Suddenly it has come around already. My final issue of the Linacre Life(s). Smaller than the last two. Later than the last two. Oh, well, it's someone else's responsibility next time...

Fortunately I can attribute some of the blame for the tardiness of this issue to everybody's current favourite enemy - the computer hacker. The exceptionally astute amongst the readership will surely have noticed that the layout is slightly different again this time. Not having the luxurious interface of Adobe InDesign at my disposal has forced me to regress to the best that my computer at home has to offer - Microsoft Publisher '97. Not exactly a worthy substitute, but hopefully I will have managed to present things smartly enough that you are not discouraged from reading some excellent pieces. Just six of them though I'm afraid...

A massive 'thank you' to all those who've contributed, both to this issue and previous ones. It may have taken a certain amount of pestering on my part - but surely it was worth it!

I'm not entirely sure why, maybe it's related to the wonderful year Greece has had - what with the football and the Olympics and all - but 50% of the authors in this issue are Greek. Considering that Greeks constitute approximately 1.5% of the Linacre population - this is really quite impressive!

What is also nice to see is that the concept of a 'theme' for each issue does seem to have some effect on what gets written. The theme for this issue is 'belonging', and I would say that four out of the six articles fit very well with the topic. Whether or not that is just coincidence, however, is another matter entirely...

So, it has turned out that after laying out all of the articles I've been given, there is still an empy page. I was considering putting the great exam paper text "[This page has intentionally been left blank]". The irony of this statement always made me smile...

Seeing as I have this extra space available, I thought I would reprint an email which I was forwarded by someone who works at the bar at Linacre. It was originally sent by a bar-worker to all of the Linacre Bar Staff, and is really quite a wonderful example of an unfortunate typo... [see below]

Well, it seems it still hasn't used up quite as much space as I was hoping, so I'm going to have to digress...

Fortunately, I have many topics upon which I could digress for hours, but there is one in particular which I have a nice little picture to go with (and a picture which, for a pleasant change, I actually own the copyright to). My undergraduate degree was in Physics, and by far the most common response to telling people this is, "Oh physics - I hated that at school." One fellow physicist even suggested that the effect of informing a nice girl you've just met that you study physics is remarkably similar to the effect which vomiting over them might achieve!

Guy's and gals.

I've got a bit of an emergency. There has been an 'incident' in my house and at 7.30 tonight our landlord wants to have an emergency meeting with us. Unfortunately, this clashes with my bar shift and as I have no idea how long the meeting will take and would also like to give the house an extra special clean I'm not going to be able to do it. Can anyone please please cover my shit?
Well, despite its obvious widespread unpopularity, I can’t help but remain of the opinion that physics is bloody interesting. And I think that most people, deep down, holding behind their fear of maths and the stereotypes of nutty professors, are interested in physics too. Because physics helps us to understand how things work - and that is fundamentally fascinating.

Given half a chance, even art students might find themselves asking questions about Black Holes and Special Relativity that have been bugging them for years, but were apparently genuinely afraid to ask.

And just as a little example of the kind of thing that I think makes physics ‘cool’, my final-year project of my undergraduate was called ‘Diamagnetic Levitation’. Now, you are welcome to ignore the first word if you don’t know what it means, (just try not to be scared by it) but you’ve surely got to admit that levitation is cool!

And you might well be thinking that we could only levitate stuff that is magnetic. Well, that’s true. But it turns out that the magnet we had was strong enough (17 Tesla for those in the know) to levitate water!

So now to the picture. The magnet we were using had a 5cm diameter vertical hole down the middle. The point of levitation was inside the hole, so the photo was taken from underneath. The large arc is part of the upper opening of the magnet bore. You can see my right eye and a bit of my nose looking down through the bore. The small circle is a sphere of levitating (yes, levitating, not touching anything but air) water. Lensed in the water you can see all of my beautiful smiley face.

Go on, admit it, physics is cool!

Daniel Gallichan

CHALLENGE: Work out what the picture is of without reading the text...

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Those Great Pipes

Milo Thurston tells of rather an unconventional hobby - he plays the bagpipes...

Playing the Great Highland Bagpipe (GHB) produces a unique effect on listeners. A few make cheeky remarks about the volume or tone, or trot out old and familiar jokes. Many comment on how enjoyable they find it, and ask for more. One rarely encounters indifference (for at 105 decibels, one does not have to be good to be noticed). What almost all non-piping listeners have in common is that they are not too familiar with a few tunes, and they come from one particular part of the repertoire.

Some people think that bagpipes are a Scottish invention and unique to Scotland. In fact, they are known throughout Europe e.g. in England, Ireland and France. They appear in many forms, either mouth-blown or blown with bellows. They can be quiet, such as the English Northumbrian pipe or the Scottish smallpipe, which are designed for indoor use, or loud outdoor instruments such as the best known bagpipe, the GHB. Pipe music usually includes music for dancing and music for listening to, such as arrangements of popular songs. The repertoire of the GHB differs somewhat from this pattern.

It's generally agreed that there are two classes of music for the GHB. The most well known is "ceol beag" - Gaelic for "small music" (also known as "light music") this includes dancing and popular music similar to the traditions associated with other pipes. It also includes a huge amount of martial music due to the association of the GHB with the British army. This is the music that most listeners are familiar with, and they will often accost pipers to request "Amazing Grace" (pipe version of a popular song) or "that one they all play", A.K.A. "Scotland The Brave". Ceol beag consists of a lot of very good music and amongst it many tunes can be found that would appeal to any listener except those who don't like the pipes because they don't like the pipes. However, it's not what the GHB was designed to play.

Far more interesting is the tradition known as "ceol mor", or "big music". It is often known as "piobaireacht", Gaelic for "piping", and individual tunes are usually called "pipers" - an anglicised version of the Gaelic. That music is thought to have originated around the beginning of the 17th century (the great pipe is basically unchanged since then) and the era of the best compositions was over by the end of the 18th. During the 19th century - a period that also saw the invention of the modern pipe band and much of the
cool bag martial repertoire - there was no real man revolvo, and its survival today is due to this. The sound of cool mor is very strange to those used to the light music. For a start, it does not have a fixed rhythm. It is therefore quite difficult to read, and modern staff notation doesn't really do the job properly. It is used to be taught through 'carntaibreach', a style of playing the tune of which mimicked the pipe whilst the words dictated the fingering to be used. As the music was passed on directly from teacher to pupil this worked very nicely. It is no longer possible to use staff notation as effectively since the introduction of electronic recordings. In fact, CD's of pibrochad lessons sell very well amongst modern pipers.

Cool mor also has a very characteristic structure. It starts with the "urlar", or "ground", usually a rather slow melody. This is then followed by several variations. The first is often a simplified and slightly more regular version of the urlar, and subsequent ones add more elaborate gestures onto the notes. In most pipe music (the Northumbrian pipe is an exception) it is necessary to add grace notes to the music to distinguish between repeated notes as the pipe plays continuously. In cool mor these graces are very highly developed. The fanciest thereof is the "crumleath a mad" (the nearest translation is something like "the going-out crowning deserty"), which occurs as the final variation. The grace notes in the much take up more time than the melody notes! The urlar then is repeated again, and the tune comes to an end. Usually, this takes about 10 minutes or more. Because of the use of elaborate grace notes, and the slightly differing tuning of the GHB compared to modern instruments, it's not really possible to properly reproduce cool mor on anything else (which hasn't stopped people trying).

Cool mor was used for salutes, lamentations, and "gatherings" - tunes to summon the clansmen to battle. During the 17th century, it was considered the only "proper" pipe music and the great players often played nothing else - dance music was considered beneath them. At that time there were no such things as pipe bands (for which our ancestors were probably grateful). There was one piper per military company, usually paid directly by the captain. Highland troops would often refuse to fight unless they had a piper to play a pibroch as they did so. A famous example of cool mor in battle occurred during the Battle of Waterloo, when piper Kennedy, MacKay stepped outside the square to play "Cogadha No Sath" (A.K.A. "War or Peace" or "The True Gathering of the Clan") to rally the 79th regiment as the French cavalry swarmed about them. MacKay was rewarded by George III with a silver-mounted pipe as a reward for his bravery.

These tunes may occasionally be heard in the university parks, or at other places such as the Rolllight Stones below or even Castle Bolton (below left). Don't ask me to play any of that light music, though...
Somewhere over the Sahara, Farida didn’t make it to the bathroom in time. I hadn’t noticed what had happened until the French couple sitting directly in front of me grabbed my arm and, holding their noses, motioned towards the five-year-old girl with headscarf askew and the growing puddle on the seat beneath her. So, four hours into our flight from Nairobi, I found myself walking a sleepy and terrified girl and her embarrassed mother to the tiny airplane bathroom to use paper towels to clean up and change into another set of blue and gray US-government issued sweatsuits.

Farida, her brother Salat, sister Hareda and mother Musliima were heading to a small town near Buffalo, New York, and I was the oblivious but exceptionally fortunate woman hired to conduct them, and 28 others, into their ‘new lives’ as resettled refugees in the United States. The Ahmed-Omar family belongs to a group of approximately 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees that are being moved to new communities, even as I write this, by the United States Refugee Program (USRPI), in what is the largest single African refugee resettlement initiative in history.

The Bantu are an ethnically distinct minority group from Somalia – the descendants of slaves originally from Tanzania, Mozambique and Malawi. Due to the deeply ingrained insularity of clan politics in Somalia, the Bantu never fully integrated into Somali society and were consistently prevented access to schooling, ownership of businesses or intermarriage with the dominant ethnically Somali group. In the almost 300 years since they were brought to Somalia, the Bantu have lived as a severely marginalized group, and were disproportionately victimized when the civil war broke out in Somalia after the fall of the Siad Barre dictatorship in the early 1990’s. Vulnerable, without weapons and already impoverished, the Bantu fled en masse to Kenya from 1991-1992, where they joined other Somali refugee groups in sprawling and under-resourced camps.

Up to this point this story is, in most significant respects, the story of many forced migrants. But then here’s where the Bantu win the refugee ‘lottery’, where the path that leads up to this British Airways flight begins. In 2000, the United States agreed to resettle an entire class of Somali Bantu refugees, a number that started at about 15,000 but eventually cded up at 11,860. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are only three main ‘durable solutions’ for protracted refugee situations like that of the Bantu: local integration, which is a limited possibility in an already poor country like Kenya, repatriation to their home country, a dangerous proposition with the continued warfare and discrimination in Somalia, and resettlement in a third country. While many refugees often talk of resettlement, it is truly the ‘Holy Grail’ of options, as less than 1% of refugees will eventually be resettled. Few have been able to give much thought to the challenges that may lie ahead in the West.

So from war-torn Somalia and from one Kenyan refugee camp to the next, the Bantu have been waiting more than ten years for the international community to respond, and, by some miracle, get involved. For years without much of the major donors interested, in this case, the United States government actually did.

The logistics involved in moving almost 12,000 people who have never before seen a toilet, let alone an airplane or a secure Heathrow customs official, are, as you can imagine, extensive. The US government will spend millions of dollars in the effort, as families are grouped together in escorts of 30-40 to travel from the Kakuma refugee camp in Northern Kenya, by charter flight to Nairobi, and then via Europe to their eventual destinations in the U.S. Drawing on the experience of previous resettlement groups, USRP has identified several mid-sized American cities as ideal for the Bantu resettlement, so from Minneapolis to Pittsburgh to Tampa, small communities of Somali Bantu are forming into local support networks. The US has subcontracted the ‘integration’ efforts to a series of voluntary agencies, both religious and secular, and apartments.
have been routed, diapers purchased, and small armies of poopers are lined up to help advise on everything from how routes to how to purchase groceries cheaper in bulk.

But in order to get there, the Banu, accompanied by hapless volunteers like myself, must make a harrowing transatlantic flight. We meet in the Nairobi airport at 4am. My companions are easy to find, a quiet group of 32 identically clothed refugees, 18 of whom are under the age of ten, 10 of whom are under the age of five. At first the USRP-passed303 duty delights me. It seems deeply offensive that the refugees are made to look like prisoners on the trip over, but as the flights set off, I'm grateful for the official sanction for our group. The yellow kangacloth that the women wear as head coverings and that are emblazoned with official 'USRP' seem to put the other passengers at ease, and whispers about the entire group seem to be less about possible terrorists and more about the 'poor durings' after they learn what the letters stand for.

Each minute of the trip presents a new challenge. I've never noticed before how plentiful the constant supply of food and drink from British Airways really is, and each new item is a moment of terror. The refugees are all lactose intolerant without having had access to drinking milk since childhood, so the cheese ravioli, truffle and dairy milk offerings for dinner are a disaster waiting to happen. Everyone eats the packets of butter and salt when I don't remove them in time, parents hand steaming cups of hot coffee to the babies, no one wants to eat the vegetables. Later, despite the request for hot meals, BA hands our boxes of barn and cheese to the whole group, and I find myself perusing a stack of processed airplane ham down the aisle to throw away before anyone notices. In 24 hours, I change more diapers than in the rest of my life combined. By a factor of 10.

The second flight, having become accustomed to unravelling all the goodies that are handed out by the flight attendants, the group opens up the baby life-preservers, incurring the hostility of the head flight attendant who briefly threatens me with legal action (the storm passes quickly through). Already, everyone has gotten the hang of the airplane toilets, though it's best to wait outside so that they can knock from the inside and tell you when to open the door (those folding doors are really tricky). British Airways navy blankets are being used as headscarves and nursing blankets and everyone is absolutely exhausted.

We land in Newark at 8am. It's hard to say 'Welcome to America' with a straight face when your first sight is the industrial wasteland of northern New Jersey in the middle of a steamy August, but even I, cynically reluctant American though I may be, feel moved at the thought of this group ending the long journey that began well before 4am that day.

It's impossible for me to say goodbye, so I sit in the empty customs area for the next few hours as my friends are fingerprinted and issued their temporary visas. I feel intensely material, like I've given birth to this group even though we've only known each other for a short time. I'm excited for them, but mostly I'm terrified. I grow up in a progressive, urban area, and I can only guess at the difficulties that are going to lie ahead for a group of conservative Muslim, African refugees with little English, education, skills training or ability to navigate the innumerable systems of small-town modern America.

I follow the integration efforts of the Banu through reports from the agencies, and through articles in the local newspapers from the cities where the Banu have landed. Each of the articles reveals a bit more about the expectations of the Americans than they do about the refugees. The interviews with the church groups who provide many of the services remind me of what I love and hate about my country - the use of faith to inform truly generous, and often misguided works of goodwill. And as each day since has passed, and particularly throughout the Presidential Election, I've thought more about the ways in which my country values, or forgets to value, the contributions from those with different and difficult histories, of diverse faiths, who challenge and contribute to the notion of what it means to be an American.

In a few years, Fadzai and her siblings are going to be full American citizens, at least on paper. I can't know whether they'll ever remember the harsh life in the camps, the journey over, or the struggle to establish a new community. My fervent hope for them is that there is some way to achieve a second miracle, in some ways a more difficult one, to eventually feel like they belong in and to the strange country in which they've landed.

Alice is in her second year of an MPhil in Anthropology. She is also the current CR Secretary.
North-East Assembly
The Republic of Geordieland?

Zoe Birtle looks at some of the reasons why many people feel like foreigners in their own country.

As soon as I found out that the theme for this edition of 'Lixacre Lines' was 'Belonging! It is the end I would have to write something for it. At the start of October I received a postal ballot paper to vote in a referendum for the North-East Assembly. Essentially, this was supposed to be the beginning of devolution in the English regions. The government is based in London and very London focused, so it was the idea of the deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to set up regional parliaments in England to govern regional issues. To test this idea the North-East, comprising of the counties of Cleveland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Northumberland, was chosen as a guinea pig region. There was an all-postal ballot asking the question "Regional Parliament - yes or no?"

The 'Yes' campaign

The 'North-East says Yes' campaign was run by Sir John Hall. This immediately alienated the entire population of both Middlesbrough and Sunderland because he is the former owner of Newcastle United football team. They are the sworn enemies of 'Boro' and Sunderland teams!

I question whether the 'yes' campaign took itself seriously. They recruited 'local' celebrities such as Sting and footballers Alan Shearer, Paul Gascoigne and Peter Beardsley. As far as I am aware, Sting has lived in London for several decades and I do not think a bunch of overpaid, under-talented sports stars are representative of the average person on the street. What happened to the educated people? I am sure most voters in the north-east are not so swayed by celebrity fever.

I disliked the aggressive nature of this campaign. I will describe below the stereotypes people hold about people from the northeast. But here is where you learn what northerners call the population of 'down south' - 'RATS'. That is Rather Arrogant Tony Southeners. Personally, I think using such a phrase as part of a political campaign, well known though it is, is petty name calling.

Amazingly, Tony Blair turned up in support. He has an official residence in a Durham mining village. At a staggering cost to the nation this house is protected by armed police around the clock. But, as far as I am aware, Tony has only spent about 15 nights in it since he was elected in 1997. He did contribute to local business by bringing some American tourists to visit once though. It seemed like every local within a twenty mile radius was evacuated as Blair took his new best friend Mr Bush to his local pub, the Dun Cow in Sedgefield. However, Bush isantee! The main problem for the 'yes' campaign was that the new parliament was to have very few powers. Initially just a talking shop in the eyes of many. This is Britain's poorest region. People do not have money to spare on another layer of government. I think if they had been able to promise tax cuts or some other monetary benefit then the 'yes' campaign may have had a better platform to stand on.

The 'No' campaign

The slogan of the 'No' campaign is 'Politicians talk, we pay'. This was the main objection to the parliament. It would create jobs only for those elected, who would sit around at their desks talking at the taxpayers expense.

I don't think the 'No'
campaign realised the real breaking point for the assembly. It aroused me as a Teessider (someone from the area surrounding the river Tees at Middlesbrough) that this has become the parliament of 'Geordie-land' (as named by the Guardian). I'm not a Geordie. 'Geordie' are the people of Newcastle, but the biggest city in the region is Sunderland. Why are the Geordies in charge? This, though, is very typical of central government treatment of any place outside of London. Everywhere to them is exactly the same and homogeneous.

The 'No' campaign staged a series of publicity stunts such as symbolic burning of £5 notes and populating the countryside with large inflatable white elephants. Thus to indicate the potential waste of taxpayers' money this could be. Tony Blair's constituency in rural County Durham already has the highest council tax rates in the country.

Why us?

So why was the North-East chosen as the place to start this new political map? Apparently because this is the region with the strongest local identity, something which I wasn't aware of until I left home to go to university at 'the other place'. I have an accent. So do you. So does everyone. There is no 'perfect' accent in English or any other language. However, I quickly found that having a North-East accent is utterly unacceptable to many people in southern England. From the first day I had to get used to people correcting me, talking slowly to me as if I am mentally retarded, and, of course, ridiculing me at every available opportunity. I knew the North-East is portrayed extremely negatively in the media, but I didn't know that I was despised by half the nation. I am supposed to be a hard drinking football hooligan who owns a whipper, keeps pigeons, cannot hold down a job and can neither read nor write. Apparently I am 'friendly but thick'. Thanks for the compliment. I suspect foreign students worry about their accents before they come here.

Well don't worry, it's not politically correct for people to abuse you. It's considered admirable to take pot shots at me. There was recently an article about this in The Radio Times by Alison Graham. She describes the current situation as 'a world where news organisations have northern correspondents' as if Carlisle were Kabul. Not accepted. Part of a foreign country. There is an old north-east television programme called Auf Wiedersehen Pet about a group of builders who go off to Germany in search of work. When they first return to the UK they go to a pub in southern England, and as soon as they speak everyone stares at them. They complain they feel more like foreigners in their own country than they ever did abroad. I totally identify with this. I went to work in Australia when I graduated and did not feel so alienated there as here.

Conclusions!

The end result of the referendum was an emphatic, if somewhat surprising, 'no' vote. 78% voted no in a 47% turn out, it's ironical for a campaign which centred on the mistrust of politicians, I am not convinced I have heard the end of this. In some ways I am surprised at such a result. The northeast has always felt neglected and cut of reach. When Tony Blair became PM there was great hope for change because he represents the North-East. But since then he has turned his back on us. In other ways I am glad the result was 'no' because I do not think the enormous north-south divide in this country benefits anyone. Potentially the North-East Parliament would only increase this chasm.

One of my main reasons for writing this was that I know over 65% of Lincs students are from overseas. I hope I have given you a little insight into the petty squabbles of regional characters in this country and that maybe you will visit the wild and lawless North some day. It's almost another country.

Zoe is studying for a DPhil in Bioinformatics. She is fully literate, and her first language is English!
Welcome Home. This was the message on the colourful banners found in every main road in Athens this August...Staging the XXVIII Olympic Games in Greece, 108 years after the first modern Games, represented a historical homecoming full of symbolism.

It was a difficult journey. Problems and delays with the preparation, worries over security, negative publicity and criticism by foreign media. Criticism that was sometimes justified but in other cases was simply bitter irony about the 'incapable Greeks'. This somehow touched the Greek psyche, the Greek 'filotimo', and in the end, to everybody's surprise (including the Greeks themselves) everything was ready on time.

And not just ready...The facilities were world class, the Olympic Village the 'best ever' according to the International Olympic Committee, the Olympic Stadium impressive with its infamous Calatrava roof. And Athens herself, unrecognisable! With a new tram, the 4-mile Faliron esplanade, the biggest pedestrianised area in Europe in the historical centre, new museums and renovated squares...

Jacque Rogue, the President of the International Olympic Committee, got it right when he said that the Greeks worked like Syrakti's rhythm - starting very slowly but building up to a cataclysmic pace.

The other big issue was security. The world demanded a safe Olympics and Athens delivered a secure but not oppressive Games. Greece spent about €300m (almost equivalent of the total cost of the Sydney Olympics) on security, and nothing happened. It's funny to think that some boco said before the Games

1Filotimo: A Greek word which does not have direct translation in English, but means something like 'with a keen sense of honour'.
that 'The only place worse to hold an Olympics would be Baghdad!'  

As for the atmosphere, the Organising Committee had the inspiration to return the modern games to both Ancient Olympia and the Panathinaiko Stadium. Sacred places, where you can feel the past and identify the historical continuity. This linkage with the past was so lyrically portrayed in the fabulous Opening Ceremony, full with metaphors, like the one where God Enos (Love) was flying above the two lovers, signifying that Art started as a desire to express Love.

Athens was hot and dusty by day, vibrant and luminous by night. I remember being in Plaka, just underneath the Acropolis, at five o clock in the morning and the place was absolutely packed with people, Greeks and visitors alike, celebrating the victories of their teams, singing and waving their flags, hugging each other...

At the stadia, these Games had their powerful moments. Hitcham El Guerrouj grinning, Paula Radcliffe weeping, the Argentines winning gold on basketball and football, the Iraqi football team, Michael Phelps' performance.

The Games had their darker moments as well. Just a few days before the start, the scandal with the Greek sprinter Kostas Kenteris missing his drug test shocked the Greeks. Or the Russian shot-putter Irina Korshaktenko, the first ever woman to win a gold medal at the ancient site of Olympia (what an irony!), who was stripped of her medal after testing positive for steroids.

Summer 2004, in a quiet beach in Halkidiki, where the pine trees end next to the sea water, and my grandson is asking me about the Greek Summer of 2004. The summer that the Greek football team unexpectedly won Euro 2004 and Athens hosted a wonderful Olympic Games. I am sure I will have a lot of stories to tell.

Nick is a Linacre Student at the Environmental Change Institute.
Cigarettes and Alcohol...

Another party, another round of B52s, but same faces, same jokes. Same music.

Feeling a bit awkward at first, perhaps I shouldn’t have come. Britney’s blasting from the speakers, begging to be hit one more time. Masochist bitch! God, four years have passed, but nothing has changed. I haven’t changed, perhaps that’s the scariest thing of all.

“Hey, whatcha drink? Haven’t seen ya in ages!” I swear I’m going to seriously hurt the next person that asks me that. It’s already the tenth time tonight. I smile enchantingly (or that’s what I think I do) hoping there’s no lettuce stuck in my teeth. Should have brushed after dinner. Another round of explanations: “Just submitted my thesis you know”. Big, fake grins, “Awesome!” Yeah, right, like they care.

Let’s drink some more. More shots. Let’s laugh a bit louder. Didn’t we used to be best mates? Can’t find anything to talk about. Let’s talk about the weather. “Yeah, I know, it’s so cold! It sucks.”

Common People by Pulp is playing now. That’s my favourite song: “She came from Greece; she had a thirst for knowledge...” Yeah, that’s me. Eight years ago.

It was so exciting at first. Escaping my provincial existence and embarking on a great big adventure and all that. At first, it was really cool being different, a foreigner. Standing out. Got a great kick out of it. Being able to travel and see wonderful new amazing things I’d only read about in books, to smell crisp, rain-heavy air, to touch ancient, dream-saturated stones, to taste bitter-sweet ale... To experience, ergo, to live. To broaden my horizons, to learn.

And meeting all these people from all around the world. The laid-back Aussies, and the reserved Brits (sans alcohol), the flamboyant Italians and raw-energy, arrogant-filled Americans, the quiet Asians and the proud French, the structured Germans, the wild Brazilians and the pain-in-the-ass Greeks...
Making friends, breaking friends...
Eight years. That's a long time to be away from home. My horizons have stretched to breaking point; my senses are heightened to saturation level. Why then do I feel so empty?

Is it my ancestor's blood? The traveling, the emigrating, the gypsy lifestyle...
Once more I'm gathering my belongings, strange how everything fits in a couple of suitcases... Once more, I'm moving again, can't stand still now. Not back home, oh no, I don't belong there anymore. The provincial existence I so frowned upon in the past rejects me now. I'm a foreigner there. No, let's move, yes, to another continent perhaps. There's so much of the world, just waiting, there, for me to reach and touch and smell and taste. My senses, still unsatisfied, still hungry, still yearning...
It's time to go; I've put it off for so long... I can't stay here any longer, I don't fit in. I don't want to stand out; I don't want to be different anymore. I want to blend in, be welcomed, and accepted; to belong.

How can I explain this to my friends? We share another round of drinks. I'm wonderfully tipsy, cocooned in the sweet haze of alcohol. The awkwardness is gone now, we embrace and swoon in the rhythm of the music, screaming out the lyrics to Bohemian Rhapsody. Afterwards, we stay up until dawn, talking, drinking. Yeah, that feels right. Feels comfortable; perhaps there's a place here for me after all. Perhaps I don't have to go, maybe I could stay here for a bit longer.

Maybe, just maybe, if I drink a lot, if I smoke even more, if I sing louder, if I twirl and dance until I'm dizzy, if I snog the cute guy in the corner,

Head spinning from the alcohol,
Eyes bruised from smudged mascara,
Throat burning from the cigarettes,
Maybe,
I'll forget the emptiness and the vacuum,
So dark, so vast,
Threatening to swallow me,
Maybe I'll forget how lonely I am.

Deprina Voulgaraki
A trip to the Countryside
or why the idea that we belong in nature is absolutely ludicrous

One of the most idyllic dreams in the life of the modern Homo
metropolitanus is to abandon the hectic lifestyle of
the city and retire to a remote village or rural region. The
countryside is now seen as a
retreat, a return to the simple
enjoyment of essentials, a par-
sadimensional utopia where life is
easy, everyone is nice and
happy, and human relations-
ships are sincere in their unaf-
fected naiveté. For the urban
dweller, the countryside vil-
lage with its surrounds
stands as a symbol of pure
union with the elements – air
(fresh), water (clean), fire
(cozy and “traditional”), a
sense of being part of nature
and the natural world in gen-
eral, undiluted by the
concerted practices of civiliza-
tion.

Except it's all a fantasy.
The image of the village de-
scribed above, undoubtedly
the most prevalent in the
mind of the urban animal, can
only be true for the kinds
countryside that are as arti-
ficially and pretentiously rural
as the Cotswolds. They cer-
tainly have nothing to do with
the really rural countryside,
where animals (of roughly ev-
ery kind except Sam cun and
Dalmatian dog) and humans
share the same habitat, trac-
tors are the most commonly
sighted vehicle, and wildlife
constantly threatens to invade
the permeable human world.
A personal experience this
summer helped me realize
that, far from feeling at home
and myself in nature, the rur-
ral experience was able to in-
spire in me such profoundly
primitive instincts as fear of
extinction and self-
reservation, that I was con-
vinced, in the end, that a
natural existence isn't some-
thing you want to take lightly,
and, even less, fantasize
about...

My experience is located in
the Greek countryside, this
August. My boyfriend and I
took a 3-day trip to a remote,
but lately increasingly
touristy, mountainous region
close to the Prespa of lakes on
the Albanian border. The
countryside there is amazing
very un-Greek for sure: lush
forest, water everywhere, grey
houses made of local stone. A
beautiful landscape, scattered
with Byzantine monuments
(the area was a retreat for
monks in the middle ages
and, because it remained re-

tume to recently, every-
thing survives almost intact!),
old villages with traditional
guest-houses, and the oppor-
tunity for agri-tourism, a new
form of tourist enterprise that
involves getting familiar with
traditional economical struc-
tures in agricultural commu-
nities.

You got the idyllic side of
the story. Let's proceed to
some practical matters now:
spending time at a place like
the above inevitably entails
experiencing the real life of
farmers and stock-farmers who
are still practising these
old professions in such parts
of the world. It can be ex-

tremely interesting, admit-
tedly. The problem is that a
basic component of this life is
dogs - big dogs that run all
over the place (face it, you're in nature, where everything is free) and bark loudly. If you're not particularly adept at appeasing an angry creature like that, then it is probable that an encounter of this kind (which is bound to happen more than once) will irreparably mar your picture of the place as an idyllic retreat.

The experience continues with cows and sheep. If you have never been close to such an animal, even less a herd or flock of them, then think twice before you do. Cows are generally benign, but they have horns (at least those in that village did), which look threatening. Plus, if you come across a bull that happens to be angry about the world that day, then there's nothing that can guarantee your safety except a good run. Sheep can be cute, but not rams - they're dodgy and you want to avoid them.

Hiking (we've moved to the 'surroundings' now) is the biggest attraction in a place like the above. But it depends on where you hike and what kind of wildlife you encounter in the process. A total of eight bears live in the region that we visited (yes, there are bears in Greece!). The chances of ever coming across one were so small that fear could only have been a neurotic reaction. Yet, as I walked through the lush fir, oak, and cedars: trees, and climbed the steep hills to breathtaking views of the lakes and the region, I couldn't help having a creepy feeling that any unfortunate encounter that might have ensued from an accident of fate could only have resulted in my violent extinction. Not to mention snakes, scorpions, and other dangerous creatures that can creep on the ground, hide under stones, and even, possibly, hide under your carpet in your hotel room. You can get really obsessed with the idea of seeing, stepping on, or being bitten by them.

Conclusion: I didn't like it. Being out in the wilderness was scary. Walking around in the village at night was stressful. All because danger was lurking at every corner. And also because it was out of my control. This, above all, is the biggest challenge that nature sets upon the spoiled metropolitan dwellers: how to cope with a reality where, exactly because it's natural, the big fish will want to eat the small fish, which, by definition, will have very limited escape route options.

No, no. I'm a different kind of animal - a 'political animal', as Aristotle says. I take that to mean 'a creature that is meant to live in a polis', i.e. a proper city'. I'm quite sure that's what he meant - for he must have seen, as I did, that it is only in the city that you can best fulfill your true mission as a human being. The dilemma between nature and culture is as artificial as the image of nature it puts forward (a very Cotswoldesque one, to be sure) - heavily freighted with romantic illusions that disregard the fact that, when we come to tackle with real, hardcore nature, we chicken out, and proudly retreat to our urban paradise. In reality, there is no dilemma, just distinct choices of lifestyle. So, give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and accept nature as an antidote to the overwhelming realities of urban existence - with the qualification that it be reserved for certain times only.

Katerina Oikonomopoulou