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ERATO'S MAGAZINE



"What Happens To Literature"

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
EUPHORION

”

PREFACE



December 2022
Utrecht, Netherlands

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the very first edition of Erato's Literary Magazine, brought to you by students of the BA Literary Studies at Utrecht University. If you are reading this, it means our project is starting to take shape: it took a great deal of work, so we hope you enjoy it.

The theme for this first edition is 'Muses': anything that gets you inspired, that you long and hope for, a muse that brings the inspiration to you. It could be anything. Our writers took great care to follow the theme - and the result was brilliant!

This theme was inspired by the name of our magazine: Erato was one of the Greek-inspiring muses, who were goddesses of literature, science and the arts. We decided to name the magazine under this muse in order to not lose our focus, always one invocation away from writing great literature!

This magazine is not ours, nor yours: it is a space for encounters. A space shaped and propelled to continue on the formidable task of writing, inspiring and learning. This literary magazine does not aim for academic recognition, it is a place for the innocents, those of you who would like to experience the encounter. Like a waltz, or a dialogue during an extensive dinner, this magazine serves as a space for exchange. We do not make exceptions, we must embrace the beauty of this dialogue. This magazine was born before I was even born, before Euphorion was created and before our studies began. It has been there, in latent form, waiting to be pushed out into the world. And here we are, thankful.

None of this would have been possible without a fantastic committee, part of the study association Euphorion.

I am incredibly proud of this team, who since day one has shown enthusiasm and effectiveness, love and passion and - most importantly- loyalty and compromise to the project. My dearest first magazine committee, of whom I have the privilege to be part of, this is your work finally seeing the light of the day. I would also like to show my gratitude to SV Euphorion, who granted us the platform to begin with this very ambitious project, allowing me to step aside from regular training. They warned me about the amount of work this would be, but they never let me down in the worst moments of stress and intensity. Only thankful for these hard-working teams, who show vivid emotions and deep commitment to their causes.

Here we are, in winter, about to show you the result of almost four months of long meetings, collaborations and re-readings. From the Erato's Magazine team we would like to thank you, dear writers, for submitting precious works.

This is why the magazine is a space for encounters that can take any geometrical form. We will always hold a special place in this magazine for first edition writers: art is a world of collaborations and exchanges.

To you, dear reader, we would like to thank you for taking the time to enjoy something different. All suggestions, comments, critiques or compliments shall be welcome. You can mail, email or contact us in any way you wish for, because we appreciate your input and comments.

We are about to face a very cold winter, and so we hope this initiative warms you - and your heart - up. Sincere thankfulness and appreciation.

Much love,

Amapola Alonso

Editor-in-Chief of Erato's Magazine

Chair of SV Euphorion.

Keep an eye out for the next edition: Distance!

Brought to you by Euphorion

ERATO'S MAGAZINE

THIS EDITON

Dear writer,
We are Erato's Magazine, the BA Literary Studies Magazine. We're on the hunt for submissions for this edition: Distance.

We're looking for:

- Poetry
- Fiction
- Art and Book Reviews
- (Non) Academic Articles
- Opinion Pieces

Please see below for the place of submission!

Alongside the lovely submissions and columns, the April 2023 edition of Erato's Magazine will include a "Travel Diary" showcasing the annual Euphorion trip, which is in Vienna, Austria this year. Stay tuned for pictures, stories and great memories of our travels!

"DISTANCE"



The theme for this edition is "Distance". This could mean distance between people or lack thereof, proxemic distance, emotional distance, traveling whatever you can think of!

Please add a short summary (max 200 words) to your piece stating things such as what your inspiration was, how your work complies with the theme or any other information you as the writer would want the reader to know about your work.



SUBMISSIONS

Submissions can be emailed to erato.submissionsmagazine@gmail.com by April 25th 2023!

For any further questions, please contact the email address.

Please observe the guidelines from the QR code provided



POETRY



HAUNT MY LINES by Anna Cariatì

now I wonder for how long I'll write about you
a day, a month, a year
will you haunt my lines, poem after poem?
will you hide between consonants, and befriend my
rhymes?
or will you disappear into the sun of a couple verses?

Brief Authorial Information:

This poem is about feeling like one has lost control over what inspires their writing. I wrote a few poems about an event that affected me deeply, and as I went forward with my life and moved on from that trauma I wondered if the remains of it would still show through my art. I compared that feeling to the one of being haunted, and in this case the entity that is doing the haunting is the muse.



False muse by Jess Molenaar

The false muse echoes in the agony
The projection of what I desire you to be
What I long for has solely been kept in suspense
Needing that substance to make any sense
You need her, whilst I, need you indited
I will leave with you, even if you're affrighted
For I see the man, who cannot regress
My true words cannot hide, it leaves you in stress
Breath high in my chest, no way to unwind
Alone with my thoughts, only you that I find
Devoted on my knees in plain misery
Chained to a future, not meant for me
I suffer like there's nothing better than that
In the back of your mind, an empty threat
My translucent reality, laughable
And my longing, I know to be fallible
Putting you into words, acting like a child
Everything pure, I now have defiled
When thoughts of you become too real
It's my false muse that tells me to kneel

Brief Authorial Information:

When I am uninspired, not infatuated with either a concept, a place or a person, I become lethargic. Always looking for something to inspire me, I become entrapped in what I call a “false muse”



Wither by Gem

This love, I've longed for:

Every word of our story written in dripping sweet
honey, the bees cheering for our loving gazes at each
other.

My muse.

My love.

My everything.

Will you bloom for me?

Fiore, maybe I can find a home in you.

Maybe I can find myself in you, whoever that is:

For loving you is all I've known-

who am I without how deeply I have fallen in love with
you?

İlan-ı aşk, maybe you'll finally see that every song is
about you and every poem sings your name,

İlan-ı aşk, how have you been so sane?

Without you I have been lost, nothing
without your gentle hand on my waist guiding every
step I take.

How have you been the same-

as the last time that I saw you, battered and bruised?

How did you go from

loving me to loving her, with everything you have?

My muse

My love

My everything

-is falling apart in my hands, to the fingertips of a girl
whose smile is not crooked, whose eyes are ablaze with
sparks and whose lips you love to kiss.

You've killed all the bees, fiore, my muse, my love.



From writing you lovestruck lyrics to heartbroken
epics over days, months, weeks-
It's been a while hasn't it?
Our story has long flipped past the last page.
Fiore-
my muse, my love, my nothing.

Brief Authorial Information:

Some things to keep in mind while reading this piece:
“Fiore” means ‘flower’ in Italian
“ilan-ı aşk” means ‘declaration of love’ in Turkish
When writing this piece, I thought about what has
been a muse to me in the past couple of months,
which was a particular sad little love I experienced.
The frustration of still thinking and writing about
something that is over was a present theme in my
mind as I was writing.

FICTION



Haunting Beauty by Beloslava Stanoeva

New York City was unusually quiet. It was 5:23 am. There were only a few people left on the streets, probably drunk or drugged. In any case, extremely intoxicated, trying to get home after a wild night. Other than that, the city was quiet - no traffic, only a few people. No noise pollution at all. There were even birds chirping in the parks. The sun was slowly showing up, coming through the big windows, and spreading its light rays into the room. The only other awake person in the city was, not surprisingly, Reverie's girlfriend - Laura Capri Pellegrino, who was gathering her bags, about to leave once again. She stared at Reverie, drinking in her image, her gracious body soaked up in the sunlight, caressing her skin so gently. If I didn't know better, I would have said that Capri wasn't bothered by leaving.

If I did, I would have lied. Instead, her heart was shattering, her smile and soft expression were drenched in nostalgia. She hated leaving as much as Reverie did. But it had to be done, even if she wished she could pause life and stay caught up in this single moment of serenity. Capri had to go back to L.A., work was waiting for her. So, she ran her fingers gently through Reverie's hair, smiling ever so lightly. She kissed her naked shoulder then her forehead. Then, grabbing her bags and leaving as quietly as possible, not looking back even for a moment. She knew if she did, she would break even more. The only thing that kept her going was the thought that time would pass by quickly and she would see her again.



The love of her life, her Muse to whom she'd call for inspiration (just like Homer had once done). And oh – just the mere thought of her writing songs about her, dedicating them to her. Not surprisingly at all, the songs, similar to their relationship, were full of nostalgia, of ecstasy, of haunting beauty - a perfect depiction of a drug you're bound to never quit. But, I suppose, that is what love does to one - in its sadness and blue beauty, the warmth and heartbreak it provides is the greatest Muse of all.

Brief Authorial Information:

What was your inspiration for writing this?

I was browsing through my older pieces such as poems, short stories, etc. when I noticed a pattern in most of them. It got me thinking that what inspires me to write, the moments when creativity hits me like a tsunami, is love and heartbreak. I suppose it is because we have put love on a pedestal, we have made it a vast and consistent part of our lives. In a way, love shapes us. Thus, I presume, all my pieces are inspired by a love of any kind, of any form, not unlike many other artists. In the end, love is a driving force, one of many.

What do you want your readers to keep in mind when reading it?

I don't want whoever reads this to keep anything in mind. Let them read it and interpret it however they like, take those pieces that appeal to them and relate them to their experiences. I want them to experience it the exact way that will make them feel, it doesn't matter what. I'd like them to do whatever they desire with it.



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Winter Fog by Faustus

First things first, content warning for this piece with relation to death, suicide and depression. If discussion or mention of these kinds of things are sensitive matters to you there is no shame in protecting yourself and not reading them.

The fog that hung in the air was of the kind you only get in in good winters. The kind that's nearly frozen in the air and leaves you isolated from the rest of existence in your tiny circle of visibility. Frost clung to the grass and the empty branches of trees and bushes, giving an almost otherworldly feeling to the world around me.

I don't know why I decided to start this morning walk, leaving the warm comforts of the bed and a lover's arms for the cold embrace of winter's airs. I don't know how long I've been walking for, though judging by the light it must at least have been quite some time. I shiver at the touch of a slight breeze, coming and going quickly as if it knows it's presence is unwelcome here, a disturbance in the still and frozen air. I sigh and let my thoughts wander until I didn't even see what bits of scenery remained within my line of sight. My entire consciousness gets swallowed by fleeting thoughts, visions of memories long since past, the white noise that fills the back of your head when there is something you want to think about but can't quite reach.



The snapping of twigs and crunching of frosty grass and leaves brings me back to the cold reality; I've reached the end of the paved paths in the forest. I don't know how long I've been walking but it's quite bright out, far more so than during my last true thought, and the quiet darkness that welcomed me when I left feels like years ago. I decide to go on until the next landmark I recognise, which shouldn't be too far off from where I am now. The soft crunch and occasional snap below my feet keep the silence away, and while I regret not being able to drift away into my thoughts again it feels safe and comforting as well; like a vast emptiness that, while not filled, is at least less intimidating and all-encompassing than it once was.

I lose the path in the fog, I see so little around me I barely notice until there is a barren bramble in my way. I curse, with the visibility as low as it is it's going to be hell to find my way back, I don't even know how far or in what direction I wandered off the trail. I take a moment to see if I can find my tracks, but there isn't enough frost on the ground to make visible footprints. Deciding moving is better than standing still, I turn my back to the brambles and start walking, digging my hands deep into my pockets. When was the last time I felt my fingers? Before I turned into the forest, after? I don't know nor care anymore, any such concerns replaced by the longing for the warmth I left behind.



While I try to find my way back to the path the outline of a figure slowly becomes clear through the fog in the distance. Despite something feeling off about it I breathe a sigh of relief, another person means that the path is close, or at least they would know where the path is. As I get closer to them my thoughts begin to protest, the eerie feeling I had strengthening into a revulsion and fear of what might await me, but I keep forcing one foot ahead of the other.

When the figure becomes clear to see I realise what the problem was. They weren't standing on the ground but rather hanging from a thick branch of a tree: judging by the rime coating their clothing they had been for a while even. I panic, my mind racing as I try to figure out what to do. I left my phone at home wanting to have a walk without any distractions. I still don't know how long of a walk it is to the path, nor long of a walk to my, or any, house.

Then, looking at the body again in some morbid curiosity it hits me. This isn't just the body of someone I found hanging in the woods. It is my own.

Realising that causes a chill to pass over me, freezing me to the bone. My hands still deep in my pockets grow painfully numb and hard to move. I try to call out for help but my voice chokes in my throat, all the while the fog grows denser, locking me on a small and tiny island of reality with my own corpse. I run, frantically trying to get away from the grim visage but always seem to come back to myself as my every step grows heavier and slower. As I'm about to collapse I



can feel a hand being laid on my shoulder while a voice that weighs heavy in the air like a gravestone speaks to me. While I can't hear what it says, it comforts me. The fog closes around me, obscuring the tree and body from view as my breathing slows and eventually stops, falling away into the white silence.

Brief Authorial Infromation:

As for the matter of what inspired me to write this story? I could tell some magical tale of an early morning walk with my then partner through a heavily fogged and snowy park, and there would be some truth in there, but I could also give a more honest answer. This story was written after I drank about 2 litres of coffee around midnight and as an attempt to channel a depressive episode into something creative and I would like to think that I succeeded quite nicely there.



The Schtrek by Javid Donas

1

Puny mortal! Hear ye; hear ye now— and listen! For I can tell when you don't listen— to my most relishéd tale of man's suffering. It's like, hilarious.

A human— the human— my human, lay dormant as destiny until the day of its departure. The day of man's reckoning— humankind's reckoning. The beginning of the end, to put it kitschly.

As all action, this human's action began with a thought implanted by me, in its soul. A thought, that upon this human's formulation thunk as follows: 'Jesus fuck I'm so tired of this shit.'

What followed was, in a funny way, the following tale of human suffering— a parable, if you will— if you can— you may try— Dearest diarrhea,

Jesus fuck I'm so tired of this shit. Sorry... posterity. This is for you, honey babe: the finale of the human race (towards ² extinction). It's Jason, by the way. Like Jason and the Argonauts. Ironic, although I'm not sure what irony is. I'll be honest about as much, posterity. You wanna know why? I don't believe in you. It's ironic, I guess, that I'm writing this ~~for you~~. It's only I who I'm obligated to.

I'm literally the last person on Earth, as far as I know. I should be. I better be. It's ~~summer-twenty-ah~~ who gives a shit— who? And really that's really when it ended that's when I stopped writing and got going because, the thought was— (burp)— nobody is gonna wanna

hear this, not before it really happened at least and now look at you— you're here, hearing this before it actually happened— okay, let's make haste, that's what I thought, and that's when I got off my chair, very minimal, really— wooden, if you must know — I'm not much for detail, but it was all wooden and I do like wood and that's good because there wasn't much else— well, there was but I grew out of it (out of the scraps, handed down to me by my siblings, I guess you could call them, in a way— the ones that deserted me), but we were never a happy family— the global family— like all families, but what did they expect? bringing together millions of families, most of which were probably bad given everyone had a brain malfunction and social anxiety.

I don't remember much of my personal animal family but they were good enough I suppose, thankfully I don't have—to— didn't have to worry much about that anymore. I'm happy they left me— I was,
and still am... (sniffle)... still am.

3

I always wanted to be a carpenter so that was a very useful want

if I wanted to make life more personalized which is all that I wanted, really. Like my father and my grandfathers before me, I built myself a house. I'm very minimal-like so all I needed was a roof-over and some wall for comfort— for my claustrophilia's I like to call it. The smaller and simpler an enclosed space, the less I have to strain to contain myself. So I built myself a quaint little cabin on the beach— always wanted to live by the beach— the new beach, by the new sea where somebody never lived— the Indians maybe but probably not— it was a desert in the Other people times... (sob)... anyway—

Are you okay?

Yeah. (sob).

(silent)

No, yeah, it's just been a billion years, (deep inhale)

You must be lonely.

No, yeah no I'm fine. I'm fine

You want to continue the story?

(burp) woo, haha yeah (fart). (cough)wanna hear something funny? I never liked those people anyway— the Others— the animals, well, we were all animals but they didn't get it— they just didn't get it!

I mean look at what they did! What they left me with is one blue ball that sometimes tingles...

It was an eeny bit warmer back then— back when they did it— all of it it all kinda happened at the same time— predictable, suddenly, like really really important things and unimportant things sometimes also, but hey, deserts stay deserts.⁴

And that's when I stopped writing and got out my wooden chair and table and paper and shed, packed up my bindle and got going 'cause Jesus fuck was I tired of this shit.

Now third person, that's nice.

And that's when he got going.

I mean, what were they thinking? (He thought) They were all so different, but they thought they were all the same, so they wanted to make it come true. (He thought) They wanted it to become

irreversible. They couldn't live with each other, so they made it so they couldn't not. (He kept thinking) What a bunch of morons. I couldn't stand a single one of them. I bet they're even dumber as a hive mind or whatever.

Jason kept thinking to the point of forgetting what he was thinking, and attempting to recover what he was thinking by thinking more, only ending up thinking about thinking and that's what got him a lot of the way through. There wasn't much scenery to admire along the way— wasteland. Cold, wet sand. Don't blame him for growing sick of it, and from it— radiation. How he lived this long, I don't know. Oh, luck, why Jason?

To be fair, it wasn't all barren. Since the cooling and the flooding, life began to spring up in places previously untouched for its lack thereof— prime conditions for the development of post-human life forms. Rapid development, given the radiation. Freaky shit. Sci-fi shit. Vidya game shit.⁵ He wasn't lonely or anything, but the idea made him giddy. Home-grown alien life? Another reason to leave the shed. Maybe it's cute— not that he was lonely. Just, seeing something move would be nice. Oh, right—

Now that I'm here... nuclear war— my biggest fear right after failure. It kinda negated all the warming and then some, but only after the poles had melted, so what Jason was left with was cold wet sand. And he was alone. Because they all left. Him. They didn't want to be with him. They hated his guts. Just kidding you, they loved him. But he couldn't tell! He didn't

want to go to the party. He wanted to stay home. So he stayed home, alone, forever. Everybody at the party died. To him. They uploaded themselves into a computer. Into the cloud? A sad fucking rain cloud, in his opinion. But it was probably one big party. He couldn't stand it. They left him an in, but he couldn't see in, so he'd rather kill in. He'd rather they died for pretend, because they were already dead for real. They'd rather live pretend, than live with him. Then he'd rather live alone, for real.

The sirens were tempting, though. He'd be pulled by them sometimes, by their sirening, but they were always there, sirening.

He would hear them, but would drown out their noise with another beast. At times he had chosen to listen— ended up torn apart.

I encountered a siren on my way that day— a special siren. She was the most beautiful siren I'd convinced myself of ever having seen. Sure, she had scales, and teeth, but I liked her better when she bit. I was just passing through Death Valley, expecting the inevitable— love. I was seeking it out, I won't deny it. I'd be the first to deny it. Until I met her, that was— she immediately ripped my head off. She'd made herself an oasis. It felt like it, anyway— it was supposed to make you feel like it.

I wanted to feel like it. It was a microbiome of life after death— it had wildlife, a thermostat, and a queen-sized bed — no wood. I made my peace, and I settled. My journey could wait— it felt more like a farce with each passing day. I'd replaced an illusion with another, more comfortable illusion. I became just like the Others.

And then and then and then and then... she ripped Jason's heart out, and fed it to her pet rabbit. He didn't even mind — he was grateful. He was glad to be on his way again, another day, righteously drowning out the calls of nature.

The other beast, then— the driver and devourer— the silver lining slitherer. The creeper, subliminally digging ever-deeper: a stalker of liminal sublimity. Surfacing from the depths of sadnesses— the realest of Jason's adventures— one such, experienced on the sand- water waves overlooking Sin City. Now damp, seeped in the salt-water

tears of a cold-blooded seer. A wet world made wetter, all for the better.

Jason was sad, ‘cause his mer-girl left him, even though she said she loved him in the midst of drinking his blood; ‘cause he understood how deep a trench is; ‘cause he was actually about to suicide his species— and ‘cause of how happy he knēw it would make me.

God, it made me happy.

Did it, now?

It really fucking did.

You piece of shit.

What Jason kept thinking on those tear-imbued dunes was, that

it would all be so so much easier to bear without anyone else around. In complete solitude. No loneliness— that’s relative. Impossible without relatives.

He undid his bindle, wrapped the kerchief ‘round his face like a balaclava, stuffed the green algae and holothurian sandwich behind

his belt buckle, and seized the canteen with his rudder hand— surfing the bindle-stick down the stream of weep as it cascaded down the slope of the sandhills.

It was so dope. I wish somebody had seen me, he thought. Then he thought: well, I saw, and I actually care the most, so me seeing me doing me should be good enough. And thinking about how it’s good enough kinda makes it so. I mean, I didn’t even have the capacity to think while it was happening, so I guess that’s all fine. I don’t

understand why I have to reflect so poorly on myself. I don't. So I won't. Good. Good good good. Okay. Let's scram (he thought).

Prepare, improvise, shred, and go home, man. That's what it's all about— but only after you've been shredded. If you don't get shredded,

you're doing something right, and that's wrong. Being right is all wrong; being wrong is alright. With that attitude, Jason felt he could shred anything for the rest of his life... but there was only one life left to shred. Humankind, kinda.

If we gotsta talk details, then there's not much to gather— only what I've been able to deduce from this image: a Windows XP blue screen hooked up to a zillion translucent tubes pouring through a series of golden mandala-like discs vertically stacked on top of each other, sort of pyramid-scheming to the top of a torn-open ceiling in a casino. Figures; they figured it a gamble. Bodies everywhere— corpsing forever— completely juiced by the

computer tubes. Hundreds of them, naked, stacked on top of each other. Assholes— one that didn't show, right by the machine. Doctor Bahnman, in her snake-skin lab coat— unjuiced. She made this whole operation happen— her brains, blown out by a sawed-off. Her whole face, actually. Shame. She was quite beautiful when we married— not objectively, but she was comfortable to look at. Didn't want to take the risk, understandably. Smartest thing I ever knew.

Oh, well... sighed Jason, crouching to a note posted to her coat, reading:

‘Jesus fuck I’m so tired of this shit...’

Brief Authorial Information:

What's important to keep in mind is that the keeping of mind is unkeepable; the mind is to be unkept; to be mindful of the keeping;

that the minding is the keeping; to keep minding is unkempt.

To be clear, the story is about you and I, but it's also about what it's

about and what it's not.

It does not in any shape, form, or way, represent what the author

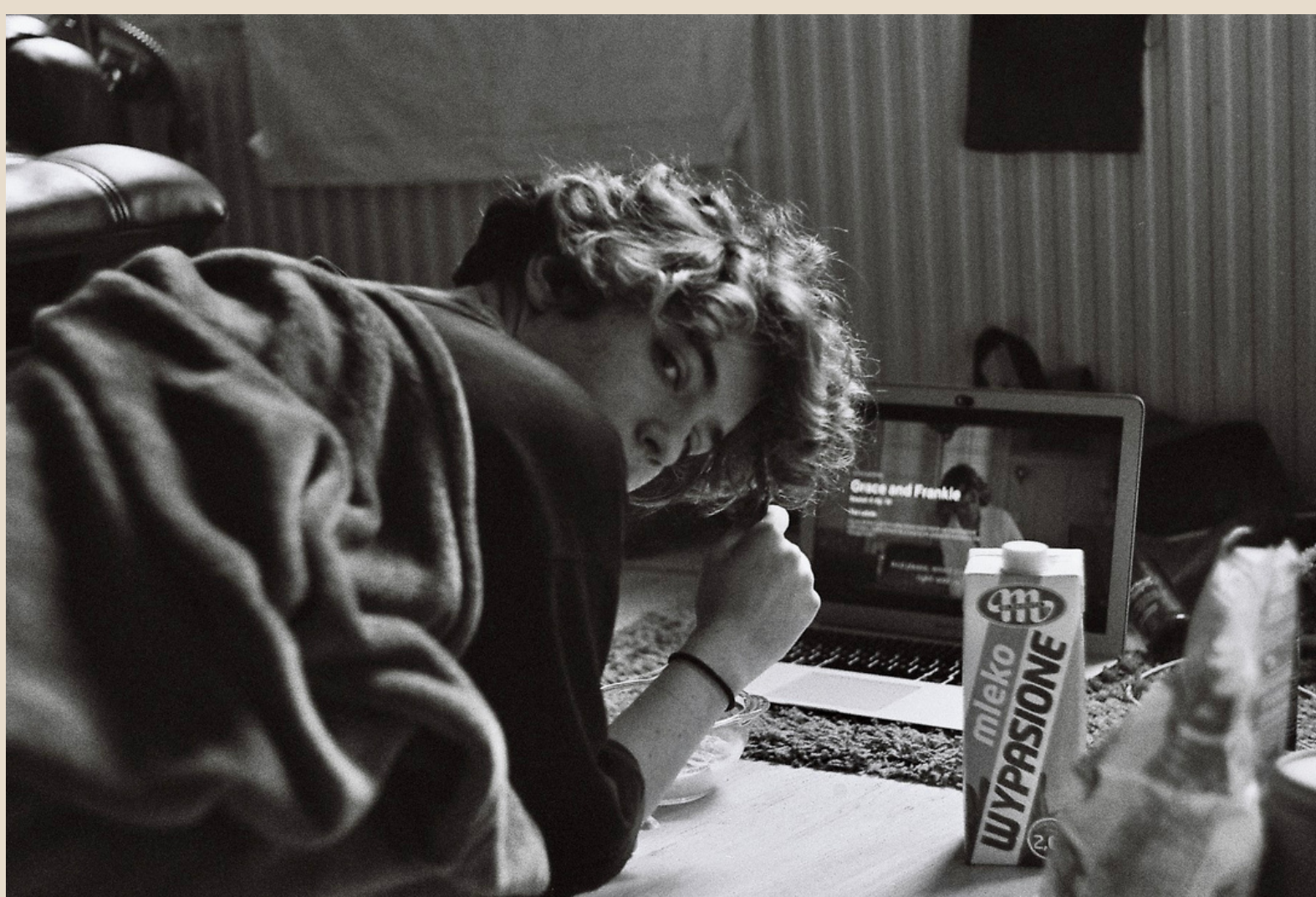
intended.

PHOTOGRAPHY

All Pictures By
Ksenia Kwiecińska



Matylda



Hela watching ‘Grace and Frankie’ during our breakfast
in Groeningen



Swimming in Kromme Rijn this summer



We almost canoed



Maja trying on earrings



Maja on our way for a cup of tea
(Szczecin)



Sasha reading my Tarot



Anežka visiting me with
tulips



A morning with Amapola

COLUMNS



Daphne Vetulani, November 2022

The white piece of paper fascinates me. The first few pages of all my notebooks have some type of description of those virginal pages: what will I think in the future? It is only in rare instances that I believe a thought of mine is more beautiful or worthy than an empty page. I tend to blame it on inspiration, truly (or lack thereof). The best stories simply appear at a random moment, and it is up to me to capture the exact feelings of the story.

The last time a story was bubbling up inside of me, the city had been in the grip of a storm. The wind outside played with the roof tiles as if they were merely leaves, and on one of these dark and stormy nights, when the rain attacked my face and I had biked my lungs out, the Dom appeared between the houses. And whilst I was only advancing tiny centimetre by centimetre, fighting against the wind, I knew it for sure. The Dom will be blown over once more. The storm will first make all the ornaments and little towers sway, after which, very calmly, the rest of the Dom flies away like a pile of sand. I will, layer after layer, be buried by the slightly more expensive bricks of the Dom Church.

Strangely enough, the thought barely even bothered me. No, it actually seemed quite peaceful, because as always happened in the poetic brain of youth, the wind didn't only blow in the streets, but I experienced an inner storm.

I had come face to face with the fact that I could never fully express all the beauty of this world. My most powerful muse has always been nature. As a young and easily impressed soul, the attentive gazing at a tree could make me feel Big Emotions, yet when I tried to jot them down it was impossible to capture the spirit of any of these Deep Thoughts and Big Emotions.



Well, maybe it is possible. But I would simply be too embarrassed to show them. To present to you, an external reader, a little piece of my soul. What did being a writer even mean to me if I could never face my work (or rather, myself?)

There is something deeply personal about creating an artwork, whether it's writing or painting or sculpting, because as the labour is being poured into this masterpiece, so is a little fraction of the artist themselves. You see, a story that is written with a main character that behaves a certain way that, even if it does not resemble the author in any way, is the creation of the author's mind. The author will still have created that character, from something inside of them. The words of the character are written by the author. It is precisely for that reason that I have stared at a blank page for the past few days, or even weeks, no, years. How does one put a little piece of their heart on a paper and present it?

But just as the storm outside died down, my inner conflict calmed down as well. I accepted that surely something sublime would eventually blow by again and by then I would be wise enough to articulate my exact feelings. Besides, the wind is not supposed to be so violent in Utrecht. I was ready for crocuses and sweet spring showers again.



Brief Authorial Information:

My inspiration for this piece was the struggle of writing something, which felt quite ironic, seeing that “inspiration” and “muses” are so closely bound together as themes. After being upset I couldn’t shake anything out of this brain of mine I decided to simply express all the thoughts that run through my mind to create a writer’s block.

There was an actual storm, in the beginning of 2021. I was deeply impressed by my high school art classes and wrote an essay in my diary on the sublime and the storm outside, which formed a very vague beginning of this little column.



The Poetry-demon by Dung Ly

The Poetry Demon 詩魔

My chan mind is vexed by the poetry demon,
“The moon cold and a gentle breeze”—what to do
about it?

禪心喧撓被詩魔
月冷風清奈爾何

All night I try to subdue [the demon, but] subdue I
cannot!

一夜欲降降不得

A horde of [Māra’s] minions come and come.

紛紛徒屬更來多

This was written once upon a time in Song-dynasty China by the Tiantai Buddhist monk Gushan Zhiyuan. Many scholar-officials of the time would most certainly have disagreed with him, to whom learning to write good poetry was a near perfect analogy to achieving an enlightened Chan mind. Although I would like to take the side of these literati, I can earnestly relate.

Until recently I used to quite dislike the poetry I drafted, no matter how earnestly written. But they weren’t particularly cringeworthy because of what they expressed, so much as in what they neglected to express. I would like to argue that all you really need to start writing a poem is any particular feeling, but what you truly need to complete a poem is a particular conviction.

So it was that when it would be time for me to edit and complete a poem I composed spontaneously, I would find that I could not because I had lacked the intention to communicate a thing to begin with. What the muse is to you, so are you to the muse; one grants a strong gale, the other hoists a good sail.



It is why my feelings and their failed poems stop me from calling myself a committed poet, as they clutter up my phone, my laptop and my paper surfaces with failures. I happen to be very passionate about writing on the idea of Glory, to explain more concretely. Capital G, a topic to my heart. The very practice of relating to actions worth remembering, great and small. A topic for another time, but its meaningful enunciation would necessarily require communicating deeply-held positions.

Continuing on, Buddhist monks certainly took positions in life to shape their individual lives and achieve enlightenment, but it was a position against poetry. Throughout pre-modern Chinese Buddhism at least, feelings, meant for poetry or not, were considered only karmic residue: holding on to them to express them held them back from achieving enlightenment. But the beautiful thing about poetry is that it involves so much more than sharing a feeling. In my opinion, the poems the following monks decided to write were completed by their convictions, which I say represent the other half of our inner world.

Let us start with this poem by the Poet-monk Qiji, from the Tang-dynasty. Now, poet-monks are a different story entirely, neither considered a true monk by clergy of their time, nor a true poet fitting in with the traditions of the scholar-officials. Poet-monks traditionally wrote for a livelihood by writing about Buddhist doctrine in a stimulating way. Just like the more mainstream elite Buddhist monks in China of the time, they participated in high literary/ruling society by writing verses for social exchange. This one then, could have been written to a scholar-official with whom he was friendly with. Or just on the wall of a house, poet-monks generally were madlads like that.



Cherishing Intoning 愛吟

Will I truly be able to fix my thoughts and shut the gate to meditation?	正堪凝思掩禪扃
This Indic adherent is once again vexed by the poetry demon.	又被詩魔惱竺卿
Leaning for a moment against the shutters, I follow the falling light;	偶憑窗扉從落照
Unable to sleep, gusts of snow continue until the last watch.	不眠風雪到殘更
Jiǎorán need not have been deluded by his earlier tendencies;	皎然未必迷前習
Zhī Dùn would've been better off had he not been aware of his future lives.	支遁寧非悟後生
Their writings, passed down, have met an essential mirror	傳寫會逢精鑒者
Who ought to understand this feeling of idle singing.	也應知是詠閒情

Evidently Qiji couldn't quite meditate, inspired by a Chan state of mind to write about a wholly different world of experience, which to a scholar-official would have been quite the selling point of meditating. But if it was just about a monk being sad, then it would have sufficed to leave out the four final verses.

But as you may be surprised to hear, social poetry would be read not only by the intended, but would be shown to friends too. Poetry was one of the defining occupations of scholar-officials, so these friendly exchanges often took on the nature of public statements in their circles.

Qiji in this poem seemed to have felt certain that in the minds of the renowned Buddhist poet-monk and philosopher respectively, there was a decently Buddhist reason to write the poetry nonetheless. Excluding simply to put transcendental truths into verse-form: as an aside, Buddhist masters throughout the later Song-dynasty would distinguish their verses from what they knew as poetry by styling them as Jisong. These were considered sutra verses of Chinese origin, with the salvific power to reveal the Dharma and written by subverting mainstream Chinese literary forms.

Let us then continue by saying that the poetry-demon manifests in the attachment to a sentiment in any given moment, creating the beginnings of a poem. I would argue



hat the authenticity and stirring quality of poetry is not necessarily to be found in a versified feeling so much as it is found in an expressed conviction. Look at the fifth and sixth verses again: they are not just a lament, but also an application of his Buddhist convictions, conflicting with his feelings. Crucially, together they express personal vulnerability in the final two verses, something that could not be conveyed by feelings alone. In finishing this poem, Qiji did indeed express a feeling, but he completed his poetic efforts with the very conviction he found himself to be lacking in.

That is, I would have wanted to argue as much, but I found that convictions and positions are not the ever-neglected ingredient I should be speaking of for writing poetry, not on their own at least. I caught on to this after reading this poem by the more conventional Chan Master Xuedou Chongxian from the Song-dynasty.

Taking Leave of the Chan Masters at Lingyin to Comply with the Invitation at Cuifeng
赴翠峯請別靈隱禪師。

Of my feelings when about to depart, I'm too lazy to speak –	臨行情緒懶開言
Propagating cardinal tenets is also so much idleness.	提唱宗乘亦是閑
For such venerable guiding masters and a sea of worthy monks	珍重導師并海眾
I could not exhaust thoughts that linger and bend toward this temple.	不勝依戀向靈山

In the polite poetic society of Song-dynasty China, it was considered good form to express authentic feelings of sadness when writing in the genre of departure poetry, a mediaeval genre quite particular to Chinese literary culture. Naturally, Chan master Xuedou would not be moved to tears because of his mastery of the Chan teachings, yet the society of that time would still expect a stirring display of both this mastery and his conformation with the norms of society.



The first verse already dismisses cultural convention; the second verse dismisses the utility of poetry for Buddhism. So what remains but that they are but a means to show a more worthwhile thing behind either? The abbot-to-be is helpless before his peers as he needs to address them in a meaningful way, as scholar-officials are surely wondering how the enlightened nature of the master will manifest in this situation. Unwilling to waste words on Buddhist teachings or on passing feelings, he chooses to dignify his crowd by expressing that of all the good or earnest things he could say for the occasion, He chooses to say only that these simply are.

The master manages to express his being a subject in a way that was the prime characteristic of Chan Buddhism: communicating and understanding that which cannot be put into words. A stirring display of both his convictions and feelings without showing either, leaving only his vulnerability, being subject to a world that is expecting great things from him.

I think the thing that really makes either feelings or convictions worthwhile to read in a poem is this mere but key vulnerability, this preceding undefined willingness to subject oneself to not just judgement by but dialogue with others. In my experience, too often people think we are simply subject to our muse for making art, a simple situation of being given something and giving shape through our inmost commitments.

But in being able to be held accountable for expressing both we reveal something of ourselves beyond both, turning these words into something beyond set or not set into stone, something truly authentic. To set a final example, I will finish this column with a poem from my hand and prove myself not to have merely suffered from a temporary demon

in writing this column.



Acts to treasure

Writing turning phrasing louder than actions: past flow the verses.

Demons and muses

dance by the old creeks. My principles stand tall, present as mere trees.

Glorification

is like rivers reaching oceans: singing streams rather than sinking efforts.



Bibliography/ further reading

Protass, Jason. *The Poetry Demon: Song-Dynasty Monks on Verse and the Way*. University of Hawaii Press, 2021.

Mazanec, Thomas J. *The Invention of Chinese Buddhist Poetry: Poet-monks in Late Medieval China (c. 760-960 CE)*. Diss. Princeton University, 2017.

Brief Authorial Information:

I wanted to contrast the idea of a muse to the idea of the poetry-demon that I encountered during my internship. The translations and production context are by the scholar Jason Protass mentioned up above, and the poet-monk context and the translation of *Qiji* by the scholar Tom Mazanec. In my opinion the muse is generally looked upon in a romantic way that frames the artist as a more passive creature, so with this column I wanted to introduce a different way of looking at inspiration and feelings of such.

So I went about this in a somewhat practical way: your muse is a particular problem you have and this is the particular problem and its solution. I also just wanted to talk about Chinese monks and stuff and my particular way of making poems worth their time, for either other people or myself.

NON-ACADEMIC



#ProChoice by Sonja Zahmat

My mother always wished to be my muse. To inspire me to follow in her footsteps. Follow her dreams for me.

I wonder at what point she realised she was wrong. If she ever did.

Sometimes I feel like there are oceans between us, a vast distance that I could never cross. I wonder if she feels it too. I wonder if she ever regrets all the sacrifices she made. Does she think about all the different paths she could have taken? All the roads unwalked. I think about them all the time. How easily I could have not lived.

I am never quite sure how to feel about that thought. Sometimes it fills me with guilt like it was my fault that she was stuck with me, and not the perfect little daughter she had in mind. But I suppose children never turn out to be what you are expecting.

When pregnant couples yell “We are expecting!” with elation, I hope they know that their child might never meet their exact expectations. I hope they will give their child the kindness and grace they deserve. I hope that child will know they can pick and choose their own paths and their own dreams, no matter what anyone else might think about it.

Our true muses will find us and call to us in due time.



Brief Authorial Information:

When I was writing this short piece, my main muse was my childhood and, in particular, my relationship with my mother during my childhood and adolescence. Prior to this, I had never really written about muses before so when I sat down and tried to come up with a story relating to muses, this is what my mind naturally wandered to.