

Simile Issue / 03

Interview with Nicci Gerrard

from Nicci French

The view from the States

with Beth Hiskey and
Maud Casey

Comical Short Stories

***Reflective
poetry and
visual artwork***





Simile

student literary magazine

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Nicci French is a name linked to famous crime novels, but did you know that “she” is made up of two authors: Nicci Gerrard and Sean French. The pair are happily married and write the novels together, as well as writing separately under their own names. As it happened, Nicci Gerrard was recently at the Antwerp Book Fair to promote her newest solo endeavour, the novel “The Middle Place”. Simile was lucky enough to get an interview and ask some questions that desperately needed answering.

INTERVIEW/ with Nicci French

By Kate Luysterborg and M.L.M Verdonck

SIMILE: In your opinion, what qualities should literature have?

Nicci Gerrard: That is such a huge question, I wonder what other people say to that. The first thing I would say, because I write literary novels of my own and I write thrillers with Sean (French), there is no such thing as a genre that can't be literature. You can write science fiction, you can write thrillers, you can write romantic novels and it can be good literature. Nakobov once said in a lecture that the first great test of whether or not a book works, is if it causes a thrill down the spine, if it goes through your heart, your bones and your blood. I would go with that. The job of literature is to break down barriers, to open horizons, to evoke sympathy and empathy. I do not know what makes good literature, but I know what it does. You cannot say what makes good literature, but you can say what makes bad literature. And in a way, only time can tell what makes bad literature. You can say novels are structured badly, imagined badly. Those books do not survive. You can say that some good books do not survive, but bad books never survive.

SIMILE: Can crime be literature, and not be literature?

NG: It can be anything. Yet, there has been, certainly in the UK, a strong division; there were literary novels and then there were genre novels, and crime thrillers were basically genre novels. Genre novels did have rules, they were not meant to be literature, they were not meant to care about the characters or the quality of writing. And people who read crime thrillers did not read literary novels. That used to be something of a law but I think that is gone now. Crime thrillers can be anything; It has got to have some contact with the reader, some kind of narrative that takes place.

SIMILE: You write together with Sean French, are the readers able to notice which part was written by whom?

NG: If the reader can notice, then we failed. Good literature is made up by the voice in the novel, a relation between the reader and writer. If you cannot feel that one voice, if you feel two voices, it is wrong. The reader has to be able to give himself up to that voice. For instance, there are books that I love enormously, in which nothing happens except inside someone's head. In those books, you cannot say it is all about the story, it is all about losing oneself in the voice of the book. Some readers who know us very well, however, cannot help themselves. They try and guess which part is written by whom, and they cannot tell. If it would be a battle between two voices, it would make for a bad novel and a bad marriage. By the time we finished the book, it is not just two voices. Sometimes, we cannot remember who wrote which section, and that is good, really.

SIMILE: Is there a difference in technique between Sean and you?

NG: When Sean and I write together, it is absolutely collaborative. When you have an idea together, you can bounce it back to each other and explore it. It makes writing together easier and it feels safer, you get to know whether an idea is good or not. When we write separately it's much more lonely. When it is going bad, it feels like you are going up a hill, and then there is that feeling when it is going well. And that happens when we write together, it is magic, and madness.

SIMILE: When you write separately, do you still read and edit each other's work before it is published?

NG: We were always each other's first reader and first editor, even when we were journalists and on-going novelists. But I would never show work in progress, or talk of it. It's too embarrassing.

SIMILE: How does your work with Mr. French influence your work individually?

NG: That is a really good question. I am not sure of how to answer that. To be honest, I am not sure if I would write the way I write now if I had not written with Sean first. I think there was something about writing with the two of us that made me jump off the diving board to also write on my own. So there is that, but I also happen to think that the more you write, the more you develop yourself as a person, because you learn to open up different parts of your own imagination.

There are things that Nicci French would write, but that Nicci Gerrard would not want to write. There is the way in which I write on my own, which does not tally with the way in which Nicci French writes. In a way, Nicci French is a strange third person, not simply summation of Sean and me. It also feels safer, because that strange third person and each other are things we can hide behind. That makes thinking of ideas and publishing novels easier.

SIMILE: Do you have advice for aspiring writers?

NG: I have two pieces of advice, and they are really basic and really obvious, and that is to read, and secondly to write. People often want to be writers but do not want to go

through that awful process of writing. It is work that you have to do, and there is never a right time to begin writing. For instance when I have time or when I have got money in the bank or when inspiration strikes, and so on. And you think 'when all these things happen, then I can begin'. Well you never begin like that. You have to make it happen, and that feeling we were talking about when you write and you can't write fast enough, that doesn't come until you make it happen and get across the horrible bits of not being able to write.

SIMILE: Are there circumstances in which you prefer to write?

NG: No, some writers take that very literally, they have to have a room of their own, they have to have peace and quiet. I can write anywhere, and I think that is because of the way we started writing. We had four kids, there was much more chaos. I used to think I was able to write in spite of all those things. There were many books about how to write but they said nothing about how to write when you have a household to maintain. That really irritates me. Those books said something which could be an enemy to writing. I think that for me, writing in a mess, writing while having kids wandering in and out, having a stew cooking in the kitchen, having people over. I quite like interruption when I write, I like to place myself in the middle when I'm writing. I think I can write anywhere, and that is what I want. I do have a room of my own, a lovely study with a beautiful window and I love it but I feel a pressure to work in there. But if I did not have that, I do not think I would not be able to write. I like to think that I can write anywhere and at any time, and I do.

SIMILE: What are your main influences?

NG: Well, I have friend writers who in the act of writing are afraid of reading. I can understand what they mean, but it is a bad feeling, you're a leaking vessel. I do not read much crime fiction, but I read a lot of Victorian novels, gothic novels, and modernist novels and I've always read with my daughters, I also read a lot of poetry. But the influence is not just about literature, it is about what you see, the conversations you have, and so on. Influence is something inevitable, something you have to have. I think, instead of trying not to be influenced, you should say: 'let me have it'. (sigh) It's a very bad answer, because I have no idea what my main influences are.

SIMILE: Which writers inspire you?

NG: There are a lot of writers today of which I think 'I wish I could write like them', but every writer has to find out what kind of writer he or she is. It is no good trying to be like someone else, you have your own DNA, your own fingerprint. For instance, I said to my publisher that I was going to write a happy book. But it did not happen, I just could not do it. In life you have to find out who you are. Everyone in life has their own voice, and it does not work trying to use someone else's. And I advise aspiring writers to find their own voice, and to do that by writing and writing and writing.

SIMILE: *Do you consciously or unconsciously refer, in your work, to what you read?*

NG: Not consciously, but I definitely do. Things come in almost like you are a ventriloquist (someone who can make their voice appear to come from somewhere else, ed.). For instance when we were writing *Blue Monday* [our latest book] it was influenced by my all-time favourite children's book *Moominland Midwinter* by Tove Jansson I read it as a child and I read it to my children, a book I still read and cry at. There is something about how it plugs into me.

It was said that in one of our novels, we used a line by the Beatles. And we must have known it was a line because it is a very famous line, but we did not realize it. And actually, when saying that people have to find their own voice, you can say that it is made up by other people's voices, which is what modernism is all about. People are a collage of memories, of what they've heard and also of other people's voices. It's tricky; Influence, when is it plagiarism? When is it a reference? When is it a homage? There are all these words in the world, but there is a very thin line between plagiarizing and just being influenced.

SIMILE: *How does the research for your novels work?*

NG: That is one of the things with every novel: you need to see that it is in safe hands, right. For example, in *The Memory Game*, a body was found after 25 years. Now we (Nicci and Sean, ed.) had no idea in what kind of state people would find a body after such a long time, what the earth surrounding it would look like and things like that.

For another book (*Killing me Softly*, ed.), we researched mountaineering. We talked to people who went mountaineering, read books on the subject, watched videos, learned the jargon, those things. Research is important to create a 'real' fictional world, to enhance the willing suspension of disbelief. To make a story believable, you need to know the facts, for example 'what does hypothermia do to your body?'.

SIMILE: *How do you try to achieve a literary level in your novels?*

NG: I honestly can't judge that. I do not know how literary my novels are, people have to tell me that, I do not have that degree of self-consciousness. I do not think I consciously try to stick to literary standards. I write the way I write, I mean, I definitely take literacy into account, but I do not know how literary my novels are. I am very bad at judging that for my own writing.

SIMILE: *Using your own criteria, on a scale from one to ten, how well do you think you do when it comes to writing literature?*

NG: [Hilarity] Oh my God, I cannot say that! That is not fair! Really, I could not, I am not going to score myself, really, I-I [laughter everywhere]



After completing her degree in English and French at the University of Washington, Beth Hiskey was awarded a grant as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. She has been working in the UGent English Linguistics Department for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Beth's farewell address / The view from the States

By Beth Hiskey

Whenever I told someone I was moving to Belgium for a year, their reaction was easy to predict. If the person were American, their eyes would light up. "How exciting!" they'd exclaim. And then, after a brief pause, the light in their eyes would dim slightly as they puzzled, "What language do they speak there?"

When I addressed a Belgian, however, the reaction was even more predictable. Their nose would wrinkle slightly and their eyebrows would gently furrow, "Why Belgium?!" they would ask, genuinely concerned for my apparent lack of decision-making skills.

And, in fact, it is a difficult question to answer. I was not seeking any single goal in my year here in Belgium. There was no ulterior motive, no poignant reason why Belgium was the only country for me. My original intentions were less well defined: to practice my French, to gain teaching experience, and to enjoy the adventure of living in Europe for a year before settling into my new career.

It is too easy, as a young person, to be carried along on the conveyer belt of life – the pipeline that pushes you forward from school to university to career without allowing you the time to stop and reflect and very consciously decide, "What do I want out of life?" And so my move to Belgium was designed as a sort of self-intervention. A way of knocking myself off the conveyer belt and challenging myself to live.

In truth, I've actually always known what I wanted to do with my life: I've been expressing my desire to teach since the age of five. In that sense, my exploration was not a diagnostic prescription, but a type of resistance. A manifesto, if you will. I want to be daring. I want to explore, create, learn, ruminate, and engage, and I don't want to lock myself into a box and live safely inside until the end of time.

And to that extent, I reckon this year has been quite successful. I embraced my eight months in Belgium, meeting brilliant people, learning Dutch, sampling beer, and learning

to teach. I fought to make the most out of each experience – from traveling to Turkey to spending the entire weekend on my couch with a stack of 60 literature reviews.

Of course, there are a few moments that stand out. Teaching my first class, walking into my apartment for the first time, watching my students' hilarious role plays, delivering my first lecture to 200 students waving eagerly from the audience. My surprise birthday party in class, endless hours of oral examinations, writing conferences, the silence of the first day of class, the babbling of noise when students finally felt comfortable speaking. These moments dance effortlessly before my eyes, even when the rest of this year dares to settle into the blur of routine.

But now, the end nears. As I write this, I have only 30 days left in Belgium before moving on to the next great adventure – teaching in New York City. And looking back, it's not Belgium that has transformed me, but the people and the moments within that geographical abstraction that have truly defined my time here.

And so it is with life. My life, at any rate. Those individual people and moments alter how you perceive reality, and the more you expose yourself to those moments and those opportunities, the more inspired you become. For it is through these moments that you realize who you are and who you want to be.

For me, this year, those people and those moments have been made up of all of my students and colleagues. I've spent the last eight months astounded by the skill, finesse, and good humor of nearly everyone I have encountered. The students at UGent work tirelessly to meet the demands of their curriculum and their own elevated standards. It is this effort, in part, that has pushed me to redefine my own expectations.

And yet, there is one clear drawback to this systemic excellence: the fear of failure. I encounter this handicap every day with students too worried about their grammar or pronunciation to risk sharing an insight or sparking a debate. The same fear still rattles inside me as I attempt to approach a new person with my faltering Dutch. But it is this very fear that determines the limits of the excellence we are trying to establish. For we will prove our excellence not through our controlled caution, but through our willingness to abandon those very inhibitions and pursue what matters to us most.

So, yes, go to class. But don't let that class become your world. Find what inspires you, and pursue it relentlessly. Gain experience, travel, dialogue, write, laugh, teach, dream – and do it often. Because it is often outside of the classroom that you will experience the moment that will light a fire inside you for the years to come. And so to those of you this year who have helped ignite my passion for teaching, travel, and life: thank you. It's been wonderful.

COLUMN/

In “Stars, Stripes & Trees,” we explore the connection between American civilization and the environment. Once an enemy of the frontiersmen, the environment has steadily become an integral part of the great American identity. Join me on this hike into the obscure meadows and hidden vales of a greening America.

Stars, Stripes and Trees by Dimitri Neyt

Proto-environmentalists

In the sixties and seventies, caring for the environment became a national concern in the United States. Scientific research established that we were well on our way to destroy our natural environments. We would not just lose wilderness and forests and merry birds and fluffy animals, we would actually *harm ourselves irreversibly*. A notorious and influential 1962 novel called *Silent Spring* raised awareness about the dangers of spraying DDT without proper knowledge about health and environmental risks. Since then, “the environment” and “environmentalism” became household words practically overnight.

But well before that, the United States had already seen a first wave of environmental concern. It goes by the name of conservationism, but you could also call it proto-environmentalism if you’re into long and fancy phrases.

The roots of this movement go back, at least, to the mid-19th century. Some people, intellectuals from the East mostly, began to appreciate that nature was being threatened by a rapidly progressing civilization. Before that, Frontiersmen believed the opposite was the case: wilderness was the Devil’s den and what better to do than *bring civilization to the wild*? It was a big step, intellectually, to see nature as something that was valuable in itself. From then on, some people actually wanted to preserve wilderness. Fence it off, figuratively and literally if it must, from the industrial, utilitarian society!

These Easterners, often writers and artists, were inspired by one great American author: Henry David Thoreau. His writings, and those of his contemporary and friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, expressed a longing for what was still *wild*. “In Wildness,” Thoreau famously wrote, “is the preservation of the World.” Thoreau believed that Man had to get in contact with the Wild to be fully alive. Society makes us passive – nature can strengthen us, make us moral beings, let us feel the great force of nature deeply. This

intellectual revolution thoroughly influenced Thoreau's readers and made them yearn for Nature and its preservation.

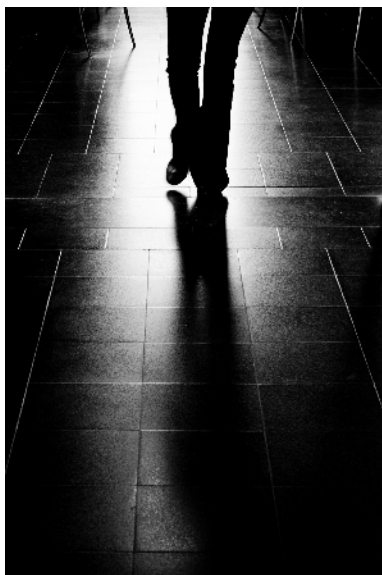
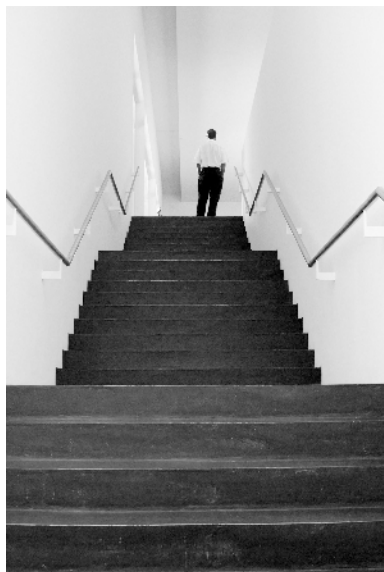
One such person was the Scottish-born John Muir. Having hiked for long periods of time through the truly wild regions in the Far West, Muir was enthralled by nature. His passion was enormous. Muir, the great conservationist, did everything in his life to ensure that the beauty of America's wilderness area would be preserved for future generations. Muir wasn't a sit-still philosopher. He pro-actively lobbied for the preservation of the Yosemite Valley. Thanks to him, Yosemite became America's second national park in 1890 and one of the nation's most cherished places. Muir was also the founder of the Sierra Club, the oldest environmental organization in the States.

In the early 20th century, the conservation movement was incredibly popular, considering how early it came about. For the first time in history, thousands of people were actively involved with the preservation of natural landscapes. At one particular occasion in 1913, one Senator concerned with the question whether to dam a valley in Yosemite or not, received an estimated five thousand letters (!) opposing the dam. Although their attempt eventually failed, it was a huge symbolical achievement for the conservation movement.

At least sixty years before the tree-hugging Hippies first celebrated Earth Day in 1970, American people championed the conservation effort, establishing national parks and an independent agency devoted to the preservation of them. The conservation movement of the early 20th century was not a mature kind of environmental concern: most people would not have understood the intricate workings of ecosystems or biodiversity. But it most certainly was a sincere attempt at doing what is good. Good for Man, and – for the first time – good for Nature.







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BITTERSWEET SYMPHONY | MATTHIAS OPSOMER

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APPLE INTRODUCING iWEAR - CANVAS PANTS AND

TURTLENECKS FOLLOWING | NILS SMEUNINX

Comic Writing

01

Bittersweet Symphony

by Matthias Opsomer

The harsh sound of metal on metal echoed through the valley. A small figure hurried away from the noise and dove behind a bunch of bushes as if his life depended on it. Admittedly, as far as he knew it did. Panting on a heap of leaves he counted 42 heartbeats. Nothing happened. That was good, right? He took out his mission description and read: "... once dragon slain, open door (keys under the doormat) and save her." Hastily he scrambled to his feet and started walking towards the tower. What a day, thank god the weather was nice. He hated rain.

Ruikan took a deep breath. This was going to be the best day of his life if only he didn't blow it. Stay calm, stay cool. Maybe he should say something. The knights in the tales always had an impressive opener. But he wasn't much of a talker and he knew it. No, he would go in and say "Hi", nice and simple.

Gathering all the courage he could muster he knocked on the door. Listening intently for a few moments he had to admit that once more nothing seemed to be happening. He knocked again, somewhat harder now. Silence still. Alarmed, Ruikan drew his sword, lifted the rusty door handle and opened it with a squeaking sound that penetrated the cold silence. His heart was beating like a mad jester on a drum, courageously he ordered his hands to stop shaking. He threatened, begged and negotiated, but they seemed not to care. Holding his sword in front of him, he decided to go in, ignoring the slight trembling of the weapon in his hands.

Looking around the room he noticed something was not right. As a matter of fact, something was terribly, terribly wrong. The room had a bed, a closet, a couple of chairs and a table, nothing unusual there, but something was lacking, a rather essential something, a something in need of being saved to be exact.

"Hello? Anybody here?" he yelled. Or better, he tried to yell but his voice abandoned ship halfway through the sentence, making him sound more like the door he had opened a few moments before. Ruikan walked around the room, paused and looked under the bed, then in the closet but found nothing but dust and a set of pink gowns.

That was the moment a voice behind him decided to call out "And who the hell are you?", causing Ruikan to gasp, hit his head in an attempt to get it out of the closet and dropping

his sword somewhere in the process. In the doorway stood a young lady with an expression of surprised anger on her face.

“Hi” he said according to plan, though a little croakily, “err... my name’s Ruikan.” For a split second the trembling muscles in her face seemed to relax, softening her traits.

Then the icy look in her eyes returned as she said: “And what, may I ask you, are you doing here?” Tricky. That was a question he wasn’t prepared for.

“Well”, he started hesitatingly, “I hoped to find here something female to rescue from the dragon.” He knew he had made a mistake the moment the words left his mouth. And if he hadn’t known it the dagger that was thrown at him that very moment was a clear hint as well. While he was wondering how she got that thing out of that pink dress so quickly, it swirled through the air and hit the vase on the table next to him. The thing tilted, fell and broke into pieces on the red carpet.

“Something female?” Vanilla cried out.

“Well, I couldn’t be sure, you see, only last month I rescued a badger” Ruikan mumbled hastily, suddenly fascinated by his feet. “A male badger,” he added.

The princess led out a frustrated sigh. “So of all the knights in this kingdom you were chosen to come and rescue me? One with badger experience.” Ruikan cringed, this was going downhill.

“Well, not at first. I’m sort of the last one, you see. All the others came here by night, fought the dragon and well, lost you know. You must have seen it, there’s no way a knight can defeat a dragon on his own. So I waited for him to go hunting and here I am.” The icy look in her eyes now showed a hint of contempt as well.

“Not very heroic, is it? Are you sure you don’t want to come back when the dragon’s here too?”

Discouraged he opened his mouth and said as knightly as he could “I’d rather not, thank you very much.” This wasn’t going downhill anymore, this was more like jumping off a cliff. He tried again.

“Come on Val, that dragon will return any minute now. We’ll need every yard we can put between us and him before he discovers you’re gone. Let’s get out of here.” The last words were nothing more than a tired whisper, pleading, begging.

Vanilla walked round him, careful not to come too close and looked out of the window. An awkward silence filled the room once more.

“You don’t understand,” she replied eventually, “if a princess is kidnapped by a dragon the king sends out his most courageous knights, one of them kills the dragon and rescues the girl. That’s how it’s done, what you’re doing is kidnapping me again, just like the dragon did. Then I’m twice as kidnapped as I am now.”

Seeing he wasn’t about to figure that one out by himself she took a deep breath and said: “Go away, Ruikan.” She turned her head around and looked him in the eyes with that icy gaze that made him want to go home and hide beneath his blanket. “Go away.”

He wanted to protest, but knew he wasn’t going to win this. Some things never change. He turned around briskly and left the room, unable to see the silent ‘sorry’ in her eyes.

She heard the familiar sound of flapping wings in the distance as she picked up the sword he had forgotten. A tear flowed down her cheek, tried to get grip of her chin, failed and fell down. As it hit the ground the earth rumbled. Outside Ruikan let out a yell and tried to draw his sword. Thank God the weather was nice. He hated rain.

Inspector Dawlish by Stephanie Benoit

A sharp breeze blew through the open window. It was a perfect, storybook murder scene, Inspector Dawlish observed. Everything was in place; the austere couches, the traces of a struggle, the puddle of blood. There was even a shifty butler standing near the door. Everything was there. Everything – *except the body*.

This was highly unusual, thought the Inspector. Quite against protocol, yes. These modern murderers didn’t even have the decency to leave their victims anymore! And there had undeniably been a body, of that he was sure. He had seen it just this morning. In fact, it had disappeared around the same time the shifty butler had offered him some tea and

cake downstairs. Dawlish cursed his sweet tooth. Damn sweet tooth. It always got him into trouble. Like the time he had eaten precious evidence in the Rosenberg case – that was a blemish on his career all right. He had just assumed the chocolate on the mantelpiece of the Rosenberg estate living room was for him. How was he to know that it was covered with the fingerprints of the lost great-aunt of Mrs. Rosenberg's housekeeper? Who in fact turned out to be *the very same* great-aunt of Shelly Sheldon at the Carp & Co. Café where the murderer had celebrated his 40th birthday? He would never live down the blunder. His thoughts wandered back to the case. Ah yes, the body. Or rather, the absence of the body. Where could it have gone? The Inspector took out his magnifying glass, because it always impressed women, no matter what, even if it had never really proved useful in a case. He scanned the puddle of blood. Hmm. Yes, it was still blood, even up close. He sniffed it. Suddenly, the Inspector stiffened. The blood was bothering him. Was it really blood? Blood so thick and fluorescently red that it could only be.....ketchup? "AHA!" cried Dawlish, "A clue at last!". He sprang up, the light of enthusiasm in his eyes. The corpse was not a corpse, but alive and kicking! "Come, minions! Together we shall nab this fake corpse, and solve the grandest case of Murder and Mystery ever seen in Pucklechurch!" he called out. His two junior assistants followed him eagerly as he strode across the room.

They were just walking down the driveway when Dawlish remembered he had forgotten his pipe at the scene of the crime. He strode up the stairs and grandly swung the door open.

The body was back.

"Oh honestly, this is just ridiculous," said Inspector Dawlish. "Sir, you are making a mockery of my profession. If you are not dead, then get up and explain yourself, for pity's sake! And if you are dead, you may remain lying down. I am not an unkind man."

The body sat up slowly and sighed a little sigh of embarrassment.

"I had to use the bathroom. Sorry. It was very urgent."

Dawlish was not amused. "Yes yes my good man, giving me a reason for your sudden departure is all very well, but why on earth would you stage your own death in the first place? The Pucklechurch Police Dept. has many other important things to look into and corpses that don't stay dead are a waste of my time. Why, our annual baking competition is only next week and the organization is not at all up to par. You try and get a Pucklechurch woman to follow the rules of a contest. And amongst all those problems, there's you, turning out alive when you're supposed to be dead." He said.

The body thought awhile before explaining himself.

"You know, it does get awfully boring on the weekends here. It seemed like such a good idea at the time, you can't blame me. I mean, I was reduced to watching day-time

television! Can you imagine? I almost succumbed to temptation one day when I felt this overpowering desire to order a Whipatronic, and that was when I realized that enough was enough." It said.

"My wife has a Whipatronic! Unbelievable! I completely understand, oh you poor man. You really must find something else to do with your time though, murder cases where nobody is murdered look bad on my report. Oh but I know! Why don't you join our annual baking competition?" said Dawlish.

And so the body (his name was really Peter) agreed that this was a very good idea and tried his hand at a chocolate-and-vanilla marble sponge. To his surprise, he won that year, and a new era began for the Annual Pucklechurch Baking Competition. Inspector Dawlish could not be prouder, and many a future assistant of his would receive the honour of hearing that particular story over, and over again.

The piece of paper that cut off God's Hand

by Jorin Carpels

Today, one of the most controversial ideas in the universe is still that the Christians were right about the creation of the Earth. Many arguments have been brought up against this theory, but it simply is the truth. Because they say so. Because God says so. Because he is almighty. Because it says so in the Bible. Because, well, you catch my drift.

Nobody denies the fact that the Bible contains a few minor errors, but God works in mysterious ways. There's also that long period of time when nothing actually happened on earth. This is obviously because God had a very long to-do-list, with the creation of humanity as the penultimate point, its destruction being the last, but that's another story. This one is about the day God completed one of the points on his list. This point being the creation of pink paper.

It is a common misconception that the invention of a new kind of coloured paper is an easy process. There are many factors to be considered: the weight, the density, the velocity when falling to the ground on the second moon of Mars (in sheet, note pad AND ball form), the increase of a person's gay percentage upon touching the kind of paper and so on.

It was during this laborious process that something rather disturbing happened. God was testing the resilience of the paper by crumpling some sheets. Unfortunately for God, one of the sheets had a rather bad temper and went on a little rampage. He also accidentally cut off God's hand.

This specific piece of paper suffered from a rather severe case of marriage. To make it even worse, marriage to a piece of turquoise paper. And everyone knows turquoise pieces of paper tend to have a rather demanding personality. They need constant attention and will brag about themselves all the time. That morning it had been worse than ever and the piece of pink paper had gotten into a quite murderous mood.

This of course terribly ruined God's day and as a punishment pink paper became the most gay paper in the entire universe. This did not help the aforementioned piece of paper's temper. Not at all. No really, he committed genocide in an alternate universe because of it. And stole Jesus' slippers just before he left to spread the word on earth, which resulted in an indescribable mess and Jesus' life-long search for decent footwear and him not getting crucified at age 33, but that's also a story for another time.

Next: How God gets a new hand and the mystery of the one-handed monkey.

Humans dwarfed by Johan Bollaert

Human scientists really made a mistake, denouncing him as if he hadn't been a sign to the auspices and even a powerful god of the dead for a while. Pluto generally wasn't angered easily. Constantly being among the cynical dead made one like that, careless. Yet even a cynical uncaring planet had hackles to raise if need be. Denounce him they would, even worse, call him a dwarf planet! If his new title had been any less inferiorating, he could have accepted his fate. But to be compared with those false, nonexistent creatures of the north, digging for shiny jewellery in the dirt. Disgusting.

Thus he spent his time grumbling and wasting away. Until he, as far removed from Sun's light as he was, could hear Mother Earth's cries of agony. It was then that Pluto made up his mind and decided to do something about those fleas infesting her skin. Silently

planning and biding his time, he waited for the other planets to move across Sun's blinding and deafening rays. A conversation with mother was what he wanted, and he'd rather have it unwitnessed. Tired of waiting for the others to move, he went to Earth, neglecting the fact that Moon was yet there to see him. What would a tiny nephew like that one do, anyway?

"I heard your cries, mother" he said on arriving. Earth looked up with a gloomy glare and asked him what he wanted. "I want retribution. It has gone on long enough." Earth didn't believe in accepting help from her fellow planets anymore. Her brothers and sisters had long since chosen her invigorative skin's offspring above herself. "Is this what they have driven you to? I remember your lush green surface, still youthful and fertile. Don't let them turn your crust into a hard shell like mine." Earth smiled brownly and asked: "What? Would *you* help me then? Or turn away as all the others have done before you."

He then told her of his own anger, and related the plan to release them from their misery. Yet he also told her about the problems he faced, and the energy the impending actions would cost him. Rather brightened by his genius and apparent selflessness, she told him not to worry. Once restored to her former strength and beauty, she would replenish him with an everlasting supply of cookies. Surely such a large amount of calories should be enough for him to regain his power, he might even surpass his current force and rise amongst the other planets. This most of all brought a new perspective to his mind. Maybe he might even punish his brothers and sisters for their belittling behaviour. Thus invigorated by his bright future, he left Earth and returned to his former position, just in time for Mercury to cross Sun's border. Knowing that he would have to wait a long time before he would next have a free run at Earth again, he spent his time on chemistry, the building of weapons and armoury and random stargazing.

Meanwhile Moon was making its own plans as, being just around the earth, it had overheard their conversation. It was afraid of losing its newfound friendship and once again being cast into isolation. Too small to be worthy of observation, the other planets had ever refused to acknowledge it, yet recently man had set foot on its surface. It relished the idea of being the subject of their investigations and maybe even being the ground of their future explorations. Therefore the survival of humankind had to be ensured.

Years, ages, even millennia passed before the time came again when all the planets except earth and Pluto had moved across the border of Sun's aurora. Realizing his time had come, Pluto readied himself and embarked on his mission. Shifting gears and adjusting his

engines he aimed directly for the Mediterranean, a salty pool of liquid exceptionally suited to his purpose. The shockwave that would be caused by hitting Earth's surface would ensure the demise of all the neighbouring people. The ensuing waves, rain and dust clouds would smother all who could have survived. Picking up speed he passed Neptune's and soon Jupiter's orbits. By the time he reached the asteroid belt, he was no longer to be stopped by such minor collisions. Seeing the Neapolitan city, he set his goal just of the beach. Behold humans, his anger unleashed!

Turning over in her sleep, Margareta was awakened by a sudden urge to swim. She lifted herself out of the bed, which groaned under the effort of keeping her up. She went to the window, seeing the moon was full and the beach was charmingly illuminated by its reflection. She packed her swimming suit and went out, dressed only in her nightgown. The cloth barely covered her enormous buttocks and definitely failed to protect others' eyes from her sagging bosom, swinging around while she struggled down the stairs at the edge of the beach. Luckily nobody was around to see her at this ungodly hour of four o'clock in the morning.

Hoping a swim would temporarily release her from the aching back pains that lately troubled her so often, she shifted into her bathing suit, or tried to at least. Finally giving up the struggle to fit her ginormous ass inside the all too thin straps, she walked naked into the water and let the current take her, knowing that she would never sink. With her rolls of fat, even a planet would be kept floating. And that was exactly what Moon aspired to, pulling his oceanic strings so that poor Margareta was positioned exactly in Pluto's track.

Pluto, however, with all the ages of waiting before the plan could go into action, had found a simple chemical combination to cure fatness, originally created to save him from the aches that eating too many cookies would surely induce upon him. Yet being faced with this problem, he quickly launched the antidote in front of him. Not bothering to slow down and see its effect, he plunged right after.

When she had nearly given up all hope of ever getting rid of those tiring aches, Margareta suddenly felt something stabbing her left cheek, as she was bobbing face down in the water. Almost immediately she noticed how she had to struggle to keep up in the water, no longer floating around easily. She realized her pains had lessened and that she could once again swing her arms freely around, unimpaired by the layers of fat keeping them stuck to her body. Splashing around she praised the lord for granting her wishes, and

making her beautiful again. However, no longer being held up by those bands of fat, she disappointingly started to drown and splashed and spattered about. Her shouts for help were never heard as Pluto roaringly touched the outer edges of the atmosphere and made its final descent.

Seeing his plan had worked, and the antidote had cleared his way, Pluto crashed down on Earth. In his mind's eye he could see the demise of humankind playing out around him. O, how he suddenly longed to be the god of death again, observing all those surprised faces, that didn't realize where their end had come from. They would beg him for answers and cry to the heavens that it was not fair, that their time had not yet come. How they would howl, to realize they'd have to spend the rest of their lives - or deaths for that matter - serving the cause of their agony. He laughed, raged with finally unplugged mirth, as he saw himself rise amongst and above the others, never being looked down on again, feeding on the everlasting supply of cookies Mother had baked for him.

Apple introducing iWear - Canvas Pants and Turtlenecks to follow

by Nils Smeuninx

CUPERTINO, CA – In the next logical step after the release of the iPhone 4S's Siri, a phone capable of delegating even the drudgery of social contact to an Apple-designed and certified platform, Apple Inc. has today announced its branching out into the twin industries of optics and fashion.

'We were already seeing many of our elite group of customers talking on their iPhones and listening to their iPods while writing on their MacBooks in coffee bars, so we thought that we'd already achieved maximal visibility,' explains CEO Tim Cook, 'but then it struck us: what about their visibility? They may use our products to be noticed by the world, but how do we make sure they can notice it noticing them back?'

The answer? The iWear Visual System 1G, as the California-based electronics giant has conveniently branded it to avoid confusion with the 2G 3G, 4G and 4S models already in the pipelines. The next step in naso-aurally supported optical technology, the 1G will launch at \$719, featuring a sleek aluminium-based design with integrated gyroscopic

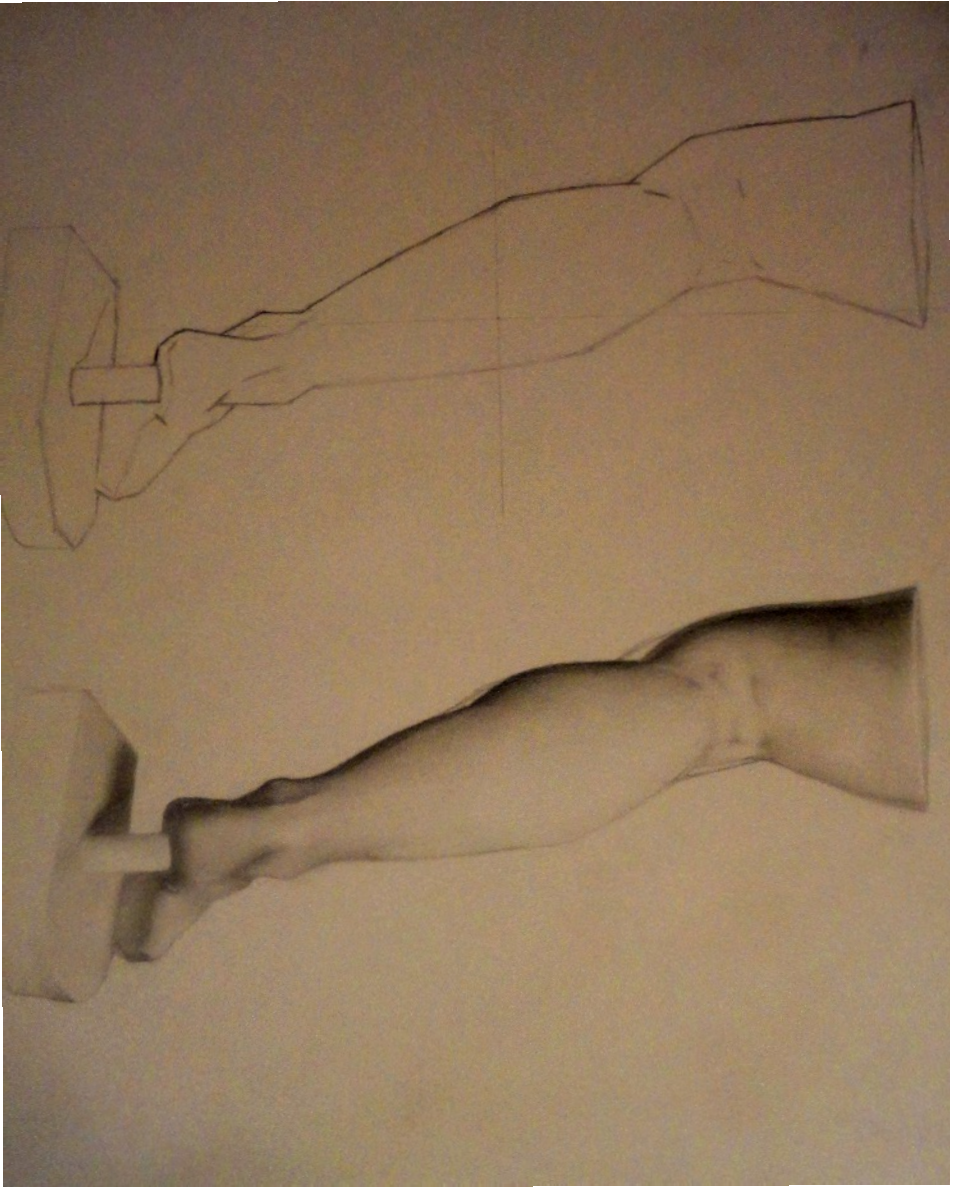
stabilizers and cooling fins as well as thermal funnels to ensure maximum airflow to the user's cranium.

Additionally, the set will feature a hand-operated Apple-designed and themed antibacterial microfiber cloth to remove debris and other impediments to perfect vision, with refills currently priced at \$59. The iWear will also – at a slight premium – enhance vision. Pricing on this feature is yet to be announced.

The iWear 2G is currently set to be able to recognise and track over ten thousand different objects, and the 3G will aid the wearer in identifying them through vocal shorthand thanks to a built-in speaker and earplug jack. The 4G and 4S feature matrix is as of yet undisclosed, but Cook has hinted that 'it will revolutionize the way we look at things.'

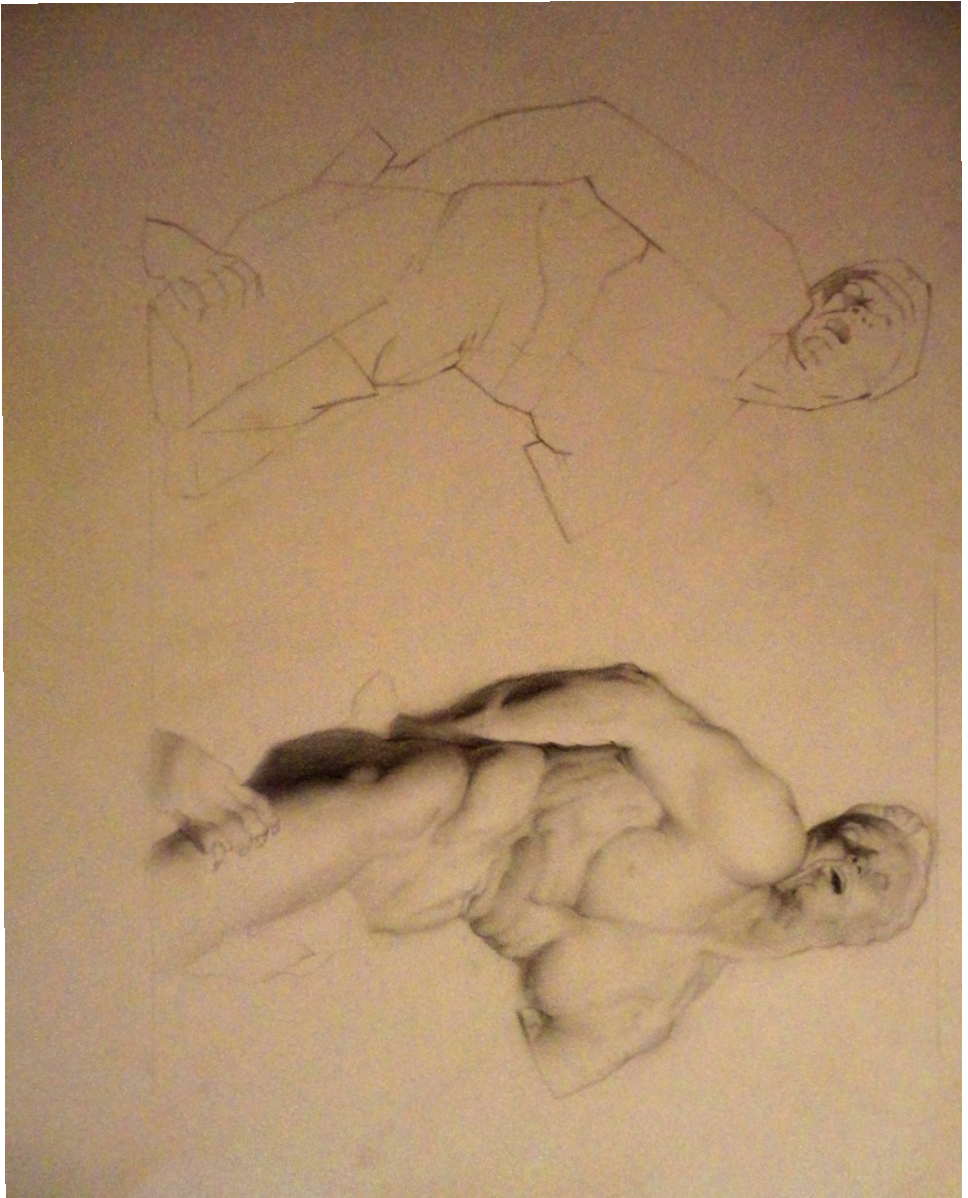
The CEO emphasises that even though the percentage of customers who don't at least wear glasses ironically is less than five percent, Apple still doesn't want to ostracize those amongst its fold with 20/20 vision. For compatibility reasons, Apple tech support advises against consulting independent optometrists, but future adopters of iWear technology will be able to get their eyes adjusted for any model of their choice at the new iCare section, coming 2012 to all major Apple Stores.

Next in line for Apple if iWear technology proves successful is applying the same design philosophies to turtleneck sweaters and canvas pants to ensure that no part of the user's apparel misses out on the Apple experience. These items will wirelessly interface with Apple's already released electronics such as iPhone, as well as the iWear 2G or subsequent models, via Bluetooth. While both turtlenecks and pants will be based on the iPhone and iPod design, Apple hopes to have a Mac-branded raincoat ready for fall 2013. Despite being a massive departure from the company's established product lines, Cook claims that the established Apple slogan will ring truer than ever for this new generation of kit: 'it just works.'



Leg cast study

(Gabriel A. Vega)



Cast study

(Gabriel A. Vega)



Female portrait
(Gabriel A. Vega)

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Visit by Maud Casey

The view from the States



Maud Casey is a published author and teaches creative writing at the university of Maryland. On 22nd March 2012, she visited the English Department to talk about her work and give us some hints on our own writing. She explained that in her university, creative writing studies are an integral part of the English Department, and contrary to what one might think, the course is above all about learning to read and less about learning to write. In order to understand your own possibilities for writing, you have to understand the structure of the literature that came before you. Thus one of Casey's main goals is helping her students to find their own voice when writing

creatively. Every story creates its own world and thus has its own "narrative knots that need to be untangled." Casey also talked about how a Creative Writing group serves as a community. This community spirit shows when writers meet other writers, and discuss their writing and the problems they encounter while writing. In this spirit, the group had the chance to do an interesting writing exercise...

***T*he Exercise:**

Step one: choose an emotion

Step two: describe that feeling through the eyes of a character who is experiencing it. You cannot mention explicitly what your character is feeling. Make the emotion clear through your description.

***T*he Result:**

On the next page you can see a sample of the work written in response to this prompt..

Sample 1

Shooting booths. At least four of them. One with tin cans – that shouldn't be too difficult. One with balls dancing on fountains, two with white, chalk-like batons that hold red and pink roses. A strong smell of hamburgers and french fries flows by like a heavy fog on a busy morning on the freeway – all-enveloping, suffocating almost. A Ferris-wheel next, and a stall with rubber ducks for eager toddlers. That smell ... it creeps up on one like a tiger in a garish, fluorescent jungle. Merciless, with deadly fangs. Hunting in herds too: at least five hamburgered beasts of prey are lurking at their victim here.

Sample 2

The sky rumbled, the clouds started to gather. He could feel their combined force above his head. It felt too close. Maybe even the shortcut through the fun fair wouldn't save him from those sharp rain drops. The stands loomed over him as he passed, making him think the entrance of the haunted house looked more inviting. Some cuddly toys did their very best to hang from the ceiling in a sinister way, reminding him of slaughtered animals. He picked up the pace but couldn't help staring as the wind started to play around with them. The beasts seemingly wanted to untangle themselves from the ropes that held them, moving vehemently, moving towards him. The next stand just brought him another heap of those creatures. They caught his gaze with hard, black eyes. Dead yet hungry. The dull shine of life that covered th -

Sample 3

Small specs of light floated around, against the dark blue sky, just floating, tumbling about, falling and rising again. Specs that varied between blue and pink, and yellow and orange, and green, too. But no matter how colourful the specs were, they never quite appeared within Ian's sight. He was strolling about the streets –or maybe not strolling, it had more of a dragging kind of dimension to it. When you'd lay eyes on him, you might think he's just another young chap who's wandered off in thought, reminiscing about her smooth, dark skin. Maybe her warm hand on his forearm, so innocent to her, yet so meaningful a gesture to him. If only. If only he could remember such a thing. If only he could recapture the pleasures that were irrevocably associated with and attached to this mysterious lady.

When he walked on, he didn't seem to notice the noise that grew louder with every step he took. He seemed to be deaf, additional to his initial blindness. The screaming of children, almost screeching from pleasure when they went down on the mini-rollercoaster, the low humming of the cotton candy machine and the sharp, loud-

What Maud Casey had to say about her time in Ghent:

For the past five years, I have been working on a novel about a man inspired by the subject of a 19th century French psychiatric case study, a man who walked in a semi-trance state all over Europe. For these five years, I've been imagining my way into this character who walked all over Belgium, including Ghent, a place I had never been until I had the pleasure of visiting the University of Ghent in March. So it was quite magical to be in this city where this peculiar man had once wandered, and even more magical to have the opportunity to speak with faculty and students who care so deeply about the realm of the imagination and the strangely wonderful and wonderfully strange process of making worlds out of words.

MAUD CASEY'S TOP TIP: How to solve writer's block

One of the major problems students have is the infamous writer's block, often caused by anxiety, and Casey had some suggestions for what to do when this happens:

- *Put aside the writing for a while and read literature which you consider a good model. Try to focus on images and write towards them.*
- *Don't forget that writing is about communication, but keep in mind that you write for yourself in the first place, and your audience in the second .*
- *You write to discover questions, not to answer them: your obligation as a writer is to formulate the question, not the answer.*

Journalism Workshop

With Lorna Sheddick and William Edwards

Missed the journalism workshop on the 21st of March? Here are the headlines:

Lorna Sheddick and William Edwards are journalists for an international news station in Paris, called “France 24 (“France-vingt-quatre”).

Lorna studied English and William studied Philosophy at university. Then they both took journalism degrees at City University London.

They worked at ITN and Sky News in the UK before moving to Paris where Lorna now presents breakfast’s news in the weekend and William covers business and international news.

Lorna and William came to Ghent to give students a clear view on the life and work of journalists. We worked towards a ‘real’ filmed broadcast with correspondents and specialists, to get a taste of the real work of a journalist. We needed skills such as teamwork, condensing information, writing headlines without losing the most important points.

Here are some reactions of students who attended the workshop:



“If you are interested in becoming a journalist, not coming to this workshop was probably a mistake. During the workshop, Lorna and William pointed out the most important aspects of a journalist’s work. We were shown how broadcasting works in reality. Similar to real life, everything had to go very fast. Skimming texts, only keeping the core information, rewriting articles, still working until just before your broadcast will air... I found it interesting to see how

a broadcast is put together and what kind of work is involved. I also think that becoming a journalist is a matter of ‘right time, right place’ and a dose of luck.”

(Introduction and reaction by Yalicia Deroubaix)

“I might want to be a journalist one day, but I am still undecided. Lorna and William were very enthusiastic and eager to answer our questions. It was interesting to work on an actual news broadcast in small groups with people that I did not know. The workshop was also a nice way to practice our writing and speaking skills. I learned from that it is really important to be able to write a good summary as a journalist and that stress is a part of the job which you can learn to deal with.”

(Liselot Quisquater)

“The journalism workshop was an exciting experience. Putting a news broadcast together means a lot of work in a short time, everything has to be done in a rush. What I learned from this experience is to stay calm, as getting nervous will never help you. The part I enjoyed the most was watching the result, keeping in mind that a few seconds before we went ‘on air’, we were still writing our texts. I was thinking about being a journalist when I graduate, but now I am sure I want to be one.”

(Nikki Marci)

“The workshop was very exciting, but also stressful. The cold sweat only got worse when we had to make our own news report after we saw Lorna in a perfect example. In only half an hour we had to choose our articles, write our own texts and present them. Even though our broadcast differed from Lorna and William’s greatly, I felt a real sense of pride. Some of us were even starting to dream about a journalism career, but Lorna brought us back to reality by pointing out that it has a lot to do with luck. Even though it is a difficult, stressful job, I cannot help but wonder what it would be like to work as a journalist.”

(Elana Libbrecht)





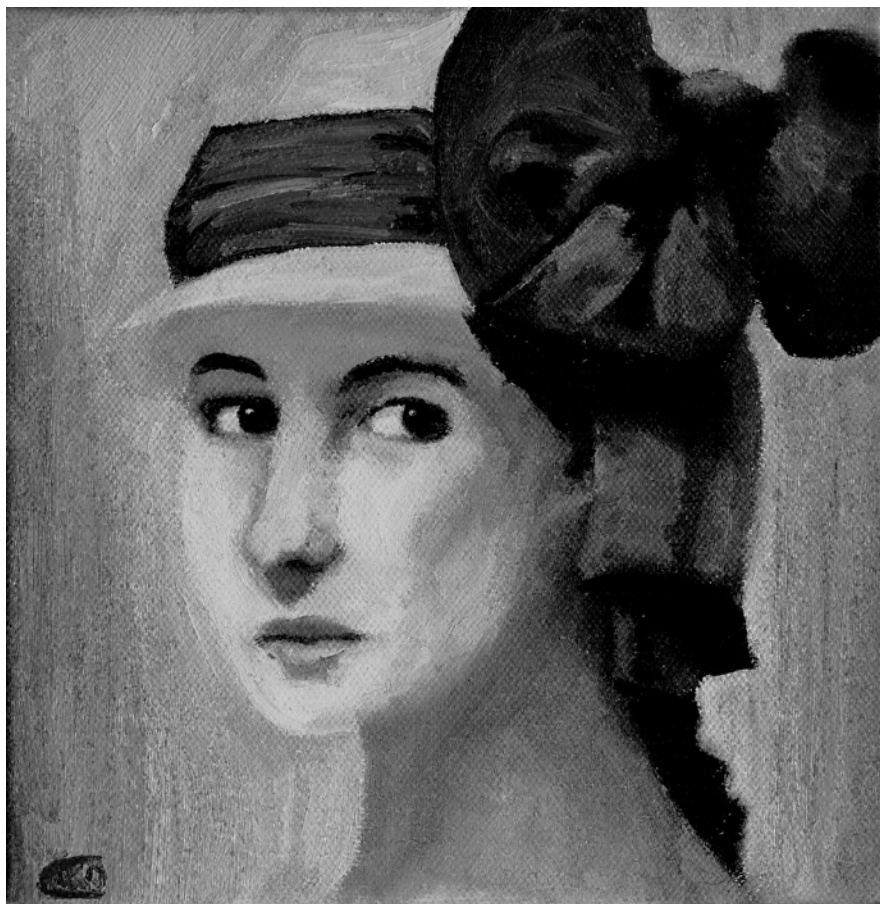
Swann Princess (Karen Schuurmans)



Lisa (Caroline Tillemans)



This feeling (Caroline Tillemans)



The girl with the Ribbon (*Caroline Tillemans*)

A vintage typewriter sits on a windowsill. To its left is a small brown cup. The window behind it is divided into panes, with the right pane containing text. The scene is brightly lit from the window.

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Poem | Valentio Bottazzo

U got mail | Amber Vallance

A voice sung | Joanna Britton

Soliloquy | E.M. Eroll

All the questions | Kate Luysterborg

The house at sea | Hannah Dato

CR/02

Today the spring does smile and sing to us
Her wind caresses softly skin and hair
and spreads a scent with notes of roses sweet
with honey, apples, I can almost taste,
and fresh-mown grass. And as we walked a bit
more close, we heard a choir of rustling leaves,
the sound of splashing water in the background.
And as the night here fades into the day
and mother moon hands over reign and light
to th'ever-warming sun with rays of spring,
the nightingale completes her last sweet song
and leaves her sway to the day-lark at dawn.

(Valentino Bottazzo)

U got mail by Amber Vallance

This story has no real beginning. It is just a small fragment out of an insignificant person's life. However, saying that this person is insignificant does not necessarily mean he is. It just depends on the perspective. You may not care about a stranger's life until you get to know him or her. If that is the case, then this story will introduce Floyd.

Floyd is someone who doesn't care much about anything. Well, actually, that's not really true. He does not care about things that most other people care about. He doesn't worry about the way his blonde hair looks, what kind of clothes he wears or what job he wants to do as soon as he's out of college.

What Floyd *does* care about is being happy. He looks at the world on a larger scale. He realizes that what he does doesn't really make any difference to anyone other than himself and the few people around him. This thought might be depressing to some, but to Floyd it's just a reason to have fun. He is actually what you would call a "hedonist", you know, someone who strives to get as much fun out of life as possible.

So, this story will relate an event quite out of the ordinary, which obviously changed the tracks of Floyd's life.

At a certain moment in time, Floyd was on his way home to watch a match of football with his friend Dan. Floyd does not care much about footy, as he likes to call it, but he likes being with his friend and it's not like the lazy bastard had anything better to do. So he was cycling on his black, creaky bike through the park.

Then he noticed something red in a tree. Floyd, taken by curiosity, stopped his bike to take a closer look. The red object appeared to be a balloon. It was broken, however, obviously popped by the branches of said tree. But that was not all. There seemed to be a string attached to the balloon and attached to the string was something that looked like a piece of paper.

Floyd couldn't help but wonder what would be written on the piece of paper, if there was anything at all. He was itching to find out, even though he knew that would make him late for the football game. Yet he could watch football any time and you don't find a balloon in a tree every day.

So before he knew it, he was sitting on a park bench near the tree, clothes dirty and leaves in his hair, but with a mysterious envelope in his hand.

"To the finder of this balloon." it said on the front, in neat, tidy handwriting. Floyd quickly opened the envelope to find a card inside.

"Hello, I would like to meet you. I've written down a place and time on the back of this paper. Please bring the balloon with you, I'll be wearing a red hat."

The Sender"

Now that was a short message... Floyd flipped the paper around. Indeed, there was a place and time written on the back. He wondered what kind of person would send letters with balloons asking to meet someone they don't know. Well, there was only one way to find out, right?

"So, you're going to meet this girl now?"

Dan was leaning in the doorway while Floyd put his coat on.

"Dan, no one said it's a girl."

"Oh, come on, who else would send cards like that?" Dan smirked. "It's a real girly thing to do, if you ask me. Besides, what kind of guy would wear a red hat?"

"Yeah yeah, whatever you say. I'm off."

"Dan, don't pester him like that," Alex yelled from the kitchen.

"I'm not pestering him!"

His friend's response to their roommate faded away as Floyd closed the door behind him. The day had arrived when he was going to meet the Mysterious Sender. It was one of those rare sunny days in autumn where the sun would accentuate the warm hues of the fallen leaves. Floyd didn't let the sun fool him, though, and made sure to wear a coat. He didn't really know what to expect from this meeting. He wondered if Dan could be right in thinking that the sender would be female. The things he said did seem kind of farfetched, but at the same time... what if he would meet a nice girl this way? He blushed slightly at the thought, but quickly blamed his reddened cheeks on the cold.

The Mysterious Sender had described a place in the very park where Floyd had found the balloon. As Floyd was nearing his destination, he suddenly got nervous, though he didn't exactly know what he had to be nervous about. He clutched the broken balloon a little tighter. There were a lot of people out enjoying what could possibly be the last rays of the summer sun. Luckily, it seemed red hats were out of fashion, so it wouldn't be difficult to find the Mysterious Sender. At least he didn't have to worry about approaching the wrong person.

A shock went through him when he spotted a red hat sitting on a bench. It was a girl, just like Dan expected. Excitement replaced his nervousness. Floyd took a deep breath and tried not to run as he approached the person.

"Ehm... hello," he said when standing in front of her. The girl looked up.

"I believe this belongs to you." Floyd showed her the remains of the balloon. She smiled when she recognised it. Her smile triggered something in Floyd. A kind of attraction, yet not physical. Mental attraction? Is that even possible? He quickly discarded the thought, but still wondered if she might have felt it too.

"Eh... my name is Floyd." He held out his hand. She took it and said: "My name is Aubrey."

It was the beginning of friendship.

This story didn't have a real beginning and likewise, there's no real end. The reason being that there is no real ending. But perhaps another event might illustrate that friendship between Floyd and Aubrey.

It was about a year after Floyd and Aubrey had met. It was a nice day and they decided to go on a picnic.

Floyd helped Aubrey spread out the picnic blanket on the grass and they smoothed down the folds and creases. It was very clichéd, a red and white checkered sheet, but Aubrey liked it that way. What would really have completed this image was a wicker basket, but neither Floyd nor Aubrey had one of those. So instead Floyd dropped the heavy plastic bags on the blanket and he and Aubrey both sat down.

"Let's see what we've got again," Aubrey said. "Sandwiches, crisps, fruit juice... oh, cherries! I love cherries!" They neatly arranged all the edibleness on the spread. Floyd

smiled and took a bite out of one of the sandwiches. Cheese and cucumber. In between bites, Aubrey babbled about how she had lost a pen and ended up finding it in the refrigerator. Then she started nibbling on some cherries and was silent for a while.

“Aubrey, do you remember when we met?”

“Of course I do! That was wonderful.” She smiled, then poured herself a glass of juice. Floyd lay down on his back and gazed at the clouds. There were quite a few of them, but the day was warm and sunny nonetheless.

“Hey, I just realized I never even asked you why you decided to send that balloon in the first place?”

“Hm,” she answered. She lay down next to Floyd, their heads touching. “Well, why not?” She laughed and took a grape from a bunch. “I guess I was just curious about what would happen. I was hoping for something really exciting to happen, I guess.” She put the grape in Floyd’s mouth. He chewed on it absentmindedly.

“You know what I think, Floyd?”

“What do you think, Aubrey?”

“I think our friendship is even better than anything I could have hoped to achieve with that balloon. You’re the sweetest person I have ever met.” She sat up and smiled down at him.

“You’re pretty sweet yourself, Aubrey. I’m glad you made it possible for us to meet.”

“You’re welcome! What’s funny though, is that I don’t think we could ever fall in love, you know? It’s kind of weird, but that’s how I feel. I do love you, just not that way.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. I felt the same way when I just met you. I suppose ours is a platonic love in the purest sense of the word.”

“Platonic, huh...” Aubrey gazed at a ladybug that was making its way across a packet of cookies. She then rummaged through one of the plastic bags and took out some old bread. “Let’s go feed the ducks!” she said cheerfully. Floyd smiled.

“Yeah, great idea!”

A voice sung

A voice sung
is the cosy, beery dough wafting
from above your dusty cream radiator,
clean, rising, hopeful, flesh-like.

is the choicest snowflakes that vanish
on your tongue on a midwinter night,
before my door with the dim light behind.

is the tiny blades that stripe the distant fields,
luminous greens in the snowy sun, full with
mathematical promise into afar.

is the kindest inner earthquake,
a fountain of air freezing the butterflies
mid-thought, mid-gaze, mid-breath.

(Joanna Britton)

Soliloquy

Come, friend, and breathe your last with me
A final, fitting toast of air to us, the dead -
Have we not bravely fought for you, for me
For everything between us is but dust
And fading ether brings the promise
Of new dawn deep in darkness drenched.

Rebel against this fate? What if
Not that did bring you here
But something else unfathomable
In your dark-lit pits of eyes?

Mind you, no finer – no more empty
Gaze to cross for silent seconds
Let us lie here, you and I
Forever more in instants
Unified.

(E.M. Eroll)

All the questions

by Kate Luysterborg

Simile / 48

I ask you not to leave me at the dawn of cold. As the world gains colour I start to lose my own and it doesn't matter for I could never be this vibrant. If you tell me I could, then your eyes are treacherous, leaving lies and false imprints on your brain. You try to oppose those words and I hush you and look at the oddness of my surroundings. The world is in slow decay, preparing to rest for a while, until it's time to bloom again; but, to me, it looks just as colourful as before. The colours are just different, and to love it is just a matter of taste.

You ask me if I find it sad to see the trees emptied, the green grass covered entirely in golden leaves, and all the flowers withered. Then I tell you sadness, in a way, is just another form of beauty. It can be a bit more melancholic, dramatic, heart-breaking and so, so quiet. The most emotional of things, finding its reflection in the world in decay, are those things we love the most from time to time. And you agree, as you take me in protectively to shield me from the wind.

You ask me if I'm cold, if I'm uncomfortable, and if it bothers me. I tell you that the fading warmth is not forever, and this cold has its own charm. To shiver slightly is a small price to pay to be able to witness these wonderful changes, there's an easy remedy for chills. I'd just bury myself in your arms, your coat, your being and at night in all the sheets available. It makes me feel warmer than the sun ever could. The sun's absence drives me to new sources of warmth but they are equally lovely. And the only time it is uncomfortable, is when I know I have to leave it again.

You ask me if this is the season I love the most, if melancholy is the mood I cherish most. I tell you I love all things passing, every shift in my world. When the environment changes, my mood will follow, I will feel equally well and content, sometimes deliriously happy, sometimes sorrowfully silent, and each time in a different way. This change in the world and ourselves is how we keep it all interesting and worthwhile, without having to undergo extensive mood swings or radical changes in life itself. Natural change is enough. Just imagine how dreadful it would be if the world did not have this cycle, and remained in the same state forever, how dreadful it would be if we humans were to remain in the same state forever. All is a circle, and each time around it is different, but I will enjoy every step of the way.

You ask me if there is something that doesn't change, to which I reply that almost everything changes, all but one thing. There comes change in the way we look, the way we act, how we speak, how we think. And that is merely us, the world changes more drastically and more subtly at the same time. When you, then, finally ask me, what that one thing is that does not change, I say that I will always ask you not to leave me at the dawn of cold. I will need you forever.

And then you look at me and stop asking all those questions, because I have all those answers. And all the questions in the world will simply not suffice if you wish to experience the world as I do.

The House at Sea

The coast side house anticipates its downfall
Peeling paint dripping like tears off the wall
Once it stood so bright and confidently proud
Until the crowds went home and summer faded out
Now it's sighing, moaning as the fierce wind passes by
But there's no one around to hear the house cry
How storms have torn through its halls every night!
After all these years, nature will win the fight
Rotting, brittle wood becomes weaker with time
Tumbling, cascading down into eternal grime
Loose sand creeps in every crack and corner
Scrubbing out previous traces of pristine order
Feel clammy fingers of salty mist in the room
Dampness dwells in this house that is doomed
The stale ocean air is stripping life away
In this forsaken house no one wants to stay

(Hannah Deroo)

Travel to teach

By Griet Jacques

Many students dream of going abroad once they have graduated. After many hours of hard labour in musty auditoria, young people long for change and adventure. Even though travelling abroad often comes to mind instantly, the choice of how to travel is less obvious. You have to ask yourself how you want to experience other cultures and an interesting way to do so, is for instance volunteering in a project abroad. By volunteering you immerse yourself in the life of a particular region or city, work together with local and foreign people and combine the pleasure of adventure with utility. In September I am leaving Belgium for three months to join a voluntary organisation in South East Asia which I now want to present.

An organization as *Travel to Teach* offers several destinations to do volunteering work. It is a non-profit organisation founded in 2002 by the voluntary Kerstin Ahlzenin in Nong Khai (Thailand). The motivation which made her start this project, still lies at the heart of the organisation:

I have the strong belief that the best way one can help a person, or a country is by providing education. Nothing is more positive than trying to help 'empower' people, and create conditions for 'sustainable development' by offering education. I also believe that nothing is more likely to help provide an international understanding than by actually being in day-to-day contact with the people of another country as this goes towards creating a positive bond between different cultures. (*Kerstin Ahlzenin*)

With her project, she sets herself up in opposition to large Western corporations which make profits out of volunteer work. *Travel to Teach* wants to give people of all ages and from all different parts of the world the opportunity to contribute to voluntary work and local communities, as well as getting to know new people and cultures. To join their project, *Travel to Teach* asks a moderate fee, less than other volunteering organizations, just to cover accommodation, taxes, teaching material and practical costs. The fee is only half of what other organizations ask because *Travel to Teach* is seated in the region they work in. Another advantage of working in situ is that the agents have close contact with visiting volunteers.

Despite the growth of *Travel to Teach*, the organization continues to work as a non-profit and offer a fair voluntary experience. *Travel to Teach* now has projects in more than ten countries spread over four continents. As a volunteer, you can join activities in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bali, China, India and Nepal. On the other side of the world too, in Mexico, El Salvador and Costa Rica a volunteer can join *Travel to Teach*. Their programs have expanded considerably since 2002: alongside teaching English and computer studies, volunteers now also help in areas such as wildlife, restoration of buildings, arts and sports. Teaching and learning, however, remain the main objective in all projects.

Travel to Teach offers a wide range of possibilities to do voluntary work. You can choose a region, a country, a program and the duration of your stay, ranging from two to twenty four weeks. Joining a volunteer organization is a unique experience through which you get to know other cultures, people and yourself. You can find more information on their website: www.travel-to-teach.org.



LITERARY HALL OF FAME/ Crime fiction

Nicci French “Blue Monday”

I must admit that – aside from the classic *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco – I had never read a crime thriller or detective novel. Oh, the shame creeps upon me! And you can take that creeping quite seriously, for this book, this entwining of words to sentences to chapters to a well-constructed whole of gradually-revealed mysteries and lingering questions; this truly is the work of a born tale-teller. I think I can state with firm determination that it takes only one well-written book to get me smitten.

What probably kept me turning pages most, was the eye for detail; as if you – literally – stepped into the pages and experienced every moment. But also the withholding of information, the manner in which some questions were raised and lay dormant, to jump up again when you least expected them. It was not so much the whodunit, but more the howtheydunit and whytheydunit that kept me going.

One thing I am not that fond of in this novel, is the synopsis on the back cover. I chose this book merely because Nicci French is / are an established value in the landscape of crime thrillers, and *Blue Monday* simply is their most recent book. Because prejudiced me thought ‘all detectives are the same’, I did not even bother reading the back cover and just went with it. And to me, that seemed to be the right way to go: if you are dropped into a book (any book really, this applies to all books, not just thrillers), without any knowledge of the storyline, things are less obvious, and take more intellectual effort to be unravelled. If I had read the blurb first,

Name: Nicci Gerrard & Sean French

Born: June 10, 1958 & May 28, 1959

Occupation: both journalists and successful writers.

Nationality: British



The married couple behind the famous crime author ‘Nicci French’ is Nicci Gerrard and Sean French. Gerrard graduated from Oxford University with a degree in English Literature. Working with emotionally disturbed children was her first job. She soon married her first husband, Colin Hughes, a journalist and they had two children together. She taught English Literature in Sheffield, and launched ‘Women’s Review’, a magazine aimed at women interested in culture. In 1989, Nicci and Colin divorced. In the same year, she took a job as literary

it would have made the experience far less interesting..

On the one hand, *Blue Monday* is the kind of book you yearn to finish then and there, on the spot, you want to know what happens next and you want to know it now. You feel the need to verify your own theories about the protagonists and antagonists. And I can confide that the disappointment when you got it wrong eats away at you while the bliss when you got it right is just as physically real. On the other hand, you want to slow down reading this novel and let it last for a lifetime: it simply tastes that good!

Therefore, my conclusion is rather straightforward: buy the book, borrow the book, download the book, for crying out loud, steal the book if that is what it takes! Whether you see it as literature or a book to put your mind off things, is none of my business.. Just as long as you read it, for you would not be a true language student if you remained ignorant for so long as I did.

Koontz sure did write a 'strange' book here. His 'staccato' manner of writing prevents the reader from identifying themselves with the protagonist, Ben Chase (or with the second protagonist, Glenda for that matter). At times, the conversations between Chase and Glenda border on the absurd. Admittedly, our protagonist is a 'Nam war hero' and our deuteragonist was abused throughout her childhood and adolescence, so they surely have had

as literary editor (New Statesman, Observer), then as feature writer and executive editor (Observer). She now works as a journalist for the Observer.

Sean French also studied English Literature at Oxford University, around the same time as his future wife. In 1981, he won the Vogue Writing Talent Contest, and then became their theatre critic, but also worked as a deputy literary editor and television critic (Sunday Times), film critic (Marie Claire) and deputy editor (New Society). Sean and Nicci married in October 1990 and had two daughters. Sean wrote novels and non-fiction books (biographies, ...). In 1995 Nicci and Sean started writing together under the pseudonym of Nicci French. They also continue to write separately.

Dean Koontz "Cold Fire"

Name: Dean Koontz

Born: July 19, 1945

Occupation: Novelist, screen writer & short story writer.

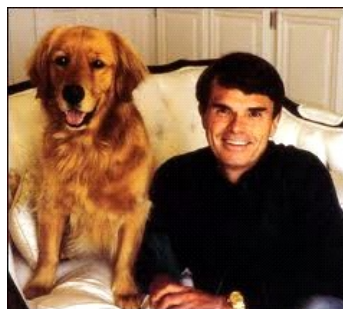
Nationality: United States of America

more than a deserved share of traumas in this life. Yet this does not mean that the telling of their tale has to be diminished through a detached – almost careless – narrator, even though it's fictional, it still needs to be real enough to serve its truth. It is interesting that the narrator refers to the protagonist as Chase throughout the novel, creating distance by using his last name instead of the more customary first name. He does this until Chase finds peace with the serene Glenda: from then on he is referred to as Ben, which decreases their inaccessibility if only slightly.

But I stick to my guns when I say that I find it very off-putting if I have no possibility of identifying with the characters I read about; learning about a distant protagonist through seemingly disinterested narrator is as perpetually boring as it is annoying to read an author like Henry Green who does not seem familiar with the concept of 'articles'.

Some irregularities struck me too; for instance when Chase gets stabbed by the antagonist Judge, he has to lean on the hood of the car to be able to stand. But when it comes to carrying a partially naked teenage girl to his car and driving her to the police station under the same circumstances, it is – as he demonstrates – peanuts.

Exhibit 2°. When Chase breaks in to Judge's house, he is wearing gardening gloves to avoid leaving behind fingerprints. Clever, very clever indeed. If only it were not for the meticulous detail that apparently he can remove the pressure clips from the window screen without effort. With gloves. Thick, unpractical, clownish gardening gloves. Seems a tad bit unbelievable to me. But hey, I am a woman. I probably just do not have the technical skills to pull off a move like that.



After graduating from the Shippensburg State College (Shippensburg University), Koontz started working with underprivileged children as a tutor. When he learned that these children were not as innocent as they might seem (the previous tutor had been beaten up and had to recover in hospital for several weeks), Koontz started building a career as a writer.

He is a man who sometimes writes under various nom-de-plums, such as Leigh Nichols, Deana Dwyer and K. R. Dwyer, and is what is called a 'bestselling author', with 400,000,000 copies sold and books translated into 38 languages. Both his hardcover books and paperbacks appeared in the bestseller lists of the New York Times.

Some of his stories will be made into television projects, and *the Husband* is currently being turned into a script for a film.

Furthermore, you cannot drag someone *into a television*. It's physically impossible. You throw someone *at a television*. Or you knock someone out *with a television*. Correct usage of prepositions, dear sir-author, clearly is not what got you the title of 'best-selling author'.

And lastly, labelling the molestation of a four-year-old child plainly as 'strange'... I don't think I can even begin to say how much this enraged me.

No, this is not my kind of thing. I prefer novels with an actual heart.

Thomas Odd, a series about a man who can communicate with the dead, is rumoured to be in the running as a new video game.

He is praised for his lyrical manner of writing (did not see that one coming), and "psychologically complex, masterly and satisfying" writing (New York Times).

Those who want more can also consider reading

Edgar Allen Poe – Charles Dickens – Arthur Conan Doyle – Agatha Christie –
Michael Connelly – Dorothy L. Sayers – S. S. Van Dine – Dashiell Hammett –
Margery Allingham – Michael Innes

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY | MATTHIAS OPSOMER

THE LOVELY BONES | LAURA PORNEL

FILM FESTIVAL GHENT | LAURA PORNEL

50/50 | LAURA PORNEL

Reviews

03

MOVIE AND BOOK REVIEWS/

01. ***The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*** Reviewed by Matthias Opsomer



The Guide starts on the day, a day very much like all the others, that Earth is destroyed by an alien species called *The Vogons* to make way for an intergalactic bypass. Those Vogons are not a very friendly race of aliens, considering their poetry is considered a cruel torture device. In fact one might call them *most loathsome, filthie, foule and full of vile disdain*. Arthur Dent, one of the few survivors (two in fact), is launched into an adventure in a wonderfully strange place called *The Universe* with the help of his friend Ford Prefect and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. *The Guide* is the most popular encyclopaedia in the Galaxy, even more popular than the *Encyclopedia Galactica* because *The Guide* is slightly cheaper and because it has the words "DON'T PANIC" written on them in big friendly letters. Following Arthur from one unlikely event to the other Douglas Adams introduces his readers to a most pleasing form of insanity, the importance of a towel, the truth about mice and as a bonus the meaning of Life, Universe and Everything. In short: this book is simply too much fun not to read.



The movie starts the same way as the book but then chooses its own path through the Galaxy, leaving the readers of the books somewhat confused. The characters they know from the books do not act as they expect them to as if they seem to enjoy doing exactly the opposite of what they did in the books. This is not necessarily a bad thing though, as most of the humour of the books wouldn't fit in a film, after all films obey their own set of laws. There is for instance a lovely scene where Arthur saves the love of his life by filling out forms and filling out forms and filling out even more forms (you did not see that one coming, did you?). This would have never worked in the book, but it does a terrific job on the screen. So when one stops comparing the film with the book he (or she) sees an entertaining British movie, starring Stephen Fry as the voice of *The Guide*, Bill Bailey as a whale dropping out of the sky for no particular reason and Alan Rickman as the maniacally depressed robot Marvin. Who would not want to see that?

02. *The Lovely Bones*

Reviewed by Laura Pornel

“The Lovely Bones” tells the story of Susie Salmon, a fourteen-year-old girl, caught in between childhood and adulthood. One morning, she gets raped and killed and ends up in heaven where she watches her family fall apart. Susie desperately wants her killer to get caught and sends messages to her family, trying to point out where her body was buried and who killed her.

Beautifully written and emotionally told this novel is a must, although if you are not into slowly-moving stories, you should probably choose a different book. The story is captivating but the plot unravels at a slow pace. Yet it does surprise you with a few twists...



The grief that strikes the family is beautifully described if maybe milked too much, given that this is the only subject in the book, apart from finding Susie’s killer. The whole search for Susie’s attacker is a joke: there are so many leads yet no inspector can make the pieces of the puzzle fit.

It is best not to ask yourself to many questions and just enjoy the emotional rollercoaster that this book offers you.

The movie is a bit more subtle than the book. The producers have chosen not to show the rape or the death of Susie Salmon. The message that she has been murdered gets delivered without any images. It therefore may reach a wider audience than the book. All the events that may shock the viewers have been left out or are only hinted at. In the movie, Susie’s mother just leaves her family, whereas in the book she first cheats on her grieving husband and then disappears until her husband nearly dies of a heart-attack. The visual effects in the movie are well done, and the images we get to see of Susie’s heaven are lyrical and soothing, but this can sometimes be just a little over the top.



Although both versions are good, the movie doesn’t leave much space for the viewer’s imagination to take over, and overall the book is more striking and leaves the reader with more of an impact.

EVENT REVIEW/ Film Festival Ghent

Reviewed by Laura Pornel

The Belgian public loves international films, in particular English and American films. Most of the films playing in Belgian cinemas are American or English and as most films are not dubbed, it seems that we love the English language too. This phenomenon was also to be seen at the 38th Ghent International Film Festival, held at the Kinepolis in Ghent from 11 - 22 October last year. 111 films from over 32 countries were shown in just 38 days including many English language films as well as other foreign films: not just blockbusters but also some Arthouse titles made it a great opportunity for the public to discover new movies.

Big names could be spotted on the red carpet: Oscar-winner Octavia Spencer, star of *The Help* for example, with Tate Taylor, director of the same film. Benedict Cumberbatch was also there representing the festival's opening film "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy". This espionage film, also starring Colin Firth, is set after the Cold War and tells the story of a veteran spy who is forced to give up his retirement to uncover a Soviet agent. The festival attracted over 450 000 visitors and of course *Simile* was there too to review the new American release "50/50" - check out the review below. And for those of you who missed the festival, be sure to make space in your diary for the next festival: 9 - 20 October, 2012.



FILM REVIEW/ 50/50

Reviewed by Laura Pornel

Adam is a regular 27-year-old guy who has a best friend and a girlfriend, like all of us do. But unlike us, Adam has a rare kind of spinal cancer. With his friends and family, Adam begins his journey to health. On this journey his girlfriend leaves him and a certain shrink becomes an important part of his life. Based on a true story and the experiences of screenplay writer, Will Reiser, this film tells a story about cancer in which there is still space for a laugh every so often.

Although it deals with a heavy subject, the film still falls under the category of comedy. Whether it is Adam's high-spirit or his friend Kyle's stupid actions and expressions, the film still manages to force a smile on your face. (And very often the smile will turn into bursts of laughter.)The movie is touching but not over-dramatic although the plot has a dramatic turn and is not as light-hearted as the rest of the movie.

Or rom-com -stress VS. Real friendship

As Adam's adulterous girlfriend Rachel walks out on him it is Kyle who supports him: he takes him out for a night on the town and helps him to destroy Rachel's painting, he drives him to hospital appointments and still treats him as "his normal friend Adam" instead of "his sick friend Adam". This is the point where this film differs from the average romantic comedy we get to see so often these days; this story is about male friendship instead of the usual "who will get it on with who?" theme.

Rachel has the role of bitchy girlfriend who doesn't really feel like having a boyfriend with cancer she drives him to the hospital but doesn't want to go in with him because of "the bad energy" and leaves him to go through his first chemo session alone. As Adam gets weaker she starts to ignore him, and it is Adam's loyal friend, Kyle who is there to pick up the pieces. All these elements make "50/50" a movie about real friendship. When your life is coming apart and everyone starts running to save themselves, your best friends will stay and support you.



$E = mc^2$ (Amber Vallance)



Some portraits (*Amber Vallance*)

MYSTERY AT THE MUSEUM | LENI VERBOGEN

RIVERS | JOANNA BRITTON

HEARTBEAT | KATE LUYSTERBORG

REFLECTED ILLUSIONS | M.L.M. VERDONCK

EMPTY | JORIN CARPELS

INNATE | M.L.M. VERDONCK AND CAROLINE TILLEMAN

CR/04



“What happened so far in *Mystery at the Museum*: A priceless gold mask disappeared from the Mori Arts Center in Tokyo. Where the police were clueless, detective Isaac Apanay found evidence relating the crime to the renowned gang Tokyo Storm. Isaac sought them out and caught sight of them as a few gang members were harassing an innocent girl. Isaac quickly took control over the situation, and interrogated the leader of the group: Ogura Takuya. Ogura confessed that Tokyo Storm was involved in the making of a small remote controlled device that could touch the glass cone in which the mask was secured without being noticed. Isaac jumped on his motorcycle and left the gang defeated on the ground...”

Mystery at the Museum / part 3

By Leni Verbogen

Suddenly a pair of hands closed around his waist...

A pair of girl's hands, Isaac noticed as he looked down in alarm.

‘Can’t you find your own transport?’ Isaac shouted at the girl behind him.

‘I know something you may be interested in,’ the girl shouted above the roar of the engine.

‘Besides, I haven’t been able to thank you yet.’

‘No need to!’ Isaac shouted back at her. ‘What do you know?’

‘I know where you should go next!’

The manor on the outskirts of Tokyo was brightly lit. Isaac slowed down and killed the engine.

‘So you’re telling me that the man who lives there has made a bid on the mask?’ Isaac verified.

‘Yes,’ the girl answered decidedly. ‘He made an offer to the Chinese government, but they refused. He bid more than the radio says it’s worth.’

‘And how do you know that?’

‘I’ve done some research.’ The girl shrugged her shoulders.

Isaac looked at her attentively. ‘Some research, huh. How did you get involved with Tokyo Storm?’

‘I write for the school newspaper,’ the girl said, not without some pride. ‘I found out Tokyo Storm is trafficking drugs. I decided to pretend I was on their side to get more information. They attacked me because I hadn’t sold any drugs.’

‘All that for an article in the school newspaper?’ Isaac said incredulously.

‘If I write a big article, I may be noticed by a famous newspaper!’ the girl smiled. Isaac could see the Yen signs in her eyes.

‘That’s a dangerous game you’re playing. Drugs traffic is just the tip of the ice berg for Tokyo Storm.’

‘Not any more dangerous than the game you’re playing,’ the girl retorted. ‘First you beat up Tokyo Storm members and now you’re going to burgle that house!’

Isaac grinned at her. ‘Nice you’re so quick in understanding. That’s exactly what I’m going to do.’

Isaac and the girl got off the motor and Isaac pushed it towards the nearest hedge.

‘What’s your name anyway?’

‘Yuki. Yuki Mayu.’

‘So, Yuki, are you going to write about this too? About how you burgled the house of one of the richest men in Japan?’

‘Of course not! Well – maybe if we find something...’ Yuki looked at the manor dreamily.

‘Don’t get your hopes up,’ Isaac warned her. ‘We’ll probably find nothing.’

Yuki simply shrugged her shoulders and sauntered off towards the house.

The security system was complicated, but nothing Isaac couldn’t deal with. Yuki stared in awe as he cut the security system in even less than half the time the security company had deemed impossible. One last blip and the security was down.

‘How did you do that?’ Yuki asked breathlessly.

‘General knowledge,’ Isaac shrugged. ‘Come on, before anyone sees us.’

The street was deserted at this time at night, but Isaac had no illusions that the other residents weren’t as paranoid as the owner of this house.

Isaac quickly undid the lock of the large glass back doors and stepped inside. Yuki closed the door behind them.

‘Don’t turn on the lights,’ Isaac whispered. ‘And be as silent as you can be, we have no idea whether somebody is in here or not.’

‘Understood,’ Yuki said silently.

They tiptoed through the house, their ears strained for any sounds of movement. There was nothing to be found in the big, evidently unused kitchen, nor in the luxurious living room. But then they entered a long room filled with displays.

‘Stop there,’ Isaac whispered as he stretched out his arm to keep Yuki behind him. ‘This room is bound to have even more security than the house itself.’

‘Can’t you undo that?’

‘I’m not going to try,’ Isaac shook his head. ‘He’d have to be a moron to have that mask on display when the police are looking for it.’

Isaac pulled a small flashlight out of his pocket and shone into the room. From what they could see from the doorstep, the room was filled with all kinds of antique rarities. Expensive antique rarities, that was.

‘That would explain why he wanted to buy the mask,’ Isaac whispered, more to himself than to Yuki, although he knew she was listening intently. ‘And why he would want to steal it. Only a collector would have stolen the mask; it’s impossible to sell. Even if the mask was melted down and all rubies and diamonds sold separately, that wouldn’t earn the thief half of the mask’s worth.’

‘So only a collector like this would have stolen the mask?’ Yuki whispered.

‘Would have had the mask stolen,’ Isaac corrected her. ‘Yes, that’s the only explanation. Or somebody who really hates the director of the museum.’

Yuki looked at him questioningly.

‘The director probably won’t be a director anymore soon,’ Isaac explained. ‘Having the mask stolen is such bad press he won’t be allowed to stay on.’

They found nothing as they moved through the other rooms. Isaac inspected the millionaire’s bedroom as Yuki looked in one of the bathrooms adjacent to it. There was really nothing to tie the man to the theft, and with nothing, Isaac meant solid proof. Maps of the museum, details about the security system, another Tokyo Storm badge,... Nothing that would stand as proof in court.

Isaac was checking the bedside tables when he noticed the walk phone on one of them. Sure there was nobody in the house but him and Yuki, he pressed the answer machine button.

An upset male voice ripped through the silence. ‘Mister Kitagawa! I just got a call from Tokyo Storm, they say they were...’

Yuki walked back into the room.

‘What’s that?’ she hissed. ‘I thought we were supposed to be quiet?’

‘There’s nobody home,’ Isaac said, as he quickly stopped the answering machine.

‘Oh, was there anything interesting on there?’ Yuki asked curiously as she saw what he was doing.

‘No, nothing,’ Isaac said. ‘There’s no proof against him.’

‘I’m sure he did it,’ Yuki said tenaciously.

‘How come you’re so sure about that?’ Isaac smiled slightly.

‘I just know it,’ Yuki said firmly. She agitatedly walked out.

Isaac slid the phone in his pocket.

Isaac winked at the female officer at the entrance of the Tower, and immediately the sour look she had given Yuki, trailing in his path, disappeared. She let them through without comment.

As they passed the officers all shot questioning looks at Yuki in her school uniform, but no-one stopped them. Apparently the word had spread that the Japanese police force was one Filipino stronger.

The crime scene was nearly deserted when Isaac and Yuki walked in. They could hear the Chief Inspector loud and clear as he said, "Well then, mister Kitagawa, I'm very sorry for wasting your time. I'm sure you'll understand."

The Chief Inspector bowed low to a middle-aged, greying man in a suit.

'I certainly understand,' mister Kitagawa said as he bowed towards the Chief Inspector.

'Time spent in the pursuit of the perpetrator of a crime is no wasted time at all.'

'Thank you for your consideration,' the Chief Inspector bowed.

'Could we halt the formalities for a moment?' Isaac said loudly.

The Chief Inspector turned towards him with an extremely sour expression on his face.

'Please forgive my colleague his intrusion, mister Kitagawa. He is a foreigner and is unaccustomed with Japanese customs, as you can see.'

Isaac chose to ignore that remark. 'I have some information for you, as promised. Thanks to your cooperation, Chief Inspector,' he added sarcastically.

'And this information cannot wait until mister Kitagawa has left?' the Chief Inspector said icily.

'Since the information I have concerns mister Kitagawa, I'm afraid not,' Isaac said calmly.

The expression of confusion on mister Kitagawa's face changed minutely. He folded his hands behind his back and seemed to content himself with an attentive silence.

'This had better be good, Apanay,' the Chief Inspector threatened.

'Of course it will,' Isaac said confidently. 'All I need is some witnesses and your generous cooperation.'

As they waited for the surveillance man, the night guard and the director to arrive, the Chief Inspector scrutinized Yuki.

'And who may this girl be?'

'This is Yuki Mayu,' Isaac gestured towards Yuki. 'She had some very interesting information for me.' Isaac saw Yuki proudly straighten her back as he said that. Show off, Isaac thought.

'And is it necessary for the case that she stays?' the Chief Inspector said irritated.

'If maybe not necessary, certainly relevant,' Isaac replied.

At that moment the witnesses were shown in, which cut the Chief Inspector's annoyed reply short.

'Good,' Isaac said. 'Let the show begin!'

He walked towards the cone the mask had been in and ordered everybody to gather round.

'As we all know, we are today confronted with the impossible theft. A Chinese mask worth \$ 2.5 million dollars has been stolen from this display. The cone was protected by camera surveillance, movement-sensitive rays and a night guard. The cone itself has a touch-sensitive lock. Nothing can be seen on the surveillance tapes, and the rays and the lock haven't responded. The night guard claims he hasn't seen anything.' Isaac looked at the

night guard. Everybody else in the room immediately stared at the night guard, who lowered his head to look at his shoes.

'With that, we have the impossible theft. It is, however, as I shall prove, not an impossible theft.' Isaac looked the witnesses in the eyes one by one. Some of them immediately looked away. Mister Kitagawa returned his scrutinizing gaze calmly.

'When I examined the room, I found this.' Isaac took the Tokyo Storm badge from his pocket and held it up to the group. He saw the Chief Inspector chew the inside of his cheek, but he said nothing.

'This is a badge owned by a member of Tokyo Storm. Tokyo Storm is a criminal organization that will do about anything for money. When I questioned them, in the presence of Miss Yuki,' Isaac gestured towards Yuki, 'they told me they had been involved in this case. They were asked by an outsider to make a remote controlled devise, which would be about the size of a fly and thus invisible on the surveillance camera's.'

The surveillance man swallowed uneasily at that remark.

'They claimed their only additional assignment was to touch the cone in which the mask was laid with that devise. This they did without touching off the ray security system. After that, they left. So Tokyo Storm didn't steal the mask. They merely activated the touch-sensitive lock on the cone. Still, even if the surveillance man didn't notice the remote-controlled devise, the night guard should have noticed that the security system had been activated.'

Now everybody stared at the night guard. He didn't meet their gaze.

'But what happens when the touch-sensitive lock is activated, I wonder?' Isaac went on.

'Why not see it in action?' And before anyone could stop him, Isaac touched the cone. There was a moment of hesitation, and then the cone sank into the ground.

'Exactly as I thought,' Isaac smiled.

'I didn't tell him!' the director whispered to the Chief Inspector. 'This is bad – in ten minutes from now all of Tokyo will know exactly how the cone is protected!'

The Chief Inspector merely gave him a sour look.

'Indeed, the director didn't tell me this would happen,' Isaac nodded. 'But I figured it would. You see, when you go down to the 52nd floor, there are a lot more – I won't bother you with exactly how much – stairs than there are between the 52nd and the 51st floor. This means the bottom of this floor is a lot thicker than that of the other floors. Thick enough to let the cone sink into the ground, and thick enough to let a grown man come near it.' Isaac smiled calmly at the group around him.

'If the cone sank into the ground, the night guard would have had to go down to it to check if the mask was still there. Did you?' Isaac asked the night guard.

'Yes, I did,' the night guard said silently. 'But the cone was empty, I swear!'

'I don't believe the cone was empty,' Isaac contradicted him. 'I believe the mask was in there and you took it out.'

'I didn't!' The night guard sounded panicky.

‘Then who else could have made the cone rise back to its original position?’ Isaac said smoothly. ‘I’m sure there is some kind of policy that says you should warn your superiors when the cone is activated, isn’t there?’

Isaac took the guard’s silence as a yes.

‘But you didn’t, did you? You didn’t warn your superiors. You made the cone return to its original position and told the inspectors that the security system had never been activated.’

‘Matsumoto?’ the director said angrily as the night guard didn’t respond.

‘I was embarrassed the cone was empty when I got there,’ Matsumoto said. The tremor in his voice betrayed his anxiety.

‘Empty or not, you should have told the police!’ the director barked.

‘I am very sorry!’ Matsumoto bowed as low as he could.

‘I have proof Matsumoto was involved with the case,’ Isaac said. ‘Please listen to this.’ He took Kitagawa’s phone from his pocket and pressed the answer machine button before Kitagawa could protest. Matsumoto’s voice filled the room.

‘Mister Kitagawa! I just got a call from Tokyo Storm, they say they were attacked by a Filipino who wanted to know about you, but they say they haven’t told him. They told him about the remote control, though. It must have been the same Filipino that interviewed me earlier, but I swear I said nothing! I swear! And now I just heard the Chief Inspector is going to send for you! Please do not name me in any of this, Mister Kitagawa! I beg of you! I swear I haven’t told them anything!’

Everybody stared at Matsumoto and Kitagawa.

‘This is counterfeit!’ mister Kitagawa exclaimed.

‘I’m sure you recognize Matsumoto’s voice,’ Isaac said. ‘And this is your walk phone.’ He held the phone up to the angry Kitagawa.

‘This is burglary! You didn’t have a warrant!’

‘I am with the Secret Services, mister Kitagawa. I can have a warrant arranged right away.’ Kitagawa seemed to consider that and went silent.

‘I believe mister Kitagawa made an offer on the mask, but the offer was refused. Am I right?’ Isaac asked the director.

‘Yes, yes, that’s true. He made an offer of four million dollars,’ the director nodded.

‘So mister Kitagawa had the motive to steal the mask. As a collector of rare art, he had to have the mask. On the black market the mask would have been impossible to sell,’ Isaac concluded. ‘And Matsumoto’s phone call confirms that mister Kitagawa gave the assignment to steal the mask. The mask, however, cannot have been taken out of the museum. It would have been far too risky to smuggle the mask out of the Tower when the surveillance man had already called the police. That means that the mask is still here.’ The Chief Inspector and the director stared at him with their mouths open.

‘The mask is still here?’ the director asked weakly.

‘Yes, I believe it is. Could you please make the cone come back up?’ Isaac said politely.

‘Well – eh, yes, just a moment.’ The director rummaged through his pockets until he found a strange, rectangular key. He kneeled to the ground, peeled at the plastic tile floor and removed a small piece of a tile. Underneath there was a small lock. The director inserted the key and the cone slid back up.

‘Now, I believe there must be a key for that lock as well,’ Isaac pointed at the lock on the foot of the cone. The cone was divided in two pieces; the top half was made of glass, and the lower half was made of white plastic. There was a lock in the white half similar to the lock the director had just turned.

‘There’s nothing in there,’ the director said. ‘Just some wiring that we need for the security system.’

‘Please open it,’ Isaac persisted.

The director turned the key and gasped his breath as he opened the little compartment. In the mess of technical wires lay the mask, shining in the museum spotlights.

‘Mister Matsumoto and mister Kitagawa, I place you under arrest for the attempted theft of an important work of art,’ the Chief Inspector said. He quickly placed handcuffs over the wrists of the two men.

‘Idiot,’ Kitagawa hissed at Matsumoto as they were lead away.

‘So there was nothing on the answering machine, was there?’ Yuki said insulted.

‘You got your big story, didn’t you?’ Isaac smiled at her. ‘Shouldn’t you quickly start writing before the other journalists find out what happened?’

Yuki froze for a moment, then turned around and sprinted out the room, Isaac’s bellowing laugh accompanying her to the elevators.

***R*ivers**

I

The Sunday sun skates to the whites beneath the clock tower, colouring even the
beggars picturesque. The domes and roofs on the slopes shine golden and red.
And the breeze on its errand from the sketched, the snow-tipped mountains
Tastes like a hint of the breath of the Gods.
Two braids roll past, skipping in their Sunday best,
While mama and papa argue behind, yet kindly, pushing the pram.
A lone bike whirrs past almost as fast and loud as these cold rapid rocks-
But almost-

II

My river used to be majestic, ethnic, lethargic with the muck of two millennia,
My sun limped lazily to warm the book men packing their tomes.
Offices of squat, glinting glass lined the strands.
The skaters and druggies and punks were yesterday's passé
while two gingham braids on roller-blades would nearly have been out of place.
Yet maybe your eye will catch her, skipping to a Sunday matinée, enjoying the
haze, not seeing the steady postdiluvial swamp; almost imagining herself into a
mountain stream heaven.
But almost.

(Joanna Britton)

Heartbeat

By Laura Pornel

The moment he opened his eyes, all he could see was red. The colour was screaming off the walls and hurting his eyes. The only sound which reached his tired brain was a strange kind of drumming sound. He could not fit the pieces together to complete the puzzle of his location. He got to his feet and found the walls were tumbling, they came towards him and then withdrew. The entire room was moving at the same rhythm, the rhythm of that sound he could not name.

It could have been hours or it could have been days. When was the last time he had opened his eyes? He could not remember his last memory before his awakening in this strange place.

The second day was the first time he stayed conscious the whole day. Suddenly, he felt the entire room was moving. The walls were always moving, that was normal by now. Today was different, the walls were moving faster; and faster, and faster, ... Until, out of the blue, it stopped. The pulsating sound he had by now grown fond of also became louder and with it came a melody. He recognized it. It was a song, he knew the words to the melody. It had been Sarah's favourite song. Suddenly, he heard a voice, it was the voice of a man, his voice. And a woman was answering it. He recognized not only her voice but also the answer she gave. He had heard this before and was now trying to drag the thoughts out of the cracks in his memory but at that moment the room began to shake. He got swayed from one side of the room to the other and by the time all was quiet again, the voices had disappeared...

A few hours later the room started to shake again. He heard his voice again, saying hello, and the same familiar voice of that woman. He could overhear them talking: they were talking about this morning, about how they met. She had been jogging and he had bumped into her. He didn't need to listen any longer, he already knew this story. It was his. The story of Sarah and him.

Sarah had been a pretty girl, in search of a soul mate and he had been a man who had no soul. She had fallen in love with him and he had broken her heart.

While he listened to these two characters having dinner and feeling the entire room grew bigger and this colour he had seen for the past few days got lighter, he figured out what had happened to him. How and why, he did not know, but someone or something had put him inside the one thing in the world he had destroyed and could not mend: Sarah's heart. The moments when the room started to shake, were the moments Sarah saw him. He could now feel how she had felt. And his source was the one thing that could not lie:

her heart. He knew this story would not have a happy ending: what would happen to him the moment he broke her heart?

The answer came to him, a few weeks later. They had been dating over a month now and he didn't even remember why he had broken up with her but he remembered the day. That day he woke up and he just knew: this was the day. Sarah knew it too: she awoke that morning and felt something was wrong. Her heart skipped a beat every now and then.

Later that evening he heard his voice, greeting her like he always did. Sarah's heart was beating irregularly and he just sat down and waited. He overheard the whole conversation and felt the shaking of Sarah's heart. Until it finally fell silent. The sound had stopped and the shaking as well. He stood up and looked around, waiting for the end of it. But nothing happened...

Sarah walked home, got into her apartment, went to bed and never got out again. And in her heart, a war had begun.

The harder he tried to hold everything together, the more all the bits and pieces slipped through his fingers. There was nothing he could do to keep her heart from falling apart. Eventually he gave up, stood in the center of her being and let her grief come over him.

That morning John awoke from a nightmare in the middle of the night. He got out of bed and put his clothes on. At the local night shop he bought some flowers, stepped into his car and drove to the center of town, parked his car and walked through the gates of the cemetery.

Reflected Illusions

Behind the mirror the boy looked out on Her
burying Herself in the face of Another

Her spine curling under His urging fingers,
the image staining the boy's inner I

And then, seemingly without cause, a call
emerged from the entangled bodies;

Causing him to spring forward and
crush the glass under his hard hand,

Forcing him to remember that She had once said
"the only one who really loves me is You"

While rushing thus rapidly he cursed
for he had left Her unprotected

Yet when he takes Her in
he finds She was all,
All alone.

(M.L.M. Verdonck)

Empty

Pain would be a blessing
Joy a fleeting bliss
If I could feel just anything
But nothing, is everything there is

(Jorin Carpels)

***In*nate,**

Yet her stained lips assert otherwise
the bare skin overlaid by embarrassed fabric
blushing its pale blank gloom as a hush
flutters through the folds of her dress

An eyelash lingers on her left cheek
scattering her halo
of blameless naivety
in hard contrast with her

Hardly unblighted motives
while the smoke curls up
around her untouched body
claiming untainted virtue,

(M.L.M. Verdonck)



Innate (Caroline Tilleman)

Simile

student literary magazine

Produced by and for students at Ghent University,



Simile is:

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– a place to compare and bring together Belgian and English-speaking cultures and literatures;

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If you have 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, please drop us an email at similemagazine@gmail.com.

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