

# What Yet May Be

✘ When Michael Faraday was demonstrating the newly-discovered effects of electromagnetic induction, one of his audience voiced his concerns. This business of magnets and copper wire was interesting, certainly, but what possible practical use could it have?

'Sir,' Faraday replied, 'of what use is a new-born baby?'

It seems like a story for a more optimistic time than ours. Now all the sci-fi dreams of the last century are the sole property of megalomaniac billionaires, they do not seem so inviting. We can no longer mock former ages for their ignorance and superstition when folly in all its forms seems all around.

The world we once knew, whether or not we thought of it as ours, is gone beyond recall, and what will replace it is still unclear. Small wonder, then, that many of the responses to the theme of *Small Beginnings* echo a sense of regret and loss. All My Friends Are Dead and Aftermath speak of ghosts that still demand attention – The Empty Cradle of a ghost that never was. Other ghosts are simply there for those who have eyes to see, as in Under Tattenweir Bridge, or are kindly ghosts that may be honoured, as in Wedding Present.

Yet there is, as is suitable for this time of year, a progression from darkness to light, and as Darkness considered reminds us, even night can work benign magic. Consolation may come through the innocence of Play or Werifesteria. Could Van Gogh ever have imagined his work would immerse Carlisle Road Methodist Church? You do not even need to be human to appreciate the effect of Small Things brought Together.

Hence the symbolism of the dragon's egg: each small beginning has the potential to bring something new into the world, something that may turn out to be monstrous or magical, but demands to be seen.

To paraphrase Faraday's questioner: what possible practical use is Art? As someone who will never bear a child herself, I can answer with Faraday – whatever we may conceive is as useless as any other new-born child. But it is surely right, if we can, to give them a chance to grow, to become become better than they seemed at first. How might they do that? We cannot tell. They are our children, not our property.

**Jenny Brien**

**Image:** *Hatchling* by Eran Fowler