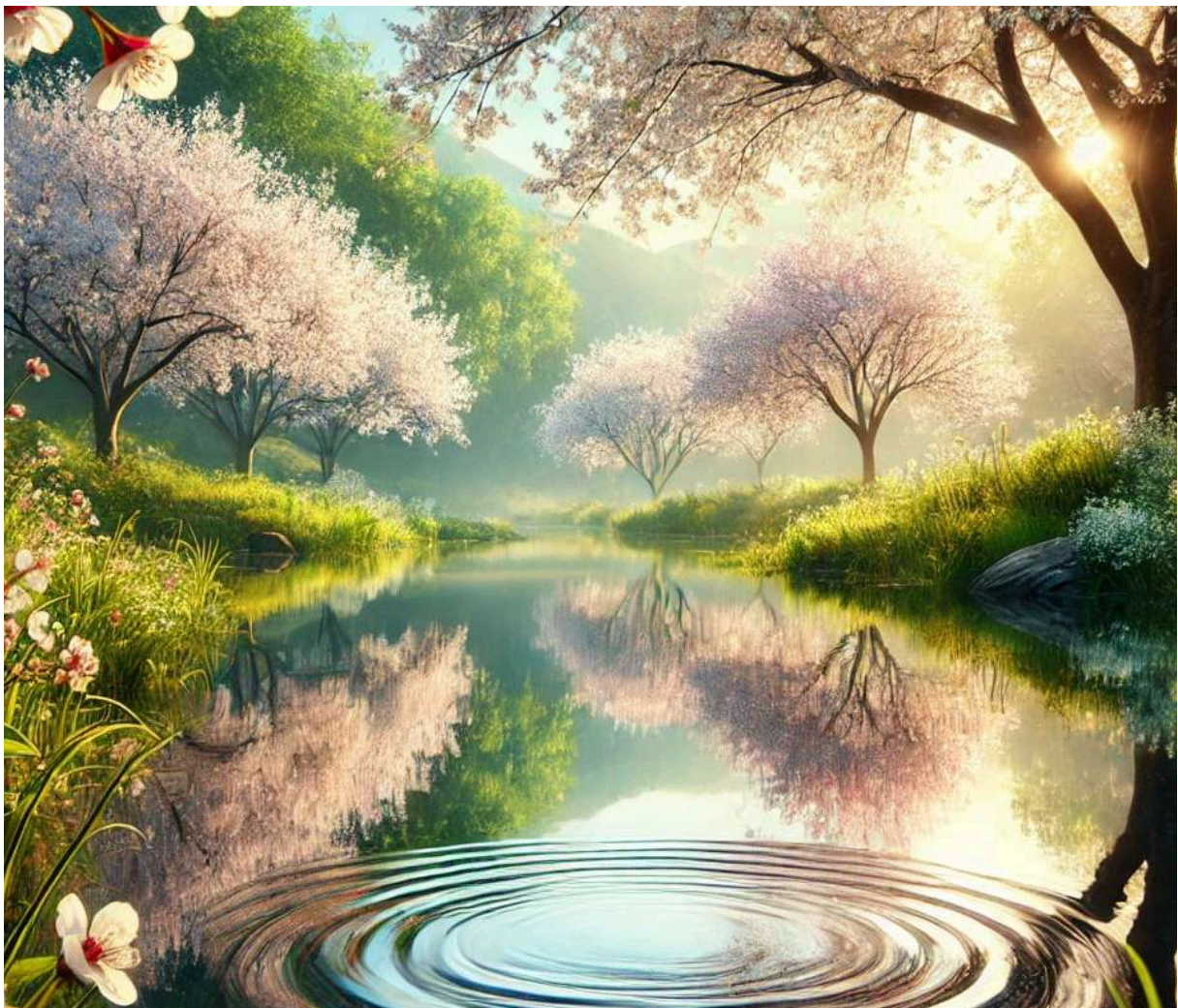


Mirrors

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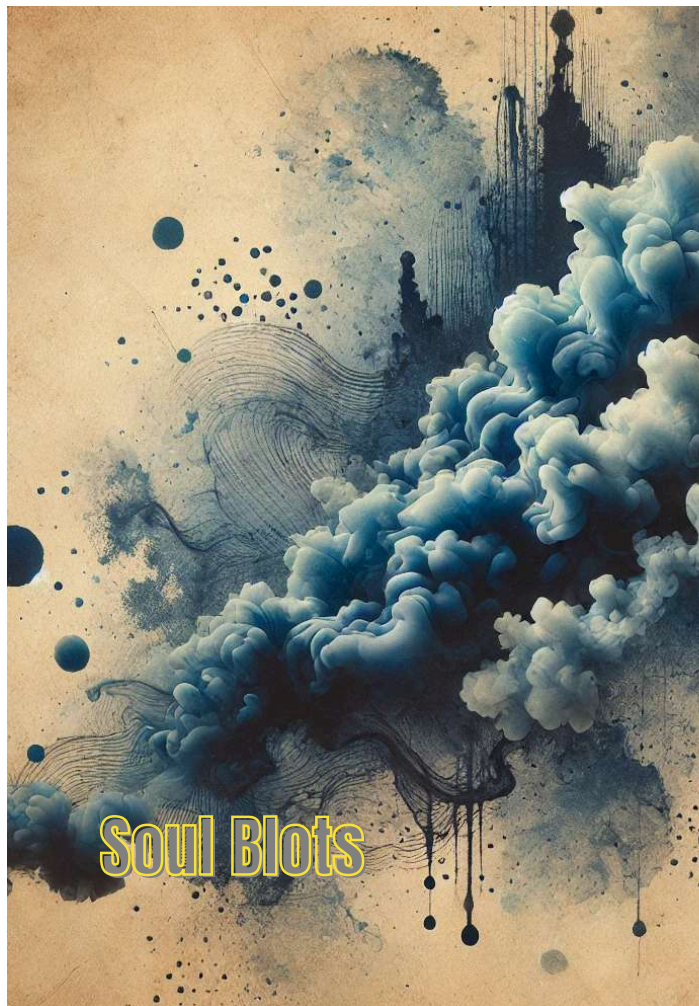
Page 5
Soul Blots

Page 9
From the Heart

Page 16
Reflections

Page 21
Artistic Zoom

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Soul Blots



From the Heart



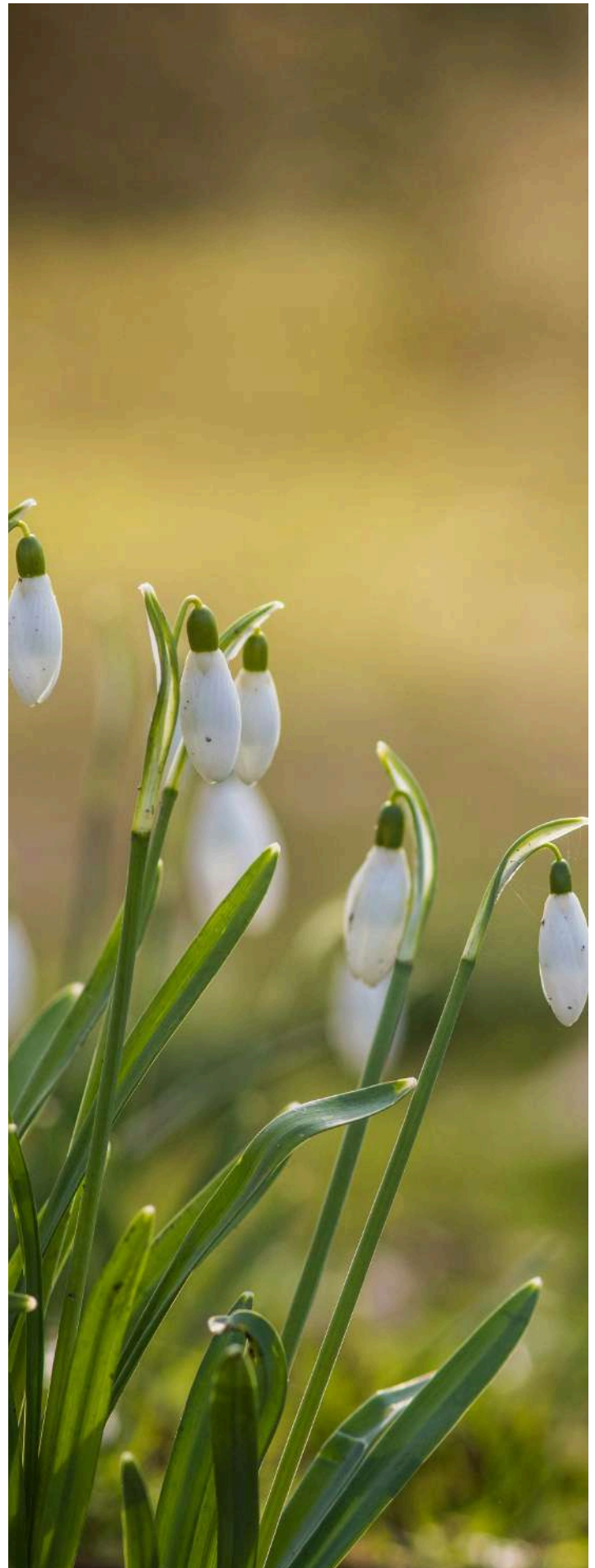
Reflections



Artistic Zoom

Table of Contents

2	On Murder in Russian Politics and Literature
4	The Importance of Being Present: Staying Engaged in a Distracted World
6	***
6	Old Love
7	In Pursuit of Love - a Universal Quest for Humanity
10	Why Do We Laugh?
11	Similar but Essentially Different
12	True Love Lies in Details
12	In Touch With Our Own Nature
14	Spending a Day at the European Parliament in Strasbourg
17	The Ethics of Ambiguity
19	Theatre - shaped Psychoanalysis
22	Love, Loss and the Cafe Where Time Stands Still
22	A Tribute to Living Fully
23	Trapped Beneath the Glass
24	A Letter Across Time - A Tale of Love and Wonder
25	When Make-Believe Becomes Reality
25	A Haunting Meditation on Isolation and Identity
26	War Without Glory
27	Cruella versus Maleficent
28	Rebellion and Control - A Battle for The Human Spirit



On Murder in Russian Politics and Literature

Oana Andone

Being forged by the same forces, the literature of a nation reflects its national character to a great extent. Literature is shaped by the country's history, values, struggles, and collective imagination. Writers are the immediate products of their time and place, and, consciously or not, the world they create tends to echo the hopes, fears, and identity of their society.

More often than not, historical experience has a huge impact on literature. The traumas and triumphs of a nation inevitably shape its stories. Post-war literature in Germany, for instance, is steeped in guilt and memory. American literature often centres around freedom, individualism, and race issues which are at the heart of its national story. Russia's literature is also inseparable from its history which was one marked by long periods of political repression, social upheaval, and collective suffering. From centuries under Tsarist autocracy to the cruelties of serfdom, from the violence of revolution to the horror of Stalinist purges, the Russian people have endured cycles of trauma that have deeply shaped the national psyche.

It is therefore understandable that Russia's turbulent history, marked by autocracy, serfdom, revolution, and war bred a literature that understands violence not as anomaly, but as a natural part of life, as part of the tragic reality of being human in a turbulent world. Russian authors do not flinch from depicting murder, betrayal, or ideological assassination. Instead, they probe the moral and spiritual aftermath of such acts. What matters most is not the violence itself, but what follows: guilt, reflection,

repentance, and often, forgiveness. In a society where institutions fail to deliver justice, where oppression is normalized and dignity stripped away, forgiveness becomes a deeply personal act: the refusal to be consumed by hate. It allows characters to retain their humanity in a system designed to dehumanize them.

Dostoevsky himself was a man who survived a mock execution and years in Siberian exile. His personal experience of state violence shaped his belief that even in the darkest depths of suffering, the human soul is capable of change, of grace, and of forgiveness. In this view, forgiveness is not forgetting or condoning evil, but rather enduring evil without letting it destroy one's inner life. This form of moral endurance is seen in character after character across Russian literature. It is obvious in the quiet spiritual transformation of Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*), in the compassion shown by Prince Myshkin (*The Idiot*), or even in the peasant wisdom of Alyosha Karamazov (*The Brothers Karamazov*) who offers love and empathy in a world overwhelmed by cruelty.

Last but not least, language is blended with identity and a shared psyche. Language is not just a tool, but a carrier of worldview. National literature written in a native tongue often carries idioms, metaphors, and rhythms that reflect how a people think and see the world. Through literature, a nation processes its identity. Characters and narratives often embody national traits: Russian literature is known for its introspection and moral

weight; Irish literature is rich in wit, melancholy, and oral tradition. In a way, reading the literature of a nation is like peering into its soul, not always flattering, but deeply revealing.

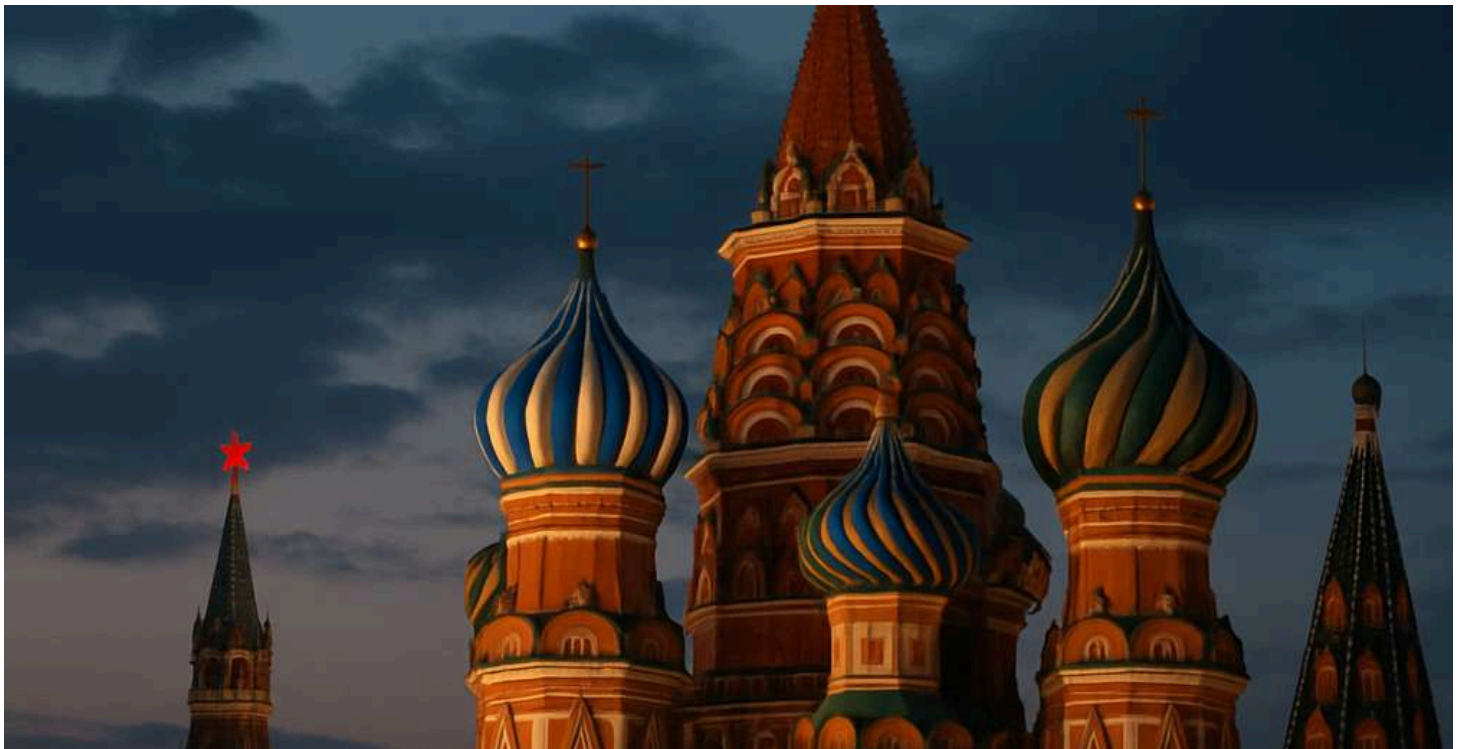
It does not come as a surprise then that modern political assassinations in Russia, while real and disturbing, seem to echo themes deeply embedded in Russian literature. There is a kind of tragic continuity between the moral questions raised by literary murders and the ruthless politics of today. Russian literature has long dwelt on the ethical and psychological dimensions of murder, often depicting it as a moral crisis rather than simply a crime. In novels by Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Solzhenitsyn, murder is not just about death, but about conscience, redemption, guilt, power, and the value of human life.

Today's political murders, such as the assassinations of opposition leaders like Boris Nemtsov, Alexei Navalny and other dissidents are not explored through literature, but they seem to reflect the same grim tension between power, violence, and morality that Russian literature has long dissected. However, while literary murders are followed by soul-searching suffering, state-sponsored assassinations appear cynically devoid

of remorse.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov tries to convince himself he has the right to kill for a greater good, echoing the same ends justify the means logic often used by authoritarian regimes. But he collapses under the weight of his guilt. Today murders carried out by the state are cold, silent, and unacknowledged. There's no visible guilt. Just silence. This gap between murder and accountability is what makes the modern killings feel even more chilling.

Modern Russian politics seem to fulfill the darkest of prophecies of Russian literature, i.e. the fear that a society can lose its moral centre when violence becomes normalized or institutionalized. What is different now is that the assassinations are no longer examined through a shared cultural narrative. There is no Dostoevsky to dissect the soul of the assassin. There is no Tolstoy to cry for the sacredness of life. Where literature once demanded reflection and introspection, contemporary power demands silence. Where literature treated murder as a site of ethical confrontation, modern power treats it as a tool of efficiency. The repentance and forgiveness which once defined the Russian literary tradition have been replaced in the sphere of power by indifference and impunity.



Being Present is a Present

The Importance of Being Present: Staying Engaged in a Distracted World

Andreea Jijie

In a world buzzing with notifications, endless content and the pressure to multitask, staying focused has never been harder, especially for students. It's easy to be physically in class, but mentally miles away. In this environment, the ability to be truly present isn't just rare, it's powerful.

Today's students face a constant battle for their attention. Whether it's the sound of a notification, the temptation of an open tab or the ever-present draw of social media, distractions are everywhere. These constant interruptions don't just break concentration, they weaken the brain's ability to stay focused. As attention becomes increasingly fragmented, students find it harder to dive deep into subjects, retain what they learn or build genuine connections with peers and teachers.

Being present goes far beyond simply occupying a seat in the classroom. It's about showing up mentally, emotionally and attentively. When students are mentally present, they don't just absorb information, they interact with it, they ask better questions, make deeper connections and often find a greater sense of meaning in what they're learning. Presence also lays the groundwork for authentic relationships. In classrooms where students are fully attentive, maintain eye contact and

communicate openly, education evolves into a life-changing journey. It's no longer just about memorizing facts, it becomes a shared, human experience where growth happens on multiple levels.

The good news? Staying present doesn't require a complete lifestyle overhaul. Small, mindful habits can make a big difference. Putting the phone away during study sessions, using focus apps or simply writing down key takeaways at the end of the day can strengthen awareness. Like any skill, presence improves with practice, by noticing when the mind drifts and gently guiding it back. Students who learn this skill often gain more than academic success. They feel more grounded, less overwhelmed and more in control of their learning journey. School becomes not just something to get through, but something to grow through.

In a world that pulls our attention in countless directions, choosing to be present is more than a habit, it's an act of quiet resilience. It means choosing depth over speed, connection over convenience. Presence isn't about perfection, it's about returning to what matters, again and again.

The background is a textured, aged paper with various ink splatters and a large, billowing blue cloud-like shape. The cloud is composed of many small, rounded, overlapping segments, giving it a three-dimensional, smoke-like appearance. It is surrounded by dark blue and black ink splatters, some of which are circular and others are more elongated. The overall color palette is muted, with the blue of the cloud being the most prominent. The text 'Soul Blots' is written in a large, stylized, yellow font with a black outline, positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image.

Soul Blots



Alexandra Mereuță

I shall forever sing to my dear,
The moon, with no fear,
For she always listens
And back to me she glistens
In pitiful tears
That no one hears.



Old love

Bianca Teodora Mărica

They ask me, "Why do you love him so?"
And I just pause, unsure to show—
It's like asking why the sky is blue,
Why birds take flight or sing on cue,
Why ocean waves will never cease,
Why certain moments whisper peace.

How do I say you make me whole?
That just your voice revives my soul?
The years have passed, yet still I find,
No time can dim what's in my mind.
One glance at you—I start to beam,
For you're the heart within my dream.

How do I tell them love's like air?
You cannot see it, yet it's there.
It moves in silence, strong and wide,
A pulsing tide we feel inside.
It steals our breath, it makes us true—
That's what my love has done with you.

So let them doubt, or call me mad,
This love's the best I've ever had.
It lifts me up, it pulls me through,
It shapes my world and colors too.
No logic holds what hearts admire—
This love is soul, and spark, and fire.

And now, with silver in my hair,
I write these lines in a rocking chair.
A lifetime lived, yet still I see—
Love's bloom has never aged in me.



In Pursuit Of Love - A Universal Quest For Humanity

Sara Manta

I love a lot of things. Some people love sunrises and sunsets, others the gentle breeze of the wind, random acts of kindness, larks warbling in the trees and watching the night sky, alone or with their loved one. This feeling has intrigued poets, philosophers, and everyday individuals for centuries. It's a term that evokes deep emotion and brings images of comfort, romance, closure and eternal commitment. But what does it really mean? How can we describe something that is so different for every one of us and which refers to not only a person, but also a scenery, a smell, a memory or even an idea.

According to the dictionary, love is a strong feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection, such as for a parent, child, friend, or pet and a thing for which one has a strong enthusiasm or liking whether it is a hobby, a concept or a moment in time. However, can we really define it? How can we explain a word that can be used in every context from people to nature to intangible prospects of the future (I would love to become a lawyer). To fully understand what love is we need to analyze certain relationships and emotions, which can lead to a better comprehension of this topic.

Firstly, in connection to people, love is an amalgamation of sensations, actions and intentions. To some it could take the form of a presence, a willingness to opening-up or words of reassurance. While the balance varies from each individual, it is commonly agreed that true, authentic love comes from appreciation, loyalty, responsibility, warmth and respect. This feeling is expressed towards family, friends or a lover.

One popular framework is the Ancient Greek classification of love, which outlines several distinct types. Eros refers to romantic, passionate love; Philia is associated with the platonic, brotherly one; Storge is familial love between parents and children; Agape indicates unconditional, selfless love and it is also associated with the love for God or another divinity; Ludus relates to playfulness such as flirtation or casual affection; Pragma represents enduring love, often relating to maturity, developed over time, like in long-term relationships and at last Philautia, which signifies self-love and it could mean both self-respect or narcissism. This classification proves that even from the beginning, love has been perceived as not only a feeling, but a presence of its own in interhuman connections, nature and everyday life.

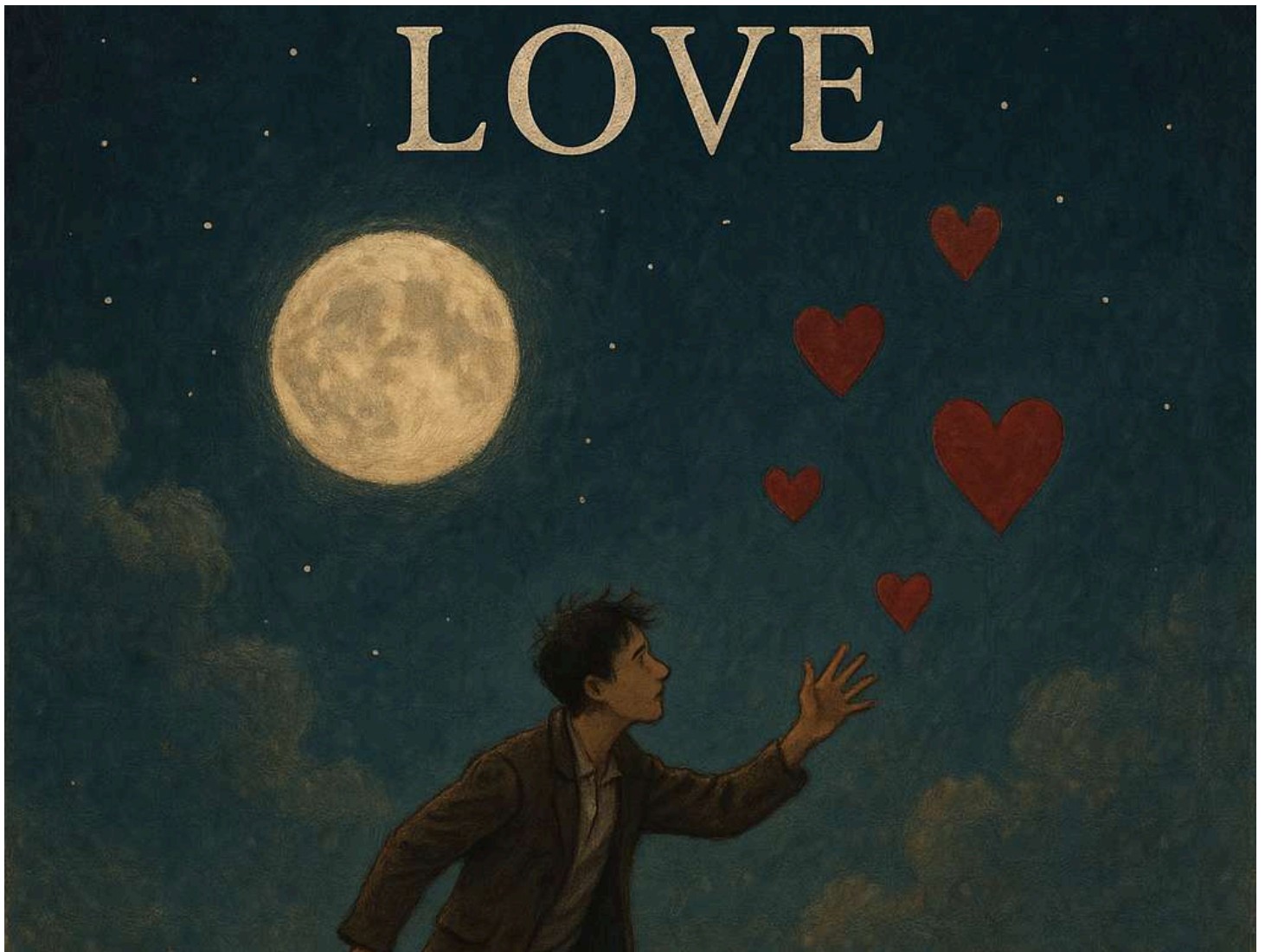
Secondly, love is something beyond romance or connection, it is internal and expressive. This emotion becomes a mirror of the soul, a means of reflection and discovering who we truly are. It's in these moments when love becomes a tool of expression: through art, music, nature and mere curiosity. We connect with ourselves by listening to our favorite artist, reading passionately and exposing our insecurities on paper. Love becomes a part of us, we sense it in our little pleasures, hobbies and lifts us in times of heartbreak. It shifts from being just a feeling of shivery or butterflies in one's stomach to becoming our whole personality. We love what reflects us, what shapes us into being human. Some fall in love with equations, with dots and lines to create figures and meaning while some try to find answers, either through philosophy or just by sitting with questions that don't always

need answers. Love, in this way, can be about connecting with ideas or things that make us feel like ourselves. Moreover, this feeling refers to unity, connections with nature and the world surrounding us. Our purpose is not to claim, but to grow, to accommodate with the setting and evolve along with the environment. Revolving our existence around nature comes with a sensation of inner-peace and relaxation. Consequently, through love we acknowledge both ourselves and our habitat, flourishing our minds and the lands-fauna and flora.

In conclusion, love could be part of every single aspect of our lives. It's in moments of reflections, in healthy habits and passions, in unforgettable

memories and most importantly in the people we admire. We love in part with the hope of completion. We all have a deep-rooted need to blossom just as flowers do. That is why with people who respect you, support you unconditionally and listen to your problems regardless the hour, you thrive and become the best versions of yourself. Life has never been more than just loving and being loved, or at least it should be. That is why I am grateful for my friends, those who stood up for me and held me tightly whenever I couldn't hold onto myself. For my parents who whipped my tears and sang softly in my ear. And I am grateful for who I am, for the things which represent me and help me grow serenely.

Where there is love there is life - Mahatma Gandhi



A vibrant, sunlit forest scene. In the foreground, a large, heart-shaped wall made of lush green moss and small plants is the central focus. Below it, a stream flows over moss-covered rocks, with sunlight filtering through the trees in the background, creating a warm, golden glow.

From the heart



Have you ever wondered why do we laugh? Why do we have a physiological, involuntary response to humour, contracting our muscles in the chest to squeeze out air and make weird sounds while our brain secretes endorphins?

At first, you might say, “well, you laugh at a funny joke or situation”, but it turns out that we rarely have that reaction in these contexts. Most of the time, we laugh when we talk to others, and in general, when we’re in group settings. One study found that people laugh seven times for every 10 minutes of conversation!

So, it’s safe to say that laughter serves as a social function. It is, in a sense, a form of communication, through which we tell others that we wish to connect with them. It started out when we were younger as playing with other kids, which made us feel joy and, therefore, made us laugh, and it evolved to a form of emotional expression in other social contexts. That’s why it’s also contagious! It demonstrates affection and affiliation.

Other theories suggest that we laugh as a means to relieve pent up “nervous energy”, (hence why we might find sexual or taboo jokes funny), or because of the incongruity between our expectations and reality (the best jokes are the ones you don’t see coming).

But you know what else oddly makes us laugh? Tickling. It’s so weird when you think about it—despite the fact that we don’t want to be tickled, we still laugh at that, as if we’d enjoy it. How does that make sense?

Well, scientists have studied the complex nature of tickling, and the parts of the brain that it activates. In short, it’s not just the brain areas responsible for pleasurable feelings that are being activated, but also the hypothalamus, which controls defensive behaviours and reacts to stress.

Research suggests that our reaction to being tickled, especially in sensitive spots, could be a defense mechanism, which makes us submit in the face of an “aggressor”, so as to avoid a tense situation and protect ourselves from harm. Now it makes sense why it’s called a “tickle fight”. I mean, I don’t know about you, but I surely feel attacked when I’m being tickled...

But the greatest thing about all this, is just how universal laughter is. Humour is subjective, but our response to it is understood throughout the whole world, regardless of cultural background. Not to mention all the health benefits, such as increasing your oxygen intake, relieving stress, or even boosting your immune system.

So there you have it. The answer to all your problems: laughing.

If you’re wondering how many times I’ve said the word “laugh” or its other variations throughout this whole essay, it’s 12.

Hopefully you learned something new today, and I hope you’ll get to laugh – 13 – as often as possible, because I believe it truly is a gift.



Similar but Essentially Different

Emilia Albu

In many countries all over the world, the United States is seen as the land of hopes and dreams. No matter how true that is, politics plays an important part in the image the country has. This essay will not discuss which political system is better but the differences and similarities between the American and Romanian political system.

The first noticeable difference is how the president of the country is chosen. In Romania, citizens directly vote for the president every four years. In contrast, America uses an indirect voting system. Every four years, Americans vote for members of The Electoral College, a group formed of experienced public persons who then vote for the president. Their vote is predictable therefore it might seem a transparent choice but it is not the case.

As the system works on a winner-takes-all basis, there have been instances throughout history when a candidate with fewer popular votes has become president hence, many consider the system faulty.

A similarity between the two is the undefined

boundaries between the values of "opposite" parties. The difference between the parties in Romania is close to unnoticeable. They don't have contrasting principles but they rephrase the same goals, despite lacking distinct principles. In America the parties are divided between Democrats and Republicans. The former is supportive of the poor, favouring consistent welfare programs and promoting minorities such as women, blacks and Hispanics, the latter relies on middle-class Americans, supports big business and is in favour of fewer economic regulations. Although it may look strictly divided, in recent years, their borderline has become vague and less focused on its values as politicians strive to attract a larger number of voters.

All things considered, the two systems are different through the methods used to choose the head of the country and similar through the close to inexistence of opposition and opposite parties. Every system has its flaws and benefits. The key to change is to vote, no matter the country and how good or bad its political system is.





True Love Lies in Details

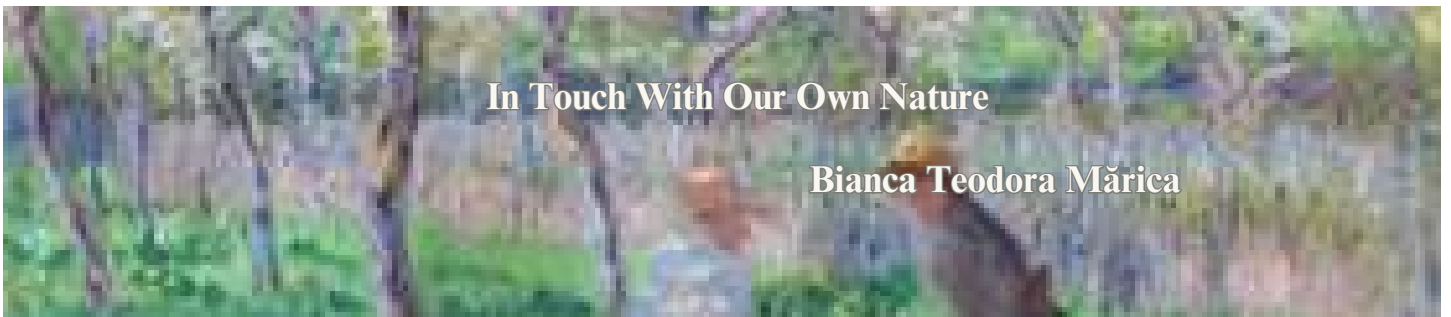
Pădurariu Maya

As we progress toward a world of materialism and superficial, grandiose gestures to show our love for others, I believe it is important to note that the most honest, raw and unfiltered love can be found not written in petals on a billboard in central New York, but in fingers gently grazing your scalp after a long, tiring day.

Along with the rise of both social media influencers and advertising and consumerism, especially young people are made to believe that true love can only be found in a bouquet of hundreds of red roses, in overpriced plushies and loud, preposterous and public declarations of eternal and undying commitment. The “if they wanted to, they would” trend on social media just a few months ago promoted not only going above and beyond financially to express feelings, but also rising

expectations to a certain level only more privileged people can achieve, giving people a sense of entitlement to being worshiped by their significant others, because “if they wanted to, they would”.

This idea has been so prevalent that sometimes people cannot see the forest through the trees. As this thought has been pacing in my head for quite a while, I thought to look deeper into the actions of people that love me, and the more attention I pay, the brighter the scenery is. From making sure the soup is just a little saltier than it should be, because that’s how I like it, to sending me photos of adorable stray animals seen while on a walk, because I always coo at their cuteness, these small gestures bring happiness and joy each day and I had never even paid attention to the profound thought behind the seemingly small gesture until recently.



In Touch With Our Own Nature

Bianca Teodora Mărica

In today’s world many are constantly in a rush. Every little action is hurried: our pace resembles running, our breathing-screaming. Where did peace disappear? Distant memories of childhood and joy cloud the mind for a little while, but as all good things do, they go away, far from our present they remain. So what could we do to invite stability in our lives? Is all hope lost or will a ray of sunshine show us the way to a new future,

one in which we could leave this Earth without regrets, knowing that we lived to the fullest? Ask yourself if you were to die tomorrow, would you be grateful for today, would you change anything?

Over time we lost touch with nature, shaping it to fit in our over-technologized world. The natural world is vital for every human being and disconnecting ourselves from it could lead to personal imbalances.

When was the last time you looked out the window, without searching something? From my point of view, many will get bored by just observing a fragment of the beauties that can be found on this planet in the first few minutes. Gazing at trees, grass and flowers seems more like an ancient activity, one our ancestors used to enjoy in their daily promenades back in the 19th century. It is obvious that it was a significant part of their reality, but how can we incorporate it in our daily routines? Can we, as people living in the digital era, learn how to appreciate the little things like the buzz of a bee flying to make honey, the beauty and grace found in a butterfly's wings or the pleasure of growing plants and watch them bloom?

We can reconnect with the flora and fauna around us any time we want, but one season in particular encourages us to take a step towards creating a bond with it: SPRING. It is a time of rebirth, growth and color, which can be projected onto people as well. When I think about springtime two colors pop in my mind: pink and green. Pink represents flowers blooming, the shade of a child's cheeks, the color of happiness. If a smile had a colour it would be pink, and so is this time of year-

a cloak of warmth and joy that wraps itself around the frosty atmosphere. When nature is mentioned I immediately think of green. A color that rules the Earth and has surrounded humans for centuries. It brings a whole new perspective on the universe thinking that the woods, the rivers have been here longer than we do. And why do we separate ourselves from them, isolating our soul in a world of concrete?

I believe that many have thought at least once of leaving the buzz of the city, aiming for a quiet life in the countryside. It is a fantasy waking up in a cottage and reconnecting with nature, observing its beauty everyday. A life in which I am surrounded by fluffy sheep, lively dogs and horses seems like a parallel universe. But thinking about it I realize that I could do that, I could live in a secluded area where the only noise heard is made by a rooster. I dream of picnics, rivers, long walks in the forest, taking care of plants and animals... "I can do it" I remind myself, yet that possibility is so distant, I can only imagine it, being so far away from my reach. The future is an unknown domain, but if I believe in fairy tales and stay close to my dreams I will be able to find inner peace and happiness in little things like the song of a bird or the color of a rose.





On March 28th, twelve members of our EPAS team had the incredible opportunity to spend a day at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. Our trip lasted five days, as we travelled by bus with stops in Hungary, Austria and Germany. Spending so much time together helped us bond, get to know each other better and transform from a group of acquaintances into a true team.

We were invited to take part in a special day dedicated to the European Union's "Zero Pollution" action plan. This initiative aims to reduce pollution in the air, water and soil to levels that are no longer harmful to human health and ecosystems by 2050.

Our day at the Parliament began with a Q&A session with the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Victor Negrescu. He addressed a variety of topics that were especially relevant to the young audience gathered in the Hemicycle. Afterward, we had the opportunity to interview Camille Siefriidt, a policy analyst, with whom we discussed the goals and challenges of the Zero Pollution initiative in more detail. We explored effective strategies for reducing pollution and highlighted the importance of collective action in achieving the plan's objectives.

Following lunch, we participated in a simulated parliamentary debate. Divided into four groups—pro, against, undecided and compromise-seeking—we engaged in a lively discussion that closely mirrored the real processes of the European Parliament. Later, we took part in a voting session and discussed the differences between disinformation and misinformation, learning about their impact and the dangers they pose. We ended the day with feedback from our teachers, a group photo session, and a shared sense of accomplishment. It was a truly memorable and inspiring experience.

Beyond our formal activities in Strasbourg, we also embraced our roles as tourists, visiting beautiful cities such as Budapest, Melk, Salzburg, and, of course, Strasbourg itself. These moments of exploration and relaxation gave us the chance to laugh, share stories, and deepen our friendships. We saw each other outside of our school environment and created memories that will stay with us for a long time.

Now that we have built stronger connections, we are confident that our upcoming activities as an EPAS team will be even more engaging, collaborative and rewarding.



On March 28th, twelve members of the EPAS team had the chance to spend a day at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. It all started on February 20th, 2025, when we found out that we had been invited to take part in the EUROSCOLA program for EPAS students. We were invited to

spend a day at the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Taking part in the EUROSCOLA program at the European Parliament in Strasbourg was one of the most inspiring experiences of my life. I had the

opportunity to represent my school and my country for a day, together with students from all over Europe. The topic of the day was the EU's "Zero Pollution" action plan, which made the experience even more meaningful.

The "Zero Pollution" action plan is an important initiative by the European Union to make the environment healthier for both people and the planet. Its main goal is to reduce air, water, and soil pollution to levels that are no longer harmful to human health and nature. It also focuses on improving waste management, reducing noise pollution, and creating cleaner cities. I believe this is a very necessary plan, especially for future generations.

During the day at the Parliament, we first listened to a presentation about the European Union and how the Parliament works. The day began with an engaging Q&A session led by the Vice President of the European Parliament, Victor Negrescu, who addressed various topics of interest to everyone in the Hemicycle. Our activities continued with an insightful interview with policy analyst Camille Siefriidt, where we delved deeper into the details of the Zero Pollution plan and discussed what lies ahead for this important initiative.

During the interview with Camille Siefriidt, I had the opportunity to ask a question that had been on my mind. My question was: ***"How do you see the effectiveness of strict pollution regulations in Europe when major polluters outside the EU, like China, the U.S., and India, don't always follow the same standards? Can European efforts truly make a global impact, or do we risk economic disadvantages without real environmental benefits?"***.

Mr Camille Siefriidt explained that the issue of pollution is a significant political challenge, much like the European Green Deal discussions. The European Commission has developed a strategy for

the 2024–2029 period to reduce pollution while maintaining European businesses' competitiveness.

This includes providing subsidies to ensure businesses aren't negatively impacted. He emphasized the urgency of action, noting the serious consequences of inaction, such as the extreme pollution in some Indian rivers. Pollution in Europe causes around 200,000 deaths each year and leads to health problems. Water pollution is also a critical issue, and Camille stressed the importance of improving water treatment and supporting industries in transitioning to cleaner solutions through financial help and supportive policies, not by forcing compliance.

We learned effective ways to reduce pollution and how collective action is key to achieving the goal. After lunch, we took part in a simulated European Parliament debate, divided into four groups: in favor, against, undecided, and compromise-oriented. We also voted and discussed the dangers of disinformation and misinformation. After feedback and some photos, the day concluded, and we headed home.

After the day in the Parliament, my colleagues and I had the chance to explore the beautiful city of Strasbourg. Walking through its charming streets, admiring the historical architecture, and relaxing by the river helped us truly take in everything we had experienced. I felt a deep sense of gratitude for the opportunity to be part of such an inspiring program.

On this adventure we also became closer as a team and formed real friendships. It wasn't just a trip—it was a meaningful experience that brought us together and created bonds we'll carry with us for a long time. It was the perfect ending to a day full of learning, teamwork, and unforgettable memories!



Reflections



The Ethics of Ambiguity

Jessica-Ana-Maria Secrieru

Many people set goals for the new year, and perhaps even more ask others about theirs. I have been asked the same question countless times, yet I have never found myself thinking about or setting actual goals. Birthdays are another moment of reflection, a celebration that excites most people in almost the same way the new year does. But again, I have never considered my birthday a happy occasion – rather, it has always been either sad or unimportant. Its significance, I found, existed only in the meaning others assigned to it. And yet, on one birthday – one particularly lonely and dreadful birthday – I did something I had never done before: set a goal. A simple one at first sight. To be more sincere with myself.

I have never considered myself the most honest person. I lie, as does everyone. But is it truly a lie in other people's eyes when the first person deceived is yourself? Deception, in general, is fascinating, but self-deception even more so. Mastering this skill must make you an interesting person, to say the least. Some might even argue it does not make you a good one. But is simplicity really what humans are guided by?

Good and evil – do they even exist? Or are they nothing more than the deluded guidelines we create for ourselves and call “rules”? Through this exploration, I seek not only to prove that deception is intrinsic to human nature, but to uncover how it shapes the very structures of morality, identity, and the values we claim to uphold – and endlessly argue over as if an absolute truth exists, when in reality, it does not. The idea that some actions are inherently righteous while others universally condemnable

is a convenient fiction, one that provides order to an otherwise chaotic world – especially considering how drastically moral standards have shifted throughout history, and continue to do so.

Society presents its justice system as the ultimate enforcer of good and evil, yet it rarely functions as such. It merely reflects the moral constructs of those in power. Justice differentiates between harm inconsistently: a woman killing her abusive husband is charged with murder, yet a rapist often faces leniency, while survivors endure a gruelling legal process and relentless social stigma. Taking a life is seen as the ultimate crime, but what of destroying one beyond repair? The legal system protects certain groups while punishing others, enforcing bias rather than morality. Homosexuality was once accepted – in Ancient Greece widely practiced – only to be later criminalized and gradually reclaimed. Women's rights shifted from nonexistent to radical to “self-evident”. Racial segregation was once law, then repealed, yet systematic discrimination endures. If justice were truly objective, these shifts would not occur. Yet they do, repeatedly. Morality is often framed as eternal and unchanging, yet history shows us it is neither. The very values people once clung to as natural, righteous and irrefutable have collapsed under scrutiny, only to be replaced by new ones – ones that, in time, will also evolve.

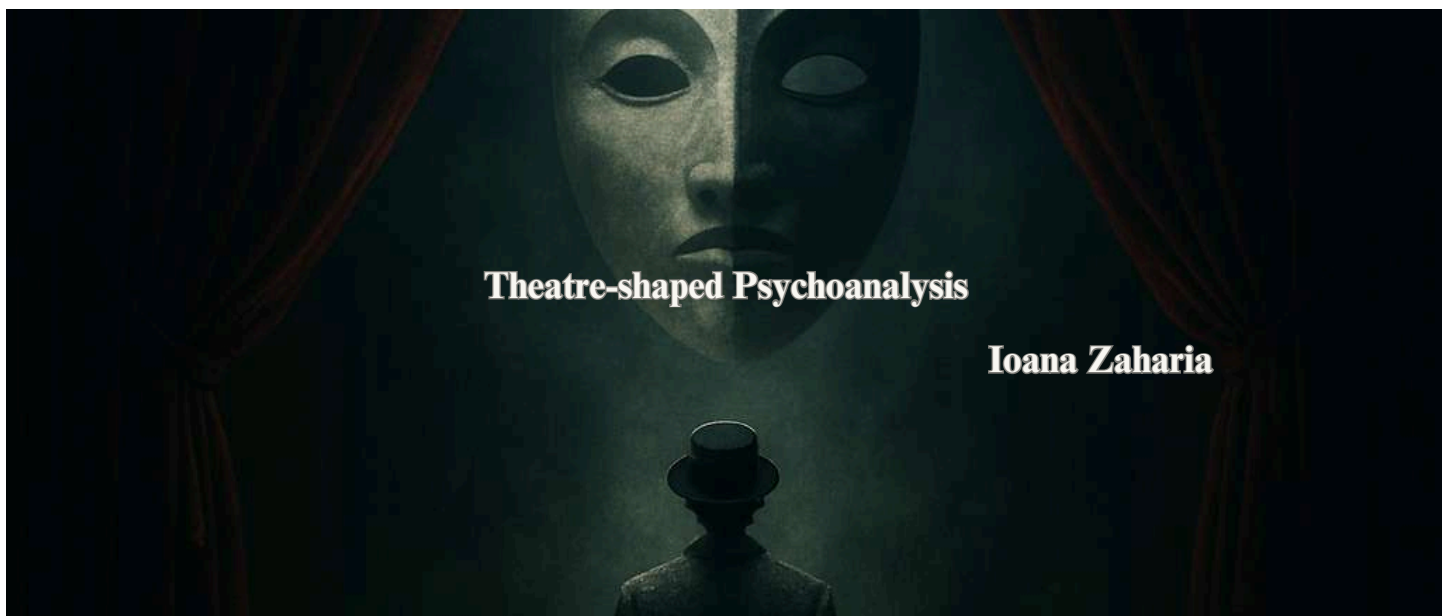
If we want to understand what a society truly believed, we do not look at its laws – we look at its literature. Laws dictate behaviour, but literature exposes the subconscious beliefs, biases, and values that people held, mirroring society itself. Greek

mythology reduces women to extremes: the passive muse – which exists solely to inspire men – or the dangerous seductress. Figures like Medea, Circe and the sirens are condemned not for wrongdoing, but for defying male authority. Consent, as we define it today, was irrelevant in a moral framework that did not acknowledge it. Religious and medieval literature reinforce these patterns. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice is a symbol of purity and divine guidance rather than a woman with agency. Meanwhile, Eve – one of the most enduring female figures in literature – is blamed for the fall of mankind. Her "crime" was curiosity, a trait that, when exhibited by a man, is usually seen as intelligence, not a moral failure. This moral scripting extends beyond gender to race. Colonial literature portrayed non-Europeans as "savages", framing colonization as a civilizing duty rather than exploitation, legitimizing oppression for generations.

Literature reveals a truth that law does not – morality is neither static nor pure but a tool of power, shaped by those who write history and enforce ideology.

In the end, I have no interest in explaining values, acceptance or tolerance to those unwilling to see beyond their own illusions. Instead, I seek to challenge the very foundation of what they call values. Oppression is too often justified through arbitrary moral claims – claims that shift with times yet are treated as absolute. Morality is not a universal truth but a construct, built and rebuilt by those with the power to shape it. This is why we must never judge or confine people, or their worth – no matter how gilded the box may seem – through these unstable, artificial lenses. Lenses that, perhaps, not even we, but others have crafted for us, shaping narratives in order to fit whichever "truth" best serves the times.





Theatre-shaped Psychoanalysis

Ioana Zaharia

“We know what we are, but not what we may be.” or “To be, or not to be, that is the question”. Shakespeare’s play “Hamlet” begs the question of whether living, being human is a blessing or a curse.

We are inclined to believe that we know everything there is to be known about human nature, when, in fact, we know nothing. But, of course, nobody with the slightest sense of self esteem would agree to that. So is it that the vast majority of us simply cannot admit to not being masters of everything? Or is it that agreeing to not even knowing ourselves would spark the concern of a journey that must be carried out, which we have no clue what will uncover, that frightens us? Realistically speaking, this is not half as drastic as it may seem, but, although few, there have been cases of people gone mad (to say the least), while searching for the deeper meaning of life. Thankfully, for those of us who do not wish to challenge the forces of the universe in a broad spiritual search, there is theatre and there is also psychoanalysis. Now, you might be confused about what one has to do with the other, but bear with me.

For centuries, thousands of years even (472 BC), theatre has not only been one of the most famous forms of entertainment, but, at the same time, a very complex one. With the first ever shows (‘The Persians’ - Aeschylus) being played in the Theatre of Dionysus (south of the Acropolis), in Athens, theatre has managed to shed light on the whites,

blacks and greys of life, through imagination. Notice, for instance, Henrik Ibsen’s plays, which portray realities in which disheartening dramas take over the lives of, otherwise, ‘normal’ people. Similarly, John Osborne himself once described his plays as ‘lessons in feeling’, each one of them actually being part of a larger search for a cure for the wounded soul of the writer. The act of performing, in itself, is the best example for all that theatre, being the toughest, yet the realest act of exploration, stands for: creating art out of crossing all personal boundaries and searching through the unknown, the only limit being the stage.

And just like actors have to dig deeper within themselves with every role they play, so did Freud when he made a studied effort to analyse himself as part of his developing what was later called psychoanalysis; he paid careful attention to his dreams, any perturbing thoughts and took notes on any baffling behaviour. For context, Freud also believed that we tend to mould ideas in our minds, to build make-believe worlds, more often than not unconsciously, which often replace the missing bits in memories we can hardly recall. Although many things have changed since, analysts today still share Freud's guiding theory that thoughts can exist in our minds which we are unconscious of. This basically sums up what psychoanalysis is: a way of understanding the

human mind and behaviour focusing on the acts of the unconscious mind (but, of course, Freud couldn't have developed such a complex system by himself, so many of the theories that created the basis for psychoanalysis drew from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's philosophies). On top of that, Freud considered dreams to be the 'royal road' to the unconscious and deciphering dreams became key to even more discoveries.

Coincidentally, one activity that made Freud get out of his lab and which was devoted to was theatre-going. Funnily enough, he turned into somewhat of a theatre critic as well. Nonetheless, Freud was the first to apply psychoanalysis to art, choosing the works of Leonardo DaVinci as his study object.

For instance, observing the painting of 'The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne', Freud deduced that the artist had depicted his two mothers, his biological mom and his stepmother. Later on, many artists, especially authors and playwrights were profoundly influenced by his works on psychoanalysis, one such example being Thomas Mann ('Death in Venice' and 'The magic mountain').

Therefore, theatre might just as well be a simpler form of psychoanalysis and –through mimicking a dream-like state, filled with uncertainty, but also bewilderments– one other way to reach the unconscious. I'm sure Freud would probably say I'm exaggerating, but the least theatre can do is make us wonder: is anything truly as it appears?





Artistic Zoom



Love, Loss and the Café Where Time Stands Still

Elisabeta Bungianu

Before the Coffee Gets Cold is a novel written by the Japanese writer Toshikazu Kawaguchi. It was originally written as a play before being adapted into a novel, in 2015, grasping the attention of many readers, such as myself.

The book follows the story of a café, called Café Funiculi Funicula, that allowed its customers to travel back in time, the only exception being that they have to return before the coffee gets cold, hence the name. The author divides the book into four parts, while also interrelating the costumer's stories, giving each protagonist a chance for an indepth storyline.

I truly loved reading this book. It has well-written

characters, as well as the plot, the author being able to pay attention even to the smallest details in the storyline. This attention to detail makes it a sentimental book worth reading. The narrative flows smoothly, allowing readers to easily follow the characters as they confront their deepest regrets and desires.

I would recommend this book, especially to fans of touching storylines, as the author knows how to explore the complexity of human emotions. This book was written in order to encourage its readers to cherish every moment. If you want a touching perspective on life, I would highly recommend this book.



A Tribute to Living Fully

Erika Postolache

Yoru Sumino's *I Want to Eat Your Pancreas* is a heart-touching novel that explores themes of life, death and human connection in a deep way. Told from the perspective of an introverted and emotionally detached high school boy, the story follows his unexpected bond with Sakura, a cheerful and popular girl who is secretly suffering from a terminal pancreatic illness.

This novel is more than just a tragic romance. It is a meditation of what it means to truly live. Sakura, despite her fate, gives incredible vibes and spontaneity, while the boy, initially indifferent to the world, learns to open up his heart through their time together. Their dynamic is both a warm connection and a painful struggle, filled with bittersweet moments that remain long after the final page.

The novel's strength lies in its ability to bring genuine emotions. One moment, it makes you smile at the duo's playful bond and next, it leaves you teary-eyed as reality catches up with them.

Yoru Sumino's writing is simple yet deeply emotional, capturing raw, unspoken feelings between the characters with a fine elegance. The title itself, though unusual, carries a deep cultural and metaphoric meaning, symbolizing a desire to connect with and understand another person completely.

For those who enjoy deeply emotional writings, I wholeheartedly recommend *I Want to Eat Your Pancreas*. Reading this book, one cannot help feeling and being aware of the importance of treasuring each moment and the people who make life meaningful.



Trapped Beneath Glass: A Reflection on *The Bell Jar*

Sara Vasilache

The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath is a semi-autobiographical novel that delves into the life of Esther Greenwood, a young woman grappling with her mental health as she is trying to accomplish herself professionally. This piece develops on themes relating to depression, identity and the struggles of the 1950's women as well as the completely unattainable conventions surrounding them.

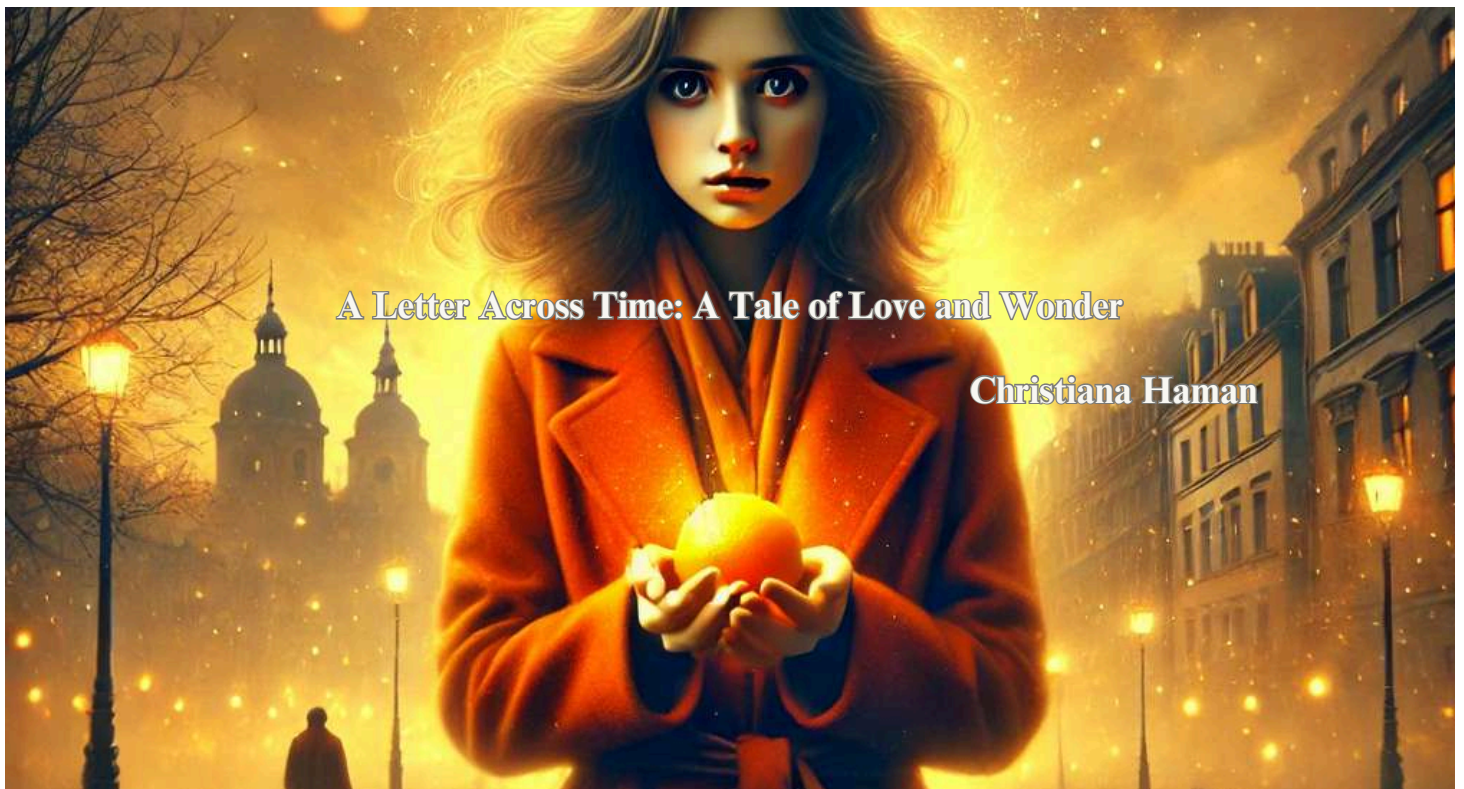
Esther, an ambitious, talented college student spends a month in New York as a guest editor for *Ladies' Day* magazine, after earning an internship there. She soon starts to feel disoriented and overwhelmed by the superficial world she encounters. Plath tactfully depicts her descent into madness and isolation, and unconventional, melancholic behavior using the metaphor of the bell jar to illustrate the protagonist's sense of entrapment, determined by the overwhelming pressure to conform to the archetype of the domestic, and submissive ideal woman.

The introspective dimension of the writing, determined by the first-person narration, confers a

chillingly concise and cynical tone. This enhances the staggeringly raw portrayal of the character's hardships that make the novel so thought-provoking. Because the narrative is both compelling and heartbreaking, the reader is left wanting to know more about Esther's grueling condition in order to help her overcome it. Plath's vivid imagery only exacerbates this feeling, creating a haunting atmosphere that is meant to linger, and almost make the reader uncomfortable through its authenticity and candidness.

This book tells the story of a young woman who aspires to be everything, but overwhelmed by the infinite number of possibilities, symbolized by figs, remains paralyzed with uncertainty as the fruits rot, and fall to the ground.

I would thoroughly recommend *The Bell Jar* to anyone, as it combines a riveting plot, extraordinarily compelling writing and extremely well-built characters, to make up what is an exceptional piece of literature that, in my opinion has earned its title as a classic of feminist literature, and that you should therefore, not miss out on.



A Letter Across Time: A Tale of Love and Wonder

Christiana Haman

The Orange Girl by Jostein Gaarder is a philosophical fiction novel that embraces themes of love, family, death, destiny and, the most important, the meaning of life. Known for his intrigant storytelling, Gaarder invites readers to meditate deeper on every sign and experience that appears in their lives, searching for hidden meaning that might change their perception about existence.

The novel follows the story of a 15-year-old boy, who finds a letter left by his father, Jan Olav, before his death. Through this letter, Jan reveals the story of a mysterious and unexpected encounter with a pretty woman carrying a bag of oranges, whose identity is gradually revealed. Jan is deeply fascinated by her, but, unfortunately, she disappears before he can get her name, leaving him with a sense of sadness and curiosity. He begins looking for her, being haunted for months by the memory of their encounter. His search becomes a powerful exploration of love and fate, leading to Jan Olav and The Orange Girl meeting again and slowly forming a deep connection. As the story unfolds, Georg discovers more about his father's past, finally uncovering the importance of hearing the story after so many years.

Gaarder's characters are relatable and well-developed, each one resonating with readers through their emotional and complex journeys. Being narrated by a teenage boy, the book is written in simple language, allowing people to connect easily with the protagonist's thoughts and emotions, especially younger readers. While reading this book I cannot help feeling both excited and deeply connected with Jan Olav's love story but also a sense of sadness because he never got to share these experiences directly with his son, leaving Georg to meditate in his father's thoughts and advice from the letter written years ago. If I were to find fault with the book, I would replace some parts related to Jan Olav's passion for the Hubble space Telescope, which, in my opinion feel unnecessary.

The Orange Girl is a must-read for anyone who likes philosophical fiction, especially for those who tend to reflect on the deeper meanings of life, destiny and love. This book is definitely a page-turner due to its captivating tale, keeping the readers engaged in the narrator's profound and complex love journey.



When Make-Believe Becomes Reality

Oana Andone

Ben Rice's *Pobby and Dingan* is a compelling novella that explores themes of imagination and the fragile nature of belief. Set in the remote Australian outback, the story follows Ashmol Williamson, a young boy whose sister, Kellyanne, has two imaginary friends, Pobby and Dingan.

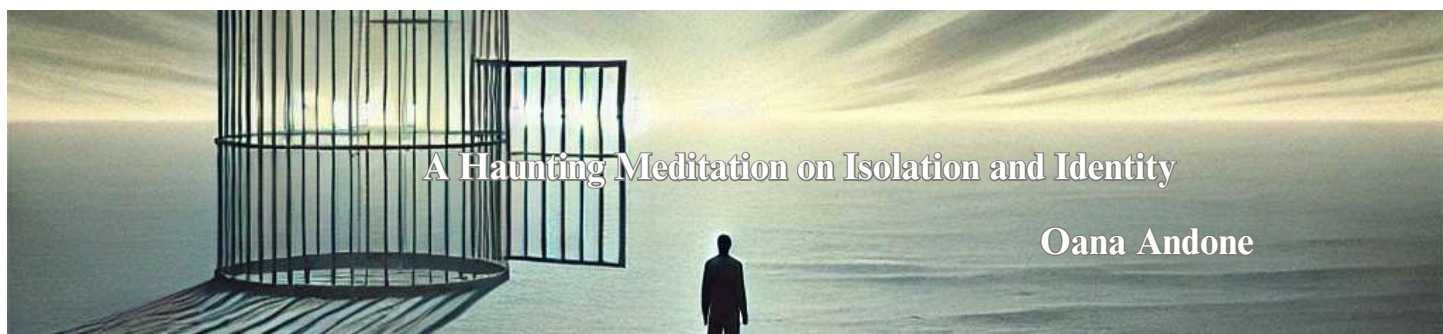
While Ashmol initially dismisses them as childish, everything changes when Kellyanne falls ill after believing that her imaginary friends have been lost. In a desperate attempt to help her recover, Ashmol embarks on a journey to "find" them which forces him to confront the power of belief and the depth of his sister's emotional world and which leads to his own unexpected emotional transformation.

One of the central themes of the novel is the power of belief. While at first, imaginary friends seem trivial, their absence has real and devastating effects on Kellyanne's health. The novel suggests that belief, whether in childhood fantasies, or in each other, is what holds people together. When Ashmol

begins to embrace his sister's world, he realizes that imagination can have as much weight as reality, especially when it comes to love and connection.

The novel also explores loss and grief. The disappearance of the two imaginary friends serves as a metaphor for losing innocence and coping with the inevitability of change. The community's reaction to Ashmol's search reflects the tension between skepticism and empathy- while some mock him, others recognize the depth of Kellyanne's pain and join in his mission.

Ultimately, *Pobby and Dingan* is a moving exploration of how people deal with sorrow, how imagination can bridge gaps between individuals, and how belief can bring healing and understanding. Rice's writing is simple yet powerful, making this a deeply touching and thought-provoking read.



A Haunting Meditation on Isolation and Identity

Oana Andone

Jacqueline Harpman's *I Who Have Never Known Men* is a haunting, philosophical novel that explores the limits of human existence, identity, and freedom. Told through the perspective of an unnamed narrator, known as Child by the other characters, the story follows a young girl who has spent her entire life imprisoned underground with 39 other women, watched over by faceless male guards. One day an unexpected event allows them to escape, but the outside world offers no answers, only a desolate landscape devoid of life.

The novel is not a traditional dystopian thriller but rather a profound existential reflection. The protagonist has never experienced human connection beyond the companionship of the other women, not having being allowed to touch one another. Therefore she navigates an empty world without history, culture, or memory, without any ideas about human interaction, let alone intimacy. As she searches for meaning, Harpman evokes themes of loneliness, survival, and self-discovery.

The novel's straightforward prose mirrors the bleakness of its setting, making the reader feel as lost and unmoored as the narrator herself. The absence of clear explanations for such important questions as "Who were the guards?", "Why were they imprisoned?" and "What happened to the world?" adds to the novel's eerie, dreamlike quality. This lack of resolution might frustrate some readers, but it also enhances the novel's philosophical depth.

At its core, *I Who Have Never Known Men* is a chilling exploration of what it means to be human in the absence of societal constructs. It is a novel that lingers in the mind long after the final page, offering no easy answers but prompting deep introspection. For readers who appreciate quiet, thought-provoking literature, this book is a profoundly unsettling yet beautiful experience.



I first came across *All Quiet on the Western Front* when my History teacher recommended it as a must-read for understanding the realities of World War I. Written in 1928 by Erich Maria Remarque, this novel provides a hauntingly realistic portrayal of war through the eyes of a young German soldier.

The novel follows Paul Bäumer, a German soldier who enlists with his classmates, believing in the patriotic ideals taught to them in school. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm quickly fades as they experience the brutal horrors of trench warfare. The story explores themes of lost youth, comradeship and the emotional numbness caused by war.

Furthermore, Remarque's writing style is both unique and deeply moving, portraying the harsh realities of battle with striking detail. The characters, especially Paul and his friends, feel realistic and

convincing, making their suffering all the more impactful.

Additionally, what I find extraordinary about this novel is its 2022 film adaptation which received critical acclaim. The movie captures the novel's depressing atmosphere and effectively conveys the senseless destruction of war. However, some changes were made to the original storyline, which may affect how the audience perceives the message.

All in all, I would thoroughly recommend this book to anyone interested in history and war literature. It is a deeply emotional and thought-provoking novel that sheds light on the true cost of war, making it a must-read for those seeking a powerful depiction of World War I.



Two characters that I think are worth comparing are Cruella, from the movie with the same name and Maleficent, from the 2014 Disney production. The two are not actually rotten to the core, which is revealed at the end of both movies, but they have been hurt in the past and being bad is their way of protecting themselves.

The two characters are both different and alike. Disney presented Cruella as a little genius girl who had poliosis, defined as the decrease or absence of melanin in some or all hairy areas. By being the second tallest Disney villain and an evil fairy, Maleficent amazes the audience with her astonishing wings and huge horns. Although they come from different eras, they share some common features: red lips, pointy nose, sharp jawline, tall cheeks and imposing posture. Maleficent is restricted by her natural habitat to wear dark clothes but she is never underdressed.

Cruella on the other hand, being a graphical artist has always fresh and bold designed outfits.

They both had a personality glow up throughout the movies. Estella, a kid with dissociative identity disorder, transformed into a gifted fashion designer. With her caring nature she fostered a stray dog and a long life friendship with two of her classmates. She decided to embrace her weirdness after having repressed her true self for years and manages to conquer the fashion industry. Because of a love disappointment, Maleficent isolated herself from humans. Her wings and horns are a trademark of her outgoing personality and stubborn character. Her faith in humanity is restored and becomes Aurora's godmother and her closest friend.

I feel empowered by Cruella's courage to embrace her true self but I appreciate both of them as an essential part of the stories we grew up with.



An illustration at the top of the page shows a grey bird with its wings spread, flying out of a wire cage. The cage is made of vertical bars and has a small perch inside. The background is a light, textured yellow.

Rebellion and Control: A Battle for the Human Spirit

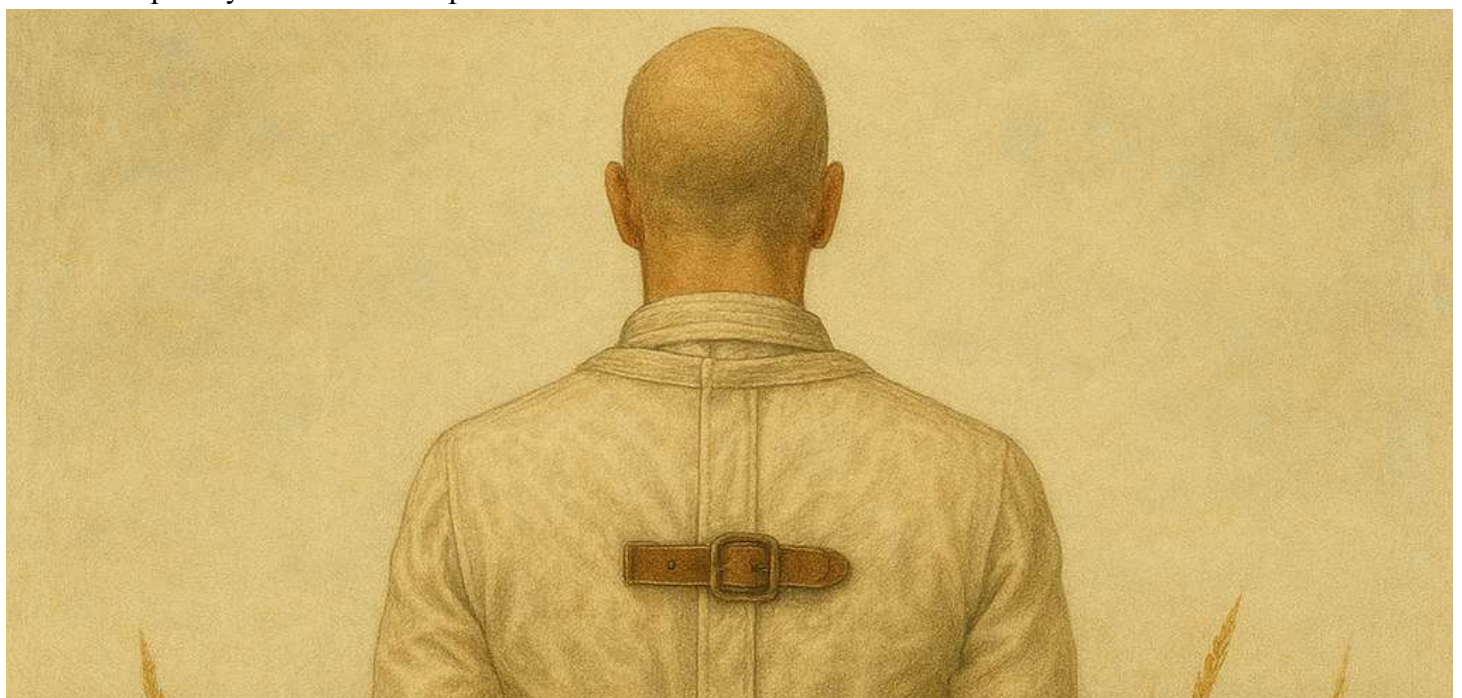
Oana Morariu

While I was searching through my grandmother's attic I came across a box filled with books. Out of curiosity I started to look into it and I found one that stood out. The title of this specific book was "One flew over the cuckoo's nest" and I decided to take it. With that in mind, I knew this was going to be my next read.

Published in 1962, *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* written by Ken Kesey is told from the first-person point of view of Bromden, a long-term patient at an Oregon psychiatric hospital. Bromden is considered a Chronic or a patient without any hopes to recover. On the other hand, the patients who have high chances of recovery are named Acutes. He and the rest of the men here are terrified of Nurse Ratched, who makes the rules in the hospital. Yet, this is all going to change with the arrival of McMurphy. With the help of his charm and personality, all the Acutes and especially Bromden quickly fall under his spell.

One of the best things about this book is the writing style. The author manages to combine successfully themes and symbols like sanity, friendship or fear to create a complex story and essential life lessons. For example, the development of the relation between Bromden and McMurphy, which lead to Bromden starting a new life is, indeed, a metaphor that suggests how important it is to find "a way out" and how people can significantly change you. Moreover, this writing-piece gives an outlook of psychology and how exactly it works. You do not need to know a lot about mental health disorders to comprehend the way people that suffer from these actually feel and how the influence of this kind of problems can alter their lives.

In conclusion, *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* is well worth reading and I advise anyone who is interested in psychology to give it a shot. I can assure this book will leave you with a stronger understanding of how the human brain works. Thus, Ken Kesey's literary creation will remain a lifelong call of mental health awareness.





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