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WRITER'S BLOCK

*Students' magazine for
writing, film & literature*

#30

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ODE TO AUTUMN

ROOS GRAVEMAKER AND PAUL HOFMA

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun...*

On your way to work, school, or your grandmother's house in the forest, you may already have noticed that the season is changing; suddenly your T-shirts feel oddly cold and you have to dig for the sweaters hidden away at the back of your closet. At the same time you somehow find yourself surrounded by the aroma of Pumpkin Spice Latte, spread by a groups of young girls wearing padded jackets and Ugg boots. This visual horror reminds you of Halloween, which has been glaring at you from your Channing Tatum-themed calendar for a couple of days now, whispering awful costume suggestions. Oh my Keats, it's autumn!

A new season and a new academic year means a new Writer's Block board, and of course a new issue. Editors-in-Chief Roselinde Bouman and Judith Kroon have handed over the reins to yours truly, Paul Hofma and Roos Gravemaker. They have done a fantastic job of running the magazine in 2015-2016, and we hope to live up to their legacy and deliver another year of hard work and quality magazines. Luckily, we are not alone and we have a fantastic new board who will help us in continuing publishing stories, essays, poetry, and artwork from new talented writers and artists.

In this issue we have another wonderful collection of poetry, short stories, artwork, and essays from our talented contributors. The seasonally appropriate poem "Still" by C.G. Huff will open this issue. Then Casper Rudolph will bring in some Country Western horror in his short story "Anthropophagy", followed by Gary Beck's reflections and observations on the vastness of city life in his poem "Urban Passage". We are also honored to feature an Oxford Scholar in this issue, who has brought a homage to the recently deceased British Poet Sir Geoffrey Hill. Another wonderful poetic work is brought to you by Kevin Casey, who wrote about a couple trying to cover up their marital problems by renovating their bathroom. Editors David and Luc interviewed Charlotte Dijkstra, an amateur photographer who captured the wonderful mountain scenery on our previous issue. Nadia Gerrassimenko will make her poetic debut in our magazine with her heartbreaking poem "Safe Cocoon". Even though we have a fresh new board, former editor Vincent Baptist couldn't stay away from Writer's Block and wrote an article on *Macbeth* adaptations from Orson Welles to Justin Kurzel. Lastly, just before Writer's Block new editorial board is introduced to you, Alyssa Huisman will close this issue with her beautiful poem "Words Like Forgiveness".

You may lament the warm summer evenings, the birdsong, and lazy afternoons spent by the lakeside. But know that autumn has its charms too; think of snuggly sweaters, hot chocolate, and warm apple pies. Don't be intimidated by Keats' eloquence and romantic musings, but remember his words: "Thou hast thy music too". So hesitate no more and send us your work. "Where are the songs of new submissions? Ay, where are they?" **WB**

When you tread upon a leaf
be careful to remember
the smell of dread nature breathes
as life gasps in September.
Death comes to the world
hidden in fear:
dressed as a snowman,
sombre with cheer.
Gone are the colours from this mind's eye.
Frozen and still - lost ponds of kept ice.
One day, silently,
even time
stops.
Dew.
The first sun.
Another day comes,
and a breath draws air with faded ink
to revive lost cares that dreamt sans wink.
Their pages - damp,
wrinkled, and listless.
A faded stamp
winks at the mistress.
With a candour that disarms,
the still pond shows what is sought.
Unforeseen shadows will harm
if one lives by lies self-wrought.

ANTHROPOPHAGY

CASPER RUDOLPH

I

In the dead of night there ain't none but a few still awake. Inside a nearly lightless room, the gloomy glow of candlelight is reflected on the golden star. Shrouded eyes underneath the rim of a cowboy hat look across the table at the undertaker. The distant howls of a coyote are carried on the wind. The sheriff shivers and lifts the glass of whisky, half-empty now, to his mouth, hastily almost. He takes a swig and tries to stay unaware of the predator-like way in which the undertaker watches his Adam's apple.

The undertaker doesn't say nothing, placing his elbows on the table, intertwining his fingers. The twinkling left eye gazes over the ridges of ten knuckles. A low, monotone hum comes from thin lips barely visible above pale hands.

Quietly, the sheriff utters, "You promised to reveal the whereabouts of..."

The still presence of the haunting man silences him. The table is lightly tapped by his glass; it's as if he's unable to control his own hand. A tick on the window, outside, makes him jump a little. He looks up. Two black, beady eyes, momentarily lit by a moon-ray, meet his own. The creature caws at him.

Slowly he turns back to his shadowy interlocutor. He probably means to sound tough, but his voice is like that of child who's seen somebody get shot up close for the first time: "Tell me what I need to know, mister."

The undertaker wears the reaper's face as he lays bare the remains of yellow teeth.

II

A flame flickers like a ghost in the dark. An imperfect circle of light has become an uncertain

haven from the cold and the night-time prowlers. A wrap fails to keep a trembling body warm. The fugitive stares into the fire, trying to deny the nightmarish howls over those hills and the hiss that may very well be a rattlesnake lurking somewhere in tall grass. He winces as a jolt of pain rises from the cut in his leg, and for a split second he relives how the sheriff's bullet sears his flesh. Once more he opens the cylinder of his five-shot, and lets his eyes linger on the two bullets he's got left. He recalculates his chances, but the only conclusion he sees comes in the shape of a sinister circle, hovering over the waning flame. The number zero. High above him, under the stars, a crow flies by and caws only once before vanishing.

III

Wearing a colorless outfit, the undertaker sits perched on a rock, blending into the blackness. The cool air is a soft blanket on his fragile skin. Blue eyes deep within the sockets are fixed on the unfolding scene below. Two more golden souls. Soon. Patiently, he sits still, waiting his turn.

IV

The sound of leather boots on the prairie ground. The fugitive shifts his eyes, reaching for his weapon under the blanket. A tower emerges from the dark, entering the hallowed circle, and on the intruder's shirt a star shines. A shadow dances on the face beneath the hat, but the fugitive instantly recognizes his opponent.

"I've been looking for you," the sheriff says.

The fugitive remains silent.

"You understand there's only one way this goes

down, don't ya?" As the sheriff speaks, it's as if he's growing larger, taller, becoming an unbreakable wall blocking the only exit. With sweat shining on his forehead, the fugitive envisions himself hanging in front of a few hundred faces, twisting and turning on the rope, struggling to draw his last breath.

"Remove the blanket and show me your hands." Sheriff draws his gun, cocks the hammer, takes aim.

In that instant, the fugitive sees with clarity the only possible, desperate way out. In a blur, he casts off the wrap while simultaneously lifting his firearm. A low explosion booms across the landscape. As the smoke rises from the barrel, the sheriff falls to his back into dust. A red rose grows on his torso.

The fugitive lowers his weapon, barely comprehending the result of his action. While trying to figure it out, he unexpectantly finds himself staring into a deep tunnel from which a bullet comes flying at him.

The sheriff watches how the fugitive collapses. Then the gun slips from his own hand.

V

The campfire has almost burned up. The undertaker stands over the bodies, wringing his hands. Then he reaches into a pocket and the tape measure appears. Quickly, as he can't wait any longer, the undertaker hunkers down beside the sheriff's body, but when his eyes fall on the dead face, his own features turn to starkest white.

Carefully, he looks toward the fugitive, and somewhere in the back of his head something gets stuck between rotating gears. In the remaining light the undertaker sees the truth. On those faces he sees thin lips curling into infamous, greedy smirks and he sees identical scars running across the

bridges of the noses. These ain't the faces they used to wear; it's as though they've lost their uniqueness, and morphed into his very mirror image. The undertaker has trouble breathing, and falls over; he has the taste of bitter medicine in his mouth.

He lies on the ground, reeling and coughing; the flame is reduced to an ember. In the darkness, a flock of crows floats over him. A choir of caws rises in the night. Somewhere a coyote joins in, howling. The tape measure falls out of his weak fist, rolling out over the prairie.

VI

The long shadow has fallen over town once more. In a bleak, nearly empty room, the undertaker finds himself lying in bed, buried in sweat-stained sheets. The room's obscured, save for the moonlight trail running from the curtainless window, across the bed, to the plain wall. The guy's unable to sleep as he keeps on coughing up blood.

The creaking of the door fills the tainted space, followed by the dull sound of leather boots shuffling on the wooden floor. He sees a lean silhouette creeping across the ghastly illuminated wall. A glass vial containing some unholy liquid shimmers in the moonlight. The silhouette comes to a halt on the right side of the bed and looms over him like a drooling, hungry man-eater, extending his thin hand in which he clenches that vial; a nice, healthy dose of malady.

"Open your mouth." The voice nothing but a raspy whisper. "I'll take it from here." The chuckle that follows sends shivers down the sick man's spine.

All the undertaker can do is stare back at the haunting visitor. He sees them glistening glasses sitting on that pointy nose. He sees long white hair reaching small shoulders. He sees thin lips curling into a greedy smirk. When he looks more

closely, he notices the ugly scar sliced across the skull-like face, running from the left cheekbone, across the narrow lips, all the way down to the lower right corner of the crooked chin. At last it dawns on him who he's looking at. The dying man pulls up the sheets, then freezes while his eyes grow wide with fright. The heir to his dark legacy is here.

A bony hand tears the sheets off him and seizes his throat in an unrelenting, ice-cold grip. Gasping for air, he feels another bloody cough rising, but it's pushed back by the poisonous flood pouring into his mouth. Then he hears them coming, hears them cawing, those hellish crows. The last thing he sees is his devilishly grinning successor reaching for the tape-measure. **WB**

URBAN PASSAGE

GARY BECK

Streets of strife
disrupt security,
the last serenity
of city dwellers
dwindling morally,
having lost the thread,
the throbbing pulse
that welds together
diverse strains
huddling tightly
in cramped spaces,
insufficient
to allow rampages
to disrupt practices
that bring us
out of constriction.



GEOFFREY HILL: A HOMAGE

MADELINE POTTER

Sir Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016) has often been hailed as one of the greatest English poets of our times. Still, his own writing remained, to the end, pervaded by the same anxious desire for poetic atonement expressed in his widely-quoted critical essay 'Poetry as Menace and Atonement'. It is from this inescapable and irony-infused anxiety that the mastery of Hill's style arises, with the implications of his play on the etymology of words in his poetry forcing the reader to question the standardisation of language and attune their poetic senses to the bearing of meaning lying beyond cliché. In *Pindarics*, one of his later volumes, Hill wrote:

'I'm spent, signori; think I would rather
crash out than glide on through. Pound
glided through his own idiocy; in old age
fell upon clarities of incoherence'

Despite the once again anxious yet trenchant introspection of these lines, Hill, in old age, was not 'spent', and his verse did not 'glide on through', but retained the same scholarly clarity which has often brought him accusations of elitism. Amidst such accusations, Hill defended the right of art to remain difficult, and insisted that linguistic complexity was linked to intelligence. Following Haecker, he pointed out, in his famous interview with *The Paris Review*, that the gross simplification of language was ultimately the mark of tyranny:

'Haecker argues, with specific reference to the Nazis, that one of the things the tyrant most cunningly engineers is the gross oversimplification of language, because propaganda requires that the minds of the collective respond primitively to slogans of incitement.'

On a different occasion, Hill is known to have said that 'accessibility' is by no means a word to be applied to poetry:

'Accessible is a perfectly good word if applied to supermarket aisles, art galleries, polling stations and public lavatories, but it has no place in discussion of poetry and poetics. Human beings are difficult. We're difficult to ourselves; we're difficult to each other and we are mysteries to ourselves; we are mysteries to each other. One encounters in any ordinary day far more real difficulty than one confronts in the most "intellectual" piece of work. Why is it believed that poetry, prose, painting, music should be less than we are?'

I remember sitting down in a cold room in the Examination Schools in Oxford, listening to Hill's 'Fields of Force' talk, one of his Professor of Poetry addresses, when he said: 'Something, or somewhat, of the burden of this present discussion is nonetheless impinged upon by the title on the posters'. He stopped, and in a sarcastic tone reprised the phrase: 'impinged upon', adding, with perhaps feigned frustration: 'how I wish I could stop acting and sounding like Jeeves!'. Hill's poetry often takes a similar turn, when the soberness of his verse is suddenly heckled by the voice of the archetypal butler character created by P.G. Wodehouse; yet Hill's Jeeves, while deeply funny and playful, is always angry, and always articulating starkly scholarly questions, rendering this voice invariably important. This is, after all, the voice of a poet who wrote 'Unless or until Peer Gynt skitters sled- / drunk through my door, scattering the six cats / from their dishes of

liver and cold cuts, / She shall be the confidante of my need,’ framing the sombre theological question of devotion to the Virgin in humorous terms. Few poets in recent times have tackled theological questions of such depth with the same scholarly acuity as Hill. Perhaps one of his most enduring preoccupations in terms of theology was the doctrine of Original Sin, which he identified as the central precept of his belief in Christianity. Soon after his death on 30th June 2016 – which was, coincidentally, the day his verse translation of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* was published – his wife, poet, librettist, and Church of England priest, Alice Goodman said, on BBC Radio 4’s ‘Last Word’ that ‘he had a very, very strong sense of Original Sin’, adding that he must have been led towards God by a sense of ‘smallness’ of himself.

Hill wrote compellingly of the Midlands, where he was born and grew up, weaving together strands of Anglo-Saxon and contemporary history in *Mercian Hymns*. In *The Orchards of Syon* Hill’s poetry shifts constantly out of and back into an imagined time and space of heavenly perfection, associated with Goldengrove, which he takes from GM Hopkins’ ‘Spring and Fall’, a meditation on the passing of time and its cyclicity. Yet for Hill, the time of Goldengrove – heavenly time – transcends the tedious repeatability of historical time. In fact, as he indicates in section XXIV, in the time of the heavenly Goldengrove, there is no time, and consequently no measure for it: ‘In no time at all / there’s neither duration nor eternity’. It is only in this heavenly spatiotemporal dimension that the ‘knowledge of sensuous intelligence’ could enter ‘into the work’, as he wished it ‘That Man As a Rational Animal Desires the Knowledge Which Is His Perfection’, as the work is restored to prelapsarian fullness. He was decidedly obli-

ous to how timeless his own poetry would be, in that his verse is likely to be read by generations to come. Yet throughout *The Orchards of Syon Hill* reminds us that Goldengrove is not fully apprehensible to us as human beings, and shifts the focus to the brokenness of post-fall human nature, with its fallen passions and emotions. It is almost as if the poetic confidence in the transcendent is brought back into the boundaries of earthly experience by the evil of ‘gravity’s chains’, as Hill defined it in his disputation of the Augustinian concept of *privatio boni*, the idea that evil is not an entity in itself, but rather the absence of good, when he wrote ‘[e]vil is not good’s absence but gravity’s / everlasting bed-rock and its fatal chains’.

The desired and attempted transfiguration of his native Bromsgrove into Goldengrove, for example, is bound to fail, chained down by human nature, reduced to a wishful musing over the nature of belief: ‘I wish greatly to believe: that Bromsgrove was, and is, Goldengrove’.

Finally, to Hill’s memory I address his own words in ‘Parentalia’, with the contention that while *his* book might have sadly closed for *his* time, it shall indeed remain open for generations and generations of avid readers to come:

‘The book is closed for your time; it will not
open again to the slow
round of the psalms, the prophets of righteousness.
But go, as instrumental, of the Lord,
life-bound to his foreknowledge
and in his absence making your return
to the generations, the rosaceae,
the things of earth snagging the things of grace’

Requiescat in pace. **WB**

RENOVATING THE BATHROOM

KEVIN CASEY

It began before we signed the paperwork;
before we committed to buying the house
we knew the old tub surround would have to go,
and the pedestal sink whose drain was collared
with a blossom of verdigris and rust.

Condensation that dripped from porcelain
colluded with copper leaks and wet feet
to weep dampness beneath the vinyl floor,
staining and softening the boards beneath,
revealed when viewed from the cellar below.

And for years we did nothing but delay
and deny, until that spring when you began
spending nights on the sofa, and we sensed that
something desperate needed to be done.

Then the plans came easy, and the choices
we made: the clawfoot tub from the catalog,
the new vanity we stored in the parlor
waiting for the plumbing to be prepared -
though we stopped agreeing about all else,
and our words were like sledges and pry bars
that demolished even civility in the end.

Despite all that damage, the negligence
and wreckage we fashioned within our house,
by the time autumn came and I agreed
to leave, we had rehabilitated
that room, satisfying some misplaced urge
within us both to fix and to make new.

BEHIND THE LENS: CHARLOTTE DIJKSTRA ON THE ART OF CAPTURING LIFE

DAVID KLEINSTEUBER AND LUC DE VRIES

Charlotte Dijkstra is an Amsterdam-based photographer with her own photography company, Charlotte Dijkstra Photography. In this issue, Charlotte shares with Writer's Block her thoughts on what makes a person photogenic, what her different experiences with analog and digital photography have been, and more.

Charlotte, could you give us a short introduction?

I'm 22, and I don't study anymore. I've tried a few different subjects but I just couldn't quite find my niche in any of them. At the moment I'm building a career in photography and film, but trying to get started can be difficult sometimes.

Difficult in what sense?

There's a lot of demand for photography but also a lot of people supplying it, so you really have to make a name for yourself first before you can make any progress.

Right, and you've already started to make a name for yourself by starting your own photography company, Charlotte Dijkstra Photography. How did you get started with that? When did the idea first come up?

At the moment, the company is primarily focused on rowing photography. The idea came into being when I joined Skøll's photography committee. After two rowing matches I realized that I really liked doing photography, so I thought "I'm just gonna do this. I'll see how far I can come". That wasn't exactly appreciated by the chairperson, but I was enjoying myself and I got reasonably successful quite fast.

And after a while people knew that Charlotte was

your go-to person for pictures. Did the demand for your work increase after your first few years in rowing photography?



I mostly get requests from committees and boards, so at the moment I get my clientele from my connections, and not much from outside of my social circle. Yet.

Could you tell us something about the picture we've used for the cover of issue 29? It is a great picture; a very misty mountain landscape. We were really happy with it.

It was in Switzerland. I was on vacation with my family and the weather was just total crap. Normally we would have gone mountain climbing, but we weren't able to because of all the mud streams. Then again, the weather did make for an opportunity to take nice pictures, you know with the clouds and all. So that's how the photo came

into being.

Is that something you often experience? Having your camera or your phone with you and then suddenly seeing something catches your eye? Are you actively looking for moments to capture?

I'm not really looking, but I've always got my analog camera with me when I'm on holiday. I really prefer analog because it makes me contemplate more about the picture when I'm shooting. When I have my digital camera on me, I randomly take pictures and just see what comes out. So I'm always looking at what's happening around me. If there is something that catches my interest, I go for it and really do my best to capture that moment. That being said, I'm not looking through a camera lens 24/7. But if I see something, I shoot it.

What makes you happy or satisfied when taking photos?

I don't really know. It depends on the photos. With regard to rowing pictures, I like people tagging themselves in pictures on Facebook or people saying "What a cool pic!". That aspect of photography is awesome but that's mostly digital photography. Regarding analog photography, I never really show that part to people. It is only a small part of my photographic repertoire because I don't shoot that many analog pictures. In fact, I think that in my life I've shot no more than eight film rolls, which is very little. It is however charming in its own way. It's always quite exciting to see what comes out.

I noticed that your digital photography is more focused on people, while your analog photography mostly consists of still lives and nature sceneries.

That is correct. I find analog photography is very calming, because it pressures me to take the time to look around me and see what is happening.



Only then do I take a picture. I really enjoy just taking my time and seeing what is going on. When doing digital photography however, for instance when taking the rowing pictures at Skøll, I just go for it. I don't overthink the moment or check the camera settings, but I just do it.

Digital photography is a less deliberate art project.

Right. My main goal is to make sure people get great pictures which can be quite difficult if you are trying to fit six teams all together into one frame. So at Skøll I am really doing it for the people. Analog photography on the other hand is really something I do for myself. I must say that I do sometimes share my analog pictures with others, but mostly I just keep them for myself purely because I like them just for the way they are and that's enough for me.

What is it like to make a transition from leisure photography to business photography? Do you think it has settled your enthusiasm or is it like a dream come true?

I was actually a bit concerned that I would lose my

love for photography if the business photography wouldn't work out. Photography is so close to me and I was really afraid that I would lose my passion if my business adventure would turn out to



be a huge disappointment.

You mean that by turning your passion into your work, you end up ruining it?

Exactly. Ruining my love for photography is something that I'm quite scared of. That is the reason why, at the moment, I only take on jobs that don't stand too close to me personally. For instance, I recently did a photo shoot with Enactus which is a non-profit student entrepreneur organization. I also still have my committee duties at Skøll. All these jobs are a lot of fun and I do enjoy making sure that people get a great photo of themselves, but these pictures are not that personal to me. So I am keeping my personal photography separate from my professional work for now. I am thinking of sending my personal pictures to Yellow Korner, which is an online gallery for upcoming photographers. But I'm not sure yet if I want to. I think I will shoot a few more rolls first before I am confident enough to take that step.

In that case, I can imagine that it must have been quite a step to let us use your picture for our cover. Yes, it really was. I remember that, when you asked if I could send more photos, I said, "only

if you remove them from Writer's Block's Google Drive immediately afterwards." [She laughs] However, I'm really trying to push myself to step out of my comfort zone because sometimes you just have to go forward and these are simply the steps you have to take in order to do that.

When are people the most photogenic?

When they are comfortable being photographed – and it can be quite difficult to gain their trust. To be honest, I don't even like being photographed myself so I know how hard it is sometimes to overcome your insecurity or shyness. When taking pictures, I try to be friendly and approachable to make people feel at ease. I also show them the pictures I have taken and give them posing tips. It is important to ask people what they want themselves instead of just ordering them around. Once people feel that they are still in control over how they appear in the picture, they become more relaxed which makes for greater pictures.



Would you say that people generally look better in pictures if they know that they're being photographed, or would you say that their unawareness makes for a better picture?

When people don't know that they are being photographed there is a certain calm present in the picture. But of course calmness isn't always what you want. If you look at the pictures of rowing competitions for instance, there is an interesting contrast between on the one hand third year row-

ers, who have been doing competitions for a while and are quite relaxed, and on the other hand less experienced rowers, who are sitting in the boats with tense shoulders, focusing on getting the first stroke just right. One of the moments I love the most is when people just notice that they are being photographed. It is so beautiful to see a small smile appearing on their faces, just after having spotted the camera, revealing the excitement that they are feeling inside. Those are really the greatest pictures.

Last but not least: Charlotte, this is a question that might be interesting for our readers who have photography ambitions themselves. In the past few years you've gained a lot of experience in photography through Skøll, your own company, and your personal photography. Do you have any tips for beginning photographers?

Just go for it. Just do it. Even if you think you don't have the right equipment or that you don't know anything about it, just go for it. I myself started by just toying around with the automatic settings on the most ridiculous cameras. You might end up

with a hundred photos and only thirty good ones but that's just the beginning. Share them with others online or elsewhere and see what other people think of it. For me, the moment people began liking my pictures was when it started being fun. Actually, some of my first photos ended up in Skøll's yearbook.

Did you already have a decent camera at the time?

I had a Nikon D7000, which is a nice camera. I had no idea what I was doing, though. But 18 photos of mine were in the yearbook, which is quite a lot.

One last thing: does equipment matter?

In my experience it doesn't really matter that much. Sure, one camera has more pixels than the other but you know, those pixels don't really mean anything if the subject of the picture is not appealing. I mean, I like a pixelated picture of a person who's laughing much more than a high definition one of a turd. Sorry for that example [laughs] but what I am trying to say is that the most important part of a picture is what you are capturing. If the image itself is simply nice to look at, the pixels don't really matter. **WB**

At the moment Charlotte is very active and up-and-coming.

If you are interested in seeing more of her wonderful photography, make sure to check out her page 'Charlotte Dijkstra Photography' on Facebook or visit her website www.oypo.nl/charlottedijkstra.



SAFE COCOON

NADIA GERASSIMENKO

Mama, I heard you and papa again today
I couldn't pick up on the words
But you were screaming, he was yelling

Something shattered
Something banged
And you cried

Mama, I haven't heard papa's voice in a while
He used to read to me, his voice soothing me
to sleep
Now all I hear is your sad lullaby

Whatever day
Whatever hour
You cry

Mama, what is that reek? What are you
drinking, too?
What an unusual smell engulfing
It feels so hot all of a sudden
I'm gasping for air

I'm dazed and confused
But you laugh and cry

Mama, what are you swallowing so fast?
It tastes so powdery and bitter
My fragile tummy doesn't agree

I feel so sick
So sleepy
You stop crying

Mama, it's safe and warm in your cocoon
As I fall deeply asleep
Thank you for keeping me nestled

Breathing in and out
First heartbeats and last

We sleep together

MACBETH: IN PRAISE OF OLD AND NEW SHAKESPEARE FILM ADAPTATIONS

VINCENT BAPTIST

When looking at the list of upcoming films, one might easily notice that the premiere of *Assassin's Creed* is fast approaching. That's right, the popular stealth-adventure game series is getting a cinematic derivative that will hit the theaters in January 2017. And although video game adaptations can generally be considered as one of the most awful inventions in film history, there's actually a good chance that *Assassin's Creed* will turn out to be a substantial surprise for both game aficionados and Hollywood skeptics. Why? Mainly because of the film's director, Justin Kurzel, an Aussie who initially unleashed bone-chilling nightmares on the international film world with *Snowtown* (2011). Based on true events, Kurzel's debut was praised by the late American critic Roger Ebert as the most frightening film about a psychopath he'd ever seen.

But how does a filmmaker leap from Australia's gritty serial killer history to Hollywood's latest blockbuster prospects in merely six years? With the help of William Shakespeare, apparently! Kurzel was able to squeeze himself into the American film system by adapting one of the Bard's most famous plays, *Macbeth*. This in itself is already a daring feat, since *Macbeth* has been subject to countless adaptations and interpretations within various domains of performing arts. With regard to cinema, Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015) has to compete with some of film history's most distinguished directors:

Orson Welles, Akira Kurosawa, and Roman Polanski have all made their own unique version of Shakespeare's shortest and bloodiest tragedy, leaving a rather limited space for additional interpretations.

Orson Welles, for example, adapted his *Macbeth* (1948) as a baroque and claustrophobic fever dream. Largely inspired by the German Expressionism of the 1920s, Welles utilizes stark black-and-white photography to create jagged shadows that reflect the fateful mood of the play. The use of authentic Scottish dialects strengthens the almost otherworldly character of the film. Welles takes on the role of Macbeth himself, and uses his bewildered eyes and thunderous voice to create striking parallels between Shakespeare's doomed general and protagonists from his own previous films. The slightly blunt final combat scene is a let-down, though, since it falls a bit out of place in the otherwise hallucinatory cinematic experience.

If you're actually really into medieval sword fights, you might want to check out Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971), which culminates in a good old-fashioned duel between two bumbling harnesses. Nowadays, this film is rather overlooked in Polanski's entire oeuvre. Looking back, however, it becomes apparent that, in its conventional storytelling and medieval castle scenery, this 1970s interpretation

seems to have set the stage for other classically heroic Scottish tales like *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) and *Rob Roy* (Michael Caton-Jones, 1995). Whether that's an honorable achievement is up to you to decide.

The boldest of all *Macbeth* adaptations might well be a film that doesn't incorporate any of Shakespeare's original dialogue, one that completely alters the way in which Macbeth's ruthless dictatorship comes to an end, and that doesn't employ (the characteristic) three but just one witch to establish the tragedy's initial murderous prophecy. Set in feudal Japan, Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) introduces interesting additions to the original story that increase the perverse intrigues of the plot to a maximum level. Together with the heavy use of symbolism and a remarkably minimalist mise-en-scène, this makes *Throne of Blood* an essential adaptation to watch.

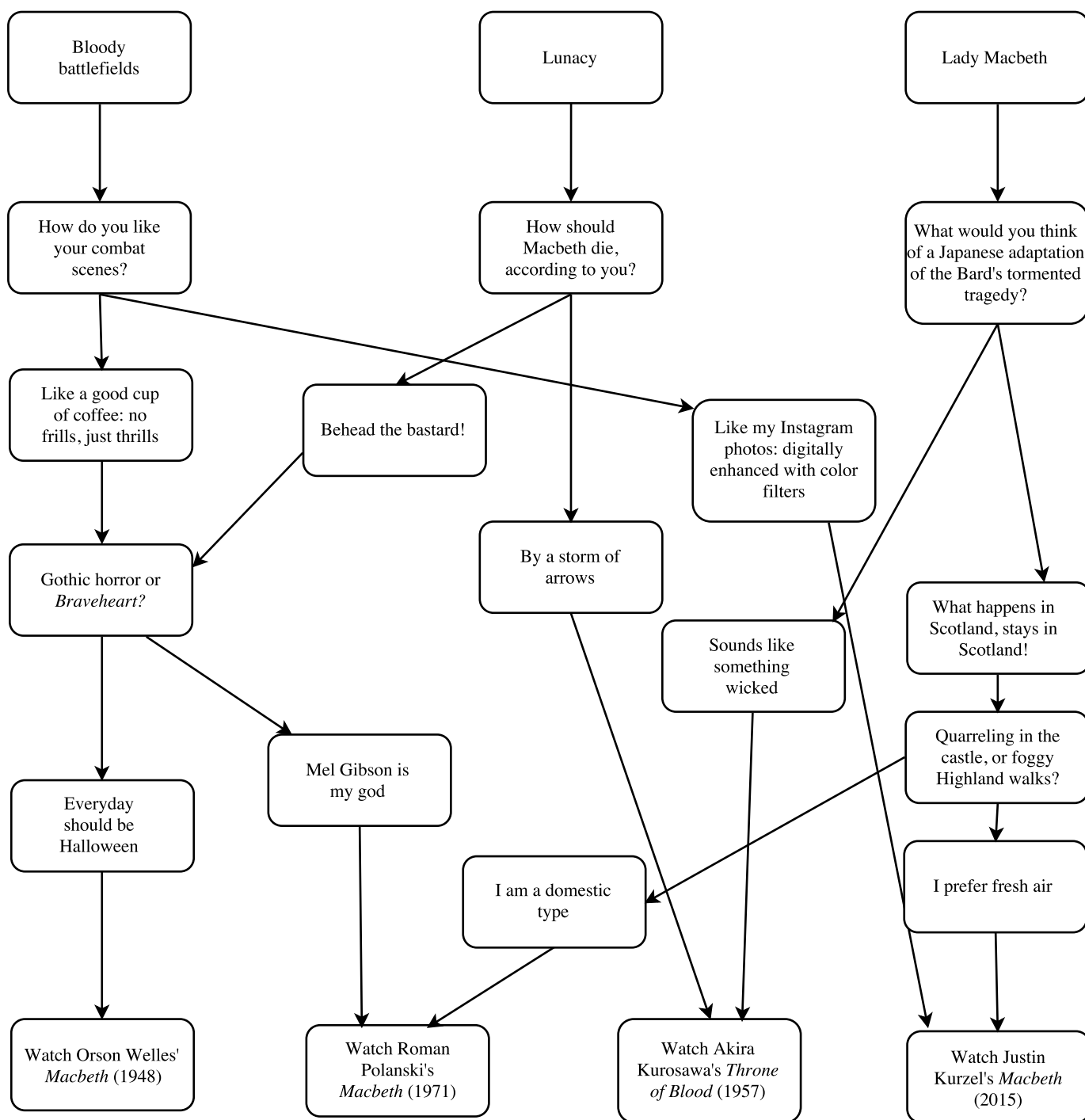
How, then, could Kurzel's screen adaptation be of any significance to this cinematic heritage of valuable *Macbeth* films? The rookie director cunningly strengthens the tragedy's continued relevance by inserting brief but smart references to various other movies that deal with the struggle for power and status: think *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), *Excalibur* (John Boorman, 1981) and *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas

Anderson, 2007), for example. Kurzel also further explores the destructive motivations of the main characters: greedy lust, religious fanaticism, and parental grief make up Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's psyche, transforming their castle into an eerie prison.

If that doesn't arouse your curiosity yet, I can also mention that in Kurzel's terrific reinterpretation, the Macbeth couple is being portrayed by Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard. So it's no coincidence that this mystifying pair also constitutes the lead characters in the forthcoming *Assassin's Creed*. "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes"! **WB**

WHICH MACBETH FILM SUITS YOU THE MOST? TAKE THE TEST!

What do you think of first when you think about *Macbeth*?



WORDS LIKE FORGIVENESS

ALYSSA HUISMAN

can you see me there, by the side of the road, not being, not moving?
i breathe in absence; you only touch a ghost.

imagine taking your thoughts and giving them away -
you will still be left with these hands. dear tenderness, please
come and find me. i've been waiting for you.

i had to invent all these whispers by myself. the way they taste,
the way they shiver. i let him lay his head on my chest, and
there is some quiet prayer - like the way he says my name, the way
he kissed my shoulder. tell me we're safe again. tell me it's alright.

we haven't been forgiven,
i think. all of us, despite the leaves
and the stars and
the answers
but never the right questions

this is the periphery of
stories,
we're alive, and we don't always
save a seat for heroes.

this is the place where something starts to begin. you could sink
down deeply, so we wait, so here we are still, and i don't know how
to fight. the space next to me is empty, but the absence is holy,
setting fire to this forgiveness - i hear the rain, your breath
goes through my veins

can you give me something to warm my hands
will that save me
instead?

MEET THE NEW BOARD

ROOS GRAVEMAKER AND PAUL HOFMA



From left to right: Rachel Aisa-Bonoko, Elise van der Linde, David Kleinsteuber, Anna de Boer, Roos Gravemaker, Sophie van Hellenberg Hubar, Tom van Veenendaal, Paul Hofma, and Luc de Vries

You may recognize **Rachel Aisa-Bonoko** from last year's board. She was one of our final editors last year and, in addition to her general editing tasks, she will this year be Writer's Block's secretary and will respond to all of your emails. Rachel is a third-year English student and art fanatic. Because she lived in Panama for a couple of years, her interest lies with South American literature, specifically Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende, and Pablo Neruda.

Elise van der Linde flew all the way from Aruba to join our board this year! No, just kidding, she is a third-year English student as well, and will be responsible for the magazines' graphic design

and keeping you in the loop of everything that is happening with Writer's Block via social media. Her true skill, however, is her all-seeing eye which she will use to keep you up with your future in her frequent horoscopes.

David Kleinsteuber is another familiar face. Our friendly burrito-loving philosopher will keep his position as treasurer this year, bringing us another year of well-managed finances and meandering musings. He describes himself as a "sentimental hippy", but he has a sharp eye and even a sharper pen, which will come in handy for his tasks as final website editor.

Our social-media butterfly, **Anna de Boer**, will gather your likes and shares on our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. She is a vivid librocubicularist (person who likes to read in bed – we had to look it up too) and loves to roam around Waterstones in search of the newest Young Adult gem. In her articles she will bring you anything varying from existential self-help articles to monthly favourites, to cheesy lyrics and book reviews.

Sophie van Hellenberg Hubar is willing to spend two brave hours in the horror that is Dutch public transport to join us for Writer's Block and to get her Master's degree in Editing at the University of Amsterdam. She will be hard at work to keep the website up to date and to bring you your weekly joy with posting our website articles. She named her cat after Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennet and is very passionate about food.

Tom van Veenendaal is Writer's Block resident wandering literary soul. By day he is always on the road for literary and social events, often visited, he admits, under false pretenses. By night he transforms into an Oscar Wilde-like dandy reading Norman Mailer's *Mind of an Outlaw* and Sir Geoffrey Hill under the joy of Górecki's Third Symphony. At Writer's Block he will channel his meticulous tendencies by keeping the minutes and, being the final editor, he will make sure no typos slip into our magazine issues.

Luc de Vries has traded his comfortable Nijmegen for an 8.5 square meter apartment in Amsterdam which are for 80% filled with books and healthy skepticism. The rest is taken up by his can-do attitude. Next to reading and writing, he loves film and music. Being used to crammed spaces, he is, as our final editor, able to squash even the smallest errors from essays, poems, articles, and short stories.

Having introduced the editorial board, we have arrived at the Editors-in-Chief, yours truly, **Paul Hofma** and **Roos Gravemaker**. After a year of travelling around the world, Paul has returned to Amsterdam where he is studying for his Master's degree in Physics. As the resident science-guy, he likes making the natural sciences accessible for a broad audience in his articles. Dreaming of working for a publishing company and having some low-key journalistic ambitions, Roos is doing her Literary Studies Master and likes to sometimes take a break from composing academic essays through writing articles for Writer's Block.

We are really looking forward to working with this team of ambitious and talented people. We hope that we will continue the legacy of dedication and love that have been put into the quality magazines that Writer's Block has been publishing over the last years. **WB**

