

Up!

FEBRUARY 2023

LIGHT



Making the world a better
place - one page at a time

Contents

Up Front! The Team	1
Into the Light	
Paint Up! Sylvia Yount	2
The New York Met comes to Cullercoats	
Word Up! Poetry Corner	4, 8, 12
Your poems on the theme of Light	& 17
Light Up! Jennifer C. Wilson	5
A beam in the dark	
Snap Up! Ray McIver	9
Top tips for super snaps	
Sun Up! Steve Lowe	13
Everything under the sun	
Write Up!	20
Come and join us	
Read Up! Jenna Warren	22
Showing tonight	
Coming Up! 'Til Next Month	24
Feeding Folk	





Up Front!

Hi everyone and welcome to February 2023's issue - this month we're all about light. But, to be honest, right now we're writing this at 4.55pm on Pancake Tuesday. It's starting to get dark and we're hungry - a deadly combination, so we'd better get moving!

So, back to the light. This month we have all manner of positive, optimistic and 'up' features for you. Among other things we've got lighthouses, stunning photography ... and a specially written article on a world-famous artist by a curator of the New York Met no less! Oh yes, we're all about the scoops here at Up! HQ.

Every day from hereon in gets a little longer and a little lighter. Spring is just around the corner, with Summer hot on its heels.

So, pour yourself a cuppa, click on a reading light and settle in.

Bridget & Harry x



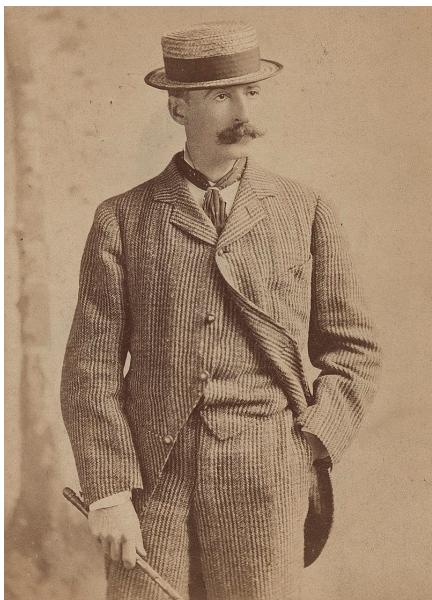
This month's front cover is a photograph by Ray McIver. Check out Ray's article on page 9

Paint Up!

SYLVIA YOUNT

Following her recent visit to our home village of Cullercoats to see where the famous American artist, Winslow Homer, lived and painted from, we asked Sylvia Yount, Curator at the New York Metropolitan Museum Of Art, a couple of questions about Homer. She went one better than answering our questions - she wrote us a whole article!

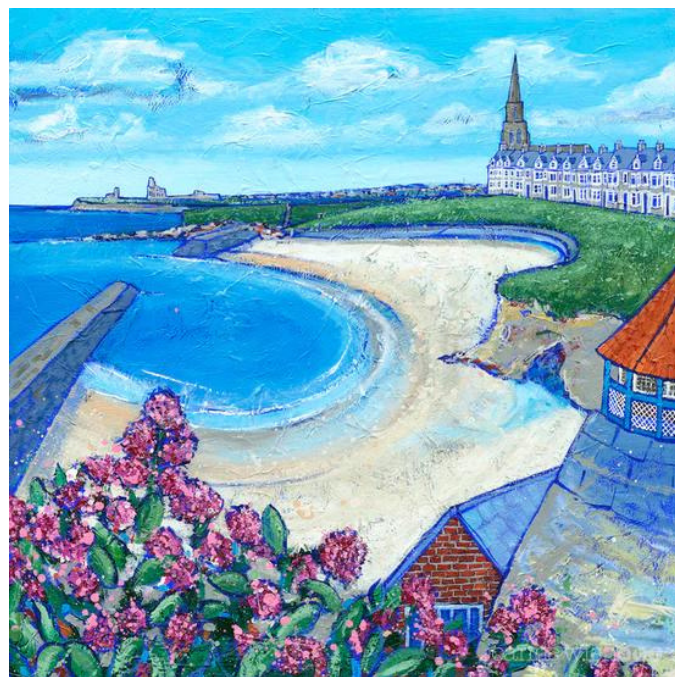
The celebrated realist painter Winslow Homer (1836-1910) chronicled some of the most turbulent and transformative decades of American history.



He developed his distinctive artistic vision in a crucible of struggle, creating emblematic paintings that illuminate the effects of the American Civil War (1861-65) on soldiers, formerly enslaved people, and the landscape.

Turning to charged depictions of rural life, heroic rescues, and churning seas—throughout the Atlantic world—Homer continued to grapple with themes of mortality and the often uneasy relationship between humans and nature. Close study of his artistic production reveals a lifelong preoccupation with conflict and uncertainty, as well as persistent concerns with race, gender, class, and the environment.

We don't really know what led Homer to



Cullercoats in Bloom, by Cullercoats artist, Joanne Wishart

Cullercoats, but as he had painted en plein-air (outdoors) in other seaside communities, it's likely he was attracted by accounts of its reputation as an artists' colony. Also appealing would have been what it offered in terms of the striking meeting of water, air, and light in different seasons and times of day—and the way they interacted—as well as the drama and challenges of daily life in the village. When artists talk about the quality of light in coastal areas, they often mean the reflective play of it on water - as well as the overall atmosphere - and the challenges of capturing the effect on paper and canvas. For watercolourists, it's a particularly auspicious environment.

There's no question that Homer's art was transformed by his roughly 19 months in England (March 1881–November 1882), largely spent in Cullercoats. While he had previously enjoyed summers painting in working-class waterside communities in the U.S. that also doubled as active artist colonies — for example, in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine. Before Cullercoats, Homer had not experienced those locales in all seasons, particularly the fierce winters. Inspired by the

Paint Up!

SYLVIA YOUNT

daily life-and-death experiences of local women and men inextricably tied to the ocean, Homer produced many dramatic oil paintings, watercolours, and drawings focused on danger and rescue.



The Gulf Stream, 1899



The Life Line, 1884

The artist was also engaged by the quieter rhythms of village life in Cullercoats and the varied efforts of the “fishwives.” He often located his paintings at the harbour and along the water’s edge, where the community awaited the return of the fishermen from their labour on the harsh North Sea. In these works, Homer celebrated the rugged fortitude of the women, whom he depicted with a new monumentality,

possibly inspired by the Greek sculpture and other European art he had studied in London.



Perils of the Sea, 1881



Inside the Bar, 1883

Homer returned to the U.S. from England with a new sense of gravitas in how he approached his subjects – especially his figures, endowing them with greater weight and intensity of feeling. This new approach shaped all of his subsequent work focusing on sea peril, modern heroism, and human vulnerability in the face of the dynamic power of nature. In short, Homer would not have evolved into the consequential artist he became without the Cullercoats experience.

Who knew? Our tiny, quiet village an inspiration to a world famous artist!

If you'd like to find out more about Winslow Homer, click on the link to the New York Met's exhibition - Crosscurrents

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF LIGHT

Brú na Bóinne (Newgrange)

Mist clings to parched grass
grainy grey light conceals the mounds.
No creature joins our pilgrimage.

Walking on my toes, I stumble
conscious of bones under the soil.
The valiant song thrush who heralded

many dawns and sweetly closed dusk.
Families of rabbits who gathered
to wonder at this new edifice.

And the builders, in that pre-historic time
constructing a place of celebration,
of community and of marvel.

When the light hits the chamber
I'm overwhelmed at this beacon
from the past heralding the future.

As we rejoice in the return of light
to this small island on the edge
of oceans and continents.

Rona Fitzgerald

The first light of the day
in the east wan and dim
then the orb of the sun
peeps over the rim
red and then gold
banishes the night
announcing the day
increasingly bright
climbing the sky
and erasing the moon
reaching its zenith
at the peak of high noon
afternoon basking
in the sunny warm glow
then slowly retreating
crimson sunset show
darkness returning
the balance remade
we can't appreciate light without shade

Graham Bell

Light work

The earth weighs 1.3 x 10²⁵lbs,
too much for one man's shoulders.
Its boulders, soil, its seas and lakes,
would take a god to carry.

Try to lift all the displaced,
a rucksack packed with troubles.
The dispossessed, the war-misplaced,
one pair of arms won't shift it.

But add the strength of many hands,
neighbours, friends, and strangers.
The heavy load will raise up high,
light as feathers, light as dust,
light as a summer sky.

Gerda Pickin

Light Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

Our resident marine biologist casts her beam out to sea ...

When it comes to lighthouses, what comes to mind? For me, in part, it's this song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tivph7mTku4> although in fact, if the person really is the singer's lighthouse, then instead of definitely guiding them "back to solid ground," poor Shane, Mark, Kian and Nicky could end up (depending on the purpose of the lighthouse in question) being directed away from the shore...

But anyway. I suppose the focus is safety, whether that means getting into a harbour, avoiding hazards, or both. And of course, I would never want anything other than safety for my lovely Westlife boys!

So, what really does come to mind? A 'classic' lighthouse? Standing tall and proud on a rocky headland, its light shining strong as a beacon of hope for lost or homecoming sailors? It turns out that concept is beautifully ancient in origin, and the theory behind them hasn't changed in millennia.



Ancient mariners would be guided by simple fires lit on hilltops, headlands, or near ports, acting as entrance markers to reach a safe haven.

Excavations suggest that the oldest 'lighthouse' as we might recognise it is potentially 4,000 years old, as more solid, and permanent structures began to be constructed.

The actual oldest 'modern' lighthouse is debated, but one of the most famous must be the Lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the Ancient Wonders of the World, and estimated to stand up



to 118m tall. It survived almost in full until 1323 AD, with some of its ruins even still visible until 1480. Just think, if Richard III had found time to go travelling, he could have seen it! Sorry.

As civilisations developed, so too did their technology, and whilst the concept of the lighthouse didn't change, how it was run moved with the times. From the simplest of fires, we saw development of combustible liquids and other fluids, protection of the flame through installation of windows, and mirrors being used to throw the light as far as possible from the source. Improvements in building methods meant the towers could become taller, sturdier, and able to withstand greater forces of nature (always a good thing when that close to the coast!).

Light Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

Further developments gave each lighthouse its own unique pattern of flashes, meaning that captains could time the intervals between flashes, identify the lighthouse they were in the vicinity of, and navigate more easily along the coasts. When this is combined with distinctive foghorn soundings, or radio signals, it makes navigation in even the worst visibility more achievable.

As a north-east lass, there are two lighthouses which have always held a special place for me: St Mary's, north of Whitley Bay, and the Brownsman lighthouse, out on the Farne Islands.



St Mary's began as a simple beacon as part of the priory which was founded there in the 11th century, with the formal lighthouse not being built until the mid-1600s, and the current development in 1898. Of course, if we're being

pedantic, it probably shouldn't be called St Mary's at all, but either St Helen's or St Katherine's, after the early chapel on the island, or the Lady Light. Quite how it got accidentally called St Mary's isn't clear, but as with many mistaken identities in history, this one has stuck... It's just a shame that the pub which used to be on the island isn't there anymore, or that the actual light is no longer functioning. Still, that means it's easier to get up to the top and enjoy the views of our gorgeous scenery, and of course, all the seals which make their home on the rocks nearby.

One of the other great cliches about lighthouses is, of course, the lighthouse-keeper. That gruff, slightly grizzly gent, in his thick woollen jumper and heavy cap, spending hour after hour staring out to sea, probably going slightly mad in the meantime, and almost certainly destined to come back and haunt his place of work after his demise. What's strange in this characterisation of the role, is that one of the most famous named individuals associated with lighthouses fits none of those criteria. That person being the wonderfully heroic Grace Darling.



Light Up!

JENNIFER C. WILSON

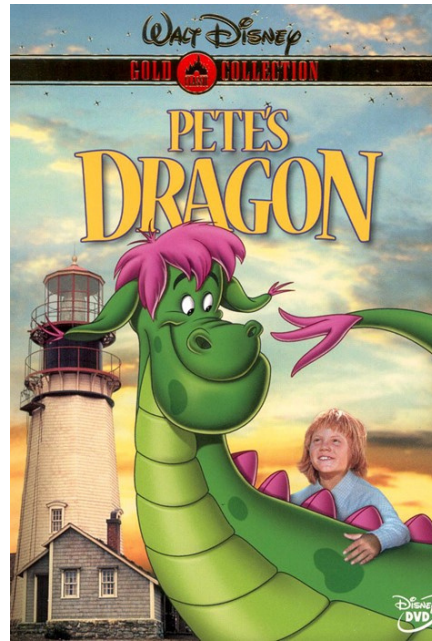
There can't be many coast dwellers, and certainly very few north-easterners, who don't know the story of this inspirational young woman, and that's probably the worst part of the story. It's fine that Grace didn't want the celebrity and the glamour, that she preferred to live quietly back on Brownsman Island, tending the now famous light, but it's tragically unfair that she died of something as commonplace as tuberculosis, having contracted the illness on a rare trip to the mainland. Even being cared for by the Duchess of Northumberland in Alwick Castle itself couldn't spare her. But people don't like to think of that. We prefer (as we should) to remember the heroine, bravely putting to sea with her father, William, to rescue the stranded survivors of the Forfarshire, aground on rocks on its way from Hull to Dundee in September 1838.

It goes to show, I think, just what a difference adrenaline and the rush of energy that comes with it, can do to the human body and spirit. Yes, Grace would have had more strength than many young women of her age, but to be able to hold a coble steady in rough weather, having rowed almost a mile to get to the rock-clinging survivors is a practically supernatural feat. No wonder at all that she was showered with praise, awards, and gifts. And even less of a wonder that she's still a huge icon and inspiration even this long after her untimely death.

Once again, I've managed to somehow bring death and misery into an 'uplifting' article. Definitely need to turn this around. I've mentioned Westlife, got a sneaky reference to my current favourite TV programme in, and need another happy note to end on. The trouble is, too many lighthouse-based

films aren't exactly positive in nature. 'Cape Forlorn' is a case in point - the keeper's wife ends up in a love-rectangle, and at least one party does not survive... Other films with titles such as 'Tower of Evil,' 'Tower of Terror,' and 'The Phantom Light' don't help this argument.

But then, miracle of miracles - all is not lost! Initially, the film doesn't scream 'happy'. We have a runaway orphan, a cruel foster-family (hence the runaway), a potentially-widowed woman missing her shipwrecked fiancé, a village full of misguided town folk, and a rogue wave extinguishing the lighthouse's flame JUST as the (not dead!) fiancé's ship is finally returning. However, we also have... (have you guessed it yet?): Pete's Dragon!!



Because who else can suddenly reignite a sodden flame and save the day than a dragon-that-only-some-people-can-see? I headed to YouTube to watch the final few minutes and was a blubbing wreck (see what I did there!) by the end of only one scene!

I hasten to add, this is entirely based on the 1977 original; I haven't seen any of the 2016 remake. It's a perfect note to end on then, lighthouses, acting as metaphors for good over evil, bringing hope to those in peril, and lighting the dark times people might be going through. And who wouldn't love a pet dragon??

As well as being a full-time marine biologist, Jennifer also writes historical fiction.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/jenniferwilsonwriter/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/inkjunkie1984/>

Blog: <https://jenniferwilsonwriter.wordpress.com/>

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF LIGHT

First Light

As the first pink bloom rises along the valley edge
As the Blackbird, Mea Culpa, Mea Culpa does sing
As the rooks from their trees arise with a cacophony of barks
As the robin and bluetits serenade, melodies sublime.
As a lone goose calls for leaving across the ever lightening sky
As the lapwing's soulful cries to the wind.
As one voice they call to Spring,
Rejoice, rejoice and sing, for another Winter we have survived.

Andrew Hare

The perks of putting out the bins in the dark

Jack's glued glitter all over the lids
Pizza burns neon, Fish and one Chip
Monitors fade on the worn cleaner's shift
Shut eye of moon gives Venus a wink
Traffic lights fractal in screen-shatter-grit
Reynard stops, sniffs, pads on.. lit..shadowed..lit..

Alison Raybould

Dragonfly Wing

Cross-hatched with threads
so fine and strong
it is a framework
on which to stretch
the fine transparent silk.

Light, its only ornament,
shimmers
like oil on water.

Gill McEvoy

Light Haiku

Light comes as a dove,
making the night disappear
like a startled crow.

Sav

Next month's theme is: **SPEED**

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Full submission details can be found on our website: <https://positivelyup.co.uk/poetry-submissions>

Snap Up!

RAY MCIVER

The north-east photographer shares his tips for getting that perfect shot

There are really only five key things to bear in mind when composing a photo, whether it be taken on a fancy DSLR camera or a simple mobile phone:

- Include foreground, middle-ground and background in your image
- Place the subject well off-centre (or use absolute symmetry and place it in the middle)
- Follow the *Rule of Thirds* to find a good location for your subject
- Use *Lead Lines* to guide the eye into the image
- Consider post processing and cropping

If you can adopt say three of the above into your composition then your photo is likely to be improved.

Let's look at each of the above in more detail and illustrate with examples.

Include foreground, middle ground and background



Image A - *Sunrise and Seaweed*

Taken at the mouth of the Tyne this image includes foreground (seaweed and rocks), middle ground (fence and River Tyne seawater) and background (sky and clouds). This gives the image a lot of depth and interest for the viewer to look at. Note where the sun is deliberately positioned - we will talk about this later under *Rule of Thirds*.

Place the subject well off-centre (or use absolute symmetry).



Image B - *Well Wrapped Up*

This lovely Mallard duck was found in Marden Quarry, Cullercoats and is deliberately located well off-centre in the image with space left on the right hand side for the duck to “move into”. It's a fact that composition is more interesting if we do this. In the Western world we tend to prefer a direction of flow from left to right (probably as we read and write that way). Had the duck been facing to the left, then we could easily flip the image over during our edit.

Image C - *Green Goddess of the Tyne (next page)*
This image taken at night has the Tyne Bridge deliberately located smack bang in the centre of the image with a very symmetrical arrangement.

Snap Up!

RAY MCIVER



By using a tripod and a slow shutter speed (about 30 seconds) the waters of the Tyne appear very tranquil and frozen-like, with good colourful reflections from the night lights.

Rule of Thirds



Image D - *Horse and Castle*

This winning image was taken shortly after sunrise on Bamburgh beach which is famous for its wonderful wet sand reflections. It is deliberately atmospheric and has the horse and rider located near the thirds. This is about a third of the way in from the left-hand edge and about a third of the

way up from the bottom of the image. The castle is also about a third of the way in from the right-hand side and a third of the way up from the bottom. No one really knows why the *rule of thirds* works, but it does, and viewers certainly like it. If we go back to Image B you will see that the eye of the duck is on the thirds, as is the bright starburst light of the sun in Image A.

Lead Lines to help guide the eye into the image



Image E - *Moody Mary*

This atmospheric image is of St Mary's lighthouse in Whitley Bay. The composition makes use of *lead lines* from the concrete causeway (right-hand side) and the service pipe (left-hand side) to take the eye out to the lighthouse which is the main subject. The dark sky also allows the white lighthouse to clearly stand out. Lead lines can be anything that points in the desired direction to the subject - say a fence line, edge of a road kerb, yellow lines, a river or stream, etc.

Post Processing and Cropping

I have always believed that a good image is a combination of a good capture with the camera in the field, and good editing afterwards to enhance and accentuate what the author is trying to convey. The best images are powerful and can inspire a range of feelings in the viewer.

Post processing involves the use of software to modify an image, and is a skill that can be learnt

Snap Up!

RAY MCIVER

by all. Simple software is usually already found on mobile phones, tablets etc. but I would recommend the use of *SnapSeed*. This completely free, intuitive, and very powerful software is produced by Adobe for all mobile phones, tablets and PCs. More professional (and expensive) software is also available such *LightRoom* or *PhotoShop*.

Post processing is an art form in itself, but perhaps the simplest modification is cropping - the reduction in size of the image to achieve a better composition. This can be used to reposition the subject to be "on or near the thirds". It can also be used to cut off unwanted areas of the image that may be spoiling the composition. Finally it can be used to zoom in and focus on a small area that is of particular interest on an otherwise bland image. Below is an example of the latter. Whilst the sunrise is rather bland, the water reflection in the foreground is interesting.

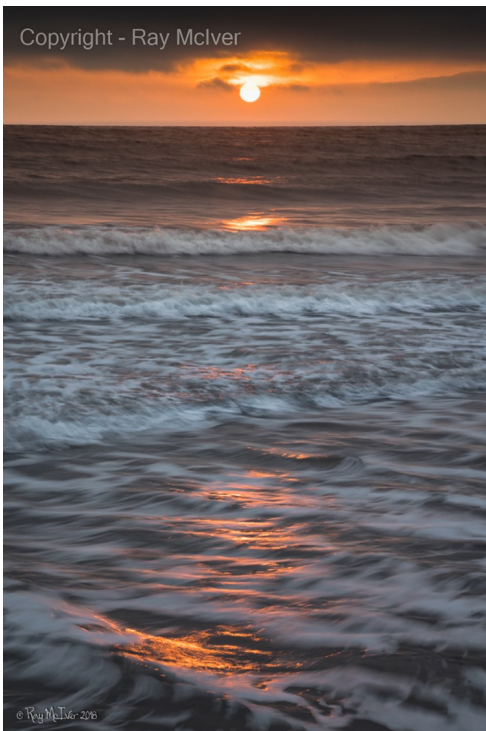
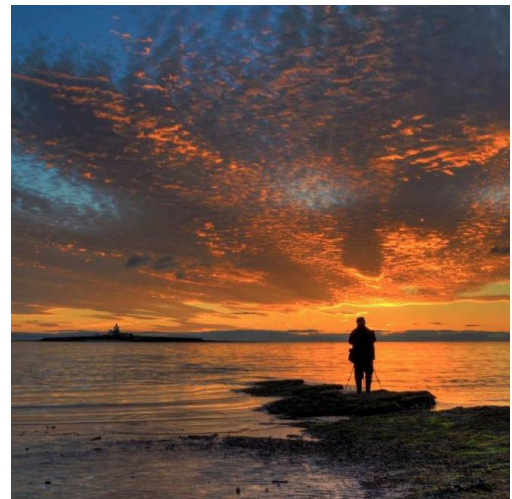


Image *Fire and Water* - a foreground extract from the previous image using cropping.

Well that's all my simple guidance and advice for now and I hope you found it useful. Happy snapping!



For more of my images please feel free to visit my social media:

Facebook Page - [Whitley Bay Tog and Travels](#)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/whitleybaytog/>

Note - I do not print or sell my images but would be happy to supply a high definition .jpg file of an image to anyone who is prepared to donate to charity.

Please contact me through my Facebook page or by emailing admin@positivelyup.co.uk

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF LIGHT

SUNSHINE

You say, 'I don't realise how amazing I am,'
as we sit sipping mochas on the high street steps.
While the Jesus people preach, we have our own spiritual awakening.
There is nothing like coffee and confidence to spur us on.
So soon we will be unstoppable.
The fresh free air blowing in our faces.
We are the wind.

Sun is shining.
Silver lining.

Together we have purpose, behind our previous jesting
is a deep common bond.
The ice long since broken and melted.
I have looked into your eyes many times, and saw the sun shine back.
I like your energy and light-fingered touch.
Your deep dark hair, smooth and chiselled black.
You are gritty, real and genuine.
We all need more of that in this world.

Carol Fenwick

MYTHOS

in the fog in the woods
between clarity and obscurity
she whistles for the wolves
come she whispers let it begin

at dusk between light and dark
she calls out to the owls
it is time she cries fly
spread the word

a faint drizzle hovers
neither wet nor dry
the stag arrives bellowing
i heard and bring friends

there they wait and watch
for human consciousness
to transform and trigger
the return of the sun

Marsha Warren Mittman

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Sun Up!

STEVE LOWE

Up!'s outdoors man goes in search of the light

I was watching Lord of the Rings (again) and it occurred to me that most of the evil and ugly creatures were associated with darkness, with the elvish folk and most of the good guys being creatures of light (with apologies to the dwarven folk – no offence).

It made me think of nature and I quickly realised that we humans categorise wildlife in much the same way. So bats are associated with the night, with vampires, witches, and spooky old buildings.



On the other hand, eagles are considered to represent light, spirit, and healing. Don't you think that it's odd

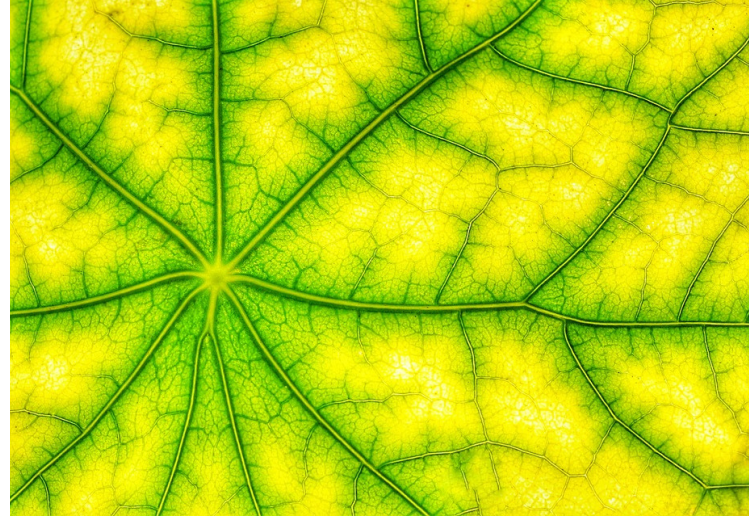
(especially if you're a rodent with one eye on the sky)?

Light is essential for the maintenance of life on earth. Both plants and animals depend on Earth's daily cycle of light-and-dark rhythm to govern life-sustaining behaviours such as reproduction, nourishment, sleep and protection from predators.

I wonder if, like me, you find it hard to get moving during the winter? Sure, it's colder, and that's one disincentive, but it's the reduced length of available light that gets me. Even a half decent "day" ends too soon as the sun rotates around the planet, and I feel like retreating beneath the duvet almost immediately! There's probably something to say for hibernation (that's why many

animals do it or move to warmer climes) because the daily need to sustain life become so much harder without that light.

The sun is driving this. Longer days mean more sunlight and that means plants are able to photosynthesise their own energy.



Photosynthesis is the process that converts the energy (power) in sunlight to chemical energy, which is used by green plants and other organisms. The process always begins when energy from light is absorbed by proteins called reaction centres that contain green chlorophyll pigments (although it is performed differently by different species). It's a complex process but is the critical basis by which all "food" is produced and without which life would cease. Each organism on earth plays a role in this web, take one away (extinction) and the balance gets upset.

Similarly, events such as volcanic ash clouds, solar storms and other natural phenomena can impact upon plants' capacity to "make food". And perhaps another giveaway is that you don't get plants in deep dark places.

You do, however get light as the natural world has beaten human ingenuity once again by creating artificial light. The most amazing of these may be the sea creatures (many at great depths) that create "bioluminescence". Seas can glitter and glow thanks to the light producing abilities of

Sun Up!

STEVE LOWE

many marine organisms. For instance, some fish dangle a lighted lure in front of their mouths to attract prey and even worms and tiny crustaceans also use bioluminescence to attract mates.

We primarily see this when it is triggered by a physical disturbance, such as waves or a moving boat hull, which causes the animal to show off its light. The lights may also be a form of communication as well as a response to an attack, or to attract a mate. I haven't tried it yet!

Any reader of *James and the Giant Peach* will recall the glow worm and her ability to light up the darkness of the peach using the light from her tail, which was "as bright as the brightest light bulb". I often wonder if Roald Dahl got this idea from stories from the trenches of WW1 when soldiers used them to light up maps, a function celebrated by a "Britain's Animals in War" sculpture by David Backhouse. Located in Park Lane, London it would be lovely to think it lit up itself rather than be visible by boring old sodium streetlights at night. In fact, artificial light can be a major problem to wildlife and is something that is now considered within many planning applications.



Whilst streetlights make us feel safe and allow us to see what is going on after dark, light at night disrupts natural behaviour and can cause injury or death to the animal population.

Research has shown that light pollution has a big impact for migratory birds because it disturbs them in their flight trajectories, causing crashes, often with deadly consequences.

Light in the dusk or dawn hours and at night particularly upsets animals' natural sleep/wake cycles (called 'circadian rhythms'), with daytime species becoming active at night and missing out on rest and sleep. Night-time species, on the other side, will either avoid light or be excessively attracted to it, which keeps them from performing crucial activities such as hunting and mating. It is also known to impact upon plants through alteration of their growth form! Light pollution also affects entire habitats, with many animals either not using suitable habitats because they are lit up, or species on roadsides being temporarily blinded, sometimes being killed by lights from cars.

Research has also demonstrated that the whole predator/prey balance was disturbed by night light, because it gives some species a better ability to see and hunt other species, especially the ones attracted to lights which will stay around streetlamps. Moths and bats spring to mind!

On the other hand, species afraid of light will hide, not hunt, and so miss out on good food supplies. This then creates an imbalance between predators and prey but also between different predators of the same species, as they will have a different behaviour toward light.

Thankfully, technology is helping. Development of dimmers, motion sensors and timers all help to reduce average illumination levels and save

Sun Up!

STEVE LOWE

energy, whilst the switch to LED lighting allows for reduced illuminance without compromising visibility.

Natural light is a lovely thing. Winslow Homer apparently painted in Cullercoats because of the particular light. But we all enjoy the variety of lighting phenomena that the natural world presents us with and it's also a major inspiration and source of wellbeing to many.



The most frequently occurring visual displays of light in nature are sunsets, which result from refraction or the bending of light.

In astronomy, sunset is the point when the trailing edge of the Sun's sphere disappears below the horizon. The brilliant array of colours that appear in the sky at this time are created by scattered airborne particles passing through rays of white sunlight traveling through the atmosphere. And because the evening air contains more particles than the morning air, sunsets are typically more radiantly coloured than sunrises.

Viewing a rainbow is a beautiful natural phenomenon that occurs when drops of rainwater meet sunlight. It's considered to be a sign of good fortune (anyone ever found that pot of auric

wealth?). But that characteristic archway of colours is also caused by refraction.

Best of all though, in my opinion, are the Aurora Borealis or the Northern Lights. I have been lucky enough to see them locally (dimly) and was thrilled. It's an entirely natural light display that is caused by "the collision of solar wind and magnetospheric charged particles with the high-altitude atmosphere". Auroras can be seen all over the world but occur most frequently in high altitude such as the arctic (northernmost) region on Earth.

These light-shows can be staggering and it is very easy to understand why early mankind was in awe of them, as they are so integral to our existence. And our absolute joy at viewing them may therefore be instinctive. See you in the morning/evening/rain/night-time.



An experienced wildlife professional, Steve currently works freelance with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects.

His hope is to leave the world a better place.

Write Up!

This Friday sees the return of our fast-growing writers' zoom session.

Come and join Bridget and Harry for a quick chat followed by a precious hour of your own creative time. There's nothing like being able to set aside a little time in the company of other creative people and seeing what you come up with!

This regular zoom session is happening on **Friday 24th February, 7pm - 8pm (GMT)** with [joining instructions](#) on the Up! facebook group page.



Whether you're a seasoned writer, or just starting out on your writing journey, everyone is welcome for mutual support and encouragement on your creative journey. See you there!



*There is a crack in everything,
that's how the light gets in*
Leonard Cohen

Never fear shadows. They simply mean there's a light shining somewhere nearby
Ruth E. Renkel

Only in the darkness can you see the stars
Martin Luther King Jr.

*Why blame the dark for being dark? It is far more helpful to ask
why the light isn't as bright as it could be*
Rob Bell

Word Up!

YOUR POEMS ON THE THEME OF LIGHT

She Span

She span and she swirled
She twisted and twirled
She revolved and rotated
She danced and gyrated

She reeled and she turned
Til her skirts were all burned
She was singing along to a heavenly choir

She tripped and she flipped
The crowd were all gripped
She was spinning along , her feet were on fire

She boogied and woogied, quick stepped a lush tango
Waltzing and weaving, she did the fandango

She turned ever faster in a milky way spiral
She spun out the stars, sending them viral

She danced and she pranced, it was part of the plan
She tripped the light fantastic, she swirled and she span

She span
She span
She span
She span

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Aaron Wright

Read Up!

JENNA WARREN

Up!'s resident reviewer takes us backstage with this month's selection of books



This month, I thought I would write about some of my favourite books themed around theatre and performance. In theatrical settings, some characters desire the spotlight while others hide in the shadows.



Clara and Olivia by Lucy Ashe tells the story of twin sisters, both ballerinas at Sadler's Wells, London, in 1933. They have quite different personalities: Olivia is introverted and highly dedicated to her craft, and Clara is more extroverted and wishes to see the world. The novel explores the dynamics between them: a complicated knot of love, rivalry and the desire to live their own separate lives. When Clara is given a chance to start a new life in America, she worries about leaving Olivia alone in London.

Their lives become intertwined with those of two men: Nathan, the company pianist and former child prodigy who wishes to marry Clara, and Samuel, the shoemaker's apprentice who falls in love with Olivia.

The novel is rich in historic detail and provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of ballet. It's primarily an historical novel, but there's also a dark thriller element, particularly in the last third of the book. The action takes place alongside a production of *Coppélia*, with the author drawing parallels between the Hoffmann story that inspired the ballet, and the lives of her main characters. If, like me, you love the film *The Red Shoes*, you'll enjoy this.

On a lighter note, I recently enjoyed *Perfect Timing* by Owen Nicholls. This delightful romcom follows Jess and Tom, two characters who keep being romantically drawn together but then pulled apart by bad timing and misunderstandings. Jess is a stand-up comedian who hides her real, vulnerable self behind the shock value of her live material, and Tom is a musician with anxiety, who fears he has nobody outside his band.

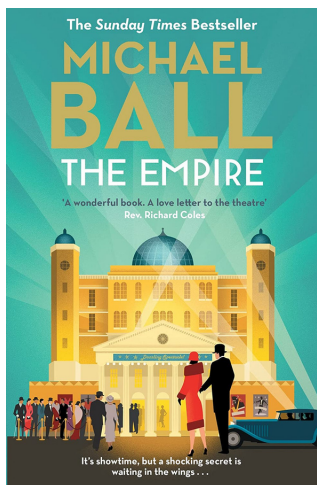
The novel begins with their first (very funny) encounter at the Edinburgh Festival and follows their respective careers as they grow more successful in their fields. But neither character is being quite true to themselves, and they're only able to get together once they've recognised this.



This novel is great fun, but it also handles some serious issues with sensitivity and a light touch.

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Back in October, I was interested to read the debut novel from musical theatre star Michael Ball. *The Empire* is set in 1922, and the action resolves around a grand theatre of the same name. It features a massive cast of characters (Ball helpfully includes a list of dramatis personae at the beginning), including actors, administrators, and backstage crew. It does a beautiful job of capturing just how many people are involved in the operation of a theatre, and there's an intriguing mystery, too.

My favourite character was the rival theatre owner and impresario who wishes to buy the Empire. I really hope we hear more from him in future books.

It seems strange to recommend a Christmas book in February, but I wanted to mention *Murder at the Theatre Royale* by Ada Moncrieff.

This cosy mystery is set in 1935 and follows Daphne King, a journalist turned sleuth. Ada is sent to the Theatre Royale in London to interview a famous actor who is appearing on a West End stage for the first time in years. The production is *A Christmas Carol*. While she's visiting the theatre, the actor playing Scrooge dies suddenly during a rehearsal, and Ada is convinced that the circumstances are suspicious.

This is an enjoyable mystery with some fabulous characters.



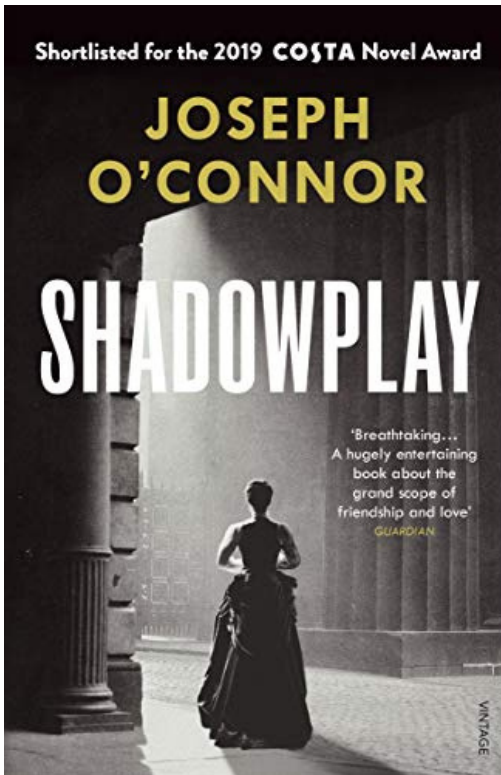
Wise Children by Angela Carter is a fascinating novel that captures the magic, joy and occasional darkness of the theatre, and what it means to be a lifelong performer.

It traces the histories of two theatrical families, the Hazards and the Chances, and draws inspiration from Shakespeare's plays, incorporating cases of mistaken identity and using twin sisters Dora and Nora as the narrators.

The book is full of surprises and big set pieces and feels like theatre distilled onto the page.

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One of my favourite theatrical novels of recent years is *Shadowplay* by Joseph O'Connor. This wonderful book is a fictionalised account of the life of Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, and the many years he spent working as manager of the Lyceum Theatre under star actor Henry Irving. In 1878, Bram travels from Dublin to London with his new wife Florence. He has worked as a theatre critic, but has no experience of managing a theatre, and is very much thrown in at the deep end. Over the course of many years, he has to deal with Henry Irving's demands and tempestuous moods, while also finding himself drawn to actress Ellen Terry.

Bram remains enigmatic throughout the book, but this is the point. He's constantly in the shadows, putting the needs of Irving and the theatre ahead of his own. His literary aspirations are mocked and dismissed by Irving, who doesn't come out of this novel particularly well.

This is a fascinating book about a multifaceted character. It's also about the changing function of theatres, ending with the emergence of cinema. It's both a homage to Gothic novels (it's written in a similar style to *Dracula*, with letters, diary entries and other documents) and a moving story in its own right. There's also a theatre ghost, because this is the sort of book which would feel odd without one. I love this novel.

*Jenna Warren is a bookseller and writer from Teesside. She studied Theatre and later Creative Writing at university. She runs Book Corner, an independent bookshop in Saltburn-by-the-Sea. Her debut novel, *The Moon and Stars*, was published in 2022 by Fairlight Books.*



You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me
C.S. Lewis

*I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set,
I go into the other room and read a book.*
Groucho Marx

Coming Up!

So there we are, we're suitably illuminated! As the days lengthen so too does our resolve to make a positive difference to our community, which, dear reader, is you!

On a serious note, we hear that foodbank donations have been tailing off, no doubt as a result of the cost of living crisis. All of this makes it more important that we redouble our efforts towards our Feeding Folk initiative. As a quick reminder, Feeding Folk is a series of performance evenings where everyone gives their talent for free and everyone, including performers, brings a tin or two of food, all of which is then donated to the local foodbank. Our last month's FF evening was the busiest ever!

What better way to show solidarity with your sisters and brothers than to organise your own FF night - be it spoken word, knit and natter, book club - anything goes, so long as the end result is a good haul for your foodbank. Get in touch with us if you'd like help setting up your event or want to be part of the Up! FF community.

As 2023 hurtles along (can it really be March next week?!), we thought it apt to make next month's theme 'Speed'. So join us then, with the wind in our faces and our hair blowing behind us!

Until then, take care, look after each other and stay Up!

Love
Bridget & Harry xx



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