



Edition VII.

Flames and Storms

July 12, 2023

This document is the pdf version of the VII. edition of the Journal d'Ambroisie with the theme of Flames and Storms. Please visit the website www.journaldambroisie.com for a detailed insight to the previous editions and important information.

Support Us



Journal d'Ambroisie



Journal d'Ambroisie

Follow Us



Journal d'Ambroisie



Journal d'Ambroisie



Journal d'Ambroisie

Editors' Note

Flames and Storms conjures up a world of passion and drama. A reverence for something that isn't, for something more, for something other.

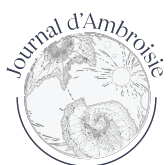
Storms disturb, they are violent, transformative, they bring fear and relief and ultimately, change. Flames hurt, and yet they are light, they spread quickly and efficiently. They burn everything that is in their way. Flames are torture. A death, a rebirth.

Anger, sadness, hatred, pain. Joy, sensuality, love and strength. A summer of passions, of intimate words, of intense rage, of our most hidden depths. Flames and storms together are completely destructive and cataclysmic. Together, they represent the worst pain and the highest pleasure imaginable. Together, they are ruinous. And ruin is a gift.

As this edition takes you on an intense journey of (self-)exploration, the Journal is also transforming. From a child, it's moving into a space of maturity, as we grow and innovate with you, dear reader. Thank you for being on this journey with us.

"You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire. You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is." ~ Charles Bukowski

Yours truly,
Emma and Dodo



Phoenix, *Literature & Philosophy Journal*

- Sherry Ahmed and Sarah Hussain**, Bare to the bones: a philosophical inquiry into the state of masculinity 1
- Sabrina Harverson**, Can Women get Angry? 9

Centaurus, *Social Commentary Journal*

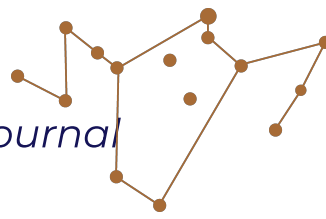
- Linda Luciani**, Sunday at Copenhagen's Human Library: stories of women. 14
- Anja Radonjic**, The Certainty of a Promise : Montenegrin Parliamentary Elections in 2020 and 2023 20
- Sanobar Sabah**, Brown women reclaiming their space through art 40
- Emma Gabor**, And then there were you, just standing there 32

Draco, *Causes We Care About Journal*

- Zsófi Lázár**, 'The World on Fire - a wider view of climate action and its inadequacy'. 42

Lyra, *Creative Writing & Poetry*

- Shivi Sharma**, I had a dream about you. 46
- Gábor Papp**, And then there were you, just standing there 47
- Sanobar Sabah**, I'm sorry, I am too much 50
- Maria Mobin**, Running Away 53
- Sara Whittemore**, A Bionic Tender Cauldron 55
- Anja Radonjic**, Lost earrings, white duvets, and ripe peaches : a friendship that makes a woman 60
- Alitza Cardona**, Crazy and Cool: Not like the stories before 63
- Maximiliane Donicht**, Pyrosome 66
- Blanka Pillar**, Scenery 68



Sherry Ahmed



Sarah Hussain

edited by
Miriam Zeglache

Bare to the bones: a philosophical inquiry into the state of masculinity

To try and give definition to “masculinities” (a state of plurality) is reductionist; the term itself is precarious – a radioactive atom. The traits we assign to masculinity today are based on historical and political ideologies, as opposed to the genetic wiring of man. In this article, the authors (who share a similar point of view on this topic) will explore contemporary masculinity from each own’s academic discipline of interest: from a social point of view then delving deeper into the anthropological, philosophical and pseudoscientific interpretations of the subject over various timeframes.

The ‘missing male experience’

Connell, a sociologist, postulated the gender order theory, which separates masculinity into four types, one of which is hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1996). The man who embraces this is the courageous and aggressive type – stoic and dominating over the Woman and the normative version of masculinity. It imposes an idealistic standard for those who practise hegemonic masculinity, particularly cisgender men, since this type ostracises the woman from its class. But, masculinity is so vast, and cannot be simplified. Thus, the concept can be perceived as a plurality, as masculinities, encouraging intellectual dialogues and progressive tolerance in a prejudiced society. Nevertheless, other forms of masculinity exist in the gender order theory, such as subordinate masculinity – practices which do not conform to the hegemonic, thus, are considered more “feminine”.

The margins between the types of masculinities are ambiguous, and research shows that hegemonic masculinity, for example, is not self-reproducing (Demetriou, 2001). They distinguish the experiences of masculinity in the position of the macroenvironment (the social and political world) and the microenvironment (interpersonal competition between other masculinities). The problem is that this civil war divides those who assimilate into desired personas versus those who do not and result in people suffering a constant social pressure to be the unadulterated version of masculinity they have chosen to be. And of course, their choice is open to prejudiced scrutiny that is further encouraged by cultural and religious beliefs. The greater the social pressure, the greater the aggressive response to self-perceived threat there will be (Stanaland & Gaithner, 2021).

Masculinity studies highlight these pressures and work towards post-structuralism in their field. We don't know about you, but we began questioning the role of masculinity after we challenged femininity. You will see feminism commanding contemporary gender discourse and the struggles of breaking away from the hegemonic masculine figure. What you will see less of is the over-compensation of salient emotions in response to the covert protest against masculinity, which can be interpreted as tyrannical and provides justification for misandrist feminists. There needs to be an acknowledgement that alongside the oppression of women, the ramifications of this very same system subjugate the people who practise masculinity and is known as the 'missing male experience'.

Masculinity in ancient times

From Eastern Confucianism to Western Greco-Roman traditions, an amalgamation of the cisgender man and the state of masculinity was sought; 'Man', 'Manliness', 'Male' and 'Masculinity' were synonymous. In Aristotle's polis, the male was superior because his judgement was rational, void of emotional interference (Aristotle, 1981). Universally, masculinity was elevated to a cosmic realm whereby according to medievalist Mathew Kuefler, even separating "Roman definitions of masculinity from more general notions of ideal human behaviour" was impossible - his words not ours. What we are left with here is a standardisation of masculinity: it does not exist in a dichotomy or relational to femininity (the absence of masculinity), but rather, it is a postulation that mankind's excellence is governed by facets of masculinity.



However, masculinity wasn't the inherent condition of the cisgender man - rather it was something one had to build. An intricately designed hierarchical system oversaw the power struggles between the multiple states of masculinities. In ancient Greco-Roman culture, the man who succeeded to achieve a perfected masculine state had the power to approve or disapprove other men's masculinity. For example, the *andreia* ("maleness") of a man could be defeated in political debate, if his opponent surpassed him in oratory skills. It is interesting to note that ancient Greece was divided over this being a desirable, manly quality - the Spartans were well known for their laconism whereas Athens paid more attention to the literary and artistic development of their young (Rubarth, 2014). Similarly, in ancient Rome, a man who could control his desires was regarded manly - presenting as too aggressive or sexual would've threatened one's virility (Mancisidor, 2022). The rigidity of this system is likely to end in forcing those who embrace masculinity to the extreme edge where they become devoid of human emotions and experience a dissociated sense of self. To us, this sounds like a sad attempt to bully others to achieve power and *eudaimonia* (what Aristotle refers to as happiness, in simple terms) and in the process, facilitate a self-destructive cycle of 'who will top in this game of survival of the fittest'.

A philosophy of the classics

But before the ancient philosophers coined terms to describe the ideal state of manlihood, and before scientific theories could provide interpretations for nature, we had pseudoscience: beliefs and practices based on what scholars deemed objective and mathematical.

Various cultures recognise the world by dismantling substances to facilitate our understanding of nature through the universal "Five elements". These are credited to be at the centre of all and include: Earth, Wind, Water, Fire and Quintessence (the void/soul). There are two elements amongst the four (with the void being a neutral force), that are accepted as masculine energies, and are summarised, alongside their attributes, as below:

Culture	Origin	Fire (Masculine)	Air (Masculine)	Water (Feminine)	Earth (Feminine)
Western	Greek (Aristotle in his book “On generation and corruption”).	Hot and dry.	Hot and wet.	Cold and wet.	Cold and dry.
Eastern	Japan’s “Godai” (the great five) during the Edo period (influence from Neo-Confucianism)	Life and energy.	Movement and expansion.	Fluidity and adaptability.	Rocks and stability.

Confucius asserted that “the interplay of opposite principles constitutes the universe”, implicating that the characterisation of the masculine force is the reverse of its feminine counterpart (Li, 2006). To further support this, the table above indicates that masculine energies are active (travelling) and initiative (aggressive), whereas feminine energies are receptive (unmoving) and stable (calm).

Let’s apply this theory to the Greek Amazons – a society in Themiscyra (modern day Turkey) which consisted of women only. Using ancient Greco-Roman values, the lack of manliness would produce an imbalance. However, these women embodied the strength and fierceness that was typically considered masculine. So, Confucius’ theory would suggest that the Amazons’ legacy was maintained by a balance of both masculinity and femininity, further illustrating that the concepts can exist without the cisgender man or woman. But it does not support a view whereby masculinity is abstract and transforming so it becomes harder to offer a medium of interaction between the two “opposites principles” when they are so polar.

Although masculinity (and femininity) is static and binary, it exists in us all as a part. But this does not support a view whereby masculinity is abstract and transforming. It becomes harder to offer a medium of interaction between the two “opposites principles” when they are so polar.

Western Astrology

The aforementioned elements can exemplify energies in other pseudoscientific studies. In Western Astrology, the twelve Zodiac signs are presented as a 'wheel', connoting the twelve constellations in the sky. The Sun, Moon and planets pass through each constellation during a year, which is utilised to determine natal charts as well as daily horoscope transits (Tester, 1987). Each star sign is parallel to one out of the three modalities: cardinal (the leaders), fixed (the stabilisers) or mutable (the adaptable). Additionally, each Zodiac is ruled by a planet, and is allotted a masculine/feminine marker. Once again, the feminine signs here are the Earth and Water signs, whereas the masculine signs are Fire and Air. Femininity correlates to intuition and introverted energy, alongside the previously established passiveness, whereas masculinity is instinctive and exhibits extroverted energy, as well as maintaining its activeness.

The table below can be analysed and observed, to hypothesise what is considered masculine in Astrology (Hamilton, 2001).

Zodiac	Modality	Masculine (M)/Feminine (F)	Ruling planet	House	Element
Aries	Cardinal	M	Mars	1 st - "The ego"	Fire
Taurus	Fixed	F	Venus	2 nd - "Money and Value"	Earth
Gemini	Mutable	M	Mercury	3 rd - "Local community, national travel, siblings and communication; sharing"	Air
Cancer	Cardinal	F	Moon	4 th - "Home and family"	Water
Leo	Fixed	M	Sun	5 th - "Joy, pleasure, sex, children and dating"	Fire
Virgo	Mutable	F	Mercury	6 th - "Work, health and daily routines"	Earth

Virgo	Mutable	F	Mercury	6 th – “Work, health and daily routines”	Earth
Libra	Cardinal	M	Venus	7 th – “Commitment, partnerships and marriage”	Air
Scorpio	Fixed	F	Mars and Pluto	8 th – “Joint resources, intimacy and transformation”	Water
Sagittarius	Mutable	M	Jupiter	9 th – “Pursuit, travel on a wider scale, philosophy, law, and spirituality”	Fire

Capricorn	Cardinal	F	Saturn	10 th – “Career, reputation and goals”	Earth
Aquarius	Fixed	M	Uranus and Saturn	11 th – “Greater communities, friendships and dreams”	Air
Pisces	Mutable	F	Jupiter and Neptune	12 th – “Intuition, hidden strengths/weaknesses and endings”	Water

Referring to the table above, it can be documented that the masculine signs are Aries, Gemini, Leo, Libra, Sagittarius, and Aquarius. The one true commonality that interlinks these Zodiacs are that they are all either Air or Fire signs, which, as formerly discussed, are linked to masculinity. Curiously, the only house that focuses on an internal area of life is the masculine Aries, whereas the rest of the houses propel towards the external world. This flaunts the independence of the masculine house, as it endorses self improvement and survival. No matter the school of thought taken to interpret masculinity (e.g., Astrology and Greco-Roman philosophy), somehow it always prevails as the dominating counterpart. Where is the balance now?

Investigating the houses further, the third, fifth, seventh, ninth and eleventh houses are denoted as masculine, yet some of the specialisations oppose the stereotypical merits ascribed to each Zodiac. As an example, the seventh house of Libra, concentrates outwardly on 'commitment, partnerships and marriage', which are, hypothetically, passive, and constant areas of life (allied with the feminine Earth and Water). As an air sign, the qualities of the house that rule Libra, should be complementary to its characteristics to evade a state of uncertainty or even contradiction; though, it may be argued that the houses are indeed independent of any gender assigned to them.

Our reflections

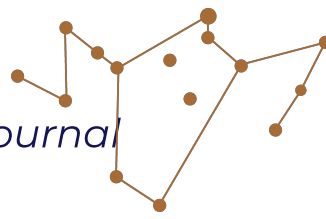
Masculinity is a familiar concept and has historically been oversimplified. However, we believe there should be more clarity in defining the boundaries between the terms 'man' and 'masculinity'. Currently, we do not have the adequate lexical knowledge to propose such distinctions. Nevertheless, we think of masculinity as a state which is attached to a 'host' such as a man (as it traditionally has been). Furthermore, Astrology only models a fragment of the interpretive array of masculine traits. With the involvement of the houses and planets, there will be archetypal attributes of opposing genders, which will overlap in their practical application.

So, no man is void of feminine characteristics and vice versa.

Therefore, masculinities operate on a spectrum held within constraints, whereby no form holds precedence over another, but coexist in a somewhat equal hierarchical structure. Perhaps this is unattainable given that humans constantly desire superiority. But perhaps if we use a neutral lens to undress masculinity to a constant (like in mathematics where a fixed quantity is given for a specific value) that transcends time in existence (e.g., traits such as aggression), we can begin to understand it better.

References

- Connell, R.W., 1996. New directions in gender theory, masculinity research, and gender politics. *Ethnos*, 61(3-4), pp.157-176.
- Demetriou, D.Z., 2001. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique. *Theory and society*, 30(3), pp.337-361.
- Hamilton, M., 2001. Who believes in astrology?: Effect of favorableness of astrologically derived personality descriptions on acceptance of astrology. *Personality and Individual differences*, 31(6), pp.895-902.
- Li, C., 2006. The Confucian ideal of harmony. *Philosophy East and West*, pp.583-603.
- Mancisidor, S.C., 2022. 'I am not who I was': Old age and masculinity in Maximianus Etruscus' elegies. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 61, p.101038.
- Rubarth, S., 2014. Competing constructions of masculinity in ancient Greece. *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*, 1(1), pp.21-32.
- Saunders, Trevor J. Aristotle, *Politics*. Penguin Books, 1981.
- Stanaland, A. and Gaither, S., 2021. "Be a man": The role of social pressure in eliciting men's aggressive cognition. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 47(11), pp.1596-1611.
- Tester, S.J., 1987. *A history of western astrology*. Boydell & Brewer.
- Thompson Jr, E.H. and Pleck, J.H., 1995. Masculinity ideologies: A review of research instrumentation on men and masculinities.



Sabrina Harverson

edited by
Miriam Zeghlache

Can Women get Angry?

Traditionally in *King Lear*, the daughters of King Lear, Goneril and Regan have been perceived as evil, deceitful, and ungrateful, with their sister Cordelia deemed an innocent party of her father's rage.

Lear decides to stay with Goneril after essentially "retiring" as king, but he still wants to maintain all his royal privileges.

"By day and night, he wrongs me! Every hour" Goneril complains to her steward Oswald (Shakespeare, 1997, 1.3: 4). She is angry about Lear wanting to retain all his kingly powers and him encouraging his knights to be disruptive in Act I scene III. When that doesn't work out for Lear, he goes to Regan. Regan is equally unhappy about the situation when Lear stays with her instead, Regan says "I'll not endure it!" (1.3:6)

Traditional interpretations of this play would argue Goneril, and Regan have a duty to act graciously towards their father. But having put all three daughters through a "love test" in Act I Scene I to decide how much of his kingdom they should get, who could blame Goneril and Regan's actions when he then wants to "retire" at their residences with "all the airs and graces" as if he is still king? It is Goneril who confronts Lear on his behaviour in Act I Scene IV with his riotous knights who have taken up what seems like permanent residence (1.4.10).

Throughout the play these two sisters are threatening, autocratic, cold, and ambitious. Many critics have focused on their wholly masculine traits and responses, and argue that Goneril and Regan were the ones that caused the onset of misery and destruction of the family in this play (Kott, 1976)

Goneril and Regan get angry to say the least. But their anger and hatred do not seem uncalled for when their father effectively decides to divide his kingdom based on how much each daughter proclaims their love for him. After Lear banishes Cordelia for her refusal to play the game, Goneril and Regan try to counsel their father “part in self-interest” ; they are worried he’s not making decisions in the best interests of the kingdom. When it doesn’t go Lear’s way, he resorts to dehumanising name calling, effectively wishing one of his daughters infertile.

Condemned, by past critics, throughout the play as malevolent figures, (although their actions are not blameless) surely Goneril and Regan’s anger is a reaction to disastrous and chaotic decision- making at the hands of their father? And does this not all touch on wider issues still relevant today?

The question is, is it socially acceptable for women to get angry? We all experience anger in certain situations, both in our professional and private lives. It is an emotion that can surface as mild discontent to full scale fury. It can at the more heated end of the spectrum trigger our flight or fight response (Devlin , 2019) As a result, it releases stress hormones in the body, like adrenaline and testosterone, in order to prepare for a fight. However, what we decide to do in a scenario that has made us angry depends on the prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain responsible for decision making and reasoning. It does, shall we say, remind us that we should put our anger into context and respond in a socially acceptable way (p.1).

One study showed that men were more likely to display aggression than women, but it did not mean women did not experience rage any less frequently (p.1) Then why do women seem generally less angry than men? Several studies have argued it is gender expectations that operate insidiously upon us. (p.1) One psychologist even argues these expectations are instilled in us from a young age at school, where we learn how to regulate our responses (p.1).

Boys can be outwardly angry, girls on the other hand must learn to conceal it, even if they experience anger as frequently as boys. But this, it seems, is only the tip of the iceberg.

One of the major problems is although anger is experienced by all, the associations of anger with men and women are entirely different. Anger with women is associated with evil or madness. If we consider King Lear and Goneril and Regan, critics lament in detail about the daughters' evil actions and callous hearts. But they have been done a great disservice by their father, betrayed even. But for men, the associations with anger are entirely different. It's viewed as part of masculinity, an inevitable trait of the male psyche. For example, seeing as Lear rages at how his three daughters have betrayed him throughout the play, are we not meant to feel sorry for him? Is this reasonable? His daughters Goneril and Regan by contrast are "evil" and perhaps considered emotionally unstable. For they have decided not to follow his plan built on a lie. His anger and subsequent tears seem very much like crocodile tears.

This is a key problem though when men are angry, it is generally considered reasonable. (Remeikis, 2022). When women outwardly display their anger, it is not feminine at all and is viewed as rather outlandish. Not at all reasonable, women's anger is often reasoned to be the result of unstable emotions (Remeikis, 2022). And if this was not bad enough, time after time this way of thinking is reinforced through literature and myths. Women who are angry in many myths and legends are "doomed for life", cast away by friends or family or worse, hunted down by their male counterparts. You only have to think of someone like Medusa to see how this scenario plays out repeatedly in all walks of life where women are pursued and punished (Remeikis, 2022).

But why is this disparity so worrying? It's because it affects women in every walk of life and harms them not only personally but professionally. It is a multifaceted problem of why women are not equal to men in professional spheres, but the differing reactions to anger are arguably a contributing factor. Several studies have shown that women suffer from displaying anger in their working lives, but men by contrast are rewarded, even though the same emotion is being displayed (Remeikis, 2022).

This conundrum is evident with female politicians. Studies have shown they are more likely to receive critique when moving away from expected gender norms and displaying the “masculine” emotion of anger (Karl et al., 2021.) But this is one of the key problems; anger is generally seen as “masculine” or part of being “manly”. If it is displayed by women it is seen as almost alien to their nature. Conversely, emotions of powerlessness are associated with women such as sadness or weeping. They are regarded as feminine attributes. But it seems wholly impossible to bring about change, say politically, if one is weeping. Anger by contrast has been viewed as bringing about change, particularly in politics, so where does this leave women? (Karl et al., 2021).

Equally there is another problem at hand, is it is considered far from masculine if a man is weeping. The societal expectation of how one should be, is inconspicuously oppressive for men and women. There is no easy answer or quick fix solution to any of this. However, it does not mean that change cannot happen. The main problem is the stereotypes and expectations surrounding anger. It is also important to consider that anger has a domino effect, in that too often, the other person bearing the brunt of the anger gets angry too and there is no resolution.

Moreover, anger is ‘protective’ in that we are often frightened when expressing anger at the extreme end. That’s why in King Lear, Goneril and Regan are partly reacting the way they are out of fear. Why are women made to feel the way they are acting is bad, when it’s out of fear? It is perhaps a case of meeting our needs through expressing ourselves more coherently and with a different emotion entirely, such as being assertive. Utilising assertiveness requires good communication skills and can be improved upon by both women and men alike. Thus, anger is often reactionary and is a response due to a less than ideal situation and is important to bear this in mind.

Bibliography:

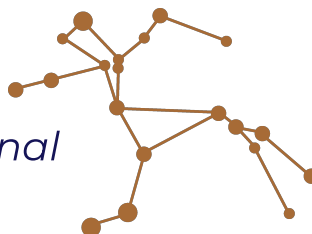
Devlin, H. (2019) 'The Science of Anger: How gender, Age and personality shape this emotion' The Guardian, 12 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/may/12/science-of-anger-gender-age-personality#:~:text=Research%20has%20consistently%20found%20that,motivated%20by%20rage%20as%20frequently>

Karl KL, Cormack L. (2021) 'Big Boys Don't Cry: Evaluations of Politicians Across Issue, Gender, and Emotion'. PubMed Central, 1-22. doi: [10.1007/s11109-021-09727-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09727-5)

K, Kott. (1974) Shakespeare Our Contemporary, WW Norton & Company.

Remeikis, A. (2022) 'Women's anger is not dissipating- and politics as usual won't solve it' The Guardian, 23 January. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/24/womens-anger-is-not-dissipating-and-politics-as-usual-wont-solve-it>

Shakespeare, W. (1997). King Lear. Edited by R. A. Foakes. London: Bloomsbury.



Linda Luciani

edited by
Faustas Norvaisa

Sunday at Copenhagen's Human Library: stories of women.

The Human Library offers a unique borrowing experience where living people, representing marginalized groups, serve as "books" with personal stories and experiences. These individuals come from various backgrounds and face prejudice and discrimination based on factors like identity, lifestyle, occupation, social status, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, and more. By challenging existing prejudices, the Human Library provides an opportunity to safely verify beliefs about others and promotes the core principle of meeting one's prejudice and unjudging someone. With over 80 Human Libraries worldwide, the Nørrebro library is open every Sunday from 12 pm to 4 pm, operating between April and October. These libraries play a crucial role in a world where tolerance and acceptance are often threatened. While visitors to the library may already demonstrate mental openness, it is important to recognize that even they can hold biases. To extend the library's impact, events are organised in schools, universities, and companies to engage involuntary and "stubborn" readers, fostering connections and encouraging the unjudging of prejudices. This approach aims to address inclusiveness and civil rights opposition in society effectively.

Once I arrived, I could choose my first reading from a blackboard outside the cottage, displaying the full list of books available for that day. Then I was invited to sit on any preferred spot in the garden.

a. Marianne. Putting a child up for adoption.



A blue-haired lady in her 70s (the one that you see in the photo above) walks toward me. Marianne was born and raised by a wealthy family in Strøget, the old town of Copenhagen. When Marianne was 15, she met a 34-year-old van driver working for the same postal company as she did. They had a few consensual sexual intercours during, what she perceived as, "a juvenile adventure". Marianne did not know he had a wife and two children.

She confirmed she did know how one could get pregnant when I asked tho. The first time she visited the doctor after missing her period, they told her it was due to a metabolic malfunction. When they finally got the pregnancy diagnosis, it was too late even for an illegal abortion. That was in 1965. At that point, the doctors told her to keep the pregnancy secret, so ultimately, for almost all her life, no one knew about it: youth friends, nor even her brother, except her parents.

When the baby came into the world, they did not give her the chance to hold him. If she had held the baby in her arms, she would not have been able to go for that decision. That made me question for a moment the answer she gave me when I asked whether it was her free choice to give the child away. It was. Her parents would have supported her with the baby, but she felt too young for motherhood and wanted to act in the child's best interest. It made sense, but I still wondered to what extent she was put in the condition to believe she would have been a decent mother for her son in a context where she was forced into silence during the pregnancy and forever after.

After the hospital, they banded her breast full of milk. What in many women manifests itself as postpartum trauma, manifested in Marianne as unfulfilled motherhood feelings. She probably managed to make up for it by taking care of a little Turkish boy who used to attend the community canteen for immigrants that her parents had started. As well as, later in life, by having two children from her husband. Marianne confessed that if she wasn't able to have her two children, she would have repented heavily of giving his firstborn away. When her children tried to find out about him, it came out that the boy died at 21 and very little they managed to know about his life.

Marianne has lived with her secret for almost all her life. Her children were the first to know, when in their 20s while only in recent years she opened up to her lifetime friends and in tears they told her they would have supported her if they knew. During their conversation, it also came out that in her class, six other girls went through teenage pregnancy while being forced to keep the secret. That gives a sense of how common cases like Marianne's were at that time while society still "stigmatised" and isolated young women, without questioning their desire, dignity, and right to motherhood.



The Human Library or Menneskebiblioteket in Danish
- Nørrebro, Copenhagen.

b. Lone. The social worker.

It was the time for a second book. Lone, a 57-year-old, has been in the job for six years and felt frustrated with the stigma of being “lazy and uncaring” that social workers receive from society: both public opinion and the people that they are directly helping. She is now working at a job centre in Copenhagen. Lone opened up about her inner struggle to enforce laws that she does not recognize as fair for the majority of the unemployed, those who are not in the physical and mental conditions to perform a job.

She has the spirit of a fighter. Before the office job, she had experience from the streets - approaching homeless people and drug addicts, explaining the forms of help the state could offer them. The reactions were often unpleasant but the winning strategy was persistence and “talking their own language” so as to build trust. A tough job, not for everyone. I saw in Lone a vocation for being a social worker that built on a fundamental value that only a few people are persuaded from to the deepest extent - all lives have value and dignity!

c. Lise. The polyamorous.

The last book for the day. Lise, 41 years old. She is a mother of two kids (nine and ten) within a 13-year-long marriage with his ex-husband that about one and half years ago decided to divorce her and become monogamous with another woman. Lise was still in love.

A few years into the marriage she proposed to his husband to open their relationship to other partners, both romantically and sexually. They started giving each other a set of rules and boundaries that in time become looser and looser. For many years the equilibrium has been such that she had two-long term relationships (two boyfriends) and her husband had the same but with another woman (girlfriend).

When I asked about how they managed the situation with their children, she told me about the time that her daughter asked why Mary (fantasy name for the husband's girlfriend) used to sleep in mommy's bed while a family friend slept in the guest rooms and at that point, the child's father explained that Mary was a special friend while Rasmus just a normal friend. It was in the sixth year of his husband's relationship with his girlfriend that he decided to divorce Lise. The decision came soon after a period in which Lise had limited ability to help the family in the aftermath of a surgery.

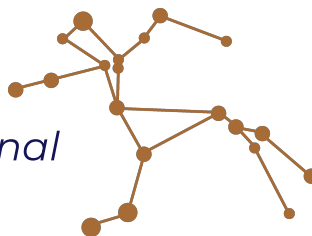
She moved out of the apartment and Mary moved in with Lise's two kids and her newborn from Lise's ex-husband by now. After the divorce, Lise felt the need to terminate the relationships with her two boyfriends to elaborate on the pain from the failure of her marriage while today she is again in multiple relationships.

My biggest question to Lise was how to refrain from unconsciously building a hierarchy within her own circle of lovers. "I follow where my mind goes," says the lyrics of a song. Lise gave me a sensical perspective on this. Each lover can give you something different and unique, and for that, the relationship deserves to be cherished. No need to make it into a competition.

It is maybe a more democratic and moment-focused way of living through relationships. We agreed that it requires a higher degree of awareness and to some extent, the reward of multiple partners comes also with the risk of losing balance when it comes to time and energy allocation in nurturing each relationship. Imagine going through a honeymoon phase with your partner, and now imagine going through the same with the three of them. Then, also imagine going through turbulence with one against three. Again, it is a risk-return tradeoff.

When I asked whether she could have travelled back in time and rather not proposed to her husband to open the relationship and maybe have saved her marriage, she looked firm in her answer; she would have never given up who she was and her desire to experience multiple dimensions of intimacy with other humans. If Lise's family situation was not something to be jealous about, I could definitely admire her confidence in "coming out" and living the way she likes. Despite the fact that I believe I won't be able to go through the same experiences, what is not to admire respect in someone who is happy in her own skin and lives her polyamorous life in the sunlight?

Walking home from the library, I realized that all the books I happened to read were women and all in a mature stage of life. It takes time to build self-awareness, elaborate feelings and situations, and in the end, find the courage to fight stigmas by means of your own story. Thank you to these women for that!



Anja Radonjic

edited by
Faustas Norvaisa

The Certainty of a Promise : Montenegrin Parliamentary Elections in 2020 and 2023

Montenegro is oftentimes a wonderland; in a day, you hear the news about an allegedly loose panther in a remote village, and read about canceled classes over bomb threats. While sensationalism and absurdity in the media shake up the daily lives of Montenegrins, it still remains a quaint and mundane place. Despite the small population and territory, the country presents a pivotal strategic stronghold for both regional, and international powers.

In a place of 500 000 registered voters, Montenegrins have high stakes in influencing the geopolitical tides in the Western Balkans. Bordering Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, and Albania, it is within Montenegro where external powers can assert their presence in the region. It is a country where the influences of the West, Russia, UAE, and China, interplay; yet, Montenegrin domestic and foreign policy has been steered towards the European Union and the West throughout the decades since its 2006 independence. For instance, Montenegro became a member of NATO in 2017, and membership negotiations to join the EU started in 2012.

While pro-EU sentiments were shared amongst the public in the past, with slow progress and the rising presence of populism, Montenegro's future becomes more unclear. Europe may have been a representation of progress, but euroscepticism trickled down from wider political presence of Russian-backed leaders who helped the common men in times of financial disparities during the pandemic. In the whirlwind of press statements, affairs, scandals, protests from pro-Serbian nationalist groups, and counter-protests of pro-Montenegrin civil blocks, parliamentary elections become the best indicator of the political climate in Montenegro.

After six months of lockdown and highly restricted movement in 2020, Montenegrin's political tide shifted for the first time in years. The loss of the largest political party, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), during the parliamentary elections in 2020, many foreign analysts interpreted as the first democratic elections in the country, but also as a potential political turmoil. European political analysts like Florian Bieber warned that Djukanovic's pro-Western stance does not excuse for decades of unwavering rule. There was no social upheaval, nor power-grabbing attempts in the aftermath of the 2020 elections. Newly elected PM Zdravko Krivokapic introduced his cabinet ministers as 12 apostles, there to bring change to a corrupt society that formed and roted the political structures under the DPS rule. An allegory was the golden promise made to America and the EU, as a final crackdown on organised crime and corruption. It was a promise of a breakdown in separation of church and state, in a multi- religious and multi-ethnic country.

In fact, this was the first election in Montenegro with a political campaign openly funded by the pro-Russian Serbian Orthodox Church. The supporters of the winning coalition headed by the far-right Democratic Front (DF) attacked or threatened Muslims and ethnic Albanians residing in the north of Montenegro. They wrote on their houses, "the blackbird takes its flight, Pljeverlja will be another Srebrenica". Despite the unrests and violent threats that transpired (and which the newly elected government never publicly condemned), American Ambassador Reinke welcomed the transition of power as "the new government is constituted through democratic processes, by the will of the people".

In 2021, Curt Walker at the Centre for European Political Analysis in Washington D.C. recognized that “Serbia and Russia ran great interference in 2020 elections.” Indeed, the 2020 elections have indicated the political capacities of Montenegrin society to change age-old political structures. The 2020 elections showed not only to the foreign partners, but to the Montenegrin public, that the electoral results can be respected and that the voter turnout of 76% mattered in defining the political course for the next four years. The public voted for a promise of change. While the power-grabbing and nepotistic practices exhibited by DPS during their time in parliament remained, the political climate indeed shifted, with greater integration of religious figures and their political agendas in domestic and foreign policy, trickling down to changes in education syllabuses and acquisition of funds for cultural projects.

Now, three years later, the Montenegrin public has witnessed, although ever so subtle, social fragmentation in society. The town of Cetinje, a place of historical and social significance as the old capital of Montenegro, became a microcosm of such dynamics; in 2021, mass protests against the inauguration of the next Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan were held at the two entries into the town. Heart-breakingly, it also became a place of great sadness and moroseness in 2022, with the first massacre to occur in Montenegro after 35 years. In both instances, the government alienated the public, with a lack of follow-up inquiries, all lost in the accusatory behaviour between Montenegrin and Serbian national factions in parliament. After 18 months, the DF government lost its vote of confidence, and the technical government led by Dritan Abazovic, leader of URA, brought the decision-making to a standstill.

From Krivokapic’s government, “two apostles” became the faces of a new political party called Europe Now, which aims to steer Montenegro toward the final stages of the EU accession process. During 2020, Jakov Milatovic and Milojko Spajic acted as ministers of economic growth and finance, respectively. Earlier this year, Milatovic managed to unseat the encumbered president Milo Djukanovic and mark the first mandate of a non-DPS candidate in years. Spajic on the other hand, led the party list in the 2023 parliamentary elections.

While Spajic leads with promises of higher minimum wages, the Montenegrin public has grown more apathetic in the last years; disappointed by either side of the political spectrum. As I write this, the age-old dance of the back-room political dealings and promises is about to begin in Montenegro. With only 56% of voters participating in the 2023 parliamentary elections, there were no winners or losers for the 81 parliamentary seats. With only 24 seats for Europe Now, 21 seats for the DPS-led coalition, and further weakening of support for third parties, it's an open game for who will be able to form a government. Interestingly, 2023 marks the first election where radical right political figures did not pass the threshold of support. A multi-party government awaits the Montenegrin public, and if the last three years can attest, there is a storm of uncertainty about what the next four years will unfold.

In the end, only a few things in Montenegro are seldom certain. That cafes and chatter over deutch coffee remains. The BlueLine buses will never arrive on time. And we will never be truly content with our leaders and political landscape. Dissatisfaction (and slowly growing apathy) fuels conversations and reminds Montenegrins of the lack of proper judicial structures that could hold politicians, whether in power or in opposition, accountable to their voters. Being well-situated on the Adriatic coast and in between the EU and non-EU borders, Montenegro becomes a boarderland for soft power influence. Without a complete alignment to either the West or Russian/Chinese blocks, the foreign policy of Montenegro has to be carefully crafted, as the country cannot afford to alienate either external power. Because of such ambivalence, it was possible for 2020 elections to turn the tide in favour of Serbian Orthodox Church-backed coalition. With the dismantling of secularism in both political and social spheres, it is difficult to believe Europe Now (as a party that stemmed from SOC- backing) will truly adhere to a pro-EU agenda. Montenegrins are essentially paradoxical pessimists. They will never be satisfied with their political landscape, yet it has not dissuaded the people to follow promises, no matter how improbable they might seem.

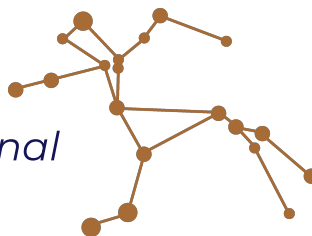
1. Most recently mentioned after Presidential elections in March, 2023. <https://twitter.com/fbieber/status/1642665737301946368>

2. <https://www.cdm.me/politika/krivokapic-12-ministara-kao-12-apostola/>

3. <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/kamenovali-prostorije-islamske-zajednice-i-ostavili-poruku-polecela-crna-ptica-pljevlja-bice-srebrenica>

4. <https://www.cdm.me/english/raising-reinke-the-usa-is-looking-forward-to-partnership-with-the-new-government/>

5. <https://www.cdm.me/politika/volker-o-godisnjici-rada-vlade-nema-znacajnijeg-napretka-u-borbi-protiv-korupcije/>



Sanobar Sabah

edited by
Faustas Norvaisa

Brown women reclaiming their space through art

TW: Mention of suicide.

I gravitated towards writing personal essays soon after my father passed away last year. We had just completed his funeral proceedings, and I was still in the aircraft on my return flight from Mumbai to Abu Dhabi when I randomly signed up for a memoir-writing workshop by Natasha Badhwar. Until then, I had no idea what writing personal essays entailed.

It's been a year since that last workshop. Even though I come from a reserved, if not a shy, family, I wrote essay after essay revealing a gamut of my complex emotions - fears and ambitions, anxiety and desires, hopes and dreams. Not only did I write, I decided to go public with my writings.

The more I indulged in writing, the more I discovered bits of me that were covered underneath multiple layers.

Because of the socio-cultural challenges brown women still face today, I learned that sharing our stories - whatever art form we adopt - is difficult. One is constantly worried about what people will think of you and how it will affect your relationships - in a society where female expression even within their own homes can be quite intimidating for many, how does choosing art to challenge female representation publicly affect you and others around you? For many, sharing their stories with honesty remains a dangerous threat even today.

Intrigued by the transformation writing enabled in my life, I decided to write for the 7th edition of *Journal D'Ambroisie* about brown women using art to reclaim their space. I interviewed three South Asian women, wizards challenging patriarchy, gender bias and stereotypes wielding their artistic skills like magic. Natasha Badhwar, memoirist, author, columnist, filmmaker, and a teacher. Mahima Vashisht, creator of *Womaning in India* (an umbrella brand that includes a newsletter, a podcast and a series of gender sensitivity workshops) and, Namal Siddiqui, writer, poet, mountaineer.



Namal

Question 1

How do you see the rise of brown women using storytelling to reclaim their space?

Natasha: I do believe we are living in the age of memoir. Despite the backlash against women, despite the rise of authoritarianism at a global scale, more and more artists are speaking up – both to tell their own stories and in solidarity with each other. I love it.

Mahima: I think women have always been storytellers – with stories that grandmothers told children, and stories that sisters and friends whispered to one another – it has always been happening. Among all the other caregiving and invisible household burdens that women have shouldered forever, they are also the ones who chronicling family histories.



Natasha



Mahima

I feel fortunate to be alive at a time when this storytelling is making its inevitable foray beyond the four walls of the family home. But I also see that there is also a long way to go. A majority of women are still suffering in silence within their own families – the rise in incidents of domestic abuse around the world shows that our worst nightmares often live inside our homes.

Namal: We must speak. We must tell our stories. Women have traditionally been marginalised in the literary world. Then to be of colour has its own challenges. Of course, things are changing, but fundamental shifts take place when change is constant. The more we tell our stories, the less it becomes an anomaly, less of a riot, and more of a conversation to be had. We must take ourselves seriously. We must give ourselves due credit. We must not be afraid of not being nice all the time. We must be opportunistic. There is nothing to be shy about any of that.

Question 2

What does writing mean to you?

Natasha: I've always relied on being able to find meaning and joy in stories – both real and imaginary. Writing is my way of solving mysteries. I am a busy detective, forever trying to map my neurodivergent ways to make sense of what is natural for me and embrace my most authentic self.

Mahima: My discomfort with gender-based injustices used to be a very impotent kind of anger with nowhere to go, and, therefore, it just constantly burnt me on the inside. Writing *Woman in India*, for me, has been a way to channel my anger in a productive direction. The tangible positive change I see happening because of my writing is a brilliant bonus! I received an email from a father who said his teenage daughter reads every edition of *Woman in India* and then involves her family to discuss how they can implement positive changes in their day-to-day lives.

Separately, another regular reader – a divorcee – once sent me an email saying how one of my pieces on society making excuses for male 'incompetence' when it comes to domestic responsibilities would have perhaps saved his marriage had he read it earlier. He added that he is determined that his children will grow up knowing better.

Such messages make me confident that writing is one of the most meaningful things I have done in my life.



Natasha: I do believe we are living in the age of memoir. Despite the backlash against women, despite the rise of authoritarianism at a global scale, more and more artists are speaking up – both to tell their own stories and in solidarity with each other. I love it.

Namal: I have been writing poems since I was seven or eight. I inherited the love for writing from my parents, especially my mother. I was able to finesse it with young love's innocence during teenage years. Whatever phase of life I was in, my poems always accompanied me. I found myself sharing poetry on a common platform with poetry lovers, and when you share and laugh with people eye to eye, word to word, words that you have written and are somehow making someone else laugh or cry, you know that you're being heard. That there is a kind and tender place in the world.

Question 3

How has your family responded to your passion for storytelling? What about the men in your family?

Natasha: My husband is my greatest champion. He is an odd, unpredictable, and deeply loving man, so I am not going to try to analyse this further. For my children, my memoir writing and documenting the moments of our life is an intrinsic part of our family life. They approve of me, so long as I stay busy and happy with myself.

Mahima: I want to add an honourable mention here for my father-in-law. I write routinely about my marriage and the gender roles we unwittingly fall into, especially as we tackle parenthood. My father-in-law reads almost everything I write. I used to wonder how he felt about some of these things I write, particularly about my marriage to his son. But last year, when I launched paid subscriptions for my newsletter, he became one of my first paid subscribers!

My husband also reads everything I write. He is very proud of my work and is a rock of support for my writing. My son is too young to really understand what I write, but he loves what I do. He talks about becoming a writer himself.



Namal: I have been lucky because the women in my family are a force to reckon with, and my father is the most gentle man. There was a willingness to understand their children as opposed to conforming to society's expectations. We were raised through the lens of independence - individual independence, the ability to reason, to make decisions - not just financially - and everyone was willing to learn and move on from redundant habits. It is a work in progress, but having a supportive family helps.

Natasha: I was 36 when I quit my full-time job with NDTV, which was India's premier news broadcaster at that time. I worked there for 13 adventurous and very satisfying years. I had a nice official designation and a great salary package, but I needed to grow as a person. I owed it to myself and my very young children at that time to use my time better. It was not an easy decision at all. I stepped out of my comfort zone and felt like I was starting from scratch all over again... but I learnt a lot about myself. I grew into myself, in a sense.

Mahima: Ageism in the case of women is a very different beast from that against men. Women are expected to retreat into insignificance as they age. A 60-year-old man marrying or dating a 25-year-old woman is called a "silver fox." But, a woman like Priyanka Chopra marrying a man ten years younger than her... had half the world up in her arms with the need to deal with their age difference.

Then there is ample evidence that medical science takes the able-bodied male as the default and, therefore, very little research exists about conditions specific to women like endometriosis and perimenopause - while we have spent billions of dollars researching and developing Viagra.

Namal: I have met a 60-year-old woman climbing Kilimanjaro and a 65-year-old woman climbing Mount Kazbek. I met a 71-year-old woman pursuing her Masters after her husband passed away. I am 35, unmarried, childless, pursuing my passion, and trying to make a difference in my own way, and I have no qualms about it.

Question 5

Your take on the term, 'brown women'?

Natasha: I don't bother to use the words "brown women" or even "women of colour". I'd rather not be privileged by the colour of skin as an identity marker. But I can't be bothered to feel offended by these terms either. I understand the context in which terms like these have been coined.

Mahima: I have no problem being called a brown woman – regardless of my actual skin colour being lighter or darker than brown – because I see it as more of cultural identifier than an exact skin shade. I see nothing but internalised racism amongst South Asians in this squabble over being identified as your exact shade on the skin shade card – ranging from 'fair' to 'wheatish'.

I will be the happiest person when we are able to talk about people without labels. But for that, we first need to focus on building a world where these accidents of birth – our race, religion, gender, skin colour – stop controlling the stories of our lives quite as much. Sadly, we are not yet living in a world where the colour of our skin has no bearing on our life experiences.

Namal:

I've written about the colour brown – its resilience and its beauty. I don't care for labels. Human beings are identified by their obvious features. They shouldn't be judged by them.

Question 6

Your take on the term, 'superwoman'?

Natasha: Well, I do believe in my superpowers. Like I said, I don't care for labels. Only for individual agency.

Mahima:

Idolising women's sacrifices is a subtle form of abuse. In my opinion, these terms are used to fool women into a false sense of pride at being abused. I think being 'super' at anything needs to be a choice. But in the case of women, especially mothers, there is simply no choice but to be 'super' at the job – because no one else will do it if you don't and to me, that is domestic abuse. Let us stop sugarcoating it.

Namal: *We will always be given labels. It is we who need to decide who we want to be – super or not. What’s important is we are able to decide for ourselves without any pressure and be able to take a step back from the same decision, if needed.*

.....

A very integral part of art for any artist is that it helps you connect with your own roots. A wide spectrum of emotions from joy to grief are intricately woven in one’s works. This is particularly more striking for the closed South Asian communities.

The Juggernaut, a New York based media publication for the South Asians with over 300,000 followers on Instagram recently reported:

“About a decade ago, South Asians in the U.S. had a greater stigma toward mental illness than any other minority group, according to the non-profit South Asian Public Health Association, while an international study from 2019 reflected that South Asian immigrants experience high rates of mental health disorders that go unaddressed.”

Pushing the envelope of cultural stigmas in her memoirs, Natasha compassionately yet objectively creates a safe space for a dialogue on issues like intergenerational trauma: without judgement. In her debut memoir, *My Daughters’ Mum*, she boldly addresses suicide and therapy based on her personal experience.

One wonders about the courage needed to go so public about an experience that is private. “What is private about feeling suicidal or attempting suicide? Can there be a more public way to express one’s despair?” Natasha objects. “I speak and write about depression, anxiety, grief and dissonance so that I can triumph over them. So that I can pass on energy and hope to others who may be struggling without support. I will call out the toxic ways of society, family and political systems instead of allowing them to defeat the sensitive and just amongst us,” she declares defiantly.

Writing makes you probe, rewarding you with crystal clarity. Additionally, one of the common revelations of a writer's experience is that writing helps one come to terms with their own sense of belonging. In an increasingly globalised world, the idea of 'home' is ever- evolving. Through her Spoken Word performances, Namal, a Dubai-based Pakistani artist and a third culture kid herself, has consistently flirted with the question - 'Where are you from?'

Challenging the dated homogeneous idea of 'home' Namal points out, "Home is my ability to write and love the way I would like to. The UAE is a friend who grew older with me and offered me a space to be myself. It was only natural for me to reach out and share what is dear to me, what nourishes me - my poetry. It is my way to claim my space here."

....And, many of us will agree, writing is indeed our home.

END

-
1. Virani, A. (2021), 'South Asians in Therapy: Challenging Norms and Taboos', The Juggernaut.



From Me to You:
A Love Letter to the Community

Emma Gabor



Editor: Dorottya Ágoston
Creative Director: Jessica Rosen
Photographer: Lunara Dossayeva



I was born in 1999. And yet the past few years were when I truly became *Emma*. Before, I was a mere possibility of my own potential. Stranger, welcome. Friend, good to see you here. Lover, this piece will make you believe.

**Stranger, welcome.
Friend, good to see you here.
Lover, this piece will make you
believe.**

If you knew me a year ago, say goodbye. If you knew me two years ago, let it go. And if you knew me before already, forget it completely. I have never been as myself as I am now. In my mind and soul, there is the Emma before and the one now. They don't even look the same. The light in their eyes sparkles differently.

The past three years have been about love, challenges and growth. The loss of people, of things, and of beliefs. But loss is gain. The opportunities and love that presented themselves to me after deep grief were marveling and I am grateful.

To the people who have helped me along this journey, hello darling. Thank you, let me hold you in my thoughts for a moment. Mentors, family, friends, lessons, I am grateful to the pain and joy and wisdom you have bestowed upon me.

To the people who have loved me, it is reciprocal. I have never been more full of love in my life. Let me hold your face gently, reverently in my thoughts.

And to the people who have tried to bring me down, look at me now. I was in flames, living through storm after storm trying to do right by everyone, only to realise that people like that will only ever take. My kindness and empathy would only push them further into their cruelty. So I made choices. Difficult, painful decisions to let them go, to give them a taste of their own medicine. Because in the end, I am a mama bear, who will do anything to protect her children.





Creating the Salon from scratch was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. Two years of non-stop work, not enough sleep and obsession.

Obsessively believing in a vision that – when I told people – they would laugh at. And now here we are: we have a group of three pioneering projects merged together in less than two years, and we are only just beginning. The [Salon](#), the [Journal](#) and the [ACMC](#) are proof that our community is stronger and more powerful than ever. From reaching readership worldwide on four continents at the Journal, to having diverse members at the Salon from more than thirty countries, to our partnership with the CEU (Central European University) with the ACMC which will take place this autumn in Vienna – I look around and I see potential. Potential in growth, in actually making an impact in the world, potential in *you*.



Nobody prepares you for the pain of change. For the prices you have to pay. The sacrifices, the storms you have to walk through, the flames that burn your skin while you do so, without break, constantly, for years. From a girl with no self-confidence or self-respect, a pathological people pleaser, I was surrounded by snakes whose abuse was constant and harrowing. Lovers, “friends”, strangers, people who were too close when they should’ve been very far.

To the people who have loved me, it is reciprocal. I have never been more full of love in my life. Let me hold your face gently, reverently in my thoughts.



To the young woman with strength, boundaries, the bearer of deep scars that will catapult her into greatness, she is now at liberty, happy days are here, she made it into the light. The past few years were times of immense growth, of intense therapy, of letting go of past ghosts and sorrows. Writing this piece feels cathartic, and my eyes are swollen with tears of relief and hope for the future. Everything is not perfect and pain is still there. But we are on the right path.

The past dried up in violent flames disguised as people. Lessons, corrections, redirections. Innocence and naiveté can only last so long – after a while, they become redundant of an echoey past and they shift into strength and rage. The hurt some people bestow on you will make it inevitably so.

Contemplation, sadness, the waiting game. Every once in a while, one has to stop, reevaluate their path and make certain tough, yet necessary decisions. But when one is completely alone, what can you do? I have been alone and lonely my whole life. And in my deep knowing, I understand this will likely never change. Accepting one's strange vision of life is a moment of rupture from others, from those closest to you. They will question you, they will betray you, they will not see what you see: light. In this way, you are no longer of this world, yet you have never belonged more than now.

Writing this piece feels cathartic, and my eyes are swollen with tears of relief and hope for the future.



The Salon and the Journal are my first children. They have grown from babies to youngsters, soon to step into the chaotic, adventurous age of early teenagers and cause wonderful havoc in their environments. I am a proud mother of two, always holding hands with my partner(-in-crime), Dodo. I am not yet satisfied with how things are, but I am joyous that life was generous enough to bestow this gift upon me. The Salon and the Journal represent freedom, possibilities and a better world. Join the movement [HERE](#).

The Salon was born when I was in flames. I was captured, living in a prison, screaming unbeknownst to myself. The Salon saved me. Then came the Journal which changed everything. And the ACMC, which, as I am writing this, brings prideful tears to my eyes. What a journey this has been, and what beautiful milestones still lie ahead.

During (unbearably) difficult moments, one of the many things I kept hearing from those closest to me has always been: 'If anyone can do it, it's you. You're so strong, you're going to get through this.' True. And yet these past two years, I arrived at a point where strength was not enough anymore. I had to reevaluate my entire existence and ask myself: 'is this how I want to live my life?' The answer was crude and simple: no.



**The past dried up in
violent flames
disguised as people.
Lessons, corrections,
redirections.**

The growth that followed was shocking. The time within which I grew into the woman I am today, the progress I made in this very small time frame was powerful and fulfilling. I believe it showed that it was truly about time this shift took place within and therefore around me. I was like a phoenix rising from years of ashes. And my wings are now wide and strong. I am becoming. I am living my truth more and more everyday, unapologetically so.

Essentially, our world is filled with chaos. I don't believe I need to elaborate on the pain and gravity that was brought about these past few years. We all feel it. My generation and our community without a doubt. And what lies ahead feels like an antagonistic, turbulent era fueled by animosity, angst, and ambivalence. Our job, our purpose, is to rebut these feelings and turn them, to the best of our abilities, into *love* and *kindness*.

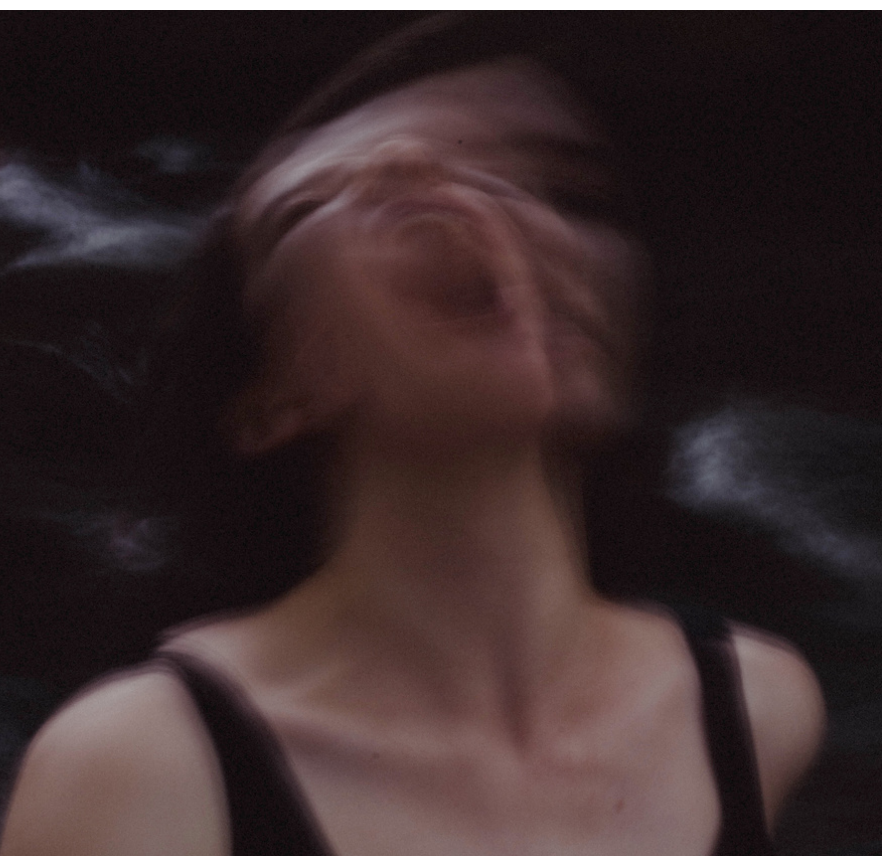
One young girl had a dream. She has grown into a woman and with it, she sees her dream being shared with others. I cannot do this alone. I was never meant to. We are stronger, brighter, more powerful *together*.

Last year, I came to the realization that I was truly lonely. Trying to lead a big group of people while attempting to live a balanced life (and doing a Masters degree on top of it!) proved impossible. Truth to be told, I fell apart. Not meeting the expectations I set for myself and that I felt the community wanted me to meet, I had to take a step back and hole up. Suddenly, the long held, repressed rage that has been hiding inside of me burst open. I was in flames.

**I was like a phoenix rising
from years of ashes. And
my wings are now wide
and strong.
I am becoming.**

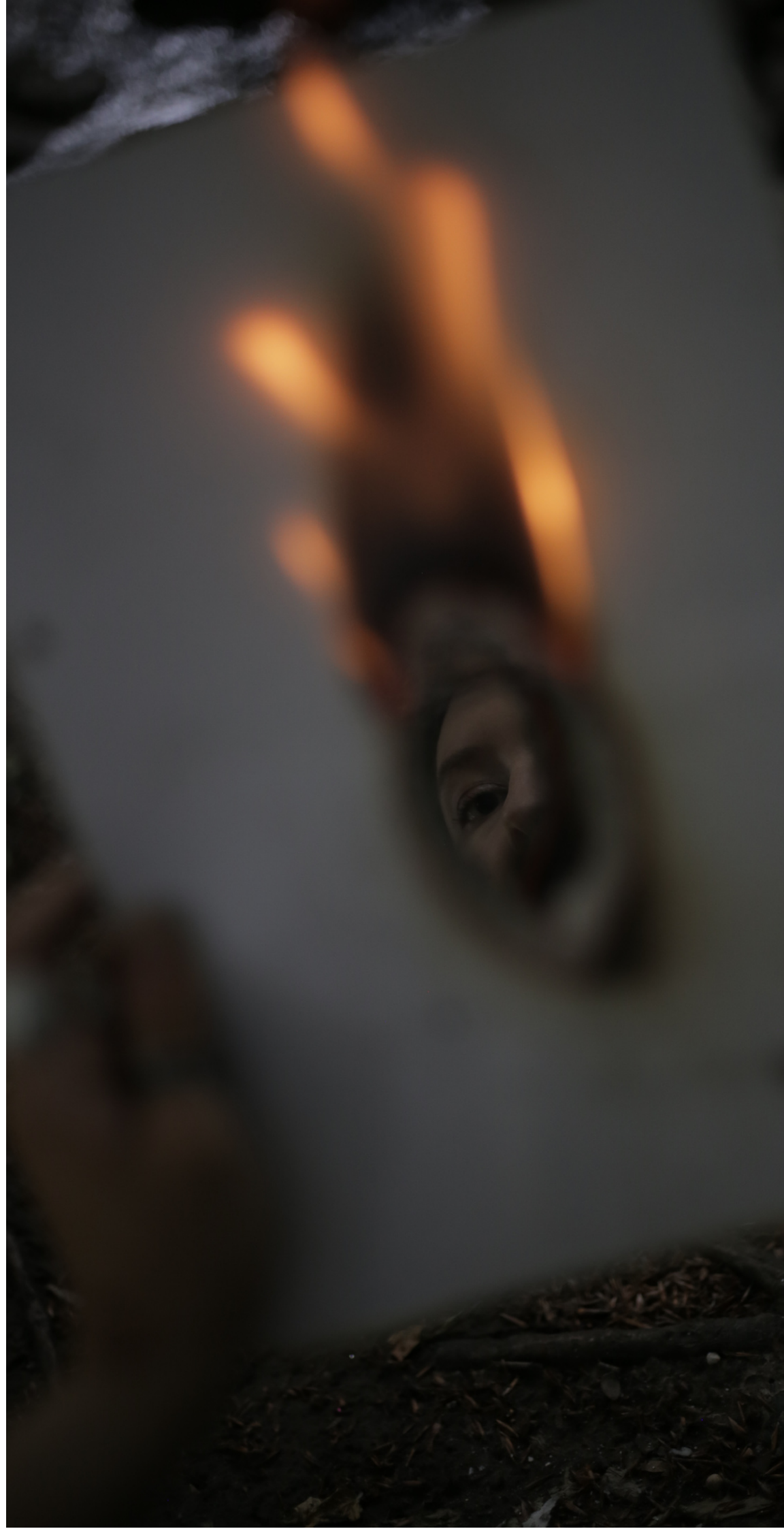


This female rage that has been reigning inside of me like a screaming storm of lightning and thunder has leaked from its safe premises, my calm and usually polished countenance. It has transformed into flames so powerful and dangerous, that anyone in my way has experienced my woeful wrath. It is a testament that you can never truly tame the potential that lies within people.



The flames inside me now are those of passion and ambition. The storm inside of me still prevails, however. The hostility struggling deep within is that of my vision. Our vision. Communication is often scarce, difficult. People are busy, occupied. We cannot do this alone. When is sunshine coming? When will the applause finally arrive for all our hard work? When does ultimate happiness finally reach us? Our vision needs support, visibility, it needs more people to make it into the incredible potential it has.

Beat me, push
me, blame me,
hurt me. But
you will never
tame me. Burn
the past, burn
the pains, burn
the illusions
and my sinful
ways. I am
starving, give
me light! Grief,
sadness, the
loss of the past,
the loss of
innocence.
You're begging
the skies:
"please don't
hurt me", and
they reply: "like
a phoenix, you
will rise, for the
magic of pain is
that of true
transformation.
Be proud (of
your journey)".





When the illusion comes off, at first it's bright and the pain is raw. Then, slowly but surely, the coast becomes clear and full of hope. The light burns and blinds your eyes, and looking around, the people that have remained by your side, your sigh is deep with relief, you surrender. This is your family, you are home.

Beat me, push me, blame me, hurt me. But you will never tame me. Burn the past, burn the pains, burn the illusions and my sinful ways. I am starving, give me light!

My vision for the future is deep yet simple. Our world is filled with chaos and pain. For the past few years, I have strived to bring love and light into it, to ease the suffering. In light of this, here are the three main goals for the future: first of all, we see the talent and knowledge in you, in the pioneering youth, a unique knowledge with which we can build the world and a better future, *together*. Our purpose is to reach as many people as we can globally: are you partners in this? If so, click [HERE](#).

Second, we want to build a thriving community, one where we can all help and support each other, one where we are family. The way you can back us is by joining us [HERE](#).

Just as important is our ambition to make our projects financially sustainable. To this end, we need your support by joining in the building of our projects (join our committees [HERE](#)), and by joining our events (which you can do [HERE](#)). We are very proud of our next big event, the ACMC's 6th Edition, to take place in Vienna September [27-29](#). Last but not least, our ultimate objective is to create a global community and organisation, one that rests on strong foundations of knowledge and creativity, and a steady, diverse network of people. To this end, we thank you for your presence and support. Let us join together and make the world a better place.



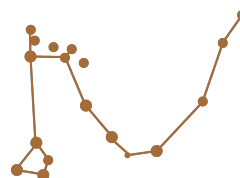
**The light burns and blinds your eyes,
and looking around, the people that
have remained by your side, your
sigh is deep with relief, you
surrender. This is your family,
you are home.**

As we stand today, the Salon, the Journal and the ACMC have never been more vigorous. We are becoming, these projects are at last beginning to reach their potential. It is with you, dear reader, that these promises are conceivable. So, let us stand together and unite the pioneering voices of our generation to leave a lasting impact in the world. *Communitas et incrementum sapientiae* .

With my love,

Emma

¹ 'Community and Growth in Wisdom' as translated from latin, the projects' motto.



Zsófi Lázár

edited by
Lizzie Rose

‘The World on Fire - a wider view of climate action and its inadequacy’.

We talk about the world going up in flames fairly consistently - it is a turn of phrase to indicate our dissatisfaction with the state of government, culture and mindsets that are painfully regressive or harmful. However, today, we are close to making this statement a reality. Scientists have predicted that this year, for the first time, we are going to break the 1.5 celsius warming limit, established as a benchmark for deleterious climate change in the 2015 Paris agreement with a probability of 66%. Emissions from human activities and the likely El Niño weather pattern later this year are the key contributors to this rise, which will lead to floods of devastation in the form of aberrant weather and storms, and fires that could consume vast swathes of land, and settlements. Both fires and storms are becoming increasingly common in Europe, the United States and Australia, and threaten us all.

Before COP27, the UN Environment Program released two reports informing the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan adopted by Member States at the end of the conference. The ‘Emissions Gap Report 2022: The Closing Window’ found that climate pledges leave the world heading for a global temperature rise of 2.4-2.6°C this century, necessitating an urgent system-wide transformation to get on track to 1.5°C. Moreover, UNEP’s ‘Adaptation Gap Report 2022: Too Little, Too Slow’ found that financing and implementation of climate-friendly solutions are inadequate, and will need US\$160 billion to US\$340 billion per year for adaptation by 2030. This comes in sharp contrast to 2020, where international adaptation finance flows to developing countries were only US\$29 billion.

However, the UK government's actions have not been nearly reflective enough of the severity of the situation. Recently, Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party's 'green strategy' has been challenged because of its focus on nuclear fusion as opposed to the previous general focus on lowering carbon emissions and wider, holistic, sustainable solutions. This change of strategy, speaks to warring factions in the Tory government as The Guardian identified, and does not inspire confidence in the wake of the High Court's judgement last year that the government's existing strategy to meet its legal requirements by 2050 is inadequate (Harvey, 2023). Moreover, the Labour Party has recently scaled back its pledge to invest £28 billion a year in green industries if it wins power, stating it needs to be "responsible" with the public finances. Though this is not necessarily a backwards step, as accountability and transparency with public funds is commendable, it does show that there is a tendency to treat Green budgets as somewhat expendable when compared to other priorities. Shadow Chancellor Reeves would not commit to a figure as to how much investment would be possible, arguing that the economic backdrop, and so the potential scope of investment, could not be understood in advance. This seems a hardly convincing strategy for either party to take considering that the UK is seen by some as a western world leader in climate action and green strategy. Instead, Britain seems to be flailing, making it clear that many people, government ministers included, actually have no idea how to solve the climate crisis, or have the conviction to take even minimal climate action. Though slow progress can be seen in that the Green party have their first majority in a constituency for the first time as of this May, the UK's stance is nonetheless disappointing.

In Mikaela Loach's new book *It's not that radical: Climate action to transform our world* Loach strongly criticises the UK's governmental tactics and their failure to encompass a holistic approach to the issue of climate change. Loach asserts that the climate crisis should not only be seen in terms of geographical and meteorological change, but must be tackled through addressing inequalities in cultural, racial and social issues as well.

Though climate change can be understood in meteorological terms and geographical phenomena, ultimately the growth and drive of capitalism paves the way for the destruction and exploitation of the planet. The inequality of the 'Global North' compared to the 'Global South' is considerable, both in wealth, and vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change. 92% of total global emissions in excess of our carbon budget capacity have been used by the richest nation states of the Global North - with the UK, Canada, the USA and Europe, with the USA alone comprising 40% (Loach, 2023). In contrast, countries in the Global South which experience the most adverse effects of climate change, only contribute an excess of 8%. People in the Global South are around five times more likely to get displaced due to sudden extreme weather disasters; putting those already facing marginalisation on racial, gender or economic grounds at disproportionate risk through an exposure to flooding, pollution and other threats. As Loach asserts, climate change is not the "great equaliser", but the "great multiplier" - "we might all be facing the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat".

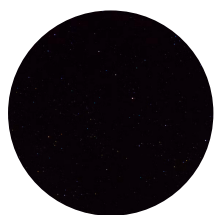
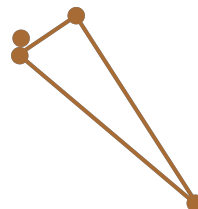
Moreover, the success of the capitalist accumulation model depends heavily on the backs of Indigenous Peoples who have been continually exploited for their lands' natural resources especially through extractive fossil fuel mining, for instance. Dispossession, denial of security and even genocide are natural consequences of capitalism, and so should be treated hand-in-hand with other effects of climate change that also originate in this system. As can be seen in UN reports, Indigenous peoples are the best stewards of our planet as their cultures mean that they are in symbiosis with nature rather than exploiting it, preserving over 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity. According to the United States' Environmental Protection Agency, however, Indigenous peoples have an increased risk of water-related illnesses, respiratory illnesses and other health risks that expose them to greater threats as the climate changes, such as harmful algae blooms through increased water temperatures, or threats to water supplies and land in Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands through rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns.

However, in combating climate change and changing the systems that have endangered our planet, we uplift everyone - for instance, a report from the London school of Tropical Medicine said that moving from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources would significantly increase air quality and improve child health. This not only impacts those who are marginalised, but all in our societies and world. Though the problem may not be an equaliser, the fight against it may be.

Sources:

- Harvey, Fiona. "Hasty Changes to Sunak's Climate Strategy Reveal a Warring Tory Party." *The Guardian*, 30 Mar. 2023, www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/30/hasty-changes-to-rishi-sunak-climate-strategy-reveal-a-warring-tory-party.
- Loach, Mikaela. *It's Not That Radical*. Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 6 Apr. 2023.
- UNEP in 2022 Annual Report





Shivi Sharma

edited by
Miriam Zeglache

I had a dream about you.

It's 12 am and I'm staring at the ceiling. Why did you leave?

The other day, I saw you on the street and you looked at me and I hoped you'd come and talk and we'd apologise and everything would be okay. I guess I was wrong.

I texted you the other day and you shunned me. And I saw your dad and he looked at me as if he knew me but he didn't and I wish he did. I guess these flames and storms are all in my head.

I wonder sometimes if you think about me too, if you wonder what could've happened.

I had a dream about you and this time we were friends.

I guess some things are bigger than us in infinite ways and there's no way we can overcome that. There are times I think that maybe we're never gonna be okay. Maybe we were meant to be this way but then I see you on the street, laughing and I think it's just me who's that way.

I still check my texts everyday to see if you would've apologised but I guess I was wrong. What have we done to ourselves?

I saw your dad again, driving past me and I looked at him and I thought that maybe you would've told him but you didn't. You didn't.

You feel like home to me and this time home isn't a broken window and bloody tiles, it carries your scent and our love. Would it hurt for you to just maybe say that it'll be okay?

I think there are things bigger than us that we left unsaid because we're both a bit selfish and hurt. Remember the time we got caught sneaking out?

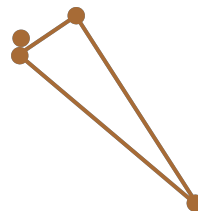
Maybe you can forgive yourself now.

I had a dream about you and this time we weren't lost broken teenagers.

And I can't see you in my dreams anymore.

I had a dream about you but this time, it wasn't you.





Gábor Papp

edited by
Faustas Norvaisa

And then there were you, just standing there

It was around five in the afternoon. I just finished my lunch and decided to visit a temple maybe ten minutes from my flat in the Sanmin District, in Kaohsiung City, after seeing it highlighted on different websites.

The Sunfong Temple was built three hundred years ago, and it's the largest dedicated place of worship for Neza, a protector deity. A mischievous and disobedient child, who killed two of the Dragon King's messengers, one of them being his son. As a punishment, his father was commanded to sacrifice himself, but Neza chose to kill himself instead to save his father and his village. Only to become eternal enemies with his own father, who could never forgive him, even in the afterlife.

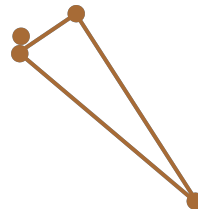
For me, the motivation was less spiritual. I just wanted to take pictures. Its splendid architecture, the carefully sculpted columns, the solemn gate carved out of stone, and the hundreds—or maybe a thousand—of red lanterns decorating its skies called to me.

On my way I walked past an unusually busy road, with tens of scooters piling up on one another, waiting for the traffic light to turn green. Behind an army of white vans lining up on the side of the street, with vendors, like ants before the rain, busily lifting off the goods from the cars and organising them. I decided to take a closer look. Although it was pretty early, as the market officially opened at six, one could already see the colourful textiles carefully laid out on the tables and hoarded ornate and rusty trinkets all over them. The smell of different pastries, sweet potato balls and dried delicacies calling from Paradise, while stinky tofu doing the opposite.

It was already crowded. But as someone who just arrived in Taiwan, I felt the call of an adventure. As I was going deeper and deeper into the market, I stopped and started scouting the area around me, looking through the people, trying to find something worthy of further exploration. And then there were you, just standing behind cradles of fruits, green, yellow, and red. With a white van's door still open, waiting for you to diligently put all the goods in their right place. I approached your stand carefully, and picked up a box of blackberries. Or at least what I thought it to be. Their petite stature and weird fragrance made me question their authenticity. Yet in that moment, a nostalgic flood swept me back to my grandma's garden, where as a child, I indulged in the delight of sweet and ripe raspberries, with plenty of juice in them. My interest in the fruit was only a pretence though, I was there for something else. Your hair like a cascading waterfall of black silk. It was as if manual labour had never dared to disrupt it. Your dedication to self-care was undeniable, visible in the exquisite contours of your body that peeked through the folds of your attire. Your fair skin, a flawless canvas that seemed to glow with a delicate radiance, enhanced by a touch of makeup on the lips. And your eyes. They were a cerulean expanse of wonder, shimmering with an otherworldly brilliance. I still find myself questioning if such magnificence could ever be real, for they looked almost artificial. You clearly were captivating. So much so that I had a smirk after thinking about my last night in Vienna - joking to my friends about finding a wife in Taiwan amid sweet beer delirium. Oh, the love it can bring! Such an empowering emotion. After all, to be desired is perhaps the closest anybody can get to feel immortal in this life. And also the most courageous, as loving something that can be touched by death is, no doubt, one of the bravest deeds.

So, I said "hi", smiled, and held up the box to inquire about it. For which you approached with firm steps, with a touch of grace, and smiled back. Only then I saw it. The absolute lack of dental hygiene, with yellow and black teeth waving back at me. The realization shattered all my previous emotions and thoughts in an instant. I will not be immortal roaming the lands when everyone else is nothing but dust and forgotten memories. Nor a hero who saves others from despair and disdain after glorious battles. You took it all away. Like thunder, you struck down on my hopes.

I chose to buy the raspberries in the end, which they sold with a tiny container of sweet and thick condensed milk. I continued my walk towards the temple, with small, sour, and weirdly dry raspberries in my hand. Hoping that maybe Neza can protect me from further disappointments. Yet I was smiling, for being able to experience such a storm of emotions in a mere moment. I looked back one more time, and then there were you. Embodying love, immortality, heroism and a grave disappointment, all that could have been and all that actually was. What a day it was.



Sanobar Sabah

edited by
Faustas Norvaisa

I'm sorry, I am too much

I talk too much

I laugh too much

I cry too much

I think too much

I feel too much

I love too much; I hurt too much

I desire too much

I ask for too much

I am too much



Celebrating ME in a land far away

I'm sorry, I cry too much as I've swallowed storms of grief for centuries within me.

I laugh too much as the oceans of joy roar inside me, swirling and dancing – they've only witnessed silence for generations.

The happiness within me lifts my soul up to the seventh sky where you'll find me doing a happy dance amongst bouncy clouds.

But, when I hurt, I hurt like someone's just dug sharply and suddenly into my heart, snatching it out of my chest; shredding it into smithereens.

I hurt badly – deep and profound.

I'm sorry I talk too much. There are untold stories buried inside me screaming to be heard.

I love too much as well. I don't know any better, really. I love fiercely with all my being – I'm sorry, I don't do half love stories.

I'm sorry I don't feel ashamed of my fiery desires – the desire to love and be loved, the desire to flourish, the desire for mad intimacy, the desire to make a difference and leave the world around me in a better place I found it...

I'm as celestial as God wanted me to be – embodying fire, water, earth and air – all lovingly, intricately wrapped around me.

I'm sorry I'm no longer nervous about taking up space. I'm tired of waiting for you to offer me what's always been mine.

I'm colourful, I'm loud, I'm sensitive, I'm intense.

I'm done with being offered breadcrumbs in the name of love and respect.

I'm cosmic, I am my universe.



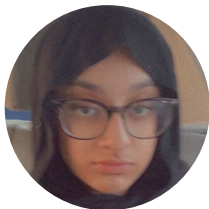
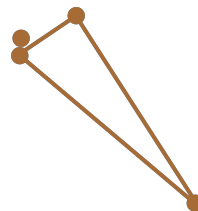
Yes...

I. Am. Too. Much.

But, I'm sorry...

But, no!

I'm not sorry. And, I won't ever be.



Maria Mobin Abdullah

edited by
Miriam Zeglache

Running Away

Walking into the city, each step takes me a ridiculously enormous amount of effort. My feet are weights, I thought, as I drag them along. I want to turn back and run, but where to? There is nowhere to go. The sun is obscured by dark, furiously crackling clouds. Barely anyone is out. Why would they be? They certainly seem to mind the storm. But I don't. The storm and I are alike. It's 2 o'clock in the afternoon; the sun should be shining and winking down at me, and I should feel energized. Yet there is no sign of the sun, darkness embraces me, and it is almost as if it's 11 o'clock in the night. Exhaustion begs me to sit down but I cannot, I cannot. I have to keep going, travel as far away as possible. Two days have dragged by, painfully slow, with this darkness engulfing the light. The once-clean streets are an utter mess now; the howling wind from yesterday having wrecked the place. Passing a green and red themed restaurant, I frowned. Had I not been here before?

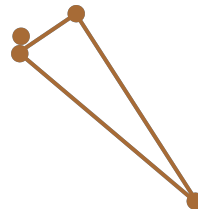
Then it clicked. It was the same one we had been to just a couple of days ago. It caused a deep thought to surface. A thought that I'd been shoving down for the past three hours. I have left my family for good. There's no turning back; I am free.

But was I though? Would I ever be?

Just four days ago, my family and I had been enjoying sushi and Chinese food. Everyone was sitting on cherry red, metal chairs. My younger brother was cracking jokes as usual, his grin growing and cutting into his cheek as my parents, sister and cousins laughed heartily at each and every one of them. All the chairs were huddled around the crystal-glass tables, as if coming closer to celebrate the family reunion. We ate and gossiped, laughed and insulted. This was the perfect family. The glass table sparkled in the sun, displaying its fondness for all of us. Silver cutlery clinked and patterned cups arose all around the table. A toast to this harmonized family. Smiles appeared simultaneously on every face.

A crash of thunder brings me back to reality. My hair whips around my face as my body begins brimming with anger. A balloon of emotion was rapidly expanding in me, screaming to explode. It had all been such a filthy lie. They are no family. Families don't lie to you, don't hurt you, don't leave you. My eyes lock on to the large crystal table and the cherry chairs, and I stare, hard. They look barely like the ones I'd seen a few days ago. They are strewn all over the place, as if the raging war at my house last night had journeyed all the way here, destroying everything I once knew as fun and family-like. A glass, patterned cup that was held by my father just days ago was rolled around on the ground in the wind. Picking it up, I turned it through my fingers. Blood seeped from my middle finger as it brushed over a sharp, jutting edge. Watching the blood trickle down my finger caused a rush of adrenaline in me, mixed with resentment and fury. I hurled the glass into the wall. It shattered into thousands of pieces, redisplaying to me what has happened to my family.

Another crash, followed by the deafening crack of a lightning strike. Rain began to pour down, as if the clouds had sucked up the sea and spat it out on us in fury. Puddles and streams began forming immediately. Hair plastered to my face, I found the cherry red chair that I had sat on that day. It looked nothing like itself. Rust was enveloping it, making the color an eerie deep, reddish brown. It didn't look unlike blood, but it didn't exactly look like it either. Droplets clung on it, as if they were terrified to let go and hit the ground. Had the chair been giving me a warning that day, I thought, as I sat down next to the glass shards and looked at it, about what might happen? Should I pick it up, place it next to the table? No, whispered the voice in my head. Pain demands to be felt. And so it does. One last look at the place. I pictured the day when everything was all right. And looking at it now, who would have imagined that their life would take an entirely different, sudden turn?



Sara Whitemore

edited by
Miriam Zeghlache

A Bionic Tender Cauldron

"Because I whispered,
I want"
-Sappho

I lay in bed, against a thigh, against a palm of hand. My heart simultaneously still yet throbbing as I attempt to silence my breath. Despite the warmth of the touch there's still a distance between us, a threat to our existence, a longing that was not satiated by the proximity of chest to back. As the light cracks through the blinds I'll get up, sneak out, remove myself further.

An aesthetic desire has been bubbling up through my gut, through my lungs. The body transforms. The style of self presentation transforms. I buy sticky, lip plumping lip gloss, gold hoop earrings, a blonde wig, pink pumps, a black dress with a gauzy lace overlay. I pretend to be a slut online. A practice of othering and selving. You are what you eat.

A mechanical phylum of desire pulses underneath the creation of all new worlds — a perpetual emergence of the corporeal. Desire is repetition, producing and negating itself in every dance between I want-I don't want.

"Repulsion is the condition of the [desiring] machine's functioning, but attraction is the functioning itself" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1977).

After months he invites me over but never kisses me.

Because writing exists, I want to be a writer. Because poetry exists I want to be a poet. Because art exists I want to glue glitter on scrap paper. Because the world exists, I want to put it in my mouth.

Some facts about the oyster: oysters can change their gender multiple times during their life, they are shaped by their beds, they can clump together forming oyster reefs that provide shelter for other ocean creatures, raw oysters are still alive when you eat them, they breathe via gills and have no central nervous systems, humans have been eating oysters since prehistoric times, edible oysters do not produce pearls.

A language builds up around the desire for desire. I am plotting on a map. I am crafting a dialogue, a dictionary. When the boundaries of self are absorbed by such longing, we create new ways to self-create. To see myself as though through a camera lens, as though I am the director and the actor and the camera operator. I have a crush, it floats in and out of existence and isn't dependent upon the object of desire. I write a poem.

Months have gone by in the midst of a crush I can't rid myself of. At times torturous, so I focus on the lack. But it isn't lack driving this impulse to satiate my desires through performance, ritual, the writing of a poem. An entire book unfolds in the language of creative torment. We dream of love but we always find new solutions through distance and exchange. I write myself in and out of love everyday.

"Desire is in itself not a desire to love, but a force to love, a virtue that gives and produces, that engineers" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1977).

To want is an act of pleasure. There is an ability to remake yourself over in over in afterimages, in multiplicities, to remake yourself into and out of liquid machines. I project a fantasy across the clouds, root systems, mycelium. I fold the desire into networks that form/ re-form selves. I am every desire and what I want is left changed by my power of wanting it.

Sublimate your desires only to break it all apart again.

A collection of colorful lingerie has amassed itself in the top draw of my turquoise dresser. I wore it to transform into the object of luxury, to transform myself into a projection of myself in the gaze of another's eyes. Now i mostly wear it on my own black sheets for a ring light, for the gaze I can carve.

I am. I am not. I want. I want not. I will. (Or will not.)

At dinner, I can eat for hours. Tartar, foie with brandy aspic, slippery, salty oysters, clams in brown butter, little pots of cheeses and cremes, preserved mackerel with preserved lemons, gallons and gallons of Gruener.

Delueze and Guattari postulate that the death of freedom lies in the congealing of desire into a stabilized identity that can be controlled by the state, by the marketing staff, by the object I'm pursuing's vast indifference to my system of varying networks. I flood them out in excess, pooling around the floor. Identity is an illusion — a network of machines pumping desire into consciousness. Desire pushes and pulls, creating new networks, new poems, new cities. Delueze and Guattari claim the only way to free ourselves is to deterritorialize, to de-frame, unwind desire. Antonin Artaud's statement that "only the madman is truly sane" is transformed into only the madman is truly free.

Can delusion be a means of freedom?

I walk down the stairs into the long tunnel lit up by red, blue and green fluorescent lights, up the stairs and beyond the curtain that separates the whole rest of the world from the Pixel Forest. Beyond the curtain there are long strings of colorful, floating jellyfish lights, bean bag chairs where an audience floats in and out to watch two large screens loop videos of Worry Will Vanish. I lay down in a bean bag, I watch the lights dance in color, I watch the video turn from skin and teeth to an entire forest, I write a poem.

Sunflower skyscrapers, a miniature city downtown in a garden field. In the light they flutter their own phototropic fate. I wish to participate, to appropriate their language into my language — take pictures as if I could capture some part of their beauty in my image, steal a few petals to press between sheets of thick cardboard and paper, write sunflower, sunflower, sunflower as if I could create my own field.

Desire self replicates, desire creates desire creates desire. A lilac colored typewriter catches my eye in the shop window, pools of typewriter ribbon arrive in the mail. I want glitter, I want magic, I want more money, I don't want to work, I want to write, I want nail polishes in blue and black and silver, I don't want my apartment to be messy, I don't want to clean, I want a garden, gold mirrors, silver teeth. The desire that rots is the desire that feeds.

There were times when I would fantasize about licking the back of his neck. Imagine his calves closing in on me as our bodies entwined. A turbulence of erotic shock that doesn't lead to an orgasm but to a poem written in the dark.

The narrowing of the eyes communicates in its own erotic language.

“These intense becomings and feelings, these intensive emotions, feed deliriums and hallucinations. But in themselves, these intensive emotions are closest to the matter whose zero degree they invest in itself. They control the unconscious experience of death, insofar as death is what is felt in every feeling, what never ceases and never finishes happening in every becoming” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1977).

To crave, to obsess. What works I create out of these moments of madness, abandoning stabilization for tumult. Nails are painted jungle red, eyelashes reach towards the sky. I collect scraps while exploring the city — business cards with colorful flowers, fliers with bulbous sculptures, a pineapple sticker from an iced matcha purchased when exhaustion and thirst took hold. To thirst. I carve flowers into every piece of furniture. In my fervor I attack art like a maniac. I cannot be soothed. No amount of coolness will seep in and lead me to peace. I fold craving into a meaning only to unfurl it against the wall.

“The experience of death is the most common of occurrences in the unconscious, precisely because it occurs in life and for life, in every passage or becoming, in every intensity as passage or becoming. It is in the very nature of every intent site to invest within itself the zero intensity starting from which it is produced, in one moment, as that which grows or diminishes according to an infinity of degrees.” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1977).

My desire to survive leads me to a job that I can tolerate but on days like today the desire to be a worm overrides this survival instinct. What other fresh machines will peak their heads into my peripheral? Eventually the coldness of the air will outweigh them all.

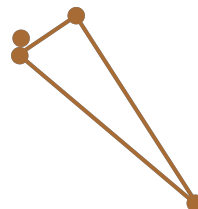
In another city, I wish to collect any language I can find—particular patterns in the bark of trees, the veins of the leaves, words scrawled on dive bar bathroom walls, informational pamphlets along the road stand. I have become a floriographer, each petal containing its own particular piece of text. I linger against a fence, intoxicated by the perfume of jasmines and gardenias that bloom for two weeks in late April.

Where does the lust go when it is negated? Does it return to the source of desire, desire itself? Is it just dispersed into the ether awaiting the arrival of an anticipated, new other? Am I performing for a future crush?

“Dissolve into the flux you already are” (GoodReads review of Anti-Oedipus).

The hungry cat slides towards me affectionately.





Anja Radonjic

edited by
Lizzie Rose

Lost earrings, white duvets, and ripe peaches : a friendship that makes a woman

Dear Indigo,

I must apologise that this letter finds its way to you only after five years. There is a bit of irony that all I ever wrote are occasional post-its and birthday poems for you. Few short words will always shake up the core of your being more than an ode to your existence (and no, I won't write you one). Indigo, the cursor keeps blinking and my mind races back to the beginning, a friendship formed in between the grey plastered walls and on blue laminated kitchen floors of Max Rayne House. I remember you gasping for air, a stream of tears going down rosy cheeks from laughter. Hands covered in charcoal, a piece of artwork that might barely meet the deadline. The golden earrings laid forgotten on the desk, and we miss Bus 29, yet again. I miss the chaos, and the way you made our bellies hurt with your brutally sharp, witty sentences.

It was a world of nineteen-year-olds founded in the belief of our very own greatness and maturity, before being able to admit their hearts were bleeding from first heartbreaks and life-slaps. As many know, friendships come in all its shapes and lengths, yet seldom help you find yourself. Our friendship, with its highs and lows, annoyances, and gentleness, brought me closer to the essence of my very own being. When there is no need to impress or prove oneself, who are you, truly? When the bar closes and chairs are pulled up, who do you want to sit beside you, on the sidewalk?

In my memory, you exist not as an image or a sentence, but a feeling – you were someone that could calm the raging storm, or awaken a fire when needed. You wouldn't let me hesitate. Since living with you, I became more determined, I weighed my thoughts more. I remember peace as we roam across the RA gallery, each gliding across the white marble at our own pace. The bubbling of effervescence, and you dragging me into another house party. The mellowness in the air, as you and your mind hid underneath your cloud-like duvet, and I wondered when you'll resurface. In stillness and in motion, we followed each other's pace.

That's a difficult art to master, knowing what kind of support another person might need. You knew when to coddle me. Most importantly, you have the impeccable precision of calling my bluffs, waiting for the silences and hurt between the melodic spiel about another day. Thank you for that, for becoming a pro at it. I could always count on your honesty, yet this never awakened any meanness or brutality within you (besides the traybake incident). In a city where everything was fleeting, from people, and places, and interests, to promises and future plans, you were my certainty.

As an only child, I will never innately know the meaning of having a sibling; but if the annoyance and lovingness you have for me can attest to it, then I could grasp the idea. Now, before you dwell up tears in your eyes, let me tell you what I've learned from our friendship.

Someone else's happiness can mean just as much as your own.

Stretching yoga cats (aka cheeky bastards) indicate a high level of genius and humour, and if one cannot laugh at yoga cats, well, do you need them in your life?

Be patient with your pain, and with those of others.

If there is respect and care in a friendship, there is never a space for resentment to fester. Honesty is an act of kindness, not a hidden blade in one's sleeve.

Peaches taste sweeter when shared in warm weather, and remembering that sun and peaceful silences with you resemble the golden patchwork of life.



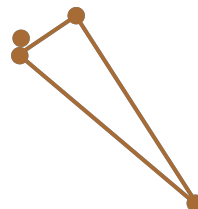
You will always be the superior cook.

I know there will always be a seat for each of us at our respective family tables (Christmas in June and/or Montenegrin christening parties not included in the offer).

My beloved friend, my sister, my guide – thank you. For a friendship that is simple. For a friendship that has allowed us both to grow, on our own and with other people, yet distance has not severed the bond, and calls have never ceased. For still involving me in your life, although we have lived in different countries for a while. For knowing the names of crushes, new colleagues, and new friends. For continuing to still surprise me, and for being the kind of weirdo I am so unbelievably lucky to call mine.

With all my love and admiration,

A.



Alitza Cardona

edited by
Laurine Heerema

Crazy and Cool: Not like the stories before.

I am seeing you. As you lay over there, my mind races. I think —of course loving you will require me to understand how your fire will endure the unyielding desire that flows and forever becomes. You have built your peace with the cold. I know too well, it can be terrifying to be a castaway of flowing ideas and disappointments. Even within society, these continue to build an architecture of circumstances that pretend to be nature. No story that has the potential to result in trauma, started without some form of love. I know at this point, I will never aspire to be a first. The first to make you feel nor the first to innovate through our differences. Neither with you nor within my social circumstances. Social realities continue to endure through social prescriptions, however, with you I feel I can be the last. The last to build what could be an exceptional form of nature, made from complementary forces. I think to myself, I will meet you at the close. I believe we can all meet there if we wanted to. That boundary that will contain our duration. I believe trauma is a pause that disguises as a crisis. One that questions the desire to challenge the motivations that have become dependent on seemingly consistent conditions. I know —I keep talking about trauma, as a figure that creeps on you and this account. But isn't it so? We never expect those circumstances which will sculpt for us some future version of our many before.

In many ways the conditions we are born into bequeath us ideal images shared as ideas. These, reflect, in many cases, our position in a society that pretends to be the becoming of some kind of reality. At some point, where ideas become free of the molds of practice, beginnings become experiences and illusions, the tragedy of an end —I turn to the right. Your white back is like a map that draws a mirror of emotions —I turn to face the ceiling. I see the sun flooding through the blinds. I remember that I come from a country that melts in the heat of a blasting sun. “I see you baby”, I whisper in Spanish. You lay there worried about sleeping enough, while being as brilliant and passionate as that sun. Yet, you don’t know what it is like to sleep amidst warm nights and growling hurricanes. I believe you are oblivious to the freedom that comes with becoming one with a sea of feelings that house many unknowns. I do feel. That’s the space we need to fill. That one, which separates the forms that do not know each other.

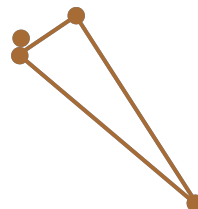
As my country melts, yours floats in crises. Possibilities become fixated through traditions and the reality of this is that tradition might be a cage. Some cages are beautiful yet, we could question the space that holds for wandering. The limits of this cage do not leave space for innovation. I do carry some of its values behind symbols. As conditions change, some of their forms preserve what makes us relate. However, did you know that we can carry castles without walls? What if we lift the weight of many stories that make us feel that perspectives diffuse in one gaze —You wake up. I see the darkness in your eyes that just started to shine with curiosity -- I say to myself: “maybe this turns out to be a simple memory”. Today we will continue to keep producing another story in our lives — I continue my internal monologue: “I don’t know, at this point, if this other person is capable of creating meaning”.

To build stories. Is this freedom? In many ways, freedom has become founded by fixed possibilities offered through our capabilities of production. Life has accelerated so much that I’ve had to think of the idea of you as part of a thread, bound by society and place —I believe this scenario is not enough. Throughout the many forms we can weave, threads can bridge intimacies and confidentialities, but through them spaces persist. Forms are built from many dimensions. As we cover ourselves with the sheets, I still imagine. “I can see you baby”, I think — Flexing the cloth, holes form as I play with the sheets. The spaces through them can become larger.

I perceive them to frame an image, one that can seem forced, like the exhaustion I feel, only building for myself. "Don't you find individual foundations so fragile?" I ask you in many ways that are not carried by sound. Individuals keep building with the idea of many other "you". There are some things you cannot measure with the scientific method. I see you. Yet, I do not dare infer some generalisations, of reasons and things, people do as individuals. How can we judge the conditions that limit another as a creator when stories develop throughout so many plots? Realities of differences enrich the universe, yet we defy its normalcy by profiting on assumed separations.

I desire you. I get on top of you, because like me you are the world. We are free to change, to rotate. Movement: confusion, consumption, extraction, production. Transformation is upon us in each pause, because even if for you this is a game, you will not win. You will not lose. There is that certainty. We will come and become. Our environments will change and places will become one ocean. But I promise, we will float even through our tears. Not everybody has the socioeconomic capability to invest in rules and regulations. Sometimes we cannot afford to follow the rules. There will be voyages to find ourselves without earth under our feet. You think about progress as a system but the problem with this way of thinking is that sometimes structure ignores details of the unpredictably creative. Creative people are a force. We can open new possibilities in an unfolding present. I can show you. If you could open to this. The two of us can make sense of this form of intuition. Space lies behind an arched door made of cultures. Its firm structure can hold the weight of traumas that thread corrupted stories as a political landscape. Cities and its noises were forged from the same fire that feeds fear and illusions.

This story can be the beginning of a journey. This reality only imitates an assumed nature. Yet, when it means something, an artificially produced process only becomes a path. Now that you hug me. I see you. Do you want to walk with me outside the norm and into the storm?



Maximiliane Donicht

Pyrosome

I

Giant thimble, cooperation colony,
or conglomerate of sack, of pelagic
sea squirt.
Hundred thousands of zooids travel
in a gelatinous tunic.
Each negligible entity
merely millimeters.
Together: completely improbable.
Be tempted, glowing wonder.
They share tissue, a wardrobe and purpose, use
light as language.

II

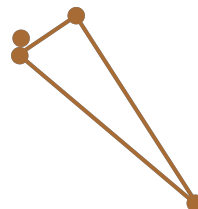
The acinar cell, the astrocyte,
and goblet cell, each a distinct
specialized structure.
They share tissue, a wardrobe and purpose,
use current as language.
Trillions of cells travel
in a follicled tunic, each negligible
entity merely micrometers, together:
utterly, utterly improbable
conglomerate of goosebump and shopping list.

III

Sucking and blowing propels
 the lot of us forward, somewhat
 jet propulsion engine, only with no gas
 and no engine, sometimes with both.
 Giant thimble, corporation colony,
 or conglomerate of pelagic sea squirt.
 Distinct tiny clones, we share
 a wardrobe and purpose, use
 vibration as language. Organic
 cotton, polyester, the Great Pacific
 Garbage Patch.

IV

Seven days before your mother died
 just before dawn but still in dark
 I lay on a frozen slope, the night ice
 holding me like an alligator
 cradles an infant over teeth, howling
 with unforgivable pain.
 For seven days I was inconsolable, my own mother
 storming my flat a few days later, just past dawn, for fear
 I had done something irreversible.
 Just the way she stormed in that first morning you and I
 had slept there, the same panicked vibration
 distorting my name in her mouth. Does this mean
 she knew of my shattering on the stiff snow
 a year later? Does it mean I knew
 of your losing, of the way it tore into the fear
 that lives in your gut like a ticking clock? I still feel
 teeth on my back, the clicking of a locked jaw.
 Tell me, does it mean
 you and I are kept
 somewhere for good?



Blanka Pillar

edited by
Laurine Heerema

Scenery

I forgive him for the little lies. The little fibs that slip away and the broken promises that go unkept. He always tells the same lies, and sometimes I believe him because the story paints itself like a vivid oil portrait: first, the figures are painted, then the background, then the corners, edges, contours, and finally, it becomes as if it were a real scene on the canvas of life, but only the immensity of human imagination has made believable what could never be real. It tells me what I most desire, so I reach for it with all my heart, stretching out my soul's arms to preserve all his lips whisper and hold it within me for eternity. I love him with all my heart, but when my reality is keen-eyed, it sometimes smells like the scratch of jagged-edged infidelities in the dawning light or the wistful night. The cold realisation slips into bed beside me or touches me as I walk.

Today we take it into our heads to walk around the riverbank. We get caught in the cool January breeze, and he starts coughing. I take off my thin pink cotton scarf and wrap it around his neck with careful movements. He gives me a weak half-smile and walks on. My chest gets hot, even though my whole body is shivering from the winter's minus temperatures.

Sometimes we stop. We look at the broken-legged seagulls on the slippery waterfront stones, the sloppy sidewalk ahead, and the footprints of giddy pedestrians. He rubs his hand as we spy on one of the old buildings covered in melted snow. His fingertips are almost purple, so I tug off my black fabric gloves and slip them on his frosty palms. He thanks me quietly. His silent words creep into my consciousness like angelically soft notes, wrapping my trembling body in a gentle embrace.

Barely perceptible, the milky-white sky opens, and it drizzles, but we are unperturbed. We sit on a stinging bench and stare silently at the glistening toes of our wet boots as they tread the snowy ground before us. Somewhere in the distance, expensive hand-painted plates clink, light pages of newspapers crinkle in the city breeze, the iron bells of a dilapidated church clang, and a delicious golden-skinned duck in a warm oven is being prepared. I feel him move beside me, and I put my head down. He sways back and forth with folded arms while tiny particles of dripping snow fall on his knitted flame-red angora sweater. I slip my thin arms out of my expensive loden-lined coat and place them on his back. He looks me in the eye. My tongue curls and confesses at seeing his delicately delineated and perfect face. It humbly admits the truth it has admitted so many times before and hopes. It hopes that, for once, its love's answer will not be a lie. But once again, he replies, I love you too. I-love-you. He utters this gracious lie delicately. The first syllable is trust, the second is passion, and the third is loyalty. He feels none of these, yet he testifies to them. He savours the shape of the voice. First bitter, then sour, then finally swallowed. After all, it's only one word. But for me, it's so much more.

Maybe that's not how it all happened. I've been sick for a while now; my lungs are weak from the January freeze. Every time I close my eyes, I try to remember our last story. Embellish it, add to it, rearrange it, change it. Maybe one day I'll grind it to perfection, and that word won't ring so false. Or the memory will turn yellow, like old letterhead, and no longer matter. Or maybe "I love you" will become just another fluffy word to be whispered in the harsh winter, bored, picked up by the wind, carried far away, across the world, to where it means nothing. Far from the eager, greedy arms of my soul.



Edition VII. Flames and Storms

July 12, 2023

Support Us



Follow Us



Journal d'Ambroisie

Journal d'Ambroisie

Journal d'Ambroisie

