

Simile

Student Magazine of Literary English



Interview: John Irving in Ghent

NEW INSIDE! The best creative writing: “Mystery at the Museum”, “A Black Man’s Raging Rant”, “Ribeiera, descending”, “The Wanderer” & other new poetry, prose and drama — Exclusive interview with author John Irving — A peek behind the scenes of *The Importance Of Being Earnest* — Erasmus: the morning after — Q&A with UGent professors Vander Motten and De Vos — Scottish punk band *Oi Polloi* in Ghent — Freek Braeckman and Lisbeth Imbo talk about their university years

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A word from the editors...

Welcome to the first edition of ***Simile***, a brand new English magazine put together by a team of very enthusiastic students based in Ghent, Belgium. Why did we decide to publish a magazine in English, you might ask, and why on earth is it called ***Simile***? First and foremost we all like to write, and we wanted a forum to publish our creative writing. Second, we felt it would be a great opportunity to use our English for something other than writing essays for once.



And why ***Simile***?

1. The Engelse Letterkunde I handbook tells us that “‘Simile’ is ‘an explicit comparison, indicated by words such as ‘as’ or ‘like’”. We would tell you that the handbook is wrong, and that actually ‘Simile’ is about comparing and bringing together Belgian and English-speaking literature and culture.
2. We’re a literary magazine, so of course we wanted an English literary title.
3. It’s an acronym (sort of) for Student Magazine of Literary English. Because that’s what we are!

This edition is packed with the best new writing from young Ghent writers; interviews with Freek Braeckman and Lisbeth Imbo, talking about literature rather than the news, for a change; features on student life abroad (be sure to read ‘The Morning After’ reflecting on the Erasmus experience) and at home, including an up-close-and-personal peek behind the scenes with two stars of the recent student production of ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’. And not forgetting our central feature, an exclusive interview with John Irving, one of America’s great modern authors, although our feature will reveal why he would not approve of that label.

Enjoy!

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Finding the plot: John Irving in Ghent!

BY DORINE TEMMERMAN AND MARGOT GUILLEMIN



John Irving is one of today's most successful American authors, known for novels such as *"The World According to Garp"*, *"A Prayer for Owen Meany"* and *"The Cider House Rules"*, which was also adapted for screen and received two Oscar nominations. Irving is a prolific writer and has written thirteen novels so far, which have been received well by critics all over the world and translated into a number of languages. His latest novel, *"Last Night in Twisted River"*, came out in October last year, and on March 16, Irving came to Ghent to promote the book in the Vooruit, where he was interviewed by VRT journalist Greet Op de Beeck.

As students of English Literature, we knew it would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience to interview Irving for *Simile* and so Margot contacted Irving's literary agent. Her boldness paid off and Irving's literary agent managed to squeeze us into an already packed schedule.

And so on the sunny morning of March 16, the two of us, together with Stephan our photographer, make our way to the NH Hotel at the Hoogpoort for an interview with the author himself. Irving's agent is already waiting for us in the lobby of the hotel when we arrive and we strike up a chat to calm our nerves. After a moment's wait, we enter the spacious but snug library of the hotel and shake hands with John Irving, while the previous TV-crew leaves the room.

As he greets us kindly, John Irving comes across as a regular, down-to-earth man in a tracksuit and sneakers; perhaps a reflection of his passion for sports and his past career as a boxer. He seems used to the VIP treatment in the hotel and the attention he is getting from journalists, almost oblivious of our photographer who constantly points the lens of his camera at him. What few nerves we have disappear entirely when we are invited to sit back on the comfy sofa..

We start talking, and Irving opens up immediately as we ask him about the early days of his career. The process of writing a book has not changed for him at all. From the very beginning, he had people around him - family, children, friends and other writers - to whom he read aloud, so that by the time his books were actually published, he had already had the experience of reading them out to this select audience. Even after publication, his first four books had only a small audience and his novels were neither translated nor published outside the U.S. He still considers himself lucky to have started off as a writer in this semi-private environment as there was no expectation or pressure to rise above it. However, unlike so many other writers, he did gradually acquire a bigger audience. This was not a sudden rise to fame; by the time he had the opportunity to have his books published in forty languages, he had already been writing for about twelve years and was in his late thirties. Irving modestly tells us that he never expected his success to grow any further, but we, of course, know better...

As literature groupies, we all have our favourite authors or poets to look up to, cramming our bookshelves with their works and perhaps hoping to become such a writer ourselves. When we ask Irving who influenced him, we are not surprised that he drops the name of Dickens. Irving himself has been called a novelist ‘of Dickensian tradition’ and anyone who has read (or studied) Dickens will know exactly what that entails: detailed descriptions of scene, characters with real psychological depth, and an abundance of visual imagery are what characterize Irving’s novels too, not in the least his latest work, *“Last Night in Twisted River”*.

JOHN IRVING is one of the famous American novelists of our time. He was born in Exeter, New Hampshire in 1942. He attended the University of Pittsburgh and the University of New Hampshire and received an MFA at the University of Iowa in 1967. Irving is the best-selling author of novels such as ‘The World According To Garp’, ‘A Prayer for Owen Meany’ and ‘The Cider House Rules’ which was also adapted for screen. Irving lives with his family in his houses in Vermont and Toronto.

But was Dickens the only source of inspiration for Irving? He smiles nostalgically as he tells us more about the authors he enjoyed reading as a kid – and still enjoys reading and re-reading. *“The writers who have meant the most to me, the ones I read as a teenager and that made me want to be a writer in the first place, were already dead for a hundred years”*, Irving reveals. They were the great novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who are now so familiar to most university students: Dickens, Hardy, Melville, Hawthorne, and even George Eliot; these were the most influential to Irving. With a hint of amusement he adds: *“Those writers were already considered old-fashioned before I wrote my first book and my models for literature were thus never fashionable, they were never the critically esteemed writers of the moment”*. When he was writing his first novel, Irving thus realized that he was modeling his work on a kind of novel that was no longer written for the most part and consequently, that he would never be considered ‘modern’ or ‘fashionable’ by the 21st century literary establishment.

However, even before he read the nineteenth century greats – and this makes sense when you consider the vibrant characterization in his novels – Irving’s first love as a kid was theatre. His mother worked in a theatre and so he practically grew up backstage, he tells us. Much like his later passion for those ‘old-fashioned’ 19th-century authors, Irving was most impassioned by the Greek authors, by Shakespeare; and not at all by contemporary theatre which was the reason why he decided not become a playwright, or even an actor as he was in his college years.

Something in Irving’s tone of voice suggests that he does not mind the association with ‘old-fashioned’ authors such as Dickens, as this particular writing style has been his conscious choice. The enduring popularity of his novels seemingly proves him right here. From the very start, Irving’s emphasis has been on plot, and yet, since his childhood he was aware that narrative story telling was becoming less fashionable. Nowadays, in his opinion, elements we think of as vital for a novel, such as plot, narrative development and visual detail, are not critically popular anymore and Irving regrets this: *“I hear everywhere from other writers, not just critics, that plot is a kind of dinosaur, it is a dead animal.”*

“Plot is a kind of dinosaur, it is a dead animal.”

Plot clearly drives the writing process for Irving. In the case of *'Last Night in Twisted River'*, he tells us that the novel had been on his mind for 20 years, but he was missing a key character and also missing the last sentence. His approach means he always begins a book with the last sentence. *"It just comes out that way. I think of endings first. I do not imagine there is a novel I want to write, until I know what the end of a story is. And I need to know more than what happens; I need to know how it sounds, what the tone of voice of that last sentence is."* After he has that last sentence he starts making *"a kind of road-map of the story"* and goes backwards to where he thinks it should begin. Sometimes this process of mapping takes 6 to 7 months, sometimes a year or more, but he doesn't write a word of the novel until he *"gets"* that first sentence.

***"I don't feel writing
is a competition."***

It seems that *Last Night in Twisted River*, is the result of constant revising, a method that can be summarized in one of John Irving's most famous quotes, which he also repeated to us: *"The building of the architecture of a novel-- the craft of it--is something I never tire of"*. As might be imagined from this explanation of his writing process, *Last Night in Twisted River* is a novel with, to stick with the construction analogy, one serious blue print. The story consists of a framework within a framework, giving the attentive reader a good mental work-out. Irving says in fact he had known almost everything about this story: the cook, his son, the fact that the son would be a writer and the fact that the book would be written by the son. He knew all of this for 20 years but he felt he was missing something, not only the last sentence but also the character, Ketchum, who holds the plot together. He had the character in mind, but the idea was rather vague and he felt he had to know more about him and his relationship with the cook and his son, as Ketchum would be such an important character for the whole plot.

In contrast to Irving's beloved nineteenth century novelists, the "zenith" of American literature - as he calls him - in his university years was Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway was the author they were all supposed to aspire to be, yet Irving was anything but a fan of this *"ex-journalist who became a novelist and continued to write like a journalist"* using sentences short enough for any advertisement. For Irving, Hemingway is overrated and yet is celebrated as a great American author and inserted into the literary canon. What we consider as 'high literature', which is on our reading lists, is not necessarily good literature for everyone, and especially not for students of literature. *"Anyone who is at all sophisticated as a reader will also find books that he/she finds awful. If there are writers you love and read you may find others you don't like. We all make these distinctions, it's natural, it's only when an alleged authority tells us what the canon is, then it's offensive."*

Irving feels that a canon says far more about the academy than it does about the books themselves. He is of a similar opinion when it comes to the Nobel prize, often undervalued in the States, and, for him, nothing more than *"a prize handed out by a very small group of men in Sweden. It is the Swedish prize for world literature"*. The label of 'great American author' is something he rejects, also with a smile. *"The very idea of the great American novel is a kind of comparative, a kind of a competition, and I don't feel writing is a competition"*.

Yet this is the central irony of Irving, because for many, a great American author is exactly what he is. His books too form the canon for which he has so little respect. And so, to conclude, we ask him the one question we have been dying to ask ever since he mentioned his dislike of having to read Hemingway because it was on his university reading list. His novels, like Hemingway's, are by now a staple of high school reading lists in the U.S. and we want to know how he feels about that. Irving has mixed feelings here. *"It matters a great deal to me that young people are reading me in high school, in university and I feel very lucky as a writer that I have always had a very young audience"*.

Irving continues to have a young audience nowadays and he finds it gratifying to still have readers in high school and university now that he is 68. On the other hand, Irving does realize that high school reading lists fall into the category of 'required reading', which implies an obligation of some sort. He recalls: *"I remember as a kid that being told 'you have to read this' and it was great if you liked it, if because of a book you were required to read you found something you loved, but what about those books that just bored you to death and you never wanted to read them to begin with. It makes me uncomfortable to think that there are these young people out there who have been forced to read me and who do not like it – because I still believe that reading is a pleasure"*. Irving remarks that a lot of people do not read because perhaps they had an awful experience with these reading lists; having to read books that killed them. But then he puts things in perspective: we have all had to read a book we do not like.

Being students of English literature ourselves at Ghent University, we too are confronted with reading lists. Our opinion? Having read authors ranging from Dickens to D.H. Lawrence, Joyce and Woolf; we cannot help but agree with Irving that at some point in our academic career we have been confronted with a book or a play we did not enjoy - *c'est la vie*. You only discover what you like once you dig into a wide variety of genres and periods of English literature and what university does is to offer students a selection of works but not force us to like either this or that novel. After all, we have to keep the university's slogan "Durf Denken" ("Dare to Think") in mind and form our own opinion on 'the canon' too.

LAST NIGHT IN TWISTED RIVER (Random House, 2009) In his latest book, Irving tells the story of a cook and his son Danny, who is twelve when the novel begins. Danny wakes up in the middle of the night and goes to check out a strange sound. At first he is convinced that he can see his father in bed with a bear on top of him; Danny reacts by slamming a frying pan into the animal's head. A few second later, he realizes that his father is actually in bed with the babysitter Jane. Just hours later, Danny and his father leave town to get away from Jane's angry partner, a psychopathic cop. From that moment on, the fates of father and son are sealed. The suspenseful narrative traces them as they wind their way through different towns and different names until you finally witness the confrontation with the cop, and the ending you feared and expected most from the start.

Creative Writing

Out of sight.

My eyes reflect you as my future past
 Shaping reality the way they do
 Misleading all I find beauty and true
 You noticed, ran off, another chance passed

Late at night, asleep, I dream of your glance
 But with eyelids shut, I don't scare you off
 My mirrors covered, I'm blind as my love
 As we dive into this musing romance

We wade further and further from this life
 In which nightingale and scarecrow don't match
 To a place where I can exploit my patch
 And not entice an entire world of strife

Pity these things aren't for my eyes to see
 If only you'd open the blinds for me

Sean Wille



Nevermore... Anymore

You wake up with fall, and fall into summer.
 Winter in between the springs we have seen.
 The years of the past are just a number.
 We gazed upon roads, and junctions in between.

How many times again you'll say once more?
 I want to spike your love upon my door.
 Your pamphlets of affection I read before...
 Those will vanish from my memory nevermore.

Yesterday's fog, seemed tomorrow's future.
 Today is the day, rain will stagnate in vain.
 Feel like a surgeon, seeking his suture.
 Love quite often, seems so hard to attain.

How many times again I'll ask once more?
 For you to spike my love upon your door.
 Your leaflets of love, I've already seen before...
 Those won't appear inside my memory anymore.

Geoffrey Colson

Epiphany

Frustration - Nothing I can do.
 Each breath is a trigger,
 a reminder of before.
 Reminiscing - me and you.

Us- just a thing of the past.
 A faint memory, and old picture.
 I should have known better.
 Nothing exists to last.

I liked to fool myself.
 Fault - it's yours
 Truth - all I gave
 Fighting pointless wars

Time passes by
 Denial - my friend
 You - slipping away
 Feeling alone in the end

Finally - some sense
 kicking its way through.
 I learned the hard way
 how much I care for you

Magali Seghers

Tears

Tears taste like the weight on your chest
 when you can't breathe
 as they shimmer and shine, they cut
 in your tongue as salt in a wound
 Tears taste like a sea-wind, when you're standing alone,
 all alone, on a cliff
 Tears are like droplets of liquid sorrow,
 And they sear the throat, as ice-cold iron would
 when your skin is still bed-warm
 Tears taste like the dying light in your eyes
 But I shall bear it,
 and kiss your tears away

Charlien Geerts

Bittersweet

Both burdened by heavy issues,
 we find ourselves in need of tissues
 Dragging ourselves outside
 our moral as low as the tide
 Whose loss is worse, I can not tell
 Still we both feel like hell
 Drowning in our sorrow
 Feeling as if there's no tomorrow
 Still it's not all bad
 When they were in our lives
 We were always glad
 Our ladies may even be better off
 And are perhaps now having a laugh
 Yes all this is bittersweet
 And someday we'll get back on our feet

Yannick Mua

If you fail to see

If you are so unfortunate
 that the light has left your eyes
 And you cannot see what comes after day
 I will describe it to you in a different way
 The colours turning after a setting sun
 is like a sudden rush of cold in November
 like winter has come too early
 The stars alight and never-ending
 are like a sea of people you hear talking
 suddenly falling silent
 And the dark that lasts & lasts
 smells like a heavily raging storm
 without the soft scent of the rain

Kate Luysterborg

I Cut The Wire

*"I'm sorry, my love
I love you, my true
You know I care", you said
" I care only for you".*

*"I will protect you, my sweet
And keep you safe" you grin
"I'll be here forever,
so let forever begin".*

Today, I'm past clichés.
I'm no longer your clown.
Today, I cut the wire
that's been keeping me down.

I've heard all your stories.
Each and every lie.
First I believed you,
but now it's you I defy.

You took my soul,
just left a shell.
I'm past my grieving
No longer shall I dwell

*"I'm sorry, my love,
I love you, my true"*
I've heard it all, but now,
you & me, we're through.

Time has past,
and days have gone by.
I cut the wire. Today,
I know what it is to fly.

This is the country:
 lush with little alleyways and children
 who play by the flowerpots in front of an open window,
 above those miscreants who only with a stick
 subdue the stairs under their lonely sun.
 Mother, don't worry:
 this land brought me here.
 No one else would venture this way,
 unless, unless there was no other choice.

Just recently, night had descended
 and I could almost find my way home.
 I was walking past the ocean dark to the left,
 for centuries terrible and unknown,
 before the Mediterranean world
 scattered cinnamon and cloves into my rice.
 Mother, tell my friends:
 I need their mouths to chew my food,
 their voices to read this poem.

Thankfully I have a good memory
 for remembrances and long-winded gifts.
 I know about a hundred fishermen
 who hang my old photographs on fishing lures
 and dip them in the burning water,
 eternal shipwrecked ones by the quay.
 I have beaten life into a strange form:
 I am not as happy as I should be,
 I received everything I have asked for.

I know no other freedom but the one
 of the uttermost borders at my right hand,
 the Galician swords,
 red like the peppers in the trees.
 Mother, now I am finally your son:
 somebody who could be a bird
 that hangs broken in the branches
 and who, over snowy mountaintops,
 you will carry into Africa.



Ribeira, Descending

It has become a tradition:
 purple bougainvillea's in the morning
 the windowpane blossoming with the regulated fantasy
 of a grandfather
 who never stood high upon his balcony
 barefooted
 patiently waiting for time, anarchistically
 battling in the grass.

If his archive is endless,
 without any memories,
 then every empty shelf
 rests on a tightly wound wire
 over crickets chirping.

This is history as I made it up myself:
 the way downwards,
 where bleached dogs roam the prados
 rattled with children
 and the lukewarm scent
 of raw olives on their hides.

Until high noon, I am wrapped up in fog
 and view life descendingly:
 from the wide-open windows in Porto,
 to the sun exploding between the fisherman's ships
 on the river,
 the Douro by the quay
 to the ocean glowing miles from the bay.

The formless shadows of the Cais da Ribeira
 are the view of my forgotten verses.
 They are some reckless friends,
 the words of my lover,
 her name.

There is a generation left in Portugal.
 A flowing line in white earth,
 not much longer than death,
 smaller than an index card
 signless
 but for one random word.

With a view of half moon highway street,
 the pigeons pick the rooftops bald.
 With a view of Lisbon glistening
 like a drop of water on Tagus flow.
 Floating on an intrinsic repeated motion.
 She prefers such a sound in her sleep.

A box of glass
 with friends, some of them first,
 like jackdaws tamed in april,
 scratching impatiently on my windowpane,
 who gratefully forget my name,
 beggingly pull their feathers off
 until the prados are littered with it
 and the fados and the wasted fish is buried.
 This is the sound of the undertow
 without time.

In the mould of the moment,
 in itself and not a second later.
 Each meaning postponed is a meaning lost.
 Therefore, the view of the afternoon,
 in the painted seconds of soft autumn light.
 It is the background for her fervent letters,
 her proud accent and a dress
 made for luxurious traders.

This is the place where I remember my tame fados,
 the sideneck of my street
 and the backhead of my house. My first best friend
 and the full, rich seasons of the midwest
 recklessly survived.
 A tightly wound clothline,
 frayed and far from her country.

The Nectar

He curls up
underneath the blanket
of dark feathers, dividing
safety from crime

You mumble
as I come and stare at
the silhouette that is hiding
with the pleasures of time

His face framed with
uncountable strands of
miniscule black, carrying
the pains of this world

None could ever see: his
wings folding the hands of
grief, keep on burying
the face of the body of he that lies curled.

Michelle Verdonck

02.00 AM haiku

We are not lovers,
but together we shelter
from the pouring rain.

Geoffrey Colson

The Hero

"Gather round, come closer, Ladies and Gentlemen! We would like to inform our faithful public that crime has risen to an all-time high; acts of the most vile and odious kind are happening everywhere as we speak...indeed, the streets are no longer safe for the honest, law-abiding citizen. The nation in which we live is in peril; life as we know it will cease to exist if nothing is done! The wave of crime must be stopped! The tide of evil must be stemmed! Something must be done, and do it we will. We will call the Superhero."

Five miles away, Brad Gordon is making breakfast. He likes his eggs over-easy, with no runny bits. He is middle-aged, and his hair is balding a little. He lives alone because he is too shy to speak to women. He enjoys wearing tight latex costumes, capes and boots when he thinks no-one is watching. This little hobby of his has led him to sign up for an amateur superhero society. The members get together on Tuesdays and discuss comic books. They also discuss the merits of suction boots versus Velcro gloves and so on, and they usually have tea afterwards. Brad Gordon knows there is no such thing as a superhero. The newspapers know there is no such thing as a superhero. However, the public doesn't.

There was need for a Superhero. And so by a bizarre sequence of events, Brad Gordon finds himself the new face of Liberty, Democracy and Justice. When he steps out of his door, he is assaulted by cheers and general cries of admiration. He now orders his groceries by phone, and when they arrive he is serenaded by the quartet of delivery boys. Boys trail around their mothers in the toy shops, asking for one thing only: the coveted Brad Gordon action figurine. Girls have posters of him on their bedroom walls. Brad Gordon is the new sex symbol for women, the new ideal for men. Brad Gordon gives speeches, signs autographs, shakes hands, smiles for the camera. There is a Brad Gordon Day. Young admirers have begun imitating his way of dress, his attitude towards crime. In fact, with so much Brad Gordon-inspired vigilance, crime has dropped at an astonishing rate.

And in the middle of this, Brad Gordon is completely, absolutely terrified. Terrified beyond words that one day, he will really have to be a hero.

Stephanie Benoit

The pillow

She wasn't there. "I wasn't there", she mumbled. She heard the little giggles and coughs but most of all, the cries. Ooh, how she loathed that shrill sound coming out of its little mouth. It sounded so far away, though, when she focused on the ticking of the little clown clock on the television, releasing a sound of smothered laughter and flashing light over her dark absent look. Then the screaming stopped. And she was downstairs, sipping her glass of whisky on the rocks while still clenching the little pillow that was just a moment ago covering the baby's mouth.

Aleksandra Hrkic

It's not that bad

"Dance with me"

"Why? There's no music"

"There's no time like now, the sun is fading and the streets are emptied"

"They're lonely"

"Not if we fill them again"

"With what?"

"Love"

"There's no love in this world"

"If there isn't, I wouldn't be happy and my presence here would be utterly useless"

"Happiness doesn't exist, everything is useless"

"It does exist if we make it"

"How?"

"By laughing"

"I dare not break the silence in this empty street"

"Why not?"

"It's frightening, chasing it away is foolish. It would come back again soon enough"

"It isn't frightening, it's merely dull"

"Like the world is dull, passive and numb"

"Not all is black"

"I don't see any colours"

"Open your eyes then"

"They are open!"

"Then start looking, look at the shades of purple in the skies, the remains of the sun and your reflection in those windows. Look at their beauty"

"I see what I always see. Misery, cold, distrust and indifference, the world is covered in a dark shade of grey. I seem to be blind from the colours you find so magnificent"

"Then create some light yourself"

"How?"

"Sing! Smile! Search and you'll find that there's some beauty left, still"

"How can I when I don't feel the way you do"

"Do something that makes you happy"

"What do you suggest then?"

"Dance"

"There's no music"

"Then we'll dance to our own little song, without rhythm or words. But it'll be ours and beautiful"

And she took his hand and danced with him under the fading sun, when the streets were emptied.

Mystery at the Museum: *An Isaac Apanay Case*

...Tonight, the Roppongi Hills Mori Tower in Tokyo has been the scene of the greatest art theft of all time. A gold mask, inlaid with rubies and diamonds, and estimated at \$ 2.5 million has disappeared from its display. The mask was a loan from China to the Mori Arts Center and its disappearance could spark a diplomatic row. Meanwhile, it remains unclear how the mask has been stolen. The director of the Mori Arts Center and the Chief of the Police refrain from any statements. It is not the first time that a mayor incident occurs in the Roppongi Hills Mori Tower; only in 2007...

The Roppongi Hills were very much alive at three in the morning that night. Police cars wailed through the streets, their lights flashing in the windows as they screeched past. The Roppongi Hills Mori Tower was brightly lit, like a giant candlestick looking out over the city. Police cars were scattered all around it.

A motorcycle emerged from the traffic, weaving itself in between the cars as it roared past. The driver completely ignored the agitated gestures from the police officer he overtook. His gaze firmly locked on the Tower, he shot past.

The motor slowed to a steady purr as the Tower came closer. Ignoring all signs that this was a pedestrian area, the driver drove the motor up to the sculpture of a giant spider next to the entrance. There he parked the motor, leaning it against one of the spider legs, and casually took off his riding goggles.

As if he wasn't already remarkable enough, with some ten officers running at him to fine him and throw him off the grounds, his russet skin immediately gave him away as a foreigner. With his dark, near-black eyes and snub nose he could only be a Filipino. He ran his hand through his short black hair, sighed, and turned to the first police officer to reach him.

Unfortunately for her, she was a woman.

The Filipino gave her a polite smile which made her heart skip a beat. There was something about this guy... How was anyone allowed to be so cool?

From his leather jacket to the goggles he casually held in his hand, he was a mayor distraction to all women around. At the entrance two female officers were trying to peek over the shoulders of their male colleagues.

'Ahem... Good evening,' the female officer tried to sound authoritative. 'You are not allowed to park here. Can I see your driver's license please?'

The Filipino only nodded in reply, took his driver's license from the pocket inside his jacket and handed it to her. When their fingers touched for just a moment her heart jumped in her chest. She quickly looked down at the license. God, this guy was hot!

'You keep that,' the Filipino said and walked past her. He was already past the female officers at the entrance, who were too much in a daze to ask him what he thought he was doing, when she broke from her astonishment and realized she was holding her own driver's license.



He pressed the “up” button on one of the many elevators and the glass doors slid open. Without any hesitation he pushed the button for the 53rd floor and the doors shut behind him. The elevator propelled him at high speed to the top of the building.

The Mori Art Center occupied the 49th to 54th floors, but all exhibitions were on the 53rd floor. The floors just above and below it were used to let the tourists take in the view of Tokyo. Two other floors were members-only.

The Filipino quickly removed the ID card of the female officer and slid in one of his own.

When the elevator doors opened more police officers crowded the hall. The two closest to the elevator looked him up and down and immediately decided he wasn’t allowed there. They could hardly hide their surprise when they saw his – to their eyes – fully legitimate police badge.

‘So, Isaac Apanay,’ one of them said incredulously, ‘have you been working for the police force for a long time?’

‘Not so long,’ Isaac replied with a straight face. ‘I mostly work as a casual clothes officer anyway.’

‘I already wondered why we didn’t know we had a Filipino colleague,’ said the other officer. ‘But Tokyo is big, isn’t it?’

‘It certainly is,’ Isaac agreed.

And with another short bow and an apology for wasting his time, they let him through.

He found himself in a big hall filled with police officers. Straight ahead there were two escalators leading to the Mori Art Museum. Three officers flanked the escalators. Isaac walked towards them, flipping his police badge open.

‘We have orders only to let the crime scene investigation team in,’ said one of the officers, stopping him before he could get on the escalator.

‘I just came from the office,’ Isaac said. ‘I have some information that may be important for the case.’

The officer looked him up and down, exchanged a glance with his colleague on the other side of the escalator and put his finger on the earpiece in his ear. ‘We have an officer who would like to talk to you, Chief Inspector. Says he has some important information.’

Isaac heard the Chief Inspector mumble something in return, and the officer nodded. ‘You go on,’ he said to Isaac.

Isaac made a polite bow and walked past him. The escalator came to life with a whizzing sound and gently carried him to the entrance of the crime scene.

The museum looked just like any museum would look, with the exception that there were several CSI-officers scattered about the big room. In the center of it, Isaac saw the glass cone in which he knew the mask was displayed. The cone was empty.

In front of it, the Chief Inspector of the Japanese Police was talking to the director of the museum. Isaac confidently walked towards them.

‘... is really a mystery,’ he heard the Chief Inspector say. ‘Nothing on the tapes, the rays haven’t been activated, nobody has seen anything...’

This is the worst thing that could have happened to the Museum,’ the director said desperately. ‘The Chinese will claim an incredible sum! And just think what a bad influence this will have not only on the Museum, but also on the Tower!’

‘I’ll assure you we are doing all we can to get the mask back and apprehend the culprit,’ the Chief Inspector said. He suddenly noticed Isaac standing beside him. ‘Ah – if you will excuse me.’ The Chief Inspector and the director bowed towards each other.

‘Who are you?’ The Chief Inspector said once the director had gone.

‘Isaac Apanay, Sir.’ Isaac made a polite bow.

The Chief Inspector looked him up and down as the other officers had done. ‘You have some important information?’

‘It seems,’ Isaac said, ‘you have some information for me. You see, this isn’t just a case for the National Police,’ he quickly went on, ignoring the surprised (and somewhat irritated) expression on the Chief Inspector’s face. Isaac lowered his voice. ‘I am here as an undercover agent of the Japanese Secret Services. We believe this case may be just what we need to solve one of our own cases.’

‘The Secret Services are on this?’ the Chief Inspector whispered, evidently torn between awe and irritation.

Isaac nodded. ‘I believe I don’t need to tell you this has to remain strictly confidential. All I need is an opportunity to look around and make some enquiries. And who knows, maybe I’ll be able to tell you something that can help you with the investigation.’

If the Chief Inspector hadn’t looked at him in quite the way he did, Isaac might have added a wink to that remark. But he decided not to push it. The Chief Inspector really didn’t seem to like the idea of the Secret Services running off with all the honor in the greatest case he had ever worked on.

‘I am sure you will,’ the Inspector said icily. ‘Well, be my guest then.’ He gestured to the room around them.

‘We are very grateful.’ Isaac bowed and turned his back on the Inspector, quickly hiding a satisfied grin. You’d really think the head of the Japanese Police wouldn’t be so easy to convince.

‘Hey, you!’ the Inspector barked at him.

“Really a mystery,” he heard the Chief Inspector say. “Nothing on the tapes, the rays haven’t been activated, nobody has seen anything...”

Isaac quickly turned around. Had he just thought that too soon?

‘You’ll need these,’ the Inspector said, and threw a pair of gloves at him.

Isaac dexterously caught them and walked away to the nearest exposition stand.

The exposition was on China’s riches through the ages. There were all kinds of valuable items – you’d think that if someone made the effort of stealing the best guarded piece in the exhibition, they wouldn’t be put off of stealing the rest too... Isaac thought about what he had heard the Inspector say when he came in. There apparently wasn’t anything to be seen on the surveillance tapes of the museum. Tapes could be tampered with, but the ray security system that responded to movement hadn’t gone off either... It was, in other words, the impossible theft.

Isaac began to like it.

(To be continued in the next issue of Simile.)

Wood

There is a low, rumbling noise. I think it's like a tumble dryer but then again I'm not entirely sure how those sound. Concrete below. Is it concrete? Not even sure at this point. Probably not. Things – trees, lights, metal boxes all zip past. People in cars. Pretty sure there's something profound to be said about them. People in metal boxes. Like sardines.

Slow cadence like a lullaby.

No. That's trite. Cliché. Not even close. And it doesn't work anyways. There's fundamental problems with reading too deep into reality. It just does its own thing, regardless. Can find patterns, meaning, wisdom etc. in books, films, dreams etc. Not in reality. I've taken this up with it, but so far it's always come out on top.

Sleep is sneaking up on me and no amount of effort would help fight it off. My eyes are falling shut.

Made it this far. It can only get better from here. It's actually working this time. I'm doing it. I'm not thinking of you. You.

You. I forgot to call You.

Bugger. If You were here, I'd curse my hubris. You'd laugh. Say something mean. Not really mean. Just teasing. No point, though, you're not. There's no point. You're not here. What you are not is here. What You are is lucky I'm so tired. Does that make sense? Is that even a sentence? Doesn't matter. Won't press the point. Which is why You're lucky, yeah? 'course you're not really here. So maybe I'm lucky that I won't have to. Hell, dunno. You, me, someone probably is.

But I'm just too tired.

That's when this happens – *and of course I don't realize* – but I fall asleep.

Well, maybe I do realize. How else could I be telling you, huh?

There's fog. Lazy strands of mist drifting between hulking, ancient trees. Peaceful and quiet. *Fog? In my head? Hah. There's a new one.*

Above, a lush canopy of verdant leaf, all shades of green and amber sheltering the forest from direct sunlight. A soft white glow prevails.

Like in the stories. Except not like in the stories, because it's never like that. Like in a dream? Trees flash past me. They are so close; it feels like I can touch them. My nose fills with the smells of the forest; the smell of pines and moss and the pulpy wood of a freshly fallen tree. Like in a dream, birds, white as pure snow, cleave through the mist overhead and disappear again between the trees. In the distance, there is birdsong calling. Birdsong, and... something else. *Unease. Fear. Unsure why. Then recognition.*

Then, recognition. Dulcet tones I have heard before.

Dreamt to have heard before.

Your voice. Unmistakable, beckoning to come without a moment's hesitation.

Knowledge. Purpose.

All my senses are filled with forest, but my thoughts are full of sweet memories of You. The twigs and leaves that brush against my skin do not hurt me, but remind me of Your tender caress. As I see Your face in my mind's eye, my legs start to speed up.

The mist thickens, and the only direction left is yours. I dash, madly, in Your direction, vaulting through the forest, brushing past the branches and leaves.

I trip and fall, but get up again. Twigs In my hair and dirt on my face, I stagger on. Doubt starts to grip my heart. When will I finally see You again? Catch a glimpse of Your clear blue eyes that look at me as if I were the sun, moon and stars. The slender fingers that touch me like I'm made out of glass, a little china-doll that could break from a whisper. But I am strong, and I will keep going on.

Although I am now leaving a faint trail of red droplets behind me.

The wood wraps itself around me, becomes a maze, and yet the way is clear.

Brown and green are all I see. Brown and green and sometimes, like a ray of hope, a sliver of dark blue from the night's sky. Though I cannot spot her, I know the moon is looking down on the vast forest. Not yet full, she forms a cradle, as if waiting for lovers to lie down safe in each other's arms and her embrace. Through the foliage I feel her gaze, but beneath the leaves it is dark. And I can only distinguish shadows of brown and green.

I follow Your song, and every errant ray of light, and every butterfly darting between the trees. The chase

Is it a chase, really? Of what?

goes on for what seems like hours until I find a clearing in the woods. This is it.

My chest hurts as I try to catch another breath. My legs cramp up and only sheer willpower keeps me going on this track of agony. I come to a stop when I stumble into a clearing and my vision starts to blur. I find myself surrounded by shadows and mist, until suddenly, I am able to focus on two clear blue eyes that look at me as if I were the sun, moon and stars. And all is perfect again.

I know I'll find You here, basked in starlight with pure honeyed glory flowing from your velvet lips. You'll dance, and sing to me of You and I, We lovers all, in different places, times, and guises and brush Your hands – as soft as silk? No, softer still – across my all too coarse unworthy face and swear You'll never, ever let me go or feel anything else than You ever promise not to *STOP!* There is a stop.

Enough! No more. Take a deep breath, and let it be over now. No more rambling, no more incoherent strands of thought, of things that cannot be or cannot be attained or...

No dream, this. Truth. Not the Truth. A truth.

This is not truth. This is You, again making me my own Tantalus. Leave me be. I'd rather gamble everything on the world outside this car door than live with my own head.

There is nothing there, outside. There is reality. Not Truth.

There's you. You. Or maybe there's not You.

I awoke at some point. I'm not entirely sure when, but when I got out of the car I found you waiting for me there. Not too long, hopefully. You looked a bit puzzled, like you had a question. There's something I wanted to ask you actually, but it was stupid anyway.

Will you live up to it?

*These three texts were written by students during a meeting of the Creative Writing Group. The exercise? **Write in a humorous way about something which annoys you.***

Travelling

Travelling is nice. You move from point A to B and back again. This can be done in many different ways. By boat, car or plane, they all have their particular advantages. I noticed, for example, that the more you gain in speed, the less leg-space you get. You can float around for days, walking around the decks and have a nice cup of tea. Even dancing is an option. And yes, you move from town to town, but there, it's not about the result. It's the sailing itself that matters and travelling is nice. Once you set foot on a plane, you can still have a cup of tea but the walking around part is much reduced. Eating is done with your elbows against your belly button and if you're seated next to a not so thin person, that's just your luck. Travelling is nice, but this is not travelling. This is getting to your destination and, please, as fast as is humanly possible.

Charlien Geerts

A Black Man's Raging Rant

If all you lads and lasses think that racism's dead now that there's a black man in the white house you're dead wrong. Yours truly (by the way I am black) has been harassed several times, twice by the boys in blue. Luckily I won't bore you with the details. What happened to my old mate Stijn is far more interesting. He got arrested for armed robbery at the ripe old age of 12. When photos of the real culprit were released and it became clear that my mate looked NOTHING like him the coppers just blurted out well they all look alike don't they? If you want more famous examples of blatant racism here's a couple of good ones. Wouter Van Bellingen a member of the Sint-Niklaas city council had presided over weddings for quite a while. Several cretins who must remain nameless didn't and I quote: 'want to be married by an ape'. I thought to myself, wow this feels like a trip to the zoo a monkey for a city official and the bride and groom behaving like asses. And my favorite, A certain Flemish radio station compared the Williams sisters with apes during the 2003 Australian Open tournament. Sure they were playing against Clijsters and Henin and they triumphed over them but that's no reason to be nasty. The hosts of the show even invited listeners to join their little anti Williams rant (which many did gladly). Who still remembers Bashir, a very nice Indian boy who dared to participate in one the early editions of Big Brother Belgium? He of course was the first to be booted of the show. Some were vexed by this blatant example of racism, but members of the right-wing party said: 'well, they can't all be as lovable as this chap'. I smell bollocks I always think to myself, when hearing such nonsense. I really hoped that people were past this kind of prejudice and fear, but enough of this negativism, nobody likes a cry-baby. If we truly want to achieve a harmonious society we have to learn to trust one another, whatever color the other might be or we'll have a very bleak (or black) future.

Jan Mua

The annoyance of unanswered e-mails

When I ask Dan why he doesn't reply to my e-mails he just shrugs.

"Busy," he says.

Well, I'm busy too, the whole goddamn world is busy, but I and the world still reply to e-mails, don't we? Even the ones with the fluffy puppies that make us vomit.

Well – I don't reply to that last category of e-mails, they immediately end up in my virtual bin, but you get what I mean. Imagine the whole world not replying to e-mails anymore. The Queen's appointments would constantly have to be re-scheduled because some high-paid moron thinks he's too good to click on "reply", and where would that leave us? At a situation where a bunch of sheiks and kings are angry at a little old woman.

Fair, isn't it?

No, not replying to mails is just plain rude. Imagine one of your friends inviting you over for her birthday party. If you don't reply, you can count yourself lucky if you get away alive next time you see her.

So not answering mails is also bad for the crime rate. And we wouldn't want that one higher than it already is, would we?

Dan says crime rates are nothing to do with e-mails, but I disagree. Who knows how much crime is organized through e-mail these days? I bet a prisoner planning to escape, who doesn't get a reply to his helicopter-order, won't be very nice company if he ever meets the helicopter company director.

So overall, not replying to e-mails makes little puppies sad, makes little old ladies sad, makes your friends sad, puts helicopter company directors in danger and makes me livid.

Leni Verbogen

Come & Write!

Sharpen your pencils and join the English department's creative writing group. You'll find us haunting the dark and dank **Ghent university basement (room 2)**. Seriously though, we're a really nice bunch. We'll do our best to make you feel right at home. Why should you join us? Firstly **it's free**. Secondly your **writing will definitely improve**. I've read some excellent work since I've joined this fun little group. We don't just write poetry, plays, short stories, songs are more than welcome. You can even write a novel if you want. Who knows, we might have the next Jane Austen among us, or Oscar Wilde if you're a bloke. Another plus we've managed to snatch a **native speaker** out of her natural habitat, to help us. It isn't all hard labour of course (as we all know all work and no play can make us very dull boys and girls). After we've explored the depth of the human soul through writing we usually go for a **drink** in one of Ghent's fine pubs. That's a nice treat isn't it? So join us please, the more the merrier.

Jan Mua



This time imperfect

I'm sitting near the window, staring amusedly at my youngest daughter playing in the courtyard, when he comes in. He clears his throat, rapidly, twice, and I'm already getting annoyed at the fact that he expects me to answer to his call immediately. Instead I direct my gaze to his hands, which he's nervously clasp and unclasp. When he finally forces me to face him, I get up and motion for him to follow me to the bed. We lie in what used to be comfortable silence, but is now just an agreement to keep the questions and accusations inside. I subtly sneak a peek at his prominent features, the high sculpted cheekbones, straight nose and pouty lips I once called my own. Of course, I could still afford your elite charms back then. And my brother was not throwing you sacks of gold along with smirking leers either. Suddenly a graphic image of you with my brother on this very bed crosses my mind, asphyxiating me, and you're still searching my eyes for an answer, a payment. I bolt out of the bedroom, leaving you. Through the open door I glance at you, flexing your fingers and curling them in the warm blankets. I wish you would leave me, no emotions on your pretty face, so that I would not have to do it myself. Turning my back to you, I can still sense your hopeful eyes, boring through my skull. As I crush you by walking away, again, I'm silently getting used to plucking the stars out of your eyes.

Patrick Cake

Spinning

We spin around slowly, every day is pretty much like the one before. Aside from the fact that many things have changed since that day before.

Except the things that should.

I suppose you can compare it with throwing your arms up high, as if you believe you can reach the sky, and starting to spin around. First rather slowly, then a little faster, and faster, and faster. Your stomach starts tingling and you start feeling a little dizzy, in a good way. There's absolutely nothing that could possibly go wrong. The sky is nearly reached.

Until you cannot control yourself any longer. You feel something is going wrong and try to stop but you simply can't. Once you start spinning too fast there's no stopping, as you now realise. you just keep on spinning faster and faster. Then the moment arrives where you fall face down onto the ground and all you can do is hope that someone will be there to pick you up and spin around with you. Someone to watch your moves closely, to slow you down when you're at the edge of losing it again, to keep you from falling.

Spinning happily ever after

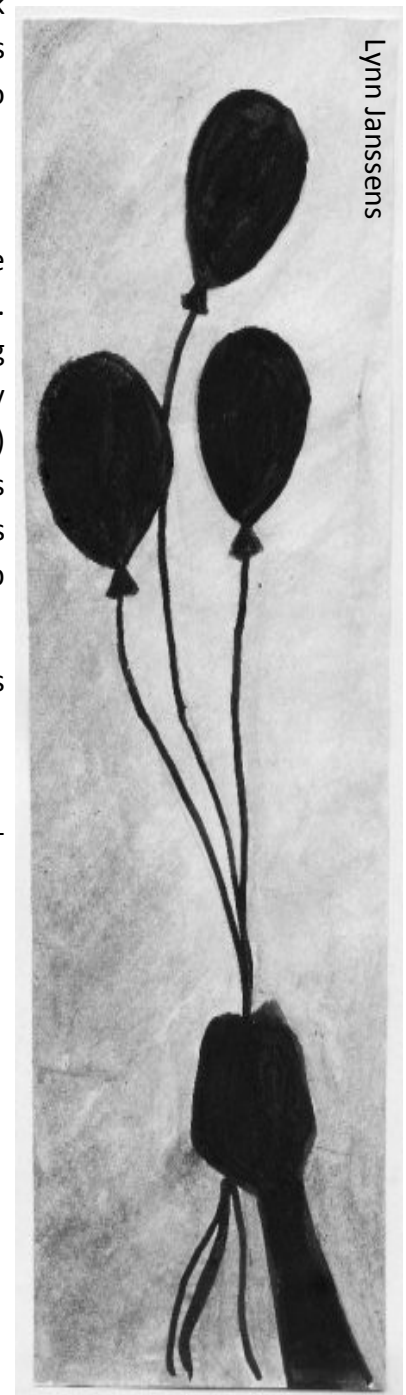
There are people, who wish to obtain this position. Trying to change the world with hopes and dreams and sometimes with a bit of action. Making an attempt to control the world and keep it from falling (failing to see of course that it has already fallen and needs picking up). They hold their arms up high (believe strongly that they can reach the sky) and tell us that many things need change. There are times their words are merely words with nothing to follow them. There are also times their words are followed by great deeds that will take us another step forward! And then several ones backwards.

Many people hope, even attempt, to be such a person of great deeds to lead us forward without falling back.

Except the ones that should.

And so we keep on spinning, sometimes slow, sometimes fast, but always falling in the end.

Kate Luysterborg



The wanderer

List of characters: the main character (MC), the wanderer in the painting

(A bed with the head end to the stage left, blankets pulled open, it has clearly been slept in. A rock party at the stage right, mist circling between them. A man is standing on one of the rocks with one leg lifted onto another, his back towards the audience. Grey-blue clouds as backdrop. MC dressed in pyjamas. MC stands beside bed as the curtain rises, staring at the back of the man. Not surprised but thoughtful.)

MC: Oh yes, this one.

(walks a bit towards the man)

Has he finally come to take me with him? I've been expecting him. I didn't really believe he'd come... but I was expecting him.

(walks to other side of man, turns around, facing the bed)

Or does he want me to take him out of there? After all that time he's been standing there, I'll bet he wants a change of scenery. I mean, that mist and all that.

(faces audience)

It's really nice in the beginning, spooky and special effects and stuff.

(face lights up, smiles)

Maybe there's a lake beneath those clouds, with a monster in it!

(tone turns a little mocking)

But if that bloke still hasn't spotted the monster, or even managed to trick himself into believing it's there by seeing some branches move from the corner of his eye and thinking that hey, maybe it's a tentacle of the monster... Well, I guess he's having a pretty dull day up there.

Wanderer: *(does not move but speaks loud and slow, almost mechanical)*

The monster does not have tentacles. The monster has moved away a long time ago.

MC: *(not surprised at all, only disappointed. Moves back to original position beside the bed, looks up at wanderer)*

Perhaps then this man is looking for a suitable place for a picnic. I reckon he hasn't found it here, unless he likes them rocks sticking in his and his company's ass.

(looks at wanderer as if hoping for a reaction. None comes. Moves closer to wanderer, faces audience again)

He knows that place, he knows it isn't good for a picnic. He still wants to go there. But this is the last time. He is saying his goodbyes.

Wanderer: I am saying my goodbyes.

MC: *(walks to the wanderer, turns to face the audience, standing back to back with wanderer. Solemn expression.)*

Shall I take his place?

(Curtain falls.)

Features and Reviews

The Importance of Being Earnest

BY KOENRAAD CLAES

English Theatre Company, Tinnenpot Theatre Ghent, 24 March 2010

The English department, and with it a sizeable delegation of the local theatre crowd, recently witnessed an exciting staging of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, with all parts acted by students of English from our university. Dr Van Bogaert and her troupe should be commended for their courage to take on this challenging late-Victorian comedy, for what to many involved was allegedly a maiden performance. *Earnest* (1895) is considered one of the central works in Wilde's oeuvre, as it is not only the final play he wrote, but also the most enduringly popular. It is moreover sometimes read as *théâtre à clef* for the numerous references it would contain to Wilde's tumultuous personal and business life, that would soon cause him so much controversy that the previously flourishing play was closed down. When performed as accomplishedly as by our English Theatre Company, it can of course also be very good fun for the uninitiated.



Sofie Hoflack as Cecily and Karlien Lowie as Gwendolen

The four star roles, being those of "Jack", Algernon, Gwendolen and Cecily, require suave delivery, a ready command of smugness and smirks, and a degree of proficiency in the English language many native speakers would not be able to muster. The lead actors succeeded on all counts, and special praise is due to Karlien Lowie for her sweetly capricious Gwendolen Fairfax. Simon Bequoye (Jack/Ernest) inevitably suffered the mixed blessing of playing the title role, which has the least zesty lines and therefore occasionally gets upstaged by others, but he played the tormented lover quite endearingly. The interpretation of the supporting parts, which rely on a delicate balance of graceful social parody ever in danger of tipping over towards either the bland or the ridiculous, was overall satisfactory as well, and never failed to entertain an enthusiastic audience.



The amateur professionalism of this young cast and dedicated production team is doubly to be admired, considering the small yet bothersome setbacks which have beset their project from day one. The less than ideal location they had to settle for, with its uncomfortable wooden benches arranged in a semicircle, fortunately turned out to be not overly distracting. Besides, it is undoubtedly easier to keep your audience on the edge of their seats when there is hardly any seating to begin with; although the elegantly swooning lady on the second row was probably not solely overcome with the undeniable charm of Alger non (Régis Dragonetti), or the sweltering glances of Cecily (Sofie Hoflack). The transposition to the mid-twentieth century of an older play that is so very much a 'period' piece, prompted by a shortage of props and costume from the late nineteenth century, would perhaps have been more convincing if some of the text had been rewritten accordingly - though I admit this smacks of sacrilege.

I sincerely hope that this successful staging, which has certainly sparked the interest of many who attended, will mark the renewal of the long abandoned tradition of excellent student theatre at the Ghent University English department.

Photography: Pascal Van De Walle

Why participate in a play?

Simile gets the low down on the high life, fame and fortune experienced by the stars of 'The Importance of Being Earnest.' Or something like that...

I entered for the fame, the women and the millions I was going to spend on the latter. What I got was a dozen new friends, a better understanding of the workings of theater and a bad rash due to my wearing tweeds, which in the end proved a pretty decent trade, except for the rash of course. But seriously – though I know to be 'serious' is somewhat against the nature of my character Algernon whose views on nonsense and whose ways of interrupting oneself I have come to adopt on writing this very contribution it seems. But seriously, during this whole experience it was not Wilde's wit that struck me, for I knew his reputation; it was rather his concern with macro structure and the crafty composition of the lines themselves that really awed me. Every rehearsal was like walk on the construction site of a cathedral where no sculptures or refined glazing had yet been placed but where the wooden framework was all the more impressive. Getting to know a play from the inside out is definitely a splendid opportunity to really get in touch with the laws of dramatic writing and – now boldly addressing all you teaching eminences – could be a fruitful approach from an educational point of view as well. This being as far as my seriousness stretches, I may conclude by correcting a small inaccuracy that I introduced some lines ago for stylistic reasons, and to give it the stamp of truth it deserves I'll quote Dr. Kate Macdonald on this one: you can't beat a nice bit of tweed.

Régis Dragonetti

I on the other hand, was not at all interested in women. I auditioned because I loved to act and because Lady Bracknell was such a wonderful character to play. I am in earnest (pun intended) when I say that I imagine everyone would love to pull up their eyebrows and, deadly serious, look in the eyes of Algernon, while saying 'I hope you are behaving very well?' When I told one of my closest friends that I was playing a part in 'The Importance of Being Earnest', he sighed, smiled and shook his head: 'Oh my'. And he was right, 'Oh my' was the perfect term to describe Earnest. We started out with a common goal, laughed, cursed and got emotional in the end. As for the play in itself, well, I think Wilde was practically a genius. He had me laughing right from the start until the very last performance. Every time I heard the play performed, I noticed another joke that had escaped my attention the previous 1000 times. I prefer cathedrals when they are finished, so I'm not going to compare Earnest with that. I'd rather say that rehearsing and playing Earnest was a very long circular journey, sometimes tiring, sometimes extremely rewarding. In the end you get back to where you started, but you've gained a lot. Friends, an improved British accent (though perhaps a bit too posh now), the feeling of being on a stage... That's why I'd like to correct my last sentence in the play: 'My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of profound wisdom'.

Aya Van Renterghem

Reviewing Scotland's finest: Oi Polloi

BY MATHIJS DEBAENE

Frontline, Ghent, 1st March 2010

With all the publicity around "Departuur", we would almost forget that there were other events as well, that evening. In the Frontline, a little underground concert hall not far from the Blandijn, a concert of Oi Polloi was scheduled. I had heard a lot about this Scottish underground punk band, so I decided to go and have a look. Apparently the band has been active for almost 30 years now, and still going strong. They support environmental action and veganism, and they speak out against, among other things, racism, sexism, homophobia and fascism. Expectations ran high.

Oi Polloi didn't disappoint. What an enormous amount of raw energy! What a fabulous lead singer! Deek Allen, who must be in his fifties now, was still as uncontrollably active as he must have been in the heyday of the band, raging against every social injustice one can possibly name. They had songs against skinheads ('bash the fash'), homophobia ('when two men kiss'), the pollution of our environment ('Nuclear waste'), apartheid ('apartheid stinks'), you name it, these fellows have music to match with it! No song went by without a short introduction in which the band explained how the particular song came into being. Which pleasantly surprised me was the fact that a considerable amount of their songs was in Gaelic. I think it is remarkable that a "popular music" band still pays attention to a dying language, and that they put effort in keeping a minority language alive. Furthermore, the band showed that they were not afraid of a little bit of history as well: "Don't burn the witch" is a splendid indictment against the medieval witch trials, and "Hands off Nicaragua" raises the matter of the dubious role the US has played throughout the history of the country.

Allen proved to be quite a generous person, sharing a bottle of the finest Scottish whisky with the crowd. They loved it. He also wasn't afraid of a touch of humour in the introduction of the songs: after a firm hand shake with a spectator, Allen told the astonished guy that (and I quote literally) "It is an honour, sir, to shake the hand that has given you so much pleasure over the years" ... followed by a song on masturbation, suitably called 'DIY'...

After one and a half hour of pure energy, we could safely return home with ears torn apart. Although some of Oi Polloi's points of view are quite radical, I could not help but agree on quite a few things they said. What a pleasant surprise it is to notice that not everywhere in our society ignorance is bliss. Being socially conscious seems to be regarded as being old-fashioned by many people, but that night Oi Polloi has proven to me that, in contrary, it is alive and kicking.

If you want to know more about this band, check their Myspace at <http://www.myspace.com/oipolloialba>. Good luck deciphering the Gaelic!

Getting to know Professors Vander Motten & De Vos

INTERVIEWS: KATALIJNE DE MEYER & JAN MUA, TEXT: JAN MUA



Prof. Jozef De Vos

In a few months' time we will be saying goodbye to English literature professors Jean Pierre Vander Motten and Jozef de Vos. So we at **Simile magazine** thought it would be interesting to interview both of them about their respective careers.

The English department will be saying goodbye to *Professor Jozef De Vos*, *UGent's Shakespeare expert*, after his career spanning thirty years. **His journey to becoming an English literature professor is a fascinating one.** Professor De Vos fell in love with theatre in secondary school. When he came to study at this university he became enamored with the work of the great William S. King *Lear* especially had a tremendous impact on Professor De Vos. "The tragic events in this play are almost too

much to bear, I wanted to scream, stop!" **On why he chose English literature, the professor said:** "English is a world language. Literature is an art, you can always discover new things even in something you've read many times."

When asked what his opinion was on the more contemporary Shakespeare adaptations he surprisingly answered: "I think the modern adaptations of the plays show great creativity and courage. I particularly like the adaptations I saw by Ivo Van Hove and Tom Lanoye." But since Shakespeare is an English playwright he can understand their more traditional approach to the material. Locals may know that **Ghent has always had a Shakespearian tradition** and De Vos is vice-president of the Shakespeare society for the Low Countries.

How did the university shape his manner of reading and writing? Professor De Vos feels that "we kill poetry sometimes by overanalyzing. We no longer read for our enjoyment, we can't stop being critical, and that is unfortunate." **Next we grilled the professor on the knowledge of his students.** "It's not that the students know less now, they know a lot of different thing on contemporary culture. They also come from all sorts of backgrounds. It wasn't always like this".

Is Shakespeare still relevant today? one might ask. Professor De Vos had this to say on this subject too: "It is amazing how Shakespeare is able to demystify power; politicians should perhaps read Shakespeare more."

Another great mind who will be leaving the university soon is Professor Vander Motten. **When asked why he chose to study, and later teach English literature** he said that it exerted such a strong attraction that the choice was easy. Addressing a large number of people is never easy, even for university teachers: “I still get some stage fright but it passes quickly.” We were curious to know **if students had changed much over the course of thirty years**. According to Professor Vander Motten it varies: “There will always be strong, mediocre and bad students.” Teaching, however, has changed quite a bit: “It has gone from one extreme to the other,” he told us. Whereas in the past, professors could do as they pleased, and many did just that, “Now we have a system where you have to be available all the time. Explain and account for every move you make.”

The professor had this to say on whether teaching is the only career possibility for language students: “Obviously not, a large majority make a different career choice. I know people who have a master’s degree in languages and ended up working for a bank, they found the transfer very easy, and that says something about this education.” Journalism is also an option after graduating here apparently. Liesbeth Imbo, for example, was one of Vander Motten’s students and Dirk Sterckx one of his peers.

Professor Vander Motten does hope that at least some students will go on to become secondary school teachers themselves. “It’s a cyclical movement; if we don’t have enough competent teachers, students will be ill-prepared.”

On to Professor Vander Motten’s areas of expertise: First, *17th century English-Dutch cultural relations*. He came to this via studying late 17th century drama. **But why study this?** “Because it enlightens us on the cross-channel contact in that period.” *Edgar Allan Poe in Belgium (fin de siècle period)* is another of his interests. This came about when Professor Vander Motten was asked to do a survey article on the poet for a book called *Poe Abroad*. He also made a contribution to *the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. This book of reference has the lives of 50 000 writers in them. The professor provided 9 entries for the 2004 edition.

What, then, will the literature professor do to avoid falling into any proverbial ‘Black Hole’? “I’ll be catching up on all the novels I’ve long wanted to read but couldn’t, I’ve made a list.”

We at **Simile Magazine** understand the professor’s plight only too well. We’re all torn between the things we want to read and those we have to.



Prof. Jean Pierre Vander Motten

Lisbeth Imbo & Freek Braeckman: successful UGent Alumni

BY KATELIJNE DE MEYER

*We language students are often confronted with the question why on earth someone would want to study languages, a useless course since you are sure never to cure cancer; and what profession can you get by studying languages, besides teaching in a secondary school? Looking for an answer to these questions, *Simile* interviewed two successful alumni of the Ghent English department, Freek Braeckman and Lisbeth Imbo.*



"Reading Shakespeare isn't boring at all."

What was your main motivation to study English?

I still don't know why I chose to study English. The main reason why I decided to study Germanic languages, was the assumption that this course would be easy to combine with top sport. [Germanic languages is a course for which you can read and write throughout the entire year and where the actual material to be learnt is quite limited, whereas a course such as law obliges you to cram huge amounts of material before the exams.] Furthermore, I loved to read and was fascinated by languages in general. 'Though I also enjoyed studying mathematics, and presumed that the linguistics taught in Germanic studies would suit me, which it did. Phonetics, for example, bears many resemblances to mathematics. Another reason why I chose to study linguistics was the astonishing amount of English literature which I was presented with in the first two years, which struck me as quite intimidating. The number of English books that have been published is *inconceivable*.

So I dropped the idea of studying English literature, although I undoubtedly missed the experience of reading many great literary works.

Were you fascinated mostly by 'classical' linguistics, or was your interest/curiosity also aroused by the relatively new area of sociolinguistics?

Braeckman: Professor Stef Slembrouck carried on quite a campaign for sociolinguistics, which I thought was very interesting. However, I preferred to examine more closely the underlying language system. People aren't aware of their existence in everyday life, and this made it even more intriguing for me. I actually also chose phonology for my thesis.

"After my education at Ghent University, I didn't touch a book for nearly three years."

Did studying English literature help you appreciate writers you were not inclined to read before?

Braeckman: It made me realise that reading Elizabethan writers such as Shakespeare isn't boring at all. I learned to appreciate, for example, Shakespeare's works which, I now know, are incredibly funny, witty and sagacious. By 'learning to appreciate' I don't mean that you have to increase your theoretical knowledge before being able to comprehend the greatness of Shakespearian writing; just by being forced to look at it, and actually read it I realised the value of these works. At the same time, I never got acquainted with other writers because of the fragmentary nature of the literary courses in the first two years. What annoyed me most during my education at Ghent University was that almost each course was called 'an introduction to' or 'an overview of' a certain subject.

Did your education at Ghent change the way you approach literary texts?

Braeckman: After my education at Ghent University, I didn't touch a book for nearly three years. This was a reaction to overanalysing books during my study, which I believe prevented me from really enjoying the books I read. But now, looking back, I'm convinced that the overview I got helped me create a wider framework in which I can see books in a cultural tradition or discover similarities with other works. This education also provides you with the ability to critically slate a book which you didn't like before, but now you actually know *why* you didn't enjoy it.

To which extent did your deepened study of English philology have an impact on your professional career?

Braeckman: My awareness of language is something I put to use every day. I am also able to interview a writer, but since I chose to focus on linguistics instead of literature, this honour is often given to a colleague who has more knowledge of literature. For example, last week I was unbelievably jealous of my colleague Greet Op de Beeck who got the chance to interview John Irving. Studying at a university you learn to analyse more easily, to make connections, to put together an overview, to draw conclusions, etc. skills that are very useful in whatever career you choose.

"Books, and foremost poetry, are often analysed too much."

Why did you choose to study English?



Lisbeth Imbo: I thought long and hard about this choice, since I didn't know which language I preferred, English or French. One of the main reasons I finally chose to study English was my rather inspired English teacher in secondary school. He was very enthusiastic about Shakespeare and was able to pass on this enthusiasm to his students. I loved the Shakespearian language and the multi-layeredness of his works. I wanted to study English to learn more about this divine author.

During your career as a student of English philology you doubtlessly had to read a vast amount of literature. Which book(s) or author(s) made a big impression on you, and why?

Imbo: During my study of English literature, I regrettably didn't see much Shakespeare. I still look upon this as a considerable flaw in my education as a scholar of English. Nonetheless, I also became acquainted with some American writers such as Philip Roth and E.L. Doctorow, two authors I certainly can appreciate.

Did the books you read change the way you look at the world or mankind in general?

Imbo: It is hard to say if it was the books that changed my view on the world or if this was a consequence of the changes you undergo at that age, when your worldview begins to broaden [I left my small hometown to go and study at Ghent University; this of course also shapes your worldview]. My thesis subject was the now 81-year-old American poet Adrienne Rich. She was born in 1929 as an American with Jewish roots and was raised in the Southern part of America by a black nanny. She got married and had three sons, but only later on did she realise that she was a lesbian. Consequently, she left her husband, who finally committed suicide. Adrienne Rich established herself as a defender of women rights. Her involvement in both anti-war and feminist activism are reflected in her poetry. As a gay woman she undergoes all kinds of suppression by men, who paint a certain negative picture of her. Adrienne Rich tries to conceive the world differently, for example she points to the way in which men depict women in commercials. By studying her for an entire summer, I also started to look at the world in a different way. I now notice how in television series where one of the characters is homosexual, the fact that (s)he is homosexual is emphasised, the homosexuality of that person is a storyline as such, it is always relevant for the story. Whereas being heterosexual isn't relevant at all for the story. In this way, reading and looking into the life and work of a writer can change your perception of certain elements of daily life you would otherwise never have paid attention to.

[Do you still like to read English prose or poetry?

Imbo: After studying at university, literature stayed an important part of my life. I like to cooperate in literary projects such as 'De Gouden Uil'. But because of my work I don't have much time to read books, though I still try to read some English literature. Now and then I like to reach back to Rich's poems, which I really enjoy reading. I also like reading English novels, nevertheless I sometimes also dare to read a translation into Dutch.]

Did your education at Ghent University influence your approach to literary texts?

Imbo: I think that books were too often considered as an illustration of a literary movement. In the courses people didn't think freely enough about books, their view was too much influenced by what had already been written about it. Of course this depended on the professor teaching the course. Professor Versluys for example, who taught American literature, mainly discussed very recent books, about which there hadn't yet been many reference works written. He wanted you to form your own opinion about the book, to think for yourself. His classes dealt with the books and not primarily the authors or the literary movement they might belong to. Books, and foremost poetry are often analysed too much, whereas I believe that explaining a poem isn't an indispensable part of reading poetry. What is more important to me is what a poem means to you, what feelings it evokes. This, however, is mostly regarded as irrelevant at university. The focus is more on the structure of the poem, and the different meanings of the word 'stone' in a poem. I did always feel that analysing a poem is a good mental exercise too, and can be very interesting, but we cannot forget that a poem also tries to aim at something that goes beyond the rational.

Erasmus: The Morning After

BY ALEXANDRA COUSY & GRIET JACQUES

Last semester, Ann-Katrien and Lennart studied English literature at the University of Limerick (UL) and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). Looking back on their adventure, it is clear that “Limerick” is more than a poetic comic genre and professors do have a first name. Simile caught a glimpse of the other side of

At the beginning of our interview, Lennart has a confession to make: *“Honestly, I’m actually not much of a reader myself.”* But that doesn’t mean he didn’t have to read any books during his stay. *“One book every week.”* Apart from all the reading, he took literature courses on romanticism, post-colonial writing and post-structuralism – a mixture of ALW and historical criticism. Ann-Katrien is surprised Lennart only had three courses. She had to take five, of which women’s writing was one of her favourites - she is even planning to write her Bachelor paper on the subject. The course “Irish literary revival” was less interesting. It illustrates the pride of the Irish people regarding their own literature. You even get a slightly different approach to English literature.

Islanded

MMU offers an open, pleasant welcome, Lennart states. One of the first days a trip to *“a special castle”* was organised with a barbecue afterwards where all foreign students could meet. At Limerick University, orientation days are set up where all new students, Erasmus and first years, are guided through the city and also given plenty of information on how to manage the heap of administrative papers. *“That’s really necessary!”* Lennart remarks, *“My first experience with bureaucracy was arranging Erasmus.”* *“Do you know that film L’Auberge Espagnole?”*, Ann-Katrien asks. *“The situation is quite comparable...”*. Does she mean the administrative hassle or the wild parties, we wonder ...

Chalk talk

Lennart explains how in Manchester he had to adapt to a completely different educational system. In Ghent we are used to having lectures of three hours. In Manchester these are divided into an hour-long lecture and a two hour seminar. During a seminar you work in small groups of ten to twenty people. Therefore the focus is much more on reading in depth. Lennart actually prefers the British education system and is convinced that he learned more in Manchester. *“You are forced to think for yourself and show that you understand by writing essays and doing some research on the subject. Here you just learn your syllabus by heart and you will probably pass the examination.”* At MMU you had to keep up with things since you were continuously assessed. *“I think I wrote a total amount of 15,000 words! You were really trained to write papers.”* Ann-Katrien agrees and also emphasizes that the atmosphere is far more relaxed in Limerick. Generally speaking, there is much more interaction between student and professor. Lennart recalls when he bumped into his professor, he could say *Hi Adam!*

Ship the bookshop

The average luggage allowance on an airplane is twenty kilograms per person. No problem transporting a stamp collection, but booklovers experience more difficulties. Besides buying syllabi, Ann-Katrien purchased some hundreds of Euros worth of books. The scales, however, would not cooperate. Luckily her library also contained some dreary works. A guidebook to *MLA-style, Critical Practise Handbook* and some other boring books stayed in Limerick. On the other hand, the book she absolutely wanted to take with her was Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1991). A friend of hers is now writing her Bachelor paper about it. As we ask Lennart which books he brought to Belgium, Ann-Katrien starts laughing, "*Duncan Wu, Romanticism!*" He bought this 1480-page-long tome because of his lectures on Romanticism, a course we do not have at Ghent University. Beyond the anthology, Lennart also discovered a novel from the field of post-colonial literature. He explains: "*India, Trinidad, Australia, and some African countries like Nigeria used to be colonies of England, but now they are all independent and have a whole literary field of their own. More and more, it's becoming a separate genre, post-colonial writing.*" This is how he came to read a great Indian writer, Jhumpa Lahiri (author of the best-selling novel *The Namesake*, eds.). And *The God of Small Things* of Arundhati Roy got another chance.

Spread the word

In Ghent we have our own 'dream catcher' Peter Verhelst, city poet of Ghent 2010, so we wondered if there were any literature events in Manchester or Limerick. According to Lennart, British people hold literature in high esteem. Literary festivals were organised around the city and beyond. At MMU there even was a literary society you could join, discussing poetical and literary work. But there was no such thing as a special poet who spreads his poems across the city. In Limerick there is a guided tour dedicated to *Angela's Ashes*, the best-selling novel by Frank McCourt. The story actually takes place in Limerick, so you can visit all the places that are mentioned in the book. But neither city has a poet like our Peter Verhelst. A unique event it seems.

Should I stay or should I go?

Erasmus is a one-time opportunity: a chance to meet people from all over the world, a chance to enrich your knowledge of languages. Lennart and Ann-Katrien share this opinion of studying abroad. They chose an English-speaking country without the explicit purpose of improving their English. "*It is, however, a useful advantage,*" Lennart explains. It was his mother in particular who focused on the potential improvement of his English. "*Your English will improve. And your drinking skills as well*", Lennart laughs. But to force people to go abroad for a semester is not a good idea, they both think out loud - it is still a personal choice.

"I remember saying 'Hi Adam' when I bumped into my professor the other day."

The morning after...

Erasmus has changed them, Ann-Katrien and Lennart both agree. *"My personality has not changed that much"*, Ann-Katrien explains, but since her Erasmus experience she has the urge to see many different places. *"When we were in Ireland we went on trips every weekend. Here, the weekend voyage is going home ..."* Lennart nods, Erasmus has made him more independent. However, he was also glad to come home. *"Life in Ghent is much easier. At the weekend, at home, you have whatever you want. And there are certain chores you do not have to do. Household jobs"*, Lennart laughs.

Clearly their morning after can be called a 'happy hangover'. Erasmus has definitely changed their further study career and especially their view of things. Both of them are already longing to go back to their second home. Thanks to Ann-Katrien and Lennart for a very interesting chat! As Lennart leaves the cafeteria he concludes *"Erasmus makes you stronger, you know"*. And raising his fist *"for Sparta!"*.



A home from home: Lennart in Manchester during his year on Erasmus

Do something different, do volunteer work!

BY LARA VAN DEN BROECKE

Why do volunteer work?

If you are looking for an opportunity to do something good for others, to meet new people, and on top of that have a great vacation, then maybe it is a good idea to do some volunteer work. It is definitely not all about work; you will have fun and lots of time to chat and make new friends. There is so much more to it than you would think, because when you help others you aren't just helping them; volunteering abroad also gives you a chance to improve your language skills and learn about another culture.

In Europe there are several organizations that make it possible for you to do volunteer work in countries all over the world. I went with 'Bouworde' who organize technical, social and ecological camps in Europe for people from age 18 to 30 and for people from age 21 to 30 outside Europe. You can choose out of more than 60 camps divided in 29 countries. I went to a technical camp in France where we helped Wim who had started a project that has to help young juveniles stay out of trouble. We had to renovate a little house and work on a path in the woods. There was no electricity and this made the experience really extraordinary. We had plenty of free time when the working day was over, so our evenings were filled with going to the waterfall and talking round the camp fire. At the weekend we took a little trip to Genève. So the experience was definitely for more than just work, it was also for making friends and exploring new places. This camp was also for people from other countries, and in this way I met two girls from Germany and one from Italy. We communicated with each other in English, so it was also good for my language skills.

How do I start if I want to do volunteer work?

If you want to do volunteer work there are some things you should keep in mind. First of all, think about how much money you want to spend, where you want to go and which organization you can go with. For most of the projects you don't need any particular skills, you just need to be willing to adjust to another culture and to work.

- One website that gives you a good and structured overview of opportunities is www.gostrange.be. You will definitely find an organization there that fits you.
- If it is your dream to become a teacher, than it can be a great experience to teach English to children abroad. There are some organizations that give you the opportunity to do this, like www.bouworde.be. You can go to Thailand or Cambodia for a month during summer and teach English to young children. The price you pay for such a camp can be €1380, as some of this money goes to supporting the people helped by the project.
- If you want to go away to do volunteer work for a longer time (1 year) than there are organizations that help you start and provide money in exchange for your work. Take a look on www.jint.be for more information.
- Maybe you don't want to go far away and also don't want to spend much money. You can still do volunteer work! Why not in Ghent? Unicef Ghent can always use some volunteers to help them. You can contact deman_maarten@yahoo.com if you are interested. And you can visit www.unicef.be for more information about what they do.



Movie & Book Reviews!

Have you ever watched a movie after reading the book it was adapted from, and then felt completely disappointed because 'it was just not what you imagined'? Say goodbye to those days of continual disappointments!! After having read *Simile's* reviews, you will have full knowledge of both book and movie.

Ask the Dust, a review by Griet Jacques



by John Fante 1939. John Fante replays his own life through the eyes of struggling writer called Arturo Bandini, the main character in *Ask the Dust*. Bandini is a second-generation Italian immigrant from Colorado who flees to Los Angeles. But during the Great Depression this 'lover of man and beast alike', as he calls himself, ends up isolated in a shabby room on Bunker Hill, surviving on Japanese market oranges. With astute swiftness and pure lack of sentiment, Fante describes the desperate atmosphere Arturo Bandini lives in, parading a series of eccentric low-lived characters. Like the writing of Bukowski and Ellis, John Fante's prose is rough and direct, permeated by racy dialogue. Bandini's inner monologue, however, is frightened and lonely, stormily describing himself through shifting perspectives. The relationship between Bandini and Mexican waitress Camilla Lopez captures your attention till the end.



by Robert Towne 2006. The human mind is existentially jerky and jittery. Fante uses this as a starting point for his (lack of) philosophy and pitch black humour. Robert Towne found his dust on a South African stage set. His *Hollywood* version of John Fante's tome starts off showing the sharp dialogues and allusive acts. But while John Fante wittily plays with the readers' speculation of potential developments, Robert Towne chooses a straightforward plot. The relation between Arturo Bandini (Collin Farrell) and Camilla Lopez (Salma Hayek) is the focal point which changes the original philosophical and black humorous story into a relatively soft romantic drama. Probably an inevitable outcome considering the level of sensuality Collin Farrell and Salma Hayek provoke. The American production of *Ask the Dust* does not have the existential acuity of the original. But on a more superficial level Robert Towne's *Ask the Dust* is an excellent piece of dramatic entertainment.

Pride and Prejudice, a review by Margot Guillemin



by Jane Austen 1796. The story of the lively and witty Miss Elizabeth Bennet and the haughty Mr. Darcy has managed to sweep entire generations of its feet and continues to do so. The novel tells the story of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, who at first can't stand the sight of each other, but as the result of some scandalous events get to know each other better and eventually fall in love with each other. This world famous novel by Jane Austen has remained her most popular one throughout the centuries, though prejudice may lead people to thinking that, since this book was written in 1796, it has become old fashioned and boring to read. The writer's realistic style and wit make sure that this is unlikely to happen for at least another millennium.



by Simon Langton 1995. The 1995 version of *Pride and Prejudice*, aka the BBC TV series, is probably one of the best known versions of Jane Austen's world famous novel. This series with Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle in the leading roles, has bewitched tens of thousands of people, and with a stunning 9.3/10 on the IMDB site 15 years after its official release it is well on its way to becoming a classic. Though the Jane Austen novels are generally perceived as something for women, even the male voters gave it an average of 8.9/10 so the boys don't have to be shy and use a girlfriend as an excuse to watch. The series stays very close to the book in dialogue, setting and general appearances. With outstanding acting from all the actors, this series is as brilliant as the book and deserves a full 10 out of 10.

Alice in Wonderland: Through the looking glass, a review by Margot Guillemin



by Lewis Carroll 1865. This book by Lewis Carroll is the sequel to '*Alice in Wonderland*', and starts with Alice playing in the garden with her kittens. After arriving in Wonderland, by going through a mirror; she meets several characters including the Red Queen, who explains to her how Wonderland is now a giant chessboard. The adventures of Alice as she tries to escape her enemy, the Red Queen, involve a lot of plot twists, and shifts in time and place. The theme of chess is also relevant to the story, because whenever the place or time changes, Alice too crosses from one field of the chessboard into another. This change of time or place also enhances the nonsense form of the story. The conclusion is that, although this book is a classic children's book, it is still fun to if only you can see past the nonsense.



by Tim Burton 2010. The 3D version of *Alice in Wonderland: Through the looking glass*, is rather loosely based on the book, with the whole theme of chess being removed except for in the fight scene. But we still get to meet the main characters and the story remains the same. Every character is portrayed by an accomplished actor, for Alice we have Mia Wasikowska and Johny Depp outdoes himself as the Mad Hatter. Harry Potter fans may recognize Helena Bonham Carter, aka Bellatrix Lestrange, here playing the Red Queen; Anna Hathaway again proves her ability to portray royalty and everybody's favorites Tweedledee and Tweedledum are both convincingly played by Matt Lucas. All in all, *Alice in Wonderland* is a typical Tim Burton film with an amazing cast and story.

Shutter Island, a review by Jan Mua



by Dennis Lehane 2003. Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* recounts the story of Teddy Daniels. He is a US Marshal who has come to Ashecliffe hospital for the criminally insane to investigate the disappearance of Rachel Solando. She is a very aggressive woman who murdered her own children. Nothing is as it seems though, and we are on the front row to witness Teddy's descent into madness. This book is brilliant, the more you read the less sense it all makes. It shows that this author has a lot of faith in his readers, knowing that difficult plots turn some people off. Most of the story takes place on an island, that creates a sense of isolation. The impending hurricane contributes to the already creepy atmosphere. There is some sex and violence, but these only make it more real. This novel is worth checking out.



by Martin Scorsese 2010. *Shutter Island* is a very good adaptation, worthy of the book. Martin Scorsese proves once again what a master craftsman he is. On to the cast then. Ben Kingley is very convincing as the creepy Dr Cawley. Scorsese favourite Leonardo Dicaprio proves that he can do more than portraying pretty boys in romantic dramas. You find yourself rooting for his character right from the get go. Mark Ruffalo's Chuck Aule is so salt of the earth, that you're very surprised to find out who he really is near the end. The books creepy and sombre atmosphere has been flawlessly translated to the screen, it definitely sets the mood. It is not always easy following the narrative but this picture is worth the effort. The imagery can also be scary at times, but you can always hold your partner's hand. *Shutter island* deserves two thumbs up.

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Simile was brought to you by...

(Editor) DORINE: *Being a part of the magazine team has been an inspiring experience and I would do it all over again! I truly enjoyed working on the magazine and the idea that what we made will be read by dozens of students and professors... Exciting!* **(Editor) WINNE:** *Last minute changes, lots of meetings, but my nerves survived, and the result is worth the while.* **(Assistant editor) MARGOT:** *The most memorable moment of making the magazine was interviewing John Irving with Dorine. I remember us both being rather nervous but when we were actually doing it all went smoothly. Everything was just an amazing experience !!* **(Creative writing coordinator) CHARLIEN:** *I really liked being able to help put the texts from our Creative Writing Group in the magazine. Now we can finally show all our friends and family what it is we do every other Monday evening.* **(Other team members) ALEXANDRA:** *I got involved because it seemed exciting to have your own name written under an interesting article in an even more interesting magazine, read by lots of interesting people!* **GRIET:** *I love to write and joining the magazine group was the ideal experience to do so! A great enthusiastic group and a long list of books to be reviewed; we are just getting started!* **JAN:** *It's my biggest wish that all of you out there have as much fun reading as I've had writing.* **LARA:** *I enjoyed being involved in the whole process of the making of this magazine. From the gathering of ideas till the actual writing, it was fun to do.* **(Staff members) JOANNA:** *Back when I mentioned to Kate that it might be a nice idea to collect and print some of our students' fantastic creative writing, I had no idea that it could turn into something as exciting as *Simile*— great work!* **BIRGIT:** *This goes beyond all my expectations! Thank you all !* **KATRIEN:** *Students never cease to amaze me. I want my copy signed by all contributors, and I intend to frame the cover. Good work everyone!!*

Get involved with SIMILE!

That's it for this edition of Simile. But never fear, we'll be back next year! So if you enjoyed this edition of Simile and would like to be on the team for the next edition, or if you have any creative writing, artwork, features, reviews or interviews to contribute to the next edition then please drop us an email at: similemagazine@gmail.com. We'd also love to hear what you thought of our magazine. We look forward to hearing from you!

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