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POETRY | SPRING 2016

## There is a Dreadful Hell Within Me

By Wendy French

*There is a dreadful hell within me*

Ivor Gurney

or so she thinks as she drives to the unit  
escaping the perils of night terrors  
and the aftertaste of fear.

*But it's nothing*, she continues in her head  
as she winds her way round the one way system  
and thinks about the old woman dying

who believes her family have abandoned her  
when they visit every day after long journeys  
and work. *It's nothing*, she thinks, compared

to the man with OCD who's afraid to go out  
knowing he'll contaminate others after  
he's washed his hands fifty times.

Stopped by a red light she measures up the day  
until it turns green and she can go. Go?  
She ponders the etymology of 'go'.

Passes Camberwell Green, the Marie Curie field  
and turns in at the Maudsley. She nods to patients  
who huddle in thin cotton clothes, muttering,

and the day moves on as she tries to understand.  
That hell within Gurney exists here  
in the very walls, the interactions, the staff,

the patients, the distant notes from the piano, repeated  
over the years, and the ones he once composed.  
The singing from the chapel choir.

And all those years back all he wanted was freedom  
to walk the hills of Gloucestershire,  
madness let loose from the old brick walls.

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Wendy French has two chapbooks and three collections of poetry published, *Splintering the Dark* (Rockingham, 2005), *surely you know this* (Tall Lighthouse, 2009) and *Thinks Itself A Hawk*, (Hippocrates, 2016). She collaborated with Jane Kirwan on *Born in the NHS* (Hippocrates, 2013). French, who won the Hippocrates Poetry and Medicine prize for the NHS section in 2010, was awarded second prize in 2011 and has worked for the past twenty years in healthcare settings helping people come to terms with their situations through poetry. She was Poet in Residence at the UCH Macmillan Centre from April 2015-2016.

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