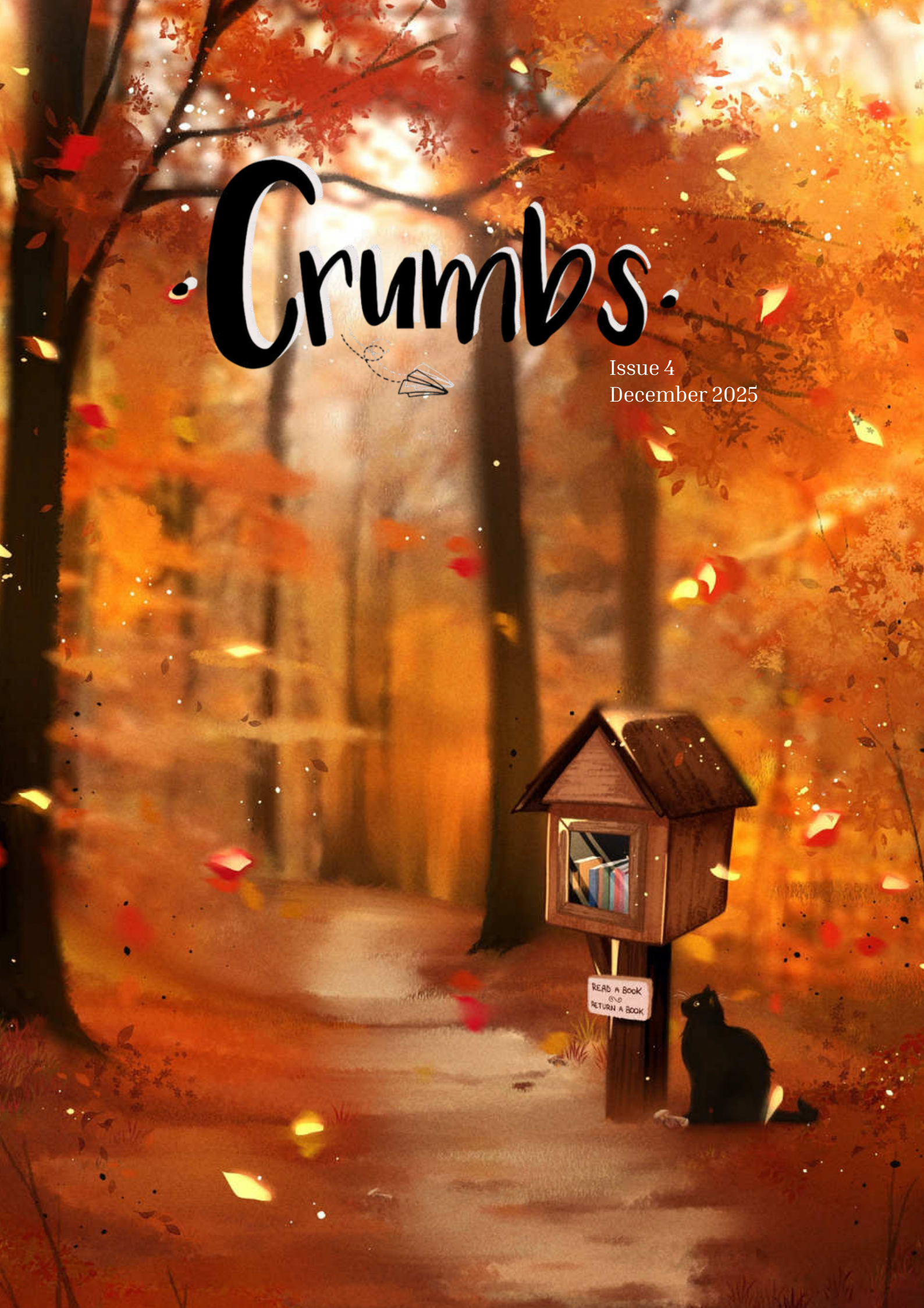
Crumbs

Issue 4
December 2025



Crumbs

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Foreword

by Zarja Gumilar Papotnik, Editor-in-chief

Hi Everyone,
Welcome to the 4th issue of Crumbs.

In this year's issue, we've kept the format we developed last year, specifically the combination of non-literary and literary submissions. Same as last year, we offer you our thoughts about deciding between a pedagogical and non-pedagogical MA, as well as thoughts about GUSEGG and tales recounting Erasmus experiences.

This issue includes two interviews, one with Anja Zag Golob, co-owner of Mariborka and co-founder of the publishing house VigeVageKnjige, where she works as editor-in-chief. The other one is with American fantasy and sci-fi author James Todd Cochrane. We also included an overview of this year's English Club events, a movie review, Professor's Picks, and more.

So, what's new? We decided to subdivide the literary section, which now includes prose, poetry, and a nonfiction segment. You will find the prose and poetry segments familiar, but truly new is the non-fiction category. In it, you will find essays, a monologue, and other works that don't quite feel at home in the poetry or prose segments.

I am very proud of this year's issue, and for that I would like to thank our editorial board of Živa, Lina, Martina, and Val, who have helped bring this issue before you. I would especially like to thank our department tutor Živa, who coordinated the printing and helped make Crumbs a reality. A big thank you to everyone who submitted their work: you are what Crumbs is built on. I would also like to thank Anja, who is the artist behind this year's cover art.

Special thanks go to Professors Gadpaille and Hempkin for proofreading our beautiful creation.

And, of course, thank you to our readers. I hope you enjoy this year's Crumbs.

Maribor, 16. 11. 2025



Zarja Gumilar Papotnik



Tutor's Foreword

by Živa Šprajc, the English Department Tutor

Dear Readers,

I am happy to announce another issue of our beloved student magazine, Crumbs. Crumbs truly is the platform for everything and anything. I believe we, as future researchers or teachers, need to pass on the torch that is creativity. Every work of art, be it prose, poetry, or even a drawing or a photo, is a representation of our hearts and souls that yearn for release.

Crumbs was never, and never will be, just another magazine whose pages are flipped without purpose or result. It is a story told through various artists and their hidden art. Hidden away for a year or two, maybe three, pushed to the side or into the bin, or used as a coaster, these writings were present but never seen. It is our job to open the doors to these secrets and reveal the world beyond the ordinary.

Despite the odds, Crumbs has persisted through chaos and time restrictions. It is a great pleasure to once again see this magazine come together with all the hard work of so many students. Lastly, I would like to thank the Student Council of the Faculty for their immense support for and faith in this project.

Crumbs will forever hold a special place in my heart, both as a past and present editor, as well as a tutor.

Let the emotions begin.

Živa Šprajc

Živa Šprajc



Mariborka (Anja Zag Golob) interview

Lina Murko and Živa Šprajc

1. Where does your love of graphic novels and literary creation come from?
We call them risoromani, which is our translation of the term graphic novel, which better reflects the actual situation and their content. In fact, it is as much about love as it is about the need for Slovenian readers to have access to at least a fraction of what is currently being published abroad in comics, the fastest-growing literary genre at the moment. Translated editions also open up the possibility for more publications by domestic authors, as they increase readers' interest in comics, while also serving as a good report on what is happening outside our borders, which can also serve as a model or inspiration.

2. Why Mariborka?
Mariborka was born out of a desire to create a space of freedom and coexistence for all who enter it with a desire for dialogue. We believe that a bookstore in a city should be a community space, a place you visit because it is part of your urban identity. Maribor desperately needs such spaces, as they are increasingly disappearing under the pressure of capital, and MOM allocates far too little money to this so-called ˝soft tissue˝ in the city, which (too) often prevents the very existence, let alone the development, of certain content. But since this content is primarily intended for the city's residents, this shortfall is noticeable. Every month, we organize between two and four events, some of which are too



VigeVageKnjige



VigeVageKnjige



VigeVageKnjige

big for Mariborka, so we collaborate with the Lutkovno gledališče Maribor, which acts as our co-producer in such cases. We don't receive a cent from MOM for this program, but it enriches the lives of the city's residents. At the same time, such events are valuable because they build community – specifically, around books and reading. Of course, a bookstore has to sell books, because that's how it makes a living, but a good bookstore should be much more than just a place to buy and sell books. With Mariborka, we strive every single day to make this happen.

3. The future of Mariborka, your 5-year plan?

To survive. From the previous answer, it is clear how difficult this is, unfortunately, in this environment.



VigeVageKnjige

4. One recommendation to readers: what should they reach for first in Mariborka?

Right next to the entrance, you will find our shelf with periodicals, and next to it, a shelf with new releases. This is where most people head first, but if you are looking for something special, whether humanities literature, poetry, novels, comics, or children's books, you can always ask Iva, the manager of Mariborka, for advice. She knows more than anyone else about everything Mariborka has to offer and is definitely the right person to ask. Oh, and if you're looking for a gift, she'll be sure to ask you how old the person is and how much they read, and it wouldn't hurt to know a couple of their favourite books.





5. Favourite events at the bookstore. Upcoming event: Miki Muster's anniversary.

On the occasion of the 1st National Comic Book Day, which the Ministry of Culture declared to be November 22, the birthday of Miki Muster, which happened to be his 100th birthday this year, we at LGM organized a discussion with Pižama, and before that, in October, we hosted Ksenija Benedetti at the Judgement Tower. These are larger discussion evenings, which we will also continue next year, while in Mariborka we prepare smaller, more intimate readings, mainly poetry. These are truly unique events; the bookstore cannot accommodate a large audience, but in today's world, this makes them even more appealing, as the contact with the author and the work is so much more direct. There are so few opportunities for this; it is rare to have the chance to talk about poetry or prose literally face-to-face, which is another reason these meetings are so precious to us.



VigeVageKnjige

The English Club Chronicle

Lina Murko



As the new year began, so did our English club events. In the short month and a half since the semester started, we've managed to produce three of these: Freshman Games, Halloween Movie Night, and Brucovanje.

The chaos started early, on the 8th of October, with a new event: Freshman Games. The goal of this gathering was to help the first-year students kick-start the year right and to get to know each other before Brucovanje. The theme was 'A typical student's day', which, in true student fashion, consisted of games emulating: waking up (with difficulty and some morning yoga); walking to school in heavy traffic that makes you feel as if you are walking into the middle of a Formula 1 race; meeting new students (with a How I Met Your Mother spin, and a rubber squeaky chicken); trust exercises; being responsible and getting, or at least trying to get, your schooling information in order; and lastly, sneaking into the student dorms guarded by a very serious guardsman holding a halberd. We can assure you that the event was filled with laughter, with new friendships and advice given to first-year students by older students.

Next up was the 'scariest' English club event of the year: Halloween Movie Night. Costumes were mandatory, and everyone thankfully took this rule extremely seriously, which made the event truly magical. The night started off with Scary Movie and pizza, continued with a costume showcase, and ended with an extensive debate.



Finally, the most recent event: Brucovanje. The theme this year was time travel through the literary periods covered during undergraduate studies. Therefore, it was no surprise that the event was attended by some of the most well-known characters (or people) in English literature: The Green Knight (with a Teletubby twist), Hamlet, Byron, and Sherlock Holmes. There was a mix of new and old games, the new ones being writing the first six lines of the famous 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, and the 'Whodunit' game, and the older games being 'The Pearl Poet' game featuring professor's quotes, and 'Poetry or Songetry?'.

All in all, this year has been great fun, and we are incredibly grateful to all those who attended the events. We're looking forward to seeing you in the future (note: keep an eye on all the faculty notice boards!). Until next time:)





An Erasmus Experience

Hasan Ozan Öztürk

A My name is Hasan Ozan Öztürk, and I live in Denizli, Türkiye. Between 2015 and 2019, I studied preschool education at Pamukkale University, and in 2019, I enrolled in a degree in English language and literature, graduating in 2022. I am currently pursuing a Master's degree in English language and literature at the same university.

From 1 October 2024 to 21 February 2025, I studied at the University of Maribor within the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme. In total, I spent 172 days there. I chose Maribor was because it was close to my Croatian friend. At that time, I had no prior knowledge about either Maribor or Slovenia; when making my choice, I only checked how far it was from Zagreb. Later, I was quite surprised to learn that the entire population of Slovenia was almost the same as that of my home city. When I first arrived in Slovenia, that was all the information I had.

Before leaving Türkiye, I thought I might face some difficulties, as it was my first time travelling abroad. However, once I landed in Ljubljana, I did not feel any sense of unfamiliarity. I believe this may have been because my mother's side of the family has Macedonian roots, and my father's side migrated from Hungary, which gave me a sense of connection to the region. I was deeply impressed by the landscape I saw from the train on my way to Maribor. Since the region where I live in Türkiye has a Mediterranean climate, it is not as green. I was therefore delighted to see that Maribor is a city surrounded by nature. As I explored the city, it reminded me of the district where I grew up – a peaceful place with kind and quiet people. From the very first day, the residents did their best to help us whenever possible.

During my stay in Maribor, I made many friends – from my department, among locals, and other Erasmus students. I owe special thanks to my friends from the department, Martina Gramc, Noemi Čop, and Eva Jevšnik, who were incredibly supportive and made me feel like one of them. I would also like to thank all my professors, especially Professors Kirsten Hempkin and Katja Plemenitaš, whose courses I attended. They assisted me greatly with my thesis and provided me with valuable new knowledge. In addition, I had the opportunity to observe various cultures closely and gained many fascinating insights throughout this period.

Dormitory life in Maribor was very different from what I was used to in Türkiye. In Turkish dormitories, meals and laundry are entirely handled by the staff, and each room has its own bathroom and toilet. Therefore, I was surprised to learn that in Maribor there were no meal services and that students had to do their own laundry – even paying to use the washing machines. I was even more shocked to find that bathrooms and toilets were shared. I had serious concerns about hygiene, and I cannot say that I ever fully became used to that situation. I also believe that the dormitory buildings should be renovated, as they were rather old. Apart from these issues, I did not encounter any major difficulties during my stay. Having already lived away from my family throughout my university years, I possessed the necessary life skills, and thanks to the helpfulness of the people in Maribor, I was able to spend my days there smoothly.



One of the most memorable experiences for me was celebrating Christmas for the first time. Thanks to my Croatian friend and their family, I was able to spend it in a warm family atmosphere. Walking around the Christmas markets and witnessing the celebrations was an incredibly enjoyable experience for me.

Besides these positive experiences, I also had a few minor negative ones. The bureaucracy operated slowly, and almost every process had to be completed on paper. In Türkiye, most procedures and documents can be accessed online, which allows us to handle things much faster. It was also difficult to contact the student affairs office. When I sent email about a problem, it sometimes took days to receive a reply, so I often had to go there in person. However, visiting the office was only possible on certain days and at specific hours, which I found quite unusual. Another thing that surprised me was having to register online to take an exam. If the purpose was to determine the number of participants, I thought it would make more sense for only those who would not attend to notify the system. Additionally, I still do not understand why we were required to use pens instead of pencils during exams.

Overall, my Erasmus experience in Maribor was an excellent one. I managed to fill 172 days with countless memories, experiences, and new knowledge. If I had the opportunity, I would not hesitate to go back to Maribor again. I always say that studying there was one of the best decisions I ever made. Since returning to Türkiye, I have recommended the University of Maribor to many students. Likewise, I strongly encourage you to visit Pamukkale University. Experiencing Turkish hospitality, our rich cuisine, and the natural beauty of our country would be an unforgettable experience for you.



Photos by Hasan Ozan Öztürk



AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE IN IRELAND

Aja Barbič

From January to June 2025, I had the incredible opportunity to complete an Erasmus work placement. I worked as a language assistant at the Language Learning Hub (LLH), School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics at the University of Limerick, Ireland. During my time in the LLH I had to undertake a range of duties. My main role was to assist the LLH coordinator with the centre's everyday activities. I advised students on how to improve their language skills using digital material and kept the resource database updated, ensuring that all material could be used for discussion groups, which I helped organize.



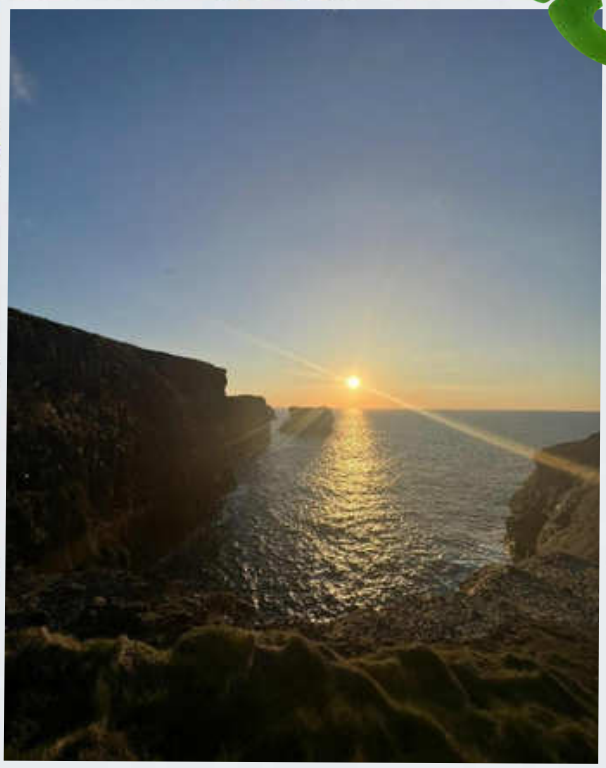
Assistants of the LLH in Galway.

Since the LLH supports the learning of a language through digital material, I helped organise and deliver workshops that focused on learning languages through VR glasses. Furthermore, I helped with marketing, including social media content. I produced training videos for future assistants as well as promotional material. The LLH was involved in a variety of projects, including conferences organised in collaboration with other departments. Therefore, I had the opportunity to attend and contribute to these events, which allowed me to work closely with teaching staff and learn from them.



LLH assistants in Dublin.

Working at the Hub allowed me to grow in so many ways, both personally and professionally. Before coming to Ireland, I was nervous – leaving my family, my friends and the comfort of home felt overwhelming. I worried I would feel lonely in a new country, but that could not have been further from the truth. I met kind and welcoming people everywhere I went. An elderly man named John kept me company at the bus stop, making sure I knew all about Ireland's history. I was welcomed by a wonderful host family, made amazing friends, with whom I stay connected, and travelled to incredible places across Ireland. Outside of work, I got to experience the country's rich culture, its beautiful landscape, and the genuine warmth of its people. Before I knew it, Limerick had become my second home.



Kilkenny – cliffs free of charge and free of tourists.



An everyday view on my walk back from the bus stop. Tough crowd.

Working at the Hub allowed me to grow in so many ways, both personally and professionally. Before coming to Ireland, I was nervous – leaving my family, my friends and the comfort of home felt overwhelming. I worried I would feel lonely in a new country, but that could not have been further from the truth. I met kind and welcoming people everywhere I went. An elderly man named John kept me company at the bus stop, making sure I knew all about Ireland's history. I was welcomed by a wonderful host family, made amazing friends, with whom I stay connected, and travelled to incredible places across Ireland. Outside of work, I got to experience the country's rich culture, its beautiful landscape, and the genuine warmth of its people. Before I knew it, Limerick had become my second home.



Bunratty castle in green.
Ready for Saint Patrick's Day.



Limerick, Ireland.



The famous flags of the University of Limerick.

Photos by Aja Barbič

Interview with the Author James Todd Cochrane



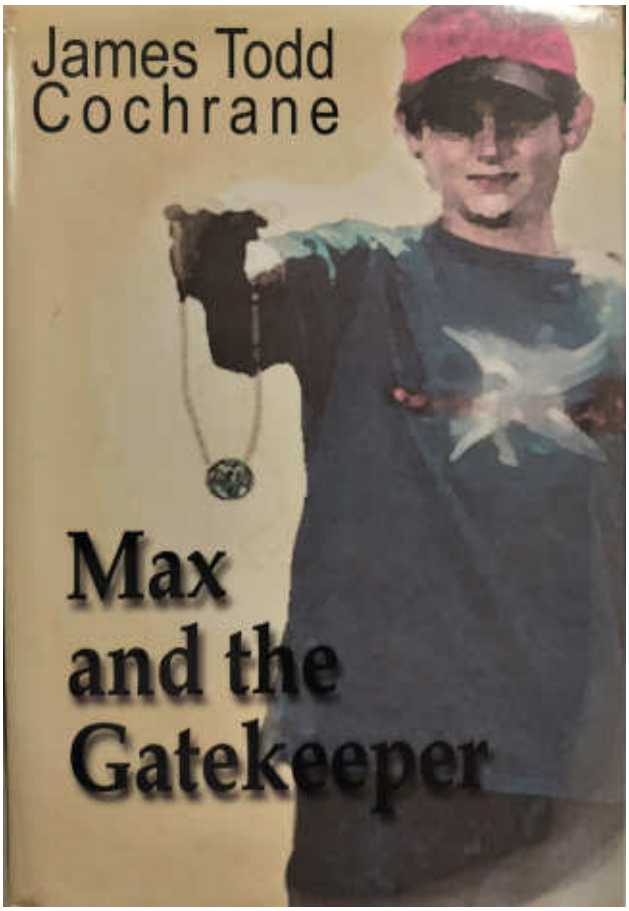
goodreads.com

Zarja Gumilar Papotnik

James Todd Cochrane is an American author, writing YA fantasy and science fiction. He is the author of the Max and the Gatekeeper series, as well as the Centalpha 6 series. I started reading Max and the Gatekeeper when I was about 13 years old, and ever since then, it has stuck with me – the way it's written, the plot, and most of all the use of Slovene in the book. Yes, you read that correctly, this American fantasy series contains multiple Slovene words and expressions; not only that, but the Slovene words are used for spells: out with alohomora, in with odpri. So, of course, I was incredibly happy when the opportunity to interview James Cochrane presented itself. If this is the first time you're hearing about Max and the Gatekeeper, and you are a fan of fantasy fiction, I strongly recommend you pick up the first book of the series, as you will not be disappointed.

Where did you first get the inspiration for Max and the Gatekeeper?

It probably comes from a few different places. I have always loved fantasy, as The Wishsong of Shanara was the book that hooked me on reading as a teenager. Baseball was my first love as far as sports go, thus the baseball themes. I grew up in a small town in Wyoming and that was the idea for the small town. It is a combination of my love of fantasy and science fiction. I mean, The Empire Strikes Back is the greatest movie of all time. :)



Dark Moon Publishing

Is there any particular reason you chose the YA (young adult) and Fantasy genres?

As stated in the first question, a fantasy series, the Shanara series, was what hooked me on reading. I chose young adult as I wanted to write something that everyone would be able to read. I did like the aspect of the characters growing up and gaining experience. Like Max will take over for Grandpa Joe eventually.

How did you come across Slovene and why did you choose to include it in your books?

I served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints way back in the early nineties. I loved Slovenia: the people, the country, all of it. My great grandmother was also Slovenian, and my great grandfather was Croatian. My grandpa still used Slovene words around the house.

Why did you decide to use Slovene as language for magic and spells?

I wanted to be different. Most spells and other books have a form of Latin in them. Slovenian isn't a very widely used language, as far as the world goes. I figured it would be something different. It would draw a little more attention to Slovenia.

Has your background and education in the IT sector influenced some of the technological aspects of the books?

That's a good question. I think I have used a few IT references in my books but cannot remember them. I would think more so in Centalpha 6 than in Max and the Gatekeeper, as Centalpha 6 is just science fiction and not a combination of fantasy/science fiction like Max and the Gatekeeper. I am a computer programmer in IT. Trust me, nothing I do makes an interesting story. lol



Time, Temporality, and Transition — and Everything In Between: Our GUSEGG Journey

Tjaša Jožič and Žiga Rotovnik

Each year, our faculty sends a few of its students to the Graz International Summer School Seggau (GUSEGG), and this summer, Žiga and I had the privilege of joining the experience - and writing about it.

Held from July 6 to July 19, 2025, GUSEGG marked its 20th anniversary with the theme "Time, Temporality, and Transition: State – Society – Religion." The program took place at Seggau Castle near Leibnitz, Austria, and brought together 65 students (from 43 universities and 28 different countries) and 20 professors from around the world for two weeks of academic exchange, cultural encounters, and a bit of castle life.
We will share the story of our experience in southern Styria – through our own eyes and those of our fellow students.

Life at GUSEGG

The daily rhythm was structured but not overwhelming. Mornings started with lectures that introduced key ideas and sparked conversation. After that came "dot group" discussions – small mixed groups where students from different seminars shared perspectives and compared notes. In the afternoons, we attended our chosen seminar (you pick one of seven and stick with it for the full two weeks), diving deeper into topics and occasionally getting into debates that continued over dinner. The program also included an academic writing workshop, and for those who want to take it further, there's the chance to publish in the Off Campus: Seggau School of Thought series. Plus, you earn 6 ECTS credits, which is always a nice bonus.
The first weekend was all about exploring. The excursions to Graz and Maribor gave us time off from the academic side and a chance to get to know each other better while wandering through two lively cities. No lectures, no pressure – just conversations, coffee, and a bit of sightseeing.



The castle setting helped too. Meals, dips in the pool, and late-night chats made it easy to connect beyond the classroom, and while the academic part was solid, it's the people we met that made it memorable. We're still in touch with friends from the US, Spain, Canada, and elsewhere – proof that a summer school can leave a lasting mark.

Evenings at Seggau had their own rhythm. There was karaoke (some brave performances), a movie night, a live show by a Maribor band, and international presentation evenings where we got a glimpse into each other's countries – short, informal, and insightful. And those were just a few of the events on the schedule.



Voices from GUSEGG

"Deciding to attend GUSEGG wasn't easy – I was deep in my thesis writing process – but it turned out to be a great decision. The summer school is both academically challenging and incredibly fun, bringing together people from all over the world to share ideas and perspectives. It's not about answering all of society's existing questions, it's about coming up with new ones to ask – thinking about thinking, stepping outside the box, considering the other side, finding new perspectives, and exploring new possibilities. But what makes GUSEGG unforgettable isn't just the learning – it's the people. Sharing dober tek before every meal, becoming a tour guide for a day in Maribor, playing football, and having late-night talks with new friends are the moments I'll remember most."

Žiga



"This year's GUSEGG summer school reminded me of the quiet power of the human mind. To bring up any topic and be met with curiosity, debate, and genuine interest felt both rare and liberating. In a world that tries to shape how and what we think, critical reflection becomes an act of courage. GUSEGG proved that the problem was never thinking too deeply or choosing the wrong topics – it was speaking about them to the wrong crowd. Here, I found those who are not afraid to look up. In fact, I found a crowd brave enough to look straight into the eyes of the power that dares to shape our perspectives."

Jelena

"GUSEGG is truly a one-of-a-kind summer school – imagine bringing the whole world together in one room, inside a 12th-century castle! It's a place where you hear countless perspectives and unique takes on both common and controversial ideas that completely challenge the way you think. You start reimagining the world, your surroundings, and even yourself.

What makes it special is how much you can learn in such a short time. For two weeks, you're surrounded by people from around the globe – studying, debating, laughing, exploring, and bonding around the clock. The professors are incredible professionals who bring their colourful personalities into every lecture and discussion. They don't just teach – they share, connect, and make sure you take something valuable from every moment.

I left GUSEGG with more questions than answers, but in the best possible way – challenged, inspired, and grateful for every 'wow, I can't believe I'm here' moment."

Emilija

Looking Ahead

Next year's GUSEGG will run from July 5 to July 18, 2026, with the theme "Curiosity, Concern, and Commitment in Europe and the Americas: State - Society - Religion." If you're thinking about applying, we say go for it - it's a solid way to spend part of your summer, meet new people, and engage with ideas that reach beyond your usual classroom walls.

- Tjaša & Žiga

Photos by Žiga Rotovnik in Tjaša Jožič



Martina Gramc

TO TEACH, OR NOT TO TEACH, THAT IS THE QUESTION.

Are you a student of English studies at the Faculty of Arts?
Are you unsure whether you want to continue your studies at the pedagogical or non-pedagogical program?
Are you undecided whether to continue your studies at the MA level at all?
No, yes, and yes? Error.
Yes, yes, and yes? Or yes, yes, and no? Continue reading :)

Let's start with this:
<u>the MA level is not for everyone.</u>

That does not necessarily mean you lack intelligence, persistence, or diligence. It simply means that it may not be the right path for you. You should be aware of the privilege of having a choice. But sometimes, having choices can feel more burdensome than having everything decided for you.

If you look at the syllabi of the pedagogical and non-pedagogical programs, you may notice that they are designed for two very specific types of people: one must love teaching, the other must love reading. And no, neither of them primarily aspires to acquire large amounts of wealth.

Have you ever had the opportunity to teach and loved it? Did you leave lessons smiling? Did you share those experiences with friends and talk about them with enthusiasm? If your answers are positive, then you know what to do.

If you feel you lack teaching experience and are not entirely sure how you feel about it, a good option might be to take an absolvent year and gain experience through student work. Many schools are looking for students willing to offer additional professional assistance (DSP – dodatna strokovna pomoč), and there are tutoring jobs and, in some cases, even temporary teaching positions available.

If your goal is to work in an international company, organisation, the non-governmental sector, or cultural institutions, then do not choose the pedagogical program. You'll be better qualified for these kinds of jobs with a general degree in English Studies.

It is possible to teach after completing the non-pedagogical program – just not in the public sector, meaning state schools.

However, that does not mean the non-pedagogical program prepares you for all these roles. It is best suited for future creative and academic writers. There are few – realistically, almost no – grammar courses, so your grammar knowledge will not expand significantly during your MA studies. There is also no emphasis on specialised vocabulary or expanding your vocabulary in general. By the end of the non-pedagogical program, you will not miraculously know the meaning of the word alacrity, for example. You might not even know it exists – I didn't, I just googled it.

What you will gain, however, is deep familiarity with Shakespeare's works and the art of analysing every detail of a text. You'll become more comfortable with public speaking, critical thinking, and you may come to understand what is meant by "power of language" – including sensitivity to the manipulative nature of specific word choices or formulations.
If these skills don't align with your goals, you might consider enrolling in a different program. Technically, after acquiring a BA degree, you can enrol in any MA program; however, some additional steps may be required, depending on the course of study.
Also, just because MA education is free doesn't mean enrolment is obligatory. If another BA program sparks greater interest in you now, it might be worth the investment. Having a BA from two or three different fields of study can be both personally enriching and professionally attractive to employers.

There is also the possibility of completing educational and andragogical training (PAI – pedagoško-andragoško izobraževanje) after finishing the non-pedagogical program. It's not free, but it allows you to work in the public educational sector.

Movie Review

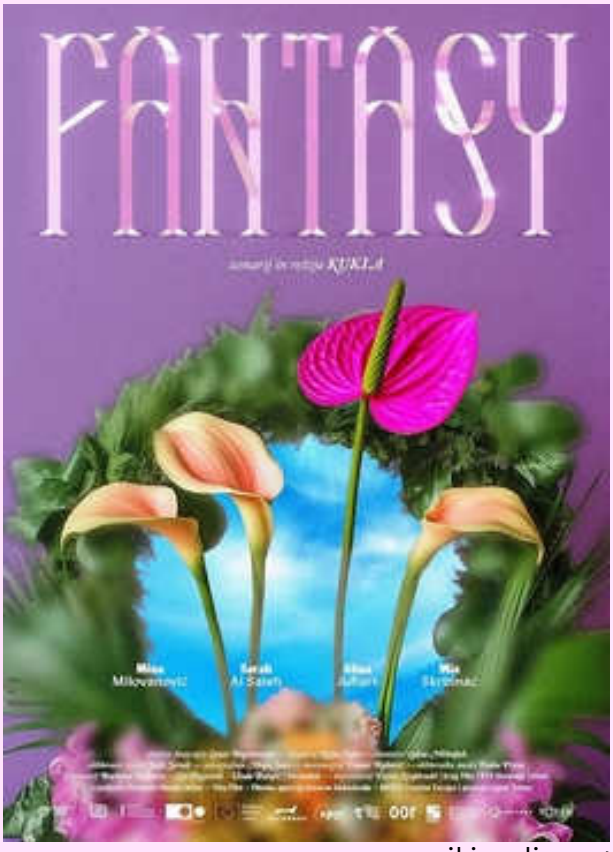
THE ABSENCE OF PTA IN KUKLA'S FANTASY

J.Š.

Another year has almost gone by, and we have seen the release of 2025's only two feature films: Paul Thomas Anderson's One Battle After Another, and Kukla's feature debut Fantasy. As is always the case, the two directors were selected by the Film Committee – one (Anderson, in our case) for his already established and well-refined style, which has proven again and again to be able to touch the hearts and minds of audiences and critics alike, and the other (Kukla) for her yet unexplored potential and fresh perspective on the art of cinema. However, despite her inexperience with the lengthier form, Kukla is by no means entirely new to the world of directing – she (apparently) shot her first short documentary in 2009 and has since then had her fair share of music videos, even exploring fantasy's playing field in her short Sestre (Sisters).



leedsfilm.com

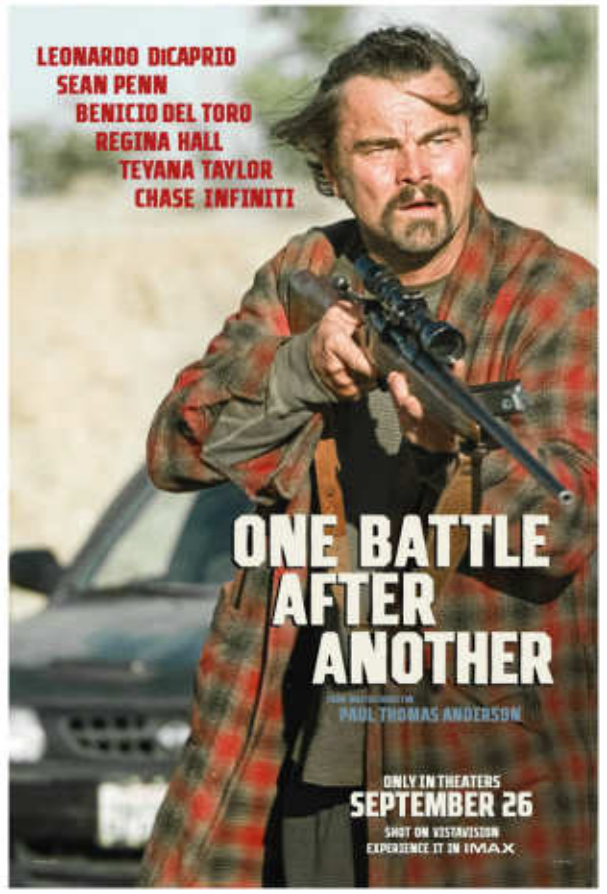


wikipedia.org

But the topic of this article is not the two directors, their career, or private lives. I am simply pointing these facts out to assure the reader that my attempt here isn't to in any way discredit or diminish the significance of either of their styles, which have obviously been founded on years of experience and work, and are – for better or worse – the only two we've had the privilege of seeing manifested through the format of feature film this year. I also realize that this being the sole review of these two films, I can afford to make it unnecessarily longer than regular editorial constraints would allow, as the readers are unlikely to put it down for fear of remaining ignorant on a culturally important topic.

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Now, to be sure, One Battle After Another and Fantasy are two very different films, but, apart from their distinct subject matter, visual style, and boom operators, what I find most interesting is the fact that Fantasy obviously wasn't written by Paul Thomas Anderson. This is a clear win for Kukla, as it is testament to her creative freedom, as well as for the entire entertainment industry, as it affords it more diversity and manoeuvring space for development, but what I want to discuss is what exactly this absence of Paul Thomas Anderson presents for Fantasy, and what Kukla should have done, had she wanted the two films to be more alike.



moviefone.com

When I mean that Paul Thomas Anderson is nowhere to be seen in Fantasy, what I mean is that, in his own films, he can almost always be found hiding somewhere in the minds of his characters, and in the plot itself. This, however, can only be possible if the characters already have their own identities and depth, which is usually sufficiently established in the film's first act, and can then pull and direct the story itself, rather than the other way around. Kukla's characters, however, seemed to have been written with the intention of carrying specific ideas, and thus acting as representations of specific themes, which – and here the gap between the two films is the widest – because of their sheer breadth, entirely take over the characters and don't allow them to be anything but what the story needs them to be to get the specific

message over. What's more, the audience then has a hard time establishing an emotional connection with these characters as they don't see them as complexly interesting but instead must rely on the plot to entertain them and ensure their overall investment.

There is, however, a feature that both films share: at any single point in the story, it's very difficult to tell where it is, or where we are in fact headed. If we now add to this what's already been said about their characters, it's not hard to predict which film would, had we been presented with a third or even a fourth film, perform better with mainstream audiences.



imbd.com



imbd.com

Now, it might seem that what I'm doing here is an attempt to convince my readers that there is something that One Battle After Another has, which Fantasy lacks. This, however, could not be further from the truth. It is a simple case that they are both distinct films, whose directors have their own unique styles which are neither praise-worthy, nor reprehensible, but merely exist as proof of the sheer creative capacities that humans possess. It is also true that there is no aim behind the writing of this article, other than plainly expressing the idea it has so far expressed. I will reassure my readers that examples will be given to support my claims, but for

Professors' Picks

PROFESSOR KIRSTEN HEMPKIN

I must begin again by apologising to the editors, as I find it impossible to limit myself to just one pick. I have thought long and hard about what I have consumed (culturally) this year, and the following choices are those that really stood out. First of all, those of you with HBO should watch Somebody, Somewhere. The story revolves around a woman who has returned to her hometown to nurse her terminally ill sister and who decides to stay on after her death. While the subject matter touches on the intense themes of death and grieving, it is also very, very funny – I can't remember laughing out loud so much at a series in a long time. Besides belly laughs, what the show also provides is a beautifully observed portrayal of – if not an ode – to friendship and the importance of the deep connections we build with non-romantic partners (especially, perhaps, as in this series, the friends could be described, in the most positive way, as some of life's misfits).

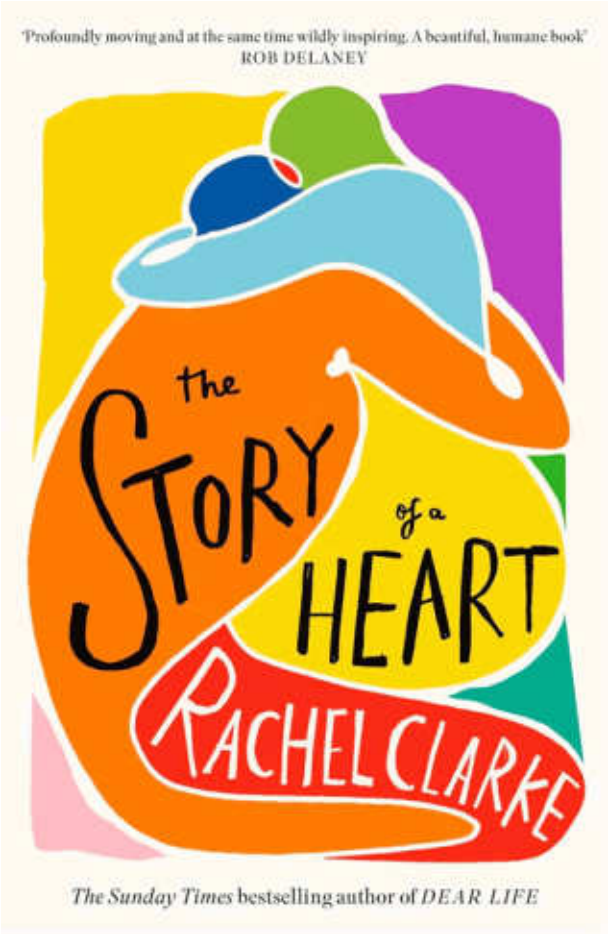


imdb.com

My second pick is a non-fiction work: The Story of a Heart: Two Families, One Heart, and a Medical Miracle by Rachel Clarke. I love to read medical memoirs (having somehow convinced myself that if I hadn't become a teacher, I would be a doctor). Rachel Clarke is an actual doctor who has written several works inspired by her medical experience. In The Story of a Heart, she weaves together the (true) stories of those involved in a heart transplant – from the family of the young girl who donated the heart, to the young boy who receives it, and the medical professionals who are involved in their care. Clarke's writing is immensely readable, and she conveys well why she uses "miracle" in the title to describe the transplant process, which is what we might consider the best of human beings – the act of selflessness on the part of the grieving parents, the immense skill demonstrated by the surgeons, the devoted care provided by the nursing staff...



SNG Maribor

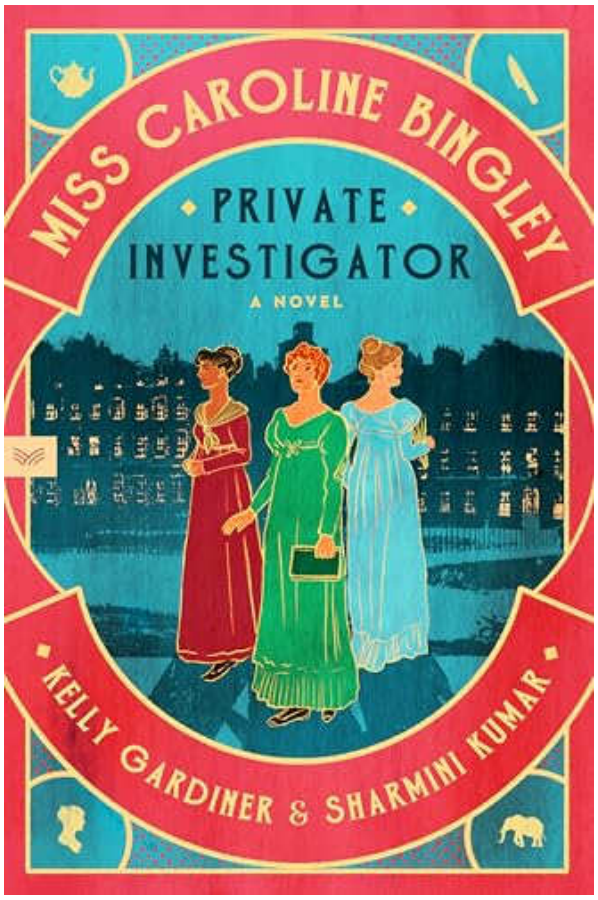


amazon.com

And finally, a local cultural event – the SNG Maribor production of Evita by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The story of Eva Perón, told by the musical, is one of extremes in a way. Born into poverty, Perón became part of the elite with her marriage to the Argentinian president, and she used her platform to advance charitable causes and women's suffrage. She was known not only for her political acumen but also for her beauty and charm. The staging is a real treat, blending the bold and bright with the delicate and subtle to capture her story and essence. The standout performance for me was by Mike Sterling, a West End performer, as Juan Perón – I loved his voice, and his stage presence was incredible. Warmly recommended.

PROFESSOR TJAŠA MOHAR

Miss Caroline Bingley, Private Detective by Kelly Gardiner and Sharmini Kumar is my pick.
It's a historical crime mystery featuring characters from Jane Austen's celebrated novel Pride and Prejudice but focusing on two minor female characters, Mr. Bingley's sister and Mr. Darcy's sister, who dare to venture into the dirty and unsafe parts of London to uncover a murder mystery. This mixture of historical and detective fiction is a great choice to mark the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth. As one of the reviews says, "Miss Austen Would Approve."



publishersweekly.com



stripi.si

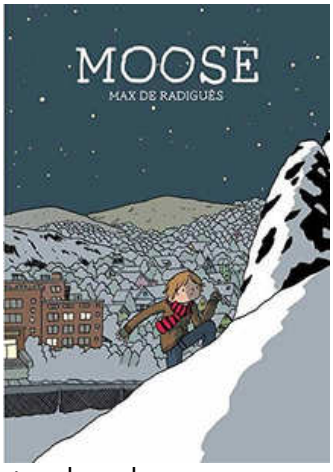
PROFESSOR TOMAŽ ONIČ

In recent decades, the graphic novel has gained considerable recognition as a literary genre. It combines elements of written texts with visual art, allowing readers to experience a bit of both worlds: an extensive read resembling a longer companionship with a traditional novel and a visual experience with its immediacy and a non-linear appearance. Far from being "just comics," graphic novels can address difficult and complex issues, from the holocaust, severe illness or loss to biblical themes, science fiction stories, and remakes of canonical highlights of world literature.

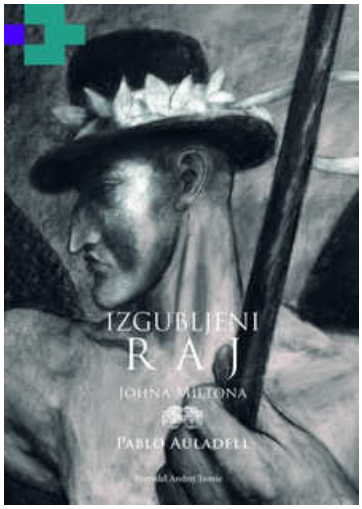
I would like to suggest three recent graphic novels that beautifully illustrate the power of this genre. They are all translations into Slovene, published in the last couple of years. Brez las (Engl. Without Hair) by Tereza Drahoňovská and Štěpánka Jislová tells the painful personal story of a woman facing alopecia, exploring self-acceptance and resilience with honesty and warmth. Certain moments of the story, like the shock at the discovery of the disease, seem to be way better suited to the visual medium. The next story is Los (Engl. Moose) by Max de Radiguès, which explores the ever-relevant problem of bullying and the blurred lines between victim and aggressor. Many panels are "silent" in the verbal sense, but they use expressive drawings to provoke reflection and empathy. And then there is Paradise Lost, in Slovene Izgubljeni raj, in which Pablo Auladell recreates John Milton's classic epic through dark, haunting imagery that brings to vivid life the eternal struggle between good and evil. For the most persistent readers, the comparison of this graphic novel and the Slovene translation of Milton's original epic by Marjan Strojan would surely present a demanding but rewarding challenge. Anyone willing to accept it?



SNG Maribor



goodreads.com



vigevageknjige.org

PROFESSOR BERNARDA LEVA

My pick this year is ballet – live and up close. I usually go to SNG Maribor, where this season brought a double celebration: 20 years of Radio and Juliet and 10 years of Peer Gynt, both by Edward Clug. Peer Gynt was an extra treat, with Clug himself appearing onstage for the jubilee. Both productions have toured internationally, helping to cement not only Clug's global reputation but also the stature of the Maribor ballet ensemble on some of the world's most prestigious stages. If you are new to ballet, start with anything on the SNG Maribor programme: movement, music, light, and theatrical depth combine to make a memorable night.


Literary Part



Prose

Prologue - The Parting River

Andraž Kovačič Pohorec

A moonless night, heavy and humid – still warm from the sun. A most uncomfortable night, where only red lanterns occasionally light up the dark and empty streets.

Rarely would one see a lone woman with a child in her arms on any side of the river. Everyone knew the dangers of such nights, no matter which side of the town you came from. Yet here was a lone woman, a child wrapped in her arms.

The people moved as if encountering the plague. A tattoo on her neck, dark red, yet glowing, gave her away. She was a whore. Not by choice. No one was anything by choice in this river town. And the child – already tattooed with the very same symbol – was a reflection of her misfortune, and more so of the misfortune of that very child. Branded from very birth.

On the other side of the river, a story, not much different from this one, was unfolding. A different woman, a different child, a different brand of tattoo. Same inevitable fate. A whore and her offspring, branded by the symbol of their owner.

The youthful woman – no, a girl, not yet fully matured – hid her face. A single lamp in her free hand to light her path. It was not unusual to see a whore so late at night, nor was it unusual to see children branded just for being the children of whores. But it was unusual to see a whore wandering the night with her children. Shunned even. Sooner rather than later, they would be found.

The north of the town was still full of vegetation. The running river gave an illusion of a small paradise. No one who had ever visited the town thought of it as one. The surroundings might have been pretty, but they were intentionally so. Inviting, for those naive enough to enter. And here came the woman, a basket ready by the riverside "paradise."

A rustling disturbed her. She flinched, looking over the river. A lamp. A child. A basket. A lone woman. Almost a reflection. The two looked over at one another, bitter smiles exchanged. They put their children into the oddly comfortable baskets. Children, not even a year old.

In sync, they put smaller lanterns into the baskets, shining upon the children's faces. Small letters accompanied the lanterns, barely a word written inside. It was a ritual. A horrid tradition. If one did what they were doing, one had to do it right. It was the only hope for escape.

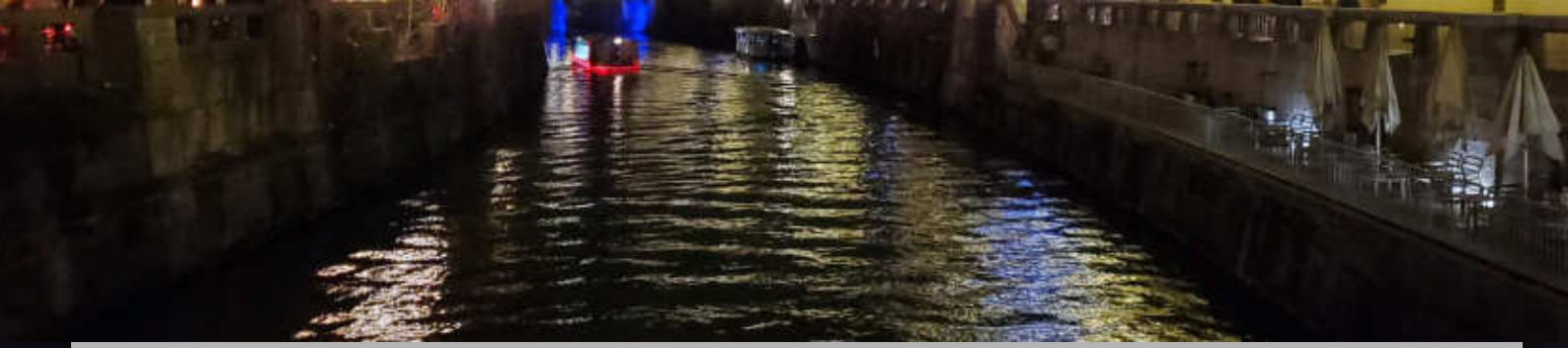
The two baskets were lowered to the river, floating with ease. It was a calm, serene river for the town it ran through; the baskets did not even sway. Side by side, two lonely little lanterns had only each other on that river, running below the many stone bridges that led southwards through the town.

Those who noticed the baskets did not bother picking them up. Pity, hope…or nothing inhabited the faces of those who saw them.

On the riverbank, the woman finally froze. A strong and, she knew, dangerous hand grabbed her shoulder. She did not dare turn around.

"I hope you know what you've done."





The woman remained silent. She stared directly across the river, where her unknown companion was going through the very same thing.
"You should've done it before the branding."
The woman breathed in, exhausted. She could barely keep herself together. "You know that is impossible."
The man did not answer. He too knew that this happened only in fairytales. He pulled her away, and the woman gave one final look to the opposite side of the river.
"You threw away your only hope of escape." The man led the whore away.
"There was no hope to begin with." She kept on looking to the other side. She found an odd feeling of companionship with the other whore. If only she could know. Did she have the same reasons as her own? Hope – if not for herself, at least for her child?
But she would never know. Not when they were separated by this river. Two sides, never to cross each other.
She turned to the serene water, to the lanterns, which were now invisible. Those on the river would be guided by it.
Two small bodies now began to cry, separated from their mothers. The uncomfortable silent night now filled with pure life, for a child's cry was uncorrupted. Its only purpose was to alert their caretaker.
And so the river ran. Unbothered by the children's wails. Flowing from north to south, it led out of the twisted city, and into open plains. Slowly, more and more rocks started littering the peaceful river, irregularities in the so far consistent stream.
The river parted; the waves spiralled. On the left they spun right; on the right they spun left. The little baskets turned, facing each other. With them, the children, who thought they were alone, finally noticed the strangers that had been accompanying them the whole time. For but a second, they stopped crying, curiosity filling their minds.
The letters flapped, opened by the light wind as the children parted. Nylee. Wyn. Names. Only names were on the letters. The "paradise" did not offer the time for parting words.
And then? And then the children saw no more. Only the riverbank—dividing them, as the river had divided the stony town.
But a river divided would often return to where it began. Meeting itself…and turning whole again.

Note: This is the prologue for a longer novel called Crossing Lines (if it ever sees the light of day).

An excerpt from Autumn Leaves: Ash and Sand, chapter 1
Of Myths and Children's Tales

Val Pšeničnik

...

The droplets of morning dew were glistening with the rays of a waking autumn morning, reflecting colours of vibrant flame that adorned the trees of the noble estate. The faint noise of birds chirping outside was muffled by a thick glass windowpane barring any distraction from disturbing the quiet study next to the well-stocked estate library. The only noise coming from it was the quiet humming of the study's resident brewing a soft infusion of herbal tea.

"Yrleich! Yrleich!" screamed the voice of a young lad, no older than twelve, who came running into the study with childish curiosity on his face.

"Is it true that there is a huge land of ash to the north? And, and... is it true that we're just the people who ran away from there?" he hurriedly asked the tall man, who offered him a fresh cup of tea.

"Indeed, to some extent I can confirm that what you say is true. But first, where did you hear that?"

"Nymm was making fun of me for not knowing it," the boy replied with a frown, "she said it's basic history and that everyone should know it."

Yrleich smiled and remarked, "Well, it seems I haven't taught you enough history then. Very well, let us make today's lesson on the history of this continent, Ethos, and the way it became as we know it today."

"However," he said, "all we have to go on are folk tales and cautionary stories for children, so I'll chose one that will be both insightful and entertaining."

"It'll be more interesting than studying maps and manners for sure..." the boy replied.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Yrleich "you really wouldn't like the way they teach at the academy then."

"I don't want to go to the academy..." said the boy sullenly.

"I know, I know... However, you'll be Duke someday, and your father has tasked me specifically with preparing you for further study in the academy. Remember Oliwer, we do not choose to be born as we are and freely decide the amount of time that is given to us; we do, however, have all the choice of using that time to do what we were meant to do to our fullest desire."

"Mhm..." mumbled Oliwer, still sulking.

"Forget that for now," Yrleich said in a calming tone, "Come sit here by the window and let me tell you a tale."

"Today we'll be learning the tale of The Boy and the Serpent."

...

The Boy and the Serpent

In an age long passed, in a land barren and rocky, unfit for farmland, there lived a boy. One day, when foraging for what scarce food he could find
...the boy met a silvery Serpent...
It was the size of five men and its scales glistened silvery white. The boy recoiled at the sight and covered his face in fear.

The Serpent spoke in a soft, cunning tone:

"Worry not child, for I bring you a deal.

Trust me, its worth will be more than a meal.

I offer a land where in riches you'll bathe,

In return I ask just of your worship and faith"

The boy, unwilling to return to his people empty-handed, followed the Serpent through desolate paths to a large black mountain with dark, rich soil where plants could grow plentifully and fresh. Hidden beneath the surface at the foot of the mountain he found what they called Aethill, God's Gem. The boy rejoiced at the newfound land and dashed off to his family. The word of the land spread fast, and the boy led a starved nation through treacherous lands to the black mountain. When people saw the lush growth and shining minerals at the foot of the mountain, they grew overjoyed, each of them thanking the boy and proclaiming him the finder of paradise and the first king of a new nation. Thus, the great kingdom of Ethia was founded.

The boy once again went to the Serpent to praise him and hear the rest of his deal, and so the Serpent spoke:

"I ask for a temple at the mountain's top,

I promise you riches and abundant crop.

Leave offerings aplenty and spread my word wide,

But never enter the place where I abide."

The first king of Ethia then remained true to his word. He built the serpent a grand temple that covered the entire crater of the volcano and adorned it with riches and offerings. The word spread and the kingdom expanded whether through war or diplomacy. The Serpent was regarded as a deity even though it remained well-hidden inside the temple and the language of Ethia evolved so far that even now all peoples of this continent speak it.

However, all realms are eventually fated to fall. Ages passed and people started to doubt the word of the Serpent; greed filled their shallow hearts and some even began to doubt the Serpent even exists. What they did know, is that at the top of their great mountain is a temple and, in that temple, there are centuries of offered riches, and most important of all Aethill, God's Gem. In their greed they breached the temple and dug down into the covered crater of the volcano. As soon as the floor was breached, however, they heard a terrible voice from the deep abyss:

Ethians! You dare breach my gates and enter my hall?

Wilful traitors I pronounce you all!

Betrayal has given you plentiful debt

For this I will bring disaster no one will forget...”

The mountainous top suddenly erupted and laid ruin to the entire civilization, fulfilling the wrath of a betrayed Serpent. Countless cities were destroyed, nations annihilated, even the neighbouring continent fused to our own. A scarce few remained alive on this continent afterward. They say nearly all who live here are descendants of those few survivors. The mountain where Ethia’s centre lay has now sunk into the ground and the surrounding land forever lies under shadow and ash. Only one rumoured bastion remains living in that land, established well past the tale’s eruption, now only known as Sorrow’s End.

...

“At least that’s how the tale goes...” said Yrleich.

“Whoa...“ said Oliwer, his mouth agape. “Do you think it’s true? Is the Serpent real? Is it still alive? Does the land of shadow really exist?“

“Whoa, whoa, one question at a time,” laughed Yrleich.

He calmly took another sip of his tea and looked through the window at the fiery autumn leaves falling beside the manor.

“Perhaps some of it is true, and perhaps not. I sure would like to see this land of shadow once.”

“You see,” he said, “not all tales are to be believed; however, I should not be one to speak. These days the people of our realm hardly believe any intelligent being but Ridgefolk exists, meanwhile a half Tall-one such as myself is here, teaching their future leader.” He chuckled to himself and took another sip of his tea.

...





The Hunter

Maša Harl

Her feet were barely touching the ground in her hurry. Legs scarred from the rough forest floor, they still refused to stop. Behind her, a pair of boots stomped just as fast, leaving a trail of broken stems and twigs in their wake. The stomping was filled with anger and determination. She whipped her head around, her big round eyes searching for her pursuer. The wide-open eyes soon landed on a grotesque face sporting a grimace of hatred bisected by a jarring scar. His deep-set eyes, filled with hatred, locked with her wide-open ones, filled with fear, and he started to gain speed. Whipping her head back around, terrified, she pushed her slender legs to the limit and picked up the pace. The forest ahead of her started to thin and grey patches of a road began to peek through the branches. She fixed her dark eyes on the road, seeking motivation and even hope.

With the hunter close behind, she finally felt the hot asphalt under her feet; at the same moment she heard a loud sound coming towards her. She looked up and froze in the blinding lights.

The hunter had lost his prey.

The Attraction

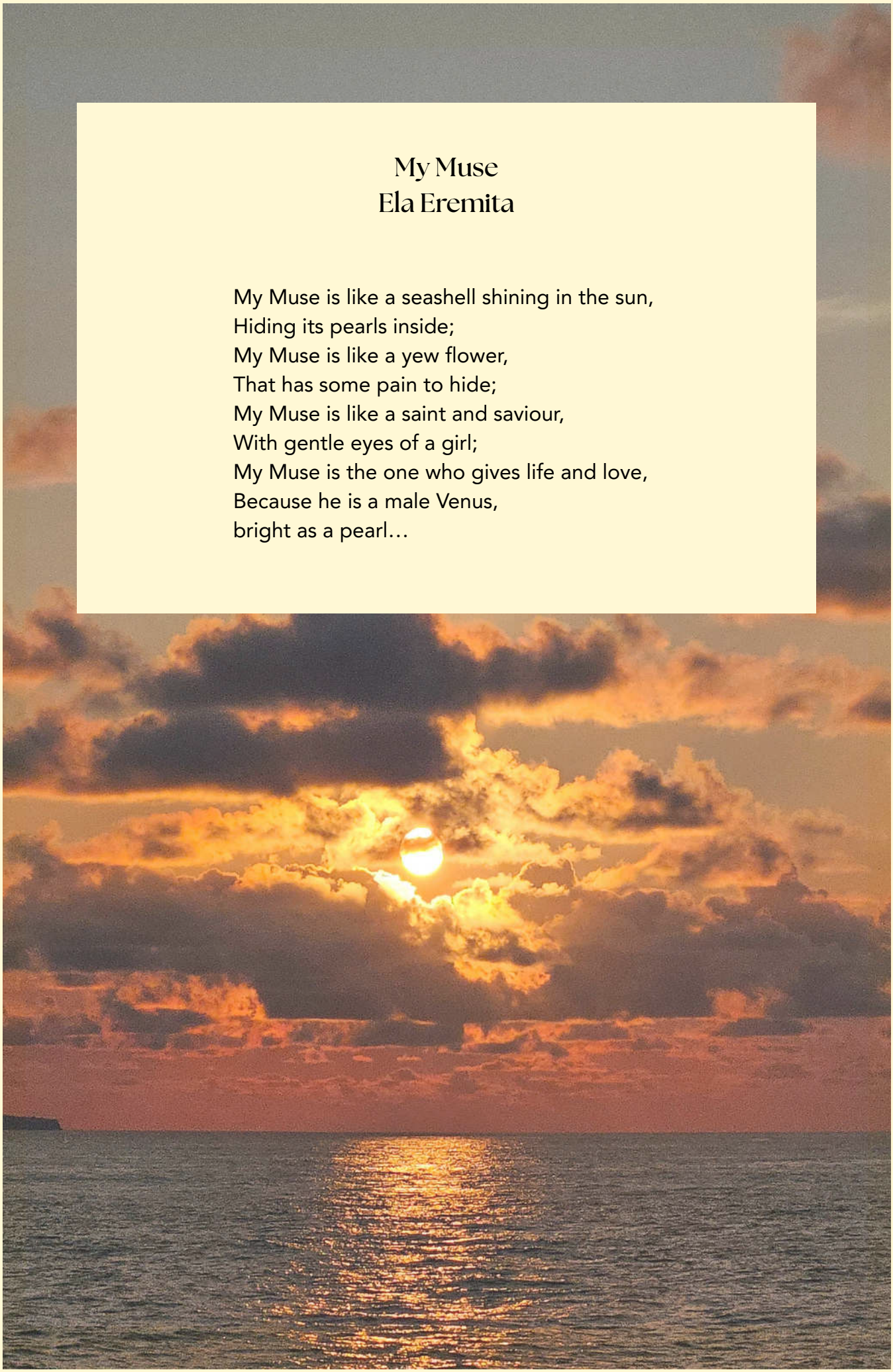
Petra Erdős

I open the window and light a cigarette. I need a minute. I ask R. to send the priest up to me. I don't know what answers I expect from him; I don't even know what I want to ask him exactly. I'm not religious but I feel like he is the only one who could say anything about all this. The door opens but I don't put my cigarette out. I'm sure he has seen brides do worse. I ask him about death, and he answers with a surprising lack of worry. I'm sure he's been asked worse things before ceremonies like this. I shouldn't worry. I will be with V. even when our lives on this earth come to an end; love is forever and now it seals our fate. I thank him, ask him to leave, and so he does. I didn't believe a word he said. The only thing he sealed in me is that no one understands. I've felt it for years that there is something inside me no one can take in. At first, I fought, then I waited patiently for someone to give it to, to share it with. When I met V., I truly believed he was the one. It didn't scare him that I handed all this to him so fast. But this feeling of pressure inside me didn't stop even after years. I started having dreams, indescribable ones. I felt some otherworldly pull, and after I woke up, there was nothing but the infinite emptiness of it all.

It ate me alive.

I played but I only really felt anything when I was dreaming. Somebody loved me before I was human, before all the skin, bone, and destruction. Someone who is not here, never will be here, and maybe never was. Still, it calls. I know I can only feel what is inside me with it, because what is inside me does not exist in this world. I've known this for years, just as I knew that our fate with V. was sealed the day after my first dream. But the scales of truth decided only now. Uncertainty was the only thing holding me back, keeping me on this path. I now lift that off as easily as I take my high heels off my feet. On my tiptoes I can still kick the chair out from under me, but I do not hear it hit the ground anymore. I have chosen the attraction.


Poetry



My Muse
Ela Eremita

My Muse is like a seashell shining in the sun,
Hiding its pearls inside;
My Muse is like a yew flower,
That has some pain to hide;
My Muse is like a saint and saviour,
With gentle eyes of a girl;
My Muse is the one who gives life and love,
Because he is a male Venus,
bright as a pearl…

Diaspora Semiotics
M. Gadpaille

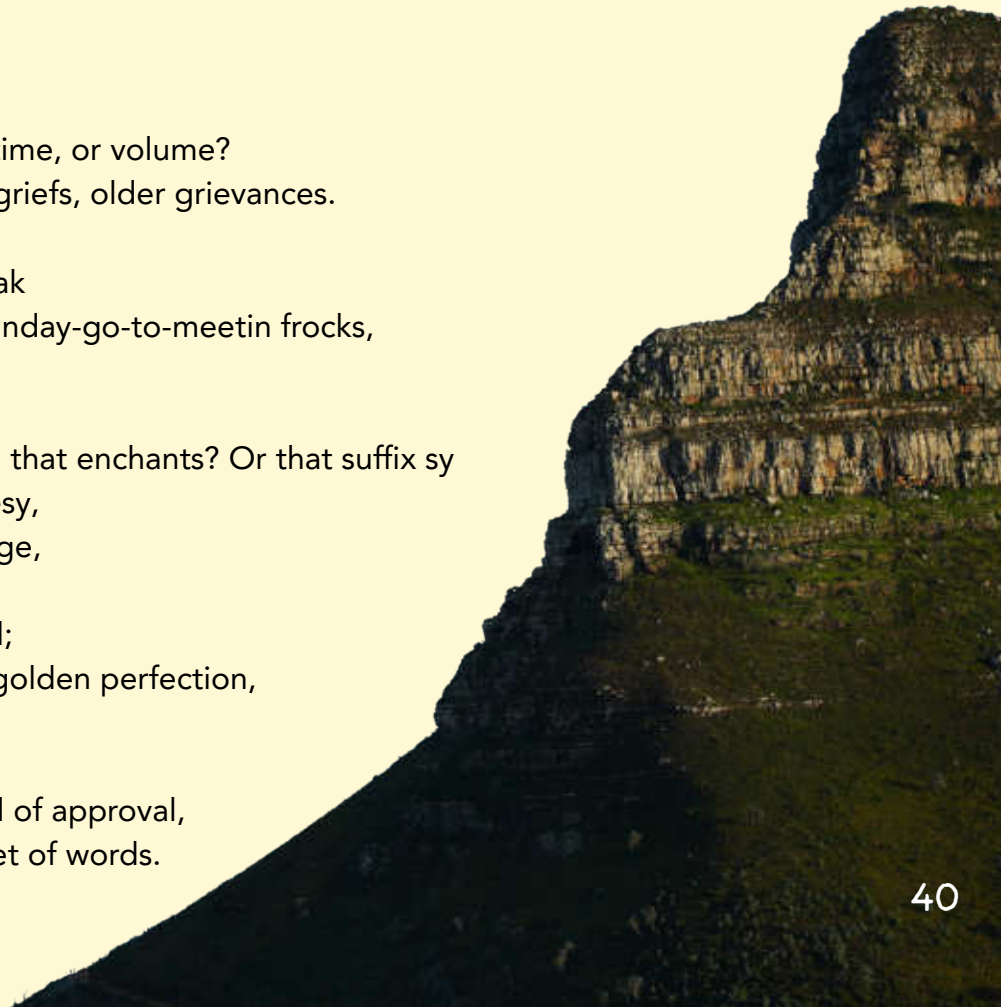
The Caribbean has elbowed its way into the Oxford English Dictionary with 12 new words commonly used in the region. (ABC News)

Adam's task of giving things their names (Derek Walcott, Another Life)

The Oxford Dictionary has spoken:
new words blossom in its pages
on its screens.
Pholourie, cou-cou, bulla.
These sounds have rolled off the tongues
of Caribbean people
for ages: beg a bulla, missis, hat up dat cou-cou fi mi.
Sound must travel slowly
from the ridges of the Blue Mountains
to the halls of Oxford,
On indolent tides, across the Sargasso Sea,
to a place where sound solidifies
into single meaning.

Saltfish settles into its kitchen definition,
shedding its origin in slavery and starvation.
Visual metaphor turns delicacy in buss-up-shut;
mout water a run,
confounding hermeneutics.
What, then of cry long water?
How to measure sorrow—by time, or volume?
Both cup the overflow of old griefs, older grievances.

Caribbean grandmothers speak
a language of cookpots, of Sunday-go-to-meetin frocks,
of pride in ancestry.
Broughtupsy.
Could it be the past participle that enchants? Or that suffix sy
so artlessly stolen from courtesy,
Returned to the dictionary page,
transformed,
to a language for standing tall;
Words brought up, baked to golden perfection,
Served in victory,
perhaps vengeance,
Slipped in, with an official seal of approval,
At the world's biggest banquet of words.



HAIKUS
Hossein Valizadeh Sarvandani

Playing hide and seek
Setting sun over mountains
Train passenger's eye

Gleaming city lights
From distance at night
Someone on the road

Fast cars' whooshing sound
A slow heavy truck driver
His wandering thoughts

Road's white dashes
Slicing it in two ribbons
Just a few more miles

A warm wooden desk
Timelessness repeats at night
A book a coffee

Early morning dark
Waiting for the morning sun
Sitting on the porch

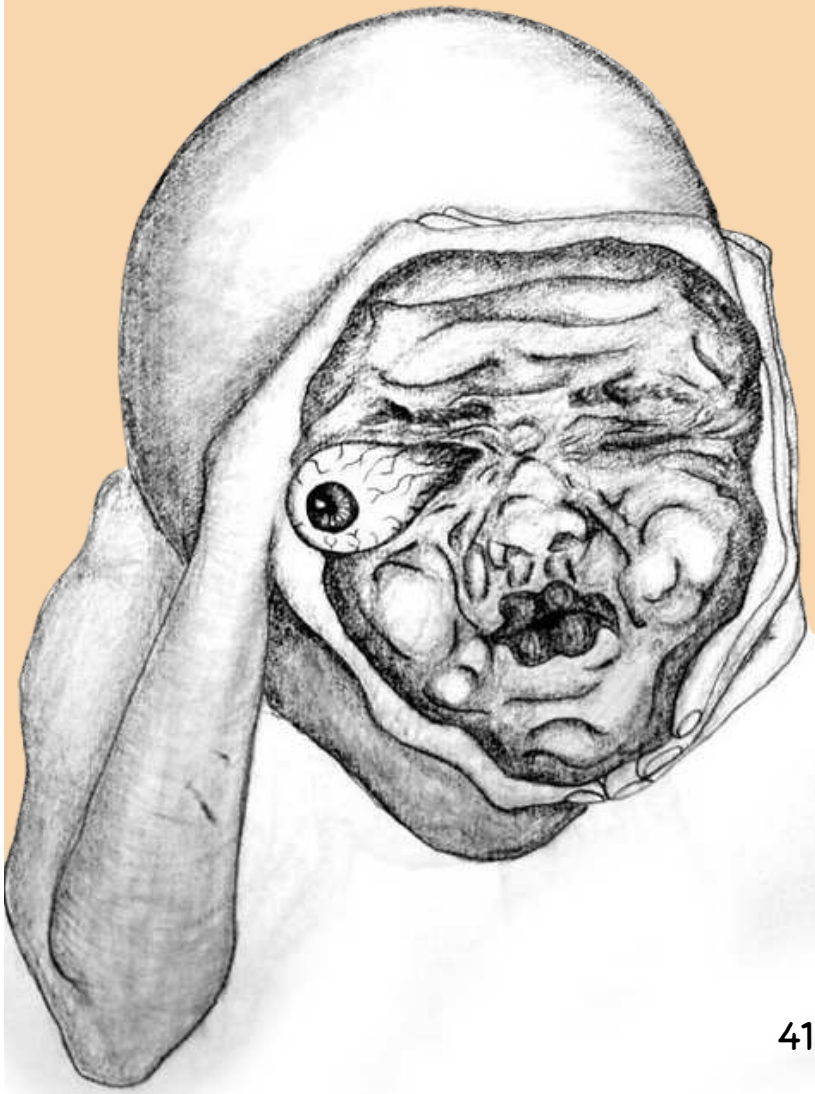
The wind blows, moving
Amid river sounds, soil's scent
Sun rays through tree leaves

An airplane takes off
Sound of footsteps in valley
He's home after long

Crowded gather rounds
Counting the people you know
Special occasions

A car passes by
Recognising the music
Memories flash by

Photo album found
Life kept through pictures I smile
Old youth revives tears

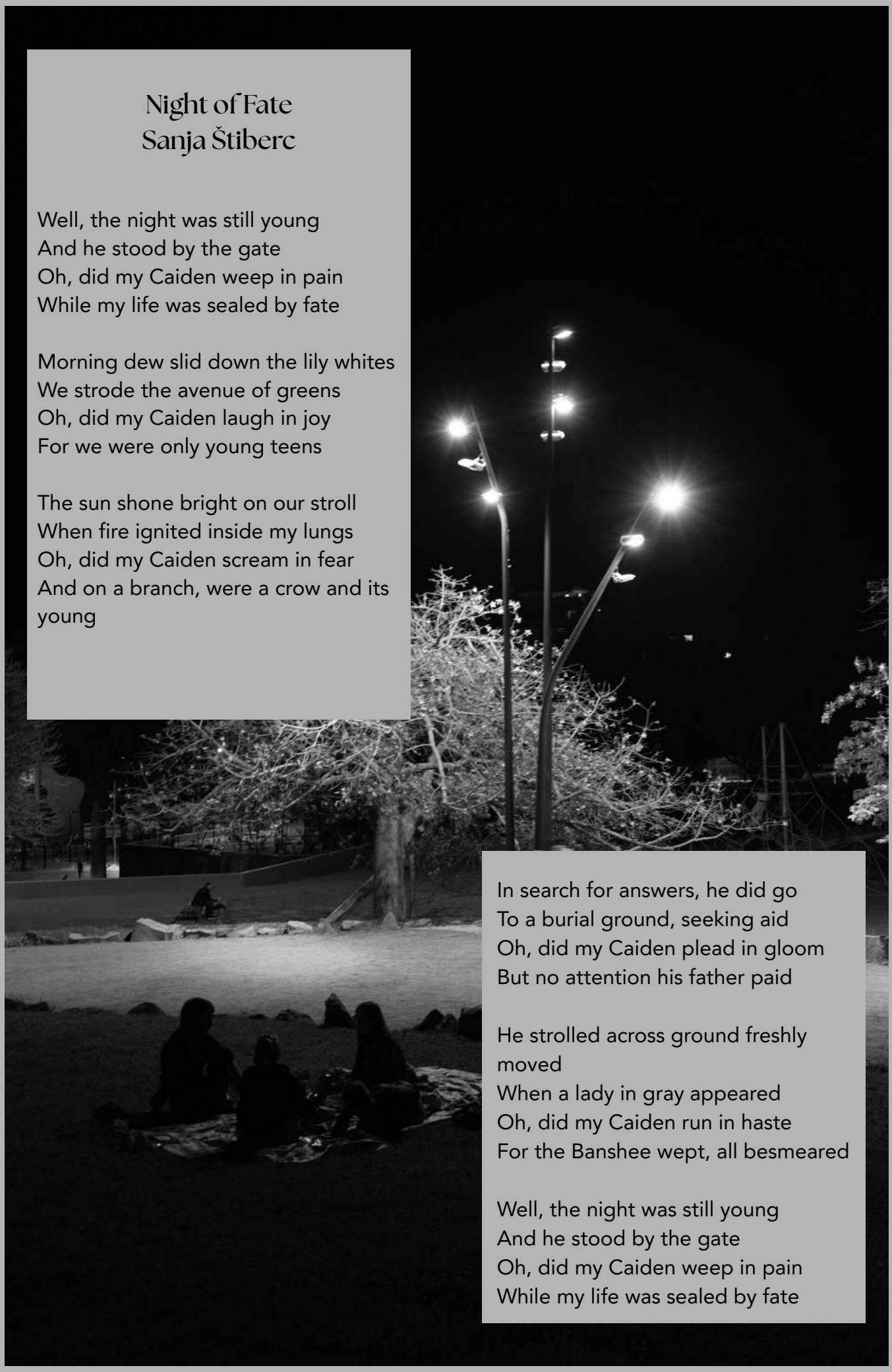


Night of Fate
Sanja Štiberc

Well, the night was still young
And he stood by the gate
Oh, did my Caiden weep in pain
While my life was sealed by fate

Morning dew slid down the lily whites
We strode the avenue of greens
Oh, did my Caiden laugh in joy
For we were only young teens

The sun shone bright on our stroll
When fire ignited inside my lungs
Oh, did my Caiden scream in fear
And on a branch, were a crow and its young



In search for answers, he did go
To a burial ground, seeking aid
Oh, did my Caiden plead in gloom
But no attention his father paid

He strolled across ground freshly moved
When a lady in gray appeared
Oh, did my Caiden run in haste
For the Banshee wept, all besmeared

Well, the night was still young
And he stood by the gate
Oh, did my Caiden weep in pain
While my life was sealed by fate

The Scars Of a Life Well Lived

Narcis Ramić



What do they mean? is a senseless question
They mean nothing
They hold no meaning
They are lines and shading
But they are not meaningless
To be that they would not exist
They are holy
They are the accumulation of a life well lived
They hold the blood shed
For grief, glory, wrath and joy
Yet their meaning is irrelevant
To everybody but me and the artist who scarred my skin
And in the years far from now
Let those who see them
Wonder what they meant, what they mean
If I regret them or not
It will not be on my mind
I will forget I have some of them
Every time I look in the mirror or at a certain angle
I will discover one I forgot
I will remember a time that once was
I will remember people that once were
I will remember joy and love
I will remember hatred and grief
I will remember
For what meaning does something as holy as tattoos need
Scars bound to me in this life and the next?

Illustration by Taro Tattoo

In eighteen forty-eight
we decided we were great,
standing up for liberty
for that bright light we all could see.

Then came nineteen ninety-one,
our great fight we had won –
from Communism we were free,
in forestry, still number three.

But we, the people of invention,
a historically multi-cultured nation,
allowed a dark cloud of the past
to climb up our flag's mast.

Thirty-four years later,
our situation is still bitter.
"He said this" and "she did that",
though sports achievements all around,
a nation's heartbeat going flat
on this, our beautiful Slovene ground.

Poem Once a Dream
Florjan Perec



Illustration by Taro Tattoo

Fairies Love Fairies
Maša Harl

Meet me where the fairies meet.
Dance the cursed forest dance.
Feet tangled with my feet.

Scream a banshee scream.
Lips hunger for your lips.
Dream with me a fever dream.

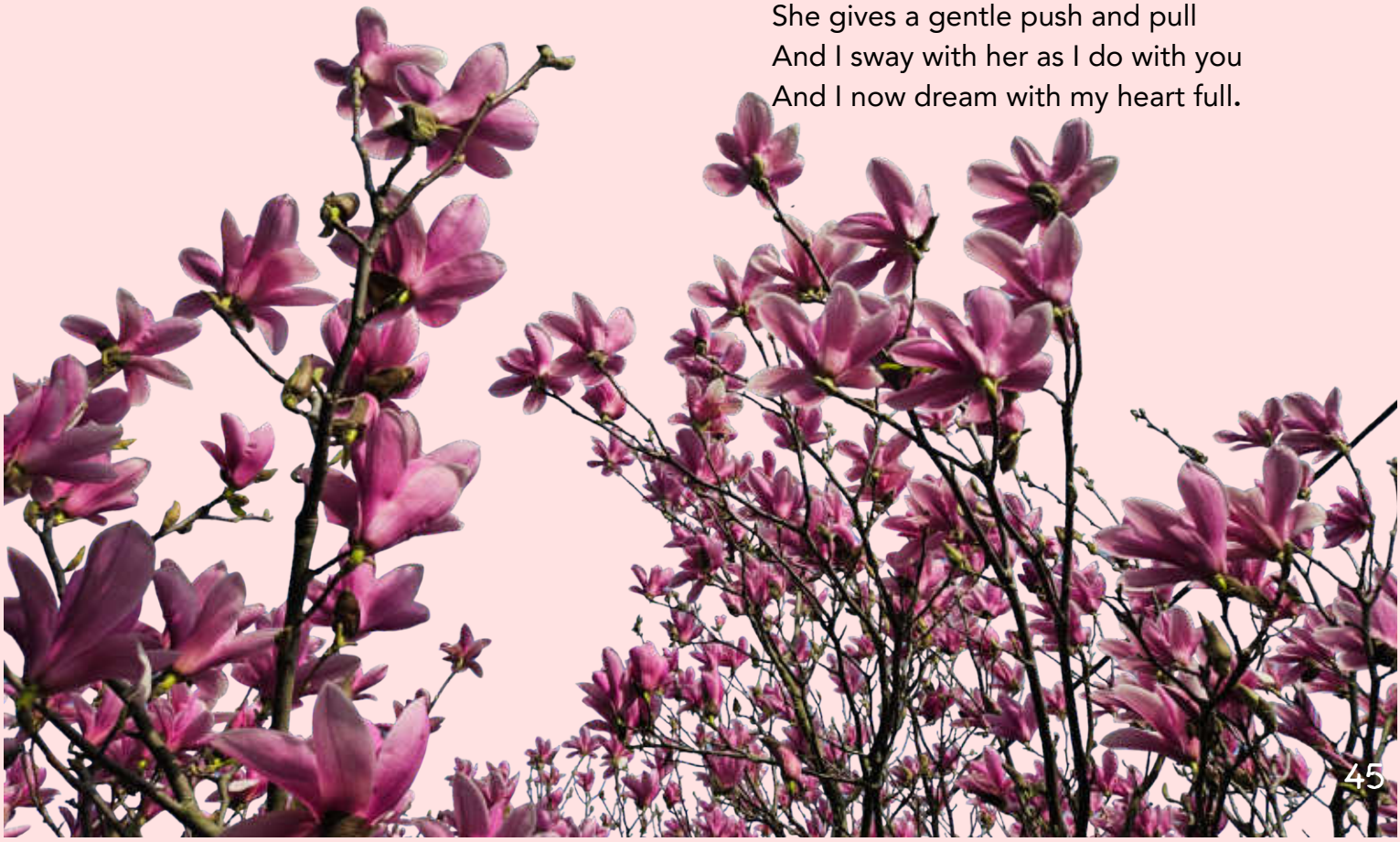
Fire at me your lovely fire.
Gods are killed by gods alone.
Desire me, as I you desire.

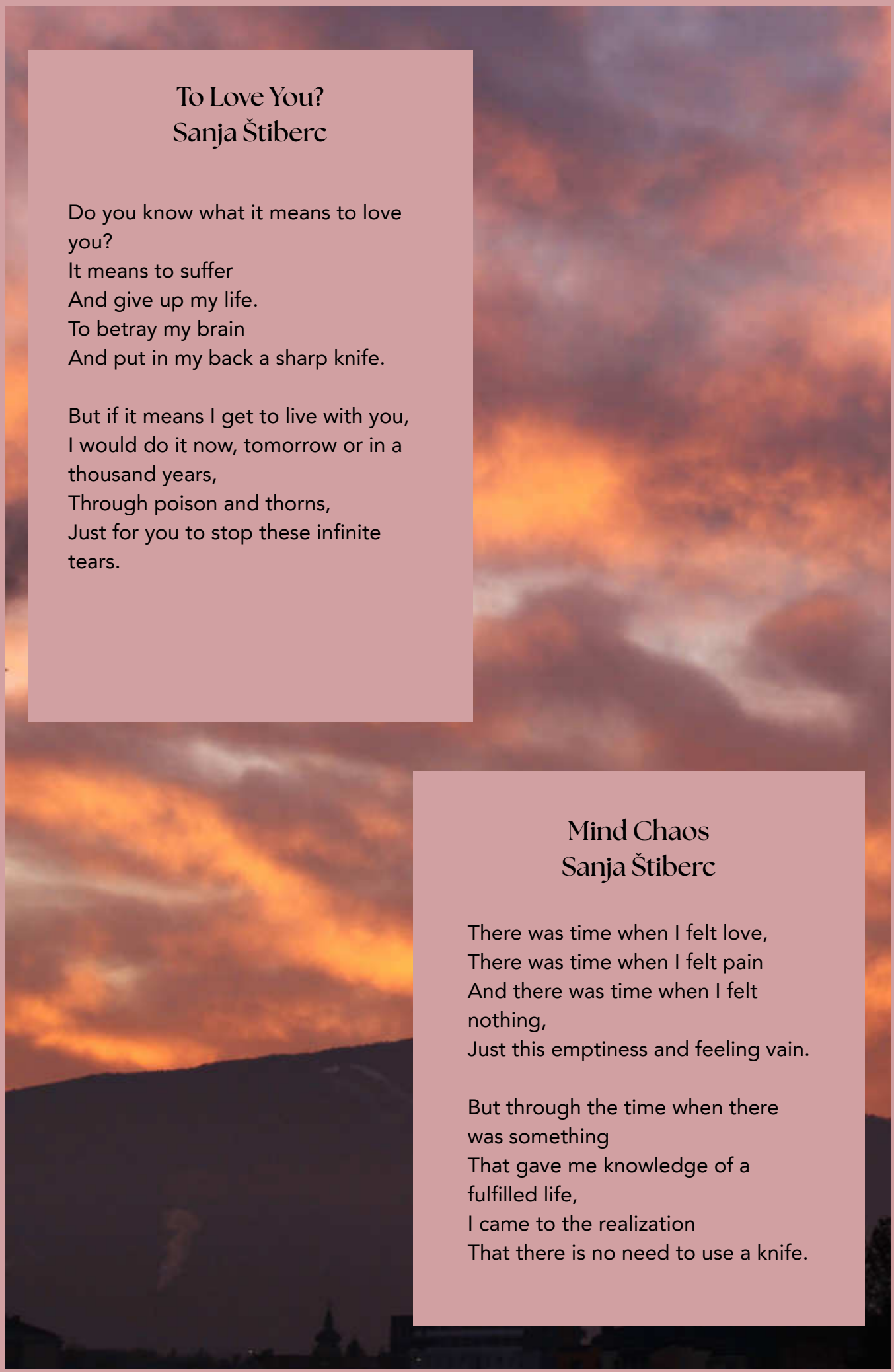
Love me, like it's wrong to love.

She Speaks of Us
Maša Harl

The sea plays its sweet melody
On the organ of white steps.
She tells me to love and live
When these stone shores she taps.
Old stories she tells of us
How we danced and laughed.
Her song so tireless;

Never ending as our love.
She gives a gentle push and pull
And I sway with her as I do with you
And I now dream with my heart full.





To Love You?
Sanja Štiberc

Do you know what it means to love you?
It means to suffer
And give up my life.
To betray my brain
And put in my back a sharp knife.

But if it means I get to live with you,
I would do it now, tomorrow or in a thousand years,
Through poison and thorns,
Just for you to stop these infinite tears.

Mind Chaos
Sanja Štiberc

There was time when I felt love,
There was time when I felt pain
And there was time when I felt nothing,
Just this emptiness and feeling vain.

But through the time when there was something
That gave me knowledge of a fulfilled life,
I came to the realization
That there is no need to use a knife.

Dreamer's Lament

Ana Vinovrški

As long as I remember, I have had
a dream – a dream of you and me, my dear.
In you, I could confide my pain and fear,
and you were always there when I was sad.

You told me everything would be all right,
and I believed in every word. We talked
into the night, you held my hand, we walked
between dimensions as you held me tight.

Then I awoke, as if I hit the ground.
I felt the pillow next to me – still cold;
and when I reached out for your hand to hold,
I noticed you nowhere to be found.

And that was when reality hit me;
you don't exist; we're never meant to be.



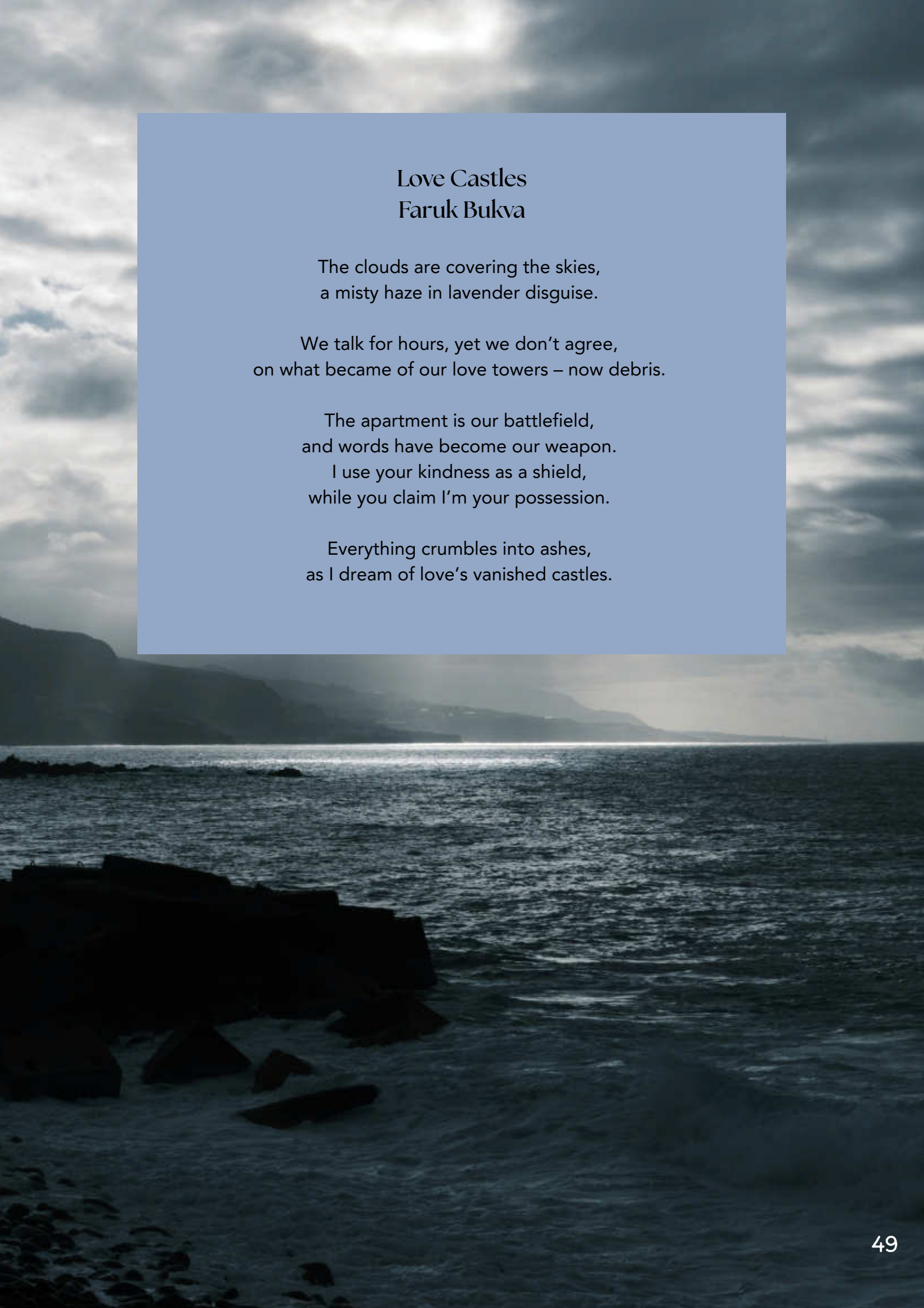
September Rain
Faruk Bukva

Rain is pouring.
The streets are empty.
The wind moves through the night,
candles in the windows burn bright.

Rain is pouring.
The streets are empty.
You sit by the terrace,
your face reflected in the dark –
a dream of what we could have had.

Rain is pouring.
The streets are empty.
Silence grows louder.
The only sound
is your thoughts.

Rain is pouring.
The streets are empty.
Your thoughts drift with the wind.
My soul follows –
follows the September rain.



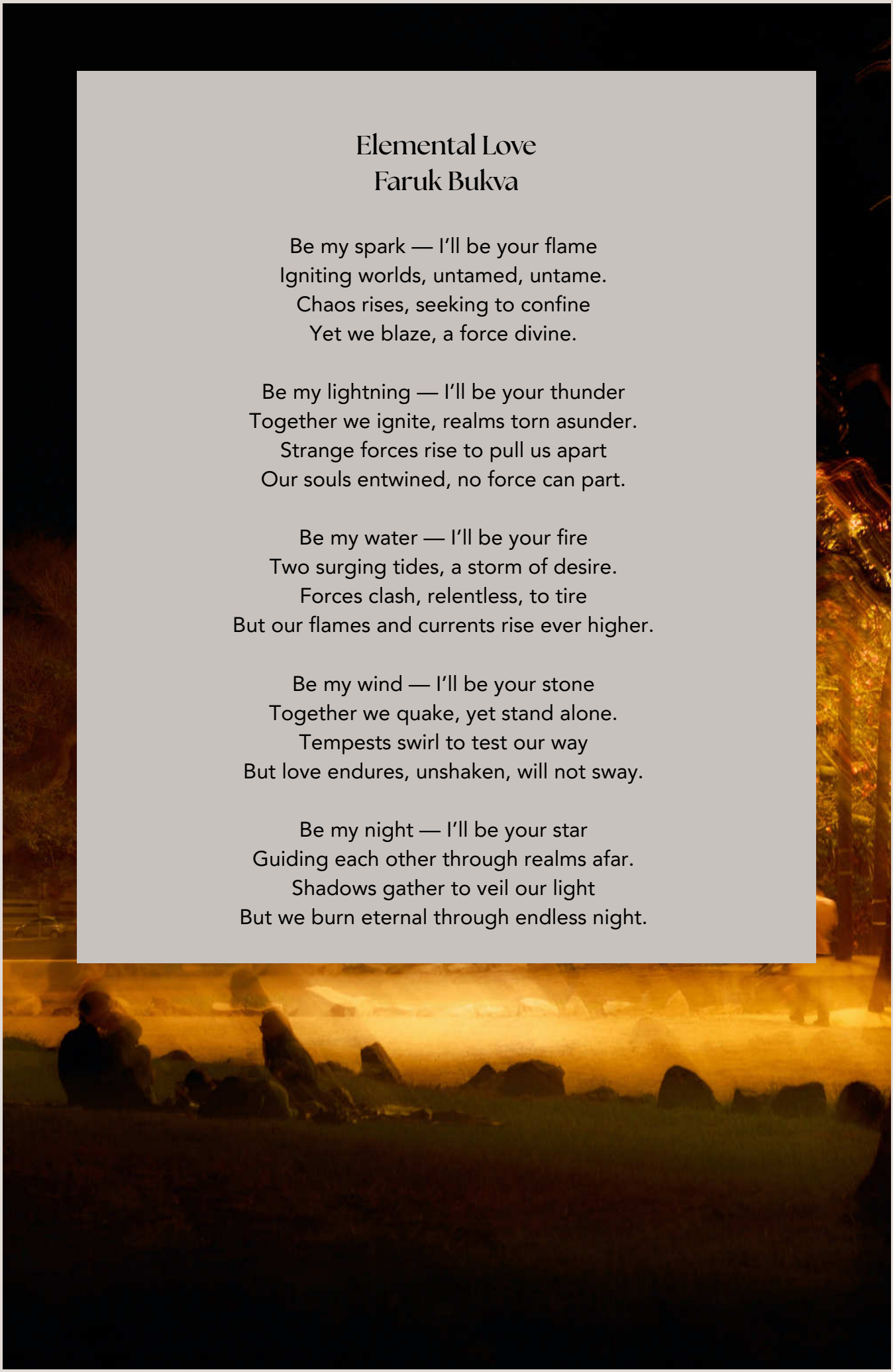
Love Castles
Faruk Bukva

The clouds are covering the skies,
a misty haze in lavender disguise.

We talk for hours, yet we don't agree,
on what became of our love towers – now debris.

The apartment is our battlefield,
and words have become our weapon.
I use your kindness as a shield,
while you claim I'm your possession.

Everything crumbles into ashes,
as I dream of love's vanished castles.



Elemental Love
Faruk Bukva

Be my spark — I'll be your flame
Igniting worlds, untamed, untame.
Chaos rises, seeking to confine
Yet we blaze, a force divine.

Be my lightning — I'll be your thunder
Together we ignite, realms torn asunder.
Strange forces rise to pull us apart
Our souls entwined, no force can part.

Be my water — I'll be your fire
Two surging tides, a storm of desire.
Forces clash, relentless, to tire
But our flames and currents rise ever higher.

Be my wind — I'll be your stone
Together we quake, yet stand alone.
Tempests swirl to test our way
But love endures, unshaken, will not sway.

Be my night — I'll be your star
Guiding each other through realms afar.
Shadows gather to veil our light
But we burn eternal through endless night.

Muulenarcoo
Juan Tejera

Emerald caqui and gold
What a gift it is to know your name
Silk lays upon your soul
Be next to you, it's all my heart longs for

This silly life it's full of coincidences
In this minuscule land
I'm glad we found each other to fall
When some struggle to remain after all

Curiosity is bound to find
Hello was just the first base
Would you like to be my date
This time I promise, it's not a race

My thoughts would like to know
Hands which crave to hold
It's hard letting go of control
When you long to be enough

In your arms I want to lie
Even when I know it's not to stay
Hold me close and tight
I promise there will be no fright

Words are heavy when I speak
want my heart to have a chance
Even though it's not hard
Caution is a route I don't ever walk

Calm and serene,the first time it seems
There is no shadow of fear
in this short time, I hope
We get many moments together

amor

Author's comment: "Mulenarcoo" comes from a place of love and hope. After 2024, a year of many painful moments and hardships in general, I'm glad to have come up with a more enthusiastic and hopeful piece of writing. This short work tries to put a picture together of how sometimes life brings people into our lives, and even if it's momentary, they can change everything as we know it. I dedicate this poem to that special person who has recently brought smiling back to me.

Zardoyaesk
Juan Tejera

Author's comment: "Zardoyaesk" is a piece directly inspired by Maria Zardoya's new album Melt. The album deals with whether love is worth the pain, and some of the lyrics spoke directly to me. Taking one line from the song "Moment," this poem came to me in just a few seconds after I listened to the album earlier this week. I also wanted to bring my interpretation of the album's symbolism.

Heaven is a place beside you
Where I want to become lost
Hold me in your orbit
Do not ever let me go

Hold and touch me
Feel my skin burn
Smell my fear in the air
I never want this to end

For a moment stand still
See me for what I am
A mere soul in this land
Fear me not: I'm not a woe

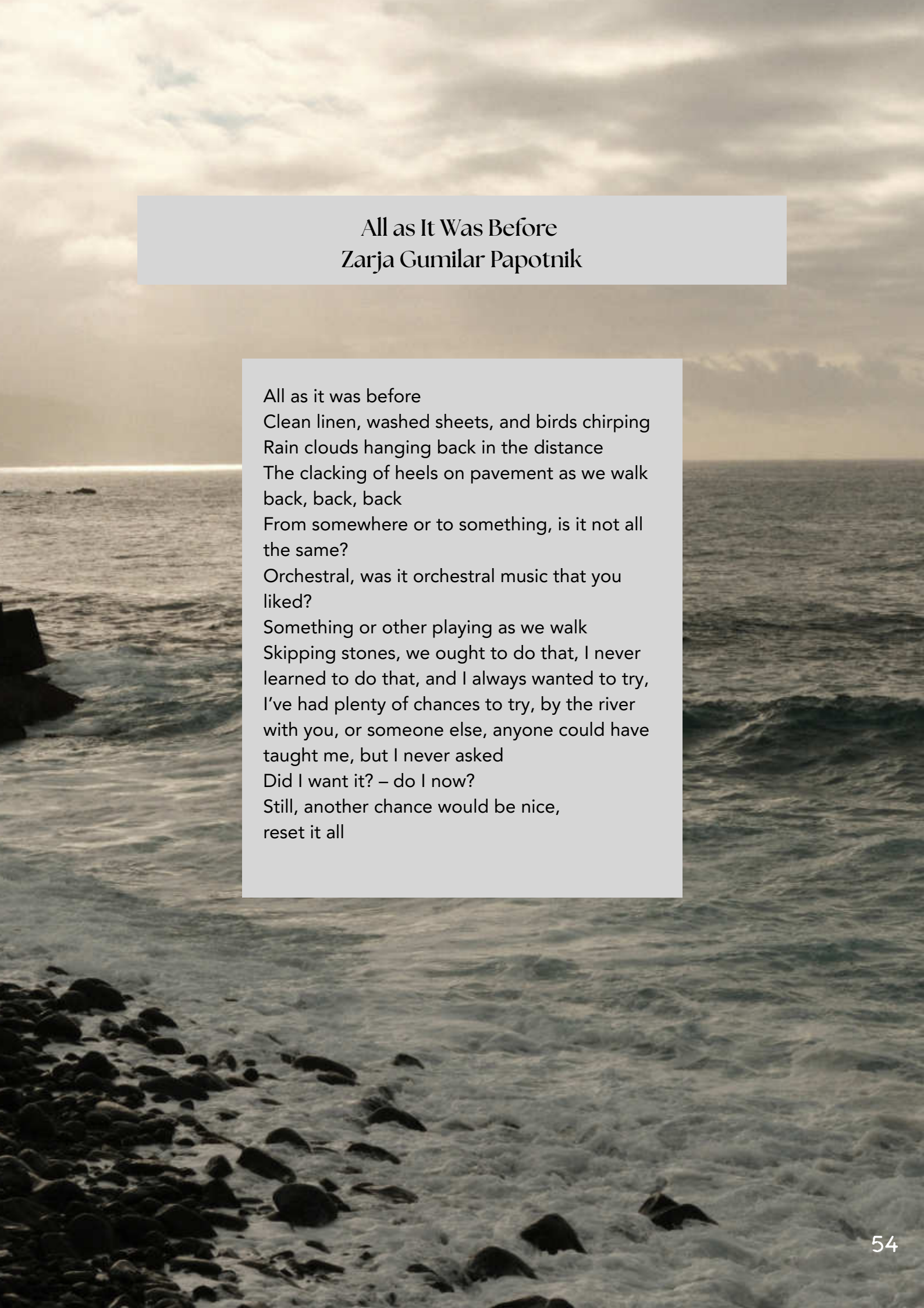
Time is passing by
I don't want water to get cold
Hold my hand and say the words
Just you and me, that's all

We do not need more
Our place is free of wrongs
Just smile and let go
Melt into me

Life of the Lively
Ema Pristovnik Kelbič

A fixed idea is in me
Imminent to share with thee
For the past was
For it offered us diversity
Because of singularity
For the future will be
For it could offer us diversity
Because of finity
For now, there's relativity
If two talk
And one is smart
The other just won't see
The objects that tend thee
Ask if care really be
To connect one with thee
Ask if feeling never brings honesty
When does singularity become diversity?
And don't you realise potentiality
If all yell "Surpass!"
And all to be
Others better not see
Thoughts of the sinful
Bother responsibility
If true reason can, at all, exist simultaneously

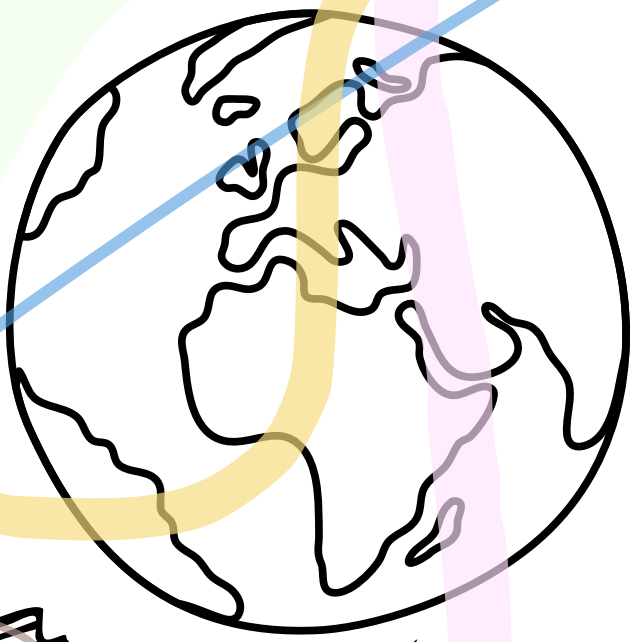


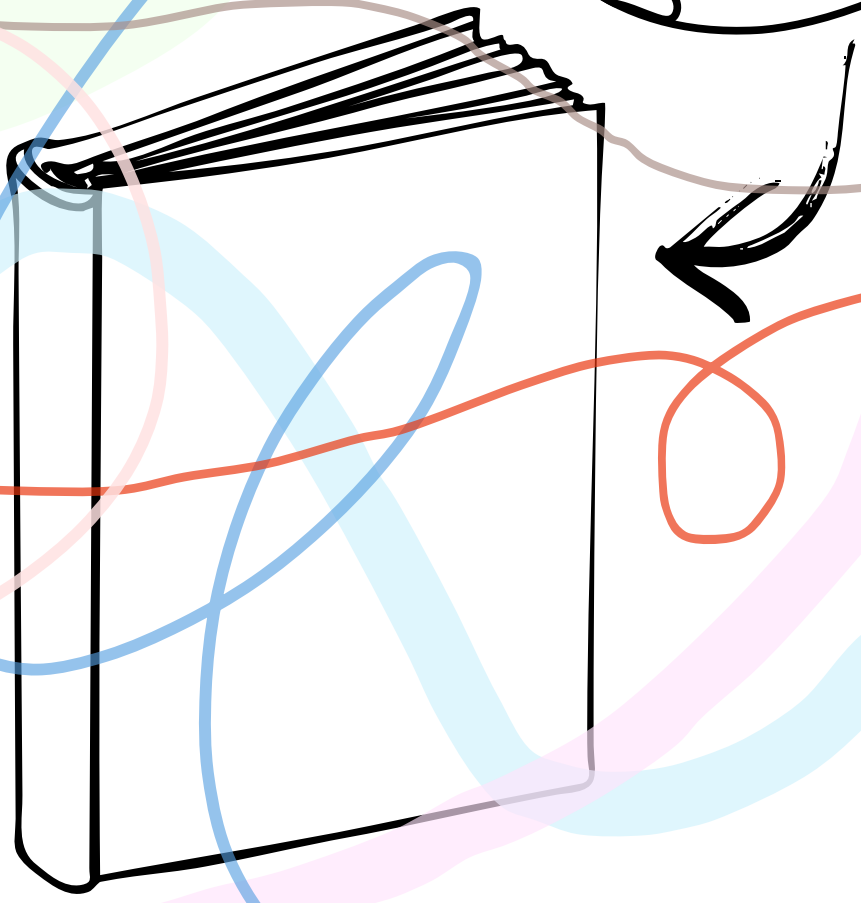


All as It Was Before
Zarja Gumilar Papotnik

All as it was before
Clean linen, washed sheets, and birds chirping
Rain clouds hanging back in the distance
The clacking of heels on pavement as we walk back, back, back
From somewhere or to something, is it not all the same?
Orchestral, was it orchestral music that you liked?
Something or other playing as we walk
Skipping stones, we ought to do that, I never learned to do that, and I always wanted to try, I've had plenty of chances to try, by the river with you, or someone else, anyone could have taught me, but I never asked
Did I want it? – do I now?
Still, another chance would be nice,
reset it all

NON-FICTION





Uncertainty as an Opportunity

Alex Podpečan

Growing up in religious circles leaves strong marks. For some, religion is a source of comfort and community; for others, a symbol of constraint and hypocrisy. And then there are those, like myself, who occupy a restless middle ground – not indifferent, not devout, but profoundly entangled. Broadly speaking, imposed religion seems to produce two archetypes: those who grow to despise it and those who follow it blindly, indifferent to contradiction or reason. I, however, belong to neither.

From a young age, I was compelled to attend rituals at a local church, to sit quietly through sermons about sin, death, and salvation, and to listen to tales of an "all-loving" God who often appeared to embody anything but that. These experiences shaped my perception of Christianity, and religion as a whole, into something profoundly ambivalent: a mixture of fascination and frustration.

This essay examines that ambivalence and the intellectual path down which it led me, from faith, through rebellion, to agnosticism. Drawing on the works of Katherine Stewart (The Power Worshippers, 2020) and Lesley Hazleton (The Doubt Essential, 2016), I explore how the confrontation with doubt, far from being a weakness, becomes a philosophical and ethical stance – a way of living with uncertainty rather than denying it.

As a child, I quickly became aware of the unspoken but rigid dichotomy of "us versus them." "They" as the nonbelievers, women, homosexuals, or simply anyone from the people of the global majority who did not pass as cis straight white men. It was difficult to escape the omnipresent patriarchy woven into its symbols: the Almighty Father, His obedient Son, twelve apostles, and one virgin. The Church, I realized, was less a space of transcendence than one of choreography: men at the altar, women in the pews, all moving to the rhythm of obedience.

Expressions of doubt were treated as moral defects in our house. If you could not see, feel, or understand God, you were told to believe harder. To question God, was to risk eternal punishment. After all, doubt was the devil's language – and curiosity, its dialect.

When I first realized that belief was, in fact, optional and that one could live without the approval of the divine, I felt both liberated and doomed. My first instinct was to reject everything. Atheism, with its defiant certainty, was intoxicating. There was pleasure in the clarity of denial, in the neatness of saying, "There is no God."

But absolute denial, I discovered, carries the same problem as absolute belief: it leaves no room for uncertainty. It is just another kind of religion — belief in the impossibility of faith.

Eventually, my curiosity led me elsewhere: toward agnosticism. Not as a timid middle ground, as many mistakenly assume, but as a radical openness to not knowing. Agnosticism, to me, is not about indecision but about humility, the intellectual and emotional acknowledgment that questions can be more meaningful than answers.

Lesley Hazleton captures this idea through what she calls epistemological humility, the awareness that ultimate truth is beyond human reach (Hazleton, 2016). To embrace that uncertainty, she argues, is not defeat but courage. It is the condition for creativity itself. If all answers were final, curiosity would die, and with it, imagination.

The danger, of course, begins when faith ceases to be personal and becomes political. When belief is used not to connect people but to control them. Katherine Stewart (2020), in The Power Worshippers, exposes how religion in the United States has been systematically weaponized and transformed into a political tool for advancing economic and ideological agendas.

The pattern is disturbingly familiar: combine divine authority with nationalism, sprinkle in fear, and the result is moral certainty disguised as faith. Suddenly, political figures such as Ronald Reagan or Donald Trump are described as "God's chosen men," despite (or perhaps because of) their obvious contradictions. Once a leader speaks in God's name, rational debate becomes redundant. Blind obedience takes its place.

The same mechanisms echo globally. In Afghanistan and Iran, religion has been turned into a weapon against women's autonomy — a divine justification for silencing, veiling, and exclusion. Women who, in the 1970s, walked freely in the streets now risk punishment for speaking in public or pursuing education. The "eternal truth" of religion becomes the perfect alibi for human cruelty.

Even in my own country, Slovenia, the same logic subtly persists. During the 2024 referendums on euthanasia, preferential voting, and cannabis, priests stood at the pulpit and advised believers to vote three times no. Apparently, divine will also has an opinion on civic matters. Ironically, this intrusion was justified as moral duty — a curious interpretation of the supposed separation between Church and State.

The irony, of course, is bitter. Faith, which should have been a space for transcendence, compassion, and doubt, often becomes a machine for obedience.

Certainty, I have learned, is far more dangerous than ignorance. Ignorance can be cured; certainty cannot. It is the end of thought, the quiet death of questioning.

Hazleton reminds us that uncertainty is not a flaw but the engine of inquiry. The moment we accept doubt, we also accept possibility — the openness to be wrong, to grow, to wonder (Hazleton, 2016). Stewart makes a similar point from a political perspective: the suppression of doubt is the first step toward authoritarianism (Stewart, 2020). When divine authority merges with state power, faith ceases to be a matter of personal conviction and becomes an apparatus of control.

Religious dogma, when combined with political ambition, has produced some of humanity's darkest episodes: war, genocide, and inquisition. The logic is always the same: "us versus them." It is the same logic that fuelled the Second World War, and the same that perpetuates the suffering in Gaza. The promise of absolute truth, once politicised, becomes a license for violence.

For me, agnosticism represents more than a lack of faith; it is a way of living, a quiet rebellion against the need for final answers. It allows me to linger on questions without despair, to doubt without shame. It is, paradoxically, the most honest form of belief I have found.

To accept that some questions will remain unresolved is not resignation but freedom. Freedom from illusion, from fear, from the suffocating certainty that claims to know the mind of God.

Hazleton and Stewart, each in their own way, remind us that the limits of human knowledge are not walls but thresholds. We can either deny them, building temples of certainty that eventually collapse under their own rigidity, or we can acknowledge them and turn them into spaces for growth, dialogue, and imagination.

Growing up within a faith that demanded obedience taught me something that faith itself did not intend to teach: that doubt is sacred. The Church wanted certainty; I found irony. They offered truth; I found questions.

Agnosticism, for me, is the art of living with that irony of recognizing that the search for truth is endless and that perhaps its beauty lies precisely in its elusiveness. In a world eager for absolute answers, to say "I do not know" is not weakness; it is an act of intellectual and moral courage.

As Hazleton suggests, uncertainty is the birthplace of creativity; and as Stewart warns, certainty is the seed of control. Between the two lies the space where genuine thought, and genuine faith, might still exist.

References

Hazleton, L. (2016). The Doubt Essential: Why Uncertainty is the Heart of Faith. New York: Riverhead Books.

Stewart, K. (2020). The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Mother's Daughter

Vasja

You look at yourself in the mirror, your feminine features staring back in the light gleam of the evening sunlight. You look closer, your chest forming two alien breasts and you can't help but wince. This is something fundamental, a part of you, but when you look at yourself, all you see is a man with breasts. An abomination. Downwards lie your hips, still full of fat, although you've tried to make them slimmer. Why can't it all go away? Why couldn't you have been born different? Not this. You think of your options: you could bind your chest and wear looser clothing to hide your feminine side, but you know it won't erase the reflection you see, the feeling that's clawing in your chest. All you and everyone else will see is an impostor, a fraud. And you think to yourself, "So what, I can still transition and get on T?" That would mend those things, get you closer to your inner self, yet you do nothing. You're paralysed with fear, so you hide. You don't look at yourself closer, you accentuate your feminine features and pretend you're not looking at a stranger in the mirror. That's how the days, months and even years pass. And suddenly you're 22. An adult woman. You feel like it's too late. Think what's even the point? You've come this far, and you aren't in anguish every day over it. You try to forget the doubt and the sadness, the jealousy that sprouts every time you see a person who transitioned or is openly seen as their true self. You stare at moustaches and masculine builds, joke how you would love to have them, but if anyone asks, you run away. You can't face any of it, not the shame and not the pain that comes when you start the endless cycle again. You hate your name, the pronouns people use, but you never correct them, don't even know what to say. But the cracks grow wider when someone mistakes you for a man. It's always an accident, of course. Yet your heart leaps just a tiny beat, and a slight smile grows on your face. You never correct them. So, you become bolder. You start to bind your chest and wear clothing that makes you feel like a man. You draw moustaches in secret; look for a new name you would like to have. But nothing changes. People tell you what a lovely lady you are, compliment your feminine figure and you're back at square one. You try not to wince every time your mother calls you her little princess because that's what you are. You also don't fight it; you remember what happened the last time you did. You have no gene to prove you were meant to be a man; biologically, you're 100% a woman. You joke about cutting off your breasts at the dinner table, and your mother leaps from her chair and shouts for you not to mutilate your body more than you already have and to not even mention it to your father because it would kill him. You think of all this and start to question yourself again. At first, you're angry and sad; you know they love you, so you start to doubt the whole idea of being a man. You'll never be a real one in any case, so you put a complete lid on it and go back to being just your mother's daughter.



Comedy and Propaganda; Or On the Loss of The Jester's Privilege

Zarja Gumilar Papotnik

In the ye old times of medieval courts, every court worth something had its jester – now imagined as an all-around silly guy, goofing around in a red cone hat and wide pantaloons; but a good court jester can be so much more, for he is protected by a cloak of comedy. He can make fun of the powers-that-be, poking holes in the establishment, and he can do so while keeping his head on his shoulders, because it is all, at the end of the day, just a joke. Thus, the term "jester's privilege" was coined. Comedy has many roles in society, but we do not shine enough light on its socially conscious function. We believe comedy's sole purpose is to keep us entertained, distracted, and happy, but comedy also keeps us socially aware and can function as a tool to fight propaganda and authoritarianism (much needed in today's day and age); however, the protective power of comedy is beginning to wane.

To understand comedy's role in fighting propaganda, we must first become familiar with propaganda itself. A standard definition of propaganda would be "information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions" (Cambridge Dictionary). Propaganda takes many forms, from the more explicitly propagandistic war posters of the early 20th century to the TV shows and movies we watch today. What was once an "Uncle Sam wants you for the U.S. Army" flyer is now a Marvel Cinematic Universe movie. Who makes or manufactures propaganda? That is a more philosophical question, along with defining its limits and refining its definition: does a company's ad campaign influencing you to buy their products count as propaganda? Does antiestablishmentarianist propaganda, whose purpose is to make you aware of standard propaganda, count? Is anti-propaganda propaganda still propaganda? For the purpose of this essay, we will shrink the definition of propaganda to the propaganda manufactured and disseminated by political regimes or the establishment in power (not necessarily only the governing party or people in power, but also those in support of them), and propaganda manufactured and disseminated by extremists, like fascist, Nazi, or other alt-right propaganda (alt-left propaganda will be excluded because of its low presence and relative lack of harmful ideology). What you absolutely must understand about propaganda is that you are not immune to it – nobody is, and it is dangerous to believe otherwise. This is why noticing it and calling it out is so important, and this is where comedy comes to the rescue.

Comedy has historically played an important role in satirizing regimes and battling propaganda. From court jesters to comedy of manners, comics have always been given a slight privilege: they can say almost anything they want, as long as it is placed in a humorous context. The comedy of manners genre has played an important role in pointing out the absurdity of social stratification and class hierarchy. Political cartoons have been poking fun at those in power since the 18th century, drawing attention to corruption, injustice, and controversy.

Political satire or parody makes fun of the regime and thus undermines it. An author can hide a lot of social criticism in a comic play, TV show, movie, or cartoon drawing. Thus, not only exposing propagandistic narratives, but also making critical thinking of this kind accessible and fun. Common modern examples of this type of propaganda awareness are the comic monologues performed by late-night TV show hosts, like Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, Jimmy Kimmel, and John Oliver. Every evening combined millions tune in to watch them make fun of U.S. politics, consequently poking holes in the ideological narrative spun by those in power.

But this type of anti-propaganda has recently come under threat, as "cancel culture" begins to redefine what is acceptable in humour. Cancel culture in the hands of the masses (online cancel culture as most know it) is not as dangerous as cancel culture in the hands of the regime, because this is where "cancelling" starts to tip over into "censoring." If selected people online decide to boycott movies because of problematic people attached to them, that is far less impactful and far less dangerous (better yet, hardly dangerous at all) than politicians policing the jokes of comedians and writers that make fun of them, the regime, or the prevailing ideology, thus silencing important commentary. A recent example of this is the cancellation of Jimmy Kimmel's show after he made supposedly inappropriate comments about the death of right-wing activist and commentator, Charlie Kirk; the cancellation was not due to masses of viewers deciding that the comments were inappropriate but to a decision by the politicians in power. Fortunately, in this case, the cancellation was not permanent, but the next time something like this happens, it might be. Another example is The Late Show with Stephen Colbert – Colbert will not be returning to the air next season, and many suspect this is because of his vocal criticism of the current administration and its meddling in the world of broadcasting. As people in power begin to dictate what can be made fun of and what is beyond limits, the effect of comedy is limited. The message to other political satirists and comedians is clear: some of the core tenets of right-wing ideology cannot be disputed and cannot be made fun of and thus undermined, if you go against this, you risk losing your platform.

As political satire becomes increasingly scarce, because of meticulous planning and removal by those who are hurt most by it, another safety mechanism is removed. The more propaganda can flourish and spread, the easier it is for extremist and authoritarian regimes to ascend to power. Propaganda aims to normalize the extreme and discredit the alternatives — if there is nothing that exposes propaganda and discredits it, one is on their own in recognizing and fighting against it. Today, with AI allowing for such swift manufacturing of propagandistic content, with algorithms that reward extremism and bring it to the "for you pages" of your children, your parents, or your friends, the once extreme is becoming more and more mundane until we might suddenly find ourselves living in a society advertised and promised to us by propagandistic material.

Sources:

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Propaganda. In dictionary.cambridge.org. Retrieved October 25, 2025, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda

And with that, this issue of



comes to an end.

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