

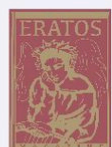
ERATO'S

MAGAZINE



1st ed. 2025/26

Erato's Literary Magazine . Created for
&
by students



First Impressions



2025 is the year of Jane Austen's 250th birthday anniversary. With this edition, we wanted to pay tribute to her and her heritage.

Our theme is a nod to the original title of *Pride and Prejudice*. It is about celebrating the habit of looking again, at people, the past, and ourselves. Austen's novels often highlight how the first judgments rarely tell the whole story. We present to you works that explore transformation, re-evaluation, and the ways time reshapes our perspectives.

Foreword

A letter from the editors

On first impressions:

Dear reader,

This edition is brought to you by a (mostly) fresh team. For many of us, it will be the result of our first impressions: of Erato's, of our own creative potentials, of seeing our sensibilities mirrored and shared in the form of a magazine. For you, the first impression of our impressions, which we hope will slowly turn into familiarity as the seasons give way to each other and, with them, new editions come into being.

Even before we put this out, my first impression is that Erato's is moving toward everblooming, beautiful things.

May we always treasure new beginnings.

Love,

Rita (your co-chief editor) xx

Table of contents

I.	The Idea of Us - Nena Mandziak	5
II.	Zine - Daria Tyżlik-Carver	7
III.	Loop - Floriane Taruc	9
IV.	Review of <i>Frankenstein</i> - Nena Mandziak	12
V.	Meet Halfway - Floriane Taruc	14
VI.	The Smile - Sophia Jamali	15
VII.	Izanami - Naoka Kadar-Todo	16
VIII.	Untitled- Femke Kapteijns	19
IX.	He Who Saw the Deep - Naoka Kadar-Todo	20
X.	Tryst - Sophia Jamali	28
XI.	untitled - Patrícia Luptáková	29
XII.	Untitled - Helena Issa	31
XIII.	Whaleback: Do you have a Minute? - Chloe Broodbank	32
XIV.	Untitled Drawing - Patrícia Luptáková	40
XV.	From Snow I Came - Hugo Wolters	41
XVI.	On The Night Before Christmas... What Would Jesus Buy? - Allyson Geduld	45
XVII.	Hello/Goodbye Cold - Floriane Taruc	49

The Idea of Us

Nena Mandziak

He caught her eye across the train,
a quiet spark he can't explain.
Two strangers glimpsed, two strangers guessed—
first impressions doing all the rest.

When glanced again,
she still was there,
writing like she breathed the air.
Her thoughtful stare,
a silent spark of something rare,
suggested worlds he couldn't reach,
ideas she breathed no one could teach.

He turned back to the window's gleam,
green and gold in gentle stream,
threads entwined without a fuss—
and somehow he thought, they're like us.
But then her seat was suddenly bare;
her journal left behind with care,
a doorway to her hidden mind
as if she'd dare him or invite.



Tempted by curiosity,
he lingered there uncertainly,
unsure of what he'd hope to find
in the world of such a sharper mind.
She wrote a poem about "him,"
or someone close enough to be—
the version crafted in her view,
a stranger shaped from something true,
yet a reflection of a clue.
And as her pages came to rest,
he knew his view of her was guessed—
just as her picture wasn't him,
his of her was a fantasy.

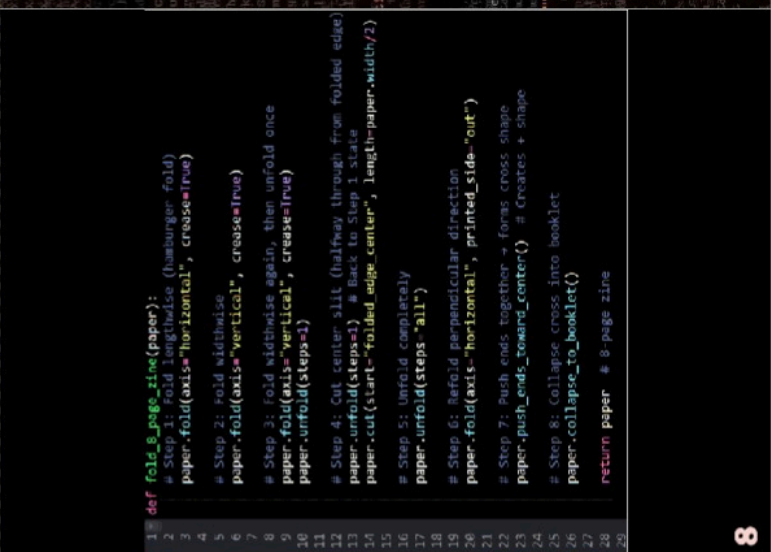
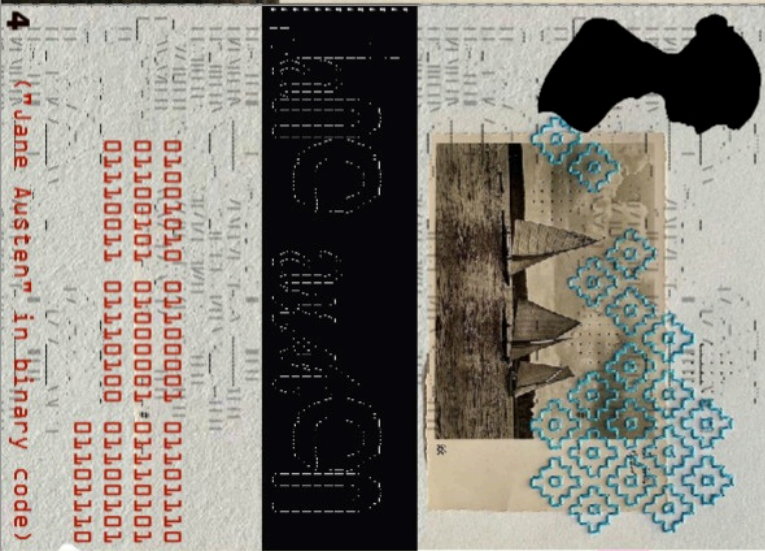
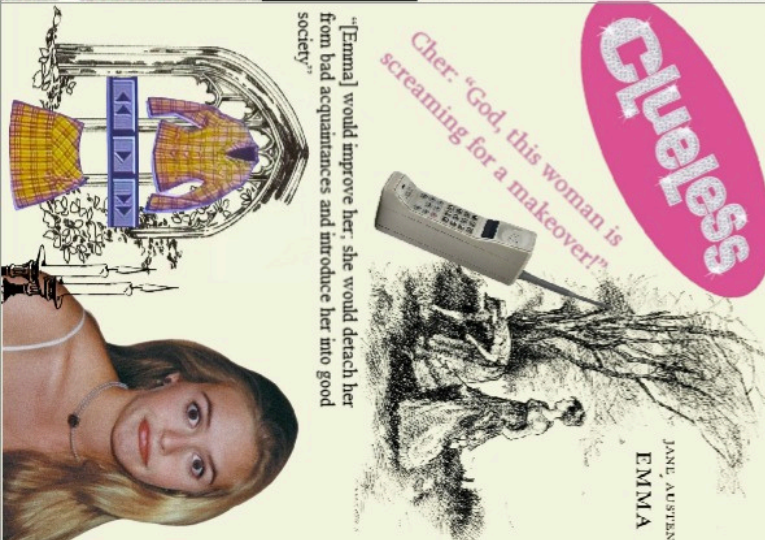
Zine

Daria Tyżlik-Carver

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'Zines'. Observer, <https://observer.com/tag/zines/>.



Loop

Floriane Taruc

The perfume of tulip buds along the brick-set sidewalks was but a lingering fragrance when an ageing oak leaf, kissed by the gentle autumn breeze, heard the calling of the river and yielded to its siren song – a mirage of orange and brown as boats casted their reflections on the water. A cacophony of screeching car tyres, bicycle bells, hurried footsteps and clinking boat anchors roused the oneiric city by the canals from its slumber, at first gently, then abruptly when a gunshot ricocheted and echoed on that clear autumn morning, fuelled by the fiery despair of a man – extinguishable only by the very thing he had lost: his heart.

The said heart, pumping what remained of its crimson life force, throbbed and detracted inside the chest of its master: a man sprawled across the groomed Bermuda grass on that misty Dutch morning. As one with the late risers, he was unmoving and uncaring – waiting for a stronger sun to come alive. His hair, wildly loosened from what appeared to be a bun, was matted in fresh and lukewarm blood. On his temple once covered by brown skin, a gaping hole, a lifeless void, now existed. He took one final gasp for dear life, tightened and relaxed his grip on a pistol, black against his ghostly hand, trembled, shuddered, and finally froze. The cemetery grounds were no stranger to death but that didn't mean that the faceless angels guarding the tombs did not take pity on the man they'd seen alive and breathing countless times before that morning.

There among the falling leaves of autumn a life was taken. The black iron-wrought gates of the cemetery opened with a high-pitched screech; its hinges were rusty from only being used for funerals and All Souls Day. A mute ambulance entered, its lights of flashing red and yellow went unnoticed against the light of day. Next came two police cars racing to finish the job. As it is, when police cars grew impatient, and ambulances went silent, they headed to an inevitable end: a dead man.

The door to each vehicle opened and five people, two from the ambulance and three from the police cars, found themselves looking at blood seeping through the pavement. The two paramedics were indistinguishable – two lanky men in blue coveralls with silver reflectors running vertically from their shoulder blades and horizontally wrapping around the stomach. Someone clicked their tongue as the paramedics opened the ambulance door. One of the unrelated twins propped one foot up the ambulance steps, his back sticking out the wide open double doors. He stepped down and pulled a lever. A loud tick followed by mechanical sounds echoed through the cemetery. The other twin held the left door open and out came rolling a black stretcher with two squares of folded white sheets on top.

“They should have called the mortuary for this”, sighed the first twin, the side of his mouth curling in visible disapproval. “He’s as cold as the woman I go home to!”

“Some things just need to be done, young man”, said one of the three policemen, his voice rough and authoritative, like he had waited months before speaking again. He was the shortest among the men in uniform, but the lack of height he compensated in broadness. “This was clearly a suicide, but we have to get statements from the caller for the paperwork. Pieter, take Jan with you.”

The paramedic twins lowered the stretcher as Pieter and Jan briskly walked to the cemetery office on the far east wing. It was an aging building, square-shaped with small overhead windows. The concrete was beginning to grow black from algae, and on its side was a retractable metal ladder welded perhaps to make cleaning the roof easier. The two officers heard little: their breathing, the crunch of their boots against the gravel, and the occasional flapping of pigeon wings as they approached the office. Jan opened his mouth and then closed it again. He looked at Pieter expectantly.

“I don’t think there’s anyone here”, Jan finally said. “But we should knock”. It was his second week at the job and three weeks after he finished training in the Academy. Jan always asked when he voiced out opinions: “What do you think?”

In submission, his companion said, "Yes, but you've got to stop asking other people to make decisions for you. It's not good for the job."

Jan removed a brown leather glove from his left hand and lifted the brass ring above the doorknob in an attempt to knock. He noticed how the door had not been repainted in years and in place of a knob was a poorly patched hole, kept in place by rusty nails. A moment of hesitation made him release the ring and turn to Pieter.

"Is it just me or do you also get the feeling that we shouldn't be here?" Jan's voice quivered at the end of his sentence.

Pieter, who had been looking at pigeons pecking on gravel, let out an exasperated sigh.

"Look, Jan. I understand you're new but here we follow orders." Pieter took three long strides to the door and knocked using his clenched fists. Silence.

The sun was up but the cemetery remained blanketed in mist. Pieter knocked once more, startling the pigeons and Jan, who now stood by the metal ladder and pretended to examine its patterns of decay. Pieter motioned to Jan and the latter stood by the door with him. Just as the officer was about to knock again, sounds of locks being opened were heard from the inside.

With an ancient screech, the door opened, revealing the same man Pieter and Jan had seen dead minutes ago.





A Review of Guillermo del Toro's *Frankenstein*

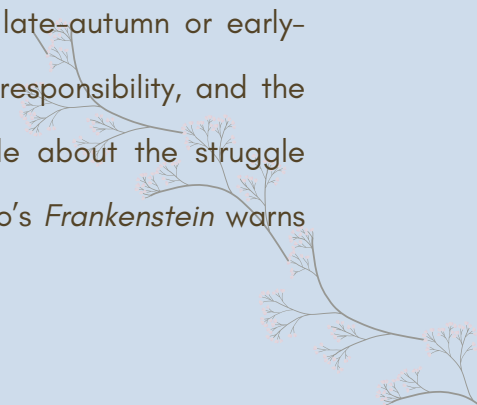
Nena Mandziak

As the gloomy atmosphere settles in, we wrap ourselves in blankets, light a candle, and with a cup of warm tea escape into the world of fiction—name a better scenario. Our lovely Film and Literature Committee gifted us just that on one of the November evenings, when we had the chance to watch and discuss a recently released adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*.

Del Toro's reimagining is not so much a horror film as a Freudian-spirited fairy tale about the generational relay of sons harmed by their fathers. It might be a surprise to some that the title character, Victor Frankenstein, is the creator, not the monster. Or isn't he?

Portrayed by Oscar Isaac, Victor is a young scientist consumed by his obsession with conquering death. Driven by this fixation, he assembles fragments of human bodies to create an immortal being. But when the creation takes its first breath, it becomes clear that it is no mindless construct. The creature—played with striking sensitivity by Jacob Elordi—possesses consciousness, emotion, and a desperate longing to understand his place in the world. Rejected and horrified by his own existence, he begins the search for answers from his creator.

What unfolds is a destructive and deeply moving relationship shaped by grief, fury, and mutual blame. Set against a richly Gothic backdrop—perfect for a late-autumn or early-winter evening—the film becomes a meditation on loneliness, moral responsibility, and the perilous limits of human ambition. Resembling an age-old fairy tale about the struggle between good and evil and the horrors of unchecked power, Del Toro's *Frankenstein* warns against human ego and the tragic consequences of playing God.



What struck me most was Del Toro's ability to humanise the creature without stripping away the unsettling strangeness that defines him. I must admit, I was initially unsure about Elordi as the creature; his handsomeness and natural elegance seemed at odds with the raw, unsettling presence I had imagined. There were moments when this tension was distracting, yet his blend of fragility and menace gradually settled into something unexpectedly moving—less monstrous, perhaps, but more tragic.

However, when discussing the adaptation with those familiar with Shelley's novel, it became clear that the film diverges in notable ways. In particular, the moral landscape feels more sharply divided than in the original. The film leans into a very literal black-and-white contrast between good and evil, which at times imposes a single reading on a story that is, at its heart, ambiguous and morally complex. I loved the creature, but I wanted to feel more sympathy for Victor—I believe the potential is there, but was sadly left unexplored by Del Toro.

I also loved the film's visual language: the muted, wintry palette and detailed set design captured an atmosphere that felt simultaneously magical and decaying, both terrifying and strangely beautiful. I appreciated the narrative structure as well. Both parts—Victor's Tale and *The Creature's Tale*—were richly developed, allowing us to inhabit two perspectives of the story. Still, once these sections concluded, the plot felt abruptly accelerated toward the finale. Perhaps lingering longer would be too monotonous—the film already runs for two and a half hours—but even so, I couldn't shake the sense that something essential was missing from the final stretch.

For more sensitive viewers, it is worth noting that some scenes venture into the grotesquely brutal. I'm usually somewhat allergic to this kind of vividness myself, but while occasionally uncomfortable, it remained manageable—and overall, I found the film absorbing, haunting, and ultimately rewarding. So for anyone seeking a haunting story to match the lengthening shadows of autumn, Del Toro's *Frankenstein* offers a dark, compelling companion.

Meet Halfway



Floriane Taruc

The Smile

Sophia Jamali

Here

the stone does not smell of rain

it is soaked

in the scent of blood

The neighbor's daughter

behind a broken window

stitches a smile onto her child's shirt

I

with hands cracked

from waiting

think of the moon

which dies more each night

than I do

They say

one must swallow sorrow

but they didn't say

with which throat?

And love

Love...

A sip I drink every morning

to know I am still alive

not in the hope of salvation

but for the honor of living

in memory of those who still

stitch a smile facing death

and taint the stone

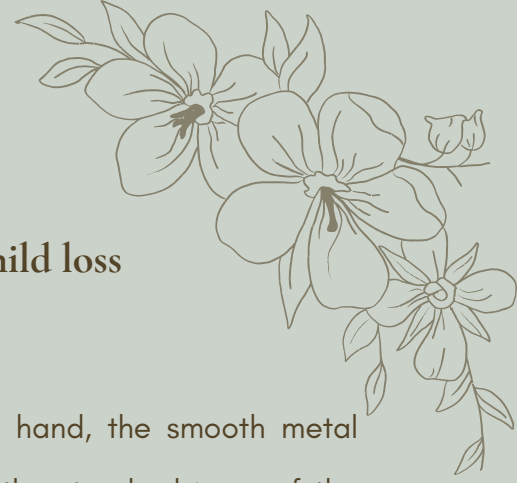
with the scent of humanity...



Izanami

Naoka Kadar-Todo

TW: Suicide, Child loss



Shizuka stalked through the house, the pistol sleek in her small hand, the smooth metal cooling her irate fingers. One bullet loaded into the Nambu 60, the standard issue of the National Police Agency that Toki kept stored in his top-right drawer.

For now, it hung loosely by her side, like the satchels that her high school students would carry.

Shizuka smiled, leaning against the clean, polished table; she made sure to swipe it spotless meticulously after every mealtime. The sway of exhaustion within her was gone, replaced by a sparking fizz of energy. With this unexpected swell of confidence, Shizuka strode past the kitchen into the office. The rickety bookshelf creaked in greeting as she caressed the numerous volumes with her fingers.

All her beloved books remained stowed neatly on a modest pine shelf. The Classics, some European and American Literature. All of Jane Austen's works. But there were many Japanese novels too: Natsume Soseki, another few novels from Banana Yoshimoto. The *Kojiki*.

She stroked the grainy cover of the *Kojiki*, flipping to the first page. *Congratulations on your middle school entrance, your Papa and Mama are enormously proud!* This had been her Bible back then, falling to its elements from the years of tear and wear. The dates of writing competitions filled the rest of the page, the kanji letters bouncy and eager just like her aspirations were – a far call away from being an off-duty teacher.

Flipping through the creamy pages, something protruded between the pages. She had forgotten the wedged papers, hidden away from prying eyes. Flicking them open, two papers slipped out. The first paper an ultrasound, the white-grey bean of an alien creature nestled in the centre of the laminated page.

"Akio," Shizuka whispered, tenderly passing her index finger over the image. She remembered strolling away from the clinic after receiving the ultrasound, relieved at the prospect of having a son – her in-laws would be satisfied with an heir to the family name. No more aimless, passive-aggressive demands, armoured with the relief that her little boy was perfectly healthy to top it all off.

She had to suppress laughter. The irony of it all – healthy, only to die during birth. To this day, she could not comprehend what had happened, but her Akio was wrenched away from her forever. Shizuka remembered the motionless, blood-drenched lump in a nurse's arm, but that was all that she could recall from her memory. All over, in a matter of minutes; her confusion had temporarily pushed away the imminent grief that would follow, the puzzled haziness of painkillers forming a choking fog in her mind.

Her fingers exhaustedly let go of the papers that she held, letting them spiral to the ground. The confusing jumble of medical descriptions the doctors mumbled after the birth would keep nagging at the back of her mind relentlessly, diverting Shizuka from her dull duties as a housewife.

Shizuka's tasks were outlined like a guidebook the moment she entered the threshold of her in-law's household: she was to take care of their home whilst they worked at their printing company, and Toki filled reports at the Station. An incessant wave of sorrow would wash her usual composure away from her, disorienting her as she vacuumed and scrubbed and cooked for her family. Often, Shizuka would lie down on the couch and stare into the nothingness, hugging the small photograph of Akio to her bosom. Other times she would find herself raving furiously, mumbling incoherently, fighting against the tsunami of resentment that would grapple within her like a fever.

She flipped through her beloved book, to page one-one-two.

Her favourite tale from all myths in the *Kojiki*, Izanami's tragedy. The Goddess of Death, wife of Izanagi the Creator who had created the Japanese isles from drops of dragon blood.

Izanami, 'an incarnate of evil' as described in the *Kojiki*. Tragically dying during childbirth, as her son, Kagutsuchi, unintentionally burned her to death due to being a fire sprite. Despite Izanagi's attempts to save her beloved, slashing the child ruthlessly to death, her spirit had left her body. Despite the warnings of the other Gods, Izanagi had ventured to the infinite depths of Yomi, the underworld. Yet all his quest was rewarded with was her disintegrating, festering corpse, causing Izanagi to abandon her without hesitation. Izanami was left to a fate of eternal loneliness, the agony of his betrayal eternally lingering.

Placing the book back onto the shelf, she crawled up the stairs and slid the door of their bedroom open.

Toki was sleeping deeply, exhausted from his unpaid overtime at the police station. Breathing loudly, his bearded face was round and peaceful in the moonlit darkness. Shizuka stepped a little closer, observing the sharp nose and furrowing brows. The square glasses were folded neatly on the tatami mat beside his futon bed.

Did she love him? She supposed she did. He never abused her and was as gentle as a lamb, comforting her with soft words and hugs after the miscarriage. But does a lamb ever speak up against his berating parents? Never. Ever stood up against their criticisms, or spiteful comments thrown at her? Never.

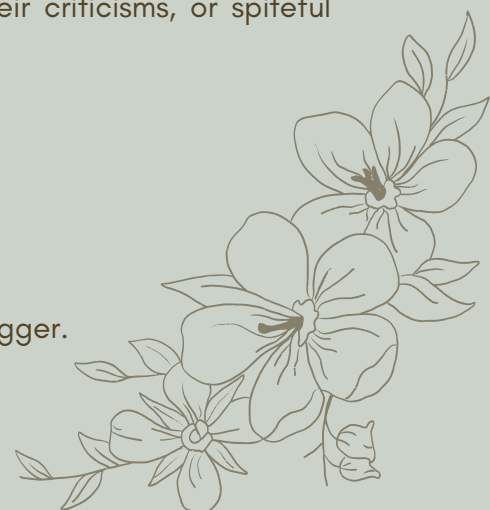
She steadily raised the gun.

Shizuka set the gun to the soft curve of her temple and pulled the trigger.

The diagnosis paper remained crumpled under Shizuka's bookshelf.

'Diagnosis: Bipolar I Disorder

Requires urgent treatment and medication. The patient presented clear signs of the disorder including extreme mood swings, the inability to accept diagnosis, hallucinations, depression and inability to control emotions. CAPLYTA and Haloperidol treatment required.'



Untitled

Femke Kapteijns



Yes, they were the very same
Wolf then, and Wolf now
They could not be estranged

He Who Saw the Deep

Naoka Kadar-Todo

PART I

"There was a man who saw the deep, the bedrock of the land, who knew the ways and learned all things." The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet I

The outskirts of the woods darkened against the horizon as the two warriors halted in their tracks. A solemn weight settled onto the silent cedar trees, the blessed hand of Anu heavy over the thick-growing forest. As the boughs rustled in the wind, the forest breathed like a living beast, the gentle scales of the leaves glimmering from the morning dew. For a while, the two men stood in awe, admiring the ancient trees. Eventually, one of them stirred, the rising sunlight catching fire on his golden chestplate. A giant in stature, he unsheathed his axe and set to hew at the gnarled bark of the trees.

"Gilgamesh!" the second warrior uttered hesitantly. He stepped forward, touching the low branch of a cedar tree. The moss parted beneath his fingers, growing as thick sheep's wool, and he let the unblemished earthiness of the forest air seep through him. "Must we harm these trees?"

"We must cut our way through, Enkidu," Gilgamesh stopped with his work. The wind sighed through the branches, scattering leaves across his lengthy braided beard. He faced Enkidu, placing a hand on his shoulder. "There is no other way for us to find Humbaba."

Enkidu nodded, latching onto the stern look of his friend – Gilgamesh beamed confidently down on him, squeezing his shoulder reassuringly before starting to chop the trees with renewed vigour. Reluctantly, Enkidu took his own axe into his hands, sinking the weapon into the tree closest to him. The amber sap of the cedar gushed slowly from the gaping wound, bleeding out onto the foliage below.

Enkidu blinked from the sudden darkness enveloping him as they entered deeper into the heavy curtain of the forest. He followed the lead of Gilgamesh as they scoured a path, leaving a jagged mess of stumps and fallen trees behind them as the days passed. He silently prayed for the trees, so valuable to the people of Uruk yet utterly wasted, left to rot as the rainy season would set in. As brutal as this method was, Enkidu acknowledged that there was no other way for them to get through the web-like labyrinth of trees.

They had talked over their plan to destroy Humbaba numerous times in the depths of the night. Gilgamesh's voice would be reassuring, devoid of guilt despite the calamity that they were about to wreak. Whilst Enkidu could still not comprehend the hero's desire for greatness through the unjustified slaughter of Humbaba, the legendary sentinel of the Cedar Forest, the tenderness in his voice would make him forget all foreboding, and his heart would be rekindled with passion.

"Enkidu, are you listening to me? I can sense that we are nearing him," Gilgamesh whispered, halting in his tracks. "We must take caution from now forth."

"I am listening. I shall follow your lead."

For the rest of the evening, they trekked further into the thicket around them, an unsettling silence lingering throughout the day. The sun melted beyond the rugged red mountains to the west, and the trees surrounding the two men lunged towards them like claws.

"Damn the rain," Gilgamesh said, frustratedly throwing his flint and steel aside as they shivered under the shelter of a low cedar shrub. He opened a gourd of wine, passing it first to Enkidu before taking a large swig himself. Enkidu inched closer, trying to ignore the chatter of his teeth – he let the sour pang of the wine spread a numbing warmth across him, creeping snugly into his belly. For a while, they sat without conversation, eating a meagre portion of preserved meat from their travel packs; Enkidu worriedly noted their dwindling supplies, as days had passed in the forest without a single animal in sight. "I shall keep watch

first, Enkidu. You go sleep now. You'll need your strength for tomorrow." Enkidu set out his bedroll onto a heap of dry cedar needles, suspiciously eyeing the slumping figure beside him.

"Have your nightmares returned?" Enkidu could catch the startled jerk of his companion's head, a hoarse sigh rattling Gilgamesh's lungs. He groped around in the dark and gently took Gilgamesh's hand, interlocking his calloused fingers with his own. Despite the freezing cold, Enkidu was glad of the isolating darkness surrounding them, for this was the only time Gilgamesh would let his guard down. His companion's almost childish adurance of flaunting his fearlessness around others was prominent ever since the first day he had entered Uruk. It was this fearlessness that had made him revered but also feared amongst his subjects, yet Enkidu knew that this was but a protective shell that Gilgamesh had set up to shield his true thoughts. "I know that they have, I can sense it from your voice. You sound..."

"It is not fear that I feel," Gilgamesh replied curtly, interrupting him. He let go of Enkidu's hand, sinking down to the forest ground tiredly. "I am just anxious. Dreams do not come often to me, let alone dreams carrying prophecies." Enkidu inched closer and covered them both with his blanket. Gilgamesh lowered his voice to a hushed whisper, as though he was afraid to be overheard. "Shamash had come to me in a dream, Enkidu."

"You have not told me of this," Enkidu frowned; whilst he had only heard of the high Goddess in detail from Gilgamesh, her name was revered and feared throughout Uruk.

"She came about a week ago to me." He said, ignoring Enkidu's remark. "She warned me of the power that Humbaba holds. Enkidu - do you remember the garments that he wore when you last saw him?"

"It was many years back," Enkidu protested, a sickening guilt nudging at his conscience. "But yes, I do recall him wearing numerous tunics. What of them?"

"We cannot let him don six of his tunics at once. If he does so, we shall have no chance of survival, let alone defeating him. That is what Shamash had prophesied."

For a while, none of them spoke, the cold rain splattering relentlessly over their shelter. Enkidu closed his eyes, settling in the nook of Gilgamesh's broad shoulder and trying to block out the imminent sense of clammy dread settling over them. He set his ear to his side, the steady throb of the warrior's heart grounding the racing of his own.

"Are you asleep?" Gilgamesh said softly after a while.

"Nay," Enkidu replied, despite his desire for the numbing lull of sleep to take him. "Let us return home, Gilgamesh. We do not need to achieve such grand feats to be happy."

"You may not, but I do," Gilgamesh said bitterly. "And it is not about my happiness. How could I return to my people as a coward? How would I then prove my worth to them as their king?"

"You have already proven enough," Enkidu said. "The people look up to you and hail you for your bravery. Your name will be revered in the songs and tales for eternity."

"One third man and two-thirds god," Gilgamesh chanted. "That is what their tales will sing of me – the man who cowered before the name of Humbaba. Do not lie to me, or yourself, you know that not all acknowledge my standing in Uruk. They look down on me as a mere mortal!" Because you are a mortal, Gilgamesh," Enkidu stressed. "But they do not see you as pathetic. What does a dotard woman's gossip mean to you?"

"Nay, they are correct in their judgment, though. If I return to Uruk now, I will not have the courage to attempt any deeds greater than those I had accomplished before. I would die a boasting fool, Enkidu. I must make a name now, grander than the stars, grander even than the Gods!" his voice rang keenly in the darkness, giddy from excitement.

"All great heroes die eventually. But until then, you must use more prudence; we cannot leap blindly into danger. Hey, are you listening to me?" Gilgamesh snuggled closer, and his bear-like limbs spread a tingling warmth across Enkidu.

"We will talk more of this tomorrow," Gilgamesh said. "But you should really sleep now."

"Someone has to watch guard," Enkidu said sheepishly. "Stop squirming around, you always do this when you are about to sleep."

"What if I do?" Gilgamesh grinned, contentedly settling down. "No living beast will attempt to harm us in the presence of Gilgamesh the Great."

"What about Humbaba?"

"Stop fussing, Enkidu, I will eat him whole if need be. You deserve rest," he mumbled sleepily, before falling into an exhausted slumber. Enkidu gave up, curling up against Gilgamesh and letting the gaping darkness devour them both.

The bitter cold spread like poison through Enkidu's limbs when he woke the next morning. Gilgamesh had pulled the blanket off him as they slept, wrapped tightly in it like a caterpillar in a cocoon. Cursing, he forced himself to sit up, his eyes catching onto a pale beam of sunlight that weaved through the thick barrier of trees a few yards away. Straining his ears, Enkidu could catch the rustle of hard hooves that he had heard so often whilst hunting with Gilgamesh. But also when, he admitted with a drooping sense of guilt, he would wake in the mornings as a boy, the herd of antelopes around him grazing gracefully in their clearing. Yet the rich savouriness of cooking meat tempted him, and he swallowed hard at the thought of a hearty breakfast.

"Wake up, antelopes!" Enkidu whispered, shaking Gilgamesh. Yet the warrior was immovable from his deep sleep, and Enkidu excitedly tugged his chestplate and greaves on. He took his

heavy bow in his hand, stringing it and pulling an arrow from his quiver, and sheathed his axe, laying welcomingly beside him. Shifting his weight onto the balls of his feet, he silently stalked his way through fallen logs and the low shrubs of berries, his keen eyes alert for the movement of the beasts – Enkidu’s stomach churned with anticipation as he daydreamed of the first proper meal that they would have since days, if not weeks. The scent of rainy earth was heavy in the air, and he relished the coolness rising from the black soil beneath his boots. He smiled, briefly shifting his gaze back towards where Gilgamesh slept.

The ground suddenly gave way before him, his heart skipping a beat as he fell. His body slid in a mad roll down a rocky ledge, the forest and its canopy blurring into an incoherent smudge of black-green. Something jagged smashed into his side, followed by a sickening crack as he kept tumbling like a rag doll. The dull thud of the rock wall bashed mercilessly against his head, and darkness descended on Enkidu.

A searing agony ripped through Enkidu’s leg as he bolted awake, his heart throbbing in his chest. For a fraction of a second, his breath stuck within his lungs from the shock, before erupting in a guttural scream. Panicked but unable to budge his head, Enkidu reached down with a shaking hand, and a warm pulse of blood washed over his fingers. The tips of his fingers brushed against the cold steel blade of his own axe, wedged firmly into his thigh.

“Gilgamesh!” he yelled frantically, clutching his leg desperately as though he were a drowning man. His eyes hungrily hunted the presence of his friend, transfixed on the edge of the cliff towering beside him as the clamor of feet grew louder.

“Stop there, Gilgamesh,” Enkidu said, a bitter fear striking him as he heard the familiar grinding voice.

“Humbaba,” he cursed under his breath, gasping as the words sent a dart of agony through his side.

“You are wise to stop; you know well that I am invincible with all my garments. Do I see your

broken resolve there? How pathetic – the great Gilgamesh, breaking down before we would even fight. Has fear struck you dumb, you fool, or are you mute? Well, there would be no use of begging anyway, for it is clear that I have won.” The echoing words made Enkidu bristle with indignation.

“Gilgamesh! Don’t hesitate!” Enkidu shouted hoarsely, the strain of the words making him light-headed. He blinked a fresh trickle of blood out of his eyes, a heavy nausea weighing down on him suddenly. A fluttering and disbelieving anxiety tore at his belly.

“Pathetic, you could not even beg for me to spare your dying friend. I have no desire to fight, let alone taint my hands with the blood of such a craven coward. If you leave my domain now, I shall spare you, Gilgamesh. Are you too cowardly to even say a word of farewell to your friend? What a disappointment.” Enkidu shuddered, his mind stunned from disbelief – the encounter between the two was over within minutes, though it had seemed to be but mere seconds for him.

“Gilgamesh!” his voice grew weaker, cracking from the panic bubbling within him. “Gilgamesh! Answer me!” Yet no response returned to him, only the dull thud of sprinting feet growing fainter by each passing moment. “Please! Don’t leave me!”

As silence reigned, the grip of his fingers loosened around his thigh, a numbing exhaustion spreading across Enkidu’s aching body. The gentle rustle of the leaves in the growing sunlight shimmered above him, a sprawling and fading smudge of lush green. Focusing hard, Enkidu screwed his eyes shut, trying to block out the pain erupting through his battered body. His thoughts drifted hazily back to the last morning they had spent in Gilgamesh’s room in Uruk.

He would lie by him and turn to his left, watching the gentle rise and fall of Gilgamesh’s side. The weatherworn features of his face would be softened by sleep and tinted gold-red from the morning sun that sprawled across the painted clay walls of the bedroom. He would reach out, smoothing out the tumbled black curls.

Yet when he opened his eyes again, the mangled wreck of his leg leered back at him. His life flowed out as his garments became soaked in the putrid iron tang of blood, pooling into the rotting foliage of cedar pine leaves.

His eyelids weighed down involuntarily, waking him into the pits of deep darkness.

END OF PART I

Tryst

Sophia Jamali

Your absence

the hollow song of the world

Your presence

the only meaning of being

within these mists and illusions

Our night is seized

but the light of your eyes is the sun

Your passion

is a love bound to the earth

I must turn green

even if no spring arrives

even if the bud

is an open letter

Let the world

block every path that leads to us

you and I

with every pebble beneath our feet

shall build a home

Longing and desire

two small streams winding and curling

you and I

two streams lost from one another

come, let us reach the sea

Your absence

the hollow song of the world

Come

come

let us be the first line of dawn

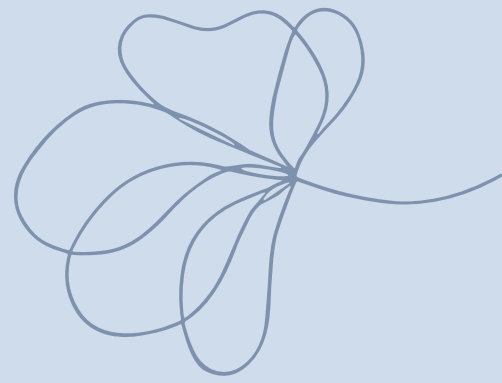
where words

stand helpless, utterly helpless...



Untitled

Patrícia Luptáková

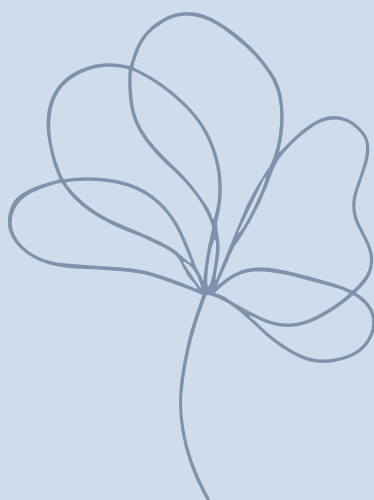


The night was carrying sweeping whispers of mystery, there was a call of a foreign force vibrating in spaces of hollowness in the atmosphere. I press my cheek on the glass of the window as if to defy the materiality of the objects around me and was answered with the tingly flickers of the northern element. Having an obstacle within the interaction and yet cutting off the fragile cobweb of the interlacing cells was a thought too treacherous to bear so I chose to sink further into the depth of the solid and find my eyebrow half sank down into the liminal space. I was desperate to hear the message in the wind, to decode the signals of the omnipresent, of the foundational. It was alive as it is a concept of creation itself, arguably more a something than anything else in existence. It wasn't tangible, yet I felt its force compressing half of my head and expanding it into nothingness. I want to touch the air, taste the stems of grass returning into unity with the soil, disperse into the depths until the remaining speckles of myself fizzle out into the core of the earth itself. There is where it begins, you have to go all the way down towards the nothingness to spring into infinity. As it is the cycle of life to create everything out of absolute nothingness and make everything disperse into the emptiness. But there was this glass in the way, too stubborn, too present, entirely too comprehensible, creating a titan of an obstacle. I knew I could shift into a state of release, to flow through like a river finding its way through tough terrain, twisted and moulded in whichever way. I begged to become a witness to such beauty. I knew it happened when I felt an immense pressure within my eyelids that flipped my entire eye sockets inside out and I beheld a sight. It held no shape of no color, impactful so little on any human sense that I doubt I had any ability to feel at all and it was the most glorious thing I have ever experienced. I knew this is it, I felt as though I returned to a long lost familiar embrace with the lack of anything that I was or that I owned, lack of anything at all in fact. The last touch of any kind was experienced through the compressed whoosh that swept through my body as I fully sank into the glass, in between the atoms of its structure. The illusion of contact was the final thing in my consciousness as I have cherished it the most. I

have always craved to physically touch so powerfully as to intertwine and become one, to look for the river path within a different tangible object as to knot yourself so deeply within it as to be one. It is this that is sought and fulfilled within everything without exception. I was spilling out into the space, extending my roots with the guide of gravity withering away the further I reached, chipping away my memories, ambitions, all to the last inch of my nail on my toe. I gave when useful, provided when approached, called by my instincts to push as far as my concept allows, participating in infinity and creation as I was that void of creation I longed for, but also the hand reaching for it through space and time. It was there, possibly overlapped or somewhere in between precisely, but a point of contact was never reached and the miniscule distance of the encounter formed an infinity within.

.

There will be trees. There will be windows. And I know because I am there too and I am them, too.



KOM JE OOK



korte verhalen avond

salon van Zanten

28 januari

19:00 inloop

19:30 start

22:00 verwacht einde

aanmelden voorlezen:

evenverhaalhalen@gmail.com

ticket link in bio

Untitled

Helena Issa

At first sight they looked like charred cadavers among the dull green of the high grass

Like malheur had passed and sucked all life from them

At first sight it was as if God had warned a messiah with a blazing bush

I wondered if there was anyone who listened

Dried fingers of autumn reaching out

Spreading like a witch's curse

The damned that failed to grab a piece of heaven

At first sight they were nothing like tall dried, dead sunflowers



Whaleback: Do you have a Minute?

Chloe Broodbank

Ah! Welcome back, valued voyager, to that vast and terrifying expanse known as *SpaceTM*! I'm sure you've seen it all before, but just in case you've been afflicted with a sprinkle of the old 'nesia, let me reintroduce you to this stage that all the world is or however the saying goes. What? You don't see it? Of course you don't! It's not an actual stage, oh, never mind. Look, there. That great big thing over there... The great big *Space Whale*! Honestly, do I have to describe it all for you? Oh, I do? Oh very well then, here it goes...

Gently drifting through the vast, cold, empty and star studded expanse of *SpaceTM* is an enormous grey-blue skinned *Space Whale*. It looks fairly similar to a regular whale, if you were to find one that is thousands of kilometres long and a few hundred wide, with its thick skin pock marked by asteroid craters and of course sporting a giant tree like growth on its back. There, nestled amongst continent sized leaves, lies a great plateau upon which the world of the Whaleback lies, and where today's story takes place, but you could have guessed that. Just like how you can guess where on the Whaleback we are (metaphorically speaking) zooming in on.

The city of Frankshaven is amongst the largest, oldest and dirtiest of the many cities across the Whaleback. Sitting on either side of the river Flus and around the giant circular harbour where the Flus empties into the sea, Frankshaven is notable for being a city that people think they have heard of somewhere before.

There's always something going on in the city, from sudden flash floods to magical mishaps with extreme vegetation in one of the university's courtyards and brewing revolutions of all sorts (political, artistic, industrial and religious, just to name a few). We will ignore those grand conundrums and epic tales of corruption and heroism and instead focus on one of the thousands of streets that weave their ways between the many tens of thousands of tightly

packed woodwork buildings...

*

Gary draws in a deep breath. 'A new street, full of new chances', he thinks to himself. Slightly nervous he draws in another deep breath and then steps forward. He raises his arm, his hand folded into a fist. Arching it expertly he lets his elbow do the work and the wrist support the movement as a side-piece. Elbow hinged, wrist tensed in preparation and fist sailed through the air in a well aimed manner at a steady pace.

Knock

The elbow having done its main job of hinging now braces itself and lets the wrist take over.

Knock *knock*

Gary pauses for a second.

Knock

Satisfied he takes a half step back and fixes his gaze at the door, waiting. Behind the door he can just about make out the sound of approaching footsteps. A second ticks past, then another... and another. Finally the door creaks and swings inward. A pale round face appears from behind it, sitting neatly under a messy mop of brown hair.

"Good day to you, sir or madam! May I take a minute from your day to talk to you about--"

SLAM

Gary sighs, letting his shoulders drop as the door rattles on its hinges from the force of the slamming shut. It would be one of those streets.

Regaining his composure Gary turns around and efficiently strides across the narrow street to the door on the opposite side. He plants his feet, raises his arm and knocks. A half dozen moments pass and the door swings open.

"Greetings! Do you have a moment to talk about some--"

SLAM

"Typical" Gary mutters to himself. He then turns and moves the handful of paces to the next door and tries his luck again.

*

It is a well known fact that door to door salesmanship is one of the hardest jobs in existence, and it's no different on the Whaleback. Only the very best actually manage to get past the first sentence and even fewer manage to ever sell anything, but those slim odds have never stopped any salesman from trying.

Gary, who has been a door to door salesman for a number of years now, is not amongst the best of his profession in Frankshaven. In all his days on the job he has successfully made three sales. Not that that success rate has ever gotten him down. Inside he knows that there's a door out there with his fourth sale behind it, he just needs to find the door in question. Luckily for him there are many many thousands of doors in the city to try.

*

Five doors later and so far Gary hasn't had a good run on this street. Three times the door slammed before he could even finish saying "Hello!" and twice the door remained completely unanswered, even after repeated knocking. Making for the eighth door of the street he pulls out his heavy black umbrella, takes a brief break to adjust his coat, necktie and bag of information material, and then knocks anew on a new door.

He waits patiently as pots and pans clatter inside. 'This one will open at least', he thinks to himself. When it does he grins widely and starts his usual script:

"Good day to you sir or madam! Do you have a minute to talk about the latest from Michael's and Co.?" He finishes the opening line and blinks, his mind not quite done processing the strange lack of door slamming. The brief moment's silence after the question mark stretches out into the early stages of uncomfortableness. Gary blinks again, trying to focus his vision on the figure in the open doorway. He sees a short, stout fellow standing there, with messy dark brown hair and a mouth agape in something between shock, surprise and horror. Gary is just about to repeat his question when the figure in the doorway finds their voice and screams. Gary calmly takes a half step back and braces himself for the inevitable...

SLAM

'Oh well, at least I got past the word "about",' Gary thinks, turning away and making for the next door.

*

Half a city away, on the quay of the grand circular harbour, stands another beleaguered professional trying to attract the attention of any and all who pass by. Leony leans against the large wooden crate where they have set up shop. Propped against the sea facing side of the crate is a large wooden board that carries the painted exclamation of: "Visytor Informaeteon!" Spread across the top of the crate are many small parchment squares filled with neatly written text and colourful drawings and one large illustrated map of the city.

Leony's face aches from the forced smile that they've been holding since dawn. "Smile, whatever you do make sure you are smiling," they had said when they had sent Leony down here, "it makes you look approachable and friendly." So they had said, but there's only so much a smile can do to make a stone face like Leony's appear "approachable and friendly". Unfortunately, for Leony, they don't have much choice when it comes to employment, there are after all only so many employers who would even consider hiring mountain trolls.

"Information! New to the city and in need of pointers? Get your information here!" Leony calls out. They had told them that too, "every few minutes call out your services to the people, not everyone can see or read the sign", they said. And so Leony did what they were told. They needed the money after all. Not that calling out achieves much when the last passenger boat had disembarked an hour ago and the next wouldn't arrive for an hour more.

*

Gary stands before the twenty-third door of the day. By now the sun is beating down on his heavy black umbrella and the lack of success is starting to erode his reserves of strength. 'A few more and then I'll take my lunch break,' he tells himself, stepping forward and knocking on the tarnished oak door in front of him. The door swings open after a few moments and Gary starts his routine anew. Five words later and...

SLAM

He sighs and moves to the next door down. There he sees a similar amount of success, getting to the eighth word before the door slams in his face. The one after that goes no better, and Gary decides to call it there and go for lunch.

*

Back at the harbour, a newly arrived passenger galley has docked and its customers are slowly filing down the narrow gangplank onto the stone quay. Leony observes the mass of people moving from the deck down onto land and slowly coming up the quay towards the customs house and the city beyond.

Careful not to get their hopes up, Leony calls out as the passengers start to wander past: "Information! Maps and Guides! Anything and anywhere you need to know! Get it here!" Their voice booms out across the quay and the people moving along it. A few faces turn to look, taking in the painted sign and the myriad of pamphlets, before spotting the giant stone figure of Leony standing next to the information. The faces quickly turn away again at the sight of the troll and their forced rocky grin.

Leony tries to catch the eyes of some of the passers-by, they had told them that eye contact promoted people to stop and see what there is on offer. That advice had proven as useful as the smiling. Not one of the passengers stopped and soon the quay lay empty again.

*

Two streets over Gary found a cosy little park to have his lunch in. Sitting on an old and worn bench, its beams covered in decades of carved love confessions, petty insults and profound single word observations about life, the universe and the mysteries of the number forty-two, Gary unpacks his lunch. Peeling back the layers of crinkling paper, the lumpy shape is revealed to be a small brown rodent. Gary let his tongue run over his teeth, circling the pair of extra sharp canines, as his mouth waters in anticipation of his well deserved meal. The salesman raises the rodent to his mouth and bites down, his sharp teeth puncturing the animal and warm blood flooding his mouth. It has been a long day so far with very little success and he had earned the little treat.

Gary occasionally wondered if being a vampire may be a contributing factor to his low

success rate as a door to door salesman. It wasn't out of the question. In an ideal world anyone could perform any job and not need to fear discrimination just for what they are. But the world isn't ideal. Frankshaven, the continent and the Whaleback as a whole are far from ideal, but those who live within them must simply make the most of it, Gary supposed. He also knew full and well that the Salesman's Guild does not tolerate any kind of discrimination, and that if it weren't for them, he would not have his current job. After all, they had argued, vampires make for the perfect door to door salesman, since they physically cannot enter or even keep a door open without permission of the inhabitants, thereby providing the customers with the safest and most controllable experience imaginable. 'Be that as it may,' Gary thinks to himself, 'it doesn't help me much in getting sales.' Gary tries not to dwell on it and sets his focus on enjoying the meal before him.

*

Across the city, Leony sits on the quay grappling with similarly deep thoughts. Munching on a tree roll (a troll delicacy similar in style to a sushi roll, only much larger and with treebark instead of seaweed and fillings sourced from mountain areas instead of the oceans), Leony mused, as only trolls can as a rate of a thought every twelve seconds, about the irony of being a big scary living stone creature and acting as a first point of greeting for visitors to the city. Most trolls work in the heavy industries, positions like bouncers, benders, lifters and pushers are popular amongst the mineral communities. Leony tried to go into one of those professions too, but they weren't really suited for it. Too small to be a bouncer, too weak for bending, lacking the leg boulders for proper lifting and the required shoulder stones for pushing. Failing the traditional trollic professions, Leony looked for other lines of work. And if it weren't for the friend of a friend's former roommate's previous boss's former business partner, who had taken pity on the troll and happened to be in desperate need of any worker at all, then Leony would still be scraping around in search for any employment at all.

'I should count my lucky stones,' Leony thinks to themselves as they munch on their tree roll. The stand of pamphlets and maps and information leaflets lies forgotten by the troll, and is currently being raided by a new crop of arriving passengers. If Leony cared to listen, they would be able to hear the chatter of the group pouring over the many useful tips and tricks pages and quick guide illustrations. If Leony were to listen, they would hear a chorus of

excited sharing of found information, of passengers spreading the parchment squares between each other.

But Leony didn't. Instead the troll sits there on the quay, their stone legs hanging over the water, their rocky gaze resting on ships bobbing around in the harbour and the tree roll being slowly consumed. When, hours later, Leony has finished their tree roll and returned to the info stand, they discover it pillaged of all useful information. "Would you look at that," Leony grumbled, gathering up what scraps were left behind, "the information just flies away if I'm not there." Satisfied that their job had, albeit on a technicality, been completed, Leony packed up and set off on their way home.

*

With his lunch long eaten and the day winding towards its end, Gary stands at the end of the street. He has knocked on every door save for one and has had each one of them slammed in his face (that is if they even opened at all). Out of all the slams, half occurred before Gary could even finish saying "Hello", a quarter more when he got to the word "about" and the rest were anywhere else in the course of the opening line. Well there had been one exception, when the door was opened by a nearly deaf old woman, to whom Gary had to repeat his line five times before he decided to take pity on the poor lady and close the door for her.

Now he stands at the final door of the street. Already looking forward to dinner and bed, Gary takes a deep breath and approaches the final door of the day. Just as he had many many times before, Gary steps forward and plants his feet in front of the door. He raises his arm, his elbow held in a right angle, wrist tensed and hand balled up into a fist. With all the ceremony one can expect from a tired vampire reaching the end of his working day, Gary let his elbow unfold and his fist knock into the door.

Knock

Then he pulls his fist back and lets it fly forward again.

Knock *knock*

Gary pauses for a second and for good measure knocks one last time.

Knock

A few moments pass and the heavy stomping of footsteps echo from within. The door creaks and swings open. From behind it comes into Gary's view a large grey figure.

"Good day to you, sir or madam, do you have a minute to talk about the latest from Michael's and Co.?" Gary asks.

"Sure," Leony answers as kindly as they can, trying to mask their own exhaustion.

"I... wait, what?" Gary blinks, caught dumbfounded by the acquiescing.

"Yeah, why don't you come in," the troll says, stepping to the side to allow the vampire in, "I can get us some beer and you can tell me about your information."

"Why, thank you," Gary accepts the invitation, stepping inside, "I think you'll really like the new stock in our catalogue..." The door swings shut behind them. Hours pass and a steady stream of laughs, thumps and chuckles echo out into the night.

If Gary actually managed to sell anything to Leony? Who knows. Let's just leave them to their merry making with beer and plenty of complaining about the rudeness of the average Frankshavener. And even if Gary didn't sell anything it wouldn't matter, the Guild doesn't require either of the two professions, door to door salesman or visitor information provider, to make any sales at all. They are more than taken care of by the guild, after all, the city just wouldn't be the same without them knocking on doors or calling out at the docks and gates. It certainly pays to be in the Guild...

To Be Continued

Untitled Drawing

Patrícia Luptáková



From Snow I Came

Hugo Wolters

Alright. I admit it. I've gotten lost in paradise. Paradise weaved its wide white grace around me and cradled me in sleep, rendering me blind. Hence, I stand here now, eyes bright red, face painfully contracted in a grimace, breathing only now coming down from continuous hyperventilating, in front of the cabbages and carrots, behind which I *wish* I could hide.

"Aaron," I hear next to me, "so it is you."

Startled, I look at the man selling the greens as if drawing a last breath before going under; as if he could help.

"Hey."

A silence befalls. The man's interest fares as he notices I spoke to the woman next to me, and he continues packaging carrots, grabbing them and tying them. Grabbing and tying. For some reason my mind is more busy with the tied carrots than with formulating a reply. Speaking to her in the past felt the same as how the carrots must feel: tied and in full display for people walking past.

It stays silent for a little while, before I turn completely towards her.

"Why'd you walk off just then? Didn't you hear me?"

Pulled out by the roots, too. Me and the carrots, I mean.

"No, I uh- I was elsewhere with my mind, sorry."

"You look terrible."

I try to meet her gaze but my eyes keep wandering off.

"I thought you moved out of the city? How have you been?"

How have you been?



She speaks with the same confidence after all these years, as if she knows she can get away with everything. Only once had I seen it shake, flicker, like a candle. Nearly had I blown it out. Oh, I had tried.

"Still not one to speak, huh? Do I need to wait another decade? You know I tried looking for you?"

My lip trembles; silently I hope for her not to see.

"Things have changed, Mariann. I—"

"Oh, have they? Really?"

The same sarcasm after all these years. I try to relax my jaw.

"I tried reaching out, Mariann. Have you forgotten?"

Her face hardens.

"You tried? In eight years, you called three times. Aaron, even your brother called more often."

"Leave my brother out of this."

"Why? Why should I? Do you despise people who take care of their family?"

"Mariann, I'm warning you."

She scoffs. "Do you despise people who can stay sober for their loved ones?"

"Shut the fuck up," I raise my voice, "I told you, it's different now."

"Huh?" she continues, raising her voice too, though only slightly, "I thought everything was different now, everything is forgotten? Yet here you are screaming again?"

I say nothing, my lips tremble.

"Everything's changed, how wonderful! I'll go tell my daughter, you know, the one that doesn't want to call you her father anymore. She will be delighted!" Mariann laughs out loud; her eyes stay silent.

Oh, how I'd wish to think about the carrots instead. But this bitch, this woman—

"Listen Mariann, I'm trying to move on, and of course I am still so terribly sorry about.... about what had happened, but it has been so long now, I—"

"Oh, indeed, it has been so long. Clearly it's not relevant anymore, as you look healthy as ever, buying carrots at the market. You know how long she continued to ask for you after that last night?"

"Mariann, it was hard for me t—"

"Two days, Aaron. And I kept wondering if that amount made any difference to you."

"If I could see her—"

"Who are you kidding? You had no eyes for her then, when she was right there in your house. Did you want her to see you like that, convulsing, puking throughout the apartment?"

I try to relax my jaw again, try to block out the thoughts the man behind the stall must have.

"I don't know what to tell you Mariann."

"That's a first."

I look her in the eyes, anger raging within me.

"You came after me to start berating me? Fine, go ahead. Tell me when you're satisfied. I have nothing to tell you."

Her face immediately shifts; saddens.

"Of course you don't. I came to see if ghosts are real. I came to see if things were different now. Almost, Aaron. You almost had me. You looked better, I thought. Your cheeks less caved in, your eyes less darkened. Then you ran away." She laughs again, throwing her arms in the air, but it sounds closer to crying. "Don't you think I know what you were doing there?" she says, before she looks me in the eyes again. "Carrots, Aaron, really? Do I have to believe you came here to buy carrots?" She sounds almost pleading. "Are you going to pay for your carrots with a fucking fifty euro bill?"

I say nothing.

She doesn't either, looking me straight in the eyes. As if thumb wrestling, she eventually wins, and I turn away my gaze. She continues, her voice softened again.

"I had a dream, Aaron, which I want you to hear. You were a cat, I were a bird. You were catching snowflakes as if your life depended on it, no matter how many times they melted in your tiny claws. I was flying over, watching as you jumped, looked at what you caught, and sought out your next target. I watched how you stopped catching the snowflakes, and just sat there. I tried to sing your name but we spoke different languages; eventually I fell silent. When the snow got too heavy I came down, and you didn't try to catch me."

I say nothing.

"Tell me, Aaron, why are you letting yourself get snowed in? Tell me why you stay put until you're engulfed, all sound muffled? All the times I shovelled you out, to be disappointed by yet another failed drug test."

I say nothing; a tear crawls over my cheek.

"Some ghosts don't scare by shutting doors or throwing down cups, they scare by echoing how their lives came to an end. What is needed for you to stop this pity, for you to raise your arms above your head, for you to stop this act of dying? How many of you do I have to catch until I find one that doesn't melt; one that I recognise?"

My attention is with my tear. I say nothing.

She looks at me, waits for me to say something. Until she gives up.

"Oh, Aaron," her face stood mournful, "then this is it. Turns out, ghosts are real, but you can poke right through them. I'm done pitying you. Goodbye, Aaron."

I say nothing whilst another tear makes way across my face, and another, and another. Thick, like glue. I cry crystal white opium tears, crawling over my cheek as if a poppy who has never quite flowered; a poppy cut down before it ever fought to live. They stick to my face, and I cry and I cry until they pile up, and I lay down in them, curl up in them, until the deafening white is wholly again.

On The Night Before Christmas... What Would Jesus Buy?

Allyson Geduld

It was the night before Christmas, the screens shining bright,
each click a small prayer to the god of delight.

The children dreamt softly of gifts guaranteed,
for love must be proven through things we don't need.

Every December, cities are lit up in gold and red, and shop windows gleam
like altars of desire. The season which once promised reflection and warmth
now pulses to the rhythm of sales and slogans.

The first impression of Christmas is one of generosity; a time
to give, to love, to gather. Yet for many, the act of giving has
taken on a new meaning; faith has faded, but the routine
remains. Many people still celebrate
Christmas, not out of devotion, but out of habit,
nostalgia, and the thrill of consumption.

“We are on a mission to
save Christmas from
overconsumption.”

The 2007 documentary, *What Would Jesus Buy?*, captures this paradox with equal parts humour and heartbreak. Directed by Rob VanAlkemade, the film follows the performance artist Reverend Billy and his choir the “Church of Stop Shopping” as they travel across America, preaching not against faith, but against consumerism. Their mission, delivered through songs, satire, and megaphones, is both comic and sincere.



Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir

The documentary follows the exploits of Reverend Billy and his troupe, a performance collective that blends activism with theatre to challenge the average American's obsession with consumption. Led by actor and playwright **William Talen**, who portrays the charismatic Reverend Billy, the group stages mock sermons and gospel-style protests through song, humour, and street theatre, against the commercialisation of Christmas. They urge people to reclaim the holiday's meaning beyond shopping bags and corporate slogans. Reverend Billy's flamboyant sermons reveal a tension at the heart of the modern holiday:

a collision between true affection and manufactured desire. His message is not anti-joy, it is anti-illusion. Through his theatrical alter ego, he exposes how advertising, even to children as young as three, teaches us to equate love with material things. A preteen in the documentary confesses that she knows when marketers manipulate her, yet still insists it "doesn't really make a difference if it's advertised or not, I still wanna buy it because everybody's buying it." Her words reveal that we often want things not because we chose them, but because everyone around us has already been convinced to want them too.



Preteens shopping in the documentary "What Would Jesus Buy?"

A part that stood out in the documentary is the moment where it reimagines Clement Clarke Moore's beloved poem:

"'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house,
not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
while ads for new doodads played out in their heads."

The satire works precisely because it feels so close to reality. Today, on Christmas morning, many of us wake not to wonder, but to discount codes and delivery notifications. Credit cards step in as a kind of false comfort, letting us spend beyond our means and feel briefly generous, even as the bill that follows deepens the very emptiness we are trying to soothe. The documentary's brilliance lies in how it reveals this truth, not through guilt or lectures, but through humour and laughter as a mirror.

As Cass Hebron points out in her article, comedy has a way of lowering people's defenses, making hard-to-swallow truths more digestible. When facts and warnings fail to move us, laughter can still reach where logic cannot. Reverend Billy's exaggerated sermons, part theatre, part truth, do exactly that. His absurdity, standing in a white suit shouting "Stop Shopping!" in the middle of Times Square, reflects the absurdity of our own rituals. Hebron notes that when repeated warnings grow boring, satire offers a way back to engagement, and that's exactly what the documentary does. It lets us laugh not at the problem, but at ourselves, at the gap between our values and our habits. Through humour, the documentary recovers something sacred that the marketplace forgot, connection, which may be its greatest strength. In a culture numb to messages about sustainability, climate change, or ethical consumption, laughter rekindles awareness without despair. Hebron observes that comedy "creates a more accessible and human space to discuss serious topics and break down barriers," and *What Would Jesus Buy?* proves that joy itself can be a form of resistance.

Beneath its humour, *What Would Jesus Buy?* asks a quiet but urgent question: *what are we really celebrating?* Christmas may shine with generosity and joy, yet beneath the glitter lies a hum of anxiety, debt, and performance. We overconsume not out of greed, but out of longing, for connection in a culture that sells us substitutes for it. The Church of Stop Shopping may look comedic at times, but its message rings true: love does not need to be proven through things we do not need. There is nothing wrong with giving gifts or sharing in the joy of the season; it's part of what brings people together. But when giving turns into obligation, or when abundance becomes excess, that's when it's worth pausing to reflect, to rethink the first impression we've had of Christmas. Perhaps this year, the greatest gift is to slow down and look beyond the receipts and reclaim joy from excess. Beneath the noise of overproduction waits a smaller, steadier miracle: the miracle of enough.

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Hello/Goodbye Cold



Floriane Taruc

Afterword from the editors

Dear Reader,

We hope that you thoroughly enjoyed reading this combined autumn/winter edition of Erato's! We, the magazine committee, certainly liked bringing it to you. While the bright leaves of autumn have already begun to make way for the coldness and darkness of winter, the spirit of both seasons radiates throughout all the lovely poems, short stories, reviews, collages, photographs, and drawings that we have all managed to pack into this edition. Hopefully these will keep you warm throughout the winter.

This literary magazine would be nothing without its readers, writers, editors and visual artists. Therefore, we would first and foremost like to thank everyone who has shared a piece of their work with us. We would love to see your art return and hope that you have inspired others to also unleash their creativity in the next edition! Of course, we would also like to salute the magazine committee for making this edition possible with your own writings, editing skills and visual designs. Again, thanks to everyone who has contributed.

This academic year, Erato's will return in the spring and in the summer. So, keep an eye out for those and do not hesitate to share your work with us! We appreciate every single one of your submissions.

Have fun in the winter break and happy Holidays for those celebrating!

See you in the spring edition!

Yours heartily and affectionately,

Femke Kapteijns

Co-Chief Editor, Erato's Magazine Committee

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