



**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.

[www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk](http://www.manchesterliteraturefestival.co.uk)

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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.