



Jake Goldwasser

NEW COMMISSION

Luddite

Jake Goldwasser is a poet, translator and cartoonist based in Iowa City of Literature. His writing has appeared in *The New England Review*, *Lit Hub*, *Grist*, and elsewhere. His mission is to make more people love poetry, and he gets to work towards that mission every day as a teacher of literature at the University of Iowa. He is interested in exploring how the wisdom of the past is relevant to issues of the present, like technology, climate change, and globalization. The practice of translation is central to that interest and to his writing. Jake translates from Dutch, and his translation of Judith Herzberg's *Landscape* was published by Circumference Books (2022). When he's not writing or reading, Jake is a cartoonist for *The New Yorker* and other publications.

In Spring 2022, Jake Goldwasser was appointed the first Virtual Writer in Residence at Chetham's Library by Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester UNESCO City of Literature for the second Festival of Libraries. As part of his residency, he was commissioned to create a new series of poems inspired by his research, reading and conversations with colleagues in Manchester.

Jake discussed his residency and *Luddite* in a special Instagram Q&A for Manchester Literature Festival with local writer and host Kate Feld on 9 December 2022.

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About Luddite

The big challenge of poetry is to capture the sensation of a moment for people who aren't there to experience it with you. As a virtual writer-in-residence at Chetham's Library, I had something of the opposite problem: I wasn't there to experience it with me either. I had to somehow engage with an institution from afar, equipped with the same tools we're all equipped with—photos, catalogues, and stories on the internet, as well as correspondence with Chetham's excellent librarians.

The idea of the virtual is at the core of poetry. A good poem can be a teleportation device. Nowadays, the word virtual conjures technology, with tools like video chat becoming a normal part of (virtually) everyone's existence. I used technology as a starting point to explore the history of Chetham's Library and Manchester, a city that was completely transformed by technology, and which transformed the world with its technologies in turn. The library's collection encodes this technological history, showing how complex new tools changed the path of human thought, from microscopes and new printing methods to the railroad. Throughout my residency, I tried to learn as much as I could about the social and political dynamics of industrialization. I use the history of a secret organization, the Luddites, as a case study in a bigger question: What is our relationship to machines?

Jake Goldwasser

No general but Ludd

Enter.

It stands billeted at the masthead of a stamp
the same year as the War of 1812.

That's the thicket. A press
circumscribed these words in soot
ink's negative, or stamped
as the librarian guesses, by potato.

(Two centuries to the year hence,
the scrapbooked entrance is printed
to the library website. Hello world.)

All caps, some bigger than others.
Visible grain, fresh from the paper mill.
On flax, or hemp, or cotton.
A sine wave, as if woven through the holes
of the fringe of the stamp, lithograph
of a loose wire, or, if eyes
are to be believed, a human hair.

Dance of Albion

Roadside in shale country I scarf
half a protein bar. I slept last night
with the dead. The pilgrim exhaust,
windshield imago, the open

pit mines, hell under highway. No more
prairies to slice a big sunlit
arrow in the logo of a freight truck
no creamsicle rocket ship ice lolly

of the sky. Just every middlesex village
skutched empty by chain or audiobook
or on to the next place. Primitive
man writ futile by flying shuttle.

Survey of English Dialects, 1950

What do you call that small,
four-legged, long-tailed creature
blackish on top that darts
around in ponds?

A slurry of pink and green and yellow dots
all about the isle.

(Rhotic Os, warts and all
on a country's amphibious torso.
Nymph stage, eft stage, terrestrial
adult. Celts excluded.)

The key unlocks samples
from Carlisle to Brighton:
ebbet, swift, askerd,
mewt, ask.

Median

You are on the vastest route.
You are an intersection
left right at a turn

where factory dandelions
outwit their provenance.
Where excess of ravish

voices its dilemma.
Wildflowers bursting on
the median. Mine, all mine,

piercing vein in bedrock.
A new song of songs.
Chorus of artery

stalwart, of stone song
with a handhold on an
edge and bleeding.

Reading the Riot Act

unlawfully assemble
to the disturbance

the public peace
being required

depart
 remain
or continue together

Reading Bamford's *The Life of a Radical*

Bridport for the high price of bread.

Bideford against the exportation of grain.

Bury to destroy machinery.

Ely, not without bloodshed.

Newcastle by colliers.

Glasgow with violence.

Preston by weavers.

Nottingham by Luddites.

Merthyr Tydvil for a wage reduction.

Birmingham by the unemployed.

Dundee for the high price of bread.

Turing Test

His occupation should not
dissuade or convince us.
In either case, his word
can be taken at face
or dismissed out of hand.

Comments on literature.
A truism of being alive
in a box. A perfectly
context-free grammar
ringing sound in our larynges.

Can it illuminate
a manuscript? Paint
the fore-edge of a volume?
Assume a pronoun
to be animate?

At a Museum

I ignored the cabinet of numanism and stuck to the fiats of physics. An air pump understood to manipulate nature itself brushed against a lightmill, a brass balloon, conductor spheres, a gyrosopic balance, and some kind of old stone whose water-sawed cross section looked like a Greek diner's terrazzo. I was charmed by the ichthyosaurus bones, how they thought it was some kind of crocodile before they learned it was more like a dolphin. This old stuff has always been at hand, on the mind, even at a time when poultry hung by bound feet from kitchen walls and painters scrambled to depict their eggs. In the oval room, I sauntered past specimens of quartz and feldspar to pyramid cabinets and enjoyed the faces of wooden models of crystals. One sign said "we call this process metamorphosis," though I can't recall which. Maybe it was about rocks. Maybe it was blurbs on Watt or Volta, or the electromagnets that looked like Calder mobiles holding glass vases. Or the Siberian lodestone with the armature, a found magnet. Or the hydraulic press, which can hammer soft materials, and also very hard ones.

Autocomplete

this reticulated auto mobile perpetual
motion vehicle powered by corn
laws scrivined into vision by the great
vowel shift key backspace button typewritten
contract ideologue's certain
death money back guaranteed tissue
paper bond paper carbon paper carbon
dating coal burning peppered moth pepper
mill carriage writing end of line bell ding
welding sweet mechanical clockwork joint
stock bell tower workaday blackmail
timecards a-carding cottonseed from cotton
flour mill chambered escapement and mainspring
well spring pavement and grave
debt prison for laggards late payments
wind up key sticking fruit jamming
the family put out and sent to Australia

garden path

the older i get the more appalled
i am by myself on a film
set with a bread knife opening
letters from childhood versions
of an effigy I was sold on by church
and state innocently this union
organized to make shift home in
on the spot carved in bench I have
become heretical to love again
and again in blaring sunlight held
candles to natural grottos
sought soot handprints
on cave walls sewn intricate
sequins to the roofs of my mouth
nothings for effect or event that seed
the acoustics of this room can be ever
perfect between you and me
there is no grail worth
owning if not to drink
burgundy from

Hooke's Micrographia

The compound eyes of a tabanid fly
stare back as if through the business
end of a telescope. Binoculars looking
at binoculars through binoculars
approximate the wax-wane cycle

of a spring. Having seen
firsthand the deformation of elastic
objects perhaps the wave theory of
light shaped my Wednesdays
and knowing how Jupiter behaves
compared to a louse or bee sting
helps me to dispute
the biblical age of Earth.
Should it not scare me?

Memory expanding and contracting?
Having sat with a grandfather and watched
his words condense to a
prime, then a subset, then a mere
list of selected anecdotes, I know

we do not have souls.
Nervous tissue, held under microscope.
Minute bodies made by
magnifying glass. I refuse
to be compared to a mayfly.

Luddite

Iron-mad, having heard ten thousand
clanks grow tenfold in a generation, the cart
city pulled frantic by horsepower, fed
bread through grated metal to friends,
I want to be commanded by the spirit
of something. Broken blood or vessel.
Smashed stocking frames. A ritual
gone berserk at its crazed visage
in silvered glass and the sign
to play enlightened havoc from
inside machines. To have seen engines
suck air and hammer diets into
ductile sheets. The febrile Irwell
labor by child exacting fiefdoms
from a present realer by the day. For all
the piddling, screaming heads of
presses, there are fingers caught
and severed, the Newcomen engine's
strings tied to levers and leveling the question
How many are allowed to be and who?
Strangers allied on an island we lift
ore from earth and argue over
how many seeds each anvil is allotted.

Eels

What survived
the Thames' trashing, plated with parsley liquor.

Bones like barbed wire
scrubbing the language from your throat.

Animal power

Scores of leggers. Is sieve to sift
as leg to lift? Or lay, or levy?
As in dam, death, or taxes. By dint of travel
I engine through on axles, announcing my arrival.
Peru, Illinois. A place I've never been.
A world where everyplace wants to be anyplace else,
where beasts of burden bellow in the Andes,
and llamas in the lake district live as holiday
pack-animals. I plod under sun-roof
sailing through sidecountry. A sheep of sorts
in sheep's clothing, or shill of the interstate
flying through, freight fallen
off a lorry's hind legs. The last bits of iced
coffee crunch between canines like grass.
I bray on backroad, burning fossil fuels and
feeling guilty. Fealty to an odd creature
I can't get to know. A kenning or leviathan
epithet or epiglottis with an unwavering flap.
For forager and farmer, a finch in the legs
moves muscle, makes hay, pull
over and shoulder an onus to drag
seed drill through soil for harvest.

Confession

Hay pitch.
Wrongly infected
chicken pecking
last meal from order.
Blood magenta
thorn flowers sleeping
for nobler ideals.
From the head of a ceramic
person, a cactus grows fractal
in beet-yellow greenhouse
of an in-law unit cracking the zoning code.

Small earth-patch approximating
original garden, apothecary
jealous at flowers for zeal,
do not let the blood of my ankles
please. I regret to have ignored the mouse
and her embryo in the jaws of a dog
heard old timber sigh volumes
in bridges over petty moats.
The gravity of toe music gets in deep.
Now that I feel the cold
of the peat bog's snowmelt on my dewclaws
I promise to fear you.

City life

Trash day. Clear
plastic bags full of unopened
books spoiled wavy by moisture.
Nicked one thick hardback. Took
turns with myself waving
through alleys to ice cream.
Glass in squares and triangles.
Bins for compost opened
and polluted. Small towns
soldered together at jagged
border lanes. At a razorwire
playground, dead baby
rats float sickly in poison sludge.