

ERASMUSGRACHT  
BOS EN LOMMER



20<sup>th</sup> edition of

WB

WRITER'S BLOCK

*Students' magazine for  
writing, film & literature*



# COLOPHON

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## JANE DOE POEM

TEXT FLAX JOHNSON

**Jane Doe**

Above the bridge  
The weeping willows wept tears of  
Electricity, while you saw it slip away  
Curiosity ran alongside  
The stars screaming  
And the wondrous monotony of life you  
Joined in unison  
Unaware, never to return  
A gaping hole  
Dug up by your beloved  
Earth sprinkled, holding memories  
While the stars alleviate  
Your anonymity

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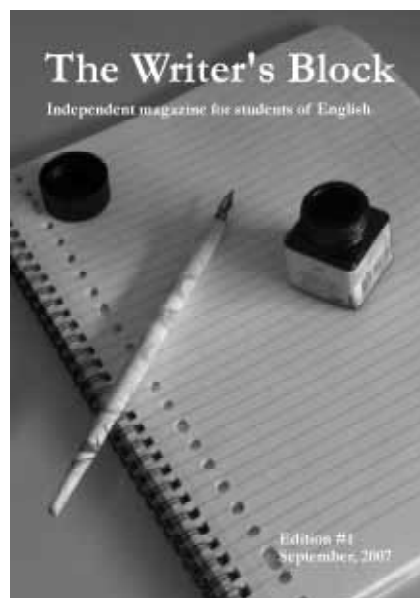
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# WB

WANTS TO  
READ YOUR  
WORK TOO

EMAIL US AT [WRITERSSBLOCK@GMAIL.COM](mailto:WRITERSSBLOCK@GMAIL.COM)  
YOU DO THE WRITING. WE GIVE THE FEEDBACK

For the love of god I (Rob) could not remember what it was like to turn twenty; it was probably one of those anti-epiphanies in which you, nailed to the floor, wait in vain for some epic music to announce your new level of coolness. But for Writer's Block it is a big milestone. This is our twentieth issue. Many people before us (our special thanks go out to Lester Hekking and Godelinde Perk) have worked hard to get us to the place that we occupy today. For me (Nora), becoming twenty was the moment that my best friend sent me a postcard reading "I Bow to Your Oldness", forcing me to face the fact that in terms of numbers (and how I would be addressed by my friends from now on) I entered a new era. Hopefully this will be a new era for Writer's Block as well, a magazine that has gone through tremendous changes over these twenty issues. We used to be called The Writer's Block, the size changed each issue and the in- and outside have had completely different looks. We hope to keep evolving, changing with the times and the tides, washing in and out of your lives with beautiful stories and things to think about. **WB**



*First Writer's Block*

To get to know Writer's Block better in the light of our 20th anniversary, turn to page 10.

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**ASVA studentenunie**   
De centrale belangenbehartiger van Amsterdamse studenten

### call it my emancipation

There's a darkness to things  
now, a certain  
fragmentation. Sitting  
on the back of our skyline  
a red rock made sense  
a paper game of chess made sense  
a heap of broken images made  
perfect sense.  
But that it would crumble  
and keep crumbling, that  
surprised me.

We crossed the world in vertical,  
the tarmac, flashing blue  
and yellow clouds  
surrounding, we strode  
next to next to you I wrote  
myself a cheap pornography  
you on the backs of Russians.  
Looking up, up I saw you reach  
higher and  
when you thought I wasn't watching  
a little higher still.



# ELEMENTARY! COMIC SKETCH

TEXT JOSHUA DUNCAN

[The scene: Sherlock Holmes and Watson stand at the scene of a crime. Sherlock is examining evidence, perhaps a dead body.]

## INTRODUCTION:

Did you know, even though the character Sherlock Holmes is often associated with the phrase “Elementary, my dear Watson,” he never uses the phrase once in the original books by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Indeed, Dr. John Watson might have had a hard time understanding what Sherlock was talking about even if he ever did say...

SHERLOCK: [With conviction and passion] Elementary, my dear Watson!

WATSON: Forgive me, Holmes, but what is “elementary”?

SHERLOCK: The meaning of this evidence is elementary.

WATSON: But what is your meaning when you say “elementary”?

SHERLOCK: I mean that this is the solution to our confounding conundrum!

WATSON: So, to clarify, the definition of “elementary” is “the solution to a confounding conundrum.”

SHERLOCK: Of course not. The evidence is the solution to this mystery!

WATSON: Yet you also say the meaning of the evidence is “elementary.”

SHERLOCK: Correct.

WATSON: And this evidence is also “the solution to a confounding conundrum”?

SHERLOCK: Correct.

WATSON: Then it follows that “the solution to a confounding conundrum” is the definition of “elementary.”

SHERLOCK: To me, perhaps, but clearly not to you.

WATSON: So... there is more than one meaning?

SHERLOCK: No, this evidence can only mean one thing, and if you would open your eyes, Watson, you should be able to discern it!

WATSON: Hold on, Holmes, I see where we are getting confused. You seem to think that, by asking your meaning when you say “elementary,” I’m talking about the answer to the mystery. I meant to ask the definition of the word.

SHERLOCK: And what word is that?

WATSON: The word I want you to define is... “elementary.”

SHERLOCK: [Thinking Watson means for him to guess the word] Watson, you idiot, how am I to know what word you want to have defined?

WATSON: [With slight distress] No! “Elementary.” The word, “elementary!”

SHERLOCK: Ah, I see where you got me turned around. I thought you were saying that it should be elementary for me to know the word you wished to know, but the word you meant to mean was “elementary.”

WATSON: [Hopeful, but unsure that they are on the same page.] Correct. Now, what is the definition?

SHERLOCK: Its definition is “simple.”

WATSON: [Not understanding and eagerly awaiting the definition.] All right, it’s simple. Then you should be able to explain it to me.

SHERLOCK: Do I have to explain everything to you, Watson!

WATSON: Just because the definition of “elementary” may be simple does not mean that I should be able to guess it.

SHERLOCK: No, Watson! I do not want you to determine the definition of “elementary,” but to determine the meaning of this evidence, which should be elementary even to you! Now, think about the evidence!

WATSON: [Watson takes a moment to think, apparently examining the evidence.] Ah! Holmes! At last I understand what you mean when you say the meaning of the evidence is “elementary”!

SHERLOCK: Jolly good, Watson, then explain it!

WATSON: You mean that the meaning of the evidence is simple!

SHERLOCK: No, there is nothing simple at all about the meaning of this evidence.

WATSON: Then why do you say it is “elementary”?

SHERLOCK: [Full of triumph and self-satisfaction, rips open his shirt to reveal the giant S of Superman.] Because I AM SHERLOCK HOLMES!

WATSON: [Stares in disbelief at Holmes’s smug expression.] Sigh...elementary!

SHERLOCK: Good man, Watson! Now, hold the gun and look important. The game’s afoot! [Handing the prop to Watson and guiding Watson towards the exit stage left or stage right.]

WATSON: Forgive me, Holmes, but what’s “afoot”?

SHERLOCK: [In answer, he wordlessly kicks Watson from behind, before stalking off stage in pursuit of his culprit.]

# THE MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST REVIEW

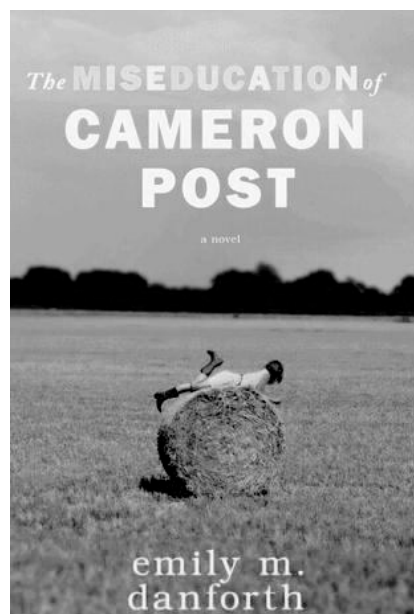
TEXT RUBY DE VOS

On a hot summer day in Miles City, Montana, 1989, Cameron Post kisses her best friend. Only hours later, Cam hears that her parents have died in a car crash. From that moment on, life changes drastically for Cameron: her conservative aunt Ruth moves in with her and her grandmother – and the beautiful Coley Taylor moves into town. Coley and Cam rapidly become friends, and their friendship gradually develops into something more. When they are discovered, Cameron is sent to a Christian school to “cure” her of her homosexuality. There she has to come to grips with her sexuality, the death of her parents, and herself.

Cameron’s life at “God’s Promise School and Center for Healing” takes up the second half of the book. Readers have expressed their dismay at Emily Danforth’s portrayal of this school, which is somewhat ambiguous in the sense that Cam’s experiences are not always downright negative. *Cameron Post* does not show the ex-gay camps that you may know from documentaries like *This Is What Love in Action Looks Like*. Words like “hell” and “damnation” are conspicuously absent. It is nevertheless exactly this ambiguity that brings the book to life and sets it apart. Danforth manages to transform what is obviously a despicable institute into something more: a place where human beings live, including all their conflicted desires.

Both Aunt Ruth, who sent Cameron to Promise, and Pastor Rick, who has set up Promise, did what they did because they genuinely believed it to be the right thing to do. Danforth treats this aspect of the novel with surprising frankness and insight – never truly condemning Ruth and Rick as individuals, yet ultimately still taking a stand against institutions like Promise. This becomes even more obvious in her portrayal of Cameron’s fellow students: some of them feel so uncomfortable and scared about their sexuality in the hostile anti-gay environment in which they grew up, that they would do anything to change themselves. Danforth understands this fear and the need to transform, but is not afraid to show the devastating consequences of the process of change either.

*The Miseducation of Cameron Post* is marketed as young-adult, LGBT-literature. *Cameron Post* is both and neither. Danforth’s story moves slowly, leisurely,



*The Miseducation of  
Cameron Post*  
Emily M. Danforth  
Balzer + Bray  
2012  
470 p.

at a pace not altogether typical of YA literature. Cam’s character develops gradually yet constantly – Danforth never loses sight of the story she wants to tell, but is not afraid to meander at times too. There is actually very little that radically divides this novel from any coming-of-age novel marketed as literary fiction and *Cameron Post* has therefore – of course! – been compared to *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Similarly, *Cameron Post* also transcends the genre of LGBT/queer literature; a problematic genre in itself, because it reduces the characters – and often the readers of the genre as well – to nothing more than their sexuality. Simultaneously, it also implies that “regular literature” cannot be about non-heterosexual experiences. That is not to say that we do not need novels that explicitly deal with LGBT thematics, however, as we do need them more than ever. Luckily, *Cameron Post* manages to find a perfect balance: it gives a voice to a lesbian girl, but it also, and more importantly, gives a voice to a teenager. Yes, being gay in a community that refuses to accept this is part of Cam’s teenage experience, but so is getting drunk for the first time, and smoking pot in the woods, and making out in a derelict building. Danforth deals with heavy-handed subjects here, but she never sensationalises them and it never feels like she is delivering a Message. Instead, she tells Cameron’s story as it is in a tone that manages to be lucid and lush, gritty and truthful, forgiving and gentle all at the same time. And that is impressive.

# WRITING THROUGH THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS POEM

TEXT NATHALIE VAN DANTZIG

Three-quarters-emPty train  
all cusHions hot  
all beIng in a hurry  
windscreens smeLt  
the rIver  
slePt.

For miLes  
A  
stopping cuRve southward  
we Kept.  
wIde fams  
weNt by

hedges diPped and rose  
tHen a smell of grass  
dISplaced  
the Long cool platforms  
I took  
for Porters

Larking  
And  
gRinning,  
never KNown success  
so wholly farcIcal.  
WomeN shared the secret

like a haPpy funeral  
wHile  
gIrls,  
free at Last,  
loaded wIth  
Poplars

Long  
shAdows  
oveR roads  
pacKed like squares  
there we were aImed.  
ANd as we raced

Past  
tHis  
fraIl  
heLd  
wIth  
Power

sLowed  
Again,  
theRe swelled  
a sense of falling liKe  
sIght.

Author’s note: this mesostic was created by putting the seed text “Philip Larkin” and the oracle “The Whitsun Weddings” through the Mesostomatic (available at <http://mesostics.sas.upenn.edu/>). The thing about the Mesostomatic is that it is, arguably, partly the author of this text. There’s Larkin, there’s the Mesostomatic (or its creator) and there’s me as a very poor third. The omission of the final N is a result of the method of composition of the poem. There is unfortunately no final N in the Whitsun Weddings.



# HOW WE WORK AT WRITER'S BLOCK LETTER

TEXT YENTL DUDINK & NORA VAN ARKEL

Dear readers,

You might wonder what we, the editors of Writer's Block, actually do when you hear silence in our office and when we keep telling you we are lost in a cacophony of sound, craving caffeine and sleeping too little. This is why we want to enlighten you as to what the world of Writer's Block actually entails. We are a small group of people and we have a big interest in our readers and contributors. Therefore, we want to show you how we are running this magazine, so that you know it as well. Every once in a while, all of a sudden a Writer's Block wildly appears lying around in the Bungehuis, ready for you to read. This has happened twenty times by the time you read this. This is the fifth time that the Writer's Block editors in this current formation (more or less) make sure you get to read the finest pieces of writing from our contributors. We plan to keep doing this, albeit with different people joining and leaving the editorial board each year.



Every single week we do come together in the Bungehuis and talk about the submissions we received. If we didn't receive any, it is a wonderful moment for us to despair and lapse into yet another brainstorming session about PR techniques. Every submission is read by all editors before the meetings and is discussed in all its aspects when we meet. We often don't agree on which is the best part, or the least interesting part, but we keep on talking until we reach a consensus about what feedback we want to give the

writer. If we don't reach a consensus, we – very democratically – vote and some will be happy and some will be heartbroken for the rest of the meeting. For each piece of work, whether we want to place it or not, we assign one or two editors to add comments to the text. With these comments we try to point the writer to grammatical or lexical mistakes and gently try to suggest some changes. This could be a suggestion to leave out a certain part that we think is unnecessary and without which the story will have a stronger impact on the reader or will simply flow more easily. We always want to be in dialogue with our writers rather than imposing radical changes on their texts without explanation. Sometimes writers are not amused by our suggestions, but then again, writing is a very personal engagement. It's hard to let someone touch your baby and you might not expect to have to change a lot in your writings when you send your work to a magazine. We, however, want to make use of the full potential that a text has. Therefore, we want to share our humble opinion with you and we hope the writer can find a use for our trains of thought. Of course we have read a lot of texts by now and we try to use all this experience to edit your works and prepare them for publication. While our meetings are the most regular part of our schedule concerning Writer's Block, it is definitely not the only thing that has to be done in order to successfully publicize the magazine. The editors have a lot of email contact with the writers and once in a while arrange a personal meeting with them. We are often busy with designing posters, flyers, finding interesting things to share with you on Facebook and sometimes visiting your classes to encourage you to submit anything you might



have written lately or in the past. Within the group, Ruby takes care of our e-mail inbox, Ines takes notes during the meetings and Joeri takes care of our expenses and income. Robert usually leads the meetings and Nora makes to-do lists for everyone and makes sure the entire group takes notice of the deadlines ahead. Isadora takes care of our contact with the Amsterdam Writer's Guild, a group that we'd like to support in their enthusiasm for English creative writing in Amsterdam. Isabel, Thirza, Yentl and Joshua are passionate general editors and writers. They work hard to fill our issues with the very best.

After the editors have finished discussing the texts, the final editing round still has to be done. This means looking for minor mistakes like misspelled words, comma splices or double spaces. Then it is time to collect and order all the reviews, stories, poems, photos and other creative works that are ready to be placed in the issue. The actual pages are then put together and designed by Nora, after which the whole is once again checked for errors by our proofreaders. The last two steps consist of contacting the press and making sure they print our issue in the exact right format and on the exact right paper, and eventually, it is time to distribute all the copies that are now ready to be devoured by you. At this very moment we can only hope that you enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed making it, and that it will inspire some of you to send in your writings for the next WB!



Yours sincerely,  
Yentl Dudink and Nora van Arkel



# JAKE ARENDS'S BOOKCASE INTERVIEW

TEXT RUBY DE VOS PHOTOGRAPHY INES SEVERINO

Jake Arends was born in Miami, grew up in Aruba, and now lives in Amsterdam. He is a first-year student of English and has some very interesting books on his shelves that he talks about with *Writer's Block*.

## What are your favourite books?

I love *A Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. I also like *Kafka on the Shore* by Haruki Murakami for its dreamlike quality. It doesn't really have a plot or rationality. It's just nice to read, sentence by sentence. *A Hundred Years of Solitude* has all this as well, but it also has a story, it has more emotions to it and particular moments are really special, they stand out. There's a girl in the book, for example, and people think she is a simpleton, because she just sits around, she eats, takes long showers. But at some point she just goes up to heaven, body and all! The other characters don't make a big deal out of it, which I like. And there are so many characters that I made a family tree. [see photo] I also liked *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell, which I read after I watched the film. This also has a circular feeling like *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, it tells a story about many generations, and this, too, is very different from anything else.

## Do you read non-fiction?

Yes, mostly stuff about evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology. Dawkins, for example. For me, science is about describing the world and no other science does this as good as evolutionary psychology. Since our perception and experience of the world is filtered, we prioritize certain things and other things we overlook. This is a psychological matter and evolutionary psychology explains this phenomenon, it explains why we do this and how it developed.

## Do you buy a lot of books?

I go on book buying sprees. If I have enough money, I can buy like two hundred euro's worth of books. But then after that there is a long time

when I do not buy any books at all. Right now I am reading mostly on my iPad. I've bought enough, so now it's time to download things, haha!

## What are your reading habits? Do you eat while reading, for example?

I don't eat while reading. If I want to eat, I'll take a break! I think I mostly read in bed or on the couch. I also read a lot while travelling.

## What are you currently reading?

Besides what I have to read for school, I'm reading *The Perennial Philosophy* by Aldous Huxley. I'm reading it for the second time, so obviously I like it. Now I'm more critical though, and I'm reading it more carefully and find myself disagreeing with him quite a bit. That is a good thing, because your ideas become clearer through disagreement. I'm learning more. And for a class I took we had to read a short story called "In Winter the Sky" by Jon McGregor and that is an *amazing* piece of writing.

## You are also participating in NaNoWriMo [National November Writing Month – an annual writing project where you write 50.000 words during the month of November]. Could you tell us a bit about your experience?

It's not going *that* well – to write 1700 words a day is really a lot, especially since I also have to do stuff for school. I am doing it, I am writing, but I'm not going to get to 50.000 words, that's for sure.

**In December, about a month after the interview, we asked Jake how he looks back on NaNoWriMo. He responded:** I am still writing, but not what I started writing at the beginning of November for NaNoWriMo. It didn't go well in terms of the amount of words I wrote, but I did learn from it and I'm glad I did it, and I'm definitely going to try again next year, with better planning!



# ESSAY

## WINNER

Joey van der Ham found a way to introduce a cultural difference in a humoristic and original way. With his shocking topic, he deals with this Western taboo in an enigmatic and diplomatic manner. He urges us to think critically about sexuality in different cultures and not to persist into thinking in our own paradigm. Joey makes this strong and delicate point, yet he also leaves room for the reader's own opinion. With references to popular culture, such as *Pokémon* and *Dragon Ball Z*, which most of us are familiar with, he is more than capable of keeping the reader playfully entertained. These choices in style and content combined made us eager to read more of Joey's works and it is for this reason that we believe he deserves the first place in our Essay Competition.

## THEY DREAM OF EELS ESSAY

TEXT JOEY VAN DER HAM

When I started my academic career at the University of Amsterdam, the last thing I expected to write an essay about was Japanese pornography – yet it came to me easily. On one of those Tuesday nights before a three-thousand word essay deadline, my smartphone whistled and vibrated, nearly pushing off my last cup of writing-for-university-after-midnight coffee. I had one new WhatsApp message. Starved for social interaction after a desperate four-hour writing spree against the clock, I opened the message. The all-capital words flew past my eyes. Only the words “boyfriend”, “masturbation” and “Japanese porn” burned on my retinas. Evidently, my best friend's boyfriend was masturbating while she was in the next room. The worst part was not that he was masturbating while he could be enjoying perfectly consensual sex with his girlfriend, but that he was masturbating to Japanese porn. Apparently, Asian women squealed with pain during sexual activities, and made noises akin to “a malfunctioning vacuum cleaner being attacked by a bunch of harpooning Ahabs mistaking a household device for a great white whale”. Porn from Japan terrified her. She panicked and

postulated, “is my boyfriend into rape?”, implicitly asking for my help. I had my work cut for me. Perhaps the skills I learned in those many essay-writing courses could prove to be a practical tool after all. Once again, I opened Word and, with the latent buzz of caffeine and a slight tingling sensation in my fingers, began typing. Overnight and through the early morning, I became an amateur in the field of Japanese sexuality, hoping that I could convince my best friend that Japanese pornography was very explainable and possibly even normal.

The decision to write an essay to assuage my friend's pornography terrors was not merely born out of a sense of friendly obligation. Like many others of the millennial generation, I was raised on a heterogeneous diet of imported Japanese cartoons. I filled every morning singing along to the *Pokémon* Rap, and I spent every afternoon eagerly waiting for that new episode of *Dragon Ball Z* to air. While my other primary school classmates' interest remained on the level of only watching the TV shows and enjoying the merchandise, the many card games that none of us really understood and those darn shiny pieces

# COMPETITION

of paper and plastic everyone wanted, my curiosity always went a bit further. This interest culminated until I made the fatal choice of doing a homework project on Japanese comics and cartoons, called manga and anime respectively. Not quite yet skilled in the delicate art of Googling (a skill that somehow still needs to be taught in universities), I typed in the address bar: manga dot com. Only one mouse click was necessary to throw my nine-year old naiveté out the window. Drawn images of angry-looking burly men attacking crying naked women with certain body parts assaulted my vision. I had no idea what was going on and, as might be expected, I was terrified. Understandably, this semi-trauma ushered in a brief period during which my interest was reduced to cinders.

In high school, I inevitably surrounded myself with the world of Japanese artistry again, downloading anime and consuming manga as a means of adolescent escapism. This time, the internet did not challenge my interest but the social opinions attached to manga and anime did. On a single occasion, I dared to read a relatively innocent manga about a ditzzy angel on earth during a lunch-break in biology class. My other classmates dubbed me a pervert. Even my teacher asked me if this was one of those “Japanese tentacle pornos”. My beet-red head could have exploded with the embarrassing stigmatization I experienced. I might as well have been reading *Mein Kampf*. Somehow, the people around me considered that Japanese drawings were inextricably linked to the sexual, the weird, the outlandish – and thus they ad-hoc vilified it. My interest eroded until it became nothing more than distant nostalgia. However, I would end up revisiting my interest in Japan, not for its entertainment, but for its language instead. With the archeologist of ultimate internet weirdness, Google, I once again stumbled on terrifying imagery. Whilst I

was looking for a specific book for learning Japanese, I happened upon something that bore the same title, though with a much more terrifying English subtitle – “Eel Porn”. How anyone could desire having elongated, brown slimy fish near any orifice of your body was absolutely beyond me. Okay, so the Japanese did have certain preferences that crossed the lines of my generally open and understanding disposition to other cultures. Still, I wondered how western society formed this rigorous relation between the Japanese and the Weird. This ultimately became my primary motivation for wanting to unravel the idea that Japanese pornography was inherently bizarre and, as my best friend would try to convince me, inhumane.

Thus my actual research began by looking for examples of weird Japanese pornography. One of the earliest and most salient examples I could discover was from the same artist who made the world-famous iconic print of the great wave, who had also produced a horse (or rather, aquatic fetish) of a different color. Sometimes cited as being one of the starting-points of Japan's long-standing love relation with tentacles, *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* depicts a woman being intimate, for the lack of a better euphemism, with a large octopus and his son. Additionally, the artist bedecked the woodcutting with dialogue in the background, which contained possibly the most poetic eroticism I have witnessed. I whole-heartedly recommend everyone to read it aloud, with a passionate voice and preferably in a public space:

“Fucking octopus! Ah ah, you get my cervix! I can't breathe! Oh, I'm coming, your suction cups... oh, your suction cups... oh, what you're doing with them! Oh yeah, oh yeah... I've never been so... aaah aaah... by octopuses... Mmmm... good good... yeah... there... zu zu zu...”



I decided that perhaps the modern entries in the vast catalogue of Japanese pornography could offer less comic enlightenment.

There were two aspects of modern Japanese pornography that seemed to baffle most of the online western community. For the men, it appeared to be the decency law that forced all producers of Japanese pornography to censor genitalia, which instead only accentuated the weirdness contained within this genre. Historically, nudity has never been a problem in Japan. With typical law rhetoric, this edict possesses vague wording about what can be deemed decent, and what cannot. Yet more importantly, America had a strong influence on Japan's cultural values and back then also censored porn. Japan followed suit and never stopped censoring. The second aspect was the main spot of bother for most women, and indeed, my best friend. Overall, most women in Japanese pornography act as if every sexual act they have to undergo is one that needs to be resisted as vocally as possible. This too, had an easier expectation than one might assume. The general paradigm regarding sex in Japan seems to focus on the ritual of converting the virgin. On the surface, Japanese society values the virginal and cute acting girls over sexy women in most forms of media; from pop idols to their TV stars to their 2D characters, cuteness is the standard and sexiness is always marked as being other. Understandably, pornography too reflects this maxim. Nevertheless, as a certain *Canterbury Tales* character remarks

– there could not be virgins without sex in the first place. Thus, Japanese pornography treasures the transitional phase from virginity into sexual maturity and chooses to depict the fetishizing of this transition.

Ultimately, my essay did not entirely convince my friend, as she nearly accused me of being a rape-apologist, until I pointed out the similarity to western pornography. Male power and the loss of virginity, whether physically or mentally, is a constant that runs throughout pornography of all cultures, both western and eastern. Whether a woman sounds like she enjoys sex and men calling her a “bitch” or a “slut”, or whether a woman sounds like she opposes sex as much as her culture requires her to, is a moot difference. There is no single right way to behave during sex. There are no universal sex guidelines on the same level of authority as moral guidelines; there is no one who knows the correct way to groan, the absolute manner in which one ought to twist and turn, the categorical facial expressions to make. The paramount thing to do is not just to merely gloss over these differences in the sexuality of other cultures and write them off as simply being weird, but to be critically aware of what it is that makes it weird, and consequently point to yourself – what makes the things western society likes in pornography so normal? At the end of the day though, I had to admit that dreaming of sex with eels... was still pretty far out there. **WB**

## WE BUILD THESE BUILDINGS POEM

TEXT ALEX MANTHEI

### We build these buildings

without realizing  
they build us too

this  
is where I learned to stand up straighter  
my back against the level of these floors

this is where I pressed the fronts of my wrists against the doorframe  
and my arms did not rise as high as they once did  
and I had to admit to myself  
I used to pull them up to beat my brother to it  
like all of us moved the Ouija board together  
shouting

not me  
not me  
not me

and there is a deck of cards here on the bookshelf  
that marks the years in folds about the edges

the rooms did this to them  
or we did this to them now from living  
and that chair  
that chair is where I hid my things under  
forgetting they were there

a pin collection  
the keychains that I held to remember  
not to fear  
because they swung and I could always catch them  
my mom's penny set that was heavier unopened

there is my desk and all the desks I've had atop it  
reaching to the ceiling that is somehow deeper here

Do you see the bottom one with the light on inside it  
and the map glued against the wood  
with Paris on the corner  
on the edge  
I could not see

I could not see even as I turn the corner here

and I am sharing a wall with my brother again  
and that  
is not my room

I met Georgiana through a mutual friend. We were at this party together, a bash Abel threw for his 25th birthday and I ‘simply had to attend’. I had tried to duck it at first by persuading him to let me take him shopping for a gift instead. I remember Abel just looking at me with a blank stare after which he moonwalked away, yelling “Be there!” before bumping into someone. So it was settled then.

It was raining and I had to ring the doorbell five times until someone finally heard. “Hiiiii,” Abel said as he flung open the door and gave me a big hug. I checked my watch behind his back; it was way too early for him to already be this hammered. I handed Abel my coat, which he dropped, and then proceeded to wait for him for two minutes while he tried to pick it up and put it on a hanger. Done fumbling, he asked me to follow him to the living room and I opened my backpack just a little bit to see if I didn’t forget the present I bought him.

I was awkward and loud, she was awkward and quiet, and beautiful. Usually bald girls don’t turn me on, but Georgiana rocked it. Her booming body and perfect breasts, barely covered by her skimpy shirt and too short a skirt, may also have had something to do with it. I took my seat next to her on the couch and waited for Abel to introduce us to each other. When he instead sprayed vomit all over the living room rug, I offered her my hand and said “Hi, I’m Alex. Wanna sit somewhere else?”

Her cigarette lit up the cold and dark October night, the tobacco glowing red every time she inhaled.

“Are those warm enough?” I asked, gesturing at her stockings. “Do you need a jacket, maybe?”

“I’m fine,” she smirked. “I’ve heard a lot about you, by the way.”

“Any of it good?”

Georgiana eyed her cigarette, took it from between her thumb and index finger and pointed at the now empty space. “About this much.”

I paused, placed my hands on her hips and eventually said “Yeah, that sounds about right,” after which I grabbed her cigarette and took a drag before throwing it off the balcony and placing my red lipstick lips on her black lipstick ones.

I distinctly remember the smell of rain in our clothes when I took off her shirt and skirt, when I peeled off her nylons, when I kissed the inside of her legs while rolling down her thong and being presented with a swastika tattooed on her inner thigh. My heart rate increased, my mouth ran dry, and I sat up, took deep breaths while staring at the mark in her lap.

“Are you okay, doll?” Georgiana asked, half-moaning, anticipating the touch of my tongue. I looked up at her face, at this beautiful girl biting her lip impatiently, and nodded in the half-light of my bedroom. “You ready?”

“Def.”

I got down on my knees again and wetted my lips.

I must have been staring at her until the sun came up, something I never do. This wasn’t my first one-night stand, far from it, so why the sudden change? Why with this girl? And why didn’t I really care about Georgiana until I saw that crooked cross on her skin? I rubbed my face, got out of bed and went to take a shower. The water must’ve woken her up, because later she entered the bathroom and joined me. I rubbed the soap all over her body, methodi-

cally, not missing a single pore, seeing what else there was to find. Which, as it turned out, was nothing.

“Go on and ask,” Georgiana suddenly said, her hands on her head, her body stretched out under the stream of water pouring from the showerhead.

“I’m sorry?”

“You want to know about the tattoo next to my vag. I know you do.”

“Actually, I think I know enough.”

“And you’re sure about that?” She removed her hands from her head and washed her armpits, then her pair.

“You’re a neo-Nazi, Georgiana.”

“And that’s all I am?”

I hesitated, I shouldn’t have. I shut up for too long and gave her too big an opportunity. With every second I didn’t speak, she came closer. With every second she touched me, she got deeper under my skin. The minute she slid her tongue into my mouth and ran her fingers down my tum, I knew I was done for.

In the following months, I pretended we were just a regular couple. We moved in together, decorated our new home, even took a dog. All I knew was Georgiana had to take off some evenings to be present at club meetings, and that was all the information I could handle. I knew, felt, that I didn’t want to be part of it, and I hoped that Georgiana didn’t really believe the racist slurs I had heard neo-Nazis speak. I hoped that when I provided her with a home and place where she could be who she was, she would leave ‘the movement’, as she called it, behind. I hoped the ink on her thigh would magically vanish and leave her unmarked. But when she invited me over to their makeshift clubhouse one evening, saying it would mean the world to her if I came, I knew this part of Georgiana would never go away. I smiled, kissed her and locked myself up in the cellar to cry.

“Nice to meet ya.”

A man, who I guess was in his forties, wearing a bomber jacket, army pants and big black boots sat down on the stool next to me and ordered the three of us a beer.

“Is this the beauty you’ve been hiding away for so long, George? Ain’t fair, is what it is!” He slammed his fists down on the bar, took off his jacket and showed me a shirt with a Third Reich eagle on it. “You like it?”

I cracked a smile, despite the fact my heart was beating in my throat and every fiber of my body was screaming I needed to get out. When she tapped my shoulder and I turned around, Georgiana forced her tongue against mine and tried to put her hand between my legs. Shocked, I intercepted her hand and held it, while I closed my mouth and bent over to her ear.

“What the fuck are you doing?” I hissed.

“Please go along with this, I need it,” she whispered back, all the while only looking at the man behind me.

“Does she know what she’s doing here?” the man asked, meanwhile signaling two skinheads at the other end of the bar.

“No Daniel,” Georgiana replied. “Not yet.”

“Well, this should be interesting,” Dan said as he took what I now know is a Luger P08 pistol out from under his shirt.

Georgiana’s hands were on my wrists, my hands on the cold wood and metal of the gun. I remember her nipples pressing against my back, at the bottom of my shoulder blades. “Quit crying and just do it, babe,” she said. “I just want us to share everything.”

I nodded, blocked out the cries muffled by the gag in the man’s mouth and squeezed the trigger.



# THE WINDMILL THEATRE COMPANY INTERVIEW

TEXT ISABEL HARLAAR & THIRZA OSTERHAUS PHOTOGRAPHY VERA MENNENS

The ten actors and actresses of the quite recently revived Windmill Theatre Company performed their first play *Candida* two years ago. Willem Bakker, Mitchell de Best, Jimmy Eggleston, Suzanne Heuff, Max van Kreij, Anna Luiken, Charlie May, Joyce Nijhuis, Sandra Polak, and Twan Schenkels were brought together by their shared love for theatre, guided by their inspirational teacher Steve Smith, or 'Stevie' as they call him.

After *Candida* and Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the 'Windmillers' staged their third major play, Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*, very recently. A parodic Agatha Christie-style whodunit which satirizes the world of theatre critics and the whodunit genre, but which is also a light-hearted story that does not fail to keep you on your toes because it is a play-within-a-play.

We decided to interview these young actors before they pave their way to stardom and getting hold of them would take many a phone call with secretaries and personal assistants. On a dreary December afternoon, we spoke to them about their acting techniques, stage fright, and dreams for the future. We were soon lost in a cacophony of voices surrounded by this group of enthusiastic and animated performers eager to share their stories and experiences in theatre. The Windmillers – all students of English at the University of Amsterdam – started by explaining to us how they go about the difficult process of portraying a character on stage. They begin by reading the text together in order to get a clear image of the characters manifested in the play. After the roles have been distributed, they do various exercises to rehearse their roles, such as playing each other's roles. However, they all have their own view on acting and they adhere to their personal acting techniques.

Luiken: "[in my opinion] the play just exists

within the rehearsal space and then you just try something and the director says that it works or says that you could try to do it more like that. It's not like you come fully prepared and are able to stage a character immediately. It's something in progress, something which develops."

May: "I always ask the director a lot of questions to get a grasp of his vision and to understand where he wants to go with something. And then I try to go and find some similarities between the character and me, just to see if I can find certain elements that add to the role. Then I read into the character and look at other interpretations and other types of approaches."

Luiken: "[I'm really interested in] the use of my voice and how it influences the way I portray my character. What I always do when I look at the text is that I try to find the motivations behind my character's behavior. I always try to look for a reason behind an action or emotion."

Bakker: "It also is a case of thinking outside of your box. There are a few things you wouldn't have thought of had you not been working with other people – one sentence can have at least a dozen interpretations."

Van Kreij: "I try to find a basis by looking at stereotypical roles on television or in films that show some kind of similarity to the role that I am playing first. After that I try to develop this stereotype and add to it to create a whole new character with a little help from Steve. During the rehearsals I try to learn to fully grasp my character's way of talking and moving until I finally get it right."

Studying to become an actor, as it turns out, can be quite life threatening at times. While Eggleston was in London for a while to study Theatre at Middlesex University, he did not stay for a long time. He was influenced in his decision by the neighborhood in which he lived: "In the first week some guy got stabbed in front of my house and the other week some guy was shot,"

Eggleston tells us. To this Heuff jokingly adds, "So it was like, act or die?" In the end, Eggleston chose to live, got out of there and is now enjoying the safer dynamics of the Windmill Theatre Company (though his characters are not safe from harm - his role in *The Real Inspector Hound* made him act *and* die).

While some highbrow actors believe in total eradication of the self and wholly engulfing themselves in a role, the Windmillers have a more multilateral view of their character portrayal.

Bakker: "I think you are every character you play..."

Heuff: "... but it is always you who steers the character underneath..."

Bakker: "... and you are just allowing that side of yourself to be there."

Heuff: "It's a weird combination between completely opening up to what is happening and on the other hand also being in total control of what you need to do next..."

Bakker: "... the lines are fixed but still anything can happen."

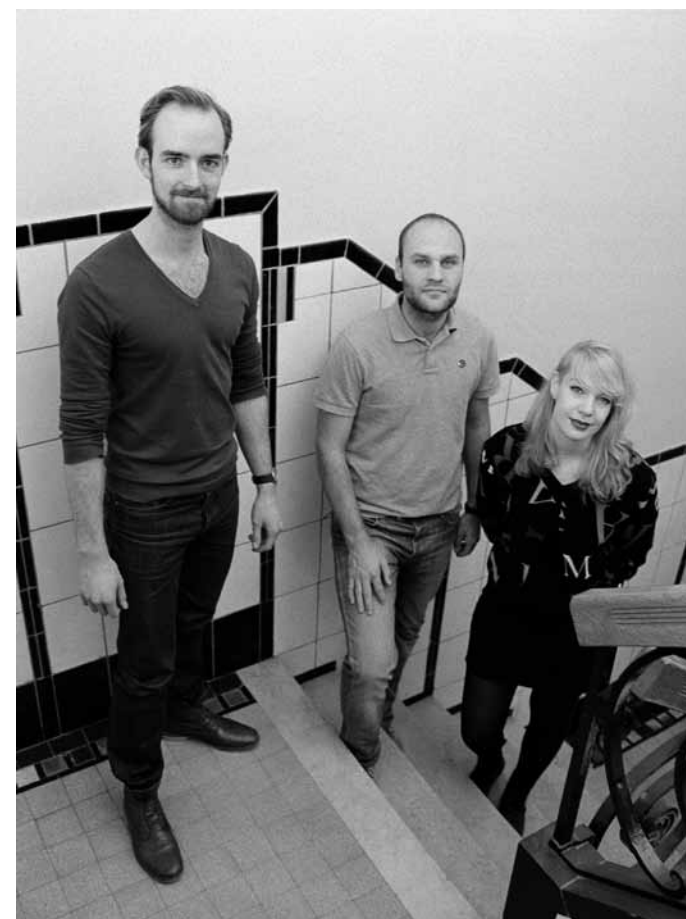
Does this leave any space for stage fright to take hold of them before taking the stage? When we asked them this question, the actors started laughing wholeheartedly and gave us a definite 'yes' in concert. They do not have tips on how to overcome stage fright and believe you just have to acknowledge it is there, or as May concludes, "you just have to deal with it".

Luiken: "Every time I go on stage I ask myself why I do this and why I put myself through this every single time."

Van Kreij: "For that matter it is like hell..."

Heuff: "... and afterwards you just forget about it and you just think 'oh, that was so much fun!'"

Luiken: "One time I was really relaxed when I got on stage and that time it did not go well, so you also *need* the nerves to keep yourself focused."



When they do forget their lines, they just "solve it." "We try to solve it for each other," says Bakker. "And sometimes you just wait for it to come back," says Heuff laughingly. "Or someone else will say your next line or ask a question so that you will remember your line."

The Windmillers were not completely comfortable when speaking of their dreams of their futures in acting. They started laughing nervously and were a bit scared to share their hopes with us. While they might not have set their future in stone yet, they do know for sure that they will continue acting no matter what. With talents such as theirs, we will undoubtedly come across their faces again in big theatre productions or on the silver screen. One thing is certain: they are not to be missed out on.

The Windmill Theatre Company is looking for new acting talent! Do you want to join them? Mail to their director Steve Smith: S.T.Smith@uva.nl



# / CAN YOU KICKSTART A DEAD HORSE? REVIEW

TEXT ISADORA GOUDSBLOM & ISABEL HARLAAR

A REVIEW OF *THE SELFISH GIANT* (BARNARD, 2013)

When Arbor and Swifty, two young boys from the impoverished regions of Bradford, find themselves expelled from school, they develop a hunger for something to lessen the tediousness of their run-of-the-mill lives. They start wandering around town stealing metal objects to sell them for scrap to help their families get by. This is the dismal childhood that is portrayed in *The Selfish Giant* (Barnard, 2013), a film loosely based on the Oscar Wilde story of the same name. Impressively, this is Clio Barnard's first feature-length film, a film that tugs at your heartstrings.

The quality of acting of the young Connor Chapman and Shaun Thomas (respectively portraying Arbor and Swifty) is remarkable and immensely moving. The duo can be as entertaining as a modern-day Laurel and Hardy, but when they undergo hardship they become skillful conveyors of emotion. The harsh lives Arbor and Swifty lead rob them of the playfulness and peace generally associated with being young. With this film, Barnard wanted to remind people of the fact that the protagonists are just kids, a fact one might forget watching them try to make gold out of rubble – no, there is certainly no room for child's play

here. This absence of youthful hope in the film is demonstrated in the scenes – perhaps the most heart wrenching ones of the film – in which Arbor is hiding underneath his bed, unwilling to get out from under it. The confinement of being under his bed forms a mirror image with the restrictions his surroundings impose on him and his spritely mischievousness: both are dark, dusty, and there is no room for development whatsoever.

*The Selfish Giant* is a movie intended to shock, and not one to re-watch, since the depression level is way up the charts. When Swifty shows he has a natural talent for horsemanship, he is offered a job as a rider and for a while the film seems to take a more uplifting turn. Arbor's thirst for gold, however, has been whetted and he delves into even more dangerous realms on a quest for valuable cable from power stations. In the words of Thom Yorke, you cannot kickstart a dead horse, but Arbor and Swifty desperately try to do so anyhow. If you want to know whether they succeed or not, we suggest you to hasten to an independent cinema to watch *The Selfish Giant* right now. We certainly are looking forward to further works of Barnard's.



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