

Issue XXIII

ENgLIST

November 2024

The English Students'
Newspaper


UNIVERSITY
OF LJUBLJANA

FF
Faculty
of Arts



ENgLIST: The English Students' Newspaper

Issue XXIII, November 2024

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Sal Lavrenčič

PROOFREADER-IN-CHIEF: Iza Stres

EDITORS: Sal Lavrenčič, Iza Stres, Nadica Trajkova, Zarja Ljubič, Petruša Golja, Maiken Zupančič Danko, Laura Bastič

DESIGN: Iza Stres

COVER ART: Iza Stres

the.englishlist@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/ENgLIST

https://www.instagram.com/the_englishlist/

englishlist.splet.arnes.si

PRINTED BY: Prima IP d.o.o., 50 copies, Ljubljana, November 2024

FUNDING: ŠOFF

Price: free

ISSN (print): 2670-4889

ISSN (online): 2670-4897

DISCLAIMER

The statements and opinions contained in this issue of ENgLIST are solely those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of ENgLIST's Editorial Team. We are not affiliated with either right- or left-wing doctrines and do not censor or omit material if it only contradicts with the prevailing ideology, but do intervene in cases of hate speech, direct assault or sheer vilification. ENgLIST also does not assume any responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, relevance or quality of the information provided in this issue. By submitting their pieces for publication in this journal, authors confirm that their submissions are their own work, that they have clearly referenced/listed all sources as appropriate and that their works are therefore not results of plagiarism.

The authors are free to use any dialect of English to their liking as long as they are consistent in its use. They also get the final say in matters concerning wording, grammar, language and content.

Content warnings for issue XXIII: death, sexual themes, harassment, cursing, suicide

EDITORIAL

Dear reader!

Instead of the early days of summer, we come to you in the rainy cold of autumn. I have to say, this year's edition is a bit like the season – quite a few of the authors have shown a preference for the darker themes – but just as the sun still breaks through the clouds, the submissions we've included have a lot of heart and humour. Aside from that, this year was pretty diverse, from Hana Stankovič's stream-of-consciousness long piece to the experimental writing of Janez Nemec, the nostalgic sort of love for your hometown of Ana Blažič and Laura Bastič to the gothic atmosphere in Nadica Trajkova's "The Third Eye". There's something in here for everyone!

I would like to thank our team of editors, especially Nadica and Iza, our indispensable proofreader-in-chief, who have worked hard to bring this year's edition of ENgLIST to life. A big thank you also goes to every single person who sent us their valued stories, poems and essays.

To be able to express yourself in the literary form and share your words with the world is something that takes a lot of bravery and dedication, but also something that makes the world brighter and more beautiful. ENgLIST is here for this reason precisely. I invite you all to lose yourself in the pages and find something that resonates with you – whatever form it may take.

Sal Lavrenčič

Table of Contents

PROSE FICTION	1
THANK YOU FOR THE GOOD TIMES	1
ASPHYXIS.....	3
DOLOROUS	11
A VERY PUBLIC SUICIDE.....	16
A SHINING METAL BAT	18
THIRD EYE	19
TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN	23
POETRY	28
LANGUAGE IN USE POEMS	28
1. AGED HANDS.....	28
2. DEAR FRIEND.....	28
3. ANDREJ'S PLOT	28
GREEN	29
TRBOVLJE	29
LUCY.....	30
VALHALLA.....	30
FLOWERY REST.....	31
DESPOT.....	32
EXISTENCE IS PAIN.....	32
EGGSHELLS.....	32
FINLANDISATION	32
TELL ME.....	33
ENOUGH OF THIS.....	33
GIANTS	34
THE WOMAN UNDER THE LEATHER	34
MISCELLANEOUS	35
JOKER OUT SUBS: TRANSLATING A BAND	35

PROSE FICTION

Thank You for the Good Times

Ana Blažič

The eerie silence of an overcast Sunday slowly crept into my childhood bedroom, laying its head gently next to mine and sliding its cold discomfort under the covers. ‘Time to wake up.’

It always seems the hardest part of the weekend, waking up on a Sunday morning. The silent threat of the workweek looms ahead, and the unfulfilled religious responsibilities preserved from our childhood wait to cause unease. And yet we take it as it is, with acceptance and a smidge of giving in.

I rise slowly from the warm covers and the world spins slightly. ‘Okay. First the left foot, then the right.’ A deep breath.

The floor is cold, making the muscles in my feet tense up; ‘Go on, it’s pointless if you don’t get up now’. So I stand up. ‘It’s cold outside, so, long sleeves. It’s probably too cold for shorts as well.’ I stare into the open drawer and choose the clothes, squishing the slippery plastic fabric in my hand to gauge its thickness. On my way to the bathroom, I intentionally turn away from the kitchen; I’ll eat later. There are more important things to do now, so I hurry.

Staring at my shoes in the hallway, I wonder about yesterday’s conversation and tears start to well up in my eyes.

‘No time for that now.’ Similar to other compulsions, this statement also haunts my everyday; a mantra to live by. No time, no time, no... time.

I step out, distraught before 9 in the morning, and my feet are heavy. ‘Get moving; left foot first, then the right.’ The air seems too viscous, even for the end of the week, making it hard to breathe. I tread on. The run always starts unnaturally, no force propelling my feet forward except the threat of getting stuck in that moment. This prevents me from stopping at the top of the hill, so I adjust my tempo.

A metronome of footsteps synchronized with my heartbeat, the inevitable discomfort of moving forward. Ever since my headaches started, I have been convinced that I process my thoughts better when moving; a rather bold delusion. It wasn’t a way of thinking, I ran to shut it all off. Not having to deal with one’s own mind is a luxury.

I reach the riverbank.

The air thins out and the fresh cold rising from the water strikes my face, and I know the river is there just for me. Tearing into the hilly landscape like an endless gaping wound, it seems magical; green water washing the town’s sins away for centuries, and now washing away mine. I stop, my mind filled with the calm murmur of the stream.

The words of yesterday’s talk creep back in, ‘It’s okay, you just need more time to figure it out,’ the meaningless consolation echoing in my head. My chest tightens; time to move on. I pick up the pace and struggle to keep up with the river. ‘Focus on your movement.’ Focus. Focus. Opening my shoulders, I try to keep the drive of my elbows even. Sweaty palms. ‘Concentrate on keeping your core fixed, engage yourself entirely.’ The echo disappears, replaced by a burning sensation in my thighs. I reach the square and veer right

onto a street with the café. My legs demand a rest. My soul does too, and only certain places can provide it.

My hometown is full of calm spaces that offer peace at the low cost of reasonably priced coffee, but this particular small, hole-in-the-wall café is my favourite. The sole companion on my journey through Hell.

Every Sunday it serves as the town's meeting place, each week the same faces cohabit in it for an hour. I never truly understood the desire for these shared experiences. Groups of different individuals forcing shared moments, forcing sameness, to take part in the human experience. It hadn't made sense until it became routine – seeing people whose paths I never crossed nod to greet me, not knowing anybody, yet still everyone asking each other, "How do you do?" A friendship unknowable if not experienced.

I go there daily now. Different guests come and somehow all feel known to me, like acquaintances one hasn't met yet but is nevertheless familiar with. When I visit, it is usually to write, but when the air feels heavy, this is the only place where I can think. This is my storm shelter.

I walk to the end of the street. Eerie silence coming from the corner spreads like a plague throughout my body. I reach the coffee place; the door is closed and the windows are dark. A sign stares back at me. It seems impossible: 'Closed. Thank you for six years of trust and good times!'

Asphyxis

Hana Stankovič

I ask: what can be learned in over forty minutes or so? I was in the grossly large tube with guts and mixed-in pebbles – because I wanted to become the thing in the grinder chewing itself to death- I went under highway passes and crawled along tracks looking for the pale blue trace of the cherubim, the broad-backed and kind of lumbering thing – thinking I saw it in the distance – if I slide out of focus long enough, there he is crawling just over the doorway. But the door is being perpetually latched and unlatched, not even preserving the integrity of its spatial body – the door mirthless and the cherubim just suave enough so that he can flatten himself somehow horizontally, becoming as thin as a sheet of paper and dragging himself over the edges of every falsely visible thing –

He goes like he's always gone, a mirage sliding through the gap actually behind the hinges. So the latching and unlatching of the hinges has nothing to do with his passage at all – he's smart, and I was always jealous – if the distance between us was large enough I looked at him through lensless glasses becoming conniving and stern – admitting his acrobatics, looking for his flattened back, him sheet of paper and me what, the vehicle running after? In my jealousy I was always looking for somewhere to dislodge myself.

I'm not sure what purpose I have for myself in the beginning. That is why I don't ever want to begin with myself. But as it goes I'm very narcissistic – I have to poke my head through every nook and cranny before anything else in my head has a chance to grow – then I playfully assume the role of the receptionist. I have my dream of sitting behind desks and endlessly shuffling papers – greeting desultory passengers that just happen to show up maybe having seen the sign outside, maybe by word of mouth – in all likelihood by accident – doesn't matter because I greet my guests primely, I throw them in the bureaucratic apparatus right away – and they squeal with delight at being frazzled and ingested alive –

I slobber after the guests going too far because they present me with splendid imagery. I am the predator in the lobby scheduling my 12 A. M. meal. They look at me first thinking I'm the ambivalent neutral – in fact I'm the appendage of the Big Bad Thing – I'm just a servant in some weird hell, launching off the ground and writhing in my ambition contorted – I who wasn't meant to be flying anyway, I who only wanted to depersonalize myself – a volcano going off behind my back and in the distance the whole of the valley alight – I flip a page in the ledger and call forth the next guest.

The sky is overcast and gray. It is eternally day here, and the sky will never fix itself. I loosen my cap which is fastened round my chin because it was beginning to suffocate me – I love my red and yellow receptionist uniform because it is the ironed out measure of power I have always been deprived of in my life – not loose, not slack, but arbitrary and precise. This way I can effectively categorize: I suck the pleasure out of the ordering of things.

People shuffle in the line that winds from my desk and disappears behind a bend in the rocky precipice. Eternally they have to cough because of all of the smog that rises everywhere in swathes. With every eruption a new layer of ash settles over the whole picture – the path steep with no railing to clutch, cutting through the flesh of the mountain like a loose vein encased in pitfall precipice – every once in a while little avalanche spurts of rocks and debris tumble down the sheer cliffs, from somewhere up above where the peaks wrapped in black mist aren't sleeping – we're neither close to the sky nor in sight of the ground, lodged somewhere in the unimaginability of the exact middle –

I am ambivalent in the insane fiery ambition which is burning me alive. And it is not at all selfish – it is the ambition to exit life through life. I'm shallow and narrow minded, and I'm looking at myself from behind the desk with the gaze of a beast. A victim of my own exploding and burning. The newest guest looks at me smirking in apparent challenge as she comes to a stop in front of me contrapposto with her hip cocked. "Is your ambivalence good or bad?"

"It's neither," I answer, pulling from a hook in the rock another key. I press a button on a machine that whirs and prints out a ticket, all the while a mechanical buzzing hovers in the air. A woman with a smart haircut and burgundy velvet purse leaning on the desk. Asking, waiting with a silent gaze.

I was also leaning on the desk all the time. I look and don't even say anything. I see when she realizes: that I'm just the rotten appendage sprouted from the Big Bad Thing. But I am also just the sum of myself always, and everything connected to the germinal also contains the heart of the disease. I am content because my brain is symptomatic. I see her illusion disperse in a flash. I hand her her key and ticket and she disappears past my desk down the pitted path.

Suspicious path, surrounded by these fun and singing rocks and neon signs pointing in the direction of the valley – some song in the distance cursed and ringing out – I guess there have to be some carnival grounds somewhere in the vast, vast distance, and I wonder with pleasure why this woman is willing to walk all the way there – just to reach that little bit of fun, just for that dissolute piece of a crumble – though I don't know what's really there – that's how she unknowingly ladles out equal measures of power in every interaction she has, that's how she, clueless newcomer, tricked with her arrival both me and her, superimposing upon us her system by virtue of her presence –

At first glance I don't seem hostile, I'm just infinitely powerful in an indefinite way. Not powerful with strength or the means to govern but powerful in the blooming explosion I made – in the lushness of self-torture driving myself to shrivel and starve and burn to death all the while I while away looking on and looking up, ambivalent and also bored, that is the sum of my power which is also the sum of the whole world – the world which is simultaneously narrow and wide, not here but everywhere, the world which I exclusively am –

The crisp clicking of her heels echoes off the mountain walls and slowly dies down as if it were being smothered. The path roughed up but her gait was steady. This is like going to the store or something for her. I wonder what other guests will come. She has understood me, and thus consumed me and became bigger than me. Something joyful and brisk flashes in my eyes.

Suddenly it starts to snow, and I find myself under a streetlight in the middle of my curiosity – electric snowfall brittle and soft, and me catching it with my curious eyeballs opened wide – swollen lidless lips mutely ajar – I'm afraid of blinking, I'm afraid of missing even a second of this. If someone looked upon me truly, someone really totally looked at me, took me in with serious scrutiny – then they'd see that I have no eyes, or that rather my eyes are pitch black and empty – because they've evolved to detect the labdanum, styrax, kumquat and sorrel in the Master flavor of things – over the centuries I managed to sniff this out in the interstitial –

It took centuries but I learned that old women pee, I heard her not long ago in the cubicle next to mine, of course I went to pee, not shit, as can be understood, I sauntered into

the rank bathroom seeing the dense budding and spouting of vegetal life – over the edge of the porcelain tile turquoise sex and jungle brush – little shoots growing and fecundating under the toilet seats, someone, maybe ten thousand people commencing to open and close the spigots in the wash basins at the same time – me listening to the slow hunching and creaking of the laurel and the pumpkin plant, seeing the growth of the Japanese maple, the titter of the great American sycamore tree- the scuttling of the paramecium over the hardened wall and his quiet snigger, every day on the petri dish going to war-

The pandemonium in the wash-basins swells and I blink my eyes ten times, strumming with fingers the strands of mulch and peat runnels that trickled lipping down the styrofoam cubicle walls – I'm crouching in the corner scratching to somehow escape the bamboo shoots and everything that wants to grow through me poking me in the back – I am annoyed with the plant because of its innate misunderstanding – if the plant had black circular sunglasses it would rub on the plastic bridge and carelessly snap the temples in half, pushing the temples past burned skin because its forehead is too fat but all the while smirking – all the while sleazy and wanting to exploit the way we understand appearance and dress –

I think the plant is evil because it is pure system and mapped-out apparatus. Meanwhile I am pure will stored in the node and the synapse of the branching of the secret tree. And what do the animals want? The animals are my instinct – I watch the beetle trundle and trawl through the freshly upturned earth. I'm giving it all space, I give the beetle its wet space. I see it hesitate. So where do I get off? If I get off at one point will I see the truth of the whole or the singular thing?

And if the whole contains the particular then what is the purpose of me in this thing? The purpose of me is to get trapped in the womb again – I'm looking at the stars but the stars are in the cellular – when I enter my blood I enter the endless cosmos of space. This is now, no? Instead of intensifying nicely things are beginning to settle – and I don't have the power to make them burn again – I've been sedated but by who? And must I go against this? I am the creator and as such the breaker of rules.

I went – looking for something abnormal – I found something abnormal and then it slipped from my grasp. So what do I do like this? I've been left with the worst – the knowledge of the abnormal but none of its living soul – I hear the shrill grinding of the plant as the sound of two tectonic plates scraping against each other in huge enormous metal peat – one of the plates in the end giving, bending and nimbus of rust flaking off – what I am hearing is the growing of the plant seedling, a sprouting of the actual tectonic plate deep beneath the surface of the Earth. We have metal in our blood precisely because we grew up on this planet, and the tectonic plate wanted to fertilize itself in metal-sea –

I give the plant a chance to explain but the little shoot has tricked me and vanished. My torso stretches and expands. With elongated torso I am now able to climb onto the next shelf, I escape the previous one since there's nothing left there to consume – though my legs got gnawed at or simply rotted – I am left hanging halfway off one shelf of the wooden wardrobe, pulling myself incapacitated with only the strength of my arms and my super-long torso sling – and bacteria entering through my belly button because I forgot to bring a longer shirt, I'd flick that off but I'm preoccupied clutching for my life at the upper shelf and its supposed Next Interest – directly above the lower one, I have no leverage to lift myself –

On the upper shelf I am coy because I forgot to tell myself something: smirking, I enter the ruthless cave. As it opened up in front of me I hoped the cave would be noxious and interesting, but now the poison in the air doesn't strike me as scary at all – I'm sad, because I wanted the fear of the gerbil in the molecular stroke – the gentle fluttering of the

sick cell? Her so small and blown away, me watching her disperse in the ether. She relaxes my muscles with her going away.

I was much worse than the cell because I lived insincerely. The cell was either too sick or too small, but I was too full of my wish for illness – I reached inside my illness and found a hollowed-out shell. I, from some fabric or human cloth, I, meaning to arrange some glass flutes etc. on the tabletop because I was opening a bar and wanted a tabletop just like this in the darkness – I was sighing dismally behind the lugubrious bar. Because this already happened to me and because I already overtook myself in the future, my skin sagging and my cheek dragged down by the weight of my enormous skin – scratch scratch scratch, someone gurgling at the door. I get up and prepare to greet the first of the arriving guests.

I previously had pulsing cities in the heat of which I didn't even know I was existing. In the cobblestone vomit I was finally brainless – it was time to find some purpose for myself – I was strung along as it were, towards myself, somehow well-wishing, but I was wishing something bad for my illness and myself – I was licking my lips with that wonderful self-sabotage in which I invited everyone to the grand opening of my bar, in the center of the medieval city, my friends' faces longitudinal and grim –

Their, and there are more and more people here, gazes melting into one telepathic totemistic parasymphonic look – all, maybe everyone, nearsighted and gaunt – finally my senses retarded, the gaze of a tired old horse somehow puzzling me, still seeping with life, somehow enigmatic and hermetic, wishing I would understand Him, I cock one brow in misinterpreted quizzical look – I don't know these people at all, and I want their attention on myself now – I want their attention for confirmation of something embarrassing in me. I'm squirming inside though outside I'm cool. I am the thing that appeared here some time ago.

I wander at some woman and her red-haired gaze, her jerky cigarette movement aseptic and intertwined – she's settling in the meanwhile her ass on the lip of the ashtray – the ash crumbling and scudding in the calcified light. Either on the porch or in the barroom inside. That bar is dripping rain – I invited my friends for a tired drink here because I liked the hardened moonlight drops. They were my chronic secret – that I was secretly advanced and debonair, and that I had rain like this which was mystic – rain is somehow inside now, and we are outside in the night on the street.

I also live on the barstool: I proudly present a series of neon epileptic bottles of drink. My drinks are blue and timid, though shooting with sharpened gaze when you reach out to grapple with their bitter taste – you want with tongue their contents, the contents want you back – that is their abashed response –

That's how they smirk and present themselves, slumped and suave in the still-life dance of night. In reality, the contents want to lacerate and sear. In reality the contents want to deglutinate you, those bottles wrapped in dust and cobweb droops – I brush aside the droops and pour myself a drink, automatic. I'm my own boss and hostess, on the rocks. My uniform brutal and clean. It'll be day soon, and it'll stop raining. I listen to the chatter trickling in from the street.

She takes me by surprise, happily sidling up to the counter. Her green tropical dress and blue shirt. She walks into the frame self-consciously, or at least that's what I think, that's what I think as she walks around, lackadaisically looking at my barroom – as if it were a museum exhibit on display – a second later she's springing to life. A youthful dance, a twirling of the thousand underskirts. Silk and chiffon getting tangled in her legs.

The green dress rises as if it were air. And her arms, two scraggly matchsticks, her torso disproportionate and askew – her ribcage too big for her body – she breaks up her dance, quick and self-contained. Spontaneous and unrestrained, not too much and not too little because it's exactly what it promised to be – what she decided in this exact moment –

She pulls back to check the exhibit, this time in a different light and with differently configured eyes. I'm alarmed and annoyed because there aren't even any different lights in this bar. There's only my precious acidic: the blue throb I made up vulnerable in my dream. But she doesn't care about my peril. With that twirl she dances childish and elegant again. She's completely insane and life-driven, and flaunting her freedom with her billowing shirt – the light a shrine above her, and she doesn't care about the light – only about her dance and looking in the mirror –

This is her recess. This is her lethargy, her inanition, but as in all inanition she's consumed too much of herself – looking at me now bent of the floor with her lips puckered, her legs crooked, her knees tucked underneath her glutes – she's so full, she's so full she's almost retching. She thanks me in that stupid sleepy wordless way. Sated and jaded and bloated and full. For her, the world slows down, having suckled on the sweet and throbbing balsam of whatever it was that she wanted. My wish for the brilliant way her stomach swells.

Yes, I want that bit of dress that covers her ballooning bowels – I want that which is like the gentle blanket of rain – a fraction of the dress hugs her, a fraction of it bothering me beyond words – I don't have and will never have that dress, no, not that tropical pattern – where the hell did she get that – that's not something you can buy, she things and I hear – that's something so personally cursed –

All of my clothes are personal but none of them cursed – not caught up in themselves, not trying to be clothes within clothes with enough enterprise – and looking at themselves backwards and inside-out from the seams outwards, I don't have clothes with depth like that – I think the dress sewed itself directly on her life? And she wanted it? Or did her life give birth to that dress? I scratch my legs, suddenly discomfited and aware. Suddenly I am reduced to the itch that bothers me.

Outside, a pickup truck backs out of a driveway beeping. The woman stands up and advances towards me with calculated, courtly steps. She shoots me this halfway smirk; in return, I cock my head to the side. Together we exit the room.

Outside she quickly overtakes me. Together we walk down a hallway, the one it has taken me ten years to traverse. She suddenly stops, regarding me with that all-knowing smirk. Beyond her and past the bend in the hallway a deadened river canal – an inexorable marsh – and beyond the still water a wild garden on a river island I have never up till now been able to reach. I could never get past the dead river –

With my back to the island I signal to her that I can't go on. "Don't you want to get on the river island?"

"But why are you asking me this?"

"I want to push my face in the fresh water."

I look at the dead brown water, which is not fresh, and get excited. "You're not lying. Actually, you're absolutely right."

We fall into the river canal in unison and face-first. The brown water is tepid but the surprise of it is icy cold. But I don't smell anything because I'm in the water. In the water there are water bugs, and I think about the water gliders.

She stills next to me, relaxing her tensed neck and rolling around on her back like a manatee – finally stilling in the depression of a shallow shelf, moonlight-daylight streaming down and washing over her face – raining down from the tree-tops which are now our mammalian cradle – in this primordial relaxation her hair finally isn't getting tangled in her face. She herself formless and beast-like, and me observing the bionic water glider dance –

Upturned and with their feet to the surface the water gliders dance swaying and insane – that rickety dance is the fulfillment of everything I could never conceive, of the piece of life that we couldn't conceive together – me and her – the music they dance to something from my memory and something I detest my brain for remembering so insidiously – I didn't want to remember and just because I heard it against my will that doesn't mean that it has to be stuck there forever –

The river is letting us be still but the river itself is purple, yellow, red, green powder. And in this luscious, living H₂O river I look around astonished with wide eyes. My head out of the water, my wet and plastered hair. I wipe my unctuous brow and realize I need my face wash gel immediately. God, I had the flash of that vision for a second – I almost had it in my grasp –

I tear myself away from our awful death. The woman gone, and the river nonexistent. I hunch and sag because I am suddenly neurotic and rapt. I want rose and various stone petals, I want mortar and pestle and secret potion brewing on the windowsill at night. My mask cool, my true self trim and fatuous. I'm falsely crossing every boundary that ever existed on Earth.

Earth is where magma swells, and where the caustic cold cleanses. Lurching and snarling I saw heave past those eternal wanderers of the mausoleum of night- those belching crooks frolicking with no fingers trying to drink coffee setting down on tabletops their cardboard cups – pouring double-shot espressos in and scooping the scalding coffee out with their blunt finger-stumps – digging through the cups like twitching moles, licking themselves clean and hoping for the last dregs of the Holy Sustenance of Life-

I lift gently from the pool of nectar I have been sinking into for a while. Because I was laying back and down in that thing that was already curdling – stirring with chopsticks acidic kimchi cubes all lithe – in the great sucking-tube between the vent and the gasoline table- infusing with the vigor of indifference those blinking swathes of fools who were going spasmodic with dance on the brink of crucifixion in the apex of the Machine- I comb the kiss-air with my comb caress. I lay down on the floor of the dream, waiting.

I move through life with extreme precision. I don't think I just pray, I heave with the whole of my being the size of the massive prayer. I go, I look, I forget to get vulgar, attaching my lips to that full and transparent vein on the other end of which the gismo pumping wine-pumping lifeful blooming wine, me, my curling cyst and head of hair. I greet the calm that settles over all of this, settling over me and my cigarette butt end. I, the poison sitting on the tip-end ash. I slide through life on castors.

Something went wrong in the lighting of this cigarette. I feed the pigeon two of my medicine shots. Two shots to the pigeon then tossing back another dose myself, absentminded celebration with medicine in the house, having so transpired that little 0.2 ml disposable syringes all over my drawer clatter choreographic – rolling back and forth – I

want to gorge myself on medicine, the one syringe constantly clogged with scum and yogurt-stench, rancid just after a few days and so corpulent that I get convulsive trying to smell – yes, because I force myself to smell this for no reason, because that liquid is pale and epicene –

I rove phosphorescent eyes around; I'm shooting a purple beam. Yes I am flying, my flight is squirts of toothpaste and papier-mache. In trying to establish dialogue with the asscrack of metaphysics I, too, got tangled in its disgusting hair – with crumbs and stale revolting puree here and there matted – I, too, sitting on a cliff edge puffing on a wood pipe, and listening to music and staring at the sea- I, too, was in Ancient Greece where they strummed songs on their weak instruments- I don't think I happened, I think someone rubbed their hands and I accidentally fell out. I was always swimming with two yellow-bellied sliders in the aquarium of the underdeveloped and stunted dream-

I inch crablike along the edge of a slab of granite; I suckle my claws and sit on the stoop in front of the cathedral of death. All the while my grin is not wilting, the grin not wilting and drilling through my chest a tunnel of open-galaxied fear – and down there in that black depth, my soul curled-up on a bamboo mat, sleeping –

Except my soul was bigger than me, and knew how to make itself more comfortable – I emerged out of the sum of all of those bus stations, basements, stadiums and castle walls – at being informed I was being prepared downstairs I waggled my human eyes – being informed they're cooking me, they're getting ready to very humanely put me down – they are fixing something up – I answer in a very clear & loud & magnanimous, booming voice – that I knew that already – the new season is upon me, and I tremble and shake in fear –

I inhabit the chasmic cracks of my body, I burrow and penetrate everything down to the last pore — I have no address and I have no telephone number, I am putting myself up on strings and I'm okay with whatever they will do to my body — my hate for the world such that I will gladly thank and accept when they hand me back with a half-bitten-off apology — I will turn the fuliginous mycelia of my body into my home and meekly smile —

I feel a cramp in my stomach: the story is melting me down. No, not in my wings, but in the lining of my stomach. I've put it through too much. I retch everything in a single flash. I made my mistake in considering my diet delicately – every day for me was a useless menu of fine milk-breads – tearing off chunks so piecemeal and slow, and seeping them in milk and slurping from a straw this sacred but horrible porridge – I ate the hunk of bread that's sweeter than life –

No, that's too disgusting. I've gone too far. The bread will be dry and puffy and will taste of powdered milk. I land on a grassy promontory cradling my newly-wounded guts. The grass looks much worse up close than it did from afar when I was flying over it: there are gaps between all the individual billows.

I unwrap my milk-bread from the crumpled tin foil and realise with horror that there are various berries mixed in the dough. With the state of my stomach the berries will kill me. I pick them out one by one and pile them in a hill by my leg before I begin eating. I don't have another flight in me.

In the distance, the sound of traffic from a busy road. I'm not far: I'm only a few inches away from the breathing. I can smell the sweet swell of my breath, feel on my skin the inhale of the exhale, further beneath that, the billowing ridge of my being– I am the morsel of the brain rising, I am the thing breaking through the surface of that bottomless

primordial lake. Sat in the garden that no one ever tends to but is somehow always blooming. I look up and observe the boxy machine positioned in a little niche just beneath the ceiling of my room. Its quiet rupture and almost inaudible click. A newborn pattern emerging, endlessly recording and directing life. The old parent-machine winks, and sets in motion a new breathing. I am banished to the foreground of my mind.

Dolorous

Janez Nemec

Awoke to see the blood flowing up. Would've floated up too were I not tethered to the wire digging its way deep into my foot. Hurt like brand new shoes. Had to writhe out of it with a snap. Fell from that stupid ledge above me, thinking it was a shortcut. Always took the easiest way out. Freed myself anyway. Used to dragging things after me. Still, had to walk on to find my exit. Any exit, if it existed.

Landed on the platform. Flimsy thing couldn't've broken sooner. Felt the liquid escaping through my pockets and tears. Still flowed up. Some things never changed. Had a queer quality about them. Droplets were still hovering up in the air. Could see my reflection if I cared to look, clear as a surface day. Not much peace to be found on one's own. Like the bowels of an ever-howling beast. Kept hearing the scraping above the scaffolding. Rusted and sagging old monuments bending to the vascular entrenchments. They'd finally fall and crumble one of these days. Rather see me rotting alongside them. Anything to dull this pain. Anything to stop the shine.

Blaring lights shone even in death. Stupid sound shuddered anyone passing by. Signalled a change. White night again. Had to hang in low places. Cage was vast. Had no walls. Windows pointed towards someplace else. Some had spaces to crawl through. Only wanted a roof. How hard could that be? Air was brisk all around. Listened to the sudden silence for a moment. Forgot that sound as soon as it ceased. The sun had already fallen. Only ever seen the moon, pointed like a blade in the dark. Closer than I thought. Before long, my eyes saw the vestige. Light stopped dripping through the stars then. It was atop the cage with that circle behind its head.

Was staring back at the bleakness of creation when it first disappeared. Scharde, that. Why couldn't it be closer? Wouldn't ever really know. Must've been waiting for me. Thought so, anyway. Didn't matter where I looked. Could've left a sign at least. Could've left anything. Been peeking more than I wanted to. Less space with every turn. Ought to've crawled. Nowhere left to go. Losing time, marking death. Hell, this. Like a labyrinth. Hard to breathe. Couldn't catch it. Living life without a voice. No one would hear it. Had to find someone. Had to find it somewhere. Anywhere but here.

Used everything that caught my hands. Anything to find it. Bendy scaffolding and warping wires usually did the trick with that terrain. Cold and concrete went together in marriage. Became one and the same down in the depths. Closest notions to a guide were scorched drawers filled with countless blood-stained papers. Signalled the death of nomads. None could be found here. Not anymore. Burned it all away like a scorching sunset.

There it was. Waiting for someone? For whom? Couldn't quite tell. Not for me. Sure of that. Wanted it more than anything. Wouldn't give me the time I wanted. Saw me and turned away immediately. Made me wroth. Recognised it all in a heartbeat. Wanted it in my hands so I could wring its neck. Just out of reach. Hands were too numb and weak to do it.

Not dressed in some bona clobber just for me, are you, mucker?

Grasped at its hand. Never gave it out to anyone. Not yet. Mocked me with every breath. Sod it. Pushed it aside without much force. Broke it all. Made sure it was gone. Wouldn't leave so much as a pulp. Left as soon as it fell only to stop turning as it called out to me.

Look behind the munge.

Ears were deaf. Impact was loud. Broke us apart that way instead. Had no power there. Rocks and debris fell all around, yet none tried to hit me. Must've been luck. Must've been a game. Had to wrap my fingers around rusty poles. Every turn might've made me slip. Never did though. Still clinging on. Where else could I go? Where had it gone? It appeared above me again. Stared at me in disgust while biting its lip. Ends were already dabbing around my fingers all playful and careful. Knew what it was about.

You promised you'd do it.

No porkies. Tell all. I'll do it now.

Heard the sigh escape its lips. Looked at me with ice. Knelt close enough to graze my stiff joints. It was intentional. Knew what it was doing.

Right, dove. Tell all. You start? I start, as per usual. Hated the light. Wanted the night. Stuck it deep inside only for no one to scream. Kept ogling. Course, parkering all those lavs didn't do much of anything either. Still out for me. Nothing's changed. Still the same. That's why you're stuck.

Wanted to lash out at it again. Couldn't do it this time. Couldn't let go. Had my life in its hands, really. Decided not to end it. Can't you help me? You even real?

Doesn't matter what you think I am, dove. I'm here for you. Still fancy a feel?

Tried taking its hand again. Anything to touch it. Snatched it away from me.

Don't want to see if I'm real after all.

Vardad enough. Parkered too much already. Get to it. You left. Why am I still looking?

Smoke rose before my eyes, lithe as a figure. Came from its mouth. Couldn't make out the face anymore if there ever was one.

Desperate, mucker. Do us a favour – piss off by yourself for once.

A restless dream, a never-ending nightmare made just for me. Wanted to cry for someone other than myself. Wounds had long since cicatrised. Why was it so difficult? Felt better when it was sucking the blood from them. Better than dying. Prolonged the feeling. Remained a stranger to it until it found me there. Only one lingering, bleeding and writhing. Wanted a place for ourselves. Would've given anything for us.

Find us a flowery for the nochy. Asked no one in particular. Couldn't stay there. Can't stay here. It had returned.

No jarries, no bevvies. How many days?

Say tray? Response was as meek as ever. Shook its head, its tongue flicking at its teeth. Sharper than before.

Long dedger more like it, mucker.

Naff, this. Stepped on its hands whenever I tried getting closer.

Varda where you lay those lallie tappers. Nearly there. Got it.

Found something?

It's not cod, but it's not bona either.

Just a letter. Manky, innit? Threw it into the abyss below with the rest of the finds.
Should've thrown it harder.

Meese, if anything.

Aren't we both proper medzered? That's what it was like. I varda that now.

Parker your fambles. Found your hole.

Can squeeze through anything. Promise. Done it before. Push. Push, damn it. Can squeeze through anything? Prove it. Cunt. Smacked the wall. Didn't leave so much as dent it. Didn't want to leave. Why? Knew the way better than before. Stopped me without saying a word. More I hit, less I felt. Hands were reduced to stumps. Kept dripping.

Stuck again, mucker?

Saw it dive back into the void without me. Barely made a sound. Eyes heavy and free, heart skipped a beat. Alone again. Looked down only to find it standing all smug-like on the wall.

We'll have to leg it.

Followed it without looking back again. Didn't care if it was behind me. Had it before me, leading like a shepherd. Would've given a hand, but it didn't want anything. No yearning in these parts. Could feel it in the thin cold air. Neck was close enough to choke. Should've done the trick back when I had the chance.

Why? Had to ask something. Anything to break the silence. Didn't want to concede. Not yet. Why leave?

Couldn't bear that naff cackle. Decided to scarper.

Where to?

Anywhere but here, mucker.

Walked right into the steam blowing from the broken pipes. Cut away like sagging arteries. Could feel the sting on my face that time. Haven't lost feeling yet, even after piercing my leg. Good. Meant I could keep going, if only for a little further. If only to find it. Knew it'd leave someday. Didn't want to accept it when it did it. Wasn't ready. Felt like yesterday. Figured I'd've become numb to it all. Final nail was the home we never had. A living room with static mesh and a kitchen with a basket filled with chopped up fruits. Forbidden ones. Called to me despite my restraint. Indulging in carny pleasures only ever suited one of us. Thought about a way to cleanse it all away. Tired of making the same old mistakes.

Lit the basket. Never been one for that case. Light and then dark again. Traces of anything few and far between. Caged again, like a bird fluttering to find its clipped wings. No one would help me there. Still blind as ever. Might be worth a sound or two. A chirp, at least. Laughed at the answer. Knew where to go then. Had to ready myself. Shot in the dark. Only one chance to make it right. Ran and ran in the clamour of the iron cage before meeting the glass. Broke through it, falling a little further down. Wind would've cut away at me. Was ready for it. Closed my eyes so I could see. Shapes and forms that wanted me back weren't real. Could finally recognise myself in them. Pitiful and forgetful. Never knew the truth. Didn't need it to break through. Had only one chance left. No more ignorance. No more bargaining. Knew what it was about. Finally knew.

What do you say? Wager a buvare? Veras? Ought to've smacked me for it.

Craving some more?

Consumed by perky smiles and all that. Not anymore. Schooners more so than the bebies.
Better used.

Or just a clevie?

Took my hand. Snatched it away immediately. Knew what they wanted now. Wouldn't get it. Piss off. Told them off and they smiled.

Lights in your eyes were like an inferno, mucker. Could catch them from the rooftops even before dusk. You wore them so well. Like a painting without a frame.

At every part – it. Just it. Only ever it. Had to blink some more. Could never tear it down. World around me kept mangling another forgotten memory. Always something new. Always another detail that'd gone unnoticed. Needed a mirror to finally see what I needed. Kept scrubbing my hands, but the blood wouldn't stop forming. Could never wash it off. Was all over the floor and the sink and the bath. But not the mirror. Never got it dirty. Thing's ugly anyway.

Only found my own reflection moving without me. Blank stares returning with scowls and smiles before leaping out of the screen. Stood amongst the broken bits like a shambling mound of pure dark smoke. An amalgamation of parts from days past and future times. Fought amidst angular splashes of white light. A hit there and a stomp here. Kept running. How could anyone fight? Never knew what it wanted. Always came sauntering back with drags and pulls. Tried at my legs and arms, curling around throbbing feet and aching hands. Bathed in the darkness. Wouldn't let the light find me. Had to do something, lest I consumed myself forever. Cut me deeper than anyone else. Shadow knew me better than even myself. Wouldn't stop at the flesh. Wanted the insides out without a second thought. If they didn't hold back, why did I keep going?

Through the inky tendrils of the night in the shine of the blaring lights, we found ourselves lost in the bleakness of life. Thing was damp like a cave. Never saw the droplets, only ever heard them. Fell all over the shadow's form. Couldn't bare thinking about them touching me. Enveloped into a mass of ever-expanding ichor, I came about the resolve to press on. Run, as I always have. Didn't leave it unfinished. Wouldn't let even a speck come back with me. Not this time. Loved seeing it crash and crumble back into the earth where it rightfully belonged. But it had been watching. Saw everything. Saw me. Even if I thought it was done, there was always another step. A finale. Something I dreaded. Something I had to face again. Never again.

Lived again, mucker?

Like grass on concrete.

That right? Bit cocky, stopping all dolly like that. Road's clear before your ogles.

Just a reprieve. Made it sound as though I wanted it. Throat ached. We cleaned up so well. Tired of being mogued.

Had a lock on it. Heart was still racing through those lonely half-beaten halls. Wasn't real. Always just out of reach. It knew it. Had to be smug about it. Both had been waiting for it to cease. Harder than expected. Needed a push from someone, anyone.

Sure you want to go about it all again?

Needed an answer for myself. Not much of a choice for me, is there?

You're at the threshold. Step it up. Why aren't you running?

How could I? Kept running away before. Made mistakes. Countless of them. Kept seeing you everywhere I went. Why? Couldn't you just let me?

Only way to go's forward, mucker. I know it. You know it. Let yourself breathe.

Craved a stop. A stop to this Hell. A stop to its Heaven. Wanted to cast away the divide if only I had a tool. Destroyed much on my way to the barrier alone. Pockets were empty. Hands felt numb than ever before. Shattered pieces lay strewn across the cracked ground. Just a large shard would do.

I'm not real. You know that. You've always known that.

Let its hands intertwine with mine. Cold between us soon became warm. Felt foreign for only a moment. Soon came to realise I wanted this from the beginning. Wanted this touch. Something living. Soft, like skin. Proper and real. Looked at them with those eyes that'd refused to see for so long. It wouldn't do it without me.

Had bona times together. Don't forget that.

Nodded at that. Plunged the glass deep into its chest. Heard the thud when it hit the wall behind it. Whimpers fell on deaf ears. Smiled at that. Finally saw myself in its eyes. Glossy.

Thank you.

Shattered into countless little particles. Kept floating in the air alongside all the blood. Had to breathe now that I could. It wouldn't disperse. Couldn't choke either. One last act of feeble defiance for my sake. Finally accepted it after countless attempts. Wanted to savour it. Wanted to remember this freedom for eternity. But that'd just make me stuck again. Couldn't let myself go off easy. Had to keep going. Had to finish this. Overlooking the buildings with long steel tentacles, they grazed the roofs and buried into the concrete like the sharp things they were. Unwavering assaults tightly holding on. Signal for me and me alone. Refused to bend to this reality any longer.

A long drag later and they were gone again. Hoped they were gone for good. Flicked the remains off into the debris and scarpers with the rest. Wasn't done running. Everyone knew that. Had to keep trying. Wouldn't know otherwise. After enough time, I found a path with fewer obstacles. Thought so, at least. As above, so below.

Never got to see the drop.

A Very Public Suicide

Dominik Lenarčič

I'm going to kill myself today.

Oh, sorry, where are my manners? This is no way to introduce oneself to a stranger. Here, let me try again.

My name is Tim. I'm going to kill myself today. I'm going to jump off this motorway bridge and hopefully die on impact with a speeding lorry.

I know what you're probably thinking. "Don't jump, Tim! You have so much to live for!" How do YOU know that, you voyeuristic git? You've only just met me! For all you know, I could be a criminal trying to escape jailtime by plunging himself into the jaws of death before the fuzz arrive. Or maybe I'm just depressed. Whatever the case, I've decided to end my own life. You can try and argue with me, but you won't dissuade me. In fact, in a couple of minutes, I'll be too high to even hear your pleas.

That's "high" as in intoxicated. Stoned. Out of one's box. I have just injected myself with my neighbour's horse tranquillizers. I'm a little scared of heights, you see. Yes, I know, silly of me to go and try to give up the ghost by throwing myself off a bridge. I have no other options. My car broke down a week ago, I don't have a rifle and my aforementioned neighbour took my rope in exchange for those tranquillizers. Thanks to these wonderful little drugs, I'll be able to calmly step over the edge and not have to worry about getting cold feet at the last minute. And if I don't make it over the edge before it hits, then I can be sure I'll black out and fall to my death regardless.

Now then, less talk, more action. I just need to make one step. Oh, and maybe check my note is sealed. Yes, I wrote a suicide note. A message to my neighbour saying that he can keep the rope. And my blasted car. Now, once I've hit the ground, I'll probably be bleeding harder than a Chinese dam, so I made sure to keep my note in a sealed plastic bag. You know, so the ink doesn't get smudged. I just need to check the bag is sealed and-

Wind! The bloody wind snatched my suicide note! Bugger, guess my neighbour won't get the message. Ah, well, 'tis what it is. I've got dying to do.

Phwoar, this metal railing is a lot harder to climb over than I thought. Why do they need to put these on every sodding bridge?! Makes me wish I had skipped a few meals. There, over it now. All that's left is to wait for a lorry or a bus to come.

Wait, what's that? Is that my note, stuck on the outer side of the railing? Oh, the wind is really having a laugh at me today. All right then, guess I'll have to drag myself across. Easy ... easy now. I've almost got it.

"Tim?"

Oh, Buggery Jones. It's my neighbour.

"What the hell are you doing there, Tim?"

"Oh, good morning there, Bert! I'm just... erm... admiring the view!"

Admiring the view. You've really gone off the deep end, Tim. Oof, I'm feeling dizzy.

"Well, you've picked a fine spot to do so. Come, I've brought back your rope."

"Ok, ok. I'm coming... Just... give me... a second..."

~ ~ ~

The next thing I know, I'm waking up lying on the cold asphalt. Did I fall? I don't feel dead. In fact, I don't even feel any pain. Ah, no, I'm back on the bridge. Goddammit. Today is really not my day.

Bert is sitting next to me. It appears he's reading my note. Now he's looking at me like he's about to unleash the wrath of the heavens on me. I predict he's going to chastise me for my amateur attempt at bungee-less jumping. All right then, let's hear it.

"Why on earth would I want your bloody car, Tim?!"

A Shining Metal Bat

Nadica Trajkova

There are millions of tiny little statues of myself placed neatly on the shelves of my mind.

They're all headless, like Venus de Milo. Even more lifeless. All of them serve as reminders of what I've been and what I could be. None of the statues are mine, of course.

Because why would I keep my own creations when other people's are so much nicer? They're pleasant to look at. They're not crooked, misshapen and ugly, not made by these tired hands that have worked endlessly to create the real statue, the most genuine and honest representation of the body known to history.

The creators of these sculptures which are mine but also not mine – they could never be fully mine – they take them and make modifications from time to time, as they see fit. They gently place the statues back on the shelves, expecting my admiration with great anticipation.

And so I stare at the sculptures, sometimes waiting for the day when I forget the names of the artists placed on the plaques under each one. Most days I pray for the courage to pick up the spiked, metal bat that sits by my side and patiently waits for my tired, soft hands. The same hands that have created so many different statues.

All of them still end up shattered on the floor. Always a feeling of dread which follows the act. So I pick up the bits and pieces and each of my new sculptures contains fragments of its predecessors, no matter how tiny those fragments are. A never-ending cycle.

And I look back at the metal bat. The two of you have placed it so kindly by my side, telling me to use it whenever I want to. The two of you, who've never dared to place your own creations on the shelves, even though your names stand there, engraved on the metal plaques which I polish more frequently than the rest. You know none of these statues belong here.

And I look back at the metal bat, tears streaming down my face. I pray for the courage to one day smash everything to pieces. Marble, wood and all. To hear the deafening crash of everything falling to the ground into a million tiny shards, too small to be used again.

Tears spill down my cheeks in endless bouts. Tired hands timidly caress the sweet, cold handle of the bat.

Third Eye

Nadica Trajkova

Above the quaint and quiet apartment building, located in the middle of an unnamed city, floats a giant eye. It is hideous, swollen, and bloodshot, capillaries twirling and twisting like snakes over the entire eyeball. The optic nerve, which connected it to whatever entity it belonged to before, now gently sways underneath, disconnected.

This eye belongs to a young and promising woman named Maria. She recently moved apartments after she finished her studies. She is seen as an upstanding member in her community: she excelled in university and now in the firm she works for, volunteers at the local animal shelter every week, takes care of herself and her family. A quiet and stable life.

“How do you manage to keep everything so nice and tidy?”

A flash of an awkward smile. “I don’t know, I just like routines and order.”

The statement is technically true; the routine and order *do* give her a sense of accomplishment and safety. But they also keep her thoughts occupied and away from the eyeball which follows her every single step. No matter where she goes, she can always feel its searing gaze like a hot poker at the back of her head. No matter if she’s at work, at home, with friends or family. It’s always there, forever unblinking, filled with judgement and malice.

She isn’t sure when the eye came to be, but she first noticed it when she was about nine years old. It happened after she was left alone in a room with an older cousin during her aunt’s birthday party. Even to this day, she’s still unsure about what happened in the room, but when she fearfully ran outside into the garden for some fresh air – there it was.

The garden was in full bloom that late spring evening. A gentle breeze made the bushes dance and shiver, their rustling mixed with the muffled laughter and revelry coming from inside the house. The flowers left a scent that reeked of nostalgia and sickening sweetness, but all Maria could see was the disembodied eye.

It floated above the ivy-covered wall, outlined by the soft moonlight, looking down at Maria with what seemed to be satisfaction displayed across its glassy surface. Even then, the way it looked at her made her feel disgusting.

“Hey? Where did you float off to?” Dan snaps his fingers in front of her face.

They’ve been seeing each other for about seven months. Right now, they’re sitting in Dan’s low-lit living room, nestled in each other, quietly chatting and sipping wine. The couch feels oddly uncomfortable tonight. He’s gently caressing the top of her leg and looking at her expectantly.

“I just zoned out,” she mutters softly and takes a sip from the wine glass. “It’s been a long week.”

“Anything specific you’re worried about? You look like something’s bothering you.” He gently nudges her closer to him and gives her leg a squeeze.

She looks up at him while her head rests on his shoulder. “Can I be honest with you?”

“Yes, of course!” He places an affirming kiss on her forehead. “You know you can tell me anything.”

“Promise me you won’t laugh or call me crazy.” She gives him a serious look, and he pauses before answering.

“I promise. You don’t have to worry about that when you’re with me.”

He gives her another affirming squeeze. Maria can feel her muscles relax a little bit.

“Well, I’ve talked about this with Lana and she understands where I’m coming from, but my therapist thinks I might be hallucinating or going insane or something. It worries me cause whatever I’m seeing feels so ... real. But I have no evidence of its existence besides my own goddamn eyesight. It’s driving me insane. It’s something that’s very much real and touchable, but then it feels like it shifts into another dimension and then it’s gone. It appears when only I can see it, as if it’s playing some sick game.” She feels the tears welling up and a lump slowly lodging in her throat.

Dan quietly shifts on the couch and his face changes from a soft, worried gaze to a completely stone-cold serious expression. His shoulder feels like a tiny poker in Maria’s neck. “What is it that you’re seeing, exactly?”

“It’s a giant eye. I know it sounds stupid, but I’ve been seeing it since I was a kid. It usually floats somewhere visible to me. Either outside my window while I’m doing something on my computer, or I can see it in my periphery, poking and looking through the legs of the dining room chairs, or from the corner of my room. And it feels like it’s always watching me; it’s a very weird sensation.” The tears flow freely.

She looks at her hands, wringing them, avoiding his eyes. “It reacts differently depending on my mental state. That’s why I’ve been trying to be as good as I can. If I keep a positive mindset for long enough it starts bleeding and twitching and convulsing. But if I’m in a mental slump, it starts growing and pulsing.”

“When I was a teenager, it got so bad that I saw it start to mutate. It looked as if it had this tumour growing from the left side. Ugly thing, it looked like it was oozing puss and then teeth started forming from the skin. And then it slowly grew a mouth? I started going to therapy after and worked out some issues I had back then. It took a while, but eventually that tumour and the teeth and everything started bleeding and they eventually rotted off. I can’t shake the image out of my head.” She blinks, as if it would help her get rid of the tears and memories. It never helps.

“And the worst part is that when I saw the mouth, I had this sinking feeling that it was eventually going to eat me. As if with every transformation, it just kept getting bigger and bigger. It felt like it was eventually going to consume me whole.”

There is nothing but silence from Dan. Maria feels a searing hot sensation on her neck which slowly moves towards her throat. The tears have completely stained her cheeks now. She can spot movement in her periphery, coming from the window right above the couch they’re sitting on.

“That’s ... I’m sorry you’ve been dealing with this for so long. But it’ll get better. Have you talked with your psychiatrist about getting proper medication?” He slowly sits up and takes the tissue box, an orange, and a knife. He hands Maria a tissue and then starts to peel the orange. The pedicel of the orange makes it look eerily like an eye. Maria swears she sees it move across the orange peel so it’s looking at her.

“That’s the issue though. I don’t think I need medication. I’ve talked to Lana about it and she told me she’s been seeing the same thing since she was a teenager. Similar-looking disembodied eye, just floating there and watching. Hers appeared at a different time, but it shifts depending on her mood too.”

The tears blur her vision but her voice is surprisingly steady as she tries to reason. “You can’t tell me that two different people can have the same sort of hallucination. They’re real; we just don’t know what the hell we’re looking at.” She desperately tries to wipe away the tears, mixing them with the sweat from her palms. The tears are weakness to Dan, as much as he denies it.

“She hasn’t gone to therapy. I have and I’ve been given all sorts of medication. It doesn’t help in any way. I’m sorry if this sounds insane to you, but whatever this thing is, it’s real, and I don’t know how to get rid of it,” the last part comes out as a desperate wail, which makes Dan lift his head from the orange he’s been focused on until now.

She feels another stab at her neck, sees the familiar figure looming over the window. The lump in her throat is now a jagged rock scraping against the insides of her oesophagus. It’s getting hard to swallow.

Or think.

“Maybe you can find a new psychiatrist. Maybe the current one messed up the type of medication or gave you the wrong dosage. I’m sure you can figure it out.” He takes her hand and gently squeezes it. Another sharp stab. She looks in his eyes and underneath all the worrying, there’s just pity staring back at her.

“You think I’m insane,” she utters, barely able to speak. There’s a numb, tired sensation moving throughout her entire body. Just looking at Dan makes her nauseous.

“I don’t think you’re insane, sweetie. You just need better help than the one you’ve received.” He hands her an orange slice. She takes it and the sticky juice immediately covers her fingers. A small bite. It tastes extremely sour.

She looks up at him. They’ve somehow ended up on opposite sides of the couch. All that Maria can see in his eyes is poorly concealed pity. Her stomach is starting to roil. The room feels very warm and stuffy.

“Why didn’t you tell me about this earlier?” The question is laid down heavy, filled with disappointment. Its accusing tone is a knife stab in her side.

“Because every single person who knows about this has looked at me like I’m insane and then left!” Her voice slowly starts to rise, anger and pain mixing into a small but steady fire. “Lana is the only one who’s taken me seriously. I was scared of telling you because I was afraid you would look at me like you’re looking at me right now.” The last words she can

barely spit out. She feels the rock in her throat is tearing her apart mercilessly from the inside.

He quietly puts the rest of the orange slices in her hand. There's a long and awkward pause as he returns the knife on the coffee table and sits back on the other side of the couch. Maria feels a heavy, thunderous pounding in her head as she looks at him in confusion. The sweat is pouring down her back.

"I understand that you're going through a lot, but I don't know how to help you, Maria." He inches a bit closer and softly presses a hand on her arm. "Maybe it's best if I give you some room to breathe and figure things out on your own."

A prolonged pause, trying to find the right words to make it better. "I'll be waiting for you, if you want me to, of course. I think that you're a beautiful woman, and I can't wait to see you bloom into your full potential." Another pitying smile.

The stabbing pain is coursing through her entire body. She can see a familiar shape floating outside the window on her right, looking at her the same way it looked at her that night in the garden.

Maria lets out a deep sigh and chuckles, finally wiping away the tears from her face. She smiles softly at him.

"Thank you, Dan." She places her hand over his. "But as touching as that is, you won't have the pleasure of seeing that version of me."

He doesn't see the knife going towards his neck. The cry for help is muffled by the inhumane screech coming from the bulbous eye. It twists and turns erratically around its own axis, blood and puss starting to leak from all of its pores. Another stab, another otherworldly screech. Maria looks up into the sky and smiles as she sees it slowly falling apart, large chunks falling off and disintegrating before they hit the ground below.

Then there's nothing.

The blood feels like soft, velvet gloves on Maria's hands. Her shoulders relax and her jaw unclenches. No more hot poker on her neck.

Just the sweet sensation of the cold sweat covering her entire body like someone who just came out of a long state of delirium. Maybe the eye doesn't completely disappear. But in this moment there's total peace and quiet.

Two Sides of the Same Coin

Nadica Trajkova

The village was teeming with people as they went about their daily business, which wasn't much considering December had befallen them and there weren't any crops to take care of. But life still had its tasks. The women were feeding wood to the cookfires or tending to livestock, while the men, covered in sweat despite the seasonal conditions, were fixing the roof of a house that had caught fire.

The rest of the houses had no such concerns: they sat in the valley like little rocks with their slate roofs, wisps of smoke slowly drifting from the chimneys like lazy serpents. The only thing which interrupted the mundaneness of this village was the visitor slowly riding up the frozen dirt road.

As the mysterious hooded figure passed by the first houses, silence fell over the village like a giant wave. Even the clamour of the children could no longer be heard. All was silent except for the steady sound of hooves approaching.

The figure, sitting atop one of the two black horses, passed by the houses and stopped before the first group of villagers. With the grace one would attribute to a member of nobility, the cloaked individual leapt down onto the compact ground.

As the group of men carefully watched the person draw near, a feeling of bewilderment seeped into them, the sort of bewilderment one would feel when they saw a woman moving toward a village like theirs by herself, alone in the dead of winter.

"Good afternoon, kind sirs," they heard her voice behind the large, thick woolen scarf speak up and they soon saw the face behind it as the woman pulled the piece down.

"Good afternoon. Can we help you, madam?" The oldest of the men spoke up as she came close to the group.

"I've been told there is an inn in this village. Is that correct?"

"Very much so. Go further down the main road and you'll see it. It has a wooden sign dangling above the door."

"Thank you." The woman gave a short bow and led her horses by the reins towards her destination.

After the strange woman had passed, the men and everyone around them started muttering.

In truth, she wasn't a woman. The face under the hood was plain, but most of all surprisingly young; she was no more than eighteen years of age. Dark brown hair jutted from under her hood and fell over round, green eyes. But what was a girl of high birth doing alone in a rural area of the country? They looked after her as the wool cloak of deep purple on her shoulders flapped in the rising wind.

The village began to stir again and the curiosity of the children grew uncontainable. Soon the girl had a cluster of little ones around her, relentlessly hurling questions at her.

"What's your name?"

"I am Hecate," replied the girl with a gentle smile at the boy asking the question.

"Where are you from," another curious demand.

"The southern parts of the kingdom."

"But what are you doing here?" asked a girl with honey blonde hair, which made something twinge painfully in Hecate's chest. It had already been so long.

"I am travelling."

"Aren't you scared?" Another boy piped up.

At this remark, the newcomer raised an eyebrow.

"Why would I be scared?"

“There are monsters in those woods, didn’t anyone from the other villages tell y-”

The child was interrupted as an older woman clasped her hand over his mouth.

“Pardon us, but this little runt doesn’t know when to shut his yap,” the woman said apologetically.

“It’s fine, children are naturally curious and that is a beauty in and of itself.”

The woman looked at her with a confused expression and gave her a nod.

“Well, my name is Ada. I’m the inn owner. I heard you’re looking for a place to stay.”

“Yes, I would like to rest here.”

“As you wish. Follow me then.” Ada turned around and slowly moved towards the inn.

Before entering, Hecate went to the horse burdened by her travel bags. She poked her hands into one of the bags and pulled out some oranges. Beckoning the children around her, she soon had a bunch of heads looking up at her, eyes expectantly shifting to the fruits.

“Here you go, an orange for each of you.”

“Thank you, missus!” the children said in unison and ran away to eat their citrusy treats. Except one. It was the largest and also most likely the oldest boy in the group.

“I’ll take care of your horses, I’m Ada’s son.”

“What a good, hard-working son. I am very grateful.” She smiled and gently patted his head.

The boy’s face turned bright red. “No problem.”

After having released her horses from the hefty travel bags and having entered the inn, Hecate was greeted by a small but cozy main hall. The fire crackling in the fireplace filled the room with a warm atmosphere common to this sorts of village inns. A flight of wooden stairs led to the rooms upstairs while the smell coming through the second door in the hall indicated a kitchen.

“Sorry about the inconvenience, but we don’t have many big rooms suited for a lady like you. If you wa-”

“That will not be a problem. I will be satisfied with the smallest room you have, as long as it is clean,” Hecate mused.

“Oh, as you say then. How long will you be staying?”

“Till the next full moon.”

Suddenly all the warmth drained out of the woman and she glared at Hecate with fear and weariness.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I’m sure you’ve heard of the stories surrounding our village...” The woman said warily.

“Indeed, I have. That is precisely why I’m here.”

At this point, the woman could barely look at her.

“I’m not sure if you can stay here, it’s da-”

“Ada,” a man’s voice called from the kitchen. “The lady wants a room, and she’ll get it. It’s none of our concern what she chooses to do in our village or ‘till when she intends to stay,” the voice continued sternly.

Shortly, a large, burly man came ducking through the door.

“Provided that she doesn’t cause any harm,” he uttered with a dangerous smile.

“I can assure you that I will leave you as peacefully as I have found you. I swear it on a maiden’s honour.” Hecate smiled warmly.

“Glad to hear that. My name is Blaise,” he said as he extended his hand. “A pleasure meeting you, miss?...”

“Hecate.” She pulled out her hand from under the purple cloak and clasped the man’s hand. “The pleasure is mine.”

“Splendid!” the man exclaimed. “My wife Ada will take you to your room.”

“Thank you for letting me stay. I will mention your family in my prayers.”

His wife had stood silent throughout the conversation, now glaring at her husband and now Hecate. She picked up Hecate’s luggage and moved towards the stairs without a word.

“This is your room,” Ada said coldly the moment they arrived and before Hecate could thank her, she turned away and went back down the stairs.

As soon as Ada was confident that Hecate had closed the door to her room upstairs, she pulled Blaise into the kitchen.

“Are you out of your mind?” she growled at him. “Our village has been avoided for almost two years since that thing appeared, and still it isn’t suspicious to you at all that she’s going to stay here till the full moon?! What if she were a demon herself? If more death is brought upon our village, I will be cursing your name even in hell!”

“She will do no such thing,” her husband said calmly.

At this point, the hairs on her neck stood on end. Her temper would never reach such a pitch again. “And how can you be so sure?”

Blaise opened the fingers of his left palm and showed her the object. “This is enough to assure me,” he said as he held the coin up between two fingers.

Ada took it carefully, frightened it would harm her. The coin was cold iron and it gleamed in the last rays of daylight coming through the kitchen window. Ada had seen this sort of coin only once in her life. It was plain, without details bar the worn-out imagery of a cross on both sides.

“When did she give you this?” she looked at her husband with confusion.

Blaise’s big mustache twitched in amusement. “Wasn’t it strange to you that I shook instead of kissing the hand of such a lady?”

Ada stood silent for a few moments, chewing on the question her husband had just laid upon her.

“She isn’t nobility, is she?” she gave him a puzzled look.

“In a way, she is, in a way she isn’t.” He gave an enigmatic smile, landed a kiss on her forehead and focused back on the meat he had been cooking.

A week had passed since she had come to stay. At first, the villagers’ looks were wary but as the children began to enjoy her company, the elderly were gradually getting accustomed to her presence as well. She gave the older girls the jewellery she had with her and the smaller ones little dolls stuffed with lavender and cotton.

She traded some of her materials, like herbs, food ingredients, and other miscellaneous items, for dried and salted food that would carry her through the rest of her journey.

As the days went by, she found out that the villagers had initially kept the monster at bay by giving it a sheep every time it got in the vicinity of the village. But as time passed, the beast became increasingly insatiable. They would sacrifice three sheep at a time and it would just pester them even more. If they didn’t offer sheep, the thing would move on to other, more precious meat. Terror had been growing with every passing day.

It reached its peak when a child went missing.

The twelve-year-old boy had been dragged into the darkness of the woods while searching for firewood. Since then, no one had dared to leave their home after twilight or when they knew the beast was hungry again. Torches and fire pits were installed around the entire village in the hopes of keeping the beast and the dark at bay.

Hecate listened to their troubles and gave them solace by assuring them she would get rid of the monster and find the missing child, which the villagers found hard to believe.

At night, she would hear howling from the forest. The first night it happened, everyone demanded in a hushed and scared voice whether she had heard it.

She had. And that howling was the most welcoming thing she had heard in all her life. What the villagers heard as a bloodcurdling wail was the closest thing she had ever known to home in her nomadic way of living. To them, it meant despair. To her – it meant hope.

The days went by and Hecate commenced to prepare slowly for the trial that was about to occur. Often, she would lock herself in her room and only appear for meals and during the night when she circled the village several times and observed the surrounding field and forest. She was watching carefully for the huge shadow that became braver and braver as the nights passed. During the last week, she met Blaise in the main hall.

“Blaise, may I ask a favour of you?”

“Of course,” the man looked at her curiously.

“Would it be a problem if the villagers made numerous fire pits and torches facing towards the forest? I think it will help to keep the beast away. They must be constantly watched though, so that they never gutter out.”

“I will see what I can do.” He tugged at his mustache and left her alone with her thoughts.

The villagers had opposed the idea, protesting that if they did so, their firewood would be scarcer than it had been and that they would freeze to death if Hecate’s plan came to nothing.

Before long there came the accusations of witchery and demon-worshipping but all of that subsided when the village elders and Blaise raised their voices and ordered the people to abide by Hecate’s plan.

Hecate was the type of person who never felt pressured or apprehensive when it came to her job, or in any situation for that matter. But as the days were looming and the moon became fuller and fuller, so too did Hecate’s restlessness grow. With every passing night, the disquiet became stronger.

The night before her final stay in the village was a promising one. The sky foretold of snow the following day and as everyone had thought, they awoke to a soft, white blanket covering the already frozen earth.

Hecate spent the day with the villagers, aware that these would be her last moments with them.

She listened arefully to the stories the elder inhabitants retold and the wisdom their words conveyed. However, she also spent time with the children, spoke to them of adventures from far-away lands and kingdoms, playing their favourite games with them.

Her last moments were spent drinking mead with Blaise in the empty main hall of the inn, sharing thoughts on Gloom Stalker-related matters and reports of trouble from other parts of the kingdom. Both reminded each other of the past and shared fond memories.

While preparing her horses for departure, he gave her his hand to shake.

He had the softest smile a man of his stature and shape could have. “It was a pleasure seeing you again.”

Hecate gave a small nod and began to lead her horses out of the stable when the urge to turn around overcame her. She looked at the colossal man standing in the shadow of the stable and she flew back, throwing herself into his warm embrace.

“You were so tiny when I twirled you in the air like this,” he murmured and fell silent for an instant. “I’m glad nothing has changed,” he said with a smile.

“I hope to see you again soon, Blaise,” Hecate whispered and let herself down onto the ground.

“Stay safe.”

“You too. ‘Till next time.”

She moved through the village, scores of children, women, and men trailing after her to the boundary where the fire pits began. But she crossed the field on her own.

The night had barely settled when she reached the edge of the forest. She gave one last glance at the crowd lined up at the edge of the snow-covered village, smiled and dived into the dark with the horses as her only companions.

As the forest became more thickset and gloomier, she closed her eyes and concentrated the energy she had stored inside during her stay in the village. The little sphere of light around her hand detached and slowly led the way through the undergrowth, casting a bluish-yellow light across the tree bark of the nearby pines and the freshly settled snow.

As the glow grew fainter, the horses became more agitated and apprehensive of moving deeper.

Hecate knew this was the place.

Please, let it be her.

She glanced around warily, looking for the smallest signs of movement.

It did not take long before a hulking figure emerged between the whitened trees, only a faint outline against the shadowy forest. Two yellow eyes glowed like embers in the night. Two yellow eyes stared down right at her.

Hecate drew in a deep breath and took a step forward.

“Maeve...” she paused. “Please... come, come back. I’ve missed... you...” she felt her voice catching in her throat.

The giant, wolf-like creature glared at her, lowered its head and charged.

Hecate’s body froze, every muscle protested even the slightest of movements. She could only stare in fear at the beast that should have been her sister, as it charged at her. Seconds before the werewolf reached her, she closed her eyes and said a quiet prayer for the afterlife.

She felt the soft, puffy impact of snow under her body. Instead of teeth and claws devouring her flesh, she was met with a soft embrace and a smell as familiar as her childhood bed.

Tears welled in her eyes and rolled down her face, her lips quivered with excitement.

“I’ve missed you, too, sister,” the deep, soft, human voice murmured to her after what seemed like ages.

Hecate opened her eyes. It was Maeve that was in front of her, exactly as Hecate remembered her – with untamed hair the colour of mead and wild green eyes.

The softness of her touch dazed her as Maeve gently wiped away the tears from her face.

“I’m sorry... For everything...” her sister’s voice was laced with sorrow. She had never been this upset.

Hecate smiled. “It will be forgotten, like tears in the rain.”

“The boy is alive,” Maeve muttered apologetically. “I only wanted a friend. Could you lead him back home?”

“Yes, I’m sure his mother will be overjoyed.”

“Then it is time we went home.”

“Indeed it is.” Hecate hugged her sister tightly before getting up.

POETRY

Language in Use Poems

1. Aged Hands

Aged hands, together they hold.
Many stories can be told.
In a dark room, together they lie,
Fearing the day they'll say goodbye.
Hand in hand, a dance through time,
Their love will always remain sublime.

Ana Blažič, Nika Megloba, Denis Orlić,
Maja Tacar
(1e)

2. Dear Friend

Dear friend, please come over
As I have found a four-leaf clover.
Since I have also found a ladybird,
I hope my wishes will be heard.

Dear friend, please come over,
I haven't seen you since October.
The joy I feel when you are near
Makes my worries disappear.

Please, please don't be late,
With you, my dearest, everything feels
great.

Anja Papič Jakša, Ela Hlastan, Neja
Benedičič, Semija Faljić
(1e)

3. Andrej's Plot

In fields so gold 'neath the sun's warm
hug,
Andrej worked, a tireless tug.

Seeds he planted at the crack of day,
Hard labor played in the sun's bright rays.

For his father's plot, he lent his hand,
Turning toil into a fertile land.

Tasty, hearty, the crops he grew,
Wealth bloomed where determination
flew.

A beetle came, a pest so sly,
With a needle, he made it say goodbye.

Victorious, he earned a farmer's feast,
His father's praise, a joy released.

In the farm's heart, a tale of grit,
Andrej's journey, where hardships fit.

Andrej Markežič, Žiga Primožič, Luka
Šmelcer
(1f)

Green

Laura Bastič

Everything is turning green. Green trees. Green grass. Trees and flowers blooming. The spring flowers are springing out of the earth. Green rivers. Green moss. Green ivy. Green trash cans. Green shoes. Green jeans. Green faces. Green skies. Green skin. It's not green everywhere.

Everything is turning red. Red floor. Red skin. Red skies. Red bodies. Red buildings. Red hospital hallway floors. The black rubble made by the black weapons by the white and blue hatred. The green lakes and the green forests do not see the red hospital hallway floors. Some drops and some trees might. Some ignore, for it is not their floor.

Trbovlje

Laura Bastič

Most wish they could leave. Most wish they never had to return. The once-dirty air is trapped in their lungs for all eternity, calling them back with whispers, shouting "Trbovlje, Trbovlje, Trbovlje." The centre of the three valleys, the biggest, the ruler, with its heavy history of hardworking drunken miners, communist workers, and angelic voices. Known for the fog, known for the factories, known for the smog – apart from the natural, all almost completely gone. Known for its new-media elements, though it's not all she is. The beauty of her nature ignored, yet it perseveres. Surrounded by hills many live on, even more love to climb; she emits, to some, claustrophobia, to some, a comforting embrace. Regardless of many people's opinions, I love my town. I love that mostly we all know each other, I love the dialect I'm unable to naturally recreate, I love the inexplicable humour and the culture. I love the streets, I love the old, faded buildings, I love how we are a part of two regions but don't really belong to either. We are a community in many more ways than one, and despite her many issues, I love my hometown.

Lucy

Nikola Ninković

Smile, smile once more, like you did all those ages ago
Look at me with those hazel eyes, don't say that I am a foe
For in this lonely hour, when the stars start to whisper
I cannot but see your soft lips redden as the air becomes crisper

Oh, tell me, sweet maiden of the pond, what is it which you desire
What do your eyes see in the sky painted by fire
Do you wish for another talk, yet another meet
Or have you closed off your heart, are you afraid of the greet

You stay there still, looking upon the horizon, the sea's distant edge
Waiting for a piece you gave away, a piece standing on a small sandy ledge
Yet I don't mind waiting, looking at your hair changing its hues
My sweet dear, no matter what you think, you will always be my muse

Valhalla

Nikola Ninković

There on the field where my bones lay
Now children, with glee and joy play.
In the creek, where tears and blood had once flown
You can quench your soul, even your wounds would be sewn.

Man walking around with wrinkles and grey hair, oh what a sight to see
No mothers weeping over their sons, fathers that were never meant to be.
Joyful cheers echoing in the distance, their rhythm not broken with the cries of plight,
Nowhere in sight does a person force, upon others, their might

And now when I look down from up above, I smile and chuckle
For I see my children not taking up after the old, I knew that hatred would buckle.
So, as I drink my mead, I take up my axe and leave the hall, going outside to rejoin the
eternal brawl
There we cross arms, grins never fading, sunrise till sundown, not tiring a bit
During the night we rest while sharing a meal, we, the last preachers of Odin, the last sons
of Valhalla.

Flowery rest

Nikola Ninković

A fresh ocean breeze sweeps across the plains, ones overlooking the endless blue
Were you, until the bitter end, to your word true
Flowers are in their bloom, endlessly interchanging tunes, as they grow with vigour in
between those stones.
Do you still feel the sun, even with no meat on those dusty bones

As I come nearer, I see where they left you to bleed, there on that stone, now you forever
lay
Mind wanders as the wind with my hair starts to play, oh what was it, the last thing you
managed to say
Now as the day comes to a close, next to your bones of lead, I leave a Marlboro red
I turn my back, not waiting for the smoke, my soul is content, for you and I had nothing left
unsaid

Despot

Dominik Lenarčič

I was going to stay quiet,
but now I won't.
Your puppet strings coiled themselves
around my stomach.
They squeezed
and forced the words out of my mouth.
Now you're covered
with a mess of your own making.
I'll leave you behind to clean it up,
but before I go,
do tell me,
if there exists a universe
where we're still friends,
so I can hop over there
and spill my words all over you again.

Existence Is Pain

and art is a painkiller.

Dominik Lenarčič

Eggshells

Dominik Lenarčič

The worst thing about walking on
eggshells
is that somebody will always break.

Finlandisation

Dominik Lenarčič

I was but a little man.
And you – a titan of lust,
a person of insatiable desire.
Desire of conquest.
Desire of control.
I could not dare to oppose you,
so, I let myself become your slave.
Your sphere of influence.
Your very own puppet state to play with
on the stage.
You probably thought I was enamoured
with you,
that I couldn't live a day without you
and the pull of your strings.

But I never really loved you.
I only wanted to survive.

Tell Me

Iza Stres

My shoes are tied so I can run.
My phone is charged so I can call
someone.
I don't wear headphones so I can hear
if anybody comes too near.

I can't ever hitchhike.
Sometimes I can't even ride my bike.
Is that skirt too short, did I give the wrong
hint?
We always come back to what I did or
didn't.

Why is it always about what I wrote?
Why is it about how I sing my own note?
Why is it about if I did or didn't wear a
bra?
Why is it always that I've "gone too far?"

Why is it if I want what I deserve,
I'm getting on someone's nerves?
Why is it always about what I do
and he can just say "I disagree with your
view?"

"Well, it's actually about your intellect
and success."
Then why are we still paid less?
How long is it worth it to inconvenience
myself
and when can I start screaming for help?

It's about the looks that follow you across
the street
and the only thing you can do is speed up
your own feet.
So now I dare you –
tell me I'm imagining it.

On Our Own

Iza Stres

Each one of us a fateless little creature,
trying to become a preacher,
while we pass the bread around,
while we all try to stand on our own
ground.

We are all trying on our own
to both outwait time
and end infinity,
while we forget how foreign we've
grown.

While we forget we are not stone
or sand, not anymore.
While we forget what we're searching for
won't satiate us, not anymore.

While we refuse to comprehend
that we can in fact fend
for ourselves and put trust,
not in gods but in us.

That we are so much more than ashes,
we are so much more than dust.

Enough of this

Iza Stres

Painted faces, puffed up minds,
I step on quicker or draw the blinds.
The more I look, the more I see
a vibrant crowd, a shallow sea.

All we do is pass duty around,
each one of us free, by spiderwebs bound.
The more I see, the more I know –
I don't want to be owed and owned.

Giants

Iza Stres

We have giants in the sky,
passing swifter than you or I.
In your palm as soft as a sigh
but they can only be touched by your eye.

They mark time's flight,
while as homes to delight
they spend their days in laughter light,
then pass the threshold of the night.

With words I made them a diadem,
for a moment like them –
untouched by world's ire.
Then I watched them as they caught on
fire.

The Woman Under the Leather

Marija Šeruga

You are the river
parting
--
you made me drown

You are the fire
I see
--
through your eyes

You said goodbye
to promise
--
made tomorrow

You haven't met
the eyes
--
of the Woman Under The Leather

MISCELLANEOUS

Joker Out Subs: Translating a Band

Breda Hribernik

Picture this: London, early April 2024. Day four of my solo journey to England. After queueing for several hours (something that would never happen in Slovenia), me and a few of the friends I met just a few hours ago finally made it into the venue: Shepherd's Bush Empire, built in 1903 as a music hall. The high ceiling and intricate wall decor closely reminded me of the Slovenian National Theatre Drama in Ljubljana, which got us all even more excited for the concert. And after the two opening acts, the main performers finally made it onto the stage.

There are events in life you expect to happen as if they were a part of a 'Lifetime Bingo'. Scraping your knee as a child. Having a best friend. Going to college. But I never thought I would ever be attending a concert in London where a crowd of 2,000 would be loudly singing along to songs in my native language, Slovene. And yet that was exactly what I experienced during my Joker Out concert in London.

The band, consisting of Bojan Cvjetičanin, Jan Peteh, Jure Maček, Kris Guštin and Nace Jordan, gained international stardom during and after their Eurovision days. At the time of writing this article, the band had completed two successful tours in Europe, with a busy festival schedule awaiting them throughout the summer. This kind of global recognition is rather unexpected for a Slovene band. However, because most of the band's content is in Slovene, especially their older works, the language barrier can present a problem for foreign fans. This is where JokerOutSubs comes in.

1. General

Joker Out Subs (hereon JOS) is a fan-organised translation group. While translating celebrity content is nothing new, it mostly consists of individuals who translate short clips and post them online. Such translations have, in the past, been seen with K-pop musicians. JOS, on the other hand, is a group consisting of several members from all around the globe, me included. Alongside speaking Slovene, our members also speak languages ranging from Finnish to Japanese. The fan-translation group has one main goal: translating content.

The group was founded in May 2023, after we discovered a desire for translated content. Since then, the group whose main goal is translating different content in connection with the band has only grown and expanded. While a great deal of work is still done by speakers of Slovene, JOS would not be as successful without its other members. Social media managers, makers of closed captions, and editors are just a few people who really bring our translations to life.

2. Translation Process

Our translations have a large audience and, in some cases, they are even used by Slovene language teachers around Europe. We make sure to hold them up to a high standard: they are checked multiple times. Alongside our work being grammatically correct, we also want to ensure that the language remains neutral, in order not to implicate anything which does not occur in the original.

Communication-wise, we have a Discord server with many separate channels (for the various languages) and threads. We use Google Spreadsheets specifically for our translations, as using columns is a manageable approach. Column one contains the original text, column two has the translation. The following columns are reserved for comments.

Our translations are not always as simple as translating a written text. A great deal of the content we translate are either videos, radio interviews or podcasts. With those, creating a transcript is the first step. For videos, we also have to create closed captions with timings. Both of these processes are rather tedious, but the end result is a text ready for translation.

Once the first translation is finished, it is checked by a fellow member. For translations from Slovene, this will be a fellow Native Slovene speaker. The reviewer will correct the spelling, punctuation, and grammar of the translation in the form of comments, which the original translator can then approve or dismiss.

Still, the translation is not done yet. Our Native English speakers conduct the final correction of the text. This is mostly to find mistakes that have previously been missed, but English speakers also reshape the piece to make it sound as authentic as possible. The original translator again has a say in these corrections. Finally, our social media team publishes the piece.



3. Translation Problems

As most of us can remember from our classes, translation is rarely done without a hitch. But when one is translating the work of five men in their twenties with diverse linguistic backgrounds (two members of the band grew up in bilingual environments), the work becomes even more difficult. And when these men use slang in their speech, the skills acquired in one's university translation classes are almost useless.

One such example is an interview with the radio station Val 202, in which the lead singer Bojan Cvjetičanin talks about one of their departed band-members, Martin Jurkovič (who left the band in autumn of 2022 in order to pursue his studies). Bojan wanted to express that Martin was very successful in his field and therefore used the phrase 'trga gate' which does not have an equivalent in English. 'Ripping underwear' does not exactly mean 'to be successful' in English. As we wished to retain some of the vulgarity of the original, we translated the phrase as 'kicking ass'.

“... se je njemu v njegovih osebnih sferah odprlo v najboljši možni smeri, in tako kot rečemo mi, **trga gate**.”¹

... his personal spheres have taken off in the best possible way, and he is, as we say, **kicking ass**.

Alongside slang, dialects can also pose a challenge. As a promotion for their concert in Maribor, the bandmembers organised a giveaway for two tickets. All the participants had to do was write down one of their favourite words from the Styrian dialect, before the band members shared their own. Jure Maček, the drummer of the band, said that his favourite word was ‘štbljc’, which means ‘bedroom’. It would be nearly impossible to translate the word into English and somehow retain its Styrian colouring. In this case, we retained the original in the captions of the video and added a note with its meaning in English elsewhere. These culture-specific notes need to be done often.

“Štbljc je po moje blj.”²

‘Štbljc’* is better.

*bedroom

Occasionally, Ljubljansčina, or the dialect spoken in Ljubljana, can also cause problems. In a video for A1 VAJB, Kris Guštin (one the guitarists) mentioned that his dream date would include the castle in Ljubljana, which is the city he grew up in. After listing the location, he said: “pa gasa.” Most of the JOS members understood ‘gasa’ as a narrow street, but it was clearly not used in this context here. After some consultation, we translated it as follows:

“Ljubljanski grad pa **gasa**.”³

Ljubljana Castle and **away we go**.

Slang and dialects are not the only elements causing us trouble, as the band members also tend to make up words on the spot. One such word, which luckily uses English word formation, has become quite a staple in the fandom. During the vlog of their first tour in the United Kingdom, the guitarist, Jan Peteh, coined the term ‘sparklative’. In addition, he coined the term ‘capybaster’ (capybara + capodaster) in another vlog. However, the most prolific when it comes to creating new terms and phrases is certainly the lead singer. In an Instagram Live back in February 2023 (translation yet to be published), the band was discussing whether they would prefer to be a mushroom or pregnant. Bojan responded that he would like to be ‘nosrečen’ (noseč + srečen). On a quest comparable to those of the people who had to translate the Harry Potter book series into Slovene, we had to coin a term which would sufficiently embody this neologism. With the help of a native English speaker, we coined the term ‘pregstatic’.

“Kar zabaven bi bil. V bistvu ej ej... v bistvu bi bil **nosrečen**.”⁴

It would be quite fun. I'd be basically, hey, hey... I'd basically be **pregstatic**.

¹ JokerOutSubs. “Joker out between Dreams and Reality (Val 202: Music 202) - Part 1: Bojan and Jan.” Tumblr, August 3, 2023. <https://jokeroutsubs.tumblr.com/post/724661675937136640/music-202-joker-out-between-dreams-and-reality>.

² JokerOutSubs. “[Eng Sub] danslovenščine A1 VAJB: Joker out Share Their Favourite Styrian Word! #jokerout.” YouTube, February 21, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/shorts/YT_uWmBeAis.

³ JokerOutSubs. “[Eng Sub] What Is Your Dream Date? For A1VAJB #jokerout.” YouTube, September 28, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/82ejQX6TWYM>.

⁴ Instagram Live February 2023

4. Original Content

As JOS expands, our work reaches beyond the realms of translation. We now also publish original content, such as our own podcast. Some episodes are readings of longer articles by our Native English speakers. We also have two episodes aptly called ‘Queue and A’ where a member of our team interviewed some fans while queueing for the concerts in Amsterdam (December 2023) and in London (April 2024).

Besides interviewing fans we have also managed to interview the band themselves on four occasions. Our first interview was filmed in Tampere, Finland in September of last year. Then an interview in Poznań, Poland was conducted in November 2023. In 2024 we have so far had two interviews (as of writing this article⁵): an hour-long deep-dive interview in London, UK and a shorter interview, discussing Italian culture in Padova, Italy. The interviews were conducted in English and subsequently translated into Slovene.

Moving forward, the goal of JOS is to keep on doing what we do best, which is to translate. We also hope to create more original content and continue to spread positivity in the fandom. To finish off with the words of the lead singer Bojan Cvjetičanin, “JokerOutSubs, no one translates it better.”⁶

⁵ Between the time of originally writing this article and it being published, we managed to conduct another interview. This was our first interview with only one band member, Nace Jordan, and it was done in Slovene. Fret not, you can watch it with subtitles in 15 different languages.

⁶ JokerOutSubs. “[SLO SUBS] Joker Out intervju z JokerOutSubs v Londonu.” YouTube, February 25, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzgM5BGG-QE>.

Issue XXIII