

Tourists

by Rachel J. Fenton

I went back to the church
where we married, Saint Matthew's
in the City; the one where
someone left graffiti on the billboard
over: *God's a hard*
act to follow; the one that made the news
(world headlines) but we
chose it for the white sun streaming in
through those high
coloured slots like filtered spotlights
at a disco, and I sat
on a pew at the back and cried and tried
to remember why we
decided not to get hitched outside.

A couple of tourists
came in, I could tell by their clean
boots and backpacks
they'd just got off the plane, I entertain
the idea they thought
I was praying which was true in a way
and they smiled
sympathetically. You must understand
it seemed real at the time,
though I know now I was dreaming
else pretending to
with you at my side and I wonder,
with so many quakes,
why they built a church with a spire;

how it stays up.
I think of its shape as an angular spiral
like the crooked one
at Chesterfield I saw in passing on a train
as architectural DNA
or a tornado pulling God out of the sky,
and all that hidden space

inside; caves like those
underwater formed by chemical
corrosion of streams
I imagine in dreams I'm swimming down,
only there's never any room
for turning at the end, but a few people
have passed through
and taken pictures, samples, there
is no art work as such,
save the structure, no rudimentary
painting, pigment smeared
by hand, and some appear in fiction
(strictly literary texts),
Ondaatje's English Patient's one example
of several lying on the bed.
I'd like to know how to turn, I have the urge
to ask you. I can't see
your face in the dark. It's featureless.

Can we talk about this?
You're not asleep are you? I'm inspired
but it's late, the curtains,
white as icing, show the first signs;
one more night over. In
another hour the sun will take a slice
but, for now, it stutters
and as I wait for it to rise I consider travel;

going back to study,
to learn speleology, but I know you're just tired.

