



ERATO'S MAGAZINE



Cover Art by Josephine Hop

"What Happens To Literature"

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EUPHORION



A word from the Erato's Magazine Committee

Dear reader,

We would like to thank you for reading, enjoying and supporting this magazine. We sincerely appreciate your encouragement, submissions and positive response throughout these editions.

With the end of the school year, we would to to preface that it is not the end of submissions! If you write something that you would like to share, you can email it to us at Erato.submissionmagazine@gmail.com throughout the summer.

We wish everyone a pleasant vacation and thank you, our readers, for everything once more.

With lots of love,
Erato's Magazine Committee

POETRY



For you I'd even write poetry by Daphne Vetulani

See, you think you're everyone's muse but mine
and I might not have created a masterpiece under
your influence

But I've jotted down many a grocery list with you in
mind

and the carefully copied lyrics in my diary are all
yours.

I wrote few postcards here and there;
even my calendar has your initials all over it.

You are the muse of my lecture notes too-
so in case you are ever tired they are in neat cursive

My dear, do you truly think the drunken monologues
about "my girlfriend"
are any less devoted than their pretty lyric poetry
alluding to you?

You have inspired me to cry and you have inspired me
to sigh

I clean my room with you in mind

You have inspired me to wear pants and skirts and
glasses

and really, anything that might make you look at me
twice

And oh! I am no Catullus or Ovid but
it seems I too have finally written poetry about you



VERSAILLES by Anna

you turned our home into the palace of Versailles
forced me to flee and never look back

I left one warm august morning
from the carriage I watched the sun rise over the
fountains

my skin itched in my gown
but I knew, where I was headed
I would take my corset off,
breathe in and gaze over roaring meadows

I still think of Versailles
the home that was never mine
you were a dictator
I was a lamb
your wife, who carries the name of Marie Antoinette
still hangs from your lips
like a half-chewed piece of cake
but I left
now the further I get from you
the closer I get to myself,
you wouldn't recognize me
in a flock of crows.

COLUMNS



Can I have two shots of grief and something to chase it away with? by Eva Kom

Trigger Warning: this piece talks of death, grief and parent-loss. Please consider how this will affect you and if this is the right time to read about these topics. If you ever want to talk, please know that you are not alone in this. I am right next to you.

It rained the day of the funeral.

It was a day before I graduated high school. A day of endings, in every possible way. A week later I moved to Utrecht: I wanted to be new, brand new. Shiny and polished, able to be returned if not up to standards. I had some friends in the city that wanted to be there for me – but as it was summer, they could only “be there” from the coast of France, Italy or the Grand Canarias. They were not home or had gone home, while I had just left mine. My plan was to create a new person in a new city. The city where I was raised stunk with memories. There was too much of him – of us, to breathe in. I wanted fresh air, untouched air. I wanted to introduce myself to the air and the grass and the city as someone new. Someone who did not wear the burden of grief on her shoulders. I imagined myself in cafés, reading my book and looking like something out of a John Green novel. Mysterious, happy. I did not want to grieve who I was and what I had before, I wanted to pretend it had never existed in the first place.



As expected, this did not happen. My first two months in Utrecht were the loneliest of my life:Essentially, I spent most of the months in bed, watching the air that I thought was clean slowly get infected with grief, with sadness. Until I couldn't differentiate what was here and what was home. Or what home looked like anymore. So, I forced myself to create myself again. The pieces that were left in my hometown did not fit anymore, they had had a dad, I did not. If I couldn't try to be her anymore, I would become someone else. Someone carefree, someone happy, someone that did not know grief. As if she wasn't holding my hand.

Writing about grief is impossible. I cannot explain how I felt, how I still feel. So why am I trying? Why am I talking about the one thing I tried so hard to keep away? Not even to someone I trust, but to a small magazine that is going to be read by my peers? It took me four months of living in this new city to even mention my dad's passing at all. I lived with a secret that was bigger than life; death. I was afraid of burdening my friends and swore to myself I wouldn't mention it until more time passed. I thought my dad passed away half a year ago sounded better than my dad passed away last week. And I held true to my promise. I did not utter a word about my father. The girl I was did not exist. I did not know her anymore.

And that is why I am writing now. Because as a first year student living in a new city, we can be whoever we want to be. We breathe air into our lungs believing it will change us from the inside out. Yet grief is not forgotten. And even though I do not regret my choice to keep silent, I wish it was easier to do the opposite. To talk.



I did not talk. My friends would probably say I still don't. Instead of talking, I discovered the one solution that everyone in college is well acquainted with: partying. I got a job in nightlife and let myself get washed away into the night. The air of the night was different, it was new. I had never been much of a clubber at home, there weren't many options and the existing ones I just didn't like. In Utrecht it was different, at night nobody knew me. And more importantly, the distance between me and my dad slowly disappeared then. It was as if I could dance with grief, with death. We could do shots together, her and me. I wasn't the person I was last year, but I could dance with her. Remember her, and tell her it would be alright.

Obviously I am not saying that partying is the solution to dealing with your feelings. I already hear the AA-meeting knocking on my door. What I am saying is that there is no good way to deal with grief. Because it is not something *to be dealt* with. It is not something you can recover from, with the right medicine and therapy. It is something that changes you. It is something that completely distances you from the life you thought you had. At least that was the case for me.

I have no solution or conclusion that I want to share with you. It is now almost a yearsince I have lost my father. I can talk about it, most days. Some days I still can't. But I wanted to write about it because even though we pretend grief to be miles away from us, it is the one thing every single person on earth will have to deal with. And I wish we didn't have to do that in silence. I wish it was not as taboo to talk about. And because I am just a student and do not know how to change the world, I did the only thing I could think of. I started talking. Hoping some of you will follow my lead.



The lad who leapt through literature by Dung Ly

An account of writing for this magazine.

Tiger leap

The first few times I took my writing seriously was when I set my eyes on winning some of the competitions I could find on the internet when I was younger. I kept this silent from everyone for many years as I wasn't so much writing to reach out to people so much as to validate my big mammal brain. But I did form an idea of what it meant to me to write things I take seriously.

Yet when the judgement of others is on my mind while writing, in my experience what helped me through the effort was to pretend for the jury to be hostile. Whatever I put to paper is not my precious self anymore: they become just my knuckles and nails. A violent fantasy of shattering someone's mind with just a glance at my all-encompassing wisdom. The fear of failure becomes the thrill of the hunt.

To human eyes, tigers are bright orange, but to tigers, they are supposed to be well-hidden until they are not. Preying on recognition is being like the tiger: your bright colours seem mundane, to be what makes you yourself and non-instrumental, but from the perspective of the tiger they are weapons for killing, a body determined for success.

As one more critter in the bush, I couldn't imagine the distance between reader and writer being bridged consensually, even if I know that the magazine does have readers reading voluntarily. I will now leap onwards to the column I wrote for this magazine some time ago. I had leftover materials from my research internship and leftover



pretensions from when I still competed, so I decided to write a piece in which I wagged my finger about what poetry is. It will sound more wholesome, I hope, when I also tell you that I was just that excited about clawing people's faces off with the topic of my internship, medieval Chinese Zen Buddhist poetry.

There is something very interesting about metaphorically assaulting people by contributing a piece to this magazine, *hint hint*. The fantasy of getting challenged or praised by readers is only a hint of what I mean: crafting a good argument is like thinking about how to sprint by being aware of every muscle in your legs and arms. You stop thinking about social anxiety or being awkward because you focus on being authentic and not wasting the time of your readers.

The distance I discussed is in fact like a board game: when individual contributors square up against the community they are aimed at, meaning happens when our readers decide that we aren't completely right. We aren't a literary magazine because we have pretensions about literature: we are a literary magazine because we imagine being read, enjoyed or challenged by the readers. But writing columns isn't just a kind of parasocial intimacy.

Quantum leap

The smallest distance to another I have experienced is a hug. Hugs are warm and cuddly and they work because you feel seen by touch. But in my experience, hugs can feel distant and unwanted at times. When your hands are the most prominent sensation or when your chin isn't digging in, I'd wager there is either an awkwardness too because you know you are misunderstanding each other, or you just start brooding, because the hug is supposed to be some other



gesture. It is still a hug, but with a distance: there is not much to communicate other than to be seeing each other if I had to put it into words.

Writing for the magazine is much like giving hugs to strangers, maybe like those people on the streets with the cardboard signs. I wouldn't dare hug my readers without their consent, never mind asking them. But when I am putting in effort to touch them with my writings- not just to rant but to elicit some meaningful response or perhaps endow some insights I dare to have-, I can and perhaps prefer to stay at a distance, with I suppose, a cardboard sign with the two syllables that are my name and surname; how is this not as duplicitous a distance?

Although at first, I thought writing seriously was all about sending a message, I found it to fill a niche in how I fashion my internal life. But to set myself apart as a contributor here, or at least to grow meaningfully, I will have to make a leap in skill. Readers need to arrive at not just the message that I am sending, but at the world in which I wrote this text for this particular reason.

Mind you, the magazine committee is a welcoming place- just being present has the impression of a hug. But It isn't as if we write our pieces together. But that is the nice thing: I can be intimate in these columns precisely because I can simultaneously entrust it to my colleagues and know it isn't really meant for any of them in particular but to some far-off reader, with ever my work in between them and me.

A quantum leap is a duplicitous expression. The distance between me and my reader is the smallest possible distance; but figuratively, I am as far away from my fellow meatsacks as can be.



Literary leap

It is one thing to believe that the words I am writing are all fancy and full of wisdom; I suppose it is another thing to get the reader to experience that themselves, never mind getting them to understand what I am writing. The hermeneutical gap I suppose: convincing the reader to return again and again to my work to continuously enjoy being enlightened, while also writing to get them to think hard and critique me harder and move on.

In writing short stories or poetry, I do not expect readers to be willing to do either. That is because I myself am a petty reader, jealous because I assume there to be some literary merit in what I read beyond my all-encompassing wisdom before I even read it. The chances they give me are perhaps loaded with prejudice against me as a twenty-year-old nobody, seeing these hermeneutical thingies not as a cycle but as a sharp choice.

Consequently, I often like to keep my distance from most literary works until it is absolutely necessary for me to go through that hermeneutic circle, demanding and rewarding as it is. Though writing creatively means engaging with your presumed reader, there is always going to be this gap in what either of you considers as brilliant writing or good reading. Even between literary students learned in all of 'dem literatures.

But when it comes to cooking up something I wager as literary, hermeneutical distance is your friend, not an enemy. A leap of faith is perhaps required for my readers to find merit in my work and then to find out what it has to do with both the writer and themselves. But as a writer, perhaps a leap of faith is demanded from me as well:



although I often aim to make myself clear to readers, there wouldn't be much merit to what I wrote if that clarity only revealed things about me.

Distance closed, case opened

I can't put it another way: if you want to give your mind two more legs to stretch and to feel like it drives a majestic horse, go write for this magazine. It is one thing to read it just because your friend contributed to it or to stay up to date on the intellectual prowess you know your fellow students to have; it is another thing entirely to make a screeching leap at people with your column about the literary meaning of pelagic lifeforms. We have a mailbox: send a literary pipe bomb. We have editors who are willing to video chat with you to help make edits: explain not the literary significance but the sheer craft demonstrated by your 500-word scribble of a short story. I am an editor specialising in punctuation: go wild and use semicolons!

The case I am making is that contributing to the magazine has a bigger meaning than either inflating your ego, pouring out your heart or contributing to the intellectual realm of Utrecht. I am the least qualified to say this on account of being an anti-social menace, but a vibrant student community is not born not from mobilising the gentle harmonies of our interests into an institution capable of funding drinking occasions.

Perhaps I am a menace, but the distance between intellectual drama and literary success outside of the classroom- a space just for students perhaps-, is perhaps thinner than you would think. What I do encourage with this piece is people entering things that aren't just flexing mammal brains. But transparency is just as much a literary



skill as rhetoric. Contribute to constitute a choir, not to sing
the best songs.



Choosing seagulls over men by Daphne Vetulani

The distance from the very tip of one wing all the way to the other wing on a lesser black-backed gull is 124 to 150 centimeters. For reference, if one of these birds would try to embrace me, they would reach all across my torso to my elbows: holding my baby nephew would be easier (not even considering that a gull would probably struggle when put in this cruel position). Another reason I wouldn't want to be near the mischievous creatures is because I must stay humble.

When you see these birds, just walking around, they seem so small, having the status of a pigeon or a blackbird, but when they come close, in a place in the city where one too many fries has been dropped or fish lie rotting in the green water, maybe you too will be convinced to admire these "pests". If you have never felt alive, I recommend biking past a canal, preferably one a grandmother with breadcrumbs just visited, and watch the storm of gigantic white wings and hear their terrible screeching and pray they don't fly into you.

It was in the evening of an excruciatingly warm day, that I was lying in a hotel room with the windows open and the crappy Italian air conditioner was working overtime, it was doing its very best, and it made these repetitive sounds, whooshing. Outside, even though I wasn't even remotely near the sea, I heard gulls! And I remarked to the boy at my side "Isn't it beautiful that it sounds like we're just near the sea?" and he must've muttered something like "oh, how romantic", but I knew that it wasn't, not even slightly: it was much, much more than that, something that even if he wanted to, he could never be a part of. It was the distance between me and the sea suddenly being so very small, the distance between me and happiness, the distance between those cold deep waters and tiny little me.



The seaside meant everything good and everything beautiful. When I go to the sea , my breath runs clear and my lungs are free, and my skin gets so very soft and if I don't burn I'll get a tan that will remind me for weeks to come “you were touched by the sun”. It is those seagulls that set that scene, not only at the sea, but also in the trapping city , when there was no hot sand that you had to jump around on but only sticky cobblestoned.

The seagulls close the distance, they bring me closer to so many beautiful thoughts and overwhelming feelings, and that is something I could never explain. And so the boy who joked about running seagulls over with his boat is happily left in that memory in that room: I am glad he didn't understand.

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Daphne Vetulani



Distant acquaintance; closing poems by Dung Ly

Some time ago I attended the poetry night hosted by the literature committee. I usually go to these events to overcome my social anxiety, but I always find myself left wanting a bit more. The ennui with the activities, I suppose, is because the strangers remain strangers to me and interests are about all the personality anyone gets to express- in my presence at least. Nevertheless, I imagined poetry night would be an occasion different from the others because I could let my prettiest words do the talking and then talk about writing poetry to put the cherry on top of my ego. It sure beats talking about breakfast or the literary significance of a video game I played some time ago.

Of course, there is more to starting friendships than having things in common or being the first to inappropriately share regrets. That said, poetry can be a wonderful device for making friends, with interesting caveats and conveniences. To translate (middling) skill into (middling) charisma is as turning the useless into the useful. Forget about having to keep asking people to go for tea by De Ontdekking on the corner of the Drift- but perhaps the effort I make to have something between me and others when making acquaintances makes me an anti-social menace to (polite) society. Anyway, my experiences with poetry night cannot quite do without putting it into perspective.

Not personal perspective of course, but historical. Poetry and relationships are about as old as festive occasions- older most likely. I could have done with a bit of reading up on the matter. Consequently, it is fitting that I left somewhat gratified and unfulfilled, but although I would deny doing the whole socialising thing wrong, I do wonder whether I was doing the whole poetry thing wrong.



Case in point: delayed while travelling there by train, I vented my frustrations by composing the following poem, which I wished to share with everyone present to show off my social eligibility. At the time I was doing a research internship in Chinese poetry, so bear with me here. Based on an anecdote embedded within the account of a Nineteenth-century missionary in China:

“Participating in the Imperial Examinations, the Roof Collapsed and Gave Us Hypothermia.”

Drawing his Majesty’s eye, I could not but keep at exerting due diligence.

But my cell has been breached, how am I now to maintain my show of intelligence?

I know what poetry should be: economical, intellectual, but not lyrical!

Let them tear up at the understanding we share, not the pretensions I share!

I know what verses should not do: demanding or exalting, yet speaking to no one!

Let my lines let them touch me, in a good way, leaving them be!

But now the soldiers have come to drag me away.

Asking answers from Heaven is cheating: thus my words die, and so do I.

I really cringe at not editing the poem further, but I am telling a story here. I was still messing about with translating the Lüshi poetical form into English, so it didn’t quite have the formal stringency I would strive for later, but the compactness and pointedness certainly stood out amidst all



he other poems recited, I like to imagine. I did plan on reciting more, but I got stage fright, so I decided to recite and discuss poetry with people as the night went on.

The point is, it is an icebreaker in poor taste to come in with a poem about dying in an egotistical way.

That said, poems have been put to the test in weirder situations. As a young man, the famed 11th-century scholar-official Ouyang Xiu served in the Song Dynasty capital Kaifeng. As one does, he spoke out against the corrupt and inefficient behaviour of many of the higher-ups, pissing off, in particular, Chief Councillor (prime minister) Lü Yijian. Perhaps justice prevailed that day, as the Chief Councillor ultimately resigned soon after. But promoted to censor (supervisor of imperial officials), Ouyang Xiu proceeded to memorialise the emperor never to employ either this guy or anyone from his family ever again.

Naturally, two years later Ouyang Xiu was demoted and Lü's relatives in the bureaucracy remained in place. But as it happened to be, while on a different career track as the governor of Yingzhou, Lü Gongzhu, son of Lü Yijian, happened to be a subordinate of his in that place. Who knows what character development Ouyang Xiu had undergone in the six years since his memorial, but rather than finding some pretext to get Lü Gongzhu demoted at his workplace or fired, he tried several times to invite him to a drinking party by writing poetry, as a scholar-official does. Bear with me, but Chinese poems can be found translated with wonderfully practical titles:

“Offered in Answer to the Composition the Grand Tutor and Magistrate [Lü Gongzhu] Gave Me Entitled ‘Declining to Drink.’



If you don't enjoy yourself when you can
Your youthful face will soon become haggard,
Time gallops past like a racing steed,
And when it is gone, you cannot catch it up.
If you don't make the effort to drink today,
Later, even if you regret it, there's nothing you can do.
. . . I have long heard about West Lake,
Now I see it surpasses its fame,
Lotuses drift about, reds mixed with greens,
Mandarin ducks swim through rippling waters,
In all four seasons flowers and bamboos grow,
Food and wine appear whenever I desire them.
Even better if I can share them with worthy people,
Wafting the fragrance of orchid and angelica.
My excellent wine is cold and flavourful,
The sounds of clear songs gently linger,
Guests on all sides are already tipsy,
How could you alone hesitate to drink?..."

According to the scholar who translated this poem and the later poems in the correspondence, Ouyang Xiu had been indeed successful at mending relations. I think now it ought to be mentioned why poetry in particular could be such a neat device for sociality, in the words of Colin Hawes:

"[...], the indirectness of poetry exchanges meant that a skilled writer could use them, as Ouyang did in addressing Lü Gongzhu, to express his feelings and sound out a potential acquaintance's attitude, without either side losing face if a closer relationship was not possible at the time (65)."

Hierarchical relations notwithstanding, Ouyang Xiu took upon himself the difficult task of bridging personal grudges without bringing them to the fore. But it is not only the grudge between them he would have to have been indirect about. What was at risk with a refusal would have likely been



Ouyang's "face", particularly the one accorded to him by his hierarchical superior as his boss. Thus, the particular thing Ouyang would likely want to be indirect about as well would be to invite him as his boss would invite an underling.

This poem could be taken as a direct description of their shared space: The first six lines have Ouyang Xiu addressing him directly. His allusion to a West Lake in line 7 refers to both the one in Yingzhou and the more famous one in Hangzhou, one of the cultural capitals of the dynasty at the time. He is describing their shared space as a distant and different place as if he were looking at what their shared space could be rather than what it is in unspoken terms, namely a place for silent grudges. Lines 13 and 14 constitute a culture-specific metaphor further developing this space, implying that Lü Gongzhu was a talented guy. In combination, he is painting their workspace as a place where talented people such as themselves should naturally get along.

Thus, the last two lines should therefore need not be taken as a superior peer-pressuring a subordinate: in a painting of an ideal space, the hesitation of Lü Gongzhu is not a problem to be addressed but the crowning brushstroke that enlivens the painting. The tense grudge between them is transformed from an unspoken problem into a component of a lively painting, turning it from a static picture into an open-ended story.

It has been written on Ouyang Xiu, by his son and by Hawes, that he went out of his way to resolve personal grudges between himself and others. I admit I did come to the party with an anti-social grudge of my own making. But poetry can be an occasion to turn such grudges or other ugly feelings into an indirect and ambiguous showpiece.



Indirectness, not just skill at poetry, is how you can try to approach other people during poetry night from behind a veil. Talking about poetry, just like talking about breakfast or the news, is an indirect way to get in touch with others socially. Because if you can't say what is really on your heart, let some medium carry intimacy between people, like boats over the water.

Ironically, amongst the things I talked about was how easy I could make it myself to write poetry. In my eyes, I was basically saying how easy it is for me to engage with everyone else at Poetry Night. I had this special form and all and the topic of the poem makes it even more ironic perhaps.

Sharing is caring

Abundance is redundant to sharing,

My suffering is irrelevant to caring.

Reciprocity:

One of a kind of

Treasure; by greed am I drawn as a sword from its scabbard.

The form has five fingers: a thumb and a pinky, respectively a pentasyllabic word and a pentasyllabic sentence; A ring and index finger, at least thirteen syllables long and of equal length, emphasis on internal rhyme; finally, a middle finger with a message always longer than the index and ring finger by a significant degree. As you can see, I already played fast and loose with my own composition rules.

But although talking about writing poems made me more confident in myself there, I imagine myself to have been quite rude: people don't come to poetry night to obsess over each other's skills. They come in company as far as I discerned, for a poetry themed-party. No one was going to start composing quick-hands or link each other's verses as the aforementioned literati did at parties- as Scholar-



Officials do. In posing my poems, I was much too blunt in what I felt perhaps, and with perhaps not enough obvious craft to overshadow the feelings that inspired them.

So in the end, poetry is as much a bridge as it is a distance between people. It is a pleasant experience to cross bridges, what with the sights to see and the conquest over obstacles between people. But as a meeting place, the distance stays the same, set in the stone the bridge is made of. The only thing that closes the distance between people is reaching out, for which sharing poetry can never be a real substitute because...

Well, actions speak louder than words, but they don't speak names.

To finish this piece, I would like to present I bullet my foot did dodge. There was another poem I had intended to present, but at the very end of my recital and under particular conditions. Thank god I didn't: I wouldn't have been capable of talking to anyone at all after that evermore, what with burning bridges and everything.

Not an introvert

Finding myself amidst peers, I am dissatisfied.

I can't say who I am here for, though I wished to talk.

I don't want to talk shop; though this is just the place.

I can't talk about how I feel; I put too high a price on it.

My problem is not theirs, but maybe with them.

Not finding these, somehow I see a place for friends.

Considering this, I know who to talk to, not wanting it.

Consider this: listening in I entered; will I leave so now?



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Horses by Daphne Vetulani

I wish I was very good at drawing penguins. But I do not look at them often enough that I could draw them from my memory. For Lotte I draw horses. That I am able to do. My father taught me once. You start with two circles and then you add a bit more, though I've never seen a horse made up of two circles and a bit more.



But I think for penguins I need to practise more. They're strange little fellas. Everybody thinks they're fun, but how many people grow up with penguins in their local fauna? Well, people in the southern hemisphere. I didn't. I saw them once in the zoo but I was very small and I remember my grandma better.



See? The alleged penguins look like scribbles. That's all I can imagine them to be

My grandma used to drive her car all the way from Poland to visit us, even when she was eighty, and when she went back she would light a little candle in the Dom Church for a safe trip. It was her birthday recently and I lit a candle for her there, for safe travels, perhaps to heaven. Though not a very controversial thought, I think distance is something overcome by love and care. Physical distance is traversed easily if one thinks of the destination of a loved one, mental distance can be bridged through little actions. I highly



doubt my grandmother would approve of my life choices and I very much do not hold the same beliefs as she does, but in my head, there is a heaven only for her.

I wish I was very good at drawing penguins. I wish I could capture a penguin on a piece of paper. Then those that love penguins do not need to go to the southern hemisphere or a zoo but I can draw it in



a little corner of their notebook, just like the way Lotte can be near her horses in the very centre of Utrecht if I give her one.



Distant examination; a reading. Part 1 by Dung Lee

Premise

The premise of this collection is a poetic examination, akin to the (medieval) Chinese imperial Civil service examinations. The examinee submits a poetic response to a question and in return the examiner - a flat character of a Qing-dynasty scholar-official out of time- interprets and judges it through a poem of his own. Well, may respond, as the standard was to just give it a grade based on adherence to formal features. Because the situation depicted isn't literally medieval China, there will be some play with language, history and locations to account for the discrepancies in a clean way.

Exegesis

The *lüshi* was a poetic form composed broadly between the Sui and Qing Dynasties. In the original Chinese language, it consisted of strictly 8 lines of 5 or 7 monosyllabic characters. It was a strict form as amongst other things you had to adhere to tonal pattern rules, rhyme on every second line and a content division within each line between its two and three characters. Organised as couplets, the first couplet would have to introduce the context of the poem, the body consisting of 2 couplets had to be a temporal pause developing the first couplet as an observation and the final couplet had to pin down the emotional or intellectual response to the first couplet alluded to in the body.

Throughout history *lüshi* found much circulation as social exchange poetry and as a form of civil service examination, in which medieval Chinese recruits for the civil service had to demonstrate their insight or communication abilities through poetical composition. It was also a form of ideological selection, as in its most famous Tang-dynasty



iteration, the form was oriented towards capturing or translating experiences through a Daoist worldview, as Daoism was the state-favoured religion of that dynasty. As such, the body of the poem contains the main poetic tricks of the form: a playground for poetical inversions, parallelisms, contrasts or transformations of binary oppositions reflecting that dynamic worldview.

I based my imitation on the features most common to translations. Such compositions have a history, such as in the work of the poet Ezra Pound, who has -or rather attempted to- translate Chinese poetry. My main goal was to capture the semantic density and economy of the originals: what often happens in translation is that the amount of syllables per line increases approximately fivefold from the Chinese original. I was most comfortable with a 22-meter so that is what I stuck with.

Now Middle Chinese or Classical Chinese is quite a different beast from spoken Chinese, or the official Mandarin dialect based in part on metropolitan accents throughout the ages. It is a dominantly monosyllabic tonal language and an important part of why Lüshi in particular could be so semantically economical or dense. The Middle Chinese Characters in the lüshi I have included in my compositions are not only based on that language but also their particular range of meaning within a Daoist context as discerned by scholars in the field.

The use of Chinese Characters with a Daoist range of meanings is important, as the poems were supposed to capture a Daoist world not through shorthand concepts but through imagery. Dropping concepts is just my clumsy way of making up for the fact that most of my readers are not in fact Daoists or Scholar-officials. As a general rule, whatever mistakes I make I usually just chalk up to the premise of this



collection: a modern poet tries his hand at the poetical examinations of the Tang and is bound to be somewhat clumsy. But the Examiner is also a dug-up skeleton and not metropolitan-born but from the region of Yue, whose mother language is the Min dialect.

To move on to other features, generally, though the rhymes are usually not translated, I tried to because the rhymes in the original bound the couplets together. The syntax of the sentences I tried to contain two clauses of unequal length, at times inverting the approximately 2/3 syntax imbalance in particular. A dictionary and some of my interpretations of Chinese Characters are included after the poems. A bibliography and exposé on all the hidden meanings I am aware of, included consciously or are too complex for your feeble minds to catch are included there as well.

Pair 1: What is poetry?

Examinee

Passerby, novices and masters search their reflections in the canal today.

Profoundly examined, will true poetry be found in this mirror mere tonight?

Lines pass by like tour rides, une force majeure obscuring wishing dimes.

Rhymes hold eyes at edged sights, undulations distorting vacant skies.

Valued freight miscarries to its destination, scheduled to bold meters.

Frightened fish disappear in the stirred sediments, muddying surface meanings.



Utrecht's canals did not deliver me a poem, as I don't cheat on exams.

But I answer: poetry is carried on the surface, revealing the depths of heaven.

Examiner

Your poetry conveys the surface: a tour of your Utrecht, if meaning a thing at all. 22

Know I am oft presented emotive verses, as ephemeral as the occasion.

Your shallow waterways neither depart from nor arrive at the Grand Canal of 隋 Suí 朝 Cháo.

Avoiding my language, your black lines ripple and rhyme, but do not follow regulations. 22

Attracting attention, my white dots reflect not those meanings perceived on your mere surface.

Your abysmal French lines are neither rippling nor still within 天地 Tiāndì's swirling mirror 中 Zhōng.

But I must discern the mundane for the meaningful, the transcendent from the gradable.

Black dots searching verse overlook Utrecht's canals, mistaking laden ships for right diction.

Pair 2: What is authenticity?

Examinee

It has been tried wandering the Dutch countryside, when in need of authentic poetry. 22

Poets following fell winds in search of 正 Zhèng, found two windmills as if itching for a fight. 22



The bright one was not as ugly as often told, yet swinging
sharp fins spoke 'dem fighting words.

No grains does it grind, but screens so necessary for reading
and writing are set alight. 22

The aged one was not as pretty as often heard, but
brandished worn blades mouthed their weak insults.
No spark from it flies, yet poetic references require such
historical sights. 22

Cries to battle arose; upstanding verses intimidate most
those reaching from level ground.
But upon examining 辯 biàn: limb and life risked reveal
poets playing at sincere plight.

Examiner

Since recent times I am forced to grade in English, as writers
of 律詩 lüshi have disappeared.

Such was revolution; even 梅华 Meihua of 唐朝 Táng cháo
are subject to the 道 Dao of 天地 Tiāndì. 22

Drawn in Mandarin my characters were a learned dialect: I
spoke 閩南語 Mínnan Yû at home. 22

Composed for 民 mín petals descend to the earth: a
deciduous world has lost its glory. 22

Written in English your Dutch landscapes reference Spanish
tales: amongst which 鍾繇 Zhong Yao's script fits. 22

Perceived as 仁 Ren tulips ascend to heaven: coniferous tales
gain their shape in poetry. 22

Since ancient times the authentic human being has revealed
itself through cycles of reading.

I will read your 律詩 lüshi: Hermeneutic adversary I may be,



but never fear a reactionary.

Dictionary for Daoist Interpretations of Characters

For characters not included in this list, see the exposé.

辯 biàn: Disputation, demonstration or “Back-and-forth”. In Daoist context, in particular, as understood within the Zhuangzi, it is often subject to ambiguity with transformation, which is a homonym in Chinese. The ambiguity was a critique of the reasonings of all kinds of philosophies circulating before the Han dynasty. Its strategic use in the poem in question is to objectify and interpret the situation of the poem, that is that to rage at windmills is, to put it in my words, to behold the transformation of the insincere or the foolish into an act of poetry or “crafting authentic expression”.

道 Dao: the way. The consistent interpretation within this collection is as the course of a particular thing: how the world runs its course, how the composition of poetry has a particular course that is repeated every time etc.

地 Dì : the earth. Now the Earth is not just the opposite of Heaven as it is quite inseparable from the expression 天地 Tiāndì, which translates to Heaven and Earth. Earth does not seem to mean much on its own, but in this bisyllabic expression, it refers to the world as a whole that is inhabited by humans. As scholarship on Earth as an independent concept was hard to come by, my interpretation is that understanding Earth as the opposite of Heaven is only the start of understanding it as complementary: if Heaven refers to processes beyond human influencing, then Earth refers to that which is subject to processes but not a process in and of itself: things. This completes the traditional trinity of



Heaven-Earth-Humans, in which Humans are those who influence and are influenced.

民 Mín: the people/the masses - 仁 Ren: the humane.

Although initially it seems an obvious Confucianist contrast between the vulgar/barbaric and the civilized/moral, on closer inspection the Daoist context moves beyond it by characterizing Heaven, Earth the Sage and other concepts as not Humane, as these concepts do not hold onto rigid understandings of morality, even if they can be agents for such. Thus in the context of this poem, when the Examiner refers to poetry as composed for the masses or as perceived as Humane, he respectively refers to poetry, or rather the Lüshi form, as an agent that loses its efficacious role in society and that also gains a (hi)story by being perceived as previously efficacious to society.

天 Tiān: the sky. In Daoist terms, Heaven refers to what is outside human control, such as (natural) processes for example. Of course, it can also be used to refer to what one thinks to be processes outside human control.

正 Zhèng: true or correct or aligned with. It is a relative statement in that sense: an archer's aim can be said to be true because it aligns with its target. When an object is 正 Zhèng it can for example be said that it is an exemplar of its type because it aligns with notions about what it is supposed to be.

中 Zhōng: it broadly refers to the middle, as in location. But in Daoist terms, the middle can be said to have a potential for creation, such as the creation of coherence, meaning or identity precisely because it is situated between more clearly defined things surrounding that middle. The other name for China, Zhongguo, can be taken as meaning Middle



country because it is supposedly the centre of the world, surrounded by barbaric lands.

Exposé

There are some references I used in the poems that have more restricted meanings

1. 律詩 Lüshi: this is just the form.
2. 梅华 Meihua: plum blossoms in China are amongst other things a symbol of endurance, as they often flower in winter.
3. 閩南語 Mînnan Yû: refers to the Min Dialect of the Chinese Language, as opposed to metropolitan Mandarin. In any given period since its inception, Examineé's from nearer to the capital often stood better chances at passing the examination as, for example, they were better aware of the particular dialect they should adhere to in their tonal patterning when composing poetry, which favoured metropolitan pronunciation rather than regional. That and bribes.
4. 鍾繇 Zhong Yao's script: refers to the Chinese Character script as popularized and codified by Zhong Yao, a Han-dynasty official. This type of script is also known as “regular script” and is likely to be what you are familiar with through common print or websites. But because the examiner is more a modern or Tang examiner rather than Han, it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to the Regular script rather than Zhong Yao's script.
5. Grand Canal of 隋 Suí 朝 Cháo: The Grand Canal of the Sui Dynasty. A major work of medieval infrastructure, it connects the Yellow River to the Yangtze. The network existed previously, but only in the Sui Dynasty a concerted effort was begun to integrate both river systems into one waterway.



Furthermore, here is a list of hidden meanings:

1.

In the first poem of the examiner, he tells the examinee that his poetry neither departs from nor arrives at the Grand Canal of the Sui Dynasty as a way for the examiner to assert through comparison that their 律詩 Lüshi are fundamentally different: a product of two different semantic systems in which meaning circulates. Not only that, it is an abject refusal of allowing them to mix.

2.

The examiner points out that the first poem by the examinee does not follow regulations. Not only because this is in Chinese: amongst other things, the rhyme scheme is wrong. But otherwise, it does adhere to the narrative structure and semantic imbalances, amongst other things.

3.

The examiner points out how randomly inserting French in the poem does not at all create meaning for it, even as he himself starts inserting Chinese. In particular, this comment is embedded in the mirror structure of the body: even as he says that his star-like intellect is not mirrored by the observations of the examinee, he says this through a mirror structure. His reference to the middle expresses that randomly inserting a different language does not create meaning in and of itself. As the water from which the examinee draws understanding of poetry is “neither rippling nor still”, the blunt insertion of French lines to better fit the meter or anything like that do not at all reflect what poetry is about in his opinion.

4.

So, 中 Zhōng to the unlearned eye seems to rhyme with -tion. But the examiner makes a crucial mistake in mistaking the tone of the word: -tion often has a descending tone in English as it is rarely a stressed syllable, while the 中 Zhōng in this poem in the traditional Chinese pronunciation has a



high-level tone. I chalk it up to the examiner not being too familiar with English. Interestingly, there may be a precedent for how within the narrative the examiner has come to understand the tone of -tion: the examinee has only ever used the French pronunciation of -tion, which does have a high-level tone comparable to 中 Zhōng.

5.

Initially, it may seem wrong to answer the question of what is authenticity by making a statement about what constitutes poetry that is 正 Zhèng. But the contrast between windmills poses a quandary one might ask to muster creativity: what makes an authentic windmill? Is the classic Dutch wooden windmill more real because it has a longer history? Or is the windmill for sustainable energy more authentic because it retains the more mundane and practical use that once characterised the classic windmill? This is the prime quandary referred to by 辯 biàn, a synecdochal way to refer to the question of what true poetry might be. Rather than examining the poem as a rational argument about what makes an authentic windmill, examine it in the context of the poem: a disputation as an occasion for creativity.

Ultimately, the examinee seems to assert that authenticity is best understood as play-fighting. What is relatively true is what is thus authentic; a person expresses himself most authentically by relating his subjectivity to other things or using external things to authenticate his own subjectivity. The desire to argue about or fight windmills speaks of something inside the poet himself, whether that is some “plight” or just the desire to write poetry that will be accepted as authentic.

6.

The second line of the last poem in this collection refers to the history of the lüshi: when the imperial examinations were abolished, its relevance also plummeted. That said, the form has not actually been in official use throughout history



without interruption, nor is it perhaps impossible to find vernacular Chinese poets having dabbled with the form.

7.

Finally, take the last couplet of the collection in the context of the whole collection rather than just that poem. After all, the examinee was examined on what he could achieve with his poetry.

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INTERVIEWS

by *Amapola Alonso*

Preface:

When writing about 'distance' I realized the importance of using the resources we already have at hand. Not only that, but also how the same things that impose a certain distance are also the ones bringing others together. Then I decided to interview four teachers asking what book they were currently reading, something that made them connect with the book - a quote, an image, a color - and finally what does this book bring them closer to. The answers were moving and very honest. Here are the books that your teachers were reading during Block 3!

Questions Asked:

- Which Book are you currently reading?
- A quote that stuck with you? An image? A color that you associate this book with?
- What does this book bring you closer to?



Flore Janssen

is an Assistant Professor at Utrecht University. Her research is interdisciplinary, international and multilingual and focuses on literature and social, political and economic history in the long nineteenth century: “I am particularly interested in gender, marginalized identities and social activism and my published work has examined activist campaigns on issues including harassment, access to birth control and labor exploitation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”.



Allisson Neal

came from University of Cambridge, where she was a (postdoctoral) Junior Research Fellow at Trinity College. Her work centers on twentieth-century American literature, poetry and poetics, and the relation of literature to the other arts.



Onno Korsters

is an Assistant Professor of English literature and Translation Studies at Utrecht University. His teaching and research fields are English and Anglo-Irish literature 1700-present, and translation studies.



Müge Ozoglu

is a Lecturer in Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. She holds a BA in Turkish Language and Literature from Yildiz Technical University and an MA in Comparative Literature from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She obtained her PhD in Film and Literary Studies from Leiden University's Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), where she also worked as a university lecturer and taught courses on cultural theory, as well as on gender and sexuality.



Flore Janssen

What book are you currently reading?

1. On Beauty by Zadie Smith
2. Review on Victorian Women Writer

A quote that stuck with you? An image? A color that you associate this book with?

1. Pink or Orange sunset
2. An outsider :)

What does this book bring you closer to?

1. Representative experience of campus and university life.
2. Border crossing, cultural and physical freedom of women during the 19th century



Allisson
Neal

What book are you currently reading?

1. The Marriage Portrait by Maggie O'Farrel
2. The Human Condition by Hannah Arendt.

A quote that stuck with you? An image? A color that you associate this book with?

1. Female artists in society.

Colour: Green Forest.

2. Colour: Seance Lavander

What does this book bring you closer to?

1. Past self and a long project, a sense of continuity.

An abstract?

Always, in these miniature underpaintings, there is the face of one particular woman, in a crowd, perhaps, or as a dryad in the background. There she will be, often looking out sideways, addressing the viewer with an enigmatic, unfathomable gaze, always with the air of someone who

cannot quite believe her good fortune, to be a nymph, swimming in a warm sea, or a peasant with a basket of peaches. But others who worked away at dissolving these paintings have found nothing at all, just a plain piece of tavola, carefully sanded to a silken grain.

--Maggie O'Farrell, The Marriage Portrait

What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.

--Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition



Onno
Korsters

What book are you currently reading?

Vernietigen - Michel Houellebecq

A work of speculative fiction. A powerful evocation of the near future. The imagery in this book gets under your skin, everything seems closer than what it seems.

A quote that stuck with you? An image? A color that you associate this book with?

Color: Indigo.

What does this book bring you closer to?

Soul; and what does it mean to be humans.



Müge
Ozoglu

What book are you currently reading?

I am currently reading *Glory* written by the Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo. It is an Orwellian political satire shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2022.

What does this book bring you closer to?

Since I started reading *Glory*, significant developments have occurred in Turkish politics. The Supreme Election Council has set the date for the upcoming elections on May 14, 2023. I was not able to fully immerse myself in the novel, and my reading has been hindered by the influx of news articles, political commentary, and social media posts concerning the upcoming elections. Notably, the novel, *Glory*, also revolves around an election in a fictitious nation. While reading *Glory* during a politically unstable period, I was reminded of the similarities and differences in the dynamics of various countries, both fictional and real. The political developments in Turkey both distanced me and brought me closer to the novel.

An abstract?

“Well, me myself, I don't mind that Dr Sweet Mother actually kicked us off our land to make way for her farm! I really don't mind at all, not a bit, kana, ngisho, I mean it made us homeless, but otherwise where was she going to farm? In the air? On a tree? Inside her mansion? And futhi it's not at all like a white colonizer kicking you off your land! Which, that one is a whole 'nother matter for sure, a matter of war, which is exactly what we did to liberate our land. But why on earth would I ever think to war against Dr Sweet Mother?”

TRAVEL DIARIES
(VIENNA)



Foreword

We would like to thank the Travel Committee for their hard work during the year and during the trip so that we could all have a high quality and amazing time! These stories could have not been written if it were not for you!

All the love,

Magazine Committee.



11. 04 - The Train to Vienna [Sven]

After days of counting down, making plans and deciding on outfits the most exciting day of the month April had come: the 11th! It was finally time to go to Vienna with our group of energized literature students, longing to discover Vienna's culture, cafés, clubs and whatever they had on their to-do lists. After we were all together, assembled at jaarbeurszijde of the Utrecht Central station, we got assigned a travel committee member to lead us to the train and help us check in. As we waited on the station we got together with the people we shared our cabin with. Luckily for me, these were my friends or people I already knew and got along with. As the train entered the platform we took our baggage and stepped into the train. One person was late unfortunately and we were unsure if she and a travel committee member would make it until the last second. While one Euphorion and Travel committee member were running their lungs out to be on time, we peacefully walked to our cabins. The first impression I got and heard from the people in my room and other rooms was that it was a very small space. If you've never traveled with the night train picture it like this: The cabins were really small with 2 red (round even) beds at the left and the right side, a window in the middle with a tiny table and a trashcan kind of thing and a curtain. On the table were six water bottles, gifted to us by the train company. The water we got was warm? Which was a little bit concerning, but we didn't really have anything else to drink. I did have a bottle, but she disappeared in the morning, somehow. The hall we could walk in was also not so spacious for thirty people with big bags and suitcases to walk in, so I would not recommend traveling by night train if you're claustrophobic. After a little struggle, we got all settled. A train worker visited all of our cabins to talk to us, our group called him "Diederik". He told us that if we wanted our beds to be made we should ask him because two of the six beds



were folded in because we wouldn't be able to sit before we were going to sleep. After this, we chatted, ate snacks and played a game. Because my cabin mates and I were bored we went to other cabins to ask them to play a game with us. One of them answered and one of them didn't. It was a simple game of tic tac toe, we won, and it was fun. We also told horror stories, read poetry and listened to some bad songs; the Vienna trip was off to a good start.

Diederik helped unfolding our beds so we could lie down and try to sleep. I was a little bit sad to see that our pillows were as big as my hand, with not a lot of stuffing inside and our blankets were really thin. I am privileged maybe, because that didn't make sleeping easier per se. But I think the night was not really a bad night. It was an experience though! As I was trying to sleep the sounds of the train kept me entertained. The machinal noises were as annoying as comfortable background music to help me fall asleep. You could feel the train riding really fast and then slower, making a turn and then stopping. The train felt like a gigantic mechanical worm unsure about where to go while traveling across the earth. Which I really didn't mind until some point in the night. I woke up from a loud and heavy sound and as I looked around, confused, Faey and I made eye contact. She gestured for me to come with her outside and we tried to open the door without making too much sound (which was not an easy task). We were both wide awake because, as Ruben later told us later, two train sets disconnected and reconnected.

I woke up from the voices of my friends and we chatted about how we slept until breakfast came. After not sleeping and being a little bit train sick, I did not feel well enough to eat it but also the fact that Diederik came in with our breakfast and made a funny cheery sound while doing this, made me want to eat it just for him. I also didn't want to



waste food. So I drank the fruit tea that tasted like warm lemonade and ate the bread that was pretty good. The whole breakfast-eating situation was awkward because we couldn't sit (we hadn't cleaned up yet so Diederik couldn't fix our bed), so we had to lay down and eat. I decided with someone else to have a little picnic on the small floor space (If I laid down I would throw up). When I was a little settled on the ground I really enjoyed the view and peacefulness of being on a train. I decided to listen to music for a bit and a calm feeling came over me. The rest of the morning was fun and slow. Since we woke up we had two maybe three hours to eat and get ready to leave the train, which was more than we needed.



12.04 Wednesday, Vienna [Amapola]

When we arrived at the station it was around 10.30 in the morning. Everyone was sleepy enough to walk without talking - a very funny scene considering we were there with 30 of us, half awake, mumbling every sentence. It was a delightful arrival, as we jumped into the first tram of the trip. You see, trams are a huge thing in Vienna. It turned out to be our preferred medium of transport during the trip, which was complemented by the metro - running all night long! We hopped out of the tram to leave our stuff at the hostel. I felt the Vienna air running through my lungs and coming out. It was very refreshing to be outside, especially in such a wide, spacious, horizontal landscape—horizontal meaning that there were different landscapes, different heights of buildings and streets, allowing us to get our gaze lost in such a landscape. My first impression of Vienna was reminiscent of a dream, perhaps due to the lack of sleep, perhaps because we were all looking for a fantasy. I cannot recall much of the first steps, however when I regained consciousness we were walking towards Schönbrunn gardens, the green gem of the city. An Empire required everything to be giant-sized, as was the case with these gardens. Under the ray of sunshine, a star-like texture of different trees, herbs were perfectly allocated in different shapes and heights. The amount of work put behind the organization of them mesmerized me: handpicked flowers meant to grow worldly!

Thankfully, we had stopped at a supermarket before and grabbed the best on-duty-study-trip snack: cheese with tomatoes and bread. We chose a very appealing spot in the gardens— covered by an outrageously tall set of bushes, we could secretly eat in a circle next to the statue. Lunch was great for recharging, and sitting under the Viennese sun. Soon we would find out it was our only chance to experience



it. After a few arrangements on schedule, the group started to shear off in the wild city. Some others and I decided to continue exploring the gardens. There was a labyrinth, a desert house, a warm house, a botanical garden house; a cold house - in short: a tiny piece of every part of the world. We decided to go first to the botanical gardens which itself were divided amongst cold, medium and warm temperature plants and flowers. We acquired our tickets and immersed ourselves in another wild savannah. We walked up the stairs until we reached the glass ceiling, and from the top we could see all shades of green mixed with one another. It was a fascinating experience. I think we must have spent around an hour and a half just strolling around and finding new names we could not pronounce. The labels had the name of the plant and where they were from, but not any further information. We found our way into the warm house, where humidity dominated the scene and kept the plants alive, as it also takes place back home. We drew and journaled for quite a long time, then went around finding huge leaves and multi coloured flowers. We decided to go into the Desert House - we were not ready to go out to the chilly weather. The desert house was inhabited by rodents and cactuses and wild fish. We were just amused, and I could tell from the consistent gasps and generalized feeling of awe that we were all just grateful for this little oasis.

The group was growing tired, so once again we split our ways. I decided to go with Giulia to Café Gloriette, the coffee place on top of the hill. After clearly underestimating how tiring this adventure would be, we managed to get up and get a seat near the window. We ordered two espresso and one piece of cake. Café



Gloriette irresistible: graceful and elegant, one could see the entirety of Vienna and even further away, the hills. The acoustic was rather poor, but we had an amazing time trying to figure out what we wanted to say to one another. Seeing Vienna from the top of a hill gave me a sense of perspective, and also a rather logical explanation on why this imperial building was where it was.

I refused to take the tram on this wonderful day, so we walked back to the hostel at around 18.00. Already six in the evening! I went to my room and there I met Rana, who had made a smart decision of taking a nap. We agreed that we would head to the center in around an hour. Exactly at 19.30 sharp - very Dutch - we left the hostel ready to grab a quick dinner and walk towards the activity organized by the travel committee: Karaoke! The metro decided to take an uncanny turn so we hopped down on the next station. There was a large street full of food places, and pizza seemed like a smart-safe choice. We had a margarita and bumped into other Euphorion members on the same street. How odd it was that this was a completely new city and still the same people were around. It created a somewhat strange, comforting feeling that somewhere a familiar face was always around. It made Vienna less mysterious, in a sense. It is a big city, and rather being aware that there is someone who knows about your existence gave me a sense of belonging. We were highly spirited about the trip.

We strolled around and walked and walked until we reached the Karaoke Area. The eve had perfect weather to do so. We entered the Karaoke to find more Euphorion members - and a very professional Karaoke



setting. The greatest hits were being sung: Black Velvet, Love is in the Air and even Valerie by Amy Winehouse. The performers were passionate and at several points they had the whole crowd just singing along to their lyrics. You could find them in all kinds of ages. Ruben, our guide for the day, had secretly signed us up to sign as a chorus. We waited, and drank, and waited some more until our name was announced. The public did not know what to expect - but here they had a group of twenty year olds singing Unwritten by Natasha Bedingfield! What a performance! A truly fantastic first eve of our trip!



13.05 Thursday Vienna [Meltem]

The creaking of the floorboards in the Kunsthistorisches museum was reminiscent of that morning's gentle rain. The pace people walked created a sweet melody: the soles of their feet first, followed by the gentle caress of their feet onto their toes. In such a hectic city, hectic country, hectic world, it was a slice of a newcomer calmness- almost slow motion, the adagio tempo accompanying the art on the walls. It's a leisurely moment of life, everyone's eyes transfixed onto a snapshot of paint as they murmur, astonished, to one another.

As I was taking in the overwhelming amount of history and elegance surrounding every corner, I couldn't help but notice the beauty that resided within each and every person around me, and wonder how many of their stories the walls of the museum had seen. They have seen such intimacy; the paintings have memorized the soft whisper between lovers and the gentle caress of people's eyes- both to the pieces of art, and to one another. I wondered how many children these walls had watched grow up, how many class trips they have supervised. As I was contemplating this, I was blessed by a story from one of my friends, Bloem, about this very thing.

“Once, when I was around eight years old, my family and I went to a museum. There stood a beautiful, ancient piano with pretty designs on it. Now, as a curious little child, I had decided that it would be a brilliant idea to see if it still worked.” she explained, gesturing wildly as we strolled through the Antiquity exhibit. I giggled,



partly in horror as I knew exactly how this story would inevitably end. She explained that her small pudgy fingers had reached over the security bands and her little foot had gone *just* over the invisible alarm lines before alarms had started blaring and this curious little child had been swept away by security.

“I was terrified! I just wanted to do a quality control on this antique piano but people didn’t let me!” She laughed out loud, smiles painting both of our faces at childhood antics.

Our trip to the museum came to a close a short while later- the walking, looking around and the constant stimuli tiring us out. We had decided to go to a cafe which was close to the Kunsthaus, as we had originally planned on visiting there as well. However, we soon became enamored by the decor of the dainty cafe and it’s ridiculously cheap drinks- which led us to start drinking cocktails at two pm. Combined with conversation, we also played the card game ‘shithead’: a Dutch classic. Perhaps the reason for my miserable losses was that I’m not Dutch, perhaps the reason was that I had learned it the day before, or the more plausible answer, the reason I lost was because I just simply sucked at card games. After multiple rounds of shithead, we decided to not go to the Kunsthaus and stay in the enchanting cafe and order food instead. Although the kitchen had technically closed minutes prior, a very beautiful man emerged from the back of the cafe and told us he would cook what we wanted. We were eternally grateful to him and the fries he made for us, they truly held a special place in our hearts.



Following our drinks, food and chill session at the cafe, we headed back to the hostel to get ready for the main event of the day: the ballet. We were tired as we made our way to our rooms, however the giddy anticipation that filled us was enough to energize us. This energy did not last long however, as we collapsed onto our beds as soon as we arrived. This, dear reader, was a grave mistake- on my part at least. I miscalculated the amount of time it would take all of us to get ready in one tiny mirror, and we had to rush out, not even fully ready. My hair was done on the metro and I had grabbed my moisturizer instead of my hair gel, my shoes and belt were haphazardly slapped on and the energy drink I had chugged was making my hands shake with anxiety. We arrived exactly on time to the Opernhaus, a little winded, a little disappointed in ourselves but exactly where we needed to be.

The Opernhaus did not disappoint: the crystal chandeliers, golden decor and perfectly placed accessories created a fairytale-like building for our eyes to feast on. Taking in everything around us, we made our way through the building onto the places we were designated to be at. After giving our coats, taking some pictures and reapplying makeup, soon enough, it was time for the show to start. Unfortunately from our seats, we could not see much of the stage nor the dancers - the most extravagant dance move we could see was a singular foot flexing at best. Swallowing down the disappointment, I made it a mission to enjoy this opportunity nonetheless and focused on the chunk of the orchestra which I could see: the brass section, the second violins, the violas and the conductor. It brought me back to the days I used to be in those very same



chairs, playing similar melodies for my school orchestra. It filled me with a bittersweet feeling, one that brought tears to my eyes at the delicate tunes.

After the second intermission, some of the board and travel committee members switched spots with us which made us able to actually see the stage! The elegance of the ballet dancers were unlike anything I had seen before- this was my first ballet performance after all. Their bejeweled white dresses and delicate steps took my breath away and focused on every carefully practiced movement. A standing ovation was only fair at the end of the performances. Following the ending of the show, we took a full-cast, all members of the trip photo (which you can see on the Euphorion instagram page ;)) to finish off the ballet experience. Shortly after, we began the way to the metro to reunite with our beds. The walk back to the hotel from the Opernhaus in the fresh air was a welcome occurrence, especially with the great company and conversations that took place in the trek through the city. The familiar yellow walls of our room were a comforting sight to return to, although one of my roommates would disagree with my liking of the color, throughout the trip, I came to enjoy the annoyingly bright shade.



14.04 Friday, Vienna [Amapola]

On Friday morning, the rainy weather seemed unbearable. It was Ruben's birthday, the sunshine of our day. I woke up very early and decided to take the tram towards the city and get to a nice café that my friend Lia recommended. I had not spent time on my own for quite a few days, and I really needed to write down everything that happened. I ordered a large cup of tea and sat there, anonymously, for the next three hours. Once I had read and written everything that my mind pleased, I paid for the tea and walked down the very rainy and chaotic streets, and turned and swirled around the city. I was about to decide to abort my mission since, now the entirety of my clothes were damped. As I was walking past another café window, I saw Jeroen and Rana! What were the odds, what were the chances of casually bumping into them on the streets of Vienna! This reminded me of the luck and the charm behind a Study Trip: there would always be a familiar face around! I stopped and said hi, grabbed some tea and, still shocked by our odd coincidence, we laughed and laughed.

At 15.00 we reached the bigger group by tram. Our activity of the day was to visit the Belvedere Castle and museum - where The Kiss by Klimt is kept! - and there was a huge queue. We ended up buying the tickets at the shop - thanks to a very kind gentleman who hacked the system for us. One thing I had learned at this point is how annoying it is for the ticket services to sell to large groups and how to split money wisely. The group re-split between the ones who went to the Lower Belvedere and the Upper Belvedere. The Upper Belvedere was the most mainstream option, but since I



had never been in Vienna, I'd rather see the iconic Klimt Kiss. This Museum also had a fantastic bar and café, where the wine was insanely cheap, and that just added to the experience. The museum was crowded and busy, a lot of humanity and languages swinging back and forth in the rooms. I managed to see several artworks by Egon Schiele; Adolf Mölzel; Helene Funke and Oscar Kokoshka. There was also a self portrait by Joseph Hock of 1922 during his exile which I still dream about. The exposition was divided in different themes: Exile, Landscapes, Psyche and Provocation; Female Artists Emancipation. It was a very rewarding and fulfilling experience, where I learned a lot about the unseen and the other side of art history. The Kiss was very impressive, however I still prefer Klimt's landscapes filled with flowers.

The rain persisted and as we gazed from the windows, Giulia and I decided to go to another museum: The Albertina. This was one of the most iconic museums of Vienna, and on Fridays it was open until 21.00, allowing us to experience a museum at night! We tried our best to get a reduced ticket but we failed. I must confess that the Albertina is the most stunning, impressive and striking place to be at night. The outside appearance is not necessarily appealing, but once you get inside there are three floors of art works, filled with works from Dürer to Degas. What struck me the most was the artistic movement of mannerism, luckily organized chronologically. The detailed depictions of "The fall into the Earth" and the apocalypse were eye-catching and you could stare for hours on end at the same fine line of ink. I love to explore museums from top to bottom, so I climb the stairs running like a child and then hold my



breath - and anxiety - to see the most renowned art works, which would likely be on the first floor. The third floor of the Albertina was organized in two sections: Impressionismo and Fauvismo and Puntillismo. They had paintings from almost all the big French figures: Cezanne, Toulouse Lautrec, Degas, Matisse, Gauguin and even Modigliani! I could not contain my excitement - and running around these paintings, I felt contained and embraced by the beauty of these artworks. It was a humbling experience, for sure, but a very rewarding one. Colour, form and line lived in harmony, and they mirrored the artist's mind. But the ability to contain in particular the universal was what got my heart. I slowly began to realize that these were not mere theories, but acute and tangible, expressions. I fell in love with a new artist: Oskar Kokoshka. His *Venus and Girls with Necklaces* are now my source of comfort and understanding. Throughout this trip I have been learning the importance of embracing but also of being embraced by human(ity). I realized that we are no one without acknowledgement, and that we have an influence even when we are not actively seeking for it. Kokoshka is now my comfort, although it was never his aim to comfort me specifically. Being able to stroll around knowing a familiar face might pop up also made me appreciate the comfortability of acknowledgment, of recognition and being hugged by the human experience. The first floor was slightly more uncanny, featuring artists like Munch, Paula Rego and Schmutzer with their dark, unconscious, nightmare-like expressions. There was another room of mannerism of the 1400-1500s in which we spent around forty minutes just staring at the apocalypse. A very rewarding and fulfilling experience. There were plenty of posters and



line-printing by different artists. It was very interesting to see the different methods and all the progression of style of the artists. The learning process is beautiful and its display makes it even more wonderful. Lastly, the ground floor was where all the special collections were: and there was an exposition on Picasso! Giulia and I could hardly believe it, but there was a sample of each Picasso period. I had always been a great admirer of his, but the way this was organized in order to move and compassionate the viewer really made me regrow my passion for him. Before we left I went back to Marc Chagall's paintings - probably one of the last times I would see them - and said goodbye and thank you to all these wonderful people.

Incredibly, it was still raining. So with Giulia I once again ran towards the closest café which was the Mozart Café. Our whole trip we struggled with dying phones and not speaking German, so internet connection was a must. We entered this fancy, elegant café and asked - in our damp jackets - if we could possibly charge our phones. We ordered two glasses of wine and continued to chat about our admiration and luck of being able to enjoy art in such a way. Moreover, we were grateful for the opportunity of just being surrounded by art and to have traveled to a city filled with fun activities to do every day, and that our trip was also organized around different interests. One hour became three, and the Mozart Café was about to close. When ordering the check we had a fun little chat with the waiter, an Austrian man who justified why alcohol was cheaper than coffee in a very charming way, and sent over a few recommendations on what to do this eve. Our original idea was to go listen to jazz, however the place was -



quite literally - underground, and very expensive. We ended up at a jam session of two guitarists next to the Danube. They were playing Steve Ray Vaughan and Roy Buchanan, but the E string snapped out of the guitar - and the show had to be canceled. Very proudly we took the metro back to our hostels, rewardingly tired and in a very red mood - just happy to be where we were and excited for what tomorrow might bring.



15.04 Saturday, Bratislava [Sven]

On the fourth day of the trip, we went to Bratislava. We needed to get up early in the morning to catch the train. Some people went out the night before, so it was funny to see some hungover faces while getting ready. While Ruben and Imre got our breakfast Faey and I, who took too long to get ready, finished our morning routine. We got to the station and joined a part of the group to wait for the rest of us to go to the platform. I truly enjoyed the train ride: Faey and I exchanged music, the view was awesome and it was such a weird realization that we were in a different country at some point. Anezka was the leader of the group and when we arrived she told us that she planned for us to go sightseeing which included walking up many steep hills. This was exciting but I was also worried because I was not in good shape to do a lot of walking. The vibe was cheerful and when I tried to be pessimistic I was snapped out of it by my friends.

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The first thing we saw was the “Jaskyňa Lurdskej Panny Márie”. I can’t really put my finger on what this place was exactly. The best way to describe it was as an outside church/ monument/ cave. The focus point of the place was a statue of the Virgin Mary. Around her, roses and candles could be seen. On the hill around the outdoor church name tags were placed, at least this is what they looked like and I can not find a proper English source that tells me more about the place. It was a beautiful place and you can sense that there is a history behind it, that the place has an important meaning. I sat down at one of the wooden benches for a second and I made sure that I took a good look at everything around me.

After this, we went to the Slavin memorial complex, which is situated on the highest hill of Bratislava. Even though it is very inviting to look over the city, the complex itself grabs your attention in such a way that you don’t realise the beautiful placement at first sight. There was one big centre tower/ statue and around it there were different sections with graves. Above the whole place hung a solemn peace, which was beautiful as it showed the importance of the complex. Though seen as a cliché activity, I walked past the graves with Josephine and counted how young these people died during the fight for liberty and peace in their country. It was also raining a little bit, “miezeren” as you would say it in Dutch. I was overcome by a bit of sadness as I walked through the place and in between the graves. I looked at the bigger tower that is the main point of the memorial complex. On this, you could see inscriptions



their liberation in 1944-1945. The grotesqueness of it all impressed me and I was thankful that the fallen soldiers had a place where not only the inhabitants of the city and country could remember them, but also curious foreigners like us can have a moment of sympathy.

The walk continued. We went to a castle and took a group picture. I didn't really look around much because I was mainly looking for a place to sit and eat. I sat down with Annick and we laughed at two parents who jokingly held their kid above a well as if they were going to throw the kid in there. This was as concerning as it was funny. We went underground where we found an old deep well. It was a shady place to go into, as you couldn't see where you were going when walking the stairs, but it was a fun thing to do during our little break. A few moments later we gathered with the group again and this was the point where we split up. The people who wanted to see the famous UFO and maybe even go up there could do this together. The rest of the group went to discover the city. Some friends and I decided that the big famous grey thing that was called a UFO was not impressive or exciting enough to visit. Martijn looked up a route we could walk to a café and Annick found one where we could also visit a church. I cannot remember much from the church we went in. I only remember that the architecture was beautiful and I didn't really know where to look because there was so much to look at. We only took a little walk and then went to a café. At the café, we ordered lunch and the tiredness struck us. I got a slice of bread with hummus and tomato, which wasn't as good as they made it look. While we were all zoning out a little bit and scrolling on our phones we saw something funny; on the wall of this café was a drawing



of a dinosaur with the text “Do what you feel like... free...”, so interpret this in any way you want. When we were done eating Ruben decided to join us (he had gone to visit the UFO) and we decided to lift up our spirits and go drink some cheap cocktails.

We ended up at a bar where they served cocktails for only 3 euros! The fun thing was that it was a place where we saw people of all ages come in. There was an old couple, a father with a child and some teenagers. Which was weird in a sense, because they mainly served cocktails. But that was not as surprising as what we saw when we looked out of the window at the wall that was next to the bar. Three pictures hung on the wall next to the bar, two of which I can remember. One was of nuns smoking cigarettes and the other was of two naked boys (with different heights and body sizes) standing next to each other, covering their genitals with their hands and laughing. We couldn't figure out the purpose of the picture and how someone came up with this. Maybe they tried to make a statement? Something about positivity and gay rights? I still can't get the picture out of my head so I think in some way the artists' purpose has been fulfilled. Honestly, the whole place felt like a fever dream, but we really enjoyed ourselves (our server did not, or maybe she just had a bad day).

Tipsy from the three cocktails we drank, we decided to go to a place where they serve 50 cm pizza's that we walked past earlier. I was very excited about the corn pizza that was displayed there so I insisted that we order it. The displayed pizza was gone, so Imre and Faey went to ask if they could make a new one. The man behind the counter didn't understand what they were talking



about, so they showed them a picture of corn. We also ordered a pizza with broccoli. Both decisions were questionable, but the pizzas tasted really good! We even got some free sauce! (Faey and I couldn't finish our pieces so saved them for later, we ate them the morning after and questioned if they really tasted good the day before or if we were just tipsy). This was a very good ending to the day and a good point to end the description of this day. I hope that the other Euphorion members enjoyed the day as much as we did. And a message for the reader; I encourage you all to try eating a huge corn pizza when you're drunk, but maybe the ones in Utrecht aren't as good as the ones in Bratislava.



16.04 Sunday, Vienna [Meltem]

The 16th started off strong. I woke up earlier than all my other roommates, however with the headache of a lifetime and regretful of the decision I had made to drink so much at the club the night before. Of course, I had to stay on brand and be dolled up, so I did my makeup in the dark with a little flashlight from my phone in order to avoid waking up the others in the room. My efforts were slightly futile— however it wasn't me that awoke the girls, but the repetitive song that was absolutely **BLARING** outside of our door. I wish I was exaggerating, dear reader— the cleaning personale was playing a single song, on full volume from her speaker for an entire two hours. I am not joking or exaggerating— an actual two hours straight. While I was eternally grateful for their work in the hostel of keeping it clean, I was severely questioning their music choices and at that point, every single decision I had made which led me to that moment. I still hear it in my head as I write now.

Partly in order to escape, I ventured out to the station with two of my friends staying in the room next door to locate some breakfast for us. Buying some fruit and pastries was a slight challenge due to the sheer number of people present at the stores, which was to be expected considering so many other stores were closed on Sunday. It reminded me of the years I lived in Zurich, how every single place was absolutely deserted on the day and how appreciative I should be for the accessibility of the day. In Utrecht, I can do my grocery shopping until ten p.m., which is such a bizarre but amazing concept to me. It is such a contrast to Zurich where even if it's not a Sunday,



all the shops close at seven p.m. sharp. This is precisely what I talked about for a good ten minutes on a random bench we sat at — my adventures in Switzerland and how being in Vienna made me slightly nostalgic to it. My poor friends sat there and listened to me rant, nodding their heads and asking questions, struggling to keep up with my energy drink and ADHD fuelled rant. The conversation was interrupted as we had to meet up with my roommates and make our way to the National Library. It was at that point where I started feeling a bit off, just as we arrived I started feeling dizzy, and joked that the beauty of the building was the cause of it.

Feeling quite faint, out of body and tired, seeing the breathtaking Nationalbibliothek felt even more surreal. The gold lined plaques and thousands of books on the walls truly are a literature student's dream. The art on the ceiling particularly encapsulated me, the tiles creating the prettiest pictures that I craned my neck looking at. I did almost run into multiple people because of this very thing, stupidly uncaring towards the world around me. The hall was enchanted with such a particular aura of peace and gentleness. Although it wasn't necessarily quiet or cozy, there was an unknown sense of comfort in being there.

This time, the sounds around didn't remind me of the rain — the shoes are far too squeaky on the marble floor, contradicting the supposed quietness the concept of libraries entails. People gasp and point at the artifacts littered around the hall, gawking at the historic information. I did find it funny that you can't read any books there, a collection of so much knowledge at the grasp of your fingertips, but protected behind a harsh



barrier.

After we finished our tour of the library, we went on our way to the famous Cafe Central. However, due to it being full and the line possibly being a very long wait, we ventured out to find another, less crowded place to sip on some coffee. On our journey to find a cafe we had spotted on Google Maps, we came across a different one which looked promising – flowers as decor, curving pink embellishments on the doors and a welcome demeanor . As we sat inside and watched the wind blow while we waited for our drinks, tartes and snacks, my mind lingered on the raindrops that fell on the ground. Rain seemed to be a recurring theme in the days we had resided in Vienna -sometimes a mere drizzle, and other times nearly a violent storm. It revealed the unpredictability of the big city: one corner is calm, cozy, comforting, just like the cafe we sat in at that moment. However another corner can be wild, erratic, like a wildfire. They balance each other out, much like people do. I found myself observing people's dynamics around me- the banter between my roommates, how they're opposites in many aspects and they fight, but you could tell with the simplest of looks that they care about each other deeply. The city reflects them and this type of proximity in a way; conflicting at times, but well loved.

We stayed at that cafe a little while longer; I wrote and journaled even more John Green-esque poetry and prose. My roommates and I then walked to the vegan Vietnamese restaurant we had gone to for dinner on our first day, as we decided we needed to revisit before we left Vienna, not knowing the next opportunity we would have to eat at the place again.



The twenty-five minute walk there felt shorter as we spent it listening to Eva narrating her predictions of how our lives would unfold and what she saw our futures being like. Only time will tell if I will end up in a publishing house and move to New York or if Bloem will meet the love of her life in Sicily, as she foretold. After our dinner, I got going to the event of the night: the amusement park Prater.

On my way to the Prater Plaza, I ran into multiple problems:

1. My phone's battery was almost drained
2. The metro decided to kick everyone out one stop away from my destination
3. I was already about 20 minutes late

All of these problems combined led to a very interesting speed-walk over to the area in which the park-goers were waiting. The near dash I was executing partially also being due to the copious amounts of fear I experienced due to the drunken middle aged men shouting around me. Thankfully, I arrived without further mishap and started off the night with the bumper cars: I hadn't been to an amusement park in a long time, especially not the cars, so I was very excited and had a lot of fun running into people. I really realised in those moments why I should never be allowed to drive.

The next attraction was a rollercoaster. It wasn't a normal one where you sit down on a seat –no, where's the fun in that? This one required you to lie down on your stomach and speed through the attraction, flinging you around and doing what roller coasters do, just



considerably scarier. However, as I had to take my glasses off, I had less complaints. I wasn't really bothered by the heights we were reaching because all I could see were blurry lights anyway, so I didn't comprehend that I was meters up in a not so secure, coffin-like thing whizzing through the air. After the adrenaline slowly wore off, we walked around, visited other attractions and watched as the park closed around us, the lights turning off one by one.

We wound up in an English style pub with questionable looking decor and even worse music, however, the cheap beer won us over. It was then that the tiredness of the day started catching up to me and I found myself in a state of sleep induced delirium, saying whatever came to mind, possibly confusing the people I was with. We also discovered that in the bathrooms, one cubicle had a massive hole in it, one toilet was simply in the public area with a mountain of tissues thrown into, and there was only a sole working toilet with privacy left standing. I also struggled to keep awake, unsure if the beer I was drinking helped or deteriorated my efforts.

Nevertheless, the night ended with great conversations and great company.



17.04 Monday, Vienna [Amapola]

Monday started off quite early for me. I went walking around the city again- I feel that at this point I started to miss biking. Nonetheless my street walking led me to arrive at our first activity of the day : Bookstore Touring! Guido had chosen different second hand and English bookstores. Some of them were very radical, some others more commercial, but getting a sense of the book industry and book market in Austria was a rewarding experience. Seeing what is being read and what is advertised to be read gives one a sense of innovation, and what one could also absorb from that environment and adapt it to our own library. I had quite a lot of fun, but then noticed that my watch had stopped working! I managed to google a gentleman who was a specialist in vintage watches - mine is my grandmas, so it really had to be taken care of by an expert. His name was Peter Hüller. I walked in and I felt like I had been a victim of time-traveling. The place was very clean and neat, but full of clock parts! I presented my issue to the clock-expert, and he promised to fix it before five in the afternoon. I saw him take part per part under a magnifying glass. What an enthralling job - it probably drives you slightly insane. That was what I thought, at least.

I walked up the Viennese hill and joined the big group in Freud's Museum. As a big fan of psychoanalysis I was excited and hyped to see the consultancy room. Freud has always been one of my parameters of knowledge and being able to see his place had been a goal of mine for a long time. So we were there, walking up and down this massive house in which he lived for the first forty-seven



years of his life. Sadly, the spaces were completely empty, except for a selection of objects. It was a nice introductory museum, but honestly quite disappointing. Walls were white, and wooden floors and... that was about it! Disappointment is a tough word, I know. But I cannot think of anything more appropriate. I feel like Freud loved symbolism - and these were just mere allusions... I am not even sure. It felt like we were always about to see something and never quite getting there. Nonetheless the shop of the museum was very fun and the employees were very very friendly. I also happened to encounter Ksenia, a very I would cut out one of the very's, it's a bit repetitive close friend from the study, who was just visiting for a day. She joined for the museum and left very again, I suggest considering a different word than very quickly, but it was also nice to have her company, even briefly.

Afterwards, Rana and I had to meet up with a Viennese friend of ours, Norina. She was a girl with whom we shared a course with, and although we were not specially good friends with her or anything, it was nice and refreshing to talk to a local and actually get to know her. Acquaintances are great because they can very easily become friends - and also the conscious knowledge that the interaction is going to be brief is very liberating, as in, there is no aim or no goal or no sense of continuity unless one actively seeks it. That opens up the space for a very free conversation, where the things one represses or is most likely concerned with are few. We met Norina at a typical Viennese Café for Artists, and Rana and I were very curious. I, of course, arrived late since I had to pick up my watch and pay the kind gentleman who fixed it. I congratulated him for his job and walked very



quickly towards our meeting point with Norina.

Norina was doing great, she thrived in university and it proper Viennese. She has her bike and her helmet which she brings everywhere, enjoys her studies and is always seeking a new adventure. It was inspiring to talk to her in that sense. We touched upon several topics, including family and having children - a completely new type of conversation in comparison to the ones we were having with our trip partners. It was refreshing and mind-opening I guess, there were no judgements to be made, just mere curiosity. We had dinner and fun chats as well as catching up on the little information we had of one another's life. It is incredible how people can remember specific details, but on the overarching theme of a LIFE itself it matters very little, but in that specific time and space it feels like it's the only thing in the world. Moving and inspiring.

Rana and I noticed that - oh surprise - we were running late to check out of the hostel. We rushed towards the metro and got out on our stop, very happy and content with our encounter. We grabbed our bags as we said goodbye to what had been our shelter for the past week, and to all the small daily things we walked past. It is a nice ritual, saying goodbye. Not hoping for a re-meeting, just appreciating the fact that I have met. The spaces, the metro entrance, the shop, the doors... everything that had become so close to us was slowly fading away. It was nice, I thought, to also give the physical spaces a goodbye. They might never feel it but, on the other hand, I knew I needed to thank them.

We walked towards the Tram station and met a few



others. We were happy and tired, as we were when we had first arrived. Cyclical, once again, life presented itself. We arrived at the train station. Our farewell was unavoidable. We were happy.



18.04 – The train rides [Sven]

The train back to Utrecht

The first train ride was a ride, the second one was a lot more fun (for us, the first-class cabin at least). I actually slept that night, which was amazing and something I didn't expect. At all.

After Lois held her little speech and we all clapped for her, they divided the group in two, one went into one part of the train and the other into another. This is something I didn't think much of until we went inside. We opened the door of our room and a kind of relief went through me when I saw that the cabin was decent. More than decent even! It had two beds and one other that was not out yet. There was a table with gift bags and some kind of champagne, maybe wine. Also a little water bottle and next to this our *own* wash table. As we sat down the sadness that this was the end of the journey struck me, but that didn't disturb the happiness the room gave me. A lady from the train company came to explain different parts of the room to us, she even told us that there was a button which we could press and then it would call her to come and help us, which was a bit icky and weird. I felt like a king that could get his waitress to bring him food whenever he rang a bell.

We sat down. Ruben was very tired, so he went to lie on the upper bed. We were given a form with breakfast options to choose from – there was yoghurt, bread, and different garniture options like jam, butter, Nutella etc. I also chose two different drinks; tea and hot chocolate. I really enjoyed the luxury. I think if the train ride to Vienna wouldn't have been so horrible, I would appreciate the experience a lot less. After filling it out



Josephine and I took this time to chat and catch up a little. I asked if she could draw me since she is a very good artist. She drew me as a knight in shining armour with an owl on my shoulder. It was quite impressive how she did that, she really has some good drawing skills! This you might also see in this diary, as I saw her drawing in her sketchbook for the magazine. Josephine and I also came to the conclusion that we have the same music taste, but don't know the same artists so we made a playlist to dump songs into that the other one doesn't know. As we listened to My Chemical Romance and Tally Hall it got slowly darker outside. We were visited by the train company lady and she made our beds ready. We decided to go to sleep and, as the beds were quite soft and the blanket was slightly heavy, so falling asleep came a little easier than before. That night we slept well.

Ruben had to leave the train early, so the long journey he had to make to come home wouldn't be unnecessarily long. While Josephine and I were cleaning up the table after our luxurious breakfast Ruben let his shoebox (he bought his infamous brand new (walking) green and pink shoes in Vienna) with his old shoes in it fall on the table. Fruit tea went all over Josephine's leg, my jacket and my backpack. It was a mess. After we cleaned this up I tried to put the plates on top of each other so it would be easier for the train lady to take them with her, but they both fell this time, making a bigger mess. So, this is hereby my informal apology to the person who had to clean up what we couldn't. It was a weird and unreal feeling to step off the train and be in Utrecht. It felt like two hours ago that I left my house and said goodbye to my mother and sister. This week had passed in the blink of an eye. I hugged my friends and walked to the



platform where my train home waited for me. I left with a warm feeling inside my chest, a combination of sadness and gratefulness. I was also happy that I had an amazing week to look back on, filled with joyful memories, laughter, lots of coffee and wonderful people!

SHORT
STORIES



By Chloë Stol

During Covid one of the arising problems was loneliness amongst the elderly. Though it had been happening for a while, the pandemic made the cry for company of the elderly heard. Everyone was feeling the isolation and the consequences that came from it. But the distance that the lockdown forced created awareness of the situation and tighter bonds once the quarantine was lifted.

In a park, an old woman and a young person are sitting together on a bench. They seem to be enjoying each other's company as well as the beautiful spring weather. The sun is high in the sky and while not at its most powerful the heat it gives allows people to walk around in just a sweater. The birds happily sing their songs while flying around looking for small branches and fur to prepare their nests. In the distance, someone can be seen walking their dog. The grass is at its brightest green at the end of the cold and just before the summer droughts. Bees and small butterflies are flying around from flower to flower.

The duo on the bench is talking softly, holding hands, and smiling. They are catching up on the younger one's life.

'Did you know that when I was your age I also wanted to study? Of course, I couldn't because I was the eldest and I had to take care of the kids, but I wish I could have. I guess you will just have to study for the both of us.' Despite the sadness in the words, the elders face reveals nothing but happiness for the younger one's chances in life.

The couple continues their conversations, sharing memories of the past, both together and separate. The elder talks about the different jobs she had in her life.



While the younger one talks about their various family members and how they are doing. The lightness of the conversation changes nothing in the eagerness they exhibit when listening to the other.

‘Where is grandpa?’, the elder questions out of the blue ‘Is he waiting at home?’ An uncomfortable look appears on the younger one’s eyes. ‘He died grandma, remember, 7 years ago’. The voice is monotone and steady, it shows the routine of the line of questioning, but the smile, present a minute ago, has changed to a frown. With just these two questions the happy moment has vanished, the illusion shatters. A blank and unfocused look appears in the old woman’s eyes, and the sadness that comes over the younger’s face is unmistakable.

Now that the magic has faded, everything becomes clear; the park is a picture on the wallpaper, the grass is a cement floor painted green, the birds’ happy chirping is merely a soundtrack, the heartwarming scene is not taking place on bench in a park but on a chair in a home for the elderly with Alzheimer’s disease.

The distance felt between the two people in that moment, has never been this big. The realization that no happy moment can erase the pain of watching a loved one forget. Their happiest memories together, cherished no longer by both but only one.



By Josephine Hop

ATTENTION: do you work as a deliverer at New York pizza? Why not? In 2023 we will be the first to send a pizza deliverer to space! Because we here at New York Pizza want to be the chillest employer ever. Apply now to the coolest company ever and maybe you will be that person...

That person turned out to be me, Tyler, age 20. Old enough for the company to avoid negative reactions about ethics and shit. Young enough for it not to be sad that I still work at New York pizza. Not particularly handsome, not particularly ugly. A very marketable face if I say so myself.

A few months ago, my manager got a call from corporate announcing that I had gotten through the selection process and had been selected for the company's space program. I was happy. Of course I had been. All my little boy dreams were coming true. (Except the one of having a dinosaur and an infinite amount of free pizza). At the same time I barely registered anything. 'No, I don't have any heart diseases. Yes, I do have all of my vaccinations.' Somewhere along the line I was made to sign a dubious contract adorned with the logo of New York pizza's parent company (three crowing roosters). The extensive training and prepwork all went by in a blur and before I knew it, a tacky limousine with the logo of the company plastered on the front was picking me up from my parents house. I answered the excessively smiling presenter's questions about how nervous I was on autopilot.



‘No, training wasn’t hard. Yes, I am going to miss my friends.’

When asked about the tattoo of a fish eating a pizza I had on my arm (which I had gotten long before I started working as a pizza deliverer) I parroted what someone behind the scenes had whispered in my ears.

‘I think our pizza is sooo delicious, even a fish would like it.’

My mind still felt kinda numb when some spaceX dude strapped me in my seat before the checking of the intercoms and shit started. For some reason New York pizza corporate had insisted I go on an otherwise unmanned ship. This was fine because it meant the tech people could make the rocket smaller. All the important stuff was done by computers anyway. I still kinda felt like I was watching myself from a tv screen, wearing my stupid New York Pizza uniform, when the countdown started. Through an actual screen I could see people cheer me on from the outside.

And then I got catapulted at hyperspeed back into my own consciousness.

Holy fuck.

The rumbling of the rocket had started. This was happening.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

I was being shot into space.

I tried to force a smile on my face to point at the camera.

That was the deal. I signed a contract that said I had to present myself as if I were enjoying the experience.

When I had done so I didn’t think that would be a problem but now it took all my willpower to not be in breach of contract and poop out a grin.

Every atom of my body was in full panic mode.



‘Okay Tyler,’ a staticky voice spoke. ‘ In about twelve minutes you’ll reach outer space and then we’ll let you float around for a few hours and then we’ll send you back home safely.’

I nodded, comforted by the tech guy’s words, and realized I had no idea if he could see me so I answered him instead.

‘Okay.’

‘Oh and try to enjoy it a bit, Major Tom. You’re going to space!’

Maybe it was the fact that with every second I was putting more and more distance between myself and all known life, but I really liked this dude.

‘Thanks ground control,’ I whispered.

After what seemed like an eternity the rocket started slowing down and came to halt.

I unclasped my seatbelt and just now noticed all gravity had disappeared. Weightlessness was an alien feeling. Like swimming without water.

This is it. Now floating around in space I could finally breathe and take a look at the window. Looking down at the earth a peaceful excitement took hold of me.

‘Wow, you guys, this is really amazing, ’ I said, smiling at the camera in the cockpit. I was facing the part of the earth that was mostly covered in ocean and it was like staring at a large blue gemstone. So peaceful from afar. No sign of life or global pizza companies. Just blue.

The blinking of the camera stopped.

‘Everything okay?’ I said, aiming at the ground control guy.

‘Yeah, we just stopped filming now that we’ve got your reaction. What do you think of it?’

‘It’s amazing,’

It really was.



‘Cool. We’ll just let you enjoy this for a while until we send you back.’

‘Kay.’

And then it was silent again. So silent I could hear my own breathing and the faint zooming of the aperture of the spacecraft. I peeled my gaze away from the window for a second just to take in my environment. The cockpit was about the size of a street corner bodega minus sleazy guy in need of a shower, but with all the old timeliness of one. There was the place where I had sat during lift off and a small cupboard. I made my way over to it so I could look inside and almost choked on my tongue when I did. Inside the cupboard, next to some medical supplies and a radio was a stack of New York pizza boxes, buckled down so they wouldn’t float away. I looked inside and saw that there was a Hawaiian, a margarita, barbeque and a pepperoni. What the fuck.

I wasn’t in the mood to contemplate who had put in the effort to transport a bunch of mediocre pizzas to space and floated back over to the window.

I was here to see the sights so I would do exactly that. Stunning, beautiful, never been done before. The rocket had now reached the part of the earth that wasn’t covered in blue but with patches of green and brown. To my shame I had to conclude I had no idea where I was. During my training I had been told it would be difficult to tell different continents apart. I wasn’t seeing them from the angle I would see them on a map. What I did see was a big cloud of smoke coming from it.

‘Uhm... ground control dude?’

‘What’s up?’

‘What is that big gray cloud coming from earth?’

‘What?’



‘There’s a big cloud shaped like a muffin coming from earth and it’s freaking me out.’

‘According to my info you should be right above Russia now so... OH MY GOD!’

‘What’s happening?’

‘The nukes.’

‘Ground control, you're scaring me.’

‘US has fired the nukes at Russia and now the whole world is shootin at each other. I’m hearing the sirens outside. There's a popup on my computer and shit ’

‘What?’

I felt my heart racing in my chest. All the green and blue below me was turning black at top speed.

‘Dude, what is happening?’ I said between hyperventilation breaths. My heart started to hurt in my chest. Desperate to know what was happening down there.

‘What is happening is that we’re all going to...’

Ground control fell silent.

‘No no no, come back!’ I yanked on the microphone as if that would make it talk back to me.

‘Fuck!’

Filled with defeat I leaned back in my chair. The sphere that just seconds ago looked like an old and magnificent god had now turned into a big lump of coal. Everything was gone. Everything. All my family, my friends, ground control dude, squirrels, waterparks, bagels. Everything. Everything except...

I made my way back to the cupboard and took out the pepperoni pizza. I let out a morbid laugh. When aliens would come across the earth they would find absolutely nothing. All evidence of life has been wiped out. If they would travel just a bit further they would come across a lone and abandoned space vehicle. Inside this vehicle



they would find a corpse that died of dehydration, with a pizza tattoo, in a New York pizza uniform with a stack of pizza boxes next to him. The only evidence of humanity: pizza.

It was so absurd that despite everything I could only laugh and take a slice of now cold pizza and stare at the remnants of a destroyed planet.



Rooms by Kendra McManus

I was seven when I realized that rooms could be things you had for yourself and not a tiny sliver of bed that you shared with your parents.

My classmates had been talking about their rooms at recess; once I caught on to the topic of conversation, my heart began to thump wildly. Maya's room was huge like a castle and pink like a Barbie sunset, Izzy's walls were blue and adorned with horse posters. Clementine liked orange and begged, successfully, for her parents to decorate her white room with orange accessories. The Crawley twins had bunk beds and Thomas's bed doubled as a race car. *Don't ask me. Don't ask me. Don't ask me.*

"What's your room like, Lily?"

I shrugged, playing it cool.

"It's just a normal room."

"What color is it?" another squeaky voice asked.

"White." The walls of my parents' room *were* white.

"Do you have any posters?"

"Oooh, I have a bunch!" someone else answered.

"Me too!" exclaimed another.

I was then freed from the shackles of conversation. I slipped away quietly as they distracted themselves with talk of posters and celebrity crushes.

When I got home that afternoon, my mother saw right through me.

"What's wrong?" she demanded, glancing at me as she stirred a large pot of garlicky black beans. My mood darkened further at the prospect of eating rice and beans for dinner yet another night. "Nothing."



She set down the ladle and looked me in the eyes, arms akimbo. I suddenly found the banana bunch on the counter top in front of me to be greatly fascinating and placed all of my attention upon it. My mother knew my tricks too well. She picked up the bananas and placed them elsewhere. “Lily. When I ask you a question, you answer. What’s wrong?”

“I said *nothing*.”

“Is someone picking on you at school?”

“What?” my face scrunched up. “No.”

Her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“No! No one picks on me. But if they did, it would be *your* fault.”

This time, it looked as if I struck her with the metal ladle she’d just set down. Her eyes softened.

“What’s wrong, really?”

I sprang up from my seat at the counter. “It’s this stupid place!” My arms motioned wildly at my surroundings.

“It’s tiny, and ugly, and I don’t even get to have my own room! How can I invite friends over when I don’t even have a room?” I screamed, my mother becoming a blurry, shapeless form before me. I bid the tears to remain just a little pool in my eyes.

“Clementine’s parents love her so much they painted her room orange! I hate it here! I hate *you*, and I hate dad too!”

At that, the dam burst. Hot, wet tears rushed down my face as my little fists tore through the air. I felt like I couldn’t breathe. How could I say that to my mom? I loved my mom. I didn’t look her in the eyes because I feared her expression. I love you, mom. I love you. I love you. Before I realized, my bare feet were pounding along the neighborhood road. I didn’t know where they



were taking me, but the shouting of my name behind me only spurred me on.



Island of the Holy Snakes by Josephine Hop

When I looked away from the shore I saw a small snake making its way past my feet. The little fellow seemed to look right at me as he made his way through the open patch that I had created within the wild flowers that were now probably hiding his friends. I clutched the flowers I had picked tightly while the creature looked at me with its little beaded eyes. His snout twitched a bit before it disappeared within the sea of flowers again. A soft breeze arose from the shoreline and suddenly I remembered why I had been staring at it. This realization was accompanied by a faint shouting of my name.

‘Phillipe, where are you?’

I was late, late, late.

Quickly I sprung out of the meadow onto the beach. No longer sheltered by the hazy protection of the trees, reality overcame me like the waves crashing a few meters down. I ran across the Island until I reached the small dock. Looking like an unfinished bridge it served as the only connection to the outside world. Aunt Imogen was loading big milk tins into her boat.

‘Oy, child. Are you gonna help me with these or what? Do you want the lovely people of McAllistair to go an entire week with spoiled milk?’ She sounded angry but there was a grin plastered onto her weathered face.

‘Sorry. Got distracted.’ I started pushing the large tin onto the boat which slowly shifted through the sand.

‘Whatever, ya little muppet.’

When all the tins were on the boat, Imogen clacked her yellowed and silver teeth and started revving up the motor. I tried not to flinch as the sound of a dying



chopper pierced through the peaceful air of Serpentine Isle. While waving my aunt goodbye, I traced the foam path she made as she slowly went over to the real world. She shrunk until she was so small that only ants would see her. My eyes traced the coast that belonged to the mainland. All so far away that it just seemed like a sketch someone made across the sky. Nothing discernible but the explosion that came from the right side of the opposing shoreline.

Everything is okay. Everything is okay. Imogen is just going to the docks of McAllistair, drop off the milk and come straight back. The wars do not affect us. Not here. As I repeated that to myself I drew back into the island. Were i couldn't see or hear the bombs.

After wandering around for a bit I was still drawn to the temple of snakes. I looked up and found myself standing in front of it as if the wind had carried me here.

Secluded on the part of the island where aunt Imogen never bothered to come, the temple of snakes stood tall, surrounded by poppies, lavender and elder flowers. The vipers and tree snakes circled it as if they knew it was supposed to be an altar to them. A while ago, although I couldn't tell how long, when I still remembered who we were before the island, I stumbled across a small patch of land where all the snakes that live here seemed to gather. Because the snakes were the only breathing thing that couldn't leave. I felt like this little piece of land should remain theirs. It started with collecting little flowers and stick to decorate the space and provide shelter but soon I started building these structures out of the rocks that the sea spit out. Now I was back at what by now had turned into a massive structure, about as tall



as I was. The snakes were crawling all throughout it and I had to try my best not to step on them as I approached the temple. I started to weave in the wisteria I had picked that morning through the twiggy arch that formed the entrance, to make sure that the snakes had some privacy. They kept me silent company while I was weaving and I got so lost in the sticks that I nearly had a heart attack when a big boom appeared from behind me. Another bomb. A bigger one this time. I assured myself again that Imogen was safe. Then I imagined myself standing on the field where all that violence was happening. Explosions all around me a monotone melody permanently stuck in my ears. I knew deep down I was stupid for yearning that adrenaline rush. I was safely kept away on Serpentine Isle. Probably the most beautiful place in the world where I had everything I needed. The perfect place for a little child to grow up. But still.

Wouldn't it be neat to know there was someone waiting anxiously whether I would return from the battlefield. I imagined fellow soldiers calling out for me while running away from enemy fire. When the battle was over I would fight with them, and angrily fall into the arms of a lover who's just happy I'm home.

'Ow.'

A sharp pain in my ankle pulled me out of the fog. Instantly I knew it was a snake bite. I looked down to see a small snake get away from me. Little rascal. A viper maybe. Whatever it was I felt the venom go through my leg like lightning.

I dropped into a weird contortion so I could immediately suck out the venom. The snakes here weren't super poisonous but the bite would still add to the collection



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of scars that decorated my feet.

‘Have you fed the cows today.’

I was having dinner with Imogen at the house. She had just come back from the mainland and had brought some duck with her.

‘I have.’

‘Did you play with the snake again?’

‘Nuh uh.’

‘Then why are you wearing socks?’

Blast. I never wore socks. Of course she could tell I had visited the snakes.

‘I didn’t seek them out. I just wasn’t paying attention. She came out of nowhere.’

‘Damn it, Phillip. I do everything to keep you safe but you just can’t stop playing with fire, can you?’

‘I’m sorry. How was the mainland today?’

‘Horrible as always. There’s a war going on yet somehow everyone still manages to get caught in drama.’

I trailed off as Imogen started going on a rant about the people on the mainland.

Trying to ignore the sting in my chest, I thought: damn I really want to get involved in some drama. Getting my heart broken seemed preferable now. At least I still had my snakes.

The next morning when Imogen was off to her adventures on the mainland I went to the temple of snakes. When I got there and took a look to see what still needed to be done. Nothing. The entire structure was finished. What was I supposed to do now? Decorate further I guess. I started to gather more rocks, sticks and flowers to build the temple towards the heavens. The



rocks would form the base for a decorative second floor, perched right on top of the first. With the branches I would weave big serpentine sculptures that would turn the temple into a true cathedral adorned with a halo of flowers.

As I was working I felt yet again a snake bite my foot. No venom this time. I barely registered.

Pain didn't matter anymore. This temple would bring meaning to this little forgotten corner of the world. The temple would reach out to heaven and let the gods know what the snakes meant. Another bite. I might be forgotten but the snakes wouldn't. Not with this monument to the holiness. My feet were turning numb at this point. Flowers and twigs intertwined with my bruised hands. Calloused from working for centuries. From far below me I heard someone I may have known call what may have been my name. Nothing mattered. None of history up until this point mattered. Not the wars. Not the empire that rose and fell. All that mattered were the snakes crawling all over my body and the light that consumed me.



Modern epistolary short story: Spaceworm by Mignonne Wildeboer & Isa van Rooy

In a forgotten corner of a second-floor lecture room, an abandoned piece of paper with the following scribbblings of two literature students was found. The contents of the crumpled piece far transcend what has been discussed in any literary discussion. In the common interest of all, it is necessary that their ideas should immediately be brought to the masses. Even though the topics discussed are highly complicated and quite dangerous to openly discuss, it is felt that this spontaneous, yet carefully researched conversation must be shared...

I: If you had to choose between being a spaceworm or a seaworm, which one would you pick?

M: Seaworm, because there are more visible forms of life in water, while I do not think that would be the case in space. I would be very lonely as a spaceworm, I suppose. However, space is incredibly beautiful, and you would probably eat stars as food (which is pretty cool), so I'm pretty torn.

I: Honestly, I think that having stars in your stomach would feel the same as being in love. So, every time you're hungry and eat some stars (twice a day for a worm probably), you would feel love-jitters. Although, it would be pretty tragic if you have these feelings, but you cannot express nor share them because you're a lonely worm in space. Maybe you would attribute your feelings of love to some space-rocks or to the stars you eat. If you're a seaworm, you'll probably get so many love partners, though... Difficult decision; popular sea worm or lonely, but yearning space worm...?

M: The thing is that stars burn but being in love does



not. When you're in love you're unable to eat and your stomach feels like a floating rock and this feeling differs a lot from that of a burning star, I think. As a worm, you would not be in love, but you'd just have extreme bowel problems.

I: But when you're in love you yearn for someone and lose, as a result, the feeling of hunger. The feeling in your stomach does become similar to a dribbling leaf, but if you see your love interest, your body (including your stomach) feels like the explosion of a meteorite. So, I think that eating stars feels like being with your loved one. Can a worm have bowel issues, though?

Google!

M: Worms poop too!!

I: Don't worms have one big internal system? Just like pigeons. It's disgusting but kind of practical. Like some men having only 7 boxersHORTS in total in their closet or using one fork for every meal.

M: Coming back to your statement: "...like the explosion of a meteorite", that's what you said, right? If we look at the explosion of a meteorite scientifically - this is a purely scientific conversation, naturally -, a black hole is formed when meteorites explode and meteorites explode when they're at the end of their life. So if the worm eats a very old, dying star, in theory, it could implode in his stomach and form a black hole. If the worm has a black hole in his belly, would this hole yearn for love, so much that it would absorb me - the worm - entirely once I have no love left to give? Also, how do pigeons have one big internal system? Don't they have little feet?



I: I think this is very possible, but I'd like to believe that from the explosion of meteorites, by the collision of space rocks against these meteorites, new planets could arise; kind of how the earth came to be. If the space worm would focus on these stars, in a loving way, by eating them, then the dying stars that implode in the spaceworm's stomach are simply one big implosion of love. I believe our dear worm (you) will eventually, after millions of centuries of floating, become a planet of its own. Or the worm just continues to have bowel issues, bumping into space dust, space rocks, and meteorites. This would then be how new planets are formed; out of these small bumps. Then the alien tree species are made of what the worm no longer possesses or needs, the planet's air made of the dust of eaten old stars. The cycle of space worm-planets would continue endlessly.

Silence

I: The new Joost Oomen story.

M: Out now!!

M: Wait, something is not right.

M: A meteorite detonates because all of its gas particles in the planet's core have been burned, and as a result, it implodes in itself: A gigantic light explosion occurs. All of the particles of this rock will disperse, and either a black hole or a floating mass of particles will appear; but the meteorite must be burned out, must die, before something new can arise out of it.

I: That makes sense. But wasn't there a meteorite that crashed against our moon, and that's the reason it orbits around the Earth and our planet is the way it is? So, in that context, meteorites could have an effect on the originating of new planets. Also, isn't it the case that black holes, in some cases, just appear out of nowhere



and that researchers cannot find a definitive cause?

O! I have a new theory; what if all the solar systems with big black holes in the middle of them are just planets that another species has annihilated similar to what we're currently doing? That we're just failed solar system number 300000000000?

M: Interesting, could be. We would have to invent a telescope that is able to view distances beyond trillions of lightyears, so that we'd be able to see how black holes are formed. Besides, then we will be able to see our ultimate demise; will we be smashed by a meteorite due to our knowledge of the spaceworms, similar to Max in Harry Mulisch's "Discovery of Heaven"? However, before we'll be bombarded by millions of particles, we'll probably have a dozen eco-conspiracists running around with images of thousands of solar systems imploding in on themselves due to the communal stupidity of the spaceworm, and species similar to us.

But let us go back to the beginning of the story; if the spaceworm is in love, doesn't it make more sense if the meteorite or black hole doesn't implode in his stomach, but in his planet-heart instead?

I: That's both beautiful and profoundly sad. I look at it from less of a human perspective; I don't think we're involved at all. The main focus point is the spaceworm, with its planet-heart, just being in love with the digested stars and the rocks that float by. I think whether the worm itself turns into a planet or the actions of the worm form planets has nothing to do with humans. The spaceworm is, whether it survives in worm-form or other, just floating around, living in some way a kind of 'life'. Just not as we know it to be.



M: Every time we look in the telescope, we would look at solar systems of old life, so we can never know. We look at the time when black holes were un-imploded and full of life as we know it. If we would look back, we would live an old life, instead of a new one.

I: But even if we could see the black holes arising, instead of beforehand, there is a possibility, of course, that humans would watch the cascading happening. But it happened light years ago: if it is inevitable to try to get ourselves out of the ultimate destruction in the shape of a black hole created by said worm, then I don't know if we should know it. Or, if we want to live in that truth, even though it is grim, all we can remember is what I said earlier; the spaceworm, his beloved stars, and the floating rocks are all there is; are all that's eventually left.

M: Okay, so we got what could have or would happen if I was a spaceworm. What would happen if you were a seaworm?

*The true origin of this piece is one of utter fatigue and boredom- the students were in a state of delirious creativity when they decided to put their pens on the paper.

By Mignonne Wildeboer & Isa van Rooy



Homemade Distance: incorrigible scoundrels by the sea by Dung Ly

Trigger warnings: Cursing, Violence, Racism, Terrorism, Grievous Injury, Death.

Kasih gently cut into the duct tape with a kitchen knife. He rolled this strip around the matchbox he had prepared and placed it in an improvised socket. This, he placed before a piston, which he had hooked to a timed switch he was learning to make, which he hoped would count down to exactly ten seconds. Over the table lay a fire blanket. Finally, he put his apartment window ajar, turned on the volume of the radio and put it by the window. He expected music, but he heard the following:

“To move to our next topic, next week our Setiawan Daturbara will be awarded the, and I will read this in full, the *Metropolitan Order of Sagely Insights Presented to His Crowning Majesty*. Furthermore, it is rumoured that for his work and influence amongst our Sister-people across our Trading Sea, he will receive more honorary titles as well.”

“They really intent to load him up, don’t you think?”

“Ma’am, I have heard that you helped him with the research for his semi-autobiographical novel, *Between the Subjects of a Remembered Empire and the New*, so do you believe that despite the Crowner’s disreputable standing within our League- is it appropriate for him to go and receive the recognition from this foreign sovereign?”

“Well, on the surface it acknowledges the historic bonds between...”



Without a bang, the matchbox flung off the socket and burst into flames before it hit the ground. Kasih quickly put it out with the fire blanket, but a charred spot was left on the floor covering. He put the foot of his wooden chair over the spot and went to the window. Rather than elated, he was put at ease.

Opposite the bustling harbour lay his land of birth, beyond the horizon. Kasih recounted that within the week Daturbara would likely depart for the Realm, depriving him of the chance to throw the thing through his window. Daturbara had not answered his letters for rent money and an interview... but he did discuss his threats on the radio.

Thinking of the man, he looked towards the cargo docks. For ages past, the great submarines of the archipelago have dodged navies and taxes to move shipments of coal, amongst other things- which until recently he too had helped to mine as well.

It was expected a Goldcoast man would travel by imperial zeppelin; Kasih had arrived here by submarine. He was Upriverkin - his sisterman-, but his face would not be the face of their shared future- his future- he would be. Iron clouds departed for his homeland in the sky; the trading sea would not sunder the reality of history beyond the Crowner's domination.

He shook his head, put away the radio and went back to the table: he spent the next hour attaching another taped-up matchbox to a fuse on top of his pipe bomb. Coming here as a migrant, he used to offer blasting



services as a subcontractor, but the big companies from his former home had already snatched up many of the small mines across the archipelago of the League. They have been bringing in their own talent from across the Trading Sea- not from his birthplace, but from the opposite end of the Realm. It is not a story Daturbara would write about; just sappy tales about both their kin married by imperial officials.

His thoughts were interrupted: quite unexpectedly, he found that he could not attach his timing mechanism without it rattling: hurtling through the air could set it off prematurely, so he had to pad the insides of the metal wrap-casing.

Before he could think further about it, he suddenly heard noise from the staircase outside his single-room apartment. He hid his tools absentmindedly, but the bomb he covered with a few old worksheets he had in his third-floor apartment. As he thought of using paper wrappings as padding, the door was opened unexpectedly with a key.

The elderly landlady swung open the door and displaced the chair. “Dear Kasih- Oh, anyway... I have great news for your apartment! ” When her expression turned puzzled Kasih suddenly noticed that he had frozen up.

“I was... reviewing a blasting plan of an old colleague of mine- I was just cleaning up these sheets – low explosive left on the sheets he send me!”



“Oh don’t confuse me with stuff I’m not an expert~ in! You’re much too kind-” The landlady forced her way in and rummaged through her purse- “ He at least paid you right? Oh open that window, you always clean it so nicely and – now, I want to see them pretty bulks...” The old lady brushed past him and he could see more of the tattoo on the back of her neck. He had noticed it when he helped her repair his door: a winged serpent, fangs bared, feathered in navy blue.

The Freefleetfolk were more real in this land than they had ever been in the stories his parents told him- the romance of his land of birth as an independent Realm. It is why he helped her with the door to begin with: he was told stories full of violence, riches and monsters.

As she opened the curtains, Kasih left the door open and put his chair in place, sitting on it to force his landlady to lean on the windowsill. “He would ask around for me with his family- they supposedly work a mine a few islands away.”

The landlady turned around, but it seemed as if her jovial expression had never been there. “Be sure to put in the notice with me on time.” A silence permeated the room for a few seconds as the landlady scanned the room. She then took a step back, leaned on the windowsill and took out a roll of candies: “...have some. Why do you clean your windows anyway: everyone else in this block just puts up the curtains and goes to work.”

Kasih stood up to take the candy. He was about to say that because of the open trucks carrying coal, soot



would quickly accumulate on the windows, but as the window opened inwards, he did not find it a hassle to clean it every other day.

But as he stood up, he moved the chair and he saw her eyes moving to the black spot. When he made eye contact, she said: “I don’t appreciate you damaging my property in any way.”

Kasih thought it some sinister metaphor: he snatched up his pipe bomb and took position between his window and the door. The landlady jumped and put her hand with the candies in the purse. “I shake this- we die right now! Do you understand!”

When the landlady noticed Kasih subconsciously rattle the thing, she took her hand out of her purse and showed her palms. “Hey now- hey! I believe you, I’ve handled steel pipes before. ”

Kasih nodded and stepped back, taking a few deep breaths. “... Okay. I am going to leave. If I hear you move, I’ll...” He stopped and the landlady could see his mind was racing. “Money- the purse! And I’ll need...”

“It’s alright- take your time, you are in control. ” But she waited for him to settle in his silence. “I’ve worked with many a ... bold... young lad before... as you may have surmised from the uh, urban legends. No offence- You don’t seem like the type.” She looked at his blank face as he was breathing quickly through his nose now. When she noticed tears in his eyes, she continued.

“I came by to tell you that... I was going to exempt you



from the rent markup! An old friend recommended me to invest in insulated windowsills and I know you've lost your job sometime already- anyways, few sailors retire as loan sharks you know- we uh, run from'em in fact- so if you can put down the uh, pipe-bomb?"

Kasih took a seat but held the pipe-bomb with both hands now. "That's it, lad, I'll just... lean against the window." She kept silent for as long as was needed.

His eyes were glued to the bomb, even as he straightened himself out in his seat. "I... work alone. There is this author, who is going to get this award from the Realm Across, but I need to stop him. If the people at home think they are already home, they'll never understand it is better here- no wait..."

The landlady nodded and thought for a moment. "It's alright: you're new here and you're willing to make a stand for this place. I uh... get that. Yes. Was it a ... big change to come here?"

Kasih rubbed over the steel-encased product of his morals. "It's a lot easier to obtain a residence visa here with the admiralty, which I needed to obtain a work visa with the government outside the city. I know this... kinda thing doesn't get me citizenship... but we share the language! Reading up on history and accents doesn't get me in either, as nice as doing it during downtime it is."

"I love reading too- it is a sailor thing. " She noticed a book on the desk by Daturbara: Homecoming Diary:



“... They just let you on?”

“They take anyone. They will want people with a fancy resumé sure, but if you’re on the run, they won’t let anyone else have your- ahem, *person* for twenty years. *No questions asked* that is. ”

The landlady picked up her bag and took out her roll of candies again. “Anyways, how about this: you just, clean all this up, I’ll hold up on the rent. You come to see my old buddies and me -we always meet in the community centre- and we see about helping you with a job... on land of course. If you haven’t done anything, it will all die down- I’m sure.”

Kasih was not on board: his homeland may be ruled by scum, but the freefleets are nowadays known as scoundrels too. More importantly: it could be a lie and she would turn him in!

On the other hand, the cops were already on his trail, never mind the rent, or his family back home... Then again: he was already a scoundrel. “The freefleets! Let me join!”

She dropped her roll of candies from fright and put a hand to her chest. “Hey now, calm down- listen here...”

Kasih took her doubt for trickery: believing his life depended upon it, he had already taken one hand of the bomb. “Call one of your buddies now! Tell him to escort me to the harbour! Tell him to find me a crew- to sponsor me and-”



He needed time to communicate his demands, but he also felt the need to assert himself, but suddenly he saw her eyes roll back. She was convulsing.

By the time he had put the bomb back on the table, she had fallen and couldn't get up. "Help- Brothers, sisters... My..." Kasih didn't own a phone and he had held out money on first aid courses- but it was too late now.

The death of the old lady elicited confusion and pity: he may not have intended to, but he realised he did indeed follow up on his threats: he had taken her life for trying to decide what kind of man he was going to be. *For interrupting him.*

His eyes fixated on the staircase: only one way out. He had made up his mind about the violence: then he realised that regardless, he should probably hide her in one of the unused rooms and lock the door. After that, head onto the streets with his stuff and then-

But right as he made up his mind, he heard shuffling and a gun click behind him. "You virgin, not even a breath-giving kiss, huh?"

Kasih turned around, instinctively reaching for the bomb. She shot him in his left knee, causing him to fall down.

"Shit! ...Shit!" said the landlady.

He kicked the leg out from under the table and the bomb rolled towards the edge. Kasih's hands groped his



knee: the blood couldn't trickle out of his pants, but he couldn't straighten out his leg.

Perhaps the landlady did catch it, or he was more feeble than he thought; he couldn't curse over his own cries of pain, a black hole for all his plans: his escape, the offer of the landlady, the bombing and...

“Fuck me, did that bullet bounce off?- You virgin- you cock, I did not suffer forty years of moaning assholes and cunts in a metal tube to get done in by some sorry sootskin that can't even pay me my rent!”

Numb as his mind was, he could feel heartache in every breath he released and his neck straining to lift his head. But there was also the dense tropical air tumbling over his tongue and the blue sky outside reflected in the grey roof of his room. It silenced him.

Kasih heard the click of the gun. “Ah, let's clean house: what will stand in for your rent is a medal and a piece in the morning paper to share with me folk ... Arrrr matey.”

“No, please... I can pay rent- I have family!”

The barrel went up. “A *powder monkey* like you? You don't strike me the type as having a family.”

“I just haven't written them for a year! They must be missing me! I'll say it was all a work accident.” He struggled to keep his mind and head up, but he couldn't imagine dying here. “They can pay the medical bills as well- they paid for my education too!”



The landlady mulled it over. “Oh goddammit- Well, with that leg they will not be offering a spot on any ship- “She put her gun in her purse. “ I am much too old for all this, but saving money to go into rentals hasn’t worked out very well either. But I want to read the letter, to make sure they will want to help a sorry *dog* like you.”

As the elderly landlady stopped the bleeding, Kasih tried to put into words what he was going to tell his family. But then he became aware of two feelings, rising and falling with his breath: none of his plans would come to fruition, so his future felt open. Crippled for life, he imagined that all that was left was to endure the condemnation, bear it however he ventured best.

But he also felt he had only delayed confronting the mystery of his heart, his very best part ticking like a time bomb.