



WB

WRITER'S BLOCK

*Students' magazine for  
writing, film & literature*

# 28

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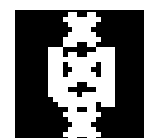


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# C O N T E N T

THESIS SURVIVAL GUIDE EDITORIAL 4

FIRST NIGHT WITH DEATH POETRY 5

EVER SHORT STORY 7

A LOVE STORY IN THREE POEMS POETRY 10

CORPSES SHORT STORY 12

THE TREE POETRY 14

QUANTUM BREAK: BREAKING NEW GROUNDS IN CROSS-  
MEDIAL STORYTELLING ESSAY 16

FABRICE POUSSIN INTERVIEW 19

STORYTELLING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE STORYTELLING  
REVIEW 21



# THESIS SURVIVAL GUIDE

TEXT ROSELINDE BOUMAN & JUDITH KROON

“What that Aprille with his shoures soote  
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote...”

Yes, folks, it's that time of year again. The narcissus are blooming, the sun is peeking out and the Danio-eating hipster at your local bus stop looks down upon it all and sees that it is good. Sadly, for those of us who are hoping to graduate this year, April only means one thing: thesis season. Not to worry, Writer's Block is here to help! Whether you are dreading that thesis deadline, essay or personal writing project, these three tips are bound to get you through.

## 1) Eat a car

For this tip, we are indebted to Dr Joyce Goggin, who has ample experience in getting students through thesis season. The key is to envision your writing project as a car. One that you are determined to eat. When you go about eating something that big, you don't swallow the whole thing at once. You start with the headlights and slowly work your way through, one bite at a time. Subdivide your project into chapters and subsections. Write an outline of what goes where and start filling it in. Before you know it, you'll have eaten that entire car and still have room for dessert.

## 2) Forget Lewis Carroll

“Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop.” These not-so-wise words are spoken by the king in *Alice in Wonderland*. (Then again, who expects good advice from a man who is married to a human guillotine?) When you are writing, The Blank Page is your worst enemy. The solution? Don't start at the beginning, start with the best bits. Take the juiciest quotations and analyse these first, then fill in the rest. Save your introduction for last!

## 3) Be like Bill Chuck

Photographer Chuck Close once said, “I don't work with inspiration. Inspiration is for amateurs. I just get to work.” Sitting in front of your laptop waiting for inspiration will only get you one thing: to be annoyed. The best strategy is to just start writing and become inspired as you go. You can always chuck (pun intended) lesser bits out later. If all else fails, search for inspiration elsewhere. In this brand-new Writer's Block for example.

And to the rest of you, not having this hardly bite-sized car in front of you, simply enjoy reading this new issue of Writer's Block, filled to brim with joyous material for you to read and see. Happy reading! **WB**

# FIRST NIGHT WITH DEATH

POETRY SAMUEL PRONK

How peaceful lies the perished body there  
In the ecstatic grip of Death:  
The pall-sheets tremble where no trembling were;  
The Angel reaps her final breath.

In the cold clutches of a life's defeat,  
Lost soul with virgin void conjoins;  
And chanced are we an ancient love to meet,  
Late passing through her hallowed loins.

When someday aged and feeble I subside;  
Pale horses pull the chariot  
Wherefrom appears my dear macabre bride,  
Crowned with the veil of cerecloth.

Forever in damnation's glory bound:  
The knell has tolled with lurking doom;  
In final expiration shall we haunt  
The death-bed of our bridal tomb.

Some whips to flog the marrow, lash the bones -  
The guilty pleasure of undoing.  
Our bodies suffering, with silent moans,  
From the euphoria of ruin.

Her sapid smile within the darkness guides  
Some sweeter lips to smother me;  
Her corpus curls itself 'round mine to-night,  
And we are one in agony.



57

I don't remember my birth. I've tried to see if there is something lurking in a recess of my subconscious, but every time I think back I just stumble into a void at some point. I know I had a family, a best friend, and a lover, but my life itself is inconceivable. All I remember are moments: the smell of smoke in clothes lost after a bonfire. I might as well put the scarf back on - wear it every anniversary up until the end. This'd make it 24.

For a pale blue dot I've seen a lot of red. This time, however, it's dripping across my face as I lean back against this driftwood here. My pulse is fading, and I'm one flicker away from darkness. My joints are stiff and sore, which is meaningless in the long term. Even the universe will suffer from rigor mortis in the end. I don't know what the final frontier will be, nor which prophets will arise, or whether we will even still be here at the end of days. Regardless, every day has a twilight that cuts to black. Everything will die a desperate, despondent death as it dims to deeper and deeper shades of its inky demise - everything.

All shall be forgotten when the last eyes close.

△

5

I'm looking down from the tree house at my cousin below. She's putting dirt and twigs into the bucket for me to hoist up on the pulley. My little brother is climbing up the ladder to join me. He clamors into the one-room, secret hide-out and fiddles with the spice bottles on the shelf. They're filled with earth. The tree house is circular and dusty. Its walls are made from wood we found at the coast, and its floorboards are warped from the rain, held together with rusting, iron bands. I bring the bucket in from the rope and put the twigs in the toy cash register. My cousin hurries up to join us. She takes an empty saltshaker and scoops some soil out of the bucket to fill it with. My brother returns it to the shelf and starts exchanging the old for the new. She opens the drapes and looks at herself in the scratched mirror. As she pushes her hair behind her ear, she sees me and smiles.

I hope I remember this moment: light comes in through the drapes.

10

"Meet you halfway?"

I hang up the phone and fetch my shoes. Mom asks me if we're going to his house or mine. We're going to his. I shut the door too hard before I cut through the front yard and head out to the street. The day is unremarkable.



We always meet halfway, regardless of whose house we're going to. There are two stop signs on streets a block away from one another. In between them is where we always meet. The challenge is to get to the other side before he does, but it almost never works out like that. I see him come round the bend as I do. The first words are always a little test: a little nod to power, a little nudge into place. Something witty... something witty... something witty. I'm kind of nervous so I look down at the ground. As my feet pass over the slabs of concrete, I slow down a bit. There is sand in between the cracks.

I hope I remember this moment: meeting my best friend halfway.

16

I'm at my grandparents' house in the garage. The smell of gasoline is engrained in the cement, and the window is letting in the morning light. Grandpa is bent over the pool table showing my kid brother a trick shot he's not interested in. Grandma is sitting next to me. She's handing me a bowl of clam chowder from the kitchen because she knows it's my favorite. I look down under the pool table to see what my

grandparents have hidden away under the felt and mahogany. Pictures from long ago fill its underbelly, bound together in books sealed with dust. I wouldn't recognize anyone in them; I probably haven't even heard their names before.

I hope I remember this moment: the boardwalk of history through generations.

23

It's cold outside so I've shut the window. The trees in the back garden have started to crisp and wither. Food is cooking on the hotplate in the corner, and the door to my studio is shut. I've been here for 2 months now, and the allure of novelty has worn off. It's lost its sheen. Now I'm just here. Alone, in bed. My computer is on the desk, playing music. It's just on to make noise; silence would do me in. I can't remember when I last moved. My backpack is half unpacked on the floor, and the stamp in my passport is still fresh. Why do I just want my eyes to shut? Why do I just not want to be if I'm going to be alone? I'm staring at the burgundy wall opposite me. I can see the forgotten holes where somebody's memories used to be, where

somebody's life laid patent.

I hope I remember this moment: knowing I'll be forgotten.

35

The sun tosses up one final death throe before it ducks behind the horizon. A gasp of green light floods the sky above us for an instant. I can smell the salt mixed with oil. It's back: fanaticism, free-for-alls, fundamentalism. We are the first, charred waves on new shores, sully the sand. We disperse, coming in unnoticed amongst the more distinct and vocal tides. Our stains stand out even

before we've left, though. From marble neoclassicism to sanguine post barbarism – the empires are rotting and eroding. We can feel the electricity. We can see the kindling. The steady roar has grown

louder, but it's encrypted; Enigma has returned. Smog hangs in the sky, but everyone is looking through it at the ships over yonder. Horns and sirens inundate the air. My partner clutches my hand.

I hope I remember this moment: fleeing from the impending tempest.

42

If I fall back asleep too quickly, I risk wandering back into my nightmare. I can't be back on that beach. I won't feel those tears stream again. That fear and screaming won't haunt my naked psyche another time. Not tonight. Clouded, my head wanders through the hours and days looking for the clarity it's forgotten somewhere amidst the trek. These night terrors could conquer me. They could raid, pillage, and colonize me. They could impale my sanity with a listless blow - hoist a foreign flag upon the land it stole. I'm tense and trembling. The whisper of light from the city outside does nothing for my solipsism. I draw the blinds. The room is overflowing with emptiness. I need to focus on something, distract myself into a dreamless sleep and see if I can make it 'til tomorrow. Maybe the blitzkrieg will finally end.

I hope I don't remember this moment: the sound of tanks around the bend.

Δ

No one remembers falling asleep. **WB**

# A LOVE STORY IN THREE POEMS

POETRY L.S. FORTUIN

\*

IN THIS LIFE WE  
ARE NOT A SCENE

During Silvester 1970  
That year in Sweden  
It rained and we wore silver masks,  
Stared at soaked confetti.

Like in each and every country,  
The colorful pools of  
Decorations old-fashioned,  
Its tragedies rustling tomorrow.

In this life we  
Are not a scene  
Because in this life we  
Watch you watch us.  
And in this life we  
Take out the plastic bottles  
Let the water pour  
Over our shoes, over our masks  
The rain wetting 1970.

And right now in Göteborg  
Right this moment in Gothenburg,  
You can just  
Open your eyes and  
Look at me still looking at her.

\*

IN THIS LIFE WE  
DON'T LIKE LOSING THINGS

It took us  
A finding time,  
Entering the word,  
Then leaving it behind.

And in this life we  
Don't like losing things  
Although by now, most of us  
Have gotten quite used to it.

When I look at her looking at me,  
I imagine untying the thread that  
Connects her bones and  
The thread that is knotted very precise,  
very tight.  
It will make her open her mouth, her face.  
Ears open, nose open, thighs,  
And her long white eyes,  
They are now shut.

But in this life I have time  
(hold it precious in my hands).

\*

IN THIS LIFE WE  
KEEP HAVING THESE FANTASIES

The day we left Sweden  
She sew herself together  
Only to find that later,  
She could tear it all apart.  
That day we left Sweden, in 1971  
She only stopped walking  
To tell me to "Go Find My Way".

So in this life we  
Keep having these fantasies,  
We keep having this fantasy  
That we wake up one day-  
To find that  
One day-  
We really can start living.

I turn around,  
Here in Gothenburg,  
Thread in my hand and,  
I hear you whisper my name quietly.  
Precisely.  
I listen. I answer, here it is.



# CORPSES

## SHORT STORY MITCHELL GRABOIS

*Now your beauty is all furniture. It has been moved around too much.*

- Henry Miller

The people of Denver lined up by the thousands to see the Corpse Plant. It allegedly had the largest flower in the world. It only bloomed every fifteen years. It smelled like shit. People waited for hours to get a whiff of it. Only the veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars stayed away. They'd already smelled plenty of death.

The Danes owned an island in the tropics. They brought in a million slaves to make sweetness. Everyone's taste buds got corrupted. Plain fruit was no longer enough. I took my one-year-old granddaughter. She was very well-behaved. She waited like a little adult to catch the odor of death.

It was hot and hungry and slaves died in droves. Some got the disease, Yaws. The Danes isolated them on Yawzi Point, a small peninsula thick with cacti. They put up a sign: Don't go here. The slaves stayed on the jut of land until they died.

Yom Kippur was coming. Jews were confessing their sins, even sins they had never committed themselves. They were asking G to write them down in the Book of Life for another year. Many of them were cheating on the required fasting. They didn't think He would notice. They filed by the Corpse Plant just like anyone else, anyone else who was not a member of the Chosen People.

Now the Danes come to party. They plant

their flags on the beach. Some fool tries to make bay rum from a bay rum tree. They drink copious amounts of Jamaican beer. They toast the Pope and the Dalai Lama. They toast Helen Keller. They toast anyone who comes to mind. They toast a Dane who made it big in the American Baseball League.

Everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, people who were purple, those who were green, wrinkled their noses at the smell. I stood by the ventilator to get a fuller inhalation. Without sharing this, everyone believed that by smelling the Corpse Plant, they were immunizing themselves from Death.

The Danes made furniture out of teak. It was understated. At first, it was handsome, but became progressively battered as it passed from hand to hand, buttocks to buttocks. Now your beauty is furniture. Your boyfriend is a Dane who joined the Hell's Angels. He's a furniture mover. He moves your furniture. He moves you.

He no longer moves you. You've been moved around too much, much more than the average six times that Americans relocate in their lifetimes. It all has to do with economics. If you're not willing to migrate, you become a hobo, hopping trains.

My one-year-old granddaughter found other one-year-olds to play with. They joined hands, even the ones who could not yet walk, skipped around a circle, and sang Ring around the Rosie, pockets full of po-

sies, ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

They threw the furniture into a boxcar. They didn't care if they scratched it. You are a hot mess, a cold mess. Your Resting Bitch Face tells me everything I need to know about you. I can imagine you in elementary school: smug because you knew all the answers, and the pretty girl sitting next to you didn't. Her face was confused. Your face is a frozen snarl. Your husband closes his eyes. He prefers to remain clueless—his defense since childhood.

The Corpse Plant clumsily slapped its plant hands together in applause. All the other plants were envious that the Corpse Plant could do this, and they couldn't. The Corpse Plant was like a junior high gymnast, trying

to clamp down on his own egotism. He knew that his classmates would always hate him for his advanced and precocious skills, and for his gymnastic muscles. He could see it in their eyes, even at their fiftieth reunion.

You are a few pieces of furniture I got at the Salvation Army. Give me a gallon can of varnish, and I'll make everything better. **WB**



# THE TREE

POETRY PAUL HOFMA

It had been a long, long day -  
Yet still the sun reigned high above;  
Unyielding  
Unbidden

There was no shade for miles and miles  
And,  
Somehow,  
I found myself lost on  
A desert of waving grass  
Panting  
Sweating  
Surrounded by gentle hills  
Lush and curvaceous,  
Taunting me.

Yet far in the distance  
Stood a silent sentinel  
A lone olive tree,  
Standing watch over this  
Meadow of infinity  
  
Slowly, far too slowly  
It grew on the horizon  
Until it was the horizon;  
Its canopy stretching  
To the edges of the world  
Its trunk thick  
As the heart of the oldest mountain  
  
Between its roots I found a rat -  
He bore my face

And whispered my name  
But as I asked him who he was  
He laughed  
Harshly  
Cruelly  
And vanished

I looked up, and within that  
Ashen sky of leaves  
There shone a thousand golden olives  
Drinking  
Extinguishing  
The sun

And one spot  
- One stain -

Of white  
Among ashes and gold  
The owl descended  
And then I was the owl  
And he was me  
And I asked him who he was  
And he laughed -  
A quiet, mirthless laugh.

Because I knew already  
  
And together we soared on  
Wings of snow and wings of light  
And sometimes  
- though I must not speak of them -  
On wings of blackest midnight

And when we, at last,  
After countless eons,  
Returned to that tree unbound  
Its roots had become the earth  
Its leaves had become the sky  
And its trunk,  
Gnarled and twisted,  
Filled all of time and space  
And we, too,  
Had become the tree  
And I understood.





# QUANTUM BREAK: BREAKING NEW GROUND IN CROSS-MEDIAL STORYTELLING

ESSAY JULES SCHLICHER

*Jack Joyce walks through a vast and strange tableau. In the grounds of a university, Soldiers and the student protestors they are arresting stand frozen in time, as do all other organisms and objects. He seems to be the only one unaffected by this all-encompassing time stop. Welcome to Quantum Break.*

With *Quantum Break*, Finnish videogame developer Remedy created a game tailor-made for Microsoft's Xbox One console. To be exact, it created a game for the console as it was presented to the public in early 2013. When Microsoft unveiled the Xbox One, it presented the machine as the "one" console needed in the living room to complement the television. It plays videogames, but would also be a platform for television, internet and various apps. Quantum Break would be a videogame and a television series. Perfect for the Xbox One, right? It's also a perfect reflection of the myriad forms of storytelling videogames can incorporate, and that the medium is providing writers with increasingly more options and tools to tell their stories in more intricate ways.

Roughly speaking, *Quantum Break* is about an experiment with time that went horribly wrong, and the attempts of a number of characters to keep time from grinding to a halt. These characters either see the end of time, "Zero State", as inevitable or averta-

ble, and act accordingly to their beliefs. The player fills the shoes of Jack Joyce, the adventurous brother of scientist William Joyce, and best friend to entrepreneur Paul Serene, who believes he can change the world for the better with William Joyce's research into quantum mechanics. When Jack meets Paul at the fictitious Riverport University, they conduct the experiment that shatters time. They are both affected by certain "chronon" waves, giving them a unique control over time. Paul is sent forward to the future, but manages to travel back in time, and arrives back on the scene of the accident, only seventeen years older, and head of a nefarious and powerful organisation called Monarch.

Jack's and Paul's powers over time are expectantly the exciting and spectacular parts of the game's gameplay. As Jack, the protagonist, you can throw 'time stops' at your enemies, temporarily locking them in a translucent bubble of 'stopped time', or you can create a similar barrier around yourself to stop yourself from getting shot at by enemies. Also, Jack is not affected when so-called "time stutters" occur. In those moments, the whole world freezes, while Jack can still move around. Walking through these icy tableaux is as bizarre as it sounds, but the images are wondrous and fascinating, especially when parts of the environment seem to be stuck in a destruc-



tive loop. In one instance, Jack has to climb over the flying rubble of a collision between a huge ship and a bridge. It's tempting to stand still in these moments and just act the voyeur for a while.

Paul, the antagonist, on the other hand, can see possible futures, and can determine which one will become reality. Playing him, you make a choice between two different paths you and, by extension, Monarch can take, at several junction points. When the choice is made, you see an episode of the television series, which takes about twenty minutes, and depending on your choice, the episode takes different turns. The example Remedy always gave in presentations, is the choice between a hardline

and a public relations approach to witnesses of the incident at Riverport University: will you let Monarch kill the witnesses or will you manipulate one of them to frame Jack Joyce for the whole thing? With these choices affect both the protagonist and antagonist in different ways, which you can see, and which implicitly gives you the chance to give Jack advantages, make certain villains seem more diabolical, or even get rid of some of them. This being a game, you can of course replay the whole thing to test the different outcomes.

Effectively, the game is about the heroes and the show is about the villains, but when viewing the series, you quickly realise that such a dichotomy is too crude. Paul and his

close colleagues, for instance, do what they do because they believe that their actions can repair the damage Paul did to time. It makes him relatable as an antagonist, in spite of his actions. His 'relatability' is further enhanced by the acting prowess of his performer, Aidan Gillen, who is best known as Littlefinger from *Game of Thrones*. Other well-known actors who give stellar performances are Shawn Ashmore (*X-Men*) as Jack Joyce, Dominic Monaghan (*The Lord of the Rings*) and Lance Reddick (*Fringe*) as Martin Hatch, Paul Serene's scheming second-in-command. These actors illustrate how highly Remedy and Microsoft value *Quantum Break*: every part of the product must be of a high quality.

Taken together, the game and show uniformly tell a story about time-travel, which is very hard to nail down without plot-holes, because characters end up being in different places at the same time, and affecting proceedings with their respective actions. The cleverest part of the story, though, is that those actions have little to no effect on the passage of time: the past is set and cannot be altered. Remedy handles this story remarkably well, and it never gets out of hand with strange plot points. The game even provides explanations for the science behind the events in the game, hidden in emails you can read whilst making your way through Monarch's various facilities. Those emails, as well as posters, graffiti, videos, radio shows, songs, memos, diaries, screenplays, and so on, give background information on the characters, their surroundings, and the events. The writing for all of this is wonderfully clever and endearing, especially in the case of an

early, banter-filled email exchange between Jack and Paul, and a peculiar diary kept by another character that travelled through time.

Coincidentally, there is also a *Quantum Break* book, called *Quantum Break: Zero State*, which generally follows the same story as the game and show, but deviates in some interesting ways. This is due to the fact that the writer of the book, Cam Rogers, didn't simply want to regurgitate the game's plot, and had left Remedy when large parts of the game's script were being rewritten. The novel therefore contains several plot points that did not make it into the game, thereby providing an interesting deviating storyline within the same story world. Combined with the game and show, a player, viewer and reader would get 'the full picture' of *Quantum Break*, which is an intriguing one, to say the least.

Born out of Microsoft's desire to dominate the living room and an idea for a game from Remedy's creative director Sam Lake, *Quantum Break* has become a daring experiment of a new intellectual property. And the experiment pays off. Videogames are uniquely able to tell one story with several media within themselves, and they can be supplemented by companion applications for phones and such, as well as by television series, or so it seems. It remains to be seen if *Quantum Break* proves to be the first of many games of its kind, or merely a very special game that strives to push the boundaries of its medium. That alone is admirable in our time of safe-bet blockbusters, and it gives hope to storytellers and enjoyers of good storytelling. **WB**

## PHOTOGRAPHY INTERVIEW WITH FABRICE POUSSIN

TEXT ROSELINDE BOUMAN

**Fabrice Poussin is a Georgia-based photographer, poet and novelist. In this issue of Writer's Block, he shares his main sources of inspiration and best advice for aspiring photographers.**

*How and when did you realise that you wanted to be a photographer?*

When I was fourteen years old, I invested all of my money in a camera I could just afford. It was not much, but it was the beginning. Being a photographer is not as important to me as offering an image that others can see and appreciate, to the extent that they will want to dive in and be part of the product. I have been taking photos my entire life; it is a huge part of who I am. I also write and publish my writing, poetry and novels. I suppose I could say I am a naturally inclined creator. There is no specific beginning, but rather a natural development.

*What are your main sources of inspiration?*

This is going to sound trite, but the world is. I believe I should always carry a camera so as to not miss a single opportunity to capture the moment. In truth, I suppose you could say I need to take little fragments of the world, and give them a life of their own. Mostly, I want to create powerful images from what others might not give a moment's attention to. It could be a rock, an old door, a rusty nail, clouds, the leg of a chair...

*Does being a photographer influence the way you perceive the world around you? If so, in what way?*



There is no question that being a photographer influences the way I look at the world. Basically, the instant I set my eyes on anything, I imagine how I could photograph it, and emphasize the element that attracts me. I frame it in my mind; I see the image and internalize it, before I snap the shutter. To me, the world offers new visions every day. It allows me to slow down a little, and to appreciate all the details that surround me – us – at all times, to not just be a passer-by in this world, but to truly be an active participant.



*Do you have a particular 'style'? Has this changed over the years?*

I am not sure I have a style. Others could possibly tell if a picture is mine, but I am really not sure what it is that typifies them. My technique has changed and improved over the years, and I have sought out unusual equipment to create different effects. Of course, I mostly work with digital cameras today, although I do not mind, from time to time, to work with my wonderful medium and large format machines. They are very special and so precise.

*Could you elaborate a bit on "Rooftops" (our cover picture)? Where was this picture taken? What feelings did the image invoke in you?*

This photo was taken in the North-West of France. It is a fairly unusual landscape for that part of the country. Normally, it is impossible to get this kind of view of the rooftops without climbing on a tall ladder. Here, the little village is located in a very small valley. The scenery emanates both a sense of peace and mystery. What happens under all these very protected roofs, in so many families, in so many lives? The nicely structured tiles remind one of a quilt, made up of so many stories, and also a comforting blanket for a very calm and safe little town.

*Do you intend to get a certain message across in your pictures, or are they open to interpretation?*

I would like my photos to remain open to interpretation. While I focus on an object, scene, or context, I seek the detail, to capture survival in all its shapes (chipped wood, rust), to ultimately find the most intricate



and mysterious detail.

My message is one of life in all nooks and crannies, the rest is up to the observer. Often I hear some wonderful interpretations, of which I had not thought before.

*What advice would you give to aspiring photographers?*

My advice for photography is, as it is with any art: free yourself. Try anything until you are pleased with what you see. Do not let others tell you what art is. It is not a matter of "good" or "bad". It is a matter of how you, the artist, feel about the image you create. It has to please you first. Learn to use a camera well, seek out the works of successful photographers and go from there. Everything else will fall into place in time. No need to rush; your art is too important for that. **WB**

## STORYTELLING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE STORYTELLING: MIGUEL GOMES' ARABIAN NIGHTS

REVIEW VINCENT BAPTIST



When was the last time you stumbled upon a genuinely new story? No, really, something you never heard before? This is an issue I often think about with regard to film narratives. The past months, for example, saw the release of the films *Black* (by Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah) and *Tanna* (by Martin Butler and Bentley Dean). Although they depict two very different settings, both films tell the same *Romeo and Juliet*-inspired tale about rival clans and forbidden love. Nothing new under the sun here.

The coincidentally successive releases of these two films reminded me of a bold statement by the notorious Hungarian director Béla Tarr, concerning our disappointingly limited storytelling capacities: "I don't care about stories. I never did. Every story is the same. We have no new stories. We're just repeating the same ones." Keeping in mind the way in which both *Black* and *Tanna* were marketed as fresh *Romeo*

and *Juliet*-offsprings, I have to side with Tarr's opinion. But still, are there really no ways anymore in which old narratives can lead to something startlingly new?

Enter Miguel Gomes. This Portuguese maverick director first burst onto the international film scene with intriguing feature films like *Our Beloved Month of August* (2008) and *Tabu* (2012). His latest and most ambitious project, *Arabian Nights*, caused quite a stir among critics during its Cannes premiere last year. Last month, it also received a theatrical release in the Netherlands.

*Arabian Nights* is a six-hour triptych, recounting Portugal's recent socio-economic crisis through a dizzying amount of imaginative fables. *Volume 1: The Restless One* kicks off with Gomes self-reflexively addressing the viewer. He admits his failure to come up with any new and meaningful



stories, and in a moment of absurd despair he literally tries to escape his own film by running away as fast as he can.

The rest of the prologue, in which you catch glimpses of Portugal's unfortunate deindustrialization processes and unemployment growth, unfolds in haphazard ways. Since there's no storyteller anymore, the viewer can freely choose what to focus on. It's almost as if the director's escape turns into the viewer's liberation. In this way, a narrative void is being created, which simultaneously feels alluring and frustrating.

After a while, however, Gomes returns to the screen. He pleads guilty for his cowardice, and wants to make up for it in a remarkable way. Subsequently, Scheherazade, the exotic narrator of the ancient *One Thousand and One Nights* tales, is introduced. It is by means of her voice and presence that the director ultimately guides the viewer through nine separate stories dedicated to the Portuguese people's characteristic gratitude and firmness.

Did I say nine stories? I actually mean nine thousand! Indeed, the different tales that make up the Arabian Nights project all contain numerous narrative detours and they unfold in dense and intertwining ways. The trilogy's first volume, for example, depicts IMF bankers as impotent sheikhs, a polar bear plunge as a magnificent social revolt, and a noisy rooster as an attentive town sheriff.

This abundance of stories continues in *Volume 2: The Desolate One*, in which clear references to the western genre and the courtroom drama can be found. On the other hand, only occasionally does Gomes' cinematography feel as impressive and unique as his narrative eccentricities. Then again, not a lot of directors would be able to utilize a dusty apartment block, a puppy and a Lionel Richie song in ways as clever and endearing as he does at the end of *Volume 2*.

### **ARABIAN NIGHTS UNDOUBTEDLY IS ONE OF THE MOST CINEPHILE MILESTONES OF THIS YEAR.**

Finally, *Volume 3: The Enchanted One* sees Gomes introducing some aesthetic oddities like superimpositions and split screens. With these techniques, the director creates an enjoyable homage to the classic *Woodstock* documentary from 1970, but it ultimately doesn't conceal the fact that the trilogy's closing volume is also the most unbalanced and faltering one.

Over the course of its six swirling hours, *Arabian Nights* thus definitely reveals some flaws and self-conceit. But at the same time, that's also what makes this cinematic adventure so audacious and memorable. Gomes uses his beneficent creativity to commingle a classic narrative source with present-day political commentary. *Arabian Nights* depicts both the death and resurrection of storytelling, and it undoubtedly is one of the most cinephile milestones of this year. **WB**

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