

MIRRORS



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Soul Blots

Reflections



From the Heart



Artistic Zoom

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Soul Blots



Mara Graur

On this lonely night, you watch me burry you with glassy eyes

Hidden away from the sky scrappers of the city, away from the bustling night life and noisiness of the streets, a lone park stands at the edge of an old neighborhood. Abandoned and dilapidated, the park, overrun with vegetation, this little place that once brought children and families happiness, rusted over with a layer of time, appears forgotten by the world. A gentle breeze travels through it, unwittingly pushing the crumbling swings of the playground back and forward and back and forward again. The squeaking of the corroded joints of the swing set echoes through the looming trees surrounding this forgotten corner of the world.

Deep within the budding forest, strange noises sound into the night. Shifting gravel, a shovel throwing dirt into a dug up whole into the ground. A figure stands atop a shallow grave, looking down into its darkened depths. An ornate box, silver and intricately designed, lays discarded on the damp earth.

The figure, a young adult, stares at it with wariness, a tinge of nostalgia framing the edges of his expression. His face is dirty, splotches of mud and checked dirt smeared across his radiant skin. Underneath all that grime stands a handsome young man whose hair seems to be woven out of the sun's brightest rays of light and whose eyes resemble glowing topaz.

The night's air is warm against his heated skin, beads of sweat carving paths down his jawline. He inhales with difficulty, tired from the strenuous activity, and the crispiness of the air burns his lungs. Dejected, he drops the shovel from his hands and falls to his knees on the ground, dirty hands gripping at the blades of grass beneath him.

Deep exhales leave him, and suddenly he's crying, rivers of tears running down his cheekbones and he feels helpless, lost, swimming through a sea of dark ink seemingly without direction and destination in sight.

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He can't continue like this. What happened remains seared into his memory, forever left to play before his mind's eye, like a mockery of a cheap film whose main actor is no-one but him. But he plays a poor role, of a fool dancing to the whims of others, singing along to a tune not of his own making.

It branded him, collared him in a way that nothing else has. His freedom is gone and he feels the chains locking into place, metal cuffs clicking onto his wrists and ankles. He's a prisoner of society, he thinks in that moment.

He wants to change, for things to go back to the way they were before, before everything happened. Before he was broken beyond repair.

Some things can't be fixed. Some hurts won't heal. Sometimes punching stuff (or forcing the issue) only makes it worse. When it comes to the wounds that you can't see or touch, sometimes the best you can hope for is soothing the pain, be it by working through your emotions on your own or talking it through with someone else.

But doing things on his own feels like a Sisyphean task, done in futility, and talking to someone else is no longer an option. (The stinging pain on his cheek throbs then, a reminder of tonight's events.)

He thinks back, to years past, and a wave of nostalgia threatens to drown him. Those forgone years, bittersweet in their beauty, both warm him and chill him to the marrow of his bones. Memories are dangerous things. You turn them over and over, until you know every touch and corner, but still you'll find an edge to cut you. And his heart bleeds as he remembers days of sunlight and laughter, something in him squeezing in pain in that instance.

Someone died tonight. A soul is gone and he mourns. He buries the remnants of a person who will no longer be remembered. Only he remains to keep the memory of that person alive. But it feels impossible, when all that everyone sees is but a ghost of someone who once was.

They were as vibrant as the rainbow after an unforgiving storm. And they died on the precipice of metamorphosis, right on the edge of becoming something more. And the being that took their place is but a shadow of their true self.

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And he stands there, at the lip of a shallow grave, looking down into the depths of the belongings of the child who he once was. He cries for the innocence he's lost, for the years of freedom and carefree joy he can no longer experience. He mourns the child of bright aspirations and dreams that he nurtured.

Someone died tonight. A piece of his own soul is gone, and only he is left of remember it.

With tears in his eyes, he picks up his shovel once more and gets back to work. This unmarked grave, left deep within the memories of his childhood, will never be found. He doesn't know when —or if ever— he will return here, to this place of irretrievable purity, so he soaks up whatever joy he can in the few moments he has left here.

Not yet a corpse. Still, he rots.



By Ana-Maria Paslaru

Denisa Muntianu

The stolen true love...

The stolen true love...

Ironically you left,
and yet I will forgive you
the game ends when the queen gets tired
Ironically you are in front of me

Constantly
The bloody hands froze
The venom in the arteries
but I couldn't touch you anymore
Do not
come back

The king has limited powers
And the most beautiful
You made my hell, heaven
I wrote a lot about nothing
is that right?
Late he lies

Refusal of the divine comedy
the unquestionable assumption
Neva I'm coming back to you
The only relief
Ice the only love
After payment always comes the Devil
Slowly takes what's his
When you want more it appears
And so the butterflies are strangled
The Red Queen smiles bitterly
One by one everyone dies
Loneliness her best vice
Blood runs down their bodies
The Red Queen instead smiles
Some have sunshine after the storm
Not here
In this fairy tale
Not

Just a storm
Ghosts are told and in fairy tales you just
believe

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Anastasia Ciuntu

[untitled]

loneliness is a disease
it's a curse but
you may also find peace
i hate felling lonely but
i love being alone
i can not describe it so
silence is all that i own
i can't write about it
'cause it does not exist
maybe it's just
the emptiness in my heart
that annoyingly persists.



Bianca Bulbucanu

Love is a journey

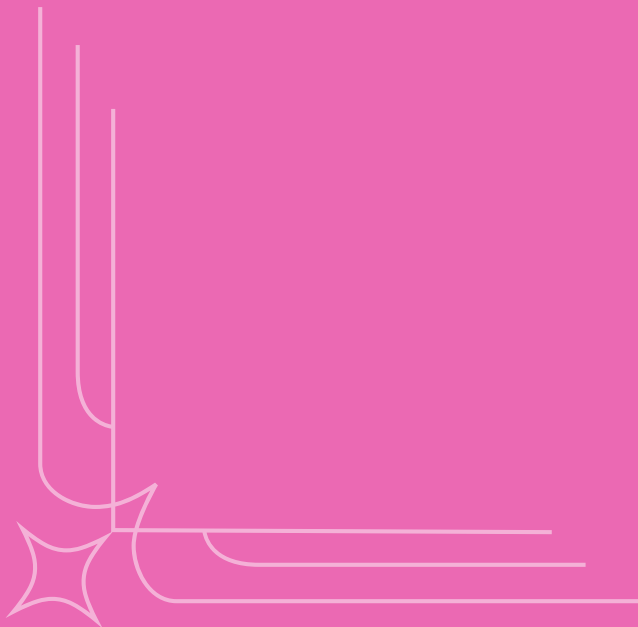
Love is a feeling, a force that's so strong,
It carries us forward, it pushes us along.
It's a flame that burns bright, it's a warmth that's so real,
And it's something we all need, something we all feel.
Love can be gentle, like a breeze through the trees,
Or it can be wild, like the crashing of seas.
It's a bond that connects us, it's a light in the dark,
And it's something we all long for, deep in our hearts.
Love is patient and kind, it's forgiving and true,
It's a shelter from storms, it's a bright morning dew.
It's a journey we take, with our hearts intertwined,
And it's something that grows, with each passing time.
Love is a promise, a vow that we make,
To stand by each other, through joy and heartbreak.
It's a gift that we give, and it's something we receive,
And it's something that makes life worth living, and we believe.
So let us cherish love, let it guide us each day,
For it's something that's precious, it's something that stays.
Let us open our hearts, and let love be our guide,
And let it be the force, that carries us through life.

Daria Melinte

My star in the sky

I truly believe you came in my life to teach me some life lessons. I will never forget my first and my last day with you. When I saw you for the first time I felt like I was going to burst with excitement. I knew from the very first moment that you were meant for me. I do believe you have something special that nobody in this world has. The way you make me feel needed and loved makes me want you forever but, unfortunately, all good things must come to an end. I wasn't emotionally prepared for your last day. When I saw you not being able to breath or open your eyes anymore my heart shattered into a million pieces. It is very hard letting myself say goodbye but I have to, because I know you are in a better place now waiting for us. I finally understand why God didn't allow our pets to speak: to teach us that love and loyalty come through actions and not words. I hope that one day I will be able to not cry anymore but I promise you will be forever missed and loved. I want to hug and kiss you forever but now you are my guardian angel. I do know I'll always be spiritually connected with you and I will always be looking for your signs. I will love you forever and I promise we will meet again in the future. May God rest your innocent soul in peace!

Sura, my star in the sky.



Mara Graur

In hindsight, I thought you loved me

He smiles, and it's sweet like the poison that he gingerly feeds her unknowing mind. Lost in her obsession, blinded by the golden glow of his lineage, she is oblivious to the shadows that clamor at his heels, following and ever-watching his every step.

There's blood on his hands, dripping down in thick rivulets, the pit pat as they hit the ground echoing in the silence of the room. She is deaf to it, her entire being focused on the boy whose face twists in a mockery of a gentle smile. To the way his golden hair flows and his jeweled blue eyes pierce her soul, she is enamored with a being that sees her as nothing but a means to an end.

(She is blind.)

Lead like a lamb to the slaughter, she willingly takes his hand when it is offered, the blood warm on her skin, and she thinks that he glows so brilliantly, like the evening sun. She is in love with an ideal, a hauntingly beautiful boy with otherworldly eyes and a heart as black as the void he was born from.

(She dies thinking that somehow, she should have noticed.)

Amalia Talpalariu

what song do you think plays at the end of the tunnel?

As you sit alone, in your room, the whole world asleep, what is it you hear? Is it the buzzing of a lightbulb turned on far away, the sound of your own heartbeat or terrifying, grueling silence, self-imposed punishment for your own choices? As tears start streaming down your face, what is it you hear? The ghosts of the past coming back to haunt you or a pesky mosquito, the only creature that craves your presence? As your worries take over you, rendering you motionless, and your breathing gets faster and the walls cave in and the clock gets stuck at 4:44 and the door is locked and the water in the room swallows you whole, what is it...you hear?

The only sound loud enough to drown out that of my darkest fears is that of music. The tether to safety, the key to serenity lies somewhere in a favorite playlist, amongst the thousands of songs I've ever liked. It may be the song you used to dance to back in kindergarten when the world wasn't yet scary or the song you cried to as your best friend left you for another or the song you associate with the ones that got away or maybe, just maybe, it's just a song you think sounds good. So, tell me, as you find peace and comfort and happiness and success and love, once this is all over, what is it you hear?

Dimitrie Damian

너와 같은 꿈을 꾸는 꿈 꿀래 *

*The title of this story is a verse from the Korean 12 member girl group Iz*One's title track Secret Story of the Swan, my favorite song of all time (you'll see why in a following article). It means „I'll have a dream where you and I have the same dream”.

Falling in love is, according to Giles Maxtible, frightfully easy for a boy. He only needs to spend a few hours up and about in town and he will more than certainly find a suitable girl to crush on (metaphorically, you perverts). He might choose her due to some extraordinary physical assets, like a tiny wee nosey, eyes like two rings of diamonds, an overall gracious body shape, or maybe her hair is just the right shade of neurotic blonde. Anyway, the main point is that if you search hard enough you can find someone to call “dream girl”. The truly excruciating part is actually making her understand this thing. Giles didn't like history at all, but when considering love, he wished he had lived in the middle ages. Back then, if you stumbled upon that someone who gave you insomnia, you simply put your armor on, rode some miles to the nearby forest, slew the local dragon (dragons, of course, don't exist in the real world; however, you could always substitute it with a rabid otter) and then you lived with her happily ever after. If you had competition, it was even easier, having only to establish a rendez-vous with the contestant at the fair maids' castle, say something in the area of “Let us joust, if thee be a man of valor!”, and then simply find a suitable moment to impale the bastard. After the dramatic confrontation, when your whole *raison d'être* was down on her knees on the pavement scrubbing away the blood and the occasional entrails, you simply had to declare your undying love for her and then the both of you lived happily ever after.

But now it isn't so simple anymore. You have to write her sickly sweet poems, to be a gentleman always, to take into account compatibility, zodiacs, personality, ascendants... and a whole plethora of other dumb things. But above all, you have to impress the young lady. Make her feel special and at the same time show her that you're special. That is what Giles had been trying to do.

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He constructed a time machine that functioned on the principles of static electricity, capable of reaching the golden years when Shakespeare was in full creative swing, and indirectly dramatically altering the basics of human science. And all that to impress a girl. But not just any girl. Marion Marie Dalton. The heavenly being. His chemical hype girl. Venus Kallipyge. How he longed to hold her hand in his, board a raft constructed out of their love and see together what's after like. Will-o' the-wisp babe... oh baby, it's blue flame...!

But life, just like love, is sour grapes. Just when he was doing a test run with the time capsule, it blew up, thus releasing a horrifying electrical spirit with six hands, four legs and the face, memories and attitudes of a literary character from a book whose author isn't even born, let alone traumatized enough in order to put pen to paper and write the story itself.

And now, as our little narratorial escapade unfolds once again, we find Giles positively scared of out his wits and carefully and stealthily making his way to the drawing room, where the creature is floating close to the ceiling, unleashing bolts of lightning and destroying everything in its path, whilst continuously ranting on about a trip to a place called Odobești and something that had to do with pancakes. With sweating hands but equally determined to drive the blithering cretin from his house, Giles loads a rifle which, even though it had been actively used in the Crimean war, is unscathed, save for a slight dent on the bayonet resulted from a bold attack against an offensive looking matryoshka. With the weapon now ready, Giles draws a deep breath, knowing that it might well be his last before being burned to a crisp, and, throwing away all his overthinking for a critical moment, steps courageously from the shadows, and, his eyes seething with rage, determinedly points the weapon to the malevolent but downright idiotic apparition.

'Foolish boy!!' it crackles arrogantly, 'do you really think that puny human contraptions are enough to kill me?'

'This is no murder! This is pest control!!'

He pulled the trigger. On the one hand, the cracks he had managed to make gave a lovely feel to an otherwise featureless ceiling. However, his target was unharmed and laughing mockingly in response to Giles' failure. Fuming, the boy grabbed a decorative spade hanging on the wall nearby:

'En garde, if thou seeks't quarrel with me!' he cried, but the creature pointed two hands in his direction and smashed the blade of the weapon with two well placed lightning bolts, as though the sword was nothing more than an oversized toothpick.

'You truly do not understand who you're fighting against, puny being! I am superior to you in every respect, so spare me further folly and surrender willingly!'

'Superior maybe, but mind you, at least my Marion doesn't eat pancakes with other men just because they know how to shake their rear end!

'Why you...!' muttered the creature and another routine of lightning-dodging on the part of Giles began, causing even more ruin in the drawing room Until...

'Wait a tick, who the hell is Marion?'

'Don't talk like that about her you brute! But since you cared to ask, it's the girl I've been trying to impress by building the blessed time machine out of which you came!'

'Oh, I see... so she's not called Ela or something like that, right?'

'No of course not, what kind of a mediocre being's name is that!?'

Lightning and dodging of lightning intermission.

'Well then...' said the creature after it finally got bored '*... I guess there's no point in spilling my rage in such a futile and irresponsible manner, is it?*'

'Not it bally well isn't!' answered Giles trying to contain his rage.

'*Thought so to be honest... oh, sorry for destroying the decora in your house so savagely, but I really thought you were someone whom I hate and who...*'

'Get the mating-process out of my evil-smelling house, you pathetic little result-of-man's- communion-with-nature!'

‘Right, right, will do, no worries.’ he concluded, and began to hover lightly through the shattered French windows ‘Good bye then! It’s been a pleasure... well, chasing you around and attempting to do cook medium-rare I guess... I hope you manage to impress your girl, I truly do!’

‘Cheers mate!’ spat Giles through clenched teeth.

And so, the ghastly but mostly pathetic apparition left Maxtible manor, Godalming and Britain for good. No records are kept of his whereabouts but, from his statements, it is safe to assume that he had, at some point, reached a country somewhere in central eastern Europe, where he met a young novelist and inspired him to write a book that would be hailed as a literary masterpiece by literary critics, but torment that nation’s 12th graders for many years to come.

Back to Giles. He was now all alone in the now more than critically crippled drawing room, and, by extension, house. Everything was torn, ripped, mangled, maimed, shattered, burnt, bruised and, in the case of some expensive china lying in an about-to-lose-it’s-balance display shelf, traumatized for life. The boy surveyed the scene. Oh well, he’ll just have to nip to the time machine and move to a completely different temporal coordinates, preferably some that boasted less furniture. He started for the basement, but suddenly remembered that his creation was also a victim of this destruction spree. So he returned to surveying the scene, but this time from the unoccupied armchair. As he stood there, he noticed something brown, round and furry rolling slowly on the staircase. Upon closer inspection, he realized that it was the head of Mr. Tiddles.

‘Now where in the name of Bovey Tracey does mother keep that sewing kit?’ he muttered to himself calmly after irreversibly breaking his language self-control skills.

‘I think it’s in that drawer by the mantelpiece!’ said the voice of a shocked person

‘Why thank you very much, Marion! ...holy bunsen burners!’

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He sprang up from where he was sitting with a reality-bending momentum. In the middle of this desolation there now stood the gracious figure of a fair faced girl, positively scared out of her wits. The faerie like Marion Marie Dalton had finally arrived. There was no sign of his or her parents, so Giles assumed that probably his father was showing them his garden inch by inch. There followed an uncomfortable and utter silence, although for Giles the atmosphere was louder and more agitated than the heaviest of storms. His cheeks turned blood red, his breathing became heavier, his arms kept searching for a normal position in which to rest, a restless drum began to be heard from inside his chest... at this point, after all he thought and did, he daren't even to look her in the eye He generally couldn't. E quando vede l'uomo l'attosca. But the exterior silence remained, and it was only when the display shelf finally gave in to the temptations of gravity that a revolution occurred in the boy's confusing thought process:

No this is wrong this shouldn't happen I am a human like she is and to behave in such a way is definitely wrong I have to tell her that I care about her otherwise it's a dead end for me I've been scared wudu wyrtrum faest but now I'm definitely not being scared is for wimps and I need to stop acting like one I have to become the stealer going to deepest part of your heart that's right the heart of the girl whom I love time is short there aren't many acres in the backyard and father is bound to finish sometime time is limited action that's what I have to act and don't think love is irrational the brain kills irrational things but not all people on this planet whatever goes from my mouth must pass no thought process anti-ti-ti-ti fragile fragile that's how I have to seem if I am to win her over the china that broke is fragile and thus expensive I hope that does not mean that I have to pretend to be cheap nothing's wrong nothing's right anythings right when it's about love apparently the boys I know are downright avoided by Darwin's theory but they have girls the lucky slob's Fred's girl good looks a nymph from greek paintings a ballerina like swan swan swan why did she chose that outrageous tramp so there really is no part for the brain to play I have to shut it down impossible it's keeping me alive so only the conscious side has to shut up why am I still doing that

mirrors

have to finally tell her something but am very scared scared of what you want her to be happy so if her happiness does not involve you you can still be glad no that's not how it works sadness will engulf me depression suicide hell heaven of bad people must not think that otherwise I am a sinner the statue of Virgin Mary shattered on the floor but not my fault will there be hell for apparitions like that the jewel inside was his condemnation I delivered him from it what a senseless waste just to tell Marion I love her love what a dreadful and debilitating infection love has to be suppressing my words and ability to freely live my life and express myself words that refuse to come consciously subconscious have to get there all alone ding ding ding at least the grandfather clock is still working not many acres to go have to muster up courage tell her everything end the pain be sincere girls love honesty she might say yes she might say no my life depends on her outcome doesn't know the poor thing a great friendship might end because she never wanted a relationship that was ages ago she probably change her mind probably hates feeling lonely so she might say yes a definite yes wonder joy to the world walking on the street hand in hand no longer being jealous of all the couples but the odds—

‘What happened here, Giles?’ said Marion, interrupting his stream of consciousness. ‘It looks like an earthquake, but we felt nothing unusual on the way here...’

The boy was about to embark on another stream of consciousness, but managed to stop himself. Deeds, not thoughts. He drew a deep breath. He had only one shot at this, and decided to postpone it no more.

Thus spake Giles:

‘Marion Marie Dalton... my lovey, my dovey...! I still recall with great clarity the Christmas dinner that changed everything. There I was, sitting patiently in my seat when your ma comes up to me and says „I don't think Marion told you, but it's your duty to protect and deliver her from all things harmful, especially other boys!” In my innocence I asked „But what if a boy likes her?”, to which your mother replied „Those are the ones you should watch out for especially!”, and left. Frightfully easy, I said to myself, as I had only feelings of companionship for you... how foolish I was!

From the murky waters of my subconscious, there rose a monster, intent on disturbing and ending my careful watch. I fought him valiantly, like Beowulf would have done... but like him, I was slain, eventually. My heart had been stolen. But I didn't mind, because it was fecked by you. I feared to admit my defeat at first, but spending time with you and realizing what a marvel of a girl you were began to give me terrible pangs, and so I've developed a helpless devotion. Only for you.

'I was afraid, sweet Marion, to tell you the true nature of man feelings. You once told me that I was the boy you were the closest with, and I knew why; because you were absolutely certain that there was no danger of me liking you in a romantic way. And it pained me since yesteryear, because that is when I finally realized that, deep down, I had betrayed your trust, and that a confession would certainly mean the end of our friendship, and I couldn't bear losing you, and at the same time I feared that you would choose to waste your uniqueness with another boy, and I couldn't bear that either... I think of you every day, and every day is a pandemonium of loss and utter pain because on top of what I said earlier, it seems to me that I have done some moral injustice or mortal sin, and so I thought it was just me throwing tantrums, and thinking only about my satisfaction, and that I should keep it to myself, and that a relationship was not something that I desperately needed. But I simply could not resist it anymore, with you being so lovable and so devastatingly charming... hringboga heorte gefysed, as I might quote. Believe me, if I had to choose between loving you or continuing to be just your friend, I would have wholeheartedly chosen the latter, even on pain of death! But somehow I could, there was no stopping, or... you may find all this very silly, given what a clever chap you know me to be, but, in this matter, rationality was something that disappeared before I knew it... And so, today, after several more or less internally painful years, the cowardice ends and I finally have the courage to tell you that you are the greatest being who ever lived, and I want you to be the first and last girl in forever to hear me say what I am about to utter.

‘Love. L and O and a VE... simple word, plain vowel consonants succession, only four letters long. But it is attributed to such a complex state... Aristotel said that the instinct of communication precedes man, and if that is true, then love most definitely transcends him. After all, communicative structures are present, with wolves gathering in packs, fish in shoals, gorillas in whoops, baboons in fringes and so on... but only humans are capable of love, and, as it is something superior to them, they have simplified it to a downright basic and perverse form. Some think it's only about flowers, holding hands, kisses, overused clichés, an awful lot of movies (Giles shouldn't be aware of the existence of this form of entertainment; oh well, nobody's perfect)

But it, fortunately, is not, and the only thing that gives me the courage to tell what I am now telling you is the certainty that I love you in the deepest and most sincere manner than any other boy could.

‘I used to have a flawed perspective regarding love in the past. Yes, I used to think that the girl to whom I gift my heart should be the most beautiful, the most intelligent, the best of the best... I even used to put you too on a pedestal and dub you „the epitome of perfection”. But in truth, let's face it, you're no celestial. You are not the prettiest girl I've ever seen, and definitely not the brightest... shouldn't have said that...! Anyway, the point I am trying to make here is that you may not tick all the boxes when it comes to absolutes, but every time I look at you I see the greatest wonder alive and breathing on this Earth! You hold no title, other than that of simply being Marion Marie Dalton. And that is the single most important reason why I care about you so much! I also used to think that when you love someone you had to sit by her side, hold her hand, whisper sweet nonsense in her ear. I've never done that, but now I realize that this was all gibberish... but in fact true love isn't about sitting next to her on a bench, it's about sitting in front of her and cover her pretty face with your back from the scorching sun, even though you're experiencing a thermal discomfort. It's really sad that girls never seem to notice the latter...

‘I didn’t know how I should begin my confess my true feelings towards you just then... I could’ve used stereotypical phrases, like one two three four five six seven you make me feel like eleven but no... for me, as I postulated above, gestures triumph over words. And I don’t mean holding the door open for you, or making sure that you can get safely in the carriage and things like that... love was when I detoured my parents’ whole vacation to rain-swept Aberdeen just to see your rendition of those African songs you sing so vividly and lovely. Oh, and that time in Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwl’llantysiliogogoch, you performed with such passion and talent and class, that the whole room marveled and wondered who you were, and I simply wanted to rise up and shout till my lungs exploded „She’s the best girl in the universe and I’m her spiritual brother and devoted keeper and I’m fiercely proud of it!”

‘Oh, how many relationships I could’ve had. So many girls professing their undying love and devotion to me... I turned them all down... only for you. They were all wearing strong perfumes, come to think of it, but truth be told, no scent enchants me more than the smell of your wind-swept hair in the cool summer breeze.

The young new maid who is now on holiday, looking at me when she thinks I’m not payiies totally bewitch me, and your impurities even more so.

‘I have passed through many emotional stages since I met you. But now, my mind has changed like the weather, even I don’t know myself. That doesn’t matter, what matters is I’m into you right now. Seems like a dream but it’s definitely not, I can’t explain it... it must be love. Don’t try to doubt what I just said, it’s beyond like, and you and I it’s certainly more than like. The blue flame that bloomed in my heart is hotter than the sun. If you heard me and have heeded me you won’t even hesitate in making up your mind, it’s swell to have managed to finally tell you everything. So now, Marion, let’s hold our hands and make the perfect sacrifice, let us love dive into a *καθαίρειν* sea of happiness together and change ourselves to an invulnerable love! Or, as your beloved Shelley would put it, *Life of Life! thy lips enkindle...*’

mirrors

There. He had done it. He looked at her keenly. Beautiful, but not gorgeous. Intelligent, but nowhere near his genius. Educated, but definitely not mannered, even a brat sometimes... flawed, a definite no celestial, surely not the best Giles „could do”, yet she was so very precious to him, just because she was Marion Marie Dalton and no other... if her personality had been different in the tiniest of respects, no extraordinary words were to have been uttered today. To Giles, the sounds of the outside world vanished.

Everything had. There was now only the two of them, in a locked time bubble, their love being the only thing that matter. All was just pathetic desolation. Or, as lord Byron would put it (‘Should’ve said that to her as well, for pity’s sake!’):

The populous and the powerful was a lump,
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless—
A lump of death—a chaos of hard clay.
The rivers, lakes and ocean all stood still,
And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths;
Ships sailorless lay rotting on the sea,
And their masts fell down piecemeal: as they dropp'd
They slept on the abyss without a surge—
The waves were dead; the tides were in their grave,
The moon, their mistress, had expir'd before;
The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air,
And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need
Of aid from them—She was the Universe.

She was the only Universe. Acushla machree! Ma, dia retta a me! Ora pro nobis.

‘Awww, Giles, that’s cute! You’ll have to excuse however, I’m with Fred at present...!’

The expression on Giles’ face betrayed total internal destruction. With a blank visage, he picked up the rifle that was lying on the floor. At the exact same moment, his parents and the Daltons burst through the now doorless doorway.

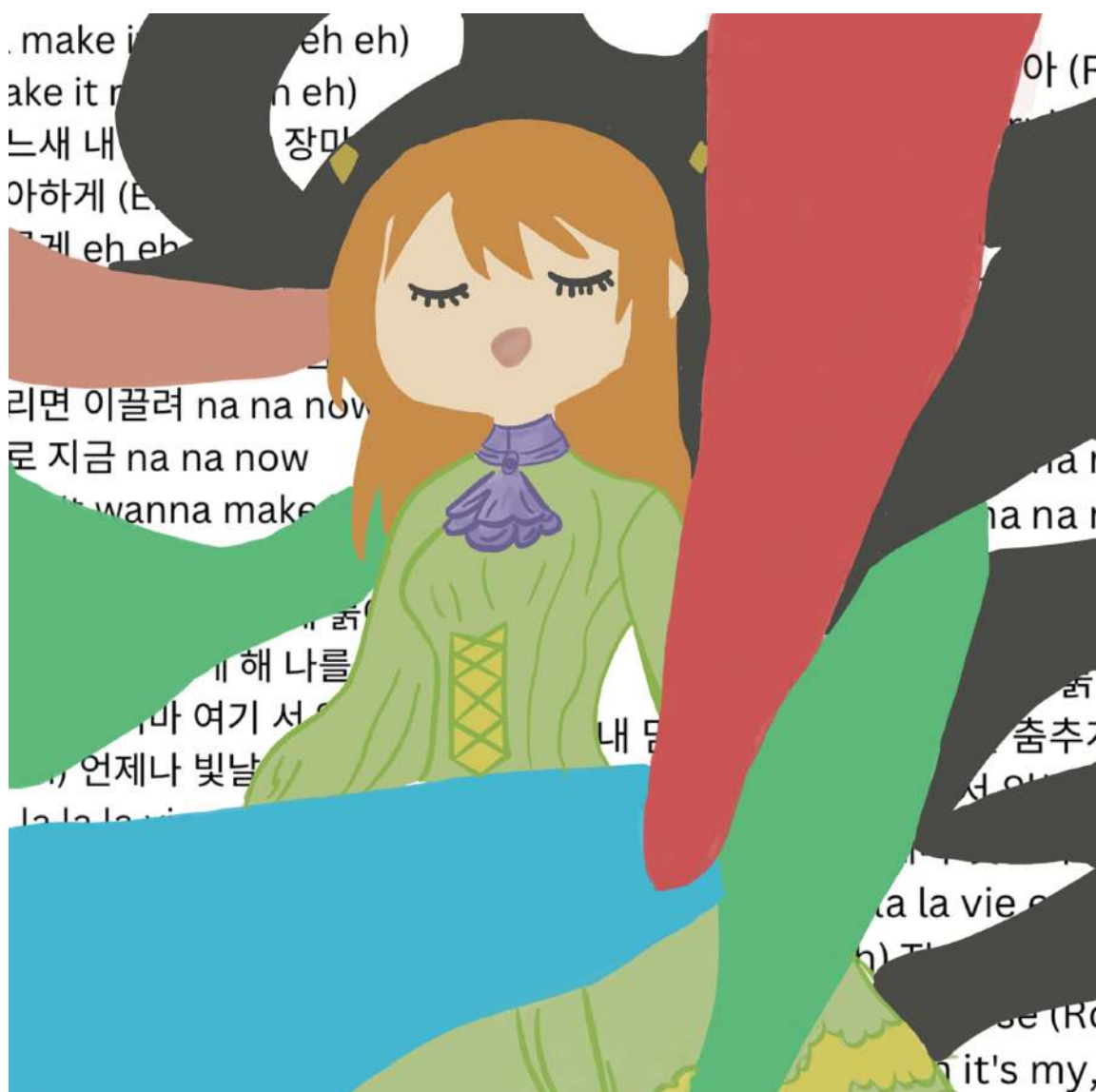
On the two occupied armchairs, however, the bets were being placed:

‘Right, let’s go through this again, shall we? So, if the poor sod kills just the girl, I get one of your shiny boats rent-free for a month, and if it’s also up to all the bystanders, it’s also no taxes for a year for crossing your murky river. However, if he just fills the room with bits of blown brains, I give you my very own polishing and sharpening kit for you to keep your hammer tidy. And if he also goes after this, what’s his name, Fred, I...’

‘Stop right there! No more terms, no more bets!’ fumbled an annoyed Charon.

‘Right you are then... now, let’s see how all this works out, eh? Not long to wait, I reckon!’ said the Grim Reaper, eagerly grabbing his scythe.

DE AMOR NIL NISI BONUM DICENDUM EST

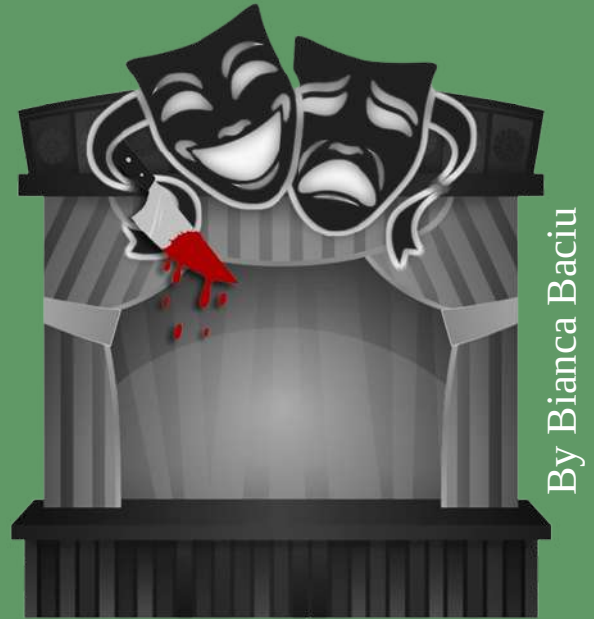


Rareş Mancea

I like this a lot

Theatre is just so exciting!

Everything is just perfect. If everything goes according to plan, it is the most wonderful thing you can experience! Seeing the plots unfold, the emotion conveyed by the actors right as they're about to kill (or be killed), betrayed.... It's addicting, really.



By Bianca Baci

Recently, I saw a play directed by a friend of mine, a bit of an, how do I put it, eccentric fellow, but a genius nonetheless. He never believed that theatre was as exciting as I made it seem, and always sought to make the plays more and more vivid for the audience, to make it seem as if the actors really experienced the emotions their characters did. "It's all crap! None of 'em actually feel anything, they's just up on that stage, blabbering on and on, and they drop a tear once in a while... but I'll make 'em feel like they're bloody Othello"... I didn't quite understand what he meant by that, but all geniuses are a bit off their rocker so I didn't give it much thought.

Unfortunately, for some, I understood what he meant the night of the play... The show was Othello, and I did think of his words, but I expected a one of a kind show and nothing more. The play was... alright for the most part, rather below average compared to others I had seen, but something was... off about the final two acts. The actors were very tense, as if they knew some of them were going to die... and I admit, it was perfect, it was ideal theatre, the ideal performance! The emotions they showed, the screams, everything was astonishing, enough to cover up the sins of the tedious beginning. Of course, their deaths were treated as accidents and nothing more.

Last night the rest of the cast died under mysterious conditions, but the police ruled them as suicides caused by the guilt of the actors.

But I knew what he, my friend, had done. But I knew what he, my friend, had done.

Either way, he did accomplish his goal, he improved theatre. The emotion was, intoxicating. It is safe to say that I will be looking forward to his next play.

Ingryd Radu

It still doesn't deserve any title

One year has passed since Dandelion wrote his last letter to the most precious person he has ever held in his arms. The frail blonde guy considers that he reached a point where he is ready and emotionally capable of finally recalling the memories this much loved being has left him.

Dandelion has never changed anything about their once shared bedroom of modest sizes, not even moving the tiniest object away from its spot as if it would be a totally revolting offence to do so. Numerous specs of dust spread over a wooden cabinet like a veil, placed in the darkest corner of the room. It's been ages since he has last opened this cabinet, back when he could do so with that particular person next to him and not by himself, with his lean, veiny hands trembling on the small doors' handles.

It's cramped with love letters, when their relationship used to be tumultuous due to the long distance keeping them apart, drawings made by Dandelion in episodes of hysteria and random notes that have lost their meaning as time passed by. Well, for Dandelion, everything has lost its meaning after he disappeared, but he must use these last bits remaining from the past to receive the closure he deserves to this strenuous healing process.

"I can't wait to come back to you."

"I wish you knew how much I miss you."

A warm, content smile is sketching on the blonde's face as an intensely pink tint appears on his cheeks when he remembers the circumstances in which these words were written. It all felt like even though they were physically apart, Moon was still next to him in a way or another. Then, a letter he has written himself catches his eye among the infinite papers.

"Then, the hate towards myself shifted into an unexplainably strong hate towards you. Yeah, you, the one that in my eyes, would never be to blame for anything. I hated you so damn much for leaving me behind into this cloud of smoke, clueless and forced to carry on like nothing happened."

The letter he wrote after Moon died. Is that even possible? Is it even possible for Dandelion to hold the slightest feeling of hatred towards his loved one? Now, after giving himself time to perceive the pain properly, Dandelion has the maturity to realize that his hatred was valid, his outbursts back then were as valid as they could be, but not anymore, in this advanced, almost terminal stage of grief.

"Κάθε φορά που νιώθω μοναξιά, κοιτάζω το φεγγάρι. Και κάθε φορά που κοιτάζω το φεγγάρι, μπορώ μόνο να σκέφτομαι εσένα.

"Dear Dandelion,

I have told you before that this trip will be longer than the others I have taken so far and I don't want to say that I will never come back again, but this probability is high taking our situation into account. Crete is dangerous. Crete is a cage of lions. You are lured by the most beautiful landscapes you have ever seen, only to be proven that what hides inside them is terrifying. Crete is dangerous in general, let alone for people like us. Our law doesn't say that we can't romantically co-exist here. However, if their stares and disdainful threats were made of fire, we would be burnt and dead by now.

I want to leave this place. I want to leave this place so bad, I want to find a place that welcomes us with open arms. That's why I took this trip. As far as my research shows, Athens and Thessaloniki are the best options for that, yet I have to see that with my own eyes before bringing you there as well. I am certain that you have the same point of view as I do, you know inside that Crete will only eat us alive in the long run if we dare to remain there. Let's leave Crete in the past; it's for the best.

We will have a better life somewhere else, trust me. We will be able to materialize our wishes without any sort of fear and love each other freely, my Dandelion.

The next time I will send you a letter, it would be one where I am asking you to come to me and continue our story in a different part of Greece. I adore you the most, little one. I will do my best to keep you safe and the happiest.

*Καινούργια αρχή, καινούργια πρόσωπα, η ίδια αγάπη μεταξύ μας για πάντα.
Kisses,
Your Moon"*

It's shorter than usual, but it's packed with the most skin-crawling emotional depth Dandelion has ever met in a simple piece of paper. The blonde finds himself embracing the letter, with his eyes drowning in a wave of salty tears that threaten to escape and fall down his flushed cheeks at any second. Since then, he has moved to Athens from Crete because he couldn't stand living surrounded not only by these old wounds, but also by narrow-minded and cruel people that would otherwise put their life in big danger. No. His life. Now, he is by himself. Hadn't that incident taken Moon away from him, Athens could have been both's home.

These are not necessarily only tears of sorrow though. While he discharges the burden that has bottled up in his heart, Dandelion senses soothing touches scattered across his back, as if that specific person would stand right behind him in real life. It's not real life, he is aware of that. It feels like something sacred which reinstalls the tranquility he has been desperately longing for. The blonde turns around for a brief moment to check for his mental peace that what he senses is not real life. And it's not.

After finally feeling more at ease with the situation, Dandelion puts the letters back to their spot and closes the wooden cabinet. For good.

He is here and he is not at the same time. He has always been and he will always be. Moon is still a part of his life and Moon will watch him all the time from now on, but from a different spot. This experience represented the realization that he hasn't actually lost his partner. While his physical form might have vanished, the soothing touch didn't disappear.

"He is surely proud of me."

mirrors



by Maira Raza

Amalia Arvinte

Make a wish: life or death?

I closed my eyes and opened them again, hoping this was just a nightmare. It was not.

Natalya Sokolov, 10th March 1970- 10th march 1997 Rest in peace.

I've been staring at this funeral stone for good minutes, waiting for it to dissipate before my eyes and remind me it was all an illusion. Tomorrow was my birthday, not the day I laid to rest. I didn't even remember why I chose to go for a walk in a cemetery, to begin with, but now that I was here, I started to deeply regret my decision. My heart was pounding so rapidly, I could almost hear the thump in my ears, telling me something was wrong.

Memories of me trying to put an end to my life on my 23rd birthday invaded my head. 10th of March. But that was years ago, when I was dealing with depression. Since then I came to realize my life has so much more in store for me. At least to some extent.

No. This was just a coincidence. There was no way the Universe made me pay for my mistakes and brought me here to warn me. Most likely, someone who despises me made this stupid joke to scare me. But how did they know I wanted to kill myself? And the exact date? Or that I'll take a walk someday in this cemetery?

No. All I had to do was head back home, make myself a hot chocolate and... and definitely ignore the creepy silhouette staring at me while blocking the exit. A tall, slender figure, dressed up in a black robe covering everything from head to toe, gray locks of hair hidden under a hood, and scrawny hands that looked like they belonged to a corpse, rather than a living thing. That was what I saw before my eyes and made me think this might actually be a nightmare after all. More than 600 000 words in the English dictionary and none of them was good enough to describe the terror I felt in that moment. As much as I wanted to believe that was just an elderly woman, coming to take care of her long-lost husband's graveyard, my mind told me something was wrong.

mirrors

All I wished for was to run away and never come back to this place ever again, but she was blocking my way and I was too afraid to take some steps forward and let her know I was about to leave. The creature might have read my mind because she began to approach me, moving slowly towards my supposed funeral stone. Whoever predicted the date of my death miscalculated with one day. There is no chance I'd leave this place alive tonight, judging by her facial expression. If looks could kill, she would win an award. Perhaps I could flee before she got to me. I stepped back, thinking of another route to get to the exit.

But a scream left my mouth. Cold and boney fingers wrapped tightly around my right wrist and a whisper made its way to my ear. 'Where do you think you're going, Natalya?'

The last thing I remembered was my head hitting the ground and the coldness overtaking my body.

My head was throbbing so badly and my body ached. There is no explanation for this pain other than muscle soreness I was used to after my workouts. But this didn't feel like my comfy bed I rested after training. More like a harsh surface, cold and unbecoming, just like the hand that grabbed me in the cemetery.

The cemetery. Now I remembered: the funeral stone, the creature, me, fainting. Although I was too scared to open my eyes and take in the surroundings, I did so. The probability of hitting my head while I was falling to the ground was high, considering that now I had two women standing before me like the one that frightened me first. And we were all in some sort of cave, primitive and sinister. I was lying on a table, tied and gagged, without any possibility to escape. I wanted to speak, to beg them to let me go, but the old fabric in my mouth prevented me from doing so.

One of the women approached me. 'I am sure you are wondering what's going on here. We'll be short and sharp. You are going to die.' she told me without a hinge of remorse, letting out a heinous laughter.

All I could do was whimper and move pointlessly in my cuffs.

'It won't hurt, don't worry.' the second one added. 'The thing is, you've been wasting your life so far. No meaning to it, no experiences lived, no goals pursued for the past 5 years. You lost your motivation, hence we decided to give you a lesson.'

Unfortunately, it cannot be undone. I am afraid it's permanent.' another villainous laughter filling the cave we were in. '《The Counsel of Witches》' 'agreed on one more day before your death, but you're a waste of time so we'll do it faster. Isn't it what you wanted anyway? Or did you forget about your 23rd birthday, maybe?' she asked while tracing her long nails over my jawline. I shut my eyes in an attempt to erase the past three hours of my life, but it only added salt to the injury. My heart was racing, trying to keep me alive, but for what? I was trapped here, having no one to help me.

Tears began to trickle down my cheeks, recalling my dreams and aspirations for my life. Wasn't I the girl who desired to become a vet and treat the poor animals? The girl who wished to travel around the Globe and explore the world we lived in? The one who hoped one day she'll see herself successful and happy, having her own family? And I am sure I haven't met all the people I was meant to cross paths with yet.

What happened to me? When did I become so ungrateful for what I had and took my life for granted? I wish I could turn back in time and do things the right way. To cherish every moment of my life and accomplish my goals.

What happened to me? When did I become so ungrateful for what I had and took my life for granted? I wish I could turn back in time and do things the right way. To cherish every moment of my life and accomplish my goals.

Now it was too late. Death was chasing me.

My tears stopped, but the hand touching my face did not. Only now it felt warm and familiar, like my mum's. I wanted to see her one more time before passing away, even though I knew before me were standing two of the most hideous living souls. I opened my eyes anyway. And saw my mum instead. All worried and relieved at the same time, wiping my tears off.

It was then that I realized it was all a nightmare and I had a long life ahead of me, waiting for me to seize it from all points of view.

mirrors

Reflections



Matei-Paul Popa

A wake-up call for Europeans

It's almost a year since Russia invaded Ukraine and war broke out. This came like a huge shock for almost all Europeans, including the political class, even though Russia prepared this invasion for a long time. We weren't prepared for a war in Europe and we had false impressions such as Ukraine falling in a couple of days. Because of this our response was slower than it should have been. But once we realised what was really going on we showed unity and solidarity. This war really exposed both modern Europe's strengths and its weaknesses. We overestimated Russia's force and they underestimated our desire to stand up for the democratic values.

In my opinion this should be a wake-up call for us Europeans that if we become too comfortable people like Vladimir Putin will appear and will attack the way we live. For too long before the war we closed our eyes at the illegal and inhuman things he has done, so that we don't upset the mighty Russia. We thought we could talk it out with him, just like our predecessors thought that they could talk it out with Hitler. History is the best teacher and maybe if we learned from our mistakes sooner there wouldn't be a war in Europe today. I say "we" because I think we are all responsible as we became too passive, enjoying our comfortable lives. In order to preserve our democracies that offer us so much we have to be more active, we have to get involved in politics even if we don't like it so that we can make sure that Europe is going in the right direction. We mustn't forget that is us the people that should keep an eye on our politicians. Otherwise, more people like Putin will appear in the future.

This problem is especially present here in Romania throughout us, the younger generation. Studies have shown that the young people are the least involved in politics and as a result the least represented. Most young adults and teenagers believe that there is no point in getting involved in politics as it's boring and all politicians are the same. Things must change. We must understand that one day our parents and grandparents that know the horrors of a totalitarian regime will no longer be here to defend democracy for us and the future generations will look to us to lead them.

mirrors

We must understand that the least we are interested in politics, the least will politicians be interested in following our interests. We must understand our role in the democratic system.

In conclusion, us Europeans should play a more active role in preserving our democracies in order to prevent the apparition of wars, totalitarian regimes and crimes against humanity, because even though democracy is not a perfect system it's the best we have.



Teodora Crăcăileanu

Academic Pressure: The Silent Killer

As a 12th grade student who will graduate soon and will not go (for the moment) to college I chose to write about an important topic: academic pressure. For example, the pressure that comes from family expectations, the ambitious (most unhealthy) goals students set for themselves, or the demands placed on them by society and how that affects your health. From a young age, students are expected to have good grades, to get into the “best” schools, to have already picked out their future career and so on. But too often academic success can interfere with the emotional development of teenagers. This builds up a lot of pressure and stress which negatively impacts your mental health and causes things such as anxiety, depression, poor sleep quality and many more. High levels of stress and burnout can lead to lower academic achievement. Ironical, isn't it?

Worrying about a test coming soon (even when you're prepared), feeling stressed about poor grades, wanting academic validation-we've all been there, at least once, you can't deny it. But the bigger problem is when a student relies on academic success. It all sounds ideal: achieving perfect grades, being the first one in everything, teachers or parents being proud of you. But, behind this "perfect" facade is an intense chase for academic success which will lead to sacrificing your mental and physical health just to get a good grade that will have no real long-lasting impact on your life. Even worse this could lead to students allowing grades to determine their self-worth or define their success. A grade represents one small part of your work at a single moment in time. Academic success should for sure be one of a student's priorities, don't get me wrong. However, there should be a balance between a pleasant high school experience and academic commitment. Letting yourself be consumed by the pressure of always achieving good grades is unhealthy. Achieving perfection is impossible and exhausting.

Progress, growth and effort are more important and they should be prioritized over perfection.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Everyone has been asked at least once in their life. The pressure to decide our future has been put on us from a young age. Students often experience stress when it comes to planning out their future. It is difficult for a teenager to know precisely what they want to do for the rest of their life. They are obligated to at least have some idea. There are cases where parents control their child’s options or don’t support their decision or passions. Parents put pressure on their child to choose a job that brings plenty of money and reflects well on the family. This leads to a fear of picking the wrong path and confusion-they feel stuck, due to parental or societal pressure.

From my experience, all my life I picked the future career that my parents wanted. But when I realized that I was preparing and working hard to get into a college just to make them happy I decided to finally find a career I liked. With no experience and without any particular passion there was no college major that I wanted to pick. It is frustrating seeing everyone around you having decided on what to do after highschool and there was me, feeling lost. I was afraid to choose the wrong major, especially because there was nothing that I liked in particular. So, I put aside college options and started thinking about what I really wanted. I want to travel, to learn who am I and what I like and work to gain experience. I can go to college later in life when I’ll know what to do. It’s okay to not be completely sure what you want to do. People grow and change, and with that growth, people’s aspirations and goals change.

The best advice I can give is to not compare yourself with others and to stop chasing for perfection. Perfection is unrealistic. If everything is perfect, what is there left to learn and improve? Strive for what’s the best for you and for progress. We’re all human- imperfect beings: we change, and mistakes or failures are not the end of the world, it’s part of our natural growth experience. Be patient with yourself as you develop.

mirrors



From the Heart

Dimitrie Damian

A (Show)Case for the Defence

**„We can break it baby
Rock it, twist it, lock it baby
All I know is you can't chain me
'Cause I'm gonna break out
Gonna, gonna break out, out”
- Nakamura Kazuha and
Miyawaki Sakura, *Antifragile***

안녕하세요! Oh my giddy aunt, I seem to have gotten a little bit carried away over there just now, eh? No matter! What I'm basically trying to say is hello again! What, you weren't expecting to see me here? Me neither, truth be told. I for one really thought that that colored nonsense of a story would be my last contribution to this magazine. But it turns out it wouldn't. And, because I have to study for my finals, let's leave the excogitations related to my being here once more aside and get this little piece of writing going, shall we?

The purpose of this article (no better introduction I'm afraid) is to present to however might be interested in reading it with answers to one truly mind-numbing question: why would an amateur writer with a keen interest in classic literature, British comedy, medieval poetry, philosophy, and, last but not least, James Joyce, choose to spend his ever decreasing free time listening to... Kpop. Bit anticlimactic, innit? Most people will think so, but here I am, keyboard in hand, to explain, in a polite fashion (unfortunately), how wondrous this trend is, and how, for me, this is the right genre of music. And in order to do so, I am going to do what I do best: ~~annoy you to death~~ tell you a story.

My first contact with Hallyu (Chinese for „Korean wave”) was in the ninth grade. Back then, „Kpop” was just a word flung in a casual conversation by my deskmate. Thank God she did, because otherwise I don't know what I would've gifted her for Secret Santa.

I remember walking into the bookshop, picking up the first book that had the word „Kpop” on the cover, paying for it and that was it. I remember someone asking me: ‘You do regret spending money on that book, don’t you?’ and me responding ‘Yes I do.’, but it was more of a generic answer, as I didn’t know what Kpop exactly implied and in my mind it was something along the lines of „weird korean stuff, boys with make-up, no respectable person listens to that sort of thing”.

The time machine of thought now brings us two years into the future, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Pallas Mall and Environs. It was five o’ clockish and the sun was roasting the yellow plastic chairs of the summer theatre, and, by extension, the people sitting on them. The date was July the 27th 2021, and I was invited by the same deskmate, to a Kpop showcase. Do not think I was doing it because I was such a good friend, oh no not at all, I was forced to go there. But that is beside the point. Before the show started I was already thinking about how utterly boring for me it was going to be, why couldn’t I have just stayed at home and watch some Doctor Who, or perhaps read something from The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy... the usual gist, really.

At first, the show simply went by without catching my interest, applauding only out of courtesy. The first moment that managed to grip my attention was when a Kpop cover group from our town came up dressed in yellow and red, and this awoke a mean comparison in me, thinking they look like McDonalds employees. I rembered the title of the song, Thumbs Up; it was impossible not to do so, as the choreography involved a lot of thumbs ups. Then there came another moment whose song’s title I remembered, In the morning, but mainly because it began with a gunshot, and that was startling enough.

But this... now this is where the fun begins. After this performance and several others (or before?) there came one of those moments in life that you basically ignore when it happens to you, but then are frustrated for eternity that you cannot remember a nanosecond from it. Because this moment virtually changed my whole artistic expression... forever.

The presenter came up on the stage, and announced that this girl, what-you-may-call-her, who has a passion for ballet, is going to come up and dance to the choreography of this song, „what-you-may-call-it Swan” ‘Oh great!’ I says to myself, ‘Swan lake!’ But, in retrospect, it was much, MUCH more than just that. I had virtually no idea that, what I predicted to be just another mundane number (it turned out to be the classiest and most magical from the entire show), was going to become the gateway through which I discovered my favorite song of all time. But more on that subject, later on...

In fact, the whole show managed to have some sort of impact on me, very surprisingly, in the end, when all of the performers gathered up on stage and danced to BTS’s Permission to Dance. I know this song isn’t everybody’s favorite, but back then, it had an unusual impact on me. It induced me in a sort of trance, whereupon I glimpsed a world, identical in every respect to our own, but where everything was, somehow, shinier, better, merrier... Overall, after following about 30 or so very energetic and intricate choreographies I became a little tired myself (I, unfortunately, made the jarring mistake of voicing this out loud, to which a girl snapped ‘Well how do you think we’re feeling!?’... her and I are good friends nowadays.)

The next day, my fate was sealed. As I sat down to write one of my stories, I decided to listen again to that song, *Thumbs Up*. What started as a mild curiosity became the whole day’s listening. When the night came, I decided to listen again to the other song that stuck with me, *In the Morning*. For a few days, these were the only two (Kpop) songs I listened to. And then I had the joy to rediscover something beautiful, something exquisite, something... secret... more specifically, *Secret Story of the Swan* by Iz*One. I just cannot put into words how much I love this song! It just feels perfect. The title is mesmerizing, the music is glorious, the visuals of the MV have a dreamlike quality, a sort of visual transformation of *Finnegan’s Wake* (by the way, spot a quote from this book in the article), the message is clear (becoming who you are meant to be) and delivered in a very artistic fashion through absolutely well sung and majestically written lyrics. And also, there are the Iz*One girls, Eunbi, Sakura, Chaewon, Yuri, Yena, Chaeyeon, Minju, Hyewon, Nako, Hitomi, Yujin and Wonyoung at their very best.

Unfortunately, this girl group disbanded in April 2021 (so close...), but the musical legacy they have left behind is, in my opinion, unmatched by any pop artist of these days, or of any come to think of it, in the world.

And now, a healthy year and a half after those events, I have become an absolute Kpop stan.

I have several albums from six different groups or solo artists, one season's greetings (utterly commercial boxes filled with futile things, but they have your idol's faces on them, so it's worth it). I even went to an international Kpop festival, Kpop.flex in Frankfurt, where I got the chance to see my favorite girl-group, the Daesang winning IVE. I also did several impossible things in the name of this form of art, such as staying nine hours in town without drinking any water just to see how a Kpop cover is filmed (well, maybe not for that reason entirely. #friendsknowwhy). I even, since last summer, learned a few choreographies myself, even though I always thought I most definitely did not have what it takes to dance „professionally“. However, let's address the elephant in the room. What has listening to Kpop done for me and why do I love it so much? Well, truth be told, had I not attended that showcase, I dare not imagine how my life would have been. Ever since I had begun listening to this genre, I am living in the world that I have glimpsed at the end of that event. The world to me now seems so beautiful, and sadness is just a mood that comes and goes at long intervals. It finally made me realize that I am an extrovert at heart, and this attitude changed me and my world forever, and for the better. Kpop songs are something completely different, and they digress from the stereotypical way of doing music.

Creations by artists such as Twice, IVE, Le Sserafim, (G)-Idle, Itzy, Stray Kids, Jo Yuri, Yena, Aespa, Kep1er, The Boyz, BTS and many more take me to places of undreamt beauty and wellbeing. Some have a cheery tune and make me feel better (Likey, Hype Boy, Attention, Smartphone, Smiley, Love Shh!, That That), others are in every respect unique (La Vie en Rose, Love Dive, Antifragile, Eleven, After Like, The Boys, The Great Mermaid, BIBI Vengeance) others help me imagine new settings, plots and characters for my stories (Black Mamba, Vampire, Suki to Iwasetai, Girls, Thunderous, Dice, The Stealer, Gambler), others make me see the world in a different perspective

(No Celestial, 28 Reasons, Loveable), others make me feel at peace with myself and so on. But they all have one thing in common; they succeed in helping me attain the state of *κάθαρσις*. And, nothing else does it so much better.

But perhaps the greatest thing that Kpop has indirectly given me, apart from a pleasant personality (hopefully) and an original style of writing, is simple, yet it makes all the difference in the world: real friends. Due to this trend, I have been introduced to the novel experience of being part of a group where we are free to voice our wildest thoughts and opinions, where we accept ourselves with our ups and downs and really care for each other.

This article is respectfully dedicated to these very special people, who love me and whom I love, and who give me reason enough to face the day of tomorrow with ever renewing optimism.

And yes, I have been judged by people for listening to Kpop. Others were simply doing it because they simply wanted to be mean, but I have also stumbled upon people who genuinely believed that this is not the right music for me, that it „does not suit my intelectual type” and that I should listen to something more „valuable”. Never in a magenta moon! This is the first music genre that I enjoy totally and completely, and I am not going to discard it and its impact upon me just to conform to other people’s standards. These are the vibes I have somehow been waiting for my entire life. For this one, I am staying firmly put. I am going to be bitchy, excuse my french. I am going to, ultimately, be myself and nothing less or else.

To sum up (no better conclusion either), I hope that through this article I have managed to convey to you a little bit of what Kpop is to me and how it has fundamentally and utterly changed my life for the better. I also hope that it also made you braver to show your true self to the world and never ever care what they say as long as you know that the artistic product you decide to enjoy is the one that helps you be the best version of yourself you could possibly be.

Andreea Teleagă

Letter to my future self

Dear future me,

I'm sure our life is going the way we always wanted to. I have no doubt that you take care of us at least as much as I'm trying to do it myself now. I've been thinking of you for a while and all I can say is that I didn't expect to get myself in tears while writing this. As you already know, I've always been struggling to put in black and white the knotty thoughts and ideas that my mind creates mainly because words don't seem enough to me. But now, so be it.

I've recently realized that we don't have to prove anything to anyone. I've been incredibly strong for you, more than anybody will ever acknowledge. I've taken care of things alone and I learned to allow myself not to feel alright. Being a victim or not, it's human to hurt, whether you are criticized for wanting to detach or to start over by yourself I know that we mold into our own shape in order to grow, aiming in the directions that only our path follows. I know you can clearly see the same goal that I have today, but not from the same spot I am looking at it now. In a few years I want to recognize ourselves, but I want you to allow yourself to be different, better, at peace. I know you will be humble, but not crumble under the pressure that our past has put on us.

Obviously, I want us to be successful, you have to reach your dreams. We endure so many wounds and we are puzzled by many things. Therefore, be okay first. Heal. You are allowed to do whatever it takes to protect yourself. I can't wait to be you, but let's get there alive, being ourselves. When you exceed what I have dreamed for years, do not forget me and do not lose yourself. Find out who you really are and seek out the truths you are meant to learn from the people around you, even if it's only to learn not to be like them. I allowed myself to make mistakes but I didn't let them devour me so that you cannot be defined by them. We have a little secret now. We have something that they don't. We know ourselves for who we are and we took over the power to decide how we want to build our life.

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I wish I could tell you all that will happen and help you along the way but I know how strong and capable you are to do it by yourself. Because that's how it's always been. Just the two of us. And our guardian angels.

Break free from the pressure to fit in. Break free from wanting to be more than perfect. Break free from hating all that you aren't.

Never stop fighting for us.

See you in 10 years, Doc...



Irina Scripnic

The delicacy of ballet

"The ballet needs to tell its own story in such a way it can be received without having to be translated into language." -Twyla Tharp



by Bianca Prisacaru

Giselle is a ballet in two acts composed by Adolphe Adam, original choreography signed by Jules Perrot and Jean Coralli. Giselle is one of the greatest masterpieces of classical ballet and one of the few from the early romantic period that has remained in the repertoire to this day. In addition, Giselle was one of the first full-length ballets to be performed on pointe.

Giselle, a lovely young peasant girl, falls in love with Albrecht, a disguised aristocrat, in the ghost-filled ballet. However, when Albrecht's actual identity is exposed by his rival, Hilarion, Giselle goes insane and dies of grief. She is called from the grave after passing away into the vicious sisterhood of the Wilis, which is comprised of the ghosts of unmarried women who died after being betrayed by their loves and exact retribution at night by dancing men to exhaustion. When Albrecht visits Giselle's tomb to pay his respects, they try to capture him under the leadership of Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, but her great love releases him. They rule the stage with their long tulle robes and solemn looks, gaining strength in numbers as they skillfully dance through dramatic patterns and coordinated motions. This aura of ethereality intensifies as they slowly approach Albrecht. Giselle protects him from the Wilis while also preventing herself from joining them.

Although the music for Giselle is by no means excellent, it cannot be disputed that it is beautifully appropriate for the piece. It may be danced, and the color and tone can be changed to fit various dramatic circumstances. Giselle's music still has charm to it because when we listen to these haunting tunes from more than a century ago, we are immediately conscious of their intensely nostalgic nature.

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The romantic era's humanness is reflected in Giselle's choreography, which has rounded arms and an upper torso tilted forward. Many people believe this dance to be "the best ballet of its time" because of the tenderness that the style portrays, which is especially evident in the upper body and the alignment of the head.

The story of Giselle is a romantic tale of innocent love and betrayal; of philandering Count Albrecht and a trusting peasant maid, Giselle. But despite the fact that it is a tragic love story, the central romantic theme of Giselle remains love.

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Artistic Zoom

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Dreams of them

by Albert Filip



Milan, Italy





Ioana

The story that shaped me



One memory that I could never erase from my mind has to be the first classic movie I watched one night when I was 8 years old, that has stuck with me throughout my whole life since then. I was getting ready to go to bed when my uncle asked me if I wanted to watch a movie that was on TV at the moment. I remember thinking I would just sit there for a little bit and then go to bed because it couldn't be something that will actually impact me and for me that decision was the start of an amazing passion.

My little body was rooted for three full hours to that warm bed just so I could watch the full Titanic movie. I remember feeling so amazed that the three hours felt like really three minutes for me. I had so many thoughts throughout it and every little question of mine kept developing with the movie. I was visually pleased by all the beautiful people that were acting in it, by their customs and then by the mesmerizing views of the biggest ship built in 1914, but with the action progressing I got even more attached to the story that was incredibly unreal for me. I remember going back to school the day after and just telling everybody this story because for me it felt that what I had just watched was very close to my heart.

In the following months, I rewatched it as often as I could and it was the first time I enjoyed learning and talking in English. If Rose and Jack could talk in that amazing language, so could I. It also made me so curious that I began watching documentaries in English and researching facts about the actual ship. I felt rewarded and the true story of the ship and the movie kept my mind going for years and made me learn so much about myself, about what I'm interested in and my view of the world. I know that for a lot of people it might seem like a classic movies but for me it was such a meaningful experience.

Ten years later I discovered that the movie would be replayed in theaters for the 25th anniversary. That was enough to send me back to my childhood, to the small version of myself that would stay awake at night just to learn some lines from Rose's dialogue with Jack. Never in a million years would I have imagined that the day of the premiere would be my exact birthday. I felt like the luckiest girl in the world and really took it as a sign that this movie will always be a part of my heart...

...and my heart will go on.

Alexia- Maria Bejenariu

The art of “Sonnet 18”

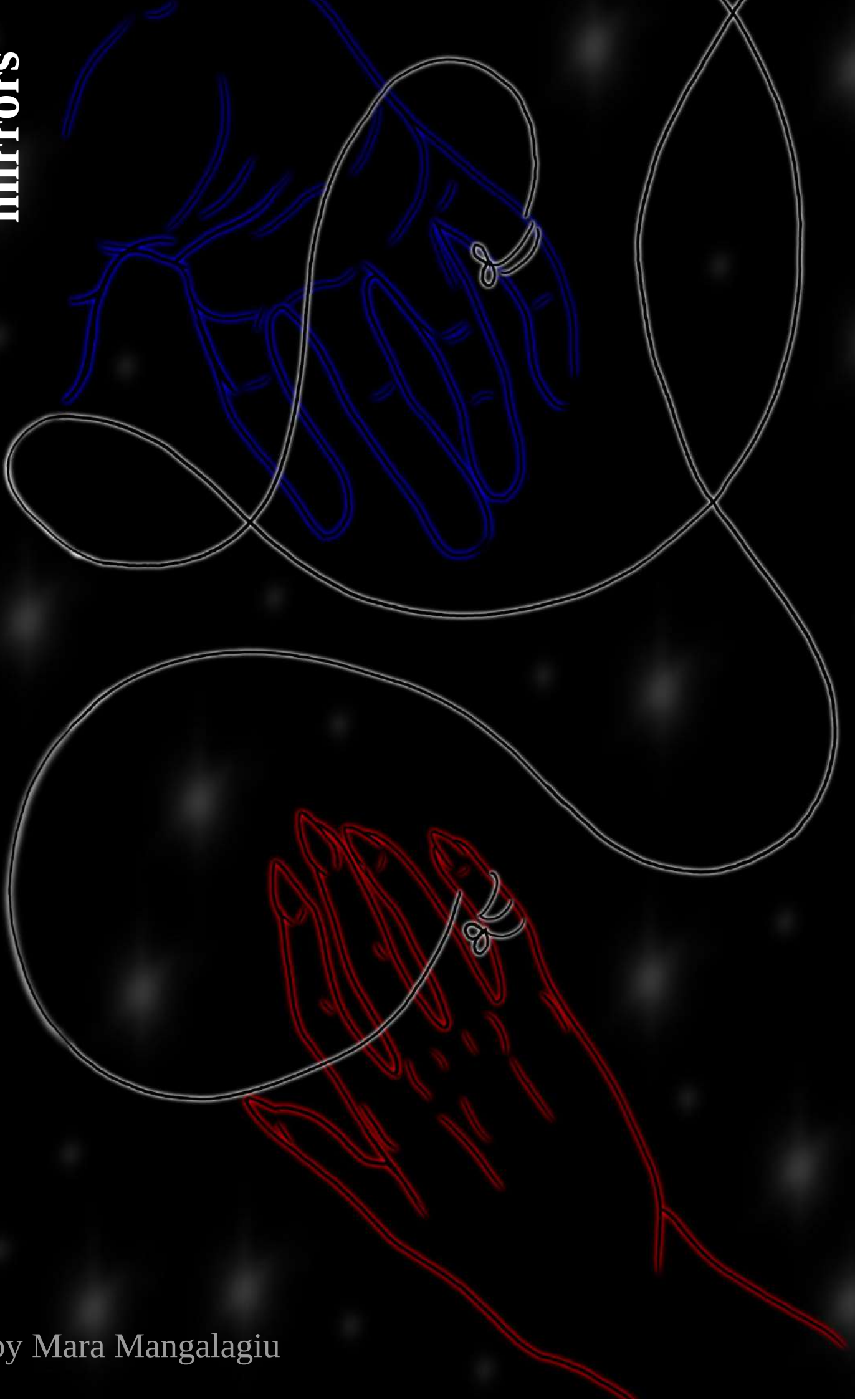
In “Sonnet 18”, the great William Shakespeare immortalises the beauty of his beloved through his writing. The author reveals his aim through the lyrics: “ When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st:/So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

The immortality theme is something common in Shakespeare’s work, especially in his sonnets. The writer uses his work to immortalise the persons he loved and his affection for them. This idea comes from the deep feelings that Shakespeare has for these people and from his wish that these emotions should be immortal even though humans are not. These thoughts can be found also in Sonnet 18 through the lines : “And every fair from fair sometime declines,/By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d;/But thy eternal summer shall not fade,/Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st.” With the summer being his beloved as revealed at the beginning of the text:” Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”

I think it is fair to say that Shakespeare achieved his goal as his beloved and his love are immortal through the reader’s mind. For who does not dream of love, when he sees the description of “thee”.

In conclusion, the immortality theme is present not only in Sonnet 18, but in most of William Shakespeare’s work because it is his vision that the beauty and the love should be ever-present even though people are not.

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by Mara Mangalagiu

Rareș Barbu

Floral Shoppe – an overview

"Floral Shoppe" is an album by American musician and producer Vektroid, released in December 2011 under the pseudonym Macintosh Plus. The album is considered one of the most influential and iconic works of the vaporwave genre, which emerged in the early 2010s as a subculture of electronic music that was characterized by its use of samples from 80s and 90s pop, R&B, and elevator music, among other sources.

The album's cover features late 90s-like website background, Japanese text and the Roman bust of Helios, which perfectly captures the nostalgic and dreamy atmosphere of the music. The album's tracks are based on samples of songs by a variety of artists, including Diana Ross, Toto, and Whitney Houston, among others, and are manipulated through various digital effects and techniques to create an otherworldly, ethereal sound.

The album's most famous track, "リサフランク420 / 現代のコンピュー" (Lisa Frank 420 / Modern Computing), features a sample of the song "It's Your Move" by Diana Ross and is often cited as one of the defining tracks of the vaporwave genre. The album's other tracks, such as "ブート" (Boot), "地理" (Geography), and "花の専門店" (Floral Shoppe), also feature unique and memorable samples and soundscapes.

While the album was initially released on the Bandcamp website, it gained significant attention and popularity in the following years, leading to a resurgence of interest in the vaporwave genre. "Floral Shoppe" has been praised for its innovative use of sampling and digital manipulation, as well as its dreamy and nostalgic atmosphere, which captures a sense of longing and melancholy for a past era of consumer culture.

Despite its impact, the album has also been the subject of controversy, with some critics accusing it and the vaporwave genre as a whole of being a form of cultural appropriation, due to its heavy use of samples from Asian and Western popular culture. Regardless, "Floral Shoppe" remains a significant and influential work of electronic music and has inspired countless artists and listeners around the world.

Ilinca Leahu

Women throughout time

Even the people who do not know anything about art can name one male artist and one thing they have done but very few people can name one female artist and her art. Since the beginning of time, the world has been dominated by men, even in art and that is why Zing Tsjeng, in the book *Forgotten women – the artists*, talks about 48 women artists, their art and how they and their art has been viewed by society just because they are women.

It all started in 2017 when Zing Tsjeng's friend invited her to watch the documentary *!W.A.R. (!Women Art Revolution)* made by Lynn Hershman Leeson. In the documentary Leeson approaches people in New York and San Francisco and asks them to name three women artists. As expected, people didn't know how to answer. In the film, Leeson says that she is on a mission to honor the lost feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s: 'When artists are battling for space in the cultural memory, omission – or even worse, eradication – becomes a kind of murder.' This documentary convinced Zing Tsjeng to write this book, saying 'I was convinced that, if there was ever to be a *Forgotten women – the artists*, the opening sequence of Leeson's powerful and much-needed documentary had to be in introduction.'

Throughout history, men always had better jobs or were paid better than women and unfortunately this is still true. According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, based in Washington DC, only 30% of artists represented by US commercial galleries are women – and for every dollar a male visual artist makes, a woman artist makes only 81 cents. Women in art professions can expect to earn almost \$20,000 less than their male peers every year.

In 2017, a group of researchers from the University of Luxemburg decided to study how little women artists were paid in comparison with men artists. They studied 1.5 million auctions from 45 countries and they found that a painting by a woman could typically sell for 47.6 per cent of the price of a work by a man. Scientists concluded that ‘Women’s art appears to sell for less because it is made by women.’ That year, a painting made by Leonardo da Vinci sold for \$450 million, eclipsing all other auction records – including the \$44.4 million record set by Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1* as the highest price ever fetched for a piece of art made by a woman. Some men have disagreed with the idea that women should be paid as much as men because ‘Women simply don’t pass the [market] test.’ That’s what the German artist Georg Baselitz told a *Der Spiegel* reporter in 2013. ‘Women don’t paint very well. It’s a fact.’

But we do not have to wait until the distant future to see women getting paid the same amount as men. We just have to look in the ancient past, at the case of Iaia of Cyzicus (fl. c. 100 BC). Iaia – also known as Lala, Laia, Marcia – is mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his encyclopedia *Naturalis historia* (‘Natural History’), and then by Giovanni Boccaccio in *De claris mulieribus* (‘Concerning Famous Women’). Pliny the Elder says that Iaia is one of the most impressive women artists he had ever seen. ‘No artist worked more rapidly than she did,’ he writes, ‘and her pictures had such merit that they sold for higher prices than those of Sopolis and Dionysios, well-known contemporary painters, whose works fill our galleries.’ Not much information is known about her, but we know that she was born in the town of Cyzicus in what is now present-day northwest Turkey, but worked and lived in Rome. We also know that she painted on ivory and wood, and Boccaccio records that she also carved ivory, or, according to one translation, marble. Pliny does not say how she acquired such incredible skills, but he gives a brief rundown of her work: ‘She painted chiefly portraits of women, and also a large picture of an old woman at Naples, and a portrait of herself, executed with the help of a mirror.’ Pliny notes, too, that Iaia remained single all her life. Unfortunately, nothing of Iaia’s works have survived the ages, and we will never get to see the work that moved Pliny the Elder and the art buyers of Ancient Rome.

Everyone thinks that men have always predominated the art field, even in the prehistoric times. But is it actually true? In some prehistoric caves archeologists have discovered handprints which were usually tucked next to paintings of animals. They are thought to be made by ancient creators, the prehistoric cave painter (fl. c. 38,000 BC), by blowing paint over hands tightly pressed to the surface of the rock. These caves have been discovered in places ranging from Indonesia and Borneo to Argentina, and they are thought to date from about 40,000 years ago. Nobody knows what they mean, but scientists theorize that they are some kind of artistic signature.

For decades, however, scientists were sure of one thing: the handprints were male. But the Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Pennsylvania State University disagrees with this idea. He published a decade's worth of handprint analysis that showed that most of the handprints were made by women. Snow said in the *National Geographic* magazine: 'There has been a male bias in the literature for a long time. People have made a lot of unwarranted assumptions about who made these things and why.' Snow built an algorithm that could distinguish whether a handprint was male or female, and he crunched data from 32 of the clearest prehistoric stencils from Europe. When the results came in, 75% of the handprints belonged to women.

When he published the journal with the analysis, he started getting a lot of attention, a lot of people, including scientists, disagreeing with him. He responded to the negativity by citing a *New Yorker* cartoon from 1980 that shows a group of cavewomen huddled around a wall of prehistoric art and one of them asks: 'Does it strike anyone else as weird that none of the great painters have been men?' Snow says: 'The humorous irony in 1980 was, of course, based on the generally accepted view that the cave artists must have been males. Now more than three decades later, the cartoon still seems funny, but the focus of the irony has been shifted.' In other words, the historical myth of the great male artist had 'gone the way of the woolly mammoth.'

To sum up, *Forgotten women – the artists* by Zing Tsjeng is an amazing book that everyone – especially the readers who love art – needs to read. Tsjeng presents the life of 48 women in a simple way while she uses extraordinary designs.

Ştefan Spiridon

Novel Review – The Hobbit

J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" is one of the best known and loved fantasy books. Published in 1937, The Hobbit has been translated into over 50 different languages and sold over 100 million copies.

The main asset of this novel is the plot. The Hobbit is a wonderful prelude to "The Lord of the Rings" series which tells the story of Bilbo Baggins and his unforgettable expeditions with a wizard, a group of dwarfs and several mystical creatures. He travels from his home in the Shire all the way to the sacred residence of the gnomes – The Lonely Mountain. The imps have hired Bilbo as a burglar and have set out to take back their home from the fierce dragon Smaug. What ensues throughout the voyage is nothing short of magical and memorable.

Another appealing aspect of this book is that every known individual can find their inner-hobbit, the part that wants nothing but an easy and comfortable life. Yet, there is still something that emerges at the thought of adventure and a journey into the unknown that makes this masterpiece such fondly remembered by all who read it.

The main drawback of the book is that several parts felt rushed. There was a specific scene at the end that proved to be one of the critical parts and yet only had one page at the most dedicated to it. There is only so much the author could say, but most readers wished that bit of the book had more to it.

I would wholeheartedly recommend this novel not for its success, but for its astonishing plot and characters that you can easily be attached to.



Darius Oprea

No CTRL

To say that I love music would be an absolute understatement. All of my life I've had a very close-knit relationship with music, it has seen all the good and bad moments, all my friendship being formed and some of them falling apart, it has been with me through my growth periods and through the times I've regressed emotionally. To me music is escapism and most importantly music is freedom as it shows all the ways in which the human sound can be interpreted.

So, after that little introduction it is safe to say that picking my favorite album was not an easy choice to make but throughout the years one piece of music has consistently resonated with me on a level deeper than the rest: CTRL by SZA.

To me this record perfectly encapsulates the young adult experience with all its toxicity, heartbreak, endless questioning, melodrama and more joyful moments. It is a beautiful showcase of SZA's perception of control with sub themes of growth, insecurity and self-love that have resonated with so many.

The sound of the album is a mix of alternative R&B with neo-soul elements. The songs range in the intensity of the production from the more stripped down "Supermodel" to more cinematic songs like "Pretty Little Birds". Lyrically the album is very raw, SZA's vulnerability being at an all time high as she lays out all her insecurities, dreams and aspirations for the listener. Each song on the record becomes more and more relevant as time goes by for example tracks like "Prom" or "Broken Clocks" that deal heavily with topics around the passing of time and the imminently terrifying aspect of growing up didn't quite appeal to me when I was younger but now they are some of the most relatable songs on the album; in the same vein I think the ending track, "20 Something" will hit me infinitely harder in 3-4 years for me.

mirrors

Lastly, the thing that takes CTRL for me from a great album to a masterpiece is the fact that each song perfectly transitions into another making the album one cohesive and definitive piece of work. Additionally, the ending of the last track perfectly transitions into the opening of the first one, creating the perfect loop and cementing the themes of cyclicity into the record.

I don't think this album is for everyone's taste, but I find that the ones that resonate with the record often stick around with it and listen to it for a very long period of time ,an aspect which is backed by its 296 weeks spent charting on the Billboard 200.

Elena Angheluță

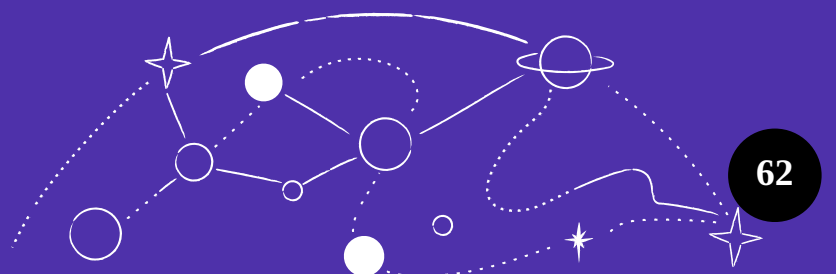
Lovecraft and cosmicism



Cosmicism is a philosophical doctrine that author Howard Phillips Lovecraft developed based on his own writings. The belief states that there exists no recognizable divinity, such as how other religions may preach as a “god”, in the universe. It also emphasizes the fact that humans are particularly insignificant in the larger pattern, image, of existence within the astrophysical plane.

In Lovecraftian literature, human beings are subject to powerful beings and cosmic forces, although these forces are not purely malevolent but they are indifferent toward humanity, resulting in the story being tainted perhaps a darker shade than one would believe it to be at first glance. One should note that Lovecraft thought of himself as a "scientific" or "cosmic" indifferentist. Essentially, he believed in a meaningless, mechanical, and uncaring universe that human beings, with their limited faculties, could never fully understand and this belief is completely detached from any religious root.

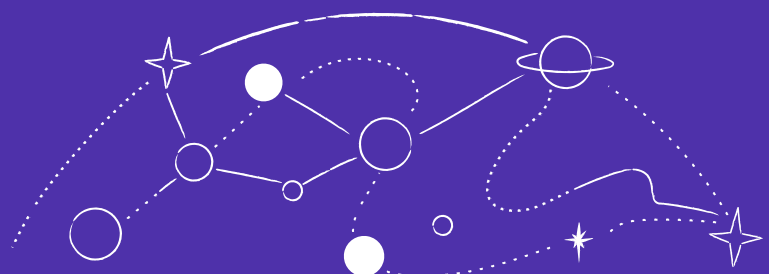
Within Lovecraft's works, the absence of meaning itself is not the one that causes torment and horror in the protagonists, rather it is the discovery that they have absolutely no power to alter anything in the vast, indifferent and cold universe that surrounds them, the search for knowledge always leading to disaster, and yet despite all of this, this thirst never being able to be quenched. The characters are doomed to a self-destructive doom where, deep down, they simultaneously play the role of the criminal, victim, judge and prosecutor.





The doctrine seeks to emphasize the insignificance of humanity as a whole, the meaninglessness of its doings. However, contrary to nihilism, cosmicism seems to doom the individual to an eternal fear, rather than an existential dread rooted in the rejection of the possible existence of some higher purpose.

The prominent theme revolves around humanity's fear of their own insignificance inside an incomprehensibly large universe: the fear of the cosmic void, the very same that serves as a basis for Lovecraft's works and the one that the author lays nested deep within his characters' psychological states.







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