

Peter Mitchell: Nothing Lasts Forever

1. Scarecrow 28

This colour photograph, measuring 40x40 inches, shows a scarecrow in a field of ripe wheat on a grey, foggy day. It's taken from a low angle and the horizon is a little above halfway up the image. The field of grain is a warm, textured gold with individual ears of wheat out of focus in the foreground, and stalks shooting up at every angle. A few metres back from the photographer, and central in the image, a scarecrow faces us.

The scarecrow wears a long brown, dark plaid coat, buttoned up and tied at the waist with baler twine. The underlying structure is a cross of wooden timbers, a horizontal plank forming the wide square shoulders – too big for the coat, the empty sleeves hanging down unevenly, the fabric rucked up at the front. A tube of white card, held in place by wide strips of yellowed tape, forms the head – the peeling texture and stripe of yellow providing a distant echo of a face. On top, there's an old brown sunhat with a floppy brim. This scarecrow evokes an elderly farmer, tall with broad shoulders, but now gaunt, a little crooked, unable to button his coat up properly.

Behind the scarecrow, at the distant field boundary, there are two trees, framing him. They are different species, the one on the left a more rounded, spreading shape, the one on the right a little taller with more vertical branches. Although there are leaves on the branches, the grey light makes the trees appear as sepia brown silhouettes, as do the hedges to the right and the very distant trees beyond, on the horizon, shadows in the fog.

There's a sense of kinship between the two trees and the scarecrow – the photograph makes them almost the same height and colour – but the golden yellow stripe on the scarecrow's head, and the wispy ends of the twine around his waist, also connect him to the wheat. He – *should we say he? Projecting so much on an empty coat?* – stands alone in the middle of the field, but with watchful ancestors flanking him, between the harvest and the fog, between agriculture and forest, between human and non-human nature...