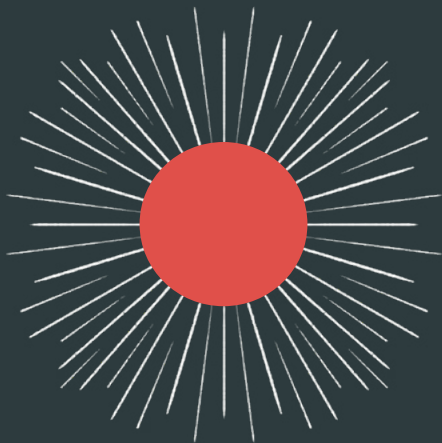


# HOPE TALES



Chapbook IV:  
Fire

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# Contributors

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**Andrew Simms** is an author, political economist and campaigner. He is co-director of the New Weather Institute, assistant director of Scientists for Global Responsibility, and a research associate at the University of Sussex. He co-authored the original Green New Deal, came up with Earth Overshoot Day and jointly proposed (with Peter Newell) the Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty.

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**Emma Kittle-Pey** loves writing vignettes and stories for performance and is about to submit a novel for her PhD at the University of Essex. She teaches at the university, at ACL Essex and a primary school, works for Essex Book Festival and is the founder of local writing community, Colchester WriteNight.

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## *The Plague Poets*

**Three friends - Andrew, Nicky and Nick - each wrote a poem a week in response to a suggested word or theme during the pandemic (and continue to do so).**

## Rituals of light, fire and coming darkness

by Nicky Saunter

The clocks have moved back, causing an unsettled feeling and an awareness of change. It is also no coincidence that this week is a time of ancient rituals of change, turning, fire and darkness.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of November marks the traditional Celtic pagan festival of Samhain (Sar-wen), the end of the harvest season and beginning of winter or «darker half» of the year. Samhain was a time of great gatherings and feasts, a liminal or threshold festival time when borders between this world and other more shady places became thin, and both people and spirits could pass between them. In ancient times, the great burial mounds of fallen leaders might be opened at Samhain, acting as portals to the Otherworld. Some Neolithic tombs on these islands are aligned with the sunrise at the time of Samhain. Was the pouring in of light as this time of growing darkness enough to wake the dead?



As the shorter nights of winter approached, Samhain perhaps gave people with much to fear from the winter a chance to push back the darkness with bonfires and even sacrifices. Cattle would be brought down from their summer pastures and livestock slaughtered to feed people through the winter. Special bonfires were lit, deemed to have protective and cleansing powers. Offerings of food and drink would be made to ensure both people and livestock survived the winter. It is not difficult to see how the commemoration of the infamous gunpowder plot to blow up the houses of parliament has stayed the course and become our modern bonfire night on November 5<sup>th</sup>. Were we drawn to the idea of fire and light, rebellion and change at this precise time of year, reliving ancient memories of how people on these islands faced the winter together?

At Samhain, when the space between this world and others became thin, the souls of dead kin were believed to revisit their homes seeking hospitality and warmth. A place would be set at the table for them to join their family in a meal. In the early modern era, Mumming (folk play acting, often done in disguise) became part of the festival, and people went door-to-door in costume reciting verses in exchange for food. It's no huge jump to see how people from the Celtic nations of Scotland, Ireland and Wales in particular took these traditions with them to America and they return to us now as modern day Halloween.



So if you are feeling jumpy, unsettled, aware of trials and tribulations to come, wary of the long winter ahead, then you are not alone. These are long-felt human sensations and what we are doing here tonight, gathering together to face the dark with fire and light and laughter, is part of the same communal history and a ritual with deep roots.

Uwe Derksen



four





# The Keeper of the Fire

Inside the sweat lodge, the people were lit by the glow of superheated stones. These had been gathered by children, a special task given only to them. The whisper of steam combined with seared lungs. It was fiercely hot, sweet was the smell of spruce boughs on the ground. Water was poured, more steam surged, the fire transformed each and every heart. Each time we crawled from the cave, the summer dusk had dimmed yet further. The outdoor fire crackled and leapt in brighter colour, replacement stones gathered heat. Even the shaman steamed and staggered. There were blackfly, and clouds of silence.

One of the Innu elders later said, three black bears were wandering around, there on the beach near the lodge, not so long ago.

"What do you think of that," he said?

No one knew. The dogs did not even bark. His son added he had been driving home yesterday from Goose Bay, and came upon an owl walking in circles on the road, bright in



the headlights. Animal behaviour is always instructive, but of what?

We waited on the buffeted beach for two days. The white caps did not look so bad, but Shushep said, we pause. Sometime after five o'clock, it was, the boat was crashing and juddering, smashing through water. Beneath the Mealy Mountains, the square tent was pitched, there on the foreshore strewn with trunks of trees. Shushep set a fire, cooked salmon and trout from the nets, put lichen on the fire to repel mosquitoes.

In the wide evening of that breezy summer, we walked along the coast of Lake Melville to find the graveyard, on a rise in the boreal forest. There was a carpet of white flowers, the tribal elders laid under wooden crosses.

One day, clouds sealed the sky, and torrential rain fell. The rusted stove glowed, beyond the canvas the world was cold and grey. All day, we lay on the spruce telling stories.

This trip would end with the four of us walking out of the forest into the village, grinning at the common place, kids on bikes, cars on blocks. We were at the end of a six-mile hike around the shore, weighed down by the baggage of life, by salt water and fish.

For we had tasted trauma.

We broke camp, packed the boat, the wind churning at the lake. We crabbed along the shore, the sky fell dark and then the storm struck. Shushep pointed to the far side, shouted, his words lost. The swell rose and now the open



boat was crashing into solid walls of water. We bailed, loosened laces. Water began to fill the boat. Not everyone could swim. All sense of a world beyond had gone again. There were waves, there was rain, there was water. And yet, without warning, the boat was suddenly skating into a wide marsh. There was a wooden cabin. We walked waist deep, pulling the boat, shivering wildly.

Within seconds, Shushep had brought fire and hope to this land. In that pelting rain, gradually clothes began to steam. We grinned. This was a good place to be. We would have to walk. The black bears, someone later said. The owl too.



by Jules Pretty



# How tourism can save Mayan tribes of Mexico

*"Carrying Halloween fire in their eyes,  
The tribe hunted in the wild.  
Pushed out of their ancestral lands,  
Wandering for a meagre bread.  
Reaping the fruits of chaotic development  
that others sowed,  
Like the phoenix, resurrected from ashes,  
they glowed."*

I visited a town Tulum in the Yucatan Peninsula of Southeast Mexico. Known as the Mayan city, it was originally inhabited by the Yucatec Mayan tribe.

Yucatan harbours 7,300 wild species, attracting tourists who make Tulum their base. However, Tulum's internet image of tribals as hunters is often intended to bait the tourists. Instead, yoga retreats and eco-chic resorts are spread throughout the town, lacking any traditional tribe or ethnic Mayan culture.





by Eva Badola

I observed a graffiti of a Mayan woman with a dolphin, symbolizing harmony, and animal worship. Ironically, it was adjacent to a giant Dolphin aquarium where animals were used for tourist entertainment.

As eco-tourism transformed into elitism, tourist activities evolved into luxurious cruises, opulent yachts, and private jets heading to untouched beaches and forests. Meanwhile, the town with a carrying capacity of 7,000 people was hosting 2 million visitors annually.

With a Mayan guide, I snorkelled with the endangered Green Sea turtles – their rain god. He gruded how real estate was snatching their ancestral lands, forcing them to migrate to tourist towns and dooming them to low-paying jobs.

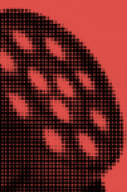
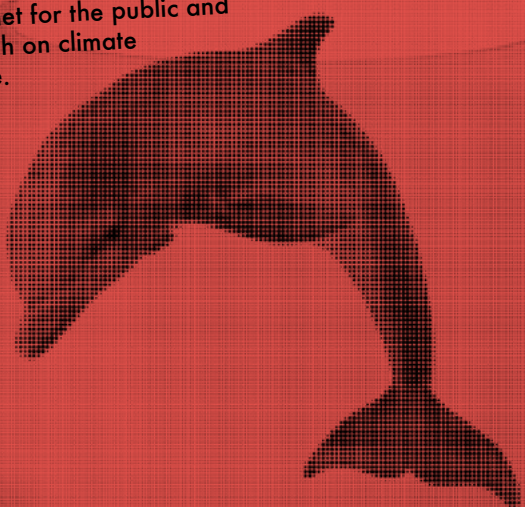




Additionally, turtles have dropped their immunity and developed tumours from tourism stresses. Facing developmental threats, seven of the world's eight sea turtle species found in Mexican water are endangered.

Ritually, only a few Yucatec Maya still hunt. However, they regulate the animal population by permitting the hunting of only 13 deer per rifle.

My experience taught me that tribal tourism is beyond wildlife safari or tribal dance but boosting the local economy and conservation actions. For instance, tourists can upload photographs to the net for the public and research on climate change.



# Fire

I'm here to keep my fire alive.  
Not to be flattened by plasma,  
Not to be numbed by the dumb din of TV,  
Not to be flattened by smart screens,  
I'm here to believe –  
Believe in change in a changing world,  
Believe in flames in a burning world,  
I have to have a go.  
I have to have my hope.

Thora Valley, Eastern Australia, 2019. I watched the flames jump over the mountain range and engulf the entire hillside to my south and west. I was camping with my love and my best friend. I saw their beautiful figures against the glowing, burning mountain, and I thought: these are my apocalypse buddies.

We are all apocalypse buddies. Incarnated in inferno, where do we go?

Do we run away? Pack ourselves into bigger cities, sheltered by ever thicker walls of concrete, with carbon-sucking machines and metaverse screens to approximate the feeling of being alive? Do we put up wind turbines – by some estimates, 3.7 million more of them – and carry out another mega-industrial project? I'm sorry, but that vision is not my “green transition”. My soul says no. My mental health says no.


We all sit together in that ashy field. Should we run towards the land?

In Australia, after the Black Summer bushfires of 2019, there was a great renaissance of interest in indigenous “cultural burning” – a practice of intimate knowledge of place with many hands on the land, many eyes per acre.

I believe that's the kind of response we need. Many hands on the land repairing our damaged ecosystems, caring for ecology, taking our lead from the patterns of nature. That's a vision I can commit myself to, because I don't want to watch the world burn on TV.







This year, I came to the UK to be part of the Planet Local Summit, a global gathering of people who believe in new, local, land-based economies. Economies that allow us to become agents of healing for nature, “ecological protagonists” – and wholer, happier, healthier people too.

In a burning world, can we sustain a flame for systemic change? Let's see.

We gather at events like these.

We gather to keep our flames aglow,

Even though we may never know.

A future depends on the seeds we sow.

Not to be numbed by TV,

Not to be flattened by smart screens

We feed our flames with events like these

Hope Tales and time to dream between

If we can step in together,

Strangers, friends, and feed our belief

Nourish the glowing hearth of a growing movement,

If we can sit in circle together,

Then we have won.

**by Henry Coleman**



# ÆLDER-WISE

Elder booms from knotted hedgerow  
flings flowers like comet tails  
in love with themselves  
at the lengthening day

A backlash of bramble hides  
hummingbird and warbler, locks  
berries, their wine and cordial  
away like in a miser's cabinet

This fruit saved for fearless  
deer, elk, sheep, is paint for pigeons  
decorating the path, ripe stain  
that drips like a summer afternoon

Dead hollow stems though, it holds  
for us, gave our elders to blow fires  
to life in wintertime, send sparks  
like flowers into berry-black night

(\*Æld is old Saxon for fire and, Eld, the same word in modern Swedish. Elder, the plant, is thought to have been named because its hollow stems were commonly used for fire making)



## THE AUTUMN OF SOULS

It's not all bad  
the autumn of souls  
to kick through piles  
of fallen memories  
colours drained  
shape remaining

There is fruit, love  
grown over decades  
fallen, bruised, but filling palms  
morning mist, chill breath  
on tracks retraced


Shorter days, the kind embrace  
of dusk, darkness welcome  
hiding all your weariness  
letting cares fall

No, the autumn of souls  
told in huddled fireside tales  
is woodsmoke on clothes  
your lived-in face that glows



# FIREWORKS

Upright you stood  
tightly wrapped  
something made me  
stand well back



Coat cold as cardboard  
fire in the eyes  
secrets densely packed  
the quiet ones surprise

Indoors for so long  
late Autumn let out  
rooted in wet grass  
your toes rose to shout  
Time rained, I waited  
if looks could smoke  
your fuse was short  
we were broke

By luminous moonlight  
you read my admission  
I wrote on blue paper  
flared with sedition

I knew when you smiled  
and it burned to a smirk  
whatever came next  
there'd be fireworks

## Fire Poems by Andrew Simms



The air was like a Friday night  
hot hormonal looks, taught  
about to kick, a spark was  
all it took before flames caught

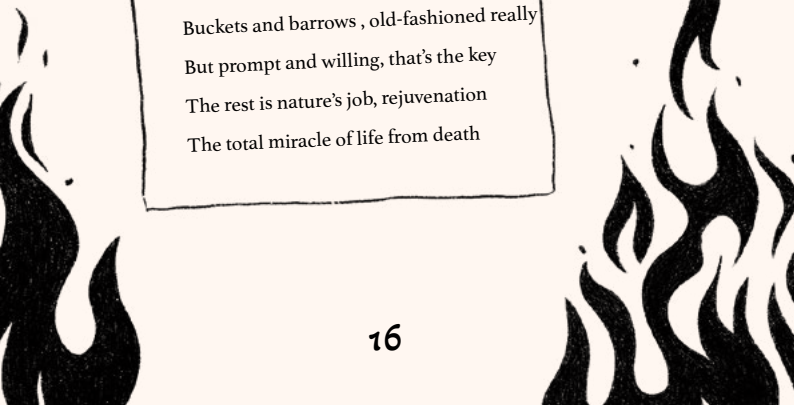
Then we were fire weather too  
raging at the indifference of age  
sweeping through deadwood generations  
demanding to write the next page

# Fire Poems



## Fields on fire

One cigarette butt from a hairless lip  
Is all it took to torch the hay  
Strewn with care round tender trees  
Searching still for sap root safety  
(Aren't we all?)  
But even as the cinders sparked skyward  
Supporters poured in a soothing flood  
To extinguish the pain, splash laughter  
on flames  
Buckets and barrows , old-fashioned really  
But prompt and willing, that's the key  
The rest is nature's job, rejuvenation  
The total miracle of life from death



## Fireworks

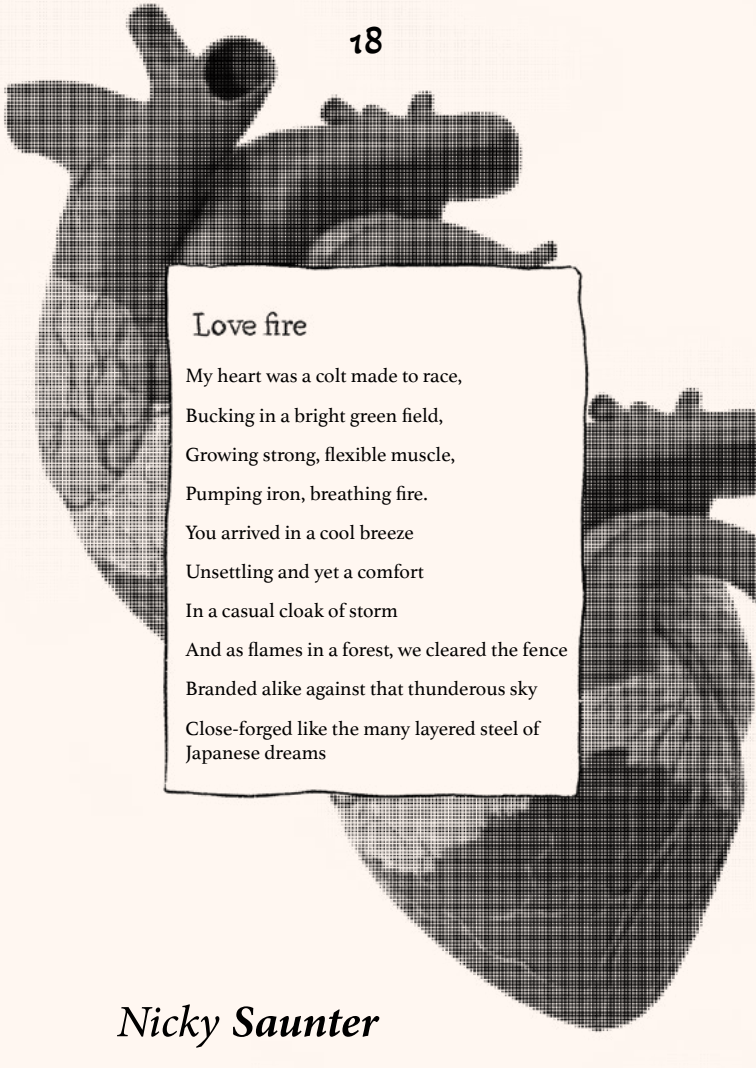
In my pocket a hot potato  
 Crispy edged but soft like a creature  
 Hunkered in my woolly hand  
 Against the chill of November  
 Boys shout and race after parachutes  
 Floating umbrellas of silent ash  
 Everyone is orange in the glow  
 Red hot fronts, freezing backs  
 Silhouettes hide familiar faces  
 I am a witch with my face to the fire  
 The guy burns on high, tilting and ghostly  
 The last moments of pagan power  
 Stars glitter overhead  
 The real fireworks  
 On bonfire night



## Puppets

Folded comfortably in the warm dust  
 The audience waits, chats, settles  
 Sharing quiet jokes behind slender hands  
 The crack of seeds, snacks shared  
 They have all the time in the world  
 For there is no rushing a tale of gods  
 And the musicians have barely begun  
 Their four day feast of sound  
 Guns and bells in ancient scales  
 Rhythms from the forest floor  
 Taking form on the shadow sheet  
 As the Prince himself manifests  
 In a clash of symbol glory fire  
 Darting sideways in haughty power  
 To cries of awe and of recognition  
 Welcome to the long night of puppets





## Love fire

My heart was a colt made to race,  
Bucking in a bright green field,  
Growing strong, flexible muscle,  
Pumping iron, breathing fire.  
You arrived in a cool breeze  
Unsettling and yet a comfort  
In a casual cloak of storm  
And as flames in a forest, we cleared the fence  
Branded alike against that thunderous sky  
Close-forged like the many layered steel of  
Japanese dreams

*Nicky Saunter*

# New Shoes

There was a dump of weird rubbish again at the far corner of the field. Already a burnt out white mound, but still smouldering, smoke coiling gently in parts. Michael couldn't resist picking up a stick and running towards it, trampling the hard stems of the chopped wheat as he ran. She remembers wanting his trainers. She'd glanced at the windows of the tin shack, alone on the edge of the housing estate, sitting between the path that led to their cul-de-sac and the farm to the east.

By the time she'd caught up, he was bashing the side of the pile, beating a pale ash storm.

Standing on the edge, she'd been careful, thoughtful, about the new shoes. She'd watched as



the singed pages of a book carcass  
lifted, floated and fluttered around  
them in flakes. He'd picked up the  
strap of a grey lace bra with his  
stick and flicked it onto the peak.  
She'd wondered who they belonged  
to. A shadow moved across one of  
the small windows.

It was then she'd seen the glimpses  
of orange, the fire eyeing them from  
inside, from the core of the mound.  
She'd stepped back, her shoes were  
covered with a fine white coat like  
the sherbet she was used to at home.  
Underneath they were beginning to  
melt, a thin plastic tide retreating  
from the heat before she had.

She remembers moving away fast  
to protect them, and her toes.  
She'd shouted to him, Stop - Look,  
Michael!



# by Emma Kittle-Pey

But he hadn't listened, or if he had he couldn't resist another couple of whacks, each more powerful than the last. The ash clouds bellowed up into the clay-blue sky, a flash of sun as the window creaked, and he was rolling around the ground on his back, holding his left cheek where the dump had spat and hit him in the face. She'd forgotten about her shoes then and run as fast as she could to the gate of the shack. But the door was already opening. The man they'd whispered about for so long, with his big hair and bushy beard, small bare chest and green army trousers, was pulling out a bucket of water and a packet of lard.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHAPBOOKS

Chapbooks first emerged in the 1600s, and grew in popularity the 1700s and 1800s to become widespread forms of urban and rural street literature. A chapbook was small, typically short in length, published on flimsy paper, and illustrated with woodcuts and drawings. Chapbooks covered a wide range of material: from fairy stories and folk tales to heroic journeys, from ghost stories to songs and ballads, from fortune telling to political manifestos, from almanac to religious tract, from news of crime and disaster to dreams of hope.

Chapbooks were sold by shopkeepers and booksellers, but achieved great popularity through itinerant vendors and peddlers. These men and women came to be known as chapmen, who also carried to rural villages other items for trade: bootlaces, ribbons, needles, seeds and spice, gloves and fans. The term “chap” originates from the Old English *cēap*, meaning to barter or exchange. In France, chapbooks were known as blue books (*bibliothèque bleu*), and in Germany as people’s books (*Volksbuch*). “Chapman” became a common surname.

Many well-known fairy tales were first published in chapbooks: Jack and the Beanstalk, Jack the Giant Killer, Cinderella, Bluebeard, Little Red Riding Hood. Samuel Pepys collected and published chapbooks; John Clare heard chapbook tales as a child; and Robert Louis Stevenson and Charles Dickens both used the form. Traditional folk songs and ballads were recorded in chapbooks, and chapbook tales and poetry was read aloud in pubs and salons. It is said that tens of millions of chapbooks were sold annually on the streets by the mid-19th century.

Chapbooks are for sharing, passing on and discussing.  
Please leave a comment on this page and pass it on to  
someone you think will enjoy it.

## **A Rapid Transition Alliance Chapbook**

in partnership with the Centre for Public and Policy Engagement,  
University of Essex

**[rapidtransition.org](https://rapidtransition.org)**

**[essex.ac.uk/centres-and-institutes/public-and-policy-engagement](https://essex.ac.uk/centres-and-institutes/public-and-policy-engagement)**

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