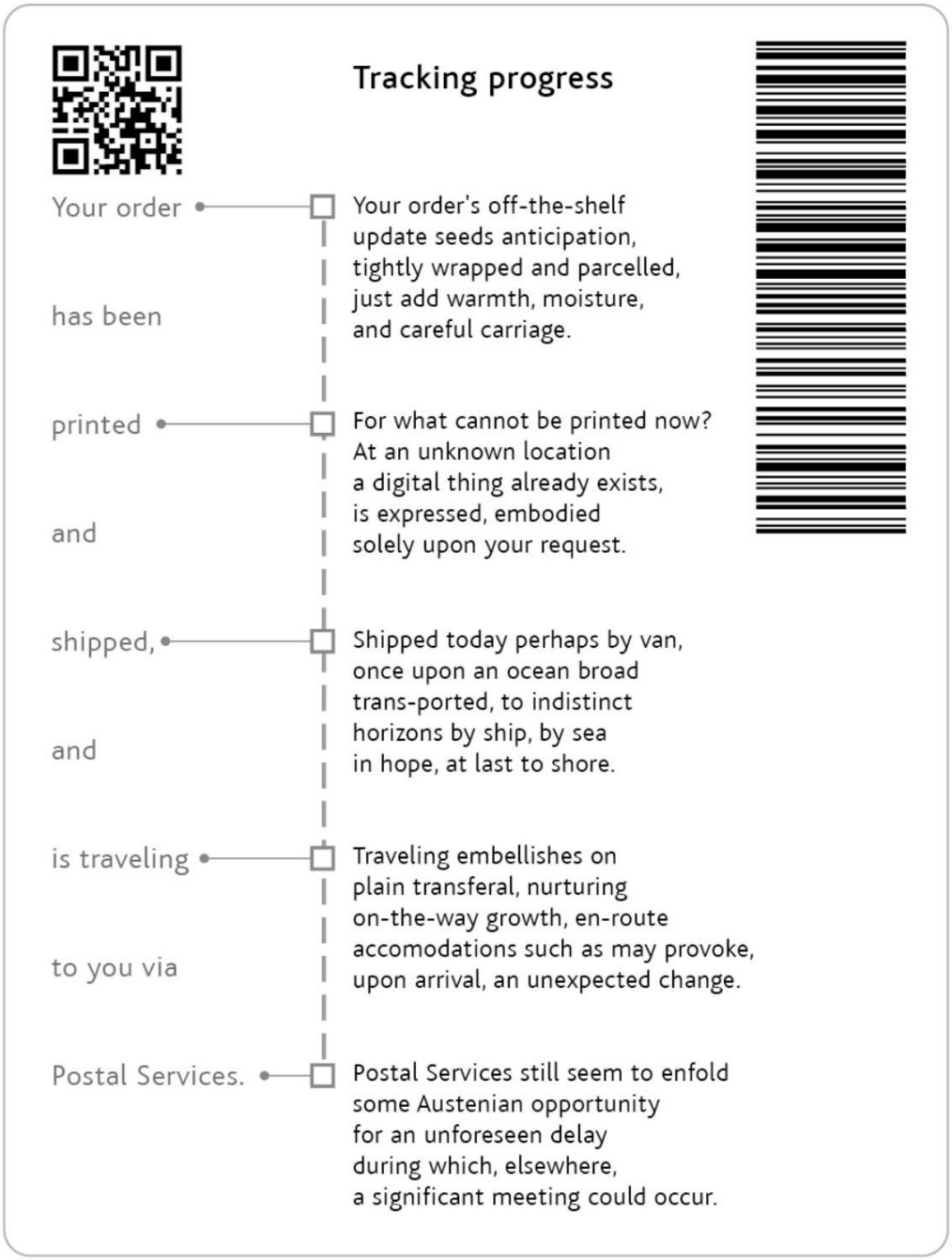
What do you do with broken bones?

All the ways and secrets lead you to darkness…

Sophia is an architect, fashion designer , poet, and writer. The main language of her poems is Persian , and her poems have been translated into English, German, French, Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese and published in literary magazines and websites.

Tracking Progress

Steve Smart



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