

# The Gentian - Issue #1: The North



*Cover Image by Nygel Deyn*

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*"Winter Blume" by Jessica Wang*

## Middlesbrough in August

*Theodora Oyani*

There was water colour in the sky,  
this evening as the cars went by.

I trudged on, the day near gone  
and thought and thought lovely  
thoughts.

My mind was spent and work  
was hard and my ears were numb  
and my eyes were fogged.

The day was gone and the cars  
went by and what a lovely sight  
that Tuesday dusk!

To see watercolours in the sky.

## A Plea for Future Winters

*Beth Davies*

Don't ever let me say *It's only snow*.

If the season comes when I no longer  
watch wide-eyed at windows, when I stop  
listening for each footstep crunch, and never  
run arms-wide into blizzards. If one day,  
these Christmas card days cannot

make me child again, throw a snowball  
in my face. Take me sledging in Bingham Park,  
on a red toboggan with yellow handles.

Tell me the name of every snowman  
I ever built. Remind me how we squealed  
when the first flakes fell, how it tasted  
to catch wonder on my tongue.

## 832 Square Miles

*Jay Hulme*

They said I didn't come from here,  
That 'here' was just a place, and people come from people,  
But so far back as I can see, my family come from here.  
I may have been the one to escape, the one to run from here, but I come from here.  
My family is not the type to keep records  
Or to speak about the past  
But I know a thing or two about our history.

I know my Grandfather's Grandfather worked in the mines,  
All closed now for decades, his for generations,  
His hands clawing at the spark of the seam,  
In the dark of the Earth, the coal gleam,  
I see his eyes like stars, glistening in the breathless black.

I know his Son had a motorbike  
And rode it for England, drawing endless ovals in the clouds of dust,  
And I know he did what he thought he must  
When he stopped for the sake of his family,  
For the sake of my family.

And I know nothing of most of the others,  
Except that this land birthed their Fathers and Mothers  
As it birthed mine,  
And theirs,  
And theirs,  
And back.

And I don't care for this city,

It may be my home town, but I know for a fact it's not home,

But it's the place where my blood mingles with the earth and ploughs up a history,

Where my blood mingles with the earth and uncovers a legacy,

Smudged by the thumbprints of time.



*"Leaf by St. Mary's College" by Jessica Wang*



## NORTH / SOUTH

*Gabriel Evans*

“Where are you from?”

The question hangs like a wineglass over a bar.

I map myself: my Welsh surname, my Scottish nan,  
my all-too-English parents. My surrogate has roots

in Venezuela. Online, I traced my branches back  
to France, Germany, America, Macedonia.

I picture ancestral migration and anglophobia.

I reveal my town and county, its capital city,  
but to them, all three are a mystery. So,  
for the sake of simplicity:

“The Midlands.”

My housemates stare like I’m from another dimension,  
a world between worlds, a parallel universe.

They deny the existence of this land between,

their England clear-cut into North and South.

Northumberland insists the middle is marked  
by Middlesbrough. London mentions Middlesex

with a wink. I rattle off Middleport, Middle Hill,  
Middlehope. Oxfordshire finds the middle line  
in our accents, her long *graaass*, *baaath*, *laaast*.

Cumbria laughs it off: *spaaaggetti, saaandwich*.

Lincolnshire looks to me for advice, too lost  
to recall which version she uses. I add my voice:

“I say *bewk*, not *buck*; *lewk*, not *luck*.”

His eyes as wide as double O, London says

he’s never heard anyone say it like *that*.

Cumbria laughs. Northumberland brings it back:

“Wherever the North

and South divide,

you need to pick a side.”

I’ve heard it all my life. I exist in the inbetween places,  
always neither, never either. Bookended by black and white  
is my grey area, too misty for others to see. They wonder

how I don’t get lost when I’m so unaligned. How can I not  
pick a side? If I’m not Northern or Southern, then where do I find  
myself? Their dividing line splits me in two, but it’s true,

I’m lost for an answer when they ask me about my roots.

I just hide in the inbetween places, out of their view.

The Hungarian rolls her eyes from across the room.

## I Can't Find My Way, but I Know Where North Is

*Beth Davies*

Dad taught us  
how the constellations point  
towards the sky's compass.

We couldn't agree  
what to call that point of brightness.  
My brother shouting Pole Star,

I insisted North. Laughter travels  
faster than light; we mocked each other  
for all the stars to hear.

From that balcony,  
we claimed the heavens, triumphant  
in our ridiculousness.

We have grown since then,  
but the sky above is still full of stars,  
waiting for us to name them.



*"Industry" by Nygel Deyn*

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If you would like to submit to our next issue or would like to get in touch please visit our website: [www.thegentian.com](http://www.thegentian.com) or email us at [poetry.society@durham.ac.uk](mailto:poetry.society@durham.ac.uk).

Yours,

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